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### Burglary

Wim Bernasco

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### **[ - ] Abstract and Keywords**

This article addresses burglary in various countries and jurisdictions, in criminal law as well as in victimization survey questions. It discusses victims, offenders, and the police as sources of information. It presents data on the current prevalence of burglary in the United States, England, and Wales. This article discusses burglary targets and reviews data on the people who commit burglaries. Burglars are described in terms of their demographic attributes, motivations for burglary, co-offending patterns, and level of planning involved in the commission of a burglary. The burglary daily time cycle and its relation to target choice are also mentioned. The next section is dedicated to the issue of repeated burglaries against nearby addresses and is a phenomenon that has received considerable attention during the past decades. It discusses evidence on the effectiveness of situational burglary prevention measures and concludes by enumerating future research priorities.

Keywords: burglary, victims, criminal law, time cycle, target choice

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BURGLARY is very common. Most people will be a victim of burglary at least once in their lifetime. Although commonly listed as a property offense, most victims agree that the illegal entry into their home causes more emotional turmoil and more enduring stress than the monetary loss and inconveniences they suffer. Burglary is one of the most extensively studied offenses, and it is an illusion that a single scholar could ever read all that has been written about it. A comprehensive essay on burglary appeared in the fourteenth volume of *Crime and Justice* (Shover 1991). I took that as the starting point for this chapter, focusing mostly on research that has appeared since. Several conclusions can be drawn:

- Burglary is the actual or attempted illegal entry into a dwelling with the intent to steal. Definitions vary between jurisdictions (and surveys) with respect to details, for example whether the actual entry requires force or destruction and what precisely constitutes a dwelling.
- Our knowledge about burglary is derived from victimization surveys, from the police and other criminal law organizations, and from offenders. Victimization surveys are preferred when the aim is to assess incidence and prevalence.
- Burglary is a common crime that occurs in industrialized countries with a decreasing annual rate of currently roughly 4 burglaries per 100 households. Burglary is most common in Anglo-Saxon countries. Victims report 40 percent of attempted burglaries and 80 percent of completed burglaries to the police, depending on the size of the loss involved.
- Burglars tend to burglarize in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods with poor social control. They prefer dwellings that are unoccupied and easily accessible and unobservable from the street, and they prefer items that are CRAVED (concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable), the ideal being cash. Victimization risk is most strongly related to the amount of time a dwelling is left unoccupied. Victims quite

often know the offenders.

- The majority of the people who commit burglaries are young males who burglarize to sustain an expensive lifestyle, often including drug use. Juvenile burglars are more likely to co-offend than adult burglars. Specialization in burglary is uncommon, as most burglars also commit other offenses, including violent ones.
- Burglaries are subject to time cycles that correspond to the times that dwellings are unoccupied. Although precisely for the reason of variation itself (absence of the occupants), the exact time of burglary is often unknown, and the daily time cycle shows most variation. Burglaries do not seem to vary a lot over the days of the week, but there is some seasonality in burglary data. In the United States most burglaries are committed during the summer, in Europe during the winter.
- Many burglaries are repeat burglaries of the same address. Often the second burglary involves the same offender as the first, and the second tends to take place within a few weeks or months after the first. The elevated victimization risk after burglary extends to dwellings in the immediate environment of the burglarized dwelling, which may indicate that a blocked repeat burglary elsewhere is displaced to nearby victims.
- Most conventional preventive measures against burglary are target-hardening devices that strengthen the physical barriers against unlawful entry to the property and measures that draw attention to illegal entries. There is some evidence that target-hardening devices are effective in reducing burglary. Preventing repeat victimization of recent burglary victims has been particularly successful.
- Large parts of Shover's (1991) essay remain valid in 2008, in particular the characteristics of offenders, victims, and offending. Three notable changes are that burglary rates have dropped considerably worldwide, that more sources of information on burglary have become available worldwide, and that repeat burglary victimization has been introduced as a useful concept for prevention, especially in the United Kingdom. Future work could address the offender-victim nexus, as well as burglary detection by contemporary technologies such as CCTV and DNA. More ethnographic work along lines initiated by Wright and Decker (1994) would be welcomed.

This chapter comprises nine sections. Section I kicks off by addressing how burglary is defined in various countries and jurisdictions, in criminal law as well as in victimization survey questions. Section II discusses victims, offenders, and the police as sources of information. In section III data are presented on the current prevalence of burglary in the United States, England and Wales, and other countries. Long-term burglary trends are addressed, as is the decision of victims whether or not to report a burglary to the police. Section IV discusses burglary "targets": the areas where offenders commit burglaries, the types of houses they enter, from whom they steal, and what they steal. Section V reviews what we know about the people who commit burglaries. Burglars are described in terms of their demographic attributes, motivations for burglary, co-offending patterns, and level of planning involved in the commission of a burglary. The burglary daily time cycle and its relation to target choice are described in section VI. Section VII is dedicated to the issue of repeated burglaries against the same or nearby addresses, a phenomenon that has received considerable attention during the past decades. Section VIII discusses evidence on the effectiveness of situational burglary prevention measures. Section IX concludes by discussing whether and how our understanding of burglary has increased since Shover's (1991) essay and by enumerating future research priorities.

## I. What is Burglary?

When someone enters an inhabited dwelling without permission and with the intent to steal, many people would agree that the person is committing a burglary; if a lock is broken to get inside and if valuable items are taken away, virtually everyone will agree. However, definitions of burglary differ between jurisdictions and over time (Mawby 2001, p. 4).

