Understanding Bag Theft Within Licensed Premises in Westminster: Identifying Initial Steps Towards Prevention

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Research into crime within licensed premises has so far concentrated on violence and assault. However, with the push towards 24-h cities currently being seen in the U.K., it is important to examine the additional role pubs and bars play in generating offences such as theft. This paper presents the results of a micro-level study conducted on licensed premises with the London Borough of Westminster. The results show that theft represents a significant threat to patrons and that theft in bars tends to be unevenly distributed across venues. More detailed analyses show that bags are the most commonly items targeted and that patrons perceptions of risky locations within a bar are not always accurate.
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Introduction

Worldwide, 24-h cities are growing phenomena. In the USA, Las Vegas, New York, Washington, Chicago, Boston and San Francisco are revered as cities that never sleep (Miller, 2003). As cities throughout England and Wales follow suite and step ever closer towards becoming 24-h cities, the crime implications linked to becoming 24-h businesses are substantial. Although business crime does receive attention in criminology, commercial victimization surveys have tended to focus on losses borne by businesses and by those who work in them and have examined only a limited range of business types (e.g. the Commercial Victimisation Survey, 2002). When discussing becoming 24-h cities, arguably one of the most effected businesses are licensed premises. As licensing laws evolve to remove opening hour restrictions for city-centre bars and pubs, a dialogue has emerged surrounding the effects of such changes. Within this dialogue the focus has mainly been on how 24h opening will cause problems for local residents (Open All Hours? Campaign, 2002; Roberts and Turner, 2005) and has largely ignored ways in which 24-h cities may generate 24-h victims. As pubs and bars increase their opening hours, it can be hypothesized that patrons are going to be available as potential victims for longer periods of time (Association of British Insurers). As we shift towards non-stop cities and highlight ourselves as potential victims for an increasing

proportion of the day, prevention methods must become intrinsic to this new social lifestyle:

> being out-and-about at night is an anthropogenic addition to nature's ways, and it is now thus a responsibility of environmental designers to ensure that this can happen in safety and without trepidation (Samuel, 2001).

In the United Kingdom, perhaps more so than other European countries, "public house culture" is an ever-increasing phenomena in terms of both popularity and business (Jackson *et al.*, 2000). In terms of criminogenic characteristics, licensed premises have the clear potential to both generate crime, as large numbers of people congregate within them, and to attract crime as offenders will quickly learn about venues which offer good opportunities for crime with acceptable risks of detection (see Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) for more on crime generators and attractors). In contrast to other types of locations at which people congregate, alcohol can play a contributory role in enhancing victimization risk, lowering victims awareness of security, and potentially reducing offender's perceptions of risk or their consideration of it.

The relationships between disorder, crime and alcohol have been widely researched and represent a complex and multifaceted set of interactions (Ensor and Godfrey, 1993; Day *et al.*, 2003; Richardson and Budd, 2003). Several themes have emerged demonstrating associations between alcohol and assault (Mattinson, 2001); alcohol and burglary (Bennett and Wright, 1984); and alcohol and domestic violence (Leonard, 2001). Thus, intuitively licensed premises may be considered as what Clarke and Eck (2003) refer to as "risky facilities", places where the risk of crime is elevated. However, there is a paucity of research concerned with the extent and nature of acquisitive crime such as theft in alcohol-selling venues and thus further research is required. Unanswered questions include those as simple as "what is the extent of theft in bars?" and "is there a favoured Modus Operandi?" Thus, with a view to understanding the problem and consequently generating ideas for its prevention, the current paper examines the problem of theft in more detail within licensed premises within one area of London (UK). In what follows, police recorded crime data and survey data are analysed to explore the problems experienced across bars within the area, and for one chain of bars in particular. By using a chain of bars, we were able to control to some degree for confounding variables such as security procedures, layout and type of clientele when making inter-bar comparisons. Naturally, this restricts the generalizability of the findings to other bars, an issue that is re-visited in the conclusions to this paper. The analysis is subsequently extended using a micro-level analysis for two bars with high concentrations of crime. Before discussing the analyses, the focus of this article will turn to look at why licensed premises offer potential for criminality.

Bars as "risky facilities"

Intrinsic to crime pattern theory (e.g. Brantingham and Brantingham, 1995) is the belief that criminal acts are not random, unpredictable events. Instead, a level of bounded rationality on the part of the offender (Becker, 1976; Cornish and Clarke, 1986) is assumed to apply just as in all other decision-making. When committing a crime, where the potential risks

and rewards are perhaps the most important elements to rationalize, there are three "almost always" elements (Felson, 2002):

- A likely offender;
- A suitable target;
- The absence of a capable guardian against the offence.

The function, locations and clientele of many licensed venues arguably draw together some or all of these factors and provide a context for crime and disorder problems. While violence has been the most widely researched offence in relation to licensed premises, theft offences amount to a considerable proportion of crime within pubs and bars (roughly 20,000 offences per year in Westminster (Metropolitan Police figures)). The lack of research may in part be due to the difficulties associated with generating and extracting data about such a loosely defined problem. "Bag theft" is not a police crime category and thus the process of extracting police data involves pulling out data for all theft crimes across all licensed premises. There is then the laborious task of cleaning location data to synchronize "Weatherspoons, 5 High Street, Margate" and "Margate High Street, Weatherspoons", for example, a police recorded crime data issue widely discussed within the literature (Read and Oldfield, 1995; Sampson and Phillips, 1995).

