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The democratic function of victim surveys

Demokratyczna funkcja badań wiktymizacyjnych

Abstract: Police-recorded crime statistics have been discredited among academic criminological circles for decades. Within the British public discourse, they gradually lost ground to victimisation surveys, most prominently "The Crime Survey for England and Wales." In Poland, by contrast, official crime rates still enjoy uncontested dominance, and alternatives such as victim-recorded statistics are sidelined by the police, who prefer to remain in control of crime data. Using a public criminology framework, this article shows that victim statistics have an important democratic function that goes well beyond their epistemic value. I argue that by providing victimisation data, criminology can act as a democratic under-labourer: it can be a counterweight to the official narrative, keep the police in check and calm heated debates.

Keywords: UK, Poland, crime statistics, public criminology, victim surveys

Abstrakt: Policyjne statystyki przestępczości są od dziesięcioleci dyskredytowane w kryminologii. W brytyjskim dyskursie publicznym stopniowo ustępowały miejsca badaniom wiktymizacyjnym, z których najbardziej znane jest „Crime Survey for England and Wales". W Polsce natomiast oficjalne (policyjne) wskaźniki przestępczości wciąż cieszą się dużą popularnością, a alternatywy – takie jak statystyki wiktymizacyjne – są marginalizowane przez policję, która woli zachować kontrolę nad danymi dotyczącymi przestępczości. Wykorzystując ramy kryminologii publicznej, artykuł ten pokazuje, że statystyki wiktymizacyjne pełnią istotną funkcję demokratyczną, która wykracza daleko poza ich wartość poznawczą. Twierdzę, że poprzez dostarczanie danych o wiktymizacji kryminologia może pełnić rolę demokratycznego „pomocnika" i stanowić przeciwwagę dla oficjalnej narracji, kontrolować działania policji i tonować emocjonalne debaty.

Słowa kluczowe: Wielka Brytania, Polska, statystyki przestępczości, kryminologia publiczna, badania wiktymizacyjne

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Introduction

Crime statistics are important. Not only are they useful in determining what we think about crime, they also influence what the public and politicians believe should be done about issues of law and order (Lomell 2010). However, not all crime data is equally reliable, and it is well known across the field of criminology that police-recorded statistics are "both incomplete and biased" (Reiner 1996: 188). A wider debate on the limitations of police statistics (Smith 2006; Independent Police Complaints Commission 2009; Buil-Gil, Medina, Shlomo 2021) is outside the scope of this paper.

The main criticism of police-recorded statistics is that they are susceptible to the dark figure of crime, i.e. the number of crimes which are not reported to the police. There are various reasons for this gap, but it is mostly associated with police practices and the willingness of victims to report. An unwillingness to report victimhood could be attributed to many factors, including a lack of faith in the police and the criminal justice system (Fagan, Tyler 2004; Sandholtz et al. 2013; Xie, Baumer 2019); not wanting to "go through the hassle" (MacDonald 2001); not seeing one's victimisation as serious enough (Los Ignatans, Pease 2017); or various combinations of these. Other limitations of police-recorded statistics could be a lack of standardisation across various forces (van Dijk, Tseloni 2012) and the fact that police forces in some areas are better at recording crime than others (Baumer 2002). The dark figure of crime can also be a product of manipulation where different police forces are less or more proactive with certain offences – especially easily detectable ones such as drinking in public – to make the problem of crime seem sufficiently high or low (see e.g. PASC 2014). The value of police statistics is further weakened by changes to legal definitions and classifications of offences over time. Crucially, the dark figure of crime hinders the operation of the criminal justice system, leads to mismanagement of resources and prevents victims of crime from accessing public and private resources (Skogan 1977).

Victim statistics are presented as an alternative to police-recorded statistics, especially in terms of epistemic value. Their potential for the development of criminology has been deemed so high that the recent presidential address to the European Society of Criminology was fully dedicated to the idea of a continent-wide victimisation survey conducted under the auspices of the Council of Europe (Bijleveld 2023). If successful, such a survey could overcome the comparability problem of national crime data and trace major trends in criminal offending across time and jurisdictional boundaries. A more "neutral source" of information on crime and victimisation can also contest the reasoning behind police actions. For instance, victim surveys can illuminate areas where the police are not being proactive enough and can potentially highlight areas where the police seem to be overly proactive (perhaps for reasons of expediency). This article argues that the value of victim statistics stretches beyond "official" functions. In the 2020s, when

much is being said about the decline of liberal democracies around the world (Görlach 2021) – and more specifically the legitimacy of the police – this article aims to show that victim statistics can perform important democratic functions.

