

Crime, Domestic Violence, and Family Security in Poland: Trends in Police Data, 2020–2023

Przestępczość, przemoc domowa i bezpieczeństwo rodziny w Polsce: tendencje w danych policyjnych z lat 2020–2023

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Abstract: Crime affects family security through direct victimisation, fear of crime, and disruption of family functioning. This article examines the scale and trends of crime relevant to family security in Poland between 2020 and 2023. It applies descriptive analysis to aggregated data from the National Police Information System (KSIP), covering national crime statistics, data for the Warsaw metropolitan area, crime detection rates, selected common and serious offences, and domestic violence. The interpretation is supplemented by the author's twenty-five years of participant observation in investigative and preventive policing. Overall police-recorded crime peaked in 2022 and declined in 2023, while detection rates remained relatively stable at approximately 63–65%. The study identifies domestic violence as the most direct threat to family well-being: although the number of “Blue Card” forms decreased during the analysed period, the recorded number of minors affected by violence rose markedly in 2023. The findings support coordinated law-enforcement, preventive, educational, and social-support measures and further interdisciplinary research on family security.

Keywords: family security; crime trends; domestic violence; child victimisation; police crime statistics; crime detection; National Police Information System (KSIP); Poland

Abstrakt: Przestępczość wpływa na bezpieczeństwo rodziny poprzez bezpośrednią wiktymizację, lęk przed przestępczością oraz zakłócanie funkcjonowania rodziny. Celem artykułu jest analiza skali i tendencji przestępczości istotnych dla bezpieczeństwa rodzin w Polsce w latach 2020–2023. Zastosowano analizę opisową zagregowanych danych Krajowego Systemu Informacyjnego Policji (KSIP), obejmujących ogólne statystyki przestępczości w Polsce, dane dla obszaru stołecznego Warszawy, wskaźniki wykrywalności, wybrane przestępstwa pospolite i poważne oraz przemoc domową. Interpretację uzupełnia dwudziestopięcioletnia obserwacja uczestnicząca autora, wynikająca z pracy dochodzeniowej i prewencyjnej. Ogólne wskaźniki przestępczości odnotowanej przez Policję osiągnęły najwyższy poziom w 2022 r., a następnie spadły w 2023 r., podczas gdy wykrywalność utrzymywała się na względnie stabilnym poziomie, wynoszącym ok. 63–65%. W artykule przemoc domowa została wskazana jako najbardziej bezpośrednie zagrożenie dobrostanu rodziny: pomimo spadku liczby formularzy „Niebieska Karta” w analizowanym okresie liczba odnotowanych małoletnich dotkniętych przemocą wyraźnie wzrosła w 2023 r. Wyniki wskazują na potrzebę skoordynowanych działań organów ścigania, profilaktyki, edukacji i wsparcia społecznego, a także na potrzeby dalszych badań interdyscyplinarnych nad bezpieczeństwem rodziny.

Słowa kluczowe: bezpieczeństwo rodziny; tendencje przestępczości; przemoc domowa; wiktymizacja dzieci; policyjne statystyki przestępczości; wykrywalność przestępstw; Krajowy System Informacyjny Policji (KSIP); Polska



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid pace of development in the modern world brings about numerous changes and transformations in social life, and thus in the functioning of the family as the basic unit

of social influence. Innovative technologies and solutions improve the living conditions of individuals and families. Unfortunately, the development described above also creates new threats. Scientific studies present a full typology of security threats (Dawidowicz 2007; Kaczmarczyk 2013; Fehler 2007; Wiśniewski and Falecki 2006; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek and Niczyporuk 2010), among which crime is included as a phenomenon that directly affects the family and the children and youth raised within it. This phenomenon exerts the greatest influence on the individual's sense of security and the functioning of the family. Consequently, this issue also remains within the interest of family studies—a relatively young academic discipline. Its interdisciplinary nature is closely connected to the social sciences, theological and humanities disciplines, medical and health sciences, as well as selected engineering and agricultural sciences.

