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Ihsan-Ghafoor, F, Worthington, R and Coughlin, L (2024) Risk and desistance factors for female acquisitive offending: a systematic review. *Journal of Criminal Psychology*, 14 (4). pp. 391-410. ISSN 2009-3829

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCP-11-2023-0074>

Publisher: Emerald

Version: Accepted Version

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Risk and Desistance Factors for Female Acquisitive
Offending: A Systematic Review

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| Journal: | <i>Journal of Criminal Psychology</i> |
| Manuscript ID | JCP-11-2023-0074.R1 |
| Manuscript Type: | Research Paper |
| Keywords: | Female, Acquisitive, Theft, Burglary, Robbery, Offending |
| | |

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MANUSCRIPT DETAILS

TITLE: Risk and Desistance Factors for Female Acquisitive Offending: A Systematic Review

ABSTRACT:

This systematic review sought to examine the research body on acquisitive offending among female offenders, specifically exploring what factors may take females closer towards engaging in acquisitive offending and what factors may support desistance from this behaviour.

A systematic review was conducted, using the recommended guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). A total of 8,129 initial articles were identified from the search terms, 77 articles were deemed suitable to meet the inclusion criteria and are explored in the results section. Papers were screened for quality appraisal and risk of bias.

10 factors were identified which took females closer towards offending. 5 factors were identified which took females away from offending. Based on the findings 4 typologies of female acquisitive offenders were identified: Short Term orientation (adolescent); Mental Health orientation; Life-course persistent (theft); and Acquisitive Diversity (including robbery and burglary).

Future research would benefit from exploring a more rich understanding of the mechanisms which underpin why females engage in acquisitive offending and what factors contribute towards their desistance. A wider range of bio-psycho-social factors which may increase the risk of acquisitive offending should also be considered in future research alongside ways in which interventions may be gender-responsive.

CUST_PRACTICAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

CUST_SOCIAL_IMPLICATIONS_(LIMIT_100_WORDS) :No data available.

This review provides insight into the differing functions and typologies of female acquisitive offending. Interventions for each of these typologies are considered within the review.

Risk and Desistance Factors for Female Acquisitive Offending: A Systematic Review

Abstract

Purpose: This systematic review sought to examine the research body on acquisitive offending among female offenders, specifically exploring what factors may take females closer towards engaging in acquisitive offending and what factors may support desistance from this behaviour.

Methodology: A systematic review was conducted, using the recommended guidelines of the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA). A total of 8,129 initial articles were identified from the search terms, 77 articles were deemed suitable to meet the inclusion criteria and are explored in the results section. Papers were screened for quality appraisal and risk of bias.

Findings: 10 factors were identified which took females closer towards offending. 5 factors were identified which took females away from offending. Based on the findings 4 typologies of female acquisitive offenders were identified: Short Term orientation (adolescent); Mental Health orientation; Life-course persistent (theft); and Acquisitive Diversity (including robbery and burglary).

Originality: This review provides insight into the differing functions and typologies of female acquisitive offending. Interventions for each of these typologies are considered within the review.

Research limitations/Implications: Future research would benefit from exploring a more rich understanding of the mechanisms which underpin why females engage in acquisitive offending and what factors contribute towards their desistance. A wider range of bio-psycho-social factors which may increase the risk of acquisitive offending should also be considered in future research alongside ways in which interventions may be gender-responsive.

Keywords: Female; Acquisitive; Theft; Burglary; Robbery; Offending; Risk; Desistance.

Introduction

What is Acquisitive Offending?

Acquisitive offending is crime committed with intent to acquire material gains. Serious Acquisitive Crime (SAC) is defined by ‘His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services’ (HMICFRS) as: domestic burglary, personal robbery, theft from a person, and theft of and from a motor vehicle. In addition, shoplifting is also considered an acquisitive offence and refers to theft from a shop or taking something without paying for it which is an offence under the Theft Act 1968. Over 1.3 million acquisitive crimes were recorded in England and Wales between 2016 and 2017 (ONS, 2017). The London Assembly (2014) adds that acquisitive crime accounts for 35% of total notifiable crimes in the UK and causes psychological harm to the victim who may also may suffer an immediate risk of physical harm (ONS, 2022). At the community level, acquisitive crime leads to unsafe neighbourhoods, reduced livelihoods, and property losses (ONS, 2022).

Why do people engage in acquisitive offending?

The mechanisms that motivate individuals towards crime have considered the interactions between biological (e.g., genetics, hormones, physiology, brain structure/functioning), psychological, and sociological factors (Walton *et al.*, 2017). Thus, it is understood that no single factor explains offending.

Moore *et al.*, (2003) report that for the most part, both genders commit acquisitive offences following careful or rational planning, indicating the presence of underlying drivers of acquisitive crimes. However, since crime orientation (Byrne and Trew, 2005) references social and psychological influences underlying offending behaviour, it acknowledges the presence of gendered differences within the broader field of criminal studies.

Gender and offending

Sex role theory suggests that biologically determined factors can explain disparities in offending as well as differences in the self- development socialisation process between males and females (Ray, 2019). Factors such as strength of parental relationships, involvement in social activities, social group and values have also been postulated to explain gender difference in offending (Kempf-Leonard and Morris, 2019). Strain theory also notes that certain stressors can increase the likelihood of crime resulting in negative emotional responses that may contribute towards pathways to offending but these may manifest in different ways for males and females (Agnew and Scheuerman, 2015).

