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## CRIMES INCIDENCE AND CONTROL IN AN ACADEMIC LIBRARY: IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT AND POLICY

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### Abstract

The study investigated the incidence and control of crimes in Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Observation and survey research techniques were used to obtain data for the study. 120 copies of the questionnaire developed were administered to the different categories of workers in the library, because the responsibility for effective security is collective and not exclusive to any particular individual or group within the library. Out of these, 102 were returned, while 100 were validly completed, thus giving a response rate of 83.3 percent. The findings reveal that inadequate staff, lack of proper supervision, non availability of photo-copying machines, amongst others, are the reasons for prevalence of criminal activities in the library. The study has established the prevalence of criminal activities and offers some suggestions on how to combat and reduce the incidence of crimes in a library.

**Key Words:** Crime, incidence, control, security, measures, academic, library, management, policy.

### Introduction

The incidence and control of crimes in academic libraries is of concern to librarians worldwide. Educational institutions are not always safe and secure places. Violence and property crimes can and do occur. University libraries are no exception and they are subject to a wide variety of security concerns. These include the theft and mutilation of library materials, theft of personal property like handbags, purses, wallets, keys, money, calculators, laptops, handsets, etc as well as

the harassment of library staff and patrons. The New Encyclopedia Britannica (2005) defined crime as the intentional commission of an act usually deemed socially harmful or dangerous and specifically defined, prohibited and punishable under the criminal law within a broad spectrum of cultural and historical variations. Crimes are acts that are legally forbidden by a society. Murder, theft and arson are some of the acts that are considered criminal by modern societies. Austin (2008) defined crime as a violation of

a society's formally enacted criminal law. Crime is an intentional act of human conduct that causes harm for which the actor is held responsible and for which there is a prescribed punishment carried out by the State. Sometimes, 'force', 'fraud' and 'material gains' are added to the definition.

A crime is any act that violates the law, and for there to be a crime, there must be a defined punishment. If the law does not set forth the particulars of the punishment for the described act or omission, then it is not a crime. According to Rogerson (2004), crime incidence refers to the number of criminal events that have occurred in a given area. Incidence is often expressed as the number of events suffered per head of population. However, not all crimes are reported. Incidence can then be referred to as the measure of typically reported in official statistics about the extent of crime.

Crime has become as complex as human nature. Modern technological advancement and tremendous progress in communication have facilitated the occurrence of crimes. Criminals often use sophisticated equipment in one place and then escape to another place. The present day world faces the grim problem of illicit drug trafficking, smuggling, hijacking, kidnapping and terrorism. In spite of vigorous and vehement national and international efforts towards combating such crime, it is quite disappointing to note that the crimes are rapidly growing in various forms. Crime has adversely affected the societies of both developed as well as developing countries by impairing the quality of life, threatening human rights and fundamental freedom and posing a serious challenge to the community. No country has remained unaffected, although the level and intensity of the problem might vary from nation to nation. Crime Statistics are often better indicators of prevalence of law enforcement and willingness to report crime than actual prevalence. Willingness to report crime and confidence in the police and the legal system influence the rate of reporting crimes. Over

half of United States citizens feel that they can report crimes to the police, because they have confidence in the police and the legal system.

A number of security measures are often put in place to control crimes. Security measures refer to actions taken as precautions against crimes like theft or espionage or sabotage. Staff training, devices, professional services and practical changes are security measures that help to provide a secure and safe workplace for employees. According to Ifidon and Okoli, (2002), academic libraries are libraries that are attached to educational institutions like universities, polytechnics and colleges of education. The main function of an academic library is to function as an auxiliary to parent institution in carrying out its objectives mainly the education. Library is an important intellectual resource of the academic community and helps them for their self-development to fulfill the curriculum requirements and to promote studies and research. Most libraries seem to have been invaded by criminal minded users and staff. Having defined crime, it is expedient to define criminals. Criminals are people who are prepared to take chances and the greater the likelihood of their being apprehended as a result of criminal activity, the less likely it is that he or she will take that risk. Libraries are organizations which hold collections of publicly-owned property in buildings, usually open to all and sundry. The criminal in the library is unlikely to be of the hardened society. The criminal is much more likely to be a member of the organizations' staff, since the chances of an insider getting away with substantial criminal activity are that much greater.

