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Children and youth in criminal networks

Network entry, offending, conditions, and network exit

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

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English translation of report 2023:13

Foreword

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (SNCCP) has been instructed by the government to examine how children and other young people become involved in criminal networks. The study presented in this report is among other things intended to provide municipalities and public sector agencies with a detailed description of the conditions experienced by children and youth in criminal networks: how they enter these networks, the nature of their offending, their relations to network elders and their opportunities to leave the networks.

The study has been conducted by Katharina Tollin (project leader), Henrik Angerbrandt, and Anna Jonsson. Li Hammar, Anna Gavanas, Anders Stenström, and Karolina Hurve have also contributed to the study by reviewing the data and texts, and by conducting literature reviews and data processing. Research assistants Julia Andersson and Sara Litzén have transcribed interviews.

The study would not have been possible without the assistance of other agencies, who have provided the SNCCP with access to data and helped in the recruitment of interview participants. The SNCCP would therefore like to thank the Swedish Prison and Probation Service, the intelligence section at the Swedish Police Authority's National Operations Department, the office of statistics at the Swedish Prosecution Authority, the National Board of Institutional Care, the National Organisation for Women's Shelters and Young Women's Shelters, and also the gang exit programme and social services staff who have assisted in the data collection process. We would in particular like to thank the 28 individuals who agreed to be interviewed about their participation in criminal networks, and who have thereby made an important contribution to developing an understanding of the situation for children and other young persons in this environment.

Professor Tove Petterson (Stockholm University) and Dr. Polina Smiragina-Ingelström (Lund University) have peer reviewed a draft of the report and provided valuable feedback. The SNCCP is, however, solely responsible for

the contents of the report. The report was translated by David Shannon, head of the unit for research and development at the SNCCP.

Stockholm, October 2023.

Mattias Larsson
Director General

Daniel Vesterhav
Head of Unit

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Summary

This report presents a study focused on the way children and youth become involved in criminal networks. The study has been conducted by the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (SNCCP) at the instruction of the Swedish government and examines how children and youths enter criminal networks and what motivates the recruitment of these young people. The study also examines the offences that these young people typically engage in, why they commit these offences, how their activities are controlled, how they progress within the network hierarchy, and what opportunities they have to leave criminal networks.

Children involve other children in drug distribution

The report shows that the process of becoming involved in criminal networks differs from that linked to participation in criminal youth gangs. Such gangs are often comprised of youths of the same age who commit offences together, whereas criminal networks have a hierarchical control structure, are dependent on well-developed contact networks, and have access to illegal goods (drugs and weapons).

The study shows that children are primarily recruited into criminal networks by other children. According to the those interviewed in the study (individuals with experience of participation in criminal networks) the process typically involves an older teenager (aged 15-20) involving a somewhat younger child (aged 12–15). The flow of children and youths into criminal networks occurs within the context of drug distribution systems, in which continuous recruitment constitutes part of the established business model.

In order to progress within the networks, the older teenagers have to recruit younger children as lackeys. By developing a crew of two to five “youngers” of their own, the older teenagers become able to move larger quantities of drugs and thus make more money. This means that the majority of those involved in the lower levels of the network hierarchy engage in recruitment.

The children who are recruited in this way are primarily used to stash, transport, and sell drugs. The reason for using children is that they are cheap and able to do the tasks that involve the highest risk of detection; the use of children also contributes to the network's expansion and entrenchment in a given neighbourhood.

Criminal networks are formed around age-based hierarchies

The criminal networks that involve children are based on loose ties but are at the same time hierarchically governed. The networks often comprise three or four age-based strata. At the top, there are "the elders", who direct the activities of individuals who are their own "youngers". These in turn have their own groups of "youngers", who in turn also have "youngers". Network solidarity is based on bottom-up loyalty (towards the "elders") and harsh top-down control (focused on one's own crew of youngers).

The longer a network has been established in a given location, the larger the number of age strata that develop. The continuous recruitment process produces new branches lower down the hierarchy, which are based on social relations between individual youngers and elders. Thus, the children who are recruited as youngers cannot be seen as peripheral but are rather an integral part of the network structure. The inflow of new children and youths produces an organic expansion of both the networks and the drug distribution chain.

The networks' structure means that several strata of elders become financially dependent on industrious children producing income for the network. Exiting the network is therefore often fiercely regulated. Debts, threats, and violence are used to prevent youths from terminating their relations with elders. However, there are occasions when children and youths who have not been given permission to leave the network are able to seize an opportunity to do so when elders are absent for a long period of time (as a result of incarceration, for example).

Direct involvement in serious crime

Children and youth who have been recruited to handle drugs often develop intense relationships with their own "elders". They are socialised into the

network by spending time together on a daily basis, and by being subject to continuous tests and arbitrary rewards. Boys with strong ties to elders are expected to do what they are told, show their loyalty, and carry out their prescribed assignments. The report shows that the youngest children, in addition to their involvement in the drugs market, are also used to stash and transport weapons; engage in extortion, theft, and street robbery; participate in frauds; and carry out acts of serious violence (including shootings). In addition, many of them also continue to commit offences on their own initiative together with same-age peers.

Thus, the move towards participation in serious crime is not gradual but rather occurs immediately upon entry into the criminal network. The report's presentation of crime statistics for youths aged 15-17 and 18-20, and of the Prosecution Authority's statistics on youths under 15 suspected of offences[1], shows a substantial increase over recent years in the numbers of suspected offences involving weapons, extortion, drug sales and distribution, and fraud that have been linked to suspects under the age of 18.

Older youth groom younger children

One precondition for the involvement of younger children (aged 12-15) in criminal networks is that the "elders" (aged 15-20) are present in the children's neighbourhood, give the appearance of having a desirable lifestyle, and are accessible to children who wish to approach them. When such contacts are initiated, the first step may be taken by either the elders or the younger children. Even when the contact is initiated by the younger child, entry into the criminal network is preceded by a process that shares many similarities with sexual grooming. Many children are unaware that accepting an "offer" means that they will thereafter be subordinate to an elder and deprived of their autonomy for a long period of time. There are also occasions when coercion in the form of threats, violence, or the establishment of debts is used to involve children and youth in criminal networks.

The interviews conducted in the study show that the networks primarily look for and accept children and youths who are already involved in less serious

[1] These are suspected offences by children aged under 15 (the age of criminal responsibility) that are investigated in accordance with Section 31 of the Young Offenders (Special Provisions) Act (1964:167).

offending together with same-age peers, who are present, visible, and unmonitored by adults in the area in which the network is active, and/or who have family ties to individuals who are already active within the network. The report shows that the entry process into criminal networks is rapid and produces a marked shift in the individual's criminal career. On occasion, an entire youth gang may enter a criminal network at the same time.

The National Council's assessment

The report shows that both children's and youths' involvement in criminal networks represents a challenge to the justice system's work to combat organised crime, and that the victimisation experienced by children in criminal networks constitutes a significant social problem. This means that the issue is one that affects a large number of actors with different areas of responsibility at the national, regional, and local levels. The SNCCP's consideration of the study's findings has been restricted to an assessment of how existing working methods at the interface between crime policy and social policy might be developed on the basis of the report's findings. The proposals that have been considered relate to opportunities for municipalities and public sector agencies to: 1) reduce the capacity of criminal networks, and 2) reduce children's exposure to victimisation. This summary gives a brief presentation of a number of proposals. Chapter 6 in the report, *Conclusions and assessment*, presents a more detailed discussion and additional proposals.

Reducing the capacity of criminal networks

The SNCCP's view is that legislation, the powers of public sector agencies, and various ongoing initiatives should be reviewed and adapted in order to focus more accurately on the way criminal networks exploit children. Making the exploitation of children in criminal activities less attractive should in turn reduce the capacity of criminal networks.

There may, for example, be reason to consider **an extension of the powers used in criminal investigations**, where certain measures cannot currently be used, or where their use is restricted, in relation to children aged under 15. It may be necessary to extend the opportunities to use police search powers and the covert interception of communications in relation to children who have

not reached the age of criminal responsibility in order to prosecute the older individuals who instigate their offending.

The report shows that it is common among the children and youth who are involved in criminal networks for their contact networks to expand and their exploitation to continue when they are subject to incarceration or out of home placements. The SNCCP is of the view that **restricting access to mobile phones and other forms of communication** at youth institutions maintained by the National Board of Institutional Care may be necessary to combat this intensification of criminal involvement, and to make it possible for youths to exit criminal networks.

Reduce children's exposure to victimisation

The SNCCP's study shows a high level of victimisation among children and youth involved in criminal networks. Family members are also at risk of being exposed to threats, violence, and manipulation. The SNCCP's assessment is that in order to have a better chance of success, the work of state and municipal agencies to prevent and combat children's involvement in criminal networks needs, to a greater extent than today, to be: a) evaluated, b) adapted to the relevant target group, c) based on information sharing among different agencies, and d) focused on specific windows of opportunity, when changing circumstances affect the ability of elders to exercise control over youngers.

The SNCCP is of the view that there may be reason to **evaluate some of the measures that are currently recommended in relation to this target group**. This may, for example, include FFT (functional family therapy for children and youths aged 11-18 with externalising and criminal behaviour) and MST (multisystemic therapy for children aged 12-17 who commit offences). These measures can be adapted for gang-involved children and youth, among other things via the implementation of FFT-G.[2] Since such methods have to date not been widely implemented in Sweden, there may be reason to examine whether they produce positive effects and can be made available to the children and youths who are involved in criminal networks.

[2] The G stands for Gang.

The SNCCP is also of the view that **exit services for children and youth** should be offered to a greater extent than at present. The report shows that periods during which elders are absent can lead to generational shifts and conflicts within the networks, but also provide opportunities for leaving the network. When elders are placed on remand, convicted, or placed in out of home care, or when they move to another country, their opportunities for exercising control over youngers are weakened. There may therefore be reason for actors at the local level to develop a readiness to act when such opportunities arise to a greater extent than they do today.

Method and data

The report's findings are primarily based on interviews with 28 individuals who have themselves been active members of criminal networks in different parts of Sweden. The majority have experience of both entering networks as children and of themselves involving younger children in the networks. The SNCCP has also compiled and analysed crime statistics, statistics from the Swedish Prosecution Authority, and quantitative intelligence data from the Swedish Police Authority. The study also includes data from criminal investigation files, investigations of offenders conducted in accordance with the Young Offenders (Special Provisions) Act, and interviews with employees of the Police Authority, the social services, residential care homes for children and youth, women's shelters, and exit service providers.

1. Introduction

Over recent years, the involvement of children and youths in criminal networks has become an important crime policy issue. There have been frequent media reports of young people being used to commit serious crimes. These include children under the age of criminal responsibility (15 years), children aged 15-17, and young adults (aged 18-21):

> Six teenagers are being prosecuted for various serious offences committed during the wave of violence that has affected Stockholm. Three are aged around 15 and are charged with having been perpetrators and having accepted assignments to commit murder. (Dagens Nyheter 12-05-2023)

> Somewhere in the region of 15 children aged 10-12 in Orminge have been recruited by lifestyle criminals, among other things as narcotics couriers.[…] "We have been crying out for help for years. We have been sitting on the front row watching these developments, and have felt fairly helpless. There are between 10 and 15 children aged 10, 11, 12 whom we are concerned about. Because the children are under 15, they are also below the age of criminal responsibility."[3] (Mitt i Nacka 21-05-2021)

The involvement of young people in offending and gangs is nothing new, however. The research on youth crime is extensive, and studies show that youth tends to be a period of relatively intense involvement in crime, particularly for young males (Estrada and Flyghed 2017, Sarnecki 2001, Pettersson 2002, Farrington 2008). Researchers have among other things examined the initiation and development of offending, desistance from crime, and also what characterises the relatively small proportion of high-frequency offenders who continue to offend into adulthood (Farrington 2008, Moffitt 1993, Sampson 2010, Sivertsson 2018). However, the exploitation of children in criminal networks has been viewed as a growing problem, and as involving types of offending whose structure and character may differ from that of youth crime more generally (Polisen 2021b).

The Swedish government has therefore instructed the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (SNCCP) to study "the nature of the relationship between younger and older individuals in criminal networks and

[3] Those interviewed were municipal officers in the municipality of Nacka, a suburb of Stockholm.

to describe the different ways in which children and youths become involved in and exploited by criminal networks". The aim of the study presented in this report has been to improve the knowledge on the processes by which young people become involved in criminal environments, with a focus on how and why such young people are exploited by older individuals in criminal networks. The SNCCP has also been instructed to describe "what characterises the girls and boys who are attracted to and exploited in criminal environments", "the motivating forces among older criminal actors", and "how youths are induced to actively participate" (Justitiedepartementet 2022).

Aims and research questions

The study's primary objective has been to describe and analyse the relationships between younger and older individuals in criminal networks. The following questions are examined:

1. How do young people enter criminal networks, and what serves to motivate this process?
2. What types of crime and other assignments do young people in criminal networks typically engage in, and why?
3. How are young people controlled within the networks, and how do they advance within the network hierarchy?
4. What opportunities are available to young people to leave criminal networks?

The government's instruction also required the SNCCP, "to the extent that it is possible, to assess the extent of the problem and how it has developed over time" (Justitiedepartementet 2022). Information on the number of children and youths involved in criminal networks during the period 2019-2022 are therefore presented in Chapter 2, *Network entry*. Chapter 3, *Offending*, presents crime statistics from the SNCCP and statistics from the Swedish Prosecution Authority showing the numbers of individuals aged under 15, 15-17, and 18-20 that have been registered as suspects in connection with a number of serious offence types over the past 10 years. Descriptions of what characterises the individuals who become involved in criminal networks are presented in Chapter 2, *Network entry*, which describes the types of children and youth who are sought by the networks.

The SNCCP has also been instructed to describe "promising international and national experiences in working to combat the involvement of children and youths in criminal networks" (Justitiedepartementet 2022). Chapter 6, *Conclusions and assessment*, therefore describes the ways in which a number of promising collaborative models might be further developed with a focus on this target group. The final sections of the report also describe a number of examples of ways in which law enforcement and crime prevention work could be improved on the basis of both the study's conclusions and consultations that the SNCCP has held with other agencies.

The focus of the study

The terms children and young people are used in the study to refer to males and females aged up to 21. This means that the study the study has focused on individuals who have not reached the age of criminal responsibility (up to 14 years of age), children who have reached the age of criminal responsibility (aged 15-17), and young adults (aged 18-21). These are all groups who may be subject to different forms of measures and support for young offenders (Socialstyrelsen 2020, Statens institutionsstyrelse 2022).[4] Throughout the report we use the term children to describe individuals under the age of 18, and young people to describe the entire age range included in the study (0-21). The report also uses terms such as younger, older, "youngers" and "elders", to describe relative age differences that are ascribed importance in criminal environments[5] (for example the difference between an 18-year-old and a 15-year-old).

[4] The age of criminal responsibility in Sweden is 15 years. This is the age at which they can be convicted for criminal offences. Prior to age 15, it is the social services that determine appropriate measures for children who offend. Youths aged 15-20 may be sentenced to sanctions such as youth care, youth supervision, and youth community service. For offences that would otherwise result in imprisonment, children who are aged 15-17 at the time of the offence may also be sentenced to a determinate care placement, youth custody, at the National Board of Institutional Care. Youths prior to age 21 may also receive a court order from an administrative court requiring a care placement in accordance with Section 3 of the Care of Young Persons (Special Provisions) Act. Such placements can be made as a result of criminal activity that is harmful either to the youths themselves or to others. When sentencing youths aged under 21, the criminal court is required to take the child's age into consideration when determining the penalty for an offence. On January 1, 2022, a number of exceptions to this so-called "youth rebate" were introduced. Youths aged 18-20 who are convicted of offences for which the penalty scale includes a prison term of at least one year no longer qualify for a penalty reduction as a result of their age.

[5] The term criminal environments is used to refer to social contexts and places in which several individuals repeatedly engage in offending together in order to make money (cf. Brå 2019a, Brå 2020a, Brå 2021c).

The study focuses on involvement in criminal networks, and thus does not include all the types of offending that young people may commit in groups. The term criminal network refers to groups characterised by a hierarchical control structure that engage in offending for financial reward, and in which adults engage in violent crime. Other forms of criminal organisation (such as youth gangs) and criminal networks (such as family-based networks) are discussed and defined at relevant points in the report when these are relevant to the study's data and results.

Previous research

As was noted in the introduction to this chapter, the criminal careers of children and young people have been the object of extensive research. Widely accepted conclusions about the offending patterns of young people are often illustrated using the age-crime curve. This curve shows that young people constitute the population group with the highest level of involvement in offending, and that a large majority of youths desist from offending during their late teenage years (e.g., Piquero et al. 2014, Farrington et al. 2013, Moffitt et al. 2001, Farrington 2010, Sivertsson 2018). A small proportion of these young people are so-called high-frequency offenders, approximately 5-10 percent of a birth cohort, and these account for the majority of the offences committed by young people (Sivertsson 2018, Sivertsson 2022, Brå 2020b, Brå 2021b).

Many of the offences committed by young people are committed in groups (Sarnecki 2017, Pettersson 2002). In most cases this offending involves "opportunistic offences" (e.g., breaking and entering, and theft), and is often viewed as a manifestation of young people going through a phase in which they experiment with rule-breaking behaviour. For a small group, however, offending takes the form of more continuous involvement in violent crime and offending for financial reward, which is embedded in and supported by a pro-criminal social context (Forkby and Liljedal Hansson 2011). Characteristics of this type of involvement in criminal groups include the offending itself being initiated as a result of group participation (Sarnecki 2017, Curry and Decker 1998), an over-representation of boys and men (Kirby et al. 2016), and the normal persistence process being impeded by the

norms and rules of the group (Forkby et al. 2019, Lalander 2013, Brå 2016:12, Rostami and Mondani 2019).

A substantial proportion of the studies in this research field focus on how youths enter into different forms of organised criminal activities (Kissner and Pyrooz 2009, Hixon 2010, Kirby et al. 2016, Ostrosky et al. 2012). However, relatively little research has examined how the recruitment of young people occurs in practice. There are studies that have clarified differences between formal and informal group entry (Rostami and Mondani 2019, Brå 2016a, Brå 2019a, van Dijk, Kleemans and Eichelsheim 2018), and why those who become involved in such groups seek the sense of belonging that gangs provide (Alstam and Forkby 2022, Forkby and Liljedal Hansson 2011), but less research has specifically described the conditions experienced by young people within these groups or networks, or the underlying, illegal market structures (among those Mastropolo 2014, Harding 2020). The current study therefore contributes to the existing knowledge base by directing its focus at the conditions experienced by young people, the logics of illegal markets, and the motives of older individuals.

Data and method

The study is based on interviews and analyses of information from police investigations, intelligence data, statistics, register data, and investigations conducted in accordance with the Young Offenders (Special Provisions) Act (1964:167). The methods employed are described in more detail below.

Interviews

The principal data source used to answer the study's research questions comprises interviews with offenders – or more specifically interviews with individuals who themselves have experience of involvement in criminal networks. A total of 31 interviews have been conducted with 28 individuals (25 males, 3 females). Just over half of these individuals had been involved in networks in metropolitan areas, while the experiences of the remainder were from medium-sized cities or smaller urban areas. Almost all had themselves been participants in criminal networks, but the experiences of two of the interviewed females relate to having lived for a long period with a male who was involved in a criminal network. Just over half of the interview

participants were under 25 years of age at the time of the interview, and one-third were aged between 15 and 20. Of the 28 interview participants, 22 had experience both of entering a criminal network as children (under 18) and of subsequently involving other children in the network once they had themselves become a little older. Approximately one-third of the interview participants had at some point occupied a leading position within a network.

Participant recruitment and interview themes

The study's interview participants were approached via contact persons in the Prison and Probation Service (10), the social services (8), gang exit programs (5), the National Board of Institutional Care (3) and women's shelters (2).[6] The interviews were conducted in prisons, youth care institutions, social services offices, at the premises of the SNCCP, and by telephone.

The interview guide included questions about the participants' paths into criminal collaborations, their relationships with older and younger individuals in criminal networks, network structures and careers within the networks, conflicts, unwritten rules, and possible ways of leaving the networks. During the initial phase of the study, three individuals were each interviewed twice in order to explore a number of the study's themes in more detail and to develop the semi-structured interview guide. Most of the interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the remainder were annotated during the interview. The majority lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, while one-third lasted longer (between two and three hours).

Supplementary interviews and observations

In addition to interviewing offenders, 14 interviews were also conducted with employees of the social services, the police, gang exit programs, youth care homes, and women's shelters. The aim of these interviews was primarily to obtain information about the participants' experiences of working with the target group, and about conditions affecting the young people's opportunities for leaving criminal networks. We have also participated in a number of drive-alongs and walk-alongs with social services field workers, parent

[6] The contact persons were asked to approach clients who met two criteria: individuals who a) had personal experience of involvement in criminal networks, and b) had themselves entered the network environment as young people (i.e., under the age of 21).

networks, and community police officers in order to develop a picture of the environments described in the interviews.

Coding and the use of quotations

All notes and transcripts from the interviews have been coded in text-analysis software to facilitate analyses and comparisons between statements focused on the same themes. The coding schedule included codes relating to among other things the first contact with older individuals within a network, the first offence committed, the neighbourhood, living conditions, hierarchies, career paths, the tasks assigned to young people in the networks, payment, and network exit processes. The analyses based on this coding process are exemplified throughout the report using quotations that are representative for a number of different interview participants. The language and details presented in the quotations have been adjusted for the sake of clarity and to safeguard the anonymity of interview participants. Almost all the interviewed offenders (25 of 28) are quoted in the report, the majority more than once.[7] To further protect the anonymity of the interview participants, no identification numbers are presented in connection with the quotations included in the text.

Police investigations and Section 31 investigations

The interview data have been supplemented with information from a review of police investigations and investigations conducted in accordance with Section 31 of the Young Offenders Act. A total of 155 Section 31 investigations and 35 police investigations were coded to analyse information on young people's roles in criminal networks. The 35 police investigations were selected by prosecutors from all four of Sweden's public prosecution regions and from the National Unit against Organised Crime, following a request from the SNCCP for police investigations that contained information about the involvement of young people in criminal networks.[8] Almost all of the police investigations relate to one or more serious offences (e.g., homicide

[7] No quotations are presented from the supplementary interviews with employees of the social services, police etc. We do however present some of the content from a couple of these interviews in Chapter 5, *Network exit*.

[8] The request from the SNCCP asked for access to cases of a substantial size that had been concluded during the years 2016-2022, and that included information on suspects under the age of 18 who had either been exploited by older individuals or had themselves been played a significant role in criminal networks.

or serious drug offences) involving suspects aged both over and under 18 years of age.

Section 31 investigations are also conducted by the police, and are similar to other police investigations, but focus on the investigation of suspected offences committed by children under the age of 15, when such an investigation is appropriate in accordance with Section 31 of the Young Offenders (Special Provisions) Act (1964:167).[9] Offences linked to suspects under the age of 15 are only investigated when certain conditions are met. According to the Act, a Section 31 investigation should be initiated when an individual "may be suspected"[10] of having committed an offence for which the lowest sanction in the penalty scale is a term of imprisonment of at least one year (Åklagarmyndigheten 2022a).[11] The sample of Section 31 investigations examined by the SNCCP was restricted to investigations that had been initiated in 2021 and that related to offence types that had repeatedly been described by interview participants as offences that were "typical" network-related offences committed by young people[12] (see Chapter 3, *Offending*). In 64 of the 155 Section 31 investigation files examined, there were indications that the child under investigation had a relationship with an older individual in a criminal network.[13]

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[9] References in the report to Section 31 investigations exclusively relate to investigations focused on children under the age of 15 (conducted in accordance with Section 31 of the Young Offenders Act). Other provisions in the Act also cover police investigations focused on children aged between 15 and 18 – requiring, for example, that the municipal social welfare committees are informed when a child is arrested, placed on remand, or registered as a suspect.

[10] This is the only degree of suspicion that may be registered in connection with individuals aged under 15.

[11] In cases where there is a suspicion of an attempted offence with a relevant penalty scale, or of preparation or conspiracy to commit such an offence, and where attempt, preparation or conspiracy are also criminalised, these offences should also be subject to a Section 31 investigation unless there are special grounds not to do so. A Section 31 investigation can also be initiated when there are co-suspects over the age of 15 (when there is a need to investigate which individual did what), at the request of the local social welfare committee, in order to recover goods acquired through crime (or goods that may be subject to forfeiture), or if an investigation is of special significance on the basis of a public or private interest. For children under the age of 12, however, exceptional grounds are required to initiate a Section 31 investigation for offences for which the minimum sanction in the penalty scale is less than one year's imprisonment (Åklagarmyndigheten 2022a).

