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Reducing Burglary

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ISBN 978-3-319-99941-8 ISBN 978-3-319-99942-5 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99942-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018955907

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG
The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgements

Chapters 4, 5, 6, 8 and 9 of this book are based on the past work undertaken with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council, Secondary Data Analysis Initiative Phase 1 (ES/K003771/1 and ES/K003771/2). The authors are indebted to the project's Advisory Committee (http://www4.ntu.ac.uk/app_research/soc/document_uploads/178982.pdf) for their support for the duration of the research project and contribution to this work. Crime survey data sets used in this project are cited as follows: Home Office, Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, TNS-BMRB. (2012). *British Crime Survey, 1992–2011*. [data collection]. UK Data Service. Retrieved from https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/series/series?id=200009; and Office for National Statistics. (2013). *Crime Survey for England and Wales, 2011–2012*. [data collection]. UK Data Service. Retrieved from https://beta.ukdataservice.ac.uk/datacatalogue/series/series?id=200009. Any errors or omissions are entirely the authors' responsibility.

Contents

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List of Figures

Diagrams

List of Tables

Chapter 1
Introduction

Andromachi Tseloni, Rebecca Thompson, and Nick Tilley

Burglary has formed, and continues to form, a major focus for both research and policy in many industrialised societies. This is for two main reasons. First, burglary comprises a high-volume crime, which rose rapidly in decades following the Second World War (Van Dijk et al. 2012). Second, the experience of burglary has a major impact on many of its victims, who have suffered not only losses but also psychological damage (Dinisman and Moroz 2017). There has, therefore, been a strong interest in understanding what leads to vulnerability to burglary and what can be done to reduce its incidence. This book reports recent original research on burglary patterns, the role of security and efforts to implement preventive strategies based on its findings. It also takes stock of previous major initiatives that have been used to address the problem, especially in the UK.

This book is aimed at researchers, postgraduate or honours students, policymakers and practitioners interested in domestic burglary and its prevention. We have also tried to make it accessible to members of the public interested in crime and crime prevention. Whilst the remainder of this book presents new research findings, in this opening chapter, we introduce you to some basic facts about domestic burglary as they emerge from quite a large volume of existing research. We rehearse what decades of research have revealed about major patterns of domestic burglary and the effects of burglary on victims, before giving an overview of the chapters to follow.

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A. Tseloni et al., *Reducing Burglary*,
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-99942-5_1

1.1 Domestic Burglary: Definition, Data Sources and Counts

Domestic burglary includes burglaries in dwellings and attached buildings. It is to be distinguished from non-domestic burglary, which occurs in other types of premises including all types of commercial building, such as shops, banks, factories, warehouses and private offices, as well as other non-residential buildings, such as schools, hospitals and universities. Domestic burglary is sometimes referred to as residential burglary or burglary-dwelling. Because this book is specifically about domestic burglary, in the interests of making the text readable where we refer to 'burglary', we mean only domestic burglary. Where we refer to non-domestic burglary, this will be made clear in the text.

In formal terms, a burglary takes place when someone enters any building or part of a building as a trespasser and with intent to steal anything in the building or to inflict grievous bodily harm or to effect unlawful damage to the building or anything in it (Theft Act 1968). A burglary is committed where the attempt is made to commit the crime, even if it is thwarted. Some crime statistics distinguish between attempted burglaries and burglaries with entry, between burglary with loss and burglary where nothing was taken and between burglary of the dwelling itself and burglary of attached buildings.

There are two main sources of burglary statistics: police recorded crime and crime survey data. Police recorded burglaries are incidents like the ones described in the previous paragraph that have been reported by victims (or any members of the public) and recorded as such by the police. In the Crime Survey for England and Wales (CSEW), burglary is determined via the following questions:

> During the last 12 months, … has anyone GOT INTO this house/flat without permission and STOLEN or TRIED TO STEAL anything? (ONS/TNS 2015, p. 41).
>
> [Apart from anything you have already mentioned] in that time did anyone GET INTO your house/flat without permission and CAUSE DAMAGE? (ONS/TNS 2015, p. 42).
>
> [Apart from anything you have already mentioned], in that time have you had any evidence that someone has TRIED to get in without permission to STEAL or to CAUSE DAMAGE? (ONS/TNS 2015, p. 42).
>
> [Apart from anything you have already mentioned], in that time was anything STOLEN out of your house/flat? (ONS/TNS 2015, p. 42).
>
> And [apart from anything you have already mentioned], in that time was anything (else) that belonged to someone in your household stolen from OUTSIDE the house/flat - from the doorstep, the garden or the garage for example? NOTE: DO NOT COUNT MILK BOTTLE THEFT (ONS/TNS 2015, p. 43).

