

Theft Victims and their Attitudes toward being Victimized

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ABSTRACT

Until recently the attention of criminal justice has not been adequately drawn toward the victims of crime. Instead, more concern had been given to crime and perpetrator. But last twenty to thirty years there have been movements to discuss the victims' rights and their involvement in the criminal justice system. Scholars have found out the extent of harm suffered by the victims. This study focuses on the theft victims and the harm caused to them by the perpetrators stealing their properties. Theft as a property crime records a considerable decrease in percentage from 66.8 in 2006 to 25.39 in 2019. The research problem is primarily concerned with the impacts of theft as a property crime, and how far it has affected the normal life of the citizens of the country for it stands at 16.6 percent of the total number of grave crimes in the country. Therefore, this study was aimed at finding the nature and the impacts of theft on victims. Eighty-four victims of theft were selected to achieve the targets of the study from a convenient sample, adding 5-8 incidents of thefts from a police station chosen from the selected fourteen districts. The data were collected by using a semi-structured interview schedule administered to the victims of theft. The findings of the study revealed that 64.3% of the thieves were unknown to the victims except for the fact that 35.7% of offenders were their family members, relatives, and neighbors. The majority of the victims (44.7%) were involved in businesses and government sector employment and comparatively, they were well-to-do people in the community targeted by the offenders for theft. The main target of the thieves was money or jewelry or both some occasions they had stolen mobile phones, motorcycles, three-wheelers, and other valuable items. Of the identified thieves, 15.5% were drug addicts and alcoholics who had committed thefts to finance their drugs. The impact of the theft was a financial loss, mental pain, and anxiety caused to the majority of the victims. The victims have taken measures to prevent revictimization by ensuring the security of their residences as well as their business establishments. The study proposes reducing drug addiction and target hardening on thieves to minimize theft in the country.

Keywords: Theft, Victims, Property, Perpetrators, valuables

INTRODUCTION

The history of theft goes back to the beginning of human history. People have stolen other people's property when they do not possess enough money and movable property. Presently, theft is the most common property crime committed in many countries of the world. The Sri Lankan Penal Code defines theft as an act of intending to grab dishonestly any movable property out of the possession of any person without his or her consent and moving that property away (Penal Code 1883:391). Until a thing is attached to the earth it is not a movable property but once it is severed from the earth it becomes a movable property. In the United States theft is identified as "the unlawful taking, leading or riding away from the possession or constructive possession of another" (FBI, 2009).

According to Barlow, theft or stealing covers many crimes that include shoplifting, pocket-picking, burglary, petty larceny, grand larceny, check forgery, embezzlement, auto theft, fraud, confidence games, and many more crimes (1978:181). However, three conditions should be met if a theft were to occur. Firstly,

there should be movable property available. Secondly, there should be someone, an owner of that property, and thirdly, there should be someone who steals that property.

In many countries, theft occurs daily. While some people commit some sort of theft, others become victims of it. To state it more correctly, theft is a common crime in many countries where as, in some other countries, theft cannot be heard of or occurs occasionally. As material wealth is of high value in capitalist countries many tend to acquire wealth through legitimate or illegitimate ways thereby causing theft to occur at large.

It is commonly believed that the poor and the disadvantaged are mostly involved in theft but people from all walks of life may commit theft with the expectation of accumulating more wealth. Livingston explains that thieves are not alike in their professionalism and motivation. From one end some thieves steal things relatively infrequently. They are known as opportunistic thieves who commit stealing only when they have a convenient opportunity. On the other end, some thieves steal as a profession to make regular income (1992:234). As a criminal activity theft or stealing has a long history but criminal laws against theft have emerged from early penal codes such as the code of Hammurabi. Accordingly, those who stole from temples or the king's palace were punishable by death. Those who stole from private citizens were punished with compensation. Between 1792-1750 B.C. the King of Babylonia, King Hammurabi codified the first great code of laws by the name code of Hammurabi which encompassed 285 laws on personal property, real estate, trade and business, the family, injuries, and labor. The main purpose of the code was to "prevent the strong from oppressing the weak" and also enlighten the land to further the welfare of the people (Bohm, Haley, 2007:108).

In the early era, legal codes had not clearly defined what theft was. Therefore, some laws had not identified theft as a punishable behavior. However, according to the common law, theft is a civil law violation and trespass. The common legal term for theft is larceny which means "laying hands on another's possessions without his permission" and this is what trespass amounts to. Consequently, there is no larceny without trespass (Adler et.al, 1995:266-267; Walsh, Hemmens, 2011:434-435).

When the stolen objects are considered the articles being stolen have varied with the social change that has taken place with time. During the agricultural society, the stolen goods were agricultural products such as paddy, wheat, and other kinds of praedial produce. In agricultural societies, animal husbandry was the main livelihood of people therefore, cows, pigs, goats, and birds was often stolen by thieves as they were exchanged for money. With the change of society from agriculture to industry, the objects of thefts changed and they became increased in number. The value of the stolen item decided the gravity of the crime. The more valuable the stolen goods were, the graver the punishment was for them. Consequently, when the value of the stolen goods was less, it was considered petty theft and vice versa. For a petty theft, the punishment inflicted on the offender was minor whereas, for a grand theft, it was severe.

Criminologists believe that victimization is not a random process. It includes a process encompassing a host of systematic environmental, demographic, and personal characteristics. According to the type of crime victims, these characteristics become different. There is a strong possibility that the victims of crime will suffer from mental trauma when he recollects the incident of victimization and they may suffer from distress or shock even throughout their lives. Victimization has a lasting effect of insecurity, fear helplessness, fearfulness, etc. (Paranjape, 2011).

Another study has found that victims of property crimes suffer from anger, and they felt shocked, worried, fearful, or scared after the incident (Maguire, et. al. 2012:354). Anxiety and depression were common among the victims of theft. Further, victimization may militate not only against the victim but also against the entire community. Therefore, conducting this research on victims' perceptions and their attitudes toward their being victimized would be of considerable significance. Figure 1 indicates a sharp decline in the rates

of theft in Sri Lanka after 2006.

