

## USERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS MATERIAL THEFT AND MUTILATION IN DELTA STATE POLYTECHNICS LIBRARIES, NIGERIA

**Nina-Okpousung, M. O.**

*Delta State Polytechnic Library, Ogwashi-Uku Delta State*

*E-mail: monluv2002@yahoo.com*

### ABSTRACT

*Academic libraries across Nigeria are concerned with the safety and physical integrity of valuable intellectual properties. The spate at which materials grow legs and disappear from the library shelves has reached unimaginable height. Users constant mutilation of very important library materials has caused other users frustration which eventually has very negative effect on library services. This study aimed at investigating users attitude towards material theft and mutilation in Delta State Polytechnics Libraries. The study examined systematically the factors influencing material theft and mutilation and how students' attitudes towards theft and mutilation of library materials can be curbed in the State polytechnics libraries. Descriptive survey method was used in carrying out the study, with a population of ten thousand and fifty actual users from the Delta State polytechnics libraries. Structured questionnaire was administered to three hundred students; equally to male and female users using the convenient sampling technique. Statistical analysis of simple percentage was done on the collected data. From the analysis it was established that male and female users had stolen and mutilated library material primarily because of a lack of publicity, laziness and greediness. Users will not steal and mutilate library material if Librarians themselves enforce strict sanction and penalty. Among the recommendations was that students should be taught the use of library as a general study course by Librarians with credit earning and sanctions should also be enforced by Librarians without fear or favour.*

*Keywords: Library, Users attitude, material, theft, mutilation, polytechnic*

### INTRODUCTION

Colleges are waking up to the fact that the work of many researchers depend on the library, because it is the place where students can learn to move beyond lectures and investigate for themselves (Rubin, 1998). Changes in teaching methods require the academic library to supplement textbooks and enrich the curriculum. Okoro and Udoumoh (1998) states that the library has more vital relationship to the academic community, because books and other resources do not merely accompany academic activities, but are the fabric of activities. In addition, the library is a multipurpose establishment and a driving force in the realization of the aims and objectives of any higher institution of learning. It can be regarded not only as a reading centre but also a teaching and service agency.

The library is the central laboratory of the whole academic institution of learning. Academic libraries are regarded as fundamental and integral to higher

educational systems. Despite all the benefits and academic advantage of the library, there exists threat to intellectual property. Theft and mutilation have posed a tremendous challenge to the library culture worldwide. As a consequence there is a vast literature on a range of problems concerning library security, with emphasis being placed on theft and mutilation. Because this insecurity to the human intellectual heritage is an intractable problem, researchers are always seeking for lasting solution, but with limited success. Academic libraries have introduced traditional crime prevention measure aimed at curtailing the theft and mutilation of books.

Discovering that books have been stolen in the first place is fundamentally important, because this is not always obvious. Indeed, if the criminal who stole and defaced the books had not dumped them, they may not have come to light for a long time. It is true that before we can get near to proving who did it, we need to know that something has been done. Most major libraries provide for an annual system of checking the contents of the shelves as a way of identifying any items that may have gone missing. This however is no easy task. Usually the methods used can be painstaking and laborious and leave much room for inaccuracy. One method is the stock count where all items on shelves and on loan are counted and the resultant figure compared with that of the previous year, with addition to stock and discards taken into account. Any discrepancy should show amounts of missing books. However, this system is suspect because it does not supply actual titles lost and errors can often occur in counting. Another method is the stock check, where catalogue cards are checked against books on shelves and on loan. This can take weeks to complete and errors can occur because a catalogue is never one hundred percent accurate, books can be removed for repair and overlooked and also volumes can be mis-shelved.

