

Real or False Image of Police Recorded Crime: What Do the Crime Data Show?

Vesna Stefanovska

Associate professor at the Faculty of Security — Skopje,
University "St. Kliment Ohridski" — Bitola
✉ E-mail: vstefanovska77@gmail.com

Abstract

The process of police crime recording is a research issue in many studies within the expert and research community. Since police crime statistics are a product of police practice to record crime, the question how to measure, count and record all reported crimes in an objective and accurate manner includes serious challenges and weaknesses. In fact, the dominant view within social constructivism and critical theories is an institutional approach which means that police data on crime are suspicious and subject to manipulative practices by the police. The basis of this approach is the principle that crime statistics are subject to construction by the police and primarily serve to achieve certain organizational goals and priorities. This means that crime numbers do not reflect reality but represent its subjective reflection. In a way, they are a part of police gaming in recording and classifying reported events as a crime. The associated decision-making process is affected by different organisational, social and situational factors which can have influence on the crime rate, so the most frequent question remains whether the data show true or false picture of a crime. The answer depends on many factors: adoption of police recording standards to harmonize different police practices and to establish legal rules and guiding principles, determination of organizational goals and priorities within certain period, establishment of police performance indicators, cognitive and other capabilities of police officers etc. Those factors and possible techniques used by the police to manipulate crime recording in order to distort the real picture of reported crimes will be analysed within this paper. In fact, we will go through a certain manipulation process known as that police gaming in crime recording practices that is affected by different factors. We have divided these cases into three basis categories: legal framework for crime recording; police organizational structure and priorities and police discretionary practices. Our aim is to discuss possible obstacles and recent findings that prevent correct crime recording by the police which distort the real picture of a reported crime.

Keywords: police statistics, reported crime, police discretion, data manipulation

Introduction

Whether and how much we can trust crime data and how objective, confidential and accurate those data actually are have still remained frequently asked questions among criminologists and the researchers who investigate crime numbers. The basic principle is that, just as many other phenomena, crime is a product of social processes and the criminal justice system plays a significant role in its social construction. In this respect, any data collected by the police should be treated as a subjective measure of a social process. Consequently, one of the ways in which crime is constructed by the police is through official statistics. Instead of reflecting the objective world of crime, crime statistics and numbers filter out the reality of crime (Lynch and Addington, 2007 in Lomell, 2010). On the other hand, crime numbers are produced to meet certain organizational goals so statistics

do not reflect objectivity of committed crimes, do not describe them or explain the phenomena that they refer to. In fact, the main problem in interpreting official crime statistics recorded by the police is that they are incomplete and with prejudice (Reiner, 1996, p. 188).

In order for a crime event to be covered by official police records, two obstacles have to be removed. First, the event itself has to come to the focus of the police. Then, the police must record it as a crime. Hence, there are many reasons, legitimate and illegitimate, that prevent reported events from becoming official police records (Lomell, 2010, p. 124). Studies show that only 1/3 of the reported crimes end up as a statistical number. Statistics could thus not be used, for example, for purposes of crime forecasting or to assess the effectiveness of the criminal justice system. On the other hand, they should not be ignored either. Their value lies not in the figures themselves, but in the questions posed by different theoretical perspectives. In fact, issues related to the process of police decision-making, the factors that affect police discretion, the goals and impact of organizational policies and practices on such processes, the prevalence of abuse of power in official statistical records and the fear of victims to report crimes should form the basis for in-depth scientific research. Hence, Maguire in his work *Data and Statistics on Crime* (2002) states two major recommendations: (1) crime statistics are not simple reflections on "facts", but one of many possible tools for gaining a greater understanding of complex and rapidly changing forms of behavior that can be described as a crime and (2) crime statistics are not immune to political and social changes and to the ways in which crime data are collected, analyzed and presented (Maguire, 2002, p. 295). In that sense, in the remainder of this paper, we will analyze possible manipulation of crime figures known as the *police gaming* in crime recording practices that is affected by different factors. We have divided these cases into three basis categories: legal framework for crime recording; police organizational structure and priorities and police discretionary practices. Our aim is to discuss possible obstacles and recent findings that prevent correct crime recording by the police which distort the real picture of a reported crime.

Possible manipulation of statistical numbers

Research and expert community is aware of possible misconceptions, manipulation and errors of police statistics and crime reports. Sulejmanov (2003) writes about unintentional and intentional mistakes in his *Criminology*. Unintentional errors are divided into: (a) errors in police responses (for example, one event will be recorded as a crime, whereas, for the other, clarification will be made that the reported event does not fit the legal definition of a certain crime (no recognizable crime) and (b) errors in the collection and data processing. Intentional mistakes are made due to daily political reasons to conceal increase in certain types of crimes, calm the public or reduce fear among potential tourists (Sulejmanov, 2003, p. 74). Also, misconceptions of the police statistics data are created when the police "does not want to know" about certain criminal offenses or if they know about a crime but do not record it; with crimes committed against prisoners during incarceration; in case of "informers" who are released from charges and their crimes remain unregistered; or in criminal cases with imbalance of power between the offender and victim (in case of family violence, sexual harassment, mobbing etc.) (Sulejmanov, 2003, p. 74).

