
Racist Violence in Sweden

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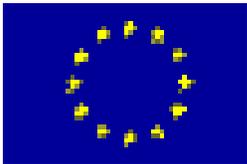
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An assessment of overall trends and patterns

In Sweden, several studies have pointed out that immigrants and persons born in Sweden, who have foreign born parents, are subject to greater levels of racism and discrimination¹. Among the immigrant group, immigrants/descendants from the Middle East and Africa are the targets of Islamophobia and/or Afrophobia. Other vulnerable groups of racist and religious hate crimes are the Roma and the Jewish community.

In Sweden, statistics on racist violence and hate crimes are compiled in annual reports by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet, Brå). These reports are primarily a statistical summary of the hate crimes reported to the police. A major change in the definition of hate crimes was made in 2008, when Brå decided to expand the scope of hate crimes to include offences between minority groups and offences by minority groups towards majority groups. New hate crime motives were added such as hate crimes towards Afro-Swedes (Afrophobic hate crimes) and Roma (anti-Roma hate crimes) since these groups emerged as being particularly vulnerable².

In 2009, Brå reported that there were 585 reports containing an **Afrophobic motive**. The kind of xenophobia/racism that afro-Swedes experience in the Swedish society is based on their ethnic background, skin colour and nationality³. These can be in the form of racial insults in graffiti sprayed on front doors saying 'ape', defamation by being called 'nigger' or being assaulted in a market due to skin colour. Although Afrophobic hate crimes are a growing concern in Sweden, there is still lack of knowledge about the exposure of Afro-Swedes to hate crime and discrimination⁴. According to Brå, unlawful threats and molestation represent 37% of all Afrophobic hate crimes reported, which makes this the most common crime category. Violent crime (26%) and defamation (19%) are the next most common types of crime⁵.

In 2009, just fewer than 120 reports were identified as having a primary offence with an **anti-Roma motive**. Brå reported that unlawful threats and molestation represent 44% of all anti-Roma hate crimes reported, which makes this the most common crime category. Violent crime and agitation against ethnic group (10%) and defamation (12%) are the next most common types of crime. Other crimes (4%) and criminal damage (3%) are

¹ De los Reyes m.fl. 2002, Dahlstedt, Dahlstedt & Lindberg 2002.

² The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention http://www.bra.se/extra/news/?module_instance=3&id=310 assessed 10 July 2010.

³ Experiences of discrimination and racism among young people with African background in Sweden, maps out different types of racism and discrimination experienced by young people in Sweden. Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, DO (2007, p. 55).

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention Report Hatbrott (2010: 12). http://www.bra.se/extra/faq/?module_instance=2&action=question_show&id=559&category_id=0 p. 38 assessed 10 July 2010.

less common compared with other hate crime motives⁶. Information and data on racial violence by Brå show that are subjected to defamation by being called “gypsy” or by being subjected to unlawful discrimination by being refused entry into shops because of their origin. Although the victimization of Roma is increasing, there is still lack of knowledge about the exposure of Roma to hate crime and discrimination.⁷

Reported **Anti-religious hate crimes** (Islamophobic, anti-Semitic and other antireligious hate crimes) by Brå, show that the crimes committed are often cases of vandalism of premises linked to religion, such as mosques, synagogues, churches or cemeteries, but also harassment of persons because of their religious faith. In 2009, there were almost 600 reports identified as containing an anti-religious motive. Of all reported anti-religious hate crimes, 42% were anti-Semitic, 33% were assessed to be Islamophobic, and 25% were all other forms of anti-religious hate crimes⁸.

In the report published by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention in 2010 regarding statistical data of hate crimes during 2009, the number of cases with a xenophobic/racist motive amounted to 4,100. This is a decrease of about 100 reports compared to 2008. The report showed that the majority of all hate crimes reported are motivated by xenophobia/racism (71%)⁹. The most common offence types found among xenophobic/racist hate crimes are unlawful threats and harassment (42%) followed by violent offences (22%) and defamation (14%)¹⁰.

In 2009, there were 555 white power ideology motivated hate crimes; the majority of these were xenophobic/racist hate crimes (81%). The most common crimes reported were criminal damage/graffiti (35%) and agitation against an ethnic group (37%). This means that a total of 6% of all hate crime can be linked to a national socialist organisation or right-wing extremist group¹¹.

