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ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN NATIONAL HEALTH AWARENESS

Tazia Tariq [1] & Dr. Habibullah Shah [2]

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Author Details:
[1] Research Scholar, University of Kashmir, Kashmir, India;
[2] Associate Professor, University of Kashmir, Kashmir, India

Corresponding Author:
Tazia Tariq

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Abstract

Libraries play an essential role in raising national health awareness by serving as trusted community centers that provide reliable health information, develop health literacy, and encourage wellness, particularly among underprivileged communities. It is critical to recognize that libraries are not merely sources of information but also active agents of national growth. This study emphasizes libraries' crucial role in raising national health awareness among the general public. Demand for wellness services has risen in recent years, particularly following the COVID-19 epidemic. The study gathers data from secondary sources. Relevant literature was collected from research articles, books, and online databases about the role of libraries in promoting national health awareness. The collected data were critically examined through thematic analysis to identify key roles, challenges, and best practices. The study finds that public libraries provide a wide range of health, educational, social, and economic services, having an enormous impact on people's well-being. Libraries are strategically well placed to promote health and well-being among people from diverse backgrounds, making them excellent partners in helping healthcare facilities communicate with these communities. Public libraries may make excellent partners for community health organizations. While obstacles exist, they can be overcome by training and promoting health initiatives and services in public libraries. Moreover, it becomes important to overcome the current separation between libraries and the communities they serve. There is a need to publicize what libraries provide, ensuring that these services meet the community's changing needs. This demands comprehensive community engagement programs that clearly describe available resources and services. As we adjust to a new normal following the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries are emerging as critical hubs for community cohesion and involvement. They can serve as walls, boosting the ability of the community and augmenting public mental health measures, notably in the fight against loneliness and social isolation. Libraries may act as beacons of hope and connectivity, bridging societal divisions. Embracing libraries' varied roles may help build healthy communities, paving the way for a brighter, more peaceful future.

Keywords: *Health Awareness, COVID-19 pandemic, Public libraries, Community engagement, Health literacy*

Introduction

The public perception of libraries is gradually changing, as these institutions are no longer solely associated with access to books and are increasingly providing a broader array of public services that can enhance community health and welfare (Bertot et al., 2016; Morgan et al., 2016).. A library is a venue that collects books, magazines, and sometimes films, music, and other materials for individuals to read, study, or borrow (Oxford Dictionary). Whether privately or publicly owned, a room or building is intended to receive information, facilitate research, or offer recreational activities. Historically, libraries primarily acted as physical, community-focused centers for organizing, safeguarding, and granting access to printed works such as books, journals, and manuscripts. But modern libraries have transformed from conventional book-lending centers into essential "third places" that serve as community health hubs. (Oldenburg, 1999; Aabø et al., 2010). Libraries play a significant role in public health, health literacy, and overall community welfare. (Whiteman et al., 2018; Morgan et al., 2016). They are trusted, secure, and open spaces that help bridge gaps in health information and services, especially for vulnerable populations (Vårheim, 2014; Institute of Museum and Library Services [IMLS], 2020).

Good health is a crucial foundation for the advancement of any society. Thus, countries around the globe strive to implement strategies to maintain a healthy population, enabling progress and growth. Healthy communities foster collective development as their members can effectively fulfill their societal roles. Nevertheless, health literacy has been acknowledged as vital for

attaining good health (ECOSOC, 2010; Lehmann & Abel, 2016; Paasche-Orlow & Wolf, 2007), and this responsibility extends to libraries, the epicenters of learning, understanding, and education, as well as library staff, who plays a key role in enhancing health in developing countries (Crisp, 2007).

Importantly, libraries can gather essential health information, including resources on preventing the conditions that lead to health issues and on preventive and treatment initiatives. Libraries should be able to gather and preserve relevant health information resources to aid in the fight against non-communicable diseases (Chipungahelo et al., 2015). Promoting health information resources is crucial to raising awareness of non-communicable diseases and methods to tackle them. It is the responsibility of public, academic, and hospital libraries to provide the community with accessible and trustworthy health information sources and services (Orban, 2005). Public library initiatives aimed at improving health literacy occur at both the organizational and individual levels, particularly among librarians. At the organizational level, both institutional and community service health literacy programs are implemented for senior communities, marginalized groups, doctors, students, and their patients (Barr-Walker, J., 2016).

