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Disaster Preparedness in Libraries: a review

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ABSTRACT

Purpose–*The paper aims to explore and analyze the literature pertaining to "disasters preparedness and libraries", in order to highlight the overall preparedness in libraries against the disasters.*

Methodology–*Works related to "Disaster Preparedness in Libraries" were thoroughly examined using various online databases, search engines, websites etc. Numerous search terms like "disasters and libraries", "disaster preparedness and libraries", "disaster management and libraries" etc were used to retrieve the desired literature. The retrieved information was analyzed to highlight the level of preparedness in libraries against the disasters.*

Findings–*The Literature review connotes that although innumerable resources have been lost by libraries all over the world due to disasters and enough has been written over the importance of having a disaster preparedness plan in libraries, yet most of them have ignored the importance of such a plan and are practically unprepared to face any disaster.*

Practical Implications–*The scrutinized literature clearly reflects that although significant literature pertaining to disaster preparedness in libraries has been published all over the globe, yet most of the institutions including libraries fall way behind when it comes to the practical implementations of such preparedness plans. The paper paves the way for organizations like libraries (both at national and international level) to take concrete steps in order to ensure they are prepared enough to face and tolerate a disaster.*

Paper Type: *Literature review*

Keywords–Disaster, Disaster Management, Disaster Preparedness, Disasters & Libraries.

INTRODUCTION

Libraries are the institutions which collect, organize, preserve and propagate knowledge resources. Thus, libraries play an important role in the progress of a society. Libraries represent a link in the conduction of the cultural heritage across generations. They support teaching, learning and research in all disciplines. These numerous

roles played by the different types of libraries earmark them an important element of an information society. Any ignorance, damage or destruction of this important segment of the society imparts grave consequences. Since a wide range of disasters like floods, fire, war etc have severely affected Libraries and information centers in the past, this study analyzes the literature highlighting the overall preparedness of the libraries to face a disaster.

DISASTER: CONCEPT AND TYPES

A Disaster is an unexpected catastrophe that not only destroys our resources but also poses severe threat to human life. They have been happening throughout the human existence. **Pearce-Moses and Yakel (2007)** define a disaster as an event that arises with little or no warning. It happens with such an extent that it hampers normal life for a long period of time and requires efforts from the community or country, so that its effects are over-turned. According to **Goel (2006),** a disaster is an episode which happens gradually or abruptly, cannot be restricted and disrupts human life as well. **Eden and Matthews(1996)** narrate Disasters as "any episode which threatens human safety and/or damages or threatens to damage resources". **Oxford English Dictionary (1989)** defines disaster as "anything that befalls of ruinous or distressing nature; a sudden or great misfortune, mishap, or misadventure; a calamity". "A disaster is a grave interruption of the functioning of a society, causing extensive human, or environmental losses, which surpass the capacity of the affected society to cope while using its own resources" (**Pasricha,2006).**According to **Charlotte (2003),** a disaster is defined as 'an event that is beyond the controls of the first responder and that results in severe damage and prolonged service disruption. **Verma (2006)** sees disaster as the occurrence of a hazard that may cause harm, and the inability of a society to handle the consequences in the aftermath of such event. As per (**Silverman, 2004**),on an average, 464 disasters occur annually all over the world. Some are more catastrophic and destructive than others. Other than drought, famine and war, approximately 197 take place in Asia, 111 in the Americas, 77 in Europe, 61 in Africa, and 18 in Oceania. As a result, 50000 people are killed, 74000 seriously injured, 5 million displaced from their homes, and 80 million affected in some peripheral way, annually. **Matthews and Feather (2003)** simplify a disaster as an unavoidable event that drastically damage the resources and severely affect the functioning of a library. **Ilwaine and Varlamoff (2006)** defines a disaster, whether natural or man-made as "an event whose timing cannot be predicted and whose consequences are gravely destructive". **McGinty (2009)** defines a disaster as an adverse phenomenon that results in the losses (of lives, persons injured, property damaged, and economic activities disrupted). **Baumwoll (2008)** sees disaster as an event that is hazardous, causes harm, and makes a society incapable to manage its consequences. He gave a mathematical equation for a disaster as:

Disaster = Events (hazard) + Inability to manage

Disasters can be classified in various ways. The most common method of categorizing disasters is based on the primary cause - natural or man-made **(Pasricha, 2006a).** Global warming and other environmental factors have, in recent years, amplified the incidence of natural disasters like floods, cyclones, tornados, hurricanes, heavy rains, earthquakes, landslides, droughts, cloudbursts and tsunamis. Man-made disasters are explosions, fires, accidents, spillage, building collapse, electricity failure, chemical and nuclear radiation, bomb blasts, terrorism, war, insurgency etc (**Carter, 1991). Ogden (1999)** categorizes disasters into following major groups i.e. natural disasters, man-caused disasters, hybrid, and subsequent disasters.

