



SYSTEMSTATS

North Carolina Criminal Justice Analysis Center

Governor's Crime Commission

Burglary In The Tarheel State

Every five minutes a burglary occurs in North Carolina – that is a reported burglary. In fact, data from the *National Crime Victimization Survey* reveal that about half of all burglaries are reported to law enforcement, suggesting that it is very likely that a burglary actually occurs every two to three minutes in the Tarheel state. In fact, this high frequency of burglaries in North Carolina has made our burglary rate the highest in the nation for eight consecutive years (1999 through 2006).

How has the burglary rate in North Carolina been different than that of other areas around the country in the recent past and why? What have been the rates for North Carolina counties? What is the *expected* punishment in terms of incarceration days per each act of burglary committed? Lastly, what can be done?

Overview

What is the official definition of burglary? According to the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program, burglary is defined as the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft. *Structure* pertains to a permanent dwelling such as an apartment, barn, house, trailer, houseboat, office, railroad car, stable and vessel. The use of force to gain entry does not need to have occurred for an offense to be classified as a burglary.

What is the punishment for burglary? In North Carolina, burglars are generally punished as felons depending on the degree of the offense. Specifically, the degrees and punishment of burglary are outlined in North Carolina General Statutes §14-51 and §14-52. Other specific information can be found in North Carolina General Statutes Chapter 14, Article 14.

Why be concerned with burglary? The Gallup Organization has revealed that about four percent of individuals nationwide have their house or apartment broken into each year. While this percentage of burglary victimization may seem low, polls show that many Americans worry about being victimized. In fact, 21 percent of Americans surveyed in October 2006 stated that they frequently worry about their home being burglarized when not present. Polls also show that in 2005, 29 percent of persons surveyed had a burglar alarm installed in their home, compared to just 23 percent in 2000 and 20 percent in 1994.

