

Theft and mutilation of print collection in university libraries: A critical review of literature and proposed framework for action

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University libraries strive to provide information resources in both print and non-print formats. Library managers and administrators need to strike a balance between access and security of the resources. This paper examines a number of published literatures on library security, in particular, the different incidences of theft and mutilation as they relate to print collections in university libraries. Major forms of theft and mutilation identified from the literature includes theft by patrons and insider theft, tearing of book pages, writing on the pages of the books and marking of books content, all of which could temper with the actual subject matter of the book materials. The strategic and managerial measures for effective collection protection of library collections are also identified, evaluated and reported. The paper recommends the implementation of collection security management plan as a viable way of protection against theft and mutilation of materials in university libraries. The plan should include policy formulation and implementation, user awareness campaign, education and training of staff on the protection of collections. The paper concludes by proposing 'a framework for action which could serve as a guide for university librarians and stakeholders to ensure the protection of their library collection. In addition, it is hoped that it will serve as means of reawakening and reinforcing the awareness of university management about collection security breaches.

Keywords: Library Security, Collection Security, University Libraries

Introduction

Security is an important and complex challenge in contemporary societies. Not only do individuals require security and safety of their lives and properties, but also organizations such as libraries. A university library in particular, strives to provide information resources in both print and non-print to support the educational services of the university community and the humanity at large. From documented evidences, everyday there are reports of loss, theft, fraud, embezzlement and vandalism. These offences may affect any organization, as there is no discrimination between small, medium and neither large organizations nor does the purpose for which they exist earn them immunity¹. University libraries constitute and contain all they entail for security issues like theft and mutilation to emerge, 'the major target being the collections'². As such, the need for libraries to provide, maintain and secure its collections in order to ensure the availability, accessibility and longevity of the collections, as well as to provide effective services to community therefore becomes necessary. To achieve this objective, however, university library managers must identify the security issues as they relate to their

libraries. In addition, there is also the need to design strategic security measures for the protection of the collections.

Objectives of the study

- To identify and discuss the major forms of theft and mutilation incidences with reference to print collection in university libraries;
- To examine the strategies to be used for effective and efficient protection of library resources; and
- To propose a framework for the protection of collection against theft and mutilation in university libraries.

Methodology

This paper critically examines a number of published literatures on library security in general and collection security in particular. From the review, the different incidences of theft and mutilation, and the strategic and managerial measures for effective collection protection are identified, evaluated, reported and depicted in a proposed 'framework for action' for collection protection.

Literature review

The issue of theft of library collections is extensively discussed by various authors³⁻¹⁷. Book theft is considered as the oldest library problem which has continued to exist even in present day libraries. Rude and Hauptman⁵ report that theft of library collection has always presented a problem for library administrators particularly in university libraries: "A person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it; and thief and steal shall be construed accordingly"⁴.

In the context of this study therefore, theft of library materials is seen from this perspective. It is therefore necessary and essential for librarians to understand the essential requirements of theft and other offences from legal point of view. Theft of library collections is an anti-social; unlawful act and an offence, the perpetrators of which can be subjected to legal punishment. Ugah¹⁴ considers theft of library collection as a criminal activity and formidable obstacle to information access and use. He describes theft and other collection incidence like mutilation of information resources, assault on staff as serious security issues that need urgent attention. Theft is a common phenomenon to all types of libraries. As guardians of intellectual freedom, librarians should be aware of items taken and protect the collection. Cuddy and Marchok¹⁸ have noted that the library is not a viable resource to users if the books notated in the catalogue are not on the shelf and that, it is a loss of money and the librarians' time.

Martell¹⁷ who has reported incidences of theft and its effects on libraries admitted theft as a serious problem in libraries. He identifies a number of strategies for checking collection security breach incidences like theft. He further advises library managers to combine planning strategies, policies and procedures with speed of action in order to combat collection security incidences like theft, and non-return of library materials. In other words, Martell called for an enshrined collection security where staff and administrators have the 'will to act' for the protection of library collections.

