

Public Libraries Role in Promoting Health Awareness in Sultanate of Oman

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Abstract— The study discussed the role of public libraries in promoting health awareness in Sultanate of Oman, as the study concluded that public libraries awareness degree of its role in health awareness is weak as (36.3%) of the sultanate's libraries offer some health services represented in availing little number of health information sources and manifestos and posters obtained by libraries from health organizations, in addition to holding some lectures and seminars about some health subjects like anti diseases or children's vaccination also some libraries provided first aids courses, but the libraries didn't use internet in providing services of promoting health awareness in the Sultanate, and of the most important health awareness obstacles libraries and their officials non awareness of its role in promoting health awareness and lack of budget and potentials of providing training courses of health information development to libraries or users, the study recommended that health awareness shall be incorporated under the library's objectives and services, and its annual plan includes some health services all the yearlong and calling some health organizations' members to deliver some lectures or providing training courses to users, and the library's website includes public health websites links.

Keywords— Public libraries, Sultanate of Oman, Health awareness.

I. INTRODUCTION

Public libraries are cultural organizations providing their services to all community's members, according to public libraries principles, acculturation and information are their main objectives, it aims to achieve through resources availability, and offering services guaranteeing the user's information development. Libraries are knowledge mediators having skills and sources needed for assisting governments and individuals to communicate, organizing and understanding the main data to achieve permanent development through providing them with information about main rights, public services, environment, health, education, job opportunities and public expenses supporting local communities and nations for guiding development. The declaration confirmed that libraries services shall avail health information for supporting permanent development efforts [1].

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Accordingly, public libraries play a big role in supporting health awareness of community members. To confirm this role IFLA statement [2] said that libraries shall take their role in guaranteeing that all shall receive maternal health care including family organization, media, education and incorporating maternal health in national strategies and programs.

Medical libraries association defined health awareness as capacities or potentials required identifying suitable information sources and using in retrieving relevant information, in addition to appreciating information value and their applicability in a certain situation and analyzing, understanding and using information in making good health decisions [3].

This study aimed at identifying activities and services offered by Sultanate of Oman to enhance health awareness between community members and restrictions preventing libraries from performing their role. To achieve such objectives, the study tried to answer the following questions:

- 1-How far are the public libraries aware of promoting health awareness in Sultanate of Oman?
- 2-What are the most important activities and services offered by public libraries to promote health awareness among Omani community's individuals?
- 3-What are the most important restrictions preventing libraries from promoting health awareness in Sultanate of Oman?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study followed analytical descriptive method to describe objectives and services offered by public libraries to promote health awareness in the Sultanate, to collect data; questionnaire was used as a methodological tool.

Study Community

The study community consisted of public libraries in Sultanate of Oman. The study was directed to all public libraries in the sultanate to identify libraries offering activities of promoting health awareness. The number of libraries offering health awareness promotion services reached 8 libraries out of 22 libraries (36.3%) which is a low percentage among libraries contributing in promoting health awareness in Sultanate of Oman.

These libraries covered many zone in the sultanate, variegated according to authority to which they belong, as one library belonged to sultanate court council and 7 libraries belonged to national heritage.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study aimed at describing public libraries activities and services in promoting health awareness in Oman. To achieve such purpose, the study offered some questions whose results were reached by analyzing data collected from questionnaires and discussions of the subject with the librarians whose results are discussed.

A. First Question

The first question discussed how far public libraries are aware of their role in promoting health awareness in the sultanate. To answer this question, the questionnaire included questions about how far the public libraries have a written annual plan including services for promoting health awareness. Six libraries out of 8 libraries (54.5%) proved that they have an annual plan included some programs related to health awareness. Two libraries proved that they held some seminars or lectures in events without incorporating the same in the library annual plan.

Accordingly, libraries are unaware of offering some health information of availing some health information sources. Upon discussing librarians about their roles in promoting health awareness, it was found that what they have being offering didn't depend on satisfaction with the importance of their role. In this respect, rather events discuss some of such services like; a certain epidemic spread as happened in 2009, influenza spread, as some libraries availed some manifestoes to inform about or held lectures in cooperation with a physician about this epidemic and means of protection. A study by Bumham and Peterson [4] proved the importance of public libraries in promoting health.

B. Second Question

The second question aimed at identifying activities and services offered by public libraries in Sultanate of Oman to promote health awareness (Table I). To answer this question, the study identified activities and services offered by libraries and means used in promoting health awareness.

