

LOCATION OF SHOPLIFTERS IN BOCA RATON, FLORIDA¹

Millard H. Wafle

Shoplifting in the United States is epidemic. Estimates of the magnitude of this crime suggest conservatively that in each supermarket nationwide shoplifting occurs at least six times a day, and probably twenty to fifty times is more accurate. Estimating only ten thefts per day, the annual loss per supermarket is some fourteen thousand dollars per year. Nationwide the figure becomes a staggering 1.7 billion dollars taken from retail stores, and indirectly from consumers.² For Florida the loss estimate (1976) was 1.3 million dollars.³

Research has investigated the problem of shoplifting and the nature of the shoplifter; little has been said about where the shoplifter lives relative to the place of the crime. Does the shoplifter live and steal in close proximity? Or does he/she journey long distances from home in order to avoid recognition which might result from frequenting the same stores too often?

The present research was conducted on arrest data from the Boca Raton Police Department during October 1978 to September 1979. Some 181 shoplifting arrests were made (excluding juveniles); these amounted to 23 percent of all arrests. The data used for this study are for three stores in Boca Raton: Jeffersons, Star Value (both variety stores), and Boogarts (a supermarket). The distance variable in the study is the distance to nearest mile that the arrested person lived from the place of arrest. The data for all three stores were aggregated together so that a single, overall model could be presented.

It can be seen that there is a clear distance decay function (home from site of crime) with an exponentially declining curve. That is, most shoplifters live close to the store they shoplift. Typically, the person shoplifting in a given store lives nearby, and probably does most of his/her legitimate shopping there as well.

The proximity of the shoplifter to the place of crime is even more dramatic when considered from the point of view, not of numbers per linear mile (as in Fig. 1), but in terms of the numbers per square mile of space surrounding the store, i.e., shoplifter density.

