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An Overview of the Research on the Dark Figure of Crime in Germany

Concept, methods and development

Crime registered by the police describes only part of the crime actually committed. In order to illuminate the dark figure, which varies from offence to offence, studies are carried out in criminology on victimisation experiences and self-reported delinquency in addition to the data on the known figure. This article deals with the research on the dark figure of crime in Germany. Particular attention is given to the different aspects of the dark figure, the objectives and the related different methodical approaches as well as the problems of the survey techniques in the context of the research on the dark figure. The main purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the development and the knowledge gained by the German research on the dark figure from its beginnings in the 1970s to the present day. In this context, the problem of comparing the data on the dark figure with the data on the known figure and finally the perspectives of the research on the dark figure in Germany will also be discussed.



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1. INTRODUCTION

Police crime statistics do not reflect the actual volume of crime, but instead, they only reflect an extract/part of it in the form of annual progress reports of the police.¹ The term “known figure” relates to crimes known and registered by law enforcement institutions. Unreported offences are part of the so-called “dark figure” of crime.²

The beginnings of recording criminal statistics date back to the first half of the 19th century. Although the dark figure was not completely disregarded outside the official crime and judicial statistics, it was irrelevant because the influential founder of modern social statistics, Adolphe Quetelet, in particular, assumed little difference between registered and unregistered crime across all offences (Quetelet 1921, 253). The “constant ratio law” (Wadler 1908, 15)

derived from it persisted and was only invalidated in the middle of the 20th century by the emerging Anglo-American research on the dark figure. Since then, the dark figure has been regarded as the “great crux of crime statistics” (Exner 1949, 15).

This article focuses on the research on the dark figure of crime in Germany. First, the article deals with the concept of the dark figure, the objectives of the research on the dark figure and the common repertoire of methods. Then, the various methodological difficulties of the research on the dark figure are discussed. Afterwards, the focus lies on giving an overview of the studies on the dark figure and their most important findings. Within this, the beginnings and developments to the present day of the dark figure will be portrayed. This is followed by a presentation of the metho-

dological problems involved in comparing the data on the dark figure data and the data on the known figure of police crime statistics (PKS). In the conclusion of this article, the perspectives of research on the dark figure in Germany are of particular interest.

2. CONCEPT OF THE DARK FIGURE, OBJECTIVES AND METHODS OF THE RESEARCH ON THE DARK FIGURE

According to a standard definition, the dark figure of crime includes all offences that have actually been committed but have not been brought to the attention of the prosecution authorities (police and judiciary) and have subsequently not been included in official crime statistics (cf. Kreuzer 1994, 10; Schneider 2007, 294). A distinction is usually made between the relative and the absolute dark figure (Bundeskriminalamt 2018, 6). The relative dark figure also includes actions evaluated as criminal by respondents, which are brought to light by research on the dark figure and by its various methods (Prätor 2014, 32). In this way, the undetected offender reveals him or herself – although anonymously – in an offender survey. In a victim or informant survey, the same applies to a victim, a witness or accomplice who originally refrained from filing a report.³ The absolute or double dark figure relates to offences that remain in the dark figure because those involved do not perceive the behaviour they have experienced as criminal acts, or because they do not remember it, or because they do not wish to disclose it to the police or researchers of the dark figure (Kunz 2008, 18; Prätor 2014, 32).⁴

Studies on the dark figure do not only deal with the data collection of offences that remain undetected, but also of crimes recorded by the police (Prätor 2014, 32 ff). In victim surveys, however, the crimes de-

tected by police monitoring activities (“offence of low reportability”) are excluded because these crimes do not involve victims (“victimless” crimes) and their intensity of prosecution depends on the resources and focus of policy and police management (Birkel et al. 2015, 44–45).⁵ Accordingly, studies on the dark figure, exactly like crime statistics, cover only an extract of the “reality of crime” (Heinz 2006, 243–244; Mischkowitz 2015, 36).⁶ This extract overlaps with the known figure, reveals the relative dark figure of the offences surveyed and, in part, lags behind the crime statistics due to its necessary limitation to the survey of relatively minor offences⁷ and sub-areas. Due to these limitations, the original objective of the researchers of the dark figure – the statistical clarification of the dark figure (“crime survey”) – receded into the background (Heinz 2006, 245). It is currently acknowledged that continuous and nationally representative studies on the dark figure are a “necessary and indispensable complement to official crime statistics” (ibid., 263). The gain in knowledge goes beyond the problematic comparability with the data on the known figure (further details under section 5) by providing insights into the sensitivities of victims and offenders that would otherwise not be available (ibid., 245).

