

## **Functionalization of the Human Library Concept in Sri Lanka: University of Colombo Library, University of Sri Jayewardenepura Library, Athurugiriya Public Library and National Library**

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### **Abstract**

Over time, many innovative concepts have come into the library system. Accordingly, the concept of human library can be introduced as one of the most important concepts that has entered the field of library recently. Human libraries provide an opportunity to connect with a live human book and exchange ideas. The main objective of this research was to study the importance of applying the concept of human library to the library system of Sri Lanka through the Colombo University Library, Sri Jayewardenepura University Library, Athurugiriya Public Library and the National Library. Most readers prefer to communicate with a live person instead of reading books. Foreign countries are reaping many benefits from the use of the human library concept. In order to put such programs into practice in the library, it is very important to introduce this concept to other libraries, to explain its benefits and to spread this concept within the Sri Lankan library system.

*Keywords: Library, Information, Human, Human Library, Human Book*

### **Introduction**

A human library is a collection of "books" that belong to man. Each of these books volunteers to participate in the library and share their stories. Like a normal library, the human library has a book jacket and description, and a "reader" can check "books" on a topic that he / she / they are interested in learning more about. The Human Library was created in the spring of 2000 in Copenhagen by Ronnie Abergel and his brother Danny and colleagues Asma Mauna and Christopher Erichsen. The original event was open eight hours a day for four days and covered more than fifty different topics. The wide selection of books gave readers enough choice to challenge their stereotypes, so more than a thousand readers benefited and the books, librarians, organizers and readers were amazed at the acceptance and impact of the human library" (Human Library Organization, 2020). Through the concept of human libraries are able to positively change people's attitudes, thoughts, perceptions and behaviors, and thereby create a respectful conversation. Instead of examining and judging a book from its cover like in a traditional library, we will be able to connect with a person who has stories with unique life experiences and we can chat with them for free.

It has been nearly 20 years since the concept of the human library was introduced. The concept of human libraries has spread far and wide in foreign countries, and the results have shown that these countries have reached the pinnacle of development. According to Johannes, the library is an innovative way of promoting dialogue, reducing prejudice and encouraging understanding. Following this rationale, human library access has been promoted in other countries and followed in various fields. Alport also suggests that positive relationships between groups can reduce negative prejudice. He also points out that the human library approach

focuses on facilitating inter-group relationships, and that it is a good way to intervene as a remedy for mental health malpractice.

The human library is the key that can be used to successfully socialize people with mental illness(Kwan,2020). He goes on to say that human library access can be introduced as a community intervention strategy to facilitate optimal socialization of people with mental illness( in recovery ).

Today, the number of suicides and mental illnesses in Sri Lanka has increased dramatically. According to a report released by the World Health Organization in 2012, Sri Lanka has the third highest number of suicides. But in the 30 years between 1985 and 2015, Wikipedia ranked Sri Lanka 7th out of 107 countries in terms of the number of suicides in the world. About one million people commit suicide each year, and by 2020 it is estimated to be 1.5 million. According to the Registrar General's Department, about 4,000 Sri Lankans commit suicide each year (World Health Organization,2020)Possibility through programs. Therefore, it is very important to implement human library programs in third world countries such as Sri Lanka. Libraries can also do a great job of talking about their problems and motivating them with positive ideas. The importance of applying the concept of human library to the library system in Sri Lanka is immense. However, the spread of the human library concept in the library system in Sri Lanka is still slow and it is safe to say that the programs that are currently being implemented are not functioning successfully and are problematic.

### **Objectives**

The main objective of this research was to study the importance of applying the concept of human library to the library system of Sri Lanka through the Colombo University Library, Sri Jayewardenepura University Library, Athurugiriya Public Library and the National Library. The other objective is to identify the current status of human libraries currently operating in Sri Lanka, identify strategies used in the implementation of human library programs, and identify issues and challenges faced by librarians and staff in implementing human library programs.

### **Methodology**

The survey method was used as the research method. University libraries and public libraries in Sri Lanka as population. For sample, University of Colombo Library, University of Sri Jayewardenepura Library and Athurugiriya Public Library and National Library have been selected for a total of 100 readers, each with 25 readers and the librarians and staff have been selected for a total of 25 each 5 librarians and staff. Primary data was collected from a questionnaire. University Grants Commission, Department of Census and Statistics, Annual Reports and Statistics of the respective Universities for obtaining secondary data Records were used.

### **Results and Discussion**

It was revealed that the concept of human library has not spread properly in the library system of Sri Lanka. It was also revealed that library programs in the University of Colombo Library, Sri Jayewardenepura University Library, Athurugiriya Public Library and the National Library in Sri Lanka are not functioning successfully at

present. Many librarians implement human library programs confined to a traditional framework. Most readers prefer to communicate with a live person instead of reading books

### Conclusion and Recommendations

Many benefits can be gained by applying the concept of human library to the library system in Sri Lanka. In Sri Lanka, human library programs operate in only a limited number of libraries. There is also inefficiency in the human library programs that are currently being implemented. The competent authorities should pay attention to this and further promote human library programs. The concept of human libraries in Sri Lanka has spread slowly. It is limited to the National Library, the University Library of Colombo and the University of Jayewardenepura and several public libraries. Today, the concept has spread to more than 80 countries. But the concept of human libraries has spread in Sri Lanka at a very slow pace. That is, the concept of human libraries has spread to a very limited number of libraries.

Human library programs need to be further expanded within the library system of Sri Lanka. Competent authorities should pay attention to its expansion in the library system in foreign countries as well as in Sri Lanka. Every librarian as well as staff should be informed and given proper training to implement the human library concept. Human library programs should be organized involving all parties from young to old. Programs should be promoted using appropriate media to educate users about upcoming human library programs. Curriculum should be developed on this human library concept.

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