

## POLAND

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The International Crime Survey in Poland was carried out between 20 January and 5 February 1992 by the Polish Radio and TV Public Opinion Polling Centre on a nationwide random sample of 2,000 respondents aged 16 or over. The relatively poor state of the Polish telecommunications service (especially in the rural areas) made it impossible to apply the CATI method as it would have resulted in too great measurement error. Thus the Polish part of the study was conducted using the traditional questionnaire survey method (face-to-face).

Since work on the compilation of the survey results is still in progress, only a few selected response patterns for the whole sample (without correlations and cross-tabulations) will be presented. Also, due to some difficulties with the application of the supplied computer programme, no overall victimisation rate is available yet, except for specific offence categories.

In the period under investigation, the crime most frequently experienced by the respondents was personal property theft (20.1%), with as many as 83.6% of all incidents being cases of pickpocketing. 8.5% had personal property stolen in 1991, and almost 20% of them were victimised more than once. Yet, only 21.4% of all personal property thefts committed in the five-year period covered by the survey were reported to the police, even though over three-quarters of the respondents described the incidents as serious or quite serious. The main reason for failing to report the crime seems to be lack of faith in police effectiveness ("police could do nothing", "police won't do anything about it").

Bicycle thefts were also quite common (19.3%), of which 4.9% in 1991. Among respondents who had a bicycle stolen in the last year, almost 30% were multiple victims of this crime. Less than 50% of bicycle theft victims reported the incident to the police, and only in 13.7% of the cases was the bicycle recovered. The rather low reporting rate corresponds very closely with a lack of faith in police work, which was the main reason provided for not reporting.

There were fewer (8.7%) cases of moped thefts. Among respondents who were victims of this crime over the last year under survey (1.2%), over 30% suffered such loss more than once. In almost 90% of the cases the theft was reported to the police, who in this particular instance were somewhat more effective, since 47.6% of the stolen mopeds were recovered.

15.3% of the respondents were victims of thefts from garages, sheds and lock-ups in the relevant period. It seems worth pointing out that almost 40% of the respondents were victims of thefts from garages, sheds and lock-ups more than once, and over 15% three or more times.

48.4% of Polish households had owned a car, truck or van over the five-year period. Among "crimes against cars" the most prevalent were thefts of equipment or parts (24.1%), and 10.9% during the previous year.

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Almost 25% of car owners were multiple victims of such crimes in 1991 alone. And yet almost half (47.2%) the thefts from the cars went unreported.

Cases of malicious damage to cars were slightly less frequent (19.4% in five years and 10.5% in 1991).

For the majority of respondents whose car had been maliciously damaged in the previous year, it was a one-time experience (71.1%); the rest, however, experienced car vandalism repeatedly. The "dark figure" in this instance is quite substantial: only about 30% of the respondents reported the incident to the police. The main reasons for not reporting were that the incident was "not serious enough" or that the police could do nothing for lack of evidence.

Car thefts were relatively infrequent: only 3.9% of car owner respondents had been victims of this type of crime in the five-year period and 1.5% in 1991. It should be mentioned, however, that in the case of cars, theft incidence is very strongly related to the type of area: most cars are stolen in large cities. For this reason a combined data figure is particularly misleading in expressing risks for car owners in big towns. Moreover, it must be stressed that as many as 30.6% of the respondents whose car had been stolen in 1991 fell victim to the same crime a second time. As could be expected, the percentage of cases which were reported to the police was very high at 94.4%.

Contrary to popular belief, the proportion of cases in which car owners did not regain their stolen cars was not too high - about 23%.

Nearly 7% of the respondents had been victims of a burglary during the five-year period, and 2.6% during the last year. It is interesting to note that as many as 36% of the respondents who had their home burgled in the last year were multiple victims. However, only 53.5% of household burglaries were reported to the police, although nearly 80% of the respondents judged the event as serious or quite serious.

Just under 5% of households reported an attempted burglary within the last five years (3.1% in 1991). Over 30% of the incidents were cases of multiple attempts. As could have been expected, attempted burglaries were much less frequently reported to the police. In fact, such action was taken only in one out of four cases.

Altogether, over the five-year period nearly 12% of Polish households were either successfully or unsuccessfully burgled.

The most common forms of violent crimes were assaults and threatened or attempted assaults: amounting to almost 8% in the five year period and (4.1%) in 1991. Of those victims against whom force or threat of force had been used in the last year, over 40% reported having been attacked more than once. In almost half the cases, the respondents were attacked by more than one person, and in one-third of the cases by groups of three and more people. In about half the cases, the victim did not know the offender. In nearly 40% of the incidents actual force was used, with 11% involving the use of weapons. The serious nature of the attacks is reconfirmed by the fact that nearly 30% of the victims had to seek medical help. But again, only 26.9% of the victims reported the incident to the police.

