Burglaries in France: An Exploratory Analysis of the Characteristics of Victims and their Environments

Vincent Delbecque[A] and Inès Bettaïeb[B]

A total of 4.8% of households in mainland France were victims of a burglary at their principal residence between 2005/2006 and 2012/2013.

Among all of these households and according to their sociodemographic characteristics, it is estimated that those least affected by these types of offenses were households made up principally of single people in a disadvantaged socioeconomic position (economically inactive or unemployed). About 4.5% of this group were victims of such offenses, compared with 5.3% of households made up of socioeconomically comfortable couples.

The proportion of victims is also linked to the household's type of accommodation. Only 4.2% of households identified as tenants of a small apartment reported having been victims. Conversely, 5.3% of homeowners (or mortgagors) of large detached houses have been victims of these types of offenses.

Finally, the proportion of victims varies depending on the type of neighborhood of residence. The highest proportions of victims were observed among residents of densely inhabited or residential zones in the suburbs, with 5.4% of such households having been victims of these offenses in contrast to 4.5% among households living in densely populated and multifamily environments in downtown areas, and 4.7% in rural or periurban, low-density areas composed of individual housing units.

Keywords: cycle, crime rates, security, homicides, organized crime, police, private security, corruption, social controls, cyclical theory.

Introduction

Burglaries[1] are a form of attack that stimulates both public debate and criminology research. They provoke public debate because after a steady decline in France and in most developed countries since the 1990s, the number of burglaries increased significantly between 2008 and 2013. This increase led governments to implement special preventative and informational measures aimed at citizens. This was

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[A] Deputy head of statistics, French National Supervisory Body on Crime and Punishment (Observatoire national de la délinquance et des réponses pénales (ONDRP))

[B] Researcher, ONDRP

[1] Burglaries is defined as forcible entry, unlawful entry where no force is used, and attempted forcible entry.

the case in France,[2] and also in Switzerland, Great Britain, and Belgium. For security and prevention policies to be effective, it is necessary to bring all of the available information to the attention of public decision makers and citizens.

Criminology, meanwhile, has paid particular attention to this topic, aiming to describe and explain its workings through the development of various theories. Three main currents allow us to grasp this issue by means of general or individual approaches, focusing either on the perpetrator alone or on the relationship between the perpetrator, the victim, and the surrounding circumstances.

The phenomenon can be analyzed using a macro approach, according to which crime is to be explained on the basis of social disorganization (Shaw and McKay 1942), decreasing social control, and the inadequacy of institutional control.[3]

A more individual analysis of motivation can also be carried out on the basis of the concepts of control and opportunity. Rational-choice and opportunity theories (Cloward and Ohlin 1960) emphasize the cost-benefit calculations (the cost of the punishment against the benefits from the theft) carried out by the potential perpetrator on the one hand and the significance of the lack of surveillance for the opportunity represented by the theft on the other.

Routine activity theory offers a more comprehensive approach to crime and brings together a motivated perpetrator, a suitable target, and the absence or insufficiency of control (Cohen and Felson 1979).The importance attached to the victim and the situation opens up a rich seam of analytical possibilities in terms of victimology and prevention. Since the early 1980s, these theories have stimulated a major school of research, and in English-speaking countries and some European countries they have often been applied to the theme of burglaries, particularly as addressed on the basis of victimhood surveys (Tseloni, Wittebrood, and Pease 2004).

In France, however, this area remains little explored. Research on some aspects of burglary such as the circumstances (Rober, Zauberman, and Névanen 2011), security devices (Le Jeannic and Tournyol du Clos 2008), and the types of theft (Rizk 2010) has been produced based on the "Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" (Living Environment and Security (LES)) victimhood survey.

This study addresses the issue of burglaries from the point of view of the victim and of his or her environment by proposing a typology of households and a proportional measurement of victims of burglaries in France based on the LES survey. This work is therefore very much in line with routine activity theory, since it sheds light on the characteristics of potential victims (the suitable target) and their environments. This study is also significant at the national level, since it offers an analysis that complements the relevant French studies, which, to our knowledge, have only partially explored the victimological dimension of burglaries.

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[2] The Ministry of the Interior launched a national plan to combat burglaries in September 2013 (see: http://www.interieur.gouv.fr/content/download/84436/618928/file/2013_plan_national_de_lutte_con-tre_les_cambriolages_et_les_vols_a_main_armee.pdf).
[3] See Hirshi and Gottfredson (2005) for a summary of the subject.

