

Unit 3: Property Crime

What Is Property Crime?

The word “property” generally refers to land, buildings, or personal items such as money or cars. Property crime is the illegal taking or destroying of someone’s property or land without threats or force. Auto theft, burglary, forgery, shoplifting, and larceny (theft) are examples of the illegal taking of property. Arson and vandalism are crimes that damage land or property.

Although property crimes are not defined as involving threats or force, this does not mean they are victimless crimes or “just” minor offenses. Crimes are committed against people, not against property. Even if the victim does not witness the crime, its aftermath may be frightening, life-changing, and disturbing. Offenders can cause victims significant fear or distress and can disrupt their lives by stealing a car or stereo, burglarizing a home or business, setting a building on fire, or shoplifting.

Offenders are responsible for what happens to a victim during a crime, including indirect injury to the victim. An example of indirect injury might be the victim having a heart attack in response to the crime. Property crimes can be especially difficult for older people as they may not have money or insurance to replace property and may have sentimental feelings about the stolen or damaged items.

Children may find property crime especially frightening if the crime occurs in or near the home.

When a property crime occurs, some people think that insurance companies can solve the victim’s problems. The original reason for having insurance was to cover accidents, such as someone backing into a car or accidentally hitting a baseball through a neighbor’s window. Today, insurance companies process many claims for stolen cars, home and auto burglaries, stolen stereo equipment, and graffiti cleanup.

Insurance companies have systems for how they pay victims and how much they pay for items. A victim may not be paid the full amount for an older TV or receive the full purchase price of a car because the item loses value over time. In addition, insurance companies require that victims pay part of the loss, called a deductible. Deductibles can range from \$100 to \$1,000, which is an out-of-pocket cost to the victim.

Property crime victims have to deal with—

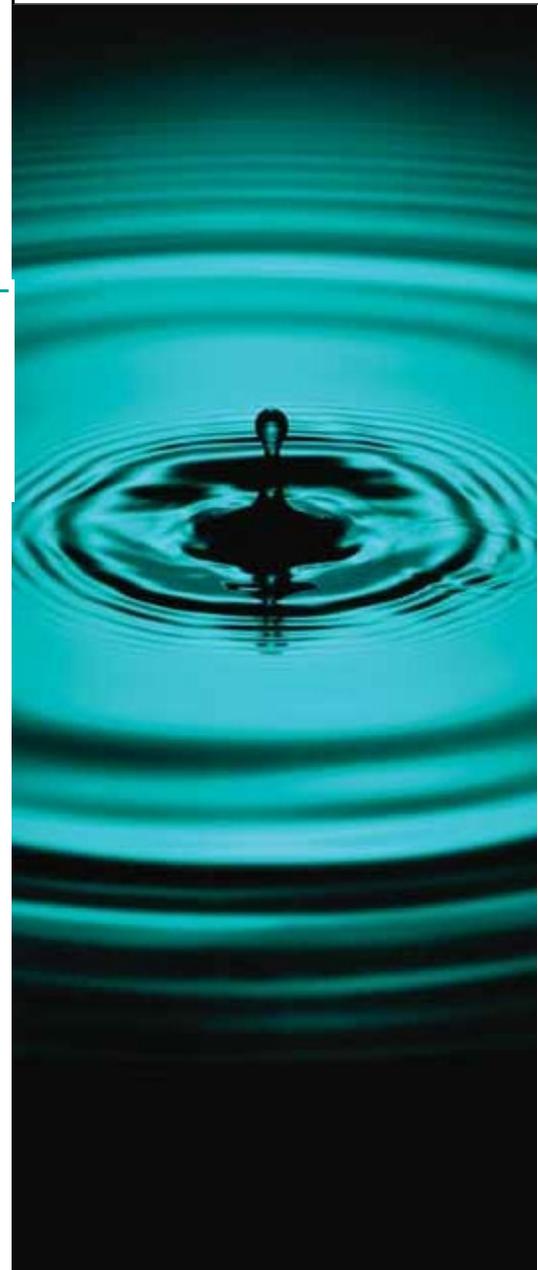
- Having their privacy violated.
- Being scared to stay in their burglarized homes.
- Being scared to return to work, where the crime occurred.
- Seeing their businesses burned down.
- Waiting a long time to have their property returned.
- Cleaning up after their homes or businesses have been vandalized.
- Filling out insurance paperwork.

