

INFORMATION USE AND READING HABITS OF WORKING WOMEN IN THE STEEL CITY OF ROURKELA, INDIA

Chittaranjan Panigrahi,
Qrs. No.-E-/183,Sector-7,
Roukela- 769 003, Orissa, India.

ABSTRACT

Provides an insight into the reading habits, information needs and information seeking behavior of the working women of an Indian steel city, Roukela. Data collected through a structured questionnaire from 100 working women are analysed. The majority of the working women have stressed the need for an adequate and varied reading materials

Keywords: Reading habits; Information sources; Working women; India

INTRODUCTION

The concept of women in India which is often regard as best suited to being at home, is gradually changing. With the changing economic environment, more and more Indian women who were confined to their household duties are taking up jobs in well-established offices and companies so as to ensure a definite income for them. There are still others, who have their own business and are engaged in other industrial activities, although the number of women in this category is comparatively low (Venkataraman , 1995,p.1). The working women needs constant updating of their knowledge of new changes in order to demonstrate their skill, ability, leadership qualities, job efficiency, as well as knowledge on their rights, duties and limitation. This could be possible through continuous reading, adequate training, education and effective library facilities to support these information needs. While the

female literacy rate of India has increased to 39.42% in 1991, in Orissa it remains at 34.4%, which is far below the national average (Senapati, 1991, p. 19).

Reading does not only enrich the mind but also sharpens the intellect of the reader. Reading is therefore, necessary for the working women to develop their personality and to find solutions to problems they encounter not only on the job but also in their day to day life.

A library being a service institution can justify its existence only when it satisfies the information requirements of its users. Thus, users' satisfaction is one of the basic objectives of the collection development of any library. To systematically plan the organisation and development of library resources and services, as well as to assess the information needs of the users, user studies are becoming crucial and imperative. The present study, therefore, intends to evaluate and assess the

information needs and reading habits of the working women.

HYPOTHESES

One of the positive hypotheses formulated in this study is that, information needs and reading habits of working women has a definite relation with certain characteristics, like qualification, subject specialisation and the amount of time available at the disposal of each working women. Also, their domestic burdens including the burden of nurturing children might have a substantive influence in keeping the working women away from continuous reading.

METHODOLOGY AND SAMPLE

Since the target population of this study is from an urban area and all of them are literate, the questionnaire method has been used for the collection of data required. The population surveyed included exclusively the working women of the steel city, Rourkela. The questionnaire was personally distributed to a group of selected working women covering different fields of specialisation. On the whole, a total of 143 questionnaires were distributed among the working women of Rourkela, out of which only 100 working women have responded to the request with a response rate of 69.193%. The data was then tabulated and analysed for results and discussions.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

The basic aims and objectives of the present study are:

1. To identify information needs and reading interests of the working women;
2. To find out the amount of time spent in reading and acquiring information;
3. To identify the libraries and the source(s) of reading materials on which, the working women depend upon;
4. To identify the information seeking behaviour of the working women;
5. To identify the major factors that prevent the working women from continuous reading as well as the factors that influence their reading habits;
6. To identify the type and form of reading materials they are interested in; and
7. To suggest appropriate measures for improvement of the existing library facilities.

SCOPE AND LIMITATION

The present study is confined to the analysis of information requirements and reading habits of working women of Rourkela, India. The following limitations are identified;

1. It investigates the information needs and reading habits of the working women (limitation by respondent);
2. It covers the working women of only the steel city Rourkela (by geography);
3. It considers only those working women having a minimum qualification of matriculation or above (by qualification);
4. It includes only those working women having their age range of 20 years or above (by age);

5. It covers both married and unmarried working women under its preview (by marital status);
6. It includes those working women who hold a post not below than the rank of a Class-III employees (by grade);

The women who are unemployed; housewives; paddy workers; holding Class-IV jobs; having below matriculation levels of education; and below 20 years of age are excluded from this study.

SAMPLE CHARACTERISTICS

The questionnaires was distributed among 143 working women of Rourkela, out of which only 100 responded, giving a response rate of 69.93%. Among the sample respondents, 37% belonged to the age group of 30-40 years followed by 30% from the age group of 40 to 50 years; 22% belonged to the age group of 20-30 years. Only 5% of the respondents are within the age group of 50-60 years. About 6% of the respondents did not indicate their ages.