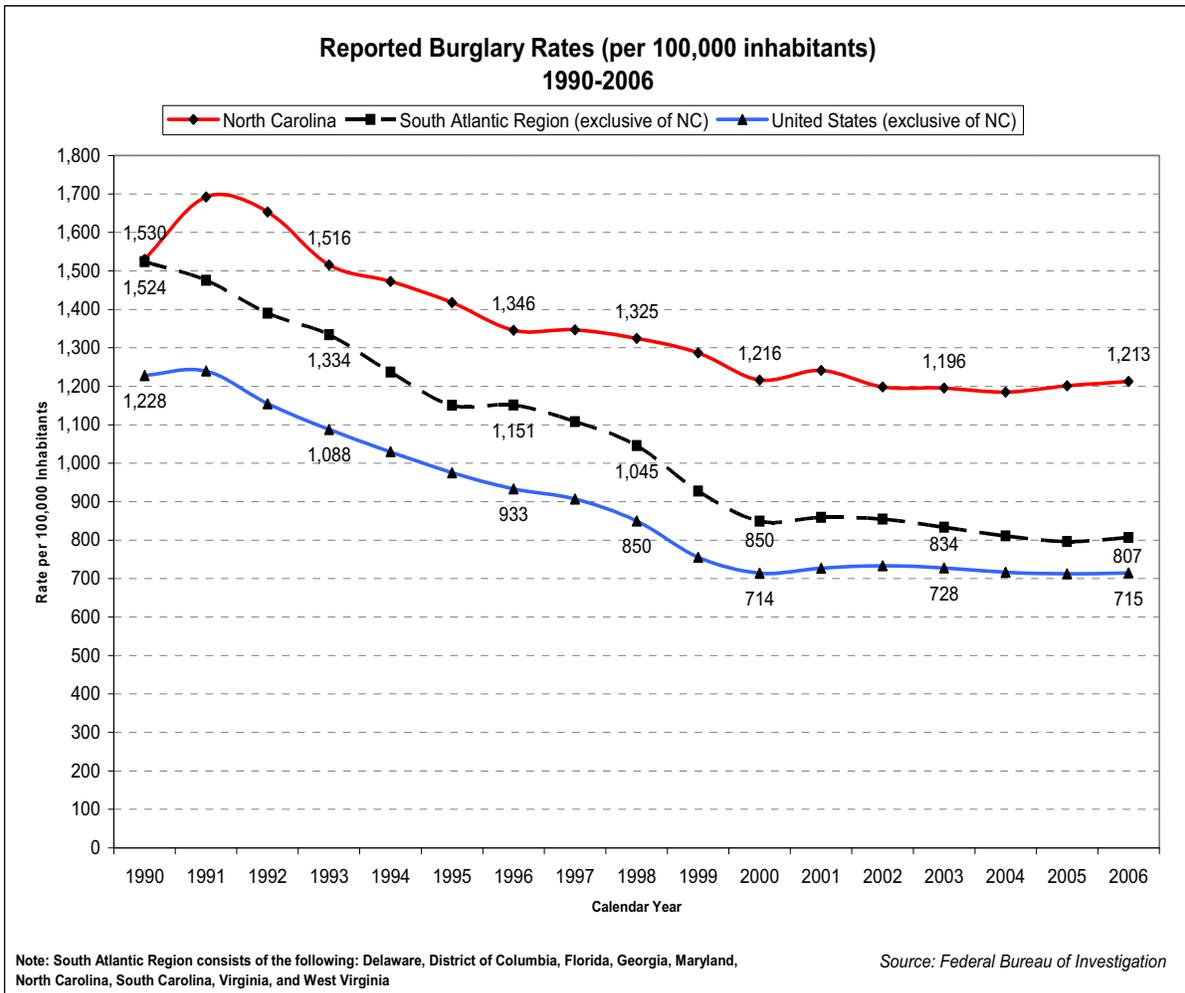
What do we know about burglary? Based on national data, the use of forced entry (i.e., breaking windows, cutting screens, picking locks, etc.) occurred in roughly 61 percent of all reported burglaries in 2006. About 32 percent of all burglaries were classified under the subcategory *Unlawful entry – No Force*, and just over seven percent were classified as *Attempted Forcible Entry*. UCR data from 2006 also show that of the residential burglaries for which the time of occurrence was known, 63 percent took place between 6 a.m. and 6 p.m. Approximately 57 percent of reported nonresidential burglaries occurred at night (between 6 p.m. and 6 a.m.).

According to North Carolina State Bureau of Investigation (SBI) crime data, roughly two out of every three reported burglaries occur at a residence. In 2006, the average property value stolen per residential burglary equaled around \$1,379 while the value stolen for each nonresidential burglary was \$1,832. When it comes to clearance rates, about 17 percent of reported burglaries are cleared by arrest or by exceptional means annually. In terms of arrests, one of every five arrested individuals is a juvenile under the age of 18.

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How much do burglaries cost society? According to criminologist Mark Cohen, when considering both victim costs and criminal justice-related costs, the annual costs of burglaries committed by an average career criminal equal \$4,965 (in 1997 dollars). Accounting for inflation, this would be the equivalent of \$6,530 in 2008 dollars. As a word of caution, Cohen’s calculations are *marginal* costs rather than *average* costs. In other words, they represent minimum costs because they exclude fear of crime costs, private security expenditures and averting behavior costs to avoid potential victimization.

