

HANDLING STOLEN GOODS: FINDINGS FROM THE 2003 OFFENDING CRIME AND JUSTICE SURVEY

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Abstract

This paper presents findings from a systematic analysis of stolen goods markets, based upon scholarly research and criminological theory, with a toolkit for implementing Sutton's Market Reduction Approach (MRA). The MRA has been implemented in several UK police forces including Kent, Thames Valley, the Metropolitan Police, Derbyshire, Manchester and West Mercia. Other forces use MRA techniques, while Nottinghamshire and Cheshire currently seek to build it into routine policing. Independent academic evaluators, commissioned by the Home Office to evaluate the MRA in 3 police force areas: Kent, Greater Manchester and West Mercia, found MRA theory to be sound, referring positively to police using this report as 'The Sutton Bible'. This Primary Research Paper presents important analysis.

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Introduction

The investigation of unregistered criminality will, even if it does not bring about any revolution in general outlook on crime and criminals, certainly challenge some of the established dogmas of present day criminology².

The Offending, Crime and Justice Survey (hereafter, OCJS) makes an important contribution to evidence-based policy first, by enabling us to get beyond offender statistics based on convictions and cautions; and second, by presenting the Janus face of the British Crime Survey to illuminate the prevalence and incidence of offending behaviour³. The aim of this report is to present selected key findings from the analysis of the handling stolen goods component of the OCJS. In this way, this report casts light upon the extent of these crimes, the people who commit them, the dynamics of offending and the variety of circumstances in which they occur. The OCJS builds upon previous national self-report studies and uses innovative data collection techniques that are discussed in more detail below.⁴

Crime data are always the product not only of criminal desires and intentions but also of situational opportunities. Such data can be affected by the way prevention (including the apprehension of offenders) are organised. Crime data are always the product of organisational processes for the defining of events, and this is true, for activities such as buying and selling stolen goods where (a) there is more uncertainty in making attributions of intent or recklessness and (b) there are more prestigiously contested views about the legitimacy of the behaviour than is present in most other areas of crime for financial gain, where values are more socially embedded (Henry 1977; Williams 1985).

Outline and Structure of the Report

The Report has been structured as follows. After this Introduction, section 2 focuses upon what we know about the nature and extent of handling stolen goods, Section 3 examines findings from the OCJS, Section 4 concludes the report and examines the way forward for research and crime reduction policy in this area. A technical appendix (Appendix 1) explains some important limitations of the data and finally, Appendix 2 provides detailed tables of statistics with some particularly detailed information related to multivariate analysis of the data.

² Anttila, I. (1964)

³ In theory, for those offences asked about in both surveys, the number of offences admitted to should roughly correspond to the numbers of victimisations experienced: though for some offences, the victim's view about the offender's intentions or recklessness may not correspond to the putative offender's own construction of 'what happened'.

⁴ In addition, Appendix 1 contains technical details relating to the design of the survey.

The 2003 OCJS handling stolen goods questions and methodology

The OCJS respondents were asked about involvement over the past 12 months in buying stolen goods in general, buying stolen mobile phones and selling stolen goods – see Fig 1.

Fig 1

<i>Handling stolen goods</i>	<i>Age range asked</i>
Bought stolen goods	18-65
Bought stolen mobile phone	10-65
Sold stolen goods	18-65

Methodology

The Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing Technique (CAPI) was used in the first half of the OCJS, with the interviewer reading questions from the screen of a laptop and entering responses. The automatic routing and error checking of CAPI is designed to minimise interviewer error and so improve data quality. More sensitive self reported offending data in the second half of the interview was recorded directly into the computer by the respondent, allowing respondents to report their offending without having to tell the interviewer. Respondents with literacy problems were able to use an audio version of the questionnaire and respond to questions, with confidentiality maintained, so long as they could recognise the numbers that were triggered on the laptop alongside the responses they wished to choose.

Interviews also included Computer Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI), whereby respondents read the questions and the answer codes from the screen of a laptop computer and enter their own answers. This option was used for the more sensitive questions about offending and other areas. The OCJS also used Audio Computer Assisted Self Interviewing (AUDIO-CASI) which involves the respondents listening to pre-recorded questions and answer categories through headphones and then entering responses into the laptop computer. AUDIO-CASI has not been used before in a large-scale household survey in England and Wales, but was used in the OCJS because of the need to interview children and the particular sensitivity of some questions. It proved to be extremely successful. In addition, it is worth mentioning at this point that there is some evidence to suggest that CASI results in higher admission levels of behaviours such as drug use and handling stolen goods offending (O'Reilly et al 1994; Percy and Mayhew 1997; Sutton 1998; Flood-Page et al 2000).

Data and Presentation of Findings

Data used in this report are based on a nationally representative sample of 2704 10 to 17 year olds and 7375 18 to 65 year olds. This provides a total of 10,079 respondents, and the survey had a response rate of 74 percent.

All percentage figures presented in this reported are rounded to the nearest whole number. Most questions covered in the survey were asked of those aged 18 to 65 years. However, as Fig 1 shows, those asked about buying of stolen mobile phones include those aged 10 years and upwards. Findings for these younger respondents are

presented alongside those for older age groups, to allow for useful age group comparisons of self report offending.

While the OCJS builds upon the knowledge gained from other self-report offending surveys, it is not designed to be directly comparable with them. Nonetheless, some comparisons are made with other data sources, including police recorded crime, the British Crime Survey. In addition, this report frequently seeks to place findings in context with those available from other contemporary research.

Section 3 of this report corresponds with Appendix 2 - which contains tables showing the associations between a number of demographic and social variables such as gender, age and income with self-report handling of stolen goods. Where such findings are statistically significant⁵, they are discussed in more detail in Section 2. Since it has a self-report prevalence rate of above 5 percent, buying stolen goods in general is looked at in more detail, to seek to determine whether certain demographic and social factors may help to explain such offending. This is done by using more sophisticated analysis known as logistic regression (LR). LR analysis allows for an examination and clear explanation of the interactive effects between demographic and social factors, on the one hand, and self-reported offending on the other. Results of this analysis provide insights into the attributes of those who are particularly at risk of buying stolen goods. Appendix 1 provides a detailed explanation of how this technique works.