According to the 1994 British Crime Survey, only 38% of thefts and robberies, 29% of motor vehicle thefts, 77% of burglaries and 95% of vehicle thefts are recorded as such. In other words, on average, 60% of the crimes reported to the police are actually recorded. The remaining 40% are not recorded because of lack of evidence that the crime has indeed occurred or because some crimes are considered as trivial offenses for which no formal police action is taken. So, the basic thesis when recording the crime is that, *although an event is reported to the police, it does not mean that it will be recorded as a criminal offense*. According to certain authors, the non-registration is a kind of a police game aimed at reducing the reported crime and, hence, we should not be surprised by the fact that police officers themselves can point out that they can be part of it (Patrick, 2014, p. 4). In that respect, certain questions remain open: how and why do the police manipulate statistical crime figures?

Ways of “manipulating” statistics

In the process of police crime recording, crime data may not be registered or might be wrongly presented, causing an increased or reduced crime rate or rate of specific criminal offenses. This can be explained in several ways, mainly by processes of concealment and play bargaining. The first process refers to non-registration of those crimes that are not likely to be cleared up. The second process covers the practice of increasing the rate of recorded crime in a way that the detected and caught perpetrators are “forced” or “incited” by exerting subtle pressure to admit to or confess to those crimes that they may not have committed or that had been undetected. The award for such confession comes in a form of a shorter sentence or better treatment in penitentiary institutions. On the other side, the police goal of such extorted confession is to increase the clear-up rate. For example, one study shows increase in clear-up rate of burglary from 25% to 70% annually in one police station only (Jupp, 1989, p. 88).

In terms of manners in which crime statistics are manipulated, one publication stands out in academic literature: James A. Patrick's (2014), *A Tangled Web: Why we cannot trust crime statistics*. The work is recognized as a whistle blowing book and the author as a “whistleblower” because he directly reveals the ways in which police games about crime statistics data are being played. Patrick is a retired police officer who, in the course of his police work, has revealed certain findings such as: how the reported robberies are recorded as ordinary thefts or how serious sexual offenses are often recorded as minor offenses only. In addition, he argues that the manipulation of crime figures that points to greater police achievements and efficiency has become part of the police culture. More precisely, Patrick writes about a perverse police model and explains four main processes that contribute to distortion of the image of crime. All of them are part of the police gaming process to create an illusion that fewer crimes are committed and that most of them are cleared up. In addition, the author argues that the manipulation methods are tacitly approved by senior police officers, as well as by the British Home Office.

The processes: cuffing, stitching, skewing, nodding

The cuffing process can be explained as concealment of the true extent of the crime or no-crime procedure, such as “hiding in a sleeve” or “looking through fingers”. It is, in fact, a process that contributes to reduction in crime recording and thus reduction in their number in official statistical

records. This is done by playing down their severity and the extent of harmful consequences in order to classify them as minor offenses or misdemeanours, as well as by indicating that reports are false. For example, in one case, the perpetrator shot at a certain person, but missed him and broke the window behind him. The reported event was recorded as criminal damage, rather than as attempted murder. In another case, a certain person who had reported robbery in a red-light area known for prostitution was told by the police that they could not record the event without informing his wife. Such a suggestion, in fact, was meant to discourage the robbed person to report the event and pursue criminal charges within the criminal justice system. Also, when evidence to prove the alleged crime is insufficient, the police use certain means to "hide" or "conceal" some types of crime events from further reporting and recording. They might suggest the victims to reconsider their carelessness or negligence or hints that they might be wrong.

Another method of no-crime recording practices, especially related to criminal damage, includes a suggestion from senior police officers to initially record the damage caused by crime as accidental until there is undisputable evidence that it is indeed a result of the committed crime. As Patrick in his book reveals, police officers were ordered not to record criminal damage as a crime. From one flow it emerged that certain incidents such as car vandalism should not be classified as offenses when there is no idea how it happened (Patrick, 2014, p. 19).

The stitching process can be defined as exaggeration of the strength and credibility of evidence against someone. The process increases the rate of recording of criminal offenses and, consequently, their number in official statistical records. This is done by recording those events for which there are insufficient grounds that they have occurred or that contain the legal elements of a crime. For example, the police may be aware that a certain crime "will not undergo" the prosecution process and that criminal charges will be rejected, but yet they decide to record the crime in police statistics and count it as a solved case. Another way to increase crime recording occurs in situations when, despite the lack of elements for a particular crime, it is still recorded as a "minor" wrongdoing (for example, instead of being classified as severe theft the crime is qualified as ordinary, Patrick, 2014, p. 49).

