

A Study On Burglars' Target Selection: Why Do Burglars Take Unnecessary Risks?

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Abstract

Most previous studies on burglars' target selection assumed a rational cognitive state on the part of the burglar. However, if different arousal factors affected the rational model of decision making with respect to burglars' target selection, the explanatory power of such a model could be regarded as limited. The goal of this study was to determine to what extent that burglary decision making was distorted or short-circuited by arousal. An in-depth interview with fifty-two burglars using a purposive sampling was employed to suit the specific needs of the study. The results showed that when a subject was under the influence of alcohol, or allowed himself to be, in whichever form, swayed by a partner or partners, his rational decision making processes were undermined.

Key words:Burglary Target Selection, Rational Choice, Decision Making, Unnecessary Risks

Introduction

In Republic of Korea, the high frequency and rising number of residential burglary has created both fear and anger in communities throughout the country and it is expected to remain as a serious issue for the foreseeable future. Therefore, the crime of residential burglary needs to be understood properly and preventive measures should be presented.

In order to better understand residential burglary, it is important to explore the following questions: how do offenders make decisions? In relation to the preceding question, theories on environmental crime prevention share certain common propositions, namely, that criminals engage in 'rational' decision making processes, in which they weigh the perceived costs and benefits of committing any given crime; and that criminals read 'cues' in the environment that help them to assess the costs and benefits associated with committing a crime. These assumptions also underscore the conceptual framework of this study.

The research on the decision making or target selection processes by burglars originated from the notion of the "reasoning criminal." This notion, in which criminals are seen as employing the same cognitive strategies when contemplating an offence as they and others use when making 'normal' everyday decisions, was proposed by Ronald Clarke and other researchers at the British Home Office Research and Planning Unit (HORPU) who had been involved in studying the importance of opportunities, in the creation of crime. Cornish and Clarke(1986) proposed a Rational Choice Perspective in explaining criminal behaviour. They claimed that criminals make a conscious decision about crime risk, weighing the costs and benefits associated with the commission of a crime (Cornish and Clarke, 2008).

The Rational Choice Perspective assumes that criminals are motivated, but that they may be discouraged from committing a particular crime if they perceive a potential target to be too risky, to involve too much effort, or to yield too meagre a profit to make the venture worthwhile (Cornish and Clarke, 2008). In the light of the Rational Choice Perspective, therefore, the strategy of increasing the risks, increasing the effort, and reducing the rewards, from the point of view of the potential criminal, becomes the basis for situational crime prevention.

Most studies on burglar's target selection have assumed a rational cognitive state on the part of the burglar, albeit in varying degrees (e.g., Johnson and Bowers, 2010; Bernasco, 2008; Lee & Lee, 2008; Bernasco and Nieuwbeerta, 2005; Cromwell et al., 1991; Bennett and Wright, 1984; Brown and Altman, 1981; Reppetto, 1974). However, if it can be shown that arousal affects the rational model of decision making with respect to target selection, then such a model based on rationality must be seen as being limited in its explanatory capacity.

Shover (1996), in fact, suggests that investigations of burglary employing a Rational Choice Perspective will only be useful if they include more, intervening, real-life variables. In this connection, the goal of this study is to determine to what extent burglary decision making is distorted or short-circuited by arousal. This research is an effort to bridge the gap between the ideal perspective and a more realistic one to understand key facets of the burglary decision making process.

Methods

In this study, a qualitative interview is conducted for a profound understanding of the situational criteria that could influence the burglars' reasoning processes. This type of interview method allows the researchers a better understanding of the events and activities that are not observed directly by providing the intellectual framework.

