



## ‘Information Ethics for Libraries – A global perspectives’

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### ABSTRACT:

Information Ethics (IE) for libraries includes responsible and ethical handling of information encompassing issues like intellectual freedom, privacy and equitable access as well as protection of intellectual property while also ensuring that information is easily and freely accessible. In this paper an attempt is made to review the adoption of Information ethics in the libraries worldwide. For this purpose a structured questionnaire was prepared and was sent on IFLA-I listserv to seek responses. In the context of this paper, information ethics was studied from the perspectives as a discipline of ethics defined with the usage and development relating to the responsible use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The advancement of ICT has posed several challenges for library and information professionals. The focus has now shifted from traditional library services to issues like intellectual property rights, protecting privacy of users, to serving the socially diverse community related with ethical considerations.

**KEYWORDS:** Information ethics; ICT; Libraries; Ethics

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The term ethics is derived from the Greek word “ethos” which defines customs or character. In terms of ethical behavior, ethics is a set of moral principles that defines any person’s traits like conduct, behavior, character, fairness, humbleness, morality, values, commitment, duties to self-improvement to the society at large, and the person’s obligation to the profession, institution and society at large.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines the meaning of the word ethics as the science of morals; the department of study concerned with the principles of human duty.

Ethics as a philosophical branch of study it’s a systematic approach to understanding, analyzing, and distributing matters of right and wrong, good and bad, and admirable and deplorable as they relate to the well-being of and the relationship among sentiment beings. Ethics is often used in relation to the activities of organizations and with the professional code of conduct: for example, in the Library and Information professional code of ethics, which are often defined in terms of certain sets of rules or guidelines explaining how employees are expected to behave in their workplaces (Singh and Mishra, 2017).

Information ethics (IE) provides an ethical framework for the information professionals for carrying out various information related works like acquiring, storing, processing and using of information (Hoq, 2012). Information ethics is evolving as a field of study in library and information science and is growing in its dimension embracing many other disciplines in it as well. IE has a 44 year long evolving history in the United States, which includes amalgamation of librarianship first and then from computer ethics (Froehlich, 2004). IE generally has taken shape much more recently. Some of the other development of this discipline includes African Conference on IE held in Pretoria, South Africa in 2007 which issued a 'Tshwane Declaration on Information Ethics in Africa' (Sturges, 2009). The value of Information ethics includes privacy, accuracy, property, access, dignity, integrity, confidentiality, respecting human rights and more (Ndumbaro, 2018).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW:**

Ndumbaro (2018) had done a study in her Thesis to investigate the role of information ethics for the provision of library and information services in the university libraries of Tanzania. The study tried to find the level of awareness of library professionals of the university libraries of Tanzania about the role of Information ethics in promoting Library and Information Science (LIS) professional practice. Four universities were surveyed which included public and private universities. The study tried to find about the attitude and perception of library professionals of University Libraries of Tanzania towards Information Ethics. The study investigated the influence of Information Ethics by library professionals in University Libraries in Tanzania. The study also mentioned about the perception of faculty and post graduate students about ethical conduct of library staff in providing library and information service.

Adebayo and Mabawonku (2017) in their paper had done a study on Perception and practice of Information ethics by the librarians of the four higher institutions namely University of Ibadan, Ajayi Crowther University, The Polytechnic, Ibadan and Emmanuel Alayande College of Education of Oyo state, Nigeria. For this purpose survey was done by distributing questionnaires to 47 librarians and out of it 46 were returned and were considered for data analysis and also Interview was conducted of 4 Senior Librarians. The study finds that there is a positive perception regarding Information Ethics (IE) in four higher institution of Oyo state, Nigeria. The study reveals professional code of ethics to be practiced by librarians.

Ferguson, Thornley and Gibb (2016) in their paper had done a study to investigate how library and information science (LIS) professionals face ethical dilemmas, with particular reference to the impact of new technologies, sources used to help make ethical decisions, and the contributions made by case studies by ethical understanding and decision-making. For the purpose of this study data was collected by interviews held in Britain, Ireland and Australia of LIS professionals, educationalist and members of professional organizations. The study finds that the existing code of ethics for library professionals are suitable for addressing traditional issues relating to the library like access and confidentiality but are not sufficient for addressing ethical challenges arisen due to the advancement of present and future digital environments.

Fallis (2015) in his paper discussed about Information ethics for twenty first century library professionals. The paper described about codes of ethics for library professionals as well as several limitations of the codes. The paper has described about the theories of ethics namely

consequence based theories, duty based theories, right based theories and virtues based theories as well as the limitation of the theories. The paper mentioned about the courses conducted by universities like University of Pittsburgh and University of Arizona. The paper has mentioned about several ethical dilemmas in implementing information ethics concept in libraries.

Hoq (2012) in his paper discussed about the concept of ethics and information ethics. The paper further mentioned about the ethical dilemmas faced by library and information professionals due to the advancement in Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The author has described about the factors that influenced Information Ethics (IE). The author further mentions about the conflicts in handling of ethical situations in libraries. The paper mentions about the code of ethics by various library associations.

