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# **The Population of the Czech Republic and Victimization. New research findings**

# Summary

Victimization surveys have been carried out since the 1960 s. Over time, they have expanded to cover a wide range of crime-related topics. Their main advantage is that they can provide a variety of information on crime and its patterns that is not limited by the confines of official statistics. The best known studies of this type are, for example, the American National Crime Victimization Survey, the Crime Survey for England and Wales (previously called the British Crime Survey) and the International Crime Victims Survey (ICVS). The Czech Republic has regularly participated in these studies since the 1990 s through the research activities of the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention. In 2017, a new version of this research was launched, when a victimisation questionnaire was created on the basis of proven foreign research tools. The intention was to repeat this survey on a regular basis. The current project is therefore a second sweep, based on the same methodology and instruments, with the aim of creating a regular cycle of surveys and the resulting time series.

The primary objective of the study was to determine the extent to which the population is affected by the crimes under study, thus providing an additional source of information on the extent of crime in the Czech Republic, including its latent part. The secondary aim was to obtain more detailed information regarding the victimisation experienced, such as the proportion of crimes reported to the police and reasons for non-reporting, secondary victimisation and the wide range of impacts of victimisation, as well as respondents' views on crime-related issues. We also sought to identify potential risk and protective factors associated with victimisation through self-assessment scales and questions about respondents' lifestyles. For the first time in Czech victimisation survey, the questionnaire included a self-report section, aimed at capturing the respondent's own potential violations of the law.

Special attention was paid to the issue of domestic violence; in addition to the fact that it was included in the basic battery on victimisation, we were also interested in respondents' indirect experiences with this social problem, as well as their views on the options for dealing with perpetrators of domestic violence. The intention was to complement the findings of the IKSP project "Improvement of perpetrators treatment and victims support in cases of domestic and gender-based violence in the Czech Republic" with the perspective of the general population. As the reference period included the period of the covid-19 pandemic, we were also interested in whether the situation had any impact on the victimisation of the population.

The full version of the questionnaire was quite long, but the actual length of the interview depended on the level of victimisation of the respondent. Only a small part of the interview was intended for all respondents. The research focused on respondents' victimisation by selected offences. The questionnaire consists of several thematic modules which can be flexibly modified in the future if necessary. The core of the survey is a 'victimisation screener', mapping the respondent's victimisation in the three years preceding the interview, which represented the period roughly from autumn 2019. For incidents where their nature did not preclude this (domestic violence, stalking), victims were further asked if the incident had occurred in the last year.

A total of 12 offences were surveyed. For car theft, theft of items from a car, theft of a motorcycle, theft of a bicycle, residential burglary, and cottage burglary, we mapped the victimisation of the respondent or members of the respondent's household. The other offences observed – robbery, theft of personal property and physical assault – were only related to the respondent's person. In addition, responses to questions on sensitive offences (domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking) were completed by the respondents themselves, i.e. without the assistance of an interviewer.

The more detailed circumstances of the reported victimisation (place, time, type of violence used, characteristics of the perpetrator and many other circumstances according to the specific type of offence) were collected in the following section of the questionnaire. These questions were only answered by respondents who had been victims of one of the reported offences in the last three years. If they had been victims of the same offence more than once, they reported on the most recent one. Some of the supplementary questions for each incident were specific to the nature of the particular offence, while others were common to all offences. These were mainly about reporting the incident to the police (and reasons for not reporting), the outcome of this reporting, and last but not least, an assessment of the police work and their approach to the victim.

We also asked whether specialised victim support services were involved in the case, how satisfied victims were with the support they received or the reasons for not using these services. Consequences of victimisation beyond the primary harm are also an important factor in how the victim copes with the incident.

