

WILLINGNESS TO REPORT CRIME IN RELATION TO EXPERIENCE OF CONTACT WITH POLICE IN SERBIA AND CROATIA

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Abstract: Numerous research show that trust in police has important role on decision of victim or witness of criminal offence to report it. The aim of this paper is to investigate whether the willingness to report criminal offences in hypothetical situations is different with regards to police behaviour towards respondents during their last contact and whether this willingness differs in Croatia and Serbia. The research was conducted on convenience sample of 227 students from Croatia and 222 from Serbia by using the survey quantitative method. Ten hypothetical situations were described to respondents where they had to picture themselves either as a victim or a witness of particular crime and assess their willingness to report it. ANOVA statistical analysis shows significant differences in willingness to report in relation to police behaviour during the last contact. The results indicate the importance of police behaviour towards citizens and have practical implications in preventive actions and encouraging reporting of crimes.

Keywords: reporting crimes, victim, witness, police, Croatia, Serbia.

INTRODUCTION

Dark figure of crime is very important subject that is lacking research in South Eastern Europe. In order for crime that happened to be noted, usually someone has to report it, which according to studies is not the case. Therefore, officially recorded crimes and deviant behaviours are one of the least reliable of all official social statistics (Giddens, 2007: 216). In order to avoid this problem, so-called victimisation surveys are being conducted, in which respondents are asked whether they were victims of crime (usually within a year) and whether they reported crime to the police (Giddens, 2007: 217). Such surveys are relatively new and

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according to Abercrombie, Hill and Turner (2008: 175), the very first such survey was conducted by the British government in 1982. The results of that survey were that the majority of crimes were not reported to the police.

Victimisation method has some limitations, including refusing to participate in the survey, which can lead to false conclusions because the population that refused to participate has most likely unique characteristics that we know nothing of. Furthermore, the participants can also decide to neglect that they were the victim of a crime because of shame or fear, which also has effect on final conclusions. Finally, the results can also be under the influence of the current social climate or perception of particular crime to be really a crime, where sometimes the public can perceive a particular crime as a serious crime, sometimes as less serious, but sometimes no crime at all (Young, 1988, according to Haralambus & Holborn, 2002: 368). Nevertheless, such surveys are better indicators of real situation than the official records and show discrepancy between the official and real number of crimes that happened (Wittebrood & Junger, 2002).

FACTORS INFLUENCING REPORTING CRIME

According to earlier research on willingness to report crime, a few factors have emerged that are related to higher or lower willingness to report crime.

There are several research models of reporting of crimes (Goudriaan, 2006). For example, economic model deals with a decision to report crime from victim's perspective of cost, whether it is material, time or psychological cost, and benefit, whether it is material or psychological, that victim would have if the crime is reported. This research model is usually linked with property crimes, but it can also be linked with other types of crimes. Victims of crimes against life and body will, for example, make a decision based on the severity of injury, but also on the time it takes to report and the possibility of compensation of damages. In the end, the decision to report or not to report will be based on what victim perceives as more beneficial (Goudriaan, 2006: 16). A drawback of this model is in assumption that a person can, in case of being victimised, make a rational decision, and at the same time it neglects cognitive factors such as fear of shame (Greenberg & Beach, 2004), as well as other factors like former victimisation, that can have interfering effects on victims rational choices (Bowles, Reyes & Garoupa, 2009; Avdija & Giever, 2012).

Psychological model, on the other hand, as expected, takes into account cognitive factors, but emotional factors as well. According to Ruback, Greenberg & Westcott (1984) a victim is passing through three phases while making a decision to report crime: 1) identifying a crime and putting itself into a status of a victim; 2) assessing severity of crime based on their own vulnerability and harm taken, and finally 3) making a decision whether to report a crime or not based on their own cognition, and all in order to reduce experienced discomfort.

Sociological research model is observing reporting of crimes on macro level through the prism of society. This model assumes that reporting of crimes is the function of social structures in a society where both victim and perpetrator live (Black, 1976, according to Goudriaan, 2006: 19). According to Black (1976, according to Goudriaan, 2006: 19), the *behaviour of law* depends on five structural social variables: social stratification, morphology, culture, organisation and social control. Many research support this model, whereby individuals who tend to report less are of lower socio-economic status (Avdija & Giever, 2012), individuals living in suburban and rural regions (Rennison, Dragiewicz & DeKeseredy, 2013), males (Skogan, 1984), older individuals (Goudriaan, 2006: 166; Avdija & Giever, 2010), if there is lower social cohesion (Skogan, 1984) and social control (Avdija & Giever, 2010; Hart & Colavito, 2011).

