

Official Crime Statistics and Survey Data: Comparing Trends of Youth Violence between 2000 and 2006 in Cities of the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Russia, and Slovenia

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Abstract Based on official crime statistics, violent crimes of youths in Germany and Central and Eastern Europe had appeared to have increased considerably between 1990 and 2000. Survey data that can overcome limitations of police data and allow to compare crime trends across countries are rare. Based on self-report delinquency studies of 15 year old juveniles in 1998–2001 (SRD) and 2006 (ISRD-2) using compatible questionnaires in Germany and Central and Eastern Europe (partly in the same cities), trends of attitudes towards violence, of victimisation experiences and self-reported wanton and instrumental violence are compared cross-nationally. There is substantially less approval of violence in 2006 and a corresponding decrease of victimisation experiences and violent behaviour between 1999 and 2006. Official crime statistics show serious limitations. The results are discussed with respect to theories of modernisation and social change.

Keywords Juvenile delinquency · Robbery · Assault · Attitudes towards violence · Behaviour change · Cross-national comparison

Measuring Trends of Violent Crime in Europe

About six years ago a series of articles discussing crime trends in Europe was published in this journal (Aebi 2004; Gruszczyńska 2004; Lewis et al. 2004). The data discussed were based on official police statistics published in the European Sourcebook (Killias et al. 1999, 2003) and on data of the International Crime Victimisation Study (ICVS; van Kesteren et al. 2000). An increase of violent offences was observed, in particular in the second half

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of the 1990s. In Western Europe an increase of police recorded assault was most evident (a 69% increase of median rates of offences per 100,000 between 1990 and 2000), whereas in Central and Eastern Europe rates of robbery offences per 100,000 sharply increased (a 94% increase between 1990 and 2000) (Gruszczyńska 2004, p. 129–131). Overall, in 2000 the rates of assault were substantially higher in Western European countries than in Central and Eastern Europe (428.2 offences per 100,000 vs. 56.9) whereas the rates of robbery in Western Europe were slightly lower than Central and Eastern European rates (102.0 offences per 100,000 vs. 114.3) (Gruszczyńska 2004, p. 127). Although rankings of countries based on police data and on victim survey data covering the same period were different (partly due to different definitions in police data, partly to difficulties of translations of the ICVS questionnaires), with respect to robbery the survey data confirmed the increasing trends shown in the police data (Lewis et al. 2004, p. 203). The increase of officially recorded violent offences in Western Europe was partly attributed to growing public sensitivity towards violence and to an increase in reporting offences to the police. However, as changes in reporting behaviour across countries were not entirely consistent with changes in recorded crime rates and since in some countries the reporting rate did not increase, this was taken as evidence for a real overall increase of violence in Europe between 1990 and 2000 (Aebi 2004, p. 176 f.).

The general picture of an increase of violence in European countries was also observed with respect to juveniles and young adults (Estrada 1999; Pfeiffer 2003). Although overall youth crime rates appeared to be rather stable or slightly declining, since the second half of the 1980s an increase in youth violence became apparent in the US, in Poland and in nine Western European countries (at least by 50% between 1986 and 1995, in the majority of countries by more than 100%). The increase was most observable in the younger age groups (14–17), in all countries it was greater among juveniles than among young adults (Pfeiffer 2003). Again, part of the increase could be attributed to growing public disapproval of violence and a growing readiness to report incidences to the police. Nevertheless, indications from victimisation data gathered in some countries and simply the size of the increase led to the conclusion that “the trends shown in crime data are in any case in part the product of true changes in delinquent behaviour by young people.” (Pfeiffer 2003, p. 299) Several explanations for the observed increase of violence were offered: Growing proportions of immigrants in some countries, an increase of income inequality, increasing poverty among children and youths, propagation of expensive lifestyles in the media, a growing segregation of young people from adult society, and a general increase of youth unemployment rates in Europe.

One should note, however, that the increase in violent behaviour of juveniles and young adults was mainly observed in official police statistics, and partly inferred from victim surveys. Victim surveys, however, are only imperfect means to estimate changes of delinquent behaviour of juveniles because victimisation risks are lifestyle dependent and information on the age of the offender is uncertain. Likewise, it is only an assumption that victims and offenders are of the same age, although this may largely be true (Esbensen and Huizinga 1991; Lauritsen et al. 1991). Self-report studies can solve a lot of problems that make the use of official crime statistics or even victim surveys questionable. Self-reports are preferable although more serious offences will less likely be admitted, adults are more reluctant to report offences committed than juveniles, and chronic or high risk offenders are more likely to be underrepresented (Junger-Tas and Marshall 1999). Compatible self-report studies are the only means to estimate changes of offending behaviour of certain age groups such as juveniles over time, as differences in reporting offences to the police or in the way incidences and suspects are officially recorded do not affect the results. Self-report surveys

that allow to study trends in offending rates, however, are rare. The only studies with comparable survey instruments across a number of European countries are the International Self-report Delinquency (ISRD) studies conducted in 1992 and 2006 (Junger-Tas et al. 1994; Junger-Tas et al. 2010a).

