

# Factors Related to Burglary From the Perspective of Burglars: A Qualitative Study

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**Background:** Among different crimes, burglary is a common criminal attitude that deranges security in society.

**Objectives:** The aim of present study was investigated factors and incentives resulting in commitment of robbery according to prisoners accused of burglary in central prison of Kermanshah Province.

**Patients and Methods:** In a qualitative research based on contractive content analysis, 19 male convict of burglary were studied. They all stated their satisfaction with attending the study and were selected objectively to gain data saturation in Kermanshah Central Prison. Participants went under deep individual interviews. Semi-structured general questions were designed as interview guide to be answered openly and descriptively and sample answers guided its process. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts were made later. Data were analyzed and conscious satisfaction, obscurity, information security, withdrawal from participation on will, and moral commitments were confirmed.

**Results:** Five main themes resulted from interviews. Codes included "personal factors, family attitudes and conditions, others' effects, regulations on burglary punishment, and availability of stolen property".

**Conclusions:** Results from present study introduced several factors in regard of burglary; among these, personal and family factors were the most important. The present study could be a guidance to design proper interventions and introduce efficient measures to prevent burglary commitment among at risk groups.

**Keywords:** Crime; Prison; Qualitative Research

## 1. Background

Crime is considered as a main problem in societies, which imposes costs to people and communities. Most crimes in urban environments lead to high loss, difficulties and human suffer, waste of economic resources, citizen frustration, and disorders in their lives quality (1). During the last decade, fast urbanization has been introduced as an unpleasant phenomena resulting in major problems such as higher rates of felony, marginalization, housing crisis, undesirable working condition, and environmental problems (2). There is no doubt today that urban environments are the most criminal and therefore, the most hazardous places (3, 4). On the other hand, security is an essential demand, which is introduced as the basis for development and advance by social experts, where its decrease results in people dissatisfaction, anxiety, and fear (5-7). Unfortunately, in all communities there are some people who create unsecure conditions and environments due

to their antisocial attitudes and threat social safety (8). Accordingly, burglary is defined as a common crime that threatens social security (9). The word "burglary" means taking others' properties without their permission (10). In addition, others define burglary as a relatively intellectual action, which is accomplished based on a given plan and deciding ahead on victims and how to do it. The more complex the life is, the more various and complex the burglaries are, where criminals make use of different tricks and methods to commit burglary to gain more benefits while leaving less evidence (11).

## 2. Objectives

One of the important, under discussion issues in different societies is to prevent and control crime, and investigate reasons and motives to commit crime, which was specifically considered by humanism experts.

Considering the negative effect of burglary on social security, present study aimed to investigate arguments and motives to commit burglary based on burglary convicts' experiences in Central Prison of Kermanshah.

### 3. Patients and Methods

We recruited 19 male convicts of burglary in Kermanshah Central Prison in this qualitative research, which was based on contractive content analysis. All participants stated their satisfaction with participating in the study and were selected objectively to gain data saturation. Participants underwent deep individual interviews. Semi-structured and general questions were designed as interview guide to be answered openly and descriptively; sample answers guided the answering process. All interviews were tape-recorded and transcripts were made later. Data was analyzed and conscious satisfaction, obscurity, information security, withdrawal from study on will, and moral commitments were considered. Personal information like age, educational background, occupation before being conviction, marital status, and family condition in addition to questions about reasons to commit burglary were asked. Individual interviews took 20 to 30 minutes and continued until data saturation. Following questions were used as guide to interviews:

- 1) When did you commit your first burglary?
- 2) What is your opinion on reasons to commit burglary?
- 3) Describe your first commitment to burglary.

In addition, there were exploring questions based on types of answers to recognize deep surface of participants' experiences including why, how, and explain more.

