

Chapter 7

Findings, recommendations and conclusion

7.1 *Introduction*

This chapter covers the research findings, recommendations, areas for future shop theft research and the conclusion. To begin with, the literature and empirical research findings that emanate from this research work will be discussed, and appropriate recommendations, based on the research findings, will also be examined. Areas that were not covered in this research study will then be discussed with future research studies in mind and finally the conclusion of this research study will be discussed.

7.2 *Findings*

7.2.1 Findings based on the literature review

7.2.1.1 Historical perspective

The literature studies mention that the historical perspective with regard to shop theft dates back as far as 1597.

7.2.1.2 Different perceptions on shop theft

There are different perceptions held with regard to shop theft as indicated in the literature studies.

7.2.1.3 The extent of shop theft

The literature studies on shop theft indicate that it is difficult to measure the extent of shop theft throughout history.

7.2.1.4 The under-reporting of shop theft

The reporting of shop theft is seen as the responsibility of retailers not everybody's business. Very little on shop theft is reported or recorded.

7.2.1.5 Number and types of merchandise stolen

The literature also points out that shoplifters steal from stores more than once and target specific desired merchandise for own personal use or reselling purposes. The motives for stealing from shops differ significantly as far the gender, age, and grade , occupation of shop theft offender is known.

7.2.1.6 The victims of shop theft

The literature studies make no mention of both retailers and customers as victims of shop theft in different categories.

7.2.1.7 Shop theft as a criminal offence

Shop theft is recognised as a serious offence throughout the world, including South Africa , as it is covered in the South African Theft Laws.

7.2.1.8 Types of punishment imposed for shop theft

The literature findings mention that types of punishment imposed for shop theft differ significantly from country to country

Next for discussion will be the empirical research findings.

7.2.2 Findings based on the empirical research

Tables 1 and 2 showed that in all the grades the number of females registered more than the males, in grade 12 there were 101 females, followed by 96 in grade 11 and 94 in grade 10. It was discovered more females are more convinced than males that violent criminal acts which include murder, rape, hijacking and assault that result in serious injury as serious (table 2).

Table 3 showed a high number of females in disagreement than males with regard to this statement; table 4 indicating that more females disagreeing and strongly disagreeing with their male counterparts with regard to the taking of clothing and table 5 findings stating that much more number of females seemed to be in disagreement than the males pertaining to the view that it is alright to steal from stores because they make a lot of money.

Table 6 findings showed that more females than males disagreed (92) and strongly disagreed (142) with the statement of stealing when the opportunity has availed itself, it was discovered that table 7 findings indicated that most females (272) than males seemed to be in disagreement with stealing as a result of influence from friends.

The empirical research findings showed that females are more convinced than the male respondents that a prison sentence is appropriate. The males seemed to be more inclined to take other merchandise from stores and appear to more lenient in their choice of punishment than their female counterparts (Table 8). It was also revealed through this research with regard to the prison sentences for stealing from the house, a higher number of females seemed to be advocating a prison sentence between 2-6 months, 1 year, 3 years, 11-15 years and 21-25 years. Higher number of males were on 2 years, 4 years, 11-20 years and both genders seem to be in agreement on certain period to be spent in prison such as on 1 month or less, 6 months to a year, 5 years and 6-10 years (Table 9).

The findings of this research also indicated that more males than females took

merchandise from stores in the last three (3) years (Table 10) a number of reasons may be advanced in this regard such as negative peer pressure, to prove to friends their capabilities, this show that shop theft should be viewed as one of the most prevalent types of crime, which is not taken into serious account by the public at large. Another findings registered showed that more males as compared to females on the number of times items were taken from stores without being paid for, males stole thrice and more. Perhaps such stores have not given top priority to their store security measures which are in a lax circumstance, stores with many entrances or exits, the overall store design render more opportunities for the commission of shop theft, thus limiting opportunities become a crucial aspect of any retail institution to flourish (as indicated in table 11).

Table 12 findings showed that more of the 17 years (149), followed by the 16 years (101) and the 18 years regard violent behaviour which is seen universally as serious than other age group, it was discovered that (99) of the 17 years more than other age group seemed to be in disagreement with the statement, followed by the 16 years and 18 years (table13).

Table 14 findings indicated that more of the 17 years seemed to be in more disagreement with other age groups with regard to this statement. With regard to age versus opportunity (table 15) showed a higher number of the 17 years more than any other age group disagreed with the statement that it is alright to steal if the opportunity is there to do so and no-one will catch you.

