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THEFT AND MUTILATION OF INFORMATION RESOURCES IN THE LIBRARIES OF AMBROSE ALLI UNIVERSITY, EKPOMA, AND UNIVERSITY OF ABUJA, NIGERIA

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Abstract

Theft and mutilation of information resources threaten the capacity of university libraries to support teaching, learning and research. This study investigated the forms, causes, and security practices of theft and mutilation of information resources in the libraries of Ambrose Alli University (AAU), Ekpoma, and the University of Abuja (UNIABUJA), Nigeria. A descriptive survey design was used, covering the entire population of 59 senior library staff, with data collected through a modified Likert-type questionnaire. Fifty-two questionnaires (88.1%) were validly filled and returned (AAU = 31; UNIABUJA = 21). Data were analysed with frequencies, percentages and Pearson correlation (r = 0.736), indicating a strong positive relationship between the two libraries' response patterns. Throwing materials out of windows was most reported at AAU (87.1%), while writing on and cutting pages were most reported at UNIABUJA (90.5% each). Poverty, inadequate copies of titles and selfishness were the leading causes, and heavily consulted, scarce and rare materials were most vulnerable. Security practices, especially photocopying services, were widely adopted and perceived to have reduced theft and mutilation, yet inadequate security remained the most cited reason for persistence. A written security policy, CCTV coverage, stricter sanctions, adequate multiple copies of high-demand titles and affordable photocopying are recommended.

Keywords: Theft; Mutilation; Information resources; Library security; University libraries

Introduction

University libraries exist to support the teaching, learning and research mission of their parent institutions, functioning as the nerve centre of academic research and to provide information resources to their users. The information resources university library provides can be refer to as information that was created and/or found, registered, and

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assessed with certain laws of degradation and renewal. It is also a collection of data organized for efficiently obtaining reliable information. According to Maidabino (2010), the university library is described as the central location where information technologies combine with knowledge resources in a user-focused, service-rich environment. All such services depend on the availability of the collections the library holds, and theft and mutilation of these collections remain a persistent, worldwide problem that is costly and disruptive to libraries and their patrons (Omoike & Alabi, 2020).

Theft and mutilation of information resources are not new developments of our time as such acts can be traced as far back as 539BC in Egypt when the Persian conquerors removed rolls of papyri from the Library of Ramses II around 41BC. Also, information resources such as books were chain-locked during the Middle Ages to prevent them from theft. From the inception till date librarians are concerned on how to guarantee the security of information resources in the library from being stolen and mutilated. Omoike and Alabi (2020) defined theft as the unauthorised removal of library materials through patron theft, insider theft by staff, or burglary. Theft is a criminal act in which property belonging to another is taken without that person's consent. It is sometimes used synonymously with larceny. Theft is a broader term which encompasses many forms of deceitful taking of property, including swindling, embezzlement and false pretences. All these offenses mentioned above are sometimes categorized under a single statutory crime of theft by some countries. Appiah, Kwaah, and Plockey (2024) confirmed that necessity rather than malice frequently drives such acts, with insufficient copies of titles, financial

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pressure on students and weak orientation to library rules are the most commonly cited drivers.

On the other hand, mutilation can be seen as the act of injuring or damaging, especially by cutting of a part of something against its whole. When a part or some parts of a material is altered so as to make it unrecognizable, disfigured or damaged irreparably, mutilation has occurred. Hant (2003) asserted that mutilation of information materials would include such acts as cutting pages, highlighting, underlining, marking notes in margins and adding materials, such as stickers or letters that are not meant to be part of the materials. Mutilation can also be seen as vandalism, wherein a material is destroyed consciously by a person. Mutilation of library resources can be seen as the defacement or damage of library resources in the library. Therefore, this study examined theft and mutilation of information resources in the libraries of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma and University of Abuja.

Ambrose Alli University Library, established in 1981 as Bendel State University Library, and the University of Abuja Library are typical of Nigerian university libraries: both operate open-access collections, employ security personnel, and serve large communities with limited multiple copies of titles. AAU Library reports a staff strength of 86 and more than 10,000 registered users, while UNIABUJA Library has 62 staff and about 11,500 registered users. Despite this, no empirical study had examined theft and mutilation in the two libraries together.

