

Edith Cowan University
Research Online

ECU Publications Post 2013

1-1-2014

The 'Oldest Tricks In The Book' Do Not Work! Reports Of Burglary By DUMA Detainees In Western Australia

Natalie J. Gately

Edith Cowan University, n.gately@ecu.edu.au

Jennifer Fleming

Nathalie McGinty

Anthony M. Scott

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworkspost2013>

 Part of the [Law Commons](#)

This is an Author's Accepted Manuscript of: Gately, N. J., Fleming, J., McGinty, N., & Scott, A. M. (2014). The 'oldest tricks in the book' do not work! Reports of burglary by DUMA detainees in Western Australia. *Trends and Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice*, 489(2014), 1-8. Available [here](#)

This Journal Article is posted at Research Online.

<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ecuworkspost2013/671>

Trends & issues

in crime and criminal justice



Australian Government
Australian Institute of Criminology

No. 489 October 2014

Foreword | *Research investigating the methods and motivations of burglars has typically focused on incarcerated offenders. The Australian Institute of Criminology's Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) program provided an opportunity for the authors to explore the methods and motivations of those actively involved in committing burglaries, whether or not they had actually been caught or detained for that offence.*

The findings support Routine Activity Theory, indicating that offenders consider a number of factors in determining whether a property will be targeted for a break and enter offence. As might be expected, opportunistic burglars choose easy to access properties, stay a minimum length of time and take goods that can be disposed of easily. It was concluded that simple prevention strategies could minimise the risk of becoming a victim of opportunistic burglary, which also has implications for law enforcement, the security industry and insurance agencies.

Adam Tomison
Director

The 'oldest tricks in the book' don't work! Reports of burglary by DUMA detainees in Western Australia

Natalie Gately, Jennifer Fleming, Nathalie McGinty and Anthony Scott

Break and enter crimes are associated with many costs. A substantial amount of police resources are involved in investigating and apprehending burglars (Cummings 2005), and there are financial implications to both to the homeowner and the insurance industry (Shover 1991). There are also associated costs to the justice system with regards to court and community management, and incarceration for convicted offenders. Furthermore, the social costs of the intrusion into private homes can significantly impact the psychological health, wellbeing and perceived safety of victims and the wider community (Thornton, Walker & Erol 2003; Waller 1984). Statistics indicate that individuals are more likely to be the victim of theft or burglary within their homes than any other type of crime (AIC 2012; WAPol nda). Break and enter crimes are therefore one of the most common and far reaching forms of criminality in Australia. In approximately 20 percent of burglary cases, the psychological trauma experienced is extensive (Waller 1984) due to the violation of, and intrusion into, the victim's private territory (Brown & Harris 1989), particularly for women who reside alone (Shover 1991). Victims report a new sense of vulnerability as the burglary violates their perception of personal security (Beaton et al. 2000). In addition, significant distress can result from the loss of sentimental and irreplaceable items (Beaton et al. 2000).

Burglary contains two main elements—break and enter, and stealing. Although the exact definition of burglary varies between states, in Australia burglary is

...any offence involving unlawfully entering a house or other building to steal property, usually at night; the statutory offence of entering a building as a trespasser (or without consent of the owner) with the intent to steal anything in the building or (depending on the jurisdiction to commit some other offence in the building) (Butt 2004: 58).

For simplicity, the generic term of **burglary** will be used in this paper, which encompasses all of these circumstances.

Existing literature and police strategies recommend many preventative measures to reduce the chances of being burgled. However, while the rates have decreased over the long term, overall occurrences of burglary remain high. Therefore, given its prevalence, it is important to understand how burglary is typically carried out. Research conducted to date has generally focused on convicted offenders rather than on 'active' burglars who are yet to be apprehended (Newburn 2013). Furthermore, the offences of convicted burglars may have included some element of aggravation or violence that has led to a prison sentence. Therefore, investigating the attitudes and behaviours of active burglars represents a fresh approach and arguably offers a new perspective.

A study of 50 ex-burglars by UK home security firm Friedland, and supported by the local Crimestoppers, revealed that households with no visible security take as little as two minutes to break into, with the average home burglary taking just over 10 minutes to commit (Friedman Home Security 2011). The ex-burglars revealed that a simple home alarm system would have deterred the break-in. Furthermore, simple Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design measures such as cutting back trees and bushes, and removing potential hiding places were all found to be good deterrents and are similar to suggestions forwarded as part of research conducted decades ago by Maguire (1982), and Bennett and Wright (1984).

The report also revealed the top four most common mistakes made by homeowners were leaving windows open, leaving valuables in view, hiding keys by doorways and leaving out parcels/mail (Friedman Home Security 2011). The study additionally found that 78 percent of ex-burglars strongly believed that existing thieves utilised social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter to get status updates and target homes for burglary. Nearly three-quarters stated that in their 'expert' opinion, Google Street View was playing a role in contemporary home thefts, allowing thieves

to 'scope out' properties from the comfort of their own homes.

