

The Influence of Changing Reward of Electronic Consumer Goods on Burglary and Theft Offences in Western Market-based Countries

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COMMENTARY

Burglary and theft offence trends have broadly moved in parallel in 'Western' market-based countries since the 1950s. Between the 1950s and 1990s burglary and theft offence rates consistently increased, and since the first 1990s these rates significantly decreased and still do so. While a plethora of things are hypothesised to account for this trend, none of them have adequately explained the phenomenon, with improved security arguably among the more coherent explanations so far. However, as are going to be explained during this paper, even the safety hypothesis doesn't sufficiently account for the variation in crime rates over time, particularly with reference to the rationale for the rise in burglary and theft offence rates between the 1950s and early 1990s. Drawing on criminological theory, explains why the changing reward of electronic commodity complements the safety hypothesis in explaining burglary and theft offence trends from the 1950s to this date.

The impact of the changing reward of electronic commodity, specifically, shouldn't be understated. Electronic commodity have long comprised the third largest category of products stolen in domestic burglaries, while mobile phones alone have consistently been stolen in over 30% of all 'theft from the person' incidents for the past 10 years. The two categories of products that have continually represented a bigger proportion of the stolen goods mix are cash and jewellery. Cash and jewellery have always been valuable to prospective thieves as they need inherent value. Indeed, one among the simpler reward-reducing phenomena for theft of money has arguably been the decrease in availability of money, as we shift increasingly towards a cashless society.

This section explains how the hypothesis that the changing reward of burglary and theft offences is a crucial factor affecting longitudinal burglary and theft offence rates is grounded within the crime as opportunity perspective. Namely the CRAVED framework, crime scripts, and therefore the situational crime prevention framework are going to be discussed. In analysing goods most often stolen by thieves, the 'hot products' are people who are: concealable, removable, available, valuable, enjoyable, and disposable. While the concealability, removability, and availability of products place physical limitations on their stealing potential, the value, enjoy ability, and disposability of products are qualitative, time-

varying attributes which will explain theft rates of products that consistently meet the physical (concealable, removable, available) attribute requirements for theft over time. As long as the bulk of property crime is committed with economic motivations in mind, the worth and disposability, instead of enjoy ability, attributes of products over time are particularly important in explaining why and what goods are stolen. Indeed, the disposability of stolen goods (i.e., the convenience with which they will be converted into cash or drugs) is probably going the foremost important attribute affecting the quantity a selected good is stolen. Conversely, if the costs of hot products consistently decrease, then they might be inherently less rewarding to prospective thieves, and theft rates would also decrease.

Initial evidence that the changing reward of burglary and theft offences has impacted burglary and theft offence rates over time comes from studies measuring the consequences of inflation. Among the factors proposed to underlie a positive relationship between inflation and property crime rates includes an increased motivation or reward think about terms of a marketplace for stolen goods. Similar significant positive inflation-property crime relationships have also been reported in France between 1950 and 1997 and during a sample of eight 'Western' free enterprise countries between 1981 and 2010. These statistically significant relationships between inflation and property crime rates are independent of a variety of other socioeconomic conditions included within the models and together, span the years 1947 to 2012. Moreover, the effect is non-trivial. The connection between inflation and property crime rates reported within the literature has been remarkably consistent in its statistical significance and positive directionality. This positive relationship provides a sign that a gift factor is vital in affecting property crime rates over time through a changing willingness among consumers to get stolen goods. However, inflation may be a broad construct that's, among other things, representative of a changing willingness to get stolen goods. Other factors related to changing reward like changing income inequality may additionally affect a changing willingness to get stolen goods. As such, to avoid simply re-labelling several broad economic indicators under 'changing reward' and claiming that some combination of those factors has produced the property crime trends since the 1950s, a more specific construct of adjusting

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reward is important. That specific construct is that the changing prices of electronic commodity over time, and there's good reason to believe it's impacted changing burglary and theft offence rates for the subsequent reasons: (a) there's robust evidence for an association between changing prices and changing property crime rates which suggests aggregate offence rates are aware of changes in prices of products, and (b) there are comparable trends between

consumer price indices for electronic commodity and burglary rates over time.

Finally, like previous literature examining these issues, this paper was limited within the data available to match trends of specific property crimes; future research should test this hypothesis with a more extensive and varied range of crime data and sources.