Statement of the Problem

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Information resources in university libraries are widely perceived to be lost or destroyed daily, limiting the capacity of libraries to support teaching and research. Despite the security practices Nigerian university libraries have adopted, theft and mutilation are believed to persist, with serious consequences for service delivery, and it remains unclear what sustains the problem. Empirical evidence on how information resources are stolen and mutilated in AAU and UNIABUJA, studied together, is scarce and this study addresses that gap.

Research Questions

1. What are the various forms of theft and mutilation of information resources in the libraries of AAU and UNIABUJA?
2. What are the causes of theft and mutilation of information resources in the two libraries?
3. Which library resources are more prone to theft and mutilation and the security practices adopted to tackle theft and mutilation in the two libraries?

Literature Review

Conceptual Clarifications

Information resources are the created and available stocks of information accumulated for use in production, management and everyday life including books, journals, theses and grey literature (Berestova, 2016). Theft covers larceny, robbery and burglary as applied to library materials, while mutilation, also termed vandalism, occurs when users tear, mark or otherwise damage materials (Maidabino, 2010). Omoike and

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Alabi (2020) similarly frame theft, mutilation and abuse as a single continuum of misuse that undermines a library's ability to serve its community better.

Forms of Theft and Mutilation

Allen (1990 & 1997) classified theft and mutilation as patron-based, insider-based, or burglary, with patron theft the most common and insider theft the hardest to detect. Nwalo (2003) and Abareh (2001) catalogue concealment in clothing, tearing pages, throwing materials through windows, misuse of date-due slips and marking pages as common devices. Omoike and Alabi (2020) found out that Nigerian undergraduates most often concealed materials in bags, distracted circulation staff, or tore out pages, while Appiah et al. (2024), studying three Ghanaian academic libraries, found overdue retention, concealment for personal monopoly and disregard for regulations to be the dominant delinquent acts.

Causes and Vulnerable Materials

Several studies link theft and mutilation to economic and situational pressures rather than malice. Omoike and Alabi (2020) found financial constraint (85.7%), selfishness (80.9%) and high demand for particular titles (75.2%) to be the leading causes among Nigerian undergraduates. Appiah et al. (2024) similarly identified inadequate orientation of users, insufficient copies of books and indiscipline as the main drivers of delinquent acts in Ghanaian academic libraries. These findings extend the broader pattern that poverty, scarcity of titles and selfishness underlie much collection abuse (Abifarin, 1997), and reinforced Maidabino's (2012) argument that necessity, more than malice, drives much university library vandalism. Heavily consulted, scarce and high-demand

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materials are consistently reported as most vulnerable (Omoike & Alabi, 2020; Gabriel, 2010). It is therefore obvious that lack of finance might be the main cause why students steal and mutilate information resources when compare with other causes of theft and mutilation of information resources.

Security Measures

Security responses combine physical, human, electronic and policy measures. Omoike and Alabi (2020) found camera surveillance and monitoring of user behaviour (94.3%), qualified staff (92.4%) and orientation programmes (88.6%) the methods most used to curb theft and mutilation, while Appiah et al. (2024) recommend stronger user orientation as the most direct route to reducing delinquent acts. These findings are consistent with earlier work recommending written security policies, shelf-reading and affordable photocopying (Maidabino, 2010; Oyedum, Sanni, & Udoakang, 2014). It should be noted that if the security measures stated above are properly implemented, theft and mutilation of information resources in the library will drastically reduce.

Theoretical Framework

Two classical crime-causation theories frame the study. Lombroso's (1876) biological positivism attributes offending partly to innate disposition, while Shaw and McKay's (1942) social disorganisation theory attributes crime to external factors such as neighbourhood, peer group and economic disadvantage. Applied to libraries, the sociological view would locate theft and mutilation in peer influence, scarcity and financial hardship, consistent with the situational explanations that recur in current library-security research (Omoike & Alabi, 2020; Appiah et al., 2024). Theft and mutilation of information

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resources in the library is seen as a crime against the library management and the institution in general. As Lombroso (1876) believes that most criminals did not act out of free will, but rather they were urge to commit crimes because of their innate organic nature, so also library users who engage in theft and mutilation of information resources did not act out of free will but were urge to do that because of their innate organic nature. Most library users steal library resources because naturally they are born criminals.

