

A Comparative Analysis of Romanian Librarians' Perception of their Working Environment

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Abstract

Work environment factors are influencing employees performance, and thus directly affecting the organization's efficiency. The objective of this paper is to draw a general image regarding the way in which employees from school, county, and university libraries perceive tangible (furniture, work equipment) and intangible (security, temperature, silence, air quality) elements from their work environments in order to emphasize the main issues librarians are facing. The novelty of this research stems from the application of the strategic comparative management's principles in order to collate the work environment perceptions of the three aforementioned libraries. The research method was sociological inquiry, based on a survey, implemented through a questionnaire, which was addressed nationwide to school, county, and university library employees, helping us identify attitudes towards the work environment. In general, librarians seem to be content with their work environment conditions, and they feel safe. There are significant differences within employee attitudes towards work environment factors. The most satisfied were school librarians, because they interact with fewer users and work in a smaller environment.

Keywords: work environment, work safety, work equipment, librarian, comparative analysis

JEL classification: J81, J24, N30

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1. Introduction

A safe and well-structured work environment is fundamental in order to ensure employee productivity and organisational efficiency. Research has demonstrated that environmental factors such as, but not limited to, temperature, air quality, equipment, furniture and noise (Wolkoff, Azuma and Carrer, 2021;

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Donley, 2021; Lamb and Kwok, 2016) alongside the feeling of safety are the cornerstones of a productive workplace.

Info-documentary structures, whose purpose is to disseminate information and culture, are depending, as much as any other organisation, on the aforementioned factors in order to uphold the proper work environment. (Hoffmann, Berg and Koufogiannakis, 2017). This is especially important since they support the students of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), which serve as pivotal drivers of innovation and socio-economic development within their communities (Păunescu et al., 2022).

The novelty brought by this research is that, by implementing the principles of strategic comparative management, we are analysing the work conditions in three distinct categories of libraries (University, County and School) in order to identify differences between their employees' perceptions regarding the labour environments. Thus, we will be able to identify their main complaints and how these shortcomings vary from library to library. Due to the fact that this research included employees from three different types of libraries, the results will be analyzed separately.

2. Importance of the Researched Problem

We conducted this research, which analysis the perceptions of librarians from different info-documentary structures regarding the work environment in order to identify the main issues faced by them while performing daily work tasks. In order to have a clear image, we evaluated two different dimensions. On one hand, the physical characteristics of their work environment, which are comprised of five different variables (tranquility, dust, temperature, furniture, work instruments). On the other hand, we focused on the security dimension, more specifically, how safe librarians perceive their workplace and if they know how to act in a confrontational situation.

Libraries, as info-documentary organizations, are key institutions for the society's development, which offer their users the necessary instruments required for the evolution of professional, personal, and academic skills. Moreover, in modern times, libraries are surpassing their initial purpose of disseminating information and culture and are increasing the positive impact on society by directly aligning their actions with the goals of the UN 2030 Agenda, which is an "integrated framework of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) spanning economic, environmental and social development" (International Federation of Library Associations and Institutions, 2016), that represent key pillars of the modern global economy, playing a crucial role in balancing society's economic, social, and environmental demands (Dima, 2024). The progress of various regions and states in achieving these goals is marked by considerable variation, highlighting substantial disparities in the execution of national policies and strategies (Ciucu Durnoi et al, 2024). Thus, libraries become places in which "people find refuge, connections (both human and internet), and a free space open

to everyone.” (Shepherd, 2025). Libraries are directly addressing the gap in its users knowledge, not only through their resources but also through the provided services, such as internet access, safer computer networks, or the possibility to scan documents. (Whitebloom, 2021).

