

English summary

Crime among persons born in Sweden and other countries

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The objective of this study is to update the picture of registered crime among immigrants that has been presented in previous research. The primary intention has been to compare the findings from an earlier study conducted by the National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) with corresponding data from more recent years. The most recent findings available on persons suspected of offences relate to the period up to and including the year 1989. Since this time, almost 300,000 refugees have arrived in Sweden. The number of persons born in Sweden to one or two parents who were themselves born abroad has also increased. At the same time, the recession of the 1990s has involved increased levels of problems for these groups. The proportion within these groups who were unemployed and dependant on welfare benefits increased, as did levels of residential segregation.

It is against this background that the National Council decided it was warranted to investigate how these factors have affected the extent to which persons from an overseas background are registered as suspects in connection with criminal offences. The crime period examined covers the five years between 1997 and 2001 inclusive, i.e. the period twelve years subsequent to that previously studied by the Council (1985-1989). The study relates only to persons registered as resident in Sweden during the period in question, and not to persons who only stayed in Sweden on a temporary basis.

THE PICTURE PRESENTED IN PREVIOUS SWEDISH STUDIES

Previous Swedish studies on the criminality of immigrants have shown that persons born outside Sweden have higher levels of registered crime than persons born within the country. In the National Council's study from the period 1985-1989, the findings showed that it was twice as common for

persons born abroad to be registered for criminal offences by comparison with persons born in Sweden to two Swedish born parents. Persons born in Sweden to one or two foreign-born parents were also registered for crime more often than those with two Swedish born parents. For this group, it was 1.5 times as likely to be registered as crime suspects.

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES HAVE PRODUCED RESULTS THAT DIFFER IN PART FROM THOSE FOUND IN SWEDEN

The majority of current international studies on registered crime, like their Swedish counterparts, show that persons born outside the country in question tend to be registered in connection with criminal offences to a greater extent than persons born within the country. There are a number of older, American studies, however, which show the opposite, namely that persons who have migrated to a new country tend to commit offences to a lesser extent than persons born within the country to two parents who were also born there.

International studies have also focused special attention on crime among those born in the new country but to one or two parents born overseas. The general picture produced by these studies indicates that this group is registered for crime to a greater extent than both those born overseas and those born within the country to two native born parents.

When these results are interpreted, emphasis is often placed on the notion that some children born to non-native parents, who grow up in the new society, are torn between two cultural worlds. They often experience their situation and their future possibilities as more limited than others of the same age whose parents were born within the country, which may lead to their becoming frustrated and alienated.

THE MAJORITY OF THOSE REGISTERED FOR CRIMES ARE PERSONS BORN IN SWEDEN TO SWEDISH BORN PARENTS

The National Council's study includes all those persons aged between 15 and 51 years of age who were registered as resident in Sweden in 1997. This group comprises approximately 4.4 million individuals. Slightly under 60 per cent of the almost 1,520,000 offences for which these persons were registered during the period covered by the study can be attributed to persons who were born in Sweden to two Swedish born parents. Almost one quarter of the crimes are registered to persons born overseas, and almost twenty per cent to persons born in Sweden to one or two parents born abroad.

Using this as its point of departure, the National Council has attempted to estimate how the *total number* of reported offences is distributed across different groups. The picture then changes somewhat, primarily because those offences committed by persons not registered as resident in Sweden are also included. This group is estimated to account for seven per cent of the offences reported during the study period. This represents an increase from the figure of three per cent noted in the National Council's previous study.

**THOSE BORN ABROAD ARE REGISTERED FOR OFFENCES
MORE OFTEN THAN PERSONS BORN IN SWEDEN**

By far the majority of all those included in the groups examined in the study have not been suspected in connection with any offences during the five year study period. This is true irrespective of ethnic background. The proportions of the different groups not suspected of any offences at all varies between 88 and 95 per cent.

The proportion suspected of offences is higher however among those born outside Sweden or who have one or two foreign-born parents, by comparison with those born in Sweden to two Swedish born parents. It is two and a half times as likely for persons born abroad to be registered as crime suspects as it is for Swedish born persons with both parents born in Sweden. They thus have a "relative risk" of 2.5. For those born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents, it is twice as common to be registered as it is among persons born in Sweden to two Swedish born parents. For this group, then, the "relative risk" is 2. Among those with one Swedish born and one non-Swedish born parent, the risk is 1.4 times as great. Thus the pattern that emerged in the National Council's previous report, namely that the risk of being registered for crime was lower among the Swedish born "children of immigrants" than it was among those who had themselves migrated to Sweden, is also apparent in this new study.