In order to take advantage of the fact that a large research sample was being collected, the questionnaire (as in the previous wave) also included questions designed for all respondents, regardless of their reported victimisation. In addition to questions about personal safety concerns, all respondents (i.e., even those who had not been victimised during the reference period) were asked questions that were not primarily intended to be repeated periodically. The questions were chosen to allow, as far as possible, the exploration of differences between victims and respondents with no experience of victimisation. A section addressed various self-assessment scales as well as respondents' risk-taking and protective behaviours. A specific module included in the 'self-completion section' dealt with experiences and views on domestic violence. For the first time, a module dealing with the respondent's own possible violation of the law was included. Of course, socio-demographic variables were used to sort the data.

The fieldwork was carried out by an external agency that won the tender. Data collection took place in the autumn (September-October) 2022 and was carried out using the face-to-face (F2F) method.

The population of the Czech Republic aged 15 years and older was the base population. The research sample is representative for this age group of the population of the Czech Republic. The sample of respondents was recruited using quota sampling, based on data from the Czech Statistical Office. The quotas taken into account were gender, age, education, region and size of the respondent's residence. After discarding incorrectly or incompletely completed sheets, 3 073 questionnaires were included in the final processing.

As in the previous wave of research, we sought to complement the findings of the population-wide victimisation survey with an additional research technique. Therefore, as part of the research task (also taking into account the pandemic situation that was just ending at the time), a research probe was conducted among professionals working with victims of crime. The intention was, first of all, to find out about the particularities of the victimisation of some marginalised groups that are not usually included in demoscopic research. Thus, the aim of this sub-research, which complemented the main victimisation survey, was primarily to obtain information about current service delivery practices for selected groups of crime victims and to obtain information about the impact of the covid-19 pandemic on the work of service providers with their clientele from the perspective of service providers. The research was carried out in the form of a short online questionnaire survey in February-March 2022 and focused on examining the practice of service provision to people affected by crime by five groups of subjects: selected organisations listed in the registers of service providers for victims of crime (accredited service providers), the Probation and Mediation Service (PMS), specialists in helping homeless people, specialists in working with drug addicts; we were also interested in the provision of assistance to victims of crime by psychotherapists. The sub-survey collected data from 472 professionals.

In the first part of the questionnaire, which focused on certain property offences, respondents were asked not only about their own victimisation but also about the experiences of other members of their household. This is because many immovable and movable assets are used by all members of the household, regardless of who paid for the item or whether it is officially in their name. Among these household offences, 4.5% of respondents or another member of their household had a car stolen in the last three years. The next offence surveyed, theft from a car, can take several forms – items left in the car may be targeted, or theft of car accessories and equipment can be stolen from outside the car, including fuel. A tenth of car-using households have been victims of such offence, a slight increase of one per cent since the last survey. However, for households where someone has used a motorcycle (of any type) in the last three years, we observe a massive increase in theft (4% compared to 13%), with a quarter of them having had their motorbike stolen repeatedly within three years. In the current survey, the term ‘bicycle’ has been extended to include electrified single-track vehicles. More than 18% of respondents (household members of the owners of such a vehicle) admitted in the questionnaire to having stolen a bicycle (or a similar device), while in 2017 this figure was only 13%. If we recalculate the relative frequency of theft for conventional bicycles only, we get a value of just under 14%, which shows that the level of theft in this type of delinquency is constantly increasing due to inclusion of electric variants of these means of transport.

The number of residential burglaries has fallen slightly since the last wave of the survey, from five per cent of households (affected over three years) to the current 3.4 per cent. In the past year, 1.2% of households have experienced a burglary. There is a relatively simple explanation for this decline: the covid-19 pandemic. At a time of massive restrictions on social life and travel, the opportunities for burglary in empty dwellings have also decreased as most residents have been forced to stay at home. Over 21% of respondents said they owned or used a holiday home. Burglary to such properties is also the most common type of offence (taking the users of such a building as the research sample), with almost a quar-

ter of 'cottage dwellers' having one such experience in the last three years, and 4% having experienced it repeatedly, giving a total of 28%. Overall, there has been an increase since the last survey, when 20% of respondents from holiday home users had been victimised.