To this end, we offer a typological analysis of households in mainland France, of the accommodation in which they live, and of their environment based on data from the LES surveys conducted between 2007 and 2014. We will first present the data and the methodological considerations related to the creation of the typology. Secondly, we will present the groups identified by the typology and the proportions of victims of burglaries, attempted burglaries, and thefts without forced entry for each of the profiles identified. Finally, we will discuss the significance of these results for empirical knowledge and with respect to potential public security policies.

Methodology

Source Data

In order to produce this study, we drew on data from the Living Environment and Security survey compiled by the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies (Institut national de la statistique et des études économiques(INSEE)). This survey, which has been conducted since 2007, aims to record the crimes of which households and their members may have been victims in the two years prior to the survey. It focuses on burglary, thefts from or damage to vehicles or homes, thefts against persons, physical violence, and threats or verbal abuse, and it covers both crimes that were the subject of a complaint and those that were not. It also focuses on the views of individuals concerning their living environment and security. Between fifteen thousand and seventeen thousand households answer the questionnaires each year. The sample of respondents is then weighted so that it is representative of the entire population of mainland France.

In researching the subject under consideration here, we used data from surveys conducted between 2007 and 2014 with households in mainland France. In particular, we drew on responses to questions concerning burglaries, attempted burglaries, and thefts without forced entry at the principal residence. In this study, this group of offenses may, for simplicity's sake, be referred to using the term "burglary."

Over the course of these surveys, around 132,000 households were interviewed. This sample was then weighted to be representative of the twenty-eight million households in mainland France during the period covered by the surveys. It is estimated that 4.8% of households reported having been victims of burglary, attempted burglary, or theft without forced entry in their principal residence during the two years preceding the survey.

In addition to issues relating to offenses against households and individuals, the survey allows households and individuals to be described according to their sociodemographic characteristics, their accommodation, and their neighborhood of residence. These characteristics may be those of the household reference person, all of the household, the relevant accommodation, or the surrounding environment. The descriptions of these were given either by the person interviewed or by the interviewer when the survey was carried out.

We were therefore able to draw on a set of indicators bearing both on the victimhood reported by households and on the elements that facilitated the characterization of households, their occupants, and their living environment detailed in table 1 and in appendix A4.

Table 1: Summary of the characteristics of households, their accommodation, and their neighborhood.

	Characteristics of the household	**Characteristics of the accommodation**	**Characteristics of the neighborhood**
Variables	• Educational qualification of the reference person • Household income • Marital status • Type of household • Professions and socio-professional categories of the reference person • Employment status • Age of the reference person	• "Legal status" • Surface area • Presence of a watchperson • Number of security devices • Presence of a dog • Type of accommodation	• Centrality • Size of the urban area • Type of neighborhood • Sensitive Urban Zone (SUZ) • Knowledge of burglary

Source: *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey, INSEE-ONDRP*

Statistical Analysis

With regard to exploratory statistical analysis, taking household characteristics one by one allows the proportion of households corresponding to the values of each of the variables to be "measured." Although this "univariate" approach (a single variable studied at a time) provides very complete descriptive information, it has two main limitations.

The first limitation appears when there is a need to treat a large number of variables or characteristics. The completeness of the univariate analysis loses its significance in the face of the multiplicity of the results obtained, and the interpretation of these results loses clarity. In our case, we have available to us seventeen variables for a total of seventy values. The exploration of all of these variables individually would be tedious and would ultimately teach us little.

The second limitation is that univariate analysis does not allow for a description of the relationships that may exist between several characteristics. This task, however, is of particular interest because it allows associations between various factors to be established, and thus allows new information to be acquired. These associations can be determined two by two through bivariate analysis. But once again, the problem of the number of intersections between all of the characteristics and of the exploitation of these results in terms of usable information arises.

In order to overcome these limitations and offer an analysis of the characteristics of households that is both synthetic and informative, here we use multivariate analysis

methods. These are used to synthesize the available information, thus making it simpler to read and interpret. This study makes use of two multivariate analysis approaches.

The first is multiple correspondence analysis (MCA), which is used to synthesize all of the relevant factors and values into two composite indicators. It provides a graphical approach that aims to represent variables in a diagram and to measure their "proximity" or "likeness." This technique is not intended to create a priori categories; nevertheless, the graphical representation provides an illustration of the groups created during the typology (see below).

