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EVALUATION OF RESIDENTIAL SAFETY BASED ON A SURVEY OF RESIDENTS OF BIAŁA PODLASKA COUNTY

Key words: sense of safety, Biała Podlaska county

Introduction

Both from the individual and the group perspective, a sense of safety is crucial for the personal growth of individuals and the development of entire communities. Crime statistics are analyzed, and the subjective impressions of community members residing in a given region are surveyed. A sense of safety is determined by a number of factors. In the micro-social dimension, it is affected by an individual's personal experience, temperament, personality traits, upbringing, education, peer pressure, work environment and other variables which are difficult to measure in a scientific approach (such as the respondent's emotional state when assessing a given situation). From the macro-social point of view, a sense of safety is influenced by cultural values, the region's geographic location, level of development, the legal system in force and, above all, the operations of central and local authorities. Those factors undergo continuous change due to the dynamic growth and transformations of contemporary societies.

A consortium of three public opinion research centers (CBOS, DGA PBS and TNS OBOP) was commissioned by the Police Headquarters to carry out a survey of residential safety among Polish citizens in January 2007 and January 2008. A total of 17000 respondents older than 15 were surveyed. The results of the survey clearly indicate that Poles have a growing sense of personal safety. The researchers developed a map of voivodships whose residents were not afraid to venture into selected areas and streets in their place of residence after dark. This opinion was expressed by 69.3% respondents in Lubelskie voivodship, around 65% in Mazowieckie voivodship and 70% in Podlaskie voivodship. The residents of Lubelskie voivodship demonstrated an above-average level of satisfaction with the work of the police. In the 2008 survey, the residents of Lubelskie voivodship felt safer in comparison with the results of the 2007 study. Survey questions served as a basis for identifying the problems discussed in this paper.

This study evaluates the subjective sense of safety communicated by the residents of Biała Podlaska county. This was the second survey carried out in joint effort with the Sociology Institute of the Pope John Paul II School of Higher Vocational Education in Biała Podlaska and the Police Office in Biała Podlaska. This paper discusses only selected fragments of the poll carried out in 2008.

Methods and respondent characteristics

The objective of the study was to survey the opinions of Biała Podlaska county residents regarding their perceived level of safety in the place of residence.

In reference to a national survey investigating Polish citizens' sense of safety, this study addressed the following problems:

What is the respondents' subjective sense of safety?

Do the residents of Biała Podlaska county feel safe when they leave their homes after dark?

What locations are considered dangerous and are avoided by the residents of Biała Podlaska county?

The diagnostic poll method involving questionnaire interviews was used. The questionnaire was the principal research tool. Research methods were developed in collaboration with the Police Office in Biała Podlaska.

The study group was a representative sample of 1097 residents of Biała Podlaska county. The survey was carried out at the turn of May and June 2008 with the involvement of Sociology Faculty students of the Pope John Paul II School of Higher Vocational Education in Biała Podlaska

The number of towns, municipalities and village administration units was selected in such a way as to adequately represent the structure of the county. The respondents from each town and village were selected subject to availability (the sample was structured in view of respondent availability).

The number of respondents in each town, municipality and village was set proportionally to the total population of a given administrative unit.

Tab. 1. Detailed list of the respondents' place of residence.

Place of residence	Number od respondents	%
Biała Podlaska	42	3.8
Drelów	49	4.5
Konstantynów	40	3.6
Leśna Podlaska	48	4.4
Łomazy	43	3.9
Międzyrzec Podlaski	45	4.1
Piszczac	51	4.6
Rokitno	34	3.1
Rossosz	24	2.2
Sławatycze	24	2.2
Sosnówka	24	2.2
Terespol	57	5.2
Tuczna	35	3.2
Wisznice	48	4.4
Zalesie	37	3.4
Międzyrzec Podlaski	118	10.8
Terespol	45	4.1
Ogółem	1097	100

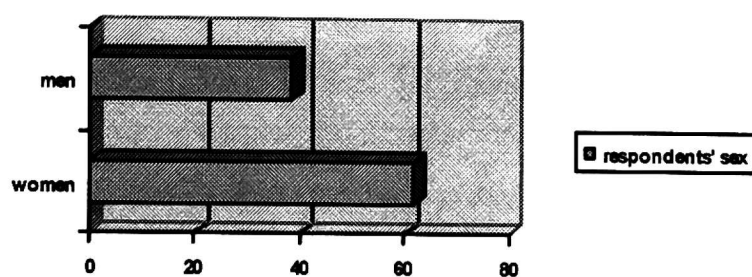


Fig. 1. Respondents' sex.