4% of the respondents were victims of a robbery during the period covered by the survey. Among respondents who experienced a robbery in 1991 (2.3%), as many as 30% had been attacked twice, and 6% even more often. Consistent with the idea that robberies tend to be group crimes is the finding that in nearly 70% of cases there were at least two attackers. In about a quarter of the cases, the

offenders carried a weapon (mostly knives), but no cases of the offender actually using the firearm were revealed in the studied sample. It may be noticed that in 40% of the cases the offenders did not actually manage to steal anything from the victim. Considering that robbery is regarded as one of the most serious offences, and that in many cases the victims suffered an injury as well as loss of property, it may seem surprising that as many as 66% of the cases were never reported, even though over three-quarters of the respondents described the events as very or quite serious.

Almost 7% of the women admitted to having been sexually harassed, and 4.8% in 1991 (45% reported one-time incidents, and as many as 55% multiple assaults). In nearly 90% of the cases the victim had not known the offenders before the incident, and in 10% of the cases more than one offender was involved. None of the victims of sexual assaults would describe the offender as someone close (present partner, family member, etc.). When asked to describe the nature of the incident, nearly 14% of the respondents defined it as attempted rape, and close to 30% as indecent assault. Over 60% responded "yes" in answer to the question on whether they regarded the incident as a crime. When asked to provide a judgement on the seriousness of the incident, over 70% of the women who had been victims of sexual offences judged it as very or fairly serious. But again, less than 8% of such offences were reported to the police. This percentage seems to confirm the notion that in the case of sexual assaults the "dark figure" is particularly high.

During the last surveyed year, 11.5% of the respondents were victims of a consumer fraud (mostly in shops), and 5.1% reported that they were asked by an official to pay a bribe (civil servants and customs officers were most frequently mentioned in this connection).

A rather accurate estimate of the overall unreported crime rate can probably be gauged from the question about whether the police were notified by the victim or someone else during the last experienced crime, irrespective of its nature. It appears that the offence was not reported in as many as 65% of the cases.

This apparent unwillingness to report seems only natural considering that only 40% of the respondents who reported the crime were satisfied with the way the police handled the case. The main reasons for dissatisfaction were that the police "didn't find the offender", "didn't do enough" and "were not interested". However, incorrect or impolite treatment of the victim by the police was relatively seldom mentioned as a reason.

Almost half the respondents expressed a negative judgement when asked to evaluate police performance in fighting crime. Only 26.2% of the respondents reported that a police patrol passed by their street at least once a day, and 34.5% thought it happened less than once a month or never at all. Over 70% felt the police should appear in their area more often.

In short, the perception of the general public seems to be that although the police are still not doing their job properly, they are at least more polite. Without doubt, this can provide us with some consolation.

The next group of questions were related to the respondents' sense of security and the adoption of precautionary measures motivated by fear of crime. The main finding seems to be that the Poles can count on receiving only a very limited support from their fellow citizens in either fighting or preventing crime. Over half the

respondents maintain that in their area "people mostly go their own way", and only 30% think they can rely on neighbours for help.

In answer to the question about whether they felt safe walking in their area after dark, almost half the respondents (46.2%) stated that they did not, and 11.6% of them felt very unsafe in such a situation. 35.5% of the respondents avoided certain streets or places after dark, one-fourth recently went out in the company of another person for reasons of personal safety.

When asked about the likelihood of their house being broken into over the next year, as many as 37% of the respondents judged it probable. It seems surprising that despite such pessimistic (or, as some would have it, realistic) expectations, only a small percentage of the respondents try to protect their house against burglary. Among safety measures, a strong preference could be detected for the "natural" solution: as many as 43.5% of the respondents owned a dog for security reasons. Other safety devices include special door locks (17.1%), high fences (10.7%) and door phones (4.3%). Only 1.6% of the respondents had a burglar alarm installed. In contrast, a relatively high proportion (31.4%) insured their house against burglary. An even higher proportion of the respondents (45%) protected their cars with anti-theft devices (steering column locks, alarms).

The fear of burglary is also manifest in the fact that almost 40% of the respondents ask a neighbour or caretaker to watch their home during their absence, even a short one.

Less than 2.8% of the respondents admitted to owning a gun, and half of them claimed that they kept one to protect themselves against offenders.

65% of the respondents believed it would be useful to receive help from a victim assistance agency.

