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Oběti kriminality. Poznatky z viktimizační studie
Victims of crime. Findings of a victimisation survey
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Summary

Studies of the victims of crime (victimisation surveys) originated in the 1960s and over time began to focus on a broader range of crime-related issues. Their greatest benefit is that they can provide a wide range of information on crime and its development, free of the shortcomings of official data. Among the most important research of this type is the U.S. National Crime Victimization Survey, British Crime Survey and International Crime Victims Survey. The Czech Republic has repeatedly participated in this latter project through research activities carried out by the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention (IKSP), most recently in 2013. The current project follows on the tradition of Czech victimisation surveys.

The subject of the survey was public experience, attitudes and opinions on selected topics related to crime. The survey focused on the victimisation of respondents by selected offences committed during the reference period, and other topics related to victimisation and crime.

The primary objective of the survey was to determine the level of victimisation of the population by the selected crimes (and to thus obtain a supplementary source of information on the extent of crime in the Czech Republic, including its latent part). A secondary objective was to obtain more detailed information relating to experienced victimisation (e.g. reporting, or the reasons for not reporting the incident to the police, secondary victimisation, the impact of victimisation...), as well as other views of the public on issues related to crime.

In 2013, the Czech Republic passed the Crime Victims Act. The Act implemented obligations arising for the Czech Republic from European legislation. The aim of the new legislation was to strengthen the standing and expand the rights of the victims of crime. More than four years after the Act came into effect, we have tried to map its impact from the perspective of both potential and actual victims of crime. For this purpose, we have included a special module in the victimisation survey that focuses on this issue. The advantage of this approach is that it allows us to capture the views of both the general public and the views of victims, including latent victims.

Methodology

From the very beginning of this research, we wanted to gain a broader view of the issue and identify relevant topics in this area in terms of practice. Therefore, a qualitative sub-study was conducted in the form of a focus group with experts working in the field of victim assistance. We tried to put together the group in such a way as to maintain the adequate heterogeneity and professional relevance of the participants. We approached experts from the justice system, police, probation services and the non-profit sector.

The principal research tool was a relatively extensive questionnaire. As already mentioned, the current project follows on previous research, therefore the same wording of questions was used as far as possible in order to maintain comparability. Emphasis was placed on ensuring the study reflected the specific environment of the Czech Republic as best as possible. The aim was to create a flexible research tool that would allow longer-term mapping of trends on one hand, and an opportunity to explore current issues in criminology, victimology and criminal policy on the other.

Data was collected in the autumn of 2017 on a representative sample of the Czech population over the age of fifteen. Respondents were selected by stratified sampling in the categories of gender, age, education, place of residence and region. Questioning was conducted face to face on behalf of IKSP by an external agency selected by a tender. A total of 3,328 interviews were used in final processing.

The questionnaire covered a relatively wide range of topics and can be divided into several thematic sections. It can therefore be flexibly modified in the future, if necessary.

The main part of the survey focused on mapping the victimisation of respondents over the last three years. Where this was not barred by the nature of the incident, victims were then asked whether the incident had occurred in the last year, and where appropriate, how many times. Since victimisation is not a common phenomenon, this combined reference period was chosen to capture more cases. In addition to traditional criminal offences such as property and violent crime (so-called common crimes), the research also examined the sensitive topics of sexual assault and domestic violence. Attention also focused on new forms of crime, namely stalking, online shopping fraud and fraudulent e-mails.

More detailed circumstances of reported victimisation were examined in the following part of the questionnaire. This was devoted to victims, i.e. respondents who reported victimisation in

the reference period. Additional questions on individual incidents were both specific to the nature of the crime and common to all offences. The aim was to determine whether the incident potentially met the characteristics of a particular crime, and to gather further information, such as the time and place the incident occurred, the number of offenders, the means/method used, etc. We also examined whether or not the offence remained latent, i.e. whether (or why not) the incident was reported to the police, and if so, we then asked how the reported incident was handled and how the person reporting the crime rated the work of the police. We were also interested in whether or not victims sought the help of specialised organisations and why. The last set of questions was aimed at mapping the subjective impact of victimisation, including health, mental and material aspects.

A separate section, intended for all respondents, focused on personal safety concerns (after dark in the respondent's neighbourhood) and the likelihood of victimisation in the coming year. The questionnaire concluded the aforementioned module, focusing on the current issue of the level of care for victims in the Czech Republic, including the impact of the Crime Victims Act.

Selected results

The questionnaire included a total of fourteen types of criminal behaviour. As mentioned above, we focused on not only common crime, but also sensitive topics and new types of crime committed via the internet. Due to the scope of the questionnaire, we could not devote our attention to all common types of delinquency and had to leave out, for example, fraud, hooliganism, vandalism or defamation.