Libraries of the future will serve an even more important purpose in society because their employees will have to fulfill activities in accordance with the new “community role of libraries” (Dezuanni and Osman, 2025, pp. 9), such as becoming "part of the race to get the best education for children" and fighting against "loneliness and vulnerability collectively, through libraries" (ibidem). This way, libraries and its employees will become important agents in the fight against present and future risks, such as “inequality, misinformation and disinformation, lack of economic opportunity or unemployment” (Zahidi, 2025, pp. 7). In order to successfully accomplish the new roles bestowed upon by modern times and to continue to deliver high-quality educational services, info-documentary structures will be needing visionary management strategies in order to overcome internal and external perils. Internal dangers, the focus of this research, are stemming from the deficiencies of the work environment, which directly affects the quality of the services provided by library employees. On the other hand, there are the external factors, such as “employment trends, demographics, changing work agenda, globalization, social trends” (McKinlay and Williamson, 2010, p. 12) which are harder to harness and are not of interest for our paper.

The organization’s key resource, its employees, represent the most important resource required by an institution to successfully accomplish its mission and obtain its goals (Munteanu et al, p. 2). Thus, the first step in enhancing the organization’s performance is to identify and solve the work environment issues faced by the employees. These problems can be grouped into two distinct categories. On one hand, there are the ones directly regarding the work environment, where employees are spending most of their time. On the other hand, their skills and abilities need to be evaluated in order to identify the possible knowledge gaps and introduce the proper training programs, using an approach based on the principle of “train the trainer” (World Economic Forum, 2024).

3. New Trends in Library Management: Strategic Comparative Management

The new trend in the management of info-documentary institutions “is based on the clear idea of the need for change [...] according to the changes occurring in society” (Moldovan, 2017, pp. 7). The main purpose of strategic comparative management is to provide a detailed picture regarding the way in which the work environment "contributes, facilitates or impairs organizational capacity to respond, or even anticipate, social, economic and environmental adversity." (Borim-de-Souza et al., 2015, pp. 202) and influence the way in which organizations are orienting, formulating and implementing their strategy. (Luo, Sun and Wang, 2011, pp. 193). This perspective emphasizes the role of the work

environment within the development of proper strategies to overcome different issues, but also the fact that these strategies ought to be adapted to the specifics of each organization.

Moreover, by applying a dual-focused perspective, built upon "theoretical-abstract and empirical segmentations [...] and socioeconomic, ecological, and behavioural approaches" (Luo, Sun and Wang, 2011, pp. 203), which is useful for multiple reasons. First, there is a lack of data and literature regarding comparative analyses between the work environments in different types of libraries in Romania. Even though this paper will not be able to completely fill the informational void, at least it will be able to offer a brief description of how the work environment differs between multiple types of libraries in Romania. Second, it allows us to have a hands-on, direct approach of the researched issues. Third, based on the results generated by the collected data, we will develop distinct strategies meant to address the specific issues each type of library is facing, because each organization needs to correct its internal issues based on "a series of demands or contingencies posed by the scale of operations, usually expressed as size, the technology employed, and the environment within which operations take place" (Koen, 2015, pp. 6). Thus, an organization seeking to improve its efficiency is ought to be actively contributing to the creation of a proper labour environment by providing its employees with both the proper tools and safe work surroundings, will be "benefiting from enhanced levels of employee job performance" (Mearns and Reader, 2008, pp. 389).

4. Relevance of IEQ for Organisational Success

Some of the factors influencing the work environment fall under the incidence of the IEQ (indoor environmental quality) and play a key role in "creating healthy, comfortable, and productive indoor environments" (Lightning Europe, 2025, p.1) shaping the organization both on a micro and a macro level and generating outcomes that positively impact the worker's "satisfaction, health and productivity" (Franke and Nadler, 2020, p.5).

The work environment has to be focused on the worker's wellbeing, in order to avoid any "risk and disease" (Hanc, McAndrew and Ucci, 2018, pp. 15). Moreover, nowadays, managers are aware of the relationship between the work environment and the organization's overall productivity, and are in constant "pursuit of 'adding value' through the fostering of wellbeing" (ibidem). The two major dimensions through which employee well-being at the workplace can be evaluated are "satisfaction and health" (Franke and Nadler, 2020, p. 4). It is undeniable that workplace satisfaction is highly influenced by the working conditions, as research suggests (Raziq and Maulabakhsh, 2015; Kafui Agbozo, 2017) and how these conditions impact the workers' physical and psychological health.

