A survey of violence in public libraries

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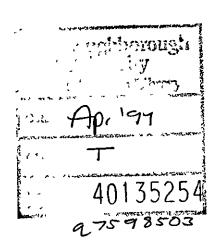# A SURVEY OF VIOLENCE IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

By

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ABSTRACT

A SURVEY OF VIOLENCE IN LIBRARIES

This research investigates the extent to which violent and aggressive behaviour by library users is a recognised problem in public libraries, and seeks to identify preventive measures to reduce the problem and improve the working environment for staff. Public libraries in four counties were surveyed, questionnaires being completed by various types of library staff.

A review of the relevant literature identifies the issues surrounding violence in the workplace and analyses violent behaviour in libraries and the various types of problem users.

The results indicate that public libraries suffer from a wide range of problem users. Serious incidents which involve physical assault are rare, although verbal abuse is widespread and is generally tolerated by staff who regard it as 'part of the job'.

The role of the Library Charter and the concept of customer care as a means of reducing aggressive situations in libraries are discussed. Although customer care is largely regarded as sufficient training for reducing aggression in customers, many staff would prefer specific training for dealing with difficult situations, as well as the provision of security cameras and other deterrents. The use of personal alarms was also suggested as a means of summoning help once a situation became potentially violent or when an incident actually occurred.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

'If you asked the average person to list the main hazards faced by library staff the response would probably be ...falling books, back strain or eyesight problems from too much reading. If you asked them whether they thought library staff worked in a threatening, hostile environment they would probably laugh at you for even suggesting it' (1).

Violent and aggressive behaviour from a range of people visiting libraries has become an increasing feature in recent years, for example, in his national survey conducted in the early 1980s, involving 1700 libraries, Alan Jay Lincoln reported on the most common forms of library crime during a twelve month period. His results indicated that 50% of libraries had experienced vandalism of books, 7% reported assaults on library users, arson had occurred in 4% of libraries, and 3% of staff had been assaulted (2). Although the problem of workplace violence is not confined to libraries, library staff are placed in a particular predicament. Libraries are informal, welcoming and accessible, although this accessibilty means that staff are at risk to abusive behaviour from the public. Violence in the workplace should be regarded as an occupational hazard and library staff should not feel that any sort of abuse is 'part of the job'. Learning to cope and deal with violence does not mean putting up with it, but rather, finding ways of dealing with aggression in a positive, pro-active manner such as customer care and interpersonal skills training which are designed to identify potentially difficult situations and diffuse them before they become uncontrollable.

Libraries are there to serve the public, but that does not mean at the expense and welfare of the staff. Dealing with difficult situations can lead to stress which in turn can lead to a lack of concern for customers, feelings of resentment towards customers and even absenteeism.

Under the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, employers have a 'personal' legal duty to take reasonable care for the health and welfare of their employees in all circumstances arising out of the course of their employment.

The lack of published articles on the subject towards library staff led to the editorial of the *Assistant Librarian*, October 1988 to ask the question 'What is the scale of violence in libraries?' (3). Its appeal for fears, stories and suggestions failed to achieve the desired response and the issue still largely remains as the profession's 'skeleton in the closet' (4).

The Aim of the Study

It is the aim of this study to investigate the extent to which violence and aggression to staff is a recognised problem in public libraries, and to identify what measures are available to tackle the problem.

Definitions and Scope of the Study

For the purpose of this research, violent and aggressive behaviour are defined as any intimidating behaviour which is unacceptable in the context of the workplace. This includes verbal abuse and threats through to actual physical assault. Sexual harassment is also included in the definition. However, the research is concerned only with aggressive behaviour from the public to members of library staff. Violent behaviour between members of staff is a separate problem. Findings refer to the British experience in public libraries.

Outline of the Study

Due to resource and time constraints, the study presents only a 'snapshot' of the current situation. The research focuses on public libraries around England. With the use of questionnaires, library staff were asked about the types of problem behaviours they experienced at work, the provision of guidelines for dealing with such behaviour, types of training they had received and preventive measures aimed at tackling the problem in their libraries. A copy of the questionnaire can be found in Appendix One.

The methodology is presented in Chapter Two. Chapters Three, Four and Five give the results of the literature review. Chapter Three provides a review of the literature regarding violence in the workplace, and particularly violence in libraries. This section of the chapter discusses the various types of problem users common in public libraries and why they become aggressive. Preventive measures are also discussed.

Chapter Four concentrates on the literature dealing with violence in libraries, including a discussion on assertiveness training and the analysis of Bradford Library and Information Service's *Positive Steps* pack which aims to help staff deal with difficult borrowers (5).

The literature dealing with Customer care policies is the focus of Chapter Five which discusses how these may help to reduce the risk of violence in libraries. The role of the Citizen's Charter is also analysed as part of the customer care ideal. The issues raised by the completed questionnaires are analysed in Chapter Six. Finally Chapter Seven draws conclusions from the data and recommends areas for further research.

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CHAPTER TWO

VIOLENCE IN LIBRARIES: METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The basis for this study is the preposition that violence in public libraries is increasingly becoming a problem and that customer care has a role to play in reducing the number and extent of violent situations.

Research Aims

The aims of the study were to:

1) investigate the extent to which violent situations occur in public libraries.

2) assess to what degree the problem is recognised.

3) to identify possible preventive measures and solutions.

Literature Review

The literature on the subject of violence in libraries is scarce thereby leading to a wider review of literature in other disciplines, for example Business and Industrial Relations. Literature from the field of Psychology was also reviewed, for example theories of violence and customer care, and these were related to the subject of violence in libraries.

Computerised abstracting tools were used, including CD-ROM, BIDS and OCLC.

Research Setting and Subjects

Constraints on resources meant that only a small number of counties could be included in the survey to provide an illustration of the current situation of violence in libraries. Public libraries were surveyed rather than academic or special libraries as the literature suggests that those who work in the public sector are more likely to suffer abuse from their customers.

The counties were chosen by geographical location; North East, North West, South East, South West and the Midlands. The researcher wished to provide results from a cross-section of the country but was not trying to prove that violence is related to any particular area.

Postal questionnaires were originally sent to: Yorkshire, Devon, East Midlands, Liverpool and Essex. Ten questionnaires were sent to each county and a covering letter asked that, when completed, they be returned to the researcher. Replies were received from all but Liverpool and Essex.

Questionnaires were sent to each County Librarian who then distributed them amongst various libraries in the county. This gave an opportunity for anyone who wished to take part in the survey to do so, and complete a questionnaire. As a result, the various types of library staff were represented in the survey including library managers, librarians and library assistants.

A more in-depth case study of Berkshire libraries was also planned, based on semi-structured interviews. However, due to a poor response rate to a notice asking for volunteers in the library circular, the decision was taken to send questionnaires there also, and the results were incorporated into the main body of research. Therefore, the final sample size included libraries from four counties. To retain confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents, these counties will be known as A, B, C and D.

Table One: The number of replies received from each county.

County	Replies received
County A	44
County B	17
County C	2
County D	6

The high response rate from County A was due to the fact that the study co-incided with their own research on safety at work and a strong interest in the subject area prevails. Hence, the original questionnaire had been photocopied and distributed throughout the county.

The Research Instrument

Various methods of data collection were considered including interviews with library staff in the different counties. However, this method was rejected as being too costly. Questionnaires were used as they provided a means of collecting a large amount of data at a lower cost. Due to the use of questionnaires, the information gathered was not always very detailed. Some respondents did elaborate on their answers which proved to be useful for the researcher. However, the study aims to represent a picture of the current situation in these counties and therefore provides only a 'snapshot' of the whole situation.

The questionnaire consists of 17 questions which ask library staff about their perceptions and experience of violence at work, and guidelines for dealing with such violence. It also asks questions on the library charter and staff training.

Question 1 asks for general information about job titles which was designed to gain information on the types of employment respondents were in.

Questions 2 and 3 are designed to assess the types of complaints and situations which might lead to an aggressive confrontation.

Questions 4 and 5 investigate what types of abuse are most common and whether library staff regard any of these as 'part of the job' i.e., which types of abuse are viewed as inevitable and tolerated.

Question 6 asks whether any particular time of day is worse for aggressive situations occurring. This was investigated as opening hours could be reviewed if there were problems at certain times.

Questions 7 and 8 investigate whether or not staff and users have guidelines on what sort of behaviour is discouraged or unacceptable. These questions were intended to examine whether or not regulations were on display and if they were effective. Staff were asked whether they had guidelines on what constitutes unacceptable behaviour as having regulations in written form provides staff with support for any action they take against unruly customers.

Questions 9 and 10 are intended to discover what types of incidents are reported and also investigates reporting procedures. This was asked to discover whether staff felt that their situation was acknowledged by management or if they felt that violence was not treated seriously by management.

Question 12 is designed to assess the sorts of training received by staff, and what these involve.

Questions 13 and 14 ask staff about the presence of a library charter in their particular library and investigates how it is used.

Question 15 is a statement to which library staff are asked to what extent they agree or disagree. This is asked to assess whether or not more complaints or abuse have been directed at staff as a result of the charter's introduction. If people realise what standards they can expect from the library, they may be more likely to complain if those standards are not met.

Question 16 asks staff about possible solutions they might suggest in order to reduce aggressive situations. This was asked in order to make recommendations for preventive measures which might be considered by management.

Question 17 is an open question which asks for respondents' views generally on violence in libraries and any other comments they wished to make.

A number of important issues were identified from the literature, and the questionnaire was designed to address these issues and to investigate staff's opinions of them. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected; the majority of the questions were designed to collect quantitative data, although many respondents elaborated on their answers thereby providing qualitative data also.

CHAPTER THREE

VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE

In recent years there has been growing concern over the problems of harassment, aggressive behaviour and violence encountered by employees in the course of their work. Staff who are harrassed in any form at work are unlikely to perform at their best and dealing with such stress can lead to absenteeism. When an organisation invests money in staff and training they become an asset worthy of, and entitled to, protection.

In 1986 the subject of violence at work was brought to the forefront by the disappearance of estate agent Suzy Lamplugh and the deaths of three social workers in 1984, 1985 and 1986 (1).

A joint survey undertaken by the London School of Economics and the Municipal Journal in 1991 (2) questioned council employees about aggression from the public. It was discovered that staff in the highest risk areas were those in housing, community charge and social services departments. The survey also showed 'surprisingly' that those working in libraries were equally likely to come under attack from the public.

However, the issue of violence in the workplace is not new. In 1981 the Trades Union Congress (TUC) held a conference on violence towards staff in the workplace (3). A wide range of occupations were represented including social workers, NHS staff and public transport workers.

The result was that the Health and Safety Executive (HSE) established a sub committee on violence in 1983 (4). The responsibilities of the committee were to set guidelines and offer advice on the subject, as well as commissioning research. Representative bodies and associations were also stimulated into issuing guidelines to their members, for example, the Association of Directors of Social Services (ADSS) (5) and the Library Association (6).

The problem of violence in the workplace can and must be tackled, although the cause of violence in any given context is liable to be both complex and unique to that particular setting, and therefore it is impossible to set standard solutions to the problem (7). Organisations must therefore consider local solutions which are appropriate to their situation.

