

2022

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[10.1177/14732254221122617](https://doi.org/10.1177/14732254221122617)

This is an Author Accepted Manuscript version of an article published by SAGE in *Youth Justice*, on October 5th 2022.

Rock, S., Gately, N., McCue, J., & St Martin, N. (2022). Temptations, techniques and typologies: Insights from Western Australian sample of young people who burgle. *Youth Justice*. Advance online publication. Copyright © 2022 (SAGE). <https://doi.org/10.1177/14732254221122617>

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Temptations, Techniques and Typologies: Insights from a Western Australian Sample of Young People Who Burgle

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Abstract

A significant amount of property crime is committed by young people. In this novel qualitative study, 50 young people were interviewed to obtain an insight into their motivations to burgle. Decisions were based on peer pressure, opportunity and perceived need. Bennett and Wright's typologies of adult burglars were applied to young burglars. Young burglars were more prone than adults in Bennett and Wright's study to commit opportunistic burglaries but were deterred by similar target characteristics. The social and psychological factors are strong motivators for youth burglary and should guide the development of intervention and deterrence strategies.

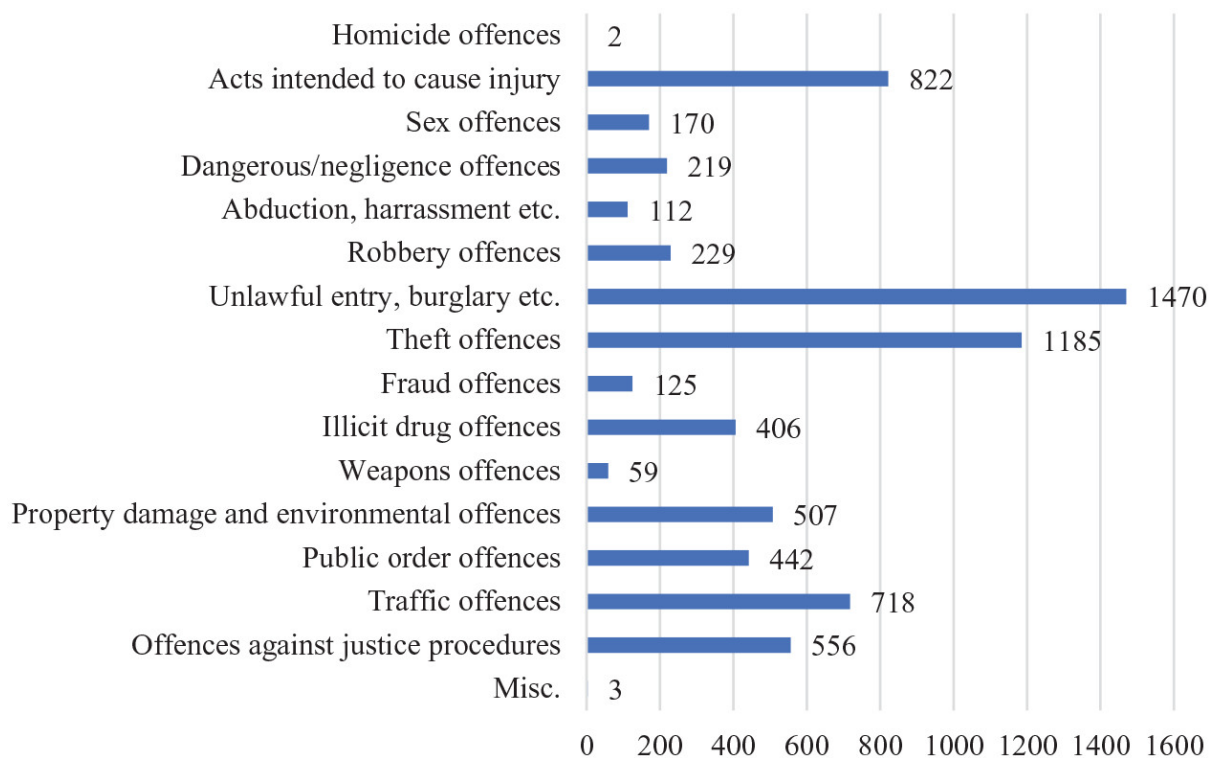
Introduction

Burglary offences remain of particular concern to law enforcement agencies, individuals and the broader community (Mawby, 2013). Burglary crimes result in significant costs to victims and the wider community. Victims experience financial burdens associated with the loss of items as well as the psychological injury caused by an unknown person violating their private space (Beaton et al., 2000; Bjørgo, 2016; Brown and Harris, 1989; Grabosky, 1995; Mawby, 2013). From a community perspective, the significant costs of burglary are associated with investigating burglary, recovering stolen items, prosecuting offenders and increases in insurance premiums (Cummings, 2005; Gately et al., 2014). However, burglaries do not happen by chance (Grabosky, 1995). The risk that homes will become targets depends on the opportunities and motives of prospective offenders (Grabosky, 1995).

In Australia, burglary is defined as the 'unlawful entry of a structure with the intent to commit an offence where the entry is either forced or unforced' (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2011: 56). It can include breaking and entering offences regardless of whether property has been stolen. Historical data for burglary offences indicates the overall rates have been declining since 2001 (ABS, 2018). The reduction in burglary offences may suggest that crime prevention strategies are generally effective in combating this crime (Grove, 2011; Morgan et al., 2012). However, the Australian Bureau of Statistics showed there were still nearly 170,000 reported victims of burglary in 2018 (ABS, 2018a).