However, whatever method is used, unless the stock-takes are held on a regular basis, the current rate of loss cannot be stated and it will not be known if book losses are static, accelerating or under control. It is generally true, however, that the statistics gathered on missing books are not the result of detailed shelf and user surveys. The spate at which materials disappear mysteriously from libraries has reached unimaginable dimensions. User's attitude to theft and mutilation of library materials has become a common occurrence in academic libraries in Nigeria as well as other parts of the world and if this dangerous trend is not investigated and checked, it could lead to Users frustration and serious dearth of information materials in the library. It is important to note that Librarians and Library Staff impede Users acceptance of sanction and penalty to theft and mutilation of library material. Also, particularly of interest to this study is the fact that from personal experience, female members of society, by nurture and training, are usually brought up to be subservient and obedient to laws and regulations and are required to be generally more law-abiding to rules than their male counterparts. Therefore, this study is an opportunity to find out whether there is actually any difference in male and female users' attitudes to material theft and mutilation in academic libraries, using Delta State Polytechnic

library Ogwashi-uku, Ozoro and Otefe-Oghara as points of reference. Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What factors influence users' attitude to theft and mutilation of library materials by male and female students in Delta State Polytechnics Libraries?
2. How can male and female students' attitudes to theft and mutilation of library materials be curbed in polytechnics libraries in Delta State?

The study is aimed at investigating users' attitude to material theft and mutilation in Polytechnics Libraries in Delta State. This study will be beneficial to students in academic libraries and library staff in general because it will provide information on factors influencing users attitude to library materials theft and mutilation among male and female students, how both male and female users attitude to material theft and mutilation can be curbed. It will provide library management with information that lead to a more meaningful gender-directed enforcement of sanctions and penalty on users who steal and mutilate library material. Based on the rules governing the conduct in the library, conditions for using the library and ensuring that library resources are available to all and shared on a fair basis, as well as increase information in gender studies programmes concerning male and female behaviours in relation to laws, it will add to the literature of material theft and mutilation in academic libraries in Nigerian.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Three polytechnics libraries in Delta State were chosen for this study. The libraries are those situated at Delta State Polytechnic, Ogwashi-Uku, Delta State Polytechnic, Ozoro and Delta State Polytechnic, Otefe Oghara. The study considered the actual users of these Libraries only. The actual users are the registered and frequent male and female students who use the Delta State Polytechnic Libraries. The descriptive survey method was used in carrying out the study. The sample was three hundred students. Questionnaire was administered equally to male and female users by the convenient sampling techniques and statistical analysis of simple percentages was done on the research questions. The respondents consisted of one hundred and fifty female users as well as one hundred and fifty male users. In line with the purpose of this research, the responses were sought to know factors influencing male and female users attitude to theft and mutilation of Library materials and how users' attitude to theft and mutilation of library material could be curbed.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Lack of multiple copies of relevant books, and inadequate access hours with reserve collections, unsatisfactory opening hours on weekdays and weekends, poor reprographic services, librarians and library staff inabilities to enforce library sanctions, staff showing preference to female users were factors influencing male and female users to theft and mutilate library material. The researcher explained the trend this way, when in March 2008 in the Polytechnic Library, the Library Assistant

responsible for ordering replacement pages for journals noticed an upsurge in the number of pages she ordered. She also found that people who defaced books were not aware of the adverse effect of their actions. Raising users awareness to the consequences, in terms of cost and difficulty in replacing items, might be effective in reducing the incidence of damage.

Male as well as female users behaviour to theft, mutilation as well as other library crimes can be curbed in the Delta State Polytechnics Libraries by users' compulsory attendance at library orientation, publicizing library regulations, sufficient opening hours, provision of reprographic services at cheap rate, punishing violators and teaching of the use of library by Librarians in General Studies courses with credit earning.

***Users Attitude to Material:*** Quality in a product or service is not what the supplier puts in. It is what the customer gets out and is willing to pay for. A product is not quality because it is hard to make and costly as many manufactures typically believe. Customers pay only for what is of use and value to them. Nothing else constitutes quality (Drucker, 1974). Consumers happily pay only for goods or services they derive maximum utility. Similarly, Users of the library materials will naturally not steal or mutilate library resources if the library meets their information needs, open at convenient hours at weekday and at weekend and reserve collection evenly shared on fair bases. Satisfied library users will naturally have the fear of being deprived from using the library or expelled from the institution as a result of sanction and penalty. Miller (2003) lends credence to this when he stated that academic libraries today are complex institutions with multiple roles and a host of related operations and services developed over the years. Yet their fundamental purpose has remained the same; namely, to provide access to reliable, authoritative knowledge.