There is a significant body of research that attempts to explore the factors that burglars take into account in making the decision to offend, and in selecting their targets. Many of these studies have been conducted in the qualitative mode; i.e., talking to burglars about their attitudes, assumptions, perceptions, and beliefs, as well as about their decision making strategies and other aspects of their crimes. With limited exceptions, these studies have interviewed burglars that have been incarcerated at the time of the interview. As Walsh (1986) explains, interviewing offenders is a very useful technique for this type of study that is concerned with offender decision making and target selection:

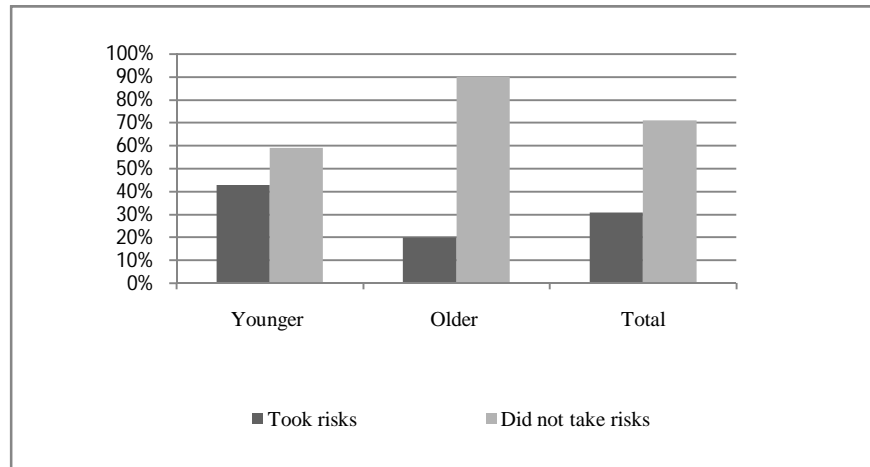
Because offenders are the source of the crime it would seem absurd not to avail oneself of their versions of what they are doing and why. Linked with this, other methods of data collection, valuable as they may be, seem to both skirt the issues and generally be impractical for crimes characterised by great secrecy (p.49).

As a result of taking into account these considerations, in examining various possible research methodologies, the method of the personal qualitative interview was chosen as the most useful and credible means to yield the type of information required to answer the identified research questions. Other methods, such as self-administered questionnaires, or file reviews, were thought to be inadequate, given the nature and purpose of the study. In this study, the technique of the semi-structured form of interview was used as the method of acquiring information from the people selected for interviewing.

The Incheon Metropolitan City, the third largest city in Korea with a total population of 2,853,489 (December 2012), was selected as the location of the study. Moreover, for the interviews, a sample of fifty-two burglar suspects detained in the Detention Centre at the Incheon Public Prosecutor's Office was selected using the criteria of non-probability sampling method. The interview sessions were held over a ten-month period. All interviewees were male and were between thirteen and fifty-nine years of age; and the average age of the participants was 25.1 and the mean number of burglaries committed was 40.1.

Taking Unnecessary Risks

The subjects in the study were asked whether they had taken any unnecessary risks in the recent past in the commission of their burglaries. As illustrated in Figure 1 below, nearly a third of the subjects (30.0 per cent) stated that they had on occasion taken unnecessary risks; and most of them mentioned alcohol use, and the presence of co-offenders, as the most important factors causing this unnecessary risk-taking. It was notable that subjects' age was a significant factor in their risk-taking tolerance level. Thus, older and more experienced subjects were much less likely to take unnecessary risks than were younger and inexperienced ones. Over 40 per cent of the younger subjects (under 21 years) stated that they had taken unnecessary risks, whereas only about 20 per cent of the older subjects (21 years and over) stated that they had done so. The findings herein demonstrate that the decision making of the older subjects in the study was more planned and deliberative than was that of the younger ones. The following part of this chapter will focus on the effect of drug and alcohol use, and the influence of co-offenders, as factors contributing to the taking of unnecessary risks in relation to burglary.

