

# How police underestimate break-ins as gateway crimes for sex predators

April 19 2018, by Michael Arntfield

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Credit: Donald Tong from Pexels

Conventional thinking has suggested for years that predatory offences like exhibitionism or actual sexual assaults are typically the early crimes committed by future serial sex predators.

But the reality is that residential [break-and-enters](#) are common among incarcerated sex offenders as their first, or gateway, offence en route to becoming high-risk violent serial offenders, whether homicidal or non-homicidal.

[A recently published Canadian study](#) confirms that of 624 convicted and federally incarcerated sex offenders, including sexual and serial murderers, interviewed over a six-year period, breaking-and-entering was the prevailing first offence committed during the formative years of their criminal careers.

Indeed, the study suggests, breaking into residential dwellings is more likely to be sexually motivated than previously thought.

Police, however, still wrongly assume when nothing is stolen in a break-in and there seems to be no obvious financial motive that the offender was either scared off, aborted the [crime](#) for some other reason or was otherwise just indulging in petty mischief.

The police approach to break-and-enter investigations is still languishing in the dark ages across much of Canada. Both investigative and analytical methodologies have failed to keep pace with the forensic and academic literature. Some police services are worse than other, and they know who they are.

What's even more disturbing is that their approach may allow incipient sex offenders and serial predators not only to go free, but to go entirely undetected.

In my companion piece for *The Conversation Canada* on how police "cook the books" to inflate their solved crime rates, I touched on the fallacy of break-and-enter crime data in Canada.

One of the inevitable consequences of police forces' statistical manipulation through systemic *unfounding* and *recoding* of crimes is how it consequently allows potential sex offenders to go unrecognized at the critical point in their developing criminal careers.

(Unfounding means that the occurrence is considered a non-event and baseless. Recoding is a method police use to reclassify an offence at their discretion.)

Due to these police tactics, potential serial sex offenders can avoid apprehension, identification and arrest before they inevitably escalate in their crimes.

There is an erroneous assumption among many police brass that B-and-Es are easily relegated to being "victimless" offences and otherwise innocuous "property crimes" unless there is overt evidence of fetish activity at the scene, or unless there is an actual attack on an occupant —what is still rather ridiculously described in some cases as a "burglary gone wrong."

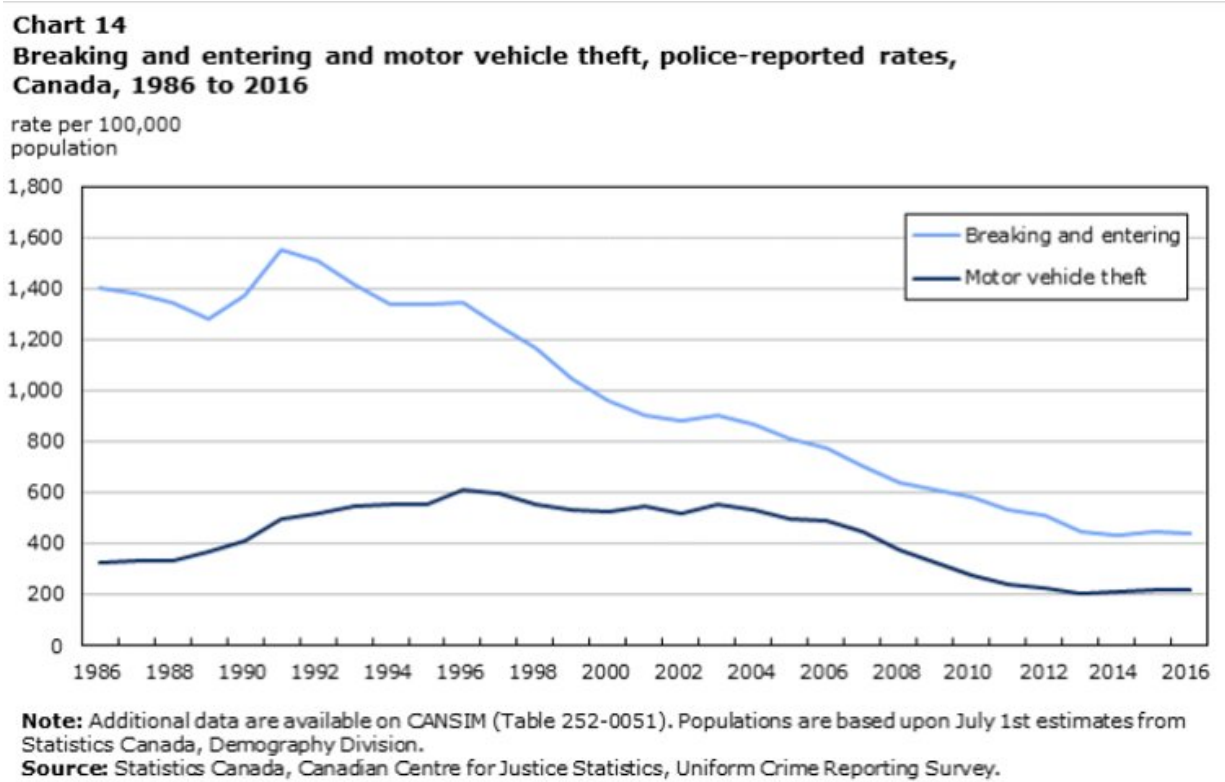
## **Burglaries 'gone right' for perpetrators**

In reality, these are burglaries gone *right* —the key is recognizing why the offender was in the residence to begin with.

