

Perception of Law Community about book pilferage in libraries: A study of M D University, Rohtak

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ABSTRACT

Libraries have been serving the community since the time immemorial. In the early stage the documentary resources were very less and hence were kept in close access, even in several cases documents were kept chained with the shelves. The open access system brought with itself another problem for libraries as by-product which is called pilferage of documents. The pilferage of documents from libraries is a universal phenomenon. However, the quantum of pilferage differs from country to country. In India, this problem is being faced by almost all the libraries irrespective of their nature. The present study is an attempt to investigate the perception of students, research scholars and teachers belonging to the field of law. The results indicated that a majority of respondents perceive that humans are greedy by nature whereas less than fifty percent do not agree to this. As far as gender of the respondents is concerned, it does not have any significant effect on this issue. More than 65% respondents do not agree to the statement that pilfering of books is not a matter of prestige for men and the same respondents also do not agree that female users pilfer more books to impress their male counterparts. As much as 60% respondents disagree or strongly disagree that neither males are encouraged by their female counterparts nor females are encouraged by male counterparts to pilfer the books from the library.

Key words: Library Loss, Stock Verification, Library Stock withdrawal

INTRODUCTION

Libraries have been serving the community since the time immemorial. In the early stage the documentary resources were very less and hence were kept in close access, even in several cases documents were kept chained with the shelves. Libraries were then maintained only for preservation and use of limited people. With the passage of time the concept of libraries tuned into social institutions and these are nowadays meant for use. This change in the attitude of libraries forced the libraries to shift from the close

access to the open access. In open access documents are shelved in open stacks and users are allowed free access to the documents for consultation as well as use. The open access system brought with itself another problem for libraries as by-product which is called pilferage of documents. The pilferage of documents from libraries is a universal phenomenon. However, the quantum of pilferage differs from country to country. In India, this problem is being faced by almost all the libraries irrespective of their nature. Though the libraries, nowadays, are making their best efforts to minimize the pilferage by adopting the various modern security systems like: RFID, CCTV, etc. Still the problem exists.

The word pilfer (synonym of theft) is as old as the human civilization. The meaning of word theft; according to Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary of Current English is "To steal things of little value or in small quantities, especially

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from the place where you work¹ Even in Indian Penal Code² under Section 378 the word 'Theft' is defined as "whoever intending to take dishonestly any moveable property out of the possession of any person without that person's consent, moved that property in order to such taking, is said to commit theft".² Hence the meaning of pilfering is to steal others' good without seeking the permission of the owner. The word 'perception' relate to human psychology.

After physical verification, libraries are striving for the settlement of the loss reported in verification. However, as per General Financial Rules 2005³, Govt of India has prescribed for library loss as under:

"Loss of five volumes per one thousand volumes of books issued /consulted in a year may be taken as reasonable provided such losses are not attributable to dishonesty or negligence. However, loss of a book of a value exceeding Rs. 1,000/- (Rupees One thousand only) and rare books irrespective of value shall invariably be investigated and appropriate action taken."

Many times the library staff catches red handedly the users taking a document out of the library, but action as prescribed under section 379 of Indian Penal Code could not be taken due to various reasons. It is clearly prescribed under section 379 of Indian Penal Code that "Whoever commits theft shall be punished with imprisonment of either description for a term which may extent to three (3) years, or with fine or with both".

Now question arises that why the civilized users of the libraries pilfer the library books? What aspects force them to commit such a crime? The present study is an attempt to investigate the perception of students, research scholars and teachers belonging to the field of law.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The major objectives of the present study are:-

1. To find out whether sociological aspects have any impact on pilferage of library books.
2. To find out whether psychological aspects have any impact on pilferage of library books

3. To find out whether economical aspects have any impact on pilferage of library books.

4. To find out whether administrative aspects have any impact on pilferage of library books.

Literature review

Ajidahun (2004)⁴ reported that there is a significant relationship between students' moral judgment and their involvement in the theft of library books. He perceived that the general moral decadence in the society is a contributory factor to the involvement of student in the theft of library book. As far as the matter of relationship between economic factors and students' involvement in the theft of library books, he perceived that certain economic factors enhance students' involvement in the theft of library books. Such factors include the high cost of books, poverty, economic recession in the world, inflation, and the lust for money and craze for wealth. About the relationship between institutional factors and students' involvement in the theft of library books, he indicated that certain institutional factors could make students to steal library books. Such factors include inadequate library security staff, lack of female porters, lack of book loans to students, un-conducive library environment, lack of vigilance and thoroughness of library porters, collusion between library porters and students, poor design of library building for security purpose, inadequate library opening hours etc.

