
THE IMPACT OF REPEAT VICTIMISATION ON BURGLARY VICTIMS IN EAST AND WEST EUROPE

by

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***Abstract:** This study reports and analyses rates and correlates of repeat victimisation in selected European cities. Rates of repeat were lower outside the English cities surveyed. However, the extreme level of repeat victimisation among dacha victims in Miskolc, Hungary, proved startling, indicating the vulnerability of such property to burglary. There are marked differences between levels of repeat victimisation in different cities and countries. In both East and West Europe, repeat victims are more likely than first-timers to leave the home unoccupied in the daytime for at least six hours. There was no convincing evidence that repeats were more likely to be affected by the burglary at the time it occurred. In essence, it seems likely that the "shock of the new" more than compensates for the "last straw." In this context, it is perhaps surprising that first-timers were more likely to feel they had no need for victim assistance. A different pattern emerges, however, when the longer-term implications of repeat victimisation are considered. "Repeats" were less positive about their neighbours and neighbourhood and more inclined to express a desire to move, and were more likely to register fear, related to both the risk of a future burglary and street offences. This suggests that both crime prevention and community safety initiatives are correctly targeted at repeat victims.*

As this volume testifies, recent research on repeat victimisation has been considerable, and has, through the Kirkholt initiative (Forrester et al., 1990) and the Safer Cities Programme (Ekblom and Sutton, 1996; Tilley and Webb, 1994), had a major impact on policy

(National Board for Crime Prevention, 1994). Interestingly, though, interest in repeat victimisation has been almost entirely generated from within the U.K. Some studies have taken place in North America (Robinson, 1998; Polvi et al., 1990), demonstrating that revictimisation is also a common feature there, but little or nothing is known about its incidence elsewhere in the world. Given the reliance in much of the research on police data, and the difficulties of gaining access to such data in many countries (Mawby, 1999), this is perhaps not surprising. It does, however, prompt the question of how common the phenomenon is in different societies with different crime patterns.

While repeat victimisation is common for violent crime, much of the research has focused on property crimes, such as car thefts and, particularly, burglary (Anderson et al., 1995). It is also notable that much of the emphasis in the literature has been on when and where repeat victimisation occurs. Thus, it is well recognised that revictimisation is most likely to occur in the few weeks following a first burglary (Robinson, 1998; Anderson et al., 1995; Polvi et al., 1990), that corporate property is especially at risk (Bowers et al., 1998; Mirrlees-Black and Ross, 1995), and that it is most common in poorer, more deprived, higher crime rate areas (Ratcliffe and McCullagh, 1999; Trickett et al., 1992).

In contrast, little attention has been paid to the *effects* of a second or third offence; that is, the impact of repeat victimisation. Indeed, although some authors imply that revictimisation has a greater affect than a first victimisation experience,¹ there is a paucity of evidence to support this view. The seminal paper on victims experiencing multiple victimisation, in fact, implies that victimisation may become a way of life, making one almost immune to the impact of another incident (Genn, 1988).

The assumption that those who experience a repeat incident are particularly affected seems to rest on the common sense assumption of "the straw that broke the camel's back," or what might be termed for convenience the "last straw" hypothesis. That is, if victimisation is a traumatic experience, a second or third crime will increase the trauma. Problems getting property insured may be cited as an exacerbating factor. It is, however, equally plausible to argue the opposite: that is, given that shock is commonly experienced by (burglary) victims, the "shock of the new" will be especially traumatic. Moreover, given the possibility of secondary victimisation, individuals who have been victimised before may be less affected than those who, for example, do not know how long the police will take to arrive, have never

made an insurance claim, or are unaware that victim assistance may be available.

THE RESEARCH

The findings reported here are part of a cross-national survey of victims' experiences of burglary and the response of the police and other agencies (for further details, see Mawby et al., 1999; Mawby, 1998).² The initial research design was for a survey in six cities in four countries, with three countries drawn from Western Europe and three from Eastern Europe. These were, respectively, Salford and Plymouth, England; Mönchengladbach, Germany; Warsaw and Lublin, Poland; and Miskolc, Hungary. Subsequently, the research was extended to Prague in the Czech Republic, although data from there are not included herein. With the exception of Warsaw and Prague, all of the cities were of roughly similar size, with populations of 250,000 to 300,000.

