

A Bibliometric Study on W.H.O. Publications Available in the Peradeniya Medical Library

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The collection of publications by the World Health Organization (WHO) in the Medical Library contains documents since 1950 to date. It provides valuable information and is available to the library free of charge. The collection is very much under-used. A bibliometric study on the collection was carried out with the objective of making the readership and the library staff aware of what is available in the collection, as a means of indirectly improving the usage.

The entire collection of WHO publications in the Medical Library as at end-of-July 2011 was used for the study. A head count on the total publications was obtained, excluding journals. The numbers of items in major subject divisions and in popular subject areas within these divisions were counted separately. Various types of publications (excluding journals) were also counted separately when numbers of those types were large. Contents of the publications in the collection were carefully perused in order to identify any specific topic or aspect of health on which the coverage was dominant. Geographical coverage of the publications also was examined when it was possible. A chronological evaluation of the collection was done by counting publications in each decade from 1950 to 2011.

The total number of publications in the WHO collection was 2791 (excluding journals). Various types of publications within the collection were identified. Disciplines which were covered by the collection substantially, with respect to the total number are: Statistics 1.1%; Social services 1.3%; General Medicine 9.4%; Health care 8.2%; Environmental health 30.5%; Pharmacology 11%; Clinical Medicine 19.7%; Surgery 1.8%; and Gynaecology and Obstetrics 1.5%. Further analyses for specific topics covered by the publications in Clinical Medicine showed that there are 40 publications on AIDS; 22 on Tuberculosis; 18 on Cancer; 19 on Mental health; 14 on Malaria; 15 on Medical education; and 4 publications on Dengue. General topics which were prominent in coverage were: World Tobacco Control; Global Alcohol Control; Public Health; Reproductive Health; Control of Tropical Diseases; Global AIDS Epidemic; Influenza Epidemic; Family Health; Health System Planning and Services; and Drug Information. The study revealed that the content of 70 publications had relevance to global issues; 24 publications were on issues relevant to developing countries; 17 publications were on South East Asian regional matters; and there were four publications specifically on Sri Lanka. The rest of the publications had an international coverage. Distribution of publications according to year of publication showed that 20% of the WHO collection was published after 2000 and around 48% of it is published after 1990 indicating that the content provides information relating to recent times. There were only 20 publications (0.72%) published in 2010/ 2011.

The study provides an insight into a valuable, though much under-used, collection of health information that has been made available by the World Health Organization. The collection contains information on various health-related topics at international, regional and global levels; in addition, it contains information on developing countries, tropics and South East Asian regional countries. The collection needs to be improved by acquiring current publications.