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A Systematic Review of Information Seeking Behavior & Information Needs in Female Lawyers

Abstract

Objectives: The primary objective of this study is to determine the legal information-seeking behavior of female lawyers. The study explores the legal information needs, methods, and barriers faced by female lawyers while seeking legal information.

Methodology: In this quantitative study survey design is used. The population of this study consists of female lawyers from which a sample (n=305) is taken. A structured questionnaire was distributed among the female lawyers of Punjab province in Pakistan. The questionnaire collected data regarding demographic information, information-seeking behaviors, information needs, and barriers faced by female lawyers while seeking legal information. SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS V-23) is used for data interpretation. Data presented in tables and comprised of percentages, mean, modes, standard deviation, and frequencies.

Findings: The study found out that law libraries, internet, and online legal resources are available for female lawyers at the workplace. The study reported that female lawyers seek legal information for the preparation of professional cases and prefer printed material over electronic data while seeking legal information. Non-availability of a separate law library for females and lack of training to obtain digital information are among the major barriers faced by female lawyers while seeking legal information.

Keywords: female lawyers, information-seeking behavior, legal profession, information needs, Pakistan, legal information seeking

Introduction

Information is the key to success in the 21st century. Today, in all professions, up-to-date and timely information is a basic necessity that guarantees success. Information is knowledge derived from experience or study. it can be related to any field like education, politics, health, and law. The information helps the individuals and organization to make the right decision at right time (Ezekiel & Saleh, 2014).

It can also be defined as data that has been processed into meaningful form for the recipient, for whom it is of real or perceived value for current or future decisions (Davies, 1976). Okeh (1999) described that information is needed to solve our daily problems like finding required consumer goods, investment opportunities, finding proper medical facilities and government policies, etc.

It means that no matter what you do and where you live, you need information for your day to day activities and without correct information; you will suffer losses and bad consequences. It might be possible for someone to survive in a secluded environment without any information 200 hundred years ago, but today in this global village, such a person cannot survive for long on his own as Bayraktaroglu & Ozgen (2008) suggested that one of the essential developments of this century is to access and usage of information.

Law is one of those professions where information is the barometer of success. For lawyers, up-to-date legal information is like a lifeline and no one can professionally survive without it. Access to legal

information means, ways or methods used to obtain the right legal information from available sources. There are diverse sources of legal information like law library, radio, TV, faxed, e-mails, public notices, etc. (Tuhumwire & Okello, 2010). Makri & Blandford (2008) described information-seeking as a vital part of the legal profession as compared with others. They stated that the legal profession has access to many comprehensive electronic resources like Lexis Nexis and Westlaw but still it is difficult for lawyers to get the legal information. The main reason behind this fact is that traditionally such digital law libraries are regarded as difficult to use and access. Bowes (2003) discussed that law is an information-intensive profession which depends completely on the up to date sources of information. Same views are also presented by other scholars who argue that information sources and their characteristics are important for community acceptance and a trusted legal information source creates confidence among its user in decision making (Moore, 2003). Gottschalk & Karlsen (2009) defined lawyers as knowledge workers who gain knowledge through formal education and then through on job experiences.

Women as an important part of society also need access to information. For female lawyers, it becomes more important because generally, they are way behind their male counterparts in the legal profession. as women are the foundation of any society, the information needs of women should be of major concern (Olorunda, 2004). Women are excelling and performing well in almost all professions and the same is true for the legal profession. but to compete with their male colleagues in this male dominant profession they need equal access to legal information. Baker (2011) pointed out that to perform well in families and societies the women need a sufficient amount of information.

Literature Review

Although there are many studies conducted on the legal information-seeking behavior of lawyers around the world yet there is a huge literature gap on the legal information-seeking behavior of female lawyers. Female lawyers are behind their male colleagues in this man dominated profession and also face more problems while seeking legal information.

Oguche David (2013) conducted a study to determine the information needs and information-seeking behavior of Research Fellows of the Nigerian Institute of Advanced Legal Studies. He found out that a law library is a crucial place in legal research and legal information seeking. Law libraries need to design and develop the appropriate information systems that can serve the information needs of lawyers. He pointed out that process of legal research is different in different countries and legal systems but generally, it revolves around some basics like finding primacy resources, searching secondary resources, and some non-legal sources for supportive information.

Kim & Seo (2015) conducted a study to explore the legal information-seeking behavior of lawyers. They discovered that attorneys prefer digital information in online databases and formal information like case laws and statutes. The study also revealed that meaningful use of informal information in a difficult situation often results in improper information which is adverse for the information-seeking behavior of attorneys.