Table 16 findings showed that more (97) of the 17 years seemed convinced that prison sentence is appropriate, 29 opted community service, 15 suspended sentence, 7 indicating fine and 3 any other penalty for stealing from stores. It was also discovered that in certain instances all the age group showed some agreement on certain penalties, thus it is difficult to explain the discovered findings thus, table 16 findings warrant further research.

Table 17 findings showed that the grade 12's more than other grades seemed to disagree

with the statement on particular society's views on crime, followed by grades 11 and 10. It was found that with regard to table 18, it showed that the grade 12's appeared more convinced that burglary is a serious crime, followed by the grade 11's and the grade 10's. Table 19 findings showed that more of the grade 12's regard personal theft as an illicit crime, followed by the grade 11's and grade 10's, respectively.

The empirical research findings with regard to table 20 findings showed that more learners in grade 12 appeared more convinced than learners in other grades that stealing items valued less than twenty rand constitute crime. Most number of learners in grade 12's as far as table 21 is concerned showed that they regard taking of items more than R100 as a crime, followed by the grade 10's and the grade 11's. Table 22 findings indicated that more of the grade 12's disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement, followed by the grade 10's and the grade 11's. Table 23 findings showed that a high number of the grade 12's disregard the stealing from stores on the basis that they generate more money, followed by the grade 11's and the grade 10's.

Table 24 findings showed that more of the grade 12's strongly agreed and agreed with this statement, followed by the grade 11's and the grade 10's. It was also found that the grade 10's more than other grades showed disagreement to this statement, followed by the grade 12's and the grade 11's. Table 25 findings showed that more of the grade 12's disagreed and strongly disagreed with the views that stores seldom prosecute shop theft offenders, followed by the grade 11's and the grade 10's.

The findings with regard to table 26 showed that more of the grade 12's disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement, followed by the grade 11's and the grade 10's. With regard to table 27 findings more of the grade 12's also disagreed and strongly disagreed with this statement, followed by the grade 11's and the grade 10's.

Table 28 findings showed that more of the grade 12's recommended 6 months to a year prison sentence for stealing from stores, followed by the grade 11's and the grade 10's. It was also found that in some instances all the grades agreed on certain prison penalty, for example, 1 month or less, 4 years, 5 years and 16-20 years said the same view.

With regard to the specifically formulated hypotheses, the following findings were recorded
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7.2.3 Hypotheses confirmation

Hypotheses	Status
Ha The gender of the learners will influence their perceptions on shop theft.	Confirmed
Ha The age of the learners will influence their perceptions on shop theft.	Confirmed
Ha The grade of the learners will influence their perceptions on shop theft.	Confirmed
Ha Shop theft is not caused by opportunistic acts.	Confirmed
Ha Shop theft is not caused by inadequate security.	Confirmed
Ha Shop theft is not caused by friends daring each other to do it.	Confirmed

7.3 *Recommendations*

7.3.1 Recommendations based on the literature review

7.3.1.1 Historical perspective

It is recommended that since shop theft is viewed as an old type of crime (1597) in England and continues to flourish even in the 21st century as a serious problem. In 1976 no scientific studies were available in South Africa regarding shop theft. This research study recommends that there should be more South African related shop theft research projects be funded by the business sectors so as to develop a comprehensive crime prevention model appropriate to South African context rather than from foreign sources.

7.3.1.2 Different perceptions on shop theft

It is recommended that the general public to be taught to disregard negative views about shop theft as an insignificant, petty or harmless crime. Shop theft cannot be justified but to reinforce it as an illegal activity as this will add value in changing negative views into positive ones.

7.3.1.3 The extent of shop theft

It is clear from the literature research that it is difficult to measure the true extent of shop theft. The researcher recommends that retailers should record and document shop theft incidents, details of shop theft offenders, the items stolen and their monetary value, not to release offenders at store level but notifying both the police as well as parents. This will help to measure shop theft to a certain level rather than confronting same reasons of it is difficult to determine the extent of shop theft in South African retailing institutions.

7.3.1.4 The under-reporting of shop theft

The literature research findings regard shop theft constituting one of the most under-reported crimes. The researcher recommends that more research studies should be conducted in determining the underlying reasons for non or less reporting of shop theft incidents. It is also suggested that a Shop Theft Anonymous Reporting Program be instituted, which should include a 24 hours toll free number as such efforts will help in reinforcing the perception of shop theft as a serious social, economic and legal problem.