A substantial proportion of property crime is committed by young people. Furthermore, burglary remains the most common offence young people present for in the Children's Court of Western Australia, with rates remaining steady for the past 5 years (Department of Justice, 2019a). Young people who are apprehended and sentenced for burglary offences in Western Australia are overwhelmingly Indigenous (Tubex et al., 2018). Mandatory sentencing legislation in Western Australia for burglary offences has been argued to be discriminatory

and to have increased rates of incarceration for young Indigenous people (Tubex et al., 2018). While not the focus of the article, it is an important consideration when examining young burglars in Western Australia (Figure 1).



Given the extent of burglary offences, representatives from the Western Australia Police Force requested assistance from independent researchers to explore young burglars¹ who had recently committed a burglary offence to garner the experiences of young burglars, their modus operandi and motivations to burgle. The term ‘young burglars’ is used to refer to the young people in this study aged between 11 and 18 who reported committing at least one burglary offence, whether they had been caught for it or not. Given the absence of information regarding young burglars this project used adult burglar typologies outlined by Bennett and Wright (1984) to determine whether the model could be useful in understanding contemporary young burglar trends and motivations. This article outlines the rationale and purpose of the project, and presents the modus operandi, experiences and motivations as reported by the 50 young burglars interviewed.

Characteristics

Initiation into burglary offences tends to occur between the ages of 10 and 18 years (Farrington and Lambert, 1994) with an average age of 14 for first-time burglars (Clare, 2011; Cromwell, 1994; Decker et al., 1993). Expert adult burglars who had successfully completed and avoided detection for burglary offences commenced their ‘careers’ younger than novice burglars (Clare, 2011). Therefore, stopping early career burglars is paramount to reducing recidivism. Numerous studies have investigated characteristics that are common across burglary offences (Clare and Ferrante, 2007; Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Nee and Meenaghan, 2006; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998). It has been consistently reported that in comparison with adult burglars, young burglars are more likely to commit their offence in the company of peers. Furthermore, those who become recidivist burglars are more likely to

commit solitary acts as they age and become more skilled (Clare and Ferrante, 2007; Crettenden, 1985; Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998).

Target considerations made by burglars of all ages include properties being unattended by occupants during work hours, coverage provided by foliage or fencing, the absence of an alarm system and unsecured entry points (Bernasco, 2006; Clare, 2011; Crettenden, 1985; Gately et al., 2014; Morgan et al., 2012; Wright and Logie, 1988). A consistent finding has been that both adult and young burglars prefer properties that are unattended, easy to access, and therefore, require minimal effort to obtain potential reward. Common factors that deter burglars of all ages include alarms, signs of occupancy (e.g. the presence of a car, lights being on or a TV/radio being active), the presence of a dog and the presence of neighbours (Clare and Ferrante, 2007; Gately et al., 2014; Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Logie et al., 1992; Wright and Logie, 1988).

Cash remains the most desired and stolen item during the commission of a burglary (Crettenden, 1985; Office for National Statistics, 2017; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998; Quinn and Clare, 2021). Jewellery, alcohol, cigarettes, watches, televisions and other electrical goods are often also targeted as they can be used by the offender or sold to obtain cash (Crettenden, 1985; Fox and Farrington, 2012; Office for National Statistics, 2017; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998; Quinn and Clare, 2021). Crettenden (1985) found that 14- to 24-year olds who burgle may also be motivated to steal stationery and food items, depending on personal circumstance and stage of psychological development. Furthermore, as individuals advance their skill in committing burglary, the cumulative value of items stolen also increases (Crettenden, 1985). However, these studies focus on retrospective reports from adult ex-burglars, arrestees and imprisoned burglars, which are now dated. The Western Australia Police Force was interested in contemporary data on young people actively committing burglary offences.

Like adults who offend, young people have been found to experience a range of social and psychological challenges that influence their offending behaviour. Specifically, this population typically experience disproportionate rates of economic disadvantage, low-or-limited income, limited community involvement, high rates of truancy and unstructured time, delinquent peer groups, poor or absent caregiver involvement, and exposure to family conflict and domestic violence (Ellis, 2021; Haapasalo and Hämäläinen, 1996; Stevenson et al., 1999). These issues are not the focus of the article, but they are important influencers in the motivations to burgle for young people.

Motivations

Although some common characteristics of young burglars have been identified, the motivation to burgle is not well documented in contemporary literature nor in an Australian context. Bennett and Wright (1984) described adult burglar motivations which included instrumental needs, the influence of others, the availability of opportunity, expressive needs, and drug and alcohol use. Other studies conducted in the United States and the Netherlands mainly focus on adult motivations, including the need for money, drugs or alcohol, excitement or thrills, rebellion, boredom, delinquent subcultures, peer approval and gang membership (Bernasco, 2006; Bernasco and Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Cromwell, 1994; Fox and Farrington, 2012). Bernasco and Nieuwbeerta's study of 548 burglaries included 29 (5.3%) committed by offenders under the age of 18. They concluded young people may have been

more motivated than adults by a need for thrill-seeking (Bernasco and Nieuwbeerta, 2005). Previous findings from the United Kingdom regarding the motivations of young and adult burglars' first offences, revealed that the majority were motivated by peer influence (31%), funding drug use (23%) and boredom (18%) (Hearnden and Magill, 2004). This international research provided the rationale and theoretical framework (Bennett and Wright, 1984) to explore young burglar behaviours in Western Australia.

Bennett and Wright's Burglar Typology Model

Bennett and Wright's (1984) UK study described various typologies of offence decision-making by adult burglars based on interviews with imprisoned burglars. They identified three groups: opportunists, searchers and planners.

