Burglary and the Ideal Victim

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Abstract

In the latter quarter of the twentieth century, successive UK governments made burglary the focal point of policies aimed at harm reduction and crime prevention. This paper uses an adaptation of Christie's construction of the ideal victim as a useful way of explaining this. Three dimensions are distinguished: the ideal crime; the ideal victim; and the ideal offender. It is argued that burglary was the ideal crime, the burglary victim was the ideal victim, and the burglar constituted the ideal offender. More recently, a shift in government priorities has resulted in burglary no longer being accorded the same emphasis by policy makers. This is explained in terms of it no longer being considered the ideal crime. At the same time, burglary victims have been replaced by other victims considered more deserving, and other offenders who more starkly epitomise the evil outsider. While a change of direction may bring additional help for victims previously ignored, it is regrettable that the burglary victim may be returning to obscurity.

Key Words: victim policy; crime reduction; burglary; ideal victim.

The concept of the ideal victim

The concept of the 'ideal' victim was famously introduced by Neils Christie (1986) to identify the type of victim who would evoke the most public sympathy and, partly as a result, elicit the most state support. Thus, in western industrial societies an example of the ideal victim would be a frail old lady walking home in the middle of the day after caring for her sick sister, violently assaulted by a large man who steals her purse and uses the proceeds to buy drugs. In contrast, a far-from-ideal victim would be a young man drinking heavily in a bar, assaulted an acquaintance who he provoked. While most real victims and real offenders are ordinary people, not the 'ideals', Christie suggests that victim and offender policies are based around these stereotypes.

In essence, then, for Christie the ideal victim is:

- Weak relative to the offender.
- Behaving in a law-abiding and not reckless manner.
- Blameless.
- Unrelated to the offender who is a 'stranger'.
- Either influential or evoking sympathy, without threatening vested interests.

Note, however, that characteristics of the offender also contribute towards whether the victim is considered 'ideal', largely in terms of being different to the victim: strong where the victim is vulnerable; a stranger; and an outsider where the victim is a valued member of society.

The concept of the ideal, or deserving victim, is commonly used in the UK to account for the development of criminal injuries compensation (Miers 2007). It has also been used extensively in discussions of policy and practice *vis a vis* rape cases, both in terms of an historic reluctance to prosecute and with regard to explaining why some cases are proceeded with and others not (Larcombe 2002), as well as – more recently – sex trafficking (Milivojevic and Copic 2010). In this article, rather differently, it is used to account for the fact that in the UK since the 1970s policies aimed at victim support and crime prevention have, until recently, focused disproportionately on burglary. In arguing that the burglary victim was perceived as the ideal victim, a modified version of Christie's model is used. Namely, in terms of:

- The ideal crime, which should be:
 - Common
 - High impact
 - And fit policy priorities
- The ideal victim, who should be:
 - Blameless
 - Vulnerable
 - Cooperative
- The ideal offender, who should be:
 - Unknown
 - But assumed different and unrelated to the victim.

The following section considers the emergence of burglary-related policies from the 1970s to the turn of the century. The next section assesses these developments using the concept of the ideal victim. Subsequent sections then focus on recent shifts in emphasis.

The place of burglary in the emergence of victim services and crime reduction in the UK

Victim Services

In England and Wales, the first Victim Support scheme was launched in Bristol in 1974 as an independent charity relying on the co-operation of statutory agencies such as the police, probation service and magistracy. Over the next thirty years the organization expanded to cover the whole of England and Wales, Northern Ireland and the Channel Islands, incorporating both community-based services and court services. Scotland had its own, separate organisation.