Figure 1. Taking Unnecessary Risks in Relation to Burglary

The Effect of Drug and Alcohol Use on Burglary Decision Making

The results of prior research show that many income-producing crimes are committed to finance an addiction to illegal drugs, and that burglary is a crime that is often utilised to obtain money, or property that can be exchanged for money, in order to buy illegal drugs. According to a report from the National Institute of Justice (2010), more than half of male arrestees that had been tested, had recently used drugs. Research from Western societies has also consistently shown a large proportion of burglars to have used illegal drugs in the recent past and that this practice has affected rational decision making in target selection by the burglars (e.g., Cornish and Clarke, 2008; Cromwell et al., 1991; Bennett and Wright, 1984). Therefore, the adoption of the Rational Choice Perspective in relation to burglary target selection, without an acknowledgement of the possible role of illegal drugs, could well be short sighted.

However, contrary to the situation in Western societies, in Korea, illegal drugs are not yet perceived as a constituting a serious social problem (Korea National Police Agency, 2012). Historically, Korea has been viewed as a relatively drug-free society compared to, for instance, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, and many other countries worldwide. The Korean government imposes severe punishment on drug-related crimes, including simple drug abuse, in an effort to build a drug-free society. Among the positive results of the government's strong policy stance against illegal drugs, is the opposition to their use, on the part of most Koreans (Korea National Police Agency, 2012).

The strongly prohibited status of the use of illegal drugs in Korea has resulted in very little information having been collected to date on drug users. Consequently, no official figures as to the numbers of users of illegal drugs in Korea have been produced. However, a survey has shown that only 0.4 per cent of the population reported use of illegal drugs, and the prevalence of drug use among prison inmates was only marginally higher, at 1.3 per cent (Kim, 2011). Another survey of students from private and public high schools in Korea, found only 0.2 per cent of the students reporting drug use at some time in their lives to date (Kang, 2009).

The extent of drug use among the subjects in the study did not differ greatly from that of the general population. Two of the subjects admitted to the use of inhalants such as glue and butane gas, a few times in their past, although neither of them had done so immediately prior to committing any burglaries.

I started smoking when I was 13. Actually, I started inhaling glue and butane before I started smoking cigarettes.... The people I was hanging out with were using inhalants, so it was just there constantly. They gave them to me for free. (Respondent 43)

When I was fourteen, I started smoking, drinking, and inhaling glue.... I was stealing every day, but I never inhaled glue just before committing any burglaries. (Respondent 52)

There was no one in the study sample who could be categorised as a drug abuser. In reference to the link between alcohol and crime, there is a body of evidence to this effect, in the literature. The Justice Department of the United States, for instance, reported that between 30 and 60 per cent of incarcerated offenders had been drinking around the time when they committed the crime for which they were currently serving sentence (Cordilia, 1985). Also, interviews carried out with street offenders disclose that alcohol use is common among them, especially during the commission of criminal offences such as burglary (Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Shover, 1996; Cromwell et al., 1991).

In a study based on interviews with 658 newly convicted male offenders in the United States, the researchers concluded that local life circumstances, including the drinking of alcohol, are strong predictors of offending (Horney et al., 1995). The study in question had offenders recreate their calendars of offending, and of other activities, in one month units. The results showed that during months of drug use, the odds of an offender committing a property crime increased by 54 per cent; and that heavy drinking periods were even more strongly related to property offences than illegal drug use.

In the present study, over two thirds of the subjects (71.2 per cent) admitted to drinking before some of their burglaries, and five of those subjects stated that most of their offences were committed under the influence of alcohol. Therefore, the following section of this study will focus on seeking to determine how alcohol use affects burglary target selection and the other decision making processes associated with residential burglary.

