

CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Jana Valkova¹

The International Victimization Survey was carried out in Czechoslovakia in 1992, the data being collected between 6 and 18 June. The survey was implemented by the Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention in Prague, which ensured its organisational preparation, an evaluation of the results and their interpretation. Specifically trained professional interviewers were hired for data collection; they personally contacted the respondents at their households and interviewed them according to the pre-prepared questionnaire.

One hundred and seventy interviewers questioned a total of 1,346 respondents in the Czech Republic and 109 interviewers contacted 654 selected persons in the Slovak Republic. The respondents were selected according to the quota technique, that is to say on the basis of their age, gender, and socio-professional qualifications as well as according to the area of residence, regional distribution and size of the population. The interviews were carried out in the Czech and Slovak languages.

Data collection proved somewhat difficult since it was carried out during the pre-election period in the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic, when the interviewers were very overworked and people were "fed up" with public opinion surveys and with elections in general. Despite this, the number of questionnaires returned by the interviewers was very high. According to the interviewers' report, the survey had been generally well accepted by the respondents, who had expressed the view that this was the most interesting research implemented by the Demoscopic Research Center to date. The reason for this positive reaction was closely related to the fact (among others) that the interviewees themselves considered crime to be a very current, and often the most serious, social problem. When asked: "What was the respondents' reaction to the Survey topic?", the interviewers replied that 28.7% had considered it very positive; 55.8% positive; 2.3% negative; and 13.2% did not know.

Sincere public concern over the problem of crime corresponded with the respondents' willingness to collaborate with the interviewers (52.2% answered the questions "absolutely spontaneously, without timidity and willingly"; 43.3% "relatively without timidity but not so spontaneously" and 4.5% "with significant timidity and unwillingly"). No respondent was encountered who was unwilling or too timid to answer the questions.

Both interviewers and interviewees found the questionnaire very intelligible. A few problems arose regarding an estimation of the value of the stolen (or damaged) property. These difficulties were caused by the rapidly changing prices in the society at the time.

Data collection was carried out successfully and without any complications. Some difficulties concerning the elaboration of the coding sheets were caused by the postal system. It sometimes took these sheets more than 14 days to reach Prague after they had been mailed. However, the greatest difficulties and problems

¹ Institute for Criminology and Social Prevention, Prague, Czechoslovakia.

arose during the transfer of data onto a diskette. The required method of transfer was completely atypical, complicated and lengthy compared to the procedure normally used in Czechoslovakia.

The research sample covered 2,000 persons and 1,821 fully completed questionnaires were returned (91.0%). The sample consisted of 882 (49.3%) men and 908 (50.7%) women (frequency missing - 31 persons). 51.6% of the respondents were aged between 35 and 64 years, 36% between 16 and 34, and 12.2% were aged 65 or over. 18.9% of the respondents were single, 60.3% married, 1.5% living with another person as a couple, 7.9% divorced or separated and 11.4% widowed. 1.9% of the respondents had received no education and 20.0% primary-level education; 34.9% consisted of skilled workers who had not passed a school-leaving examination and 8.5% of skilled workers who had passed a school-leaving exam; 25.9% had a secondary-level, and 8.9% a university-level education.

42.2% of the interviewees lived in a flat, 49.1% in a house, 1.4% in an institution and 7.2% used other types of dwellings. Seventeen percent of the respondents lived in an upper status residential area, 69.9% in a middle status, and 13.1% in a lower status area. 6.5% of them lived in either the Czech capital (Prague) or the Slovak capital (Bratislava), 8.9% lived in a regional capital, 28.0% in another town and 37.0% in a village. 68.1% of the interviewees lived in the Czech Republic and the rest in the Slovak Republic.

64.5% of the respondents' households had below-average net incomes, 20% above-average net incomes, and the rest did not know.

A total of 423 respondents (23.2%) had been victims of one or more offences during the five years covered by the survey.

Tables 1 and 2 present prevalence victimisation rates for a five-year and one-year period respectively. As can be seen from the tables, car thefts were not frequent among the respondents, and this fact is connected with the relatively low level of car ownership in Czechoslovakia compared to developed countries. However, the number of thefts from cars and especially of car vandalism was significantly high. Other frequent offences included bicycle theft and personal theft, and a relatively high level of sexual offences towards women was alarming. One out of six respondents had been the victim of a robbery (or attempted robbery), and one out of ten had been assaulted or threatened.

If a respondent had become the victim of any offence covered by the survey, this had occurred significantly often in 1991 (with the exception of motorcycle theft and car vandalism). This is proof of a rapid increase in criminality following the social changes which began in the Czech and Slovak Federal Republic in 1989 and which continue to the present day. Most of the respondents had been victimised once or twice in 1991.