The Canadian study in part validates earlier research and expert input that strongly recommended that DNA [evidence from B-and-Es should be included in the National DNA Data Bank](#), this despite the fact that they weren't widely regarded as sex offences.

Original research conducted by expert staff at the [Center for Homicide Research](#) in Minneapolis has now identified a total of six sub-types of sexually motivated residential break-and-enters that are often indicative

of a pathway toward violent future sex offending, including sexual homicide.



There is one thing all of these sub-types have in common: They're the most likely to be declared unfounded, recoded as an "attempt" only (thus not a completed incident by StatCan standards) or recoded as mischief, a trespasser or some other misrepresentative category.

And then the cases are closed in what are known as "first and final" investigations.

In each of these circumstances, a break-in investigated solely through the lens of material gain means missing the point of many, if not most, residential burglaries. These crimes are therefore not properly flagged for full investigation.

This could also in part explain the otherwise puzzling drop in "completed" and "founded" break-ins in Canada over the last 10 years that seems at odds with declining socioeconomic conditions in many communities across Canadian communities.

In reality, however, supposedly "unfounded" or "attempted" cases are the ones that actually merit the most investigative attention.

That's because, unlike a conventional break-in where items have been stolen, the intruder who was merely looking and took nothing is not pursued at all, even though he may have had far more sinister motives. He is free to continue experimenting and escalating in his methods. Chances are, he is described below.

## **The six sub-types**

1. *Fetishistic*. Normally involves the handling of undergarments and/or the surreptitious theft of intimates that may not be immediately noticed, whereas other more valuable items remain untouched. At first glance, it may appear as though the offender never fully entered the home; in other cases, the theft of more traditional items (jewelry, electronics, liquor) may be used to mask the actual target items that offer a fetish, souvenir or fantasy value to the offender. In recent history, ["Killer Colonel" Russell Williams](#) fit this bill.
2. *Voyeuristic*. Normally involves discreet entry that may appear only as tampering. The offender's objective is to conduct surveillance of the premises and collect intelligence on the lives

of the occupant(s) before returning. This method is widely believed to have been the modus operandi of the still unidentified [Original Night Stalker/East Area Rapist/Golden State Killer](#), one of the most prolific serial rapists and killers in American history.

3. *Somnophilic*. Often an escalation from Typology 2, and often known as "sleepwatcher" cases. The offender enters a specifically targeted location in the middle of the night while occupants are at home and asleep. The offender watches and/or photographs/records the occupants without their knowledge. The occupants have no knowledge or memory of the intruder being in their bedrooms. Recent cases targeting university students in [London, Ont.](#) and [Halifax](#) brought overdue national attention to this typology. In most cases, the only items stolen will be souvenirs.
4. *Active Desecration*. The opposite of the previous three typologies, the offender in this case wants his presence to be known, but is unlikely to steal anything, instead causing property damage only. In this case, the offender is often aroused by the thought of the shock and horror experienced by the occupant(s) upon returning to the dwelling to find it ransacked. The damage is often of an especially invasive or humiliating nature, such as urinating in a child's bedroom or destroying family albums. The offender may remain in the area to watch the occupant(s) return and relish in the aftermath from a distance.
5. *Passive Desecration*. A combination of Typology 2 and Typology 4, the offender will typically enter with precision and leave no obvious sign of his entry or presence other than carefully moved or modified personal belongings. While rarely is anything stolen, the intruder may eat an item from the refrigerator, lay down in a bed and leave their shape in the comforter, move or transpose photographs or other personal effects, along with other subtle acts carried out to leave the occupant(s) second-guessing

themselves and paranoid. A highly sadistic subtype and often accompanied by other stalking activities, it has been chillingly featured with great accuracy [in the television series \*The Fall\*](#).

6. *Intrusion Focused*. Perhaps the most likely to be declared unfounded or recoded as a non-break and enter—if even reported by the victim at all—these cases involve the offender obtaining, much like Typology 4, sexual satisfaction by making their presence on the property known. This may include breaching a window or door and not entering or, more commonly, cutting a screen with an edged weapon. Often a rehearsal for a more serious sexual crime, these incidents are often also dismissed as "attempts" and not activated for investigation, the rationale being that the offender never actually entered the home. In many cases the objective is merely to develop a future entry plan.

## Continue in their crimes

As I stress in my public talks, the lack of awareness and training surrounding these six burglary typologies, and the fact that they're often miscoded and misidentified, is the single biggest blind spot in the accurate tabulation of break-and-enter data nationally.

It's also the single biggest loophole that allows escalating and still nascent [sex offenders](#) to often continue in their crimes, increasingly emboldened as they go unrecognized and undetected.

What are known as *administrative clearances* have, in the past, allowed a series of crimes to be conveniently attributed in bulk to a single offender with a similar background in order to artificially inflate a police force's solved crime rate.

In a similar manner, being dismissive of B-and-Es in order to keep cases

off the books entirely serves as a significant threat to public safety, all in interest of numbers in most [cases](#).

Doing so not only contorts the data, it allows offenders whose break-ins are clearly sexually motivated —and who conform to one or more of the six subtypes —to elude recognition. They then often move on from B-and-Es to more significant (and dangerous) sexual offences because their early crimes go unnoticed and largely undocumented.

The result is an unknown number of potentially (and likely) high-risk offenders going unrecognized and lost in the oblivion of dishonest statistics.

It is time to change the conversation.

**More information:** Eric Beauregard et al. Sexual Murderers: Sex Offender, Murderer, or Both?, *Sexual Abuse: A Journal of Research and Treatment* (2017). [DOI: 10.1177/1079063217711446](https://doi.org/10.1177/1079063217711446)

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