

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to assess the information needs of foreign women in Malaysia, with special reference to the Sudanese community. In particular the study examined the following questions:

1. What are the main information needs of Sudanese women community living in Malaysia?
2. What are the main sources of information for these Sudanese women?
3. Do these women use the library for their information needs, and if so, what types of materials do they use in the library?
4. What are the major barriers to meeting their information needs?

This chapter presents the overall design of the study and identifies the research population. It also describes the instrument employed in this research and how the questionnaire was designed. A brief outline of the items used in the instrument is also provided. It also explains the methods of selecting the subjects, and the techniques of analysis. Each section will be handled separately below.

Survey Method

Survey research has been defined as “ the research strategy where one collects data from all or part of a population to assess the relative incidence, distribution, and interactions of naturally occurring variables” (Kidder and Judd 1986).

The basic assumption of survey research is that by carefully following certain scientific procedures the researchers attempt to study directly the characteristics of populations through the use of surveys. The word survey literally means to look at or to

see over or beyond, or in other words to observe. A key strength of survey research is that, if properly done, it allows one to generalize from a smaller group to a larger group from which the sub-group has been selected. The sub-group is referred to as the sample. The larger group is known as the population. The observations or measurement made during survey research, or any other kind of research, produce data. Conclusions can be made based on the data collected systematically presented and analyzed and presented.

Survey research is characterized as being used to gather contemporary data, but it does not enable the researcher to manipulate the independent variables and it provides less control of the research environment. Survey research is considered to be less rigorous than other methods, though it is better suited to study a large number of and geographically dispersed respondents. It is also appropriate for studying personal factors and for exploratory analysis of relationships (Powell 1997). Survey research examines the frequency and relationships between psychological and sociological variables and taps in to constructs such as attitudes, beliefs, prejudice, preference, and opinion (Salkind 1994). For these reasons, the survey method was used to gather information from a scattered population of the Sudanese women community in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. This study primarily used the postal questionnaire for data collection. It helped save time and energy without sacrificing efficiency, accuracy or information adequacy in the research process.

The Questionnaire

The researcher used the questionnaire that comprised 20 questions as the data collection instrument. In order to plan the questionnaire, the researcher first defined the problem, considered previous related research solutions to the problem, identified

the potential respondents or subjects and finally selected the best or most appropriate method.

The questionnaire as a technique or instrument for collecting survey data has many advantages. The mail questionnaire in particular tends to encourage frank answers and the respondents can complete the questionnaire without the researcher being present. Thus the questionnaire can be quite effective at measuring attitudes. The fixed format of the questionnaire tends to eliminate variation in the questioning process. The questionnaire being distributed and allowed to be completed, within limits, at the leisure of the participant is another advantage.

The questionnaire can be constructed so that quantitative data are relatively easy to collect and analyze. It can also facilitate the collection of large amounts of data in a relatively short period of time. Questionnaires are usually inexpensive to administer. Although there are disadvantages, the advantages of this method outweigh them.

Development of Instrument

The literature was reviewed to examine guidelines and similar research studies that used questionnaires to gather data on similar topics. The questionnaire, "*Information Needs of Foreign Women in Malaysia with Special Reference to Sudanese Women Community*", was then designed and based on the studies related to information needs for women reviewed in the literature survey.

A common closed-ended questionnaire was developed to use in the data collection task. The questions were designed to fulfil the research objectives outlined in the study. A copy of the questionnaire can be seen in Appendix 1.

Pre- Testing

The importance of the pre-testing of the research instrument, which is sometimes referred to as a "pilot study" is that, although the questionnaire may seem clear to its designer, it may create some difficulties for the respondents. In order to get some comments and suggestions regarding the questionnaire and its clarity and validity, the questionnaire was pre-tested. It gave the researcher an opportunity to identify questionnaire items that tend to be misunderstood by the participants and to point out problem questions, poor instructions, and unnecessary or missing questions and to give their general reactions to the instrument. In order to strengthen the questionnaire and to prevent misunderstanding of the questions, the questionnaire was sent to 10 Sudanese women of the community prior to the actual study. On the basis of the comments and suggestions, the questionnaire was revised accordingly before the final questionnaire was distributed.

Population and Sample

Given the constraints of insufficient time and insufficient research funds, the next best strategy is to take a portion of a larger group of participants and do the research on a smaller group. Hence the population of this study were the Sudanese women community living in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya, which totalled about 120 individuals. From the population, a stratified random sample was selected from all the community members. The total number of the sample in this study was 90 informants. The characteristics of the sample were all Sudanese nationals, who were at the time of study, staying Malaysia. They were mainly housewives accompanying their husbands or students. The whole sample of 90 participants was selected from the Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya Sudanese women community. The researcher chose the

sample of participants randomly. All the subjects were of Afro-Arab ethnic background. As to their religious background. Islam.

Data Collection

In the study the work was conducted at Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya.. The actual questionnaire was 90 copies which were used and distributed to the Sudanese women community. The respondents were given one month to complete the questionnaire. A covering letter also accompanied the questionnaire to briefly explain the purpose of the study and to stress the importance of each person's response. The questionnaire was accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped, return envelope. Follows up letters were also sent out as reminders.

Distribution and Collection of the Questionnaire

Ninety copies of the questionnaire were distributed to the Sudanese women community in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya. The material settings, time, locations and informants formed the laboratory of the study and specific ideas became clearer while analyzing the data. The study was conducted on the first of July 1999 and the participants were given one month period to return the questionnaire.

Data Analysis

The data collected was processed by the use of Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) Version 9.00. The process of analyzing the data gathered basically involved dedcoding the responses, or placing each item in the appropriate category; tabulating the data and performing appropriate statistical computations. The data was analyzed based on the close-ended questionnaire.

The analyzed data was then synthesized and presented in narrative form. The findings and conclusions were then based on the objectives and the research questions of this study. The report of findings was presented under four sub-headings based on the research questions of the study. The first part described the primary information needs of the Sudanese women community in Malaysia. This is followed by the discussion of the findings of the current information sources available to women. Discussion of the findings on how far the sources met the information needs of women was presented. This was followed by the discussion on the possible reasons why the women are not getting information that they need. Finally the discussions on how other factors such as age and levels of education of the respondents had influenced the choice of types and sources of information was presented

The following chapter relates the findings of the survey by first describing the data on the general characteristics of the respondents and the results and interpretation obtained from the data.