Crime surveys can be international, such as the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) that covers 78 countries (Van Dijk et al. 2007), national or local. Many countries now operate national victimisation surveys. The first was in the USA – the National Crime Victimisation Survey (NCVS) – and goes back to the 1970s (Cantor and Lynch 2000). Other examples of national crime surveys include the CSEW and the Cadre de Vie et Sécurité (CVS) in France which the

coming chapters of this book draw upon (Jansson 2007; Flatley 2014). A notable local crime survey, the data from which has delivered a rich set of criminological insights and innovative empirical methodology, is the Seattle multistage hierarchical data set (Miethe 2006; Rountree and Land 1996). These types of surveys capture crimes not reported to the police as well as a rich set of factual information about victims and non-victims, their households and areas of residence as well as their opinions and perceptions in relation to crime and the criminal justice system. Victimisation surveys are now conducted to measure levels of crime against businesses as well as individuals and households. These surveys have become core indicators of crime and are also used to inform policy. Questions go beyond crime experience and cover a range of other issues that are important for understanding crime patterns, attitudes towards the criminal justice system and security measures taken. Therefore they are an invaluable source of information about crime, crime perceptions and crime prevention (Tilley and Tseloni 2016).

Large-scale national victimisation surveys provide the most robust data for measuring variations in rates of crime within a country, provided that the sample size is large enough and appropriately allocated between densely and sparsely populated geographical areas (Flatley 2014). In England and Wales, national victimisation surveys have been undertaken going back to 1981. The survey was originally called the British Crime Survey, or BCS, but is now called the Crime Survey for England and Wales, or CSEW, better to capture its geographic coverage (details are provided in Appendix A). Throughout this book it will be referred to as the CSEW. Initially the CSEW sample sizes were quite small, at around 10,000, and waves were irregular. Surveys covered 1981, 1983, 1987, 1991, 1993, 1995, 1997 and 1999, before becoming annual or continuous from April 2001 to March 2002 onwards. Sample sizes increased in 2005/2006 when they reached more than 45,000, since which time they have fallen slightly, as shown in Fig. 1.1. The CSEW is (at the time of writing) the only measure of crime designated by the Office for Statistics Regulation as 'National Statistics', meaning they are fully compliant with the Code of Practice for Official Statistics. They are therefore a major resource for understanding crime, crime patterns and changes in crime experience in England and Wales. The research we report in this book leans very heavily on it as the most robust data we have on the issue.

In some instances, an offence that could be classified as a burglary is categorised as another type of offence, in particular where the possible alternative classification relates to a more serious offence. For example, if a rape is committed when unlawful entry has been made, the incident will typically be classified as a rape rather than as a burglary. According to the rules of crime surveys' offence classification, an incident is recorded as the most serious offence that took place during its occurrence. As burglary is the most serious household crime, it can only escalate to a crime against the person, such as rape or assault (ONS 2015, pp. 112–118). A small percentage of crimes reported in the CSEW entail both household and personal offences which, for need of a better term, have been termed composite crimes

