

Conclusions - Reducing burglary: Summing up

Chapter 10:

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Reducing burglary: Summing up

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Abstract

This book presented original and innovative research which has direct practical and policy implications for burglary security. The concluding chapter provides a synthesis of the research evidence discussed in the previous chapters addressing three broad themes: burglary trends and patterns; which security devices work and how; and burglary prevention lessons. The chapter ends with suggestions for future research.

Keywords: Burglary; Crime drop; Evidence-based prevention; Security; Practice-embedded research

Domestic burglary has fallen substantially over the last 20 years in many countries but remains a high-volume crime affecting many households. As well as financial loss and damage to property, the psychological impact of a burglary can be considerable (Dinisman and Moroz 2017). For this reason, burglary consistently ranks as a top public concern in relation to crime and disorder and is likely to remain an important area of crime prevention.

This book has reported a range of original research that speaks to physical security measures that are installed with the aim of reducing risks of domestic burglary. The book sheds new light on the impact that physical security has on burglars' decision-making processes as well as burglary patterns and trends which directly inform burglary prevention. This last chapter collates the main points made in this book into three sections:

- Burglary trends and patterns (Section 10.1)
- Which security devices work and how? (Section 10.2)
- Burglary prevention lessons (Section 10.3).

The chapter summarises the main lessons that emerge from the research we have undertaken, alongside other cognate work that also speaks to the patterns of impact that security measures have had, and can be expected to continue to have in the future, on domestic burglary. In each case we flag the major points in this book where the relevant arguments and research findings are described in detail. In a few cases, where the research reported here does not address key issues in any detail, we cite other research the interested reader might like to consult.

Most of the points overviewed below relate to research findings on which we can have some confidence. We also note the major data sources that can be used in analysing overall burglary patterns, highlight areas where there is urgent need for specific areas of future research, and

spell out some important policy and practice implications if the welcome reductions in burglary widely observed over the past quarter century in many countries are to be maintained and extended.

Readers need to bear in mind that the data analysed in most of the original research reported here relate to England and Wales in particular, albeit that one chapter focuses specifically on France. We would certainly hope that the findings we report would apply also in other jurisdictions, although of course we cannot be certain.

10.1 Burglary trends and patterns

Against expectations, dramatic falls in many crimes, including burglary, have been witnessed across many countries since the mid-1990s, generally referred to as the ‘crime drop’ (Tseloni et al. 2010). Burglary trends and patterns such as this have been best understood with the use of victimisation surveys that overcome many of the weaknesses in recorded crime data. They often include supplementary questions that can help in the identification and analysis of patterns and trends (Chapter 1). The (international and across crime types) reach, timing and trajectory of the crime falls (Tseloni et al. 2010) imply that “...changes in the quantity and quality of security have played a major part in driving crime falls in most industrial societies” (Farrell et al. 2011, p. 151). This book provides further evidence in support of this hypothesis in relation to burglary.

Two national crime surveys, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW) and the French Cadre de Vie et Sécurité (CVS), have been used in this book (Chapters 1, 4, 5, 7 and 8). Through this data, we find that burglaries are not uniformly distributed: some households, neighbourhoods, regions and countries are more affected than others. Both the fall in burglary

and the uptake of security was uneven across population groups and area types. Burglary became more concentrated against households which are less likely to have the most effective security combination (window locks, internal lights on a timer, door locks and external lights on a sensor – WIDE). The gap between households who do and do not have WIDE has widened over time meaning certain groups have not felt the positive impact of the national drop in burglary (Chapter 5).

