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Regionální kriminalita a její odraz v kvalitě života obyvatel

Regional crime and its impact on quality of life

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Summary

The aim of the project (whose results are presented in this publication) was to verify the validity of certain foreign criminological theories regarding the links between the type of environment (neighbourhood), victimisation and fear of crime. This was achieved through a survey of public opinion in eight selected locations in the Czech Republic. Questions focused on the pros and cons of living in the given location, the level of concern about crime, the respondents' sense of security, satisfaction with life in the neighbourhood, and, last but not least, victimisation.

In addition to this survey, we gathered data on the amount of recorded crime in the research locations. The purpose was to describe the dependence of the current level of crime or victimisation and the fear of crime based on the type of location.

The introduction focuses on the important theoretical foundations affecting the study of environmental impact on crime. We concentrated on core criminological theory dealing with the relationship between the physiognomy of the physical environment and intensity of deviant phenomena. This concerns the theory of social disorganisation, the theory of incivility (known as the broken window theory) and the concept of collective efficiency, taking into account the relationship between social cohesion and informal social control.

The selection of research locations was deliberate. We decided to compare two districts in the capital of Prague, two housing estates in regional cities and the central area of two (former) district towns, selected according to crime statistics in their region as average. In addition, we chose two rural areas, covering eight villages of 200 – 3,000 residents. One region was located in a traditionally stable rural area, the other near the border, where there had been a virtually complete change of population seventy years ago. One of the introductory chapters

also includes a socio-geographic description for a more comprehensive idea of these locations.

Fieldwork was conducted through a professional agency using face to face interviews. Respondents were chosen in the selected locations on a random walk. Overall, 3,523 residents were interviewed; 3,361 interviews were used for statistical analysis. The research tool used was a specially crafted questionnaire, in which the team relied on the above criminological theories. Questions were designed to assess the place of residence in terms of its social (dis)organisation, the victimisation of respondents or a member of their household, their sense of security and fear of possible criminal assault.

The research locations differed considerably in terms of the socio-demographic characteristics of the sample. Differences primarily prevailed in terms of income, level of attained education, unemployment, as well as the time respondents had lived in the area and number of family and friends in the neighbourhood.

At the beginning of interviews, we focused on three basic groups of socio-psychological characteristics in individual locations. We measured the degree of social disorganisation using a battery of questions mapping the presence of annoying manifestations in the neighbourhood. The level of informal control was studied using seven model situations to determine how witnesses to these events would respond according to respondents. Thirdly, we were interested in the nature of neighbourhood relations in the area.

In each of these areas, we construct a summary index to find out how individual research locations differed. It became clear that order, social cohesion and related informal control were highest in rural areas and the residential district of Prague. Conversely, North Bohemian Chomutov and the centre of the capital proved to be the most socially disorganised locations.

To what extent these characteristics relate to the level of victimisation and fear of crime is the subject of the following chapters. Victimology research provides information on latent criminality; we were interested in the extent to which our selected locations would differ in this aspect. Furthermore, we examined how the declared victimisation experience related to the respondent's characteristics, and how the victimisation experience manifested in their assessment of the area and their sense of security.

24% of respondents in the sample said they or a member of their household had been the victim of a crime (or attempt) in the last five years somewhere in the Czech Republic or abroad. This was most commonly reported by the residents of Prague 3, where 34% of respondents were victimised; in Chomutov and Prague 6 this was almost one-third of respondents. The least experience with crime (14-16%) was reported by residents in the City of Písek and rural locations. We also asked about victimisation in the immediate vicinity of their place of residence - this was an average of 16%. Distribution between locations copied overall victimisation. In terms of victimisation, housing estates were in the virtual middle between urban and rural locations.

Crime in their neighbourhoods was more frequently encountered by people over sixty, pensioners and the unemployed (but also entrepreneurs and tradesmen), and in terms of marital status, the widowed. As expected, victimisation in the neighbourhood thus mainly applies to those groups that spend more time here.

Respondents cited specific crimes of which they were the victims, from which we derived their experience with property and violent crime. In the sample, 13% of respondents reported direct experience (either personal or of a member of their household) with property crime in their place of their residence and 3% had experienced violent crime. Local differences were significant; a striking example was the noticeably higher declared experience with violent crime in their neighbourhood by respondents in Chomutov (which corresponds to official statistics).

People with experience of victimisation have less trust in others and feel subjectively less happy. They are also less satisfied with housing, rating neighbourhood relations as weaker and they think about moving more often. However, these relations also generally apply for victimisation in the place of residence anywhere else.

One of the core aspects of the study was to examine the sense of security and fear of crime, i.e. variables for which we expected there could be significant differences between research locations. We were interested in whether there was a relationship between crime, victimisation, the physical and social characteristics of the location and the sense of security or fear of crime. We examined the influence of gender, age, education and other factors. In accordance with the most common international approach, we measured the sense of security

using questions on how safe respondents felt in their place of residence during the day and after dark. In addition, we asked about their level of concern about property and violent crime.

By day, 71% of respondents felt safe; in Chomutov this was only about half of respondents and in rural areas the vast majority (91%). After dark, residents did not feel safe, especially in Chomutov (12%). The fear of crime was lowest in rural areas and highest in Prague, Chomutov and housing estates in Brno and Plzeň. In terms of individual characteristics (based on international findings), there was a strong correlation between gender and the sense of security after dark. A significant association was also found with subjectively perceived health. We noticed a relationship between the sense of security after dark in and around the respondent's place of residence and their subjectively perceived contentment and trust in other people (a positive relationship and trust in people gave in a stronger sense of security). A similar correlation is found between the overall fear of crime, trust in other people and sense of satisfaction (contentment).

Understandably a relationship between the respondent's victimisation experience, sense of security and fear of crime was shown. Data shows that any victimisation leads to a greater sense of danger and a greater fear of crime. This applies to all research locations. In terms of the type of neighbourhood, it holds true that people feel most secure in neighbourhoods they see as less disorganised, where relations between neighbours are relatively strong and where people help each other, keep an eye on each other's property and maintain order in the given location.

We investigated which factors influence the sense of security and fear of crime most using regression analysis. Social disorganisation proved to be a relatively strong influence, while neighbourhood relations or the level of informal social control did not play as significant a role in the overall scale of things as that attributed to them in foreign studies.

Finally, we analysed the connection between the above findings and the criminal and socio-economic situation in the given location. It turned out that there was a very close relationship not only between reported victimisation and statistically recorded crime, but also the fear and concept of registered crime. However, there are certain differences, for example, between the two rural areas and housing estates, so it is evident the fear of crime is determined by other factors than the urban form of the neighbourhood and higher crime rate; this opens the door

for further research. In contrast, the level of unemployment or percentage of households receiving welfare benefits does not affect the fear of crime in any apparent manner.

Translated by: Presto