Twenty-three years ago, Mike Maguire (2002: 368) wrote that "the traditional source of crime data associated with the modern period – the standard statistical series of notifiable offences published in official crime statistics – is becoming increasingly irrelevant." In Britain this seems to be true in relation to police-recorded crime (PRC) and seems to be exemplified by a 2014 report from the Public Administration Select Committee (PASC 2014: 3), which starts by claiming that "there is an accumulation of substantial and credible evidence indicating that the PRC data do not represent a full and accurate account of crime in England and Wales." It goes on to say: "the PRC under-records crime, and therefore the rate of decrease in crime may be exaggerated, and this is due to lax police compliance with the agreed national standard of victim-focused crime recording." However, Maguire's statement seems to not ring true in Poland in 2025. As I argue in this article, ownership of crime and crime-related data continues to be a controversial issue in Poland. Robust victim surveys, if executed correctly, create a source of information that is less susceptible to political influence. While it is convenient for the police in Poland to control how crime is counted and how crime statistics are generated, without a well-established alternative "counterbalance," the police can selectively deploy data to create an overly positive picture of their effectiveness.

This article focusses on two cases: Poland and the UK. These cases have been selected because I believe that there are significant differences in how victim statistics are portrayed and treated in the official setting in both countries. In the following section, the article first describes victim statistics in Britain and Poland. As it shows, victim surveys are well established in both countries, but in Poland they continue to be politicised. I develop this latter point in section 2, where I demonstrate the selectiveness of the Polish police in deploying favoured statistics and sidelining – or even withholding – different viewpoints. In the same section, I also describe the "democratic" functions that victim statistics can perform, set in the framework developed by Ian Loader and Richard Sparks (2011). In this article, I show that important democratic functions, which are needed in every country, are performed by victim statistics. However, in its current format, victim statistics in Poland are sidelined and not given the same opportunities as in Britain.

1. Victim surveys in Britain and Poland

Britain has a long history of police-recorded data, going back to 1857 (PASC 2014). Although there are various victim studies and sources of data in Britain, the largest and most established is undoubtedly the Crime Survey for England and

Wales (CSEW). The CSEW was initially developed and implemented as a tool for supplementing police-recorded data (Tilley, Tseloni 2016). It is the main monitor of the extent of crime in England and Wales, and it has been used to develop and evaluate crime reduction policies for over 40 years. The survey was first generated in 1982 and was known at that time as the British Crime Survey. The Survey was a product of the Research and Planning Unit of the Home Office.[1] The beginning of the British Crime Survey was rather humble, with a small sample of 10,000 respondents and a limited budget (Tilley, Tseloni 2016). Since then, it has grown substantially to cover approximately 50,000 households, although historically this sample has varied. Notably, the CSEW has its own annual conference, the Crime Surveys User Conference, where academics and officials exchange updates on the CSEW and present their research applications.

The CSEW includes detailed socioeconomic and demographic information of the participants. The survey asks both victims and non-victims about their perceptions and attitudes towards crime and criminal justice institutions such as the police. Comparing the two groups' responses has resulted in a better understanding of victim characteristics (e.g. the Repeat Victimisation framework) and has subsequently led to better informed police strategies (see e.g. Pease 1998). The CSEW is representative of all residents in England and Wales (over 16 years of age). The survey uses a stratified, multi-stage cross-section sample design with the use of Postcode Address Files (since 1992). The CSEW was successful in highlighting the existence of the dark figure of crime in Britain (Buil-Gil, Medina, Shlomo 2021).

Poland likewise has a long tradition with victim statistics, although its police dignitaries notably have a history of being defensive about crime data. In his memoirs, Sir Leon Radzinowicz (1999) recalls the many obstacles he faced trying to analyse crime trends in pre-WWII Poland after official statistics were discontinued and academic criminology was met with suspicion by the communist regime. The study, which he ultimately completed (Radzinowicz 1935), would have been even harder to conduct in postwar Poland (1944–1956), where crime statistics became classified. However, this began to change in the late communist era.