Hearndon and Magill (2004) interviewed 82 convicted burglars in southern England about their decisions to plan and undertake domestic burglary. Three-quarters were in custody at the time of the interview, with 11 on post-prison release. The most common reasons cited for burgling homes was the influence of friends, the need to fund drug use and boredom (Hearndon & Magill 2004). While some planned the burglary and others reported it as spontaneous, the majority had an intention to burgle but did not decide which property and method until later (Hearndon & Magill 2004). The most frequently cited reason that attracted burglars to properties was the perceived likelihood of finding high-value goods (Hearndon & Magill 2004). Neither Bennett and Wright (1994) nor Hearndon and Magill (2004) captured the views of 'active' burglars.

Burglary rates

The International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) gathers data to draw an international comparison on criminal victimisation (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren & Smit 2007). Of the 30 countries surveyed, Australia had the fifth highest rate of household burglary. The ICVS also collects international data in relation to perceived burglary probability. The findings indicated that over a third (36%) of Australians believed it would be very likely that they would be burgled within the next 12 months. This placed Australia as the sixth highest nation for perceived potential victimisation (Van Kijk, Van Kesteren & Smit 2007).

Nationally, household burglary is one of the most widespread crimes in Australia, with the Australian Institute of Criminology reporting over 335,700 break-ins nationwide during 2009–10. In 2011, 26,622 dwelling burglaries and 8,922 non-dwelling burglaries were reported to WA Police in the Perth metropolitan area. A further 5,183 dwelling and 2,659 non-dwelling burglaries were reported in regional locations (WAPol nda). These figures indicate a total of 43,386 burglary incidents reported in 12 months

and WA Police statistics reveal a steady incline in both burglary and specifically dwelling burglary over the past five years (WAPol ndb).

International, national and state-level statistics not only indicate a high rate of burglary, but also the expectation of Australians of the likelihood of being burgled (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren & Smit 2007). Yet, despite being one of the most common crimes, there is currently limited Australian research that has examined the incentives that attract burglars to certain types of dwellings, or that has identified factors that deter thieves.

Present study

The Drug Use Monitoring in Australia (DUMA) project has been collecting data on drug use and crime through quarterly surveys with police detainees since 1999 (Makkai 1999). The project offers a unique opportunity to identify relationships and analyse patterns of illicit drug use and crime in Australia over time. It also provides the opportunity to survey detainees about emerging or ongoing crime issues in the form of addenda to the existing DUMA questionnaire. The quarterly collections allow a snapshot of information on current issues deemed important by local stakeholders to be collected.

Discussions with the Western Australia Police Community Engagement Division identified a need to develop an addendum to examine the behaviours and patterns of 'active' burglars. The addendum was designed to provide information on the planning processes, the disposal of property methods and the decision-making factors that burglars use to determine whether a property is vulnerable and worth breaking into. The knowledge obtained from this addendum is a preliminary step in identifying what makes a home or building a prime target for thieves and can be used to design more comprehensive research to examine the habits of burglars on an ongoing basis and in more detail. Given the high prevalence of burglary crimes in Australia, research enables crime-reduction strategies to be designed and employed.

Figure 1 Reasons for targeting a premises (%)

