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## **Advantages and challenges of self-report surveys in Polish criminological research**

### **Zalety i wyzwania prowadzenia badań typu self-report w polskiej kryminologii**

Self-report studies have played an important role in the development of victim-centred theories of crime. These theories focused on the occurrence of criminal events rather than the motivation for committing crimes. The routine actions of victims have become the source of the social context of victimisation, as the fact that the perpetrator of the crime has been arrested, charged or convicted is irrelevant in self-report studies. In this research, the perpetrator is the one who self-confesses to have committed the offence, whether it has been disclosed or not. The aim of self-report surveys can be to estimate the size of the so-called ‘dark number’ of crimes in the population or to create independent variables as a basis for further analysis.

The purpose of the article will be: 1) to show the methodology of self-report research in criminology, with particular emphasis on research in Poland; 2) to demonstrate the advantages and challenges of research with self-report surveys of crime, deviance and social pathology. The article uses a narrative review of selected literature to answer the research question: what are the main advantages and challenges of self-report surveys in Polish criminological research? A bibliometric analysis of the papers of Polish researchers published in the Scopus database, who used the self-report method in their research, was also carried out. Social science research articles between 2010 and 2022 in which the term ‘self-report’ was included in the source title, abstract and keywords were examined.

In Polish criminology, self-report surveys are used incidentally. A lack of sufficient knowledge and skills to apply this method in criminological

research or a lack of confidence in the quality of the data, obtained using this method may influence for it.

**Key words:** self-report; Polish criminology; methodology; advantages of self-report surveys; challenges of self-report surveys.

Badania typu self-report odegrały istotną rolę w procesie rozwoju teorii przestępczości skoncentrowanych na ofierze. Teorie te skupione były na występowaniu zdarzeń przestępczych, a nie na motywacji popełniania przestępstw. Rutynowe działania ofiar stały się źródłem społecznego kontekstu wiktymizacji, ponieważ w badaniach typu self-report nieistotny jest fakt zatrzymania, oskarżenia czy skazania sprawcy przestępstwa. W badaniach tych sprawcą jest ten, kto sam się przyznaje do popełnienia przestępstwa, bez względu na to, czy zostało ono ujawnione czy nie. Celem prowadzonych badań typu self-report może być zatem oszacowanie rozmiarów tzw. ciemnej liczby przestępstw w populacji lub tworzenie zmiennych niezależnych, będących podstawą dalszych analiz.

W polskiej kryminologii badania typu self-report wykorzystywane są incydentalnie. Czynniki wpływającymi na taki stan rzeczy mogą być między innymi: brak wystarczającej wiedzy i umiejętności stosowania tej metody w badaniach kryminologicznych lub brak zaufania do jakości danych uzyskiwanych z wykorzystaniem tej metody. W związku z powyższym celem niniejszego artykułu będzie: 1) ukazanie metodologii badań typu self-report w kryminologii, ze szczególnym uwzględnieniem badań prowadzonych w Polsce; 2) zwrócenie uwagi na zalety i wyzwania prowadzenia badań z wykorzystaniem metody self-report w obszarze przestępczości, dewiacji i patologii społecznych.

W tekście posłużono się przeglądem narracyjnym wybranej literatury przedmiotu, aby odpowiedzieć na postawione pytanie badawcze: jakie są główne zalety i wyzwania prowadzenia badań typu self-report w polskiej kryminologii? Przeprowadzono również analizę bibliometryczną prac polskich naukowców, opublikowanych w bazie Scopus, którzy wykorzystali w swoich badaniach metodę self-report. Badaniu poddano teksty z dziedziny nauk społecznych w latach 2010-2022, w których w tytule artykułu, abstrakcie i słowach kluczowych zostało uwzględnione pojęcie „self-report”.

**Słowa kluczowe:** samoopis; kryminologia polska; metodologia; zalety ankiet samoopisowych; wyzwania związane z ankietami samoopisowymi.

## Introduction

Self-report surveys in the social sciences allow us to explore the subjective opinions and experiences of individuals and to collect data on their behaviour and attitudes. They can provide information about many social phenomena that would be difficult to measure otherwise. Many self-report studies on crime and victimisation have been conducted over the past few decades, mainly in the USA, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the UK and other European countries, but also in Japan, India, China and South Africa.

Currently, self-report studies in criminology are used to measure the scale of crime, test criminological theories, and show the dimensions and trajectories of individuals' criminal careers. Among this type of research, there are both longitudinal, large-scale studies and cross-sectional, small-scale studies. Regardless of the research purpose, the results of self-report surveys provide a huge database on crime and victimisation.

An important dependent variable in criminological research is deviant behaviour. In the past, it was most often measured by official crime statistics. However, there has been a perception that official records do not provide an accurate measure of the extent of criminal behaviour. Consequently, it became apparent that there was a need to develop alternative ways of capturing data on deviant behaviour. One of these was self-report surveys.

