

Summary

Recidivism after high impact crimes

Recidivism of offenders of high impact crimes who were convicted between 2002 and 2013

For some years now, the term 'high impact crimes' (abbreviated HIC) has been used in the Netherlands to indicate offences that have a major impact on the victim, their social environment and the sense of security in society. Among the classic HIC offences are (violent) property crimes, such as domestic burglary, mugging and robbery. Recently, the government has made great efforts to combat the HIC problem, through various policy and safety programs and by setting up a Robbery Task Force.

In this report, we examine the recidivism of HIC offenders who were convicted between 2002 and 2013. Three HIC groups are distinguished: domestic burglars, muggers and robbers. This study is part of a five-year research program into recidivism among HIC offenders. In the present study, the research questions were:

- 1 How many individuals are convicted annually for domestic burglary, mugging and robbery?
- 2 What are the characteristics (personal and criminal case characteristics) of HIC offenders and how do the characteristics of this group compare to the characteristics of the total group of convicted offenders?
- 3 What is the recidivism rate among HIC offenders?
 - a Recidivism prevalence
 - What percentage of the domestic burglars, muggers and robbers came back into contact with the criminal justice system within two years of their HIC criminal case? How does the prevalence for this group compare to the prevalence of recidivism for the total group of convicted offenders? Three forms of recidivism are examined: general, HIC and special recidivism.
 - Focussing on robbers: what percentage of domestic robbers and of other robbers came back into contact with the criminal justice system within two years of their HIC criminal case?
 - b Recidivism frequency
 - How often do domestic burglars, muggers and robbers come back into contact with the criminal justice system within two years of their HIC criminal case? How does the frequency for this group compare to the frequency of recidivism for the total group of convicted offenders?
 - Focussing on robbers: how often did domestic robbers and other robbers come back into contact with the criminal justice system within two years of their HIC criminal case?
- 4 Which personal characteristics are related to whether or not HIC offenders reoffend and how do these compare to those for the total group of convicted offenders?
- 5 How do recidivism rates among HIC offenders develop over time, taking into account shifts in the background characteristics of offenders?

Method

The research was carried out according to the WODC recidivism monitor procedures and data from the Research and Policy Database for Judicial Information (OBJD) was used to measure recidivism. The OBJD is a pseudonymous version of the Justice Documentation System (JDS), the Dutch legal registration system for criminal cases. The use of the OBJD implies that only crime that comes to the Public Prosecution Service's attention is included in this research. Therefore, offences and offenders that are not detected by the police and are not prosecuted by the Public Prosecution Service are not taken into consideration.

The group examined in the current study includes offenders of domestic burglary, mugging and robbery who were prosecuted by the Public Prosecution Service between 2008 and 2013 and where a HIC offence was proven. More specifically, these are perpetrators for whom the HIC offence has irrevocably ended in a court order or has been settled by the Public Prosecution Service (including discretionary dismissals, but excluding acquittals, technical dismissals and other technical decisions).

To put the background characteristics and recidivism percentages of the convicted HIC offenders in perspective, these data are compared to the characteristics and recidivism rates of a reference group of all convicted offenders in the Netherlands. This reference group includes all offenders of a criminal offence in which the criminal case was terminated irrevocably in a court order or was settled by the Public Prosecution Service.

This study was carried out following the WODC recidivism monitor procedures. According to the recidivism monitor, recidivism is defined as the registration of a punishable offence (by an ex-offender) in the Judicial Documentation. There are a number of criteria for the measurement of recidivism. In this study three criteria are examined: general recidivism, HIC recidivism, and special recidivism. General recidivism refers to when a person is reconvicted for any new offence. HIC recidivism refers to when a person is reconvicted for a HIC offence. In this study, special recidivism refers to when a person is reconvicted for the same kind of offence as the original offence, that is a domestic burglary, mugging or robbery. Recidivism rates have been calculated using survival analysis. This is adjusted for incapacitation time, in other words, for the time that offenders were in detention and reoffending was not possible.

