



Has it become more difficult to obtain person-based clearances for fraud and assault?

*Interim report pursuant to the Government
instruction regarding Performance in respect
of investigation and prosecution*

Has it become more difficult to obtain person-based clearances for fraud and assault?

*Interim report pursuant to the Government
instruction regarding Performance in respect
of investigation and prosecution*

English summary of Brå report 2016:18

**The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) –
centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures**

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)
works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society
by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime
and crime prevention work.

This report is a summary of the Swedish report
Har bedrägerier och misshandel blivit svårare att personupplära?, report no 2016:18.
The Swedish report can be ordered from Brottsförebyggande rådet, info@bra.se

Author: Kristina Jerre

Production:
The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå)
Box 1386, SE-111 93 Stockholm, Sweden
Tel: +46 (0)8 527 58 400
E-mail: info@bra.se
Brå on the internet: www.bra.se

© Brottsförebyggande rådet 2016
URN:NBN:SE:BRA-682

Summary

The person-based clearance rate is the central follow-up metric for the police's activities. There has been an overall decline in the percentage and number of person-based clearances of offences since 2010. This reduction comes on the heels of the Government's increased investment in more police between 2006 and 2010. One of the expectations underlying this investment was that performance would be improved.

In connection with the evaluation of the investment, Brå researched a number of possible explanations for the decline in the person-based clearance rate. In the final report (Brå 2014), Brå identified several issues which Brå did not have the opportunity to examine empirically. One of these concerned whether the character of matters reported to the police has changed in a way which has had a negative impact on the person-based clearance rate. In light of this, the government has now instructed Brå to investigate whether the criminal matters which the justice system has to handle have become more difficult to clear. The instruction also includes estimating how, in such case, this has affected the person-based clearance rate. According to the instruction, the analyses must cover developments since 2006, but with a particular focus on developments in recent years.

Three types of offences, three measurement time points, and 1,700 matters

Between 1.2 million and 1.5 million offences per year have been reported since 2006. These volumes make it impossible to investigate the character of all of these offences. Brå has chosen to focus on three types of offences, specifically *fraud*, *assault involving strangers*, and *assault involving acquaintances*. The person-based clearance rates for all of these types of offences have declined during the period in question. These three types of offences together comprise a sufficiently large percentage of reported crimes that they could have a certain impact on the total development of the person-based clearance rate. In the instruction to Brå, the Government has pointed out a number of factors which Brå must investigate, and these factors are indeed suitable to study in respect of the selected types of offences. Brå has investigated (in previous studies) which factors affect the likelihood that the matters which relate to these types of offences will have person-based clearances, which facilitates the analysis in the instant study.

In order to investigate the trends in the character of the matters, Brå has chosen to look at 2006, 2010, and 2013. Brå has collected and analysed a total of 1,700 matters. Broken down into the three types of offences and the three years of analysis, this leads to approximately 200 matters per type of offence and year.

Increased percentage of frauds which are difficult to clear

The primary question in the instruction is thus whether the matters have become more difficult to clear. In order to answer this question, Brå has investigated whether a number of aggravating circumstances have become more common over time. The circumstances which have been investigated in fraud matters are:

- whether the report lacks information which could lead to the identification of a perpetrator;
- whether the perpetrator has committed the offence using the Internet;
- whether there are foreign ties in the matter.

The general pattern from the material is that there are an increasing number of matters where one of these aggravating circumstances exist. In addition, there are a number of matters where at least two of these three aggravating circumstances exist simultaneously, and this probably makes them particularly unamenable to person-based clearance.

