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The pandemic of COVID 19 and Role of Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The present article highlights the role of libraries and the library staff to be played during the emergency circumstances of the community spread of the virus of the COVID-19 worldwide. The study proposes that the libraries cannot afford to close down their formal duties of providing information to the users. During the situation of lockdown, the libraries can provide the relevant information and knowledge sources to the information seekers including teachers, students and researchers through various online and web sources. The libraries should be in continuous coordination with the researchers conducting research in the field of the cure of the COVID-19. Besides performing these formal roles, libraries have the social roles to play which includes the roles of disseminating the awareness about the precautions to taken for the prevention of the CORONA-19, spreading out the guidelines of government in community and playing motivational role boosting the morale of people.

Keywords: Libraries, COVID-19, Teaching-Learning, Research, Awareness.

Introduction

Academic libraries, established in colleges and universities, are the core sources of information for students, researchers and teachers. The information seekers belonging to any discipline of education rely on libraries to obtain the most appropriate and most reliable sources of information. Libraries preserve huge number books and journals to satisfy the

information needs of the users. Besides, books and journals, there are other periodicals, reports, dissertations which attract particular information seekers (Baker & Evans, 2011). For general users of libraries, newspapers, periodicals and booklets are available ready to present the fresh and authentic information to the seekers. Times have been changing. New scientific inventions have been taking place (Nicolson, 2017). The needs and aspirations of the information seekers have changed. New sources and devices of delivering information have become popular. Nevertheless, the libraries have been still maintaining their relevance and authenticity as ever, since centuries.

The Crisis of the COVID 19 Corona Virus

COVID 19, it the name of the advanced corona virus, which had been firstly identified in China. The difference of COVID 19 from the previously existing corona virus is that it is much more lethal in comparison to the normal corona virus. Whereas, common corona virus causes cough, cold and mild fever, the COVID-19 results in more severe consequences and may even cause death in certain cases. The old aged persons and persons already suffering due to any chronic diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, T.B. etc. are more prone to this virus and their chances of casualties are more common. Starting from the Wuhan city of China in November 2019, up to June 2020, it has spread over 110 countries of world (WHO 2020: 2-3).

It has been confirmed by the experts that the virus of the COVID-19 is communicable. It transfers from one person to other person when the saliva or mucus of one person from his/her mouth especially reaches to other person or persons while speaking, coughing or sneezing. If the saliva or mucus of the infected person rests on his hands or any other part of his body and reaches to the other person through his touch to the saliva or mucus, there are severe chances of the transfer of the virus. As per the WHO (World Health Organisation), the R_0 (a mathematical term for measuring the level of infection of a disease) of COVID-19 is 3.77. In the terminology of the medical science, it means that a person carrying the

infection of the COVID-19 may infect 3.77 persons who come to his contact. Consequently, for controlling the transmission of COVID-19 from an infected person to other persons, various countries started chalking out the strategies to control the spread of the virus. All countries locked-down their public places wherever people could rush and the threat of the spread of the virus could further aggravate.

Impact of COVID-19 on Libraries

When all public places were announced to be closed for the indefinite time, the libraries were also shut down in haste. As the library employees had no prior intimation about the temporary but immediate shut down, no plans could be made for meeting the challenges of the times. The books had been issued to the users for definite time, but now those books could not be returned. There were books, periodicals and other items which were yet to be placed appropriately. Now, due to the unannounced and indefinite shut down, the cleanliness and maintenance of hygiene of the libraries was not possible. More worryingly, the needs of the users or the information seekers could not be fulfilled, which further meant that libraries could be perceived as non-existent during the times of pandemic. Till date, it has been a huge challenge for the librarians and other library staff to maintain the relevance of libraries during these times of crisis.

Role of Libraries during the Pandemic of COVID-19

Michael Mabe and Emily A. Ashley in their book entitled “The Developing Role of Public Libraries in Emergency Management: Emerging Research and Opportunities” have discussed in detail the role of libraries in the situation of emergency (Mabe & Ashley, 2017). They have mainly highlighted a number of roles of libraries during emergency which are discussed in brief as following.

Being a Safe Haven: Libraries, due to the architecture and the safety measures taken during the process of the construction of their buildings, are comparatively very safe. Therefore, whenever any natural calamities such as

earthquake, hurricanes or floods etc. Occur, libraries can be used as the shelters for the nearby community. The basic facility such as shelter, water, toilets and electricity can be provided within the premises of libraries.

Offering Normal Services: During the situations of crisis, libraries should be endeavoured to provide the consistent services to the clients or users, without any fluctuations or delays. The teachers, students and especially researchers should be provided maximum support so that they can accomplish their assignments without any hindrances.