Defining Violence in the Workplace

Employers, staff and unions must have clear and shared definitions of what constitutes 'violence' if it is to be confronted effectively. Painter (8) argues that

> *'the major stumbling block to the development of a coherent policy for solving the problem is one of definition. What constitutes a violent incident is dependent on a number of intervening variables, including the vulnerability of the parties involved.'*

Figure One: An eloborated model of violent assaults at work

The Assailant

- Personality
- Temporary condition
- Negative/uncertain expectations
- Immaturity
- People with dogs

The Employee

Appearance
Age and Experience
Sex
Personality and
Temperament
Attitudes
Expectations

The interaction

Giving a service
Caring
Education
Money
transactions
Controlling
Inspection
Robbery
Vandalism

The work environment

Working alone
Job location
Cash being handle
Waiting and queuing
Time
Territory
Privacy

The Outcome

Physical injury
Attempted injury
Threats with weapons
Verbal abuse
Angry behaviour

Source: Poyner and Warne, Preventing violence to Staff, p 7

Violence therefore must be defined according to a wide criteria. Research so far indicates that violence includes a wide range of behaviours from assault, kicking, spitting, sexual assault (physical violence) to verbal abuse, threats without weapons, threatening gestures, swearing and shouting, ie. non- physical violence (9). The meaning assigned to a particular incident depends on the context of the service and the nature or characteristics of those involved. This view is also taken by the Education Services Advisory Committee (ESAC) in its report *Violence to staff in the education sector* (10). People perceive behaviour differently, so what one employee sees as threatening, another will describe as merely annoying. ESAC's definition of violence is:

> *'Any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted by a student, pupil or member of the public in circumstances arising out of the case of his or her employment' (11).*

This definition encompasses verbal abuse and racial or sexual harrassment. The report states that even where no physical injury has occurred, the victim can still suffer considerable stress.

Common Factors of Violent Situations

There are many reasons why people become violent towards staff in any organisation. Figure One shows some important aspects of the assailant, the employee and the work environment which influence the liklihood of assaults occurring. It also lists examples of the types of interaction and outcome commonly involved in assaults. Some of the most common reasons for violent situations arising include:

- Where a person feels powerless, particularly if the situation is perceived as being personal

- Where the person has had to react to some change in their life or to a new situation

- Where a decision is perceived as being arbitary

- Where money is involved

- Where the worker intervenes in a conflict between two other people

- Where a previous disagreement has been unresolved

- Where the disagreement leads to a 'will struggle', particularly if an audience is present (12).

What the Customer Brings

Amongst the most common factors involved here are:

- That the person has been drinking or taking drugs

- That the person has a history of violent behaviour

- That the person has a psychiatric disorder

- That the person has difficulty in communicating (13).

Is Violence 'Part of the Job'?

Unfortunately, the concept of violence in the workplace exists, especially in the caring professions and public sector employment. Anyone who is providing a public service and who is in contact with that public is at risk of violence. Many employees deal with the public in stressful circumstances, and Painter (14) argues it is in this sense that many employees see violence as an inevitable part of the job. Although they are unhappy with the situation they exercise a certain amount of tolerance towards their abusers.

This acceptance of violence is being questioned and challenged by management, unions and employees alike. Anne Greaves of NALGO stated that violence is an occupational hazard and should be seen as such by employers (15). She rejects the idea that local government employees should tolerate a certain level of violence as part of the job. The Working Group on Violence to Road Passenger Transport Staff, in its report *Assaults on Bus Staff* also concluded that:

> *'it would not be reasonable to expect the risk of violent assault as an inevitable part of daily work. Staff have a right to be protected from foreseeable risks to their safety' (16).*

Preventive Measures for the Workplace

Reports by the ESAC (17) and the ADSS (18) conclude that data collection should enable employers to identify the factors which lead to violence, and using this data, they can find and implement an appropriate preventive strategy. Different workplaces will require different preventive measures due to the nature of violence varying between employment sectors

The main feature of any policy is that it reflects the needs of the individual workplace. Protective screens were introduced in Cleveland Transit buses to protect drivers from physical abuse, whereas removal of protective screens in Glasgow's Housing Department was seen to be more appropriate. By doing so, a more pleasant environment was created, providing a more conducive atmosphere for public relations (19).

Forms of Preventive Measures: the 'Violence Diamond'

It is all too easy to jump to one strategy as a possible solution to workplace violence because it seems to be obvious, inexpensive or easy to implement. However, ADSS argue that there must be a full examination of its suitability to the particular circumstances and that:

> *'Managers must structure policies, procedures and back up support in such a manner that they are not influenced primarily by resource availability but rather by their effectiveness'* (20).

Figure Two: The Violence Diamond

Areas of Concern

Environmental
design

Organisational

Physical

Psychological

Source: Boot, N, T Cox and T Smith, Contolling Violent Situations at Work.

A single solution to the problem of violence is generally inadequate as the problems are so varied and complex. An additional problem of relying on single measures is that they rarely attack the root cause of the problem Unfortunately, this is the most difficult part of problem solving (21).

Successful management of violence in the workplace involves a multi-factorial approach (22). Changes may be necessary in some or all main areas represented by the violence diamond (Figure Two) in order to solve or contain the problem. The diamond shows the preventive measures available to an organisation and the relative lengths of its sides represent their potential importance for a particular organisation.

<u>Environment and design</u>

The physical layout and design of a workplace plays a significant role in increasing or decreasing the risk of violence towards staff. Waiting areas that are comfortable and less formal reduce the risk of triggering an aggressive response from a customer. The use of security cameras and guards also reduce the risk of violence and may be appropriate measures to take.

Organisational

A main area with potential for change is the organisation and its culture. Although staff must be trained in the prevention and management of violence, organisations must also consider their work structure and practices, which may be changed in order to reduce risks. This might involve extra staff to avoid other staff working in isolation, improved communication between staff as well as between staff and customers. Any changes which improve services are essential.

Psychological

Psychological measures include customer care training and interpersonal skills training so as to foresee, control and endure violent situations, an important feature where public service employees are concerned (Customer care training and prevention of violence in libraries is discussed in Chapter Five).

Physical

This involves training staff in physical skills to enable them to deal with irate customers, for example, self defence and breakaway techniques. Although the former is generally not appropriate for the service industry, the latter is useful for employees who are in direct contact with potentially violent clients, such as social workers.

Monitoring Preventive Measures

It is important that any measures introduced are examined regularly and re-evaluated in order to find problems, areas which need updating, etc. Unfortunately, it is all too common for organisations to become lax about this once the initial impetus has died down and enthusiasm wanes.

Staff may stop reporting incidents or managers might fail to follow up reports made by staff. If measures are not evaluated over time they can become ineffective. Poyner and Warne (23) argue that effective monitoring reassures staff as managers are seen to be concerned over the safety of their staff.

Violence in Libraries

Introduction

To the average person libraries appear to be quiet, safe places in which to browse and choose books. However, research has found this picture to be misleading and shows library staff to be working in an increasingly hostile and threatening environment (24). It seems that society in general is becoming more and more violent and the results of this are becoming increasingly apparent in the workplace; public libraries are no exception to this.

Unfortunately, there has been little research in the area of violence in the library. In her article *Sex and violence in the library - scream a little louder please*, Easton complains about the insufficiency of literature regarding the subject. She asserts that:

> *'The subject of the problem patron has been the profession's skeleton in the closet. Library literature contains so few references to it that a bibliography scarcely deserves the name'*(25).

In the 18 years since Easton's article was published, the situation has improved very little. However, research that *has* been undertaken presents a very worrying picture for public library staff.

The majority of research has been undertaken in the United States and tends to emphasise extreme violent situations such as rape and even murder (26) but comparisons between the USA and Britain are restricted due to societal differences. However, there are several factors which may be constant between the two countries.

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The Library in Society

Libraries have long been seen as welcoming, informal places which are accessible to all. On the whole, the success of the service is largely due to these features.

The British National Conference on Library Security in March 1991 was concerned with staff safety in libraries (27). Certain difficulties were identified which often led to aggressive situations including: the use of the library as a place for voicing general complaints about the council; gangs of youths demonstrating disruptive and intimidating behaviour; the library being used by vagrants, drunk or otherwise, as a place of shelter.

The latter problem of the library being used as a place of refuge is a controversial issue. The question to be addressed is whether or not the library should be a shelter for lonely, often emotionally unstable, people. Should these needs be met elsewhere in the community?

The Nature and Character of Librarians

Staff in public libraries are increasingly being placed in potentially dangerous situations and are at the forefront of abuse from the public. Easton asks '...at what point does a public servant become a public slave?' (28) Librarians want to be seen as helpful and conscientious but they do not want to be taken advantage of. They may find it difficult to assert themselves when they see a problem patron who does not seem 'quite adequate' (29). The more attention library staff pay to these people the more they will demand from the staff, and so the librarian must be assertive and curb unreasonable behaviour. Libraries have long been frequented by the mentally or emotionally disturbed as they are warm, quiet refuges. Librarians are therefore natural targets of abuse from these people.

Many library staff find it very difficult to deal with problem patrons and this might be due to their nature and a lack of training. Much of the American literature argues that the inability to deal with problem users effectively is due to what Downing (30) calls a 'general non-confrontive nature', ie. that librarians are unassertive and untrained. However, Downing's article appears to stereotype librarians as weak and unassertive people and fails to acknowledge whether his opinions are based on proper research into personality profiles of librarians.

Reid (31) also suggests that many librarians are unassertive and argues that they lack the 'moral fibre' to enforce rules concerning noise and disruptive behaviour in libraries. Groark (32) advocates assertiveness training for library staff to empower them to stop problem users from 'acting out'. He maintains that non-assertive librarians unwittingly encourage problem users.

Downing (33) sees library schools as partly to blame for this lack of assertiveness training and states that they are 'reluctant to deal with the problem', a notion echoed by Grotophorst who argues that there is little or no assertion training in the curricula, and so librarians are not prepared for the abuse they are likely to suffer. According to Grotophorst there is a

> 'perceived notion that placing restrictions on the behaviour of individual users somehow signals a departure from the traditional philosophy of encouraging library use' (34).

Librarians, therefore, face the prospect of being abused by the same public they seek to encourage.

Why Do Library Users Become Aggressive?

The term 'emotional anger' is commonly used to explain violence in the workplace (35). Emotional anger deliberately inflicts injury; for example, the library counter staff who are attacked when insisting on fines being paid are not attacked in order to convince them to waive fines, but the attack is driven by anger and the desire to hurt (36). Averill (37) found that 'loss of personal pride, self esteem or sense of personal worth' following the harmful action of the other person was a commonly reported cause of anger. The motive for anger most often cited was 'to reassert authority...or to improve [one's] image' (38).

The reason for an assault in the workplace may range from an attempt to rob or intimidate a member of staff, to a loss of control due to emotional stress, frustration or anger (39). These feelings may be exacerbated by alcohol, drugs or mental illness, making behaviour less predictable and increasing the risk of a violent incident.