However, self-report data are also affected by a number of factors that threaten the validity of comparisons across countries and time: Among others, changes in the sensitivity to violence and crime, differences in the socially and culturally determined perception and evaluation of deviant behaviour, difficulties in translating questionnaire items, changes of measurement instruments across time, and differences in sampling frames and response rates will affect the answering behaviour and the responses measured and will thus affect the estimates of delinquency even if other factors such as the administration of the survey and the coding of the responses will be compatible. Concerning the ISRD-1 and ISRD-2 studies, differences in the sampling frame are probably the most important factor that will make comparisons of offending behaviour across time debatable. While the ISRD-1 study consisted of a survey carried out in most countries on random samples of youths between the ages of twelve and eighteen and took individuals as primary sampling units, in the ISRD-2 study random samples of school classes of grade 7 to grade 9 students were taken as primary sampling units (i.e. students of the age groups 12–13 to 14–15) and surveyed-representative either on the level of several cities or the whole nation (Junger-Tas et al. 2010b).

Fortunately, in the years between 1998 and 2001 several city-based crime victimisation and self-reported delinquency (SRD) studies of grade 9 students were conducted in the same countries (partly even in the same cities) using the same methods of sampling and survey administration as in the ISRD-2 study. The countries were the Czech Republic, Germany, Poland, Russia, and Slovenia. In both the SRD and the ISRD-2 studies representative samples of grade 9 classes (of 14–15 year old students) per city were surveyed. The questionnaires per set of cities were in major parts identical (although different in the SRD and ISRD-2 studies). The data allow to compare trends of attitudes towards violence and changes of victimisation experiences between 1999 and 2006 across countries, and to compare the ranking order of countries (cities) with respect to self-reported violent offences over time.

Comparison of Attitudes towards Violence and Violent Behaviour across Nations over Time

Trends of Officially Recorded Rates of Violent Offenders

Crime trends based on official statistics as discussed above only cover the period between 1986 and 2000 and are not specific for Germany and the four Central and Eastern European countries as being considered in the following. Primarily based on European Sourcebook data (Killias et al. 1999, 2003, 2006)¹ Figs. 1 and 2 show rates of offenders (per 100,000) of assault and robbery between 1990 and 2003.

The increase of offender rates concerning assault between 1990 and 2000 as discussed above is more or less observable for all countries except the Czech Republic. The increase was steepest in Poland (213%) followed by Germany (53%), Russia (39%), and Slovenia

¹ The Russian figures are based on the yearbook of the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (1988–2009) because the European Sourcebook figures of robbery in Russia 1996–2000 are obviously not correct.

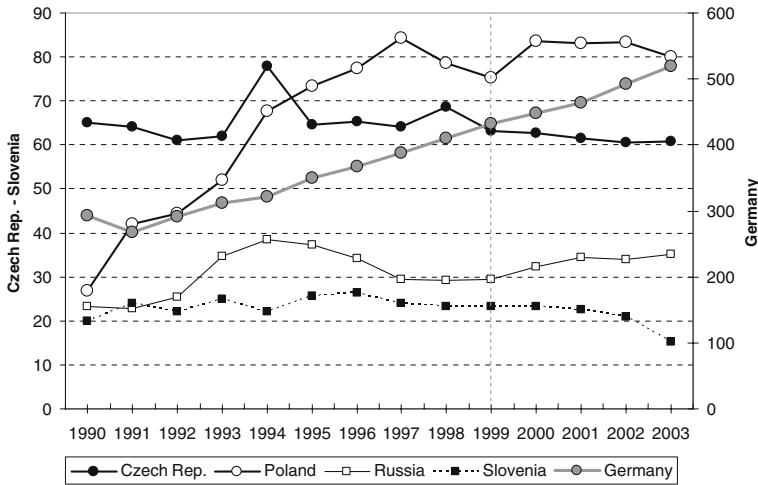


Fig. 1 Police recorded offenders (per 100,000 population) of assault 1990–2003

(16%), whereas in the Czech Republic there was a 3% decrease between 1990 and 2000. One should note, however, that the offender rate in Germany was considerably higher than in the Central and Eastern European countries. Overall, the rates in Slovenia and Russia were the lowest. The overall increase did not continue until 2003, except in Germany and (to a small degree) in Russia where the increase continued beyond 2000.

