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Security Challenges of Formulating, Implementing, and Enforcing Parental/Youth Escort Policies in Shopping Malls

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ABSTRACT

This paper draws on data and evidence from a premises security lawsuit to illustrate the security challenges of formulating, implementing, and enforcing parental/youth escort policies in shopping malls. While there is some diversity in terms of content and implementation, parental/youth escort policies typically require teenagers under a specific age to be accompanied by an adult if they are on shopping mall property past a certain hour. Over the last several decades, parental/youth escort policies have proliferated as shopping malls increasingly confront violent incidents, teenage disturbances, and criminal activity. The paper describes the security problems faced by shopping malls as places of unstructured socializing for teenagers; and discusses the limitations and conflicts associated with implementing a parental/youth escort policy. A major goal of this paper is to show how extant criminological research can serve as a valuable tool in helping security leaders and practitioners fulfill their roles in creating, maintaining, and assessing security programs.

KEYWORDS

Shopping malls; security management; parental/youth escort policies

Introduction

This paper describes the challenges of formulating, implementing, and enforcing parental/youth escort policies in shopping malls. Parental/youth escort policies are curfew policies that forbid persons under a certain age (usually age 18) from being in a shopping mall after a certain hour on particular nights (usually weekend nights) unless they are accompanied by an adult over the age of 21. Age-related restrictions and access control limits on teens in shopping malls are not new. The Mall of America located in Bloomington, Minnesota instituted a parental/youth escort policy in 1996 and variations of this policy have increased in popularity and frequency among owners and managers of shopping malls. According to the International Council of Shopping Centers (ICSC), a shopping industry

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trade organization, in 2007, there were 35 shopping malls in the United States that had some form of escort policy. By 2010, the number had increased to 66. In 2017, the ICSC reported that it was aware of at least 105 of the 1222 shopping malls in the U.S. having some policy limiting access by minors (Winton, 2017).

Widespread violent incidents, teenage disturbances, and criminal activity at shopping malls have been the major drivers of the adoption of parental/youth escort policies. In January 2013, police were called to the Mall of Louisiana in Baton Rouge to quell a disturbance involving 200 juveniles. A month later in February 2013, a fight erupted among 200 teenagers at the Ford City mall in Chicago resulting in the arrest of 19 teenagers (Christian Science Monitor, 2013; WTHR Channel 13, 2013). In October 2014 and January 2015, fights broke out at the Castleton Square Mall in Indianapolis reportedly involving hundreds of people. On December 26, 2016, more than 15 malls across the U.S. witnessed violence as fights involving dozens of teenagers forced authorities and merchants to shut down malls. In Memphis, Tennessee, police arrested seven people after incidents at two malls. In Aurora, Illinois, police arrested and charged eight juveniles in connection with a large disturbance at the Fox Valley Mall. In Fort Worth, Texas, security officers placed the Hulen Mall on lockdown after 100 people were involved in a series of fights (Sidner et al., 2016; Walsh, 2016). In December 2018, a major disturbance involving hundreds of youths yielded four arrests at the Buckland Hills Mall in Manchester, Connecticut (Betz, 2018; Leavenworth, 2018).

In this paper, I draw on my experience as a litigation consultant to examine the security challenges of formulating, implementing, and enforcing parental/youth escort policies in shopping malls. I first discuss the crime opportunities presented by shopping malls as places of unstructured socializing for teens. I then draw on the criminological perspectives of Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED) to elucidate the security challenges of formulating, implementing, and enforcing parental/youth escort policies. I then draw on evidence from a lawsuit involving the arrest and detention of two teenagers for violating the parental/youth escort policy at a shopping mall. I use evidence from this lawsuit to describe the ways in which security researchers can use extant criminological research to assess the adequacy and reasonableness of security measures at a shopping mall or other business premises. I next discuss several conflicts and problems associated with implementing and enforcing a parental/youth escort policy. To protect the confidentiality of the participants in the lawsuit, I use pseudonyms for names and organizations. Overall, a major goal of this paper is to show how criminological research can serve as a valuable tool in helping security

leaders and practitioners fulfill their roles in creating, maintaining, and assessing security programs.

