

## VICTIMS OF BURGLARY

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*Vóko professzor úrral való együttműködésünk több évtizedre nyúlik vissza. A szakmai kapcsolatunk alapja elsősorban kutatási érdeklődésünk közelsége a szankcionálás és intézményrendszerének működése területén. Személyes-baráti kapcsolatunk hasonlóan a távoli múltban gyökeredzik. Kandidátusi disszertációm egyik opponense professzor úr volt 1995-ben, és azóta is figyelemmel kísérte munkámat, tanácsaival és tapasztalataival egyengette utamat a börtönkutatások során. A kérdéskörtől azóta sem „szabadultam”, ahogyan ő sem, így jelen tanulmányom is fogvatartottakkal folytatott interjúk feldolgozásával készült. Ezzel kívánok tisztelni Professzor úr munkássága előtt, kívánva neki – mindannyiunk hasznára – még sok-sok, munkával (is) tarkított, örömteli évet.*

Burglaries deserve more attention, not only because of their steadily increasing number and relatively low detection rates, but also because they have a markedly negative impact on citizens' subjective sense of security. In addition to suffering material losses, the victims of these crimes' trust in the security of their residential neighbourhood is shaken; they may have ill feelings and anxieties, as the sanctity of private property and private life is questioned by these burglars intruding into people's private living quarters by prising open the doors of their homes and rifling through their drawers, family photos or even their underwear cupboard.

Another characteristic of these criminal offences is that potential victims can do a lot in the interest of prevention, i.e. for their own security. It is therefore important to explore the information and data on victims and the findings of Hungarian and foreign literature and research.

## 1. Hungarian and international research

The first comprehensive Hungarian research on burglary victims was conducted in 1991. It was justified by the massive crime wave following the political regime change, resulting in a marked increase in criminal offences against property. In 1990, recorded criminal offences grew by 50 percent compared to the year before while the effectiveness of investigations decreased. As national police chief at the time Győző Szabó<sup>1</sup> wrote, this resulted in such a quality change in public security that, in high-risk areas, crime became a decisive factor in the public's well-being and quality of life. The number of burglaries increased by 483 per cent between 1970 and 1989.<sup>2</sup> The research, conducted by Lenke Fehér, Ferenc Kratochwill, Anna Kiss, László Gatter and Ágnes Mató<sup>3</sup>, was, unsurprisingly, sponsored by one of the Hungarian insurance companies. The research involved extensive studies of the files of 69 persons who had committed burglary, and interviews about 200 cases with experts, representatives of the legal profession and, to a lesser extent, with victims. The assessment differentiated between "experienced" and "inexperienced" burglars. With regards to victim behaviour, the research emphasised the importance of a preventive approach. In his summary, Tihamér Tóth pointed out that, despite their fears, the public did very little to protect their valuables and believed that it was more of a police duty. Considering the not so favourable detection rates at the time and the low proportion of damages compensated, it seemed even in the late 1980s that burglary was an important issue and prevention should be emphasised.<sup>4</sup>

In 2001 Ilona Görgényi researched burglary victims in an international context (with contributions from England, Poland, Hungary and Germany). The research, conducted in Miskolc, relied on Hungarian and international crime victim survey (ICVS) with an analysis of a total of 557 burglary cases reported to the police and interviews with 207 victims.<sup>5</sup> In over 60 percent of cases, burglary scenes were weekend houses; the rest were flats and residential homes.

<sup>1</sup> SZABÓ, Győző: A közrend és a közbiztonság aktuális kérdései. In: KEREZSI, Klára (szerk.): *Kriminológiai Közlemények* 38–39. Budapest, Magyar Kriminológiai Társaság, 1991. 6–24.

<sup>2</sup> TÓTH, Tihamér: A betöréses lopások viktimológiai sajátosságai. In: KEREZSI (szerk.) op. cit. 84–93.

<sup>3</sup> See eg. FEHÉR, Lenke: A betöréses lopás sértettje – egy empirikus vizsgálat tanulságai. In: KEREZSI (szerk.) op. cit. 47–64.; KRATOCHWILL, Ferenc: A bűncselekmények áldozatainak kártalanítása. In: KEREZSI (szerk.) op. cit. 65–83.; and KISS, Anna: A sértett eljárási helyzete. *Kriminológiai és Kriminológiai Tanulmányok*, 34. (szerk. Irk Ferenc) 1997. 232–254.

