

# Information Seeking Behaviour of Practicing Lawyers of Islamabad District Courts Bar Association, Pakistan

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## Abstract

**Purpose:** This study examines the information needs and information seeking behaviour of practicing lawyers of Pakistan.

**Design/methodology/approach:** The study is designed on the Wilson's 1996 model of information behavior. A semi-structured questionnaire was designed to collect data from practicing lawyers of Islamabad District Courts. The questionnaire was personally distributed to a convenient sample of 30 lawyers. Twenty-eight (93%) persons completed and returned the questionnaire, 24 males and 4 females.

**Key finding(s):** The results of study revealed that majority of lawyers (21, 77.8%) seeks information to prepare for legal and judicial proceedings. They consult court decisions or case laws, whereas the top most used information source entails books. The frequently consulted library is own chamber or firm library of lawyers.

**Research limitation(s):** This research only includes the lawyers practicing in Islamabad District Courts and registered members of Islamabad District Courts Bar Association.

**Practical implication(s):** This study is useful for the law publishers, librarians, and other stakeholders to improve their services to better serve the lawyer community.

**Contribution to knowledge:** This study is first of its nature with respect to Pakistani lawyer's information seeking behaviour on the basis of Wilson's 1996 model of information behaviour.

**Paper type:** Research.

**Key word(s):** Information seeking behavior; Lawyers; Islamabad District Courts Bar Association; Pakistan.

## Introduction

Information seeking is a significant and dynamic area in the field of library and information science. As observed by Case (2007), information seeking is a conscious effort to acquire information in response to a need or

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gap in your knowledge. Marchionini (1998) asserts that information seeking is a fundamental process in which humans with determination engage in categorizing and change their state of knowledge and it is closely related to learning and problem solving. Many factors instigate the process of search to information that we call information seeking process. It includes the individuals' task or profession. The term 'search' is also used to indicate behavioural expression of humans engaged in information seeking. Therefore, the information seeking process is an accepted and necessary means of human existence. Expansion of information has been enormous at all levels and the legal profession is critically dependent on current as well as old information. For efficient and effective information seeking and searching process, individuals are required to develop useful, effective and rational information coordinating behaviour and processes.

Lawyers as information seekers need to synchronize or harmonize a number of elements, including their cognitive state of mind, level of knowledge, their understanding of information problem into a logical series of activities that may possibly include seeking, searching, retrieving and using information. Lawyers are considered to be the main axis of the legal system in any country because their job involves administration of justice, active participation in courts, advise clients, and conduct legal transactions. Lawyers have need of information to solve a variety of legal problems for which they need to consult different sources of information widely. These may include the decisions of the courts, the rulings of the legislature, and other legal documents. Consequently, they require authentic and up-to-date information support to carry out their work effectively.

Pakistan's judicial system has been influenced and inspired by various periods in history, such as Islamic sources, the Mughal rule, the British colonial period and the post-independence period and is, therefore, a blend of national, Islamic as well as foreign flavor. In Pakistan, every type of court has associated bar associations, of which practicing lawyers are members. Most of the cases are filed and processed at the lower courts, whereas the higher courts mostly deal with appeal cases. As established by previous researches, law is essentially an information seeking profession. The lawyers are constantly engaged in information seeking and their information needs are greatly influenced by the nature of the work they do (Haruna & Mabawonku, 2001; Leckie et al., 1996; Thanuskodi, 2009; Wilkinson, 2001). As claimed by Otike (2000), the work of lawyers is challenging both in terms of time and effort, and anything less than excellence is likely to affect or influence the final outcome. Clearly, court

decisions have a significant effect on the people involved, and in the administration of justice. Certainly, provision of right information at the right time in right form at the right cost is, therefore, of utmost importance to lawyers.

### **Research Objective and Questions**

The main objective of the study is to identify the information needs and information seeking behaviour of lawyers of the Islamabad District Courts Bar Association. In order to achieve this objective, this study focuses on the following research questions:

RQ 1. What are the purposes for which lawyers seek information?

RQ 2. What kinds of legal information sources are used by the lawyers?

RQ 3. What importance do the lawyers place on each of the sources used?

RQ 4. What is the level of their satisfaction with the information received from these sources?

RQ 5. What problems do they encounter while seeking the required information?