There are not, however, increases between all three of the studied years. Between 2006 and 2010, there were increases in the percentage of matters lacking information about the perpetrator (from 25 to 36 per cent), the percentage of matters with foreign ties (from 11 to 23 per cent), and the percentage of matters where at least two of these circumstances existed simultaneously (from 11 to 21 per cent). The differences were statistically significant. Between 2010 and 2013, however, none of these circumstances increased in the matters in the material. In respect of the percentage of matters where the perpetrator committed the crime using the Internet, these increased only between 2010 and 2013 (from 30 to 38 per cent). The increase was not statistically significant. However, according to the official statistics, the number of reports regarding computer fraud and fraud using the Internet increased significantly after 2010, which indicates that the increase in the material can nevertheless be regarded as actual.

The change in the character of the fraud matters may have had some effect on the person-based clearance rate

Might the increased percentage of matters with aggravating circumstances lie behind the lower percentage of frauds with person-based clearances? In order to examine that question, the material was broken down into matters with person-based clearances and matters without person-based clearances. The question studied was whether the increase in percentage of matters with aggravating circumstances was greater for matters without person-based clearances than for matters with person-based clearances. If this were the case, this would indicate that an increase in these matters which are difficult to clear may have been significant for the reduced person-based clearance rate. The analyses show that matters with aggravated circumstances increased only among matters without person-based clearances included in the material, and not among those with person-based clearances. The increased influx of such matters thus could partially explain the increased percentage of matters which do not have person-based clearances.

The report provides a rough estimate of how the person-based clearance rate would have appeared had there not been an increase in reports of frauds which are difficult to clear after 2006. The estimate is based on those matters in which there are two or more aggravating circumstances. The result was that the percentage of frauds with person-based clearances would nevertheless have declined, but the decrease would have been from 17 to 12 per cent between 2006 and 2013 instead of, as is the case presently, from 17 to 10 per cent.

Different development for the two types of assault

Brå has investigated whether there is an increase in the percentage of assault matters which include aggravating circumstances. For purposes of analysis, the matters were broken down into assault involving strangers and assault involving acquaintances. The same circumstances were, however, investigated for both types of assault, namely:

- the character of the violence and the injury;
- the injured party's willingness to participate in the investigation;
- how known the perpetrator was at the time of reporting;
- whether the suspected person confesses;
- whether the suspected person reports the incident as an assault against them;
- witness participation in the investigation.

The review shows that one-half of the circumstances have changed over time. The injured party's willingness to participate, whether the suspected perpetrator confesses, and whether the suspected perpetrator reports the incident as an assault against them, have *not* changed. Other circumstances have changed either for both types or for only one type of assault.

Increased percentage of minor assault cases involving strangers

The circumstances which have changed in the material regarding assault involving *strangers* is the level of violence and injury, and how known the perpetrator is at the time of reporting. The percentage of minor cases, i.e. cases where both the violence and the injuries were minor in nature, increased from 15 to 24 per cent between 2006 and 2013; this increase is statistically significant. These minor cases are difficult to clear because there are no visible injuries from the assault which can be documented and serve as evidence in the matter. At the same time, it became less common that someone, at the time of reporting, was able to point out or name the perpetrator. The percentage of such matters declined from 45 to 36 per cent; this difference was not, however, statistically significant.

It is probably particularly difficult to obtain a person-based clearance for a matter where these two aggravating circumstances coincide. Both of these circumstances coincide in a total of 13 per cent of the matters. The percentage of such matters in the material increased from 9 to 16 per cent; this difference is not statistically significant.

The increased percentage of matters which are difficult to clear has had a limited impact on the person-based clearance rate of assault involving strangers

The next step in the analysis was to investigate whether the increased percentage of matters which are difficult to clear might lie behind the reduced person-based clearance rate. As was the case for the fraud matters, the investigation focused on whether the aggravating circumstances increased more among the matters without person-based clearances than among those with person-based clearances.

The analysis shows that the percentage of minor assault matters in which both the violence and the injuries are minor increases *both* among the matters without person-based clearances and those with person-based clearances. The percentage of matters where the perpetrator is not identified at the time of reporting, as well as those where this coincides with the assault being minor, increases, however, *only* for those matters without person-based clearances and not for those matters with person-based clearances in the material (see overview in figure 1). The increase in the percentage of minor matters thus probably cannot per se explain the reduced person-based clearance rate. On the other hand, it is clear that an increase of the percentage of matters where two of the circumstances coincide would have had significance.

