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Factors Influencing Crime Reporting: An Analysis of Victims' Perspectives Based on Sociodemographic Characteristics

Faktory ovlivňující hlášení trestné činnosti: pohled obětí optikou sociodemografických proměnných

Abstract

This article examines the factors influencing victims' decisions to report or not report criminal incidents. Drawing on survey data, the study analyses variations in the reporting behaviour based on victims' gender, age, and education attained. Data was collected from a total of 550 respondents aged 15 and over across the Czech Republic, 138 of whom were crime victims. The sample is representative in terms of age, gender, and education. The study focuses on motivations for reporting (such as the desire to punish the offender, obtain assistance, or receive compensation) as well as barriers to reporting (such as lack of trust in the police, minimising the harm, or fear of retaliation), and examines differences between sociodemographic groups in the reasons the influence their decision-making process. These patterns suggest that personal and structural factors jointly shape the victim's behaviour in the aftermath of crime. The study contributes to a better understanding of victims' decision-making processes and highlights the importance of targeted policies that address specific barriers faced by different population groups. Insights from this research may support the development of more responsive victim support systems and promote increased crime reporting rates.

Keywords: crime, victim, reporting behaviour, decision-making, security.

Abstrakt

Článek se zabývá faktory ovlivňujícími rozhodování obětí trestných činů o tom, zda daný čin nahlásit či nenahlásit. Na základě dat z dotazníkového šetření analyzuje variace v chování při hlášení trestných činů podle pohlaví, věku a dosaženého vzdělání obětí. Data byla získána od celkem 550 respondentů ve věku 15 a více let napříč Českou republikou, z nichž 138 bylo obětí trestných činů. Výzkumný vzorek je reprezentativní z hlediska věku, pohlaví i vzdělání. Studie se zaměřuje na motivace k nahlášení (například snahu potrestat pachatele, získat pomoc nebo náhradu škody) i na bariéry vedoucí k neoznámení (například nedostatek důvěry v policii, bagatelizaci

újmy či obavu z odvety) a zkoumá rozdíly mezi sociodemografickými skupinami v důvodech ovlivňujících jejich rozhodovací proces. Tyto vzorce naznačují, že osobní i strukturální faktory společně formují chování obětí po trestném činu. Studie přispívá k lepšímu porozumění rozhodovacím procesům obětí a zdůrazňuje význam cílených opatření, která řeší specifické bariéry různých skupin obyvatelstva. Poznatky z tohoto výzkumu mohou podpořit rozvoj efektivnějších systémů podpory obětí a zvýšit míru hlášení trestné činnosti.

Klíčová slova: trestná činnost, oběť, oznamovací chování, rozhodovací proces, bezpečnost.

Introduction

The reporting of criminal offences by victims is a key component of an effectively functioning criminal justice system and it has a significant impact on the capacity for both prevention and prosecution. Although reporting crime constitutes the first step towards investigation and potential resolution, a substantial proportion of victims choose not to report the offence. The reasons behind this decision are multifaceted and encompass personal motivations as well as social and institutional barriers.¹ They also result from a complex weighing of potential benefits, such as the pursuit of justice and the expectation of protection, against perceived costs, including the time required, loss of privacy, or fear of retaliation. This decision-making process is further shaped by sociodemographic factors, the severity of the offence, and the nature of the relationship between the victim and the perpetrator.² Understanding these factors is essential for optimising policies aimed at supporting victims and increasing the rate of crime reporting.

Situational factors – namely the characteristics of the incident itself and its immediate context – play a significant role in shaping the decision to report. A victim who does not know or did not see the offender often lacks sufficient information for identification, which may reduce the motivation to report the crime. Conversely, when the offender is someone close to the victim, the willingness to report may likewise diminish, as the victim may fear the personal or social consequences of doing so.³ Several studies have confirmed that incidents involving a perpetrator who is a close acquaintance or family member are less likely to be reported, as victims often perceive such cases as a “private matter”.⁴ However, other studies challenge this association and point to comparable reporting rates for violence committed by intimate or known offenders and that perpetrated by strangers.⁵ A lesser degree of harm or damage may

¹ ROUBALOVÁ, Michaela. *Oběti kriminality: poznatky z viktimizační studie*. Praha: Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci, 2019.

² TARLING, R. and K. MORRIS. Reporting Crime to the Police. *British Journal of Criminology*. 2010, vol. 50, no. 3. DOI: 10.1093/bjc/azq011

³ FELSON, Richard B. et al. Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police. *Criminology*. 2002, vol. 40, no. 3. DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-9125.2002.tb00968.x

⁴ Ibid.; SKOGAN, Wesley G. *Contacts between police and public: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey*. London: HM Stationery Office London, 1994.

