

# Impact of COVID-19 on libraries and its challenges towards library professionals in Assam

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## Abstract

**Overview:** In this crucial situation of COVID-19, most of the physical library systems were stuck due to maintaining the rules of social distancing and also help to overcome the spread of virus infection but now it is time to remind society of the importance of the library.

**Objectives:** The main objectives of the study were to discuss the various challenges and how library professionals are dealing with this situation and their roles towards society and also to know the types of resources and services provided by them and their responsibilities to serve a different group of the community like researcher scholars, students, academicians etc.

**Purpose:** The researcher has chosen the study to know the various roles and responsibilities of the library professions during the lockdown and the main purpose of the study was to know the library infrastructure and how they managed to provide services during the lockdown period.

**Methodology:** For the present study a simple random sampling method has been taken for collecting data from the library professionals and the library users through the questionnaire as data collection tools, and some sort of interview was also taken to verify the data.

**Findings:** 96.66% replied that they have an internet connection in their library, 84.50% replied that their libraries have provided services during the lockdown, most frequent use of services through social sites, access to digital resources was the most common queries received from the user ends. WhatsApp and Facebook were the most used social sites and Google meet, Zoom has mostly used web tools during the lockdown period to disseminate the information.

**Keywords:** COVID-19, Lockdown, Social sites, Web tools, Library professionals, Assam

**Library Congress Classification No:** Z716.2

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Coronavirus disease or in short COVID-19 is an infectious disease caused by a newly discovered virus called the corona. Most people have been infected with the COVID-19 virus. In such a pandemic situation libraries across the world including Assam have been locked down to help slow the spread of COVID-19. But in a pandemic situation when information outbreak is enormous, it is time to remind society about the importance of the library. American writer and producer Mr. Sidney Sheldon once said, "Libraries store the energy that fuels the imagination. They open up windows to the world and inspire us to explore, and achieve, and contribute to improving our quality of life." In this pandemic situation of COVID-19, the physical library systems are stuck due to maintaining the rules of social

distancing and also help to overcome the spread of virus infection. Since in this information age, libraries serve as a lifeline for school & college students, researchers, professionals, and many people in our society.

In this situation, the role of the library professionals is the most important to serve the whole community by adopting virtual support to their users such as the provision of references, document delivery, searching of literature review etc. Some libraries have also initiated online webinar and sessions to keep in touch with those users so that the users won't be misinformed by some false media.

### **1.1 Statement of the Problem**

In this chaotic situation, most people rely on Google and several other channels like social media to access and share information. However, relying too much on these media may have some pros and cons as it is blindly forwarded to others without checking the information thoroughly and most time the authenticity of the information have been unchecked. These lead to enormous rumours, about coronavirus which misleads people causing a violation of government orders and rules possessed on this pandemic period.

In this situation, especially lay people are the victim of this information overload. Generally, there is a fear of overconsumption of inaccurate and unauthentic information of these people. The reason this information outbreak is also the creation and dissemination of false information by television and social media.

Government has a specific role in this regard. Since it is an infectious disease, to lessen the disease to a greater extend government-imposed increasingly severe lockdowns, quarantines, curfews, closures etc which has a direct impact on librarians. Therefore in such a tough period, library professionals are working as digital library professional like they have created WhatsApp group, telegram etc. Some librarians have also started offering free online e-books.

Although the librarians are taking initiative towards exploring the right information to the right people at right time yet they are facing various problems as there are in many places of Assam where it has not touched with Broadband facilities. The users from those remote areas are not facilitated with library programs taken in the pandemic period.

### **1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study**

Following are the aims and objectives of the study:

- ❖ To discuss the various challenges and how library professionals are dealing with this situation;
- ❖ To discuss the various traditional roles of library professionals are dealing with challenges in this pandemic situation of COVID-19;
- ❖ To know the types of resources and services provided by the different types of libraries during the lockdown period;

- ❖ To define the responsibilities of library professionals to serve a different group of the community like researcher scholars, students, academicians etc.

### **1.3 Scope of the Study**

The scope of the present study is restricted only to library professionals. The geographical study area is Assam only. Only library professionals from Assam state has been taken into consideration for the present study.

