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A Survey on the Social Status of the Library and Information Science Profession (Case Study: Librarians of Public Libraries of Guilan Province, Iran)

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to investigate the social status of Library and Information Science from the point of view of librarians of public libraries in Guilan province, Iran. This research is an applied research and has been conducted through a survey method. The statistical population of the study consisted of 199 librarians working in public libraries of Guilan province, Iran. Using Morgan's table, 127 subjects were selected as sample size and 124 of them responded to the questionnaire. In order to assess the validity of the questionnaire, professors' and library managers' opinions were used and for reliability purposes, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was used which had an acceptable reliability of 0.96. Findings showed that based on the views of librarians of public libraries, the social status of Library and Information Science is at weak and moderate levels. There is also a significant difference between the views of librarians on their social status in terms of gender and level of education. According to the results of this research indicating the low level of the social status of the Library and Information Science profession, it seems that the authorities and policymakers of this profession, on the one hand, and the librarians themselves, on the other hand, need to take more effective steps and decisions in order to promote the status of the field.

Key words: Social status, Public libraries, Library and Information Science.

1. Introduction

Early attempts at the definition of "profession" began from the point where professional groups demanded a professional position and discussed the features that, based on these characteristics, themselves from other groups Job differentials (Cannon, 2017). According to Oppenheim and Pollecutt (2000), every profession should at least include the following: skilled or specialized knowledge gained through extensive training; this specialized knowledge is developed through research; can provide a valuable service to the community and it has internal autonomy.

Librarianship is a profession that is concerned with the application of knowledge, creation, acquiring, processing, and organization of information to users at the appropriate time. Librarianship is seen as a career that is dedicated to serving the public, providing timely and accurate information, thus contributing to the development of the society (Damilola et al., 2018). Today, the importance of Library and Information Science (LIS) professions has become more and more evident as the pace of movement towards the knowledge society accelerates. LIS professionals play a decisive role in the knowledge societies. By analyzing the nature of information and knowledge and developing mechanisms for its collection, organization, dissemination and management, these experts provide a framework for community dynamism (including organizations and society as a whole). They are consistently transferring their experiences and learning in the form of formal and informal education, according to their professional foundations (Turner, 2016). In fact, the task of library and information specialists is to pave the way for communication between the two elements of information and information that is necessary for the development of society.

LIS is an effective platform for the development and development of creative thinking in society. If creativity and innovation comprehensively and fully integrated into any organization, including libraries, can be taken into account, it can provide the growth of staff talents, increase the quantity and quality of services, reduce costs and provide job satisfaction for employees, all of which, enhances the effectiveness of the social status of the profession. Therefore, one of the issues that LIS needs to pay more attention to is the social dignity of the profession. Because this field is essentially a social sphere and the activities of the librarian are in fact a social preexistence that cannot be ignored without social and communicative impacts. In fact, social status means a wise sense of respect for people with a particular responsibility in the community (Aydin, Demir and Erdemli, 2015). In other words, social status refers to the place of an individual or group in the social networking system or to the rank of one person or group in comparison with other individuals or groups (Kazemiupour, 2010). In order to identify and assess the social status of the LIS, the knowledge of librarians

and even young people interested in studying in this field is necessary for the status of the social status of the profession or for the improvement of its status.

As it turned out, one of the areas of research in the field of LIS is the research on the social status of librarians. This has been viewed from a variety of perspectives. For instance, librarians had a history, at various times, what they were worth, what class they were and what they were doing. Or is the livelihood status of librarians in different societies. People generally have a look at the librarian, and this kind of look is influenced by what factors. Various approaches and approaches such as historical research, questionnaires and interviews have been used (Shaghaghi, 2013).

The social status gained the attention of researchers in other professions (Aydin et al., 2015; Husnutdinova, 2017; Ilina et al., 2018). However, within LIS, Prins and DeGier (1992) in a research entitled "Situation and Fame and Information Work" highlighted several factors in the low social status of librarianship, the most important of which are the community, economy, and psychological characteristics. The shortage of funding, low quality of services, and high unemployment rate among graduates are among other factors that reduce the social status of the field. Harris and Wilkinson (2001) examined the position of LIS professionals among the 12 information-related jobs that participants in the research considered for a lower ranking for librarianship and believed that this area required less skill.

