

Information Needs and Information Seeking Behaviour of Lawyers of District Courts, Andhra Pradesh: A Survey

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ABSTRACT

The present study has been undertaken to assess the Information needs and Information Seeking Behaviour by the lawyers of district courts in Andhra Pradesh. A well structured questionnaire was distributed among the practicing lawyers of district courts. The findings indicate that practicing lawyers were using a variety of information resources to satisfy their information needs. It is evident that 64.34% respondents are highly dependent on the District Bar Library for acquiring information resources, 21.23% depended frequently, 12.48% depended occasionally and the remaining 1.95% rarely depended. It is evident that 69.04% lawyers are not satisfied with the overall library resources and services of the district court bar association libraries. Lawyers always seek information for 'case preparation', 'professional needs' and 'leisure needs for writing books/articles'. These three purposes have got first, second and third ranks respectively for information-seeking purposes.

Keywords: Information, Information seeking behavior, Lawyers, Court, Library.

INTRODUCTION

Information is regarded as a valuable resource in the modern day information society. Information-seeking is a broad term, which involves a set of actions that an individual takes to express his information needs, seek, evaluate and select information, and finally, use it to satisfy his information needs. However, various factors affect the information-seeking behavior of an individual or a group of individuals, i.e. purpose for information, channels and sources of information and barriers to information.

Information Needs:

It is defined as information that a specialist lacks and consciously seeks in order to perform his legal responsibilities. In other words, the term 'need' is used to mean a potential demand or unexpressed demand. 'Need' is what an individual ought to have for his work. 'Information need' as defined in this work as one segment of a continuum of information requirements to which the information systems have to respond.

Information-Seeking behavior:

Information-seeking behavior is defined as any activity of our individual that is undertaken to identify a message that satisfies a perceived need. In this context, 'information' is viewed as any stimulus that reduces uncertainty and 'need' is defined as recognition of the existence of this uncertainty in the personal, or work related life of an individual. The above view of

Krikellers¹ is supported in Atkin's work in which information need is defined as "a function of extrinsic uncertainty produced by a perceived discrepancy between the individual's current level of certainty about important environment objects and a criterion state he seeks to achieve". According to Girja Kumar² "Information seeking behavior is mainly concerned with who needs what kind of information for what reasons; how information is found, evaluated and used".

District Court

The highest court in each district is that of the District and Sessions Judge. This is the principal court in the first line of jurisdiction besides the High Court of a state. The District Court is presided over by one district Judge appointed by the state government.

Lawyers

The law dictionary defines the lawyer as "a person learned in the law as a Counsellor Solicitor"³. In this study, the 'Lawyer' is a person who is practicing legal matters in District Courts. The word Advocate is used as a synonym to the word 'Lawyer'.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the study are to:

1. To know the frequency of visit by lawyers to the District Court Bar Association Libraries and the average time spent by them in gathering information
2. To find out the purposes for which lawyers need, seek and collect information
3. To suggest suitable measures to improving legal information channels.

METHODOLOGY

This study attempted to examine the information needs and information seeking behavior of District Court lawyers in Andhra Pradesh. Totally 894 junior and senior advocates were selected from total population as simple random sampling basis. The researcher employed a well structured questionnaire for collecting the data from the advocates. The respondents were personally requested to fill up the questionnaire at their earliest convenience to help the investigator to collect the same during his next visit. In case any respondent chose to orally provide answers to some questions, the investigator filled the answers himself. Doubts raised by the respondents were promptly clarified by the researcher. Some of them were interviewed in depth. The researcher did not press the users to give their names on the questionnaire if they were unwilling to do so. The investigator had to make a second, third and fourth visit to the district bars for collecting the filled-in-questionnaires from the practicing advocates. During these visits, the investigator could collect questionnaires from 617 out of 894 (20% of total population) advocates among whom the questionnaire were distributed. This constitutes 69 per cent of the total response. The researcher carried out the data collection work from January 2015 to December 2015.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this study are mainly applicable to only practicing lawyers of Andhra Pradesh state of total thirteen District Court Bar Associations locate at district headquarters were selected for this study.

