

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries

Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln

April 1981

Problem Patrons: The Other Kind of Library Security

J. Kirk Brashear
University of Dayton

James J. Maloney
University of Illinois, Chicago Circle

Judellen Thornton-Jaringe
University of Nebraska - Lincoln, jthornton-jaringe1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience>



Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Brashear, J. Kirk; Maloney, James J.; and Thornton-Jaringe, Judellen, "Problem Patrons: The Other Kind of Library Security" (1981). *Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries*. 147.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libraryscience/147>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Libraries at University of Nebraska-Lincoln at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications, UNL Libraries by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

problem patrons: the other kind of library security

*j. kirk brashear, james j. maloney, and judellen thorton-jaringe**

"We may joke about our past experiences among other librarians or try to 'top' one another with the worst incidents we have experienced, but at the time when it happens, it is no joke."

— Survey Respondent

The security of library collections and property has long been a matter of serious concern to librarians, and much has been written about the protection of library property from vandalism and theft. This is quite understandable given the pressure of decreasing budgets, rising costs, and the difficulty of obtaining replacement copies. Little serious attention, however, has been devoted to another kind of library security problem: the need to protect the rights and safety of people, both staff members and library users, against what are loosely referred to as "problem patrons."

Several articles have appeared in recent library literature concerning the problem patron. However, the approach of these articles has largely been anecdotal, and of little scientific value to the library profession. Because we believed that systematic research into the topic of problem patrons was necessary before a worthwhile discussion of the issues could take place, we decided to undertake this survey. Although it is not intended to be definitive, we believe that the survey is a good start.

Survey Design

The survey was conducted through questionnaires mailed to selected public and academic libraries in

Illinois. We intended to discover:

- (a) how widespread problem patron activity was by quantifying its frequency and severity;
- (b) who among the library staff was responsible for handling problem patron behavior;
- (c) information on the type of guidance and other aids available to the librarians responsible for coping with problem patrons;
- (d) to ask librarians what, if anything, needs to be done within the profession about the problem patron.

Although we initially believed that problem patrons were found primarily among public libraries in large urban areas, we decided to test this assumption by sampling libraries serving small and medium-sized communities, and academic libraries. We regarded Illinois as a good testing ground since it embraced a wide range of public libraries, from the Chicago Public Library to the numerous, small rural libraries, as well as a full complement of academic libraries. The sample was divided by size and type of population served into five categories:

CPL — The Chicago Public Library: the branches of the Chicago Public Library (from which we received 68 responses);

Public III — Large Public Libraries (outside of Chicago): those libraries serving communities of more than 50,000 inhabitants (16 responses);

Public II — Medium-sized Public Libraries: those libraries serving communities with a population of between 50,000 and 5,001 people (38 responses);

Public I — Small Public Libraries: those libraries serv-

*J. Kirk Brashear, is with the Research Institute of the University of Dayton, Dayton, Ohio; James J. Maloney, Reference Department, The Library, University of Illinois at Chicago Circle, Chicago, Illinois; and Judellen Thorton-Jaringe, Catalog Department, Love Library, University of Nebraska-Lincoln, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The authors wish to acknowledge the assistance of the University of Illinois Survey Research Lab at both the Urbana and Chicago Circle campuses, as well as the financial support of the Graduate School of Library Science, University of Illinois, Urbana.

ing communities with fewer than 5,000 people. (24 responses);

Academic — Academic libraries: university, college, or junior college libraries. (36 responses).

A disproportional stratified sample of the Illinois public library population was taken, based on the premise that the incidence and severity of this behavior would be proportional to the size of the community served. A census was taken of the branch libraries and divisions of the Chicago Public Library, and of the large public libraries outside of Chicago. Every fifth public library serving a population of fewer than 50,000, and greater than 5,000, was selected systematically from the order in which the library appeared in the "Illinois Public Library Statistics," published annually by the Illinois State Library in its *Illinois Libraries*. Every tenth public library serving a community of fewer than 5,000 was chosen in the same systematic fashion.