City bars and restaurants, typically located in busy, multi-purpose, urban areas, are at risk from being target locations for theft and robbery (Steventon, 1996). Unlike a local public house for instance, perhaps located in a residential area, patrons of town centre bars are often a younger, less stable population. Office workers, shoppers and tourists are likely naturally drawn from where they reside into town centres, and thus licensed premises, bringing anonymity between individuals, multiple "sets" of people with little or no relationship between them. As such, there is little cohesion or community territoriality among patrons, reducing any self-policing by patrons and hence the rewards of committing crime within this environment may outweigh the perceived risks.

In contrast, in other locations, there may exist a defensible space where human territoriality has the potential to operate as a positive group response that may be harnessed for crime prevention (Newman, 1973). For example, research demonstrates that in the wider community where neighbourhoods pull together to respond to crime, this collective efficacy can act as a powerful inhibitor against crime (Hirschfield and Bowers, 1997). Within an urban bar or public house, it is virtually impossible to create such a setting as the customer base is often transitory and made up of disenfranchized groups, gathered for business or pleasure. As such, in bars without cohesion, just as in communities without cohesion (Lee, 2000), it is more difficult to identify strangers or unusual behaviours. A venue that contains a transitory population may also have a lack of unofficial "place managers" (Clarke, ??) to monitor behaviour and therefore guard against crime. This anonymity creates a suitable setting for criminality, particularly theft. In a setting where anonymity between patrons is the norm, cooperation and interaction is dampened creating a more accessible environment for an offence to be committed without inception or detection (Coleman, 1985).

In addition, offenders may favour such venues because the promise of reward is high. Handbags on the floor, laptops left propped against the wall, and mobile telephones left on tables ensure that the potential yield from any one venue is sizeable. The items available

in bars typically have the features summarized by the acronym CRAVED being conceal-able, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable and disposable (Clarke, 1999). Cash, credit cards, mobile phones and desirable electronic equipment, which can quickly be converted into hard currency are good examples of CRAVED items. CRAVED items are popular with offenders because they commonly deliver the greatest rewards for minimal effort (e.g. Well-smith and Burrell, 2005). Many of the items that patrons to licensed venues carry with them conform to this acronym further increasing what Felson (2002) refers to as the "chemistry for crime" at these locations.

However, as will become evident in the sections that follow, not all bars experience the same levels of victimization. This is, of course, in line with the findings for other types of crime such as burglary for which repeat victimisation at the same property accounts for a large proportion of the total volume of crime (e.g. Johnson *et al.*, 1997; Pease, 1998; Eck *et al*., 2005). Thus, crime tends to be concentrated. Moreover, research demonstrates that the manipulation of situational factors at these repeat locations, such as more secure "access control" and improved "natural surveillance" as well as simple target hardening of locks and bolts, can have a substantial impact on crime without displacement of the problem else-where (e.g. Forrester *et al*., 1998; Bowers *et al*., 2004).

In relation to crime at licensed premises, it is plausible that some venues will experience more crimes than others and experience *chronic* repeat victimization, whereby the venue is targeted on multiple occasions for a sustained period of time. One reason for anticipating this is that in the absence of intervention, and particularly where established popular venues are concerned, the factors that combine to make a venue particularly attractive to offenders are likely to remain static over time. For instance, the locations of venues do not change, nor is it likely that the clientele that frequent them (or the typical characteristics of them, for example, regulars, tourists, and so on) and hence the potential victim profile will fluctuate to any great degree (at least, while the business remains in the same hands). The implication of an affirmative finding demonstrating fairly long-term chronic victimization would be that the manipulation of situational factors within licensed premises may well represent the most pragmatic and sustainable solution to crime reduction in this context.

In what has been discussed so far, crime risks have been considered between different locations. Of course, within a single licensed venue, there usually are a variety of places a customer can sit or stand. Thus, just as crime risks may vary across different venues, there may be differential risks within premises. Intuitively, one might suspect that risks would be greatest nearest the exits of a bar as offenders targeting people or bags at these locations would enjoy the shortest escape routes. However, in the absence of empirical data, such predictions remain speculative. For this reason, data were collected concerning the spatial distribution of crime within one of the bars studied.

Equally interesting is patrons perceptions of risks within bars. If people have an accurate picture of the most risky locations then they may adapt their behaviour accordingly or avoid those locations. If they do not, then it is possible that they may increase their risk of vic-timization unwittingly. Prior research has examined police officer's perceptions of burglary and car crime hotspots (Ratcliffe and McCullagh, 2001) and demonstrates that accuracy varies, being higher for the former than the latter. Work in progress is also exploring the ac-curacy of prison officer's perceptions of risk within the facilities where they work (Rengert and Ratcliffe, 2004). However, no work with which the authors are familiar has examined

differences in perceptions and reality within licensed premises. Thus, a case study is here presented and the implications of the results for crime prevention discussed.

To recapitulate, the aim of this research was to increase understanding of the theft problems that are faced within licensed premises using both recorded crime data and a micro-level analysis. Focus is particularly on "bag theft", a problem that is rarely examined in isolation and has received very little attention in the literature and, with a view to informing crime prevention, the central aims of the paper are to explore the extent of the problem, whether it is concentrated at certain locations, what types of items are targeted and how crimes are committed.