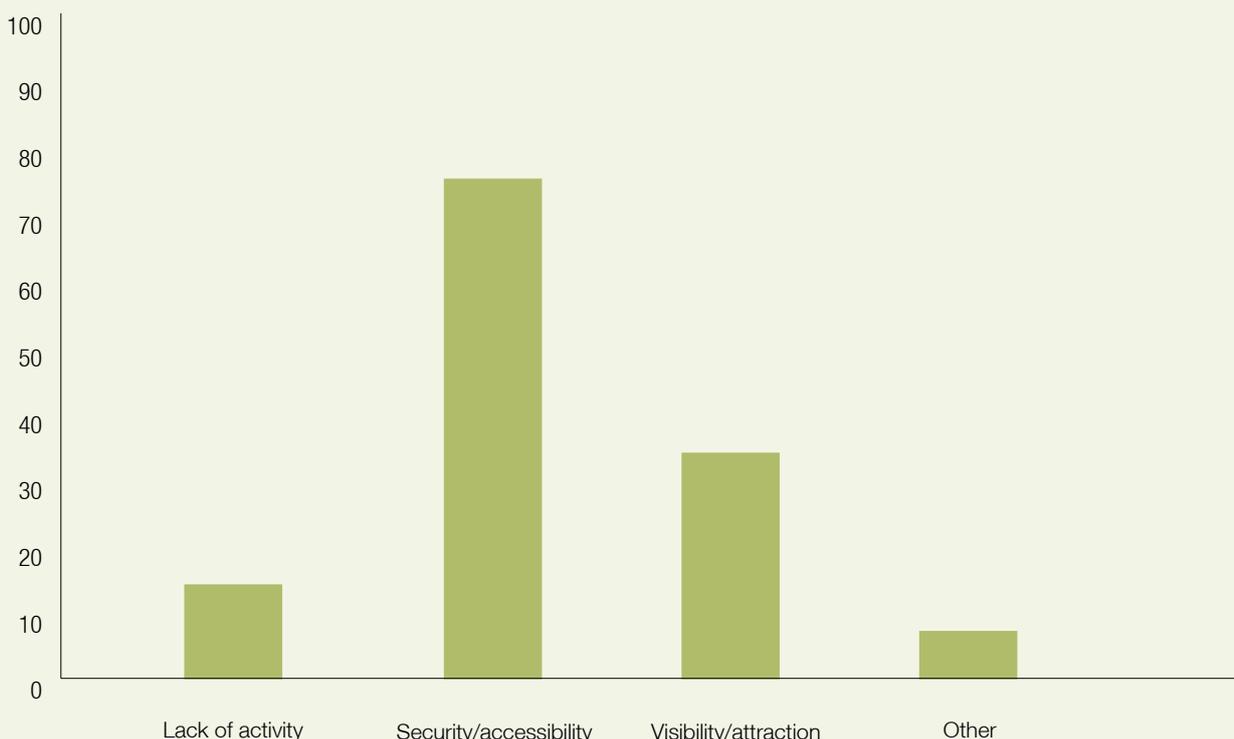


Table 1 Police detainees reported value of goods stolen in a 'typical' burglary (n=65)

Value	n ^a	%
\$0	8	12.3
\$<100	6	9.2
\$101–500	13	20.0
\$501–1,000	11	16.9
\$1,001–5,000	10	15.4
>\$5,000	5	7.7
Do not recall	7	10.8
Refused	5	7.7

a: Only 65 of the 69 detainees responses are included here as 4 detainees stated they did not break into properties to steal anything, but for some other reason etc to sleep

Specifically, the research questions that guided the design of the July–August 2012 DUMA addendum were:

- How do burglars plan and target homes for burglary?
- What timeframe is used in the commission of burglary?
- What is the usual value of goods stolen and how are they offloaded?
- What do burglars perceive as the most common mistakes property owners make that facilitate burglary?

Methodology

Procedure

Police detainees were administered the burglary addendum at the completion of the DUMA core questionnaire during quarter three (July–August) 2012. This approach is unique as detainees were asked to report on burglary activities regardless of the crime they were currently being detained for and therefore, the sample captured active offenders who had not yet been apprehended for their burglary offences.

Survey

The data analysed in this project were obtained from the core DUMA questionnaire and the WA burglary addendum. Information from the core survey included current offences and self-reported demographic information.

Sample

Overall, a total of 228 detainees were interviewed and of these, 168 (73.7%) were asked the screening questions regarding their knowledge of current burglary activity.

To gain a broader sample of burglars, the detainees were asked 'if they had committed a burglary offence in the past 12 months, regardless of whether they had been caught for it or not.' A total of 69 (41.1%) detainees qualified for inclusion. For the purpose of this study, only those detainees who reported committing a burglary offence in the previous 12 months were included (n=69) and will be referred to in the remainder of this report.

Demographics

The majority of detainees were male (92.8%), had completed Year 10 or under (42.0%), were single (60.9%), lived in someone else's house or apartment (56.5%), had no dependent children (82.6%) and were unemployed (75.0%). The absence of juvenile offenders must be acknowledged, as they are not routinely interviewed as part of the DUMA project in Western Australia. The average age of the detainees was 28.2 years (SD=9.3; range=18–64 years) and approximately half of the sample (49.3%) identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous).

Results and discussion

Previous burglary offences

Of the final 69 participants, 89.8 percent (n=62) had previously been charged with a burglary or break and enter. There was no significant difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous detainees, and history of burglary charges ($p>.05$). Of those charged with burglary offences, 18.8 percent (n=13) of participants had been charged in the previous 12 months and 10.1 percent (n=7) had never been charged with a burglary but admitted having committed this offence.

When asked about previous burglary offences, over a third of detainees (n=24) reported that they had committed a burglary in the past for which they had not been detected or caught. Non-Indigenous detainees were significantly more likely than Indigenous detainees to report committing a burglary and not getting caught in the previous 12 months ($\chi^2(1)=8.676$, $p=.003$, $\Phi=.335$).

Planning and target selection

Just under one-third (32.8%) of offenders described their burglaries as 'planned'. However, the majority (57.8%) claimed the burglary offences were spontaneous/unplanned, with 9.4 percent either not recalling, or declining to answer. There was no difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous detainees in terms of planning.

The 21 detainees who reported planning their burglaries described a series of behaviours also used by former and convicted burglars (Bennett & Wright 1984; Friedman 2011). These included:

- scoping the premises prior to breaking in, identifying:
 - no alarm system/limited security;
 - no dogs;
 - sites with desired goods to steal.
- vacancy of premises:
 - absence of signs of movement/occupation;
 - no cars in driveway;
 - no response after knocking on doors.
- property characteristics:
 - wide driveway;
 - distal proximity of neighbours;
 - open doors/windows.
- involvement of others:
 - briefing/recruiting friends.
- organisation
 - carrying tools to facilitate the break and enter (house-breaking implements and/or gloves).