Handling stolen goods

The law treats the offence of handling stolen goods with particular caution. Section 22 (1) of the Theft Act 1968 requires guilt to be established on the basis of 'knowledge' or 'belief' that goods are stolen and the jury or magistrate must infer from the circumstances of the case whether the defendant had such 'knowledge' or 'belief'. Judicial interpretation of the statute has been such that a mere suspicion that goods are stolen is not enough to lead to a conviction for handling unless the defendant either knows or is virtually certain that they are stolen goods (Hall 1952). In this connection, the eminent jurisprudentialist Glanville Williams (1985) stressed the need to understand the meaning of *belief* within Section 22 that goods are stolen as: '...the sort of belief we would associate with a devout religious believer' not as a belief that the goods are probably stolen. In supporting such a strictly narrow interpretation Williams argues: '...people must be allowed a margin of safety. If they cannot buy goods that they know to be probably stolen then they cannot safely buy goods when there is an appreciable possibility that they are stolen, because no one knows when lawyers, judges and juries between them may not turn possibilities into probabilities.' This consideration, above all others, places severe constraints on what can be achieved in the way of controlling theft and burglary by purely legal measures aimed at receiving. That said, perhaps police services should make more use of the little-used section 27 of the Theft Act 1968 when dealing with known and previously convicted prolific thieves and handlers. This section allows for joint prosecution of those suspected of stealing and/or handling stolen goods. More importantly under section 27 it is possible, for the purpose of proving that a person knew or believed goods to be stolen, to present evidence of earlier convictions for theft or handling

⁵ Above p<0.05 level; two-tailed test.

stolen goods. In this way section 27 can be used to streamline the process of proving criminal intent of theft or handling for those who have been convicted of theft or handling within a five year period prior to a current charge – and who has in their possession stolen goods from a theft occurring no more than 12 months prior to that current charge.

The effect of demand for stolen goods

The often quoted phrase: ‘...if there were no [professional] receivers there would be no thieves’ (Colquhoun 1796), is hardly true in the modern world given the range of options for converting stolen property into cash. Dealers in stolen goods act as middlemen, or *middlewomen*, and through marketing they may create demand for stolen goods as well as respond to it (Sutton 1998). Yet the role of the public as buyers is of equal importance in creating the market in stolen goods – because if there were no bargain hunting citizens the market for stolen goods would shrink enormously. To quote Henry (1977): ‘...public demand for stolen goods shares some of the responsibility for maintaining the fence⁶. The role of the consumer in a capitalist society requires him, like the businessman, to buy goods at the cheapest possible price. Advertising persuades him of the advantages of the ‘bargain’. He needs little if any encouragement when presented with ‘cheap’ or ‘bargain goods’.

Compared with other areas of offending such as burglary and robbery, there has been relatively little research into who stolen buys goods and the factors that influence demand for them. But one thing is certain and that is that *if goods are being stolen then those same goods are being bought*. Yet research in this area might reveal new ways to reduce theft by reducing demand for stolen goods or by reducing the outlets where thieves sell them. While it some thieves do steal to order (Sutton 1998) this does not mean that individual burglaries, for example, are simply the direct result of a burglars’ knowledge of what items are inside a particular home. In fact, research shows that individual ownership of ‘suitable targets’ (Cohen and Felson 1979) is a poor predictor of burglary risk because many burglars do not know what items a dwelling contains before breaking in (Mieth and Mier 1990). Therefore, in cases where burglars do not know their victim, the reasons why particular houses are selected for burglary – e.g. less risk of detection or apprehension (Bennett and Wright 1984) - are not the same as those that influence a burglar’s decision to steal particular items from peoples’ homes once they are inside. As Johnson et al (1993) and Clarke (1999) point out; offenders have a hierarchy of goods that they prefer to take. And most houses contain at least some of those hot products (Sutton 1995). Since most burglars steal because they want money, top of their list is cash, followed by items that can be easily sold for relatively high prices such as jewellery and hi technology home entertainment equipment in demand. Stolen goods markets, then, motivate thieves because most steal goods to sell for cash, irrespective of whatever they want to spend that cash on.

⁶ Dealer in stolen goods.

Stolen goods, drugs and theft

Some 29 percent of arrested thieves are heroin or cocaine users and research suggests that these are the most prolific offenders, probably responsible for more than three-fifths of illegal income generated by thieves selling stolen goods in England and Wales (Bennett et al, 2001). It is not surprising, therefore, that so many crime experts now see drug use as the root of theft. However, in-depth interviews with prolific thieves (Sutton, 1998; Sutton et al, 2001; Sutton 2003a) also reveal that drug dealers are often reluctant to exchange drugs for stolen goods (perhaps because this makes them more vulnerable to arrest for handling, and also because it diverts them from their core activities by effortful trading). Thieves know they can get more drugs if they buy with cash, having first sold their stolen booty, rather than taking the hot goods to their drug dealer where the exchange rate is at best poor and more usually the dealer will 'not want to know'. This means that stolen goods markets play at least as an important part, as regular hard drug use, in explaining high theft rates and, therefore, represent an important opportunity for crime reduction initiatives (Sutton 2004).

England and Wales: Nations of handlers

Rapid changes in technology and the constant advertising and demand for new desirable, but expensive, mass produced consumer goods at less than high street prices drives the trade in stolen goods markets. Despite Dickensian imagery of the fence as a Fagin stereo-type (Tobias 1974) the work of Henry (1978; 1981) Parker et al (1988) Hobbs (1989) and Foster (1990) has emphasised the role of the consumer rather than the professional middle man as the most important focus of attention regarding 'dodgy dealing' among the English working class. And strategies that affect both consumers and middle-men have the potential for reducing the motivation of offenders (Sutton 1995, 1996; Pease, 2002). This has now been taken on board (Clarke, 1999; Felson, 1998; 2002; Sutton, 2004) by criminologists seeking to reduce theft by tackling their underlying causes as well as their immediate situational precursors.