### **3. INFORMATION ETHICS – THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE:**

There exist several classical ethical theories, frameworks and recently developed ethical models that explain the research phenomenon in research ethics. Information Ethics (IE) is based on classical ethical theories among others: Consequence-based theory, Duty-based theory, Right-based theory, Virtue-based theory. The two ethical models which studied Information Ethics include PAPA model which stands for Privacy, Accuracy, Property and Access and another model is Luciano Floridi's Resource-Product-Target (RPT) model. Whereas two Information ethics frameworks include; World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Action Line 10 and The African Network for Information Ethics (ANIE) Thematic Frame (ATF). Information ethics is still in its nascent stage and it doesn't have any well-established theoretical model in order to define the discipline.

There exists a gap between the different ethical theories propounded by different scientist. For understanding the concept of Information Ethics (IE) the reputed Information professional always recommend the study of the basic foundation of ethical theories, the different models mentioned above vary in its conceptualization. For example the PAPA model which stands for privacy, accuracy, property and access. World Summit on Information Society (WSIS) Action Line 10 focuses on privacy, confidentiality, accuracy, ownership access/accessibility and security online and more. The African Network for Information Ethics (ANIE) Thematic Frame (ATF) studies the concept of Information Ethics in African context. Luciano Floridi's Resource-Product-Target (RPT) model is useful in understand the concept of IE in information society, as it helps the library and information professionals in guiding the professionals about handling certain circumstances (Ndumbaro, 2018).

### **4. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The objectives of the study are as follows:

1. To assess the level of awareness of library professionals of Information Ethics.
2. To examine the level of compliance of library professionals to Information Ethics in libraries.
3. To identify the practical challenges faced by library professionals in practicing Information Ethics.

## 5. METHODOLOGY

This paper is the first comprehensive survey undertaken in the field of Information Ethics for libraries to understand the global perspectives on Information Ethics. An online questionnaire was designed using Google forms and was sent on IFLA-I listserv for collecting the data. The questionnaire was made available for noting responses and due to time constraint waiting for more responses couldn't be possible. A total of 41 responses were received from different countries. The questionnaires consist of 17 questions in total, the first question of Name was omitted and the remaining 16 questions were considered for data analysis. The first 6 questions were related with demographic details of respondents and the remaining 10 questions were related with the study. The collected data is collated and analysed in the following section.

## 6. DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaire consists of 16 questions relevant for the study. The first 6 questions were related with demography. Out of the remaining 10 questions, three questions of the study allowed recording multiple responses and they were related with library user's confidential borrowing records, protecting privacy of library users and copyright protection user guidelines. Three questions were based on Likert scale, out of that one is based on PAPA model. Four questions relating to study are of closed-ended type and allow recording responses in either Yes or No. The responses received are tabulated in MS-Excel 2007 and analyzed in the following sections:

### 6.1 Country

The questionnaire received response from 30 different countries. Most response if received from USA which is 6 then after from India 3 responses were received. Total 41 responses were received. Figure 1 shows the responses received from different countries.

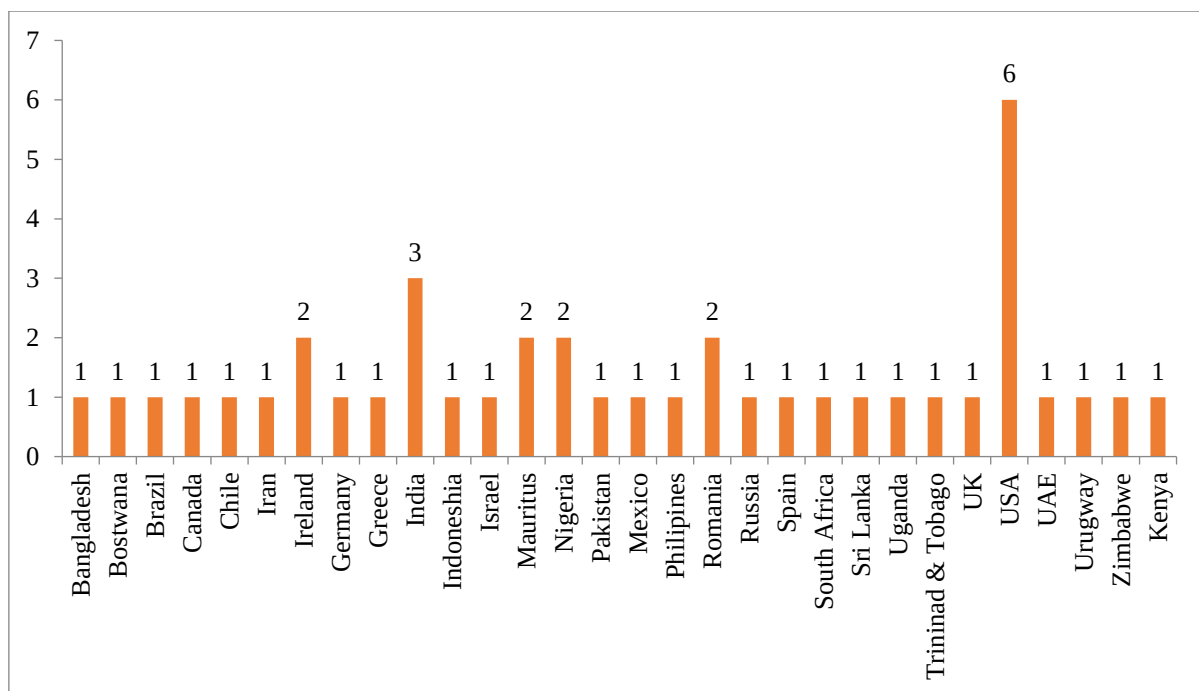
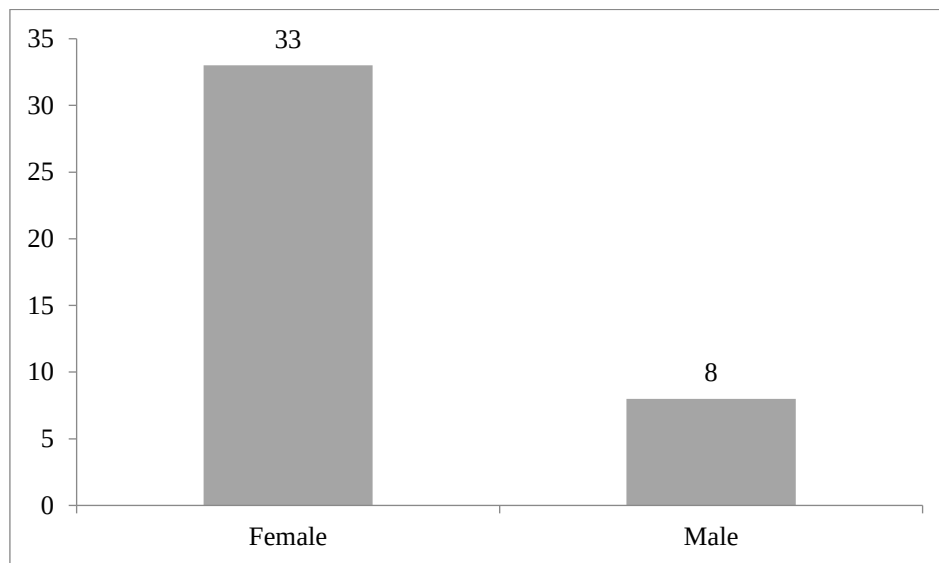


