

Leave No One Behind: Senior Citizen's Perceptions on Public Library Services in the Colombo Municipal Council Area, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

The slogan of 2030 Sustainable Development Goal is "Leave no one behind." Older adults, as a vulnerable population, require equal rights in order to achieve balanced sustainable development. However, compared to children and teens, this rising segment has been consistently overlooked in service provision. They deserve to have their later years spent wisely and effectively. A public library is one of the places where they can make good use of their free time. This study explores the services available to older persons through public libraries, as well as their perceptions of those services. This study focused on three public libraries (Colombo public library, Kotahena public library, and Susharitha public library) in Colombo Municipal Council and its older adult patrons. For this study, an exploratory research design was used. The American Library Association's "Guidelines for Library Services with 60+ Audience: Best Practices" were

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Received: 02 March 2022, Accepted revised version: 15 June 2022

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used to examine the four core service areas of collection, programs, facilities, and staff. Senior users believe that the collection and staff services suit their needs adequately, with few downsides when compared to the other two services - programs and facilities.

According to the study, regular surveys on seniors, collaboration, awareness programs, voluntarism, and designated staff are suggested as ways to improve library services for senior adults.

Keywords: Senior Citizen, Public Library, American Library Association, Sri Lanka

Introduction

When I was waiting for university admission twenty years ago, I spent much of my time in the Sucharitha Public Library, which was close to my home. During my time there, I had seen a large number of older individuals, in ages ranging from sixty to seventy who visited the library, read newspapers and periodicals in the morning and evening. Some of them had trouble reading; therefore, they kept their papers close to their eyes; some taking a nap under the fan or relax while chatting with their colleagues. I just returned to the library after twenty years and observed the identical events with regard to older people, with the exception of certain physical differences. The observations and experiences with older individuals, as well as the services provided by the public library, give a solid foundation for conducting this research.

(First author's experience)

In recent years, the population of the world has been rapidly ageing; this has also been observed in Sri Lanka. This condition will persist in the future decades due to demographic transition achievements and increasing life expectancy ([Perera, 2017](#), [Asian Development Bank, 2019](#); [United Nations, 2019](#)). Senior citizens are vulnerable groups who experience various difficulties and abandon in the population segment despite their equal rights in a society like other population divisions, children, youth, and adults ([Protection of the Rights of Elders, 2011](#)). On the one hand, retirement, the late stages of life, provides more spare time. On the other hand, decreasing health is a significant challenge that many elderly faces

during this time. However, after retiring from public life, this group struggles to fill their time with productive activities such as entertainment and leisure in everyday life. A library is one of the places where they can effectively and efficiently spend their time.

As service providers, public libraries play an important role in meeting the information requirements of the community. As members of the community, a substantially higher proportion of older citizens directly challenge the public library's service provisions. Although libraries have long recognized senior citizens as important stakeholders with unique needs and preferences ([Wynia Baluk et al., 2020](#)), their service offerings are generally geared toward children and youth ([Angell, 2009](#)).

Problem Statement

As members of the community, a substantially higher number of older persons directly challenge the public library's service provisions. As a result, library planning, facility design, resourcing, marketing strategies, collaborations, and staffing must all be taken into account ([Joseph, 2006](#)). However, focusing solely on senior persons in public library services continues to be a struggle. Although public libraries play a dynamic role in society, studies focus on senior citizens and public library services lack in Sri Lanka. Further, a handful of evidence of senior citizens' preferences is integrated into a public library's services with different information needs.

Sri Lanka has also expected a significant increase in senior citizens ([Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka, & HelpAge of Sri Lanka, 2014; Perera, 2017](#)). Yet, there is a lack of knowledge production by prioritizing how public libraries cope or adapt to this future challenge. In this

background, the key question of this study is to determine whether public library services adequately meet the requirements of senior citizens? To answer this question, the author tried to determine senior citizens' perceptions of public library services in terms of collections, programs, facilities, and staff to identify areas where services may be improved and developed to better suit their needs in the future.

Who is a Senior Citizen?

Senior citizens can be classified according to their chronological age, social and economic status, and biological characteristics ([Kasthuri, 2019](#)). The numeric or birth date is used to describe chronological ageing. The United States and Canada, for example, regard anyone above the age of 65 as an elder ([Hughes, 2017](#)). However, in Sri Lanka, a "senior citizen" is someone who is sixty years old or above ([Maduwage, 2019](#)). Within that, there are three stages of ageing: (i) young-old (60-69); (ii) middle-old (70-79); and (iii) oldest-old (80 and more) ([Perera, 2017](#)).

'Old' can be defined socially and economically in addition to chronologically. Ageing, for example, is a social and economic construct that is frequently associated with a shift in social responsibility, behaviour, and earning capability. When a person becomes a grandmother, a pensioner, or can no longer work and earn a living, society immediately labels them as senior or geriatric ([Kasthuri, 2019](#)). Furthermore, elderly persons are classified biologically or in terms of their physical abilities. With age, a continuous decrease of physiological function or a progressive functional decline occurs. Also, as people get older, they are more susceptible to illness or impairments. ([United Nations Population Fund & HelpAge International, 2012](#); [Dugarova, 2017](#)).

