STUDY OF THE PROBLEMS OF READER DELINQUENCY IN COLLEGE LIBRARIES OF THE UNIVERSITY OF DELHI

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A sample of 17 college libraries of University of Delhi was used to critically examine various aspects of reader delinquency. A delinquent, in this context has been defined and various forms of delinquency are recognized. Survey research method was used for data collection. Data analysis show that .38% of the collection is lost annually and of the rest 24.05% is mutilated and 17.5% is misplaced. When reader delinquency occurs in a library, three parties are involved - the library, the delinquent reader and the other group of readers. Concludes with measures to check delinquency and a model which shows the extent of the loss.

1 INTRODUCTION

The loss of books in libraries has always been a problem but over the past few years losses have been rising. Today books vanish off the shelves and go out of the libraries in an unending flood to the extent that every patron or other visitors, too, can be viewed as potential thieves. When a book is lost the library suffers not only its cost but its processing cost too.

It may seem strange that although libraries suffer a lot from mysterious disappearance of books, it is a subject not widely discussed by librarians. A reason Badriprasad[1] has given for this is that “talking about these things might provide ways and means to the potential offenders”. In other words, it may create more library thieves, therefore, this escapist attitude is adopted. In fact, there are three basic reasons[2] for such an attitude. Firstly, there is a natural hesitancy to attempt to discover the true extent of losses because when the truth becomes known something will have to be done about it. Secondly, some librarians feel that nothing can be done about it, as losses are an inescapable condition of open stacks and free access. And thirdly, the prevailing opinion seems to be that stock-taking is too expensive and the cost of such undertaking is far greater than the monetary loss from missing books.

Various studies have revealed that it is the academic and public libraries that suffer the most by this problem. A special library is used by specialised patrons only, who are considered more responsible. I have confined myself to this growing problem in college libraries alone. A question arises here as to why college libraries suffer the most. An answer to this question regarding student’s attitude to libraries is best provided by Broadhead[3]; “The pressure of academic studies upon the students has intensified to the level where they feel that personal need overrides any obligation to adhere to library procedure, which results in unrecorded removal of library materials. This in turn enhances the demand factor, frustration sets in causing an increasing number of library users to adopt the same use. The chain reaction causes a spiral effect on book losses”.

2 WHY THE TERM DELINQUENCY?

According to Webster’s Third New International Dictionary a “delinquent individual” means “a transgressor against duty or law especially in a degree not constituting crime”[4]. Thus a user of the library who steals or damages documents in a library can be regarded as a transgressor against duty or law. Thus, he may be called a delinquent.

The use of the term delinquent was first made by Ralph Munn[5] in the year 1935, in a paper presented at Denver Conference where he blamed the educators for what he called juvenile delinquency[6] amongst college adolescents by their faulty teaching methods. Literature search reveals that during the last decade there has been frequent use of this term in library science literature.

For the purpose of this study the term delinquent reader has been taken to mean “a user of the library who overborrows to a high degree, or retains books after they have been recalled, or illegally borrows or misplaces books, or steals or mutilates books”[7]. This excludes those persons who break library rules accidentally or through foregetfulness.

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Based on the author’s M. Phil dissertation of Delhi University.
Also excluded are harms done to physical property of the library.

In view of the above definition of a delinquent reader, we may recognize the following forms of delinquency:

- Overborrowing, overdues, illegal borrowing, misplacements, theft and mutilation.

21 **Overborrowing**

Overborrowing is getting more books issued than the number determined by the library.

22 **Overdues**

A book is said to be overdue when it is kept by a reader for period longer than that determined by the library.

23 **Illegal borrowing**

It is theft of library books by means of stolen or found library tickets or borrower’s cards.

24 **Theft**

Theft is taking and removing the property of others without the consent of the rightful owner with the intention of converting it to the taker’s use. A library theft is defined as carrying out of a library book without prior permission of the librarian.

25 **Mutilation**

Mutilation is caused when a book is made unfit for reading purposes wholly or partially by cutting off or destroying its pages in some other way. Mutilation is not as serious as theft as the book physically remains in the library with its limb or limbs gone.

