



LIBRARY VANDALISM: CAUSES AND PREVENTION

Suneel Kumar Bhat

Vandalism is a menace that affects all types of libraries, especially academic libraries. Academic libraries are an integral part of an institution of higher learning. Librarians are considered curators of a library collection and they need to be aware of the ills of vandalism. They should adequately be prepared to deal with this menace. This paper examines the problems of vandalism being faced by the librarians. Various types of vandalism that occur in the libraries have been reported in this paper. The researcher has also highlighted the costs associated with vandalism along with vandalism prevention strategies.

KEYWORDS: Library Vandalism, Prevention Strategies

INTRODUCTION

Vandalism includes different types of damage to library property (Cooper & Carolyn, 1997). Vandalism described by Bessette (1996) refers to willful or malicious destruction or defacement of any public or private property without the consent of the owner or persons having control. In English Law criminal damage Act 1971, under chapter 48, vandalism is defined as intentionally or recklessly destroying or damaging any property belonging to another without lawful excuse. Hedge (1979) defines vandalism as one of the most visible forms of delinquent behaviour.

Vandalism is considered as an intentional loss. Vandalism of books has been studied by a number of library professionals. Librarians consider book vandalism and mutilation a threat to intellectual property and have seen it as a tremendous challenge to the library profession worldwide. Handwriting or marks in and tearing or removal of pages from books can all be forms of vandalism or mutilation (Philip, 2013). Arson is another form of library book

Suneel Kumar Bhat ✉

Sr. Librarian, MIER College of Education (Autonomous), Jammu, India.

Email: suneel.bhat@miercollege.in



This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

vandalism. The hiding of books within libraries is sometimes considered to be a form of material vandalism. A study conducted by Jodi (2009) in Memphis University Libraries revealed that perpetrators of library book vandalism were a diverse group including the general public, students, researchers, academics, and library staff themselves. Mutilation of books at university libraries in Ghana was reported to have been significantly carried out (90%) by students.

Lack of staff training and support for maintaining books is often tied to high rates of book vandalism. Metro Toronto Library staff felt that their experience in losing over 200 reference books in year 1975 to book vandalism was due to the library being understaffed (Sager, 1975). The Memphis study mentioned above also found that staff could be part of the problem by being innocent, ignorant or complacent. In addition, the same study found that students using the library felt that security in the library was seen as poor and that students did not know the cost of materials damaged and felt that punishment for being caught would be lenient (Hendrick & Murfin, 1974)

THE PROBLEM OF VANDALISM FACED BY LIBRARIANS

Vandalism poses all sorts of threats to materials, equipment or buildings that in some cases may be irreplaceable. In Pedersen's survey, fifty-five percent of the university students surveyed indicated that torn-out material from books had inconvenienced them for reading. The other problems faced by librarians are:

- Eating or drinking inside the library by users
- Playing audio equipment loudly.
- Bringing pet animals into the library.
- Bringing a child in the library
- Talking loudly, making noise, or engaging in other disruptive activities.

TYPES OF VANDALISM

A number of authors have recognized certain categories of vandalism, many of which are common in all types of libraries. These are:

- **Acquisitive Vandalism:** This involves acts done to obtain property or money (Goldstein, 1996). An example of acquisitive vandalism that may occur in libraries includes damage to parking meters, public telephones, vending machines, and photocopiers.

- **Tactical Vandalism:** It includes acts done to accomplish goals other than monetary gains, such as graffiti or the defacement of material by a student to

prevent the use of that material by fellow students.

- **Ideological Vandalism:** It includes acts which are done in promotion of a social, political, or other cause (Goldstein, 1996), such as the placement of Ku Klux Klan (KKK) stickers within materials in a public library. Often ideological vandalism will be identifiable by the materials targeted (Cornog & Perper, 1992).

- **Vindictive Vandalism:** It involves acts to gain revenge (Goldstein, 1996),

- **Play Vandalism:** It includes acts of destruction or disfigurement in the course of play (Goldstein, 1996), such as a group of teenagers who decide to play target practice with library windows.