A systematic sample of college and university libraries was drawn from Table 1 of the *Library Statistics of Colleges and Universities: Institutional Data*, published in the fall of 1975 by the National Center for Education Statistics, Department of HEW. Libraries that served institutions of a very specialized nature, such as the Aero-Space Institute, the American Academy of Art, or the Illinois College of Podiatric Medicine, or libraries that served institutions with a marked religious orientation, such as the Bethany Theological Seminary (but not Loyola University or Rockford College), were excluded from the sample population. We believed that problem patrons were prevalent among institutions open to and serving the general public, and that such specialized libraries were either not of interest to, or accessible to, the general public.

Since the term "problem patron" covers such a wide range of behavior, including vandalism, failure to return library materials, discipline problems with children or young adults, and other types beyond the scope of our project, it was necessary to categorize and define the various levels of problem behavior. Three types of problem patron behavior were set up; each type represented a distinct level or degree of disturbance or threat to the comfort or physical well-being of others.

Type One (Relatively Harmless Nuisances): persons who do not pose an overt threat or cause disruption, but who may generally be regarded as offensive by the staff or other patrons, such as quiet drunks, persons who sit and stare for hours, or persons who are offensively dirty and foul-smelling. A number of objections were raised over the inclusion of this category, both during the pre-survey testing phase and by a number of survey respondents. These objections and the

issues they raised will be discussed later.

Type Two (Disruptive or Threatening): those who disrupt other patrons or staff members, or who pose a threat without actually attempting to commit an act of violence, such as exhibitionists, loud drunks, uncontrollably irate patrons, people who walk around glaring and muttering at other library users, etc.

Type Three (Violent): persons who commit or attempt to commit an act of violence against a staff member or other patron, such as by assault, rape, or child molestation.

A library which had encountered any of these types of behavior was instructed to record estimates or statistics of the number of times they have encountered them over definite periods of time consisting of the last year. An additional category for the last five years was supplied for the violent patron type because of the presumed scarcity of this behavior in libraries.

All of the academic libraries in the state, and all of the public libraries, with the exception of the Chicago Public Library, were surveyed during the fall of 1978. The portion of the survey that involved the Chicago Public Library was conducted with the cooperation of Peggy Sullivan, and was not completed until winter 1979.

Survey Results — Incidents

Of the 228 surveys distributed, 182 were completed, resulting in a return rate of nearly 80 percent. The problem patron had appeared — in all varieties — among a wide distribution of the survey population. One or more types of the problem patron were reported among 72 percent of all respondents. Problem patrons were observed in over 90 percent of the large public libraries (including the Chicago Public), three quarters of the medium-sized public, over half of the academic, and over one quarter of the small public libraries.

Public I Libraries

Although many of the small-town public library respondents wrote that they were in communities too small to be bothered with such problems, a surprising 29 percent indicated that they had experienced Relatively Harmless Nuisances (Type One). While most of these problems were infrequent, ranging from one to six per year, two of these libraries indicated an estimated weekly incident. None of the small libraries, however, reported more serious incidents.

Public II Libraries

Seventy-four percent of the medium public libraries had experienced one or more problem patron types. The most widespread and frequent of these types was the Relatively Harmless Nuisance, which was reported among 63 percent of the medium public libraries. Of that 63 percent, 17 percent indicated weekly incidents and three libraries averaged one or more occurrences each day. The highest rate was an estimated 680 cases per year. Another 21 percent had at least one per month, while the remaining 49 percent had only occasional problems of fewer than one per month.

Although their frequency was lower, Disruptive or Threatening Patrons were reported among almost as many public libraries (i.e., 55 percent) as the Relatively Harmless Nuisance. Of that 55 percent, only two libraries (10 percent) had weekly problems. Another 10 percent averaged one or more per month, while 80 percent had only occasional problems.