Overall, there is no concrete or exact definition for 'senior citizen.' It has different meanings in a diverse society or community. According to a person's physical and mental ability, there is no more chronological definition of old age. Many countries, however, have designated old age based on chronological age since this will allow them to easily identify this rising segment and integrate them into the social welfare system without difficulty. The authors of this study defines a senior citizen as someone who is sixty years old or above in Sri Lanka.

Public Library Service Guidelines for Senior Citizens

The American Library Association (ALA) has been working on public library services for the ageing. It has developed several guidelines and toolkits for elderly users from time to time. In 1972, The Adult Services Division of the American Library Association had adopted a statement accepting "The Library's Responsibility to the Ageing" because of the "social, economic, and biological problems resulting from the process of ageing (cited in [Reed, 1973](#) p 404)." In 1975, the Reference and Adult Services Division (now Reference and User Services Association) of the American Library Association published "Library Services to Older Adult Guidelines". It was the first professional procedure in this category age group. It was revised three times in 1987,1999, and 2008 ([ALA, 2008](#)). In 2017, the guideline had changed and had the new title 'Guidelines for Library Services with 60+ Audience: Best practices by Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) of the American Library Association ([ALA, 2017](#))'.

The guidelines are as follow:

- 1) Staff training: The library staff should have a proper training to help older adults with courtesy and respect.
- 2) Information Services and Collections: ensure the services and collection reflects the needs of older adults.
- 3) Programming: organizing programs should be targeted based on the more senior population interest and needs
- 4) Technology: provide IT related services and assisting and teaching about IT to the older adults
- 5) Outreach and partnership: participate in community activities and establish a partnership with local area agencies on ageing. providing materials to elders who live homebound and elders' homes
- 6) Services to the homebound and special populations: providing materials and services to elders who live homebound and elders' homes
- 7) Facilities: accommodate space and ensure the signage are clear
- 8) Funding and budgeting: assess the budget and plan it ([ALA, 2017](#), p 1-4).

This guideline categorizes service provisions into eight areas. These eight areas merged into four key areas according to the local context in this study. These are (i) collection, (ii) programs, (iii) facilities, and (iv) staff.

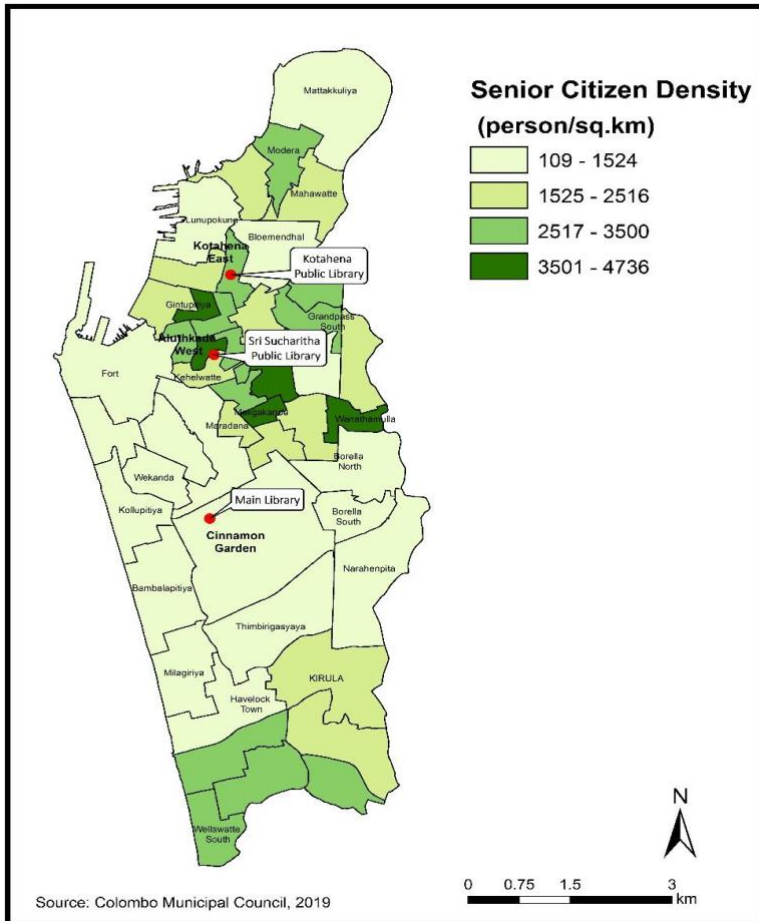
Methodology

An exploratory research design was adopted in this study. It assists in locating public library services for older adults in terms of collection, programming, facilities, and staff. It is based on the American Library Association's "Guidelines for Library Services with 60+ Audience: Best Practices" (2017). Three public libraries in the Colombo district were chosen for this study. The Colombo district comprises the majority of the elderly population (31 percent among the elderly population) in the country. It has a high ageing index, which reflects the rate at which the population is ageing (Maduwage, 2019).

During the colonial time, the Colombo Municipal Council (CMC) was established as an important administrative entity in the district. The CMC has one central library and eleven branch libraries spread over the district of Colombo. Three public libraries were chosen for case studies, based on the density of older persons in the CMC, (i) Colombo Public Library (CPL), (ii) Sri Sucharitha Public Library (SPL), and (iii) Kotahena Public Library (KPL) were chosen for this study. Those libraries are based on low, high, and medium population density, such as the CPL, which has the lowest density of senior persons. At the same time, SPL has the largest density of older citizens, whereas KPL has a medium density. As shown in figure 1, these libraries are located in the Cinnamon Garden, Aluthkade West and Kotahena East, respectively.

