

MARTA WELFE-STARZAK

University of Lodz

THE MEDIA'S PERSPECTIVE ON CRIME IN LODZ

Abstract: A feeling of safety and security is one of the key elements in the quality of one's life. People construct their feeling of safety based on their own experiences, the experiences of people dear and important to them, and based on the reports of local and national media. Local media can be very influential when it comes to how citizens view safety in their own environment, as it focuses on the local area and is usually the only available source of information on what is happening in, for example, one's city of residence. In particular, spectacular front-page stories can exert a lasting effect on an individual's feeling of safety. This article summarizes crime-related events as presented by local media in Lodz in 2014. Among its key findings is that within the sampled body of news reports, the view of the events concerning safety was simplified and devoid of context. Most press releases concentrated on road traffic collisions and violent crimes. The downtown city centre was presented as being the most dangerous. Such a presentation must have an effect on the feeling of safety of Lodz's inhabitants, and that effect will be the subject of the continuation of this research.

Keywords: Crime, feeling of safety, local media study, press study.

Introduction

Security is one of the most basic needs – not only in the individual, personal aspect, but also for the society at large. People base their hopes and plans for the future on how secure they feel. It allows them to forecast the future for them, their loved ones, and their community. It's also one of the most important indicators of the quality of life of individuals.

The aim of this survey was to investigate how the local press presents information on crimes and misdemeanours perpetrated in Lodz. The study is exploratory, and its objective is to describe the ways in which unlawful acts are described in the media. The analyzed texts consisted of articles from the local edition of "Gazeta Wyborcza", published in 2014. This corpus was then evaluated both quantitatively and qualitatively [compare: Szczepaniak 2012].

1. The definition of feeling of safety

Security is defined as “a state, giving a sense of certainty, guarantee of stability and a possibility of improvement. One of the most basic human needs is for situations characterized by a lack of risk of losing valued elements of life, such as health, work, dignity or emotional investment” [Balcerowicz 2002; own translation]. Security can be evaluated at both the macro level – on a national scale – and micro level – e.g. evaluating the security of an apartment complex, housing development, a borough or region [Urban 2009, pp. 11-30]. Security in the personal aspect may be synonymous with the feeling of safety, which is an individual, subjective opinion about the level of feeling endangered. Feelings of safety are part of the ‘bylaws’ of how a society functions and provides for its development, and places which exude a feeling of safety are the ones which attract investment and lead people to become attached to them. The feeling of safety is therefore a type of capital, and its deficiency can have similar effects as a lack of human or social capital [Hołyst 2014].

The feeling of safety depends on many factors. Above all it is associated with crime indicators, both social and special, whose connection to actual crime is scientifically proven [Urban 2009]. Secondly, it depends on how a given place is seen by a particular person, on his or her own experiences and the experiences of people they know. Finally, it depends on knowledge about the actual crime rate and the portrayal of risks in the local media. This large array of factors affecting the feeling of safety means that people’s perception of security and their evaluation of potential risks may be very different from experts’ analyses and/or the actual threat of becoming a victim of crime. It can be even said that personal experiences of individuals do not explain the level of insecurity they feel [Kossowska 2006; Sessar 2008]. The level of insecurity felt by urban dwellers is also further affected by a much more general insecurity shared nowadays, as described by Beck [2004]; compare: [Sessar 2008]. It is increasingly more difficult for individuals to deal with this pervasive insecurity, which has partially become independent from its actual source. It’s therefore important that individuals have an undistorted image of crime and other dangers, because the actual relationship between their perception and actual risks can vary, as presented in Table 1. A false image may cause the individuals to be either too cautious or too optimistic about the level of their security. This in turn can cause them to fail to take actions which should increase their security, and may lead to them finding themselves in a dangerous situation, as well as cause them to avoid undertaking certain actions because of unfounded fears.

2. Factors influencing feeling of safety

Crime anxiety is a problem of the same magnitude as crime itself [Czarnecki, Siemiński 2004, pp. 11-15]. A significant amount of research has found a lack of cor-

relation between an increase in crime and the feeling of safety. As it turns out, the most important factor is what people believe, and not an actual increase in crime. Gaberle [2003, p. 49] gives an interesting example of the paradoxical fear of crime among women and the elderly, who are among the least affected by crime yet have the highest crime anxiety.

