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Seniors in the Czech Republic - Victims and Perpetrators of Criminal Offences

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Summary

This publication deals with the issue of the victimisation of seniors by criminal offences and the criminal activity of seniors. In addition to a theoretical treatise on the poor treatment of seniors, the first part of the monograph includes current research data on the experiences of a **representative sample of three thousand individuals aged from 65 to 80 from across the Czech Republic** with selected criminal offences. The second part of the publication presents data on trends in the criminal activity of seniors in the Czech Republic from the perspective of Czech departmental statistics. It also contains up-to-date findings based on an analysis of criminal files relating to offenders aged 65 and over, who have been sentenced to imprisonment by a court for their criminal activity.

1. The specific goal of the **victimisation survey** was to determine the extent of victimisation of senior citizens in the Czech Republic by 19 selected criminal offences in the year immediately preceding the survey. At the same time, the aim of the survey was to obtain more detailed information relating to victimisation by the studied offences (e.g. repeated victimisation, the degree to which incidents are reported to the police, reasons for not reporting incidents to the police, the subjective seriousness of the offence, etc.). The opinions of respondents on selected crime-related issues were also of interest. The focus was not only on concerns regarding fear of crime, but also respondents' experience with selected criminogenic phenomena, opinions on the work of the police, etc.

The data have been acquired during personal interviews of questioners and respondents (CAPI). When preparing survey questionnaire we have been inspired by methodological processes used at international surveys of crime victims (ICVS –International Crime Victim Survey).

2. The aim of the second research, which focused on **seniors as the perpetrators of criminal offences**, was to map the crimes they committed in the Czech Republic within the reference period. The aim was not only to analyse the criminal activity of seniors from the perspective

of available statistical data, but also to obtain information on the criminal activity of seniors and their personality traits based on an analysis of a selected sample of criminal files.

- The research revealed the following findings about the experiences of seniors in the Czech Republic with selected criminal offences in the year preceding the survey.

- Offences that affected the respondent's household (five offences were examined)

More than one fifth of the owners/users of weekend/holiday homes (21.6%) had **experience** with burglary. 7.6% of car owners/users had personal belongings stolen from their car; 6.4% of respondents had experienced home burglary (or someone breaking into adjoining buildings/structures). Almost one in ten bicycle owners/users (8.9%) had had their bike stolen and 2% of the owners/users of private cars had been the victims of car theft.

Repeated victimisation by the same offence occurred most often, in almost one fifth of cases, with burglary of weekend/holiday homes (17%). On the other hand, none of the victims of car theft had experienced such a theft more than once. Approximately 5% of the victims of bicycle theft and about one in ten victims of the theft of personal belongings from a car (11%) and home burglary (12%) experienced the same crime again. Repeated victimisation by the offences under investigation usually occurred twice during the one-year period.

Almost 30% of the victims of the theft of personal belongings from their car (27%), one fifth of the victims of home burglary and/or burglary of adjoining buildings (20%) and 19% of the victims of bicycle theft **did not report the incident to the police**. About one tenth of those who experienced a burglary of their weekend/holiday home did not inform the police of the incident (12%). Only one car owner/user did not inform the police (3%) of its theft.

Approximately one third of the victims of car theft (34%) and almost 40% of the victims of burglary of their weekend/holiday home (39%) and victims of home burglary (38%) were **dissatisfied with the work of the police** after reporting the incident. Half the victims of bicycle theft and 58% of the victims of the theft of personal belongings from a car were dissatisfied with the work of the police.

- Offences against the person of the respondent – without the use of physical violence by the offender (six offences were examined)

Almost one in ten respondents **were victims** of the theft of personal items (9.5%); 2.2% of respondents had experienced theft in their flat/house after letting a stranger into their home and the same percentage of respondents were victims of schemes to lure large sums of

money from them by strangers (or attempts at such). Almost one percent of respondents said their personal data had been misused (0.7%); 4.4% of respondents had experienced a request for a bribe or its obvious expectation; 6.2% of online account/credit card users had been asked to provide security codes for these products on the internet (to which, except in very rare cases, respondents did not respond).