Consequently, academic libraries, along with their private, special and governmental counterparts, have long stood unchallenged throughout the world as one of the foremost primary provider of recorded knowledge and historical records. Within the context of higher education, especially when users want dependable information, they often turned to academic libraries. This is why users' awareness to the effect of theft and mutilation of library materials is necessary to ensure proper usage and exploitation of the resources. Yet, users behave differently toward library material; some factors could be bad influence on users' attitude to library material theft and mutilation.

The security of library materials is of growing concern to all types of libraries and Librarians. The magnitude of the problem is a matter of conjecture in Nigeria. Thompson (1977) notes that there was objection to the concept of open access as far back as the eighteenth century on the ground of security, the principal reasons being theft, misplacement of library material, combined with increased wear and tear. Hansson (2000) notes that the imposition of short operating hours influence users to steal and mutilate material which hurts users of the library, many of whom are researchers and students. Traditional library users often travel long distances in these

Polytechnics Libraries to make use of the resources available in the library and shorter opening hours would unduly restrict their access to the library and its services.

On whether hours are convenient in general, even library non- users felt that libraries do not observe convenient hours. It seems that changing hours may increase library users from stealing, mutilating as well as defacing library materials. The length of time that libraries are opened determines whether library materials may or may not be used, and thus, indirectly determines the degree of physical accessibility to materials in traditional libraries. It therefore, follows that a user may mutilate as well steal library materials because opening hours of the library are not convenient. Typical library hours are unsatisfactory, because libraries are heavily used at evenings and weekends by students. This, they noted, is one reason why users resort to stealing and mutilating library materials. Madu (2004) asserts that library buildings and the environment must be conducive for learning. When the library environment is not comfortable, users may mutilate and steal materials to allow them have quiet time with these materials.

Noise has a significant impact on the quality of life, and so it is a health problem. As noted by the World library and information congress (2005), noise must be recognized as a major threat to human well being. The effects of noise are seldom catastrophic, and are often transitory, but the adverse effects can be cumulative with prolonged or repeated exposure. Although it often causes discomfort and sometimes pain, noise does not cause ears to bleed but noise induced hearing loss usually takes years to develop. Jato (2005) notes that library users admitted indiscipline as the reason for noise making in the library. He further said fatigue from long reading and ignorance are among other factors responsible for noise in the reading room of libraries, and yet another reason for mutilation and book theft.

Mcknight (2005) carried out a study on causes of noise in libraries. From his study, he noted that library staff influence users disregard for library regulations. He observed that users will observe silence within the library, if library staff and cleaners live by example. He further noted that some students claimed to concentrate better with music on or in a noisy environment. Such users may want to bring such attitude to the library. They may wish to use radios or sing to themselves thereby disturbing other users and making them uncomfortable. According to educationists, study and homework are best done in a quiet room, without distractions like noise from either music or loud talks. Even when the library is quiet, most users have 'monkey minds'; that is they like to wander when they are studying. Studying becomes ineffective because of this with so much time wasted reading a line over and over again.

Reserve collections enable the library meet the information needs of users, especially when the items in the library holdings are in limited copies. Agboola (2000) carried out a study to determine reserve book collections in Nigerian academic libraries with particular reference to their acquisitions and administration; Twenty-Two universities were used for this study. He found that the type of materials on short loan collection in the libraries included lecturers' recommended texts, heavily used materials, lecturers' personal books, past question papers, students' projects/

long essays, theses and dissertations as well as newspaper clippings. These materials are usually in very few multiple copies and in heavy demand by users.