Opportunists

Bennett and Wright's (1984) opportunistic burglar category had the lowest number allocated, with only 7 per cent of their experienced burglar sample reporting they committed opportunistic burglaries. These types of burglaries were characterised by the opportunity posed to the burglar, such as an open window in an affluent area or valuables in view. The opportunistic burglar would then commit the offence almost immediately. To fit this classification, the time gap between seeing the opportunity to burgle and committing the offence needed to be minimal, otherwise the offence would fall under a 'planned' burglary typology (where the intent was set some time before the commission). The opportunistic typology has been challenged with arguments that opportunistic burglars are merely 'searchers' on 'passive mode' (Maguire et al., 2010: 9). In essence, an open window is not seen as an opportunity by everyone but is more likely to be viewed as so by individuals with prior offending experience or expertise (Nee et al., 2019; Nee and Taylor, 1988). These typologies have been used as first conceptualised to assess their applicability to a young burglar sample, many of whom were first-time burglary offenders who were unlikely to have accrued expertise akin to adult burglars.

Searchers

Searchers (45% of the sample) differed from opportunists as they made the decision to burgle first and then located a suitable target to commit the burglary directly after target selection. Searchers could use methods such as travelling to affluent areas; those who looked for a target within their current locale; or were flexible and did not set parameters for their target selection. In this typology, the decision to burgle came first, followed by target selection, with a minimal time gap where the burglary was committed directly after selection.

Planners

The planner typology was the largest category with over half of the respondents describing a planned offence by Bennett and Wright's (1984) definition. 'Planners' refers to burglars who make any decisions relating to the burglary prior to its commission. These decisions ranged from setting a day to offend to developing a detailed plan for the burglary. The planners' main point of difference is the time gap between decision-making, target selection and the commission of the burglary. Bennett and Wright separated planners' behaviours into two types: (1) where the target was selected (by the offender or through a tip off) then returned to later and (2) where there was a decision to offend followed by target selection at a later stage.

Subsequent research has also identified that most offenders make a decision to burgle and then select their target, aligning with the ‘planner’ typology (Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Nee and Meenaghan, 2006; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998). The decision-making is argued to be rooted in expertise or an offending predisposition (Maguire et al., 2010; Nee et al., 2019; Taylor and Nee, 1988).

Bennett and Wright’s (1984) typologies provided insight into adult burglars’ behaviours and provides a useful base for later research. Other criticisms include limitations around the lack of consideration of group dynamics (Maguire et al., 2010), which is likely to be of importance among young offenders. That said, the current study uses Bennett and Wright’s (1984) model to test whether the adult typologies could be applied to inexperienced young burglars and thereby guide recommendations for law enforcement and the criminal justice system.

Present Study

Although research has examined the offence characteristics of young burglars, the research is predominantly not Australian-based, not limited to young burglars, and dated. Moreover, little has been recorded regarding the motivations of young burglars from their own perspective. Therefore, this research project examined the perspectives of young burglars at the point of court contact, to investigate the following questions:

1. What are the offence characteristics of a sample of young burglars?
2. How does Bennett and Wright’s typology model explain the motivations and offence decision-making of young burglars? and
3. What factors do young burglars report would deter them from burgling?

Method

Design

The research was designed to explore the decision-making of young burglary offenders. Qualitative interviews were utilised to yield meaningful data that were sensitive to the developmental needs of the young people interviewed (Holt and Pamment, 2011; McCarry, 2011). Given the likely vulnerability, suspicion and scepticism of the young people being researched, interview methods allowed for sufficient rapport to be developed, to lessen concerns about data collection and provide reassurance how the information would be used. Forensic interviewers experienced in working with young people involved in the criminal justice system, drug users, prisoners and vulnerable groups were employed to conduct semi-structured interviews to obtain greater knowledge and understanding of the participants’ unique world view and experiences (Creswell, 1998; Liamputtong, 2019). Interviewers paid particular attention to: using simple, plain English language to accommodate possible learning difficulties or delays among participants; avoiding leading questions and minimising possible distress. The use of interviews was also preferred to encourage the young people to elaborate on their experiences, particularly when more than one burglary had been committed.

This article utilises data from a larger study about the experiences of young people in the criminal justice system. Data collection took place in the Children’s Court of Western

Australia. This court has the jurisdiction to deal with young people aged between 10 and 17 years at the time the offence was alleged to have been committed. Participants up to and including 18 years were approached for inclusion in this study, with those over age 18 years for historical criminal charges excluded. All interviewees were in court for a criminal matter but were not necessarily presenting for a burglary charge. During their interview, a screening question was used to ascertain those who had committed a burglary irrespective of whether they had been apprehended. Those who reported having committed a burglary offence were asked additional questions about their methods and motivations specific to burglary. The information from these self-reporting young burglars is presented in this article.

Sample

A total of 89 young people were interviewed for the original study. Of those, 50 young people admitted to having committed a burglary offence. They were aged between 11 and 18 ($M = 14.86$). Almost all were male (94%; $n = 47$), consistent with data on young burglars, therefore, gender distribution did not allow for meaningful comparisons. Six young people (8%) indicated they had only committed one burglary. Most young people reported they did not attend school regularly (90% of those asked; $n = 36$) and were currently using drugs (82% of those asked; $n = 28$). Cannabis was the most reported drug used with over half of male participants (55.3%; $n = 26$) reporting current daily use. One female reported daily use, with the other two reporting weekly drug use. To prevent marginalisation of Indigenous people a condition by the government department responsible for granting approval for the project was that no data relating to ethnicity, including Indigeneity, be collected. This omission prevents an in-depth comparison between Indigenous and non-Indigenous young burglar behaviours.