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### **Literature Review**

Several research studies have been carried out on the information seeking behaviour of different groups, both at academic and professional levels. These studies have led to the development of some theories and models that represent the information seeking behaviour of specific groups and professionals. The well-known studies in this respect are the sense-making theory by Dervin of 1983 and 1996, Ellis's model of 1989, Khulthau's ISP model of 1980s and 1990s, Wilson's model of 1996, and the one by Leckie et al. of 1996. Many studies are originated on legal practitioner's subject interest, occupation, information environment, and geographical location. Meho and Tibbo (2003), while representing the information seeking behaviour of social scientists revisited the Ellis model, confirmed it and concluded that four additional features should be added to those already identified by Ellis. Information seeking has a variety of important implications in the day to day life of lawyers who conduct information searches to solve legal cases and update their legal knowledge.

As explained by Kayler (2010), the legal resources as available in various formats are branded as either primary or secondary. The primary resources include legislation (statutes and regulations) and case law. Whereas, Secondary resources are those documents that assist in the application or interpretation of the law such as commentaries, legal texts,

journal articles and conference proceedings. As noted by number of researchers and law librarians the lawyers feel overwhelming sense of comfort with print materials over electronic resources. In well-known studies on this topic specifically, such as the one by Wilkinson (2001), lawyers like to access informal and external resources of information much more willingly than internal or formal resources. This access trends show that external and informal resources, such as helplines, are used for problem solving and answering the research questions alike. Despite the fact, it is evident that formal information resources must be cited in court, for informal resources may not be regarded as ample sources for legal research. The overwhelming occurrence of informal and external sources in results of Wilkinson's (2001) study may have been supported the fact that she was exclusively addressing problem solving and not legal research.

Otike (1999) established that information needs of lawyers are very much influenced by the nature of the work that they perform and their work experience has a significant influence on their information needs. The newly qualified lawyers are likely to expend a substantial amount of time in legal research because they have no idea how to go through all the basic steps required when discovering the right information. In another study, Otike (2000) states that lawyer's work is determined by the legal needs of the clients, which, in turn, influences his information needs. Hence, the kind and amount of information support required depends on the nature of work done. This influences the purpose for seeking information support. Makri, Blandford, and Cox (2008) examined the information seeking behaviour of academic lawyers, who were studying at London University and a nearby vocational law college through semi-structured interviews and naturalistic observation of twenty-seven academic lawyers. The researcher found that academic lawyers mostly used a central set of electronic resources, most frequently the digital law libraries. The study proposed the need to develop an enhanced model of understanding of lawyers' information seeking behaviour on the basis of Ellis model and suggested refinement in it.

Leckie et al. (1996) concluded that lawyers' need to conduct legal research was not a haphazard occurrence because they were professional information providers like others. These researchers identified six components of lawyers' information seeking experience, namely work roles, associated tasks, characteristics of information needs, awareness, sources, and outcomes. The lawyers' work roles were then broken up into four main categories: advocacy, drafting, counseling, and managerial. Each of these roles shapes the information seeking process through the nature of the

required information and its subsequent use. Wilkinson's (2001) study findings, which are similar to Leckie et al. (1996) concerning a professional approach to information in general, demonstrate that lawyers in problem solving and conducting a legal research make use of a network of colleagues and external human information sources.

Haruna and Mabawonku (2001) found that lawyers had needs for legal information with changeable degrees and were interested in the most recent decisions of superior courts and up to date legislation. They kept themselves current with changes in law through attending seminars, lectures, workshops, conference, reading current legal periodicals and from side to side dialogues and discussions with colleagues within or out of their own establishments. Al-Daihani (2003) in his study of Kuwait lawyers, found that a majority of legal practitioners needed information on legislation and demonstrated a lower need for jurisprudence and commentaries. They needed to respond to cases as they came before them and, therefore, they were more likely to need specific information on a particular area at any one time that might be satisfied through legislative information.

Two studies that have been conducted on this topic in Pakistan are quantitative in nature and their scope of study (e.g. population) and data analysis are limited (Khan, 2010; Khan et al., 2011). Khan (2010) conducted a study of faculty members of the University of Peshawar and its affiliated law colleges. He collected data through a questionnaire and semi-structured interviews from randomly selected 100 faculty members with a response rate of 86 percent. He found that most of the participants (n=81, 94.2%) used the library frequently to gather related information for preparing lectures and were satisfied with the services provided by the library staff. The results showed that majority of respondents depended on textbooks, followed by general books and law dictionaries. The data indicated that majority of faculty members (n=77, 53.47%) required information for preparing lectures, followed by updating knowledge (n=29, 20.14%). However, most of them demonstrated dissatisfaction concerning the sources, services and facilities provided by law libraries. The use of information technology-based library sources, services and facilities were less frequent compared with printed sources because there was scarcity of IT facilities and majority of faculty members complained about the inadequate provision of computers and internet in libraries.