- **Malicious Vandalism:** These acts express rage or frustration (Goldstein, 1996). For e.g., a library might encounter include the clogging of toilets or sinks, setting off fire alarms or sprinkler systems, or urinating in public places (Lincoln, 1989). While the above categories have not been extensively tested so as to verify their comprehensiveness and reliability (Goldstein, 1996), they may be useful in designing appropriate prevention practices.

Explanations for vandalism in libraries, and in particular the mutilation of materials, are diverse. Cornog and Perper (1992), who have extensively examined the treatment of sex materials in libraries, suggest that convenience and privacy enter into the decision to mutilate materials. Likewise, (Susanna & Matheson, 2000) interviews with public librarians found that they believed one factor influencing vandalism of materials was embarrassment at signing out the materials, which they submit re-emphasizes the importance of librarians remaining non-judgmental. Prasad submits that idleness and selfishness are the primary motivations for mutilation: A sluggard is a problem for librarians. He is habitually lazy and inactive. He wants all the documents of interest to him to be at his service. He never takes pain to take notes and is always looking for a chance to take out the document or tear out the pages of his interest from the document.

FREQUENTLY TARGETED MATERIAL

Frequently targeted material is not the same in all libraries; it somehow varies from libraries to libraries depending upon the needs of the different types of users. It has been observed that religious materials, controversial materials, and sexual materials are also prone to be vandalized. For example, in four Indian university libraries, works written about Jehovah's Witnesses had their pages slashed and torn and were dumped into the garbage. Smith and Olszak (2011), do not believe that complete elimination of materials mutilation is possible. However, they suggest that understanding the types of materials

that are most frequently mutilated is the first step in reducing the problem. Another common complaint from the librarians was patrons who filled out the crossword puzzles of the daily newspapers carried by their libraries.

THE COSTS OF VANDALISM

There are both social and monetary costs associated with vandalism in libraries (Goldstein, 1996). There is little statistical information about the costs incurred by libraries in addressing vandalism. Librarians generally believed that it was not worthwhile to keep statistics relating to this area and were unable to estimate the costs associated with vandalism in their libraries (Susanna & Matheson, 2000).

Some monetary costs of vandalism are obvious such as the cost of replacement and repairs. Other costs, however, may not be immediately apparent to library users, such as the increased clerical time spent ordering materials or repairs or tracking suppliers, transportation costs involved in shipping materials in need of repair or new materials being ordered, the differential between the replacement of an item compared to the original price, the custodial labour spent cleaning up debris, security investigations, and prosecutions (Goldstein, 1996). There are also social costs incurred as a consequence of vandalism such as the stress of the act itself and the added work it can entail, feelings of insecurity by both the library staff and its users (Goldstein, 1996), and the reputation of the library either following from the feelings of insecurity or as an easy target for further acts of vandalism.

CAUSES OF LIBRARY VANDALISM

As per the views of (Afolabi, 1993) the causes of library vandalism can be seen in the following two broad heads:

- Human agents and
- Natural agents or phenomena.

Vandalism causes by human agents relate to complete or partial loss of the library materials and this loss can be either permanent or temporary, making the materials unusable by other patrons of the library. This type of vandalism includes theft, mutilation, and non-return of borrowed materials. The offenders of this type of crime are the patrons for whom the materials are collected to serve.

Vandalism caused by natural agents like water, humidity, fire, and many others are more dangerous than human agents.

There are few other damages done to library materials include shelving arrangement of books or jamming them tightly on the stacks, bending books backward, or pressing their backs for the purpose of photocopying.

Other factors which become a basic cause of Library vandalism are discussed below:

- **Economic Factors**

The rising cost of learning materials and financial constraints also encourage library vandalism.

- **Sociological Factors**

Selfishness is another factor for library vandalism. [Hart \(2003\)](#) examined that scarcity of library resources and increased library users at Sokoine National Agricultural Library (SNAL) and University of Dar Es Salaam (UDSM) library has boosted anti-social behaviour. Sixty-three percent of the respondents surveyed attributed mutilations to the selfishness of the library users.

- **Psychological Factors**

The lethargic nature of the library users moves towards library mutilation and theft. The young person does not have career goals defined but is faced with the need to make decisions in the near future. The frustration which this young person faces in attempting to adjust to society is easy to vent on an institution which is the apotheosis of that society.