Stolen goods markets: the Home Office Handling Study

If we are to succeed in reducing motivation to steal it is essential to know what happens to stolen goods. This is because asking the questions *who* does *what* to *whom*, *when*, *where*, in *which way* and with *what* effects (in what might be termed the 8Ws) helps to identify risks from particular offenders in certain situations and identifies threats to potential targets of their offending (Sutton 2004). The Home Office Handling Study (Sutton 1998) set out to answer the 8Ws in relation to stolen goods markets. Undertaking the first ever systematic analysis of stolen goods markets, the study involved 45 in-depth interviews with thieves and fences – conducted in prisons, young offender institutions and probation offices, and in the homes of convicted and non-convicted offenders. The study identified five main market types:

1. *Commercial fence supplies*. Stolen goods are sold by thieves to commercial fences operating out of shops – such as jewellers, pawnbrokers and second-hand dealers.

2. *Residential fence supplies.* Stolen goods (particularly electrical goods) are sold by thieves to fences, usually at the home of the fence.
3. *Network sales.* Stolen goods are passed on and each participant adds a little to the price until a consumer is found; this may involve a residential fence, and the buyer may be the final consumer or may sell the goods on again through friendship networks.
4. *Commercial sales.* Commercial fences for a profit sell stolen goods; either directly to the (innocent) consumer or to another distributor who thinks the goods can be sold again for additional profit. More rarely, such sales are made to another distributor.
5. *Hawking.* Thieves sell directly to consumers in places such as bars and pubs or door to door (e.g. shoplifters selling cigarettes, toiletries, clothes or food).

Although the Handling Study found that particularly active fences tend to encourage thieves to increase their offending, it also revealed that stolen goods markets are mainly fuelled by thieves offering goods for sale rather than by proactive demand from dealers. On the basis of the limited evidence available, it appears that offers from thieves to sell stolen goods have the greatest influence on the way that stolen goods markets operate. This is because most dealers and consumers do not actively seek out stolen goods. Therefore, these items need to be offered to them in order for them to be able *knowingly* to buy. Stealing to order does go on, and the practice is quite widespread, but it is not as common as what should, perhaps be called *stealing to offer* (Sutton 2002). As Felson (2002) concludes in his chapter on marketing stolen goods: ‘...offers of second-hand merchandise at low prices are exactly what drives crime in local areas’. What the handling study reveals is that the design of an effective approach to tackling stolen goods is most likely to impact on the markets if the dynamics of the markets are understood. The Market Reduction Approach (MRA) designed by Sutton (1998; Sutton et al 2001) is a strategic, systematic and routine problem-solving framework for action against the roots of theft. The approach is not aimed at specific thieves in specific situations but at the market and the players in it who affect many situations and many thieves by providing incentives and inducements for theft. This approach is based upon research findings that suggest that in general there is no unidirectional thief-receiver relationship and that stolen goods markets are in both a downstream consequence of theft and also serve as an underlying motivational force driving much acquisitive offending.

British Crime Survey 1994 findings

The Home Office handling study (Sutton 1998), revealed the extent of self-report handling of stolen goods, revealing that 11 percent of respondents admitted buying stolen goods in the past five years, while 70 percent thought that some of their neighbours had stolen goods such as VCRs and TVs in their homes. The handling study also utilised statistical modelling techniques to reveal which groups in the population were most likely to engage in this type of offending. Nine years on, the 2003 OCJS findings are analysed, to determine the extent of self reported stealing, buying and selling of stolen goods in general and mobile phones in particular. The findings also reveal many of the demographic characteristics of offenders and these are examined in the next section of this report.

OCJS Findings

OCJS interviewees aged 18 to 66 years of age were asked three questions regarding stolen goods: whether they had bought anything they knew or thought had been stolen in the past 12 months; whether they had sold stolen goods and, more specifically, whether they had bought a mobile phone that they knew or believed to be stolen. Over seven percent admitted buying goods in the past 12 months which they either knew or believed had been stolen.⁷ This figure is smaller than the 11 percent figure found in the 1994 BCS (Sutton 1998). The most likely reason for this is that the period asked about in the OCJS is the past 12 months rather than the past 5 years – which is the period covered by the BCS. The OCJS also asked whether people had sold stolen goods in the past 12 months, and found that nearly 3 percent admitted doing so. Over one percent of people bought a mobile phone that they knew or believed to be stolen.

Fig 2

	<i>Buying or selling stolen goods in past 12 months</i>	
	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i> ⁸
Bought stolen mobile phone	7.2	(7266)
Bought stolen goods	1.3	(9782)
Sold stolen goods	2.7	(7354)

The Characteristics of handlers of stolen goods

Tables A2.1 through A2.6 in Appendix 2 show the complete results from analysis of OCJS data of a number of social and demographic variables cross-tabulated with each of the three types of stolen goods handling that are examined in this report. Only associations that are highly statistically are discussed here for each type of handling⁹.

Buying stolen goods

Gender age, age and several other demographic and social variables were found to be important in terms of predicting who is more likely to buy stolen goods:

- Males are more likely than females to buy stolen goods
- 16-25 year olds are more likely to offend than those aged 26-39 and 40-65 years
- Single people are more likely buy than all other marital status groups
- Those living in ACORN *Striving* areas are more likely to buy than those in all other ACORN area types
- Those in full-time education are more likely to offend than those working, retired and with *other* employment status

⁷ Slightly more buyers bought 3 or more times (4 percent) than just once or twice (3 percent).

⁸ Total of those eligible and answering each question and excluding those responding 'don't know'.

⁹ P<0.05 – two tailed t test.