[12] The sample included investigations focused on drug sales, extortion, robbery involving firearms, fraud, gun homicides and attempted gun homicides against males, and weapons offences.

[13] The criteria used to identify involvement in criminal networks were as follows: the child or co-suspects of the child had previously been identified by the police as being involved in a criminal network, there was information

The 35 police investigations and the 64 relevant Section 31 investigations have been coded in order to analyse information relating to the tasks performed by young people, contacts between younger and older individuals, methods used to control young people in criminal networks, status markers, sex differences, exposure to violence, the use of violence, and the factors that characterise the life situation of the children under investigation. One general observation is that the data from the Section 31 investigations provide additional information on the conditions experienced by the youngest group of network-involved children, whereas the police investigations provide a clearer picture of the organisational patterns that characterise certain types of crime and the network structures in which young people become involved.

Registry and intelligence data

The SNCCP has been instructed by the government "to the extent that it is possible, to assess the extent of the problem and how it has developed over time" (Justitiedepartementet 2022). A number of studies from other countries have measured the extent of young people's involvement in gangs and networks by means of self-report surveys.[14] Several of these studies have been based on school surveys that have included questions on membership of criminal gangs (Pedersen 2014, Kirby 2016). No such studies have been conducted in Sweden.[15] At the same time, a couple of estimates have been

indicating that the offence has been committed at the instruction of older individuals who were known to the police (e.g., as a result of intelligence collected by means of intercepted telecommunications, or other analyses of criminal network communications), or the case involved firearms or drug sales (provided that the source of the drugs was not the children themselves having purchased the drugs via the darknet). These indicators often feature in combination with other typical indicators, such as the repeated use of "no comment" responses in police interviews, and the offences involving large sums of money.

[14] In these studies, between 6 and 13 percent of survey participants have self-identified as gang members (Maxson 2011; Esbensen et al. 2008; Pedersen 2014). In certain high-risk areas of the USA, this figure has been as high as 20-30 percent (Maxson 2011). The corresponding proportion in a study of high-risk areas in Denmark was 13 percent (Esbensen et al. 2008).

[15] The SNCCP's school survey on crime, which is conducted every other year, does not include questions that can be used to indicate gang membership or contacts with older individuals in criminal networks, either in the form of self-defined gang membership or whether self-reported offences have been committed alone or together with others. In connection with their admission to special approved homes, however, young people sentenced to youth custody are required to answer whether they "belong to a gang". Among those admitted in 2018 (n=790) and 2019 (n=820), only 7 percent answered this question in the affirmative. This outcome should primarily be interpreted as a manifestation of norms about not talking to the justice system (in the same way as answering "no comment" in the context of police investigations), rather than as an indication that few of those admitted to special approved homes have been involved in gangs (Statens institutionsstyrelse 2023).

published on the number of individuals involved in criminal networks, based on intelligence information collected by the police at the regional and local levels (Rostami et al. 2018, Granath 2022, Mondani and Rostami 2022b). The SNCCP also views police intelligence data as the most appropriate source for assessing the number of young people involved in criminal networks in Sweden. Data have therefore been requested from the Swedish Police Authority's Cylinder Model. The Cylinder Model is a national compilation of the individuals deemed to contribute to be exerting a criminal influence in Sweden's local policing areas.

The Cylinder Model, crime suspect records, and neighbourhood-level documents

At the time the Cylinder Model data were provide by the police, the Model comprised a population of just over 13,000 unique individuals who had been reported to the police's National Operations Department by local policing areas. The data collection was initiated by the police in 2019 and is repeated on an annual basis. The data provided to the SNCCP include the personal identification numbers of all individuals included in the Cylinder Model, and the police's assessment of the criminal capacity of these individuals for the years 2019-2022.[16]

This population of individuals has been used for analyses of the population's age distribution, its size, and changes over time in the number of individuals in the population. Since the data only cover four years, they can only provide information on recent changes.[17]

The data from the Cylinder Model have been used to provide a broader context for the interview participants' descriptions of the offences that young

[16] The data provided included data for all the years in which the Cylinder Model data had been collected by the National Operations Department at the time the SNCCP made its request (autumn, 2022). The study does not therefore include data for 2023, although these data have been presented in the context of a different governmental assignment (see Polisen 2023c). The data are used by the Swedish Police Authority among other things for the purpose of conducting comparisons between different parts of the country and different years. As the data are updated each year, the individuals included in the model are reviewed, and individuals who are no longer relevant are removed from the Cylinder Model.

[17] It is also important to note that the quality of these data is highly dependent on the intelligence collection work of the local policing areas, their work with young people, which offences are detected, and how the Cylinder Model criteria are interpreted. The Swedish Police Authority has made the assessment that the collection of the Cylinder Model data had not been sufficiently well implemented until 2021 (Polisen 2023b).

people linked to criminal networks tend to commit. Records of the offences for which the individuals in the Cylinder Model population have been registered as suspects have been obtained from the SNCCP's Unit for Criminal Justice Statistics. These data have been used to provide more information on the types of offences that the identified individuals have been suspected of committing at different ages (see Appendixes 1 and 2).

Statistics and additional intelligence data

The study has also examined whether young people are being registered as suspects for certain types of crime to a greater extent than was previously the case by compiling data from the SNCCP's criminal justice statistics (for the period 2012–2022), and by means of statistics provided by the Swedish Prosecution Authority regarding the offences for which children aged under 15 have suspected in the context of Section 31 investigations (for the period 2015-2022). The time series for the Section 31 investigations is shorter, because individuals are successively removed from these data after a period of five years.

The Swedish Police Authority has also granted the SNCCP access to encrypted chat-service messages used by offenders involved in criminal networks (Skye ECC and Anom) for the period 2019-2021. These data are limited to chat messages involving children and include a little over 400 chat threads. The data have been coded with the aim of compiling the information they contain regarding the tasks assigned to younger children in criminal networks, their relationships with older individuals, their status, and the extent to which they are able to exercise some degree of autonomy. Information regarding the nature of the younger children's participation in criminal networks has also been obtained from 175 police intelligence documents focused on local policing areas from 2021 (these documents are produced as part of the Cylinder Model data collection process).

Data quality and suitability

The analyses and results presented in this report are primarily based on data from the offender interviews. The interview sample is not representative, but nonetheless provides a broad overview of young people's involvement in different network environments in metropolitan areas and medium-sized towns and cities. The information from the interviews has been assessed to be

reliable for a number of reasons. Our general assessment has been that the majority of interview participants have chosen to participate in the study and describe their experiences because they view recent developments in the network environment as negative and serious and have wanted to contribute to bringing about change. Several of them are at risk of being subject to violence, and expressed concerns about participating, but stated that they nonetheless wanted to participate because: "Someone has to take responsibility for what is happening in the community", and "The reason I'm talking is because it might help someone; it's for the sake of the youngsters".

Despite the interview participants having been recruited via different channels, having experiences from different parts of Sweden, and having been active at different points in time, their descriptions were very similar on the central issues examined. The analysis has primarily been based on the interview participants' descriptions of their own experiences – general reflections based on hearsay have not been included in the coded data. While interview participants in some cases chose to speak of their experiences in relatively general terms, the content of their narratives showed that their descriptions were based on personal observations and experience.

In the report, the information from the interviews is often related to findings from previous research and data from the criminal justice system. It is, however, difficult to use the different data sources to validate one another methodologically. Statistics, quantitative intelligence data, registry data, and information from police investigations and Section 31 investigations are in part a result of the focus of police activities, whereas the interview data provide a more in-depth picture based on the descriptions provided by individuals. We cannot therefore expect a high degree of correspondence between the information provided by interview participants on the types of crime committed by young people in criminal networks and the distribution of the offences for which young people have been registered as suspects in the data from the Police Authority's Cylinder Model. The data from the criminal justice system are nonetheless presented, however, in order to show whether the information from the interviews contradicts or is in line with the information on individuals and offences contained in police investigations, statistics, and intelligence data.

At the same time, the encrypted chat-service data provided by the Police Authority have been used to examine whether central themes from the offender interviews are presented in a similar way in these chat conversations. This comparison showed a high degree of correspondence in the terminology or jargon used, and in descriptions of how and why young people are used in criminal activities, thus providing corroboration for our assessment of the reliability of the interview data. Information from the chat-service messages also provides confirmation of some of the offences mentioned in the police investigations (primarily involving punishments exacted within networks), which were only described in a few of the offender interviews.

Although both the interview data and the other data sources provide a broad picture of the conditions experienced by young people in criminal networks, there is reason to believe that that the data may be subject to systematic bias in certain areas. This bias relates both to information that few interview participants have been able to or wanted to provide, and to types of crime that are more rarely detected by the criminal justice system. We have identified three areas in which the study data are insufficient: 1) the relationship between young people and criminal networks in northern Sweden, 2) the relationship between females and criminal networks, 3) offence types that are associated with feelings of shame (such as sexual assault and kidnapping).

The extent of the analysis based on the different data sets included in the study is discussed in the relevant sections of the report. Results, interpretations, and the current working methods of relevant agencies, along with the need to develop these methods, have been discussed with reference groups comprised of experts and officials working in the social services and at the Police Authority, the Prison and Probation Service, the Ombudsman for Children, the Family Law and Parental Support Authority, the National Board of Health and Welfare, the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services, and the National Board of Institutional Care. These discussions have been an important part of the quality assurance process that has constituted the basis for the SNCCP's assessment, which is presented in the final chapter of the report.

Organisation of the report

The study's findings are presented in four chapters, each focused on a specific theme, which follow the chronology of involvement in criminal networks. Chapter 2, *Network entry* presents information on the types of young people that tend to be sought by and accepted into criminal networks and on how the process of entry into criminal networks occurs in practice. Chapter 2 also presents data on how many young people become involved in these networks, and analyses of why young people are sought by the networks and why they are attracted by the idea of becoming involved.

Chapter 3, *Offending*, describes the types of tasks, assignments and offences that young people tend to be required to engage in within the networks. The chapter also examines the social context in which these offences are committed, and why young people in particular are used in these ways by the networks. Chapter 4, *Network conditions*, provides a more detailed picture of the ways in which young people are controlled within the criminal networks' structure and socialisation processes. Chapter 4 also describes different career paths within the criminal networks.

The report's final empirical chapter, Chapter 5 *Network exit*, describes the opportunities available to young people to leave criminal networks. The focus is directed at circumstances that lead to young people wanting to, and being able to, leave. The report concludes with Chapter 6, *Conclusions and assessment*, which presents the SNCCP's assessment of the study's central findings and also a number of proposals based on these findings.

2. Network entry

This chapter presents the SNCCP's findings regarding the ways in which young people become involved in criminal networks. The chapter begins with a short introduction that describes how concepts such as "network" and "entry" are used in the report. This is followed by a description of the different steps in the process of becoming involved in a criminal network, beginning with the factors that affect the opportunities for initial contacts between network participants and young people outside the networks, the types of young people sought by older network members, and how many young people become involved in these networks. The presentation then moves on to describe how the network entry process may take place in practice, and the strategies employed to this end by the networks. The chapter then describes and discusses: a) why older network members want to recruit younger individuals, b) why young people want to become involved in the networks, and c) whether the number of young people involved in criminal networks has increased, and why this is the case.

The chapter is primarily based on interviews with offenders, but also presents information from the SNCCP's review of Section 31 investigations and analyses of quantitative and qualitive intelligence data.

Entry into criminal collaborations controlled by older individuals

In order to study how young people come into contact with, and then become involved in, criminal networks, it is important to be able to distinguish this form of criminal involvement from other types of criminal collaboration (cf. Sarnecki 2007). One general observation is that virtually all the study's interview participants consistently referred to this type of distinction when describing their experiences of criminal environments. Several interview participants made repeated references to differences between youth gangs and criminal networks, and a majority of those interviewed described criminal networks as being "somewhat more organised" and referred to these networks having "contacts in other towns and cities" and as being based on hierarchical structures.

Criminal networks are also linked to other forms of offending than those committed by same-age co-offenders in criminal gangs. Unlike youth gangs, criminal networks are viewed as primarily focused on offence types that require access to contacts in criminal social opportunity structures (Kleemans and de Poot 2008). The offences in question are primarily of a kind that require such contacts (which are not accessible to individuals outside established criminal environments) in order to access illegal, smuggled goods such as drugs and weapons (Ouellet et al. 2018). The individuals who have such contacts are also those who are viewed as controlling the collective and individual criminal activities that occur in the context of criminal networks. A 23-year-old interview participant explained the situation:

> In the network, people had contacts with other networks, and people are doing a lot of different stuff. There was violent stuff with weapons. It was very organised, it was, "You should do this, you shouldn't do that". In the first gang, we were like friends. It was we who came up with what we would do. But when you come into the network, you don't have any choice; sometimes you have to do stuff. That's just the way it was.

The interview participants' descriptions of the "organised" nature of network activities referred to the control structures that characterise criminal networks. The networks were often compared to youth gangs, in which same-age peers are viewed as equals, with no ability to make decisions about one another's actions. The majority of interview participants also described the dominant individuals within the networks as "elders", both in the sense that they were older than the interview participants themselves, and in the sense that they were well-established criminal actors within the local community.

Varying degrees of constraint in relationships between "elders" and "youngers"

Almost all the interview participants were also able to identify specific occasions on which their own, or others', "transitions "into the network had occurred, and a "before" and "after" in relation to this event. In most cases, these transitions had involved a situation in which a younger individual had accepted an offer to complete an assignment for an older individual. For most, the "after" that had then occurred involved the initiation of a hierarchical relationship with one or more older individuals within the network, rather than any sense of membership in an organisation. Almost all

interview participants characterised network entry as a transition that resulted in a clear restriction of the autonomy of younger individuals, although to a varying extent.

Many interview participants described the relationship between an "elder" and a "younger" as being characterised by "ownership". The younger individuals were spoken of as "your youngers" or a specific elder's "own youngers". This type of ownership relation was described as meaning that the elder determines when and how the younger will participate in activities, while at the same time the younger is expected to constantly be available. Other interview participants described a greater degree of freedom, and a relationship that was hierarchical but limited to regular tasks and assignments (such as selling drugs). Slightly less than half of the interview participants said that they had remained active within a youth gang with same-age peers at the same time as they "started meeting the elders in the neighbourhood", "subordinated themselves to elders", "submitted to group pressure and joined", "were recruited by elders" or "started working with the elders". In some cases, this had meant that a youth gang had started to function as a sub-group in relation to the criminal network.

Against the background of this general overview of the meaning of the terms "network" and "entry", we now move on to a more detailed, step by step description of the ways in which young people enter the networks. In this chapter, the focus is directed at processes and conditions *prior to* and *during* the network entry process, while information on the socialisation and control of youngers *subsequent* to their entry into the networks is presented in Chapter 4, *Network conditions*.

Requirements for initial contacts

One general conclusion that can be drawn from the study data is that young people's initial contacts with a network require proximity to or established participation in criminal environments. Since the involvement of new individuals in a criminal network always presents a risk, the networks primarily seek and accept young people with whom they are already familiar. This pool of potential "recruits" is thus comprised of young people who a) are already involved in offending, b) live or spend a lot of time in the area in

which the network is based, or c) are family members, close friends or relatives of individuals who are already active within the network.

A majority of the study's interview participants stated that they had met *all three* of these criteria prior to becoming involved in a network – they had grown up in a socially disadvantaged area in which the network was active, they had already started offending in the same area, and they had one or more relatives (including girlfriends) who were already active within a criminal network.

Prior offending

Most of the interview participants described having engaged in offending prior to coming into contact with a criminal network, but for different periods of time and with varying intensity. Their first offences had been committed between the ages of 7 and 15. In most cases, their offending prior to coming into contact with the networks had involved shoplifting, breaking and entering, and other forms of theft (such as "nicking bikes"), but some also mentioned assault and mugging offences. Almost all the participants stated that these offences had been committed together with friends, and that they had been part of a youth gang prior to the initiation of their relationships with elders in the networks.

These gangs were described as having been "more like mucking about, you're a kid and you get into fights in town", "knives but not guns", and "people you're hanging around with, taking drugs, and nicking stuff". These groups primarily comprised young males who were friends with one another, in which "everyone was equal" and "helped each other out". They might "set fire to cars and break into buildings as a fun thing to do". Several interview participants also described developing a criminal identity and a repertoire of neutralisations that could be used to legitimise their actions (cf. Wikström 2023). They said that they "started feeling a sense of kinship with offenders who were a little older" and "thought, ah, but these are people like us". Several described having adopted a view of the world in which offending was justified on the basis of the poor life conditions experienced by young people in socially disadvantaged neighbourhoods. In the interviews, this worldview manifested itself in fatalistic statements such as, "If you come from the

suburbs there are two ways you can go: either you become like Zlatan, or you become a serious criminal".

Several of the interview participants stated that involvement in offending in youth gangs is the reason that children attract the attention of older offenders from criminal networks, or alternatively that children themselves seek out and contact these older individuals. These observations are in line with the findings of previous studies, which have shown that youth gangs are often relatively short lived and can function as a recruiting ground for criminal networks (Ouellet et al. 2018). Some of the interview participants said that the attention of older offenders in the criminal networks is directed both at individual children and entire youth gangs. Contacts are made possible by the fact that older and younger offenders spend time in the same physical environments, recognise one another, and observe one another's offending from a distance. Some interview participants said, for example, "You live in the same area of course, you see each other every day", "I can see who is doing something [illegal] and who isn't", and "I always tend to be out in the neighbourhood, so I see which youngsters are getting up to mischief".

Visibility in the neighbourhood

Other interview participants said that being viewed as open to an approach from a network offender might require no more than living in the same area and spending time in the same public spaces in a given neighbourhood. These participants said that children who have "grown up on the same block" were viewed as being easy to approach because "I know where he lives, who his family are". The potential risks involved in initiating such contacts were generally viewed as being lower in relation to children whom older individuals have being seeing "since they were in nappies" and who "spend their lives out on the block". A young person might also already have a reputation for being reliable: "They looked at me and thought that he could maybe be someone, because he's loyal", but other factors also mattered.

Spending unmonitored time on the street

Knowledge about a child's family means that the individual "can't hide" if anything were to go wrong, and it also makes it possible to observe the child's social conditions. This makes it possible to select young people who are subject to a lack of social control from parents (and other adults). Some

interview participants described school holidays as a period during which it becomes clear which children are unmonitored and spending time on their own in the neighbourhood. A 20-year-old interview participant explained:

> I think it's all about how visible they are outside on the street. If an elder sees this little kid who couldn't go off to summer camp, who plays football outside on the block day in, day out, then obviously you go up and approach them.

Neighbourhood conditions can also mean that organised leisure-time activities, which tend to function as a protective factor in relation to offending, instead become a contact opportunity. In a small number of both Section 31 investigations and interviews, football training sessions were described as a meeting place both between older people involved in criminal network and younger individuals, and between same-age peers who then started to offend together. The qualitative police intelligence data from the local policing areas also includes examples of cases in which offenders were actively involved in organised leisure-time activities and associations. In neighbourhoods where outdoor environments are dominated by young males during the evenings, participation in certain leisure-time activities is also viewed as providing exposure to individuals who are well-known as active in criminal networks.

Non-residents choose to spend time in disadvantaged neighbourhoods

Some of the youngest interview participants (aged 15-20) had not themselves grown up in the disadvantaged neighbourhood in which the network they had become involved was based, but had themselves chosen to spend time there. Several of them said that they had felt more at home there than in their own neighbourhood, among other things as a result of having a non-Swedish background. One interview participant said, for example, "Because I lived in a neighbourhood with a lot of Swedes, I never felt like I belonged". As a result of their repeated presence in public places, and friendships with residents in the neighbourhood, these individuals had after a time been viewed as part of the neighbourhood. Several participants described that sustained presence in a neighbourhood was necessary for a contact to take place. They had experience of young people from other districts contacting them via social media, but said that it was more difficult to involve these individuals. One 16-year-old said, "It isn't possible with everyone", and described the type of young people that the networks were *not* looking for:

> The ask their friends if they know anything, if they know someone they can sell for. And then they come to us. They're usually always the rich little Swedes, you know. They watch too many music videos and stuff like that. It's the music. The gangsta rap, I mean. They think it's cool. And so they also want to do it to be cool.

At the same time, almost all interview participants said that the dissemination of expressions of criminal network culture, via music and social media, have served to extend the reach of the networks. Several interview participants said that this functioned as a form of "marketing" and "advertising" and said that networks that included popular rap artists had grown as a result of young people being attracted to them. A number of interview participants said that being visible in digital environments served as "a means of recruitment" outside the networks' own neighbourhoods: "It's really easy, it costs nothing, you don't have to meet the person, you can just sit and write to each other". The different approaches to previously unknown individuals may reflect a varying degree of risk aversion. Thus, "knowing who someone is", as one 17-year-old interview participant put it, is often, but not always, a requirement for initiating a contact.

Relatives and immediate family

More powerful forms of trust and familiarity are primarily established by means of social relations – by friendship or through immediate or extended family ties. Of the study's 28 interview participants, a majority had a close friend, family member, or relative who had entered a criminal network before they themselves had done so. In many cases, the interview participants had brothers who had become participants in the same criminal network that they themselves would later become involved in, "I've got a big brother who also got involved, so I was sucked into it", and, "Quite simply, it was my brother, his friends who were the same age as him, and the older guys who made the decisions – I felt that I wanted to be like them too". For a couple of these interview participants, participation in a network had not been preceded by typical forms of youth offending (thefts, break-ins, driving without a licence). One 20-year-old interview participant who is active in an extended-family-based network described a more direct path into network offending:

> I've grown up surrounded by criminality. I started when I was 13. Before that it was just fights at school and so on. When I started, it was serious crime straight away.

> Collect weapons, extortion, a bit of everything. Because of who I was. I've always known everybody, so they knew they could trust me. I've known everyone in the area, I can go to anyone. The ones I was active with were considerably older.

The thing that most of the interview participants who had directly become involved in serious crime have in common is that they had become involved in networks dominated by their own extended family or by their own (biological) brothers. Girls and women who become involved through a romantic relationship with a male in the network may also be introduced into the males' norms and given various tasks to perform. However, this may require that the female's partner vouches for her, as was described by one 22-year-old interview participant:

> If a girl were to approach this network, then she wouldn't be treated like me. Because she's got a lot of weaknesses; she can't defend herself, if she's not carrying a weapon. But I can fight till I die, you know. But if she gets hit, she's going to fall over. It's about what you can and can't do; that's what matters. Then of course there are girls who are respected by everyone, because they've got a man behind them. Nobody can say anything to them; nobody would dare to do anything. Not because she is what she is, but because she belongs to this particular person or that particular gang. Then everyone shows her respect.

The interview participants' descriptions of the type of young people who are sought by the networks, and the places in which contacts are established, are confirmed to some extent by the information obtained from the coding of Section 31 investigations. Of the total of 64 such investigations that included indications of links to criminal networks, almost two-thirds (41 investigations) related to crime suspects under the age of 15 who were living in socially disadvantaged areas. One-third (21) of the investigations contained information indicating that a family member (primarily brothers, but also fathers) or a more distant relative (a cousin or parent's sibling) had also been registered as a suspect in the same police investigation, or was "known to the police". Only a small number of these cases involved females. Previous research has primarily identified parental involvement in crime as a risk factor[18] for males with regard to the development of criminal behaviour

[18] A risk factor is a variable that is assessed to be associated with an increased risk for involvement in offending.

(Socialstyrelsen 2020) and involvement in family-based networks19 and organised crime (van Dijk, Kleemans and Eichelsheim 2018).20

Variations in network inflow in different parts of Sweden

The data that the study has examined from the Cylinder Model (information collected by the National Operations Department's intelligence unit regarding individuals assessed to be contributing to a criminal impact on local communities) provide an overview of the geographical distribution of networks in Sweden. Unlike many other indicators and assessments focused on criminal networks and organised crime, the National Operations Department's Cylinder Model also includes individuals who have relatively loose ties to the networks, and not only the central, more prominent individuals. The model assumes that locally established networks involve individuals who are at different stages of a process of becoming involved in offending (Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020).[21]

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[19] Labels such as family- and extended-family-based networks primarily refer to networks in which one generation of a family or extended family assumes a dominant role. An additional characteristic of such networks is that family members who are viewed as not being directly involved in the network may (voluntarily or involuntarily) be required to participate in the network's activities.

[20] No corresponding pattern could be found for females in this study (van Dijk, Kleemans and Eichelsheim 2018). The impact of risk factors generally varies on the basis of social structures, such as gender, race, and neighbourhood (Farrington and Welsh 2007).