Relatively few librarians (16 percent) reported incidents with violent patrons. Only one of these incidents had occurred within the preceding three months. Two other libraries had one or more cases within the last year, and the remaining libraries reported from one to three within the last five years. Eight percent of the libraries reported mail or telephone threats within the last five years.

Public III Libraries

Among large public libraries, all but one (or 94 percent) had some type of problem patron. All of the 94 percent reported Relatively Harmless Nuisances, ranging from a low of one case during the last three months, to an estimated 18 cases per week. One respondent simply wrote "countless." Of those reporting a problem, 40 percent had one or more incidents daily, and another 13 percent had one or more incidents per week. An additional 27 percent had at least one problem per month (not including the regular sitter for one of these libraries), and the remaining 20 percent had only occasional problems.

All of the large public libraries reporting Relatively Harmless Nuisances also reported Disruptive or Threatening Patrons. However, as with medium public libraries, the frequency of these cases was far lower. Of the 94 percent reporting Disruptive or Threatening Patrons, one library had one or more cases daily, 20 percent had one to five incidents per week, and 13 percent had one to two cases per month. Sixty percent averaged less than one case per month.

Violent Patrons were reported among 38 percent of the large public libraries. However, the highest rate

was reported by one library with three cases in the last year. None of the reported incidents had occurred in the last two weeks, and only 13 percent had occurred in the last three months. Two-thirds of the libraries had one incident each during the preceding five years. Forty-four percent of all large public libraries had received mail or telephone threats over the preceding five-year period.

Chicago Public Libraries

Ninety-one percent of the Chicago Public Library Branches and Divisions had reported some type of problem patron. Relatively Harmless Nuisances were reported among 87 percent of the CPL Libraries. Of that 87 percent, 25 percent had daily problems, and five branches reported particularly severe problems with 90, 36, 30, 25, and 18 weekly cases, respectively. Another 27 percent of these libraries reported one or more weekly cases, 21 percent reported one or more per month, while 20 percent had only occasional problems.

Disruptive or Threatening Patrons appeared at 71 percent of the CPL Libraries; the frequency with which they appeared was, again, far less than that of the Type I Patron. One-quarter of the libraries that reported problems had one or more cases per week. Five branches or divisions reported from 11 to 15 cases during the preceding two weeks, and from 125 to 300 incidents during the last year. Another branch reported 30 incidents during the last two weeks, and an estimated 450 cases during the last year. One or more occurrences of Type 2 behavior during the month was reported by 27 percent of the libraries, while the remaining 47 percent suffered only occasional problems.

Violent Patrons were found among 28 percent of the libraries. This is less widespread than what the large public libraries had experienced, but the frequency was greater. Of that 28 percent, none reported incidents within the two preceding weeks, and only 27 percent had incidents within the last three months. The remaining 73 percent reported incidents during the last year, of which two branches experienced 10 and 14 cases each. Mail or telephone threats were infrequent; only 22 percent reported any of these threats in the last five years, which was far less than the figure reported for all of the large public libraries.

Academic Libraries

Academic libraries had experienced less problem patron behavior than the medium-sized public libraries. One or more types of problem patron behavior had been reported by 53 percent of the academic libraries.

Of that 53 percent, Relatively Harmless Nuisances were found among 44 percent of the libraries; one library had daily incidents, one reported weekly cases, one monthly cases, while the remainder gave estimates of incidents ranging from one to twelve times per year.

Of the 44 percent of the academic libraries that had experienced Disruptive or Threatening Patron behavior, only 6 percent had experienced anything as frequent as monthly incidents.

Three libraries (8 percent) had each reported one incident of Violent Patron behavior. One of these had involved a stolen purse which resulted in a violent confrontation with the university police. Occasional mail or telephone threats were reported by 19 percent of the academic libraries, and were thus more widespread than among the medium-sized public libraries.

Overall Frequency and Seriousness

As anticipated, there was an apparent relationship

between the size of the community served by a given library and the frequency and seriousness of its problem patron behavior. Problem patron behavior was found to be most frequent, as the tables below reveal, among public libraries serving large, urban communities, i.e., the Public III libraries and the Chicago Public Libraries. While the Chicago Public Library had the greatest number of Type I incidents for all temporal categories, there was a steady decline in the number of Type I incidents reported for all temporal categories from Public III, to Public II, to Public I.