Methodology

The Metropolitan Police provided recorded crime data on all theft offences within all licensed premises in the London Borough of Westminster, U.K. These were extracted using a Modus Operandi field, which identified the place of offences as being a licensed premises. These data covered a period of slightly more than 5 years (1st January 2000 to 31st March 2005). Each record included data on the time, date and location of the offence, details of the Modus Operandi and the nature of the property stolen. In addition to focusing on problems within Westminster bars as a collective, a more detailed analysis was conducted for nine Westminster venues of a prominent national chain of bars.[1]

When using recorded crime data here are inherent problems associated, not least the issue of underreporting and under recording. The BCS 2004/5 indicates that only 32 per cent of theft person offences are reported to the police, of which on average, 63 per cent will be recorded by the police and make it to the figures (British Crime Survey: Comparing BCS estimates and police counts of crime 2004/2004). It was partly because of this that in addition to recorded crime data, primary data were collected from surveys carried out in two of the nine Westminster chain venues over a period of approximately 18 weeks (October 2004–February 2005). Both of these bars were located on busy Westminster streets and had fairly high theft problems, making them more suitable for micro-analysis. Since bag theft is a low-frequency event within each individual bar – using high-risk bars gives a larger sample size when exploring the theft problem. Information was elicited from customers and victims using a number of self-report forms designed by the authors. These were designed to record as many details as possible about the particular circumstance of theft when this happened. This included the location of the victim at the time of the theft, the location from which the bag went missing, the timing of the theft, a record of what was taken and whether the theft would prevent them from returning to the bar in the future. Customer feedback forms, collected during lunchtimes,[2] were used to elicit a snap shot of information about people's perception of risk and preventative behaviour concerning theft (Appendix A). To elaborate, examples of questions asked included: where in the bar do you think you are most

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[1] The chain examined is a popular nationwide company, marketed at professionals aged 21+, as a place for after work drinks and business lunches, as well as a place to meet friends. The environment is contemporary, with large windows and an open layout.

[2] The decision to collect at lunchtimes was made to maximise returns and hence get a representative snapshot of the bar at that time. This succeeded as return rate was close to 100 per cent.

likely to have your bag stolen from?; have you had your bag stolen in the last 12 months?; and, would you like to see more anti-theft measures in bars across London?

Results

Recorded crime analysis

The extent of the bag-theft problem
To examine the magnitude of the problem, a simple count of theft committed in licensed venues per month was derived and is shown as Figure 1. This shows that around 4500 incidents recorded every 3 months in Westminster alone. It also shows that the number of offences was relatively stable between January 2000 and December 2003. During 2004, there was a sustained fall in thefts recorded by the police;[3] nevertheless, over 15,000 incidents still occurred throughout that year.

The results shown in Figure 1 are for the borough of Westminster as a whole. Further analysis of the data revealed differences in risk within the area. Westminster has five police areas and of the 80,786 crimes that had been coded (police data does not always include a region code), West End Central accounted for 41 per cent of thefts within licensed venues, Charing Cross for 29 per cent, Marylebone accounted for 17 per cent, while Paddington's and Belgravia's licensed venues experience the least amount of bag theft with 7 and 6 per cent, respectively. This is perhaps not surprising. For example, West End Central is at the heart of London's tourist district and arguably the busiest in terms of passing population and available victims. Belgravia on the other hand is an affluent area and does not attract the same volume of people or tourists. Nevertheless, this finding illustrates that crime risks in terms of overall volume of the problem is more prominent in some areas than others.

According to the police Licensing team for the area, there are roughly three and a half thousand venues with licenses in Westminster, meaning that the average incidence rate for theft per annum was around 4.2 incidents per venue. On the face of it, this may not seem too problematic. However, as discussed above crime tends to be unevenly distributed, typically being concentrated at a small number of chronically victimized locations. The question here is whether chronic victimization is true for the venues examined.

Bag theft in sample bars
To explore patterns of victimization in more detail, a concentration curve was generated for those nine bars, which belonged to the chain of bars considered here. Figure 2 shows that the concentration of offences across the bars conforms to a J-curve with one of the nine bars accounting for almost 20 per cent of the total number of thefts.

Expressed in a slightly different way, Table 1 compares the annual bag theft rate in the two bars in which the surveys were conducted and compares them to the Westminster and chain average. The tables shows that the Chain venues across Westminster experience a greater concentration of offences than we would expect if every licensed premises in the Westminster area experienced an identical risk of victimization, demonstrating that the