26 **Misplacement**

It means placing books at points other than those determined by the library.

3 **OBJECTIVES**

The following were the objectives of the study:

- To study various forms of delinquency.
- To find out the annual percentage of loss in college libraries.
- To know the loss-to-use ratio.
- To know the annual loss in terms of amount (in rupees).
- To examine and analyze the factors that cause delinquency.
- To know the attitude of non-delinquents and the effects of their activities on delinquents.
- To study the delinquent’s behaviour in relation to psychological, environmental and socio-economic background.
- To determine the methods of prevention of delinquency as suggested by staff, students and teachers.

4 **METHODOLOGY**

41 **Survey Research**

Survey research method was used to carry out this study as survey is versatile and practical especially for administrator as it indicates present conditions and points to present needs[8]. Surveys cannot make decisions for researcher but provide information on which to base sound decisions. The techniques of data collection used were:

- Direct observation, Interview based on questionnaire and case studies.

411 **Direct observation**

This method was chosen as it not only helps to study individual behaviour but human relations too. Also, the data gathered are more reliable and unbiased. For the purpose of this study four college libraries were chosen as sample and in each of them the behaviour of library staff and students was observed. Most of the data were recorded on the spot.

412 **Interviews**

Interview is one of the principal survey methods which helps to draw information from people. Structured interview method was used and a set of questions already prepared was used to ask questions. For this study interviews of library staff members, teachers and students were taken. Most of data were collected through this method.

413 **Case Studies**

The case study consists of data relating to some phase in the life history or entire life process of the individual. Therefore, this method was adopted to study the behaviour of delinquents. Names and addresses of such students were taken from librarians or through other students. Data were collected regarding their background, type of delinquency they had indulged in, their reasons for doing so, and so forth.

42 **Sample**

A sample consists of limited number of items or people from whom generalizations can be made about the whole population. For the purpose of this study disproportionate stratified sample[9] was used. Stratifying a sample is performed by classifying or dividing all elements in the population into categories that are relevant to the study. In proportionate stratified sampling, proportional number of samples
from each category are chosen at random but in disproportionate stratified sampling enough elements from each stratum are chosen so that in case of small categories the same is properly represented.

In University of Delhi there are 67 colleges having their own libraries. These were divided into different categories on the basis of location or region. In all a sample of 17 college libraries from all regions was chosen. Thus the sample consists of 12 college libraries from campus and neighbouring areas, 2 from West Zone, 2 from South Zone and only one from East Zone (this zone has only 2 colleges). A sample of 54 delinquents and 64 non-delinquents was used for the study. About 58 teachers from colleges of University of Delhi were also interviewed to get their views and suggestions.

5 ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Analysis is concerned with satisfying man’s deep desire to uncover that lies beneath the surface. It reduces a field to ‘size’ and helps in splitting the whole data in small categories on the basis of logical categories. The data gathered should be analyzed to the limit that is possible, consistent with the aim of the survey but the analysis should never be overelaborated. Regarding data collected from interviews, the answers are to be reduced to meaningful form to draw conclusions. Some of the data can be presented in the form of tables, diagrams or figures.

51 Forms of Delinquency

511 Annual loss in college libraries

As already mentioned, a sample of 17 college libraries was used to study loss rate. Of these 17, data available from 15 college libraries were used for drawing conclusions as in 2 college libraries stock taking is not done at regular intervals.

Table 1 shows annual loss for the year 1977-78 in college libraries. The number of books lost varies from 21 to 360, i.e., from .21% to .84%. Thus, on an average, .38% of books are lost annually. In case of the library where loss rate is .21% the figures are low due to the fact that it is an evening college and its students take “studies seriously”. Also all the books used frequently have been placed under closed access which minimises losses. In the college library where loss is .84%, the highest, the figures are high due to the reason that the library is located in an isolated place. The case studies of students from this library reveal that they don’t take studies seriously and when the examinations approach they depend on stolen books or torn pages from books of their library. Open access too increases greatly the loss of books.

