



Police officers' view of crime prevention work

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Report 2013:21

Summary

Assignment

In 2006, new resources were allocated to the police in order to contribute to greater visibility, more planned crime prevention work and higher detection rate. Based on this, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) has been commissioned by the Government to analyse the police's work. In a first report (Brå 2013:12), we described how the approximately 2,500 new police officers must be seen as a relatively limited investment in practice. Based on the various measurements available, we also described how the extra resources have been distributed among different units and how the result of the work has developed. The report also reveals that the police's crime prevention work has become more extensive and more structured since 2006, but that there are shortcomings in quality, for example in terms of how initiatives are planned and followed up.

This study was initiated by Brå. It not only highlights the Government's investment in the police; it is also intended to provide the decision-makers with a picture of how police officers perceive the current crime prevention work and which factors they feel prevent/promote positive development of this work. It thus becomes a complement to the first report on the investment in more police officers – and to previous studies.

The study is based on the perceptions and opinions of the crime prevention work obtained from a large group of police officers. In two separate surveys, almost 350 local police chiefs and officers on patrol duty,¹⁰ among others, answered the question concerning which problems they feel are the biggest and where they feel there is room for improvement.

The survey for officers on patrol duty was sent out to three police authorities, and the survey for local police chiefs was con-

¹⁰ The officers on patrol duty are primarily emergency response officers in the field and local police officers. There are other groups that work with crime prevention within the police force, but the report is based primarily on information from emergency response officers, local police officers and local police chiefs.

ducted on a national scale. These two surveys constitute a limited foundation for the report and cannot provide a full picture of the police's crime prevention work, especially seeing as one of the surveys – the one for officers on patrol duty – only looks at three authorities and has a high nonresponse rate. Despite these limitations, however, we believe that the study – in combination with previous studies – provides valuable insight into how the studied groups within the police force perceive the crime prevention work.

In tandem with this study, a report is presented concerning the police's investigations of volume crime (Brå 2013:20). The report is based on surveys, participant observations and interviews conducted primarily in four counties.¹¹

Definition of crime prevention work

When defining crime prevention work in the report, we base this on how the police in the study interpret the term themselves. It is primarily a matter of police work with the main goal of preventing crime, accidents, damage/injury and fear of crime. When the study refers to “the police officers in the study” and “according to the survey responses”, it is referring to the response material from both surveys, i.e., the combined responses from police officers on patrol duty and local police chiefs.

Organisation of the police in Sweden

Apart from the National Police Board (RPS), the National Bureau of Investigation and the Swedish National Laboratory of Forensic Science, the Swedish Police consists of 21 police authorities, one for each county. Each police authority is led by a police board of which a County Chief Commissioner and politicians appointed by the Government are members. The police board decides on operational plans, budget, internal organisation and rules of procedure within the authority, whilst the County Chief Commissioner is responsible for the continuous operations and finances. The police authorities govern their own organisational structure, which creates a certain degree of variation. As a rule though, there are units for investigation and prosecution, crime prevention work and service. The size of an authority varies, both geographically and in the number of police officers employed. In Stockholm, for example, there are over 5,500 police officers, compared with Gotland's barely 100-strong force (Brå 2013:20).

¹¹ Stockholm City, Södermanland, Uppsala and Värmland.

Initiatives in traffic are said to be most common

When the local police chiefs and officers on patrol duty were asked to indicate what crime prevention initiatives they feel are most common, there are five areas that came up regularly:

- Initiatives in traffic
- Initiatives for young persons
- Initiatives in alcohol serving environments
- Initiatives to increase police visibility
- Initiatives in collaboration

The area of initiatives mentioned by the largest proportion of respondents is initiatives in traffic; often drink driving or speed checks. In terms of initiatives for young people, these mostly concern visits to schools – to provide information in the classroom, to be seen or to create a contact.

Initiatives in the alcohol serving environment are in most cases a matter of police visibility in such environments. Other initiatives related to visibility consist of patrolling of public places, according to many of the respondents. Targeted initiatives for specially identified “hot spots” are also mentioned quite often. Collaboration initiatives are in many cases directed at young people, according to the officers in the study, and the municipalities are the actors most often named as collaboration partners.