In the literature, issues of self-report type research were taken up in the early 1960s by I. Nye and J.F. Short<sup>1</sup>. In subsequent years, reflections on this type of research can be found, among others, in the works of authors such as M. Gold<sup>2</sup>, T. Hirschi<sup>3</sup>, R. Hardt & S. Peterson-Hardt<sup>4</sup>,

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<sup>1</sup> I. Nye, J. F. Short, *Scaling Delinquent Behavior*, „American Sociological Review” 1957, vol. 22; J. F. Short, I. Nye, *Reporter Behavior as a Criterion of Deviant Behavior*, „Social Problems” 1957, vol. 5; J. F. Short, I. Nye, *Extent of Unrecorded Juvenile Delinquency: Tentative Conclusions*, „The Journal of Criminal Law, Criminology and Police Science” 1958, vol. 49.

<sup>2</sup> M. Gold, *Undetected Delinquent Behavior*, „Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency” 1966, vol. 3; M. Gold: *Deviant Behavior in an American City*, Belmonton 1970.

<sup>3</sup> T. Hirschi, *Causes of Delinquency*, Berkeley 1969.

<sup>4</sup> R. Hardt, S. Peterson-Hardt, *On Determining the Quality of Delinquency Self-report Method*, „Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency” 1977, vol. 14.

L. Gould<sup>5</sup>, N. Christie, J. Andeneas & S. Skirbekk<sup>6</sup>, R. Hardt & G. Bodine<sup>7</sup>, J. Hackler & B. Lauth<sup>8</sup>, J. Clark & L. Tift<sup>9</sup>, W. Belson<sup>10</sup>, D. Farrington<sup>11</sup>, M. Krohn, G. Waldo i T. Chiricos<sup>12</sup>, R. Smart<sup>13</sup>, M. Hindelang, T. Hirschi, J. Weis<sup>14</sup>, D. Elliott, S. Ageton<sup>15</sup>, S. Cordrey, K. Polk<sup>16</sup>, M. Gottfredson<sup>17</sup>, C.W. Harlow<sup>18</sup>, D. McDowal & C. Loftin<sup>19</sup>, E.J. Wentland & K.W. Smith<sup>20</sup>, C. Sedikides & M.J. Strube<sup>21</sup>, D. Finkelhor<sup>22</sup>, L.C. Morey & V.W. Lanier, 1998<sup>23</sup>, M.D. Krohn<sup>24</sup>, J. Junger-Tas, I.H. Marshall & D. Ribeaud<sup>25</sup> or D. Enzmann, M. Killias & M. Steketee<sup>26</sup>. In Poland, self-report studies

<sup>5</sup> L. Gould, *Who Defines Delinquency: a Comparison of Self-reported and Officially Reported Indices for Racial Groups*, „Social Problems” 1969, vol. 16.

<sup>6</sup> N. Christie, J. Andeneas, S. Skirbekk, *A Study of Self-reported Crime*, „Scandinavian Studies in Criminology” 1965, vol. 94.

<sup>7</sup> R. Hardt, G. Bodine, *Development of Self-report Instruments in Delinquency Research: a Conference Report*, Syracuse 1965.

<sup>8</sup> J. Hackler, B. Lauth, *Systematic Bias in Measuring Self-reported Delinquency*, „Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology” 1969, vol. 92.

<sup>9</sup> J. Clark, L. Tift, *Polygraph and Interview Validation of Self-reported Behavior*, „American Sociological Review” 1966, vol. 31.

<sup>10</sup> W. Belson, *The Extent of Stealing by London Boys and Some of Its Origins*, London 1968.

<sup>11</sup> D. Farrington, *Self-reports of Deviant Behavior: Predictive and Stable?*, „Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology” 1973, vol. 64.

<sup>12</sup> M. Krohn, G. Waldo, T. Chiricos, *Self-reported Delinquency: a Comparison of Structured Interview and Self-administered Checklist*, „The Journal of Criminal Law and Criminology” 1974, vol. 65.

<sup>13</sup> R. Smart, *Recent Studies of the Validity and Reliability of Self-reported Drug Use*, „Canadian Journal of Criminology and Corrections” 1975, vol. 17.

<sup>14</sup> M. Hindelang, T. Hirschi, J. Weis, *Correlates of Delinquency: the Illusion of Discrepancy between Self-report and Official Measures*, „American Sociological Review” 1979, vol. 44.

<sup>15</sup> D. Elliott, S. Ageton, *Reconciling Differences in Estimates of Delinquency*, „American Sociological Review” 1980, vol. 45.

<sup>16</sup> S. Cordrey, K. Polk, *The Implications of Respondent Loss in Panel Studies of Deviant Behavior*, „Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency” 1983, vol. 20.

<sup>17</sup> M. Gottfredson, *Victimization surveys*, [in:] M. Tonry, M. Norval, *Crime and justice: An annual review of research*, vol. 7, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1986.

<sup>18</sup> C.W. Harlow, *Injuries from crime. Special Report*, Department of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Washington, D.C. 1989.

<sup>19</sup> D. McDowall, C. Loftin, *Comparing the UCR and NCS over time*, „Criminology” 1992, vol. 30, pp. 125-132.

<sup>20</sup> E.J. Wentland, K.W. Smith, *Survey responses: An evaluation of their validity*, Academic Press, San Diego 1993.

<sup>21</sup> C. Sedikides, M.J. Strube, *The multiply motivated self*, „Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin” 1995, vol. 21, pp. 1330-1335.