Table 1: Theft of Property Including Praedial Produce over Rs. 5000, Cycle and Cattle Theft in Sri Lanka 2006 -2019

Year	Total No of Theft of Property valued over Rs. 5000	Mid-year Population in '000	Rate per 100,000 population
2006	13,265	19,858	66.80
2007	12,589	20,039	62.82
2008	13,303	20,217	65.80
2009	11,911	20,450	58.24
2010	12,605	20,653	61.03
2011	11,883	20,869	56.94
2012	11,620	20,328	57.16
2013	11,352	20,579	55.16
2014	10,914	20,771	52.54
2015	6,375	20,966	30.41
2016	6,094	21,203	28.74
2017	6143	21444	28.65
2018	5996	21670	27.67
2019	5536	21803	25.39

Source: Annual administrative reports of Inspector General of Police. 2006-2016

Statistical Abstracts-Department of Census and Statistics. 2006-2016

Table 1 contains statistics on theft which is reported separately as a grave crime in the police report. This type of crime alone comprises 39% of the total number of grave crimes reported in 2019. This particular category of crime represented 31% of the total number of grave crimes in 2006. This particular category indicates a serious trend of change in the patterns of grave crimes in the country. Even though the proportion of theft has increased compared to the other types of grave crimes, there has been a steep decline in the rate of theft per 100,000 population in the course of the period under consideration. The theft rate remained at 95.7 in 2006 and it declined to 48.4 by 2016 with fluctuation in some years. This decline in theft by 47.3 seems to be a positive sign of a reduction in the number of criminals and a change in that particular criminal behaviour of stealing.

RESEARCH PROBLEM

The incidence of theft cannot be perceived as a minor social problem for it falls under the category of grave crimes. Such incidents manifest a direct violation of vital social norms and laws of protecting people's property. The laws alone are not sufficient to protect the people's property. The social structure together with its organization plays a vital role in the maintenance of peace, law, and order in society, including the protection of victims.

Sri Lankan society has undergone a dramatic change, adversely affecting its social control maintained through cultural and social structural arrangements. The property of people is highly targeted by thieves as well as by offender gangs. Many valuable items have been stolen causing physical and psychological damage to residential dwellers. Although the police have succeeded in controlling theft to some extent, unscrupulous people still keep inflicting injuries upon law-abiding people and causing damage to their

property. This research study mainly concerns this social phenomenon and attempts to explore and explain the incidence of theft and its impacts on the victims of this crime.

Objectives

- To identify the effects of theft on the victims
- To determine the causes of theft in Sri Lanka
- To determine the nature of theft and the incidence of stealing.

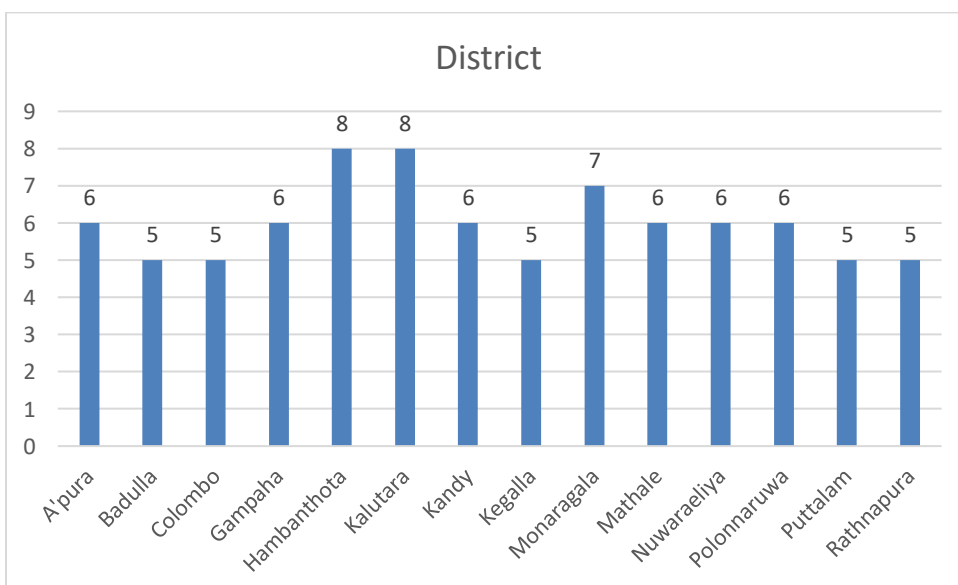
Significance of the study

Although there had been very few researches conducted to determine the nature of the victimization of theft, both the impact of theft on victims and the nature of the criminal behaviour of the thieves have not yet been examined adequately in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this research will undoubtedly be significant for both academics and policymakers to work towards an extensive program to prevent theft incidents and advance policy planning. The study will also generate new knowledge regarding the nature of theft and the causes and motives that lead to committing such crimes. Further, the impact of theft on the victims and an awareness of the extent of their suffering would help protect and rehabilitate them.

METHODS

This study is a descriptive research design carried out concerning the theft victims selected from fourteen districts in Sri Lanka. Figure 2 indicates the number of cases selected from each district. From each district, some victims from 5 to 8 were chosen from a convenient sample drawn from the data available in selected police stations. Selected victims were met at their houses and business establishments, thus data were collected by interviewing them using an interview schedule. Interviews were designed primarily to gather data on the impacts of theft on the victims, the nature of the incidents, and the criminals’ motives that drove them to steal from people. This semi-structured open-ended procedure took approximately thirty minutes per victim. However, the length of the interview was subject to considerable individual variation. An assurance of confidentiality and a voluntary nature of participation was established with those who participated in the interviews.

