

Distraction burglary: recorded crime data

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Background

Distraction burglary: Any crime where a falsehood, trick or distraction is used on an occupant of a dwelling to gain, or try to gain, access to the premises to commit burglary. It includes cases where the offender first enters the premises and subsequently uses distraction burglary methods in order to remain on the premises and/ or gain access to other parts of the premises in order to commit burglary. (Home Office Counting Rules for Recorded Crime, 2004).

In 2000 the Government set up a Distraction Burglary Task Force to tackle the problem of bogus callers. The Task Force is a national partnership comprising of government and voluntary agencies. It was established in response to a growing awareness of distraction burglary, a crime that generally targets vulnerable communities, particularly the elderly.

Distraction burglary is different from other forms of burglary as offenders engage directly with the victims in order to deceive them and gain entry to their home. This approach contrasts with more 'conventional' forms of burglary, where offenders generally seek to avoid the victim by attempting to enter homes unnoticed, often when the occupants are asleep or away.

The analysis of distraction burglary incidents found that offenders use a range of tactics to gain entry into people's homes (Lister *et al.*, 2004). One of the most common guises adopted is that of an official. In many cases, this is the employee of a utility company or council worker, police officer or domestic contractor. For example, an offender may deceive the victim into thinking that he/she is a meter reader in order to gain access to the property. There are also other types of distraction used, where the offender uses alternative forms of deception. For example, the offender may pretend to be a person in an emergency or in need of help.

Recorded crime data

Distraction burglary is included in the overall burglary figures, but with effect from April 2003, distraction burglary became a recorded subcategory of the 'burglary dwelling' offence category. Up until that time forces may have kept local records, but now analysis is possible at a national level as well as comparisons between forces. Table 1 shows levels of distraction burglary in 2003/04 at both police force area and regional level. The table shows that on average distraction burglary accounts for four per cent of all burglary in England and Wales. This is the same as British Crime Survey (BCS) results that show four per cent of all burglaries involved entry or attempted entry by false pretences (Simmons and Dodd, 2003). In the 41 forces for which data were available, there were over 15,000 recorded distraction burglaries in 2003/04.

The highest levels of recorded distraction burglary are in Northamptonshire, Bedfordshire and the London region. Distraction burglary per 10,000 population varies from 14 per cent in Northamptonshire to less than one per cent in North Wales.

As this is the first year for which the data have been collated, it is not possible to assess the consistency with which distraction burglaries are identified and recorded; but any variation in these factors could explain apparent differences.

Figures 1 and 2 show the geographical spread of total domestic burglary and distraction burglary rates per 10,000 households in 2003/04. In some forces, like the Metropolitan police, both the rate of total domestic burglary and the rate of distraction burglary are relatively high. However, this pattern is not true for all forces. Many of the forces in the North West and Yorkshire and the Humber regions have high total burglary rates, but distraction burglary only constitutes a small proportion of these (2.2 and 2.8% respectively). In contrast, in the Eastern region and in the South East, total domestic burglary is relatively low (120 and 121 burglaries per 10,000 households), but a larger proportion of these are distraction burglaries.

Table 1: Burglaries recorded by the police rates by police force area and region, 2003/04