Research Gap

The literature confirms that theft and mutilation are widespread and addressed through physical, human, electronic and policy measures, and recent studies (Omoike & Alabi, 2020; Appiah et al., 2024) largely corroborate earlier findings. However, no study had examined AAU and UNIABUJA together, nor compared the two, hence, the gap this study tends to fill.

Methodology

A descriptive survey (ex post facto) design was adopted. The population comprised the 59 senior staff of the two libraries (AAU = 35; UNIABUJA = 24), selected purposively because of their responsibility for and knowledge of collection security; the entire population was studied, so no sampling was required. The main instrument was a modified Likert-type questionnaire. Reliability was established through test-retest and the researcher administered and collected the questionnaires personall. Of the 59 copies

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distributed, 52 (88.1%) were validly completed and returned. Data were analysed with frequencies and percentages, and Pearson's correlation coefficient was computed to compare the response patterns of the two libraries.

Results and Discussions

Demographic Characteristics

Thirty-one respondents (59.6%) were from AAU and 21 (40.4%) from UNIABUJA; 28 (53.8%) were male and 24 (46.2%) female. Most respondents (61.5%) were aged 35-44 years, 19.2% were aged 45-54 years, and 9.6% each were aged 25-34 and 55-65 years.

Forms of Theft and Mutilation of Information Resources at AAU and UNIABUJA Libraries

Table 1: What are the various forms of theft and mutilation of information resources in the libraries of AAU and UNIABUJA?

Form	AAU (*n* = 31)	UNIABUJA (*n* = 21)	Combined (*N* = 52)
Writing on page surfaces	80.6	90.5	84.6
Cutting/tearing off pages	77.4	90.5	82.7
Purposeful mis-shelving	71.0	81.0	75.0
Borrowed materials not returned	80.6	85.7	82.7
Hiding materials inside clothes	80.6	66.7	75.0
Throwing materials through windows	87.1	66.7	78.8
Staff-assisted smuggling	61.3	28.6	48.1

Note. Values are the percentages of respondents who agreed.

Results in Table 1 indicate that at AAU, throwing materials out of windows was the most frequently reported form (87.1%), followed by writing on pages, hiding materials in

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clothes and non-return of borrowed materials (80.6% each). At UNIABUJA, writing on pages and cutting or tearing pages were most frequently reported (90.5% each). Insider-related forms received the lowest agreement in both libraries, particularly at UNIABUJA.

The finding that tearing pages, writing on pages, non-return of materials and throwing materials out of windows are the dominant forms of misuse corroborates the devices catalogued by Nwalo (2003) and confirmed more recently among Nigerian undergraduates by Omoike and Alabi (2020), who found concealment in bags and page-tearing to be leading methods, and among Ghanaian academic library users by Appiah et al. (2024), who reported concealment for personal monopoly and disregard of regulations as dominant delinquent acts. The low agreement on insider-related forms is consistent with Allen's (1997) observation that insider theft is the hardest to detect, and may also reflect staff reluctance to acknowledge colleagues' misconduct.

Causes of Theft and Mutilation of Information Resources at AAU and UNIABUJA Libraries

Table 2: What are the causes of theft and mutilation of information resources in the two libraries?

Cause	AAU (*n* = 31)	UNIABUJA (*n* = 21)	Combined (*N* = 52)
Poverty of students	80.6	76.2	78.8
Inadequate resources	80.6	66.7	75.0
Selfishness	77.4	90.5	82.7
Short loan period	64.5	38.1	53.8
Inadequate security	90.3	61.9	78.8

Note. Values are the percentages of respondents who agreed.

Results in Table 2 show that poverty and inadequate numbers of resources were the leading causes at AAU (80.6% each), while selfishness in hiding and illegally reserving

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materials led at UNIABUJA (90.5%). These proportions are consistent with the 2020-2024 evidence reviewed above.