However, from the literature surveyed for this dissertation it appears that likely causes of tension between library staff and users include fines, queues and unavailable books, etc., leading to verbal abuse and possibly physical assault.

The Problem of Fines

Librarians face difficult situations when a customer refuses to pay a fine that has been set. The question to be asked is 'how far should a member of staff insist upon payment at the risk of an argument and possibly a violent confrontation?' If a customer becomes irate over a fine it is easier for the librarian to waive it rather than insist upon payment. However, this makes the librarian appear weak and easily intimidated. It is also unfair to dismiss fines for abusive users at the expense of other customers.

The Problem of Queues

Queuing for a service is exasperating and annoying for customers and often leads to them making complaints to staff (40). Queues reduce the customer's tolerance levels and lead to frustration especially when they are in a hurry to be elsewhere. An aggressive confrontation is therefore more likely where queuing is involved.

Disatisfaction With Library Stock

This problem is a major grievance among library users who demand a good service in terms of the material they wish to borrow. In a 1982 survey undertaken by Masson (41) dissatisfaction with library stock was expressed in four main areas.

Firstly, readers wanting to borrow 'radical' publications, such as gay and lesbian literature, felt they were disadvantaged in terms of public libraries. Secondly, some users felt that libraries had a bureaucratic atmosphere, and that librarians had only a small role in stock selection. There were also complaints about the classification of material; for example, readers whose interests were of a similar nature (Third World issues, environmental material, etc) found that classification dispersed the material they sought. Finally, libraries were seen to be unresponsive to contemporary issues, in that 'radical' publications are only required by the minority and libraries tend to concentrate on the needs of the majority.

Books being unavailable and the lack of new titles are often problems for small libraries with small budgets. There are also problems with users who have failed to return reserved books on time, causing the waiting customer to complain. This is a major difficulty as nothing can be done until the books are returned.

'Problem Patron' is the term used to describe a person who displays unruly, disruptive or potentially dangerous behaviour in the library. This behaviour often includes verbal and physical abuse, and sexual harassment. It may threaten the safety of staff, other library users and library stock.

However, Griffith argues that libraries actually invite problem patrons by

> *'foolishly promoting...peripheral activities in an attempt to increase attendance or awareness of library services.'* (42).

He suggests that in attempting to provide a welcoming atmosphere, librarians have attracted undesirable 'non-patrons'.

Grotophorst argues that the problem patron

> *'disrupts our activities, drains our energies and diverts our attention from other, more useful tasks'* (43).

Librarians are not usually trained psychologists or social workers and therefore may experience limitations in dealing with problem patrons.

It is important for library staff not to try to take on the role of social worker, psychologist etc (44). In order to be taken seriously, library staff should be firm and consistent, as inconsistancy in their responses will appear to make them weak and vulnerable. Finally, Grotophorst also argues that library managers should be in contact with any local social welfare and mental health agencies in order to gain advice and to inform them of any problem patrons in the library (45).

Youths and Vandalism

Finances, resources and staffing for libraries have become limited in recent years resulting in many pressures and too few resources to cope with them. The increase in vandalism against libraries has become a major, expensive problem (46).

According to MacLeod (47), various acts of vandalism are often carried out by gangs of youths. The incidents she cites include: lighted paraffin rags being thrown through doors and windows; vandalism of staff cars; threats to staff with scissors and screwdrivers; books being misused and thrown around.

Hodges' survey found that staff were particularly concerned with youths who were considered to be the worst offenders in aggressive acts towards library staff, especially those who were '...not interested in books, preferring to shout, swear, throw things about and misuse the facilities' (48).

London's Brent Library Service was forced to close one of its libraries in 1984 when it became subject to vandalism by school children. Staff were forced to restrict noise levels, stop fights among children, and prevent both damage to the building and intimidation of other users. (49)

At Parkside Library in Hackney, the doors were locked for four months, staff only opening them to admit genuine customers in order to prevent access to disruptive teenagers (50).

Vocino's survey (51) found that youths used libraries as local 'hangouts' and that efforts to establish programmes to involve children in constructive use of the facilities had met with failure. However, a juvenile specialist involved with helping library staff argued that helping these youths was not a role for the library, and suggested that the police be called in cases that went beyond the ordinary 'juvenile' offences.

The Leicestershire Solution

However, employing youth workers in Leicestershire was found to be a solution to the problem of disruptive and destructive youths in the library (52). Their survey found that the most troublesome group was 10-15 year olds. During the winter of 1982-83 there was an increase in problems caused by youths, and so experienced youth workers were employed to talk to young people and discourage disruptive behaviour. The project was first carried out in 2 libraries and was found to be a great success. In 1989 there were plans to employ youth workers in the 11 libraries suffering the most problems.

This method is a positive way of combatting the problem of disruptive youths and has helped to reduce vandalism. It has also helped staff with youths when no youth worker has been present, as skills have been passed on to them through training. Unfortunately, not all libraries can afford to employ such workers and so staffing levels at certain times of the day when the problems arise, as well as opening hours, must be considered and possibly altered in order for staff to cope.

Care in the Community

Management of violent patients in the community is more complicated than management of violence in hospitals; the outpatient has access to many potential precipitants of violence such as alcohol, which are less readily available to the inpatient. The patient also has access to a different range of victims (53).

The mentally ill are a constant concern to library staff, although a person suffering from a psychological disorder is not necessarily dangerous. However, their behaviour can be unpredictable and there may be cause for alarm (54).

Much has been said about care in the community for mental patients as being unsuccessful (55) It has caused many problems for both the clients concerned and for the community. Many library staff have experienced problems with the psychologically disturbed and have difficulty finding adequate training in dealing with situations when they arise (56).

A survey as early as 1979 found that library staff were extremely concerned with the treatment of the mentally disturbed on an out-patient basis instead of incarceration (57). Grotophorst argues that

> 'for a variety of social, cultural and economic reasons, many of these individuals find their way into the library' (48).

In New York, librarians complain that libraries are attracting more than 30 000 mentally disturbed patients from state institutions. The reason given for this is that the patients have no rehabilitation programmes; they have nowhere to go, and so turn to libraries as they are public buildings and are easily accessible (59).

In libraries occurrences range from incoherent mumbling, sudden arguments and both verbal and physical attacks on staff and other users (60). There seems to be a lack of training for staff to enable them to cope in such situations and guidance is needed in appropriate procedures.

The problem of dealing with these patrons had become so acute in many areas in America that as early as 1976, libraries offered staff workshops at which a mental health officer instructed staff on how to deal with them. Staff were instructed not to be solicitous of these patrons, but rather to simply state that their behaviour was not appropriate for the library and that they must either stop or leave. Refusing to answer their questions which were not serious or rational was also stressed. If a violent situation arose the police were to be called (61).

However, Vocino argues that librarians have a tendency to be 'bleeding hearts' and that they want to help without taking what appears to be a drastic course of action, ie. calling the authorities, although this may be the only course of action to take (62).

He also argues that librarians are not mental health specialists and should not venture into areas in which they are not trained. Finally, he asserts that librarians are not helping emotionally unstable patrons by tolerating their strange or disruptive behaviour.

Preventive Measures

The Library Association has produced the following guidelines to help reduce violent situations from arising in libraries (63).

Management attitude

It is important for managers to be sympathetic and understanding towards their staff who have had to deal with difficult situations. They should demonstrate confidence in their staff and acknowledge their ability to cope with such circumstances.

Communication and consultation

The importance of effective two-way communication can not be stressed too highly. Staff must feel able to discuss their problems with senior members of staff, and managers must consult with staff on policies at all stages.

Opening hours

It may become apparant that most incidents occur at certain times, eg. evenings. If this is the case, then decisions should be taken on the revision of opening hours. Adjustment of hours may be necessary until the problems disappear. The Library Association recommends that opening hours be under continual review, taking account of other activities in the area such as late night shopping, youth clubs and other community meetings in the evening.

Staffing levels

The Library Association suggests that it may be necessary to increase staffing levels so that staff are not working in isolation, especially in the evenings. They argue that alterations in opening hours can allow this to happen without having to increase numbers of staff. However, it might be difficult to reschedule opening times and staffing levels in order to suit customer requirements.

Training

Training designed to help staff to cope in difficult situations should be included in induction courses and should also be on-going. All staff must be instructed in how to deal with justifiable complaints and how to prevent these from developing into more unpleasant situations.

<u>Liason with other organisations</u>

Good working relationships with the police, youth leaders, probation officers and other libraries within the community can help to alleviate some of the problems caused by patrons. Exchange of information with these groups is a benefit to be gained. It may be possible to arrange meetings between librarians and community workers on an ad hoc basis to discuss problems.

Contact with the local police could be more productive than formal links at higher levels. Making officers aware of library bye-laws will make them better equipped to deal with incidents which they might otherwise regard as outside the remit of the law. Crime prevention officers are available to advise on security of both existing, and the design of new, buildings.

Policy Making

New York's Metropolitan Reference and Research Library Agency's (METRO) workshop in October 1978 raised the issue of problem patrons in libraries. The two main complaints from librarians were: that front-line staff lacked training in dealing with aggressive situations; and that library administrators were more concerned with appearances, preferring to preserve a good public image rather than protecting staff and users, for example, although the use of security guards was an option to protect staff, the idea was rejected as being a bad public image for the library (64).

This thought is echoed by Grotophorst (65) who maintains that staff who are most bothered by problem patrons usually have little or nothing to do with the formulation of library policy. It is important for the administration team to be involved, but as they are often removed from the 'combat zone' there must be effective communication between them and library staff. Whatever the case, administrators can no longer afford to ignore the pleas from library staff for better security and support when an emergency arises.

The METRO workshop concluded that there was a need for clear policy statements which clarify the roles of library supervisors, individual staff members and patrons, and METRO was asked to help by starting a collection of library security policies (66).

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CHAPTER FOUR

DEALING WITH VIOLENCE IN LIBRARIES

Violence in the workplace is undesirable under any conditions and can lead to anxiety and stress for the employees concerned. Being stressed may make it even more difficult to cope with an aggressive situation as people become emotional and are less likely to stay calm.

Hodges argues that stress can show itself in many ways, including

> ' a lack of concern and respect for clients, plus a feeling of resentment towards those making demands and towards the job itself ' (1).

In order to provide effective customer care, staff must be kept up to date on any policy changes, training and such like. There needs to be effective communication between front-line staff and the decision makers where policies are concerned, as they can offer valuable insight into library procedures and situations.

Training for Staff

Training in customer relations is an important factor in reducing an employee's vulnerability to aggression. It is important to be able to foresee the signs of stress in others and to respond to them in a sensitive way so as to diffuse a situation rather than aggravate it. Interpersonal skills training is designed to do this.

Groark argues that many librarians are reluctant to deal with problem users because they lack assertiveness training and this passivity 'mirrors the prevailing social attitude that there are few things over which it is worth getting into a hassle' (2). Groark asserts that librarians might unwittingly be perpetuating this kind of disruptive behaviour in libraries.