Looking at trends in victimization over time can be difficult since the definition of hate crimes was changed in 2008. It is Brå’s view that it is not possible to directly compare the levels for all hate crimes and xenophobic/racist hate crimes with previous years.

When we investigate the perpetrators of xenophobic/racist hate crimes, the absolute majority of them (97%) were committed against minority groups by the majority groups (77%). Only 20% of the perpetrators were other minority groups. The least reported xenophobic/ racist hate crimes (4%) were committed against the majority group, which are people of a Swedish background¹².

⁶ The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention Report Hatbrott (2010: 12). http://www.bra.se/extra/fag/?module_instance=2&action=question_show&id=559&category_id=0 p. 40 assessed 10 July 2010.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid. p. 42.

⁹ Ibid. p.26.

¹⁰ Ibid. p.31.

¹¹ Ibid. p. 57.

¹² Ibid. p. 32.

The authorities responsible for hate-crime data collection in Sweden are the Law enforcement agency / Police Prosecutors office and the National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå), which works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime and prevention¹³. The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority is responsible for assessing state compensation, administering the Fund for Victims of Crime and acting as an expert centre¹⁴.

Although racist hate crimes have consistently been in the majority (71%) of all reported hate crimes to the police in Sweden, there is still a lack of research in this area compared to other forms of hate crimes such as homophobic hate crimes¹⁵. Very few projects or research on racial violence are actually funded by the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority. This can be compared to the relatively massive funding that homophobic hate crimes have received¹⁶. This lack of knowledge and funding on racist violence was confirmed by Gudrun Nordborg at the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority. She explained that in recent years they have not funded any projects about racial violence and hate crimes¹⁷.

One of the few reports on racial violence published by the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority is the report *Offer för hatbrott* (Victim of hate crime). In the report there is a section about Afrophobic hate crimes and the lack of funding of research and projects aimed at fighting racist violence presented by the NGO; the Afro-Swedish Association¹⁸.

Among NGOs working with anti-Roma hate crimes, the Roma International Association has concentrated on increasing the authorities' understanding of the Roma's situation. The federation has also concentrated on encouraging Roma to report crimes, but also for the authorities to differentiate between discrimination and hate crime¹⁹.

The anti-discrimination agencies also receive reports about racist violence. In a report made by the anti-discrimination agency in Helsingborg, they raised attention to a case

¹³ <http://www.bra.se/> accessed 11 August 2010.

¹⁴ Brottsoffermyndigheten; <http://www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se/default.asp?id=1345> accessed 11 August 2010.

¹⁵ Tiby, Eva (2000). *De utsatta: brott mot homosexuella kvinnor och män*. Stockholm: Folkhälsoinstitutet. Tiby, Eva och Lander, Ingrid (1996). *Hat, hot, våld: utsatta homosexuella kvinnor och män: en pilotstudie i Stockholm*. Stockholm: Folkhälsoinstitutet. Tiby, Eva (1999). *Hatbrott?: homosexuella kvinnors och mäns berättelser om utsatthet för brott*. Stockholm: Stockholms universitet, Kriminologiska institutionen.

¹⁶ One of the few reports published about xenophobic hate crimes is the report *Intolerance* by Brå and the Forum for Living History published in 2004. The report examines the trends of xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism and homophobia among Swedish school children,

¹⁷ Telefon discussion with Gudrun Nordborg, The Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority, 2010-07-15.

¹⁸ Brottsoffermyndigheten, 'Offer för hatbrott - vad har gjorts och vad kan förbättras?'

<http://www.brottsoffermyndigheten.se/Sidor/EPT/Bestallningar/PDF/Offer%20f%C3%B6r%20hatbrott%2C%20rapport.pdf> accessed 11 August 2010.

¹⁹ Brå, *Hate Crimes, Reports to the police where the motivation for crime includes ethnic background, religious faith, sexual orientation or transgender identity or expression*, (Stockholm, Brå, 2008) http://www.bra.se/extra/measurepoint/?module_instance=4&name=Hatecrime_2008_summary.pdf&url=/dynamaster/file_archive/090916/072681d84616ef1e0cda07047c76ab62/Hatecrime%255f2008%255fsummary.pdf accessed 11 August 2010.

where a 10 year old Roma boy was harassed and physically violated because of his Roma background. The school denied the incident and didn't take any measures to ensure that such an incident would happen again. The case was later reported to the Equality Ombudsman²⁰.

