



Crime news: genre, specifics, trends

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Crime is ever the focus of media interest, and crime news make up a significant part of the news. Research shows that the vast majority of the lay public obtains information about crime from the mass media, which shapes public attitude to punishment and criminal policy. The Institute of Criminology and Social Prevention implemented the project „**Representation of crime and punishment of crime in the media**”. The aim of the project is to analyse the role of the media in the process of defining crime as one of the risks of contemporary society and also the role of the media representation of crime in the process of legitimising the relevant means of dealing with such risks. We carried out a qualitative and quantitative content analysis of television crime news and also analysed the public perception of this media representation through focus groups.

This poster deals with the media representation of crime and crime news as a specific image of reality. It presents the results of a quantitative content analysis of Czech television crime news, which focused on describing the characteristics of crime news in general and the specific differences between public television and commercial television news. By analysing the media representation of crime types, specific crimes, crime news actors and punishments, the differences in the media construction of crime risk between the two types of news coverage were highlighted.

Method

Quantitative content analysis evaluated a corpus of 1,886 crime news obtained by multi-stage random sampling using constructed week samples of the main news programmes on **public television** (Česká televize/Czech Television, N=420) and **commercial stations** (Nova and Prima, N=1466). Two time periods were chosen: 2015/2016 and 2000/2001, a period when efforts to promote a resocialization approach to offenders in the Czech Republic at the institutional level culminated in the establishment of the Probation and Mediation Service.

