

# **The information needs of adults over sixty /**

## **Weissman, Gavriela**

### **Abstract**

In order to assure better information services, the information providers have to identify the population to be served, and to satisfy its specific needs. The purpose of this research was to develop an information demand profile in the field of legislation and the related services that would meet senior citizens' needs. The studied population was mentally independent senior citizens able of caring of themselves, Hebrew-speaking members of social clubs for seniors from the Tel-Aviv area. The following questions were posed:

1. Are the seniors sufficiently informed about the existing services and laws that might be beneficial to them?
2. What are the characteristics of the information in the field of legislation and the related services that the seniors would be interested to obtain?
3. Is there any correlation between the characteristics of the information needs and personal characteristics of senior citizens?

The research was based on the concept of Nicholas (1996, 2000) that used modern and effective management methods to ensure that systems were providing consumers with whatever they really needed and wanted. Within the framework of this concept, an information provider has to evaluate the user's information needs and his/her personal characteristics.

### **The research tool**

A questionnaire has been developed for examining the characteristics of an information recipient, the information required and the correlation between them.

### **Results**

#### **Receiving Information**

It has been determined that over a half of the interviewed seniors prefer not to share their problems with other. In spite of these finding, most of them used to consult somebody if they had a problem. No correlation has been found between the preference not to share one's problems with others and the willingness to consult others once a decision had to be taken on a newly arisen problem. The seniors need information mostly for coping with the changes occurring in their life.

#### **Information Providers**

It has been found that the sources of information were mostly family members, and in a very few instances – counselors at such governmental agencies as the National Insurance Institute and Shil – Citizen Info Service. Most respondents wished to obtain information from a Social Information specialist. A negative correlation has been discovered between

the respondent's age and his/her wish to get information from such a specialist. The older was the respondent, the less he/she wanted to get information from a Social Information specialist. It has been also found that:

- ◇ Friends were less frequently used as an information source by mobile handicapped seniors.
- ◇ Older seniors preferred their children and grandchildren as an information source over their friends.
- ◇ More educated respondents preferred friends and professionals as an information source.
- ◇ More economically well seniors did not prefer neighbors as an information source.

## Information

It has been found that elderly people are generally not well informed.

- ◇ Most seniors know the benefit to get a 30% discount on property taxes. Fewer of them were aware of reduced fares at theater and cinemas. Only half of respondents knew that there were programs for senior citizens at the Israel Association of Community Centers (IACC).
- ◇ Women were better informed than men on the benefits provided by public agencies.
- ◇ Respondents born in East Europe and in USA had a better knowledge of the laws and services that provided benefits than respondents born in other countries.
- ◇ Visually handicapped respondents were less informed than seniors with out such a handicap.

The following specific needs for information have been identified:

- ◇ The seniors were concerned mostly about their finances, then about the health issues, and less interested in recreational information.
- ◇ Men were more interested to get financial information than women.
- ◇ Hearing-impaired respondents were less interested to get information about health issues and recreational information than well-hearing respondents
- ◇ Almost all respondents wanted to get information about addresses and opening hours of institutions providing public and medical services.
- ◇ Hearing-impaired respondents showed less interest in information about addresses and opening hours of institutions providing public and medical services.
- ◇ Older seniors were less interested in information about addresses and opening hours of institutions providing public and medical services than younger seniors.
- ◇ The respondents were more interested in explanations of rules and services that

provide benefits than in information on how getting the benefits had influenced another seniors' lives.

## Delivery channels

Most respondents wished to get the information in plain Hebrew and not in an academic-styled language, in the form of a printed brochure delivered it them by mail. The second preference of getting the information was in an oral form. Mobile handicapped seniors were interested to be provided with information services by volunteer workers at home.

## Location

Respondents preferred to receive information services at the following locations, in descending order of reference: at social clubs for seniors and in IAAC, at health fund clinics, and at home. Only 2.1% of respondents wanted to get information services at a public library.

## Recommendations

The profiling of information needs can be instrumental in improving the ways of satisfying the information needs of senior citizens. It may also help the information providers to adjust their services to the special preferences of this population.

## Recommendations on additional research

The recommended topics for further research are:

- ◇ To investigate why the senior citizens are poorly informed, in spite of the abundance of publications on the laws and services that provide benefits for senior citizens.
- ◇ To undertake similar researches in other population groups: seniors residing in rural areas; seniors who are not members of social clubs for seniors; people who do not speak Hebrew; and children caring for their old parents.
- ◇ To check out to which degree people below the pension age are informed of the laws and services that provide benefits for senior citizens, and whether seniors citizens were informed before their achieving the pension age.
- ◇ To find out why senior citizens are not interested in getting information on how the benefits are influencing other seniors' lives.

System No.  
1071145