Since 1950, managers and researchers have paid more attention to the work climate, in order to identify and eliminate the "environmental hazards that created

dangerous conditions for workers” (Donley, 2021, pp. 586) which might lead to dangers such as physical damage or the spreading of disease (Wolkoff, Azuma and Carrer, 2021). This initiative, meant to protect the worker’s health, gradually evolved and began to take interest not only in their physical but also in their mental well-being, “much research has focused on the psychosocial impact of the work environment on individual health and well-being” (Donley, 2021, pp. 586). Poor working conditions and an overall improper work environment, characterized by several factors, such as “how information is processed and communicated, what office equipment is needed and available, and whether work is interrupted to the degree where it causes additional work” (Griffin et al., 2007, pp. 336) can affect an employee’s cognitive functions, such as “attention, perception, memory, language” (Wang et al., 2021, pp. 9) and can even lead to “different intensity SRDs” (stress-related disorders) (Nieuwenhuijsen, Bruinvels and Frings-Dresen, 2010, pp. 285) or even more serious mental health illnesses, including but not limited to depression and anxiety.

On a macro level, we are evaluating the impact of the working environment on the organization’s productivity, which is a key indicator of its efficiency (Jaskiewicz and Tulenko, 2012). The two types of factors that influence the organization’s productivity are “technical factors and soft factors” (Wagner and Murphy-Hill, 2019). The technical ones are referring directly to the technology behind product and service delivery. Soft factors encompass organizational aspects that do not necessarily partake in the production process but are influencing organizational productivity, including the “work environment” (ibidem, p. 74).

Another important aspect that needs to be taken into consideration is the fact that the work climate is not marked only by the physical traits and conditions, but also by the employees “relationships with their organisation, clients and other workers” (Eurofound, 2018, p. 28). Workers feel safer, if, during their interactions, they have a strong “perception that help is available from the organization if required” (Daniels, Watson and Gedikli, 2017, pp. 2) which is generated by the implementation of the proper mechanism of protection, which will be activated in the situation in which they are going to feel endangered.

It is important to acknowledge that not all of the IEQ factors influence the workers in the same way. For this purpose, one needs to differentiate between “direct and indirect effects” (Franke and Nadler, 2020, pp. 5) generated by the environmental factors. An illustrative example of direct effects is when the equipment is too old and inefficient, directly affecting the workflow. The second category of factors, which influence productivity indirectly, is somewhat more difficult to illustrate because “it affects individual state factors that support normal work performance including motivation, alertness, and focus” (Lamb and Kwok, 2016, pp. 336)

Factors which influence the IEQ

The factors that influence the IEQ can be divided into two distinct types of variables. On one hand, there are the tangible ones, on which this research will

focus, which are easy to observe, such as “temperature, air quality, lighting and acoustics” (Franke and Nadler, 2020, pp. 4). Some of them, such as temperature or air quality, can be measured through the help of specialized instruments, while others, such as light, can be observed directly. On the other hand, there are the intangible environmental factors, such as “office layout, location and amenities” (Al Horr et al., 2016, pp. 377) and even “outside views from windows, greenspace or personal control” (Franke and Nadler, 2020, pp. 5) which are more difficult to measure and also carry a more subjective influence.

In order to avoid burdening our paper and to maintain its relevance, we focus on five key factors of the work environment. Three of them (temperature, silence and air quality) are intangible, and the remaining two (instruments and furniture) are tangible.

Temperature, also known as thermal comfort, refers to "the subjective state of mind satisfaction with the thermal environment and is assessed by subjective evaluation." (Mujan et al., 2019, pp. 648). Temperature is a subjective issue, which varies according to region, culture and personal preference. The ideal value needed for thermal comfort is included in "a range of temperatures between 20°C and 30°C" (Porrás-Salazar et al., 2021, pp. 11). However, research, which correlated temperature and productivity, concluded that for maximum productivity, the workspace needed "the optimal set-point temperature of 25.15°C" (Kim and Hong, 2020, pp. 13). However, even here attitudes vary based on individual factors, such as how warm are the clothes worn are the employee's clothes or if he is willing to stay in an area with a functioning AC.