The model that indicated the best fit and is most comprehensive is, according to Goudriaan (2006: 21-22), the socio-ecological model of reporting of crimes that indicates that decisions are never made “in vacuum”, they are a part of a larger unity, “dynamic interaction with social environment in which decision makers are integrated in” (Granovetter, 1985; Nee & Ingram, 1998). Menard (2003, according to Goudriaan, 2006: 21-22) describes the socio-ecological model as a whole context in which a crime took place, including the factors such as type of space (public, semi-public, or private), the availability of police, the strength of social connections within community, the relationship with police, attitude towards police, etc.

The decision to report crime can be influenced by radius or distance between place of residence and the place where crime was committed, as well as time spent in a specific place (Wisniewski et al., 2013) and spatial governance (Lee et al., 2013).

In addition, there is a correlation between willingness to report crime and if victim knows the perpetrator, where the victim will tend to report less if they know the perpetrator (Goudriaan & Nieuwbeerta, 2007), especially if it is the intimate partner in case of violence, but major role will be played by the facts such as if they have children or the severity of crime (Akers & Kaukinen, 2009).

The important role, maybe even the essential role in decision to report crime, is played by the relationship between citizens and the police, as indicated by some research. The relationship between citizens and the police generally plays major role in overall functioning of police system, criminal justice system and social system. The perception of police in society can be influenced by different factors, such as context, media, personal experience with criminal justice system, presence of police and police actions (Miller & Hess, 1998: 36-38). In the context of reporting crimes, less willing to report will be the victims who have lower trust in police and who have bad experience (Sparks et al., 1977), where it should be emphasized that younger individuals and men have bad experiences with police more often and consequently have lower trust (Avdija & Giever, 2010; McAra & McVie, 2005; Low & Durkin, 2001; Beck & Yulia, 2004). Great influence on deci-

sion to report also has the presence and behaviour of police officers (Levitt, 1998; Tolsma, Blaauw & Grotenhuis, 2012).

Aims and hypotheses

The aim of this paper is to investigate if there is difference in willingness to report crime in hypothetical situations in Serbia and Croatia as well as if there is difference in willingness to report crime in relation to experience of the last official contact of a respondent with the police. Furthermore, the aim is to investigate if there is difference in willingness to report crime in hypothetical situations being hypothetical victim and hypothetical witness of a crime with regards to country of residence. Considering the aims of research and relevant literature, the following hypotheses were formed:

H1: There is a difference in willingness to report crime in hypothetical situations between Croatia and Serbia;

H2: There is a difference in willingness to report crime in hypothetical situations in relation to experience of the last official contact with the police.

Methodology

The research was conducted as part of awarded international student research project *Research on frequency and readiness of students in post-socialist countries of Southeast Europe to report criminal offences*.⁴ The method used is the quantitative method of survey and the instrument used for collecting data was an online questionnaire. The research was conducted during February and March 2019. The sample consisted of 1419 students from 7 countries (Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Slovenia and Serbia), but for this paper the data for Croatia and Serbia (N=449) were used. The respondents were recruited using the social network *Facebook* through student groups. The online surveying method was selected due to two reasons: firstly, because of the sensitive nature of research topic and ethnicity, in order to increase feeling of anonymity and security during participation in survey (Kosinski et al., 2015), and secondly, the online surveying method has proven to be one of the best when researching the student population (Vehovar, Lozar, Manfreda & Callegaro, 2015: 25-26).

