

English summary

National study of rapes reported to the police

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This study takes as its point of departure the need for a description of reported consummated rape offences (i.e. excluding offences recorded as attempted rape). The objective is to provide a more detailed picture of rape offences than can be seen on the basis of existing crime statistics and thereby improve the basic knowledge available with regard to rapes reported to the police. The study builds to a large extent on information from victims, of whom the vast majority are women. This means that the study proceeds from the perceptions, experiences and from the reality experienced by women.

The study is based on information from approximately 90 per cent of all cases of consummated rape reported to the police in the years 1995 and 2000, which has been collected from each of Sweden's regional police authorities. The material contains data relating to 2,370 reported rapes, with a total of 2,277 victims and 2,745 perpetrators. The police reports refer to acts that were recorded as consummated rapes at the time the incident was originally reported. The information presented in the report is for the most part based on descriptions provided by the victims, which means that data relating to the perpetrators is rather sketchy. Since the data have been collected from police reports, they refer to events where the judicial questions of whether the act constituted a crime and whether the perpetrator is guilty have yet to be established.

The study may be assumed to constitute a faithful reflection of reported rape offending for the two years that have been sampled. Our assessment is that generally speaking there are good grounds for generalising the findings to rape offences reported to the police during the majority of the 1990s and the early years of the 21st century. However, considerably more caution is

required in relation to any attempt to generalise from the findings to the total of actual rape offences, i.e. including those not reported to the police.

In the majority of cases, victims and perpetrators know one another

The findings clearly show that a majority of the total number of reported rapes are committed by perpetrators who are well-known to, or at least acquainted with, the victim. As regards rapes against victims aged fifteen or over, the most common relational pattern involves the victim being, or having been, involved in an intimate relationship with the offender (32 per cent). Of these two alternatives, an ongoing relationship represents the most common pattern (17 per cent). The second most common pattern involves the victim and the perpetrator being superficially acquainted with one another (27 per cent), having met or gone out together one evening for example. Many of the rapes linked to participation in public entertainments are found within this category. The third most common pattern involves a victim and a perpetrator who are not known to one another (20 per cent). Many of the rapes in this category are comprised of assault-rapes. In addition, there are cases where the perpetrator is a member of the victim's immediate or extended family, a close acquaintance, or a colleague from work or school/college, but these patterns are generally less common.

The majority of rapes are committed in the home of one of the parties involved (60 per cent). As regards the large proportion of rapes that are committed by perpetrators with whom the victim is or has been involved in an intimate relationship, other offences are simultaneously reported in addition to the rape itself in over half of such cases. These offences often relate to assaults, commonly combined with threatening behaviour. This shows that the rape itself is often not an isolated incident experienced by the victim, but rather constitutes part of a pattern of victimisation.

The perpetrators in cases of rapes against children under the age of fifteen are also often closely acquainted with the victims, but are primarily members of the victim's immediate or extended family. There are also other ways in which the findings relating to the youngest victims differ from those noted with respect to those aged fifteen or over. Differences are marked in relation to the question of who it is that reports the offence, for example, a factor that is included in the presentation of findings.

The victims are usually young

The study shows that the victims in a significant proportion of cases are very young. Twenty-nine per cent are under eighteen years of age – and thus children according to the definition employed in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. Fifteen per cent of all the rapes included in the study were perpetrated against children under the age of fifteen.

Within the group of victims aged fifteen or over, the median age is 26 years, and slightly over 60 per cent are under 30. When all victims are

included, the median age stands at 20 years in connection with rapes involving more than one perpetrator, 24.5 years in connection with rapes related to participation in public entertainments, and 23 years in relation to assault-rapes.

Types of rape that have attracted special attention

The presentation of findings includes separate presentations of rapes involving more than one perpetrator, rapes related to participation in public entertainments and assault-rapes. These constitute types of rape that have attracted a substantial amount of attention in the context of rape reporting and the debate surrounding this type of crime.