<sup>4</sup> TÓTH op. cit.

<sup>5</sup> GÖRGÉNYI, Ilona: *A viktimológia alapkérdései*. Budapest, Osiris, 2002.

The research uncovered a number of circumstances that cause, in addition to material damage, other injuries in such cases. Consequently, it was evidenced that psychological injury to the victim was much more serious than the material damage caused by the burglary.

With regard to the act itself, 78 percent of victims reported anger, 19 percent fear and 15 percent shock. In addition, a spontaneous 10 percent named helplessness as a contributing factor. There appeared to be a difference in the emotions suffered as a result of house and vacation home burglaries. While the former was more about fear, it was hatred that was mostly reported in the latter case. This phenomenon can be explained by the more general and intimate nature of a family home, an offence against which affects citizens more seriously. The research also focused on indirect victims, such as family members, who can be considered indirect victims only in terms of reporting the crime to the police and the insurance company; in actual fact, they also suffered direct injury as the burglary also affected their home. The research also proved that women, single citizens and those in poor financial situations were more vulnerable, as they had a higher level of fear and lower sense of security.

In 2004 a victim survey by the National Institute of Criminology, with a sample of ten thousand respondents, studied burglary victims in a questionnaire covering criminal offences against property.<sup>6</sup> It was found that this type of criminal offence was less characterised by latency than other minor offences against property. This was primarily due to the fact that pursuing insurance claims requires a report to be filed with the police. At the same time, these offences also have a general influence on the victims' state of mind; namely that previous victims of crimes against property are typically more afraid that their home will fall victim to burglars.<sup>7</sup> We inquired about the emotions of victims after suffering the criminal offence. The survey indicated that the recollections of the event, even years later, trigger intense emotions from victims including fury, anger, agitation, defenceless, anxiety and helplessness, although these were found not only in terms of criminal offences against property.

In contrast, it is interesting to see what the injured persons did, at least after the event, to improve their level of security. Just like the outcome of the

<sup>6</sup> Ferenc IRK (ed.): *Victims and Opinions. Vol. I–II*. Budapest, National Institute of Criminology, 2004.

<sup>7</sup> Mariann KRÁNITZ: Victims of Crimes Against Property. In: Ferenc IRK (ed.): *Victims and Opinions. Vol. II*. Budapest, National Institute of Criminology, 2004. 27–59.

international InSec survey<sup>8</sup>, the Hungarian survey also reported that respondents preferred passive or some other kind of defence, based on a behavioural change.

After becoming a victim, despite their fears, only 11.4% of the injured persons had a security lock installed or reinforced; 10.7% had the security features of their house, car, garden, etc. improved, and only 6.9% had a local alarm system installed. What is interesting to note is that among those who suffered criminal offences primarily against property, the majority (58.7%) changed their lifestyles and behaviours after being victimised, yet a smaller group (39.4%) took specific action.<sup>9</sup>

Due to the large number of foreign research projects, I focus on their common characteristics and special features. These research projects use different approaches in their analyses of victim-related issues of burglary. Similar to the Hungarian method, there are international studies focusing on the victims of this particular criminal offence and there are some other, more general research projects assessing victimisation that also touch upon this particular type of criminal offence. Special types of the latter group include ICVS and NCVS<sup>10</sup> studies, which focus on general issues on a large sample of respondents and deal with victims of specific crime types, including burglary, in addition to general problems.

In addition to the causes and circumstances of victimization, the needs of victims and the possibility of prevention, these research projects primarily focus on the short and long-term effects, primarily psychological ones such as fear, anxiety and other emotions, of the criminal offence. The first such studies were published in the 1990s.

These special studies were generally based on telephone interviews or questionnaires completed within specific time intervals following the actual offence. Feltes, for instance, first contacted victims 48 hours after the crime and then once more later.<sup>11</sup> (The research conducted by Iлона Görgényi in Miskolc with international cooperation was completed using a similar method.<sup>12</sup>) Actually, these are accurate reflections of the state of mind of the victims

<sup>8</sup> InSec – Insecurity in European Countries (Hamburg–Amsterdam–Krakow–Vienna–Budapest). HPSE-CT-2001-00052.