The crime prevention work should – in accordance with the police intelligence model (Swedish abbrev. PUM¹²) – largely be planned in PUM-A.¹³ According to survey responses and interviews with police officers on patrol duty, however, a large part of the daily work is dictated by external events and individual police officers’ own experience and judgment – not by the planning in PUM-A. Examples of initiatives carried out by officers at their discretion are car patrols, spontaneous traffic checks and visits to youth recreation centres.

The police officers wish to work more with visibility and less with traffic

On the question of which crime prevention initiatives the police officers in the study consider to be the most effective, many give initiatives for police visibility and initiatives for young people as their answer. Initiatives in alcohol serving environments, traffic initiatives and collaboration are also seen as effective. In other words, the same areas that come up in the question of which initiatives are most common. The survey responses therefore indicate

¹² The police’s intelligence model: a work and decision-making model that the police’s crime prevention work shall be based on.

¹³ PUM-A is the tool in which work in accordance with PUM is documented.

that the police officers are working with the types of initiatives that they also feel are effective.

One area that the respondents wish to work more with is police visibility. Visibility-related initiatives – such as spontaneous patrolling or patrolling around hot spots – are mentioned more frequently as being effective than commonly occurring. Conversely, the officers in the study would like to work less with traffic initiatives than they do at present.

Several of the initiatives said to be common and effective are not thought to be specially targeted initiatives – spontaneous patrolling of public places in order to increase visibility, for example. Research into work methods for crime reduction shows that targeted and problem-based initiatives are preferable. It should however be noted that increased visibility has been at the centre of the budget proposal for the police for a number of years.

Lack of resources seen as a big problem

In the study, we have attempted to identify the problems and room for improvement the police officers see in the crime prevention work. One of the largest problems is considered to be a lack of resources. Eight out of ten police officers in the study do not feel their workplace has sufficient resources to conduct effective crime prevention work.

Above all, the opinion is that more police officers are needed on patrol duty – both officers working primarily with emergency response and those working with crime prevention. The respondents in the study are of the understanding that the Government's investment in more police officers has not increased the number of officers on patrol duty or had any hugely positive consequences for crime prevention work on the whole. According to Brå's first interim report (Brå 2013:12), there is in fact a greater number of officers on patrol duty today than there was before 2006. The proportion of officers on patrol duty, however, remains the same.¹⁴

In the "Brå's assessment" section later in the report, the perceived lack of resources is put in context and we discuss how it can be viewed in relation to the resources in other police operations.

Better follow-ups could improve status, according to police officers

In addition to the lack of resources, a low status/commitment is considered to be one of the biggest problems in the crime prevention work. Nine out of ten police officers in the study feel that the crime prevention work has a low status in their authority. The ac-

¹⁴ The number of emergency response officers is not considered to have increased either (Brå 2013:12).

tivities considered to have a higher status are primarily emergency response and investigative work.¹⁵

The respondents feel that the fact that the crime prevention work is less valued has the consequence that this work is often unnecessarily accorded a lower priority.

One explanation for the low status, according to the answers to the open question in the study, may be that the crime prevention work becomes “invisible” within the police force. A number of the police officers on patrol duty feel that they do not have an overall picture of the results produced by this work: they would like to receive more and better quality follow-ups of the impact of the crime prevention work. This could increase the status for – as well as the commitment to – crime prevention work.

Crime prevention work felt to be a low priority

A review of the police’s most important policy documents, carried out by the National Police Board (NPB), revealed that these documents do not clarify how the police’s crime prevention work should be prioritised in relation to other operations (RPS 2013). Many local police chiefs in our investigation also feel that the directives they receive from higher up are unclear in terms of how the crime prevention work should be prioritised.

