



UNC CHARLOTTE

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**Charlotte Residential Burglary Victimization Survey: Exploring Post-Burglary
Adaption from a Victim's Perspective**

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this project was to explore security, safety and behavioral changes among residential burglary victims, approximately six months after a residential burglary at their primary residence. Burglary victims were identified with the assistance of the Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department. An online survey was designed to explore: 1) security precautions taken before the burglary incident (i.e., alarms, surveillance equipment, lighting, etc.); 2) police and/or security response; and 3) changes made following the burglary incident (i.e., light timers, alarm installation, other security measures) among a sample of burglary victims in Charlotte, North Carolina. Data collection efforts resulted in 301 usable responses. The following points highlight the results discussed in the report.

Victim Demographics and Burglary Setting Characteristics

- Just more than half of respondents were female. Almost two thirds of participants were white, a quarter of them were black, and 12% were other races. The most common age range of the respondents was 26 to 40, followed by 41 to 55.
- Residential targets of the reported burglaries were primarily single family homes, apartments or condominiums.
- Most survey participants did not live alone; they lived with spouses, other family members, or roommates. Only 3% of the respondents did not live at the residence at the time of the burglary. More than two-thirds of respondents lived at the burglarized residence five years or less.
- Burglaries occurred most frequently between 12:00pm and 4:00 pm. Only one in six burglaries occurred between 10:01 pm and 5:59 am (i.e., nighttime).
- Importantly, no one was present in the residence during 80% of the burglaries.

Victimization Reporting and Police Response Time

- Almost three quarters of the respondents reported the burglary to police.
 - Alarm companies notified the police in 43% of the events that occurred with an actively-monitored alarm system.
 - Police response time was less than 15 minutes for 30% of respondents, and less than an hour for about half the survey participants.

Residential Security and Alarm Status at the Time of the Offense

- The most common security measures reported to be in place at the time of the burglary were 1) leaving indoor lighting on; 2) having a security sign; and 3) owning a dog.
- Twenty-nine percent of respondents reported having an alarm system at the time of the burglary.
 - Among the alarm owners, more than half said the alarm system was not fully-activated, or activated at all, at the time of the burglary.
 - Two-thirds of alarm owners indicated the system was being actively monitored by the alarm company at the time of the burglary.
- The primary reason mentioned for not having an alarm at the time of the burglary was that victims were renters at the residence. Further, almost 20% reported cost as a reason for not having an alarm, although 14% said they were thinking about getting an alarm.

Method of Entry, Items Stolen and Offender/Case Status

- Entry occurred primarily by breaking (24.1%) or forcing open (15%) a window for forcing a front (15%) or back door (21.4%) open.
- The most common items taken during the burglaries were computers, jewelry, smart devices/phones, and televisions; items that were rarely taken included prescription or other drugs and firearms (rifles and pistols were each taken in only 2% of cases)
- The offender(s) was/were apprehended by the time of the survey (approximately six months later) in 18% of cases.
 - More than half of apprehensions involved only one suspect.
 - Almost a third of respondents knew the suspect.

- Stolen items were recovered in 17% of cases.

Residential Security Changes Following the Burglary

- When asked about security changes/improvements after the burglary, the most common change was installing a new alarm system (35%). The next most common changes were leaving on inside and outside lights. Less than one in five respondents said they have made no security improvements since the burglary.
- The only demographic characteristic related to number and type of security improvements was age, with respondents aged 40 or younger being significantly more likely than older participants to purchase a firearm.
- Respondents who lived in the same residence that was burglarized were significantly more likely than those who moved to start leaving indoor and outdoor lights on, and to install new outdoor cameras/surveillance equipment.

