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Aggressive behaviour in urban convenience stores: a focused mixed method survey

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Aggressive behaviour in urban convenience stores:
a focused mixed method survey

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The objective of this mixed method survey was to find out how frequently employees are exposed to aggressive behaviour in small, urban convenience stores and how it affects them. Terrorism, robberies and internal workplace violence were excluded from this research.

The scope of the research was limited to stores with high incident rates and a mixed method approach was utilised in collecting data. The survey was carried out in 24 stores located in South London, UK. The survey methods included a quantitative questionnaire survey, structured interviews and a period of participant observation. Quantitative methods were applied to analyse the questionnaire results and the supplementing data from the interviews and observation were used as a narrative to describe aggressive behaviour.

The study shows that aggressive customers are perceived to be a daily occurrence in the urban convenience stores and some staff are so used to being verbally abused that it is accepted as part of the job description. Verbal threats are considered a regular and unnerving occurrence. Most aggressive incidents are related to shoplifting, age restricted sales or groups of youths. Gender, age or position has little effect on how aggression is perceived or how often it is witnessed. 73% of the participants fear for their personal safety when faced with a verbally abusive and loud customer and over 66% feel there is not much they can do about aggressive behaviour. Employees exposed to threats of violence are more likely to experience actual violence than those who are not exposed to threats and verbal abuse.

Desensitization to aggression, non-compliance to written policies and under-reporting are three of main issues which need to be addressed in order to develop work place safety in convenience stores. Community interaction, training and operational management can be improved to reduce aggressive behaviour.

Further research is required to understand the underlying issues in greater detail. Psychological and psychosocial variables should be considered in to be included in future crime surveys. There is also a gap in national and international research focused on convenience stores alone.

Keywords: workplace violence, occupational safety, convenience store, aggression

Lähdesmäki Timo

Aggressiivinen käyttäytyminen kaupunkialueiden valintamyymälöissä: kohdennettu sekakäytännön tutkimus

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Tämän kohdennetun sekakäytännön tutkimuksen tarkoituksena oli tutkia kuinka usein työntekijät altistuivat aggressiiviselle käyttäytymiselle pienissä suurkaupungin valintamyymälöissä ja miten tämä altistus vaikuttaa työntekijöihin. Terroriteot, ryöstöt ja työpaikan sisäinen väkivalta rajattiin tutkimuksen ulkopuolelle.

Tutkimus rajattiin myös koskemaan ainoastaan myymälöitä, joissa esitiedon mukaan oli tunnetusti tavanomaista enemmän tilastoituja uhkatilanteita. Tutkimustavaksi valittiin kohdennettu sekakäytännön tutkimus, jossa pääasiallisena tiedonkeruutapana oli työntekijöille lähetetty kyselylomake. Tästä saatua kvantitatiivista tietoa täydennettiin haastatteluilla ja kentällä suoritetulla tarkkailulla. Tutkimukseen osallistui 24 myymälää Etelä-Lontoon alueelta.

Tutkimus osoitti, että aggressiivisia asiakaskohtaamisia tapahtuu valintamyymälöissä päivittäin. Osa henkilökunnasta on niin tottunut nimittelyyn ja uhkailuun, että sitä pidetään osana työkuva. Suusanallisia uhkauksia pidetään epämiellyttävänä kokemuksina ja niitä kohdistuu henkilökuntaan säännöllisesti. Myymälävarkaudet, ikärajojen tuotteiden myynti ja nuorisoryhmät ovat pääasialliset syyt kaikkein aggressiivisimmille tapahtumille. Työntekijän iällä, sukupuolella tai asemalla työyhteisössä ei ole merkittävää vaikutusta siihen miten usein aggressiiviselle käyttäytymiselle altistutaan. 73 % vastaajista pelkää turvallisuutensa puolesta kohdatessaan aggressiivisen asiakkaan ja 66 % kokee, ettei asialle ole juuri mitään tehtävissä. Uhkailujen ja toteutuneen väkivallan välillä on voimakas korrelaatio; mitä useammin työntekijä altistuu uhkailulle, sitä todennäköisemmin hän altistuu myös fyysiselle väkivallalle.

Psykologinen desensitisaatio, tai epäherkistyminen, aggressiolle on yksi keskeisistä myymälöiden henkilöturvallisuuden ongelmista. Ohjeiden vastainen toiminta ja lievien aggressiotapausten vähäinen tai olematon raportointi nousivat myös esille keskeisinä parannettavina asioina. Yhteistyön parantaminen viranomaisten ja lähiyhteisön kanssa, sekä koulutuksen ja operatiivisen toiminnan kehittäminen voivat osaltaan vähentää myymälöissä koettavaa aggressiota.

Jatkossa tutkimustyöllä olisi syytä pyrkiä selvittämään ja ymmärtämään aggressiivisen käyttäytymisen taustalla olevia muuttujia ja mahdollisia ongelmakohtia. Psykologisia ja psykososiaalisia tutkimuksia voitaisiin tulevaisuudessa yhdistää rikos- ja uhritutkimuksiin. Pienten valintamyymälöiden turvallisuutta olisi syytä myös tutkia laajemmin kansallisella ja kansainvälisellä tasolla.

Asiasanat: työväkivalta, työturvallisuus, valintamyymälä, aggressio

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1 Introduction

Criminal behaviour, disorderly conduct and the risk of violence to staff have been seen as increasingly important issues in retail premises over the past 15 years (Gore, Beswick, Rogers 2009, 1). While theft and vandalism is experienced by most retailers, regardless of their comparative size, smaller retailers are more vulnerable to violent and threatening behaviour (Shury, Speed, Vivian, Kuechel, Nicholas 2005, 3).

Workplace- or work related violence is a term often used when describing and defining aggressive behaviour in the workplace. Narrow definition for workplace violence would only include acts of physical violence towards an employee, but this definition is rarely used. More commonly workplace violence is defined as any incident in which an employee is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work (Health and safety executive, 2015). This definition does not include incidents, which are very likely to lead to violence, but are not considered violent by nature. A broader definition is required to understand the root cause of violence.

This subject is of great personal interest to me, as I've personally witnessed violence and aggression in small convenience stores. I've also seen what it does to employees and how it affects their work and even relationships. Exposure to even minor conflicts, threats, abuse and intimidation may leave the employee feeling hurt, insecure and frightened. It can also have more serious consequences, which require professional advice and guidance. A long term exposure to aggression may desensitize workers to violence and may result in an irrational reaction to a shoplifting or a robbery incident. This irrational behaviour is often described as a "compliance issue", referring to employees not complying with company policies. A compliance issue or not, intervening a shoplifting incident is the leading cause of injuries due to workplace violence in the UK's retail sector (Retail Crime survey 2013, 29).

Previous research has identified late night retail establishments as high risk workplaces for violent incidents (Shury et al. 2005, 3 -7; ASIS 2005 10, 11). Convenience stores often combine late opening hours with a very small team of employees. Most or all of the serious incidents are typically reported to the employer or the authorities, but many of the minor incidents, such as verbal abuse or even theft of goods, are not. Health and safety legislation in the UK requires employers to report only acts of physical violence, which cause serious injury to the employee. An injury is considered reportable if it results in a person being incapacitated from work for more than seven consecutive days. (Reporting of Injuries, Diseases and Dangerous Occurrences Regulations 2013.)

Aggressive behaviour encompasses a large variety of dynamic interactions, which are not all violent or even punishable by law. It is unknown how frequently employees are exposed to this type of behaviour and how it affects their work. This research hopes to shed some light to this subject.

The goal of this thesis research is to create an understanding on how often employees are exposed to aggressive behaviour in small convenience stores and what effect it has on them. The leading hypothesis of this research is two-fold: It is believed that aggressive behaviour is witnessed regularly, but only the more serious incidents are reported accurately. It is also believed that there is a causal relationship between the frequency of witnessed aggression and the frustration of employees. As there has not been a comprehensive survey on convenience store aggression, this research hopes to go some way of filling a gap in current knowledge.

This research is best described as a focused mixed method survey. The scope, the length and the content are limited to cover a limited number of selected convenience stores in an urban environment. It is designed to gather information on a very specific issue of aggressive behaviour, originating from a source external to the workplace. The term “focused mixed method survey” is widely used in the medical science field to describe surveys narrow in scope and content.

1.1 The scale of the problem

Exposure to workplace violence or the threat of violence affects roughly 1.1% of working adults annually in the UK. It is estimated that 257,000 individuals experience work related violence and threats every year with approximately 583,000 incidents consisting of 269,000 assaults and 314,000 threats. 56% of affected individuals reported just one incident and 44% reported two or more incidents in a year. 28% of reported incidents resulted in a physical injury. (Violence at work 2013/2014 2014.) It is also believed that the issue of workplace violence is highly under-reported (Gore et al 2009, 10; Retail Crime survey 2013, 15).

As the UK retail sector employs just over 2.7 million employees (Rhodes 2014, 4), excluding the wholesale sector, it is estimated that workplace violence affects approximately 30,000 retail workers every year. According to the UK Health and Safety Executive, employees who work in retail customer service jobs are not more prone to workplace violence than the population average (Violence at work 2013/2014 2014, 6).

In an interesting comparison 100,000 employees, or 4% of the Finnish workforce are estimated to experience workplace violence annually. In the Finnish retail sector 7000 employees or 4.5% of the workforce are estimated to experience workplace violence annually. (Piispa, Hulkko 2010, 8.) The variation and differences between the two countries may be the result of slight variations on the survey wording, used terminology and differences in used definitions. It may also indicate cultural definitions and perception of violence. In any case, it would be unwise to draw definite conclusions from the comparison of these two separate surveys.

The consequences of workplace violence, whether it is physical or psychological, are severe. As well as the requirement for hospital treatment, employees exposed to workplace violence and threats are often treated for emotional injuries as well. According to Duncan Chappell and Vittorio Di Martino psychological violence has the potential to cause significant emotional injury, and which is often repeated causing serious cumulative damage. The impact of being repeatedly emotionally victimised can have more serious consequences than being physically injured (2006, 16).

1.2 The scope of the research

The focus on this thesis research was on the frequency of witnessed aggressive behaviour, more specifically behaviour from an external source i.e. customers or visitors. Internal aggression and aggression between customers were not studied in this research. The scope was also narrowed down to exclude armed robberies, robberies in general, terrorist attacks and any incidents where staff would attack customers as these incidents are relatively infrequent and the employees have very little or no control as to where and when they happen and they are expected not to intervene in any way. Witnessing aggressive behaviour does not mean the employee is necessarily the victim of such behaviour. To witness aggressive behaviour requires the person just to be present and observant when it occurs.

Previous research indicates shoplifting, age restricted sales and disturbing groups of youths as the main source of aggressive interaction between employees and visitors to the store. Other triggers for aggressive behaviour were related to refusal of payment cards or customer being under the influence of alcohol or drugs. (Retail Crime Survey 2013, 29.) It was decided to focus on the most common causes for aggressive behaviour and study other possible causes further if required.

The scope of the research was exclusive to small convenience stores as they were expected to be more vulnerable to aggressive behaviour than large retailers. Previous research offers slightly conflicting results to this, indicating employees in large stores experience aggression

more often than those in smaller establishments (Shury et al. 2005, 15). This may be due to the structure of the questions asked. Some surveys are directed at store management, with questions related to aggression in workplace in general. In a large workplace it is more probable to find someone who has experienced violence or threats at work, as there are more employees. This would mean that the particular workplace has experienced such behaviour, not that a certain proportion of staff has experienced it. Preliminary interviews with convenience store management has indicated that most, if not all, convenience in urban areas have experienced aggressive behaviour. This research attempts to measure how many employees experience aggressive behaviour and how often.

1.3 Definitions of key terms used

This research thesis uses the following terms throughout. The definitions may vary from terms used in other documents or context.

A convenience store is defined as

“A retail store with the size of less than 3000 square feet that is not subject to restricted trading hours by the Sunday trading Act (UK) and stocks at least seven of 18 core categories. The core categories are: Alcohol, bakery, canned and packaged grocery, chilled food, confectionery, frozen food, fruit and vegetables, health & beauty, hot food-to-go, household, national lottery, milk, newspapers or magazines, non-food items, sandwiches, savoury snacks, soft drinks, tobacco”

(Convenience retailing fact sheet 2014.)

Workplace violence is defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as:

“Any action, incident or behaviour that departs from reasonable conduct in which a person is assaulted, threatened, harmed, injured in the course of, or as a direct result of, his or her work” (Code of practice on workplace violence 2003, 4).

ILO differentiates between internal and external workplace violence depending on whether the offender is also employed by the organisation or not:

“Internal workplace violence is that which takes place between workers, including managers and supervisors” (Code of practice on workplace violence 2003, 4).

“External workplace violence is that which takes place between workers (and managers and supervisors) and any other person present at the workplace” (Code of practice on workplace violence 2003, 4).

The UK Health and Safety Executive defines work-related violence as:

“Any incident in which a person is abused, threatened or assaulted in circumstances relating to their work” (Health and Safety Executive 2015).

The Division of Occupational Safety and Health for the state of California (CAL/OSHA) has further defined workplace violence into three categories, two of which are discussed here.

Type 1 workplace violence:

“the agent has no legitimate business relationship to the workplace and usually enters the affected workplace to commit a robbery or other criminal act” (CAL OSHA 1993).

Type 2 workplace violence:

“the agent is either the recipient, or the object, of a service provided by the affected workplace or the victim” (CAL OSHA 1993).

In other words, an assault occurring when an employee attempts to stop a thief from escaping would be a case of type 1 workplace violence and an example of external violence. An employee verbally abused by a customer after a refused sale of alcohol would be considered type 2 workplace violence.

Merriam-Webster defines aggression as:

“a forceful action or procedure (as an unprovoked attack) especially when intended to dominate or master”

“the practice of making attacks or encroachments; especially : unprovoked violation by one country of the territorial integrity of another”

“hostile, injurious, or destructive behavior or outlook especially when caused by frustration” (Merriam-Webster online dictionary 2015.)