Shopping malls places of unstructured socializing

One of the main justifications for a parental/youth escort policy is that the combination of youth congregation and lack of adult supervision can lead to problems at a shopping mall including rivalry and conflict among youth, collective disturbances, and delinquent behavior. Disorderly youth in shopping malls constitutes one of the most common problems security firms and police agencies must handle. Dealing with youth disorder requires a significant amount of security and police time and disorderly youth are a common source of complaints from shoppers and merchants in malls (Beck & Willis, 1995; Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995; Scott, 2002). Some shopping malls face a catch-22 situation: On the one hand, many youth that enter shopping malls are eager to spend money and many shopping mall merchants actively market to youth and seek to attract them. On the other hand, some shopping malls can become a hub of teenage social activities that can, in turn, can raise the potential for increased security problems and violent disturbances. Thus, shopping centers face two interconnected challenges: they seek to provide an esthetically pleasing and inviting environment for customers while simultaneously providing security mechanisms that protect patrons and employees from disturbances and criminal events that may originate from the actions of youth (Lee et al., 1999; Savard & Kennedy, 2014).

Criminologists and social scientists recognize that unstructured socializing with peers (peer-oriented activity without supervision) is positively associated with adolescent delinquency (Hoeben & Weerman, 2016; Meldrum & Barnes, 2017; Meldrum & Leimberg, 2018). In addition, commercial land-use, particularly large shopping and theater complexes, can become criminogenic if particular place-based situations and socio-physical opportunities are present to create or intensify criminal motivations (Kinney et al., 2008; McCord et al., 2007). Shopping malls are facilities that are attractive to youth because they contain a number of leisure amenities with minimal adult supervision (Brantingham et al., 1990). Criminological research shows that shopping facilities “can generate problems because these locations tend to have place characteristics that induce bad behavior—the relative absence of adult supervision permits a substantial amount of time for informal, unstructured activity” involving youth (Bichler et al., 2012, p. 120; 2014, p. 972; Brantingham & Brantingham, 2008). Research by Bichler and colleagues (2012) has noted that shopping centers can draw youth from several different communities and thus act as inter-city

crime attractors. “The magnetic appeal of regional shopping centers enables the congregation and interaction of youth who would otherwise not be exposed to each other” (p. 121). According to one research study, “shopping centers may be crime magnets due to convenience of location, teenage loitering, and multiple opportunities for auto theft, shoplifting, and assault on female shoppers” (Kennedy, 1993, p. 113; see also Kinney et al., 2008, p. 64). Just “beneath the facade of a placid shopping environment,” according to Lee and colleagues (1999, p. 158), “there often exists the threat of gang violence, abductions, carjackings, armed robberies, sexual assaults, homicide and crimes by and against young children.” “Almost every shopping center attracts some vagrants, homeless people, juveniles, and gangs that can disrupt ordinary operations,” according to Overstreet and Clodfelter (1995, pp. 92–93).

In the work of Brantingham and Brantingham (1995), shopping malls can be crime generators—places in which large numbers of people are attracted for reasons unrelated to criminal motivation. As a major activity node, shopping malls can provide large numbers of opportunities—unstructured socializing, lax adult supervision, entertaining activities, easy access to cash—for offenders and targets to come together in time and place with the outcome being crime or disorder. To paraphrase Roncek and Maier (1991, p. 726) who analyze crime opportunities at bars and taverns, at shopping malls “patrons and the businesses have all the components of target suitability (Cohen & Felson, 1979, p. 591), namely, value, visibility, low inertia, and accessibility.” “Crimes tend to follow the routine pushes and pulls of activities across an urban environment,” according to Kinney and colleagues (2008, p. 62). “The general patterns of movement towards and away from activity nodes such as ... major shopping areas ... provide a very general image of where crimes will concentrate” (p. 62). As Kinney and colleagues (2008, pp. 64–65) put it:

[A] shopping centre or shopping district has busy hours when a broad range of people are present for many reasons – shopping, working, meeting friends, eating, drinking or walking through. During such busy times the crowd can also include beggars, buskers, and thieves who are there for shoplifting, for picking pockets, for credit card fraud or for stealing from motor vehicles. Shopping centres can support a variety of legitimate and criminal activities during business hours.

Not all shopping malls are crime generators and some shopping malls can be more criminogenic than others. Criminologists have found that variations in shopping mall crime depend on the popularity of locations for youth. Bichler and colleagues’ research (2012, 2014) suggests that “magnetic facilities” that attract youth tend to be “large community or regional shopping complexes that contain or are proximate to movie theaters.” These points dovetail with the criminological work of Weisburd and colleagues

(2014) who note “both situational opportunities and social characteristics of places strongly distinguish chronic crime hot spots from areas with little crime.” If we apply these insights to shopping malls, then we might hypothesize that shopping malls where place managers implement effective security measures and engage in preventive crime activities will have significantly fewer signs of disorder and greater levels of civil behavior (Mazerolle et al., 1998). Just because a shopping mall has a high number of teenagers does not automatically mean that there will be high levels of crime and disturbance. Rather, place managers can discourage crime when they act as capable guardians (Eck, 1994; Felson, 1995).