RELATIVE RISK HIGHER FOR SOME OFFENCES THAN FOR OTHERS

If the material is broken down into different offence types, the proportion of suspects from each background group becomes appreciably smaller. The proportion of persons born abroad that are suspected in connection with a theft offence (Chapter 8 of the Swedish Penal Code – *Brottsbalken*), or a crime against the person (Chapter 3), which includes assault offences, lies at slightly over four per cent for each offence category over the course of the five year observation period. For other types of crime, the proportion of foreign-born persons in the population is lower. At the same time, it may be noted that the relative risk for being registered for crime among persons born overseas is greater for certain offences than it is for others. It is four times as likely, for example, for foreign-born persons to be suspected of lethal violence and robbery as it is for persons born in Sweden to Swedish born parents. This involves 0.03 per cent of persons born overseas being suspected in connection with lethal violence during the study period and 0.35 per cent being suspected of robbery.

**"CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS" ARE MORE COMMONLY
REGISTERED FOR TYPICAL YOUTH CRIMES**

On the whole, those born in Sweden to at least one overseas born parent assume an 'in-between' position as regards the question of being suspected of criminal offences. It is less common for members of this group to be suspected in connection with various types of crime than it is for those who were themselves born overseas, but it is more common than among persons born in Sweden to two Swedish born parents. There are however certain types of offences that are more common within this group than they are in

either of the other two groups. These offence types primarily involve categories of crime where a large proportion of the offences are generally committed by youths (irrespective of background). These involve car thefts, vandalism, drunken driving, drug offences including offences that only involve personal consumption, and crimes against the Weapons Act (*vapenlagen*) and the Knives Act (*knivförbudslagen*).

THE PICTURE IS RELATIVELY STABLE IN COMPARISON WITH THE COUNCIL'S PREVIOUS STUDY

If the findings from the current study are compared with those produced in the National Council's previous study, the picture that emerges is relatively unchanged. For those born in Sweden to one or two foreign-born parents, the relative risk is more or less the same as that noted twelve years ago; 1.6 as compared with 1.5 in the previous study. Among those persons born abroad, the size of the relative risk has increased somewhat, from 2.1 in the previous study to 2.5 in the current one.

ARE THESE LEVELS OF RELATIVE RISK TO BE CONSIDERED HIGH?

Whether or not the levels of relative risk presented by the different groups are to be considered high may be a matter for debate. To take one example, the difference between men and women as regards crime is greater than the differences based on whether or not a person was born in Sweden. It is 3.5 times as likely for men to be suspected of crimes as it is for women. With regard to more serious offences, the differences between men and women are greater still. Furthermore, it is six times as likely for persons from families registered as having received social welfare benefit to be registered for crime as it is for persons from families who have not been in receipt of such benefits.

LEVELS OF OVER-REPRESENTATION GREATER AMONG GROUPS FROM CERTAIN AREAS OF THE WORLD THAN OTHERS

The proportion of persons suspected of offences is greater in groups from certain geographical areas than it is in those from others. This is the case for certain parts of Africa, such as North Africa, for example, and for Western Asia. Those coming from West European countries, South-East Asia and from the USA, Canada, Australia and New Zealand comprise the groups of those born outside Sweden who are registered as crime suspects least often. The factor that distinguishes the areas whose emigrants are suspected of offences in Sweden to a particularly large extent is that the living conditions in these areas are unlike those in the western world. In addition, those moving to Sweden from these areas have often been "forced" to leave their homelands as refugees, whereas those arriving from western countries most often come more of their own free will.

The high level of relative risk noted among North Africans does not however mean that persons from North Africa are responsible for a large proportion of the offences that are linked to crime suspects in Sweden. On the contrary they account for a very small proportion of these offences. The groups that dominate in this regard are those from the Nordic countries.

Persons from Finland, Norway, Denmark and Iceland account for almost five per cent of those suspected of offences, whereas the corresponding figure for North Africans is 0.7 per cent. Amongst other things, of course, this is a result of the fact that the number of persons living in Sweden who were born in North Africa is not very large. The number of immigrants moving to Sweden from her Nordic neighbours is much larger.

