

New findings—Burglars have one of four personalities, and they're finally getting caught

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Bryanna Fox, PhD, assistant professor of criminology at USF. Credit: University of South Florida

Law enforcement agencies across the country are solving an average of

85 percent more burglaries after adopting a new profiling system. The statistics-based program designed at the University of South Florida in Tampa indicates that the manner in which a burglary is committed is linked to the type of person behind the crime.

Bryanna Fox, PhD, assistant professor of criminology at USF, trains law enforcement to categorize each [burglary](#) as organized, disorganized, interpersonal or opportunistic in nature. These descriptions apply to the crime and the suspect's likely personality. It helps narrow the list of potential suspects. As burglary remains the most common yet most unsolved major crime in the United States, this field-tested program is having considerable impact for [law enforcement agencies](#) and their communities.

New Burglar Profiles:

- **Organized:** Suspect is male, 30 to 50 years old, and typically a repeat offender. He's generally employed full time and often meets potential victims on the job. As a "professional" burglar, his crimes are mostly premeditated and he brings tools such as a crowbar or lock pick to the scene.
- **Disorganized:** Suspect is usually a young male and operates spontaneously, often due to a drug addiction. He regularly targets easy-to-pawn items (cell phones, jewelry, etc.) to make a quick profit. The haphazard offender may smash a window to break in, leaving incriminating evidence behind. This group tends to be well known to law enforcement for committing other crimes.
- **Interpersonal:** Suspect knows the victim and may steal something personal, such as women's underwear or nothing at all. (Burglary is defined as "the intention to commit a felony" and does not require theft.) They might break in to show control and instill fear, possibly an ex-partner or a person of acute interest to the offender.

- Opportunistic: Suspect is an amateur, often a juvenile, and takes advantage when finding an open/unlocked door, window or garage.

Fox has trained six [law enforcement](#) agencies in New York, Minnesota, and Florida (Cheektoaga, NY, Duluth, MN, Daytona Beach, FL, Clearwater, FL, Winterhaven, FL and Pasco County, FL) and followed their burglary arrest and incidence rates for the following two years. She found that the agencies she trained solved 84.8 percent more burglaries after using the burglary profiles, and solved 32.9 percent more burglaries than comparable neighboring police agencies that didn't use these new profiling guidelines.

"I think an even more important, but very unexpected, finding was what happened to the number of burglaries occurring in the treatment departments' jurisdictions after they started implementing the burglary profiles," said Fox. "Specifically, results show that they had 40.9 percent fewer burglaries occurring in their jurisdictions, likely because they were doing a better job of putting so many more bad guys away!"

This comes as a tremendous cost savings to taxpayers and victims. For example, each burglary costs the average police department \$7,000 to investigate, and the average victim loss is \$2,500. As Fox's burglary profiles helped to prevent an average of 600 burglaries each year, this would save a police department \$4.2 million in investigative expenses, and would save residents \$1.5 million in losses.

Fox is currently training additional departments and will continue to follow their progress in solving more burglaries.

Provided by University of South Florida

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