Part of the drop in levels of burglary was a consequence of physical security improvements that have not been systematically documented over the period and therefore cannot be directly measured alongside burglary falls (Chapter 8). These include, for example, security improvements and increased surveillance in public spaces of residential neighbourhoods (Chapter 2); modern building standards for new housing developments which incorporate high quality windows, doors and frames originally for conserving heating energy, also to comply with SBD standards (Chapter 3); and similar improvements to the existing housing stock undertaken by home owners and landlords. The evidence on the security hypothesis for the burglary fall in this book refers to one jurisdiction, England and Wales. Similar proliferation of physical security and CPTED policies occurred across many industrialised countries¹

10.2 Which security devices work and how?

Burglars' accounts on the deterrent role of physical security and surveillance (Chapter 3) are in full agreement with the kinds of interventions that made burglary prevention projects successful (Chapter 2). Burglars target properties with low natural surveillance, easy access

¹ Please see evidence for the Netherlands by Vollaard and Van Ours (2011) and De Waard (2015) and for Chile by Ojeda (2015).

and escape routes and poor physical security in locations which seemingly lack community spirit (Chapter 3). This book presents new research evidence in relation to physical security, and in particular how this plays out in different community conditions (Chapters 4 to 8). Physical security is the most straightforward housing feature to be investigated not least because of data availability – the CSEW in England and Wales and the CVS in France. The type and prevalence of devices partly differs across countries and in France physical security features also differ between houses and apartments (Chapter 7)².

Burglars can assess the quality and robustness of doors, windows, their locks and other physical security features, including type and brand of burglar alarms. In addition, the evidence presented in this book suggests they are not deterred by most burglar alarms and perceive excessive visual security, such as gated developments and window grills, as an indication of high-value possessions (Chapter 3). They may therefore find properties with these specific devices attractive. The most effective device combination (in terms of both protection, safety *and* cost) in England and Wales was window locks; internal lights on a timer; double door locks or deadlocks; and external lights on a sensor. This is captured in the acronym, ‘WIDE’ (Chapter 4). Window and double door locks formed the basis of all effective security combinations highlighting the importance of restricting access through the use of good quality windows and doors as well as simulating occupancy and increasing surveillance potential through security lighting.

In France security doors (alone) offer the second highest (after alarms) protection against burglary with entry for houses (Chapter 7). Digital locks (alone) offer the highest protection

² The most prominent were digital locks and caretakers which are more common in French apartments (than houses and hardly exist in the UK).

for apartments. The most effective combination for both housing types includes alarms, digital locks and security doors (Chapter 7).

The evidence from burglars' accounts (Chapter 3) and from previous research (e.g., Cromwell and Olson 2009) suggest that burglary is a process of distinct hurdles and decisions. The entire sequence of these decisions was introduced and tested in Chapter 7 of this book as follows:

1. Selection of neighbourhood (Chapters 5 and 7);
2. Selection of a property (Chapters 4, 5 and 7);
3. Burglary with entry (Chapters 4 and 7); and finally
4. Property stolen (Chapter 7).

It is proposed burglars assess the situation at each stage of the above and accordingly move to the next stage or abandon the process. There are 'transition points' between each stage – to move from one to the next, a burglar must not be (a) deterred (i.e. discouraged from selecting the property); (b) thwarted (i.e. physically prevented from entering); or (c) interrupted (i.e., leave the house without having taken anything) (Chapters 4 and 7). Different security devices have distinctive 'deter' or 'thwart' mechanisms highlighting the importance of considering different 'security packages' and their relative effectiveness in order to provide more accurate crime prevention advice (Chapter 4).

The most intriguing findings of this book were in relation to burglar alarms which according to burglars, with one exception, do not deter them (Chapter 3). Burglar alarms alone increase the risk of both burglary with entry and attempted burglary and, in combination with other devices, reduce the overall level of protection against burglary with entry in England and Wales (Chapters 4 and 8). The increased risk of attempted burglary associated with alarms is also

supported by evidence from France: an offender may try and fail to enter a property due to being disrupted by the sound of a burglar alarm or someone responding to the alarm (Chapters 4 and 7). However, the evidence from France with regard to burglary with entry partly contradicts what was found for England and Wales. In France alarms (alone and in combination) are effective in preventing burglaries against houses but alone do not protect apartments (Chapter 7)³. There might be a proliferation of burglar alarms in England and Wales partly fuelled by their low cost and, consequently, low quality products which may often sound due to faulty technical problems rather than to alert about break-ins. They can also be perceived as a nuisance and thus be ignored by neighbours and passersby (see Tilley et al. 2015; Chapters 4 and 8).