<sup>22</sup> D. Finkelhor, *The victimization of children and youth: Developmental victimology*, [in:] R. Davis, A. Lurigio, W. Skogan, *Victims of crime*, California: Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks 1997.

<sup>23</sup> L.C. Morey, V.W. Lanier, *Operating characteristics of six response distortion indicators for the Personality Assessment Inventory*, „Assessment” 1998, vol. 5, pp. 203-214.

<sup>24</sup> M.D. Krohn, T.P. Thornberry, C.L. Gibson, J.M. Baldwin, *The development and impact of self-report measures of crime and delinquency*, „Journal of Quantitative Criminology” 2010, vol. 26(4), pp. 509-525.

<sup>25</sup> J. Junger-Tas, I.H. Marshall, D. Ribeaud, *Delinquency in an International Perspective: The International Self-Report Delinquency Study (ISRd)*, Kugler, The Hague 2003.

<sup>26</sup> J. Junger-Tas et al., *The Many Faces of Youth Crime: Contrasting Theoretical Perspectives on Juvenile Delinquency across Countries and Cultures*, Springer, New York 2012.

have been conducted by, among others, H. Malewska<sup>27</sup>, H. Muszyński<sup>28</sup>, Z. Ostrihanska & D. Wójcik<sup>29</sup>, and also K. Ostrowska<sup>30</sup>, A. Siemaszko<sup>31</sup> or B. Gruszczyńska<sup>32</sup>.

On the one hand, self-report surveys are an important element of research into crime, but on the other hand they have significant limitations that pose a huge challenge to researchers of deviant behaviour – criminologists, sociologists or social educators. This is because both the right sample selection and the conditions for conducting this type of research are important. Therefore, the aim of this article will be to present the methodology of self-report research in criminology, with particular emphasis on research conducted in Poland, as well as to draw attention to selected advantages and challenges of conducting research using the self-report method in the area of crime, deviance and social pathology. The volume limitations of the text determine the focus on selected issues, as discussing all the advantages and challenges, would be impossible in this case.

The text uses a narrative review of selected literature to answer the research question: *what are the main advantages and challenges of conducting self-report research in Polish criminology?* A bibliometric analysis of the works of Polish scholars published in the Scopus database who used the self-report method in their research was also conducted. The research sample consisted of texts from the social sciences between 2010 and 2022 in which the term *self-report* was included in the article title, abstract and keywords.

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<sup>27</sup> H. Malewska, *Norma uczciwości w środowisku młodzieży. Refleksje nad przestrzeganiem tej normy oparte na niektórych wynikach badań ankietowych*, „Studia Socjologiczne” 1963, nr 2.

<sup>28</sup> H. Muszyński, *Kradzież w poglądach i postępkach dzieci*, „Nowa Szkoła” 1963, nr 1.

<sup>29</sup> Z. Ostrihanska, *Norma poszanowania cudzej własności w zachowaniu uczniów szkół podstawowych*, „Państwo i Prawo” 1980, nr 7.

<sup>30</sup> K. Ostrowska, A. Siemaszko, *Rozmiary spożywania napojów alkoholowych przez młodzież szkół ponadpodstawowych na terenie Warszawy w 1979 roku*, „Studia Kryminologiczne, Kryminalistyczne i Penitencjarne” 1983, t. XI.1.

<sup>31</sup> A. Siemaszko, *Rozmiary zachowań dewiacyjnych młodzieży wiejskiej*, „Studia Kryminologiczne, Kryminalistyczne i Penitencjarne” 1986, t. XVIII.

<sup>32</sup> J. Junger-Tas et al., op. cit.

## Self-report surveys in criminology – an overview of the concept

Self-report surveys are used in criminology to collect data and often arise from the need to complete information about recorded crimes that have not been reported and recorded to the police or other justice authorities<sup>33</sup>. The victim of a crime when completing the questionnaire provides far more detailed information, both about the crime and its context, in contrast to the data that can be found in police records.

In the studies described, the fact that the offender has been arrested, detained, charged, tried or convicted is irrelevant. In self-report surveys, the perpetrator is the person who self-confesses to have committed the crime, regardless of whether the crime has been disclosed. Respondents are usually given an anonymous questionnaire to complete, which contains a list of offences or deviant behaviour, along with other questions. Survey participants are asked whether they have ever engaged in such behaviour and, if so, how often<sup>34</sup>. Results from self-report surveys can be used to create an independent variable as a basis for further analysis. In this procedure, survey respondents are usually precisely divided into 'offenders' and 'non-offenders' or 'deviants' and 'non-deviants' based on the type of response to the question on criminal (deviant) behaviour. Further analysis (e.g. causal analysis) is then carried out, taking into account specific independent variables. One can, of course, try to estimate the scale of the so-called dark number of crimes in the general population, but this is not an easy task. This is because we are not sure whether law enforcement and justice authorities would consider the acts in question as crimes if they were disclosed by the respondents. In addition, estimating the number of crimes is made more difficult by the nature of the sample in the first place, which significantly limits the scope for acceptable generalisations. Therefore, according to Siemaszko<sup>35</sup>, only rough and imprecise estimates of the extent of actual crime can be made on the basis of self-report surveys, which we also agree with.

