

Current Status of the Security at the Public Libraries in North Central Province of Sri Lanka : A case study

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating the perception of library security by its stakeholders, existing levels of security at the public libraries and prevention mechanism of the threats at the same libraries which born by both physical and human impacts at the public libraries of Sri Lanka. Sample was selected throughout the North Central Province and the case study method was applied with a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) that used as a tool for data collection. The results reveal that existing level of the security has critically in questionable level while some of other security precaution levels are high. Further results showed that awareness of library staff about prevention from the natural disasters were in low level and finally it was revealed that many general issues such as negligenc of staff, readers and parent authorities are also highly impacted for the total security of library materials in the libraries.

Keywords : Library Security, Enemies of the library, Library collections, Public Libraries, North Central Province, Sri Lanka

INTRODUCTION

Saur (2001) defines 'Public Library' as "an organization established, supported and funded by the community, either through local, regional or national government or through some other form of community organization". Reading a book or a newspaper at the public library would be the first library experience of most of the people who live in the villages because they provide access to "knowledge, information and works of the imagination through a range of resources and services and is equally available to all members of the community regardless of race, nationality, age, gender, religion, language, disability, economic and employment status and educational attainment" (ibid).

The principal responsibilities of the public library are to provide the various information resources and services in a multiplicity of means to encounter the needs of individuals and groups for education, information and personal development including reformation and relaxation. Most of the public libraries are basically follow the five rules of S.R. Ranganathan to provide a very satisfactory service to its users.

Generally, Public Libraries are administrated by the urban or municipal council authorities and immediately managed by the public librarians. Whole funds for the library development are coming through the provincial or central government funds and librarians are totally responsible for the loss of available resources. Therefore, the librarians and staff of the public libraries have an important role in the development and maintenance of a democratic society by giving the individual access to a wide and varied range of knowledge, ideas, and opinions. As a result, public libraries have become the focal information collecting, storing and distributing centers of the world. International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) and The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) have collaboratively given the special recognition to the public libraries as the places where 'supporting both individual and self-conducted education as well as formal education at all levels' (Manifesto, 1994).

After a decade, the term 'Public Security' has become very popular today among the people of Sri Lanka and them demanding a huge assurance from the government on it. In this juncture, library administrative pay a considerable attention on it specially security assuerness of library properties and library users. When considering the public libraries, it would be seriously difficult to assure the safety of users because they could not be pre-defined easily by their demography. Generally, public libraries are used by various communities who come from child groups up to elder groups. Therefore, the library authorities have to pay huge attention not only for their properties or liabilities but also for their different kind of user groups to certify the security. Even though at the normal situation, providing the maximum

security for their library materials or liabilities has become a main responsibility of the librarians and staff through the library rules and regulations, otherwise, they might pay even for shortages of a single book. Therefore, pay more attention while assuring the high-level security at the libraries definitely will be a big role of the library authorities and showing their loops would be most significant.

Therefore, the main objective of the study was to explore the existing status of security levels of the collections, users and staff at the public libraries of NCP. The rest of objectives were to examine the physical condition of the library buildings, strengths & weaknesses of the existing security policies used by the libraries and the real role of the library authorities to safeguard both library collection & users.

METHODOLOGY

For this investigation mainly the case study method was applied. By adopting a survey method a survey was conducted among the librarians of the selected public libraries and a self-administered questionnaire (SAQ) was used as a tool for data collection. The entire population of the study of 56 public libraries in NCP were listed on a statistical handbook on libraries in Sri Lanka, 2018 and 22 libraries among the population including both Anuradhapura (17) & Polonnaruwa (5) districts were randomly selected as a sample of the study. The survey questionnaire was designed for taking inputs from physical facilities, library resource and available library services and staff motivation to save the library materials. Entire 22 libraries have sent duly filled questionnaires and response rate was 100%. To represent the distribution of data, few statistical methods; mean, median and average were calculated and the tendency of the data was calculated.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Location wise distribution of the libraries

Out of the 22 libraries, 17 (77.3%) were located in Anuradhapura District and rest of 5 libraries (22.7%) were located in Polonnaruwa District (Table 1).

Table 1: Location of the libraries

District	Frequency	Percent
Anuradhapura	17	77.3
Polonnaruwa	5	22.7
Total	22	100.0

Source: Survey data

Physical status of the library buildings

The study considered dedicated buildings with permanent walls, doors, and tiles or asbestos roofings as permanent building and part of the other building or temporary basis buildings as temporary buildings. The results showed that none of libraries were in temporary buildings (Table 2).

Table 2: Status of the Library Buildings

Type	Frequency	Percent
Permanent building	22	100.0
Temporary building	0	00.0
Total	22	100.0

Source: Suervey data

Spaces of the library buildings

The results showed that different types of spaces available in the libraries. As shown in table 3, more than 68%of libraries had space between 1000-1500 square feet. There were 2 libraries more than 2000 square feet spaces.