A wide spectrum of potential criminal activity exists within the library. This ranges from vagrancy and minor nuisance through petty vandalism and theft to burglary, criminal damage and physical assault. Although theft and damage to library property are the major concerns it is important to recognize that staff in libraries

have fears concerning crime against the person and these fears can have a demoralizing effect. Book mutilation often occurs in the library. It can be in the form of key pages torn out of books or underlining or making comments in the margin of reading materials. Burrows and Cooper (1992) are of the opinion that non-return of books is another crime that is being committed in the library. Non-return of legitimately borrowed library books is like their direct theft from the library and this has been a long-standing problem for the library service. The failure to return material has the same consequences for the library as deliberate theft. Other readers are deprived of access to books; the library is deprived of its assets; substantial costs can be incurred in recovery. Theft by staff and users contributes to the crime in the library. Omotayo and Ajayi (2005/2006) observe that students always destroy the library security checkpoint, assault library porters on duty and go away with their personal effects whenever there is power outage and stern security sanctions have not been introduced against this unruly behaviour.

Books may appear to be missing from a library for a number of reasons other than theft and non-return. Librarians regard mis-shelving to be the next most important factor likely to account for material regarded as missing. This encompasses accidental mis-shelving by library users and staff alike as well as cases of deliberate mis-shelving by those wishing to have unique access to material at a later point. Libraries are also targets for other forms of opportunist crime which carry a high risk factor, in particular the theft of personal property like handbags, purses, wallets, money, calculators, handsets, laptops, keys etc. The nature of library service use encourages concentration and users can get distracted easily.

Lincoln (1984), categorized theft in the library into four which are:

- Theft of books
- Theft of reference materials

- Theft of equipment and
- Other theft which include theft of magazines, or personal property of readers or members of staff.

According to him, research shows the number of books stolen from libraries to be enormous. Lincoln and Lincoln (1987), observe that 250,000 books were stolen from 100 libraries in America. Souter (1976) discovers that British academic libraries losses 1.5% of their total collection annually. The second type of theft is that of reference materials which includes theft of rare books. This often involves selected books targeted by professional collectors. However, this type of crime is likely to increase as the value of those books continues to rise. Other forms of reference materials that are equally stolen include atlases, guide books, encyclopedia etc. The third category is the theft of equipment which is not rampant. The fourth category i.e. other theft is difficult to define and identify. It includes theft from staff, patrons and various forms of criminal damage directed to the library premises.

Nwosu (2000) mentions among others, book theft, mutilation of books, defacement, noise making, assault, seats reservation, vandalism, stealing of library resources and personal belongings of staff and patrons as crimes perpetrated in the library. According to Shuman (1999), hiding of books, keeping books for too long in the study carrels, stealing of library books either by throwing them outside through the windows or taking them out through the exit doors, non-payment of fines for overdue books, tearing of pages needed because of the long queue at the photocopier unit or non functional machines are the common library crimes and misdemeanors. Wilson (1972) is of the opinion that university libraries are the keystone of teaching and learning. It has been noted that a high quality education is impossible without a high quality library. Aguolu (1983) is of the view that the university library is an important organ in the

institution. The academic health, intellectual vitality and effectiveness of any university depend largely upon the state of the health and excellence of its library. Therefore, the academic library has to build a strong collection in the form of physical, electronic and digital to cater for the knowledge requirements of the academic community. The library has to preserve the physical collections for the use of its clients as well as the future generations, hence the need to provide a safe and security facility for library staff, resources and equipment as well as library users.