Rapes involving more than one perpetrator comprise eleven per cent of the rapes included in the study, a proportion that is more or less identical across the two years sampled. Perpetrators are counted such as to include co-perpetrators, who may have assisted in the rape by holding the victim down, for example. In the majority of these cases (61 per cent), the rape was committed by two perpetrators. The most common scenario involved the perpetrator first meeting or confronting the victim out of doors, and rapes actually committed out of doors were somewhat more common in this category than rapes committed indoors. The most common pattern in this category of rapes involved perpetrators and victims who were not known to one another (40 per cent of cases), but it was also common for them to be superficially acquainted (33 per cent).

Rapes related to public entertainments comprise those cases where the perpetrator first meets or directly confronts the victim at a place of public entertainment or at a place that may otherwise be linked to participation in public entertainments. Fourteen per cent of the rapes included in the study are of this type, with this proportion once again being the same across the two years sampled by the study. In most cases (70 per cent), the victim and perpetrator are superficially acquainted, not unusually having met for the first time the same evening that the rape is committed. It is common for them to have gone home together, with the most common crime scene being the victim's or the perpetrator's home (47 per cent). The material shows that at least 43 per cent of the perpetrators have consumed alcohol. A large majority of the victims (at least 78 per cent) have also consumed alcohol, and of these some are extremely intoxicated (at least twenty per cent). Information relating to the perpetrator's alcohol consumption is not as complete as that available for the victims. Thus noting a higher proportion among the victims does not in reality mean that more of the victims than the perpetrators have consumed alcohol.

Assault-rapes are defined in the present context as rapes that are committed by perpetrators unacquainted with the victim and that are initiated by means of a sudden attack. Assault-rapes comprise twelve per cent of the total number of rapes included in the study, a proportion that is very similar across the two years sampled. The majority of these rapes are committed out of doors (78 per cent) and many of them take place on the weekend and

during the summer months. Assault-rapes account for 43 per cent of the total number of rapes committed out of doors. Two or more perpetrators are found in a little over one in five assault-rapes. The use of violence is extensive. At least 38 per cent of the victims have been exposed to aggravated and at times extremely serious violence. In at least fifteen per cent of assault-rapes, the victim has been threatened with a knife, gun or some other kind of weapon.

The report presents the major categories of rape separately on the basis of the most common types of relationship found between victim and perpetrator. There are major differences of several different kinds between types of rape differentiated on the basis of the nature of this relationship. The findings show that this division may constitute a fruitful point of departure for discussions and deliberations as to crime policy and other measures that may be introduced to combat different types of rape.

Trends

The number of consummated rapes reported to the police has increased dramatically, more than tripling over the course of the past two decades. A total of 2,261 consummated rapes were reported to the police in the year 2004. The results of the current study do not provide an infallible basis for stating to what extent this massive increase reflects an actual increase in rape crime. In order to clarify trends in actual rape crime with a greater level of confidence, complementary sources of data are required, such as may be produced by recurrent, large-scale survey studies. The simple analyses conducted on the basis of the crime statistics and the material collected specifically for the current study do not suggest that a major increase has occurred in the propensity to report these offences. One finding that points in this direction is the lack of any substantial differences in the distribution of the variables examined in the study between the two years. It does appear to be the case however that a legislative change introduced in 1998 has led to certain offences that would previously have been recorded as sexual coercion or attempted rape, subsequently being recorded as consummated crimes. It is likely that this change may explain some part of the substantial increase in the number of reported rapes over recent years.

It is not possible to exclude the possibility that the dramatic increase in reported rape offences may at least to some extent be the result of an increase in the propensity to report these crimes to the police. On the whole, however, no support was found for interpretations suggesting that this factor, even taken in combination with the effects of the legislative change referred to above, would be sufficient to explain any major part of the increase in the number of reported rapes. Thus it has not been established, but it does not appear unlikely, that the number of rapes committed has in fact increased.