7.3.1.5 Number and types of merchandise stolen

The literature findings indicate that shoplifters stealing from stores more than once or twice and certain merchandise are targeted more than others. The researcher recommends that it will not be wise to specifically give attention to the number of times items were stolen or the preferred items and neglecting other security measures. The researcher recommends that store security should be a priority for any retail institution by developing comprehensive crime prevention programs and policies emphasising that shop theft is a criminal offence and is punishable by law.

7.3.1.6 The victims of shop theft

It appears from the literature findings that negative views held by the general public are that retailers are not the real victims since they can make a lot of money and can afford the losses. The researcher recommends that shop theft awareness campaigns should be aimed at the youth since they are identified as an age group more likely to steal from stores than other age group. Such campaigns should look at the plight of customers who are compelled to pay more than they can afford (soaring merchandise prices), indicating that both the retailers and customers are victims of shop theft, this might have a positive impact in changing negative views on shop theft.

7.3.1.7 Shop theft as a criminal offence

Shop theft in terms of South African theft laws is recognised as a criminal offence indicating the seriousness of the problem. The researcher recommends the development of both educational and public awareness on shop theft, to be included in the school syllabus by e.g. teaching Criminology in all the schools, emphasis being on the crime, its causes, consequences and more importantly on how to prevent it from happening as well as how to control it.

7.3.1.8 Types of punishment imposed for shop theft

The literature findings show that a variety of sentences may be imposed for committing shop theft such as imprisonment, fines, and a suspended sentence. The researcher recommends that policymakers and lawmakers should receive training on shop theft aspects especially presiding officers and state prosecutors that when imposing sentence it should fit the crime committed. Shop theft courts should be established to deal effectively with such cases. The use of community service should be encouraged above suspended sentences which is used more often as a result it reinforces the negative view on shop theft.

Prison sentences if recommended for habitual offenders should be coupled with educational rehabilitation programs as this will stress the notion of seriousness as far as shop theft is concerned. The value attached to the appropriated merchandise should not be a determining factor for sentencing. Serious consideration should be on the theft itself as this will add value in changing negative views with regard to shop theft.

7.3.2 Recommendations based on the empirical findings

For tables 1 and 2 the researcher recommends that it is imperative for the schools through the auspice of the department of education funded by government and private organisations to develop crime reduction outreach programmes which afford the mentioned crimes as priority ones, mostly committed by males against women and children.

The researcher with regard to tables 3, 4 and 5 recommends that workshops and shop

theft seminars be conducted in schools and public places, whereby the emphasis highlighting the mutual relationship between retail institutions and customers - condemning the negative thought that shop theft is unjustifiable crime.

It is recommended that as far as tables 6 and 7 are concerned it should be the responsibility of retailers to ensure that opportunities for stealing are limited by improving the store layout and develop store policy on shop theft as will make it difficult for shop theft offenders from stealing even if friends influenced them because of the high apprehension risk factors.

The researcher suggests that as far as tables 8 and 9 are concerned it will be appropriate to conduct further research, as it is difficult to explain the projected findings. A project of such nature should be funded by retail institution and other interested parties, including government departments.

Table 10's findings necessitate the development of an anti shop theft program, which should commence with the stores= layout being improved. Crime prevention programmes should be a priority for business institutions and those who are caught, particulars should be registered first with the stores= security sections before being handed to the police for prosecution. The stores= tendencies of releasing shop theft offenders when caught red-handed reinforce the negative view of shop theft as a crime one can get away with it. They should be photographed for profiling purposes .The researcher recommends that more research should be carried out on why , what, when, and how males find it is relatively easy to steal more than females. This will add value to the establishment of a consolidated shop theft crime prevention initiative and emphasis being placed on reducing opportunities for committing shop theft.

The findings emanating from this research necessitate the researcher to recommend the following measures to limit the opportunities for the commission of shop theft:

- * a programme that warns people to be security conscious,
- * planning stores= architectural layout in such a way that entry and visibility are used to lessen the prospects of shop theft commissions,
- * target-hardening reinforcement such as burglar proofing in stores,
- * attractive articles must be withdrawn from unprotected areas such as jewellery and small expensive merchandise and put into guarded display units,
- * entrances and exists must be used for one and the same purpose, and be under the control of a guard and
- * closed-circuit television and video cameras must be installed in vulnerable areas of the stores.