Since the majority of crimes are committed as a means to an end by persons deprived of material needs and wants (Chu *et al.*, 2021), it is important to examine whether those motivations differ on an individual level due to gender differences. For instance, there is research to suggest that males commit more crime than females (Walker and Madden, 2013). This is supported by statistics on offending in England and Wales where males comprised 85% of all arrests, 73% of all convictions, and 95% of the national prison population in 2019 (Ministry of Justice UK, 2019). The pathways to acquisitive offending among males have previously been suggested to relate to intrinsic motivations that mould a positive crime orientation, such as positive social status (Byrne and Trew, 2005). Thus implying that males are more likely to oppose formal authority (such as law enforcement) to enhance their social reputation and therefore are more likely than females to commit crime. For male offenders, opposing authority is viewed as a quick and exciting way to gain influence, often from a relatively young age (Bax and Han, 2018). Research also suggests that drugs contribute to serious or violent offences among males (Pierce *et al.*, 2015).

In contrast it has been reported that females are more likely than males to commit crimes to address pressing needs such as money for family (Byrne and Trew, 2008) and are less impulsive only offending after careful consideration of the pros and cons of crime (Rodermond *et al.*, 2015). However, impulsivity and poor planning has been found to contribute towards offending for incarcerated females (Foroozandeh, 2017). In addition, females surrounded by criminal others have been shown to commit crime / become violent to ensure respect and self-preservation (Batchelor, 2005). Some research suggests that drugs contribute to non-violent crimes in females, again differing from the research in relation to

males (Pierce *et al.*, 2015). Whilst other research indicates substance misuse was correlated with burglary, violent offences (Boduszek *et al.*, (2021) and in increased risk of offending and arrests in females compared to males (Gunnison, 2014). Psychological issues such as depression, low self-control, trauma, and victimisation also contribute to offending among females more than they do in males (Byrne and Trew, 2008). These findings demonstrate that offending may be a gendered issue that affects females in unique ways. However, there is a limited understanding on the risk factors which may take females towards acquisitive offending.

Desistance from Offending

Desistance refers to the abstaining from crime (Rodermond *et al.*, 2015). Uggen *et al.*, (2006) reported that desistance is perhaps best understood as part of an individual's on-going journey towards successful integration within the community. Desistance theory strives to explain the process by which offenders come to live a life free of criminality. Early research by Maruna and Farrall (2004) attempted to combine biological and volitional models of criminality into a theory of desistance. This identified a taxonomy of two types of offenders: those who engage in offending for a brief period of their life; and 'life-course persistent offenders' who start to offend much earlier in their lives and continue well after their teenage years. There are a number of theories that attempt to understanding desistance from offending, these are theories such as: Social control theories which point to age, latent traits and social variables as being responsible for desistance (Gunnison, 2014); Rational choice theories which attribute desistance from crime to the individual making a rational decision to cease (Paternoster *et al.*, 2015) ; Social learning theories attribute criminal involvement to the learning of criminal definitions and associations with delinquent peers. Therefore, it is expected that exposure to pro-social beliefs and associations with pro-social peers will influence desistance from criminality (Gunnison, 2014).

However, most empirical studies underlying desistance theories are based on males and it is unclear whether these are applicable to female offenders (Rodermond, *et al.*, 2015). Research shows that some males and females demonstrate a willingness to abandon crime when confronted with familial duties, but that willingness is strongest in females because some

males persist in crime when faced with parental responsibilities (Gunnison, 2014; Rodermond *et al.*, 2015; Boonstoppel, 2019). Attitudinal and behavioural changes, such as choosing better friends, have proven most effective at inducing and maintaining desistance in males (Loeber *et al.*, 1991; Simons *et al.*, 2002) as has financial independence in some females (Rodermond *et al.*, (2015) although this may not apply to those in the 'life course persistent' category. As noted by Roderman *et al.*, (2015) during their systematic review of female desistance large proportion of the literature uses qualitative studies with relatively small samples of females or quantitative studies with limited covariates which inhibits generalisation. In addition, the systematic review conducted by Roderman *et al.*, (2015) did not relate specifically to female acquisitive offending nor taken into account social changes in female offending such as gender equivalence have indicated changes in female offending over time (Palermo, 2003). For example, Fair & Walmsley (2022) noted how prison population data around the world has revealed a much faster growth in female than male prisoner numbers since the year 2000 and the number of women and girls in prison has grown by almost 60%. Thus it is evident there is a need to better understand female offender pathways to and away from offending in isolation to that of male offenders.

Objectives

The aim of the present systematic review was to isolate studies specific to females in relation to factors that may take females closer towards engaging in acquisitive offending and to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the risk factors for acquisitive offending (theft, robbery, burglary) in females?
2. What are the factors that increase desistance from acquisitive offending (theft, robbery, burglary) for females?

Method

Search Process

A structured systematic review was conducted following the guidelines and procedures from the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analysis (PRISMA) statement

(Page *et al.*, 2021). Initial scoping research was conducted to determine no previous review had been undertaken on the topic area. Following this a pilot search was conducted using search string combinations to trial and record the most relevant searches for your research question. Searches were all undertaken online using the following data bases: PsychINFO, PubMed, SCOPUS, and ProQuest. The following search strategy was identified and used to access relevant articles: Theft OR Burglary OR Robbery.

Inclusion Criteria

The criteria for inclusion were selected using the PICO (Patient, Intervention Comparison and Outcome) (See Table 1). The definition of theft, robbery and burglary was taken from the Theft Act 1968 which replaced the Larceny Act (1916) to provide specific legal definitions and principles related to theft, robbery, and other related offences. Specifically, the Theft Act 1968 clarified that theft comprised the elements of dishonesty appropriating property from another with the intention of permanent deprivation. Prior to this convictions for offences of Larceny consisted of offences such as ‘killing an animal with the intent to steal’ which could potentially result in a conviction for fishing. As such the Larceny Act (1916) was replaced with the Theft Act 1968 to be more specific in terms of comprising of acts of theft, robbery and burglary. Therefore only papers published after 1968 were included in the screening process to ensure that these comprised of behaviours related to theft, robbery and burglary. The use of the term Serious Acquisitive Crime (SAC) was taken from the ‘His Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services’ (HMICFRS) This defines SAC as: domestic burglary, personal robbery, theft from a person, and theft of and from a motor vehicle.