Perhaps unsurprisingly - bearing in mind the general picture that emerges from the study - as many as 47.2% of the respondents reported that the subject of crime had recently come up in conversation. The most frequently mentioned subjects were crime in general (assaults, robberies, rapes - 78.8%; fear of crime - 54.1%; crime increase - 20.6%; and factors conducive to crime rate increase, such as unemployment and easy access to firearms - 23%). Unlike his politicians, the average Pole does not seem unduly worried about corruption and financial scandals; the subjects were mentioned by just over 25% of the respondents who talked about such matters.

Somewhat surprising, on the other hand, was the response pattern to the question about the type of punishment the respondents considered appropriate for a recidivist burglar who stole a colour TV set. Contrary to expectations (and previous studies which strongly indicated that the Polish society opts for more punitive sanctions), less than 30% favoured a prison sentence. The sanction most often chosen was community service (46.3%) but, unfortunately, the way the question was phrased does not allow us to ascertain how many of the respondents favouring this punishment confused community service with forced labour camps. 12.5% of the respondents favoured a fine, and it may have some curiosity value to notice that 1% of the respondents thought that justice would be served by hand or finger amputation. Among the respondents favouring imprisonment, the majority (56%) considered a sentence of between 6 months and 3 years as appropriate for this type of crime.



## TABLES

**Table 1: Prevalence victimisation rates (5 years)\***

	Victimisation rate (%)
Theft of car	1.9
Theft from car	11.5
Car vandalism	9.2
Theft of motorcycle	2.2
Theft of bicycle	14.7
(Owners)	
Theft of car	3.9
Theft from car	24.1
Car vandalism	19.4
Theft of motorcycle	8.7
Theft of bicycle	19.3
Burglary with entry	6.8
Attempted burglary	4.9
Robbery	4.0
Personal theft	20.1
Sexual incidents	6.7
Assault/threat	7.8

\* 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	0.7
Theft from car	5.2
Car vandalism	5.1
Theft of motorcycle	1.2
Theft of bicycle	4.9
(Owners)	
Theft of car	1.5
Theft from car	10.9
Car vandalism	10.5
Theft of motorcycle	5.0
Theft of bicycle	20.5
Burglary with entry	2.6
Attempted burglary	3.1
Robbery	2.3
Personal theft	8.5
Sexual incidents	4.8
Assault/threat	4.1
Consumer fraud	11.5

Corruption	5.1
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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	94.4
Theft from car	51.1
Car vandalism	27.9
Theft of motorcycle	88.1
Theft of bicycle	47.5
Burglary with entry	53.5
Attempted burglary	24.5
Robbery	34.2
Personal theft	21.4
Sexual incidents	7.8
Assault/threat	26.9

**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		44.9	41.5	18.1	18.1	11.8	28.0	19.1	36.9	43.3
Solved it myself		5.5	1.5	8.7	8.7	6.7	14.0	3.7	2.1	9.4
Inappropriate for police		11.9	7.6	6.7	6.7	8.4	8.0	6.0	15.2	10.3
Other authorities		0.9	0.7			1.6	2.0	0.3		
My family solved it		0.9	1.5	1.3	1.3	5.0	4.0	0.3		2.8
No insurance		4.5	2.3	2.0	2.0	1.6				
Police could do nothing		35.7	35.3	36.9	36.9	44.0	32.0	54.8	19.5	20.7
Police won't do anything		18.3	22.3	27.5	27.5	16.9	20.0	28.9	21.7	18.8
Fear/dislike police		2.7	1.5	4.0	4.0	5.0	8.0	2.6	4.3	3.7
Didn't dare			3.0			1.6	10.0	2.6	10.8	8.4
Other reasons		5.5	6.1	6.0	6.0	5.0	8.0	4.7		3.7
Don't know				2.0	2.0		4.0	0.3		

\* 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	55.6	17.6	14.1	38.1	17.6	43.3	37.7	33.2	33.3	25.3
Fairly serious	36.1	38.2	35.3	45.2	47.9	39.9	39.0	42.9	37.3	39.0
Not serious	8.3	44.2	50.5	16.7	34.5	22.8	23.4	23.9	29.4	35.6

\* Percentage based on victims of specific crimes.

**Table 6: Crime prevention measures\***

	%
Installed burglar alarm	1.6
Installed door locks	17.1
Installed window/door grills	4.0
Maintain watchdogs	43.5
High fence	10.7
House has a caretaker	1.5
None of these	15.3
Others	6.3
Ask somebody to watch home	39.4
Neighbours watch anyway	10.8
Possession of firearms	2.8
House is insured against burglary	31.4

\* Percentages based on total sample of respondents - multiple answers possible.