Consistent with the observation that robbery rates increased generally more in Central and Eastern European countries as compared to Western Europe (see above), overall the increase in offender rates concerning robbery was greater in the four Central and Eastern European countries than it was in Germany: The steepest increase was recorded in Slovenia (273%) followed by Poland (187%), Russia (131%), Germany (52%), and the Czech Republic (13%). In general, similarities in the rates were greater for robbery than for assault offender rates, although in 2000 rates in Germany and Poland were about 1.5–2 times higher than in the other countries. Also with respect to robbery the increase did not continue

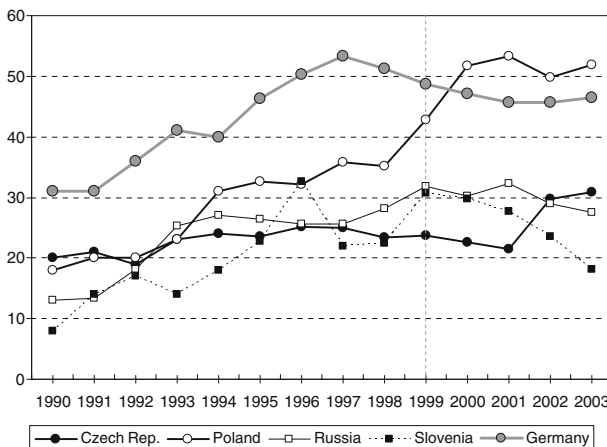


Fig. 2 Police recorded offenders (per 100,000 population) of robbery 1990–2003

beyond 2000, except in the Czech Republic where an additional increase of 37% was recorded between 2000 and 2003.

The fact that, in general, the increase in officially registered violent offender rates did not continue beyond 2000 is an important observation that shall be discussed in the light of the results of the survey data shown below. However, when interpreting these trends one should take into consideration (a) that they refer to the total population, not only juveniles and young adults, and (b) that they are country level data, whereas crime rates in larger cities (such as investigated below) are generally different from (or higher than) rates in small towns or rural areas, and (c) that they do not cover the complete period between 1999 and 2006 as investigated by the survey data.

Samples Studied in the 1998/2001 and 2006 Surveys

In 2000 students in representative samples of grade 9 classes of schools in Plzen (Czech Republic), Krakow (Poland), Volgograd (Russia) and Ljubljana (Slovenia) were surveyed by using translations of a German questionnaire that was also used for surveying students in representative samples of grade 9 classes conducted in Hamburg (Germany) in 1998 and 2001. Among others, the questionnaires contained items to assess attitudes towards violence, victimisation experiences (assault and robbery), and self-reported delinquency (assault, extortion, and robbery) (see [Appendix](#)). The reference period of the victimisation and self-reported delinquency items was the calendar year preceding the year of the survey (1999 in the Central and Eastern European cities, 1997 and 2000 in Hamburg). To minimise the errors due to differences in the reference year the data of both samples of Hamburg were combined, reducing the average time difference to the reference year of the other cities to 0.5 years.

The sample sizes were 1,255 (Plzen), 6,244 (Hamburg combined), 1,395 (Krakow), 1,730 (Volgograd), and 1,902 (Ljubljana). The response rates were 66% (Plzen), 81% (Hamburg) and 63% (Volgograd).² More important than the overall response rates is the fact that between 76% and 87% of the students registered in the classes which were surveyed actually participated. This implies that problems due to self-selection are small. The mean age (overall: 15.0) was similar across cities (Plzen: 15.0, Germany: 15.1, Krakow: 15.5, Volgograd: 14.6, Ljubljana: 15.0). Overall 48% of the students were male (Plzen: 45%, Germany: 50%, Krakow: 50%, Volgograd: 45%, Ljubljana: 46%). Because generally male students tend to be more violent than females, in the following analyses we apply appropriate weights to account for differences in the gender distribution. Whereas in Hamburg 30% of the students were non-nationals, in the Central and Eastern European cities this rate was always less than 2%. Although there is a huge difference in the proportion of non-nationals and migrants between Hamburg and the other cities the non-nationals remain in the sample because they belong to the youth population in German cities.

In 2006 and 2007 representative samples of school classes of grade 7 to grade 9 students were surveyed in cities of the same countries in the context of the ISRD-2 study. The questionnaires were translations of the English ISRD-2 student questionnaire (ISRD2 Working Group 2005). Items assessing attitudes towards violence were identical to the SRD study items of 1998–2001, items to assess victimisation experiences (assault and robbery), and self-reported delinquency (group fights, assault, extortion, and robbery) were similar (see [Appendix](#)). The reference period of the victimisation and self-reported delinquency

² The response rates in Krakow and Ljubljana are not known but were most likely in the range of 65% to 80%.

items was the 12 months preceding the time of the interview (more or less covering the year 2006).

The samples of grade 9 students were considerably smaller in the ISRD-2 study than in the 1998–2001 SRD studies. Had we used only samples of the same cities as in the SRD studies the basis of comparison would have been suboptimal (Plzen: 181, Hamburg: 197, and Ljubljana: 348 cases). Instead, samples of large and medium sized cities (100,000 and more inhabitants) of the three countries were combined, resulting in larger samples: Czech Republic (Plzen and Prague) 445, Germany (Cologne, Hamburg and two medium sized cities) 720, Poland (Kalisz and Warsaw) 472, Russia (Kazan and Moscow) 512, and Slovenia (Ljubljana) 348 cases. The response rates based on the number of students registered in the classes surveyed were 67% (Czech Republic), 84% (Germany), 61% (Poland), 81% (Russia), and 87% (Slovenia). The mean age (14.8) was similar across countries (Czech Republic: 14.7, Germany: 15.1, Poland: 14.9, Russia: 14.8, and Slovenia: 14.4). Overall, 48% of the students were male (Czech Republic: 51%, Germany: 50%, Poland: 42%, Russia: 49%, and Slovenia: 49%). In the following analyses appropriate weights are applied to account for differences in the gender distribution. There were considerable differences with respect to the proportion of first or second generation migrants in the cities of these countries. The percentages range from 37% and 31% (Germany and Slovenia) over 15% and 11% (Russia and Czech Republic) to 2% (Poland). Based on the survey data it is not possible to determine whether the proportion of migrants in Central and Eastern European cities changed between 2000 and 2006 because in the previous surveys students were only asked their nationality.