The skewing process can be regarded as redistribution of police resources to highlight the effectiveness of police detection and improved clear-up rate. This process explains the police tasks aimed at detecting and solving minor criminal offenses in order to increase the efficiency and clear-up rate. This police approach, in fact, deliberately directs attention and activities to minor offences and underrates more serious forms of crime because more difficult to detect and solve. The idea is that, regardless of the severity of crime, any discovered crime is assigned the same statistical value and figure in the overall efficiency rate. As Patrick has emphasised: "We only investigate crimes that matter in terms of performance data" (Patrick, 2014, p. 43).

The nodding process takes place during secret negotiations (or bargaining) about the charges between the police and offenders. The police interest is to increase crime recording and clear up rate, and offenders' interest is to get shorter prison sentence or better prison conditions. In this case, subtle pressure is exerted on perpetrators who have already been charged and/or convicted to confess to the committed crimes which are not disclosed and recorded by the police.

In addition to police gaming processes, the fraudulent reporting of criminal offenses, most often in case of lost or accidentally damaged items, also affect the objectivity of the recorded crime. Such fraudulent reporting takes place because insurance companies replace stolen or destroyed property (usually a mobile phone) if it is stolen or damaged as a result of a crime. The time of reporting by the damaged party serves as relevant evidence of possible fraudulent reporting. For example, according to some findings (Smith, 2003), damaged owners usually report thefts eight hours after the event directly to police stations, rather through an emergency call. The reporting time reveals that, in order to claim replacement, in consultation with insurance companies, owners decide to falsely report theft or other criminal offense (Patrick, 2014, p. 13). Other studies show that one in five victims falsely report robbery or that 3% of the reported cases have not actually occurred (Patrick, 2014, p. 16).

Factors that affect police crime recording

Reported crimes undergo several processes before they end up as a statistical figure. First, they should be disclosed, reported and recorded by the police. Secondly, these processes involve several stakeholders: the victim, the perpetrator, the witness, the police officer. Since a statistical figure is only the final product, in order to understand crime rates and their fluctuations in different time periods, it is necessary to comprehend the processes of police recording. Actually, the decision-making process to record an event as a crime is rather complex. Many factors may affect the likelihood of an event being recorded as a crime: its nature, certain prejudice against the victim or the offender, the expertise and/or cognitive capabilities of police officers to classify the reported crime etc. In addition, different police agencies use certain recording standards that can differ in main principles and approaches (Tierney, 2006, p. 29).

In fact, by applying the processes of recording, qualifying, measuring and counting, the police produce crime instead of detecting or revealing it. In other words, the scope of crime is a social construction (Lomell, 2010, p. 121). Hence, police officers are part of a complex processes and recording is not a purely neutral process of gathering facts (Tierney, 2006, p. 29). A crime needs to go through several stages to become a statistical number; these stages include crime detection, crime reporting and crime recording. In fact, in the reporting phase, the relevant police officer should decide whether a crime has actually occurred, how to classify it, what standard of the criminal code applies and, finally, whether the event is relevant to record it as a criminal offense (Brown, Esbense & Geis, 2013, p. 75) or the crime should be recognized, reported and recorded (Lomell, 2010, p. 129). Regarding the factors that influence these processes, Maguire divides them in three categories: changes in criminal justice system (legislative changes and formal rules for recording), police recording practices (a wide variety of political, social and institutional factors can have an impact on how the police discretion is exercised) and public reporting practices (Maguire, 2002, p. 257).

Factors related to the police

Taking into account that the police are a complex organizational and hierarchical structure that operates on the basis of strict organizational and management rules, but with the right to act or decide according to their own judgment (discretion in decision-making), we will consider formal, organizational and discretionary aspects related to crime recording practices.

Formal aspects

The legal framework, legal procedures and rules for collecting, recording, classifying and displaying criminal offenses have a significant impact on the timely, objective and accurate recording of the reported crime. In that respect, research and practice show that there are differences not only in national legislations, but also different interpretations and practices in the application of those rules and procedures. These differences are also useful for comparative criminological research in many countries, since comparisons of the scope and crime trends also depend on national counting and recording standards. Therefore, before observing and determining the extent of crime nationally, it is first necessary to identify and compare national legal rules and procedures. In the latest international crime research conducted in 36 countries by the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control, several issues have been raised to the participating countries (Killias, M. at all, 2014)¹, namely:

Are there written rules that regulate the way in which crime data is recorded? All in all, 31 states responded that they had written rules on the way crimes were recorded, while three countries did not have such rules.

When is the crime recorded in the statistical records: is it after the initial report ('input' statistic) or after the initial investigation ('output' statistic)? In this case, 18 states responded that the crime was recorded in the statistical records when they reported to the police, while 10 states recorded it at a later stage, before completing the investigation. Eight states recorded it when the investigation was concluded.

What is the crime counting unit: criminal offense or perpetrator? In 35 states, the crime was a counting unit, in one state the case itself, whereas in two countries the counting unit was the police decision to process the case.