The original scheme, in Bristol, prioritised burglary victims (Gay, Holton and Thomas 1975; Maguire and Corbett 1987) and as Victim Support expanded into a national

service, burglaries came to dominate its case files (Simmonds 2013). In 1985, for example, some 80% of referrals were of victims of burglary (Mawby and Gill 1987). Since then, one of the most dramatic changes has been in the increase in help for victims of more interpersonal crimes. For example, by 1998/99 only 38% of Victim Support's referrals were burglary victims and Victim Support dealt with 4,184 rape cases and 671 homicides (Victim Support 2000, 10). Nevertheless, Victim Support's (1995a) *Codes of Practice* identified burglary, along with thefts (excluding vehicle related thefts), robbery, assaults (other than domestic violence), criminal damage and arson, as crimes that should 'automatically' be referred to schemes. Victim Support's continued emphasis on burglary was reaffirmed in its *Burglary in Britain* campaign, of which Tarling and Davison's (2000) literature review was the first stage.

Moreover, secondary analysis of the 1998 BCS by Maguire and Kynch (2000) demonstrated that: burglary victims were disproportionately likely to be contacted by Victim Support (53% compared with 29% for all relevant victims). Where contacted, burglary victims were also relatively likely to be visited – in 30% of cases. As a result, 46% of respondents who said they had received a visit were burglary victims.

Similarly, in Plymouth, Simmonds (2005) found that of 4,939 victims offered support by Plymouth Victim Support in 1998/1999, 2,376 involved 'simple' burglary, 71 artifice burglary and 18 aggravated burglary. Furthermore, the support offered differed markedly according to crime type. Taking seven days in May 1998, she found that almost all those visited were burglary victims (89%) and indeed 82% of victims of household burglary were visited and most of the remainder (15%) sent a letter. Detailed research on a sample of 90 burglary victims revealed that in only 3% of these was no attempt at contact made, with 23% written to and the remainder visited.

The trend towards prioritising victims of other crimes, however, continued, and by 2006 only 18% of Victim Support's community service referrals were burglary victims, with 39% victims of violence (Victim Support 2007). Despite this, the proportion of all recorded domestic burglaries referred to Victim Support still exceeded that for any other offence, and as late as 2005, Victim Support (2005b) produced a report investigating the practical support needs of burglary victims.

The distinctiveness of Victim Support in England and Wales in prioritising burglary victims was also underlined by the international crime victims survey (ICVS). At the time of the third survey, as many as 21% of burglary victims in England and Wales received help; none in the USA sample, and 6% in the Netherlands (Mayhew and van Dijk 1997, 44-46). The fourth survey similarly noted that most support for burglary was offered in the UK (van Kesteren, Mayhew and Nieuwebeerta 2001, 72-73), a pattern confirmed by the 2004/05 survey (van Dijk, van Kesteren and Smit 2008).

Crime Reduction Initiatives

When, in the 1980s and 1990s, crime reduction policies that aimed to prevent crime through increased street patrols and target hardening of property became a key feature of government policy, burglary was also the crime at the centre of such

initiatives. Thus, neighbourhood watch, while targeting a variety of crimes, such as vehicle-related thefts and vandalism, placed significant emphasis on the prevention of burglary (Dowds and Mayhew 1994; Laycock and Tilley 1995; Sims 2001). In particular, though, the target hardening of residential property, primarily to prevent burglary, became the central component of crime reduction policies towards the end of the twentieth century (Maguire 2004).

Ownership of home security devices increased dramatically in the 1990s (Mirrlees-Black et al 1998), and to a greater extent than in other western societies (Mayhew and van Dijk 1997, 52-55). It was also notable that experience of a burglary led to a marked upgrading of security: whereas only 47% of burglary victims had window locks at the time of the offence, by the time of their interview for the BCS this had risen to 70% (Mirrlees-Black et al 1998, 49).

