Urbanisation as a Factor Which Influences the Increased Level of Crime and Victimisation of the Population

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Abstract. The characteristic features of urban social relations, processes and connections, including urban crime, are projected on the most significant segments of the population. Crime has historically formed as an urban phenomenon, and with the development of social ties, it turns into a general social phenomenon. Urbanisation acts as a factor of criminalisation and, consequently, the process of victimisation of the population is expanded. The city acts as a ‘social magnet’, attracting urban and rural migrants, thereby ‘excluding’ the most active social groups in remote areas. In turn, this contributes to the distortion of the social composition of the population and the demographic situation, causing a gradual cultural degradation of the rural way of life. In addition, the city attracts the criminally active part of the population from rural areas. All these aspects constituted the research topic reflected in this paper.

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Introduction

Considering the current processes of accelerated globalisation, one of the most important specific elements of the sectorial approach in criminology is the awareness of the differences between the qualitative and quantitative parameters of urban and rural crime.

As a matter of fact, urbanisation should be seen as an indispensable side and an essential feature of globalisation. In this context, it is not only about the fact that migration from developing countries to developed countries mainly complements the population of cities, but about an important component of urbanisation under the conditions of the information society, the widespread dissemination of the urban lifestyle and the affirmation in the public consciousness of the values and norms of an urbanised society. Urbanisation cannot be equated with the mere mechanical growth of cities. The most complete sociological understanding of urbanisation requires ‘including’ this process among the number of multi-level and multi-faceted processes. At the same time, urbanisation is interpreted as a process of increasing the role of cities in the life of society, associated with the concentration and intensification of non-agricultural functions, the spread of an
urban lifestyle (with a special structure of communication, culture, system of value orientations, etc.), and the formation of specific socio-spatial forms of settlement. This process is associated with a thorough socio-economic transformation of both the city and the countryside.

Urbanisation is a factor of economic and social progress, offering jobs, superior training and specialisation opportunities, consumer goods of ever better quality and implicitly increasing people’s standard of living.¹

Today, approximately 55–60% of the world’s population lives in urban areas.² This percentage is constantly expanding, representing an increased risk to the security of people and the public safety of urban localities through social, economic, sanitary, food and ecological problems, created with the escalation in the number of the population that must be served by an appropriate urban infrastructure. Unfortunately, this has a series of shortcomings that generate multiple problems in terms of public safety in general. Not in vain, recently more and more researchers are frequently discussing a new branch of criminology — Urban Criminology.³

Large cities are defined by the concentration of large masses of people in a limited area. These circumstances give rise to conflicts of an objective and subjective nature and often act as the cause of various types of crimes, mainly directed against the person. Precisely for these reasons, twice as many crimes are committed in cities as in the countryside. In the current socio-economic situation, large cities also acquire a special economic attractiveness for many migrants, including those who seek to achieve various antisocial goals. At the same time, the impact of migration on crime is directly related to the problem of social adaptation to the urban environment.

In some suburbs and cities of the Republic of Moldova, neighbourhoods have been formed during recent years where vagrants, beggars, alcoholics, drug addicts and other people who belong to the category of rejected and socially maladjusted people often live. This especially concerns the peripheral areas formed around the densely populated urban sectors. Obviously, a large part of these categories of people are potential criminals and/or victims.

**Studies and commentaries on crime and victimisation generated by the urban environment and its negative factors**

The first significant research steps in this field are associated with the names of the American criminologists C. Shaw and H. McKay. Carrying out victimological

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research within the criminological concept of social disintegration, they developed a detailed mapping of the criminals emerging from the vulnerability of various Chicago neighbourhoods in the 1930s and 1940s. Particular attention was paid to factors such as the location of large industrial and commercial units, population growth, the economic status of citizens, and the racial composition of the population, including the percentage of migrants.

The main emphasis in the study by C. Shaw and H. McKay, was placed on identifying the factors of social disintegration, which explained the dependence of crime on the socio-territorial parameters of the organisation of life in a large city, causing the emergence of these factors. As a result, they found that most of the violent criminals known to police lived in areas close to Chicago’s central business district, where the poor population and most of the migrants were concentrated.

