THE INFORMATION NEEDS AND INFORMATION SEEKING BEHAVIOR OF OLDER ADULTS

AN ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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SCOPE NOTE

This bibliography cites journal articles and books that discuss the information needs and information seeking behavior of older adults. For the purpose of this bibliography, older adults refer to adults who are over the age of sixty-five. Older adults experience unique needs and challenges as a result of their age and the aging process. Because they are not a homogeneous group, this bibliography references sources that discuss sub-groups of older adults, such as minorities and the “oldest-old,” who have even more specific needs and information seeking behavior. The bibliography also includes two sources that more specifically address older adults and information retrieval, in the context of using an online library catalogue and the web to perform searches. These sources were included because information science literature on older adults is heavily focused on the disadvantages it is assumed older adults face using adapting to technological changes. Lastly, two sources are referenced that address older adults’ information needs and information seeking behavior for health information, the information need that is most prominently identified among older adults.

ENTRY 1


The authors address the information needs and information seeking behavior of the oldest old, adults aged eighty-five or older. The oldest old have traditionally been grouped with all adults over the age of sixty-five; however, the differences between these two groups, including diminished health, cognitive abilities, and the loss of social networks, impacts their ability to access information, viewed as pivotal to “successful aging.” The article reviews the differences between the oldest-old and the younger old, the relevance of aging theories to a library and information science study of the oldest-old, existing research on the oldest old’s information needs and their preferred information sources, the relationship of information to the oldest old aging successfully, and the oldest old’s relationship with the internet.

DATABASE: First Search in ArticleFirst, Eco, & ERIC (Full text - Elsevier SD JAI)
ENTRY 2


Research and a study of the information needs of individuals “at the end of [their] life” is discussed in this article. The research includes an analysis of the information needs of terminally ill individuals and coding of the information needs of an elderly dying man, as stated in his autobiography. The categories of information needs identified in both studies are health, financial, spiritual, and psychological. The latter study involved coding an autobiography written by a dying elderly man and his wife. This study found that the information needs of the man were specific to dying, such as “where to die,” pension issues, and fear of the unknown. The author notes that despite the gravity and breadth of these information needs, they are not currently well researched or served by LIS professionals. While dying is certainly not peculiar to older adults, this citation was included because it is extremely pertinent to the experience of older adults.

DATABASE: Ageline
SEARCH METHOD: Controlled vocabulary and browsing
SEARCH STRATEGY: The terms “information needs” and “library services” and “older adults” were searched in the Ageline database. Browsing the database with keywords led to identification of the above descriptors.

ENTRY 3


This study evaluates the information needs of older and disabled people in the UK. The study emphasizes the role of this information on older adults’ quality of life and independence. The study has three components: a literature survey of research about the information needs of older adults, collection and review of information inquiries by older adults to social service organizations, and a survey of 1,634 older adults. The survey of older adults demonstrated a great need for supportive services, a lack of knowledge about who to ask for help, and a desire
for information about financial information and the adaptation of their home for physical disabilities. Additionally, the older adults indicated a preference for securing information locally and through face-to-face contact. The author concludes that older people are not receiving the services they need and the information that would direct them towards those services. She notes that this is particularly disturbing because there is a shift in society towards greater self-reliance and obtaining information electronically.

**DATABASE:** Web of Science  
**SEARCH METHOD:** Keyword Searching  
**SEARCH STRATEGY:** Browsing and Footnote Chasing. I searched “The Information Needs of Elderly People: An Exploratory Study” by Tinker, McCreadie, and Salvage, one of the most highly cited records in the subject of older adults and information needs. I selected the option for Related Records, of which this article was one.

**ENTRY 4**


This article investigates the under-representation of older adults in adult education. A diverse group of forty-nine older adults were interviewed to ascertain their information needs and what impact, if any, these needs have on participation in adult or continuing education. The participants identified that “coping needs,” such as health, family, and money, benefited most from information and were priorities to the older adults. The participants most used and trusted sources of information were newspapers, television, and friends and family. Lastly, the participants were interviewed about their feelings towards participating in education that would help resolve the aforementioned information needs. The participants expressed a desire to find out information independently, and other physical and mental challenges that hindered them from seeking this information through adult education.

