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**Aplikace výzkumných metod a technik v kriminologii. Obecná část.  
The application of research methods and techniques in criminology.  
General Section.**

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*Summary*

Through criminological research we are able to collect knowledge concerning the nature, structure and development of criminality, about perpetrators and their victims, both individual and social causes, criminogenic factors, and about the possibilities for effective defence against threats. Through this research we not only collect specific data, but also learn about opinions, attitudes, arguments and consider proposals for solutions. On the basis of the data and statements obtained we seek to discover the wider and deeper context and to formulate principles that should be of general validity. We should refute inaccurate and fixed prejudices, provide warnings concerning tendencies that could become threatening to individuals and for society, we should be looking for optimal solutions to problems.

At the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention we have tried to evaluate research methods and techniques in terms of the extent to which these tools are reliable and of general validity, whether or are not they are able to encapsulate reality, to what extent their use is functional, what lack of precision or possible bias they may include. We focused on the research that has taken place in the Czech Republic subsequent to the year 1990. When research of similar topics in the Czech Republic was not available we referred to comparable examples from foreign studies or to those international investigations that had been carried out with Czechoslovak participation. Most of this research was carried out by the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention, in some cases we also took into account studies that the researchers had discussed in the workshops of the Section for Social Pathology of the Masaryk Czech Sociological Association. When there were other interesting and more unusual approaches, we consulted rarely discussed of theses by students of the Faculty of Social Sciences of Charles University.

In the original text there is not simply a generalised list of the methods and techniques currently in use. It seeks primarily to be a reflection of what has been examined recently – and how – in the field of criminological research. From the methodological point of view,

we sought to evaluate the effectiveness of the research methods utilised and to seek for fresh improvement that could lead to greater flexibility, accuracy and reliability and, on the basis of the results found to broaden the range of their applicability.

This publication constitutes a general introduction to the series that is dedicated to the methodology of criminological research. It is divided into three sections.

The first section includes a definition of what criminological research is concerned with and of what the practical applicability is of this focus. Additionally there are illustrative examples of how criminological research is carried out, what types of qualitative and quantitative data it determines and what general principles can be derived from them. Also mentioned at the same time are the limitations associated with criminological research. These include: environments that are frequently difficult to reach, restricted access and limited options for using data of persons, latency, the complexity of communication with offenders and victims. Also mentioned in the introductory section is the division between method and technique. In regard to the specific stages of research activity, the importance of a thorough preparatory phase is highlighted. Primarily essential is the theoretical background: a precise definition of the field to which the phenomena being examined belong, the definition of the complex and of its individual stages and their precise boundaries, and/or an outline model of likely related factors and the formulation of hypotheses. There are also other important elements such as operationalisation, prior research and piloting. Great attention is paid in this section to selected files and to their representativeness in relation to the main file.

The second section deals with methods. Defined as methods are research procedures, in the course of which we generalise and categorise specific data in a context that is determined according to the research techniques utilised. In the study we dealt first in accordance with the historical method. This we understood primarily as an analysis of social changes and their correspondence with changes in criminality. In a narrower sense, we have provided examples of analyses of criminal groups and individuals. We also referred to the analysis of statistical data that can be considered as a method when it compares recorded data within the context of development over time or in terms of structural changes. Utilising a monographic method we analysed the past, present and future of the behaviour and conduct of specific individuals or of small groups, including the external influences that influence them. Using a typological methodology we created abstract theoretical models

from the identified data and we sought for typical patterns of behaviour in the conduct and activities of offenders, victims, groups, social units and various criminogenic situations. Based on the knowledge obtained, by using a topographical method, we create maps on which we can demonstrate, on a global, national or regional scale, the occurrence of phenomena, the prevalence rate of some activity, or transit routes or areas facing threats. Just as all research should start by analysing the past, it should be concluded by utilising forecasting methods to attempt to predict the future development of the phenomenon under investigation. The prognosis should consist of a comprehensive analysis of potential variants that could occur in the future, defined in the context of the facts examined.

In the third section we focused on research techniques. Techniques were considered as research tools, the use which we employ in accordance with the specific circumstances, exploring, summarising and evaluating both quantitative data and qualitative statements. In the study we first discuss observation and experiment, which – incidentally – have not been applied so frequently during recent years. In contrast, widely used was document analysis. This technique has been used in almost all the research of the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention. Mainly analysed were international documents such as resolutions, action plans, conventions the regulations of the UN, the CoE, the EU and relevant governmental and departmental documents, such as evaluation reports, conceptual proposals, guidelines, analyses, in addition to documents of civic associations, foundations, community organisations, church initiatives and others. Also extensively utilised were court records, additional and investigative files, anonymous criminal records, the personal files of convicted and imprisoned individuals and expert opinions. Recordings of psychological examinations can also be used in the form of documents. A frequently-used source is an analysis of the relevant legislation. Also included in the analysis of documents also is the use of information from the media, including the Internet. In some cases analysis of the press or of the printed material pertaining to a certain group and autobiographies may also be used.

Surveys are often utilised in research that is undertaken either through questionnaires or in the manner of a controlled interview. Using these methods attitudes, beliefs, knowledge and information can be identified; during the interviews the interviewee also evaluates the facts researched. In criminology non-standardised, individual and narrative interviews are frequently also used. Using questioning also enables us to seek the expertise of professionals who have knowledge and practical experience in the specific area. In criminology frequently specific groups of respondents are interviewed, especially those whose professional life is

related to crime control. Using questionnaires we can also contact the institutions that maintain records concerning the phenomenon being observed.