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[3] A fall that the local police put down to a targeted operation that culminated in the arrest and deportation of 20–30 individuals from five "family" crime syndicates.
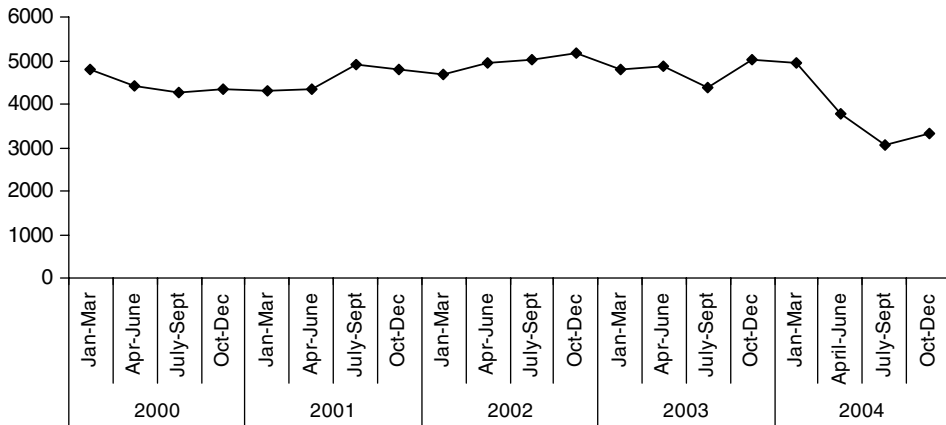
Figure 1. Quarterly time series of theft in licensed venues in Westminster.
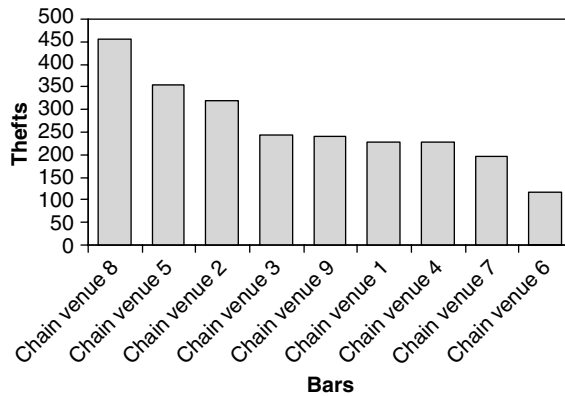

Figure 2. Theft offences across nine Westminster chain bar venues January 2000–March 2005.

chain was a particular target of bag theft. Therefore, not only is the distribution of bag theft throughout bars in Westminster varied, but variation exists within multiple locations of the same chain of bar; there are some types of bar that are particularly high risk and some bars within high-risk chains that are particularly targeted.

Modus operandi – offence differentiation between bars

Having explored the volume and concentration of the problem, the recorded crime data were analysed to see *how* thefts were committed within the bars and how this varied between them. Table 2 shows the method of theft, expressed as one of the four categories recorded by the police. Dipping is also known as pick-pocketing and involves discrete access gained through a pocket or bag while the victim is "wearing" the pocket or bag. In these cases the

Table 1 Incidence and concentration rates for Westminster licensed premises (expressed as an average rate per venue across 75 months)

	Incidents of bag theft Jan 2000–March 2005	No. of venues	Yearly incidence rates
Westminster licensed venues	92,844	3500	4.2
Chain average[a]	2615	12	34.9
Chain venue 8	456	1	73.0
Chain venue 9	242	1	38.7

[a]Average across Westminster venues.

Table 2 Modus Operandi for offences in the Chain's venues across Westminster

	Method					
	Unattended (%)	Dipping (%)	Distraction (%)	Snatched (%)	Unknown (%)	Sample size (n=)
Chain venue 1	55	14	5	3	23	229
Chain venue 2	54	3	**9**	1	33	321
Chain venue 3	**59**	**18**	1	0	22	243
Chain venue 4	53	12	6	0	29	227
Chain venue 5	**61**	**14**	5	2	17	355
Chain venue 6	54	8	**8**	0	30	118
Chain venue 7	56	7	6	2	30	196
Chain venue 8	**61**	6	**10**	1	22	456
Chain venue 9	56	**19**	7	1	17	242
Chain venue average	57	11	6	1	25	265

item is taken quickly, the victim unaware of the offence taking place. In distraction offences, offenders use a ploy to divert the victim's attention away from the offences taking place (e.g. holding up a leaflet of some sort (tube map/begging card) so that the victims property lies behind the leaflet and can be grabbed and taken or making conversation with the victim to gain trust and some time later removing the victims property). In snatch offences, property is taken overtly and the offender hastily exits the premises. Force is often used to pull the property from the victim's grasp. Finally, unattended offences occur when property is removed from a static location while the owner is inattentive or some way away from the owner. This category would include pick-pocketing type offence where the victim *is not* "wearing" the pocket or bag.

Table 2 demonstrates that while offenders tended to favour stealing unattended items, there was statistically significant variation (χ^2=134.5 (32) P<0.0001) in the methods used across various bars within the chain. For example, dipping accounts for only 3 per cent of chain venue 2 whereas in chain venue 9, 20 per cent of all recorded thefts are carried out in this way. In contrast, distraction is far more common in chain venue 8 than in chain venue 3. Understanding the contrasting problems is essential for crime prevention strategies, as the

same intervention may work in some locations but not in others. For example, products that work to secure bags to tables are clearly only suitable when theft problems centre around bags that have been left unattended (on the floor, under a chair) or are snatched. Where theft problems centre around dipping and/or distraction methods, a campaign to increase public awareness may be more appropriate.

Further analyses were conducted for unattended thefts across the Chain's nine Westminster Venues to see what was taken. From the results, shown as Table 3, it is not the contents of bags and briefcases that dominate the table, but instead the handbags themselves. Perhaps, the promise of valuable goods inside the bags attracts the offenders, or perhaps these are easier to steal than single items. Alternatively, the results may reflect the availability of different items. Notwithstanding this latter point, the results demonstrate a preference on the part of offenders for handbags and hence crime prevention interventions should target these items. What we cannot tell from this is whether this indicates that women are more at risk, or whether it simply means that if women are targeted they almost always have their entire handbag taken and that males are the targets for most other items stolen. This question is revisited later.

