

Operation Swordfish

This RCT tests the impact of a target-hardening intervention on incidents of residential burglary.

Key details

Status	Complete
Lead institution	University College London
Principal researcher(s)	Professor Shane Johnson shane.johnson@ucl.ac.uk
Police region	London
Collaboration and partnership	West Midlands Police.
Level of research	Professional/work based
Project start date	September 2012
Date completed	March 2013

Hypothesis

- To test whether a low-intensity target-hardening intervention which adopted a near-repeat victimisation targeting strategy had an impact on residential burglary.
- To test whether a low-intensity target-hardening intervention which adopted a near-repeat victimisation targeting strategy had an impact on residents' fear of crime.

Geographical area

West Midlands.

Target sample size

46 neighbourhoods.

Participants - inclusion criteria

All neighbourhoods.

Interventions

In the treatment areas, when a burglary occurred, victimised homes and their eight immediate neighbours (four on either side) received a visit from officers and residents were given a simple target-hardening pack.

In terms of priority levels and treatment received, burglary victims were given a gold package. This comprised LED units that shone light against the window creating the appearance of a television being on, electronic timers, door and window chimes, a crime prevention sticker, and details of neighbourhood watch schemes in the area. The four closest neighbours of victims received silver packages and their subsequent four neighbours received bronze packages. The silver packages contained the same items as the gold, but without LED units and stickers, and bronze packages were the same as silver but without door chimes. Equipment costs were about £12 per household.

Study design

Block randomised control trial.

Police neighbourhoods were matched on burglary rates and randomly allocated to the treatment or business as usual conditions.

Outcome measures

Burglary outcomes were measured at the individual household and at the area (treatment or control) level. A resident survey was conducted to measure resident's satisfaction with the police, awareness of burglary, and their fear of crime.

Summary of findings

Results suggested that residents in treatment groups were slightly more satisfied with the police and more likely to have been contacted by the police concerning burglaries. Although they had

more awareness of burglary, their fear of crime was not heightened. Statistical analysis suggested a very modest positive effect of intervention on crime and rates of re-victimisation. In particular, a survival analysis revealed that homes in low-crime treatment areas were less likely to be re-victimised than were those in similar control areas. Effects were more evident in low- than high-crime areas.

Results suggest that a low-intensity target-hardening intervention which adopted a near-repeat victimisation targeting strategy had a modest positive effect on residential burglary without increasing residents' fear of crime.

Johnson, S.D., Davies, T., Murray, A. *et al.* [Evaluation of operation swordfish: a near-repeat target-hardening strategy](https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9301-7); *J Exp Criminol* **13**, 505–525 (2017). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11292-017-9301-7>