Whether planned or spontaneous, once a decision had been made to break into a property, two-thirds of detainees (66.2%) reported typically entering the property through unlocked doors or windows. The remainder reported entering by way of breaking a door or window (see Figure 3). These findings are in contrast with the British Crime Survey, which concluded that forced entry was the most common method of gaining access (Budd 2001). The British Crime Survey found that a smaller proportion of burglaries involved entry through unlocked doors (21%) and unlocked windows (6%; Budd 2001).

Participants were asked why a particular property was targeted. The majority of responses (29.0%) reported that valuable items had been left in view, that they knew the area well (15.4%), that they had previous success in the area (11.1%) and that keys were carelessly hidden (10.8%).

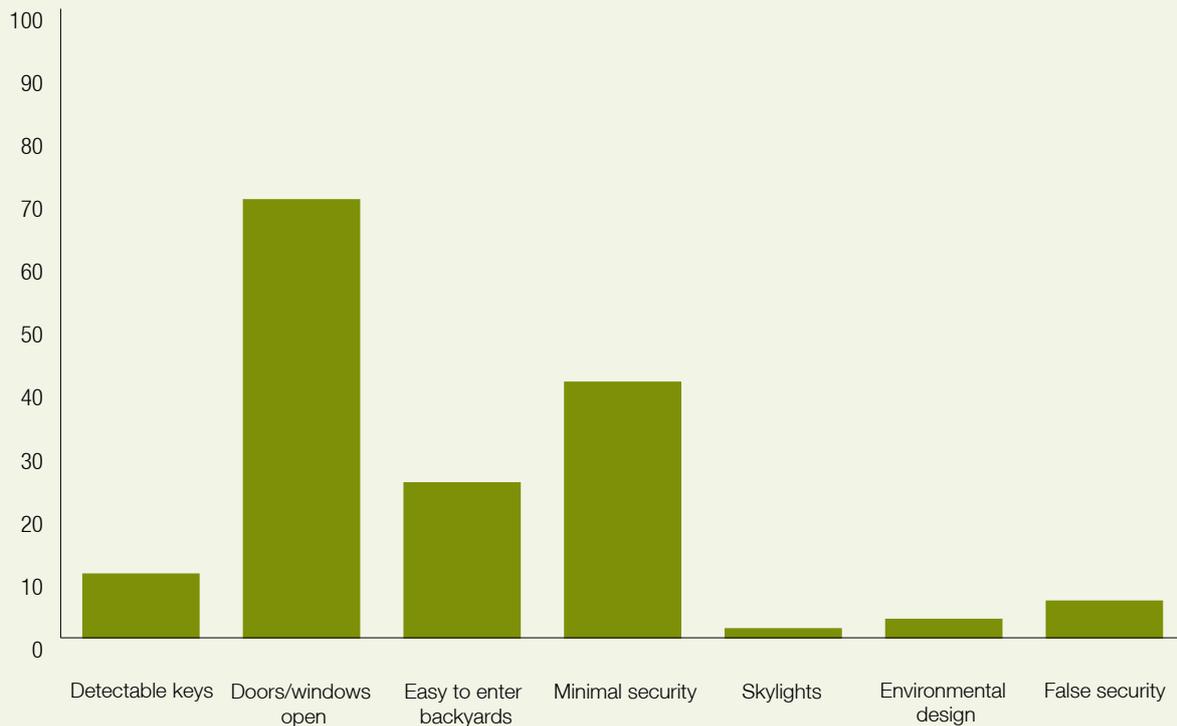
The majority of participants avoided homes or streets with activity (such as cars, neighbours, passers-by), as they believed it increased the risk of detection. However, when asked if they would enter a property while a homeowner was inside, but the burglar thought they could get away with stealing items undetected, 46.2 percent indicated they would (41.5% said no, 4.6% were undecided and 7.7% refused to answer). Therefore, despite the public's general fear of home invasion, a majority of burglars sought to avoid confronting a victim and being detected. This is consistent with Grabosky's (1995) findings on the intentions of burglars.

Timing

The majority of detainees (43.1%) reported they would typically commit a burglary during the hours of 6 pm–7 am, with 37.9 percent preferring daytime hours (7 am–6 pm). A further 13.8 percent said they would commit a burglary at any time and 6.2 percent refused to answer the question. Grabosky (1995) suggested daytime burglary is partly due to Australia's patterns of employment. As employment is high, there are fewer people at home during the day, therefore leaving premises empty and also fewer residents around to detect suspicious activity. The fairly even distribution of day/night burglary occurrences was also observed in Budd's (2001) research in the United Kingdom.

In terms of differences across Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants, chi square tests revealed that Indigenous people were significantly more likely to burgle during evening hours, whereas non-Indigenous people were significantly more likely to burgle during daytime hours ($\chi^2(1)=8.026$, $p=.005$, $\Phi=.393$).

Figure 2 Burglar's perceptions of mistakes made by homeowners that facilitate burglary (%)



Regardless of the time of day, three-quarters of participants took less than five minutes to enter a property. While 11 percent either refused to answer or could not recall, 12 percent took between five and 15 minutes, with only two percent taking from 15 to 30 minutes to enter a property.