In summary, libraries have become vibrant community hubs that play a vital role in promoting national health awareness. As trusted, inclusive, and accessible spaces, they help bridge gaps in health information by providing reliable resources, increasing health literacy, and enabling informed decisions among diverse populations. Through organized health collections, outreach programs, partnerships with healthcare professionals, and specialized services for at-risk groups, libraries contribute significantly to preventing and managing both infectious and chronic diseases. Librarians serve as information mediators, educators, and advocates at both organizational and individual levels, empowering citizens with the knowledge to adopt healthier lifestyles. As a result, integrating libraries into national health strategies can strengthen public health systems, boost community resilience, and support sustainable social development.

Literature Review

Libraries are increasingly becoming strategic institutions for promoting national health awareness, especially in the post-COVID-19 era, when access to authentic health information needs to be more widespread. Asikin-Garmager et al.'s (2025) recent study considers public libraries as trusted community "health hubs" that connect the healthcare system and citizens by providing credible, evidence-based information in a secure, diverse environment. (Fleary et al., 2025) further added that traditionally, libraries were viewed only as information repositories; they are now recognized as dynamic "health spaces" that organize awareness campaigns, preventive health programs, screenings, and collaborative initiatives in partnership with healthcare professionals. These initiatives support the expansion of national health strategies, particularly among underserved communities facing obstacles to accessing formal healthcare services. Moreover, studies generally highlight the increasing importance of digital health literacy, as individuals rely more on online platforms for medical and telehealth services. Libraries provide dependable support for reducing digital inequalities by providing access to reliable online health services and fostering skills for critically evaluating digital information (Curtis et al., 2023; Karki et al., 2024).

Karki et al. (2024) further suggest that communities recognize libraries as trusted and easily accessible institutions for addressing physical and mental health issues, thereby promoting holistic well-being. During and after the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries played a key role in disseminating accurate public health information, combating misinformation, supporting remote access to health resources, and enhancing social connectivity through digital community programs. These efforts have lessened the impact of social isolation.

Additionally, in developing contexts, e-libraries and digital library services have significantly supported national and global health goals, including Sustainable Development Goal 3, by increasing public access to health education materials and awareness campaigns (Saroya et al., 2025). Despite their growing contributions, some challenges remain, including limited funding, insufficient professional training in health services, infrastructure deficiencies, and misalignment between library services and evolving community needs (Curtis et al., 2023; Saroya et al., 2025). Researchers continue to emphasize the importance of strong policy integration, effective initiatives, and active community engagement to strengthen libraries' role within the national health framework (Askin-Garmager et al., 2025).

Overall, libraries serve as inclusive, accessible, and reliable platforms, not only enhancing health literacy but also making valuable contributions to social connectivity, mental well-being, and sustainable national development, recognizing libraries as important partners in promoting national health awareness.

Conceptual Framework

A Conceptual framework in which the role of libraries in national health awareness places public or specialized libraries not just as passive repositories of information, but as active community health hubs (National Institute of Health, 2023). The framework generally incorporates key components of Social Capital Theory (fostering community trust) and the Health Belief Model (influencing individual perceptions of health risks & benefits).

Social Capital Theory offers a framework for understanding how social networks, trust, and shared norms serve as valuable resources that promote cooperation within society. Pierre Bourdieu (1986) describes social capital as the potential resources stored within enduring relationship networks. James Coleman (1988) proposes that a society's structure—focused on trust and coordination—improves social outcomes. Additionally, Robert D. Putnam (1933, 2000) links social capital to social engagement and institutional effectiveness, highlighting the importance of social networking and cooperation for democratic life and

community well-being. Overall, this theory underscores that greater social connectedness and trust significantly enhance social, educational, and public health outcomes.

The health belief model (HBM) is a foundational framework for understanding health behavior, originally developed in the 1950s by social psychologists at the U.S. Public Health Service (USPHS). It primarily explains why many people do not adopt disease prevention measures or undergo screening tests for early detection of asymptomatic illnesses. The model centers on individuals' perceptions of health threats, their motivation to act, and the influence of significant goals and the chances of success. It identifies six key "dimensions" affecting behavior: perceived susceptibility, perceived severity, perceived benefits, perceived barriers, self-efficacy, and cues to action. When considering how libraries contribute to national health awareness, the HBM offers a useful framework for understanding their role in promoting health behaviors.

In summary, libraries can significantly improve national health awareness campaigns by strategically aligning their resources and programs with the principles of the Health Belief Model. This approach helps shape perceptions of susceptibility and severity, emphasizes the benefits of preventive measures, reduces perceived barriers, provides key cues for action, and enhances self-efficacy among community members. Ultimately, this strategy fosters a more health-conscious and proactive population.

