

Pandemic as an additional criminality factor

Larisa Vladimirovna Gotchina^{1*}, *Dmitry Mikhailovich Kokin*¹, *Victoria Vyacheslavovna Semenova*¹, *Leonid Vasilievich Serdyuk*², and *Pavel Leonidovich Serdyuk*¹

¹Saint Petersburg University of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, Department of Criminal Law, Saint Petersburg, Russia

²Ufa Law Institute of the Ministry of Internal Affairs of Russia, Department of Criminal Law and Criminology, Ufa, Russia

Abstract. The prerequisite for the study was the emerging new “coronavirus” disease, viewed as a criminality factor. The objective of the study is to identify new characteristics of crime in the context of the incidence of coronavirus in the population, to identify its highly latent types, to reflect the dynamics. The following methods were used to achieve the objective: analysis, synthesis, generalization, statistical method, content analysis, method of expert assessments. The results of the work were the revealed patterns of crime in the sphere of illegal circulation of drugs, weapons, and domestic violence. The novelty is the identification of highly latent types of crime during a pandemic and its characteristic features. Issues related to the prevention of domestic violence during a pandemic with the participation of law enforcement agencies and guardianship authorities in this work were considered. The draft laws “On responsibility for domestic violence” and “On restricting the removal of children from the family” were discussed, recommendations for their improvement were provided. Attention is focused on the practicability of strengthening preventive measures in the fight against domestic violence to preserve families and ensure the interests of children. An increase in the number of drug crimes was revealed during the pandemic, both in Russia and abroad. The Russian drug market is experiencing a shortage of smuggled drugs. It is reoriented to synthetic drugs with new underground drug laboratories being opened. The main contingent of attraction to drug use is still young people and adolescents, the main method – using Internet technologies. The increase in the number of crimes in the sphere of illegal arms trafficking was provoked by the factor of fear, due to the presence of the threat of becoming a victim of selfish and violent crimes. The consequence is consumer panic and an increase in the need of the Russian population for self-defense.

Keywords: drugs, arms, domestic violence

1 Introduction

The separation from the family of its members in everyday life due to employment and a decrease in spirituality has formed an established way of life of the population. It turned out

* Corresponding author: lgotchina@yandex.ru

to be unprepared for extreme events, for example, a pandemic and a period of isolation. Interpersonal relations, both family and corporate, have become aggravated. An unhealthy psychological climate manifested itself in social groups. Divorces, an increase in the number of alimony relations, layoffs, unemployment are the consequences. The demand for highly profitable types of crime (drug-related crime and arms crime) and the level of their latency have increased.

2 Methods

A content analysis of the works of Russian and foreign authors of the pandemic period was carried out to identify the general dynamics and characteristics of highly latent types of crime. The conclusions are supported by expert assessments and statistics.

3 Results

Such high latency types of crime as drug-related crime, domestic crime, and arms crime were identified in Russia during the pandemic. The main reason for the first is self-serving motivation. The increased situational aggressiveness as a characteristic of the personality during periods of isolation and social restrictions is the reason for the second type. An increased need for self-defense and protection of one's property from criminal encroachments is the reason for the third type of crime.

4 Discussion

The problem of combating domestic violence is acute in Russia during the pandemic. The number of such facts connected with women and children has increased 2.5 times since April 10, 2020. The conclusion is based on the number of calls to law enforcement agencies which increased by 24%: 2537 of them were recorded in February this year, 6054 in March, and more than 13000 in April [1].

Of course, this is not a reliable indicator of domestic violence-related conflicts. "I think the problem here is communication," says T. Moskalkova, ombudsman for human rights. – Mail may not work; electronic media are not always convenient for the victim ..." [1].

In early May 2020, the head of the WHO European division, Dr. Hans Kluge, announced that "countries report a 60% increase in the number of calls from women who have experienced domestic violence in April compared to last year" [2]. A forecast was made at the WHO meeting that "there will be about 30 million more such cases in the world if the restrictive measures introduced due to the coronavirus are extended for another six months" [2].

