

# **Community Information Needs of Urban Population – The Herzliya Model**

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## **Abstract:**

The purpose of this study was to identify the community information needs of the Herzliya community, as a model for other Israeli urban communities. The term "Community Information" refers to information about the community and its services; information produced by and needed for the everyday decision-making and problem solving of the citizens.

A community information center in a public library can greatly improve the quality of life of the community. This is especially true in times like ours, when individuals and societies are struggling with the challenges of a changing life style, the information explosion, an increased life expectancy, a rise in the standard of living, and an increase of leisure time.

The public library as an information center, will only improve its status within the community, in an age when many organizations are struggling to justify their existence, to obtain public funds.

While unheard of in Israel, and despite that people in the field are aware of its importance, the public library as a provider of community information has been well-known all over the world for decades.

Familiarity with the community and its needs, is a vital prerequisite for the establishment of a successful information center. Thus, this study was based on the following survey questions:

1. Into what major categories can the day-to-day problems of the community members be categorized?
2. Where do the people of the community turn to for information?
3. To what extent do these sources of information satisfy their information needs?
4. Which information channels does the community prefer?
5. Where would the community want its information center?

6. How often does the residents utilize the public library, and for what purposes?

Two methods were used to collect data. The primary data source was a questionnaire, transmitted by telephone, to 304 respondents. The data collection was performed between March and June 2001. The second instrument was personal interviews with nine community representatives, i.e. municipality telephone operator, worker at the municipality emergency center, "SHIL" (citizens' rights and information Center) coordinator, "Tipat Halav" (baby care clinic) nurse, new immigrants information center coordinator, two social workers, social worker who specializes in juvenile problems, the secretary of the municipality ombudsman.

The purpose of the questionnaire was to collect both descriptive/qualitative and quantitative data. The questionnaire included both open ended and multiple-choice questions. The open-ended questions were related to personal experience, to ensure maximum authenticity.

The results of the open-ended questions were analyzed by content and quantitative analysis. A set of content categories, used in community information studies, was specifically adapted for the content analysis of this study. The final set of categories was determined after a pilot survey.

The multiple-choice questions were analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistical methods. Quantitative methods were also used to present the content analysis of questionnaire data.

Interviewing the community representatives, served two purposes: to collect data regarding community information needs, directed to them, as well as data regarding the community representatives' professional needs. The interview data were analyzed by content analysis.

The analysis of the data from both methods, indicated numerous and varied information needs, including cases where obtaining the information might prove particularly difficult.

The analysis of the questionnaire data indicates that the five main categories, that cover almost 57% of the concerns, are (in order of frequency): environment, education, transport, issues dealing with government offices, and culture, recreation and leisure. Correlation analysis between the frequency of the problems in the specific areas and a number of demographic and socio-economic factors was performed. Though some correlation was found between some areas, they were not consistent; consequently, no definite correlation between the factors tested and the frequency of problems in the various fields could be determined.

A distinction was made between local community information needs, and general information needs. It seems that more than half the concerns were local, and within most categories, there were more local issues than general ones.

The surveyed population uses a variety of general and specific information sources. It seems that within the population studied, there is a definite preference towards specific information sources.

The main source of general information used was daily and local newspapers. The Internet, in some categories, was a popular information source, but it was not the most preferred method.

The preferred means for obtaining information were those that included personal contact, i.e. telephone and face-to-face conversations with the information provider.

The analysis of the interviews indicates that members of the community often turn to the community representatives for information on various subjects including some not within their direct responsibility. This phenomenon would indicate a lack of sufficient and accessible information.

This study qualified the importance of public libraries as major community information centers.

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