

Introduction

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THIS ISSUE OF *Library Trends*, "Protecting the Library," deals with a topic that as recently as twenty years ago may have been met with, at most, passing interest. This is not to say that problems of crime and disruption were not affecting libraries, but that the problems were scattered and generally not perceived as serious. Book theft certainly has affected libraries for much of their history. According to Munn in an early article:

When the Persians went into Egypt and withdrew papyri from the library of Rameses II, without stopping for any formalities at the charging desk, they began a practice which has remained to torment libraries ever since. Book theft is as old as libraries themselves. It might also be listed as one of the original and basic sins of mankind....¹

In recent years it appears that the range of problems has become greater and the impact of crime in and against libraries more widespread.

Our most serious problem occurs in the downtown library....[It involves behaviors that] range from stolen car batteries, to indecent exposure, to a physical attack on the security guard which resulted in his having a concussion. Contributing factors include the proximity of a commercial plasma bank and a free lunch program at a nearby church-sponsored mission....more serious problems than we observed even three years ago. I would characterize our most serious problem as disruptive behavior from persons having mental health problems and/or criminal records ranging from merely

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annoying to violent and potentially violent. We are seeing an increase in the potentially violent.²

This collection of articles will examine a full range of issues related to protecting the library—from the causes and the impact of crime to physical and legislative measures to prevent and control crime. The suggestions and recommendations offered by the authors vary. This is necessary since the kinds of problems that librarians face also vary tremendously. Perhaps the oldest problem, as mentioned above, is the theft of books. The problem continues today and in many libraries is considered a major operating cost. This involves the theft of rare books by profit-oriented thieves as well as the theft of expensive but commonplace volumes by “ordinary” patrons, students, and faculty. Unlike the professional thief, others often steal for selfish motives; they “need” the book, they “like” the book, they “can’t find the book anyplace else,” and so on. In academic libraries, the perceived competition for scarce resources entices students and faculty to take what they “must have.” Of course, taking a popular volume not only improves one’s own chances of success but simultaneously reduces others chances.

As libraries continue to develop their nonbook resources, these materials become increasingly popular targets of thieves. Episodes of theft are not confined to books. Records, tapes, software and hardware have become favored targets in some libraries. At times, these items—as well as books—are not stolen but are mutilated, reducing both the value and usefulness of the materials. Mutilation may be in the form of slashing needed pages from journals or books. In terms of motivation, this action may be more similar to theft than vandalism in that the perpetrator’s goal is to obtain some desired material rather than destroy it. We were told of one episode of valuable information stored on computer discs being thrown in toilets by intruders. Acts of property destruction also occur with alarming regularity. Buildings are defaced and occasionally burned, equipment is damaged, and files are destroyed. Libraries also are likely to be targets for the so-called “white collar” crimes of false billing and other fraud, counterfeit money exchange, and theft by employees. The theft of personal items belonging to staff and patrons also may be a problem in some areas. As we shall demonstrate later, it is the unusual library that is free of all crime and disruption.

While property crimes against the library are the most common types of offenses, they may not be the most feared. Crimes against persons evoke strong reactions from those involved or concerned. Even

Introduction

when a library is free from personal crimes, the anticipation of a possible episode can be devastating to employee and patron morale.

One of the more common complaints from librarians, particularly those in public libraries, concerns the disruption caused by "problem patrons." The range of disruptive episodes is limited only by the imagination of the offensive patron. Some problem patrons are merely annoying due to their excessive noise, movement or odor. One respondent from the nationwide Library Crime Research Project provided the following example. "The other disruptive class is quieter, but even less attractive: male vagrants who arrive at opening time and are ushered out the door when we close. We have continuing problems with this group, the worst of which is the effect they have on the library's ambience." Others tend to be disruptive to the normal functioning of the institution:

A middle aged man who comes in with his hands tied together, all the while screaming obscenities at staff and public alike;...A high school student who lifts statues from their exhibition stands and carries them around the reference room;...or finally a woman who after reading a news article screams in laughter and claps her hands over her head...³

Of even greater concern are those problem patrons who are a potential threat to the safety of staff and other patrons. This category includes those who use the library for illegal purposes such as buying and selling drugs, making sexual contacts, or stealing anything of value. "Voices begin to hiss 'wanna smoke, wanna smoke?—twice, three, four times before a resolute reader reaches the top of the library steps.... At least five pushers are holding up their plastic bags with marijuana and hashish for sale, and some customers light up on the spot."⁴ "The most serious problem we have is the theft of employee and patron personal property, especially handbags and briefcases, by 'professional' thieves."⁵

Crime Patterns

Why do libraries have so much of a problem with crime and disruption? To better understand the sources of and possible solutions to these problems, it would be helpful to examine briefly some of the more general characteristics of crime in the United States.

