

Abuse of Records and Archives Materials; Staff Perceptions and Views at the University of Botswana Central Records and Archives Unit

Paper Presented at the 23rd Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Branch of the International Council on Archives (ESARBICA) General Conference under the theme; Archives uses, Abuses & Underutilization, held from the 8-12 June 2015

By

Thatayaone Segaletsho

University of Botswana, Department of Library Services, Gaborone, Botswana

Batshidi Power Mosweu

Department of Human Resources, University of Botswana, Gaborone, Botswana

Presentation Layout

- Introduction
- Objectives
- Scope and limitations
- Methodology
- Findings and discussions
- Conclusion and recommendations
- References

Introduction

- Libraries, archives and records materials are highly perishing due to abuse by their users and custodians throughout the world (Ebunuwele, Yaga, and Krubu, 2011).
- collection abuse is associated to actions of illegal or immoral activities that users carry out during the process of consulting library, archives or records materials (Ebunuwele, Yaga, and Krubu, 2011).
- It is the activities that users indulge in which are against the guidelines or policy frameworks, security measures and any other activities that may lead to damages or disappearance of information within records, archives or library materials.

- There are different types of abuses depending on the situation in which the abuse occurs.
 - The types of abuses vary from malpractice, material abuse, economic abuse, mental abuse, legal abuse, intimidation, institutional, incivility, hazing, discrimination, authoritative abuse and many more (Powers, Mooney, and Nunno, 1990)
- Common materials abuses in archives, libraries and records units/centers include authoritative abuses and material abuses such as tearing pages, removing book covers, and even economic and discriminative actions (Akor, 2013).
- It is, therefore, paramount that libraries, archives and records centers/units should strive to prevent any abusive activities on documents or materials they hold.

- In the same manner, the University of Botswana Central Records & Archives Unit (UBCRAU) is concerned with the aim of developing and implementing records management systems that will oversee UB administration records in order to avoid document abuse.
- In order to explore on some of these records management activities, this study sort to determine perceptions and views on collection abuse of records and archives materials held at the University of Botswana Central Records and Archives Unit.
- Specific objectives are shown the next slide

Study Objectives

- Try and understand perceptions and views of internal staff on records abuse at the UBCRAU
- Determine causes of records abuse observed at the UBCRAU
- To assess the level of document abuse at the UBCRAU
- To determine the level of knowledge on records abuse by the UBCRAU staff
- To make recommendations for improvement on records abuse at the UBCRAU

Scope & Limitations

- The study focused on perceptions and views of internal staff on abusive activities within UBCRAU
- The UBCRAU holds three types of records that include Personal files, Correspondence/Policy files and (Council Minutes; Staff Appointments and Promotions Committee Minutes) of which these records form part of the archival records.
- However, this study was only limited to **Personal files (only active/current paper based Records)** since they are the mostly frequently used files that might be exposed to different abusive activities. Electronic and other media of records were not covered.
- Due to the limitation of time, equipment and finances the study did not include clients or customers at this stage. Future studies will be conducted to get both perceptions and views from staff and customers.
- However, we hope study provides recommendations that can be used by the University of Botswana Central Records and Archives Unit Staff and elsewhere to improve on prevention of collection abuse.

Methodology (Survey)

- This study obtained both qualitative and quantitative information from the respondents.
- Questionnaire
 - The study distributed questionnaires to a total of six (6) UBCRAU Staff (staff compliment in the unit is 7). A total of five (83%) questionnaires were collected from the respondents.
 - The Deputy Director and Director in the Unit were not included in the study, only respondents who directly work with Records on daily bases were included since they are the ones with high chances of observing abuse on Records

- Observation

- A total number of 16 filing cabinets of which 8 of each cabinets contained 4 drawers, whilst the other 8 cabinets had 5 drawers. On aggregate, each drawer contained about 44 personal files.
- Two files were randomly retrieved from each drawer in the cabinets and the documents folios were checked for any form of abuse from folio 1 to the last folio in the file. A Checklist Guideline was used as a guide on issues that were observed on Records abuse. A total of 144 files, containing about 6770 folios were examined to determine if there were signs of records abuse.