Figure 1

Senior citizen density and selected libraries in CMC



Target Population and Sample

The target population of the study is patrons aged 60 years and above. From the total population, 5 percent was randomly selected as a sample (see table 1). The sample size of the study retrieves proportionally from three public libraries.

Table 1

population and sample

Library Name	Population		Total Population	Sample (5%)		Total Sample
	Male	Female		Male	Female	
CPL	695	440	1135	35	22	57
KPL	72	90	162	4	5	9
SPL	7	4	11	1	0	1
Total			1308			67

Data Collection Tools & Analysis

Since it is a qualitative study, older adult users were employed for in-depth interviews. Before conducting the interviews, the researcher obtained consent from the respondents. Notably, the senior patrons were approached randomly at the circulation counter when they checked in or checked out their library materials. After explaining the purpose of this study, the researcher then asked patrons whether they would be willing to participate in the study. After obtaining the consent, the researcher interviewed each patron, which took approximately 30 minutes to 40 minutes to complete. But sometimes, it took more than an hour when participants were eager to share their experience. The discussions were audio-recorded with the permission of the participants. For direct quotations, the respondents' true names were not utilized; instead, codes were used. The questions for the interviews were prepared based on 'Guidelines for Library Services with 60+ Audience. The interviews took place from July to October 2020.

This study also required to understand how older adults approach the library, spent time in the library premises, difficulties they face, their behaviours and interaction between them and the staff. Direct observations

on these will provide in-depth understanding of above situations without relying on anyone else. Thus, direct observation is another method used in this study to examine the daily routine of elders and staff who engage with them. Approximately around four to six hours were spent mainly in CPL where the number of departments is more. With the approval of the chief librarian, the observations were made in public spaces in the library.

However, staff and elders did not know that they were being observed. Data gathered from this method provide a better understanding of the patron-staff relationship and the behaviour, their needs, and challenges faced by older adults. Also, the database of the registered senior patrons of the libraries was collected from respective libraries to find out the trend of the senior citizens' registration.

Dialogs from recorded interviews were carefully translated and transcribed from Sinhala or Tamil (local languages) to English. Then, those data were analyzed through NVivo software and categorized according to the themes. The thematic analysis was used to better understand the existing services for older adults, their perception about the services and the challenges that they face.

Result and Discussion

Membership Trend and Characteristics of the Senior Patrons

The public libraries of the Colombo Municipal Council include two types of membership: one is for registered users who can access lending and reference materials as well as visit the periodical division, which contains newspapers and periodicals. Another type of user is the non-registered user, who is unable to borrow library materials but is permitted

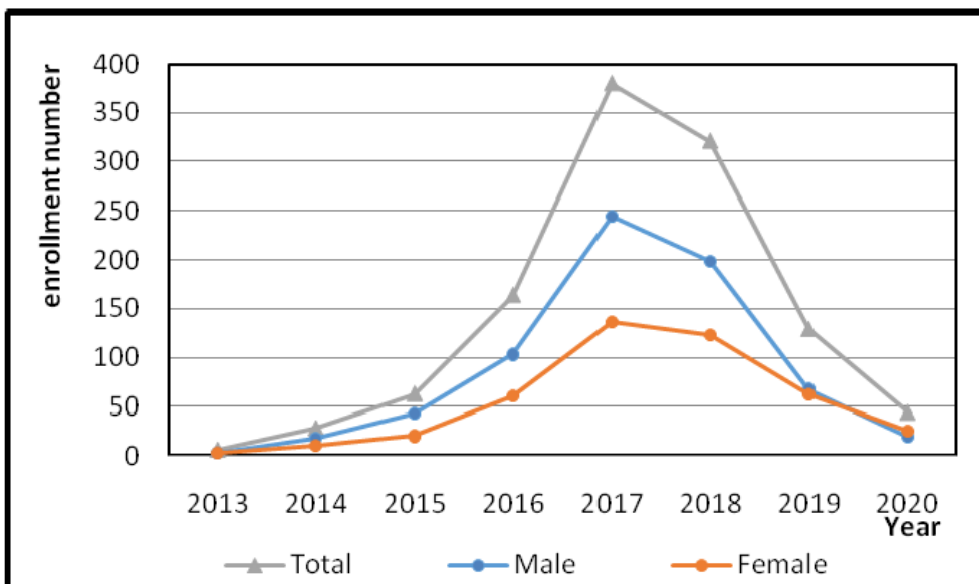
to browse through the periodicals. Only registered users who have access to all library materials were considered in the study.

Three public libraries charge users who want to join for two years an affordable membership fee (Rs 100 for adults and Rs 50 for children). Annually, the number of community members of all ages enroll in public libraries increases as a result of the flexible membership process.

Specifically, senior citizen registration has been on the increase in recent years. Figure 2 depicts the enrollment of older adults in the CPL from 2013 to 2020. Due to increased membership numbers, the CPL and its branches have maintained a separate database for older citizens since 2013.