Fear of Victimization before and after the Burglary

- Levels of fear of being burglarized increased after the burglary for 69% of respondents. The average increase in fear levels was 2.25 points on a nine-point scale, which was statistically significant.
 - Individuals 40 and younger had lower levels of fear before the burglaries as compared to older victims; no other demographic characteristic was related to level of fear before or after the residence was burglarized.
 - Survey participants with moderate to high levels of fear before the burglary were significantly more likely to have left indoor lights on at the time of the offense.
 - Victims with moderate to high fear levels after the burglary were significantly more likely to start parking a car in the driveway or parking lot as a security enhancement.
 - Respondents whose levels of fear increased by three or more points on the nine-point scale were significantly more likely to not live in the burglarized residence.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Burglary, a FBI Uniform Crime Report - Part I Index Crime, often results not only in loss of physical and valuable property, but also has significant implications for the physical and psychological health of victims (Wright & Decker, 1994). Although perceptions of safety remain high, offender-based data reveal a 60.2 percent decrease in the burglary rate over the past three decades, when burglary rates dropped from 1,684.1 incidents per 100,000 persons in 1980 to a low of 670.2 incidents per 100,000 persons in 2012 (FBI Uniform Crime Reports, 2016). These data are supplemented by victimization data from the National Crime Victimization Survey where the rate of household burglary declined 63.9 percent from 1993, when 64.0 incidents per 1,000 households were victimized, to 23.1 incidents per 1,000 households in 2014 (NCVS, 2016). The victimization data are particularly relevant because it also indicates that only approximately half of all victims of residential burglary choose to report the victimization to the police (Brame, Turner, & Paternoster (forthcoming). Without citizen-police interactions related to the burglary incident, victims lose out on the opportunity to receive any professional advice related to future security and safety concerns (Greenberg & Beach, 2004; Morgan, 2001). The further development of knowledge related to how burglary victims respond to their victimization is the focus of the present study.

Burglary Victimization and Victim Responses

Despite perceivably low reporting rates by victims of burglary, researchers have reported a series of important findings related to the burglary victimization experiences. In fact, Baker and Gray (2005) provided one of the only comprehensive studies of post-incident behaviors taken by burglary victims. Relying on data from semi-structured interviews with 54 victims of

burglary in New Zealand, Baker and Gray provided evidence related to: (1) the awareness of police and community initiatives related to burglary; (2) victims' satisfaction with police services after reporting a burglary; (3) specific details of attempted and completed burglaries; and (4) victims' documentation of security measures before and after the burglary. Each of these broader issues is discussed below.

In any given community, police officers spend a portion of their day engaging with members of the community to build relationships, gain intelligence, and solve crimes (Skogan, 2006). In a study of New Zealanders, no police/community initiative administered in the study area resulted in at least 50 percent of the sample becoming aware of its existence without some prompting (Baker & Gray, 2005). In other words, the majority of citizens appear to be generally unaware of the police/community initiatives in a given community. Approximately two-thirds (62 percent) of respondents were aware of police engagement in burglary-specific operations and that they were targeting known offenders. Unfortunately, respondents were generally ambivalent about police initiatives to reduce burglary and were skeptical as to whether imprisonment would serve to change offender behavior (Baker & Gray, 2005).

A slight majority of victims report a burglary incident to the police. Research has documented that the motivation for reporting is centered on the victims' perceptions of achieving procedural justice and other instrumental factors (Murphy & Barkworth, 2014). Victims who did report their burglary victimization to the police indicated a general level of satisfaction with how the police handled the incident (Baker & Gray, 2005; van Dijk, 2001). However, victims were less supportive of their crime prevention strategies and of follow-up communication by the police once the crime was reported. Victims were generally resigned to their loss of property,

but they just reported wanting more information on how the case was handled subsequent to the initial report. Residents made recommendations suggesting that police develop a system to routinely inform and update residents about the outcome of an incident (Baker & Gray, 2005; Coupe & Griffiths, 1999). Increased attention to the plight of victims would also assist in repairing the psychological damage, often the most damaging aspect of the offense (Maguire & Bennett, 1982). Victims report increased levels of fear for up to two years following a burglary incident (Baker, 2014). It is notable that burglary victims in jurisdictions with low clearance rates reported rates of satisfaction with their case investigation similar to those victims in jurisdictions with higher clearance rates (Burrows, 1986).

Understanding the detailed nature of the burglary incident has important implications for law enforcement, how they respond to the event, and how residents can protect themselves from being a victim again in the future. Wright and Decker (1994) aimed to illustrate the nature of a residential burglary incident through the eyes of the offender (also see Palmer, Holmes, & Hollin, 2002; Blevins, Kuhns & Lee, 2012). Through a series of intense interviews with burglars, their research documented that burglary offenders sometimes chose their target in advance using knowledge gained about the people and the property (Wright & Decker, 1994). Burglars with less experience, and those operating within urban environments, tend to be more opportunistic (Rengert & Wasilchick, 2000). Burglars generally report a process of weighing the costs and benefits associated with the target (Hakim, Rengert, & Shachmurove, 2001; Rengert & Wasilchick, 2000). Sanders, Kuhns & Blevins (2016) confirmed that many burglars are impulsive, particularly female burglars, and are likely drug-motivated (see Kuhns, Blevins, Miller & Cambareri, 2016).