This study was developed based on an analysis of crime in Poland from 2020–2023. The research method applied aimed to illustrate the scale and developmental trends of crime based on numerical data collected in the National Police Information System. The author's intention was to analyse police data due to the possibility of examining broader datasets (compared to other statistics), containing the scope of detected crime. Attention was also given to the datasets of confirmed and adjudicated crime. The presentation of numerical data includes general police statistics, as well as data on the effectiveness of criminal prosecution and the dynamics of selected categories of crimes. The selection of specific categories of crime was based on social perception and the degree of social harm associated with offenses connected to the family. The scope of dynamics illustrates the developmental trends within the individual areas analysed. The study also includes conclusions drawn from the author's participant observation conducted over twenty-five years of investigative and preventive work.

1. SCALE OF CRIME IN POLAND

The concept of crime is understood as the number of prohibited acts committed within a given area in a defined unit of time (Hołyst 2009, 95). This phenomenon has been

explained in great detail by Brunon Hołyst, who identified all its characteristic features, including its geography, structure, and dynamics. From a scientific perspective, the issues of the emergence, development, detection, and prevention of crime fall within the scope of research in criminology, criminalistics, sociology, political science, and security studies (Bałandynowicz 1998; Hołyst 2007; Chrzanowski 2015, 33-46; Hołyst 2014; Hołyst 2013; Hołyst 2009; Koral 2009; Mikołajczyk 2015, 133-142; Mikołajczyk 2014a, 259-273; Mikołajczyk 2014b, 240-246; Zając 2015, 175-185; Sienkiewicz-Małyjurek and Niczyporuk 2011). Nevertheless, this phenomenon also remains of interest to many other scientific disciplines, including family studies.

The National Police Information System is “a set of data sets in which information, including personal data, is processed in connection with the implementation of statutory tasks” (Act of April 6, 1990, on the Police) by the Police. This database operates entirely as an ICT system. Its name officially appeared for the first time on September 5, 2007, in the regulation of the Minister of Internal Affairs and Administration. «The Chief Commander of the Police ensures the operation of a set of central information sets called the “National Police Information System (KSIP)”» (Regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration of September 5, 2007). In fact, KSIP was created by the Chief Commander of the Police on July 25, 2017 (Decision No. 165 of the National Police Headquarters of July 25, 2017) pursuant to the regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration (Regulation of the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Administration of September 29, 2015).

Ascertained crime is defined as “all acts whose nature as crimes was confirmed as a result of preparatory proceedings” (Hołyst 2009, 96), while disclosed crime is defined as the number of acts for which preparatory proceedings were initiated. The scope of statutory tasks for which the Police conducts the National Police Information Service (KSIP) covers four areas:

a) “protecting the life and health of people and property against unlawful attacks violating these rights;

b) protecting public safety and order, including ensuring peace in public places and on public transport, in road traffic, and on waters intended for general use;

c) initiating and organising activities aimed at preventing the commission of crimes and offences and criminogenic phenomena, and cooperating in this regard with state and local government authorities and social organisations;

d) detecting crimes and offences and prosecuting their perpetrators” (Act of 6 April 1990 on the Police, Art. 1).

“Currently, in criminological research on the social costs of crime, the primary focus is on the feeling of threat, fear, and living in fear of becoming a victim” (Hołyst 2015, 427). Therefore, an increase in a given category of crime can lead to heightened social anxiety and disruptions in the functioning and development of families and the individuals within them. Road safety threats, widely regarded as a key social problem in Poland, are a prime example. This type of crime is among the most widely recognised in society.

The table below presents figures on crimes reported and identified in Poland between 2020 and 2023. These figures cover all types of crimes reported to the Police and for which investigations were initiated, resulting in the crime being confirmed.

Table No. 1. Detected and Confirmed Crime in Poland in 2020–2023

Year	Detected	Confirmed
2023	466 241	308 153
2022	490 934	313 424
2021	489 052	315 807
2020	469 971	307 452

Source: Own study based on KSIP figures.

It should be noted that the scale of revealed crime differs significantly from the scale of identified crime. Therefore, not all crimes reported during preparatory

proceedings were found to be criminal. The number of offences revealed in the first three years analysed increased, and the same was true for offences identified in 2020–2021. While 2023 shows a reduction in the phenomenon, its scale indicates a significant crime threat. Therefore, crime continues to significantly affect citizens' sense of security, as well as the well-being and development of families. However, the true scale of crime remains difficult to determine, as an unknown number of offences are committed but never reported to law enforcement agencies. This is particularly relevant to crimes directly related to family life, such as domestic violence in its broadest sense, as well as crimes against life and health.