Figure 2

Enrollment of senior citizens in the CPL



The total membership of senior citizens in the CPL is 1135: male 695 and female 440. Compared with female members, male users are higher in the registration process. Figure 2 depicts the gradual increase in membership between 2013 and 2017. In 2017, it reached as high as of 380 members. The enrollment trend was marginally down in 2018, but significantly down in 2019. This was due to the infrastructure modification process of the library building. Also, Due to the Covid 19 pandemic, the library was closed for several months in 2020, and enrollment of senior declined drastically as male: 19 and female: 25.

Figure 3 illustrates the Kotahena Public Library (KPL) membership trends. It is a contrary trend when compared with CPL enrollment. However, the growth slows down noticeably after an initial surge. In the KPL, however, there was no difference in membership between male and female older adults. Retired teachers make up the majority of female responders at the KPL.

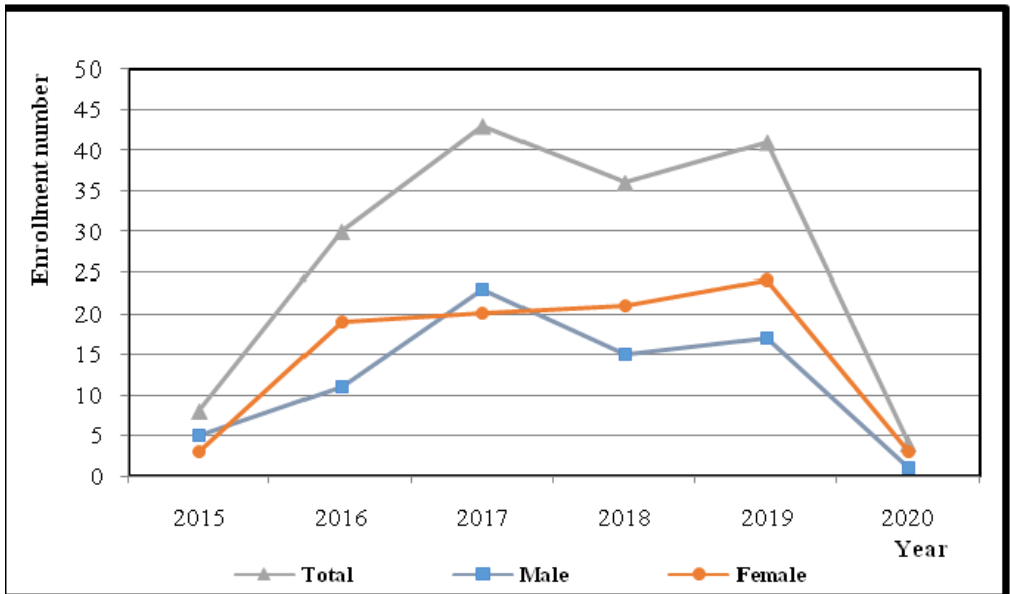
However, male registration trends have fluctuated, indicating a progressive climb from 2015 to 2017, a minor dip in 2018, and a thin rising membership trend in 2019. In 2020, as a result of the pandemic crisis, user registration reduces substantially, as does the CPL. However, the Sri Sucharitha public library (SPL) has a total of eleven members.

The senior users of the CPL and KPL mostly prefer to visit the lending division. Education and professional status and living environment are reasons for their multiple interests. The elderly users of the CPL are educated in the English medium curriculum in popular schools in Colombo. Most people in this group represent either higher social strata or retired from professional jobs. After their retirement, they have enough time with a comfortable living environment and space. Therefore, they

wish to take the reading materials from the libraries and spend their leisure time in their home with readings.

Figure 3

Enrollment of senior citizens in the KPL



At the same time, the SPL senior patrons mainly come for reading the newspapers and magazines. Their socio-economic backgrounds are different compared with the other two libraries. Senior male users were mostly involved in the informal sector and had small businesses during their earning time. Therefore, they still work without retirement. As a result, they prefer reading contents on current events and news rather than spending more time on fiction and non-fiction materials (lending collections). A respondent from SPL states:

I visit the library as a first-person every day in the morning to read the newspapers. I wish to read all the local newspapers in the three languages. It takes approximately three hours. So, I am in the library from 8.00 am to 11.00 am. (65 Aged, IDI: 10)

Notably, reading habits among females at SPL are deficient. According to the discussions from the interviews, it indicates that most people in this area do not have reading habits since childhood. They spent most of their lives on household chores such as cooking, caring for grandchildren, and family-related activities. Unlike working people, these females do not have retirement from their household chores in their lifetime. Their responsibilities are continuing from generation to generation, from children to grandchildren. Since most women are economically dependent on their husbands and children, their decision-making for their own benefit is often challenging. They do not intend to obtain membership from the public libraries with these difficulties. It is one of the reasons behind the SPL's low membership.

Senior Citizen's Perceptions on Collections

The three public libraries in this study consist of a significant number of books, magazines and newspapers, nearly one million books, 57 newspapers, and 111 periodical titles in three main languages – Sinhala, Tamil & English. Each library has its three collections – Lending, reference and periodicals. CPL has a reference division separately; nevertheless, the facility is limited in both KPL and SPL.