The second is classification, which facilitates the creation of a typology of individuals in the statistical sense of the term (here, households), thus allowing them to be grouped into homogeneous sets according to certain characteristics.[4] We used these two techniques in a complementary manner and for exploratory purposes on profiles of households in mainland France, relying on the characteristics presented above.

The synthesis of information through MCA and the creation of a typology of households were subsequently used to estimate the rates and the differences in the rates of victimhood with regard to burglaries between different groups. As a result, it was possible measure the proportion of victims within each group and determine the profiles most at risk among the groups identified.

Results

Creation of the Typology

Here we jointly analyze the graphic results of the MCA and the creation of the typology resulting from the classification for each factor (sociodemographic, accommodation, neighborhood). It is worth recalling that MCA is not supposed to establish a priori groups, though the illustration that it offers is in line with the groups created by the classification. Readings of these results are therefore complementary.

The first MCA was carried out for households' socioeconomic conditions. Figure 1 allows the distance between the values of the characteristics to be visualized via a two-dimensional diagram,[5] and allows associations between them to be identified.

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[4] Readers interested in a fuller introduction to these methods may wish to consult Dehon, Droesbeke, and Vermandele (2008) or Saporta (2006).

[5] Two "axes" were defined for each of the three MCAs. Each axis is a combination of all the factors of origin and each factor makes its own contribution in each axis. Thus, the position of a value in the diagram depends on its weight on the first axis and on the second axis. For example, the value "un-employed" has a high and positive weight on the vertical axis and a very low weight on the horizontal axis. The reading of the position of each value taken individually allows the axes to be characterized, and the joint reading of the values allows the link that may exist between them to be demonstrated. The values associated with the axes (dimensions) in the graphs represent the representational capacity of each axis in the total dispersion of the values. In the case of figure 1, the two axes used allow around 18% (10.67 + 7.45) of the total dispersion of the values to be explained.

The two main axes around which the values are divided show a gradual increase in terms of level of income and level of educational qualification in the vertical dimension and of family status and activity in the horizontal dimension.

The grouping of characteristics notably brings out, in the upper part of the graph, a set of factors which may represent single people who may or may not have children (single parent families, not in a couple) and who are young (15–24 years). In the lower-right part of the graph, there are values that characterize intermediate and higher occupational classes, the upper-middle and upper classes, and graduate couples and individuals. Between these two groups on the right-hand side of the chart there is a set of values for people in couples who are employed, belong to a class aged between 25 and 54, and who have an educational qualification equivalent to the baccalaureate, the professional aptitude certificate, or the occupational studies diploma. In the lower left-hand part of the graph it is possible to distinguish in particular households whose reference person is inactive or a farmer and aged 65 and over. Finally, in the upper-left part, there is a grouping of characteristics that describe households belonging to the lower-middle classes or classes of modest means. These households comprise single people whose reference person is employed in a clerical or manual position.

The results of the classification (table 2) bring out four groups of households based on sociodemographic characteristics. The group of economically active couples with middle and upper income levels (denoted as H1) represents 30% of the households studied according to the classification made. This group consists of households characterized by the values located in the lower-right portion of figure 1.[6]

The second group identified by the classification brings together households of mostly young, economically active couples who belong to the "middle class" in terms of income, employment, and educational-qualification level (H2). This category comprises 20% of households.

Students or young graduates, mainly in employment and with high incomes (denoted as H3) (see table 1 for a more detailed description), and economically inactive older people make up the third group of households. Out of all of the resident households, 20% are assigned to this group according to the classification produced.

Finally, the classification includes in a single category households made up of a single person, with or without children, and households on low incomes whose reference person is unemployed or not economically active. This group includes precarious but economically active households and households of retirees. These two types of households have been grouped together (H4) on the basis that they both have low incomes. This group is the largest in terms of size; it alone accounts for nearly a third of the households surveyed.

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[6] See the Excel file in the appendix for the exact composition of the groups identified.

Figure 1: Sociodemographic characteristics of households

To view image, scan the QR code above, or go to:
http://www.ipsonet.org/publications/open-access/ijc/volume-3-number-2-fall-2015.

