

The awareness of disaster management among the library staff of university libraries: A case study based on the staff of the University of Sri Jayewardenepura Library in Sri Lanka

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Abstract

A disaster is an unpredicted incident that puts every resource in any institution, including libraries, at risk. At present the library is fully automated and provides printed resources, e-resources, etc. to fulfill the information needs of users. The objective of the study is to explore the awareness of disaster management among the library staff. The study used the descriptive survey research method. The sample size was 62, and the population was the University of Sri Jayewardenepura library staff. Sixty-two copies of the questionnaire were disseminated, and 56 (90.32%) of the completed copies were received. The study analyzed all 56 responses. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted using the purposive sample technique. Out of the 56 respondents, only 6 were selected for the interview based on the purposive sampling method. The study concludes that the library staff members are very aware of the disasters 49 (87.50%) and damage 40 (71.43%) that occurred due to the disasters in the library. The library staff members lack awareness of disaster management in the library 38 (67.86%). It is further revealed that the library staff members do not know how to use library disaster management equipment in disaster situations. The study recommended that the library organize awareness programs on disaster management for the library staff. The study also suggested that the library staff should be trained on how to use library disaster management equipment and emergency response through the appropriate disaster management courses.

Keywords: *Disaster Awareness, Disaster Management, Emergency Management, Library Disasters, Sri Lanka, University Libraries*

Introduction

There are various factors that increase the occurrence of disasters around the world. Academic libraries are one of the potential learning environments that function at the tertiary education level (Kaur, 2009). The library has to face disasters caused by natural, man-made, or hybrid disasters (a combination of natural and man-made disasters) situations (Akussah & Fosu, 2001). Eden and Matthew (1996) defined disaster in society as any incident that threatens human safety and damages a library's building, collections, equipment, systems, activities, and services.

Natural disasters include weather phenomena such as floods, fires, earthquakes, storms, cyclones and hurricanes (Morgan & Smith, 2014), tornadoes, rainstorms, volcanoes, mudslides, etc. (Rasaki, 2019). Human-made disasters are fires, wars, civil disorders (Johnson, 1994), theft (Hussain, 2019), bombings, malicious vandalism, negligence, power surges, failures, and mutilation (Akussah & Fosu 2001). However, disasters, whether natural or man-made, always have negative impacts on the economic, social, health, environmental, and delivery of services across both organizations and the wider society.

The negative impacts are managed through a proper disaster management plan and activities (Eden & Matthews, 1996). Disaster management concepts such as preparing solutions for a wide range of disasters, disaster control, disaster preparedness, disaster response, and recovery are developed around the world (Himayatullah et al., 2008). Library disaster management and preparedness are the most important steps that libraries should follow to minimize library disasters (Eden & Matthews, 1996). Librarians and library staff are aware of the need to

practice disaster planning, training, communicating, and collaborating to minimize disasters. The library staff should be aware of how to minimize disasters before they occur and manage library activities in disaster situations (Fortson, 1992; Harvey, 1993).

One of Sri Lanka's state universities is the University of Sri Jayewardenepura (USJ), which has eleven faculties. The 11 faculties include humanities and social sciences, management studies and commerce, applied sciences, graduate studies, medical sciences, allied health sciences, dental sciences, and computing. The USJ library serves as the university's knowledge hub, disseminating all users with information resources and library facilities to fulfill their information needs, including academic, non-academic, and researchers. There are 47 non-academic staff members, 12 academic personnel, 1 academic support staff member, and 1 executive in the library. Nearly 15,000 users use the library, which has three branches devoted to medical, engineering, and technology.

On December 28, 2017, a water leakage occurred at the main library of USJ. The water leakage that happened during the night caused damage to many sections of the library. A year later, on November 30, 2018, a cyclone took off the roof of the Technology Library, causing rainwater to ruin a part of the collection. Over time, library staff discovered several mould-infected books on the library's shelves due to mold growth. Furthermore, it was found that the newly added volumes were also at risk of mold infections if they were kept with the affected books (Wijayasundara, 2020). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic is a severe disaster that libraries still face. Unfortunately, no expert disaster management staff members at the library know the proper procedures

for recovering damaged resources or how to use equipment to minimize disasters. Therefore, short-term and master plan solutions are needed by the library for awareness of library disaster management.

According to the observation, library staff did not know what to do with the wet electrical wiring, computer equipment, and wet floor carpet other than apply ad hoc arrangements. The library staff did not know how to use equipment to minimize disasters and continue library services during a disastrous situation due to a contagious disease. Again ad hoc arrangements were applied.

Therefore, this study explores the awareness of disaster management among the library staff at USJ, Sri Lanka.

Objective

- To explore the awareness of disaster management among the library staff.

The objective describes library staff awareness of the disasters and damages that occurred in the library, library staff awareness of the disaster management process, activities and the staff awareness of how to use disaster management equipment and how to manage human resources during a disaster situation.