INSERT TABLE 1

Data Extraction:

The initial search identified 8,129 articles, out of these 1,143 were removed as duplication (950 were removed using a software programme called Endnote and 193 were manually removed). The remaining 6,986 articles titles were initially reviewed by relevance based on the headings and from these 4,875 were excluded. Reasons for exclusion included papers related to: public attitudes towards SAC; experimental studies with a non-offending population; SAC victimisation; and studies that did not include females. A total of 2,111 abstract were reviewed and from these 963 were removed. 1,148 full articles for reviewed

for relevance and out of these 1,071 were excluded (See Figure I). A total of 77 studies were included in the final analysis, each one was assigned a number (e.g. 1 to 77) to allow for ease in identification of the article being reference throughout this paper (Reference numbers can be found in Supplementary Table 2).

INSERT FIGURE 1

Quality appraisal and Risk of Bias:

To appraise the articles a number of quality assessment tools were used these included the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) qualitative checklist (CASP, 2018), the CASP cohort study checklist (CASP, 2018) and the Appraisal tool for Cross-Sectional Studies (AXIS) Downes *et al.*, 2016. Each article was also classified based on the six levels of appropriateness (Barends *et al.*, 2017) which assesses a study's validity. Levels range from "AA", representing the "gold standard" with systematic reviews or meta-analyses of randomized control trials, to the lowest level of appropriateness "E", representing case studies and case reports. The quality analysis was completed by one main reviewer and a random sample was assessed by a second reviewer to ensure the quality of assessments as recommended in the Centre for Evidence-Based Management (CEBMA; Barends *et al.*, 2017). Inter-rater reliability (IRR) was 1.0 demonstrating a 100% agreement. 66 of the papers were rated as D and 11 papers were rated as E (see Table 2). Articles rated as D were predominantly cross-sectional surveys and articles rated as E comprised of case studies thus having limited generalisability.

INSERT Table 2

Analysis

Throughout the data extraction process it was identified that there were discrepancies in findings across studies. It was therefore decided that a narrative synthesis approach would be used to analyse and compare the studies (Popay *et al.*, 2016). The synthesis consisted of a review of the articles in terms of characterises, content, relevance to the research questions. The studies were then grouped into two themes: 'pathway towards acquisitive offending' and 'pathway away from acquisitive offending'.

Results

The results of the systematic review were collated, organised into themes, and summarised in the subsequent sections. The reviewed articles reflected a worldwide representation and utilised a demographic sample of females between ages 10 and 60. Specifically, 43 articles were from the U.S., 10 from Canada, 6 from the United Kingdom., 3 from Hong Kong, 3 from Brazil, 2 from Japan, and 2 from Poland. The articles recruited samples from prison populations, the general population, the court systems, while others utilised existing data from official records. There also were single articles each from Belgium, Finland, Germany, Hawaii, Netherlands, South Africa, and Sweden. Article 19 did not specify any locational information. Forty-seven articles drew their samples from the general community, 6 from prison populations, and 1 from the court systems. Two articles [49 and 64] utilised samples from both prison populations and the general population, while 21 articles relied on data from official records such as national or regional crime statistics.

A total of 43 articles explored stealing/theft; 17 on robbery; 14 studies focused on shoplifting; 14 on burglary. 10 articles examined offences in combination. Some articles also examined specific types of theft, such as auto theft [5, 49, 53] and property theft [71]. The findings are summarised below and have been separated into 2 sections 'pathway towards acquisitive offending' and 'pathways away from acquisitive offending', each section explores the finding in terms of themes that have been found in the research.

1. What are the pathways towards serious acquisitive offending for females?

10 themes were identified as factors that took females closer towards acquisitive offending:

- Substance Misuse
- Mental Health difficulties: Depression; Eating Disorders; Kleptomania)
- Self-Control/Impulsivity
- Age
- Attitudes that Condone Offending
- Poor family/social binds
- Excitement/Buzz
- Offending with groups
- Unemployment and Poverty
- Other Dissocial Behaviour

Theme 1 - Drug and Substance Abuse

Fifteen articles [9, 12, 18, 20, 29, 31, 33, 38, 45, 47, 50, 55, 58, 61, 64] presented drugs and substance abuse as implicated in shoplifting, theft, burglary and robbery for females whereby substances served as a direct or indirect motivation to offend. Direct motivation comprised of diminished self-control or selling drugs, while indirect motivations were presented as acquisitive offending aimed at acquiring money to purchase drugs. Theft to fund substance dependence was noted in [9] as well as shoplifting [12, 18] serving as an alternative to engaging in sex work with the female being her 'own boss' and liberated from dependency on males [12, 20]. Substance misuse was associated with females who engaged in a lifetime history of shoplifting [31]. A strong relationship between robbery and illicit drug use was found in females [29, 64] with crack use being associated with reduced empathy finding offending amusing [64]. Article 38 confirmed the relationship between drug use and acquisitive offending, showing that female burglars were drawn to burglary to fund their drug and alcohol addiction. The article also noted that drug addiction increased females' likelihood to commit burglary more so than it did for male offenders; females cited drug use as the main reason (70%) for their acquisitive offending and that they engaged in burglary due directly or indirectly to drug and substance dependence. Article 33 found that illicit drug use in adolescence predicted delinquent behaviours such as theft in both males and females. However, the article noted that for females, illicit drug use in adolescence predicted theft in later years. Thus, substance misuse appeared to contribute to more lifetime prevalence in shoplifting and theft [31, 33, 47]. Article 45 showed that drug addiction during childhood was associated with an increased likelihood of burglary and robbery in adulthood for females. Further, Article 58 established that drug use contributed to burglary among impulsive burglars, while non-impulsive types committed crimes primarily due to monetary reasons. Substances used included marijuana, cocaine (including crack) heroin and PCP [20] as well as alcohol [29, 31, 61].