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<sup>33</sup> A.D. Biderman, A.J. Reiss, Jr., *On exploring the "dark figure" of crime*, „Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science” 1967, November 1-15, p. 374.

<sup>34</sup> A. Siemaszko, *Metodologiczne problemy badań typu self-report*, „Archiwum Kryminologii XV” 1988, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Ibidem.

## Selected self-report surveys in global criminology

The model for self-report surveys was the A. Porterfield<sup>36</sup>, published in 1946. Porterfield analysed crimes committed by juveniles who were accountable to the courts. The sample consisted of two thousand students, both male and female. The author of the study categorised the offences into about fifty types, including in the typology both offences that were commonly considered trivial and those that were considered serious. Among the respondents surveyed, there was no one who had not committed a crime for which minors had previously been held responsible, at least once in their lives. Obviously, the results of the survey carried out showed undisclosed criminality, as most of the respondents (according to the findings of the author of the survey) did not answer for the crimes they admitted to committing during the survey. A similar study was carried out in 1946, and its results published a year later, by J. Wallerstein and C. Wyle'y<sup>37</sup>. At the time, the extent of crime in American society was revealed among some 1,700 adults of both sexes. Central to contemporary self-report research methodology is a series of studies conducted by J.F. Short and I. Nye<sup>38</sup>. The methodology they developed has been the benchmark by which other studies of this type have been conducted over the years.

The first large-scale self-report survey was *The International Self-report Delinquency study* (ISRD-1) conducted between 1991 and 1992 among 13 countries (mainly members of the European Union). The study was initiated by the *Dutch Research and Documentation Centre* (WODC). Analyses and interpretations of the data obtained in the study were published in 2003<sup>39</sup>. The aim of this project was to show the international variability of criminal behaviour as declared by respondents, to present the order of occurrence of different criminal behaviours, and to popularise self-report surveys<sup>40</sup>. Although the ISRD-1 study used a standardised survey questionnaire, researchers in some countries made modifications to it. Many researchers did not realise the great importance of standardisation for comparative purposes. The failure to maintain standardisation

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<sup>36</sup> A. Porterfield, *Youth in Trouble*, Forth Worth 1946.

<sup>37</sup> J. Wallerstein, C. Wyle, *Our Law-abiding lawbreakers*, „Probation” 1947, vol. 4.

<sup>38</sup> I. Nye, J. F. Short, op. cit.

<sup>39</sup> J. Junger-Tas, I.H. Marshall, D. Ribeaud, op. cit.

<sup>40</sup> J. Junger-Tas et al., op. cit.

of the survey instrument made comparative research extremely difficult. To avoid such problems, a subsequent project (ISRD-2) paid special attention to all aspects of survey methodology in each participating country. One of the first self-report studies with an already distinguished methodology conducted on a large scale was the international study on juvenile delinquency conducted by J. Junger-Tas and I. H. Marshall (ISRD-2) in 2012<sup>41</sup>. 31 countries participated in the study<sup>42</sup>. This study was the second of its kind.

Although self-report surveys have been a fundamental part of the crime data process for more than sixty years, they have usually been limited to surveys conducted within one or a few countries<sup>43</sup>. For example, Thornberry and Krohn<sup>44</sup> analysed seven longitudinal studies on crime in the UK, US and Canada. However, no clear standardisation, research tools used or sampling can be found in these studies.

## Self-report surveys in Polish criminology

In Poland, the precursors of self-report type studies were H. Malewska and H. Muszyński<sup>45</sup>, who at the beginning of the 1960s made an attempt to determine the scale of the crime of theft among adolescents of sixth forms of primary school. The nationwide survey sample consisted of 2222 students. The aim of the survey was to reveal young people's attitudes to the right to property, as well as situations in which this right could be violated<sup>46</sup>. Other self-report type studies in Poland were conducted in 1976-1977 by Z. Ostrihanska and D. Wójcik<sup>47</sup>. The sample size was 3177

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<sup>41</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>42</sup> Armenia, Aruba, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia, Canada, Czech Republic, Cyprus, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Ireland, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Netherlands Antilles, N. Ireland, Norway, Poland, Russia, Scotland, Slovenia, Spain, Surinam, Sweden, Switzerland, United States, Venezuela.

<sup>43</sup> R. Svensson, P. Lieven, *Is a risky lifestyle always "risky"? The interaction between individual propensity and lifestyle risk in adolescent offending: A test in two urban samples*, „Crime & Delinquency” 2010, 56.4, pp. 608-626; A.T. Vazsonyi et al., *An empirical test of a general theory of crime: A foundation comparative study of self-control and the prediction of deviance*, „Journal of research in crime and delinquency” 2001, 38.2, pp. 91-131.

<sup>44</sup> T.P. Thornberry et al., *Gangs and delinquency in developmental perspective*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2003.

<sup>45</sup> H. Malewska, op. cit.; H. Muszyński, op. cit.; H. Malewska, H. Muszyński, *Children's Attitudes to Theft*, „The Polish Sociological Bulletin” 1964, no. 1.

<sup>46</sup> A. Siemaszko, *Metodologiczne problemy...*, p. 45.