Situational crime prevention (SCP) and crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED)

While there is some diversity in the policy orientation and implementation procedures, parental/youth escort policies are generally based on criminological theoretical perspectives that emphasize the immediate situational opportunities presented by particular places in generating deviant behavior. Criminologists refer to these theoretical perspectives as “opportunity theories” (see Wilcox et al., 2003) and include routine activities theory (Cohen & Felson, 1979), Situational Crime Prevention (SCP), crime pattern theory and Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). What unites these different theoretical perspectives is that they all stress the central impact of place-specific opportunities in shaping the likelihood of criminal incidents. In this context, criminological research has emphasized the role of formal guardianship—police presence, security officer surveillance, access control, etc.—to discourage and reduce the situational opportunities for crime (Durlauf & Nagin, 2011; Felson, 1995; Weisburd et al., 2014).

The concepts of access control, activity support, surveillance, and territoriality can assist security management in addressing questions of scope, implementation, and enforcement of a parental/youth escort policy. Access control, surveillance, and territoriality are major components of Crime Protection Through Environmental Design (CPTED), a crime prevention approach which asserts that “the proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in the fear and incidence of crime, and an improvement in the quality of life” (Crowe, 2000, p. 46). According the principles of CPTED, properties designed with security and crime prevention in mind will consider the layout of the property, lighting, access points, sight lines, and other factors, with the purpose of creating a space where a potential offender would feel vulnerable to detection.

Access control refers to various physical security measures that limit the ways in and out of a business. Access control can include target hardening—e.g., physical design alterations to deter potential offenders from initiating a crime. Activity support refers to design and signage to encourage acceptable behavior and discourage deviant behaviors and lawbreaking activity. Surveillance refers to the observation, detection, and recording of the premises through clear windows, CCTV, and high quality lighting. Natural surveillance creates opportunities for people to observe others and is facilitated by the design of the commercial building, window placement, and location of entrances. Formal or organized surveillance can include police and security patrols and electronic surveillance strategies. The concept of territoriality means clearly defining private from public property and conveying an image that a business property is cared for (graffiti removed, trash pickup, etc.). Territoriality goes hand in glove with the concept of image/space management which refers to efforts to promote a positive image with property upkeep and routine maintenance (Atlas, 2013; Cozens & Love, 2015; Crowe, 2000).

A major premise of Situational Crime Prevention (SCP) is that context-specific situational factors can influence whether a person chooses to commit crime or not (Clarke, 1980, p. 142). The physical environment combined with the security measures of a shopping mall can give off behavior cues that can either motivate offenders to commit crimes or deter them from engaging in a criminal act. The crime-prevention practices promulgated by SCP can be useful to mall management in formulating and implementing a parental/youth escort policy. SCP is a crime prevention approach that emphasizes the reduction or elimination of opportunities for crime using various techniques that increase the effort, increase the risks, reduce the rewards, reduce provocations, and remove the excuses associated with criminal events (Clarke, 1980; Cornish & Clarke, 2003). SCP suggest that these techniques can be used in different situations to prevent crime (Cullen & Agnew, 2006). Controlling access to a facility during a specified time period for a specified age group via parental/youth escort policy is one way to increase the effort of committing a crime. Utilizing place managers such as security officers can be one way to increase the risk of committing a crime. Enforcing a parental/youth escort policy removes the excuses for youth to be without adult chaperon at a shopping mall during the curfew hours and thereby reduces the opportunities for them to offend or be victimized.

Case example: parental/youth escort policy violation at a shopping mall

The analysis in this paper draws on evidence from a lawsuit involving the arrest and detention of two teenagers for criminal trespass after notice for

violating the parental/youth escort policy at a shopping mall. As a supplement to the shopping mall general code of conduct, the parental/youth escort policy forbids persons under the age of 18 from being in the mall after 6:00 on Friday night and Saturday night unless they are accompanied by an adult over the age of 21. A contract security officer working at the mall stopped the two teenagers and they admitted that they were under the age of 18. The security officer briefed the two teenagers on the parental/youth escort policy and its terms and gave them a copy of the parental/youth escort policy in pamphlet form. She then advised them that they were trespassing and therefore they must leave the shopping mall. The security officer radioed for assistance and backup when the teenagers dismissed the request to leave. An off-duty police officer arrived and then arrested and detained the teenagers for criminal trespass after notice.

After the release of the teenagers, a suit was brought against the police officer, the security officer, the shopping mall, and the security firm. The suit accused these defendants of false arrest, use of excessive force, malicious prosecution, and violation of plaintiffs' civil rights. The plaintiffs also accused the shopping mall and security firm for negligent hiring, supervision, and retention of an unqualified and inadequately trained security officer. Eventually, the police department dropped the charges against the two youths and cleared their records. The plaintiffs and defendants ultimately settled the suit.