[21] The Cylinder Model categorises identified individuals in A-D in regards to capacity. Category A includes dominant figures in criminal networks, those who have wider contact networks and the capacity to regulate supply and demand on illegal products. The B-category covers individuals who are visible in the neighbourhood and involved in illegal drug distribution, violent crimes and other types of network related offending on a daily basis. The Cylinder Model however also includes children who have been assessed to be "at risk" (Category D) because they have "started to develop norm-breaking behaviour and have a high level of exposure in their residential environment as a result of often spending time in the same places as criminal actors", and Category C) "youths who copy older individuals' criminal behaviours, even if they do not necessarily commit very many, or serious, offences" (Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020). Our analyses of the histories of suspected offending of the young individuals included in the Cylinder Model show, however, that a majority of those included in Categories C and D had already been registered as crime suspects, and often for serious offences (see the section "Drug dealing as the foundation" in Chapter 3, *Offending*). The reason that many young people are nonetheless included in Categories C and D may be due to a lack of information-sharing (between the social services and the police's intelligence and investigative units), the fact that children's involvement in offending is more difficult to detect and register, and a lack of insight into the age structures of the networks. As a result of these observations, our Cylinder Model population has also included those individuals assessed by the local policing areas as belonging to Categories D and C in terms of their criminal capacity, and presentations of data from the Cylinder Model make no distinctions between categories A-D. In the next chapter, and in Appendix 1 and 2, we present

During the period 2019-2022, just over 13,000 individuals were registered in the Cylinder Model. In order to present the most current picture possible regarding how many young people have been identified in different areas, we have compiled data for slightly over 9,000 individuals who were identified in the most recent collection of data from Sweden's local policing areas.[22] Table 1 shows that 42 percent (3,829) of these individuals were aged 21 or under at the time of the most recent data collection. One in seven of the individuals identified (1,307) were under 18 years of age. Both the number and proportion of young people in this population is considerably larger than that identified in previous Swedish estimates of the numbers involved in criminal networks based on other data sources.[23]

Table 1. Age distribution among the individuals registered in the Cylinder Model in the most recent data collection from Sweden's local policing areas. Age at the time of the most recent data collection.

Age	0-14	15-17	18-21	22-25	26-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
All (n)	196	1,111	2,522	1,949	1,319	1,362	385	214	9,058
All (%)	2.2	12.3	27.8	21.5	14.6	15.0	4.3	2.4	100
Males (n)	179	1,049	2,434	1,874	1,276	1,302	363	193	8,670
Males (%)	2.1	12.1	28.1	21.6	14.7	15.0	4.2	2.2	100
Females (n)	17	62	88	75	43	60	22	21	388

the offences for which the Cylinder Model individuals have been registered as suspects according to age and gender.

[22] During the period 2019 -2022, 80 of Sweden's 95 local policing areas have provided data to the Cylinder Model. In the most recent data collection (2022), 70 local policing areas provided data. For the other ten areas, Table 1 includes data from the most recent year in which data were provided.

[23] One study has estimated the number of individuals aged under 25 who are involved in criminal networks at between 1,000 and 1,500 individuals (Granath 2022). This estimate was based on a Police Authority assessment that there were 33 local criminal networks in Stockholm, with 20-40 members, of whom half were assessed to be under age 25, giving a total of between 300 and 800 individuals. Based on an estimate that there are roughly the same number of criminal networks in the rest of Sweden, these figures were doubled to produce an estimate of between 1,000 and 1,500 individuals aged under 25. This estimate is thus based on an assumption that criminal networks are a phenomenon that is largely restricted to metropolitan areas. Of the individuals included in the Cylinder Model, only around one-quarter were registered in the Stockholm police region. This may indicate that, outside the Stockholm region, crime linked to criminal networks, and the number of individuals involved, may be greater than previously assumed, including in the study by Granath (2022).

Age	0-14	15-17	18-21	22-25	26-29	30-39	40-49	50+	Total
Females (%)	4.4	16.0	22.7	19.3	11.1	15.5	5.7	5.4	100

Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit; data processed by the SNCCP.

Virtually all those included in the Cylinder Model are males (96 %). The proportion of young people (21 or younger) was approximately the same among males and females. However, the proportion aged under 18 was larger among the females (20.4 %) than among the males (14.5 %). It is difficult to draw conclusions about sex differences, however, as a result of the small number of females in the population.[24]

The young people identified in the Cylinder Model are also unevenly distributed across Sweden. Slightly over 40 percent of the Cylinder Model population who were aged under 18 were registered in so-called vulnerable areas.[25] This means that children identified in these areas are over-represented in relation to the proportion children comprise in these areas' populations. Measures focused on criminal networks are prioritised in disadvantaged areas, which may mean that the involvement of young people in criminal networks is more often detected in these neighbourhoods than in others. This is particularly the case in areas in which there is a well-functioning collaboration between the police and social services. At the same time, there is reason to believe that the prioritisation of measures, and the development of inter-agency collaborations, has at least in part been motivated by an awareness that the involvement of young people in criminal networks constitutes more of a problem in disadvantaged areas than elsewhere.

Network entry in practice

There is much to suggest that the young people who become involved in criminal networks are primarily individuals whose capacity the older

[24] Information on the numbers involved, and the offences for which they have been registered as suspects, are presented by gender in Appendix 2.

[25] For a geographical area to be categorised as vulnerable by the police, it must be characterised by both low socioeconomic status and a high degree of criminal impact on the local community (Polisen 2021a). The most common form of criminal impact involves open-air drug dealing and violence in public places that may be linked to criminal networks based in the area. Areas may be classified as vulnerable areas, risk areas, or particularly vulnerable areas, among other things depending on the degree of criminal impact and the propensity of residents to participate in the criminal justice process.

network offenders have to some extent been able to assess prior to any approach being made. Approaching children who are already actively involved in offending, or who are well-known for other reasons, reduces the risk for those who will become their "elders". The young people sought by the networks are primarily those who "are hungry" and "who want to get going". In order for such young people to initiate relations with older individuals within the networks, however, these elders must be present and available for young people wishing to approach them. Several interview participants therefore described the involvement process as starting when prominent elders made themselves visible (in the neighbourhood or via digital channels), showing off eye-catching jewellery, clothing, or cars, and the company of rap artists.

Making a show of an extravagant lifestyle, in combination with generosity towards the children and other residents in a given neighbourhood, can function as a means of both manifesting the power of a certain group within the local community and ensuring an inflow of motivated young people into the network. Being prepared to "help women carry their groceries" and "buy scooters for kids on the block" contributes to an image of the elders caring about "their" neighbourhood. At the same time, these activities also serve to mark and legitimise the network's presence in the area. One 20-year-old interview participant, who described always offering children lifts and playing football with them, said that he could see the consequences of giving them this attention: "A lot of kids come up to me and say, 'I want to be like you'".

Courting youngers

When contacts are initiated, it may be either the young person or the "elder" who takes the first step. A number of interview participants said that "youngsters come running" to them, that "youngsters want to get drugs on tick"[26], "a lot of young people approach elders", "youngsters came to us, and we used them", and described that they themselves had also been "drawn to the elders on the block". Other interview participants had observed "elders approaching" children, or had themselves experienced that "elders came and

[26] I.e., buying drugs for sale, on credit.

made me an offer", and that "we got noticed by elders". Irrespective of who initiates a contact, relationships can quickly become established, provided that the child is willing to accept an "offer". Several interview participants described these agreements as happening quickly: "They go up to them, talk to them, maybe 15 minutes", or "if you know someone round there you just have to ask – next day you're in". Others said that "it depends on how hungry the youngster is", and "if you feel uncertain, can't make up your mind, then it can take a bit longer". Even in cases where a young person has approached elders, the agreement may be preceded by some form of courtship. One 18-year-old interview participant described a situation of this kind:

> Yeah, I mean, they would stand somewhere near the shops. You see that they're selling drugs, so you go up and maybe ask if they've got any weed, and then maybe buy a gram [of cannabis] from them. Then you have them on Wickr and you start to ask like, "Do you know some way you might earn some money quickly?" [...] Yeah, but they were good to me when I met them the first time, you know when I was going to start selling drugs for them. They went off and bought me drinks, we smoked a joint, we went and ate at a really expensive restaurant. You know, "You're going to be able to earn like this when you get a bit higher up", or "then, when you've started". He bought me a bit, you could say. [Interviewer: *How did it feel for you?*] Yeah, I suppose it felt cool.

A central part of courting young people involves attempting to give the impression that the relationship is on equal terms. Several interview participants described elders getting close to young people by sharing experiences (for example, experiences of marginalisation and negative experiences of police contacts) or by participating in activities together (such as barbecues or going to football matches), while at the same time appealing to the young person's self-esteem using flattery ("he's someone to be taken seriously, he's tough") and gifts (cash, expensive clothes, hotel sleepovers, meals at restaurants). These gifts may also produce contagion effects, and lead to newly involved youths functioning as ambassadors for the networks: "By recruiting those individuals, you recruit others to, you know, when other youngsters see that they're going around on an electric scooter that costs six, seven thousand [SEK]". This approach is viewed as particularly important when it is an elder who takes the initiative and approaches a younger person. One 16-year-old interview participant explained why:

> You can't just say to them, "Start selling" straight away. Of course, they're going to say no. But you spend time with them for a while. In the end you say to them, "Help me with this", and give them five grams [of cannabis]. "Go to a customer, show me!". Then you say to them, "Ah, you know about this, why don't you start?" [Interviewer: *Does it usually work? Or are there some who don't want to?*] That can happen sometimes. There are some who say, "No, no" for a while. But in the end they'll come round. They see that their friends join up.

This courtship process functions both as a promise as to what future involvement in a network could mean, in terms of money and camaraderie, and as a way of concealing the premises that the future relationship will be based on. One general observation is that access to information is often unequal at the time these relationships are initiated.

A relationship of unequals

Even though a young person can assess the terms of a specific "offer" (such as the amount of drugs to be sold in a specific time frame), young people almost always lack the necessary information to judge what entering a network will mean in practice. This information gap primarily involves knowledge about the restrictions that will be placed on the young person's autonomy and the possibility of dissolving the relationship with the elder. One older interview participant described the process of involving young people in criminal networks as a "power game" with "youngsters who don't understand the consequences". However, the process is nonetheless viewed as legitimate, since the elders themselves have "had the same journey". At the same time, several interview participants said that the elders' advantage can be even greater when the process happens quickly, and that young people make decisions with no opportunity for reflection. One 23-year-old interview participant said:

> They think, "Wow, I want to have that power too; I also want to be a part of this gang; I want to be one of you". And they make a quick decision. And then they're stuck in it. And then it goes really quickly. It didn't use to be like that.

Several of the older interview participants described feeling that the entry process is quicker today than it was ten years ago. They compare the process of becoming involved in a network today with their own experiences, which were of a more gradual process (cf. Brå 2019a). For example, one 29-year-old interview participant described that he and his friends had started

"hanging out more and more" with elders during the school summer holiday, and that it was only at the end of the summer that they were given an offer: "You can earn a bit of money if you take this stuff home and hide it".

The speed of the involvement process may mean that young people with lower levels of impulse control are likely to be over-represented among those who become involved in criminal networks. Generally speaking, the developmental immaturity of young people means that they do not have the same ability as adults to judge the consequences of their actions. Young people with neuropsychiatric problems and disabilities often have an even more limited capacity for long-term thinking and emotional regulation, which may make them attractive to people involved in criminal environments (cf. Wikström 2023). One 22-year-old interview participant described why this is the case:

> Children with ADHD are particularly easy to involve. They're over-represented in the [criminal] underworld, I can tell you that straight off. Impulsiveness, action, excitement, everything happens fast. I have ADHD myself, so I know what it's like.

Although most of the interview participants did not view cognitive and emotional problems as a principal explanation for why they had themselves become involved in networks, over half stated that they had had problems completing their compulsory schooling as a result of concentration difficulties, marginalisation, bullying, fighting, and truancy.

Persuasion, manipulation, and coercion

The initial interaction with an elder may vary in length and intensity, from "starting to sell for the elder" to helping out with "just this one little thing". If the "younger" does not accept an "offer", elders may increase the intensity of their attempts to involve the young person, through flattery focused on the specific child's significance ("No one else can do this, you're a real brother to me") or by reminding the child of gifts they have been given ("We've given you this, looked after you like our brother, come on").

Demonstrations of power

We are unable on the basis of the interview data to assess which factors lead to an increase or decrease in the intensity of efforts to involve a certain individual in a network. Some interview participants said that children who

resist attempts at persuasion, and who have parents who intervene, may come to be viewed as uninteresting, because further interactions may lead to the elders attracting the focus of the authorities. Others said that elders may instead switch to threats and force children to become involved, despite resistance from both the children and their parents. One reason for this may be that the elders in question want to maintain a reputation of "having power in the neighbourhood" and of being able to "call the shots".

Debts and other forms of leverage

A relatively large number of interview participants said that elders "play dirty" if a young person is unwilling to become involved in a network. These participants described experiences of elders (speaking of either themselves or others) asking young people to do favours that they know in advance will result in failure. The aim is to create a hold over the young person and to generate a debt that then must be paid back. A 23-year-old interview participant described this method as being just as well-established as recruitment approaches based on consent:

> If I see a 14-15-year-old hanging out on the block, and who wants to be with us, then there are two ways to get him in. The first is that you completely spoil him. I mean, you give him money, you go out and eat together, you invite him to parties. You show him flashy cars, watches, chains. You want him to become fascinated by this life, so that he can do what you do. And then there's the other way, if you see that he doesn't want to. Then I can like give you drugs and say, "Go and put that in the corner over there". And then when he's done it, I go and take it. And then I say to him, "You've lost my stuff, you owe me fifty grand, so you have to do this and this". Where can this kid get hold of that kind of money? And then of course I give him a choice – that you can start selling for me, so that you pay off the debt. And he has no choice. Those are the two ways. A lot of people are using them today.

Arbitrary debts resulting from "incorrect" behaviour, or from a (real or invented) loss are often referred to as "fines" in criminal environments. Several interview participants described the levying of such fines as commonplace and said that they were used "all over the place", particularly in relation to young people. A young individual who has been fined in this way often has to "work off the debt, stashing things, selling drugs, robbing people". Thus, the levying of fines leads to individuals entering into involuntary relationships with network elders.

Powerful pressure in certain areas and within the family

The SNCCP's review of Section 31 investigations and police investigations in part confirmed the interview participants' descriptions of the use of compulsion to induce young people to commit offences and establish their position as "youngers" of specific network elders. There were a handful of cases in which intercepted communications or witness statements indicated that children had been compelled to engage in crime for the benefit of an elder. Three such Section 31 investigations contained information that a family had chosen, or was planning, to move as a result of children, or other family members, having come under threat when they had taken action to prevent a child becoming involved in a network. These Section 31 investigations focus on offences committed by children aged under 15 who have been forced to rob a store, stand at a specific place and sell drugs, store weapons at home, or steal expensive items from stores. One interview participant, who was the girlfriend of a male involved in a criminal network, was critical of these recruitment strategies and described her observations of the way children in her local area had little chance of exercising any autonomy:

> Unfortunately they're really young, a lot of them. I mean I have no problem talking to these guys, so I've said several times, "What the fuck are you doing?" And they're like, "Yeah, but it's not our decision, it comes from higher up, so we can't do anything about it". […] There is a family that lives here, and they have a lot of kids. One of them, who is 13 now, stands on the street near the shops. And you know, I've known this kid a long time and he's been so well-raised. And when I saw him there, I just looked at him and said, "What the fuck are you doing here?". And he says, "I've got no choice". But I said, "You've got so many choices; your brother doesn't do this even". And he said, "But I'm scared".

Some of the information from interviews and a small number of Section 31 investigations also suggests that the pressure can be particularly high on children whose fathers, siblings, or cousins are involved in criminal networks. This information related to young people who had been compelled to becoming involved in connection with some form of crisis that had arisen within the network in question. Such situations involved young family members or relatives having had to take over "business" or exact revenge when a family member or relative had been convicted, died, or been forced to retire as a result of having come under threat. One 25-year-old interview

participant provided an example of a young non-involved family member being chosen in this way:

> In one case it was when a relative had been shot. Then it was the youngest brother, who was 16 at the time, who had to get revenge. It was the family that sent the youngest [to do the shooting].

This information is in line with the findings of studies that have shown that the threshold for network entry may be lower for children who have relatives in a criminal network – partly because they are exposed to criminality in their home environment, and partly because decisions on their involvement in the network may be made by older family members (van Dijk, Kleemans and Eichelsheim 2018).

Why are these relationships initiated?

The previous section shows that elders may make use of potent measures and strategies to involve young people in criminal networks, while young people themselves may also be the driving force in initiating these relationships. This final section of the chapter on network entry takes a closer look at the incentives that motivate elders who approach young people and vice versa. The interview data show that both younger and older interview participants primarily describe financial motives and a need for protection as reasons for initiating these contacts. This means that relationships between elders and young people are often started on the basis of both common and contradictory interests.

Having "your own youngers" is a requirement for elders' careers

Most of the interview participants, including those aged between 15 and 18, had experience of themselves having "drawn in", "fixed", "controlled" and "delegated things to" other children, who had thereafter served as "their own youngers". Almost all interview participants said that these recruitments were motivated by labour requirements within the illegal drugs sector. They also said that career development within the networks is primarily based on a continuous increase in one's own drug sales volume. A new drug seller often starts out receiving 100 grams of cannabis at a time, which is then sold. This involves labour intensive sales work, for a good, but in the drug-market context relatively small, return.

Drug sales can be scaled up

Earning more money requires acquiring new employees as the volume of drug sales is scaled up. Interview participants were relatively consistent in saying that this means that industrious young drug sellers need to recruit individuals who are younger than themselves, "their own youngers", in order to move from handling 100 grams to a kilogram at a time. The interview participants said that a kilogram distributor may need between two and five youngers (depending on their capacity) to package, transport, store, and sell the drugs. A 17-year-old interview participant described the division of labour:

> Hmm, yeah, you want to earn more money the whole time, you know. So you need someone who – say that I collect a kilo [of cannabis] – I need someone who helps me sell it. So you find new youngsters. […] You start them in a way: first 25 grams, then 50, and then 100. When I feel that I don't need to work, meet customers and so on, I give them my phone [sales phone that contains numbers to drugs customers]. Then they meet the customers themselves.

The networks grow organically as older children involve younger children

Thus the "elders" who initiate relationships with children are themselves young people, who are often 1-3 years older than their own "youngers". Several interview participants from metropolitan areas and medium-sized towns with several criminal networks said that the typical age to start recruiting youngers was 16 years, and that those who were recruited were often aged 12 or 13. Thus, the involvement of the youngest children often takes place on the initiative of other young people who are located at the bottom of the drug distribution chain, but their activities mean that the entire network structure grows organically. This means that the benefits that accrue to the higher strata of the networks are also dependent on a continuous recruitment process. An interview participant who was in his twenties described how his own segment of a criminal network had developed:

> After we had collected drugs from the elders, we sent it off to these [youngers] and they did their thing. They took it and sold it, and then it just continues like that. When they felt that they'd done enough, they started giving their mobiles to younger people. After a year or two, as they start to reach 18, they give the mobiles to two other 15-16-year-olds who approached them. And so it continues, and the further down it goes – the higher up we get. So the more that are involved in this, how can I put it – pyramid, the higher up we get. And that means that the quantity increases.

There are thus certain structural incentives that make this field of criminal activity dependent on new recruitment. In addition to these structural incentives, interview participants also spoke of other reasons for involving youngers. One emphasised the power produced by having access to "kids" and said that "you always want to have youngers around who are willing to run your errands". Others said that they had finally agreed to involve young people out of goodwill, because the youngsters had pestered them and wanted to "go big", but also said that they themselves were not the kind of people who "wanted to exploit youngsters".

Girls exploited as "clean" individuals

For the somewhat older teenagers, moving up in the network also requires – in addition to having their own youngers – additional labour resources. This involved having access to what are referred to as "clean" individuals – people with no criminal history, who are therefore more suitable for certain types of activity. Interview participants said that there was a special demand for "young Swedish individuals who don't look like criminals" and "if possible, girls", who have jobs, driving licenses, and their own apartments. A 32-year-old interview participant described how he had found suitable girls:

> They were often approached for it. Sure, there are some who already want to do it, but you usually approach them. It may be that you are out having a drink, and you notice: she's got nothing against taking coke, I'll offer her a little. The next time you have a party at home, you start talking to her: "Do you need a bit of money, I can help you". That's how it worked. To be honest, many of the addresses I used [to store drugs] were girls' places. And it was girls who needed help – single mothers, that kind of thing. I gave them money; they were happy to take it.

Some interview participants described having entered relationships with girls, which resulted in these "girlfriends" allowing them to use their homes and cars in the belief that they had a real relationship, but where the objective had always only been to exploit their assets. There are also cases in which manipulation and compulsion are used:

> So it's a girl who I grew up with. She's not criminal, nothing. She just grew up with us. She has an apartment; she has a job; things are going well for her. And then one of us says, "Hey, can I put three kilos in your cellar, leave it there for a week?" And she says, "Okay". What happened then, three days passed. Then he sent someone to break into

her cellar. [Interviewer: *So she then had a debt?*] She had a debt. They said to her, "Now you'll store stuff for us". They locked her in.

The "clean" individuals are not viewed as being "one of the boys" and are often only used to do a specific task (such as money muling, stashing goods, driving), unlike the elders' "own youngers" who are required to be accessible and to participate in many different types of offending (see Chapter 3, *Offending*).

The needs of youngers: money, kicks and protection

The reasons youngers themselves seek out or consent to a relationship with elders are considerably more varied than the elders' motives. One general observation is that the older interview participants often had a narrative to explain why they had entered into network criminality, whereas the descriptions provided by teenagers and younger adults (aged 15-23) were more fragmented. Several of these younger interview participants were still actively involved in networks, which may mean that they have not yet developed a retrospective narrative about why they became involved. Another reason may be that the older interview participants, as a result of their maturity and having had time to reflect (for example via conversations with people working in exit programmes), may have developed a clearer picture of the circumstances and conditions that influenced them. Most interview participants, however, irrespective of age, gave more than one reason for having become involved in a criminal network.

Virtually all those interviewed described financial rewards as one of their motives. Entering the drugs market, via their elders, was described as giving an opportunity to "earn money", "have money and nice clothes, feel that nobody looks at you funny", and "to get what the elders had" because they were "fascinated by the lifestyle". Thus, it was a question of both the instrumental significance of improving one's financial situation, and the status that this was expected to provide. Many of the interview participants also said that the camaraderie among the elders attracted them in various ways. Being perceived "as one of them" meant that "you feel cool", "nobody could come at you", and that "you finally get respect". Having a relationship with a network may also be viewed as necessary to a progression of one's

criminal identity, with "adrenalin" and "kicks" being described as motives. One 18-year-old interview participant said the following:

> It just happened; friends meet friends. Friends who are bit off. You meet people who are bit off. Then you are developing all the time. After this week, when I'll be doing robbery, next week I want to be doing – something that's worse. Every step that you take, it gets worse and worse. […] You want the attention of others: "Look at him, he's fucked up".

Among those who had already been involved in offending before becoming involved in a network, there were also individuals who had sought the sense of solidarity found in the network as a means of protection. They described having found themselves having "problems" and "stress" after deals that had gone wrong, conflicts with same-age peers, or because they had conned the wrong people. The networks' capacity for violence and resources, and their camaraderie, were experienced as providing a sense of security when these individuals had come under threat from others.

Other interview participants described their involvement in a network as a way of escaping marginalisation, a destructive home environment, and failure at school. Although about one-third of the interview participants described having experienced a relatively good childhood, with engaged parents, a majority came from what may be characterised as difficult family conditions. They described having had parents with substance abuse problems, mental health issues, experience of war trauma, and experiences of domestic violence and corporal punishment at home. Several had grown up with an absent father and as part of a large group of siblings with a lack of social control. Such interview participants said that the networks gave them "affirmation from the wrong people".

Reputation rather than solidarity

These descriptions of the youngers' motives are largely in line with the findings from previous studies, which have shown that young people who are themselves motivated to join criminal networks tend to be attracted by the protection and camaraderie offered by the group, by an exciting lifestyle, and by fast access to money, and that involvement may also provide a means of financing one's own drug abuse (Behan 1996; Hixon 2010; Ostrosky et al. 2012). A sense of transition towards adulthood and of meaning, identity, and

self-esteem have also been described as motives (Forkby et al. 2020, Brå 2019a, Puhakka, 2005, Forkby and Liljeholm Hansson 2011). A number of differences can be noted in relation to these other studies, however.

