THE MCKELL INSTITUTE SA/NT

Fuel on the Fire

FIXING THE POLICY GAPS DRIVING PETROL STATION ROBBERIES IN SA

About the author

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One Page Briefing

CONTEXT

The McKell Institute's latest report, *Fuel on the Fire: Fixing the policy gaps driving petrol station robberies in SA*, outlines a three-point action plan to improve service station workers safety in South Australia.

THE POLICY PROBLEM

In terms of their vulnerability to robbery, service stations are the new banks. They are situated close to major highways, they store large quantities of cash and valuable commodities and are, as this report will detail, poorly protected from violent crime.

Increases in armed hold-ups and assaults has made working in a service stations a high-risk job.

MCKELL'S THREE-POINT PLAN TO PROTECT SA SERVICE STATION WORKERS

The report proposes four recommendations for all state and territory governments:

ACTION 1 SAFEWORK SA ESTABLISH A CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PETROL STATION SECURITY AND SAFETY

Petrol station robberies clearly pose significant WHS risks to workers physical and psychosocial safety. Given its prevalence we recommend SafeWork SA establish a 'Code of Practice for Petrol Station Security and Safety' to provide guidance on preventative risk mitigation measures to employers.

ACTION 2 STATE PLANNING POLICY FOR SAFETY

The South Australian Government should develop a State Planning Policy to require building designers implement Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, and guidelines to help local councils and industry partners mitigate against the risk of violent crime.

ACTION 3 BUSINESS DESIGNS SAFER WORKPLACES

Businesses ensure sites are designed and updated to mitigate against the risk of violence and armed robbery.

BENEFICIARIES OF THE REFORM

If enacted, the proposed changes would improve the safety of more than 4,000 South Australian service station workers by ensuring service stations are no longer seen as a soft target for robberies.

Contents

Foreword

At 1am on 13 September 2023, the staff of a Port Wakefield service station faced a nightmare situation. Three armed men entered the road-side station and forcibly detained the workers using cable ties. For the next few minutes, the men tried to break into the service station's safe and get away with whatever cash they could.

After a few minutes, the men fled quickly onto Port Wakefield highway in what was suspected to be a stolen car, well before any law enforcement were able to arrive.

The experience was traumatic for those affected. Worryingly, it is part of a trend that has emerged in South Australia in recent years. As 24/7 service stations have expanded across metropolitan and regional South Australia, so too has a wave of crime targeting these businesses.

Service stations are inherently vulnerable to robbery. They are situated close to major arterials, allowing thieves to flee quickly; they are often laden with cash; they stock valuable commodities such as cigarettes; and are, as this report will detail, poorly protected from violent crime. In terms of their vulnerability to robbery, service stations are the new banks.

As the spate of service station violence has escalated, so too have the dangers facing working people who make their living working at service stations. These individuals are usually younger than the general working population and are routinely faced with traumatic experiences in the workplace that can have life altering impacts on their physical and mental wellbeing.

> We often view this dynamic as something that cannot be solved: police cannot be instantly on the ground moments after every single robbery. But working in a service station should not be a high-risk job.

As this report outlines, solving this challenge is not simply a matter of improving law enforcement. There are preventative measures that both government and employers must take to improve the safety of workers and ensure service stations are not seen as a soft target for robberies.

ED CAVANOUGH
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER
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Key Findings

1. **Petrol stations are <u>unsafe workplaces</u>.** The exposure to violence and trauma in these workplaces contributes significantly to mental health problems for employees. Beyond direct costs to workers and their families, this has a flow on effect for employers and the economy as a whole.

2. **Service stations are attractive targets because they stock high value items (such as cigarettes and cash),** they have low numbers of staff, and a relative lack of other customers.

3. **Petrol station robberies have become highly prevalent in South Australia, but little has been done to prevent them.** Government and business need to develop dedicated action plans to improve safety and reduce risk.

4. **The Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED)** are not well accounted for in South Australian planning approaches.

5. **There are inherent vulnerabilities in service station design and operating models –** this includes ease of access and regress, relatively low staff and customer numbers, extended trading hours and merchandise that entices robbery.

6. **Work Health and Safety Laws create imperatives for employers to mitigate risk,** but employers need better guidance through a Code of Practice to improve worker safety and ensure compliance.

Executive Summary

Across South Australia, there are approximately 250 fuel service station outlets – petrol stations which combine fuel retailing with other convenience store offerings – employing thousands of frontline workers.