### **1.4 Sample**

The population of the study has consisted of library professionals and library users from various libraries of Assam state. The sample has been collected through the questionnaire as a tool by using a simple random sampling method. A total number of 329 library professionals from the Assam state has participated in the study.

## **2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Various studies have been conducted by various researchers in context on the topic that has been chosen for this project study. The researcher has tried to present some of these reviews.

Ali (2020) in his article summarise the role of librarians in creating health awareness in a pandemic situation. He has even told to provide routine core services for regular library users. These activities will continue for as long as necessary. A need for information exists in every crisis, librarians and information professionals must ready to meet this need whether it is of COVID-19 or something else. Although social distancing is a good way to prevent the spread of COVID-19 information access to users remains a social responsibility of our librarian and information personal.

Kosciejw (2020) in his study aims to present and discuss the international library and information community's initial responses to the coronavirus pandemic. It chronicles official statements from various library and information associations as they were released in real-time, thereby providing a contemporary and historical snapshot of the early stages of this global health crisis. The authors of this study help the end-users disseminate current, alternative, contingency or other future library responses geared towards or tailored for the coronavirus or other health-related crisis.

Mehta and Wang (2020) the main aim of this article is to explore how the library has adopted some existing services into a digital format. It also describes the library's various digital services that are used to meet the needs of the patrons during COVID-19. Through this article, the author aims to make the other university libraries aware of what the library has implemented with providing digital services to its teaching faculty and students during the pandemic. It also describes the challenges and implications for the library professionals working in the house and remotely.

### 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A simple random sampling method has been taken for collecting data from the library professionals and the library users. A random sample is a sample that is chosen randomly. It could be more accurately called a randomly chosen sample.

The following methods of investigations have been carried out for conducting the study:

- ❖ **Questionnaire:** A questionnaire has been prepared with the necessary questions for the library professionals for effective answers. The questionnaire has been distributed to the selected libraries. After collecting data these have been analysed.
- ❖ **Survey:** A survey has been carried out for some special aspects in the field of housekeeping operations.
- ❖ **Interview:** An interview is the most important to know the situation in the real sense. This method has been adopted for some of the librarians and library users.

#### 3.1 Limitations

The study area is limited to Assam state only and the sample population is the library professionals and library users only. Due to time and financial constraints, the researcher has taken the Assam state only to conduct the study.

There are some limitations related to information outbreak in pandemic and have some obstacles in front of the library professionals. They are:-

- ❖ Lack of proper digital resources in libraries.
- ❖ Lack of proper training of library professionals.
- ❖ Selection of software.
- ❖ Lack of support from the current governing body.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

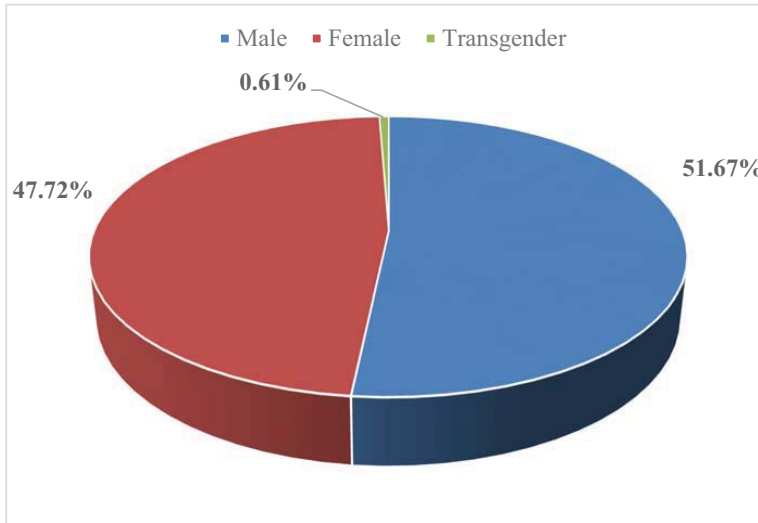


Figure1. Gender wise respondents (N=329)

The above figure shows that the information assembled from 329 respondents out of which 51.67% are male and 47.72% are female library professionals and only 0.61% are transgender.