Attitudes Towards Violence

There are many reasons why the study of attitudes towards violence and of attitude change is worthwhile. There is an abundance of literature studying and demonstrating the link between attitudes and behaviour. Behaviour modification programs often try to change attitudes in order to change behaviour. Interestingly, from a criminological perspective the study of attitudes is still relevant even if we would have reason to assume that the attitudes measured were influenced by social desirability. Changes in attitudes towards violence, even if resulting from socially desirable responding, indicate changes in the values and norms of the social environment that should have a bearing on the behaviour of the respondents.

Psychometrically, the attitude items used in the SRD and ISRD-2 surveys can be treated as one dimensional. However, from a substantive point of view it is useful to distinguish between *attitudes towards wanton violence* more characteristic of (male) juveniles (e.g. “Without violence everything would be much more boring”) and *attitudes towards culturally accepted violence* with the purpose to solve conflicts or to prove one’s strength (e.g. “If somebody attacks me, I will hit him/her back”; see [Appendix](#)) because both measures show different profiles across countries, different changes over time and different relationships with violent behaviour.

Table 1 shows the reliabilities (Cronbach’s alpha) of both measures as well as their correlations in the five countries in 2000 and 2006. The reliabilities of the three item scale “attitudes towards wanton violence” range between .68 and .81 and turn out satisfactory, whereas the reliabilities of the two item measure “attitudes toward culturally accepted violence” are rather low. The correlations between both measures are substantial, corresponding to the fact that (with the exception of the 2000 study in Russia and Slovenia) all items can be combined to a reliable total score with Cronbach’s alpha over .75 in the 1998–2001 SRD study and well over .81 in the 2006 ISRD-2 study.

Table 1 Reliabilities (Cronbach's alpha) and correlations of attitudes towards violence

	Czech Republic	Germany	Poland	Russia	Slovenia
SRD study (1998–2001)					
α (AWV)	.77	.80	.74	.68	.71
α (ACV)	.40	.49	.43	.31	.33
r (AWV, ACV)	.49	.57	.52	.26	.37
ISRD-2 study (2006)					
α (AWV)	.68	.73	.81	.74	.72
α (ACV)	.35	.53	.58	.49	.44
r (AWC, ACV)	.40	.54	.42	.46	.41

AWC = attitudes towards wanton violence (3 items); ACV = attitudes towards culturally accepted violence (2 items)

Despite their correlation both attitude measures show quite different profiles across cities in the 1998–2001 SRD study (Figs. 3 and 4).³ Whereas in 2000 the acceptance of wanton violence was substantially higher in the Czech Republic, Germany, and Poland as compared to Russia and Slovenia, violence as a means to solve problems or to prove one's strength was accepted mostly in Russia, followed by Slovenia. This means that in Russia (and Slovenia) in 2000 violence was not generally disapproved, apart from wanton violence without any instrumental purpose.

About six years later the approval of both kinds of violence decreased substantially, especially in those countries that previously showed the highest scores. Although in 2006 the attitudes approached the floor of the scale, nevertheless Russian students still showed significantly less acceptance of wanton violence. However, the differences between countries became clearly smaller (2000: $F_{(4, 12521)}=134.4$, $p<.001$, $R^2=.041$; 2006: $F_{(4, 2472)}=6.03$, $p<.001$; $R^2=0.010$). With regards to violence as a means to solve conflicts or to prove oneself, the Russian and Slovenian juveniles no longer stand out. German juveniles condemn this kind of violence more than others, whereas Czech juveniles are recently showing comparatively high acceptance despite its considerable drop between 2000 and 2006. Perhaps one should not stress the differences between countries in 2006 too much considering the remarkable overall drop in the acceptance of violence in all five countries.

Victimisation Experiences

The observed drop in approval of violence between 2000 and 2006 corresponds to a substantial and statistically significant decrease in the prevalence rates of victimisation experiences in all countries except for Poland. This applies to victims of assaults as well as victims of robbery (Figs. 5 and 6). The decrease of the prevalence rates is probably not just a simple artefact of (changes of) the measurement instruments but more likely a result of true changes, because the content of the items and the layout of the questions in the questionnaire were quite similar. A change in the lifestyle of 15 year old juveniles is also a less plausible alternative explanation because it is unlikely that, in 2006, youths would prefer to spend leisure time outside their homes (and thus in more risky public places) less often than in previous years.

³ The scores were transformed to a scale ranging from 0 to 100.

