

A STUDY ON THE AWARENESS OF RIGHT TO INFORMATION ACT

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Abstract

It has taken 82 years for India to finally wake up and accept the RTI rule and government has tried to let the transparency flow between the people and them. The Right to Information Act has been enacted for the convenience of the citizens of the country and to maintain the transparency between the government and the public. This study attempted to find out the awareness and usage rate of RTI among the residents of Panvel and thereby empowering them. According to the census 2011, there were around 180,000 people residing in Panvel. Due to geographical and cost constraints, the research was limited to 240 respondents. The researcher preferred questionnaire method and employed snow ball sampling to collect data. Analysis of data was done by using percentage of responses given. Hypotheses are tested with an appropriate statistical tool. The study concluded with suggestions/recommendations for creating more awareness.

Keywords

Right to Information, democracy, good governance, RTI.

1. Introduction

The Right to Information Act, 2005 came into force after the Freedom of Information Act, 2002 was repealed. This act came in with the basic objective to promote openness, transparency and accountability in administration. “The right to know receive and import information has been recognised within the right to freedom of speech and expression. A citizen has a fundamental right to use the best means of imparting and receiving information and as such to have an access to telecasting for the purpose.”

Unlike many other countries (for e.g. UK) which took several years to operationalize the Act post the enactment, India took only a few months to bring it into force. This time was inadequate to change the mindset of the people in Government, create infrastructure, develop new processes and build capacity to deliver information under this Act.

Thus, the aim of this paper is to analyze whether people are aware of this basic right and whether they utilize it for their benefit or not.

2. Scope of the study

The area of this research was Panvel. It is a city in Raigad district of Maharashtra, in Konkan Division. The city is highly populated due to its closeness to Mumbai. Geographically, Panvel consists of two divisions namely, Old Panvel & New Panvel (recent developments in Panvel) & demographically, it has 180,020 People residing of which male and female are 92,484 and 87,536 respectively.

3. Rationale of Research

The reason why the researcher took such an endeavour because as much as understanding the efficacy of the Act is essential, an even more essential aspect is to understand how people perceive the Act and use it to promote transparency and accountability in the governance of this country. The rationale of this paper is to see whether people have understood the right that has been conferred on them and are they using it to their best advantage or not.

4. Objective of the Study

The Research was carried out with the following objectives:-

1. To Study the level of awareness among male & female.
2. To Study the level of awareness among various age groups.

5. Hypotheses of the study

Hypothesis is an assumption or proposition whose tenability is to be tested. The researcher in this present research work has framed the following two hypotheses:-

1. Gender (Male/Female) does not have considerable impact on R.T.I Awareness.
2. Age factor does not have considerable effect on R.T.I. awareness.

6. Research Methodology

An attempt has been made to triangulate the various methods as no single method of collection of data can prove exhaustive enough given the vastness of the topic. A combination of techniques of data collection and analysis was adopted that included survey, interviews and review of secondary data, literature and media reports. The details are given below:

6.1 Survey

A survey of 240 People was carried out. Though 250 questionnaires were distributed, 240 People responded. The Questionnaire draft with variable questions, rating and yes/no questions were provided. Details such as Name, Age, and Gender were collected from the respondents. The Questionnaire consisted of three parts. Part-I contains general information (this part mainly contains question related to basic awareness of RTI) Part-II contains specific questions (Mainly for RTI users) and Part – III contains questions pertaining to awareness of Right to Information Act and its use by respondents. The respondents were promised confidentiality and anonymity; the replies received were then tabulated.

The Questionnaire was semi structured. While designing it, the following points were kept in mind:-

- It was intimately related to the final objective of the research.
- Questions were very simple, clear and specific.

- The structure of the question was according to the form in which the response is to be recorded.
- There was a logical sequence of questions in the schedule.