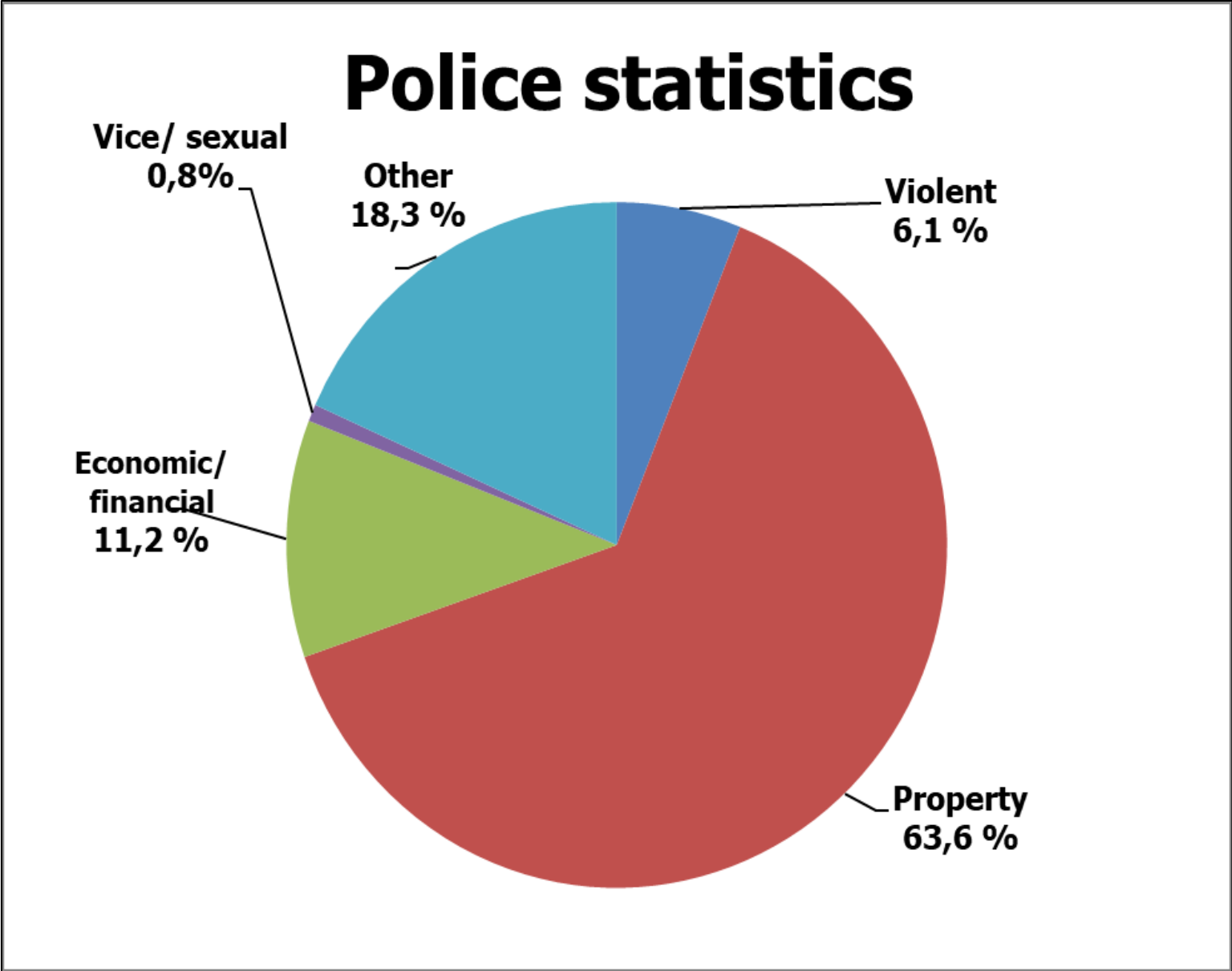
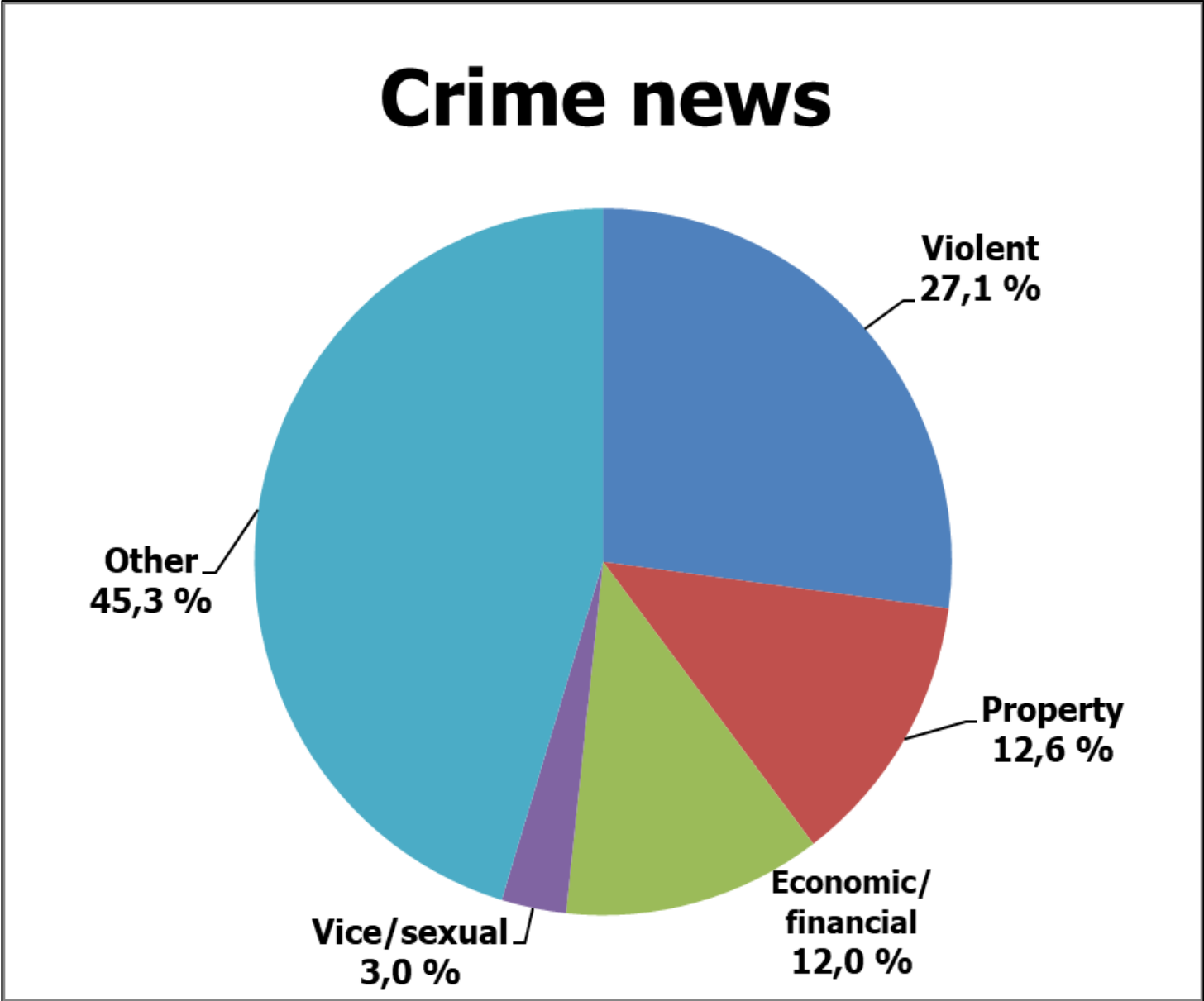
Results