This study revealed that the senior users are interested in traditional paper format rather than electronic. A study by [Williamson et al.](#) (2006) also indicates similar results that generally elders in many parts of the

world prefer physically touchable, paper format. Older people feel that paper format is fundamental when developing the collection in the library. The majority of the participants are delighted (60 percent) with the physical collection.

Even though they were satisfied with the physical collection, among elderly users of the KPL, the demand for Tamil collection is higher than Sinhala collection because the neighbourhood of KPL is densed with the Tamil community. Due to the lack of adequate Tamil books in the collection, sometimes senior users are frustrated and return home without any books. Occasionally, only one or two copies are available of the new arrivals. Therefore, it may take at least one year for those books to reach the particular user's hand after several rotations. An older user of the KPL remarks that,

The majority of Tamil speaking people live at Kotahena, but unfortunately, the library collection mostly consists of books in Sinhala language. It's better to increase the number of Tamil books.

(64 Aged, IDI: 5)

In addition, senior users of the three libraries have no idea where to look for the information they need. The Dewey Decimal Classification (DDC) number-system is used to arrange the books. The DDC number system is unfamiliar to the majority of older users. As a result, they spent a significant amount of time searching through the shelves for the information they required. They also are not aware of the Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC).

That was expressed by CPL respondents,

I do not know how to find a book that I prefer; therefore, I spend more time finding the desired one..(61 Aged, IDI: 8)

Another respondent relates her experience with frustration,

If unable to find the desired one, I take whatever available. (65 Aged, IDI: 15)

Furthermore, the lack of equality in the provision of materials makes it difficult for visually challenged elders to obtain materials such as large print text and audio recordings of fiction and nonfiction publications.

Seniors with vision problems prefer large print text collections in their physical collections over regular print. They may be hesitant to visit the library if it does not provide an equitable service for those vulnerable groups. According to a study participant,

currently, I am using magnifying glass when I read the text. If we have large-print text, it is easy to read in low light and also can read more quickly. But unfortunately, I do not see any large-print collection in this library. We need our equal rights as other regular users have. (65 Aged, IDI: 10)

There is no special section or designated place for periodicals at SPL, where the majority of senior residents come to read the newspapers. As a result, they read newspapers in the common area, which is shared with others. On the other side, in KPL the periodical collection is located on the first floor, making it difficult for mobility impaired people to access the services. According to a senior user at the KPL,

My physical conditions make it difficult for me to ascend stairwells. However, I visit the section to satisfy my thirst to read newspapers.

However, I consider that the newspaper area should be located on the ground floor. (75 Aged, IDI: 20)

Despite its shortcomings, the periodical division is used by a significant number of senior adults. It is visible in all three public libraries. They mostly come to read the local daily newspapers and magazines.

Senior Citizen's Perceptions on Programs

Usually, public libraries organize programs for all user communities to attract nonusers and keep existing users active ([Bennett-Kapusniak, 2013](#)). Several types of programs, such as programs for pure entertainment, programs that teach new skills, programs that help patrons find or renew a hobby, programs that help with daily life skills, and programs that are educative ([Mates, 2003](#)). But this study mainly concentrates on the following programs, which focus on senior users and identify their perceptions.

- Assistive technology
- Inter-generational programming
- Awareness programs on healthcare through seminars & workshops
- Exhibitions & entertainment
- Book review and discussions
- Library user education programs

Assistive technology means aiding a senior citizen to operate and use technology-related equipment to access information in a library. Assistance can be done by the staff of the library or volunteer library user groups, particularly youth. Under the assistive technology program, introduce necessary computer skills to browse the websites, create email and other social media accounts (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram, etc.),

and teach smartphone operations in the library for senior users. However, according to this study, the senior users are reluctant to take technology-related help. Anyhow 44 percent of elderly users willing to learn computer-related technology.

Intergenerational programs involve youth and senior users interacting and sharing their experiences and abilities. It will also improve intergenerational understanding ([Martins et al., 2019](#)). Volunteering as a youth can help seniors who are new to computer technology. Seniors, on the other hand, can impart their life experiences and abilities to teenagers. One of the senior participants opined that,

I am a retired photographer, and I like to teach photography techniques to the younger generation free of charge. I will be much appreciated if the library could organize a platform for us to engage with teenagers. (65 Aged, IDI: 10)

Likewise, another female senior user states.

I am good in Sri Lankan traditional cooking. If needs are arising, I am so pleased to share my cooking skills with teenagers. But the opportunity for sharing these types of culinary culture is lacking since most youths are hunting for IT-related knowledge. (65 Aged, IDI: 22)

Therefore, this type of intergenerational programs might help break down stereotypes that teens have of older adults while strengthening strong community ties.

The public library can implement healthcare awareness programs through seminars and workshops for senior users without restriction ([Whitney et al., 2017](#)). Public libraries of the Colombo Municipal Council

(CMC) have conducted ad-hoc medical camps for elders. But it was not on a regular basis. The KPL also has conducted medical camp programs at the library premises with the help of the Lions Club.