Some authors have expressed concerns with the types of materials that are being stolen in the library^{12,19,20}. The writers report both print and non-print materials as important targets in the library. In addition Holt¹² examines theft of library materials by staff in university environment and reports that, theft

by staff do frequently occur particularly on research and high demand materials such as special collections, rare books and manuscripts. Forley²⁰ reports that, all libraries and public collections which include books, journals, as well as rare books and archives are at risk of theft and mutilation. Most of these items are unique and have high monetary and historical value, and may therefore be irreplaceable.

The issue of staff or insider theft has also been examined by Holt¹² and Griffiths & Krol¹⁶. Insider criminals in an organization comprised those whose positions concealed their actions. In library context, they included regular staff, temporary and contract-based staff, trusted vendors, interns, volunteers, board and committee members, former staff, frequent patrons, and donors¹⁶. In addition, they are more concerned with the catastrophic damage insider theft can cause to the library insisting that insiders know more about the collection and the security arrangement of the library and therefore may pose a dangerous security threat to the collections than infrequent users. Furthermore, they lament over the lack of data and studies on insider theft. Holt¹² focuses his submission on the implication of staff or insider theft in libraries. He mentions some of its consequences which include, social litigations particularly when arrests are made and possible court cases; union contract negotiations, risks of bad publicity, loss of public support; and possible changes in policy or procedures. Other implications centered on the recruitment and replacement of employees; problem with staff morale; changes in training and the possibility of increased costs incurred whether through technology or additional staff. To ensure effective management of insider theft in libraries Griffiths and Krol¹⁶ has advised librarians to develop security strategies in response to the issue. These include proper employee screening and marking of library collections, intellectual control, publicity about stolen materials as well as use of electronic security devices such as the radio frequency identification tags (RFID).

Other researchers have also commented on the causes of theft of collections in university libraries. Many studies have identified the patterns of use, increased student and staff population, and growth of library collections as the main factors for theft in libraries. Ratcliffe¹⁹ admits that there have been some striking examples of theft and other collection security incidences in the libraries due to increasing

staff and students' population in universities. Abareh⁶ conducted an exploratory survey of book loss, theft and damages in Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi, Nigeria, in order to establish the motives for book theft and mutilation in libraries. He identifies selfishness, non-availability or insufficiency of books, poverty, and denial from using books as the main reasons for book theft and mutilation in libraries. In addition, the finding of the study shows that, there are security lapses in the implementation of preventive security measures in the library studied. Mansfield¹³ identifies pressure for academic success and students' misconception of theft as an academic crime rather than a real crime as important reasons in increasing book theft and other collection security breaches in university libraries. Furthermore, he reports the mechanics and offenders involved, noting that, "offenders are young, predominantly male, second-or-third year undergraduates, and that, book theft is usually carried out during the afternoon or evening of the semester period". Students, faculty and staff members, and librarians were identified as being implicated in theft and other security cases¹⁹. Economic and financial factors were also identified as the major catalysts for theft of library materials. Forley²⁰ mentions that the reasons for theft are varied but have not changed significantly through time. He identifies greediness and selfishness and lack of respect for other users' information needs as the main reasons for theft in libraries.

Some studies have revealed that, not all theft of library collections is perpetuated by patrons; some library staff takes materials from the library without properly circulating it^{12,21,23}. This is what they called insider theft which according to Olorunsole²³ is one of the hardest thefts to prevent. Holt¹² also shares this view on staff theft, describing it as 'a hot potato issue' which may have direct impact because of the complications and economic consequences involved. Berlin²¹ studies insider theft and reports incidences where staff often steals library seal to be used for documenting that a particular book has legitimately left the library stock. Burrows and Cooper³ expressed very strong views on the extent to which librarians themselves are directly responsible for book theft and mutilation and while there seems little empirical evidence to support such views, there have certainly been numerous cases of library staff being prosecuted for the theft of many books. They cited a case where a rare book curator from the University of Georgia was

sentenced to 15 years on probation and a \$45,000 fine for the theft of more than a million dollars worth of rare books.