DISASTERS AND LIBRARIES

Despite the different definitions, illustrations and categorizations, a common denominator is being shared by all disasters. As per that denominator, they can occur at any time, under variety of circumstances and severely damage the libraries. Disasters in libraries and other related information centers have become a common episode in the recent past all over the world. These disasters occur due to man initiated as well as natural causes. Fire can be caused by defective electrical systems, flooding can occur because of heavy rains or bursting of water papers, while theft can be the result of inadequate security (**Kaur, 2009**). **Warnasuriya (2005)** says whenever a disaster strikes a library, it largely affects the library collection, its premises and staff. Apart from extensive disasters, e.g. floods, earthquakes, tsunamis, fires, wars, civil disorders **(Johnson, 2005),** libraries also face smaller incidents, such as burst heating pipes, leaking pipes, rain penetration, small fires, theft, vandalism, paper decay, insect raids, mould etc. **(Corrigan, A. 2008). Baryala (2006**) deliberates the extensive damage caused by the floods of 1910 in Paris & France and that of 1966 in Florence & Italy, to their respective national libraries.

In June 2006, due to heavy rains, the Sidney Memorial Public Library, New York, USA was flooded with water, resulting in severe damage to its collection **(Flaherty, 2010). Riedlmayer (2007)** narrates the destruction faced by the public libraries of New York, USA due to the flood that engulfed the region in 2009.**Welsh (2010)** discusses the losses suffered by two university libraries of Punjab that faced floods during July 1993.According to **Shaheen (2008),** the 2005 earthquake destroyed the National Library of Khurshid in Muzaffarabad and the Kashmir Central Library & the Information Center of the Azad Jammu and Kashmir University in Pakistan. The destruction to the resources in these libraries was irreplaceable. The devastating tsunami and the earthquake of 2004 in the Indian Ocean **(Varlamoff, 2005),** the Katrina and Rita Hurricanes (2005) in New Orleans and Texas **(Welsh & Higgins, 2009)** and the very recent earthquake and the tsunami tragic disaster in Japan further extends the long list of library disasters.

DISASTER EXPERIENCES

This section reviews the literature pertaining to damages suffered by libraries all over the world due to varied range of disasters. **Van der Hoevenand van Albada (1996)** enumerate libraries that have been lost or damaged in the past due to different types of disasters including war and political conflict. An estimated monetary loss against each damaged library has also been indicated in the study. **Curzon (2006)** describes the effect of an earthquake on California State University Library at Northridge, USA. In his study, he finds that nearly 75% of the resources were lost during the disaster compounding the damage to nearly half a million US dollars. **Loftus (1999)** narrates how earthquakes have affected Stanford University Campus libraries, USA. He highlights that resources worth 10 million US dollars have been lost during the last one century due different natural and man-initiated disasters. Similarly, **Batori (2009)** reports the damage and destruction in libraries of the Kutch, Gujarat due to the earthquake. **Frank's (2011)** paper reports the impact of Hurricane Katrina on Gulf Coast libraries including Southeast Louisiana, New Orleans, and Southern Mississippi. The selected libraries were surveyed to find out the state of damage and how the libraries coped. It was found that these libraries were unable to handle such a large disaster and the most of them lost more than 90% of their resources. (**Wilson, Yowell & Holst, 2009)** discuss the floods in Prague city of Czech Republic in August 2002, that destroyed and damaged huge collections in more than 40 libraries, including 14 major research libraries and the National Library of the Czech Republic. More than 8,00,000 documents were damaged or destroyed. Damage to the National library was estimated at $11,000,000. **Lenzuni (1987)** reports the loss suffered by public and private libraries in Florence, Italy due to floods of November 1966. His study also resonates the damage that these libraries suffered due to this disaster. On similar lines, **Tarmann (2000)** vividly assesses the damage suffered by the National Library of Italy due to disasters that it suffered over the last two decades. **Lule (2006)** describes the loss of 8,00,000 books at ten prominent public libraries of Mumbai due to the floods of 2005.