Words To Know

- Arson
- Burglary
- Embezzlement
- Extortion
- Insurance deductible
- Irreplaceable
- Larceny-theft
- Memorabilia
- Sentimental value
- Vandalism

Money cannot buy my heart.

—Burglary victim, regarding the loss of sentimental items





In the News: Property Crime Trends

Every day you can find television or newspaper stories about property crime. Take a look at the property crime trends below. Which trend is the most surprising to you?

- Property crime makes up approximately 75 percent of all crimes in the United States.
- Only a small percentage of stolen property is found or returned to victims.
- Larceny-theft is the most common property crime.¹
- Property crime, regardless of the type, occurs more often to those living in rented property.
- The estimated loss for theft is between \$50 and \$250.
- The estimated yearly loss due to property crimes (except arson) is more than \$14 billion.²
- More than \$4 billion is spent on locks and safes, \$1.4 billion on surveillance cameras, and \$49 million on guard dogs.

Examples of Property Crime

The following are definitions and examples of nine types of property crime. As you read each story, consider the impact on victims.

Burglary

Unlawful entry of a structure to commit a felony or theft.

John and Maria return home from the store and see that their front door is open. Their stereo and TV have been stolen. How do you think John and Maria feel?

Receipt of Stolen Property

Buying or receiving property that has been stolen or has been obtained through theft or extortion.

George and Damon are in a public parking lot selling stolen TVs at a discount from their van. How do you think George and Damon obtained the stolen TVs?

They are there for 20 minutes to wreck your life . . . and your sense of security.

—Burglary victim

¹ <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/offenses-known-to-law-enforcement/property-crime/property-crime>

² <https://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2014/crime-in-the-u.s.-2014/offenses-known-to-law-enforcement/property-crime/property-crime>

Larceny-Theft

(Except motor vehicle theft): The unlawful taking, carrying, leading, or riding away of property from the possession or constructive possession of another. Examples are thefts of bicycles, motor vehicle parts and accessories, shoplifting, pocket-picking, or the stealing of any property or article that is not taken by force and violence or by fraud.

Nine-year-old Connor is riding his bike home from school and is stopped by a group of four older kids. They tell him to get off his bike, make him drop his backpack, and then run away laughing with his backpack. How would you feel if Connor were your son or brother?

Auto Theft

Theft or attempted theft of a motor vehicle.

Ahn and his two kids have been to a Saturday afternoon movie at a local theater. When they reach the parking lot, Ahn hears his daughter, Mila, say, "Daddy! Look! Our car is gone, and there's broken glass all over." How do you feel about what happened to Ahn and his kids?

Me and my kids should not have to be afraid in our own home.

—Burglary victim

Vandalism

To willfully or maliciously destroy, injure, disfigure, or deface any public or private property, real or personal, without the consent of the owner or person having custody or control by cutting, tearing, breaking, marking, painting, drawing, covering with filth, or any other such means as may be specified by local law.

Lynne volunteered to work at a high school wrestling match held at a rival school. After the meet, in the school parking lot, she noticed her tire was flat. Her tire had been punctured and the whole side of her car had been "keyed." How would you react if Lynne were your sister?

I keep asking, "Why would someone do this to me? What did I do to deserve this?"

—Vandalism victim

Embezzlement

The unlawful misappropriation or misapplication by an offender to his/her own use or purpose of money, property, or some other thing of value entrusted to his/her care, custody, or control.

Minh and Amy are friends who both work in a coffee shop, usually during the same shift. They take turns counting the money from the cash register at the end of their shift. Every other day they put some of the money that does not belong to them directly in their pockets. Who are Minh and Amy harming by stealing money?

Arson

Any willful or malicious burning or attempt to burn, with or without intent to defraud, a dwelling house, public building, motor vehicle or aircraft, or personal property of another.

A group of teenagers set fire to a shed using gasoline, rags, and lighters. Jackie uses the shed to store furniture and personal items. The shed and all the property inside are damaged. Who has been harmed by the teenagers' behavior?

I don't understand what he was thinking, but his stupid act has ruined the lives of people he didn't even know.