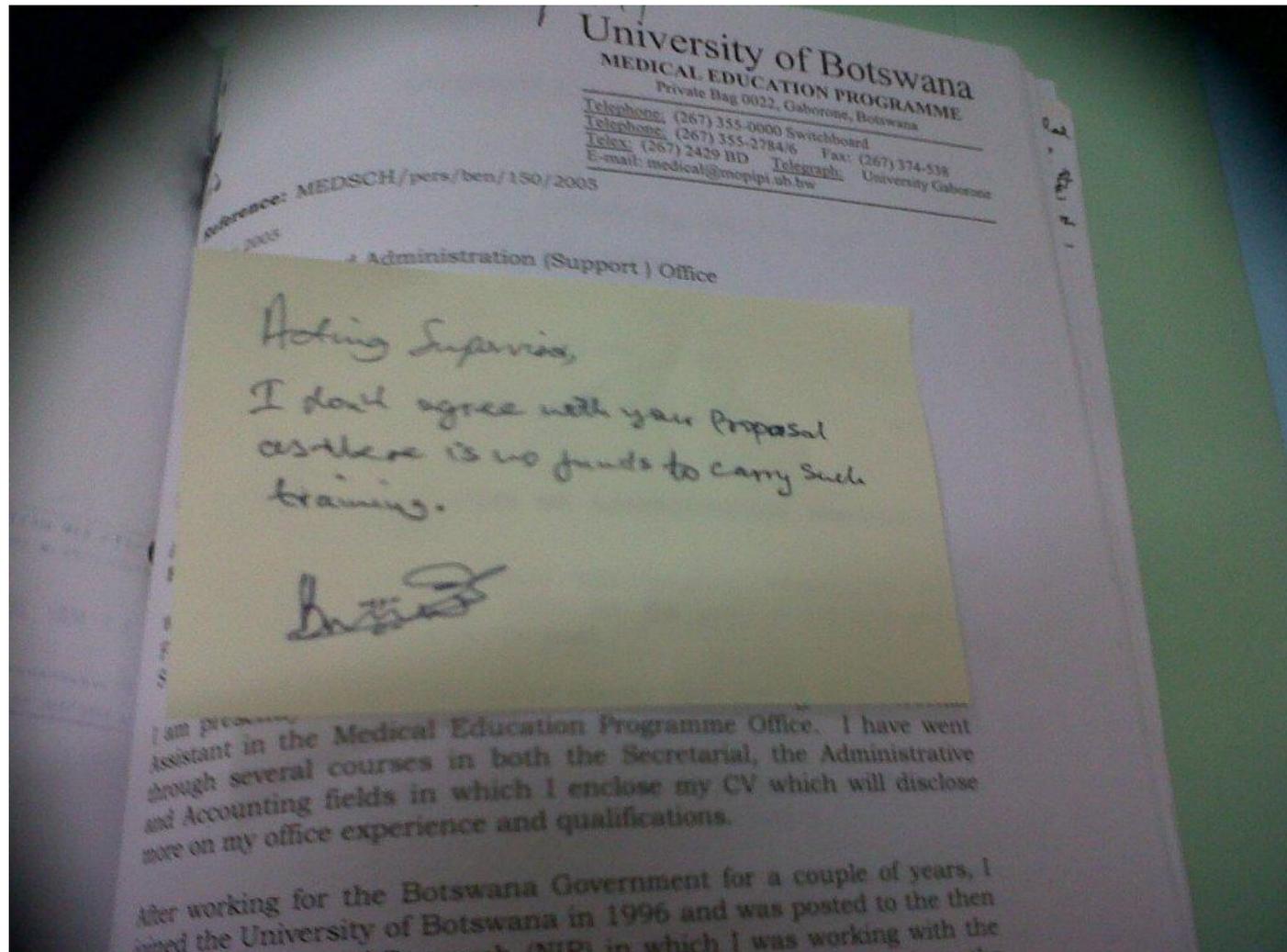
- Document analysis

- The study also examined relevant documents such as policies, manuals and guidelines on records management.