National, Regional and State Trends

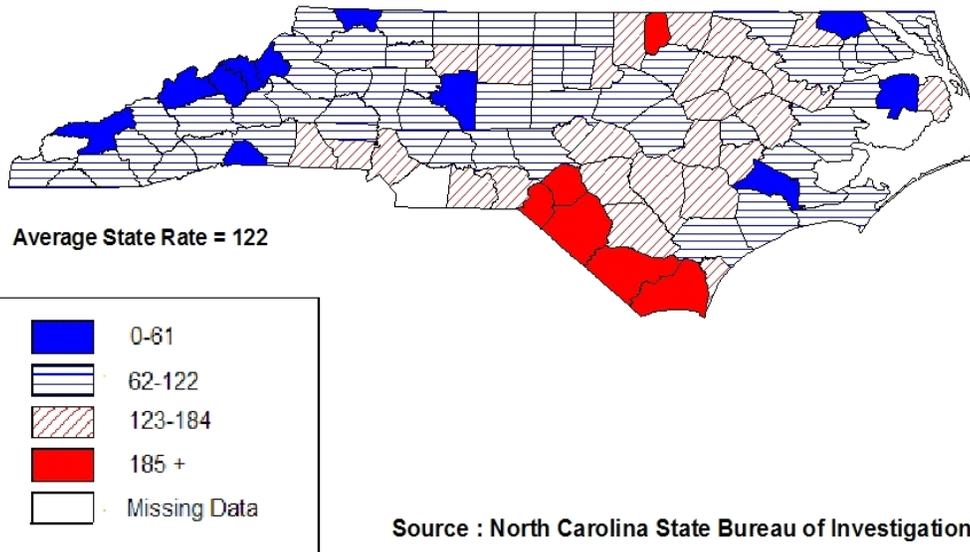


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National, regional and state burglary rates have generally decreased since 1990. While North Carolina's burglary rate has dropped by 21 percent, the rate has fallen much slower than that of other South Atlantic states or the nation. In 1990, North Carolina's burglary rate was almost exactly the same as the South Atlantic regional rate (exclusive of North Carolina), but both rates were about 25 percent higher than the national rate (exclusive of North Carolina). By 2006, the state's rate was approximately 50 percent higher than that of the South Atlantic Region and about 70 percent higher than the national rate.

County Rates

2000 - 2006 Average Burglary Rates (per 10,000 inhabitants)

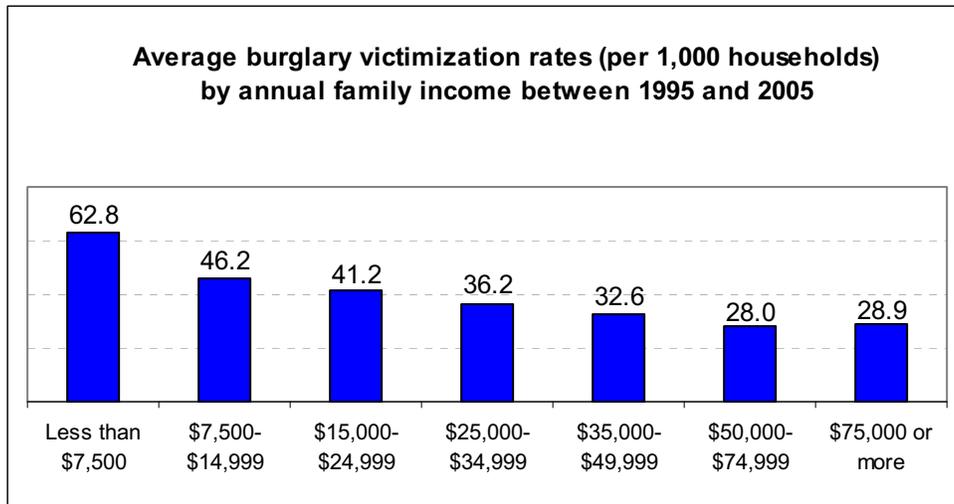


While the state of North Carolina as a whole has experienced high rates of burglary in the recent past, several counties within the state have had relatively low burglary rates. Between 2000 and 2006, 18 counties, mostly in the western part of the state, had average burglary rates that were actually lower than the national burglary rate, and 62 counties had rates that were lower than the state's rate of 122 burglaries per 10,000 inhabitants. During the same period, 33 counties had rates that were higher than the average state rate while five counties had incomplete data. As seen in the map above, many of the counties that have had the highest burglary rates are located in the southern and eastern parts of North Carolina.