**DATABASE:** First Search in ArticleFirst, Eco, & ERIC (EbscoHost)  
**SEARCH METHOD:** Controlled vocabulary  
**SEARCH STRATEGY:** “Older adults” and “information seeking” and “information needs” were searched as subjects. The subject terms were identified through browsing.
ENTRY 5


This study explores the information needs of elderly Chinese immigrants in California and the implications of those needs for the provision of information services. Through interviews, the authors found that the study participants were primarily interested in world news and news about their home country, and their preferred information sources were newspapers, television, and family and friends. The participants were also interviewed about their information “preferences” within the categories of personal information needs, health information needs, and family information needs. Their priorities were information about “places to go and things to do,” preventative healthcare, family recreation, shopping, real estate information, education, and religion. The participants were not regular users of libraries and were more likely to purchase a book than borrow it from a library.

**DATABASE:** Libraries and Information Science Research (Elsevier SD JAI)
**SEARCH METHOD:** Controlled vocabulary
**SEARCH STRATEGY:** “Libraries” and “user needs” and “old people” were searched as descriptors and the search was narrowed to peer-reviewed journals. The thesaurus was used to determine the search language.

ENTRY 6


This study notes that older adults have successful strategies for obtaining information, but that these strategies are primarily useful for print sources. The study tested this premise by having older adults perform three different everyday information searches in their natural environment. The study found that older adults chose to use or preferred successful information seeking strategies that they have developed throughout their life. The older adults did not feel that using the web was faster, more reliable, or less frustrating than using other sources, such as telephone newspapers, or asking a person. Additionally, the older adults preferred receiving or confirming information with a person, particularly when using electronic sources. Lastly, dislike of using the Internet for finding information was linked to the lack of borders or “landmarks” on the web that exist with print resources, such as the ability to fold over a brochure’s corner could be folded over or a place a post-it on a book page.
DATABASE: First Search in ArticleFirst (Elsevier SD Freedom Collection)
SEARCH METHOD: Keyword Searching
SEARCH STRATEGY: The search statement "older adults" or "elderly" or "older people" and “information()needs" or “information seeking behavior” was used.

ENTRY 7


This article discusses research on the information seeking behavior of older adults and African-Americans for health information on the Internet. Older adults, considered a vulnerable population because of their increased risk of healthcare problems and low health literacy, consistently express a desire to learn or use the Internet to research health information. The research indicates that this health information is used by older adults as “background” information – they typically discuss their findings with their physician and prefer health information from their physician, family members, television, or other print resources to the internet. Two other key findings of the research discussed are that older adults are the least likely of user groups to use the Internet outside of their home, with implications for libraries, and older adults with higher education levels are more likely to use the internet to find health information.

DATABASE: Dialog (GaleGroup InfoTrac Expanded Academic ASAP)
SEARCH METHOD: Keyword Searching
SEARCH STRATEGY: The search was performed in the OneSearch category Information and Library Services (INFOSCI) using the search statement: older()adult? and information()seeking()behavior?

ENTRY 8


This study surveyed eight hundred older adults about their selection of information channels to find information about five elderly-specific issues. Their selection of information channels, which included five media sources and three interpersonal channels, were analyzed in relation to their education, age, income, and living arrangements. The channels included were television, radio,
newspapers, magazines, brochures/leaflets, friends/relations, professionals, and organizations. The three information channels most selected by the participants were television, newspapers, and family/friends, while the least selected information channel were professionals. The study’s second component was the relationship of an individual’s choice of an information source to their overall use of media. The study found that there were significant differences in the use of sources along the lines of education, income, age, and living arrangements. Perhaps the most interesting finding of the study was that the older, lower-income, and lower-educated seniors demonstrated overall “lower information seeking orientation” – they were least likely to choose any of the eight information channels as a source of information and generally displayed less interest in information seeking or media use, even for entertainment.

**DATABASE:** ERIC (Requested through Interlibrary loan)
**SEARCH METHOD:** Controlled vocabulary
**SEARCH STRATEGY:** The thesaurus was used to identify the proper search language. The search terms used were “older adults” and “information sources.”

**ENTRY 9**


Hale’s comprehensive book discusses the information needs of older adults in the context of solving problems. She notes that their information needs differ from other groups because they face unique needs and challenges. Hales-Mabry categorizes these challenges (as well as some advantages) as influences on the older adults’ ability to receive information. These influences, physiological, psychological, and sociological, impact their “asking behavior” or efforts to solve problems through information. She analyzes this asking behavior in the context of the older adult’s family, friends and professionals or among institutions, such as libraries, schools, or government offices. Hales concludes her book with two chapters that discuss two subgroups among older adults: ethnic minorities and those suffering major health problems. The latter group Hale consistently identifies as a minority; she reiterates throughout the book that most older adults are living active adults.