The acoustic comfort encompasses "both internal and external noise sources" (Mujan et al., 2019, pp. 651). The internal ones are generated by peer discussions and the sounds made by standard indoor-operated office machines, such as “telephones ringing, printers, and keyboards” (Banbury and Berry, 2005, pp. 29). The external ones are made by nearby traffic or construction sites and can be reduced, by using soundproof windows.

The air quality within the working environment is a more complex factor, affecting productivity and health. It can be associated with temperature because “the mechanisms that mediate the effects of thermal conditions and indoor air quality on performance are surprisingly similar”. (Wargocki and Wyon, 2017, pp. 365) Thus, the corrective measures meant to address either of them can be used in order to solve both issues. However, the quality of the air is a less subjective factor because its negative effects on the workers are undeniable, aggravating already existing health conditions such as “asthma and allergy” (Eduard et al., 2012, pp. 337) or even causing illnesses such as “pneumoconiosis, tuberculosis, chronic bronchitis, emphysema, and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease” (Anlimah et al., 2023, pp. 54408). Moreover, a working environment with a low air quality is not affecting “only workers but their family members as well” (Stobnicka and Górny, 2015, pp. 10) because particles of harmful “fungi, microorganisms, mold” (Pinheiro, Sequeira and Macedo, 2019, pp. 687) and even "compounds of

lead (Pb) and mercury (Hg)" (Turner, 2023, pp. 6) contained by old books can be carried home on clothes or other objects.

Furniture is also a key element in the construction of an efficient work environment, due to the fact that it has multiple ways in which it can affect the employee. First, in a direct way, by inducing "work-related discomfort, pain, and disease" (Kroemer and Kroemer, 2016, pp. 4). Second, it contributes to the creation of a constant state of discomfort, by generating and perpetuating "poor or improper postures, [...] often caused by ill-fitting furniture including chairs" (ibidem), which are affecting the worker's health on the long run, causing him to be less efficient. The whole debate regarding the multiple issues generated by the use of low-quality furniture in the workplace led to "a broader consideration about the role furniture might play to improve [...] staff, and resource outcomes" (Malone and Dellinger, 2011, pp. 4). Thus, further research has demonstrated that not only the design of the furniture is influencing productivity, but also the material from which that object is made. Certain materials, such as wood, which "may lead to improved stress responses" (Burnard and Kutnar, 2019, pp. 321) compared to other materials such as plastic or metal. We believe that wood has a positive influence on employees because it is a resource found in nature, and people respond better to elements with which they are familiar, compared to plastic or metal, which, traditionally, are not a representative part of the human environment.

Office equipment is the final element from the work environment included in our research. The daily tasks of a librarian can be accomplished only through the use of multiple devices that cover a vast array of activities. For this purpose, it is fundamental that library employees have at their disposal all the necessary equipment. Traditionally, high quality working equipment is directly enhancing the worker's productivity by leading "to innovative performance" (Lee, Choi and Yang, 2021, pp. 7716), thus simplifying the labor process as a whole. In turn, this improvement also impacts the productivity of the organization as a whole. In some cases, proficient working equipment represents an indicator of the organization's efficiency, a "fundamental method for measuring performance" (Hansen, 2001). On the other hand, ill-functioning equipment negatively impacts not only the general productivity, but it can also affect the physical and psychological well-being of the laborer, by either causing physical harm or generating a feeling of dissatisfaction stemming from the incapacity of properly performing his job. Thus, it is important that library employees have the proper equipment.