In the United States the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) program defines burglary as the unlawful entry of a structure used as a permanent dwelling to commit a felony or theft. To classify an offense as a burglary, it is not required that force be used to gain entry. The UCR program has three subclassifications for burglary: forcible entry, unlawful entry where no force is used, and attempted forcible entry. In many jurisdictions, including England and Wales, burglary also includes "distraction burglary," where falsehood, trick, or distraction is used on an occupant to gain access to the property in order to steal (Thornton et al. 2003). Various gradations of burglary can

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be distinguished depending on whether the offender was armed, whether there were co-offenders, whether the burglary took place at nighttime, and whether the property was occupied when entered. In Australia legislation introduced in 1999 replaced break-and-enter offenses with a range of so-called criminal trespass offenses, making it possible to distinguish larceny and criminal damage from illegal entry in various gradations of seriousness (South Australian Department of Justice 2007).

For statistical purposes, an important distinction is whether failed burglary attempts are included in the definition, as it has been suggested that there are nearly as many attempted burglaries as completed burglaries (Budd 1999). For example, when an offender is disturbed upon entering by an alarm system or by the occupants and flees, this is viewed as a burglary attempt (i.e., “attempted forcible entry” in the UCR classification).

Definitions of burglary differ with respect to the nature of the property entered; some countries exclude theft from a secondary residence or from an attic or basement in multidwelling buildings, and some countries include theft from a car (Aebi et al. 2006). A particularly important distinction is whether to include illegal entry and theft from structures not used as a dwelling, such as schools, offices, and shops. These are sometimes called commercial or nonresidential burglaries, as opposed to domestic or residential burglaries. This chapter deals with residential or domestic burglary only.

Because we increasingly rely on accounts of victims rather than on police records for understanding the nature and extent of burglary, the legal definition of burglary may be less important than how burglary is defined in survey questionnaires and interviews. In the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS), the definitions of burglary and attempted burglary are reflected in what questions respondents are asked (van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit 2008: appendix 8, Q60 and Q65), for example:

Over the past five years, did anyone actually get into your home/residence without permission, and steal or try to steal something? I am not including here thefts from garages, sheds or lock-ups.

Apart from this, over the past five years, do you have any evidence that someone tried to get into your home/residence unsuccessfully? For example, damage to locks, doors or windows or scratches around the lock?

In the British Crime Survey, burglaries include all break-ins and attempts, regardless of intent, to all inhabited dwellings (any house or flat or any outhouse or garage linked to the dwelling via a connecting door; Nicholas, Kershaw, and Walker 2007, p. 75). The questions refer to a period of 12 months preceding the interview. Affirmative answers to these questions are indicative of burglary or attempted burglary:

During the last 12 months ... has anyone GOT INTO this house/flat without permission and STOLEN or TRIED TO STEAL anything?

[Apart from anything you have already mentioned], in that time did anyone GET INTO your house/flat without permission and CAUSE DAMAGE?

[Apart from anything you have already mentioned], in that time have you had any evidence that someone has TRIED to get in without permission to STEAL or to CAUSE DAMAGE?

Questions in the U.S. *National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS)*, a rotating panel survey, refer to the six months that precede the interview (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2007a): “In the last 6 months, has anyone broken in or ATTEMPTED to break into your home by forcing a door or window, pushing past someone, jimmying a lock, cutting a screen, or entering through an open door or window?” Based on the answers to subsequent follow-up questions, and in line with the UCR classification, the *NCVS* distinguishes between completed burglaries (either “forcible entry” or “unlawful entry without force”) and “attempted forcible entries.”

## II. Sources of Knowledge on Burglary

What we know about residential burglary comes either from the police and other agencies in the criminal justice system, from victim accounts, or from offender accounts. In the United States, the Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) are the major source of information at the federal level collected by law enforcement agencies. These are compiled

from reports transmitted to the Federal Bureau of Investigation. In the United Kingdom, the Recorded Crime Statistics are based on crimes notified to the Home Office by police forces. Other countries collect and publish similar statistics on crime recorded to the police and other law enforcement agencies. The European Sourcebook of Crime and Criminal Justice compiles and harmonizes crime and justice data, including burglary statistics, from about 40 European countries (Aebi et al. 2006).

Before the advent of population surveys to measure criminal victimization, burglary data recorded by the police and other criminal justice agencies were the only data available to measure the size of the burglary problem. In the 1970s the criminal victimization survey was discovered as a way to measure the “dark figure” of crime not reported to or not recorded by the police and other law enforcement agencies. In the United States the *National Crime Victimization Survey* started in 1972 and was designed to serve as a benchmark for UCR statistics (Rand and Rennison 2002, p. 48). The *NCVS* is an ongoing panel survey designed to be nationally representative of households and persons age 12 and over in the United States, collected by the Census Bureau under the direction of the Bureau of Justice Statistics (Lauritsen 2005). Each year about 134,000 persons in 77,200 households are interviewed. A special methodological feature of the *NCVS* is that it employs a rotating panel design: households remain in the sample for, at most, seven interviews, a feature that affords longitudinal data, albeit over a relatively short period. Another distinctive feature is the use of the first interview as a “bounding interview” to minimize the telescoping effect, that is, the tendency of respondents to report that incidents are more recent than they actually are.

The British Crime Survey (BCS) started in 1982; subsequent sweeps were in 1984, 1988, 1992, 1994, 1996, 1998, 2000, before it moved to an annual cycle in 2001. The BCS asks adults in private households about their experience of victimization in the previous 12 months.