**DATABASE:** First Search in WorldCat, ERIC, and ArticleFirst (Requested from Drexel’s Hagerty Library)
**SEARCH METHOD:** Author searching
SEARCH STRATEGY: The work of the author Celia Hales-Mabry was consistently an outcome of every search. I searched the author using FirstSearch in the WorldCat, ERIC, and ArticleFirst databases. I located this book, which was a part of Drexel's catalogue, and requested it through inter-library loan.

ENTRY 10


The purpose of this study was to determine and rank through free response interviews older adults' information needs and concerns. 271 older adults participated identified the questions they would like to see answered in a prospective newspaper column. The 58 most frequently mentioned "categories of concerns" were identified from the 1,523 requested needs and were then rated according to eight properties, such as either a health concern vs. not a health concern and quality of life vs. necessities of life. One finding, for instance, was that the participants viewed the loss of a spouse as an individual concern strongly related to quality of life. The authors conclude with an interesting finding of the study: while there was a strong interest in information about government programs from which they might receive benefits, this information need was not rated as a quality of life issue. The authors believes this suggests that the participants may not currently need these programs, but desire information about their eligibility for government benefits in anticipation of future need.

DATABASE: Expanded Academic ASAP (Requested through Interlibrary loan)
SEARCH METHOD: Browsing
SEARCH STRATEGY: I used the basic search function to search the terms “information needs” and “elderly." This article was on the first page of the search results.

ENTRY 11


This study tested and compared the web searching skills of novice older searchers compared to novice young adult searchers. The participants each selected two of five questions, one of which was characterized as easy and the
other as difficult. The participants developed search strategies that were described verbally and then performed on the Web. The study found that younger and older adults performed simple searches in the same amount of steps (efficiency) but the information that the older adults accessed was 20% less accurate. In the case of difficult searches, the older adults were less efficient by eight steps than young adults, but the information they found was equally accurate. The researchers investigated several different explanations to support these outcomes, but none of these reasons were found to be conclusive. Lastly, the researchers found that prior to the search the older adults had far more negative attitudes towards the web than the young adult novices, but afterwards both groups had significantly improved attitudes.

**DATABASE:** Dialog (EbscoHost Professional Development Collection)
**SEARCH METHOD:** Controlled Vocabulary
**SEARCH STRATEGY:** This search was performed in the OneSearch category Information and Library Services (INFOSCI) using the search statement: older adults/de and information seeking/de was used in Dialog

**ENTRY 12**


This study focused on older adult’s information retrieval success using a library online catalog. The author evaluated the participants using a “three-layer framework,” developed by Christine Borgman, that evaluates the user’s conceptual knowledge, semantic knowledge, and technical skills. The study participants undertook nine different tasks, which can be characterized as either basic or advanced searching. To participate in the study, the older adults needed to possess some experience using the library online card catalogue. The study found that while the participants were generally successful using basic search functions (author, subjects, title searching, information location), they were not proficient using the advanced search features (keyword searching, Boolean searching, and database change functions). In particular, the participants had difficulty translating their information need into a search phrase. The author concludes that because the participants had some level of familiarity with the online catalogue systems, the older users and less experienced users must have even lower levels of success accessing the information they desire.

**DATABASE:** Library, Information Science & Technology Abstracts
**SEARCH METHOD:** Browsing
SEARCH STRATEGY: I performed a simple search using search terms that were effective in other databases: “older adults” and “user studies” and “information.”

ENTRY 13


This study addressed the information needs of older adults, as expressed by 1,812 older adults residing in Queensland, Australia, about housing, finance, legal matters, home maintenance, and recreation, and their preferred method of receiving the information. The older adults were asked to identify their information sources for issues that arise in each of these categories, and to identify any alternative sources of information. The researchers found that while 97% of the older adults could identify one source of information for each subject, less than 50% knew of two or more sources for each subject. The researchers found this troublesome because the primary sources that older adults identified were not always appropriate, such as real estate agents for housing issues. As with other studies, it was found that older adults rely heavily on family and friends for information, and express a strong preference for obtaining information over the telephone or speaking to someone in person. Extensive background information on information needs and seeking behavior of older adults is provided.