As Table 3 shows, a well-known fact related to crime reporting has been confirmed: the most frequently reported offences are car theft and burglary. Furthermore, approximately one-third of thefts from a car, attempted burglaries, bicycle thefts, robbery and personal thefts were reported to the police. Those offences that the police learnt the least about were related to sexual incidents (only one out of every twelve cases).

Table 4 lists reasons for not reporting, which differ from case to case. In general, it is possible to conclude that this occurred because the respondent did not consider the incident serious enough. Other reasons were related to the interviewee's view on

police effectiveness. In this case two types of replies were given: "police could do nothing" and "police won't do anything". A number of the incidents were solved by the interviewees themselves.

The respondents also provided different judgements on the seriousness of the crime (see Table 5) and this depended on the type of crime committed (the offence that was mostly considered to be very serious for the respondents and their household was car theft).

The victims received most support from their relatives (59.2%) or friends (49.2%), but also mentioned the help of neighbours (21.9%) and the police (17.6%). Only a very small percentage of the victims had received assistance from social welfare agencies, religious organisations, specialised agencies, or from another person (1.6%, 1.9%, 1.0% and 5.1% respectively).

Two-fifths of the victims felt that a specialised agency to help victims would have been useful, 17.7% thought that it would not have been useful and 41.8% did not know.

These results lead to the conclusion that the Czech and Slovak society is not sufficiently prepared to ensure the provision of a concrete form of assistance to victims of crime. This kind of agency activity does not have roots here and therefore its creation must start from scratch. As a result, given the high level of crime in Czechoslovakia, victims find themselves in unenviable circumstances, and in order to find a rapid solution to the problem, an analysis of their position and possibilities of assistance is necessary.

36.1% of the respondents were satisfied with the way the police dealt with the reported crime, 55.4% were unsatisfied and 8.5% did not know. Thus, dissatisfaction with police activities prevailed, the main reasons for which were that the police "did not find the offender"; "did not do enough"; "were not interested" and "did not recover my property" (Table 6).

Nor was the work of the police in patrolling the streets where the respondents resided positively judged. 32.4% of the interviewees thought policemen do a bad job; 55.4% could not provide a judgement and only 12.2% evaluated their job as a good one.

18.5% of the respondents stated that a police officer passed along their street, either by car or on foot, at least once a day; 18.1% stated that this occurred at least once a week; 8.6% at least once a month and 12.5% did not know. At the same time, two-thirds of the respondents believed that the police should pass more often and only 14.1% were satisfied with the level of street control (the rest did not know).

Critical attitudes towards the work of the police were related, among other things, with the negative role of the police before the 1989 Revolution, when they supported the Communist Regime. Citizens do not trust the police very much. Despite the fact that some positive changes have been introduced within the framework of the Ministry of the Interior and the Police Force, these are not yet reflected in the citizens' attitudes towards the police. The changes, therefore, have not contributed very much in increasing the prestige of the police in the eyes of the public. A further reason for this unsatisfactory situation could be related to the fact that a rapid increase of the crime rate after 1989, coupled with a low clearing rate, has led to an increase in the fear of crime among people. The citizens blame the police for this situation; they accuse police officers of passive behaviour and consider policemen incapable of solving crime-related problems.

Fear of crime was also confirmed by data collected during the survey. Only 15.8% of the respondents felt very safe when walking alone in their area after dark; 40.3% felt fairly safe; 33.4% a bit unsafe and 10.5% very unsafe. 5.3% of the respondents deliberately avoided certain streets or areas, or walking in their own area after dark for safety reasons (36.9% gave a negative answer; 49.3% could not remember and 8.5% stated that they never went out).

The chances of someone trying to break into a respondent's home within the next months were considered real by more than two-fifths of the interviewees (very likely for 7.8% and likely for 34.7%). Only 31.5% did not admit to this likelihood and the rest did not answer.

Table 7 indicates the crime prevention measures taken by the respondents. Although most interviewees try to secure their property against a burglary, they usually use rather simple preventive measures (such as safety locks on the door, high fences or a guard dog) which do not stop the offenders from committing the offence. In most houses a caretaker is not employed although it has been proven that they play an important role in crime prevention.

Citizens do not take enough care to secure their property although they are well aware of the unfavourable conditions in the field of crime. The public must be made more aware, by providing more information and through the use of publicity campaigns, on the use of crime prevention measures.

Most respondents (62.9%) would pass an unconditional prison sentence on a recidivist burglar who stole a colour TV; the majority opted for a period of 2 to 6 months (14.4%); 6 months to 1 year (14.8%), or 1 year (12.2%). A suspended sentence and a fine were suggested by 16.5% and 10.3% respectively of the respondents, and 5.8% of the respondents would pass another sentence, mainly compensation for the damage (often exceeding the amount of the damage caused). One alarming suggestion was to impose a physical punishment on the offender by cutting off his/her hand.