Historically and socially, Koreans have relatively liberal attitudes towards the consumption of alcohol. Indeed, Korean drinking customs can be summed up in one phrase, namely, "Drink until you get drunk." Korea is one of the few countries in the world where a man's social competence is often judged by his capacity for consuming large quantities of alcohol. Moreover, alcoholic drinks are relatively inexpensive and they can be obtained everywhere. The percentage of drinkers is as high as 90 per cent among Korean men (Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2011). Gender differences in alcohol consumption are also marked among Koreans, with Korean women being much more likely to abstain or to consume smaller amounts of alcohol, than their male counterparts. A recent survey concluded that Korea had the highest percentage of adult alcoholics in the world, and that 16 per cent of Korean men were alcoholics (Korean Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2011).

The subjects in the current study were questioned regarding their use of alcohol. On the basis of their responses, and as shown in Table 1 below, the majority of the sample was drinkers. Twenty-one subjects (40.4 per cent), the largest group in the sample, might be qualified as social or occasional drinkers, drinking alcohol only once or twice a week. Sixteen subjects (30.8 per cent) were drinkers who engaged in regular consumption of alcohol, drinking three or more times a week; with six of those (11.5 per cent) drinking every day. Fifteen of the subjects (28.8 per cent) claimed to have never or very seldom drunk alcohol, a fact possibly reflecting the sample's large number of young offenders (That age group tends to drink less in Korea than do those who are older).

Table 1. Alcohol Use by Subjects in the Study

Frequency of Drinking per Week	Number	Percentage
Everyday	6	11.5
3-4 times a week	10	19.2
1-2 times a week	21	40.4
Never or seldom	15	28.8

As shown in the Table 1, it is widely acknowledged that there is a direct relation between alcohol use and crime (Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Cordilia, 1985; Greenberg, 1981). In this connection, the subjects in the study identified alcohol as being an important factor in their commission of burglary; and the effect of drinking on the decision to burgle that they most frequently mentioned, was that it provided the necessary nerve to initiate the offence. In order to be able to commit a serious crime such as burglary, the suppression of the fear of adverse consequences is certainly necessary. Subjects in the study sometimes cultivated this state of mind through the use of alcohol. Just under a fifth of the subjects (19.2 per cent) reported that they often specifically used alcohol to prepare themselves for burglary, and that alcohol consumption allayed their fears about the possible consequences of committing the crime of burglary.

They stated that without alcohol, they would not have had the courage to initiate the criminal offence of burglary. Consequently, most of the subjects believed that they were more efficient when they were under the moderate influence of alcohol, when undertaking a burglary.

I can't think straight without having a few drinks. If I didn't have a few drinks, I couldn't do what I did.... Once I'd got a few drinks, I was not afraid and I could think straight enough to complete the burglary without making a mistake. (Respondent 6)

It took a significant amount of courage to build myself up, both mentally and physically, to do what I set out to do. The only way I could do it was when I was loaded. (Respondent 38)

I wanted to do that burglary before I started drinking. But I was too nervous to do it. Alcohol calmed me down, and I needed that to burgle the house. (Respondent 24)

In such cases, the subjects involved had some idea that they wanted to commit a burglary, before they began drinking alcohol. Often, having first decided to commit a burglary, they then drank various quantities of alcohol to fortify themselves so that they had enough courage to follow through on their decision to commit the burglary. Alcohol consumption enabled them to engage in the burglary that they had decided to do but that, according to their own report, they could not have carried out without this fortification. In general, the subjects who intentionally drank alcohol prior to executing a burglary, were careful enough to achieve only a slight buzz before committing the crime; since they knew that if they were to consume an excessive amount of alcohol in such a situation, it would impair their cognitive and physical abilities, and would increase the chances of them being caught in the act.

I always had a little buzz on purpose when I went in. Alcohol gave me more strength to do burglaries. It would always boost me up so that I could do it. But I try not to drink too much. (Respondent 50)

I usually have one or two shots before a burglary, but I've never overdrunk myself. It is very hard to get the job done when I am drunk. (Respondent 35)

When subjects did go over the appropriate level of alcohol consumption prior to a burglary, they became incapable of planning and would act in ways that would be considered irrational. In fact, some of the subjects were habitual drinkers who often did drink over the appropriate level, prior to committing a burglary. Nine of the subjects (17.3 per cent) reported that they were impaired when some of their burglaries occurred; and four of those subjects stated that they were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the burglary for which now, at the time of the study interviews, they had already been arrested.