Methodologically, surveys with victims, offenders and/or informants are mainly used in studies on the dark figure as they provide more insights into the extent and structure of the dark figure (Prätor 2014, 41). Offender surveys – usually in combination with questions on victimisation – primarily address young people and students, as they are easier to reach and more willing to provide information about their delinquency, including violent crime, than adults (Heinz 2006, 247). Nevertheless, there have recently been promising approaches to explore the delinquency of

older people in more detail (Kunz 2014). Informant surveys come into question if the direct target groups, such as those in need of care, are only accessible to a limited extent and nursing staff are questioned about the (observed) victimisation of this clientele (Görge/Rabold 2009). In Germany, regional cross-sectional surveys that assess the extent of victimisation or perpetration and the volume of crime at a certain point in time are particularly widespread. Ideally, (representative) longitudinal surveys with several measuring periods are used to determine the developments and changes in the emergence of various forms of crime, the willingness of the population to report various crimes and the shifts in the known figure and the dark figure and the connections between cause and effect (Praetor 2014, 41). Longitudinal studies are divided into trend and panel studies. (Tausendpfund 2018, 48). While different samples are interviewed in the most commonly used trend studies to track changes at the aggregate level, the sample remains the same in the few panel studies to track individual changes (ibid.). Examples of a trend study include the student surveys of the Criminal Research Institute of Lower Saxony [Kriminologisches Forschungsinstitut Niedersachsen, KFN] (Baier et al. 2009; Baier et al. 2006; Wetzels et al. 2001) and recently the representative resident surveys in Lower Saxony by the Provincial Criminal Investigation Department [Landeskriminalamt, LKA] of Lower Saxony (LKA Niedersachsen 2013; LKA Niedersachsen 2015; LKA Niedersachsen 2017). In the project “Crime in the modern city” (CRIMOC), a panel study was carried out based on a sample of young people in Duisburg and Münster (Boers et al. 2010).

3. METHODOLOGICAL PROBLEMS OF DATA COLLECTION TECHNIQUES

The design and conduct of surveys have a number of pitfalls that can affect the required reliability and validity of the respective study on the dark figure. The findings on the extent of crime are reliable if the same results are obtained in several studies with the same measuring instrument (Tausendpfund 2018, 126). Another quality criterion concerns the validity of a measurement, i.e. whether something that should be measured has been measured (ibid., 129). Problems of validity in the research on the dark figure in Germany only attracted attention in the early 1990s (Kury et al. 1992, 23). Since then, the techniques of the data collection and evaluation tools and the validity of the data have been improved (Mischkowitz 2015, 38 ff). The following section deals with various mode effects that diminish the reliability and validity of the studies on the dark figure.

3.1 Different mode effects

According to the broad definition, mode effects are not only limited to the way in which data is generated during a survey (face-to-face, written-postal, telephone, online), but extend to the entire survey process (questionnaire construction, sampling frame, sample design, contacting and recruitment of respondents) (Kury et al. 2015, 80). Common sources of error include defects in the sampling (coverage sampling error), systematic nonresponse errors and mode-related deficits (Groves et al. 2009, 54 ff).