Theme 2 - Mental Health

14 articles identified mental health challenges as contributing to shoplifting, stealing and theft among females [3, 7, 10, 16, 17, 18, 19, 22, 24, 26, 28, 31, 39, 47]. Three types of mental

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health difficulties were identified: depression/mood disorders; kleptomania; and eating disorders.

Sub-theme: Depression/mood disorders

Four publications [18, 19, 22, 39] suggested depression contributed to shoplifting and theft in females, with the depressive episodes arising from various challenges such as strenuous life events. Items taken included clothes [22] as well as objects from a shop they did not need such as small items of food when they had the money to pay for these [19] and items under \$50 [39]. Shoplifting and theft were done primarily for the elevation in mood they brought following a depressive episode. For instance, article 18 was comprised of a sample of shoplifters who were deemed moderately depressed due to a combination of strenuous life events such as loss of employment, cancer, separation, or divorce. Article 19 found that females who engaged in shoplifting despite having no criminal background or motivations also suffered from depression and anxiety. The article also identified a risk profile for female acquisitive offenders, those without criminal intent, which comprised of factors such as depression and emotional instability. Article 22 also found that adult female offenders involved in shoplifting had experienced significant losses or traumatic events that contributed to their criminal behaviour. Specifically, the article identified unresolved mourning or loss in the context of high stress and depression as a predominant factor in acquisitive offending among females. Equally, article 39 found a relationship between depression and minor theft in females. The average age of shoplifters in this category was in their forties with all these females being adults described as being in their mid-life [18, 19, 22] (aside from one who was aged 70) [19]. They did not have a history of shoplifting prior to the onset of depression [18, 19, 22] and were disturbed/regretful by their behaviour subsequently. Adolescent females who were already involved in child welfare due to child abuse or neglect and had engaged in minor theft (e.g. shoplifting) were also 4 times more likely to be depressed.

Sub-theme: Kleptomania

Kleptomania was associated with shoplifting and stealing [3, 26, 27, 28]. Items taken included: make-up; perfume [3]; food [26]; and items of little financial value [26]. They were also noted to hoard items [26, 27]. Stealing occurred from family members, children at school, neighbours and in shops. Two studies noted females had started stealing before adulthood

[3, 26]. Females in this group ranged from 13 [26] to 19 [3] they also had comorbid depression [3]. Of the adults studied [27, 28] females were more likely to be married, have a later shoplifting onset (aged 20.9 compared to 14) and steal household items as well as have an eating disorder.

Sub-theme: Eating Disorders

Four articles found a strong correlation between eating disorders and shoplifting, stealing and theft [7, 17, 24, 47]. Article 7 observed that patients who had significantly high scores on Eating Attitudes Test, bulimia scores and significant depression levels were arrested for shoplifting more often than persons without eating disorders. They were all adults and their average age was 35 [7]. Article 17 found that females with anorexia and bulimia engaged in shoplifting with this occurring during bulimia phase of illness (vomiting/purging) in females who are described as more extrovert, sociable and depressed. It was hypothesized that the function of stealing in people with eating disorders related to the attraction to tempting but bad objects [17]. Their average age was 27.4. It was also noted that a history/prevalence of shoplifting did not differ between adult females with an eating disorder and those without [24] nor did the age at which they first engaged in shoplifting [24] but that people with an eating disorder were likely to have shoplifted more items and were more likely to continue shoplifting in adulthood when symptomatic. Shoplifting preceded the onset of eating disorders (bulimia) and was associated with depression, alcohol misuse and substance misuse in lifetime shoplifting [47]. Items stolen included food [7, 17, 24, 47] clothes and make-up [17, 24, 47].

Theme 3 - Self-control and Impulsivity

Thirteen articles [7, 9, 14, 17, 20, 25, 26, 27, 30, 34, 41, 58, 64] presented a lack of self-control and a predisposition to impulsive behaviour as a pathway towards shoplifting, theft and, burglary. Males had lower self-control than females and engaged in violent crimes more often than did females [14], while females were more predisposed to non-violent offences such as theft than were males [20, 30]. All findings held even after controlling for the adolescent age. Opportunism was also noted if a victim was perceived to have items worth stealing or was wealthy [9] or if a burglary opportunity arose [58]. However, opportunism was also noted as a factor for stealing items that were of not necessarily of value to individuals with kleptomania

[26, 27, 41]. Article 25 found a link between shoplifting and cognitive deficits such as poor decision-making, impulsivity, and low attention. Article 58 used rational choice theory to demonstrate that female offenders engaged in burglary due either to deliberate decisions motivated by money, or impulsive behaviours driven by drugs or money, or both showing that impulsivity was largely responsible for burglary among females. This category of ‘super-impulsive’ burglars were noted to be older and considered environmental/situational factors less. In addition, impulsivity was associated more with street robbery [64] in comparison to robberies that were planned with associates.