LEGAL PROFESSION IN INDIA

The legal profession has a unique place in the society. Without strong and competent legal system, no country can hope to maintain law and order in an effective manner. The legal profession plays an important role in the administration of justice. The lawyer assists the court in arriving at a correct judgment. Usually, a lawyer collects legal materials relating to a case and thereby helps the court or judge to arrive at a correct judgment. Without the assistance of a lawyer, it would be a difficult task for the judge to arrive at a satisfactory judgment. The lawyer requires up-to-date knowledge and legal information to maintain a reasonable quality in his practice. In the ancient days, the legal resources were insufficient and most of the judgments were delivered informally. The dispute between the members of the society was resolved by adhering to long-established traditions and customs. Thus, the traditions and customs create and long established tradition and customs. In fact, the traditions and customs create and govern society. The accepted habits and customs over a period became accepted legal system⁴. With the exponential growth of population in the world and India in particular, the limited legal resources available are found inadequate to meet the ever-increasing demands of the populace. In this situation, the legal profession should be aware of growth and generation of legal information sources which are considered to be the right instrument for achieving the constitutional goals.

REVIEW LITERATURE:

Nirmal Singh and Amarvir Singh (2015)⁶ conducted a study on information seeking behaviour of lawyers of the High Court of Punjab and Haryana. The study revealed that under the influence of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) a majority of respondents are using Internet to access information. At the same time, the significance of print format has not declined as three-fourth of the respondents prefers both print as well as e-resources to find the required information. The study concluded with the need for library professionals to adopt a pro-active approach in meeting the information requirements of law professionals.

Thanuskodi (2010)⁷ conducted a study on “Information Needs and Use Pattern of District Court Lawyers of Salem and Erode in Tamil Nadu” The paper described the ongoing work involved in examining the information use pattern of legal professionals of the District Court. The findings indicated that practicing lawyers were using a variety of information sources to satisfy their information needs. Respondents preferred to first consult their personal library before resorting to other information providing sources and agencies. This group of District Court lawyers often found it difficult to find the required information while using digital law libraries. The study observed that a majority of the respondents were not aware of e-resources. On the whole, respondents perceived district bar library collections, services and facilities as adequate to meet their information effectively.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table-1: Gender-wise respondents:

S.No	Gender	Number	Percentage
1	Male	502	81.36
2	Female	115	18.64
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 1 that out of 617 advocates, 502 (81.36%) are male and (18.64%) are female. It shows the relative representation of the male and female advocates.

Table-2: Distribution of respondents according to their age:

S.No	Age	Number	Percentage
1	21-30	27	4.38
2	31-40	298	48.30
3	41-50	234	37.92
4	51-60	39	6.32
5	61-70	19	3.08
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 2 that out of 617 advocates, 298 (48.30%) respondents are between 31 and 40 years, 234 (37.92%) are between 41 and 50 years, 39 (6.32%) are between 51 and 60 years, 27(4.38%) are between 21 and 30 years and practicing lawyers (67.92%) in the District Courts of Andhra Pradesh belong to the age group between 31 and 50 years old.

Table-3: Distribution of the respondents according to their status:

S.No	Status	Number	Percentage
1	Junior advocates	284	46.03
2	Senior advocates	333	53.97
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 3 that out of 617 advocates, 333 (53.97%) are senior advocates, whereas 284 (46.03%) are junior advocates.

Table-4: Respondents according to the frequency of visit to the library:

S.No	Frequency of visit	Number	Percentage
1	Every day	67	10.86
2	Once in a week	84	13.61
3	Once in a fortnight	214	34.68
4	Once in a month	235	38.09
5	Occasionally	17	2.76
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 4 that 235 (38.09%) lawyers visit the library once in a month, 214 (34.68%) lawyers visit once in a fortnight, 84 (13.61%) lawyers visit once in a week, 67 (10.86%) lawyers visit every day and the remaining 17 (2.76%) lawyers occasionally visit the library. Hence, it can be concluded that a majority of the lawyers visit the library either once in a month or once in a fortnight.