The research instrument contained a set of 10 so-called vignettes, hypothetical situations containing the description of a situation in which the respondents had to picture themselves as the victim of a particular crime (Cronbach $\alpha=0,66$) or the witness of a crime (Cronbach $\alpha=0,637$), after which they had to report to which extent they would be willing to report a specific crime, on scale from 1 to 4 (1 – I completely agree that I would not report, 4 – I completely agree that I would report), for example: *Imagine that you see a person who is trying to steal a*

⁴ DIC Graduate Fellowship 2018, American Society of Criminology

bike. Would you report it? The questionnaire also contained questions regarding the experience of contact with the police and the attitude towards the contact of citizens with the police. In order to describe their experience of the last official contact with the police, the respondents were asked how the police officers behaved during that time. With the use of seven offered answers about the level of perception of positive or negative contact, three groups were formed: *positive experience, negative experience and unknown (or does not remember)*. Furthermore, the questionnaire contained the questions regarding how much citizens should collaborate with the police and how often they would/like to have contact with the police.

Respondents

The respondents were students from Croatia and Serbia. According to the data from the Croatian Bureau of Statistics (2018) and the Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (2018), total number of students in both countries for academic year 2017/18 was 415 602. There were 256 172 students in Serbia and their number in this sample is 222. There were 159 430 students in Croatia and their number in this sample is 227. Proportions and percentages for the whole population and for the sample can be seen in Chart 1.

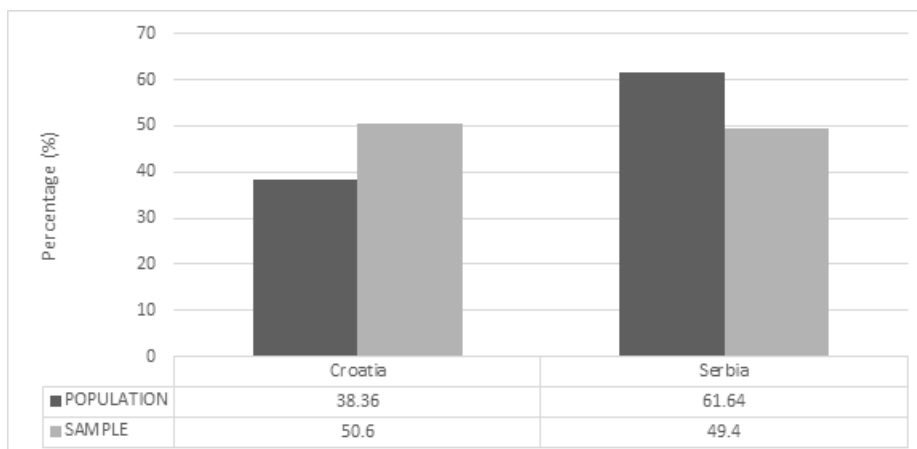


Chart 1: – *Proportion of students per country in population and in the sample⁵*

The gender structure of the sample consists of 82.6% female, and 17.1% male respondents (Chart 2). The respondents are uniformly represented according to their year of study, with most students of the fifth year of study (Chart 3). It is important to note that in the percentage of the students of the fourth and the fifth year of integrated studies there are also the students of the first and the second year of graduate studies.