Store layout can contribute substantially to minimise the opportunities for pilfering by customers. Studying store layouts and displays and determining how best to put obstacles in their way, is the best way to minimise the threat of pilfering. The store must be laid out in such a way that sales staff can view all areas without any difficulty, and more importantly, vulnerable areas must always be appraised and the merchandise rearranged. Attractive and costly merchandise, that is a target for shoplifters, must not be displayed adjacent to either entrances or exists (perhaps this must be regarded as store policy). It is recommended that further criminological research be conducted regarding the issue of any other sentence, as these are unclear and vague types of sentences that can be imposed on offenders, informally or formally.

It is recommended with regard to tables 12,13 and 14 that a youth oriented crime prevention programme be formulated focussing specifically on educational and awareness campaigns, which will help in changing negative views held on shop theft.

With regard to tables 15 and 16 the researcher recommends the development of extracurricular activities in schools as a measure of limiting the opportunities for the commission of shop theft. This will minimise the level of involvement of young people in youth misconduct. Further research is needed with regard specifically to table 16 outcomes.

With regard to tables 17,18 and 19 it is recommended that Criminology as a subject be taught in schools, addressing the crime, its causes, implications, prevention and control of it. The researcher recommends that shop theft educational and public awareness campaigns to be intensified in schools, developing shop theft programmes, designing booklets, pamphlets on shop theft and the serious implications for committing it. Such programmes will enlighten people on shop theft as a criminal offence punishable by law.

Tables 20, 21, 22 and 23 necessitated the development of Anti-Shop Theft programmes. The emphasis should be on condemning the stealing of goods irrespective of the monetary value attached to them. The school has a potential role to play in this regard, during guidance classes and with the support of business in compiling booklets and pamphlets on shop theft.

With regard to tables 24 and 25 the researcher recommends the establishment of a Shoplifter Offender Program to be initiated for both the potential and prosecuted shop theft offenders. Such a program should be developed along the lines of Alcoholic Anonymous, as a self help group in finding out about their primary motivation for stealing and the consequences they have confronted with.

The researcher with regard to tables 26 and 27 recommends that a school based delinquency prevention programme among the youth be established. Such programmes should use positive social behaviour whereby they will have control over themselves and use refusal skills techniques as a mechanism of solving problems.

As far as table 28 was concerned, on the length to be spent in prison the researcher recommends that there is a need for further research to explore with regard to some agreement between females and males on certain duration for shop theft offenders.

7.4 AREAS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

The researcher is of the opinion, upon the completion of this research work, that a number of shop theft areas require an in-depth research undertaking in the future, which will indeed be meaningful for shop theft aspects that are not covered in this investigation. The areas that require attention are:

- * an empirical research regarding the comprehensive typology of shop theft offenders,
- * elderly peoples= perceptions with regard to shop theft problems,
- * convicted shop theft offenders explanations of shop theft in their own words and its implications,
- * retailers= reluctance to prosecute shop theft offenders,
- * shop theft: the misunderstood crime, myths and misconceptions,
- * perceptions regarding employee theft (theft by store personnel) in South Africa,

- * the recently proposed regulations on shopping bags and the extent of shop theft.

7.5 Conclusion

Shop theft is a significant social problem with acute effects, appraised in terms of the economic value and the amount of human grief it manifests. Theft from stores is generally an opportunistic crime committed by people from all backgrounds for diverse reasons. It is also a type of criminal behaviour that is usually exhibited when an individual or group of people pretend to be legitimate customers and enter the stores with the intention to illegally appropriate merchandise.

It is argued that this research has made a start, and provided new information for the complex topic of shop theft. There are, however, several opportunities for more advanced investigation, which may provide meaningful information to minimise the occurrences of shop theft. The various negative views people subscribe to are harmful to business, the economy, the criminal justice system and the community at large and create an unfavourable environment for businesses to flourish in, and merchandise prices continue to soar and everybody pays.

The use of inaugurated programmes is identified as a primary objective by this particular research project. Appropriate crime prevention programmes must be developed and will be of significant value to reinforce positive perceptions regarding shop theft. Educational and public awareness crime prevention programmes are essential, because they are specifically directed at the psychological deterrence and attempt to eliminate shoplifters' feelings of self-confidence.

It is apparent, from the research findings, that, to some people, shop theft is a rather serious crime and not an insignificant offence, which is more prevalent amongst young

people and viewed less seriously by boys than girls. The recommendations that were made are significant, in the sense that appropriate crime reduction measures will add value and change the negative perceptions regarding shop theft in South Africa. From this research study it is also evident that shop theft is a serious crime confronting South Africa, It is therefore imperative to conduct research on shop theft on an ongoing basis.