A CRIMINOLOGICAL STUDY OF RETAIL ROBBERY

by

NADINE PATRICIA STEWART

Submitted in fulfilment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Criminology
in the Faculty of Humanities
University of Pretoria
Supervisor: Dr Linda Davis

October 2002

© University of Pretoria
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TABLES</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FIGURES</td>
<td>vii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUMMARY</td>
<td>viii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OPSOMMING</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## 1. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE, DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS AND STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM .................................. 1

### 1.1 HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE .......................................................... 1

1.1.1 Highwaymen, bandits and outlaws .............................................. 1
1.1.2 Revolutionary movements ....................................................... 4
1.1.3 Robbery at present .............................................................. 4

### 1.2 DEFINITION OF CONCEPTS .................................................................. 5

1.2.1 Retail robbery .............................................................................. 5
1.2.2 *Modus operandi* .......................................................................... 7
1.2.3 Victim .......................................................................................... 9

### 1.3 STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM ............................................................ 10

1.3.1 Extent of retail robbery ............................................................ 11
1.3.2 Aftermath of robbery .................................................................. 12
1.3.3 Problems with the investigation of retail robbery ....................... 13
1.3.4 Problems with existing research ................................................. 14

### 1.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY ............................................................ 14

### 1.5 VALUE OF THE STUDY ...................................................................... 15

### 1.6 AIMS OF THE STUDY ....................................................................... 16

### 1.7 CONCLUSION .................................................................................. 16

## 2. THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES ............................................................... 17

### 2.1 ROUTINE ACTIVITIES THEORY ....................................................... 17

2.1.1 Theoretical assumptions of the routine activities theory ................ 18
2.1.2 Application of the routine activities theory to retail robbery ........ 21
2.1.3 Evaluation of the routine activities theory .................................... 25
2.2 VICTIM EXPERIENCES .................................................................28
  2.2.1 Crisis theory .................................................................28
  2.2.1.1 Application of the crisis theory to retail robbery ..........32
  2.2.1.2 Evaluation of the crisis theory .................................33
  2.2.2 Janoff-Bulman and Frieze’s theory of victim reactions ....34
  2.2.2.1 Application of Janoff-Bulman and Frieze’s theory of victim reactions to retail robbery ..........36
  2.2.2.2 Evaluation of Janoff-Bulman and Frieze’s theory of victim reactions ..........38
  2.2.3 Attribution theory .......................................................38
  2.2.3.1 Application of the attribution theory to retail robbery ..........40
  2.2.3.2 Evaluation of the attribution theory ..............................41
  2.2.4 Model of the victim’s experience after a retail robbery ..........41

2.3 CONCLUSION ........................................................................46

3. EXTENT, NATURE AND PREVENTION OF ROBBERY ...............47

  3.1 EXTENT OF ROBBERY .........................................................47
  3.1.1 Reasons for the increase in robbery .................................49

  3.2 NATURE OF ROBBERY ........................................................56
  3.2.1 Modus operandi of the robber .........................................57
  3.2.1.1 Planning phase ...........................................................57
  3.2.1.2 Operational phase ......................................................59
  3.2.1.2.1 Days on which robberies occur ..............................59
  3.2.1.2.2 Times at which robberies occur ..............................59
  3.2.1.2.3 Areas where robberies occur ..................................60
  3.2.1.2.4 Victim-offender relationship .................................61
  3.2.1.2.5 Number of offenders involved in robberies .................61
  3.2.1.2.6 The role of threats and violence during robberies ..........61
  3.2.1.2.7 Victim resistance and precipitation ..........................65
  3.2.1.3 Post-offence phase ......................................................66

  3.3 OFFENDER PROFILE ..........................................................67
  3.3.1 Gender .......................................................................67
  3.3.2 Age .............................................................................67
  3.3.3 Race ............................................................................67
  3.3.4 Use of alcohol and drugs ...............................................68

  3.4 CLASSIFICATION OF ROBBERS ..........................................68

  3.5 VICTIM PROFILE ...............................................................71
  3.5.1 Gender .......................................................................71
  3.5.2 Age .............................................................................71
  3.5.3 Race ............................................................................72
  3.5.4 Occupation .................................................................72
3.6 CONSEQUENCES OF ROBBERY ................................................................. 73
3.6.1 Financial consequences ................................................................. 73
3.6.2 Physical consequences ................................................................. 74
3.6.3 Emotional consequences ............................................................... 74
3.6.4 Social consequences .................................................................... 75