#### 3.1. Data Analyze

Content analysis with contract methods passing seven steps was used to analyze the data. Steps included:

- 1) Formulating research question to gain answers
- 2) Choosing the samples and sampling
- 3) General plan of coding process and training analysts
- 4) Fulfilling coding process
- 5) Defining levels
- 6) Determining validity
- 7) Analyzing the results from coding process

In this method, researchers avoided using predetermined layers and let the layers and their names come out of the data. According to the relationships among sub-layers, some of them were combined and organized in newer layers and their relationship was hierarchically designed as a schematic tree to help development and reorganization (12). To support and improve data validity and extracted codes, review prescriptions of other studies and expert suggestions were used (13). Analysis continued after each new interview. Primary codes were fractured line by line and encoded. Primary codes were compared with each other continuously and categorized in different layers

according to their similarities and differences; each layer was declared by its content. Moreover, any new data or code was compared, categorized, and repeated with other data. To increase the reliability of data, prolonged engagement in accordance with research subject and external check were used.

### 4. Results

Five main themes resulted from interviews by participants; codes included "personal factors, family attitudes and conditions, others' effects, regulations on burglary punishment, and availability of stolen property". Table 1 shows main and subordinating themes of intellectual experiences about effective factors on committing burglary. In the following, these themes are explained making use of participants' statements.

#### 4.1. Personal Factors

Personal factors played an important role in committing burglary and included many codes. Codes at this part included financial problems and easy incomes, sensation seeking, addiction, poverty, and insufficient knowledge. Some statements by participants are as follow:

##### a) Financial Problems and Easy Income

It could be concluded from statements by most participants that financial problems and, specifically, gaining ready and high income were important factors leading to committing burglary among participants. Such willingness was clearly seen in sayings by a participant, as:

"I would gain more than five million Tomans if I committed just one successful burglary during a month! There was no difficulty... In your opinion, could I consent myself with a job including much difficulty? Or a job earning less income?"

##### b) Sensation Seeking

Sensation seeking is defined as demand to excitement and new, various, and complex experiences and tendency toward accepting physical and social dangers to experience the excitement (14). Some participants introduced the excitement of burglary and satisfying the feeling in them as the reason to commit the crime. For instance, a 31-year-old participant explained his first burglary at his 17:

"My friends had told me that burglary was dangerous and fearful, which sounded interesting to me... I remember that one evening my friend and I were waiting at the entrance into a shopping mall. After a while, a cyclist parked his motor cycle at the entrance and walked in the building. Chasing him, I made sure that he would be busy for a while; then, my friend turned his motorcycle on and we ran away in excitement. I enjoyed the excitement". As stated, enjoyment, high excitement in the first experiment, fear, feeling power, impossibility of being arrested, and enjoyment were major effective factors to commit the first burglary.

##### c) Addiction

**Table 1.** Main and Subordinate Themes Resulted From Intellectual Experiences of Participants on Effective Factors to Commit Burglary

No	Main Themes	Subordinate Themes
1	Personal factors	- Financial problems and easy way to make money
		- Sensation seeking
		- Addiction
		- Poverty
		- Lack of proper knowledge
2	Family attitudes and condition	- Family attitudes and behavior before committing burglary
		- Family attitudes and behavior after committing burglary
3	Others' influence (including friends)	- Friends' talk on burglary
		- Pleasant experience on living with friends
		- Friends' experience on burglary
		- Friends' suggestion on a burglary
		- Friends' accompany on burglary
		- Observing friends to learn how to steal
4	Regulations on burglary punishment	- Keeping in touch with professional burglars
		- Weak regulations on burglary
		- Ignoring burglary punishment
		- Comparing burglary punishment to major crimes
5	Easy access to stolen properties maintaining and keeping burglary properties	- Ease of committing burglary
		- Getting experienced and ease of burglary
		- Changing the process of burglary (committing heavier burglaries)
		- Designed burglary and having a customer for stolen properties

Among participants' statements, some mentioned factors were committing burglary to buy drug, being fired from job due to addiction and lack of money to buy drug, addiction among family member, changes in pattern of drug abuse, and using industrial drugs and reduction of fear on burglary consequences. A 27-year-old participant, married with a one-year-old child, explained his first burglary:

"I have been using drugs for ten years, and only used opium for the first five years and I could buy my needed dosage with my money. Then I started taking industrial drugs and committed burglary to supply the drug... I was a welder and earned good money... but as I turned to use higher dosage, I was not able to work and committed burglary to gain money and supply drug".

#### d) Poverty

Many studies reported that poverty could be the main reason or the basis to all relative problems to health (15). It is introduced as a reason to committing burglary to supply essentials of life.