<sup>47</sup> Z. Ostrihanska, op. cit.



students from fifty primary schools in the Warsaw area. The study was part of a research programme aimed at determining the extent of social maladjustment among adolescents at a younger age and identifying its determinants.

The most common self-report survey in Poland and the most similar to other surveys of this type conducted worldwide was carried out in 1979 by K. Ostrowska and A. Siemaszko<sup>48</sup>. The sample selection was purposive and consisted of 2994 secondary school students in Warsaw. The aim of the study was to show possible differences in the scale of deviant behaviour between younger and older adolescents. The present study was repeated in 1981<sup>49</sup>. At the time, the sample was selected from secondary schools in the Bielskopodlaskie, Łomżyński, Ostrołęckie, Siedleckie and Zamojskie voivodeships. The sample consisted of 2144 people.

Since the 1960s, self-report surveys have become a common way of measuring the extent, structure and determinants of crime and other deviant behaviour, but primarily in the United States or Canada<sup>50</sup>. There, they gradually displaced traditional survey research among people deprived of their liberty, where at the time there was a clear disparity between self-report surveys and other methodologies, with the latter becoming very rare. In Poland, on the other hand, self-report surveys are almost unknown and their use was and still is extremely rare.

In order to illustrate the present situation, we performed a bibliometric analysis. We examined texts included in the Scopus database from the social sciences in the years 2010-2022, in which the term self-report was included in the article title, abstract and keywords. Searches were limited to the area of Poland, as the place of affiliation, indicated by at least one co-author or author of the publication. The sampling was non-random and purposive. In the analysis, we also included texts in the field of psychology (which from the Scopus database constitute a separate category), because according to the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Science of 11 October 2022 on scientific fields and disciplines and artistic disciplines (Journal of Laws 2022, item 2202), psychology is a discipline within the field of social sciences. Another rationale in favour of including psychology in the analyses was the fact that research in the field of criminology is sometimes also conducted by psychologists.

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<sup>48</sup> K. Ostrowska, A. Siemaszko, op. cit.

<sup>49</sup> A. Siemaszko, op. cit.

<sup>50</sup> A. Siemaszko, *Metodologiczne problemy...*, p. 36.

A search of the Scopus database identified 347 texts, including both articles, reviews, book chapters, data papers, conference papers and books, as follows:

**Table 1.** Social sciences and psychology – documents by type (Poland 2010-2022)

Document type	Documents
Article	326
Review	9
Book chapter	6
Book	2
Conference paper	2
Data paper	2

Source: own elaboration based on data from Scopus database

Publications by year of publication are shown in Table 2.

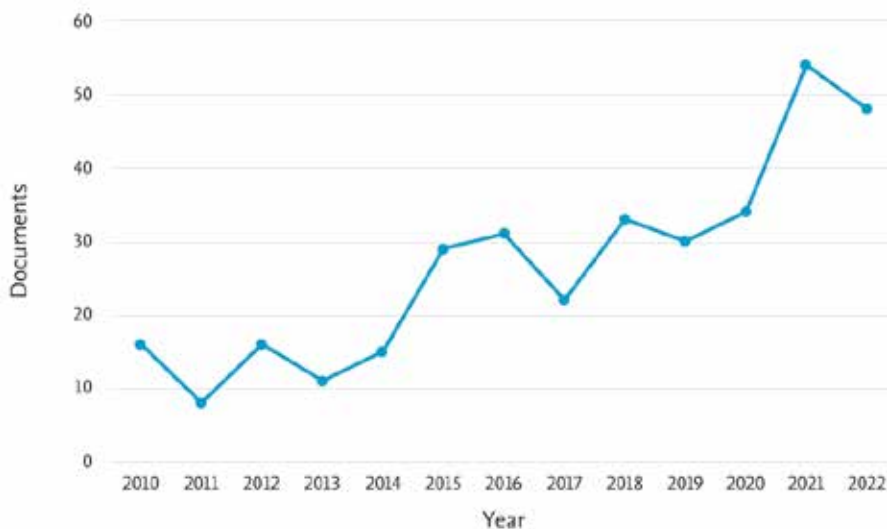
**Table 2.** Social sciences and psychology – documents by year (2010-2022)

Year	Documents
2022	48
2021	54
2020	34
2019	30
2018	33
2017	22
2016	31
2015	29
2014	15
2013	11
2012	16
2011	8
2010	16

Source: own elaboration based on data from Scopus database

Based on the above data, several important facts can be observed regarding publication trends in the study area of interest. The overall number of publications has increased over the last few years, especially in 2021 and 2022. There was a relatively low number of publications between 2010 and 2014, which started to increase in the following years.

**Figure 1.** Social sciences and psychology – documents by year (2010-2022).



Źródło: <https://www.scopus.com/term/analyzer.uri?sid=320c025c9965c570cb-9f7bee5c1b134d&origin=resultslist&src=s&s=TITLE-ABS-KEY%28self-report%29&sort=plf-f&sdt=cl&sot=b&sl=26&count=396&analyzeResults=Analyze+results&cluster=scoaffiltry%2c%22Poland%22%2ct%2bscosubjabbr%2c%22PSYC%22%2ct%2c%22SOCIO%22%2ct&txGid=f5e9a651f6323a53546c-99d6058a3783> (dostęp: 10.02.2023).