A major problem here, though, was that those who were best able to afford such extra security were, arguably, least at risk of future burglary, whilst poorer inner-city residents, or those in the most deprived public-sector were least likely to increase their security following a burglary (Wojcik et al 1997). As a result, numerous crime reduction initiatives in disadvantaged areas of the UK, especially areas of predominantly public housing, have involved government investment. These included the Kirkholt burglary reduction project developed in the late 1980s (Forrester, Chatterton and Pease 1988; Pease 1991; Tilley 1993), and other initiatives within the Safer Cities programme (Eckblom, Law and Sutton (1996), the Secured by Design (SBD) initiative (Armitage 2000; Cozens, Pascoe and Hillier 2004; Pascoe and Topping 1997), the Burglary Reduction Initiative ¹ launched in 1998 as part of the government's Crime Reduction Programme (Maguire 2004; Tilley 2004; Tilley et al 1999), and projects targeting older people such as *Locks for Pensioners* (Mawby and Jones 2006) and the Distraction Burglary initiative (Thornton et al 2003). Many, including the Kirkholt project, prioritized recent victims of burglary in recognition of the fact that reducing repeats was the most effective way of cutting overall burglary rates (Farrell and Pease 1993; National Board for Crime Prevention 1994).

Much of the emphasis in these initiatives was upon target hardening – locks and bolts, lighting and alleygating – although some have incorporated social prevention, especially neighborhood watch based schemes, and others, for example the Distraction Burglary initiative, have prioritised educating vulnerable groups.

The rise and rise of the burglary victim as the ideal victim in the late 20th century

How, then, should we account for this preoccupation with burglary and the burglary victim? It is argued that in the UK at the time burglary could be seen as the ideal crime, against the ideal victim, committed by the ideal offender. It was the ideal crime, in that burglary was: relatively common; had considerable impact on victims; and gelled with the policies promoted by the Major and Blair governments. It produced the ideal victim, in that victims of burglary were perceived to be: blameless;

¹ Subsequently renamed Reducing Burglary initiative.

vulnerable; and cooperative. And it was committed by the ideal offender: unknown but presumed unconnected to the victim.

The ideal crime

Burglary has not always been singled out as a major problem. Indeed, the late Chief Constable of Greater Manchester, James Anderton, went on record to question the assumption that the police should devote extra resources to what was, after all, 'only' a property crime.² However, by the late 1980s, the status of burglary, or at least *household* burglary, had been transformed to the extent that it was seen in the UK almost as 'public enemy number one' (Mawby 2001). Certainly, official statistics and victim survey data suggested that, after vehicle-related crime, burglary was the most common property crime, and the ICVS demonstrated, unequivocally, that the risk of household burglary was comparatively great in England and Wales compared with other western societies (van Kesteren et al 2001; Mayhew and van Dijk 1997, 21). Equally, police and victim survey data suggested a steady increase in burglary rates until the mid-1990s, with the British Crime Survey (BCS) identifying 6.4% of households as victims in 1995. At the same time public perception of burglary as a major threat was established through public opinion polls as well as the BCS, with worry about burglary peaking in 1993 in England and Wales (Chaplin, Flatley and Smith 2011). Paralleling variations in risk, the ICVS suggested that anxiety about being burgled in England and Wales was higher than in most other western societies (van Kesteren et al 2001; Mayhew and van Dijk 1997, 50).

Added to this was an increasing recognition that burglary had a significant impact upon its victims. Again, BCS data revealed that many victims of burglary were greatly affected. Indeed, cross-national research demonstrated that the UK phrase, 'An Englishman's home is his castle', was replicated elsewhere, with unlawful entry to the home seen as an invasion of privacy (Mawby 2001). Moreover, concern that the householder might be confronted by the burglar often evoked fear and sleeplessness. The extent to which victims experience anxiety and concern was well illustrated in Maguire's (1980) early research, and reiterated by Mawby and Walklate (1997) who noted the wider implications for children in the home. Donaldson (2003) also suggested that older victims might suffer severe health ramifications as a result. In the US, Dugan (1999) identified a significant minority of victims who subsequently chose to move home after being burgled. However, the impact was not usually so great that victims required professional help. From the first, burglary was identified by Victim Support as the most appropriate crime for schemes to target because it was seen as more traumatic than other property crimes, but - unlike violence - not so serious that victims would need *professional* help (Gay, Holton and Thomas 1975), nor indeed, as introducing any potential danger to an unannounced caller. The Victim Support ideal of help being provided by local volunteers offering 'tea and sympathy' thus ideally fitted the needs of burglary victims (Mawby and Gill 1987).