The subjects that had consumed more than the appropriate amount of alcohol prior to committing burglary typically failed to plan their crime. Rather, they portrayed themselves as having minimal input into the burglary, and alcohol clearly contributed to the occurrence of the crime, by diminishing their capacity to think clearly and to care about the possible consequences.

On the last one [burglary], I got drunk with my friend and he suggested doing something and we got out.... We broke into a house that seemed to be unoccupied. That was it. No planning was involved in our burglary. (Respondent 6)

Usually, I drank a lot. However, on that day [the day of burglary for which he was arrested] I drank more. I was drinking a lot on that day. (Respondent 1)

These subjects who overconsumed alcohol prior to committing a burglary usually sought to achieve immediate criminal goals, focusing on the rewards of the crime and temporarily putting potential risks and consequences out of mind. For instance, as one subject explained, when he was drunk, any reward, whatever its relative size, was enough to motivate his crime, and any obstacles to his obtaining that reward, including the risk of apprehension and punishment, were ignored by him.

When I was drunk, it did not matter to me if the burglary victims had gotten ten thousand Wons [Korean currency; one thousand Wons is equivalent to £ 0.55 (UK) and \$ 0.96 (US)] or ten million Wons. The target residences had money and I did not have it, so I would have to commit burglaries to get money. (Respondent 15)

Subjects who overconsumed alcohol or were drunk at the time of committing burglaries also tended to overlook important territorial cues related to risk, and once inside the residence missed finding items that were hidden there. They stated that they were more likely to take unnecessary risks in relation to a burglary when they were drunk.

Every day I got up and drank alcohol. After a while I got to the stage I needed it. Alcohol kept me happy and I did not have to worry about anything. I would always get drunk before I went out and it had influence on my burglaries, too.... Alcohol makes me too brave and very stupid. When I get drunk, I'm prepared to take risks. I can't think right and miss many things. (Respondent 45)

Once I accidentally drank myself into a state where I did not know what I was doing. I even forgot I was in someone else's home. (Respondent 41)

I was too drunk before I broke into a house. I must have made too much noise. I woke up the whole family who lived there and I was caught. In fact, I would not have broken into the house if I had not drunk too much. (Respondent 22)

The overconsumption of alcohol prior to burglary could also function as a tool to persuade subjects who were hesitant participants within a group to partake in a burglary. Thus, three of the subjects claimed that they were encouraged by others in the group to consume alcohol in order to minimise their fears. One of them described how his partner put alcohol to such functional use, employing it to divert him from the building tension that could accompany the planning of a burglary.

He came to me the night before the burglary, saying he needed some money, and he tried to get me drunk to go ahead and do it. But I would not then, because I knew that sooner or later I was going to get caught. However, the more we drank, the better it sounded. It took me a few bottles of Soju [a kind of Korean hard liquor] before I would agree to join him to commit a burglary. (Respondent 14)

In the study sample, some subjects were deterred by nothing when deciding to commit a burglary. Even if a house was occupied, they might still try to somehow sneak in. At the other end of the scale, some offenders were much more tentative and nervous. Layered over this general range of decision making was the influence of alcoholism. Two of the subjects who were alcoholics said that if they were drunk, or were suffering alcoholic withdrawal, they would put only minimal planning into their efforts towards carrying out a burglary. They admitted to taking great risks in such cases. When they were not drunk or suffering alcoholic withdrawal, however, they would approach their task in a much more controlled manner. They stated that their decision making deteriorated significantly when they were drunk or were suffering alcoholic withdrawal. One of the alcoholic subjects described one time when he was drunk and tried to break into a house.