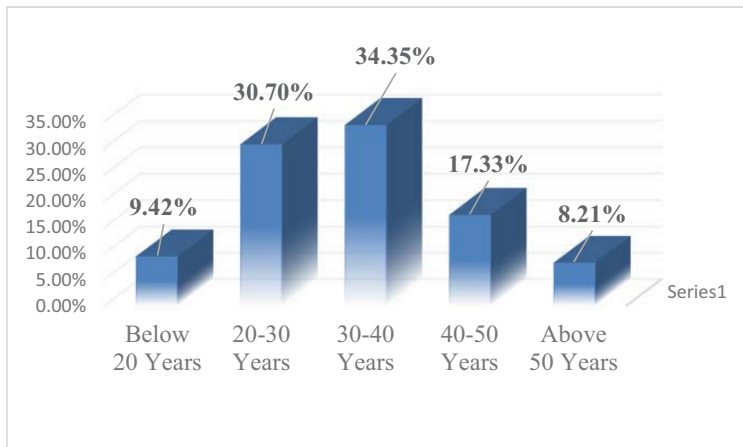
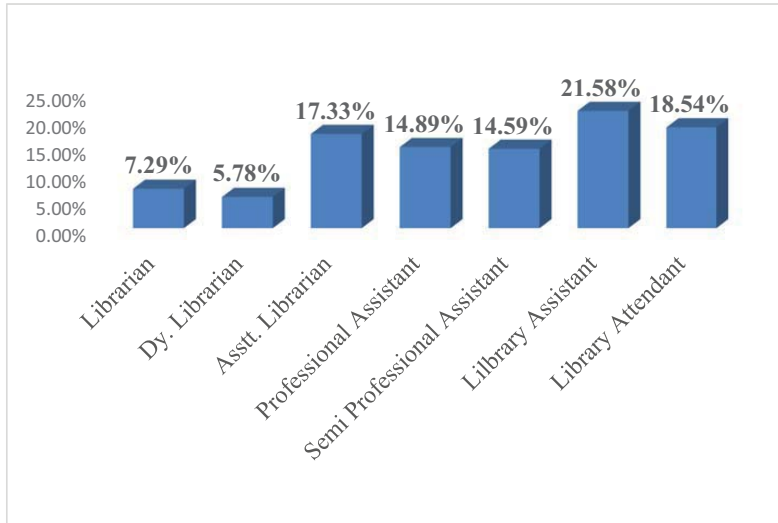


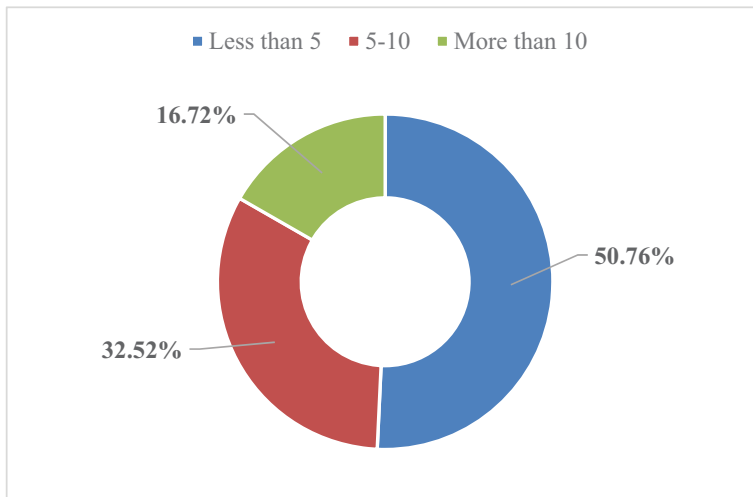
Figure 2. Age-wise respondents (N=329)

Individuals in different age groups are serving in different libraries, however, most of the respondents i.e. 34.35% are from the age group 30-40 years, followed by 30.70% are from the age group 20-30 years. A very less percentage of library professionals i.e. 8.21% belongs to the age group of above 50 years.