IMMIGRATION IN EARLY CHILDHOOD CONSTITUTES A PROTECTIVE FACTOR AGAINST INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME

International research shows that persons born abroad who move to the new country of residence during their first years of life find it easier to adapt than those who arrive once they have reached school-age. The National Council's study indicates that this general observation also holds in relation to criminal behaviour. Those who migrated to Sweden at a very young age, i.e. before starting school, are registered as suspected offenders to a relatively minor extent. Persons who were of school age, up to and including the late teenage years, when they arrived in Sweden, comprise the group whose members were most often registered in connection with crime.

LEVELS OF RELATIVE RISK DIMINISH WHEN OTHER SOCIAL FACTORS ARE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION

We know from previous research that certain background factors, such as age and gender, covary with the risk for involvement in crime. Against this background, the National Council has subjected the material to a standardisation procedure in relation to gender, age, level of education and occupational income. This standardisation means that the different groups have been "equalised" in relation to these factors by means of statistical procedures. On the basis of these statistical calculations, all groups are assigned the same proportions of men, younger persons etc. Once the material has been standardised in this way, the level of relative risk among those born abroad is reduced from 2.5 to 2.1. The size of the relative risk among those born in Sweden to two foreign-born parents also diminishes substantially from 2.0 to 1.5. One reason for this is that these groups contain a larger proportion of young men with low levels of educational attainment and income by comparison with those born in Sweden to two Swedish born parents.

By contrast, the size of the relative risk is not affected to any appreciable extent among persons born in Sweden with only one parent born abroad. One explanation for this is that this group's "profile" in relation to the factors discussed is more similar to that of those born in Sweden to two Swedish born parents.

Discussion

THE PICTURE IS MUCH THE SAME AS IN THE NATIONAL COUNCIL'S PREVIOUS STUDY

Immigrants' risk of being registered for crime has not changed in any pronounced way since the previous study conducted by the National Council, which related to the situation at the end of the 1980s. This means that:

- The vast majority of immigrants are not registered in connection with crime, either in the previous study or the current one.
- The relative risk for being registered in connection with crime has increased among persons born abroad, but is more or less unchanged among those born in Sweden to one or two foreign-born parents. Among those born outside Sweden, the size of the relative risk has increased from 2.1 to 2.5. If one standardises in order to take into account group differences in relation to age, gender, level of education and income, the relative risk among those born outside Sweden diminishes to 2.1.
- The increase in the size of the relative risk among those born abroad is not due to certain groups of immigrants being registered in connection with crime to a greater extent today than they were twelve years ago. The increase is instead explained primarily by an increase in the number of persons in Sweden who belong to those refugee groups that previous research has already shown to have a particularly high level of relative risk.
- The pattern noted in the previous study that the "children of immigrants" are in Sweden registered in connection with crime to a lesser extent than those who have themselves migrated to Sweden, which is unusual from an international perspective, is also found in the current study.

The fact that the picture of immigrants' crime has changed so little may seem remarkable given the changes that have occurred in Swedish society during the 1990s. Sweden has witnessed both the arrival of sizeable new groups of refugees, and a worsening of the situation on the labour market whose effects have been particularly negative for immigrants. The proportion of those who have migrated to Sweden who live in "poverty"²⁰ has increased, as has the level of residential segregation. The fact that immigrants' relative risk for being registered in connection with crime has remained relatively constant over a long period of time, despite both a gradual increase in the number of persons who have themselves migrated to Sweden, and changes in the surrounding society that meets them, is however something that has already been noted in previous studies. Thus in von Hofer, Sarnecki and Tham's study from 1997, it was shown that the relative risk among immigrants for being convicted of offences had remained relatively constant since the 1970s. They too felt there was good reason to emphasise the fact that the trend had been so stable, despite changes in the reasons underlying immigration – from labour force immigration to refugee immigration and the immigration of family members of those already resident in Sweden – and despite the fact that immigrants are arriving from increasingly distant countries.

²⁰ i.e. persons with a total annual income below the social allowance standard.

IS THE RELATIVE RISK DUE TO IMMIGRANTS COMMITTING OFFENCES MORE OFTEN, OR IS IT A RESULT OF DISCRIMINATION?

Even if the size of immigrants' relative risk for being registered in connection with crime has not increased very much since the National Council's previous study, it has been found to exist in this study too. How then can this higher level of risk be understood? The question that must first be discussed is that of the extent to which these relative risks are the result of actual differences in levels of involvement in crime between persons with an immigrant background and those who do not have such a background. Or are relative risks primarily the result of a process of selection when crimes are reported or attended to by the police?