In each city, we applied three research approaches: first, we carried out semi-structured interviews with key players, such as police and victim agency staff; second, we drew samples from police files of burglary victims and abstracted data on the features of each case; and, finally, we aimed to interview 200 victims in each city, half some six to eight weeks after the offence, the remainder some 16 to 18 weeks after the crime. In each city we used a similar questionnaire and the same definition of burglary (i.e., that deployed in the International Crime Victim Survey). Interviews were conducted during 1993-94.

We interviewed 200 victims from Plymouth, 132 from Salford, 257 from Mönchengladbach, 200 each in Warsaw and Lublin, and 207 from Miskolc. One distinctive feature of the Miskolc sample was that a majority of burglaries (63%) involved *dachas*, or weekend homes, that were situated within the city boundaries. We had received no prior indication from the police that this might be the case, but once we realised the situation we decided against changing the sampling process and questionnaire. These findings did, however, indicate a much higher level of risk associated with such properties, which is not surprising given that they were empty, and consequently unguarded, for long periods of time. *Dachas* located further afield, that is, outside the city boundaries, were excluded from our sampling frame, so we have no way of knowing whether the same levels of victimisation applied to them. In comparing the findings from each city, we have reweighted our samples to include 200 respondents from

each city (and, in Miskolc, from conventional homes and *dachas* separately). Further, given the regularity of findings that women react to crime differently from men, we also reweighted to create a gender balance.

It is important to stress that the research was not conceived to be concerned in any way with repeat victimisation. However, we did include a question about whether respondents had been the victims of any other burglaries within the previous five years. This question was inserted to test whether those who answered in the affirmative had reported this earlier burglary, and, if so if they had noticed any changes in the way the police dealt with their complaints.

Nevertheless, this does provide us with a rough measure of repeat victimisation. Of course, the repeats (those who had suffered an earlier burglary) include victims from an earlier time period than is usually covered in research on repeat victimisation. The first-time victims include some who would have experienced a burglary more than five years ago, and some who had experienced other offences within that time frame. We are also unable to say *when* an earlier burglary occurred or whether repeats had suffered more than two burglaries.

Bearing this in mind, we are able to consider variations in levels of victimisation among cities and countries. Two points are notable from Table 1. First, the extreme level of repeat victimisation among *dacha* victims in Miskolc is startling, again indicating the vulnerability of such property to burglary.³ Two features may accentuate this: (1) *dachas* are commonly located away from conventional housing: thus, when they are unoccupied, the likelihood of nearby dwellings also being unoccupied is great, reducing the risk of potential burglars being seen; and (2) because such dwellings are on the outskirts of the city, they are within "striking" range of offenders from Miskolc.

The second, but less dramatic, notable point from Table 1 is that there are also marked differences between levels of repeat victimisation in different cities and countries. Over all, the two English cities had higher rates than the four other cities, and, within England, the rate was higher in Salford — a more deprived city than Plymouth (Mawby and Walklate, 1996). This latter finding corresponds to other British research that indicates higher rates of repeat victimisation in more deprived and higher-crime-rate areas. But while we would estimate that burglary rates are higher in England than in the other countries in our survey, prosperity levels are clearly higher than in Poland and Hungary (Wojkic et al., 1997) where rates of repeat victimisation were relatively low.

Because of the distinctive experiences of *dacha* victims, we have excluded these from further analysis here (for further detail, see Mawby and Gorgenyi, 1997). We have also excluded the Mönchengladbach sample, since the survey here was conducted rather differently. The remainder of this article focuses on a comparison of repeats and first-timers for the remaining five cities, two from Western Europe and three from Eastern Europe.