Violent patrons, and patrons exhibiting disruptive or threatening behavior, were most commonly found among the Chicago Public Libraries and among the other large public libraries throughout the state. Conversely, small public libraries had no incidents of Type 2 or 3 behavior to report, and few academic libraries and medium-sized public libraries reported incidents of Type 2 or 3 behavior.

Table I

The mean number of Type 1 incidents reported for two weeks, three months, and one year by category of library.

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Category of Library</i>					
	All Libraries	Academic	Public I	Public II	Public III	CPL
2 weeks	57.9	0.6	.29	1.86	11.07	44.62
3 months	169.93	.24	1.67	7.6	16.03	144.12
1 year	618.27	2.02	6.79	31.26	80.46	497.74
Number of Libraries		34	24	35	16	62

The mean number of Type 2 incidents reported for two weeks, three months, and one year by category of library.

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Category of Library</i>					
	All Libraries	Academic	Public I	Public II	Public III	CPL
2 weeks	4.35	0	0	.16	2.13	2.06
3 months	15.03	.17	0	.66	5.75	8.45
1 year	58.58	1.05	0	3.18	23.25	31.1
Number of Libraries		35	24	33	16	64

The mean number of Type 3 incidents reported for two weeks, three months, and one year by category of library.

<i>Time Period</i>	<i>Category of Library</i>					
	All Libraries	Academic	Public I	Public II	Public III	CPL
2 weeks	0	0	0	0	0	0
3 months34	.03	0	.03	.13	.15
1 year83	.03	0	.03	.19	.58
5 years	2.17	.03	0	.18	.38	1.58
Number of Libraries		36	24	38	16	66

A surprising result, and one which may require further analysis and study in order to correctly interpret, was the minimal incidence of all types of problem patron behavior among academic libraries. This result is difficult to explain, at first sight, because the actual user populations of many academic libraries may rival those of large public libraries in Illinois.

The results show that Type 1 problem patrons (relatively harmless nuisances) were the most widespread and frequent types of all types of problem patron behavior. Table 1 shows that the number of Type 1 incidents for all libraries was over ten times greater, in all temporal categories, than the number of Type 2 incidents reported for all libraries. The incidence of Type 3 (i.e., violent) patrons was miniscule, even in comparison with the incidence of Type 2 behavior.

The results of the survey concerning the number of bomb, arson, or similar threats encountered by a library revealed that at least 60 percent of the large public libraries (Public III) reported at least one incident over the last five years, while only 20 percent of the Chicago Public Libraries and 17 percent of the academic libraries reported incidents over the same five-year period.

Significance of the Survey Results

Based on the results of this survey, is it possible to conclude that problem patron behavior poses a significant threat to the security of libraries? By definition, problem patrons pose exceptional problems to the library staff in their ability to handle patrons. The degree of special handling that must be exercised is contingent upon how extraordinary the problem may be.

It is apparent from the results of this survey that all public librarians, and to a lesser extent — academic librarians, need the ability and training to handle, at least, the relatively harmless nuisance. The need for guidance and training in the handling of the violent as well as the disruptive or threatening patron, is especially apparent among the Chicago Public Libraries and other large public libraries throughout the state. This need is also apparent, but to a lesser degree, among the academic and medium-sized public libraries in the state.

In discussing the incidence of violent, and disruptive or threatening patron behavior, it was mentioned that the reported incidence of these problem patron types wasn't nearly as common as that of the harmless nuisance. It should not be concluded from the more modest appearance of the Type 2 patrons, and the relatively infrequent occurrence of Type 3 behavior, that these patron types do not pose a serious threat to

library security. The seriousness of these problem patron types must be seen, not in their frequency, but rather in the nature of their behavior. The actions of the violent patron, including assault, child molestation, or rape, and even the less serious actions of the disruptive or threatening patron, need only occur (or have the potential to occur) once or twice to make them a problem to be reckoned with.