An attorney for the defendant shopping mall retained me to review the file materials in this matter and to evaluate whether shopping mall and contract security firm breached any security standard of care and if such a deviation caused the plaintiffs' injuries. Before arriving at my opinions in this matter, I reviewed numerous documents, including the following: the Complaint, Amended Complaint, photos of the parental/youth escort policy signs, lease, contract for security, the security firm's security handbook, security training reports, invoices, personnel files, post orders, online newspaper articles, and Answers to Interrogatories and Responses to Production Requests from all the parties in this litigation. I also reviewed the depositions of the two teenagers, two security officers, and the head of security at the shopping mall. In addition to these materials, I interviewed the head of security management at the shopping mall, and two security officers working on the night of the incident. I also conducted phone interviews with the vice president of the mall property firm, senior director of management at the shopping mall, and the associate counsel for the mall property firm. I also conducted a security site inspection of the shopping mall one afternoon.

Access control and surveillance, activity support, and territoriality

In this case, I investigated whether the parental/youth escort policy in place at the shopping mall at the time of the incident was in accordance with

security industry standards of care pertaining to access control, surveillance, territoriality, and activity support. To evaluate whether the defendant's actions in this case were in violation of an appropriate security standard of care, I researched premises liability and security standards promulgated by various professional organizations such as American Society of Industrial Security (ASIS) International, National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), and the defendant shopping mall's own security policies.

Investigating whether a defendant breached a standard of care is an important aspect of any forensic criminological investigation of negligent security in a shopping mall or other commercial property (Gotham, 2020; Gotham & Kennedy, 2019a, 2019b; Kennedy, 2006, 2014). A shopping mall's own policies will show whether mall management hotel recognized security measures necessary to protect customers and tenants. If faced with a premises liability for negligent security suit, courts may expect mall owners and managers to demonstrate that they exercised due care by showing that they calculated the cost of security protected, conducted up-to-date objective security surveys of the business location and immediate vicinity, complied with industry standards of care, employed employee training on security policies and procedures, adhered to a schedule of ongoing review and updating of the overall security plan, and complied with their own internal safety and security practices (Gotham and Kennedy 2019a, chapter 7; Twerski & Shane, 2017).

Access control and surveillance

Access control focuses on reducing opportunities for crime and deviance by denying access to potential targets and creating a heightened perception of risk in potential offenders. Some high-rise buildings located in large downtown areas may provide key access and have a security officer at the front entrance. In addition, many commercial facilities including sporting arenas, concert venues, and movie theaters restrict access on ability to pay the entrance fee. Other facilities such as retail stores and shopping malls rely on promoting free, easy access to the facilities. Large shopping malls can have many entrances and "permeable perimeters allow for people to freely enter and exit with little to no interaction with security personnel" (Savard & Kennedy, 2014, p. 265). Free, easy access is central to the retail and shopping mall business model but it also restricts access control options from a security perspective.

A primary function of a security officer is access control, which is the regulation of movement into, out of, and within a designated building or area. The typical security officer instructions concerning access control include "identify and report any person any person in the facility without

proper identification” (ASIS International, 2011, p. 4). Formal (or organized) surveillance is also provided by local stakeholders (shop keepers, security officers) that enforce the parental/youth escort policy. When security officers follow the practices and procedures of a parental/youth escort policy, their time is devoted to proactive patrol activities which includes visible security, assisting patrons, “observing suspicious circumstances, and disrupting emerging disorder conditions (congregating juveniles)” (Twerski & Shane, 2017, p. 15).

In this case, I opined that well-trained security personnel who patrol in uniform are centrally important to realizing security goals which can include access control, surveillance, and crime deterrence (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995, p. 94). Over the decades, some security officer companies have come under scrutiny for allegedly lax hiring practices. “The best way to stave off mall security problems is through well-trained personnel,” according to a 1991 report from the Peter Berlin Retail Consulting Group, Inc. (Wilson, 1992), and “when a mall’s reputation for tight security increases, criminal activity decreases, and as shoppers feel safer in the malls, sales increase” (Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995, p. 94). Patrols should be clearly observable by customers since the goal is crime deterrence. Ideally, the visible presence of a security officer should depress crime opportunities since those who may want to commit deviant acts may be reluctant to do so if a security officer is monitoring their activities (Felson, 1995).