<sup>9</sup> Tünde BARABÁS: General Victimology, Latency. In: Ferenc IRK (ed.): *Victims and Opinions*. Vol. I. Budapest, National Institute of Criminology, 2004. 161–201.

<sup>10</sup> International Crime Victimization Survey (ICVS) and National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS).

<sup>11</sup> Thomas FELTES – Frank KAWELOVSKI: Der Kampf gegen den Wohnungsdiebstahl: Wie können wir ihn gewinnen? Teil I. *Die Polizei*, 5/2014. 163–164.

<sup>12</sup> GÖRGÉNYI op. cit.

following the criminal offence. The following section details some of these targeted research activities.

## 2. Emotional–psychological effects of burglaries

Burglaries also have negative emotional effects on most victims. As seen above, these could be specific negative emotions, such as fury, anger or longer psychological processes, for example, fear of becoming a victim again, or a more general anxiety or the fixation of a behavioural disorder that complicates the victim's everyday life. Finally, we can talk about long term emotional change, such as the development of a sense of vulnerability, or lack of trust in the police, as reported in a number of research projects.

Psychological studies, typically in English-speaking countries, primarily research trauma caused by burglary. In their 2013 study, Kunst, Rutten and Knijf categorise studies on the subject into three groups.<sup>13</sup> The first category includes research projects that attempt to separate the effect of the break-ins on the psychological state of the victims completely. Beaton, Cook, Kavanagh and Herrington, for instance, compared burglary victims with other non-victimised persons.<sup>14</sup> The research was conducted in two phases: the first one was 7 and 12 days after the break-in, and the second 4–5 months after the very first police visit. They concluded that the psychological wellbeing of burglary victims changed to a much lower level. In contrast, Sorenson and Golding did not find any marked difference between the psychological wellbeing of victims and non-victimised persons.<sup>15</sup>

The other group is characterised by research projects focusing on the impact of break-ins on the psychological state of mind as related to various circumstances. One such study was conducted by Kobayashi and Saito who concluded that certain factors reinforced the negative impact: if the victim is a woman, if the insured person had taken preventive measures prior to the criminal offence (e.g. locked the doors and windows), repeated victimisation, when the victim saw

<sup>13</sup> Maarten J. J. KUNST – Sanne RUTTEN – Ellen KNIJF: Satisfaction with the Initial Police Response and Development of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder Symptoms in Victims of Domestic Burglary. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 26., no. 1. (2013) 111–118.

<sup>14</sup> Alan BEATON – Mark COOK – Mark KAVANAGH – Carla HERRINGTON: The psychological impact of burglary. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, vol. 6., no. 1. (2000) 33–43.

<sup>15</sup> Susan B. SORENSON – Jacqueline M. GOLDING: Depressive sequelae of recent criminal victimization. *Journal of Traumatic Stress*, vol. 3., no. 3. (1990) 337–350.

or heard the offenders, loss of a large amount of money, major damage to the building or when it is assumed that the crime was committed by professional criminals.<sup>16</sup>

The studies in the third category compare the psychological effects of break-ins with the damage caused by violent crimes or crimes against property; however, no major difference has been pointed out so far. One such example is the study by Lurigio on the psychological impacts of burglary, robbery and aggravated assault, which failed to identify any specific difference between the impacts of criminal offence types.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to these three major directions, however, a number of research projects centre on the negative emotional state resulting from the victim suffering a burglary, its characteristics, the various reactions, their causes and development. According to Maguire, a relatively small group of victimised persons are characterised by long-term damaging effects, where an event negatively influences their lives in the long run.<sup>18</sup> Earlier Brown concluded that a large percentage of victims experienced "post-burglary" emotional reactions, anger, excessive caution with strangers and anxiety but failed to mention frequent occurrence of long-term effects. Over half of the victims reacted with nervous system symptoms, by crying and shaking, even when objects of small value were lost.<sup>19</sup>