- Those with lower level (D-G) GCSEs are more likely to buy than those with higher GCSEs, A levels and those with higher education qualifications
- Those with no qualifications are more likely to buy than those with higher education qualifications, higher GCSEs (A-C) and A levels
- The retired are less likely to buy than the unemployed and those working or with *other* employment status

Overall, this analysis between contrasting groups shows that buying stolen goods, like many other offences, is a crime most often committed by those who are young, single, male, poorly qualified and living in relatively deprived areas. These OCJS findings are supported by other research which shows that much burglary and other theft is concentrated in particular areas and that thieves prey more often upon particular people in those areas (Pease 1998). Markets for stolen goods are concentrated in the least affluent areas (Sutton 1998, Felson 2002) and this is probably one of the most important influences upon the prevalence of crime and incidence of victimization that is daily visited upon the people who live there – upon their homes, cars, businesses and upon their persons.

As with earlier findings with self-report handlers of stolen goods (Sutton 1998) those in the very lowest income group, or finding it difficult to manage on their income, are **not** significantly more likely to buy than those in higher income groups. A likely explanation for this is that while many stolen goods markets are concentrated in the least affluent areas, spare, and readily available cash, is required to buy stolen goods that are non-essential luxury items. The finding that those in full-time education are more likely to buy than all other work status groups (apart from the unemployed) is something that needs to be explored further. It seems likely that this could be partly due to increased opportunities to buy stolen goods among those in full-time education who are particularly likely to be known by a large number of fellow students - who are all in close proximity to one another for several hours a day. This is important because most thieves *steal to offer* rather than to order. Therefore, youth, being known and being present plays a large part in who receives offers of goods for sale - and those who receive most offers are most likely to buy (Sutton 1998). Schools and colleges should be looked at further from a crime control perspective since they are clearly places where crime is generated through stolen goods markets. Most likely, *hawking* and *network sales* are taking place in schools and colleges and this may play a significant part in the generation of theft of hot products – including mobile phones.

Buying stolen mobile phones

Theft of mobile phones¹⁰, particularly during street robberies, represents a crime harvest, of the type described by the Foresight Reports (2000), which has been a particular problem over the past five years. Information regarding the demographic and other social characteristics of those who deal in stolen mobile phones will help to inform crime reduction strategies aimed at tackling the markets that generate the motivation for thieves to target their owners.

Analysis of the significant differences between contrasting groups reveals that:

¹⁰ Also known as cell phones

- Males are more likely to buy stolen mobile phones
- 16-25 year olds are more likely to offend than all other age groups
- 10-15 year olds are more likely to buy than those aged 26-39 and 40-65 years¹¹
- Single people are more likely to offend than those in all other relationship groups
- Those in full time education are more likely to commit this offence than those who are aged 14 or less, working, retired or who answered *other* for work status
- Those who are working and those in the *other* work status category are more likely to commit this offence than the retired
- Those with higher GCSEs (A-C) are more likely to buy than those with a higher education and those with *Other* qualifications
- Those living in the least affluent ACORN *Striving* areas are more likely to offend than those in the most affluent *Expanding* and *Thriving* areas
- Those living in ACORN *Aspiring* areas are more likely to buy than those in *Expanding* areas¹²
- Those in households with a total annual income of under £10,000 are more likely to commit this offence than those living in households earning over £30,000 a year¹³

Those most likely to buy stolen mobile phones are young males under 26 years of age living in areas of relative deprivation and in households with very low incomes. This is also an offence most likely to be committed by those in full time education, which suggests that being part of a large group of young people gathered in one place increases opportunities to purchase – through direct offers to buy or knowledge of who is dealing (Sutton 1998). As with the finding noted above, from this, it seems reasonable that opportunities to purchase in schools and colleges may play a key role in explaining who is most likely to buy stolen mobile phones. This is important information for those seeking to reduce markets for hot products such as mobile phones.

Selling stolen goods

Analysis of the significant differences between contrasting groups reveals that:

- 16-25 year olds are more likely to sell stolen goods than those in the age groups 26-39 and 40-65 years

¹¹ And at a slightly lower level of significance ($P < .05$ one tailed t-test) 26-39 year olds more likely to buy than those aged 40-65

¹² And at ($P < .05$ one tailed t-test) than those living in the most affluent *Thriving* areas

¹³ And ($p < .05$ one tailed t-test) than those earning £10,000-£14,000 and ($p < .10$ one tailed t-test) those earning £20,000-£29,999). Those earning £15,000-£19,999 are more likely to offend than those earning over £30,000 ($p < .05$ one tailed t-test).

- Those aged 40-65 are more likely to offend than those in the 26-39 years age group
- Those with other work status are more likely to sell stolen goods than those who are working
- Those with lower GCSEs are significantly more likely to sell stolen goods than those with higher GCSEs, A levels or higher education qualifications
- Those with no qualifications are more likely to sell than those with higher education qualifications
- Single people are more likely to sell stolen goods than those who are married, separated or divorced¹⁴
- Those living in ACORN Striving areas are more likely to sell stolen goods than those in Settling areas¹⁵

The analysis of the significant differences between contrasting groups reveals that males are more likely than females to sell stolen goods. However, this is not listed above since the level of statistical significance is not high¹⁶. Unlike buying stolen goods, there is no straightforward linear relationship between youth and offending. That said, it is important to emphasise that, compared with the other age groups examined, those in the youngest age group are most likely to sell stolen goods. As for indicators of relative deprivation, those in the least affluent Striving areas are more likely to sell stolen goods than those in Settling areas - but the difference is not as highly statistically significant when compared with those in the most affluent areas. Clear associations are found between low educational qualifications and offending. The same can be said for being single. In sum, this analysis reveals that selling stolen goods is most strongly associated with being under 25 and single with poor educational attainment. There are no significant differences between those on different levels of income, and how well people are managing on income does not appear to be related to dealing in stolen goods.

This is the first time a nationally representative crime survey has asked about involvement in selling stolen goods. The finding that nearly 3 percent of the population of respondents self report doing so is important since this provides an essential indicator of the prevalence of offending in England and Wales. The above findings will be extremely informative for those involved in implementing the MRA (Sutton 2001; 1998; Sutton et al 2001; Harris et al 2003). Backed up by research into the dynamics of local stolen goods markets (Sutton 2004), these findings are an important guide to where scarce crime reduction and detection resources should be focused upon those most likely to be dealing in stolen goods.