A study by Moriarty (3) for example had research accomplices sit down next to a series of individuals trying to use the library for study. The accomplices were instructed to conduct a loud seven minute conversation intended to test the user's willingness to be victimised. Only one person out of forty asked the violators to be quiet. Nine users left the table where they were working, and the remainder watched the violators until the conversation stopped. However, this experiment does not necessarily indicate 'the library user's willingness to be victimised' as users should not be expected to reprimand disruptive patrons. It is interesting to note that none of the users asked for help from a librarian.

Some staff feel that requesting a user to behave in a particular way may be unkind, but by not approaching them, librarians give their approval to disruptive behaviour. He suggests looking to assertiveness training for a solution.

Alberti and Emmons defined assertiveness as

> *'behaviour which enables a person to act in his own best interests, to stand up for himself without undue anxiety, to express his honest feelings comfortably, or to exercise his rights without denying the rights of others'* (4).

Assertiveness is not a personal trait, but a series of specific learned responses to specific situations (5).

Lazarus (6) identified four components of assertive behaviour which fall into four response patterns:

- The ability to say 'no'

- The ability to make requests

- The ability to express oneself

- The ability to initiate, continue and terminate a conversation.

While staffing public library service points, librarians have constant opportunities to use these four components. Such situations might include: telling users they cannot borrow certain items, helping a user who is having difficulty locating the material they require and requesting the return of overdue items (7).

Assertion training stresses the importance of articulating the commitment to self-respect in verbal communication. The use of the pronoun 'I' conveys self-confidence and demonstrates decisiveness as well as willingness to accept responsibility for what one is saying (8).

Groark argues that by consciously communicating in a clear concise manner the individual can reduce anxiety in stressful situations which has positive implications for a variety of situations including handling difficult library users.

There are various types of asertiveness training, and Caputo (9) lists 22 examples. However, according to Caputo, the three most important techniques for dealing with difficult customers are:

- Anger starvation

- Clipping

- Broken record

Anger starvation

This technique is also known as 'disarming anger'. The aim is to calm an angry person so that the problem can be rationally solved. Anger starvation has three components: firstly, a clear recognition of the attacker's emotion and its strength, followed secondly by a statement of one's willingness and intent to help solve the problem. The third component is to remove the source of anger. This should be a complete physical removal to another location if possible. If not, steps should be taken to change the environment so that the source of anger is diluted (10).

Caputo argues that this technique should be used when the customer is very angry or appears to have overreacted to a situation that is a just cause for milder anger. She asserts that the technique is highly effective and therefore recommended.

Clipping

This is the term given to short answers consisting of simple affirmatives or negatives that give little or no information, and is used when staff are under attack and are unsure why (11). Simple yes or no answers are used until the problem issue is identified and can be responded to.

Caputo recommends clipping as a way of avoiding inappropriate conflict, arguing that it keeps staff from reacting to the overt components of an attack, allowing them to focus instead on investigating the underlying reasons for the attack.

Broken record

This technique involves the calm repetition of a statement, usually in the exact same words, hence sounding like a broken record. It is used in two different instances.

Firstly, it is used when making an assertive statement and the customer tries to sidetrack staff or to bring up other points which may or may not be relevant. It is a useful way of keeping emotional control when faced with intentionally provocative comments (12).

Secondly, it is useful when staff have given an assertive refusal which is not accepted, and they are being pressured into reversing it. This use often includes repeating short phrases such as 'No, I can't do that' (13). However, Caputo argues that this use of the broken record technique is frustrating for the customer and does not help resolve problems. She recommends that it only be used in situations where an immediate resolution is not necessary (14).

Dealing With Aggression and Violence

It is important for staff to recognise and be able to diffuse potentially violent situations. A change in stance, voice, gestures and facial expressions, etc. can signify the onset of aggressive behaviour (15).

The 'Handling aggression and violence' course run at Bradford Library discussed issues and advice for staff placed in violent situations. Several guidelines were developed, some of which are discussed below.

- Remaining calm is vital as raising the voice and panic are indications of loss of control. A slow even tone communicates calmness.

- Acknowledge that the person is angry and, where appropriate, that they have a right to be angry.

- However, it is important to focus on the cause of the anger rather than on the behaviour the anger is producing.

- Don't take an aggressive attack personally. Doing so reduces the ability to deal successfully with the situation.

- Avoid making the angry customer feel that they are powerless.

- Avoid power struggles in which the issue is who will give in first.

- In line with the above, try to offer the person a way out of the situation that they can take without humiliation and that will not result in future problems.

- If possible, separate the angry customer from an audience or from the situation which is causing the anger. This should only be done if it can be achieved without force as this can cause further conflict.

- Avoid physical force unless there is *no* other alternative. Using force may encourage the other person to do the same.

- Be aware of signs that the person has been drinking (staggering, slurred speech, etc.) as alcohol and drugs can increase the chances of a disagreement becoming physically violent.

- Bear in mind the question 'Has the situation reached a point where I need to get help or to escape?' If it has, then get help or escape; don't think that doing so is a result of failing to deal with the situation (16).

The Library Association has also developed guidelines for dealing with unacceptable behaviour in libraries but these can only be described at best as brief (17). A serious problem such as violence deserves more that a four page booklet devoted to its prevention.

Policies, Guidelines and Training

Both Grotophorst (18) and Downing (19) have observed a particular problem which tends to occur when the issue of violence in libraries is raised. The discussions become anecdotal and the swapping of stories dominates, hindering discussions and the effective formulation of policies. They feel that there is a lack of interest in the problem by both management and staff, and suggest that librarians speak up more often rather than accepting incidents as part of the job. The need for training is emphasised, both in the workplace and at library school.

Bradford's ' Positive Steps'

In September 1989, Bradford Libraries and Information Service launched a new enterprise to help staff in dealing with difficult situations at work. The Positive Steps package (20) is a help pack with advice on coping with these situations to ensure that incidents are dealt with effectively and reported accurately.

In 1988, Council officers met to discuss violence in the workplace, but the guidelines were designed by the library service itself. It was found, through discussions between supervisors, managers and front-line staff, that not all staff would be able to attend relevant courses such as awareness sessions on personal safety and breakaway techniques. The libraries team therefore decided to produce the Positive Steps pack which would give practical, on the spot advice and which would be available to all staff.

Four key points were identified as being relevant and the pack accordingly is divided into these sections:

- Coping with complaints

- Dealing with unacceptable, disruptive or unruly behaviour

- Reporting and monitoring incidents

- Personal safety and accident reporting

Coping with complaints

The pack asks that complaints be looked at in a positive way as they might show weakness in the service which could be improved. The section also gives advice on dealing with grievances, such as when an apology is most appropriate or when to pass on a complaint to a senior member of staff. Staff are also reassured that they are not failing in their job if they do pass on a complaint to another staff member. Collecting all relevant facts is stressed in order to deal effectively with the complaint.

The guidelines give advice on coping with complaints and strike a balance between customer care and staff care. For example:

- Treat people making complaints courteously. Be firm where necessary but never to the point of rudeness

- Keep cool. Don't let the angry complainant draw you into a row.

- Don't make guesses when dealing with enquiries. Check your facts.

- Don't take the complaint personally. (21)

Bradford Libraries and Information Service have devised a Complaints and Suggestions form which can be offered to dissatisfied customers if they feel the explanation given them by staff is inadequate. They are assured of a confidential reply from the appropriate senior office. The purpose of the form is threefold; firstly, to channel the user's aggression away from the counter staff; secondly, it allows a positive way of responding to complaints; and thirdly, it ensures that complaints are dealt with by the correct member of staff (22).

Dealing with unacceptable, disruptive or unruly behaviour

It was felt that the bye-laws should form the backbone of any advice given to staff. However, Bradford acknowledged that ' unacceptable' behaviour is difficult to define and that it depended on the vulnerability of the staff involved. They therefore suggest that each situation should be assessed by staff, although activities such as spitting, smoking and damage to property are strictly prohibited and should be dealt with as such.

Reporting and monitoring incidents

Bradford had operated a system of incident reporting prior to the Positive Steps package, but the emphasis was purely on serious affairs (23). Less serious occurrences were being overlooked by management although they were still frustrating for those dealing with them. Thus, the 'Spot of Bother' form was introduced for staff to record minor incidents which occurred and which are often tolerated as 'part of the job'. The benefits are that staff have a chance to make managers aware of problems and to 'get it off their chests' as well as problems being tackled at an early stage before the situations become uncontrollable.

Personal safety

Included in the pack is advice on using personal alarms, precautions for staff working alone or late at night and instructions on the completion of accident report forms. Although the advice is largely common-sense, it is reassuring for staff to have specific written procedures.

Implementation of the package

A draft package was designed and piloted in several different libraries for three months, in order to assess its suitability. Management acknowledged that staff must find the pack useful if it was to be successful. Therefore, staff consultation was a top priority, where the various sections were introduced and explained and staff discussed any problems they faced (24).

The results of the trial period showed that the pack was easy and effective to use, although it had only been used on rare occasions. One of the factors leading to infrequency of use was the fortunate lack of serious incidents. However, staff needed regular reminders about the pack's use in less serious cases (25).

In conclusion, Positive Steps has been a successful pack for library staff which has been continuously monitored and assessed. Many of the guidelines are common-sense and are part of any library training. However, it is useful for staff to have written procedures and ideas for reference if a difficult situation should arise. The pack provides a useful example for other authorities contemplating the introduction of guidelines about violence and unacceptable behaviour in the workplace.

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CHAPTER FIVE

THE ROLE OF CUSTOMER CARE AND THE CITIZEN'S CHARTER IN THE LIBRARY

Introduction

There has been more emphasis on quality management in the service industry and this has affected libraries with the introduction of customer care programmes, for example the Brent Library approach.

Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management (TQM) was developed in a manufacturing environment, but the process of applying it to the service industry has been a slow one. Libraries have been slow to embrace the techniques and attitudes from the 'for-profit' sector (1).

Simply defined, TQM is 'a system of continuous improvement employing participative management and centred on the needs of customers' (2). TQM involves employee training, problem solving, long-term goals and recognition that the system (not employees) is responsible for most inefficiencies (3). It is an holistic approach to improving the effectiveness of a business as a whole.

'Getting it right first time'

The prevention of errors and wastage of resources such as materials and time are vital to an organisation's success. Quality experts estimate that up to 40% of staff time is wasted being spent re-doing work, correcting errors, etc. (4). TQM strives for the prevention of errors. The TQM philosophy acknowledges that error rates and quality problems largely lie with management failing to set clear objectives or to train staff adequately.

However, TQM also recognises that the achievement of 'right first time' depends not only on senior management commitment but also on staff being involved, especially through teamwork and control ('ownership') of their work (5). Focussing on these two approaches prevents errors and wasted efforts, and services are targeted on meeting customer requirements, resulting in efficient use of resources and increased customer satisfaction.

Quality

In this context quality is defined as 'meeting the requirements of the customer, both external (end-user) and internal (work colleague)', and not as signifying excellence or high quality, although this may be the achieved customer perception (6).

