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The Rise of Shoplifting in the UK – Speaker Notes

- Shoplifting explained.

Shoplifting is when someone takes items from a shop without paying. A big reason people do this is homelessness. Without a safe place to live, many end up on the streets, in shelters, or abandoned buildings, facing daily struggles (Sentencing Council, 2024).

- Homelessness and survival.

Life without a home is very hard. Many homeless people have no money to buy food, clothes, or hygiene products, so some steal small items like bread, soap, or warm clothes. They don't do it to be bad, but to survive hunger, cold, or desperation.

- Why they feel no choice.

Many have no job or support, and some struggle with mental illness or addiction. These problems make life worse, and when people are sick, hungry, or desperate, they may shoplift just to get by (Wright, 2024).

- The scale of the problem.

More than 270,000 people are homeless in the UK, living in temporary housing, shelters, or on the streets (Shelter, 2023). With no food or safety, many turn to shoplifting as their only option.

- Impact on businesses.

Shops lose money when goods are stolen. To prevent theft, they use cameras, guards, or locked items, and sometimes call the police. But punishment doesn't solve the problem — after jail, people are still homeless and desperate (Alavi, 2025).

- Other causes: cost of living.

Rising prices in the UK also make shoplifting worse. Even people who are not homeless may steal because they cannot afford food or basic goods. Poverty and high costs push some into stealing when they feel they have no other choice.

- Real solutions.

The answer is not more punishment but more support. Giving homeless people food, shelter, jobs, and healthcare can reduce shoplifting and help them live better lives (CRISIS, 2024).

- Conclusion.

In conclusion, shoplifting in the UK is often linked to homelessness, poverty, and desperation rather than people wanting to be criminals. Many are simply trying to survive another day without food, shelter, or support. While businesses lose money from theft, punishing people alone does not solve the issue because it ignores the real reasons behind it. Instead, society needs to focus on long-term solutions, such as tackling homelessness, reducing poverty, and making sure people have access to jobs, mental health care, and safe housing.

Reference List:

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