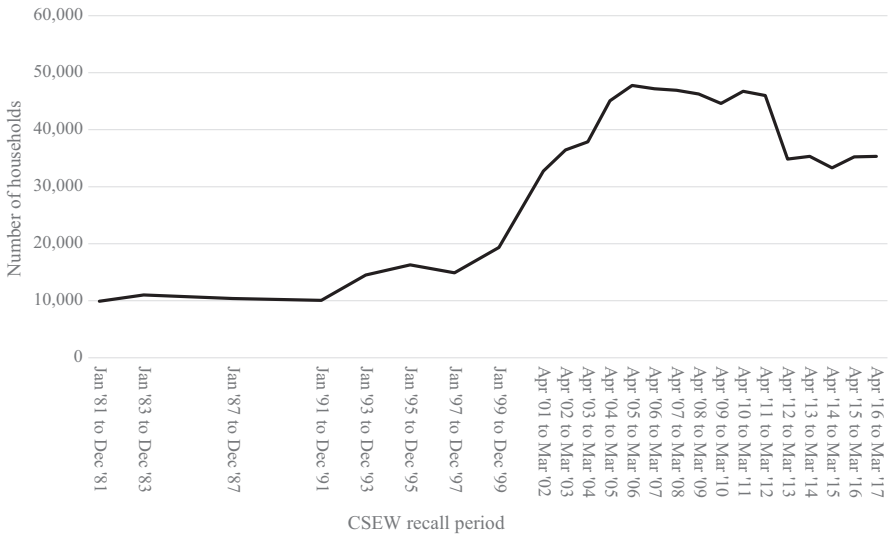

Fig. 1.1 Sample size CSEW 1981–2017

(Tseloni et al. 2010).[1] In police recorded crime, the changed classification can sometimes, however, reflect efforts to downplay the seriousness of the offence in the interests of massaging crime statistics, for example, when what appear to be attempted burglaries are classified as criminal damage or simply suspicious incidents (HMIC 2014).

1.2 The Distribution of Burglary

Crime statistics sometimes distinguish between *prevalence* and *incidence*. Prevalence refers to the number or rate at which potential victims of burglary have experienced one or more burglaries over a given period, normally a year. Incidence refers to the number of burglaries or rate of burglaries committed against members of a given population over a given period, again normally a year. Confusingly, the prevalence and incidence rates are often expressed with different denominators – prevalence as a percentage and incidence as per 1000, 10,000 or 100,000. Furthermore, rates are sometimes expressed in relation to households and sometimes in relation to population. In practice, police recorded crime statistics on burglary generally refer to incidence, and rates are given in relation to the population. In contrast, crime survey data often refer to burglary prevalence in relation to

[1] Therefore burglaries which escalated into a more serious offence cannot be identified as such from the publicly available data set; one would need to investigate the incident narrative to decipher how many crimes against the person were committed in the course of a burglary.

households. The Crime and Justice Statistics which are published quarterly by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) provide burglary statistics which refer to both prevalence and incidence rates over 100 households based on the CSEW (ONS 2017). Prevalence rates are always lower than incidence rates. The difference springs from the fact that some victims suffer more than one incident – a phenomenon known as 'repeat victimisation' – an issue that has proved a rich topic for research and an important focus for preventive strategies, as discussed below (Farrell 1992; Pease 1998). Where crime rates are referred to casually in the press, it is generally not clear whether they refer to prevalence or incidence. If the report draws on police data, the reference is almost invariably to incidence.

Rates of burglary per household are strictly preferable to those per population, given that all members of a household are victims where an offence takes place: all have had their private space invaded even if some have not suffered a loss. Crime surveys generally use addresses as the sampling frame, with one eligible member selected as the respondent (with the exception of the NCVS which interviews all household members). When asked specifically about burglary, they are answering on behalf of the whole household. When findings are reported as rates per population (as in the case of police recorded crime), slightly misleading impressions can be given.

At every level, burglary is unevenly distributed (Tseloni and Pease 2005; Van Dijk et al. 2007). Research has identified some widespread patterns in burglary victimisation. Table 1.1 shows the variations in national incidence rates per 100 population for domestic burglary for 2004/2005, as presented by the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and found by the ICVS for 2004/2005. The table also shows the rates for reporting domestic burglary to the police, as found in the ICVS.

The UNODC uses official police recorded crime rates. The ICVS is designed to iron out variations in definitions of crimes (including burglary) and to avoid falling foul of national differences in rates of reporting and recording offences. It also uses a standard methodology so that valid comparisons can be made between levels of crimes in different countries (Van Dijk and Tseloni 2012). There have been five main 'waves' or 'sweeps' of the ICVS (Van Dijk et al. 2007; UNIL 2018). Table 1.1 picks out countries that took part in the 2004/2005 ICVS and that are also included in the UNODC data. You should bear in mind that there are wide error margins in ICVS estimates, given that the sample sizes for ICVS surveys in individual countries are quite small – usually around 2000 – and burglary events are quite rare.

