

# An examination of situational crime prevention strategies across convenience stor...

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This study compares situational crime prevention (SCP) strategies against robberies of convenience stores with SCP strategies used against crimes committed in fast food restaurants in and found that crime control strategies used against convenience stores cannot be applied with success to prevent robberies in fast-food restaurants. In fact, many of the target-hardening strategies documented were shown to have no significant effect on the prevention of crime in either type of industry, and those that were found to be useful in one industry tended not to work on the other. Thus, SCP schemes are truly situational and cannot be applied with success to prevent crime across industries.

The revenue from convenience stores rose to \$568 billion in 2006, and with it, the rate of crime against convenience stores. The rate of robberies against this industry more than doubled in the past three decades to reach a record of nearly 150, 000 robberies in 2007, so it is natural that criminologist should turn their attention to the prevention of crime against this industry. However, the prevention of crimes against fast-food restaurants has gone largely ignored by criminologists despite the fact that there are twice as many fast-food restaurants than convenience stores with a significantly larger customer base. Criminologists use some of the SCP strategies developed to fight crime in convenience stores to combat crime in fast-food restaurants even though there are fundamental environmental and procedural differences between the two industries, and even despite the fact that criminologists know that even within the convenience store industry, different SCP strategies must be

applied according to the situation. The following section analyzes some of the various strategies.

### **SCP, Hot Spots/Dots, and Risky Facilities**

Criminologists rely on the evaluation of factors such as opportunity, routine activity and the environment of the crime target to develop their SCP strategies, as well as on crime pattern theories. Crime is largely dependent on the nature of the offender, the victims, location of the establishment, and the products sold. Understanding the interaction between these factors can help predict the probability of a crime and in turn help prevent the commission of the crime.

### **Robbery of Convenience Stores and Service Stations**

Convenience stores and gas stations are at the highest risk of becoming the targets of crimes, most of which involve a quick “hit and run” type of robbery. Convenience stores and gas stations are designed for quick access, are often located in remote areas, and are open at late hours, all of which make them vulnerable to crime.

### **Establishment Vulnerability and Repeat Victimization**

The majority of these establishments remain crime free. The statistics are driven by a number of convenience stores and gas stations that for a variety of reasons become the targets of a series of crimes; some because they are located in a hot spot of crime, others due to the lack of crime prevention strategies or the money to implement them. Furthermore, this type of crime is an impulse driven crime that relies on opportunity, which attracts young

men in need of a quick source of thrill or money for drugs with little change of their getting caught.

## **Analysis of the Study**

### **Dependent and Independent Variables**

This study evaluated 321 fast-food restaurants, 295 convenience stores connected to gas stations, and 28 convenience store-gas station establishments with attached fast-food restaurants located in Charlotte or Mecklenburg, North Carolina. The dependent variable was whether the establishment had or had not been robbed. The independent variables included operating procedures, including environmental design, target-hardening strategies, history of victimization, and census data.

## **Procedures**

An officer from each Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) district was assigned to collect data from each of the target facilities to be evaluated in this study. The data collection process was standardized by holding a collective training session with all the participant CMPD officers.

## **Results**

Environmental design. There was wide variation according to environmental design. Convenience stores that had pay phones and that kept smaller amounts of cash in the register were more likely to be targeted.

Target hardening. Fast-food restaurants with a drop safe had a higher change of being robbed, whereas those with an alarm had a lower chance.

Control variables. For either business type, the best predictor of robbery in the current year was the occurrence of a robbery in the past year.

## **Conclusion**

Fundamental environmental and procedural differences between fast-food restaurants and convenience stores preclude the application of SCP strategies that are used to combat crime in convenience stores to prevent the same type of crime in fast-food restaurants.

## **References**

Exum ML, Kuhns JB, Koch B & Johnson C, 2010. An examination of situational crime prevention strategies across convenience stores and fast-food restaurants. *Criminal Justice Policy Review*, 21(3) 269 –295. Access at <http://cjp.sagepub.com/content/21/3/269>