After preparation of the questionnaire, a pre-test was done to improve it. For pretesting, it was distributed to fifty respondents. Minor ambiguity was detected in two questions. These questions were modified and thereafter the questionnaire was given a final shape. The following steps were taken to increase the response of respondents:-

- The confidentiality of the data was made clear in such a way that the respondent will be assured of protection.
- A serial number was assigned to each question in order to identify it easily, and to facilitate the control of interviewing assignments.
- The schedule was framed as short as possible with having only those questions which were related with the objectives.
- Maximum questions in schedule were asking objective information.

6.2 Interview and Secondary Data

Interview was held with a senior Officer in Second Appellate Office to know the rate of RTI Users and to gather the response rate of the same. Secondary literature and data was utilized to comprehend meaningfully the primary data. The secondary data and study reports were dovetailed with primary data in the analysis of the right to information.

6.3 Sample Selection

In the present research, Snow ball sampling method was employed. Snow ball sampling refers to non-probability sampling technique where existing study subjects recruit future subjects from among their acquaintances. It has following advantages:-

1. Locate hidden populations.
2. Locating people of a specific population.
3. Low cost.

6.4 Research Design

This Research was restricted on two aspects of 'Right to Information Act' viz. (1) its awareness and (2) its use in the area of research i.e. Panvel. The findings have been suitably generalized Problems coming in the way of its proper use and reasons for low awareness have been found and suggestions are given for rectification and improvement.

6.5 Respondents

Respondents were categorized into three age groups (18-25, 26-35 & 36 – above) to get a better analysis of the study. The respondents were again divided on the basics of their gender. So, an overall comparison can be made.

6.6 Scale

Scale is the instrument with the help of which a concept is measured. In the present research, Likert Scale was used for measuring information pertaining to use of Right to Information Act. Choices were given to respondents for each question and they were asked to mark the category which best describes the characteristic being rated/measured. Respondents were then asked to place a check-mark in one of the places on each scale to indicate their rating.

7 Data Analysis And Interpretation

The data collected with the help of research methodology was analyzed by using various tools and Techniques of statistical method. Further, it was manually organized and entered into a database for analyzing different variables

7.1 Findings of Study

After a proper interaction with the respondents regarding their awareness towards this Act and following results were obtained:-

- Awareness about the act is 77.5% (186 out of 200).
- Awareness amongst Female is 73.78% (76 out of 103).
- Awareness amongst Male is 78.83% (108 out of 137).
- However, they are mostly unaware of how many services and how many department are brought within the ambit of this Act. Thus, the quality of their awareness is low.

- Those aware about the Act, most of them came to know about it largely through newspapers, displays at offices and word-of-mouth.
- Very few people have applied to seek information under this act (34 out of 240).
- Out of the respondents who applied to seek information under this act, only 64.70% respondents received information.
- 63.33% respondents express their 100% support to this Act.
- 79.16% respondents consider spending their time in spreading awareness among people.

7.2 Presentation of Results

After proper analysis of data, it was classified and tabulated. Tables, graphs, bar charts and pie-charts are used as methods of data processing in the present research.

7.3 Testing of Hypotheses

One-way ANOVA was used in the study to test the hypotheses. It is a statistical method in which the variation in a set of observations is divided into distinct components to determine whether there are any statistically significant differences between the means of the groups.

1) **H₁: Gender does not have considerable impact on RTI Awareness.**

H₀: Gender does have considerable impact on RTI Awareness.

Gender	Total	Awareness	Applied
Male	137	108	26
Female	103	76	8
Total	240	184	34

To test this hypothesis, the respondents were grouped according to gender. 57.08% respondents were male and 42.91% respondents were female. Among the male, 78.83% respondents were found to have awareness, & 18.97% applied for information under the act. Among the female, these figures were 73.78% & 7.76% respectively. The logical conclusion was that “gender has considerable impact on R.T.I. awareness” and “R.T.I awareness is more in male than female”. The difference in level of awareness in both the categories was tested through one way anova. The degree of freedom for the tabulated data was calculated to be 1

and value of table was calculated to be 9.5832 for 0.05 % level of significance. Since, the calculated value was more than the table value of anova , this proves that there is a significant difference between the level of awareness between male and female category for 0.05% level of significance; and thus corroborates the conclusion. The null hypothesis thus stands disproved and rejected by the anova test and opposite hypothesis stands proved and accepted.