5111 Loss to use ratio

Materials issued out of the library are more liable to be lost than those used within the library. The circulation figures have direct relationships with loss and mutilation. The loss to use ratio can be calculated on the basis of taking ratio of books lost to the books issued out of the library.

Books lost: Circulation figures of the period.

Table 1 indicates that on an average, one book was lost for every 496 books circulated during 1977-78. The loss rate varies from one book lost for 228 books circulated to one book lost for 1572 books circulated.

512 Mutilation

A sample study on mutilations was done in 17 college libraries to know the extent of damage caused. To get a proper picture sample included campus, non-campus, girls, co-educational, special and evening college libraries.

In each college library, books at random from every fifth row and from each row, every third shelf were checked for various forms of mutilations. In each library five such shelves were chosen as sample. The data collected thus has been presented in Table 2. A book was considered to be mutilated if it had pages missing, underlining with pen or pencil, marginal notes, ink marks or any other marks or folds.

As seen from Table 2, on an average out of 142 books nearly 34 have been mutilated in one form or another. This means that nearly 24.05% of the collection is mutilated, which shows a high degree of mutilation in college libraries of University of Delhi.

513 Misplacement

Although not considered a very serious offence and offenders often let off, misplacements often cause problems and may lead to duplication. The librarians of libraries visited had no records of students caught misplacing books. Therefore, a sample study on misplacements was carried out in 17 college libraries.

In each college library, books at random from every fourth row and from every row every third shelf were checked for any misplaced books. A book was considered to be misplaced in 3 ways—a book placed in another subject, a book placed more than one shelf away and a book placed away on some shelf or one shelf before or one shelf later. In each library, fifteen such shelves were checked.

As seen from Table 3, in college libraries of University of Delhi, 17.6% of the collection is misplaced. On an average out of 426 books, 75 books were found to be misplaced.

514 Illegal borrowing

Illegal borrowing is by means of stolen or found library membership tickets. The librarians do not seem concerned about this form of delinquency as they always recover the cost of
the book from the student whose ticket is involved. This study revealed that during each academic year, 5-6 such cases occur in each college library. These incidents usually take place during or before examination time.

515 Overdues and overborrowing

To get data of overdues, five college libraries were chosen as sample. From each college library figures (only estimated) regarding return of books, overdues and over borrowing each day were taken. In each college library about 400-450 books are returned everyday of which about 100-125 are overdues. This means that about 25% of returned books are overdues.

Overborrowing is only during examinations and that too occurs only with the help of library staff members.

52 Annual loss in amount

Loss in terms of amount of rupees was calculated by taking average price of a book. For this purpose, 50 books (most of them were textbooks and published in India) acquired by a college library, during the period for which loss figures were taken, were considered as sample. From these 50 books, average price of one book was calculated, which comes to about Rs.22.50 per book. To this was added the processing cost, i.e., 10% of the cost of the book. Thus, cost of one book lost is Rs.25/.

As seen in Table 1, on an average each college library loses about 192 books every year and the cost of these lost books is about Rs.4,800/-. This loss is written off each year by the authorities.

53 Factors that cause delinquency

When delinquency takes place in a college library, the three parties involved are: the library, the delinquent reader and the other mass of readers (the non-delinquents).

531 The library

Regarding library there is a saying “Good service, less theft. Less theft, good service”[10], on the basis that if service is good, students feel more or less satisfied and there will be less cause for delinquency. If there is less theft, then it will mean that the library provides good service. But the library should be prepared for some losses as for good service there are bound to be some losses. The library’s role may be considered as follows:

- Lack of proper security arrangements
- Non-availability of reading materials
- Attitude of library staff to users
- Loan period not long enough
- Faculty reservation system
- Heavy fines
- Lack of photocopying facilities
- Open access vs closed access