Figure 1: Country wise response

## 6.2 Gender

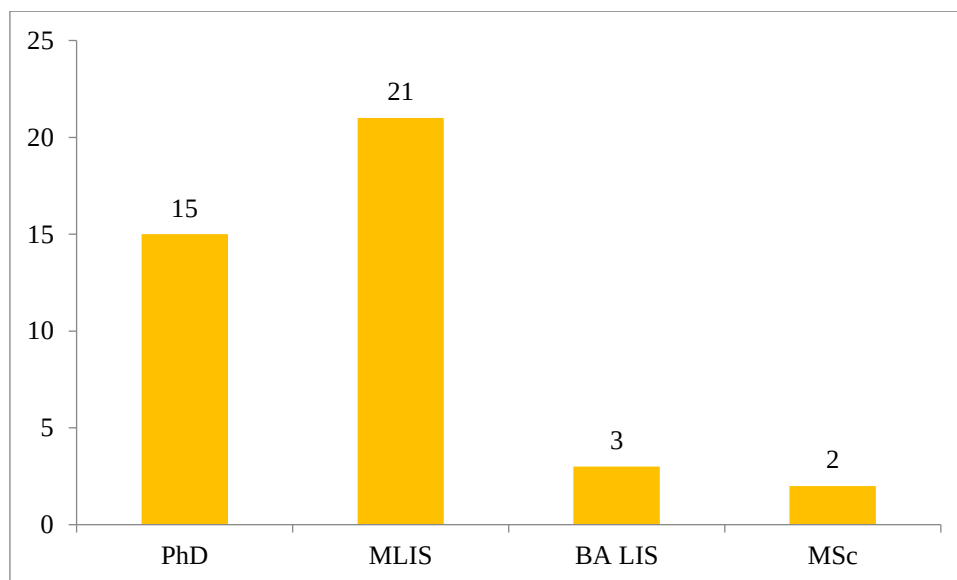
This question received response from 33 Female and 8 Male participants. Figure 2 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 2: Gender wise response**

## 6.3 Educational qualifications

This question received the most 21 responses from MLIS degree holder, followed by 15 from PhD holders, 3 from BA LIS and 2 from MSc degree holder. Figure 3 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.