Although Brå has reported that Islamophobic hate crimes have decreased during 2009, the media reports and the experience of NGOs show otherwise. NGOs such as the Sweden's Young Muslims have raised attention to the piles of hate mails and threats they receive on a daily bases. The organization has repeatedly complained about the way the police handle these cases by deciding to discontinue the investigations²¹. The anti-discrimination agency in Örebro has also received similar death threats and they too have raised concerns regarding the lack of investigation into these cases by the police authorities²².

In the statistics from Brå, anti-Semitic hate crimes have increased the most during 2009. This is consistent with the media reports and the experiences from NGOs. During 2009 several cases of damages towards Jewish buildings and sites were reported in Malmö, which is a city in southern Sweden. Members of the Jewish community were concerned for their children's safety at their pre-schools and Jewish families decided in quantities to leave Malmö in order to escape persecution and harassment²³.

A heated debate took place in 2009 regarding the increasing Islamophobia in Sweden. Several incidents of harassment against Muslims were reported, among these the case of an Imam in Malmö who was shot at through the window²⁴. However, the most reported incident in the Swedish Media on Islamophobia related to an article published by the newspaper *Aftonbladet*. In the article, Jimmie Åkesson, head of the far-right Sweden Democrats claimed that Islam is the biggest threat to Sweden since World War II. According to Åkesson, 'more than ten Muslim terrorist organizations have been established in Sweden'. He argued that Muslim men are highly overrepresented among the perpetrators²⁵. Several NGOs reacted against this article and the space that the newspaper gave to it. The anti-racist organization Centre against Racism (Centrum Mot Rasism) reacted by calling on the Chancellor of Justice to examine whether the statements made by Åkesson were tantamount to agitation against Muslims. The Chancellor of Justice disagreed and a preliminary investigation was never made²⁶.

²⁰ Årsrapport, Diskriminering och rasism i Sverige 2009: Centrum mot rasism, www.centrummotrasism.nu accessed 10 August 2010.

²¹ Dagen 25 January 2010, <http://www.dagen.se/dagen/article.aspx?id=200625> accessed 10 August 2010.

²² Centrum mot rasism (n20).

²³ Sveriges Ungas Muslimer. http://www.ungamuslimer.se/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=262:hotbrev-till-sum-muslimer-oever-2-ar-maste-doedas&catid=1:latest-news&Itemid=53 accessed 10 August 2010

²⁴ Kvallsposten <http://kvp.expressen.se/nyheter/1.1830911/mordforsok-mot-imam-i-malmo> accessed 10 August 2010.

²⁵ Aftonbladet Debatt <http://www.aftonbladet.se/debatt/debattamnen/politik/article5978707.ab> accessed 10 August 2010.

²⁶ Newsmill, 19 October 2009, 'Därför polisanmäler jag Aftonbladet för hets mot folkgrupp' <http://www.newsmill.se/artikel/2009/10/19/mariam-om-ab> accessed 10 August 2010.

Another heated debate in the media during 2009, regarded the racism that was exposed within the Swedish police force. The police were caught on a surveillance video using racist language in December 2008 during a riot in the immigrant dense suburb, Rosengård. The police were filmed calling immigrant youth 'damn little apes'. Later it was also revealed that fictitious names such as 'Negro Nigger' and 'Oskar Nigger' were used by the police force in Skåne [Southern Sweden] during an internal education course. These incidents caused outrage among NGOs, politicians, and the public. The policemen were reported to the Equality Ombudsman and to the Parliamentary Ombudsman [Justitieombudsmannen]. The Chief District Prosecutor initiated a preliminary investigation against the police according to The Act on Persecution of Minority Groups (*Lagen om hets mot folkgrupp*)²⁷.