At the same time, burglary appeared as the perfect crime from a policy perspective at a time when the 'nothing works' philosophy of sentencing (Martinson 1974) led to an emphasis on preventing crime through target hardening and design changes. In this context it mattered little if offenders remained undetected when the focus was on

² See for example: www.theweek.co.uk/comment/1297, accessed 21/04/12.

modifying the target to make successful offending more difficult. Social crime prevention, where services were directed at the offender and the environment that gave birth to offenders thus gave way to situational crime prevention (Gilling 1994; Pease 2002) with the emphasis on the place where crimes occurred. Reducing burglary was the ideal target for such initiatives, where approaches such as routine activity theory (Felson and Cohen 1980) could be used to identify features of target exposure (the visibility and accessibility of the home) and guardianship (the extent to which the home was protected) that explained different rates of burglary and provided theoretical justification for deploying burglar alarms, window and door locks and bolts, and later alleygating (Armitage 2000; Bowers, Johnson and Hirschfield 2004) as the government's flagship approaches to crime reduction.

The ideal victim

Burglary also produced the ideal victim, in that victims of burglary were considered blameless, vulnerable, and cooperative.

Of course, not all burglary victims were blameless: for example, in cases of fraud, which occurred either as insurance scams or when offenders broke into pay meters in their own homes, and negligence, where windows or doors were left open or insecure. However, in the vast majority of burglaries, victims were seen as blameless. This contrasted with violent and sexual crimes, where offenders often knew their attackers, and where they may have been seen as acting provocatively, leading to the common practice of victim blaming. Thus, where BCS data suggested that those who spent more time away from their homes were more likely to experience both personal and property crimes, their behaviour was more at risk of condemnation where they were attacked in the street after dark than where their homes were broken into when left empty in the evening. This led services like *Victim Support* to reassure victims that the crime was not their fault. Indeed, until repeat victimisation gained recognition among policymakers, victims were often told that it was 'bad luck' that they had been targeted and that the burglar was unlikely to return. And even with the introduction of policies aimed at reducing repeat burglary, the emphasis was on educating victims and providing additional resources rather than apportioning blame. A similar perspective applied in the case of policies targeting elderly victims.

Statistics also suggested that in some respects, if by no means all, victims were vulnerable. Thus, while there was no evidence that women or older people were more at risk of burglary – indeed quite the opposite – police and BCS data demonstrate clearly that burglary was concentrated in poorer, inner city areas and deprived estates of public housing. Government initiatives aimed at target hardening homes on council estates, especially where, as in the case of the Homesafe initiative, they were tied into home insulation drives, took on the mantle of welfare projects. A similar philosophy applied in the case of projects targeting older victims.

But what made the typical burglary victim particularly attractive to policy makers was the fact that they were generally perceived as cooperative. While this was somewhat misplaced, and the notion of victims as expressing anger was largely ignored in favour of the fragile victim (Ditton et al 1999), it was also evident that – unlike in the

case of violent crimes where victims often expressed dissatisfaction with, hostility, and even aggression towards the police, the BCS and police satisfaction surveys revealed burglary victims to be relatively positive about the services they received (Bunt and Mawby 1994): eerily so, given that the police rarely made an arrest and goods were even more rarely returned. Clearly, victims were the beneficiaries of insurance payouts, but equally clearly this impacted on victims' wider levels of satisfaction. For example, insured victims were more positive in their assessments of police than were uninsured victims (Wojcik, et al 1997).