Singh & Singh (2015) presented their study about the information-seeking behavior of lawyers and pointed out that Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) are influencing the lawyers to use the internet and online databases for information retrieval. At the same time, the study also found out that print media is still important in this era of ICTs as 75% of the respondents prefer both prints as well as

electronic resources to find the required legal information. Finally, the study suggested that library professionals need to adopt more pro-active approaches in meeting the legal information requirements of lawyers.

Jamshed, Naeem, Bhatti (2020) worked on the legal information-seeking behavior of Lawyers of Multan, Pakistan. The study found out that lack of training facilities on the use of the internet and the proper use of online resources are the problems faced by the majority of respondents. It also pointed out that internet connectivity and access to legal online resources are the major barriers faced by lawyers. The study was about male lawyers but it provides a basic insight into the barriers and problems faced by the lawyers in Pakistan while seeking legal information.

Ramachandrappa (2017) revealed in this study that the usage of the internet is increasing among lawyers. The majority of lawyers spend a reasonable amount of time online seeking legal information. The study also found out that lawyers prefer both print and electronic media for legal information.

Statement of Problems

Information is the key to success in any profession, but in the legal profession, it is of paramount importance. Lawyers need a huge amount of legal information daily to prepare and present legal cases in court. Female lawyers often feel difficulties as compared to male lawyers while seeking the required legal information. Different factors contribute to making it more difficult for female lawyers in a bid to obtain legal information. This study is an attempt to highlight those particular factors along with all other aspects regarding the information-seeking behavior of female lawyers.

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study is to determine the legal information-seeking behavior of female lawyers. The study attempts to answer the following questions;

- What are the legal Information needs of female lawyers?
- What are the information sources used by female lawyers while seeking legal information?
- What are the different methods used by female lawyers to seek legal information?
- What are the barriers/problems faced by female lawyers while seeking legal information?

Methodology

This quantitative study was conducted while using survey design and a structured questionnaire was designed to collect data. The population of the study consists of female lawyers working in Punjab, Pakistan. The convenience sampling technique is used by the researcher to collect data and (n=305) samples are obtained from the population.

The questionnaire was prepared and discussed with the five female lawyers. It was then pilot tested among 6 female lawyers. Some minor recommended changes were incorporated into the questionnaire after pilot testing. The questionnaire is composed of three parts i.e. first part is about demographic information, the second part is the availability of resources and the third part contains the questions on a “fully anchored rating scale” regarding the issue at hand. In the third part, a summated rating scale (also known as the Likert Scale) is used to measure the abstract constructs from respondents. The questionnaire

was distributed among the female lawyers of Punjab, the largest and most populated province of Pakistan, through courier services, post, e-mail, and in most of the cases by personal visits. Overall, 500 questionnaires were distributed among the participants and 305 questionnaires were received back with a response rate of 61%.

The collected data were analyzed by using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS V-23). The data is described in distribution, percentages, means, standard deviations, and frequencies by using descriptive statistics.

Findings

The majority (79.0%) of respondents belong to the age group of 21 to 30 years. Most of the respondents (47.5%) have professional experience less than five years and an overwhelming majority (87.2%) has L.L.B as their highest qualification (Table 1).

Table 1: Demographic Information

Age of Respondents	21-30 Years	31-40 Years	41-50 Years	50 & above
	241 (79.0%)	46 (15.1%)	14 (4.6%)	4 (1.3%)
Professional Experience	<5 Years	6-10 Years	11-20 Years	20 & above
	145 (47.5%)	124 (40.7%)	21 (6.9%)	15 (4.9%)
Qualification of Respondents	LLB	LLM	PhD	
	266 (87.2%)	36 (11.8%)	3 (1.0%)	

A thumping majority (93.6%) of respondents has access to a law library at the workplace but the majority (60.0%) of them does not have a law library at their home. Internet facility is available to the overwhelming majority at home (91.5%) and the workplace (89.2%). The majority of respondents (92.1%) have access to an online law library for case law search at the workplace but only (29.5%) have access to online law libraries for case law search at their home (Table 2).

