Burglary & Armed Robbery

To understand this newsletter, it is important to note the following definitions and terms used to describe these sorts of crime:

- **Burglary**

  This is the act, by individuals who have the intention of breaking and entering into a property unlawfully and intentionally, to commit the criminal offence of theft from the specific premises. Specifically in the case of residencies, this is done usually when the occupants are either not at home or when they are not directly threatened or disturbed by the burglars.

- **Robbery**

  Although similar to burglary in that there is the intention of committing the unlawful act of theft, the difference here is that the seizure of the victim’s items occurs under their supervision as they are present when this occurs. Commonly in South Africa, these sorts of crimes are committed by a group of armed individuals and depending on their duration inside the property, these crimes often become more violent and can result in serious injury, rape, torture and death.

- **House Robbery**

  The first term is the ‘unofficial’ description that the SAPS use to describe a robbery that occurred at a home and when the occupants were present. Victims are overpowered, detained and then robbed. The attackers either gain access to the property by ambushing the victim outside the property and using them as a ‘human key’ to gain access forcefully into the home or overpowering the residents once they are already inside the home.

- **Housebreaking**

  An illegal and forced entry into a home.

- **Aggravating Circumstances**

  The following is used in relation to robbery as is defined within the Criminal Procedure Act:

  a) The branding of a firearm or any other weapon that can be considered dangerous
  b) Grievous bodily harm that is inflicted by the robbers
  c) The threat of the above-mentioned by either the offender or an accomplice during a robbery, either prior to or after the goods have seized.
Facts

Various ongoing studies have been conducted by Professor Zinn in regards to burglary, armed robbery, housebreaking, hijacking and other crimes in South Africa. The following section is a summary of some of these findings and facts from Professor Zinn, as well as various other sources both nationally and internationally. Please note that a lot of the information and tips as supplied in the hijacking newsletter will be relevant in the case of the home or even the workplace being invaded too.

Planned Attacks

One of the patterns revealed in the Doctor’s studies was that criminals who observed their intended targets prior to the attack did so mostly between 5 pm and 8 pm. For residencies intended for robbery, attention is specifically given to where individuals are inside the home. When the house is stormed the robbers split up and ambush each person individually and directly whether in the kitchen, lounge, bathroom etc. The locations of the inhabitants are determined through habitual patterns noted during the surveillance phase and the noise created through cooking or the TV is used as a cover for the attack.

Last year almost 15,000 home break-ins and robberies occurred and disturbingly approximately half of these happened exclusively in Gauteng.

Categories of Burglars

Burglars can generally be divided into 3 main groups. The first group is the professional and high stakes burglar. It is not necessary for the homeowner to be too concerned about this group as they will usually target banks, malls or big corporations. The group that targets homes falls under the semi-professional group. These individuals usually work in a gang and blend into our daily lives. Additionally criminals will watch your home and gather information prior to the attack and will do this as well as their planning for up to 2 weeks per site or area. The last group is your amateur and opportunistic thief. The latter will only steal if the opportunity is presented to them and if there is any form of casing done in regards to the property, it is only for a few hours. A large part of this group actually consists of delinquent and adolescent males that actually reside in the neighbourhood or very close by. They are also mostly responsible for petty crimes such as acts of vandalism in the area. Unless from the latter delinquent category in this group, such burglars will usually act alone.

Target Canvassing

Organised criminals belonging to the second group will drive around during the day and night to canvas a neighbourhood and determine prior to the attack or the burglary as to which properties to target. Further planning of how they intend to get in and out, as well as the level of ease or difficulty to do so is also done. This is where the reporting of a suspicious vehicle that is spotted at various intervals in your neighbourhood can actually save yourself or one of your neighbours from becoming a victim of criminal attack.

Informants

In the case of complexes or areas that are guarded or boomed off, the times when the Security Officers change shifts would be noted as that is when they are the most distracted. Sometimes they are bribed or even threatened to participate, assist, turn a blind eye or provide information about the residents by the criminals.

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Further information can also be collected from the homeless in the area or they will send a member to your home under false pretences such as posing as someone taking a survey, collecting money for charity or as a TV license inspector.