Source: *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey 2007-2014, Insee-ONDRP*

The graph resulting from the MCA carried out for the characteristics of households' accommodation is presented in figure 2. A smaller number of variables and values is used in this representation compared to the previous one, making it easier to interpret. The first group can be distinguished in the top right of the graph. It consists of accommodation with a surface area of less than 40 m², located in an apartment block of at least ten homes in which the occupants are private-sector tenants. In the lower-right part, the accommodation is characterized by the presence of a watchperson or concierge and two security devices. Moreover, these characteristics are also associated with accommodation in apartment blocks with over ten housing units and whose occupants are low-income-housing tenants.

In the left part (top and bottom), there is a grouping of owner-occupied households and those of mortgagors of individual houses or townhouses with a surface area greater than 70 m². With regard to security devices, this part of the chart includes both accommodation with no devices and accommodation with numerous devices (three or more).

The typology of households according to the characteristics of their accommodation led to a distinction between four classes of accommodation for residents of mainland France over the period 2007–2014.

As the MCA highlights, there are first of all small apartments whose occupants are tenants. These homes are mostly equipped with one or two safety devices and enjoy

the presence of a watchperson (A1). A total of 34% of the households are grouped in this category of accommodation.

Figure 2: Characteristics of households' accommodation

To view image, scan the QR code above, or go to:
http://www.ipsonet.org/publications/open-access/ijc/volume-3-number-2-fall-2015.

Source: *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey 2007-2014, Insee-ONDRP*

A second category is made up of apartments and small individual houses whose occupants are tenants. This accommodation, which has a surface area of between 40 and 70 m², is generally not equipped with security devices (A2). This category comprises around 12% of households and is thus the smallest in terms of the total number of people it contains.

The third category is characterized by the frequent presence of townhouses whose occupants are mortgagors. This accommodation is not specifically characterized by the number of security devices, and its surface area is usually between 70 and 100 m² (A3). In total, 20% of all households are grouped in this category.

Large, detached houses constitute the last accommodation category. They are associated with the fairly frequent presence of a dog, and the occupants are mostly homeowners or mortgagors. In terms of security devices, both homes that have no devices and those that have many (three devices or more) are grouped together here. This group therefore does not in itself represent a single majority equipment level (A4). This type of accommodation accounts for 30% of the households interviewed during the survey and therefore constitutes the largest group by size.

Figure 3: Characteristics of households' neighborhoods

To view image, scan the QR code above, or go to:
http://www.ipsonet.org/publications/open-access/ijc/volume-3-number-2-fall-2015.

Source: *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey 2007-2014, Insee-ONDRP*

     The third MCA was carried out on factors relating to households' neighborhoods. The two axes identified by the procedure present, in the vertical dimension, a distinction between downtown areas at the top, periurban and rural areas in the middle, and suburbs in the lower part. The horizontal dimension presents a distinction by urban area size and density (type of residential environment). Accordingly, in the top right we find households located in densely populated and central urban areas; in the lower-right part there are households located in outlying urban areas; and in the left side of the graph there are sparsely populated rural or periurban areas.

     The results produced by the MCA bring to light the links that exist between the different characteristics according to large groups of factors and thus make it possible to identify large groups of households for each of the types of factors used. This approach provides a graphical representation that is useful as a means of visualizing these groups. Nevertheless, an exclusively graphical approach may appear arbitrary and lacking in justification with regard to establishing relevant groups. This study also adopts a second, numerical approach, which aims to create a typology of households based on their statistical "likeness."

     The results of the classification presented below were obtained using the same data as was used for the MCAs. As a result, they can be interpreted in a complementary fashion. The types identified can be illustrated by the graphic results presented previously while also providing these with a statistical justification. Indeed, the

classification methods not only allowed homogeneous groups to be identified, but also allowed the optimal number of groups to be determined by minimizing intragroup heterogeneity and maximizing heterogeneity between groups.[7]

The groups of neighborhoods were established using indicators on the size of the urban area, the degree of centrality, the type of residential environment, and the proximity to Sensitive Urban Zones (SUZ) of the place of residence of the household surveyed. An indicator of the households' knowledge of the existence of burglaries in the neighborhood was also integrated into these factors.

Based on all these characteristics, the classification offers a grouping of households according to three types of neighborhood or environment, which correspond to the groups identified visually on the basis of the results of the MCA.

The first neighborhood group is characterized by a mixed residential environment (apartment blocks and houses) located in a suburban area with a large population size. A total of 23% of the households that responded to the survey were classified in this group.