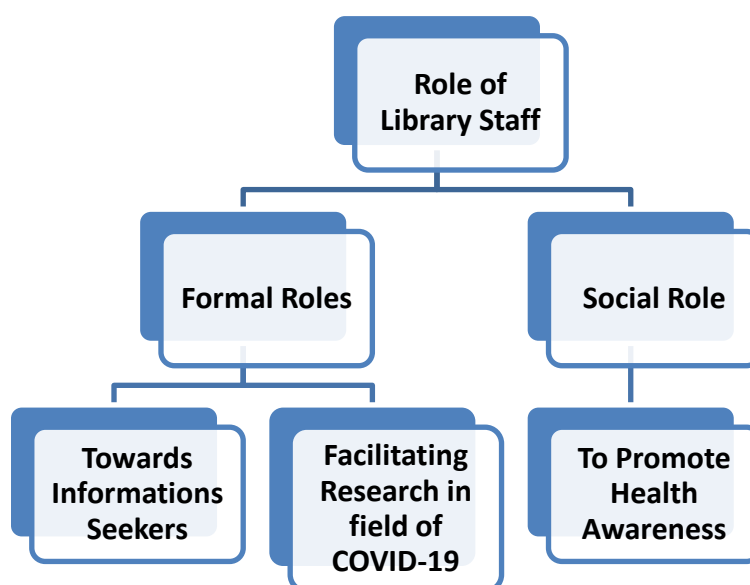
Operating as Information Hubs: Libraries have an important role of disseminating information during the times of emergency. Library staff is always trained and hence, expert in accumulating relevant information and communicating the same to various seekers of the information. In the case of emergency, the library staff can spread out in public the information about adopting various precautions to prevent the ill-effects of emergency. In case of getting struck in any emergency situation, the escape routes and the remedies can also be disseminated by the library staff.

Improvising: The library staff has a formal training as well as availability of sources in keeping the community engaged in positive activities. In case of emergency, the library staff can contribute in boosting the morale of vulnerable and effected groups and communities by sharing with them positive case studies, stories and motivational talks through various online and web sources.

Discussions and Findings

During this time of crisis, people are in panic situation due to the threat of the spread of the COVID-19 virus and the governments have declared to shut down temporarily all places of rush for the indefinite time. It is a challenge for library staff to play a positive which can contribute to provide information to the information seekers and provide social help as well.

Model- 1: Role of Library Staff during the COVID- 19



Formal Roles

Formal role in this particular context means the functions of the library staff to perform which are formally assigned to them as part of their officially designated duties. These roles are always well defined in objective form. All members of the library staff are aware as well as trained to perform these roles. Formal roles of the librarians and other library staff are further divided into two categories, i.e. role towards information seekers and role in facilitating research in the field of the protection from the virus of COVID-19.

Role towards Information Seekers

Every academic library has a certain number of information seekers who are formally affiliated as well as practically regularly attached with the libraries. These information seekers or users in academic libraries are formally called as users of a number of categories. There are different categories of users in the academic libraries. There are students who regularly excel libraries for the purpose of getting books and other informative material relevant for their studies. Researchers are the other larger segment who regularly visit libraries to obtain the information from books, periodicals, manuscripts and dissertations. Teachers are also the frequent users of the libraries who use

different library sources for preparing their notes and pursuing their research along with other requirements.

During the crisis period of COVID-19 students compose the largest and most helpless section of sufferers. The decision of the lockdown was declared in the countries in haste and therefore, students could not get any time to plan for collecting and accumulating the alternative sources information and knowledge during the time of lockdown. The students largely depend on libraries. Students get the required books issued at their library pass-books for further readings. Moreover, students use the reading halls of the libraries for reading. Now during the lockdown and even curfew in several parts of world, students are deprived of the most reliable and common source of information. Under this unfamiliar and unwelcome scenario, the librarians and library staff has very crucial role to play with regard to satisfying the information related needs of students affiliated to certain libraries. Today's era is the era of information technology. Almost all libraries, which are aware about the recent developments in the field of information science, have developed several kinds of web or online sources of information and knowledge. In the present situation, students can be provided the free access to the e-books. The libraries are now interconnected with each other through the INFLIBNET or other mechanism. The data-base of the students affiliated to the library can be prepared for this purpose. After getting the e-mail addresses or what's app numbers of students, information can be circulated to them about the online or web sources for obtaining the data related and relevant to their studies.