5. Info-Documentary Structures

If we are carefully analyzing Law Nr. 334 from 31 May 2002, also known as the law of the library, which regulates the library's organization and functioning, one can identify that the library, which can be "an institution, compartment or specialized structure" (Law Nr 334, Library Law) has multiple attributions. Its main goal is to facilitate users' access to information by "establishing, organizing, processing, developing and preserving book collections, serial publications, other

library documents and databases” (ibidem). By facilitating users’ access to this kind of information, libraries are accomplishing, simultaneously, multiple functions, out of which the most important ones are the “custodial, conservation, educational, documentary” (Marinescu, 2009, p. 38) ones. Through these functions, libraries directly contribute to the accumulation, preservation and dissemination of information in the forms of books, magazines and digital databases, directly contributing to the development of culture and education. According to the type of users, libraries can be grouped into multiple categories. For this research, we will analyze only three of them. First, the University Libraries “services students, teachers and researchers from universities or other higher education institutions” (Law nr 334, Library Law, pp. 2). Second, county libraries are “an encyclopedic-type library, which services the local community of a county” (ibidem). Finally, school libraries, which “function within a pre-university educational institution and services students and teachers from that institution” (Ibidem). This classification is important because even though they serve the same purpose, that of enabling access towards information, their means and resources vary according to the target audience, a fact that is directly influencing the work environment.

6. Methodology

Through this descriptive research, which “attempts to objectively present the analyzed social phenomena.” (Chelcea, 2011, p 182), we generate an overview of the work environment in Romanian public libraries. It is a comparative analysis, because we included employees from three different libraries.

This research is applicable because it does not seek to “determine the theoretically significant fact” nor to “match the facts with the theory” (Mitulescu, 2011, pp. 36). The applicative nature of this research stems from the fact that it has a direct beneficiary, who wants to solve a series of problems. Through this research, we identify the problems faced by library employees and, at the same time generate viable solutions for the identified issues. Thus, at the same time, we are “diagnosing problems, planning and implementing actions to reduce or eliminate dysfunctions” (Chelcea, 2011, pp. 201). The survey was accessed through a google forms link and had national coverage, amassing responses from librarians from all over the country.

The method used in this researched is sociological enquiry, which used the survey as its main instrument. The survey included *filter questions*, in order to increase “the quality control of the answers” (Chelcea, 2011, pp.256) by excluding the ones which did not face certain situations.

The questions measuring employees’ attitudes towards the work environment were based on the principles of the Lickert Scale, which includes five answer possibilities which range between “complete agreement and complete disagreement” (Babbie, 2010, pp. 244). Thus, we were able to capture a wider variety of attitudes.

7. Data analysis

A quarter of the county librarians did not express their opinion regarding their satisfaction with furniture, dust or work tools and chose the neutral option "neither dissatisfied nor satisfied".

Over two-thirds of all library employees are satisfied with the workplace tranquility, because the library is an institution which emphasizes the importance of silence in the majority of its spaces utilized by users. Those unsatisfied with the tranquility, on average less than 10%, probably do not work with the users, and are affected by internal noises, made by work equipment or their colleagues.

Dust is the factor which amasses the greatest levels of dissatisfaction. Almost half (46%) of University library employees, a third (33%) of school library employees and a quarter (26%) of county library employees consider there is too much dust in their institution. University libraries have materials (newspapers, old books) in their heritage that are often dusty. Thus, the high rate of dissatisfaction among university librarians regarding dust is justified by the interaction with these materials.

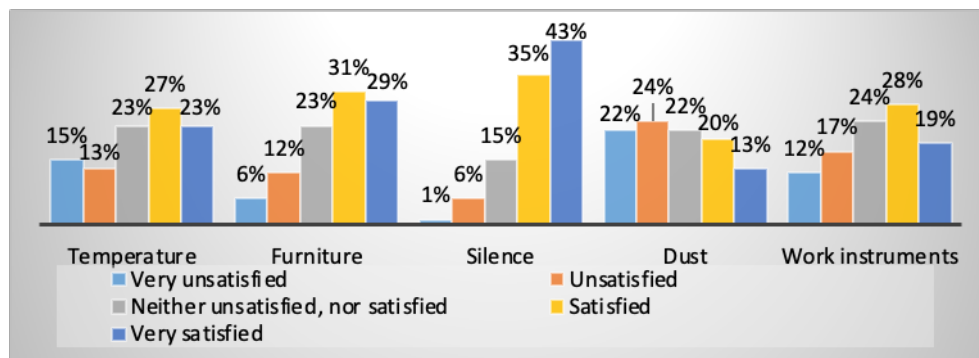


Figure 1. Satisfaction with Working Conditions in University Library
Based on data collected through our survey

Workplace furniture is appreciated by librarians. Two-thirds of all library employees are satisfied with their furniture. The highest levels of dissatisfaction towards the workplace equipment can be traced towards University librarians (29%) followed by those from School libraries (20%) and County libraries (17%). This dissatisfaction can be justified by the fact that university library employees have a greater number of activities to perform, thus are required to work with more types of equipment. Due to the limited budget, not all outdated equipment can be replaced at the same time.