There are a small set of independent fuel retailers in the state, but many of these essential retail outlets are owned and operated by some of the largest businesses in South Australia, one of which - the largest private company in South Australia - owns 170 petrol and convenience stores and employs over 3000 South Australians.[1]

Fuel retailers provide an essential service but changing economic conditions and consumer habits have prompted the industry to innovate and expand business offerings to focus more heavily on convenience and smaller grocery style offerings.

Given the nature of the fuel retailing business, most operate on a 24/7 basis and are situated on major thoroughfares with ease of access and egress for vehicles. These attributes leave service stations and their employees highly exposed to criminal activity. Regularly, these workplaces are the victims of serious crime. These crimes are often violent in nature, with incidences of armed robbery common.

There is some evidence that the rate of petrol station robberies in South Australia is increasing. There are consistent news stories detailing the latest instances of armed robbery, and SAPOL crime statistics related to 'aggravated assault' show a consistent rate of prevalence over the past decade and 24 per cent year on year variance increase over the past 2 years.

Crime and, in particular, armed robberies are not a new phenomenon for these businesses. Their changing commercial approach, employment practices, and operating models require owners and operators of these retail chains to respond to these risks and adequately protect both their own commercial interests and the safety of their employees.

This report examines this challenge in South Australia and proposes a five-point action plan that looks beyond simply expanding law enforcement responses to petrol stations robberies, and instead examines additional preventative reforms that can be considered to reduce the likelihood and ease of petrol station robberies.

Part One of this report examines the status quo. It details the emergence and development of the petrol station retailing business and the consequences of violent crime in this industry.

Part Two identifies the dynamics of the industry that leave it particularly vulnerable to violent crime.

Part Three draws on South Australian service station workers' experiences to highlight some of the issues outlined in this report.

Part Four details a three-point action plan aimed at mitigating the likelihood of petrol station-based violence. These plan includes SafeWork SA establishing a Code of Practice for Petrol Station Security and Safety that provides guidance to business on risk mitigation strategies including the reduction of high-value products and cash on premises; reforms to the planning code to improve worker safety; and preventative measures to strengthen the safety in these vulnerable workplaces.

Violence towards petrol station workers in South Australia is a scourge. While law enforcement responses are required, preventative measures must be considered to strengthen security in these workplaces, improve safety for workers, and ensure they are no longer considered soft targets for crime.

Part One
The scourge of petrol station robberies in South Australia

KEY FINDINGS

1 Perpetrators of armed robbery tend to be male, acting alone or in small groups, are relatively opportunistic, and undertake minimal planning.

2 Perpetrators are drawn to service stations due to the prevalence of high value items, such as cigarettes and cash, and the relatively small numbers of staff and/or other customers.

3 Unsafe workplaces, including exposure to violence and trauma in the workplace contributes significantly to mental health problems for employees. Beyond direct costs to workers and their families, this has a flow on effect for employers and the economy as a whole.

CHANGING FUEL RETAIL APPROACHES PRESENT INCREASED RISK

Since the 1990s, and particularly over the last decade, there has been a significant shift in the fuel retailing industry. The growth of both out-of-home consumption and smaller format retail has encouraged fuel retailers to take advantage of the significant value of their real estate to offer non-fuel related and convenience retail options.

Like many industries, fuel retail was severely affected by the global pandemic in the first half of 2020, with fuel volumes in some months more than 50 percent down from the previous year.[2] However, most markets have experienced a rapid recovery as private mobility rebounded, partly because public transportation was perceived to present an infection risk.

Convenience shopping has also proved considerably resilient in this context. Keen to avoid crowded supermarkets, many shoppers have sought out local convenience stores instead. Royal Dutch Shell announced that basket sizes in its stores had increased by 18 percent between 2019 and 2021.[3] These and other indicators suggest that convenience stores are becoming a destination of choice not only for traditional categories such as tobacco, drinks, and snacks - but also for newly introduced and expanded grocery assortments.

However, this new retail context places these locations at increased risk. Research on the prevalence of service station robberies in Australia has been intermittent, though there is enough evidence to indicate that some of the characteristics of these retail spaces make them particularly attractive to perpetrators.

In the United States, prisoners interviewed as part of a study investigating armed robbery indicated that they viewed convenience stores as particularly easy targets, referring to them as 'stop and robs'.[4] Late trading hours, easy access to merchandise, relative lack of other customers and staff, and ease of access and egress for vehicles make these locations vulnerable to crime.