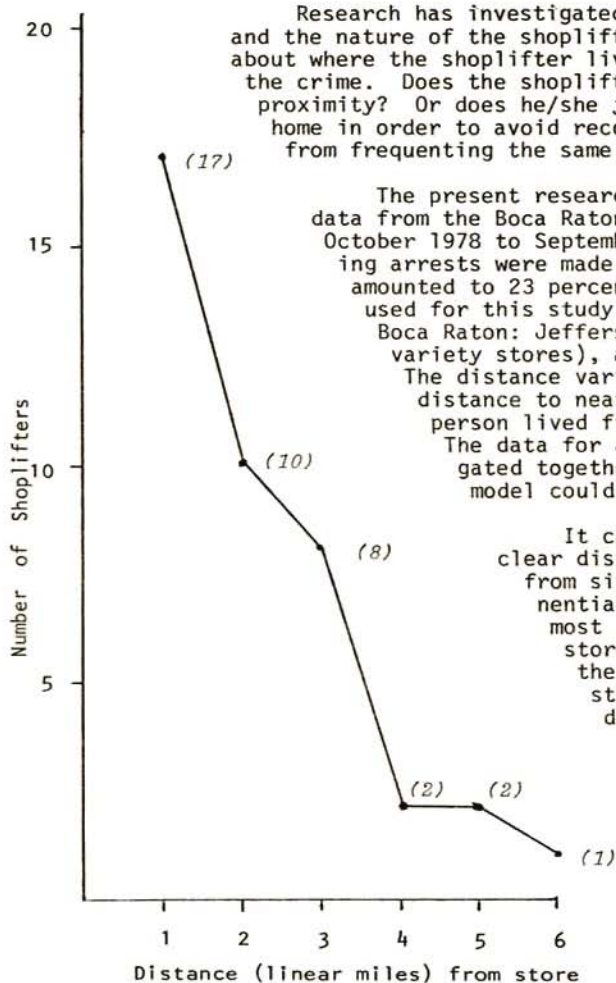
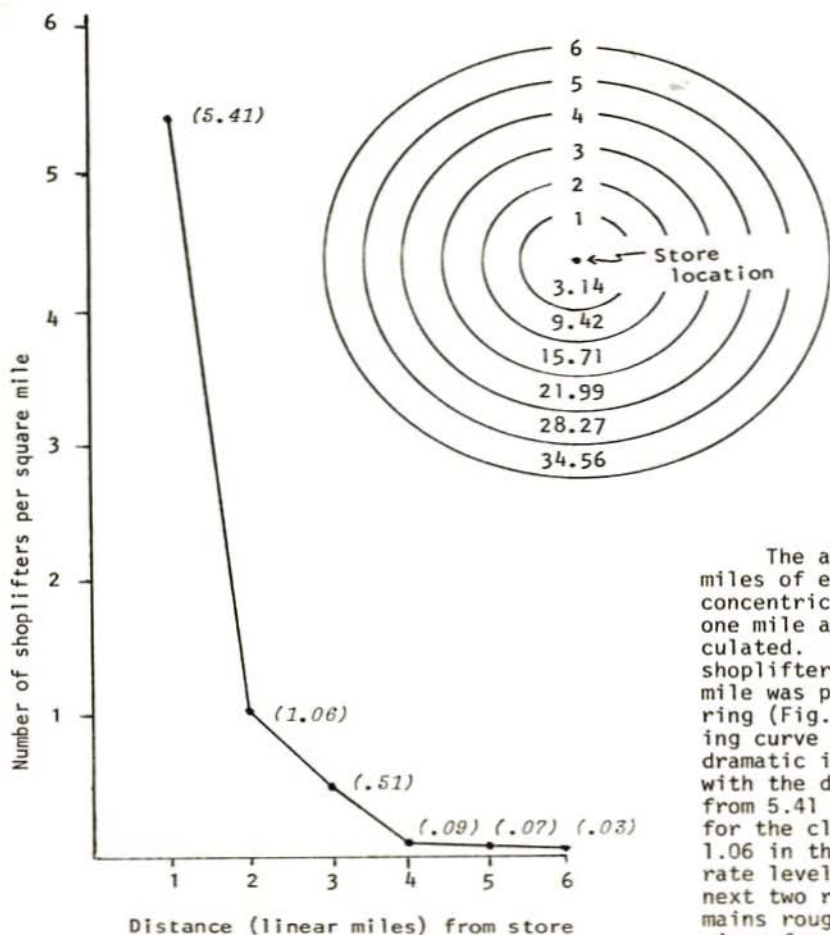


Fig. 1. Number of shoplifters (by distance from site of crime: aggregate of three stores).



The area in square miles of each of six concentric rings spaced one mile apart was calculated. The number of shoplifters per square mile was plotted for each ring (Fig. 2). The resulting curve is even more dramatic in its decay rate, with the density dropping from 5.41 per square mile for the closest ring, to 1.06 in the second. The rate levels off for the next two rings, and remains roughly the same for rings four, five and six.

Fig. 2. Shoplifter density (by distance from site of crime: aggregate of three stores). Inset: areas of rings in square miles (lower numbers) and distance from store (upper numbers).

Concluding from the Boca Raton data, one can say that the shoplifter lives close to the store he/she shoplifts. Distance from a store has a pronounced effect on the like-

lihood that a potential shoplifter will steal from that store. Shoplifters, then, are not migrants coming from outside the local area to commit their crime---they are people of the neighborhood.

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1. Grateful appreciation is extended to Jerry Koontz who assisted on this manuscript.
2. Margaret Hughes, *Shoplifter: Who and Where* (Los Angeles: Security Publishing Inc., 1974), p. 34. See also Loren Edwards, *Shoplifting and Shrinkage Protection for Stores* (Springfield, Ill.: publisher unknown, 1958).
3. Florida, Governor's Crime Preventive Committee, *Help Stop Crime, Retail Theft* (Tallahassee, 1976 [?]).