

## CRIME TRENDS AND THE COVID-19

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*In response to the pandemic, cities implemented states of emergency and stay at home in order to reduce virus spread. Changes in social dynamics due to local restrictions impacted human behavior and led to a shift in crime dynamics. We analyze shifts in crime types by comparing crimes before the implementation of stay at home orders and the time period shortly after these orders were put in place across the world.*

The COVID-19 virus has revolutionized virtual life. Normal (in person) human contact has been largely replaced by intrafamily agreements and computerized ones, allowing public education authorities and some businesses to continue to function despite social distancing. Unfortunately, this did not go without consequences.

The increase in screen time spread not only the susceptibility and victimization of online frauds and fraudulent transactions that are already familiar to us, but also specific crimes: cyberbullying and hate crimes, which often occur on anonymous social networks. Thus, stay-at-home orders influence some of the routine actions, which are known to provide new opportunities for committing crimes. Lifestyle has also changed due to the threat of infection, this should theoretically have an impact on the capacity and distribution of crime, internal with cybercrime and violent crime (domestic and family violence), as well as with economic stress. Perhaps the most obvious threat that is driving crime rates down is forced isolation [1; 2].

And yet the question remains open. a natural question arises as to whether the policy of the state influences the change in the picture of crime. Swedish researchers M. Gerell, J. Kardell and J. Kindgren studied crime for ten weeks after the start of government restrictions on movement in public places, observing a total recorded crime of 8.8%, despite the somewhat weak reaction of the country (on the restriction social movement) [3]. Specifically, the researchers showed that burglaries went down by 23%, commercial burglaries went down by 12.7%, and pickpocketing went down by a staggering 61%. But there was little change in robbery or drug-related crimes.

Sweden is a particularly interesting example of the COVID-19 and crime, as it has taken drastic measures to cope with the virus in compare with other countries. Swedish scientists believe that only "risk groups" should be isolated - the elderly and those who suffer from chronic diseases. The rest should not be afraid of being infected with the coronavirus. In Sweden, they are convinced that in this way the country's population will acquire a kind of herd immunity and the virus will lose its effectiveness in the long term.

In a study of crime in Australia, Payne and Morgan presented that assault, sexual abuse and domestic violence did not differ from what was predicted in the "normal" conditions at the lower end of the confidence interval [4].

Similar trends during the pandemic were observed in the Republic of Belarus, since no official quarantine was introduced. According to the statistics of the Republic of Belarus, in 2020 there was a decrease in the number of grave and felony crimes (-28.3%), including rape (-45.3%), violent acts of a sexual nature (-8.8%), crimes against property – brigandage (-34.1%) and robberies (-13.3%). The number of recorded corruption crimes also decreased by 23.6%.

However, the total number of reported crimes increased by 8%. For example, there was an increase in murders by 1.6%, intentional infliction of grievous bodily harm by 5%, and extortion by 53.7%. The number of thefts through the use of computer technology has significantly increased – by 192.1% at once [5].

What kind of analysis can be done based on this data? The general tendencies (trends) can be considered as a decrease in the level of "street" crime and an increase in the level of cybercrime. While the level and percentage of physical crimes (sexual, domestic violence) will vary from country to country. The number of physical crimes has decreased for several reasons. The first is that the coronavirus slows down and discourages organized crime, and it takes time for it to recover. The second reason will be improvements in security features. And precisely because of this, the number of physical offenses has decreased.

For example, social distancing measures and blocking streets have had an impact on street crime, often associated with organized crime. In Mexico, the homicide rate, which was at a high level in 2020, fell sharply from the national average of 81 per day to 54 following social distancing measures, although, unfortunately, this rate quickly returned to the average, due to the fact that the movement of cars is limited, there are no people on the streets and more and more law enforcement officers patrolling the traffic control [6].

As a result, the chances of the criminal leaving are greatly reduced. Likewise, in the Balkans, local news reports that there has been a decline in murder and looting in recent weeks.

In Bosnia, where vehicle theft is a serious problem, would-be thieves report that it is more difficult to steal cars stealthily when traffic is restricted and there are no people on the streets.

While it is too early to say what the long-term impact on the level of violence might be, in the short term, restrictions on freedom of movement also deter criminal groups. In Italy, police arrested long-haunted mafia boss Cesare Cordi of Ndrangheta for violating movement restrictions.

In turn, opportunities for cybercrime are increasing as the Internet spreads. The rise in the level of cybercrime is due to the fact that both individuals and organized criminal groups are using new opportunities to commit crimes, guided by the desire for profit and personal gain.

It is estimated that over 80 percent of cyber crimes are committed in some form of organized activity, with established cybercrime black markets in the malware cycle, computer viruses, botnet management, personal and financial data collection, selling data, and getting money for financial information.

Cybercriminals have honed criminal tools and techniques using the social, legal, and psychological nuances of COVID-19. School-aged children, both new and active Internet users, are increasingly targeted for online sexual crimes. In particular, criminals infiltrate online classrooms - a phenomenon known as "Zoom Bombing" [7] – and use grooming [8] and sexual blackmail [9] against children.

Criminals are increasingly using people's fear of the COVID-19 virus for their own purposes: they put fake drugs, non-existent disinfectants, personal protective equipment (PPE), medical devices and hygiene products for sale on the Internet. Other types of scams include investment advice offers, including cryptocurrencies, as well as false medical advice and diagnostics. Cybercriminals continue to seek new opportunities for extortion, claiming they know and can disclose the victim's alleged use of online pornography. Darknet forums continue to sell compromised data, including high-profile officials and celebrities.

Thus, after analyzing modern crimes, both physical and cyber, we come to the conclusion that:

The COVID-19 pandemic poses an unprecedented challenge to the entire global community. Many have switched from physical operations to online, and so have criminals. As the scale and sophistication of cybercrime increases and the number of victims increases, in some countries, law enforcement officials are forced to assume other responsibilities. Compounding the situation for the public and government, the economic impact of COVID-19. This creates ideal conditions for potential cybercrime.

The pandemic is a global problem and therefore cannot be resolved without international cooperation. Countries with weak social order and governance will come under pressure as the impact on the most vulnerable will increase. Counteracting this will require sustained development assistance, expanded assistance in countries with large numbers of vulnerable groups (such as migrants and refugees) and in cities controlled by crime, even with competing domestic priorities.

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