Latent crime in the Czech Republic - research

Latentná kriminalita v ČR - výskum

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Abstract:

The recognition of latent criminality is always topical because if we do not know its approximate rate, the measures for reducing crime will be limited and not very effective. We researched the possibilities of recognizing latent criminality. Our study did not aim to solve this complicated issue, but to detect the level of latent criminality in the Czech Republic, the ways to recognize it, and the possible reasons behind the "non-reporting" of crimes.

Keywords: *crime, victimization, research, victims.*

Abskrakt:

Uznávanie latentnej kriminality je vždy aktuálne, pretože ak nepoznáme jej približnú mieru, opatrenia na zníženie kriminality budú obmedzené a málo účinné. Skúmali sme možnosti rozpoznania latentnej kriminality. Naša štúdia si nekladla za cieľ vyriešiť túto komplikovanú problematiku, ale odhaliť mieru latentnej kriminality v Českej republike, spôsoby jej rozpoznania a možné príčiny „neoznamovania" trestných činov.

Kľúčové slová: *kriminalita, viktimizácia, výskum, obete.*

Introduction

Crime is a socio-pathological phenomenon that represents a current societal problem. People have always tried to reduce its frequency. It is necessary to recognize criminality so that the measures taken are most efficient. In this case, a significant problem, namely that overall crime consists of two parts, i.e., overt (or registered) and

latent. A registered crime has been reported to law enforcement authorities, i.e., Criminal Justice (CJ), or searched and entered into the information systems. Latent crime is unknown to CJ, and it is impossible to say what share it represents in the total crime rate. For this reason, it is necessary to ensure it is recognized.

This paper aims to acquaint the public with research results that sought to determine the degree of victimization in monitored crimes, the rate of non-reported crimes (latency of monitored criminal activity), and why crimes were not reported to the police.

Research

Limitations

It is necessary to consider some aspects that partially relativize the results of victimization studies. Marešová and Martínková [1] state that we must objectively recognize that victimological research has certain limitations, such as:

a) It does not cover all relevant age groups (the respondents are mostly older than 15 or 16 years, so it does not reveal anything about children's experiences with crime).
b) It deals with non-legal entities as victims.
c) It is limited to the crimes listed in the questionnaire used in the research, and so only measures a limited number and type of victimization experiences.
d) It does not include serious crimes such as murder, economic, organized crime, crimes against the environment, etc.
e) It does not cover crimes with no apparent victim (e.g., drug abuse).
f) It usually excludes persons who do not live in a household, e.g., "socially marginalized persons", people placed in various institutions, etc.

Critics also point to specific weaknesses in the research methods used. The tendency of victimological research to record more or fewer incidents is often mentioned. Therefore, the methods of compiling the research sample group and the range of answers obtained are being improved.[2]

The above-mentioned limitations of research on victims of crime probably mean that the research shows a smaller extent of crime. Sometimes these studies measure respondents' perceptions of crime, rather than the "actual" experience.

Research goals

The primary research goal was to specify the victimization rate in monitored crimes, and the rate of non-reported crimes, i.e., the latency rate of monitored criminal activity in the Czech Republic. The secondary aim was to discover the reasons behind crimes being unreported to the police.

Research questions

1. What is the victimization rate for monitored crimes?

2. What is the reporting rate for monitored crimes?

3. What are the reasons for not reporting monitored crimes?

Data collection methods

We used a questionnaire to obtain quantitative (statistical) data. The data were analysed and synthesised. We mainly used first-level sorting (frequency tables), and second-level sorting (contingency table) will be used for further data processing.

The questionnaire

To enable future comparisons, we used questions previously used in studies carried out in the Czech Republic. So far, seven studies have been conducted in the Czech Republic that follow the methodology of the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS) [3]. The implementer and national guarantor was always the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention. Research was conducted in 1992, 1996, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2010, and 2013. The studies always used ICVS methodology, i.e., the questions were aimed at the same criminal acts. The latest research, "Victims of Crime. Findings from the victimization study", was conducted in 2017 by employees of the Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention, under the leadership of Roubalová [4]. The types of criminal activities were uniform: car theft, stealing items from cars, motorcycle theft, bike theft, burglary, robbery, theft of personal belongings, physical assault, sexual assault, domestic violence, stalking, online shopping fraud, and fraudulent emails. The observed period was the last three years.

Data collection technique

The questionnaires were distributed electronically using social networks, e-mail, and WhatsApp. Respondents filled out the questionnaire using a link on the Internet.