Theme 4 - Age

12 Articles [2, 13, 14, 18, 21, 34, 40, 43, 48, 65, 68, 69] made reference to age and the pathway towards theft (2, 21, 40, 43, 65, 68, and 69), shoplifting (articles 18, 21 and 34), burglary (articles 21 and 65) and robbery [13]. Article 34 and 65 showed that females had a phase in their teens (from age 10 to 14 years) during when they engaged in petty theft, with article 34 showing that the criminal phase lasted 26 weeks and that this starts at a younger age for females in comparison to males [2, 14]. Article 40 found peak offending years for females who self-reported having engaged in theft and violence was between ages 13 and 15 with the majority ‘growing out’ of engaging in theft [40]. This was also the case for robbery whereby females were found to engage in (and be arrested for robbery) at a younger age than boys (13 in comparison to 15) but their offending also tapered off sooner [13]. Age range 16 to 20 was associated with peak offending activity for women, while ranges 16–20 and 21–25 correlated with increased desistance especially for shoplifters and other crimes of theft for females who did not engage in diverse types of offending [21]. Article 18 also observed higher age peaks for shoplifting among females with psychiatric conditions (such as depression) which was ages 26 to 35 and 51 to 60. Article 48 utilised a sample recruited from the British Crime Survey and explored stealing and showed that 18% to 30% females between ages 16 and 60 self-reported as having engaged in one or two crimes throughout their lives. Article 68 also found that theft, vandalism, and alcohol abuse increased between ages 10 and 15 for females.

Theme 5 - Attitudes that Condone Offending

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5 Nine articles identified attitudes accepting of crime as contributing to acquisitive offending
6 [9, 12, 15, 18, 31, 32, 35, 56, 64]. For example, Article 12 investigated the justifications used
7 by male and female shoplifters and found that males held different reasons for shoplifting
8 than do females, although both groups were motivated by a need to satisfy drug dependency.
9 Additionally, the article suggested that male offenders viewed shoplifting as a means to assert
10 their masculinity and independence. In contrast, female shoplifters were more likely to report
11 engaging in shoplifting to finance drug use and basic necessities such as clothes whereby
12 shoplifting was seen as an easy way to make money and as a less harmful form of crime (than
13 robbery) and seen almost as employment and preferential to sex work/prostitution as it gave
14 them independence [12] even though this may result in longer sentencing if caught than
15 prostitution. Article 15 found a strong relationship between negative attitudes about law
16 enforcement, a weak belief in authority and the view that it acceptable to break the law with
17 engagement in theft with reduced moral/religious beliefs [56]. Article 18 highlighted a general
18 indifference for the consequences among shoplifting females, a belief they would not get
19 caught [35] and anti-social traits/conduct disorder also being implicated in shoplifting [31]
20 and theft [32] and robbery [64]. Theft with co-occurring violence was also justified by females
21 as a method of revenge for perceived mistreatment [9].
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38 Theme 6 - Poor Parental or Family Bonds

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42 Seven articles [15, 31, 33, 42, 48, 50, 58] identified a positive relationship between the nature
43 of interrelations at the household level and acquisitive offending. Article 15 highlighted a
44 relationship between social bonds and theft and violent crime among female adolescents.
45 Positive social bonds reduced theft and violent crime and vice versa. However, the article
46 found the association between crime and social bonds was a gendered one; weak parental
47 attachment predicted theft in females more than it did in males, while organisational
48 commitment was a stronger predictor of violent crime for males than it was for females,
49 particularly where it concerned commitment to criminal organisations. Articles 32 and 15 also
50 found that positive social bonds reduced engagement in theft among male and female
51 adolescents. Further, Article 32 found that social bonds could be used to predict or explain
52 past theft and violent crimes among gang members. Article 33 showed that close relations
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with drug users increased chances of delinquency in females since it exposed them to drug and substance abuse, which increased participation in theft. Article 42 found a strong relationship between participation in robbery, the length of one’s criminal career, and growing in a family with a history of crime in females. Females who grew up with parents or guardians with a criminal past were more likely than others to commit robbery later in life, and had criminal careers that were twice the lengths of those who grew up in non-offending homes.

Theme 7 - Excitement and Buzz

This theme sought to establish the role thrill-seeking tendencies played in motivating females to commit acquisitive crimes, although such excitement also ranged across other themes and offences. Six articles [3, 9, 20, 34, 56, 64] made links that enjoying the act of committing crimes increased chances of acquisitive offending in females. Article 9 reported that females were motivated to commit robbery to finance a life of partying. It was also noted that females engaged in shoplifting in their adolescent years due to the excitement/novelty they drew from the offences of obtaining something new [34] and not being caught [3]. Article 56 examined excitement from the perspective of risk propensity, noting that adolescent females with low religiosity had higher risk levels that encouraged them to seek thrills through theft. Article 20 noted that robberies committed by the females in their early years were committed in pursuit of excitement, corroborating findings from Article 34 about young offenders shoplifting for the excitement it brought.

Theme 8 - Offending with Groups

6 articles [9, 36, 37, 45, 53, 64] found that females engaged in acquisitive offending in the company of other offenders. This included robbery [9, 36] with other co-offending females [9, 36] directly and indirectly with other males [9, 36] such as in the instance of engaging in prostitution. The likelihood of engaging in robbery increased from 15.6% for solo female offenders to 79.6% for females who co-offended with males [37] with co-offending robberies by males and females being more likely to target either male or female victims 88.2%) compared to male only victims (66.6%) and only female victims (45.6%) [37]. Co-offending

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3 females were more likely to target strangers for robbery [37] whereas female and male
4 perpetrators were more likely to target intimates and acquaintances [37] through planned or
5 'professional' robberies of associates [64] or organised car theft whereby females would
6 assist in driving the specialist (the person who physically broke into the car) to the car acting
7 as a chauffeur in facilitating the theft [53].
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13 14 Theme 9 - Unemployment and Poverty 15