⁵ BAUMER, Eric P. Neighborhood disadvantage and police notification by victims of violence. *Criminology*. 2002, vol. 40, no. 3. DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-9125.2002.tb00967.x; TARLING, R. a K. MORRIS. *Reporting Crime to the Police*.

also lead victims to perceive that the costs of reporting outweigh the potential benefits. Victims may view reporting a crime as a civic duty, a necessary first step towards holding the offender accountable, and a means of achieving a sense of justice.⁶ In addition, victims – particularly in cases of violent or property-related offences – may report the incident for practical reasons, such as the need to obtain assistance, protection, or financial compensation.⁷ In this regard, Goudriaan⁸ distinguishes three levels of decision-making. At the micro level – that is, the immediate context of the incident – factors such as the victim's familiarity with the offender and the nature of the event play a key role. These include whether the victim knows the perpetrator, the extent of harm suffered or the value of stolen property, the availability of means to contact the police, and the time elapsed since the incident. The decision also involves expectations regarding whether the police will respond effectively, the likelihood of obtaining compensation, and the prospect of the offender being punished. Normative aspects are equally relevant at this level and may include feelings of guilt, shame, fear of stigmatisation, or concern about the reactions of one's social environment. At the meso level – within the context of the community, neighbourhood, or organisation – the decision-making is influenced by the availability and perceived reliability of local support resources. These might include community support, private security services, or alternative conflict resolution mechanisms. Here, considerations often relate to whether self-help options exist and whether victims are aware of them. Normative pressures may arise from family, peers, or the broader community, as well as from institutional rules that may require reporting or internal resolution of the incident. At the macro level – that of the state or national context – the reporting behaviour is shaped by trust in the legitimacy, competence, and effectiveness of the police and other state institutions. Broader societal norms also come into play, including notions of individual versus collective responsibility, gender roles, and institutional arrangements such as insurance coverage. At this level, decisions about reporting are linked to how victims perceive the state's ability to protect them and ensure justice. Normative factors reflect cultural expectations of the role of both victims and society in responding to crime.

In line with other research, the decision to report a crime is also strongly influenced by the seriousness of the offence. More serious incidents – particularly those involving injury or substantial material loss – are significantly more likely to be reported.⁹ This pattern is particularly evident in cases of physical assault. The severity of the attack significantly influences the likelihood of reporting – the greater the threat or harm experienced by the victim, the more probable it is that the incident will be reported. Factors such as the presence of a weapon, the infliction of injury, or the perpetrator's dominance further increase the chances of police being contacted.¹⁰

⁶ SKOGAN, Wesley G. *Contacts between police and public: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey*.

⁷ FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police*.

⁸ GOUDRIAAN, Heike; LYNCH, James P. and Paul NIEUWBEERTA. Reporting to the police in western nations: A theoretical analysis of the effects of social context. *Justice Quarterly*. 2004, vol. 21, no. 4. DOI: 10.1080/07418820400096041

⁹ SKOGAN, Wesley G. *Contacts between police and public: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey*.

¹⁰ FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police*.

However, this does not hold true for sexual violence and rape, where a significant discrepancy persists between the high number of victims and the low rate of formal reporting to law enforcement authorities.¹¹ According to Felson,¹² the most common barriers include feelings of shame, a desire to protect the perpetrator (particularly if they are someone close), fear of retaliation, as well as concerns about the victim's own involvement in the conflict or participation in illegal activities. Significant weight is also given to so-called opportunity costs – that is, the time and psychological burden associated with providing testimony, attending court, and further involvement in the criminal justice process.

The decision-making process can therefore be modelled economically as a game in which the victim weighs whether the benefits of reporting, such as compensation or reduced risk of repeated victimisation, outweigh the costs. The benefits of reporting include intrinsic satisfaction derived from a sense of justice, solidarity with the community, and enhanced local safety, alongside external advantages such as compensation, insurance, or access to support services. Conversely, the costs of reporting can be substantial, ranging from time spent communicating with the police and courts to risks of loss of privacy, social condemnation, or retaliation by the perpetrator. These costs encompass the temporal and psychological strain related to evidence gathering and interactions with law enforcement and judicial authorities, as well as fears of embarrassment, social disapproval, or self-blame. Social costs may also involve loss of support from family or community and stigma within the community, especially when the perpetrator is someone known to the victim.¹³ The significance of these costs and benefits varies according to the victim's personal characteristics, as sociodemographic variables constitute a key factor influencing victims' willingness to report crimes at both individual and structural levels. For instance, women and older individuals tend to report offences more frequently, while socioeconomic factors such as higher income, home ownership, and higher educational attainment are associated with an increased likelihood of reporting.¹⁴ Other empirical studies¹⁵ consistently confirm that victims who are older, better educated, married, homeowners, and/or have suffered greater financial losses exhibit a higher likelihood of reporting property crimes.

Conversely, reporting rates – particularly for violent offences or less severe assaults – are significantly lower in areas with higher concentrations of immigrants or socioeconomically disadvantaged neighbourhoods. These disparities are not solely attributable to personal characteristics but are also influenced by experiences with the police and levels of trust in institutional protection. Individuals with prior negative

¹¹ KELLEY, Shamika M.; ZHANG, Yan and Eryn Nicole O'NEAL. To Report or Not to Report? A Focal Concerns Analysis of Victim Reporting Decisions Following Victimization. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 2022, vol. 37, no. 21–22. DOI: 10.1177/08862605211045333

¹² FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police*.

¹³ BOWLES, Roger; GARCIA REYES, Maria and Nuno GAROUPA. Crime Reporting Decisions and the Costs of Crime. *European Journal on Criminal Policy and Research*. 2009, vol. 15, no. 4. DOI: 10.1007/s10610-009-9109-8

¹⁴ BAUMER, Eric P. *Neighborhood disadvantage and police notification by victims of violence*.