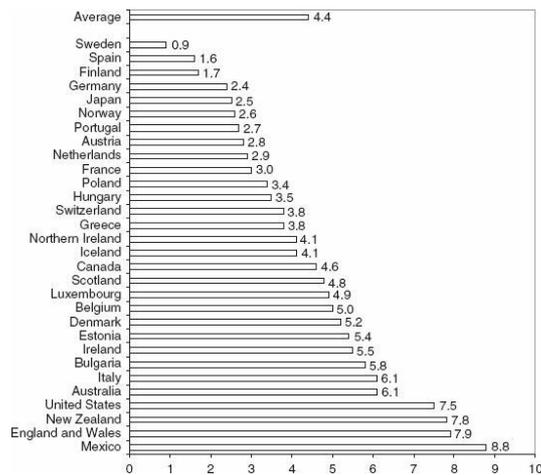
In terms of geographical coverage, the International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) is the most comprehensive of the surveys. The ICVS was started in 1987 as an initiative of a group of European criminologists to produce estimates of victimization that can be used for international comparison. There have been five main sweeps of the ICVS (1989, 1992, 1996, 2000, 2004–5). It is the only standardized victimization survey that includes respondents from a large number of countries. In the most recent sweep 38 countries were represented, of which 30 were sampled nationwide.

Offender accounts are the last source of information used to gain knowledge on burglary. Because the detection rate of burglary is universally low, offender accounts are not useful for estimating the size of the burglary problem. Rather, offender accounts help us understand why offenders burglarize and how they do it. Except for youth population surveys, such as the National Youth Survey (Elliott, Huizinga, and Ageton 1985) and the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health in the United States (Harris et al. 2003), most studies have used accounts of detained offenders (Bennett and Wright 1984; Ashton et al. 1998; Rengert and Wasilchick 2000; Palmer, Holmes, and Hollin 2002) and active offenders “out on the street” (Cromwell, Olson, and Avary 1991; Wright and Decker 1994). Nee (2003) reviews the various ways offender accounts have been used for understanding the cognitive and social processes that play a role in the commission of burglaries.

### III. Incidence, Prevalence, Trends, and Reporting to the Police

Because not all burglary victims report to the police, victimization surveys are generally seen as the best available source for estimating the size of the domestic burglary problem in quantitative terms. Three related measures have been used to determine burglary victimization quantitatively (Trickett et al. 1992; Tseloni et al. 2002). *Prevalence* is the number of burglary victims as a percentage of the population; *incidence* (or the burglary rate) is the number of burglaries per person or household; and *concentration* is the number of burglaries per victim. For example, if 10 households in a population of 100 have been burglarized, of which 5 have been burglarized twice, the prevalence is 10, the incidence is 15, and the concentration is 1.5. This distinction is potentially important because a substantial number of burglaries have been shown to be repeat burglaries of the same address within a relatively short span of time.

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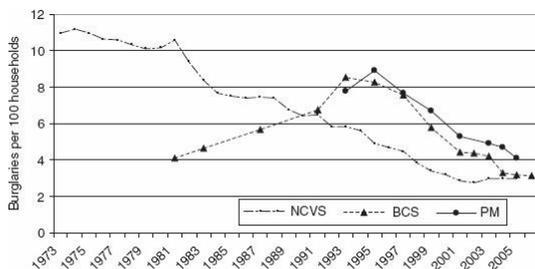
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Figure 7.1. Burglary incidence (attempted and/or completed), ICVS 2004–5.

Source: van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit 2008.

Burglary is a prevalent crime worldwide. For the industrialized countries that took part in the 2004–5 ICVS, annually there were on average 4.4 completed or attempted burglaries per 100 households (see fig. 7.1). With the exception of Mexico (8.8 burglaries per 100 households), the burglary rate tends to be highest in Anglo-Saxon countries, in particular England and Wales (7.9 percent). New Zealand (7.8), the United States (7.5), and Australia (6.1). Countries with a low burglary rate are Japan, Spain, and the northern European countries of Sweden, Finland, Norway, and Germany.

## A. The Burglary Drop around the World



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Figure 7.2. Burglary rate trends in the United States (NCVS), England and Wales (BCS), and the Netherlands (PM), 1973–2005.

Source: National Crime Victimization Survey (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2005); British Crime Survey (Nicholas, Kershaw, and Walker 2007, and previous main reports on subsequent sweeps of the British Crime Survey; see <http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/bcs1.html> for a full list); Netherlands Police Monitor (Intomart GfK 2005).

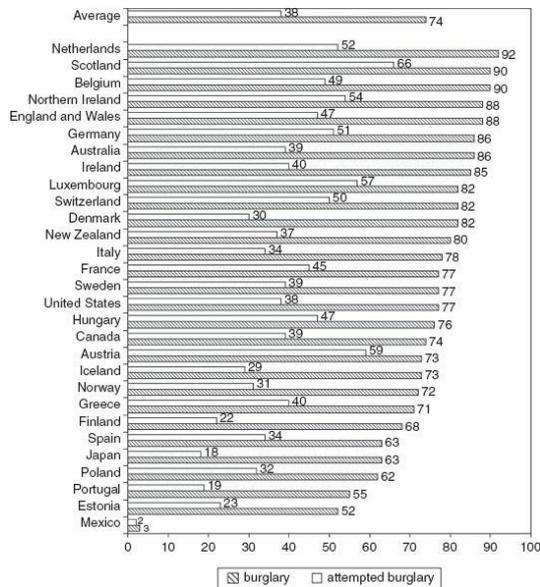
In most countries for which data are available, the ICVS shows that the incidence and prevalence of burglary have been decreasing since the early 1990s (van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit 2008, pp. 66–68). The ICVS findings on the long-term trend in burglary rates are supported by data from individual countries, such as the NCVS in the United States and the BCS in England and Wales, which may be more reliable because they are updated annually and survey a large within-country sample.

As shown in figure 7.2, according to NCVS-based estimates, the burglary rate (incidence) in the United States has been decreasing steadily, from 11 burglaries per 100 households in 1973 to fewer than 3 in 2005. In England and Wales the long-term trend since 1981 is not linear. From 1982 onward the burglary rate steadily increased until it reached a peak in the early 1990s. Thereafter, however, from 1995 to 2005, the number of burglaries dropped by 59 percent (Nicholas, Kershaw, and Walker 2007, p. 74). In the Netherlands the rate has been decreasing since 1993. In sum, there is substantial evidence for a general decline in the burglary rate in the industrialized world. It has been suggested that this continuing decrease is the consequence of the increased use of antiburglary devices and measures, such as alarm systems, locks and bolts, and improved lighting (van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit

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2008). The evidence for this claim is reviewed in the section on prevention.