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18 Four articles [52, 54, 63, and 66] showed that unemployment and high poverty levels are
19 contributing factors for acquisitive offending. Articles 52 and 66 found that structural factors
20 that limit opportunities for females and marginalise them economically, increased their
21 tendency to engage in acquisitive offences such as robbery. Unemployment was also
22 associated with juvenile burglary [54]. Article 63 examined the relationship between
23 unemployment and crime focusing on racial differences, finding that females from black and
24 Hispanic urban communities committed violent crimes more often than white females, and
25 that the black and Hispanic groups often were struggling with structural deficiencies like
26 unemployment, economic deprivation, and weak family bonds.
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36 Theme 10 – Other Dissocial Behaviour 37

38 Three articles highlighted engagement in other dissocial behaviours aside from acquisitive
39 offending as a theme [9, 16, 64]. A link between theft and general criminal conduct was found
40 for females [16] whereby two typologies were identified. A group of females who engaged in
41 minor shoplifting (items under \$50) with a minimal risk of escalation into further offending
42 (referred to as the 'petty theft' group) who comprised of 14.5% of the entire sample in
43 comparison to 60.1% who engaged in no anti-social behaviour (e.g. theft) [16]. A less common
44 second group who engaged in more serious anti-social behaviour alongside shoplifting such
45 as physical fighting, group fighting, use of a weapon, joy riding, graffiti and running away was
46 identified in 5.4% of the females in this sample [16]. Other dissocial behaviours noted in
47 females engaging in SAC included engagement in prostitution with theft and violence [9, 64]
48 with the use of a weapon [9, 64] and associating with dissocial peers [64]. Access to weapons
49 mostly aided female offenders perpetrating robbery against male victims [both strangers and
50 acquaintances] with females being less likely to use weapons when robbing other females [9,
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64] with weapons serving the function to intimidate their victims. Article 64 noted that access to weapons among females helped them maintain a consistent readiness for violence when committing to robbery.

2. What are the pathways away from acquisitive offending for females?

5 themes were identified as factors that took females away from acquisitive offending:

- Behavioural Interventions
- Psychiatric Support
- Age
- Conviction and Sentencing
- Substance Misuse Support

Theme 1 - Behavioural Interventions

Four articles suggested behavioural interventions/therapy may reduce female SAC [26, 35, 45, 67]. When N=140 shoplifting women were enrolled in a behavioural interventional group, their instinct to steal decreased significantly [35]. In addition, psycho-social intervention combined with medication was also found to be effective in reducing urges to steal for a child with kleptomania [26]. Article 45 also found that co-offending women desisted from burglary and robbery when provided with peer interventions that target negative peer influences. Article 67 followed a case of a 12-year-old girl with a stealing problem throughout her recovery. The intervention into which she had been enrolled entailed family-based behavioural therapy characterised by parental support that encouraged her to desist from stealing. Results showed that the girl desisted from stealing in the short- and long-term following parental assistance in the home environment.

Theme 2 - Psychiatric Support

3 articles [26, 57, and 62] discussed desistance as a result of psychiatric help for kleptomania. The patients received pharmacotherapy solutions that reduced their kleptomaniac impulsivity and eventually led to their desistance from acquisitive offending. All 3 articles utilised adult samples comprising of both genders.

Theme 3 - Age

Three studies [1, 21, 34] found a strong relationship between age and desistance from acquisitive crime. Article 1 analysed patterns of female theft in the US between 1976 and 1980. The author found that while women engaged in a range of serious and general acquisitive offences such as crimes against persons and general theft, the prevalence of all forms of acquisitive offending among women reduced as they grew older. However, for those that did not desist it was found that the frequency of their engagement increased [1] with more diversity of offending [21]. Article 21 studied transitions through various forms of offending among females of ages 10 to 25. The women were categorised into three age groups: 10 to 15, 16 to 20, and 21 to 25, with results showing that those who engaged in shoplifting and burglary at ages 10 to 15 often desisted from acquisitive offending between ages 16 and 25. The authors hypothesised that desistance in that age range was related to the rites of passages associated with transitioning from adolescence to adulthood during which consequences for acquisitive crime increase in severity. For example, they found that if a female had not been convicted at the age of 16-20 then the chances of them engaging in theft at 21-25 was only 2%. Furthermore, if they had not been convicted at the age of 21-25 then the chance of them engaging into theft was only 1%. However, those that showed more versatility in their offending were more likely to have been convicted between the ages of 16-20 and were more likely to continue to offend. Study 34 established a relationship between age and desistance from shoplifting among females. Utilising a sample of adolescents, the authors found that acquisitive offending most commonly started at the age of 10. Shoplifting then occurred in phases, peaking at age 13 and ending by age 15. The acquisitive phases often lasted up to 26 weeks for both genders, although female offenders desisted sooner than did males due to fear of getting caught.

Theme 4 - Conviction and Sentencing

Three papers found conviction and sentencing impacted on desistance [12, 35, 65]. Article 12 showed that females engaged in shoplifting to facilitate drug use desisted from the crimes due to fear of getting arrested and losing control or 'what little authority they did have left over their lives'. Others engaging in shoplifting who were predominantly older married females with no previous convictions and with high school to college education and were in employment expressed relief at being caught [35]. Article 65 examined the crime profiles of adolescent females engaging in theft and burglary at the moment of their first conviction. The

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article found that those committing burglaries generally desisted by themselves by age 15, while those engaged in robbery and violence required the intervention of the justice system. Gender differences were discussed in terms of females being more likely to be given a caution as opposed to a formal conviction by the court which the paper suggested may provide corrective feedback to adolescent females engaging in theft but females would be more likely to receive a conviction for robbery and violence [65].

Theme 5 - Substance Misuse Support

Three papers explored substance misuse support impacted on desistance [38, 58, 61]. Article 38 examined female burglars’ reasons to engage in acquisitive crimes and found a strong link between drug-seeking behaviours and burglary. More women than men struggled with drug abuse and engaged in burglary to sustain their drug habits. The females in the study affirmed that if they received treatment for their drug use, they would desist from burglary. Article 58 found that vocational training helped females to desist from planned deliberate burglary, while drug and substance abuse intervention helped females to desist from impulsive burglary. Article 61 also found that abstaining from drug and substance abuse helped females to desist from property theft.