South Australian Government data[5] indicates that instances of armed robbery over the last decade have remained relatively steady though it jumped by 24% between 2020-21 and 2021-22. The relatively low numbers of armed robbery in the 2020-21 data set can likely be partly attributed to the effects of COVID-19 related restrictions.

While petty theft from these locations has relatively low impacts on service station operators and staff, the prevalence and vulnerability of these locations to armed robbery is cause for concern. Between 2012-13 and 2021-22 there were 4,673 aggravated robberies and related offences committed in South Australia and, barring a dip in numbers during 2020-21, instances of robbery have remained relatively consistent over this time.

CHARACTERISTICS OF ARMED ROBBERY - WHO PERPETRATES, WHEN AND HOW

SA Police data indicates that aggravated assault is a consistent feature of the broader robbery dataset and, despite longer term trends indicating a decline in armed robbery, there has been a marked year on year increase over the past two years.

Figure 1 Aggravated Robbery and Robbery Related Offences in South Australia 2013-22
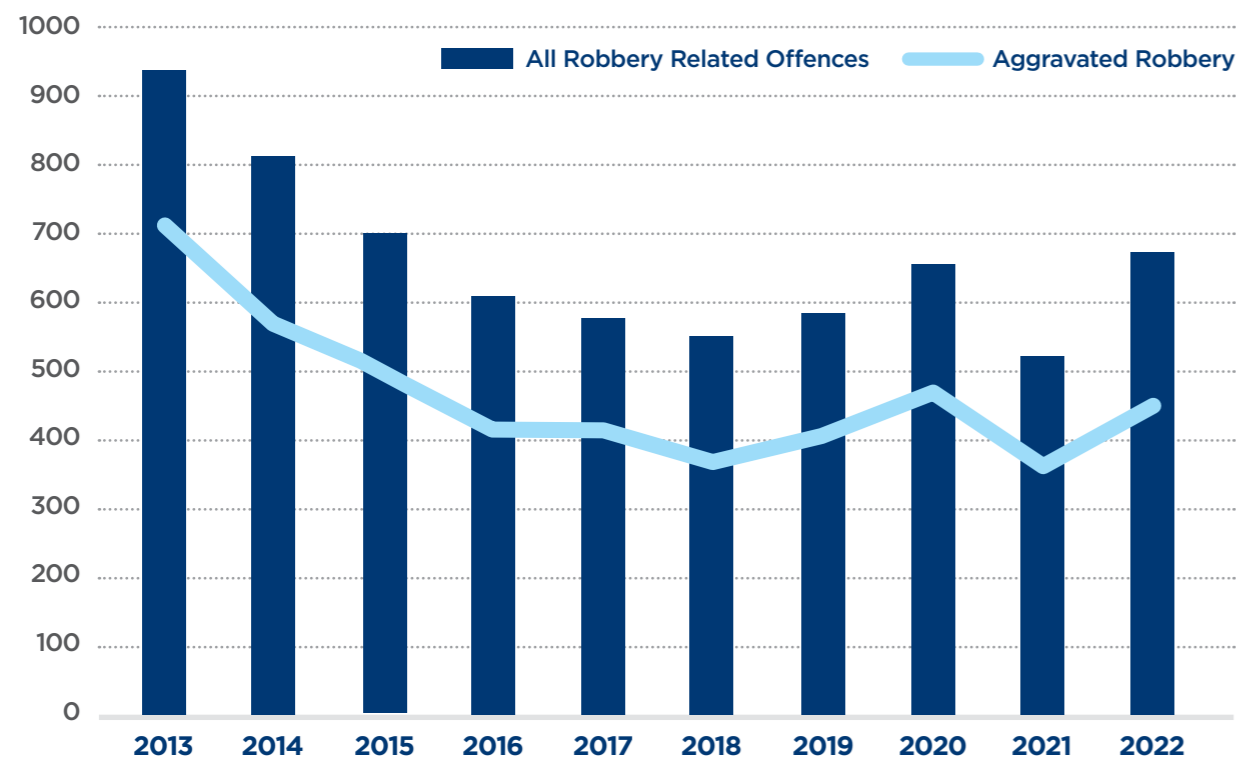
More specific attributes are not captured in the South Australian data, but ABS data indicates that more than half (56%) of all robberies committed in South Australia in 2021 involved the use of a weapon, most commonly a knife.[6] This is consistent with older, trend-based data drawn from the last annual report of the National Armed Robbery Monitoring Program (**NARMP**) in 2014 which indicated that 57% of robberies between 2004-10 were perpetrated with a knife and a further 25% were perpetrated with some 'other weapon'.[7] Sixteen per cent of incidents over that same period involved a firearm.

