Stealing on the job: Opportunities afforded by specialized access

Nerea Marteache, Ph.D., Kayla Arroyo, Erin Berk, Megan Chiatovich, Alison Lugo

EMPLOYEE THEFT IN THE LITERATURE

Prevalent:
- Accounts for 39% of retail inventory shrinkage
- $48.1 billion dollar loss per year
- 25-50% of employees with easy access to cash and hot products steal


Difficult to estimate and to study in depth:
1. Lack of agreement on definition and classification
2. Theoretical approach has not included opportunity theories
3. Lack of data → Underreporting, informal consequences, classification issues

THIS STUDY

Goal:
To understand the opportunity structure of theft by employees in different types of jobs, and the relationship between types of duties and opportunities.

How challenges are addressed:
1. Definition: Crimes of Specialized Access (Felson & Eckert 2015)
2. Opportunity theories: RAT, RCT
3. "Inside" information obtained by employees trained in opportunity theories

DATA

Participants
- 110 college students enrolled in Environmental Crime Prevention
- Class assignment 1: identify theft opportunities at their jobs
- Class assignment 2: crime prevention measures (future analysis)

Descriptives
→ Median age = 24
→ 42.7% male
→ 76.7% work part time
→ 61.7% have worked at that job for over a year

"Empirical research is needed to teach us how each occupation provides access to crime opportunities. Which positions handle money? How much and in what form? Exactly what jobs have access to computer accounts, files, keys, passwords, or confidential information? [...]"

Research needs to answer four basic questions:
- Exactly what did the specialized-access offender do?
- Were there co-offenders?
- Who were the victims?
- How did specialized access make the crime possible?"

Felson & Eckert 2015, Crime and Everyday Life, p. 175

Would you need an accomplice?

Who would be the victim/s?

Victim of the theft %
Employer 70.5
Clients 21.7
Coworkers 22.6
Other 1.5

Percentages do not add up to 100% because some thefts affect more than one type of victim

What would you steal?

Manager
Retail Sales Associate
Finance
Amusement & Rec. Attendants
Clerk-Retail
Protection & Investigation
Waiter/Waitress/Hostess
Education
Office Clerk
Cook
Cashier-Food
Warehouse Associate
Construction, Prodn. & Maint.

Money
Food
Electronics
Clothing, jewelry, personal use
Office/warehouse items
Personal information
Parking, gasoline, cigarettes
Other

How exactly would you do it?