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The Sociology of Library Crime in Nigerian Academic Libraries

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THE SOCIOLOGY OF LIBRARY CRIME IN NIGERIAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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Biography of Okogwu Flora Ifeoma

Okogwu Flora Ifeoma is a Chartered Librarian with Ebonyi State University Library, Ebonyi State Abakaliki and a PhD student of the Department of Library and Information Science, University of Nigeria Nsukka. She began her career with the renowned Financial Institution Training Centre in Lagos after her Library School from University of Ibadan. She served as the Institution's Librarian from 2001 to 2005 before joining Ebonyi State University as Librarian 11 in 2005, where she rose to her present rank of Senior Librarian. Since her appointment with the University library, she has worked in various administrative capacities in the library. She was the unit head of the cataloguing and classification unit of the University library from 2005- 2007. She was the pioneer Librarian in charge of the main campus library from 2007-2008. She is in-charge of Presco campus Library from 2008 till date. She has to her credit several published journal articles. She is happily married to Dr. Okechukwu Okogwu and her marriage is blessed with two children, Chijioke and Chidimma.

Biography of Mr. Nnam M.Uchenna

Mr. Nnam, M Uchenna is a Postgraduate student in the Department of Sociology and Anthropology, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. He is grounded in the traditions of social Anthropology, Sociology and Criminology alike. He was and still a research assistant to a consultant criminologist who is currently the Head of Department of Sociology, Psychology and Political Science at the Federal University Ndufu Alike Ikwo (FUNAI). His research interests are in the areas of kidnapping, conflict, examination malpractice, criminal profiling, armed robbery, and the like. He has to his credit several published journal articles. Mr. Nnam has pushed back the frontier of knowledge through his substantial contributions to many research projects carried out by different individuals and research institutions geared towards expanding human horizons. He is also an expert in qualitative (thematic content) data analysis, and has carved a niche for himself in this aspect.

Abstract

The spate of library crime in Nigerian academic libraries is presently alarming. This paper, therefore, is designed to dissect the patterns and trends of this crime using sociological tenets and social dynamics. Through the literature review, the major causes, dimensions and implications of library crime were unravelled. Dearth of knowledge-enhancing, sought-after and expensive reading materials, environmental nature (physical and structural arrangements) of libraries, and economic hardship are some of the causes of library crime, which manifests in various forms: theft, pilfering, mutilation, and fraud. This paper revealed that library crimes have deleterious effects on individual users, library staff, academic community and society in its entirety. The central policy implication of the study is that electronic security system should be installed in all academic libraries in Nigeria and sufficient volumes of current, sought-after and expensive reading materials stuffed in the library.

Key words

Library, Academic library, University library, Library Crime, mutilation, stealing, book theft,

sociology,

Introduction

Academic libraries are integral part of colleges, universities, or other institutions of postsecondary education, administered to meet the information and search needs of its students, faculty and staff. Academic libraries provide both print and electronic information materials for the use of the library users. Some of these library materials are to be read and kept back in the shelves but some are to be taken out of the library for use through lending. Some books may not be lent out but are not found in the library, or are mis-shelved. This may be as a result of the crime observed in the society. Crime seems to be the most pressing social problem facing humanity in the contemporary world. It has permeated every nook and cranny of the society, and library is not an exception. This is because library is an integral aspect of academic institution which is part of the larger society. Therefore, we should expect that the library will not be immune to crimes that pervade the larger society. Academic libraries in Nigeria are currently besieged by a multiplicity of problems, which range from poor maintenance culture, dejection to crime which manifests in different dimension.

Library crime, just like any other crimes, is of ancient origin. Theft or stealing of books, according to (Constantinou, 1995) can be traced as far back as 539 BC in Egypt when the Persian Conquerors removed rolls of Papyri from the library of Pharaoh Rameses II from circa 41BC. Ogunyade (2005:n. p.) submits that library books were chain-locked to prevent

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theft. (Line, 1969), cited in (Adewale and Oluwasanmi 2007), posits that book theft in academic libraries is a global problem pervasive in developing and developed countries. The researchers deduced from the reports of these scholars that crime is widespread. Accordingly, the installation of burglar-proof, detection gadgets and other security precautionary measures in both public and private libraries in Nigeria speak volumes about the prevalence of this crime in the country.

