

Risk Factors of Street Robbery

Summary of Key Factors: Proximity to drug dealing areas; Prostitution areas; Public transport; Bars, pubs and exotic clubs; Schools, banks and cash points; Post-offices, Leisure and fast-food outlets.

Aim: To assist analysts with the identification of risk factors for the production of risk terrain maps. Specifically, this brief provides an annotated review of the factors related to street robbery and the settings and times for which some factors may be most relevant. This information should be especially useful to help choose a time period for creating risk terrain maps (i.e., Step¹ 3), to identify aggravating and mitigating risk factors to include in your risk terrain model (i.e., Steps 5 and 6), and to inform the operationalization of your risk factors to risk map layers (i.e., Step 7).

By: Yasemin Gaziarifoglu

Operational Definition

For the purposes of this research brief, street robbery is defined as occurring in a public or quasi-public place (e.g., on the street or in a vehicle) and requires the convergence of the following three conditions:

- The goods stolen should belong to an individual or group of individuals rather than a corporate body;
- The actual or implied use of force should be directed against the victim or to the property, but not the victim;
- The offender and victim might be strangers or might know each other.

Aggravating/Mitigating Risk Factors Based on a Review of Empirical Literature

Risks in Relation to Criminal Victim Selection

Individuals involved in risky lifestyles might be involved in activities that are likely to be linked to disorderly/criminal behavior.² According to criminals, people already involved (or getting ready to be involve) in illegal activities are seen as perfect robbery targets since they are believed to be less likely to report crimes.³ Additionally robbers perceive police officers as less likely to intervene in robberies involving drug transactions.⁴

- Proximity to Drug Dealing Areas

When the motive of robbery is to acquire cash in exchange for drugs, proximity to drug dealing areas is a strong

correlate of street robberies, especially when small scale drug dealers (the possible robbery of both cash and drugs) and customers are targeted as victims.⁵

- Proximity to Prostitution Areas

According to criminals, people seeking illegal sexual activities are ideal robbery targets since they will be carrying cash for the transactions and they are believed to be more reluctant in reporting the crime incident.⁶ Additionally since many prostitutes are addicted to drugs⁷, high-prostitution areas may be a strong correlate for street robbery.

Risks in Relation to Non-Criminal Victim Selection

According to criminals, when they are in need of fast money, law-abiding citizens might be the most suitable victims as they will be less dangerous (less likely to respond) when compared to people involved in criminal activities.⁸

- Proximity to Public Transport

Proximity to public transportation has been cited as a major contributing factor for street robberies for a variety of reasons. Criminals specifically travel to public transport stations to commit crime. Offenders target victims waiting around isolated bus stops and train stations. Additionally, the vicinity of public transport areas turn into crime attractors and crime generators with the constant flux of people and the presence of other illegal activities such as illicit drug markets and ticket touts.⁹

- Proximity to Bars, Pubs and Exotic Clubs

Offenders prefer to target their victims when they are drunk and pay less attention to their personal safety.¹⁰

- Proximity to Schools

Offenders prey on students along the routes and short-cuts between main university teaching sites and residence halls.¹¹

- Proximity to Banks and Cash Points

Proximity to cash points increases the likelihood of street robberies as the suitable targets will be cash-rich when leaving these sites.¹² A majority of offenders are most interested in locating targets carrying a substantial amount of money to acquire the dollar sum they need in just one offense.¹³

- Proximity to Post Offices

Bag snatches from elderly people most often happen around post offices.¹⁴

- Proximity to Leisure and Fast-Food Outlets

Young, school-aged, people and young adults are often targeted around leisure and fast-food outlets.¹⁵

Setting Effects

According to UN reports, crime levels are generally higher in urban environments than rural ones in all countries, with the highest levels of crimes occurring in cities experiencing rapid growth. Additionally, victims of crimes in cities have a higher probability of being victimized in public space, according to international victimization surveys.¹⁶ Most of the street robberies occur in urban areas in the US, Wales, and England.¹⁷

Movement is primarily shaped by street grids in cities, and integrated streets attract more movement because of their ease of accessibility. Internationally, integrated streets tend to be the safest places with regard to violent crime, but are preferred by petty criminals and thieves. In American cities there is a significantly higher correlation between integrated streets and robberies because of the strong automobile dependent culture--where walking is not the preferred way of transportation.¹⁸ Furthermore, robbers feel more comfortable (and ambiguous) in metropolitan areas--with the camouflage of buildings and skyscrapers.¹⁹

Temporal Differences

Most robberies generally occur at night and on the weekends. However, in line with routine activities theory

and crime pattern theory, which emphasize the space and time convergence of a likely offender and suitable target for the occurrence of a criminal event, it is possible to identify the clustering of street robberies at specific times and days. With regard to street robberies, a specific location considered as a hot spot for street robberies at night may become a low-crime area during the day.