During the sampling procedure, the coverage problem is ubiquitous, because parts of the population with an increased risk of victimisation often tend to be excluded. These include homeless people, nursing home residents and prison inmates. Distortions vary according to the data collection

method. Telephone surveys tend to exclude young people without a fixed telephone connection unless a mobile phone selection (Mobile Onlys) is carried out, as in the nationwide victimisation survey 2012 (Birkel/Guzy 2015a, 120). In the survey, the questionnaire was also translated into Russian and Turkish and the immigrants were selected by means of an onomastic sample (findings based on proper names) in order to achieve the desired representation (*ibid.*). In a survey of older people about their delinquency, repeated contacting helped to persuade underrepresented groups (younger people, people from rural areas and people of lower social status) to answer the questionnaire (Kunz 2010, 140 ff).

The decreasing response rates, especially for telephone and written surveys, have been associated with a certain “survey fatigue” in recent years as a result of the growing number of surveys (Kury et al. 2015, 84; Schnell/Noack 2015, 52 ff). Surveys addressing a specific group of the population, such as victims of burglary (Wollinger et al. 2014), are more effective than surveys addressing the general population (Kunz 2010, 132). Postal surveys sometimes include an additional five euro as an “allowance” (incentive) in addition to the follow-up (*ibid.*, 135 ff). The appearance of the interviewers may have an influence on personal interviews, and the gender and language of the interviewer may also have an influence on telephone surveys (Schnell/Noack 2015, 51). Although it is now acknowledged that low response rates do not necessarily impair the quality of the survey, the representivity of the results should be checked by the potential different composition of respondents and non-respondents (Kury et al. 2015, 85) and any obvious under-representations should be subsequently corrected by weighting procedures (Schnell/Noack 2015, 60 ff).

As can be seen from the previous sections, the type of survey method used plays a role. Despite their weaknesses, telephone surveys are still very widespread as an inexpensive and quickly implemented variant, especially since the survey – especially in computer-assisted procedures (CATI = Computer Assisted Telephone Interview) – is highly standardised and questions can be directed to the interviewer in case of unclear formulations (Kury et al. 2015, 88). Nevertheless, the willingness to reveal victim experiences of sensitive offences, such as sexual crimes, is lower than with self-administered postal or online surveys, since shame dominates in interviewer-administered (telephone and personal) surveys (Guzy/Leitgöb 2015, 110). The advantages of postal surveys are the good sampling frame (sampling from the residences’ registration offices), so that the sampling frame and the relevant population (coverage) match; moreover, the lack of time pressure may make it easier to remember minor offences (Kury et al. 2015, 90). Disadvantages include the high refusal rate in the response rate and the omission of questions or items⁸, the questions that were incorrectly answered, not answered or misunderstood as a result of complex filtering and the long survey and data preparation phase; last but not least, the question arises as to whether the respondent addressed completed the questionnaire (Kury et al. 2015, 90 ff). The response rates for personal interviews are regularly high and the information density – apart from sensitive offences – is high in view of the longer duration of the survey (*ibid.*). At the same time, interview-related cluster effects⁹ occur to a greater extent in questions relating to victimisation (*ibid.*). Method tests show “no clear systematic differences” (Kilias 2015, 116) between the survey methods presented, therefore, a mix of postal and telephone survey meth-

ods is recommended (*ibid.*, 118). Online surveys have recently become an inexpensive and more anonymous method to reach young respondents better (*ibid.*, 116).

3.2 Specific mode effects in questionnaire design

Questionnaire design must take into account the respondents' different horizons of meaning, because socio-demographic and socio-cultural differences lead to different attributions of meanings of question texts among respondents on the one hand, and differences in interpretation with regard to linguistic expressions on the other (Faulbaum 2015, 160 ff; Heinz 2015, 276). Respondents have, in particular, problems with inaccurate, difficult or even contradictory instructions. These difficulties continue when the question is too long, complicated or grammatically incorrect; the use of technical terms that respondents do not know and the use of ambiguous or undefined periods of victimisation constitute excessive demands for respondents (Faulbaum 2015, 173). Other sources of error include an illogical order and response categories if they do not fit the question, if they are ambiguous, if they overlap with other response categories, or if the necessary response categories are simply missing (*ibid.*, 174).