Profit over identity

A considerably smaller number of interview participants than expected described that they had initiated their contacts with networks after initially having been purchasers of drugs. A small number of interview participants described their drug use as part of the path towards (youth) offending, but only one of these had initiated contact with network elders as a result of this. It is also worth noting that several interview participants described having sought camaraderie and belonging as a means of then being able to achieve financial rewards, rather than as an end in themselves. A shift of this kind has also been described in British studies of drug networks, where the desire for profit is viewed as having replaced markers of identity as the glue that holds the networks together (Harding 2020, Pitt 2008, Whittaker et al. 2019).

The emphasis that younger interview participants placed on personal profit may be understood on the basis of the structural incentives produced by the drug trade, which have been described earlier in this chapter. When the fundamental reason for involving younger individuals is based on conditions of ownership and drug distribution chains, this is likely to produce other forms of camaraderie than those found in youth gangs. It may be more reasonable to describe the networks' importance as being linked to status and reputation, rather than to solidarity "between brothers", when the structures in which young people become involved serve the purpose of increasing the volume of drug sales for an older drug dealer. The sense of camaraderie may instead be available within peer-based youth gangs, which several of the interview participants had remained part of, even though their loyalty upwards, towards "their own elders", can be strong.

The significance of the family's financial situation

The youths' desire to earn money should be viewed in light of the financial situation in their families of origin. Approximately one-third of the interview participants described having grown up under relatively good financial conditions, but roughly the same proportion described their everyday lives as

children as having been characterised by poverty. These individuals came from families in which basic needs (e.g., for food and clothing) could not be met, and some of the interview participants described having taken over the financial responsibility for the family by committing crime. Despite being opposed to their sons' involvement in crime, their parents found it difficult to say no to the financial assistance they provided.

More young people becoming involved over time

One general conclusion based on the findings presented in this chapter is that the motives that push young people towards criminal networks, and the strategies employed by elders to attract youngers, may in combination have contributed to a growth in the size of the younger age strata within the networks. Those interview participants who had many years' experience of Swedish criminal environments described seeing a marked difference in the number of young people entering the networks. One interview participant said, "There's more and more the whole time, it never ends". Several spoke of this as a relatively new phenomenon: "Using youngers as young as 15-16, that started after 2014." Another said that the increase in the inflow of young people into the networks was the biggest change that had happened in the criminal environment over recent years: "Primarily that we see a lot of very young people; there's a lot of youngsters".

Analyses of the data from the police's Cylinder Model show an increase in the number and proportion of young people registered in the model over time.[27] In order to examine changes over time, we have compared data from the 53 local policing areas that had provided data to the National Operations Department in both 2019 and 2022. Table 2 shows that the number of children (aged up to 17) identified in these areas increased from 672 in 2019 to 1,179 in 2022. This represents an increase of almost 100 percent over the four years. Children also comprise a somewhat larger proportion of the total

[27] In the report's introductory chapter (in the section on Registry and intelligence data), it was noted that the possibility of using the Cylinder Model to measure trends over time is limited. One reason for this is that the data have only been collected for a short period of time. Another reason is that the police's assessment has been that the implementation of the data collection process for the Cylinder Model was inadequate prior to 2021. It can nonetheless be noted that the successive increase in the number young people registered in the model between 2019 and 2022 (as shown in Table 2) has continued during the period to 2023 (Polisen 2023c). Data for 2023 were not available when the Cylinder Model data were provided to the SNCCP.

number of individuals registered in the Cylinder Model in 2022 (15 percent) than they did in 2019 (13 percent). This tendency is even clearer for the group of young people (up to age 21) as a whole. In 2019, a total of 2,036 young people had been registered in the 53 policing areas (comprising 39.5 % of the total), while this number had increased to 3,425 individuals (43.3 % of the total) in 2022.

Table 2: Number and proportion of individuals of different ages registered in the Cylinder Model by 53 local policing areas, as reported in 2019 and 2022. Proportion of the total number of individuals included in the Cylinder Model in these areas for each year in parentheses.

	2019	2022	Percentage increase
Total (n)	5,154	7,905	53.4 %
No. aged 14 and under	*70 (1.4 %)*	*191 (2.4 %)*	*172.4 %*
No. aged 17 and under	*672 (13.0 %)*	*1,179 (14.9 %)*	*75.4 %*
No. aged 21 and under	*2,036 (39.5 %)*	*3,425 (43.3 %)*	*68.2 %*

Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit; data processed by the SNCCP.

The number of young people registered in the Cylinder Model has not increased in all local policing areas, however. In 14 local policing areas, the number of young people has declined, while in the remaining 39 areas, there has been an increase of at least 8 percent. In 18 local policing areas, the number of young people under the age of 22 increased by 100 percent or more between 2019 and 2022. The increase in the number and proportion of children registered in the Cylinder Model is not limited to areas classified by the police as vulnerable areas but is instead also found in other types of neighbourhoods.[28]

Normalisation

Several interview participants described having experienced an increased inflow into the networks as a result of changes in the conditions for the initiation of relationships with young people. According to these participants,

[28] The data reported by the 53 local policing areas relate to 84 residential neighbourhoods (cylinders). In 53 of these neighbourhoods, there had been an increase in the number of young people (aged under 22) who were registered. Sixty-four percent of these 53 neighbourhoods had been classified as vulnerable areas. In half of these 53 neighbourhoods, the increase was dramatic, with a doubling of the number of young people registered. The number of young people registered had declined in 29 neighbourhoods, half of which had been classified as vulnerable areas.

the visible criminality taking place in certain neighbourhoods plays an important role in incentivising young people. Many children are today growing up in close proximity to places where drugs are distributed quite openly. Sellers are viewed as having shifted from having acted discretely to instead being more demonstrative in their sales activities. Some interview participants described this increased visibility, together with the impact of gangsta rap, as having produced a shift in norms, with the criminal lifestyle having become more attractive to a broader group of young people (cf. Wikström 2023). One 18-year-old interview participants said, "It has become a trend, there are more now, 2021 and 2022. Everybody wants to be a criminal".

Others said that it was first and foremost the elders' view of children that had changed. These interview participants emphasised that there has always been a need for labour within the drug sector, and that there have always been young people who have wanted to become involved. But the way elders respond to young people has changed. A 24-year-old interview participant described his own experiences:

> The elders said, "No, get out of here; you're snotty kids, like get lost". [Interviewer: *But you tried?*] Yeah, we tried to make contact. But they said, "No, you're too young, go and play". We couldn't then. But with the situation today, criminals think about exploiting them. They exploit youths and they benefit from it.

Some interview participants said that other considerations may have been a reason why there was not the same demand for young people previously. Some said that the use of children was not considered for reasons of competence. One interview participant, who was in his forties, said, "If you include children, things can go down the pan". Others said that there used to be a powerful normative barrier that is no longer there: "You didn't exploit children. We could have exploited children, but we didn't".

3. Offending

This chapter presents the study's data on the types of crime that tend to be committed by young people who have relations to elders in criminal networks. The first section presents a general overview of the social context that characterises young people's participation in the networks. The chapter then moves on to describe the types of offences that tend to be assigned to young people, and how these criminal assignments relate to one another. The chapter concludes with a presentation of reasons why these assignments are specifically given to young people.

The chapter is primarily based on data from the offender interviews. At the same time, conclusions and findings are viewed and discussed in relation to data from the criminal justice system. The chapter includes presentations of data on the offending histories of the individuals included in the Cylinder Model, which are based on suspected offences, as well as statistics from the Prosecution Authority and the SNCCP on crime trends, and also information from Section 31 investigations, intelligence data, and criminal investigations. These data are presented in order to show how the interview participants' experiences relate to the structure of the offending that is detected and investigated by the justice system.

The social context of young people's offending

The social relationships between elders and youngers are often central to the types of crime in which the youngers become involved. Chapter 2, *Network entry*, described the way in which such relationships are initiated by young people accepting or being compelled to complete a small assignment (e.g., passing drugs to a customer). The types of assignments that are subsequently given to young people depend on the strength of the ties that youngers have to "their elders", and the intensity of the contacts within these relationships. For many young people, the first assignment can relatively quickly result in daily contacts and intensive relationships with their elders.

Life as an errand boy

Interview participants described experiences of youngers and elders "meeting straight after school", "partying together", "driving around all night", and sleeping in the same apartment. Since offending activities vary and are integrated into a social context, it was often difficult for the younger interview participants to specify the types of assignment that they are usually given. This was quite simply dependent on what happened when they were together with elders: "Something new happens every day". When asked if youngers are assigned specific types of tasks, one 17-year-old answered:

> I mean, no, not tasks or assignments. It's more that you're with them. Then something happens, so you're going to help out. It's not something they assign you to do. You're going to say that you want help out yourself. And something is happening all the time. If you know the person well, you help out.

The youngest individuals who are close to elders, and who "help out", were consistently referred to as "errand boys" by the interview participants. According to these interview participants, "errands" involved doing whatever the elder asked, but also acting on one's own initiative. The services provided by errand boys vary depending on what elders need help with on a particular day: "One day it might be carrying shopping bags, another day it might be carrying weapons". The interview participants described grocery shopping, cleaning, and keeping watch outside a building as typical "errands" that were conducted in parallel with involvement in drug sales and occasional specific assignments, such as "fining someone", for example.

For other young people, their first assignment can result in continuous, but less intense, contacts with their elder. A small number of interview participants had experience of this type of relationship, saying, "We met sometimes, it wasn't all that often". What these interview participants had in common was that, other than selling drugs, they had engaged in very few tasks for their elders, and also that they had been active in smaller urban areas. Thus, the variations that emerge from the interview data relate to the extent to which the youngest individuals had committed offences or engaged in other tasks in addition to their involvement in selling drugs.

Network entry often leads directly to involvement in serious offences

Previous research has often described the process of involvement in criminal networks as a gradual development from non-criminal activities to participation in increasingly serious types of offending. These studies have found that the involvement of the youngest individuals may begin in the form of relatively simple tasks that are then gradually replaced with riskier assignments (such as storing and transporting weapons and drugs). This is then followed by participation in traditional forms of street crime such as drug dealing, theft, robbery, and violent crime (Carlie 2002, Ooms 2013).

No such gradual progression can be seen in the data collected in the course of the current study, however. In the following section, we therefore describe the criminalisation processes described in our own data – where involvement is intensified via participation in many different tasks and types of crime, which meld into one another (cf. Brå 2021b). Our data show that:

a) almost all network youngers are involved in drug dealing,

b) many are also given other assignments by their elders, and are thus involved in several types of crime,

c) they also commit offences "of their own" on the side,

d) more young people are involved in certain types of serious crime today than was previously the case.

Drug dealing as the foundation

One general conclusion that can be drawn from the study's data is that most of the young people who become involved in criminal networks engage in many different types of crime. The interview participants described that young people are used in the context of crime for financial reward (drug dealing, fraud, extortion), violent crime (assault, shootings, planting explosive devices, robbery), other crimes against the person (kidnapping, unlawful threats, molestation) and property crime (theft, breaking and entering). However, almost all interview participants said that drug dealing and drug distribution provide the central foundation for network income. This involvement in the drug market requires constant activity and (as was

shown in Chapter 2) constitutes the principal reason that the networks seek a continuous supply of new young people as a source of labour.

The interview participants' emphasis on the drugs trade as the networks' central field of activity are not contradicted by the types of offences for which the individuals in the Cylinder Model have been registered as suspects. We have examined the distribution of different types of suspected offences among the slightly over 9,000 individuals who were registered in the Cylinder Model on the basis of the local policing areas' most recent reports.[29] During the years 2018-2021, the 8,862 individuals in the Cylinder Model population who had reached the age of criminal responsibility (aged 15 and over) had been registered in connection with just over 116,000 suspected offences.[30] Children aged 15-17 had been registered for one-sixth of these suspected offences, and had on average been registered for 17 suspected offences per person. Just over one-third of these offences involved different types of drug crime (see Appendix 1, Table 8).[31]

[29] The analysis and its results are described in more detail in Appendix 1.

[30] Males account for most of the registered suspected offences. Females account for 4 percent of the Cylinder Model population, but account for only approximately 1.5 percent of the total number of suspected offences. Additional data on sex differences are presented in Appendix 2.

[31] The majority of these suspected drug offences involved possession or personal use, i.e., the individual had been suspected of possessing or having taken drugs. One possible explanation for the relatively large proportion of drug offences among the crimes for which the Cylinder Model youth had been registered as suspects may be that the police tend to focus their drug enforcement activities on individuals who are known to engage in offending, which increases the likelihood of detecting possession and personal use offences among these individuals (Brå 2021c, Estrada, Bäckman and Nilsson 2022). The large number of suspected drug offences may also reflect the prevalence of both drug use and drug distribution in criminal environments, but also the working methods employed by the police. Registering someone as being suspected of having used drugs, for example, may be used as a means of justifying body searches and searches of cars in connection with traffic stops. Those registered as suspects in connection with possession offences are likely to also include individuals who have been found to be in possession of smaller or larger quantities of drugs, but where the police intervention was in fact motivated by a suspicion that the individual was selling drugs (an offence officially labelled "transfer" in the Swedish drug legislation). In those cases where the transfer offence cannot be proved (e.g., because a drug sale was not witnessed, and there was insufficient supporting evidence in the form of drug scales or records of customer communications in the individual's phone), the suspected offence may instead be recorded as possession (Brå 2021c, Brå 2017b). This means that even suspected minor drug offences in network environments may be an indicator of the presence of commercial drug dealing within a given network.

Transporting, storing, and selling drugs

The fact that many of the suspected offences for which the young people in the Cylinder Model have been registered were drug crimes does not mean that drug offences are only, or even primarily, committed by young people. Drug crime also constitutes the most common offence type for which older individuals in the Cylinder Model (aged 22 and over) have been registered as suspects. The study's interview participants nonetheless emphasised that certain types of drug-related activities are more often given to the youngest age groups. A majority of the interview participants spoke of the transportation and storing of small quantities of drugs, but also drug sales to individual drug users. These descriptions are in line with the information contained in 175 neighbourhood documents[32] that were obtained from the National Operations Department's intelligence unit. Eighty-three of these documents contained information on the types of activities for which the youngest individuals are used. Three-quarters of these (63 documents) described certain forms of drug-related activities as those that were typically engaged in by the youngest age groups (e.g., delivering, storing, and selling drugs).

Young people take risks by being in close proximity to drugs

The interview participants said that network youngers have "stashes", "hand over drugs", "are the ones who have the drugs on them", "stand near the shops", "travel to other countries and deliver", and "are involved in rushes" (a term used to describe the transportation of drugs, e.g., by car, to other towns and cities). The interview participants' descriptions are also confirmed by the picture obtained from the study's analysis of chat-service conversations provided by the Police Authority. These chat conversations contain messages such as: "the kid's being sent with the gram in the bag", "make sure they're placed out on the square" and "the kids are being prepared to do the delivery". The information provided by both interviews and police intelligence data also show that other tasks located on the periphery of the drug market can be assigned to young people, such as being lookouts (placed to warn of the approach of enemies or police officers) or travelling around with a mobile phone (so that the phone's GPS doesn't lead

[32] The neighbourhood documents are produced as part of the data collection for the Cylinder Model. They focus on the situation in the neighbourhoods that are experiencing an impact of criminal activities.

to it being located in the "wrong place"). A 30-year-old interview participant described the range of tasks that were given to children in his district:

> You get 100 crowns a day if you sit with a mobile near the shops and ring when a strange car turns up and so on. So there's jobs linked to everything. To begin with, the only jobs involved violence or drugs; if you didn't want to be involved in that, you couldn't be a part of it. Now there are new things to put people on. If you don't want to be a lookout, you can go and buy stuff for our drug centre or fix other things. There's always different kinds of jobs to do like.

Varying opportunities for autonomy

There is variation in the degree of autonomy available to the youngest age groups involved in the drug trade. Some interview participants described that interactions with elders were limited to exchanges of drugs and money at brief meetings. Between such meetings, the youngers were relatively free to decide how they would carry out the tasks they had been assigned: "Do what you like, as long as it gets done". Other interview participants described a much greater degree of control, particularly in relation to younger children in metropolitan suburbs. The examples provided related to children having to be at certain sales locations ("for eight to ten hours"), constantly available via mobile phone for various types of assignment (such as collecting or delivering drugs), and different forms of "contracts". The same type of information was also found in some of the Section 31 investigations. The following is a summary of how the "work situation" of a 14-year-old suspect was described in one such investigation:

> At interrogation, the suspect said that a gang had offered him "employment" and a monthly salary. To begin with he declined this "offer of work", but was then threatened by the group, that he would be being given a beating. His working hours are between 3pm and 11 pm. The guy who gives him assignments is aged 16 and checks to see he is doing what he should. He leaves the money he gets at different addresses, and in the evening to people who come in cars. The "salary" he was initially offered has been halved. (SNCCP's summary)

Many of the interview participants said that the drug sellers who were a little older (typically aged 16-19) were given considerably more freedom (cf. Brå 2021c). The elders who are themselves teenagers often have "their own

youngers" (see Chapter 2) and can give these youngers their sales phones[33] during periods of stress. Career paths within the networks, and the youngers' career opportunities, are described in Chapter 4, *Network conditions*.

Other assignments: weapons, violence, and fraud

For most of the interview participants, activities associated with drug distribution had been a common thread during their youth. They had been "in charge of the phone" and had "met their customers" in parallel with being given other tasks and committing other types of crime. Handling weapons was mentioned repeatedly as something that is part and parcel of the drug trade: "In [town] it's common for children to carry weapons and handle drugs". Youngers are a popular option for hiding weapons, moving them between different locations, and carrying them when elders need to have a weapon with them.

The data from the Cylinder Model also show that young people are registered as suspects in connection with weapons offences. Children aged 15-17 accounted for 12 percent of the 4,550 suspected weapons offences linked to the Cylinder Model population in 2018-2021 (see Appendix 1).

Youngers decline to, want to, or are forced to carry out shootings

In addition to drug- and weapon-related activities, various types of violent crime were also described as assignments that were often "given to kids". The interview participants repeatedly mentioned shootings, but also other forms of threats and violent crime: extortion, debt collection, and assault. A 19-year-old interview participant described how social interactions with elders can be interspersed with assignments of this kind:

> We went over there and met the older guys around 8-9 pm. And sometimes it could be fun things; sometimes a barbecue, sometimes you could do stuff like that. Sometimes it could also be like: "Yeah, but you're going to this, boys; you're going to fine this guy, you have to get hold of this guy".

Tasks are assigned on the initiative of both youngers and elders. With regard to serious acts of violence and shootings, several interview participants said

[33] A sales phone is a mobile phone that contains contact details (phone numbers or usernames in messaging apps such as Telegram or Wickr) for drugs buyers.

that there were young people who repeatedly declined, or who were not asked to take part in, this type of assignment. Others said that many young people want to do these things, that they "are ready", "youngers offer to do it", and say that "we competed with each other to do it".[34] Still others said that "kids are sent on dirty jobs", and that youngers could be required "to do it in order to have to pay a debt". In addition to using their "own youngers", elders may also use those of other elders. Both the police investigations and chat messages examined in the study contain examples of dialogue in which elders offer one or more of their "kids" or "juniors" as "soldiers" to friends in other networks.

The data on suspected offences linked to the Cylinder Model population show that 15-17-year-olds are over-represented (by comparison with other age groups in the Cylinder Model population) among those suspected in connection with certain types of offences involving threats and violence (see Appendix 1). Individuals aged under 18 account for more than one-third of the suspected offences involving unlawful coercion and obstruction of justice for which the Cylinder Model population had been registered. Children also account for one-quarter of the non-violent offences against the person and 17 percent of the extortion offences, despite only accounting for 12.5 percent of the population as a whole.

The fact that shootings were repeatedly mentioned in the data as a form of assignment that could be given to children (aged under 18) does not mean that these crimes are always, or even primarily, committed by the youngest individuals. Several of the older interview participants said that they wanted "to do it themselves", together with friends, or described situations in which they had not even considered the idea that a shooting could be given to someone else in the form of an assignment. The analysis of the suspected offences linked to individuals in the Cylinder Model points in the same direction. Although 13 percent of those registered as suspects in connection with firearm homicide or attempted firearm homicide were aged 15-17, and 38 percent were aged between 18 and 21 (during the years 2018-2021),

[34] The reasons young people express an interest in carrying out certain types of assignment are described in more detail in Chapter 4, *Network conditions*.

almost half of the suspected offences of these kinds had been linked to individuals who were over 21 years of age (see Appendix 1, Table 5).

Young people are involved in fraud

One general observation is that, although it is always difficult to obtain an accurate picture of crime on the basis of justice system data, the use of such data to obtain a picture of the offending of criminal networks involves additional challenges. One interview participant (who had previously been part of a youth gang) said that the transition to network involvement meant that he came to be registered by the police less often than previously: "They took me in lots of times before, but when it got more organised you didn't get taken in, because it was more planned". Circumstances of this kind are probably more significant in relation to some offence types than others, with organised fraud perhaps providing one clear example.

While several interview participants described fraud as an important aspect of the criminality that provided income within criminal networks, fraud offences accounted for only 2.4 percent of the suspected offences linked to individuals registered in the Cylinder Model between 2018 and 2021. A number of interview participants said that "fraud is the new thing" and that the profits produced by fraud were "very big" at the same time as both the risk of detection and sanctions were "low". According to interview participants, telephone frauds[35] comprised the principal type of fraud crime engaged in by the networks in which young people could be given assignments. Although interview participants said that "everyone is doing it now", the youngest age groups were described as primarily being used "to find [money] mules". They can also be used to "do errands" for the somewhat older youths who work at the so-called fraud call centres. The interview participants' experiences were also confirmed by data from the chat-service messages examined in the study. These included descriptions such as "the guys' guys are organising bank accounts" and "the little 'un will collect the money". These descriptions thus indicate that large scale fraud has become an important part of the activities of criminal networks, but that the youngest children are only involved in certain aspects of these fraud

[35] Phone fraud is sometimes referred to as vishing, see Brå 2023.

activities. A 33-year-old interview participant described his own view of how various forms of fraud had spread among criminal networks:

> I mean, all networks have drugs as their foundation. But then fraud, weapons, whatever you can think of, protection rackets, all that kind of thing — as a criminal, you need as many sources of income as possible, because if one gets closed down, you have other alternatives. You always have to have a back-up. So the smart ones, they have several sources of income, not just one. And fraud, you earn millions, it's not small amounts. […] And you know, I've been there loads of times when people come up to them [the elders] with suggestions. Because they want to make money off it, but they don't have enough contacts to solve the problem. So they [elders] get loads of suggestions the whole time. They just have to sit there, because they're sitting on the contacts, they're sitting on the money, they're sitting on the power, like. So they often get this completely free. So it comes to them served up on silver platter, once they've reached a certain level.

Autonomous offending: robbery, theft, and extortion

There is much to suggest that young people also commit their "own offences" in addition to the assignments they are given by elders in the networks. Chapter 2, *Network entry*, showed that a majority of the interview participants described having engaged in violent offences, thefts, break-ins, and robbery *prior to* becoming involved in a network. Almost all the younger interview participants (aged 15-20) said that they had also committed these types of crime *subsequent to* having become involved in a network. They had "continued thieving", "nicking stuff", and "mugging people". They said that they had engaged in theft and robbery offences both together with elders and in the form of offending on their own, "on the side". While some described having the freedom to engage in this type of offending, others said that they had done so in secret:

> It was my own initiative. I mean, I didn't tell them anything. I carried on a bit behind their backs. I don't know, I just didn't care about it, fuck it. It didn't involve massive amounts of money.

Others said that they had continued to commit thefts and street robberies, but that they now did so together with their elders or that they gave elders part of the profits from the offending they engaged in on their own. Both the interviews and police intelligence data contain information on young people engaging in extortion against both businesses and private individuals on the

basis of the network's reputation. A 40-year-old interview participant described what was happening in his own town:

> These 16-17-year-olds, they take people's wages too. There's someone who lives in a disadvantaged neighbourhood, and they get to know: "Hey, you've got a job at [company], you have to give me this much of your wages". And the neighbour says, "What, okay". They can't say no. They can't go to the police either, because they know, you know. When you know that someone has shot somebody before or that someone's had somebody killed before, you don't do that.

A similar picture emerged in the analysis of the 64 Section 31 investigations (in which there were indications of links to criminal networks). Around half of these Section 31 investigations related to different forms of robbery and extortion in which children aged 12-14 had been suspected of involvement together with one or more older youths (often aged 15-17).[36] In many of these cases, the individual subject to the Section 31 investigation was part of a larger group that acted together (cf. Brå 2021d), but in some instances, the younger individual's role had been to act as bait and ensure that an intended victim would be in a certain location where he or she could be extorted or robbed. A couple of these cases involved girls who had posed as wanting to sell sex or naked images, and who had then extorted buyers with the help of males who were involved in a criminal network. There were also a number of interview participants who described similar forms of extortion involving girls and women with loose ties to criminal networks (cf. ECPAT 2023).