In the course of the Brown–Harris research, phone interviews were conducted with 44 female victims, in the course of which they studied the emotional effects of the crime and the options for establishing a sense of security and maintaining it in the long run. *The authors assume that burglary is more than just a general criminal offence violating a single private space, as it may influence the victim's sense of security in the long run.* The interview took 20–30 minutes, and the questions were directed at lost belongings, the number and types of rooms (living room, bedroom, etc.), the traces of destruction and the extent of the

<sup>16</sup> Juichi KOBAYASHI – Hiroyuki SAITO: Study on post-incident maladjustments of burglary victims. *Reports of the National Research Institute of Police Science*, vol. 36., no. 2. (1995) 45–46.

<sup>17</sup> Arthur J. LURIGIO: Are all victims alike? The adverse, generalized, and differential impact of crime. *Crime & Delinquency*, vol. 33., no. 4. (1987) 452–467.

<sup>18</sup> Mike MAGUIRE – Richard WRIGHT – Trevor BENNETT: Domestic burglary. In: Fiona BROOKMAN – Mike MAGUIRE – Harriet PIERPOINT – Trevor BENNETT (eds.): *Handbook on Crime*. Devon, Willan, 2010. 3–25.

<sup>19</sup> Barbara B. BROWN: Territoriality. In: Daniel STOKOLS – Irwin ALTMAN (eds.): *Handbook of environmental psychology*. New York, John Wiley & Sons, 1987. 505–531.

damage as well as the extent to which the rooms were ransacked and searched by the offenders.<sup>20</sup>

The study sought an answer to why certain break-ins upset victims more than others. The research concluded that the intensity of the victims' negative emotional response was directly proportionate to the injury caused to the area. The more aggressive the crime appears from the traces found on the scene, the stronger the negative emotional impact is on the victim. *The victim's sense of security is already endangered by the burglar's entry into the house; however, the more rooms visited by the offender, the stronger the injury to the victim's private sphere and the sense of injury.* The more rooms the burglar stole objects from, the stronger the fear, anger and vulnerability felt by the victim. The victim's sense of injury was the strongest when objects of personal importance fell victim to the criminal offence. The burglar's search of the rooms caused the strongest negative emotional impacts, such as vulnerability and loss of trust in the police. *Depending on the speed at which the police responded to the crime, the victims experienced the negative emotional impact of the crime more strongly or weakly.*

Another research project focused on the factors in a burglary, based on which the victims are more likely to feel anxiety or fear of becoming a victim again.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, primarily female victims displayed symptoms of anxiety and single, young female victims feared the most that the break-in would occur again. Lack of stronger ties with their neighbours may also cause anxiety in such cases. *Victims who were cautious prior to the burglary (they remembered to lock the doors and windows) are more likely to feel fear of becoming a victim again than those who were careless.*

*Victims who received effective support and information from the police about prevention reported fear of becoming a victim again in smaller numbers.*

Previous victims or witnesses of burglary are more likely to experience fear of break-in than those without any experience of such a criminal offence. Victims who lost an object of great value or a large sum of money to burglary were also more fearful of another break-in. If the criminal offence was supposedly committed by professional burglars, the victim will be more likely to feel anxiety after the crime. The same is true for break-ins involving damage to or violence against property.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara B. BROWN – Paul B. HARRIS: Residential burglary victimization: reactions to the invasion of a primary territory. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, vol. 9., no. 2. (1989) 119–132.

<sup>21</sup> KOBAYASHI–SAITO op. cit. 45–46.



Researchers of Leiden University studied the Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) caused by the criminal offence.<sup>22</sup>

Although the impacts caused by burglary do not fulfil the criteria of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), i.e. it is not an event directly threatening loss of life, severe injury or the individual or another person being physically trapped, a number of studies have concluded that there are several characteristics shared by severe posttraumatic state (indicated by intensive fear, defenceless, fright) and the victim's state of mind caused by a criminal offence. A number of victims reported repeatedly reliving the event in their dreams, sleep disorders and avoidance of facing the trauma. Chronic occurrence of these syndromes has been diagnosed in certain victims.