Eighty-four percent of senior users state that Awareness programs on healthcare through seminars & workshops are extremely important. The majority of the senior citizens are worried about health conditions as it can be a challenge due to ageing. It might be why people in this phase more like to hunt for healthcare information and awareness ([Wicks, 2008](#)). One participant's perspective on health-care programs,

I am a cancer patient and a regular patron of this library. Suppose the library organizes cancer related-information programs. It will be more helpful for patients like me and, it will benefit people who do not have cancer. (60 Aged, IDI: 3)

Since seniors have more time for relaxation and leisure, they might enjoy entertainment and exhibition programs. About 50 percent of older adults are interested in entertainment and exhibition programs. In an entertainment program, it is like 'sit back and relax.' This type of program might include screenings or musical performances. CMC's public libraries do not offer those kinds of programs but have organized exhibitions but not for senior users. According to Kumary, sixty-five years old respondent,

I am good at handicrafts, particularly traditionally weaving crafts such as mats, handbags, purses and caps, etc., by using the pann. If the library can arrange an opportunity, I can display my products and unveil the value of our traditional works. (65 Aged, IDI: 22)

Book review and discussion are programs in which popular or well-known works, whether fiction or non-fiction, are available for review and

discussion in the library. The author of the book or someone knowledgeable about the book is invited. The CPL conducted this program on a regular basis. Senior library users were the target audience, and the majority (70 percent) of senior library users participated in this program.

The senior patrons of the libraries confront challenges due to the lack of user education programs in the public library. CPL has a massive collection in the three divisions - lending, reference, and periodical. But unfortunately, senior users would not be aware of them. The senior patrons who visit the lending division would not know about periodical division or reference division. There are two reasons for this: they do not have much time to spend in the library or it depends on the caretaker. A respondent articulated that,

I have good knowledge of the lending division, where fiction and non-fiction collections are located. But I don't know other divisions of the library. I am willing to learn and find other sections of the library. (64 Aged, IDI: 22)

Further, even though CPL has self-check-in and Online Public Access Catalog (OPAC) services, unfortunately, the senior users who participated in the interviews revealed that they did not know about it. One respondent comments,

I am a former lecturer. I have a basic understanding of OPAC and how to use it. I occasionally use the OPAC to locate the item/s I'm looking for. Unfortunately, my wife is unaware of this. She walks over to the bookshelves and selects what she desires (she mostly likes fiction). She has taken what has already been referred to. (70 Aged, IDI: 30)

Overall, programming for seniors is fun and rewarding and serves to make the library a community resource centre for seniors and their families. Many programs do not require more resources in terms of finance; but commitment from the library management is needed to make them happen. For the more complex programs, community organizations or government institutions can help the library receive funds and bring creativity and diversity to the programs offered. Whatever the type of program, library staff should never forget to include seniors and senior care providers in the planning. Finally, the ultimate goal of the program should be to make the library a place for seniors to be educated, entertained, and enlightened.

Senior Citizen's Perceptions on Library Facilities

Library facilities are essential in a public library to make it easier for all community members to use them. This section attempts to explore senior citizens' perceptions of the library facilities. It discusses two types of facilities: outreach service and physical facilities such as designated area, shelving, computer access, and restroom and café facilities.

Outreach Service Facilities

Outreach services are services for those infrequent users or nonusers or services for those who are traditionally underserved ([ALA, 2017](#)). Although most seniors are non-disabled and can get to the library; some may not be. The library can make a significant difference by moving library services out of the physical premises and into the areas where these senior citizens reside in order to provide library services for all seniors.

This outreach service facility available at Colombo Public Library under the name of "Mobile Library." The Mobile Library's key objective is to cater the services to the people who cannot visit the library physically.

Mobile Library covers 43 service points in diverse locations, such as housing schemes, private and government offices, the prison in the city of Colombo from wards 1 to 15. Mobile service visits twice a month according to pre-planned schedules to respective areas by bus. The bus is designed with shelves and contains books in DDC number order from 000 to 900 in three languages-Sinhala, Tamil and English. Every service point has a community coordinator. The librarian in charge of the Mobile Library communicates with the coordinator and informs the schedule.

For example: One elderly home has been served by mobile library service facilities in Colombo city. The library selected 200 books with multiple titles such as fiction, religious, psychology, general knowledge, mainly the kinds of books that would interest those elders who live in that elderly home. These 200 books were replaced in every six months. The point of view of most of the respondents through the in-depth interviews indicated the importance of the Mobile Library. The below remarks are elaborated on the importance of the Mobile Library. One respondent commented,

Due to my mobility and vision impairment, I always rely on my daughter to take me to the library. If my daughter is busy with her work, I may not be able to visit the library when I need it. So, if a Mobile Library comes to my neighborhood, it will be a huge service to people like me. (80 Aged, IDI: 7)

A son-in-law who was visiting the library on behalf of his mother-in-law, stated,

I am retired, and my wife is still working, though she will be retired in two years. Currently, I am in charge of caring for my mother-in-law. She is a retired teacher as well. She is a voracious reader. I can't take her to the library because of her health. It would be ideal if the Mobile Library came to our neighborhood. (70 Aged, IDI: 28)

A senior user of KPL states,

I am suffering from a neurological disorder. Therefore, I cannot sit or stand in one place for a long time. At the same time, I cannot stop reading. I am a retired teacher and love to read. Whenever possible, I read at least a small para. Due to my disease, I cannot visit the library frequently. I cannot go to the library very often because of my illness. If the library offers Mobile Library services near my home, I will be overjoyed. (68 Aged, IDI: 32)

Physical Facilities

A public library's physical facilities should be safe, comfortable, and inviting for all senior users in the community ([ALA, 2008](#)). The library is like a third place for seniors after home and workplace. In this study it was considered that physical facilities of the public libraries for senior users be provided in a designated area for older adult users; placing chairs or stools near stacks, information desk and check-in/out areas; fixing accessible shelves for materials frequently used by elderly users; allowing space between shelving to accommodate users in wheelchairs; making sure

that counters are lower enough to accommodate a seated patron; signage is perfect, braille (where appropriate), and readily noticeable to all, including computer & internet facilities; providing accessible lavatory facilities; and cafeteria or Nescafe vending machine.