¹⁵ XIE, Min and Eric P. BAUMER. Crime Victims' Decisions to Call the Police: Past Research and New Directions. *Annual Review of Criminology*. 2019, vol. 2, no. 1. DOI: 10.1146/annurev-criminol-011518-024748

encounters or those who have been repeatedly victimised tend to be less inclined to report crimes again. Thus, repeated victimisation may diminish the motivation to report if earlier experiences were unsatisfactory.¹⁶ Contextual factors, such as the level of social cohesion within a community, can mediate and partly determine the willingness to report crimes, particularly in environments characterised by low trust in the police or other public institutions.¹⁷

Despite legislative reforms aimed at facilitating the victims' access to justice and increasing their willingness to report crimes, many victims remain reluctant to come forward. As a result, official crime statistics often underestimate the true extent of criminal activity, as they do not capture incidents that go unrecorded by the police. This so-called "dark figure of crime" represents a significant challenge for both criminological research and policy development.¹⁸ From the foregoing, it follows that although official crime statistics, such as data from the Czech Police or international databases, remain a crucial source for monitoring trends and evaluating security policies, they must be interpreted with an awareness of potential bias. The victims' decisions to refrain from reporting crimes not only distort our understanding of crime distribution but may also limit the victims' access to necessary support, undermine the criminal justice system's capacity to deter offenders, and complicate the assessment of policy effectiveness.¹⁹ In this respect, victims are rightfully described as the "gatekeepers" of the criminal justice system.²⁰ The issue of crime reporting by victims is therefore crucial not only from a criminal law perspective but also for a broader understanding of how individuals respond to victimisation and how its impacts can be mitigated. Research focusing on victims' motivations and barriers in their decision-making contributes to a better comprehension of both individual and structural factors that influence their willingness to cooperate with institutions. A victim's decision to engage with the justice system is the outcome of a complex decision-making process in which personal expectations, emotions, social norms, and experiences with institutions intersect.²¹

However, one additional factor must be considered when interpreting statistics. As Levitt²² points out, certain interventions, such as increasing the number of police officers, can influence the victims' willingness to report crimes, which in turn may lead to an artificial rise in recorded crime without a corresponding actual increase in victimisation. This so-called reporting bias, arising from changes in reporting rates, can

¹⁶ CONAWAY, Mark R and Sharon L LOHR. A longitudinal analysis of factors associated with reporting violent crimes to the police. *Journal of quantitative criminology*. Springer, 1994, vol. 10, no. 1.

¹⁷ GOUDRIAAN, Heike; LYNCH, James P. and Paul NIEUWBEERTA. *Reporting to the police in western nations*.

¹⁸ AEBI, Marcelo F. Methodological Issues in the Comparison of Police-Recorded Crime Rates. In: SHOHAM, Shlomoh Giyora; KNEPPER, Paul and Martin KETT, eds. *International handbook of criminology*. Boca Raton London New York: CRC Press, Taylor & Francis group, 2010. DOI: 10.1201/9781420085525

¹⁹ XIE, Min and Eric P. BAUMER. *Crime Victims' Decisions to Call the Police*.

²⁰ GOTTFREDSON, Michael R. and Don M. GOTTFREDSON. *Decision-making in criminal justice: Toward the rational exercise of discretion*. New York: Plenum Press, 1989.

²¹ XIE, Min and Eric P. BAUMER. *Crime Victims' Decisions to Call the Police*.

²² The relationship between crime reporting and police: Implications for the use of uniform crime reports. *Journal of quantitative criminology*. Springer, 1998, vol. 14, no. 1.

result in an underestimation of the effectiveness of security measures if not properly accounted for. Levitt estimates that each additional police officer contributes, on average, to five additional crime reports that would otherwise have remained undisclosed. This underscores that reporting rates are influenced not only by individual factors but also by broader structural and institutional conditions. In this context, therefore, it is essential not only to determine whether a victim reported the offence but also to understand the motivations and barriers that shaped their decision.

Aim

The aim of this study is to analyse the motivations and barriers influencing the victims' reporting behaviour in relation to their sociodemographic characteristics – specifically gender, age, and education – and thereby contribute to a deeper understanding of decision-making processes within the context of criminal justice.

Methods and analysis

The research was conducted as an ex post facto survey across the population of the Czech Republic, forming part of a broader research project focused on values, leisure activities, substance abuse, social vulnerability, and their sociodemographic determinants. Data was primarily collected through an online questionnaire (CAWI). For respondents unable to complete the survey independently online for various reasons, assistance was provided by the researcher via computer-assisted personal interviewing (CAPI).²³

Sociodemographic variables were measured using categorical scales (gender, education) or metric scales (age), with subsequent categorisation.²⁴ Beyond the standard gender categories (male, female), education was taken into account using a categorical scale comprising primary education, vocational training, secondary education, and higher education. Secondary school students were classified within the primary education category, while university students were grouped under secondary education. Age was measured on a continuous scale but categorised into four groups for analysis purposes: adolescence and early adulthood (15–24 years), young adulthood (25–44 years), mature adulthood (45–59 years), and senior age (60 years and above).

Hypotheses were tested using Pearson's chi-square (χ^2) test of independence, supplemented by standardised adjusted residuals. The following hypotheses were examined:

Hypotheses regarding the likelihood of a respondent becoming a victim of a criminal offence or serious misconduct

- **H_{1a}:** The likelihood of becoming a victim of a criminal offence or serious misconduct does not differ according to age.
- **H_{1b}:** The likelihood of becoming a victim of a criminal offence or serious misconduct does not differ according to gender.

²³ BRYMAN, Alan. *Social research methods*. Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

²⁴ AZEN, Razia and Cindy M. WALKER. *Categorical data analysis for the behavioral and social sciences*. New York; London: Routledge, 2021.

