

## Serendipity in Robbery Target Selection

Robbery and crime decision are some of the most valuable and sought after predictions of decisions and actions today. This article examines the balance between the rational, calculated nature of target selection and the happenstance, serendipitous aspect of these choices.

### **Background:**

- Decision sciences attempt to understand and predict the choices of living organisms. This is an incredibly intricate and complex task
- Work in Artificial Intelligence showcases the immensely complicated nature of an organism's decision making process.
- Predicting crime incidents is the topic of much debate, both in the field of criminology and in popular culture.
- It is important to understand whether the decision is the culmination of planning or a spur of the moment, and thus less predictable, event.

### **Findings:**

- Much of the time, target selection seems to be a serendipitous case of "right place, right time", or "wrong place, wrong time" depending on your perspective.
- Even for hardened criminals, such as those who carry a firearm, armed robberies may occur by pure opportunity. For example, a drug dealer carrying cash propositions you on the street randomly while you're armed.
- Car jackings seem to be a particularly spontaneous form of crime.
- While some crimes, such as the example above, were of a pure serendipitous nature, others are manufactured serendipity, where the offender put themselves in a target rich environment and waited for an opportune moment and target. An example of this would be heading to a grocery store's parking lot and waiting for someone to leave their car running while they run inside.

### **Implications:**

- Results indicate that perhaps an unexpectedly high amount of robberies are at least somewhat serendipitous in nature.
- Manufactured serendipity can still be planned against, as offenders are targeting an area that possessed qualities that they believe render it a fertile target ground. Removing the factors that lead to this belief are key.
- Combating cases of pure serendipity is more challenging. On a store level, one can take some precautions, such as signage reminding customers to lock their vehicles and properly training employees to never create an obvious robbery opportunity.

### **Recommendations:**

- While this article utilized a qualitative approach to interviewing offenders, future research should attempt to quantify what percentage of robbery events involves serendipitous motives.
- Additional research should examine what factors lead to situations that will evoke a serendipitous decision to commit a crime.
- The LPRC is currently collecting data that will address these points, further research to come!