Nevertheless, one might be tempted to say that the number of all publications analysed is relatively low. This may be indicative of the low interest of Polish social science researchers in the use of self-report type research. This is not, of course, a detailed analysis of the texts and their content, as this is not the purpose of this article. The aim of the analysis was to indicate a certain publication trend focusing on the topic of self-report type research by Polish researchers publishing scientific texts in scientific journals in the Scopus database. The choice of the database is, of course, our subjective and purposeful research sample. In order

to better understand what is behind these trends, a more detailed analysis of the publications and their content would be necessary.

Making the text searches more specific, we also examined texts from the social sciences between 2010 and 2022 in which the terms self-report, crime and criminology were included in the article title, abstract and keywords. Searches were limited to the area of Poland, as the place of affiliation, indicated by at least one co-author or author of the publication. Only one document from 2012 was found in the database. This is the book *The Many Faces of Youth Crime: Contrasting Theoretical Perspectives on Juvenile Delinquency across Countries and Cultures* by Josine Junger-Tas, Ineke Haen Marshall, Dirk Enzmann, Martin Killias, Majone Steketee and Beata Gruszczyńska. The Polish woman is therefore one of the authors of the publication. The book presents an analysis of *The Second International Self-Report Delinquency study* (ISR2), which we already mentioned in an earlier section.

### Selected advantages of self-report surveys in criminology

Self-report studies play an important role in the process of learning about criminal phenomena and related problems. These studies are based on the self-report of the people surveyed about their experience of crime, which makes it possible to obtain information about crime that victims do not report to law enforcement, as well as about juvenile crime or crime among groups with specific characteristics. In addition, self-report surveys make it possible to obtain information on the causes and consequences of criminal behaviour and on the profiles of those who commit crimes. Analysing the self-report surveys conducted to date, it is possible to distinguish many advantages of obtaining data in this way. Due to the volume limitations of this text, only a few will be highlighted below.

In particular, self-report surveys allow for the development of a new typology of crime, beyond the traditional and dominant one in a given society, and thus limiting in some way the understanding of crime. For example, in a study conducted in the United States using a self-report survey questionnaire, new alternative classifications of crime were distinguished, i.e. 'crime among relatives', 'crime at work' or 'vehicle

crime', without being limited to the previously accepted typology<sup>51</sup>. In our opinion, the new classification of crimes that can be obtained when conducting self-report surveys would make it possible to show crime from a new perspective. This is because it is important to present new social contexts that have not been apparent so far, as incidents have only been classified according to the specific criminal act according to the typology adopted so far.

Self-report survey data therefore provide additional social indicators<sup>52</sup> to understand crime and identify changes in it. It is important not to exclude the data obtained from both this type of survey and the data in the registers, but to treat them complementarily. We believe that it is worth treating possible discrepancies between the statistics and the data, obtained from the questionnaires, as new areas of research, in order to clarify them and not to negate data obtained in other ways.

Self-report surveys conducted among victims are also helpful in determining the offender population. When asked about the characteristics of offenders they have actually seen who have fled the scene, respondents provide data that become the basis for developing an offender profile. An analysis of this type of data, collected from victims' reports, was carried out and compared with information, contained in official registers<sup>53</sup>. This research has shown considerable similarity in the characteristics of victims and offenders. This therefore means that people tend to victimise others similar to themselves.

Self-report surveys conducted among victims also help to test theories of the causes of crime. The data obtained through the research process reveal new perspectives on the perception of criminal actions<sup>54</sup>. The impact of this type of research on identifying the impact of different types of crime is also not insignificant. Self-report surveys conducted among victims of crime also contribute to criminological theory building. The availability of data, for example, has led to the development of victim-centred theories of crime<sup>55</sup>. Attention was then given to the fact of

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<sup>51</sup> D. Cantor, J.P. Lynch, *Self-report surveys as measures of crime and criminal victimization*, „*Criminal Justice*” 2000, 4.2000, p. 88.

<sup>52</sup> D. McDowall, C. Loftin, op. cit.

<sup>53</sup> M. Hindelang, *Variations in sex-race-age-specific incidence rates of offending*, „*American Sociological Review*” 1981, vol. 46, pp. 461-474.

<sup>54</sup> L. Kennedy, D. Forde, *When push comes to shove: A routine conflict approach to violence*, State University of New York Press, Albany 1999.

<sup>55</sup> L. Cohen, M. Felson, *Social change and crime rate trends: A routine activity approach*, „*American Sociological Review*” 1979, vol. 44, pp. 588-608.

the occurrence of criminal events rather than the motivation for their commission.