Customer requirements are not necessarily restricted to the needs of a service, but can include ease of use, availability, reliability and enjoyment, such as is often the case for library users (7).

Martin argues that in the library context, this marks a distinct contrast between the traditional approach of identifying user needs rather than user expectations. This also emphasises the importance of user surveys to the successful implementation of TQM through realising what users want and tailoring service design and delivery to meet their expectations (8).

Continuous improvement

The most important concept in TQM is that of continuous improvement. This is not defined as trying to do better all the time, but rather the creation of beneficial change as a response to identified customer requirements (9).

Customer Care

Customer care is an important part of an organisation's TQM strategy. It is important for libraries to create a welcoming, informal atmosphere and librarians can help this by being friendly and interested in user needs. Whenever attention is paid to customer's needs and preferences, the result is likely to be increased use and appreciation of the library service (10). Staff training is needed so as to fulfil the needs of as many library users as possible. Information may be provided to customers, but the service they receive may be dissatisfying. Lund and Patterson argue that 'the way in which interpersonal communication is handled has a great influence on the quality of the service' (11). Therefore staff need to know how to make customers satisfied even when their information requirements cannot be met.

As late as 1990, Scott asserted that library staff neglected customers in favour of tidy shelves and neat displays (12). Fortunately he argues that there has been more emphasis on customer care in recent years; good interpersonal skills are vital if the library is to run a well used and appreciated service. Customer care and interpersonal skills are both relevant to the issue of violence in libraries.

Customer care is not merely about the training of front line staff to promote a 'have a nice day' approach. Hinks (13) regards customer care as a philosophy which means putting the customer first in the planning and delivery of services, and Scott states that customer care is everything that occurs before, during and after a staff /user interaction (14). It means a continuous review of the services provided and how they are provided. His view covers layout and presentation of the library, how staff welcome users and answer their enquiries, as well as acting positively to complaints and comments about the service.

The Brent Libraries Approach

As mentioned above (p.27) Brent libraries suffered many acts of vandalism in the 1980s, resulting in many setbacks. However, in 1994, after 3 years of new initiatives, Brent council were able to announce an 18% increase in customer satisfaction (15). In June 1991 Brent launched its 'total quality programme' which meant new attitudes towards quality and efficiency, and increasing attention being paid to customer care. Statements of the standards customers could expect were displayed and a library charter was present in every library. Tyerman stressed that library staff were consulted on both the statement of standards and the charter, i.e. there was effective two-way communication between staff and management.

To ensure that the service met the specified standards, a system was developed comprising management information and performance indicators, and a customer complaints service as well as user surveys (16). Book issues and visitor figures were shown to improve and customers reported an increased satisfaction with services.

TQM is an holistic approach to management which incorporates customer care. Customer care works on the premise that the 'customer is king' and within a library setting it relates to a welcoming atmosphere, which in turn reduces feelings of unease and tension making a violent confrontation less likely. The Brent Libraries approach aimed to overcome problem users with the introduction of a customer care programme which improved the quality of the service leading to increased customer satisfaction. Therefore customer care and TQM can contribute to a reduction in aggressive situations in libraries.

Violence in the Library and the Role of Customer Care; The Psychology of Customer Care

One aim of customer care is to make the library as user-friendly as possible. Once inside, the library customers have a right to expect helpful staff, well presented displays, clear guidelines on joining procedures, loan terms and clear guides to finding material. All these are needed to make the customer feel at ease and to radiate a welcoming, positive atmosphere in the library (17).

Hinks (18) suggests that 'all library procedures have to be assessed against the requirements of customer care' and should be re-designed where necessary in order to make such procedures more user-friendly and easier for customers.

People can become aggressive when they feel frustrated or worried if they are unsure of what is expected of them when using the library, or are intimidated by the formalities involved and are more likely to react negatively (19).

It is important that organisational strategies are implemented in order to reduce violence, but they must retain the key elements essential to customer care (20). Passmore suggests two approaches to be employed in order to enable these dual aims to be met; 'positive active' and 'positive passive'.

<u>Positive active</u>

These strategies improve service quality and the customer perceives them as a demonstration of caring by the employee. They consist of interpersonal skills such as:

- empathy

- listening skills

- voice tone

- customer centred procedures

The latter involves giving more power to front line staff, allowing them to resolve conflicts and providing a way to highlight procedural problems to managers (21). The issue of interpersonal skills is the single most important element in the interaction process; Passmore states that 'if front end employees can communicate 'care' during the interaction, the liklihood of violence is substantially reduced' (22).

Successful interactions are helped by several factors. 55% of information is communicated through body language, 38% through voice tone and only 7% through actual word content (23). Specific techniques used to help project a caring image include:

- Posture echo

This is a process of imitation where the employee uses body language to build rapport with the client by mirroring the client's body posture. It is a natural process occurring between friends, although using the technique professionally requires skill in interpersonal dealings; inexperienced employees using the technique might 'over play' the role, leading to irritation in the customer who feels they are being mocked.

- Voice tone

The employee can demonstrate a similar feeling to that being experienced by the customer by mirroring the customer's own voice tone and pace of speech. The employee can also take control by speaking more calmly, thereby encouraging the customer to do the same. Using a softer tone and slow speech may have a calming effect, but if the customer is speaking loud and fast, a low pitch may only serve to irritate the customer further. Therefore, good judgement is needed in order to assess individual situations and deciding which voice tone role to employ.

- Empathy

Empathy is the ability to perceive and communicate sensitively the feelings of the client and the meaning of those feelings (24). Therefore, the employee must be able to receive the customer's comments, understand them, and be able to communicate that understanding back to the customer.

Passmore argues that these three elements enable the employee to not only project a customer oriented approach, but also to help control the customer's emotions which could lead to violence if left unchecked.

Positive passive

This strategy is put into place before any interaction occurs, and provides an environment of 'caring' to the customer. It relies on the client's subconscious being affected by the created environment rather than occurrences which take place during the interaction (25). Two components are present in this strategy:

- Marketing and customer information

The level of customer satisfaction depends on the difference between the customer's expectation of a service and their experience of it (26). Expectations are influenced by past experience, the image of the service and prior knowledge of it. However, Passmore argues that it is important to reduce customer expectations, eg. by the use of notices, so that customers will not become annoyed over the perceived inadequacy of the service.

- Design of public areas

These should be designed with the customer in mind so that they are at ease and comfortable with their surroundings. Clearly marked information desks and receptions are important, so that customers know where they can receive help. Passmore advocates the use of wide counters to reduce the possibility of attackers leaning over them to threaten staff and an access door to a secure area to give further protection (27).

Passmore concludes that customer care and staff safety are not mutually inconsistant concepts. However, adopting either principles of customer care (positive active or positive passive) does not mean that employees will be totally free from the risk of violence. The introduction of measures such as protective screens are immediate, and the development of employee interpersonal skills, or the setting of user expectations through information is a long slow process. However, Passmore advocates the long slow process of change, arguing that it enables the objectives of both customer care and staff safety to be met (28).

Customer Complaints Initiatives

It is important to discover exactly what users want and expect from their public library. A complaints/suggestions service is one way of finding where problems lie and which services need re-thinking, updating, etc. Despite the time and effort required to respond to communications received, there are advantages for the library authority offering this service, in that areas with potential improvement are highlighted whilst the public have an opportunity to voice their feelings in a constructive way. A scheme like this takes the responsibility off front-line staff to provide immediate answers to a complaint. Unfortunately, it may prove difficult to induce an angry customer to fill in a form which could be seen as another piece of organisational bureaucracy.

The Leicestershire Initiative

In 1990, Leicestershire public libraries introduced a computerised complaints and comments procedure. A customer (or member of staff on behalf of a customer) is required to complete a form detailing the complaint or suggestion, which in turn is analysed by an investigating officer. Time limits are set for responding to the customer and a follow-up letter records the action taken. Comments are then recorded on the computer and are regularly reviewed in order to aid decision making.

However, since its introduction there is no evidence that the procedure has greatly increased the number of complaints received, suggesting that although the public are sometimes willing to complain, they are unwilling to take the complaint further by completing a form and waiting for a result (29).

The Citizen's Charter

In a speech by John Major to the Adam Smith Institute in June 1992, he stated:

> *'Of all the privatisations...the greatest and most reaching...is the privatisation of choice. That is the message of the reforms which make up the Citizen's Charter. It is the most radical programme of reform of public services at all levels that we have ever seen'* (30)

The Citizen's Charter was launched in 1991 and its importance was emphasized again after the re-election of the Conservative government in 1992. It's aims are to improve quality, choice and value in public services by publishing standards which the public should expect and to put right services where standards are not set (31).

The principles of public service listed in the Charter are:

-Information which is readily available

- Choice

- Non-discrimination

- Accessibilty

- Complaints procedures

- Quality

The Library Association, with the Public Libraries Group, established a Charter Working Group to prepare a report which would summarise existing practice and experience, and provide guidance to public librarians taking into account both the Citizen's Charter and local customer charters (32).

The guidelines stress the need to reflect local needs and wishes. Therefore the Library Association worked towards a model charter that could be adapted by every local authority.

Many of the authorities that have produced their own charter emphasize the importance of consulting with both customers and staff to guarantee that the library's commitments are relevant to the needs and interests of the local community and that they are realistic, ie. that they can be met.

Library services have different potentials and standards due to local resource levels and priorities so that, although all authorities are using a general model charter, they have produced many variations in accordance with local emphasis and application.

Information

The Charter states 'full accurate information should be readily available...about what services are being provided' (33). It is important that libraries have information about their services to promote them and to encourage their use.

People choose whether or not to use library services and information and promotion are part of the public library 'culture' (34). However, the public are often unaware of what libraries have to offer, including the range and depth of services. The Charter requires that staff are trained so as to fully represent services to customers. The Citizen's Charter offers an opportunity to promote and develop the public library's information role within the local authority given its expertise, goodwill and access. (35).

Choice

'The public sector should provide choice wherever practicable' (36). The people using the services should be consulted to ensure that the services are needed and wanted. Hinks (37) argues that local government can not ignore the fact that more than half the people interviewed by WHICH? magazine stated that local authorities do not involve the community sufficiently in deciding how to spend their money.

Because people choose to use library services, libraries have two clear duties. Firstly, to offer services that people need and want. Secondly, to ensure that all community members have access to the services and can benefit from them (38). Library managers need to perform a 'balancing act' in their service planning, bringing together customer preferences and the professional judgement of informed librarians. The results of market research and surveys can inform decision making and planning so that the public's views are heard (39).

Non-discrimination

'Services should be available regardless of race or sex' (40). This principle is included in the Library Association's Code of Professional Conduct and in the 1964 Public Libraries and Museums Act. Library services should meet the needs of all community members equally.

Commitments are also made to serve the whole community, including those with special needs, ethnic groups, the elderly and children. Cambridgeshire provides 'library services for your whole community, paying particular attention to people with special needs' (41) and Westminster promises 'books in languages other than English as appropriate to community needs' (42).

Accessibilty

'Services should be run to suit the convenience of customers, not staff. This means flexible opening hours, and telephone enquiry points that direct callers quickly to someone who can help them' (43).