Car theft was reported by 2% of those who used a car over the last three years. Approximately one quarter of these incidents occurred in the last year. Car thefts were more common in cities with a population of more than 100,000, especially in Prague.

The theft of items from a car affected nearly one tenth of their users in the last three years. More than half of these cases occurred in the last year. Items stolen from a car were more often reported by middle-aged people and again by people from larger cities, especially Prague.

The situation is similar for motorcycles. Of those who owned a motorcycle, scooter or moped in the last three years, 4% reported their vehicle had been stolen. Almost two thirds of the population use a bicycle, a figure that is conditional on the locality of those being questioned.

Of these bicycle users, 13% reported their bicycle being stolen in the last three years. Bicycles are stolen more often in larger cities, in Prague and less affluent households. Of this, 42 % of these thefts occurred in the last 12 months.

One in twenty respondents reported a burglary in their home. Burglaries occur more often in cities with populations of over 100,000. Burglars break-in to holiday homes (cabins or cottages) more often, and reached 20% in the last three years. Logically, this more commonly affects people from larger cities (and significantly from Prague), who own or occupy these holiday homes more often. Similar to burglaries in people's homes, almost half these cases occurred in the last 12 months.

Another category under scrutiny was robbery (i.e. an acquisitive crime using violence or the threat of violence). Here, the victim frequency was 2% of the monitored sample. Once again, more than half these cases occurred in the last year. Victims of robbery are more often younger people, especially students or housewives and women on maternity leave.

Approximately 12% of the research sample had been the victim of theft (typically pickpocketing without the use of violence). Over 60% of these cases were reported by respondents in the last year. Victims of this type of theft are more often younger women, students and people in larger cities. Prague and Brno were particularly problematic.

Three percent of the population declared physical assault (by an unknown person) that was not aimed at theft. Victims of physical assault are more likely to be younger men, people with a basic education, students, the unemployed, and people in a difficult financial situation.

Particularly sensitive offences included sexual assault. This was declared by 42 respondents, i.e. 1.3%. Victims are more likely to be women, students and respondents from poorer socioeconomic backgrounds. At the same time, these respondents declared that there were some questions in the questionnaire that they had a problem answering. Almost half these cases occurred once in the last year and one third more than once in the last year.

Another sensitive category in victimisation screening was domestic violence. There was a total of 88 cases of the 3,328 respondents (almost 3% affected). Again, victims are more often women, younger people, housewives or women on maternity leave and people from poorer socioeconomic households. Nearly 5% of the surveyed population had experienced stalking. Most often, this concerns women and younger people. Respondents who identified themselves

as victims of stalking also more frequently said that they found some questions more sensitive than others.

Of those who have purchased a product or service over the internet in the last three years, 16% have experienced online shopping fraud in the last year. This negative experience mainly affects young customers (students), which is undoubtedly due to the higher frequency of online purchases in this age group. In terms of incurred damage, young respondents less frequently indicated they had suffered any damage.

The final monitored category was fraudulent e-mails aimed at financial gain. More than half of respondents who use electronic mail have received such an e-mail in the last 12 months (45% even repeatedly). These unsolicited e-mails are more likely to affect men, people with a university education and people in senior job positions. About 6% of respondents responded to such e-mails, about half of them repeatedly.

Unreported crime is associated with a number of social consequences, primarily producing a certain number of victims that are hidden from the system and therefore cannot be given adequate care and rights. Therefore, the question of whether the victims had **reported offences to the police** or what led them to decide not to report the incident was part of the research.

While offences against the household are largely reported to the police, more serious offences against a person remain largely latent. The least latent offence is the theft of cars and motorcycles, which may be explained by the need to file a report for insurance claims. The same reason may play a role in other offences against the household. The least number of people report fraudulent online shopping, but fraudulent e-mails that caused damage are reported in more than one third of cases. Particularly sensitive cases of sexual assault and domestic violence are reported in only about one fifth of cases. This type of offence shows a high degree of latency across victimisation surveys.

Looking at the reasons for not reporting a crime to the police, it is clear that in many cases the victims did not have sufficient confidence in the police's ability to solve the case. Victims also often feel that a trip to the police is not worth the effort required to file a complaint, and in some cases stated that the situation resolved itself without the assistance of the competent authorities. Other reasons for not reporting an incident included, for example, fear of

worsening the situation (domestic violence) or shame, fear and a negative attitude to the police in general (stalking).