Self-report thefts forms

As part of the current research, bar staff within two bars were asked to fill in a detailed incident report form whenever a customer reported a theft to them. In reality, this did not always happen and on several occasions staff failed to complete the recording form when a theft was reported to them. This resulted in 36 records across the two bars in an 18-week period. This equates to an average incidence rate of 52 bag thefts per year across the two venues. This is slightly above the chain average displayed as shown in Table 1, but is comparable to the average for the two bars. This section summarizes characteristics of the bag theft problem as indicated by the self-report forms.

Table 3   Breakdown of unattended items that are stolen from within Chain Venues

	Property							
	Handbag (%)	Credit cards/ cash (%)	Other (%)	Mobile phone (%)	Laptop (%)	Sports bag (%)	Briefcase (%)	Sample size (n=)
Chain venue 1	47	17	20	6	5	4	2	229
Chain venue 2	46	33	3	15	2	2	0	321
Chain venue 3	40	20	6	4	19	5	6	243
Chain venue 4	60	13	2	8	11	5	2	227
Chain venue 5	35	22	21	15	2	4	1	355
Chain venue 6	33	35	18	11	2	2	0	118
Chain venue 7	40	25	14	6	15	1	0	196
Chain venue 8	41	18	21	10	5	2	3	456
Chain venue 9	46	16	20	10	3	5	1	242
Average %	43	21	14	9	7	3	2	100

Characteristics of the theft problem

The self-report theft forms allowed a microanalysis of the type of theft problems within the two Westminster bars. Floor plans were included which enabled customers to identify where in the bar the bag was stolen from. In particular, we were able to find out more about the victims of theft in the bars, the timing of incidents, the busyness of the bars when the theft took place and the particular circumstances of the theft.

Victim characteristics

The majority of bag theft victims were between 24 and 40 years of age (66 per cent). There was very little difference in the levels of men and women who were victims (48 and 52 per cent respectively). This is important because where Tables 2 and 3 combine to show that unattended handbag theft is the most prominent single problem and a particular issue for women, this microanalysis may suggest that for much of the remaining theft problem, such as dipping offences or theft of a briefcase or rucksack, for instance, men are the victims. Indeed, the risk for men may be further heightened as the customer survey, offering a lunch-time snap shot of customer base and their views, showed that approximately three quarters of the chains customers were women.

Some of the bag theft problem could stem from risky behaviour of victims, so questions were asked concerning their responses to the incidents. Eighty-five per cent of victims were actually sitting at the time the theft took place. Despite this, the overwhelming majority (89 per cent) did not actually witness the theft taking place, showing that it is an easy crime to undertake unnoticed. Furthermore, many thefts were not immediately noticed: 53 per cent noticed some time later while sat at their table and 35 per cent only noticed when leaving the bar.

One possibility is that certain people act in a way that makes them particularly vulnerable to bag theft. If this is the case, we might expect the same people to be repeat victims of the problem. When questioned, it was established that 10 per cent of victims reported that they *had* previously been a victim of bag theft, suggesting that one in 10 people fall prey to this type of incident at least twice. This rate of repeat victimization is higher than the 2004/5 British Crime Survey (Crime in England and Wales 2004/5) figure for theft person offences (6 per cent) and it would therefore be interesting to establish in future research whether there are any distinct characteristics between those that are repeatedly victimized and those that are not. Lastly, it is important to acknowledge that victimization does have a psychological effect on some people. A valuable point for the bars themselves to note is that 25 per cent of victims declared that they would not return to the bar in the future, and hence planned to change their behaviour following an incident. Assuming that victims of crime would inform their friends, this might also impact upon their likelihood of frequenting a particular bar. Thus, failing to pay adequate attention to crime prevention in bars may deter some people from visiting them, with implications for a venue's revenue.

Crime characteristics

The survey enabled us to establish more about the crime of bag theft itself. In terms of what was taken 54 per cent of thefts were of a Handbag, 20 per cent a Briefcase and 3 per cent of
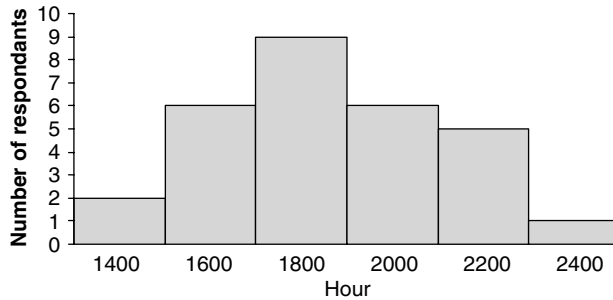
Figure 3. Hour of theft incident.

were of a rucksack. The remaining approximately 20 per cent of thefts involved standalone items such as Mobile Phones, Wallets/Purses and cash. This mirrors the patterns found for the analysis of the recorded crime data.

In terms of the location of bags at the time of theft, items were stolen from one of three places: "On the Floor" (66 per cent); "Over Victims Chair" (19 per cent) and; "On the Table" (16 per cent), demonstrating that the floor is a particularly vulnerable place to leave a bag.

Day of the week showed no particular pattern except to note that data from self-report forms supported data from recorded crime figure for the chains venues across Westminster, which shows significant differences between the days of the week and Wednesday, Thursday and Friday as days with slightly higher volumes (χ^2=25.4 (12), P<0.01).