Police force area and region	Total burglary in a dwelling #	Burglary in a dwelling per 10,000 households	Distraction burglary	Distraction burglary per 10,000 households	Distraction burglary as a percentage of total burglary in a dwelling
Cleveland	6,484	287	227	10	3.5
Durham	2,843	114	219	9	7.7
Northumbria	10,223	171	153	3	1.5
North East Region	19,550	182	599	6	3.1
Cheshire	5,780	139	138	3	2.4
Cumbria	1,799	85	47	2	2.6
Greater Manchester	37,762	361	806	8	2.1
Lancashire	8,821	149	202	3	2.3
Merseyside	12,760	225	272	5	2.1
North West Region	66,922	236	1,465	5	2.2
Humberside	10,410	283	180	5	1.7
North Yorkshire	4,936	155	73	2	1.5
South Yorkshire	13,455	252	510	10	3.8
West Yorkshire	30,127	344	865	10	2.9
Yorkshire and the Humber Region	58,928	281	1,628	8	2.8
Derbyshire	7,680	190	304	8	4.0
Leicestershire	6,514	172	314	8	4.8
Lincolnshire	3,438	124	38	1	1.1
Northamptonshire	5,284	201	367	14	6.9
Nottinghamshire	15,980	372	n/a	n/a	n/a
East Midlands Region	38,896	222	1,023	8	4.5
Staffordshire	6,165	144	309	7	5.0
Warwickshire	3,192	149	151	7	4.7
West Mercia	5,925	122	238	5	4.0
West Midlands	26,636	255	930	9	3.5
West Midlands Region	41,918	193	1,628	7	3.9
Bedfordshire	5,006	213	295	13	5.9
Cambridgeshire	4,290	145	205	7	4.8
Essex	7,055	103	546	8	7.7
Hertfordshire	5,649	131	356	8	6.3
Norfolk	2,944	85	125	4	4.2
Suffolk	2,385	84	94	3	3.9
Eastern Region	27,329	120	1,621	7	5.9
London, City of	33	+	2	+	6.1
Metropolitan Police	67,996	212	4,295	13	6.3
London Region	68,029	212	4,297	13	6.3
Hampshire	7,030	94	181	2	2.6
Kent	7,510	114	427	7	5.7
Surrey	3,914	88	170	4	4.3
Sussex	7,920	120	n/a	n/a	n/a
Thames Valley	14,505	169	720	8	5.0
South East Region	40,879	121	1,498	6	4.5
Avon & Somerset	10,966	174	392	6	3.6
Devon & Cornwall	6,027	88	163	2	2.7
Dorset	3,099	101	142	5	4.6
Gloucestershire	3,335	139	200	8	6.0
Wiltshire	2,553	101	191	8	7.5
South West Region	25,980	123	1,088	5	4.2
Dyfed-Powys	944	46	26	1	2.8
Gwent	3,199	141	50	2	1.6
North Wales	2,484	89	9	0	0.4
South Wales	7,275	147	181	4	2.5
Wales	13,902	116	266	2	1.9
ENGLAND AND WALES	402,333	182	15,113	7	4.0
ENGLAND AND WALES (excluding London Region)	334,304	177	10,816	6	3.5

Source: Recorded crime data 2003/04.

Key: # Including aggravated burglary in a dwelling (HO offence code 29)

n/a Not available

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Figure 1: Total burglary in a dwelling per 10,000 households, 2003/04