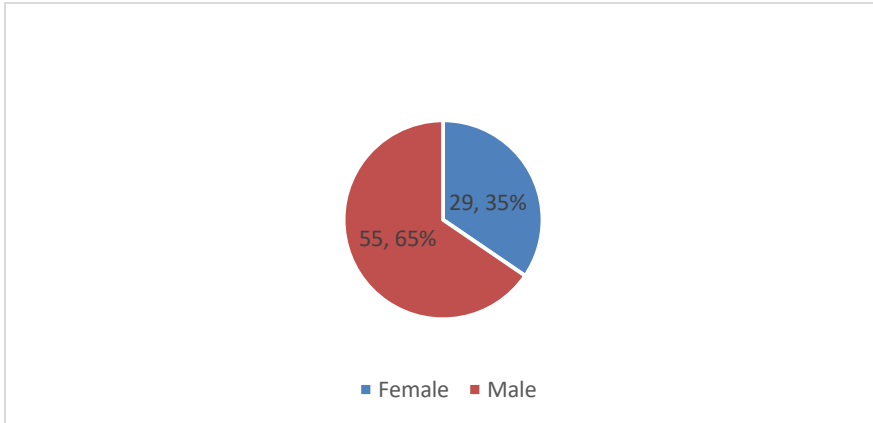
Figure 2: Sample units selected from each selected district



Source: Field Research 2019

In this study, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected regarding the impacts of theft on victims and the behavior of the thieves. In analyzing data, standard data analysis methods both quantitative and qualitative were utilized to achieve the objectives of the study.

Figure 3: Gender of the Victims of Theft

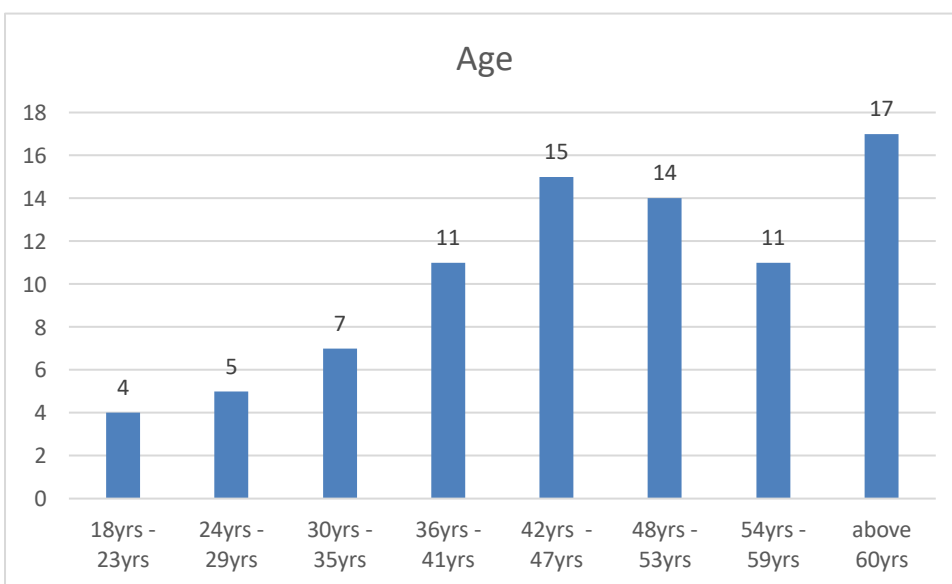


Source: Field Research 2019

Although male dominance is well evident in the commission of theft, its victimization indicates that the majority of the victims were predominantly males. The obvious reason for that is in most households the entire family has become the victims because the head of the family is often a male and he represents the victims of the family. According to Figure 3, 65% of theft victims are males. This figure suggests that the perpetrator of the theft does not expect any risk resistance from males as head of the residence in committing his crime. However, 35% of females have also been the victims of theft in this study as they have played the role of head of the household owing to their marriage or because of the absence of their husbands due to death or desertion.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Figure 4. Age distribution of the victims of Theft

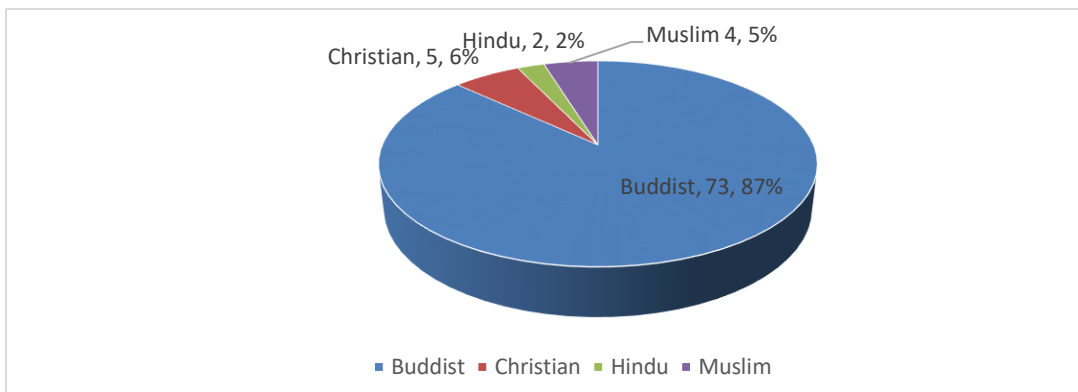


Source: Field Research 2019

The present study was conducted on 84 victims of theft selected from fourteen police stations in different districts of Sri Lanka. Their age distribution indicates an extensive age range (Figure 4). Accordingly, the

highest number of victims i.e., 17 of them (20.2%), belong to the age group of above 60 years. The second highest group numbering 15 victims (17.8%) represents the age group between 42 to 47 years. However, the youngest belong to the age group of 18 to 23 years and they stand numerically at 4 (4.8%) which is the least number of victims among the age categories. The age categories of victims between 36-41 and 54-59 years represent an equal number of victims standing at its percentages 13 each. The age category of between 48-53 represents 14 (16.6%) victims. However, chart 4 indicates that the younger the victims are the lesser the theft victims' representation is. Further, the highest number of victims of theft is the age group above 60 years and it is indeed a pathetic situation as people of such age remain dependent on others for their protection and survival. Targeting the elderly indicates that the crime of theft has assumed brutal proportions. As Conklin (1972) mentions "When thieves have opportunities to select the targets they often prefer to choose victims who are elderly, female and alone", and this is consistent with the present study too.