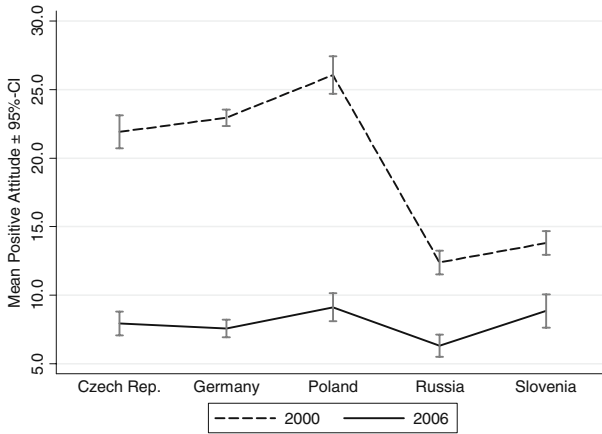


Fig. 3 Attitudes towards wanton violence across countries 2000 and 2006

Although victimisation data are based on samples of juveniles only, whereas the official crime statistics shown above refer to the total population, it nevertheless seems worthwhile to compare both data. The rank order of countries with respect to the prevalence of victimisation experiences of juveniles in 1999 differs in significant ways from the rank order of the police recorded offender rates of the total population as shown in Fig. 1 and 2. The prevalence rates of youths' victimisations of assault in 1999 (Fig. 5) are substantially and significantly higher in the Russian city of Volgograd (the rates of the Slovenian and German cities rank second), although by far the highest police recorded offender rates of assault in 1999 were observed in Germany followed by Poland and the Czech Republic. Similarly, in 1999 the highest prevalence rate of robbery was also found in Russia (Fig. 6), whereas the highest police recorded offender rates were observed in Germany and Poland.

The difference of the rank order of police recorded crime statistics and survey based prevalence rates of victimisation is most likely due to differences in external factors, such as country specific reporting levels, recording practices by local police officers, and classification rules and counting practices. The reporting rates of juveniles, in 1999, in

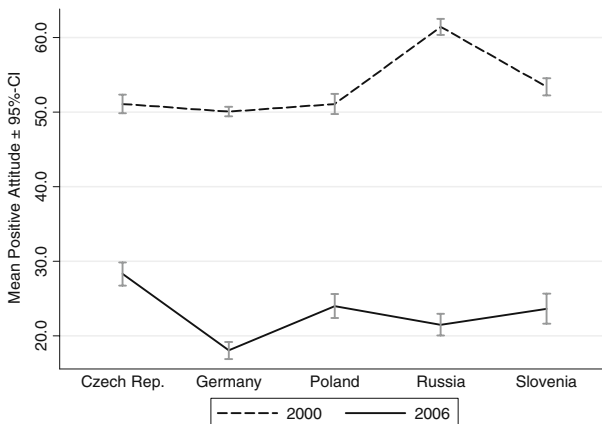


Fig. 4 Attitudes towards culturally accepted violence across countries 2000 and 2006

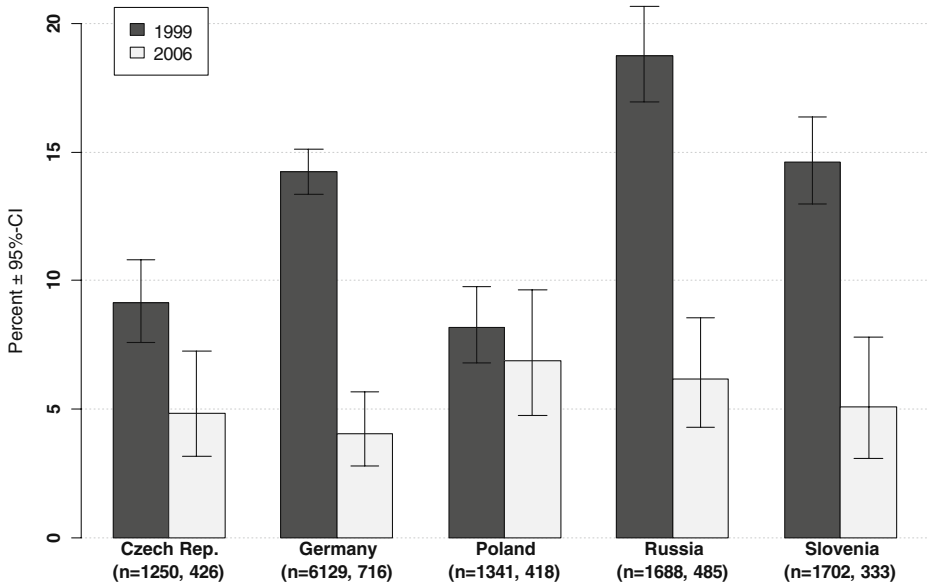


Fig. 5 Prevalence rates of victimisation by assault across countries over time

Volgograd (assault: 4.4%, 95%-CI: 2.7–7.0; robbery: 5.8%, 95%-CI: 3.6–8.7) were clearly lower than the reporting rates of juveniles, in 1999, in Hamburg (assault 9.4%, 95%-CI: 7.4–12.0; robbery: 32.0, 95%-CI: 27.4–36.7). The much lower reporting rates in Russia cannot be explained by lower sensitivity to issues of violence as the attitudes towards wanton and culturally accepted violence suggest. Instead, the low reporting rates indicate