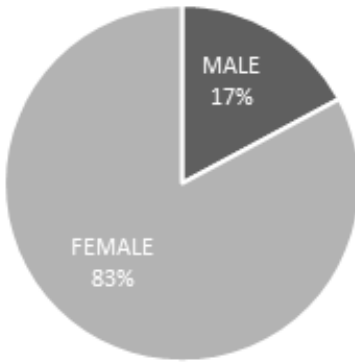


Chart 2: - Gender

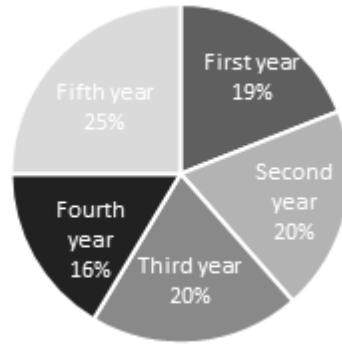


Chart 3: - Year of study

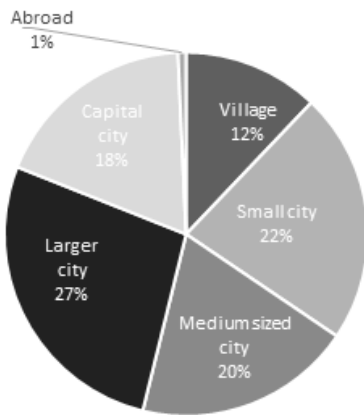


Chart 4: - Place of birth

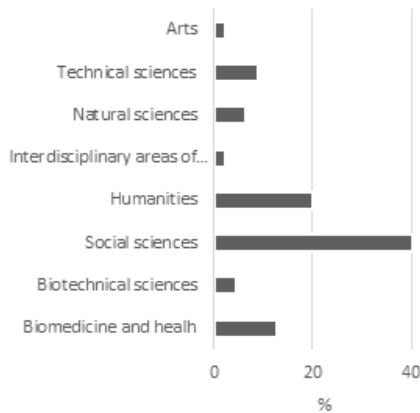


Chart 5: - Field of study

The respondents were mostly born in larger cities (27%), but all other categories of place of birth are evenly distributed (Chart 4). Looking at the field of study, most respondents study social sciences (40%), followed by humanities studies (20%), biomedicine and health (12.7%), and the least being interdisciplinary areas of science (2.4%) and arts (2.4%). Technical sciences and natural sciences are equally distributed.

Results

Firstly, the descriptive statistics are shown. In Chart 6 we can see how the respondents perceive that the police answered their questions, or provided them with help they expected, for Croatia and Serbia. In the same Chart we can see that the respondents from Croatia consider to a greater extent that the police answered their questions and provided them with the help they expected than the participants from Serbia. However, the respondents from both countries consider that the police answered their questions and provided them with the help they expected.

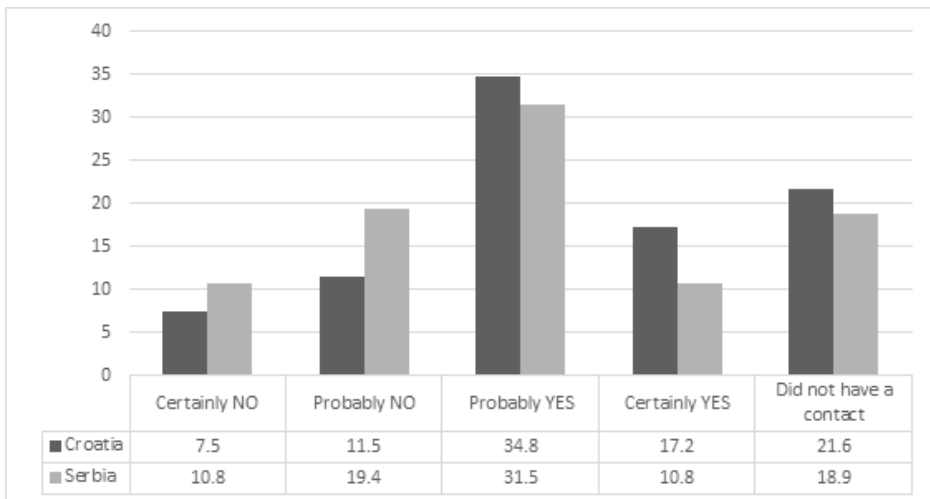


Chart 6: – *During your last encounter with the police, did they answer your questions or provided you with the help you expected?*

On the other hand, when the respondents were asked if they helped police in the last 12 months by means of providing the police with information that they were seeking from citizens, the respondents mostly answered that they did not help police. If we look at the frequencies per county, we can see that they are mostly even (Chart 7).

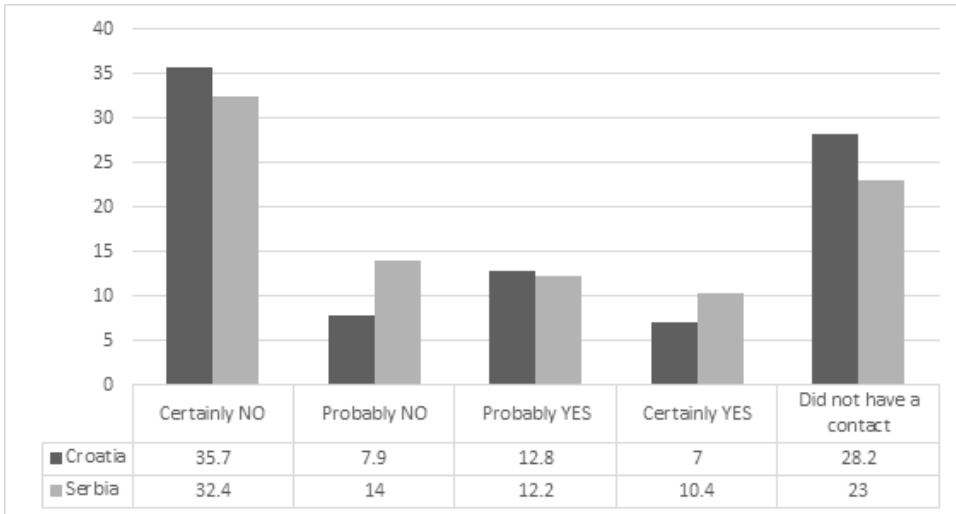


Chart 7: – *Did you help the police in the last 12 months (provided police with information they were seeking from citizens)?*