To begin with, the crime rate in the United States tends to be substantially higher than the rate in almost all other industrialized

societies. For example, the 1980 rate of robberies actually known to the police in the United States was 243 per 100,000 population. In contrast, the corresponding rate of robbery in Canada was 102. Crimes known to the police make up only a portion of the total number of crimes. Many crimes, often including those that occur in public institutions, are never reported to police. Victimization surveys designed to assess the combined amount of reported and unreported crime show that the overall rate of crime in the United States may be two to three times higher than that shown by official police statistics.

Secondly, crime rates have exhibited a general upward trend. That is, the increase in crime has been greater than the increase in the population. In 1960, the overall rate of crime was 1,887, while in 1970 it had risen to 3,984. By 1980, the rate per 100,000 had shown dramatic increases to 5,900. There may be some good news however. In the last three years we have seen some decline in the rate of crime known to police. This in part may be due to both the decline in the proportion of youth in the population and continuing efforts to control crime.

Crime patterns in the United States show that most crime that occurs is property crime rather than personal crime. For every violent crime (murder, rape, assault, robbery) there are nearly ten property crimes (predominantly larceny-theft). Yet most Americans tend to worry more about the possibility of becoming the victim of a violent crime. We worry most about the crimes that are least likely to occur.

What are some of the factors that are associated with crime? Research in the field of criminology has identified many variables that tend to influence the crime rate. The ones described here appear to have relevance for crime in libraries. For example, age is linked to crime patterns. This is true in two different ways. When considering the perpetrators of crime, the rate of arrest tends to peak at about age eighteen and then continues to decline. Arrests for property crimes peak even a bit earlier. Age also is related to the likelihood of being a victim of crime with the peak age being in the late teens and early twenties. For most crimes, including the serious offenses, there is a continuous decline in victimization rates after the peak age.

As was mentioned, crime rates have become increasingly high over the last several decades. This means that the younger members of our society have never experienced an environment with relatively low crime rates. These high crime rates and the continuous exposure to crime and news about crime have become a normal and expected part of life for the young in our society.

Crime data show that in addition to being young, being male is linked to the likelihood of being involved with crime, either as a

Introduction

perpetrator or as a victim. Males tend to be arrested about ten times as often as females with the differences being greatest for violent crimes. When considering the victims of crime, except for rape and purse snatching, males are more likely to be involved. Males are assault and robbery victims about twice as often.

There also are some geographical differences in crime patterns. Crime rates vary by state and by region of the country. For example, the crime rates in Nevada, Florida and Arizona are about three times higher than those in North and South Dakota and West Virginia. Regional differences also can be significant, but the greatest regional variations are seen when examining the different types of crimes as opposed to the total crime rate.

Among the more striking features of crime patterns are the differences between urban, suburban, and rural crime rates. As expected, urbanized areas have higher rates of crime, but the magnitude of these differences may be surprising. The rate of violent crimes in the largest cities is about seven times greater than that found in cities and towns with less than 10,000 people. However, the rates of property crimes are less than twice as great in major cities compared with the smallest cities.

When considering how to protect the library from crime and disruption it is important to assess the local situation. The general patterns described above should serve as guidelines to help the library administrator tune in to local problems.

Crime in Public Places

The problems faced by many libraries today are not insurmountable. In fact, compared with other public institutions, problems of disruption may be less serious in the library. This does not mean that trouble can or should be ignored in the hope that it will go away. Rather, local problems should be attended to—promptly, fairly, and firmly.⁶

One of the underlying reasons for many of the problems faced by libraries is that the institutions often fall into the category of “public places.” What is meant by the concept “public place?”

The term public place is not as simple to define as it appears....we use two sets of criteria to classify a location. First, let us consider the ownership of the location. The area in question may be either privately or publicly owned. This is the common use of the term public. On the public side we find settings such as municipal parks, museums, libraries, police departments, fire stations, city hospitals, and so on. Although these places share the trait of public ownership, they differ in the way that they treat the public. This brings us to the second criterion, whether access by the public is encouraged or discouraged.

Libraries, mass transit facilities, parks, and museums encourage access by the public. In fact, their very existence usually is dependent on public use and support. Police departments, fire stations, and government agencies are publicly owned, but the public is, generally speaking, not particularly welcome. Actually, these institutions function more efficiently when access to the public is limited.

What about the "private" side...? Clearly, the public is not restricted from all the locations described here....Privately owned settings often encourage as much or even more access than do the institutions described as public. Movies, theaters, sports stadiums, and other entertainment facilities must have easy access by the paying public....The open door policy of religious institutions was noteworthy until fairly recently. But crime and the fear of crime have caused many churches and synagogues to institute a more restricted access policy. The clearest example of privately held property from which the public generally is excluded is "home"....Many businesses and offices also restrict public access. In fact, most non-commercial establishments have some type of visitor control policy today.⁷

A great deal of the crime that occurs in the United States takes place in public settings. Administrators should be attentive to these trends and the inherent risks and implement appropriate crime prevention programs.