- **H_{1c}:** The likelihood of becoming a victim of a criminal offence or serious misconduct does not differ according to educational attainment.

Hypotheses regarding the willingness to report a criminal offence or serious misconduct to the Czech Police

- **H_{2a}:** The willingness to report a criminal offence or serious misconduct to the Police of the Czech Republic does not differ according to the victim's age.
- **H_{2b}:** The willingness to report a criminal offence or serious misconduct to the Police of the Czech Republic does not differ according to the victim's gender.
- **H_{2c}:** The willingness to report a criminal offence or serious misconduct to the Police of the Czech Republic does not differ according to the victim's educational attainment.

Hypothesis regarding the influence of the perpetrator's familiarity

- **H₃:** The victim's decision to report a criminal offence or serious misconduct to the Police of the Czech Republic is not influenced by whether the victim knew the perpetrator.

Sample description

Data was collected from a total of 550 respondents aged 15 and over across the Czech Republic during the period of May to June 2024. The resulting sample is representative of the Czech population aged fifteen and older in terms of age (by age groups), gender, and education, with a maximum deviation of $\pm 7\%$ from the population distribution in each category. Of the total respondents, 270 were male (49 %) and 280 female (51 %). Regarding age groups defined by adulthood stages, the sample included 96 individuals in adolescence and early adulthood (17 %), 212 in young adulthood (39 %), 138 in mature adulthood (25 %), and 104 in the senior age category (19 %). With respect to educational attainment, the sample comprised 42 individuals with primary education (8 %), 143 with vocational training (26 %), 220 with secondary education (40 %), and 145 university graduates (26 %). The distribution of the measured sample corresponds to data from the most recent census conducted in 2021.

Research results

138 individuals, representing 25 % of the total of 550 respondents, reported having been victims of a criminal offence or serious misconduct. Among these victims, women were slightly more prevalent (78; 56 %). Regarding age groups defined by adulthood stages, victims comprised 17 individuals in adolescence and early adulthood (12 %), 64 in early adulthood (46 %), 40 in mature adulthood (29 %), and 17 in the senior age category (12 %). In terms of educational attainment, victims included 14 individuals with primary education (9 %), 32 with vocational training (23 %), 50 with secondary education (36 %), and 43 university graduates (31 %).

Overall, the victim structure largely mirrors that of the entire research sample, albeit with some deviations indicating differences in victimisation rates across sociodemographic groups. While males and females were approximately equally

represented in the overall sample, females appeared somewhat more frequently among victims.

The age distribution of victims partially diverges from that of the entire respondent population: the largest proportion of victims was recorded in the 30–49 age group, despite this group not constituting the majority of the overall sample. Conversely, younger respondents (under 29 years) and older individuals (over 60 years) were underrepresented among victims relative to their share in the full sample.

The educational composition also exhibits certain shifts. Although individuals with primary or incomplete secondary education comprised a substantial portion of the total sample, they were less frequently represented among victims. In contrast, respondents with secondary education (with a school-leaving certificate) and university-educated individuals formed a disproportionately higher share among victims compared to their representation in the overall sample.

The results of hypothesis testing (H_1) concerning the influence of gender, age, and education on the likelihood of becoming a victim of a criminal offence indicate that the only statistically significant predictor in this case is the respondent's age. Detailed results are presented in Table 1. Statistically significant differences were identified in two age groups. Respondents in early adulthood (30–49 years) were victimised more frequently than expected based on their population share ($z = 2.18^*$), whereas individuals in the senior age category (65 years and older) showed a significantly lower victimisation rate than expected ($z = -2.28^*$). Differences between observed and expected victimisation rates in other age groups were not statistically significant.

Table 1: Hypothesis Test on the Influence of Age on the Likelihood of Becoming a Victim of a Criminal Offence or Serious Misconduct

Have you ever been a victim of a criminal offence or serious misconduct (e.g., theft, robbery, assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, extortion, fraud, bodily harm, etc.)?				
		yes	no	total
Age Group by Life Stage	Adolescence and Early Adulthood	17 $z: -1.84$	79 $z: 1.84$	96
	Early Adulthood	64 $z: 2.18^*$	148 $z: -2.18^*$	212
	Mature Adulthood	40 $z: 1.22$	98 $z: -1.22$	138
	Senior Age	17 $z: -2.28^*$	87 $z: 2.28^*$	104
	total	138	412	550
Chi-square test results: $\chi^2_{(df=3)} = 11.0600$, $p = 0.011406$, $n = 550$				

Respondents who indicated that they had been victims of a criminal offence or serious misconduct were subsequently asked whether they reported the incident to the police. Analysis reveals that just under half of the victims (48%) filed a report. Table 2 presents the most common reasons for reporting or not reporting these offences. According to the respondents' answers, the primary reason for not reporting the crime was the desire to resolve the situation independently, without involving official

institutions (31 %), followed by the belief that police intervention would be ineffective (11 %) or that the harm caused was not severe enough to justify the effort involved in reporting (10 %). Other frequently cited reasons included distrust in the system, fear of retaliation by the perpetrator (8 %), preference for personal or family resolution, and a subjective assessment that reporting was unnecessary. Conversely, the main motivations for reporting centred on the appeal to justice – a desire for the perpetrator to be caught and punished (34 %), as well as the pursuit of assistance (16 %) or the recovery of stolen property (13 %). Some respondents also mentioned instrumental reasons such as insurance claim requirements (3 %) or the belief that reporting is a civic duty (10 %). Overall, the data indicate differing motivations regarding institutional responses: while some respondents prefer autonomous or informal approaches, others expect justice, compensation, or prevention of further harm from the system.