Victimization data also suggests that residences in locations where offenders can easily flee, and those without adequate security, have an increased probability of being burglarized (Baker & Gray, 2005). Entry into residences typically occurs via windows or doors where the offender forced their way into the residence (Baker & Gray, 2005; Triggs, 2005). Damage to the residence was typically confined to the point of entry and items most likely to be stolen included electronics and jewelry and other items that could be quickly converted into cash (Baker & Gray, 2005). Some research documented that up to one-third of burglary victims reported significant damage to the household well beyond the point of entry into the residence (Triggs, 2005).

Finally, knowledge about the security measures that victims had in place prior to the incident, and how victims responded following the incident, is limited. Baker and Gray (2005) reported that although the majority of their study victims reported having locks and deadbolts on doors to the residence, only 14.8 percent possessed a security alarm prior to the incident. Three out of four victims reported receiving security advice from the police at the time the victim reported the offense. Most residents made some changes to the property to enhance their security, including one in four victims who installed security alarms in response to the victimization (Baker & Gray, 2005). Residents not making changes were often renters who believed those actions were the responsibility of the property owner. Even with changes made to improve security, research continues to document that residents remain fearful of being burglarized again (Lai, Zhao, & Longmire, 2012). In fact, over half of burglary victims were either “fairly” or “very” worried about their residence experiencing a re-victimization (Ministry of Justice, 2003).

Repeat Burglary Victimization and Fear of Future Victimization

Fear of re-victimization is well-founded. Research suggests that prior burglary victimization increases the risk of future victimization. Burglars also often admit to targeting the same residence multiple times (Wright & Decker, 1994). Victimization studies in the United States, as well as other nations, also report a higher risk of repeat victimization either by the same offender or by different offenders who may communicate with one another (Bowers & Johnson, 2005; Forrester et al., 1988; Tseloni & Farrell, 2002; Tseloni et al., 2004). In addition, other dwellings with similar structural layouts that are geographically located near a victimized property are often at higher risk, as burglars find the familiarity of the target setting to be particularly attractive (Bowers & Johnson, 2005; Bowers, Johnson, & Hirshfield, 2003; Nee & Meenaghan, 2006). Drug addiction may also facilitate repeat victimization and repeat offending within the context of burglary specifically (Kuhns, Blevins, Miller & Cambareri, 2016). That is to say, burglars are rarely one-time offenders, and successful burglary at one location can transition to another at the same location or nearby. As such, to the extent that burglary among males and females is drug-motivated, repeated burglaries and repeat burglary victimization may also be drug-motivated. Victims who take the time to enhance their security and target-harden their homes may therefore reduce their risks of repeat victimization.

Purpose of the Current Study

Despite the areas of interest outlined above, relatively little is known about the security and safety actions of burglary victims before, and subsequent to, a burglary incident. Some questions that may be relevant include: 1) what types of security precautions were taken before the burglary incident (i.e., alarms, surveillance equipment, lighting, etc.)?; 2) what information

does the victim have about the police and/or security response?; and 3) what changes did the victim make following the burglary incident (i.e., light timers, alarm installation, other security measures)? While some limited evidence exists on these issues from burglary victims in New Zealand, it is unclear whether these responses are relevant to residents in the United States and other countries. The present study uses self-reported data from a sample of several hundred residential burglary victims in the city of Charlotte, North Carolina to address some of these concerns and to broaden our understanding of how burglary victims respond to a burglary.

METHODOLOGY

Study Subjects

The subjects invited to participate in this study were victims of residential burglary in the Charlotte, North Carolina region. The Charlotte Mecklenburg Police Department (CMPD) provided victim contact information, which included email addresses in some cases, for residential burglary victims from November 2014 to April 2016. Most of the burglary victims did not provide email addresses during the corresponding investigations (either because they did not have one, they did not want to share it with officers/investigators, or because officers did not ask for an email address). However, over the study timeframe, we received email addresses for 1,577 (24.3%) of the 6,503 residential burglary victims who reported the crime to CMPD during the 18-month study period. A small proportion of those addresses were ultimately invalid or no longer active when we contacted victims for the study. As such, our sample of residential burglary victims may be biased toward those who had an active email address and were willing to share that information with the investigating officer (assuming the officer asked for the information).

Survey Methodology

An online survey process was used to collect the data. Victims with an active and accurate email address were invited to participate via Survey Monkey. The survey process occurred in monthly waves, which were generally initiated six months following the reported month of the initial victimization. For example, subjects that were burglarized in November 2014 were initially contacted six months later in May 2015, which allowed them sufficient time to potentially change their security practices. A total of 18 monthly cohorts were invited to

participate six months after the initial victimization. Survey reminder emails were sent four times to those that had not responded to the initial email inquiry inviting them to participate in the study. The first three reminders were sent on a weekly basis, starting about a week following the initial contact. The final reminder was sent several months later as a final attempt to solicit participation in the research.