How are multiple offenses counted? In this case, 13 countries counted them as one offense (rule of main (major) offense), while 19 states treated them as two or more criminal offenses. For example, several instances of criminal behavior committed against the same victim were counted as one crime (ill-treatment), whereas several crimes committed against several different victims were counted as two or more crimes.

How is counting done by more than one person? In 31 states, this was recorded as one crime and in three countries as two or more crimes.

Is the rule of principal offense applicable? This applies to situations in which one perpetrator has committed several crimes at the same time. The question was whether each crime was counted separately or whether there was a rule according to which only the most serious offense was counted (the so-called hierarchical rule that only the most serious offense is recorded and counted). For example, if abduction, rape and physical assault against a victim take place simultaneously, is only rape regarded as the most severe crime or all of them independently? According to the

¹ Since 1999 the European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control has carried out five studies on crime rates in 36 European countries (in 1999, 2003, 2006, 2010 and 2014). Albania, Serbia, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Greece, Croatia and Slovenia were covered by the studies. On the other hand, Macedonia has not taken part in them yet.

survey, this rule was implemented in 16 countries. In some countries, the decision depended on the severity of crime.

In practice, different situations and counting and recording rules apply. For instance, a reported stolen vehicle in a city in Ohio State (USA) is recorded 24 hours after the first report, whereas in another city, it would be recorded immediately after the report was made (Brown, Esbense & Geis, 2013, p. 76). Also, if one offender simultaneously robs 10 rooms in one hotel, it is counted as one criminal offense, but if one offender robs 10 apartments in one building, this is counted as 10 criminal offences. Those examples show that, in the first case, the hotel rooms are generally treated as one object of attack (the legal entity — hotel — is perceived as a damaged party), whereas in the second case each apartment is considered as a special object of attack and hence, every owner as a separate victim of a criminal act. Another example also illustrates different police practices. When committing a robbery, two perpetrators attack five guards in one bank and this shall be counted as one single offense in police records. However, by referring to the same case, when analysing the extent of crime (or dark figure of crime) by means of victimization or self-report surveys, the event includes five (i.e. two) crimes because the crimes covered in victimization or self-report polls are reported separately by five individual victims (i.e. by two perpetrators) in their role of interviewed respondents (Brown, Esbense & Geis, 2013, p. 78). This shows that the reported crimes data recorded in the police cannot be compared with the reported crimes data in the victim and self report studies.

The problems faced by police officers when recording the reported crimes are subject to analysis and criticism, not only within the academic community, but also as a part of the official government reports related to crime rates. To support this, according to the English experience, by 1995, some 50% of the reported cases were considered incorrectly qualified (HMIC, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, 1996), which means that a large percentage of the reported crimes were not recorded, i.e. they were not part of the official police statistical records. This situation, coupled with the efforts to increase the rate of recorded crime, led to the adoption of several legal rules and standards for crime counting and recording in 2002: the 2002 National Crime Recording Standard (NSCR) and Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR). The adoption of the Standard was an attempt to address the inconsistencies in police practices in recording crime and establish a unique legal framework that would harmonize and unify the recording and counting practices. The Standard sets the basic principles and goals in the registration process: the victim-based approach, prima facie model and balance of probability test. According to the victim-based approach, the belief in the victim's allegations (or in third person who reports on behalf of the victim) forms a sufficient basis for recording the reported event as a criminal offense. This principle stems from the assumption that the victim should be trusted. According to the prima facie model or approach at first impression, the reported event should be recorded as a crime on the basis of the first impression and first allegations about it. Under the balance of probability test, the reported event will be recorded as a crime when, on the basis of the first contact, the probability that the crime was committed is considered more relevant than the probability that there were no elements of a crime. In doing so, the crime should be recorded immediately or within the next 24 hours. As stated in the Standard, this period is sufficient to take appropriate measures and to determine the actual situation. The recording can be postponed for up to seven days if the victim should confirm the crime. However,

any change in the initial qualification requires additional investigations and evidence to confirm that the crime did not occur or that it was a matter of a different crime (Fildes & Myhill, 2011, p. 18). Although the underlying reason for adopting the Standard was the inconsistency in recording the reported crimes, the view that it was in fact created to increase the recording rates prevails in the English scientific literature. In that sense, after its adoption, the rate of reported crimes recorded by the police increased from 62% in 2000/1 to 75% in 2003/4 (Maguire, 2010, p. 261).

To sum up, introduction and adoption of legal rules and procedures serve as protection against legal uncertainty and possible abuse of discretion in decision-making by the police. They also ensure consistency and harmonization of the various police practices in recording crime and this increases the confidence in the objectivity of police statistical records.