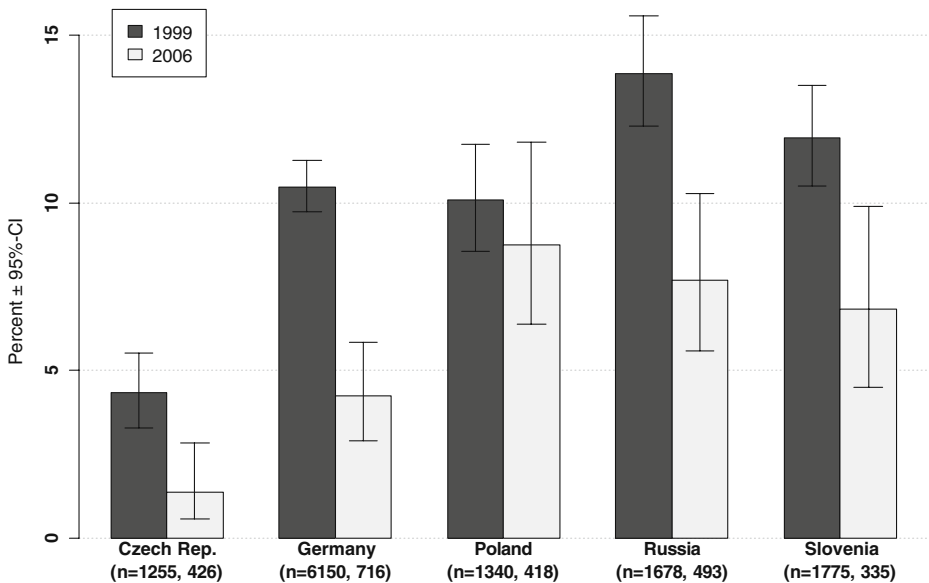


Fig. 6 Prevalence rates of victimisation by robbery across countries over time

either more willingness to solve conflicts informally or (most probably) considerably less public confidence in the police. Additionally, especially in 1999 and 2000 improbably high overall clearance rates of 73%–76% had been reported (Gilinskiy 2006, p. 272), indicating selective recording practices by the police. It again demonstrates that extreme caution is necessary when comparing official crime statistics across countries.

Self-Reported Violent Behaviour

The wording of the items to assess self-reported assault in the 1998–2001 SRD studies and the 2006 ISRD-2 study was less compatible than the wording of the other delinquency items in both series of studies (in the SRD study “group fight” was not asked). The assault items differ in the seriousness of the offences described (see Appendix). Additionally, the layout of the items to assess self-reported delinquency differed considerably.⁴ An experimental study in Hamburg in 2006 comparing two versions of the questionnaires showed that the layout version of the SRD questionnaire tended to produce higher prevalence rates than the layout version of the ISRD-2 questionnaire, especially regarding the more frequent offences, although the item contents were identical (Enzmann 2007). One should take this into consideration when comparing estimates of self-reported delinquency over time. To produce more compatible and stable estimates of self-reported offences, responses to “group fight” and “assault” (2006 ISRD-2 study) were combined into an indicator of *wanton violence* (in the 1998–2001 SRD study only “assault” was used). Likewise, responses to the items “extortion” and “robbery” were combined into an indicator of *instrumental violence*.

Figures 7 and 8 show that wanton violence and instrumental (or acquisitive) violence produce different profiles across countries. With regards to wanton violence, in 1999 the prevalence rates of self-reported assault are substantially higher in the Czech Republic and Germany as compared to Russia, Poland, and Slovenia. With the exception of Poland this pattern fits reasonably well to the profile of attitudes towards wanton violence shown in Fig. 3. Between 1999 and 2006 the percentage of youths who reported having committed acts of assault seems to have decreased substantially in the Czech Republic but remained rather stable in the other countries. This does not fit with the greater disapproval of wanton violence in 2006. However, in 2006 the indicators of wanton violence include a comparatively frequent offence (group fights) that is lacking in the 1999 indicator. All in all, this points to either a stable or a decreasing trend concerning wanton violence within these countries and not an increase.

Instrumental violence shows a different pattern and trend: In 1999 the prevalence rates in Russia and Slovenia are comparatively high whereas the rate was lowest in the Czech Republic. Seven years later, the prevalence rates of instrumental violence are substantially and significantly lower in all countries except for Germany.⁵ The drop also corresponds to a substantially lower acceptance of violence in 2006. There may be a higher tendency to social desirable responding in 2006 because of the generally lower acceptance of violence. Also, the effect of the different layout of the questionnaires could have produced lower estimates of the prevalence of instrumental violence in 2006. However, apart from these

⁴ In the SRD questionnaire all offences were listed on one single page whereas in the ISRD-2 study per offence a series of follow up questions followed, requiring the space of seven pages.

