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Summary

The study addresses robberies victimising private individuals, known as mugging, which is the most common type of robbery. The overall purpose is to map the characteristics and trends in respect of the robberies, as well as to contribute knowledge regarding who is victimised and who commits the offence. The study is based on information from Brå's Swedish Crime Survey (*Nationella trygghetsundersökning*) (NTU), which is an annual survey regarding victimisation, addressed to individuals 16-79 years of age. Other material includes the Swedish School Survey on Crime (SUB), which is a self-reported study conducted among students in year nine. Information has also been obtained from a selection of police reports regarding mugging.

The central enquiries are:

- Are certain sociodemographic groups more exposed than others?
- Can one see any risk factors for exposure?
- How do mugging victims perceive their safety and what is their fear of exposure?
- When, where, and how are muggings committed?
- Is it possible to identify any factors which correlate with participation in robbery among young people?

The study sheds light on trends, over time, in respect of the percentage of exposed individuals as per the surveys. The percentage of individuals who report the offence as well as the reasons why no report is made are also addressed. The study further investigates whether there is a correlation between exposure to robbery and a series of background factors and social factors. One section addresses perceived vulnerability and worry regarding crime among mugging victims. The study also illuminates circumstances regarding robbery, such as the victims' description of the age and gender of perpetrators, time and place of the robbery, how the robbery took place, the presence of violence, and what was stolen. In addition, the study also investigates the degree to which self-reported participation among students in year nine correlates with various risks factors.

In respect of information from the NTU, the primary focus is on robberies which occurred in Sweden and did not occur while the victim was acting in the course of their employment. In terms of time, information from the NTU was limited to exposure to robbery during the years 2005–2013. In certain analyses, the studies have been compiled into three-year periods while, for others, the material has been analysed as a whole.

The information from the SUB in respect of exposure to robbery pertains to the years 2008 and 2011, since these were the only years when the SUB

asked questions about such exposure. In respect of participation in robbery, information from the SUB from 2001, 2003, 2005, 2008, and 2011 is included.

In respect of the description of circumstances surrounding the robbery, the presentation is also based on information from a selection of police reports from 2012.

Percentage of individuals exposed to robbery

The percentage of individuals (16–79 years of age) who stated in the NTU that they were exposed to mugging in Sweden during the preceding year (the year prior to the survey) has been at a constant level of approximately 0.7 percent since the surveys started in 2006. In most cases, a single robbery is involved. An average of 13 per cent of the victims stated that it took place on two or more occasions.

The number of students in year nine who reported in the SUB that they had been exposed to robbery sometime during the preceding 12 months was 3.9 per cent in the 2008 survey and 3.3 per cent in the 2011 survey.

Less than one-half of muggings are reported

Looking at the NTU surveys as a whole, slightly less than one-half (46 per cent) of the robbery incidents were reported to the police. The foremost reason given for not making a police report was that the police could not do anything anyway. This is stated in one-third of the cases. The next most common reason was that the offence was perceived as minor or trifling. This was followed by the persons involved having sorted out the incident privately. Together, these three categories comprise approximately 70 per cent of the reasons for not reporting.

Among those who reported the mugging, approximately 60 per cent had a somewhat positive or very positive experience with the police in the matter. In approximately one-fifth of the matters, the contact was deemed somewhat negative or very negative.

In the SUB, only 19 per cent of the students who were exposed to robbery state that they reported the most recent incident to the police.

The victims of robbery

The majority of the victims are men and are relatively young

The majority of the individuals who are exposed to mugging are men while approximately one-third are women. The breakdown by gender is the same among individuals 16-79 years of age as among students in year nine.

According to the NTU, the exposure is greater for the younger age groups than for the older age groups. Individuals younger than 35 years of age comprise a majority among the victims of robbery – approximately 60 per cent during the most recent three-year period (2011-2013). There are certain differences between the time periods in respect of the age composition of the victims. Above all, the percentage of individuals 16-19 years of age has declined from 30 per cent to 15 per cent among the robbery victims when seen over the entire time period studied.

Background factors and victimisation among individuals 16–79 years of age

Exposure to mugging differs based on background factors. The analysis has been made based on all annual publications of the NTU taken as a whole. The percentage of victims is twice as great among residents of large cities than among residents of smaller cities or rural areas. In addition, the percentage of exposed individuals is twice as great among persons with a low level of education than among highly educated persons, as well as among low-income persons as compared to high-income persons. The connection between a Swedish background or foreign background and exposure to mugging is not at all as clear, but the results indicate that the percentage of victims is somewhat greater among persons born abroad and individuals with two parents born abroad than among persons born in Sweden with at least one parent born in Sweden. The percentage of victims among married or cohabiting couples is clearly lower than the average, while it is higher among single people. Exposure is lower among individuals who live in single-family homes than it is among apartment dwellers, and is also lower among homeowners than among renters.

In the surveys, a further question was posed regarding how often the subject went out for entertainment purposes, such as to a restaurant, dance, cinema, or theatre. The percentage of persons exposed to mugging is four times greater among those who participate in entertainment at least once a week than among those who do so not more than once a month (1.7 per cent compared with 0.4 per cent).