Times & Routines²⁰

In cases where older people (65+) are targeted, robberies mostly take place in the morning and early afternoons; in cases where young people (<18) are targeted, robberies mostly take place between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. (i.e., with school dismissal); in cases where adults are generally targeted, robberies mostly occur in the evening.

Drunken people and migrant workers returning home after payday are mostly targeted at night.

Morning and evening rush hours can increase/decrease the likelihood of victimization depending on the level of natural guardianship in the specific city/neighborhood.

Regarding land use, the absence of business activities at night in commercial areas with limited residential use might increase the odds of street robberies.²¹

Days & Routines²²

Certain holidays (i.e. New Year's Eve, Saint Patrick's Day, Fourth of July, Memorial Day) may increase the odds of victimization because more suitable victims will be available with valuables items to take. Additionally, the likely consumption of alcohol by suitable targets on these holidays increases the vulnerability to victimization.

Days with sporting or other special events might have increased odds of robberies due to the availability of targets in public and the likely consumption of alcohol during the events.

The beginning and ending days of a school year and the holiday breaks can affect the likelihood of victimization depending on the availability of suitable and vulnerable targets in certain places.

Recommended (Publicly Available) Readings

Monk, K., Heinonen, J.A. & Ek, J.E. (2010). *Street Robbery*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

The authors address street robbery and reviews factors contributing to its occurrence. Then they provide a series of questions to help you analyze your local street robbery problem. Finally, they review responses to the problem and what is known about them from evaluative research and police practice. Available: http://www.popcenter.org/problems/pdfs/street_robbery.pdf

Scott, M., S. 2001. *Robbery at Automated Teller Machines*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

The author identifies the risk factors for ATM robberies, proposes ways to analyze the problem and discusses specific responses to the ATM robberies. Available: <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/e05021551.pdf>

Scott, M., S. & Dedel, K. (2006). *Street Prostitution*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice.

The authors identify the problem of street prostitution by focusing on female prostitutes and male clients. They first identify the problem and factors contributing to it, then propose a series of questions for the reader to analyze their local problem and lastly evaluate the responses to the street prostitution problem from evaluative research and practice. Available: <http://www.cops.usdoj.gov/pdf/pop/e10062633.pdf>

Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate.

This practice guide draws together and builds upon the experience of the Home Office Street Crime Initiative in order to assist local policy-makers and practitioners with regard to strategic and tactical development related to street crime. Available:

<http://rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs04/pssc.pdf>

Endnotes

¹ For steps of risk terrain map production, download the RTM Manual at www.riskterrainmodeling.com

² Kennedy, L.W. & Baron, S.W. (1993). Routine Activities and a Subculture of Violence: A Study of Violence on the Street. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30 (1), 88-112.

³ Kennedy, L.W. & Baron, S.W. (1993). Routine Activities and a Subculture of Violence: A Study of Violence on the Street. *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency*, 30 (1), 88-112.

⁴ Wright, R. & S. Decker. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, p.62.

⁵ Wright, R. & S. Decker. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, pp.63-65

⁶ Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, p.68; Wright, R. & S. Decker. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, pp.69-70

⁷ Scott, M., S. & Dedel, K. (2006). *Street Prostitution*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, p. 11; Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, p.68

⁸ Wright, R. & S. Decker. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, p. 72

⁹ Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, p.59

¹⁰ Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research,

Development and Statistics Directorate, p.38; Wright, R. & S. Decker. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, pp.76-87

¹¹ Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, p.3

¹² Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, p.29, p.53

¹³ Wright, R. & S. Decker. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, pp.81

¹⁴ Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, p.29, p.76

¹⁵ Tilley, N., Smith, J., Finer, S., Erol, R, Charles, C. & Dobby, J. (2005). *Problem Solving Street Crime: Practical Lessons from the Street Crime Initiative*. London, United Kingdom: Home Office Research, Development and Statistics Directorate, p.29

¹⁶ Shoham, S.G., Knepper, P. & Kett, M. (Eds.) (2010). *International Handbook of Criminology*. Florida: CRC Press, p.620.

¹⁷ Monk, K., Heinonen, J.A. & Ek, J.E. (2010). *Street Robbery*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, p.5

¹⁸ Shoham, S.G., Knepper, P. & Kett, M. (Eds.) (2010). *International Handbook of Criminology*. Florida: CRC Press, p.633

¹⁹ Wright, R. & S. Decker. (1997). *Armed Robbers in Action: Stickups and Street Culture*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, pp.79

²⁰ Monk, K., Heinonen, J.A. & Ek, J.E. (2010). *Street Robbery*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, pp.4-18

²¹ Shoham, S.G., Knepper, P. & Kett, M. (Eds.) (2010). *International Handbook of Criminology*. Florida: CRC Press, p.634

²² Monk, K., Heinonen, J.A. & Ek, J.E. (2010). *Street Robbery*. Washington, DC: Office of Community Oriented Policing Services, U.S. Department of Justice, pp.16-18