

Patterns and Costs of Crime

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SEVERAL OF THE preceding articles suggested that, prior to implementing special security programs, it is advisable to assess the kinds and amount of losses that could be suffered. This, of course, should be done at the local level since problems vary from setting to setting. On the other hand, it is useful to have an understanding of the kinds of problems that other libraries already have experienced. The data to be described here were collected in part to meet this need.

The Library Crime Research Project is a three year study of the crime and disruption patterns in public libraries in all fifty states. It is a broad study designed to assess not only problems of crime and disruption, but to identify many of the conditions that facilitate or help to control these problems. The procedure followed for each of the states was identical.¹ First, a systematic sample of at least sixty public libraries was drawn using the comprehensive listing of all public libraries in the *American Library Directory*. Survey questions covered a variety of topics including: (1) characteristics of the library and community, (2) descriptions of patrons and patron use patterns, (3) experiences with eighteen different types of crime and disruption, and (4) direct and indirect costs of crime including the use of security equipment and procedures. A total of 2920 surveys were distributed by mail and analyses were conducted on the 1647 surveys returned by August 1983.

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Patterns of Crime

The study measured the incidence of eighteen different types of crime and disruption including types of (1) vandalism, (2) theft, (3) problem-patron behavior, (4) assault, and (5) arson. The estimates of crime obtained in this study tend to be conservative, in part because many crimes in the library are hidden—unknown to our respondents. In addition, some of the crimes might have been detected but went unreported. The rate of response from larger libraries was lower than that for smaller libraries. Since the larger libraries tend to have more crime, the study estimates would be somewhat low. Finally, use of the term *episode* in the questions may result in conservative estimates, since an episode may have involved the theft of a single volume or hundreds of volumes.

Vandalism. Six different types of vandalism were examined, including intentional book damage, vandalism outside the building and inside the building, vandalism to patrons' and staff-owned cars, and intentional damage to equipment. Table 1 contains the findings for each of the problems. The most common type of vandalism was intentional book damage. Two-thirds of the respondents reported at least one episode. Just over 25 percent had more than six repetitions.

Vandalism outside was more common than vandalism inside the building. Over half of the cases had experienced at least one act of outside vandalism, and just less than one in ten had six or more episodes. Vandalism inside the building was less common but still a serious problem. Just under half of the respondents reported at least one episode, while over 10 percent had chronic problems (six or more repetitions). Intentional damage to equipment occurred in less than 20 percent of the institutions reporting, and in half of these cases the damage occurred only once or twice.

Theft. Four kinds of theft were measured: book theft, reference material theft, theft of equipment, and other theft. Book theft was the most common offense reported. Of the responding participants, 80 percent indicated that they knew of at least one episode of book theft. Out of these cases, the majority had more than six episodes. Over one quarter of the reports indicated that books had been stolen more than twenty times.

The next most frequent type of theft was the theft of reference material. Approximately one-fourth reported one or two occurrences, and over one-fifth had chronic reference theft. The theft of equipment was a chronic problem for only 2 or 3 percent of the respondents. However, nearly a quarter of those responding had uncovered at least one episode.

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TABLE 1
 PERCENTAGE OF PUBLIC LIBRARIES REPORTING DISRUPTIVE
 EPISODES FOR A TWELVE-MONTH PERIOD

<i>Type of Episode</i>	<i>Number of Episodes: Percentages</i>	
	<i>At least one</i>	<i>Six or more</i>
Intentional Book Damage	66	26
Book Theft	80	52
Reference Material Stolen	63	23
Equipment Stolen	22	02
Other Theft	34	06
Vandalism Outside Building	54	09
Vandalism Inside Building	44	11
Vandalism of Patron's Car	13	01
Vandalism of Staff's Car	16	01
Vandalism of Equipment	17	03
Drug Use by Staff/Patron	15	03
Drug Sale by Staff/Patron	04	00
Verbal Abuse to Patron	28	05
Verbal Abuse to Staff	45	13
Indecent Exposure	17	02
Assault on Patron	07	00
Assault on Staff	03	00
Arson	04	00

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to check off as many episodes as were applicable.