The prominence of poverty, inadequate titles and selfishness as causes matches the pattern reported by Omoike and Alabi (2020), where financial constraint, selfishness and high demand for specific titles were the leading causes among University of Ibadan undergraduates, and by Appiah et al. (2024), who linked delinquent acts to insufficient copies of books and weak user orientation. This convergence supports Maidabino's (2012) argument that necessity, rather than malice, drives much university library vandalism, and lends more support to the sociological explanation of Shaw and McKay (1942) than to Lombroso's (1876) biological view, since the leading causes are economic and situational rather than innate.

Vulnerable Library Resources and Security Practices Adopted at AAU and UNIABUJA Libraries

Table 3: Which library resources are more prone to theft and mutilation and what security practices are adopted to tackle theft and mutilation in the two libraries?

Item	AAU (n = 31)	UNIABUJA (n = 21)	Combined (N = 52)
Vulnerable resources			
Books in limited supply on the shelves	27 (87.1)	19 (90.5)	46 (88.5)
Books constantly consulted by users	31 (100.0)	18 (85.7)	49 (94.2)
Rare books and books not found in the open market	28 (90.3)	18 (85.7)	46 (88.5)
Reference books (dictionaries, encyclopedias)	16 (51.6)	7 (33.3)	23 (44.2)
Security practices			
Photocopy machine available for photocopying services	31 (100.0)	21 (100.0)	52 (100.0)
At least two porters/security personnel in readers' services to	31 (100.0)	20 (95.2)	51 (98.1)

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Item	AAU (*n* = 31)	UNIABUJA (*n* = 21)	Combined (*N* = 52)
search users			
Users must drop bags before entering	29 (93.5)	19 (90.5)	48 (92.3)
Staff on duty examine materials consulted by users	29 (93.5)	17 (81.0)	46 (88.5)

Note. Values are the number of respondents who agreed, with percentages in parentheses.

Results in Table 3 reveal that books constantly consulted by users (100% at AAU) and books in limited supply (90.5% at UNIABUJA) were the resources most frequently identified as prone to theft and mutilation, followed by rare and scarce titles. Reference books ranked lowest at both libraries. Photocopying services were affirmed by all respondents (100%) as an adopted security practice in both libraries, alongside porter searches, bag-drop rules and staff examination of consulted materials, all reported by over 80% of respondents at both sites.

The finding that heavily consulted, scarce and rare materials are most vulnerable is consistent with current evidence that high-demand titles are disproportionately targeted (Omoike & Alabi, 2020). Universal adoption of photocopying echoes recommendations that affordable copying reduces the temptation to tear pages, matching the emphasis recent studies place on surveillance and orientation as effective curbing methods (Omoike & Alabi, 2020; Appiah et al., 2024).

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study:

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1. Library management should install window grilles or alarms and CCTV coverage at reading areas and conduct regular user-education campaigns against theft and mutilation of information resources.

2. The libraries should increase the number of copies of high-demand titles and offer affordable photocopying and flexible loan arrangements to reduce the pressure that poverty, scarcity, and selfishness place on students.

3. Libraries should prioritise high-demand, scarce, and rare titles for extra protection, such as restricted-access shelving, electronic tagging, and stricter checks at issue and return, and should supplement the existing porter searches, bag-drop rules, and photocopying services with electronic security systems.

4. Since the current practices were perceived as effective but did not eliminate theft and mutilation, both libraries should regularly review and reinforce them.

Conclusion

This study concludes that theft and mutilation of information resources are present in the libraries of Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, and the University of Abuja, occurring mainly through throwing materials out of windows, writing on pages, and cutting out or tearing off pages. Poverty, inadequate copies of titles and selfishness are the main causes, and heavily consulted, scarce and rare materials are the most vulnerable. Security practices, particularly photocopying services and the searching of users, have reduced but not eliminated the problem, and inadequate security remains the main reason for its persistence. These findings align closely with current Nigerian and West African evidence

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(Omoike & Alabi, 2020; Appiah et al., 2024), and the strong correlation between the two case-study libraries suggests they reflect a common pattern in Nigerian university libraries.

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