Significant of the Study

This study is a very cooperative effort to identify the staff risk of library disaster management activities in the library. The library is able to pay attention to the awareness of disaster management among the library staff at the library. The library develops awareness of disaster management strategies to minimize disasters that occur in the library.

The library develops library management activities to determine what to do or not do in disaster situations.

Materials and Methods

The descriptive survey research method was applied in the study. Researchers used qualitative and quantitative data. The population consisted of the entire library staff at the University of Sri Jayewardenepura and the sample size was 62. The study used the purposive sample technique for semi-structured interviews. Questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observation and pilot study were the data collection instruments. Sixty-two copies of the questionnaire were distributed, and 56 (90.32%) of the total were received after filling it out. Six respondents (09.68%) were not received. All 56 responses were used for data analysis. According to the purposive sampling method, only 6 participants out of the 56 who responded were selected to be interviewed. The interview session was arranged by the telephone. Primary and secondary data were gathered for the investigation. The data collected through questionnaires was analysed with descriptive statistics such as percentage distribution and frequency counts using the Excel package. The data was presented in tables and visualized using bar charts and pie charts. The study's semi-structured interview data was transcribed and organized into themes and sub-themes. This research is a case study, only the Library staff members of the USJ were selected as respondents.

Results and Discussion

Table. 1: Staff awareness of disaster management

Awareness	Yes	No
	Frequency (%)	Frequency (%)
Are you aware of disasters that occurred in our library?	49 (87.50)	7 (12.50)
Are you aware of damages that occurred due to those disasters?	40 (71.43)	16 (28.57)
Are you aware of activities needed for pre-disaster management?	28 (50.00)	28 (50.00)
Are you aware of the disaster management process?	18 (32.14)	38 (67.86)
Are you aware of how to use library disaster management equipment during a disastrous situation?	16 (28.57)	40 (71.43)
Are you aware of how to manage human resources during a disaster?	23 (41.07)	33 (58.93)
Are you aware of disaster reporting after a disaster?	26 (46.43)	30 (53.57)

Source: field survey data, 2021

According to Table 1, about 49 out of 56 (87.50%) library staff said they were aware of the disasters that occurred in the library. This fact was discussed in the interviews. They mentioned that they remember the library's water leakage, rainwater damage at the Technology Library, damage caused by insects to the books, especially the silverfish, and more recently, the service breaking down due to the COVID-19 pandemic as disasters at the USJ library. One interviewee stated that

"Due to the leakage of water from the upper floor, the floor carpet of the computer room was damaged, and the carpet gave off a bad smell for a few days. Some areas of the carpet became slippery and changed the color of the carpet. There was physical damage to the carpet".

This statement clearly shows that they remember not only the disasters, but they also know of the damages that occurred due to disasters, and

there were 40 (71.43%) of them recalled past incidents. Nearly half of the respondents 28 (50.00%) know about the activities they should take before the disaster, or pre-disaster activities. The number of respondents who are aware of managing human resources during a disaster is even lower 23 (41.07%) than those who know the process of reporting a disaster after its occurrence, 26 (46.43%). However, only 18 (32.14%) of the responded library staff members are aware of disaster management processes, and 16 (28.57%) know how to use the related equipment during a disaster. The response of library staff members who lack awareness of disaster management processes is 38 (67.86%), and those who say "No" how to use the related equipment during a disaster are 40 (71.43%). "No" was selected by 33 (58.93%) to manage human resources during a disaster. Those who said "No" to the process of reporting a disaster after an occurrence were 30 (53.57%). The researcher also used interviews to get opinions from respondents about their awareness of disaster management. Following are some of the responses to measure their level of awareness:

"I do not know how to use fire equipment. I think that all library staff do not know how to use fire extinguishers. At least they do not know how to open those and do not know where to switch off the electricity supply of the entire library".

"Disaster management plan is a need that all institutes should use".

Conclusion and Recommendation

The study concludes that the staff members of the library were very aware of the disasters that occurred in the library, representing 49 (87.50%) of respondents. 40 (71.43%) respondents among the library staff members were very aware of the damage that occurred due to the disasters in the library. However, the staff members of the library lack awareness of disaster management 38 (67.86%). Those who dealt directly with disaster management had a poor understanding. 40 (71.43%) respondents among the library staff members do not know how to use library disaster management equipment during a disastrous situation.

The library staff members 33 (58.93%) do not know how to manage human resources during a disaster. The library staff members do not know how to report after a disaster, representing 30 (53.57%). At present, the awareness of disaster management among the library staff is not at a satisfactory level. The interview result revealed that the library staff members lack awareness of library disaster management activities. The library staff members do not know the disaster management process and how to use library disaster management equipment in disaster situations.

The study recommended that Awareness programs on disaster management should be organized for the library staff. The library staff should be trained on how to use library disaster management equipment and emergency response. Experts should be invited to train staff on how to use library disaster management equipment in disaster situations and emergency response. The library collaborates with university libraries to organize awareness programs on disaster management. The library

organizes guest lectures, workshops or seminars and exhibits of movies and photographs on managing various disasters. The library staff study appropriate disaster management degree courses or disaster management programs.

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