Statistics

Robberies are most likely to occur within the first 30 minutes up until an hour after the residents have arrived home. The reason for this is at that time you are busy either cooking, watching television, in the garden and or still settling in for the night. It is also during this time that the majority of people deactivate their alarms as they are active in and around the house.

This is not always the case though as some robberies have occurred either between 19:00 – 00:00 as this is still considered as active times in the household but attacks and burglaries can still happen up to 04:00 in the morning.

Poor Conviction Rate

Almost all burglars and robbers commit these crimes as a professional avenue to obtain income for years to come and the possibility that they will be caught after the crime is so minimal that it is not even considered as a real risk or a deterrent by them. The few times they are caught are when the crime is still occurring and the authorities or Security Company has been alerted while the housebreaking is in progress or where sufficient, usable evidence has been made available. One of Dr Zinn’s more recent studies revealed that the conviction rate of burglary and robbery in South Africa is only 7.67% which is strongly in contrast to the USA which has a conviction rate of 53%.

High Averages

On average a criminal commits 104 different crimes over a span of 7 and half years before he is caught and convicted. Those who have been in involved in crime longer that others have shown to display much more violence and overall dispassion towards their victims. This behaviour and attitude was found to be more prevalent in the category of armed robbery.

A disturbing increase has been noted in robberies in that the occupants of targeted homes are present during the attack and that these crimes were conducted during waking hours during both the day and night, where in the past homes were struck by burglars when the residents were on holiday or while they were asleep.

Lighting Can Strike Twice

Burglars have been known to commonly strike again after the initial theft as they are already familiar with the layout of your home and can safely assume that all the stolen items have been replaced by the owners’ insurance. Additionally there have been cases where robbers act as delivery people of these replacement appliances and equipment to the domestic and on the pretence of a wrong delivery, they will simply remove all the new equipment and drive away with the stolen goods.

Professor Zinn’s most recent research and statistics of this year have been based on extensive interviews with 30 convicted armed robbers presently serving their sentences in 6 different high security facilities.
Modus Operandi

This year it was discovered by Dr Zinn that inner crime and inside information and intelligence as gleaned from the domestic staff, gardening services or previous employees at the home constitute between 53% - 79% of most home attacks. This is the norm in regards to modus operandi and it is vital that you have a discussion with your staff in regards to crime and Security Awareness. Your domestics must be informed as to not allow strangers into the home when you are out and to also not divulge any information or answer questions regarding the home or the family. If something like this does occur, she needs to inform you immediately.

Bear in mind if the criminals cannot access information through this channel, they will still survey your home for some time to gather the necessary info if they are intent on targeting your home. Observation of the home will continue up to the point of attack and they have usually been waiting in the garden biding their time just before ambush.

A further 17% of Security Guards and 17% of policemen were proved to be implicated in such other crimes. It was also noted that despite the level of violence in some of these attacks, robbers viewed farms as just another house break-in and do not differentiate this from other housebreakings, except that these homes were more isolated and that Time-X was considerably much longer.

Crime Flows like Water

Additionally race or culture does not play a part in these criminals determining who to target next. Previously black neighbourhoods are being targeted more frequently, thereby dispelling the myth that only Caucasians are targeted. Usually such groups will focus on a specific, up-market and affluent area or neighbourhood and if they find that the overall security is good, they simply move on to the next vicinity. In this case, crime can be considered as flowing water. Areas where it is airtight and no leakages can be found will be passed by and will trickle on further until a gap is found. This can be seen when reviewing reported crimes as a spate of robberies or burglaries will occur in a neighbourhood in a short time and then move to another area close by, where this pattern is repeated.

Double storey homes are targeted more than those of only one floor by groups of criminals and occupants that possess luxury vehicles or whom openly display their wealth are upped on the list of possible hits. It should further be noted that the home base of the criminals is usually only a 10 – 30 minute drive away from the victims’ properties.

Packs of Robbers

Packs of robbers usually consist of 4 members but this amount is generally doubled when the target is a farming property. Alarming 97% of these robbers are armed. 83% of these criminals are only out to obtain money and jewellery over other items and this in then spent on a variety of luxury items such as expensive clothes or vehicles and even excessive partying and prostitution.