The effect of hidden crime in the library is as great if not greater than that of the outside world. The ways in which libraries are being run gives room for carrying out criminal activities. These include the central location of the library and the long hours of operations which attract so many people; there is no admission fee, and most services are provided without cost; open stack policies which make it possible for people to go to where they wish without challenge; and above all, low budget which does not give room for academic libraries to have effective security plans. The crimes in the library can be grouped into two which are crime against property and crime against people. These may be in form of stealing books, mutilating books, and periodicals, misusing computers, stealing of personal belongings of both staff and patrons, abusing staff verbally and assaulting one another. There is the need for libraries to have safety and security plans to ensure that staff is prepared to respond to large-scale threats to collections. It is important to provide a safe and security facility for library staff, library resources, equipment and library users.

Library Management, in facing up to the unpleasant truth of crime in their organizations, must take the question of security planning seriously. There is no avoiding the fact that designing out crime can throw a lot of inconvenient spanners into the planning process, the cost implications cannot

be overlooked either. Security is expensive but, in the long run, it will prove to be a cost-effective investment. If library management can be persuaded to take the question of security seriously, the battle against library crime is already half-won. The simple truth about crime is that it can be reduced, or even eliminated, if the opportunity to commit wrongdoing is not present.

According to Rajendran and Rathinasabapathy (2007), an academic library should provide library facilities and services necessary for success of all formal programmes of instruction, open the door to the world of knowledge that lies beyond the boundaries of own field of qualification and bring books, students and scholars together under conditions which encourage reading pleasure, self discovery, personal growth and the sharpening of intellectual curiosity. There is the need for the academic library to build a strong collection which can be in different forms to cater for the knowledge requirement of the academic community. Therefore, the need to preserve the library collections for future generation is important. Library security includes safety of staff, users, fire protection of the library and its collections as well as disaster planning. Security is an important programme, which library and those who work there must take seriously. There is the need for the libraries to place high value in securing and preserving their irreplaceable contents of their collections, making the historical and cultural artifacts of our civilization available for future generation.

The various ways through which library materials are mutilated is by tearing off useful pages for such materials i.e. mutilation, stealing of library materials by throwing them down through the windows, carrying them under dresses, hiding them inside bags, files, removal of data due slips, erasure of library's ownership and using fake date due stamp. Shuman (1999) is of the view that security of building equipment, materials, electronic and personal are some

security considerations that must be addressed in an information management environment. Ajegbomogun (2004) defines library security as a strategically designed system to protect library collections which include books and non-book against unauthorized removal. The protection involves safety of users and books against fire outbreak, insects, flood and protection of the premises against intruders.

The type of checkout introduced will determine the type of crime committed. A sophisticated checkout system will produce less theft, though likely to increase the levels of book mutilation, and a less sophisticated checkout produce more theft and less damage. Lending books offers the greatest opportunity for theft. This could be seen in two forms. There is the systematic, carefully considered pre planned type of theft, the other less preplanned where borrowers no longer want to be library members; they have books on loan, may even promise to return them, yet somehow never do. The latter is more numerous and includes large numbers of otherwise respectable citizens. Many people appear to have stolen books in this way, mostly when they were students and sometimes in later life.

According to Houlgate and Chaney (1992) the responsibility of the library management is to try to achieve a balance between security and access, and this is not an easy objective to achieve. While the logic of good security practice will be telling him or her that all high-risk property in the organization should be in one place, the library and information professional in him/her will be saying the opposite. Striking the right balance in security disciplines is the ultimate aim. Any security strategy must aim first and foremost to reduce criminal opportunity, and if that is not possible, then it must at the very least deter the potential criminal in other ways. Library and information managers must establish the right atmosphere in their organization. Without the right attitudes amongst all involved, that

is the management, staff and users alike, a strategy is unlikely to work effectively, so the grounding of that strategy in the right ethos is a pre-requisite in the process.

### **The Problem**

The social decadence of the society has led to the prevalence of crime in most academic libraries. However, this development is being addressed through putting in place appropriate security measures, particularly in advanced countries where all sorts of electronic security measures are used to control the incidence of crime in libraries. In developing nations like Nigeria, most academic libraries do not have electronic gadgets that can be used to control crime in libraries. The management of most university libraries employs physical measures to combat crimes. In view of this situation, this study, therefore, investigated the incidence and control of crimes in a Nigerian University library.