At this juncture, it is important to define library crime so as to keep both the preceding and subsequent discussions in perspective. Unfortunately, no dictionary or even sociology criminological literature has categorically defined this term specifically. Library is an indispensable institution where valuable and relevant educational materials, both print and electronic, are stored for human consumption. Crime, on the other hand, is an act or omission to act which flouts the core values, rules and regulations guiding a particular establishment. By implication, library crime can be described as a process of using unauthorised method(s) to gain access to library materials, and this includes forging of Library Identification Particulars (LIP), mutilation, pilfering, theft or stealing, fraud, and the like.

Noteworthy here is that library crime in Nigerian academic library is on the increase with deleterious effects. Despite the public outcry and existing draconian measures to control all forms of crime, there are still increasing violation of this act in academic libraries by its patrons which include students, staff and other academic community members. The general objective of this paper is to incorporate sociological ideas and the dynamics of the society into library studies to broaden our horizons in research. Other specific objectives of the study, which formed the literature review of the current study, include:

1.   To identify the factors responsible for library crime;

2.   To ascertain the dimensions of library crime; and

3.   To determine the implications of library crime.

Factors Responsible for Library Crime

There exists a legion of factors that are responsible for library crime. These include economic, environmental, academic and social factors. (Akinfolarin,1992) detailed the cause of library crime in developed countries as follows: indigence of students, drastic reduction in book votes, poor security, belief that public property belongs to nobody in particular, selfishness on the part of some users, and absent-mindedness on the part of staff resulting in failure to properly check out books. The widespread poverty and high cost of living in Nigeria account for the various crimes in our academic libraries. No wonder (Hogan-Bassey, 2000) contends that most books in Nigeria are unaffordable by a majority of the students while the cost of living has gone up so high as to make living standard difficult for the low income group. Perhaps, against this background, (Line,1969) cf. (Adewale and Oluwasanmi, 2007) argues that the problem of book theft in Nigeria is even more pronounced in these days of economic crunch when books are not only scarce but also their prices are exorbitant. And this has resulted in emphasis being placed on book preservation instead of reader satisfaction.

Lending credence to the above assertion, (Ogunyade,2005) reveals that library crime is caused by many factors, which include inadequate volume of books, poverty on the part of the students, short period of loaning by the library, and selfishness on the part of the students to hide library books illegally. Arguing from the same direction, (Bello,2001) asserts that

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lack of adequate security and supervision on the part of the workers is the primary cause of library crime, followed by inadequate number of books available in the library.

Emanating from the above statement is the fact that library management or owners creates its own brand of crimes and criminals by encouraging library patrons to make use of libraries without providing relevant and sufficient knowledge-enhancing materials for reader satisfaction. Certain books are in short supply, even the few available ones are so expensive that it is only the middle and upper economic classes that can afford to buy them. The people of the lower class are mostly affected by poverty, and they have lesser access to opportunities that can improve their living conditions. The implication is that those who could not afford certain materials they considered imperative, use whatsoever means and opportunities at their disposal to steal or mutilate them.

Supporting the above argument, (Adewale and Oluwasanmi,2007) opined that libraries' book votes have drastically reduced over the last two decades. Student's population increases annually in Nigerian Universities without corresponding increase in the vote for purchase of books for their libraries. This has in turn led to a competitive atmosphere concerning the use of the few copies of books and other materials available in the library which encourages book theft. In justification of the present authors' viewpoint, the author further confirmed that books in high demand are susceptible to theft where sufficient copies cannot be made available in the library, and the same applies to rare and expensive books. Similarly, (Mansfield,2009) reports how a student stole books from the University Library and sold

them on the online market place, eBay, having foiled the security systems. Most of the stolen books were latest editions and high demand texts.

Research suggests that the major causes of library crime in Nigerian University Libraries are the inability of these Libraries to adequately cope with the increase in student's population, introduction of new courses and expansion of existing ones. This exacerbated by insufficient funding from Federal and State Governments (Adewale and Oluwasanmi, 2007). Another factor that increases the incidence of crime and wrong doing in a University or College Library is the unusually large number of students in a class (Hogan-Bassey, 2000). A lot of studies have linked crime and deviance to social, economy, environmental and library factors (Ishaya, 1995), (Ogunyade, 2005). Social environment as a determinant of crime is certainly not a recent development in the aetiology and epidemiology of crime in the real world. The environmental nature of libraries in the manner of social organisation and social conditions like overcrowding with its concomitant induce crime in all its ramifications.

By implication, the organizational structure of most academic libraries in Nigeria is, to say the least, a major predisposing factor that encourages students and other library users to steal, pilfer and mutilate books. The great number of students now in Nigerian institutions of higher learning makes our library overcrowded, which results in the absence of thorough "search and entry" due to the manual security framework, among others. (Ungarelli 1973) claims that the high rate of library crime is due to the physical arrangement of the exit unit. In some cases, where work stations or study desks are far from the stacks or shelving, compact shelves and limited space between the aisles provide ideal conditions for book theft.