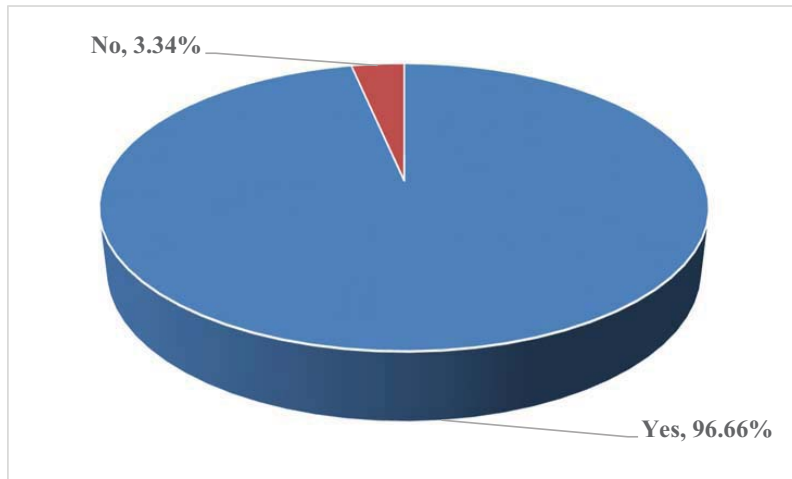
**Figure 3.** Designation wise respondents (N=329)

Figure 3 shows that the designation of the respondents usually, 7.29% are titled as Librarian, whereas 5.78% are Dy. Librarian and 17.33% are designated as Assistant Librarian. The highest number i.e. 21.58% are replied that their designation is Library Assistant followed by 18.54% are Library Attendant. 14.89% are Professional Assistant and 14.59% are Semi Professional Assistant.



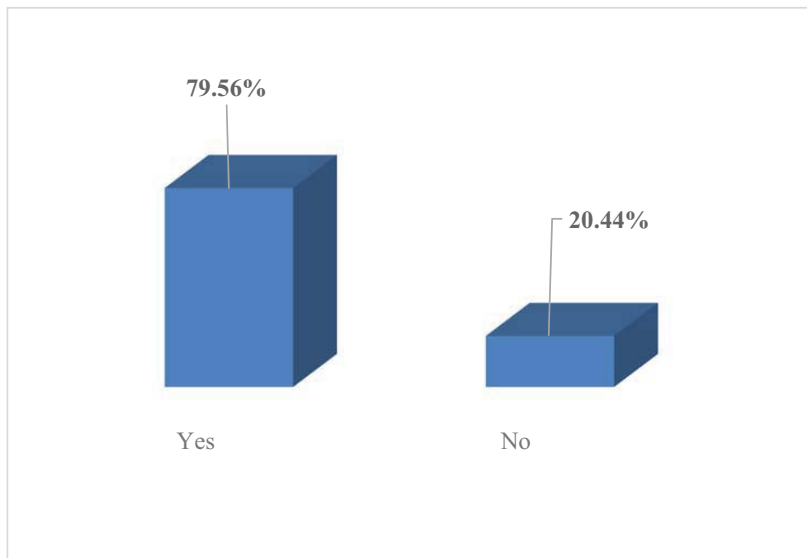
**Figure 4.** Number of staffs available in the library (N=329)

The above figure shows that 50.76% of institutions have less than 5 staffs in their library, 32.52% replied that they have 5-10 number staffs in their library, while only 16.72% replied that they have more than 10 staffs working in the library.



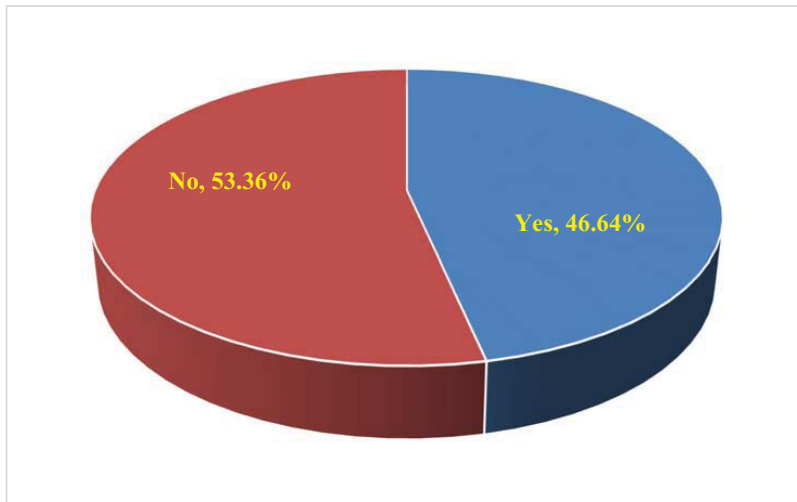
**Figure 5.** Internet connection facility (N=329)