Nevertheless, the respondents from both countries express their will for helping the police in the future, while the respondents from Serbia are more willing than the participants from Croatia (Chart 8).

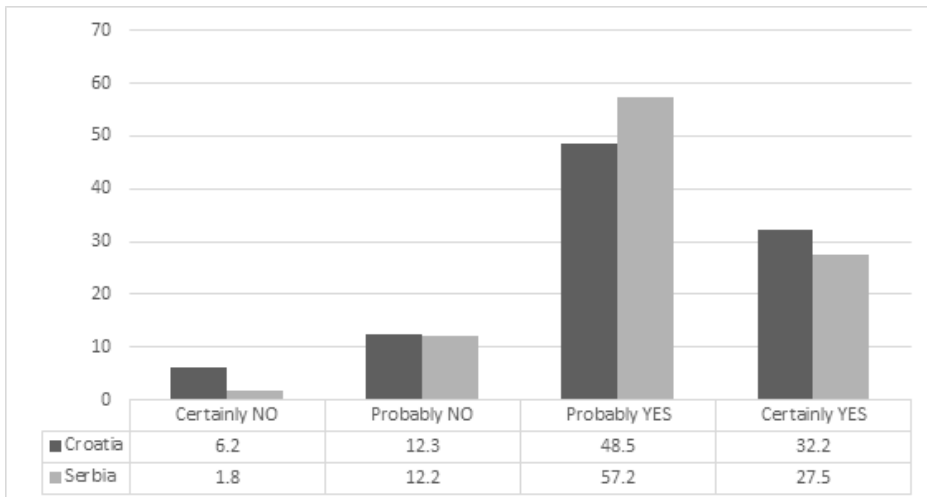


Chart 8: – *Are you willing to help the police in the future?*

However, despite the will for helping the police in the future, both respondents from Croatia and Serbia are not willing to encounter a police officer and be in contact with him, and such willingness is lower in Serbia, and a bit higher in Croatia (Chart 9).

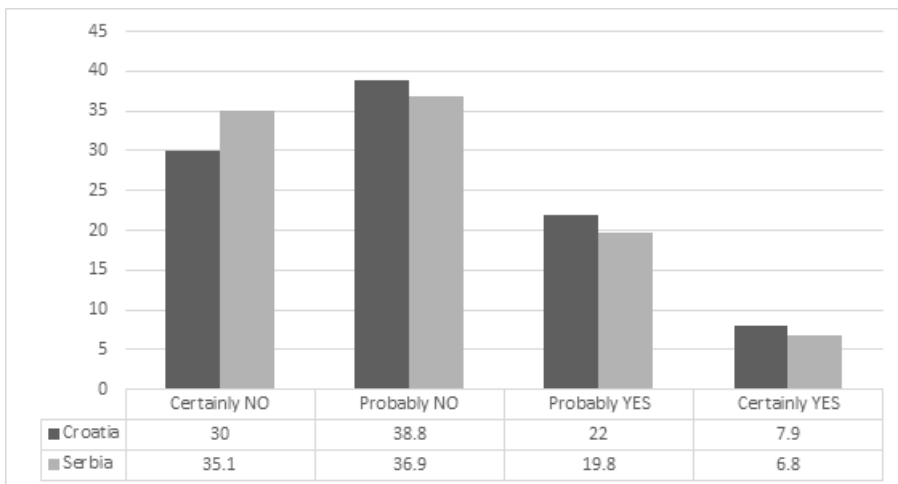


Chart 9: – *Would you like to encounter a police officer more often and be in contact with him?*

The answers that were unexpected (Chart 10) in regards to the previous chart (Chart 9) indicate that most respondents from both countries state that in order to keep order in a place/city they live in, it is necessary to establish closer cooperation and connection between the citizens and the police, while the respondents from Serbia agree a bit more.