Table 1

Perception and actual risk

	Correct image of danger	Distorted image of danger
Large actual risk	No security	False security (large risk perceived as small)
Small actual risk	Security	Obsession (small risk seen as large)

Source: Own work based on [Freia, as cited in Mordwa 2013, p. 13].

The differences between police statistics and the feeling of safety of Lodz's inhabitants are significant. The defects in police data and the problems associated with using it to estimate the actual level of crime has been thoroughly described by Siemaszko [2001]. In 2014 the Lodz Police Department has registered 11,123 crimes less than in the previous year. Reductions were reported in all of the following categories: murders [art. 148 kk]; thefts [art. 275 kk, 278 kk, 279 kk]; robberies [art. 280 kk, 281 kk, 282 kk]; break-in thefts [art. 279 kk]; car thefts [art. 278 kk, art 279 kk]; and property damage [art. 288 kk] [*Podsumowanie rocznej...*]. At the same time, Millward Brown's survey, conducted for "Gazeta Wyborcza" in November 2013, showed that amongst the 26 largest Polish cities, Lodz inhabitants assess their feelings of safety and security as the worst, scoring security at 3.79 in a scale of 1 to 6. People in the age bracket between 18 and 24 feel the least safe, while people in the age group 45-59 feel the most safe. What's interesting, gender did not affect this evaluation and the higher the level of education of those surveyed, the greater the feeling of insecurity [Kołakowska 2013]. A similar result was reached by the Rokicka team: even though a significant majority of those surveyed did not have any personal experience of crime, their level of insecurity was relatively high, and much higher when compared to national surveys, and the author of the report indicated that this issue is particularly sensitive to the effects of a moral panic [Przybylski 2013].

Crime is obviously the most important factor that breaches the feelings of safety of individuals and entire communities. Defining what is and isn't a crime is inseparable from applicable laws. This is defined by the very beginning of the Criminal Code [*Kodeks Karny*, Dz.U. 1997, nr 88, poz. 553]: "Art. 1 § 1. A person is culpable of a crime only by committing an act prohibited under penalty by an act of law applicable when committing the act." There is also a distinction between a felony crime and a misdemeanour. The former is characterized by a significant social harmful-

ness. Misdemeanours, on the other hand, are regulated by the Misdemeanour Code and characterized by low degree of social harmfulness. However, it should be noted that what kind of wrongful act (*delikt* in Polish) one finds oneself a victim of, and to which of those two categories such an act belongs, can be changed by lawmakers *via* amendment of the Criminal and Misdemeanour Codes. In both the case of felonies and misdemeanours, how a particular act is qualified is decided by the appropriate branches of the government and until a verdict on a particular case is reached and becomes final, a given act cannot be declared an offence.

These distinctions and classifications that are created by the Criminal Code are “not useful for sociological analysis of crime” [Kiersztyn 2008, p. 225]. The more common definition of crime is drastically different from the scientific or juridical definitions of this phenomenon. In the analyzed material it is often quite difficult to know if particular acts were felonies or misdemeanours. On the other hand, often journalists and readers do not differentiate between different types of deviation. What is important for the media, readers, and this analysis is that the social order has been breached and as a result the security of the inhabitants has been endangered. What's more, readers of the media reports do not take into consideration the results of a subsequent trial. Because of this, while being aware of certain simplifications, it has been decided to qualify all reports about any breach of legal norms or even suspicions of a breach as material for this study.

3. Media and crime

It cannot be said that media is purposefully manipulating the point of view of its audience, even though it may be so in some cases. The way the events are presented does, however, influence the public opinion about the probability of becoming a victim and the extent of the real dangers. As regards the aspect of *perception* of safety, shocking crimes presented by the media have a major influence. In addition, politicians often emphasize the problem of crime in an instrumental fashion, often aimed at gaining public acceptance for stricter law by increasing citizens' feeling of insecurity and endangerment [compare: Sessar 2008; Szymanowska 2008]. The media usually employs a very simple logic: the offender has to be captured and put in jail, making the attitude of their audience towards deviants more strict. As a result, no wider context leading to a crime is taken into consideration and analyzed.

By increasing the feeling of endangerment, the media is able to expand its readership and influence. On the other hand, they depend on information from law enforcement bodies and courts. What is interesting is that their influence on the general feeling of safety is stronger than on the personal feeling of safety of individuals, which can be explained by the fact that the individual feeling of safety also consists of a person's own victimization experience and that of others important to them.