Reserve collections are very valuable in Nigerian academic libraries as a result of poor funding of libraries. Ifidon (1999) has accordingly noted that due to the poor level of funding of African university libraries, libraries cannot easily afford the purchase of books and so they are forced to place too many book titles on reserve. Materials on reserve can be borrowed for short periods of time, usually two hours, though they can be renewed for another couple of hours if not required by another reader. It is not enough to place an item on reserve; it is necessary to determine users' reaction to their accessibility. This is helpful to the library because according to Fawowe (1998), the library can fulfil its function best by pursuing a policy of constant self evaluation so as to be alert to the changing needs of its users. Such self evaluation will help create an atmosphere which will encourage students not to steal, mutilate and deface library collections. Reserve materials by their nature are meant to be used within the library, but can be borrowed overnight or during weekend for home reading. Such books however, are candidates for mutilation.

The library houses books and other forms of records that help to meet the broad and varying needs of the institution. In the past, library collections were extremely guarded and preserved against theft, destruction and mutilation. Unfortunately, however, attempts to maintain these are undermined by some who, by their selfishness, constantly destroy, steal or mutilate such materials. The true extent of book theft cannot be ascertained by libraries. Although from studies carried out, these anti-social activities in the library are common all over the world, it is observed to be more pronounced in the Third World Countries. Most writers based their argument for this situation on security and economic depression. Library staff members universally cringe at the very thought of the tiresome chore of inventory and shelf reading. This, of course, is the only way book theft and mutilation can be identified by libraries. Anyone who has performed this odious task knows just how time consuming and boring it is. However, it is the most effective device in identifying what is missing and which subjects require greater surveillance. The identification of lost books will help libraries put in place more regulations that might encourage students to observe them.

Bello (1997), in his study, revealed that the most vulnerable library materials lost through mutilation were reference books. This was attributed to the strict control of the materials. Staff's non commitment and security lapses, would now seem to be yet another reason for users stealing and mutilating library materials. Some other studies reveal that book theft in Nigerian university libraries is motivated by societal problems. Omoniyi (2001) buttresses this by saying that society competes for almost everything, be it academic qualification or social influence, while everybody tries to outshine the other to get whatever they need even through crooked ways. This may eventually endanger the society as well as the library. Significantly, theft and mutilation could also be linked to users who tend to live an affluent life and thereby

influence their associates with such criminal behaviour. Corrupt individual influence on users' lifestyle is yet another reason why users steal library materials.

Omoniyi (2002) further observes that some prominent factors that prevent libraries from purchasing adequate numbers of books are economic problems and monetary allocations which have, over the years, been drastically reduced in some universities while some other universities are not given any. Libraries economic problem could be seen as one reason why multiple copies of relevant materials cannot be acquired. Therefore, users resort to stealing and mutilating library materials. Agboola (2001) sees the economy as a brain behind this problem that has made personal ownership of essential textbook a luxury. This shows that development in the educational sector will be unattainable because both government and the stakeholders are reluctantly moving the driving wheel. Afolabi (1993) also agrees that since the economic depression has deprived users of the ability to purchase or make photocopies of the few books that are available, the greedy ones are likely to steal and mutilate library materials.

Also, because power outages affect users' ability to make photocopies, they resort to stealing library materials. Verner (1983) lists a series of factors that have contributed to library malpractice or crime. These include inadequate service staff at night and during the weekends, lack of multiple copies of library materials in high demand and inadequate photocopies facilities. These facts have negatively impacted users' disposition towards theft and mutilation of library stock. Shuman (1999) notes that researchers often find library procedures cumbersome and detrimental to their needs. They become frustrated with tiresome routines, and their frustration can result in theft. Many commit the acts of pilferage not because they are selfish or because they seek vengeance but because they are lazy and it is the easy way out. It is just too hard and bothersome to play by the rules. So one either flouts them or play "cafeteria", that is picking and choosing, deciding which rules to or which one not to follow. Some library users go as far as making rules for themselves, based on their perception of self interest. Burdensome library procedures and laziness of library users are identified as reasons responsible for users' theft and mutilation of materials.