- **Administrative Factors**

The library users are not aware of the existing library rules and regulations. Library rules and regulations, especially those related to the destruction of library materials should be posted in the entrance and notice boards where they can be easily seen. The reason for vandalism in academic libraries is 'problem patron' and 'problem personnel'. Users or patrons of the library being the focal point upon which the use of the library is gauged, they are welcomed, encouraged and therefore provision for free access, which in turn is a major cause of mutilation and misplacement of books in libraries.

- **Security Factor**

Weak security and lack of serious supervision is a major reason of library vandalism. Most libraries contain valuable and easily solid items, including books,

audio-visual equipment and materials, cash, artwork, antiques, and so on. Librarians recommended that libraries should install electronic devices such as surveillance video cameras to ensure security.

• Reprographic Service Factors

Poor reprographic facility and the high cost of photocopying are responsible factors for library mutilation. Another problem is that; most students do not spend their book allowances to buy books.

• Library Architectural Factors

Various entrance and exit points in the library during design lead to theft and vandalism. The high loss factor of library materials is due to the physical arrangement of the library building where control of the exit is difficult

• Open Access System

The open-access system is a root cause of systematic book theft, mutilation, and misplacement of library material. (Jayaram, 1988) in his study on the needs and attitudes of student library users discovered that in some instances the extended hours coupled with the ease of access also make the library a particularly attractive setting for potential offenders.

• Other Factors

Libraries are particularly prone to vandalism for a number of reasons. Libraries are heavily used by young persons, and it is generally conceded that youth are the largest single category of vandals by a large margin (Sager, 1975).

VANDALISM PREVENTION AND ACTION STRATEGIES

Technology plays a vital role in vandalism preservation. Libraries adapt various types of charging systems like some libraries have computerized (Radio-frequency identification & Smart Card Technology) their charging system to make their operations faster (Ogbonyomi, 2011). Goldstein (1996) suggests a number of anti-vandalism strategies that address both the environment, that being the library, and the person, or the potential vandal.

- Target Hardening: It includes the use of devices or materials designed to obstruct vandals by physical barriers. Examples would include fire and break-resistant books returns (Lincoln, 1989), toughened glass, window-screens, and

tamper-proof hardware for signs (Goldstein, 1996).

- **Access Control:** It is a strategy that uses architectural features and mechanical or electronic devices to keep control over entry to the library, such as key control systems, locked doors, and where appropriate, student identification (Goldstein, 1996). Similarly, exist-entry screening seeks to increase the detection of people who are not in conformity with entry requirements or to detect objects that should not be removed, through the use of devices such as closed-circuit televisions, metal detectors, motion detectors, and library book tags (Goldstein, 1996).

- **Deflecting Offenders:** It refers to intentional efforts to channel the vandal's potentially destructive behaviour into more positive directions by physically altering the environment, for example, through the use of graffiti boards, mural programs, the layout of pathway circulation, and interesting wallpaper or even chalkboard on bathroom walls (Goldstein, 1996).

- **Controlling Facilitators:** It is another way to curb vandals' behaviour through altering the environment, but by making the means of their behaviour less accessible, less available, or less potentially injurious, such as placing signs, thermostats, fire alarms, and light switches far from reach or in secluded areas (Goldstein, 1996). Thought needs to be given, however, to the unintended consequence of making it easier for vandals to escape once they find those items.

- **Surveillance** should be part of any library's vandalism prevention approach. (Goldstein, 1996) recommends two types of surveillance. The first is traditional formal surveillance by police, security guards, citizen groups, or paid or voluntary security personnel. The second type of surveillance is that which naturally occurs by employees such as librarians and custodians while completing their daily activities. The third one is technological surveillance.

- (Goldstein, 1996) describes rule-setting as making express statements of both acceptable and unacceptable behaviour, as well as the consequences for misbehaviour, available and well posted. To keep rule setting from being an empty threat, libraries should follow through with punishment, another strategy suggested by (Goldstein, 1996), by enforcing their rules on the (unusual) occasions that vandals are caught. Punishments may include fines, restitution, or suspension of library privileges.