### **Research Questions**

The following research questions were formulated to guide this study:

- (1) How often are the identified crimes being perpetrated in the library?
- (2) What are the probable causes of these criminal acts?
- (3) What are the existing control measures?

### **Methodology**

The study is a survey research design aimed at eliciting information on the incidence and control of crimes in the Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan. All members of staff in the library constituted the population of this study. A fifty one-item questionnaire titled Crime Incidence and Control Questionnaire (CICQ) was designed and distributed to all members of staff in the library. The questionnaire consisted of five sections. Section A sought for background information on the respondents. Section B gathered information on security incidents.

Section C sought information on criminal activities perpetrated in the library. Section D sought for reasons for perpetrating criminal acts in the library. Section E sought for information on prevention of criminal activities in the library. A total of one hundred and twenty copies of the questionnaire were distributed, out of which one hundred and two copies were retrieved and 100 validly completed copies were analysed using descriptive statistic of percentages.

### Report of Findings

The findings of this study are presented under the research questions which guided the study.

#### Research Question One: How often are the identified crimes being perpetrated in the library?

Table I: Library Crime Incidence

Crimes	Often (%)	Rarely (%)	Non-response (%)
Impersonation	60.0	26.0	14.0
Illegal borrowing	63.0	29.0	8.0
Non-return of overdue books	79.0	17.0	4.0
Theft of books and other materials	80.0	17.0	3.0
Theft of patrons and staff belongings	74.0	24.0	2.0
Books mutilation	79.0	13.0	8.0
Hiding of materials	85.0	14.0	1.0
Mis-shelving	79.0	17.0	4.0
Tipping staff before rendering services	23.0	75.0	2.0
Noise making	80.0	19.0	1.0
Reservation of seats	78.0	20.0	2.0
Assault of Staff	68.0	24.0	8.0

Table I contains a list of the major crimes that are perpetrated in the library. Majority of the respondents agree that virtually all of the crimes identified are being perpetrated in the library. However, the incidence of tipping staff before rendering service is rated low, just 23 percent. Hiding of materials is most common crime with a rating of 85 percent; followed by theft of books and other materials, and noise making, with 80 percent each. Non-return of overdue books and illegal borrowing each had 79 percent.

#### Research Question Two: What are the probable causes of these criminal acts?

Table II: Causes of Criminal Activities in the Library

Reasons for Criminal Acts	Yes (%)	No (%)	Non-Response (%)
Selfishness	61.0	37.0	2.0
Indiscipline	77.0	23.0	0.0
Inadequate Staff	75.0	22.0	3.0
Availability of few copies	72.0	26.0	2.0
Poverty	78.0	20.0	2.0
Materials are Expensive	77.0	20.0	3.0
No Proper Supervision	74.0	22.0	4.0

Table II contains with the probable causes of crimes in the library. All the identified causes were rated high, with poverty having the highest percentage of 78, high cost of library resources had 77, and indiscipline also had 77. Inadequate staff had 75, no proper supervision had 74, and inadequate copies of library resources had 72 while selfishness had 61. The presence and visibility of library staff is central to the protection of library collections. The survey revealed that many staff considered themselves to be inadequate to meet the demand. Most respondents opined that lack of staff was the main factor preventing them from tackling crimes in the library, hence the need to employ more staff.

Furthermore, direct access to the stacks, placement of high-risk materials such as rare and valuable books either in vulnerable places or in low-visibility areas are equally responsible for criminal activities in the library.

**Research Question Three: What are the existing crime control measures?**

**Table III: Existing Crime Control Measures**

Measures	Yes (%)	No (%)	No Response (%)
Regular orientation Programmes	87.0	11.0	2.0
Security Checks at Entrance/Exit	97.0	2.0	1.0
General Security Patrol	13.0	85.0	2.0
Installation of Surveillance Camera/CCTV	0.0	99.0	1.0
Electronic Anti-Theft/Burglary Alarm	0.0	99.0	1.0

Table III contains data on the existing crime control measures in the library. Security Checks at Entrance/Exit has the highest percentage of 97, followed by orientation programmes, and general security patrol has a low percentage of 13. Crime prevention and detection electric devices like surveillance Camera/CCTV and Electronic Anti-Theft/Burglary Alarm are not available at all in the library. Even though, these devices have a higher degree of effectiveness than the manual system being employed.

