

The Journey to Crime: A Test of the Effects of Demographics on Crime Mobility

Jeong Lim Kim · James Vardalis · Hyungjin Lim

[Abstract]

The ‘journey to crime’ literature indicates that offenders commit crimes close to their homes. It is further confirmed by the mobility literature on the crime of burglary. The literature in the past identified demographic characteristic differences among crime mobility, while the modern literature has not devoted a substantial effort towards it. This article aims to revisit the idea of crime mobility and any inherent demographic differences in the journey to crime. Employing a sample of 331 arrested and charged burglary offenders from a large city in the southern United States, this study tests whether burglaries are most often committed close to an offender’s place of residence, as well as if there are identifiable age, gender, or race patterns in crime mobility for burglary. Our findings suggest that offenders remain close to their homes. Most significant, there are racial and gender differences in the distance traveled, in which regard crime policies and strategies are also discussed.

Key Words: Journey to crime, Mobility, Routine activity space, Burglary, Demographics

I . Introduction

Target selection is integral to the study of crime (Townesley & Sidebottom, 2010). One area of importance within this process is the journey to crime or criminal mobility (see Rosmo, 2000, for a comprehensive review). Research suggests that crimes tend to occur close to the offenders home (Snook, Wright, House, & Alison, 2006; Townesley et al., 2015; Townesley & Sidebottom, 2010; Wiles & Costello, 2000). As research on crime in general suggests, the crime of burglary is no different in regards to geographic mobility (Bernasco, 2006) suggesting that burglaries should occur near an offender's residence. While past literature has identified demographic characteristic differences among crime mobility, more modern literature has not devoted a substantial effort towards it. Earlier literature would appear to contradict the more recent crime policies of situational crime prevention that are predicated on targeting specific problem areas. In turn, the findings of demographic variances in journey to crime also challenge associated theoretical approaches such as routine activities and crime pattern. Taken in combination, the literature appears to be insufficient in painting a fully accurate depiction of crime mobility. It should be noted that criminal mobility is defined here as the distance travelled to commit a criminal act. Likewise, journey to crime is defined as a distance based crime estimate. Because of the similar definitions used in this research, the two terms will be used interchangeably to define the distance travelled by an offender to commit a burglary. Using the above theories and past literature as foundations, it is the aim of this study to determine whether burglaries are most often committed close to an offender's place of residence and if any demographic differences can be identified with the mobility of burglary.

The importance of basic demographical information and the journey to crime

should be revisited as the bulk is dated. There is a sizeable amount of research on journey to crime, yet there is a dearth of current research that has placed importance on demographical variables within the subject. Below is a summarized review of the general journey to crime literature.

II. Literature Review

2.1 Journey to Crime/Crime Mobility

Journey to crime has received considerable attention in the literature to provide valuable insight into environmental approaches to crime. Research into the journey to crime has found that most crimes occur close to the offender's home, which is a pattern known as distance decay (see Rengert, Piquero, & Jones, 1999; Townsley et al., 2015; Townsley & Sidebottom, 2010). At the aggregate measure, offenders do not travel far to commit crime and the trips (crime trips) tend to be short, or within a few miles from the offenders home (Eck & Weisburd, 1995; Morselli & Royer, 2008; Townsley & Sidebottom, 2010). The findings suggest that this should be the circumstance for any crime type; burglary included.

Several dated American national studies have been conducted examining journey to crime in burglaries (see Phillips, 1980; Pyle, 1976; Repetto, 1974; Rhodes & Conly, 1981; White, 1932). Each of these studies found that the mean distance traveled was as low as .50 miles and as high as 2.48 miles. International studies on burglary and journey to crime have had similar conclusions; offenders' commit crimes close to their place of residence. Studies have found that the mean distance traveled was as low as .35 miles and up to 2.41 miles (see Barker, 2000; Gabor &

Gottheil, 1984; Snook, 2004). Further, the literature finds that there is no substantial difference in mean distance traveled between residential and commercial burglaries. In particular, Snook's (2004) sample of 41 serial burglars in Canada found that there was no significant difference in distance traveled between burglars that choose residential or commercial targets.

Although this research affirms this study's position that many burglaries occur within a short distance of the offenders' homes, Bernasco (2010) suggests a significant proportion of offenders commit crime outside of their home environment, albeit environments of familiarity. Bernasco found that offenders often commit crimes within the immediate area of a past residence as well as their current residence. While these findings contradict the discussed body of literature and have the potential to inflate the overall mean distance traveled to commit burglary, it reaffirms the importance of familiar demographics of an environment as an enticement for crime.