Procedures

Prior to their court appearance, responsible adults were approached by an interviewer in the waiting room of the Children's Court who explained the purpose of the interview and issued an information sheet and consent form. The nature and extent of the confidentiality of information disclosed by the young people were explained. Where consent was provided, the young person was then approached for assent. The purpose of the research and what was required of them was explained to the young person and the revised information letter for young people was read aloud to account for any literacy issues.

The Children's Court of Western Australia provided a confidential room in which the one-on-one interviews were conducted. Where consent and assent were obtained, young people were interviewed according to a semi-structured interview schedule. All interviews were recorded electronically then transcribed verbatim for the purpose of analysis. Interviews with young people lasted for approximately 30–60 minutes. At the request of the court, incentives were not offered to young people in exchange for their participation to ensure participation was entirely voluntary. Interviews were conducted so they did not interfere with the court processes.

Analysis

Specific crime data were extrapolated from interview transcripts into a quantitative categorical and numeric format, to permit descriptive analysis through SPSS version 24. Interviews delved into how burglary crimes were committed, which could then be categorised into Bennett and Wright's (1984) categories. The interview data were analysed using content

analysis. A question-ordered matrix was used as a management tool to organise the information in a methodical and coherent mode for analysis (Liamputtong, 2019; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Patton, 1990). Common responses and words were recorded and categorised under each research question. Analysis involved deductive coding where data were grouped into content relating to the research questions (Bengtsson, 2016). For example, Bennett and Wright's burglary typologies were used for categorising data relating to burglary motivation and decision-making. Two researchers conducted this separately to triangulate the data and increase trustworthiness of the findings. Furthermore, throughout this article, quotes from interviewees were used to provide context to numerical data and also demonstrate the rigour in analysis.

Ethics

It is well established that research with young people involves a raft of ethical considerations (Graham et al., 2013). However, practical difficulties were also present and demanded flexibility for the research to yield worthwhile findings (Alty and Rodham, 1998; Hassan, 2016). The combination of ethical and practical tensions in the current research significantly influenced the research design and the methods used. The overriding consideration was how to protect the rights of young offenders, consistent with their legal rights in a Court setting, yet obtain reliable information that would be of sufficient value to inform practitioners and programme providers (Ellis, 2021).

Qualitative methods, such as interviews, are noted as one method of researching young people in a way that is meaningful, and also allow for potential harms to the participant to be managed and even reduced (Ellis, 2021; Holt and Pamment, 2011; McCarry, 2011). Parental consent and child assent was obtained. A child psychologist was consulted over the interview questions and was on call during the interview process in case of participant distress. The comprehensive consideration of factors regarding interviewing young people in a forensic setting required ethics approval from Edith Cowan University's Human Research Ethics Committee, Western Australia's Department of Justice, and Department of Communities. The information letter invited participants to contact the researchers for a summary of the research findings. As the interviews conducted were confidential, personal contact details were not collected from participants, which prevented following up with this information.

Limitations

As was anticipated during the development of this research project, the level of detail to some questions was difficult for the young people to provide. It was also anticipated there may be an unwillingness to disclose details and a lack of trust in the interviewer, whom they had only met that day. Reluctance to answer some questions was evident in a small number of young people who became suspicious about the level of detail being collected in relation to their burglaries. Generally, however, the young people were candid about their criminal behaviour, substance use and other sensitive and/or personal information. The interviewers reported a high level of forthright answers to those questions the young people could easily recall or answer. Although they were cooperative when answering general questions, some young people became frustrated trying to recall information regarding the more precise details of their offending. To avoid stress, if an interviewee became visibly frustrated or anxious, the questions seeking specific detail were skipped. The difficulty experienced by young people may be attributed to their age and limited maturity, cognitive difficulties resulting from

substance use, learning difficulties or developmental issues, which can result in deficits in oral competency (Snow and Powell, 2004, 2005; Swain et al., 2020). It may also be attributed to an unwillingness to disclose such details and a lack of trust in the interviewer, whom they had only met that day. Another limitation was the lack of representation of young people in the care of the state, due to delayed approvals. The current sample is a discrete group of young people still in the care of a parent or guardian. It is acknowledged that children in care of the state and involved in the justice system (so-called cross-over children) are not captured in this sample. Due to these limitations, further exploration into the characteristics and motivations for young people in care is recommended in future research. Gender comparisons were also unable to be made because only three female participants were interviewed. Finally, the limitation of not collecting data on Indigeneity prevented valuable insight into better understanding motivations of this marginalised group.

Findings and Interpretations

This section will provide the offence characteristics, motivations and offence decision-making of a sample of young people who had committed burglary offences. It discusses the factors that young burglars report would deter them from these offences. It also presents how Bennett and Wright’s burglary typology can be applied to a youth population (Table 1). Quotes from the young people are presented in italicised font to provide explanations in their own words. They were asked how old they were when they first committed a burglary offence. The responses ranged from 10 to 16 years ($M = 13.8$ years, mode = 12 years) and is consistent with other Western Australian burglar research (Clare, 2011). When asked whether they had been ‘caught’ for the first burglary, 70 per cent ($n = 35$) indicated that they had been charged for their initial burglary offence.