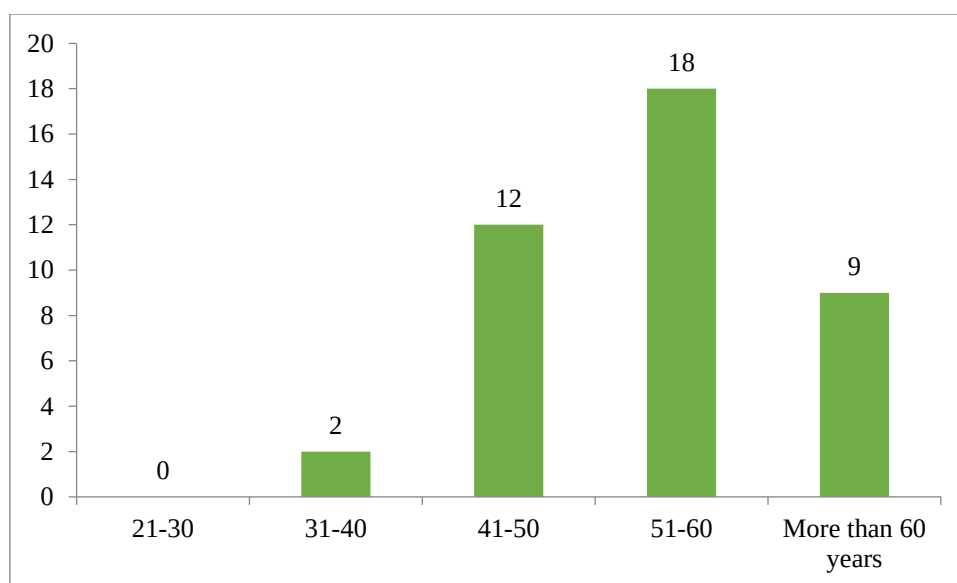


**Figure 3: Educational qualifications wise response**

## 6.4 Age group

This question received most response from 18 from 51-60 age group, followed by 12 from 41-50 age group, 9 responses were received from more than 60 age group and 2 responses were

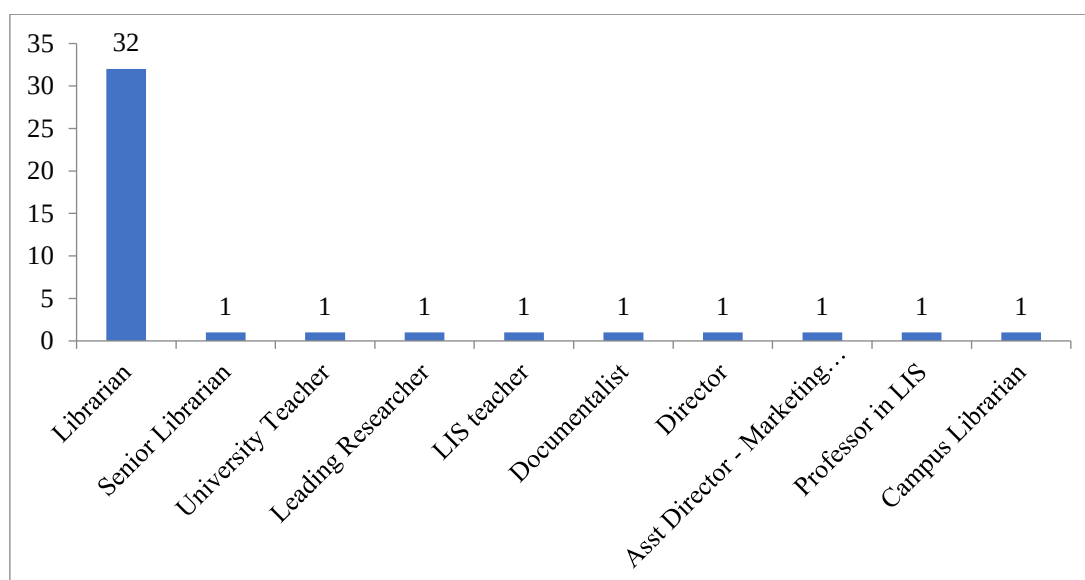
received from 31-40 age group. Figure 4 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 4: Age group wise response**

### 6.5 Designation

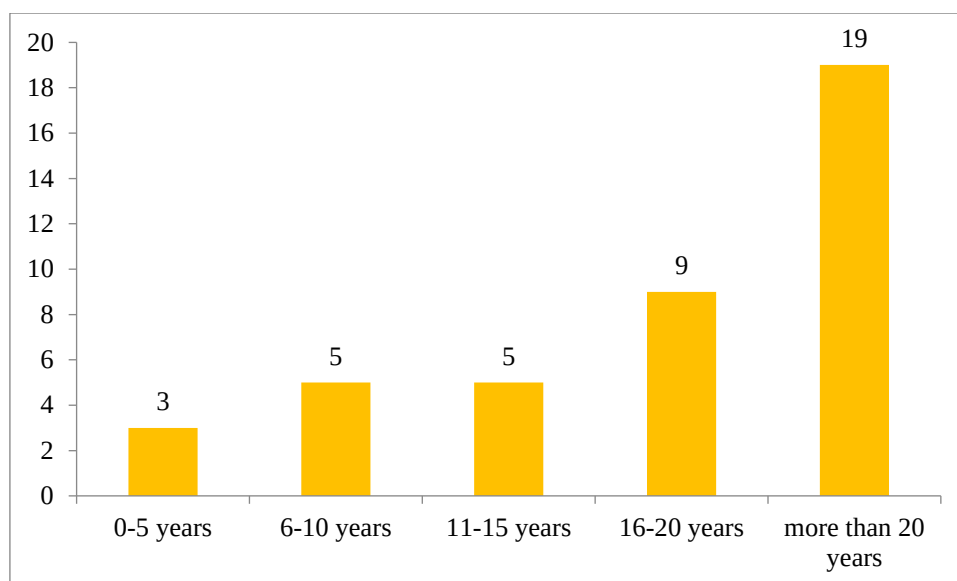
This question received most response 32 from Librarian and one each from different designation holding respondents. Figure 5 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 5: Designation wise response**