Weak community relations might play a role in alarms' ineffectiveness as suggested from the evidence in relation to French apartments: unlike houses, apartment blocks do not encourage meaningful social interactions and neighbours may be indifferent or reluctant to respond when alarms go off. Households in urban areas have consistently higher burglary risk and greater levels of effective physical security than others (Chapter 5). Conversely, households in rural areas are generally less likely to have effective security but have sustained low exposure to burglary (Chapters 5 and 7). Environmental factors, such as living in an urban area, with high population density and high crime levels (which may affect burglars' familiarity and accessibility) have a stronger effect than physical security when targeting properties (Chapter 7).

³ As 85 percent of households in England and Wales live in houses the contradictory finding in relation to this type of housing between the two countries is not a statistical artefact.

A further factor that may limit the effectiveness of physical security is target attractiveness (Chapters 3, 5 and 7). Houses and apartments over 100m² in France are more targeted than smaller ones and so are wealthy houses (independently of size) (Chapter 7). Similarly, (over the crime drop) in England and Wales affluent households had the highest security increases without necessarily the highest burglary drops – which were actually enjoyed by middle-income households, earning £20,000-£29,999 per annum (Chapter 5). The above evidence tells us how and under which conditions physical security works to prevent burglary. The next question is how this evidence can be used for burglary prevention by householders, landlords, and the public, voluntary and private sectors in their policies, guidelines and regulations.

10.3 Burglary prevention lessons

Domestic burglary is a high-volume crime, which can cause substantial distress to its victims. As a result of its high volume and impact, preventing domestic burglary has been a sustained focus of policy attention. The research reported in this book takes us beyond current theoretical knowledge as well as being transferable to burglary prevention in practice. It provides insights about measures that householders and landlords can take to protect their homes and properties.

With respect to community protection, the research findings reported in this book can be translated into practical advice about specific interventions the police, Police and Crime Commissioners, crime and safety partnerships, victim support organisations, Neighbourhood Watch, the Home Office and other responsible agencies can implement to reduce burglary rates in their jurisdiction. Burglary levels can be reduced efficiently and effectively by prompt improvement to the security of dwellings where burglaries have taken place and the dwellings close to them. The use of WIDE security measures focused on burgled premises, and those

nearby, has produced promising burglary reduction outcomes without displacement of burglary risks to nearby neighbourhoods in a demonstration project in Nottingham (Chapter 6).

The findings also have practical implications for the private sector: insurance companies, the security industry, the building and planning sector and government bodies that oversee and/or regulate their activities. Burglar alarms do not necessarily deter burglars (Chapters 3, 4, 7 and 8) – the industry can clearly either re-think their approach to alarms (and their design) or become outdated. Home insurers' requirements that homes should be equipped with doors and windows that lock with a key and a fully operating alarm for cover eligibility are partly contested by the book's findings. Without further insights on specifications and contexts within which alarms fulfil their role, insurers' policies are responsible for potentially misleading the public into a false sense of security.

The enduring high burglary risks to specific households which are unlikely to acquire effective physical security (Chapter 5) has implications for the way crime prevention agencies respond to victims. It also has implications for housing policy and the use of grants for security upgrades to those most in need. Protecting the most vulnerable households, by offering effective physical security upgrades in the first place, brings down overall burglary rates. As burglary has fallen substantially, its prevention is now easier than it was two decades ago, precisely because it has become highly concentrated on a small number of household types (Chapters 1, 5 and 8). Physical security combinations that effectively deter burglars directly speak to social housing standards for Local Authorities and Housing Associations as well as licensing policies for rented accommodation, HMOs and student landlords (Chapters 4 and 7).