Aggressive behaviour - Overt behaviour with the intention of:

- a) Inflicting physical damage upon another individual
- b) Inflicting damage to or loss of property
- c) Intimidating another individual

(Tolan 2007, 6; Bushman, Anderson 2002, 28).

Offensive aggression: Also known as goal orientated, or covert aggression. Sometimes referred to as predatory aggression or instrumental aggression. Refers to pre-planned aggressive behaviour, with an expectation of a favourable outcome. (Bushman, Anderson 2002. 29; Maxson, Canastar 2007, 91.) Sometimes offensive aggression can be an intuitive response to a witnessed aggressive incident.

Defensive aggression: Aggressive behaviour in a response to aggression by another individual with the aim to protect and defend a valuable resource or. Also known as overt aggression, hostile aggression or impulsive aggression. (Bushman, Anderson 2002. 29; Maxson, Canastar 2007, 91.)

Overt behaviour: Behaviour intentionally visible to others

Covert behaviour: Behaviour not visible, or unintentionally visible to others.

Threatening behaviour - Any verbal or physical behaviour or communication that could be interpreted as conveying intent to cause physical harm to person or property.

Verbal abuse - Offensive behaviour involving the use of language. A form of aggression.

Trigger variable - Action, or behaviour, which triggers an aggressive response. Usually a response to staff intervention, mounting frustration or an irrational thought process. This term is used to analyse the survey results later on in this research.

Behavioural variable - Action, or behaviour, which is the result of a corresponding trigger being activated. Visible aggressive behaviour in all the possible forms, from shouting to violence. This term is also used to analyse the survey results later on in this research.

2 Theoretical framework

The research question of this thesis calls for great understanding of workplace violence in retail premises. Fortunately there is a wealth of information available on this subject matter. In order to further understand the dynamics of workplace violence, aggressive behaviour needs to be studied as a psychosocial phenomenon. Workplace violence is often studied and explained as a health and safety issue. Government organisations, labour organisations and trade unions are a good source of health and safety related information.

The art of understanding aggressive behaviour as a psychosocial phenomenon took this research onto a long and winding path into social sciences and eventually neuro-psychology. In order to strike a balance between a purely statistical survey of stating the obvious and explaining human aggression in too much detail, some generalisations had to be made. The following list of resources was considered adequate for the purpose of this research. Figure 1 shows a summary for the possible data sources for this work. Some sources were used more extensively than others.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE	AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Commercial victimisation surveys - The Home Office (UK) • Crime Survey for England and Wales - The Office for National Statistics • Retail Crime Survey - The British Retail Consortium • Health and Safety Executive (UK) • National institute for health and welfare (FIN) • Workplace violence in retail trade. Nina Isotalus • The center for occupational safety (FIN) • International Labour Organization (SUI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Cambridge handbook of Violent Behavior and Aggression • Aggressive Behavior: Current Perspectives. L. Huesmann • Human Aggression. Craig A. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman • Before Conflict: Preventing aggressive behavior. John D. Byrnes

Figure 1: Data source and references

2.1 The Crime Survey for England and Wales

The Office for National Statistics, together with the Health and Safety Executive, has published numerous comprehensive research papers regarding violence at work, including retail premises. One of the key surveys is the annual crime survey for England and Wales. The latest edition had a sample of around 34,000 respondents and it was considered to be nationally representative (Violence at work 2013/2014 2014, 3).

The survey shows that there were an estimated 583,000 incidents of violence at work, of which 28% resulted in injury. Minor bruises accounted for the majority of the incidents, with one fatality and 4069 injuries resulting in 7 or more days absent from work. (Violence at work 2013/2014 2014, 2.)

Risk of violence to retail staff was 1.1%, included in the category of customer service occupations. This matched the overall national average of 1.1%. Employees working in protective service occupations, such as the police and private security guards, had a highly elevated risk of experiencing violence at work, 9.6%. This translates to almost one in ten employees reporting the threat of violence or actual violence once or more in a year. (Violence at work 2013/2014 2014, 11.) The survey did not specify the risk levels for sub-occupations, such as customer service occupations in small convenience stores.

2.2 Commercial Victimization surveys 2002 and 2012

The UK Home office published retail and wholesale related findings from the second national commercial victimisation survey in 2005, which was conducted during 2002. This survey included almost 4000 retail businesses, which were interviewed by telephone. Even though this survey was primarily focused on actual criminal behaviour, assaults and threats were also included. The survey showed that only 20% of the respondents reported having experienced threats or assaults in the previous year and 10% experiencing theft from premises (Shury et al. 2005, 89).

The 2002 victimisation survey excluded all businesses employing over 250 people, so large hypermarkets were mostly excluded from the sample (Shury et al. 2005, 82). The 3955 interviewed retail business included 917 establishments selling food, tobacco and beverages that employed 1-9 people, thus loosely fitting the description of a convenience store (Shury et al. 2005, 80). From the final report, it is impossible to extract the answers given by these 917 establishments, which would have been beneficial in regards to this particular thesis.

It is worth noting that the latest survey offers some relatively surprising results compared to the 2002 survey. The latest survey suggests a dramatic 72% decrease in the incident rate for assaults and threats. The survey also indicates an 88% decrease in fraud crime and a 61% decrease in theft. (Home Office 2013, 64.) One of the main reasons for this seemingly large statistical decrease in crime is probably the sample structure. The 2002 survey only included businesses in the retail and wholesale sector, while the 2012 survey also included manufacturing, transportation and storage and accommodation and food.

The 2012 survey includes interesting correlations between the location of the victimised establishment and the rates of various crime types. One comparison was the distance to the nearest pub. The survey indicates that if the walking distance to the nearest pub is 15 minutes or more, the level of theft is decreased by two thirds compared to when the establishment is adjacent to a pub. (Home Office 2013, 25.)

The 2012 survey also suggests that independent businesses are much less likely victimised by any crime when compared to branches of businesses, for example a branch of a supermarket chain (Home Office 2013, 26). Geographically business in London experienced assaults and threats more often than business elsewhere in the country (Home Office 2013, 38). In the retail and wholesale sector there were 6,408 incidents of assaults and threat for every 1000 premises, equating to just over 6 incidents per year for every retail or wholesale establishment. This was the highest number for all the business sectors included in the survey. (Home Office 2013, 40.)

2.3 Retail Crime Survey 2013

The British Retail Consortium published the results for the 2012-2013 retail crime survey in January 2014. This survey was one of the most extensive surveys in this field. The survey involved 30 retailers, who employ 1.4 million individuals and represent over half of the retail sector's annual turnover. (2014, 9.)

The survey was a good cross cut of the sector, with 6% of the respondents' outlets and 7% of the employees representing convenience stores (2014, 10-11). The survey included online retailers as well as traditional stores and supermarkets.

In contrast to the latest commercial victimisation survey, the retail crime survey indicated that customer theft (2014, 18) and fraud (2014, 26) has increased from 2006. The categories relating to aggressive behaviour have been changed and are not comparable to previous surveys.

The survey indicates that there were 38 aggressive incidents per 1000 employees, 8 of which have caused some form of an injury. 26 incidents per 100 employees were not physically violent, but rather considered abusive. Theft and age restricted sales have been identified as the major triggers for violence and abuse. (2014, 29.)

Due to variations in the definitions and the way data was presented, it is very difficult to draw comparison between the three major British crime surveys. Direct comparison can be drawn between the commercial victimisation surveys by the Home Office and retail crime survey by the British Retail Consortium in terms of robberies, fraud and customer theft. Even then there is much to debate about the sample selection, which affects the results considerably. Table 1 demonstrates the relative variance between the commercial victimisation surveys and retail crime surveys. Abbreviation CVS 2002 refers to the 2002 commercial victimisation survey, CVS 2012 to the same survey from 2012 and RCS 2013 refers to the Retail Crime Survey from 2013.

	CVS 2002	CVS 2012	RCS 2013
Theft	37 264	13 327	47 250
by customers	per 1000 stores		

Table 1: Comparison of the crime surveys

Similarly it is challenging to compare the results for aggressive behaviour, which is called either violence, threat of violence or abuse depending on the survey. The Commercial victimisation surveys always refer to premises and businesses, rather than individuals. The Crime Survey for England and Wales refers to people, same as the Retail Crime survey. Table 2 shows a comparison between these surveys. The Crime Survey for England and Wales is abbreviated CSEW 2013.

	CVS 2002	CVS 2012	CSEW 2013	RCS 2013
Violence	5325	1481	11	12
Abuse				26
	per 1000 stores		per 1000 employees	

Table 2: Comparison of surveys for risk of violence

As the major surveys offer only some guidance in regards to aggressive behaviour in small convenience stores it was evident this subject has a gap in research and needs to be further studied. All recent surveys agree on the problem of under-reporting, which is a concern even for the more serious offences, not to mention the relatively minor incidents of verbal abuse and threats.

2.4 The Finnish connection

Ms Nina Isotalus has researched and published comprehensively about workplace violence in the Finnish retail sector. Though not directly relative to this thesis, her work offers an opportunity to compare how workplace violence differs between Finland and the United Kingdom. She has studied the frequency of violent incidents in Finnish grocery stores, supermarkets, pharmacies, kiosks and petrol filling stations. A random sample representing 14% of all stores nationwide is indeed a good representation of the retail sector. (Isotalus, Saarela 2000, 468.)

Isotalus also identifies intervening to shoplifting incidents as a main cause for work related violence in the retail trade. Her work also acknowledges the long term negative effects of exposure to violence, mentioning staff turnover rate and reduced motivation as some of the key issues. (Isotalus, Saarela 2001, 124.)

In her work, Isotalus refers to previous surveys which indicate up to 74% of the managers in small convenience stores and 42% of employees have experienced the threat of violence at work during the previous 12 months. Small convenience stores were considered to experience the threat of violence more frequently than larger stores. (Isotalus, Saarela 2001, 125.)

The survey, which was conducted in 1998, included respondents, among others, from 179 local stores, which loosely fit the description of a convenience store. Just over 20% of the convenience stores reported experiencing theft on a weekly basis and just over 60% indicated exposure to theft every month. Around 30% of the convenience stores reported other types of aggressive behaviour to take place every month. Angry customers appeared to be more common in large supermarkets than in small stores. (Isotalus, Saarela 2000, 471-475; Isotalus, Saarela 2001, 129.)

Regarding the survey itself, Isotalus points out that low response rate is typical for surveys in the retail sector. She describes the 48% response on her survey as fairly low with a typical response rate in the retail sector being from 20% to an average 56%. The overall response rate was possibly affected by the extent of the questionnaire form, which had a total of 263 questions. According to her review, it is possible that only individuals who felt strongly about the subject have responded to the questionnaire thus biasing the results. For future reference,

she suggests that such surveys should be simpler and perhaps done on the telephone for an increased response rate. (Isotalus 2002, 97.)

2.5 Available North American Literature

Perhaps due to cultural and historical differences the literature on workplace violence is very different in the USA than in the UK, or Finland. Several American authors were considered and reviewed for this thesis work. Many of the books turned out to be well written, even academic, but offering advice more than explaining the core issue of work related violent behaviour. It was also apparent, that the focus was focused more on internal and inter-employee relations rather than external problems. Guns and armed confrontations played a remarkable role in the literature. For the most part, the reviewed literature was deemed unsuitable for the purpose of this thesis. They do offer, however, an insight into the problem from another perspective.

In his book, *workplace violence*, Kim M. Kerr identifies several factors, which may increase the risk of work related violence. Working in high crime area, working at night or late hours and working alone or in small numbers are three of these 10 risk factors. Being in contact with the public and the exchange of cash are also likely to increase the risk of violence. (Kerr 2010, 36-37.) These five points relate very heavily to small convenience stores world-wide, especially in the UK. Beyond that, Kerr talks extensively about workplace safety and active shooters incidents. Violent robberies terrorist attacks and active shooter incidents are outside the scope of this research thesis.

In an ASIS International publication, “workplace violence: Before, during and after”, Sandra L. Lanier identifies several high risk workplaces for violent behaviour. The rankings are based on the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) records for the number of homicides per 100,000 workers. Retail sales were mentioned in the top four for the years 1993-1999, with the number of homicides greatly reduced by the year 1999 (Lanier 2003, 6). Lanier discusses internal issues, frustration, stalking and employee-supervisory relations for the most part of her work.

She offers a universally acceptable view on threatening behaviour, which is useful in the context of this research thesis. Lanier explains that individuals use threatening behaviour a control measure over people and situations. Intimidation is seen as an effective and primeval method for controlling others. According to Lanier, employees who are victimised by threatening behaviour require an immediate resolution to the situation, as the consequences of this behaviour extend beyond the initial victim. Such behaviour will also affect other customers in a negative way. (Lanier 2003, 103.)

Lanier also points out that aggressive customers display certain warning signs before overt violence. Yelling, and swearing are some of the key indicators for aggressive behaviour, usually escalating to physical actions such as stomping feet, pounding fists and waving arms. Lanier warns about “a boxer stance” and clenching fists as an immediate signs of imminent violence. (Lanier 2003, 111.)

John D. Byrnes, the founder of Center for Aggression Management describes aggression as a progressive continuum rather than a single incident. Instead of attempting to define aggressive incidents through the word “violence”, such as “workplace violence”, he focuses on managing aggression and aggressive behaviour in general. (Byrnes 2002, 11).

Byrnes identifies three separate phases in the aggression continuum, a term which is trademarked to the Center for Aggression Management Inc. The first phase is called the trigger phase, during which some anxiety is experienced. These Triggers are experienced by everyone, but most people learn to cope with them. A person enters the escalation phase when he or she can no longer cope with cumulating anxiety and visible changes in the person are created. Byrnes lists three areas, where these changes are evident: Behaviour, body language and interpersonal communications. (Byrnes 2002, 13-15.)

The last phase of the aggression continuum is the crisis phase, which begins when a person loses all self-control and judgement. Loss of verbal controls is followed by the loss of physical control. Byrnes describes this behaviour as primal and almost animalistic. (Byrnes 2002, 17.)