Western criminologists concerned with regional crime problems also attempted to study the problem. However, real victimological studies in this direction began to be carried out only from the 1970s. The city map in Great Britain, for example, was drawn up similarly to that of C. Shaw and H. McKay. It highlighted the relative areas of the crime scene, without specifying the place of residence of the criminals. Strictly speaking, this gave the respective studies a criminological and victimological dimension, because most of the victims are, as a rule, residents of the area of the city where the crime is committed.

Another American criminologist, O. Newman, in a work published as early as 1972, revealed the correlation between the number of crimes committed and the characteristics of the urban environment in New York and London. The results presented in this study have been analysed by some UK government agencies, including the Ministry of Internal Affairs. At the same time, in London, the areas with a high level of crime were specially studied; attention was paid to the architectural parameters, the infrastructure, the degree of pollution, etc. A series of neighbourhoods were redeveloped, taking into account the recommendations of victimologists, who were involved in the design of new buildings and micro districts. Along with the spatial and dimensional organisation of the neighbourhoods, a number of factors were taken into account, such as the location of the districts, the income level of the majority of the population in these districts and the particularities of the socialisation of the young people.

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Since the 1980s, large-scale sociological studies have been carried out in the United States and Great Britain, which allowed criminologists to identify the correlation between the limits of criminal victimisation and regional characteristics. This data has been analysed to show the distribution of criminal victimisation across the country in the UK. The population in the relatively poor suburbs of the big British cities were found to be the most victimised, with the number of thefts and violent crimes being quite high.

Later, the scheme was expanded, and the territory of England was divided into ten regions according to the degree of victimisation of the population. Through this, it was found that in the case of patrimonial crimes, the difference between the areas with the lowest victimisation rate and those with an increased level of victimisation exceeded the ratio of twenty, this being even more significant for crimes against the person. At the same time, the most victimised areas are highlighted by a high percentage of repetition of crimes committed against the same people. As a result, three types of areas were identified where the probability of committing crimes against the person and property was very high:

1) surfaces of old buildings and areas of residence of a multi-ethnic population;
2) areas where many single, unmarried citizens lived;
3) sectors with the weakest budget of municipal administrations.

Some criminological studies with reference to street crime denote the percentage share of crimes committed in different territorial areas of large cities in the Russian Federation, as follows:

- sectors in industrial areas — 2.3%;
- cultural and administrative centres — 8.2%;
- areas that have transport hubs — 11.5%;
- shopping centres’ areas — 24.8%;
- residential areas — 58.2%.

The risk of becoming a victim of serious crimes against the person is the highest in the capitals according to the studies on the degree of victimisation of the population carried out in different cities in Finland, Denmark, Norway and Sweden.

A corresponding analysis of regional parameters of victimisation in the USA did not reveal such a definite interaction. Thus, the highest number of thefts from homes in large cities was recorded in Los Angeles, and the lowest in New York. Residents of central urban areas were more frequently victimised than residents of suburbs or rural areas. Simultaneously, the individuals most likely to be victimised lived in poor housing located in large metropolitan areas. Violent crime was most common in the areas where the lower and middle classes lived close to each other.

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During the last decades, the problems of the impact of urbanisation on the victimisation processes of rural residents have attracted increased attention from victimologists. S.J. Smith, who focused his study on the northern borough of Birmingham, has carried out some research in this area. Thus, the author highlights the following factors that caused a high level of crime: the multi-ethnic nature of the population, which includes a large number of people from developing countries; the high proportion of low-income families; the large number of unemployed; and the increased residential density, which is generally uncharacteristic to the United Kingdom. The area was mostly built in the 19th century and was dominated by uncomfortable housing for the lower-class population. The majority of the population consists of elderly Britons, representatives of the Irish community (living here since 1930) and immigrants from India (mainly in its western regions). During the last two decades, immigrant communities from other countries such as Asia, Latin America and Africa have become quite widespread.16

Therefore, a certain percentage of crimes is always inevitable, because human behaviour is subject to social-legal norms, and materially tangible goals and the possibilities of achieving them are clearly differentiated. At the same time, the level of crime at any given time depends on the socialisation patterns of the potential offenders and potential victims.