From 2008, it is mandatory for the police authorities to indicate in a new field whether a crime is a suspected hate crime or not²⁸. The method that Brå uses for identifying hate crime is based on searches and the examination of the narrative text included in the reports by the police²⁹. This means that it is important that the police register the relevant information in the report made by the victim. Unfortunately, this is not always the case. Several NGOs have raised the issue of the lack of knowledge about hate crimes in the police force and that it is common that reported cases are discontinued. The shortcomings by the police authorities in registering hate crimes have also been observed by Brå. The way the police for instance record hate crimes in the RAR system has not effectively captured a large proportion of reported hate crimes. Brå argues that the problem is mainly about differences in the definition, aim and area in recording hate crime properly in RAR³⁰.

This police practice can have an impact on underreporting of incidents of racist violence. Often victims of racist violence are not aware that what they suffered is a hate crime and therefore when and if they report the incident, they do not identify it as such. In turn the police report it as a normal criminal incident. Furthermore, victims do not have a lot of trust in the police and feel that 'that they would not understand' or treat the incident seriously which leads victims not to report the incident.

During 2009 few hate crimes have been tied to a perpetrator. When Brå followed up the reports on hate crimes from 2007 until the end of March 2009, it emerged that few reports (8%) lead to an initial prosecution, a statutory punishment issued by a prosecutor or a waiver of prosecution³¹.

To improve prosecution of hate crimes, research has to be carried out on what happens to reported hate crimes further down the judicial chain. Previous studies have shown that the rule of increased severity of punishment is rarely used – hate crimes do not

²⁷ *Sydsvenskan* 10 February 2009 'Skånepolisen JO-anmäls' <http://sydsvenskan.se/malmo/article411666/Skanepolisen-JO-anmals.html> accessed 10 August 2010.

²⁸ It is recorded in n RAR, the Rational Notification Routine. RAR is a system where criminal offences and events are recorded.

²⁹ Brå, Hate Crimes (n19) p 11.

³⁰ *Ibid*, p77

³¹ *Ibid*.

often lead to more severe punishments. A positive initiative is that Brå intends to start a study aimed at developing the judicial chain perspective in hate crime statistics. This is also an area where NGOs could contribute with their specific knowledge concerning racial violence.

In the Swedish Crime Survey (SCS), a sample of the population was asked whether they were exposed to approximately 10 types of crime. For the following categories of crime: mugging, assault, threats and harassment, the SCS posed a follow-up question as to whether there might have been a xenophobic motive behind the offence. In total, the results from the SCS 2008 show that 1.2% of the population (16–79 years) which is approximately 83,000 persons answered that they had been subjected to a hate crime with xenophobic motives during 2007³².

Looking at the gender suspects of hate crime, men make up the majority (80%). Women are more often subjected to xenophobic/ racist hate crimes. Young people are overrepresented, both as victims and as suspects of hate crimes. The locations that are common to be subjected to hate crimes are one's home, place of work, school and in public places³³.

Typical case study

The case study chosen is a common case that exemplifies hate crimes directed towards NGOs working against racist violence and their staff members.

Death threats linked to hate crimes against ADB in Örebro

A letter was received addressed to B who works at the anti-discrimination agency in Örebro. The letter, which was several pages in length, was full of insults and threats against Muslims. On the front page, it states 'to all Muslims and those who help Muslims will die'. B called the police on the same day that the letter arrived and reported the incident. During the phone call, B pointed out that it is important that the incident is classified as a hate crime. Instead the police that received the report argued that he was not sure whether it was a hate crime. He explained that this depended on how worried the receiver was of the threat. The police promised that B would be contacted within the following five days. After two weeks, B called the police to get information about the progress of the report and why no one had been in contact with him. B got the reply that the investigation had been discontinued on the grounds that it couldn't be investigated any further. B asked why nobody from the police department had contacted him after filing the report. The police on the line referred to the inspector who performed the investigation, but also informed B that the inspector was now on vacation. When B further questioned why the report was not recorded as a hate crime, he got the same answer again being referred to the inspector who performed the investigation.

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

Recommendations

- Provide funding to research how the rule of increased severity of punishment is used concerning hate crimes.
- Official policies against racist violence should focus on combating anti-Roma, Afrophobic, anti-Semitic and Islamophobic hate crimes
- The official recording of racist violence should have common definitions, aims and categories.
- Racist hate crimes should be a priority by the police, other law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system.
- Provide further research on the response of the police, other law enforcement agencies and the criminal justice system to racist violence.
- Increased funding to NGOs working to support the victims of anti-Semitic, Islamophobic, anti-Roma and Afrophobic hate crimes.

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