3.7 PREVENTION OF ROBBERY ............................................................... 75
3.7.1 An effective state policy on community and social development ................ 75
3.7.2 Effective law reform ........................................................................ 76
3.7.3 Situational crime prevention ............................................................ 80
3.7.3.1 Choice of surroundings and site .................................................. 81
3.7.3.2 The buildings ........................................................................... 83
3.7.3.3 Target hardening ....................................................................... 84
3.7.3.4 Example of a situational crime prevention programme .................. 85

3.8 CONCLUSION ..................................................................................... 87

4. RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS ................................................................. 88
4.1 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE MODUS OPERANDI OF RETAIL ROBBERS ................................................................. 88
4.1.1 Research expectations regarding the operational phase ...................... 88
4.1.2 Research expectations regarding the post-offence phase .................... 89

4.2 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING SITUATIONAL FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE RETAIL ROBBERIES ............................................. 91

4.3 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE VICTIMS’ REACTIONS DURING THE RETAIL ROBBERIES ..................................................... 94

4.4 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE CONSEQUENCES OF RETAIL ROBBERIES ................................................................. 94

4.5 CONCLUSION ..................................................................................... 97

5. RESEARCH DESIGN ............................................................................ 98

5.1 METHODOLOGICAL JUSTIFICATION ............................................... 98

5.2 MEASURING INSTRUMENT ............................................................... 99
5.2.1 Interview schedule ........................................................................ 99
5.2.2 Pilot study .................................................................................... 101

5.3 SAMPLING PROCEDURE AND DATA COLLECTION .......................... 101
5.3.1 Sampling strategy ........................................................................ 101
5.3.2. Composition of the sample .......................................................... 102
5.3.2.1 Interviews ................................................................................. 103
5.3.2.2 Description of the sample ......................................................... 104

5.4 TECHNIQUES FOR THE ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF
DATA ........................................................................................................ 107

5.5 CONCLUSION .................................................................................. 107

6. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION OF DATA ...................... 109

6.1 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE *MODUS OPERANDI*
OF RETAIL ROBBERS ........................................................................ 109
6.1.1 Research expectations regarding the operational phase .............. 109
6.1.1.1 Research expectation 1 .............................................................. 109
6.1.1.2 Research expectation 2 .............................................................. 111
6.1.1.3 Research expectation 3 .............................................................. 112
6.1.1.4 Research expectation 4 .............................................................. 113
6.1.1.5 Research expectation 5 .............................................................. 114
6.1.1.6 Research expectation 6 .............................................................. 115
6.1.1.7 Research expectation 7 .............................................................. 116
6.1.1.8 Research expectation 8 .............................................................. 117
6.1.2 Research expectation regarding the post-offence phase .......... 118
6.1.2.1 Research expectation 9 .............................................................. 118

6.2 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING SITUATIONAL
FACTORS THAT MAY INFLUENCE RETAIL ROBBERIES .......... 119
6.2.1 Research expectation 10 .............................................................. 119
6.2.2 Research expectation 11 .............................................................. 120
6.2.3 Research expectation 12 .............................................................. 121
6.2.4 Research expectation 13 .............................................................. 123
6.2.5 Research expectation 14 .............................................................. 126
6.2.6 Research expectation 15 .............................................................. 127

6.3 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE VICTIMS’
REACTIONS DURING THE RETAIL ROBBERIES ...................... 128
6.3.1 Research expectation 16 .............................................................. 128
6.3.2 Research expectation 17 .............................................................. 129

6.4 RESEARCH EXPECTATIONS REGARDING THE CONSEQUENCES
OF RETAIL ROBBERIES ................................................................. 131
6.4.1 Research expectation 18 .............................................................. 131
6.4.2 Research expectation 19 .............................................................. 133
6.4.3 Research expectation 20 .............................................................. 135
6.4.4 Research expectation 21 .............................................................. 136

6.5 CONCLUSION .................................................................................. 137
7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS ............................................. 139

7.1 CONCLUSIONS REGARDING THE ACHIEVEMENT OF THE AIMS
OF THE STUDY .................................................................................. 139