Many police officers in our study feel that the crime prevention work is often lowered in priority in order to give way to other police operations. They feel for example that the work is often unnecessarily interrupted by alerts from the Police Command Centre (Swedish abbrev. LKC¹⁶). However, this picture is complicated in the report on the crime investigation process presented together with this report. In the study, LKC operators say that they take care not to disrupt the planned crime prevention work. Initiatives that are not included in the plan or which are initiated by the police officers themselves are however often interrupted (Brå 2013:20).

In general though, these disruptions are considered to reduce the quality of the crime prevention work: seven of ten local police chiefs share this perception, and police officers on patrol duty also mention disruptions as a problem. The Swedish National Audit Office has previously noted this and believes that there should be greater clarity within the police force of how criminal prevention work should be prioritised in relation to event-driven assignments in daily operations (RiR 2010:23).

¹⁵ This does not, however, apply to all investigative work. In Brå’s study of the criminal investigation process, the investigation of volume crime is also perceived to have a low status within the police force (2013:20).

¹⁶ LKC is the Swedish police’s emergency service centre. Here, decisions are made as to whether or not a police patrol shall be sent to respond to a report. Civilian operators work here around the clock, receiving calls made by the public to SOS Alarm (112).

Local police chiefs want a problem-oriented approach

Another factor considered to be important in the crime prevention work is a problem-oriented approach. This entails working structurally to survey, analyse, implement initiatives and follow up various criminal issues.

The vast majority of local police chiefs feel that it is important to adopt a problem-oriented approach. At the same time, there is a relatively large group – among local police chiefs and officers on patrol duty – that believe the police's current approach is not sufficiently problem-oriented. Surveys and analyses are what the respondents want to improve the most. It is felt that these should be done more often, and that they should be of a high quality. Here, the Criminal Intelligence and Investigation Department (Swedish abbrev. KUT) could play an important role: many local police chiefs feel that they should be able to make their data more useful.

Negative attitude towards PUM and PUM-A

Though the majority of local police chiefs state that they wish to adopt a problem-oriented approach, many are sceptical of the police's current work and decision-making model PUM – one which is based on a problem-orientated approach. There is also a negative attitude towards PUM-A, the IT tool in which work that follows PUM is documented. Over 70 per cent of local police chiefs do not feel that PUM-A improves the crime prevention work. From the open answers, the primary issues are considered to be a lack of time for documenting in PUM-A, low user-friendliness of PUM-A, and that it is difficult to see the benefit of the tool as it is in any case not used as intended. Many local police chiefs witness to criminal prevention work often being documented in duplicate; i.e., in more than one system.

Previous studies have also indicated shortcomings concerning both PUM and PUM-A. They have not been sufficiently well implemented in all police authorities and are not used to maximum effect. For example, according to Brå's first report on the investment in more police officers, only ten per cent of the initiatives in PUM-A fulfil the documentation requirements pertaining to follow-ups (Brå 2013:12).

Newly qualified police officers are thought not to have sufficient knowledge of crime prevention work

Previous reports have indicated a need for more crime prevention work in the syllabus, both in the basic police officer training and in advanced training (RiR 2010:23, RPS 2012:2). Among other things, more training in the problem-based approach is required.

The police officers in our study also see a need for more training in crime prevention work. Eight out of ten local police chiefs feel, for example, that the newly qualified police officers would need more knowledge of crime prevention work during the period from basic training to police officer. The results of the survey do not reveal, however, which parts of the crime prevention work need to be reinforced through education.

Six out of ten local police chiefs also feel that the newly qualified officers are only marginally interested in crime prevention work. At the same time, a high level of commitment is seen as one of the most important success factors in the crime prevention work.

Brå's assessment

According to the police officers in our study, the most common areas for crime prevention initiatives are traffic, young people, alcohol serving environments, visibility and collaboration. We have used research on crime prevention work to attempt to provide a picture of how effective these initiatives are in reducing crime, although we would first like to once more mention that our study is based on two surveys sent out to select professional categories: police officers on patrol duty and local police chiefs. The nonresponse rate in the survey among officers on patrol duty was high, and a number of the open answers concerning the most common measures were very brief. Our investigation therefore does not provide a complete picture of the most common initiatives in the police's crime prevention work. This also applies to other results in the study – the investigation is limited, and this should be taken into account when reading Brå's assessment. In this assessment we bring up questions rather than drawing secure conclusions on the police's crime prevention work.