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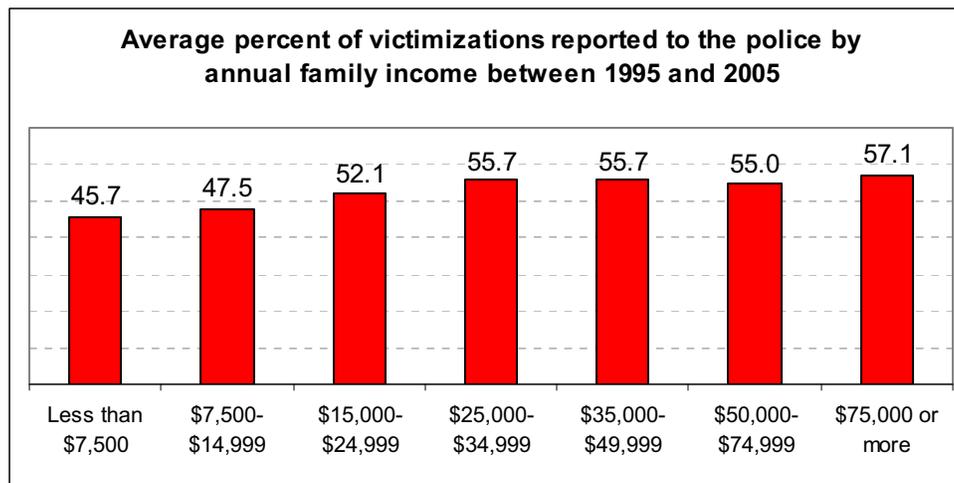
Annual Family Income and Burglary

When comparing national household burglary victimization rates by annual family income, one will notice that households with lower annual incomes tend to be victimized more often than those households with higher incomes.



Per 1,000 households with an annual family income of less than \$7,500, about 63 households are victims of burglary each year. This rate is more than double than those households with an annual income of \$50,000 or more (28 households per 1,000).

However, based on recent data collected by the *National Crime Victimization Survey*, the percentage of burglary victimizations reported to the police actually increased as annual family income increased.