The average age group of robbers is 19 – 26 years of age but most of these individuals began committing crime while still in their teens. Those that have become involved in crime at such an early age showed to possess much more aggression and act extremely violently towards their victims. Women are generally more hurt and tortured than their male counterparts. The youngest house robber that Professor Zinn interviewed was only 12.
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Only 17% of house robbers are foreign while the rest constitute of different racial and ethnical groups of South Africa meaning that not all housebreakers are black. The only common thread amongst these individuals is that a large majority of them came from poor backgrounds and are unemployed. A further 90% did not achieve Matric. Some of these criminals who were working gave up their jobs for a life of crime because more money was made and one interviewee stated that he earned up to 5 times more than his monthly salary through one single house breaking.

Undeterred

Robbers and burglars admit that they are not really deterred by alarm systems, CCTV or the electrical fence. As mentioned homes are generally targeted when the inhabitants are busy and the alarms have been switched off anyway. What they do confirm though is that small dogs in the house are their biggest deterrence particularly in South Africa.

Most Common Modus Operandi & Habits of Burglars

The following section concerns the most common method and means used by burglars when committing a break-in:

- This method is used by burglars both acting individually or in group
- The criminal(s) decide on which home is to be targeted
- Prior to the attack, their vehicle is parked around the corner and one will walk the distance to the victim’s home. If working in a group, the driver will move closer to the home, or even drive inside if access is allowed to him from the inside, to assist in the removal of large items such as stereo equipment or flat screens TVs which can then be transported as they make their getaway.
- Robbers on the other hand may wait for you to arrive home so that they can hijack your vehicle and use that to carry larger items away and to escape
- The burglar on foot will either ring the doorbell if he has access to the front door or press the intercom. Should anyone be home he will pose as charity collector, a salesman of some kind OR a TV license auditor. Other excuses used is that he was looking for another house or somebody else
- Once it has been confirmed that no one is home as there is no answer, he will typically move to the back of the house if they have the access to do so and so as not to draw attention from the street or a neighbour
- Most criminals do not even try to pick a lock as they know there are cruder, quicker and easier means in which to gain access inside. Access is most commonly gained through a small, ground floor window or door. In the case of the latter, it will be the back door that he will attempt to force open. The next 2 most common points of entry into the home will be either through a small window then or through the garage
- If tools are required to facilitate with the breaking-and-entering, these implements are found in the homeowner’s own inventory. Robbers prefer not to carry such implements on their person as they believe it makes it easier for the SAPS and the patrolling Security Providers to spot them. Also in the event of homes with 2 floors, they will take the ladder from the owner’s garage and access the home from one of the top windows, the roof or a balcony
Although a large percentage of burglars prefer to work in the dark, some will rather opt to target the home when the occupants are not at home; which means they will plan the burglary for during the day when everyone is at work. This is to avoid confrontation but as stated, in South Africa, which differs from the rest of the world greatly in regards to crime, more burglaries are increasingly becoming armed robberies and they don’t care anymore whether you are home or awake.

A triggered alarm does not really deter the majority of criminals because it can be assumed that most of the time the neighbours will not interfere. An unfortunate situation in today’s modern society is that people no longer have empathy towards others and will often not assist another person, particularly a stranger, especially in the case of a criminal attack for fear of their own safety. Furthermore organised criminals have definitely gathered information regarding the Service Providers in the vicinity and the expected time of arrival of the response vehicles.

Once inside and if working in a group, the housebreaker will contact the others to come in and open a door for them where possible.

Most thieves only require a few minutes to get what they need. They usually head straight to the main bedroom where they know jewellery, cash and medications will be kept. Additionally they will also steal small items of high value such as cell phones, tablets, laptops and guns.

A quick sweep is done of the rest of the home and generally includes the living room / entertainment area and dining room.

Attics and basement areas are commonly avoided as burglars fear they may get trapped there if the occupants or the back-up response arrives.

Burglars working independently prefer single storey homes as the same reason as mentioned above is relevant due to the fact that most master bedrooms are on the 2nd level. Those functioning in groups prefer double storeys as they will be able to split up to sweep the whole house more effectively.

How Homes Are Chosen As Targets

A huge selling point used by real estate agents is called “curb appeal”. This term defines how desirable and attractive your home appears from the street. Criminals notice this too during their initial cruises or survey of the neighbourhood and this is unfortunately a huge determining factor in the deciding process of which houses to target.