There is a lack of research which can guide the police in their crime prevention work in a simple manner. The recommendations which can be made based on the research are rather general in nature – apart from work involving hot spots, they primarily involve attempting to adopt a targeted and problem-based approach.

At the same time, the available research findings give cause to question whether some of the initiatives mentioned by many of the officers in our study are effective when it comes to reducing crime. General initiatives targeting young people and general patrolling with no clear focus, for example. Instead of having these general initiatives, there could instead be initiatives that target identified groups of young people that are in the risk zone for criminality and initiatives that involve targeted patrolling based on well-analysed crime issues at specific hot spots.

It should also be added that it is unsure whether the initiatives currently categorised under crime prevention will be seen as such

in the future. During the period 2013–2014, work will be underway at NPB to test a new definition and a new categorisation of crime prevention work (RPS 2013). The new categorisation is considered significantly narrower than that of today, and fewer operations will be classed under crime prevention. This is a positive change. Brå is of the opinion that a narrow definition is likely a prerequisite for clearer and more structured crime prevention work.

Lack of resources and de-prioritisation

A lack of resources is one of the biggest problems in the crime prevention work, according to the police officers in the study. The perceived lack of resources must however be viewed in relation to how police officers in other operations see the resource allocation. Even in the report on the criminal investigation process – published together with this report – the respondents feel that a lack of resources is one of the biggest problems (Brå 2013:20). One perception is that there is too little time for initial investigation measures and too few resources for investigations of volume crime.

When Brå revealed in the first interim report on the Government's investment in the police (Brå 2013:12) that this investment has not resulted in more emergency response officers, the response from many of the senior officers in the police authorities was that despite everything, there are more police officers on patrol working with crime prevention and that LKC thereby has more police officers at the ready when required.¹⁷ Their reasoning seems to be based on the idea that the crime prevention work of for example the local police should be interrupted in the event of an emergency. Inspectors on duty often respond to these comments by saying it is difficult to interrupt planned crime prevention work as the personnel react negatively. This is confirmed by those on patrol duty among the respondents in the study.

Brå is of the opinion – if we work from the first report, from this study, and from the parallel study on the crime investigation process (Brå 2013:12, Brå 2013:20) – that a clearer and more structured analysis within each police area of how the total time in patrol duty should be prioritised between emergency response and planned crime prevention initiatives may be required,¹⁸ in order to guarantee sufficient resources for emergency response work. This can eventually lead to a reduction of the resources for other tasks such as crime prevention work. But on the other hand, this may also lead to fewer disruptions of the planned crime prevention

¹⁷ This came up in a number of talks where Brå's first report on the investment in more police officers was presented (Brå 2013:12).

¹⁸ In this context, there may also be cause to analyse the extent to which special services for crime prevention officers should exist.

work – and this work could thereby retain a higher quality and more motivated personnel.

More follow-ups of higher quality may increase the visibility of the work

Many of the police officers in the study perceive that the crime prevention work has a low status within the police, which among other things leads to de-prioritisation.

At present there is a lack of clear directives from NPB and from authority leadership in terms of how the crime prevention work should be prioritised (RPS 2013). Low status and low priority could be counteracted by clearer guidelines.

Police officers on patrol duty also feel that the crime prevention work is “invisible” as it is not followed up and they do not find out what effect the work has had. This contributes to low status and low commitment, according to them. One way of rectifying this is to perform more and clearer follow-ups of the effects the crime prevention work has, suggest the officers in the study.

Based on this and on what has been revealed by previous studies, Brå believes that more regular evaluations and follow-ups of effects that are more firmly rooted in the operations are required. This is true even if we are aware that it can be difficult to follow up the effects of crime prevention work, partly as there are factors other than the police’s work that affect crime.

