Initiating the "Human library event" in public libraries in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

A Human Library emphasizes empathy as an aspect to create better understanding between people and provides a conscious space where people learn more about each other. This study examined the present, means of human library, importance of introducing human libraries and the expansion of this concept within the context of public libraries in Sri Lanka and as well as why we should set up human library concepts in our culture. The critical research carried out to fulfil the objectives in this study. The research found that expansion of human library concept was importance, those are as creating a space of dialogue and understanding, promoting respect for Human Rights, passing knowledge and experience of people exposed to discrimination, stereotyping, prejudices and exclusion and Shaping attitudes of openness and acceptance towards 'otherness'. The vast majority of countries have multicultural societies that have diverse community groups. There are various characteristics, beliefs, arts, knowledge, and other social- factors of different groups of people throughout the world. Hence, through the human library approach humans can share the knowledge and experience of humans. The research recommended conducting new awareness programs to enhance the human library event and encouraging library professionals collecting 'voluntary human books' through reader society in public libraries.

Key words: *Human Library, Public Library, Human Book, Social Inclusion, Prejudices*

Introduction

As a gateway to knowledge and culture, the library provides life-long education for humans. The word "library" seems to be used in so many different aspects now, from the cuneiform tablets to the digital libraries. The most noticeable functions of any library are determining, acquiring, organizing, disseminating and preserving the knowledge for the utilization of their users and for an innovative society. Traditional Library gives insistence on storage and sustain of physical items, particularly books, periodicals and related material. Concept of "Human library" contrasts any other kind of physical library, because of the "living books" in a human library.

The Human Library is very much like a regular library where people go to borrow books. The only contrast is that the books are all human volunteers who have opted to speak about their circumstances openly to an interested audience and answer any questions they are asked. Each volunteer is a book on a specific topic. According to Ronni Abergel, "There are grateful books hidden in most of us", and this is a chance for those books to be read by others and find their spot on the bestsellers list (Buley library, 2020).

The human library approach was established as a community intervention strategy to facilitate a social inclusion of people to the recovery from mental illnesses ("in recovery") (Johannsen, 2015). The first human library was initiated in Copenhagen, Denmark by an international organization in 2000, to ensure a global implementation of the Human Library as a learning platform. The concept has been validated as an effective method to share the knowledge and experience of humans. According to yap, the human library is a venue for

dialogue among those stereotyped, judged, oppressed and discriminated against (yap, 2020). By participating in the human library, readers can engage in a dialogue with "living books," or storytellers, whom they may seldom meet in daily life (Kudo et al, 2011). The significance of human libraries is that; the library comprises actual people. Just like printed books, human books can be arranged according to various categories with the availability of human resources such as people with abuse, Anger & Conflict resolution, Anxiety, Co-parenting, Depression, Digital addiction, Divorce & separation, eating disorders, grief & loss, disabilities, refugees, cancer survivors, LGBTQ people and etc. During a Human Library event, readers can borrow one of these titles and engage in conversation with their chosen human Book about what they are interested in and users can learn further, since the human library provides opportunity to share people's experiences who have faced that in their lifestyles, beliefs and discriminations. Founder of the human library concept, Ronni Abergel elaborates on the major objective of initiating a human library stating that it creates a space,

"where you can walk in, borrow a human being and talk to them about a very challenging topic. Ideally, we wanted people to talk about issues that they normally would not talk about, or potentially don't like to talk about, but that we need to talk about" (Elsesser, 2020).

Although the concept of "The Human Library" has begun in Denmark, currently a huge number of libraries throughout the world tend to practice the human library concept. March 2nd, 2013. Visitors to the Halifax Public Libraries were invited to take out a Human Book and challenge their preconceptions about other members of the community at their first Human Library event.

A new chapter of the Human Library is on its way to serve readers at the University of Jakarta (Human Library Organization,2019).

First "Human Library" event in Humanistic Youth Movement in Murmansk Was a pilot project to see how and in which way the Human Library can be used as a useful tool to raise a more tolerant attitude towards stigmatized groups in the community. Moreover, The Human Library works with organizations like the IMF and big corporations like Daimler, Heineken, Ebay, and Microsoft to educate workers, increase diversity and tolerance, and promote inclusive work environments (Buley library, 2020).

Sri Lanka is a multinational state, home to mixed cultures, languages, and social-class. Since it has a multinational population, the human library would be assessing socio-cultural harmony among different communities. In Sri Lanka, "the human library" concept is an arising topic that has been captured by the librarian community. The concept of human library is still new to Sri Lanka, even though in 2009 the University of Colombo and the University of Sri Jayewardenepura organized human library projects. In Sri Lanka, "the human library" concept is an emerging topic that should be gaining attention among librarians, while especially public libraries around Sri Lanka must pay attention to initiate human libraries for the benefit of their users.

Objectives of the study

The objective of this study is to introduce the concept of Human Library and discuss the approaches to initiate human libraries in public libraries in Sri Lanka.

Methodology

Research carried out critical research using the web based survey. The sample human library events of the study were taken from the Human Library organization https://research.ppld.org/humanlibrary/worldwide (Human Library Organization,2019). Reviewed research articles, books and web pages relevant to this concept were facilitated to fulfil this study. To come to conclusion, content analysis has been conducted.

Findings

The research found that expansion of human library concept was importance as learning platform, those are as creating a space of dialogue and understanding, promoting respect for Human Rights, passing knowledge and experience of people exposed to discrimination, stereotyping, prejudices and exclusion. It leads to a unique exchange of thoughts and usually to mutual understanding. As the scientific research the Human Library has already proved, a short conversation can have a big impact. The quality of the conversation is important. To set up a high quality Human Library, it may have taken quite some preparation time (Human Library Organization, 2019). In this, there are some important principles to consider.

- Certification   Evaluation

- Catalogue   Safety
  Training   Accessibility

- Prejudices   Diversity

- Contact details   Voluntary

Conclusions and Recommendations

Since every country in the world has its own cultural values and conventional values, it is crucial to promote cultural – cohesiveness and harmony among communities to build society as a better place to live in. In this view, human libraries play a main role by delivering opportunities for making a better understanding and improving social inclusiveness in the society. On the other hand, Public libraries continue to be a place for education and self-help and offer opportunity for people of all ages and backgrounds. They offer opportunities for everyone to learn and to pursue self-improvement. In response to community needs for information, many libraries offer programs such as English as a Second Language (ESL) classes, homework help, after-school programs for children, job information centers, assistance for new immigrants, literacy programs, and much more. To serve such community needs, public libraries collect and make available information in many formats. Hence, initiating a social discourse by creating human library events in public libraries is the need of

the hour for minimizing cultural friction and misunderstanding.

The world we are living in today is enriched with multi-cultural values and traditions. Hence, although culture is the symbol of a nation, culture-based controversies are rampant among communities that are affiliated to different cultures. In this phenomenon, the "human library" concept would be a blessing to ensure the cultural – harmony of the society.

It is highly recommended to the national library in Sri Lanka to conduct the awareness programs for public library professionals to arrange human library events and encourage library professionals collecting 'voluntary human books' through reader societies in public libraries.

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