THE EFFICACY OF HOME SECURITY MEASURES†
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ABSTRACT: Crime prevention through environmental design (CPTED) assumes criminal acts are influenced by their inherent costs and benefits. Policy implications drawn from CPTED suggest home security measures increase these costs and reduce the likelihood of burglary. This paper tests the efficacy of home security measures. A telephone survey of 566 residents in Mobile County, Alabama, inquired about security measures burglary victims and nonvictims employed. A logistic regression solution found some, but not all, of these security measures to be quite effective.

INTRODUCTION

The dominant view of crime prevention underwent profound change in the 1970s, led by researchers who proposed a dramatically different theoretical and empirical agenda. While current crime prevention theory is diverse and difficult to categorize, this paper concentrates on methods commonly referred to as “crime prevention through environmental design” (CPTED). CPTED rests on the idea that criminal opportunity results from the interplay between target, risk, effort, and payoff (Feins, Epstein, & Widom, 1997; Jeffrey, 1971; Kaplan, O'Kane, Lavrakas, & Pesce, 1978; Robinson, 1999). This perspective casts the situational aspects of the criminal incident as the appropriate unit of analysis instead of riveting attention upon the offender.

The appeal of this paradigm lies mainly in its adoption of simplifying assumptions which neatly explain the decision calculus offenders use, thus permitting researchers to hold that troublesome variable constant (Weisburd, 1997). CPTED allows investigators to concentrate on elements of the criminal incident considered to be more predictable and stable. Studies which embrace this focus tend to look at the characteris-

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tics and patterns associated with the targets offenders chose. Proponents regard this approach as more promising and policy relevant than its predecessors.

Criminal justice practitioners have put this evolving crime prevention research to good use. One particular area, the study of burglary, has been especially productive. CPTED proponents maintain that citizen deployment of home security measures is related to burglary victimization. Burglars are rational actors. When these offenders make the decision to strike, they calculate the costs against the benefits. Home security measures increase these costs and decrease the probability of victimization. Unfortunately, research examining the efficacy of these security measures has been insufficient.

**BACKGROUND**

The study of burglary has captured considerable academic attention. Cohen and Felson (1979) proposed that post-WWII increases in burglary were the product of contextual change in the burglary incident. Social and economic trends showed marked improvements in urban areas around 1960. Under theories that suggested crime was a social product like other behavior (Lilly, Cullen, & Ball, 1995), upward movement in these key variables should have presaged corresponding drops in the crime rates. Such was not the case. Crime, including burglary, rose substantially. Cohen and Felson (1979) tried to explain this anomaly. They proposed that the rise in burglaries was due to an increase in benefits and a corresponding decrease in the costs for persons inclined to offend. More working mothers after WWII meant there were more unoccupied homes during the daytime, thereby reducing the odds of burglars being discovered in the act. Manufacturers reduced the size of consumer items like radios and other appliances after WWII. This change made these goods smaller and more portable, thereby increasing the pool of potential proceeds. Thus, according to Cohen and Felson (1979), the offender assumed an incidental role and the contextual elements of the burglary incident took center stage.

To better understand the important contextual aspects of burglary, researchers interviewed active "free world" or incarcerated burglars. Much effort was spent discovering the motivation for beginning and terminating a criminal career, offense planning routines, target selection, methods of entry, search routines, as well as selection of which items to steal and their subsequent disposal (Bennett & Wright, 1984; Cromwell, Olson, & Avery, 1991; Rengert & Wasilchick, 1990; Reppeto, 1974; Scarr, Pinsky & Wyatt, 1973; Shover, 1973; Shover & Honaker, 1996; Waller & Okihiro, 1978; Wright & Decker, 1994). The literature im-