Table 1: Percentage of Repeat Victims from Each City

| | |
|--------------------|----|
| England | |
| Plymouth | 26 |
| Salford | 34 |
| Germany | |
| Mönchengladbach | 14 |
| Poland | |
| Warsaw | 12 |
| Lublin | 18 |
| Hungary | |
| Miskolc | |
| Conventional homes | 18 |
| Weekend homes | 67 |

FINDINGS

In general, there were few major background differences between repeat and first-time victims. Most notable were differences according to the family structure and marital status of respondents, with repeat victims more likely to be single (17%) or separated /divorced (16%) than first-time victims (12% and 11%, respectively). Reflecting this, 20% lived alone, compared with 16% of first-timers. While we did not measure social class, we did include a number of measures of prosperity: for example, ownership of luxury items (car, video and computer) and regularity of holidays abroad. However although analysis here suggested that poorer people were more likely to be repeats, the differences were minimal. For example, 50% of repeat victims and 47% of first-timers owned only one or two of the three luxuries. In

terms of the standard social variables that distinguish victims from non-victims, then, it seems that patterns are similar vis à vis repeat victims and first-timers, but not as pronounced.

There was a clearer pattern when we considered area of residence, with first-timers more likely to say that they lived in an area where people generally helped each other rather than "going their own way" (see Table 2). It is possible, however that this is an effect of repeat victimisation rather than a cause; that is, being the victim of a second burglary may dispose people to view their neighbourhood more critically or suspiciously, a point we return to below.

Table 2: Percentage of Repeat and First Burglary Victims Who Said They Lived in a Neighbourhood Where People Generally Helped One Another

| | Repeat Victims | First Victims | TOTAL |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| England | 22 | 25 | 24 |
| Poland/Hungary | 17 | 25 | 24 |
| TOTAL | 19 | 25 | 24 |

Table 3: Percentage of Repeat and First Burglary Victims Who Said Their Home Was Empty for at Least Six Hours on Weekdays in the Daytime

| | Repeat Victims | First Victims | TOTAL |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| England | 45 | 32 | 36 |
| Poland/Hungary | 61 | 51 | 52 |
| TOTAL | 53 | 45 | 47 |

What appeared much clearer was the relationship between repeat victimisation and lifestyle. Elsewhere we have noted that most burglaries, especially in Eastern Europe, occur in the daytime, and that victims from Eastern Europe appear to leave the home unoccupied for longer in the daytime (Mawby et al., 1999). Here, as is evident

from Table 3, in both the East and the West repeat victims are more likely than first-timers to leave the home unoccupied in the daytime for at least six hours. These homes are more vulnerable to a break-in and, correspondingly, revictimisation.

What, then, of victims' feeling about the burglary itself?

We asked respondents a series of questions about the offence and its impact on them and their families at the time. For example, we asked how affected they had been; how long the effects had taken to wear off; whether they or other household members had been emotionally affected, and in what ways. Two points are notable here. First, there is no evidence that those who were burgled for a second time were more severely affected at the time than those not burgled in the previous five years. Second, where differences did emerge, they were more likely to suggest that first-timers were most affected. For example, 53% of these said they had been very much affected by the crime, compared with only 43% of repeats; 45% of the former but only 40% of the latter said they had been shocked. The only exception to this pattern was with regard to anger: 79% of repeat victims but only 69% of first-timers expressed anger.

The pattern here suggests that those experiencing a burglary for the first time, or at least the first time in recent years, express as much, if not more, concern at the time as do those who have been through the process before. However, that is not to say that the longer-term implications are similar for each. We can address this in terms of responses to two sets of questions: first, concerning feelings about the neighbourhood in which they lived; and second, addressing their concerns about further victimisation.

Of course, perceptions of one's neighbourhood may be an objective interpretation of local conditions that, in themselves, account for the likelihood of revictimisation, or they may be coloured by victimisation experiences. It was assumed that victims' assessments of their area as, for example, one where people helped one another, captured a measure of neighbourhood cohesiveness that might help to explain different levels of revictimisation. It could, however, be argued just as persuasively that an individual's experience as a (repeat) victim affects his or her view of the area, and that as one in which people "pulled together" or went their own way. What is unequivocal, though, is that repeat victims held more negative views of their neighbourhood and were more likely to want to move, and we would argue that this is at least in part a *result* of their crime experiences. This is illustrated in Table 4, where repeat victims are shown significantly less satisfied with the area in which they lived, and Table 5,

where 41% of repeats but only 30% of first-timers said they would definitely/ probably move within the following two years.