The existence of these triggers sounds very logical, and the idea of the aggression continuum is easy to understand. Certainly aggressive situations in a retail environment often follow a similar path. Anxiety and frustration is visible on the faces of many customers and sometimes staff alike. I was fortunate enough to interview Mr Byrnes on the telephone regarding his work and it's suitability for this thesis. It was obvious that further research was required to understand why these triggers existed and whether they were universally applicable.

2.6 Perspectives to aggressive behaviour

For the most part of this research thesis, the literature consisted of previous surveys of criminal incidents. This statistical, quantitative data, is very valuable in determining what can be measured and analysed scientifically within the scope of this particular research. Human aggressive behaviour is a vast and deep ocean of scientific interest. The Cambridge Handbook of violent behaviour and aggression offers a more than adequate wealth of information regarding the psychology of aggression. This handbook was used as the primary source of theoretical

information in the thesis. The book is published by the Cambridge University Press and edited by Daniel J. Flannery, Alexander T. Vazsonyi and Irwin D. Waldman. Over 70 individual researches contributed to the 41 chapters covering most aspects of aggressive behaviour. In the scope of this research, it was necessary to cover only some these.

Many factors contribute to aggressive behaviour. These can be related to cultural, social, gender and situational variables. Depending on the field of study, there may be many more variables and definitions for aggressive behaviour and violence. (Tolan 2007, 8-11.) For this thesis it was decided to keep the perspective on Interpersonal and contextual factors as they would seem to be most appropriate for the types of incidents studied in the research process. This decision was made with the full knowledge, that there are several primal, biological and physiological factors that can be also considered. Neuropsychology, neurobiology and genetics were considered factors outside the scope of this research.

One part of the research hypothesis was that there is causal relationship between exposure to violence and the feeling of frustration felt by the employees. Exposure to violence has been studied by several psychologists. Flannery et al include witnessing violence and being a victim of violence as being exposed to violence. The exposure can occur via media channels such as the internet and television, or being a witness to actual violence in real life. (Flannery, Singer, van Dulmen, Kretschmar, Belliston 2007, 306.)

Exposure to high levels of violence has been consistently been linked to mental health symptoms and aggressive behaviour. It is related to anxiety, anger, depression and violent behaviour. Previous research have been conducted with high-school students in North America and in diverse samples of children and adolescents. Anger and anxiety was reported by a large portion of students exposed to high levels of violence, compared to very little or no anger and anxiety reported by students with low levels of exposure (Flannery et al 2007, 309-313.)

These research works seem to suggest that exposure to aggressive behaviour at work will have some negative effect on the employees. It is worth noting that research on students may not represent accurately a population of grown up adults working in a retail environment. Some generalisation can be made as it is expected psychological responses operate in similar ways regardless of the age of the individual. Adults are probably more capable of coping with aggression related stress than adolescents.

L. Rowell Huesmann and Lucyna Kirwil have contributed to the research by attempting to answer the question, why observing violence increases the risk of violent behaviour the observer. They explain that social-cognitive information-processing model explain how people perceive, think and learn to behave in certain ways. Interactions in real world as well as the fictional world are a vital part of this theory. (Huesmann, Kirwil 2007, 546.)

The proposed model suggests that exposure to violence can have immediate short term effects, which manifest in three possible ways. The observed violence primes certain previously acquired social scripts, or the observer imitates violence immediately to solve a social problem or becomes aroused by violence, which in turn increases the risk of behaving violently later on. Social scripts are partially activated, or primed, concepts and ideas associated with certain environmental stimuli. The ideas and concepts are created over time, and can be activated without the person being aware of this influence. Aggressive behaviour can create a filter that biases subsequent perceptions, thereby increasing the likelihood of an aggressive response. (Huesmann, Kirwill 2007, 549.)

Anyone who has ever faced an aggressive or violent incident can probably relate to what Huesmann and Kirwill write about observing violence. It is highly disturbing, or emotionally arousing. Increased hear rate, sweaty skin and several other physiological indicators are signs of emotional arousal. Most people would describe this as unpleasant. This arousal can have an immediate effect on performance of complex tasks and lowering the threshold to give inappropriate responses when provoked. People tend to respond more aggressively to provocation after being exposed to violence. Psychologist call this arousal and excitation transfer. (Huesmann, Kirwill 2007, 550.)

Huesmann and Kirwill explain that in addition to immediate and short term consequences, repeated exposure to violence also has certain long term effects. These effects are complex learning processes, which in short change the subject's beliefs and scripts so that violent response becomes more likely and change the subject's emotional opinion on violence. (Huesmann, Kirwill 2007, 551.)

Observational learning theory suggest that individuals will acquire social scripts by observing others. This learning is especially strong when the individual identifies with the model, or the model is considered attractive to the viewer. The behaviour of the model reinforces the observer's scripts and eventually the behaviour is imitated. (Huesmann, Kirwill 2007, 551-552.) The models, or in popular terms, role models, exist also in workplaces. One can only imagine how much the behaviour of a manager influences younger employees. Is it possible that manager's actions or inactions are seen as appropriate and justifiable even if they contradict written policy?

Repeated exposure desensitizes, or changes the emotions related to violence. Cognitive desensitization, in which violence is believed to be common and inevitable, rather than rare and unlikely, results in more approving attitude towards violence. (Huesmann, Kirwill 2007, 552.) This desensitization probably occurs in small convenience stores and other retail environments, if exposure to aggressive behaviour is frequent.

Leonard Eron further explains that behaviour which is reinforced will be repeated and behaviour that is not reinforced will be extinguished. It is also noted that according to the social learning model aggression is controlled by positive reinforcement, whereas another theory called the drive model explains negative reinforcement as an escape from any aversive situation. (Eron, L.D. 1994, 5.) In other words, aggressive behaviour can be triggered by fairly primitive desire to escape harm or avoid injury. A fleeing shoplifter may use violence as a tool to avoid arrest.

As Gary Jensen illustrates, the social learning theory acknowledges imitation as one of the learning mechanisms for aggressive behaviour. Behaviour is copied because it has resulted in a favourable outcome or prevented negative outcome for someone else. In a social environment there are rules, values, beliefs and technical knowledge which set the guidelines of what can be done and what is allowed. Socializing forces, such as the peer group of youths, community and family are important sources of these social norms. (Jensen 2007, 638.)

If a person observes another committing a theft in a local convenience store and gaining an immediate reward, that criminal behaviour and the technique of success can be learned and copied regardless of the moral values. Social learning theory goes a long way explaining the repeated victimisation of stores in a high crime urban area. Criminal behaviour is observed, copied and imitated over and over again. At the same time employees are desensitized to this behaviour and their behaviour eventually changes accordingly.

Criminal victimisation surveys and preliminary interviews to this research have shown that employees are sometimes afraid of gangs, or groups of youths loitering around the store. This loitering may not be criminal nor directed at the employees, but can certainly be of nuisance.

Arnold P. Goldstein offers certain social theories to explain the delinquent gang phenomenon. Though the focus is mainly on American youth gangs, the theories can be used to some extent in this research. According to Goldstein the typical American juvenile gang has a structured organisation, some form of leadership and identifiable territory. They may also have a specific purpose and probably engage in criminal activity. (Goldstein 1994, 256.)

Young people join gangs to seek peer friendship, pride and excitement. Being a member of a gang gives teens an identity and enhances their self-esteem. The resources made available through a gang membership may not be available through legitimate means, especially in low-income areas. (Goldstein 1994, 261.)

It would be easy to assume that groups of youths are a problem especially in deprived urban areas, such as the South London area where this research thesis was conducted. Indeed the 2012 Crime victimisation survey indicates London and other Urban areas as having higher robbery rates (2012, 35), assault rates (2012, 38) and theft rates (2012, 44) compared to rural areas. Graffiti and teenagers loitering around the premises were identified as concerns in the 2002 crime survey (Shury et al 2005, 49).

2.7 The General Aggression Model

Craig J. Anderson and Brad J. Bushman introduced The General Aggression model (GAM) as a development to domain specific theories of aggression. They identify hostile aggression as impulsive, thoughtless and anger driven behaviour with the ultimate motive of harming the target. Hostile aggression occurs as a reaction to some perceived provocation. It is also called impulsive or reactive aggression. On the other hand, instrumental aggression is defined as pre-planned means of obtaining some other goal than harming the victim. It is also called proactive aggression. (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 29.) In the context of this research a shop-lifting incident would be considered instrumental aggression. Attacking a member of staff attempting to intervene would be an act of hostile aggression.

The General Aggression Model is a suitable model for this thesis, as it incorporates many elements from previous aggression theories and combines them in a simplified yet detailed model. There are three basic levels to an aggression episode, according to the model. Firstly there are personal and situational variables, which are the inputs. Personal factors, such as traits or characteristics, perceptions and expectations are combined with beliefs, attitudes, values and long term goals. Other personal factors, such as gender and behavioural scripts are added to create the personal variables in this particular cycle of social interaction. (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 34-36.)

Situational cues prime aggressive concepts in memory and increase the levels aggression. Interpersonal provocation is presented as the single most important for human aggression, and include insults, physical aggression, interference and various forms of verbal aggression. (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 37.)

Relevant note to this thesis was the discovery of perceived injustice as being positively related to workplace aggression. Customers may perceive certain situations as not justified and unfair, even if the employees follow guidelines and regulations. Refusing the sale of alcohol, or tobacco to an underage customer or a person unable to show proof of age can be perceived as unfair and an aggressive response may result.

Other situational factors are frustration, pain and discomfort, influence of drugs and alcohol and incentives, or motivational factors (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 38). These personal and situational inputs are combined and interpreted by the individual.

Three variables which are present in the person's mind are called routes. These are: affect, cognition and arousal. Cognition includes possible hostile thoughts and accessible aggressive scripts or attribution biases, which have been learned and developed in the past. Affect can be described as mood and emotion, and they can be directly influenced by the situational factors, possibly increasing the likelihood of aggression. Mood and emotion can result in visible and automatic motor responses, mainly in the facial area. These expressive motor responses are probably acknowledged by anyone observing the face of a person getting frustrated and angry. Arousal, or excitement can strengthen aggressive tendencies. Arousal does not have to originate from the situation at hand, it can derive from a completely irrelevant source and persist over a long period of time. Arousal is influenced by a large number of variables. Physical exercise is said to increase physiological and psychological arousal, whereas alcohol surprisingly decreases both. (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 39.)

Combining the input variables with the three route processes will result in a variety of possible outcomes. After complex information process, which is partly automatic and partly controlled inputs are entered into the appraisal and decision making process. The outcome of this process is either a thoughtful or an impulsive action, which in turn has an effect of the interpersonal situation. (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 40.)

The General Aggression Model was deemed suitable to be used in this thesis to explain various aggressive situations in a retail environment. Figure 2 explains the model in a simplified way. In short, personal and situational factors combined with the knowledge from previous aggressive encounters affect the decision making process in any social interaction. The process results in an impulsive or thoughtful action, which in turn has an effect on the social situation.

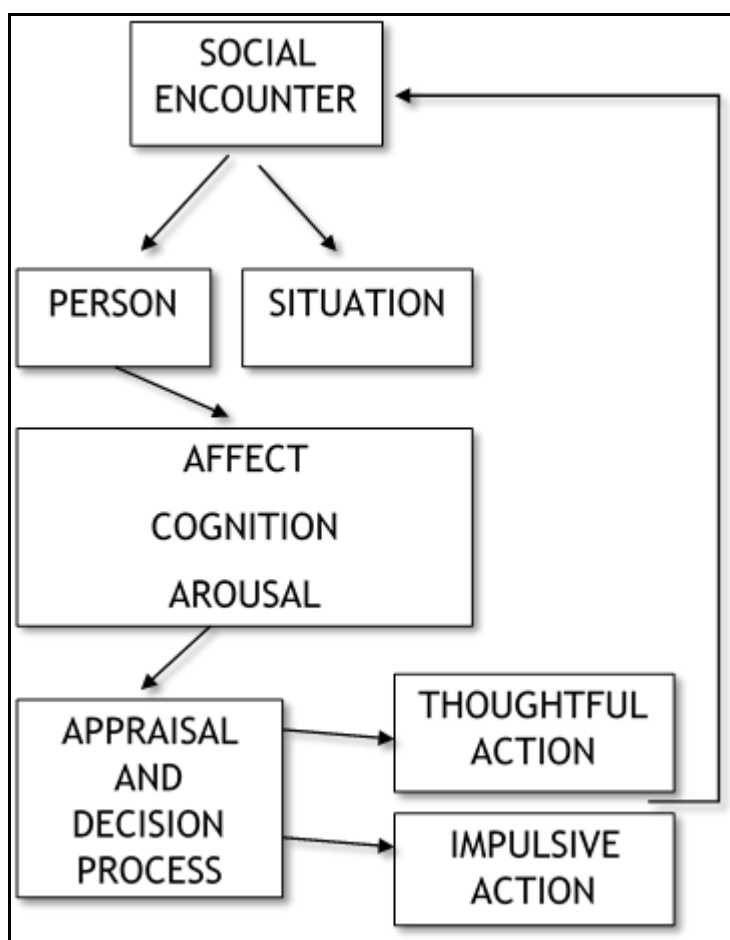


Figure 2: The general aggression model

3 Methodology

The objective of this research was to answer the question: “How often are employees exposed to aggressive behaviour in small convenience stores?” As previous research suggests, minor incidents and acts of aggression are under-reported (Shury et al 2005, 40-42), hence there is very little comprehensive and reliable data available on this subject. It was evident that the research had to include a fairly large number of employees to achieve a reasonable level of validity, even for a focused survey.

Quantitative research method would incorporate the use of numerical data, which would be helpful in answering the primary research question (Saunders, Lewis, Thornhill 2007, 145).

Qualitative methods focus on non-numerical data and are useful in analysing subjective perceptions and opinions (Silverman 2000, 2). As people tend to perceive aggressive behaviour subjectively it was decided to combine quantitative and qualitative techniques in the research. This mixed method research would give an adequately accurate answer to the research question.