The trick here is to make it appear difficult to burglars to attempt to gain access into your home while still making your home appealing to everyone else. This is also where the fine line between aesthetic value of the home and your security measures need to be maintained. Not everyone wants to live in Fort Knox or a jail and have their security effectively ruin the beauty of their home, which most homeowners have clearly put a lot of pride and time into. When we provide recommendations and solutions in regards to security, through Security Risk Assessment, we really take this to heart and supply our clients with options that will not create stark contrast, spoil or adversely affect the feel and look of their properties.

When referring to the ‘Broken Windows Theory’, well maintained properties are less likely to be targeted by the criminal element than those that are neglected. For example, if your garden is neat and your grass is cut regularly, it implies that close attention is given to your home and this can already deter some burglars or intruders, as it can be concluded the same will go for your security; whereas an overgrown lawn will draw more attention and a closer inspection of the property as a possible target because it is assumed the owners do not pay so much mind to detail. This creates an opportunity in the mind of the criminal.
Homes in the middle of the street are targeted more often than those on corner stands due to the visibility factor.

The neighbourhood in which the home is located also plays a large part in burglars deciding which houses to target. Areas close to woods, open grounds, parks and rivers are most targeted because these types of spots provide good hiding places and easier means in which to escape and ‘disappear’. Homes in ‘cul-de-sacs’ are also at higher risk because patrolling vehicles do not pass by there that regularly.

Additionally complexes and townhouses with small back yards and tightly packed upon each other are most commonly targeted by robbers. They actually refer to this as a ‘picnic basket’ cause once they have crossed the main perimeter they are free to pick and choose which units to hit. A false sense of security is created in these instances and residents do not pay that much extra attention to their own personal security. To a much lesser degree, this is also applicable to homes within boomed off communities as it assumed that criminals will not be able to enter the neighbourhood easily.

**Prevention Tips**

Although you may receive an overwhelming amount of advice in regards to crime prevention tips over the radio, in your Facebook feed, in a variety of published media, from neighbours and colleagues, as well as numerous other sources; the problem here is that we tend not to pay adequate attention to this.

Consider the following scenario to better understand this statement: Before takeoff on a plane, the airhostess explains the safety features and measures that you need to acknowledge as a passenger. Unless it is your first time on a plane, your attention begins to wander as soon as she starts. This is because she usually begins by explaining how to use your safety belt and as you already know this, it is human nature to assume that you know the rest and over 90% of the passengers will then tune out; thereby not actually absorbing what she has to say and potentially missing vital information about escape from the plane or the correct manner in which to secure and buckle your safety jacket.

This is the same with general security and crime prevention tactics. We all know the basics such as putting timers on light switches and installing good locks. This is where the large majority of people, particularly South Africans, stop heeding this advice.

**The Need for Security Risk Assessment**

Additionally this is also where the Security Risk Assessment becomes necessary for anyone owing a property. Not only will all the threats and risks in regards to your security be fully revealed but you will also know that your security is based on a strong and solid foundation. Those who have already conducted a Security Risk Assessment fall into the exclusive category of a few citizens whom:

a) Would like to learn more about security and the best means in which to protect and secure their property, assets and most importantly of all, their family and loved ones
b) Is willing to proactively fight crime in South Africa
c) Will take our advice to heart, give serious thought to the options and make the best decisions in regards to their household and security
d) Is making a positive change in regards to crime in South Africa through protecting our properties one by one (Please let me know if you haven’t read the Starfish story)
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It should also be noted that very few individuals or companies actually get as far as commissioning a Security Risk Assessment without heeding our advice. In that light, here are some lesser known general tips that can assist you in further preventing burglaries or robberies at your home other than the extensive advice provided within the Security Risk Assessment report:

- As already mentioned dogs within the home are truly considered as a deterrent by South African criminals. It is actually advisable for those who do not have the pleasure of a canine as a family member to put up “Beware of the Dog” signs up, even if they do not have dogs and can further support this by placing a dog bowl or walking lead in view. I do not feel in my personal opinion that it is necessary to have ‘attack’ dogs but your pets must be trained well enough to obey basic commands such as ‘Come’ and ‘Stay’. It is also important that they raise the alert if a stranger is at the gate or at your home.