Organizational aspects (structure and priorities)

The structure, objectives, ideology, priorities and capacities of a police agency have a significant impact on crime recording. In addition to the assumption that the number of street police officers has a deterrent effect on motivated offenders to commit crimes, the findings suggest that the increased number of police officers, and their presence in particular, increases crime recording and crime detection. In fact, their presence in the street encourages citizens to report crimes. Also, targeted (focused) police foot patrols or hot spot policing in areas designated as risky or with high concentration of crime exert deterrent and detection effects. The basic thesis is that the number of police officers and their visible presence (foot, motor — patrol, hot spot policing, proactive police action) are associated with an increased number of recorded criminal offenses. If there are more police officers, the number of charges and recorded crimes is greater and vice versa (Marvell & Moody, 1996, cited in Eterno, Verma & Silverman, 2014). In other words, the number of crimes discovered by the police affects the overall crime recorded in the police statistical records (Maguire, 2002, p. 261). As Maguire has concluded, "it is reasonable to conclude that between 2/3 and 3/4 of the difference in crime rates (in different years) reflects the differences in the police response to crime, while 1/3 reflects the differences in criminal behavior" (Maguire, 2002, p. 264).

In addition to the number of officers and proactive police activity, the rate of police-recorded crime is influenced by the well-established and defined local and national goals and priorities of police agencies. In order to meet such goals and priorities, the police can, either intentionally or unintentionally, manipulate the crime data. So, the police can "inflate" the crime rate in order to get additional budgetary funds for the purpose of creating new jobs, purchasing new vehicles or new technical sources (Sulejmanov, 2003, p. 88). For example, in order to increase their performance capacities, the police need more sophisticated methods, better equipment or tailor-made trainings and this situation calls for additional resources. For this reason crime figures can increase which reinforces the need for more resources designated for the police. Another example is the need to demonstrate improved efficiency and greater police achievements. This can be exercised by not recording some of the crimes that thus do not become part of the official police records. Certain surveys often show that no-crime recording practices of those offenses that are less likely to be proved and cleared up (most often, property offences) increase the rate of efficiency (Patrick, 2011, p. 2). Apart from organizational goals, at certain times of the year, the police can set specific priorities on the basis of safety audits: to increase the fight against drug trafficking, reduce school violence,

domestic violence or trafficking in human beings or increase control over juvenile delinquency. Such priorities (laid down in monthly or annual plans) direct police tasks and activities. Subsequently, as a result of such police attention, the number of specific recorded crimes may increase. Furthermore, in pre-election campaigns, a political party that wants to win and gain power, may often "tweak" the crime numbers before elections in order to show greater police efficiency and reduced crime.

To conclude, police statistics, rather than being a reflection of objective reality, are primarily guided by organizational objectives and needs (Patrick, 2011, p. 3, Tierney, 2006, p. 30). By setting measurable results and indicators, these targets are usually measured quantitatively, which represents the so called *quantitative regime of police management*. The aim of such management is to have as fewer crimes as possible in the shortest possible time. For example, if the goal is to intensify the fight against drug trafficking, an indicator for achieving this goal will be the largest number of detected drugs-related crimes as possible or, if the goal is to reduce street robberies, the rate of decreased robberies will be an indicator for this purpose. Due to this kind of established short-term or mid-terms goals, the police feel certain pressure to achieve them. For this reason, the general aspiration of crime control policy is crime reduction and, instead of being a starting point, police statistical records become a result of police activities. In fact, they serve as police performance and police efficiency indicators so they are measured and evaluated as ultimate products (Lomell, 2010, p. 142). In such a *target or outcome-driven culture*, the complexity of police work and the quality of collected crime data are overlooked. Additionally, police activities detect and record minor criminal offenses, a practice often described as "collecting low fruits", and neglect more serious forms of crime.

Bearing this in mind, crime figures cannot be used as performance indicators or as evidence according to which the efficiency of the police work and activities should be assessed (Patrick, 2014, p. 74; Eterno, Verma & Silverman, 2014).

Discretion in decision-making practices

Police play an important role in social construction of crime and this can be achieved by exercising police discretion. Actually, police job is responsible and complex, because a police officer should transfer criminal law in practice in each specific situation. Most of the police work remains invisible to the public, but also to the upper structures in the hierarchy of the police organization, which means that a police officer has a considerable operational discretion about when, how, where and whom to monitor, stop, examine, deprive of liberty, apply physical force or when and whether they will file criminal charges. Therefore, police discretion opens up a number of issues: the possibility of abuse; acting on the grounds of prejudice; manifesting moral contempt of the criminal behavior of the offender or just police misconduct and indifference (stated in Gogov, 2013). Moreover, as stated in Gogov 2013, "one of the leading police officers, Mark Finanane, says that at every level of police work, especially at the micro level, there is a certain choice in the way the police officer acts" (stated in Bronty & Stenning, 2011, p. 320). In professional literature, one can often come across the opinion that the police have an extensive level of discretion whenever they conduct investigations, interrogations or searches, issue warnings, deprive individuals of liberty etc. Regarding the level of discretion in decision making, two levels can be distinguished: *low level*, according to which each police officer exercises discretion when revealing a crime or

when taking measures in a specific situation for maintaining public order and *high level*, applied when the police officer decides what crimes to prioritize or whether it is necessary to establish a new organizational unit for performance of specialized tasks. A low level of discretionary conduct is implemented on a daily basis by police officers since they spend most of their working time in the field making decisions, usually urgent, without the possibility to consult other colleagues, but also without the possibility of being controlled by their superintendents.

