



PREVENTING NEAR REPEAT RESIDENTIAL BURGLARY

Does providing crime prevention material after a burglary reduce the number of burglaries that occur in zones at risk for near repeat burglary?

Policing Issue

One of the biggest challenges in policing is anticipating where and when crime will occur in order to efficiently deploy police resources. Near repeat victimization is a known crime pattern that can inform police intervention and deployment strategies. It occurs when targets that are near an original target of crime are victimized soon after. The near repeat pattern for burglary can be used to inform the testing of different intervention strategies to prevent additional burglaries.

Methodology

Researchers worked with the Baltimore County Police Department and the City of Redlands (CA) Police Department to conduct a randomized controlled field trial (RCT) in each jurisdiction. The RCT was designed to test whether providing timely crime prevention information to neighbors of a residential burglary victim could interrupt the near repeat pattern for an area. The study targeted the delivery of crime prevention to the micro level space-time window of significant risk rather than to an entire neighborhood. The crime prevention strategies used were community driven and the communities were surveyed on their perception of the police intervention strategy. The study required the use of custom designed software to randomly allocate high risk burglary zones to either a treatment or control group. The software is open source and available to departments interested in implementing a near repeat crime intervention strategy.

Findings

Analyses between treatment and control zones in the study sites found little difference between the two groups on residential burglary outcome. It appears the quick intervention of the agencies was not sufficient to reduce follow on burglary. In general, however, the amount of follow on burglary in the treatment areas was lower than in the control areas. However, the count was low, so our ability to identify statistical differences was reduced. For a more

thorough discussion of the findings, see the full technical report available at <https://www.policefoundation.org/projects/translating-near-repeat-theory-into-a-geospatial-policing-strategy/>

On the prevention of near repeat crime

The proportion of burglaries that are near repeats varies widely across cities and when considering crime prevention and intervention programs, it is not enough to establish that there is a near repeat problem at the jurisdictional level. There can be significant space-time clustering at the jurisdiction level but not enough near repeats to justify deployment of police resources to a burglary series. The size of the near repeat problem uncovered is also subject to a few analytical considerations: 1) considering only actionable burglaries reduces the number of near repeat events but gives a more realistic measure of potential crime reduction; 2) the distance measurement methods used affect the number of events that qualify as near repeats, so practitioners should pick one method and stick with it so the results of their analyses are consistent across crime types and periods; and 3) bandwidth is important, the larger the spatial or temporal bandwidth, the more events will be included as near repeats.

On community perceptions

Being given information about increased risk of burglary did not increase resident fear of crime. Instead, it had a positive influence on reported crime prevention behavior. It also led to more positive feelings and increased perceptions that the police department was being proactive in addressing residential burglary.

Implications for policing

1. Even if the near repeat pattern for a crime type is known, it may be challenging to interrupt the pattern because the actual time a burglary occurs is rarely known. While the burglary remains undiscovered, there is a chance near repeats may be occurring at a rate that is not realistically preventable for police. Advances in technology may be able to overcome some of these challenges and facilitate the collection of data necessary for proper evaluation.
2. The relatively short window for intervention between an initial and a potential follow on burglary makes fielding a police response that requires coordination with volunteers or other agencies more challenging. Volunteers are a valuable resource for police departments and efforts should be made to engage them in meaningful crime prevention and community outreach activities.
3. Researchers and practitioners should expand the scope of evaluation beyond simple crime reduction to consider the impact on residents and agency personnel.

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