Something which stands out as particularly important is to develop the part of PUM/PUM-A that involves defining in concrete terms what one wishes to achieve with an initiative and then follow up and discuss the results with those who have been involved in practical work on the initiative. Despite the importance of this, follow-ups are the least realised part of the problem-orientated approach within the police today (Brå 2013:12). Another important part is that the knowledge being developed both internationally and locally is spread more effectively than it is today.

The police wish to adopt a problem-oriented approach but are sceptical of PUM

Previous studies have indicated that the police’s approach is not sufficiently problem-based. The local police chiefs in our study are in favour of using a problem-based approach, and many wish to do so to a greater extent.

At the same time, many chiefs are sceptical of the police’s intelligence model, PUM. It is difficult to give clear answers to what the cause of this is, but it does not appear to be a matter of unwillingness to use a problem-based approach. Previous studies indicate that PUM could be developed in general and implemented bet-

ter in the police authorities. The importance of adopting a problem-oriented approach could be underlined and the processes for surveys, analyses and follow-ups could be improved.

NPB has also commenced work on developing PUM – and producing a new “PUM handbook” – which at the time of writing is temporarily halted pending various decisions on the new police organisation.

Whilst most local police chiefs wish to use a problem-based approach, in many cases they seem to base the daily crime prevention work on individual officers’ experience and judgment. Based on the survey responses, much of the police’s crime prevention work stands out as self-initiated and unfocused – despite the fact that according to PUM, a lot of this work should be planned (RiR 2010:23, Brå and RPS 2011). A self-initiated, unstructured way of working can be seen as the opposite of a problem-oriented approach in which surveys and analyses of crime form the basis of the work. A problem-oriented approach would likely be a more resource efficient means of reducing crime.

Brå’s proposal to the police authorities is therefore to examine the matter of whether time spent on unfocused, self-initiated work – perhaps unplanned patrolling without a clear purpose above all – can instead be invested in other operations. Planned crime prevention work, for example, which is run with a problem-oriented approach. Conducting more first-hand initiatives in response to volume crime is another example, as discussed in the report on the crime investigation process (Brå 2013:20).

PUM-A could be developed

It would however be unfortunate if better planned crime prevention work resulted in a need to spend more time on administrative tasks. The IT tool PUM-A is already at this stage considered far too time-consuming. A large proportion of the chiefs in the study have a generally negative view of PUM-A, which is likely related to the dissatisfaction with PUM. There is also a dissatisfaction among police officers on patrol duty. This is far from unexpected – a number of previous studies have noted shortcomings in the design, implementation and use of PUM-A.

Based on this and the results of our study, there appears to be cause to review whether or not it is possible to develop PUM-A in parallel with developing PUM. This would include reviewing the processes for surveying, analysing and following up. In addition, the system could likely be more user-friendly. Once development is complete, it seems important that PUM and PUM-A are properly implemented within the police authorities.

It can also be worth reviewing whether the police should make the same careful documentation in PUM-A for all types of initia-

tives. The commitment to and perceived benefit of documenting in PUM-A could possibly improve if the documentation process could be simplified for less extensive initiatives. This allows more room to focus on the more long-term or more important initiatives.

The documentation procedure could be reviewed in general, to see whether it is possible to free up resources for field work. This based on the fact that, among other things, many local police chiefs state that they often need to document the crime prevention work in more than one system.

There may be cause to review police training

Many police officers in our study perceive that newly qualified police officers do not have sufficient knowledge of crime prevention work – something which confirms what previous studies have indicated. It is however difficult to determine whether this is down to the basic police training, police trainee service or something else. It is also difficult based on the study to say more exactly for which parts of the crime prevention work more training is required. This is something that could be studied in more detail in the future, i.e., if the basic training for police officers needs to be improved where crime prevention work is concerned. Among the local police chiefs, for example, as many as eight out of ten perceive a lack of knowledge of crime prevention work among newly qualified officers.

It would also be possible to endeavour to motivate the students during the course of the basic training to work with crime prevention. Today, six of ten local police chiefs do not feel that the newly qualified police officers are especially interested in crime prevention work. This is a cause for concern as motivated police officers are perceived as one of the most important success factors in the crime prevention work.