Table 2: Reasons for Reporting or Not Reporting a Criminal Offence or Serious Misconduct

Reasons for Not Reporting the Offence			Reasons for Reporting the Offence		
	<i>n</i>	%		<i>n</i>	%
Resolved the issue personally	22	31 %	Perpetrator should be caught/punished	23	34 %
Other	11	15 %	Wanted to receive help	11	16 %
Did not believe the police would resolve it	8	11 %	To recover stolen property	9	13 %
Damage/harm was not severe enough to justify reporting	7	10 %	Crimes should be reported	7	10 %
Fear of retaliation by perpetrator	6	8 %	Wanted to prevent recurrence	5	7 %
Did not think of reporting	5	7 %	Wanted compensation	5	7 %
Lack of evidence	3	4 %	Other	5	7 %
Fear (or distrust) of the police	3	4 %	Due to insurance requirements	2	3 %
Resolved by family	2	3 %			
Did not consider it necessary	2	3 %			
Reported to another institution	1	1 %			
Items were not insured	1	1 %			
Did not know where to report	0	0 %			

Similarly to the findings from the hypothesis test H1 regarding the influence of gender, age, and education on whether an individual becomes a victim of a criminal offence, age emerged as the only statistically significant predictor for reporting criminal offences (hypothesis H2). The results of this hypothesis test are presented in Table 3.

The most notable deviation from the expected frequency was observed in the group of adolescents and young adults (aged 15–29), who reported not reporting the offence more frequently than expected ($z = 2.20^*$) and reporting it less frequently than expected ($z = -2.20^*$). No statistically significant deviations were found in the other age groups.

Table 3: Test of the Hypothesis on the Influence of Age on Whether a Victim Reports a Criminal Offence or Serious Misconduct

Did you report the offence to the Police of the Czech Republic?				
		yes	no	total
Age group by life stage	Adolescence and early adulthood	4 z: -2.20*	13 z: 2.20*	17
	Young adulthood	29 z: -0.71	35 z: 0.71	64
	Mature adulthood	22 z: 0.97	18 z: -0.97	40
	Senior age	12 z: 1.94	5 z: -1.94	17
	total	67	71	138
Chi-square test results: $\chi^2_{(df=3)} = 8.5008$, $p = 0.036721$, $n = 138$				

Table 4 shows that the largest group of victims consisted of those who had experienced property theft, with 31 having reported the offence and 14 not having reported it. In cases of physical assault and bodily harm, 7 respondents reported the offence, while 13 did not. The situation is reversed in cases of sexual assault or rape – out of 12 victims, only one reported the offence, whereas 11 did not, which indicated a substantially lower reporting rate for these serious crimes. Similarly, only 4 out of 18 victims of sexual harassment reported the incident. Robbery was reported in 3 cases, while 5 victims did not report the offence. Domestic violence was reported in 3 cases and not reported in 7. Reporting rates for fraud and online fraud were relatively balanced – 5 out of 7 victims of online fraud reported the offence, while fraudulent misuse of trust was reported in half of the cases (3 out of 6).

Table 4: Reporting of Criminal Offences by Type of Most Serious Offence

	Did you report the offence to the Police of the Czech Republic?			
		yes	no	total
Type of offence (If multiple, please, select the most serious one.)	Property theft	31	14	45
	Physical assault, bodily harm	7	13	20
	Sexual harassment	4	14	18
	Sexual assault, rape	1	11	12
	Domestic violence	3	7	10
	Robbery	3	5	8
	Online fraud	5	2	7
	Fraudulent abuse of trust	3	3	6
	Other	5	0	5
	Stalking, extortion	1	2	3
	Bodily harm related to a traffic accident	2	0	2
	Disruption of communal living (neighbour disputes)	2	0	2
	total	67	71	138

Table 5 illustrates the relationship between reporting a criminal offence to the Police of the Czech Republic and whether the victim knew the perpetrator of the offence (Hypothesis H3). The statistical test confirms that knowing the perpetrator – particularly personal and closer acquaintance (“knowing by name”) – is associated with a lower likelihood of reporting the crime, whereas not knowing the perpetrator increases the probability of reporting. Victims who did not know the perpetrator reported the offence more frequently than expected (41 reports; $z = 3.05$), and conversely, those who did not report the offence formed a smaller-than-expected group (25 non-reports; $z = -3.05^{**}$). Victims who only knew the perpetrator by sight showed no significant deviation from expected values (5 reports, 6 non-reports). In contrast, among those who knew the perpetrator by name, the distribution was reversed: the offence was reported less often (17 reports; $z = -3.53^*$), while non-reporting was significantly higher in this group (39 non-reports; $z = 3.53^{***}$). Victims who did not see the perpetrator at all did not exhibit significant deviations (4 reports, 1 non-report).

