ICT plays an increasing part in criminal activities

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The influence of ICT on traditional crimes such as burglary, robbery, intimidation and fraud is on the rise. Researchers from the University of Twente examined a large number of crimes in the east of the Netherlands on behalf of and in collaboration with PAC – the police cybercrime programme – and the five regional police forces which now form the East Netherlands unit. They looked into 136 burglaries, 140 commercial burglaries, 259 instances of threatening behaviour and 274 cases of fraud. The fraud cases in particular had a strong digital component.

Online fraud can generally be divided into two main types. The first of these is marketplace fraud, which involves failure to deliver goods purchased on the internet. The second type is bank fraud, in which money is stolen from the holder’s account. In such cases, criminals may have obtained information, during a burglary for example, which enabled them to remove funds from the victim’s account. It turns out that 41% of fraud cases are digital, while 5% of fraud cases involve digital burglary.

Threats

16% of all threats are made using digital resources. They involve a wide range of conflicts and problems, both personal and business, in which the person who reports the crime has been threatened and in which at least some of these threats have been made online, for example in chat rooms, on websites, via e-mail and sometimes by telephone (text messages).

Home and commercial burglaries

In the category of burglaries, 3% of cases involve deployment of digital resources, especially after the offence. This concerns cases in which a criminal stole personal information and bank cards during a burglary and subsequently withdrew money from the victim’s bank account. While no commercial burglaries involved an ICT component, it is worth noting that digital detection aids, such as CCTV camera footage, often provided grounds for arresting a suspect in commercial burglaries.

Conclusions

The main conclusion of the study is that ICT plays a greater role in common crimes than people tend to think. In addition, ICT had brought about a number of shifts in the profiles of the perpetrator and victim: digital crimes appear to involve a growing female and juvenile component. This has not only been established in the current study but also in previous research in the Netherlands and abroad. Those involved are also more likely to be of Dutch origin. Despite the increased physical distance between perpetrator and victim in digital crimes, only a small proportion of the offences (14% or less) involve a perpetrator or victim in another country. Another interesting feature of digital crime is that the victims tend to be private individuals, while in cases of traditional fraud, the victims are often companies.

Recommendations

The registration of ICT-related criminal methods (modus operandi) is inadequate. The police could sharpen their focus on the methods used in digital crime by using structured intake instructions and by providing more effective training for the reporting officers in this regard. For example, a national portal where citizens themselves can report crimes such as marketplace fraud and phishing (luring victims to a fake website) would be of great assistance. So too would a portal where citizens can upload information to help them report all manner of criminal offences. A report form on which the relevant details have already been filled in would also be useful. Furthermore, this study should be repeated on a regular basis to keep track of trends. Last but not least, contacts should be maintained with foreign police with a view to intensifying cooperation and tracing other forms of
More information: Study: Modus Operandi: a study of crime facilitated by information and communication technology (ICT)

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