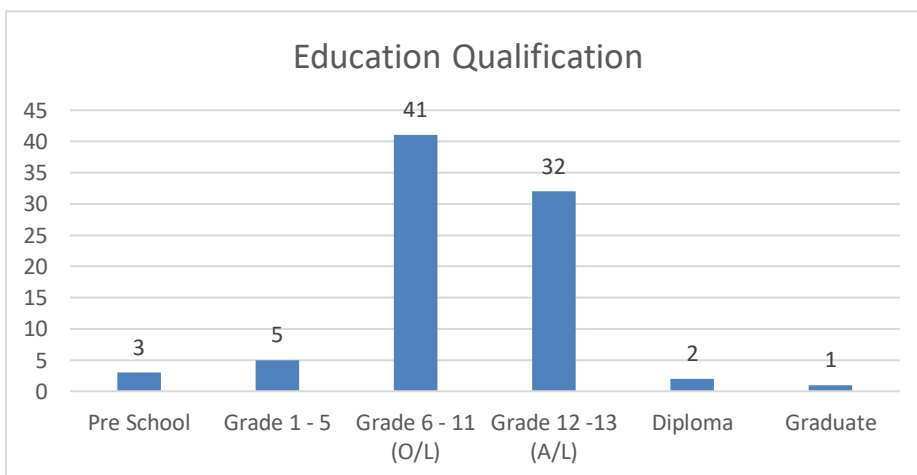
Figure 5. The religion of the Victims of Theft



Source: Field Research 2019

Among the individualistic factors that affect theft, the religion of the victims seems significant for it indicates that the majority 73 (87%) of the victims selected in the sample were Buddhists. The reason for this was that the majority of thieves were mainly Buddhists and they preferred to break into houses of the people that belong to the same culture. The reason may be the perpetrators of theft are willing to steal from the people whose culture and behavior pattern is familiar to them than those of people of other cultures. As Figure 5 indicates, the second-highest group of 5 victims (6%) comprised Christians, 4 (5%) Muslims, and two victims were Hindus.

Figure 7: Educational Standard of the Theft Victims

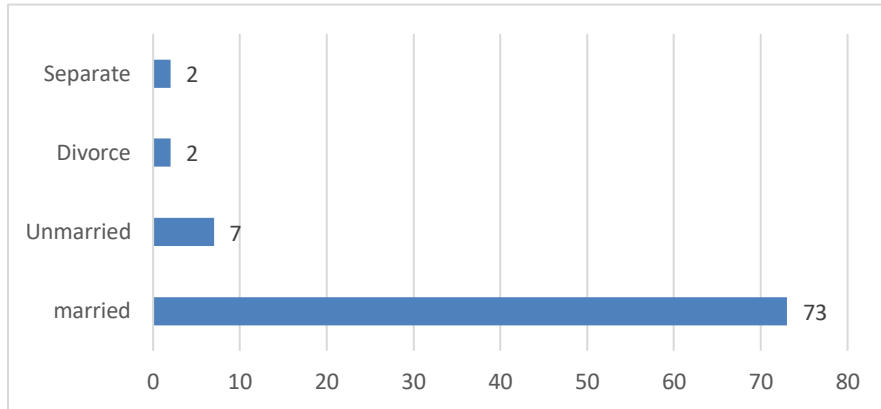


Source: Field Research 2019

Figure 7 shows the standard of education of the theft victims. The educational level of victims is a vital

factor in understanding the social phenomenon of theft victimization. Compared to the victims of other crime categories such as murder and rape, the education of theft victims remains at a higher standard. Accordingly, 41.6% (n=35) of the victims have received education up to the Advanced Level or the diploma and degree level at universities. and 48.8% (n=41) have studied from grade 6 to the General Certificate of Education (Ordinary Level). 5.9% (n=5) of them had only grade five or a lesser level of education. The lowest educated group represented three victims and they had been educated up to preschool.

Figure 8: Civil Status of the Victims of Theft

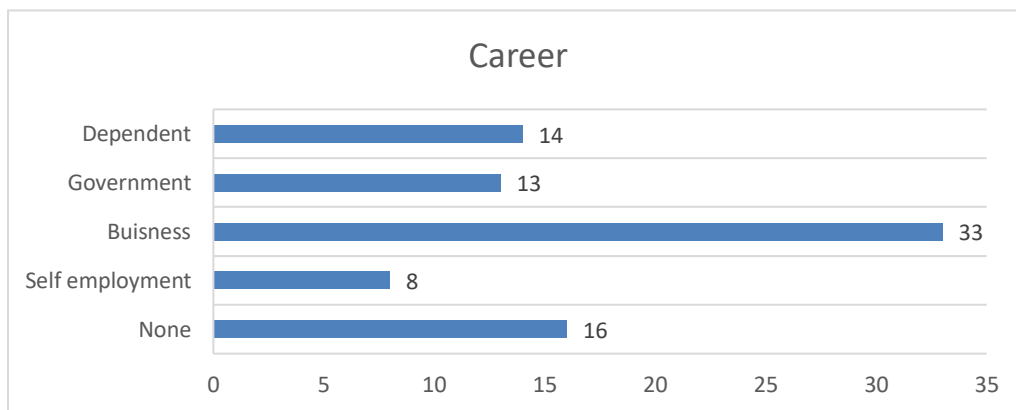


Source: Field Research 2019

Civil Status of the Victims

According to Figure 8, the marital status of the victims can be interpreted as follows. Seventy-three of the victims (86.9%) were married while seven (8.3%) were unmarried. There were two divorcees (2.4%) and two separated individuals (2.4%) in the study. It is worth noting that many married families were stable and often owned a house with movable properties accumulated for their living.

