

User library service expectations in health science vs. other settings

Focused Question:

Do people expect a different sort of service from health care libraries compared to university libraries?

Citation:

Thompson B. et al. User library service expectations in health science vs. other settings: a LibQUAL+ Study. *Health Information and Libraries Journal* 2007, 24(Suppl.1):38-45.

Search terms:

Expect*, perceive, perception*, survey*

Summary of the aim and methods of the study

Aims:

- To explore how library service expectations and perceptions of users might differ across health care libraries compared to other major research libraries.
- To determine whether users of health care libraries demand better library service quality.

Population:

- 697 participants from 10 NHS libraries operating within the UK, and 4330 participants from US institutions belonging to the Association of Academic Health Science Libraries (AAHSL).

Intervention:

- LibQUAL+® total and subscale scores

Comparison/Control:

- 21302 participants from US and Canadian non-health libraries that are members of the Association of Research Libraries (ARL).

Outcomes:

- Differences in expectations and perceptions for health compared to other library settings.

Study methods:

- LibQUAL+® survey, quantitative sections only
- Comparison of LibQUAL+® total and subscale (Information Control, Service Affect, Library as Place) scores across the three groups described above.

Main results:

Participant characteristics:

- No further information provided.

LibQUAL+® survey results:

- LibQUAL+® provides reliable scores, as the Cronbach's alpha coefficients for the scores analysed across the three groups were high (lowest = 0.88).
- There was no significant difference in the means for the Minimum, Perceived and Desired ratings for Information Control, Service Affect, Library as Place or Total Scores across the three groups.

- In all three groups, the Information Control subscale had the highest means on the Desired ratings (NHS mean =8.03, AAHSL mean =8.26, ARL mean =8.24).
- In all three groups, the “adequacy gap divided by the zone of tolerance width” scores were lower for the Information Control subscale than for the other two subscales (NHS =0.06, AAHSL =0.15, ARL =0.13).
- In all three groups, participants had the lowest means on Desired ratings for the Library as Place subscale (NHS mean =7.38, AAHSL mean =7.69, ARL mean =7.62).
- In all three groups, Perceived ratings were the most heterogeneous for the Library as Place subscale (NHS SD =1.52, AAHSL SD =1.56, ARL SD =1.53).
- In all three groups, the most favourable “adequacy gap divided by the zone of tolerance width” scores were for the Service Affect subscale (NHS =0.74, AAHSL =0.54, ARL =0.43).

Comments:

- The population groups were not explained fully (ie: why were these libraries selected, and how many individual libraries were involved in the study?), and did not include representatives from UK research libraries.
- The NHS group was a lot smaller than the other two groups, and we don't know if this is a representative sample of all NHS libraries or NHS/HE hybrid libraries.
- The authors provided a lot of background information for the survey instrument and discussed its value as a tool for collecting quantitative and qualitative information, but did not explain why only quantitative data were used for this study.
- The authors did not provide the survey questions that were used to collect the data that was analysed.
- The emphasis of the study appeared to be on the validity of the survey instrument, rather than on the differences in readers' expectations.
- The authors' premis re: “anticipated differences” is not grounded on any evidence. Library users' expectations would depend on the differences between and within the groups involved, and this has not been explored.
- More clarification of the “adequacy gap divided by the zone of tolerance width” is required, before conclusions can be drawn from this calculation.

Journal Club's conclusions:

- This research would not be helpful in supporting a case for the differences in user expectations between NHS and other research libraries, as it has not explored the differences in expectations for each survey question.
- The LibQUAL+® instrument could be used for surveying users' expectations across the OULS libraries, including the qualitative data.