Based on the available evidence this systematic review suggests that there were four different typologies of female acquisitive offenders:

Typology 1: Short-term orientation (adolescent)

This typology consisted of short-term adolescents who committed shoplifting and theft offences due to low self-control and impulsivity. They offended alone, to acquire clothes, make-up, and other tangible items. While some evidence suggested that females shoplift due to excitement this area of research was limited in volume. Females in this typology appeared to naturally desist from offending without any formal intervention which it is postulated is due to maturation. It is noteworthy that in their study using a National Longitudinal Study of N=5422 Adolescents, Cook *et al.*, (2015) found that 20.5% of females aged 13-15 reported that they had taken something from a store without paying for it. Hence, this appears to be the most common typology of acquisitive offending in females.

Typology 2: Mental Health orientation

This typology consisted of females with mental health difficulties such as depression, kleptomania and eating disorders. They were predominantly adults who engaged in lone shoplifting to acquire tangible items such as make up, food and clothes which they did not financially need but impulsively stole in response to emotional distress. However children/adolescents with kleptomania and a history of exposure to abuse were also included in this typology. Females in this typology did not display any dissocial attitudes, showed regret for their behaviour and did not cause physical harm to others in the course of their offending. There was tentative evidence that this typology may benefit from therapy to support their desistance from offending.

Typology 3: Life course persistent (theft)

This typology consisted of females engaging in shoplifting/theft over the life course to fund substance misuse and/or basic necessities. They tended to hold attitudes which excused their behaviour and displayed impulsivity. The function of their behaviour was to obtain items/money seeing shoplifting as a form of employment and as preferential to other methods of achieving this such as engaging in prostitution. There was tentative evidence to suggest that interventions targeting substance misuse may be of benefit in supporting desistance for females in this typology.

Typology 4: Acquisitive Diversity (including robbery and burglary)

This typology of females engaged in more diverse types of acquisitive offending including shoplifting, theft, robbery and burglary offences over a longer life course. They tended to hold attitudes which excused offending as well as justifications for the use of violence as a means to achieve their needs. The function of their behaviour related to financial reward, revenge and excitement. Some females in this group had less positive social bonds with parents/family or less positive social role models with family members/friends who may have also endorsed or engaged in offending. They displayed more diverse patterns of other anti-social behaviour and also experienced economic disadvantage and unemployment. This typology were also more likely to engage in co-offending with other females and with males perpetrated towards both males and females in comparison to the other typologies and were more likely to use a weapon. They also engaged in both impulsive and planned 'professional' robbery, burglary

and theft. There were few studies which explored what might reduce offending in this group other than those which discussed sentencing.

Discussion

This systematic review sought to examine the research body on serious acquisitive offending among female offenders with an emphasis on the factors that encourage and discourage such offending. The offences captured included burglary, theft, shoplifting, and robbery with a range of both internal and external factors taking females closer towards and away from acquisitive offending.

Based on the findings of this review it can be seen that the majority of females engaging in theft and shoplifting at a young age naturally desist from this behaviour although a definitive explanation for this is unclear. However, factors such as mental health and substance misuse may contribute towards adults engaging in acquisitive offending and it is reasonable to suggest that for these females psychological therapy may assist in their desistance and recovery. For a smaller minority of females, shoplifting may represent one aspect of a more diverse nature of offending which may develop into more serious offending such as theft, robbery, burglary and the use of a weapon. At present little is known about the psychological mechanisms which underpin this category of females, why they may move from shoplifting to more serious offending and what may support their desistance from this.

Constraints of the research

A constraint encountered during this systematic review concerned a lack of research on desistance. In addition, as indicated by the quality ratings, case studies and small sample sizes means the findings should be interpreted with caution. Another constraint was that the majority of the studies used cross-sectional survey designs focused on prevalence rates comparing males and females or only used adolescent samples rather than exploratory analysis to understand the complex mechanisms which underpin decisions to engage in or desist from acquisitive offending. Most of the research focused on exploring specific correlations between acquisitive offending and independent variables such as drug use or

delinquency. Thus, they were constrained by the preconceptions of the research design in terms of only measuring limited factors which may take someone closer towards offending. Therefore the factors identified in this review may simply reflect the nature of the data which has been obtained to date rather than a thorough explanation of all of the potential bio-psycho-social factors which may contribute towards offending. For example, this systematic review makes links to impulsivity, substance misuse and mental health problems in females engaging in acquisitive offending. All of these factors may also be present in people with ADHD who are also known to be at greater risk of offending (Young and Cocallis, 2019), however no studies explored the potential role of neurodevelopmental factors such as ADHD in female acquisitive offending. Neither did any of the papers specifically explore the role of trauma and exposure to abuse within the home as a potential antecedent for acquisitive offending in females. Furthermore, whilst adolescence and maturity may contribute towards desistance the mechanisms which underpin this remain unclear. Thus, at present there is a lack of a full and rich understanding regarding why females engage in acquisitive offending and what factors contribute to their desistance.

Implication for future research

1. Future research would benefit from exploring a richer understanding of the mechanisms which underpin why females engage in acquisitive offending and what factors contribute towards their desistance. This should include adopting more robust methodologies to overcome the constraints of the generalisability of cross-sectional surveys and case study designs.
2. Research should be considered across the different typologies of female acquisitive offenders in terms of how decision making may differ in each category.
3. A wider range of bio-psycho-social factors which may place a female at risk of acquisitive offending should be considered in future research.
4. Future research could also benefit from exploring not only what interventions may reduce the risk of engagement in acquisitive offending but also how these may be gender-responsive in terms of addressing potentially unique risk factors for females as the research has shown that some female pathways towards and away from acquisitive offending may differ to that of males.

