BOOK LOSSES: MANUAL VERSUS ELECTRIC SECURITY DEVICE

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ABSTRACT

Book losses in academic library constitute a serious problem. Library security in developing countries as it affects books has been placed on the library porters and the yearly number of book losses determines the efficiency of the porters.

Unfortunately, there are no training programmes for these porters nor any reference manual on what to do during emergencies. The importance of training is therefore emphasised in the paper. Neglected factors affecting library security such as reference handbook on emergencies, availability of materials for work, repairs and house keeping are discussed. Finally, Librarians are encouraged to evolve ways of solving individual security problems.

INTRODUCTION

Losses from book theft, vandalism and arson can cripple a library's ability to provide effective service. In a period of shrinking budgets and foreign exchange problem as is the case in many developing countries, the losses resulting from book theft may even present a serious threat to institutional survival. Estimates of percentage of library collections lost annually through theft is as high as 14% for new and popular materials[1]. In any given situation, the effects of these losses would include lowering of staff

morale, increased patron dissatisfaction and inability to replace some of the lost books especially in a developing country as Nigeria where foreign exchange problems coupled with distance from book publishers and book agents constitute serious handicaps. Librarians from different types of libraries share some common experiences in security problems in libraries though the methods for coping with the problems vary widely. At the same time, staff response to a situation depends both on individual training, facilities available and a library's existing policy. Each library situation is unique and as such a variety of approaches could be used in handling the same incident[2].

In most developing countries, electronic theft detection systems are not generally used in library security. The porters or the security officers man the main exit doors and handle all security jobs in the library. At present, many university libraries in Nigeria are concerned about the growing problem of library theft especially of printed materials as well as defacing and ripping off of pages of books and journals. The escalation of the problem could be gathered from various library annual reports especially of the university libraries where books are disappearing from the shelves in vast numbers. A close study of the annual library reports of eight university libraries in Nigeria showed that four of the libraries who made mention of annual book losses after stock taking exercise had average annual losses of 470, 394, 326 and 79 respectively. The remaining

four did not have the annual stock taking exercise. This does not mean that the problem does not exist in all other libraries but this could not be expressed in figures because no stock taking exercise was carried out. The inability of many librarians to talk of book losses in their annual reports has been deplored by the author when he commented that "... many libraries lose so many books to readers annually though few librarians have the courage to indicate this in their annual reports"[3]. While discussing the problem of book losses in libraries, the author also identified the problem of inadequate security systems in most libraries in Nigeria as one of the major factors militating against collection development in libraries in Nigeria.

In majority of cases, these book losses have been blamed on the low performance of library porters or security officers. For example, a University Librarian on receiving the list of missing books in his library, had this to say in a memo he sent to the library porters:

> "The final list of books missing from the library for 1983/84 stands at 589 titles. This is an alarming figure which shows that you are not very conscientious at your work. You must improve your modalities of operation, tactics and vigilance to stem the tide of heavy losses immediately".

The above observation of the boss is a normal one for he may face the criticism of the University Community who may read about the losses in the library's annual report. But are the porters solely responsible for the enormous losses? The answer is the subject of this paper.

After working as a Circulation Librarian for three years in a medium-sized academic library, whose major security agents are the porters and after being shocked by the increasing number of books lost annually as revealed by the yearly "infamous" stock taking exercise, by the sort of reprimanding memo quoted above from the boss as well as by making comparative browsing of other libraries' annual reports on the same issue, I was moved to examine the other neglected factors which militate against efficient job performance of those involved in the security of library materials.

Porters and Qualification for Job Performance

Security in libraries, particularly academic libraries, often depends on personnel who are not trained for that role and indeed cannot be expected to have expertise it requires[4]. In many Nigerian Universities, there is no distinction in the requirements of the library porters, hostel porters and the patrol men. In essence, this means that the library and hostel porters and patrol men could be called upon to work as porters or patrol men in either the library, the students hostels or in the security department of the university. Many universities have therefore insisted that to qualify for the three jobs (library, hostel porters and patrol men) the prospective candidate should have served in the armed forces or the police. As far as the library is concerned, it is the lower cadre of the ex-police or ex-army personnel that are often recruited as library porters or security men. The

reason for this is largely determined by the low pay attached to this type of job. Of the thirty university library porters from five university libraries talked to for this paper, twenty-five of them were at one time or the other either in the police or the army, three of the remaining five had the experience of security job outside the forces while the remaining two had no previous experience at all. One should now ask the question, whether military training or previous security experience definitely qualifies one as a library porter and if yes or no, what are the advantages or disadvantages in coping with difficult library patrons?

