



Home Office

Theft from the person

Information pack for partners

July 2013

Introduction

To help tailor crime prevention messages to address ‘theft from person’ (e.g. pickpocketing and snatch theft), the Home Office has asked police forces for their knowledge and experience on this subject to share with other partners. This pack is a collection of information that has been gathered from a range of sources including police forces, key partners and academia. You will find examples of:

- Lessons learnt
- Example messages
- Existing offender prevention campaigns
- Advice for forces to share with businesses on reducing Theft from the Person crime within their establishments

Section 1 of the information pack includes background information on ‘theft from the person’, including where incidents tend to occur and the profile of ‘at risk’ groups.

Section 2 offers some lessons learned from previous communication campaigns targeting theft.

Section 3 gives some example messages, focussing on two ‘at risk’ groups: students and young women.

Section 4 presents details of existing campaigns that are being used by partners across England and Wales, and focuses on offender prevention activity.

Section 5 concludes with messages to businesses on how to reduce ‘theft from the person’ within their establishments and some external links to more information. The appendix at the end of the pack contains links to further sources of information on personal safety and crime prevention.

More details, including local data on ‘theft from the person’ offences, can be found on the **Police.uk** website.

Section 1- Background information on 'theft from the person'

'Theft from person' covers theft (including attempts) of item or items (e.g. handbag, wallet, cash, phone) directly from the victim, but without the use of physical force against the victim, or the threat of it. It broadly breaks down into two types:

- **Snatch theft** - where there may be an element of force involved but this is just enough to snatch the property away – for example taking a bag cleanly from a shoulder; and
- **Stealth theft** (e.g. pickpocketing) - where no force is used and the victim is unaware of the incident.

Stealth theft makes up around 70-80% of theft from the person incidents.

Our two key measures (the Crime Survey in England and Wales and Police Recorded Crime) show that crime, and acquisitive crime in general, has been falling in recent years. However 'theft from the person' is an exception to the overall trend, and rose 8% in 2012, according to the most recent Police Recorded Crime figures. Of those offences 51% occurred in London, with the problem increasingly concentrated in inner city areas.

Based on our analysis of the problem, we believe that:

- Offenders are prepared to travel relatively long distances (up to 17 miles) to hot spot areas to commit 'theft from the person, and, with an average age of 32, they tend to be older than other offenders;
- Two thirds of offences occur during the day. During the week, 'theft from the person' is mainly a mid-afternoon offence, whereas at the weekend it switches to the night-time economy. But much of the recent rise has been seen in the night-time economy, particularly in London;
- Victims tend to be chosen because they are vulnerable for some reason (e.g. being on their own, or distracted, or under the influence of alcohol) rather than because they appear to be wealthy. Women appear to be targeted more than men, particularly those between the ages of 18 and 24;
- Offenders target night time venues. Late night public transport is also a hot spot for 'theft from the person';
- Mobile phones are the most stolen item nationally (25% of victims had their phone stolen);
- London experiences a higher proportion of phone thefts, with British Transport Police data showing that phones account for around 50% of items stolen in Greater London. There are also strong links between rising 'theft from the person' and increased ownership of smart-phones.

Section 2- Lessons Learnt

The following high level advice has been provided by partners who have had practical experience in delivering communication campaigns aimed at preventing 'theft from the person'. More detailed advice targeted at students and young women out at night is included in the next section:

Lessons learnt

- Focusing on a **type** of possession (e.g. handbag or mobile) in communication campaigns, rather than **all** possessions, can reduce the potential of raising a general fear of crime unnecessarily.
- Young people are **less** responsive to "put it away" messages – mobiles are meant to be used when out and about. Therefore asking them **to be discreet** may resonate more.
- **Tone of voice and language** is particularly sensitive – use terms like 'opportunistic robbery' rather than 'violent robbery' to minimise fear of crime.
- Adverts or promotional **materials reminding people to keep their valuables hidden or safe** at the point of the crime (e.g. in a shop, cafe or pub) have been proven to be effective in reducing 'theft from the person' offences.
- There is some evidence that messages framed around what other people do (e.g. 'most people don't...') – particularly when localised (e.g. 'most people in this area/bar wouldn't...') have been effective in prompting potential victims to take more care.

Section 3 - Example messages

The Home Office would appreciate partners' help in delivering crime prevention messages to groups particularly at risk of experiencing 'theft from the person' using your existing channels (e.g. websites, social media, discussion forums, twitter feeds and newsletters) and any opportunity you have to put messages at potential points of crime (e.g. posters, post cards, stickers).

In addition to your existing messages on this subject, you may want to draw on the following example messaging that highlights sensible precautions for two 'at risk' groups: students, and young women aged 18-24 out at night.