As indicated by Fig. 1, women accounted for 61,6% (665) and men for 38,4% (408) of the respondent group.

Tab. 2. Place of residence.

Place or residence	Number of respondents	%
Urban	415	37.8
Rural	682	62.2

The structure of the place of residence is the second variable analyzed in this report. In the discussed survey, respondents residing in rural areas outnumbered the polled subjects from urban areas. City and town dwellers

accounted for 37,8% of the surveyed population, while the remaining respondents were rural residents. The above statistics reflect the actual residential structure of Biała Podlaska county.

Analysis of survey results

A sense of safety is one of the most important factors determining an individual's living standards, therefore, the respondents' subjective sense of safety in the place of residence was one of the first aspects investigated by the survey.

Tab. 3. Respondents' perception of residential safety.

Response	Number of respondents	%
Safe	365	33.3
Rather safe	499	45.5
Rather unsafe	106	9.7
Unsafe	75	6.8
Difficult to say	52	4.7
Total	1097	100

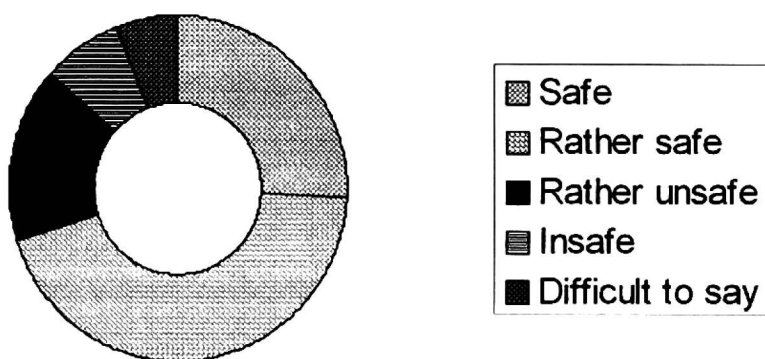


Fig. 2. Respondents' perception of residential safety in%.

The majority of respondents (78,8% of „safe” and „rather safe” indications) feel safe in their place of residence. This is a highly satisfactory result. The largest group of polled subjects (45,5%) were of the opinion that their place of residence was rather safe, followed by 33,3% respondents who felt completely safe. Around 10% of answerers stated that their place of resident was rather unsafe, while only 6.8% felt definitely unsafe. 4,7% respondents could not formulate an opinion on the matter.

Tab. 4. Sense of safety and the place of residence %.

Sense of safety/place of residence	urban	rural
Safe	24.8	38.5
Rather safe	44.8	46.0
Rather unsafe	15.4	6.2
Unsafe	10.4	4.7
Difficult to say	4.6	4.7

There are no statistically significant differences between the place of residence and the perceived degree of safety in the place of residence, but rural dwellers were slightly more likely to have a greater feeling of security. Human relations in a rural community are marked by a lower degree of anonymity and lower crime rates than in urban areas. The above could have influenced the perception of safety among the residents of Biała Podlaska county.

A sense of safety is crucial in certain situations, such as the decision to venture outside one's home after dark. The respondents were faced with a hypothetical scenario in which they had to take a stroll in their place of residence after dark. They were then asked to indicate their perceived sense of safety.