Out of the total sample respondents, 46% are postgraduates, 39% are graduates and 12% are matriculates. However, only 2% of the sample respondents held the highest academic degree i.e. Ph.Ds and, only 1% of the respondents holds a M.Phil degree.

Among the total sample respondents 76% are married working women followed by 23% unmarried. On the other hand, only one out of 100 respondents (i.e. 1%) included in the survey is a widow.

RESULTS

The data from the 100 questionnaires were classified and tabulated for the purpose of analysis and interpretation. The tabulated data clearly depicts the views of the respondents relating to their in information and reading habits in multifarious dimensions. The chi square (X^2) test was used to determine the differences in frequency variations of responses and the significance of difference between two independent groups.

Types of Information Needed

Table 1 indicates the ranking order of sample of respondents by their information needs. The study shows that the majority of the working women need information relating to child care as their first most wanted information followed by home management. They were least interested for information on politics, knitting and on films probably owing to paucity of time. The results imply a significant difference in the opinion of respondents.

Time Spent on Reading and Searching for Information

Table 2 (a) indicates the average time spent in a week by the respondents on reading or searching for information in the subject of their interest. It shows that 28% of the working women read for 1-2 hours a week, while 11% read for less than an hour. However, 21% of the respondents read for more than 6 hours a week in their respective subject fields or specialisation, which is encouraging.

Table 2(b) indicates that a major part of the respondents that constitute 44% of the

total, keep themselves busy for 1-2 hours in reading other than their field of subject interests. However, 12% of the total respondents are in the habit of reading more than 6 hours a week. Thus, it can be

Table 1: Ranked Order of the Information Needs of Respondents

Ranking	Vital Information Needs	Utmost Significant	Moderately Significant	Less Significant	Total
1	Child care	47	14	10	71
2	Home management	44	38	08	90
3	Govt. policies, plans relating to women	37	29	14	80
4	Cooking	28	47	18	93
5	Knitting/weaving	15	35	40	90
6	Films	09	42	36	87
7	Politics	07	27	46	80
Total		187	232	172	591

$X^2 = 136.393$, $p < 0.05$

Table 2(a): Time Spent in a Week on Reading / Searching for Information

Ranking Order	Time Spent in a Week on Subject of Interests	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Respondents	Cumulative Percentage
1	1-2 hours	28	28%	28	28%
2	2-4 hours	24	26%	54	54%
3	> 6 hours	21	21%	75	75%
4	4-6 hours	14	14%	89	89%
5	< 1 hour	11	11%	100	100%
	Total	100	100%	-	-

Table 2(b): Time Spent in a Week on Reading / Searching for Information

Ranking Order	Time Spent in a Week on Other Subject Fields	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Respondents	Cumulative Percentage
1	1-2 hours	44	44%	44	44%
2	2-4 hours	22	22%	66	66%
3	< 1 hour	15	15%	81	81%
4	> 6 hours	12	12%	93	93%
5	4-6 hours	07	07%	100	100%
	Total	100	100%	-	-

inferred that a large number of respondents spent more than an hour each in reading both in their subject of specialisation as well as on the subjects other than their field of interest which is a healthy trend.

Forms of Documents Read

Table 3 shows that 45% of the working women have recorded their interest in reading newspapers as top priority, 46% rated this activity as high priority and only 9% gave this activity a low priority. More than half of the respondents (57%), have recorded their interest in reading drama as low priority. It seems that, working women are more interested to know about nascent events rather than the obsolete ideas recorded in books.

Types of Documents Preferred

Table 4 shows that 60% of the total respondents gave top priority to their habit of using books, while only 3(3.7%) of the respondents assign top priority to using the reprints and photocopies. About 48

(50.52%) of respondents gave top priority to using reference books followed by current periodicals 32 (34.78%). This indicates that working women hardly pay much attention to research activity owing to certain limitations beyond their control.