During the discovery phase of this case, I examined and evaluated whether the security firm hired by the mall management followed security industry standards of care via the application of security measures to encourage preferred behaviors and discourage illegitimate activities in shopping mall use of space (ASIS International, 2012, pp. 28, 32–35, 40–42). In my analysis, I found that the parental/youth escort policy training modules covered topics such as perceptions/attitudes/stereotypes, communication, conflict resolution, and courtesy/professionalism/respect. According to the parental/youth escort policy training manual, security personnel were trained on enforcing the parental/youth escort policy using de-escalating techniques, monitoring of mall entrances, rotation of security personnel, and approaching the customer/youth. From my interview with the security officers and the lead officer in charge of mall security, I found that shopping mall security officers and off-duty police were aware of the parental/youth escort policy and its enforcement mechanisms. The training manual also noted that security officers were instructed not to consider the race or gender of the youth when deciding to approach to inquire if the person might be under the age of 18.

The parental/youth escort policy training manual instructed security officers that the mall is broken into patrol zones; they should patrol their

assigned zone; should not leave their post; and that there is a rotation of officers each hour into a new zone and mobile patrols. The security firm had clearly defined roles and responsibilities for enforcing the parental/youth escort policy. At the time of the arrest, all security officers in the shopping mall were at their assigned posts and performing their required duties as security officers, according to my interview with the lead security official. On weekend nights when security officers were enforcing the parental/youth escort policy, officers would be stationed at five different areas: e.g., near the food court and in the common area between the two common mall entrances. These security measures reflect the purpose of a parental/youth escort policy which is to increase effective adult supervision of youth on weekend nights and thereby reduce the opportunities for teenagers to engage in unstructured socialization.

Activity support

The deployment of signage to encourage intended patterns of public space usage—e.g., clear posting of parental/youth escort signs and distribution of fliers to communicate rules of conduct for youth in a shopping mall express an important CPTED standard: activity support. Activity support involves the use of physical design, and symbolic markers to communicate to users what activities are appropriate in the commercial space (Atlas, 2013; Cozens et al., 2005; Cozens & Love, 2015). In this case, I evaluated whether the parental/youth escort policy rules were clearly posted on signs located at all main entrances. On my site visit to the shopping mall, I observed that each mall entrance had two parental/youth escort policy signs: one on the door and a larger one located approximately five yards inside as one entered the mall. Each of these signs had an orange background with white and black text to attract the attention of a person entering the mall. The visible notification of a parental/youth escort policy follows recommended practices of the Problem-Oriented Guides for Police issued by the Office of Community Oriented Policing Services of the U.S. Department of Justice for shopping malls: “Clearly posted rules in shopping malls are recommended to discourage disorderly conduct” (Scott, 2002, p. 21)

Critics of parental/youth escort policies assert that racial prejudice and discrimination may play a role in the enforcement of such policies (O’ dougherty, 2006). “Much of the negative press associated with these policies,” according to Jenny and colleagues (2018) “centers on the potential for inequitable enforcement by mall owners and their personnel, making uniform enforcement the key to a successful policy.” Thus, it is important for mall management and security officers to enforce the policy in a neutral, non-harassing manner. The policy should target individuals

on the basis of age, not race or ethnic background, apparent social status, or types of dress or hairstyle.

One explanation I considered in this case was that the two teenagers were singled out for questioning and detainment based on their race. Both teenagers were African American males and plaintiff attorneys in this case argued that the white female security officer targeted them because of their race, not age. Goss (1993), O'dougherty (2006), and Vanderbeck and Johnson (2000, p. 8) have noted that "the presence of young people from minority backgrounds in 'public' spaces such as shopping malls is considered problematical by many users (including the White middle-class adult consumers for whom these spaces have typically been designed and the retailers who cater to them." Research by social scientists and criminologists has found that shopping mall youth/parental escort policies may attract negative press and criticism if these policies are not enforced uniformly and in an equitable fashion (Scott, 2002). Security practitioners maintain that effective implementation of a parental/youth escort policy requires training and monitoring of enforcement so that policy actions generate the preferred policy outcome (Lee et al., 1999; Overstreet & Clodfelter, 1995). Perceptions of biased and inequitable enforcement of a parental/youth escort policy can open a Pandora's Box of legal problems for shopping malls, especially if people view teenagers as victims of heavy-handed mall security (Scott, 2002, p. 30).

