

# Men, women equal opportunity shoplifters: experts

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A can of soda worth less than 50 cents. A stylus worth \$11 and two bottles of nail polish valued at less than \$10 total are just some of the items shoplifters are plucking from the shelves of Stouffville retailers.

The suspected offenders in these incidents were a pair of male youths, a 44-year-old man and a 71-year-old female.

None of the suspects or incidents is related to each other, according to Const. Andy Pattenden.

The thefts, however, took place at one retailer over a four-day span in September.

Between October 2012 and October 2013, York Regional Police responded to almost 3,000 shoplifting calls, 34 of which were in Whitchurch-Stouffville, according to Const. Laura Nicolle.

Approximately \$4 billion is lost annually by Canadian retailers, the Canadian Retail Security Survey 2012 reports.

In 2012, 65 per cent of businesses that participated in the survey had criminal charges laid against a shoplifter, according to the survey. In the three Stouffville incidents,

the minors were not charged. The middle-aged man and elderly woman were each charged with one count of

engage in prohibited activity under the Trespass Act.

Those charges fall under the provincial statute, which amount to a fine and will not show up in a criminal record check, Const. Nicolle said. So why do people steal such petty items when "in most cases, the people have the money?" Const. Nicolle said.

"I don't know if it's the thrill thing ... it never makes sense," she said.

"They're not going to tell me the reason they did it because they're going to convince me they didn't do

it," Const. Nicolle said.

"Adolescents are testing limits. That's part of being an adolescent," according

to Will Cupchik, a Toronto-based psychologist, who has authored a number of books on the subject of shoplifting.

Sometimes teenagers shoplift because they want something nice, feel pressured by friends or "sometimes they are just mad at the world and want to strike back," according to the National Association for Shoplifting Prevention website.

"While teens, like adults, usually know the difference between right and wrong, when their life becomes too stressful they become more vulnerable to temptation, peer pressure and

other things that can lead them to shoplift," according to the National Association for Shoplifting Prevention website. "This is especially true when they feel unworthy, angry, depressed, unattractive or not accepted."

Adults, on the other hand, have more complex reasons for doing what they do.

"When a usually honest person risks their reputation, their job ... for \$11, there's something going on here. It makes no sense," Mr. Cupchik said.

Quite often the normally morally honest person who shoplifts does so because something in his or her life has been lost and that person now wants to inflict pain on someone or something else, such as a store, according to Mr. Cupchik.

Sometimes it's "justified payback" for all they give to others and how little they receive in return. Shoplifting may be a relief mechanism for anxiety, depression or frustration, according to the National Association for Shoplifting Prevention website.

Other times mental illness is a factor, according to Const. Nicolle.

In that case, the priority is not laying charges, but getting that person the appropriate assistance.

When it comes to youths, again, sometimes charges are not the best remedy. The Youth Criminal Justice Act provides police officers with an option to put a non-violent youth through a referral program instead of being charged, according to Const. Nicolle.

The youth is assigned volunteer work or counselling or a combination of actions, for example, with the hope of getting them back on the right track. If they fail to complete those tasks or don't want to do them, then a charge can still be laid, she said.

"It holds them accountable more quickly versus courts. We don't want to overwhelm the court system with a kid who stole a chocolate bar, made a bad decision," Const. Nicolle said.

Part of why there is no one answer to the question of why is because there is no profile of a typical shoplifter. Men and women are equal opportunity shoplifters, according to the National Association for Shoplifting Prevention website.



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