Once inside the premises, the majority (46.0%) reported staying inside the property for five to 15 minutes, with 23.0 percent indicating they spent less than five minutes inside and 14.0 percent spending between 15–30 minutes. Only three participants (4.3%) reported being inside for more than 30 minutes.

Stealing and dispersal of property

A minority of detainees (12.3%) reported they had not stolen property during previous burglaries. These participants indicated a need to find somewhere to stay, or that they had nowhere else to go. Other participants (7.7%) reported stealing up to \$5,000 of cash or property on a typical burglary incident (see Table 1).

Of the 45 detainees who reported stealing property or cash, the majority reported that they had sold or swapped the goods with a drug dealer (23.1%), a family

member, friend or acquaintance (12.3%), a stranger (12.3%), or kept it for themselves (12.3%). Few detainees sold stolen goods to pawnbrokers, fences (a person who knowingly buys stolen goods for later resale), or secondhand dealers. There were no reports of the internet being used to offload stolen goods.

Common homeowner mistakes

Participants were asked whether a series of factors (listed below) would typically deter them from entering a property. Security measures such as alarms, and grilled windows and doors were noted as an effective deterrent by burglars. However, this study concluded that the most effective method of deterrence was a dog. Participants mentioned to interviewers that a dog did not necessarily need to be large and dangerous to deter, but just bark, as their main concern was the risk of drawing attention to their presence. The most common overall deterrents were noted as:

- a dog (61.4%);
- working alarm systems (49.1%);
- lights inside house (19.3%);
- grilled windows/doors (19%);
- unknown area (14%);

- visibility of property from road (14%);
- sensor lights (22.8%); and
- gates (12.3%).

Non-Indigenous detainees were significantly more likely to nominate alarms as deterrents ($\chi^2(1)=9.427, p=.002, \Phi=.407$) compared with Indigenous detainees. No other deterrents showed a significant association with Indigenous status.

The results of the British Crime Survey evidenced the effectiveness of implementing household security measures such as alarm systems and deadlocks, and other basic security measures. Budd (2001) indicated that households without security measures such as alarm systems and deadlocks were involved in 15 percent of home burglaries, whereas households with these types of security measures were only included in two percent of burglaries.

Participants in the current study were asked what mistake homeowners commonly made that either facilitated burglary or made their home a target (see Figure 2). The findings revealed three main factors—lack of activity, security and accessibility, and visibility/attraction. An ‘other’ group was added to capture other comments. These elements

are discussed below and indicate the importance of reliable home security to deter offenders, as also reported by Budd (2001).

Lack of activity

Houses that appeared to be vacant or unoccupied were targeted as there was a perceived lack of activity around the property. Houses appeared to be vacant when rubbish bins were left out, lights were not visible in the evenings, vehicles were not in the driveway and when letterboxes were left with mail uncollected. This is consistent with the findings of UK Home Office research, which also indicated that mail/and or parcels left outside advertised that the home was unattended (Friedman Home Security 2011).

Burglars also stated that they were sometimes already aware that a homeowner would be going away and leaving the property unattended. This supports the findings of Hearndon and Magill (2004) who found that over half of burgled properties sampled were

linked to homeowners known to burglars, such as an associate, neighbour or friend.

Visibility/attraction

Participants also commented on why a particular property was selected, explaining that living in an affluent area, having an expensive car in the driveway and/or valuable items on display or in view could attract burglary. Leaving curtains or blinds open so that items were easily visible encouraged break and enter. They also stated that valuables such as dirt bikes and garden chairs left outside were easy targets. This supports the view that burglars target areas where they perceive a high likelihood of finding valuable or easily removable items (Hearndon & Magill 2004).