The email indicated that subjects' responses would be confidential, that the study was conducted in cooperation with a local university (approved by the Institutional Review Board) and the CMPD, and that they could contact the primary author directly if they had any questions or concerns. A separate email address was set up for that purpose, although only a handful of respondents used the email address at all, and only one respondent expressed any concerns during the duration of the study (and those concerns were quickly addressed). Subjects who completed the survey were modestly compensated for their participation in the form of an electronic gift certificate of their choosing from one of two major retail outlets (Amazon or Target).

The survey questionnaire was designed by the research team and some of the questions were, in part, developed based on a prior survey of incarcerated burglars (Blevins, Kuhns and Lee, 2012; Kuhns, Blevins, Miller & Cambareri, 2016; Sanders, Kuhns & Blevins, 2016). The survey was designed to measure and assess security-related characteristics of the home before, during, and after the burglary, and collect general details about the burglary event, information about police/security response, the current outcome of the case, and changes that were made following the burglary, particularly those related to increasing safety and security. Additional questions examined fear of victimization prior to and following to the burglary.

Survey Response Rate

A total of 301 victims responded to the survey, although completion rates varied somewhat for some individual items. The overall survey response rate was 19.0% (after removing invalid email addresses since these invited participants did not receive the invitation). Monthly cohort response rates ranged from 7.4% to 31.1%. Evidence suggests that response rates for online surveys are systematically lower than other forms of survey dissemination, and rates may be decreasing over time. Sheehan (2001) found that response rates to emailed surveys from 1991–1996 averaged 46.8 percent but decreased to 29.5 percent from 1997 to 2000. Hamilton (2003) reported wide variation in response rates at one online survey website, where half of the surveys generated at least a 26 percent response rate, the average response rate was 32.5 percent, and small targeted surveys tended to generate slightly higher response rates. Nulty (2008) summarized a series of online survey studies and found that those produced, on average, a 33 percent response rate in educational settings specifically. Finally, a meta-analysis calculated an average response rate of 39.6 percent from 68 surveys across 49 studies, but these were surveys conducted over 15 years ago (Cook, Health, and Thompson 2000).

These comparisons suggest that the study response rate may be somewhat lower than other online survey projects, although the types of survey projects are certainly not comparable. We can only speculate about the causes, but we attribute the lower observed response rate to several factors. First, burglary victims may be concerned about sharing information via an online survey that could (theoretically) increase their chances of being victimized again (e.g., those that reported that they did not increase their security following the initial burglary might have increased fear of future victimization). Second, given the specific nature of the survey,

some victims may be concerned about sharing information with the police (e.g., some may know the alleged offender but the offender may not have been apprehended). Third, in September 2013 there was a significant police shooting involving an African-American victim and a Caucasian police officer in Charlotte. This event contributed to some minor levels of unrest. Then in September 2016, the city of Charlotte experienced a series of larger, and more destructive, public protests following another police shooting death of an African-American man (although the police officer was also African-American in that case). These events, and the public protests that followed, may be suggestive of a substantial (but unmeasured) degree of distrust between Charlotte residents and CMPD. Our survey was conducted during the timeframe between these two significant shooting events, and it ended a few months after the September 2016 protests. As such, some (victimized) residents may be unwilling to engage in any research processes that involve the police department, and this may be particularly true for African-American burglary victims. These explanations are speculative, and the precise link between these events and the low response rates to our burglary victimization survey, is unknown.

RESULTS

Respondents were asked to report information about their individual characteristics. Forty-seven percent of the respondents were male and 53% were female. About 63% were Caucasian/white, 25% were African-American/black, 4% were Hispanic, 3% were Asian, and the remainder were other races. Most (41%) reported being in a 26-40 age bracket, followed by the 41-55 age bracket (25%) (see Table 1).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristics of 301 Residential Burglary Victims in Charlotte

	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
18-25	44	15.7
26-40	116	41.4
41-55	69	24.6
56-70	42	15.0
71 and older	9	3.2
Gender		
Male	133	47.3
Female	148	52.7
Race		
Caucasian	176	63.1
African American	70	25.1
Hispanic	12	4.3
Asian	9	3.2
Other	12	4.3