While asking a question about internet connectivity, 96.66% replied that they have an internet facility in the library, only 3.34% replied that they don't have an internet connection in the library.



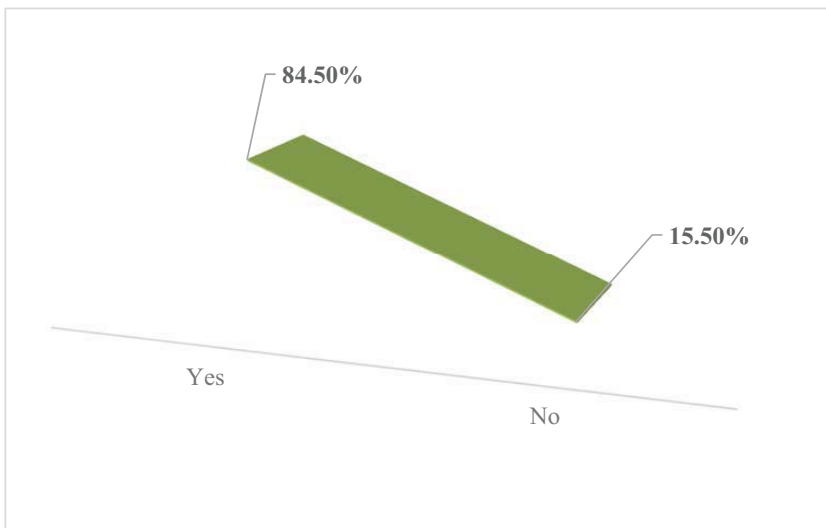
**Figure 6.** Library automation status (N=318)

Figure 6 shows that 79.56% of respondents replied that their libraries are automated while 20.44% replied that they are still providing services manually.



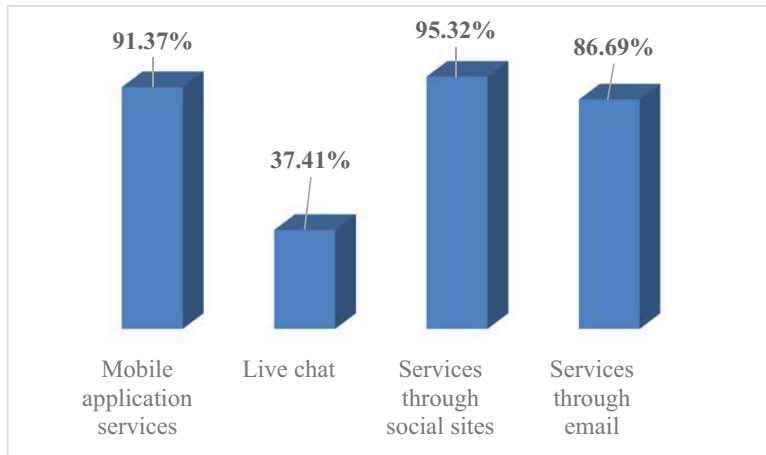
**Figure 7.** Digital library facility (N=253)

Figure 7 shows that 46.64% respondents have replied that they have digital library facilities available in the library, while surprisingly 53.36% replied that they do not have any digital library facilities available in the library.