While the characteristics of offenders who commit armed robberies can be varied, research indicates offenders often demonstrate common characteristics. Armed robberies are committed in Australia primarily by men under 35 years of age, with the average offender age being 22.9 years old. Older teenagers constituted 42% of this number.[8]

The data also shows that armed robberies tend to be perpetrated by one person. In the 2014 NARMP data, 65% of incidents involved one offender, 22% listed two offenders, 8% listed three offenders and 5% listed four or more offenders. This data helps to build a relatively strong profile of offenders and provides insight into risk factors associated with armed robbery.

Research has also helped to build knowledge regarding offender preferences and behaviour regarding when and where service stations are targeted. Generally, offenders target service stations at a time when customer presence is low.[9]

Typically, service station armed robberies occur between 6 pm and 6 am.[10] One study found that 28 percent of service station armed robberies occurred between 12 am and 3 am.[11] It is evident that offenders are taking advantage of late trading hours, fewer customers, and minimal staff to perpetrate these crimes.

NARMP analysis from 2009, that specifically reviewed armed robberies in service station settings, indicates that males were found to have committed 89% of service station armed robberies and offenders acted alone 70% of the time. High numbers of lone offenders targeting service stations late at night indicates that offenders are predominantly opportunistic, relatively disorganised and undertake little, if any, planning. That offenders tend to be younger and use firearms infrequently reinforces this view.

WHAT DO PERPETRATORS TARGET?

Analysis of trends of service station robberies in Australia indicates that the most common item of property stolen during service station robberies was cash (83% of instances). Alcohol and drugs accounted for 5% of property stolen and cigarettes were the most targeted item in the alcohol and drugs category.[12] The ease of access to relatively portable and sellable items such as cigarettes and the business' relatively high volume of cash transactions makes them soft targets for offenders.

WORKER PROFILE

Across Australia there are 15,800 people employed as service station attendants. The median age of these employees is 32 years, which is younger than the overall employment average of 40 years. A large share of these workers are aged between 25 and 34 years, and they tend to work casual and part-time hours.[13] These workers perform an essential service, and often perform these duties outside of regular trading hours and alone. This places them at significantly higher risk of victimisation through armed robbery.

VICTIM IMPACTS AND ECONOMIC EFFECTS

Although data specifically related to victim injury from armed robbery of service stations is not available, broader trends related to all armed robbery can provide an indication of the effect victimisation can have on these workers. The NARMP data contains only limited victim injury information and the broad injury categories across jurisdictions are not identical, but it is useful to examine these patterns of weapon use and injury.

According to the NARMP data emotional trauma was the most common type of injury resulting from armed robbery (35% of the 1,941 individual victim cases), followed by minor cuts and abrasions (21%). Serious injury requiring emergency medical attention was recorded for 4% of victims.[14] However it is important to recognise that this data does not account for the added emotional stress of being robbed at work and then being required, as part of your employment, to return to an unsafe workplace. Similar findings are reflected in the survey data collected by the SDA, examined in the following section of this report.

When assessing the cost of emotional trauma, longer term mental health impacts must be taken into account. Exposure to violence and trauma in the workplace has been well established as a major psychosocial risk to workers. It is estimated that the total costs to society from workplace associated mental illness including direct costs to victims and their families (as well as economic and fiscal costs) is between $15.8 billion to $17.4 billion each year.[15] A significant fiscal burden, in addition to the serious individual psycho-social impacts.

The financial costs to employees of injury are clear, but there are also broader economic implications for the economy. A recent study from Deloitte Access Economics that was commissioned by Safe Work Australia found that workplace related injury and illness costs the Australian economy $28.6 billion each year.[16] The report notes that in the absence of workplace injury and illness 185,500 additional full time equivalent jobs would be created and maintained in the Australian economy. In addition, it found productivity gains would drive a broad uplift in income to labour across all occupation types, and workers across all occupations and skill levels would benefit from an average wage rise of 1.3 percent annually.

When a worker experiences a work-related injury or illness, mental or physical, it's not only those directly affected that suffer, but also the wider workforce and economy that feels the effects.

CHARACTERISTICS, TRENDS, AND IMPACTS OF ARMED ROBBERY ARE WELL UNDERSTOOD

Although research in the Australian, and particularly the South Australian, context has been intermittent, the data is relatively consistent - armed robbery continues to pose a significant risk to service station operators and their staff.