Theft from the person prevention advice - students

- Be aware – local thieves actively target students so:
 - lock doors and windows when leaving the property;
 - keep bags securely fastened and out of view.
- Mark your belongings with a UV pen or other marking system.
- Register your valuables on one of the commercially available asset registers.
- Protect your mobile phone by:
 - Being careful when using it outside train and bus stations as these are popular venues for snatch theft, often by motor cycle;
 - Not advertising it to thieves by keeping it hidden from view (NOT in your back pocket), and keeping public conversations short;
 - **Keeping a note of your personal IMEI number (type *#06# into your phone) so that if your phone is stolen, you can block it being used;**
 - Using a security code or PIN;
 - Downloading a phone tracking application;
- Never leave your bag, mobile phone, tablet or laptop unattended in public view (e.g. on the table while you pop to the toilet).
- Avoid talking on your mobile phone or listening to music on headphones whilst walking home at night alone. Be aware of what's going on around you and keep to well-lit, busy areas.
- Be extra careful when using cash machines – make sure no one is loitering too close, do not let anyone distract you as you remove your card and cash from the machine and do not count your money in the middle of the street.
- Do not keep all your valuables in one place. Instead place items such as wallets and mobile phones in inside pockets.
- Be alcohol aware and drink responsibly.

Section 3 - Example messages

Theft from the person prevention advice - young women out at night

Be aware – local thieves actively target young people in crowded places so keep **bags securely fastened**

- Mark your belongings with a UV pen or other marking system.
- Protect your mobile phone by:
 - Being careful using it outside train and bus stations as these are popular venues for snatch theft, often by motor cycle;
 - Not advertising it to thieves by keeping it hidden from view and keeping public conversations short;
 - **Keeping a note of your personal IMEI number (dial *#06# into your phone) so that if your phone is stolen, you can block it being used;**
 - Using a security code or PIN;
 - Downloading a phone tracking application;
- Never leave your bag, mobile phone, tablet or valuable items unattended in public view.
- Avoid talking on your mobile phone or listening to music on headphones whilst walking home at night alone. Be aware of what's going on around you and keep to well-lit, busy areas.
- Be extra careful when using cash machines – make sure no one is loitering too close and do not count your money in the middle of the street.
- If possible, do not keep all your valuables in one place. Only take out what is necessary when going out at night.
- Be alcohol aware and drink responsibly.

Greater Manchester Police have used the following communication campaign material for mobile phone theft:

JAILED: THE MAN WITH 40 MOBILE PHONES DOWN HIS PANTS

A thief who was caught with more than 40 stolen mobile phones stuffed down a pair of tights he was wearing under his trousers has been jailed for two years.

#KeepItSafe

GREATER MANCHESTER **POLICE**

YOUR PHONE IS WORTH A LOT MORE THAN YOU THINK – KEEP IT SAFE

Mobile phone thieves will go to extreme lengths to get their hands on your phone, not to mention the private photos, videos and personal information that may be stored on it.

KEEP IT SAFE:

- Keep your phone out of sight in public areas and never leave it unattended
- Use a password or PIN to protect your phone
- Keep a record of your IMEI as you will need this if it is stolen - press *#06# into your keypad or ring your network provider
- Write your postcode on your phone using a UV pen and register it for free on immobilise.com. This will make it easier to return to you if it is stolen
- Install a tracking app on your smartphone - visit www.gmp.police.uk/wheresyours for more advice
- If your phone is stolen, call your network or 08701 123 123 to get it blocked

#KeepItSafe

GREATER MANCHESTER **POLICE**

Other forces have used the following communication campaign imagery as a deterrent to potential offenders.

CYCLE THIEVES

WE ARE WATCHING YOU

Newcastle University Estate Security Service in partnership with Northumbria Police

OPERATION CRACKDOWN

Areas could also use antisocial behaviour powers to tackle ‘theft from the person’, either by banning persistent offenders from city centres, or using dispersal powers to move would-be offenders away from hotspots. The Government is currently introducing new legislation on antisocial behaviour, but the current powers remain in place for the interim, and the new measures would still allow the police, councils and others to tackle ‘theft from the person’.

Section 5 – Advice for local businesses to help them reduce Theft from the Person crime within their establishments

This section contains advice that you might like to share with night time entertainment venues' staff and owners, to help them consider how they can reduce Theft from the Person crimes within their establishments.

Theft from the person prevention advice - advice for businesses working in the night time economy

- Keep customers informed that their valuables may be at risk if left unattended
- Staff should look out for customers, and could, for example, politely remind people not to leave bags, mobile phones etc unattended;
- Create bag stowage options (e.g. clips that allow customers to store their bags securely under the table, not on the ground);
- Make staff aware that peak times and locations in the establishment could be exploited by thieves, and ask them to be extra vigilant during these times (e.g. watching tables close to the exit).

Appendix 1 - Links to further sources of information on personal safety and crime prevention:

Police.uk

National Union of Students

Crime Stoppers

Neighbourhood Watch

National Community Safety Network

College of Policing