### 6.6 Years of Experience

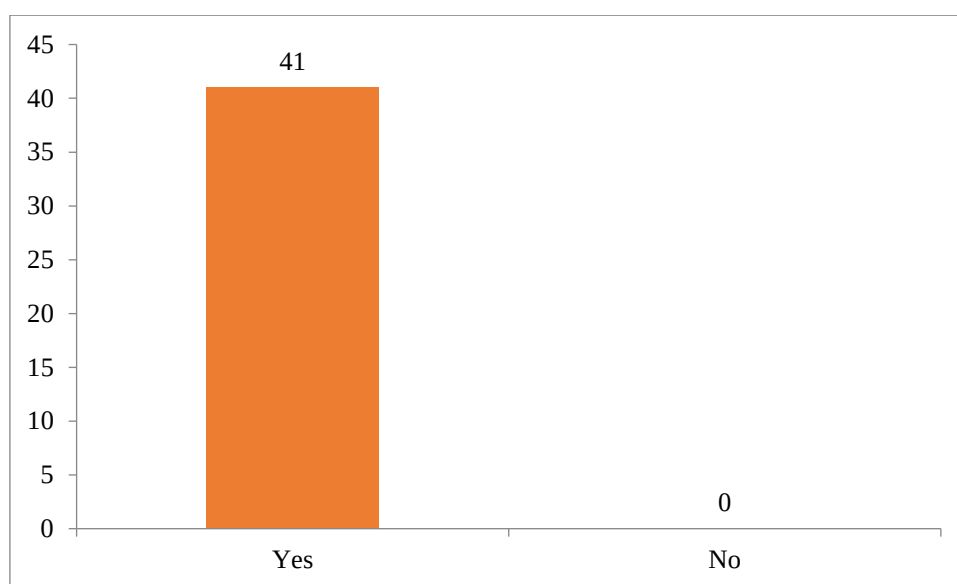
This question received the most 19 response from those holding more than 20 years of experience, then after 9 from 16-20 years of experience, 5 responses each from 6-10 years and 11-15 years of experience, 3 from 0-5 years. Figure 6 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 6: Years of experience wise response**

### 6.7 Awareness of Professional Ethics

This question received 41 (100%) Yes responses. This shows that all LIS professionals are aware of Professional Ethics. Figure 7 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 7: Awareness of Professional Ethics**

### 6.8 Level of awareness of library professionals about Information ethics in libraries

Six questions were asked on a four point Likert scale to assess the level of awareness of library professionals about Information ethics in libraries. The awareness level includes about information privacy, about information accuracy, about intellectual property, about information access, about wrongful copyright violations, and about respecting privacy of others in online environment. The responses received are indicated in the Table 1 as below.

| Statement<br>I am aware:                                 | Level of awareness |            |           |           | Total     |
|----------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
|                                                          | Very High Aware    | High Aware | Aware     | Not Aware |           |
| about information privacy                                | 35 (85.36%)        | 3 (7.32%)  | 3 (7.32%) | 0         | 41 (100%) |
| about information accuracy                               | 36 (87.80%)        | 2 (4.88%)  | 3 (7.32%) | 0         | 41 (100%) |
| about intellectual property                              | 40 (97.56%)        | 1 (2.44%)  | 0         | 0         | 41 (100%) |
| about information access                                 | 34 (82.92%)        | 6 (14.64%) | 1 (2.44%) | 0         | 41 (100%) |
| about wrongful copyright violations                      | 38 (92.68%)        | 2 (4.88%)  | 1 (2.44%) | 0         | 41 (100%) |
| about respecting privacy of others in online environment | 39 (95.12%)        | 1 (2.44%)  | 1 (2.44%) | 0         | 41 (100%) |

**Table 1: Level of awareness of library professionals about Information ethics in libraries**

From the above Table 1 it can be concluded that the awareness level about information privacy, about information accuracy, about intellectual property, about information access, about wrongful copyright violations, and about respecting privacy of others in online environment in all respondents is very high aware. This indicates very high level of awareness about Information Ethics by library professionals.

### **6.9 Level of agreement of compliance of library professionals to Information Ethics in libraries**

Four questions were asked on a five point Likert Scale to examine the level of compliance of library professionals to Information Ethics in libraries. Level of agreement of compliance includes compliance with information privacy, compliance with information accuracy, compliance with intellectual property, compliance with information access. The responses received are indicated in the Table 2 as below.



| Statement<br>I agree:                 | Level of agreement |            |           |           |                   | Total     |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|------------|-----------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|
|                                       | Strongly Agree     | Agree      | Neutral   | Disagree  | Strongly Disagree |           |
| compliance with information privacy   | 38 (92.68%)        | 2 (4.88%)  | 1 (2.44%) | 0         | 0                 | 41 (100%) |
| compliance with information accuracy  | 37 (90.24%)        | 3 (7.32%)  | 1 (2.44%) | 0         | 0                 | 41 (100%) |
| compliance with intellectual property | 35 (85.36%)        | 5 (12.20%) | 1 (2.44%) | 0         | 0                 | 41 (100%) |
| compliance with information access    | 36 (87.80%)        | 2 (4.88%)  | 2 (4.88%) | 1 (2.44%) | 0                 | 41 (100%) |

**Table 2: Level of agreement of compliance of library professionals to Information Ethics in libraries**

From the above Table 2 it can be concluded that the level of agreement of compliance with information privacy, compliance with information accuracy, compliance with intellectual property, compliance with information access in all respondents is Strongly Agree. This shows that Level of agreement of compliance of library professionals to Information Ethics in libraries is Strongly Agree.