7.2 RECOMMENDATIONS ........................................................................... 142
7.2.1 Recommendations regarding future research ......................................... 142
7.2.2 Recommendations regarding the prevention of retail robberies .................. 145
7.2.2.1 More effective law enforcement and legislation ..................................... 145
7.2.2.2 Situational crime prevention strategies ................................................. 146
7.2.2.2.1 Training on how to respond in the event of retail robberies .................. 147
7.2.2.2.2 Increasing the level of difficulty for retail robbers .............................. 149
7.2.3 Victim support .................................................................................. 154

7.3 CONCLUSION ....................................................................................... 155

REFERENCES .......................................................................................... 157

APPENDIX I: Interview schedule .................................................................... 173
APPENDIX II: Letter of introduction .................................................................. 179
# TABLES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Robbery with Aggravating Circumstances (1994-2001)</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Gender of the Victims</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Age of the Victims</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Race of the Victims</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Occupation of the Victims</td>
<td>106</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Days on which Retail Robberies are Committed</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Times at which Retail Robberies are Committed</td>
<td>111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Number of Offenders</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Size of Retail Robber Groups and the Use of Violence</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Number of Staff</td>
<td>120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 Number of Customers</td>
<td>122</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 Security Measures of Retail Stores</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 Reasons for Not Resisting Retail Robbers</td>
<td>128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Number of Offenders and Resistance by Victims</td>
<td>129</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 Rate of Physical Injury of Cashiers</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure</td>
<td>Description</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Robbery with Aggravating Circumstances in South Africa (1994-2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Model of the Victim’s Experience After a Retail Robbery</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TITLe: A criminological study of retail robbery.

BY: Nadine Stewart

SUPERVISOR: Dr Linda Davis

DEPARTMENT: Criminology

DEGREE: Magister Artium

SUMMARY

In South Africa, there has been a steady increase in the number of armed robberies within the retail industry which have many negative consequences for the victims, their families, and the community. Materialism and economic advantage are major factors, as these robberies are very lucrative, although socio-economic factors such as unemployment, poverty, and relative deprivation can also contribute to the phenomenon. The climate of violence prevalent in South Africa, the ineffectiveness of the criminal justice system, as well as the availability of illegal firearms also contributes to this climate of lawlessness. The intense fear aroused by these robberies, as well as the extent of this crime necessitates empirical research in this regard. A literature search of South African databases reflects that no specific research regarding retail robberies has been undertaken. In order to fill this void, it was decided to investigate the modus operandi of retail robbers from the victims’ perspective, as well as relevant situational factors, victim reactions and the consequences of these robberies. The Model of the victim’s experience after a retail robbery (see Figure 2) was formulated to serve as a theoretical framework to give direction to the study and interpret the findings.

In order to actualise the set research expectations, various victims of retail robberies within Gauteng were selected to participate in this study. The sample was drawn according to the purposive theoretical and snowball sampling methods. The sample consisted of 20 victims. Individual interviews were conducted with these respondents.

Upon analysis and interpretation of the data, it was found that most retail robberies occur in areas with a high crime-rate. The main reason for the selection of a specific target seems to be the obtaining of money. The findings further indicate that retail robberies are committed by groups of offenders who predominantly make use of handguns during these robberies and usually have getaway vehicles waiting outside the
stores. It was also apparent in the study that verbal threats and violence are usually employed during retail robberies in order to ensure compliance by the victims and that victims are less likely to resist if the offenders are armed with firearms. Findings indicate that the robbers become more aggressive when resisted and that aggression is influenced by the size of the group.

The findings further show that stores with few customers are more likely to become the victims of retail robberies. It was found that security measures such as armed response, alarms and panic buttons do not necessarily deter retail robbers, but most stores improved their security following a robbery. Stores with no surveillance appear to be more vulnerable. Another situational factor pertinent to the study was that most of the stores’ interiors were visible to passers-by from the outside. Finally, the impact of retail robberies upon the lives of the victims in terms of financial, physical, emotional and social consequences was also investigated.

Based on the findings, recommendations are made with regard to further research. Stemming from this, various suggestions concerning the prevention of retail robberies are also made.

**KEY TERMS**

Retail robbery
*Modus operandi*
Victims
Routine activities
Suitable targets
Vulnerability
Motivated offenders
Guardianship
Situational crime prevention
Target hardening
TITEL:  'n Kriminologiese ondersoek na kleinhandel roof.

