

Chapter 9

Information Needs and Seeking Behaviour of Rural Women: A Study of Tamil Nadu, India

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ABSTRACT

Indian society has been bound by culture and tradition since ancient times. The patriarchal system and the gender stereotypes in the family and society have always showed a preference for the male child. Sons were regarded as a means of social security and women remained under male domination. Due to her subordinated position, she has suffered years of discrimination, exploitation and subjugation. She became the victim of several evils like child marriage, sati, polygamy, Purdah system, female infanticide, forced pregnancy, rape etc. In such incidents/recorded cases surprisingly mother-in-law are also taking active part. This discrimination and violence against women had an effect on the sex ratio in India. The main causes of violence are unequal power-relations, gender discrimination, patriarchy, and economic dependence of women, dowry, low moral values, negative portrayal of women's image in media, no participation in decision-making, gender stereotypes and a negative mindset. In this study about 69.39% of the respondents were married and 4.91% respondents were widow, it is observed that 3.82% of respondents were divorcee. The rest of them 21.85% were unmarried. In this study 50.27% majority of the women need information on education information, followed by information on others respectively 25.68%, agriculture information 22.95%, employment information 15.30%, health care information 11.48%, loan and politics information 9.29%, food nutrition, entertainment information respectively 6.01%, the lowest 3.28% of the respondents needed information on religion. In this study 88% of respondents responded that they were highly satisfied with the source of information, where as 9% of respondents responded that they were partially satisfied, 2.73% of respondents said that the source of information are moderately satisfied.

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INTRODUCTION

In information society, information is the enhancer of the quality of life. The information society will be conscious towards the value of information and its use and will become increasingly centred on information handling, processing, storage and dissemination using microelectronic based technologies. Globally the society has got divided into two parts, i.e. information rich society and information poor society. A society is composed of people working together to achieve common ends and to satisfy common needs. It is a body of individuals that is outlined by the bounds of functional interdependence, consisting of different characteristics or conditions such as national or cultural identity, social solidarity, etc. It is characterized by patterns of relationships between individuals that share a distinctive culture and institutions.

A society is an economic, social or industrial infrastructure, made up of a varied multitude of individuals who may or may not be from different ethnic groups. Modern society is heading towards information society in which the central instrument of change, the force and direction of change are knowledge and information. All information societies, ancient, medieval or modern, have functioned and prospered on the basis of proper utilization of information and knowledge in their various stages of development. The term information society is said to have been coined in Japan for the first time. The two Japanese cognates “Joho Shakai” when normally translated into English means “Information Society”. The American Society for Information Science (ASIS) in 1970 organized its annual meeting around the theme “The information conscious society”, where the concept of information society was explicitly used.

INFORMATION NEEDS

The present age has been rightly called as an Information Age. Information has become the most important element for progress in society. According to Kemp “information has been described as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter”. Everyone needs information about everything even in his day to day life. The information needs; demands and wants have been used interchangeably, although they may not be identical. Information need involves a cognitive process which may operate on different levels of consciousness and, hence, may not be clear even to the inquirer himself / herself. People in different situations require information on a subject in different forms and with different emphasis and different depth of explanation. Even the same person seeks information in different ways and forms on various occasions depending on his/her knowledge of the subject and the reasons for wanting the information. So the information need is very difficult to define and categorize.

WOMEN IN INDIAN SOCIETY

The Indian society like a number of classical societies was patriarchal. Patriarchal values regulating sexuality, reproduction and social production prevailed and were expressed through specific cultural metaphors. Overt rules prohibiting women from specific activities and denying certain rights did exist. But more subtle expression of patriarchy was through symbolism giving messages of inferiority of women through legends highlighting the self-sacrificing, self sacrificing pure image of women and through the ritual practices which day in and day out emphasized the dominant role of a women as a faithful wife and devout mother.

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