



# Residential burglary

Development, nature, and police handling

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Author: Lina Fjelkegård and Emma Patel

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, Box 1386, 111 93 Stockholm, Sweden  
Tel: +46(0)8 527 58 400, Email: [registrator@bra.se](mailto:registrator@bra.se), [www.bra.se](http://www.bra.se)

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**English summary of Brå report 2024:12**

# Summary

The number of residential burglaries has decreased sharply in recent years – between 2017 and 2023, they were basically halved. However, many people still become victims of burglary. In 2023, 10,000 residential burglaries were reported to the police, and only 4 per cent were solved. Those affected may experience the burglary as a violation of privacy, and feel unsafe at home.

For these reasons, Brå initiated this study on residential burglaries. The purpose is to provide an overall picture of the nature of residential burglaries, but also to examine the development of this crime over time, and how the police handle residential burglaries. Different methods and materials were used for this. We start from a number of preliminary investigations into residential burglaries, which Brå has coded and analysed. We have also used reporting statistics, data from police records, and interviews with police employees.

## **International networks have probably had an impact**

Between 2007 and 2017, the number of reported residential burglaries in Sweden increased significantly. Brå has investigated possible explanations, and one piece of the puzzle seems to be increased activity from international crime networks from Eastern Europe. This may, in turn, be due to more open borders to the East and increased unemployment after the financial crisis in 2008.

After 2017, the number of reported residential burglaries decreased – and around that time, border protection in Sweden was also enhanced. Meanwhile, the number of suitable objects for theft in dwellings seems to have decreased. The pandemic, which meant that people worked from home more, may also have contributed to a decrease in residential burglaries. However, Brå's review is only cursory, and several factors may have influenced the development of residential burglaries.

## **Differences between single-family houses and flats**

Metropolitan municipalities generally have the highest number of reported burglaries per dwelling. Sparsely populated municipalities have the lowest number. The differences between the metropolitan municipalities and others mainly concern burglaries of single-family homes – flat burglaries

are more evenly distributed across the country. There are also differences between single-family homes and flats in how the burglaries are committed. Single-family home burglaries are most often done by someone breaking open a window or a back door, while flats are more often breached through the entrance door. Flat burglaries are also more often committed with a low degree of finesse than single-family home burglaries.

Most residential burglaries are committed during the day and the victim is rarely at home. The things stolen are often small and valuable.

### **Two-thirds acted professionally**

To describe suspects of residential burglaries, Brå made a distinction between amateur and professional perpetrators. In one-third of the preliminary investigations, the perpetrators were classified as clear amateurs. They more frequently burglarised flats, and they relatively often had an addiction or mental illness. The female suspects most often fell into this group.

The more professional perpetrators are more difficult to identify – they are less often caught and there is therefore less information about them in Brå's material. However, there is one group that can be described as clearly professional, and this is probably where you'll find the international crime networks. According to the police, they often use false identities, change registration plates, and clean up traces at the crime scene.

There is probably also an intermediate category of perpetrators who are neither amateurs nor among the most expert. The boundaries are also fluid for what is organised crime and what is not. People can, for example, be recruited temporarily by the criminal networks.

### **The police could take more investigative measures**

According to the police's internal recommendations, the authority should always send out a police patrol in the event of a residential burglary, and then use specially trained staff for the technical investigation. Both of these things are also often done – a patrol was sent out in 73 per cent of burglaries of single-family houses.

On average, the police carry out four investigative measures per residential burglary. However, Brå estimates that more measures probably could have been taken in almost half of the preliminary investigations. Often, there is no interrogation of an injured party or a witness. Police Region Stockholm

carries out fewer investigative measures than the other police regions. Consistently, the police take more measures in cases of burglaries of single-family houses than in cases of flat burglaries.

Today, the police immediately dismiss one-third of reports of residential burglaries, and the proportion has increased over time. It is also reasonable to immediately dismiss crimes that have little chance of being solved. Not everything that is reported is a crime – Brå sees that one-third of the preliminary investigations probably do not include residential burglaries. At the same time, the proportion of solved cases is only four per cent, and Brå estimates that the police can quite often do more. In particular, interrogations of injured parties and witnesses can be carried out more often.

### **The police can improve coordination of investigations and work more on finding stolen goods**

There are four main ways to catch a perpetrator; in the act, trace evidence, witness identification, and stolen goods. This is according to the reported preliminary investigations. Police catch a suspect *in the act* in one third of the cases. In 29 per cent of cases, *trace evidence* is used to catch the suspect, usually DNA. Often, special local crime scene investigators (LCSI) collect traces. They conduct thorough examinations, which can be used to detect serial crime, but which rarely lead to a match in the police database. Therefore, Brå considers it could sometimes be more efficient to let the first police patrol do the crime scene investigation. This is especially true if there is no functioning crime linkage that can make use of traces collected by LCSI. Such coordination is lacking in several police regions – and it benefits organised crime when each case is handled locally.

In one in five cases, *witness identification* is used to catch the perpetrator. More identifications could probably be made if the police interviewed more witnesses than today. There is also potential for improvement in terms of *stolen goods*. Today, a fifth of the cases are solved by the police identifying stolen goods. However, the goods are often discovered in connection with other matters – there is not much independent monitoring of stolen goods within the police. Brå assesses that there is a need for better IT tools and more active work in finding stolen goods.

## **Brå's assessment and recommendations**

On the basis of the report's conclusions, Brå makes the following recommendations to the Police Authority:

- The police can refine their work based on different types of perpetrators. Professional perpetrators should be subject to crime linkage, so that serial crime is discovered and stopped. The amateur perpetrators can be dealt with locally.
- Brå assesses that the police can conduct witness interviews more often. A methodological support that describes handling witnesses, and also the rest of the work process in the event of a burglary, could improve the work of the police and make it more uniform across the country.
- The police can work more actively in looking for stolen goods. The authority could investigate whether it is possible to search for goods on online market places in an automated way.
- Swedish Police need more effective IT tools in several areas related to residential burglary. National systems for analysing shoe prints and tool marks should be implemented and the police need to use IT tools to analyse modus operandi.
- Today, several police regions lack a functioning organisation for crime linkage of residential burglaries. It needs to be ensured that such crime linkage exists at the regional level throughout the country.
- When residential burglaries are not linked, the potential of the thorough technical investigations that are carried out today is not fulfilled. The police regions need to review how LCSi and crime linkage are dimensioned in relation to each other.
- Police Region Stockholm has the worst clearance rate and investigative measures if you compare the different police regions. It is clear that the police region needs to improve its work with both investigation and crime linkage of residential burglaries.