Who Handles the Problem Patrons?*

The question naturally arises as to who has the responsibility for dealing with problem patrons? In order to determine where the responsibility for handling the problem patron behavior lie, six categories of library personnel were established, including:

- the person in charge of the department or area involved;
- any professional staff member in the department or area at the time;
- any staff member, professional or nonprofessional, in the department or area involved;
- one or more staff members specifically designated to make such decisions;
- library-employed security guards;
- other library personnel, to be supplied by the respondent.

These categories of personnel were listed under each type of problem behavior, with instructions for the respondent to check category (ies) responsible for handling that particular type of problem patron.

The results of the survey, as shown in the table below, indicate that the professional staff bore the greatest responsibility in this regard. Of the professional staff, the preference for "the person in charge of the department or area involved" was consistently strong for all types of behavior, and was significantly greater than for the use of simply "any professional staff member."¹

As problem patron behavior became more severe, there was a significant increase in the reliance upon librarians with administrative supervision, and those such as library-employed security guards who were

*The portion of the survey concerning the handling of problem patrons was completed by Mr. Brashear and Mr. Maloney.

1. The "person in charge of the department or area" among public and academic libraries is, with rare exception, a professional staff member." These categories — i.e., "the person in charge" and "any professional staff member" — were not intended to be needlessly duplicative. They were intended to sharply define "professional librarians" in order to account for instances in which those exercising administrative responsibility in a given department or area in the library would be given the task of handling this behavior over another professional in the department or area.

Table II

Responsibility for handling problem patron behavior, expressed in percentage of the total response of all libraries.

<i>Types of Problem Patron Behavior</i>	A	B	C	D	E	F
1	29	18	30	2	18	3
2	33	18	17.5	2.5	23	6
3	32	14	16	4	27	7

A=Person in charge of the department or area involved.

B=Any professional staff member in the department or area at the time.

C=Any staff members, professional or nonprofessional, in the department or area involved.

D=One or more staff members specifically designated to make such decisions.

E=Library-employed security guards.

F=Other.

specifically delegated the task of handling problem patrons. The selection of "any staff, professional or nonprofessional" for the handling of Type 1 behavior, for example, was slightly greater than for the selection of the administrative category, "the person in charge of the department or area." However, the tables show that reliance upon "any staff, professional or nonprofessional," was dramatically reduced by almost half for Type 2 and 3 behavior. Similarly, the use of "any professional" declined for the handling of Type 3 behavior.

The remaining choices in the handling of problem patron behavior were of secondary importance. Staff members specifically designated to handle problem patrons were rare among all categories of libraries and in all cases of problem behavior. Although library security guards represented a significant agent in the control of problem patron behavior, and the guards were increasingly relied upon as this behavior became more dangerous, comments of the respondents indicated that the guards generally acted in conjunction with the guidelines set down by professionals.

Policies and Procedures

In the final portion of the survey, we sought to establish what measures were already in use among libraries for the handling of problem patron behavior. Respondents were asked to check whether they had:

a written policy;

unwritten but agreed upon procedures, known to the staff;

workshops, formal discussions, or other methods to inform staff members of the issues and procedures for dealing with such patrons;

no established procedures or programs.

Response to this question indicated that librarians are in a professional void in their handling of the problem patron. It is apparent from Table 3 that procedures for handling the problem patron were either loosely defined or nonexistent. "Unwritten but agreed upon procedures" represented the most predominant method by which libraries confronted this behavior, followed closely by the admission that "no established procedures or programs" were in effect.

Table III

Methods for dealing with problem patrons by category of library, expressed in percentage of total response for each category.