Evidence suggests armed robberies are relatively opportunistic crimes with little planning involved that tend to be perpetrated by males, acting alone or in small groups. The impacts this can have on individuals can be profound, and this has flow on effects for the broader workforce and economy at large.

There is an imperative for employers, particularly large businesses with the capacity to respond, to implement measures to safely protect their commercial interests, the physical safety and mental wellbeing of their employees, and the economic interests of the workforce and economy as a whole.

Part Two
Why policy gaps leave service stations vulnerable to armed robbery.

KEY FINDINGS

1 There are inherent vulnerabilities in service station design and operating models – this includes ease of access and egress, relatively low staff and customer numbers, extended trading hours and merchandise that entices robbery.

2 The Principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) are not well accounted for in South Australian planning approaches.

3 Work Health and Safety Laws create imperatives for employers to mitigate risk, but employers need better guidance through a Code of Practice to improve worker safety and ensure compliance.

SA SERVICE STATIONS ARE UNIQUELY VULNERABLE TO ARMED ROBBERY

Several changes have occurred in the service station industry since the late 1990s which have contributed to their susceptibility to armed robbery.

These include:

> Longer trading hours (many now operate 24 hours).

> Fewer on-site operators late at night and in the early hours of the morning.

> Lone staff undertaking duties away from the counter.

> Large amounts of on-site cash to supply extended trading hours.

> Stocks of goods attractive to offenders such as cigarettes and painkillers.

> The use of less durable construction materials such as glass and aluminium.[17]

The previous section of this report has discussed the motivations of offenders, their opportunistic nature and the types of commercial activity that attract these offenders. Studies indicate that robbery offenders tend to view one employee as an acceptable risk, while two employees may be considered too risky.[18,19] Offenders are more likely to choose targets using less visible security measures and targets in which customers do not pose a risk to apprehension.[20] Service stations' relative isolation from other businesses and the design of their forecourts also acts as an attractive proposition for potential "stop and rob" offenders.

Commercial service station operators can and should examine ways of "target hardening" and improving the design of precincts to minimise these risks in the way they set out their stores and provide access to the public.

RETHINKING THE DESIGN OF SERVICE STATION FORECOURTS AND PREMISES

There is a comprehensive area of academic pursuit that informs the design of our buildings, precincts, and neighbourhoods. Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) originated in the United States in the 1960s.

Today CPTED is defined by a set of principles that revolve around four key concepts:

- Natural surveillance,
- Territorial reinforcement,
- Access control, and
- Maintenance

These concepts mean that to design to prevent crime, spaces should allow for passive surveillance, provide clearly defined boundaries between private and community space, and control who can access private space. Finally, spaces should be designed to minimise opportunities for damage and neglect and provide opportunity for appropriate maintenance.

In viewing service station spaces the principles of CPTED are not aligned with the operation and management of many of these sites. Service stations are often isolated from other businesses, without clear boundaries of community and private space in their forecourts. While most service stations are well maintained, the situating of buildings on site - often at the back of the property to allow for forecourt refuelling - limits passive surveillance opportunities.

Consideration can and should be given to site design to limit the ease of access and egress as well as to increase opportunities for passive surveillance and a sense of place for the community. Design of vehicle entry and exit points could accommodate more complex through-ways to encourage slower and more deliberate driving to enter and exit the forecourts. Additionally, for new sites, building layout, orientation and location on site and the strategic use of design, landscaping and lighting, can all contribute to increasing opportunities for natural or passive surveillance.

APPROACHES TO CRIME PREVENTION THROUGH ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN IN OTHER JURISDICTIONS

South Australia's planning system makes no provision for the principles of CPTED. In contrast, New South Wales has had guidelines[21] in place since 2001 that have been incorporated into many local councils Development Control Plans.[22] Queensland,[23] Victoria[24] and Western Australia[25] all have developed some form of guidance that aims to incorporate these principles into building and site design and there is evidence[26] that these principles have been adopted by some councils to specifically guide decision making regarding the development of new service stations. Adopting these principles in the South Australian context will help guide planning and site design decisions to minimise opportunities for crime for new service station developments.

There is also an opportunity in this context to undertake a CPTED audit of existing sites to identify opportunities to improve site design, operation and maintenance. The NSW Government, for example, has developed guidelines[27] to assist local governments to implement crime prevention strategies in their areas where they have identified a crime problem. The South Australian Government should work with their council and industry partners to design and implement similar guidelines and strategies to help minimise the risk armed robbery poses.