Three important points emerge from Table 1.1. First, there were large variations between countries in incidence rates of burglary, however measured. The ICVS rates shown in the table go from 0.8 percent for Sweden to 4.6 percent for England and Wales. The UNODC rates vary from 0.08 percent for Mexico to 0.92 percent for New Zealand. Second, in every case the ICVS rates are much higher than the UNODC rates. As measured by the UNODC, the rate for England and Wales is still relatively high, but not the highest. Likewise, Sweden's rate becomes middling according to the UNODC figures rather than low as found in the ICVS, and Mexico's rate goes from being the lowest according to the UNODC to being second only to

Table 1.1 International variations in rates of burglary

	ICVS incidence/100 population 2004/2005	ICVS reporting rate to the police %	UNODC incidence rates/100 population 2005
Australia	3.1	86	0.91
Austria	1.2	73	0.24
Belgium	2.1	90	0.55
Canada	2.6	74	0.47
England and Wales	4.6	88	0.56
Finland	1.2	68	0.14
Germany	1.1	86	0.13
Greece	2	71	0.10
Hungary	2.5	76	0.18
Italy	2.8	78	0.21
Japan	1.2	63	0.11
Mexico	4.5	3	0.08
Netherlands	1.4	92	0.57
New Zealand	3.9	80	0.92
Northern Ireland	1.6	88	0.42
Norway	1.4	72	0.18
Portugal	1.9	55	0.21
Scotland	2.2	90	0.42
Sweden	0.8	77	0.48
USA	4.1	77	0.47

Sources: UNODC (http://www.unodc.org/documents/data-and-analysis/statistics/crime/CTS12_Burglary.xls) and Van Dijk et al. (2007) for ICVS

England and Wales in the ICVS. Part of the discrepancy in relative rates is explained by the middle column, which shows wide variations in reporting rates as found in the ICVS. Evidently only 3 percent of burglaries are reported in Mexico compared to 92 percent in the Netherlands. Note that England and Wales were found to have one of the highest rates of reporting, at 88 percent. Reporting is normally required for a burglary to be recorded, but it is not sufficient. Discretion is used by police officers in deciding that the offence is actually a burglary, and as already noted they may not always record what the victim takes to be a burglary to be one.

Figure 1.2 shows recent data on variations in prevalence rates of household crime, including burglary, household theft, vehicle crime and criminal damage, by police force area in England and Wales in the year to September 2016, as found in the CSEW. The chart shows substantial variations, from a high of 15 percent in Northamptonshire to a low of 5 percent in Dyfed-Powys. Two points need to be considered here. First, each estimate falls within quite large confidence limits because of the infrequency of burglary and the limited sample size in each police force area. Thus, for Northamptonshire the confidence limits go from 11 to 18 percent (the unweighted base – number of respondents – was 644) and for Dyfed-Powys

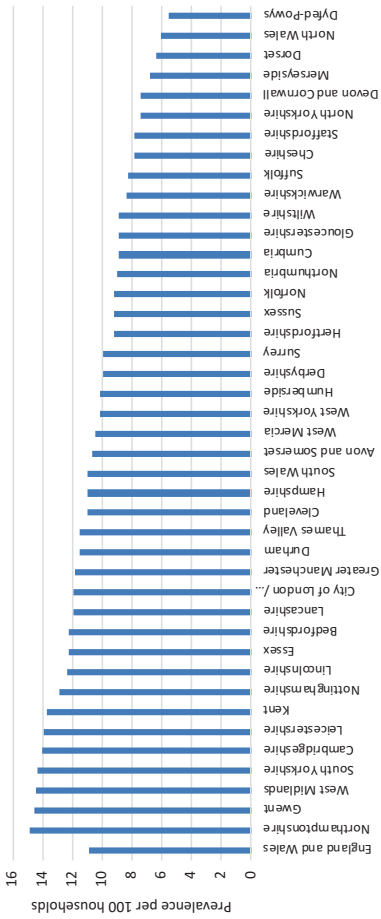

Fig. 1.2 Variations in prevalence rates of household crime, England and Wales, year ending September 2016 (Source: Office for National Statistics CSEW table at: https://www.ons.gov.uk/peoplepopulationandcommunity/crimeandjustice/adhocs/006558csewperceptionandasbdatabypoliceforceareayearendingseptember2016). Accessed 13 June 2018