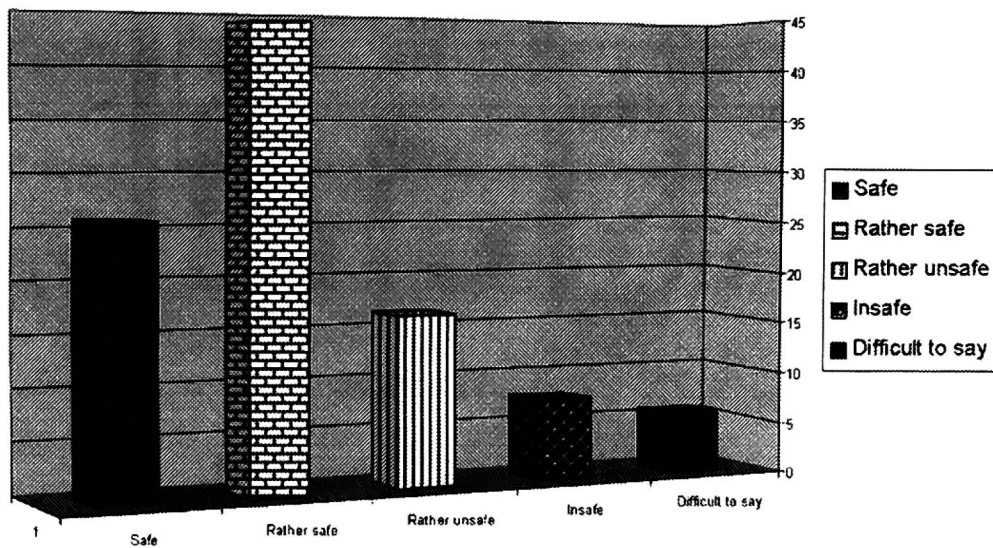


Fig. 3. The respondents' sense of safety when strolling in the place of residence after dark in%.

Tab. 5. The respondents' sense of safety when strolling in the place of residence after dark.

Response	Number of respondents	%
Safe	283	25.8
Rather safe	484	44.1
Rather unsafe	181	16.5
Unsafe	85	7.8
Difficult to say	64	5.8
Total	1097	100.0

Every fourth inhabitant of Biała Podlaska county feels safe when strolling in the place of residence after dark. The largest group of respondents (44,1%) were of the opinion that their place of residence was rather safe for taking a stroll after dark. When both of the above categories are combined, the survey produces a highly optimistic result of around 70% respondents who are not afraid to stroll in their place of residence after dark.

A different view was expressed by 24,3% of the polled subject who claimed that their place of residence was unsafe after dark. Only 5,8% of the dwellers of Biała Podlaska county failed to answer this question.

Tab. 6. Number of respondents avoiding selected locations and streets.

Response	Number of respondents	%
Avoids them	745	68.0
Does not avoid them	352	32.0
Total	1097	100

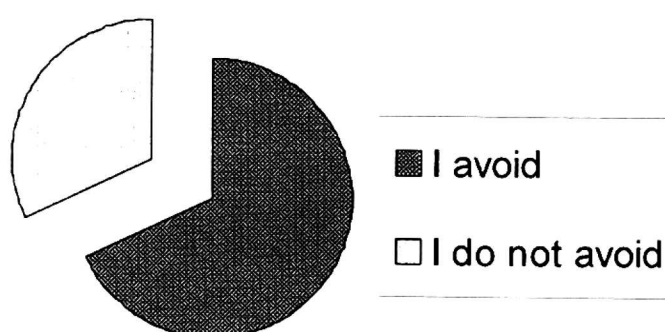


Fig. 4. Number of respondents avoiding selected locations and streets in %.

The majority of Biała Podlaska county residents do not avoid any specific locations and feel safe when strolling in their place of residence after dark. This opinion was voiced by 68.8% polled subjects. Every third surveyed resident of Biała Podlaska county claimed to avoid certain locations, streets or people in fear for their safety.

Tab. 7. The most dangerous locations in the place of residence in the respondents' opinions.

