Evidence Based Library and Information Practice

Researchers at Arab Universities Hold Positive Views on Research Data Management and Data Sharing

Elsayed, A. M., & Saleh, E. I. (2018). Research data management and sharing among researchers in Arab universities: An exploratory study. IFLA Journal, 44(4), 281–299. https://doi.org/10.1177/0340035218785196

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Evidence Summary

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A Review of:
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Abstract

Objective – To investigate researchers' practices and attitudes regarding research data management and data sharing.

Design – Email survey.

Setting – Universities in Egypt, Jordan, and Saudi Arabia.

Subjects – Surveys were sent to 4,086 academic faculty researchers.

Methods – The survey was emailed to faculty at three Arab universities, targeting faculty in the life sciences and engineering. The survey was created using Google Docs and remained open for five months. Participants were asked basic demographic questions, questions regarding their research data and metadata practices, and questions regarding their data sharing practices.

Main Results – The authors received 337 responses, for a response rate of 8%. The results showed that 48.4% of respondents had a data management plan and that 97% were responsible for preserving their own data. Most respondents stored their research data on their personal storage devices. The authors found that 64.4% of respondents reported

sharing their research data. Respondents most frequently shared their data by publishing in a data research journal, sharing through academic social networks such as ResearchGate, and providing data upon request to peers. Only 5.1% of respondents shared data through an open data repository. Of those who did not share data, data privacy and confidentiality were the most common reasons cited. Of the respondents who did share their data, contributing to scientific progress and increased citation and visibility were the primary reasons for doing so. A total of 59.6% of respondents stated that they needed more training in research data management from their universities.

Conclusion – The authors conclude that researchers at Arab universities are still primarily responsible for their own data and that data management planning is still a new concept to most researchers. For the most part, the researchers had a positive attitude toward data sharing, although depositing data in open repositories is still not a widespread practice. The authors conclude that in order to encourage strong data management practices and open data sharing among Arab university researchers, more training and institutional support is needed.

Commentary

The issues surrounding open data sharing and data management are important topics of discussion in the scientific and scholarly community. Studies have found that acceptance of data sharing and a willingness to share their own data has been increasing among researchers (Tenopir et al., 2015). However, many researchers have reservations regarding their own skills and knowledge regarding research data management, as well as increasing concerns about the risk of openly sharing data (Perrier & Barnes, 2018). Most studies regarding these issues have examined the North American or European contexts; this study provides valuable insights as the first study of research data management and data sharing practices in the Arab world.

This study had an 80% validity rating when examined using Glynn's critical appraisal tool for library and information research (2006). The methodology and results are well-described. The full survey instrument is provided as an appendix. The survey questions are very thorough and well-designed to yield precise and comprehensive answers to the research questions presented.

This survey was sent to researchers at only three universities and the response rate was low. The authors identify this as a limitation of their study, a problem which is compounded by the number of non-functional email addresses the authors encountered. It's also worth noting that although the full instrument is available, the full data is not openly available. Given that this study is the first of its kind, providing the full data so that future researchers can build on the results of this survey would be particularly helpful.

Academic librarians working in Arab universities or with interest in the global state of data management will find this study to be informative, although the current implications for practice remain limited. This study has the greatest value as a baseline for future research. The authors suggest many areas that may be pursued including an expanded study population and research into other topics suggested by the results, including the relationship between research data management, and Arab academic libraries. In addition, a comparison between the results from this survey with similar studies in other geographic and social contexts would also be potentially illuminating.

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