Braine (1993)⁵ in his study on the theft and mutilation of books in High School Library Media in the USA found that is 43% of the sample had been involved in the theft and mutilation of books in their early school years. He asserted that this is an indication that the theft of library books is not only a university library phenomenon.

Teferra (1996)⁶ reported the prevalent rate of theft of library books in Ethiopia. He reported the case of an individual who stole materials worth one million dollars from forty libraries across the USA. Dell (1992)⁷ revealed a dramatic theft of historical articles from Alexander Turnbull Library. That single incident prompted the library to review and overhaul its security

policies and measures. Likewise, Huntsbry (1991)⁸ disclosed that one notorious Stephen Blumberry who out-witted all the security systems of about four hundred libraries and stole nearly nineteen tones of rare books. Souter (1976)⁹ also conducted a study on delinquent readers in academic libraries and found that books in the areas of psychology, sociology, education and social sciences were more often stolen. He concluded that no library material is safe from being stolen.

METHODOLOGY

Keeping in view the above objectives in the mind a questionnaire containing 25 questions was structured to collect the data from the users. The area of the study is limited to Maharishi Dayanand University, Department of Law. Hence the population of the study is the users of the law library, such as faculty members, research scholars and the students (both male and females). About 180 questioners were distributed among the respondents. However, only 100 duly filled questioners were received back in the ratio of 2:3:5 of Faculty, Research Scholars and Students respectively. The data so collected was then coded, tabulated and analysed. The results are presented in the form of frequency and percentages. The data is also subjected to chi-square test.

RESULTS

The data obtained from the respondents is analyzed and presented hereafter along with relevant tables.

Sociological aspects

Man is a social animal. The behaviour of every individual is influenced by the behavior of others in the same society. The results indicated that a majority of respondents perceive that humans are greedy by nature whereas less than fifty percent do not agree to this. As far as gender of the respondents is concerned, it does not have any significant effect on this issue. Only a few

respondents perceive that humans are thieves by birth. There is a significant difference among the respondents on this statement. It is found that all the female respondents disagree to this statement whereas all the respondents who agree with this statement belong to male category. On the statement "pilfering of books from library is a hereditary habit", again only eight respondents agree and others do not.

A significant difference is noticed here as well. The more males are agreed to it as compared to their female counterparts. When asked whether the parents encourage their wards to pilfer books from the library, it is found that only two percent of the respondents agreed to it and others denied this. It is evident from the results that forty one percent respondents believe that people feel encouraged when they notice others to do so. Only few respondents feel that people pilfer library books to prestige themselves. There is significant difference on this issue among the respondents on the basis of their gender. More male have been noticed agreeing to this as compared to the female respondents. Half of the respondents agree to the statement that people pilfer the library books as these are public property whereas the other half does not agree to it. The chi-square value of Gender versus this statement is higher than the table value at the degree of freedom being 4, which shows a significant difference.

Psychological aspects

In many spheres of life, it is evident that gender has a great impact on the behaviour of humans in society. Though the problem of pilferage of library books is gender insensitive, still there is a scope of difference between the two groups formed on the basis of gender. The respondents' perception about the gender effect on pilferage of library books is presented in table 2. The results indicated that more than 65% respondents do not agree to the statement that pilfering of books is not a matter of prestige for men and the same respondents also not agreed that female users pilfer more books to impress their male counterparts. More than 60% respondents disagree or strongly disagree that