The general conclusion formed by S.J. Smith on the difference between absolute and relative population victimisation seems to be interesting and promising. Thus, the first type of victimisation correlates with the objective factors (geographical parameters, the social, age and gender structure of the population in a certain urban area), and the second type of victimisation correlates with the subjective factors, especially with the individual characteristics that manifest in the person’s behaviour (carelessness, frivolity, credulity, etc.). For these reasons, implementing preventive activities should be oriented, first of all, to correcting the objective factors, because only these can become real objectives of social macro politics.17

More recently, some British criminologists have concluded that an urban criminology that moves beyond the paradoxical thinking that has dominated criminology thus far, preventing it from taking up the cause of the city, needs to be imagined as a political and economic programme offering a critical appraisal of the complex nature of city life and its contemporary (and historical) harm.18

The urbanisation process and its impact on crime and victimisation of the population in the Republic of Moldova

Analysing the demographic evolution in the urban environment, the benchmark for the Republic of Moldova is the city of Chisinau for the following reasons: it is

16 Ibid.
17 S. J. Smith, op. cit., pp. 399–400.
the capital of the country, the main political, administrative, economic, scientific and cultural centre, and the total population of the city is about 700,000 habitants, being much more numerous than the other cities. Today, approximately 30% of the country’s population lives in Chisinau and its suburbs, and this percentage is continuously increasing.

High population density, alarming and uncontrolled demographic growth, illegal and legal migration, the mosaic of cultures, ethnicities and religions, the indecent living conditions, unemployment and poor education are factors that determine the high degree of criminality in Chisinau and its peripheries. As a consequence of this, the report on police activity for the period of 2022 mentions that the criminal phenomenon is concentrated in the urban environment to the level of 60%, with this percentage being much higher in Chisinau.\textsuperscript{19}

While the central part of the city is a relatively safe area, the outskirts are becoming more and more affected by crime in general, the percentage of violent crimes is increasing in relation to the total number of crimes committed. The existing crime in the central areas primarily affects the economic patrimonial sphere, and the periphery, due to the huge and different mix of the population, is deeply affected by violence. The causes of urban violence are different: social, economic, political, cultural, religious, ethnic, etc. The suburbs bring all these causes to a common denominator: the frustrations of those who perceived the city as a ‘lifebuoy’, but who were deeply disappointed by the harsh realities of urban life.\textsuperscript{20}

Neighbourhood gang violence is a current stage in the evolution of urban violence. Young delinquents gather in neighbourhood gangs, which, as they mature, later evolve into real criminal groups. Subsequently, these groups specialise in the illicit trafficking of drugs and various prohibited materials, human trafficking for various purposes, organising pimping, or committing acts of hooliganism, banditry, robbery, etc.

Ex-convicts are also added to this. When released from detention and mainly trying to settle down living in the city, they often influence different categories of criminals through their negative behaviour, including the young and vulnerable who have started on the path of criminal violence.\textsuperscript{21}

According to some victimological studies carried out at the national level, more than 50% of the people questioned reported that crimes have recently become more violent in two of the largest cities (Chisinau and Balti) of the Republic of Moldova.\textsuperscript{22}

The situation is no better at the global level either. Thus, a United Nations report states that over the last 20 years, crime and violence in urban areas around the world have increased by approximately 3–5%.\textsuperscript{23}

\textsuperscript{20} I. Larii, R. Cojocaru, V. Ionascu, et al., p. 17.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., p. 18.
On the general background of the social characteristics of victimisation in different urban areas of Chisinau, traditionally vulnerable groups of the population (old women and men) are less victimised. This fact is explained by their limited participation in public forms of leisure. Among the unemployed, the least vulnerable are those who are in the middle level of socialisation, and the most victimised are the unemployed who belong to categories of people with a higher level of qualification. Moreover, in areas with a high degree of crime, groups of people were identified for which the probability of becoming a victim of a crime was the highest (young people, lonely people, etc.). Comparison with the situation of similar population groups in different areas of other cities leads to the conclusion that the degree of their victimisation depends to the greatest extent on the individual characteristics of the victims.