The concept of mutilation on the other hand, entails defacement or damage of library materials/collection. It involves removal of book pages, articles from periodicals, of illustrations and, or the whole text block from monographs. The practice is becoming a serious, disheartening, and unfortunate fact of library life¹⁹. Lorenzen²² reported high incidence of book and periodical mutilation in some academic libraries studied by the researcher. The study indicated that, collection mutilation was found to take many forms, ranging from underlining and highlighting in library books, tearing and or removing some pages of the books and tempering with the editorial comment that also were appearing in the library books. Abareh⁶ affirms that mutilation of library materials is a common phenomenon in university libraries. He identifies different forms of mutilation to include misuse of library collections such as bending the spine of a book to ensure that it stays open at the right page, using wet finger to turn book pages, marking or shading book pages with pencil, or biro, tearing book pages, and damage to the book spine.

Several reasons were responsible for the cause of mutilation of library collections. Ratcliffe¹⁹ insists that necessity rather than criminal drive is responsible for students' mutilation of books. Students' dissatisfaction or unfamiliarity with library services, the lack of knowledge of replacement costs and time; lack of concern for the needs of others often may cause students to mutilate or damage collection²². Ajayi and Omotayo⁸ describes mutilation of library materials as a global phenomenon that should be handled effectively by library managers and administrators. They suggest the provision of more photocopiers, cheaper photocopying services, and publicizing the effects of collection mutilation to users as some of the approaches for the effective management of mutilation incidences in university libraries. In addition, they suggest a campus-wide campaign through display and exhibition of mutilated books and other library materials. Teaching of library culture and ethics through training and education of staff will help instil security culture for ensured protection of the library collections. Library managers should provide regular training of personnel particularly on detection techniques of mutilation and other collection security breaches or incidences.

The study of Ajala and Oyeboade¹⁵ on theft and mutilation of library materials in Nigerian Academic libraries reported the rampant increase of mutilation in the libraries studied by the researchers. They identified reference books, periodicals, rare books and books in high demand as the most vulnerable to mutilation and theft. They declared poor library security culture, ignorance of consequences of theft and mutilation as the major rationale for mutilation in university libraries. Mutilation of library materials should not go unpunished. In this context, Ajala and Oyeboade¹⁵, strongly urge library managers to employ very strict measure to prevent mutilation of library materials and propose suspension of library user once found guilty of mutilating library collections; paying for the replacement and processing cost of the book, undertaking legal measures and subsequent dismissal if found guilty based on the rule of law.

Jackson²⁴ support the idea of policy formulation and implementation for the effective management of collection security breaches. He emphasizes the need for library and security policy to clearly state and express the mission of the security policy and inclusion of the cost of mutilated book or theft; effective sanctions against those readers whose behaviour is unacceptable.

Theft and mutilation of library collections: implications for scholarship

Rude and Hauptman⁵ have noted that getting statistics on collection security are difficult due to the unclear aspect of security and the epistemological price of vandalism and theft. They capitalize on the general assumption that, until a book is needed, there may be no indication that it is missing. In Nigeria, the submission of Rude and Hauptman may well be true as noted by Ajala & Oyeboade¹⁵ who emphatically stated that, "the statistics of book theft and losses are however, scanty, if not unknown, in Nigerian academic libraries". Even though, there are no available official statistics or lost estimations due to theft, mutilation and other collection security breaches in Nigerian university libraries, writers and commentators have indicated that, there are, visibly, a sizeable number of such breaches. Abareh⁶ for example, acknowledges how an unregistered library user carried away 56 text books from the Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University (ATBU), Bauchi, Nigeria, library between the month of May and June 1998 without being caught in the process. The books were later recovered and returned to the library.