After reviewing various research methods it was decided to use a survey research approach as the primary source of collecting raw data. The survey was conducted during the summer of 2007 in London, UK. It was sponsored and facilitated by a company operating multiple convenience stores and various other formats in the UK.

A questionnaire was sent to employees and managers in the selected stores. This quantitative data was combined with qualitative data from semi-structured interviews and participant observation. The quantitative data was analysed using quantitative methods and qualitative using qualitative methods.

3.1 Sampling

Due to time and resource constraints, the survey was conducted in 24 small convenience stores located in South London boroughs of Croydon, Bromley, Sutton, Bexley and Lewisham. According to Institute of Grocery Distribution, a UK based research charity, there are a total of 47,294 convenience stores in the UK (Convenience retailing factsheet 2014). The sample represents 0.05% of the total number of convenience stores and cannot be considered an accurate representation of the overall convenience retail market in the UK. Furthermore the sample does not represent convenience stores in rural areas or any convenience stores outside the United Kingdom.

A larger sample would enable more universally applicable conclusions to be made. Any generalisations based on this fairly small sample would have an elevated risk of being inaccurate (Saunders et al 2007, 210), hence probability sampling was dismissed as a sampling method. For the purpose of this research it was decided to use focused critical case sampling, which would allow certain logical generalisations to be made on the findings (Saunders et al. 2007, 232). To some degree, the findings will probably be applicable to many other convenience stores, which have similar characteristics to the participating stores: Location in a high crime area of a large city, small number of staff and long opening hours.

The participating stores were selected due to the historical data of reported incidents within the previous 24 months. The selected stores had a higher than average rate of incidents. This narrow selection enabled the research to retain the focus on actual incidents. For the pur-

pose of this research it was important to study witnessed aggressive behaviour instead of “normal behaviour”. The relatively small area of where the sample stores were located made it easier to manage the distribution and collection of the questionnaires. The short distances between the stores and their location within a relatively high crime area was vital for a meaningful observation period. Staff interviews were also easier to conduct and they provided the survey with adequate amount of information relating to aggressive incidents.

It was initially estimated that there are approximately 11,000 people employed by convenience store chains in London. This figure was calculated from the 2014 local shop report based on the published figures of 6332 stores, with an average 7.6 employees per store and 23% of the stores considered “multiples”. (The local shop report 2014.) This figure was later adjusted based on the information received from a telephone interview with Mr. Chris Noice (9 April 2015). According to Mr. Noice the multiple stores employ an average of 16.2 people per store. The target population was adjusted to 23,593 employees. The sample size of 510 individual employees in 24 stores represents 2% of the target population. Considering this research was focused on the stores reporting high rates of crime, the sample size was deemed adequate for this purpose. Figure 3 illustrates the target population in relation to the national convenience sector workforce.

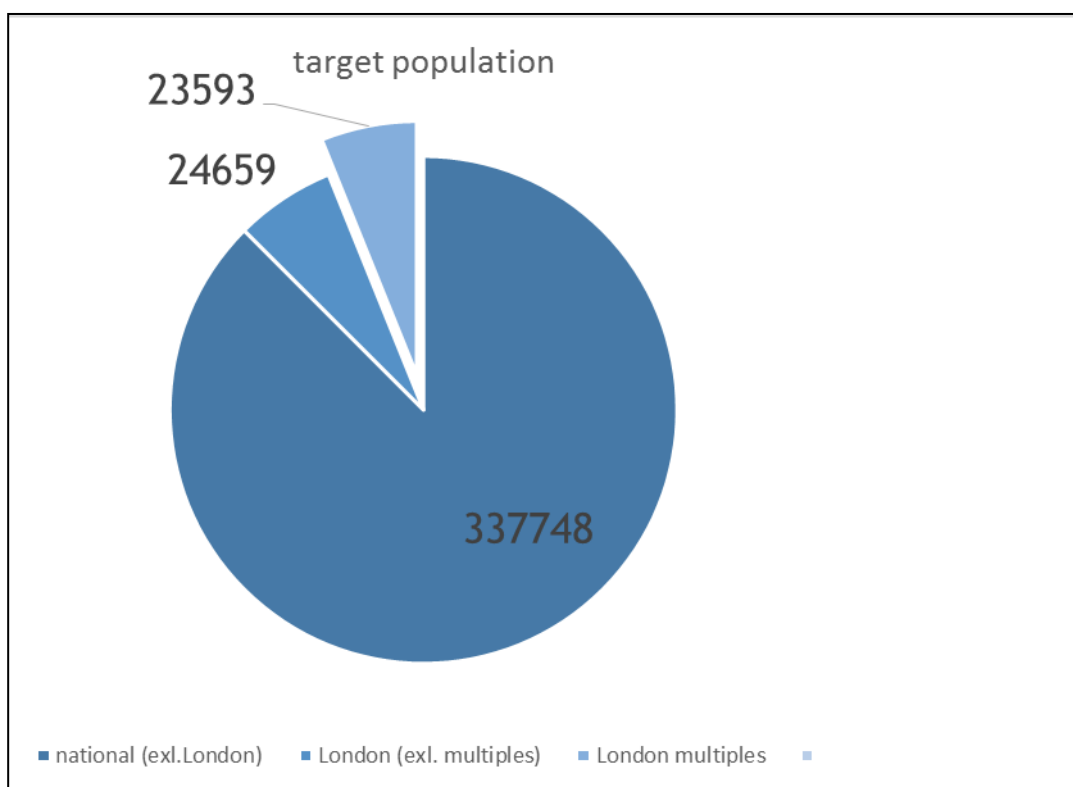


Figure 3: Target population

3.2 Survey design

For the first part of the survey, a one page questionnaire was designed. The initial version was assessed by the management team and eventually altered to meet the requirements. The questionnaire consisted of four parts. Three questions were asked to collect background information (gender, position, age), then a further seven (2a-2g) multi-choice questions were asked about incident frequency. The first three (2a, 2b, 2c) were designed as trigger variables and the last four (2d-2g) as behavioural variables. A trigger variable is an incident that will likely trigger or escalate overt aggressive behaviour. Behavioural variables are incidents, which already exhibit overt aggressive behaviour.

On hindsight, the terms which were used do not accurately describe the measured incidents. Trigger variables could have also been described as incidents of covert aggression and behavioural variables as incidents of overt aggression.

The trigger variables (2a, 2b, 2c) in the questionnaire were based on the previous research and the findings the internal incident database. They indicate that from the 57 studied incidents of assaults, threatening behaviour or verbal abuse 47.4% arise from dealing with shoplifters and 19.3% are triggered by attempted under-age purchase of cigarettes. A further finding indicates that in 37% of the incidents a group of youths were involved. The behaviour variables (2d - 2g) were designed to represent four different levels of overt aggression from verbal abuse to assaults.

The wording used in the questions was aimed to be simple and easy to understand. The respondents were asked how often they have witnessed or been involved in these situations. They were given a scale from one to five where: 1 - Daily, 2 - Weekly, 3 - Monthly, 4 - Less often and 5 - Not witnessed. The questions were:

- a) An underage customer is attempting to buy tobacco,
- b) A group of youths is causing disturbance outside the store,
- c) Staff or managers are involved in a shoplifting incident (trying to stop the thief or get the goods back),
- d) A customer is using offensive language against a member of staff (i.e. name calling or racist remarks),
- e) A customer is making threats to harm a member of staff,
- f) A customer is breaking things in an aggressive manner (either stock or property, i.e. a window),
- g) A customer attacks a member of staff (even minor assaults like pushing and shoving)

The third part of the questionnaire consisted of three questions (3a, 3b, 3c) about dealing with groups of youths and the fourth part consisted of three questions (4a, 4b, 4c) about dealing with aggressive adults. The last two parts asked very similar questions, but as a control measure the wording was altered slightly in order to avoid “vertical line answering”.

The third part of the questionnaire was designed to measure the respondent’s attitude and feelings towards groups of youths. An answer scale from one to seven was given where: 1 - Strongly agree, 2 - Agree, 3 - Slightly agree, 4 - Neutral, 5 - Slightly disagree, 6 - Disagree, 7 - Strongly disagree. The three questions were:

- a) “I have the skills to deal with a group of youths causing disturbance and shoplifting”
- b) “I am afraid of the groups causing disturbance in my store”
- c) “There is not much I can do about the groups of youths at my store”

The fourth part of the questionnaire was very similar to the third part. The three questions asked about the respondent’s feelings and attitudes towards dealing with aggressive adults. Respondents were given same scale as in part three with the questions being:

- a) “When faced with a verbally abusive and loud customer I fear for my personal safety”
- b) “When faced with an angry customer I feel I can control the situation and calm things down”
- c) “I know how to calm down aggressive situations before they become violent”

The final questionnaire form is available in the appendix 1. A cover letter and an invitation to participate in the interview was attached to the questionnaire form.

3.3 Survey process and response rate

720 copies of questionnaires were sent to the selected stores, 30 to each individual store. According to the personnel files the selected stores employed 510 people. The target for the response rate was set at 50%. Stores were initially given one week time to fill and return the questionnaires. Further 7 days were given to the stores that reported not receiving their forms.

Five envelopes containing the questionnaires were declared lost before reaching the staff. These questionnaires were resent by email. Two envelopes containing completed questionnaires were declared lost in mail before reaching the research team. One envelope containing completed questionnaires was received after the analysing process had already begun. The content was considered to be included in the survey, but after a closer examination was deemed unsuitable for research purposes as all the questionnaire forms were completed with identical vertical lines indicating a single individual filling out all 30 forms for the store.

Store managers, area managers and area personnel managers were engaged and extended time was given to make sure an adequate response rate was achieved. 258 forms from 17 stores were returned in time, which relates to an acceptable 50.59% response rate. The response rate between stores varied between 31% and 100%. Six stores did not return the questionnaires or were deemed unsuitable for the survey. The answers from 18 stores were included in the final sample.

Some stores appeared to have returned more questionnaires than the number of staff working in the store. This discrepancy is probably explained by personnel files not being updated often enough to keep up with the high staff turnover in stores. Those stores that achieved >100% response rate, were given a response rate of 100% and the staff count was adjusted to match that figure. This adjustment increased the final size of sample population to 516 individuals and lowered the overall response rate to exactly 50%, just meeting the target. A detailed table showing the response rate for each store can be found in Appendix 2.

3.4 Semi-structured interviews and the use of secondary data

A limited access was granted to an internal incident database for the purpose of the research. The data itself was omitted from the research as it was considered for internal use only. As only two individuals responded to the invitation to be interviewed, the database was used to

gather further information about actual aggressive incidents. From the incident database 14 recent aggressive incidents in the selected stores were identified and studied further.

The staff interviews were loosely structured and only guiding questions were asked in the relative subjects. The aim was to get as much information as possible about the incidents and to understand staff's interaction with customers in difficult situations. Six individuals were eventually interviewed in more detail. Interviews lasted for an approximately 60 minutes and were conducted off-premises in order to build trust and preserve confidentiality.

All interviews were done anonymously and as such cannot be used as an academic reference. Participants were asked if they had been involved in a violent incident or witnessed a violent incident in the store they worked. They were also asked how they react to aggressive customers and how they feel about working in their store. Two individuals were asked to provide details of recent incidents, where they had been assaulted.

3.5 Participant observation

During the observation period four stores were observed at randomly selected times during the late afternoon and early evening. Observation was done outside the stores when there was some to moderate visibility to the inside of the store and to the immediate surroundings. Customer and staff interaction was also observed inside the stores.

This very informal and covert approach was chosen because the possibility of an aggressive outburst occurring at the time of observation was considered unlikely. However two aggressive incidents were observed along with one case of shoplifting. The observation was conducted without any interaction to the arising incident and in covert clothing without informing the staff beforehand. The overall observation time was 8 hours, approximately two hours at a time.

4 Survey results

Results arising from the survey questionnaire were used to quantify the frequency of witnessed incidents. They were later analysed using quantitative methods. The results from the interviews and participant observation were used as a descriptive narrative, supplementing the quantitative data. Individual questionnaire forms were preserved and stored for future reference and the answers collated in digital format.

4.1 Results for the survey questionnaire

There were a total of 258 individual participants in the final sample of this survey 149 participants were males and 99 were females. 10 individuals did not reveal their gender. 32 participants identified themselves as managers and 139 held non - managerial positions. 87 participants did not reveal their position. A majority (66.4%) of the respondents were under 36 years old and almost a quarter (23.26%) were younger than 25 indicating a fairly young workforce. Table 3 shows the different age groups and their respective percentages.

		Age			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	under 25	60	23.26	24.90	24.90
	26-35	100	38.76	41.49	66.39
	36-45	51	19.77	21.16	87.55
	46-55	21	8.14	8.71	96.27
	56-65	8	3.10	3.32	99.59
	over 65	1	0.39	0.41	100
	Total	241	93.41	100	
Missing	System	17	6.59		
Total		258	100		

Table 3: Age groups of the participants

The results for the trigger variables were analysed using Microsoft Excel and SPSS software. After analysing all answers, an expected pattern emerged. Majority of participants stated they have witnessed all three situations (An underage customer attempting to purchase tobacco, a group of youths causing disturbance, staff or managers involved in a shoplifting incident) weekly or more often. Over 93% of all participants stated they have witnessed these incidents at least once. 39.53% or 102 participants said they witness an underage customer attempting to buy tobacco on daily basis and two thirds (66.67%) said this happens weekly or more often. For question 2a (An underage customer attempting to purchase tobacco) results produced a mean average of 2.2132. The breakdown of the answers can be seen in table 4.

		An underage customer is attempting to buy tobacco			
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Daily	102	39.53	39.53	39.53
	Weekly	70	27.13	27.13	66.67
	Monthly	26	10.08	10.08	76.74
	less often	49	18.99	18.99	95.74
	not witnessed	11	4.26	4.26	100
	Total	258	100	100	

Table 4: Responses to question 2a

For question 2b (a group of youths causing trouble) the mean average was 2.3230 and the breakdown of the answers can be seen in table 5. Once again an expected result indicates that groups of youths are a weekly nuisance in the participating stores as 65.11 % of the respondents said they witness this behaviour at least on a weekly basis.

