



JDiBrief - Analysis

Repeat victimisation: PURPOSE & THEORY (2 of 5)

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PURPOSE: Repeat and near-repeat victimisation analysis has been gaining prominence in an operational context for over a decade. Its purpose is to identify those people, properties and places that are at a disproportionate risk of victimisation. Pure *repeat victims* are targets that are victimised multiple times (e.g., a domestic violence victim or a school that is burgled three times in one year). *Near-repeat victims* are targets that are situated in close proximity to an original target, and that get victimised soon after the original target. Previous (near) victimisation has been shown to be the best predictor of future victimisation, for many crime types and in a variety of contexts.

THEORY: Repeat and near-repeat victimisation is believed to happen for two main reasons. These are known as the *boost* and *flag* accounts.

The *boost* account states that an initial incident 'boosts' the future likelihood of victimisation. This is because offenders are known to minimise the effort they go to when searching for targets. If they have already encountered a suitable target, they are more likely to return to it once an initial crime has been committed. For example, a house that has been burgled may be burgled again to target replaced goods, or the house may be revictimised simply because it is now familiar to the offender (hence making it easier to access). The boost explanation thus relates to repeat offenders.

The *flag* account relates to the characteristics of the target. These characteristics may make the target particularly attractive in respect of what rewards the offender expects to gain from the crime, or they may make the target particularly vulnerable by reducing the risk involved or the effort needed to commit the crime. The characteristics that contribute to the target's risk of victimisation (sometimes referred to as risk factors) are assumed to be constant over time and appeal to many offenders. These targets therefore 'flag' their own suitability to multiple offenders.

The two explanations for repeat victimisation are not incompatible but suggest different mechanisms at play. In practice, it is likely that both theories are relevant. For instance, the flag characteristics of a vehicle may initially attract an offender because it is seen as an easier target (e.g., because it is an attractive prospect with easy escape routes), with the risk of future vehicle theft in the area being boosted following an initial incident.

A final theoretical consideration is that of the offender as an optimal forager. This is a concept which likens offenders to foraging animals. As a forager, an animal makes a trade-off between the energy value of the food that is immediately available and the effort that will be expended in reaching a better food source. The better food has to be good enough to offset the energy required to travel and attain it. The quality of the food in over-grazed areas diminishes until it re-grows. This is similar to a repeatedly burgled property, where the value of the items taken from this property declines until these items have been replaced. Once an area has been grazed out (i.e. skimmed of the best theft opportunities), the forager moves on. This foraging behaviour is consistent with the findings from interviews conducted with offenders about how they select their targets.

Extensive research evidence has been amassed to support these theories and the knowledge generated from such studies is being incorporated into policing strategies and tactics to better protect victims and reduce crime.