- Many people unwittingly advertise what possessions they have inside the home which consequently attracts the criminal’s attention, thereby placing them in the light of a target. This is particularly prevalent over the festive season when empty boxes of expensive items received as gifts are discarded in plain view. The criminal can deduce from your trash that there is a new flat screen TV or an Xbox inside the home, for example. Such packaging should be cut up prior to being discarded and disposed of. Property owners who openly display their wealth are higher on the criminals’ list of potential targets and 20% of all attacks is based on this form of advertising.

- Vary your daily routine regularly. Use different routes, do shopping at different venues and ensure that you never leave or return at a set time. This makes it more difficult for robbers to predict your movement and consequently to formulate their plans.

- Criminals who have access to the internet and enough information about their potential target will make use of Facebook and Twitter to determine the whereabouts of the homeowners and to figure out how long they will be absent from the home (if their settings are viewable by the public). Furthermore GPS tracing that is automatically programmed on most smart devices when capturing a photo can be used to access the details of friends and family. These seemingly innocent photos can also indicate exactly what items you have in the home such as the TV or Hifi system in the background of photos taken of loved ones or on occasions.

- Although alarm systems, CCTV and electrical fences are not viewed as actual deterrents to South African criminals, it is important that you still invest in these vital components to build up a functional and optimal security system. Remember that the main purpose of a multi-layered system is to create time, to hinder the criminals enough and to provide you with an early as possible alert to ensure that you get your family to safety before the criminals can get to you in the frame of Time-X.

- It should be noted though some robbers are actually scared off by a CCTV camera that appears to be following them live through an operator. Video analytics will allow your CCTV system to automatically move to and zoom into areas where motion is detected giving the impression that they are actively being watched.

- A large percentage of intruders prefer the cover of darkness. Well lit areas and motion detection lights are avoided.

- Discuss Security Awareness and crime with the family and all employees at the home. Further ensure that they know what to do in an emergency situation and the relevant steps that need to be taken in case you are not at home.

- Be careful whom you employ or allow into your home.
Etch your house number and street, phone number or name into items of high value with an electrical engraving pen. Some advice columns suggest that you use your ID number but this is really not very recommendable as this can result in identity theft. These markings actually deter criminals from taking these items because it is clear that these do not belong to them and consequently makes it more difficult to resell or pawn. Additionally if they get caught these marked items will be very easy to identify as stolen goods.

Take an inventory of your home. Smaller items of value such as jewellery, silverware or the like should be marked, photographed or videoed. In the case of the latter it is a good idea to walk through your home while taking a video and note all other expensive items such as TVs, appliances or electrical equipment. These should be documented accurately and in detail. This must then be placed in a safe place. In the event that you are targeted by robbers, this will assist you greatly in your case at the SAPS as well as in terms of insurance claims. A copy of this should also be stored offsite such as in your office or another location. When new items are purchased or received, or when old items are replaced or discarded, remember to update your catalogue accordingly.

As stated, burglars generally spend less than 10 minutes in your home, if it is not an armed robbery, and will grab small items of value such as your jewellery or cash on hand. Due to the time limitation they are not going inspect a ring to determine whether it is a real diamond or a cubic zirconia. Place a pretty jewellery box as a decoy on your dressing table and rather hide the items of real expense or high sentimental value in a safer and unexpected place, and preferable in a plain box or unpredictable type of holder. A do-and-don’t list of hiding places is provided in this newsletter. The thief may think he hit the jackpot and scoop up all your costume jewellery or even the entire jewellery box without looking further.

Another clever trick is that if you have a safe in the house to actually have 2. One which will be the real safe and the other a decoy. Ensure that the decoy is semi-hidden while the real safe must be hidden very well. Thieves will assume that the decoy contains valuable items and will not possibly try to open it onsite, but rather attempt to take the whole safe with them if it can be removed. If the safe is secured it will take him time to remove it. Use screws to attach the decoy to the wall or the floor which will hinder them in attempting to take it. Fill the decoy with some worthless paperwork and more costume jewellery. Although you may be tempted to place something in there that would show them you outsmarted them, this is not recommendable. The idea that needs to be created with the decoy is that there are no other items of real value in the home so that they do not return.