A methodological challenge lies in the operationalisation of concepts and the formulation of questions (Birkel/Guzy 2015b, 135). In particular, the correct translation of criminal law definitions into everyday language descriptions causes problems if a criminal-law-oriented approach is taken to accurately illuminate the dark figure (*ibid.*; van Dijk/de Castelbajac 2015, 14). An orientation that is too close to everyday life may cause an unintentional incongruence of everyday ideas and penal provisions due to the complexity of criminal law definitions and the structure of offences

(Birkel 2014, 76; Prätör 2014, 52). A respondent may tick a box representing "theft" even though his or her evaluation does not correspond to the criminal law definition in the questionnaire and/or is below the threshold of criminal liability (Heinz 2006, 262). In order to counter this problem, some interviewer-administered surveys employ trained coders to define the criminal law classification of the incident described (e.g. Bochum victim surveys; Schwind et al. 2001, 20 ff). In any case, the ramifications of the various offences (e.g. offences, qualifications, rule examples) require the restriction to individual areas of the entire spectrum of offences and a cognitively simple description in everyday language of the offence in question, especially in self-administered surveys (Birkel/Guzy 2015b, 137). An example of a question formulation on domestic burglary stems from the telephone survey of the victimisation survey 2012: "Has anyone broken into your flat in the past five years, e.g. using a crowbar, duplicate key or breaking in through the windows, and stolen or tried to steal something? This does not include burglaries in cellars, attics, garages, garden sheds or arbours" (*ibid.*, 138).

Another neuralgic aspect is the arrangement of questions in the questionnaire or in a set/section of questions (context or sequence effects) (Kury et al. 2015, 85). If questions about victim experience bring back the memory of it, this may affect the responses to subsequent questions on the attitude towards crime (Faulbaum 2015, 169). In addition, it is recommended to ask screening questions on victim incidents in blocks at the beginning of the questionnaire in order to prevent the respondent from realising that affirmative answers trigger many inquiries (*ibid.*). Another piece of advice relates to the ranking of petty property offences because of over-

lapping definitions of offences: burglary should come first, then special petty property offences such as car and bicycle theft and finally other theft offences (ibid.).

3.3 Specific mode effects in response behaviour

Self-reported delinquency and victimisation often result in systematic distortions of responses which are due in particular to social desirability and stem from the under- and overestimation (under-, overresponse) of prevalence (Waubert de Puiseau et al. 2015, 187). Social desirability is understood as a tendency “to present oneself as positively as possible and to do justice to existing social norms, at least in response behaviour, in order to prevent any potential disapproval by third parties” (ibid., 189). This tendency can be observed all the more in sensitive questions on serious and socially taboo crimes (Prätor 2014, 49). In the context of offender surveys, fear of criminal prosecution also plays a role in the concealment of crimes (ibid.), although in a couple’s study on domestic violence, victims systematically reported fewer assaults and their severity than the offenders interviewed (Heckert/Gondolf 2000, 181). In a pupil survey in Freiburg, an external validation of the statements on their own delinquency and on their police contacts with police registrations was carried out, according to which the respondents had given correct answers (Köllisch/Oberwittler 2004, 716). In victim surveys, social desirability may have two effects. On the one hand, the victim may hope to receive victim support through his or her disclosure (overestimation as a consequence) and on the other hand, the victim may remain silent out of fear of stigmatisation (underestimation as a consequence) (Waubert de Puiseau 2015, 191). In the case of sexual victimisation, the importance of the interviewer’s gender should not be underesti-

mated, because the willingness to reveal victimisation seems to be higher among female interviewers than among male ones (ibid., 194). Apart from violence in the immediate social environment, where an underestimation of victimisation rates was found, generally valid findings regarding the victims’ socially desirable responses can hardly be made in surveys (Kilchling 2010, 44).