These approaches influence how service stations are designed, built, and operated. They also promote the adoption of innovative approaches aimed at reducing crime. One such approach is to the co-location of businesses in a single premises to increase traffic flow, customer numbers, and passive surveillance to promote a greater sense of place and connection to community within the precinct. This can include approaches such as the inclusion of a takeaway restaurant on site. There is evidence that these approaches are being implemented in South Australia already.[28] However, there is no consistent requirement for approaches that take account of CPTED to be considered.

WORK HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPERATIVES AND DRIVERS TO MITIGATE RISK

Employers must undertake a thorough assessment of risks and implement strategies, processes and procedures to control that risk. The SafeWork SA guidelines identify multiple measures that can be used to control and prevent the risk of violence, these should be implemented in full by service station operators as a means of mitigating risk.

This includes improving business practices and store layout and design to minimise risk while also providing adequate training for staff to proactively identify high risk individuals. However, this needs to be coupled with security approaches to allow employees to restrict access to stores if an armed robbery threat is detected. Even more effective would be to prevent public access to stores after a designated time and to require transactions to take place via some form of 'transaction tray' that can be used during night shifts to avoid lone staff having to allow customers inside.

This has already been implemented in a small number of service stations, but is not yet widely employed. While restricting customer access to the premises, transfer trays still provide access to the service station's goods and services without compromising staff safety. Because a majority of service station armed robbery offenders carry knives, transfer trays may prove effective in preventing a majority of incidents. This is a relatively inexpensive protective measure to implement when compared to more complex risk mitigation approaches such as the installation and maintenance of CCTV. An increase in the use of transfer trays in '24 hour' service stations would assist in reducing the number of armed robbery incidents at these locations.

TARGET HARDENING APPROACHES

Work health and safety laws provide the appropriate imperative to reduce the risks of service station employees becoming the target of violent crime such as armed robberies. Given the lack of strategic planning policies and procedures relating to CPTED in the South Australian context, other more bespoke approaches must be advocated for and considered.

Target hardening approaches involve designing a space in order to make armed robbery more difficult and higher risk for the perpetrators while also reducing the potential rewards for the crime.

There is an array of target hardening measures available to service stations to reduce the risk of being targeted by armed offenders. The

risk of victimisation decreases when adequate levels of deterrent measures are implemented. Many service stations have implemented a range of security measures such as duress alarms, cash management procedures that ensure minimal cash is available, automatic doors that employees can lock at any time, CCTV and time delay safes.

There are no policy barriers to the installation of protective measures such as these and priority should be given to ensuring every service station location in the state is appropriately hardened against armed robbery in this fashion.

Other measures should include providing greater protection for employees such as the installation of protective barriers preventing perpetrators of armed robberies accessing the service area where the tills are located, as well as where some of the other target stock, such as cigarettes, are located.

Regular staff training is also seen as a crucial security measure.[29] Employees who are able to view the car park and can implement basic target hardening measures throughout their shift will reduce the opportunity for an armed robbery incident. Different sites have different risks of victimisation and each business should review its security measures with the goal of securing its own individual environment to minimise potential losses.

These approaches are seen as the more traditional methods of target hardening. To ensure ongoing deterrence, innovative methods should also be considered. There is evidence that approaches to encourage heavier flow of customers late at night through the use of purchasing incentives can help to deter crime[30]. Given the pervasive nature of armed robbery, all approaches should be considered.

Where practicable, two employees should be employed on each shift to minimise

the perceived vulnerability of the target to potential offenders. Research by the Australian Institute of Criminology[31] indicates that the average costs to business of an armed robbery was $6,000. This report has examined the costs to employees and the economy as a whole as a result of armed robbery. Consideration should be given by commercial operators to mitigate these potential costs by modifying employment policies to include dual staffing requirements in 24/7 trading situations. The South Australian Government should also consider the policy levers it has to influence industry in this space.

REGULATING RISK

South Australia's work health and safety policy regime is consistent with those in other jurisdictions around Australia and places obligations on employers to ensure the health and safety of their workers and others in the workplace. This includes preventing work

related violence experienced during armed robberies.[32] However, more needs to be done to ensure compliance. SafeWork SA should establish a 'Code of Practice for Petrol Station Security and Safety' to provide guidance on preventative risk mitigation measures to employers.