<i>Methods</i>	All Libraries	Academic	Public I	Public II	Public III	CPL
Written policy	12	9	0	5	21	23
Unwritten but agreed upon procedures	35	43	25	54	21	33
Workshops, discussions, etc. . .	14	3	0	5	34	27
No established procedures . . .	33	34	69	31	24	9
Other	6	11	6	5	0	8
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100

The largest concentration of libraries which have taken more definite measures to control problem patron behavior was found in categories of libraries which have experienced the highest incidence of this behavior. The highest response indicating the use of written policies for dealing with problem patrons was encountered among the large public libraries and the Chicago Public Library. Both of these categories of libraries additionally showed the most response for having had "workshops, formal discussions, etc.," on the handling of problem patrons, and they exhibited the lowest responses for having "no established procedures or programs" on the subject. In contrast, slightly over two-thirds of the response of small public libraries, and roughly one-third of the response among academic and medium-sized public libraries indicated that no established procedures were in force for controlling problem patron behavior.

The written policies which we had received varied radically in quality and coverage. Some were simply one or two paragraphs in a janitor's or part-time security guard's official job description. These were not likely to be well-known to the regular staff members. Some of the other written policies dealt only with bomb threats, the least common of the problem types. The "policy" of one medium-sized public library consisted of the single phrase, "If the situation is grave, call Police to handle it."

However, we did receive a few outstanding written policies. One academic library had delineated emergency instructions in ready-reference tabular form, including telephone numbers and who had initial and backup responsibilities for notifying which authorities. This was broken down into different types of emergencies, ranging from exhibitionists and similar misdemeanors, to bomb threats, tornados, fires, power failures, and severe storm warnings. It also counseled how to handle the immediate situation ("remain calm," etc.) and included guidelines on what to announce over the intercom, if the building had to be evacuated. Unfortunately, the section on problem patrons was the least developed; it offered no help in evaluating the seriousness of the disruption. No guidelines for the staff's responsibilities towards other patrons during a disturbance, nor any help on how to cope until the summoned authorities arrive.

In fact, what to do until the cavalry arrives was probably the most repeated and glaring omission that we found. One library indicated that the library board established procedures for each individual case as it occurred. What their hapless staff did with a knife-

brandishing patron until the board convened was not at all clear. Another respondent, from a library with recurring problems, noted "If we did not learn to cope ourselves, the library would be in a constant uproar, because it may be an hour or more before the police get here." Clearly, reliance on remote police or security forces is not an adequate policy. To think that it is, is to ignore the often accute psychological and physical stresses, and even physical danger, that the front-line staff must endure until help arrives.

The Chicago Public Library frequently has uniformed guards assigned part-time to libraries with more severe problems. Their Guard and Emergency Manuals, issued by the Office of Security and Safety, were by far the most comprehensive and detailed written policies we received. As pointed out by one of the branch heads, "A 40 page Emergency Manual: The Chicago Public Library Guard Manual and Emergency Manual (Rev. ed.) was published in 1978 by C. Patrick Scanlon, Director, Library Security and Safety." Supplemented by memos, these manuals define the responsibilities of the staff, outline the guards' basic principles of conduct, and provide fairly detailed procedures for a variety of specific types of problem situations, such as what to do if a patron refused to allow his bags to be searched before leaving the building, drug and psychiatric problems, and attempts to take over the building.

Again, though, these procedures are primarily dependent upon part-time guards, who may not be available when needed, and for some branches are nonexistent. Another drawback we found again and again, was that the front-line staff are not aware of policies, even when written. Of all the Chicago branch respondents, only 37 percent were aware that there was a written policy. One branch returned our survey along with two additional copies, each filled out by a different department; one said there were no policies, procedures or programs, another said there was a policy, while the third mentioned the Guard Manual.

Survey Results — What Needs to be Done?

Lastly, we solicited opinions on what, if anything, needed to be done within the profession about problem patrons. We asked, are problem patrons a sufficiently serious concern to warrant: further research, the development of professional guidelines, the development of staff training programs, inclusion in library school of material on how to handle problem patrons, or other ("please specify")?

Table IV

Measures warranted by problem patron behavior, expressed as a percentage of the total response of each category of library.