When examining demographic variables and journey to crime for offenses in general the research is limited. The three most common demographic variables present in the mobility literature are race, gender, and age. With respect to race, researchers have found that white offenders tend to travel further than Black offenders (Phillips, 1980; Rand, 1986; Rengert & Wasilchick, 2000). For instance, Nichols (1980) indicated that, compared to black offenders, white offenders travelled significantly further on average—approximately three times more. Unlike racial disparities in mobility, there are contrasting findings for gender differences. Rengert (1975) found that women tend to commit crimes closer to their areas of residence. However, Phillips (1980) found the opposite to be true.

There is vastly more literature linking age and the journey to crime. When incorporating age, conclusions in the research are that younger offenders do not travel as far to commit crime (Snook, 2004). This finding appears to not be isolated

to the United States but rather to be universal. It has been demonstrated in the literature throughout various other countries including the Netherlands (Van Koppen & Jansen, 1998), England (Costello & Wiles, 2001), and Canada (Gabor & Gottheil, 1984). Factors including lack of transportation (Van Koppen & Jansen, 1998) and inexperience (Baldwin & Bottoms, 1976) are often cited for the variances. Moreover, the younger and more inexperienced offenders tend to be the least mobile (Snook, 2004). However, Ackerman and Rossmo (2015) discover that the distance increases during teenage years until the age of 26 after which it starts declining again. The finding was confirmed by Andresen, Frank, and Felson (2014). The literature indicates clear differences in crime mobility, yet some modern criminological theories are built on the premise that crimes occur in areas of familiarities.

2.2 Theories

Primarily with three theories criminologists have long tried to understand why some places experience more crime than others, specifically focusing on crime patterns: rational choice theory, crime pattern theory, and routine activity theory. A rational choice perspective suggests that offenders will choose targets and determine means to accomplish their goals that can be rationalized or justified (Cornish & Clarke, 1986). While some have argued that a rational choice is testable (Hogarth & Reder, 1987), others consider that rational choice is untestable because offenders' perspectives can be almost always interpreted as rational by the offenders (Parsons, 1951).

An aspect of crime pattern theory (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2008) examines crime in a spatio-temporal context based on routine geographic movement. Just like everyone else, offenders learn about their environment through everyday activities (Bernasco, 2010). According to this theory, burglary targets, such as residences or

business locations, have common attraction areas that entice criminals. Specifically, these locations are where offenders are familiar with, known as activity nodes, or targets tangentially located to the activity node (Brantingham & Brantingham, 2008). Based on this theory, true randomness of target selection is not probable (see Brantingham & Brantingham, 2008).

Another theory compatible with this research is Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activities theory. In order for property crime to occur, there must be a motivated perpetrator and a victim or object of property in the same place and time. This can be facilitated by other persons or circumstances or can be prevented by another person taking action to deter the crime. The likelihood of crime increases when there is a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of a capable guardian (Cohen & Felson, 1979). Therefore, it is hypothesized that most crime occurs in areas within the offender's routine activity space, or rather the area in which they are familiar. The most common routine activity space is the home neighborhood. In the home neighborhood, the offender is comfortable. This is the most likely area where an offender will search for targets that appear profitable, are safe, and offer the greatest chance of success (Cromwell, Olson, & Avery, 1991; Pettitway, 1982; Reppetto, 1974). An assumption is that being comfortable requires knowledge of an area and people of similar makeup. Psychological identity theories (e.g., Social Identity and Identity Process Theory) have illustrated that people self-identify with others that are similar to themselves both socially and racially. Therefore, an offender's area of routine activity should contain individuals with similar characteristics and in turn burglars of similar attributes (i.e., demographics). Another reason for staying in a familiar area is an increase in the probability of arrest. Specifically, the risk of apprehension increases with longer journeys into unknown territories (Phillips, 1980; Van Koppen & de Keijser, 1997).

The purpose of this research is to readdress the significance, or lack thereof, in the basic demographical information of the offender and journey to crime. Literature was more focused on this topic in the 1970s and 1980s, however, has since been neglected. For this reason, the authors examined burglaries that occurred in 2010 in one of the five districts of a large urban area.