Another societal variable that gives rise to crime in Nigerian academic libraries are social and academic pressures, stemming from both library and school bureaucracies. In this regard, (Boss,1984) stresses that "policies and procedures may cause anti-library attitudes which may produce an adverse effect where patrons rebel against perceived restrictions and steal books. Other factors, however, include the age, sex, choice (societal demand of such materials" etc. For instance, an investigative study on library crime shows that the perpetrators of this act are young, predominantly male, second-or third-year undergraduates and book theft is usually carried out during the afternoon or evening of semester periods with relevant and sought-after materials as prime targets (see also Sewdess *et al.,*1995 cf. Mansfield, 2009)

Dimensions of Library Crime

Library crime in Nigeria institutions of higher learning is on the increase, and manifest in various forms. Both theoretical and empirical scholarly reports have recently documented the dimension of library crime in Nigeria and beyond. Such reports include, but by no means, limited to the research work of (Akinfolarin,1992) (Hogan-Bassey, 2000), (Bello, 2001), (Ogunyade,2005) (Adewale and Oluwasanmi, 2007), and (Mansfield, 2009). Users of University libraries in Nigeria and other developing countries, according to (Adewale and Oluwasanmi,2007), employ various methods in stealing books, among which are: throwing book down through the library windows that have no barrier to hinder book passage through them, borrowing one book legally and using its date due slip to the library, and female students getting 'pregnant' with stolen books. (Ajayi and Omotayo,20$04) collated data on

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mutilation and theft of material materials. The study revealed that the most common method of library crime was the hiding of stolen items under clothing such as suits laboratory coat and free flowing or loose dresses.

Earlier studies also found the above assertion as the major means of theft in Nigerian academic libraries they investigated see (Obikoyo, 1994; Edem, 1998). Another method adopted by students and other library users in committing various kinds of crime in libraries is coming into the library at odd time and the eleventh hour, that is, during the closing time in a particular school library with the intent to steal. Some students, very often than not, capitalised on confusion resulting from rush around and last-minute rush to outwit library porters and unlawfully remove books belonging to the school. For instance, (Hogan-Bassey, 2008) reports that a student was caught attempting to taken away some library books at closing time in a particular University Library. The porter did not take kindly to his excuses, because he had more than four unborrowed library books which he attempted to steal at that peak period he was accosted. A report was immediately made and his identity card was impounded. The next day, a search party was dispatched to his hostel and a search for library books was made.

Furthermore, (Hogan-Bassey,2000) reveals that a large number of stolen books were found in the student's possession and he was arraigned before the University Disciplinary Committee which Hogan-Bassey happens to represent the University Librarian. Thus, he used the opportunity to ask the student how he managed to steal such large number of books. The student's confessional statement was descriptive but intriguing:

Any day I felt like taking away some library books,
I would wait till the final bell rings between 9:30−10:
00 PM. Then I would station my self in a queue that
usually build up at closing time. I would study situation,
particularly the person checking. At the appropriate
time, I would give the lead in harassing the "checker
that he should hurry up, he was wasting our time."
Unfortunately, other innocent students would take a
cue from me, also harassing and confusing the porter
doing the checking. Most of the time the porter doing the
checking will succumb to the harassment and would then

checks in a hurry. I will then succeed at such times to make
away with unborrowed books see (Hogan-Bassey, 2000)

 However, this shocking or patronising response of a student in the University duck may not be totally his fault. Library staff, in some cases, induces students into this crime. Conclusive evidence abounds to justify this claim. In a survey study reported by (Ajayi and Omotaya 2004), there is a significant relationship between stealing of library materials and the connivance of library staff. (Eden,1998), in a similar study, reported the involvement of library staff which she argued could be directly or indirectly involved. Here, direct participation entails actual connivance whereas negligence of duty represents indirect involvement. Another version of (Hogan-Bassey,2000) findings shows that library staff aids and abet crimes, and in some cases, commit the crimes themselves. Known forms of library crimes identified by this source include, among others, deliberately failing to lock library doors and windows properly, and leaving very subtle access ways and exist for the purpose of committing crimes outside library official hours.

Implications of Library Crimes

There is no doubt that Nigerian academic libraries are in the **throes** of crime. This has been an issue of major concern, as several researchers theorised that there exists a plethora of library crime with its wide-range consequences. Considerable number of them revealed in their study that all forms of library crime produce deleterious effects on student users, library staff, academic community and the society at large (see Gregson and Hockings,1995; Agbo, 2000; Ajayi and Omotayo, 2004; etc).