In the NTU, a question was also asked regarding whether the individual had been personally charged with an offence any time during the most recent three years. Among the smaller group of individuals who had been charged, the percentage who stated that they had been robbed was more than five times greater than among those who had not been charged (3.4 per cent compared with 0.6 per cent).

A logistic regression shows significant effects on the risk of being exposed to robbery for the variables of educational level, income from employment, and type of family, when controlled for other variables, including age. In addition, frequent participation in entertainment as well as having personally been charged with an offence appear to entail an increased risk of exposure, even when controlling for other factors.

Risk factors and exposure, according to the SUB, among students in year nine

Youth in major metropolitan municipalities are exposed to a somewhat higher extent than others. Moreover, the percentage who have been the victims of robbery is greater among those who live in apartments than among those who live in single-family homes. Young people who do not live together with both their mother and father state that they have been exposed more often than young people who live with both parents. There is a tendency for young people born abroad or with two parents born abroad to be exposed to a somewhat greater degree than young people with at least one parent born in Sweden. The connection is generally somewhat weak. The clearest connection between the studied background factors and exposure to robbery pertain to gender, with a greater number of victims among boys.

The correlation of exposure with a number of variables pertaining to social and individual risk factors has also been studied through the SUB. There is a relatively clear correlation between exposure and parents' knowledge regarding the young person's social circle and location during free time, how often the young person meets friends in the evenings, drinking to the point of drunkenness, satisfaction with school, school attendance, level of thrill-seeking and level of self-control, and the number of friends with criminal records. Exposure is higher among those who often meet friends in the evening, drink to the point of drunkenness, and so forth, that among those who do not.

The results also indicate that there is a certain level of overlap between being a victim and being a perpetrator. At the same time, the vast majority (approximately 90 per cent) of the young people who state that they were victims of robbery have not personally threatened anyone in order to obtain valuable items.

Another factor which is believed to entail an increased risk of exposure is having the experience of having been bullied. The percentage of robbery victims is clearly higher among students who stated that they were often bullied than among those who stated that they were never bullied (approximately 10 per cent compared with 3 per cent).

Many robbery victims feel worried

According to the NTU, the group of individuals who have been victims of mugging differ in a number of areas in respect of worry about crime, perceived vulnerability, and confidence in the justice system when compared with the group of individuals who have not been victims of any offence. Over one-half of the individuals who have been robbed expressed worry about being victims of violent crime. Among those who were not victims of any offence, one-fourth feel worried. There is a greater percentage of robbery victims who refrain from activities or choose other routes due to worry, and who believe that worrying about crime affects their quality of life. It is also more common among this group to have low confidence in the authorities comprising the justice system.

The results from SUB also indicate that the percentage of young people who have avoided certain activities or individuals due to worry about crime is clearly greater among those who have been robbed than among those who have not been robbed.

Circumstances surrounding the robbery

The perpetrators are often young, act in groups, and are unknown

The NTU and the selected police reports both contain information regarding gender and age of the perpetrators according to information provided by the victims. Since, in most cases, this involves estimates of age and gender, there is some uncertainty regarding the information, which should be interpreted with this in mind. Among the victims in the NTU, the most active perpetrator in approximately 95 per cent of the robberies is a man. The figure is similar in the selected reports of mugging made to the police. The age of the perpetrator is estimated as under 25 years of age in a majority of the cases. In the NTU, the aggregate figure is 65 per cent. This percentage has, however, declined in the period primarily due to the fact

that the number of perpetrators perceived as being under 18 years of age has been almost halved (from 29 per cent to 17 per cent).

According to the NTU, the perpetrators in nine out of ten cases were completely unknown to the complaining witness. In slightly more than one-tenth of the incidents, the perpetrator was known, at least by name or appearance, and in 3 per cent of the incidents it was a closely-related person.

The number of perpetrators in a mugging often exceeds the number of victims of the mugging. Both the selected police reports and the NTU show that there were two or more perpetrators in approximately two-thirds of the robberies. Juvenile delinquency is often a group-based phenomenon, and this pattern is clear when it comes to muggings. According to the NTU, when the most active perpetrator is estimated to be not older than 17 years of age, the most common situation is that there are at least two perpetrators involved in the robbery (in approximately nine out of ten cases). On the other hand, where the perpetrator is perceived to be 35 years of age or older, a sole perpetrator is, instead, more common.

Time and location of mugging

By far, most robberies take place in public places such as streets, squares, parks, or suchlike. Approximately one-tenth of the robberies take place in a residence and, in such case, usually that of the victim. Most robberies take place in the evening or at night. More than one-half of muggings take place on a weekend. The most commonly stolen items are cash and mobile telephones. According to the NTU, cash or a wallet was stolen in slightly more than one-half of the completed muggings and mobile telephones in slightly less than one-half of the completed muggings. Jewellery, watches, and purses are other types of stolen items.