Other offences observed were against the person of the respondent. The main type of property crime is theft. It appears that over 13% of respondents have been victims of theft (i.e. non-violent theft) in the last three years; of these, half of the respondents report that this happened to them in the last year. Residents of smaller towns and the youngest respondents, students and trainees, are more likely to be victims; unlike in previous surveys, women are not more likely to be affected by this type of crime.

Robbery is a crime that involves the use of physical violence or the threat of violence against the victim with the intention of taking his or her property. In our current research, 48 respondents, representing 1.6% of the research sample, have been victims of such an attack in the last three years. In line with the previous wave of research, we included not only completed robberies but also attempted robberies in the questionnaire. Future research may show whether the decrease compared to 2017 is a harbinger of a trend or whether it was again the result of a specific social situation during the anti-pandemic measures. Half of the robberies resulted in no injuries, and 15% resulted in minor injuries without the need for medical attention. None of the respondents suffered a serious injury with hospitalization and/or disability. This is consistent with the finding that a third of the perpetrators were unarmed, a tenth had a knife-type weapon and the same proportion had a striking instrument. A large proportion of victims were not sure whether the perpetrator had a weapon or similar instrument.

Physical assault by an unknown person, other than theft, was reported by around one in twenty respondents over a three-year period. A third of these incidents occurred in the last year. We can observe a stronger link to some socio-economic parameters than is the case for property offences. Victims of physical violence are significantly more likely to be unemployed, younger males aged 15–30, with primary education and students. Victims of physical assault are also specific in that they are significantly more likely to go out for entertainment on a daily or almost daily basis. Around 55% of victims of physical assault suffered either no injuries or only minor injuries requiring no treatment. Over a quarter of those assaulted received outpatient treatment for minor injuries. However, approximately one in ten people suffered injuries that required them to restrict their normal life. Three-fifths of the victims knew the perpetrator by name or at least by sight. Similar to previous research, just under a tenth of victims of physical assault (13 respondents) felt that the assault was caused by some form of prejudice.

As in the previous round of research, we also focused on particularly sensitive offences against the person. Specifically, we asked respondents about their experiences of domestic violence, sexual violence and stalking. In the current survey, 3.6% of respondents said they had been a victim of domestic violence in the last three years, while 4.8% of respondents did not know or did not want to answer this question. In line with other research, women were significantly more likely to be victims (71%) than men, with respondents who were unemployed or housebound, living in a flat on a housing estate and who considered their household to be economically deprived being more at risk. In terms of forms of domestic

violence, a third of cases involved beatings, another third involved threats; victims also reported being forced to engage in sexual activities, humiliation or other psychological abuse (7.1%). In terms of the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, partner violence dominated, accounting for almost 60% of the cases recorded. The research also confirmed the frequent coincidence of substance intoxication and violence, with almost half of the respondents indicating that, in their opinion, the perpetrator was usually under the influence of alcohol or drugs at the time of the events.

In the section of the questionnaire devoted to domestic violence, we also focused on the public's views on working with perpetrators of such violence. The assessment of the model case showed that respondents from all groups considered domestic violence to be a serious problem worthy of condemnation and would primarily send the perpetrator to prison for this behaviour; on the other hand, they considered it important to address the causes or triggers of violence at the same time.

Another offence categorised as particularly sensitive was sexual violence. This generally refers to behaviour involving unwanted sexual conduct towards another person without their consent. Fifty-two respondents in the study population (1.7%) reported having experienced sexual violence in the last three years, compared to 1.3% in the previous round. There was a strong gender bias in this offence, with women making up 83% of the victims. Victimization was also more frequently reported by younger respondents under 30 years of age. Housewives and respondents who rated themselves as essentially poor were also more likely to have repeated experience of this offence.