¹⁴ And (P<.05 one tailed t-test) more likely than those who are widowed

¹⁵ And (P<.05 one tailed t-test) more likely than those in *Aspiring* areas. And at a still lower level of significance (p<.10 one tailed t-test) more likely than those in the *Thriving* and *Rising* categories

¹⁶ p<.10 one tailed t-test

Multivariate analysis

LR data modelling¹⁷ was used to identify a number of social and demographic factors that influence the probability of someone buying stolen goods. The demographic and other social variables chosen for testing in these models are those thought, on the basis of existing knowledge, to be most likely to be correlated with offending of this kind. The way that LR modelling adds to our understanding of the complexity of factors predicting who is most likely to offend is explained in more depth in Appendix 1. It should be noted that only crimes with a prevalence of 5 percent or above have been analysed using LR because with less than 5 percent of interviewees offending, the numbers have an increased likelihood of being too small to allow the model to discriminate between the social and demographic characteristics of those that have offended and not offended. The results are explained below.

Multivariate analysis of handling stolen goods

Table A2.10 in Appendix 2 shows the results of LR analysis of the contribution of a number of social and demographic factors in explaining who is most likely to submit fraudulent expenses claims in the workplace. As explained in Appendix 1, each variable has a reference category that is not displayed in the table. This is the standard practice in presenting LR models - because all reference categories in the models contain values that are necessarily nil (Norusis 1990; Sutton, 1998). To assist the reader with interpretation of the model, the reference categories for each variable used in all the LR analysis throughout this report are shown in Appendix 1, and are also referred to in each bullet point in the summary below.

Taking account of the combined contribution of all the variables in the model to explaining the likelihood of offending, the most important findings, in terms of statistical significance and sizeable effects¹⁸ of the variables that stand out are as follows:

- Males are 1.4 times as likely as females to buy stolen goods
- Those aged under 25 are 5.5 more likely to buy stolen goods than those aged 40-65
- Those living in *Rising* and *Striving* ACORN areas are, respectively, 1.4 and 1.3 times more likely to buy than those in the most affluent *Thriving* areas
- Those with higher educational qualifications are almost half as likely to buy stolen goods as those with no qualifications

The most sizeable predictor found for this offence is being under 25 years of age. Being male was also an important predictor. This is an interesting finding, revealing that young males are more likely than young females to be involved in buying stolen goods in addition to many other types of offending (West 1982; Graham and Bowling

¹⁷ All models are based upon weighted data and all the independent variables have been tested for multi-co linearity effects. VIF and tolerance statistics, and examination of eigen values reveals that there was no significant multi-co linearity between the independent variables.

¹⁸ Exp(B) of around 2 or above.

1995). This finding is very much in line with earlier research that looked at the demographic and other social characteristics of self-report buyers of stolen goods (Sutton 1998).

Conclusions and the way forward with the Market Reduction Approach

Handling stolen goods carries a higher maximum penalty than burglary – the intention of the legislation (Section 22 of the Theft 1968) being to punish those who create a demand for stolen goods. The OCJS findings that 7.2 percent of those questioned admitted that they had knowingly bought stolen goods in the past 12 months shows clearly that a significant proportion of the public are engaging in offending that carries a maximum penalty of 14 years. Findings from the OCJS will enable policy makers to concentrate scarce resources where they are most needed in tackling particular theft problems. This report has identified the characteristics of those who admit to this type of offending and perhaps more importantly those who support demand for theft by knowingly buying stolen goods such as mobile phones. Such information will be useful in guiding decisions as to where to focus resources to reduce crime and tackle offending.

The need to understand the dynamics of demand and stealing to offer

Concentrating on the arrest and incarceration of local thieves often makes only short-lived improvements in local levels of crime. Reductions often do not even last until the remanded or sentenced offenders are released because other offenders take their place (Sutton and Simmonds 2004). The same is true of drug treatment programmes. Even though more and more criminally active substance misusers enter and remain in treatment programmes and are reported to reduce their drug intake, there is rarely a corresponding reduction in local crime rates. This raises some important theoretical questions¹⁹: does this point to an *Archimedes Principle* dynamic at work? Or the equivalent of nature disliking a vacuum? If so then what sets the water level? Or what causes the vacuum that sucks in new offenders to take the place of inactive ones? Research (Sutton 1998) suggests that demand for stolen goods and the vibrancy of local markets (Sutton and Simmonds 2004) may be a force that stabilises the numbers and activity of local thieves and subsequent crime levels. There is sound evidence to suggest that tackling markets that are at the roots of theft is based on sound theoretical principles (Harris et al 2003) – and arguably measures should be adopted more frequently to tackle markets to increase the impact of crackdowns against offenders.

Building upon existing theories and approaches to crime control – the MRA

One of the most popular crime reduction methods in the UK is Situational Crime Prevention (SCP). SCP involves the deployment of discreet managerial and environmental change to reduce the opportunities for crimes to occur and is particularly useful for designing solutions to prevent specific crime problems in the places where they usually happen (Clarke 1997). Building upon Clarke's work in looking for ways to tackle the roots of theft Sutton (1995), pointed out that - at the

¹⁹ Thanks are due to Sergeant Dave Simmonds – currently seconded to Derby Community Safety Partnership for posing these questions.

time he was then writing - both Ron Clarke and Marcus Felson had in their highly influential and respective writings on SCP and Routine Activities Theory (RAT) (Cohen and Felson 1979) 'taken for granted' the existence of motivated offenders. In doing so they had not capitalised on the fact that stolen goods markets could be tackled with a series of strategies to increase the risks and reduce the rewards of selling and buying stolen goods in ways that fit perfectly with, and build upon, the philosophy of both SCP and RAT. This is important because tackling theft in this way might satisfy the demands of policy makers, writers and crime reduction practitioners who wish to deal with the underlying causes of criminal motivation as well as the vulnerability of victims' possessions (Sutton 1996).

Most crimes require convergence in space and time of likely offenders, suitable targets and the absence of capable guardians (Cohen and Felson 1979). The MRA fits the philosophy of Cohen's RAT in the following ways:

1. *Motivated offenders*

- Motivated *thieves* (selling stolen goods), *dealers* (Buying/selling), *consumers* (buying/owning)

2. *Suitable targets*

- Stolen goods for sale – and when sold, similar goods become suitable targets for theft.

