

English summary

Robberies in shops and stores

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In order to generate effective measures against shop robberies, it is necessary to have reliable information relating to crimes of this kind. To date, the available knowledge on shop robberies remains relatively limited.

The principle objective of the current study has been to improve knowledge on robberies of shops and stores. The study has been restricted primarily to illuminating a number of factors relating to the crime situation and the objects of these offences, but it also focuses on providing a description of the perpetrators of shop robberies. The research is based on information drawn from crime reports relating to robberies of shops and stores from the year 2000. On the basis of these reports, a sample of "genuine" shop robberies has been identified. This has meant excluding from the study so-called "resistance" robberies, i.e. robberies that have arisen as a result of an intervention against theft or shoplifting.

The risk of being robbed is low

In the year 2000, the Swedish retail trade included slightly over 68,000 retail outlets. In relation to the approximately 588 "genuine" shop robberies reported over the course of the year, this means that slightly under one shop in a hundred was robbed. The general risk (i.e. the probability) of a shop being robbed can thus be regarded as relatively low. By contrast, the risk that a shop that has already been robbed will be robbed again is substantially higher. The likelihood of a repeat robbery

during the same calendar year lies at almost one in ten, and within a three year period, there is a twenty per cent risk. The risk of a shop being robbed also varies depending on the region and tends to be higher in urban areas. In the metropolitan counties, the risk of being robbed is about twice as great as that across the country as a whole.

Video stores run the greatest risk

Almost 70 per cent of all shop robberies in the year 2000 affected two retail branches, namely grocery stores and confectioners/tobacconists. Focusing on the branch-specific risk for being robbed, however, gives a somewhat different picture. If the number of robberies is related to the number of stores in a particular branch, video stores emerge as those at greatest risk of being robbed. The general risk of experiencing a robbery over the course of a year in this particular retail sector lies at just over 6 per cent. The group lying in second place behind the video stores includes grocery stores, tobacconists/confectioners and watchmaker's shops, with a risk level of between 3.5 and 3.9 per cent. This means that a little over one shop in thirty will experience a robbery over the course of a year. The watchmaker's shops are distinctive within this high risk group, since they comprise a relatively small category that experienced only 15 robberies during the year 2000. This particular branch is also particularly hard hit financially when exposed to robbery.

A third group, with a somewhat lower level of risk compared to the two groups mentioned above, comprises petrol stations and departments stores and supermarkets. It may seem strange that stores in this last category should experience so many robberies, given that they constitute a risky target for robbery attempts. In such cases, however, it is usually a question of so-called office robberies, which usually take place after the store has closed to the public.

Jewellers stand alone as the branch with the fourth highest risk for robbery. The general risk for shops in this sector lies at 1.1 per cent. In all other categories of shops and stores, the risk of exposure to robbery lies well below one per cent.

Lone shop-workers and staying open late may increase the risk for robbery

Shop robberies are heavily concentrated to the latter part of the day. The reason for this concentration is probably that many perpetrators prefer to carry out robberies when there are few people moving about in and around the shop, which is often the case during the evening and at night.

The presence of shop staff who work alone are another factor that can be assumed to affect the robber's choice of shop, and thereby the level of exposure to shop robbery. The survey indicates that a majority, 66 per cent of shop robberies are perpetrated against stores manned by a single member

of staff. Approximately half of these, i.e. one-third of the total number of shop robberies, took place in the evening or at night.

The value of the proceeds is not a decisive factor

The distribution of shop robberies across different branches of the retail trade suggests that the majority of shop robbers are less inclined to calculate the likely proceeds from such a robbery, and instead choose a shop that appears to be relatively easy to rob. On average (median), the value of the proceeds from shop robberies during the year 2000, taking both cash and other goods into account, was 5,000 SEK (approx. 550 EUR). The level of missing data relating to the value of the proceeds from robbery is relatively high, however, and the actual median value may be assumed to be much lower than this figure. The value varies greatly from one robbery to another, however, and the proceeds from certain robberies may therefore be much greater. In one robbery in ten, the robbers made away with cash or goods to the value of 100,000 SEK (approx. 11,000 EUR), and in three cases, the proceeds exceeded one million SEK.

Firearms are common

In the great majority of cases of shop robbery (86 per cent), the perpetrator had armed himself with some form of weapon to use as a threat. Firearms are the most common type of weapon, appearing in almost half of the robberies (44 per cent). It is however rare for such a firearm actually to be discharged. One noteworthy fact is that firearms are more common among young people than they are among older perpetrators with a longer criminal record. This is particularly noticeable among the youngest robbers, i.e. those in the age group fifteen to seventeen years. In addition, there has been a substantial increase in the use of firearms over the years. During the 1980s, firearms were employed on average in slightly under one-quarter of shop robberies. The corresponding figure for the 1990s was an average of 39 per cent.

Physical violence in one in three shop robberies

The use of physical violence is relatively common in connection with shop robberies. In almost one third of cases, the police report indicated that the perpetrator had used physical violence against the staff or other persons present in the shop. In a small number of cases, the violence arose in connection with shop staff acting to attempt to prevent the robbery.

Injuries to the robbery victim as a result of this violence occur only in one in six cases of shop robbery, however. For the most part, these physical injuries were of a minor nature and involved slight bruising, swelling, bumps and minor cuts and scratch wounds that did not require medical attention.

Perpetrators are relatively young

Shop robbery may be described as a young person's crime in the sense that a large proportion of the perpetrators are youths (persons aged between fifteen and twenty years). Of those suspected in connection with shop robberies in 2000, almost half (48 per cent) were youths. The corresponding proportion of youths among those suspected across all offence types lies at 25 per cent. Since the crime of shop robbery is relatively unusual, however, the number of youths who engage in shop robberies is nonetheless very small.

The proportion of those suspected for shop robberies with nine or more previous convictions is approximately five times as great as among convicted persons in general, constituting almost 30 per cent of those suspected of this type of offence in the year 2000. Thus among those committing shop robberies we find a substantial group of individuals with an extensive criminal record.

Protective measures should be focused on high-risk stores

One general strategy for reducing the number of shop robberies in a cost-effective fashion would be to focus various protective measures on high-risk stores. The survey shows that whilst the risk of being robbed remains slight for the majority of shops, this risk is substantially greater for certain categories of shops and stores and in particular for video stores, tobacconists/confectioners, grocery stores and petrol stations. Staying open late – into the evening or at night – as well as the presence of shop staff working alone, are possible contributory factors to the victimisation of these outlets. But there is also reason to suspect that many of these shops and stores have a generally low level of security. A general strategy for preventing robberies – and robberies of shop-takings in particular, which constitute the vast majority of such crimes – should therefore involve further attempts at specifying which stores run a high risk of being robbed, so that they can be targeted with focused measures in the form of robbery prevention information and improved security. Using the findings from the current study as to which stores are at risk for robbery, for example, one might go further and identify geographical victimisation patterns in order to isolate a relatively small high-risk group. Today, many local authorities have local crime prevention councils that might constitute a natural base for the implementation of such a strategy. One should even make use of information relating to whether stores have been robbed previously, since this may be regarded as an indicator that a specific store is at risk. Shops that have already been robbed also run an increased risk of being robbed again, which makes it particularly important to introduce anti-robbery measures in just these stores.