

THE ROLE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES IN ENHANCING COMMUNITY DISASTER RESILIENCE: A CASE STUDY BASED ON THE COLOMBO PUBLIC LIBRARY

Amarasooriya, Y.W.N.D¹

Community resilience is a critical aspect of disaster management, emphasizing the ability of communities to withstand and recover from adverse events effectively. Public libraries hold untapped potential as valuable resources and community hubs that can significantly contribute to enhancing community disaster resilience. The main objective of this research was to investigate the role of public libraries in enhancing community disaster resilience in Sri Lanka with the increasing frequency and intensity of natural disasters in the region, it is crucial to explore the potential of public libraries as community hubs for disaster preparedness, response, and recovery. Other Objectives are investigating the strengths and weakness of disaster preparedness plans conducted by the libraries, Suggest the improvements to enhance the libraries' ability to respond effectively to disaster and provide valuable insights and practical recommendations for public library administrators, disaster management authorities, and policymakers in Sri Lanka to optimize the role of public libraries in community disaster resilience. There are 1117 public libraries in Sri Lanka and selected the Colombo public library as a sample under purposive sample method. Because, it is the largest public library in whole public library system. The study used mixed-method to conduct the research. Qualitative data was collected through observation and face to face interviews with readers as well as staff. The study focused on assessing the extent to which public libraries have been utilized and perceived as valuable resources during disaster events. Excel package and SPSS used to analyze and visualize data in the study. The analysis of data revealed that public libraries played a significant role in disaster resilience efforts. A substantial percentage of respondents acknowledged visiting public libraries during disasters for access to information, communication facilities, and temporary shelter. Furthermore, the qualitative data provided valuable insights into the diverse ways in which public libraries contributed to community resilience. These contributions included disseminating vital disaster-related information, hosting community workshops on disaster preparedness, collaborating with local authorities for emergency response coordination, and providing safe spaces for the community during disaster events. The findings demonstrate that public libraries in Sri Lanka are essential institutions in enhancing community disaster resilience. Their accessibility, community reach, and provision of crucial resources during disaster events make them valuable partners in disaster management. To further enhance their role, public libraries should be supported with increased resources and strategic partnerships with relevant stakeholders.

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¹ Department of Library Science, University of Kelaniya. nimasha.dilrangi@gmail.com