No.	Location	Number of respondents
1	Night clubs, discos and the vicinity	302
2	Public transport stops	152
3	Railway and coach stations	290
4	Means of public transport	45
5	Parks	369
6	Shopping centers	22
7	Markets	44
8	Shops selling alcohol and the vicinity	199
9	Stadiums	56
10	Quiet streets	258
11	Main streets	37
12	Selected districts in the region	23
13	Other locations	25
14	All locations in the region are safe	242

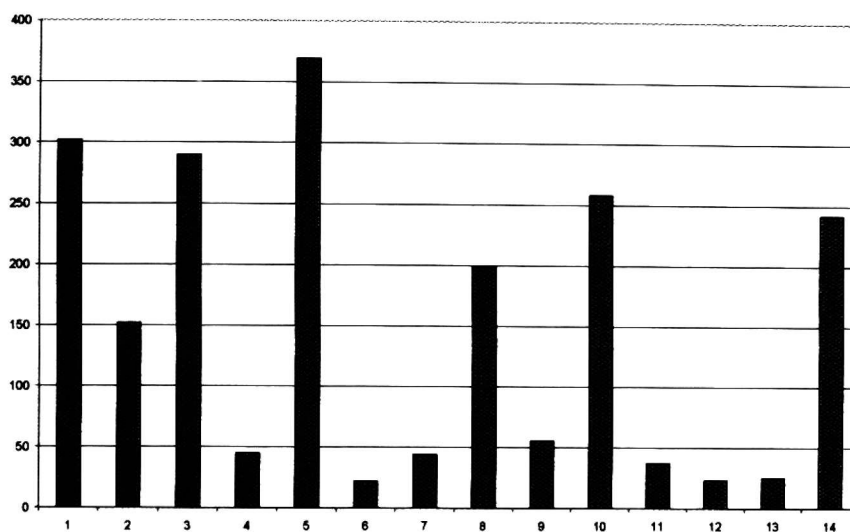


Fig. 5. The most dangerous locations in the place of residence in the respondents' opinion.

Legend:

- 1 – Night clubs, discos and the vicinity, 2 – Public transport stops, 3 – Railway and coach stations, 4 – Means of public transport, 5 – Parks, 6 – Shopping centers, 7 – Markets, 8 – Shops selling alcohol and the vicinity, 9 – Stadiums, 10 – Quiet streets, 11 – Main streets, 12 – Selected districts in the region, 13 – Other locations, 14 – All locations in the region are safe.

]In the opinion of the largest group of respondents, parks are the most dangerous location in their place of residence. According to both urban and rural respondents, parks are followed by night clubs, discos and the vicinity, railway and coach stations as well as main streets.

Conclusions

The vast majority of Biała Podlaska county residents (78.8%) feel safe in their place of residence, of which one-third feel definitely safe. Most answerers in the polled group are not afraid to stroll in their place of residence after dark.

In the respondents' opinion, the most dangerous locations in their place of residence are parks, followed by night clubs, discos and the vicinity, railway and coach stations. No significant differences in the sense of safety were observed between male and female respondents. As regards the residential criterion, rural dwellers' perception of safety was 15% higher than that of rural area residents.

The discussed survey is identical to the poll involving a national sample, and the results of both studies closely coincide. On average, more than 70% of Poles feel safe in their place of residence after dark, and 62% of respondents are satisfied with the work of the police in their general area of residence. The study offers some interesting insights into the quality of neighborhood relations in an urban environment. Human relations in rural areas are still more intense and less anonymous than in urban areas. The above could explain the greater sense of safety among rural responders.

According to father Stanisław Kowalczyk, a community is a manifestation of the common good. Kowalczyk cites J. Messner and defines communal good as help offered to another human being through shared effort of all community members (Kowalczyk 1996). The police are an institution that should further the attainment of the common good by serving the local community. A high sense of security shared by the residents of Biała Podlaska county suggests that the police of Biała Podlaska county effectively implement the principle of the common good through their service to the local community.

Abstract

The paper presents the results of a study on Biała Podlaska county residents' perceived sense of safety in their place of residence. The survey, carried out in 2008, covered 1097 respondents, both men and women, residents of rural and urban areas in Biała Podlaska county. The results of the survey suggest that the majority of dwellers of Biała Podlaska county feel safe in their place of residence.

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