Table 5: Test of the Hypothesis on the Relationship Between Reporting a Crime to the Police of the Czech Republic and Whether the Victim Knew the Perpetrator

Did you report the offence to the Police of the Czech Republic?		yes	no	total
Did you know the perpetrator of the offence you were the victim of?	Did not know	41 $z: 3.05^{**}$	25 $z: -3.05^{**}$	66
	Knew by sight	5 $z: -0.21$	6 $z: 0.21$	11
	Knew by name	17 $z: -3.53^{***}$	39 $z: 3.53^{***}$	56
	Did not see the perpetrator	4 $z: 1.43$	1 $z: -1.43$	5
total		67	71	138

Chi-square test results: $\chi^2_{(df=3)} = 14.3087$, $p = 0.002514$, $n = 138$

Discussion

The data obtained confirms that victimisation is not a rare phenomenon within the population – approximately one quarter of respondents reported having experienced a criminal offence. This finding aligns with previous research²⁵ and suggests that the prevalence of victimisation may be linked to factors such as social exposure, professional activity, and the ability to recognise unlawful behaviour. Among the total number of victims, women are slightly overrepresented. This observation is consistent with the assumption that certain types of crime (e.g., domestic violence, psychological harassment, or fraudulent behaviour) disproportionately affect women.²⁶ It may also reflect a greater willingness among women to disclose such experiences in the context of an anonymous survey.

Our research also corroborates broader trends identified in international studies, which demonstrate that the decision to report a crime is influenced not only by the nature of the offence but also by cognitive, emotional, and normative mechanisms, as

²⁵ ROUBALOVÁ, Michaela. *Oběti kriminality: poznatky z viktimizační studie*.

²⁶ FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police*.

well as wider contextual factors.²⁷ Although victims have historically been viewed primarily as passive subjects of crime, contemporary research highlights their active role as the “gatekeepers” of the criminal justice system, i.e. individuals whose decisions significantly influence whether a crime is recorded, investigated, and prosecuted.²⁸ A significant advancement has been brought about by the development of victimisation surveys, which have provided evidence of the complexity of reporting behaviours across different countries, types of crime, and time periods.²⁹ Current research trends therefore aim to develop multilevel theoretical frameworks that integrate individual motivations with the contextual environment which the victim is situated in.³⁰ These approaches enable a deeper understanding not only of the decision to report the crime itself but also of its long-term consequences, including the impacts of alternative coping strategies in response to criminal victimisation.³¹

The age distribution of victims indicates the highest incidence of victimisation in middle adulthood (46%), which may be linked to greater social and professional exposure, as well as the fact that individuals in this life stage are more frequently present in situations where criminal acts occur (e.g., in public spaces, at work, during financial transactions, etc.). The lower representation of victims among adolescents and seniors may partly reflect their reduced willingness to disclose such experiences or differing interpretations of what constitutes a criminal offence.³² It is important to note that the method of data collection may have influenced the results. In our study, respondents were initially asked whether they had ever been a victim of a criminal offence or a serious misdemeanour (e.g., theft, robbery, assault, sexual harassment, domestic violence, extortion, fraud, bodily harm, etc.). Only those who answered affirmatively were subsequently given the opportunity to specify the particular offence. Due to the low frequencies of certain types of crime and serious misdemeanour, such as stalking or disturbances of the peace, it is likely that many respondents did not identify these events as criminal acts, even though, from a legal standpoint, they arguably constitute such offences. This highlights the potential impact of question phrasing on the findings: a general question referring to a “criminal offence or serious misdemeanour” may lead to underreporting, especially regarding acts that are not commonly perceived by the public as serious or criminal. For future research, therefore, it would be advisable to consider employing more detailed, behaviourally specific questions that describe specific situations or actions rather than relying solely on legal terminology as a screening criterion.

²⁷ GOUDRIAAN, Heike; LYNCH, James P. and Paul NIEUWBEERTA. *Reporting to the police in western nations.*; XIE, Min and Eric P. BAUMER. *Crime Victims' Decisions to Call the Police.*

²⁸ GOTTFREDSON, Michael R. and Don M. GOTTFREDSON. *Decision-making in criminal justice.*

²⁹ DIJK, Jan J. van; KESTEREN, John N Van and Paul SMIT. Criminal victimization in global perspective: Key findings of the ICVS 2004–2005 and the EU ICS. *Meppel: Boom Legal Publishers and The Hague: Research and Documentation Center, Ministry of Justice.* 2007.

³⁰ XIE, Min and Eric P. BAUMER. *Crime Victims' Decisions to Call the Police.*

³¹ HICKMAN, Laura J. and Sally S. SIMPSON. Fair Treatment or Preferred Outcome? The Impact of Police Behavior on Victim Reports of Domestic Violence Incidents. *Law & Society Review.* 2003, vol. 37, no. 3. DOI: 10.1111/1540-5893.3703005

³² SKOGAN, Wesley G. *Contacts between police and public: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey.*

The distribution of victims across educational groups further suggests that victimisation is not confined to any particular social stratum but affects the population at large. This finding challenges the notion that crime primarily targets socially disadvantaged groups and underscores the fact that individuals with higher education and socioeconomic status can also become victims. Indeed, our data indicate that respondents with secondary education (with a school-leaving certificate) and those with tertiary education constitute an above-average proportion of victims relative to their representation in the overall sample, a pattern that contrasts with findings from other studies.³³ In this context, it remains an open question whether the method of data collection has influenced the self-reporting results. On the other hand, these findings may indicate that education affects certain aspects related to victimisation – for instance, the ability to recognise whether a particular behaviour constitutes a criminal offence, as well as ways of coping with its consequences, access to legal assistance, and the willingness to report the incident. This assumption further emphasises the importance of crime prevention as a societal responsibility, rather than solely a targeted intervention focused on so-called at-risk groups.