So, individual police norms and values determine how and when the law is applied and, therefore, the police shape the way in which it will be exercised. Regarding the crime recording, the police officer can also decide at his own discretion in certain situations. Although this issue has been considered from a formal and organizational aspect, however, certain circumstances related to the police personality, with its attitudes and experience, can directly influence the decision-making process. The discretion may be a result of subjective assessment of the seriousness of the offense, a result of likelihood to submit criminal charges against the offender or it might be influenced by a certain police habit of tradition (Jupp, 1989, p. 96).

In the literature, two aspects that affect the decision-making process have been identified: legal aspects that cover seriousness of the offense, nature and characteristics of the victim and external aspects that refer to potential prejudice and discrimination against the perpetrator and/or the victim, workload, structure and disorganization of the neighborhoods (Bolvin & Cordeau, 2011, p. 188). The existence of prejudice towards certain categories of citizens on the basis of their race, sexual orientation and national or ethnic origin increases the likelihood of a police officer giving that same group tougher treatment. Such a relationship may mislead the public into believing that ethnic minorities are more prone to crime. On the other hand, increased workload also affects discretionary decision-making. As the number of reported phone calls increases, the recorded crime is reduced, especially for less serious offences (Varano, Schafer, Cancino & Swattc, 2009). In fact, the police officer can decide to "make" their police work "easy" by not recording crimes or by classifying them as other events.

In addition to discretionary police practices, Klinger (1977) gives some theoretical views that explain the geographical distribution of crime. According to him, police officers are less likely to take formal measures in high-risk areas because they consider that: certain crimes are "normal", i.e. they normally occur in a given social context; certain victims deserve less police attention and services than others; and certain police interventions are useless and they have no effect on certain categories of suspected perpetrators. Therefore, reported events are less likely to be recorded as crimes in poor neighborhoods with increased social disorganization and reduced formal control. Klinger (1997) thus suggests that law enforcement officers adapt their practices according to the characteristics of a typical "clientele" in a particular area. In other words, certain non-privileged groups face a different level of police services and interventions. The hypothesis is that the police do not provide enough services in poor neighborhoods and areas because citizens living in those areas are less deserving. Some research confirms these theses. For example, Warner (1997) and Varano (2009) found that the recording rate was lower in neighborhoods with poorer populations. On the other end, the opposite hypothesis rooted in the conflict theory suggests that minority members are perceived as potentially risky and dangerous to public safety and that the police are a tool used to maintain order. Critical approach in that sense includes the thesis that the deviant

behavior of minorities is systematically criminalized and consequently over-recorded in police statistics (Bolvin & Cordeau, 2011, p. 173).

Third-Party Pressure to Show Individual Responsibility and Efficiency

In his paper *The Effect of "Third Party" Pressure on Police Crime Recording Practice*, Tim Hope writes about the impact of the "third party" pressure on police crime recording practices (Hope, 2014). He indicates several forms of pressure on the crime recording: *moral pressure* or the pressure to record crimes in order to emphasize their seriousness and harmful consequences, as well as to intimidate and deter potential perpetrators; *loss adjustment* or the pressure from insurance companies which seek official police reports of a committed crime in order to compensate the victim whose property has been stolen or damaged; *moral hazard* that can arise due to pressure from certain private security agencies that provide and monitor private alarm devices. Another form of pressure can stem from imposed performance-related targets for the reduction of recorded crimes rate. Finally, changes in the recording standards and the obligation to comply with them can also put some pressure on police officers.

So, pressure on the police can account for the process of not recording the reported crime. If the police are under the pressure to reduce the crime rate, the likelihood of possible manipulation regarding the number of crimes will increase (Eterno, Verma & Silverman, 2014). Because the police officers have significant role in production of crime statistics, any abuse of discretion in decision-making constitutes a threat to the validity of police statistical records (Boivin & Cordeau, 2011, p. 187).

Concluding remarks

Crime statistics shape our understanding of crime and inform the public about its rate and extent over the year. If statistics are wrong, public understanding of crime will also be wrong. So, if we agree with the thesis that statistics are an indicator of the crime rate in certain period and in one country, but also an indicator of the efficiency of police work and management, then we simply have to agree that they have multiple goals. In general, the aims and usefulness of police crime statistics can be analyzed from different views and perspectives. They are indicators of the scope and specific characteristics of crime in one country, the basis for anticipating and planning crime control policies, an indicator of the effectiveness of the police and a basis for accomplishing both the organizational objectives of the police and wider political goals and priorities.