#### **6.10 Importance of Intellectual Freedom in library's mission and values**

A question was asked about the Importance of intellectual freedom in your library's mission and values on a 1 to 5 rating scale, where 1 is not important at all and 5 is very important. The response received is indicated below:

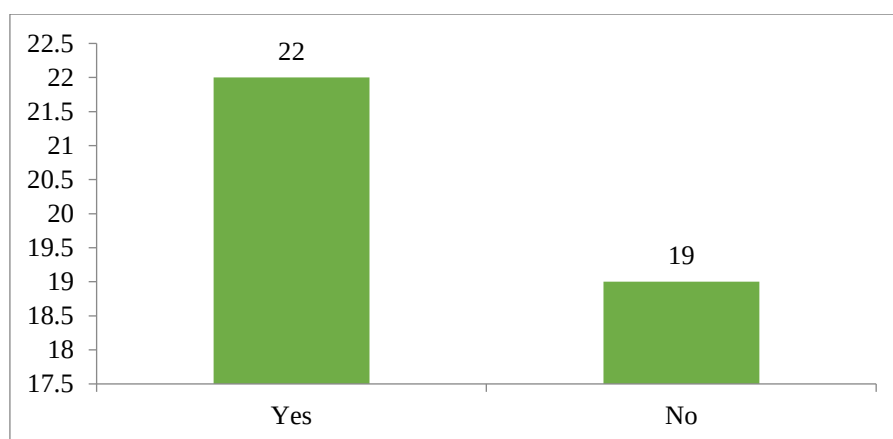
| Importance of Intellectual Freedom | Rating Scale 1 to 5 |           |            |            |             |
|------------------------------------|---------------------|-----------|------------|------------|-------------|
|                                    | 1                   | 2         | 3          | 4          | 5           |
| where 1 is not important at all    | 5 (12.19%)          | 2 (4.88%) | 8 (19.51%) | 7 (17.08%) | 19 (46.34%) |
| 5 is very important                |                     |           |            |            |             |

**Table 3: Importance of Intellectual Freedom in library's mission and values**

From the above Table 3 it shows that the most response is received to 5 rating scale with 19 (46.34%) responses.

### 6.11 Challenge or Controversy related to intellectual freedom

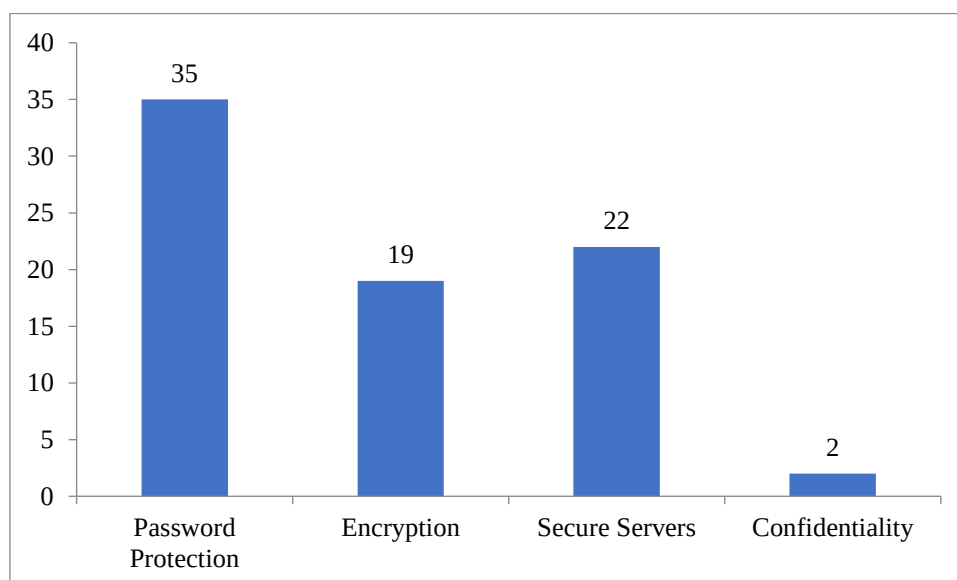
A question was asked about Have you ever faced any challenge or controversy related to intellectual freedom in your library? This was a close ended question. Yes response received 22 (53.65%) and No response received 19 (46.35%) response. This shows that the library professionals face challenges or controversy related to intellectual freedom in their daily operations more. Figure 8 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 8: Challenge or Controversy related to intellectual freedom**