Respondent selection

The target group were residents of the Czech Republic. We chose quota selection to construct the sample in the Czech Republic. Quota categories were gender and age. We used the snowball sampling method, which, as Baltar and Brunet [5] explain, is a method of selecting respondents or informants that is sometimes called 'chain' or 'reference' selection. It is a non-probability sampling type where all units or groups of units (subsets) do not have the same chance of being selected into the sample set (sample). As the sample grows, enough valuable data is collected. The sample group

grows like a rolling snowball. When social media is used, it is known as virtual snowball sampling.

Research

The research was carried out in March 2023. The internet link was accessible from February 26 to March 23, 2023, i.e., 24 days.

Data analysis - results

Potential respondents were approached electronically using social networks, e-mail, etc. The selection was carried out using the snowball sampling method. For this reason, it is not possible to say how many people were approached, but the estimated number is over 1,000. We cannot determine the number of people contacted (this was a request stated in the questionnaire). Of the 621 people who visited the page (link), 513 completed and submitted the questionnaire, while 108 opened the page without further reaction. This is a relatively large sample but not wholly representative. Of the 513 respondents, 250 were men (48.8%), 260 were women (59.6%), and 3 identified as other (0.6%). Table 1 shows the respondents' age.

Table 1 Number of respondents and age groups

Age group	Number	%
15-20	19	3.7
21-30	211	41.2
31-45	147	28.7
46-59	93	18.2
60 and over	43	8.2
Total	513	100

Empiric materials: source – proper.

The 21-30 age group was most represented, which is understandable; young people have a more "positive" attitude towards modern technologies. The youngest age group is least represented, mainly because it has the smallest age spread. The share of people naturally decreases with increasing age.

Table 2 Number of respondents who were (not) crime victims and their percentage

Answers	Number	%
Yes, they were a victim	156	30.4
No, they were not a victim	357	69.6
Total	513	100

Empiric materials: source – proper.

513 respondents filled out the questionnaire. 156 were victims of criminal activity (30.4%), 357 (69.6%) had not been a victim of a crime. The table below shows that almost every third respondent had been a victim of a selected criminal activity in the last three years.

Table 3 Number of selected crimes over the past three years, their percentage, number of reported crimes, their percentage, number of unreported crimes and percentage

| Crime type	Number	%	Reported	%	Unreported	%
Car theft	9	3.2	7	78	2	22
Car belongings theft	18	6.4	13	72	5	28
Motorcycle theft	3	1.1	1	33	2	67
Bicycle theft	27	9.5	14	52	13	48
Apartment burglary	10	3.5	8	80	2	20
Cottage/weekend house burglary	19	6.7	4	21	15	79
Robbery	1	0.4	1	100	0	0
Personal belongings theft	32	11.3	18	56	14	44
Physical assault	16	5.7	10	63	6	37
Sexual assault	8	2.8	1	13	7	87
Domestic violence	10	3.5	0	0	10	100
Stalking	14	5	6	43	8	57
Internet fraud	54	19,1	14	26	40	74
Fraudulent emails	31	11	0	0	31	100
Other crimes	31	11	13	42	18	58
Total	283		110		173	

Empiric materials: source – proper.

Table 3 shows the number of selected crimes over the past three years and their percentage, the number of reported crimes and their percentage, and the number of unreported crimes and their percentage. The respondents indicated that they had been

affected by some of the selected types of criminal activity in 283 cases. 156 people were affected, and the total number of offences was 283, which means that some people were victimized more than once, almost 1.8 times on average.