#### e) Insufficient Knowledge

Lack of information and insufficient knowledge over burglary punishment was also considered as effective factor on committing burglary. In this regard, a participant stated:

"I have been imprisoned for six years, though I was

subjected to three years of prison, cause I could not afford to pay to those whom I rubbed their properties... I knew nothing about repayment to them... I might not have done burglary if I had known about the regulation".

#### 4.2. Family Attitudes and Condition

Family is the most important social unit to socialize and treat children and is the basis to all other social institutions (16). In the present study, many participants reported the effective role of family conflict and family crime commitment. Codes showed that family condition, as a result of burglary committal, could be described in two ways:

a) Family attitudes and condition before committing burglary

many participants reported that before committing the crime, they faced some behaviors in family such as being ignored by family members, over trust in the person by family, strict family, lose family relationship, divorce, lack of respect to children by parents, no financial and emotional support from family, low attitudes to family, and family crime background, especially in father and brother.

For instance, a participant reported ignorance by family member, family over trust, and strict family:

"My family did not know, I told them I was working in a

near town... they believed that and I came to visit them once in a while... when I was home my father might ask some questions but I ignored them... living with friends was much more relaxing than staying with family members. My father was an addict and our financial condition was awful... he was a drug and alcoholic beverage dealer... I started burglary and my family had no negative reaction to me".

b) Family attitudes and condition after committing burglary

Family role and attitudes after committing the crime is very important; attitudes such as being rejected by family members, no more contact with family, and no attempts from family to recognize the roots to the problem after committing the crime facilitated the recommitments. Wrong attitudes of family after committing burglary were clearly understood from criminals' statements:

"Almost after two years since I committed my first burglary, my father figured out and punished me hard and asked me to leave home... I rented a house and I felt free in my new life... I did not visit my family for a year... I told my friends to tell my family that I was not living in the city anymore".

"I am the only son in my family, my father is rich enough, but he has never paid attention to my needs. It has been two years and eight months since I am imprisoned, but he has never come for a visit".

#### 4.3. Others' Influence

People engaged in crime and dangerous behaviors are generally more affected by relationships. For example, peer pressure or stress from other important people in life could lead a person to commit crimes such as burglary, which was mentioned by many participants during interviews. Factors such as friends' talk on burglary, pleasant experience of living with friends, friends' experiments on burglary, friends' suggestion about burglary, friends' accompanying in first burglary, learning from friends on how to act, and being in contact with professional burglars facilitated burglary commitment. One participant said, "I did not commit my first burglary for money; once we were at a friend's house when they decided to steal a motorcycle and I accompanied them".

#### 4.4. Punishment Regulations on Burglary

Some participants mentioned weak regulations on burglary. Factors such as neglecting burglary punishment or comparing it with major crimes could affect people so that they would easily commit burglary. It is almost clear from statements of a participant:

"The reprimand was low... for a normal burglary one may be sentenced to only three years of prison; one should refund the properties too,... but if you were arrested for drug, specially industrial drugs, you would be sentenced to death... though normal burglary suffers

from short punishment, burglary including physical damages has heavier punishment... I have stolen 23 cars and I was only sentenced to three years in jail".

#### 4.5. Ready Access to Stolen Properties (Maintaining and Keeping Stolen Properties)

From criminals' viewpoint, another effective factor in burglary commitment was easy access and maintenance to stolen properties. In other words, burglary was considered straightforward by participants. Interviews included statements on the feasibility of burglary, getting experienced and easier commitments, changes in burglary process (committing heavier burglaries), committing planned burglaries, and having customers for stolen properties. A participant explained that, "In my opinion, burglars only suffer from anxiety or stress for 30 seconds...one feels stress during the first 30 seconds of stealing a car. When you turn it on and drive away, everything is over; then you sell the car and enjoy the money... when I got experienced I felt it was easy to steal things".

