

# Changes in women can lead to crime — judge

By CHERYL CHODUN and JACKIE KLEIN

Shoplifting is a common manifestation of the larceny in all of us, from the executive who steals office pencils to the housewife who sneaks a package of party napkins.

That's the opinion of Southfield's 46th District Court Judge S. James Clarkson who considers shoplifting an emotional crime among both men and women. But, he maintains, the causes are easier to determine in female offenders.

"I believe crimes like stealing are often caused by chemical and hormonal changes in women during menopause and menstruation," Clarkson contended. "Chemical imbalances can bring on emotional disturbances and depression.

"Women undergoing these changes may rationalize that they need excitement, and there's a certain thrill to shoplifting, the easiest mechanism for what women consider an emotional 'high.' Chemical and hormonal changes often cause erratic behavior. Many women admit they're going through menopause, and that's why they committed an offense."

SOUTHFIELD Probation Depart-



Chemical and hormonal changes in women can cause emotional problems, according to District Judge James Clarkson. Some turn to stealing for thrills and excitement, he claims. (Photo by Allen Schlossberg)

ment, headed by Dale Chrysler, is about to begin of the first local study ever done on shoplifting, Clarkson said. The judge hopes the study will improve understanding of why so many women shoplift and help the court deal with offenders.

Chrysler commented that he hasn't determined significant correlation

between age and shoplifting. In fact, he maintained, incidents drop dramatically among women after the age of 26.

Part of the study includes questions on the emotional state of the offender at the time the incident occurred. Probation officials say they are interested in determining whether menopause

and menstruation are factors in the commission of crimes.

"I lack real authority for all my theories," Clarkson admitted, "but I have an uncanny ability for picking out disturbed offenders from professional ones. I maintain there very often is a psychosomatic relationship between shoplifting and the person accused."

"These individuals are emotionally disturbed. They're not criminals, and I often order psychiatric evaluation or counseling for them. Shoplifting isn't a normal crime, and some of the motives are really far-fetched. We've even had men bring in letters from their wives' doctors explaining their menopausal behavior."

OCCASIONALLY, Clarkson said, a woman will appear in court on a charge of driving under the influence of liquor or some other offense which could be the result of emotional problems. But 92.9 per cent of cases he handles are stealing.

"Shoplifting is also an impulsive crime," Clarkson said. "The modes of operation of women who steal on the spur of the moment are emotional. Later, their embarrassment is fantastic."

"Less than five per cent of the women we process in court are professional shoplifters whose criminal records indicate premeditation. But first offenders with emotional difficulties should be treated rather than punished."

Some of these difficulties, Clarkson said, are lack of sex, broken love affairs and disobedient children.

"Shoplifting is a phenomenon," Clarkson said. "It's not normal to steal when you have money, but doctors and lawyers will commit impulse offenses like taking a pack of gum, cigarettes or a chocolate bar."

"Some of these men and women may have started shoplifting in gangs when they were kids and they never outgrew the habit of stealing."

(Editor's note: Throughout the year, the Southfield Eccentric will focus on women and crime, both as perpetrators and victims.)

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