Book theft is an integral part of the lifestyles of the rich and famous. In California, Shuman (1999) reports Gustav Hasford, a novelist and academy award nominated screenwriter, who was convicted for the theft of almost 800 library books. In the same vein, Blumbery Stephen Carrie was also arrested, tried and convicted for federal crimes relating to the theft of nearly 25,000 titles over a twenty year period from more than three hundred United States libraries, coast to coast. Books may be stolen to help the thief achieve economic goals or to further his political aims, to "rescue" the book from abuse at the hands of its uncaring custodians or just for the sheer joy or possession of something desired. In some cases, people steal books to prove that a resourceful thief can defeat the library's pathetic attempts at security. But the end result of all such crimes is the same. The book is missing and no one may consult it or use it any longer. Therefore, all library crimes should be

taken as equally serious as shoplifting in commercial establishments, and every person found guilty of library crimes should be prosecuted. The factors that have determined users' theft, mutilation and defacing of library materials are:

1. Demand over-stripping the supply of library materials. These results in competition for library items, which invariably tempt users to steal, mutilate or engage in illegal borrowing with the tickets of other users.
2. Pressure to succeed is a prominent sociological factor that influences users, especially students, to steal or mutilated library materials, thus depriving others of their use.
3. Financial constraints affecting most students as a result of the economic situation experienced in Nigeria since the mid 1980s motivate them to engage in anti social activities.
4. Perpetrators feel library crimes are justified because they are directed at the library, and not at an individual. This thinking is rather unpleasant and unfortunate.

Before a habit is formed, there must be good reasons for that, one of which is the ability to derive maximum satisfaction from it. McKnight (2005) who carried out a study to determine users' attitude to theft and mutilation of library materials, notes that students see library policies as frustrating and annoying and would prefer to ignore them or at some other times, select which rules are convenient for them. At the circulation desk, users are expected to queue before the circulation staff can attend to them, especially at rush periods. Students are usually impatient towards such library regulations. As a result of this impatience, they seek short cuts by resorting to stealing, mutilating and boisterous behaviour in the library. Aloa (2000) observes that students' attitudes to theft and mutilation are generally unfavourable and borne out of selfishness and laziness. Since the economic depression has deprived users of the ability to purchase or make photocopies of the few books that are available, the greedy ones are likely to steal and mutilate library materials. Also, because power outages affect users' ability to make photocopies, they resort to stealing library materials.

***Improving Users Attitude to Theft and Mutilation of Library Materials:*** Ewing (1994) observes that the success of library is the satisfaction of users in accessing items within the stipulated time and in complete format. Therefore, one obvious focus of library efforts should be to promote responsibility among borrowers actively. Akinbode (2002) identifies several issues that could curb users' attitude to theft and mutilating of library material. These include responsiveness, competence and assurance (which could translate to demeanour). It is also important to note that the perceived quality of the library's resources is a key variable in explaining library users' compliance to desisting from theft, defacing and mutilating of material. Because academic library users frequent their libraries to find solutions to their academic problems and needs, it is imperative that libraries have the right kinds of resources available; otherwise, users will steal and mutilate materials. Fisher (2007) citing



Wilson gives her opinion of why theft and defacing as well as mutilation of library collection must be taken seriously. The library is and will remain the place one turns to when one is in need of information on something in any field. She commended the ways books are accessed through indexes which may not be so on-line. Rice, in the same article by Fisher, noted that users whose needs are met in libraries would always want to comply with library regulations, because they would not want such privileges withdrawn. Consequently, academic libraries must monitor the needs of the academic environment by remaining networked into their academic institution's curriculum, resources needs of teachers, students' preferences for how needed information is packaged (CD-ROMs, journals, microfiche ,audio visuals, Internet, etc) and related administrative use of information (career planning and development, and so on). By focusing on needed resources and delivering what users want, librarians can play a proactive role by developing a variety of resource access options for the users that meet cost and efficacy criteria. This can and will make users not steal library material.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

It was established that the libraries are encouraging environment for reading. The present economic situation of the country has, however made it almost impossible for libraries to buy all relevant materials; multiple copies of relevant materials should be made available in libraries, when finances permit. Library sanctions should be enforced on all users without fear or favour to enable total compliance with library regulations. Librarians as well as Library Staff should up hold library penalty on defaulting users even if it were their wards and relations involved in library crimes. Libraries could provide photocopying facilities for reasonable prices, be open at sufficient hours on weekdays and weekends to give users enough time with these materials thereby discouraging users attitude of stealing and mutilating materials.