However, Budd (2003) states that librarians are generally engaged in technical activities and often do not noted to their activities as a social act. Librarians are often considered to be entangled in their pragmatism, their professional activities, regardless of social and social dimensions. Considerable attention has been paid to research in the field of LIS in Iran in recent years. Hakimi, Tababsi and Sorinezami (2016) investigated the social statues of the librarian from the point of view of the inhabitants in the south east provinces of Iran. The study found that social status of the librarians was in the mediocre level. The social status of academic librarians was higher than the social status of public librarians in the viewpoint of people. The community of research believed that the important factors to increase social status of librarians were as follows: The sense of responsibility, the sufficient information literature of the librarians, having information knowledge to reply user, and enough skills of communication with users.

Haidari, Kokabi and KaabOmeir (2017) studied the social status of LIS discipline from librarians' viewpoint in Ahvaz city of Iran. Findings showed that 6 factors have effective role in the social status of LIS: 1- personal characteristics of professionals; 2- specialism; 3- occupational economy; 4- professional standards; 5- skill learning practice and 6- social need to the profession. Confirmatory factor analysis showed that two of them have meaningful effect: specialism and social need to the profession. Also, there were significant differences among viewpoints in terms of respondent's educational degree, professional background, type of the library, and occupational

position. However, viewpoints have not been significantly different in terms of type of employment and field of activity.

An overview of the backgrounds shows that, within Iran, research on the assessment of the social status of LIS profession and the study of the factors affecting it at the beginning of the study is needed and it is necessary to investigate this issue from different perspectives. Moreover, recognizing the value and attractiveness of LIS profession not only can attract specialists, especially young people and students, but also can help them justify the role and position of the profession in developing society and defend their historical status (Fattahi, 2012). Considering the importance of this topic, it seems that further research is needed. Therefore, the present research attempts to determine the social status of LIS profession from the point of view of librarians of public libraries in Guilan province, Iran.

In this regard, this research is an attempt to find answers to the following questions:

- 1) How is the level of social status of LIS profession among librarians of public libraries in Guilan province?
- 2) Is there a significant difference between the views of women and men on the social status of the LIS profession?
- 3) Is there a significant relationship between the views of librarians on the social status of LIS profession and their age?
- 4) Is there a significant relationship between the views of librarians on the social status of LIS profession and level of education?

2. Research Methodology

The present research is an applied research and has been conducted through a survey method. The statistical population of the study was 199 librarians working in the public libraries of Guilan province (16 cities). In this research, stratified random sampling method was used. Using Morgan's table, 127 subjects were selected as sample size and 124 of them responded to the questionnaire.

A questionnaire designed by KaabOmeir and Haidari (2016) for assessing the social status of the LIS Professionals was used in this research. This tool has 42 questions. The validity of the tool was confirmed by the experts and the reliability of the questionnaire was determined by Cronbach's alpha coefficient, which shows an adequate reliability of the questionnaire by obtaining an alpha of 0.96.

3. Results

Question 1: How is the level of social status of LIS profession among librarians of public libraries in Guilan province?

Chi-square test was used to answer this question (Tables 1-2). According to the results provided in Table 1 and Table 2, the mean of ranks is not the same; therefore, it can be stated that social status is “poor” and “moderate” in terms of rank (3.45). Moreover, “good”, “somewhat good” and “excellent” status is in the next ranks (2.85, 2.73, 2.52) respectively. As a result, findings revealed that the level of social status of Guilan librarians is in a moderate and weak position.

Table 1: Results of Chi-square test to determine the level of social status of librarians

| Variable | Social status | Average | The amount Chi-square test | Sig. |
|-----------------------------|---------------|---------|----------------------------|------|
| The Librarian's Perspective | Weak | 4.27 | 73.633 | .000 |
| | medium | 4.27 | | |
| | Somewhat good | 3.91 | | |
| | good | 3.98 | | |
| | Excellent | 3.80 | | |

Table 2: Average rankings using Chi square test

| Social status | Ranking |
|---------------|---------|
| Weak | 3.45 |
| Medium | 3.45 |
| Somewhat good | 2.73 |
| Good | 2.85 |
| Excellent | 2.52 |

Question 2: Is there a significant difference between the views of women and men on the social status of the LIS profession?