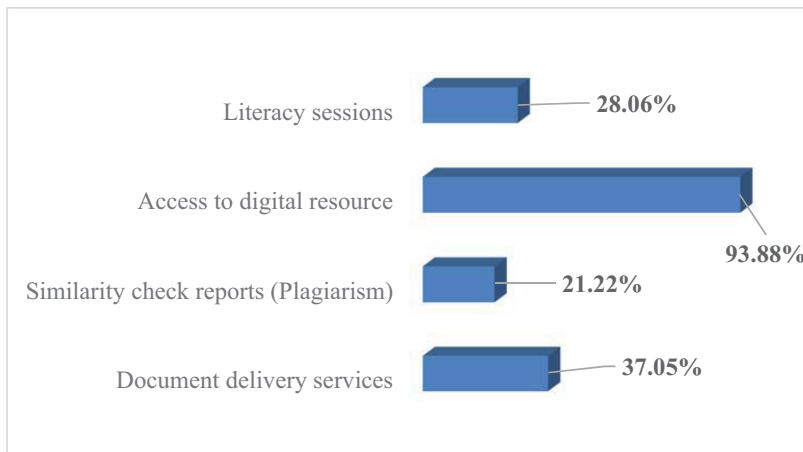
**Figure 8.** Services provided during lockdown period (N=329)

Figure 8 shows that the services of libraries. 84.50% replied that their libraries have provided services during the lockdown, whereas 15.50% are still relying on traditional services and no virtual services are being offered during the lockdown.



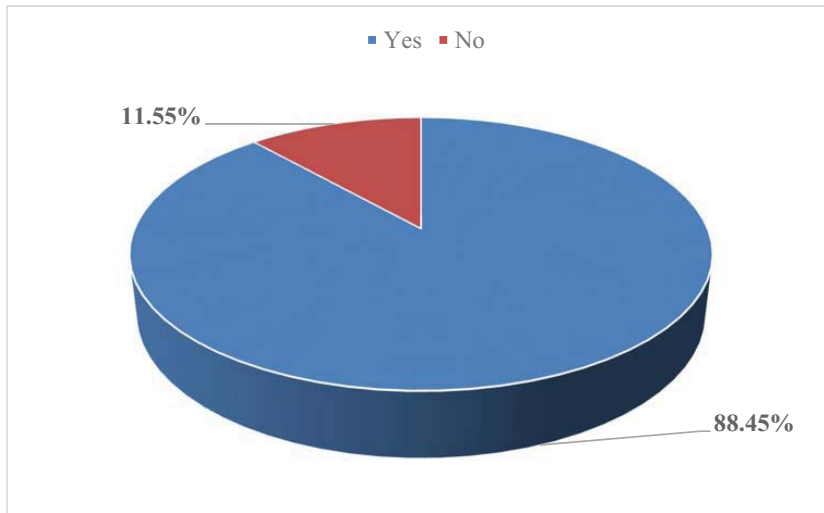
**Figure 9.** Kind of services provided during lockdown period (N=278) (Multiple responses were allowed)

Figure 9 shows that the frequency of services. Most frequent use of services through social sites replied by 95.32% respondents, while least used live chat services i.e. 37.41%; whereas the use of mobile application services in these days was increasingly common. Services through was also high i.e. 86.69% replied.



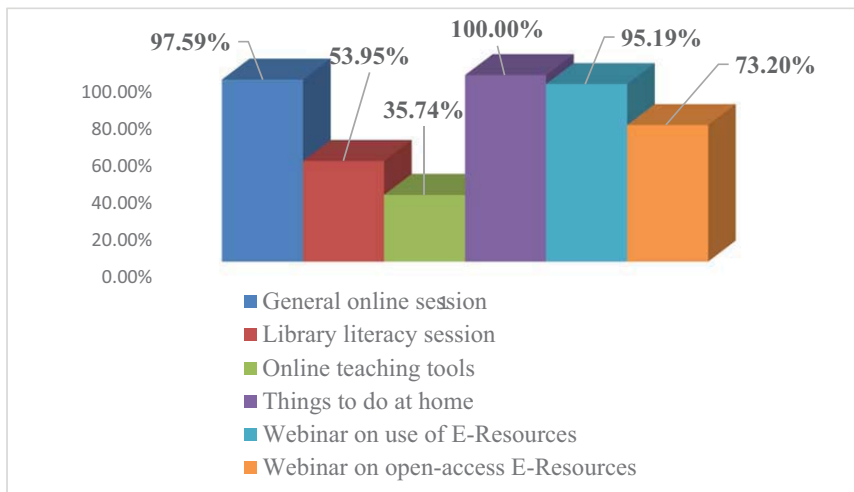
**Figure 10.** Frequent queries from the library users (N=278) (Multiple responses were allowed)

Figure 10 shows the access to digital resources (93.88%) was the most common queries received from the user ends while document delivery services 37.05% was the 2nd highest queries received. Inquires about literacy session and similarity check reports (Plagiarism) were 28.06% and 21.22% respectively.