DEUR:  Nadine Stewart

STUDIELEIER:  Dr Linda Davis

DEPARTEMENT:  Kriminologie

GRAAD:  Magister Artium

OPSOMMING

In Suid-Afrika is daar 'n geleidelike toename in die aantal gewapende rooftoekte in die kleinhandelbedryf. Hierdie rooftoekte hou negatiewe gevolge in vir die slagoffers, hulle families asook die gemeenskap. Aangesien dié rooftoekte baie winsgewend is, is materialisme en ekonomiese voordeel belangrike faktore, alhoewel sosio-ekonomiese faktore soos werkloosheid, armoede, en relatiewe depriviasie ook kan bydra tot dié probleem. Die klimaat van geweld wat in Suid-Afrika heers, die oneffektiviteit van die regspelingsisteem, asook die beskikbaarheid van onwettige vuurwapens dra by tot die klimaat van wetteloosheid. Die geweldige vrees wat deur die rooftoekte veroorsaak word sowel as die omvang van dié misdaad noodsak empiriese navorsing in dié verband. 'n Literatuursoektog van Suid-Afrikaanse databasisse het getoon dat geen navorsing oor kleinhandelroof in Suid-Afrika onderneem is nie. Ten einde hierdie leemte te vul, is besluit om ondersoek in te stel na die *modus operandi* van kleinhandelrowers vanuit die slagoffers se perspektief, asook die situasionele faktore, slagoffer reaksies en die gevolge daarvan. Die Model van die slagoffer se ervarings na 'n kleinhandel roof (sien Figuur 2) was ontwerp om die navorsing te rig en die bevindinge te interpreteer.

Ten einde gestelde navorsingsverwagtinge te toets, is verskeie slagoffers van kleinhandel rooftoekte in Gauteng geselekteer om aan die studie deef te neem. Die steekproef is volgens die doelgerigte-teoretiese en sneeuvalmetodes getrek. Die steekproef het uit 20 respondentes bestaan. Onderhoude is individueel met die respondentes gevoer.

Op grond van die ontleiding en interpretasie van data is gevind dat die meeste rooftoekte plaasvind in gebiede met 'n høë misdaadsyfer. Die verkryging van geld blyk die primêre rede vir die seleksie van 'n spesifieke teken te wees. Die bevindinge dui verder daarop dat kleinhandel rooftoekte deur groep oortreders gepleeg word. Hierdie
groepe gebruik hoofsaaklik handwapens tydens hulle rooftogte en het gewoonlik 'n voertuig buite om mee te ontsnap. Verbale dreigemente en geweld word ook geredelik tydens kleinhandel rooftogte gebruik om inskiklikheid van slagoffers te verseker. Bevindings toon aan dat slagofferweerstand meer aggressie by die rowers veroorsaak en dat aggressie deur die grootte van die groep oortreders beïnvloed is.

Die bevindings dui verder daarop aan dat winkels met min klante meer geneig is om slagoffers van kleinhandel roof te word. Daar is ook gevind dat sekuriteitsmaatreëls nie noodwendig kleinhandel rowers afskrik nie, maar dat winkels sonder beskerming tog meer kwesbaar is. Daar is bevind dat die meeste winkels in dié studie hulle sekuriteit verbeter het na 'n rooftog. 'n Verdere situasionele faktor wat oënskynlik nie teikenseleksie beïnvloed nie, is die sigbaarheid van die winkels van buite af. Ten slotte is die impak van kleinhandel roof op die lewens van die slagoffers in terme van finansiële, fisieke, emosionele en sosiale gevolge, ook ondersoek.

Na aanleiding van die bevindings is aanbevelings gemaak vir verdere navorsing, asook voortspruitend daaruit, voorstelle tot die bekamping van kleinhandel rooftogte.

---

**SLEUTELWOORDE**

Kleinhandel roof
*Modus operandi*
Slagoffers
Roetine-aktiwiteite
Geskikte teiken
Kwesbaarheid
Gemotiveerde oortreders
Beskerming
Situasionele misdaadvoorkoming
Teikenverharding
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the following people who helped me through a difficult time and enabled me to finish this study:

- My supervisor, Dr Linda Davis, for her guidance as well as all the long hours and hard work that she put into my study.

- My parents, Eddie and Elize, who supported me through all the ups and downs and tried to keep me positive.

- To my sister, Natalie, for all her support and help with the layout, printing, binding and everything else. I wouldn’t have been able to do this without her.

- Ouma, Oupa, Trishi and Stephan, for their interest and assistance in finding respondents.

- Morné and Katryn, who let me stay with them while I was looking for respondents and conducting my interviews.

- The respondents, without whom this study would not have been possible.