Physical security alone is not always enough to deter burglars, as demonstrated in the case of households living in urban areas (Chapters 5 and 7). ‘Design Against Crime’ emerged as a practical and effective programme for crime prevention based on Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design (CPTED). It has comprised a major framework for designing and delivering crime prevention into new developments or making changes to existing ones to reduce the risk of burglary, especially between 1998 and 2011. After 2011, however, SBD planning and building requirements have become localised despite evidence that new or refurbished developments with SBD standards have lower household crime rates, including repeats (Chapter 3). SBD needs national implementation if new developments are not to risk high rates of burglary.

Central (and local) government could regulate or provide incentives encouraging the nationwide adoption of SBD standards, combining physical security with ample informal surveillance opportunities, for planning and building new or renewing existing housing (Chapters 3, 4 and 7). Surveillance opportunities need not be solely based on the physical layout, architecture and landscaping of houses and their surroundings, but also enlist community support elements (Chapter 2). Burglars can adapt and so should prevention. In order to succeed, interventions require residents’ buy in and effective collaboration between practitioners and academic researchers on equal footing (Chapters 2 and 9).

10.5 Future opportunities

The evidence presented in this book advanced our understanding of which, how and when security works to deter burglars. However, there is still a lot we do not know. This last subsection attempts to identify gaps in knowledge and potential avenues for future research and to outline the information/data this work would require. Indeed, a prerequisite for the

success (and initial step) of any form of intervention is gathering information about the problem in hand and the areas and people most affected (Chapter 2). Keeping good records of interventions and outcomes facilitates constructive evaluations of what worked and what did not and the conditions needed for the measures to work. Findings can then inform decisions about what measures to replicate and where to try them in the future (Chapters 2 and 6).

The findings reported in this book contribute new cross-national understanding of the preventive strength of specific security devices and their combinations. A major limitation however is that the number and type of security devices examined is constrained by available data. The CSEW could usefully ask *both the entire sample and, at the time of the incident, burglary victims* questions about the presence of a wider range of security devices (including dogs, Chapter 7) to allow their effectiveness to be tested. Additional questions (some of which have already been adopted in the CSEW as a result of this research) include whether the security devices (for example, burglar alarms) were activated at the time of the burglary for victims and for the entire sample how often/when they are activated. Such knowledge could subsequently inform security investments and help produce further falls in burglary. We suggest that other national (for example, the National Crime Victimization Survey in the USA) and international (notably the International Crime Victims Survey) crime surveys follow the structure of the CSEW questionnaires on (a) crime security and prevention and (b) detailed information about the reported crime and modus operandi to inform similar analyses elsewhere with potential policy impacts.

The role informal surveillance and physical security plays at the different stages of burglars' decision-making during the commission of this crime is the natural extension of the research discussed in this book. This avenue of enquiry again necessitates large sample sizes in order to

examine single devices and combinations. It also requires contextual information about the neighbourhoods of respondents which can be gauged from the Census and other surveys offering possibilities for data linkage and hierarchical and/or hurdle modelling methodology⁴ (McLachlan and Peel 2000; Mullahy 1986; Osborn et al. 1996).

Future applied research that promises relevance to the prevention of burglary in practice will require close collaboration from those in policy and practice alongside those in academe. The challenges in achieving this are substantial (Chapter 9). For example, the findings on alarms warrant further research to better understand their potential effects which offer one opportunity for industry-academic collaboration. Another avenue for advancing knowledge in the burglary prevention field is close collaboration across the public, voluntary and academic research sectors. For example, in order to build a sound knowledge base, delivering and evaluating the impact of crime reduction initiatives requires (time and/or financial) commitment, regular, tailored and accessible communication and the development of trusting, mutually beneficial collaborative arrangements between national and local government, practitioners, data providers and academic researchers (Chapters 2, 6 and 9).

⁴ Apart from a conference presentation mentioned in Chapter 5 (Tseloni 2011), to date such analyses have tested the effects of routine activities and social disorganisation on burglary victimisation but have not specifically examined the independent effects of particular security devices and their combinations (Tseloni 2006).

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