How the mugging commences

Based on the selection of muggings reported to the police, the study has identified five categories of how the initial contact between the perpetrator and the victim takes place.¹

- Lightning attack – mugging through surprise with elements of violence.
- Direct confrontation – direct demand to be given the item, which can be followed up by threats or violence.
- Chatting/getting bearings/trickery – the robbery is commenced by the perpetrator starting a conversation, for example a request for a cigarette or suchlike.
- Snatching – the stolen item is snatched at high speed, and violence or threat can occur if the victim resists.
- Victim-initiated – the initial contact is made by the individual who is robbed.

Of these categories, the first three are clearly the most common ways that mugging commences.

¹ The division is modelled on a study by Smith (2003).

Firearms and weapons are used, but most often as threats

Firearms or weapons play a role in approximately one-third of muggings, and in these cases knives are most common. Firearms are uncommon and are stated to be used in approximately 4 per cent of the cases. The firearm is primarily used as a threat. According to the reports of mugging, use of firearms or weapons takes place in approximately 5 per cent of muggings, and in such case primarily with blunt objects.

According to the reports of robbery, physical violence without a weapon (e.g. striking, kicking, pushing) is significantly more common in muggings, specifically in approximately 70 per cent of the cases. In the NTU, approximately one-third of the robbery victims state that they were exposed to physical violence. One conceivable explanation for the difference between the sources is that reported robberies tend to be of a more serious nature.

Youth who threaten in order to obtain valuable goods

The percentage of students in year nine who stated that they threatened someone with blows or a weapon in order to obtain money or other valuable items on any occasion during the most recently preceding 12 months was, according to the SUB, on average approximately 2 per cent for the years 2001-2011. During the period, a declining tendency could be seen, with 2.6 per cent in the 2001 survey as compared with 1.4 per cent in the 2011 survey. According to the SUB, the reduction is related to a general reduction in the percentage of young people who committed various types of offences during the studied period. (Brå 2013a).

Youth who commit robberies have often committed several other types of offences, such as shoplifting or vandalism. They have also often used alcohol or tried other drugs. The results further indicate that the percentage of young people who have threatened someone in order to obtain a valuable item tends to be higher than average among young people who do not live together with two parents, young people who live in apartments, young people who do not have their own bedroom at home, young people from a foreign background, and young people whose parents are unemployed. The connection between the various background factors and robbery is relatively weak. Among all sociodemographic categories, there is a large majority which, according to information, has never threatened anyone in order to obtain a valuable item. The clearest connection in respect of the background factors is gender.

In the SUB, questions are also posed regarding the young person's social situation in the family, at school, and in their free time, as well as their attitudes in certain areas. The results indicate that the percentage who threaten someone for a valuable item is greater than average among young people who:

- have poor relationships with their parents;
- have parents who, according to the young person, seldom know where they are and, if the young person goes out at night, who they are meeting;
- often meet friends in the evening and often wander around;
- do not enjoy school and are often truant;

- prefer exciting and risk-filled activities to quieter activities, as well as young people with a low degree of self-control (who are impulsive, risk taking, restless, aggressively inclined);
- have permissive attitudes towards crime;
- have friends who have committed crimes.

The connection is relatively clear. The strongest connections are having friends with criminal records and having permissive attitudes, followed by the degree of self-control and thrill-seeking.

The result from a logistic regression shows that the greatest difference between low-risk and high-risk categories in respect of having made threats recurs for the variables criminal friends, followed by own tolerance to crime. A caveat should be added here: since this is a cross-sectional survey, it is not possible to determine cause and effect empirically for a number of the connections. A special analysis of the 2011 selection indicates that the percentage who committed robbery is greatest among students with a generally high tendency to commit crimes which, in this analysis, refers to a positive attitude towards committing crime and low self-control, as well as high level of exposure to criminogenic factors, which means that a person has friends with criminal records and often wanders around in the evening.²

Closing comments

Since persons who commit muggings often commit other offences, the issue of preventive measures aimed at individuals who have committed robbery or are in the risk zone to do so is one of breaking criminal patterns in the individuals and preventing crime in general. The issue of how to create the conditions and motivation to prevent individuals from setting out on a criminal path, or getting them off of that path, is beyond the scope of this study. It can vary from person to person, not in the least due to age and situation in life.

More general proposals for efforts in respect of youth based on the results in this study are, conceivably, attempting to influence attitudes towards crime, reducing the effect of criminal friends or other criminal influences, increasing resistance to the provocation and temptations to commit crime, reducing any use of alcohol and drugs, and strengthening ties to law-abiding individuals in the person's social network.

The importance of influencing attitudes and ways of thinking, strengthening bonds to conventional society, and reducing influence from criminal friends are also elements which, in varying forms and to varying extents, are present in the literature in the area and in the methods which are used in conjunction with preventive measures and treatment of criminal youth.

When taken as a whole, information from the NTU and the selected police reports indicate that, in most cases, there are two or more perpetrators while the victims are alone. Not infrequently, it appears that the victim is on their way home in the evening or at night from entertainment. Focusing on so-called hotspots, places and times where a great number of muggings occur, is a policing method of working preventively based on a situational perspective.

² The result is consistent with earlier research (Wikström et.al. 2012).

The results from the SUB in respect of students in year nine indicate that it may be important for parents who wish to reduce the risk that their child is the victim of robbery to remain informed about where their child is, what they are involved in, and who they meet.