A group of youths are causing disturbance inside or just outside the store					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	daily	78	30.23	30.35	30.35
	weekly	90	34.88	35.02	65.37
	monthly	30	11.63	11.67	77.04
	less often	46	17.83	17.90	94.94
	not witnessed	13	5.04	5.06	100
Valid	Total	257	99.61	100	
Missing	System	1	0.39		
Total		258	100		

Table 5: Responses to question 2b

For question 2c (staff or managers involved in a shoplifting incident) the mean average was 2.0969. As expected, shoplifting is considered a very regular occurrence in the participating stores. The participants were not asked to estimate the frequency of shoplifting incidents, but specifically indicate how often they see members of staff of managers intervening a shoplifting incident. A somewhat surprising portion, almost three quarters (73.26%) of the respondents report this to be a weekly or even a daily occurrence as can be seen in Table 6.

Staff or managers are involved in a shoplifting incident					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Daily	105	40.70	40.70	40.70
	Weekly	84	32.56	32.56	73.26
	Monthly	26	10.08	10.08	83.33
	less often	25	9.69	9.69	93.02
	not witnessed	18	6.98	6.98	100
Valid	Total	258	100	100	

Table 6: Responses to question 2c

The mean averages can be used to monitor change within a group of stores, but they hold little value by themselves and cannot be used to accurately compare results between stores.

4.2 Results for behavioural variables

The four questions covering the behavioural aspects of aggression in the stores produced consistent results and once again an expected pattern emerged. For question 2d (A customer is using offensive language towards a member of staff) 93% of participants answered they have

witnessed the behaviour in their store. 33.7% said they witness such behaviour weekly and 77.1% say they witness it monthly or more often. Table 7 shows the breakdown of these results.

A customer is using offensive language towards a member of staff					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Daily	65	25.19	25.19	25.19
	weekly	87	33.72	33.72	58.91
	monthly	47	18.22	18.22	77.13
	Less often	41	15.89	15.89	93.02
	not witnessed	18	6.98	6.98	100
Valid	Total	258	100	100	

Table 7: Responses for question 2d

For question 2e (A customer is making threats to harm a member of staff) 81.7% responded that they have witnessed it and 53.3% have witnessed it monthly or more often. 47 participants said they had not witnessed such behaviour. Threats to harm are a very serious form of overt aggressive behaviour and it was somewhat surprising that 27 individuals from 24 stores report witnessing this on a daily basis. As Table 8 shows, the answers were fairly evenly distributed between the available options.

A customer is making threats to harm a member of staff					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Daily	27	10.47	10.51	10.51
	weekly	60	23.26	23.35	33.85
	monthly	50	19.38	19.46	53.31
	less often	73	28.29	28.40	81.71
	not witnessed	47	18.22	18.29	100
Valid	Total	257	99.61	100	
Missing	System	1	0.39		
Total		258	100		

Table 8: Responses for question 2e

Question 2f asked how often the participants have witnessed or been involved in a situation where a customer is breaking things in an aggressive manner. Once again, this is a very strong form of aggressive behaviour, indicating a high level of anxiety and frustration. 67.4% said they have witnessed it and 37.6% have witnessed it monthly or more often. 84 participants said they have not witnessed such behaviour. The responses to the question are shown in table 9.

A customer is breaking things in an aggressive manner					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	Daily	19	7.36	7.36	7.36
	weekly	35	13.57	13.57	20.93
	monthly	43	16.67	16.67	37.60
	Less often	77	29.84	29.84	67.44
	not witnessed	84	32.56	32.56	100
Valid	Total	258	100	100	

Table 9: Responses for question 2f

Question 2g (A customer attacks a member of staff) produced a result where 68.6% of the respondents said they have witnessed it and 35.3% monthly or more often. 31.4% said have not witnessed such behaviour. A notable 17.3% say they witness attacks on staff weekly or more often and 16 individuals reported witnessing this on a daily basis. Table 10 shows the breakdown of the results, including the three forms where this question as un-answered.

A customer attacks a member of staff					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
	daily	16	6.20	6.27	6.27
	weekly	28	10.85	10.98	17.25
	monthly	46	17.83	18.04	35.29
	less often	85	32.95	33.33	68.63
	not witnessed	80	31.01	31.37	100
Valid	Total	255	98.84	100	
Missing	System	3	1.16		
Total		258	100		

Table 10: Responses for question 2g

The results for the trigger variables and the behavioural variables revealed a trend, which supports the research hypothesis and shows that events which can trigger aggressive behaviour are more frequently witnessed by staff than overt aggressive behaviour. In other words, not all potentially aggressive situations turn aggressive or violent. The results also show that the more serious the incident, the less frequently it is witnessed. Figure 4 shows a chart compilation of the results where the trend is clearly visible, assaults and expressions of overt violence are less often witnessed than incidents of covert aggression i.e. trigger variables.

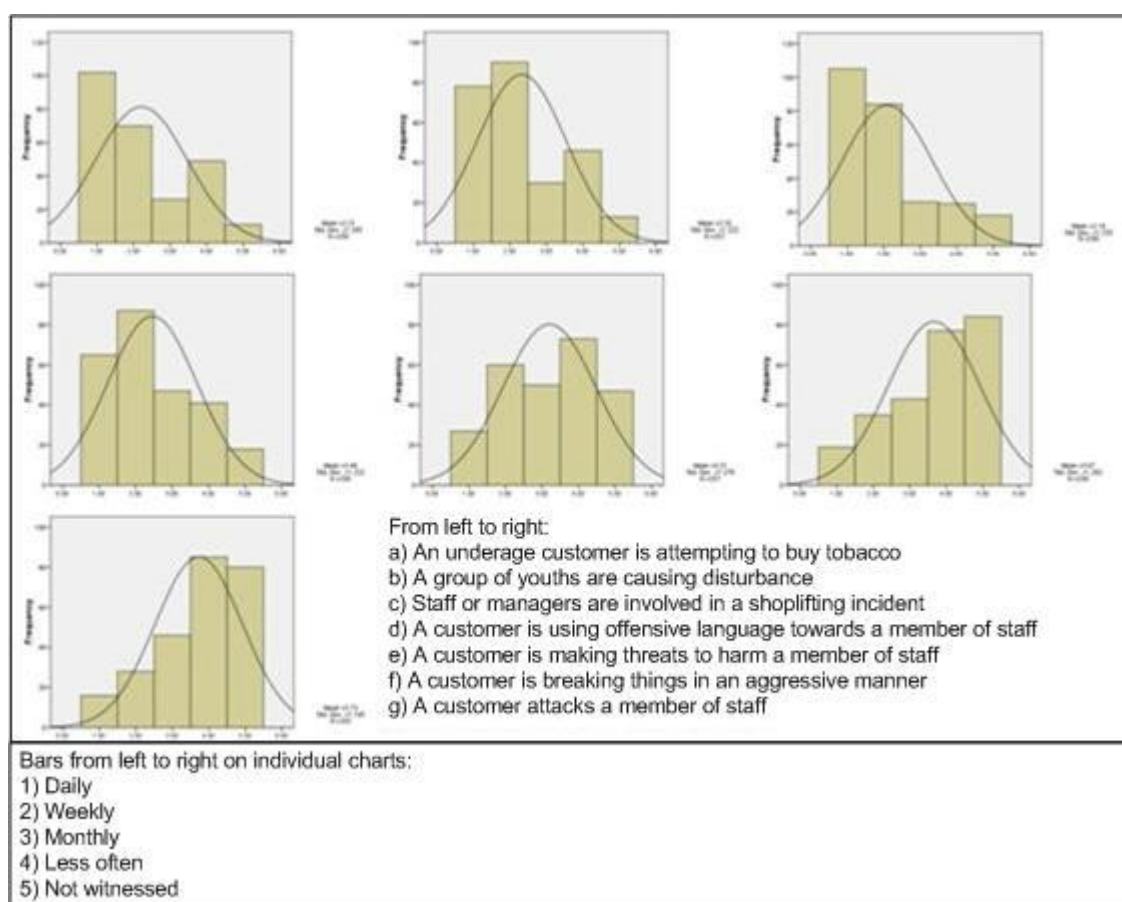


Figure 4: Comparison chart for the results, questions 2a - 2g

4.3 Results for statements 3a - 3c

The third part of the questionnaire asked the respondents how they perceived their skills to handle groups of youths that cause trouble at the store. Groups of youths have been identified as one major cause for aggressive behaviour and intimidation. In the questionnaire, three statements were made and the participants had to answer how much they agreed or disagreed with the statement. On all questions, the participants placed a lot of emphasis on positive answers. The answers were scaled from 1 to 7 (1=Strongly agree, 2=Agree, 3= Slightly agree, 4=Neutral, 5=Slightly disagree, 6=Disagree, 7=Strongly disagree).

On the first statement (“I have the skills to deal with a group of youths causing disturbance and shoplifting”) 51.36% of the participants indicated they agreed with the statement (Agreed slightly, agreed or agreed strongly). 22.57% indicated neutral feelings towards this statement. Figure 5 is a pie chart showing the breakdown of the responses to question 3a.

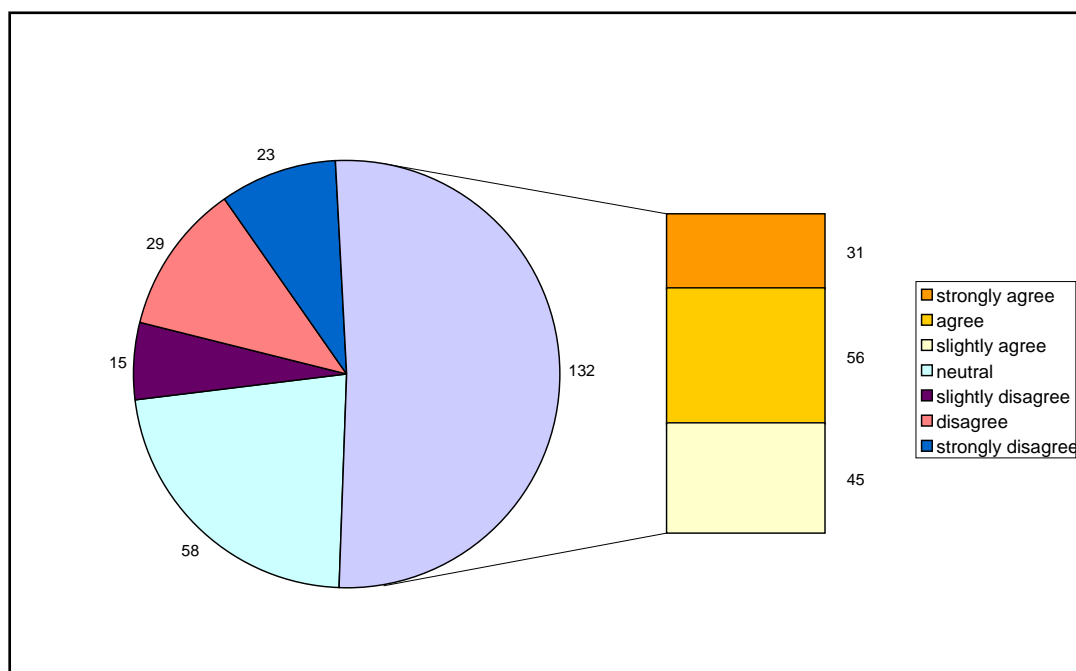


Figure 5: “I have the skills to deal with a group of youths causing disturbance and shoplifting”

The second statement (“I’m afraid of the groups causing disturbance at my store”) also generated a large portion of positive responses. 65.37% of the participants agreed with the statement (Agreed slightly, agreed or agreed strongly). 21.40% indicated a neutral answer towards this statement. 13.23% indicated that they are not afraid of the groups of youths (Slightly disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed). Figure 6 shows the breakdown of the responses to the second statement (3b).

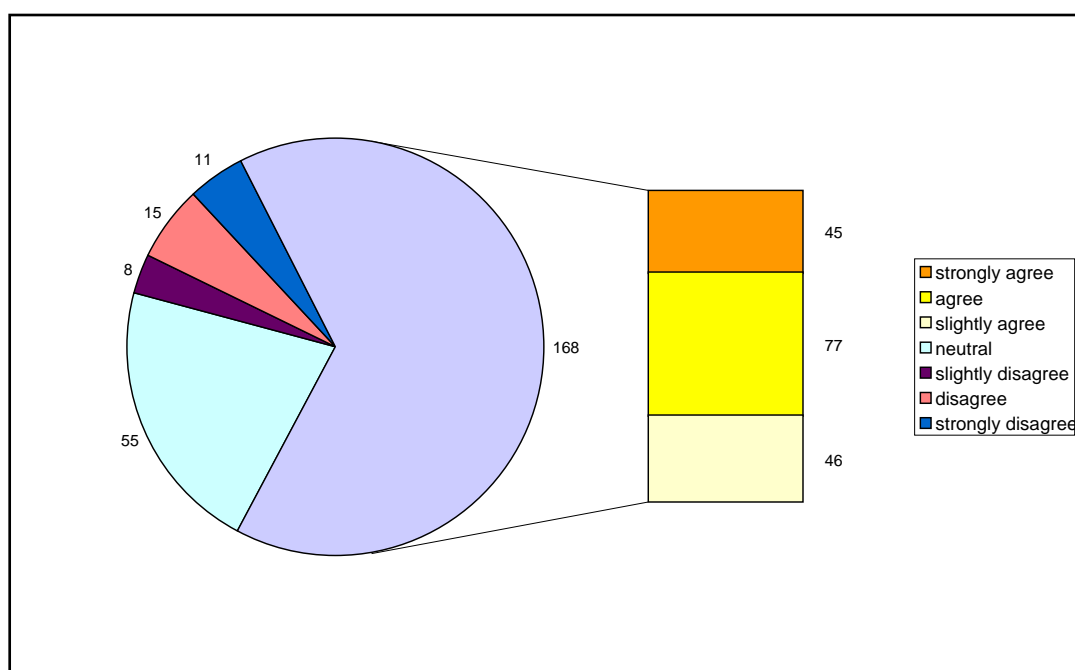


Figure 6: "I'm afraid of the groups causing disturbance at my store"

To further test the hypothesis on the mounting frustration the third question was worded in very clear terms: "There is not much I can do about the groups of youths at my store". This was aimed to provoke the participants and generate a strong response. A large portion of answers at both extreme ends of the scale were expected with fewer answers indicating neutral. The result was both surprising and as expected. 20.23% of the participants strongly agreed with the statement and a total of 67.70% agreed with it (Slightly agreed, agreed or strongly agreed). However, 19.07% still indicated neutral and 13.23% once again indicated a negative response to the statement. Figure 7 shows the breakdown of the responses to question 3c.