### 6.12 Confidentiality of users borrowing records and research request

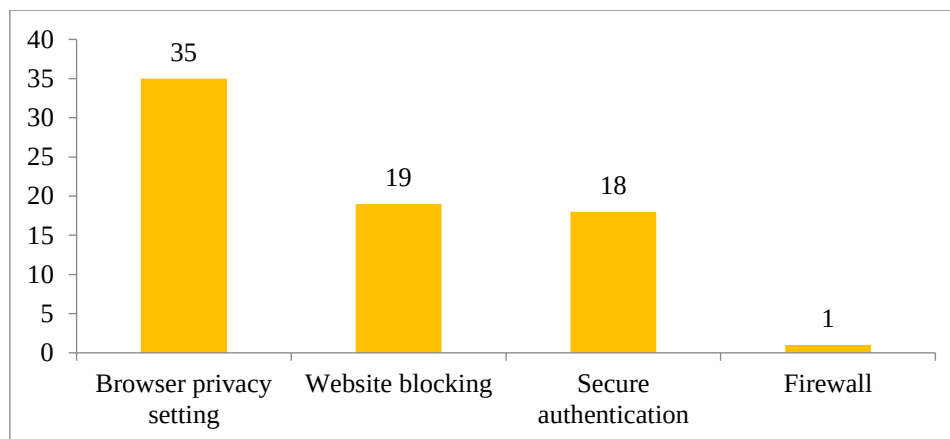
A question was asked how you ensure the confidentiality of users borrowing records and research request. Respondents were allowed to record multiple responses and total 78 responses were received. Figure 9 shows the graphical representation of the responses received. Password protection received most response followed by Secure Servers.



**Figure 9: Confidentiality of users borrowing records and research request**

### 6.13 Protecting users privacy while using library's computers

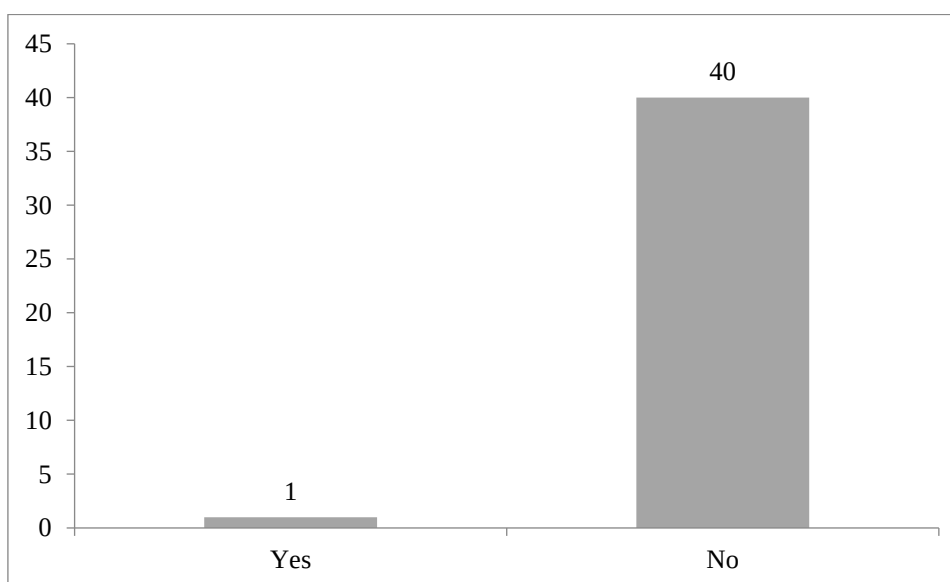
A question was asked how do you protect user's privacy when they use library computers. Respondents were allowed to record multiple responses and total 73 responses were received. Figure 10 shows the graphical representation of the responses received. Browser privacy setting received most response followed by website blocking.



**Figure 10: Protecting user's privacy while using library's computers**

### 6.14 Request from law enforcement or government agencies for user information

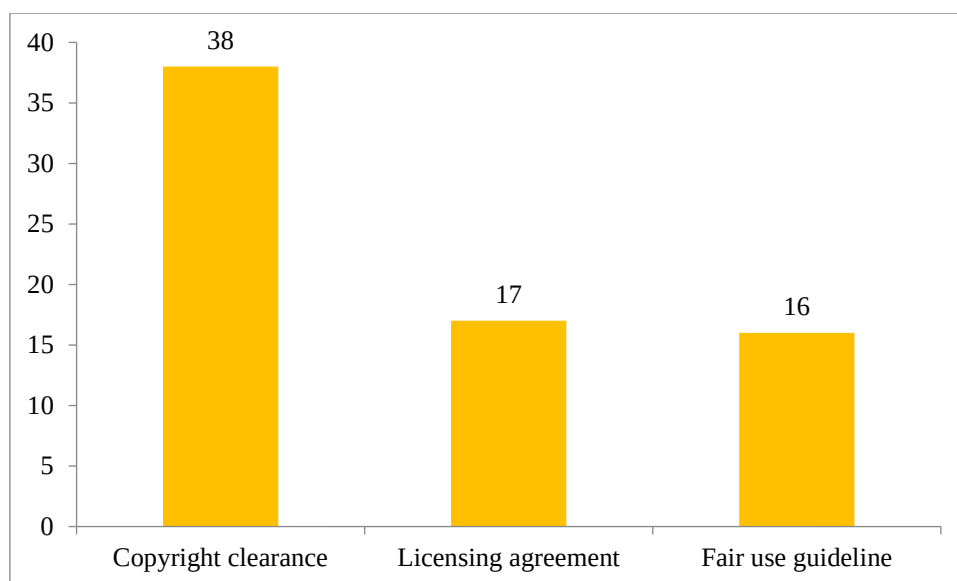
A question was asked Have you ever received any request from law enforcement agencies or government agencies for user information? This was a close ended question. Yes received 1 response and No received 40 responses. Figure 11 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 11: Request from law enforcement or government agencies for user information**