To see how the two-year recidivism prevalence among the HIC offenders developed between 2002 and 2013, adjusted recidivism rates have been calculated, in addition to the actual recidivism rates. Actual recidivism percentages are adjusted using a statistical prediction model. The reason for this correction is that fluctuations in the level of recidivism may be the result of shifts in the composition of a group over time. Indeed, as well as the background of the offenders, the risk profile of offenders can also change.

Key findings

The most important findings of the study are described below.

Total annual convictions

- Most of the HIC offenders convicted in 2013 committed domestic burglary (55%), followed by mugging (27%) and robbery (18%). The results do not show a clear trend in the number of convicted HIC offenders. The number of domestic burglars decreased between 2006 and 2009, before increasing again from 2010, reaching 2,300 by 2013. The number of muggers nearly halved between 2003 and 2009, and thereafter remained steady at around 1,100. The number of robbers decreased up until 2007, before increasing again to 780 in 2013.

Background characteristics: personal characteristics

- The overrepresentation of men appears to be greater for HIC offences than for criminal behaviour in general. About 95% of the domestic burglars, muggers and robbers convicted in 2013 were male, compared to 82% of the total group of offenders convicted in 2013.
- At the time of their HIC offence in 2013, nearly half of the convicted muggers were minors, compared to 16% of the domestic burglars, 19% of the robbers and 7% of perpetrators in general. The average age at the time of their criminal case was also the lowest (20 years) among muggers and the highest among perpetrators in general (34 years).
- Looking at criminal history, we see that HIC offenders convicted in 2013 came into contact with the law for the first time at a young age. This applies in particular to muggers: 80% of the muggers convicted in 2013 had their first criminal case at minor age, compared to 66% of the robbers and 64% of the home burglars. Of the total group of offenders convicted in 2013, only 31% had their first criminal case while they were minors.
- The criminal history data also show that HIC offenders have come into contact with the law frequently and for a range of different offences. In 2013, 68% to 83% of convicted HIC offenders had one or more previous criminal cases, 25% to 34% had previous criminal cases because of a HIC offence, and 10% to 34% had previous criminal cases for the same offence as in the 2013 HIC criminal case. All three HIC offender groups, therefore, also commit other offences and HIC offences other than their initial HIC offence, and hence we do not see high levels of specialization. Robbers appear to be the strongest generalists, while domestic burglars tend to specialize more in domestic burglary.
- Convicted domestic burglars have the most extensive criminal record. In 2013, the average number of previous criminal cases for domestic burglars was eleven, while the total group of convicted offenders in 2013 had on average five earlier criminal cases.
- Between 2002 and 2013, the average number of criminal cases for all three HIC offender groups decreased: among domestic burglars from fifteen to eleven criminal cases, among robbers from ten to eight cases and among muggers from seven to five cases.

Background characteristics: criminal case characteristics

- Domestic burglars and muggers were mostly punished with a short prison sentence of a maximum of six months (41% and 34%) or community service (30% and 29%), while the majority of robbers was punished with a long prison sentence of at least six months (65%).
- Between 2002 and 2013, there were some shifts in the sentences imposed in HIC criminal cases. Firstly, the share of community services for domestic burglary and mugging criminal cases increased (domestic burglary from 23% to 30%; mugging from 16% to 28%). In addition, in mugging criminal cases the number of prison sentences of at least six months decreased from 29% to 21%. Finally, in robbery

cases, the share of prison sentences of less than six months fluctuates from 11% to 20%.

- Between 2002 and 2013, the share of domestic robbery cases increased considerably. In 2002, 22% of the robbery cases involved an armed residential break-in, in 2013 this percentage increased to 43%. Consequently, the share of other types of robbery decreased.
- The results show that most HIC criminal cases are settled in the Randstad area. In 2013, almost half of all domestic burglary and robbery cases and two thirds of all mugging cases were settled in the arrondissements of Amsterdam, Rotterdam, Midden-Nederland (within which Utrecht falls) and The Hague. Furthermore, taking into consideration the proportion of residents per district, the Amsterdam and Rotterdam districts were strongly overrepresented in mugging criminal cases in 2013.