<i>Measures warranted</i>	All Libraries	Academic	Public I	Public II	Public III	CPL
Further research into topic	19	29	9	17	21	19
Development of professional guidelines	28.2	27	36	28	21	29
Staff training programs	21.6	20	0	25	34	29
Library school courses on topic	29.6	24	55	25	24	20
Other	1.6	0	0	5	0	3
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100

Librarians expressed a preference for immediate and direct methods in the handling of problem patrons. The most popular measure sought was "the development of professional guidelines" for the handling of this behavior. This was closely followed in popularity by educational measures such as "staff training programs" as well as "library school courses on the topic" of problem patron behavior. Although librarians appreciated the need for "further research on the topic" of problem patron behavior, it received less attention than the more immediate and direct measures discussed above. This predilection toward such tangible and immediate measures as professional guidelines and training programs for dealing with problem patron behavior is understandable, albeit curious. Professional guidelines and educational measures, if they are to be worthwhile, might require a great deal more substantive research and explication on the topic than is presently available.

A number of participants, particularly those without problems, skipped this section. Many of them said they had insufficient experience to form an opinion, and no doubt some of them felt that nothing needed to be done. Only two people were explicitly and adamantly opposed to any measures. One remarked that "Our librarians are full faculty (including research, publication, and service) and security is not part of a faculty function. Poor public relations would develop if 'librarians' tried to play security roles." The other was afraid that by training librarians in how to deal with problem patrons, they would be encouraged to do so, leading to possible lawsuits.

Indeed, "malpractice" lawsuits were mentioned several times, but more often as a reason in favor of proper guidelines and training. Librarians and staff are already de facto handling problems, either with or without help. Better that they handle the problem in a safe and professional way, rather than botch the job

and endanger themselves and others.

But it is not just legal questions which must be faced. One of the most sensitive issues raised was the concept of the problem patron itself. Thieves and rapists are clearly seen to have no right to engage in criminal activity in libraries. But there is no such clear-cut consensus as to where we should draw the line between tolerable eccentricity and the kind of abnormal behavior which justifies, or even necessitates, some kind of action. "Who are we," one person asked, "to judge what standards of cleanliness a person should observe?" On the other hand, how much should we ask other patrons to put up with? How many normal users are we willing to have driven away by "relatively harmless nuisances," and how much of their support?

One respondent expressed what is probably a rule of thumb in most libraries: "The right of any person to use the public library does not include a value judgement concerning appearance, actions, etc., until apparent or actual harm may come to themselves or others." Nevertheless, what might be viewed as normal or harmless, and apparent or actual harm, will change drastically within the context of a given library and their own experience. Some of our respondents mentioned almost casually that they usually just ask their "regular flashers" to leave the building. Other librarians clearly felt threatened by such sexual harassment and were indignant if police, when called, did not take the matter seriously.

Much of the "problem" of problem patron behavior lies in the ability, or lack thereof, of the librarian and staff to recognize and deal with these patrons. While our survey is by no means conclusive, it has shown that the problem is widespread and widely felt. As a minimum, we feel that professional guidelines and assistance are required. These guidelines should clearly define the issues, and spell out the options that an individual library has in the formation of its own

policies.

The large public libraries in Illinois, and no doubt in other states as well, have the worst problem. They are also in the vanguard in developing definite approaches to the handling of problem patrons. A coalition of them, soliciting help from legal, law enforcement, and psychiatric sources, as well as from mayors' offices, community boards, museums, or other institutions facing similar problems, should sit down and hammer out an initial consensus and guidelines. Perhaps then the American Library Association would want to take up

the matter.

What is important is that something be done. Several times during the course of the survey, we heard remarks that the library administration, secure in the rear area, did not wish to admit to and face the problem. Where present, a head-in-the-sand attitude denotes an ignorance or callousness that cannot be tolerated. Librarians face very real stresses, very real fears, and often times very real dangers. And, as one person told us, "just because a library hasn't had trouble, doesn't mean it shouldn't be prepared for it."