It is simply impossible to inform the audience about every event. The obvious result of this is that media selects the information and makes it a part of its agenda (or not) as the first stage of processing the information [compare: Allan 2006]. The criterion is frequently not its importance for the audience, but the luridness and uniqueness of the event, which positively influences the size of the audience [Migaczewska 2006]. As a consequence the perception of crime is biased, because it is based on information that is by nature sensational. The fact is that people have various attitudes, usually based on strong emotions, towards different kinds of crimes. Their reactions are far more strict when their own property, health or life is at risk, and they are more permissive when crime is connected to economic life, as economic crimes appear to them more distant, even though they can cause a much greater loss. The perception of crime is a so-called 'reverse pyramid', in which the most probable to occur are brutal crimes such as murders, assaults and sexual offences, with burglaries and other reckless crimes being less represented [Gaberle 2003, pp. 39-40]. This image is consistent with the one presented in novels and films tackling the problem of crime, but not with the actual structure of crime.

"A deviant is the one who has been labeled so by a social audience. By the very fact of stigmatization, the community at the same time indicates the existence of a social norm and identifies a specific person who violated this norm" [Siemaszko 1993, p. 371; own translation]. This means that there is no closed list of such norms and labelling is determined by the social response to the specific behaviour of a specific individual. The media has a significant impact on the social atmosphere, event assessment, and attitudes towards law enforcement and the judiciary, which makes journalists important figures in the public debate "The belief that law enforcement agencies are professional and responsive to needs for their intervention and other measures provided for by law does not fall from the sky. It is shaped by contacts with the police, observation of its behaviour towards citizens, and on the basis of information obtained from television, radio or newspapers, as well as from friends" [Gaberle 2003, p. 20, own translation]. Newspaper articles concerning violations of the law have an important preventive function. This type of prevention, called general prevention, manifests itself by deterring potential offenders by means of informing the audience about the penalties for crimes described and the fairness and efficiency of the judiciary system. These reports are designed to emphasize the significance of breaking norms. What's more, this is the way in which the press gives us a model of evil that also allows individuals to form an opinion about its boundaries.

4. Research methodology

In the study that is the subject of this paper all the press articles which appeared in the Lodz supplement to "Gazeta Wyborcza" in 2014 and were related to acts of

deviance violating legal norms¹ and committed in the city of Lodz were analyzed. The choice of "Gazeta Wyborcza" was mainly related to its prestige and opinion-forming influence – in 2014 it was the most frequently quoted national, the Lodz online forum of "Gazeta Wyborcza" is one of the daily [Szewczyk 2015]. In addition most active and has often organized the local community. What's more, the existence of a website, where the texts from the "paper edition" are published, enables the articles to reach a wider audience. While articles published in "Polska Dziennik Łódzki" – the most widely-read newspaper in the region – were simultaneously analyzed, due to the vastness of the material this analysis will be restricted to "Gazeta Wyborcza".

The sample covered only texts which exceeded 50 words, which means captions under photographs which were not a part of a longer article, and the one or two sentences long reports most often published with several others as a kind of overview of events, and captions under photographs in the "Police Chronicle" were not analyzed. The chosen sample consisted of 112 texts ranging in size from 71 to 2,184 words. The largest group were short texts of less than 200 words (30%), and the remaining breakdown as follows: articles of 200-350 words in length (20%); articles 350-500 words in length (24%); and the longest, more than 500 words in length constituted 25%. In the latter group the number of texts exceeding 1,000 words was, however, extremely low (0.5%). This, together with the average length of analyzed articles (413 words) demonstrates that readers are informed about crime in a rather sketchy reporting fashion, and not presented with the wider context or analysis of the situation. The majority of the analyzed texts were 'typical news', which belongs to the shortest type of informational texts presenting current information of significant gravity, that is – sensational, controversial, full of emotions and values. The topics of news reports' are events which are sudden, unexpected, important, extraordinary [Kudra 2010]. The second type of texts dominating in the sample were features, which are slightly longer and in addition to answering the questions "what?" "who?" and "where?", also contain information on "when?" "how?" and "why?".

Basing on the gathered material the influence of texts on crime in local press cannot be assessed, although basing on the literature of the subject focusing on violent crimes and fatal road accidents affects citizens' feeling of safety. On one hand, analyzed texts are strongly related to the police statistics, with only one attempt to tackle the problem that was not previously handled by the police, which results in describing cases that had happened. On the other hand, the criteria used to choose from police statistics by the press results in exaggeration of the amount of spectacular crimes. The study that is the subject of this paper is exploratory and is the first stage of the planned research. Its continuation will attempt to explore the impact of media coverage on the feelings of the residents.