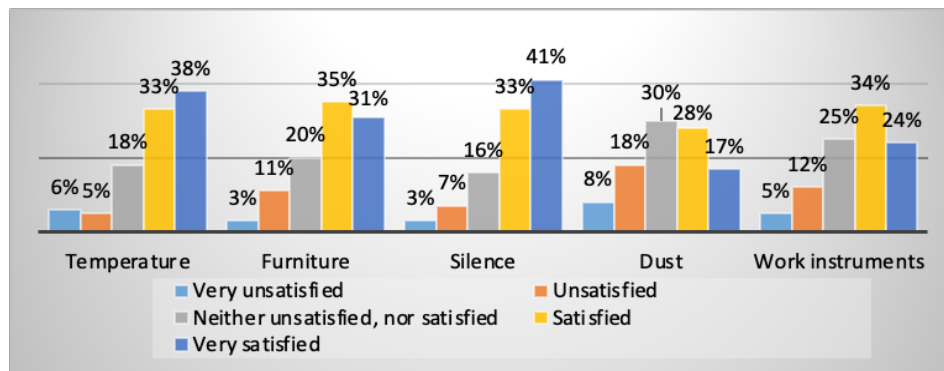


Figure 2. Satisfaction with Working Conditions in County Library
Based on data collected through our survey

Library employees generally feel safe. Most respondents who said they do not feel safe work at county libraries (6%), followed by those working in university libraries (4%) and school libraries (1%). The rate of neutral responses (neither too little nor too much) was double among employees in university libraries (14%) compared to those in county libraries (8%) and school libraries (7%). Employees of school libraries feel the safest (90%), followed by those in county libraries (86%) and those in university libraries (81%). Those who work in school libraries interact mostly with people they know, namely teachers and students from that particular school, thus they feel safer at work than those from county and university libraries.

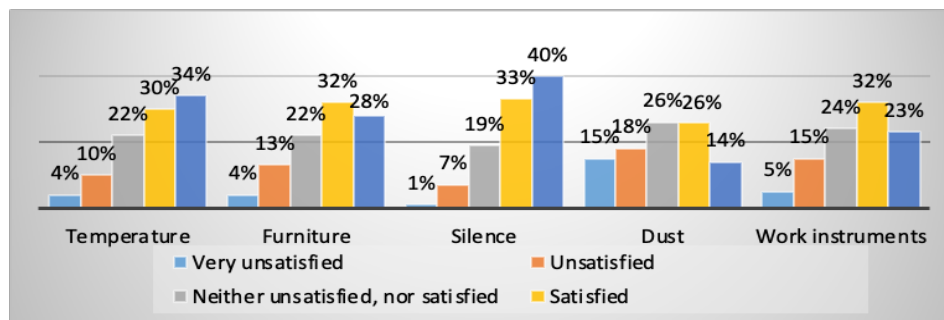


Figure 3. Satisfaction with Working Conditions in School Library
Based on data collected through our survey

At a first glance, the higher the number of users with whom library employees interact, the less safe they feel. On the other hand, we must also take into account the high rate of neutral response options among University Library employees. Moreover, there are no high values of response options that reflect insecurity at work. In general, most respondents know how to ask for help. The best informed in this regard are employees of County libraries (73%), followed by those of School Libraries (66%) and University Libraries (63%).