Findings & Discussions

Objectives1; Perceptions and Views of Internal Staff on Records Abuse at the UBCRAU

Research questions	Findings
1. Definition on the term “records, collection or material abuse”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 80% (4/5); records abuse is the process of mishandling of documents such as writing on materials intentionally.• One respondents also include activities such as misuse of records like tearing off pages, general mutilation of records and criminal activities that may occur or be done to records and their storage environment
2. Records abuse at the UBCRAU	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 60% (3/5) of the respondents were of the view that indeed there is material abuse at the UBCRAU• while only 40% (2/5) of the respondents were not sure if at all there is records abuse at UBCRAU.
3. Records abuse activities at UBCRAU	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• tearing off and removal of important pages in books/collections, rough handling of materials and writing on folios• bending or folding of materials by customers which ended up causing tearing off of the folds• most popular abuse was writing on pages of the record folios



‘Post It Sticker’ on Records at UBCRAU (Source: Field)

Researchers were of the view that a post it slip be used for decision-making rather than commenting on the actual document which defaces it

views on whether participants ‘strongly agree’, ‘agree’, ‘neutral’, ‘disagree’ or ‘strongly disagree’ with certain views on documents abuses at UBCRAU

Views	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
a. Users deliberately vandalise records & library collection	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	1 (20%)	2 (40%)	-
b. Records & archives staff are the most in vandalising collection	-	-	1	2	2
c. Customers are the most in vandalising collection	-	3 (60%)	2 (40%)	-	-
d. There is loss of information when the collection is vandalised	3	2	-	-	-
e. Recovery of lost information is costly	3	2	-	-	-
f. Decision making is affected when information is damaged	5 (100%)	-	-	-	-

Objective 2: Causes of Records Abuses Observed at the UBCRAU

Research questions	Findings
1. Causes of records abuse	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 80% (4/5) of the respondents were of the view that documents abuse was mainly caused by lack of recognition on the importance of Records and Archives Collections to the society• one respondent also felt that in addition to lack of recognition of Records and Archives, lack of communication between records staff & records/ collection users and lack of knowledge by users was also a major cause of documents abuse
2. Elaboration on perceptions and views on causes of records abuses.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• lack of knowledge on the importance of Records• lack of training to staff were,• resistance of customers from advices on care and handling of archives and records materials. When emphasizing the point, one of the respondents stated that the “I don’t care attitude by customers” was the major source of records abuse.• Ignorance by customers was explicitly advocated for as one of the issues that culminate to material abuse

Objective 3: Level of Records Abuse at the UBCRAU

1. Ranking the level of abuse as 'Extremely High', 'High', 'Average', 'Neutral', 'Low', 'Very Low' or if they were 'Not Sure'

- One (20%); records abuse was extremely high.
- 40% (2/5); records abuse was just 'High'.
- The other 40%; were 'Not Sure' of the level of documents abuse at UBCRAU.
- On average, the findings of the study indicated that respondents were of the view that **there is a significant number of records abuse** observed at UBCRAU.

2. how often they have personally experienced or observed documents abuse in action at UBCRAU

- 60% (3/5); indicated that they 'Always' experienced documents abuse activities.
- One (20%); indicated that they 'Rarely' experienced records abuse while the
- other one (20%) respondent stated that he/she have 'Never' experienced any documents abuse.

3. views from staff on what they thought could be done to improve on the situation of materials abuse

- Varied responses were observed but all the responses centred on training on materials abuse as the pillar of prevention of material abuse.
- establishment of workshops on material abuse was paramount.
- One respondent also indicated that collection surveys were also crucial in order to come up with conceptual constructs on how to manage records and prevent documents abuse.

4. A systematic random survey to determine the documents abuses observed on the documents themselves within the UBCRAU store rooms.

- total of 144 files sampled from UBCRAU contained about 6770 folios and only 57 (about 1%) of the folios had abusive signs mainly being tearing off of some pages and writings on the folios. Attributes to these records abuse activities has been opined by staff to be mainly due to lack of training, and ignorance as discussed in the above sections.
- See Table on Wooden Filing Cabinets with 4 Drawers per Cabinet (Source, Field Data)
- See table on Wooden Filing Cabinets with 5 Drawers per Cabinet (Source, Field Data)

Wooden Filing Cabinets with 4 Drawers per Cabinet (Source, Field Data)

Cabinet No	Total No of Files Sampled	Total No. of Folios	Total No of Clean Folios	Total No of Folios with Abuse
1	8	239	233	6
2	8	298	291	7
3	8	298	291	7
4	8	95	93	2
5	8	141	140	1
6	8	133	130	3
7	8	109	106	3
8	8	121	121	0
Total	64	1434	1405 (98%)	29 (2%)

Wooden Filing Cabinets with 5 Drawers per Cabinet (Source, Field Data)