To the author, an important thing that would enhance good performance on the job is training. But this is lacking in many libraries in Nigeria, be it academic, public, or special. As Cronin observed "there is relatively little training materials available on library security and the problem patron"[5]. If there are any in some developed countries, this is yet to be thought of in Nigeria. On assumption of duty by a library porter, there would be occasional briefs on what to do and at best, this is often done by a library porter, who is experienced in the job of course no formal provision is made for such. It is a process of apprenticeship given by a "guru". As there is no formal training, there is equally no guidelines as to what to do in emergencies or how to handle a problem patron. The library porter is therefore an object of assualt by unco-operative patron, though this seems to be world-wide as reported by

Griffth of forty-one such physical assualts against staff members in a year[6].

Men or Electronics

One of the achievements of the industrial revolution is the discovery of machines that can do more, better and quicker what men working with ordinary hands can do. At the moment, libraries can hardly function without the machines doing one or more library routine jobs. This ranges from book ordering, cataloguing, information storage and retrieval, on-line services, to the electronic detection systems. As for the latter, the age has arrived and many librarians have sung its glory by comparing the advantages and disadvantages from the "use" and "no" use of the electronic detection systems as shown by statistics of books losses before and after it has come into operation in their libraries. Trying therefore to justify their need in the library, meant setting the hands of the clock backward. To the librarian in the developing country, he should understand that circumstances, environmental factor, need factor, practicality and finally, cost factor should be the guiding principles in the decision to replace porters with electronics.

Romeo[7] in 1980, examined the eight types of electronic theft detection systems whose main use is to apprehend the unauthorised removal of materials from the library. A follow up of the use of the systems indicated an estimated annual loss rate by three Checkpoint I users of 500, 1,000 and 2,000

of library materials respectively. The same three libraries also gave their cumulative losses as 2,000; 8,000 and 15-20,000. This figure though may not be helpful in arriving at a useful conclusion because the loss figures before installation could not be available for comparism. The only point that the author is trying to illustrate here is that losses could be sustained even with the use of electronic detection systems. The idea that the electronic detection system is a magic wand that can stamp out all losses could not hold as was the feeling of a university librarian when, in reaction to the large number of book losses in his library, remarked that "Perhaps we should begin also to think of installing an electronic device in the proposed library building at the permanent site to check this abuse".

The cost of the purchase or rental fees, the installation fees, time and cost of sensitizing the library collections, the changing technology of the various systems and finally the power requirements for effective operation ought to be considered, else, there would be a double-faced-Janus-the electronic systems and men. What of the economic returns in using both? As of 1980, Romeo stated that only the chech-point system, Gaylord Brothers, Knogo Corporation, 3M Company and Sentronic International are currently promoting their systems in the library world[8]. The librarian in a developing country, in the words of Shaw should beware of "the increasing enthusiasm for things that are different". He should be guided by what Wasserman

described as "the need to carefully and closely access exactly what it is which the process seeks to accomplish, than to reasses each component task in order to ascertain whether or not it leads logically and efficiently to this and,... the library administrator or the lowest man on the library totem pole, should know what the current limits are in his own library, in terms of staffing, space, available budget and practicality"[9]. The librarian in a developing country should among other things consider the following factors, when considering security issues in his library.

1. Supporting Library Porters Objectively

The Library Porters form the backbone of the safety of Library materials and as such, their morale and enthusiasm must be maintained if proper checking of the patrons is to be done. A situation where the available hands are overstreched should be avoided and as such maximum number of staff should be on duty during periods of maximum use or during hours that seem to have the most problems. In many libraries, the crisis is usually at the closing time when the porters at the exit door may become unable to check and recheck every patron at the exit door as well as all possible hiding places.

2. Maintenance of Facilities

All the doors therefore should be in order, the keys and locks checked from time to time to ensure that they have no faults. The porters should make sure that every thing is locked behind them and check all doors that are supposed to be locked at all times. This is one of the porters' role and

failure to do this, opens avenue for book theft. In some libraries, students throw out books through the windows. To reduce this, the windows should be fitted with expanded wires or nets.

3. Security Policies

There should be library security policies which should guide the porters in the performance of their duties. At the assumption of duty of a new library porter, this should be given to him to study and he should be encouraged to ask questions to avoid doubts.

4. Enforcing Library Regulations

Insist that the library rules and regulations be followed, for example, no bags should be left on the reading tables but on the specific areas meant for them and the closing bells should be obeyed to avoid rush at the exit door.

