



National Crime Prevention Council

Research and Evaluation Department

Research Brief – April 8, 2008

Is There an iCrime Wave?

Hypothesis: The spike in robberies in 2005-2006 can be explained by the explosion in popularity of iPods.

Method: Crime data from the Uniform Crime Reports and sales figures from the Apple Corporation are correlated for the years 2005 and 2006 and supported with anecdotal evidence.

Findings:

- Apple introduced a new generation of iPods in the fall of 2004. Thirty-two million were sold in 2005 and 46.6 million were sold in 2006.
- The robbery rate in the United States increased by 3.9 percent in 2005 and by 6 percent in 2006. These increases reversed a 12-year trend of consistent decline in the robbery rate.
- Juvenile robbery arrests in 2005 increased 11.4 percent. In fact, increases in juvenile arrests accounted for 48 percent of the increase in arrests for robbery.
- iPod robberies on San Francisco's Bay Area Rapid Transit (BART) system increased from 4 in 2004 to 102 in 2005 and 193 in 2006. This increase accounts for 23 percent of the increase in robbery city-wide during that period.

Caveats:

- Because of limitations in the available data, the authors cannot determine whether the increase in iPods actually caused the observed increases in robberies. The data merely demonstrate a correlation between iPods and robberies.

Implications for Practice:

- iPod users should be educated to be more aware of their surroundings while listening to their devices.
- Manufacturers of new technologies, such as GPS devices and next-generation cell phones, should build in features to prevent theft. Lojack systems in cars are one example.
- Law enforcement agencies should gather data to track and measure the number and types of devices that are targeted.

Source: Roman, John, and Aaron Chalfin, "Is There an iCrime Wave?" *Research Report*, Urban Institute Justice Policy Center, September 2007.