## B. Reporting to the Police



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Figure 7.3. Percentage of reported burglaries (completed and attempted), ICVS 2004–5.

Source: van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit 2008.

Not all crime victims report to the police. The seriousness of an offense, in terms of durable physical injury or monetary loss or other harm, is the best predictor of whether a victim reports to the police (Goudriaan 2006). In the case of burglary, as is shown in table 7.1, victims of burglary attempts are less likely to report to the police than are victims of completed burglaries; victims

Table 7.1. Percentages of burglaries reported to the police in 2005, by offense and household characteristics

Variable	% reported
Total(average)	56.30
Burglary subcategory	
Forcible entry	74.70
Unlawful entry/without force	46.90
Attempted forcible entry	51.70
Value of loss	
\$10–\$49	37.70
\$50–\$99	27.40
\$100–\$249	38.70
\$250–\$499	48.10

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\$500–\$999	63.10
\$1,000+	85.90
Sex of head of household	
Male	54.90
Female	57.60
Property ownership	
Owned	58.40
Rented	53.20
Household annual income	
Less than \$7,500	54.40
\$7,500–\$14,999	55.90
\$15,000–\$24,999	49.60
\$25,000–\$34,999	55.80
\$35,000–\$49,999	61.00
\$50,000–\$74,999	65.30
\$75,000 or more	63.90

Source: U.S. Department of Justice 2006, tables 93a, 98, 99, 100.

of

completed burglaries are more likely to report if force was used to gain entry; and victims with (larger) monetary losses are more likely to report than those who lost nothing or little. Further, female-headed households report slightly more often than male-headed households; home owners report slightly more often than renters; but higher income groups do not systematically report more or less often than lower income households. These relationships also hold within the subcategories of forcible entry, illegal entry without force, and attempted forcible entry.

When victims are asked in retrospect about their motivations to report or not report crimes to the police, the reasons they give vary from perceived moral obligations (“crimes should be reported”) to cost-benefit considerations (“to recover property,” “to collect insurance”), but the answers are likely to be justifications after the fact (Goudriaan 2006, pp. 11–12).

Burglary reporting rates vary across countries. As figure 7.3 shows, no less than 90 percent of completed burglaries are reported in the Netherlands, Belgium, and Scotland. The difference between the reporting rates of completed and attempted burglaries is remarkably constant: in most countries covered, completed burglaries are reported about twice as often as attempted burglaries. The reporting rate in Mexico is much lower than elsewhere, a phenomenon that had been observed for many participating developing countries in prior ICVS sweeps (van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit 2008, p. 114).

## IV. Targets

Burglaries do not take place randomly. There is a pattern in the areas where offenders commit burglaries, which particular houses they target, what they steal, and from whom they steal. All of these (i.e., areas, houses, items, and victims) have been referred to as “burglary targets,” but in individual cases it may not always be clear what precisely the target of a burglary is.

The burglary target selection process has been described as a spatially structured hierarchical process (Brantingham and Brantingham 1978; Cornish and Clarke 1986), in which the offender first selects a geographic area that fits his or her purposes and subsequently targets a specific street segment and a specific property in the chosen area. Once the burglar is inside the property, the items to be stolen become the actual targets. Alternatively, in some cases burglary is a relational offense, for example, when a former husband burglarizes the home of his ex-wife for retaliation, so that the victims rather than their possessions are the real targets. In any case, it is useful to review which characteristics of areas and which characteristics of individual houses are associated with burglary risk and what items tend to be stolen.

## A. Areas

Leaving aside the global variation in burglary rates (see van Wilsem 2003; van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit 2008), it has generally been found that urbanized areas have higher burglary rates than rural areas, and that in urbanized areas inner-city neighborhoods suffer more from burglary than do suburban neighborhoods (Sampson and Groves 1989). Empirical research further consistently demonstrates that burglary rates (and crime rates generally) are elevated in deprived areas, ethnically mixed areas, and areas with high residential turnover, all measured at various levels of geographical aggregation.

The relationships between burglary risk and deprivation, ethnic heterogeneity, and residential turnover have been found to be indirect for two very different reasons. The first is that all three are associated with a lack of social control among residents (Bursik and Grasmick 1993; Sampson, Raudenbush, and Earls 1997). When social control (which is also captured in the slightly more complex concepts of social organization and social efficacy) is lacking, residents are less likely to take notice of incivilities or offenses taking place in their environment, and if they do, are less likely to intervene personally or call the police to stop it. Thus, where social control is lacking burglars run lower risks of apprehension and residents run higher risks of victimization.

The second reason is that most offenders themselves live in deprived, ethnically mixed, and unstable areas and usually offend within their own awareness spaces (Forrester, Chatterton, and Pease 1988; Wiles and Costello 2000). Thus these measures are largely synonymous to being nearby and exposed to concentrations of motivated offenders (Bernasco and Luyckx 2003). This may explain the paradox that although offenders themselves claim that they select prosperous targets (Wright and Logie 1988), the empirical evidence on actual targets is that burglary is concentrated in deprived areas.

Studies of crime surveys have shown that characteristics related to individuals and area deprivation interact with the more visibly affluent households (e.g., detached and semidetached properties as opposed to terraced properties and flats) in the most deprived areas having the highest risks of burglary victimization (Trickett, Osborn, and Ellingworth 1995; Bowers, Johnson, and Pease 2005). Apparently offenders' preferences for prosperous targets are local preferences: they prefer the most prosperous targets within the (deprived) area they are familiar with.

