

Study links relationship of retail staff with their workplace to prevention of shoplifting

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University of Otago research examining the role of psychological ownership in shoplifting prevention is to be extended into a New Zealand-wide survey of supermarket staff after notable results in a pilot trial.

"The role of psychological ownership in shoplifting prevention: An exploratory study," published in the latest issue of the *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* examined how the principles of psychological ownership (traditionally applied to building stronger relationships between retailers and customers) could be applied to reducing losses from shoplifting and other forms of retail crime.

The study was led by University of Otago Ph.D. student Balkrushna Potdar alongside his supervisors Dr. John Guthrie, Dr. Tony Garry and Professor Juergen Gnoth of Otago's Department of Marketing.

"We wanted to see if there was evidence to show that a good relationship between a retailer and their [staff](#) would mean employees are more proactive and alert to preventing and informing of theft. The results support our hypothesis, so it is exciting to be able to extend this out and gather wider data from supermarkets around New Zealand," Mr Potdar says.

Dr. Guthrie, who has supervised the research, says if results continue to support the hypothesis it will be a valuable tool for retailers, especially as retail crime is growing (according to findings in the New Zealand Retail Crime Survey conducted by Dr. John Guthrie in conjunction with Retail NZ in December 2017).

"From a business standpoint the learning will be whether or not there are other ways of reducing or even preventing retail crime. From a practical standpoint I believe that a valuable outcome will be information that will allow retailers to better understand their employees, and thereby help them deliver more productive training programmes – in more areas than just loss prevention," Dr. Guthrie says.

Dr. Guthrie adds that from an academic perspective a possible outcome is the creation of new safeguard theory, or perhaps more accurately,

extending the existing theory of psychological ownership into the darker (and expensive) side of retailing – retail crime.

Mr Potdar adds that given financial losses due to shoplifting are estimated to be an average loss of 6.6 per cent of sales to retailers (Perlman and Ozinci, 2014) extending the initial pilot trial of 26 staff of supermarkets to 1000+ staff members from New Zealand supermarkets has the potential to provide tangible benefits to employees as well as to employers.

"If we can conclusively prove a better employer-employee relationship results in a reduction of retail [crime](#) then we could potentially improve business' bottom-line along with staff morale and workplace satisfaction, which would be a fantastic outcome," says Mr Potdar.

The online questionnaire survey to gather the next wave of data will go out to participating supermarkets in early September, with results and findings expected in October 2018.

More information: Balkrushna Potdar et al. The role of psychological ownership in shoplifting prevention: An exploratory study, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* (2018). [DOI: 10.1016/j.jretconser.2018.07.015](#)

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