In this regard, the value of the crime recorded data was increasingly examined and, in terms of their usefulness, the data were described as "inappropriate for use" (Maguire 2002, p. 242). In particular, with the development of critical criminology in the 1970s, there has also been a lack of confidence in official crime statistics, as they can lead either to underestimation or exaggeration of the number of committed crimes. Therefore, the main concern is whether the increase or reduction of official statistics is a result of increased crime or a consequence of specific police activity. Given the fact that police crime statistics are a product of police practices for its recording, more and more scientists think that it is not possible to provide an objective and accurate illustration of the current state of crime in a society. Crime increase is unrealistic and, at certain times, deliberately

produced by the police, ruling political party or the media. The basic thesis is that changes in the figures of the recorded crime do not always necessarily reflect the changes in commission of criminal offenses (Maguire 2002, p. 249). Thus, Sulejmanov in his *Criminology* writes that statistical data are just indicators of the way in which the criminal justice system and citizens react to the extent of crime which cannot be accurately measured (Sulejmanov 2003, p. 90).

In fact, public acknowledgment for possible manipulation or forgery of police crime record numbers is also present in official police reports which assess the validity and objectivity of the displayed statistical numbers. Certain findings in England and Wales indicate that there is some substantial and credible evidence that the police-recorded crime data do not correctly represent the decline in the crime rate, which indicates that official figures cannot be trusted. These concerns related to the value, objectivity and usefulness of statistical data did not remain outside the theoretical perspectives and research within criminology. Certain theoretical perspectives support the objectivity of crime data and give them a crucial meaning in measuring and counting crime, but others think that they have no significant value in such measuring. However, there is a third standpoint supported by most authors. Accordingly, statistical data can and should be used in criminological research, but with caution about their limitations and mistakes that may arise in the process of *their production* and further statistical analysis (Sulejmanov 2003, p. 88).

In that regard, in this paper, we have tried to provide critical examination of the challenges associated with crime recording of the reported crime by the police, focusing on possible manipulation and certain factors that influence police decision-making. The main finding is that police officers might particularly be influenced by organizational goals, values and priorities of the police organization. Also, in performing their tasks, they are guided by specific rules, legal norms and practice. Thirdly, discretionary decision-making is conditioned by both the way the police officers perceive the reported event and by their individual value judgments, knowledge and professionalism to assess whether the reported event constitutes a crime and what type of crime. Having this in mind, crime recording might involve misclassification, "sweeping crime under the carpet", ignoring or hunting certain crimes, failing victims, providing no proves for modifiable crimes etc. Those obstacles erode efficacy and effectiveness of the police system. In particular, non-registration of crime is directly linked to performance evaluation of the police because, in general, police efficacy indicators are based on crime statistics i.e. how many crimes have been registered, and what the outcome of registered crime is. This usually leads to pressure on the police not to register the crime.

These issues should thus to be researched not only by the research community, but also by the police themselves in order to deliver objective and accurate crime data. There is a need to study and understand challenges experienced by crime recorders, because, above all, if there are no objective crime data, government decisions of public interest will be unsuitable, even wrong, in particular if they relate to crime prevention, victim support or even to the general social protection and education. Lack of objective police information about crime rate leads the public to develop their own crime perspective based on personal experience or media presentation and this should not be allowed because it may increase the fear of crime which directly affects their quality of life.