Other

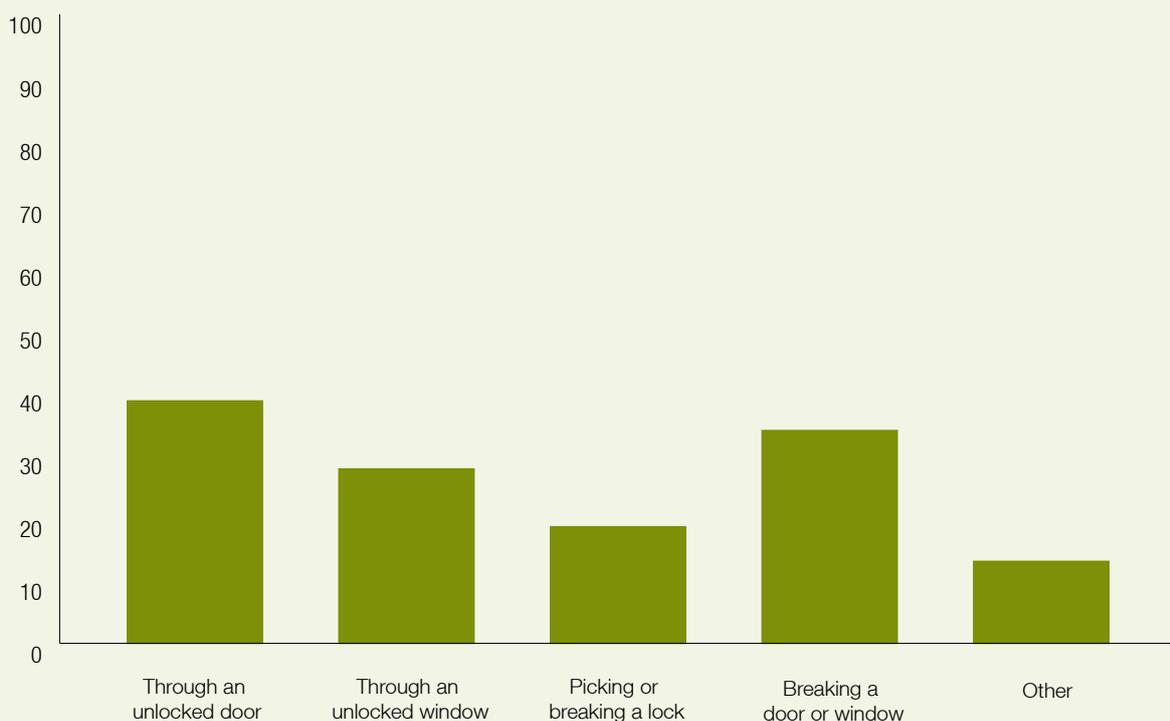
Other insights included that houses were opportunistically targeted when there was the perception that alcohol was being consumed by the occupants. This

behaviour led to a perceived lower level of security. They explained how they were able to enter a premise and take goods without the owners realising. One respondent went into detail in explaining how he was able to enter a party house with ease, enjoy some of the beverages and snack food, and then go into rooms and remove items.

Detainees described the ease of being able to enter a home when the owners were visibly occupied with outdoor chores (such as gardening or washing cars). Other entry points, such as back and laundry doors could be used to enter a building while owners were distracted.

Conversely, some indicated that having 'too much security' made it tempting to break in as they considered it a challenge or that it suggested the presence of valuable items inside. A few commented that homeowners did not need to make mistakes in order to be burgled, stating simply that if they wanted to break in they would.

Figure 3 Most common method of entry for burglars (%)



Security/accessibility

The largest number of responses pertained to the category of security and accessibility (see Figure 3). Burglars stated the most common mistake homeowners make is to leave doors or windows unlocked or open. The ICVS indicated that over a third of Australians believed they would be burgled within the next 12 months and it can be considered that the Australian lifestyle is at odds with household security, with open windows and doors commonplace, particularly during warmer months of the year; a fact supported by statistics (WAPol nda), which indicate that burglary peaks during the warmer months primarily for this very reason.

Burglars indicated that they could enter properties through open gates or via backyards and once on the property, were hidden from neighbours by high walls or fences, trees and/or gardens. A small number indicated that they entered through skylights, dog doors or via the roof, with the majority indicating that open windows flagged a lack of security. Minimal security was defined by offenders as houses without dogs and the absence of working alarms, security screens and roller shutters. Furthermore, DUMA survey participants commented on the number of people who left keys in easily detectable locations, which enabled them to readily access the property. This is consistent with Hearndon and Magill's (2004) findings, which identified that a lack of security significantly impacts a burglar's decision to target a property.

Using the 'oldest tricks in the book'

While burglars reported that a lack of lights indicated a property was vacant, they were also aware of attempts to make a property appear occupied and believed they could tell the difference between a legitimately occupied home and a poor attempt to disguise absence.

Burglars reported that a common practice for homeowners was to leave the television, radio and/or lights on at night for hours at a time. The burglars termed these practices as the 'oldest tricks in the book' and suggested that such attempts actually

advertise vacancy. As one participant summed it up 'leaving the lights and radio on means no one is home late at night'.

Limitations

The DUMA data collected for the purpose of this study was requested by WA Police who required data relevant to the jurisdiction of Western Australia. For this reason, the burglary addendum was only administered in Western Australia and was not included in the national quarter three, 2012 collection.

Self-report data can be limited by the honesty of the study participants. Data from DUMA collections has consistently validated participants' responses as honest (through self-reported drug use and urine testing) and therefore, there is little reason to question the current findings. However, some detainees may not have reported older burglary activity and therefore, the sample size may be smaller than the actual number of detainees who had actually engaged in this crime.

Implications for further research

Although the detainees reported selling or swapping goods with drug dealers, burglary could not be directly linked to drug and alcohol use through the addendum and/or main DUMA questionnaire. This is because the addendum did not specifically ask questions relating to alcohol and illicit drug use, and its role/association in the burglary offences. Future research would benefit from incorporating addendum questions asking about drug-use patterns at the time of the most recent break and enter offence identified.

The detainees did not appear to have a predetermined pathway of disposing of stolen goods; therefore, additional research investigating the pathway from offence to disposal would assist in target hardening and directing of police resources.

Juvenile detainees were not available for interview and it is considered that the burglary behaviours of young offenders could provide different modus operandi to those used by the adult offenders in this report.