3. *Absence of capable guardians*

- Low level of policing (public and private policing or citizen control) of stolen goods markets

Stolen goods markets motivate thieves, because most thieves steal to sell goods and thus obtain cash. Market demand²⁰ for particular goods clearly plays a role in motivating some people to steal items that they know others will buy. In the UK, new knowledge of the importance of the practice of *stealing to offer* in maintaining local stolen goods markets was first used to create an initial menu of *situational* tactics designed to reduce theft through the MRA (Sutton 1998). The menu was further developed to form the core element of a report that provides a strategic and systematic 'toolkit' for reducing stolen goods markets (Sutton et al. 2001). The influence of Clarke's work can be seen in the following matching of the MRA to three of the main elements of situational crime prevention philosophy:

1. *Increasing the effort of offending – focusing upon the:*

Thief

- Making it as hard to sell stolen goods as it is to steal them

Dealer (fence)

- Making it difficult to 'safely' buy and sell stolen goods

Consumer

²⁰ Or, more accurately the saleability of certain items.

- Reducing opportunities to buy and thereby deflecting consumers to legitimate markets – or alternative illegitimate markets where they will have to work harder to find the items they want – to the point where the expense/effort of searching becomes intolerable.

2. *Increasing the risks of offending – focusing upon the:*

Thief

- Making it as least as risky to transport and sell stolen goods as it is to steal them.

Dealer

- Making it much more risky to knowingly buy, transport store and trade in stolen goods.

Consumer

- Making it much more risky to knowingly buy, transport and own stolen goods.

3. *Reducing the rewards of offending – focusing upon the:*

Thief

- Reducing the price received for stolen goods because they are no longer so desirable – due to impact of moral exhortation and increased risks (no longer a sellers market).

Dealer

- Reducing the profit margin on stolen goods due to the increased risks faced in inter-trader dealing and the perceived risks that the consumers face. Fewer stolen goods in circulation – no longer core source of income.

Consumer

- Risks/guilt of purchasing and ownership outweigh the enjoyment of possession and use of stolen goods.

The MRA should be seen as a theft reduction strategy, not simply as a way to reduce illicit trading, because each essential attempt to reduce illicit markets is also essentially targeting both the theft process and loot trading process. Detecting those engaged in handling stolen goods and applying legal sanctions against them is also ensuring that offenders have less chance of profiting from the misery of victims of burglary and other thefts.

Harris et al (2003) undertook an independent evaluation of two MRA projects that were funded under the Home Office Targeted Policing Initiative (TPI). They found that while the theory behind the MRA is clearly not flawed, some of the recommended MRA tactics nevertheless proved difficult to implement and that the police services involved had not always adopted the most promising tactics that are recommended by Sutton et al (2001):

The problems encountered by the projects all related to operationalising the theory. ... While implementation has been difficult there is certainly not sufficient evidence from the two projects to suggest that the compelling logic of the theory of market reduction is unsound.

Harris et al (2003) conclude that the two projects evaluated should be seen as forerunners for future MRA initiatives. Others can now draw upon their experiences: 'Perhaps in this light, progress should be viewed less in terms of crime reduction outcomes but more in terms of lessons about the process through which market reduction approaches should be implemented.' Building upon the valuable lessons that Harris et al have identified, and taking on board a series of recommendations from their evaluations, MRA projects are currently underway in Derby and in Mansfield in the East Midlands. Hopefully, these projects will prove cost effective in terms of reducing the extent of handling – with an aim to reduce acquisitive offending. The valuable information from the OCJS regarding the demographic and social characteristics of offenders at the national level will most certainly guide local decision making in these, and other, second-generation MRA projects.

Appendix 1: Technical Appendix

The OCJS is a self-report offending survey and this section of the report explains how the survey adds to existing knowledge to further our understanding of offending and crime. Sources of crime data are discussed in terms of how they complement and contrast with self report crime data and with such data from the OCJS in particular.

The Home Office produce offender statistics including the number of offenders in custody or serving a community sentence. The Home Office Offenders Index builds upon this information by allowing for analysis of offender history, which can show how criminal careers develop. Most offending data provide simply a snapshot of the crime problem at a particular point in time. Annually, the Home Office collects statistics based upon *known* offenders. These data include the number of people convicted or cautioned by offence. However, a criticism commonly leveled at these data is that they are limited to crimes that the police know about and record, and so routine police figures tell us very little about offenders and the dynamics of offending behavior.

Nationally representative victimisation surveys, such as the British Crime Survey, provide evidence of the extent to which official statistics underestimate the true level of various crimes. These surveys work by asking a sample of the population to recall incidents of crimes committed against them or their household within a certain period of time. Such surveys are better measures than police data of the 'real' amount of crime experienced by the general public. A change in victimisation levels between each annual survey is a useful measure of changes in victimisation and offending levels.

In terms of nationally representative self-report offending surveys, the OCJS is designed to provide more information than previous studies such as the Youth Lifestyles Survey, Youth Justice Board's Youth Survey and the International Self-Report Delinquency Study. The important features of the 2003 OCJS that improve upon previous self report offending surveys are as follows:

- An extended age range from 10 to 65, though with a sufficient number of young people to provide robust estimates.
- Inclusion of a booster sample of people from minority ethnic groups.
- A large sample of around 12,000 respondents in total.
- A sophisticated questionnaire designed to give better measures of offending.
- Use of AUDIO-CASI to ensure respondents with literacy problems can participate.
- A sample design to allow the future collection of longitudinal data for young people.

Apart from the self-report offending that is captured by the British Crime Survey, many self-report offending surveys have relatively small sample sizes, which means it is more difficult to be confident that findings represent robust estimates of national levels of offending. However, the 2003 OCJS has a comparatively large main sample of 1079 – and 4574 of these are aged 10 to 25. This means that, combined with

complex sampling methods and data weighting²¹, it is possible to be much more confident that the sample is representative of the population of England and Wales.