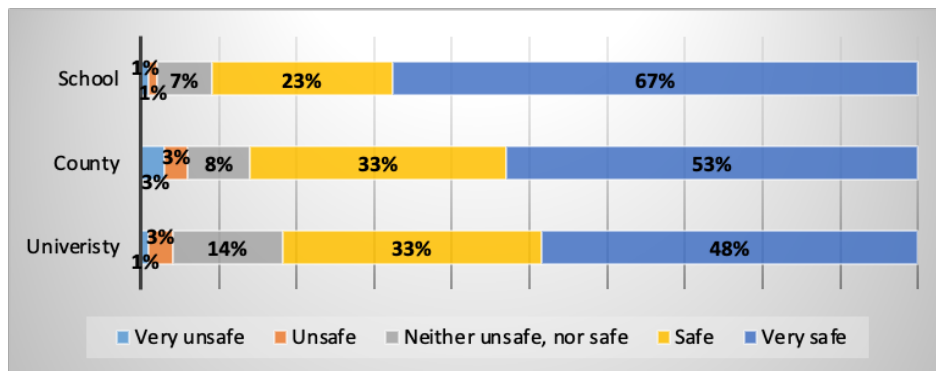


Figure 4. Perception of Safety in the Working Environment
Based on data collected through our survey

Thus, due to the very high percentage of non-responses, we cannot specifically state that employees of County Libraries have the best knowledge of how to proceed when interacting with a dangerous, violent person. 7% of employees of university libraries and 6% of employees of school libraries do not know how to ask for help, while two-thirds of employees know how to do this. The non-response rate (I don't know/I don't answer) is twice as high among employees of University (30%) and School (28%) libraries as among those in County libraries. Almost a third of employees of School and University Libraries opted for the non-response option "I don't know/I don't answer". The number of employees in County Libraries who chose the same response option was almost two times lower, 16%. Thus, by choosing the option "don't know/don't answer" they avoided an answer that would have put them or their superiors in a bad light. I believe that there are several reasons why employees do not know the methods by which they can help. First, they were not informed by their superiors. Second, they never discussed this problem within the institution where they work because they were ashamed.

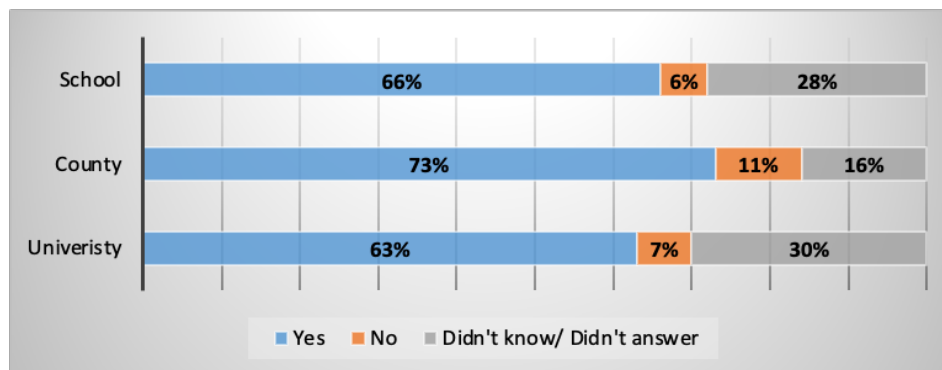


Figure 5. Employee Knowledge Regarding the Safety Procedures in Case of Physical Threat
Based on data collected through our survey

8. Conclusions

Libraries, as info-documentary structures, require an efficient oriented work climate, built on a high indoor environmental quality and measures that guarantee employee safety. These principles are important because they contribute to the physical and psychological well-being of the employees, thus directly influencing the library's efficiency.

Based on our research, the three types of libraries do not necessarily register significant differences regarding employee attitudes towards the work environment. The general attitude toward the conditions of the work environment is a positive one. All of the librarians are satisfied with the silence at the workplace.

Although, in general, librarians tend to be satisfied with their work conditions, an interesting finding is that School and County librarians are more content with their work climate than those from University Libraries, which tend to be less satisfied than their peers with internal environment factors such as dust and temperature.

The article emphasizes, through the use of strategic comparative management based on scientifically oriented empirical findings, that, in order to improve the efficiency of different institutions that aim to accomplish the same purpose but serve different categories of beneficiaries, one needs to adopt different strategies in order to overcome the issues faced by each type of library.

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