



# JDiBrief – Crime

## Bicycle theft: ANALYSIS (3 of 5)

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**PLACE:** Like all crimes, bicycle theft is found to concentrate at certain locations. Contrary to popular opinion, crime victim surveys indicate that around two thirds of cycle thefts in England and Wales occur in and around the victim's home.



Problem areas include gardens, passageways between houses and outbuildings (such as sheds and garages). High rates of residential cycle theft are attributed to a lack of secure storage and because of the (perceived) inconvenience of securely locking bicycles when at home.

Bicycle theft is also found to concentrate at schools, university campuses and transport nodes, where large quantities of cycles are routinely left unguarded and where offenders typically look inconspicuous when foraging for suitable targets.

**OFFENDER:** Detailed information on cycle thieves is limited. Police detection rates are traditionally low - in England and Wales detection rates are around 5% - in part because many victims of cycle theft cannot provide any information on who stole their bicycle. Evidence that is available suggests that most offenders are young males and that cycle theft is often an “entry crime” to more serious offences. In terms of offender motivation, there are (at least) three categories of cycle thief, those that steal:

- To joyride. These offenders tend to be young (under 16) and will steal any bicycle for pleasure or to get from one place to another.
- For cash or drugs. These offenders take advantage of available opportunities in order to return a profit.
- To order. These offenders tend to be more organised and target specific bikes to order.

**VICTIM:** Research evidence shows that cyclists display a higher risk of having their bicycle stolen than motorists their car and motorcyclists their motorbike. What's more, like many crime types, theft is found to disproportionately concentrate on a small number of victims – repeat victimisation is common. This may reflect the areas in which cyclists park their bikes or the way in which they lock it.

Although an understudied issue, preliminary research findings from England suggests that following an initial cycle theft, the risk of cycle thefts occurring at locations nearby is elevated for a period of around 4 weeks. This is known as the *near-repeat phenomenon* which has been found for different crime types (from domestic burglary to roadside bombs in Iraq) across many countries.

**TARGET:** Bicycles are hot products. They possess many of the ‘CRAVED’ features common to frequently stolen items. For example, they are widely available, often expensive, easy to use and there are numerous channels through which they can be sold. Applying CRAVED to your local cycle theft problem might usefully point towards opportunities for intervention, such as developing ways to make cycles less removable or less disposable.