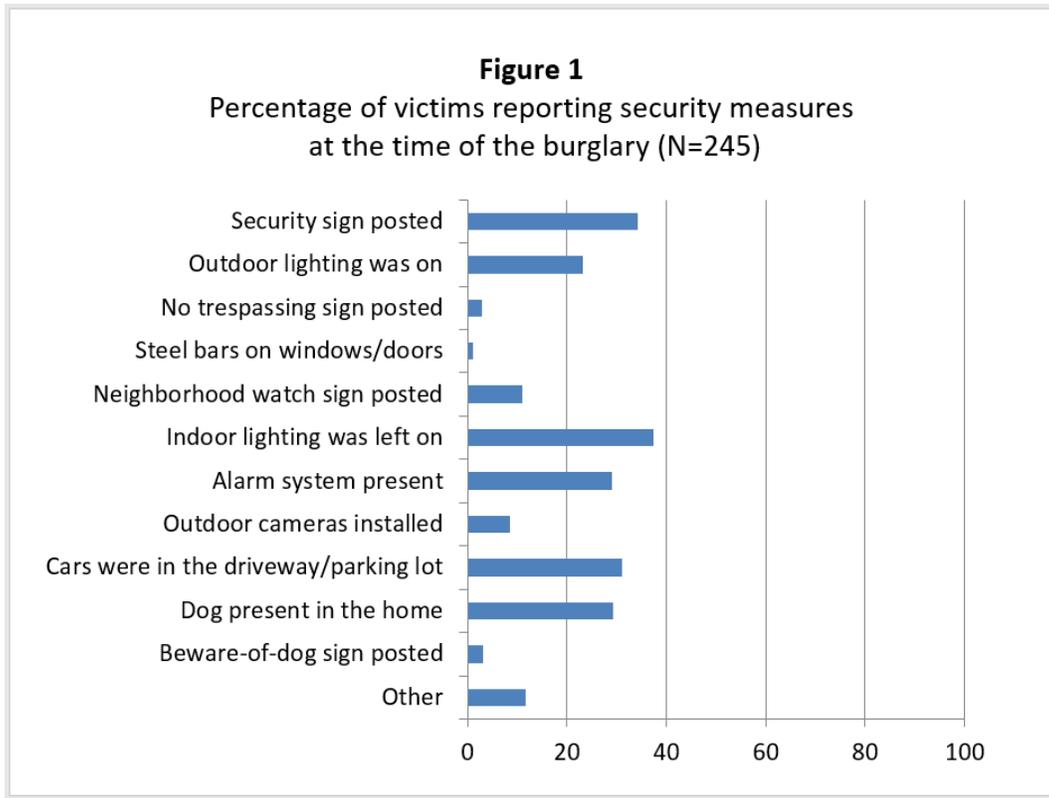
About 25% of respondents reported that they were living alone at the time of the burglary and 3% did not live at the residence at the time it was burglarized. Others reported living with a spouse or significant other, a roommate(s), or other family members. Most participants reported living at the burglarized location for less than a year (33%), or from 1-5 years (35%). About a third were living in apartments/condos, with the majority (61%) living in single family homes.

Most (71%) indicated that there were other homes or businesses nearby, that the residence was near a major road, but that traffic was not heavy and neighbors were typically not walking around at the time of the burglary.

Most (80%) of the residents reported that they were burglarized when no one was in the home. The burglaries occurred during varying timeframes, with the majority occurring between 12pm-4pm (32%) and 4pm-10pm (20%); others occurred in the early morning between 6am and 12pm (15%) or at night (16%). Almost three-quarters (73%) of the respondents indicated that they had personally reported the crime to the police.

Safety and security measures taken at the time of the burglary

The survey instrument included a list of 14 common security measures (e.g., signs, alarms, dogs, cameras, steel bars, leaving indoor/outdoor lights on, etc.). We asked the respondents to indicate which of these security measures were in place at the time of the burglary (see Figure 1), and more than three quarters (78.74%) reported at least one was in place. Of the security measures listed, the most commonly reported was indoor lighting left on (37.5%), followed by a posted security sign (34.3%), owning a dog (29.4%), and having an alarm system (29%).



