

The nature of neighbourhood crime

Characteristics and risk factors associated with neighbourhood crime

First published 19 January 2022

The following sections set out the characteristics and risk factors associated with each type of neighbourhood crime, drawing on national data (further details on risk factors can be found in the [Safer Streets – Neighbourhood crime factors](#) document).

Forces should analyse their local problem to inform the development and implementation of appropriate interventions in line with a problem-solving approach.

Domestic burglary

Offender profile

Based on CSEW data between April 2019 and March 2020, where the victim was able to say something about the offender, the vast majority of domestic burglars (90%) were male.

Overall, 75% of burglars were under the age of 40, with the majority (53%) between the ages of 25 and 39 (Office for National Statistics, 2020c).

Factors associated with an increased risk

There is some evidence to suggest that the following factors may be associated with an increased risk of burglary.

- **Victims**

Households with the highest levels of victimisation are premises with little or no security, rented properties and single-parent households (Tseloni, Thompson and Tiley, 2018). In addition, homes are four times more likely to be burgled if they have been burgled before (Forrester and others, 1990).

- **Times**

Domestic burglaries are spread evenly throughout the week, with around 70% occurring on weekdays and 30% at the weekend. Overall, 40% of burglaries take place during the morning or afternoon (6am–6pm) and 60% take place during the evening or night (6pm–6am) (Office for National Statistics, 2017).

- **Places**

Burglaries are more prevalent in neighbourhoods lacking social cohesion, where neighbours are less likely to notice the offence or intervene (Bennasco and Nieuwbeerta, 2005), or where there are fewer opportunities for access or surveillance (Armitage, 2018).

- **Observation**

Evidence suggests that the likelihood of burglars being observed while committing offences plays a major part in their decision-making. For example, the number of people present in an area (Repetto, 1974, cited in Armitage and Tompson, in press), or the degree of cover surrounding a property (Nee and Meenaghan, 2006), were key determinants in whether they saw a property as an attractive target (Armitage, 2018). Indeed, properties overlooked by between three and five other properties were found to experience 38% less crime than those not overlooked (Armitage, Monchuk and Rogerson, 2011).

- **Defensible space**

‘Defensible space’, which involves the use of real or symbolic barriers to differentiate between public and private areas (Newman, 1976), is also influential in predicting burglaries. Burglars reported that areas with clearly defined defensible space would deter them from committing burglary (Armitage, 2018). Research involving a comparison between burgled and non-burgled properties found that burgled properties had fewer symbolic barriers (Brown and Altman, 1983; Armitage, 2006).

Robbery

Offender profile

Based on CSEW data between April 2019 and March 2020, where the victim was able to say something about the offender, offenders are predominantly male and aged between 16 and 24 years, and most are unknown to the victim. Most offenders were not thought to be under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the offence (Office for National Statistics, 2020d).

Factors associated with an increased risk

Evidence suggests that the following factors may be associated with an increased risk of robbery.

- **Victims**

More likely to be male. Younger adults (aged 16 to 34) are at greater risk (Office for National Statistics, 2020d). Individuals who are distracted (by looking at their phone, for example) or vulnerable are also more likely to become victims (Thompson, n.d.). School-aged or elderly people are more likely to become victims during the day (Smith, 2003).

- **Times**

Offences predominantly occur during daylight hours (Office for National Statistics, 2020d).

- **Places**

Personal and street robbery is concentrated in metropolitan areas (Office for National Statistics, 2020d), and tends to be more spatially concentrated than other crime types (Thompson, n.d.). Robbery offences are typically concentrated around retail premises that largely accept cash transactions, areas that provide cover for offenders, or around drugs markets and areas frequented for the purposes of prostitution (Thompson, n.d.).

Theft from the person

Offender profile

Based on CSEW data between April 2019 and March 2020, where the victim was able to say something about the offender, offenders tend to be male (75% of all recorded thefts), and older than those committing robbery, with 54% of recorded thefts committed by individuals over the age of 25 (Office for National Statistics, 2020e). In addition, offenders are prepared to travel relatively

long distances (up to 17 miles) to commit offences (Home Office, 2013).

Factors associated with an increased risk

Evidence suggests that the following factors may be associated with an increased risk of theft from the person

- **Victims**

Females are more likely to be victims of theft from the person, and younger adults (aged 16 to 34) are at greater risk (Flatley, 2017a).

- **Times**

Two-thirds of thefts from the person took place during the week and one-third during the weekend. Around half of thefts from the person took place during the afternoon (noon to 6pm) and around one-quarter during the evening (6pm to midnight) (Office for National Statistics, 2020e).

- **Places**

Offences occur mainly in urban areas and on public transport. The most common location for thefts from the person is the street, although shops, supermarkets and entertainment venues are also targeted (Office for National Statistics, 2020e).

Vehicle crime

Offender profile

Data relating to offender characteristics is less readily available for vehicle crime compared with other offence types. However, research has identified two types of vehicle crime offenders: alert opportunists who will commit offences as and when they spot an opportunity, and active searchers, who will look for suitable targets (Copes and Cherbonneau, 2006). Additional research suggests that offenders who commit vehicle crime to fund alcohol or drug habits tend to take more risks than other offenders (Quinn, 2019).

Factors associated with an increased risk

Evidence suggests that the following factors may be associated with an increased risk of vehicle crime.

- **Victims**

Households that include children are at greater risk from vehicle crime than those without. Households where the owner or renter is employed or unemployed are also at greater risk, compared to those who are economically inactive (such as students or retired individuals) (Flatley, 2017b).

- **Times**

Almost three-quarters of vehicle crime occurs during the week, with a quarter occurring at weekends. The majority of vehicle crime (80%) happens between 6pm and 6am (Office for National Statistics, 2020f).

- **Places**

Over two-thirds of vehicle crime is recorded as occurring on cars parked in the street, or in semi-private areas (outside areas owned by a householder) (Office for National Statistics, 2020f).

Residents of terraced or semi-detached dwellings are most at risk, compared with those living in detached properties (Flatley, 2017b). Urban areas also have higher rates of vehicle crime (Quinn, 2019).

Tags

Neighbourhood policing