Forgetfulness or the so-called telescoping effect relates to the inaccurate ability of respondents to remember. The respondent then remembers victimisation events that are closer in time to the interview date (forward telescoping) or those that are further away (external telescoping) (Faulbaum 2015, 165). As a result, these incidents are erroneously excluded from the reference period (external telescoping) or included in it (internal telescoping), which applies in particular to more serious offences that are easily remembered and which subsequently lead to an overestimation of the offences involved (ibid.; Prätor 2014, 55 ff). Since these memory flaws increase over time, relatively short reference periods are chosen for surveys: one reference period (one-year prevalence), two reference periods (lifetime or five-year prevalence and one-year prevalence) or a reference period in relation to an anchor (since Christmas) (Faulbaum 2015, 165; Prätor 2014, 56).

Finally, it should be stressed that the description of mode effects is by no means exhaustive and that it is a subjectively tinted selection from a large number of measuring errors (cf. Heinz 2006, 263; Kury et al. 2015, 85–87; Prätor 2014, 56–57).

4. DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESEARCH ON THE DARK FIGURE

The earliest beginnings of research on the dark figure in Germany date back to the 1940s and thus to the period of National

Socialism with a study to examine the aforementioned “constancy law of the known and dark figure” (Meyer 1941, 5). But it was not until the 1970s that findings from studies on the dark figure in the USA provided the decisive impetus for conducting victim and offender surveys in Germany (Liebl 2013, 67 ff; Obergfell-Fuchs 2015, 63; Prator 2014, 37).

4.1 Beginnings in the 1970s

The early 1970s marks the beginning of the research on the dark figure in Germany (Feldmann-Hahn 2011, 18). This was started by local and regional victim surveys in the “Stuttgart Victim Study” (Stephan 1976) in Gottingen (Schwind et al. 1975) and Bochum (Schwind et al. 1978) and by surveys of offenders in pupil surveys in Bielefeld (Brusten/Hurrelmann 1973), Hamburg (Kreuzer 1975), Nuremberg (Losel 1975), Gießen and Altenkirchen (Kirchhoff 1975) and students in Gießen (Kreuzer 1999). International victim surveys were conducted for the first time in the 1980s (Teske/Arnold 1991; Arnold/Korinek 1991).

The “Bochum Victim Survey” (Bochum I) in 1975 played a pioneering role with two further replication studies (Bochum II and III) in 1986 and 1998.¹⁰ The objectives were to identify changes in crime in the known and dark figure, in reporting behaviour, in the expressions of fear of crime and in the reputation of the police (Schwind et al. 2001, 342). The selection of offence categories related to theft excluding or including aggravating circumstances, robberies and intentional bodily harm (ibid.). The personal survey sample included 0.5 % of the population of Bochum aged 14 and over (ibid.).¹¹ The data on the known and dark figure show an increase in the crime rate in Bochum. In the reference period from 1975 to 1998, Bochum recorded an increase in crime registered by the police

by a total of 67.6 % (ibid., 345). A comparison of the studies on the dark figure in Bochum II (1986) and III (1998) shows an increase in robberies by 58.5 % and in intentional bodily harm by 86.4 %, although the number of thefts decreased by 16.7 % (ibid.). The relation between the known and the dark figure was determined with the help of the so-called dark figure relation¹² (cf. 5.). The dark figure relation remained about the same for simple and serious theft and decreased for deliberate bodily injury (ibid., 347). The significant increase in bodily injuries in the known figure is partly attributed to an increased willingness of the victims to report them (ibid.). However, the findings cannot claim nationwide representation (Dormann 1988, 403; Heinz 2006, 250). Moreover, the character as a true longitudinal section is called into question because of the long periods between the measuring points (Obergfell-Fuchs 2015, 66).

4.2 In the 1990s

After the reunification of Germany, the growth of municipal crime prevention set in (Obergfell-Fuchs 2015, 65). As a result, research on the dark figure spread to large and small municipalities, resulting in a confusing number of small-scale victim studies (ibid.). But progress was also made at national level. In this respect, Germany’s first participation in the International Crime and Victimization Survey (ICVS) (van Dijk 1991) in 1989 was ground-breaking because the international study was also the first representative nationwide victim survey (n=5,000). Shortly afterwards, another nationwide victim survey took place in 1992 (Wetzels et al. 1995) and in 1997 the Constance Victim Survey (KVS), which both the Gesellschaft fur Marketing-, Kommunikations- und Sozialforschung mbH (GFM/GETAS) (n=20,000) and the Sozialwis-

senschaften-Bus (SWB) III/97 (n=3,000) implemented in a multi-topic survey (Heinz 2006, 252). The different victim prevalence rates despite the use of the same survey in the same reference period were explained by failures of hard-to-reach persons with a higher victim risk in the poorly controlled GFM/GETAS and by interviewer behaviour. Still, they raised scepticism about the validity of such surveys (Schnell/Kreuter 2000, 96 ff).