In this case, I opined that racial prejudice was not the source of the motivation or actions of the security officer on duty at the time of the incident. In looking over the information and data provided in the case, I did not see evidence that the security officer targeted either teenager because of race. In addition, I did not see evidence that racial animosity or discriminatory intent guided the actions or decisions of the security officer at the shopping mall on the night of the incident. Security officers were trained to spot check for parental/youth escort policy violations on the basis of age, not race or ethnicity, a training component that follows security industry recommendations and practices. Finally, one teenager noted in his deposition that he did not have any reason to believe that any part of the security officer's actions were racially motivated. Overall, I did not see evidence that the security officer implemented or enforced the parental/youth escort policy in an arbitrary, capricious, or discriminatory fashion. The policy had been in place at the mall for months without any prior incidents, complaints, or problems.

Territoriality

In his case, I opined that the implementation of the parental/youth escort policy at the shopping mall met another important security industry

standard: territoriality. Territoriality is a design concept directed at reinforcing notions of proprietary concern and a “sense of ownership” in legitimate users of space thereby reducing opportunities for offending by illegitimate users (Cozens & Love, 2015). Shopping mall management implemented the parental/youth escort policy in response to feedback from community and retailers who felt threatened by the prevalence of crime and unstructured socializing by youth at the mall on weekends. Crime incident data show that during the six-month period before the incident there were 65 police calls/reports involving incidents at shopping mall. These reports included Assault (1), Theft (2), Public Disorderly Conduct (1), Shoplifting (33), Vandalism (2). Shopping mall security reports show that during the same period there was a 15 year old male shot and killed in the parking lot; a large fight involving someone flashing a gun that caused a stampede out of an entrance; 3 juvenile females fighting inside the mall; and 2 unruly juveniles (Loud, screaming, etc.).

I also investigated the process by which shopping mall managers and the security firm formulated the parental/youth escort policy and what operational features and procedures were built into the enforcement of the policy. In examining the information and data presented in the case, I found that merchants and shoppers participated in the parental/youth escort policy planning process and provided input into the formulation and implementation of the parental/youth escort policy. Mall managers solicited feedback from customers and retailers concerning the large number of unsupervised youths that were visiting the mall on Friday and Saturday evenings. Mall management initiated a dialog about the communitywide issue of unsupervised youth and the need for alternative activities for young people. Through feedback from the community including shoppers and retailers that voiced concern about inappropriate behavior on weekend nights, mall management designed a policy to allow the shopping mall to address unsupervised youth issues while providing shoppers with a pleasant shopping experience.

During the discovery phase of this case, I conducted a phone interview with the vice president of the property firm in charge of the shopping mall, the senior director of management at the property firm, and the associate counsel for the property firm. My goal was to obtain information about the planning process of parental/youth escort policies at other shopping malls the property firm managed. These three individuals expressed to me that before the property firm implements any parental/youth escort policy, corporate leaders meet with mall management to ensure that the parental/youth escort policy devised is legal and enforceable; workable from an operational standpoint; implemented on a uniform, nondiscriminatory basis; and clearly defined and explained to the public, personnel, and tenants.

Research shows that there are several common practices involved in the enactment of a parental/youth escort policy in a shopping mall: e.g., the policy is put into effect for the common parts of the mall with spot checks; clear positioning of signs alerting shoppers to the policy; training for security officers; and enlisting the support of mall merchants to establish and enforce standards of youth conduct in public (Dillard, 2008). In addition, the initiation of a parental/youth escort policy is accompanied with the production of pamphlets; invitations to local media to visit the mall; and press conferences to communicate to the community the motives behind the parental/youth policy, how and when it will be enforced, and who shoppers can contact with questions. Another common practice is for parental/youth escort policies to be limited in their scope, with restrictions on individuals under age 18 on weekend nights past a certain late afternoon or early evening hour (Jenny et al., 2018). Research has established that people who are responsible for managing places—whether malls, businesses, apartment buildings, commercial districts, or parks—can collectively act to enforce rules and standards of orderly behavior that result in reduced disorder (Madensen & Eck, 2008; Mazerolle et al., 1998; Scott, 2002).

Discussion and conclusions

Parental/youth escort policies have mushroomed in recent decades as shopping malls confront problems associated with unstructured socializing by teenagers. More than two decades ago, Lee and colleagues (1999, p. 174) pointed out that more and more shopping malls were instituting a parental/youth escort policy to “limit the potential for youths to engage in crime and allay shoppers’ fears that unsupervised youths will likely engage in crime.” As these researchers noted at the time, “[t]here is presently no data to evaluate the effectiveness of these or other innovative security measures that attempt to reduce crime by eliminating problematic patrons.” This situation has not changed in the last two decades. Since the 1990s, there continues to be a dearth of peer-reviewed empirical studies on the effectiveness of parental/youth escort policies and, at present, there are no comprehensive data or analyses that address whether parental/youth escort policies can reduce crime. As noted in some news reports, some mall management companies assert that youth/parental escort policies reduce teen socializing, reduce arrests and police calls-for-service, and are welcomed and praised by merchants and customers (Hall, 2006; O’Neill, 2019). Unfortunately, we do not know if these mall management claims, for a specific mall or malls in general, are valid since we do not have publicly available data and there are no systematic or comparative studies.