TABLE I
ACTIVITIES AND SERVICES OFFERED BY LIBRARIES TO PROMOTE HEALTH AWARENESS

Activities and Services Offered by Libraries	Number of Libraries
Medical Information Sources	8
Holding Seminars and Lectures	5
Distributing Manifestos and Printed materials to the Library's Users	8
Adding Medical Links to the Library's Website	0
Practical Training Courses of Health Awareness	2
Making Blogs of Health Awareness on the Library Website	0
Participating in National Companies of the State in the Field of Health	5

Public libraries activates of promoting health awareness focused on availing some medical information sources and submitting manifestos and printed materials for health awareness as 8 libraries confirmed the same. It is clear that what is availed by these libraries of information sources is very

limited. There is a little number of books, from 10 to 100 books, in some libraries. There are no specialized medical database or general medical priorities. Reference to the study of Nigeria [5], the public libraries were keen to possess different information sources in the health field which made the community visit public libraries to obtain health information, specially in the field of maternity and childhood care. The libraries depend on the public health organizations manifestoes or printed materials, many studied showed the importance of cooperation between health organizations and public libraries for promoting health awareness in the Nigeria community [5]-[6].

Two Libraries submitted some Training courses in first aids and three libraries stated that they participated in children's vaccination awareness campaigns, and two libraries contributed in Influenza awareness campaigns during the disease outbreak in 2009. However, libraries provided no link in through their websites and created no internet blog.

C. Third Question

The study tried to identify restrictions hindering public libraries to play their role in promoting health awareness. Table II Discusses the most important restrictions referred to by the studied libraries.

TABLE II
RESTRICTIONS OF HEALTH AWARENESS IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

Health Awareness Restrictions	Number of Public Libraries
Lack of librarians trained in the health field	8
Public libraries officials' unaware of such libraries role in promoting health awareness	5
Lack of enough budget	8
No enough library's surface area	3
Electronic restrictions	5
No cooperation between libraries and health organization	4

It was found that the most common restrictions facing libraries in promoting health awareness were lack of librarians trained on understanding health information needs of the users.

Discussion with librarians proved that they received no training in the field of public health, as the same was not imitated by the library.

Also, this is due to the library's un awareness of the importance of its role in promoting health awareness. Reference to Linnan et al. [6], the information specialist answer more than 10 questions about health every week, and their desires to receive training to help them to answer health questions. Five libraries said that five public libraries officials refuse offering some health activities on the plea of the library has no relation to health awareness as this affair is the responsibility of another authorities. In addition, three libraries expressed that they had no surface area to hold training courses for users for health awareness. Moreover, all libraries said that they had no enough budget for supporting health awareness, as five libraries confirmed the non-availability of

databases inside the library of electronic sources. Also, nonuse of internet by libraries in promoting health awareness due to weak internet, and librarians unawareness of internet use in offering health awareness services.

Some public libraries have no internet communication in Nigeria to make them unable to promote health information in community [5].

It is obvious that 4 Libraries confirmed that there are no cooperation with health organizations due to the library's unawareness of health organizations' support and the health organizations' unaware of the library's importance in supporting them in promoting health awareness. The role of academic medical center library in training public librarians in 16 county in east Pennsylvania confirmed the positive role of academic centers libraries in training public librarians on availing health information [7].

IV. CONCLUSION

This study aimed at identifying services offered by the public libraries in the sultanate of Oman. It was found that libraries' awareness and their role in health awareness is weak. It was found that 36.3% of the sultanate's public libraries offer some health services. Most offers services was availing a few number of health information sources availing manifestoes and posters libraries may obtain from health organization as well as holding lectures and seminars to inform citizens about some epidemics or children's vaccination.

But the library couldn't use internet potentials in availing medical websites links offering public health information, establishing bloggers in public health or to offer training workshops in the health field through libraries websites.

Accordingly, the study recommends that incorporating health awareness promotion under the library objectives and services. Libraries shall in its annual plan incorporate services related to promoting health awareness all year long, and establishing programming of libraries cooperation with health organizations to give some librarians courses in health field and calling some of these health organizations members to deliver lectures in the field of public health and endemic diseases in the sultanate of Oman. Libraries shall use internet in promoting health awareness through transmitting videos in this field or guides about protection against diseases and making links in public health websites.

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