Seven civil society organizations sent a report on domestic violence in Russia to the Council of Europe. The most affected were the vulnerable and marginalized groups of the population. It was stated that the pandemic showed the absence of an integrated approach to the prevention of domestic violence, with the greater risk being upon women [3].

Since the beginning of the pandemic, the number of complaints of domestic violence victims in Europe has increased: in France, an increase of up to 30%, in Paris – up to 36% [4]; in Brazil – by 40% or 50%; in Spain – by 20% in the first few days of the pandemic; in Cyprus – by 30% a week after the first case of coronavirus in the country was confirmed [5]; in China, it exceeded 25%; in Spain in the first two weeks of quarantine – by 18%, that is also where the first case of the murder of a woman by her husband in front of the children took place. In the UK, the list of hotlines to protect such victims was published only after the increase in the number of messages to 20% [4]. In London, at the beginning of the epidemic,

such messages were not announced due to “fear of consequences (e.g., violence), fear of intervention by social services, fear of disclosure (would not be believed) and feelings of shame” [6].

Victims of domestic violence during the pandemic had shown increased suicidal tendencies, depression, insomnia, and increased alcohol excesses. The increase in the number of reported cases of domestic violence strengthens in the spring, which is associated with seasonality, but also influenced by “financial vulnerability, lifestyle restructuring, including more time being spent at home, unemployment, stress associated with a pandemic, uncertainty about the future” [7]. At the same time, the methods of coercion used by domestic abusers “bear an uncanny resemblance” to those that kidnappers use on hostages, according to J.L. Herman, a professor at Harvard University School of Medicine [8].

To prevent domestic violence in the context of a pandemic, K. Goering-Eckardt proposed in the Bundestag to convert empty hotels and guest houses into crisis centers [8], Y.N. Zhdanov proposed to increase the availability of emergency telephones, measures to provide housing, legal assistance [1]. UN Secretary-General A. Guterres called on all governments to give security priority to women [9].

At the same time, in May-June of this year in Russia “the number of invasions in the sphere of family and domestic relations decreased by 13%”: murder and attempted murder – by 28.2%, deliberate infliction of grievous bodily harm – by 24.7%, moderate harm – by 13.3%, light harm – by 14.5%. More fraud and cybercrimes were committed – by 35% and by 85% respectively [10].

However, this comforting picture does not apply to criminal domestic violence. This is explained by the fact that Article 116 of the Criminal Code of the Russian Federation provides for liability for beatings committed with hooligan motives, which is completely uncommon for family relations, and Art.116 with administrative prejudice – for beatings against a family despot for repeated violent actions. For comparison: in France, a family abuser is punished with up to three years in prison. He is prohibited from approaching the victim's house after the latter has contacted the police. Violence is interpreted more broadly and includes “bullying by impairing the quality of life” [4].

Toughening of administrative liability for beatings was refused in Russia because of “being disproportionate to the criminal one” [11]. However, to address the problem of domestic violence, draft laws “On responsibility for domestic violence” and “On limiting the removal of children from the family” are being discussed. It is envisaged that the court, the police, and the prosecutor will be empowered to separate children from the family with the participation of the tutorship and guardianship authority [11].

Such a decision will not contribute to the prevention of family conflicts. “It happens that the removal of a child has no grounds of real threat to his life or health, or, moreover, is associated with an unwillingness to provide social support to multiple children large families in difficult life situations” [12]. It seems that the elimination of family conflicts is effective by conducting a process of reconciliation of the parties in the form of mediation.

During the pandemic, the number of crimes in the sphere of disinterested arms trafficking has increased. The factor was an aggressive living environment, for example, in areas remote from large settlements, where threats can come from wild animals, from the likelihood of being left without food under the influence of the environment (heat, cold, precipitation), and from the destructive activities of animals to destroy food products, means for their preparation, life support systems. All of the negative factors above as well as the fear of facing them can be completely or partially eliminated with the help of arms.