Figure 1: Theories for Burglar Mobility

Theory	Summary	Proponents
Rational choice	To select targets and means in a manner that can be explained	Cornish & Clarke (1986), Hogarth & Reeder (1987)
Crime pattern	Crime is a product of spatio-temporal dynamics	Brantingham & Brantingham (2008), Bernasco (2010)
Routine activity	Crime is a product of the confluence of several elements	Cohen & Felson (1979)

III. Method

3.1 Data

One of the authors collected data from a large metropolitan police department in the southern region of the United States in February 2012. Preliminary data on cases were gathered on all burglaries reported in the calendar year of 2010. Note that all individuals in the sample have all been charged with burglary. Therefore, the final dataset includes only those burglaries that include offender information. The data included two multivariate outliers that were subsequently dropped, leaving a final sample size of 331 unique burglary offenders for the calendar year of 2010.

3.2 Methods of Analysis

The goal of this study is to determine frequency patterns in crime mobility, as well as, to identify whether demographic variables are predictive of crime mobility distance. In order to effectively yield the desired outcome, it is prudent to use a combination of analysis techniques because all respondents in the sample are charged offenders. In particular, frequencies for the dependent variable and independent variables are presented in Table 1. Following, five basic ordinary least squares regression (OLS) models are run and presented in Table 2. OLS is employed, because this study is concerned with determining whether an association exists between crime mobility and demographic variables. More simply, this study aims to explore if a relationship or patterns exist between distance and demographics. Therefore, this study incorporates both descriptive and inferential statistics into the following analyses.

3.3 Hypotheses

Centered on theory and prior literature, this research established the following hypotheses:

- H1: Burglaries will occur within 10 miles an offender's identified place of residence.
- H2: White offenders are more likely than non-white offenders to travel further to commit a burglary.
- H3: The older an offender the further they will travel to burgle.
- H4: Men are more likely than women to travel further to commit a burglary.

Specifically, it is postulated here that most burglaries will occur within 7 miles of

the offender's home, and that regardless of race, males will travel further on average to commit burglaries than women. The distance 10 miles is chosen based on the size of the sample city and the culture of driving as oppose to reliance on public transportation (which should inflate the overall mean distance). Also, the older the offender the greater means available to them for travel, therefore, the more likely they are to travel further distances to commit burglaries.

3.4 Dependent Variable

The primary variable of concern here is distance traveled by the offender, thus, distance is this study's dependent variable. Distance is measured in miles from the offender's registered address of residence to the address of the location of the burglary. Mileage is measured in two formats: 1) The exact mileage (interval), and 2) A mileage range (ordinal). Specifically, the exact mileage is coded in one hundredths of a mile whereas the mileage range is coded into one mile range intervals. For example, if an offender traveled less than one mile (0-1 mile) they were coded as 1, if he or she traveled 1.5 (1-2) miles they were coded as 2, and so forth. The expectation is by using both measures of mileage, a more complete illustration of any existing relationship will emerge. In order to measure a mileage, we utilized the 'directions' in the Google Map which provided us with a number of mileage between the offender's registered address of residence and the address of the location of the burglary. Based on the data, the mean distance traveled for a burglary was 5.10 miles. Further, the most frequent distance range traveled was between 1 to 2 miles. As a result, our dependent variable showed substantial positive skewness. Therefore, we did a log transformation for ordinary least squares regression. Note that because it is this study's goal to highlight mobility patterns both measures of distance are

treated as interval level variables for the below regression models.

3.5 Independent Variables

Three basic demographic variables are included in the analysis. Age, race, and gender are included because, as stated above, they are the three most commonly tested demographic measures in crime mobility research. The ages of offenders in our sample range from 11 years to 63 years of age. The overwhelming majority of offenders in our sample are male (88.2%). Though small in comparison, the sample contains 40 female respondents. It is the expectation that women will travel less than men to commit burglaries, and with a sample of 40 women any discernible patterns should emerge. Gender is coded as Male equals 0 and Female equals 1.

Prior mobility literature compares blacks to whites and neglects other racial disparities. While there is a considerable Hispanic population in the southern United States, the police department did not consistently code offender's race as Hispanic on the charging reports, thus, making it impossible to accurately identify offenders as Hispanic. Additionally, the sample included only a single person classified as Asian. In order to stay consistent with prior literature and due to the above problems it was prudent to code race as white (1) non-white (2). Note that anyone not classified as white were coded as non-white (i.e, Asian, Hispanic, Black). The racial breakdown of the sample was 94 whites compared to 237 non-whites.

