

### **Opportunity Makes the Thief: Analysis of the Physical Cues That Influence Shoplifters...**

In this paper, the author conducts 20 in-depth interviews with known shoplifters to find factors that influence a shoplifter's decision to steal from a retail store

#### **Background:**

- One of the main tenets of situational crime prevention is that the crime or perpetrator of the crime can be dissuaded from action through the design of the store environment.
- Research has been conducted on shoplifters and their targets, but there is a relatively smaller amount of literature about specifics in the store build environment which deters theft.
- 5 main ideas behind situational crime prevention is making the target harder to steal, riskier to steal, deny the benefit of theft, remove provocations to steal and remove excuses to steal.
- The author, working with Dr. Read Hayes, work on a preliminary listing of design strategies that are most effective in shaping shoplifter perceptions and behavior.

#### **Findings:**

- Most offenders noted that the presence of CCTV was a deterrent for them, and that lack of CCTV would leave them inclined to steal
- Natural surveillance was the second most reported deterrent. Offenders noted that they did not like to steal in front of associates or other customers.
- Store layout, and the number of "blind" spots, was also frequently reported by offenders as influencing their decision to steal.
- "Exit screening" was also a contributing factor to an offender's decision to steal. Things like EAS tags, EAS pedestals, store greeter or security guard at the front end of the store deter shoplifters from theft.
- Nearly 2/3 of offender statements regarding their decision to steal had to do with perceived risk, indicating that if a store inputs asset protection measures that increase the probability or perceived chance of getting caught, it can deter more shoplifters.

#### **Implications:**

- This study finds suggests that offenders are influenced most often by physical cues that communicate the risk of detection.
- If a new store is opening, loss prevention measures like formal and natural surveillance should be considered while designing the store layout, as it has a strong impact on shoplifter decision making.
- The front end of the store can be "hardened" with EAS pedestals, ePVMs, greeters/guards to convey to the offender that there is a sense of control within the store.
  - o Combine these factors with several methods of natural and formal surveillance to enhance the deterrent effect.

#### **Next Steps:**

- The 20 shoplifters in this survey had a wide range of experiences. It would be interesting to see if prolific thieves as well as booster have the same perceptions.