When I was drunk, I would get in anywhere I could. I did not care whether there were people inside the home or not. I just broke the window and entered the home. Sometimes I was that crazy and careless. (Respondent 4)

For alcoholic subjects burglaries were unplanned, seeming to happen more or less spontaneously. These subjects did not even seek a residential target that displayed vulnerability, as most other subjects did. The alcoholic subjects were less likely to take any precautions and were therefore caught with greater frequency than were other subjects who did take precautions. One alcoholic subject was convicted five times and another eight times, figures that were much higher than the average rate of conviction for the subjects in the study sample.

Over a fifth of the subjects in the study (21.2 per cent) admitted that some of their decisions to offend had been made during or after drinking alcohol. When these subjects were questioned as to whether they would be committing burglary if they were not drinking alcohol, most of them stated that they would not, or that their rate of offending would be much lower. They saw alcohol consumption as leading to burglary, largely through the effects of judgment impairment.

Alcohol is to be blamed for my arrest. There were many reasons for me not to break into the house in which I was caught. For example, it was too late and lights were on. That meant someone was there. However, I was too drunk to think straight and ignored those things. As a necessary consequence, I am being held in the detention centre now. (Respondent 43)

I am not that kind of person who breaks into houses. I committed the crime because I was drunk. They were just mistakes emboldened by liquor. (Respondent 4)

Cordilia (1986) utilises the criminal histories of thirty-two alcoholic prison inmates, and interviews with sixty-seven men imprisoned for robbery, in order to document how alcohol influences criminal decision making. Her analysis shows that heavy drinkers rarely entered into such drinking with any plan of committing robbery, but that, rather, robbery either occurred on the spur of the moment, in conjunction with the drinking, or the intent to commit robbery arose during the drinking.

After giving examples of quick and spontaneous decisions made while drinking that led many of the drinking subjects in her study into robbery situations, Cordilia (1986) concludes that alcohol magnifies the significance of situational factors contributing to robbery. In this respect, many of the subjects in the study agreed with the view that alcohol increased the importance of the most immediate causes of burglary, by diminishing the capacity to think about the crime in long-range terms, including in relation to its costs or consequences. However, subjects in the study stated that the decision to commit burglary usually preceded the consumption of alcohol, rather than following it, and most of them represented themselves as being careful enough not to drink excessively before committing burglary.

The Presence of Co-offenders in the Burglary Project

Criminal offenders often commit their crimes with accomplices. This is especially true of young offenders, who commit the majority of crimes, but most active offenders commit at least some crimes together with other criminals (Lee, 2008; Reiss, 1988a; Zimring, 1981). For all age groups, burglary is the crime most commonly committed in company with others (Reiss, 1988b). In this study, most of the subjects (92.3 per cent) had committed burglaries with co-offenders at least once during their criminal career, and eighteen subjects (34.6 per cent) were generally with accomplices when they burgled.

The fundamental assumption of the Rational Choice Theory on burglary is that in burglary decision making, the offender rationally assesses the risks of offending, against its rewards, and that when the estimated benefits of the prospective burglary are calculated to outweigh its estimated costs, the offender will choose to commit the burglary in question. However, a variety of studies support the assertion that the criminal group impacts on decision making insofar as group decisions differ from individual decisions, thereby affecting rational choice. Empirical work has established that the presence of co-offenders is an important referent in forming perceptions of the risks and rewards of an offence (e.g., Garcia-Retamero and Dhami, 2009; Lee & Lee, 2008; Hearnden and Magill, 2004; Cromwell et al., 1991; Cornish and Clarke, 1986; Brown and Altman, 1981). Thus, in seeking to understand how burglaries happen, it is essential to include, within the Rational Choice Perspective, the possible influence of co-offenders, when they are present in the burglary.