Attendance at library orientations should be made a condition for registering users with the library. This would enable student know what libraries expect of them. Regulations should be publicized as much as possible through post bills, flyers etc. This would curb defaulters' claim of not being aware of library sanctions. Library Porters should be motivated and trained often to get them put in their best. Use of libraries should be taught by Librarians who are professionals in Library Studies courses and should be credit earning. If these suggestions are considered and implemented by libraries and their parent institutions, users' attitude to library theft and mutilation would be curbed and library services enhanced.

**Table 1: Factors influencing user attitude to theft and mutilation of library material**

Factors	SA		A		D		SD	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Multiple copies of books	100 (66.7)	106 (70.7)	35 (23.3)	50 (33.3)	2 (1.3)	2 (1.3)	3 (2)	2 (1.3)
Adequate materials on loan	107 (71.3)	101 (67.3)	18 (12)	43 (28.7)	9 (6)	4 (2.7)	165 (10.7)	2 (1.3)
Adequate reprographic services	100 (66.7)	96 (64)	43 (28.7)	39 (26)	8 (5.3)	8 (5.3)	3 (2)	3 (2)
Adquate opening hours	96 (64)	100 (66.7)	50 (33.3)	41 (27.3)	2 (1.3)	3 (2)	4 (2.7)	4 (2.7)
Inufficient access hours to materials on reserve	100 (66.7)	44 (29.3)	101 (67.3)	43 (28.7)	3 (2)	3 (2)	4 (2.7)	2 (1.3)
Sanctions and penalty will prompt users not to steal and mutilate	107 (71.3)	43 (28.7)	101 (67.3)	18 (12)	9 (6)	2 (1.3)	16 (0.7)	4 (2.7)
Tiredness and laziness make users mutilate and steal books	115 (76.7)	111 (74)	23 (15.3)	26 (17.3)	7 (4.6)	5 (3.3)	5 (3.3)	8 (5.3)
Library opens at weekends	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	0 (0)	81 (45)	68 (45.3)	69 (46)	82 (54.7)
Conducive environment	25 (16.7)	31 (20.7)	30 (20)	24 (16)	45 (30)	52 (34.7)	50 (33.3)	43 (28.7)

Source: Field study 2011. ( ) = Percentage response

**Table 2: Ways of curbing student attitude to material theft and mutilation**

Ways	SA		A		D		SD	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Attending library orientation be made compulsory	50 (33.3)	52 (34.7)	45 (30)	43 (28.7)	30 (20)	1 (0.7)	25 (16.7)	24 (16)
Librarians should up hold penalty on offenders	43 (28.7)	78 (52)	98 (65.3)	63 (42)	4 (2.7)	6 (4)	5 (3.3)	3 (2)
Publicize library regulations	115 (76.7)	111 (74)	23 (15.3)	26 (17.3)	7 (4.7)	5 (3.3)	5 (3.3)	8 (5.3)
Multiple copies of books be made available	99 (66)	47 (31.3)	26 (17.3)	80 (53.3)	20 (13.3)	10 (6.7)	5 (3.3)	13 (8.7)
Imposition of heavy fines and serious sanctions on defaulters	99 (66)	47 (31.3)	26 (17.3)	80 (53.3)	20 (13.3)	10 (6.7)	5 (3.3)	13 (8.7)
Photocopying services should be provided in the library at low charges	115 (76.7)	111 (74)	26 (17.3)	23 (15.3)	5 (3.3)	7 (4.7)	8 (5.3)	5 (3.3)
Use of libraries be taught by librarians in GNS	105 (70)	25 (16.7)	37 (24.7)	108 (72)	3 (2)	8 (5.3)	5 (3.3)	9 (6)

Source: Field study 2011 ( ) = Percentage response

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