The second group is characterized by a rural or periurban situation located at a distance from a SUZ and made up of a sparsely populated residential environment and a small population size. Within this group, households tend to be aware of burglary in their circle. This category comprises about 44% of households and therefore contains the largest number of people.

Downtown areas, which consist of a dense residential environment within or close to a SUZ and which have a large population, constitute the third group. These neighborhoods are also characterized by respondents' low awareness of the existence of burglaries. The households included in this group represent just over a third of all households residing in mainland France (*33%*).

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[7] See note 1.

Table 2: Description of the groups identified by the typology

| Characteristics related to the...	Group	Name	Description	Proportion
Neighborhood	**N1**	Suburb, mixed residential environment	SUZ in the (distant) urban area; area of apartment blocks and houses; suburbs; more than 100,000 inhabitants; no special knowledge of burglaries	22.7
	N2	Rural/periurban, low-density residential environment	Rural or periurban; far away from SUZs; scattered houses or residential area of houses, fewer than 20,000 inhabitants; tendency to be aware of burglaries in the neighborhood	44.3
	N3	Downtown, densely populated residential environment	Neighborhood in or close to a SUZ; estate or area of apartment blocks; downtown; more than 20,000 inhabitants; little knowledge of burglaries	33.1
Accommodation	**A1**	Apartment, small surface area, protected	Presence of a watchperson; one or two security devices; no dog; apartment block; tenant; 25–70 m²	33.9
	A2	Small individual house or apartment, not protected	No watchperson; no security device; individual house or apartment; tenant; 40–70 m²	12.2
	A3	Townhouse with little protection	No watchperson; not particularly well secured; townhouse; homeowner or mortgagor; 70–100 m²	20
	A4	Large detached house, no or many security features	No watchperson; equipped with few or many security devices; presence of a dog; individual house; homeowner or mortgagor; larger than 70 m²	33.9
Household	**H1**	Couple; economically active; middle/upper income	Couple without children; married; graduate; intermediate or higher occupational classes; in employment; middle or upper incomes; 35–65 years old	29.9
	H2	Couple; economically active; low income	Couple with child; low level of education; tradesperson or manual or clerical worker; in active employment; lower-middle class or class of modest means; 25–44 years old	20.4
	H3	Single person; higher income; in active employment or economically inactive	Single person or single parent family; no professions and socioprofessional categories, intermediate or higher occupational classes; in active employment or economically inactive; upper-middle or upper class; 15–24 years old and 55 years plus	19.5
	H4	Single, elderly person, modest income	Single person or single parent family; low educational level; tradesperson or manual or clerical worker; unemployed or economically inactive; lower-middle class or class of modest means; older than 45	30.3

Source: *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey, 2007–2014*

Victimhood Rates by Group

The classifications produced allow different groups of households to be identified on the basis of their sociodemographic characteristics, as well as those

of their accommodation and their neighborhood (tables 1 and 2). Thanks to this categorization, we are able to make an *ex post* estimate of the share of the victims within each of the groups while also verifying the significance of the differences in rates between the groups identified.

Figure 4: Types of households, and proportions and rates of victimhood
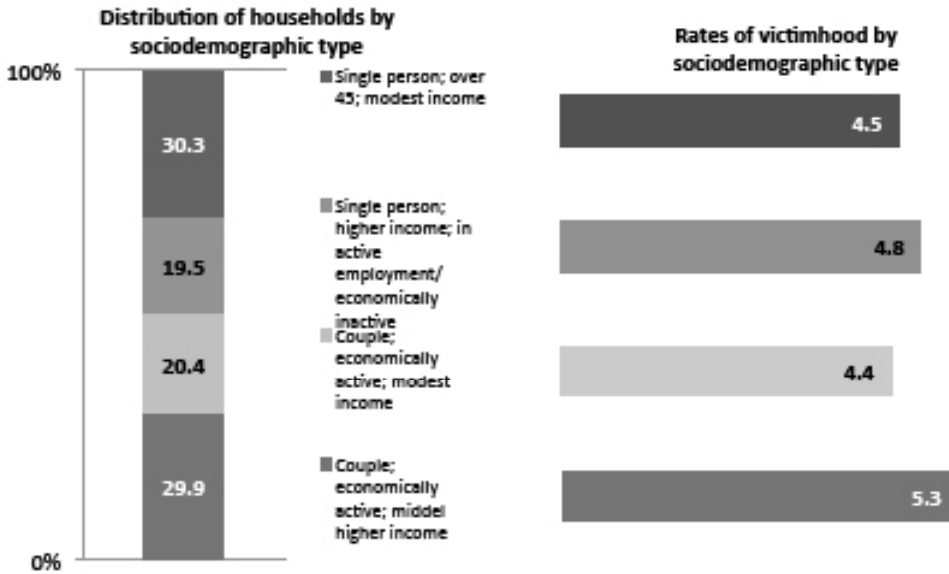
Source: *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey, 2007–2014, Insee-ONDRP, authors' calculations*
Field: *ordinary households, mainland France, rate of victimhood over two years*