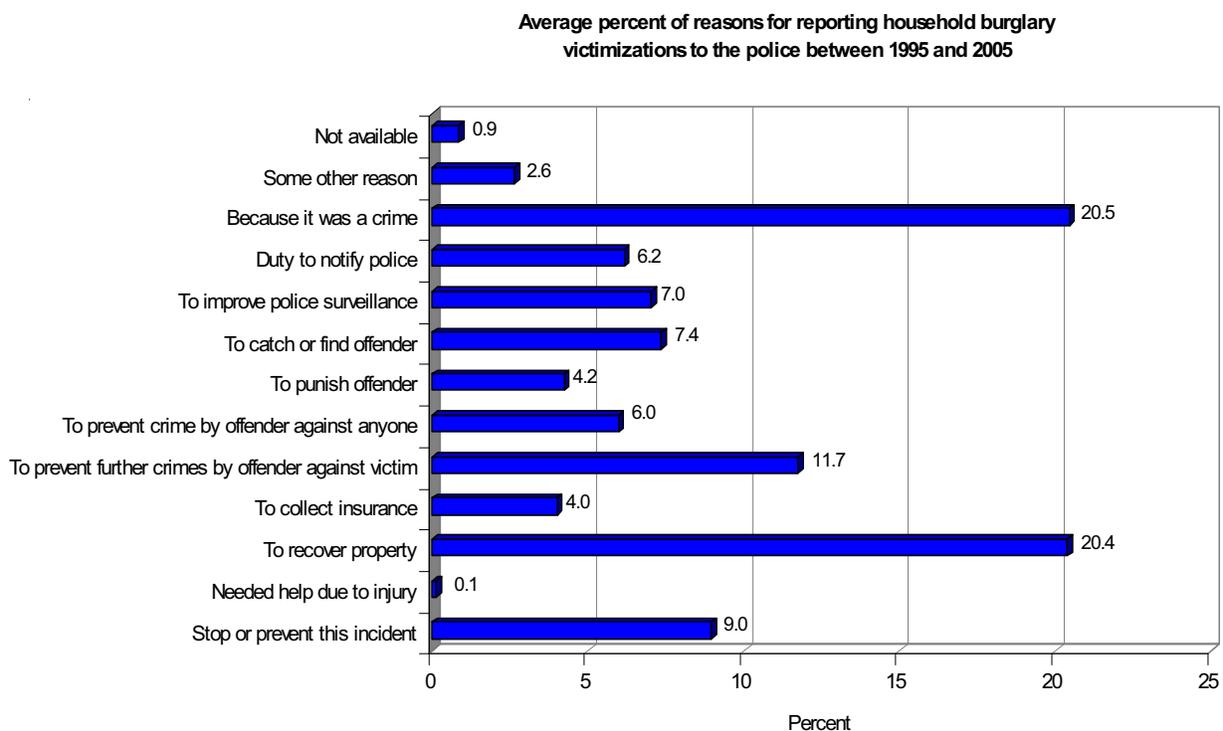


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For those who reported an annual family income of \$75,000 or more, roughly 57 percent of burglary victimizations were reported to the police. Those who fell within the income range of less than \$7,500 annually reported fewer than 46 percent of victimizations. This can be partially explained by the reasoning that those who earn larger incomes generally have more expensive items within the home. According to the *National Crime Victimization Survey*, the likelihood of reporting victimization increases with the value of loss associated with the burglary. So that begs the question: If individuals who earn less income tend to be victimized more often, and individuals who earn less actually report a smaller percentage of these victimizations than those in higher income brackets, then what reasons do individuals give for reporting burglary occurrences to the police?