Approximately one in ten victims of the theft of personal items (8%), theft in their home after letting in a stranger (10%), schemes to lure money from them by a stranger (12%) and the misuse of personal data (9%) experienced **repeated victimisation** by the same offence. Victimisation usually occurred twice during the one-year period.

About one fifth of respondents who had been asked for a bribe experienced this phenomenon repeatedly (18%). Around 41% of internet users who had received a suspicious request for their security code for internet banking and/or payment card had been contacted repeatedly.

The **police were not informed** by about half of the victims of the theft of personal items (46%). 59% of the victims of theft in their flat/house after letting in a stranger did not inform the police, and the same percentage of victims whose personal data had been misused did not contact the police. 81% of the victims of schemes to lure money from respondents (or attempts to do so) did not contact the police. The police did not know about 97% of cases in which someone had been asked for a bribe (or made it clear one was expected). Individuals who had been asked to provide security codes for their payment card and/or online account via the internet were not asked whether they had informed the police of this incident.

Satisfaction with the work of the police after reporting an incident was only examined for three offences. Around 40% of victims of the theft of personal items (42%), theft from their flat/house after letting in a stranger (39%) and schemes to lure money from them by a stranger (40%) were not satisfied with the work of the police.

- Offences against the person of the respondent - using physical violence by the offender (five offences were examined)

3.4% of respondents **were victims** of serious threats of physical violence by strangers; 2.1% of respondents were victims of threats of physical violence by family members and other individuals known to the victim. 1.4% of respondents were victims of robbery and 1.4% of respondents were also victims of physical violence by strangers. 1.2% of respondents experienced physical violence by family members and other individuals known to the victim.

Repeated victimisation by the same offence was highest among victims of the threat of physical violence by individuals known to the victim (35%) and victims of physical violence by a perpetrator known to the victim (31%) during the one-year reference period. Repeated victimisation was the lowest for robbery (less than 5%). 7% of victims had repeated experience of physical violence by a person not known to the victim, and 14% of respondents experienced serious threats of physical violence by strangers.

The vast majority of both the victims of physical violence by individuals known to the victim (91%) and unknown assailants (73%) were **not reported to the police**. Also, the majority of victims of both serious threats of physical violence by individuals known to the victim (91%) and by strangers (82%) did contact the police. Robbery was not reported to the police by 39% of victims.

- Fraud (scams) when purchasing goods and services (consumer fraud when purchasing services, fraud when purchasing goods and fraud when purchasing products on sales trips and at demonstrations were examined)

About one-tenth of consumers **were scammed** when purchasing goods and services. 11.1% in the first case and 9.0% in the second. The most commonly scammed consumers, one third (33.0%), were consumers participating in sales trips and demonstrations.

44% of consumers were scammed repeatedly when buying goods and 14% when buying services. We did not ask respondents who had made purchases at demonstrations and on sales trips about repeated victimisation.

Only a few individuals who had been scammed when making purchases **reported the incident to the police**. Although some consumers reported the offence to consumer protection organisations; only a small number of victims of fraudulent purchases made complaints to official authorities.

- Experience with 19 offences:

When studying seniors from **towns/cities of different sizes** (population up to 20 thousand; population over 20 thousand) the following findings emerged. There were significantly more victims of burglary, theft of bicycles, theft of personal belongings, fraud during the purchase of goods among the residents of larger cities (population over 20 thousand) than among the residents of smaller cities (population up to 20 thousand). On the other hand, there were more victims of schemes to lure money from victims (or attempts to do so) in smaller towns and municipalities than among those living in larger cities (population over 20,000).

Both genders were usually affected to a similar extent by the 19 studied offences. The exception was victims of physical violence and victims of the threat of physical violence by a person they did not know. There were significantly more victims here among men than among women.

Statistically significant differences between **two age groups of respondents** ("younger" individuals, i.e. 63-72 years of age; "older" individuals, i.e. 73-80 years of age) were only found in three of the 19 studied offences. These were victims of theft in their flat/house after letting in a stranger, and victims of schemes to lure money from them. Significantly more people among the "older" respondents experienced these two offences than among the "younger" respondents. The opposite was the case for victims of scams when purchasing services.

- 41.4% of respondents had been the victims of **at least one of the 19 studied offences** during the one-year period. 21.7% of respondents were affected by one offence and 10.4% by two offences; 5.1% of respondents were the victims of three offences and 4.2% of respondents were the victims of four or more offences.