Theft and mutilation of library materials has great financial, scholarship and socio-cultural consequences. Burrows and Cooper³ in their study reported the financial consequences of theft and mutilation in the UK libraries with the aggregate cost running to a total of 50 million pounds per annum and could very likely be in the order of 100 million pounds. In today's value the financial loss may probably have increased looking at the rapid increase in the cost of books and other library materials. Two years later another study was conducted by Edem, John and Graham²⁵ which further report the estimated cost of books losses in the UK libraries. According to them, researches carried out by the Home office estimated that annual book losses in UK public and academic libraries alone amounted to 159 million pounds and 3 million pounds respectively (direct book replacement only at 1989/90 prices). Ratcliffe¹⁹ described the financial consequences of theft inflicted upon American universities library collections. He points out that, between 1979 and 1986 alone, American libraries reported thefts and missing materials of rare books worth \$ 6,000 from the university of New Hampshire; \$20, 000 in rare science books from the deGolyer collection at the University of Oklahoma; \$1.1 million in plates, engravings, maps, books and manuscripts from the University of Georgia Library; \$130,000 in rare books and manuscripts from the George Washington university; and more than \$100,000 in incunabula from the Boston College. The figures above are some of the more widely reported examples and other cases which might not have been reported may further inflict more devastating financial and scholarship consequences to university libraries.

Literatures on theft and mutilation incidences in libraries go beyond financial consideration to include the negative consequences to scholarship and information access. "Theft in libraries should be handled effectively because of its implication to scholarship and to the nation's heritage"¹⁹. In addition, theft and mutilation incidences can result in access frustration for both library staff and users particularly in academic libraries. In a study on library anxiety among the Sudanese university students, Abusin and Zainab²⁶ reported how security issues in libraries can lead to negative perception towards the library environment and frustration among the library users, the effect of which can result to devastating psychological and educational consequences in terms

of effective access to the library and its collection. In addition, Martell¹⁷ describes the social consequences which theft and mutilation may cause to the library users. According to the writer, ‘theft and missing books cause difficulties in searching for the books while not on shelf and can therefore lead to frustration to the patrons’. The study of Ajayi and Omotayo⁹ reveal that theft and mutilation has negative consequence on students’ academic performances. In particular, the duo have impact on students assignment, library use, getting recommended list by lecturers, as well as impact on independent study and study for examination. The analysis of the estimates of the financial, social, psychological and financial consequences of theft and mutilation as presented above strongly suggest the need for library mangers to be aware of collection security breaches incidences, especially theft and mutilation in university libraries. It also calls for a framework of action for strategic collection protection.

A proposed framework for action

If collections are to be protected and secured from security incidences like theft and mutilation, librarians must consider security as a management issue deserving serious investment of resources. A framework of action for collection protection is proposed here (Figure 1).

The proposed framework consists of library security management plan that incorporate effective collection protection strategies in university libraries. This includes identifying security issues which could be individual staff responsibility or an independent library security management team. The team must be chaired by senior personnel in the library with clearly stipulated roles and responsibilities. By extension, this approach signifies collaborative efforts in handling security threats and ensuring the protection of the library resources in line with the theoretical submission of Lopez²⁷.

There should also be written and documented policies that support collection protection. Nielsen²⁸ advised librarians and library managers to take charge of overall library security policy and most not wait until after incidents have occurred, nor rely on external factors in order to ensure effective collection. In addition, the framework stresses the need for protection of collection during library operation process such as collection acquisition, processing, storage, circulation or access and use. The aim is to “ensure a balance