Cabinet No	Total No of Files Sampled	Total No. of Folios	Total No of clean Folios	Total No of Folios with Abuse
1	10	213	209	4
2	10	337	336	1
3	10	377	377	0
4	10	228	228	0
5	10	326	326	0
6	10	133	133	0
7	10	175	171	4
8	10	102	99	3
Total	80	1891	1879 (99%)	12 (1%)

Objective 4: Level of Knowledge on Documents Abuse by the UBCRAU

- The objective was aimed at trying to understand, if at all, the respondents had ever attained any certification or training that introduced them to records management, hence care and handling of records
1. think that they are well informed about records abuse.
 - 60% (3/5) of the respondent indicated that they were well informed on issues of records abuse.
 - Only one responded indicated that they were 'Not' informed on records abuse and
 - one respondent was 'Not sure'.
 2. whether they think customers are well informed about materials abuse issues
 - 40% respondents indicated that customers or users are 'Not' well informed on records abuse,
 - while 60% of the respondents were 'Not sure' if at all customers are informed on documents abuse.

3. indicate whether their educational qualification were either a 'Certificate', 'Diploma', 'Bachelor's Degree', 'Master's degree', 'PhD', 'Professional qualifications', 'None', or any Other qualifications.

- 80% (4/5) of the respondents indicated that their qualification was a diploma,
- while only one respondent had a bachelor's degree qualification.
- In overall, it is evident that staff are well informed on records management hence the validity of the study on their perceptions and views on material abuse is valid and informative.

Conclusion & recommendations

- On average, this study showed that there is a small number or sign of records abuse observed at the UBCRAU which indicates a good practice.
- most observed signs of documents abuse were mainly tearing off or removal of important pages in folios, rough handling of records and writing on folios
- further studies have to be conducted to get perceptions and views of customers and professionals on material abuse
- It is paramount that Libraries, Archive and Records Unit should appreciate the dynamic operations of varied individuals, more especially on how they work in their offices as authors or borrowers of records. As such, continuous establishment of frameworks, models or strategies that guide records handling should be encouraged in order to avoid misunderstandings, ignorance's and unnecessary mutilation of materials. Policies, guidelines or frameworks governing expectations on how to handle records in offices should be always shared to customers.

- Records Units should be given the protocol to induct or train all customers on how to manage records in their offices in a proper way that matches the required standards to avoid unnecessary material abuses like writing on materials.
- ‘Charity begins at home’; it should be encouraged that knowledge gap and sharing should emanate right from authors/ creators of records such that collections care should be inculcated to the community right from the daily activities in the society. This should minimise the tendencies of ignorance’s by customers on collection abuse.
- Action officers/records creators should be encouraged that upon making-decisions on an already generated record, they should write a minute or place a ‘post it sticker’ to a document they are referring to rather than writing on the original records or documents.

References

- Abareh, H. M. 2001. An Exploratory Survey of Book Loss, Theft and Damage in Abubakar Tafawa Balewa University, Bauchi, Nigeria, *Library & Archival Security*, 17 (1): 33–42.
- Afolabi, M. 1993. Factors Influencing Theft and Mutilation among Users and Staff in Nigeria, *Journal of Leading Libraries and Information centres*, 1 (3/4): 2-8.
- Akor, P.U. 2013. Security management for prevention of book thefts in university libraries. A case study of Benue State University Library, Nigeria, *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*, paper 995, Available at: <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/995>.
- Akussah, H. and Bentil, W. 2010. Abuse of Library Materials in Academic Libraries: A Case Study of the University of Cape Coast Main Library, *African Journal of Library, Archives and Information Science*, 20 (2):
- Ajayi, N.A. and Omotayo, B.O. 2003. Mutilation and Theft of Library Materials: The Perception and Reactions of Students, *IFE Psychologia*: 11 (1): 80-87.

- American Library Association, 2009. ACRL/RBMS Guidelines Regarding Security and Theft in Special Collections, Available at:
http://www.ala.org/acrl/standards/security_theft
- Anyaobi, G. and Akpoma, O. 2012. Abuse of library materials in academic libraries; a case study of Delta State Polytechnic library, Ogwashi-Uku, Nigeria, *Journal of Research in Education and Society*, 3 (1): 54-58.

This conclude our presentation

We thank you

“LEKAMOSO”