Khan et al. (2011) investigated the information seeking behaviour of lawyers' community of the District Bar Council of Bahawalpur using a questionnaire which was distributed to 70 lawyers, with a response rate of 77

percent. Most of these lawyers acquired information from their bar library for case preparation and from senior lawyers. They spent more than 7-9 hours per week in reading judgments and handling court cases/hearing. A review of available literature gives us an evidence that large number of studies conducted on information seeking behaviour of lawyers have been managed in developed countries, and as a result, reflect the picture of information seeking environment that exists there. However, the conditions in developing countries are significantly different and the studies on Pakistani situation are comparatively inadequate. For that reason, there was a need to conduct studies on the information seeking behaviour of lawyers in Pakistan.

### **Methodology**

The framework for this study was derived from Wilson's 1996 model of information behaviour. After a careful and thorough review of previous studies on information seeking behavior, it is concluded that this model can provide an adequate notion of information seeking behaviour as a process. Previous studies on information seeking behaviour of lawyers were also reviewed for designing the research methodology and it was found that the most suitable method used was questionnaire survey (e.g. Haruna & Mabawonku, 2001; Kapiriri & Bondy, 2006; Majid et al., 2000; Nasreen, 2006; Thanuskodi, 2009). Several other studies (e.g. Feliciano; Hainsworth; Newton; Shoham; Vale; and Walsh) as cited in Al-Daihani (2003) used questionnaire survey method. This method was judged as the most common method used in the field of social science research and has confirmed to be an excellent mean for measuring attitudes and orientations in a large population. Therefore, questionnaire survey method has been chosen for this study. On the basis of previous studies and selected model of information seeking behaviour, a semi-structured questionnaire, consisting of mixed (closed, open, and Likert type scaled questions) was developed with the consultation of experts. The questionnaire was personally distributed. Twenty-eight (93%) of the 30 respondents returned the questionnaire, male (24, 85.7%), female (4, 14.3%). However, not all 28 respondents responded to all questionnaire items. Some items were skipped.

### **Findings**

This section reports and interprets the data analyzed with SPSS-22.

### Information needs of lawyers

As the literature reveals that lawyers need information to enhance their performance as practitioners. The respondents were asked to provide the reasons for information seeking. Their responses are presented in Table 1.

*Table 1. Information Needs of Lawyers (n=27)*

Reasons for information need	Frequency	%
To prepare for legal and judicial proceedings	21	77.8
Keeping up-to-date with new developments in the field	20	74.1
To prepare for a defense or representing client in court	19	70.4
For providing legal advice	19	70.4
For emergency problem solving	12	44.4
For a consultancy work	11	42.3
For professional development (e.g. seminars, conferences)	6	23.1
For professional groups (e.g. to participate in associations)	1	4.0
For seeking job	1	3.6

The results show that 21 (77.8%) lawyers seek information to prepare for legal and judicial proceedings, 20 (74.1%) for keeping up-to-date with new development in the field followed by 19 (70.4%) to prepare for defence or representing client in court, and for providing legal advice. Only 12 (44.4) lawyers indicated the need to seek information for emergency problem solving.

### Types of information used

The respondents were requested to recognize the type of information they used in their legal practice (Table 2).

*Table 2. Type of Information Used (n=27)*

Type of information	Frequency	%
Court decisions or case law	27	100
Legislations or laws	21	77.8
Jurisprudence	16	59.3
Internet websites on law	14	51.9
General information	7	25.9
Management of law	7	25.9
Politics	5	18.5
Seminar (other)	1	3.6

The results of Table 2 showed that the majority of 27 (100%) consult court decisions or case laws, and 21 (77.8%) use legislations or laws, followed by 16 (59.3%) jurisprudence kind of information.

### Information sources used

Lawyers differed to a great extent in their use of various information sources. Table 3 showed that 20 (71.4%) used books, 13 (46.4%) used law journals, and 10 (35.7%) visited Internet websites on daily basis.