Our data also reveals that younger age is associated with a lower likelihood of reporting a criminal offence. This may be linked to a lower trust in institutions, limited experience with official procedures, or specific norms of youth subcultures.³⁴ The decision to report a criminal offence is not a universal response but is heavily influenced by the subjective perception of the situation as well as personal and social circumstances.³⁵ The motivations align with findings that low trust in institutions constitutes a key barrier to reporting, particularly among younger individuals and those from communities characterised by lower social cohesion.³⁶ Responses from victims who chose not to report the offence indicate that the predominant reasons include belief that they could resolve the situation independently (31%), distrust in the police's ability to effectively handle the case (11%), and a low subjective perception of the severity of the harm caused (10%). These reasons point to a low level of trust in institutions, as well as a frequent internalisation of the narrative regarding the "futility" of formal resolution. i.e. the attitude that appears to be particularly strong among younger respondents, as revealed by the age-group analysis. In contrast, those who did report the offence often cited motives related to the need for justice or institutional support, most commonly the desire for the perpetrator to be caught and punished (34%), the need to obtain assistance (16%), and the recovery of property (13%). Long-term research consistently shows that crime in Czech society is associated with concerns over injustice, rising levels of brutality, and perceived inefficiencies of the law

³³ ROUBALOVÁ, Michaela. *Oběti kriminality: poznatky z viktimizační studie.*; ROUBALOVÁ, Michaela et al. *Obyvatelé ČR a viktimizace: nové poznatky z výzkumu.* Praha: Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci, 2023.; TOUŠEK, Laco; WALACH, Václav and Petr KUPKA. *Labyrintem zločinu a chudoby: kriminalita a viktimizace v sociálně vyloučených lokalitách.* Brno: Nakladatelství Doplněk, 2019.

³⁴ SMOLÍK, Josef. *Subkultura mládeže: sociologické, psychologické a pedagogické aspekty.* Brno: Mendelova univerzita, 2017.

³⁵ TARLING, R. and K. MORRIS. *Reporting Crime to the Police.*; FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police.*

³⁶ BAUMER, Eric P. *Neighborhood disadvantage and police notification by victims of violence.*

enforcement agencies.³⁷ These concerns may shape victims' attitudes towards reporting crimes and contribute to the persistent distrust of the police.³⁸ The decision to report a crime is thus motivated not only by instrumental factors (such as compensation for damages) but also by normative attitudes (for example, the belief in the importance of reporting crimes as a principle).³⁹

Significant disparities in reporting rates across different categories of crime underscore the complexity of victims' decision-making processes, as well as the distinct barriers inherent to particular types of offending. While reporting tends to be relatively frequent in instances of property crimes, such as theft, it is considerably lower for more serious violent and sexual offences. This pattern corresponds with existing research, which highlights that victims of violent crimes encounter not only psychological challenges – including trauma, fear of re-experiencing distressing events, and social stigma – but also social and cultural norms that may perpetuate silence, particularly when the perpetrator is a family member or someone from the victim's close social network.⁴⁰ Low reporting rates in cases of sexual assault and domestic violence may also reflect victims' insufficient trust in the effectiveness of police investigations, fears of inadequate protection, and complex relationships with the perpetrator, which can include economic or emotional dependence.⁴¹ The low reporting rates for these crimes are also linked to concerns about insufficient institutional protection and the complex nature of investigations. In contrast, reporting tends to be more frequent in cases of property crime, especially where compensation or insurance claims are possible, highlighting the importance of rational, instrumental motivations.⁴² This decision-making process, however, is far more complex than often assumed. It involves not only a rational weighing of costs and benefits but also deeply rooted social and cultural factors,⁴³ as well as emotional elements. Some decisions may be made impulsively or under the influence of strong emotions, even though

³⁷ SMOLÍK, Josef. Stav kriminality: Zločin a trest. In: JANÁK, Dušan. *Česká společnost poodhalena*. Brno: Mendelova univerzita v Brně, 2024. DOI: 10.11118/978-80-7509-974-7-0151

³⁸ Distrust, feelings of powerlessness, or negative experiences with the justice system are therefore not merely individual attitudes but also reflect deeper societal patterns. For a more detailed discussion, see SMOLÍK, Josef. *Pocit bezpečí a obavy z kriminality v Brně*. Brno: Masarykova univerzita, 2018. DOI: 10.5817/CZ.MUNI.P210-8970-2018-102.

³⁹ SKOGAN, Wesley G. *Contacts between police and public: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey.*, CONAWAY, Mark R. and Sharon L. LOHR. *A longitudinal analysis of factors associated with reporting violent crimes to the police.*

⁴⁰ FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police.*; SKOGAN, Wesley G. *Contacts between police and public: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey.*

⁴¹ FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police.*

⁴² TARLING, R. and K. MORRIS. *Reporting Crime to the Police.*; WORTHEN, Meredith G. F. and Cyrus SCHLEIFER. #MeToo and Sexual Violence Reporting in the National Crime Victimization Survey. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence*. 2024, vol. 39, no. 21–22. DOI: 10.1177/08862605241234355

⁴³ Such as the acceptance of rape myths and the existence of a “rape culture” – see further details in BURT, Martha R. Cultural myths and supports for rape. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*. 1980, vol. 38, no. 2. DOI: 10.1037/0022-3514.38.2.217

a certain degree of calculation takes place. Motivations to report can include self-protection, the desire for justice, or the aim to protect other potential victims.⁴⁴