Many subjects in the study, particularly the younger ones among them, noted that the influence of others played an important role in their decision making in relation to burglary. These subjects frequently stated that they went along when others suggested doing burglaries. About a third of the subjects (18 out of 52, or 34.6 per cent) usually burgled with partners, and mentioned personal peer affiliation as a major reason for their involvement in burglary. Their statements show the important role of association in influencing them to make the decision to do a burglary.

I was just trying to keep up with the people I was hanging around with at the time. You know, you do something you are not interested in, but you go along with it at the time. (Respondent 12)

I had friends in my middle school years and my parents got divorced.... Then, when I went to live with my uncle, I picked up different kinds of friends and started getting into trouble.... There was a bit of peer pressure. My mates were doing it, so to be in with them, I had to do it. (Respondent 48)

In cases in which a subject in the study undertook a burglary together with a partner or partners, the decision as to whether or not to victimise a particular target appeared to be a collective one. Of the eighteen subjects who usually burgled with partners, thirteen (72.2 per cent of that group) stated that target selection was a group decision in which the opinions of all those who were involved were considered.

I will spot a place and check it out, and it may look good to me. I send my partner to look at it.... I tell him what to look for and how to size it up. He will come back and say “yes” or “no”. If he says yes, we do it and if he says no, we don’t.... We both have to agree. (Respondent 25)

It is a group risk, so you have to decide together. We all had to have a good feeling about it. A burglary was always discussed between the two of us. If one of us gets a bad gut feeling or says no, then we do not do it. (Respondent 44)

Most of the time I had a couple of friends along with me and it was a group decision. All partners had an equal say in it. (Respondent 5)

However, in some cases, one member of the collective appeared to have been better able than the others, to influence his group. Of the eighteen who usually burgled with partners, five (27.7 per cent of that group) said that target selection was not a collective decision, but was made by just one member of the group. The influence of such a member on the group, with respect to decision making, was often conclusive. The group member in question could be adamant about his opinion, forcing the others, through persuasion and tenacity, to accommodate him. This tendency was very strong in groups comprised of younger offenders, especially when there was also an older member in the group. The older member would pressure the younger members in the group to conform to his opinion, and the younger ones would often do so, even when they knew that his opinion was incorrect. In such cases, the older member also often kept most of the proceeds from the burglary.

You always get the toughest man in the group, and he will be the leader. If he says, “We’re going to do this,” and if it sounds alright, we do it. (Respondent 38)

An older person who had a lot of experience in crime, told us all.... He was telling us about burglary, and he told us how to do it. I guess I just wanted to be like him. (Respondent 45)

Most of my friends were quite a bit older than I. When I started going to middle school, we were getting into trouble.... Usually an older guy makes the decision and the other people follow along even when it is wrong and risky.... Once, we broke into a house through a window. There we found much cash, but they did not give me more than thirty thousand Wons. They kept all the rest. But at the time thirty thousand Wons was quite a lot of money to me. I did not complain. (Respondent 23)

In the present study, most of the subjects who usually had worked on burglaries with co-offenders (13 out of 18, or 72.2 per cent), reported a greater arousal level when working in a group than when they worked alone, as a result of the members of the group ‘psyching each other up’. As a result, those subjects reported a greater willingness to take chances, and had a higher incidence of offending when working with partners, than when they were working alone. In this connection, prior studies have suggested that participation and interaction with co-offenders may work to moderate individuals’ fear of punishment, and thus to increase the chances of their offending (Coupe and Blake, 2006; Shover and Henderson, 1995; Cloward and Ohlin, 1960). Interviews with burglars have also suggested that the presence of others on a burglary project can build confidence for the commission of the crime (Cromwell et al., 1991).

