

Review

Burglary prevention – a chemical property marking trial in the North Zealand Police District

The report focuses on a randomised controlled trial involving invisible marking of valuables conducted in the North Zealand Police District. The main aim of the trial was to ascertain whether burglaries can be prevented if house owners display on their front door, letter box and similar places that their valuables are marked with a unique UV-traceable liquid. The display is assumed to attract the attention of potential burglars to the risks associated with breaking into the house. The trial also aimed to show if mere information about the measures taken to reduce the risk of burglaries can prevent burglaries.

The aim of the trial was also to determine the extent to which the marking of valuables can help the police solve burglaries and whether there are any external differences between houses that have been subject to burglaries and neighbouring houses which have not been subject to burglaries.

The trial included 12,000 houses in the North Zealand Police District. All the houses included in the trial had been subjected to burglary within the past few years. The houses were randomly allocated into a trial group and two control groups. Households in the trial group were offered marking kits free of charge. Households in the one control group were not informed about the trial while households in the other control group received a letter informing them about various measures that could be taken to reduce the risk of burglary. 56 per cent of the households in the trial group volunteered to participate in the trial but not all the participants in the trial placed labels on their letter box, front door etc. Only 29 per cent of those in the trial group did so.

The effect of posting labels warning of invisible marking and of informing citizens about the preventive measures was measured by comparing the number of burglaries recorded by the police for a period of just over 15 months after the launch of the trial. The effect evaluation shows that the risk of burglary of the entire trial group was not markedly lower in the period under review than that of the control group. There was a short-lived effect but the result is fairly uncertain. A follow-up on a similar trial in the Municipality of Aarhus also shows that the effect there was only short-lived. The trial in North Zealand shows that the risk of burglary was somewhat lower – almost statistically significant – for the group of participants who both volunteered for the trial and also visibly displayed their participation than for those in the control group. It cannot be ruled out that an effect could have been identified for the entire trial group if a larger share of the participants in the trial had visibly displayed their participation in the trial involving invisible marking of valuables.

The evaluation also shows that no effect of informing citizens about potential preventive measures to reduce their risk of burglary was detected.



As regards the significance of invisible marking to the police's work, it is extremely small which is assumed to reflect the fact that a very small number of the items seized by the police are marked, that very few of the house owners who had received marking kits registered their unique code from the marking in the database that the police can use when they come across marked seized items and that the police's clearance rate in respect of burglaries is low.

Finally, the report deals with the characteristics of houses that have been subject to burglary compared with neighbouring houses that have not been subject to burglary.

TrygFonden, a Danish foundation, has allocated funds to conduct the trial and the subsequent evaluation.