Risk Factors in the Library

There are a number of factors that may facilitate the likelihood of crime and disruption in libraries. Chief among these for public libraries and many academic libraries is the ease of access. Many of the problems of theft and most of the problems caused by problem patrons are exacerbated by the ease of access. During our national study of crime in libraries, one theme expressed over and over again was the problem generated by open access. One library director sent a copy of a sign that was displayed in the building: "This is a public library—protect your property!" Academic and special libraries have varying degrees of visitor and patron controls which help to control some of the problems found in the public libraries. The ease of access is not the only risk factor to be considered. The schedules of many libraries may facilitate crime and disruption. Often the library is the only public building that is open after dark or on weekends. The late-night hours can be particularly problematic.

In addition, most libraries contain valuable and easily sold items, including books, A.V. equipment and materials, cash, artwork, antiques, and so on. Many of the libraries that experience substantial problems with crime and disruption have a high proportion of

Introduction

“patrons” that are young. Since the young are disproportionately involved with crime, their presence in the library may represent a risk factor and necessitate adopting appropriate security measures. In fact, the relative lack of security measures is an additional risk factor for many libraries. Along with the need for security measures, most library professionals have not yet perceived the need for training in personal and property crime-prevention techniques.

There also are several psychological factors that may contribute to crime in libraries. Initially, there is the perception held by many potential thieves and vandals that the library is a “safe target”: one in which there are both “good pickings” and a relatively low probability of apprehension and prosecution. Secondly, there are many who would consider themselves as noncriminal, but who are in reality committing crimes against the library. Borrowers who never return books or take them without proper processing because “it’s not like stealing” are examples of the “honest thief.” Finally, librarians themselves are often too tolerant of behavior that administrators/managers of other facilities would quickly label theft. Books may be considered “long overdue” or “lost”—but not stolen. It is important to differentiate between legitimate and illegitimate behavior within the library setting.

Current Selections

In the articles that follow, the authors examine a variety of problems and possible solutions that may prove useful in a variety of library settings. John T. Kirkpatrick, a criminologist, examines the nature of crime and crime causation. Focusing on property and violent crime, he describes three bodies of theory that can help to explain the origins of crime: biological, psychological, and sociological. The latter two approaches are shown to have the greatest relevance for library administrators. The implications of these theories for controlling crime in the library are developed to help guide those responsible for security within the institution.

Alice Bahr’s comprehensive article on electronic security begins with a brief historical review of the development and use of electronic detection systems. A discussion of the effectiveness and potential drawbacks of the systems is followed by illustrations of cost-effectiveness. Determining whether an electronic security system is needed is addressed by suggesting both informal and more systematic research guidelines. Varieties of operating principles and the advantages and disadvantages of each type are described. Recent developments in both systems and the ways in which systems are being used follows. Bahr

points out the importance of the link between security needs in retailing and those in libraries.

Richard Boss's article on security practices begins with a brief survey of major episodes of crime and then turns to the issue of responding to losses. Concerns are raised about the typical reactive response to crime as opposed to a proactive response. Defining security needs in a broad manner is stressed. This includes assessing the weak points in the security programs. Weaknesses may involve physical security mechanisms or the lack of items, but also may include library policies and procedures. A practical and systematic security audit which can be adapted by many types of libraries is described in detail. Boss concludes with a discussion of the cost factors involved in securing a facility and the possible complications introduced by the "human element."

Focusing on a more specific problem John Morris, an expert on arson and loss control, points out that the majority of library fires are incendiary. Most of these tend to be set by young males. The necessity for proper protection (including intrusion alarms) is stressed. The advantages and disadvantages of automated fire suppression systems are discussed as are the various options available to libraries. Special systems most appropriate for rare and special collections are explained.

Donald Ungarelli provides a history of the development of insurance as well as a brief overview of the modern insurance industry. His discussion of the "loss factor" in the library includes the role of naturally occurring and intentional acts that can affect libraries. According to Ungarelli, too many administrators still hold the view that insurance and loss prevention are expensive luxuries. The importance of risk management, along with that of securing adequate coverage, is emphasized. Potential problems with validating losses and settling claims are summarized. A significant portion of Ungarelli's article deals with insurance options and available packages including attention to rare and art items.

In the selection on crime patterns and costs, Lincoln summarizes the findings of the recent nationwide Library Crime Research Project. Basic patterns for a variety of crime episodes are described. This is followed by estimates of losses and the description of security use in the nation's public libraries.

Peter J. Parker's treatment of statutory protection begins with the suggestion that library-specific statutes may be counter productive. Illustrations of the strengths and weaknesses of several state statutes are presented. Suggestions for coordinating activities with law enforcement and court officials are followed by a comparison of "weak" and

Introduction

“strong” statutes. A thorough analysis of legislation in each of the fifty states provides a valuable reference for administrators.

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