## B. Premises

Following the work of urban planners (Jacobs 1961; Newman 1973), other studies have focused on the role of the physical design of residential environments and burglary risk. A number of physical characteristics of residential units have been associated with burglary risk. Some of these apply to the location of the house in the urban landscape or street network or to the design of its immediate environment. Others apply to the structure of the unit itself. Proximity to major thoroughfares increases the risk, and being located in a dead-end street or cul-de-sac decreases it (Budd 1999; Hakim, Rengert, and Shachmurove 2001), possibly because the former are more and the latter are less likely to become part of many offenders' awareness spaces, although the findings are also compatible with a preference on the part of burglars for houses that allow for multiple exit routes. With respect to

the units themselves, it has been shown that properties at the corner of a street block have larger burglary risks than properties in the middle of the block, and that the burglary risk is elevated in detached and semidetached houses (as compared to terraced properties and flats), especially if they border playgrounds, woods, or other nonresidential area or if parts of the house are not visible from the street.

Three general property selection criteria have been identified (Cromwell, Olson, and Avary 1991): surveillability, occupancy, and accessibility. Surveillability indicates whether properties can be overseen by other people, obviously a risk factor for the offender. Surveillability is indicated by distance from the street, the absence of trees or hedges that block sightlines, and the absence of lighting. Occupancy is whether there are people at home; this is also a risk factor. Occupancy is indicated by the presence of noise or light in the house, a car on the driveway, toys in the garden, or the absence of unopened mail. Accessibility indicates how easy it is to break into the property. Open doors and windows are a case in point, although they might also signal occupancy. The presence of a dog and target-hardening devices such as window locks and alarm systems restrict accessibility. The evidence for their effectiveness is mixed, however, as discussed below.

### C. Victims

The lifestyles of potential victims play a major role in their victimization risk. Because to commit their offense burglars mostly depend on the times that residents are away from home, a major predictor of burglary victimization is the proportion of time a property is unoccupied, a variable that is directly related to the frequency with which residents go out in the evening and go shopping, and indirectly to the composition of the households (single-person households and single-parent families have higher risks) and age (younger households have higher risks; Tseloni et al. 2004). Renters (as opposed to home owners) and unemployed residents also have elevated burglary risks, but the reason is unlikely to be related directly to the proportion of time their houses are unoccupied.

Although the issue is not reported extensively in the literature, some results suggest that burglary is not always a crime directed against anonymous victims. In the 1998 British Crime Survey it was found that in 41 percent of the burglaries victims were able to say something about the offenders. The offender was a complete stranger to the victims in only 49 percent of these cases (Budd 1999); in other cases the offender was casually known (17 percent) or even well known (34 percent). While Budd rightly remarks that the 41 percent of cases in which the victim was able to say something about the offender is probably not representative for all burglaries, it emphasizes that burglary offenders and victims quite often know each other. In some cases, for example those in which a former spouse burglarizes his or her partner's home, it may essentially be the victim who is the burglary target.

### D. Items

If the victim is not the target of a burglary, the item to be stolen is the ultimate focus of acquisitive crime (Hearnden and Magill 2004; Wellsmith and Burrell 2005). What do burglars steal? Police records and victim surveys show that the most frequently stolen items are cash, jewelry, and portable electronic gear such as cell phones, cameras, audio and video equipment, computers, game consoles, and TVs. Most of these items would fit the CRAVED model (Clarke 1999) of "hot products," that is, products that have attractive features for thieves in general and burglars in particular. Cash is the ultimate CRAVED item.

### V. Offenders

Burglary is a covert crime. Victims are seldom confronted with the offenders and may not know who the offenders are. Our knowledge is hampered by the fact that the detection (clearance) rates of burglary tends to be low: 12.6 percent in the United States in 2006, and generally below 10 percent in cities with a population above 500,000, much like those of other covert crimes (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2007, table 45). As a consequence, our knowledge of offenders is based on interviews with those who have been arrested (Taylor and Nee 1988; Rengert and Wasilchick 2000; Palmer, Holmes, and Hollin 2002; Hearnden and Magill 2004) or sometimes on observations of and interviews with active burglars in their natural settings (Cromwell, Olson, and Avary 1991; Wright and Decker 1994).

When asked about motives or precipitating factors in the decision to commit a burglary, most offenders mention

financial need (Wright and Decker 1994). Often offenders are driven by the wish to continue a lifestyle they cannot afford without offending. In particular, the continued use of expensive drugs appears to motivate burglars (Mawby 2001, pp. 66–67). The influence of others further seems to trigger the involvement in burglaries (Bennett and Wright 1984, p. 33), and some mention boredom and a need for thrills. Burglaries tend to be committed by young males. Of the burglars arrested in the United States, 86 percent are male and half of them are younger than 22 (Federal Bureau of Investigation 2007, tables 39 and 40).

Among juvenile offenders burglary tends to be a joint activity. The major reason for this appears to be social rather than practical, as the group setting induces potential offenders for various reasons to join a risky endeavor they would not get involved in on their own (Shover and Honaker 1992; Hochstetler 2001). For practical reasons, such as the possibility of carrying stolen items and the usefulness of having one offender act as a lookout, one would expect co-offending to be common in burglary. Offender accounts, however, suggest that adult offenders are solitary burglars most of the time (Mawby 2001, pp. 69–71), although one might question whether these accounts are always valid, as interviewed burglars tend to be very reluctant to talk about their (nonarrested) accomplices.

Unlike popular images of the persistent burglar, burglary specialization is uncommon. Most offenders are highly versatile, and this appears to be true for burglars as well. There is no evidence that burglars will use violence only when they are unexpectedly confronted with victims or bystanders. Many offenders who commit burglaries also commit violent offenses.

