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COVID-19: CRIME AND POLICING

**A FIRST SNAPSHOT OF ACADEMIC PUBLISHING
ON CRIME TRENDS AND POLICE ACTIVITY
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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A FIRST SNAPSHOT OF ACADEMIC PUBLISHING ON CRIME TRENDS AND POLICE ACTIVITY DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Abstract

Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic and government measures to limit its spread have had a huge impact on society. Crime opportunities and criminal justice systems have also been affected by this health crisis. With the aim of international collaboration, a working group has been created to promote research among European researchers and thereby facilitate the exchange of information and comparative studies on the impact of Covid-19 on crime and criminal justice systems. Thus, in order to get an overview of the academic publishing, the School of Criminal Justice of the University of Lausanne has undertaken a preliminary review of publications released on crime trends and police activity during the Covid-19 pandemic. This research identified the manuscripts published in English between February 2020 and July 2021 in order to review the time period investigated, the geographic area, the data used, the analytical strategies and the results. In total, the keywords chosen were able to identify 128 manuscripts. Concerning crime trends, most of the results confirmed the drop and the U-shaped recovery for property crimes and street crimes in general while cybercrime and domestic violence seems to have increased during the lockdown. Concerning the police, it played an important role in making sure that the government health guidelines were enforced. The public's trust in the police rose at the beginning of the crisis but the rise was only temporary. After the easing of the health guidelines, this trust declined as the police was still required to enforce some rules.

Keywords: COVID-19, academic publication, crime trends, police

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Introduction

As part of the project Impact of the COVID-19 on Police, Justice and Prison Institutions (ICPJP) in Switzerland, funded by the Faculty of Law, Criminal Justice and Public Administration of the University of Lausanne, this work gives a first snapshot of academic publishing on crime trends and police activity during the first year of the COVID-19 pandemic. The following research questions were established:

1. How did the COVID-19 pandemic and government measures to the crisis impact on crime trends?
2. How did the COVID-19 pandemic and government measures impact on the police?

Method

To answer the research questions, a literature review was conducted. The data was collected from peer-reviewed journals and reports of police organisations.

The research process took place on different online search engines during the period 04.05.2021 - 31.07.2021 and no territorial limitations were adopted. The criteria of inclusion of published articles in the dataset were as follows:

- Article or report based on empirical findings;
- Published between February 2020 and July 2021;
- Written in English.

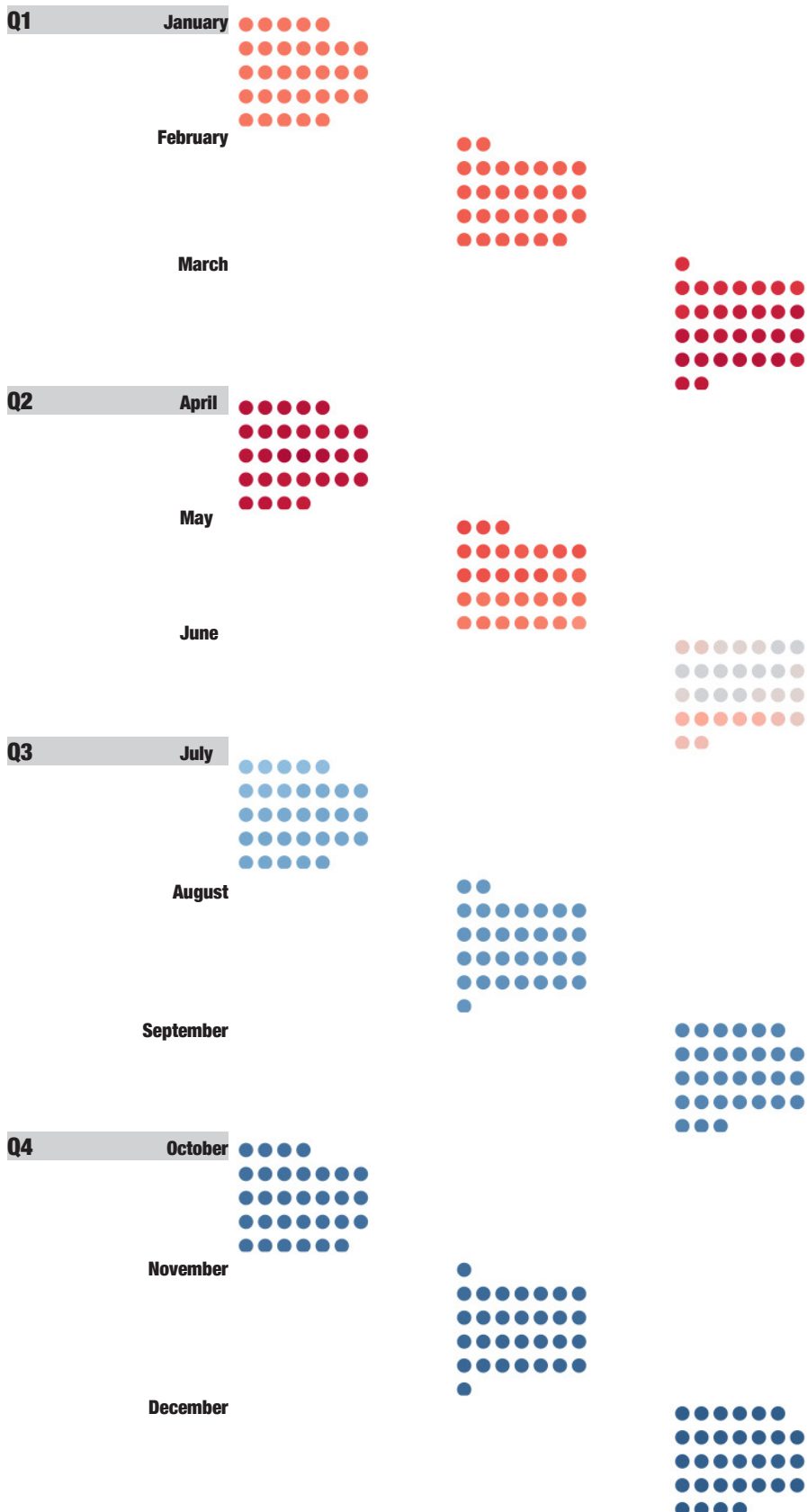
Tab. 1 - Keywords and search engines used for data collection