¹ As already mentioned, at the level of the collected material it is not possible to determine the actual nature of these events and unambiguously classify them as crimes.

The designation of the media as the 'Fourth Estate' emphasizes not only their influence on citizens, but also their ability to influence the legislative, executive and judicial branches. A huge responsibility for the selection of information provided to readers rests on journalists, especially in the case of reports of violations of the law. In this context, the fact that only about one in ten analyzed texts were not verbatim copies of announcements of police interventions or summaries of court sessions is disturbing. The authors of the texts very often relied only on the information published on the website of the Municipal Police Department in Lodz, Regional Police Department in Lodz, Lodz district public prosecutor's office, or the Lodz courts. The texts often include entire sentences lifted from the published press releases. The all-too-frequent presentation of already solved cases and reliance on official sources is probably a result of adapting to the 'production schedule' of the newspaper. This is combined with drastic and sensational elements used in order to shock the audience, which helps to sell the issue [Jewkes 2010, pp. 36-40]. The initial research question – "How are the articles on breaking the law in Lodz written?" should have rather been formulated: "Which press releases are chosen by Lodz journalists?"

Jewkes [2010, pp. 40-61] identifies and discusses twelve criteria that guide the media in deciding whether a piece of information about a crime will be published. They are: "threshold, predictability, simplification, individualism, risk, sex, celebrities or high status persons, proximity, violence, spectacle or graphic imagery, children, conservative ideology and political diversion". Whether or not a given topic will go into the media depends primarily on whether it reaches the so-called *threshold event* – whether it will be sufficiently dramatic and spectacular, which is strongly linked to its uniqueness. Interestingly, it is not only the uniqueness of the events that increases their chance of publication. Predictability is an essential quality: although the crimes are usually spontaneous and their occurrence is hard to predict, the media plans some larger topical arcs before specific events take place. This is usually linked with a previously-scheduled agenda, which results in selecting events that match the already chosen narrative description of the preventive measures taken by the authorities, which are also well known in advance. This allows media to plan themes. Sex and violence together are among the most important topics for selection of a particular story for publication. Sex and violence often fuse and are a part of the risk criteria. Risk is a criterion associated with the tendency to present crimes as unpredictable and completely random, committed by perpetrators unknown to the victims. Simplification as a criterion is connected with the fact that although the simplicity of the event is not absolutely necessary, it is important for the story to be describable in very simple terms, using a short list of motives and without a broader context. What is preferred are brevity and clarity – the world presented should be, as far as possible, black and white, with no shades of gray, which is difficult to achieve in the case of complex issues which are difficult to morally assess. Similarly, individualism is related to the fact that the media tries to abstain from scratching the broader socio-political con-

text and tends to treat reports of crime as individual actions of individual perpetrators. The category of proximity is not only associated with spatial closeness, but is also a cultural one, though this particular category is more important for the national media. The last criterion is the involvement of children and/or their relationship to a case, which always raises the attractiveness of events.

5. Categorising of analyzed material

It is difficult to divide the collected material into separate categories of events, primarily for two reasons: first of all, some of the texts combine a violation of several legal norms; and second, some of the articles describe several different events. This obviously results in the lack of separability of the proposed categories. In addition, a number of the described events were of a unique character, unlike any others. The largest and most homogeneous group however is comprised of reports of traffic accidents, which accounted for 38% of the analyzed texts. This is understandable, because Lodz in 2014 again took the disgraceful first place in the ranking of provincial capital cities with the largest amount of traffic accidents. In Lodz there were 1,790, 669 more than in Warsaw, which means that there were 25.16 accidents per 10,000 inhabitants. Forty-two persons were killed in these accidents (in Warsaw 62). Lodz also stands out in the number of intoxicated offenders in road accidents [*Wypadki drogowe...*], which also was reflected in press reports: half of the reports on road accidents included information that the offender was under the influence of alcohol, in one case that the offender was under the influence of drugs, and in one the offender had a combination of alcohol and drugs. More than half of the articles describing traffic accidents, 25 out of 43, described events in which there were fatalities. In those 25 texts, there were 45 pieces of information about a death as a result of a traffic accident. This is more than the amount of people killed in this fashion in Lodz in 2014. For the authors of texts on road accidents the most important criteria for choosing the information were uniqueness and spectacle – the more spectacular the event, *i.e.* with more cars involved or preferably involving public transport (MPK) – and thus affecting the functioning of the city – and the more victims, especially unsuspecting pedestrians (preferably older people, women or children) or passengers of MPK (risk criterion), the greater the chance that the case will be published. The large proportion of accidents in which the perpetrators were intoxicated is connected with, on one hand, a preventive function – as already mentioned, the choice of information was primarily from among that made available by law enforcement and judiciary – but also due to the criterion of simplification. It is easier to report on an accident that has an obvious reason: alcohol. If the perpetrators were also young, irresponsible men (for example without a license), the texts were longer. The dominant reasons for the accidents were alcohol and excessive speed, which is the kind of narrative that does not require a broader context and is consistent with the position of the police.