The ideal offender

Burglary was the ideal crime against the ideal victim, but, linked to these was the perception that it was committed by the ideal offender. Since he – and the offender was generally male (Mawby 2001) - was rarely caught, supposition surrounded offender imagery. But the very fact that the offender was usually unknown added to the victims' worries, with interviewed victims often expressing concern that since they didn't know who had burgled their property they suspected everyone - milkman, window cleaner, neighbours – who had any vague knowledge of when their home was empty, or what valuables they might have. An underlying effect of the burglary, then, was destruction of trust in those around them.

But while it was commonly recognised that burglars travelled relatively short distances to commit their crimes (Bottoms and Wiles 2002), and that, consequently, suspicion of others living or working in the area might well be justified, there was clear water between victims and burglars. Burglars were, socially and morally, outsiders, confirmed as such through the imagery of invasion. Despite the fact that burglars rarely carried out or threatened violence, and that property damage was generally restricted to what was necessary to gain access, the portrayal of the burglar as engaged in irrational aggression and gratuitous vandalism was presented (Walsh 1980) and reproduced by scarcely disinterested insurance companies.

The place of burglary in victim services and crime reduction in the UK today

Victim policies have continued to expand. Crime reduction policies have tended to stagnate and lose momentum. However, in each case the centrality of burglary to policies aimed at helping victims and reducing crime has, arguably, been lost.

Victim Services

Victim Support is still the dominant agency offering support to victims in the UK. But it is now a very different agency, offering a very different service. To a large extent this is at the behest of New Labour (Simmonds 2012), as can be seen in current controversy over the Alliance's proposals to reformulate victim policy and victim services (Ministry of Justice 2012).

While Victim Support continues as an NGO with charitable status, the nature of the organisation has changed dramatically since its inception. This has taken place in

two phases. Firstly, at the turn of the century, local schemes were incorporated within a new structure of 49 new Area charities and co-ordinated borough charities in London. This resulted in local offices, based in some cases in small towns, being closed, with services centralised. Additional funding from the Home Office allowed for the introduction of a new layer of professional management at area level (National Audit Office 2002).

Secondly, beginning in 2007 this revised federal structure was abandoned and a single Victim Support charity created covering England and Wales. Scotland remained separate, although it too moved to a centralised structure, and Northern Ireland and the smaller island schemes also became independent. By July 2008 all former member charities had merged with the then National Office. Victim Support thus became a national body covering England and Wales, albeit represented locally through a regional structure.

This transformation of the organisational structure of Victim Support in part reflects and has been encouraged by governments' concern over the accountability of the service, especially in terms of lack of any measurement of effectiveness and efficiency (National Audit Office 2002). This in itself reflects a dramatic growth in Victim Support's income and expenditure, especially related to government funding. In 2010-2011 the charity's income was £57.8 million, £45 million of which came from the Ministry of Justice (74.4%), which took over responsibility for its funding when the Home Office was subdivided, while other public sectors' money accounted for £10.3 million (17.8%). This £45 million reflected a 50% increase in government funding in five years (Victim Support 2011a; *ibid.* 2011b).³

Nevertheless, Victim Support continues to depend on volunteers, albeit the number of volunteers and the ratio of volunteers to employees have declined. In 2010-2011 there were over 6,500 trained volunteers and around 1,500 staff in England and Wales: a shift from 15.2 volunteers per staff member in 1999 to 4.3 in 2011. Although the most dramatic decline in volunteers has been due to the abandoning of local management committees, there has also been a decline in volunteers at the front line, possibly reflecting increased competition in the use of volunteers by other organisations.