Table 1

Particulars	Strongly Disagreed %	Dis-agreed %	Not at all %	Agreed %	Strongly Agreed %	2	df	P	Table Value (.05)
People are greedy by nature	-	28	20	41	11	1.038	3	.792	7.815
People are thieves by birth	34	22	36	4	4	9.508	4	.050	9.488
Pilfering of books from library is a hereditary habit	11	52	29	8	-	13.959	3	.003	7.815
Parents encourage their wards for book pilfering	44	39	15	-	2	8.268	3	.041	7.815
People feel encouraged when they see others pilfering the books	10	25	24	39	2	9.294	4	.054	9.488
People pilfer the library books to prestige themselves	29	41	24	4	2	16.519	4	.002	9.488
People pilfer the library books as it is government property	6	28	16	38	12	22.759	4	.000	9.488

Table 2

Statements	Strongly Dis-agreed %	Dis-agreed %	Not at all %	Agreed %	Strongly Agreed %	2 value (a)	d f	P	Table Value (.05)
Males pilfer books from library to prestige themselves among females	16	50	15	17	2	24.187	4	.000	9.488
Females pilfer more books from library to impress males	15	60	17	6	2	11.157	4	.025	9.488
Males are encouraged by their female counterparts to pilfer the books	16	45	25	10	4	16.297	4	.003	9.488
Females are encouraged by their males counterparts to pilfer the books	14	47	29	6	4	15.001	4	.005	9.488
Females pilfer more books from library to show their equality with males	10	53	14	19	4	32.818	4	.000	9.488

neither males are encouraged by their female counterparts nor females are encouraged by male counterparts to pilfer the books from the library. Females are showing their equality with

men in many fields but in the matter of pilferage of library books 63% respondents perceive that this is not such field to show their equality with men.

The table value of Chi-square at 5% probability level for 4 degree of freedom is 9.488. The calculated value of chi-square (24.187), (11.157), (16.297), (15.001) and (32.818) is greater than the table value of Chi-square (9.488). Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and the difference between the theory and observation is significant.

Economic aspects

Economical aspects seem to be major aspects in the matter of pilfering books from the

libraries. Necessity of anything and lack of many may change the human perception. Greediness of gaining more and laps of goods are major aspect to be a thief. Increasing of prices day by day and lacks of money may be major aspect to pilfer things. The present table number 3 indicates that a majority of respondents are agreed and 6% strongly agreed that users pilfer the books from library as the books are much expensive and likewise 58% of respondents are agreed or strongly agreed that users pilfer the library books as they are not in a position to purchase the costly books. Nearly

Table 2

Sr. No	Particulars	Strongly Disagreed %	Dis-agreed %	Not at all %	Agreed %	Strongly Agreed %	2 value (a)	d f	P	Table Value (.05)
1	People pilfer books from library as books are much expensive	2	26	8	58	6	15.851	4	.003	9.488
2	People pilfer books from library as they are not in a position to purchase them	6	18	18	50	8	7.407	4	.116	9.488
3	People pilfer books from library as their parents do not extend financial support	9	36	18	37	-	2.837	3	.417	7.815
4	People pilfer library books to resale these to gain pocket money	4	31	36	23	6	13.927	4	.008	9.488

45% respondents are disagreed or strongly disagreed that users pilfer library books as their parents do not extend financial support. 29% of respondents perceive that users pilfer library books to resale them and collect pocket money, where 35% respondents do not agree that users pilfer library books to resale them and gain pocket money and more than 1/3rd of respondents not at all consider this as a reason.

A perusal of table 3 reveals that in the matter of item number 2 and 3 the table value of Chi-square at 5% probability level for 4 and 3 degree of freedom is = 9.488 and 7.815 respectively. The calculated value of Chi-square is 7.407 and 2.837, which is lower than the table value. Thus

the null hypothesis is accepted and the difference between the theory and observation is non-significant. But in the matter of item number 1 and 4, the table value of Chi-square at 5% probability level for 4 degree of freedom is 9.488. The calculated value of chi-square (15.851) and (13.927) is greater than the table value of Chi-square (9.488). Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and the difference between the theory and observation is significant. In other words, the opinion of both the genders is similar on the questions i. People pilfer books from library as they are not in a position to purchase them. ii. People pilfer books from library as their parents do not extend financial support However, both

groups have different point of view on the questions: i. People pilfer books from library as books are much expensive. ii. People pilfer library books to resale these to gain pocket money.