Special attention among road accidents was devoted to accidents involving public transport and events that took place in MPK vehicles and at MPK stops (14% of all texts). This was primarily related to the accident which took place at the beginning of the year, when on January 6, 2014 a drunken tram driver went through a red light at an intersection, causing the death of three elderly women. Throughout the entire year this event was taken into consideration in the study, as this event was repeatedly reported on, both with respect to the progress in the investigation and court proceedings, as well as when other accidents were described in which MPK was involved. This is in line with the criterion of predictability. This event also contributed to a greater interest in the safety of public transport, particularly with respect to sobriety checks of bus and tram drivers of public transport vehicles. The reaction of the Lodz media even had some characteristics of moral panic [Jewkes 2010, see also: Wozniak 2013]. During 2014 “Gazeta Wyborcza” published many articles describing the steps that have been taken by the police and the MPK management to reduce the likelihood of a similar event. Also the subsequent events involving MPK buses or trams were given more space than other similar topics and included additional information that a MPK driver was sober, even though traditionally such information appeared only in the event it was determined that the driver was under the influence of alcohol².

Another numerous, but heterogeneous, group of events described in “Gazeta Wyborcza” were events that took place in the public space. About 40% of the analyzed texts were devoted to this subject. One could say that the space does not exist without its social context, and only the processes of its perception, evaluation and assimilation give it meaning [Hamm 1990]. Hence, a safe space is a kind of social construct. As we learn to read or write, we also learn about our environment and gather information about it, including information concerning threats present. Reports of crimes and offenses taking place in public spaces, such as thefts, robberies and vandalism, are extremely important for building the image of the city in the minds of its residents. According to the Rokicka’s research team, the most dangerous areas in Lodz are considered to be the settlements Śródmieście Wschód (east downtown), Polesie, and Rokicie [Przybylski 2013].

The last significant category of articles consisted of reports of events taking place in dysfunctional families (12%). The vast majority of them – 9 out of 13 – were related to incidents involving children younger than one year. Dedication of such a relatively large amount of space to such incidents is not surprising: the association of little children with violence vastly increases the attractiveness of an article in terms of readership. In addition, poor families living in enclaves of poverty formed the background of the events described (in 2014 there were three loud cases of this type), allowing the journalists to provide a simple and predictable narrative. Although the analyzed texts were

² A large number of articles devoted to this subject were not included in the sample of this study because they were, for example, reports of sobriety checks which did not detect any irregularities or of other preventive measures and did not include information about the violation of legal norms.

mostly notes and there was little space for emotional and value-laden language, reports about children always used the diminutive forms of their names, often even adding to this that they were “tiny” or “little”, resulting in forms like “little Maddie” (Polish: *mała Madzia*) in order to strengthen the emotional dimension of the narrative.

Little space was devoted to other events (only approx. 10% of the evaluated material). In this group were acts victimizing animals, extortions, frauds, and descriptions of theft or bribery. What they all had in common was that each of these events met several criteria proposed by Jewkes: persons important to the community took part in them; they included drastic elements; were exceptionally impudent; or it was possible to describe them in a simple and understandable manner. Surprisingly, there was no text that described an offense of a sexual nature in the material, even though sexuality is a criterion that is always presented as one of the key criteria in the selection of information by the media. This can be probably explained by the fact that law enforcement agencies in Poland rarely communicate about these types of events, which makes it impossible for journalists to select such information from the available press releases.

