

## Applying Theory to Crime: **BURGLARY**

At the beginning of this chapter, we presented the case study of Javier. We will not repeat his history here, but as his major crime was burglary, we will discuss some facts about burglary.

The FBI (or Uniform Crime Reports) defines burglary as “the unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft” and classifies it as a serious Index Crime. Although burglaries are nonviolent by definition, they certainly pose much risk for becoming violent—for example, if the residents return while the burglary is taking place. Although some people may believe that burglary occurs only during the night, most police departments and certainly the FBI have moved beyond that common-law definition of this crime.

Despite a steady decrease in burglaries over the past decade, the FBI recorded over 1.7 million burglaries in 2014. The vast majority of these burglaries involved some form of forced entry, and most were of home residences. Most burglaries occur during the hours of 6 a.m. and 6 p.m., when residents are most likely to be out. Still, even when victims do not encounter the burglar, the experience can be traumatic, given that victims know an offender has intruded into their home, often considered a place of refuge and security. In 2014, the average monetary/property loss of burglary per incident for a residence was \$2,229; the average monetary/property loss of burglary per incident for a nonresidence was \$2,312.

According to arrest reports, the vast majority (more than 80%) of burglary offenders are male, and a notable number (although not the majority) are under 18. Notably, the likelihood of an offender being caught for burglary is extremely low, perhaps because of the categorization of burglary as a property crime as well as the fact that there are no witnesses



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Burglary rates have decreased over the past decade, but this crime is still occurring millions of times each year.

(unlike most violent crimes). This is reflected in the low national clearance rate/arrest rate for burglary, which was less than 14% in 2014.

In an example of burglary’s low priority with police, the San Diego Police Department wrote a press release in 1998 informing citizens that police would no longer investigate home burglaries. The department claimed that the low likelihood of catching anyone (i.e., the low clearance rate), as well as burglary’s status as a non-violent property crime, led them to decide they would rather spend their resources on more serious cases or those they had a greater chance of solving. In 2013, the Chicago Police Department officially stated that they would not actively investigate motor vehicle thefts home burglaries, and several other crimes in their jurisdiction due to their low priority compared to more violent offenses.<sup>32</sup> Although alarming, this reflects the opinion of many other police and sheriff departments throughout the country regarding incidents of burglary; specifically, most law enforcement officers find burglaries incredibly hard to solve,

even when reported, because they typically involve no witnesses or hard evidence.

In the case study at the beginning of this chapter, Javier realized he did not have much going for him in terms of education, so he decided to follow his friends in committing a number of burglaries. Javier was not a violent person, so he engaged in a property offense that he hoped would not result in violence. However, had he known the high potential for violence in a burglary—if, for instance, someone were sleeping in the back of the house or a homeowner returned unexpectedly—he may have thought twice.

### THINK ABOUT IT:

1. What theoretical perspective discussed in this chapter best explains Javier’s criminal behavior?
2. What aspects of this theoretical perspective in the previous question do not adequately apply to Javier’s criminal behavior?