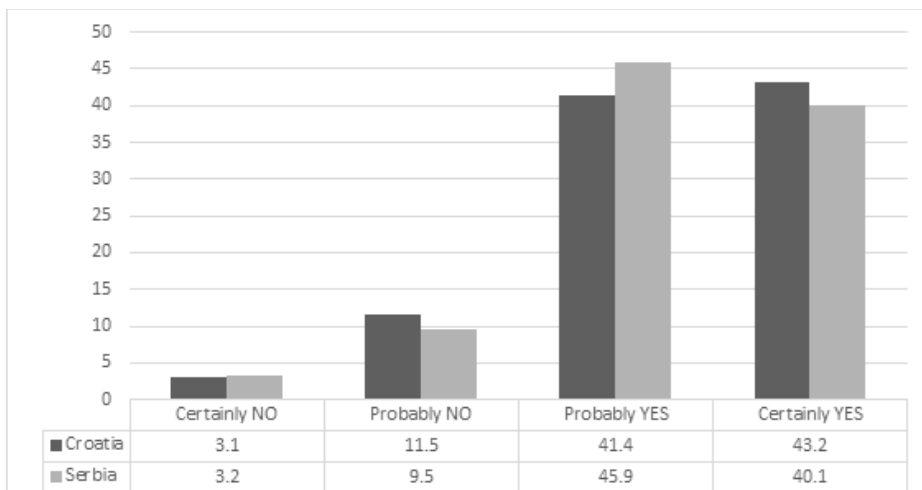


Chart 10: – *Do you think that in order to keep order in a place/city you live in, it is necessary to establish closer cooperation and connection between the citizens and the police?*

In case of the last contact with the police and their behaviour, most respondents state that police officers *dedicated a lot of attention* during the last contact, followed by *they were not interested*, then *they dedicated a lot of attention and sympathy*, and a minor part of respondents from both countries stated that police officers were behaving *irritating* and *hostile*. A large number of the respondents have stated that they do not know how the police officers behaved or they could not remember (Chart 11). Experiences are mostly the same in both countries, except for the case of disinterest which was reported more by the respondents from Serbia, while the respondents from Croatia reported more that police officers dedicated a lot of attention and sympathy (Chart 11).

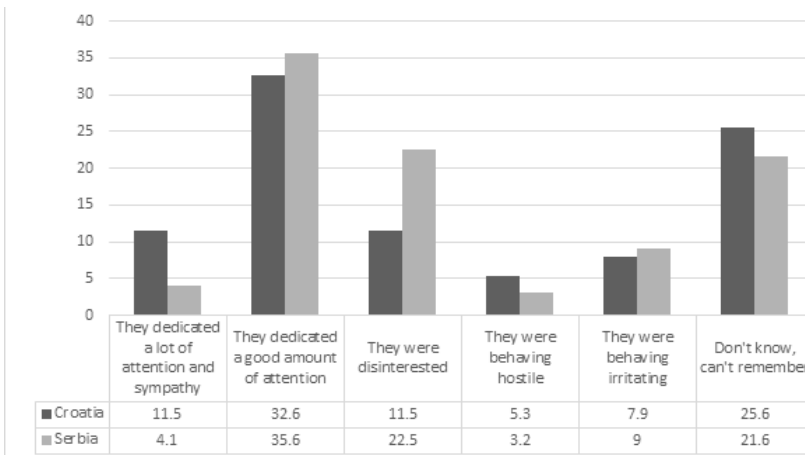


Chart 11: – *How did the police officers treat your during the last official contact?*