These data point to the sensitivity of the citizens towards the theft of private property. This was also confirmed in previous public opinion surveys, when the interviewees judged this type of theft more severely than the theft of state property.

We can conclude that crime is a serious problem and therefore must be tackled in a very responsible way by society as a whole. No significant improvements can be expected without the creation of a really effective preventive system.

TABLES

Table 1: Prevalence victimisation rates (5 years)*

	Victimisation rate (%)
Theft of car	4.1
Theft from car	21.9
Car vandalism	48.8
Theft of motorcycle	3.5
Theft of bicycle	16.4
(Owners)	
Theft of car	6.7
Theft from car	35.9
Car vandalism	80.0
Theft of motorcycle	11.4
Theft of bicycle	20.0
Burglary with entry	11.5
Attempted burglary	5.5
Robbery	3.4
Personal theft	22.6
Sexual incidents	15.2
Assault/threat	10.4

* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 2: Prevalence victimisation rates (1 year)*

	Victimisation rate (%)
Theft of car	1.3
Theft from car	4.9
Car vandalism	4.7
Theft of motorcycle	0.2
Theft of bicycle	5.1
(Owners)	
Theft of car	2.2
Theft from car	8.4
Car vandalism	8.0
Theft of motorcycle	0.8
Theft of bicycle	6.4
Burglary with entry	6.7
Attempted burglary	2.2
Robbery	1.7
Personal theft	7.3
Sexual incidents	4.1
Assault/threat	4.1
Consumer fraud	46.3

Corruption	2.4
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* Prevalence - percentage of respondents who have been victims of a specific form of crime once or more.

Table 3: Reported crimes

	%
Theft of car	88.4
Theft from car	36.9
Car vandalism	10.8
Theft of motorcycle	20.0
Theft of bicycle	32.3
Burglary with entry	51.5
Attempted burglary	35.1
Robbery	32.2
Personal theft	30.5
Sexual incidents	8.2
Assault/threat	22.9

Table 4: Reasons for not reporting*

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/threat %
Not serious enough	80.0	52.8	51.1	25.0	30.3	47.5	20.0	30.8	34.5	30.3
Solved it myself	60.0	14.2	7.9	25.0	22.5	16.9	46.7	10.8	54.5	39.3
Inappropriate for police		4.7	3.6	12.5	1.1		6.7	2.6	1.8	3.4
Other authorities		2.8	2.2		6.7			5.6	3.6	5.6
My family solved it	20.0	5.6	7.2	25.0	4.5	8.5	6.7	3.1	7.3	1.1
No insurance	20.0	4.7	9.4	37.5	16.9	6.8		7.2		2.2
Police could do nothing		24.5	22.3	25.0	21.3	15.3	13.3	30.8	20.0	10.1
Police won't do anything		19.8	25.9		23.6	18.6	26.7	28.7	16.4	10.1
Fear/dislike police	20.0	0.9	2.2		3.4	1.7		1.5	1.8	
Didn't dare	40.0	3.8	1.4	37.5	9.0	5.1	6.7	0.5	7.3	5.6
Other reasons										
Don't know										

* Percentages calculated on victims who said they had not reported the last incident of each type of crime to the police - multiple answers possible.

Table 5: Crime seriousness*

	Theft of car %	Theft from car %	Car vandalism %	Theft of motorcycle %	Theft of bicycle %	Burglary with entry %	Robbery %	Personal theft %	Sexual incidents %	Assault/threat %
Very serious	62.5	7.4	4.4	10.5	12.2	13.7	25.6	12.8	25.0	22.1
Fairly serious	22.9	30.7	32.4	31.6	55.9	42.9	37.2	43.3	34.2	44.9

Not serious	14.6	61.9	63.2	57.9	24.2	43.5	37.2	43.9	40.8	33.1
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* Percentage based on victims of specific crimes.

Table 6: Reasons for dissatisfaction with the way the police dealt with the incident

	%
Did not do enough	17.5
Were not interested	15.4
Did not find or apprehend the offender	24.3
Did not recover my property	13.7
Did not keep me properly informed	2.4
Did not treat me correctly	1.7
Were slow to arrive	3.3
Other reason	0.5
Did not know	0.9

Table 7: Crime prevention measures*

	%
Installed burglar alarm	3.2
Installed door locks	40.5
Installed window/door grills	3.4
Maintain watchdogs	31.9
High fence	16.4
House has a caretaker	3.3
None of these	
Others	0.6
Ask somebody to watch home	34.7
Neighbours watch anyway	17.1
Possession of firearms	7.1
House is insured against burglary	59.0

* Percentages based on total sample of respondents.

