



JDiBrief – Crime

Bicycle theft: SUMMARY (1 of 5)

Author: Aiden Sidebottom, UCL Jill Dando Institute

Bicycle theft is a common problem internationally. Ordinarily it refers to the theft of the entire bicycle, but can also include the theft of component parts and accessories. Estimates on the volume of cycle theft using police recorded crime data undercount the extent the problem because of the high levels of underreporting; the police are typically informed of one cycle theft for every five stolen. UK victim survey data overcome this problem and reveal general increases both in the volume and rate of cycle theft in recent years. This demands our attention since most types of acquisitive crime against property have witnessed considerable reductions over the same period. What's more, the risk of bicycle theft is shown to be an important consideration in whether individuals choose to cycle. High levels of (perceived) bicycle theft may therefore undermine attempts to increase cycle usage as a sustainable form of health-promoting transport.

PLACE: Most cycle thefts occur in the immediate vicinity of the victim's home such as gardens, sheds and garages. This is largely attributed to a lack of secure storage at such locations. Presently though, research has tended to focus on bicycle theft in public settings, particularly schools, university campuses and transport hubs. These tend to suffer high levels of cycle theft due to a regular supply of unguarded dormant bicycles.

OFFENDER: There is a scarcity of knowledge on bicycle thieves. Few are caught by the police and victims are rarely able to provide information that might assist an investigation. What we do know is that cycles are stolen for different reasons, reflecting the contrasting motivations of different types of offenders. Some cycles are stolen as a method of transport; others to convert for cash or drugs; and some to facilitate the commission of further crimes. Awareness of these distinctions can usefully inform your response.

TARGET: Bicycles are attractive targets for theft. They are widely available (increasingly so in many urban settings), easy to use, easy to sell and, critically, often left poorly secured despite their high value.

VICTIM: According to victim survey data from several countries, the risk of experiencing cycle theft is higher than that of other vehicle crimes. Many victims of cycle theft suffer multiple victimisations and the risk of cycle theft appears somewhat contagious: in the wake of a cycle theft event the probability of further cycle thefts is raised in nearby locations for a period of around a month.

IMPLEMENTING RESPONSES: Numerous interventions have been put in place to reduce cycle theft. These tend to focus on catching offenders attempting to steal bikes, increasing the difficulty associated with disposing of stolen bikes through the use of bicycle registration schemes, improving the security of cycle parks and cycle furniture, promoting the use of better locks and/or better locking practice, and combinations of the former. While success stories are available, much of the evidence indicating the success of schemes is weak and anecdotal. Systematic evaluations are rare but necessary for the future to determine 'what works'.