In an East-West comparison, the first German-German victim study in the Freiburg and Jena regions dates from autumn 1990 (Kury et al. 1992). Some time later, national victim and offender surveys began as part of a cooperation project between three criminological university institutions in three waves (1991, 1993, 1995) (Boers et al. 1997); this study is characterised by a uniform methodology and depicts change processes in East Germany compared with West Germany. After reunification, the level of victimisation had already been adjusted in both parts of the country by 1991 (Boers 1995, 166). While victim prevalence rates remained largely consistent everywhere until 1993, an increase can be observed in East and West Germany in 1995, which was somewhat more evident in the new German states in property offences, especially car theft, fraud and threats (ibid.). The victim prevalence rate of sexual harassment in the old federal states is slightly higher than in the new federal states (ibid.).

To a greater extent, there was a replication of offender surveys (e.g. Giessen student surveys). This applies in particular to non-representative pupil surveys on the prevalence of offenders, especially in the case of violent crimes, according to which the increase in youth violence observed in the known figure was lower in the dark figure (Lösel/Bliesener 2003, 5).

4.3 At the beginning of the 21st century

More recently, national research on the dark figure has prospered, although the promising international victim studies of the ICVS, the fifth (2005) and sixth (2010) rounds of which Germany again participated in, are not being continued (van Kesteren et al. 2014, 66).¹³ In Germany, the German Victimization Survey 2012 (Birkel et al. 2014; Birkel et al. 2016) was a nationwide representative telephone survey (n=35,503) that was repeated between July 2017 and January 2018. In addition, it was possible to establish a periodic victim study in Lower Saxony (2013: n=18,940; 2015: n=20,468; 2017: n=18,070) as a postal survey (LKA Niedersachsen 2015; id. 2016; id. 2018). This survey served Schleswig-Holstein with two surveys in 2015 (n=13,070) and 2017 (n=11,614) (Dreißigacker 2016; id. 2018) and Mecklenburg-Western Pomerania with one survey (n=3,170) in 2015 (LKA Mecklenburg-Vorpommern et al. 2017) as a model.

In addition, more and more victim surveys were conducted with selected groups of people. In 2003, the first national representative victim study involving more than 10,000 women was carried out, which additionally included samples of detainees, migrants and prostitutes and provided in-depth information on female victimisation in partnerships and through domestic violence as well as information on special victimisation risks (Bundesministerium für Familie, Senioren, Frauen und Jugend 2004). In addition, several studies arose focusing on sexual abuse and/or parental physical violence and abuse in childhood (Häuser et al. 2011; Stadler et al. 2012; Hellmann 2014). The victimisation of older people (Görgen et al. 2012) and the delinquency of older people (Kunz 2014) both raised research interest. The focus also shifted to violence against police forces (Ellrich et al. 2012) and the

victimisation of prisoners (Kury/Brandenstein 2002; Bieneck/Pfeiffer 2012).