In cases where the incident was reported to the police, victims often had conflicting experiences with the police. A little over half the victims believed that in dealing with their case, police officers were active and did everything they could, with the victims of car theft, the theft of motorcycles or personal belongings and the victims of physical assault being a little more satisfied in this respect. In contrast, the victims of sexual assault and stalking were the least satisfied with the work of the police.

Every victim can experience a criminal attack differently. Therefore, we asked respondents who reported victimisation by any of the monitored offences if this incident had any further **consequences** for them. To this end, they were presented with a card with a list of the more common problems associated with victimisation. Victims could indicate more than one answer or give their own answer. It was shown that most victims of property crimes experience material damage and an administrative burden. This is most often associated with car theft, in 59% of cases. The second most common response for each offence was that the victim had not noted any consequences (approximately one third of victimised respondents). However, the results related to personal crimes were surprising. Even in case of particularly serious offences, the most frequently chosen answer was „I have not noticed any consequences“. For particularly sensitive offences, we saw a slightly higher percentage of more serious psychological consequences compared to common personal crimes. Victims of sexual and domestic violence most often struggle with recurring thoughts associated with the crime. More often, victims also mention a loss of feeling safe and fear of the repetition of the crime. The victims of domestic violence suffer some of the presented consequences most often and to the greatest degree.

As already mentioned, the current study sought to extend victimisation research from merely mapping its incidence to a more comprehensive insight into experienced victimisation, including, for example, the **usage of professional care for the victims** of crime. Various organisations providing assistance to the victims of crime have been set up in the Czech Republic. One of the main objectives of the Crime Victims Act is to provide victims with effective assistance and protection from further harm, whether by criminal justice authorities (secondary victimisation) or the perpetrator (re-victimisation). One of the aims of the study was therefore to find out to what extent victims use the existing system of assistance in the

Czech Republic and whether they are even aware of the existence of special legislation governing the rights of victims.

In summary, it can be said that professional assistance is rarely used by victims. What is particularly worrying is the extent to which assistance is used by the victims of personal crimes where, due to more serious consequences, a greater need for professional assistance can be expected. In the context of an additional question on the reasons for not taking advantage of professional assistance, we were most often told that victims did not need help, they did not know any providers of assistance or did not believe someone could help them in their situation. Statements regarding the physical or financial inaccessibility of services should be particularly worrying.

Since the Crime Victims Act entered its fifth year in force, the questionnaire also examined **general awareness of its existence**. Research results in this area confirmed concerns arising from the views of the focus group. Only one fifth of all respondents were aware that a special law to protect victims had been adopted in the Czech Republic. Although it is the duty of the police to inform the victims of crime of this law, victims of more serious offences have almost the same awareness of the Act as respondents who were not the victims of crime in the reference period. What's more, only one victim of domestic violence and one of stalking learned about the Crime Victims Act through the police. Most of the rest of the respondents who have been victims of personal crime learned about the law from the media, from friends or on the internet. Respondents were also asked to rate the level of care for victims in the Czech Republic. Experience of victimisation in the reference period proved to be statistically insignificant for assessing the level of care for victims. Rating in all areas was around the mean value, but tends to be more negative. One quarter of all respondents believe there is a lack of accessible non-profit organisations to help victims of crime in the Czech Republic.

In terms of the **fear of future experience of crime**, people tend to believe they will not become the victims of property or violent crime in the coming year. Only one percent of respondents are almost certain of future victimisation for both types of crime. Where people are afraid of victimisation, it is more often property-related than violent crime. Nevertheless, it can be observed that as many as 14% of the population acknowledge the chance of becoming victims of violent crime in the next 12 months. For property crime, it is even 20% of the population. Sceptical predictions of victimisation mainly occur among people from large cities with populations of 100,000 and people from poorer socioeconomic groups. While

women are more afraid of violent crime, pensioners and entrepreneurs are more afraid of property crime. Gender differences in assessing the likelihood of victimisation are not statistically significant. In contrast, we see a statistically significant gender difference in evasive behaviour. While women are more likely to avoid certain places or people, we cannot say they are more afraid of future victimisation. Women's concerns are more accentuated in the frequency of evasive behaviour, as nearly 68% of women and only 16% of men almost always avoided certain places or people.

When testing the theory of **increased fear** of crime as a result of victimisation, it should be reminded that the reference period for the victimisation questionnaire was the last three years. Fear of crime, however, may be affected by victimisation that falls outside this reference period. Based on our results, the experience of victimisation has a real impact on different perceptions of the fear of crime. People who have fallen victim to at least one crime over the past three years are more likely to avoid certain places or people and perceive future victimisation as more realistic than their un-victimised fellow citizens.

Translated by: Presto