The results of Table 3 relate to the measurement of the relationship between gender and social status variables using the independent group t test. The results suggest that the obtained t value is 9.970 and the error level is 0.000. Since the received address level is less than the maximum acceptable error level (0.05); specifically, it means that: Social status of LIS professionals is significantly different among men and women.

Table 3: Results of independent T test

| The dependent variable | SEX | N | Mean | df | T value | Sig. |
|------------------------|-------|-----|-------|-----|---------|------|
| Social status | Men | 17 | 68.06 | 122 | 9.970 | .000 |
| | Women | 107 | 31.96 | | | |

Question 3: Is there a significant relationship between the views of librarians on the social status of LIS profession and their age?

To answer this question, one-way analysis of variance was used; the reason for using one-way ANOVA test is that we want to compare the means of a quantitate attribute in three or more of the three groups. The results of one-way ANOVA are

provided in Table 4. The results show that the obtained F value is 0.783 and the error level is 0.506. Since the error rate obtained from the maximum acceptable error level (0.05) is higher, this means that: The view of librarians of different ages is not significant.

Table 4: Results of one-way ANOVA to determine the relationship between social status of LIS profession and age

| Variable | Age | Abundance | F value | The significance level |
|-----------------------------|-----------|-----------|---------|------------------------|
| The Librarian's Perspective | 30-20 | 18 | 0.783 | 0.506 |
| | 40-31 | 42 | | |
| | 50-41 | 48 | | |
| | 51-higher | 16 | | |
| | total | 124 | | |

Question 4: Is there a significant relationship between the views of librarians on the social status of LIS profession and level of education?

The results of the relationship between the two variables of education and the social status of LIS profession are presented in Table 5. The results show that the F value obtained is 16.641 and the error level is 0.000. Since the error level obtained from the maximum acceptable error level (0.05) is lower, this means that: there is a significant difference between the social status of LIS profession and level of education.

Table 5: Results of one-way ANOVA to determine the relationship between social status of LIS profession and education level

| Variable | Level of Education | Abundance | F value | The significance level |
|-----------------------------|--------------------|-----------|---------|------------------------|
| The Librarian's Perspective | Associate Degree | 5 | 16.641 | .000 |
| | Bachelor | 100 | | |
| | MA | 19 | | |
| | Ph.D. | 0 | | |
| | Total | 124 | | |

4. Discussion and Conclusion

According to the findings, various factors in determining the social status of librarians are effective; factors such as gender and age have been identified. Moreover, results indicated that the social status of LIS profession from the point of view of librarians is in a weak or moderate level.

The findings of this study are consistent with the results of Prins and DeGier (1992) and Heydari and Kokbabi (2017). They reported a meaningful relationship between the views of librarians and their level of education. However, findings of this

research are not consistent with the results of Budd (2003). Budd believes that librarians are only engaged in technical activities and are away from social dimensions. It seems that, if librarians, for whatever reason, are dissatisfied with their role and disclose this dissatisfaction with their social behavior, will have a distant role and will reduce their social status.

According to the review of literature, Prins and DeGier (1992) do not consider the need for education to be effective in creating a positive attitude toward the social status of the profession. Harris and Wilkinson (1992) concluded that the low level of knowledge of librarians' work and the social responsibility of the library business and the lack of understanding of the status of the library in the structure of the community and its mission and functions have led to a high position for the profession and the workers do not consider it. Haidari et al. (2017) attributed the social status of this profession to various factors that determined the social need as an important and effective factor in creating a positive position in the field. Given the mission of the profession, a real librarian should try to resolve the information needs of his users. If librarians do not pay enough attention to this, they will not only reduce their position but also the profession; subsequently, then they will provide the opportunity for individuals or institutions without understanding of the librarian and discipline to play this role.

However, this research was conducted only in a province and on librarians in public libraries. Further research is needed to be carried out in other environments in order to investigate the social status of the LIS to make judgments about this issue easier.

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