Notably, since the end of the 1980s, International Crime Victim Surveys (ICVS) have been conducted in Poland five times (in 1989, 1992, 1996 and 2004) (Van Dijk, Van Kesteren, Smit 2008). These were significant, allowing Polish researchers to compare the situation in Poland with what was happening internationally amongst other ICVS participants. Poland has two further studies which resemble the CSEW to some degree. The first of these is *Polskie Badanie Przestępczości* (Polish Crime Study), a joint project by the Polish Police Headquarters and the Institute of Justice, which aims to estimate the dark figure, measure fear of crime, and evaluate police work in addition to identifying crime trends. This study has a representative sample of approximately 17,000 respondents. However, as explained

[1] The Home Office is the branch of the British government responsible for immigration, security and other areas of law and order. In Poland the equivalent is the Ministry of Internal Affairs.

in section 2, these have been unavailable for public use since 2016. Researchers can, however, access the second study (*Ogólnopolskie Badanie Wiktymizacyjne* [Polish Victimological Study]), which looks at victimisation, fear of crime, social punitiveness and assessments of the police and the judiciary. The questions used in the Polish Victimological Study are based on the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) to make them comparable with other international victim studies.

Those interested in crime and victimology in Poland can also refer to other smaller and less frequent studies. The National Bureau for Drug Prevention, for example, conducts its own survey every four to five years (N ≈ 3,000). This survey focusses predominantly on the use of and access to illegal substances, but it also includes some questions on crime more generally. Other researchers resort to generating their own samples, often using schools and universities to find participants (Tomaszewska, Krahé 2018) or centring on geographic areas of interest (Kimic, Polko 2022). One noteworthy study comes from Beata Gruszczyńska (2007), who showed that 34.6% of women suffer various forms of violence (including physical and sexual) in their lifetime.

Like the CSEW, Polish victim surveys had various successes, including demonstrating the dark figure of crime, but in contrast to the CSEW, Polish victim surveys are not respected and regarded in the same way, particularly by the public. As this article argues in the following section, elevating Polish victim surveys to the same level as the CSEW could put into motion important democratic functions. These are needed because the barriers described by Leon Radzinowicz began to reemerge amidst the semi-authoritarian rule established in 2015 by the nationalist party Law and Justice. Krzysztof Krajewski (personal communication 2023), for example, drew parallels between the mistrust towards academic criminological research today and the thick wall of secrecy that separated the public and researchers from police operations in the People's Republic. As discussed below, the manipulation of police data has likewise been taking place in Britain, as former Metropolitan Police Commissioner Lord Stevens acknowledges: "[E]ver since I have been in the police service, there has been a fiddling of figures" (Barrett 2014). It is the way that officials attempted to address this practice that is of interest to us.

2. Politics of crime statistics

In terms of the politics of crime in Poland, since its inception in 2001, Law and Justice has promoted issues of crime and punishment (Krajewski 2004), promising to impose stricter laws, increase penalties for violent offenders and "end the paradise for the freeloaders and thieves in Poland" (Polska to raj 2012). From 2015 onwards, the hijacked national broadcaster (Telewizja Polska or TVP) has become a mouthpiece for Law and Justice, showing the party in a positive light

while reporting other more negative news as propaganda against their opponents. Success stories from the frontlines of the staged fight against crime were used to show that the Polish police, under the rule of Law and Justice, were effective at fighting crime, and that Poland is consequently one of the safest European countries.

The state-controlled police became a major source of good news, intended to assure the electorate that law and order had been successfully reinstated after a period of irresponsible experimentation with liberal legislation. Looking at the official police website, one could readily learn that Poles enjoyed a growing sense of security, while officers not only protected them against crime, but also rescued pets and prevented the profanation of their much-adored religious symbols (Polish Police 2019). On its website, the Polish police reported, amongst other predominantly positive events, that in contrast to the EU average of 11%, only 4.4% of Polish citizens had had to deal with issues such as violence, crime, and vandalism in the previous year (Polish Police 2021).

Despite these rose-tinted images, not everybody is satisfied with the police, especially after the ignominious role they played in the demolition of the rule of law in Poland, orchestrated by the nationalist government. In 2021, when judges closely associated with Law and Justice passed a near complete ban on abortion, the police force was extensively deployed against protesters, resulting in violence and multiple arrests (Fazan 2023). Together with other instances of politically motivated provocations (Krajewska, Makowski 2017), unexplained deaths in custody (Wądołowska 2021) and harassment of women suspected of using contraception (Tilles 2023), these acts of abuse called into question police legitimacy, at least in liberal constituencies. Rather than acting as an impartial law enforcer, the Polish police came to be seen as a mindless extension of the state.