More recent published figures from Victim Support make no distinction according to crime type. However, unpublished statistics for 2010-2011, combining community and witness support, suggest that burglary still features prominently, albeit dwarfed by the figures for contact crime. Moreover, burglary victims, rather than being prioritised for a personal visit, are now predominantly contacted by letter or phone call, with visits reserved for more serious crimes. One recent example of Victim Support's move into dealing with the most serious crime is its national homicide service, launched in March 2010 and funded through a grant of £2 million per year from the Ministry of Justice. It is managed by a senior police officer, seconded from the Metropolitan Police for two years, and staffed by thirty employees based in five regions across England and Wales, each consisting of a team leader with support and caseworkers. The service, for this offence, thus heralds a further shift away from the volunteer principle. During the first year of operation the service was notified of

³ Additional data here provided by Victim Support England and Wales.

approximately 600 cases and supported over 1,000 bereaved people.

Despite moves by the coalition government towards decentralisation and the resourcing of victim services at police authority level through the new Police and Crime Commissioners, the emphasis of the Ministry of Justice (2012) discussion document is on concentrating services on the most serious crimes and the neediest victims. In such circumstances, it seems unlikely that burglary will feature high on the agenda.

Crime Reduction Initiatives

While Victim Support has continued to expand, crime reduction initiatives have tended to stagnate. In the case of Neighbourhood Watch, this reflects a lack of momentum going back to the turn of the century. At that time 27% of households in England and Wales described themselves as members of a scheme (Sims 2001), but there has been little evidence of any sustained growth in neighbourhood watch participation since then and questions on involvement have been quietly dropped from recent British Crime Surveys. Sustaining the momentum proved difficult, both in low crime areas where schemes saw little action and in high rate areas where intra-area conflicts pressurised members to opt out, and it is unlikely that rhetoric on the Big Society will have any effect.

In contrast, centrally funded burglary reduction initiatives have faded with the coalitions' new priorities in a time of economic recession. The Reducing Burglary Initiative ⁴ has run its course, as have projects targeting older people such as the Distraction Burglary initiative and *Locks for Pensioners*, although in the latter case it is interesting that as part of the coalition's green priorities the home insulation arm of this initiative continues. A search of the *Directgov* website for burglary reveals the headline: 'Homes with no security measures in place are five times more likely to be burgled than those with simple security measures. Good window locks and strong deadlocks can make a big difference.' ⁵ It continues with advice on measures you can take to reduce risk, including target hardening, and provides links to other websites on bogus calls, neighbourhood watch, and victim services, ⁶ but offers no substantial support. While it is likely that funding is available locally for burglary prevention initiatives in some areas, in this case the Big Society limits its intervention to the provision of advice.

The rise and fall of the burglary victim as the ideal victim in the 21st century

One part of an explanation for the demise of the burglary victim from government's harm minimisation and crime reduction agendas is that the burglary is no longer the ideal crime, the burglary victim no longer the ideal victim, and the burglar no longer the ideal offender.

⁴ Subsequently renamed Reducing Burglary initiative.

⁵ http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/CrimeJusticeAndTheLaw/Typesofcrime/DG_182053

⁶ Currently (26/04/12) listing 25 services, including Victim Support nationally, two local area links, and 22 other services, many unrelated to burglary.

The not-so-ideal crime

Firstly, and at least partly due to the success of the various burglary reduction programmes, burglary is far less common than it was two decades ago. Burglary rates, as recorded by the BCS, rose in 2010/2011 (Chaplin, Flatley and Smith 2011), but until then had shown a downward pattern. Indeed, BCS and police figures for domestic burglary each revealed increases in incidents of domestic burglaries between 1981 (when BCS measurement began) and the early 1990s. Thereafter, decreases were seen up to 2004/05. In more recent years the rate of fall in recorded burglaries has slowed considerably and BCS rates have generally remained the same. According to the BCS,⁷ then, the proportion of households experiencing a burglary fell from a peak of 6.4% in 1995 to 2.2% in 2009/10. Allied to this, public concern over burglary, as measured by perceptions of risk and worry, also fell. For example, the percentage worried about burglary peaked at 26% in 1994 and thereafter fell to 13% in 2010/11.