The analysis of the suspected offences linked to the individuals included in the Cylinder Model also indicates that robbery (together with thefts and breaking and entering) constitutes a relatively common offence type among young people who are involved in criminal networks. Young people aged up to 21 account for four-fifths of all the suspected robbery offences linked to individuals in the Cylinder Model population, and children (aged up to 17) accounted for almost half (see Appendix 1).

[36] In some cases, only children aged under 15 had been registered as suspects, despite the police believing that other individuals had also been involved. These investigations often include information from intercepted communications or analyses of digital communication, which indicated that the child had been given the crime as an assignment, although it had not been possible to obtain evidence to establish the identity of the instigators or to prove that they had been involved.

Increase in the numbers of young people involved in serious offences

In summary, this general description of the offence types in which young people become involved in criminal networks shows that they are not exempted from participating in serious crime. Several interview participants were of the view that the group of young people who commit serious offences is larger today than it was previously: "They come in directly in more serious ways." Nor is this view contradicted by the crime statistics examined by the SNCCP, or the Prosecution Authority data on the suspected offences linked to individuals aged under 15 who have been the subject of Section 31 investigations.[37]

In order to examine whether more young people with links to criminal networks are committing serious offences, we have compiled data on crime trends for a number of the offence types that the qualitative and quantitative data sources employed in this chapter indicate to be typical of the offending of young people in criminal networks. Since young people who are not involved in criminal networks are also often suspected of general offence types such as assault, theft, and robbery, Table 3 presents information on a more restricted range of more specific offences. The selection of offences is based on 13 crime codes that relate to offence types that require contacts with criminal opportunity structures (in order to obtain access to drugs and weapons). Although some of the crime codes appear to relate to offences that may overlap to some extent (first and foremost conspiracy and preparation to commit murder with a firearm, and attempted murder with a firearm), these crime codes cannot be combined because the crime statistics are based on one suspected offence per offence type, person, and year.

[37] The official crime statistics only present data on individuals who have reached the age of criminal responsibility (i.e., those aged 15 and over). The data collected from the Prosecution Authority relate to suspected offences linked to individuals who have not yet reached the age of criminal responsibility (aged 14 and under).

Table 3. Number of individuals suspected of certain offence types (one suspected offence per individual and year) among persons aged 15-17 and 18-20[38] at the time of the offence.[39]

Crime code	Age	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Weapons offences	15 – 17	42	45	61	91	77	110	130	172	167	239	336
	18 – 20	95	79	101	151	151	190	215	336	397	432	508
Murder of a male, with firearm	15 – 17	7	*	6	14	7	4	17	18	9	21	18
	18 – 20	8	10	11	13	25	33	33	43	28	34	53
Attempted murder of a male, with firearm	15 – 17	6	7	6	18	10	14	9	25	-	-	-
	18 – 20	25	34	14	30	34	48	49	49	-	-	-
Attempted murder of an adult male, victim known to offender, with or without firearm	15 - 17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	11	14	23
	18 – 20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41	36	32
Attempted murder of an adult male, victim unknown to offender, with or without firearm	15 – 17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	48	44	62
	18 – 20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	95	108	132
Attempted murder of male child, with or without firearm	15 – 17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	22	13	23
	18 – 20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	15	16	16
Extortion	15 – 17	-	134	153	140	145	157	208	230	290	230	202
	18 – 20	-	183	209	210	173	209	202	266	347	287	274
Narcotics transfer	15 – 17	310	344	320	245	213	311	349	357	390	412	406
	18 – 20	695	752	712	626	687	786	885	931	921	876	958

[38] The age groups used in Table 3 do not correspond to those used in our presentations of the data from the Cylinder Model (see Tables 1 and 2, and Appendixes 1 and 2). Our analyses of data on the individuals registered in the Cylinder Model include individuals aged 18-21 in the group defined as young people. Table 2 is instead based on the age groups presented in the SNCCP's official crime statistics. Information on the crime codes employed and the relationship between the total numbers of suspected offences and the proportions of these offences accounted for by young people in different years is presented in Appendix 3.

[39] For reasons of anonymity, values between 1 and 3 are replaced by an asterisk (*). Cells that contain a dash (-) indicate that for that year, the crime code in question had not yet been introduced, had been discontinued, or had been replaced with a different crime code during the course of the year.

Crime code	Age	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Fraud	15 – 17	363	383	336	354	307	319	383	535	691	663	776
	18 – 20	1 096	953	906	811	766	750	883	1 040	1 449	1 440	1 335
Robbery of a store, with firearm	15 – 17	30	36	44	59	49	42	31	17	10	8	9
	18 – 20	44	69	40	69	49	72	64	35	25	27	12
Robbery of a person aged under 18, with firearm, outdoors	15 – 17	19	10	16	19	8	19	18	40	42	33	32
	18 – 20	12	*	6	7	6	8	13	16	21	19	20
Robbery of a person aged under 18, with firearm, indoors	15 – 17	0	0	*	0	*	8	*	9	4	6	4
	18 – 20	0	*	0	*	*	11	6	5	5	*	*
Other robbery with firearm[40]	15 – 17	19	9	17	19	17	17	19	19	29	30	9
	18 – 20	43	33	31	31	43	25	67	25	33	44	23

Source: Official crime statistics, SNCCP.

For several offence types, the total number of young people registered as suspects was greater in 2022 than it was ten years earlier – not least with regard to a number of the offence types described by interview participants as being typical of the offences committed by the youngest individuals in criminal networks. Both Table 3 and Table 4 show a gradual increase in the number of children registered as suspects for the narcotics transfer (sale) offence. The number of children aged 15-17 who have been registered as suspected of weapons offences has increased dramatically, as has the proportion of the total number of suspected weapons offences that children account for (from 5 percent in 2012 to 11 percent in 2022, see Appendix 3). The data from the Prosecution Authority on suspected offences committed by children aged under 15 also show a dramatic increase in the number of suspected offences during the period 2015-2022.

The number of young people aged 15-17 and 18-20 who have been registered as suspects in connection with the murder of male victims has also increased markedly between 2012 and 2022. Individuals aged under 21

[40] Includes the crime code 0856, robbery offences not covered by other robbery codes.

account for half of all suspected murder offences in 2022 (see Appendix 3). There have also been marked increases in the number of young people registered as suspects in relation to extortion and fraud offences, both in the official crime statistics and the data from the Prosecution Authority on children who have been the subject of Section 31 investigations. For certain types of robbery involving firearms, the number of suspected offences linked to young people is lower in 2022 than it was in 2012. This is to some extent due to the fact that the total number of suspected offences involving robberies of stores with firearms, and other forms of robbery with a firearm, have declined substantially over the course of this period (see Appendix 3).

Table 4: Number of suspected offences that have resulted in a registered decision[41] linked to persons aged under 15 who have been subject to an investigation in accordance with Section 31 of the Young Offenders (Special Provisions) Act (1964:167), by offence type and year.[42]

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Weapons offences	9	9	10	10	24	14	28	44
Murder of a male, with firearm	0	0	*	*	0	*	*	*
Attempted murder of a male, with firearm	*	*	*	*	-	-	-	-
Attempted murder of a male, with or without firearm[43]	-	-	-	-	-	19	12	17
Extortion	26	49	38	34	96	92	72	101

[41] The term "have resulted in a registered decision" means that a decision has been registered in the system as to how the suspicion relating to the individual's involvement in a particular offence will be dealt with.

[42] The presentation of suspected offences registered in the Section 31 investigations (Table 4) differs from the presentation in Table 3, which is based on official crime statistics. In Table 4, the presentation includes all suspected offences for which the individuals (aged under 15) have been registered, which means that the same individual may have been registered for several offences of the same type. This is in contrast to the data contained in the official crime statistics (for individuals aged 15 and over) which includes only one suspected offence per person, year, and crime code. For reasons of anonymity, values between 1 and 3 are replaced by an asterisk (*). Cells that contain a dash (-) indicate that for that year, the crime code in question had not yet been introduced, had been discontinued, or had been replaced with a different crime code during the year in question.

[43] Since the presentation of data from the Section 31 investigations includes all suspected offences for which a decision was registered in each year, instead of only one suspected offence per individual, crime code, and year, it has been possible to combine crime codes that cover offences that are similar to one another. The following crime codes have therefore been combined: 0328, 0329, 0336, 0337, 9390, 9392.

	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Narcotics transfer	9	9	15	8	25	13	19	23
Fraud	11	14	23	47	37	58	54	65
Robbery of a store, with firearm	11	4	14	*	*	4	*	0
Robbery of a person aged under 18, with firearm [44]	11	10	6	17	12	12	15	15
Other robbery with firearm	5	*	6	*	7	4	*	*

Source: Prosecution Authority; data processed by the SNCCP.

Although it is inappropriate for various reasons to assume that numbers of registered suspected offences and offenders reflect actual crime trends, the information presented in Tables 3 and 4 is in line with the picture described by interview participants of an increase in the extent to which young people are involved in serious crime in criminal networks.[45] Thus, all the data sources employed in the study indicate that there has been an increase in the number of young people who have links to criminal networks, and that this group of young people is committing a greater number of serious offences today than was the case ten years ago.

Why use young people in particular?

The reasons for specifically using young people to engage in the crimes, tasks, and assignments described above can vary. Many interview participants expressed the view that criminal environments are characterised by a constant effort to increase the degree of exploitation, i.e., to increase the benefits that can be gained from the work of others (cf. Harding 2020). In relation to young people, this means that those giving young people assignments strive to give them as many tasks as possible, at as low a cost as possible. One 17-year-old interview participant, who has several "youngers", said the following, when asked about the types of assignments and tasks that could be given to these youngers:

> They can do everything. You want to get them to do it all. When you're older, I mean you're smarter; you don't want to be in prison and so on. So you teach youngsters to

[44] The following crime codes have been combined: 9808 and 9809.

[45] In addition to crime trends, crime statistics also reflect changes in working methods, legislation, and prioritisations made in relation to the work of the police.

> take care of it. They take certain drugs from one area to another, or I can get into their heads to get them to shoot this person, make him their enemy. This person hasn't done anything to them; I'm the one who actually has a beef with this person.

The interview participants' descriptions of the strategic use of young people are in line with the findings of previous studies that have emphasised the importance of financial and rational motives in relation to the decisions taken in criminal environments (Moeller and Sandberg 2017). Against this background, three types of motives were identified in the statements made by the study's interview participants. These relate to the distribution of activities in a way that means that: a) tasks that involve a high level of risk are conducted by people other than elders within the network, b) tasks are conducted as cheaply as possible, and c) the networks and their criminal activities become more competitive and are able to expand.

Transferring risk

According to the study's interview participants, the most important reason for giving young people certain types of tasks and assignments was to reduce the level of risk for elders. It is this endeavour to reduce risk that largely governs the way the continuous work of storing, transporting, and selling drugs and weapons is organised (Moeller 2017). The division of labour employed results in the young people who work close to these illegal goods constantly having to take risks, while the elders who tell them what to do are able to maintain a safe distance. A 20-year-old interview participant described his own work situation in the following way:

> Almost every day involved a risk for me when I was 16. It was everything from hiding things at home, like weapons or several kilos of cocaine or cannabis, to driving around with them in a taxi. Then you're risking quite a lot of years in prison.

Younger individuals are easier to manipulate and exploit

The data from both police investigations and interviews show that young people also function as a means of increasing the mobility and safety of elders in public spaces by acting as human storage facilities. By having youngers available, elders are able to "park" weapons and drugs on them (e.g., in connection with police interventions), at the same time as they can have rapid access to drugs and weapons when they need them. A 35-year-old interview participant described this strategy:

> In different public places, there's always a mix of older and younger individuals. And then you can work it out for yourself that everything will land on the younger guy if something happens. He is holding all the drugs. All those who are young and who can't stand up for themselves get exploited. Tough to say it, but I was too.

According to the interview participants, this type of daily risk-taking is made possible by way that the risk-assessment capacity of younger people is worse than that of older individuals. They are of an age that makes them easier to manipulate and exploit than adults (cf. Mastropolo 2014). The fact that the risk of being given custodial sentences, and of being subject to coercive investigative measures, is lower for young people is also viewed as a significant factor. Several interview participants referred to the sentencing reductions that are automatically given to people under the age of 18 as a means of convincing young people of the legitimacy of the chosen division of labour:

> They say to him, "Hey, brother – or sister if it's a girl – if you carry this weapon, park it with me, if my enemies turn up, we're going to shoot at them". And, "If you get caught, brother, you won't get much; you'll have to sit in a treatment home for three months". And it's true of course, they're not lying.

The interview participants in general described a change whereby there had been an increase in the use of younger individuals for all types of tasks, including serious forms of crime, in criminal networks. This is particularly the case in relation to homicides, which participants described as now more often being carried out by people who were not the instigators.

> Before, then you took care of it yourself like. Or you went with a friend – "click" – and did it yourself. But these days it's as though we criminals, or those of us who are a part of networks, we have like found a thing that takes it off our shoulders, and puts it on someone else, who actually doesn't even know the consequences or think about what the person can do.

Youngers assume responsibility for offences they have not committed

In some cases, when elders are suspected of offences despite their risk-reduction strategies, and are placed on remand, younger individuals assume, or are required to, "take the punishment" for these elders. A number of interview participants spoke of children who had been given assignments to confess to and accept the punishment for a serious offence that they had not committed. In this regard too, the sentencing reductions given to young

people are viewed as essential to elders' ability to motivate young people to memorise a confession that can be given during a police interrogation so that charges against elders will be dropped. These interview descriptions are also in line with the events described in a small number of the police investigations and chat conversations examined in the study, which show that young people have contacted the police and said that they were "feeling bad" because the wrong person was sitting on remand.

Minimising costs

Chapter 2, Network entry, showed that young people are often recruited in order to increase the drug sales volumes of their elders. One reason for specifically using young people is that they often accept lower levels of compensation. Reducing labour costs in this way increases the elders' profit margins. The data from the study's interviews and police investigations show that the compensation that young people receive for their services varies. While older teenagers are often able to themselves take out profits from their drug sales activities, younger individuals are often given "wages", symbolic gifts, or nothing at all. The police investigations, Section 31 investigations, and interview transcripts contain several examples of cases in which the youngest individuals have been compensated by means of relatively low weekly, monthly, or weekend wages. Several interview participants said that it was possible to pay young people less than their services were actually worth, because even small amounts can seem like a lot to children. One 31-year-old interview participant described how he had subsequently come to think about compensation in relation to the level of risk-taking in the drugs trade:

> For me as a 13-year-old, 500 crowns, that was like a massive amount. You could take stuff home that no other 13-year-old could. Have new shoes and clothes […] people look up to you and you get girls, and it was a bit like, "Wow." But of course you didn't like understand how serious it was, everything you were doing. You're up until four in the morning and meeting customers and selling, and like exposing yourself to other stuff. I've been shot and injured myself.

A number of interview participants said that their awareness of the value of different services increased as they became older. As your contact network expands, it becomes possible to compare what you are getting with what other people are getting, at the same time as becoming established on the

market (typically at age 16-18) makes it possible to scale up and earn more money by recruiting youngers of your own.

Being more competitive

A further reason for giving tasks to younger individuals is that it provides benefits in terms of the competitiveness of the networks and their criminal activities. According to the study's interview participants, young people have knowledge and access that may be central to the networks' ability to expand both their influence and their illegal activities (cf. Ooms 2013). Young people find it easier to identify new drugs clients, to move in certain client circles, and to pass under the radar of the justice system, and they can cope with long sessions on the street selling drugs (Brå 2021c). But they can also have other important abilities. One young interview participant described how he had often been recruited because he was good at fighting:

> Yeah, well when I was younger, you know, as soon as there was any conflict, they chose to use me; I was you know used more like a tool. They took me along and I got to clean up. […] I quite simply had violence capital. I've been involved in martial arts, and I've done it in a way that got people to, how can I put it, react.

While certain activities, such as drug sales, can require long and intensive work sessions for the individual, other types of crime require the involvement of a large number of individuals on a specific occasion. In a violent confrontation, for example, it is good if there are a lot of you. Some of the interview participants also noted the importance of involving large numbers of young people from the same area, because this constitutes a means of expanding the network and strengthening its long-term territorial embeddedness. A high level of recruitment, as an alternative to fusing or cooperating with other networks, is a way of expanding the size of the network:

> It's like there [among the children] that networks find their expansion. They see a way of getting bigger and more powerful and of like getting more income. They don't see these children as people, they see them as income. […] They don't want to like lose them to another network; they see that as an enormous loss. It's like losing money.

The endeavour to maintain territorial control is viewed as being linked to new recruitment: "Some want to take over an area, take over all the children". Given that a network wants to maintain control over a

geographical location in the future, one option is to recruit more young people than are currently required for the network's criminal activities. This could also be described as providing protection for the young people in a given area. By engaging them in criminal activities, the networks ensure, as one interview participant put it; "that no other criminal from another area humiliates your youngers in any way".

4. Network conditions

This chapter presents information about the conditions experienced by young people within criminal networks, with a focus on power relations and control. The chapter begins by presenting a picture of the characteristics of network structures and the significance of age. It then moves on to describe different ways in which control is exercised in relation to young people, before concluding with a description of the ways in which young people can advance their network careers and move up within the network hierarchy.

The chapter is primarily based on information provided by interview participants with experience of involvement in criminal networks. It also presents information drawn from police investigations and police intelligence data.

Structures and age-based hierarchies

The majority of the study's interview participants had experience of involvement in what are often characterised as neighbourhood-based networks – groups whose solidarity is based on a territorial identity and having grown up in the area in question (Rostami and Mondani 2019, Brå 2016a). Others had been involved in biker gangs (either dominant MC clubs or support clubs) or family-based networks. One general observation, however, is that the similarities between these different types of networks are greater than the differences (cf. Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020). Family-based networks were also described as largely being neighbourhood based, and as claiming to "control certain places", which was also the case for several of the biker gangs described by the interview participants. One interview participant, who had experience of different types of network, summarised their similarities by saying, "They are also neighbourhood gangs, you could say".

Many of the networks described by the interview participants could be described as loosely connected in the sense that the degree of organisation within the network as a whole may be low (Polisen 2019). This is in line with the descriptions presented in previous studies of criminal environments in Sweden, which show that many criminal networks tend to lack clear

organisational structures (Mondani and Rostami 2022a, Brå 2019a), and shift between conditions of stability and instability (Brå 2016a, Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020, Rostami 2016).

This low degree of organisation does not, however, mean that the networks described by the study's interview participants lack hierarchical structures, established principles for the exercise of control, or stable elements with a substantial capacity for engaging in profit-based criminality and violence, impacting the local community. One general conclusion based on the study's data sources is that power and control in almost all the networks identified, as well as the division of labour within the network, are exercised through structures in which elders are expected to exert control over youngers. Within the networks, control is based on discrete hierarchical relationships between individuals in different age-based segments of the network, and the networks thus do not function as unitary organisations. The internal structure of the networks is instead comprised of different hierarchical segments, in which bottom-up loyalties (towards one's own "elder"), and harsh top-down control (of one's own "youngers"), provide the basis for network solidarity.

These patterns are sometimes described somewhat superficially as the older individuals at the core of the network having a "tail" of youths, with this tail in turn having a tail of its own, which is comprised of children. The younger individuals are then often viewed as being less important and are therefore not included in the work conducted by public authorities to chart network membership (SVT Nyheter 2023). Our own view is instead that these "network tails" in many ways constitute the foundation of the network structure. The next section therefore provides a general description of the networks' age-based stratification and the roles played by elders and youngers, respectively.

Age-based strata

One general observation is that the interview participants described many of the relations within criminal networks in terms of age-based strata. Most interview participants spoke of three to four hierarchically ordered age-based strata, which were described as being characteristic of most of the networks.

One 20-year-old interview participant described the structure of his own local network in the following way:

> In [city district] there's a hierarchy. At the top are the eldest. Then there's the generation under them, and that's us. And we have our own youngers. They listen to us, and we listen to the level over us.

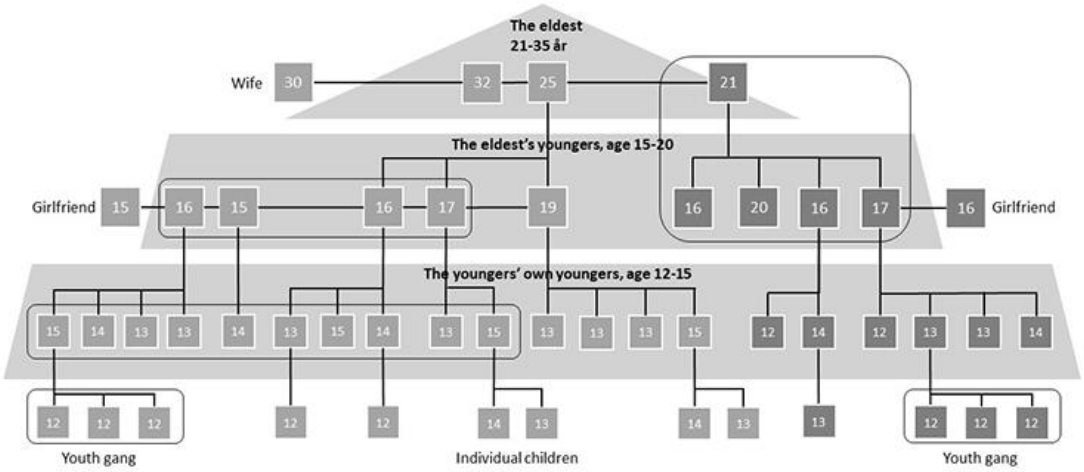
Terms such as "generations", "elders", and "youngers" are thus relative. They are used to describe hierarchical relations between different age groups rather than fixed positions. The same individual may be both an "elder", in relation to individuals younger than himself, and a "younger" in relation to those who are older and more well-established within the network. Thus, the term "elder" does not focus exclusively on an age-based relation, but also refers to an individual having been involved longer and having accumulated more power and resources in relation to "youngers". While several interview participants said that an "industrious" 19-year-old could advance quickly within the hierarchy and be viewed as part of the top age stratum by having "youngers" who were aged 20, most described an age-based stratification that was typically comprised of the age groups described in Figure 1 below.

The figure presents a fictitious example of a network with three age strata, with a fourth developing at the bottom of the network hierarchy. Networks that have been in existence for longer periods may include a larger number of generations and strata. This generates a greater upward flow of money to the elders in the network, while at the same time increasing the risk of instability. The figure shows that the different network strata are linked through personal ties between specific elders and youngers (vertical ties in Figure 1).[46] Some parts of the network may also be comprised of branches and subgroups

[46] There are both similarities and differences between this description of the age strata in criminal networks and the Cylinder Model employed by the police's National Operations Department. The Cylinder Model links age to the degree of socialisation into the network, type of criminal activity, and influence, which together determine an assessment of the capacity of a given individual into one of four categories A–D. The National Operations Department's descriptions of the characteristics of those assigned to categories A and B are in line with the role characteristics of those described in Figure 1 as "the eldest" and "the eldest's youngers". However, the National Operations Department's descriptions of those individuals assigned to categories C and D differ from our own understanding of the younger age strata. Figure 1 includes information on typical ages in different age strata, but its focus is directed at the social relationships between elders and youngers across these different age strata. Our understanding is that it is individual loyalty ties and ownership relations that constitute the basis for the division of labour and the exercise of control within the networks. This means that we direct a greater focus at exploitative relationships than at socialisation into the networks and imitation.

that are primarily involved in a certain type of crime (such as cocaine delivery services), have exclusive responsibility for a certain geographical area (certain streets in a given neighbourhood), or feel a sense of loyalty to one another as members of a youth gang who entered the network together. Such subgroups have been visualised in the figure using rectangular boxes.

Figure 1: Example showing relationships between four age strata in a network (typical ages noted in boxes).



The division of labour and power described by the interview participants is based on custom, but there are similarities with forms of criminal organisation in which hierarchies are formalised with the help of titles and rules, such as the mafia and biker gangs (cf. Rostami and Mondani 2019). One interview participant, who was in his thirties, noted that established, age-based principles facilitated the activities of the networks because "it is difficult to control people who are the same age [as oneself] or when they have a bit more to say about things". Generally speaking, the networks' age strata are characterised by a declining degree of autonomy and participation in decision making. However, the interview participants' descriptions of what was expected of individuals in the different age strata were consistent in some regards but varied in others.