Codes of Practice provide practical guidance for employers and workers. They do not replace WHS legislation - but provide directions on best practice controls for particular types of hazards and effective ways to identify and manage risks.[33]

A code of practice might include explanatory information; recommendations for best practice; or references to occupational safety and health laws.

Part Three
Examining South Australian Workers' Experiences

In response to increasing incidents of violence and growing concern around worker safety in service stations, the South Australian Shop, Distributive and Allied Employees' Association (SDA) conducted a survey of members in the sector to better understand the issues at play. The results are startling.

The SDA survey found 85 per cent of respondents had witnessed or experienced physical or verbal abuse from customers and 13% had been victim or witness to an armed robbery.

The survey demonstrates the extent to which violence and harassment has become commonplace in this sector. The overwhelming majority of respondents detailed instances of verbal and physical abuse including swearing and yelling; threats; physical violence ranging from being hit to armed hold-ups; and being followed when they left work. One respondent explained violence and abuse was so commonplace that they were "on the phone to the police almost every night". The stories also reveal numerous instances of racist abuse, drawing attention to the additional vulnerabilities for migrant workers in this sector.

The data highlights a clear failure to adequately manage risk across service stations. Troublingly - given the research shows that robbery offenders view one employee as an 'acceptable risk' – and 66% of workers surveyed said they worked alone. Seventy-five per cent did not feel they had a sufficient barrier between themselves and the customer area; 59% did not have access to a night window; and only 32% reported having a safe space to go if someone threatened their safety.

Only 63 percent of respondents had access to a secondary exit, although a further 23 percent of respondents revealed that their secondary exit was not behind the counter and would, therefore, be of limited utility in a robbery or assault. Undeniably more can, and should, be done by businesses, government and the regulator to mitigate violence and harassment of service station workers.

WORKERS STORIES

ANONYMOUS, COLES EXPRESS WORKER

I would love the screen put back up that was in place for COVID.

It prevented people from jumping the counter and kept us safe. We have safety cameras but the vision is partially blocked. We can't clearly see who is at the door at night without leaving our safe area.

IRRINNI, OTR

I had a customer get upset that I wouldn't give him a refund.

He punched the POS (point of sale) and EFTPOS machines and a metal straw dispenser.

The metal straw dispenser hit me in the face and split my upper lip.

I worry about seeing them in public and that they might have a go at me if I'm in uniform.

I've had people yell at me for all kinds of reasons. I get anxious and begin shaking anytime I have to say no to a customer for any reason. If someone asks to return something I get incredibly worried they're going to become aggressive.

Having screens between us and customers – even just around the POS (point of sale) would be so worthwhile and a night pay window would reduce so much risk.

MADDY, OTR

I recently quit my job at a service station, I was just too scared for my safety to stick it out.

Our store was like a bird cage. No back door, no office to lock myself if I needed to. The only exits on the opposite side of the counter.

I was on the phone to police almost every night. A man was also arrested in my store for trying to hit a police officer.

A group of teens tried to enter my store with a crowbar, lucky they did not figure out they could pull the front doors open.

SAMANTHA, OTR

I don't feel safe at work. I've had a customer put their hands around my neck. It doesn't help that I have to work alone sometimes.

ANONYMOUS, OTR WORKER

I have been assaulted twice.

First time was early morning by a male under the influence of drugs. The second time I was assaulted by a group of 6 teenagers at approximately 8pm.

I have witnessed one of my managers being dragged around the store by her hair by a thief. It's incidents like these that make me feel so unsafe at work.

Our night window isn't used because it's at an unsafe height. We close the doors at 11pm and don't open until 6am against company policy. I have personally been reprimanded for closing early and opening late but I don't want to risk my safety.

CHRISTINE, OTR

I've been spat on and verbally abused multiple times by customers for asking if they're going to pay for the stuff they are stealing.

Part Four
Three Point Plan to Protect Service Station Workers in SA

This report has highlighted the danger for workers in this industry, and detailed actionable policy solutions that should be implemented to reduce the risk of armed robbery in South Australian service stations.

The complexity of the issue, responses to it, and ownership of those responses warrants the articulation of an Action Plan that can concisely convey harm and risk mitigation strategies to business and the South Australian government. With this in mind, the following Action Plan is proposed to address the spate of service station armed robberies in South Australia.