To some of our critical colleagues this final statement may sound banal since the police as an institution was created to be an extension of the state and, in many ways, is there to enforce the law made by the state. I am not trying to suggest that I believe in the possibility of creating platonic guardians who would be completely impartial from the state. The degree of political manipulation and influence on the police can vary, however, and in Poland it reached a very dangerous level under the rule of Law and Justice, as exemplified by how the police acted during the Women's March (*Marsz Kobiet*).

Overall, the police can be perceived as being at the forefront of the democratic decline that characterises post-2015 Poland. This has arguably compromised its ability to provide unbiased data on the phenomenon it is supposed to tackle, since fluctuating crime rates do not lend themselves to propagandist use by state-controlled media. Against this backdrop, it is interesting to examine the results of the Polish Study of Criminality, commissioned by the police but conducted independently. Participants in the study report the extent of their trust in the police, rate the effectiveness of crime control and, crucially, report on fear of crime and their own victimisation experiences. The survey is carried out yearly at a significant cost of over PLN 420,000 (approx. GBP 80,000), paid for by taxpayers. If

executed systematically, and made public, it could allow researchers to analyse crime trends over long time periods and to compare them with official statistics. It could also help determine how the public responded to recent controversies surrounding police conduct.

This could be the case if the results of the survey were made publicly available, yet they have not been published since 2016, leaving researchers uninformed about developments since then. The Polish police are not uninterested in the true extent of crime; quite the contrary: victimisation data continues to be collected in an unchanged form, but remains a guarded secret of law enforcement agencies and, as journalists report, known only to the inner circle of the highest-ranking inspectors (Zieliński 2021). Somewhat resemblant of a politician who chooses private health care for his family amidst the decreasing quality of the national health service, the Polish police provide the public and media with substandard home-brand data, but simultaneously prefer to source their own information elsewhere.

3. The "democratic" function of crime statistics

I remain optimistic and along with other criminologists would like to suggest some potential remedies that could contribute to a healthier and more accountable police force. To exemplify what I mean, I borrow some of the most relevant ideas from Ian Loader and Richard Sparks' (2011) conceptualisation of criminology as democratic under-labourer.[2] In their book, "Public Criminology?," the authors proposed a style of engagement with the criminal question that is not limited to the production of (social) scientific knowledge and does not urge students of crime to side with law enforcement and current political interests. Ian Loader and Richard Sparks (2011) also argue that the role of academic criminology should not be reduced to activism or to a lone voice in the wilderness, out of touch with public sensibilities of the day. Instead, the democratic under-labourer contributes to the politics of crime and crime control based on sound academic expertise, which politicians and social movements may lack, while also acknowledging broader political connotations of their research work – something largely absent from many natural scientific domains with fewer implications to the public decision-making process.

Criminology may earn its place at the crime control table on academic merit and not by adopting the role of either a state actor or a progressive activist. What should be expected of criminologists is to provide knowledge about the realities of crime and punishment rather than prescriptive injunctions, which are usually followed by a lamentation about politicians' unresponsiveness. Therefore, our

[2] For Ian Loader and Richard Sparks (2011), the "Democratic Under-Labourer" refers to a vision of criminology that seeks to support democratic debate by clarifying issues, scrutinising evidential claims and improving the quality of public and political deliberation, rather than by exercising technocratic authority.

discipline's "distinctive contribution to the formation of a better politics lies in bringing this knowledge to bear on the matters of public concern and dispute" (Loader, Sparks 2011). Being aware of the political implications of our scholarship, and the context in which its successful reception is most likely, would already be a huge improvement relative to a criminology which, in its nostalgia for the liberal elitist era (Loader 2006), would wish to implement its policy recommendations over the heads of the unenlightened public. Rather than a domain of platonic guardians, crime has become a (legitimate) subject of political debate, whose rules criminologists ought to respect. While the exact contours of public criminology thus defined are yet to congeal in practice, I concur with Loader and Sparks (2011) in their aspiration to overcome the "successful failure" of a criminology which has thrived within the walls of academia but gradually lost the vestiges of impact on policymaking.