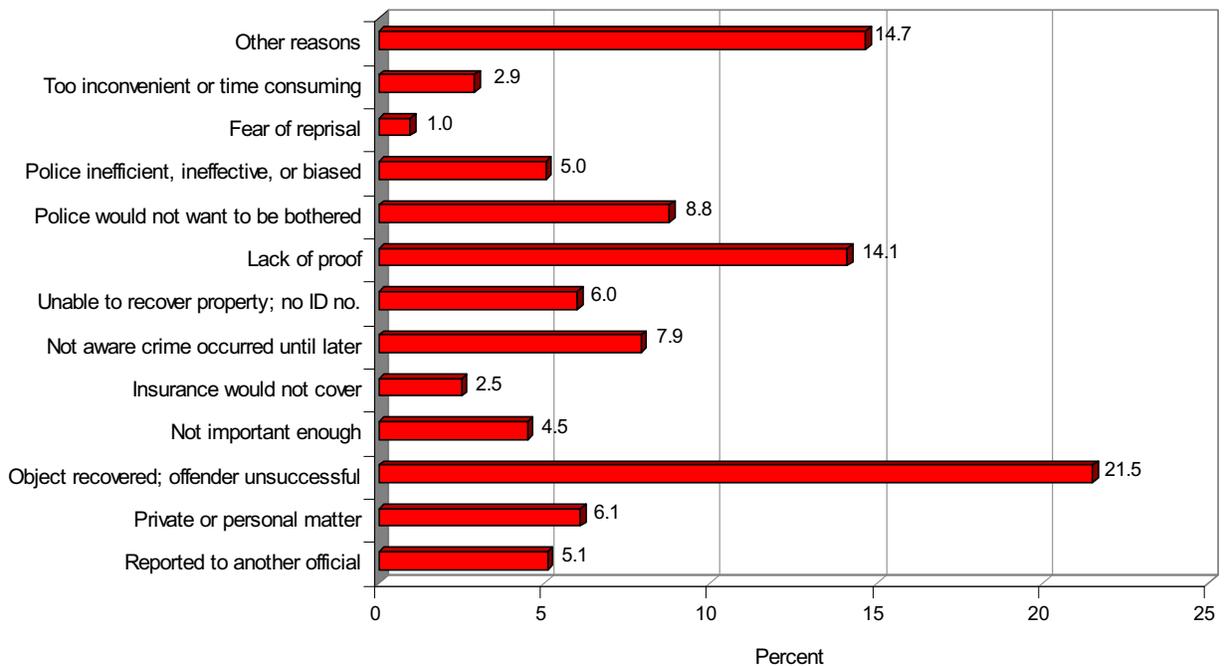
Reporting Reasons

Based on national data, about 20 percent of burglaries were reported to the police “because it was a crime” according to victims. An additional 20 percent of victimizations were reported in order “to recover property” and roughly 12 percent of burglaries were reported “to prevent further crimes by offender against victim.” The most common reason that victims gave for not reporting burglary was that the object was recovered and/or that the offender was unsuccessful.



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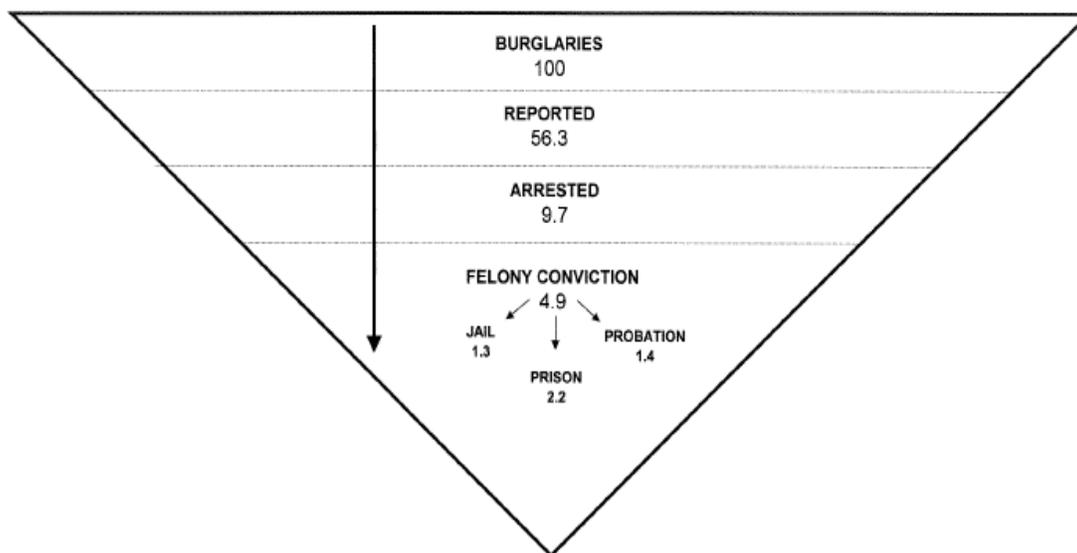
Average percent of reasons for NOT reporting household burglary victimizations to the police between 1995 and 2005



Expected Punishment

Many know what the penalties are for being convicted of burglary, but may not realize what the real *potential* costs of a specific burglary incident are to the burglar. The National Center for Policy Analysis devised a way of measuring the cost of committing a crime by calculating the expected punishment for that specific crime. Expected punishment is calculated by multiplying the probabilities of being arrested for a crime after it is committed, of being convicted if arrested, and of being incarcerated if convicted. Once calculated, the result is multiplied by the average time served for an offense (*Note: limitations exist due to the lack of complete data*). The diagram on the next page illustrates the estimated expected punishment for committing burglary in North Carolina by using a blend of national and state-level data on probabilities.