Be wary of any strange people you allow into your home. It is not necessary to be overly paranoid but it never hurts to be careful. The risk here lies in the fact that you can be robbed later from information gleaned from these unknown parties, even though they may not actually be criminals themselves. Only one or two visits are actually necessary to determine the general layout of your home, how much valuables you have inside and the strength of your security system. Such individuals that you be should be cautious around are delivery men, gardening services, repairmen, charity collectors, door-to-door salesmen, survey conductors and the increasingly popular tactic of the TV license inspector. Do not mention work schedules, planned outings or holidays where possible or give excessive information. When planning a party do not have an open party or a house party so that strangers are not allowed freely into your home. Make it clear to the kids that it is out of the question especially when you are away.

Another ploy used by more organised groups is that of a telemarketer. We have all already been warned that this is used to gather important details for fraudulent purposes and white collar crimes, but in addition, a simple question such as “When would be a convenient time to contact you?” may actually be a criminal attempting to determine whether you are at home or not.
As we are all aware, holiday times do increase the risk of burglary. This is not only when you are away on vacation but also on religious holidays such as Christmas or special events such as New Years as it can be safely assumed that if you are not hosting the party, you will be attending celebrations at other family members, friends or another venue. It is always advisable to be more vigilant over this time as many people tend to relax and are therefore more likely to be caught unawares.

- If you are away for an extended period of time, timers on lights and appliances are always a good idea. This will create the illusion of occupancy in the home. Ask a family member or friend to regularly check on your home and to remove telltales signs of absence such as post or the garbage bin in the street.

- Make sure that your house number is clearly visible from the street in case of an emergency.

**Hiding Your Valuables**

The following is a list of dos-and-don’t regarding hiding places of your valuables, especially small items:

**DON’T:**
- Hide items in the dressing table, the night stands, your underwear or sock drawers particularly in the main bedroom
- Medicine cabinet
- Under your mattress
- Avoid the dining room, master bedroom and lounge area

**DO:**
- Attic / Basement
- The children’s bedrooms
- Broom closet / pantry
- Kitchen
- Be creative such as consider hiding your very valuable jewellery in a Tupperware or lunchbox in the kitchen. That way you know that it will remain in your possession should you be robbed.

**After a Burglary**

- Report the burglary to the SAPS. The detailed catalogue of your items as explained previously can be used to determine what items are missing later and will assist in your report, as well as with insurance claims.
- Do not attempt to investigate the crime scene yourself. Wait for the detective or the investigation team to arrive to do so. Leave everything as is and untouched. Do not try clean up the mess as this can destroy evidence.
- If you suspect the burglars may still be in the house, do not go inside especially if you find a door open or a window smashed upon arrival at home. Wait for the Armed Response or the police some distance away from the home or at the neighbours.
• Ideally your security system would have already alerted them to the situation and you would have been informed via SMS that your alarm has triggered. You do not want to walk in unexpected on the burglars as they will most likely attack you. Do not attempt to keep the burglar in the house or apprehend him.

**Worst Case Scenario: Surviving an Armed Robbery**

• As with a hijacking scenario, no material object no matter how valuable it may be is worth your live or those of the family. Rather let them take what they want and have you and your loved ones see another day.
• Such individuals see it as a good sign when their victims plead for their lives and follow all instructions given.
• Keep a panic in the bathrooms as most male figures in the home are held in the bathrooms by the robbers whilst busy with the attack and going through the house.
• Avoid speaking to the housebreakers unless they have posed a question to you. Answer slowly and clearly.
• Remain calm. Ensure that your hands are visible at all times.
• Stay in your original position. Do not make any sudden movements and remain still unless otherwise instructed to move.
• Cooperate. Robbers assume that if you resist that you have something to hide like large amount of cash or other items of extreme value in the home.
• Another false assumption they make is that the more violent they are towards their victims, the more items of value that may be hidden in the home will be handed over to them.
• The possibility of rape and torture increases the longer these housebreakers remain in the home. Let them take what they want so that they can leave as soon as possible.
• Do not make eye contact with the robbers.

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