This style of criminological engagement is absent from the debate of our current interest. With almost no overlap, two positions can typically be inferred from the literature that take issue with police crime statistics. I associate them with two ideal types of criminological engagement sketched out by Loader and Sparks (2011): the scientific expert and the lone prophet.

The first one is associated with the critical school of "doing" criminology. Here, it was observed early on that the police had a stake in the recorded crime rates (Sykes 1974). Moreover, authors partial to critical thought are likely to see the collection of official data as a part of the social construction of crime (Sacco 2005). Their suspicions appear to extend to every sort of quantification, assumed to serve some unstated purpose; statistics, we are reminded, is the science of the state, and the words "government," "power" and "knowledge" are often uttered in the same breath (Hogg 1998). Granted, official crime statistics come in handy in the service of the governmental project, but what about the methods that bypass the power apparatus? The indiscriminate "Foucauldian" approach to numbers might obscure significant differences in how, by whom and for whom quantitative knowledge is generated. I agree with Loader and Sparks (2011: 130) that "the epistemic landscape is not entirely flat," and criminology is not utterly incapable of understanding the phenomena it sets out to examine. This epistemic advantage becomes evident when one compares police-recorded statistics – a low-quality by-product of the police force's main activity – with research that gives a voice to those affected by criminal offences. The extent of victimisation recorded by the surveys represents something more than Nils Christie's (2004) "suitable amount of crime" arbitrarily set by law enforcers. While I share many of the objections to PRC raised by our critical colleagues, I am inclined to see these objections as a point of departure for an alternative project.

The other position resonates with the ideal of impartial social science that is sometimes associated with falsificationism (Popper 1959; Lakatos 1970). The scientific expert opposes the official data, but with arguments of a methodological nature. Police crime statistics are simply not a valid source of empirical

knowledge, and that is due to the concerns addressed above: underreporting, imprecise classification and poor comparability. If, hypothetically, the police manipulated their data on purpose, the disengaged scientific expert would see that as "a threat to validity" more than anything else, since a threat to, say, democratic values would be hard to identify within this framework. However, even criticism based on methodology might prove ineffective when trying to reach the broader public. Criminologists may well expose the obvious shortcomings of official statistics, but unless they can come up with alternative data their voice will not be heard outside the classroom – such is the magic of numbers. The warnings about dark figures and obvious methodological deficiencies are easily ignored by the media and politicians, "who tend to present crime statistics as an accurate barometer of crime" (Lomell 2010: 125) in Poland. Without a positive alternative, such as the victim surveys I wish to champion, the "scientific expert" may ultimately achieve little more than the "lonely prophet." I also argue that the value of independently collected victimisation data resides not only in their methodological superiority, but also in the change it brings to the power dynamics of crime discourse.

Let me now exemplify what a public criminology of victim statistics could look like. The democratic under-labourer acknowledges that crime rates are a legitimate subject of public debate. Politics are not something that should or can be "circumvented or utterly removed" (Loader, Sparks 2011: 100). Crime and its extent will not disappear from public debate, but the quality of this debate might be improved with our contributions. Criminological expertise can be put to good use by producing high-quality data outside the state apparatus. The true extent of crime, whilst inherently unknowable, may be better approximated if measured independently from the administrative data collected by the police (van Dijk 2009). This allows the democratic under-labourer who compiles the data sourced from crime victims to bring into the debate scepticism about face-value categories.

As the issue of crime has become overly politicised, victimisation surveys may provide more accurate and impartial information about the extent of the problem (Aromaa 2012). Once available, these statistics could be used to calm the heated public debate on crime, whether in the UK or in Poland. One of the main purposes of modern criminology, as understood by the democratic under-labourer, is to "put evidence gathered to work in the struggle against ill-informed and ineffective crime policy driven by political considerations" (Loader, Sparks 2011: 104). Some might see victim statistics as an opportunity to satisfy the "mythical punitive public" by drawing its attention to crime's "banal, charmless, and unheroic realities" (Loader, Sparks 2011: 104). Furthermore, because the surveys always measure a particular type of offence, the data gathered from victims can improve the quality of the public debate by avoiding sweeping generalisations about "crime."

These are but a few examples of how the collection of victimisation surveys is of both epistemic and democratic value, in that they help realise the public value of criminology in a democracy. However, for us to be able to reap any of the potential benefits, the police must no longer remain the chief supplier of numbers

and must lose their monopoly on crime data. Crime statistics, previously "locked up in the administrative monopoly" (Robert, Zauberman 2009: 7), will then be freed so that they can perform their democratic functions.

