



# JDiBrief – Crime

## Bicycle theft: CRIME OVERVIEW (2 of 5)

Author: Aiden Sidebottom, UCL Jill Dando Institute

**DEFINITION:** Bicycle theft is defined as the illegal removal of a non-motorized pedal cycle. This refers both to thefts *of* bicycles and thefts *from* bicycles. Theft of bicycles include thefts for transportation, thefts in which stolen cycles are traded in for cash or drugs, thefts of specific bikes to order and thefts to facilitate further crimes. Theft from bicycles refer to the removal of cycle components such as seats and wheels as well as the theft of cycling accessories such as lights, pumps and helmets. Awareness of the different offence types is important: different types of bicycle theft often require different responses.

Bicycle theft is a high-volume crime, yet has been the subject of limited academic attention. Research findings that are available suggest that opportunity plays a major role in explaining cycle theft patterns. Levels of cycle theft are positively correlated with bicycle ownership levels and cycle thefts tend to concentrate at locations where bikes are bountiful, such as university campuses and transport hubs. What's more, crime victim surveys repeatedly find that many bicycles are stolen from in and around the victim's home. Common to all settings is the observation that many stolen bicycles are locked insecurely – making them attractive targets to steal.

**UK TRENDS:** According to police recorded crime data, the levels of cycle theft in England and Wales have remained largely static for over a decade, with around 100,000 cycle thefts in 2010/11. However, these figures undoubtedly shrink the true extent of the problem because many cycle thefts are never reported to the police. For example, estimates from the British Crime (victims) Survey suggest that there were over 500,000 cycle thefts in 2010/11. This would be higher still was it not for the exclusion of under 16s in the survey sample. Also, the British Crime Survey estimates indicate a general increase in cycle theft over time, at a period when most other forms of acquisitive crime have seen marked reductions.

**HARMS:** Theft, and the fear of cycle theft, is a major disincentive to cycle use. Many victims of cycle theft do not replace their stolen bike. Others cycle less often. This has important policy implications because it suggests that cycle theft may jeopardise efforts to increase the use of cycles, efforts that are now widespread in many industrialized countries in an attempt to reduce automobile dependency and obesity rates in urban settings.