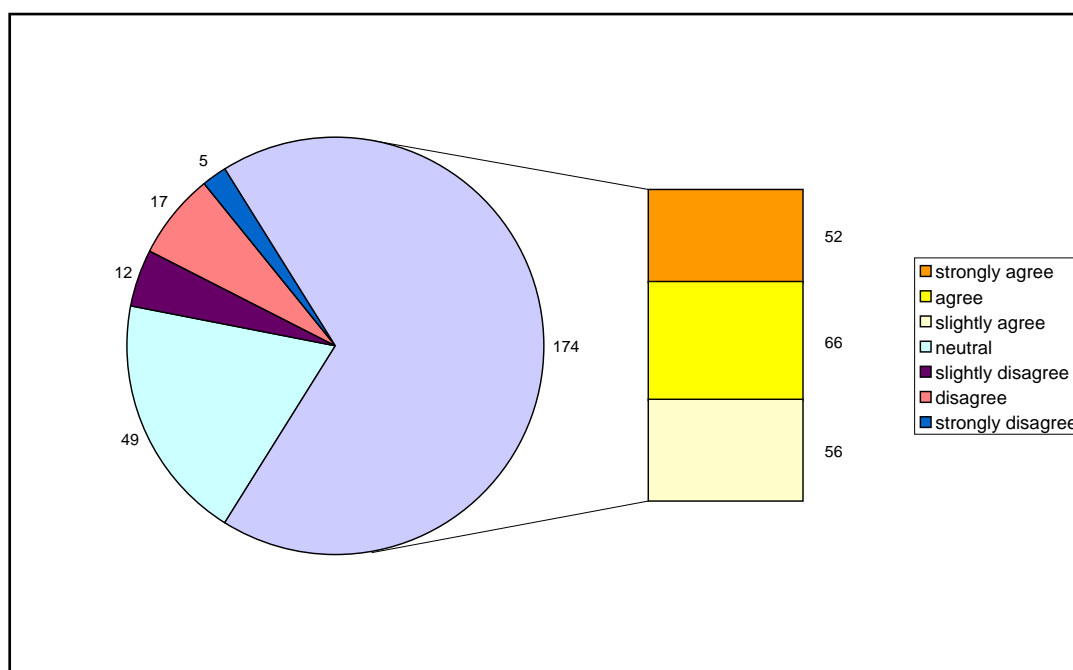


Figure 7: "There is not much I can do about the groups of youths at my store"

4.4 Results for statements 4a - 4c

Three last questions on the questionnaire asked the participants how they felt about dealing with aggressive adults. The answers were scaled from one to seven as in the previous three statements. Again the emphasis was on the positive scale with majority of answers indicating that the participants agreed with the statements.

The first statement (“When faced with a verbally abusive and loud customer I fear for my personal safety”) prompted a strong positive response with 73.64% indicating they agreed with the statement (Slightly agreed, agreed or strongly agreed). 10.46% disagreed with the statement, indicating that they are not afraid of their personal safety (Slightly disagreed, disagreed or strongly disagreed). Figure 8 shows the breakdown of the responses to question 4a.

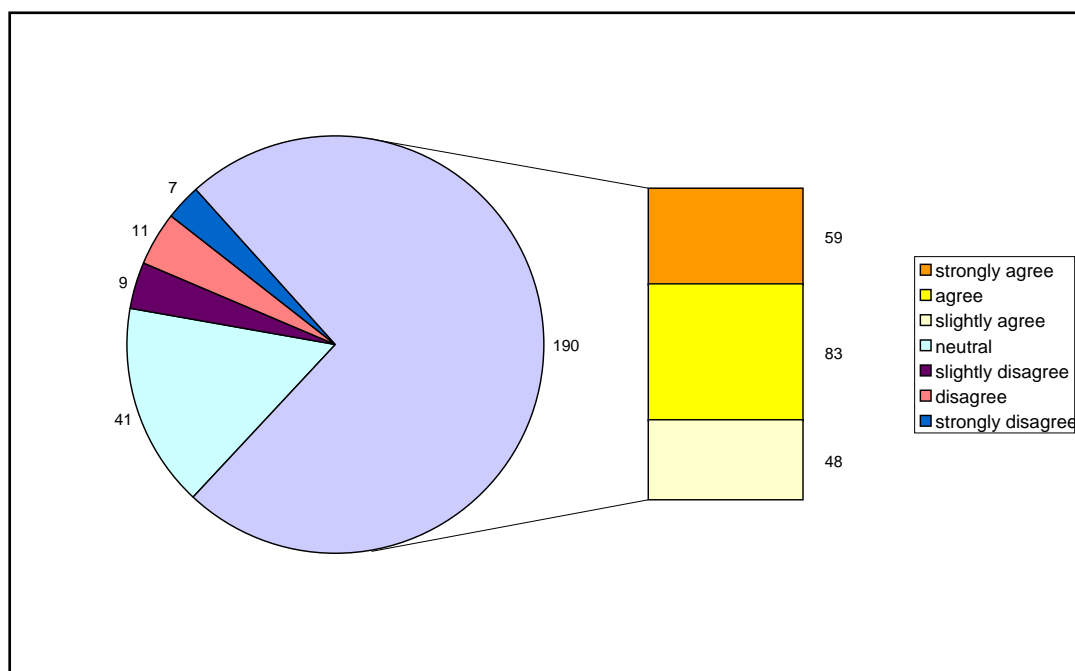


Figure 8: "When faced with a verbally abusive and loud customer I fear for my personal safety"

The results for the second statement (“When faced with an angry customer I feel I can control the situation and calm things down”) showed that the participants are confident in their skills to handle angry customers as 62.79% agreed with the statement (Slightly agree, agree, strongly agree). A slightly increased number of participants indicated that they disagreed with the statement (Slightly disagree, disagree, strongly disagree) and 19.38% stayed neutral. Figure 9 shows the breakdown of the responses to question 4b.

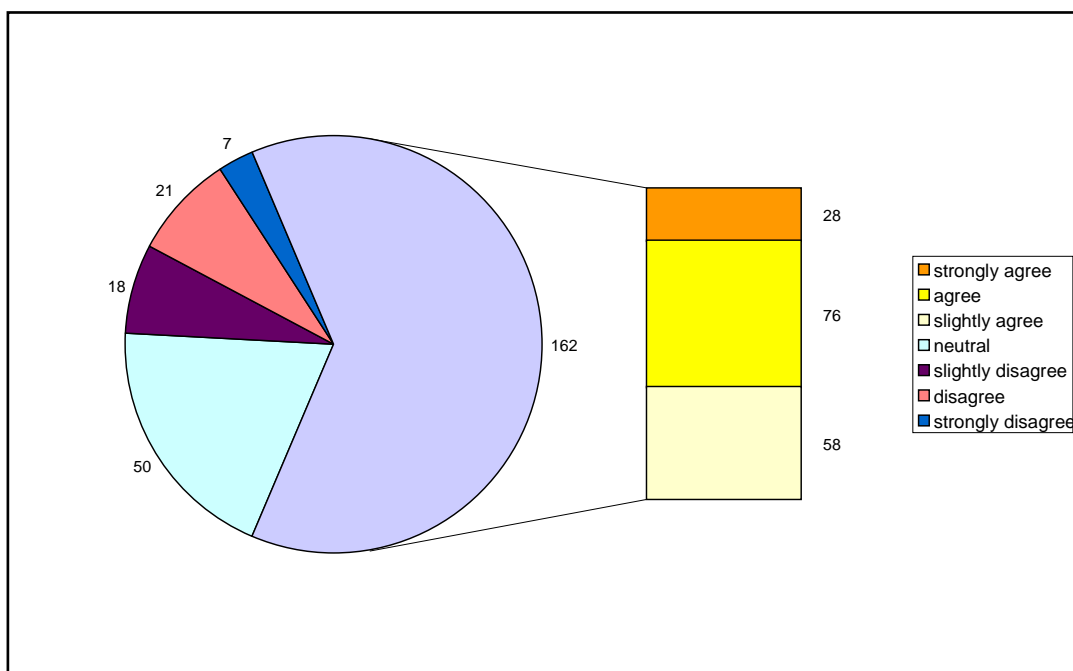


Figure 9: "When faced with an angry customer I feel I can control the situation and calm things down"

The third statement (“I know how to calm down aggressive situations before they become violent”) produced a similar response pattern to the previous statements. 62.02% indicated that they know how to calm down these situations (Slightly agree, agree, strongly agree). 21.32% indicated a neutral response and 15.12% disagreed (Slightly disagree, disagree, agree). A small number of participants indicated that they strongly agree with the statement (8.14%). Figure 10 shows the breakdown of the responses to the last question (4c).

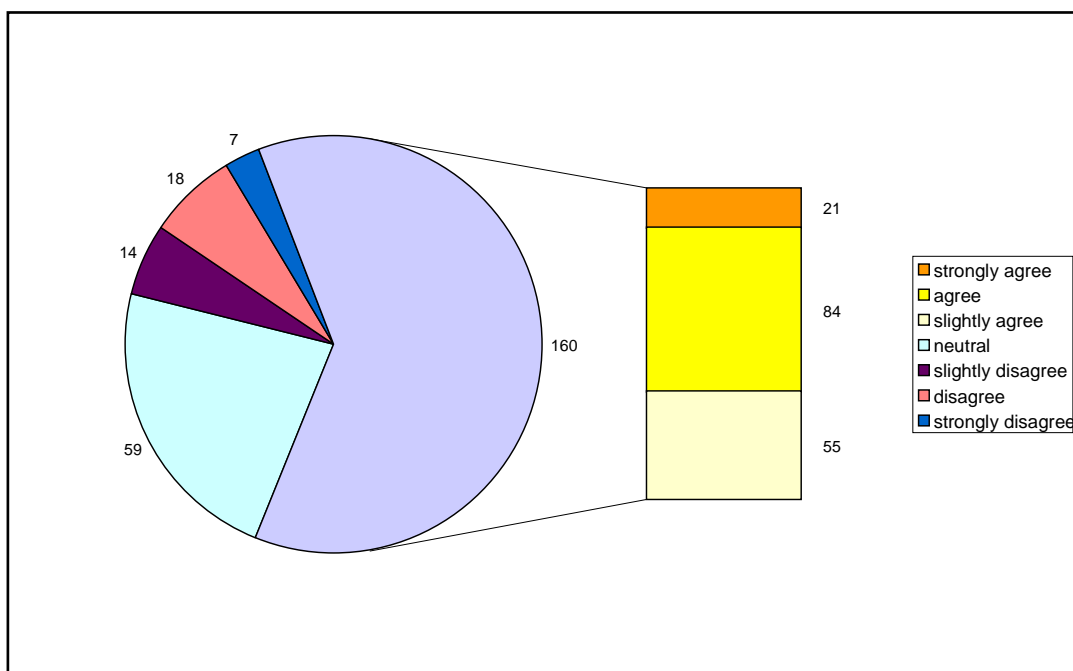


Figure 10: "I know how to calm down aggressive situations before they become violent"

4.5 The validity and reliability of the data

Quantitative data analysis techniques were used to analyse the data resulting from the survey. As mentioned before, Microsoft Excel spreadsheets were used to collect the raw data, which was then categorised and analysed using the SPSS software. According to Saunders et al (2007, 409), categorical data refers to numerically unmeasurable data, which can only be used to describe the variable. The questionnaire results were in fact categorical data as they could not be measured numerically.

All null answers and missing values were removed from the raw data in order to increase the reliability and eventually the validity of the results. As the initial questionnaire was designed with the forthcoming analysis in mind, it was fairly simple to input the raw data into the system.

Out of 258 respondents only 171 indicated whether their position in the store was managerial or non-managerial. Due to high level of missing values, this question was dropped from the

final analysis. The questions about gender and age both also contained some missing values. This indicates that the anonymity of the questionnaires was probably questioned and some respondents refused to reveal this background information. The trigger variables and behavioural variables showed a satisfactory degree of reliability and internal consistency with the result of .866 on the Cronbach's Alpha. The results showed a modest degree of reliability when questions from parts three and four were included, resulting in Cronbach's Alpha of .741. According to the institute of digital research and education, a reliability coefficient of .70 or higher is considered acceptable in social sciences (SPSS FAQ, 2015).

There was a considerable amount of inconsistency and variation between answers of the third and fourth part of the questionnaire. This may be due to inadequate wording of the questions or the difficulty respondents faced when they had to evaluate their own skills and feelings.

The results were considered adequately reliable, when certain background information was removed from the equation. The validity of questions 3a-4c were questionable as they reduced the overall reliability of the survey, however they were eventually included in the final analysis as the overall reliability of .741 still exceeded the level of acceptance as shown in the figure 11.

Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
.741	.760	13

Figure 11: Reliability of the results excluding age, gender and position

4.6 Correlation analysis

After analysing the results, certain correlations between different variables were discovered. Some of the correlations were as strong as expected, while some were in fact quite surprising. Strongest correlations were found between the frequencies of incidents which are close to each other on the escalation scale. This was especially true with the more serious of incidents. A correlation of >0.700 was found between witnessing customer breaking things and customer making threats to harm (0.760) and customer making threats to harm and customer assaulting a member of staff (0.745).