- One of the key characteristics of news coverage of crime is the frequent use of specific case reports. More than **80%** of television news reports dealing with crime or security cover a **specific criminal offence**. This characteristic is also one of the main differentiating features of crime reports that largely effects the difference between crime reports on public television station and on commercial stations. While the share of reports on a specific criminal offence is **68%** on **public television**, this is significantly higher on the **commercial stations - 87%**. **Public television** has the strongest tendency to examine crime and security issues in a general context, without including a specific case report.
- Crime types:** In terms of the type of crime, the largest share of crime reports in the unsorted data set dealt with **violent crime**. At the same time, crime news on **public television** once again clearly differed from reports on **the commercial stations**. While commercial stations with a tendency to sensationalise news prefer violent crime in their content, crime news on public television most often covered **economic crime** and cases that could be expected to have a wider social impact.
- Specific crimes:** The most frequently represented crimes in the media include **assaults, murders, traffic offences** and **fraud**. Significant differences in crime reports on individual television stations were particularly evident in violent crimes. While less than 5% of crime news on **public television** dealt with murders, 14% deal with this on **the commercial stations**. Economic crime (fraud and tax offences) is significantly more frequently reported by public television.

Types of crime in crime news (%)					
	Violent	Property	Economic/financial	Vice/sexual	Other (+remainder)
Public TV	17,7	7,7	25,3	2,3	47
Commercial TV	29,4	13,8	8,9	3,1	44,8
Total	27,1	12,6	12	3	45,3

The most frequently represented crimes		
	Public TV	Commercial TV
1.	fraud	murder
2.	traffic offences	traffic offences
3.	murder	assault
4.	corruption	fraud
5.	assault	fire, explosion, other accidents
6.	tax offence	theft

- Crime news actors:** The crime news of the different TV stations differed in the composition of the actors represented. **Commercial stations** more often feature authentic victims and witnesses and most of the experts are police officers, while **public television** more often carries commentaries by judges, prosecutors and lawyers. Police officers are the most frequent professional group featured in crime-related news across television. They are present in more than a third of the news.
- Media vs. police data:** By comparing the structure of crime in media representation and in terms of police statistics, the most significant characteristic of crime news is **the overstatement of violent crime**, which appears in media crime reports over four times more often than in crime registered by the police. The overstatement of violent crime in crime news on commercial television stations is even more evident, at more than five times actual numbers on **the commercial stations**, but only two times on **public television**.
- Types of crime according to crime news and police statistics (% , crime news N=1 552, police statistics N=1 215 836):**



- The risk of crime is unevenly distributed in the news and affects various **groups of victims** differently. Of the specific groups of crime, sex crime (rape, sexual abuse) is unsurprisingly associated with adolescents, respectively children, and women. Fraud and robberies are reported significantly more often in connection with seniors. Compared with police statistics, our media analysis showed that **the risk of victimisation by serious crime**, such as assault, murder or robbery, **is overstated** in terms of gender **in the Czech media space for women, especially young and middle-aged women**.
- Punishments:** The most frequently imposed punishment is in fact a suspended sentence. However, of the crime news that mentioned punishment, 91% mention unconditional imprisonment. It can be said that **punishment in the media space almost exclusively takes the form of long-term imprisonment**. The share of reported unconditional sentences is five times higher compared to the sentences actually imposed in the given time periods. The structure of unconditional sentences based on their duration is also overstated in the strictest categories many times over in media representation. The form of punishment presented in the media is thus more punitive in all respects than the punishments actually imposed. This undoubtedly relates to the fact that the media report on serious offences, which are subject to stricter punishments, but also the fact that the media report the strictest sentence faced by the offender.

Conclusions

- The crime news of **public television** and **the commercial stations** differs significantly in many of the characteristics observed.
- In terms of the dynamics of discourse, it is clear that individual television stations differ more in a number of characteristics today than twenty years ago. A gradual profiling of crime news on the monitored television stations is evident over time, with a **"widening of the scissors"** between serious and tabloid (sensationalist) crime news, between crime news on public television and the commercial television stations.