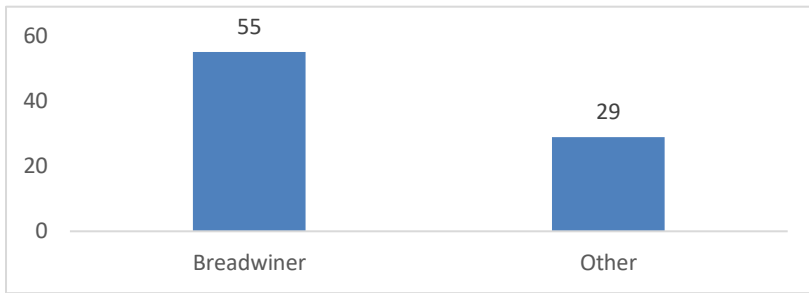
Figure 9: Career of the Victims of Theft



Source: Field Research 2019

A particular pattern of target selection for the commission of theft is quite evident from the employment information of theft victims. According to Figure 9, only 13 of the victims (15.5%) were government sector employees at the time that the crime was committed. Over 8% of victims (9.5%) were self-employed and the majority of the victims (n=33, 39.2%) were engaged in their businesses and are considered comparatively wealthier than the others in the society. Accordingly, 64.23% (n=54) of theft victims were people with medium and high-income levels. It is also noteworthy that nearly 19% of victims were without any employment, and the rest numbering 14 of the victims (16.6%) were dependent on their families as their families had enough income to maintain the lives of their members.

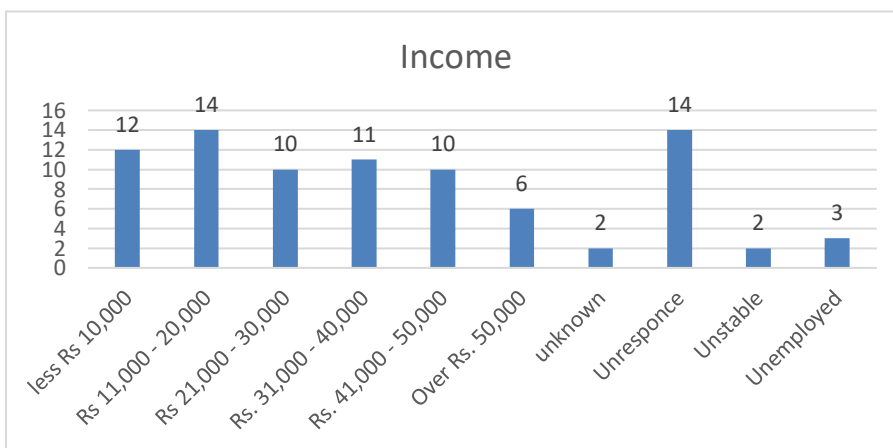
Figure 10 – Status of the Victims



Source: Field Research 2019

According to Figure 10, 55 of the victims (65.5%) were the sole breadwinner or the main income earners of their households. The rest of the victims numbering 29 (34.5%) were unemployed and casual workers in different workplaces.

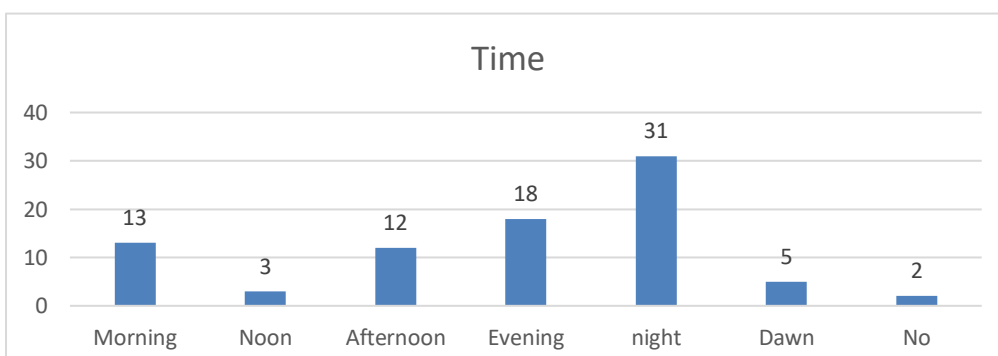
Figure 10: Income of the Victims of Theft



Source: Field Research 2019

Even though two theft victims (2.4%) stated that they did not have stable employment and consequently engaged in temporary employment, and three victims (3.6%) stated that they were unemployed. 14 victims (16.6%) were not willing to mention their monthly income. In Sri Lanka, it is a common practice that higher-income earners mainly businessmen do not like to reveal their income as it would adversely affect them in dealing with tax officers, beggars, and other charity seekers. Only twelve victims (14.2%) had received less than 10,000 rupees as their monthly income, the rest of the victims of theft had received a monthly income of Rs. 11,000 to 50,000 while 6 victims (7.1%) had received over 50,000 rupees of monthly income. Therefore, it is believed that the perpetrators of the crime had perceived all their victims were wealthy enough to be robbed.