- Another (Goldstein, 1996) strategy i.e., counselling, may be appropriate for vandals, such as young students caught vandalizing a school or public library. As well as publicizing the library's rules, publicity may be used to inform potential vandals and the general public of the problem and costs of vandalism through such means as anti-vandalism advertising, new releases, decals, slogan contests, anti-vandalism buttons, t-shirts, rulers, bookmarks,

posters, and flyers (Goldstein, 1996). Lincoln recommends that libraries share the costs of anti-vandalism advertising and other publicity such as public service announcements by partnering with schools or transit authorities.

SUGGESTIONS FOR CURBING VANDALISM

It is obvious that all types of libraries are facing vandalism problems and in the light of the finding from the study conducted, some suggestions for curbing vandalism are given below:

- Government should enact legislation on vandalism.
- Government should undertake comprehensive studies on book loss from academic libraries and crime rate in academic libraries as well as the cost involved in repairing, repainting, vandalized, library building, furniture, equipment, and collection.
- All the libraries should adopt Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) and American Library Association (ALA) guidelines regarding theft mutilation and vandalism prevention.
- Management should provide finance for the installation of modern security technology in college libraries like closed-circuit television (CCTV) & Radio-frequency identification (RFID), etc. to prevent library property from theft, mutilation, displacement, non-return of books, unauthorized borrowing, and vandalism.
- Staff in-service training should be encouraged by the library management to enlighten, particularly the junior staff on what the library profession is all about. This will enhance the efficiency of the workers.
- There should be regular funding of the library to enable it to buy multiple copies of each book title.
- Library porters should make a regular patrol in reasonable intervals for proper checking of users.
- There should be cheap and sharp photocopiers in the library, to enable users to make photocopies at any time.
- Creating a network with other college libraries for returning books belonging to other libraries brought to their library.

CONCLUSION

Vandalism is a problem that is faced by almost every librarian in every type of library. Identifying a vandal is a difficult process, but not impossible. Unfor-

tunately, most of the vandals are not caught. It needs a lot of technology, manpower and strict laws to check vandalism. Any type of vandalism within the library affects students' education. However, there are many well-researched, practical strategies; some of them are less expensive, which librarians may implement to curb vandalism. As custodians of their collection, all librarians should have a plan for dealing with vandalism when it occurs and for preventing its occurrence in the first place. Hence, the researcher is of the opinion that all these illegal problems and vandal activities from the college libraries are likely to be reduced but not stopped completely. The researcher has made an attempt to find out the possible measures taken by the college librarians to prevent such illegal and vandal activities from their libraries

REFERENCES

- Afolabi, M. (1993). Factors influencing theft and mutilation among library users and staff in Nigeria. *Journal of Leading Libraries and Information Centres*, 1(3/4), 2-8.
- Bessette, J. M. (1996). *American justice* (Vol. 1). Salem Press.
- Cooper, C. M., & Carolyn, F. (1997). *People places: design guidelines for urban open space* (2nd ed.). John Wiley & Sons Inc.
- Cornog, M., & Perper, T. (1992). For sex: See librarian. *Alternative Library Literature: A Biennial Anthology*, 303.
- Goldstein, A. P. (1996). *The psychology of vandalism*. New York: Plenum Press.
- Hart, S. (2003). *Vandalism in libraries: Causes, common occurrences and prevention strategies*. Retrieved from <http://capping.slis>
- Hedge, J. (1979). Vandalism. *Probation Journal*, 26(1), 20-23.
- Hendrick, C., & Murfin, M. E. (1974). Project Library Ripoff: A Study of Periodical Mutilation in a University Library. *College & Research Libraries*, 35(6), 402-411. https://doi.org/10.5860/crl35_6_402
- Lincoln, A. J. (1989). Vandalism: Causes, consequence and prevention. *Library and Archival Security*, 9(3/4), 37-61.
- Sager, D. (1975). Vandalism in libraries. How senseless is it? *Indian Librarian*, 30(2), 61-63.
- Smith, E. H., & Olszak, L. (2011). Treatment of mutilated art books: A survey of academic ARL institutions. *Library resources & technical services*, 41(1), 7-16.
- Susanna, A. C., & Matheson, F. K. (2000). Theft and Mutilation of Library Materials. *Library & Archival Security*, 15(2), 9-26. https://doi.org/10.1300/J114v15n02_03