The eldest

"The eldest" were consistently described as individuals located at the furthest distance from criminal activities that involved risk. As a result of their age and experience, they were described as "no longer having anything to prove". In some of the networks that the interview participants had experience of, the eldest were involved in the higher strata of the drug distribution chain (as importers or wholesalers). In other networks, they were only involved in economic crime and other offence types with relatively minor penalty scales, while at the same time continuing to receive part of the profits of the networks' drug crime. In still other networks, the eldest were not involved in offending at all, but rather had other businesses (such as newsagents or restaurants), while at the same time receiving a proportion of the profits generated by the networks, which they were still viewed as "owning". The income of the eldest age stratum commonly involved income streams from both illegal and legal activities.

The oldest stratum of many of the networks described by interview participants was centred on one or more leading figures. High-capacity networks are often characterised by a core comprised of a number of biological brothers. Brothers were viewed as having power because: "they are always loyal to one another", "we [brothers] got respect because there were a lot of us; others didn't want to go against us", and "what benefits him [the brother] benefits me".[47] The eldest are viewed as being good at "building relationships", saying the right thing", "brainwashing people" and "getting into somebody's head". The "get the last word" because: "If they raise their voice, nobody contradicts them". This means that they can exercise control "without being controlling". The eldest were also described as having to keep an eye on youngers and to be available to mediate in conflicts, both internal and external, at the same time as they primarily "wanted to keep themselves to themselves".

The eldest's social and material resources were viewed as often being a central determinant of a network's capacity. First and foremost, this involved

[47] The networks described as being dominated by a group of brothers often only included family members from a single generation – siblings and occasionally also cousins. They cannot thus be regarded as family-based networks, although there are also examples of the latter.

access to contacts, vehicles, apartments, and weapons that could continuously be used for criminal activities. It may also be important for network expansion for the eldest to re-invest profits from crime. One interview participant gave the following example:

> Because now they've got money, fast, bulletproof cars, and loads of weapons. Everyone goes to them. So with this, they become a very strong actor. Before this, the network was never on the map, it didn't exist. It was just like a loosely connected group of friends and brothers. I mean, it was nothing special, but now that they had money, they had some form of power, status.

Both the police investigations and interviews include several examples of individuals from the eldest stratum taking fees from youngers for making purchases and saving money for collective concerns. This first and foremost involved so-called war chests. Several interview participants described experiences of having made regular payments, in the form of membership fees or percentages of profits, to their networks.

> A certain amount has to go to […]. It's like when you pay tax, isn't it. Your tax money – it goes, we could say, to good things. It's the same thing here. They get money, so they have to pay tax on it. Because if a war comes, they have to be able to buy a lot of weapons; that's the main reason why they save money, for the network. […] Because the ones who have the most money and guns, they win the war.

These fees are motivated to youngers with arguments that the resources owned by the eldest provide protection and are a necessary prerequisite for the networks' business activities. Several interview participants said that the eldest's weapons could be borrowed or leased for use in the networks' criminal activities, but also if a younger wanted to "do his thing with a gun".

The eldest's youngers

The stratum below the eldest is of central importance for many networks but has a varying role. While some interview participants describe this stratum as being comprised of low-level distributors (who dealt with the distribution of one-kilo packages of cannabis in their local community), others described this stratum as a hub for the network's violent activities. This stratum is comprised of individuals who are still "youngers" in relation to their own "elders", and in some networks these individuals were expected to carry out acts of violence on instructions from above. These acts were described as benefiting the individuals in this stratum in their ambitions to establish a

position of power in the local community. This also involved these individuals being able to commit acts of violence on their own initiative, provided this was sanctioned by their elders. In practice, however, acts of violence (both violence initiated by these individuals themselves, and violence initiated by their elders) can, when needed, be assigned to these individuals "own youngers".

Several interview participants had experience of the individuals in this stratum below the "eldest" as feeling strong loyalty towards the eldest, while at the same time viewing one another with distrust and jealousy: "They all think of themselves and none of them cares about the others". Conflicts between individuals of the same age were described as "civil wars", and several interview participants described being in a constant state of readiness due to the fact that ambitions of power, competition, and discord could result in an attack from someone who had previously been "a best, best friend" (cf. Brå 2019a).

To the extent that the eldest have high levels of social competence, however, conflicts and competition can be kept in check. The visibility of the stratum below the eldest, and their ambitions to establish power in the local community, can however lead to their having the appearance of frontal figures for the network, which contributes to concealing the involvement of the eldest and their dominant role in the networks.

The youngers' own youngers

As was described in Chapters 2 and 3, the role of the youngest network participants involves doing the "dirty work" at the behest of the elders in the stratum above them in the network hierarchy. Transcripts from intercepted communications and chat conversations[48] contained references to these youngest network participants as "the kids", "the littluns", "his soldiers" and "youngsters". The use of these impersonal labels shows that the members of the youngest stratum of youngers are viewed as a labour pool and not as individuals. Information contained in these data sources also indicates that the youngest network participants are often loaned out to

[48] These comprised transcribed telephone intercepts recorded in police investigations and the Police Authority's compilation of encrypted chat conversations (see the section Registry and intelligence data in Chapter 1).

elders within the same or other networks. The chat conversations showed that youngers were both requested ("do you think your youngster can help me with a thing?") and proffered ("I'll bring you a child soldier"). This flexible use of youngers strengthens the contact networks and status of the elders. The mobility of the youngers can, however, also lead to them developing relationships of their own with "youngers" in other parts of a city, which can lead to both collaborations and conflicts.

Several interview participants said that there is often no contact between the highest and lowest network strata, and it is viewed as taboo for the youngest network participants to seek such contacts on their own initiative: "If you see someone from the network who has a higher rank than you, then you don't like go and talk to him or hang out with him". In some cases, the youngest individuals do not even know who "the eldest" are, or the nature of the relationships between individuals of different ages. For example, one 15-year-old interview participant said, "You mostly meet one individual, and they don't really show how everything is built up around them". One observation is that these circumstances may lead to networks appearing to be more loosely connected than they really are, both to those who are involved in their activities and to the agencies of the justice system.

Controlling the youngers

One important reason for involving young people in the criminal activities of networks is the desire to give them several of the tasks that are associated with a higher level of risk, as was noted in Chapter 3, *Offending*. At the same time, there are major challenges involved in delegating this work to individuals who have no prior experience, are new to the network, and who, as a result of their age, have a lower capacity to act responsibly. As a result, young people need to be taught how to commit offences and function as subordinates.

Learning the ropes

Previous chapters have shown that elders are often in regular contact with youngers and that, periodically, these contacts may involve spending time together on a daily basis. One important aspect of these contacts involves socialising youngers into the unwritten rules associated with the network

environment and instructing them in how criminal activities should be conducted in practice. This learning process serves to reduce the elders' level of risk. A 20-year-old interview participant explained in the following way:

> Yes, you're always learning from the elders, who don't want to end up in the shit themselves because a younger they've sent on an assignment leaves evidence behind or does something that can lead back to them.

The need for this type of schooling varies depending on the type of crime involved and the individual's previous experience. Some interview participants described having observed elders at a distance and having learned about selling drugs, robbery, and theft in this way. Thus, the learning process sometimes precedes entry into the network. This was particularly the case among interview participants who had older brothers who were offenders, but also among those who had grown up in neighbourhoods with a visible crime problem. More organised learning processes were described in relation to drug dealing, fraud, and shootings. According to interview participants, young people get to sit with elders in their fraud call centres (with elders giving them fraud manuscripts and then listening to the start of the conversations) or in locations where drugs are packaged in order to learn how this is done. Several interview participants said that handling guns involved testing young people's aptitude and interest: "Then we know who's who, who can shoot and who can't".

In addition to the concrete methods used in criminal activities, the learning process also involves norms and values. Most of the interview participants described respect for elders, keeping your word, doing things exactly as you've been told to, not speaking to the authorities, and not sticking your nose in or knowing more than you need to, as central precepts. Some interview participants also described a polarised worldview on the basis of which network participants were expected to interpret events:

> It's exactly the same as a sect. They share the same values; they think the same way. The state is an enemy; the state is against you. The police are against you, all the authorities are against you. It became so normalised.

These unwritten rules and frames of interpretation are central to facilitating and legitimising the criminal collaboration that takes place in the networks. The learning process does not primarily focus on knowing these values and

attitudes, however, but rather on repeatedly showing your loyalty to them *in practice*.

Doing whatever you're asked to do

Only a couple of the interview participants had been active in networks in which their capacity had been tested in connection with a formal entry process. In these instances, the individuals had been adults at the time, and the tests had been required for membership of biker gangs. The vast majority of those interviewed instead had experience of networks in which youngers were expected to "show what they were capable of" *after* entry into the network, and *over a long period of time*. Actively manifesting loyalty to the prescribed rules was generally viewed as a necessary precondition for a future career.

Being tested and broken down

The tests that the interview participants described involved young people consistently having to show that they will do what is required of them, irrespective of what happens and what is required at any given moment. Assignments to do "serious stuff" (extortion, debt collection, acts of violence) can function as a test of both an individual's capacity and of loyalty to an elder. In some cases such assignments are also intended to break down youngers' personal boundaries to ensure that they can be relied on to follow any kind of instruction in the future:

> Yeah, I mean boundaries; you shouldn't have boundaries. They don't want you to have boundaries. All they want is that the orders that are given – you carry them out. They don't care how you do it, it just has to happen. If you don't have boundaries, the youngers are afraid of you and the elders respect you because you can do everything.

Tests can also provide a basis for deciding which youngers are suitable for certain types of activity. Some interview participants also said that attitudes to the justice system are also taken into consideration, and that the documentation from police investigations was regularly obtained, using freedom of information requests, in order to examine how youngers had behaved.

Unpredictability as a domination technique

Elders can also use unpredictable patterns of payment to youngers as a further means of ensuring that they will do what they are asked to do, irrespective of whether they will get paid for it. Several interview participants stated that they did not know in advance whether they would be paid for an assignment, at the same time as it felt impossible for them to object to these conditions. Others said that young people do have a certain degree of leeway. Not simply staying silent and following orders may be a way of showing the elders that one has other desirable qualities. One 20-year-old interview participant described how it was possible to "talk back" in a right way and a wrong way:

> It's almost a golden rule that you have to respect your elders and look up to them and learn from them. […] But it depends on who you are too. If you talk back to them, things can go wrong. But if you talk back in the right way and show what you're capable of, then they'll like it, so it's good for everyone.

Some interview participants also said that the demands placed on young people to do what they are asked may be somewhat different in family-based networks. Although blood ties do not provide a fast track, they may give young people more leeway. Elders might give such youngers more alternatives, "overlook things" or choose to punish a "nephew" in a less humiliating way than others, if he objected to, or failed to complete, an assignment.

Holding on to youngers

A further dimension of the control of youngers involves maintaining the hierarchical relations between the networks' age strata. In relation to this ambition, the interview participants spoke of power games in the form of switching between violence and kindness as an important strategy. Several interview participants gave a positive picture of the elders in the networks and said that they had "felt really secure" with them, and that they "loved the elders", that they had "been like their dad or big brother", and that elders had "treated them very well". At the same time, they also spoke of having been exploited by and afraid of elders, and that the elders "actually didn't give a shit about them". These ambivalent feelings are probably more intense among those who spend time with elders on a daily basis. One-quarter of the interview participants said that they had either themselves

experienced, or know of networks in which youngers and elders spend time and live together in apartments hired specifically for this purpose:

> I mean we all lived together in an Airbnb-apartment. You lived together because you wanted everyone to be in the same place. Fewer eyes, less stress. And then it's for the elders to be able to keep an eye on everyone. So that everyone does what they are supposed to.

Several of the interview participants who have had their own youngers described shifts in the way youngers were treated as a strategy. Even if there was an ambition to treat youngers fairly, manipulation, violence, and threats were required to ensure continued loyalty. An 18-year-old interview participant explained:

> I mean, I used to always treat the youngsters with respect and so on. At the same time, you need to teach them. They shouldn't be given too much leeway. You have to be a bit scary and frighten them a bit, so that they don't go to someone else. Make sure the know their place.

Caring that actually benefits the elder

The ambivalence of the youngers may be due to their not initially being aware that *both* the repressive and more "loving" actions in the end benefit the elders. The propensity of elders to be accommodating – for example by allowing youngers to pay in planned instalments when a consignment of drugs is lost – may initially appear as an act of kindness towards the younger. It is only later that the elder's willingness to organise such a payment plan can be understood in light of the fact that this "solution" often results in the younger being indebted to the elder. This means that the younger must work to repay the debt and can be pressured into undertaking assignments that he would not otherwise have been asked to do. Gifts and conscious efforts to improve a younger's reputation for violence can increase the security of the elder and contribute to increased profitability. Several interview participants said that youngers were rewarded with weapons and mobile phones containing contact information to drug clients when they showed themselves to be good drug sellers.

> You can get it [the weapon] as a payment, you can get it as a form of security, if you have a big role in it – I mean if you sell a lot for this person. If you as a young person are selling a lot, if you're really industrious. You maybe get if for free from this person, who says, "Here it is, have it for security".

These forms of payment may contribute to "building up" the reputation and capacity of young people in criminal environments, and at the same time represent an investment on the part of elders. With more customers, youngers can buy larger amounts of drugs from their elders, and the entire network's capacity for violence increases, together with the level of protection experienced by elders, when young people are armed with weapons. Elders may also "take care of the family" during periods in which young people are serving custodial sentences and thereby ensure that the youngers' ties to the network are maintained. Thus, apparently beneficial conditions and perceived generosity may contribute to intensifying elders' levels of control and also reduce their costs.

Careers within the networks

Most, but not all, of the interview participants stated that they had striven to "move up" in the networks when they were younger. There were, however, variations in what interview participants meant by "moving up" or developing a career. Some focused on the ability to exercise power and said that they and others had striven to "become one of the elders", "get to decide over people", "take over [the market]" or "be the one who controls the shopping centre". Others focused on motives such as improved financial benefits ("being able to get rich quick") and the possibility of being able to pay for the consumption of luxury goods (cars, gold chains, travel) and basic needs (one's own apartment, providing for one's parents), rather than on their position or relations to others within the criminal environment. Still others spoke about different forms of specialism or having one's own area of responsibility within the network's criminal activities as career paths, rather than different roles within the age hierarchy. Some of the youngest interview participants were much more imprecise about what they wanted to achieve. These said, for example, that "they just ended up there" and they "hadn't thought about what they were doing".

It is also clear that not all those who become involved in criminal networks advance in their careers in the sense that they are given different work assignments, higher status, or increased benefits. Some interview participants said that there were young males who continue doing the "dirty work" and a couple said of themselves, "I didn't get any further" and "I've always been an

errand boy". At the same time, the interview participants provided a generally consistent picture of how movements between the different age strata within a network occur. In this regard, the interview participants described three different ways of moving upwards in the network hierarchy: a) becoming more valuable, b) fast track and c) taking over.

Becoming more valuable

Not unexpectedly, one factor linked to moving upwards in the network hierarchy is age. The participants' descriptions of roles and positions in the network structure in terms of age mean that there is an expectation of a gradual movement upwards. As one interview participant put it, "You see that new youngers are coming in all the time, and then you're going to move up yourself". This understanding of the occurrence of a natural progression in the network structure may make it easier to put up with poor conditions and humiliation.

However, almost all interview participants said that moving up to the next age stratum was conditional upon individual performance. One typical way of describing the speed at which it was possible to climb up the network hierarchy was that "it's up to the individual youngster". Many interview participants used the term "industrious" when describing what characterises those individuals who advance within the networks as compared to those who do not. Industriousness was generally viewed as the ability to increase benefits to the network, without exposing the network's criminal activities to detection. One interview participant described the following examples:

> You can get stuff sold quickly. You don't get caught; you do it in a smart way. You can get a lot of customers, but in a discrete way. You earn a lot of money.

Industriousness is expected to result in the accumulation of capital that the young person does not simply consume, but which is also invested in the individual's own career. Chapter 2, *Network entry* described that the purchase of a larger among of drugs led to young people taking a step up to the level of distributors (kilos instead of hectograms) and thus also produced a need to have youngers of one's own. Even though such drug purchases may in whole or in part be based on credit, the interview participants described the taking of this step as requiring a greater level of saved capital and an accumulation of trust. Young people who have been trained up and have

done what was expected of them were also viewed as candidates for involvement in other forms of profitable criminal activities, such as fraud.

Building yourself up

The majority of interview participants used the expressions "building yourself up" and "becoming built up" to describe this process. These expressions imply that the process involves both the young person and others investing in the young person's career. It was not uncommon for the different factors involved to be described as developing in interaction with one another, with industriousness and loyalty resulting in being trusted with more assignments, which in turn gave the young people additional opportunities to show their capacity. When an industrious teenager is combined with an elder with resources, the young person's career can develop quickly. A 22-year-old interview participant described his own career path in the following way:

> He said to me, "You're good, you've shown yourself that you can do this". I started collecting even more on credit. That went well, I made the payments. Then he asked for a favour; I did the favour for him. Then I got a phone. So then I had an extra phone. Automatically I got three youngers. I gave them a phone and passed on drugs to them at a higher price, so I could earn on in it. I used the second phone myself.

One important resource in this context is access to contacts. As regards drug sales, this involves contact information to customers that are recorded in phones that have been "built up" over time, but contacts with collaborators in other areas are also viewed as an asset that develops over time. A relatively large number of interview participants described placements in residential care homes and other youth institutions as meeting places for young offenders, which had contributed to the development of their own contact networks and their being able to acquire new markets in other towns and cities. An 18-year-old interview participant described the development of his own contact network in the following way:

> It was through drugs, it was through enforcers, I mean it was through a lot of things. Even when you're sitting [in an institution]. I've developed new contacts at institutions run by the National Board of Institutional Care. I've also acquired contacts outside of course, but these contacts that are "extra plus", I've made those there. That's mostly how you make contacts; it's in prison, pre-trial detention centres, youth institutions. I've made a lot of contacts in pre-trial detention centres, ever since I was young.

Jealousy and competition

Being viewed as industrious and "built up" as a result of large-scale drug sales and having large numbers of contacts is not unproblematic, however. Several of the younger interview participants spoke of how it was easy for jealousies to emerge if things went particularly well for a certain individual: "Nobody wants you to be better than the others – they want you to be a bit worse". In networks with a large inflow of youngers, the mid-level stratum can grow, as more young people make the step up to becoming kilo-distributors. When more individuals distribute large quantities, the benefits that accrue to the eldest increase, because they can then buy in and have an outlet to sell larger consignments. At the same time, competition between individuals in the mid-level stratum may become a breeding ground for conflicts, as more individuals come to want to sell larger quantities of drugs to retail customers.

An industrious drug seller may therefore become a target for same-age peers within the network, who ask, "Why should he have that gold chain or car?" and why the elders were being "so good to him and not to me". Competing networks may also see an opportunity to damage their enemies by attacking individuals who earn a lot of money for the elders in a network. For the same reason, industrious and "built-up" young people may find it more difficult to leave a network, because elders view themselves as having made an investment in the individual's career and because they are dependent on the income from his activities. These factors are described in more detail in Chapter 5, *Network exit*.

Fast track

Even if a young person can become "built up" relatively quickly, the process is often instead more gradual, involving a number of steps. One alternative involves young people engaging in acts that are viewed as constituting a "fast track" and which enable an individual to "skip certain steps" and to "step up quickly". This primarily involves carrying out shootings but can also involve accepting a punishment for another individual. Doing these things is viewed as an investment in one's own career that can lead to benefits in terms of both money and status. If a young person is paid for carrying out a certain assignment, this provides the individual with the capital to purchase a larger

quantity of drugs for distribution, without first having to build up the level of trust that would be required to obtain the same quantity of drugs on credit. Such acts may in certain cases also function as a rite of initiation and as a short cut by comparison with the process of repeatedly being tested, which other young people are put through during their time as "youngers". As one interview participant put it, "You are fully-fledged; you don't have to do anything". Another interview participant explained why this path was so attractive:

> Then there are a lot of youngers who want to do what I did, like climb up to higher levels. And you accept a job and do this – then you go from being nobody, to being able to get respect and everyone knows what you've done. […] Instead of taking the long path and doing dirty work for several years and not being able to earn anything – to going: you'll get some money like if you go and shoot someone.

Status and the rush

The fast-track path was also described as having a number of consequences, both for the individual concerned and for the networks. Shootings can lead to a young person quickly becoming "built up" and being moved up the age strata, but also to his being able to be used for similar assignments in the future. A handful of interview participants described feeling powerful, positive emotions following their own participation in shootings. The perception of those around them that they were now capable of doing anything at all was also reflected in the individual's internal perceptions of their own power. The interview participants described this as "a very good feeling; you're in charge", "you feel invincible", "I felt indestructible; something kicked in", "it's like cocaine", or said that individuals who have engaged in these acts "aren't afraid of anyone or anything". One interview participant spoke of certain individuals he knows having become "addicted to the adrenaline" and of "feeling strong", which makes it easier to carry out further assignments of the same kind. While these feelings may persist for a long time, another interview participant spoke of repeated conflicts with same-age peers about who would carry out shootings, where "everyone was fighting because everyone wanted to do it".

Other interview participants viewed fast tracking as having negative consequences and said that young people have insufficient experience to be able to carry out shootings without injuring others close to the target, their

own colleagues or themselves, and without leaving evidence behind. Still other interview participants had experience of assignments sometimes being given ostensibly as a fast-track measure, but where in reality the individual was not in fact being offered a fast track. This primarily involved cases when assignments were carried out in order to pay of a debt:

> They maybe say that you should go and do a shooting at this particular place, and then we're quits. But then when he's done it, he says, "No, but you didn't shoot well enough", or "You didn't scare people, so you have to go and do this". And so it can go on. Then in the end, it becomes a thing for this individual – that he's like that kind of kid. That he goes and does shootings. And it becomes normal for him.

Taking over

A further process that can change the position of young people in criminal networks involves external circumstances and internal conflicts. A majority of the interview participants spoke of career developments that had occurred in connection with elders being imprisoned, or having died or moved abroad. This had either led to youngers being given assignments that were necessary to keep activities going (while elders were away) or to them taking over activities and contacts that elders had used on their own initiative.

Generational shifts and instability

Although an upward movement of the mid-level stratum may be viewed as being in line with accepted principles, a number of interview participants pointed to the importance of continuity and of youngers having become sufficiently well-established before this shift occurs. Both younger and older interview participants said that the generational shifts that had occurred as a result of the so-called Encrochat court cases[49] had led to conflicts and divisions within the networks. One interview participant said the following about what had happened in his own area:

> You've arrested everybody, you've cleaned house. But what happens then? There's nobody to keep things calm in this town, and then this new generation comes and they're very young. And precisely because they were young, because they were errand boys, they were just errand boys, they hadn't got to do these serious jobs, like going and shooting someone, injuring someone. They couldn't do that; they had just sold

[49] Cases in which elders had been convicted on the basis of evidence drawn from the police's work to compile and analyse encrypted chat messages.

> drugs and held onto things for people. Now the leaders are gone, so you get this setback. That 16-year-olds are saying, "I'm running this place", "This is my place", "I'm going to run it". And those around him are saying, "Why should you get to do it, I want to do it". They argue about it, a little conflict, and it ends with him shooting the other one.

The youngers' lack of experience, in combination with powerful ambitions, were viewed as negatively affecting their ability to take over the work of the elders. Instead of assuming the role of mediator, providing collective resources, staying in the background and pushing towards a long-term reduction of risks, they act impulsively on the basis of jealousy and resentment.

Humiliation and exploitation leading to revolt

Takeovers and generational shifts may also be initiated in the form of revolts started from below. Several interview participants described conflicts between elders and youngers that had resulted in homicides. A number of these said that the way elders exploit youngers may be an underlying cause. When young people are trained up at an early age, take major risks, and at the same time are not given fair and adequate compensation, this may subsequently backfire on the elders. A number of interview participants said that they had seen young people, as they became older, take revenge on individuals who had previously exploited them. A 32-year-old interview participant described his own experiences:

> It's extremely dangerous teaching a 13-year-old to shoot. It can end with him, like when he's 15, 16, then he can shoot you, the one who taught him. It's happened on several occasions that I know about, that the one who taught this person to shoot – he's even shot him as well. [Interviewer: *Why?*] To take over. Often it's that this person has a leading role, and has treated him badly. When he is then 15, 16, and learns how much money he's not been given, how much he's earned for him without him giving anything back; he's just given him 500 crowns when he should actually have had 50 thousand. Then he goes and kills him. And then everyone shows him respect.