Problem-patron behavior. Based on a review of existing studies, several types of problem behaviors were focused on: verbal abuse of staff and patron, drug use and sales, and indecent exposure. This, of course, excludes many other kinds of problems. Respondents indicated that drug use was known to have occurred in over 15 percent of the libraries. Drug sales were rare. Only 4 percent of the questionnaires mentioned the sale of drugs by staff or patrons.

Verbal abuse was the second type of problem patron behavior. Verbal abuse of the staff was more common than abuse by one patron of another. Nearly half of the respondents told of at least one case of verbal abuse of a staff member. Verbal abuse was chronic in over 13 percent of the libraries. Despite the problem of patrons not telling respondents about being harassed, more than one-fourth of the returns mentioned the verbal abuse of a patron. Nearly 20 percent were aware of at least one incident of indecent exposure.

Assault. Attacks against a patron were reported by 7 percent of the sample. Less than 2 percent of the returns indicated that there were three

or more episodes which was similar to the breakdown found for assaults against a staff member. Three percent knew of an assault against a staff member but less than 1 percent reported three or more assaults. Combining the two assault items we find that nearly 8 percent of the sample had at least one known assault.

Arson. Arson is perhaps the most devastating crime that can occur in a library. A single episode can destroy the entire collection and the facility. The survey data show that 4 percent of the libraries had experienced an episode of arson during the year. It is likely that many of the arsons reported were relatively minor, because these are substantially more cases than the thirty-two known episodes reported by Morris in his earlier article. As a summary measure, 11 percent of the sample claimed to be free from all crime and disruption.²

Personal victimization. Nearly 80 percent of the librarians responding indicated that they had never been the victim of a crime in the library. Most of the victimized librarians had experienced only one such incident, while 6 percent had been victimized more than once.

Costs of Crime

Assessing the impact of crime can be confusing. One useful scheme is suggested by Conklin.³ He examines both the direct and indirect costs of crime. Direct costs are the result of a particular episode of crime. These costs include the value of any property lost or damaged, the value of any money taken, medical costs for the victim's injuries, lost wages, and so on. The indirect costs generally include any changes from the fear or anticipation of subsequent crime. These changes may be made by an individual in response to crime or at the institutional.

Research Findings: Direct Costs

The national survey asked respondents about the direct costs of crime and disruption in their libraries. They were asked to estimate the total losses, along with indicators of the effects of crime upon services. The impact of crime on services included: closing the library or a branch, changing operating hours, halting community programs, and losing the use of equipment.

Dollar losses. Total losses due to crime were assessed by asking respondents to: "Estimate the total amount lost due to crime and disruption...over the last twelve months." Analysis of the data showed that the most frequent response—just over 20 percent—was "less than \$100."

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Approximately 12 percent of the libraries reported no losses. Over one-fifth reported losses over \$1000, with 3 percent reporting losses in excess of \$10,000 (see table 2). How a particular dollar loss affected a library depended upon the size of the overall budget and how the loss was covered.

TABLE 2
PROPORTION OF LIBRARIES REPORTING
LOSSES DUE TO CRIME

<i>Amount Lost</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
\$0	12
Less than \$100	21
\$101-\$250	17
\$251-\$500	15
\$501-\$1,000	14
\$1,001-\$2,500	10
\$2,501-\$5,000	6
\$5,001-\$10,000	3
Over \$10,000	3

Effects of Crime

The most serious effect on services to the community would be closing the library, which was reported by less than 2 percent of those responding. In many of these cases, arson was the apparent cause of the closing. Approximately 4 percent of the libraries were forced to change their schedule of operating hours, and several had done so more than once. Of those responding, 5 percent reported that they had stopped a community program and about half of this group had terminated more than one program. Finally, 8 percent of those responding mentioned that they had lost the use of equipment because of crime problems.

Research Findings: Indirect Costs

Indirect costs, though difficult to measure, may be more devastating to an individual or institution than the direct costs of crime. The indirect costs are changes resulting from the fear of future crime and include instituting security measures or changing personal behavior.