Some authors have proposed a typology of burglars. Maguire and Bennett (1982) distinguish “high-level burglars,” “middle-level burglars,” and “low-level burglars,” a typology that is confirmed by the offense styles described by Bennett and Wright (1984, pp. 43–49), who distinguish between “planners,” “searchers,” and “opportunists,” respectively. Although their typology is basically a typology of offenses rather than of offenders, Bennett and Wright find that most offenders can be characterized by a single offense style. Opportunistic offenses occur when a burglary opportunity presents itself and is immediately, without further planning, acted upon. The decision to burglarize, the selection of the target, and the burglary itself take place with little or no time gaps in between. In the searching offense, there is a time gap between the decision to commit a burglary and the selection of a target, but not between the target selection and the act of burglary; in other words, the searcher explicitly searches for a target and attacks when it is found. A planned burglary involves time gaps both between the decision to burglarize and the target selection and between the target selection and the actual burglary; thus there is forethought and preparation before each phase. As these findings are based on accounts of arrested offenders, and because it is possible that offense styles are related to the likelihood of apprehension, it is virtually impossible to estimate how these styles are distributed in the population.

### VI. Temporal Distribution

Like all human behavior, the commission of a burglary is subject to temporal cycles, and its frequency may depend to some extent on the time of the day, the day of the week, and the season of the year. Because burglars tend to avoid confrontations with residents and prefer unoccupied targets, the exact timing of a burglary is often unknown; it is typically discovered when the residents find their place burglarized on returning home. The timing of burglaries is specified in police records using a time window that reflects when residents left their home and when they returned (Ratcliffe 2002). According to the *NCVS* (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2006, table 59), in 28 percent of the burglaries in the United States in 2005, the victims or the police had no idea what time of day the burglary was committed, although daytime burglaries (between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m.) were slightly more common (53 percent) than nighttime burglaries (47 percent) in those cases whose timing was known. In England and Wales 61 percent of burglaries occur between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. (Budd 1999, p. 19). But the patterns display much larger variations (e.g., Andresen and Jenion 2004), with the least likely burglary hours being those that most residents spend at home.

As about 30 percent of burglaries occur during the weekend, from 6 p.m. on Friday evening to 6 a.m. on Monday morning (Budd 1999, p. 19), there is little evidence for a weekly time cycle in burglaries.

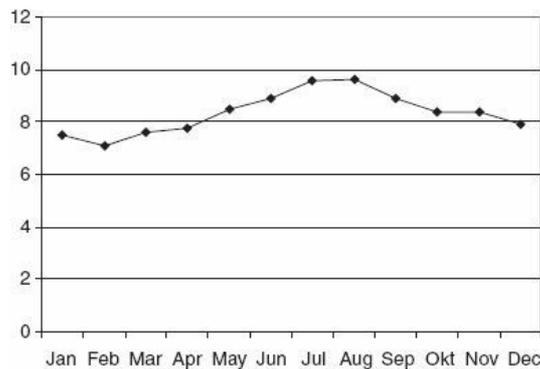


Figure 7.4. **Seasonality of U.S. burglaries, 1992–2005.**

Source: NCVS 1992–2005 concatenated incident files (U.S. Department of Justice 2005).

Like most types of crime, burglary appears to fluctuate systematically over the seasons of the year. In the United States burglary rates peak during the summer months and are below average in winter. This is shown in figure 7.4, which plots the months in which completed and attempted burglary incidents took place and which was prepared for this chapter using the NCVS concatenated incident files from 1992 to 2005 (U.S. Dept. of Justice 2007b).

Interestingly, the pattern is reversed in England and Wales, which are also in the northern hemisphere but where burglaries peak in the winter, especially December and January (Farrell and Pease 1994; Hird and Ruparel 2007).

As to the explanation of temporal cycles, in the classic study that launched routine activity theory (Cohen and Felson 1979) the authors linked crime rate trends to changing social patterns, in particular a dispersion of activities away from homes. Clearly, some, if not all, of the temporal variation in the timing of burglaries is induced by the time use of potential victims or guardians: burglaries usually take place when residents or housekeepers are away from home and sometimes when they are asleep. In addition, offenders themselves have routine activities, such as school or work, that may give rise to burglary opportunities during certain times of the day.

Another part of the (daily and seasonal) temporal variation is induced by burglars' preference to offend under the cover of darkness in order to minimize their risk of being seen and recognized and arrested. As a preference for darkness is not always compatible with a preference for unoccupied homes, burglars' preference for darkness may depend on attributes of the potential targets. For example, it was found that in daylight burglars select targets in up-market low-density residential areas where residents are employed, whereas in darkness they preferred to target dwellings in deprived high-density areas (Coupe and Blake 2006).

### VII. Repeat Victimization and Risk Communication

It has become widely recognized that crime is concentrated among relatively few victims, who are victimized repeatedly (Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garafalo 1978). Repeat burglary victimization occurs when a property is burglarized more than once within a specified period (e.g., a year). Many studies have demonstrated that previous burglary victimization is associated with an elevated risk of future burglary victimization (e.g., Johnson, Bowers, and Hirschfield 1997; Budd 1999). Repeat burglaries tend to occur swiftly (Polvi et al. 1990, 1991). Thus, the risk of revictimization is greatest immediately after the event. After a short period the risk declines rapidly until it reaches its original level. Often, revictimization takes place within days or weeks. For example, in Tallahassee, Florida, it was found that 25 percent of the repeats took place within a week and 51 percent within one month (Robinson 1998). While the data, methodologies, and outcomes differ somewhat across studies, a characteristic exponential decay in the time course of repeat burglary victimization has been confirmed in many studies (Spelman 1995; Johnson, Bowers, and Hirschfield 1997; Ratcliffe and McCullagh 1998; Townsley, Homel, and Chaseling 2000).