Table 3. Information Sources Used (n=28)

Information Sources	Daily		Once a week		Once a month		Rarely		Not at all	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Books	20	71.4	4	14.3	1	3.6	2	7.1	0	0
Law journals	13	46.4	8	28.6	5	17.9	1	3.6	0	0
Statutes	9	32.1	6	21.4	3	10.7	2	7.1	2	7.1
Legal databases	4	14.3	3	10.7	2	7.1	7	25	5	17.9
Legal digests	7	25	1	3.6	7	25	2	7.1	1	3.6
Unpublished cases	1	3.6	1	3.6	2	7.1	10	35.7	4	14.3
Reference works	5	17.9	5	17.9	4	14.3	7	25	3	10.7
Internet websites	10	35.7	4	14.3	1	3.6	4	14.3	3	10.7
Audio visual materials	0	0	1	3.6	2	7.1	4	14.3	10	35.7
Conference proceedings	0	0	1	3.6	3	10.7	5	17.9	7	25
Popular journals	2	7.1	2	7.1	5	17.9	2	7.1	5	17.9

### Importance of information sources used

The lawyers were asked how important are different information sources for their legal practice on a five-point Likert scale with 1 (least important) and 5 (most important). The respondents could select more than one source. Their opinions for each source are reported as descriptive statistics in Table 4. The most important information source was 'books' for legal practice (mean score=4.74), followed by 'statutes' (mean=4.59), and 'law journals' (mean=4.42).

*Table 4. Importance of Information Sources Used*

<b>Information Sources</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Books	27	4.74	0.526
Statutes	22	4.59	0.734
Law journals	26	4.42	0.758
Legal digests	20	3.95	0.945
Reference works	22	3.64	0.902
Internet websites	24	3.62	1.408
Popular journals	19	3.42	1.465
Legal databases	21	3.14	1.236
Unpublished cases	22	2.91	0.971
Conference proceedings	19	2.16	0.834
Audio-visual materials	20	2.05	1.05

#### **Levels of satisfaction with information sources used**

As observed, lawyers are mostly dependent on variety of information source. They frequently used many sources of information. However, the information acquired and the satisfaction gained from these sources varies from source to source. The results of their satisfaction on a five-point Likert scale (1=least satisfied; 5=most satisfied) are shown in Table 5 in terms of mean and standard deviation. The most important source which also received the highest ranking in terms of satisfaction (mean score=4.48) were books, followed by law journals (mean=4.42), and statutes (mean=4.05). It is noted that the ranking in term of level of satisfaction is somewhat same as the importance of sources used.

*Table 5. Levels of Satisfaction with Information Sources Used*

<b>Information Source</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Books	25	4.48	0.714
Law journals	26	4.42	0.703
Statutes	22	4.05	0.95
Legal databases	20	3.00	1.076
Legal digests	21	3.76	0.944
Unpublished cases	20	2.60	0.754
Reference works	23	3.17	1.072
Internet websites	22	3.68	1.393
Audio visual materials	17	1.88	0.928
Conference proceedings	18	1.78	0.732
Popular journals	21	3.19	1.537

### When information source not used

The respondents were asked about the situation that arises in their legal practice when they do not need any source of information. Reason or situation was also asked if 'Yes' is selected. Table 6 shows that 15 (53.6%) lawyers always need source of information to answer their legal queries, while 12 (42.9%) lawyers claimed that they could solve some of their work tasks without accessing or needing any information source.

*Table 6. Information Source not Required (n=27)*

Response	Frequency	Percent
No	15	53.6
Yes	12	42.9

In relation to Table 6, the respondents recorded reasons or situation when they do not need any information source. Table 7 depicts very interesting picture as the respondents were able to choose more than one reason/situation. Of 20 responses, 9 (45%) gave the reason they do not need any information source when the issue or case at hand is simple and the procedure is well-known, followed by 8 (40%) with the reason "have a considerable experience in a particular filed or issue of law."

*Table 7. Reason when Information Source not Required (n=20)*

Reason	Frequency	%
Issue or case at hand is simple and the procedure is well known	9	45
Have a considerable experience in a particular field or issue of law	8	40
One has to give an immediate decision (verbal)	2	10
Legal reality	1	5

### Library used by lawyers to seek information

To acquire legal information to meet the daily information needs, lawyers visit or use various libraries. Respondents were asked how often they visit or use various libraries to satisfy their information needs (multiple answers permitted). Table 8 shows that 20 (71.4%) of the respondents consulted their own chamber or firm library 'daily,' three (10.7%) 'once a week' one (3.6%) 'once a month', followed by 10 (35.7%) reported District Courts Bar Library 'daily', seven (25%) 'once a week', and six (21.4%) 'once a month.' Data analysis suggests that lawyers prefer to consult their own chamber or firm library to meet their information needs followed by District Courts Bar Library.