In addition to inadequate compensation, interview participants also mentioned being subject to arbitrary debts and humiliating treatment as reasons for subsequent attacks and "civil wars". Some interview participants who had experience of this type of process said, "You don't forget", that you "secretly build up grievances" and that "youngsters grow up with hatred". Among other things this involved instances where they had been spat on,

slapped, humiliated (including verbally and sexually), and assaulted with a knife. One interview participant said:

> I remember every time I was hit. It leads to revenge later; a few years later he can be shot. Just because you're a child, doesn't mean you forget.

Several of the examples described by interview participants related to a number of young people from the same age stratum together turning on one or more elders. These incidents involved shootings, in which elders had been killed, and groups of youngers who "stopped listening" to elders taking over criminal activities. Executions, and stealing resources (money, drugs, weapons) from elders, become a way of "speaking out and saying, 'we're not children anymore'". One requirement for this type of takeover is thus that the young people in question feel that they are now "built up" and have their own contacts. Having previously been given assignments to carry out attacks on the elders' enemies is viewed as one of the many factors that can lead to youngers exacting revenge.

Challenging age hierarchies

Such conflicts between elders and youngers may also be an expression of challenges to the existing age hierarchy itself. One interview participant described this as "being tired of the elders' monopoly" and asked, "why should they get to decide so much; why should they earn that kind of money?" A 25-year-old interview participant described what characterised those who started to challenge their elders:

> You're sitting on a load of weapons, you have loads of money hidden away. You have your youngers who do stuff for you, you have your elders, and you can use their resources. You have power in the neighbourhood; you're hot-headed. Then you even stop listening to the elders. You want to take the chance to do things that you yourself want to do.

Some interview participants felt that age hierarchies and the principles that governed the distribution of different roles, which had previously been relatively clear within the networks, had broken down to some extent. The increased opportunities to "shoot yourself to" better conditions and a position of power may thus result in patriarchal age structures being replaced by more meritocratic principles. In network environments where a capacity for violence trumps age, youngers can exercise power over older individuals

without this being viewed as abnormal. One interview participant felt that today it was about "what you can contribute" and whether you are "a person who can act in a way that means other people give up money and that people earn money; that's the only thing you need".

At the same time, several interview participants saw disadvantages associated with the questioning or deconstruction of age-based hierarchies. The opportunities for mediating in conflicts were viewed as evaporating when "elders are no longer role models", and since many had been convicted on the basis of Encrochat evidence, "the youngers now had a free rein". One older interview participant, who had previously "resolved people's problems", said that he would no longer take on such assignments: "It could just as easily be you who gets shot; youngsters don't listen".

At the same time, several interview participants said that there were elders who had adopted a proactive approach to these risks and changes in the criminal environment. According to one interview participant, who was in his twenties, one way of safeguarding the patriarchal model is to improve the conditions for youngers:

> Yes, but there are such enormous risks associated with that – those who exploit youngsters. They are risking a lot doing that. There are these very strong, smart leaders, who give them everything. They give them jackets, they give them mopeds, they give them anything you can think of so that they will be content and so on. So the older they become, they become best friends instead, and work together.

This type of forward planning was viewed as beneficial for everyone in the long run. One interview participant summarised the benefits of this approach: "But we treated the youngers well, because they are also going to grow up one day."

5. Network exit

This chapter presents information on factors that affect the opportunities for young people to leave criminal networks. The chapter begins with a brief description of what interview participants mean when they use the term "exit". The next section then describes the factors that may lead to young people themselves wanting to, or not wanting to, leave criminal networks. This is followed by a description of the methods used by criminal networks to prevent or regulate network exit, and finally a presentation of the strategies that may be used by those who want to leave criminal networks. The chapter is based on interviews with offenders and employees at public sector agencies.

Exiting relationships and involvement in crime

Most of individuals interviewed by the SNCCP said that they were either considering leaving their network or that they had already done so. They spoke of having "chosen to jump off", "changed lifestyle", "stopped with everything" or being "completely done with it". However, there were variations in what interview participants meant when they talked about exiting criminal networks. For many of the older interview participants, exit was synonymous with desistance from crime and completely terminating their contacts with friends who were involved in offending. Others viewed their relations with the criminal networks as the central factor, rather than offending more generally. A couple of this latter type of interview participant said that they had continued to offend, but to a lesser extent, and without being controlled by an elder. Others said that they had continued to maintain their social relationships, but that they were no longer involved in offending. A couple of these individuals had brothers who were still involved in networks, which they said, "caused them problems".

Finally, there was also a group who expressed uncertainty about the future. These comprised the youngest interview participants, some of whom said, "I've taken a little break and have to wait and see", "I feel like I would like to leave, but I don't know", and "I want to stop, but you can never know what is going to happen". Another said that he hoped he would be able to

resist being pressurised in the future, but was aware of the difficulties this would involve:

> Now I spend a bit of time with these guys, and it's bad, but what can I do? I don't have anyone else to spend time with. I just have my girlfriend and the guys.

These interview participants' uncertainty thus related to both whether they would *be able to* leave and whether they *wanted* to leave their relationships with elders. On the basis of these varying attitudes and experiences, we have identified three conditions that are necessary for network exit: a) personal motivation, b) being sufficiently established, or un-established, for an exit to be acceptable, and c) the occurrence of an exit opportunity.

When do young people *want* to leave criminal networks?

The study's offender interviews show that, for many, the desire to leave criminal networks arises when the price of involvement comes to be viewed as being greater than the benefits. The original motivations for involvement may also have faded over time, at the same time as the young person's capacity for long-term thinking may have improved. In combination, it is a question of two types of motivational processes: a growing appreciation of one's situation and successive attempts to gradually move away from one's network involvement, or a more sudden decision as a result of external threats. However, several of the interviewed offenders had experience of both types of process at different stages of their criminal careers.

The desire for another life, and external threats

A majority of the interview participants described a drawn-out process of motivational development that involved several steps and a great deal of vacillation over a long period of time. In line with the findings of previous research, many of them described involvement in a criminal network as having a natural lifespan (Brå 2021d). Several interview participants, particularly older individuals, described wanting to transition to a more conventional life because they had quite simply tired of their involvement in offending. Many described the problems associated with involvement in criminal networks as becoming "worse and worse" over time. Several spoke of a constant "stress" that had eventually become overpowering. Many also spoke of a desire to live more of a family life, once they had a girlfriend or

had become parents (cf. Pyrooz and Decker 2011). They wanted to "take the next step in life" but felt this was difficult while they remained involved in their time-consuming and hazardous network environments. In the context of this process, the influence of individuals outside the network environment can also affect the intentions of those involved in criminal networks. These may include family members, school staff, police officers, or social services contacts, who had planted a seed which had then gradually germinated into a much better appreciation of their situation. Several interview participants said that their mothers in particular had "fought for them".

External pressures

Others, and particularly public agency employees who were interviewed during the study, felt that attempts to use deterrence and to frighten young people into desistance could also have an effect. In this regard, they spoke primarily about disrupting the youths' criminal activities at school, on the street, and at youth centres. According to these interview participants, one requirement for the success of such measures was that public sector bodies (police, school, and social services) develop long-term, trusting relationships with the children involved while at the same time sharing information among themselves and coordinating their interventions. Several interview participants who were currently serving time in prison or youth custody felt that criminal justice sanctions may have a deterrent effect, but also that they provided time for reflection and maturation at a safe distance from the network. Others said that they had become "worse" after a prison term, among other things because their contact networks and criminal capacity had increased during their period of incarceration.

Exposure to serious threats

Both those who have not yet considered leaving a network, and those who have been thinking about it for a time, may be forced into moving more quickly if they are exposed to an external threat. Several interview participants described acts of violence against either themselves or close friends within the network as a turning point. These events had required them to quickly make a decision about their future. Some had experience of someone close to them having been killed. One interview participant spoke of how an appreciation of one's situation can develop quickly in connection with the occurrence of a series of serious incidents: "It was this thing with

close friends dying, many were arrested, you realised that the criminal environment was on the verge of completely disintegrating". For others it was the threat to family members that had given rise to the desire to leave and had forced them to make a decision. Although they had themselves survived high-risk situations, several had started feeling guilt and remorse about family members being put at risk of exposure to violence. One interview participant described one such critical event:

> If my sister had opened the door that time they came round and knocked on the door, she would have been shot, like. That's what made me think; I can't be this selfish anymore, I have to get out.

Such critical events can in turn lead to reflection and a questioning of the criminal lifestyle. One interview participant said, "This wasn't what I wanted; I didn't want to destroy people's lives. I didn't want it to go this far". However, others who had also experienced high-risk situations said that they could sometimes lead to an individual's ties to the network becoming stronger, and that they could bind the group even closer to one another.

A lack of alternatives

A growing, or sudden, sense of needing or wanting to leave a criminal network is often contrasted with the benefits of involvement. The so-called pull-factors, which serve as an incentive to remain in the network, are primarily the same as the reasons for becoming involved in the first place: the money that can be made. Many of the interview participants had felt that they had no alternative means of earning money other than their offending. One 19-year-old interview participant explained how a dependence on earning money fast, in combination with short-term thinking, meant that the motivation to leave the network went out the window:

> You're so used to earning money easily. You think, "No, that was the last rush." And then when the money is finished, you're standing there thinking, "What the fuck am I going to do to earn money; I try and try but can't get a job; what the fuck can I do, I've got no money". And so you end up in that circle again.

Another factor was related to the desire to accumulate more money. Several interview participants said that they had not wanted to leave until they achieved their financial goals ("getting their mansion"). Others spoke of

friendship ties and their closeness to elders as a reason for not taking the step of leaving the network, even though they wanted to. For some, social marginalisation may lead to them experiencing the network as a source of security in terms of both income and the camaraderie. A 28-year-old interview participant who had attempted to leave a criminal network said:

> I have had a job and tried to change, but I felt stigmatised at work, like you don't belong there. And at the same time you know that you can go to the neighbourhood, to the shopping centre, and that there will be 40 people there who'll hug you, who'll be glad that you're there, whereas it feels like they don't even want you to be there at work.

When *can* young people leave a network?

In most cases it appears to be much easier to enter a criminal network than to leave it. Irrespective of the level of motivation a young person feels to leave a network, it is far from clear whether this will be possible. One general conclusion is that the possibility of exiting a network is first and foremost dependent on a given individual's status and the availability of exit opportunities. Interview participants generally described young people with powerful ties to elders as having limited opportunities to leave a criminal network (cf. Brå 2016b, Young and Gonzalez 2013).

Exit is often strictly regulated

Despite the fact that many of those who are involved in criminal networks refer to one another as "friends" and "brothers", their relationships are largely based on a lack of trust. A younger who wants to exit a network is viewed with distrust and a suspicion that he (or she) instead of leaving the criminal environment will instead go to a competitor and tell them "where all the weapons and money are". Young defectors are also viewed as ignoring their responsibilities. The hierarchical structure of the networks means that a number of different strata of elders may be financially dependent on industrious young people making money for the network. Several interview participants said that, as a result of this, network exit was viewed as a betrayal and that those who wanted leave were regarded as showing disrespect, which resulted in the individual coming under threat.

Debts, threats, expulsion from the neighbourhood, and violence

The measures used by networks to reduce the risk for network exit are similar to those used to get unwilling youngsters involved in network activities (see Chapter 2, *Network entry*). A young person may be fined, for example, creating a real or invented debt that has to be worked off, and that by extension makes network exit impossible. In more serious cases, a youth may be threatened with violence, against himself or family members, if he were to leave the network. There are also cases that involve young people or their families being forced to move from a neighbourhood, or even being killed, and cases where individuals are stigmatised as outlaws.

Rumours about the networks' violence can also serve an exit-prevention function. Some interview participants described elders who showed children film clips on their mobiles and who told stories about punishments in order to prevent them from making confessions during police interrogations or talking to public sector agencies in other contexts. One 21-year-old interview participant described his own experiences in the following way:

> You see people who've had their fingers cut off; you see someone who's been stabbed, someone getting beaten up by elders. One video might be of someone who has grassed. I mean it leaves an impression; you think, "Oh shit, he's the one who does this, this guy who's standing in front of me now". And so he says, "This is what we do to people who talk to the police". So it's pure fear when you're sitting there and playing at being cool and saying "no comment" in a police interview. It looks like a kid who's psychologically strong and doesn't want to answer and who's protecting them, but it's because he's scared. He's saying it for his own safety, because the elders are never going to get arrested.

Family ties may be both help and hindrance

The tactics employed may lead to young people remaining part of a network and finding it difficult to turn to safe adults and public sector agencies. For those involved in family-based networks, seeking help may be associated with even more pressure, because in these networks there is a more general taboo about talking to public sector agencies. Several of the agency employees interviewed in the study emphasised these problems. However, some of the interviewed offenders argued that young people in family-based networks may find it easier than others to obtain permission to leave the network. One reason was described as being that there is trust within the family, another

that the young individuals' extended families actually care about them, and do not merely view them as a source of income.

Relationships with family members who are still involved in the criminal network may, however, mean that young people who want to desist from involvement in crime may be expected to still be prepared to carry out assignments and do what they are told when needed. One interview participant emphasised that a group of brothers may need to leave the network at the same time, because they otherwise tend to draw one another back into the network's activities. In some cases, these obstacles to leaving a network are reminiscent of those described in relation to attempts to leave family environments characterised by honour-related violence and oppression (cf. Brå 2019b).

Difficult to leave a partner with dual sources of "violent capital"

For the wives and girlfriends of males who are involved in criminal networks, the challenges can be even greater. Even if a wife of girlfriend wants to leave both the relationship and involvement in crime, it may be difficult to "throw their partner out" as a result of his having dual sources of "violent capital" (as a man and as a criminal with contacts). A couple of interview participants described knowing men who were involved in criminal networks who had refused to separate from their partners, and who had continued to come and go as they wanted to, together with "their boys". Breaking free of a boyfriend who is involved in a criminal network appears in some cases to be as complicated as it is for youngers who want to conclude their relationships with elders.

Both types of relationship may involve a combination of love, control, the normalisation of abuse, loyalty, violence, and fear (cf. Holmberg and Enander 2005, Brännvall 2016, Brå 2019b). In addition, voluntary or forced involvement in shared businesses may produce debts that can be difficult to pay off once a relationship has ended. Repeated experiences of the police having treated them as complicit in their partners' criminal activities may also lead to wives and girlfriends being reluctant to turn to the justice system or other agencies for help in leaving the relationship.

Being either "built up" or a beginner may be a precondition for exit

There are nevertheless situations in which opportunities arise to leave criminal networks, both for young people who have advanced in the network hierarchy and young people who have yet to become established in the network. A majority of the interview participants who stated that they had left networks said that the opportunity to do so had arisen as a result of becoming older and having advanced within network. They described that achieving a level of trust within the network could be used as a guarantee, which meant that the network felt comfortable that the individual in question would not "grass" or "work with the police" and would continue to "be a friend". One young interview participant felt that the opportunity to choose to leave arose at a specific point in one's network career:

> I know that I don't have anyone standing behind me; the problems I had have been resolved. And I don't have any debts. I don't have anything. Then you know that you're clear. It's up to you if you want to get out or not. You can also keep going. But I don't want to keep going.

In practice, this type of exit may be initiated by contacting both friends and enemies to ensure that previous conflicts are settled and that the network's activities will be able to continue as before, although on the basis of different actors. The important thing is to attempt to leave gracefully, leaving no unfinished business.

There may also be opportunities for exit for newcomers, who are not deemed to be of particular use to the network and who as yet lack any insight into the network's activities. Such individuals may also be allowed to leave without reprisals, because their exit poses fewer risks and less of a loss in terms of network income. In such cases, as described by one young interview participant, the relationship might be concluded with the words, "But thanks for the work you've done up to now".

A gradual exit process may be necessary

In some cases, however, exiting a network may be easier said than done, at least for young people who have been "built up". Even if their having the right to leave is acknowledged in principle, it may nonetheless prove difficult in practice. Long-term network involvement often involves a large number of commitments and relationships of dependency. Several interview participants

said that they had embarked on the process of leaving their network several times without success. The obstacles that had arisen had not involved elders trying to force them back into the network, but rather that "you end up back in the shit" because "a lot of people were dependant on me". In line with these experiences, previous studies have shown that leaving a criminal network or gang may often require a gradual exit process (Pyrooz and Decker 2011, Young and Gonzalez 2013). It can take time for individuals to reorientate from their often-complex relationship to the network, on both a practical and an emotional level (Young and Gonzalez 2013, Alstam and Forkby 2022).

When the opportunity arises

According to the study's interview participants, opportunities to leave the network may arise even for young people who are not given permission to do so. One option can involve negotiating about compensating the network financially in order to be allowed to leave. Some interview participants described that the payment of a financial penalty could result in the acceptance of one's own exit or that of a family member. A 23-year-old interview participant said the following:

> It can cost between 50,000 and 200,000 [SEK]. It depends. If you're a big earner, then they're not going to want to let you go. I had to pay 70,000, maybe a bit more, for them to let my brother go. But just coming out and asking, "Can I leave the group?" That won't work.

The absence of elders and youngers provides opportunities for exit

Another form of exit opportunity can arise at times when elders or youngers are absent from the network. Several of the study's interview participants said that both they and other youngers had taken the opportunity to sneak out by the backdoor when elders in leading positions had been absent for various reasons. The examples mentioned by the interview participants included elders dying, being given long prison sentences, or moving abroad. In the context of such events, youngers may be faced with a choice – either to take a step up and advance within the network, or to exit. One 18-year-old interview participant described how he viewed his current situation:

> I don't want to say too much, but the guy I was selling for went to prison. So I mean I have an opportunity. He will have forgotten me when he comes out.

Both measures that target elders' assets and long prison sentences were also described as having the potential to deplete the status of elders and their capacity to retain youngers. A couple of interview participants, whose elders had been convicted, said, "There won't be anything happening in the neighbourhood when they come back". Thus, there are events that can reduce the possibilities for elders to demand the continued loyalty of youngers. In a similar way, if a younger is subject to a long prison sentence or institutional placement, they may become irrelevant to the network, not least as others move up in the network hierarchy. At the same time, a prison term may also contribute to strengthening the position of a young person within the network, particularly if the individuals in question have taken punishments to protect elders or expanded their contact networks during their custodial sentences.

Young people also may be monitored during custodial sentences

In some circumstances, however, distance from the network can lead to the coercive relationship being broken, at least to some extent. At the same time, interview participants described that it can nonetheless be difficult for youngers to make use of such opportunities. In the context of shorter institutional placements and custodial sentences, for example, interview participants said, "you wait for the kid", particularly if it is possible to maintain telephone contact. The police investigations examined in the study also contained examples of children placed in residential care homes and other youth institutions being collected from these places in order to commit offences. One interview participant said that while his network certainly kept tabs on defectors, it did not always have time to punish them. Thus, outcomes may also be somewhat random.

Exit

Hence, although network norms do provide certain opportunities for exit, many of those involved are not able to make use of these opportunities to actually leave. Several interview participants said that those who wanted to leave often had to completely disappear from their town or city and to break with all their previous social contacts. One reason for this is that continued social interactions in the same area can lead to young people being drawn back into the network. Another is that young people who persevere in

terminating their relationship with elders against the latter's will may be punished by means of violence, expulsion from the neighbourhood, humiliation, and enforced debts. Many may therefore need help in the form of relocation and protected identities.

Despite the brutality of these conditions, some of the interview participants who were still actively involved in criminal networks said that they could to some extent understand these rules: "If you play with fire, you can get burnt". One 21-year-old interview participant said:

> I mean, if you've entered into this gang mentality, then you can't just go to the guys and say, "No, but now I feel like I want to take a new direction in life". It doesn't work like that.

In line with these norms, some individuals choose to plan carefully and then disappear, rather than challenging the networks' rule systems. Instead of relying on public sector agencies and exit programs as a means of going underground, some elders and youngers who have been "built up" choose to organise their disappearance themselves. A small number of interview participants said that they had saved profits from their criminal activities in order to be able to leave when the time was right.

6. Conclusions and assessment

This chapter presents the SNCCP's conclusions and assessment of the study's results. The chapter begins by summarising the study's most important findings and its contribution to the knowledge base. It then presents an assessment of the relevance of these findings for the work of preventing and combating young peoples' involvement in criminal networks. The chapter concludes by proposing a number of measures that may help to achieve this goal.

Summary of central findings

The government has instructed the SNCCP to study: 1) the ways in which young people become involved in criminal networks, 2) what characterises the girls and boys of different ages who are attracted to and exploited in the context of criminal environments, 3) the nature of the relationships between youngers and elders in criminal networks, 4) the factors that motivate older criminal actors, 5) how young people are exploited and attracted into actively participating, and 6) the extent of young people's involvement, and how it has developed over time (Justitiedepartementet 2022). Table 5 summarises the study's findings in relation to these research questions.

Table 5: Overview of study findings.

Questions	Answers
1) In what ways do young people become involved in criminal networks?	Young people (aged 15-20) recruit other children (primarily boys aged 12-15). Teenagers who are already involved in networks make themselves accessible for contact by being visible in the neighbourhood. When younger children approach these older teenagers, they are courted strategically. Manipulation and coercion are also employed. The entry process is quick and results in the child losing his or her autonomy.
2a) What characterises the boys who become involved in criminal networks?	They are visible in outdoor public environments, already involved in less serious offending (such as thefts) together with same-age peers, and have siblings, relatives, or friends who are already involved in a network.
2b) What characterises the girls who become involved in criminal networks?	It is unusual for girls to be a part of the network itself. Girls and women are primarily exploited to provide specific services, such as transporting or storing drugs and weapons.
3) What characterises the	The criminal networks that involve children are built around

Questions	Answers
nature of the relationships between youngers and elders within the networks?	hierarchically ordered age strata that involve" ownership" relations between elders and youngers. Individual elders may have their own crew of 2-5 youngers, who may in turn also have youngers of their own. The relationships between elders and youngers are based on socialisation, enforced loyalty, and the exercise of power by alternating kindness with the use of violence. The networks prevent people leaving by means of threats, violence, and enforced debts.
4) What factors are elders motivated by?	In order to earn more money from the drugs market, older teenagers at the bottom of the distribution chain need to recruit their own crews of youngers to work as errand boys. These youngers may also be used for other assignments and to engage in other forms of crime. Children are exploited because they are a cheap source of labour, their use reduces the risks for elders, and they contribute to the network's expansion and embeddedness in a given neighbourhood.
5) How are young people exploited and attracted into active participation?	Almost all young people who become involved in criminal networks are engaged in the drug trade. The youngest are used to transport, store, and sell drugs. The strength of their ties to their own elder determines the type of additional assignments they are given. Common examples include storing and transporting weapons, and engaging in serious violent crime, fraud, and theft.
6) What is the SNCCP's assessment of the extent of young people's involvement, and its development over time?	The number and proportion of young people identified by the police as being involved in local criminal environments has increased. Over the past decade, there has been a marked increase in the number of offences that require access to drugs and weapons for which young people have been registered as suspects. Young people also account for a larger proportion of these offences than was previously the case.

The study's contribution to the knowledge base

The study contributes new knowledge about *how* and *why* children become involved in criminal networks, and its findings are in line with the results of previous research on the characteristics of young people who tend to develop a high-frequency criminal career. The SNCCP's assessment is that the study contributes to the knowledge base and has relevance for the work of public sector agencies in four principal areas: a) criminogenic exposure, b) exploitation and grooming, c) criminal careers and d) recent trends.

Criminogenic exposure

Today, the work of Swedish municipalities with at-risk children is primarily based on an individual assessment of risk, needs, and responsivity (Socialstyrelsen 2021). These assessments also include an analysis of risk and protective factors at different levels – individual factors (static and dynamic), social factors (family, school, and leisure) and local community factors (local access to support) (Socialstyrelsen 2020). The SNCCP's study found that some risk factors (such as spending unmonitored time in public places in neighbourhoods in which networks are based) were a recurrent element in the interview participants' descriptions and may thus be a significant factor in determining which individuals become involved in criminal networks. In line with previous research that has emphasised the importance of norms and environmental factors (Farrington and Welsh 2007, Wikström and Wikström 2019, Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020), the study also shows that neighbourhood exposure to criminogenic factors may have a significant impact specifically in relation to children becoming involved in criminal networks.

One general conclusion is that the presence, influence, and visibility of criminal networks in certain neighbourhoods constitutes a necessary condition for a continuous influx of young people into more organised criminal activities and coercive social relationships. At the same time, it is clear that young people who do not live in disadvantaged neighbourhoods are also affected by such criminogenic exposure – particularly those who have friends and relatives (primarily in the form of brothers) who are already involved in criminal networks. There is also much to suggest that the expanding popularity of cultural manifestations linked to criminal environments (primarily in the form of gangsta rap) and the digital reach of the networks (via social media) have led to a glorification and broad dissemination of these groups' norms and narratives. This may mean that a larger number of children are now being exposed to criminogenic risk than was previously the case.