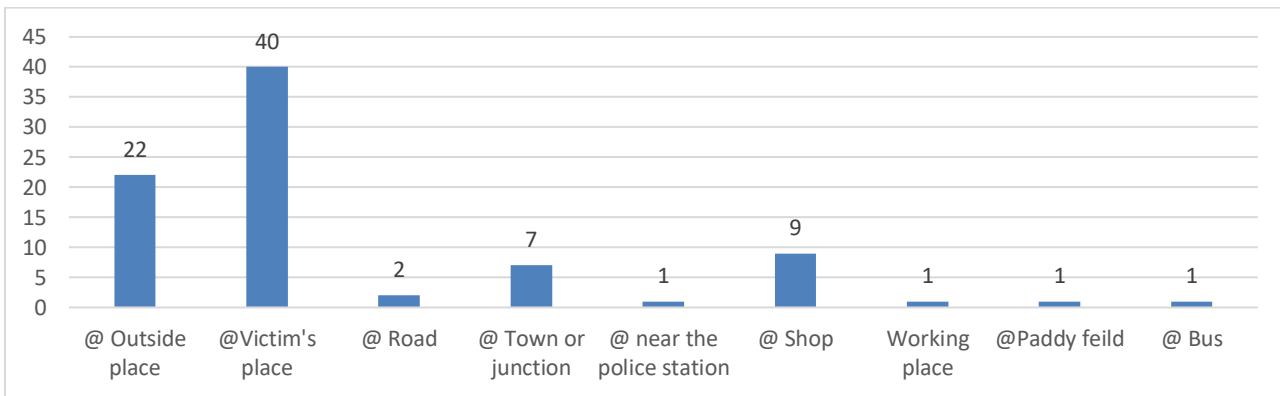
Figure 11: Time of Theft



Source: Field Research 2019

Criminologists have discovered that time is a significant factor for theft owing to several reasons especially to minimize the time spent on target places to hide their intentions. The opportunity for stealing occurred only when the dwellers are not vigilant and the completion of theft is within their working hours like legitimate employees clock off at a fixed time (Adler, et.al. 1995:277). The time of the occurrence of theft was also a concern of the present study. Figure 11 shows that most of the incidents of thefts numbering 31 (36.9%) have taken place at night. Generally, the business establishments are closed at night and they are left unoccupied and often unguarded. As a result, many thieves enter these places and steal properties without any resistance. Even in houses thieves steal properties after residents go to sleep at night. The number of thefts committed in the morning has remained at 15.5% (n=13) as people are either asleep or they have left their homes in the early morning to arrive at their workplaces. Further, only a few stay at home during the morning, and thieves take this opportunity to steal valuables from houses and other closed establishments. Further, as the time of the occurrence of the theft is concerned 21.4% (n=18) of the thefts have occurred in the evening while Only five incidents of theft have occurred at dawn when occupants had quitted their premises.

Figure 12: Places of the Occurance of Theft



Source: Field Research 2019

The selection of places for theft is also a critical factor. The thieves are concerned with the familiarity of the area, fear of recognition, and concern over ‘standing out as someone who does not belong there. (Adler, et.al. 1995:277). The causation of crime against humans takes place due to multiple reasons. As a social being, an individual who interacts with other members of society may experience criminal activities, especially with the people in his/her community or outside. When people have economic difficulties and unfulfilled needs and when they fail to satisfy them in socially and culturally accepted ways, some adopt illegal methods to find some fulfillment in life. Consequently, some criminals use different methods to acquire money and valuables from the people who offer them the least resistance and they also make use of the places where they can steal from others without much intimidation. As Figure 12 shows, 40 persons (47.6%) had been victimized at their own houses while the rest of the incidents 22 (26.2%) had occurred outside places such as at commercial establishments and shops located in isolated places where opportunity enabled the thieves to steal money and other valuables. As Conklin (1986) explains when thieves select their targets, they consider unoccupied houses and business establishments, the non-availability of security measures, the availability of valuables, and inconspicuous settings.

Table 2. Nature of the Theft

Nature of the Loss	Frequency	%
lost of property	20	23.8
lost of jewelry	15	17.9
lost of money	10	11.9
Theft of livestock(cows and Goats)	05	9.5

Theft of Motorbikes	10	11.9
Theft of Three-wheels	07	8.3
Theft of Mobile Phones	14	16.7
Total	84	100.0

Source: Field research 2019

The nature of the theft was a primary concern in the study. It was revealed that 25 incidents (29.7%) were connected with stealing money and golden ornaments belonging to both males and females. In Sri Lankan society, gold is considered an asset of wealth and therefore people wear valuable golden ornaments not only as a style of passion but also to display their social status ostentatiously. The females often wear golden jewelry to enhance their beauty and also to exhibit their wealth. Males also wear gold as chains, bracelets, rings, etc. to show off their wealth. Moreover, Many people keep golden ornaments in their possession as they can convert them into money when they are in financial difficulties. Thus, it is a common phenomenon that many a person collect golden ornaments which can easily be converted into money in case of a dire financial necessity. Accordingly, the stealing of golden chains and ornaments has become the main target of many thieves who can easily convert gold into money through fences or pawnbrokers. Apart from this, some house-breakers were keen on stealing different household items such as electronics, mobile phones, three-wheelers, motorbikes, and other valuable items which could easily be converted into money quickly. Table 2 shows that 60.7% of victims have lost their valuable properties due to being victimized by theft. Among other victims, 11.9% of victims have lost their money and 17.8% of victims have lost jewelry as a result of theft. Those who have lived in livestock farming (9.5%) have become victims of theft as their animals have been stolen in their absence.

Table 3:Victim’s Relationship to Thieves

Nature of the Relationship	Frequency	%
Family member	1	1.2
Relatives	8	9.5
Neighbors	21	25.0
Unknown Persons	54	64.3
Total	84	100

Source: Field Research 2019

As the relationship between offender and victim is concerned, the majority of offenders numbering 54 (64.2%) were not known to the victims and this can be considered a typical characteristic of theft. However, the study reveals that about 30 of the offenders (35.8%) had been known to the victims while many of them were their neighbours. In addition, one family member and a few relatives have stolen property from their relatives. This particular relationship should be viewed from the social context of the victims and the offenders. As the study reveals, theft is not a crime confined to unknown offenders. There are also known offenders who have strategically perpetrated theft against their communities and families. According to Table 3, relatives and neighbors were included among the offenders who had been involved in committing theft within their community. This factor appears as a controversial pattern in criminal behavior. When such cases are studied, these relationships can be understood in detail. For example, in cases where relatives are rich and have refused to offer their close relatives financial assistance, in retaliation, they have organized theft against the relatives who refused them money in a very tricky and subtle manner.