Some charters make a commitment to appropriate evening and Saturday opening. Cambridgeshire states that '30% of the opening hours at each library will be outside normal office hours if your community asks for this' (44), and others state that they will regularly review opening hours.

Late opening hours, however, cause problems for staff as they are more likely to be working in isolation during evening shifts. The Citizen's Charter suggests that the telephone should be answered immediately but this may lengthen waiting times and queues for people who have visited the library in person and who feel that they should have preferential treatment.

Statements on the availability of mobile libraries relate to distance and population. Somerset promises 'to maintain a network of mobile library stops serving rural communities more that one and a half miles from a static library' (45).

Complaints procedures

'There should be a well publicised and readily available complaints procedure' (46). This should be part of a customer care policy. A positive response to a complaint can often lead to an increase in user satisfaction. However, any feedback which suggests that the service is failing to meet the needs of the user should be treated positively and promptly.

A customer centered service is emphasized, including comments and complaints procedures, surveys, suggestion boxes and a responsive local service. In Berkshire, for example, 'all suggestions made by our customers will be considered as part of our continuous review of services and procedures' (47). Essex provides 'suggestion boxes in all libraries...responding to all written suggestions within one week' as well as conducting a 'yearly survey of customer opinion' (48).

Quality

This covers staff, stock, services and environment.

i) Staff

The importance of polite, well trained staff is recognised, with commitments also to awareness and efficiency, and in some cases, standards of presentation and dress. Cambridgeshire promises to serve customers 'in a friendly, polite and efficient way' (49) and Kent states that staff will be 'well trained, polite and knowledgeable and aware of the full range of the department's resources and services' (50).

ii) Stock

There is a wide range of statements relating to stock concerning availability and choice, age and currency, popularity and provision of local materials.

Somerset undertakes to 'purchase 35 books per 100 borrowers per year' and to 'circulate a minimum of 20% of lending stock between individual libraries each year.' (51). 'A broad range of books to satisfy your educational, cultural and leisure interests' is offered by Essex (52). Westminster promises 'books in large print and on tape...videos and records, cassettes or compact discs...in every lending library' (53).

iii) Services

These cover reference and information as well as enquiries, supply of requests, interlending, telephone waiting times and responses, and queueing times.

Solihull undertakes to 'respond to at least 95% of your reference enquiries within 2 working days' and to provide 'study space and a basic collection of reference works at each service point' (54). Wiltshire aims to 'serve borrowers at the lending counter within 4 minutes' (55). The range of services is also emphasized. Cambridgeshire offer 'information on all subjects as well as advice on how to use other sources' (56). Westminster promises 'community information collections in every library' (57).

iv) Environment

Charter commitments focus on creating a pleasant environment, providing study space, safety and cleanliness. Solihull promises to 'provide a pleasant place for you to browse, borrow or study' (58) and Cambridgeshire, 'buildings and mobile libraries which are pleasant, welcoming and offer materials that are well presented and signposted' (59).

v) Value for money

As well as cost effectiveness and an emphasis on value for money there are the commitments on performance, published standards, monitoring and review.

Sheffield states that 'you have a right to expect a quality service. You pay for library services through your Community Charge and are entitled to value for money' (60). Cambridgeshire provides 'a copy of our business plans describing how the service will improve over the next few years and how we spend your money. (61).

Finally Berkshire takes the initiative by asking their customers 'to be considerate of other library users and take care of library materials' (62) - a reminder that customers have responsibilites as well as rights.

However, although Scott (63) argues that customer care in libraries has only been a priority since 1990, it has always been an important part of the service industry. It could be argued that while the Citizen's Charter gives customers standards they can expect in written form, it should be unnecessary, as those standards should be met in any case. Libraries have Mission Statements which set out their aims and objectives, so it is possible that they have no need for a charter and that it is merely a cosmetic exercise.

The service industry could be seen as becoming more business oriented, and having written standards is a 'ruler' by which efficiency and effectiveness can be measured.

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CHAPTER SIX

QUESTIONNAIRE RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Introduction

Public libraries tend to experience a wide range of complaints and problem users. The majority of incidents caused by problem users are not necessarily violent or aggressive, but may be extremely annoying and stressful for staff. The public libraries surveyed experienced many similar complaints and problem users, some of which appear to be universal. As stated in the methodology this study is intended to provide only a 'snapshot' of the current situation of violence in public libraries and although several common themes emerged across the authorities surveyed, no claim to strict representativeness can be made. The sample was dictated by availability and willingness of individuals to participate, and the intention of this chapter is solely to present a picture of the situation at a particular time under certain circumstances.

The researcher distributed 80 questionnaires to public libraries between 6 counties in England; however, replies were received from 4 of the 6 counties. In order to retain anonymity these counties will be known as A, B, C and D.

Table One: Job title of respondents

Job title	Percentage (%)
Librarian	22
Library manager	11
Library assistant	55
Other	11

Replies were received from staff with various job titles, the largest percentage being library assistants who make up the majority of front-line staff and therefore are most likely to suffer abuse from the public. Table One shows the overall breakdown of respondents' job titles.

Experience of Difficult Situations

Table Two: Experience of abusive situations

Type of abuse	percentage (%)
Verbal abuse	69
Physical abuse	8
Sexual harassment	21
Other	1

Staff in all the libraries surveyed in the four counties had experienced the problem of the irate customer who became verbally abusive. 69% of respondents had suffered some form of verbal abuse. This was, unsurprisingly, the most common form of abuse and was usually in response to fines, queues and perceived inadequacy of the service. The verbal abuse not only took the form of swearing, but also threats to staff safety such as "I'll get you later." Sexual harassment was also a problem in all of the counties. This not only took the form of verbal harassment but sometimes physical harassment as well.

Fortunately, the incidents of physical assault were rare, although staff in two counties did cite incidents. No respondents in County A had suffered physical abuse, although 50% of those who replied from County B had experienced some sort of physical assault. Some examples of assault were given although they had occurred to somone known to the respondent rather than based on personal experience. However, the types of physical assaults on staff included punches and even headbutts. There are various examples of assaults on library staff cited in the literature. St. Lifer cites research where 3% of staff in 1700 libraries had been physically assaulted (1).

Is Violence 'Part of the Job'?

Most staff in County A agreed that abuse in any form was *not* part of the job, although a small minority conceded that verbal abuse was. In the other counties, verbal abuse was generally accepted as part of the job and only one respondent (in County C) viewed sexual harassment as such. It is unsurprising that verbal abuse is seen as part of the job as it is common and therefore staff regard it as inevitable and accept its occurrence Unsurprisingly, no respondents regarded physical assault as part of the job.

Common Complaints Made in Public Libraries

The most common complaint made by customers was about the shortage of books and the lack of new material. 37% of staff mentioned that customers complained about this. The lack of available material is often due to diminishing resources, although as mentioned above (p.68) some counties purchase a set quota of new books per year, such as Somerset who claim to purchase 35 books per 100 borrowers per year. However, this seems to be a relatively small percentage of new books. Masson's study concluded that borrowers become disillusioned with public libraries as they tend not to stock certain types of book, eg 'radical' publications (2). When customer expectations of a service are not met, customer satisfaction is lowered, and complaints are more likely to occur.

The length of time taken to fulfil requests also caused a number of complaints (18%). It is possible that customers perceive librarians as not trying hard enough to obtain their requests and therefore place the blame on the staff rather than on the request system.

Another common complaint voiced by customers was about the bureaucratic policies of libraries, ie. the need for various types of identification when joining the library and the various forms which must be completed as part of the joining procedure. Library users seem to regard these as 'red tape' and complain that they are unnecessary and inconvenient.

Disputes were also common over the library records. Users insisted that books had been returned, although the records showed them to be issued. Perceived staff attitude was also cited as a common cause of dispute, many staff stating that users became annoyed when librarians refuse to 'spoonfeed' them with the information they required, or if staff were slow in responding to their requests. Staff stated that users appeared to believe that staff were deliberately ignoring their requests. As one librarian in County B stated, customers become annoyed 'when they cannot have what they want the minute they ask for it.'

Opening times which conflicted with user convenience, limited loan periods and the cost of fines were all cited as common complaints by customers. Guidelines are needed which clearly state when fines can be waived and these should be adhered to and supported by management. Queues were also a common problem. There may be a need to examine library procedures and staffing levels in order to reduce time spent queueing and therefore produce a more efficient service for customers. Staff in two of the four counties surveyed, when asked what the most common complaints were, replied 'anything and everything!'

Problem Users in Public Libraries

These tended to fall into four main categories: drunks and drug users, gangs of youths, irate customers and psychiatric patients in the community. Each of these is discussed in detail below.

Drunks and drug users

Every county surveyed experienced problems with some of their patrons being drunk, and confrontations with them frequently led to aggressive incidents. 23% of staff who responded had experienced difficult situations with drunks using the library. Poyner and Warne argue that feelings of anger and frustration are exacerbated by alcohol and drugs (3). Although these people are not always violent, their behaviour can be unpredictable and their presence intimidating to both staff and other users. Alcohol can have the effect of increasing feelings of aggression so that when a drunk person is asked to leave the library a violent situation may arise. Many library assistants in County D strongly felt that drunken behaviour should not be tolerated.

Drug users also caused problems for all four of the counties. 38% of library staff found these groups to be a major problem. Staff in County B cited examples of solvent abuse taking place in one library's foyer.

Gangs of youths

These were found to be a problem in all counties and were often associated with vandalism, drug taking or both. 40% of staff cited rowdy youths as a problem in their libraries. Examples of vandalism by youths are also cited in the literature, eg. MacLeod, who found that some libraries were forced to close after being subjected to vandalism by youths (4).

The staff surveyed often stated that evenings were the worst times when youths visited the libraries. Late opening hours were given as important factors for this, encouraging teenagers to gather at libraries and deliberately intimidating staff and users. One library assistant in County A wrote

'...we dread the afternoons, especially the two 7 o'clock late nights. Borrowers tend not to use the library after 5 pm because of the youths.'

Closing the library during the evenings could be considered as a solution, but this would shorten opening hours and possibly cause more complaints. The staff had also experienced problems with gangs of youths gathering outside libraries and becoming drunk and disruptive.

However, youths do not have to be drunk in order to cause difficulties for library staff. Librarians often stated that in their opinion they visited the library through boredom purely to intimidate other users and be disruptive, for example shouting and throwing books around. As mentioned above, the solution in Leicestershire was to employ youth workers in order to build a rapport with teenagers and to encourage them to use, and behave in, the library (5). Unfortunately, this solution may not be practical in other areas, where calling the police is often the only course of action to take. However, at this stage, the problem would appear to be out of control and is more difficult to solve.

The irate customer

The irate customer who is not particularly violent but who, nevertheless, can be unpleasant to deal with, is a common problem for every library surveyed and is often neglected in the literature in favour of more difficult patrons such as mental patients (6) and drunks (7). Queues, fines and the perceived 'unhelpfulness' of staff were all considered by staff as contributors to an aggressive response from these customers. The library users might feel that the library is lacking in customer care and service adequacy if queues and opening hours, etc. cause problems for them. However, reduced budgets and therefore lower staffing levels will eventually lead to such problems as queues and lack of new material.