Figure 3 shows the time of day incidents of theft occurred. The distribution conforms to a fairly normal distribution with greatest risk of theft being around 1800. This early evening high risk within this chain may be because it is the "after-work" customers that the company is particularly marketed at and therefore this may be a busy time, with lots of theft opportunities. A similar pattern is shown using recorded crime date for the Westminster chain venues. In general, an upward trend is seen developing during and after lunchtime, where the number of thefts remain fairly stable between 1300 and 1600, after which number raise sharply and peak between 1800 and 2100 before steadily decreasing. In addition, 67 per cent of offences happened within the first 75 min of a victim entering the bar. Hence, thefts not only took place early on in the evening, they also took place soon after customers arrived. This does not fit in with the stereotypical image of bags being lifted from customers whose level of vigilance has been comprised through many hours of drinking in a bar.

An alternative hypothesis is that offenders target bars when they know that rewards are likely to be high, and risks are potentially lower. The optimal time of day might be when the bar is busy relative to quieter times of the day; hence, the increase in customers equates to an increase the supply of potential victims and an increased stealth. To examine this hypothesis, customers who had experienced a theft were asked to estimate at what capacity the bar was when the theft took place. This indicated that over 80 per cent of thefts take place when the bar is reasonably busy (60 per cent capacity or above). In the city, this is likely to be at the end of the working day (approximately 1800). This indicates that it is possibly easier for offenders to go unnoticed in busy bars. However, the volume of customers might also

impede any attempt to pursue the offender, and limit the potential impact of crime prevention measures, which feature an element of surveillance.

Perceptions of hot locations within the bar

In addition to examining the volume and type of crime in the bars, the locations of the crimes were also analysed for one of the venues. This was done using the data collected from the self-report theft forms. Each form included an architectural plan of the bar and victims were asked to indicate on these where each offence took place. These data were then converted to geographical grid coordinates using a Geographical Information System (GIS). This allowed the data to be mapped and using a technique known as Kernel density estimation (e.g. Bailey and Gatrell, 1995), "hot" locations to be identified.

As a complimentary exercise, patrons surveyed as part of the customer survey were asked to indicate where they believed the risky locations were within the bar. In the customer survey, a sample of 97 customers from one bar were asked about their perceptions of crime and their views on the use and practicality of crime prevention products. The sample was generated by visiting the bar on three consecutive lunchtimes. Everyone in the bar at the time was asked to fill out a survey form, the response rate was 100 per cent. As part of the survey, each customer was asked to identify the three locations within the bar that they believed the risk of victimization was highest.
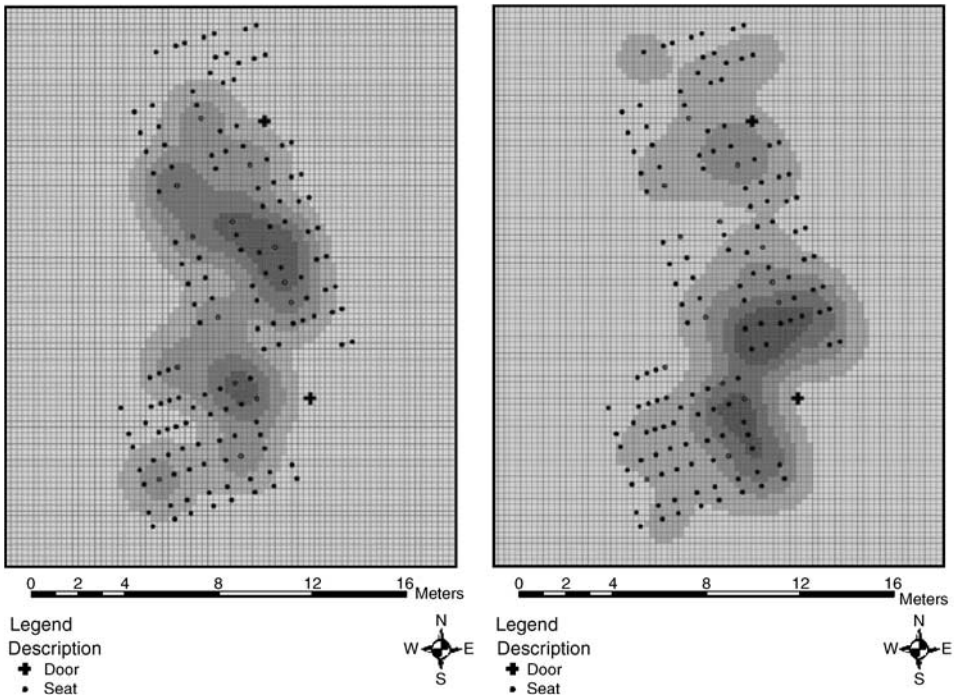

Figure 4. Actual and perceived risk of crime. Actual (*N*=19) and perceived (*N*=97) risk locations within chain venue 8.

As a consequence of this mapping exercise, it was possible to see if customers' perceptions of risky areas within the bars aligned with the actual "hot" locations. The results of this exercise are shown in Figure 4. The two maps are displayed over a simple architectural plan of Chain venue 8 bar, which indicated the positions of seats within the bars (as dots) and where the doors were located (as crosses). They show where crimes actually occurred (the left hand map) and where patrons perceived the risk of crime to be highest (the right hand map), respectively. The areas shaded darkest are those where the risk was actually or perceived to be highest. The results are somewhat similar but there are clear differences. Patrons perceive the risk to be clearly highest around the south door. While there is a concentration of crime in that area, the hottest area is located a little further away, with much of the crime equidistant between the two doors.