Crime prevention expenses. The majority of libraries spent nothing on crime prevention during the year in which the surveys were

circulated. Of those responding, 15 percent reported spending over \$250. Only 3 percent of libraries spent over \$10,000 on any type of crime prevention programs. Many of these libraries had security personnel on their staff.

Patterns of Security Use

The survey included questions about fourteen different security measures ranging from the relatively simple smoke detector and locked storage room to the more costly measures of book theft detection systems and closed-circuit television. Use of the simpler, less expensive types of security was the most widespread. Locked storage rooms were used by 37 percent of the sample (see table 3). Smoke detectors and some type of police patrol coverage were the next most common devices or programs. About one-fifth of the libraries responding indicated that all the doors had security locks. Even though book theft was the most frequent crime in the libraries surveyed, only 10 percent had book theft detection systems.

TABLE 3
PROPORTION OF LIBRARIES WITH
VARIOUS SECURITY MEASURES

<i>Type of Measure</i>	<i>Percentage of Libraries</i>
Closed circuit television	1.3
Plainclothes guards or police	2.9
Portable signaling device	4.1
Uniformed guards or police	4.8
Security screens on all windows	5.3
Unbreakable windows	6.2
Intrusion alarms on all doors	7.8
Book theft detection system	10.0
Automatic communication link with police	11.8
Electronic intrusion system inside	12.6
Security locks on all outside doors	23.0
Police patrol coverage	26.1
Smoke detector	26.6
Locked storage room	37.0

Note: Percentages do not add to 100 because respondents were asked to check off as many measures as were applicable.

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Security personnel were relatively rare and typically found in major urban libraries. Examinations of the overall use of security found a varied range of deployment—each measure was found in some libraries—but that most libraries had few devices. In fact, one quarter of the respondents said that they had *none* of the specified measures. An additional 19 percent had only one security item, while 17 percent had two different items.

Effects of Victimization

What are the effects of having been the victim of a crime while in the library? Those librarians (about 20 percent) who had been victims of crimes were more likely to demonstrate defensive behavior patterns than were nonvictimized librarians. For example, only 2 percent of nonvictims carried any type of personal protection device, while 3 percent of those victimized once, 6 percent of those victimized twice, and 17 percent of those victimized more than twice did so. Similarly, about 7 percent of nonvictimized respondents indicated that they were picked up after work because of their concerns about crime. Those who had been victimized while at work in the library were more than twice as likely to be picked up after work.

In sum, the costs of crime are varied. When crime occurs there are resulting costs. The impact of direct costs depends upon the relative cost of the episode in relation to the overall budget of the institution as well as the significance of the materials lost or damaged. The significance of the indirect costs cannot be assessed easily. To illustrate, the removal of photocopying services due to concern about damage to the machines may inconvenience many people slightly, but the fear of potential personal crime can seriously disrupt a small group of employees. Both are real costs, but the overall relative impact may be difficult to determine.

Recall that approximately 90 percent of all libraries had some experience with crime or disruption. It appears that most of these libraries should consider evaluating their security procedures. The planning of crime prevention programs should be based in part on careful consideration of both current and anticipated costs of crime and then taking steps to minimize those potential costs.

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References

1. A full description of the procedure can be found in: Lincoln, Alan Jay. *Crime In The Library: A Study of Patterns, Impact, and Security*. New York: R.R. Bowker, 1984. (A complete list of related reprints can be obtained from the author by writing to him at the Department of Criminal Justice, University of Lowell, Lowell, Massachusetts, 01854.) See also, Lincoln, Alan Jay, and Lincoln, Carol Zall. "The Impact of Crime in Public Libraries." *Library & Archival Security* 4(Winter 1982):1-11.
2. Preliminary analyses of a similar survey conducted with Canadian libraries show that crime rates tend to be lower than those found in U.S. libraries.
3. Conklin, John E. . *The Impact Of Crime*. New York: MacMillan, 1975.