In this study, three public libraries attempt to provide physical facilities to fulfill the needs of older adult patrons. On the other hand, senior users are dissatisfied with several a physical facility of the library. For example, public libraries, except for CPL, do not have restrooms; as a result, older customers with diabetes are unable to spend as much time as they would want in such libraries. Although the premises have a toilet, it has limited access for users. Very rarely the staff allows patrons to use the toilet when urgency occurs. The SPL user stated that:

Most of the older adults are diabetic patients; they need to use the toilet frequently. But unfortunately, the library does not have lavatory facilities for patrons due to the insufficient space. Therefore, they do not like to stay longer. (70 Aged, IDI: 13)

However, the CPL lobby has a comfy sofa with pillows and plenty of space. Although it is not intended for elders, they are welcome to sit and relax in the lobby. Physical facilities are extremely crucial for the majority of responders if they are to use the services smoothly and comfortably from the library.

Shelves are kept closer to each other in order to manage the space in the CPL. Therefore, there is no sufficient space between the bookshelves. It is difficult for senior users to walk through the passage and find the reading materials they want. Also, shelves are very high; therefore, senior users cannot take or reach for the books on those particular shelves. One of the respondents commented:

Difficult to access the books due to the height of the shelves; therefore, I always depend on the staff. (70 Aged, IDI: 25)

Three of the libraries in this study do not have designated areas for senior users but do have separate areas for children and students. As a result, senior users are hesitant to use the library. The senior patrons of KPL have to read newspapers while standing, which is challenging for them. They are unable to remove the paper from the stand, so they must stand and read.

I wish to read all the newspaper, but I could not stand more than an hour due to my illness. I get knee pain when I stand for a long time. Maybe there is a reason for locking the paper on the stand but, it is better to take out the paper from the stand and read it while sitting. (75 Aged, IDI: 20)

Further he states that,

Sometimes I fear it might fall due to my mobility impairment. If they offer a designated area for us, it will make it comfortable to access the services ourselves. (75 Aged, IDI: 20)

Overall, 80 percent of senior users are dissatisfied with the library facilities. They are, however, happy to spend their time in the library, where they may access vital resources.

Senior Citizen's Perceptions of Staff

Efficient and effective staff are essential to run the in-house operations of a library smoothly and professionally. According to the American Library Association guidelines for senior citizens (2017), staff should be well aware of services the library offers that may interest the

user communities. All three libraries receive highly praised remarks from the senior users regarding the helpfulness and friendliness of staff. According to the findings of the interviews, the majority of elderly users are delighted about the workforce of the libraries. The participants' responses indicated that the library staff is trained and professional, possess good knowledge of the physical and online collection, courtesy and helpful mind.

During the observations it has been witnessed the smooth, friendly working ethics of staff when they deal with senior users. Library staff is ready to help in many ways to this particular group of users. For example, if a senior user finds it difficult to reach for the materials on high shelves, the staff members are available there to do it.

One respondent by admiring efficiency of the library staff commented that,

Earlier when they were doing all the work manually, I felt that the library staff is busy with their in-house activities, therefore, that they did not have much time for us. I occasionally had to wait in a large line to check out. Everything has now changed as a result of the computer system. I think now they do it using technology, which allows them to spend more time with us. They (library staff) assist me in a variety of ways. (60 Aged, IDI: 45)

Unfortunately, one of the major issues that the three libraries encounter according to this study is the lack of specialized employees who are properly trained to assist older users. This scarcity makes it difficult to successfully implement geriatric programs and services.

The elder participants, on the other hand, expressed gratitude to each library staff member for their efforts. They are pleased with the staff

services, notwithstanding the overall lack of senior-oriented staff services as endorsed by the ALA Guidelines.

Conclusion and Recommendation

The world is indeed aging. We are moving towards a world in which there will be more older people than youngsters. By the year 2050, demographers estimate the world as a whole will contain more people aged sixty and older than children under the age of fifteen, and that will be one of the most dramatic shifts in history.

The goal of this study is to learn how senior citizens feel about their public library services. The American Library Association's Reference and User Services Association (RUSA) published "Guidelines for Library Services with a 60+ Audience: Best Practices" (2017). According to the guidelines, the study examines four important areas - collecting, programs, facilities, and personnel - to determine the perceptions of older persons.

Senior citizen is a vibrant community. The senior patrons of the three public libraries of the study are a heterogeneous population. For example, users in SPL accumulated a lack of education and mainly depended on the informal sector for livelihood. They mostly visit to read newspapers. On the other hand, CPL and KPL senior users worked formally and consequently received the pension. They like to read both books and periodicals with multiple areas of interest.