Table 4: Percentage of Repeat and First Burglary Victims Who Said They Were Satisfied with the Area in which They Lived

| | Repeat Victims | First Victims | TOTAL |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| England | 60 | 77 | 72 |
| Poland/Hungary | 63 | 74 | 72 |
| TOTAL | 62 | 75 | 72 |

Table 5: Percentage of Repeat and First Burglary Victims Who Said They Would Definitely/Probably Move from the Area Within The Next Two Years

| | Repeat Victims | First Victims | TOTAL |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| England | 41 | 27 | 31 |
| Poland/Hungary | 41 | 31 | 33 |
| TOTAL | 41 | 30 | 32 |

A similar picture emerges where we asked victims how worried or unsafe they felt. While the majority of victims said they felt safe in their home alone at night, only 61% of repeat victims felt safe, compared with 72% of first-timers (see Table 6). Fear was not, moreover, restricted to *burglaries*. As is illustrated in Table 7, repeat victims also expressed more concern about the possibility of being mugged and robbed. It thus seems that although victims' descriptions of the impact of the offence *at the time* varied little between "first-timers" and repeat victims, in the longer term repeats were more worried about the prospect of further victimisation, less satisfied with their neighbourhood, and more committed to doing something about it by moving. It is widely acknowledged that victims report higher levels of worry or fear than do non-victims (Hough, 1995); elsewhere we have demonstrated that victims' accounts of how much a victim was affected at the time do not become diluted over time, at least comparing those interviewed at 6-8 weeks with those at 16-18 weeks (Mawby et

al., 1999). The evidence here suggests that revictimisation has a multiplier effect as far as fear and worry are concerned.

What then of the support victims received from agencies such as the police and victim services? As already noted, in England recent years have seen a policy shift towards prioritising repeat victims. However, victim assistance programmes are less well established in Eastern Europe (Mawby et al., 1999), policing has traditionally been less victim- or service-oriented (Mawby, 1998), and the issue of revictimisation has been rarely addressed. We should, therefore, anticipate different patterns in different countries.

Table 6: Percentage of Repeat and First Burglary Victims Who Said They Felt Safe at Home at Night

| | Repeat Victims | First Victims | TOTAL |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| England | 67 | 76 | 73 |
| Poland/Hungary | 55 | 70 | 58 |
| TOTAL | 61 | 72 | 69 |

Table 7: Percentage of Repeat and First Burglary Victims Who Said They Were Very Worried about Being Mugged and Robbed

| | Repeat Victims | First Victims | TOTAL |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| England | 38 | 25 | 29 |
| Poland/Hungary | 38 | 31 | 32 |
| TOTAL | 38 | 29 | 31 |

A comparison of replies from England and Eastern Europe confirms this. In England, where most victims had received some communication from Victim Support, repeat victims were even more likely to know about Victim Support and were even less likely than first-timers to say that they received no help from anybody. In Eastern Europe, where victim assistance was — for all practical purposes — unavailable, both groups were equally unlikely to know about it or to

receive help from any established agency. However, when we classified victims according to whether they asked for or received any help and whether they found/would have found any help useful, first-timers in each sector were more likely than repeat victims to say they received no help and would not have found help useful.

Finally it is worth comparing victims' views on the service they received from the police. Two measures of this are considered here: first, how satisfied victims were with the way the police dealt with their crime; second, a scale of criticism constructed from answers to four questions tapping different aspects of police response, where a score of 4 represented criticism of the police in all four areas; 0, no criticisms. Over all, as has been noted elsewhere, levels of criticism were higher in Poland than in England or in Hungary (Mawby, 1998). Here, however, it is striking that a very different pattern exists among victims from England and Eastern Europe, as is illustrated in Table 8. In England, repeat victims were significantly more critical of the police than were first-timers. In contrast, in Eastern Europe (both in Poland and Hungary) repeat victims were slightly more positive. However, it seems more likely that this is a reflection of improvements in police response to victims in Eastern Europe, rather than a feature of repeat victimisation per se. In England, in contrast, it seems that revictimisation leads to more criticism of the police, perhaps because the police are blamed for failing to make an arrest or to prevent further crime, indicating a further reason why the police should be concerned to address revictimisation.

