

Swimming pools and libraries

An analysis of crimes and disorderly conduct

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

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English summary of Brå report 2020:10

Preface

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet, Brå) has on behalf of the government analysed the prevalence of crimes and disorderly conduct at swimming pools and libraries. The purpose of the analysis is to provide a basis for the government in its deliberations on whether swimming pools and libraries should be encompassed by a regulation on injunctions. The report has been prepared by Anna-Lena Beutgen (project manager), Jon Lundgren, Lina Fjelkegård and Emma Patel, all researchers at Brå. Moa Gustavsson and Erika Sallander have also participated in the data collection. The study has been peer-reviewed by Dan Hedlin, professor of statistics at Stockholm University.

Brå would especially like to thank the individuals who agreed to be interviewed for this study during a period that has been particularly challenging due to the ongoing pandemic.

Brå would also like to thank Emrah Ercin, head of security at the Culture Administration, City of Stockholm, and Anna Maria Norfall, security and OHS coordinator at the City of Stockholm, who have both helped to provide us with access to material from incident reports and contributed their experience and knowledge.

Summary

On behalf of the government, Brå has analysed the prevalence of crimes and disorderly conduct at swimming pools and libraries. The purpose of the analysis is to provide a basis for the government in its deliberations on whether swimming pools and libraries should be encompassed by a regulation on injunctions. The analysis has been conducted in the form of structured interviews in which representatives of swimming pools and public libraries in various municipalities throughout Sweden have been asked to estimate the prevalence of crimes and disorderly conduct. In addition, an analysis has been performed of all incident reports concerning crimes and disorderly conduct at municipal swimming pools and public libraries in the City of Stockholm in 2019.

Crimes and disorderly conduct at swimming pools

Crimes and disorderly conduct occur in some form or other at essentially all swimming pools. There are, however, large variations between swimming pools. On average, there have been about nine different types of incidents during the past year. In general, swimming pools with many visitors experience more problems than smaller swimming pools.

Most swimming pools have witnessed some form of dispute. Threats, harassment and sexual harassment have also occurred at many swimming pools. Almost half of the swimming pools have seen violence against either staff or visitors. In addition to actions directly targeting visitors or staff, thefts and criminal damage have occurred at a large number of the swimming pools too. Many swimming pools have also witnessed apparently intoxicated visitors as well as criminal acts such as drug use and drug dealing. Aside from different types of disputes and harassment targeting visitors and staff, it is uncommon for the different types of incidents to have occurred more than ten times at a single swimming pool during the past year.

In the case of criminal acts, most swimming pool representatives believe that most perpetrators have reached the age of criminal responsibility (that is, 15 years or over). As regards disorderly conduct, the representatives' views differ more; about a third of the swimming pools would say that the people behind disorderly conduct have reached the age of criminal responsibility.

Almost 80 percent of the representatives would say that it is always or sometimes the same people behind the crimes and disorderly conduct taking place at the swimming pools and that those involved are mainly men or boys.

A review of the incident reports from the swimming pools in the City of Stockholm offers a similar picture of the situation.

Crimes and disorderly conduct at libraries

All libraries have been affected by crimes and disorderly conduct during the past twelve months and, just as in the case of swimming pools, there are large differences between libraries. On average, there have been about eight different types of incidents during the past year. At the most affected libraries, not only have there been many different types of incidents, but also a relatively large number of them have occurred more than ten times. At the least affected libraries, there have only been a few different types of incidents on relatively few occasions. The most affected libraries are located in or close to a larger city or in a smaller town/urban area while the least affected libraries are located in the countryside or in commuter belts close to smaller cities. The interviewees describe the library's size, visitor numbers, opening hours and location as largely determining the degree to which it is affected.

Some form of dispute has occurred at almost all libraries. Threats and harassment are also common. About one third of the libraries state that they have been

affected by violence and sexual harassment during the period. Theft and criminal damage have occurred at about three-quarters of the libraries.

Almost all libraries have seen incidents involving alcohol and drugs, such as intoxicated individuals. Drug use and drug dealing are also seen but seem to be less common.

In several interviews, the interviewees also mention incidents related to homelessness and vulnerability; visitors who are considered to smell unpleasant, who sleep in the library and who use the public toilets as a bathroom.

Most common is for a particular incident to have occurred one to ten times during the past year. For some incident types, however, several libraries report that they occur more often (more than ten times). Visitors raising their voices to staff and visitors behaving as though under the influence of drugs or alcohol are quite common. Loud conflicts between visitors, as well as harassment targeting staff, are other situations that have occurred on numerous occasions at several libraries.

Most library representatives believe that it is mostly individuals who have reached the age of criminal responsibility (that is, 15 years or over) who are behind the incidents, and that they mainly involve men or boys.

The consequences of crimes and disorderly conduct at swimming pools and libraries

Most swimming pools and libraries state that crimes and disorderly conduct have a negative impact on their services. However, in most cases this negative impact has been very small or quite small.

The negative impact mostly concerns the staff's work environment. Library staff can sometimes feel unsafe, and there is also anxiety and uncertainty about how to handle different situations. The libraries need to expend time and resources on drawing up procedures for how people and situations are to be handled and, to a certain extent, even plan staffing levels and scheduling in ways that ensure staff safety. A few representatives also describe how they have been forced to cancel certain activities at their libraries and close particular rooms.

At a few libraries, they also find that other visitors are affected by disorderly conduct and are concerned about crime, stating further that some visitors no longer visit the library as much.

At some swimming pools, representatives mention the economic consequences for the swimming pools in the form of lost income when visitor numbers fall as a result of crimes and disorderly conduct, as well as increased costs for cleaning, implementing various safety measures and more. The library representatives also raise the issue of services and other visitors being inconvenienced by poorer access to equipment due to thefts, as well as the libraries incurring costs to replace such equipment.

Brå's assessment

A government report from 2019 (Straffrättsliga åtgärder mot tillgreppsbrott och vissa andra brott (Ds 2019:1), Penal measures for thefts and certain other crimes) includes a proposal for legislation on injunctions for swimming pools, libraries and similar places. According to the proposal, several conditions must be met for an injunction to be issued: The injunction must concern a known individual who is at least 15 years of age and there must be a risk of that person committing crimes or severely harassing someone at the concerned establishment. For libraries, an injunction could also be appropriate if the person in question risks considerably disrupting services, even without their action necessarily being a punishable offence.

The crimes and disorderly conduct identified in Brå's analysis largely correspond to the types of crimes and disorderly conduct mentioned in the government report. The responses to the questionnaire also indicate that in a large number of cases the concerned individuals have reached the age of criminal responsibility. Moreover, the majority of the respondents would say that at least in part it is the same individuals who are behind repeated incidents. All in all, this means that the conditions for issuing an injunction are met at least in part at swimming pools and libraries.

The extent to which injunctions would be appropriate in practice cannot be determined from the material compiled by Brå. This would depend in part on the propensity of the establishments to apply for injunctions and in part on the practical opportunities to fulfil the necessary requirements for an injunction to be issued. In this respect, we can mention that in a previous questionnaire distributed by the Swedish trade union for the culture, communication and creative sector (DIK), about six out of ten library employees responded that an injunction would be a good way to "stop visitors who repeatedly disturb the peace". However, for most swimming pools and libraries this encompasses relatively few incidents each year and most incidents are minor. Accordingly, injunctions would most likely not be considered at many establishments. There are, however, a smaller number of establishments that are repeatedly disrupted, and this affects both the staff's work environment and the visitors' experience.



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