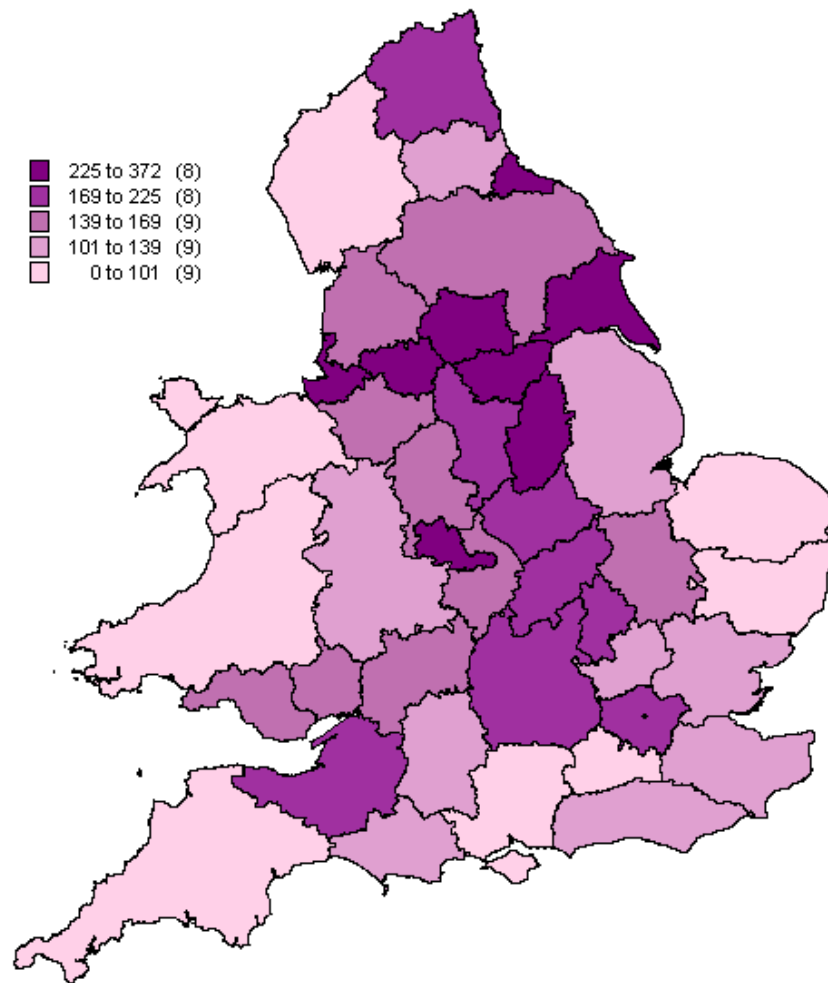
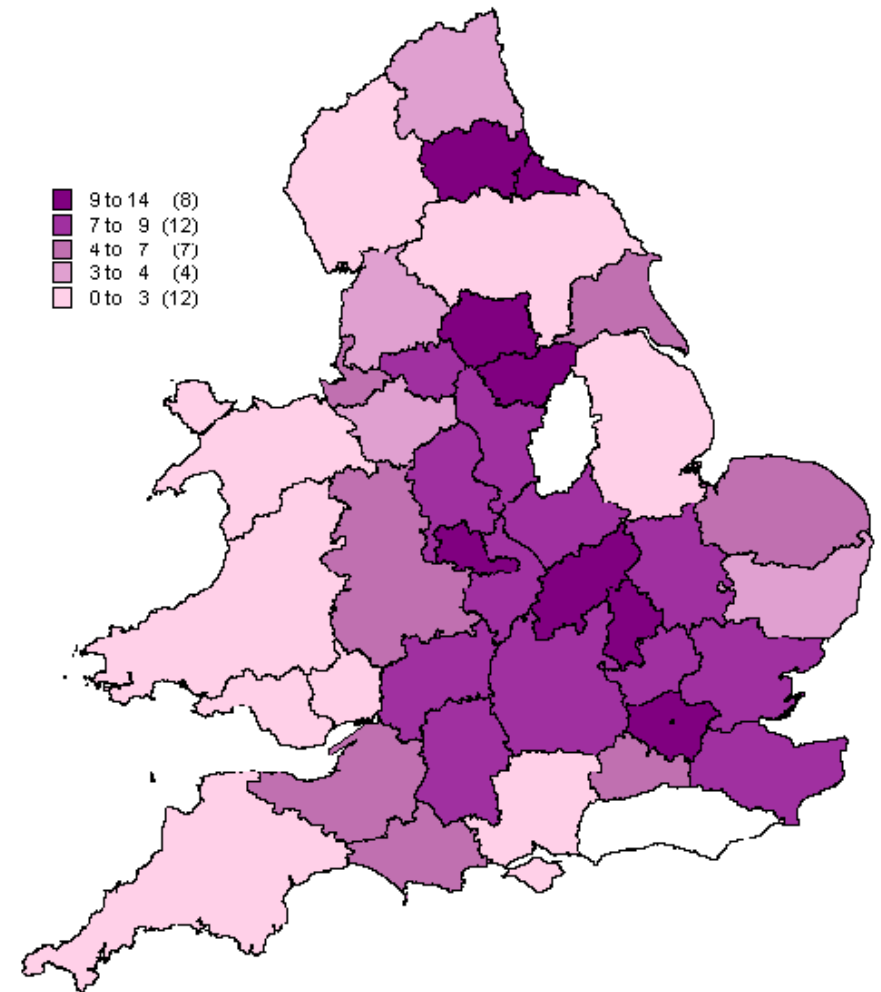


Figure 2: Distraction burglary in a dwelling per 10,000 households, 2003/04



Note:

1. No data were available for Nottinghamshire and Sussex.

References and other recent publications on distraction burglary

Home Office (2001) *Tackling Distraction Burglary*. London: Home Office.

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