Administrative aspects

Administrative aspects may also be a cause for pilferage of the books from library. The administrative reasons may include noisy environment in the library, non cooperation of library staff, no provision of books after taking

no dues etc. However the results presented in table 4 shows that such reasons does not change the perception of users to pilfer the library books. It is found that 37% respondents are not agreed or strongly disagreed that low collection of books are not reason to theft the books. As much as 40% of respondents perceived that users do not pilfer books as loan period is very less. More than a half i.e. 54% of respondents viewed that lack of seating capacity, noisy environment and non-cooperation of library staff are not the cause for theft of the library books. Just little less than a half i.e. 49% of respondents viewed that the

Table 2

Sr. No	Particulars	Strongly Dis-agreed %	Dis-agreed %	Not at all %	Agreed %	Strongly Agreed %	2 value (a)	d f	P	Table Value (.05)
1	People pilfer library books as there is a low collection of books in the Library	2	35	27	30	6	15.396	4	.004	9.488
2	People pilfer library books as loan period is very less	10	30	14	32	14	24.409	4	.000	9.488
3	People pilfer library books as there is lack of seating capacity in the library	10	44	22	22	2	3.848	4	.427	9.488
4	People pilfer library books as there is much noisy environment in the library	16	38	31	13	2	13.358	4	.010	9.488
5	People pilfer library books as library staff is non cooperative	20	34	24	14	8	3.280	4	.512	9.488
6	People pilfer library books as there is no provision of reservation/ re-issue of the book	9	26	16	31	18	21.519	4	.000	9.488
7	People pilfer library books as overdue charges are too much	2	37	24	29	8	9.116	4	.058	9.488
8	People pilfer library books due to non-vigilance of library staff	13	22	7	41	17	22.109	4	.000	9.488
9	People pilfer the library books because there is no procedure to issue the books after taking no dues before examination	10	20	10	27	33	13.705	4	.008	9.488

users may pilfer the library books as no provision of re-issue/reservation of books is there in the library. Another 58% respondents viewed that users can pilfer the library books due to non-vigilance of library staff and 60% of respondents are agreed or strongly agreed that users may pilfer the library books being no procedure of issue of the books after taking no dues from the library during the examination days.

The table value of Chi-square with a degree of freedom being 4 at 5% probability level is 9.488 in case of: i. there is a low collection of books in the Library ii. As loan period is very less iii. There is much noisy environment in the library iv. Due to non-vigilance of library staff v. there is no procedure to issue the books after taking no dues before examination. The calculated value of chi-square (15.396), (24.409), (13.358), (21.519), (22.109) and (13.705) respectively is greater than the table value of Chi-square (9.488). Thus the null hypothesis is rejected and the difference between the theory and observation is significant. But in case of: i. There is lack of seating capacity in the library ii. Library staff is non cooperative iii. Overdue charges are too much the calculated value of chi-square is (3.848), (3.286) and (9.116) respectively which is lower than the table value of Chi-square (9.488). Thus the null hypothesis is accepted and the difference between the theory and observation is non-significant.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

The topic of book pilferage can attract many suggestions. These may include: User's Awareness, Stick Bills, Strict vigilance and use of Technology. First of all it is the responsibility of the librarian and its staff that they should make aware the users about the usefulness of the library and its property. This can be done through orientation programmes and time to time interaction with the users. Though, it does not look nice, still if required library may stick bills on proper places in the library. There is no alternate to strict vigilance. To stop the pilferage of books from the library it is necessary that all library staff must be alert and vigilant. Repeated visits by the senior staff to the stack area can motivate the junior staff. Since the present era

is the era of Technology, libraries should also go for high technology of RFID, CCTV camera, Security gates, Security threads, etc.

Further, proper checking at exit decreases the chances of pilferage of books. It should be mandatory for all the users to get their bags checked. If there is need the seating capacity should be increased. Library staff must be taught how to behave with the users. Overdue charge must be nominal. The photocopy facility at nominal cost must be provided with in the library. In spite of all the above efforts, still, if there is any loss library staff should not be held responsible personally rather it should be dealt according to General Financial Rules 2005.

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