Table 1 Comparison of Bennett and Wright (1984) and the current study’s samples

	Bennett and Wright (1984)	Current study
Sample	117 persistend and recidivist burglars	50 young burglars; 44 repeat burglars
Burglar status	‘Specialists’, p. 9 Sentenced, on probation or convicted of five or more burglary offences	‘Relatively inexperienced’ Self-report admission, charge or sentence not required
Age range	16-60 years	11-18 years
Gender	All male	47 males; 3 females
Status	Imprisoned adults	Children’s Court involved youth
Location	England, UK	Western Australia

Characteristics

Circumstance

All participants reported breaking into residential dwellings, however, they lacked specific details about the types of premises noting they were ‘just houses’ or ‘homes’. In addition, schools, a building site and small shops were targeted. The majority of young people were

repeat burglars, with a quarter indicating they were burgling ‘regularly’ but could not provide exact details of frequency. Only six young people reported one burglary offence.

To better understand the factors that informed young people’s burglary decision-making, questions were asked about the target selection and method of transport. Young people displayed a lack of knowledge of exact names of districts or suburbs. Consistent with the findings of (Chastain et al., 2016) most reported they walked to the location, suggesting a degree of proximity to their residence; however, they stated they would not target their immediate area. Two young people reported they used cars, two rode bikes and two used public transport. After the burglary they generally returned home or visited friends. One indicated that they went to ‘McDonald’s’, one went to their ‘drug dealer’, and one stated candidly ‘well, we got caught so we went to the police station’.

The young people sampled were either disengaged from school or were truanting on the day of their burglary offence. These young burglars could not accurately report the time they had committed the burglary with most responding it was ‘daytime’, after residents had left for work. One participant did clarify ‘before lunchtime in case they came back for lunch’. Consistent with Bennett and Wright’s (1984) concept of property vulnerabilities, some participants reported they would check whether cars were present in the driveway or at the front of the house, before deciding to enter the property. However, most young people did not provide an in-depth level of detail in their offence decision-making.

When asked what makes a building a likely target to burgle, most common responses were that ‘no one was home’ and ‘it was easy to get into’. This is consistent with research on adult burglars who prefer unattended and easy to access residential properties (Clare and Ferrante, 2007; Gately et al., 2014; Logie et al., 1992; Wright et al., 1995). Almost, three quarters (n = 38) of young people suggested that properties with visibly open doors and windows were ‘asking to be burgled’. All but two reported being careful to evade detection, avoiding houses where it appeared someone was home. The most common strategy to determine whether a premise was empty was to knock on the front door to see whether it was answered. This strategy contrasts with adult burglars who report trying to avoid detection on their approach to the property (Hockey, 2016). The combination of Australian residences being commonly vacant during the day, together with being largely detached, single storey and having multiple and hidden entry points, facilitates access and reduces detection (Gately et al., 2014; Grabosky, 1995; Morgan et al., 2012).

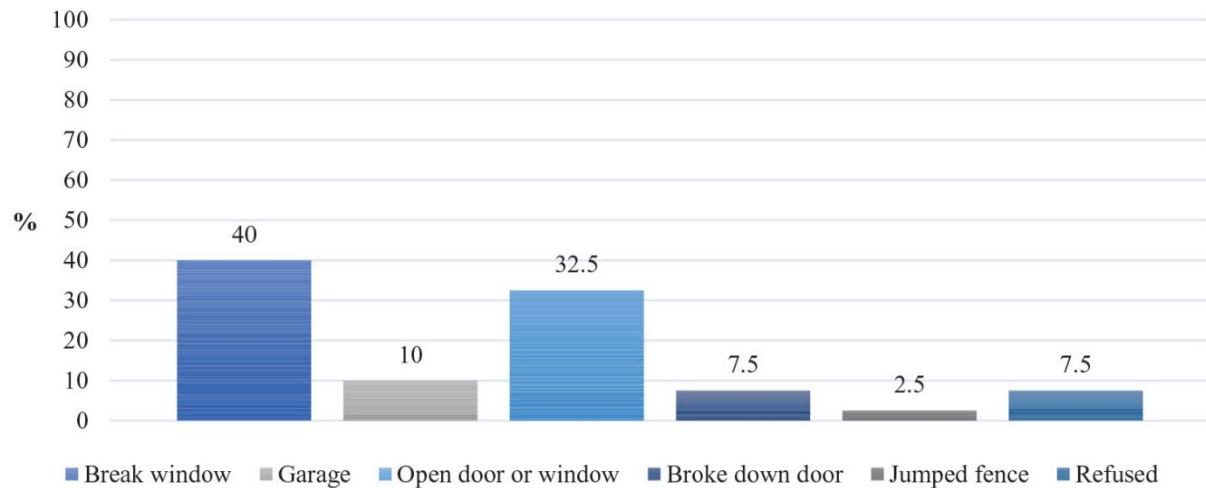
The young participants described how they looked through windows for visible and easily accessible items. Common items sought were money, high value items (e.g. games consoles) or items they wanted for personal use (e.g. toys). They described visible items as ‘just sitting there’ or ‘just there for us to take’. Their justification for the theft suggested a lack of concern for ownership – ‘they would have looked after it better if they wanted it’ – and their comments minimised the impact of their crime and their own culpability. The use of restorative justice approaches may assist with accountability for their decisions around criminal activity, emphasise the impact on victims and provide the basis re-training for pro-social behaviours (Daly and Hayes, 2001). The opportunistic nature of these offences is consistent with the typology outlined by Bennett and Wright (1984). Elaborating further on this typology, Maguire et al. (2010) proposed that there must be a predisposition to recognise the theft opportunities. This would suggest that social factors, such as peer influence, as well

as previous burglary experience, play a part in determining young people’s propensity for identifying (and acting upon) theft opportunities as was evident in this sample.

Methods of access to property

As with adult burglars (Gately et al., 2014), the most common way of entering a property was by breaking a window to gain entry or via an open door or window, as indicated in Figure 2.