Another strong correlation was found between witnessing customer using offensive language and customer making threats (0.674). A notable correlation was also found between witnessing staff being involved in shoplifting and customer making threats to harm (0.505). All behavioural variables correlated between each other to some extent (>0.531) lower correlation was found between the trigger variables (>0.365).

Correlation between background variables and other studied variables was almost non-existent. Surprisingly there was only low to moderate correlation between age and gender and how the participants felt about groups of youths or angry customers (questions 3b and 4a) This indicates that the perceptions are highly dependent on the individual rather than their age or gender. It is worth mentioning, that the almost two thirds of the sample group were aged <35 and different results would be likely if all age groups were equally represented.

Results for the SPSS correlation analyses can be found in appendix 3.

4.7 Results for interviews

Six employees were interviewed in order to obtain detailed information on the dynamics of aggressive behaviour. All employees had either participated in conflict resolution and safety training or they had access to the training material. They were also aware of the company's safety guidelines and policies.

As previously identified, age restricted sales and shoplifting, cause tension and result in problematic situations. Groups of youths were seen more as unpredictable nuisance than a serious concern. The Sale of alcohol was seen more problematic than the sale of tobacco due to the age restriction of sales. None of the interviewed employees remembered tobacco sales causing problems at the store they worked in. The main problem seemed to be with alcohol, and specifically in situations where a young customers was asked to provide a proof of age.

If Identification was requested some customers were prepared to provide a number of reasons of why they can't produce a valid form of identification. After refusal of sales, aggression would either manifest itself as verbal abuse escalating into items being broken or thrown at the cashier, or the customer would accept the situation and walk away. If a sale was refused customer could also take the items and leave the store without paying, turning the incident into an act of theft. In one bizarre incident the sale of alcohol was refused from a group of early morning customers due to restriction on alcohol trading hours, but the customers packed the alcohol in a bag and threw a bank note at the till before making off with the alcohol. Things escalated when staff tried to intervene and the situation turned violent.

The interviewed employees were prepared to accept some level of verbal abuse as part of the job, but threats to harm were considered upsetting. One employee said she accepts aggression as part of her work, but she is hoping to advance into a larger store, where it is considered to be safer.

The usual response to threatening and persistent customers was to rely on manager's or security guard's intervention. Often the irate customers were seeking to speak to manager themselves. Aggression towards security officers were not within the scope of this research, although it is often included in similar surveys.

Aggressive customers were sometimes seen to pick up items to break them up before leaving. Sometimes the selected items were used as weapons and thrown at the cashier. This would indicate mounting frustration, which is directed at the establishment, not at the individual employee.

One manager explained how aggression had developed over a two week period when interacting with a difficult customer. The manager and his staff had to refuse the sale to a female customer several times as she was abusing social benefit vouchers. Her defence was that she had been sold before. The manager eventually intervened in order to show support to his staff. The customer began to verbally abuse him and over the course of 14 days returned to the store insulting the manager repeatedly. A violent incident report was filed when the manager lost his temper and jumped over the till to face the irate female customer. He then proceeded to make a polite request for the customer to leave, using the phrase: "Leave, please". The customer responded by striking the manager to the face with her fist. The incident was considered a non-compliance issue as the manager lost his temper and acted out aggressively. The incident report itself offered no cues to the previous 14 days leading up to the incident.

Another manager described an incident where a female customer assistant saw a young man leaving the store with an unpaid chocolate bar. She ran after the man and asked him to stop and return to the store. The man carried on. The employee grabbed the man from behind by the shoulder and repeated the request to stop, using the words: "Sir, please stop". The man swung his arm around and caught the employee on the jaw, breaking it in two places. The incident was considered a non-compliance issue as the employee was not expected to make any attempts to arrest, detain or apprehend the suspect.

4.8 Results for the field observation

During the observation period the selected stores seemed to be quiet and peaceful and there was no sign of anger for most of the time. In one particular store where local youths were known to cause trouble, a small number of youths were observed to approach the store. They stopped just outside the store and seemed to deploy lookouts, monitoring the staff inside. Two of the youths quickly made their way into the store and between two aisles. They were seen to return immediately and making their way across the road and into an alley way between buildings. On their way out they were unwrapping what seemed to be chocolate biscuits. This whole incident was a demonstration of covert and goal orientated aggression. The youths were intentionally causing a loss of property to the store and obviously paid some attention to planning and executing their plan by observing the staff from outside. There was no response by the store staff and it is expected that the whole incident went completely unnoticed as it was over in less than 30 seconds.

At another store a scene of rapidly escalating car park rage was observed, when a customer parked his car in front of the cash machine by the front doors effectively blocking the traffic flow from the car park. As he was queuing for the cash machine, a queue of cars built behind his car. Some of the drivers started to get anxious and a few loud words were exchanged. When the customer had finished with the cash machine, he returned to his car shouting at the drivers behind his car and making hand gestures. One of the drivers undid his seatbelt and stepped out from his car, escalating the situation even further. The customer eventually drove off with speed, followed by three other cars.

In one store apparently low staffing levels was causing long queues at the check outs during the busy afternoon hours. The effect on the customers' behaviour was profound and immediate. Frustration was visibly increased the longer customers had to queue. Similar phenomenon was witnessed in almost all stores at some point during the observation period. Customers made their feelings known by making facial gestures in the queue and trying to make eye contact with staff or managers. One male customer left the queue with his shopping basket and threw it towards a pile of baskets, next to where the guard was standing. As he left the store he made his comments with a loud voice. Another customer approached the guard and complained about the staffing levels. There was only one female member of staff at the check-out.

There was also one store which had a problem with the sliding front doors. They would open extremely slowly and customers had to stop and wait for two or three seconds before they could enter or leave the store. Without any detailed knowledge of the door mechanics, this was assumed as a fault rather than a desired security feature. Customers were observed get-

ting angry before they even entered the store, and some demonstrated a level of aggression by trying to force the doors open, or hitting the glass with the palms of their hands. One male customer was followed into the store, where his behaviour continued to show visible signs of aggression. The customer made his way towards the back of the store, apparently looking for a particular item. A female member of staff was seen explaining something to the customer on a fairly cluttered aisle, with some opened boxes and wrapping material. The customer left the store intentionally ramming a trolley onto the boxes and into the shelf.

None of these incidents were violent, but they were certainly prime examples of aggressive behaviour, arousal and excitement at the same time. This was the result of just eight hours of observation, equal to one working day in a convenience store.

5 Review of the results and discussion

The following chapter reflects on the survey and discusses the results in light of the theoretical background and previous research. Overall it must be said that for a narrowly focused mixed method survey the results were unsurprising for the most part. It would be interesting to follow up and conduct a similar survey on a larger scale. Looking back at the results, it was evident that the participants had sometimes very strong expectations on the effect the research would have at their workplace. The work was sponsored and facilitated by the employer, which made it fairly easy to engage the chain of management. This helped to achieve a satisfactory response rate, but also resulted in at least one store manager to fill out all the questionnaire forms on behalf of the employees. Following surveys should seek co-operation with an independent national body for a greater cross cut sample. Potential partners would include the British retail consortium, the Health and Safety Executive, the UK Home Office and perhaps the Institute of Grocery Distribution.

5.1 Review of the survey results

Certain situational factors can increase the risk of violence in a retail environment. In this survey, three of these factors were studied. The sale of and in particular the refusal to sell age restricted products such as tobacco and alcohol were considered to potentially trigger an aggressive response. Preliminary interviews indicated that the underage purchase attempts of tobacco were less common than attempts to purchase alcohol. In order to get a reasonably accurate estimate on the frequency of the both of these incidents, it was decided to define the least likely factor as the comparison point.

Two thirds of the respondents said they witness underage customers attempting to buy tobacco weekly or more often. Most of these incidents do not escalate into overt aggression, but the

frequency of these reported incidents is surprisingly high. At the same time some 23% of the respondents are exposed to this less often than monthly. Based on these answers it would be very likely for a new employee to witness this during the first months of employment in an urban convenience store.

A possibly related phenomenon is the presence of groups of youths or gangs causing disturbance near the work place. Just under two thirds of the respondents indicate witnessing this behaviour weekly or more often. This is not surprising as the participating stores are located in highly urbanised and somewhat deprived areas. Groups of youths were identified as a major cause for concern in previous research (Shury et al 2005, xi). The results suggest that participating stores experience disturbance from groups of youths quite regularly.

73.26% of the respondents said they witness employees or managers being involved in shoplifting incidents on a weekly basis. This figure relates to some extent with the reported rate of customer theft of around 45 incidents per year per store (Retail Crime Survey 2013, 17). It must be addressed that this particular question may have been misunderstood as meaning the perceived frequency of shoplifting incidents in the store. It was meant to relate to the frequency of incidents where staff is actually involved. If the figure reflected reality, it would indicate frequently repeated exposure to potential physical aggression and violence.

Minor forms of workplace violence are considered heavily under-reported, but frequent. 93% of the respondents said they have witnessed customer using offensive language towards a member of staff and almost 60% said this happens weekly or more often. This result is not surprising, as the recorded figures were known to be highly under-reported. In comparison, the Retail Crime survey suggested a rate of 26 incidents of non-violent, aggressive behaviour for 1000 employees (2013, 29).

Threatening to harm a member of staff is obviously a lot more serious form of abuse. According to the results almost a fifth of the respondents have not witnessed this at all. On the other hand, one third of them said they witness this weekly or more often. Threats to harm are a form of hostile aggression, which are probably preceded by some type of an altercation. This could be a shoplifting incident, or perhaps a refusal to sell goods. While the frequency of threats correlate quite strongly with other witnessed incidents, it has a very strong correlation with actual assaults on staff.

The correlation between threats and assaults was .745, which even in this small sample is quite remarkable. It would suggest that employees who witness threats to harm are very likely to witness actual physical violence. Threats are also strongly related to other verbal abuse and offensive language and to lesser extent shoplifting incidents.

The vast majority of the respondents said they have witnessed both customers breaking things and customers attacking a member of staff. The Correlation between these two incidents very strong, .634 indicating perhaps some type of aggression continuum. Overall it seemed that the more violent the incidents were, the more they correlated to each other. Aggressive behaviour appears to be a daily occurrence in many of the urban convenience stores in London. How does this affect the employees?

Roughly half of the respondents feel they have the necessary skills to deal with groups of youths and around a quarter indicate they do not. On the same note two thirds said they are afraid of these youths and 67% said they feel there is not much they can do about it. Being afraid of something and not being able to do anything about it is a scary combination. It would appear that a portion of the employees have accepted the situation and feel quite hopeless about it. This hopelessness was one part of the original hypothesis of this thesis and it appears to have some truth to it. It is impossible to determine the causal relationship between the exposure aggressive behaviour and the feeling of hopelessness. The idea of being desensitized to aggression certainly feel appealing. Another question is whether this feeling of hopelessness explains the non-compliance issue of irrational behaviour by employees.

Similar issue arises from dealing with loud and aggressive customers. Almost three quarters of the respondents said they fear for their personal safety when faced with a verbally abusive and loud customer. At the same time 62% of the respondents felt confident in their conflict resolution skills, knowing how to calm things down and controlling the situation. Then again, being afraid does not rule the ability to control the situation and calm it down.

The results from the survey reflected the personal attitudes of the participants to some extent. The topic of the survey prompted some employees and managers to perhaps over-estimate their responses. This may have been due to certain expectations that this survey would have an effect on their working conditions. Some may have downplayed their estimations, but overall I expect the results to be biased to some degree. Under-reporting of minor incidents is certainly a real issue, but the survey may have given somewhat exaggerated results. The consistency of the answers indicate that the right questions were asked. The absence of the background information indicates lack of trust towards the confidentiality of the survey. This could be amended by using an online survey, instead of a paper version.

5.2 Review of the interview results

The six interviews supported the survey results and provided additional information about the actual aggressive incidents. In light of the theoretical framework, the interviews supported the statistical data by showing that violence often occurs as a direct response to staff intervention. As employees seem to rely on managers or security officers when facing an aggressive customer, this puts them at more risk of violence and injury.

Even though the six interviews are not statistically significant, they hold some descriptive value for the research. Individuals were not keen to volunteer for this research as only two participants included their contact details. The invitation for an interview should have included some form of an incentive or perhaps it should have been conducted on the telephone. A more balanced mixed method survey would be better suited for future surveys. A larger sample and a more structured set of interview questions would give more accurate results.

5.3 Review of the participant observation

Watching a small convenience store for hours is hardly considered an academic activity, but it produced some exciting results in a fairly short amount of time. Field observation was vital to determine whether the frequency of incidents reflected the results of the survey. It was also an opportunity to witness customer behaviour before they enter the store.

Several aggressive incidents and one shoplifting incident within eight hours of observation indicate these are very frequent occurrences in small stores. They are probably not as frequent as suggested by the survey, but nevertheless more frequent than is reported. As an observer it was possible to observe the approach and entry of the customers. There are certainly some aggressive triggers which relate to the design of the forecourt, car-park and the general surroundings of the stores.

The objective here was not to collect quantitative data or measure the frequencies of aggressive incidents in large scale. The goal was to get an unbiased opinion on how aggression escalates and what affects it in the store. It would appear that there are several situational factors present at the same, many of which relate to the operation and procedures of running the store. The design and layout of the store, the availability of goods and the various technological elements which the store relies on can increase aggression if they do not meet the customer's expectation.

The most important personal factors are perhaps the service given by the employees. Service falling short of expectations can provoke an aggressive response from the customer. Some-

times it is the norms, procedures and legislative limitations which contradict with the customer's expectations. The employees are forced to follow certain guidelines, even if the customer's demands are not met.

I would suggest that there are several operational, technical, procedural, inter-personal and managerial factors that affect aggressive behaviour in small convenience stores. This would need to be studied further as there is a clear gap in current knowledge and research.