6. Dangerous areas in Lodz

The concept of the ‘crime triangle’ [for more, see: Urban 2009, pp. 24-26] presents in a pictorial fashion that violations of the law occur when three components meet up: perpetrator, victim and place. The perpetrator, although having an intent to commit a prohibited act, does so only after meeting with a victim with suitable characteristics in a place that is convenient for the perpetrator to carry out his/her intentions; hence they decide to take action. Although certain types of crimes, such as crimes committed *via* the Internet, are not associated with a specific physical space, drawing attention to these three components constituting a crime allows one to describe it and better understand its causes. The way of describing deviant acts in the press seems to reflect this concept, because even in the shortest of news reports, the authors usually include information about these three components.

However, based on the body of the analyzed press releases it was often difficult to clearly define where the event(s) took place, even though in 91% of cases the articles had some kind of information indicating the location of the event. Road accident reports had the 3 most precise location information provided in them, giving specific intersections, and even specifying from which direction the vehicles which participated in the event were travelling. Of the 44 reports of incidents in public spaces (excluding road traffic accidents) in 41 cases there was some kind of information specifying the location of the event, but the information was much less precise than for accidents – usually it included the name of the street or a generic name for the neighbourhood. A single event that took place on Lodz’s main street,

Piotrkowska (13), stands out as an exception. A significant portion of the articles related to the murder, which took place in February and had wide repercussions not only in the local media, but also on a national level, as it was considered extremely senseless because the offender first struck a young woman, and when her friend, a young man, came to her defense, stabbed him with a knife. The most appalling aspect of this case was precisely the scene, located in the very center of the city, and with many other young people present nearby. In line with the risk criterion, the articles emphasized that anyone could have been the victim, and that if the citizens are not safe in the city centre, they are not safe anywhere. One of the end results of this case was, among others, an increase in the density of the municipal CCTV network, as well as increasing the number of police patrols and municipal police. Following the incident, the media closely monitored and reported on all the other events on Piotrkowska street and the city centre generally, usually recalling this particular crime in their reports as the beginning of this line of narration (predictability). Other reported events which included descriptions allowing the reader to approximately assign them to specific areas of the city (18) took place in areas generally described as "Lodz's poverty enclaves" (Polish: *łódzkie enklawy biedy*), including downtown [Warzywoda-Kruszyńska, Jankowski 2010]. In conclusion, from the analyzed material there emerges first and foremost an image of a very dangerous downtown and other poor and destitute areas of the city, as well as streets and roadways as a place where death lurks for both motorists and pedestrians.

7. Perpetrators

What do we know about the perpetrators? The basic information, which is usually given in the analyzed texts, is perpetrators' sex. In 80 articles (71%) information was given about the sex of a perpetrator or perpetrators, and only in 12 cases was one of them a woman. In the described cases the perpetrators ranged in age from 17 to 71 years, and averaged 33 years old. The vast majority of articles in which it was possible to determine the number of the perpetrators described the events involving one or two perpetrators, as presented in Table 2. Rarely were offenses involving five or more perpetrators described (10 cases). Not too much space is devoted to such incidents, even though they are less common. This may be related to the criterion of simplicity, since matters related to organized crime are more multi-dimensional and multi-threaded. However, on the basis of the material collected it is not possible to verify this hypothesis. In the analyzed period in Lodz courts ruled on several such cases.

In one third of the analyzed texts (34%) the perpetrators were intoxicated, mostly with alcohol (32 articles), and in a few cases with alcohol mixed with drugs (5) or with drugs only (2). "Gazeta Wyborcza" was keen on reporting on events in which there was violence (46% of all texts) and weapons (23%). In most cases involving use of a weapon

Table 2

Number of perpetrators mentioned in a text

Number of perpetrators	Number of texts
1	44
2	17
3	7
4	3
5	4
6	1
7	1
More than 10	4
Impossible to precisely ascertain the number of perpetrators	31

Source: Own work.

the weapon was a knife (15). In a few incidents the perpetrators were more original, using machetes (2), a wooden board (1), a stick (1), a hammer (1), a concrete slab (1), a stick type tonfa (1), tear gas (1), a rifle (1), objects resembling weapons (2), metal spikes which were sprinkled in the forest where bicyclists ride (1), and even a bicycle with which perpetrator attempted to run over a tortured victim (1). Also there were reports of two cases involving the use of firearms by police officers during chases. Overrepresentation of events involving weapons is obviously related to the interest of the media in violence, and their use further enhances the uniqueness of such events.