532 Role of other mass of readers

Delinquent behaviour can be due to two main reasons -- firstly, any sort of delinquency gives room to delinquent behaviour on the part of other students and secondly, it can be due to actions of non-delinquents too. A question arises as to how innocent borrowers give room to delinquency. For this, there are two reasons: firstly, some innocent borrower can give rise to circumstances which may give room to others for indulging in delinquent behaviour. And, secondly, failure by students to condemn delinquent behaviour may give room to theft, mutilations or misplacements. Students often fail to bring to the notice of the librarian any act of delinquency they know of, as often such acts escape the notice of library staff but not of other students. The students became indignant only when they themselves are affected in some way. This is found even in the state of our society. A peaceful citizen does not have the moral courage and does not want to get himself involved in any dispute. He feels insecure in case he decides to take some sort of action against criminals.

533 The delinquent reader

As already mentioned, delinquency is encouraged by failure on
the part of library to ensure good service or by other readers who unintentionally encourage reader delinquency by some innocent action. But a significant amount of delinquent behaviour does not fit into this pattern. Most of the librarians interviewed were of the view that delinquent borrowers were basically selfish persons. It has been found that a student while indulging in delinquency thinks that “my need is greater than others so I must have it now”. Such a student does not hesitate to remove a book fully or partially by hook or by crook. A delinquent’s mentality can be explained if we presume him as a person who is selfish and thinks only about himself. He does not consider the library as his own and has no sense of belonging.


**Psychological:** Regarding psychology of students Savage[12] writes, “students would hand to the police any purse they found, yet they don’t hesitate to smug out books belonging to the library”. From this it is evident that students don’t have much of honesty in their dealings with the library. Here, frustration too plays an important role. A student not well prepared for examination gets frustrated and loses voluntary control over his motivation. He does not usually intend to harm others but in some cases he does not hesitate to harm others as his only intention is to be benefitted.

A student’s behaviour when he is alone is quite different from when he is with a group. In our libraries many thefts take place when students visit libraries in a group. In a group, a student becomes more bold and even willingly takes advice from his friends regarding methods and techniques for delinquent behaviour. Also he knows that he is quite protected in a group.

**Socio-economic aspect:** Here we study the culture of a person’s society on his thinking and his action. There are strong forces in our society which encourage students to proceed in certain directions and discourage them from going in other directions. Thus, when a student steals a book he does it under the influence of certain social factors. Here economic conditions too play an important role. In poor economic conditions a student cannot afford to buy many books and with the influence of these social factors he resorts to stealing books or tears away pages from books.

In the present society nobody wants to report crime and failure on the part of people to do so gives more room to crime. In our context too this is applicable.

**Environmental aspect:** This deals with the external circumstances, conditions and things that affect the existence and development of an individual. Here relation between the offender and the environment where he lives plays an important role. The environment influences the individual and he indulges in delinquent behaviour. When a person’s behavioural freedom is threatened or eliminated he might experience hostile or aggressive feelings towards responsive agents. Therefore, in a library when a student is denied reading materials in some way or other he becomes aggressive. Lost and damaged books are evidence of such behaviour.

### 6 MEASURES

From the previous sections it is clear that delinquency is a serious problem. In view of this, certain measures are to be adopted by libraries to check delinquency. Given below are some measures, some of which are already being done and some still needs to be done.

#### 61 Circulation of Books

1. Reduction in loan period if a book is in much demand. Some norms need to be established based on demand and nature of a book.
2. Get back books from teachers (do not issue more than one copy of a book) after each semester.
3. Library staff while issuing out library books should try to see identification of the borrowers. This will avoid illegal borrowing. As it is not possible to check all the borrowers, random checks can be made.
4. Reservation of books.

#### 62 Security

5. Role of the person at the checking point is extremely important. He should be honest, alert and a little strict. Usually older employees are good in this respect.
6. The staff on duty in stacks should keep moving in the stacks most of the time.
7. Greater vigilance during lunch hour and just before the close of the library.