Among other things, the research focused on what can strengthen and what can weaken these effects. Researchers assume that the events of criminal proceedings may exert positive, therapeutic or negative, anti-therapeutic effects on individuals' mental health. *Unlike with other criminal offences, a large percentage of burglaries are reported to the police (90% in the Netherlands). We must note that, since burglaries are reported directly or shortly after they are committed, police actions take place in the early phase of PTSD.*

In the latter phase of the research, therefore, satisfaction with police actions and later developments of PTSD were studied in the month following the criminal offence.

Research participants were victims who reported burglaries in the Hollands Midden region, the sixth largest region of the Netherlands. Victims were asked over the phone within one month from the time the crime was committed whether they wanted to participate in the interview. The first interviews were recorded between February and June 2011, within 19.1 days after the crime on average, and the second interview occurred 4–6 weeks thereafter. The majority of respondents were women. *According to the study findings, existing PTSD symptoms were stronger among victims less satisfied with the police.*

### 3. Findings of the Hungarian research from the victims' perspective

The domestic research primarily studied the effectiveness of protective mechanisms and only dealt with the victim as a side issue, in terms of the

<sup>22</sup> KUNST–RUTTEN–KNIJF op. cit. 111–118.

victim's role in prevention and the criminal act from the perspective of the offender and so we have been unable to study the impacts on the victim.

As discussed earlier, we started the research from the criminological principle of *rational selection*, assuming that most offenders act rationally, thinking over and weighing the risks of the burglary against the possible gains. In other words, we can assume a preliminary, planning phase prior to the actual criminal act. This assumption was confirmed by our own research. From this perspective, the majority of sneak thefts are not preceded by such a planning phase because, as we have seen, these are more frequently based on a momentary decision by detecting a good opportunity (e.g. a window left open). It is, however, apparent that in both case types there are certain factors relevant to the victims, such as carelessness, absent-mindedness (the window left open), negligence (ignoring appropriate protection methods, if there is no alarm or it is not activated). The third case type in the research one might call "trickery intrusion", where the offender takes advantage of the victim's gullibility during the entry.

#### 3.1. Characteristics of burglaries based on the respondents' prior actions

Having analysed the scene selection preferences of burglary offenders, we could see that the majority of offenders weigh a number of options before deciding to commit the crime.<sup>23</sup> Based on the responses processed, the four most frequent answers:

- no occupants at home, no witnesses,
- existing security devices,
- quality/value of the property,
- easy entry,

all of these are linked to the victim or the behaviour displayed in the interest of prevention.

We picked those scene selection preferences of burglary offenders which the potential victim may influence. The figure below illustrates which of these circumstances influence offenders' choices and to what extent.

<sup>23</sup> More details BARABÁS, A. Tünde – EISINGER, Andrea – GAULAND, Edina – MAGI, Anna – RÓZSA, Sándor – WINDT, Szandra: A betöréses lopások főbb kérdései. In: BARABÁS, A. Tünde: *Tolvaj-kulcs. A betöréses lopások vizsgálata az elkövetők szemszögéből*. Budapest, Országos Kriminológiai Intézet, 2014. 45–98.

From the choices it is clear that the circumstance that tends to keep burglars away the most, i.e. when *people are visible* at the selected location (three-fourths of the respondents would not break into such a place) is a one that can be influenced only slightly, as occupants work, come and go, so no single person can sit at home just to facilitate crime prevention. In addition, a *security camera is installed outdoors* is an effective method, as close to one-half of burglars would not commit the crime. One-third of the respondents are deterred by a visible alarm system. In contrast, 73% of burglars would break into a house where the mailbox has clearly not been emptied for a while and the "Beware of the dog" sign is equally not a real deterrent (7.3%). A dense fence or a motion sensor lamp is not a deterrent, or from the other end, an attractive opportunity (approx. two-thirds of the respondents would break in).

As proximity of people, or the neighbours or occupants being at home, aside from a few extreme exceptions, is the most effective deterrent factor, we even used the open-ended question: "To what extent does it matter to you whether the owners are at home?"