5.4 The issue of non-compliance

The issue of non-compliance, going against the written policy, was raised several times during the interviews. It was also offered as an explanation to the large number of injuries related to retail violence. The interviewed individuals were unable to explain why employees sometimes attempt to stop thieves from leaving the store or get into physical altercation with an aggressive customer.

Physical intervention is not expected by any member of staff, and the available safety policies clearly stated this. Staff are not expected nor trained to apprehend, arrest or detain criminals with the exception of loss prevention and security officers. It is possible that stopping a thief gives the employee some form of mental or social reward and appraisal. There may be an underlying expectation to protect the goods and shoplifting incidents in small stores are fairly easily recognised by staff. In the heat of the moment employees rely on intuition rather than rational thought.

Psychological literature would suggest that such behaviour is preceded by an evaluation of one's own capabilities to succeed in achieving the desired outcome (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 41). As responsive aggression is often impulsive, this thought process is probably not very rational. In fact Bushman and Anderson explain that there are several factors that reduce inhibition for aggressive response. Sometimes an act of heroism is perceived justified or even demanded by the situation. Similarly anger and agitation may result in poor judgement and irrational overt behaviour. (Bushman, Anderson 2002, 44.)

Excitation transfer and arousal theories suggest that individuals are primed for aggressive response for a fairly long time after an aggressive incident (Bushman, Anderson 2002 32, 39). In addition long term exposure to aggression increase the risk for aggressive behaviour by the affected individual (Flannery et al 2007, 306-314; Bushman, Anderson 2002, 42, 43). Aggressive behaviour is also learned by observing role models. The example shown by someone with authority can be more powerful than a guidelines and written policies, as indicated by the observational learning theory. (Huesmann, Kirwill 2007, 551-552.)

Retail employees are often given some formal training on the lines of conflict management or conflict resolution. As the survey suggests most of the employees are confident in their conflict resolution skills. One bold question to ask is if this type of training encourages employees to actively, but unconsciously, seek confrontation to resolve? The interviewed employees indicated they used a polite and non-confrontational language when they approached the aggressor.

The manager who jumped over the till asked the customer to politely leave and was punched in the face. The employee who grabbed the shoplifter's shoulder asked politely him to return to the store. Obviously the gestures and body language were in gross contradiction with the verbal language. These were the skills learned in the conflict resolution training, but they were incorrectly applied and in fact escalated the situation further. One simply cannot politely force someone to stop or leave. As John Byrnes suggests (2002, 12) perhaps it is time to shift focus from conflict resolution to aggression management, or in more common terms, conflict avoidance.

6 Conclusions

Employees working in urban convenience stores are exposed to verbal abuse and threats on regular basis and may have accepted it as a normal part of the job description. Continuous exposure to aggressive behaviour leads to reduced job satisfaction and may eventually result in poor performance and compliance issues. This may in turn be reflected on the customer service level and cause further friction between members of staff and customers. Behavioural desensitizing to aggression increases the probability of an inappropriate aggressive response.

The leading cause for retail work related violence is related to shoplifting incidents. The risk of injury is elevated when staff intervene and attempt to arrest, detain or apprehend an offender. Refusing the sale of age restricted products or even requesting for a proof of age may result in instant escalation in violence. These situations are often witnessed on a daily basis in small convenience stores. Large groups of youths and their disorderly behaviour is considered a nuisance and can have an effect on staff morale. Most, if not in fact all, participating stores witness aggressive behaviour in all its forms very frequently which supports the theory of multiple victimisation (Shury et al. 2005, 4).

There seems to be very strong correlation between witnessed threats of violence and actual violence. This strong correlation would indicate that people who are exposed to threatening behaviour are very likely to experience actual violence. The issue of under-reporting minor incidents needs to be resolved before this problem can be tackled.

The participants in this survey are relatively confident in their skills to handle difficult situations, but they still feel unnerved by aggressive customers and groups of youths. They also express some feelings of hopelessness and feel there is not much they can do control aggressive behaviour. Not following certain guidelines, complying with company regulations, is certainly an issue in many stores. It is as much a training issue as it is compliance issue.

Overconfidence and mounting frustration can lead to employees and managers to ignore best practises and applicable policies in aggressive situations. When employees abandon self-control and respond to aggression with irrational logic, the risk of injury increases. Companies operating small convenience stores should focus on raising awareness and improving conflict management training. Training should be methodical and interactive as people are tend to ignore written policies and guidelines in real life.

Based on the findings from this survey, there are several recommendations offered to increase employee safety and reduce workplace violence in small convenience stores. The issue of desensitization and exposure to aggressive behaviour should be addressed through preventive security measures. Engaging with the local community and authorities, establishing social interaction with the customers and local youths and communicating values and principles with in-store signage can reduce the level of aggression in stores.

There are a number of design features and operational issues which can be addressed to reduce frustration experienced by customers. Clear aisles, stock availability and adequate staffing levels at the check outs are important operational factors which affect customer behaviour. This is art of managing expectations is probably something many retailers are already aware of in terms of improving customer satisfaction, but it also relates on aggressive behaviour in the stores. Secondary issues relate to the environmental factors, such as the temperature, background noise and the overall colour scheme in the store. Certain colours, noises and warm temperature can increase aggressive behaviour in a primal level.

Technical factors, or issues relating to the operation of automated electronic systems are very important in managing customer expectations. Some examples are Point of Sales systems (POS) and Electronic Payment Terminals, Heat, Ventilation, Air Conditioning systems (HVAC), Petrol pumps, cash machines (ATMS), Public Address systems (PA), Access Control and locking systems and Fire and Intrusion alarm systems. Many of these systems are integral to the store's operation and all failures or malfunctions need to be addressed promptly.

The issue of under reporting can be addressed by developing simple to use reporting systems, which allow employees to report and record even minor incidents including verbal abuse and intimidation. The reporting system should be easily accessible, and extremely simple to use.

Ideally the reporting should be integrated into the existing infrastructure, for example the POS- system or a handheld device. It should be made possible to report an incident with a single push of a button. Wearable solutions should also be considered. The reporting button can be integrated into staff name cards, id badges, smart phones or wrist watches. Better reporting would result in improved awareness and possibly improved response by the management team. Debriefing should be considered after each reported incident, as to decrease the effects of desensitization.

Staff training should be enhanced by introducing conflict avoidance strategies and case practices. It is important for participants to understand the consequences of aggressive behaviour. This could be done by discussing previous incidents and the processes which can lead to injury at work. At the same time store safety policies should be reviewed and discussed with the employees. Ideally staff safety training should incorporate elements of practical training, which would help to develop conflict avoidance skills. Managers and workers should receive same training, ideally at the same. This would create an opportunity for a real life model-observer interaction.

It is my personal belief that store safety is increased through raising awareness, engaging the community and by improving reporting and training.

This research has offered a narrow view on a particular problem and hopefully raises discussion and awareness on the subject. I have personally learned a great deal about retail safety by being involved in this project. Aggressive behaviour is truly a complex phenomenon and it can explain many aspects of retail safety, loss prevention and security. Further research should be done in the field of desensitization to aggressive behaviour and how it affects workplace safety. It would also be interesting to see how a national survey focused on convenience stores compare to the findings in this survey. How different is it to work in a convenience store in a rural environment compared to a large city? It would also be interesting to scale the survey to include the whole Europe and compare the findings internationally.

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Appendix 1 Survey questionnaire form

STAFF SAFETY AND INCIDENT FREQUENCY QUESTIONNAIRE. 05/2007

Answer the following questions and statements by ticking the box on the most appropriate answer

1.) BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Gender: Male	<input type="checkbox"/>	Female	<input type="checkbox"/>	Position:	Manager	<input type="checkbox"/>	Non- managerial	<input type="checkbox"/>
Age:	Under 25	<input type="checkbox"/>	26-35	<input type="checkbox"/>	36-45	<input type="checkbox"/>	46-55	<input type="checkbox"/>
							56-65	<input type="checkbox"/>
							Over 65	<input type="checkbox"/>

2.) INCIDENT FREQUENCY

How often have you witnessed or been involved in a situation where:

- a) An underage customer is attempting to buy tobacco
 1. Daily 2. Weekly 3. Monthly 4. Less often 5. Not witnessed this
- b) A group of youth are causing disturbance inside or just outside the store
 1. Daily 2. Weekly 3. Monthly 4. Less often 5. Not witnessed this
- c) Staff or managers are involved in a shoplifting incident (trying to stop the thief or get the goods back)
 1. Daily 2. Weekly 3. Monthly 4. Less often 5. Not witnessed this
- d) A customer is using offensive language towards a member of staff (i.e. name calling or racist remarks)
 1. Daily 2. Weekly 3. Monthly 4. Less often 5. Not witnessed this
- e) A customer is making threats to harm a member of staff
 1. Daily 2. Weekly 3. Monthly 4. Less often 5. Not witnessed this
- f) A customer is breaking things in an aggressive manner (either stock or property, i.e. a window)
 1. Daily 2. Weekly 3. Monthly 4. Less often 5. Not witnessed this
- g) A customer attacks a member of staff (even minor assaults like pushing and shoving)
 1. Daily 2. Weekly 3. Monthly 4. Less often 5. Not witnessed this

3.) DEALING WITH GROUPS OF YOUTH

- a) "I have the skills to deal with a group of youth causing disturbance and shoplifting"
 1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Slightly agree 4. Neutral 5. Slightly disagree 6. Disagree 7. Strongly disagree
- b) "I am afraid of the groups causing disturbance at my store"
 1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Slightly agree 4. Neutral 5. Slightly disagree 6. Disagree 7. Strongly disagree
- c) "There is not much I can do about the groups of youth at my store"
 1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Slightly agree 4. Neutral 5. Slightly disagree 6. Disagree 7. Strongly disagree

4.) DEALING WITH AGGRESSIVE ADULTS

- a) "When faced with a verbally abusive and loud customer I fear for my personal safety"
 1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Slightly agree 4. Neutral 5. Slightly disagree 6. Disagree 7. Strongly disagree
- b) "When faced with an angry customer I feel I can control the situation and calm things down"
 1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Slightly agree 4. Neutral 5. Slightly disagree 6. Disagree 7. Strongly disagree
- c) "I know how to calm down aggressive situations before they become violent"
 1. Strongly agree 2. Agree 3. Slightly agree 4. Neutral 5. Slightly disagree 6. Disagree 7. Strongly disagree

I sincerely appreciate your time and cooperation. Please check to make sure that you have not skipped any questions inadvertently and then return the questionnaire to your store manager who will pass it on.

Thank you!

Appendix 2 Response rates for participating stores

STORE	Sent	Received	Returned	on record	Response rate
A1	30	30	18	29	62 %
A2	30	30	11	18	61 %
A3	30	30	22	22	100 %
A4	30	30	15	16	94 %
A5	30	30	-	23	
A6	30	-	-	28	
A7	30	30	-	17	
A8	30	30	16	19	84 %
A9	30	-	-	17	
A10	30	30	10	21	48 %
A11	30	30	10	17	59 %
A12	30	30	24	24	100 %
A13	30	30	-	19	
A14	30	30	-	34	
A15	30	30	15	19	79 %
A16	30	30	14	24	58 %
A17	30	30	10	28	36 %
A18	30	30	26	27	96 %
A19	30	30	-	20	
A20	30	30	16	22	73 %
A21	30	30	12	14	86 %
A22	30	30	6	19	32 %
A23	30	30	11	17	65 %
A24	30	30	22	22	100 %
TOTAL			258	516	50 %

Appendix 3 SPSS correlation results

Correlations													
	Gender	Age	FREA	FREB	FREC	FRED	FREE	FREF	FREG	GROB	AGGA		
Gender	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.208** .002 248	.009 .882 248	.084 .188 247	-.022 .738 248	-.038 .589 248	-.004 .947 247	-.020 .753 248	-.093 .147 245	-.183** .004 248	-.163** .010 248		
Age	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	1 .002 233	.088 .174 241	.071 .273 240	-.070 .280 241	-.104 .108 240	-.104 .108 240	-.101 .120 238	-.101 .120 238	-.138** .035 240	-.108 .094 241		
FREA	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.009 .882 248	1 .174 241	.457** .258 257	.438** .000 258	.427** .000 257	.407** .000 257	.330** .000 257	.255** .000 255	.181** .010 257	.119 .056 258		
FREB	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	.084 .188 247	.071 .273 240	1 .000 257	.387** .000 257	.491** .000 257	.478** .000 257	.480** .000 257	.360** .000 255	.285** .000 257	.169** .007 257		
FREC	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.022 .738 248	-.070 .280 241	.438** .000 258	1 .000 258	.484** .000 258	.505** .000 257	.341** .000 258	.350** .000 255	.205** .001 257	.214** .001 258		
FRED	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.038 .589 248	-.104 .108 240	.427** .000 258	.491** .000 257	1 .000 257	.874** .000 257	.553** .000 258	.532** .000 255	.284** .000 257	.218** .001 258		
FREE	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.004 .947 247	-.104 .108 240	.407** .000 257	.478** .000 257	.505** .000 257	1 .000 257	.780** .000 257	.745** .000 254	.173** .005 257	.208** .001 257		
FREF	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.020 .753 248	-.068 .291 241	.330** .000 258	.480** .000 257	.341** .000 258	.553** .000 257	1 .000 258	.634** .000 255	.174** .005 257	.217** .000 258		
FREG	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.093 .147 245	-.101 .120 238	.255** .000 255	.360** .000 254	.350** .000 255	.745** .000 254	.634** .000 255	1 .000 255	.078 .217 254	.092 .142 255		
GROB	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.183** .004 248	-.138** .035 240	.181** .010 257	.285** .000 257	.205** .001 257	.173** .005 257	.174** .005 257	.078 .217 254	1 .000 257	.647** .000 257		
AGGA	Pearson Correlation Sig. (2-tailed) N	-.163** .010 248	-.108 .094 241	.119 .056 258	.169** .007 257	.214** .001 258	.208** .001 257	.217** .000 258	.092 .142 255	.647** .000 257	1 .000 258		

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).
* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).