Table 2: Law Library & Other Services

Questions regarding law library, internet & online databases	YES	NO
Is law library available at your workplace	286 (93.6%)	19 (6.2%)
Is law library available at your home	122 (40.0%)	183 (60.0%)
Is internet facility available at your workplace	279 (91.5%)	26 (8.5%)
Is internet facility available at your home	272 (89.2%)	33 (10.8%)
Do you have access to online law library for case law search at workplace	281 (92.1%)	24 (7.9%)
Do you have access to online law library for case law search at home	90 (29.5%)	215 (70.5%)

Respondents of this study were asked 05 statements to ascertain their legal information needs. One statement received a mean value of around 5 which means the majority of respondents 'strongly agree' that they need legal information for the preparation of their professional cases (M=4.54, SD=.573). One statement received a mean value of around one, which means the majority of the respondents 'strongly disagree' that they need legal information for research writing purpose (M=1.22, SD=.587) (Table 3).

Table 3: Legal Information Needs of Female Lawyers

Statements	Valid Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
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I need legal information for preparation of my professional cases	305	4.54	.573
I need legal information about new case laws	305	2.89	1.087
I need legal information about new laws	305	2.68	1.116
I need legal information to keep up with latest legal information	305	2.59	.847
I need legal information for research writing purpose	305	1.22	.587

Scale: 1=Strongly Disagree 2=Disagree 3=Neither disagree nor agree 4=Agree 5=Strongly Agree

Respondents were asked five statements about their preferred information sources while seeking legal information. Two statements received a mean value of around 4, which means the majority of respondents prefer bear acts while seeking legal information (M=4.41, SD=.811) and prefer online legal resources & databases (M=3.57, SD=.894) almost every time. One statement received a mean value of around 1, which means most of the respondents ‘never’ use legal research journals (M=1.29, SD=.599) (Table 4).

Table 4: Preferred Information Sources by Female Lawyers while seeking legal information

Statements	Valid Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
I prefer bear acts	305	4.41	.811
I prefer online legal resources & databases	305	3.57	.894
I prefer monthly case law journals	305	3.30	.908
I prefer commentary on laws	305	3.21	.871
I prefer legal research journals	305	1.29	.599

Scale: 1=Never Use 2=Almost Never 3=Sometimes 4=Almost Every Time 5=Frequently Use

Respondents were asked five statements to determine their preferred methods of seeking legal information. One statement received a mean value of around 5, which means the majority of respondents ‘frequently use’ the printed material (M=4.55, SD=.498) for seeking legal information. Three statements received a mean value of around 3, which implies that the majority of respondents sometimes use the personal collection (M=3.39, SD=.808), online resources (M=2.78, SD=.840), and library at the workplace (M=2.76, SD=.819) as preferred methods of seeking legal information (Table 5).

Table 5: Preferred methods used by female lawyers to seek legal information

Statements	Valid Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
I prefer to seek legal information from printed materials	305	4.55	.498
I prefer to seek legal information from colleagues & seniors	305	3.90	1.196
I prefer to seek legal information from personal collection	305	3.39	.808
I prefer to seek legal information from online sources	305	2.78	.840
I prefer to seek legal information from library at workplace	305	2.76	.819

Scale: 1=Never Use 2=Almost Never 3=Sometimes 4=Almost Every Time 5=Frequently Use

Seven statements were asked to the respondents regarding common problems faced by them while seeking legal information. Three statements received a mean value of around 4, which means the majority of respondents ‘often’ face problems of non-availability of the separate law

library or separate place for females (M=4.10, SD= .784), lack of quality books and journals (M=4.10, SD=.631) and lack of reading habits issue (M=3.91, SD=.990). four statements received the mean value of around 3, which means “lack of skills to use online digital resources” (M=2.78, SD=1.167), “non-cooperative attitude of senior lawyer and colleagues” (M=2.87, SD=1.073), “non-availability of online legal resources at the workplace” (M=3.02, SD=.916) and “non-availability of up to date law library at the workplace (M=3.41, SD=.760) are problems ‘sometimes’ faced by the respondents (Table 6).

Table 6: Common problems/barriers faced by female lawyers while seeking legal information

Statements	Valid Number	Mean	Standard Deviation
Non-availability of separate law library or separate place	305	4.10	.784
Lack of quality books and journals	305	4.10	.631
Lack of reading habits	305	3.91	.990
Non-availability of up to date law library at workplace	305	3.41	.760
Non-availability of online legal resources at workplace	305	3.02	.916
Non-cooperative attitude of senior lawyer and colleagues	305	2.87	1.073
Lack of skills to use online digital resources	305	2.78	1.167

Scale: 1=Never 2=Rarely 3=Sometimes 4=Often 5=Always

Discussions

The study revealed that sounding majority (93.6%) of respondents has access to the law library at the workplace but only 40% have a law library in their home. Similarly, a thumping majority (91.5%) of female lawyers have internet facilities at the workplace while the majority (89.2% have) internet facility at home. Law Library is considered as a basic and most important source of legal information. Although only 40% have a law library at home 93.6% of respondents have a law library at the workplace which shows that access to a law library is not a problem for female lawyers. Interestingly an overwhelming majority (92.1%) of female lawyers have access to online law library/digital databases for case law search at the workplace while only 29.5% have this facility available at home. It shows that the workplace for the majority of female lawyers is updated with a law library, internet connection, and access to digital databases. Shakeel & Rubina (2011) also concluded in their study that role of traditional law libraries is still important in this age of digital libraries.