Objectives

1. To examine the role of libraries in promoting national health awareness.
2. To analyze libraries in improving health literacy and public health in the community.

Methodology

This study uses a conceptual research approach, analyzing secondary data to examine how libraries promote national health awareness. Relevant literature was collected from databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, ERIC, and Web of Science. The chosen sources were reviewed and analyzed through thematic and conceptual methods to identify key themes about how libraries support national health awareness. Additionally, the study applies Social Capital Theory and the Health Belief Model to interpret and structure the findings within a conceptual framework.

Thematic Analysis

Libraries as health information providers: Libraries are increasingly vital in delivering trustworthy health information to the public, offering diverse resources that support the health and well-being of both adults and youth in communities. They serve as bases for public engagement, enhance flexibility, promote psychological health, and foster inclusion (Karki et al., 2024). Additionally, functioning as centers for social connection and education, national libraries provide inviting spaces to raise awareness about physical and mental health. Consequently, libraries are recognized as strategic partners in advancing public health (Whiteman et al., 2018).

Libraries promoting health literacy: Libraries emphasize their vital role in promoting biological and psychological health by providing access to information and services that enable individuals to make informed health choices (Adams & White, 2017, p. 192). By providing reliable health information, libraries help people take charge of their health and well-being (Harris & Martinez, 2019). Librarians are increasingly adopting innovative strategies for health education, patient instruction, counseling, and engaging health users by broadening their skill sets to address the diverse needs of the health sector (Ozan, 2020). Public health initiatives, including workshops, seminars, and educational programs, are central to increasing health awareness. Furthermore, collaborations between libraries and community organizations strengthen and expand these efforts (Whitney et al., 2017).

Libraries as community health hubs: With more than 1 billion in-person visits annually, public libraries have evolved from basic book collections to vital community health centers that are highly accessible and trusted nationwide (American Library Association, 2019). They can play a crucial role in supporting medical research, advocating for evidence-based approaches, improving clinical care, and increasing public health literacy (Whitney et al., 2017).

Libraries are reducing health information inequality: Libraries support health equity through three main approaches: (1) offering reliable health information access, (2) delivering health literacy programs and services, and (3) bridging the divide between communities and public health systems. Additionally, they promote health equity by emphasizing internal procedures and staff efforts, functioning as an “everyday setting” (Whitelaw et al., 2017, p. 891).

Libraries supporting digital health services: Norman et al. described digital health literacy as the ability to seek out, understand, evaluate, and utilize health information from electronic sources to address health issues (Norman & Skinner, 2006). Libraries contribute to digital health by offering training programs and guidance sessions to help people access health information online (Bertot, Real & Jaegar, 2016). Moreover, they work with health organizations to raise awareness and enhance community health through digital health tools and resources (DeGozman & Jain, 2020).

Challenges libraries face in promoting national health awareness: Many libraries struggle with limited budgets, which hinder their ability to run health awareness programs, obtain current health information resources, and expand community health services. (Curtis et al., 2023; Saroya et al., 2025).

Libraries without specialized training in the field often hinder guiding users to trustworthy health information. (Curtis et al., 2023). Some libraries have inadequate digital infrastructure and limited internet access, making it difficult to provide digital health information services. (Saroya et al., 2025). There is a misalignment between library services and community health needs; as a result, libraries frequently struggle to provide services that address the community's evolving health information needs. (Curtis et al., 2023; Saroya et al., 2025).

Recommendations

There should be a specialized training program for librarians to help users effectively access reliable health information. Governments and institutions should provide adequate funding to libraries to improve infrastructure, update health information, and support health awareness programs. There should be more collaboration among hospitals, public health departments & health organizations to organize workshops, seminars, health camps, and awareness camps for the community's well-being. Libraries should design health literacy programs, seminars, and information sessions that address the community's specific needs.

Conclusion

Perceptions of libraries are gradually changing; they are no longer just repositories for books but also serve various public functions that promote community health and well-being. Libraries are vital to public health, health literacy, and community welfare. Additionally, in developing nations, digital libraries greatly aid by providing access to trustworthy health education materials and bolstering awareness initiatives. Despite their increasing contributions, challenges such as limited funding, insufficient professional training in health services, infrastructure issues, and misalignment between library services and growing community needs persist. Despite these challenges, libraries hold great promise in advancing national health awareness. With targeted training for librarians, sufficient funding, better infrastructure, and effective partnerships with healthcare organizations, they can play a crucial role in strengthening health initiatives across the country. Consequently, libraries can help create a more informed society and promote the overall health and well-being of communities.

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