4. "The infrastructure"

The democratic functions I have described above cannot be performed without suitable "infrastructure," and I would now like to describe specific developments which took place in Britain and which exemplify what I mean.

For much of the 20th century, official statistics were produced in Britain explicitly for the benefit of the government under what became known as the "Rayner Doctrine" (Bumpstead, Alldritt 2011). The purpose of these statistics was primarily to inform government policies, and any wider societal value was secondary. This system was predominant until the creation of the Statistics Authority. During this time there was public outcry and criticism of this approach, and discussions were held in the public sphere on the "purpose and role of the state in relation to its citizens" (Bumpstead, Alldritt 2011: 3). This is important for the Polish context, as it will likely take a long time for a similar "infrastructure" to emerge. In 2008, the Statistics Authority was created in the UK. Their role is to safeguard the production and publication of official statistics, so they serve the public good and, importantly, "benefit society, not just the government" (Bumpstead, Alldritt 2011: 2). Their obligations are set in law by the Statistics and Registration Service Act 2008, and they operate under a Code of Practice for Official Statistics, which is used to audit all official statistics produced in the UK, including Police Statistics. The code focusses on sound methods and assured quality; it requires that those involved in the production of official statistics should continually seek to improve statistical processes, and that these statistics should be well explained and, crucially, accessible.

Police-recorded statistics have been criticised in Britain for some time now (e.g. Lynn, Elliot 2000; Smith 2006; UKSA 2010). One of the most recent attempts at criticising the validity of PRC is traceable to a report titled "Caught red-handed: Why we can't count on Police Recorded Crime statistics." This report, published in 2014 by the PASC, is critical of PRC and its representativeness of crime on the basis that it under-records crime due to a lack of compliance with national standards on the part of the police. Partially because of that report, in 2014 the UK Statistics Authority withdrew its "National Statistics" quality mark – or, in more colloquial terms, gold standard status – for the PRC (Travis 2014). "National Statistics" "required the statistics to be produced, managed and disseminated to high professional standards" (PASC 2014: 19). This followed concerns over the integrity of PRC, including, but not limited to, allegations that the Metropolitan

Police had understated sexual offences by 25%. In the rationale for the decision, the author of the report said, "the fact is in anything that gets measured, once those who are being measured, whose performance are being measured, work out how the system works, there's an incentive, resisted by many, to manipulate the process as to make your own performance look good" (Rawlinson 2013).

The CSEW became the only statistical source of information on crime accredited with the "National Statistics" quality mark. From that point on, the British police were officially no longer able to use PRC to, for example, paint an overly optimistic picture of their effectiveness; instead, they were forced to align with a more realistic representation of crime, such as that offered by surveys like the CSEW. This is not to say that PRC is completely irrelevant, but it has been officially replaced by a more robust counterpart. This has also affected the ability of the police force to create its own legitimacy; instead, British police are now more open to scrutiny from an "external" source of information, which creates a counterweight to their claims. The same report continues that "the CSEW is a crucially important counterpart to the PRC – not least as a benchmark against which the PRC trends can be compared" (PASC 2014: 17).

Crucially for this context, the responsibility for publishing both PRC and the CSEW was transferred from the Home Office to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) in 2012. This also coincided with the creation of the Crime Statistics Advisory Committee (CSAC), which was set up to provide advice on methodological issues. The CSAC is a non-statutory body established by the National Statistician[3] in 2011. It consists of academics and members of the ONS, the Home Office and other government bodies working with crime statistics. Both events were the product of an independent review set up by the Home Secretary in 2011 "to address concerns that the Home Office's involvement in publishing crime statistics was undermining public confidence in the political independence of the figures" (PASC 2014: 9).

Similar processes would be desirable in Poland since the police, being the primary stakeholder, can easily withhold findings – as was the case with the Polish Study of Criminality. Currently, it is mostly private institutions who generate survey-based data; in our view, this should also be changed. Statistics Poland (*Główny Urząd Statystyczny* or GUS) is the main body responsible for statistics in Poland. They collect and disseminate data on dozens of matters, including education and economics, for example. In some ways, Statistics Poland is a similar institution to the British Office for National Statistics, and could, in principle, assume this responsibility. We have already seen from the British context that responsibility for major projects, such as victim surveys, can be moved and changed.