5. Co-operation Among Staff

What concerns the porters should concern the rest of the library staff. Do not let them face problems alone - back them up. A show of force and solidarity will often defuse a potentially dangerous patron. But this should be done with care to avoid mob action on the part of the patrons, especially the students.

6. Manageable number of exit doors

At best, the number of exit doors should be reduced to a manageable number though this should be governed by the population of the patrons and the number of staff available.

In most libraries, book losses have been incured because of the inability of some senior library staff who are given the priviledges of making use of special exit doors to lock them after use. These doors eventually serve as access points to the library by thieves.

7. Policies on emergencies

There should be procedures to be followed during emergencies, e.g., during power cuts, fire or even thunderstorms. As pointed out earlier, verbal instructions are not always enough. In many libraries in Nigeria, during power cuts, matches for lighting candles or camping gas where the library has any, may not be available, many or all the cylinders may be empty or none available at that time, some of the globes might have been broken or mantles gone bad without being replaced as nobody cares or money may not be available to purchase new ones or damaged parts especially in this period of economic austerity and poor university funding. Sometimes, where there are toches, either some of the bulbs are dead or the batteries are not there. The result is confusion during the power cuts. The stand-by generator serving the library in some days may not be in order, either there is no gasoline to operate it or the operator is nowhere to be found. To the would-be-thief, the confusion is an opportunity to strike and the porter at the exist door has an uphill task. What can the porters do in this situation? - Call the university security men. When the security men eventually arrive, the offenders are often known

to have gone before their arrival, a situation that creates a poor relationship for future. Instances abound where many outside security bulbs are dead and there are no replacements made. The library environment becomes dark and thieves operate in such situations.

8. A look inwards

It is obvious from the above, that there are endless situations in which the porters find themselves helpless. Yet, they cannot be exonerated. They have to put in their best with dedication and honesty of course. Relations, friends or well placed faculty and administrative staff are to be thoroughly searched and reports of offednders have to be made to the appropriate senior member of library staff for disciplinary action. At the heart of this, is thorough supervision by the librarians in the public service section of the library. In addition, Lyle[11] has suggested that there is need in emphasising to the University Community that the real sufferer in the matter of book theft is not the library but the reader, both in loss of time and failure to read assignments. To achieve this, the cooperation of the faculty and university or college authorities is most important and must be enlisted. The porters cannot do it all alone.

In the University of Port Harcourt where the author works, for instance, the University Librarian has convinced the university authority to take a firmer view towards the matter of library theft and vandalism. All the freshmen during the library orientation period are adequately warned

about the consequences of such acts. Any student caught with any stolen books or ripped-off pages is reported to the Students Disciplinary Committee for trial and if found guilty, such a student is made to forfeit a Semester in addition to replacing the book. To many librarians, faculty members and outsiders, this may be harsh or barbaric but it must be remembered that efforts must be made to save the library materials. The library has also gone a step further to originate a system whereby books belonging to other libraries discovered with students (not properly borrowed or overdue) at the exit check point are seized and returned to the owner libraries. The culprit bears the cost of postage.

CONCLUSION

Library security depends on many factors. Electronic devices are vitually important, as are trained personnel. But situations will always arise in which staffers who are not trained, cannot be expected to be knowledgeable and will respond in a way that can be dangerous to themselves, the patron and perhaps even to the collection itself.

The library authority should be able to understand that no matter the types of devices being used to track down book theft, be it electronc devices or personnel, that there is bound to be losses in every library and that as put by Cronin[12], there are no easy solutions to the problem and certainly none which could apply to all types of libraries. The important thing should be on how to reduce these losses. The possible measures should include the following: putting

more emphasis on training of staff, writing reference handboooks on what to do during emergencies, providing adequate number of staff where their services are more in demand, making sure that materials to be used during uncommon and common emergencies are available, maintenance of existing facilities in the library to make for effective job performance by the porters no matter whatever device is in use, encouraging the personnel whose duty it is to do the security job and above all, thorough supervision of security staff. It is rather on the above factors that the efficiency of the library security is based not entirely on the number of book losses in the library.

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5. Cronin, Ibid, p. 50.

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8. Romeo, Ibid, p. 5.

9. Wasserman, Paul (1965). The Library and the machine. Detroit, Gale Research, p. 14.

10. Griffth, Ibdi, p. 800.

11. Lyle, Ibid, p. 77.

12. Cronin, Ibid, p. 55.

Note: General Reference were also made to Library Annual Reports of:

(a) Ahmadu Bello University
(b) Lagos University
(c) Ibadan University
(d) University of Port Harcourt
(e) Ife University.