**Discussion of Findings**

This study has established the incidence and control of crimes in Kenneth Dike Library, University of Ibadan, Nigeria. The result indicates that crime exist in the libraries. This corroborates the findings of Lorenzen (1997) which shows that majority of the Illinois public libraries had problems with security. The findings of Ajala and Oyeboade (2008) equally reveal that theft and mutilations which are part of the criminal activities perpetrated

in the library constitute a problem in the libraries surveyed in Nigeria. It can therefore be said that security of library collection is a major problem pervading Nigerian academic libraries, hence the need for a serious and urgent attention to salvage the situation. Harassment of library staff and patrons had occurred at the majority of libraries. This makes threats and harassment of individuals the biggest security problem in the public libraries of Illinois likewise in Kenneth Dike Library, where assault of staff was rated high by the respondents.

Electronic security systems are widespread and effective in deterring and catching thieves, however, these systems are not available in Kenneth Dike Library. This finding corroborates Ajala and Oyeboade (2008) who reported that electronic security devices were not available in any of the academic libraries studied.

**Implications for Management and Policy**

This study has a number of implications on library management and policy. In view of the importance of the library materials, there is the need to have a special vote for library security in order to protect these monumental materials. In all, the data gathered is indicative of the fact that crime and security issues in the libraries need to be taken seriously and that the Kenneth Dike Library is making efforts to reduce the criminal activities to the barest minimum. Improvement is however needed in the following areas:

- Proper value orientation by an individual is the best way since everyone knows what is right from wrong.
- Educating patrons on the negative effect of crime in the library.
- Installation of Electronic Security Systems.
- Organizing seminars on crime for both staff and patrons.
- Training of staff on security issues in the libraries.

- Employ more hands to man the library and
- Formulate security policy that is accessible to all members of staff.
- Limit the entrance to the building that is, having a single public entrance/exit and have uniformed security guards around to keep their eyes on people entering the building.
- Prosecute those caught committing misdeeds.

There is the need for Management of the library to formulate a written security policy which will serve as a guide in educating library staff on the library rules. The users of a university library include scholars, teachers, students, undergraduates, postgraduates, researchers, teaching assistants, corporate users, foreign students, foreign students, staff, the public and individuals from other institutions. Therefore, an important message for users which should be embedded in training is that individuals can ruin materials and reduce access for others and the continuity accessibility of the collections is a group effort to which everyone should contribute.

Encourage all staff and students to be vigilant in identifying suspicious behavior or activity. The library management should initiate an audit of the library's existing crime problem in order to know the nature and extent of the problems involved before taking the appropriate measures to deal with them.

Manned cloakrooms are effective methods of reducing crime in libraries, but they are costly in terms of staffing and space. Ensure that all valuable equipment in the library is correctly and properly marked in order to deter and prevent theft.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

This study has established that crime and security are part of the problems facing Nigerian University Libraries and if not addressed, will create a serious threat to the

patrons, staff, equipment as well as the library collections. The actions taken by libraries against the problems of theft and mutilation will naturally reflect the seriousness with which these problems are viewed within the library service.

There is the need for the libraries to be able to ascertain whether the majority of their losses arise from the non-return of loans or from direct theft, and which of their collections are most vulnerable, and a variety of other characteristics of missing material. Written security policies are important; because they help staffs identify and deal with security problems. Library staffs are not educated as to what a security problem is and how to deal with it. Library staffs do not enforce library rules which may be due to the fact that the staffs did not know what the rules are. Electronic security systems are widespread and effective in deterring and catching thieves. However, libraries are not actually having these systems. There is the need to install electronic security systems in academic libraries. Victims should be encouraged to report crime, either directly to the police or by providing alternative reporting opportunities. Above all, security problems will probably not disappear in the future, and libraries will need to continue to be aware of what is occurring in the library and generate new ideas in dealing with the different security problems.

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