

# 1. Introduction

*Dirk Baier, Christian Pfeiffer*

Representative research on crime rates and their trends in Germany is sparse. To date there have been no regularly repeated victim surveys of the kind that exist in the US and the UK. Anyone with interest in nationwide crime data for Germany has to refer to the German Police Crime Statistics. As it is known, these statistics only give a small picture of overall crime. Not only do they fail to permit reliable estimates about the prevalence of victimisation in the German population, it is also difficult or impossible to make inferences from the Police Crime Statistics about questions such as what population groups face heightened victimisation risk, what other factors are determinants of victimisation, and what are the consequences of criminal victimisation.

A major research focus at the Criminological Research Institute of Lower Saxony (CRLS), which is where all papers compiled in this volume came from, is to address the shortcomings of the Police Crime Statistics, among other things using representative surveys. The institute was founded in 1979 as an independent research institute in the form of a registered association. For three decades now, CRLS has practiced what is the rule in the English-speaking world but remains the exception in Germany, where criminology is less well established in the university research landscape, namely interdisciplinary research. CRLS brings together legal scientists, social scientists/sociologists, psychologists and in some cases researchers from other disciplines on a project basis. This not only addresses a need in research related to victimisation. Other focuses of CRLS's work – including research on offenders, research on prevention, intervention and evaluation, and research on institutions – likewise benefit from interdisciplinary collaboration. CRLS is well equipped to foster such research, for one thing because it has a fixed state-funded budget enabling long-term appointments, and for another because it annually raises third-party funding, for example from ministries, foundations and other organisations, that makes it possible to employ other staff (such as doctoral students) for shorter periods to carry out research on specific issues.

One of CRLS's objectives is to perform applied research, i.e. research of use to practitioners. This is achieved, firstly, by selecting and addressing current topics of public interest. Secondly, CRLS aims to make project findings available to a broad public, using both the media and direct contact with interested citizens through lectures and podium discussions. Thirdly, based on project findings effort is made to infer ideas for the prevention of crime. This can lead to the development of specific prevention programmes and evaluation of their effectiveness. CRLS thus also serves as an intermediary organisation between criminological research, practitioners and policymakers, and contributes in this way to a crime policy along rational and science-based lines.

Alongside this applied research, CRLS also aims to undertake more basic research. This requires the presentation of research findings to the academic public. Suitable channels for this purpose include congresses and publication in academic journals. In the past, however, success in reaching an international audience has sometimes been limited. One aim of this book is to present findings of different research projects of the CRLS to an international audience.

This compilation is divided into four sections, each containing at least one paper. The primary aim of each paper is to provide a descriptive overview of a victimisation-related topic. All papers centre on the presentation of findings from empirical research projects. These include both large-scale standardised surveys and qualitative interview studies with small numbers of interviewees. A distinctive feature of the projects carried out at CRLS in recent years is the increasing use of both quantitative and qualitative methods to investigate a phenomenon. Where underlying project data allow, the papers supplement the descriptive findings with correlational analysis. This relates both to potential determinants of victimisation and to potential consequences. Nearly all analyses presented in this volume use cross-sectional data. A few studies recently begun at CRLS are at least long-term in nature but were not yet able to be included here. But a number of papers in this compilation are able to draw comparisons with predecessor studies. This allows trend analysis, enabling conclusions to be drawn on trends based on self-report data for selected victim groups and forms of victimisation.

In the first section, in a sense by way of background for all subsequent papers, which largely relate to self-report survey data, *Dirk Baier and Michal Hanslmaier* present a key, reported-data-based statistical resource, the German Police Crime Statistics. Among other things, the authors look

at the composition of crime in Germany in term of offences and trends over time, which in some cases can be traced back as far as the 1950s.

The three papers that make up the second section are papers aiming to present information that is representative of the German population. *Dirk Baier, Michael Hanslmaier and Stefanie Kemme* first report what people think concerning crime prevalence and trends. For nearly all offences included in the analysis people estimate the number of offences to be larger and trends to be more negative than they really are. A key factor in people's (mis)judgement proves to be media use. People who frequently obtain their information from tabloid media and commercial television tend to be especially far from reality.

*Dirk Baier and Susann Prätör* examine violent victimisation in adolescence, using a very large sample of nearly 45,000 ninth-grade respondents. Among other things, adolescents are confirmed to face a very high victimisation risk: Almost one in every six adolescents have been a victim of a violent act in the past year. This risk has fallen, however, since 1998. Crime in Germany drops not only in terms of reported crime, but also on the basis of self-report data. This is also confirmed in the analysis by *Lena Stadler and Steffen Bieneck*. The authors concentrate here on sexual abuse against children and adolescents, using a sample of over 9,000 surveyed individuals aged 16 to 40. In total, one in every 25 respondents reported having experienced sexual violence with physical contact before the age of 16. Alongside the prevalence of the various offences, the authors also look at the trend in reporting behaviour and at the perpetrators of sexual violence.