Multivariate analysis using logistic regression

A logistic regression (LR) model was constructed for buying stolen goods since that is the only self report offending in the handling questions that has a self report prevalence rate of at least 5 percent. The LR approach provides a type of analysis that simultaneously considers the extent to which demographic and social variables (independent variables) increase the likelihood of involvement in a particular criminal activity of interest (the dependent variable). The Wald statistic in the model is used to determine, in each model, the relevant influence of each demographic and social variable on offending behaviour. Odds ratios are used to determine the relative probability of admitting offending for an individual with particular demographic and social attributes. Such analysis is extremely powerful and useful in that it allows for an examination and clear explanation of the interactive effects of demographic factors and other social factors on reported offending - examining the social and demographic characteristics of those most likely to commit particular offences. The analysis is conceptually straightforward and involves building a mathematical model in which each variable makes a significant contribution to explaining the likelihood of self report offending. The model will not explain everything, however, because survey data inevitably fail to capture all the factors that affect offending behaviour. Therefore, it is important to complement the analysis and interpretation of results with existing in-depth knowledge of stolen goods markets.

A range of independent variables were selected for inclusion in the model. These varied slightly for different models according to both theoretical and also practical considerations. The original set of independent variables were gender (male and female), age group (under 25, 25-39 and 40-65), marital status (married, single, separated/divorced and widowed), current working status (working, unemployed, retired, in full-time education and other), whether self-employed (self-employed and employed), educational qualifications (none, GCSE D-G, GSCE A-C, trade apprenticeship type qualifications, A-level or equivalent, higher education/degree and other), annual household income (under £10,000, £10,000-£14,999, £15,000-£19,999, £20,000-£29,000 and £30,000 plus), whether they are managing on that household income (managing, getting by, getting into difficulties), ACORN category (thriving, expanding, rising, settling, aspiring and striving), how long they have lived in the area (less than 12 months and more than 12 months), and whether their friends live in the area (yes or no). Whether friends live in the area has been included in the set of possible predictors as it seems likely that this may be important in terms of being known locally, since research suggests that many thieves do not like to sell to strangers (Sutton et al 2001).

²¹ For some of the analysis, data are weighted to nationally representative levels because the C&JS did not take a totally random sample – for instance those in certain areas were over sampled and non-respondents differ from respondents.

One of the variables listed above – current work status – was removed from the modeling process because it caused statistical problems; the models revealing that this variable was performing as a constant and could not, therefore, be entered. Marital group was also recoded into single or not single because this aided interpretation. This was done because earlier t-test analysis revealed that the main difference between these groups was in the comparison between single individuals compared with all other categories.

LR with categorical independent variables, such as those described above, requires that the person conducting the analysis specifies which of the categories for each independent variable can be used as the reference category to test the significance of the remaining categories in the model. In the software package SPSS, which was used for this analysis, either the first or the last category can be set as the reference category. In the models the reference category is not displayed because reference categories in LR models are necessarily nil (Norusis 1990). Decisions as to which category should be the reference category were informed by existing theory from the literature – and elsewhere to aid clarity of interpretation and presentation of findings.

For the models presented in this report, the reference category for each independent variable is as follows:

Sex	=	female
Age	=	40 – 65
Marital status	=	not single
Self-employed	=	employed
Educational qualifications	=	none
Annual household income	=	under £10,000
Managing on income	=	managing
ACORN	=	thriving
How long lived in area	=	over 12 months.

The way that the LR analysis works is that these variables are compared, within the same algorithm, against all other independent variables in the model to test the independent significance of each variable in terms of finding out the degree to which it is useful in explaining the particular type of offending that is being examined. This is known as multivariate analysis.

Buying Stolen Goods Model

The final model used in this report is shown in Table A2.9. The model in Table A2.9 does represent a significant improvement on the constant only model: $X^2(24) = 165961.631; p < .001$ meaning that the variables do predict whether a person will buy stolen goods better than by chance alone. The classification table shows that the model correctly classifies 93.7 percent of the respondents. However, this does not represent any change from the constant only model. This model made the most practical and theoretical sense and it has a Nagelkerke R^2 of 0.85 – meaning that the model explains approximately 8.5 percent of the variation in the data. This leaves a lot of variation unexplained by the current set of independent variables, but it is important to note that, as explained above, this is usual - as survey data from nationally representative surveys of many types of offending (such as the BCS and OCJS) inevitably fail to capture all the factors which affect offending behaviour.

Appendix 2

Table A2.1 Age of those handling stolen goods in past 12 months²²

	% Buying stolen goods		% Selling Stolen Goods		% Buying Stolen Mobile	
	n ²³		n		n	
Male	8.5	(3403)	3.0	(3450)	1.6	(4706)
Female	6.0	(3863)	2.4	(3904)	1.0	(5076)
<i>Age Group:</i>						
10-15	n/a		n/a		1.9	(1976)
16-25	19.7	(1811)	7.2	(1859)	4.2	(2444)
26-39	5.1	(1941)	1.2	(1959)	0.8	(1905)
40-65	5.0	(3514)	2.2	(3536)	0.3	(3457)
Base n ²⁴		7266		7354		9782

Table A2.2 Work status of those handling stolen goods in past 12 months

	% Buying stolen goods		% Selling Stolen Goods		% Buying Stolen Mobile	
	n		n		n	
<i>Current Work Status:</i>						
Working	6.8	(4717)	2.1	(4771)	0.9	(4710)
Unemployed	11.1	(189)	4.7	(194)	1.8	(210)
Retired	3.2	(468)	2.0	(468)	0.0	(463)
Other	8.0	(1368)	3.7	(1387)	1.7	(1391)
Full-time educ.	13.2	(521)	6.4	(530)	3.6	(1353)
Age 14 or less	n/a		n/a		1.2	(1649)
<i>In past 12 months:</i>						
Self employed	6.5	(557)	1.7	(560)	0.5	(546)
Employee	6.8	(4157)	2.1	(4208)	0.9	(4160)
Base n ²⁵		7266		7354		9782