Stalking is a form of harassment and persecution of an individual that manifests itself in repeated unwanted following, contact and harassment. The definition is not exactly settled, and respondents were provided with a brief description of such behaviour as part of the question, but we can only rely on the respondent's subjective assessment of the situation. Less than 4% of the research population reported experience of stalking, which is slightly less than in the last wave of research, when 4.7% of stalking victims were identified. Again, women (67%) outnumbered men among the respondents who identified themselves as victims. It is worth noting that in the entire year 2022, only 318 cases of stalking (Section 354 of the Penal Code) were recorded by the police statistics, and thus there is no doubt that there is a huge latency in this behaviour. As regards the person of the perpetrator, in more than three-quarters of the cases the victim knew the perpetrator – this was mainly a former partner, and often it was a person whom the victim knew but did not have close relationship with, such as a friend, colleague or classmate.

An important area of current and past research is the consequences of victimisation. Consistent with the assumption, the financial and administrative burdens appear to be the biggest problem for victims of property offences. A frequent consequence of the experience of a property offence is that respondents become more cautious; secure their belongings better and take more care. Particularly in the case of residential burglaries, the feeling of security is undermined as a result of the incident and respondents report a fear of recurrence.

In the case of robbery and theft of personal belongings, the most common consequences are financial and administrative, but also increased caution. In the case of robbery, the

victim's sense of security is disturbed, leading to psychological difficulties. Victims of sensitive offences in particular suffer a wide range of consequences. Somewhat surprising, however, is the relatively high proportion of those who experience no consequences in relation to their victimisation in these incidents. A common psychological explanation is the tendency to trivialise or displace the negative experience.

Reporting a crime to the police is a common item in all victimisation surveys. As in previous research, it appears that victimised respondents have no problem reporting property offenses to the police. After car theft, the most reported offence is bicycle theft. A higher proportion of reports was also recorded for theft of personal belongings. Compared to the previous survey, these offences are reported more frequently. For offences against the person of the respondent, the proportions of reported incidents are significantly lower. The willingness to contact the police decreases proportionally with the sensitivity of the individual offences. For stalking, sexual assault and domestic violence, the vast majority of incidents remain latent, with 15–18% of these acts being reported.

The current round of research has therefore confirmed the high latency of particularly sensitive offences. According to the respondents, the main reason for not reporting a crime is a lack of confidence that the police would solve anything, or that the harm felt by the victim was not so serious that it would be worth going through the process associated with a criminal report. For particularly sensitive offences, perhaps out of concern for secondary victimisation, victims often preferred to opt for a more self-help, unofficial resolution of the situation.

Dealing with the offence within the criminal justice system carries the risk of secondary victimisation for the victim. We therefore sought to find out from respondents who had reported the incident what impression the actions of the police had left on them. Four statements relating to the professional proficiency, activity, behaviour and quality of information provided to the victim were examined. Respondents rated their experiences with the police quite positively, and for all statements, police officers received significantly better ratings than in previous research. Victims are most appreciative of the activity and courteous attitude of the police; however, they tend to rate practical aspects such as sufficient and understandable information and professional erudition somewhat lower.

We asked respondents who had been victims of any of the offences surveyed during the period in question whether they had used the services of an organisation specialising in helping victims of crime or a lawyer providing counselling and representation to victims as part of their professional activities. The fact remains that only a very small number of victims have used professional help. If the respondents had already decided to contact a professional, it was usually a lawyer. Persons with experience of a property offence mentioned at most an insurance company, not an organisation within the meaning of the Victims Act. Alarmingly, even victims of more serious offences against the person, where a greater need for professional care can be assumed, do not make use of this assistance. Of all the victims captured, only 7 respondents had contacted a specialized organization. Victims often feel that they do not need professional help or that no one would help them anyway. Therefore, when they do seek help, it is more likely to be from a lawyer than an NGO. It



can be summarised that there has been virtually no change in the problems identified in the area of victim assistance in the previous wave of research and most of the weaknesses in the system still remain.