The factor of fear is largely due to the presence of a real threat of becoming a victim of a crime against a person or property, against public health, or of a terrorist or extremist nature. Besides, the level of fear of the population is determined by imaginary threats arising from the lack of information or the presence of false information. The consumer panic in the spring

of 2020 amid a pandemic became an example of the implementation of such a social mechanism. People realized vital needs by meeting the demand for food, hygiene products, and personal respiratory protection [13]. Such a reaction of society is primary, the most widespread, and more accessible.

The mechanism of neutralizing the factor of fear from possible illegal encroachments was realized through the illegal acquisition of weapons. A relative surge in purchasing activity was recorded concerning civilian weapons ammunition [14]. A sharp increase in demand for those has been recorded in countries where weapons are predominantly available to most members of society against the background of information about the spread of coronavirus infection. In North Carolina and Georgia, it grew by 179% and 169%, respectively [15]. According to a group of researchers from the University of California, there were 2.1 million excess purchases of firearms from March to May 2020 – 64.3% more than expected and 644.4 excess purchases per 100,000 population [16]. Given the similar development of other pandemic-related processes in Russia and the United States, it can be assumed that it is appropriate to project such an increase in demand for weapons in Russia. With significant difficulties in its legal selling, the number of cases of illegal manufacture, acquisition, and sale of weapons is increasing.

A person's fear of becoming a victim of a crime is reduced if the fundamental rights and freedoms of the individual are protected. Both the actual level and the formed public opinion about the high level of protection are of key importance. Its formation is mainly influenced by the productivity of the law enforcement agencies' work and the coverage of this issue by the media.

Aggression, fears, and difficulties in life during the pandemic were suppressed in part of the population with the help of psychoactive substances. There are currently over 35 million drug addicts in the world. Since 2009, their number has increased by 30%, most of them are young people. According to the UN Office, the restrictions imposed in connection with the COVID-19 disease have intensified the drug situation [17].

Closing borders between countries, restricting the movement of people and goods violated the plans of the illegal drug smuggling business, which created a shortage of drugs on the black market. To avoid material losses, drug traffickers began to sell more dangerous synthetic drugs, and the number of underworld drug laboratories increased. Due to the shortage of the usual drugs, drug users switched to the others. Intravenous use has become more frequent, which will entail an increase in the number of HIV and hepatitis infections [18, p. 270].

The drug business has long captured the Internet and other digital platforms [19, p. 226; 20, p. 1323], and in conditions of self-isolation it almost completely moved there as long as drug advertising and conditions for expanding the client base were improved. Due to the lack of various ways of leisure, entertainment, and live communication, being at home for 24 hours, people began to look for other sources of emotions. Youth, which is a vulnerable group for drug trafficking [21, p. 6], lacking habitual activity often experience depression, become more inclined to consume prohibited drugs and substances. In conditions of isolation and remote education, adolescents receive various offers on the Internet for the purchase of drugs, often of low-quality substances, with possible serious harm to health that can occur after the first use.

The increase in the unemployment rate and the reduction in income during a pandemic are factors in attracting new people to the drug business with the offer of “easy money” and a guarantee of complete safety [22, p. 1]. In despair, backed by no understanding of when the situation is going to stabilize, people agree, fulfill orders, receive good rewards, and compare the amount of income and time spent with those at the previous job.

5 Conclusion

The latency level of domestic violence in Russia is at its maximum, which is higher than in several European countries. The draft laws on domestic violence require the addition of sections on the subjects, means, and methods of preventing family conflicts, including terms of protecting children. Removing children from the family does not eliminate family problems, and often does not protect the interests of children either.

The pandemic has created favourable conditions for the expansion of borders in the drug business and the shortage of smuggled drugs, formed a predominance of synthetic drugs in the domestic market, and formed fear of the population for the future which was neutralized by illegal arms trafficking.

Preventive actions of law enforcement agencies and legal education of the population are of prime importance when counteracting highly latent types of crime.

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