During planning and in order to avoid being caught, offenders take potential witnesses, owners and neighbours into account. As it turned out, approx. two-thirds of the respondents would not break into such a place. In addition to the simple "I will not get in" answer, respondents occasionally emphasised that they would not break in because if they are caught and they use force, the crime would now be robbery, which they would like to avoid: "it does matter, because I would not surrender; if I get caught, it's robbery from that point" or "yes, a lot, I'd rather not get in to avoid any complications (e.g. robbery, murder)."

Thirteen percent of respondents said that it would depend on the specific situation (time of the day, season of the year, whether the owners are asleep or in the garden, where the specific object is located, etc.). Even in the "depends" case indicates a process where the offender weighs his options before committing the crime. For instance, the decision depends on the season – "it does matter in the winter because they are inside; it does not matter in the summer because they are somewhere outside, in the garden or in the pool", "it matters but not a lot, because I get in at night when they are asleep, and I will get out quickly", "it matters during the day but it does not at night; it's all the same then".

Sixteen percent of convicts said that they did not care if the owners were at home or not. Based on the answers given here, we might assume that offenders in this particular example were thinking primarily about sneak-in thefts when they would take advantage of the occupants being asleep, distracted or doing something else to get to the desired possessions. Here is a reference, for instance:

"if, for example, young people are at home, it is even better because they are loud and careless." In these particular cases, the occupants being home matters less: an open door or window is primarily a circumstance facilitating entry into the house. However, the burglar risks a lot in these circumstances by hoping that he would not be heard, which he is aware of.

We should note here that, according to the analysis by the National Police Headquarters, people with high-paid jobs and lonely people above 60 years are potentially endangered and more frequently become victims. With regards to the latter age group, it is also apparent that the offender takes the risk of being caught during the act into account. In such an event, the offender, hoping for less resistance, uses violence against the victim to keep the illegally acquired valuables, and they are not afraid to commit more severe crimes (e.g. robbery).

Finally, 6% believe that it is especially good when the occupants are at home. They are the ones who like this situation, pointing out that the alarm is not turned on at that time, more valuables are at home and entry is easier. "It is the best because you don't have to be afraid of any surprises, and the wallet is on the table." "The main point is that they should be at home. That is the best opportunity as they don't expect me." "That is better because there is cash and jewellery when they are at home." Among those respondents, there are also those who would primarily sneak in: "You can go until 5 a.m.; people are tired and careless".

In the case of theft involving trickery, the victim being at home is essential to help with the entry. Offenders committing burglary reported such cases in general or in connection with a successful prior operation. According to one of the offenders: "I am specifically counting on them being at home and letting me in - men or women, typically alone."

We were interested to learn what the offender would do if alarmed by some unexpected event, one of the most typical being when the owner gets home. We asked the question regarding past crimes, i.e. we did not focus on the assumptions or ideas of the offenders but rather their specific solutions.

Regarding the responses given to the question about being caught in the act by the owner arriving home, it turns out that 55% of the respondents had experienced such an event. According to the answers given to the question "What did you do then?", offenders were mostly (84%) able to escape or tried to hide and leave the scene later. In other words, a significant portion of offenders, in accordance with the answers given earlier (i.e. they would not break in if the occupants are at home to avoid complicated situations) would also opt for a quick way out or disappear later. In and of itself, it is a clear indication that

burglars are typically not violent offenders; they do not want to use brute force and they are aware of the consequences if they do.

Only two offenders did not escape or hide when caught. One accepted his fate and surrendered. Only one offender used force. Many explained that immediately after they get in, they prepare their escape route by opening a window or another door. Nonetheless, especially when the break-in occurs at night, the police do not recommend disturbing the burglars because their behaviour is unpredictable. It is especially true of so-called addict offenders, who do not shy away from anything, including the use of violence, to get the money that buys them their drugs.

### 3.2. Method of foray – Options for prevention

Almost without exception, respondents favoured *doors and windows* as their entry points. The analysis of the National Police Headquarters also reveals that breaking or forcing doors and windows open are the most typical means of intrusion. As it turns out, even though there is no big change in terms of the type of entry, non-traditional methods occasionally show up, such as burning the door/window or melting a plastic door/window using a heat gun.