Self-report studies also help to understand the process of victimisation. By examining the question of the motivation for calling the police in the event of a crime, it has been shown that people choose to do so because of some loss or specific injury<sup>56</sup>. It was also pointed out that the victim's previous experience with the police is also relevant<sup>57</sup>. Self-report victimisation surveys are also crucial for identifying and explaining the consequences of victimisation. Relevant here is the fact that the scale of crimes includes both those reported and recorded in official statistics and those not reported to the relevant services. Data from self-report surveys can show more broadly, for example, the specific harm suffered by victims of crime. A number of studies have shown the different forms of psychological harm that can result from criminal victimisation, in particular sexual assault<sup>58</sup>. Looking at the results of the above studies, it can be seen that depression and post-traumatic stress disorder were more prevalent among victims of crime than among victims of other traumatic events. It was also noted that some categories of victims experience more lasting psychological damage than others, which would not be shown by the statistics of recorded crimes alone. It is worth noting that self-report victimisation surveys have become a regular feature in the process of estimating crime rates in the United States and around the world. They are used both as social indicators and as tools for building criminological theories. Looking at the wide range of self-report surveys conducted around the world, it is clear that this type of methodology can be used effectively in the study of undisclosed deviant behaviour.

## Challenges of self-report surveys in Polish criminology

Self-report surveys are conducted using anonymous questionnaires, so the challenges or methodological problems that may arise, associated with the use of this research tool, do not appear to be unique. Indeed,

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<sup>56</sup> P. Mayhew, *Reporting crimes to the police: The contributions of victim surveys*, [in:] W. Bilsky, Ch. Pfeiffer, P. Wetzels, *Fear of crime and criminal victimization*, Enke Verlag, Stuttgart 1993.

<sup>57</sup> M. Conway, S. Lohr, *A longitudinal analysis of factors associated with the reporting of violent crime to the police*, „Journal of Quantitative Criminology” 1994, vol. 10, pp. 23-39.

<sup>58</sup> D. Finkelhor, op. cit.

most of the methodological challenges that arise in self-report research can equally be applied to all other types of research where an anonymous survey questionnaire is used as a tool. However, it is accepted that in self-report type research we encounter challenges that we would not experience when conducting research using a different methodology, using an anonymous survey questionnaire. Of course, we agree that self-report surveys can be extremely challenging for some researchers, but in our opinion it would be worthwhile to face them in order to obtain effective data for analysis.

An overarching issue and a huge challenge is the reliability of self-report surveys. For why should we trust what people say about themselves<sup>59</sup>. Even if respondents try to be honest, the data they provide may not be entirely truthful. This is because there is a tendency to describe oneself in an evaluative way. This behaviour can be conscious (pretending, lying) or unconscious (self-favouritism, bias, self-enhancement, denial)<sup>60</sup>. When answering questions, respondents may not answer truthfully, especially when asked about sensitive issues. Social desirability bias may then occur, whereby respondents answer in a socially acceptable manner. This has a significant impact on the data collected when conducting research. People may exaggerate what may be socially perceived as 'good' behaviour, and flatten data that is usually perceived as 'bad'. This is all the more challenging in the case of criminological research, which deals with criminal activities that are, in principle, bad.

The reliability of the questionnaires is also an important issue<sup>61</sup>. This is because there is a risk of a tendency to answer in a certain way, regardless of the question. For example, individuals may be more likely to answer in the affirmative to any question, regardless of the content of the question, or more likely to answer in the negative. It is also a challenge that respondents may be too embarrassed to reveal private details of their lives, even more so in relation to deviant activities. People may also be dishonest with themselves, which affects the survey results. Also important in self-report research is the way in which questions are asked in the survey questionnaire. The form of the question about issues related to norm violation is questionable. For example, will asking directly about issues of

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<sup>59</sup> C. Sedikides, M.J. Strube, *op. cit.*

<sup>60</sup> L.C. Morey, V.W. Lanier, *op. cit.*

<sup>61</sup> M.D. Krohn, T.P. Thornberry, C.L. Gibson, J.M. Baldwin, *op. cit.*

offences committed be more appropriate than using euphemisms?<sup>62</sup> The answer to this question is not straightforward, as each type of question carries certain consequences. The use of euphemisms may result in the concealment of facts, while straightforward questions may provoke unnecessary aggression in respondents. However, we believe that this problem does not only arise in self-report surveys. Similar concerns can also arise when constructing any other survey questionnaire in survey research. Short and Nye advocate the use of euphemistic questions in self-report surveys<sup>63</sup>. In their view, and that of other researchers<sup>64</sup>, there is less danger of respondents withholding facts if this type of question is used, as it will not generate unpleasant memories for them. Obviously, this is an important point, with which we agree, but in our view it is also important not to include ambiguous or judgmental questions in self-report survey questionnaires. This is because many times it can be seen that the justice system has problems with the qualification of a particular criminal act, so it can be all the more problematic or sometimes impossible from the perspective of the victim taking part in the survey.

Another challenge of self-report surveys is the proper presentation of all information about criminal behaviour to respondents. Another can also be a communication problem. The motivation of respondents is also not insignificant<sup>65</sup>. According to Oppenheim<sup>66</sup> motivation may be the most important factor, determining respondents' answers. Motivation is important both when respondents deliberately lie and when it is important to obtain detailed information from them. Participating in surveys and answering individual questions requires mental, psychological and physical effort on the part of the respondents, and not every respondent is willing to make such an effort. After all, the respondent has to admit to some deviant behaviour, but he or she also has to recall other information in his or her memory concerning the behaviour in question, e.g. where it happened, when it happened, etc. A lack of motivation on the part of the person taking part in the study may contribute to the falsification of the data provided, which may be his/her intentional act or the result of poor memory of specific events. Motivation in self-report

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<sup>62</sup> A. Siemaszko, *Metodologiczne problemy...*, p. 56.