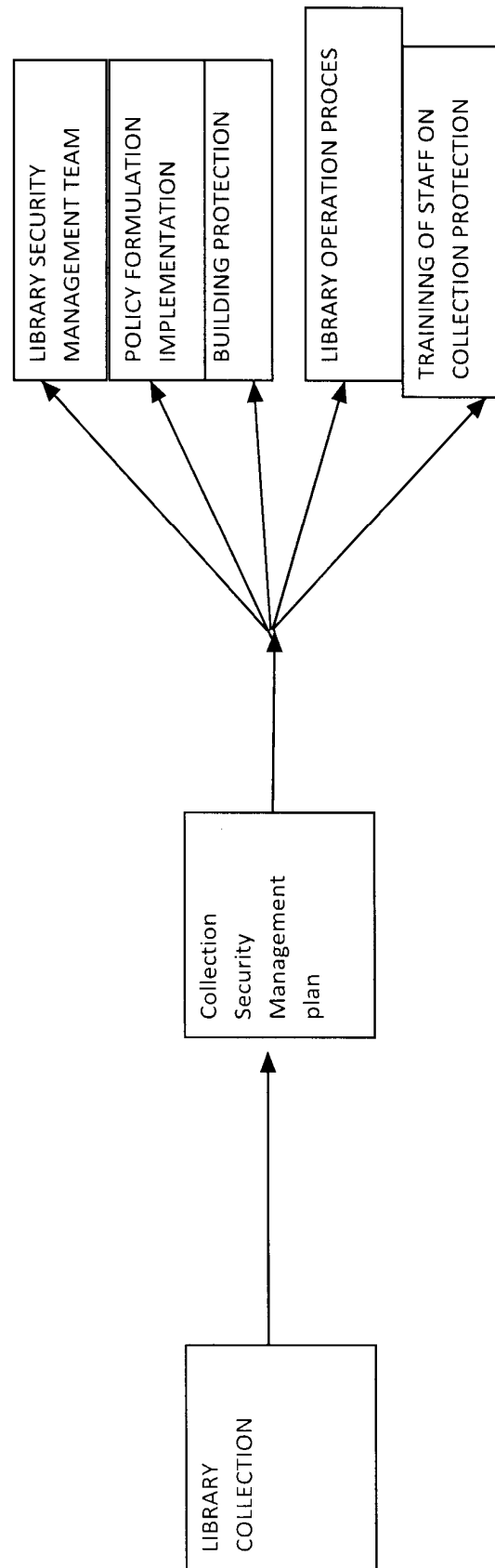


Fig. 1—A framework for action for collection protection against theft and mutilation of print resources

between access to collections and security of the collections²⁹.

Another aspect of the framework focuses on ensuring building security using both manual and electronic security strategies. Hence, security regulations and procedure should transcend to building maintenance through supervision and monitoring, patrolling and insurance coverage of the library and its collection. The need for physical safety has also become necessary. Kenreich³⁰ emphasizes that, "physical safety in library should be considered so as to provide protection from harmful or unwanted stimuli in line with Maslow's hierarchy of needs". Librarians should ensure strategies aimed at protecting their collection. In this period of technological advancement, the use of electronic security devices will undoubtedly increase the efficiency and effectiveness of collection protection in university libraries. McGinty³¹ and Trapskin³² believe that, "adding CCTV (Closed-circuit television) cameras to monitor the perimeter of libraries can alleviate risks as it allows staff to view customers entering or leaving the library. In general, modern electronic security systems such as book security systems like the RFID technology, surveillance cameras, metal detectors, door intrusion alarms, delay devices, panic alarms, a heat sensor were found to be useful in detecting different security patterns and ensuring effective security strategies for the protection of our collections and the libraries in general.

Lastly, this gesture of library and collection protection can also be made effective if staffs are adequately educated and trained on how to handle security threats for safety of collection in university libraries.

Therefore, to ensure proper implementation of the framework, security planning for collection protection must be supported and coordinated at the highest level. A library security officer or monitor should be appointed in this regard. He or she should be responsible for the implementation, coordination, and reporting of theft and mutilation in particular and other security issues in general. It is hoped that, careful implementation of the framework will no doubt enshrine good atmosphere of collection protection in university libraries. University library management should therefore, endeavour to 'match words with action' by effectively mobilizing resources, both human and material in ensuring the successful implementation of collection protection strategies as depicted in this framework.

Conclusion

The issue of collection security in university libraries is an issue that require serious managerial and strategic attention. In particular theft and mutilation of print collections should not be allowed to flourish in university libraries due to their financial, social, and psychological and scholarship consequences. University librarians and managers need to ensure best judgment and well-considered disciplinary action in case of theft and mutilation incidences. In addition, collection protection against theft and mutilation should be backed with library security plan consisting of library security officer or team, policy formulation and implementation, supervision and surveillance mechanism as well as periodic training and retaining of staff on collection protection strategies as contained in the framework. Librarians should therefore, do what is possible to create and strengthen security posture that will ensure proper collection protection against theft and mutilation as major security incidences in university libraries.

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