Table 1: Frequency Distributions for Race and Gender

Variable	Distance		Frequency
	Mean	SD	
White	4.65	5.58	94
Non-White	11.29	13.56	237
Male	13.86	16.66	291
Female	1.90	2.41	40
Total	5.10	6.53	N=331

IV. Results

Consistent with prior literature, our data follows the age crime curve. Specifically, the bulk (roughly 65%) of our sample is between the ages of 15 and 28, with an overall mean age of 26.53 years. This is important because it appears burglary is not an age specific crime. As stated, the average distance traveled from place of residence to location of burglary was 5.10 miles with a mode of 1-2 miles traveled. Collectively, this confirms our first hypothesis that most burglaries will occur near the offender’s home, specifically within 7 miles of their residence. This finding is understandable in terms of that a burglary will take place within the locations where suitable targets cross a burglar’s familiar space, i.e., his or her comfort zone.

According to the crime pattern theory which examines the spatio-temporal dimension of crime, burglars have a tendency to look for suitable targets during the course of their routine movements through time and space (Lersch, 2007). Our next two hypotheses appear to be incorrect. The mean distance traveled by white offenders is 4.65 in contrast to the mean distance traveled by non-white offenders is 11.29. Based on the overall mean distance traveled, the distance traveled on average by non-whites falls above the mean and whites fall below the mean. This indicates a

significant trend in distance traveled to commit burglary by race. Further, this result contradicts prior literature that found whites typically travel further than non-whites to commit crimes (see Phillips, 1980; Rand, 1986; Rengert & Wasilchick, 2000). The reason might be related to a comfort zone like Bernasco's study (2010). Since the data are from a large metropolitan police department in the southern region of the United States which have large scale of non-white residence areas, non-white burglars in the data might have a larger comfort zone than white burglars did. However, this finding should be reexamined in the similar geographic settings.

Interestingly, while the youngest offender (11 years) covered 9.28 miles to commit the offense, the oldest offender in the sample (63 years) traveled 7.8 miles to burgle. However, the observations do not form any discernible pattern. Taken together, with the overall mean distance traveled, these findings would suggest that regardless of age offenders stay close to home. Since there is no discernible trend by age of distance traveled our third hypothesis has proven unfitting. This finding, however, fits to Ackerman and Rossmo (2015) and Andresen, Frankm, and Felson's (2014) findings which indicate that the distance increases during teenage years until certain age and decrease again from there; so shaping an inverted U. If this is the case, age and distance would not show statistical significance.

Consistent with previous literature, there does appear to be a difference in distance traveled by gender. Hypothesis four is confirmed. Specifically, men travel approximately 12 miles further on average (13.86) to commit a burglary than women (1.90). This marks a 700 percent increase in distance traveled by men over women. The descriptive statistics appear to highlight noticeable demographic differences in the journey to crime. The second set of results will determine whether any of these findings are statistically correlated to distance traveled.

Table 2 presents standardized beta coefficients for the four OLS regression

models. None of the individual demographic variables significantly predicted distance traveled in all four models at an alpha of .05 level. Furthermore, all coefficients were approaching 0 suggesting almost no correlation. Nonetheless, the direction of each coefficient confirmed our above results. Model 1 indicates that non-whites will travel further than whites to commit burglaries, albeit non-significant. Similarly, model 2 suggests that the older an offender, the further they will travel without significance. And males are more likely to travel greater distances to commit burglaries than females suggested by model 3 findings. Finally, when all three demographic variables are included in the same model in model 4, no significant change in association and very little change in coefficient strength appear. Consistent with previous findings, non-white, older, male offenders, appear to travel further to burgle than their counterparts although non-significant.¹⁾

Table 2: OLS Model

Variable	Model1	Model2	Model3	Model4
Race	.02 (.80)			.01 (.36)
Age		.02 (.03)		.02 (.36)
Gender			-.01 (1.10)	-.01 (.36)

N=331

V. Conclusion

This study's findings align with prior mobility literature. In particular, results suggest that burglars tend to commit crimes in close vicinity to their homes. Though there appears to be no significant association between age, race, gender, and distance

traveled to burgle, descriptive results indicate clear patterns among these demographics and crime mobility. In agreement with previous literature, women are more probable to commit burglaries closer to home. But contrary to past studies findings, it appears that non-whites are more likely to commit burglaries further from home and that age is not an influential variable. Disparities in the number of women and whites in the sample could be driving the above results. However, as discussed there is significant variability among the age of offenders in the sample. This leads to a stronger confidence in the findings of Ackerman and Rossmo (2015) and Andresen, Frank, and Felson (2014) on age.