The four groups of households identified on the basis of sociodemographic variables, rates of victimhood ranged from 4.4% to 5.3% (with an average rate of 4.8%) (figure 4). Within group H1, it is estimated that 5.3% of households reported themselves as victims. This is the highest rate among all of the four groups of households broken down by sociodemographic type. Over the same period, 4.4% of households in the H2 group reported having been victims of this type of offense. This was the lowest rate among all of the categories. Nevertheless, it is not significantly different from the rate for H4, in which 4.5% of respondents reported having been victims of burglary during the surveys conducted between 2007 and 2014. Among the households in group H3, 4.8% reported having been victims of the offense we are concerned with in this study.

The different rates of victimhood for these categories reveal that the factors of income and more broadly of belonging to a higher "social class" (higher-studies degree and high socio-professional category) are elements that are positively associated with the rate of victimhood. Conversely, households in precarious situations less frequently report having been victims of burglary than the other groups.

Based on accommodation characteristics, the classification has identified four groups of households. Among households in group A1, it is estimated that 4.2% reported having been victims of a burglary during the year preceding the survey. This

was the lowest rate for all accommodation groups. For groups A2, A3, and A4, the proportions of households that reported having been victims of burglary, attempted burglary, or theft without forced entry during the two years preceding the survey are estimated, respectively, at 5.1%, 4.5%, and 5.3%. However, the differences between groups A1 and A2 on the one hand and A3 and A4 on the other are not statistically significant (see table A3 in the appendices).

The groupings produced bring out a distinction between apartments and other homes, as well as a graduation according to the accommodation's surface area. This typology is relatively faithfully illustrated by figure 2, which is based on the MCA for the accommodation variables. Victimhood rates appear significantly higher for individual and large accommodation than for multifamily housing. The characterization of groups in terms of number of security devices is made difficult by the simultaneous presence of non-equipped and highly equipped accommodation in group A4. As such, we cannot comment on the link between the number of devices and the rate of victimhood.

Figure 5: Types of accommodation, and proportions and rates of victimhood
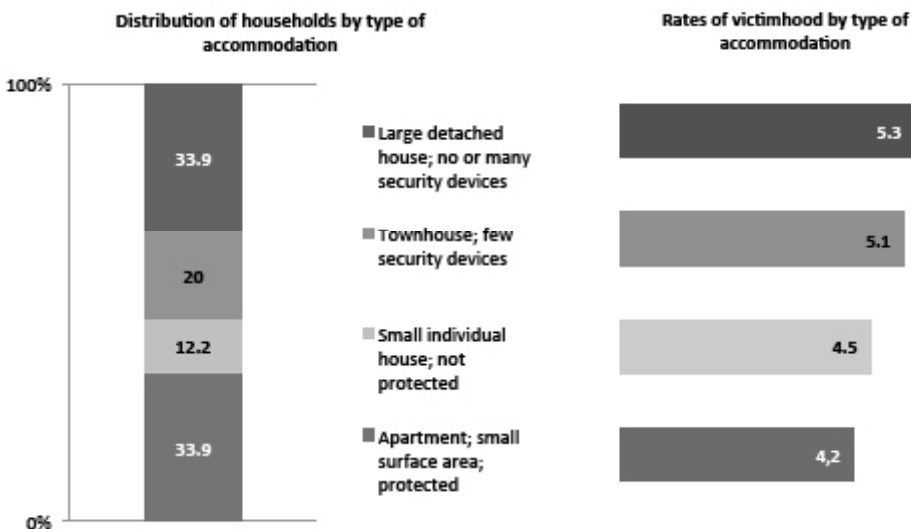
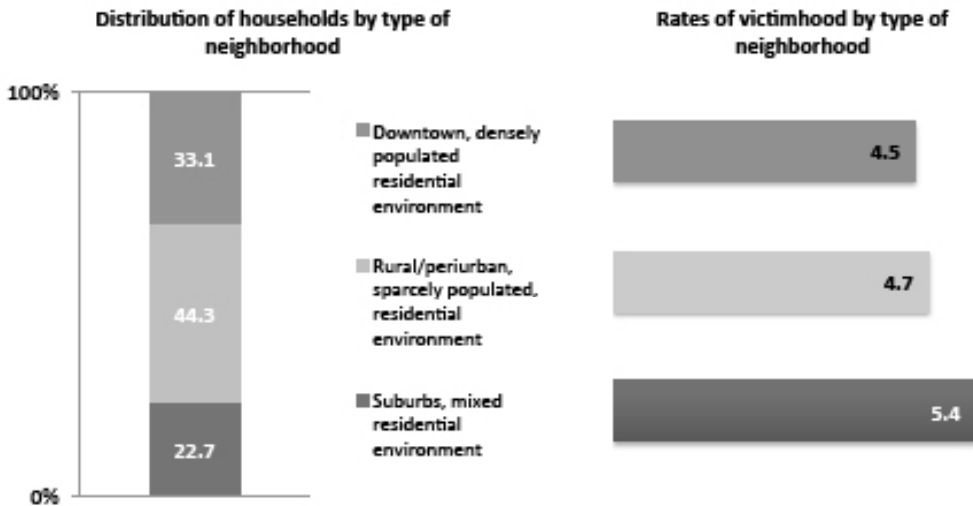**Source:** *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey, 2007–2014,Insee-ONDRP, authors' calculations*
Field: *ordinary households, mainland France, rate of victimhood over two years*