2) H₁: Age factor does not have considerable effect on R.T.I. awareness.

H₀: Age Factor does have considerable effect on RTI Awareness.

Age Group	Total	Awareness	Applied
18-25	140	114	12
26-35	48	30	14
36-Above.	52	40	8
Total	240	184	34

For testing this hypothesis, the respondents were grouped into three age groups viz. 18-25 years, 26-35 years, 36 & above. 140 respondents were in the age group of 18-25 years, 48 were in the age group of 25-35 years, 52 were in the age group of 36 & above. Amongst the respondents from age group of 18-25 years, 81.4% respondents were found to have awareness and 8.5% had applied for information. Amongst the respondents from age group of 25-35 years, these figures were 62.5%, and 29.16% for level of awareness and applied rate respectively & for the respondents of age group of 36- above years, these figures were 76.92%, and 15.38 % the difference in level of awareness in these three categories was tested through one way anova. The degree of freedom for the tabulated data was calculated to be 2 and value of table was calculated to be 3.8 for 0.05 % level of significance. Since, the calculated value was less than the table value ,this proves that there is significant difference between the level of awareness between respondents of different age groups for 0.05% level of significance and thus corroborates the conclusion. The null hypothesis thus, stands disproved and rejected by the anova test and opposite hypothesis stands proved and accepted.

8. Limitations of Study

While all efforts have been carried out by the researcher to minimize the flaws in this research yet the result may have following limitations:

- 1) Present research is restricted only up to two aspects of Right to Information viz. its use and implementation. Other aspects of Right to Information Act like its effectiveness, its organizational set up, its procedures etc can be topics for research for other researchers.
- 2) It is restricted only up to analytical study of use and implementation of Right to Information Act. Other approaches of its study like Critical Study and Comprehensive study etc can be topics for research for other researchers
- 3) It is restricted only up to Panvel. Similar study in other cities, study on other aspects in different cities, study on different approach in other cities can be topics for other researchers.
- 4) Further, Study is restricted only up to two basis of RTI viz. Gender and Age. Other basics such as caste, status, education, employment can be the topics for other researchers.

9. Conclusion

Having been studied the awareness of the Right to Information on the basis of age & gender the following conclusions are drawn from the analysis of the collected data:

- Media has played a great role in spreading awareness.
- Gender (Male/Female) has considerable impact on R.T.I. awareness wherein awareness is higher in male than female.
- Age factor does have considerable effect on R.T.I. awareness.
- Respondents in the age group of '18-25' had highest level of awareness as compare to other two age groups.
- However, the percentage of respondents who have applied to seek information under RTI act is highest in the age group of '26-35'.
- 90% of the respondents were not aware of any of the RTI Centres in their locality.
- Conclusively, it can be said that people are aware about this right but the quality of awareness they have is very low.

Awareness as an empowerment is a key to "Good Governance", therefore thrust on awareness building must be continued.

- Government should start special awareness camps especially in the rural areas and with special attention for females.
- Co-operation of Civil Society and NGOs must be obtained towards awareness.

- Special awareness Programmes should be launched with the help of Gram Panchayats, Nagar Panchayats, Nagarpalikas, Aganwadi Agents and volunteers.
- Various cultural events like folk songs, festivals, Mela etc are to be utilized for improving awareness.
- Distribution of Pamphlets, Brochures & Posters in all local language.
- RTI act should be added in the school syllabus

Simultaneously, concerned officials should be imparted training Programmes towards efficient and effective implementation of the Act. The Government should continue review the services and bring more and more public services within the purview of the Act.

For an effective and more realistic representation of the data. This Study can further be taken:-

- All over Mumbai.
- All over India.

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