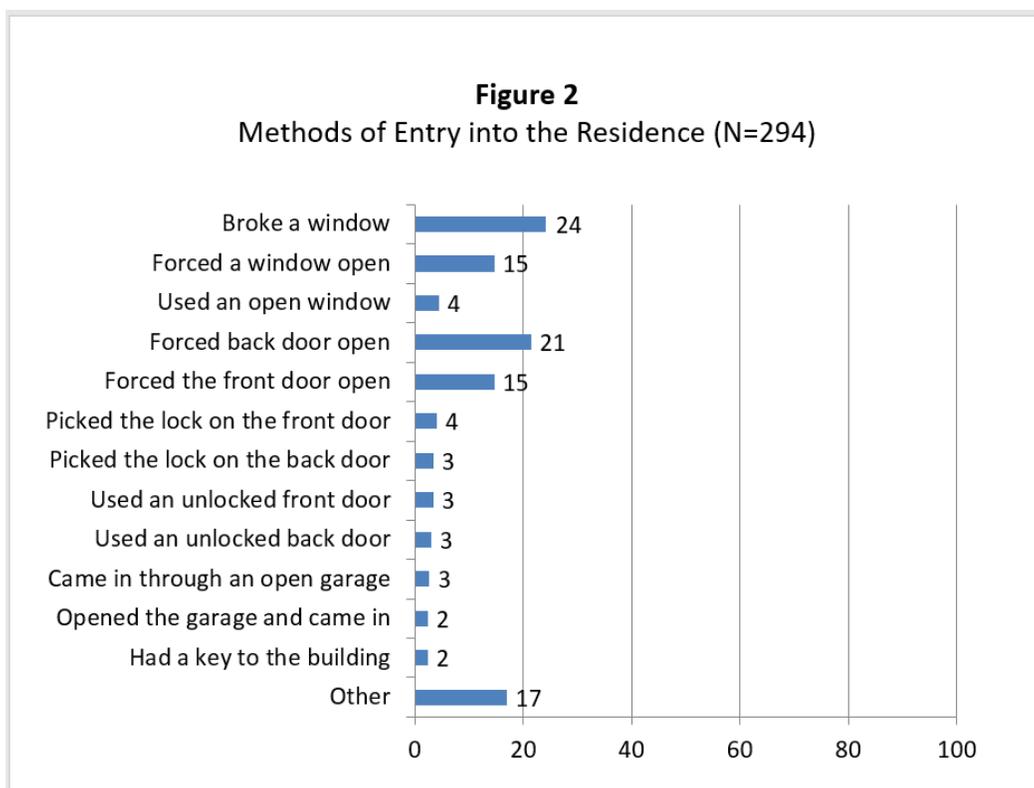
When asked specifically if there was a burglar alarm in the residence at the time of the burglary, 26% of respondents reported there was an alarm system, although more than half (54.5%) of these alarm owners reported that it was not fully activated at the time of the burglary. Residents living in single family homes were significantly more likely to have alarm systems installed, although there were no observed relationships between alarm ownership and any specific demographic characteristic.

Only 14% indicated that the intruder attempted to disable the alarm system, with just 4% indicating that alarm wires were cut (many alarm systems, of course, are moving toward wireless

infrastructures). About two-thirds of the alarms (53) were being actively monitored by an alarm company at the time of the burglary, and about 43% of those (23 of the 53 who answered this question) systems/companies notified the police when the burglary occurred.

Information regarding the offense and the offender(s)

Most of the offenders entered the residence through some use of force (about 62%), either by breaking a window or by forcing a door or a window open.



A wide range of electronic items and property were stolen including computers (42%), phones/smart devices (36%), televisions (33%), and tablets (25%). Jewelry (37%) and cash (23%) were also common targets, and clothing/shoes (15%) were also mentioned. On the other

hand, prescription medications (4%) and other drugs (1%) were rarely reported as stolen within our sample of victims. Furthermore, firearms were rarely reported stolen - only six victims (2%) reported that the intruder stole pistol(s) and seven others (2%) reported that rifles were removed. Most respondents estimated the value of their stolen property as worth less than \$1,000 (32%), or between \$1,001 and \$3,000 (28%).

Police and Alarm Company Response

Police response times to the reported burglaries were generally good. Thirty percent of victims indicated that the police showed up in less than 15 minutes, with another 50% indicating they arrived within an hour. It was extremely rare for an alarm company representative to come to the residence (2%).