Table-5: Distribution of respondents according to the time spent in the library:

S.No	Time spent	Number	Percentage
1	Less than one hour	83	13.45
2	1 hour to 2 hours	331	53.65
3	2 hours to 3 hours	155	25.12
4	More than three hours	48	7.78
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 5 that 331 (53.65%) respondents spend one to two hours time in the library to access the legal information. 155 (25.12%) respondents spend two to three hours time, 83 (13.45%) respondents spend less than one hour and the remaining 48 (7.78%) respondents spend more than three hours time in the library to access legal information.

Table-6: Respondents dependence on ‘District Bar Council Library’

S.No.	Level of Dependence	Number	Percentage
1	High	397	64.34
2	Frequent	131	21.23
3	Occasional	77	12.48
4	Rare	12	1.95
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from Table 6 that 64.34% respondents are highly dependent on the District Bar Library for acquiring information resources, 21.23% depended frequently, 12.48% depended occasionally and the remaining 1.95% rarely depended.

Table-7: Distribution of respondents according to the overall satisfaction of the resources and services of the District Bar Council libraries:

S.No	Level of satisfaction	Number	Percentage
1	Satisfied	191	30.96
2	Not satisfied	426	69.04
Total		617	100.0

It is evident from table 7 that 426 (69.04%) lawyers are not satisfied with the overall library resources and services of the district court bar association libraries, whereas 191 (30.96%) opined that they are satisfied in this regard.

Table-8: Distribution of respondents according to their level of information seeking with regard to ‘case preparation’

S.No	Level of information seeking	Number	Percentage
1	Always	393	63.69
2	Frequently	129	20.91
3	Sometimes	81	13.13
4	Occasionally	14	2.27
Total		61	100.00

It is evident from table 8 that a majority of the respondents i.e. 63.69% opined that they always seek information ‘for case preparation’, 129(20.91%) seek frequently, 81 (13.13%) sometimes, and 14(2.27%) occasionally seek information in this regard.

Table-9: Distribution of respondents according to their level of seeking information with regard to ‘research work’:

S.No	Level of seeking information	Number	Percentage
1	Always	118	19.12
2	Frequently	131	21.23
3	Sometimes	223	36.15
4	Occasionally	103	16.69
5	Never	42	6.81
Total		617	100.00

Table 9 shows that a majority of the respondents i.e. 223(36.15%) said that they sometimes seek information for ‘research work’, 21.23% seek frequently, 19.12% always, 16.69% occasionally, and 42(6.81%) never sought information in this regard.

Table-10: Distribution of respondents according to their level of seeking information with regard to attending ‘seminars/workshop presentation’:

S.No	Level of seeking information	Number	Percentage
1	Always	121	19.61
2	Frequently	135	21.88
3	Sometimes	230	37.28
4	Occasionally	11	17.99
5	Never	20	3.24
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 10 that a majority of the respondents i.e. 230 (37.28%) say that they sometimes seek information for ‘attending seminar/workshop presentation’, 135(21.88%) seek frequently,121(19.61%) always,111(17.99%) occasionally, and 20 (3.24%) did not seek any information at all.

Table-11: Distribution of respondents according to their level of seeking information with regard to ‘professional needs’:

S.No	Level of seeking information	Number	Percentage
1	Always	388	62.88
2	Frequently	123	19.94
3	Sometimes	83	13.45
4	Occasionally	23	3.73
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 11 that a majority of the respondents i.e. 388 (62.88%) opined that they always seek information for ‘professional needs’, 123(19.94%) seek frequently, 83(13.45%) seek sometimes, and 23(3.73%) occasionally seek information in this regard.

Table-12: Distribution of respondents according to their level of seeking information with regard to ‘leisure needs for writing books/articles’

S.No	Level of seeking information	Number	Percentage
1	Always	127	20.58
2	Frequently	143	23.18
3	Sometimes	229	37.12
4	Occasionally	96	15.56
5	Never	22	3.56
Total		617	100.00

It is evident from table 12 that a majority of the respondents i.e. 229(37.12%) that they sometimes seek information for 'leisure needs for writing books/articles, 143(23.18%) frequently, 127(20.58%) always, 96(15.56%) occasionally, and 22(3.56%) never seek information in this regard.