### 5. Discussion

Human behavior is reflection of different factors and knowing this causality network is important to influence effective factors on behavior (17). In this regard, an important issue under discussion in many communities is to prevent and control crime and to study reasons and motives to commit crime. Therefore, the present study used qualitative research to investigate basic factors and motives of committing burglary from viewpoint of convicts of burglary in Central Prison of Kermanshah, Iran. Five main, impressive themes on committing burglary emerged from interviews with participants, which included personal factors, family attitudes and behavior, others' influence regulations on burglary punishment, and easy access to stolen properties. Many disorders such as problems in stating a problem, emotional incompetence, inability to create true relationships with others, insularity and separation, low tolerance against deprivation, and anxiety are characteristics which result from lack of parents attention to their children emotional growth and satisfying their natural needs, which results in committing dangerous behaviors by children (16). Accordingly, several studies have shown that having a proper communicative pattern could have great influence on decreasing anxiety and depression (18-20). Jalilian et al. reported that social and family support was the strongest factor for drug abuse among addicts (21). Considering the helpful family relation between parents and children, parents should pay more attention to their relations and create proper speech communication with their children. Ataei et al. also investigated the reciprocal relation between crime and addiction among prisoners in prison of Kermanshah, Iran, and reported that burglary felonies shared deeper background of crime in



their families (22). Importance of family role to prevent and control social vulnerabilities is stated clearly by many researchers. The first teachers and behavior model of a child are parents and siblings, which directly affect personality and identity of children. Therefore, planning preventive training courses to in danger families seems essential and as shown in the results of the present study, family is an effective factor in committing burglary. Hence, introducing training courses on bring-up and communicative skills, especially for at-risk families, could be helpful to prevent committing crimes by children. Personal factor was another theme affecting committing burglary, which included many codes. These codes included financial problems and easy way to make money, sensation seeking, addiction, poverty, and lack of proper knowledge. Moreover, several studies reported the reciprocal relation between drug abuse and committing crimes. Ataei et al. reported that alcohol abuse was higher in those committing affray and crack abuse was higher in those committing burglary (22). These results significantly emphasize the importance of preventive plans to debar drug abuse, decrease crime rate in society, and improve social security. On the other hand, several studies reported sensation seeking as a strong factor to predict dangerous behaviors (23-26). Sensation seeking is a personality factor that could be affected through training courses; considering the essential role of sensation seeking in committing burglary, it was suggested to formulize, implant, and evaluate plans to decrease negative sensation seeking, especially among teenagers and young adults. Another important result from present study was lack of knowledge about regulations on burglary among participants. For instance, a participant stated that he was not aware of refund law on burglary case and probably if he knew the regulation, he would not commit the crime. This result could be considered in planning training courses by authorities. Results introduced influence of others as another effective factor on committing burglary. In this regard, several studies reported the role of peer group or subjective norms in criminal and dangerous behaviors (27, 28). Considering the results from present study and similar studies, it could be concluded that friends are significantly effective on committing crimes and training courses on interaction and communication with friends might prevent such negative effects. Another item stated by participants was weak regulations on burglary punishment; some factors such as ignoring burglary punishment or comparing it with punishments for major crimes was effective on their tendency toward committing burglary. Therefore, it is suggested to reconsider burglary regulations and issue heavier punishment in this regard. In addition, proper channels should be used to inform people living in at-risk neighborhoods about the regulations to decrease crime rates including burglary. Data analyses showed that ease of access to stolen properties and keeping them was a

motive to commit burglary. In other words, participants considered burglary as an easy act. Interviews with participants included words on ease of action, getting experiences that make burglary easier, burglary process (committing bigger burglaries), committing predesigned burglaries, and having customers for stolen properties. Hereof, preventive activities could be improved in two directions; first, it seems helpful to inform people and increase public awareness on taking care of worthy properties (car, jewelries, etc.) to make burglary harder for thief. In addition, it seems essential to consider heavier punishments on buying stolen properties to make it difficult for burglars to sell what they steal easily and therefore, decrease burglary rate. Results from the present study suggested several factors that influence burglary commitment among which personal and family factors were the most effective ones. The present study could be a guidance to design proper intervention and offer functional methods to prevent burglary commitment in at-risk groups.

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### Authors' Contributions

Farzad Jalilian, Mehdi Mirzaei Alavijeh, and Mohamad Reza Amoei developed the original idea, the protocol, and study design. Mohammad Ahmadpanah and Firoozeh Mostafavi participated in data analyzed. Maryam Changizi participated in writing manuscript. All authors provided comments and approved the final manuscript.

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