Furthermore, to reflect current social media trends, it may be useful to consider a set of questions examining to what extent social media such as Facebook is included in the respondents' definition of 'internet' research and whether they used Facebook/Twitter statuses to determine whether users would be absent from their premises (eg away on holiday).

Recommendations

Despite the limitations, the study provides a useful insight into opportunistic burglary activity. The findings regarding stolen goods dispersal are inconsistent with previous research by Hearndon and Magill (2004), as this sample of burglars did not seem to have a predetermined market for stolen goods. Instead, it appeared that these burglars first committed the break and enter, took 'hot items' and then later decided how to distribute goods.

When active burglars were questioned on how they chose or targeted properties, they cited vacancy and unattended properties as attractive. The findings showed that burglars knew when a home was empty, as they looked for tell-tale signs including leaving outside lights on late at night, uncleared letterboxes and rubbish bins left outside continuously. 'Burglar Beware' campaigns address these issues; however, some owners are complacent about the message. Homeowners need to know their neighbours, so at the very least they can ask for assistance with bins and picking up mail when they are away, or have Australia Post hold their mail. While these may seem like common sense strategies that are easily implemented, the participants of this study noted that these simple mistakes were consistently made by homeowners, which increased their likelihood of being identified as appropriate burglary targets.

'Hot items' refers to valuable and easily disposed of goods—laptops, iPads, mobile phones, wallets, purses, jewellery and car keys. The participants in this study identified wanting valuable, easy to spot, easy to hide and easy to carry items. Money hidden in the freezer and jewellery in bedroom top

drawers and in jewellery boxes are all easy targets. Therefore, the harder something is to locate, the less likely that it will be taken, especially given the finding that the average offender spends under five minutes inside a property.

Another significant deterrent was the presence of home alarms; however, there was a caveat. Information provided by the Community Engagement Division, WA Police indicates that this is effective only when home alarm systems are turned on (WAPol 2012). The sample of active burglars were aware of fake alarm systems, fake security systems and fake cameras, none of which deterred them. Rather, they presented a further indication of a property with minimal security. Insurance companies also acknowledge the increase in deterrence that active alarm systems provide, offering discounted premiums to those who have them installed.

Effective security measures were described as switched on alarms, security screens, roller shutters and dogs. Therefore, the more secure a property, the harder it is to break in and the longer it takes to get in deters active burglars from pursuing the break and enter of particular premises. This may provide an incentive for government funding and home builders to include security measures when building new houses; that is, 'secured by design'.

Other insights included that houses are opportunistically targeted when there is the perception that alcohol is being consumed, as this leads to lower levels of security. At larger parties, front entry doors are often left open for latecomers or smokers. Burglars are able to enter the premises and go undetected as people expect not to know everyone at the party and alcohol consumption may lower alertness. Commonly, handbags, keys, wallets and phones are left on tables or benches and are easy targets. Furthermore, Australians frequently entertain in back gardens, leaving the front of the home largely unattended. As such, undetected entry through open doors is gained with relative ease.

This raises an issue with regard to Australian lifestyles. The climate invites an outdoor

lifestyle and a preference for adults to entertain at home. Locking front doors, installing door bells for the latecomers, side gate exits and having a contingency plan for smoking guests is considered likely to lessen the opportunity for 'open door' burglaries when entertaining.

Anecdotal findings indicated that many participants showed a lack of concern over their crimes, suggesting that homeowners would replace stolen items with insurance payouts and would probably receive an upgraded or 'better' model than they had before. There was little recognition that homeowners may have inadequate insurance and/or that some items are irreplaceable. Few study participants demonstrated an understanding of the personal or sentimental value of some items, believing that they only took 'replaceable' items.

There are some easy ways to ensure that non-replacement items are protected. For example, remove memory sticks/USBs/video tapes and store them separately from the recording devices (video recorders/cameras etc). Separate storage helps to ensure that if the device is stolen, the data on those devices can be retrieved. Regularly backing up computer drives facilitates easier retrieval. When storing jewellery in boxes commonly kept on desks and tables in bedrooms, take out precious and sentimental items and store them separately in an unusual place. Although there is a need to protect from 'ransacking,' if these opportunistic, random, 'stay-for-a-short-time' burglars enter, they are more likely to revert to the easy to take, portable and readily disposable items.

Conclusion

In summary, almost a third of detainees interviewed reported committing a burglary, regardless of whether or not they had been charged with the offence. The majority of detainees committed the offence spontaneously via unlocked doors or windows and spent fewer than five minutes entering a property. This finding has implications for the assumption that active criminals weigh the cost and benefits of their acts (Anderson 2002). Nearly half

spent between five and 15 minutes inside a property and took less than \$500 worth of goods. On average, most stolen goods were sold to or swapped with a drug dealer, a stranger, or someone known to them, or were kept for the offender's own personal use.

There is little evidence of burglars using the internet to sell goods or goods being offered to pawnbrokers or secondhand dealers. The most common incentives to burgle were valuables being left in clear view, coupled with a lack of activity around the premises, or in the neighbourhood. The most common deterrent was the presence of a dog, followed by an alarm system. The most common mistakes made by owners were a lack of security and visible valuables.