Nonetheless, for years the most frequently used method has been *forcing or pushing them open* using brute force. The tools used for committing the crime continue to be primarily pliers, cutting tools, a crowbar, chisel and saw.

According to research findings, penetrating the wall or the roof is not a typical method because it generates a lot of noise and thereby increases the chances of being caught. In response to our questions regarding locks, the majority responded that opening them is not a real challenge for them. Based on their accounts, a large number of them are aware of the basic technology.

The burglar alarm, as an increasingly common protection method, did not hinder two-thirds of offenders in committing the crime. To improve the level of security, the signals of electronic property protection equipment can be connected to a remote monitoring service, which has agreed to reach the scene within a set time period.

This period is the critical point in the service as how much time the offender has to complete the crime after the alarm goes off is decisive. (If the burglary takes less than the critical 15-minute period, there is a lower chance of being caught. Fifty-four percent of respondents keep to this time limit; over 38% are even faster and complete the crime in less than 10 minutes. Interestingly

enough, 16% of survey participants had already committed a burglary over a period of more than 30 minutes. The reason for such an extended period must have been the complete lack or poor quality of property protection equipment.) The contracted service period is usually 5–15 minutes.<sup>24</sup> Offenders are also aware of this information, so they often test services to gain the most accurate information relevant for a planned crime possible.

Therefore, it is important to design the security system of the property so that over-riding the various security obstacles would be *time-consuming*.

Previous research has pointed out (see above) that while there is substantial fear of crimes against property, including burglary, the public is not careful enough in terms of protection and prevention and rather entrusts the police with these. A 2013 study of the National Police Headquarters entitled "*Police experience on the enforcement of victim rights and on the current state of victim protection in 2013*"<sup>25</sup> highlights, from among the subjective reasons for victimisation, in addition to other external circumstances, the following: defencelessness, lack of caution, negligence, lack of necessary property protection measures, irresponsibility, carelessness, long-term conflict situation and inability to protect oneself.

The research findings underline that even though there is no such thing as 100% security, citizens could however do a lot more on their own to protect their own assets. From the international overview we can learn, that the police, in addition to their regular preventive work, play a significant part in passing information and preventing/mitigating the process of secondary victimisation and victim traumatisation.

International research has pinpointed the role the police play in shaping the victim's state of mind. As most victims of burglary inform the police quite quickly after discovering the crime, what happens after that (the approach of the police, communication with the victim, the procedure) may prove crucial in terms of the victim's traumas caused by the burglary. The police can influence the victim's emotional responses, both negatively and positively.

Research has also revealed that three strategies are at the disposal of victims to cope with the emotional effects of the burglary. *The first is to discuss the event*. Prior research has shown that if the victim feels that the police show

<sup>24</sup> The analysis of the National Police Headquarters indicates that the average time spent committing a burglary is 4–10 minutes.

<sup>25</sup> ORFK Bűnmegelőzési Osztály: Rendőrségi tapasztalatok az áldozati jogok érvényesüléséről, az áldozatvédelem helyzetéről 2013-ban. <http://police.hu/hirek-es-informaciok/bunmegelozes/aktualis/az-aldozatvedelem-helyzete>.

less empathy and fail to listen carefully on the first occasion, the victim will experience stronger negative emotions. Based on victim accounts, the police often treat burglaries as routine procedures and are more insensitive in their approach to victims. As it turned out from the *Brown-Harris* research, it would be important if the police communicated with and treated victims with more empathy where the burglary scene displays more traces of violence (rummaging of rooms). If burglars ransacked several rooms, the police should be especially empathetic to the victim. Therefore, it would be important to incorporate the understanding and treatment of the issue into police training programmes.

Discussing the crime with people other than the police also has a positive effect on victims. This can assure them that the negative feelings they have about the burglary are normal, and it can also encourage neighbours to place more importance on preventing future potential burglaries, which would reduce the victim's sense of fear.

The second strategy is to *strengthen the protection of the premises*. Police information work could play a significant part in this. The third strategy, in combination with the two above, is *a change in the victim's own behaviour*. All of these need to be treated as an interconnected system: information, appropriate treatment by the police, and preventive measures together could help avoid severe traumatisation while rational decisions on prevention could help avoid repeat victimisation.