Local or regional student surveys on self-reported delinquency and victimisation continue to boom (e.g. Oberwittler et al. 2001 Freiburg, Cologne; id. 2002 Markgräflerland; Oberwittler et al. 2014 Cologne, Mannheim). Since the end of the 1990s, a large number of offender and victim surveys conducted by the KFN using similar methods have reached different pupil populations (Baier 2008 Hanover, Munich, Stuttgart, Schwäbisch Gmünd; Baier et al. 2010 Saxony-Anhalt); among them is a nationwide representative study on the dark figure (n=44,610) from 2007 to 2008 (Baier et al. 2009). Since 2002, the CRIMOC panel study in Duisburg involving seventh-year students has been continued up to 2019 (Boers et al. 2014). The findings of the KFN study and the panel study on the burden of violence on young people of Turkish origin and young German people differ. While the KFN study found a higher incidence of violence among young people of Turkish origin compared with young German people (Baier/Pfeiffer 2007, 24 ff; Baier 2015, 77 ff), the panel study found hardly any differences between young people of Turkish origin and young German people (Walburg 2014, 12 ff; Walburg 2018, 26 ff).

5. PROBLEM OF COMPARABILITY WITH THE KNOWN FIGURE

The comparable measurement of the crime rate by data registered by the police and data collected in studies on the dark figure poses difficulties (Birkel 2014, 67). Beyond the measuring error problems in the known figure (Kersting/Erdmann 2014, 18 ff) and in the dark figure (cf. 3.2), there is only partial congruence between the two data sources in the actual known figure intersecting set (Norris 2015, 253 ff). This is because the crime areas surveyed in vic-

tim surveys do not include all the criminal offences recorded in the PKS, and thus do not constitute a subset of the victimisation data (Heinz 2015, 294). The partial inconsistency is due to differences in the basic populations, the reference periods, the recording rules and the calculation of load factors (Birkel 2014, 90; Heinz 2015, 294). These differences also result from the different initial perspectives of the actors: while the PKS is a police progress report, victim surveys of those affected reflect delinquency experienced by them (Birkel 2014, 90). Comparability is therefore limited to an approximation of certain segments of reality from adequately prepared data (Birkel 2014, 90; Heinz 2015, 294).

The value of studies on the dark figure is that they can provide more background knowledge on the development of the statistics of known data (Birkel 2014, 91). This applies in particular to the recording of changes in the response behaviour. Only then can it be estimated whether the increase in a crime, such as criminal assault, is due to an increase in violence or an increase in the willingness to report it (Heinz 2015, 295). Estimates can therefore be made for the relation between the dark figure and the known figure for the offence areas concerned if they are comparable (Birkel 2014, 91). Studies on the dark figure also make an important contribution to ensuring that the PKS is not equated with actual crime (Birkel 2014, 91; Heinz 2015, 294). However, the establishment of a periodic, nationwide representative investigation in the dark figure is necessary in order to detect changes in the reporting behaviour over time and to improve the comparability of the data on the dark figure and the known figure (Heinz 2015, 294).

6. CONCLUSION

In Germany, research on the dark figure has made considerable progress over the past five decades and is currently experiencing an upswing. Originally, locally or regionally limited studies on the dark figure dominated, which were not uniform in their methodology and therefore did not allow cross-sectional comparisons. However, not only general surveys of respondents from the general population, but also studies on victimisation and/or offenders have shown progress. A victim survey on violence in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW), for example, will be conducted shortly.¹⁴ Recently, an increase in periodic victim surveys has been observed in some federal states, and at the federal level, the victimisation surveys in 2012 and 2017 gave important impetus to the research on the dark figure.

Last but not least, it is probably thanks to the tenacious commitment of the BKA, scientists and criminological institutions and, more recently, several state offices of criminal investigation that the Standing Conference of the Ministers and Senators

of the Interior of the States (IMK) decided to introduce a periodic, nationwide representative survey of victims in 2017 (BKA 2019).¹⁵ The concept drawn up by a federal-state project group is currently in the implementation phase. In addition to nationwide questions on victim experience, reporting behaviour, feeling of security, attitudes towards crime, experiences with the police and attitudes towards them, the federal states can supplement the questionnaire with their own content, which is only surveyed in this state. In addition, the federal states are free to increase the sample at their own expense. In the first written survey planned for 2020, Hamburg, Lower Saxony, North Rhine-Westphalia, Schleswig-Holstein and Thuringia would like to make use of this, so the sample will be increased to a total of more than 55,000 respondents. It is a welcome development that respondents have the option of completing the questionnaire either traditionally (paper-pencil) or online. Hopefully, the younger age group can be persuaded to participate in this way.

