



JDiBrief – Crime

Street Robbery: CRIME OVERVIEW (2 of 5)

Author: Lisa Tompson, UCL Jill Dando Institute

DEFINITION: Street robbery is defined in this brief as the use or threat of force to steal property from a person in public space. Street robbery is also known as mugging, which usually encompasses the crime of snatch theft as well. Snatch theft differs from street robbery in that it is the taking of property from a victim without the use or threat or intimidation. It is recorded separately by police in England and Wales.

UK TRENDS: Following a peak in 2002/03, substantial decreases in street robbery volumes were seen across England and Wales. Recent figures however indicate an upward trend, with increases of 5 per cent seen in the twelve months to September 2011 (to 70,078 personal robberies). This increase was primarily driven by personal robberies in two Police forces: the Metropolitan Police Service and West Midlands Police. Over the same period robbery was seen to rise by 2 per cent in Scotland. It should be noted however that the 2009/10 British Crime Survey estimates that only 45 per cent of robberies are reported to police.

HARMS: Street robbery is a major source of fear among the public because it can involve extreme violence, a loss of control and an invasion of personal space. The public setting of robbery also makes it impactful. It is therefore harmful for its communicative properties as well as the actual damage that is caused by a street robbery event. In the UK fear of robbery is believed to be a major driver of overall fear of crime in urban areas.

THEORY: Street robbery concentrates at specific times, in particular places, and happens to certain types of people. There are a number of theories that help to explain why street robbery is patterned in these ways. At a general level, crime events (such as robbery) can be understood in terms of factors which have caused the offender and victim to intersect in time and space under the right conditions (i.e. without a guardian present). The *routine activities* of both offenders and victims - and the timing of these - can assist us in interpreting patterns in robbery that relate to space, time and who becomes a victim.

Robbery is especially patterned in time; most often occurring in the late afternoon and evening hours (although this only describes the patterns in the broadest terms). Reasons proposed for this include the relationship evening hours have with recreational activities, which can bring people who have consumed alcohol and illegal substances into contact with one another. The afternoon peak in the week is often attributed to the end of the school day. Hours of darkness may encourage more robberies.

There are also theories that look to predict where robbery is likely to happen. As certain types of businesses or facilities draw in certain types of people, land use has been a focus of theorising. It has been hypothesised that some land uses will provide good conditions for robbery to flourish (e.g. they are open late, predominantly handle cash transactions, and provide a reason for people to 'hang around' nearby).

Good quality analysis can test these theories to ascertain whether they explain patterns at the local level. The knowledge generated from such analyses will help to design effective crime prevention and detection initiatives.