Based on the knowledge available at the present time, the National Council's assessment is that selection processes associated with the reporting of offences to the police and police investigative activities may explain a certain amount of the relative risk for being registered in connection with crime noted in this report. It is also reasonable to assume that this selection effect is greater the more a given group differs culturally and in appearance from persons with a Swedish background. This would suggest that the overestimation of the group's actual level of involvement in crime would be particularly substantial for those groups with the highest levels of relative risk, i.e. those from certain parts of Africa and Western Asia. If it had been possible to study the actual criminality of different groups, then the differences in the proportion committing offences are likely to have been somewhat smaller than those presented in this study.

The National Council's assessment, however, is that this selection effect nonetheless only explains a small part of the relative risk noted, and that the results presented in the report may be used in order to discuss patterns and trends in relation to criminality within different groups.

FACTORS THAT MAY CONTRIBUTE TO IMMIGRANTS COMMITTING CRIMES MORE OFTEN THAN OTHERS

What is it then in the life-situation experienced by immigrants that might explain their being registered in connection with crime more often than others? There are three main factors that are usually emphasised in this context:

- It is difficult to make the break from one's homeland and settle down in a different country.
- Social factors that generally increase the risk for involvement in crime are more common among immigrants.
- The reception given to immigrants in Sweden is flawed.

DIFFICULT TO MAKE THE BREAK FROM ONE'S HOMELAND AND MOVE TO A DIFFERENT COUNTRY

The thing that all immigrants who come to Sweden have in common is that they have made a break from their homeland and have settled in a different country. To leave one's homeland and the ties one has there on a more or less permanent basis involves a large number of difficulties, irrespective of the reason for emigration. One is forced to separate oneself from an environment one knows well, from friends and from relatives. One then arrives

in an unfamiliar environment, with a new language and to a varying extent also a new culture. For many of the refugees who arrived in Sweden during the 1990s from countries suffering the effects of war, there are additional difficulties associated with the fact that they have had traumatic experiences both within their homeland and during their flight from the country, which they have to work through at the same time as they are to be introduced into Swedish society (Allwood & Franzén, 2000). In spite of these difficulties, the majority of immigrants succeed in adapting to their new life in Sweden. Among those who feel alienated and experience their life-chances to be inadequate, however, the risk for criminal behaviour may increase (Martens 1997; von Hofer, Sarnecki & Tham, 1997).

SOCIAL FACTORS THAT INCREASE THE RISK FOR INVOLVEMENT IN CRIME

A large number of studies have shown that as a group, persons born abroad have poorer social opportunities and a worse social situation than the average Swede. This is the case in relation to education, for example, work, income, housing and physical and mental health. These factors generally affect the risk for involvement in crime. The National Council shows in one section of the current study that the findings are affected when the material is standardised to "equalise" all of the groups examined in terms of their level of education and occupational income (and also age and gender). When this is done, the between-group differences in the proportions that are registered in connection with crime diminish somewhat. Occupational income appears to be particularly significant in this context. It is also possible that a further analysis of differences in living conditions would produce additional "explanations" of the relative risk for being registered in connection with crime noted among those born outside Sweden.

FLAWS IN THE RECEPTION RECEIVED BY IMMIGRANTS

The third possible explanation, which is closely linked to the two already discussed, is that the reception received by immigrants in Sweden does not serve to overcome the difficulties they face in the way that it should. Several researchers have argued that widespread prejudices about groups of immigrants contribute to public sector agencies and various institutions sometimes subjecting immigrant groups to a structural negative discrimination (de los Reyes & Winborg, 2002; Kamali, 2005). This is perhaps made most visible in the research focusing on the situation of immigrants on the labour market (Höglund, 1998; Sidebäck et al., 2000; SOU 2001:79). Prejudice may also serve as a contributory explanation for the increasingly marked level of ethnic residential segregation, however. In certain areas, this has reached a point where families, children and youths born outside Sweden hardly ever meet and talk to persons who do not themselves have a non-Swedish background. This segregation involves a risk for the intensification of an "us and them" perspective, which will worsen the possibilities for immigrants to integrate in Sweden and to feel a sense of solidarity in relation to Swedish society. Particularly among youths, these factors are likely to involve an increased risk for crime.