Moreover, despite the research evidence, there appears to be a growing assumption that burglary impacts minimally on victims, and that services should be targeted at more serious, particularly contact, crimes, a notion implicit in the government's discussion paper (Ministry of Justice 2012), and evidenced in the resourcing of homicide support services. Changes to Victim Support, with more, better qualified, paid staff and resources ring fenced to allow the buying in of specialist support (Victim Support 2011a; *ibid.* 2011b) also mean that Victim Support feels more confident about providing support to severely affected victims, most notably victims of contact crime.

At the same time, burglary appears less attractive from a policy perspective as target hardening and design changes have been superseded by a renewed emphasis on dealing with offenders through firstly cognitive programmes and more recently restorative justice initiatives. While Nation and Arnott's (1991) early work on the Plymouth victim/burglar project was a rare foray into restorative work with burglars, it illustrated the difficulties of providing offender/victim interchange where most offenders went undetected, and clearly restorative justice programmes are more practicable for contact crimes with a high detection rate.

The not-so-ideal victim?

It is more contentious to suggest that burglary victims are no longer 'ideal'. To imply that they are not blameless, vulnerable, and cooperative would be to enter a political minefield. Nevertheless, it is now more widely accepted that most victims react with anger (Ditton et al 1999), and examples of burglary victims 'fighting back' and attacking – sometimes fatally – burglars are a stark reminder that victims are not always cooperative and may cause embarrassment to government.⁸ Moreover, burglary victims' claims to vulnerability have been overtaken by emphasis upon

⁷ Now renamed the CSEW (Crime Survey England and Wales.)

⁸ See for example the cases of:

Tony Martin (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/law/2011/oct/31/self-defence-law-legislation-pr>)

Munir Hussain (<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/england/beds/bucks/herts/8469850.stm>)

Omari Roberts (<http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2010/apr/19/burglary-murder-charge-dropped>)

'newly discovered' groups of victims: sexually abused children, victims of sex trafficking, hate crime victims etc.

The not-so-ideal offender

Similarly, the burglary is no longer the ideal offender. Renewed emphasis upon 'dealing with' (punitively or restoratively) known offenders tends to side-line offences where detection rates are low. Indeed, any emphasis on such crimes is an embarrassment to a government aiming to be tough on crime. Moreover, the folk devil of the unknown burglar has been supplanted by more powerful images of evil: child sex offenders, people traffickers, racist thugs etc. In such company, burglars who do not attack or threaten their victims pale into insignificance.

Summary and Discussion

The emergence of victim services and crime reduction policies in the UK in the later part of the twentieth century was paralleled by a concentration on burglary as the focal point of government policies aimed at harm reduction and crime prevention. The notion of the ideal victim is a useful way of explaining this.

This article revises Christie's construction of the ideal victim, distinguishing three dimensions:

- The ideal crime
- The ideal victim
- The ideal offender

It is argued that burglary was the ideal crime because it was relatively common, it provoked anxiety among the general population, it had considerable impact on victims, and it was in tune with governments' preoccupation with target hardening and designing out crime. At the same time, the burglary victim was the ideal victim, being considered blameless, vulnerable, and cooperative. Finally, the burglar constituted the ideal offender as an unknown 'outsider'.

The early twenty-first century has, however, seen a shift in government priorities with the result that burglary is no longer considered the ideal crime, burglary victims have been replaced by other victims considered more deserving, and burglars by other offenders who more evidently epitomise the evil outsider.

This is in part understandable. However, in a time of limited resources crime and harm reduction policies are indeed part of a zero-sum equation and it is undoubtedly the case that burglary victims and potential victims will lose out. Victims services for burglary victims did meet a need in providing necessary support; burglary reduction policies did help reduce levels of burglary (Mawby 2007). A change of direction may bring additional help for victims previously ignored, but it is regrettable if it does so at the expense of those exposed to burglary.

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