Table 8. Kind and Frequency of Library Used (n=28)

Kind of Library	Daily		Once a week		Once a month		Rarely		Not at all	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
District Courts Bar Library	10	35.7	7	25	6	21.4	4	14.3	0	0
High Court Bar Library	6	21.4	9	32.1	6	21.4	4	14.3	0	0
Supreme Court Bar Library	3	10.7	1	3.6	1	3.6	4	14.3	12	42.9
Own Chamber/Firm Library	20	71.4	3	10.7	1	3.6	0	0	1	3.6
Colleagues Library	1	3.6	2	7.1	1	3.6	5	17.9	12	42.9

### Level of satisfaction with information services and resources of libraries

Table 9 hosts the data related to satisfaction (1=least satisfied; 5=most satisfied) with services provided and resources available with various libraries. Results show that the respondents are most satisfied with the services and resources of their own chamber/firm library (mean score=4.28), followed by District Courts Bar Library (mean=4.00), and High Courts Bar Library (mean=3.56).

Table 9. Satisfaction with Libraries

Libraries	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Own chamber/firm library	25	4.28	0.890
District Courts Bar Library	27	4.00	0.960
High Courts Bar Library	25	3.56	1.003
Supreme Courts Bar Library	16	2.68	1.537
Colleague's library	19	2.68	1.492

### Major problems faced while seeking information

Respondents were asked to rate their perception regarding ten problems on a five-point Likert scale (1=not at all problem, 2=minor problem, 3=moderate problem, 4=serious problem, 5=very serious problem). Table 10 ranks the problems as 'inadequate resources available in law libraries' (mean score=3.50) closer to serious problem, followed by 'cost of information' (mean=3.28), 'up-to-date information is not available' (mean=3.20), and 'lack of legal databases' (mean=3.08) are nearer to moderate problems. Surprisingly 'colleagues are not cooperative' was considered a minor or not at all a problem.

*Table 10. Intensity of Problem Faced While Seeking Information*

<b>Problem</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>
Inadequate resource in law libraries	24	3.50	1.285
Cost of information	21	3.28	1.383
Up-to-date information is not available	24	3.20	1.413
Lack of legal databases	25	3.08	1.497
Poor services of law libraries	25	2.96	1.368
Authenticity of law publication/publisher	24	2.58	1.248
Internet services are not available in libraries	26	2.26	1.372
Library staff is not cooperative/competent	24	2.16	1.274
Lack of computer skills	23	2.04	1.397
Colleagues are not cooperative	26	1.84	0.731

## Discussion

Main purpose of the study was to discover the information needs and information seeking behaviour of lawyers of the Islamabad District Courts Bar Association. The respondents exhibited their needs for legal information with changeable degrees and it was found that most lawyers seek information to prepare for legal and judicial proceeding, keeping up-to-date with recent developments in the field, and to prepare for defence or representing client in court. This result is supported by earlier studies (e.g. Al-Daihani, 2003; Haruna & Mabawonku, 2001; Khan et al., 2011; Otike, 1999). The most used types of information sources are court decisions or case laws and legislations aligned with prior studies (e.g. Al-Daihani; Haruna & Mabawonku; Makri et al., 2008; Tuhumwire & Okello-Obura, 2010).

Pakistani lawyers use wide variety of information sources and they give them importance according to their use and information retained. They mostly use books and law journals and rank them in terms of importance as a source and in terms of satisfaction with the information they attain. This finding also conferred the findings of earlier studies carried out by Khan et al. (2011), Otike (1999), and Tuhumwire & Okello-Obura (2010). As the results show that the lawyers may satisfy some of their legal tasks without consulting any source of information, if the issue or case at hand is simple and procedure is well known. This is also similar with the findings of study conducted by Al-Daihani (2003). The majority of respondents of this study have access to various libraries and they claim to use these libraries as a source of information and are satisfied with available services and resources. Pakistani lawyers give top preference to their own chamber or firm library in terms of importance and satisfaction with services and resources. These

findings are aligned with prior studies carried out by Al-Daihani (2003), Haruna and Mabawonku (2001), and Otike (1999). The major problems faced by lawyers are inadequate resources in law libraries, and cost of information. While 'colleagues are not cooperative' is a least important problem. Some of these problems are identical to those identified by Al-Daihani, and Otike.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the information seeking behaviour of lawyers of Pakistan sampling the members of Islamabad District Courts Bar Association. It is observed that the information needs of lawyers are significantly influenced by the nature of work they do. Access to latest decisions of courts and case laws is perceived as main information need. It is noted that they specifically seek information on legal proceedings to defend their clients in courts. Books and law journals are discovered as most frequently used source of information. Experience too greatly influences the information seeking behaviour of lawyers; mostly the experienced lawyers do not need source of information if the case is simple and procedure is well known. Own or law firm library is found the most preferred source to get legal information. The major problems faced by lawyers are lack of resources in law libraries and cost of information. Comparison of findings with previous studies manifest that lawyers' information seeking behaviour is almost the same in countries with similar conditions.

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