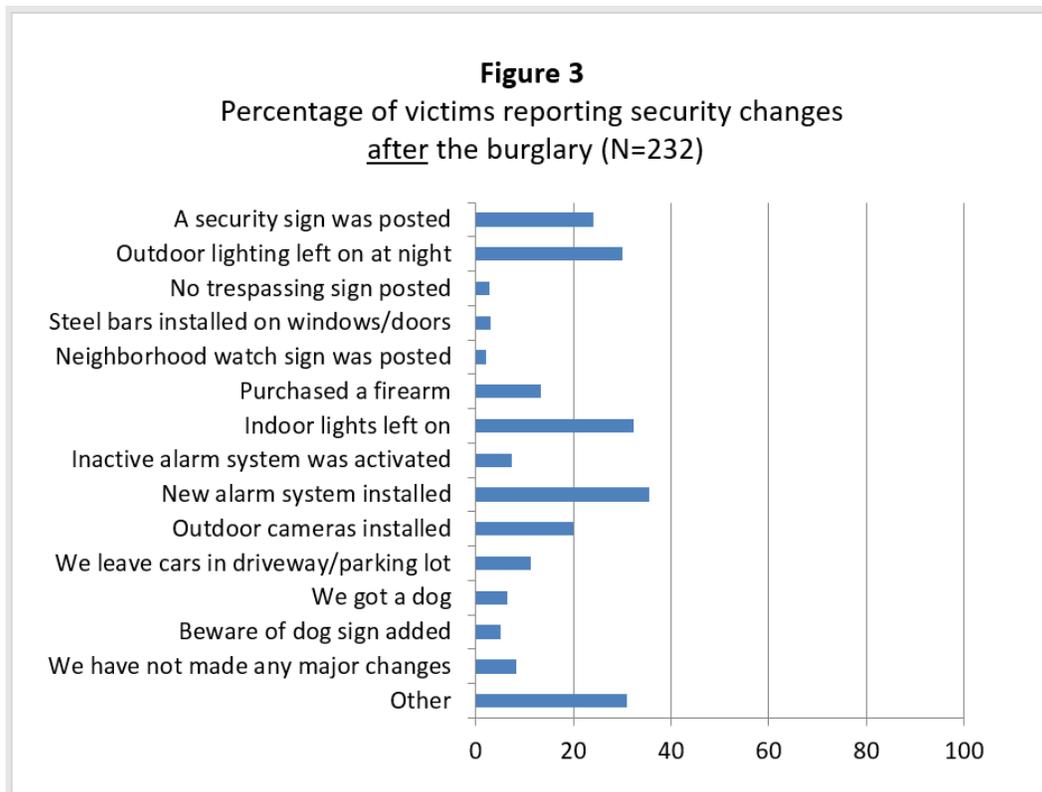
Respondents were asked to provide additional information about their experiences with law enforcement specific to the burglary via an open-ended question on the survey. Some participants reported that police follow-up was incomplete, meaning that they never heard back from the officer or the department regarding their stolen property, they were unsure whether the case was active or closed, or that the responding officer did not seem particularly concerned with their case. It is important to recognize, however, that 32 of 82 respondents (39%) who provided written answers to the open-ended question praised the department and/or the responding officers/detectives for their efforts.

About 18% of the victims reported that the offender(s) was/were apprehended, although just over a quarter did not know whether the offender was caught. Most (54%) of the burglaries involved just one offender, although more than one in three burglaries involved two or more offenders. Nearly a third of the victims indicated that they knew the suspect(s), yet only 17% of

victims indicated that any of their property was recovered. Most reported that their recovered property was returned by the police (31.3%), recovered at a pawn shop (25%), or discovered at the suspect's home (12.5%).

Security Changes Following the Burglary

Four out of five victims reported making some changes/improvements in security measures following the initial intrusion. The most commonly reported improvement/change was adding a new alarm system (35%), followed by intentionally leaving more lights on inside (33%) and outside (31%) of the home at night (despite the observation that many burglaries occurred during daytime hours). The addition of new security signs (24%) and outdoor cameras/surveillance systems (20%) were also commonly mentioned security improvements. Significantly more residents who were living in single family homes (versus apartments, townhomes, condominiums, etc.) reported adding alarm systems following the burglary. Only 19 respondents indicated that they had not made any major changes at all (see Figure 3).



Notably, statistical analyses indicated that, with one exception, demographic characteristics were not significantly related to the number or types security changes that were adopted after the initial burglary. Specifically, participants in the youngest two age brackets (18-25 and 26-40) were significantly ($p=.030$) more likely to buy a firearm than older respondents. Other differences were found when comparing respondents who still lived in the burglarized residences at the time of the survey versus those who had moved. Although installing a new alarm system was not significant ($p=.088$), residents who continued to live in the burglarized residence were significantly more likely to leave on indoor ($p=.005$) and outdoor ($p=.035$) lighting and install new outdoor cameras ($p=.041$) as compared to those who no longer lived in the same location.

Reported Reasons for Not Having or Installing an Alarm System

Fifty-two percent of the respondents reported having an alarm system at the time of the survey. Among those who did not have an active alarm system, 43% indicated that it was because they were renting their current home (and thus were unable to get an alarm system installed, or they would need the landlord to install/approve one), 14% indicated they were thinking about getting an alarm, and 19% indicated they would like to get one, but mentioned costs as a primary concern. Again, the survey invitation was first sent to potential respondents approximately six months after the victimization. It is quite possible that some victims would increase their security, including installing alarms, at a later time.