Thus, it was found that the victimisation rate of the population of the Republic of Moldova in recent years is higher in Chisinau (59%), among young people aged 16–24 (56%), in the group of respondents with a higher income level (66%), and among people who had lived in the community for less than five years (58%).

It is important to note that the negative reputation of a crime-ridden urban area contributes to the further victimisation of its population, as more socialised people tend to leave that area and, conversely, the influx of de-socialised elements will increase. As a result, the fear of becoming a victim of crime is constantly increasing among the population. As a rule, in such situations, the population considers that it is not possible to intervene when they witness a crime or another violation of the law. This fact intensifies the risks of new crimes being committed, and criminals gain a sense of impunity. Finally, in these areas, it becomes more difficult to obtain certain insurances that would guarantee the right to life, health, property, etc., and the level of employment decreases more and more.

A serious problem of the cities of the Republic of Moldova, especially of Chisinau, is the increasing number of vehicles, which increases from one year to the next. Obviously, this situation was not foreseen when the city streets and the places arranged for car parking were planned. Finally, road traffic in the capital is disrupted, the air polluted, the level of socio-urban tension increases, road accidents frequently occur with various serious consequences, including bodily injuries and even the deaths of people. Precisely for these reasons, the reports on police activity confirm that more than 20% of the crimes committed annually are in the scope of transport.

In the above context, the World Health Organization warns that more than 92% of the inhabitants of urban environments are breathing polluted air. Every day, approximately 100 children and young people under the age of 25 die in road accidents globally. Many Europeans also suffer from nervous disorders caused by the increased level of urban noise.

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24 Nivelul de viktimiziruye narod v Respublike Moldova, op. cit.
25 Raport privind activitatea poliției, Kishinev, 2023, op. cit.
Convergence of the level of victimisation of the rural and urban (suburban) population in the Republic of Moldova

Although, from a quantitative point of view, the number of crimes in rural areas continues to be traditionally lower than in cities, however, in recently years, the active movement of purely urban forms of crime to the rural environment is increasingly frequently witnessed. For this reason, the complex study of this problem is very important, especially as the results obtained will make it possible to quantify the impact of urbanisation processes on the victimisation of different segments of the population, not only urban but also rural.

At the same time, the rural population is under the influence of additional victimisation factors, especially concerning the insufficient of law enforcement resources in rural areas and the lack of trust in the representatives of the authorities. In addition, there is a high level of latent victimisation in the villages and the phenomenon of repeated victimisation prevails, especially following the commission of violent crimes.

In the last few decades, a series of new trends in the development of crime within the territory of the former Soviet republics (including the Republic of Moldova) were noticed, with which additional threats were associated for the inhabitants of the rural environment:

— sudden increase in alcohol and drug consumption;
— gradual but steady increase in the number of violent crimes (domestic violence had become a very widespread phenomenon);
— formation of organised networks specialised in the cultivation and growth of raw material for the production of drugs, as well as their subsequent trafficking (as a rule, the drugs were delivered to the urban environment, where consumer demand was increasing);
— consolidation of organised criminal groups, whose members came from the countryside;
— appearance of criminals specialising in burglaries from homes and other places where goods are stored.

Therefore, these phenomena determine the gradual convergence of the degree of victimisation of the rural and urban population. In general, the significant changes in the urban lifestyle in recent times have expanded the range of opportunities for committing crimes and contributed to the extrapolation of urban forms of crime in the countryside.

Conclusions

Even though we are living in the 21st century, the phenomenon of urban crime at the national and global level is evolving quite dramatically, with young people and other categories of vulnerable people being exposed to the newest vicious attractions: alcohol consumption, drugs and ethnobotanicals, school dropout, pornography and sexual crimes, etc. In general, various forms of criminal behaviour
frequently accompany these vices. Thus, the ever-reduced control that the family, school and society as a whole exercise over young people determines these criminal-prone behaviours. The traditional institutions that were meant to educate the population (the church, cultural institutions, etc.) have become outdated, their place being taken over by the mass media (especially internet networks), which often causes enormous harm to the public, presenting shows accompanied by strong violence.