Most common method of entry (n=40)



Items stolen and their disposal

Aligning with previous findings, participants reported stealing anything they perceived to be of value (re-sellable), items that they wanted to keep for themselves or gift to others (Crettenden, 1985; Fox and Farrington, 2012; Office for National Statistics, 2017; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998; Quinn and Clare, 2021). They explained they stole:

just what was around

jewellery, money, anything really that we could sell to get drugs

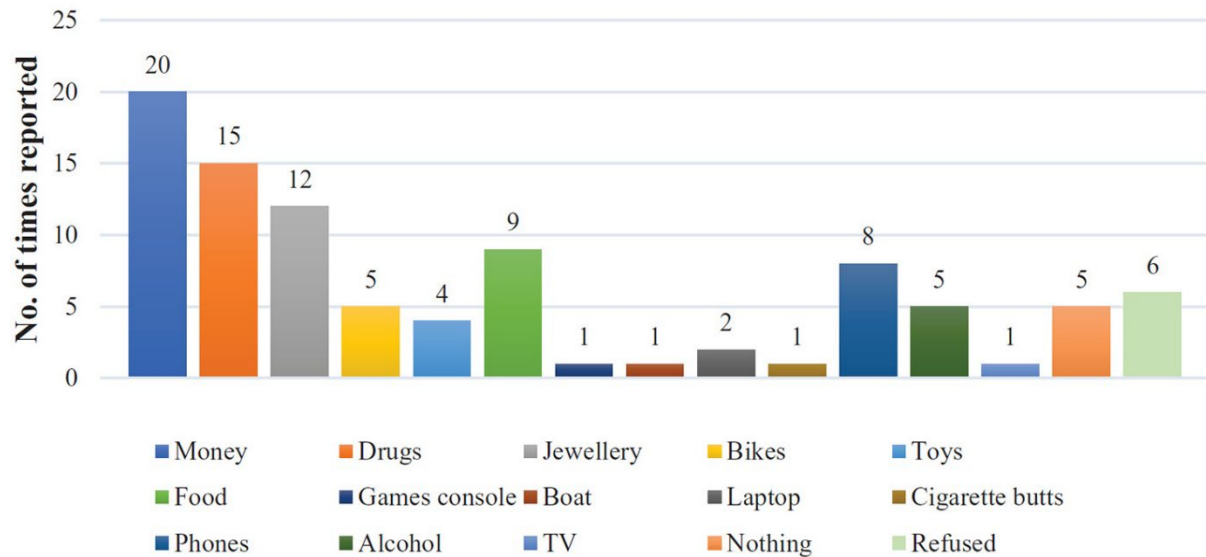
I knew they had dope [cannabis] in there

I got stuff from the freezer. I go for the food, but I didn't take anything else.

More specific items are detailed in Figure 3. One-third reported taking items they could keep such as cash, food or drugs. The young people did not provide context around this theft, but if they only stole food (leaving everything else) it suggests hunger or needing to provide for other family members. The issue of food theft warrants further investigation and attention as an urgent social welfare issue. The link between drug use and burglary was undeniable and echoed earlier Western Australian research (Clare, 2011). The link between drug use and crime was evident as young people admitted that when disposing of stolen items, they sold them to obtain cash to purchase drugs, swap the items directly for drugs via a third party or directly with their drug dealer. The high number of young burglars stealing to obtain drugs, or goods/money to obtain drugs, has implications for the assessment for suitability for treatment in specialist courts, such as the Children’s Court Drug Court in Western Australia. The Drug Court uses judicial monitoring of an individualised treatment plan to rehabilitate young people who have volunteered to take part in a pre-sentence programme to address their

drug use and offending (Ellis, 2021). Addressing these underlying causes including housing, education, family and counselling, has been found to have positive outcomes in reducing drug use and offending (Ellis, 2021).

Items reportedly stolen*



Constant among the sample was a lack of awareness of time of day, how long they were in a property, consideration about premises to burgle which appeared opportunistic, and the absence of detailed plans. These opportunistic burglaries are consistent with previous WA research on adult arrestees (Gately et al., 2014), but inconsistent with Bennett and Wright’s (1984) adult sample of prison-based experienced adult burglars, suggesting that more experienced and skilled burglars plan their offences. While burglaries were undertaken in company with peers, it was the presence of objects and opportunities which generated the impetus to offend. Easy access to suitable targets and absence of homeowners provided the young people both the opportunity and the motivation to burgle. These offence characteristics provide information pertinent to homeowners and known target hardening measures to avoid burglary, by removing ‘temptation’ and easy access to homes.

Motivators

The young people reported a range of social and psychological challenges, which are still consistent with known drivers for burglary (Haapasalo and Hämäläinen, 1996; Nee et al., 2019; Stevenson et al., 1999). These included a perceived or actual need to support themselves, the presence of a drug habit, intoxication or boredom. For example:

I had nothing to eat

Being poor, having nothing

Just drunk and being stupid

Needed the fix

Another apparent driver was peer pressure of similarly minded friends. Most reported committing the burglary with friends 78 per cent (n = 39). The influence of peers was expected and consistent with previous literature (Clare and Ferrante, 2007; Crettenden, 1985;

Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998). Only four reported committing burglaries alone. Two participants declined to answer this question while 10 per cent (n = 5) reported committing the offence with family members (mostly brothers and/or cousins, one with his father). Family appeared to be a facilitating factor for some young people who had been introduced to and educated about committing burglary by family members. This learning process presents as another driver to offending, as it normalises, builds experience and therefore confidence in the offender. It further supports assertions of predispositions to offending suggested in literature (Maguire et al., 2010; Nee et al., 2019; Nee and Taylor, 1988; Taylor and Nee, 1988). When asked how they learned or ‘knew what to do’, responses included the following:

I learnt it off my other cousins . . .