These factors shape perceptions of who qualifies as a “legitimate victim”, particularly in cases of violent and sexual offences. This often results in the selective exclusion of certain victims, such as women from minority groups, who face a so-called “double burden” of myths rooted in both gender and race.⁴⁵ Victims’ trust in institutional provision of support and justice is a crucial factor influencing their decision to report a crime.⁴⁶ Victims often hesitate to report crimes due to fears that they will not receive adequate attention, may be further stigmatised, or could experience additional trauma during the investigative process. Such concerns can foster feelings of isolation and helplessness, which diminish their willingness to engage with law enforcement agencies. Therefore, it is essential to build trust in the capacity and willingness of institutions to provide appropriate protection and support to victims. Enhancing this trust can significantly increase reporting rates, thereby contributing to more effective prosecution of offenders and the prevention of further victimisation.

This varied approach to reporting necessitates that prevention and intervention programmes specifically address these distinct barriers and needs among different victim groups. This may involve efforts to increase confidence in institutional support and the provision of specialised services for victims of violence and sexual abuse, as well as interventions targeting both children and the family environment.⁴⁷ Such an approach could help increase reporting rates even among the most heavily stigmatised categories of crime, thereby improving the effectiveness of the justice system and the protection of victims. The success of these measures also depends on whether they align with the perceptions of different population groups regarding what constitutes legitimate and effective strategies for prevention and protection.⁴⁸

The likelihood of reporting a crime is also significantly influenced by the victim’s relationship to the perpetrator. Victims who do not know the offender are statistically more likely to report the crime, which may be related to lower emotional burden and reduced fear of potential social or personal repercussions. Conversely, when victims know the perpetrator by name, there is a marked decrease in the willingness to report, reflecting the complex dynamics of close relationships, such as feelings of obligation, fear of retaliation, or a desire to protect the offender. These findings support existing research indicating that proximity and social ties between victim and perpetrator

⁴⁴ GOTTFREDSON, Michael R. and Don M. GOTTFREDSON. *Decision-making in criminal justice*.

⁴⁵ DONOVAN, Roxanne and Michelle WILLIAMS. Living at the Intersection: The Effects of Racism and Sexism on Black Rape Survivors. *Women & Therapy*. 2002, vol. 25, no. 3–4. DOI: 10.1300/J015v25n03_07

⁴⁶ HOLAS, Jakub. *Bezpečí, kriminalita a prevence*. Praha: Institut pro kriminologii a sociální prevenci, 2019.

⁴⁷ Cf. BERG, Rigmor C. et al. *Tiltak for barn og unge med atferdsvansker eller som har begått kriminelle handlinger* [online]. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of Public Health, 2020. Available from: <https://www.fhi.no/globalassets/dokumenterfiler/rapporter/2020/tiltak-for-barn-og-unge-med-atferdsvansker-eller-som-har-begatt-kriminelle-handlinger-rapport-2020.pdf>

⁴⁸ OLECKÁ, Ivana and Jiří POSPÍŠIL. Klíč k prevenci kriminality mládeže: analýza názorů populace dle pohlaví, věku a vzdělání. *Bezpečnostní teorie a praxe*. 2025, vol. 31, no. 2.

constitute significant barriers to help-seeking and crime reporting.⁴⁹ This phenomenon is particularly important in the context of violent and domestic crimes, where trust and a sense of safety within the victim's social environment are often compromised. From a policy and practice perspective, it is therefore essential to develop interventions that address this complex reality. Such measures might include supporting confidential and anonymous reporting channels, alongside comprehensive support for victims involved in close relationships.

Overall, the results confirm that when designing prevention policies or victim support services, it is crucial to consider age-related differences – especially in engaging young people and fostering their trust in the system. Focusing on destigmatising crime reporting and raising awareness of the support options available through institutional mechanisms are equally important. Enhancing trust in the police, improving knowledge of accessible assistance, and establishing accessible, safe reporting channels, particularly for victims in close relationships, are key prerequisites for increasing crime reporting rates and effectively supporting victims.

Conclusion

The study surveyed a total of 550 respondents aged 15 and over, representative of the Czech Republic's population in terms of gender, age, and education, with a maximum deviation of $\pm 7\%$ compared to the 2021 census data. Among these respondents, 138 individuals, corresponding to 25% of the sample, reported having been victims of a criminal offence or serious misdemeanour. The findings indicate that victimisation is not confined to specific groups but affects a broad spectrum of the population. Age, awareness of the criminal nature of the conduct, and the relationship to the perpetrator significantly influence the willingness to report crimes.

The low reporting rates for serious violent and sexual offences highlight the need for targeted interventions that overcome psychological and sociocultural barriers and enhance the victims' trust in institutional support. The significant role of age in reporting emphasises the necessity of specialised strategies aimed at young people and fostering their trust in criminal justice authorities.

Overall, the results underscore the importance of a differentiated approach in the development of prevention policies and support services, reflecting the diverse needs of victims and the varied contexts of victimisation. These insights provide a valuable foundation for further research and for practical measures focused on more effective protection and support of victims of crime.

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⁴⁹ FELSON, Richard B. et al. *Reasons for reporting and not reporting domestic violence to the police.*; SKOGAN, Wesley G. *Contacts between police and public: Findings from the 1992 British Crime Survey.*

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