—Arson victim

Extortion

Using fear of death, injury, property loss, reputation, and so forth to compel another person to deliver property or perform some act or omission.

John and Bobby, members of a local gang, go into a store and tell the owner that he has to pay them money on a weekly schedule to "protect" his business from rival gang members. They also tell him that he has to give them free alcohol. How do you think the store owner feels?

Forgery

Making, altering, or possessing a fake copy of a document or object with the intent to deceive. Attempted forgeries are included in this category.

Mr. Singh is elderly and lives with his family because he cannot read well anymore and gets confused easily. Without anyone’s permission, his nephew has been writing checks from Mr. Singh’s personal checking account, signing Mr. Singh’s name, and spending the money on drugs.

What are the possible injuries to Mr. Singh resulting from his nephew’s behavior?

 **What Is the Impact of Property Crime?**

Criminal behavior such as property crime causes a ripple effect that has a negative impact on a number of life areas. The lists below outline some examples of how property crime affects financial, physical, emotional, and religious/spiritual areas of victims’ lives. Add your own examples below.

<p>Financial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Out-of-pocket costs • Repairs to property • Burglar alarm purchases • Acquisition of security services • Wage loss • Legal fees • _____ • _____ • _____ 	<p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fatigue • Stomach pain • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____
<p>Emotional</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sadness • Guilt • Shame • Embarrassment • Depression • Vulnerability • _____ • _____ 	<p>Religious/Spiritual</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Questioning faith • Questioning how and why this crime could happen to a good person • Forgiveness issues • _____ • _____ • _____ • _____



Victim Impact: Listen and Learn

After viewing the OVC *Victim Impact: Listen and Learn* DVD clip about burglary, answer the following questions:

What were the financial losses?

How did this burglary affect Leanna and her family?



Being Accountable for Your Crimes

Property crime has a serious financial and emotional impact on victims. Victims suffer from a loss of security in their own homes, businesses, or workplaces. Their privacy is violated. They may never regain the sense of security they once had. **No one has the right to commit a property crime, regardless of the circumstances. No one has the right to harm another person.**

How Can I Be Accountable for My Crimes?

I need to figure out why I commit property crimes.

—Joe

I need to respect people's property. What if someone burglarized my family's home?

—Jerome

I scared that family by breaking into their home. I need to admit that my behavior was serious and I hurt people.

—Tanya

I destroyed things that were important to the victim.

—Manny

Additional Activities

Activity A— What Is Important to You?

Someone breaks into your place and steals from you. Pick the one item that would bother you the most if someone were to steal it. You have to pick one.

- Your CD and DVD collection
- Your most important piece of jewelry
- Your credit cards
- Important paperwork
- \$100 cash
- Your child's baby pictures

After you discuss this activity in class, write down your thoughts and feelings.

Activity C— The Sanchez Family

Tony takes his grandparents, Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez, to cash their Social Security checks and then they rent a few movies. When they go home, they see that it has been broken into. The house is a mess. The following items have been stolen: TV, \$300 from a cookie jar, and jewelry from Mrs. Sanchez's grandmother. In addition, these items have been broken or destroyed: the cookie jar, Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez's wedding picture, clothes (thrown around the bedroom), and a religious book.

What might Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez be thinking or feeling?

What might Tony be thinking or feeling?

What might Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez experience in the next few days?

What might the emotional impact be on Mr. and Mrs. Sanchez 6 months from now?

What are the irreplaceable items that were taken or destroyed?

Which items will the insurance company cover?

- TV
- Money
- Religious book
- Lock on front door
- Jewelry
- Cookie jar
- Wedding picture frame
- New burglar alarm

Activity D— Elisa

Elisa makes \$7 an hour working 20 hours a week in a restaurant. She is studying photography and recently bought a \$500 camera with her tax refund, overtime pay, and birthday money. Someone broke into Elisa's locker at work and stole the camera. She does not have insurance.

How many hours of work will it take to replace the camera?

How long will it take Elisa to replace the camera?

Is it realistic to think that Elisa can use all of her work money to replace her camera in that time period? What other expenses may she have?

If the offender is charged with a crime and ordered to pay restitution, how soon will Elisa receive restitution payments for the camera?