The aggression usually took the form of verbal abuse and swearing but rarely any physically violent confrontations. Staff often saw this type of abuse as part of the job but still found it to be distressing. A library manager in County B wrote

> *'they [irate customers] make enjoyable, worthwhile work less so. I don't enjoy going to work as much. It taints one's perception of the public.'*

Psychiatric patients in the community

Staff in three of the four counties (28%) stated that ex-psychiatric patients now being cared for in the community were a problem, and that the problem is increasing. As discussed above (p.28), these people are not necessarily violent but their behaviour can be unpredictable (8). Staff stressed their concern about mental patients frequenting libraries as they have nowhere else to go, for example, a library manager in County D stated that

'the trend seems to be toward a greater incidence of violent situations with care in the community contributing to this, and staff concern about this issue is expressed more frequently now than a few years ago.'

They were also concerned about their lack of training in this area.

The nature of the public library being accessible and warm makes them natural shelters for those on the street or with nowhere to go. However, Vocino argues that librarians should not tolerate their irrational and often bizarre behaviour, as this will encourage them to return to the library and the problem could become uncontrollable (9). He also argues that librarians are not trained mental health specialists and therefore should not become involved in their welfare but should contact the appropriate authorities, although one member of staff in County A stated 'we are expected to act as social workers.'

Time of Day

Staff in counties B, C and D usually found that evenings were the worst times for aggressive situations. However, most staff agreed that evenings were not particularly busy times, arguing that an aggressive situation could occur any time that service points were busy. Many staff in three of the four counties disliked working in the evenings due to the number of rowdy youths using the library as a local 'hangout'.

Staff in all four counties stressed their concern over working in isolation, especially in the evenings and during the winter months when it is dark early. The problems of cost were cited as a restrictive factor preventing the employment of extra staff in Counties C and D. In many library authorities there is a conflict between the cost of staff, the amount of use made of a library and the cost of staff security. Fears for the latter often take second place due to the lack of available resources.

A particular concern voiced by staff in two of the four counties (A and B) was the staff car parks being poorly lit or too far from the libraries, leading to staff feeling that they were at risk to opportunist prowlers.

Library staff in County C highlighted a 'knock on' effect caused by incidents which occur in the locality of the library. Staff reported feelings of vulnerability in those areas where robberies or muggings had taken place. Again, staff felt most at risk when working in isolation or during the evenings.

Regulations and Guidelines

Most of the staff surveyed (53%) stated that no library regulations were displayed for the public as to what constitutes unacceptable behaviour on their part. Many libraries had bye-laws but these were often not evident or were not on display at all. The issue of displaying such regulations was regarded by some staff as a delicate issue. On the one hand, staff feel that such notices may appear unwelcoming and negative, for example, one librarian in County A stated

> *'It is our policy to make the library welcoming, therefore we do not have a list of "thou shalt nots"'*

On the other hand, many staff feel that they should be protected by some form of rules. For example, a library assistant also from County A complained there were

> *'no clear guidelines...given to borrowers who enter the building with food and drink and dogs. When spoken to, they say "where's the sign then?"'*

Staff in all counties said they would prefer positive or 'jokey' notices to convey messages to the public.

Staff generally had some sort of guidelines on what was unacceptable behaviour on the part of customers (71%), although the libraries surveyed in County C had no guidelines at all. One library in County A also had no guidelines although some members of staff said they had informal or verbal guidelines and relied on their own common sense. Many libraries used the bye-laws as guidelines for staff as well as for customers.

Regulations and guidelines are useful for staff as they give details of what constitutes unacceptable behaviour on the part of users and give an outline of which behaviours can be tolerated or prohibited. They also provide some protection for staff in that they are there to support and justify staff actions.

Unfortunately, if a customer displays unacceptable behaviour, drawing their attention to notices is often insufficient. It can be extremely difficult to eject unwelcome users from the library, especially if they are drunk or are becoming aggressive. As one librarian in County D argued

> *'removing unwanted borrowers is difficult and we don't want to use force. We keep repeating the request until they decide to remove themselves.'*

Reporting Procedures

Although verbal abuse was generally seen as part of the job it was usually reported at weekly meetings or a form was completed detailing the incident. It was more likely to be reported than ignored in all four counties. Sexual harassment was also seen as a serious issue and was generally reported. Cases of physical violence were also reported and discussed. Other incidents which would be reported included vandalism, unruly behaviour by customers and general disruption.

Not all libraries had official channels for reporting incidents. Those that did (84%) normally reported to line managers either verbally or through the completion of a form. Serious incidents tended to be reported to Divisional supervisors and Area managers, otherwise the report stopped at the line manager. However, whether or not staff expect to be taken seriously or have policies implemented as a result of abuse is another matter. As one library assistant in County D complained

> *'many serious incidents are not acted upon and customers get away with them.*
> *The only feedback we get is when they complain about us.'*

Although in the libraries surveyed for the purpose of this research verbal abuse is often reported, there is the possibilty, on a wider scale, that such abuse goes unreported as it is so difficult to eradicate and is often regarded as part of the job and therefore accepted. Among those libraries where verbal abuse and other incidents are not reported, they are normally discussed amongst the staff themselves.

Staff Training

Table Three: Percentage of staff receiving training

Type of training experienced	Percentage (%)
Customer care course	8
'Dealing with difficult users' course	32
Assertiveness training	1
Interpersonal skills training	3
No training received	54

Staff training for dealing with difficult situations was not commonplace in any county. The majority of respondents (54%) stated that there was no training for coping with such situations. However, where training was available, staff argued that it was generally inadequate. Levy and Usherwood argue that training should be on-going but most training courses are one day affairs (10). Training in County C, for example, involved a one day course on dealing with aggression and a one day course on the psychology of violence.

County B's training included videos on how to appease aggressive customers and how to predict and avert difficult situations. All staff took part in a customer care course which incorporated dealing with aggressive users.

The issue was also dealt with as part of the customer care course in County D although there was an additional one day course specific to problem users. However, the courses available for dealing with aggressive customers had limited spaces and so were not open to every member of staff.

Many staff in County A referred to a one day course entitled 'Handling aggression and violence', the aims of which were to enable staff to:

- Identify potentially dangerous situations

- Identify and minimise harmful environmental factors

- Identify danger signals in the customer's manner and to be aware of the signposts that an incident is becoming more dangerous

- Develop an understanding of their own styles of coping with, and responding to, conflict

- Identify and develop the skills which will reduce rather than heighten the possibility of violence

- Consider their feelings and needs after an incident has occurred (11).

Most staff in every library surveyed would like to have more training (74%), especially courses at regular intervals, not merely a 'one off' course. These would also have to reach all levels of staff and be specifically designed with public libraries in mind. Some library staff also feel that short courses in psychology might be of use, especially for dealing with people affected by alcohol and drugs and those suffering from mental problems. Training should concentrate on the need to recognise and react positively to those who have disabilities, ultimately providing staff with the ability and confidence to cope with a variety of situations.

The Public Library Charter

All the counties surveyed have already implemented the library charter, although not every library in each county had a copy of it. However, libraries were more likely than not to have a copy of the charter (56%). Some library staff stated that no charter was available in the library (34%) and 10% did not know whether or not their library had a copy of the charter or not.

The idea behind the library charter is that the public can see for themselves what services are available and to what standard those services will be delivered. However, only 35% of library staff surveyed stated that their charter was on display for the public to see. The charter was sometimes used for staff training as part of their customer care courses (26%), but 35% of library staff argued that their library charter was rarely, if at all, used.

This could mean that they feel the charter has no place in the library, ie. that the services are already delivered to high standards. It might also mean that staff are not concerned with the charter, regarding it as a cosmetic exercise that has little or no real value.

'The Citizen's Charter has led to an increase in violent situations or abuse against library staff'

Respondents were asked how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the above statement. 80% of respondents felt that the Citizen's Charter has had no effect on the number of violent incidents towards staff. Only 4% thought that it had made a difference, i.e. that abuse towards staff had increased as a result of the library charter's introduction.

However, as already discussed, most library users become aggressive over the late arrival of requests, fines and queues, and the library charter does not deal with these particular factors in detail. It is more concerned with providing a wide range of stock, providing information about other services, complaints procedures and well presented staff. Although it is essentially an exercise in customer care, the library charter does not really deal with the day to day problems perceived by library users.

It is debateable as to how library customers view the library charter, i.e. are they really concerned about it and how it affects them, or even aware of it? The staff surveyed argued that customers were unlikely to complain and make a reference to the library charter in support of their grievance. As one library assistant in County B wrote '"I pay my rates" has been the cry for years.' Therefore, it appears that users require and expect quality services from their public libraries because they are paying for services themselves, albeit indirectly, regardless of the library charter.

Policies and Solutions for Preventing Violence Towards Library Staff

Table Four: Preventive measures suggested by staff

Suggested solution	Percentage (%)
Training	20
Deterrents, eg. security cameras	4
Policing/ patrols	18
Panic alarms	9
Double manning of service points	12
Support from management	10
No response	27

The most common 'solution' that staff requested was further training for dealing with difficult users, ex-psychiatric patients and drunks. This includes training for staff at all levels, not just for library assistants who tend to be in the front line. There was also a call for more assertiveness training for staff. Unfortunately, library budgets are decreasing, and staff feel that the provision of adequate training has suffered due to cut backs. Library staff also required more understanding and recognition of the problems they face on the part of senior management. Library assistants in three of the four counties argued that senior management often swept the issue under the carpet and failed to acknowledge that the problem exists. There needs to be a comprehensive reporting system which shows that management are concerned, and feedback on aggressive incidents must be given so that management are seen to be taking the problem seriously. An example of this is that in County B an Area manager stated 'very few libraries report incidents involving violence' although 50% of the respondents from that county had experienced actual physical attacks, and one library manager admitted that

'staff need to know that senior management will support them if readers are abusive - this does not happen in [County B].'

In Counties A, B and C there were calls from staff for more physical deterrents such as security cameras and guards who could patrol the building. Often, the sight of a uniformed person or some other deterrent is sufficient to make people less aggressive and more rational. Although these solutions might seem negative and appear to make the library less welcoming, many staff felt that they are necessary precautions.

Many library staff would also like to have more liason with the police including regular police patrols visiting libraries and also to make the police more aware of problem users faced by library staff. Although they acknowledge that the police are themselves busy, librarians do feel that their calls to the police are treated as unimportant. However, it is the concern of management to ensure that the police are aware of the serious nature of assaults against staff so that the police know what a problem this is. Vocino (12) argues that librarians should call the police when they are being threatened, but if their requests are not taken seriously by the police there seems little point in doing so. Research by St. Lifer concluded that library crime was not treated seriously by law enforcement agencies (13). A library manager in County B suggested hiring a private security firm which librarians could contact when they needed help dealing with violent patrons. Unfortunately, this solution would probably be impossible in terms of cost, although it may be worth consideration.