Table 8: Mean Scores on Police Criticism Scale for Repeat and First Burglary Victims

| | Repeat Victims | First Victims | TOTAL |
|----------------|-----------------------|----------------------|--------------|
| England | 1.72 | 1.19 | 1.35 |
| Poland/Hungary | 1.54 | 1.69 | 1.66 |
| TOTAL | 1.64 | 1.52 | 1.55 |

While the emphasis here has been on the quantitative research material, the findings are confirmed in the more qualitative aspects of the study. Two case studies compiled by interviewers in Salford and Plymouth, respectively, illustrate this. The first is of a Salford victim:

The respondent was a 21-year-old single mother with two children, aged 2 years and 5 months. She lived in a local authority rented flat, in a very dilapidated and depressing block of low level flats. Many of the other flats were boarded up, graffiti was prevalent and the stench of urine emanated from the access stairs.

The respondent had been burgled more than once in recent times. On this last occasion, the burglars entered one afternoon by smashing the window in the front door. The door is now all boarded up. The respondent leaves the flat only occasionally now: "[I] can't go out much [be]cause I'm paranoid — If I go out I'm always rushing back." Indeed, when she does go out she now locks and padlocks the TV and VCR in her bedroom as she thinks this is the only place it will be safe.

The police response to the burglary was too slow for the respondent — two phone calls were made before the police arrived. All in all, this was a most depressing interview, for this young woman had very few material possessions and had been the victim of a number of burglaries. The effect of these was that she was now afraid to go out and lived in continual fear of being burgled again.

The second example, from Plymouth, is of a man who was classified as a first-timer, but was subsequently revictimised:

This man had had two further burglaries since the incident recorded in February and can now no longer obtain household insurance unless he pays a massive premium. He came across as very angry that the police cannot "pin" these crimes on the culprits. His wife works in an off-licence⁴ and he feels he must collect her from work as it is too dangerous for her to walk home alone. He is fed up with this country in general, and plans to sell his house and move to France.

Fear of future crime, disillusionment with the police and a desire to move out of the area (or even the country) reflect the themes identified through the more quantitative interviews.

SUMMARY

While much of the research to date on repeat victimisation has focused on Britain, comparisons with North America have implied that it is a feature of crime — and notably burglary — in many countries. On the contrary, our survey in different European countries indicates a considerably lower incidence of repeat victimisation in the cities in Germany, Poland and Hungary that we covered, despite the fact that lifestyle measures suggest that risk might be greater there in certain respects. One exception to this pattern is the apparently high rate of *dacha* revictimisation, indicating that the fact that these properties are empty and otherwise unprotected for long periods increases the risk that they will be both burgled and subject to repeat burglaries.

When we compared the characteristics of first-timers and repeats, few marked differences emerged, although in general those variables associated with victimisation were slightly accentuated among repeats. Further, there was no convincing evidence that repeats were more likely to be affected by the burglary at the time it occurred. In essence, it seems likely that the "shock of the new" more than compensates for the "last straw." In this context, it is perhaps surprising that first-timers were more likely to feel they had no need for victim assistance.

A different pattern emerges, however, when we consider the longer-term implications of repeat victimisation. Repeats were less positive about their neighbours and neighbourhood and more inclined to express a desire to move, and they were more likely to register fear, related to both the risk of a future burglary and street offences. This suggests both that crime prevention and community safety initiatives are correctly targeted at repeat victims, and that longer-term support, rather than support in the immediate aftermath of the crime, might be needed. In either case, our findings indicate that being the victim of a second (or third?) burglary within a five-year period does have an impact upon victims' sense of vulnerability and leads to a poorer quality of life.

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NOTES

1. Thus the otherwise excellently referenced report by the National Board for Crime Prevention (1994) notes that the cumulative effect on people can be debilitating, but provides no references to support this.
2. The research team, which the author directed, comprised Ilona Gorgenyi, Gerd Kirchhoff, Zofia Ostrihanska, Sandra Walklate and Dobrochna Wojcik. The project was funded by the Central European university: contract 7/91-92, total award \$55,200. Additional travel funds were supplied by NATO: contract CRG 920530, total award 277,000 BF.
3. This is an approximate measure. Victims were not asked whether earlier burglaries took place at their *dacha* or conventional homes, so it is possible that some *dacha* victims cited earlier burglaries against their conventional homes, while some conventional home victims may have cited earlier *dacha* burglaries.
4. I.e., a shop selling alcohol.