There are two explanations for these findings (Tseloni and Pease 2003). The first is that burglary victimization simply *flags* properties with lasting attributes that attract offenders. According to this explanation, both the initial burglary and the repeated burglary reflect the elevated risk associated with stable attributes of the target. The second mechanism is that the initial victimization *boosts* the likelihood of a repeat. Under this mechanism, the initial burglary alters something about the property or the victim that increases the risk of revictimization.

It has been argued that the temporal pattern of repeat burglaries in particular often suggests the involvement of the

same offender or offender group in both offenses (Polvi et al. 1991). Indeed, the boost explanation is compatible with the possibility that a repeat offense against the same premise involves the same offender who committed the initial offense and who returns to collect items not stolen during the initial burglary or that have been replaced since then. On the other hand, in the wake of a burglary one should expect victims to be extremely vigilant and maybe to install burglary prevention devices, which should logically decrease the risk of repeat victimization. The typical time course of repeat burglary has been viewed as supporting the boost explanation of repeat victimization. In particular, it has been viewed as tentative evidence that in a typical repeat burglary, the perpetrators are the same people who were involved in the initial event. Although the exponential decay in the time course itself is not sufficient evidence for this claim, as it may also indicate unobserved risk heterogeneity (Townesley, Homel, and Chaseling 2000; Morgan 2001; Sagovsky and Johnson 2007), there is also evidence from interviews and offender accounts that returning to a previously targeted property is a common burglar strategy, especially among prolific offenders (Ericsson 1995; Ashton et al. 1998; Palmer, Holmes, and Hollin 2002).

It has recently been shown that the elevated victimization risk after burglary applies not only to the victimized property, but that it generalizes to the immediate environment of that property. In other words, burglary victimization appears to be contagious. In the wake of a burglary properties near the victim's property run heightened burglary risks as well. The phenomenon was first established in Beenleigh, a police division near Brisbane in southeastern Queensland, Australia (Townesley, Homel, and Chaseling 2003), and Liverpool, England (Johnson and Bowers 2004; Bowers and Johnson 2005), and its ubiquity has recently been demonstrated in no fewer than 10 regions around the world (Johnson et al. 2007). Because of *modus operandi* similarity in near repeats, it has been argued that involvement of the same offenders is also likely in these cases (Bowers and Johnson 2004; Bernasco 2008). Near repeats could be displaced repeats, for example if an offender returns to a previously burglarized property but finds it well secured and subsequently targets an alternative nearby property.

### VIII. Prevention

What preventive measures have been taken to reduce burglary, and what do we know about their effectiveness? Burglary prevention is not typically concerned with changing the attitudes of offenders, partly because efforts to change the delinquent attitudes and behavior of burglars cannot be very specific, as offenders are quite versatile. Another reason is that the burglary detection rate is so low that only a small minority is ever arrested and eligible for rehabilitation (Coupe and Griffiths 1996). Increases in the burglary detection rate may decrease the number of burglaries, as increased detection will translate into burglary's being perceived as a much more risky crime for offenders than before. Thus, although improving burglary detection cannot prevent the burglary that has been detected, it may deter the same and other offenders from committing future burglaries. In this respect, new developments in DNA profiling are promising, as DNA is most helpful in crimes that are the most difficult to detect. Although DNA samples currently make a relatively small contribution to all detections, they make a powerful contribution to those cases in which they are available (U.K. Home Office 2005).

Most conventional preventive measures against burglary can be categorized as situational crime prevention, that is, measures directed to change the immediate situation in which a burglary could potentially occur. Situational measures against burglary can be taken at various levels. First, target-hardening measures can be taken at the level of the individual property. Data on target-hardening measures of individual properties in the ICVS demonstrate that the penetration of burglar alarms and special door locks is higher in Anglo-American countries (England and Wales, Australia, United States, Canada, Scotland, Northern Ireland) than in Europe and Japan, and that it is higher in England and Wales than anywhere else (van Dijk, van Kesteren, and Smit 2008, pp. 135–39). Typically, at country level the dissemination of target-hardening devices is more or less proportional to the burglary rate. For example, England and Wales and Australia have the highest burglary rates and the highest levels of installed target-hardening devices. The most likely explanation of this finding is that citizens respond to high burglary rates by trying to defend themselves against burglaries.

According to findings from the British Crime Survey, a considerable number of British householders have installed devices that strengthen the physical barriers against unlawful entry to their property, such as double locks or deadlocks (76 percent), window locks (80 percent), and security chains on doors (32 percent). Further, many have taken measures that draw attention to illegal entries, such as outdoor (40 percent) or indoor (24 percent) sensor or timer lights and burglar alarm systems (29 percent). These home security measures might appear to be a

key defense against burglary victimization. Households with no home security measures were almost 10 times more likely to have been burgled as households where there were simple security measures such as deadlocks on doors and window locks. Alarm systems only weakly differentiate between victimized and non-victimized households. That simple security measures such as locks help to keep burglars out is also suggested by the fact that victimized households that experienced an attempted burglary were more likely to have double locks or deadlocks than those where entry was gained (Nicholas, Kershaw, and Walker 2007, p. 76). This is not the case with respect to alarm systems: an equal percentage of victims of completed burglaries and victims of attempted burglaries has an alarm system. If alarms are not effective this might be due to the frequency of false alarm activations. LeBeau and Vincent (1997) found that 98 percent of alarm activations in Charlotte, North Carolina, were false alarms.

The simple negative correlations between target-hardening measures and burglary risk may be spurious and may indicate that low-risk households (e.g., home owners, high-income groups) invest more in burglary prevention than do high-risk households, for reasons not directly related to the actual or perceived burglary risk (e.g., because the rich can better afford antiburglary devices or because home owners can expect longer term benefits).

Some target-hardening measures apply to larger entities than individual premises. Alley-gating, for example, is a measure that prevents unauthorized entry from the rear of properties of a block of houses; it is a target-hardening measure that has been shown to be successful (for an overview, see Armitage and Smithson 2007).