[3] The National Statistician is the Chief Executive of the UK Statistics Authority. The National Statistician advises the ONS, the Home Secretary and other officials on how to best ensure that official statistics on crime in England and Wales are accurate, comprehensible and clearly presented.

Conclusion

The aim of this article was to demonstrate the important "democratic" function of victim surveys, especially in countries with deteriorating democratic institutions like Poland. We began with a brief summary about victim statistics in the UK and Poland. In the main body of the paper, using the framework developed by Loader and Sparks (2011), we argued that victim statistics have an important democratic function. In addition, we traced how a special "infrastructure" was laid out in Britain that allows the CSEW, as reflected by the Statistics Authority, to perform the democratic function of counterbalancing police claims and guiding the police. I now have several recommendations so that Polish counterparts can do the same.

Firstly, Polish police-recorded statistics should be discredited more actively in the public sphere, and their "official status" should be changed, as happened in Britain. As described, the Polish police force currently has a significant monopoly over generating and reporting crime data. This data is then selectively used to create a positive picture of themselves, as can be seen on their website. This creates a dangerous mix when combined with state-owned public television, which is likely to report on these successes without additional scrutiny and frame it in relation to successful governmental policies. Changing the official status of PRC so as to reflect its limitations and potential for manipulation can have a potentially positive effect on the accountability of the Polish police. However, this also requires an independent statistical watchdog: a Polish Statistical Authority of some sort. Secondly, as argued, future studies should be generated independently from the police.

Discussion: Limitations, costs and caveats

It is worth concluding by saying that I am not trying to romanticise the British "approach" to this issue nor to imply that the processes outlined in this article have resulted in a perfectly accountable or legitimate British police force. Even with better victim statistics and greater accountability, as reflected by discussions in the public and political spheres, the British police continue to face significant institutional challenges. A recent report by Baroness Louise Casey (2023), commissioned after the abduction and murder of Sarah Everard, has made striking criticisms. The report concludes, amongst other things, that the Metropolitan Police has downplayed sexual harassment, with 12% of women employed in the Metropolitan Police saying that they have been harassed. One third also claimed to have experienced sexism. Baroness Casey said that the lifeblood of British policing was haemorrhaging and warned that "public consent is broken," with just 50% of the public expressing confidence – even before revelations about the force's worst recent scandals. However,

perhaps this is something I would also like to see in the Polish context: a system similar to the British one, a model where, in principle at least, the police are aiming to improve and are held more accountable for their actions.

I am also not trying to present victim surveys as a perfect tool, although I may have unintentionally done so. Even though some academics have proclaimed the CSEW as a gold-standard survey of its kind (e.g. Flatley 2014), surveys like the CSEW have their own technical limitations, which I will not describe in detail here, but they include the problem of recall bias, where participants might be unable to give precise information because they forget when, how and where something happened.

Another factor to take into consideration is that generating a new and systematic study like the British CSEW is not cheap. The contract value of the CSEW is approximately GBP 28,000,000 and is expected to increase to GBP 34,000,000 due to an increase in sample size (ONS 2022). There are also other labour costs. A survey like the CSEW is an ongoing work in progress, as what is and is not considered a crime changes over time. Stalking and cybercrime, for example, have only recently been recognised as criminal offences in Britain. Cultural changes lead to the recognition of new offences, as well as changes to the willingness of victims in reporting (Estrada et al. 2010). Those involved in new Polish studies of victimology will have to monitor these social contexts and adjust the questionnaire and sampling technique to make the survey more reliable. However, given all the costs and labour, it is worth considering that criminal justice bodies such as the police will be able to operate in a more evidence-informed way, which might lead to better use of existing resources and less waste. More importantly, there is potential for improving people's lives, which is difficult to quantify in terms of financial costs.

Change in this area would take a long time, but is really needed in Poland. Rob Bumpstead and Richard Alldritt (2011: 1) state that "statistics can only genuinely inform the citizen and the democratic debate if the focus of the producer is on their utility." In Poland, the producer of statistics – namely the police force – is less concerned with utility, and this needs to change. A source of such crucial knowledge as crime statistics must be handled and managed by an independent party. Taking away the "power" of the police by removing the official status of police-recorded statistics will not be easy, and neither will persuading other officials that further investment in victim surveys will be cost-effective. A lot of "softening up" of the key policy actors would have to be done (Kingdon 1984).

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