It should be emphasised that the number of crimes disclosed does not equate to the number of reports. This is due to the fact that in some cases reported to the Police, pre-trial proceedings were not initiated because, as a result of preliminary investigations, it was determined that the proceedings should be discontinued before initiation, or because the evidence collected refused to initiate proceedings. Such situations are defined in the Code of Criminal Procedure:

“Proceedings shall not be initiated, and those initiated shall be discontinued, if:

- 1) the act was not committed or there is a lack of data sufficient to justify the suspicion of its commission,
- 2) the act does not contain the elements of a prohibited act or the law stipulates that the perpetrator has not committed an offense,
- 3) the social harm of the act is insignificant,
- 4) the law stipulates that the perpetrator is not subject to punishment,
- 5) the accused has died,
- 6) the statute of limitations has expired,
- 7) criminal proceedings concerning the same act committed by the same person have been legally concluded or previously initiated are still pending,
- 8) the perpetrator is not subject to the jurisdiction of Polish criminal courts,

- 9) there is no complaint from a duly authorized prosecutor,
- 10) there is no required authorization for prosecution or a motion for prosecution from an authorized person, unless the law provides otherwise,
- 11) there is another circumstance excluding prosecution” (Act of 6 June 1997, Code of Criminal Procedure, Art. 17).

Nevertheless, the overall number of crimes identified is high. These include common crimes that directly affect family security and stability. Particularly in local communities, crime directly impacts families’ livelihoods and development prospects. For example, within the area of operation of the Warsaw Metropolitan Police Headquarters, i.e., the Warsaw metropolitan area (the city and counties immediately adjacent to Warsaw), the identified crime trends are similar to those observed nationwide. Compare with the table below.

Table No. 2. Total number of crimes in the area of operation of the Warsaw Police Headquarters in 2020–2023.

Year	Disclosed	Confirmed
2023	53 585	26 612
2022	57 464	28 102
2021	53 462	25 955
2020	49 381	24 462

Source: Own study based on KSIP figures.

The increase in crime between 2020 and 2022 occurred in both reported and detected crimes. A decrease in both categories was recorded in 2023.

Another area highlighted in the analysis of police datasets is the effectiveness of law enforcement, often measured by the detection rate. It is calculated as the ratio of reported crimes to detected crimes. This detection rate reflects the quality and speed of the actions taken by the police and prosecutors. In particular, the substantive preparation of police officers and prosecutors, their commitment, and the appropriate use of resources in response to the nature of the reported crime. The speed of action and the measures employed are particularly important in crimes that harm families and

undermine their well-being. One example is the use of isolation measures against perpetrators of domestic violence.

Table No. 3. Percentage values of the effectiveness of law enforcement in Poland in 2020–2023.

Year	Confirmed	Detected	Detection rate
2023	466 241	308 153	65,44
2022	490 934	313 424	63,22
2021	489 052	315 807	64,10
2020	469 971	307 452	64,90

Source: Own study based on KSIP figures.

The effective work of police officers and prosecutors ensures that victims do not feel alone and are aware of the efficient operation of the justice system. In turn, the sense of impunity among perpetrators is reduced, and the preventive measures and penalties implemented have a deterrent effect on offenders. Such high rates of prosecution confirm a high level of response to crime. More than half of the identified crimes are always detected. For comparison, in 1999, the overall detection rate was only 45% of identified crimes (KGP, Crime Detection 1999-2014). Equally important is the fact that detection rates remained similar throughout the analysed years despite the constantly decreasing number of identified crimes. In summary, this indicator reflects the areas of police and prosecutorial work that impact family safety:

- adapting police structures to threats in a given area;
- professional human resources management;
- rapid response to incidents;
- police officer involvement;
- appropriate level of specialised training;
- appropriate equipment and specialised resources;
- an efficient information management system.

2. CRIMES DIRECTLY AFFECTING THE SAFETY OF THE FAMILY AND OF CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS RAISED WITHIN IT

The greatest impact on public safety is the crime observed every day, known as common crime. Public opinion polls show that Poles are most concerned about their safety on the road. They also fear criminal activity, such as theft, burglary, fraud, robbery, property damage, and economic crime, occurring online. The latter is the greatest threat to the socialization process of the youngest family members. Children and adolescents (often inadequately supervised by their parents) have unrestricted access to the internet, making them most vulnerable to online crime. They use applications and websites that host content unsuitable for children. Social media also allows for the creation of forums and instant messaging services where people with false identities appear. The content presented is characterised by hate, sexism, pornography, and violence. The lack of parental control breeds addiction to the internet and the content posted there. Domestic violence, crimes against life and limb, property crimes, and road safety crimes pose particular threats to family well-being. Below is data on selected crimes from the period under review.