Table 4: Addictive behaviour of the Thieves

Nature of the Addictive behaviour	Frequency	%
Alcohol use	07	8.3
Heroin and Drug use	06	7.2
Womanizers	02	2.4
Do not have any addiction	22	26.2
Unknown about any addiction	47	55.9
Total	84	100

Source: Field Research 2019

The findings of the study revealed that some thieves from the known perpetrators had frequently consumed alcohol and drugs, at the time that they committed the theft, and some others were known to have been under the influence of alcohol and drugs or either of them. In general, the consumption of alcohol and drugs is deemed to stimulate or facilitate the criminal behaviour of the perpetrators and influence them to lower their inhibitions, impair judgments, and increase their recklessness and risk-taking behaviour. Substance abuse and its relationship to crime may vary according to the factors such as the amount and the type of stuff consumed, the background and the personality of the user, and the social situation where it is used. Table 3 indicates that 15.5% of the thieves used to take either alcohol or drugs or both, while 55.90% of victims of theft were not aware whether the thieves had taken drugs or alcohol at the time of the commission of a crime. The author believes that some perpetrators of those who did not addicted to substances may have committed theft owing to biological or societal needs. Therefore, as a social norm theft is tolerated or even encouraged when one is hungry or needs to feed one's children (Jones, 1941,1964; Smigel, 1956). Among the known criminals, 7.2% of thieves had taken to heroin but when it considered the number of unknown thieves, the number of drug addicts and alcoholics may be quite high within that particular group. It is noteworthy here that the heroin addicts often used black money to purchase their daily consumption of drugs at street prices. According to the findings of the research alcohol and drug use had different effects on different people and even on the same person. It is acknowledged that after consuming a small amount of alcohol, most people will experience cheerful feelings while taking moderate or large amounts of alcohol, they tend to develop aggressive and violent behaviour patterns as alcohol consumption impairs judgments, lowers frustration tolerance, and induces disinhibition (Curran and Renzetti, 1994:122). Within this scenario, it can be assumed that some offenders carry out thefts to find the money for drugs and alcohol. Especially, heroin addicts need over three thousand rupees for their daily consumption of heroin, and they often earn this amount through the commission of property crimes including theft.

Table 5: The impacts of the incidence of theft on victims

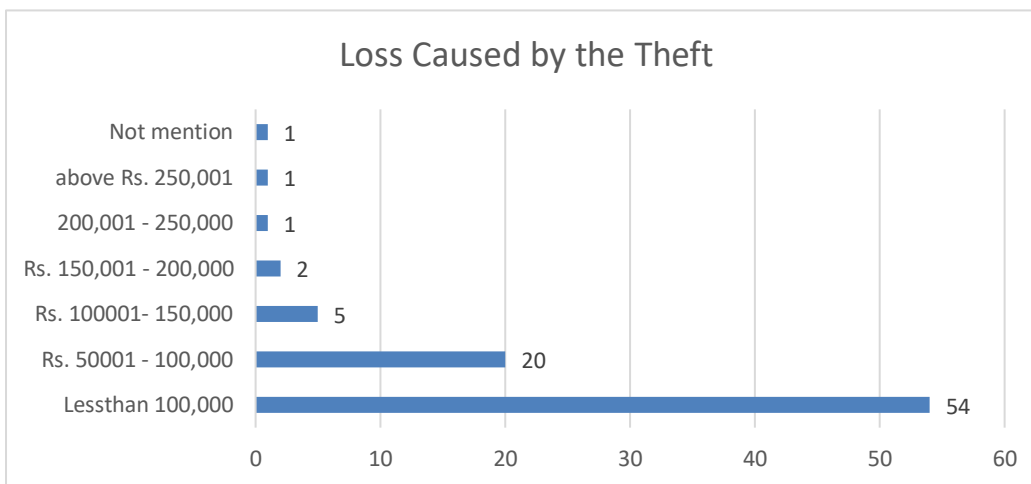
The impacts on victims	Frequency	%
Financial loss	50	59.5
Economic hardship	06	7.2
Anxiety about theft	04	4.8
Difficulty in Maintaining business	04	4.8
Frustration	10	11.9
Difficulty in Maintaining dairy farms	05	5.9
Fear of a repeat of the crime and the mental agony	05	5.9
Total	84	100

Source: Field Research 2019

The present study was concerned with the impact of the incidence of theft on the victims. As Table 5 indicates, 50 (59.5%) victims said that they suffered from financial loss as their houses and business establishments were broken and cash and valuables were stolen. Another six (7.2%) victims declared that they sustained economic hardships owing to their property being stolen. Another 4 victims (n=4.8) stated that they experienced the anxiety of their property loss and the possibility of being re-victimized. Other four (4.8%) victims stated the difficulty of maintaining their daily work as their money and three-wheelers were stolen. The three-wheel drivers had made their livelihood by hiring their three wheels and with the loss of their three wheels, they were unable to earn their living. However, ten victims said that they experienced frustration after the theft while five others accepted that they suffered from great mental agony after their property had been stolen and lived in fear of the recurrence of the crime.

When their business establishments are considered, the study revealed that the thieves had entered them and stolen money and other valuable items on sale by breaking windows or scaling over rooftops in the absence of occupants in those commercial establishments during the night.

Figure 13 – The Value of the Loss Caused by the Theft for Victims



Source: Field Research 2019

According to the research findings, it was revealed that many victims of theft had changed their lifestyles after their gruesome experiences. They had changed their behavioural patterns to prevent them from being revictimized in the future. Table 5 indicates the way that the victims of theft changed their lifestyles to cope with revictimization.