#### 63 Maintenance

8. Shelf rectifications on regular basis to discover displaced books. At present regular shelving is not done. (Make note of a book found in a particular place, do not remove the book and catch the person at the time of issue).
9. There should be multiple copies of books. The only copy of a book in great demand should be retained in the library as far as possible.
10. Loose binding makes mutilations (especially tearing of pages) easier. Therefore, priority should be given to binding.
11. Checking of books by library staff at the time of their return.
64 **Building design**

(12) If building design permits, access to certain sections of the library should be closed when limited staff is available.

(13) Avoid study carrels and partitions as far as possible as they help mutilators.

65 **Library staff**

(14) Attitude of library staff to users is very important. They should use the humane approach.

(15) Availability of assistance in location of books and use of catalogue for students at all times.

66 **Others**

(16) Photocopying facilities.

(17) Electronic security measures (if a college library can afford it).

(18) Undergraduate library

Regarding multiple copies, the librarians can take help from the undergraduate library in their zone. Since 1974, University of Delhi has started undergraduate or zonal libraries to cater to the needs of undergraduates and to make books readily available for them.

Their chief aim is restricted to lending of textbooks. They supplement college library services to the increasing number of undergraduates. There should be liaison between college librarian and undergraduate librarian of the zone so that unnecessary wastage of purchase of materials can be avoided. These libraries are open during evenings too. This also helps students as these libraries are located in residential areas.

7 **CONCLUSION**

In the past, books were few and so were the borrowers. But presently book losses are on the increase as this study and many others have revealed. It is very important to check losses occurring in this manner.

This study reveals that on an average .38% of the books are lost annually from college libraries of University of Delhi. For every 496 books circulated one book is lost. Of the remaining collection, 24.05% was found to be mutilated and 17.5% misplaced.

On the basis of the above findings, a model is drawn below:

**Model:** Let us assume that a library has 50,000 volumes in its stock.

According to this study:

a) Books lost annually are .38% of the whole collection.

Therefore, total books lost = \( 50,000 \times 0.38\% \) = 190

Cost of books lost = \( \text{Rs} \times 4,750\) (cost calculated at the rate of \( \text{Rs} \times 25\) per book including processing cost as referred in section 52).

b) Of the remaining collection, books mutilated = 24.05%

Total books mutilated = \( 50,000 \times 24.05\% \) = 12,025

c) Books misplaced = 17.5%

Total books misplaced = \( 50,000 \times 17.5\% \) = 8,750

From the above model, it appears that about 21,000 books out of a collection of 50,000 are affected by delinquency. From this it can be concluded that 42% of the collection is hit by delinquency.

Several measures (section 6) have been suggested by librarians, students and teachers. Many methods have already been applied but we have been unable to solve this growing problem. The reason for this is that theoretical methods are hard to apply and in each situation a different method is required.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>College</th>
<th>Number of books checked</th>
<th>Number of books Mutilated</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>120</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>27</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>143</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>137</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>142</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I</td>
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<td>K</td>
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<td>L</td>
<td>143</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>N</td>
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<td>31</td>
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<td>O</td>
<td>152</td>
<td>25</td>
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<tr>
<td>P</td>
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<td>33</td>
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<tr>
<td>Q</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>2,420</td>
<td>582 (24.05%)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Mutilations in college libraries of University of Delhi
required. However, there is a certain common threat that runs through these situations. Here, user education is an important aspect. It is for the college authorities especially the Principal, the parent body and teachers, besides the librarian, to wean away students from this criminal tendency. The authorities too should be prepared for some losses, as for good service some losses are likely to occur. Their change of attitudes is essential. Presently there is a lack of proper environment and the state of the society is reflected in the state of libraries too. Therefore, unless teachers and college authorities work with librarians it is hard to overcome this problem. The aim should be to avoid wastage of resources and building up of collection so that students get minimum chance to indulge in delinquent behaviour. Thus the college library authorities are to be educated to accept some losses if services are to be provided. Here, library associations can play an important role. The association should have conferences, discussions or seminars where principals, teachers and library authorities may be invited to discuss this problem to reach some conclusion.

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9 REFERENCES


6. Ibid.