In the same line of argument, (Ogunyade 2005) points out that different types of crime witnessed in Nigerian academic libraries is costly and disruptive to the library and its users. Book theft and mutilation in particular are antisocial tendencies that adversely affect patrons in a number of ways. Consequently, students and other library users are prevented from exploiting library resources to their satisfaction since they can neither find these stolen books nor important part(s) of it. This present paper equally supports the findings of (Agbo, 2000) that book theft and mutilation have aversely affected the services of the library. These have led to a situation where considerable numbers of books have been withdrawn from the shelves, thus placing students who may not have the resources to purchase the needed books on the horns of dilemma and frustration. Imagine what happens when a student of low socioeconomic status comes to the library and discover that the book he or she is looking for has been stolen or mutilated.

Book theft, pilfering, mutilation or whatever name and dimension library crime has assumed, has negative effects on the academic performance and capabilities of student. The insightful analysis of (Ajayi and Omotayo's 2004) findings on the impact of book theft and mutilations (library crimes) attest to the fact that it really has a negative impact on the academic performance of students. The students they sampled in their study commented that theft has inflicted considerable toll on independent study, including sourcing for materials. The respondents further expressed their disgust for the selfish behaviour of their colleagues who steal or mutilation books.

Obviously, the phenomenon of crime in Nigerian academic libraries has, in one way or the other, affected the quality and quantity of books in these libraries. It is a depletion on the meager book votes (financial allocation) and, to a large extent, weakens and cast aspersions on the professional integrity of library staff who have often been accused of stealing or conniving with these 'academic criminals'. In this regard, (Libendinskaia,1970) succinctly contends that the state public historical library in Moscow budgets (as applicable to Nigerian environment) annually for the cost of repairing or restoring 15,000 pages of books misused and mutilated by readers.

According to (Igbo,2000), the above painted scenario is rather more pathetic in Nigeria; the school libraries cannot procure foreign exchange that would ease importation of books and journals, and the financial resources at its disposal are not even enough to buy books locally. This source also acknowledged that most mutilated or stolen books cannot be replaced easily

because most of them are foreign publications which are difficult to obtain locally, except where the library is fortunate to have those books among the ones donated by the International Agencies like the British Council and the United States Information Service.

The social implication of library crime in all indications is devastating, and has certainly affected every user of library materials. The social impact and dynamics, that is, the effects that crime have on the services and its users has gained wide currency in library studies, but has seemingly, if any, received little attention in sociology. For instance, (Burrows and Cooper, 1992), as recorded in (MeCree,2000), noted that library crime was a matter of "growing concern' for those responsible for library service provision. One can logically argue that it is high time, or perhaps, imperative to extend the problem of theft and mutilation of books and other material outside the purview of library science. This, among other aims, spurred the duo to come up with this present paper as a springboard for pushing back the frontiers of knowledge in the culture of library crime and criminals, as progressively demonstrated to support or strengthen the existing body of literature on library crime.

Conclusion

The spate of library crime in Nigerian academic libraries is alarming. It is on this premise that this paper explores the causes, dimensions and implications of this endemic social problem within the ambit of sociology for easy and broad level understanding of the phenomenon. From the literature so far reviewed, it is apparent that library crime manifests in various forms and has differing causative factors. The study identified paucity of relevant

and expensive materials as the cause of library crime. Other factors include: poverty, insecurity and complicity of library staff.

Library crime comes in different forms, such as throwing stolen books down through the window; hiding them in the clothes, particularly inside the suit and flowing garments; conniving with the library staff; and altering library slip and identification materials in order to steal books. All these crimes have deleterious effects on individual students, library staff, academic community and society in its entirety. Specifically, book theft, pilfering and mutilation have negative implications on the academic performance and capabilities of students as they cannot access these material as and when due.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing, the following recommendations, which are by no means exhaustive, are made:

1. The government alongside the school authorities should furnish libraries with sufficient volumes of expensive, knowledge-enhancing and sought-after materials for students to access at all time.

2. The wearing of free-flowing garments by both male and female patrons into the library should be discouraged.

3. Conscientious efforts should be made to decongest the library any time its users are of uncontrollable and unmanageable size.

4. Electronic security system like Close Circuit Television (CCTV) should be installed in academic libraries. CCTV is a specially designed crime detection gadget that

monitors the activities and movements of people within its scope. This will enable easy prediction, prevention and control of library crimes.

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