The third section of this volume comprises studies dedicated to investigating the victimisation of various subgroups. *Karoline Ellrich and Dirk Baier* look at victimisation experienced by police officers, as does *Bettina Zietlow*. Ellrich and Baier relate their analysis to a survey of over 20,000 police officers in ten German federal states, while Zietlow bases hers on an interview study of 35 officers. Police officers are shown to be confronted very frequently in their work with verbal and physical violence. At the same time, between 2005 and 2009 there was a rise in violent assaults that left police officers unfit for duty. Both the analysis of the standardised survey and the in-depth interviews show that such assaults inflict a severe psychological toll and that greater support in coping with the aftermath of assaults would be desirable.

In their paper for this section of the volume, *Steffen Bieneck and Dirk Baier* investigate physical victimisation among prison inmates. The analy-

sis is based on a standardised survey of inmates in northern and eastern German prisons. Almost one in every sixth respondents reports having experienced physical assault in the preceding month; every ninth inmate reports having experienced extortions, one out of 50 inmates at least one incident of sexual violence. The authors additionally analyse violent perpetration in prison. Regarding this, one finding is that perpetration is not only caused by individual factors but in part also by factors of the prison.

A further victim group is analysed by *Theresia Höynck* and *Ulrike Zähringer* in their paper on homicide of children. The research project is based on an analysis of files for almost all child homicide offences in Germany from 1997 to 2006. The findings show the greatest risk to be in the first year of a child's life, and over a third of the children killed died the day they were born. Major differences are found between the 508 cases ultimately analysed with regard to perpetrators, circumstances, etc., and an analysis is therefore performed with reference to a number of specific case groups. In-depth analysis is provided for cases of neonaticide, maltreatment, extended suicide, mental illness, purposeful homicide and neglect.

*Sandra Fernau* writes about another special group of victims: people who were sexual victimised by Catholic clergy. She did biographical, semi-structured interviews with 13 victims. Using these interviews she can demonstrate the interplay between sexual abuse in Catholic institution and religious socialisation. Among other things it is pointed out that victims suffer on fear of stigmatisation and negative reactions by their family or community; that is why the majority of them did not talk about their experiences until 2010. Additionally, the interviews prove that the perpetrators had special religious ways to legitimate their doing, and these legitimisations are often taken over by the victims. As one conclusion Fernau points out that religion has an ambivalent status: For some victims religion helps coping with the traumatic experiences, for others it impeded any coping with the abuse.

Although consequences of victimisation already dealt with in part in papers in the second and third section of this volume, the fourth section includes two further papers that deal exclusively with the consequences. Their focus is on topics that have attracted scarcely any notice in research to date. *Michael Hanslmaier*, *Stefanie Kemme* and *Dirk Baier* go into the question of whether experience of victimisation heightens fear of crime and lessens life satisfaction. Research into life satisfaction has attracted increasing attention in the social and economic sciences in recent years, but not yet in criminology. The authors show among other things that most of

all, experience of violent victimisation reduces life satisfaction; additionally, individuals with greater fear of crime show lower levels of satisfaction.

Finally, *Bettina Doering and Dirk Baier* investigate whether victimisation affects individual morality. There are sufficient indications in research that experience of intrafamilial violence in particular can reduce self-control capabilities and enhance aggressiveness. Scarcely any research has been conducted, on the other hand, into whether such experience also inhibits the development of positive characteristics. The authors explore such relationships using a survey of adolescents. The main finding is that morality is not compromised by experience of violent victimisation, but at the same time it is an important factor in protecting against violent behaviour. It is concluded that the socialisation conditions for resilience factors are to be seen as distinct from the socialisation conditions for risk factors; in future, greater effort should be dedicated to investigate the factors determining positive personality traits.

The findings presented in the various papers relate to research projects carried out at CRLS in recent years. Victimisation research will remain a research focus at CRLS. For example, current projects include for instance victims of domestic burglary or human trafficking. The mental stress after incidents of domestic burglary is particularly severe because they involve strangers encroaching upon the victims' personal domain. Another research project is planned for victims of severe violent assault. Respondents for this project should be recruited in hospital casualty units. One of the objectives is to improve institutional assistance for victims of violence. In a similar way, the aim of future projects of the CRLS will be to investigate experiences of victimisation and their consequences as fully and comprehensively as possible.