ACTION 1
SAFEWORK SA ESTABLISH A CODE OF PRACTICE FOR PETROL STATION SECURITY AND SAFETY

Petrol station robberies clearly pose significant WHS risks to workers physical and psychosocial safety. Given its prevalence we recommend SafeWork SA establish a 'Code of Practice for Petrol Station Security and Safety' to provide guidance on preventative risk mitigation measures to employers.

Codes of Practice provide practical guidance for employers and workers. They do not replace WHS legislation - but provide directions on best practice controls for particular types of hazards and effective ways to identify and manage risks.

The Petrol Station Security and Safety Code of Practice should be evidence informed and cover security and surveillance including risk mitigation by reducing the availability of (and worker's access to) cash and tobacco, and target hardening, as outlined below.

Limit Access to Cash & Tobacco

The availability of cash and high value products, such as tobacco products, at petrol stations means these sites are attractive targets for criminals.

Maximum quantities of on-site cash and stocks of high value products including tobacco should also be established.

Cash is legal tender, and it is therefore not possible for businesses to eradicate cash payments altogether. However, cash payments should be minimised wherever possible, and consumers should be encouraged to purchase all products at service stations using digital payments.

In addition, cash handling procedures should be developed and implemented. This may include removing workers access to cash; varying banking times; utilising a dual-key or time delayed safes to store cash on site; and ensuring 'limited cash held' signs are displayed.

Security and Surveillance

Site operators should conduct security audits and design and implement security plans at their facilities. And develop, review and update security plans to provide adequate employee training and regular security audits (in line with SafeWork SA's existing guidelines for minimising risk of workplace violence).

All service stations should employ visible and regularly maintained CCTV and have communication and alarm systems that are appropriately tested and maintained.

All premises should have appropriately maintained internal and external lighting to assist visibility.

Target Hardening and Elimination

Business processes and operations should be updated to mitigate risk and improve 'target hardening' and staffing to minimise workers exposure to violent crime including:

- a policy of dual worker requirements in overnight service settings, at a minimum. Workers should not be working alone overnight.

- Workers should be separated from the public e.g. with protective barriers or screens and access to these areas should be appropriately controlled.

- Prohibiting public access inside premises after 10pm - transactions after this time should be facilitated by a transaction tray or pass-through 'night windows'.

- Workers should have the ability to restrict access to premises at any time as necessary.

- Furniture, partitions, and shelving should be arranged to allow good visibility of service areas and avoid restrictive movement.

- There should be appropriate signage to direct customers and visitors.

ACTION 2
PLANNING FOR SAFETY

The South Australian Government should develop a State Planning Policy to require building designers implement principles of Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design, and guidelines to help local councils and industry partners mitigate against the risk of violent crime.

- Such a policy or design guideline would apply to the design, construction, and operation of new service stations – and improvements to existing premises.

- Design guidelines should consider secondary exists for workers and ways to add complexity to means of vehicle entry and egress without impacting practicality for customers (e.g. garden beds requiring controlled driving).

Notifiable incidents

Currently SafeWork SA is only notified of an incident if a worker is enters in-patient care in hospital. Under Section 35 of the Work Health and Safety Act 2012, a notifiable incident is (a) the death of a person; (b) a serious injury or illness of a person; or (c) a dangerous incident. Section 37(l) defines a dangerous incident as an event prescribed by the regulations. The WHS regulations 2012 should be amended to provide that armed robberies are considered a dangerous incident, and thereby a notifiable incident by the WHS Act 2012.

ACTION 3
DESIGNING SAFER WORKPLACES

Businesses should ensure sites are designed and updated to mitigate against the risk of violence and armed robbery. Operators should:

- develop and implement maintenance regimes and promote general site visual amenity. Where feasible street facing building facades should be transparent and shelving and stock should not limit opportunities for passive surveillance to occur.

- explore options to co-locate businesses in precincts to promote greater patronage and traffic flow.

- install a transaction tray or pass-through 'night window' at all facilities.

- ensure employees have access to secondary exits and a safe retreat to avoid violence.

- create secure areas with doors and gates that automatically lock on closing.

Conclusion

This report has detailed the characteristics and trends that define armed robbery in Australia. It has helped to build a profile of who perpetrates these crimes and when they commit them. It has also detailed why service stations prove to be such an alluring target for this crime.

It has detailed policy and operational approaches that have been employed in other jurisdictions in Australia and internationally to mitigate against these vulnerabilities, and has advanced a relatively simple action plan to address these risks in South Australia.

Actioning these points is relatively straightforward but it will have a meaningful impact for South Australia workers, the commercial interests of service station operators, and the economy as a whole.

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