Main Sources of Information

Books are very widely used as the prime source of information as 77% of the total respondents frequently used books to fulfill their information needs (Table 5). On the other hand, 66% of respondents acquire information by discussing with their colleagues/ friends; 58% stated that they frequently depended on newspapers as their source of information; 49% use media reports (viz. TV, radio) as the prime source of information. The majority of the working women (67%) do not use commercial databases/ information brokers at all to meet their information needs. This could be either due to the nonavailability of commercial database and information brokers locally or ignorance about this source

Table 3: Forms of Documents Read by Respondents

Ranking Order	Types of Materials Read	Top Priority	High Priority	Low Priority	No Responses
1	Newspapers	45	46	09	-
2	Research reports	34	31	23	12
3	Popular magazines	33	58	09	-
4	Science fiction	26	28	37	07
4	Textbooks	26	45	26	03
5	Short stories	24	47	24	05
6	Journals	19	42	28	11
7	Humours	16	36	38	10
8	Novels	14	27	52	07
9	Dramas	10	25	57	08
9	Poems	10	32	52	06
10	Travel stories	09	36	49	05
11	Biographies	08	40	48	05

Table 4: Respondents Rating on Types of Documents

Ranking Order	Document Types Used	Top Priority	Middle Priority	Low Priority	Do Not Use	No Response
1	Books	60	28	10	02	-
4	Reference books	48	21	14	12	05
3	Current periodicals	32	35	18	07	08
4	Newspaper clippings	14	35	28	13	10
5	Back runs of journals	08	27	33	32	-
6	Reprints & photocopies	03	14	32	32	19

Table 5: Sources of Information Used to Obtain Information

Ranking Order	Sources	Frequently Used	Moderately Used	Rarely Used	Not Used
1	Books	77	15	08	-
2	Discussion with colleagues/friends	66	26	07	01
3	Newspapers	58	30	12	-
4	Media reports (TV, radio, etc.)	49	34	08	07
5	Periodical articles	36	46	11	07
6	Personal correspondence	18	32	33	17
7	Govt. publications	14	25	26	35
8	Conference/Seminar/Workshop proceedings	12	27	40	21
9	Research reports	12	17	23	48
10	Primary data (collected through survey)	09	26	27	38
11	Indexes / abstracts	07	18	27	48
13	Information intermediaries	03	12	21	64
14	Commercial databases/Infor. brokers	-	15	18	67

Factors Which Prevent Respondents from Reading

Domestic burden alone prevents 25% of the total respondents from regular reading, while forces like domestic burden and children's education combined have

deprived 23% of the respondents in keeping up their reading habits (Table 6). On the other hand, (i) domestic plus official burden, (ii) domestic and official burden plus children's education; and (iii) only official burden prevent 12% of the

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total respondents in each category from regular reading. However only 2% of respondents do not read due to lack of their personal interests. Interestingly, only 3 out of 100 working women, are able to keep up their regular reading habits as they reported having no problems at all.

SUGGESTIONS

The following suggestions are formulated for developing the reading habits of working women.

1. Every sector in Rourkela should have a library in order to develop the reading interest among the working women.
2. A library should be established at a central place to exclusively accommodate a collection on and about women with membership facilities open to women only.
3. Every institution to which a library is attached, must earmark one hour as library hour to encourage reading habits among the employee (working women).
4. The local library and some other agencies should conduct meetings on information requirements of working women at frequent intervals.
5. The municipal authorities should establish a library where in a 'Readers profile' (information needs and reading interests of the working women) are recorded as a guidance for procuring various reading materials for working women.
6. The reading materials according to needs should reach the doorstep of every working women through book mobile services once in a week or at regular intervals within the city by the local public library to cultivate a habit of reading among the working women.

Table 6: Factors Which Prevented Respondents from Reading

Ranking Order	Factors that Prevents Reading	No. of Respondents	Percentage	Cumulative Respondents	Cumulative Percentage
1	Domestic burdens	25	25%	25	25%
2	Domestic burden & children's education	23	23%	48	48%
3	Domestic & official burden	12	12%	60	60%
3	Domestic & official burden & Children's education	12	12%	72	72%
3	Official burdens	12	12%	84	84%
4	Children's education	06	6%	90	90%
5	Other problem(s)	05	5%	95	95%
6	No problems	03	3%	98	98%
7	No personal interests	02	2%	100	100%
	Total	100	100%		

Panigrahi, C

CONCLUSION

Information is a vital resource to create, maintain and to develop a reading society. Reading is an art and the art of reading is the art of living with the books. Reading not only leads to writing, but also enriches the mind of a reader and sharpens his intellect. Libraries can help in cultivating good reading habits among its readers. A woman, particularly those working and having a good reading habit can face any challenge in her life and can successfully tackle any problems she encounters, be it in a job place or on the domestic fronts.

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