Brå has calculated the extent to which the increase in matters in respect of assault involving strangers which are difficult to clear may have affected the person-based clearance rate. The calculations include only those matters where the assault was minor and where there is no information about the perpetrator. According to the estimates, the person-based clearance rate for assault involving strangers also declines if reports of assault cases which are difficult to clear had not increased after 2006. The percentage of matters with person-based clearances would, in such case, have declined from 16 to 15 per cent instead of, as is the case now, from 16 to 14 per cent between 2006 and 2013, i.e. by one (1) percentage point instead of two.

Figure 1. Trends in development, between 2006 and 2013, in the percentage of matters concerning assault involving strangers, where the assault was minor, where there is no information regarding the perpetrator (“P”), or where both of these circumstances coincide. Broken down into matters without person-based clearances and matters with person-based clearances in the material.

	Matters without person-based clearances	Matters with person-based clearances
Minor assaults	↗	↗
No information about the perpetrator	↗	↘
Minor assault <i>and</i> no information about the perpetrator	↗	↘

No clear connection between the matters’ characters and the person-based clearance rate for assault involving acquaintances

In respect of assault involving acquaintances, there have also been changes in respect of the degree of violence and injuries. The most apparent change is that the most serious cases have declined in percentage, and the less

serious cases have increased somewhat. When one looks at the most minor cases, there is no increase which corresponds to the increase for assault involving strangers. The reduced person-based clearance rate for assault involving acquaintances does not appear to be explainable by an increased influx of matters which are extremely minor, and which are thus lower priority and difficult to investigate.

In the material, it is somewhat more common for interviewed witnesses' statements not to support the suspected perpetrator's guilt. However, this occurs to an equal extent among both matters without person-based clearances and matters with person-based clearances. According to the analyses, it is thus probably also not the case that an increased influx of such matters has affected the person-based clearance rate to any critical extent. The cumulative assessment is thus that the changes in the character of the matters which were investigated probably did not have any tangible significance in respect of the reduced person-based clearance rate for assault involving acquaintances during the period 2006-2013.

Conclusions

The purpose of this instruction has been to investigate whether the character of the matters has changed and whether, in such case, these changes may have been significant in respect of the development of the person-based clearance rate.

With respect to fraud, the study shows that the percentage of matters which are very difficult to investigate has increased. This, in combination with a substantially increased influx of police reports in respect of fraud, has been significant for reducing the person-based clearance rate. The instruction did not include analysing possible measures by the police to respond to these increased difficulties. The question was, however, addressed in Brå's previous tracking of fraud offences in Sweden and both the need for more investigative resources and improved investigative skills on the part of the police and prosecutors were discussed at that time. However, it was also emphasised in that context that although an infusion of resources and an increase in skills might increase the justice system's effectiveness in terms of handling fraud, the volume of offences is too great to allow more than a fraction of the reports to be cleared. This underscores the significance of developing community crime prevention work in order to reduce the influx of reports.

The reduced person-based clearance rate for assault offences cannot, however, be attributed as clearly to an increased influx of reports which are more difficult to clear as is the case for fraud. In respect of assault involving strangers, the changes in the character of the matters may have had significance, albeit limited, in respect of the development of the person-based clearance rate. In respect of assault involving acquaintances, the connection between changes in the character of the matters and the reduced person-based clearance rate is, however, not clear. Finally, it should be mentioned that it is possible that the character of the matters *has* changed more than is shown by the analyses, but that Brå has not been able to ascertain these changes based on the current matter material.

It may, however, also be the case that there are other factors which have played a greater role in the person-based clearance rate for assault than

the character of the matters, for example how the work is organised and how available resources are allocated. These questions, however, do not fall within the scope of this instruction.