¹ I would like to thank my colleagues Ines Hohendorf, Sociology, and Ina Hennen, Criminology, for their cooperation.

² The German term "Dunkelziffer", which is also used, goes back to Shigema Oba (Oba 1908, 28), following the English term "dark figure".

³ The range of the definitions differs with the relative dark figure: according to a narrow understanding, Schwind limits the relative dark figure to crimes not reported by victims (Schwind 2013, 41). Schneider, on the other hand, introduces a new concept with the "grey figure" and understands this to mean offences which

are covered by the PKS but not solved, as well as offenders who are not convicted because of insignificance or lack of evidence (Schneider 2007, 308). Antholz uses the term „twilight figure“ to describe crimes that have become known to law enforcement agencies but are not statistically recorded (Antholz 2010, 409), which Liebl attributes to the general dark figure (Liebl 2013, 58).

⁴ Köllisch uses the term „black figure“ in relation to offender and victim survey, since, in his understanding, the dark figure is characterised by the fact that those involved are aware of the crimi-

nal injustice but do not turn to the police (Köllisch 2004, 72 ff); Birkel et al. limit the absolute dark field to completely unnoticed acts (Birkel et al. 2015, 44).

⁵ At the same time, dealers may confess their crimes without being identified in offender surveys with corresponding questions (Liebl 2013, 63); in informant surveys, witnesses may draw attention to manslaughter offences, which the victim can of course no longer comment on.

⁶ Interpretative definition-theoretical approaches emphasise attribution processes; their most radical representatives dispute the existence of a dark figure be-

cause of the situationally open definition of crime (cf. Dellwing 2015, 112 ff).

⁷ Respondents are more willing to provide information on minor offences than on more serious offences (cf. 3.3).

⁸ „In this use of language, an item is understood as a linguistic expression that is to be evaluated as part of the task formulated in the question on a response dimension“ (Faulbaum 2015, 153).

⁹ An interviewer-related cluster effect arises when the same interviewer interviewed a group of interviewees (clusters) who are more similar in the characteristics of interest than if each interviewee had been interviewed by a different interviewer. This effect can be traced back to the interviewer, since he or she can (unintentionally) influence – to varying degrees – the respondents' response behaviour (Kury et al. 2015, 92).

¹⁰ The victim survey Bochum IV was carried out in 2016, cf. regarding the plans published in Feltes/Feldmann-Hahn 2008, 136 ff.

¹¹ In addition, a telephone survey in Bochum III with a smaller sample of 0.1 % of the Bochum resident population; no systematic differences in prevalence rates were found in a comparison of methods (Schwind et al. 2001, 342).

¹² „In the calculation of dark figure relationships, the number of reported offences is related to the sum of unreported offences“ (Schwind et al. 2001, 138), either on the basis of the information provided in the victim survey on reported and unreported offences or on the basis of offences registered by the police and unreported offences of the victim survey. Considerable deviations occurred between the two calculations in the Bochum III study, so that questions arose about the social desirability and telescoping effect in the response behaviour (ibid., 138 ff).

¹³ The European Crime and Safety Survey

(EU ICS) 2005 (van Dijk et al. 2005) was conducted once with the participation of Germany (van Kesteren et al. 2014, 66).

¹⁴ On behalf of the Ministries of the Interior and for Home, Municipal Affairs, Construction and Equality NRW, the LKA NRW will conduct a survey of 60,000 people over 16 years of age with their main residence in NRW from January 2019. The study on the dark figure on violence against girls, women, boys and men is intended to provide results on violent crime – irrespective of the reporting behaviour of the victims or subsequent criminal proceedings – and to record the feeling of security in NRW. The aim is to gain and develop knowledge about and for preventive measures and psychosocial support, https://www.land.nrw/sites/default/files/asset/document/mhkgb_im_08.01.2019_anlage_a.pdf.

¹⁵ Cf. the recommendations of the RatSWD (2018) on quality assurance and scientific monitoring of victimisation surveys.

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