⁵ However, in several other German cities a significant decrease of the prevalence of self-reported instrumental violence (robbery) of juveniles between 1998 (4.4%) and 2006 (3.2%) was observed (Baier 2008, p. 26).

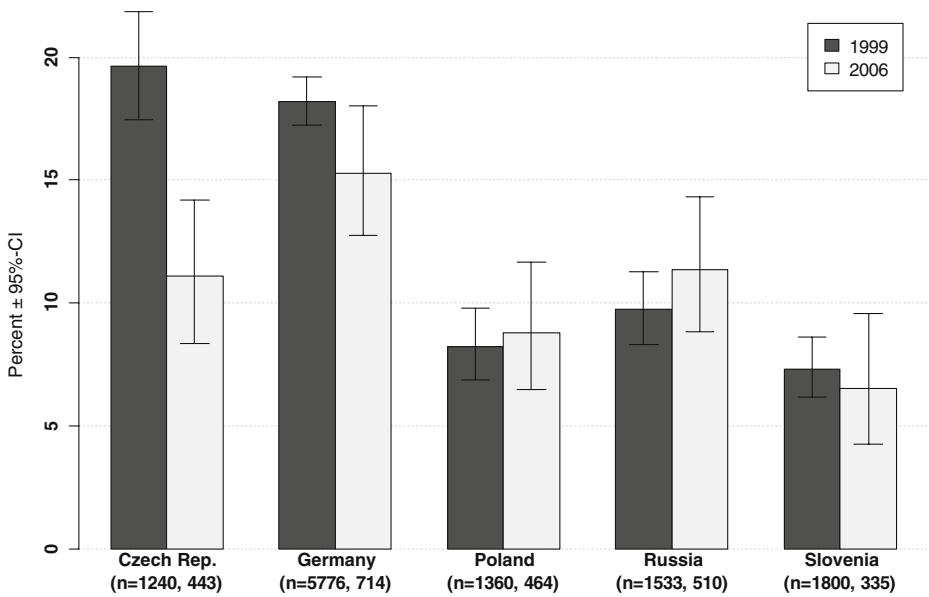


Fig. 7 Prevalence rates of self-reported wanton violence across countries over time

speculative considerations there is no evidence of an increase of instrumental violence between 1999 and 2006, rather to the contrary. Comparing the rank order of cities within the 1998–2001 SRD and the 2006 ISRD-2 studies it is noteworthy that in 2006 the juveniles in the Central and Eastern European cities show significantly lower prevalence rates of instrumental violence than in Germany. This was not observable seven years earlier.

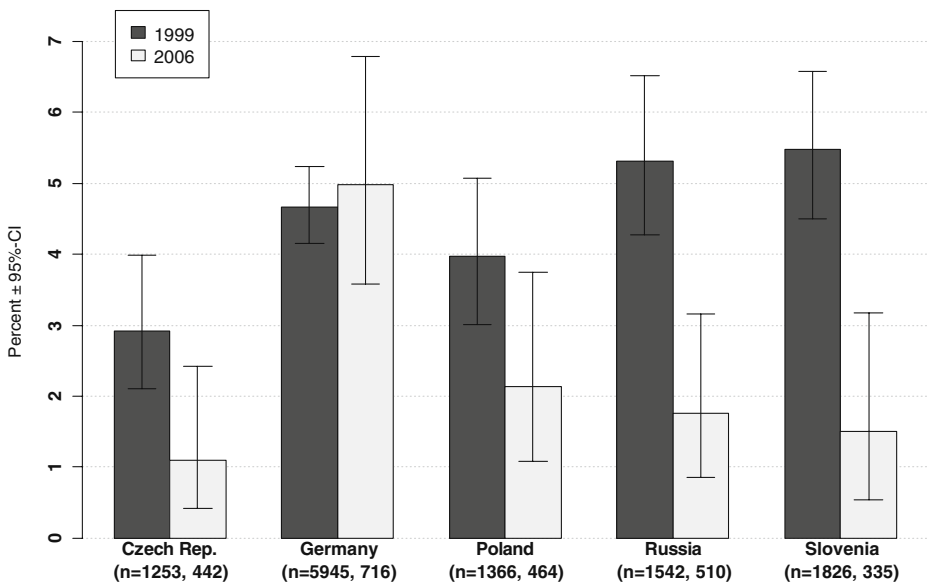


Fig. 8 Prevalence rates of self-reported instrumental violence across countries over time

Discussion

In the previous years the media, the public, politicians and criminologists alike were concerned about a spectacular increase of youth violence in Europe as apparent in official police statistics, especially during the 1990s. This trend of juvenile violence seemed to fit to an overall increase of violence and average crime rates observed since the 1950s and 1960s in Western Europe (and the USA) after an overall declining trend between 1840 and 1920 (Gurr 1989; Eisner 1995, 2004), resulting in a U-shaped curve of long-term declining and then rising violent crime. Between 1950 and 1990 mean annual increases of average crime rates of approximately 4.1% were observed in a cluster of six European countries (England and Wales, France, Germany, Italy, Sweden, and the Netherlands; Eisner 1995, p. 31), with robbery rates increasing even faster. Concerning trends in Central and Eastern European countries after the transformation from a socialist to a market economy, an even steeper increase was observed, especially with respect to acquisitive violent crimes such as robbery (Gruszczyńska 2004).