As in 2017, in the current survey we asked respondents whether they avoid certain streets, places or people in their place of residence after dark for their own safety. Respondents were also asked about the use of certain measures to increase their personal safety. The aim was to identify possible differences in behaviour between people from different socio-economic backgrounds, personality types in terms of self-control and, above all, among those who have been victimised.

A third of respondents avoid certain streets, places or people, while almost a fifth almost always avoid them. On the other hand, more than half of the respondents move freely and without fear in their place of residence. On the other hand, 14% of respondents do not go out at all after dark. Overall, 46% of respondents are avoidant, which is slightly higher than the 42% recorded in the previous survey. The slight increase in avoidant behaviour may have been influenced by the situation related to the covid-19 pandemic.

Measures to increase personal safety ranged from the basic (checking the phone charge), to not going out in the evening without a company, to carrying a firearm. The vast majority of respondents (81%) reported taking at least one form of safety measure. However, 56% of respondents either only check the status of their phone or do not choose any preventive strategy. The use of stronger forms of self-protection, while statistically significant, is a relatively weak indicator of prior victimization.

Victimisation seems to be mainly reflected in vigilance and avoidance behaviour. However, it is not possible to determine the causality of these phenomena from the data – whether the respondents have become cautious and avoidant as a result of victimisation, or whether they belong to a group of high-risk individuals who have been victims of crime even though they have tried to prevent it. The most common consequence of victimisation is that victims behave more cautiously than they did before victimisation and, in the context of attacks against the person, their relationships with people have been further disrupted. The observed variables that we have thought of as risk and protective factors for victimisation in relation to theory are related to partial socio-demographic characteristics rather than to the victimisation itself. In general, it is not very surprising to find that the presumed ‘protective’ factors are more likely to be characteristic of women and older generations of respondents. As already mentioned, there is also a specific group of unemployed men, who usually consume alcohol during their frequent evening outings and may therefore be at a higher risk of physical assault.

For the first time in the Czech Republic, a self-report survey focusing on the adult population was included in the victimization survey. The space reserved in the questionnaire for this “special module” was used for a short block of self-report questions. When designing the questionnaire we decided not to leave the description of the offence to the informant himself, as there was a considerable risk of losing important information about the na-

ture of the recalled behaviour. Therefore, we categorised the possible offences into eight basic types, to which we added a short description in brackets to ensure as uniform an understanding as possible.

It should be noted that the questions concerned the lifetime prevalence of an illegal act. It should also be borne in mind that the behaviour in question was by no means always of a kind that amounted to a criminal offence. At least one experience of breaking the law in their lifetime was reported by 559 people in the research sample, representing 18%. Reported delinquency among men is 25%, among women 11%. The most common type of recorded offence is negligent behaviour (37% of reported offences), which usually includes accidents, whether road traffic or otherwise. The next most common type of offence is disorder or vandalism, with 26% of reports. Property offences come in third place with 13%. Of course, some of the respondents had committed more than one type of offence.

Similar to the victims (see above), social status is a significant factor in the actual experience of delinquency (in the broader sense). The most affected group is the unemployed, of whom a full 44% reported having broken the law. In this context, it is not surprising that people who describe themselves as 'basically poor' are also significantly more likely to report having broken the law, namely 37% of them. The index of reduced self-control is most pronounced in cases of reported vandalism and disorderly conduct; we also see a link with drug offences and violent crime. Not all of the 'perpetrators' subgroup were dealt with by the police in relation to their behaviour. However, given that a large proportion were negligent acts, i.e. mostly traffic accidents, the proportion of respondents dealt with by the police is relatively high. Overall, 12% of respondents in the research sample had experience of the police dealing with their own law-breaking, about a third of them repeatedly.