NEED FOR DISASTER PREPAREDNESS IN LIBRARIES

In the light of discussed literature, it is understood that a disaster is an unexpected event whose timing cannot be predicted and causes severe damage to the resources of a library. It is thereby mandatory for an institution like library to be prepared for a disaster, in order to face and cope up such event. **National Fire Protection Association (2013)** enumerates disaster preparedness as "activities, programs, systems developed to support and enhance mitigation, response to, and recovery from disaster emergencies". **Lyall (1993)** emphasizes over the significance of preparedness in disaster management. He highlights that preparedness plans are usually the most significant in coping with disasters. He further adds that preparedness includes insuring collections, allocating salvage priorities, creating and frequently updating emergency plans, identifying substitute storage sites, providing ample fire protection, and providing opportunities for staff to be conscious of what is expected of

them in the event of disaster. **Buchanan (2000)** discusses that librarians often ignore disaster preparedness even if it is elementary to the safety of documentary materials. **Ngulube and Magazi (2006)** narrate that most of the libraries neither have a disaster plan nor have sufficient staff with knowledge and skills to deal with disasters. They further highlight the importance of different facets in a disaster preparedness plan. **(Knight, 1992)** also gives a detailed outlook of the guidelines for any library to frame a disaster preparedness plan. He clearly define its narrative text, emergency plans, recovery instructions, directory information, salvage techniques and revision procedure. **Sutton and Tierney (2006)** identifies eight dimensions of preparedness activities such as: "Hazard knowledge; management; direction; coordination of emergency operations; formal and initial responses of agreements; resources acquisition aimed at ensuring that emergency functions are carried out smoothly; life safety protection; property protection; emergency coping and restoration of key functions; and initiation of recovery activities". **Kahn (2009)** prepared an instruction guide for preparing a disaster plan covering all the aspects of disaster management - prevention, planning, response and recovery. It is a step-by-step manual for preparing and responding to all types of library disasters. **Fox (1989)** identified five elements of disaster preparedness as protection, planning, prevention, response and recovery. **Perry and Lindell (2003**), however, approaches disaster preparedness from the planning perspective and identifies ten guiding principles to be followed during the planning. **Amarasiri (2005)** illustrates that Librarians should prepare for disasters rather than wait for events such as the tsunami that swept across Asia in 2004 or the Hurricane Katrina that completely destroyed the Martin Luther King branch of the New Orleans Library in 2005 to take action. **Nadal (2012)** conducted a survey on disaster preparedness in national libraries, in order to raise the awareness regarding the importance of preparing a library before a disaster. The author resolved that "considering the many risks that threaten the cultural heritage, all libraries responsible for collections of national significance should set up, test, implement and regularly update a disaster plan". **Oboko (1991)** also argued disaster preparedness involves creation of awareness among people living in disaster prone areas. **Finley (2001)** claims "every library needs a disaster plan and that plan needs to plan for the worst. It's ok to hope for the best, but you should plan for the worst". **Hasenay and Kritalic (2010)** asserts that "the first step in disaster management should be raising the awareness about the importance of disaster preparedness and then framing a disaster preparedness plan. **Jhonson (2005)** discusses disaster planning in university libraries in India and reports that disaster planning in the university libraries in India remains a neglected area. She suggested that the library and information professionals need to change their attitude and take cognizance that disaster can happen any time and they have to be preparing to deal with them. **Hasenay and Kritalic (2010a)** surveys the libraries in Nigeria and finds that most of them are without a disaster preparedness plan. They further narrate a detailed disaster preparedness plan and also highlight its importance in libraries of Nigeria. **Sutton and Tierney (2006)** narrates that disaster planning may not seem to be a pressing concern in a library, but librarians need to make every possible effort to prepare themselves for a disaster, by devising disaster preparedness plan in order to minimize the effect of disasters when

it occurs. Thus, disaster preparedness is a concept comprising all procedures aimed at enhancing life safety when a disaster occurs. It also includes actions planned to boost the ability to undertake emergency actions so as to protect property and ability to engage in post-disaster reinstatement and early recovery activities.

CONCLUSION

The survey of the current literature reveals that every institution in a society including libraries is not immune to disasters. The libraries, all over the world, have lost immense resources on account of these disasters. The literature highlights the need of framing and implementing the disaster preparedness plan in libraries, so as to safeguard the human resources as well as the other resources in libraries. The literature also enumerates that although libraries are prone to disasters, yet most of them are not only unprepared to face a disaster but also have ignored the importance of having a disaster preparedness plan for their resources.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The review of the literature leads to the following recommendations:

- Every library should establish a disaster preparedness team, with an objective to implement the disaster preparedness plan.
- The library staff should be sensitized regarding the disaster preparedness.
- Periodical mock drills and training programs should be made mandatory to library staff.
- The shelves in the library must be fumigated regularly using insecticides, rodent-poison etc, so as to protect the books from mites, insects, rodents etc.
- The roof of the library building must be checked regularly, so as to avoid the water leakage during rainy seasons.
- The library must have an emergency contact list of the disaster preparedness team, so as to use it at the time of a disaster.
- Fire alarm system, smoke detectors and fire extinguishers must be available within the premises of a library.
- Flood alarm system should also be available.
- Resources of a library should be insured.

The implementation of these recommendations will ensure that minimum damage is suffered by the resources of a library on account of a disaster.

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