References

- Bolvin, R., Cordeau, G. (2011). Measuring the Impact of Police Discretion on Official Crime Statistics: A research Note. *Police Quarterly*, 14 (2), 186 – 203.
- Bronitt, C., Stenning, P. (2011). Understanding discretion in modern policing. *Criminal Law Journal*, 35 (6), 319 – 332. Downloaded from: <http://hdl.handle.net/10072/44249>
- Brown E.S., Esbense, F., Geis, G. (2013). *Criminology: Explaining Crime and Its Context* (eight edition). New York: Anderson Publishing.
- Coleman, C., Moynthan, J. (2002). The Social Construction of Official Statistics. In Jewkes, Y & Letherby, G. (eds.) *Criminology: A Reader* (pp.96 – 104). London: SAGE.
- Eterno A.J., Verma, A., Silverman B.E. (2014). Police Manipulation of Crime Reporting: Insiders' Revelations. *Justice Quarterly*. DOI: 10.1080/07418825.2014.980838 811-836
- Fildes, A., Myhill, A. (2011). Understanding crime recording. NPIA, National Policing Improvement Agency Research, Analysis and Information. ACRO Reducing Bureaucracy Programme. Downloaded from: https://whatworks.college.police.uk/Research/Documents/Understanding_crime_recording.pdf.
- Gogov, B. (2013). *Kriminalistickoto razuznavanje kako model na policiska rabota od aspekt na vladeenje na pravoto*. Unpublished Doctoral thesis at the Law Faculty Justinian Prima - Skopje, University "St. Kiril i Metodij" - Skopje, Juni, 2013.
- Hope, T. (2014). The effect of "third party" pressure on police crime recording practice. Downloaded from http://usir.salford.ac.uk/33397/1/Hope_%282014%29_Evidence_to_PASC.pdf (15.11.2018).
- Jupp, V. (1989). *Methods of Criminological Research*. London: Routledge
- Killias, M. et al. (2014). *European Sourcebook of crime and criminal justice statistics* (fifth edition). Helsinki: European Institute for Crime Prevention and Control.
- Lomell, H. (2010). The politics of Numbers Crime Statistics as a Source of Knowledge and a Toll of Governance. In Shoham, G. Shlomo, Knepper, P. & Kett, M. (eds.) *International Handbook of Criminology* (pp. 117 – 152). CRS Press.
- Magir, M. (2002). Podatoci i statistika za kriminalot. In Megvaer, M., Morgan, R. & Rajner, R. (eds.) *Oksfordski Priracnik za kriminologija* (pp. 242-301). Translated, 2010, Natpres, Skopje.
- Patric, R. (2014). *A Tangled Web: Why you can't believe crime statistics*. London: Civitas.
- Patrick, R. (2011). "Reading tea leaves": An Assessment of the reliability of police recorded crime statistics. *The Police Journal*, 84, 47 – 67.
- Reiner, R. (1996). The case of the missing crimes. In Levitas, R. & Guy, W. (eds). *Interpreting official statistics* (pp. 185 – 205). London: Routledge.
- Sulejmanov, Z. (2003). *Kriminologija*. Skopje: Institut za sociolosko i politickopravni istrazuvanja, Univerzitet „Sv. Kiril i Metodij„
- Tierney, J. (2006). *Criminology: Theory and context* (second edition). Harlow; UK: Pearson Education.
- Varano P.S., Schafer A.J., Cancino M.J., Swatt L.M. (2009). Constructing crime: Neighbourhood Characteristics and Police Recording Behaviour. *Journal of criminal justice* 37(6), 553 – 563.

Vesna Stefanovska

Fakultet za sigurnost — Skopje,
Sveučilište "St. Kliment Ohridski" — Bitola

Stvarna ili lažna slika kriminaliteta koji bilježi policija: što nam govore podaci o kriminalitetu?

Sažetak

Brojne studije u stručnoj i znanstvenoj zajednici bavile su se temom kriminaliteta koji bilježi policija. Budući da policijski statistički podaci o kriminalitetu proizlaze iz policijske prakse da bilježi kriminalitet, pitanje kako objektivno i točno mjeriti, brojati i bilježiti sva kaznena djela koja se prijavljuju policiji uključuje ozbiljne izazove i propuste. Zapravo, u socijalnom konstruktivizmu i kritičkim teorijama prevladava institucionalni pristup prema kojem su policijski podaci o kriminalitetu sumnjivi i predmet manipulacije od strane policije. Osnovno načelo pri tome je da policija 'kroji' statističke podatke o kriminalitetu i da joj je primarna svrha postići određene organizacijske ciljeve i prioritete. Drugim riječima, podaci o kriminalitetu ne odražavaju stvarno stanje nego predstavljaju samo subjektivni odraz toga stanja. Mogu se shvatiti kao dio policijske igre u bilježenju i klasifikaciji prijavljenih djela kao kaznenih. Različiti organizacijski, društveni i situacijski čimbenici koji mogu utjecati na stopu kriminaliteta određuju pripadajući postupak donošenja odluka pa se kao glavno pitanje nameće dvojba pokazuju li podaci stvarnu ili lažnu sliku kriminaliteta. Odgovor ovisi o brojnim čimbenicima: usvajanju standarda bilježenja kaznenih djela u policiji kako bi se ujednačile različite policijske prakse i uspostavila pravna pravila i vodeća načela, određivanje organizacijskih ciljeva i prioriteta unutar određenog razdoblja, uspostavljanje pokazatelja rezultata rada policije, kognitivne i ostale sposobnosti policijskih službenika itd. U ovom se radu analiziraju navedeni čimbenici i moguće tehnike koje policija koristi kako bi manipulirala bilježenje kaznenih djela i tako iskrivila stvarno stanje u smislu prijavljenih kaznenih djela. Objasniti će se određeni manipulativni postupak koji se naziva policijskom igrom u bilježenju kaznenih djela, a koji ovisi o brojnim čimbenicima. Te smo slučajeve podijelili u tri osnovne kategorije: zakonski okvir za bilježenje kaznenih djela, policijska organizacijska struktura i prioritete te policijske diskrecijske prakse. Cilj nam je ispitati moguće prepreke i rezultate nedavnih istraživanja koji priječe ispravnu praksu bilježenja kriminaliteta u policiji i koji zamućuju stvarnu sliku prijavljenih kaznenih djela.

Ključne riječi: policijska statistika, prijavljena kaznena djela, policijska diskrecija, manipulacija podacima