Like other security practices, parental/youth escort policies are not a crime prevention panacea and place managers and security practitioners should be aware of the challenges of implementing and enforcing these policies. Based on the investigation and analysis described in this paper, I raise six points to assist security decision-makers in formulating, implementing, enforcing parental-youth escort policies to facilitate effective and beneficial policy outcomes. First, anecdotal accounts suggest that parental/escort policies may reduce the opportunities for unstructured teen socializing but it is important to take into account place-specific conditions and situations. Studies of community curfew laws suggest that places where youth frequent during their discretionary time can become criminogenic places if these places do not have adequate guardianship. Research by Kline (2012) and Asato (1998) suggests that curfew laws can be effective in reducing juvenile crime but Scott (2002, p. 23) cautions that “[w]hether curfew enforcement is effective at reducing youth disorder depends on local conditions.”

Just as place matters in the implementation and effectiveness of curfew laws, it is plausible that local conditions and shopping mall-specific management practices will affect the success of parental/youth escort policies in reducing youth disorder. Research by Scheitle and Halligan (2018) on the adoption of security measures by places of worship suggests that victimization risk as well as organizational variables, such as size, resources, and role specialization have significant effects on the odds of a place of worship having security measures. These findings reveal the importance of considering both organizational and criminological dynamics when examining security and crime at specific places. Shopping malls can vary by criminogenic factors (past experiences with crime), perceived risk of victimization, place (urban, suburban, exurban), and organizational characteristics (e.g., size, structure, resources) (Chikomba, 2014; Gotham & Kennedy 2019, chapter 7; Savard & Kennedy, 2014;).

The effectiveness of a parental/youth escort policy could depend on several factors including the physical and operational environment of the shopping mall, the size and type of the mall, the mall’s tenant mix, and the nature of security management policies, practices, and procedures.

Second, generic, one-size-fits-all, security approaches—including parental/youth escort policies—are difficult to justify given the diversity of shopping mall sizes, locations, and business types (Chikomba, 2014; Savard & Kennedy, 2014, p. 260). A “shopping center’s architectural design, tenant mix, and location within a certain neighborhood may be more problematic compared to a shopping center in a higher-end neighborhood with a well-thought out, security-conscious architectural design, and ‘high-end’ tenant mix” (Savard & Kennedy, 2014, p. 26). One of the stricter policies is a curfew that bars visitors under the age of 18 after 2:30 p.m., seven days a

week, without parental supervision (Dillard, 2008). In 2010, the Atlantic Terminal Mall in Brooklyn, N.Y. had a policy that disallowed groups of four or more unsupervised under the age of 21. When five or more shoppers as old as 20 are found, they are asked to disburse into smaller groups or leave (Schaefer, 2010). Jenny and colleagues (2018) suggest that a “policy with a limited scope may be more palatable to concerned tenants, especially those whose business relies on the teen demographic for its core business.” Shopping malls with movie theaters or restaurants that employ teenagers may need to modify the policy and provide exceptions so that security officers do not routinely target teen employees.

Third, mall owners and managers should consider the potential problems and negative consequences of conceiving a parental/escort policy as a public relations device that takes precedence over security management concerns. In the wake of unwanted media attention that accompanies reports of teen disturbances in shopping malls, individual shopping malls may initiate various security management and security awareness programs. But it is important for shopping mall managers and owners to have a genuine concern for security and customers’ fear of victimization and not use a parental/youth escort policy as a public relations ploy, a bells and whistles strategy with superfluous media coverage and hype. O’dougherty’s (2006) analysis of the implementation and enforcement of the parental/youth escort policy at Minnesota’s Mall of America draws attention to how shopping mall security strategies can morph into public relations campaigns, an aspect of what sociologist Erving Goffman (1959) famously referred to as *impression management*—e.g., the process in which people attempt to influence perceptions of social reality by regulating and controlling information.

Shopping mall owners and managers may view investment in public relations as a security management strategy to project an image of a safe and secure place to buy and sell merchandise. However, prioritizing investment in public relations and not investing in resources to bolster security may pose a litigation risk. That is, directing investment away from physical or information security measures to public relations can expose a business to costly litigation especially if there is a criminal incident on the property and the victim sues. Admitting that mall management did not invest in security (e.g., enhanced surveillance, training for parental/youth policy implementation, adding security officers for enforcement, etc.) for cost considerations and/or directed money exclusively to public relations (advertising and marketing) is not likely to go over well in the courtroom. To quote Savard and Kennedy (2014, p. 260): “shopping center corporations are frequently held accountable for criminal incidents on their properties. Responsible landholders adopt prevention techniques responsive to crime

foreseeability at a given property and implement standard security practices designed to reduce crime risks to customers and employees.”