The sub-study, which complemented the main victimization survey, yielded the following findings:

Regarding the number of victims of different types of crime among the clients of the four groups of service providers (excluding psychotherapists), it was found (taking into account the estimated prevalence of more than 30% of victims of a certain type of crime among the clientele) that in the three years before the pandemic, providers of services for the homeless and for drug addicts encountered mainly victims of property and violent crime among their clients. Among drug-dependent clients, service providers also encountered victims of sexual and domestic violence. Accredited service providers for victims of crime were primarily contacted by those victimized by domestic violence, and to a lesser extent by dangerous stalking and violent and sexually motivated crime. Probation and Mediation Service staff dealt mainly with persons affected by negligence, property and violent crime, and less with victims of domestic violence.

The covid-19 pandemic did not significantly affect the number of victims of the monitored crime types among clients of the four service provider groups (i.e., the number of victims among other clients usually remained roughly the same as before the pandemic, according to the estimates of the largest proportion of service providers for each monitored crime type).

However, around one fifth to one third of drug service providers mentioned an increase in victimisation among their clients during the pandemic, for domestic violence and violent and sexually motivated crime. Similarly, around a fifth to a third of accredited crime victim service providers noted a higher incidence of victims of domestic violence, stalking, and sexually motivated crime among their clients. On the other hand, between a third and a half of PMS staff reported a significant decrease in the number of victims among their clients for all types of crime surveyed.

Use of the services offered – during the pandemic – was typically about the same as before the pandemic, according to the majority of providers for each of the services offered. Our predicted “less frequent” use of the services offered by victims during the pandemic was not significant.

In some cases, however, the demand for some services by client-victims of crime from some provider groups increased during the pandemic, compared to the period before. Among the “more frequently” used services by victims during the pandemic (mentioned by about one fifth to one third of service providers) were psychological, intervention and therapeutic support, legal counselling, medical assistance, and accompaniment to institutions.

The fact that the pandemic and the related epidemiological measures have had an impact on the provision of services to clients in general (not only to those affected by crime) was noted by 40% of homelessness workers and Probation and Mediation Service staff in each of the provider groups surveyed. This was also confirmed by about half of professionals working with victims of crime and service providers working with drug users.

The majority of service providers surveyed (approximately 70–80% of each of the four groups of providers surveyed) expressed the view that the pandemic and related measures had not had a major impact on their cooperation with other institutions. However, a minority of service providers stated that their cooperation with other institutions had been affected. In most cases, the impact of the pandemic in this area was perceived as negative by these staff. In the case of positive comments on the change in collaboration, more intensive cooperation, better work performance, and efforts to increase multidisciplinary interaction were usually highlighted.

A survey conducted among psychotherapists, members of the Czech Association of Psychotherapy, revealed the following findings:

Victimised clients of psychotherapists (whom 87% of the 220 psychotherapists encountered at some point in their practice) were most commonly affected by violent (reported by 45% of psychotherapists) and sexually motivated offenses (reported by 43% of psychotherapists). The other offences we asked about were not frequently experienced by psychotherapists’ clients.

Half of the psychotherapists reported that their clients – victims of crime, whom they had met in the course of their practice – usually did not address their victimisation until a long time after the incident (i.e. did not report their victimisation to the police and/or

did not seek any professional help). They then sought psychotherapeutic help only after a delay. About a third of the psychotherapists had met victims who had been affected by crime in childhood and had only sought psychotherapy in adulthood.

Approximately 30% of psychotherapists estimated that at least one in ten of their clients seeking psychotherapeutic help during their psychotherapy practice was a victim of crime. Other psychotherapists reported a lower proportion of crime victims among their clients during their psychotherapy practice; 13% of psychotherapists had not encountered clients affected by crime during their professional practice.

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Určeno: pro odbornou veřejnost  
Design: addnoise.org  
Sazba: Lukáš Pracný, sazbaknih.cz  
Tisk: Reprocentrum, a. s., Blansko  
Vydání: první, prosinec 2023  
Náklad: 200 ks

[www.iksp.cz](http://www.iksp.cz)

[www.kriminologie.cz](http://www.kriminologie.cz)

**ISBN 978-80-7338-202-5**