These results confirm the validity of the theoretical approaches highlighted in routine activities and crime pattern. Regardless of age, race, or gender, burglars commit crimes close to home. While certain differences developed in the mean distance traveled, the sample stayed within approximately 5 miles of their residences. Crime policies should continue to focus on patterns and routine activities of offenders. Law enforcement deployment strategies and policies potentially may influence the distance travel by criminals.

Criminals are attracted to opportunities that offer the least resistance and lowest probability of apprehension. The less crime prevention education a community receives, the more likely criminal opportunities are to develop. Therefore, criminals may not need to travel far from home to locate an acceptable target. In many areas, the policies of controlling crime by law enforcement should continue and be concentrated in areas that can be identified as high crime locals and neighborhoods. Crime victimization that appears to be contained within a community (victims and offenders) suggests that proactive policies and crime prevention education may be needed.

A specific crime-oriented study like the current one may benefit Korean policing

being efficient and effective in preventing and arresting specific criminals with evidence-based practices. When the police have better information about behavioral patterns of specific criminals, the police can establish a better plan of crime-prevention and mobilize its limited resources properly. Therefore, the criminals' behavioral patterns by demographic characteristics should be collected and analyzed across the country more systematically and rigorously. Among others, one major limitation to the study warrants discussion. Trait-based studies based on offender homology, like the current study, have been criticized on the basis of precision (Kocsis & Palermo, 2015). Therefore, trait-based study findings should be interpreted with great caution. In order to improve the accuracy of trait-based studies, such as links between offender characteristics and crime behaviors similar to a criminal profiling, future research should elaborate its methodologies including situational factors of the crimes.

Notes

- 1) One of the reviewers suggests that the reason for statistical non-significance in the OLS regression models might be relatively large standard deviations relative to the size of coefficients. We greatly appreciate this valuable comment.

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국문초록

범죄 여행:
인구동태학적 특성이 범죄이동성에 미치는 영향 연구

김정림 (머시대학교)

James Vardalis (테런트 보안관)

임형진 (백석대학교)

범죄여행에 관한 문헌들은 범죄자들이 자신들의 거처와 가까운 곳에서 범행을 한다고 가리키고 있다. 나아가서 빈집털이의 이동성에 관한 문헌들 역시 이러한 경향을 다시 확인해 주고 있다. 종전의 문헌들은 범죄이동성에 반영되는 인구동태학적 특성의 차이를 규명하려 했지만, 근래의 문헌들은 그러한 특성의 차이 규명에 실질적 노력을 보이지 않는다. 본 연구는 범죄여행에 내재하는 인구동태학적 특성의 차이를 재조명함을 목적으로 하고 있다. 남부 미국의 대도시에서 체포되어 형을 선고받은 331명의 빈집털이범들을 대상으로 수집한 데이터를 분석함으로써, 그 범죄자들이 자신들의 거처와 가까운 곳에서 범행을 하는지 여부와 아울러, 나이, 성별, 그리고 인종과 빈집털이를 위한 이동거리와의 상관관계를 파악하고자 한다. 분석된 데이터는 범죄자들이 자신들의 거처와 가까운 곳에서 범행을 하고, 범죄를 위한 이동거리의 차이는 인종과 성별에서 가장 크게 나타남을 보여준다. 이와 관련된 범죄정책과 전략도 논의하였다.

주제어: 범죄 여행, 이동성, 일상적 활동 공간, 빈집털이, 인구동태학

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게재 확정일: 2017. 06.16

이름: 김정림 (제 1저자)

소속: Mercy College

주소: 555 Broadway Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522

이메일: jkim50@mercy.edu

이름: James Vardalis (공동저자)

소속: Tarrant County Sheriff Office

주소: 1500 Circle Drive, Fort Worth, TX 76119

이메일: jjvardalis@Tarrantcounty.com

이름: 임형진 (교신저자)

소속: 백석대학교

주소: 충청남도 천안시 동남구 문암로 76 백석대학교 경찰학부

이메일: limhj@bu.ac.kr