Table No. 4. Seven selected categories of crimes in Poland in 2020–2023.

	7 selected categories of crime		
Year	Initiated	Confirmed	Detection rate
2023	229 077	114 218	49,06
2022	241 033	112 905	46,03
2021	231 520	105 941	45,10
2020	222 061	99 003	43,90

Source: Own study based on KSIP figures.

The table shows a decline in the number of crimes, both initiated and confirmed. The seven crime categories identified include:

- brawls and assaults;
- causing bodily harm;
- theft of property;
- vehicle theft;

- burglary;
- robberies, extortions, and aggravated theft;
- property damage.

The subsets of crimes posing a threat to the family also include homicide, rape, and drug-related crimes. These are presented in the table below.

Table No. 5. Other categories of crimes posing a threat to the family in Poland in 2020–2023.

Year	Murder	Rape	Drugs	Of road
2023	559	1 040	61 713	20 936
2022	499	1 064	64 013	21 322
2021	625	1 081	62 204	22 816
2020	641	1 034	59 442	23 540

Source: Own study based on KSIP figures.

One of the most serious threats concerns road safety incidents. Although the number of road accidents is decreasing, they remain a key social problem. Data on domestic violence is included separately due to its direct impact on the family.

Table No. 6. Domestic violence in Poland in 2020–2023.

Year	Number of blue card forms	Number of blue card procedures initiated	Number of those affected by violence Women Men Minors	Number of perpetrators of violence Women Men Minors	Perpetrators Under the influence Of alcohol Women Men Minors
2023	62 170	54 029	51 631 9 162 17 039	7 595 55 225 196	2 171 28 079 11
2022	61 645	52 569	51 935 8 714 10 982	6 497 55 426 321	1 872 29 901 34
2021	64 250	53 985	55 112 9 520	6 173 58 349	1 831 31 769

			11 129	324	22
2020	72 601	59 701	62 866	6 677	1 986
			10 922	66 198	37 781
			11 787	353	31

Source: Own study based on KSIP figures.

The scale of domestic violence is significant and constitutes the greatest threat to family well-being. It also contributes to marital breakdown and fundamentally disrupts family functioning and development. In most cases, completion of the “Blue Card” form, initiates an anti-violence procedure. Women and minors constitute the largest group of victims, while men constitute the largest group of perpetrators.

CONCLUSION

Ensuring family safety is an interdisciplinary process and requires the involvement of numerous entities and institutions, including central and local government, private entities, and citizens. A significant role in this process is played by law enforcement agencies, including the Police, responsible for ensuring the safety of citizens and maintaining public order. The Police are responsible for preventing and combating negative social phenomena, including crime and domestic violence. Domestic violence poses the greatest threat to family well-being and is also a cause of its breakdown. The “Blue Card” procedure is an effective institutional tool for addressing domestic violence; however, this is also the area in which the highest number of offences is recorded. In many cases, victims of police intervention are uninterested in pursuing the perpetrator and cooperating with law enforcement and justice authorities, as they attempt to preserve the family at all costs for emotional and economic reasons. Perpetrators may exert influence over victims due to cohabitation. The application of preventive measures against perpetrators, such as restraining orders, pre-trial detention, and police supervision, plays a significant role in protecting victims. Further safeguards include the restrictions on a suspect’s liberty specified in Article 275 § 2 of the Code of Criminal Procedure, as well as the order to periodically vacate the premises occupied by

jointly by the suspect and the injured party under Article 275a § 1 of the Code of Criminal Procedure.

The intensification of negative social phenomena affects families and the children and young people raised within them. The most significant threats include common crime, road traffic crime, economic crime, and cybercrime.

In Poland, during the period under review, we have observed a decline in crime and an increase in the effectiveness of police operations. This trend should be regarded as positive and sustained, particularly in areas that are most socially harmful and detrimental to families, children, and young people. It would also be advisable to involve other services and institutions in these areas, conduct public awareness campaigns, and implement educational and training activities. This area calls for further research in family studies, security studies, and other social sciences.

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