[My] uncle taught me

Been there and seen it, dad used to take me along with him.

Older mates and people I was hanging around with [taught me].

The influence of fathers’ offending on children is notably strong, and particularly so for sons (Farrington et al., 2001, 2009; Goodwin and Davis, 2011). Of concern is that novice burglars who commit their offences with more experienced burglars have been found to be more likely to have longer offending careers (Hodgson and Costello, 2006). Studies have found offending is highly concentrated in some families and that if one family member has been arrested there is a high likelihood that another family member has also been arrested (Farrington et al., 2001). Over two-thirds (n = 31) of the 45 respondents who volunteered the information had spent time in WA’s youth detention centre; of these, 22 had been remanded and nine had been sentenced to detention. While 19 of those reporting time in a youth detention centre had ‘put them off’ committing crime, they had nevertheless committed further offence(s). It appears that this learning process presents as another driver to offending, as it normalises, builds experience and therefore confidence in the offender.

Situational factors including drug use, peer involvement, impulsivity and perceived need overrode the concerns about returning to detention. Furthermore, familial involvement indicates that dealing with the young burglars’ behaviour in isolation of the wider family offending will be ineffective indicating that holistic restorative practices would be more beneficial in breaking offending patterns for young burglars.

Burglar Typologies

Data from questions on burglary offence decision-making and planning were analysed using Bennett and Wright’s (1984) burglar typologies. A comparison is provided in Table 1.

Consistent with previous research (Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Nee and Meenaghan, 2006; Prenzler and Townsley, 1998), most participants did not actively plan their burglaries. Just over half (n = 30) of those interviewed reported they had planned their burglary offence; however, when probed, 27 of those 30 reported that while they had planned to burgle, they had not selected a target (‘Searchers’). Only three participants reported ‘casing’ a property before the crime (‘Planners’). The remaining 19 had not planned to burgle (‘Opportunists’) and one participant refused to answer. A summary of the typologies for young burglars in the present study is outlined in Table 2.

Table 2. Application of Bennett and Wright's (1984) typologies to young burglars.

Type	Opportunists (n=19)	Searchers (n=27)	Planners* (n=3)
Descriptor	Not planned but opportunity arose, that is, the person saw an open door or goods visible through a window. Minimal time gap	Planned to go and obtain goods, but no target planned. Would select venue based on goods available and ease of entry. Minimal time gap	Casing of properties or gaining knowledge of high value items then burglarising those properties. Time gap
Motivation	Exploiting immediate opportunities for personal gain	Personal gain through stealing goods from properties	To avoid detection and apprehension through careful planning or personal gain of high value items

* Could not be broken down into planner types one and two because of limitations in data provided; total n = 49 as one young person could not be categorised due to limited data provided.

Planning behaviours relating to target selection appeared generally consistent with Bennett and Wright's (1984) model. However, it is worth noting that in the present study, more young people in the 'Opportunistic' category appeared to be motivated by peer influence, impulse and thrill-seeking than was reported among the adult burglars in Bennett and Wright's (1984) research. This is consistent with a previous study which ascribed thrill-seeking claims almost exclusively to young offenders (Maguire et al., 2010). Some young people in the 'Opportunistic' group had entered premises and stolen items as part of a dare or boisterous behaviour with their friends rather than being motivated primarily by material or monetary gain during one or more of their burglary offences. These individuals tended to engage in other anti-social (not necessarily criminal) behaviours as part of a peer group, but at this particular time the act was burglary. Descriptions of how their burglary offences transpired include the following:

We was going to get bumpers (cigarette butts on the floor); but not until they seen the keys and that so they started driving the cars and forklift and crashing into things and yeah we give the butts to my Nan to smoke.

We broke into the lifesaving club and took the boat and took it down the river and stayed on it overnight.

Others in the 'Opportunistic' group viewed objects they wanted or needed, and they burgled on the spur of the moment:

It was just out of the blue.

We just walked into a house, she was out the back . . . [so we went in].

I just saw toys and stole the toys, no it wasn't planned just walked past and that's it . . .

We were just walking through a school and saw laptops everywhere, so we smashed the window and took them.

Consistent with Bennett and Wright's (1984) typologies, the 'Searchers' indicated that while they had intended to go and burgle to obtain goods, they had not picked a property and would instead roam the streets looking for an appropriate target:

We don't plan it, we just knock on the people's door and if they aren't home we go in.

Although intention to burgle was present, the element of planning was minimal for this group and there appeared to be some overlap with 'Opportunistic' group in that the decision to target selected premises was still based on the perceived opportunity to enter a property and obtain items without being detected.

Young participants' responses were consistent with rudimentary plans of adult populations in Bennett and Wright's (1984) study. Even among 'Planners', descriptions revealed that actual planning and casing behaviours were minimal:

Yes, I was with the wrong people and a friend says this other guy had an Xbox and so we went there and looked for a while. He wasn't there and I lifted up the garage and went inside grabbed the console and the controllers and left.

So, go down there and have a look, come back later and fucking sneak in there . . .

We planned to go out and do one.

One young person reported that he was hired to burgle specific properties. The target properties were reportedly drug dealers' properties that the young person's 'employer' knew had large sums of money on the premises. The young person reported he was usually paid around US\$500 for these burglaries and also admitted to keeping some of the money that they stole for their 'employer'. This young man already saw employment by burglary as a lucrative career.

