

THE PREVENTION OF CRIME AGAINST SMALL BUSINESSES: THE SAFER CITIES EXPERIENCE

Police Research Group – Crime Prevention Unit Series Paper No.45
by Nick Tilley

Summary

Drawing on work within the Safer Cities programme, this paper examines first, the vulnerability of small businesses to crime; second, the consequences of crime against business, and third, the effectiveness of some crime prevention schemes which have attempted to reduce the susceptibility of small businesses to certain crimes, most notably commercial burglary.

Producing results which are consistent with the small number of previous studies which have investigated small businesses' experiences of crime, three local Safer Cities business crime surveys have uncovered high rates of victimisation. For example

One study revealed a burglary rate of 30% over the previous year, and another a rate of 50%. The third, looking individually at three main streets, found overall crime rates of 42%, 57% and 65%.

A study looking at recorded commercial burglary in Hartlepool found high rates of re-burglary against businesses. The estimated overall rate of commercial burglary is 22%.

40% of businesses which suffered a first burglary were re-burgled at least once within the following twelve months, and of those which suffered a second burglary 48% suffered a third. It is clear that vulnerability to burglary is very unevenly distributed amongst businesses.

Vulnerability to re-burglary was found to be highest in the first few weeks following an incident.

Safer Cities surveys revealed considerable concern about crime amongst those running small businesses:

One study found that 64% were either very worried or worried about the risk of crime, greatest concern being expressed about burglary and drugs.

In another study 28% saw crime as a 'very big or big problem', with 24% finding it 'a bit of a problem'. There is a shortage of systematic information on the wider impact of crime against businesses.

Safer Cities schemes have most commonly attempted to address the problem of commercial burglary. Some have offered financial support in upgrading the physical security of premises meeting specified criteria across the whole city, while others have focused on particular areas within the city, supporting security upgrading of businesses within them. Some schemes have supported security upgrading alongside other measures also, and some schemes have aimed to facilitate increased co-operation between businesses in an effort to reduce vulnerability.

Security upgrading schemes were found to be effective in stemming revictimisation of

individual businesses, though there was less evidence that they had led to overall reductions in local rates. Area rates can only be expected to fall with more co-operation between businesses, though there was evidence that this is difficult to sustain.

Points for action

- More needs to be learned about the nature of crime against business and about its impact. There is much scope for further research, including a national business crime survey.
- Crime against business appears to be very common. It is a potentially fruitful area for crime prevention activity.
- Planning business related crime prevention initiatives could be facilitated if, in addition to other details of incidents, police and other computers held records of coded crimes against business, the sector from which the business came, and the postcodes of the address.
- Clear guidance about ways of reducing vulnerability to business crime could usefully be made available to victims either through the police or through insurance companies.
- Crime prevention efforts in relation to commercial burglary can be effectively targeted by focusing on those who have been victimised and are at risk of revictimisation.
- Well evaluated projects, which attempt to encourage constructive co-operative crime prevention efforts between businesses but are sensitive to the difficulties in creating and sustaining these, are needed.
- Large companies could helpfully use their philanthropic resources to fund demonstration small shops in high crime areas. They could experiment with and then publicise successful ways of reducing vulnerability to crime.

Other related CPU papers

- CPU Paper 1: Reducing Burglary: a study of chemists' shops
- CPU Paper 9: Preventing Robberies at Sub-Post Offices: an evaluation of a security initiative.
- CPU Paper 11: Retail Crime: prevention through crime analysis
- CPU Paper 15: Crime Prevention and Racial Harassment in Asian-run Small Shops: the scope for prevention
- CPU Paper 27: Making Crime Prevention Pay: initiatives from business

*Papers in the Police Research Group Crime Prevention Series are available free of charge from:
Home Office, Police Research Group Publications, Room 448, 50 Queen Anne's Gate, LONDON, SW1P 9AT.
Telephone 071 273 2702*