Diagram 1. Percentage of selected crimes in the last 3 years
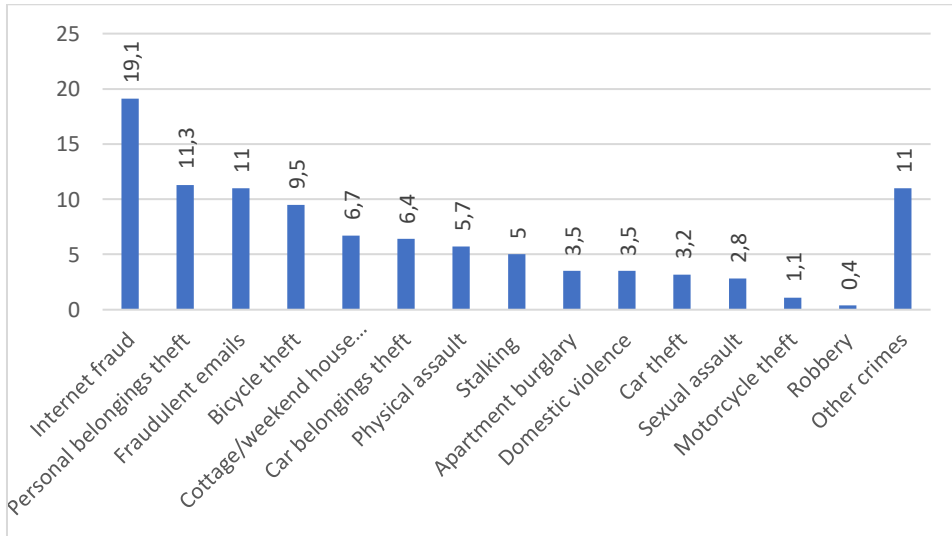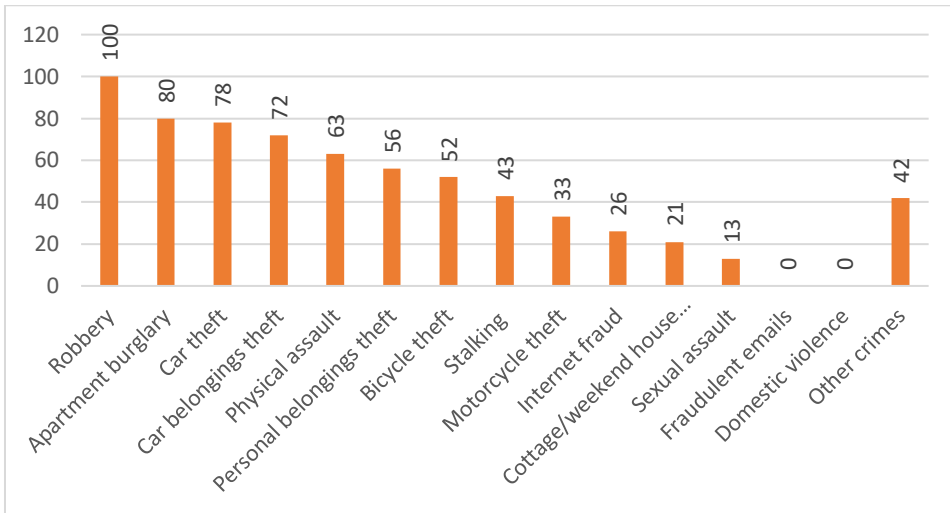

Empiric materials: source – proper.

Table 3 shows the proportion of selected types of crimes to crimes in total. For clarity, the data was transferred to diagram 1 and sorted by frequency from the most to the least frequent. Only "other crimes" were mentioned at the end. The diagram shows that online shopping fraud dominates, reaching 19.1%. Personal belongings theft and, of course, fraudulent e-mails reached a high percentage. Crimes related to personal integrity, such as stalking, domestic violence, and sexual assault, had a low percentage; probably caused by a reluctance to report these crimes, i.e., to "go public" with them. Robbery had the lowest percentage, and this is a serious, rarely committed crime compared to other crimes [according to crime statistics for the Czech Republic [6], 1,413 robberies were executed in 2022, which is 0.8% of the total crime rate (181,991)].

The above data answer the first research question: *"What is the victimization rate in the monitored crimes?"*

Table 3 reveals the answer to the next research question, "What is the reporting rate for monitored crimes?" The table shows that 173 monitored cases (61.1%) were not reported to the police, while 110 cases were reported (38.9%). Regarding the reporting of individual types of crimes, data from table 3 was transferred to diagrams 2 and 3 and sorted by frequency.
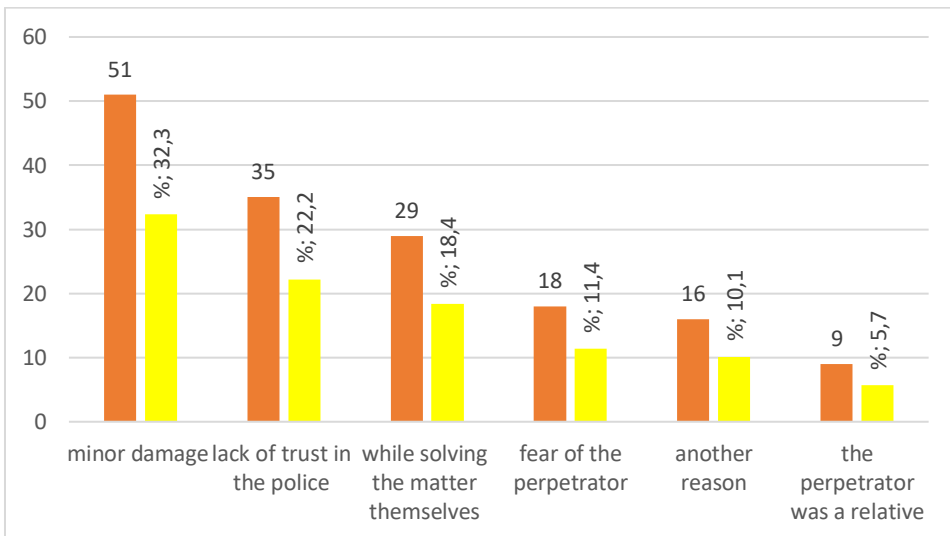
Diagram 2. Percentage of selected reported crimes in the last three years