**Figure 11.** Conduction of awareness programme for library users (N=329)

88.45% replied that they have organised an awareness programme for the library users while 11.55% replied that they have not conducted any awareness programme during this lockdown period.



**Figure 12.** Types of awareness programmes (N=291) (Multiple responses were allowed)

Figure 12 shows the Overall 291 libraries that have conducted various awareness programs for library staffs and library users. However, things to do at home (100%) was the most delivered message they have shared during the awareness programme. While instructions were given on general awareness for library users which was 97.59% and how to access e-resources was 95.19% whereas conducting a webinar on open access e-resources was 73.20%. Library literacy session was 53.95% and online teaching tools was 35.74%.

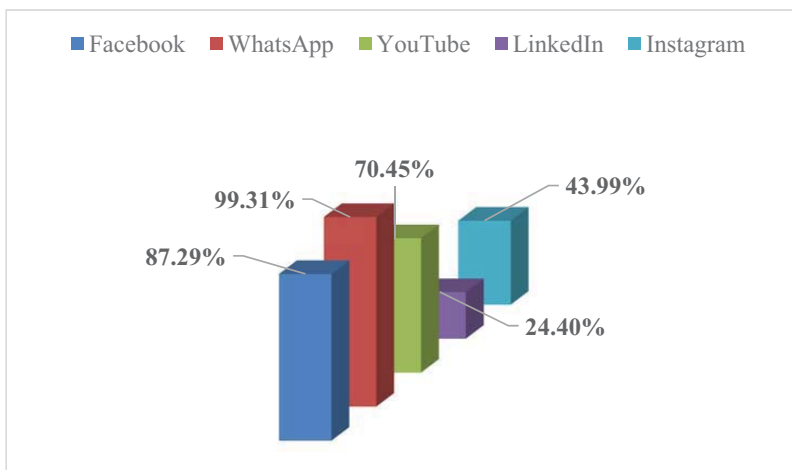


Figure 13. Mostly used social site tools (N=291) ((Multiple responses were allowed)

Figure 13 shows that since social sites are most popular these days so the data gathered on its use and found that 99.31% were using WhatsApp whereas the use of Facebook has 97.29% and YouTube was being used by 70.45%, 43.99% of library staff used Instagram and a very low i.e. 24.40% replied they used LinkedIn during lockdown period to provide the library services.

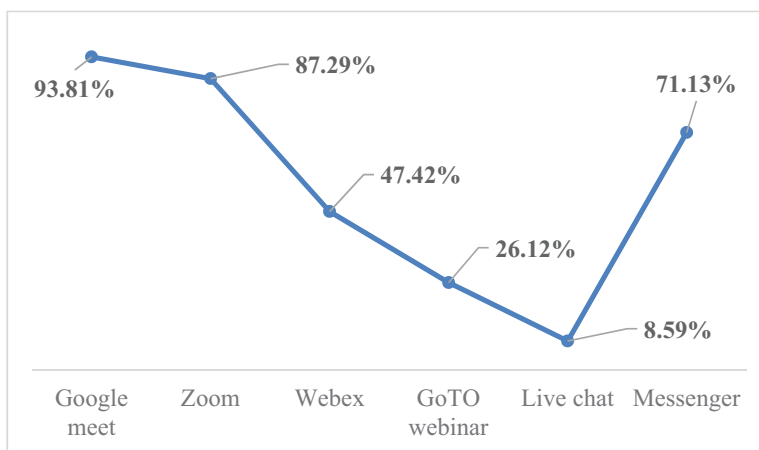
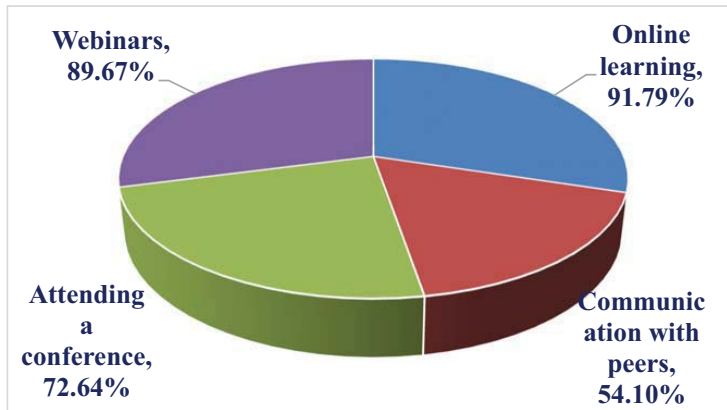