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Nationally, for every 100 burglaries committed, about 56 will be reported to the police. In North Carolina, about 17 percent of reported burglaries will be cleared by arrest (roughly 10 out of 56). Based on United States conviction data, half of burglary arrests lead to felony conviction (about 5 out of 10). National data reveal that about 72 percent of burglary felons are incarcerated in either prison or jail, whereas the other 28 percent are sentenced to probation. Multiplying these probabilities show us that **the overall probability of being incarcerated in either prison or jail for committing an act of burglary is only 3.5 percent!**

According to a Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics bulletin entitled *Felony Sentences in State Courts, 2002*, the average national prison sentence for burglary was 50 months, or about 1,520 days. Considering only 2.2 percent of burglars actually serve prison time, **the average number of prison days served per burglary act committed is about 33 days, if the sentence is fully served** (2.2% x 1,520 days).

The Rational Choice Theory and Burglars' Actions

Rooted in the analysis of human behavior by classical theorists Cesare Beccaria and Jeremy Bentham, the Rational Choice Theory emerged to help explain why criminals commit crimes. Simply stated, humans make decisions based on pleasure gained versus pain endured. Rational Choice assumes that if the benefits of committing an unlawful act outweigh the costs involved, an individual will take the risk and commit the unlawful act.

We already know that the average residential burglary has a payoff of more than \$1,300 while each nonresidential burglary has a payoff of \$1,800. The money combined with the emotional thrill and excitement of committing the crime offers the individual great benefit. Based on what we know about *expected* punishment, it is easy to see why an individual might choose to burglarize households and businesses *professionally*.

But are burglars really rational in these regards? Researchers Paul Cromwell and James Olson spent many hours with a group of 30 active burglars to gain knowledge on the motives and decision-making strategies of the *rational* burglar. They warn that risk variables such as probability of arrest and penalties do not have much of an impact on one's decision to commit burglary. They state, "Long-term rewards and future punishment appear to have little effect on most burglars...their 'here and now' orientation tends to negate the role of future consequences in their decision-making and thus reduce the impact of most public policy regarding burglary in particular and property crime in general." Cromwell and Olson discovered that burglaries are almost exclusively committed to obtain money, most of which is used on drugs and alcohol. It was also discovered that only a small portion of burglaries were committed due to social motives (i.e., peer approval, status) and idiosyncratic motives (i.e., thrills, rebellion). In terms of site selection, targets were selected on the basis of opportunity rather than purposeful selection. Thus rational choice seems to play a minor role in terms of explanation.

The Routine Activity Theory and Burglary Opportunity

Cohen and Felson state that the following three elements must occur at the same time in order for a crime to happen: 1) a suitable target – person, place, and/or object; 2) the lack of a capable guardian to prevent the crime from occurring such as neighbors, owners, etc.; and 3) the presence of a motivated offender. Social factors that affect two of the three elements of the Routine Activity Theory – lack of a capable guardian and the presence of a motivated offender— might explain why North Carolina has had the highest burglary rate for the last several consecutive years. Three important social factors that tie into the Routine Activity Theory are the stability of population with respect to transient factors, the population's dependence on drugs and alcohol, and economic conditions with respect to income inequality.

Social Factors and Routine Activity Elements

First, the lack of a capable guardian involves the "who's watching" aspect. Obviously, burglars prefer to commit crimes while no one is watching them. Given the fact that individuals leave their residences and businesses for periods of time, they often rely on others, such as neighbors, to keep a watchful eye on their properties whether they realize it. These watchful neighbors tend to be individuals with whom we have a certain level of trust. In other words, "I'll watch your back, if you watch mine."

Recently, North Carolina has seen very high levels of population migration. From a national perspective, the state had the seventh highest rate of domestic net migration in the 1990s and had the ninth highest rate between 2000 and 2004. Simply put, domestic net migration is the difference between *immigration* and *outmigration* of people within the United States during a specified time frame. These high levels of population migration have most likely contributed to North Carolinians not knowing their neighbors as well as in the past. Because we do not know our neighbors, we might not be as vigilant about keeping a watchful eye on our surroundings. In other words, we might not know what activities are normal, and therefore, might not be aware of our neighbor's work and leisure schedules.