There were statistically significantly more individuals among the younger age group (65-72) in the research sample who were victims of at least one offence (43.3%) than among older individuals (73-80) (37.8%). There were also significantly more people affected by at least one offence living in cities with a population of more than 20 thousand (45.6%) than among individuals living in smaller towns (37.5%).

There were significantly more people who rated the police as less successful in controlling crime in their place of residence among the victims of at least one of the 19 studied offences than among respondents who did not fall victim to any of the 19 studied offences.

- 11% of respondents were encumbered with **debts**, i.e. roughly one in ten (346 persons). Almost one fifth of these individuals had problems with the repayment of their debts (19%). Around 5% of debtors admitted that they were facing distraint for non-payment of their financial obligations.

- 40% of respondents reported a **fear of crime** (avoiding certain places or people for reasons of safety when outside alone after dark in the area where they lived). Significantly more people from larger cities (44.3%) were concerned about their safety than those from

municipalities and smaller towns (37.4%) (population up to 20,000). There were also significantly more women (51.9%) than men (30.1%).

- At least 5.4% of respondents (164 persons) had a **functional firearm** at home. Roughly half these individuals reported having a firearm for hunting purposes (49%), while almost one quarter had it for crime prevention (23%).

- Almost 70% of respondents rated the **work of the police** in controlling crime in the area where they lived more or less positively (17.3% of respondents considered it very good, 54.2% of respondents considered it more or less good). The work of the police was rated positively by significantly more people living in smaller municipalities and towns (population up to 20,000) (83.5%) than among individuals from larger cities (77.8%).

- The victims of the studied offences made minimal requests for help from **organisations helping the victims of crime and violence**. This was only a few individuals.

- As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, one of the researches also concerned **seniors as the perpetrators of criminal offences in the Czech Republic**.

A condition for the inclusion of seniors in the sample of individuals whose criminal activity we analysed through criminal records was their corresponding age (i.e. 65 years or more at the time of committing the crime) and an unconditional sentence of imprisonment imposed by the court.

The **40 analysed criminal records** included 38 convicted offenders (three of whom were foreigners and two were women). The largest group in the sample were seniors aged from 65 to 69, making up approximately four fifths. Most were married with one child. Three fifths of seniors were skilled tradesmen or had only completed basic education.

Seniors in the sample had different economic and social status. Most of the sentenced seniors were pensioners. However, the amount of their pensions and secondary income varied considerably, ranging from roughly CZK 6,000 to CZK 44,000 per month. Approximately **one third had debts** (37%) and about 70% were subject to distraint. Six people said they were homeless.

Individuals in the research sample **mainly committed less serious offences**. Theft and obstruction of the enforcement of an official decision and expulsion accounted for more than half of all committed crimes. The length of sentences imposed by the court corresponded to

this. In almost half the cases, short term sentences of up to one year were imposed on offenders. On the other hand, seniors committed particularly serious crimes in almost 13% of cases. In particular, there were five cases of murder or attempted murder. There were also three convictions for rape and three for fraud in the sample. Given the size of the sample, other crimes such as robbery, extortion, evasion of alimony/child maintenance payments, etc, were only committed by individual seniors.

Approximately three quarters of the studied seniors had multiple criminal records. A surprising finding of our analysis was the fact that **seniors with hitherto clean criminal records committed the most serious crimes** (murder, rape).

The victims of crimes committed by seniors in the studied sample did not know the perpetrators at all in three fifths of cases. The offender chose them randomly. Conversely, about **one quarter of the victims had a close relationship with the perpetrator**, of which 3 were particularly vulnerable victims - children.

Statistical data from central state administration bodies, i.e. the Ministry of the Interior of the Czech Republic (in 2008-2015, before the change in methodology for data collection) and the Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic (in 2013-2018) shows that **the number of prosecuted and lawfully convicted individuals of senior age is growing steadily**. Unfortunately, the rising trend is also reflected in the number of individuals aged sixty-five or more serving imprisonment in Czech prisons. In view of the aging population in the Czech Republic, this trend can be expected to continue in the future.

Translated by: Presto