The study also highlighted the fact that the legal information need of female lawyers revolves around the preparation of professional cases. The majority of female lawyers only require legal information to prepare the legal cases and they rarely require legal information for new case laws, new laws to keep them update on the legal information. Otikey (2000) also corroborated by stating that the legal information needs of lawyers are determined by the legal needs of clients.

An eye-opener finding of this study is that majority of female lawyers never require legal information for research writing purposes and they never use legal research journals while seeking legal information. It shows the dismal status of legal research writing culture among the female lawyers and also the reason for the backwardness in legal research in Pakistan. Jamshed, Naeem & Bhatti (2020) also strengthen this

finding and stated that the majority of male lawyers seldom use the law library for legal research. The study also revealed that the majority of female lawyers prefer to use bear acts and online legal resources.

Another important finding of this study is that majority of female lawyers prefer printed material over electronic material and other sources. These findings are also supported by Makri (2008) who reported that textbooks, commentary material, and legal journals among the important primary and secondary sources for lawyers. Primary materials are the statements of the law itself and it includes parliament, subordinate legislation, and reputed decisions of the court. Singh & Singh (2015) also reported that print form is also among the famous source for legal information seeking as 75% of lawyers still prefer both print and electronic resources. Many other scholars also found out that the majority of lawyers prefer printed material over electronic resources. The legal profession still heavily dependent on print media and electronic media is used as a secondary source for seeking legal information (Thanuskodi 2009; Kuhlthau 2001; Prensky, 2001). But it also important to mention that some studies reported the contrary as Kim & Seo (2015) found out that legal practitioners prefer digital information in online databases like statutes and case laws. The results of this study are different from the majority of other studies conducted on these issues.

Traditional and preferred methods of legal information seeking include printed material and advice from colleagues. Advice from the colleagues is an important source of legal information and Wilkinson (2001) also support the finding of the current study by asserting that lawyer often seek information from the fellow criminal lawyers. The consultation with colleagues is considered an informal source of information.

On the other hand majority of lawyers only sometimes use the law library of the workplace for acquiring legal information. The trend to use online legal resources is on the rise but still, lawyers rely on traditional methods like advice from seniors and printed materials.

Another important revelation of this study is that female lawyers don't have a separate law library or separate sitting areas in the law libraries at the workplace. The role of the law library is very important as Shakeel & Robina (2011) reported that the majority of lawyers prefer the use of traditional libraries over online libraries and digital databases. This issue is relevant while taking into consideration the social value and cultural norms in a country like Pakistan. Other barriers include lack of quality books, journals, and lack of reading habits among the female lawyers.

Conclusion

Access to accurate information is necessary for every profession but in the legal field professional survival is not possible without up-to-date legal information. Female lawyers face many barriers in legal information seeking in this male-dominated profession. This study analyzed the information-seeking behavior, information needs, and other related issues among the female lawyers of Pakistan. The study concludes that female lawyers face many problems like non-availability of separate law libraries, lack of training, and lack of quality books. It also determines different methods and preferred modes for female lawyers while seeking legal information.

Limitations of the Study

This study has some limitations like the sample is not large enough to generalize the overall trend of information seeking in the female lawyers. The findings of this study are based on the quantitative approach hence in-depth point of view of respondents is lacking which can be obtained only through qualitative approaches. Another limitation is that the sample of the study is collected from only one province of one country which is not purely representative, further data collected through this method has its limitation due to dispersions in the population. Another shortcoming is that the non-random sampling technique is used in this study which increases the margin of error and reduces the true representation of the whole population.

Practical Implications

This study tries to bridge the huge literature gap in the field. It provides a comprehensive picture of the information related problems faced by the female lawyers. With the help of this study, Bar Councils and legal bodies can formulate policies to improve the situation for female lawyers. It will also provide a foundation for further studies on the issues related to female lawyers.

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