I am too scared to do a house alone. I must have some friends who can psych me up to do the job. Otherwise, I do not have the guts for it. However, while together, we become very brave and do crazy things. (Respondent 39)

Well, I guess I do burglaries more often because of my friends. When we hang out, one thing leads to another, and soon everybody begins to talk about stealing and stuff like that. Then we get serious about it and we go for it. (Respondent 16)

I would rather do it alone than with others. I usually went with somebody else who was in the same boat I was. But when we got together, we became excited and reckless. It would be a lot safer to do it on my own. (Respondent 21)

Another reason for subjects engaged in collective burglary taking greater risks than they would if they were working alone, was that group participation had changed the dynamic of the individual assessments of risks and rewards, by making criminal success appear more feasible.

This apparent greater feasibility of success was due to the tendency of subjects' discussing the anticipated benefits of the prospective burglary, rather than discussing both its anticipated benefits and its possible risks. As a result of this tendency, the presence of co-offenders in a burglary project usually distorted the rational decision making process that would have otherwise been operative. During the study interviews four of the subjects who usually had worked on burglaries with partners, specifically expressed this view. In this connection, Cromwell et al. (1991) found that burglars with marked acquisitive motivations had greater levels of arousal, and that those burglars evaluated opportunities more optimistically during burglaries that they committed with others.

They came over to my place and told me that they had two or three million Wons each. Then they bragged about how they did this and did that with that money. When I heard they had done very well, I just wanted to do a burglary right away. (Respondent 5)

When we got together, I was always trying to outthink the other guys. For example, if a guy comes up and says that we steal something at a convenience store. I may say, "I am going to break into a nice house and steal a lot more things." (Respondent 30)

Reiss and Farrington (1991) divide burglars into three broad categories, based on whether or not they have worked with co-offenders. The three categories are: solo-offending career; co-offending career; and mixed, solo-and co-offending career. The first category of burglar always burgles alone. The second category always offends with others. In the third category, the burglar engages in both practices, namely, solo offending and offending with others. Among the subjects in the present study, solo offending was relatively uncommon at a young age and did not become the typical form of burglary until the subjects' early twenties. Solo offending then became the dominant form of offending as they got older.

Of the eighteen subjects already referred to who generally committed burglaries with co-offenders, only five belonged to the older offender group (21 years and over). That is, 48.1 per cent of the younger subjects (under 21 years) in the study sample committed most of their burglaries with a partner or partners, but 80.0 per cent of older subjects usually committed burglaries alone. This change of burglary practice with reference to the proportion of co-offending to solo offending was primarily accountable for on the basis of older subjects' perception of the lower risks of offending alone, and their understanding of the greater financial rewards to be gained in not having to share the proceeds of burglary.

When I was a young inexperienced burglar, I would usually conduct a burglary with a friend of mine. But he sometimes cheated me. He might go in the bedroom and say he did not find anything there, and he got money. (Respondent 24)

I had a friend and we used to work together. But when he was charged with a burglary, working separately, he reported me to the police, in order to get a plea bargain. Hence, after that incident, I would commit a burglary only by myself. (Respondent 18)

Conclusions

Results of the previous researches show that, in general, residential burglars plan and make rational decisions when they search for a target; and they hit the target that they have selected after weighing the risks and rewards associated with their actions. However, the results of this study disclosed that when the subject was under the influence of alcohol, or allowed themselves to be, in whatever form, swayed by a partner or partners, their rational decision making processes were sometimes rendered less effective. In this connection, nearly a third of the subjects in this study admitted that they had taken unnecessary risks as a result of alcohol abuse or the presence of co-offenders.

Such taking of unnecessary risks increased the subjects' chances of apprehension by law enforcement officers. Of course, as the subjects in the sample were interviewed after they had been arrested, there was a possibility that among them there was a disproportionately high number who took unnecessary risks in their commission of burglary. This research nevertheless revealed that countless burglars made unreasonable choices and took unnecessary risks in committing their crimes. It demonstrates that the situational prevention measures designed with a basis on the reasonable choices made by the criminals must be supplemented with the efforts aimed at deterring the burglars that frequently make unreasonable decisions.

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