Researchers are also the second largest group of formal and purposeful information seekers who are deprived of the access to information sources available at the libraries due the situation of lockdown as there is threat of the spread of the COVID-19 virus. Researchers, particularly, pursuing the Ph.D. or M.Phil degrees or engaged as the post-doctoral fellows, have always the pre-fixed timelines to complete the levels of their research. As there is lockdown, researchers either have moved to their homes and have left their

research institutes. Those researchers, who have been still living in the campuses or near to the research institutes, even do not have any access to the libraries they are affiliated to. Hence, their precious times is getting wasted. The library professionals can provide support to the researchers in the non-fluctuating running of their research courses. Information about the e-mail addresses and contact numbers can be availed from their departments. Via these sources, the researchers can be informed about the availability of the e sources which may be relevant for the purpose of research. There are numerous publishing corporate and professionals, who have provided open access to their journals and periodicals, particularly during the present situation of lockdown. There is availability of e books, e-thesis. While providing the access as well as training to use these resources, the library professionals can support the researchers pursuing their research without further delay while staying at their residences.

The teachers are bound to share the maximum responsibility of providing access of relevant information and knowledge to their students and researchers during the challenging circumstances of the COVID-19. The students as well as their parents especially expect from teachers that they should provide maximum related and required information sources for the persistence of process of regular studies. The libraries staff of the colleges and universities the role of making the teachers aware about the availability of various web sources which can be consulted by teachers and shared with students and researchers as well.

Role of facilitating research in the Field of COVID-19 Virus

The moment the intelligentsia recognised COVID-19 Corona as a deadly virus and adopting the nature of an epidemic, the researchers belonging to the field of biochemistry and other related sciences, initiated their researchers for inventing any medicines, which can prevent human beings from this virus. Obviously, the researchers pursuing the researches in the concerned field do need to be familiar with the pre-existing and established wisdom in the field. To go through that pre-existing information and

knowledge in the field of this kind of virus, the scientists require attaining books, research articles and other relevant materials. With this regard, the academic libraries have a historical role to play. The library employees, particularly those who are trained in this field, can establish a coordination with the scientists. The needs of the scientists with regard to books, articles and other forms of published research can be fulfilled by the library employees. The scientists can be allowed to access through the web sources, all material provided by the libraries through the online mode. The access to various paid research journals purchased by the libraries should be shared with the scientists who have been pursuing research in the field of COVID-19.

Social Role of Libraries during the COVID-19

Besides playing the formal and official roles during the crisis of COVID-19, libraries have the scope of playing the social role by contributing in the community disease control, prevention and awareness programs. Libraries can mainly perform the leading roles which are mentioned in detail in the following discussion.

Libraries can provide information to people to take preventive measures to successfully countering the chances of the spread out of COVID-19. There are several methods which can be adopted by the library employees to disseminate awareness among people about the virus. People can be told about the benefits of the social distancing. The awareness about the positive results of wearing masks in public can be further shared with people. The libraries can aware people about taking several other preventive measures such as washing hands regularly, using sanitizers where there is no possibility of washing hands and preventing going to the rush areas. During the situations of lockdown and curfews, people while sitting at their homes have started getting panic. Moreover, the increasing magnitude of the number of deaths due to the COVID-19 has created a psychological threat among people and it has further resulted into mental stress among people. The mental stress further results into weak immunity which may aggravate

the chances of getting affected from the virus of COVID-19. In these circumstances, the library staff has very important role to play. The libraries have the availabilities of the methods and channels of sharing the positive case studies, stories of survival with people. Besides that, the library staff can arrange motivational talks of experts and disseminate these talks in community to uplift the morale of people during the times of emergency.

Conclusion

Whole world had badly affected from the negative impact of COVID-19. Millions of people have suffered due to the virus. Numerous people have been losing their lives and others have been living in the age of panic. Educational institutions are closed and there is no formal operation of teaching, learning and research going on. People have been avoiding going to the public places. In this terrifying situation of the threat of physical disease, mental trauma and social disturbance, the academic libraries have an important role to play. The libraries can provide all relevant material to teachers to prepare via online sources and recommending them the open access as well paid sources so that they can prepare their notes and communicate to the students. Libraries can provide access of various web sources to students to equip them to learn for completing the syllabi and competing for the forthcoming examinations and tests. The researchers affiliated to the academic libraries can also be engaged in the research activities by the library staff by providing them the required and relevant sources to them via online modes. In particular, the researchers involved in conducting research in the field of the prevention of the COVID-19 can be provided all necessary study material by the academic libraries so that any invention regarding the cure of the virus of COVID-19 may be introduced. Besides that, libraries can play the social role of disseminating awareness among communities about taking all preventive measures, following the guidelines of government and preventing the effect of the virus of COVID-19.

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