Although the crime hotspot map was based on a relatively small number of observations (N=19), it illustrates that people's perceptions of risk within the bar were not entirely consistent with the actual "hot" locations. Nor are they necessarily consistent with what crime reduction practitioners might think. We suggest that the latter would most likely suggest that the tables closest to both of the doors would be at the greatest risk. While this is to some extent correct, it is by no means the complete picture. One explanation for the cluster in the middle is that this part of the bar offers two entry and escape routes.

Conclusions

Despite the fact that bag theft in bars is fairly prevalent crime, it remains a significantly under researched area in the literature. As discussed in the introduction, the move towards 24-h cities and extended opening hours may mean that this figure may soon begin to rise. As lifestyle changes, including extended opening hours, make victims available for longer proportions of the day, it is likely that "some" theft will be seen during every hour the bar is open and therefore hosting victims. What is not so clear, but will begin to emerge over the coming years is how customer behaviour changes as a result of extended opening hours and how this may increase (or indeed decrease) theft occurrences. The aim of the current paper was to begin to generate a better understanding of bag theft within licensed premises.

While this research has attempted an innovative micro analysis of a unique and sizeable problem, a number of key shortcomings are worthy of discussion and remedy in any future research. Firstly, this paper deals almost entirely with volume of theft figures rather than theft rates. For the police, particularly when a large volume of crimes are linked to a particular venue, this is a useful perspective as it helps with operational targeting of limited resources. Generating a rate however would be beneficial to understanding this problem in its entirety. The most interesting way of doing this would be to use estimates of customer patronage of bars, in terms of their numbers and their behaviour concerning length and frequency of visits. These data are notoriously difficult to compile, and hence maybe takings could be used as an estimate of this sort of throughput. However, bars are often sensitive to disclose such information and in this case we were denied access to this information. If similar difficulties were faced in a larger

scale project, then it may be a worthwhile expense to include observation visits to at least allow comment about levels of throughput and patronage in different bars at different times of the day.

Secondly, although bag theft is a sizable problem (roughly 20,000 recorded offences per year in Westminster), actual numbers within even the highest "hit" bars are relatively low, which means some of the sample sizes used above are low. To get around this problem, a longer time period coupled with a number of bars across which to aggregate is needed to generate larger, more robust figures. This would also get around several seasonal fluctuations that make any short-term study vulnerable to confounding variables. In this case, outside pressures from funders dictated a start date for micro analysis that was 3 weeks prior to Christmas. Although it is not felt that this invalidates or jeopardizes findings, it would be useful to study seasonal variation more fully.

Thirdly, there is the issue of the generalizability of these results to other locations and other types of licensed premises. Due to the scope of this project, we were only able to focus on bars within one chain for an in-depth analysis. It is likely that similar chains will encounter similar problems, but it would be useful to examine whether, for example, local neighbourhood pubs experience very different patterns and trends in bag theft. A more general study of this nature would have obvious practical value in terms of recommendations.

There are some characteristics of bag-theft incidents studied in the current research that should be noted. Offenders tend to snatch unattended bags from the floor, at times when the bar is busy and often during the early evening. This has implications for prevention measures, particularly raising customer and staff awareness of hot-times and hot-locations. Also of interest is that both men and women tend to lose bags, but handbags are particularly vulnerable. Currently, there is a peak at 1800, during the early part of the evening and a busy time for the Chain of bars examined in detail here. The extent to which the peak is driven by the flow of people in and out of the bar and the number of available targets might become more apparent if this peak changes with the introduction of the new licensing laws. Commonly, individuals experienced theft fairly soon after they entered the bar, but often the theft went unnoticed for a fairly substantial amount of time. Equally significant is that customers were found to be relatively poor at predicting risk areas within the bars, which means that they might choose risky locations to sit in the mistaken belief that they are safer. An interesting avenue for future research will be to see how perception of risk varies in relation to time of day and the number of people in the bar. It would be surprising if perception of risk was a static measurement and more likely that in varies depending on a number of factors.

Considering what is taken during thefts, offenders appear to favour entire bags, particularly handbags. It is possible, even likely, of course that handbags are targeted on the assumption that they contain multiple "CRAVED" items and can be snatched in one go. The micro study indicated that men and women were equally likely to be victims. Given that handbags are taken in roughly half of all cases, there appears to be some suggestion that for the majority of other items stolen, men are the victims. However, in this research, we did not have gender information attached to recorded crime information so it was not possible to back this up with figures drawn from a larger sample size.

Bag theft and crime prevention

Bag theft within licensed premises currently takes place during all opening hours with a significant peak during early evening. As lifestyle changes, including extended opening hours, make victims available for longer proportions of the day, it is likely that theft patterns will continue is as much as "some" theft will be seen during every hour the bar is open and therefore hosting victims. What is not so clear, but will emerge over the coming years is how customer behaviour changes as a result of extended opening hours and how this may increase, or indeed decrease, theft occurrences. The authors are currently applying for AHRC funding to further this work and of particular interest will be looking to see if and how theft patterns change.

Licensed premises are not homogeneous and victim and crime characteristics are likely to vary. As such, analysis is necessary to identify the particular problems faced. This type of exercise be on the same scale of the current study, but may be achieved by a rapid scoping exercise by bars themselves, perhaps supplemented with advice from crime prevention practitioners.