Three public libraries of this study provide excellent services regarding collections, particularly in lending and periodical significantly. Senior patrons of the CPL are interested in fiction collection in the various genres with the English linguistic. Senior patrons of the KPL, on the other

hand, prefer Tamil linguistics because the majority of them come from Tamil-speaking communities.

However, due to lack of space and financial resources, the library collection cannot be fully developed or expanded in accordance with the preferences of senior users. Due to limited space, the bookshelves have taken full capacity, with some shelves being very high and with very tight spaces between them. As a result, elderly users have a difficult time accessing the materials. Furthermore, materials are organized using the DDC system, and seniors are unaware of how books are organized. As a result, they spend a lot of time looking for the right materials. Nonetheless, despite the constraints, senior users are satisfied and make the maximum use of the collection and services.

The public libraries in this study (CPL, KPL, and SPL) organize and arrange a variety of programs for their users, although not all of them are geared toward elderly patrons. Many older adult patrons, on the other hand, have engaged in the book review and discussion program of the CPL. Furthermore, elder users prefer healthcare information programs delivered through seminars and workshops. However, certain medical camp programs have been held at public libraries on an ad hoc basis rather than on a regular basis. Because of the lack of library marketing strategies, some public library programs fail to attract elderly citizens. Patrons are also unaware of the programs that are available. As a result, offered programs do not effectively meet the needs of senior users.

Senior users are dissatisfied with outreach programs and physical facilities. Due to shortage of space and financial resources, those services are limited. There are no designated places or lavatories for elderly users at KPL and SPL. As a result, when patrons use the library, they experience

distress, dependency, and delays. It's no surprise that the three public libraries confront with challenges when it comes to providing resources and facilities to senior citizens.

Staff of the public libraries provides adequate services to their patrons. Senior users are also pleased with their services. However, due to lack of designated trained professionals to serve senior patrons it has not been able to pay sufficient attention to older adults and address their specific needs.

Overall, senior users believe that the collection and staff services meet their needs adequately, with few downsides when compared to the other two services - programs and facilities. Despite the numerous difficulties and challenges, public library administrators have demonstrated excellence in their work and resourcefulness, and they try to do their best to provide quality services to older adult patrons.

The tagline of 2030 Sustainable Development Goal Agenda is "Leave no one behind." That means that all members of society, particularly the most vulnerable, including older persons, have equal rights to achieve balanced sustainable development. In compliance with this, the study recommends that all members of the user community be included in the journey of public library services in an equitable manner.

Recommendations

When it comes to increasing or expanding services based on the preferences of senior users, public libraries confront with problems and barriers. However, it is the right time for public libraries of Sri Lanka to pay attention to senior citizens as a distinct group. It is necessary to provide tailored services to the growing population of senior citizens. Therefore,

public libraries must devise strategies to overcome the problems that they cannot avoid. This study makes the following recommendations with the hope of assisting public libraries in reducing obstacles and providing effective and efficient services to older citizens.

Surveying

Every public library conducts a regular survey to identify or learn about the information needs of their patrons. They must also be aware of their patrons' requirements. Furthermore, staff should be well-versed in the local and national census of the aging population, including demographics and the number of senior people living in homes and elderly homes. The results of the survey could assist the library management in providing tailored services to their older community. Indeed, a survey is the only way to get evidence-based information to determine that senior patron's needs are being met through public library services.

Collaboration

Collaboration is one of the methods that can help the institution reach its goal. Many problems can be solved if public libraries collaborate with senior-serving organizations including the Department of Social Services, the National Secretariat for Elders, the Diabetes Association of Sri Lanka, and HelpAge International. It may be possible to obtain financial assistance from them in order to increase and improve the exclusive resources and facilities for senior users by submitting necessary proposals for projects. Also, with the support of those groups, awareness and health care programs can be carried out; for example, the Diabetes Association of Sri Lanka regularly conducts health education and

awareness programs. As a result, it can provide consultancy services to public libraries.

Awareness Programs

Both the library and the patrons require information about the services and requirements. Senior citizens' information needs should be well-known to public libraries. As a result, older adult library patrons should be aware of what services are available to them and what services are not available. Public libraries should hold regular awareness activities for their user community to make them aware of the services they offer. They can get the information they need from senior users while working on programs at the same time

Voluntarism

Voluntarism is invaluable for libraries with large service areas and a small staff. Particularly, outreach library services require many one-on-one interactions between library staff and patrons. The more hands the library reaches out to the isolated senior community, the greater the chance that seniors will be touched by the library. Voluntarism can make the difference between seniors being served and seniors being served effectively. However, volunteers must be selectively chosen, trained and encouraged.

Designated Staff

Senior users should be served entirely by well-trained staff at public libraries. At least one employee should be assigned to the role of

internal senior services coordinator. This senior services coordinator may also be able to join professional organizations, choose relevant service materials, and create senior services training modules. This person would be able to arrange activities and services for seniors by liaising with community ageing groups. The senior services coordinator can also assist in the coordination of in-service staff training programs. It will assist library employees and volunteers in determining the visible and hidden conditions that may affect some older individuals, as well as how the library might meet their requirements.

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