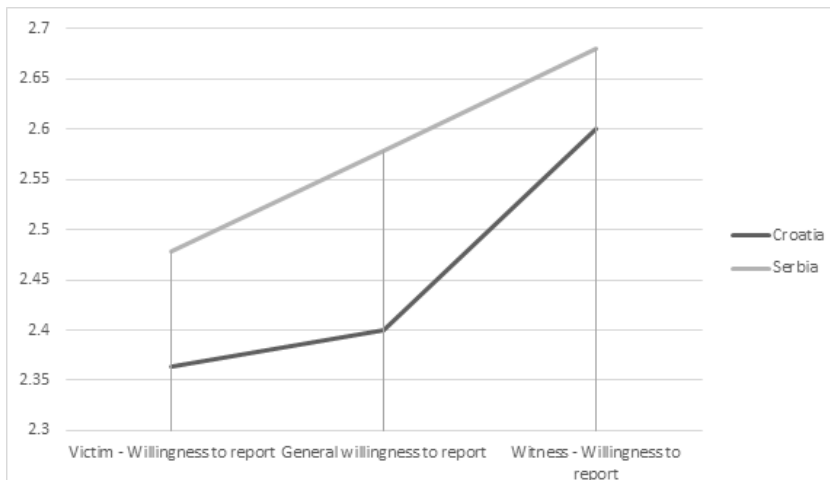


Chart 12: – *Willingness to report crime*

Willingness to report crime, Chart 12, tells us that the respondents are descriptively, on average willing to report crime, where that willingness is higher when they are placed in a hypothetical situation of a witness of a crime, than it is the case when they are placed in a hypothetical situation of victim of a crime. Furthermore, the respondents from Serbia are more willing to report crime than the respondents from Croatia in both hypothetical situations of being a victim and being a witness. We will test with the statistical analysis if there is a statistically significant difference in willingness to report crime among hypothetical victims or witnesses.

In order to determine whether there are statistically significant differences among countries in willingness to report crime and differences in willingness to report with regards to the last contact with the police, statistical variance analysis (ANOVA) and *Games-Howell post-hoc* test were conducted.

Table 1: *Table of ANOVA summary for arithmetic means of willingness to report crime and country*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
General willingness to report	Between Groups	1.086	1	1.086	4.756	0.030
	Within Groups	99.985	438	0.228		
	Total	101.071	439			
Victim – Willingness to report	Between Groups	1.447	1	1.447	4.107	0.043
	Within Groups	154.681	439	0.352		
	Total	156.128	440			
Witness – Willingness to report	Between Groups	0.702	1	0.702	3.134	0.077
	Within Groups	98.838	441	0.224		
	Total	99.541	442			

* $p < 0.05$

In Table 1, we can see that there is a statistically significant difference in willingness to report crime in hypothetical situations between the respondents from

Croatia and Serbia, where the respondents from Serbia are more willing in general willingness to report as well as in hypothetical situations of being a victim. According to the ANOVA results, we conclude that there is no statistically significant difference in willingness to report crime between the respondents from Croatia and Serbia in hypothetical situations of being a witness of a crime.

Table 2: *Table of ANOVA summary for arithmetic means of willingness to report crime and experience of the last contact with the police*

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	p
General willingness to report	Between Groups	1.861	2	0.930	4.097	0.017
	Within Groups	95.144	419	0.227		
	Total	97.005	421			
Victim – Willingness to report	Between Groups	3.056	2	1.528	4.330	0.014
	Within Groups	148.197	420	0.353		
	Total	151.253	422			
Witness – Willingness to report	Between Groups	1.094	2	0.547	2.487	0.084
	Within Groups	92.802	422	0.220		
	Total	93.896	424			

In Table 2, we can see that there is statistically significant difference in general willingness to report crime and willingness to report crime in hypothetical situations in relation with the last contact with the police. According to the ANOVA results there is no statistically significant difference in willingness to report crime among hypothetical witnesses of crime in regards to experience of the last contact with the police. In further analysis, *Games-Howell post-hoc* test will show us which groups have significant differences.

Table 3: *Results of Games-Howell post-hoc test of willingness to report crime in relation to experience of the last contact with the police*