	Keywords	Search engines	Search results viewed
Peer-reviewed articles	Crime AND lockdown Crime AND pandemic Crime AND COVID-19 Police AND COVID-19	Google scholar, BCUL, Web of science, Sociological abstracts and Pubmed	First 100 results
Reports of police organisations	Crime AND COVID-19 filetype:pdf COVID-19 impact Police filetype:pdf	Google	First 50 results

Results

In total, 128 articles were integrated to the dataset. In order to understand how academic literature investigated the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on crime trends and on the police, we analysed the period investigated, the geographical distribution and the data sources used by the identified literature. In the next pages, we present a cross-analysis of the key results identified in the literature.

Fig. 1 - Period of analysis considered by the academic publications (number of publications which mentioned the time period: 95)



The first half of the year 2020, during which many lockdowns were decreed, was more investigated by the scientific community than the rest of the year (red dots). This result can be explained by the fact that the studies being conducted in the second part of the year are still in the process of being published. Moreover, the interest for the COVID-19 theme could be limited in time, which would have led some researchers to quickly publish articles and thus induced a focus on the first lockdown.

A majority of studies were conducted in the US, in the United Kingdom and in Australia. Even with this geographic concentration of studies, several regions of the world are represented in the dataset. Police data and polls were the two main sources of data. Police data was mainly used for studies on crime and polls for studies on the police.

Polls, surveys, interviews and focus groups were conducted online, only two studies collected data with face-to-face interviews. Quantitative methodologies represent 81% of the publications in the dataset.

KEY RESULTS FROM STUDIES ON CRIME TRENDS (N=104)

1

Certain crimes such as property crimes or crimes against the person linked to the night economy were greatly reduced.

2

The crime reduction was concentrated to specific geographic areas, such as city centres where a lot of human activity took place. The stronger the routine activities were impacted, the stronger was the effect of the lockdown on crime.

3

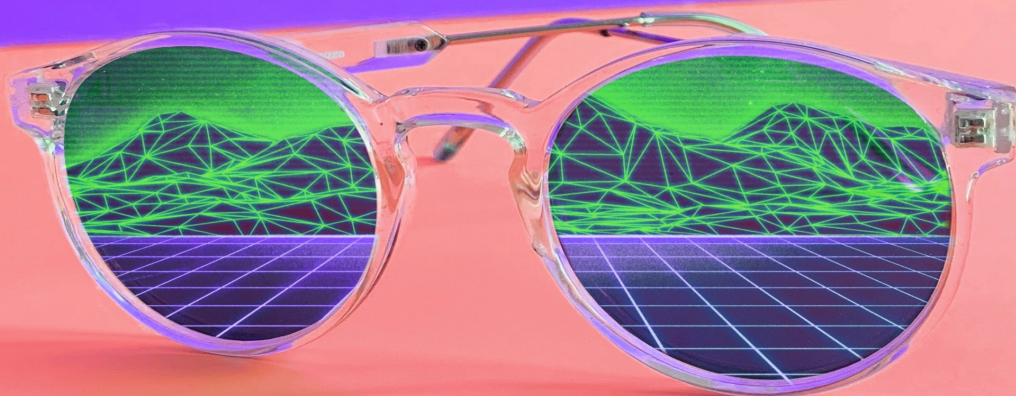
Some forms of crime saw an increase such as cybercrime or domestic violence. Cybercriminals used the pandemic context in order to pursue their activity.

4

Most crimes that decreased with the arrival of the pandemic followed a U-shaped recovery once the government restrictions were eased.

5

Organized crime activities were initially disrupted, and then they adapted to the pandemic context.



KEY RESULTS FROM STUDIES ON POLICE (N=24)

1

The police played an important role in making sure that the government health guidelines were enforced. This implied that the police had to take on new tasks for which it had no experience. There was a lack of readiness to deal with such an event.

2

The police played an important role in the public perception of the health guidelines. It was important that the police showed the right example.

3

The police made extensive use of Information Communication Technology (ICT) in order to comply with the health guidelines.

4

The public's trust in the police rose at the beginning of the crisis but the rise was only temporary. After the easing of the health guidelines, this trust declined as the police was still required to enforce some rules.



Conclusion

COVID-19 and the government measures to this crisis had a strong impact on crime trends and on the police. The U-shaped recovery of crime and the new missions given to the police are examples of the strong impact.

Situational crime theories such as routine activity theory, crime pattern theory and others can explain the short-term evolution of crime.

It is recommended that this research be repeated within a year in order to gain a better overview of academic publishing.

This research is not without limitations. The use of English keywords led to the collect of a majority of studies conducted in the English-speaking countries. The validity of police data during the pandemic is still unknown. For example, some studies using only police data detected a decrease in domestic violence whereas studies using victimisation surveys indicated an increase of this phenomenon. The studies using polls and surveys were mostly explorative and their samples lacked representation of the general population.

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