The range of responses from and multiple burglaries committed by participants indicates a degree of fluidity between and within the three categories. The difficulty in making clear distinctions between 'Planning', 'Searching' and 'Opportunistic' behaviours – and the possibility for overlap/combining of these typologies was noted by Maguire et al. (2010). These categories may also lack nuance in terms of adequately accounting for social influences like peer pressure or group bonding (Decker and Wright, 2010). However, despite these limitations, Bennett and Wright's (1984) model offers significant insight into the decision-making, behaviours and motivations of young burglars, which is crucial for guiding effective deterrence and rehabilitative measures.

Deterrence

The young people, most of whom were repeat burglars, were asked, 'what makes you "not" burgle a property?' and it was evident that certain factors were effective at dissuasion. While one participant believed he would not be impeded, stating 'Not much, I'm pretty sneaky. I have bolt cutters and I just do it hell fast', most others were deterred by target hardening measures. The most common deterrents were dogs and home alarm systems:

Dogs man, they bark and everyone knows you [are] there . . .

Usually we go through doors left open . . . but there was a big doggy door and the dogs bailed us up.

You don't go near houses with alarms, you just get caught that way.

These findings are consistent with research into adult burglars (Clare and Ferrante, 2007; Gately et al., 2014; Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Logie et al., 1992; Wright and Logie, 1988). These young people described how they avoided detection by checking for factors which would increase the likelihood of being seen, including cars in the driveway, and people in or around the property:

. . . Dogs, sensor lights, neighbours and if, you know, there a lot of big hot cars there, you know not to go in.

While high levels of insight were not displayed by most participants, some of the older participants elaborated and described the properties they refused to burgle and items they refused to steal. For example, homes with elderly people or children were avoided due to the perceived vulnerability of these residents:

If they had kids, you never target a house if it's got any sign of kids . . .

One young person explained why he never steals jewellery:

I used to roll with a couple of guys who liked to steal. But this girl I liked told me how someone had stolen a chain that her dad had given [her], I started to think again. How would I feel if someone stole something given to me from my dad? It's got sentimental value . . . you can't replace that . . .

The acceptance of victims by older young people has implications for rehabilitation and treatment. Those young people that showed consideration for victims and items stolen could benefit from restorative justice programmes that extend their empathy to other scenarios. The younger burglars in this study perceived the crime to be victimless. Therefore, raising empathy through humanising victims could reduce recidivism. Examples currently used in Western Australian youth justice include victim-offender mediation.

In this sample, 70 per cent (n = 34) stated they had been in court for previous offences. Most of this cohort of accused young people reported previous crimes (whether they had been caught for it or not) (87.8%; n = 43) and had previous experience with police (82.6%; n = 41). Most contact with police before the age of 10 was reportedly for child protection matters. As age increased, it was more likely that young people's contact with police was the result of their own criminal behaviour, with 85.7 per cent having prior contact with police for this reason by the age of 13. Given the high familial interactions with the criminal justice system, it was unsurprising to observe a normalisation of contact with the judiciary. When asked whether court was considered a deterrent, participants reported that court was inconvenient, that it took too long and was boring:

. . . it takes up a perfectly good day.

Yes (laughs) most of my punishment comes through having to sit and wait in this courtroom.

These comments suggest that broadly, interactions with police and courts, as well as any prior detention were viewed more as inconveniences than serving as effective long-term deterrents for criminal activity for this sample of young people. Future research is required to explore in more depth the issues faced by children-in-care (cross-over-children), a better understanding of gender and Indigeneity differences and the reasons for food-only theft as a matter of

urgency. However, this snapshot promotes the need for innovation in youth justice expanding on the restorative justice practices and specialist courts already available. The multifaceted drivers to criminal behaviour indicate that holistic practices are required to meet the complex needs of this young offender cohort.

Conclusion

Young people struggled to provide detailed and in-depth information on the nuances of their burglar behaviours and instead provided more general information. Motivations identified over three decades ago by Bennett and Wright (1984) for adult burglars provide a useful framework for understanding the broad motivations of young burglars. The applicability of the typology model to young burglars requires further investigation with practitioners to determine the utility of categorisation on deterring recidivism. Instrumental and expressive need, peer influence, availability of goods, opportunity and substance use are still motivations and hooks for burglary offences regardless of age. A proportion of the young burglars interviewed admitted that their offending was influenced by peer pressure and a desire to be liked or accepted by their friends. Even those more organised burglary offenders were motivated by a perceived need, such as to acquire money, desired objects, or a means to obtain drugs. Therefore, a robust burglary intervention strategy must address the relevant social and psychological factors.

Increased intervention and harsher penalties by the criminal justice system do not appear to be the most effective methods of addressing recidivist young burglar motivation. Many young burglars minimised the consequences of a criminal conviction and appeared more impacted by with the inconvenience it caused them. Their attitude towards previous police intervention and court appearances was largely one of disinterest. However, appearing disinterested has been noted as a strategy sometimes used by young males who offend to conceal oral language incompetence (Snow and Powell, 2004). To reduce offender motivations and achieve desistance in criminal behaviour, strategies that address economic disadvantage, counter the influence of peers, challenge anti-social beliefs, break intergenerational offending and improve family supervision and relationships are required. This level of social intervention would support and strengthen current situational crime prevention techniques that are in the control of property owners and have been shown to deter burglars.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank the Department of Justice, Western Australia; the Children's Court of Western Australia; the Western Australia Police Force; and the young people and their guardians for their time and honesty in participating in this research.

Funding

The author(s) disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This project was funded by the Western Australia Police Force and Edith Cowan University. The data were collected with the in-kind support of the Department of the Justice (WA) and the Children's Court of Western Australia.

Footnotes

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