There is probably no government in the world that has invested as much in reducing burglary as England and Wales, starting with the Safer Cities project in 1988 and more specifically with the Reducing Burglary Initiative that started in 1999. As most of these initiatives are being constantly evaluated (many of them applying quasi-experimental designs with control groups and pre-intervention and postintervention measurements), this has also generated a host of information on the effectiveness of various prevention methods.

A comprehensive evaluation of nearly 300 antiburglary schemes in England and Wales (Ekblom, Law, and Sutton 1996, p. 41) found that a combination of target-hardening and community-oriented action (such as fostering Neighborhood Watch, property marking, raising burglary awareness among residents) worked best, but that target hardening could also work alone. This is in line with other research on target-hardening interventions, which has concluded that whole-area target hardening can reduce local burglary rates in the short term if continuous publicity is heard or viewed by prospective offenders (Tilley and Webb 1994, p. 26).

Independently of the prevention tactic chosen, publicity appears to increase the effects of prevention schemes (Bowers and Johnson 2003). Apparently this works because it informs and deters potential offenders from burgling in the area, although publicity may also sensitize potential victims and increase their vigilance. When publicity precedes the implementation it often reduces burglary in the period before the actual intervention (this may actually undermine the proper evaluation of the effect of the intervention itself, however). It may also reduce crime in a larger geographic area than where the intervention is implemented, and it may prolong the benefits of the intervention.

At a very general level, the largest burglary reductions are to be obtained by focusing on the areas or on the victims with the highest burglary risks. This may be the main reason for the success of schemes that have been inspired by the concept of repeat victimization. The prevention of repeat burglary victimization by varying means has received a great deal of success and attention in England, where the Kirkholt project and the Huddersfield project (Anderson, Chenery, and Pease 1995; Chenery, Holt, and Pease 1997) resulted in substantial burglary reductions through multitactic interventions. The success may not have been caused by any specific method of intervention, but by addressing a very high risk population who was recently victimized and thus sensitive to and aware of the emotional and material consequences.

### **IX. Conclusion**

Although there has been a lot of continuity in the literature since Shover's (1991) review, some important developments may be highlighted. The first is the worldwide drop in burglary. The debate on the causes of the drop is ongoing, but the drop itself cannot be mistaken.

The second development concerns the nature and comprehensiveness of information on burglary. In 1991 the *National Crime Victimization Survey* had been under way in the United States for nearly 20 years; the British Crime Survey had just started in 1982 and did not yet follow an annual cycle; and the International Crime Victimization Survey gained momentum only during the 1990s. Similar developments can be observed with respect to police-reported burglary. In the United States the Uniform Crime Reports have been reported for decades, yet many other countries have lagged behind. The European Sourcebook is an example of a new initiative to collect and standardize information from various countries and to stimulate international comparison. It is also noteworthy that just after publication of Shover's essay some innovative studies were taken up to study offender accounts of burglary. In addition to the more conventional strategy of interviewing convicted burglars in prison (Rengert and Wasilchick 2000), some researchers studied target selection processes by taking arrested burglars back to places they had burglarized and having them reflect on the choices they made (Cromwell, Olson, and Avary 1991); others went as far as to interview active burglars out on the streets (Wright and Decker 1994).

A third development to be highlighted since Shover's essay is that much more is known about the large percentage of burglaries that are repeat victimizations. The success of the repeat burglary prevention programs in the United Kingdom has shown that repeats can be prevented, thereby reducing overall burglary rates substantially. An emerging line of research generalizes repeat victimization by showing that risk of revictimization can be communicated to nearby dwellings.

By way of a tentative agenda for research in the next decade, a few issues deserve to be studied in greater detail. One issue is the offender-victim nexus. It has been demonstrated repeatedly that offenders are disproportionately likely to be crime victims themselves, (Lauritsen and Laub 2007); another question is whether offenders and victims in the same incident are strangers to each other. Although the issue has not been studied extensively, a finding from the 1998 British Crime Survey (Budd 1999) indicates that quite often victims have an idea of who the offenders are. Ethnographic research shows that offenders quite often know who their victims are, as they tend to select them from a pool of acquaintances (Wright and Decker 1994; Hearnden and Magill 2004).

A second issue is the effectiveness of situational crime prevention measures. Although it has been argued that surveys demonstrate strong negative correlations between target-hardening and burglary risk, and although trend analyses show that increasing levels of burglary prevention devices are aligned with decreasing burglary rates, the evidence has not always been compelling, and the findings stand in strong contrast to the accounts of offenders, who generally emphasize that target-hardening measures play a minor role in the selection of dwellings.

The detection of burglary should be a third research priority. Worldwide the detection rate of burglary is low and a concern to the police. Possibilities for burglary detection offered by contemporary detection methods and tools (such as DNA matching, CCTV surveillance) have not yet been systematically investigated. The low burglary detection rate should also concern investigators who base their findings on police data or on accounts of arrested burglars. If fewer than 10 percent of the burglaries are detected, is there any guarantee that those arrested are representative of the total burglar population? DNA databases may help to solve this puzzle, not by increasing the detection rate but by providing evidence of the behavioral patterns (geographic, temporal, modus operandi) of those offenders who have never been arrested but whose DNA stains have been left at multiple burglary scenes. If the behavioral patterns of these burglars resemble those of arrested offenders, it would increase confidence in present findings based on arrested offenders only.

With respect to research methodologies, priority should be given to ethnographic research along lines set out by Richard Wright and his colleagues. They have shown not only that field research among offenders "in the wild" can provide important data and insights, but also that investments in such research can be translated into academic achievements and recognition.

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### **Wim Bernasco**

Wim Bernasco is Senior Researcher at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement.