Finally, the third classification provides a grouping of households according to three neighborhood categories detailed in table 2.

It is within the category N3—households living in a downtown area—that we find the lowest rate of victimhood. A total of 4.5% of these households reported that they had been victims. In group N2, 4.7% of households reported having been victims of burglary, attempted burglary, or thefts without forced entry in the course of the surveys conducted between 2007 and 2014. 5.4% of households in group N3 said that they had been victims; this rate is not significantly different from that of group N2.

A reading of these results suggests that it is the households that live in the suburbs and in densely populated areas that reported suffering the most burglaries. Conversely, it is estimated that households located downtown or in rural areas were victims less frequently than the others. Their rate of victimhood is, respectively, 0.9 and 0.7 percentage points lower than that of the households located in the suburbs.

Figure 6: Types of neighborhoods, and proportions and rates of victimhood

Source: *"Cadre de Vie et Sécurité" survey, 2007–2014, Insee-ONDRP, authors' calculations*
Field: *ordinary households, mainland France, rate of victimhood over two years*

Discussion

The results of the typology of households here provide some important initial information for the analysis of the characteristics of households in mainland France. On the basis of the characteristics related to households themselves, or to their accommodation or their neighborhood, homogeneous groups are revealed through statistical grouping. The groups identified in this way can then be analyzed in terms of victimhood linked to burglaries.

The decision to use a classification method for the factors used in this study seems relevant with regard to routine activity theory. The estimated rates for all the groups of households appear most of the time to be significantly different from each other, and taking into account the characteristics of the victims and their environment has a significant impact on the rates of victimhood.

Two main results emerge from this study. Firstly, with regard to burglaries, higher rates of victimhood are associated with households in higher social classes and with large, individual accommodation (two situations that may be complementary). In this regard, the "suitable target" highlighted in routine activity theory matches up here with a criterion of wealth. Secondly, the indicators related to neighborhood

reveal a nonlinear link between the centrality of place of residence and the rate of victimization. Households located in low-density rural areas and those located in high-density downtown ones are less often victims than households in the peripheral suburban areas.

These initial results thus provide significant information with regard to public policy because they allow profiles of households that are more at risk of burglary to be highlighted. In consequence, the preventative measures that can be taken among the population can be adapted in light of these household characteristics.

This exploratory analysis needs to be expanded and completed, in particular by implementing analytical techniques to identify the effects of individual factors and by measuring their marginal effect on the likelihood of being a victim of this type of offense. In so doing, it would be possible to conduct more detailed analysis in terms of characteristics and to modulate the composition of the profiles of burglarized households.

Appendices

Click here to view Tables A1 through A4.

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