

# A Demographic Profile of Heads of Public Libraries in Sri Lanka

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**Abstract:** This study reuses data extracted from a previous report to create a profile of public library leaders in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, it was recognized that the country has a group of library leaders mostly in their early 40s, moderately educated, and ready for further advancement with proper guidance and policy implementation.

**Keywords:** public libraries, librarians, Sri Lanka, human resources, profile of library leaders

## EXTENDED ABSTRACT

### 1. INTRODUCTION & OBJECTIVES

Public libraries in Sri Lanka are operational under the auspices of the local governments of the country. There are 21 Municipal Councils, 41 Urban Councils and 276 Pradeshiya Sabhas functioning under the 09 Provinces<sup>1</sup>. According to the National Library and Documentation Services Board (NLDSB), there are 1176 libraries being operated throughout the country (*Statistical Handbook on Libraries in Sri Lanka*, 2018). This study reuses data obtained through the Public Library Baseline Survey of the ICT Agency of Sri Lanka (Gamage, 2018) to explore characteristics of heads of public libraries in Sri Lanka.

Heads lead public libraries towards providing a better service to their communities. Hence, the term 'library leader' is used to denote heads of public libraries in this paper.

Ugwu and Ugwu (2017) conducted a study with a group of University librarians. He states that only age, education, job position and work experience are significant predictors of librarians' task-based and contextual performance. Roberts and Rowley (2008) suggests that gender may have some impact on the leadership tasks.

A few studies had expressed the danger of low profile of public library leaders in the country in terms of education and recruitment (Wanasinghe, 2018; Wijetunge, 2000).

Therefore, it is beneficial to recognize the current profile of library leaders based on the above factors to support policy making and planning for the public library sector.

<sup>1</sup> By 31st May 2019 ([http://lgpc.gov.lk/web/images/divisions/Summery\\_of\\_LAs.pdf](http://lgpc.gov.lk/web/images/divisions/Summery_of_LAs.pdf))

## 2. METHODOLOGY

Data obtained through the Public Library Baseline Survey (Gamage, 2018) was reused for recognizing the characteristics of the average public library leader. The survey considered the total public library population as the research population<sup>2</sup>. Six hundred and ninety-three (693) responses had been received. Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics.

As our objective was to get the overall profile, provincial and district level variations were not taken into account. Both appointed leaders (Librarians, Acting Librarians) and informal leaders who managed the library at the time of the survey due to unavailability of an appointed library manager were considered leaders for the purpose of this study.

## 3. RESULTS & DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Gender, age, and length of experience

Majority of public library leaders are females (88.2%). Mean age and length of service of public library leaders are 44.3 and 15.7 years respectively.

### 3.2 General education

A fair percentage of heads of libraries (73.3%) have G.C.E. A/L as the highest general educational qualification. It is also notable that Over 17% of library leaders have only G.C.E. O/L as the highest general educational qualification.

**Table 1. General education of public library leaders in Sri Lanka**

<b>Educational level</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
O/L	106	17.1%
<b>A/L</b>	<b>455</b>	<b>73.3%</b>
Degree	50	8.1%
Postgraduate	10	1.6%
Total	621	100.0%

### 3.3 Professional education

Over 31% of leaders did not have any professional education.

**Table 2. Professional qualifications of public library leaders in Sri Lanka**

<b>Professional qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Certificate	31	6.5%	6.5%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level I	89	18.7%	25.2%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level II	84	17.6%	42.8%

<sup>2</sup> Propagating questionnaires through Provincial Commissioners, via local government institutions, directly to all libraries (except children's libraries and reading rooms).

Diploma/Higher Diploma Level III	90	18.9%	61.7%
Degree	25	5.2%	66.9%
Postgraduate	9	1.9%	68.8%
<b>No professional Education</b>	<b>149</b>	<b>31.2%</b>	100.0%
Total	477	100.0%	

### 3.4 Designations of heads of libraries

We recognized that one third of public libraries (32.8%) had only one person to administer the library. They were uncontestedly considered the library leaders.

A majority of libraries were administered by leaders of posts of Library Assistant or below. A striking factor is that 13% of public library leaders are minor staff members (laborers, temporary, casual and other).

**Table 3. Designations of public library leaders in Sri Lanka**

<b>Post</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Librarian (Supra)	2	0.3%	0.3%
Librarian Gr. I	30	4.8%	5.1%
Librarian Gr. II	58	9.2%	14.3%
<b>Librarian Gr. III</b>	<b>217</b>	<b>34.6%</b>	<b>48.9%</b>
<b>Library Assistant</b>	<b>239</b>	<b>38.1%</b>	86.9%
Minor staff	82	13.0%	100.0%
Total	628	100.0%	

### 3.5 Appointment of professional librarians

Nearly 15% of libraries were not managed by a properly appointed leader.

**Table 4. Librarian appointments obtained by public library leaders in Sri Lanka**

<b>Managed by</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Librarian	309	48.7%
Acting Librarian	232	36.5%
No responsible person	94	14.8%
Total	635	100.0%

### 3.6 Professional qualifications obtained

It was found that there are no professional public librarians (Grade III and above) with postgraduate degree qualifications. However, more than 25% of them are graduates. Others have completed at least 01 level of their professional Diploma.

**Table 6. Professional qualifications obtained by professional public librarians in Sri Lanka**

<b>Professional Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Certificate	0	0%	0%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level I	20	7.2%	7.2%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level II	33	11.9%	19.1%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level III	148	53.2%	72.3%
Degree	77	<b>27.7%</b>	100.0%
Postgraduate	0	0.0%	100.0%
No professional education	0	0.0%	100.0%
	278	100.0%	

On the other hand, nearly 44% of leaders administering libraries without a formal appointment had already obtained professional qualifications. However, a majority of them did not have a professional education whatsoever.

**Table 7. Professional qualifications obtained by public library leaders in Sri Lanka without a formal appointment**

<b>Qualification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>	<b>Cumulative Percentage</b>
Certificate	3	6.5%	6.5%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level I	9	19.6%	26.1%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level II	4	8.7%	34.8%
Diploma/Higher Diploma Level III	4	8.7%	<b>43.5%</b>
Degree	0	0.0%	43.5%
Postgraduate	0	0.0%	43.5%
<b>No professional Education</b>	26	<b>56.5%</b>	100.0%
Total	46	100.0%	

## CONCLUSION

In par with the popular stereotype of librarians in the world (Simpson & Simpson, 1969), a majority of public library leaders in Sri Lanka are females.

A majority is moderately educated (G.C.E A/L). However, a considerable percentage has only G.C.E. O/L education. Nearly one third of leaders did not have any professional education.

A majority of libraries were administered by leaders of posts Library Assistant or below. Immediate action should be taken to educate leaders and recruit suitable persons for the posts. Career advancement opportunities could be lacking or, the promotional schemes may not motivate leaders for professional advancement.

Low number of staff members could be because the public libraries are small in size and operation. However, it should be further studied whether the usage is proportional to the population of domain areas.

Consequently, it should be noted that the educational profile of the contemporary public library leader is not satisfactory when compared with developed countries (American Library

Association, 2007). However, the majority of leaders are early middle aged, and possess lengthy experience in the sector. Therefore, we are able to aspire further advancement of the sector with proper planning and policy level intervention.

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