It's difficult to say much more about the perpetrators. A unique type of descriptions in this regard are the descriptions of road accidents, which often describe the motor vehicle in such a way as if it was the perpetrator, for example: "The Daewoo drove into the intersection on a red light". (Polish: *daewoo wjechało na skrzyżowanie na czerwonym świetle*). It is a common procedure to use name and surname initials (20 articles). In nine cases the fact that the perpetrators already had criminal records was highlighted in the reports, which almost always takes the form of a statement that the perpetrator "was known to the police". Information about perpetrators' employment situation is seldom given, with the obvious exception of the MPK employees, or in the case of events which took place during their work, e.g. an employee of a loan institution who deceived customers and a doctor who hit a drunk pregnant woman on New Year's Eve. Three texts reported that the perpetrators were of Polish origin, although in none of these cases was it explained why this fact would have any impact on the course of events. Moreover, in one of case the perpetrator was defined as "a foreigner" (Polish: *cudzoziemiec*), which clearly shows that the uniqueness criterion was the guiding principle. In this particular instance, the uniqueness was drawn from the "otherness" of the perpetrator.

Rarely was a broader description of the perpetrators' lives and a wider social context given. There were however four exceptions to this rule. The first was the already-mentioned case of the drunk MPK driver, which was widely described in the Lodz press in the sampled year. There have been reports about his complicated family situation (divorce, cohabitation with his ex-wife, and his need to move out of the house), which purportedly led to the deepening of pre-existing problems with alcohol. The second instance involved the murder on February 16 of a high school graduate on Piotrkowska Street, where the perpetrator was described as uneducated ("finished only junior high school"), having a tendency to impulsive behavior, and a frequenter of night clubs, while at the same time testimony of his family and friends in the process was presented, who testified that he was sociable and eagerly expecting his soon-to-be born child. The third instance was a case of domestic abuse of newborns as well as other related pathologies of family life, but in this case very predictable facts were mainly reported: living in informal relationships, divorce, problems with alcohol, many children, lack of work, being a ward of MOPS. The last instance was the case of a doctor who hit a drunk pregnant woman who was partying during New Year's Eve with a larger group, which attacked the car of the perpetrator. It was emphasized here that the wife, daughter and granddaughter of the offender were in the car with him and that he tried to protect them, a fact clearly was aimed at showing the ambiguity of the event.

Based on the news articles from "Gazeta Wyborcza", it is difficult to determine who the perpetrator is. In 27% of cases we do not know anything about them, except that they exist. They are described only in terms of their actions, and we do not know how many there were, how old were they were, or what was their gender. In another 15% of the reports, we know only how old are they and whether they were male or female. This way of presenting the perpetrators leads to the perpetuation of stereotypes and builds a very simple and one-dimensional image of crime in Lodz, with no reflection on its social determinants.

The analyzed material, even though it focuses the reader's attention on the most drastic and possibly the most disturbing events, also allows for some degree of peace of mind. In 94% of the texts there was information about the reaction of the police and/or prosecutor's office to the reported events, and 64% of texts contained information about the threat of punishment for the offenders and/or the charges against them. This is related to the concept of general deterrence – the reporting seems to say that although there are deviants among us, there are institutions watching over us in an efficient system that handles them head-on.

Conclusions

The analyzed material is first and foremost an account of the interventions by the police and the court proceedings, as a result of which the matters are mostly

presented from the viewpoint of preventive activities carried out by the Lodz Police Department. The image of crime emerging from the evaluated texts is clearly built on the basis of well-known criteria: sensationalism, predictability, simplicity, uniqueness, the participation of children and the prevalence of the risk of becoming a victim. Most of the analyzed texts covered road accidents – especially those in which there were fatalities, in which the MPK was involved – or involved the dangers of staying in the city centre and drama involving dysfunctional families. Overall these reports are short and schematic, but filled with sensational themes and violence. They lack a broader context of the deviant behavior that could provide some explanation of the actions of the perpetrators. Such oversimplification, sensationalism and apparent exaggeration of certain events through repetition, present in the media, must have an effect on how people assess their own safety and is consistent with the low feeling of security amongst Lodz inhabitants. Therefore, this analysis is the first stage of planned research into the sense of security in Lodz, and its continuation will consist of an attempt to explore the impact of media coverage on the feelings of the residents.

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