DATABASE: Dialog (ERIC)
SEARCH METHOD: Controlled vocabulary
SEARCH STRATEGY: This search was performed in the OneSearch category Information and Library Services (INFOSCI) using the search statement: older adults/de and information needs/de.

ENTRY 14


The article discussed a review of studies about the information needs of newly retired people and their information seeking behavior. The first study, a survey performed by the Research Institute for Consumer Affairs, found health, housing, finance, and neighborhood issues were primary concerns. The survey also found that the older adults sought information for these issues primarily from their
families, neighbors, friends, or local government. A second study investigated the leisure information needs of older adults with a focus on the role libraries have satisfying this need. The author evaluates these studies in the context of a description of how the differences among older adults influence their information need (income, age), and how their similarities (history, free time, final phase of life) create a common attitude towards information seeking. The author concludes with three implications for information providers: older adults do not demand information and subsequently greater emphasis must be placed on offering it to them; more study is needed on information needs of older people beyond that of housing or health; and older people should be encouraged to take a more active role in accessing information independently through education and training.

DATABASE: First Search in ERIC, ArticleFirst, and ECO (Requested through InterLibrary loan)
SEARCH METHOD: Footnote chasing
SEARCH STRATEGY: This article was cited in “Discovered by Chance: The Role of Incidental Information Acquisition in an Ecological Model of Information Use,” by Kirsty Williamson. I searched the article’s title in FirstSearch.

ENTRY 15


Sixty-five residents of an independent living retirement community were surveyed to elicit information about their reading behavior and the type of books they would like provided to them by their library. The study included analysis of the survey data according to the participant’s age, occupation, education, and living arrangement. The outcome of the survey found that 60% of the survey respondents spent five or more hours a week reading or listening to books; the time spent reading increased with age. Reading preferences were split between nonfiction (biographies) and fiction (mysteries). The study did not find any links between reading habits and education, occupation or living arrangements. There were, however, links between gender and living arrangement and preferences for library services such as book talks or audio books. The study is accompanied by comprehensive coverage of the literature on the information needs and seeking behavior of older adults.

DATABASE: ERIC
SEARCH METHOD: Controlled vocabulary
SEARCH STRATEGY: The thesaurus was used to determine the correct search language. The search terms "older adults" and "use studies" were searched as descriptors and "library" was added as a keyword.

ENTRY 16


This study theorizes that the older adult’s everyday information seeking behavior occurs within the context of the role theory and social networks. The study compares the information seeking behavior of “young seniors” at an independent living facility to the “oldest old” living at an assisted-care facility to determine whether the presumably different roles these two groups assume impacts their information needs and information seeking behavior. The participants provided information about a recent information need, how they accessed information to satisfy that need, and their general information seeking habits. The author concludes that the role-theory approach was not appropriate for the everyday information seeking of seniors. For both groups, interpersonal sources and print materials from organizations that they were familiar with were the primary source of information for their information needs. Another notable finding of the study was that older adults expressed a feeling of information overload and a limited ability to determine accuracy of web materials.

DATABASE: Dialog (Haworth Press)
SEARCH METHOD: Keyword searching
SEARCH STRATEGY: The search was performed in the OneSearch category Information and Library Services (INFOSCI) using the search statement: older()adult? and information()seeking()behavior?

ENTRY 17


This study investigates the incidental information acquisition by a sample of rural and urban elderly Australians. The participants in the study provided detailed information about their telephone calls over a two-week period and were interviewed about situations when they needed to find information for their
everyday lives. The studies found that through personal phone calls, the elderly participants felt that there was significant incidental information acquisition. The information acquisition increased depending on the length of the phone calls: female callers located in the City had the longest phone calls. Through interviews, it was found that the older adults' information needs were specific to their age, and that their primary sources of information were their family members, newspapers, friends, television, print information, and radio. The author concludes that the participants' use of favorite sources, such as television, radio, and newspapers, involves both purposeful and incidental information acquisition. Because of the role of these sources in providing important information to seniors, intentionally or not, the author contends that it's extremely important that they provide “reliable and pertinent” information.

**ENTRY 18**


This article reviews the author's major research studies on the information and library needs of older adults and the role this research plays in laying the foundation for the development of the services that meet those needs. The importance of this research is stressed because of the high percentage of elderly library uses, as well as their lower levels of computer and Internet use to satisfy their information needs. The studies reviewed include case studies of the information seeking behavior of two hundred older adults, and survey and observation of one hundred older adults use of the Internet in a public library.