Table 3: Size of the library buildings

Size sq.ft	Frequency	Percent
1000<	8	36.4
1001-1500	7	31.8
1501-2000	5	22.7
>2001	2	9.1
Total	22	100.0

Source: Suervey data

Size of the Library Collection

The study calculated the size of the library collection and it was found that 12 libraries (54.5%) out of 22 libraries had library collections between 5001-10000 (Table 4).

Table 4: Size of the library Collection

Size of the Collection	Frequency	Percent
2000<	1	4.5
2001-5000	3	13.6
5001-10000	12	54.5

10001-15000	3	13.6
>15000	3	13.6
Total	22	100.0

Source: Suervey data

Size of the live users of the libraries

Table 5: Presents the distribution of the libraries according to the size of live users.

Size of the live users	Frequency	Percent
50<	1	4.5
51-100	2	9.1
101-150	3	13.6
151-200	4	18.2
>200	12	54.5
Total	22	100.0

Source: Suervey data

The results showed that 54.5% of the libraries (12) with more than 200 total live users and 13.6% around 101-200 live users. One library found with less than 50 with its total live users.

Size of the library staff

The size of the library staff of the selected 22 libraries including library professional and supportive staff were calculated considering as the library staff to check human participation to perform the security inside the libraries and it was found that 45.5 % of libraries with the single staff member and 50 % between 2-5 staff members.

Table 6: Distribution of the library staff

Size of the Staff	Frequency	Percent
1	10	45.5
2-5	11	50.0
> 6	1	4.5
Total	22	100.0

Source: Suervey data

Table 5 presents the distribution of the libraries according to the staff members. The results showed that 50% of the libraries (11) with 2-5 total no of staff and 10 were (45.5%) with only one staff member. There was one library with more than 6 staff capacity.

Safety arrangements during the library opening times

Blades in 1888 on his book titled ‘The Enemies of Books’ has identified fire, water, gas and heat, dust and neglect, ignorance and bigotry, the bookworm, bookbinders, book collectors, servants, and children” as the main enemies of the library books. Therefore the existing level of the safety arrangements are taken into account during the library opening & closing times and precautions are taken to prevent the books from the fire or natural disasters, as well from the insects or animals by the selected libraries which were examined and analyzed the level of threat accordingly. Below table shows the data relating to the safety arrangements had taken by the above libraries during their library opening hours.

Table 7: Safety arrangements during the library opening times

Security arrangement	Yes		No	
	N = 22	%	N = 22	%
Library has established in the provincial/municipal council premises	17	77.3	5	22.7
It has a security officer at the entrance to check the incoming library users and record the check-out library materials	2	9.1	20	90.9
It has the separate place to keep the library users’ bags, wallets and valuables	17	77.3	5	22.7
It has lockable cupboards or rooms to keep the rare books or rare library materials	21	95.5	1	4.5
It has more than one door(s) to enter the library except to the library main door	6	27.3	16	72.7
It has extra special safety precautions to safe the IT instruments and accessories	5	22.7	17	77.3
It has a proper plan to arrange the library commodities which can be easily notified when re-cording the lost item(s)	19	86.4	3	13.6

Source: Suervey data

Although, they paid huge attention to some arrangements, it is apparent from table 7 that security arrangement during the library opening hours of the selected libraries was not enough. For example, while 77.3% libraries established within their parent organization premises, 90.9% had not engaged any of security officer at the entrance to check the inbound library users or outgoing library materials such as books. Further to that, it was found that 77.3% of libraries had not taken any special safety precautions to safe their IT instruments and accessories. The major drawback of the safety assurance was noted that 72.7% of libraries had several entrances to enter the

library except their main doors. However, it was noted that majority of the libraries (95.5%) out of the selected libraries had used the lockable cupboards or lockable rooms to store their rare or most valuable books or rare library materials safely.

Safety arrangements during the library closing times

The safety arrangements during the library closing times were investigated and analyzed accordingly,

Table 8: Safety arrangements during the library closing times

Security arrangement	Yes		No	
	N = 22	%	N = 22	%
It has installed night vision CCTV cameras	2	9.1	20	90.9
It has a proper door closer	20	90.9	2	9.1
It has a daily inspection system about loops or entering possibility into the library at the night times	20	90.9	2	9.1
It has a proper system to keep the main door key safely during the night times until opening the library on next day	16	72.7	6	27.3
It has one or several night visits or patrols by the security officers or the police	12	54.5	10	45.5
It has disconnected the electricity during the library closing times	19	86.4	3	13.6

Source: Survey data

As Table 8 shows, there is significant security issues at the selected libraries although they had used several traditional safety precautions. It was found that the majority of the libraries (90.9%) had not used any CCTV surveillance system to provide extra safety to their properties. However, it was found a few plus points on this regard that the majority of the libraries used a proper doors or door locking systems (90.9%), a daily inspection system about loops or entering possibility into the library at the night times (90.9%) and disconnection mechanism of the electricity during the library closing times (86.4%).

Precautions are taken for preventing the fire and natural disasters

Precautions are taken to prevent the fire and natural disasters were investigated and analyzed accordingly.