Fear of Burglary Victimization before and after the Burglary

Using a nine-point scale (1=not fearful at all, 5=somewhat fearful, 9=very fearful), respondents were asked to report how fearful they were about becoming a burglary victim before the burglary occurred, and then of becoming a victim of burglary again after the initial burglary referenced in the survey. Levels of fear increased for 69% of respondents, stayed the same for 20%, and decreased for only 11% of participants. The average level of fear was 3.11 before and 5.36 after the burglary, representing a statistically significant increase in fear ($p=.000$).

Participants' levels of fear were also examined in relation to other items on the survey. The original nine point scales were collapsed into three ordinal points of low (1-3), moderate (4-6), and high (7-9) levels of fears. These original scales were used to explore whether change in fear levels before and after the burglary were related to responses on other survey items. Relationships between levels of fear and several other items on the survey approached statistical significance, but only four comparisons emerged as actually significant.

First, respondents aged 40 and younger had significantly ($p=.017$) lower levels of fear before the burglary than older participants; no other demographic characteristics were related to fear levels before or after the crimes. Second, individuals with moderate and high levels of fear of becoming a burglary victim before the crime were significantly more likely ($p=.003$) than others to have left indoor lights on at the time of the burglary. Third, participants with moderate to high levels of fear after the initial burglary were more likely ($p=.019$) than others to begin the practice of leaving a car parked in the driveway or parking lot. Last, respondents whose levels of fear increased by three points or more were significantly ($p=.044$) more likely to no longer live in the burglarized residence than those whose fear levels changed by fewer than three points on the nine-point scale.

DISCUSSION

The primary goal of this project was to develop more detailed information about the actions that burglary victims employed before, and subsequent to, a residential burglary. To accomplish this goal, we implemented an online survey and received responses from 301 burglary victims living in the Charlotte, North Carolina region. Results of this online victimization survey provided insights into the experiences and reactions of residential burglary victims in one large city in North Carolina. Respondents from a varied set of demographic subgroups shared information about themselves, the burglary incident, law enforcement response and follow-up, as well as their own perceptions and actions before and after the burglary. The results provided a detailed snapshot of these experiences; however, two significant findings as they relate to burglary victims pre- and post-victimization are discussed in more detail below.

First, most residents in the present study had some form of security measure in place prior to the burglary incident. This finding is consistent with prior research suggesting that about half of burglary victims have security in place prior to the burglary incident (Baker & Gray, 2005). But, it is important to point out that in the present study, the most commonly cited security precautions used at the time of the burglary were leaving indoor lights on, having a security sign, and owning a dog. Stated differently, while residents initiated security measures, several residents appeared reluctant to employ enhanced security features, particularly those that have ongoing operating costs (i.e., alarm systems), prior to experiencing a burglary incident. In fact, only 29% of respondents in the present study had an alarm system at the time of the initial burglary, and more than half of these alarms were not fully activated at the time of the burglary.

Second, the data indicate that most (80%) individuals experiencing a burglary incident mobilized some method(s) to increase or improve the security at their residence. This finding is also consistent with the limited body of research suggesting that up to half of burglary victims install new locks, and one in four residents purchased alarm systems, following a burglary incident (Baker & Gray, 2005). While it is impossible to determine whether having a fully activated alarm would have prevented a burglary or increased the odds of suspect apprehension, prior evidence suggests that burglars are deterred by alarms (Blevins, Kuhns & Lee, 2012). The most common security enhancement made by the group of burglary victims in the present study was to install a new alarm system. And those individuals who did not have alarm systems reported renting their residences and the cost as the primary reasons for not owning one.

Research has documented that the psychological impact of the victimization experience remains a significant concern for burglary victims (Maguire & Bennett, 1982). Studies have also documented that victims report increased levels of fear for up to two years following a burglary incident (Baker, 2014). In fact, Weinstein's (1989) research identifies the power of personal victimization experiences in motivating individuals to employ self-protective behaviors. Building on prior research (Baker & Gray, 2005), the present study further documents that burglary victims' most typical response is to purchase a home security system. Given that burglars will tend to avoid homes/businesses with alarm systems (Blevins, Kuhns & Lee, 2012), these are prudent measures that should be encouraged among future burglary victims. While these findings make an important contribution to the literature, and offer additional general knowledge concerning burglary, the study should be replicated in other settings to determine if victims have similar experiences and reactions to residential burglary.

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