Considering the above-mentioned, the following categories of factors which increase the risks to urban public security can be highlighted:

— intensification of urban violence, especially in the peripheral areas;
— permanent increase in the level of crime and its degree of seriousness, the cities holding supremacy in terms of the number of crimes committed in relation to the number of inhabitants;
— presence among the population of groups of people prone to criminal activity;
— existence of a large population determines the possibility of identifying potential victims, especially among minors and other categories of vulnerable people;
— interweaving the migration process with migrant adaptation issues;
— urban infrastructure provides an increased potential for various illicit activities such as patrimonial, economic, financial, banking, etc.;
— uncontrolled sectors located on the outskirts of the cities provide the basis for the recruitment and selection of future criminals, etc.

For these reasons, the urban environment, including the outskirts of cities, is a permanent subject of consistent study and analysis not only for the specialised centres of the local public administration but also for those of the law enforcement agencies responsible for maintaining and ensuring public order. Thus, knowledge of the territory and the population from an operative point of view constitute priority directions of action for reducing the criminal phenomenon and the level of victimisation of the inhabitants. Simultaneously, the thorough study of the problems related to urbanisation is a starting point in creating effective systems for maintaining public order and ensuring the safety of the population.

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Streszczenie. Charakterystyczne cechy relacji społecznych w miastach, procesy, powiązania, w tym przestępczość na terenie miast, dotyczą najbardziej istotnych warstw ludności. Przestępczość historycznie ukształtowała się jako zjawisko miejskie, a wraz z rozwojem więzi społecznych staje się zjawiskiem ogólnospołecznym. Urbanizacja działa jako czynnik kryminalizacji, w wyniku czego rozszerza się proces wiktymizacji ludności. Miasto oddziała jak 'magnes społeczny', przyciągając miejskich i wiejskich migrantów, tym samym 'wykluczając' najbardziej aktywne grupy społeczne z odległych obszarów. To z kolei przyczynia się do zniekształcenia struktury społecznej ludności i sytuacji demograficznej, powodując stopniową degradację kulturową wiejskiego stylu życia. Ponadto miasto przyciąga aktywną krимinalnie część ludności z obszarów wiejskich. Wszystkie te aspekty stanowiły temat badawczy przedstawiony w niniejszym artykule.

Resumen. La naturaleza específica de las relaciones, procesos y vínculos sociales urbanos, incluida la delincuencia urbana, se proyecta sobre los segmentos más relevantes de la población. El crimen se ha configurado históricamente como un fenómeno urbano, y con el desarrollo de los vínculos sociales se está convirtiendo en un fenómeno que abarca a toda la sociedad. La urbanización actúa como factor de criminalización y, en consecuencia, amplía el proceso de victimización de la población. La ciudad funciona como un ‘imán social’ que atrae a los emigrantes urbanos y rurales, ‘excluyendo’ así a los grupos sociales más activos de las zonas alejadas. Esto, a su vez, contribuye a la distorsión de la composición social y demográfica de la población, provocando una degradación cultural gradual del modo de vida rural. Al mismo tiempo, la ciudad atrae a una parte de la población criminalmente activa procedente de las zonas rurales. Todos estos aspectos constituyeron el tema de investigación abordado en este artículo


Резюме. Особенности социальных отношений, процессов, связей, в том числе и преступность в городах, касаются наиболее значимых слоев населения. Преступность исторически формировалась как городское явление, но с развитием социальных связей она становится общесоциальным феноменом. Урбанизация выступает как фактор криминализации, в результате чего расширяется процесс виктимизации населения. Город является «социальным магнитом», притягивающим городских и сельских мигрантов, тем самым «исключая» наиболее активные социальные группы из отдаленных районов. Это, соответственно, способствует деформации социальной и демографической структуры населения и постепенной культурной деградации сельского образа жизни. Кроме того, город привлекает криминально активную часть населения из сельских районов. Все эти аспекты и составили тему исследования, рассматриваемую в данной статье.