Table-13: Distribution of respondents according to their relative levels of seeking information with different purposes:

S.No	Purposes	Total Weightages	Mean	Rank
1	Case preparation	2743	4.45	1
2	For research work	2031	3.29	5
3	Attending seminars Presentation	2073	3.36	6
4	For improving personal knowledge	2137	3.46	4
5	Administrative activities	2073	3.36	6
6	Professional needs	2727	4.42	2
7	Leisure needs for writing books/articles	2204	3.57	3

It is evident from table 13 that in order to know the relative levels of seeking of information by the advocates on various purposes weightage values of 5,4,3,2 and 1 are assigned for the responses of 'always seeking', 'frequently seeking', 'sometimes' 'occasionally' and 'never seeking' respectively. Total weightage and mean is calculated for each purpose. The ranks are assigned to all the purposes on the basis of their mean. It is evident from table 13 that the respondents always seek information for case preparation when compared to other purposes. They also seek information for professional needs and leisure needs for writing books/articles. These three purposes have got first, second and third ranks respectively for high seeking purposes.

MAJOR FINDINGS

- Out of 617 advocates, 502 (81.36%) are male and 115 (18.64%) female.
- 67.92% of the lawyers belong to the age group between 31 and 50 years old.
- Out of 617 advocates, 53.97% are senior, whereas 46.03% are junior advocates.
- A high number of the respondents i.e. 41.98% have professional experience between 11-20 years, whereas 27.88% are below 10 years, 18.15 % between 21-30 years and 11.99 % have more than thirty years of experience.
- 38.09% lawyers visit the library once in a month, whereas 34.68% lawyers visit once in a fortnight, 13.61% lawyers visit once in a week, 10.86% lawyers visit every day and the remaining 2.76% lawyers occasionally visit the library.
- A majority of the respondents i.e. 53.65% spend one to two hours in the library to access legal information. 25.12% respondents spend two to three hours, whereas 13.45% respondents spend less than one hour and the remaining 7.78% respondents spend more than three hours in the library to access legal information.
- It is evident that 64.34% respondents are highly dependent on the District Bar Library for acquiring information resources, 21.23% depended frequently, 12.48% depended occasionally and the remaining 1.95% rarely depended.
- It is evident that 69.04% lawyers are not satisfied with the overall library resources and services of the district court bar association libraries, whereas 30.96% opined that they are satisfied in this regard.
- 63.69% advocates opined that they always seek information 'for case preparation', whereas 20.91% seek frequently, 13.13% sometimes and 2.27% occasionally seek information in this regard.
- A majority of the respondents i.e. 36.15% said that they sometimes seek information

for 'research work', 21.23% seek frequently, 19.12% always, 16.69% occasionally and 46.81% never sought information in this regard.

- 37.28% respondents say that they sometimes seek information for 'attending seminar/workshop presentation', 21.88% seek frequently, 19.61% always, 17.99% occasionally, and 3.24% did not seek any information at all.
- 39.71% respondents opined that they sometimes seek information for 'improving personal knowledge', 23.82% seek frequently, 20.91% always, 11.83% occasionally, and 3.73% never sought information in this regard.
- A majority of the respondents i.e. 62.88% opined that they always seek information for 'professional needs', 19.94% seek frequently, 13.45% seek sometimes and 3.73% occasionally seek information in this regard.
- 37.12 % lawyers opined that they sometimes seek information for 'leisure needs for writing books/articles, 23.18% seek frequently, 20.58% always seek, 15.56% seek occasionally, and 3.56% never seek information in this regard.

SUGGESTIONS

- District Court Libraries must increase the collection of resources and services in order to cater to the growing needs of the legal professionals and judges.
- District Court libraries should be carrying out individualized information services such as document delivery service and e-mail alerts.
- The legal professionals and judges must have access to better Internet services and speed in order to gather current and updated legal information.
- Legal information resources available in all other court libraries must be made accessible to all lawyers from different districts of Andhra Pradesh.
- The District Court libraries of the state of Andhra Pradesh must enhance the collection of digital materials like CDs DVDs, Audio-visual materials etc.
- Easy and prompt retrieval of current information may be made through improved Internet facility.

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