Evidently, some bars and venues are more at risk in terms of bag theft than others, and identifying them is already taking place within some police forces. In Westminster, the police regularly produce a list of the "worst bars" for the offences and allocate the crime prevention officer accordingly. This is an example of a retrofit solution, where the growth of a problem leads to police intervention and license implications if cooperation with the police is not evident. In Merseyside (Best Bar None 2005), rather than targeting the worst "hit" bars, an incentive scheme operates whereby licensees are advised of their role in the prevention of crime that their venue may generate. If they then go on to act on some or all of this advice, improving their establishment and taking an active role in crime prevention they can apply for creditation. Those given "Best Bar None" status are given plaques to display their award status. Importantly, when crime prevention strategies are being devised, it is important that implementation is well targeted and evidenced based, and the most at risk bars prioritized. This is because risk is not equal and without intervention, chronically victimized bars will typically remain as such.

Analysis of the MO of thefts in bars and particularly for bag theft indicates that items are most frequently taken when they are left unattended or insufficiently secured. Thus, it is possible that simple situational crime prevention methods that offer a way of securing desirable items (such as secure bag hooks on chairs and tables) may offer a cost-effective way of reducing crime in licensed premises. Critical to such measures would be the promotion and awareness raising of them to ensure that they are used, particularly during high-risk times of the day.

Particularly when the problem revolves around handbag and briefcase theft, as seen here, methods that can secure these items and increase the effort and risks associated with theft may be particularly appropriate. In the customer survey, all but one of the 97 people interviewed reported that they would like to see more measures of this kind installed in bars. Such customer support is important when thinking about crime prevention methods that demand a degree of engagement from the user to ensure their effectiveness.

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Appendix A

BAG THEFT PREVENTION MEASURES:
CUSTOMER SURVEY

Dear Customer,

We hope that you have noticed the anti- theft features that have been installed at Regents Street All Bar One for your protection and peace of mind. The fittings on the tables and chairs you can see, and are hopefully using, have been created by Central St Martins Design Against Crime team. The anti-theft chairs and tables give you the customer the facility to dramatically reduce your risk of becoming a theft victim.

In order to maximise this facility and to protect yourself from theft in bars and pubs across London, we ask that you take 2 or 3 minutes to answer some questions.

Jill Dando Institute

1. Date: _____
2. Time: (please circle)   Lunch   Afternoon   Early Evening   Night
3. Gender: (please circle)   Male / Female
4. Age: _____ Yrs

5. Had you noticed the brass anti-theft clips and fittings before reading this survey? (please circle) Yes   No

5b. If yes, what drew your attention to them? (please circle)

Just saw them   *Bar staff pointed them out*   *The publicity within the bar*   Other_____

6. Do you have a bag/laptop case with you today?   (please circle)   Yes   No

7. Are you using the clips today? (please circle)   Yes   No

8. If you are not using the clips, why do you think that is? _____

9. Do you think the clips and fittings are suitable for most bags/ laptop cases? _____   (please circle)   Yes   No

10. Would you like to see similar anti-theft measures across other bars and pubs in London? (please circle)   Yes   No

11. Do you have any further comments about the clips and fittings? For example; the design, comfort, practicality.

_____

_____

12. Have you had your bag stolen in the last 12 months?   (please circle)   Yes   No

13.   Please mark on the map below where you are sitting today.
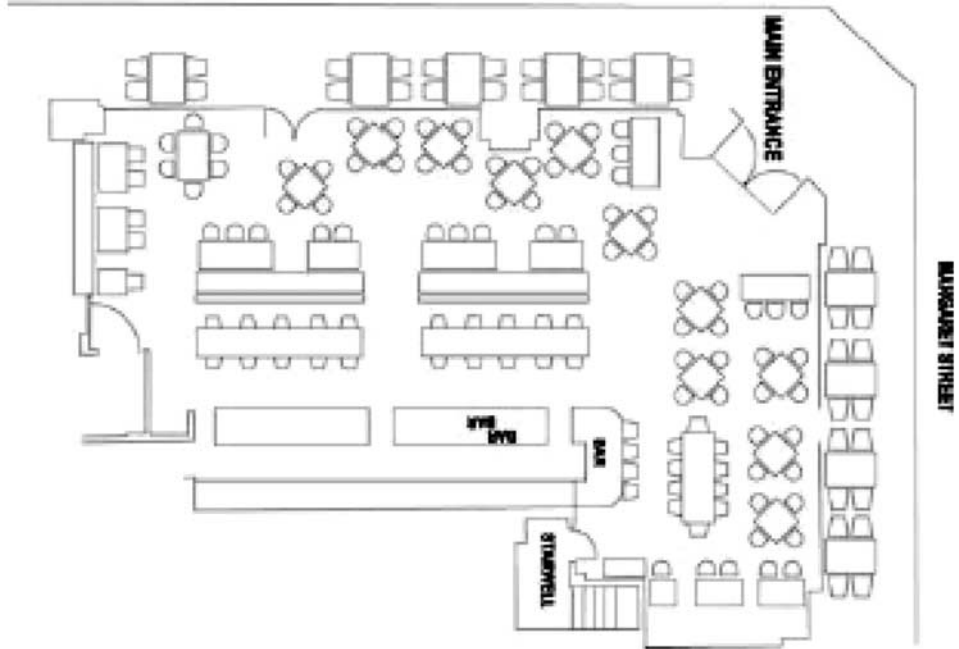
14. Lastly, please mark on the map below, the top three tables that you think individuals would be most likely to have their bag stolen from. Please use an **X** of this size (X)