Table 9: Precautions taken to prevent from the fire and natural disasters

Security arrangement	Yes		No	
	N = 22	%	N = 22	%
It has the library electrical wiring system with-out any fault such as short or break	17	77.3	5	22.7
It has a good trip switch and breaker system	18	81.8	4	18.2
It has fire extinguishers which can be used for the fire caused by electrical shortage	4	18.2	18	81.8
It has updated fire extinguishers checking sys-tem	5	22.7	17	77.3
It has the proper knowledge for staff members about safe the collection from the flood	7	31.8	15	68.2
It has a proper roof without any water leak	17	77.3	5	22.7
It has a proper plumbing system inside the li-brary	16	72.7	6	27.3

Source: Suervey data

Fire and natural disasters such as floods, tsunami or cyclone quote as the huge security threats of the libraries. Therefore, the impact of them for the selected libraries was evaluated and it was found that level of awareness of the library staff regarding those disasters is unsatisfactory. As shown in table 9, the percentage relating to the ‘Yes’ was 31.8% and percentage relating to the ‘No’ was 68.2%. The study noted that many libraries (77.3%) had not used latest fire extinguishers checking system and it was revealed that 81.8% of the libraries had not used any fire extinguishers that can be used against the fire caused by electrical shortages.

Precautions are taken to prevent from the insects, pests and animals

Precautions are taken to prevent from the insects, pests and animals were investigated and analyzed accordingly.

Table 10: Precautions are taken to prevent from the insects and animals

Security arrangement	Yes		No	
	N = 22	%	N = 22	%
It has a ciljn for the roof and can not enter inside the library by rats, squirrels and monkeys	19	86.4	3	13.6
It has done the pest control on the floor	12	54.5	10	45.5
It has used the continous treatments for book warms and cockroachs	15	68.2	7	31.8

Source: Suervey data

Table 10 shows that the majority of the libraries had taken the considerable precautions to protect their collections from the insects such as book worms and cockroaches, pests like termites, ants and animals such as squirrel, rats, and monkeys. It was revealed that 68.2% of the libraries from the selected libraries had been used the continuous treatments to prevent the damages from the book worms or cockroaches.

General issues for the security of the library collection

Uncountable, unobservable or general issues relating to the safety of the library collections are also showed the huge impact for the library security. Most probably these issues occur through the human behaviors of library staff members, library users, and stakeholders. Therefore, the study observed the impact of the library safety by those identified general issues and classified in the following table 11. To evaluate the impact on this it was used the 1-5 Likert scale which 1 represented as 'Absolutely not effected' and 5 represented for 'Absolutely affected'. Reliability of the variables which selected to discuss the general issues of the library safety (Table 11) was in a acceptable level (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.770).

Table 11: Descriptive statistics of general issues for the security of the library collection

General issue	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std. Devia-tion
Tearing pages of the library books by its users	22	1	5	2.86	1.207
Carelessness of the library staff	22	1	5	3.18	1.053
Carelessness of the library users	22	1	5	3.14	1.125
Carelessness of the respective council	22	1	5	2.77	1.193
Valid N (listwise)	22	Cronbach's Alpha = 0.770			

Source: Suervey data

Table 11 provides the mean values for four general issues related to the above other security issues at the selected libraries. It was revealed that lack of care of the library staff was more highly impacted (Mean=3.18) for the damages of library books than the other issues. However, carelessness of the library users (Mean=3.14), tearing pages of the library books by its users (Mean=2.86) and carelessness of the members of the respective provincial or municipal council (Mean=2.77). were other general issues highlighted according to this research.

KEY FINDINGS

- Majority of the public libraries of this sample are in the middle scale which does not exceed their space up to 1000-1500 sq.ft and their collection up to 5000-10000.
- Most of the libraries are run by the less staff with less live members.
- Most of the libraries have not properly addressed the issues which occur when they open the libraries and close the libraries.
- Majority of the libraries are well aware of the threats occurred by the insects, weeds or animals than the threats occurred by fire or natural disaster.
- It was found that there is no proper mechanism to check the people who comes to the library and which type of assets borrowed out from the libraries.
- Finally it was revealed that major general impact which occurs into the entire safe of the library collection born by the library staff side.

CONCLUSION & RECOMMENDATIONS

During this study, the researchers visited a few libraries in both districts and depended only on the data given by the head of the respective public libraries and conclude using the available data. The security level of the public libraries of Sri Lanka is questionable and need many improvements in the several aspects. Based on the conclusion following recommendations are made.

- Establish the proper mechanism to check the people who comes to the library and what are the assets which outgoing from the libraries.
- Aware library staff about enhancing the general security and saving methods of library books from the natural disasters.
- Advise library administration to use the single entrance instead of the several entrances to their libraries.
- Provide fire extinguishers which can be used for electricity impacts and make a proper mechanism to update them timely.
- Enhance fund allocations to provide better security for books, library infrastructure as well as live factors: library staff.

Further, this study can be used to illustrate the current situation at the majority of the public libraries in North Central Province, Sri Lanka. Authorized agents could empower their policies and strengthen their budgetary allocations to maximize the

level of security at the public libraries by operating those recommendations. Not only could that administratives of libraries in other provinces observe their levels of security by comparing with.

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