Table 6: The Behavioral Changes of Victims after their Victimization

Type of Change	Frequency	%
Stop leaving valuables outside the house	8	9.5
Stay in the house during the night or keep someone at home in the absence of occupants	4	4.8
Fixing CCTV cameras	5	5.9
Keeping no valuables at night at commercial establishments	4	4.8
Changed the residence	3	3.6
Keep special vigilance and security in their homes, commercial establishments, and livestock	39	46.4
No special changes in the behaviour	21	25.0
Total	84	100

Source: Field Research 2019

Some victims of theft said that they had to give up their habits and routine activities to prevent themselves from falling into revictimization. For example, most of the victims (n=39, 46.4%) were determined to protect their properties by keeping special vigilance and security in their homes, commercial establishments, and livestock. Eight (9.5%) victims declared that they stopped leaving their valuables such as three-wheels, and motorbikes outside their houses at night to prevent them from being re-stolen. Five victims had fixed CCTV cameras to identify thieves entering their business establishments and houses while another four (4.8%) stated that they stayed in their homes, especially at night, and in their absence, they would keep another person for the protection of their house or lock their houses and business establishment properly so that they will not easily be broken. However, four (4.8%) owners of the commercial establishments said that they did not keep the valuables in their shops at night. Three victims (3.6%) and their families had changed their residences as they thought their houses were under threat of theft. However, 21 victims said that they had not changed their lifestyle after they became victims of theft. However, the majority mentioned that they maintained vigilance on their premises after their houses and business establishments were broken into by burglars.

The incidents of theft have mostly occurred in the absence of occupants at their homes whereas some other events have taken place when the intimates were asleep after their scheduled work of the day. The victims were aware that their property was often stolen by drug addicts to finance the daily requirements of narcotics. Some victims blamed the police for not working either to minimize or eradicate the drug menace in their area which is a major motivational factor for the offenders to commit property crimes such as theft. The victims thought that the burglars could have caused physical harm to them if they had been at home and offered resistance to thefts.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was aimed at finding the “impacts of theft on the victims and their attitudes after victimization”. The nature of the victim of theft was a main concern in the study. Accordingly, data were gathered and analyzed in line with the objectives of the study, and the following conclusions were drawn.

The present study revealed that the highest number of victims (n=17; 20.2%) belonged to the age group of over 60 years. The second highest group (n=15; 17.8%) represented the age group of 42-47 years. The next highest category of victims belonged to the age category of 48 to 53 years. Further, four of the victims were youngsters belonging to the age group of 18-23 years. According to the study, it can be inferred that thieves have neither moral concern about their old age for the elderly nor any awareness of the responsibilities fallen upon a citizen to protect them in their old age. Sometimes, perpetrators tend to think that elderly people offer less resistance to theft so that they have less risk of apprehension by the police as compared to individuals in other age categories.

The causes for victimization were also considered in the study, and it was revealed that a low standard of education was not an essential contributory factor for becoming a theft victim. Correspondingly, except for eight (9.5%) victims the others had obtained education up to Grade 6 or above of whom 32 (38%) had studied up to grade 12 or 13 and another 2 had obtained a diploma and still another one victim was a graduate. However, 3 victims had obtained the least education which was up to preschool. The study revealed that the majority of offenders were Buddhists and they had stolen property from people who belonged to the same religion and the same culture. The majority of victims 87% represented Buddhists, while 5% were Christians, 5% were Muslims, and the rest 2% were Hindus. The highest number of the victims (87%, n=73) in the sample were married and 8.3% (n=7) were unmarried while 2.3% (n=2) were widowed, and the rest of the remaining two (2.3%) had been separated.

In comparison with the other form of a property crime such as robbery and housebreaking, theft has often been committed without any physical harm to the victims. The reason was that many thefts had been committed in the absence of the occupants of their houses or commercial establishments. In the rest of the cases, the occupants of houses were unaware that their goods were stolen. As the gender is concerned, theft is predominantly carried out by males and they account for 100% of the incidents of theft when compared to other male-dominant grave crimes. The link between the victims and the thieves indicates that most of the thieves (64.3%) were unknown to the victims whereas the rest 35.7% of the thieves were known to the victims. A particular pattern in selecting their targets for the commission of theft was quite evident from the employment information of the victims. Accordingly, 39.3% of the victims were businessmen whereas only 15.5% of the victims worked in the State sector. These categories of employees were either medium or high-income earners while 9.5% of the victims were self-employed and they too had considerable income as compared to the others in the community. Therefore, it is obvious that thieves target those people who keep money or other valuables at their houses and business establishments. As the nature of the theft was concerned, the study found that thieves' main concern was cash and therefore, they had stolen only money in 13.3% (n=8) of the incidents of thefts.

Even though theft remains a complex social phenomenon, the study probed the general perception of the victims about the causes that led offenders to commit stealing. Accordingly, 13 offenders (15.5%) had committed theft to finance their habit of consuming alcohol and drugs when other avenues for finding money appeared very remote to them. However, the exact number of thieves who were addicted to substances was unknown to the victims as they did not know about 55.9% of the individuals who had stolen their properties. The rest of the incidents of theft were believed to have been committed due to their poverty-stricken conditions and other urgent financial requirements and also as an easy way of earning money.

The impact of the incidence of theft on victims was also a primary concern in the study. It was revealed that 59.5% of the victims suffered from economic loss and 4.8% declared that they experienced anxiety and mental pain caused by the theft as they constantly imagined revictimization. 4.8% of the victims expressed that they had to undergo severe economic hardships as criminals stole their valuables and consequently, they experienced immense difficulty in maintaining their businesses. Another 11.9% of victims stated that they were frustrated over the incidence of becoming victims of theft. Most of the victims stated that they had to change their normal behaviour patterns in their lives as they were re-victimized and for fear that they would be re-victimized.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study proposes that the rate of theft can be reduced in Sri Lanka by persuading people to protect themselves and also by using situational crime prevention techniques. From the perspective of law enforcement, the police can help the people by providing more security to them, especially in different geographical areas where theft has been rampant and frequently occurred. Furthermore, police should take adequate measures to minimize the number of alcohol and drug addicts as they often resort to theft to find the required amount of money for their alcoholism and drug dependence. Apart from this, the police should effectively make use of prevailing retributive punishments to deter criminals who are involved in the theft.

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