

Risk Factors of Larceny-Theft

Summary of Key Factors: Public transportation and public transportation stations; Areas of tourism; Restaurants, bars, and nightclubs; Shopping centers and malls; Parking lots; Bicycle-parking facilities; Apartment yards, parks, fields, and playgrounds; Schools and school property; Goods sold; Proximity to pawnshops and markets for stolen goods

Aim: To assist analysts with the identification of risk factors for the production of risk terrain maps. Specifically, this brief provides an annotated review of the factors related to larceny/theft and the settings and times for which some factors may be most relevant. This information should be especially useful to help choose a time period for creating risk terrain maps (i.e., Step 3), to identify aggravating and mitigating risk factors to include in your risk terrain model (i.e., Steps 5 and 6), and to inform the operationalization of your risk factors to risk map layers (i.e., Step 7).ⁱ

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Operational Definition

For the purpose of this research brief, larceny-theft is defined as “the unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another.”ⁱⁱ Larceny-theft includes bicycle theft, theft of motor vehicle parts and accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, purse snatching, and the stealing or attempted stealing of any property that is not taken by force, violence, or fraud.ⁱⁱⁱ

Aggravating/Mitigating Risk Factors Based on a Review of Empirical Literature

Public Transportation and Public Transportation Stations

Modes of public transportation and public transportation stations are conducive to theft because of overcrowding, limited visibility, a general lack of supervision, admissibility to all who pay a small entrance fee, and easily predicted behavior of potential victims for offenders to anticipate.^{iv}

Areas of Tourism

Tourists are profitable targets because they typically carry large amounts of money and other valuables. As tourists are on vacation they are characteristically more relaxed and off guard making them more vulnerable. Tourists are also less likely to report victimization or testify against

perpetrators in order to avoid further problems or a return trip to the area.^v

Restaurants, Bars, and Nightclubs

Establishments such as restaurants, bars, and nightclubs are considered high-risk facilities for larceny-theft. Restaurants, bars, and nightclubs are at high-risk because of their density for theft opportunities, patron’s leaving their personal belongings unattended or at a considerable distance away from their person due to a lack of storage areas, the divided attention of the patrons due to noise, social interaction, dancing, or the consumption of alcohol, and a high population turnover that allows offenders to go unnoticed. Facilities with sufficient storage areas were associated with less theft.^{vi}

Shopping Centers and Malls

Shopping centers, especially those that are busy with a large number of customers, have higher rates of shoplifting. Shopping centers with their storefronts on the open-street attract more shoplifters than enclosed malls due to the greater opportunity to escape. Specific stores are at greater risk if they have many exits, exits that can be accessed without bypassing checkout, high displays that conceal customers, crowded areas around displays, restrooms or changing rooms, a high volume of items on the floor and near entrances, and blind areas that cannot be surveilled by staff.^{vii}

Parking Lots

In 2009, 9.0% of larceny-theft involved the stealing of motor vehicle accessories, and 27.3% involved the stealing of property from motor vehicles excluding motor vehicle accessories.^{viii} Large parking lots experience a considerable number of thefts from vehicles. In addition to the size of the parking lot, lots which contained cars parked for longer periods of time, lots that were open for a higher number of days, lots with unregulated access and limited or no security patrols, lots with multiple exit sites, and proximity to major roadways were increasingly susceptible to theft from autos. Such lots may include those designated for commuters, those located near large retail stores, shopping centers and malls, and those located at schools or universities.^{ix} Parking lots with attendants, improved lighting, limited access to pedestrians, electronic access systems, perimeter security, CCTV systems, and locations near other commercial building which provide natural surveillance are less likely to experience high rates of theft from vehicles.^x

Bicycle-Parking Facilities

In 2009, 3.4% of larceny-theft offenses involved the stealing of bicycles. Bicycle-parking facilities at public transportation stations, university campuses, recreational facilities, and shopping areas are may be targeted for theft. The use of locks, proper locking practices, improved parking equipment, and increased guardianship through the use of security guards and surveillance techniques are mitigators of bicycle-theft from parking facilities.^{xi}

Apartment Yards, Parks, Fields, and Playgrounds

In 2007, 7.8% of pocket picking and purse snatching offenses occurred in apartment yards, parks, fields, or playgrounds.^{xii}

Schools and School Property

In 2007, 9.0% of pocket picking and purse snatching offenses occurred inside school buildings or on school property.^{xiii}

Goods Sold

The most popular merchandise shoplifted from stores is concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable (able to be sold or bartered for money). Such merchandise includes tobacco products, health and beauty products, recorded music and videos, and clothing and apparel, especially those with designer labels.^{xiv}

Proximity to Pawnshops and Markets for Stolen Goods

Stolen goods are typically sold within 30 minutes of their theft in local markets for stolen goods, including pawnshops.^{xv}

Setting Effects

Areas of high drug use and drug dealing may experience higher levels of larceny-theft as some of the most prolific offenders of larceny-theft are drug users who sell and barter stolen items for drugs or money to buy drugs.^{xvi}

Neighborhoods or communities of low socioeconomic status are more likely to experience property crime. Households whose occupants earn less than \$7,500 cumulatively per year are the most likely to experience property crime.^{xvii}

Areas with high levels of tourist activity are also more likely to experience larceny-theft as tourists are high-risk victims for their lack of security concern and large amount of valuables carried on their person.^{xviii}

Temporal Differences

Thefts on modes of public transportation and in public transportations occur more frequently during morning and evening rush hours as well as from midnight to 6 am where sleeping or intoxicated passengers are targeted.^{xix}

Bicycle theft typically peaks during the summer months of June, July, and August. The rate of bicycle theft at a particular location can also be impacted by other factors, such as the start of a school semester.^{xx}

Most shoplifting occurs during when stores are at their busiest including times during the latter half of the week (between Wednesday and Saturday), during seasonal shopping rushes (pre-Easter, pre-summer, and pre-Christmas times), and as juveniles commit a considerable amount of shoplifting, during times such as non-school days, late mornings, and afternoons into the evening.^{xxi}

Endnotes

ⁱ For steps of risk terrain map production, download the RTM Manual at www.riskterrainmodeling.com

ⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

ⁱⁱⁱ U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.

^{iv} Smith, M. J., & Clarke, R. V. (2000). Crime and public transport. In R. Clarke (Ed.), *Crime and Justice: A Review of Research* (pp. 169-234). Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press.

^v Glensor, R. W., & Peak, K. J. (2004). *Crimes against tourists*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

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- vii Clarke, R. V. (2002). *Shoplifting*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.
- viii U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation (2010). *Crime in the United States 2009*. Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- ix Sampson, R. (2004). *Theft of and from autos in parking facilities in Chula Vista California: A final report to the U.S. Department of Justice*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services on the Field Applications of the Problem-Oriented Guides for Police Project.
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- xviii Glensor, R. W., & Peak, K. J. (2004). *Crimes against tourists*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.
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