Fourth, mall owners and managers should be aware of the potential for conflict among different constituencies, stakeholders, and organized interests over the scope, formulation, and enforcement of a parental/youth escort policy. Conflict can occur between local police and mall owners and managers over whether and how to implement a parental/youth escort policy. While local police may be enthusiastic supporters of a policy, mall owners and managers may be more reserved and reflective as they evaluate the costs, benefits, and potential short-term and long-term consequences of such a policy. Police may interpret a mall disturbance as a harbinger of more intense problems related to teen disrespect and law breaking (drug dealing and violence). In contrast, mall owners and managers may perceive a disturbance as an aberrant, singular event, an isolated episode. In addition, mall owners and managers may not want to alienate teens and lose valuable foot traffic due to the imposition of a draconian parental/youth escort policy (Leavenworth, 2018). Moreover, shopping malls are battling increasing competition from online sales and owners and managers may view a parental/youth escort policy as detrimental to sales.

Rather than implement a mall-based policy, mall owners and managers could consider working with local governments to create and enforce city-wide curfew policies for minors. Mall owners and managers could also consider hosting events at the mall that creatively engage youth and integrate them into structured activities. Dillard (2008) refers to the experience of one mall where management developed a music CD with a rock song about the mall’s code of conduct and invited youth musicians to write and perform songs about the code of conduct. Using a pretest posttest research design, mall owners and managers could collect before and after data surrounding the implementation of the parental/youth policy to evaluate whether these activities correlate with a reduction in the number of incidents and disturbances at the mall. Mall owners and managers could also track whether these activities correlate with an increase in sales since these activities are designed to attract and keep teens in a mall.

Fifth, conflict can also ensue if tenants believe shopping mall owners are overly taxing them to pay for an unjustifiably expensive parental/youth escort program. Enforcement of the policy can get expensive depending on the nature of the security training and the methods of implementation. Mall owners and management may be able to alleviate these concerns by providing evidence-based research that shows the effectiveness of the policy and its benefits for tenants. Mall owners and management may also find it

useful to stress security expenditures as an area of investment rather than as a business cost (ASIS International, 2012, p. 109). For example, mall management could evaluate the effectiveness of a parental/youth escort program based on whether the benefits of the program are commensurate with or exceed costs. Measures of effectiveness could include increased customer satisfaction, happier mall tenants, reduced unstructured teen socializing, reduced police calls for service, decrease in crime incidents.

Sixth, conscientious research and evidence-based security planning can operate as a check and safeguard against tendencies to overgeneralize or misrepresent mall disturbances as omnipresent security threats. In recent years, some news reports suggest that the rise of social media intimates a new danger to shopping malls since youth can use social media as a communication technology to incite and organize mall disturbances (Sidner et al., 2016). Violent mall disturbances—amplified by the 24-h news cycle and social media—may cause some mall owners and managers to feel that they need to act quickly and implement new security measures that may be irrelevant, ineffective, and unnecessary. Like active shooter incidents, mall disturbances are rare and, while shocking, they may not necessarily express broader trends that require major alterations in security policies, practices, and procedures. Rather, as discussed by Concannon and Center (2019, p. 2), “[m]edia coverage of violent incidents is highly disproportionate to the probability that individuals and organizations will likely experience violence first hand.”

Overall, the evidence-based research can assist shopping mall managers and owners in managing the delicate balancing act between accessibility and security. On the one hand, the profitability of a shopping mall depends on projecting an image of an open, inviting, and easily accessible place for customers. On the other hand, the openness of shopping malls can attract criminals and other offenders looking to exploit and victimize customers (Chikomba, 2014; Savard & Kennedy, 2014, p. 265). Evidence-based research is a means of data and information collection and analysis that a researcher, security manager, or security practitioner can use to make decisions about security measures. For shopping malls, evidence-based research can assist security managers in understanding the unique situational characteristics and socio-spatial features of shopping malls in generating deviant activities (teen disturbances) and criminal events. A security manager can then use this knowledge to plan and guide the development of security budgeting, resource allocation, intervention strategies, and security training practices. Using evidence-based research to inform security practices can help mall owners and management choose the best course of action for them that maximizes current resources, does not unjustifiably demand new resources, and provides a foundation for them to make an effective case to mall tenants.

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