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5. Given the high prevalence of young people who engage in shoplifting/theft, proactive interventions for could be provided in schools to prevent this behaviour prior to the age of likely onset (e.g. aged 13). For example, this could include psycho-education to teach young people about the costs of engaging in shoplifting both to themselves and others to aide their decision making. This could include the consequences of receiving a caution as well as the consequences to businesses, the taxpayer and the general public.

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Figure 1: PRISMA 2009 Flow Diagram

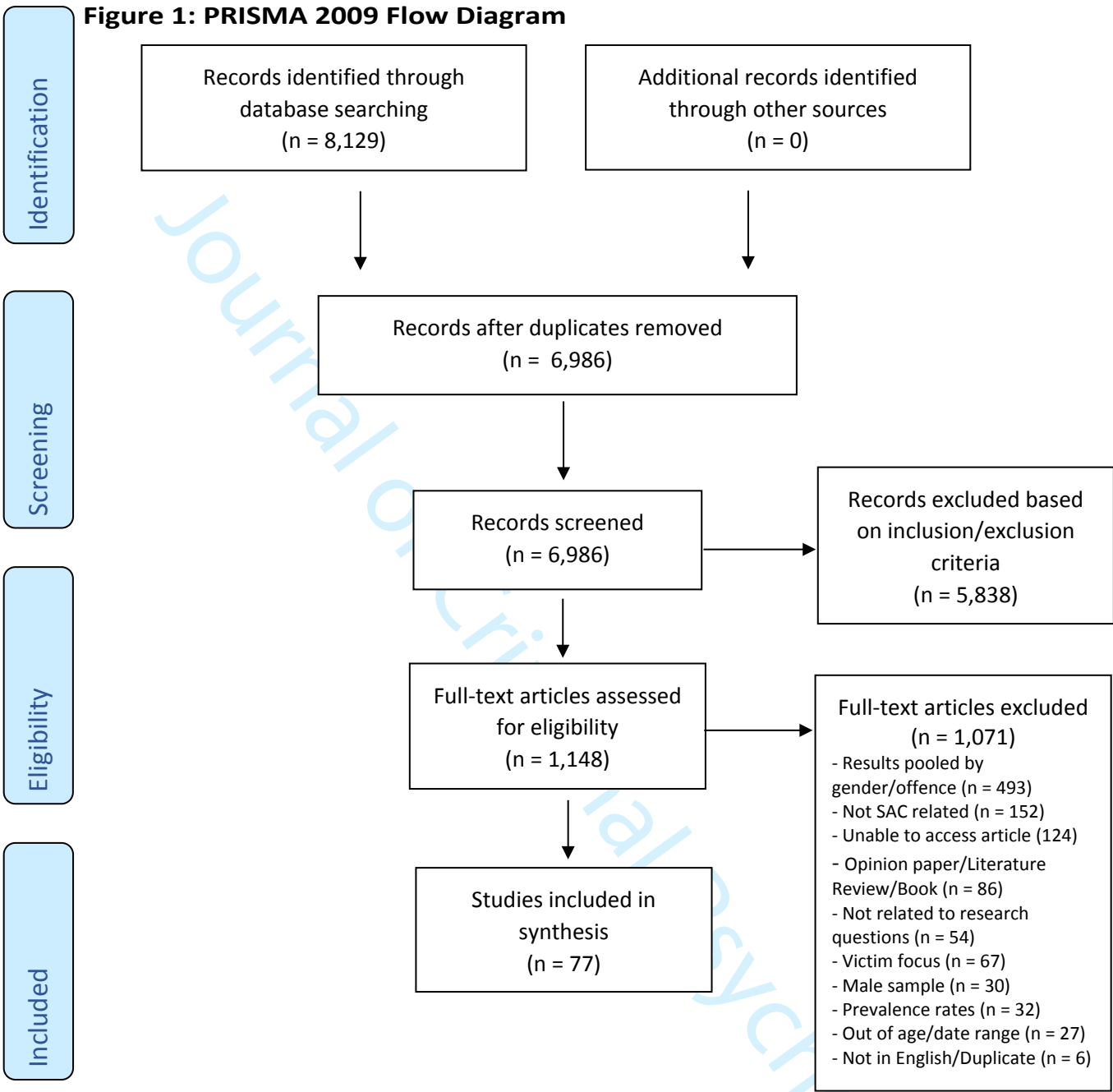


Table I: Inclusion/Exclusion Criteria

| | Inclusion | Exclusion |
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| Population | Female Over the age of 10 which is the age of criminal responsibility in the UK | Output where the data was not clearly differentiated for those under the age of 10 or where this was combined with data for males Output where participants had not engaged in SAC |
| Intervention/Exposure | Acquisitive Crime involving shoplifting, theft, robbery or burglary. | Focuses solely on victim factors Acquisitive offending through fraud |
| Context/Language | Published in English Worldwide Community and offending samples | Published in other languages |
| Outcomes | Frequency/Severity of behaviour Reduction in Risk Improved intervention/support Desistance | Studies containing only prevalence data comparing males and females Studies relating to attitudes towards SAC in the general public Experimental studies of hypothetical responses to theft scenarios |
| Type of publication | Peer reviewed Individual Studies identified from reviews Primary Data. | Literature reviews/Systematic reviews/Meta-Analytic Studies Book Chapters Opinion papers Unpublished studies or Dissertations Grey literature |
| Date restrictions | 1968 - 2023 | Studies reporting data prior to the introduction of the Theft Act 1968. |

| Article No. | Article Reference | Quality Rating |
|-------------|--|----------------|
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