Panic alarms and personal alarms were also suggested by a number of staff in Counties A and B. An alarm could be connected to the local police station or could be used to summon security staff or other library staff already in the building.

A final suggestion which was made in Counties B, C and D was that customers should acknowledge that they are *not* always right. Most of the library staff surveyed felt that they should not have to take abuse from the public, one library manager in County B arguing 'that's not what I'm paid for.' A library assistant in County A suggested

> *'a general improvement in behaviour by everyone would be nice - more politeness, consideration for others, etc.'*

Finally, a librarian from County A wrote

> *'just as staff are expected to adhere to customer care policies, so we should expect a reasonable standard of behaviour from the public and should be able to rely on senior management to back us up.'*

Library Staff Reactions to Workplace Violence

Many library staff voiced fears of being at risk of violence from the public. Some are becoming afraid to go to work for fear of abuse or an attack on their person (18%). 13% of staff in County A felt vulnerable when leaving work in the evenings or during winter time when it is dark as some of the staff car parks are some distance from the library. Although no incidents had occurred, there was a strong perceived risk of violence.

Also in County A two library assistants stated that they were nervous about dealing with aggressive customers. One library assistant wrote

> *'I am uncomfortable when aggressive situations occur and try to avoid nasty borrowers. I hide from them and get senior staff who are paid more than me to take the hassle.'*

This particular library assistant also stated that no training had been received to help cope with difficult situations.

One library assistant in County B stated that dealing with difficult borrowers led to stress which in turn can affect customer care, arguing that 'the next borrower in the queue may not receive as good a response.' Those respondents in County C were more concerned with working in isolation during the evenings and the winter months. They felt that the library became 'a refuge for people with a whole range of personal problems' which they were ill-equipped to deal with.

On the other hand, a larger percentage of library staff (18%) who responded felt that aggressive situations were unpleasant but had to be dealt with. 7% of those argued that neither verbal abuse, sexual harassment or physical abuse were 'part of the job'. The remainder felt that verbal abuse alone was part of the job. Many of them were concerned about such abuse and aggressive behaviour by users although they try to remain calm and deal with the customer as best they can. A library manager in County D wrote

> 'certain borrowers do make life less pleasant - but ultimately you just have to get on and do your job with a smile.'

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CHAPTER SEVEN

CONCLUSIONS

Violence in the workplace can occur at any point where staff are providing a service to the public. Libraries are particularly vulnerable because of their relative openness and accessibilty. This study highlights that, despite the lack of professional literature on the subject, violent and aggressive behaviour against staff is a recognised problem in libraries.

Libraries strive to be welcoming and accessible and staff want to be helpful. However, librarians are open to abuse from the same public they wish to encourage; herein lies the librarian's dilemma. Library staff, by the nature of the job are welcoming and helpful but they do not want to be taken advantage of.

The public libraries in this study experience a wide range of problem users from irate customers to psychiatric patients. Attacks also range from verbal abuse, which is the most common form of abuse, to sexual harassment and actual physical assault. Fortunately the latter is rare, although any form of abuse is distressing and unpleasant for those at whom it is aimed.

There is a strong need for the problem of violence in libraries to be recognised by senior management. In three of the four counties surveyed there was a definate lack of recognition of the problem. This is unhelpful for staff dealing with difficult situations as they feel that they have no support from senior management. Only when the problem is recognised can preventive measures be introduced. It is unfair to staff to expect them to work in an aggressive environment for the sake of maintaining a good public image. The use of security cameras and guards can protect both staff and users from aggressive patrons.

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Senior management must also encourage the reporting of incidents, especially physical assault, and be adamant that reporting violence or summoning help is *not* a sign of weakness or failure, but is sensible and will help in the long term to provide preventive measures. This will demonstrate to staff that they are not alone and that management are concerned about the situation. Manangement need to support staff, in front of customers if necessary, to show that they care about their staff. It is essential that staff have confidence in their managers and in reporting procedures.

There is a need to develop an effective reporting procedure, for example the Positive Steps package has forms for serious and non-serious incidents which staff can complete. However, the data must be analysed in order to find out why violent situations occur and not just be filed away until they are needed for statistical purposes. The reporting procedures must be evaluated through the extent of its use and effectiveness as perceived by staff if they are to be used correctly. Therefore there needs to be research into such procedures and their evaluation over a long term period.

Training is seen as an important issue in helping staff anticipate, diffuse and cope with incidents, although this is not always available to all members of staff due to the costs involved and limited places on the courses. There is also a strong desire for courses on dealing with ex-psychiatric patients now living in the community and who visit libraries, as the problems for library staff with these people appear to be on the increase and staff feel inadequate due to the lack of training available to them. It would be possible to incorporate clinical psychology into this training in order to give an insight into different types of personality disorders. There need to be guidelines on how to approach psychiatric patients who appear to be confused and disoriented. Staff should be strongly advised to call the police if necessary.

Customer care training is regarded as particularly valuable in the library context in terms of reducing the risk of aggressive incidents by improving staff/user interactions. Training is needed on how to anticipate aggressive situations, and professional trainers will assert that such situations can be detected and training will demonstrate how this can be done. Library schools can prepare future librarians by providing assertiveness training and interpersonal skills training, a notion recommended by Grotophorst (1). All staff should receive customer care training, not solely those in the front line. Training could include the psychology of violence and the rational behind customer care, ways of appeasing customers and how to deal with violence once it has erupted. Every new member of staff should receive customer care and handling aggression training as part of their induction course, with regular refresher courses, perhaps every two years, in order to learn new techniques and ideas.

Assertiveness training would appear to be a solution to help library staff when dealing with difficult customers, especially those who try to intimidate staff into giving in to customers' demands. Librarians need to be taken seriously; giving in to customers' demands appears weak and suggests vulnerability and a lack of self-confidence. Management should recognise the various types of assertiveness training as recommended by Caputo (2), for example the broken record technique, clipping, etc., and when these techniques are most appropriate or effective.

The introduction of the library charter appears to have had little or no impact on the number of complaints received in libraries. Although the library charter states what customers can expect from the service, customers do not refer to the charter when making complaints. It seems that the public are not particularly aware of the charter or that it has little or no relevance to them. There is a need for research as to how the public view the library charter. It is an exercise in customer care, although it is difficult to see how libraries can meet the high standards when budgets are decreasing yearly.

Many library staff who were surveyed felt that society itself is becoming increasingly violent and that customer care training is often insufficient to cope with aggressive users. The provision of measures such as security guards, cameras and personal alarms were suggested in order to help staff feel less vulnerable. Panic buttons and personal alarms are useful although full training in their use is necessary if staff are to have confidence in them. However, even with training, security cameras, etc., there is still a risk of violent situations arising. These measures may help reduce aggressiveness in users but it is unlikely that any measure will be 100% effective.

In order for libraries to remain welcoming there needs to be a change in attitudes by both library staff and their customers. However, this would be extremely difficult and be a long term process. Customer care can help the process as can psychology which will help staff appreciate how the user feels; for example, the classification system is common knowledge to library staff so they may not fully understand why customers become irate when they cannot find items for themselves. Notices which state 'help us to help you' are useful reminders to customers that they have rights but also responsibilities towards the library staff, materials and other users. Librarians need more respect from the public; somehow they must shake off the existing timid, unassertive stereotype, which the public take advantage of.

It is the general view of librarians that the public will always complain, whether they have a genuine grievance or not. However, the question must be asked 'why do customers complain?' Are complaints due to the fault of the library or its staff, or are external funding and dwindling resources which restrict practices, to blame? Many customers appear to complain merely for the sake of it. Others complain as they feel that paying their rates or Community Charge gives them the right to. The Conservative government has tried to turn customers into consumers. Library customers want to gain something in return for their Community Charge, and because this helps to pay librarians' wages, they demand a high quality service all the time, even when budgets are decreasing.

During the Thatcherite era there was increased emphasis on individualism which meant that people were concerned with their own interests rather than the interests of the community. This move to individualistic tendencies has brought about a 'don't care about you' attitude and this could explain the reason why customers are becoming more impatient and possibly violent towards library staff.

Library staff have the right to be protected in their work environment. However, the Health and Safety at Work Act which enforces this is not always adhered to by senior management. The survey has highlighted a number of issues concerning violence but the research is only the tip of the iceberg. Research into customer needs, expectations and satisfaction is necessary in order to discover what customers really want from their library so their needs can be met. There is also a need for research which concentrates on libraries which are able to liase with the police, social workers and community workers etc. to discover if such liasons are effective in reducing the number of other problem users, such as psychiatric patients, in the library.

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APPENDIX ONE

QUESTIONNAIRE

This questionnaire is part of a study investigating violence in public libraries. The results of this survey will be published in dissertation form for the MA Librarianship at the Department of Information and Library Studies at Loughborough University. Replies will be treated in the strictest confidence. No organisation or individual will be identified in the final report without their consent.

NAME OF LIBRARY _____

COUNTY OF _____

Please tick boxes as appropriate

1) Are you a Library manager ( )   Library Assistant ( )
              Librarian   ( )   Other (please state) _____

2) What are the most common complaints customers make?

_____

_____

_____

3) What triggers an aggressive situation ?

        Long queues ( )   Fines ( )   Drunkenness ( )

        Books not available ( )   Other (please state) _____

4) At work have you experienced any of the following? (please tick those which apply)

        Verbal abuse (including swearing) ( )   Sexual harassment by users ( )

        Physical abuse ( )   Other (please state) _____

5) Do you see the following as 'part of the job'? (please circle Yes or No)

Verbal abuse Yes/ No   Sexual harrassment by users Yes/No

Physical abuse Yes/No

6) Are any times of day worse for aggressive situations ?

        Morning ( )   Lunchtime ( ) Afternoon ( ) Evening ( )

Are they busy times ?   Yes ( )   No ( )

7) Are there any library regulations displayed for the public on what constitutes unacceptable behaviour ?   .

        Yes ( )   No ( )

8) Do staff have guidelines on what is unacceptable behaviour ?

        Yes ( )   No ( )

9) What type of incidents are reported ?

        Swearing and verbal abuse ( )   Physical abuse ( )

        Sexual harassment ( )   Other (please state) _____

10) Are there official channels for reporting incidents ?

        Yes ( )   No ( )

If yes, what are they ? _____

11) Who do you report to?_____

12) Is there any training for staff on how to deal with a difficult situation ? (please circle)   Yes / No

        What does it involve ? _____

        _____

        _____

13) Does your library have a copy of the library charter?
(please circle)   Yes/ No

14) If yes :
      Is it on display for the public (   )
  ˋ Is it for staff use (e.g. training) (   )
      Is it rarely used or not used at all (   )

15) Please indicate by circling the appropriate response to what extent you agree with the following statement:

'The Citizen's Charter has led to an increase in violent situations or abuse against library staff'

 (a) strongly agree   (b) neither agree or disagree

(c) disagree   (d) strongly disagree

16) What policies would you like to see implemented to decrease and diffuse violent situations ?

_____

_____

_____

17) Have you any other comments (e.g. Do aggressive situations make you afraid to go to work ? How do you feel about them ?)

_____

_____

_____

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