Dependent Variable	(I) Contact	(J) Contact	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Victim – Willingness to report	Positive	Negative	,18009*	,06983	,028	,0155	,3446
		Unknown	,00788	,06880	,993	-,1701	,1544
	Negative	Positive	-,18009*	,06983	,028	-,3446	-,0155
		Unknown	-,18797*	,07546	,036	-,3660	-,0100
	Unknown	Positive	,00788	,06880	,993	-,1544	,1701
		Negative	,18797*	,07546	,036	,0100	,3660
	Positive	Negative	,11398	,05481	,096	-,0152	,2431
		Unknown	,01438	,05454	,962	-,1142	,1430
Witness – Willingness to report	Negative	Positive	-,11398	,05481	,096	-,2431	,0152
		Unknown	-,09960	,05931	,215	-,2395	,0403
	Unknown	Positive	-,01438	,05454	,962	-,1430	,1142
		Negative	,09960	,05931	,215	-,0403	,2395
	Positive	Negative	,14367*	,05593	,029	,0119	,2754
		Unknown	,00207	,05536	,999	-,1285	,1326
	Negative	Positive	-,14367*	,05593	,029	-,2754	-,0119
		Unknown	-,14160*	,05993	,050	-,2830	-,0002
General willingness to report	Unknown	Positive	-,00207	,05536	,999	-,1326	,1285
		Negative	,14160*	,05993	,050	,0002	,2830

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

By applying the *Games-Howell post-hoc* test (Table 3) that was used because of unequal variances, we can see that there is a difference in willingness to report among hypothetical victims of a crime in relation to positive or negative experi-

ence, where the respondents who perceived their last contact with the police as positive will be more willing to report crime than the respondent who perceived their last contact as negative. Furthermore, hypothetical victims differ in willingness to report in relation to negative experience and unknown experience of their last contact with the police whereby the respondents who have unknown experience will be more willing to report crime. When it comes to witnesses of hypothetical situations, there is no statistically significant difference of willingness to report in relation to the last contact with the police.

If we look at the general willingness to report crime, regardless of the status of a victim or a witness, there is statistically significant difference in willingness to report crime in positive and negative last contact the police, whereby the respondents who perceived their contact as negative will be less willing to report crime than the respondents who perceived their last contact with the police as positive. Also, the respondents who had the unknown experience with during their last contact are more willing to report crime than the respondents who had a negative experience during the last contact with the police.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the research have shown that there is a difference in willingness to report crime between countries. That confirmed H1 hypothesis which stated that there is a difference in willingness to report crime between Croatia and Serbia. The *Games-Howell post-hoc* test results showed that the respondents from Serbia are more willing to report crime in hypothetical situations with general willingness and willingness to report as a victim of a crime. Regarding being a witness of a crime in a hypothetical situation, there is no statistically significant difference between countries. It is important to note that witnesses are more willing to report than victims in hypothetical situations for both countries. The differences in willingness to report between Croatia and Serbia could be explained by factors on the macro-level such as opportunities, like self-help in the community, police competences (responses to reports, effectiveness), social stratification, gender roles in the country, the roles of adults and youngsters or the level of individualism (Guodriaan, 2006: 150). Willingness to report can be also influenced by the level of conformity to rules in some countries, where the countries with higher level of conformity will be more willing to report (Pavlović & Cajner Mraović, 2019). High influence on willingness to report particular crimes, like property crimes, is expressed by the citizens' trust in police, where those who have higher trust in police will be more willing to report crime (Pavlović & Vinogradac, 2019).

When it comes to the experience of contact with the police, the results have shown that there is statistically significant difference in willingness to report in relation to the perception of the last contact with the police as positive, negative or unknown, which confirmed H2 hypothesis. The results have shown that the

respondents who have positive experience of the last contact with the police as well as the respondents with unknown experience will be more willing to report crime, while the respondents with negative experience will be less willing to report. It should be noted that the respondents who had the unknown experience are still more willing to report so it can be assumed that their experience was more positive than it was negative, since it was not remembered (Christianson, Loftus, Hoffman & Loftus, 1991). Willingness to report in case of positive experience supports previous research of this topic, where for example, the encouraging attitude of the police has positive effects on the decision to report crime (Tolsma, Blaauw & Grotenhuis, 2012). Tolsma, Blaauw & Grotenhuis (2012) also found that availability and working hours of the police, the type of report and anonymity can have effect on the decision to report. The number of police officers also plays part in reporting, where with increased number of police officers, the number of reports also increased (Levitt, 1998).

When we discuss about the student population that makes our sample, it is important to note that these are young people who are *a priori* less willing to have any contact with the police and are less willing to report crime (Avdija & Giever, 2010). Still, according to the research of student population, the frequency of contact with the police, initiating a report from other citizens and from the police, can encourage this population to report crimes (Avdija & Giever, 2010). A student's decision to report can be influenced by the stage of collective efficiency, such as social control (Hart & Colavito, 2011).

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