<sup>63</sup> J.F. Short, J. Nye, *op. cit.*

<sup>64</sup> H. Muszyński, *op. cit.*; D. Farrington, *op. cit.*; R. Hardt, S. Peterson-Hardt, *op. cit.*

<sup>65</sup> E.J. Wentland, K.W. Smith, *op. cit.*, pp. 15-16.

<sup>66</sup> A.N. Oppenheim, *Questionnaire design, interviewing and attitude measurement*, Pinter Publishers, London and New York 1992.



surveys stems from the theory of rational choice, according to which people act deliberately, making a choice among alternative behaviours<sup>67</sup>. Participation in a self-report survey can be seen as an example of human action that will be shaped by rational arguments. Respondents who take part in a survey will make a decision about how they will behave and then implement that intention<sup>68</sup>. In our view, the respondent's primary resource is information, while the interviewer's primary resource may be financial remuneration or attention. Unfortunately, self-report surveys are generally one-off activities, so they thus eliminate the possibility of gradually building a relationship based on mutual trust. The quality of participation in self-report surveys depends on the degree of trust in the interviewer, combined with an assessment of the potential cost-benefit ratio of participating in the survey. Of course, the ideal situation would be if the respondent trusted the interviewer and felt that they had more to gain than to lose by participating in the survey. However, this is not obvious. It is therefore important, and this is another challenge, for the person conducting the research to be aware that research does not take place in a social vacuum. Research is always situated in a specific setting, within a specific context. Not only the social background of the respondent is therefore important, but also the environment in which the research takes place.

Self-report surveys have also not remained immune to profound changes in the social world. The use of modern technology in the conduct of research poses a further challenge for researchers<sup>69</sup>, involved in measuring crime. Nevertheless, in our opinion, modern technology can facilitate the research process. The use of interactive online forms with properly designed navigation can encourage participants to complete survey questionnaires. The ability to automatically process the data obtained during the survey can also make the analysis of the results more efficient. Another example of the use of modern technology in self-report surveys could be mobile applications that allow participants to regularly monitor their experiences or behaviour. In addition, innovative solutions such as systems integrated with wearable devices (e.g. smartwatches)

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<sup>67</sup> J.S. Coleman, T.J. Feraro (Eds), *Rational choice theory. Advocacy and critique*. Sage, Newbury Park 1992, p. xi.

<sup>68</sup> J.F. Dovidio, R.H. Fazio, *New technologies for the direct and indirect assessment of attitudes*, [in:] J.M. Tanur (Ed.), *Questions about questions. Inquiries into the cognitive bases of surveys*, Russell Sage Foundation, New York 1992, p. 206.

<sup>69</sup> cf. M. Tanaś et al., *BigData w edukacji*, Wydawnictwo Akademii Pedagogiki Specjalnej, Warszawa 2019.

can also help to obtain more accurate data on all kinds of respondents' activities, including feelings of stress or emotions. In our view, modern technologies can increase respondent engagement and provide more accurate data on their experiences and behaviours. Of course, it is important to take care of the privacy and security of participant data and to be mindful of the limitations and potential errors associated with any research method.

In our view, self-report type surveys should therefore be conducted in specific settings and groups that will provide one measure of crime. Of course, the results of such surveys cannot be expected to provide a 'true' measure of the number of criminal behaviours. However, it should be remembered that self-report surveys can provide a great deal of useful, reliable and important information about the social correlates of crime. The data obtained from conducting this type of research can also provide a wealth of information on attitudes, experiences or behaviour, allowing theories of crime to be tested. Indeed, the results of the surveys are intended to provide a basis for further analysis.

## Summary

Self-report surveys are used in the social sciences, including criminological research, among others, to collect information on deviant behaviour in the broadest sense, including criminal activity, victims of crime or offenders. They provide an alternative to the statistical data contained in police reports. The use of this type of research raises a number of methodological challenges, including in the area of sample selection, the involvement of research participants in the area of interest to the researcher or those related to the memory of respondents. Self-report surveys are certainly not a substitute for other research methods, but they are a valuable tool that can be used to measure criminal involvement and test criminological theories.

The aim of this article was to show the advantages and challenges of self-report surveys in order to use this method in practice. Research conducted both in Poland and abroad shows that the use of self-report questionnaires provides a basis for obtaining reliable data on deviant behaviour. We hope that showing the many subjective advantages of self-report surveys, such as the possibility of developing a new typology

of crimes, providing additional social indicators, testing or building criminological theories, as well as the possibility of a broader understanding of the process of victimisation, which is crucial for estimating the scale of crime, will contribute to the dissemination of this research method. We are convinced that the challenges we have presented, such as the reliability and credibility of self-report surveys, social desirability bias, and communication with respondents, will only inspire further methodological research. As we have already mentioned, research does not take place in a social vacuum, and modern technologies should be first and foremost an advantage in the research process. The important thing is to step out of one's comfort zone and start using alternative research methods, with the aim of obtaining a different way of acquiring data that could contribute to increasing the dimension and effectiveness of the available information on crime, as social indicators necessary to undertake further empirical research.

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