Next, let's examine some factors that might contribute to the element of the motivated offender. Previously mentioned, Cromwell and Olson state that burglars often cite the need for drug and alcohol money as motives. Based on 2004 and 2005 national data, North Carolina has one of the highest percentages of persons aged 26 or older who are dependent on illicit drugs and a higher than average percentage of people over age 26 who are dependent on alcohol. These percentages are important because *professional* burglars tend to be older individuals, as younger burglars tend to commit these crimes for the thrill and excitement.

Another factor that might contribute to the recent burglary trends in North Carolina is income inequality. North Carolina has ranked among the worst states in terms of income inequality. Data has shown that between the early 1990s and early 2000s, only three states had a greater increase in income inequality between the top 20

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percent and bottom 20 percent than North Carolina. During the same period, our state had the third greatest increase in income inequality between the top 20 percent and middle 20 percent of families nationwide. In terms of income growth, North Carolina's richest 20 percent of families have seen incomes grow by over 64 percent in the last two decades. Comparatively, our state's poorest 20 percent of families have only seen incomes grow by about 17 percent.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Often it seems that our society finds it more appealing to solve crime rather than to prevent it. Raising penalties for burglary is a reactive approach and is not recommended since it seems that penalties rarely factor into the decision-making process of criminals.

Some of the best proactive approaches that North Carolina can take to aid in the reduction of burglary include the implementation of stronger crime prevention efforts and strategies, such as Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED), in addition to increasing resources for prisoner transition programs.

Crime Prevention through Environmental Design (CPTED) is based on the logic that proper design and effective use of the built environment can lead to a reduction in fear and incidence of crime. Strategies such as natural surveillance and target hardening can all be applied very easily during the planning phase of projects. A shift to stronger emphasis on CPTED principles could help reduce property crime in our state.

A practical example of how CPTED is used in some communities across the nation includes the review of architectural plans that are submitted to local planning departments for approval. CPTED principles are included in the design approval stage and applicants are provided with comments and recommendations on how to make a safer environment through design changes. In fact, Virginia took proactive steps to address crime when it amended zoning enabling legislation in 1994 under §15.2-2283. It states that "...ordinances shall be designed to give reasonable consideration to each of the following purposes where applicable:

(i) to provide for adequate light, air, convenience of access, and safety from fire, flood, crime and other dangers;

(ii) to reduce or prevent congestion in the public streets; (iii) to facilitate the creation of a convenient, attractive and harmonious community..." By incorporating the word "crime" into zoning ordinance legislation, responsibility to prevent crime was not only that of law enforcement agencies, but became the responsibility of other agencies in the planning process. Many communities have found that CPTED is a sensible, often very affordable way of preventing crime.

In terms of recidivism, data from the Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics show that 74 percent of burglars released from prison in 1994 were rearrested within three years. In addition, within the first three years of release, about 10 percent of all prisoners tracked were rearrested on a burglary offense. The Bureau of Justice Statistics has identified convicted burglars as "specialists". These are prisoners who, after being released, commit the same crime they were just in prison for. Not surprisingly, data show that the released burglar in 1994 was the one most likely to be rearrested for burglary (23.4%) out of all released prisoners. However, what was surprising was that the relative likelihood of rearrest for burglary by released burglars was 3.7. In other words, a burglar's odds are 2.7 times greater than that of a non-burglar's odds of being rearrested for burglary.

With this knowledge regarding the high recidivism of convicted burglars and the knowledge that the majority of North Carolina inmates will be released at some future date, our state should make all efforts to reduce the likelihood that released prisoners will serve time again. North Carolina can further reduce recidivism rates of its released prisoners by continuing to ensure that offenders, especially property crime offenders, are given the opportunity to participate in transition services and reentry programs. These programs provide ex-offenders with an opportunity to return to their communities and enable them to become contributing, skilled, and most importantly, law-abiding citizens. Stronger focus and increased resources aimed toward transition services and programs could have a dramatic effect on property crime rates in North Carolina due to these programs having the ability to mitigate risk factors, such as drug abuse and the lack of financial resources, which are often associated with criminal behavior.

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