We can also make use of opinion polls as a material source. The findings of public opinion can be monitored both in areas directly related to crime and in regard to socio-pathological phenomena. Usable data can also be searched for in the broader social context. Factual information concerning criminality is also made available in internationally implemented victimological research, bringing data concerning the victims of crime. Also monitored by these investigations is the level of reporting of crimes to police, the worry-level concerning crime, methods for protecting homes and property. Criminality is also a feature of research into public attitudes concerning penal policies. Within this context general attitudes toward punishment and punitiveness are measured views while views concerning capital punishment are regularly investigated, as is frequently a reduction in the age of criminal responsibility. Polls also seek out opinions concerning crime prevention, while attitudes towards drugs are also monitored and the level of alcohol consumption and certain additional socio-pathological phenomena are studied. Additionally investigated are the public attitudes of various national and ethnic groups towards migration.

In terms of the broader social context it appears from public opinion polls that criminality is related to the level of satisfaction with the political and economic situation and with living standards and unemployment. In determining the most urgent problems to be solved over the past twenty years the areas most frequently referred to have been crime, including organised crime and corruption. Significant explanatory power can also be provided by the investigation of confidence in those institutions that are the key players in the fight against crime, especially the police and the courts, but also in certain other institutions, such as the media.

A specific technique employed in criminology, is crime-prediction, by means of which the future conduct of a delinquent individual can be predicted. Selfreport can also be considered as specific tool, by means of which a person involved in an investigation – either a victim or the perpetrator of a crime – testifies in the manner of a self-evaluation or self-assessment in regard to his/her own criminal activity or concerning an injury that occurred as the result of a crime. The results can usefully complement other data, however identifying the crime incidence rate in this manner is not recommended. Sociometry is applied in criminology to the analysis of relationships for groups of convicted persons,

or for discovering the optimal composition of police teams. The conclusion is that the groups should not be too large, nor gathered in one place, and by their nature should be sustainable over a longer period.

Primarily implemented in criminology is research of the criminal environment to which, usually, techniques that would permit direct surveillance are not applicable. This restriction can be overcome through expert investigation in the course of which expert opinions are expressed by individuals who are involved in relevant fields and who frequently possess information that is not accessible on a regular basis. During the last twenty years the Delphi method, the Roundtable and the focus-group techniques have been used, in addition to brainstorming and brainwriting. Very widespread, above all, is the interviewing of experts. Unlike the questionnaires that are focused on issues of a general nature, this manner of questioning is focused on specific information that the expert interviewed communicates on the basis of his/her individual, frequently otherwise inaccessible, experience.

Extrapolation of the time lines generates a curve of the possible development of a phenomenon observed under unchanging conditions. Due to the fact that conditions are changing constantly, this should be used only as the initial starting point for broader analyses. Scenarios can suggest a more complex pattern of future developments. These, however, do not constitute a complete forecast, in which all the circumstances are taken into account; they rather focus on one specific problem and suggest the alternatives that might manifest in the event of its solution or lack thereof, or of a poor or otherwise faulty solution.

In the course of the criminological research undertaken during the last twenty years in the Czech Republic, roughly twenty research methods and techniques have been utilised to a lesser or greater extent. In most cases the research results were achieved through the use of a combination of several different research methods. Almost without exception, the results of the analyses of all the documents available were combined with surveys of the opinions of those individuals who were active participants in the processes under examination. Also the other procedures were then grouped in accordance with the two principal directions. Combination leads to a more all-embracing point of view. If a problem is examined from multiple angles, the image of it becomes more plastic. Some processes can permit the inclusion of specific details, thereby making the view more precise. An important reason for combining methods should be that the results can thereby be refined. If there are some general findings available, using additional research procedures we can deepen them,

elaborate on them, and make them more precise. Also useful is the challenging of results with different results. Most important then is the confrontation between them. The result obtained by means of a certain procedure is either confirmed or not confirmed when using alternative research methods. If it is not confirmed, or if it is only partially confirmed, this is a significant finding. We thereby receive the signal that either the issue examined is more complicated than we had originally anticipated, or that the research methods were not used correctly.

Combining research methods may not always lead to the positive results mentioned. Each research method has some shortcomings and each has a somewhat restricted explanatory effectiveness. This deficiency can be multiplied by the combining of errors. We should therefore not become subject to the impression that by linking several research procedures the results obtained will automatically be more accurate. The purpose of the methodology is to verify the explanatory power not only of each individual method, but also of combined procedures.

This study is part of a series in which we wish to sequentially recall additional details in regard to the research methods and techniques that are currently in use in the field of criminology. This series is intended primarily for researchers – both beginners and those who, though active in this field for a long time, but due to their narrower specialisation in a more specific area, can find this broader context useful to them. Due to the fact that in criminology researchers from different disciplines make representations, i.e. lawyers, psychologists, sociologists, economists, political scientists, and each of these has a somewhat different experience in terms of the specific research practices of their relevant discipline, the publications prepared as a part of this series should provide them with a summary of the evaluation and practical application of methods and techniques in the field of criminology. These publications could provide students with access to detailed information, numerous examples of practical use and assessment on a larger scale from the methodological point of view than is commonly available in dictionaries and textbooks. These publications could be useful also for the staff of operational units. From them they could obtain some idea of the rules that are applicable to serious research, how results are obtained and what the degree of their validity is and to what extent they provide an objective view. They would then be able to effectively make use of these results, without either underestimating or overestimating them.

*Translated by: Presto*