Empiric materials: source – proper.

Diagram 3. Reasons (and their percentage) for not reporting selected crimes to the police over the past three years

Empiric materials: source – proper.

Over the last three years, robbery has been a 100%-reported category. However, we must say that the robbery was marked only once. Apartment burglary and car theft

show a high reporting rate. It is necessary to mention that this high percentage of reporting to the police can also be caused by the need to obtain credentials for insurance companies: vehicles and apartments are often insured because of the possibility of high damages. The least reported crimes are fraudulent e-mails and domestic violence. We can assume a high level of latency in domestic violence, a fact also mentioned by Tomášek [7].

The answer to the third research question: "What are the reasons for not reporting the monitored crimes?" is shown in diagram 3. We must say that this is the total number of the reasons for all selected crimes.

Diagram 3 shows the total number of reasons for not reporting all selected crimes over the past three years and their percentage. Respondents reported the least amount of criminal activity due to minor damage (32.3%). A lack of trust in the police (22.2%) takes second place, while solving the matter themselves (18.4%) takes third place. Fear of the perpetrator (or the perpetrator was a relative) were most often the reasons for not reporting. This is dependent on the fact that they are probably crimes related to personal integrity, and very few of them are reported (see diagram 2).

Discussion – summary

The obtained data were processed into tables and diagrams. The data in table 3 (number of selected crimes over the past three years and their percentage; number of reported crimes and their percentage; number of unreported crimes and their percentage) were transferred to diagrams 1 and 2. The data answered research questions 1 and 2, i.e., "What is the victimization rate in the monitored crimes?" and "What is the reporting rate for the monitored crimes?" It follows the processed data that the victimization rate is almost one-third (30.4%) when the interviewees most often fell victim to online shopping fraud (19.1%). Fraudulent e-mails showed a high percentage of victims (11%), confirming that young people (the largest number of respondents) are using Internet options more frequently, and a significant share of crime is moving to the Internet. Gřivna et al. [8] state that the spectrum of actions characterized as "cybercrime" is vast and includes highly sophisticated acts which require specific skills. It goes to criminal activity outside the network, and modern technology facilitates their perpetration.

Only one-third (38.9%) of selected crimes over the past three years have been reported, i.e., almost two-thirds have been latent crimes. 100% of robberies have been reported to the police over the last three years. There was only one robbery in this case, so it has a low informative value. Apartment burglary (80%) and car theft (78%) show a high reporting rate. This may be caused by the need to obtain credentials for insurance companies: vehicles and apartments are often insured because of possible high damages. The least reported crimes are fraudulent e-mails and domestic violence. We can assume a high level of latency in domestic violence. Despite the low number of crimes, we can say that the most serious crimes have a high reporting rate. This is confirmed by Kaiser [9], who states that the pressure of norms and sanctions causes significant differences in crime reporting. When serious crimes are committed, respect for the law is high, and the degree of latency is very low. On the other hand, online shopping fraud and

fraudulent e-mails (of which there are a significant number) were not frequently reported.

We processed the data in diagram 3 to answer the third research question: "What are the reasons for not reporting the monitored crimes?". Minor damage (32.3%) was the reason for respondents reporting crimes the least. This was followed by a lack of trust in the police (22.2%). The third reason was that they solved the matter themselves (18.4%). Fear of the perpetrator (or the perpetrator was a relative) were the most frequent reasons for not reporting.

Conclusion

The problem with recognising actual crime is that it is known (registered by the CJ) or latent (not reported to the CJ or not recorded in the relevant information systems). Only chapters of criminology textbooks cover latent criminality and its recognition. Publications that deal only with latent crime are absent, although partial research has been conducted. This paper does not aim to solve this complicated issue; instead, we tried to detect the level of latent crime in the Czech Republic, its recognition, and the causes of "not reporting" crime. The data obtained from the questionnaire will be further analysed.

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