### 6.15 Library materials and services compliance to copyright laws

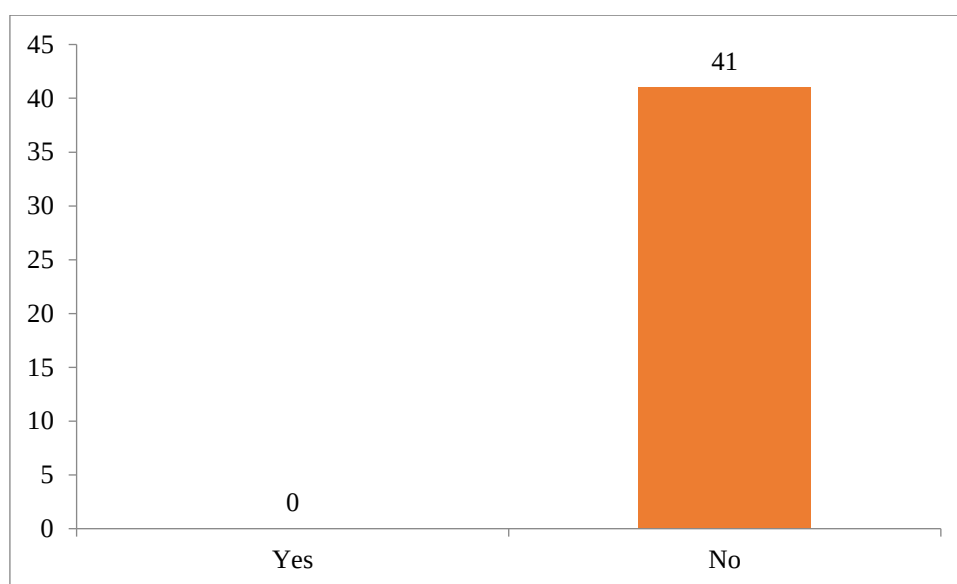
A question was asked How you make sure that library materials and services comply to the copyright laws? Respondents were asked to record multiple responses and total 71 responses were received. Figure 12 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 12: Library materials and services compliance to copyright laws**

#### **6.16 Complaint or notice regarding copyright violations**

A question was Have you ever received a complaint or notice regarding copyright violation. This was a close ended question. No received 41 (100%) response. Figure 13 shows the graphical representation of the responses received.



**Figure 13: Complaint or notice regarding copyright violations**

### **7. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

The study finds that the level of awareness of Information ethics among library professionals about information privacy, about information accuracy, about intellectual property, about information access, about wrongful copyright violations, about respecting privacy of others in online environment in all the respondents is very high aware. The level of agreement of compliance with information privacy, compliance with information accuracy, compliance with intellectual property, compliance with information access in all respondents

is Strongly Agree. This shows that Level of agreement of compliance of library professionals to Information Ethics in libraries is Strongly Agree. The practical challenges faced by library professionals in practicing Information Ethics includes Browser privacy setting, website blocking, secure authentication, user coming with their own computers, firewall, copyright clearance, licensing agreement, and Fair user guideline as per the response received.

In the changing scenario with the advancement in Information and Communication Technology (ICT) era there is an urgent need to address the issue of Information Ethics (IE) in the context of libraries. Although the recently published survey of IFLA code of ethics addresses some of the issues of the Information Ethics, there is a need to urgently publish or undertake code of Information Ethics due to the changing dimension. As the Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly evolving and there will arise a need to address the issue of AI ethics as well in near time. The professional library organization should seriously consider addressing the issue of Information ethics and AI ethics. As it is observed the issue of Information ethics is discussed in western countries and in developed few European countries only. There is a need to address the issues as early as possible.

## 8. CONCLUSION

The study finds that there is a good awareness among library professionals about different aspect of Information ethics in libraries. The library professionals also comply with various aspects of Information ethics in libraries. There is an urgent need to address the issues that may arise in the future and for this purpose Information ethics should be studied and its code for library professionals should be developed. Just now evolved AI is slowly transforming the dimension of every profession, the LIS community should prepare code of ethics for Information ethics and AI ethics from the future point of view. To avoid difficulties that may arise due to non-awareness of Information ethics on the part of libraries there is an urgent need to address the issues that may arise. The practical challenges faced by library professionals in practicing Information ethics may vary in the future so there is need to address the issues immediately to avoid any unforeseen situation in the future by library professionals.

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