Figure 14. Mostly used web tools for the meeting (N=291) ((Multiple responses were allowed)

Figure 14 shows that library staff were using different web tools to deliver messages effectively. 93.81% of the population used Google meet, 87.29% were using Zoom, 71.13% were using Messenger, 47.42% were using Webex, 26.12% were using GoTO webinar and 8.59% used Live chat options to interact with their audience.



**Figure 15.** Learning in the current situation (N=329) ((Multiple responses were allowed)

Figure 15 shows data gathered on different learning methods during the lockdown for library staff and found that 91.79% are already replying to online learning so the familiarity of online culture is not new for them. Another most used option is webinars, 89.67% replied that they attend the webinar and discussed different issues these days, Further, 72.64% of them attended the conference on multi-discipline and communication with peers remains low at 54.10% of them replied for this.

## 5. MAJOR FINDINGS

After analysing the present condition the researcher has drawn some major findings, these are as follows:

- ❖ Most of the library professionals of Assam are belonging from the age group of 30-40 years and the highest (21.58%) are working as a library assistant.
- ❖ Most of the libraries have less than 5 staffs,
- ❖ 96.66% replied that they have an internet connection in their library, 79.56% replied that their library is automated, 46.64% of respondents have replied that they have a digital library facility available in the library
- ❖ 84.50% replied that their libraries have provided services during the lockdown, most frequent use of services through social sites, access to digital resources was the most common queries received from the user ends.
- ❖ 88.45% replied that they have organised an awareness programme for the library users, things to do at home was the most delivered message shared during the awareness programme. While instructions were given also on general awareness for library users.
- ❖ WhatsApp and Facebook were the most used social sites to share information among library users.

- ❖ Google meet, Zoom was mostly used web tools during the lockdown period to disseminate the information.
- ❖ Online mode of learning was very popular among the library users during the lockdown period and another most used option was to attend webinars and discussed different issues these days.

## 6. SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ New equipment and materials should be provided to the libraries so that libraries can play a better role in this post-pandemic situation.
- ❖ The government should encourage libraries to provide awareness of new emerging technology and changing concepts in the field of library and information science.
- ❖ All library professionals should provide training on new advanced technologies to enhance their activities for that centralized training program should be conducted to overcome the financial barriers.
- ❖ The library management should endeavour to provide the needed ICT resources which the staff is to work with and make use of their newly acquired knowledge and skills.
- ❖ Online awareness programme should be conducted frequently for the library users about access to e-resources.
- ❖ The government should take initiative to provide an internet connection to all the libraries so that libraries can perform better.

## 7. CONCLUSION

A need for information exists in every crisis, librarians and information professionals must be ready to meet this need whether it is for COVID-19 or something else. Although social distancing is a good way to prevent the spread of COVID-19, information access to users remains a social responsibility of our librarians and information personnel. The findings of the present study show that COVID-19 reshapes all activities of life and lockdown changed the style of working as like traditional system of education, serving of the organizations and libraries, communicating, dealing, delivering system is to be online. Most of the students were highly satisfied with the appropriateness of library services. There is a need for digital library services so that users can access the e-resources at any time from anywhere. The government can take the initiative for that. Now there is a need to redesign the library from traditional to digital. It is high time to start the services on the digital platform. Library professionals are facing many challenges to convert the services, they should provide proper training so that they can easily accept the changes and can provide better services.

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