

Burglaries in dwellings – Forms of manifestation and prevention methods

The need for this study came from the special social impact of this type of offence on the social climate of safety for citizens, on the feeling of safety harbored by the individuals, particularly that of the victims and of the members of the communities where such offences frequently occur.

Considering the fact that burglary represents an offence with a high social hazard, the need has become clear for an in-depth knowledge of this phenomenon, as well as to reveal the triggering mechanisms and the influencing factors, with the purpose to most adequately devise preventive approaches of this segment of criminality.

The purpose of this study was to familiarize with this type of offence, with its forms of manifestation and with its influencing factors, with the purpose to identify ways to intervene towards increasing the safety level of citizens.

The study objectives were targeted at:

- **analyzing the dimension of burglary in dwellings:** the frequency of occurrence at national level, its dynamics (2005-2010), rural-urban disparities, territorial spreading etc.
- **investigating the features of this type of offence based on analyzing a number of 3,782 cases of burglary in dwellings solved in the year 2009 and on the interviews conducted with officers specialized in building cases on burglaries in dwellings: features of the offences, features of the dwelling - victims, features of the offenders;**
- **identifying the factors which favor the occurrence of burglaries in dwellings;**
- **aspects related to building the cases of burglaries in dwellings and difficulties faced in investigation;**
- **identifying means to prevent burglaries in dwellings.**

The methods used within the study were of a quantitative (study of the tracking of the case files solved in the year 2009 for 3,782 cases of burglary in dwellings, based on case sheets) as well as of a qualitative nature, since individual interviews with workers within the criminal investigations or public order structures specialized in investigating burglary cases were performed.

The analysis of burglaries in dwellings underlined a multitude of operating means used by perpetrators in committing such exploits. By analyzing the literature and the means to break in dwellings, burglaries in dwellings may be divided into two main groups:

- **burglaries committed by means of free access (36%).** In this situation, the free entry through the doors and/or windows left open, with or without the victim's consent, based on trust relationships or by means of deceiving the inhabitants is considered (by taking advantage of the distraction/negligence of the owners who left the windows/doors open; by depending on gaining the inhabitants' trust, by means of becoming friends with the victim or using the carelessness/naïveté of the inhabitants, the perpetrators deployed various pretexts in order to enter the dwelling (public interest activities by assuming a false identity/quality – rodent control, utility installations maintenance etc. or under the pretext of offering products for sale– promotions, product sampling etc.)
- **burglaries committed by clandestine overthrows of various obstacles (63%).** These cases share the feature of application of break-in means to doors, windows, bridges etc., of opening

locks and other securing devices (matched key, skeleton keys), breaking in through a removed/broken glass pane of a window, scaling etc. Moreover, the perpetrators often combine the scaling of various obstacles (window, balcony, fence/gate) with various break-in methods (breaking the safety systems, using matched or genuine keys, breaking glass panes):

The interviewed specialists appreciated that, in such cases, **no accurate profile of the victim could be established**, the perpetrators usually guiding themselves by the attributes of the dwelling, by elements indicating a good financial situation of the inhabitants, and less by the features of the dwellers. The victims **in the urban environment** may be basically characterized as active, working individuals who have a family, medium or higher education, mostly well-off, vulnerable due to the obviousness of their prosperity. Several categories of high risk to become victims may be identified **in the rural environment**: old people living by themselves and known to receive retirement benefits or to be engaged in selling products, persons departed abroad for work who leave their dwellings without supervision.

As for the **profile** of the perpetrators, the opinions of experts recorded following the interviews highlighted the existence of a typology. *Most are male, sometimes under aged, aged between 14 and 40, Romanian citizens, unemployed, with elementary education, originating from dysfunctional families of precarious financial means, unmarried or living in concubinage, to a great extent having a criminal history and being even repeat offenders, residents within the locality or in the adjacent ones (infrequently and especially in municipalities the phenomenon of traveler offenders occurs).*

The causes and conditions fostering the offence may be classified as follows:

- a) **social causes** – mainly related to impoverishing the population and to the difficulties in providing a satisfactory living standard, to the deficiency in education and to school dropout, to the high rate of unemployment and to lack of employment opportunities, to the increased passivity of the citizens in limiting such types of behaviour, as well as to the migrating flow determined by departing abroad for work.
- b) **judicial causes** – connected mainly with lack of finality of the judicial process in the cases of offenders who are in custody and documented (especially with under aged offenders), with the impossibility to cover the territory in charge with operating elements due to the scarcity of police staff and lack of feasible solutions for monitoring and reintegration of offenders either convicted or released from detention centers. This situation is only apt to nourish and even expedite the proliferation of this phenomenon, by weakening the function of prevention.
- c) **contextual causes** – related basically to lack/insufficiency of public street lighting, hidden angles, excessive vegetation, lacking/insufficient signaling of private property
- d) **individual causes** – associated both with the offender and with the victim.

The study achieves an ample descriptive approach, having as its main attribute the descriptive dimension and therefore additional properties connected to the capability of documenting the operational activity, useful especially for officers at the beginning of their career, as well as to the didactic approach. Thus, the study may be regarded as a self-standing material, useful to students in the police schools due to its actuality and thoroughness. It succeeds in unifying into its approach the three criminological factors – the offender, the victim, the circumstance, in extracting in a synthetic manner the general attributes thereof and to underline their mechanisms of specific connection, of mutual triggering in the criminal action. Thus, the utility of the study for guiding the preventive activity of the police by succeeding in highlighting the perspective of the most efficient proactive approaches as related to the offence of burglary in dwellings is foreseen.