The apparent U-shaped curve poses a problem to general sociological and criminological theories, particularly to those of long-term socio-economic change. Eisner (1995) proposed a model that can account for the U-shaped curve by reconciling modernisation theory (Durkheim 1964) and civilisation theory (Elias 2000) with self-control theory (Gottfredson and Hirschi 1990). According to this model modernisation and urbanisation need not result in increasing criminality. Instead, socio-economic changes that require a higher level of self-control can also produce institutions that promote adequate self-control. Only if the demand for self-control grows faster than the actual level of self-control crime rates are expected to increase. An accelerated process of individualisation and a decline of socially integrating cultures that promote the ability of self-control since the 1950s may be responsible for a comparatively greater lack of adequate self-control. The transition to market economies in Central and Eastern Europe since the 1990s may likewise have weakened institutions of social control and integration as well as institutions for the production of adequate levels of self-control. Extrapolating the processes at work in Eisner's model, it is conceivable that in the long run the level and modes of self-control required for an even more individualistic society will be produced because this would be necessary for its functioning, bringing the increase of violent crime to a halt. Of course, there is always the risk that society might not succeed in producing the institutions needed.

In this respect the concern about an increase of youth violence also fits to the long-term trend of sensitisation to violence. One example of the latter is the extension of the proscription of corporal punishment in education culminating in a legal ban of physical punishment by parents that started in Sweden in 1979 and is spreading over Europe and beyond (Gershoff and Bitensky 2007; Commissioner for Human Rights 2009). A greater sensitivity to issues of violence may result in higher reporting rates and an increase of official crime statistics even if the real crime rates decrease. As the survey data have shown caution must be exercised in interpreting crime trends based on official statistics, especially when comparing trends cross-nationally. Already in 2001 Estrada argued that in the majority of Western European countries trends of juvenile violent offending were already levelling off (Estrada 2001) and that growing concerns about violence reflect more our changing perceptions than real crime trends. This also may have contributed to the much stronger disapproval of violence among juveniles in 2006 as compared to 2000 as found in the SRD and ISRD-2 studies.

The survey data as well as the official crime statistics available at the moment show that it is unlikely that juvenile violence in Germany and the four Central and Eastern European

Countries has increased since 1999 in the way it had appeared in the police statistics in previous years. The evidence points to the contrary. However, it is still conceivable that the decrease in Central and Eastern European countries is not as impressive as the self-report data show: Concerning victimisation experiences the prevalence rates of Poland and Russia are significantly higher than the rates in the Czech Republic and Germany whereas the offender rates in these countries are significantly lower than in Germany. It cannot be ruled out that Polish and Russian students gave more socially desirable answers to questions about their offending behaviour than students in the Czech Republic and Germany.

Whether this is the case or not, the results show another thing quite clearly: In order to know whether violent behaviour of youths is increasing or decreasing and which factors contribute to behaviour changes repeated international self-report studies are obviously indispensable supplements to international official crime statistics and victimisation surveys. There is a need for an ISRD-3 study that hopefully will develop to a series of European and international self-report studies repeated at regular intervals.

Appendix: Items used to assess attitudes towards violence, victimisation experiences, and violent offending

Attitudes towards violence

Wanton violence

- A bit of violence is part of the fun.
- One needs to make use of force to be respected.
- Without violence everything would be much more boring.

Culturally accepted violence

- If somebody attacks me, I will hit him/her back.
- It is completely normal that boys want to prove themselves in physical fights with others.

SRD Study (1998–2001)

Victimisation experiences

Assault: Someone hit you intentionally strongly, so that you got injured (bleeding wound or black eye). No weapon or object was used.

Robbery: Someone snatched something from you by force or under the threat of violence, e.g. your bag, bicycle, or money.

Self-reported delinquency

Assault: Did you beat up and injured somebody?

Extortion: Did you (alone or together with someone else) force somebody to “pay you” by threatening him/her with a beating?

Robbery: Did you (alone or together with someone else) snatch something from somebody by force?

ISRD-2 Study (2006)

Victimisation experiences

Assault: Someone hit you violently or hurt you so much that you needed to see a doctor.

Robbery: Someone wanted you to give him/her money or something else (watch, shoes, mobile phone) and threatened you if you did not do it.

Self-reported delinquency

Group fight: Did you ever participate in a group fight on the school playground, a football stadium, the streets or in any public place?

Assault: Did you ever intentionally beat up someone, or hurt him with a stick or knife, so bad that he had to see a doctor?

Extortion: Did you ever threaten somebody with a weapon or to beat them up, just to get money or other things from them?

Robbery: Did you ever snatch a purse, bag or something else from a person?

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