²² Based on those eligible for each question

²³ n represents the total number eligible in each category to answer the specific question

²⁴ Where applicable, n is based on those eligible to answer each stolen goods crime question

²⁵ Where applicable, n is based on those eligible to answer each stolen goods crime question

Table A2.3 Educational qualifications of those handling stolen goods in past 12 months

	% Buying stolen goods		% Selling Stolen Goods		% Buying Stolen Mobile	
	n		n		n	
<i>Qualifications:</i>						
None	8.6	(1569)	3.2	(1584)	1.1	(1606)
GCSE lower/Eqv	11.8	(413)	5.5	(421)	1.2	(444)
GCSE higher/Eqv	7.7	(1629)	2.3	(1660)	1.7	(1832)
Trade	8.0	(235)	3.8	(236)	1.9	(235)
A levels	7.8	(1165)	2.5	(1180)	1.1	(1200)
Higher edu. ²⁶	4.7	(2085)	1.9	(2102)	0.5	(2024)
Other	7.7	(162)	2.9	(163)	0.3	(156)
Base n ²⁷	7266		7354		9782	

Table A2.4 Marital status of those handling stolen goods in past 12 months

	% Buying stolen goods		% Selling Stolen Goods		% Buying Stolen Mobile	
	n		n		n	
<i>Marital status:</i>						
Married/or defacto	5.6	(3945)	2.0	(3975)	0.4	(3881)
Single	12.9	(2332)	4.6	(2382)	3.3	(2955)
Widowed	5.8	(171)	2.2	(172)	0.2	(169)
Seperated/Div	5.4	(812)	2.5	(819)	0.8	(798)
Base n ²⁸	7266		7354		9782	

Table A2.5 ACORN housing area of those handling stolen goods in past 12 months

	% Buying stolen goods		% Selling Stolen Goods		% Buying Stolen Mobile	
	n		n		n	
<i>ACORN Group:</i>						
Thriving	6.4	(1519)	2.8	(1532)	0.9	(2030)
Expanding	6.8	(883)	2.8	(893)	0.6	(1214)
Rising	7.0	(608)	3.1	(617)	1.2	(734)
Settling	6.4	(1835)	1.9	(1854)	1.2	(2456)
Aspiring	6.4	(909)	2.0	(919)	1.9	(1244)
Striving	10.2	(1504)	3.5	(1531)	1.8	(2096)
Base n ²⁹	7266		7354		9782	

²⁶ Includes higher degree and diplomas and other higher qualifications

²⁷ Where applicable, n is based on those eligible to answer each stolen goods crime question

²⁸ Where applicable, n is based on those eligible to answer each stolen goods crime question

²⁹ Where applicable, n is based on those eligible to answer each stolen goods crime question

Table A2.6 Income of those handling in past 12 months

	% Buying stolen goods		% Selling Stolen Goods		% Buying Stolen Mobile	
		n		n		n
Under £10,000	7.2	(1596)	2.1	(1624)	1.7	(2084)
£10,000 - £14,999	6.3	(510)	3.0	(517)	0.8	(676)
£15,000-£19,999	5.6	(774)	2.8	(777)	1.7	(1005)
£20,000 - £29,999	7.2	(1296)	2.3	(1308)	1.1	(1676)
£30,000 and above	7.0	(1894)	2.6	(1914)	0.8	(2436)
<i>Managing on Income?</i>						
Managing	6.7	(4280)	2.3	(4320)	1.1	(5692)
Getting by	7.7	(2571)	3.1	(2610)	1.4	(3489)
In difficulties	9.0	(356)	3.2	(362)	2.2	(475)
Base n ³⁰		7266		7354		9782

Table A2.7 Handling and committing one or more other crimes

	% Buying stolen goods		% Selling Stolen Goods		% Buying Stolen Mobile	
		n		n		n
<i>Ever committed other crime(s):</i>						
Yes	10.8	(2882)	3.5	(2946)	2.6	(4044)
No	4.9	(4276)	2.1	(4296)	0.3	(5567)
Base n ³¹		7266		7354		9782

³⁰ Where applicable, n is based on those eligible to answer each stolen goods crime question

³¹ Where applicable, n is based on those eligible to answer each stolen goods crime question

Table A2.9 Buying stolen goods – logistic regression model

<i>Variable</i>	<i>B</i>	<i>S.E</i>	<i>Wald</i>	<i>Exp (B)</i> <i>(odds ratio)</i>
Sex – male	.343 ***	.004	7525.062	1.409
Age – under 25	1.712 ***	.006	84882.332	5.538
Age – 26-39	.120 ***	.005	659.183	1.127
Marital status – single	-.008	.005	2.122	.993
Self employed	.195 ***	.006	1197.163	1.216
<i>Educational qualifications:</i>				
GCSE - D-G	.295 ***	.008	1084.924	1.295
GCSE - A-C	-.289 ***	.006	2268.503	.749
Trade qualified	-.507 ***	.011	2061.546	.602
A level	-.436 ***	.007	4083.443	.646
Degree level	-.577 ***	.006	8717.524	.562
Other qualifications	-.288 ***	.013	465.102	.749
<i>Income:</i>				
£10,000-£14,999	-.221 ***	.008	710.410	.802
£15,000-£19,999	-.222 ***	.007	1056.599	.801
£20,000-£29,000	.004	.006	.589	1.005
£30,000 and above	.115 ***	.005	492.285	1.122
<i>Managing on income:</i>				
Getting by	-.043 ***	.004	101.871	.958
Getting into difficulties	-.135 ***	.012	128.297	.874
<i>ACORN:</i>				
Expanding	.119 ***	.007	318.626	1.127
Rising	.301 ***	.007	1906.303	1.351
Settling	-.124 ***	.006	454.045	.883
Aspiring	-.184 ***	.007	652.243	.832
Striving	.222 ***	.006	1315.559	1.248
Lived in area under year	-.314 ***	.008	1488.440	.731
Friends live locally	.009	.005	2.843	1.009

Nagelkerke $R^2 = .085$ * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

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