Recidivism rates

- The recidivism analysis shows that 57% of domestic burglars, 51% of muggers and 37% of robbers convicted in 2013 received a reconviction for any offence within two years of their HIC criminal case (general recidivism). In the total group of convicted offenders, this percentage is considerably lower, at 28%. HIC recidivism among domestic burglars, muggers and robbers is respectively 19%, 12% and 7%. Special recidivism among domestic burglars, muggers and robbers is respectively 17%, 7% and 2%. Although these percentages relate exclusively to the first recidivism case, they seem to support the earlier conclusion that convicted HIC offenders commit various types of offences. Furthermore, special recidivism shows (again) that robbers are more generalist and domestic burglars specialize slightly more.
- Fewer domestic robbers were reconvicted within two years of their criminal case compared to other robbers. Only 33% of the domestic robbers had a new criminal case within two years for any offence, while this percentage is 41% for other robbers.
- The recidivism frequency analysis shows that domestic burglars and muggers had an average of 2.5 new criminal cases for any offence within two years, while the total group of perpetrators had an average of 2.1 new criminal cases within two years. It must be noted that the finding that robbers reoffend less frequently may be caused by the fact that they are often given a long term prison sentence for their first recidivism case. As a result, there is simply less time for further reoffending.

Correlation between personal characteristics and recidivism

- For all three HIC offender groups we see that offenders with their first criminal case at a young age and offenders with a more extensive criminal record were more likely to be reconvicted within two years of their HIC case. In the case of domestic burglary and robbery male offenders also had a greater chance of reoffending.

Recidivism over time

- Looking at the development of recidivism, it appears that the two-year general recidivism, when adjusted for shifts in the background characteristics of the offenders over time, decreased among all three HIC offender groups between 2004 and 2013. The decrease is strongest among robbers: the two-year general recidivism dropped from 52% to 38% (a relative decrease of 28%), with a second peak in 2007 (52%). The two-year general recidivism among domestic burglars shows a fairly stable downward trend, from 63% in 2004 to 57% in 2013

(a relative decrease of 10%). The two-year general recidivism among muggers decreased with some fluctuations during this period from 57% to 51% (a relative decrease of 11%).

Limitations and recommendations

The current study has some limitations. A first limitation is that the present study uses data from the judicial documentation system. This means that only offences and offenders that are detected by the police and are prosecuted by the Public Prosecution Service are included in this study. This is particularly troublesome, as it is well known that clear-up rates for all three HIC offences are low. A second limitation is that, whilst the current study took a first step in examining the development of recidivism over time, the picture is not yet complete. The initial aim of this study was solely to provide a description of the recidivism development of HIC offenders. However, by correcting for shifts in the background characteristics of the HIC offenders, we went beyond this. What we did not take in account were registration effects and general developments in crime and crime control, which have an influence on the development of recidivism. Finally, the question remains as to what effect specific measures within the HIC policy have on recidivism development.

The current study offers starting points for follow-up research. First, we recommend that interventions used in recent years to reduce reoffending among HIC offenders should be individually assessed and evaluated in terms of recidivism. These interventions may include the HIC approach in Dutch Safety Houses ('Veiligheidshuizen'), the Amsterdam Top-600 approach, the increased supervision measure for robbers, prison sentences and community services. A second suggestion for follow-up research is to include additional background characteristics of the offenders in the recidivism study, in order to get a better picture of the precise development of recidivism and to gain more insight into the background and causes of recidivism among HIC offenders. A another recommendation is to conduct criminal career research among HIC offenders. Furthermore, it might also be interesting to conduct interviews with non arrested HIC offenders, in order to gain more insight into the criminal careers and recidivism of all HIC offenders. A final suggestion for follow-up research, which is already part of the five-year HIC research program of the recidivism monitor, is to research the possibility of mapping recidivism per region.

Finally, the results also suggest recommendations for practice and policy. The present study shows that HIC offenders are an active offender group who often start criminal behaviour at a very young age. It therefore seems important to intervene early on in cases of under age HIC offenders.