Burglary-related crimes are associated with many costs, some hidden. Issues include inadequately insured property, the time, cost and inconvenience of replacing items, the emotional burden relating to the loss of sentimental 'irreplaceable' items and the psychological impact of having a home broken into.

Burglary-type offences also occupy policing resources, with call centres responding to phone queries, police attending the scene, forensic teams gathering evidence and the subsequent search for both the perpetrators and the stolen items, which does not always return a positive result. Those involved in the justice system may feel the scrutiny of individuals who consider that inadequate attention is being placed on finding their personal items and/or prosecuting those responsible.

Collectively, the findings of this study indicate that homeowners have an opportunity to be proactive in minimising the risk of becoming a victim of burglary. This may include improving their home security measures (particularly keeping doors and windows locked), keeping valuables out of direct view, cancelling newspapers and having mail collected when away, and not 'advertising' vacancy by leaving lights and music on at unusual hours. This information is valuable for home and property owners, law enforcement, security industries and insurance agencies.

Dr Natalie Gately is the DUMA Site Manager in Western Australia and is a Lecturer and Researcher at Edith Cowan University. Jennifer Fleming is a registered psychologist and was the DUMA Site Coordinator in Western Australia. Nathalie McGinty is a Policy Analyst working at Western Australia Police and Anthony Scott was an interviewer and research assistant on the project.

General editor, *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* series:

Dr Adam M Tomison, Director,
Australian Institute of Criminology

Note: *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* papers are peer reviewed

For a complete list and the full text of the papers in the *Trends & issues in crime and criminal justice* series, visit the AIC website at: aic.gov.au

ISSN 0817-8542 (Print)
1836-2206 (Online)

© Australian Institute of Criminology 2014

GPO Box 2944
Canberra ACT 2601, Australia
Tel: 02 6260 9200
Fax: 02 6260 9299

Disclaimer: This research paper does not necessarily reflect the policy position of the Australian Government

References

All URLs correct at August 2014

Anderson DA 2002. The deterrence hypothesis and picking pockets at the pickpocket's hanging. *American Law and Economics Review* 4(2): 295–313

Australian Institute of Criminology 2012. Australian Crime: Facts & Figures 2011. <http://www.aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/facts/1-20/2011.html>

Beaton A, Cook M, Kavanagh M & Herrington H 2000. The psychological impact of burglary. *Psychology, Crime and Law* 6(1): 33–43

Bennett T & Wright R 1984. *Burglars on burglary: Prevention and the offender*. Brookfield, VT: Averbury

Brown GW & Harris TO (eds) 1989. *Life events and illness*. London: Unwin Hyman

Budd T 2001. *Burglary: Practice messages from the British crime survey*. Briefing note 5/01. London: Home Office

Butt P 2004. *Butterworths concise Australian legal dictionary*, 3rd ed. NSW: Lexis Nexis Butterworths

Cummings R 2005. *Operation burglary countdown: Evaluation study. Final report*. Western Australia: Estill and Associates

Friedman Home Security 2011. *Homepage*. <http://www.ukhomedsecurityweek.co.uk/>

Grabosky PN 1995. Burglary prevention. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* no. 49. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <http://aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/41-60/tandi49.html>

Hearndon I & Magill C 2004. *Decision-making by house burglars: Offenders perspectives*. London: Home Office

Maguire M 1982. *Burglary in a dwelling: The offence, the offender and the victim*. London: Heinemann Educational Books

Makkai T 1999. Linking drugs and criminal activity: Developing an integrated monitoring system. *Trends & Issues in Crime and Criminal Justice* no. 109. Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. <http://aic.gov.au/publications/current%20series/tandi/101-120/tandi109.html>

Newburn T 2013. *Criminology*. London: Routledge

Shover N 1991. Burglary. *Crime & Justice* 14: 73–113

Thornton A, Walker D & Erol R 2003. *Distraction burglary amongst older adults and minority ethnic communities*. Home Office Findings 197. London: Home Office

Kijk J, Van Kesteren J & Smit P 2007. *Criminal victimisation in international perspective: Key findings from the 2004–2005 ICVS and EU ICS*. The Hague: Ministry of Justice, WODC

Waller I 1984. Victimization surveys and public policy in, Block R (ed), *Victimization and fear of crime: World perspectives*. Bureau of Justice Statistics special report NCJ-93872. Washington DC: US Government Printing Office

Western Australia Police Service (WAPol) 2012. Residential burglaries: Considerations for crime prevention. Perth: WAPol

Western Australia Police Service (WAPol) nda. *Monthly verified crime statistics 2010/11*. <http://www.police.wa.gov.au/LinkClick.aspx?fileticket=uN2BCzN6TOE=&tabid=1219>

Western Australia Police Service (WAPol) ndb. *Crime statistics*. <http://www.police.wa.gov.au/Aboutus/Statistics/Crimestatistics/tabid/1219/Default.aspx>