Exploitation and grooming

The SNCCP's study also shows that the inflow of young people into the networks is primarily driven by expansive drug distribution chains, for which

continuous recruitment constitutes part of the business model. These findings are in line with the results of British studies, which have shown that the exploitation of vulnerable groups (including children) has increased as drug distribution has been taken over by neighbourhood-based networks and become territorially embedded in disadvantaged areas, and as drug sales have become increasingly digitalised (Andell and Pitts 2018, Harding 2020, Whittaker et al. 2019). Young people are sought to participate in volatile drug market activities because they are cheaper than alternative sources of labour, have a greater propensity for risk taking, are rarely detected by the justice system, and contribute to strengthening the networks' territorial entrenchment (cf. Brå 2021c).

Thus, there is good reason to broaden the focus for prevention – from factors that affect a given individual's level of risk and desire for involvement in criminal networks to factors related to market logics and the strategic activities of older actors in the network environment. By contrast with studies that have attempted to identify specific "recruiters" (Englefield and Ariel 2017), the SNCCP's findings show that most of those who become involved in the lowest strata of the networks are involved in recruitment activities, because having youngers of one's own is a requirement for advancing one's career and moving up the distribution chain. Given that slightly older youths (aged 15-20) have a powerful financial incentive to engage their own "youngers" (often children aged 12-15), it is not surprising that the use of manipulation and coercion has come to be viewed as legitimate in criminal networks.

The strategies used to involve young people in criminal networks are in some ways similar to those used in the grooming process used in connection with sexual abuse and people trafficking (Harding 2020). In these contexts, grooming involves an individual gradually developing the conditions necessary to establish contact with a child and to develop a relationship that will then allow them to exploit the child in question (Brå 2013). The current study shows that the in the context of the grooming process that precedes entry into a criminal network, the grooming relationship is also characterised by an inequality in the information available about what network involvement actually means in practice. This means that most children are unaware that accepting an "offer" will mean that they will then be

subordinate to the will of an elder and deprived of their autonomy for a long period of time.

Many children are both victims and perpetrators in the context of these processes. They are both "youngers" (in relation to an "elder" who has previously involved them in the network), and they themselves are also involving their own group of youngers, whom they then control. This means that for many of the young people involved in criminal networks there is a complex relationship between their exposure to violent victimisation and their own use of violence against younger individuals. The SNCCP's study shows that high levels of exploitation expose the individuals concerned to substantial levels of victimisation, which also has serious consequences in both the short and long term. Young people are exploited and exposed to humiliation and violence that can leave them scarred for life. This in turn leads to higher levels of conflict and cycles of violence as youngers subsequently seek revenge or revolt against elders.

Criminal careers within the networks

The study's results and conclusions regarding the process by which young people in practice become involved in criminal networks differ in some respects from the findings reported by previous research on Swedish criminal environments. Several previous studies have described a slow process of socialisation into criminal norms and groups, rather than active recruitment and rapid ensnarement (Brå 2019a, Brå 2016a, Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020, Rostami 2018). These differences may in part be due to the process actually having changed as drug markets have become digitalised and more embedded in socially disadvantaged areas (Brå 2021c), but they may also be due to insufficient attention having been directed at the strategic activities of elders.

The current study also shows that it is important to differentiate between entry into criminal youth gangs and entry into criminal networks. Although entry into a gang of same-age peers who start to commit less serious offences together may occur gradually, the current study shows that the process of entering a criminal network is rapid and involves a marked shift in the individual's criminal career. There are, however, cases in which entire youth gangs enter a criminal network at the same time, which produces a

hybridisation of loyalty-based collaborations among same-age peers and the strict, age-based control structures that characterise the age-stratified drug distribution chains (cf. Harding 2020).

This report has also provided a more detailed picture of the structure of loosely connected criminal networks and illustrates the importance of acknowledging the significance of the lower network strata to the networks as a whole. Although these networks appear to external observers to be characterised by a low degree of organisation, the networks are hierarchically controlled by means of dyadic ownership relations between individuals in different age strata. As has been found in previous research, the SNCCP's study shows that the accumulation of certain forms of capital – such as loyalty, industriousness, and a capacity for violence – are often a precondition for moving up the in networks' age strata (Sandberg and Pedersen 2011, Brå 2019a, Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020). And as has already been noted, the current study also shows that recruiting one's own youngers and the use of violence lead to automatic advancement in the network hierarchy and play an important role in the competition that exists between same-age peers in the context of extensive drug distribution chains (cf. Harding 2020). It appears also to have become more common for youngers to adopt an alternative career path by revolting against their elders. The report also shows that certain events may create important windows of opportunity[50] and are of significance for young people's ability to both advance up the network hierarchy and to exit the networks. Such windows of opportunity primarily arise when elders leave the country, die, or are given custodial sentences.

Recent trends

Finally, the SNCCP's study also contributes to the knowledge on the serious offending engaged in by young people in criminal networks. By contrast with other studies, which have described network entry as being followed by a gradual process of becoming involved in increasingly serious forms of crime (Carlie 2002, Ooms 2013, Gerell, Hallin and Nilvall 2020), the SNCCP's data indicate that many young people today immediately become involved in

[50] The term windows of opportunity is here used to refer to periods during which shifts in external circumstances change the conditions of social relationships between elders and youngers.

serious crime. Our presentations of crime statistics (for the period 2012-2022) and statistics from the Swedish Prosecution Authority on offences for which children have been subject to Section 31 investigations (for the period 2015-2022) show a marked increase over recent years in the number of cases in which young people who have not yet reached the age of criminal responsibility and children aged 15-17 have been registered as suspects in connection with weapons offences, narcotics transfer, extortion, and fraud. Most remarkable is perhaps that half of all suspected homicide offences in 2022 were linked to individuals aged under 21 (see Appendix 3).

The study's findings show that there may be reason to examine a narrower sample of offence types that may be linked to the criminal opportunity structures associated with network offending (primarily offences that require access to weapons and drugs) in order to more effectively follow crime trends for the young people involved in criminal networks. Broader analyses of youth crime indicate that the offending of young people in general has been in decline (Estrada 2017, Estrada 2022), that size of the group of young offenders with large numbers of convictions has not increased, and that these youths are not convicted of serious offences more frequently than they used to be (Sivertsson, Nilsson and Estrada 2022).[51] Analyses of trends based on data that include all young offenders and that focus on broad offence categories such as assault, theft, and criminal damage therefore need to be supplemented with more narrowly focused studies. There is otherwise a risk that the crime trends for young people involved in criminal networks will not be acknowledged. In addition, this group may be less visible in conviction statistics than in statistics based on those registered as crime suspects. Network offending is characterised by an element of strategic thinking that may be lacking in relation to other forms of youth crime, and these offences are often challenging for the police to investigate, which means that they less often lead to convictions.

[51] A study of trends in volent crime noted a successive decrease in the number of males aged 15 to 20 who were convicted of violent offending, but also that the size of the group with the largest numbers of convictions in each age group has remained relatively stable. Thus, the size of this group has not increased, and nor has its offending become more serious over time. At the same time, the contrast between this group and the rest of a given cohort has become more marked (Sivertsson 2022). The study did not, however, include cohorts that had been convicted at an early age subsequent to 2017.

The SNCCP's assessment

The government's instruction to the SNCCP included describing "promising international and national experiences to combat the involvement of young people in criminal networks" and to "propose other measures that could be implemented to prevent young people being recruited into or otherwise involved in and exploited by criminal networks" (Justitiedepartementet 2022). The proposed measures and promising international experiences described in this section are limited to an assessment of the ways in which existing working methods within the justice system (and at the interface between crime policy and social policy) could be developed. There are a number of reasons for this.

This report has shown that the participation of young people in criminal networks constitutes a major challenge to the justice system's work to combat organised crime, and also that the victimisation to which young people are exposed in criminal networks constitutes a significant social problem. This means that the issue affects a number of different actors and areas of responsibility at the national, regional, and local levels. The SNCCP is of the view that the nature of the problems associated with criminal networks, and the way these problems have developed over time, indicate the need for a wide-ranging review of public sector agencies' work with young offenders, organised crime, and the situation in social disadvantaged areas. In line with this, there are currently several ongoing governmental inquiries, and agencies have also been given a number of governmental assignments, with a focus on possible changes to existing legal provisions (see, e.g., Justitiedepartementet 2023c) and the development of new working methods. The findings from a number of such inquiries and assignments have also recently been reported to the government.

A governmental inquiry on youth crime boards has been instructed to analyse the possibility of introducing this type of board in Sweden, for example (Socialdepartementet 2023b).[52] In the autumn of 2023, the Police Authority, the National Board of Health and Welfare, and the National Board of Institutional Care reported the results of a governmental assignment and

[52] The resulting report was published in March 2024.

proposed a new structure for collaborations focused on young people involved in organised crime at the local, regional, and national levels (Polisen 2023c). In December 2023, the Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services presented a report from a governmental assignment to analyse the research base and identify effective models and methods to prevent and reduce gang-related offending among young people (SBU 2023a).[53]

In addition, the Police Authority, the Prison and Probation Service, the National Board of Institutional Care, and the National Board of Health and Welfare have been jointly tasked with strengthening and developing the support available to individuals wishing to leave criminal networks (Polisen 2023a).

The SNCCP is of the view that this report constitutes a further contribution to the ongoing development of knowledge-based crime prevention. The report's results and analyses – together with other relevant studies, reviews, and inquiries – can provide a basis for continuing inter-agency collaborations in this area. It is important, however, that changes in methods and the governance of different actors in the areas of social, labour market, education, and housing policy are developed by the relevant agencies in a way that corresponds to their mission and knowledge base.

The SNCCP's principal area of competence is focused on the criminal justice system and the interface between crime policy and social policy. As a result, and given the number of ongoing governmental assignments in this area, the proposals presented below focus on the way existing provisions, collaborations, and measures might be improved in light of the findings presented in this report. These proposals and discussions relate to two central challenges:

- **The capacity of criminal networks.** The SNCCP's assessment is that the capacity of criminal networks to engage in crime and affect local

[53] The Swedish Agency for Health Technology Assessment and Assessment of Social Services SBU has also conducted a review of the methods and measures that are recommended for use in relation to youth crime in the Nordic countries (SBU 2023b).

communities can be reduced if their ability to exploit children is impeded.

- **The victimisation of children.** The SNCCP would like to emphasise the fact that society has a responsibility to protect children by preventing and combating their exploitation by criminal networks.

Common to the proposed measures described below is that they have repeatedly been raised as important in the context of the consultations that the SNCCP has held with other agencies, and that they may be viewed as urgent on the basis of the findings presented in this report.

Reducing the capacity of criminal networks

The SNCCP's study has shown that criminal networks seek to involve young people in order to reduce the risks, and increase the benefits, experienced by older network participants. One way of reducing the capacity of criminal networks would therefore be to make the exploitation of children in criminal activities less attractive. Agency powers, legislation, and measures may therefore need to be reviewed in order to target them more effectively at the ways in which criminal networks exploit children. The following sections present a number of proposals that the SNCCP views as needing urgent consideration.

The fact that young people are both victims and perpetrators in the context of criminal networks presents a complex challenge in relation to the interventions that public sector agencies direct at these young people. However, Sweden's ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child also entails a commitment to ensuring that children are protected against all forms of violence (General Comments No. 8, 2006), irrespective of whether this violence is perpetrated by an adult or another child, and irrespective of whether the victim has subjected other children to the use of force, threats, or violence.

Improve the justice system's ability to investigate offences that involve the exploitation of children

The report has shown that the demand for children as a source of labour is primarily linked to the drug trade. Article 33 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child states that states should "prevent the use of children in

the illicit production and trafficking of [narcotic drugs]". The need to protect young people, and their significance for the capacity of criminal networks, thus means that there are powerful reasons to consider the use of more intrusive measures against children in the context of criminal investigations, if these measures are judged to be effective and proportionate.

Investigating and proving serious drug offences in court often involves the need to use so-called covert coercive measures (such as covert communications interceptions or camera surveillance). The use of these measures is currently not permitted in relation to children under the age of 15, which provides an incentive for older individuals to use children in the handling of drugs. There are also restrictions on the use of other forms of coercive investigative measures (such as search warrants and unlocking mobile phones) in relation to children. When a child under 15 is suspected of an offence, a decision to use coercive measures may only be taken if there is special cause. This typically requires a suspicion regarding either a relatively serious offence, or relatively extensive offending (Åklagarmyndigheten 2022b). It is therefore uncommon for the police to use search warrants in relation to children aged under 15. An analysis of 1,153 Section 31 investigations that the SNCCP conducted in 2006 showed that coercive investigative measures (in the form of, e.g., search warrants and body searches) were only used in between 2 and 3 percent of the cases examined (Brå 2007). Given that the current report has shown that young people are often used to transport and store drugs and weapons, there may be reason to consider extending the powers of the police and prosecutors in this area.

The government has appointed a governmental inquiry (Justitiedepartementet 2023b) that has been instructed to propose ways of improving the ability of the agencies of the justice system to use coercive measures and covert coercive measures to prevent, investigate, and prosecute offences committed by young people. The SNCCP welcomes this initiative and is of the view that extended powers should be considered, in part to combat the demand for children as a source of labour, and in part to facilitate the prosecution of individuals who have reached the age of criminal responsibility and who exploit children in order to commit serious offences.

Reducing the risks associated with residential placements and imprisonment

One central aspect of the capacity of criminal networks involves the contact networks of individuals, and their access to a crew of "youngers". This study has shown that it is not uncommon for young people to extend their contact networks, and that they continue to be exploited for the purpose of criminal activities, when they are institutionalised or imprisoned. The conditions experienced by young people serving custodial sentences (or who have been institutionalised as a result of their own offending in accordance with the Care of Young Persons Act) are thus a central factor for efforts to reduce both the capacity of criminal networks to engage in offending and the ability of elders to control youngers.

One factor that is necessary for elders to be able to maintain coercive social relationships with young people is access to communications technology. Articles 12 and 16 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child safeguard children's right to privacy and to communicate with their surroundings and express their opinions. Against this background, many children are given the right to the relatively unrestricted use of mobile phones and computers in the context of institutional placements (Section 15 a, Care of Young Persons (special provisions) Act). Temporary restrictions of these rights may, however, be imposed if they are deemed to jeopardise the care of the child. The SNCCP is of the view that such restrictions may also be justified by reference to the best interests of the child (Article 3, Convention on the Rights of the Child), when such restrictions may be needed to prevent continued participation in criminal networks during institutional placements.

The powers of the National Board of Institutional Care with regard to young people's use of mobile phones have recently been examined by a governmental inquiry (Socialdepartementet 2023a). The inquiry was among other things motivated by the need to prevent young people maintaining destructive contacts. The inquiry has proposed a prohibition on personal communication technologies (mobile phones, internet, e-mail) for young people with a high security classification. The SNCCP believes that the inquiry's proposals on restricted access to communications technology may contribute to reducing the vulnerability of young people, provided the decision to impose restrictions is based on adequate information about the young person's situation and role within a criminal network. At the present

time, however, the National Board of Institutional Care has no power to access and collect information on individuals' criminal activities and contacts, other than that contained in the individual's journal, other than for a small number of very specific purposes (Polisen et al. 2023c).

The risk of periods of institutionalisation and imprisonment leading, via new contacts, to intensified involvement in offending should also be given consideration in connection with the development of new proposals on the implementation of criminal sanctions. A governmental inquiry on custodial sanctions for young offenders has proposed that responsibility for children aged 15-17 who have been convicted of serious offences (such as murder, aggravated robbery, and rape) should be transferred from the National Board of Institutional Care to the Prison and Probation Service.[54] On the basis of this proposal, children would be kept apart from adult inmates during their time in prison, and it would be possible to deny them access to electronic communication and to intercept their communications. The aim of these proposals is among other things to prevent reoffending and absconding during the custodial sentence.

The SNCCP shares the view that it is extremely important to avoid children being exposed to contact with older individuals who may exploit them, and to prevent children from absconding from prisons and youth institutions. This report has shown, however, that coercive relationships also exist *within* the group of 15-17-year-olds. It is therefore important to take account of the fact that children exert control other children, and that it may therefore not be sufficient merely to isolate young people from adults. In order to organise the implementation of institutional placements and custodial sentences to avoid them resulting in intensified criminal relationships, increased vulnerability and the further expansion of criminal networks, it is important both prior to and during such placements to carefully investigate children's relationships with other children placed in the same institution, their coercive relationships with one another, and their vulnerability and experiences of victimisation. This will also help to ensure that the placements can instead

[54] The inquiry proposed that the necessary provisions should come into force on January 1, 2028.

focus on schooling, treatment, and desistance.[55] It may also be necessary to move children between different placement groups as the need arises.

Adapting GVI

The violent reputation of "elders", and their capacity to engage in violence, constitutes an important element in the recruitment process employed by criminal networks, not least with regard to young people who are coerced into network involvement by means of arbitrary enforced debts. Policing and inter-agency interventions focused on individuals involved in violent conflicts between and within networks may therefore serve to weaken the ability of criminal networks to involve children.

For a while now, the work focused on reducing violence in criminal environments at the local and regional levels has been employing the Group Violence Intervention (GVI) model at several locations in Sweden. This model involves directing targeted measures at the individuals most responsible for the instigation of violence in a specific area and the criminal groups of which they are a part. The model is based on collaboration between the police and the local municipality and involves both offering people support if they wish to desist from crime and responding with intensive measures if their violence does not cease.[56]

The SNCCP's study shows that young people do not merely constitute a "tail" in criminal networks but rather that they play an essential role in the networks' ability to conduct their criminal activities. It is the assessment of the SNCCP that if children are to be included in the focus for GVI measures in the future, the actors involved in GVI collaborations should examine

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[55] The Oregon Model (previously referred to as multidimensional treatment foster care – MTFC) is one measure that has been recommended in the National Board of Health and Welfare's knowledge base and guide for children who engage in norm-breaking behaviour and criminality, and who are in need of an out-of-home placement and monitored social relationships (Socialstyrelsen 2021).

[56] The actors who collaborate in the use of GVI are primarily the police, the municipalities, the Prison and Probation Service, and the local community. The international research literature refers to the method as form of focused deterrence. Evaluations in the USA have shown that the method can produce a positive effect in relation to serious violence between criminal groups (Braga and Kennedy 2020). The method's point of departure is that norms and attitudes within and between groups affect levels of violence, and the focus of prevention agencies is therefore directed at the relevant groups as a whole (www.bra.se).

which of the measures available to the involved agencies are appropriate and relevant for minors.

Reviewing the focus of the involvement of children offence

On July 1, 2023, a new provision was introduced into the Swedish Criminal Code, which makes it an offence to involve children (under the age of 18) in crime or criminal activities (Government Bill 2022/23:53, bet. 2022/23:JuU8). This criminalisation was primarily intended to target dominant, older actors. However, the results of the current study indicate that the focus of this provision may be targeted at the wrong individuals, since many of the dominant, older members of criminal networks have no direct contact with the youngest network participants.

The *travaux préparatoires* are linked to the new provision state that exceptions should be made "with reference to small differences in age and development between the individual who has committed the offence and the other person" (Government Bill 2022/2023:53, bet. 2022/23:JuU8). As an example, the *travaux préparatoires* mention the difference in age between individuals who have had their 18th birthday at different points in the same year. Given that the findings presented in this report show that both those who involve young people in criminal networks, and those who become involved, are under the age of 18, and that the age differences between the members of these groups can be small, there may be reason to review whether the application of the new provision covers the forms of involvement in crime that motivated its introduction.

Reducing the victimisation of children

This report has shown that young people experience extensive victimisation in the context of criminal networks. Victimisation occurs in all aspects of the process of involvement in these networks – including network entry, participation in crime, daily life within the network, and also the network exit process and during the period following separation from the network. It primarily involves exposure to manipulation, exploitation, and the loss of autonomy, but also includes exposure to coercion, threats, humiliation, and violence. Family members are also at risk of being exposed to crime or of themselves becoming involved in serious crime. Further, the dual role of young people in criminal networks – as both victims and perpetrators – also

means that young people may find it difficult both to seek and accept help from public sector agencies and family members. The SNCCP is of the view that the complexity of young people's exposure to victimisation means that there is a continuous need for the work of public sector agencies to be: a) evaluated, b) adapted to this target group, c) based on information sharing between relevant agencies and municipalities, and d) focused on specific windows of opportunity.

It is important that measures which are found to be effective for young people involved in criminal networks are made available when situations arise that provide opportunities to block or weaken the ties between youngers and elders within a criminal network. The following sections present a number of suggestions for ways in which existing working methods might be developed to this end.

Examine whether sufficiently well-tailored measures are available for this target group

There are currently special collaborative prevention structures at the local level focused on youth offending. Representatives of the social services, the police, and other actors (such as schools and youth leisure-time programmes) participate in collaborative groups focused on specific children. The most common forms taken by such collaborations are "community intervention teams" (CITs) and "school-social services-police-recreation" (SSPR). These are focused on two target groups: children who are already deemed to be at risk, or in the early stages of a criminal career (SSPR) and young people deemed to be at high risk of offending, or who need to leave a criminal lifestyle (CITs).

The target group for SSPR primarily comprises children up to the age of 18, whereas CITs may also focus on young people who are over 18 years of age. In addition to SSPR and CITs, several municipalities also engage in inter-agency collaborations based on the "Getting it right for every child" model from Scotland (GIRFEC 2022, Polisen 2023d). The GIRFEC model is focused on early identification and on facilitating collaboration between actors at the local and regional levels (schools, care provision, social services, and the police). A small number of municipalities also work with the German "U-turn" (Kurve Kriegen) model for collaboration, with a focus on the early

identification of at-risk children. This model is based on a collaboration between the police and social services, among other things with a focus on children who have family members and relatives who are involved in criminal networks.

These various forms of collaboration focus on providing knowledge-based measures to the individual child and his or her guardians, which are tailored to the individual's situation and needs. The choice of measures should proceed on the basis of the individual child's need for support and protection and the knowledge base and recommendations published by the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen 2021).[57] These recommendations are in turn based on research describing the types of measures that have been shown to be effective for young people at high risk of engaging in norm-breaking behaviour and reoffending. The measures should be adapted to the individual child on the basis of the risk, need, and responsivity principles (RNR).

The view of the SNCCP is that there is reason to review the availability of some of the measures that are today recommended by the National Board of Health and Welfare in relation to their use with young people involved in criminal networks. This might, for example, involve FFT (functional family therapy for young people aged 11-18, who manifest externalising and criminal behaviour) and MST (multisystemic therapy for children aged 12-17 who commit offences). These measures can be adapted to young people involved in criminal networks, among other things via the use of FFT-G.[58] Given that such gang-focused adaptations have to date not been broadly implemented in Sweden, there may be reason to examine whether these measures produce a positive effect in Swedish conditions, and whether they can be made more accessible to this target group. It is important that children who are indebted, under threat, and who have lost their autonomy to an

[57] Many of the measures currently recommended by the National Board of Health and Welfare are focused on strengthening parenting practices (e.g., via parental support programmes, and structured family treatment in the family of origin or a treatment foster family) and providing behavioural and skills training programmes for children (Socialstyrelsen 2021).

[58] The G stands for gangs.

elder are given access to measures that are adapted to the conditions that characterise the network context.

Another important factor that affects the ability of the actors involved in collaborations such as CITs, SSPR, and GIRFEC is the availability of relevant documentation. One important source of information may come from previous child protection reports and social services investigations, which may be shared on the basis of existing information-sharing regulations (Brå 2021a). The SNCCP also shares the view of the National Board of Health and Welfare, that a searchable digital system containing child protection reports, with a three-year retention period, would provide improved conditions for the relevant actors' ability to provide measures that are holistically tailored to the needs of the individuals concerned (Socialstyrelsen 2019).

Tailor support on the basis of guardians' circumstances

The SNCCP would also like to emphasise the need to take the criminal context into consideration when tailoring measures on the basis of the situation of guardians. Some parents and guardians actively seek help from public sector agencies and have a desire to participate, whereas others refuse to participate in measures or are themselves involved in criminal networks. Still others may themselves be under threat from the criminal network in question. Different circumstances may require different forms of preparatory measures.

It is important to provide guardians with what they need to enable them to participate in interventions. In some cases, interpreters may be essential to enable guardians to describe their experiences without having to rely on translations provided by the child in question or a sibling. In situations where guardians are opposed to interventions, it is important that employees at the agencies involved are given an adequate capability to offer support measures (IVO 2014). Working to establish trust may be an important precondition for the agencies' ability to make the more intrusive decisions that are sometimes required (cf. Brå 2019b).

Previous research has shown that situations in which other family members are also involved in criminal networks present a special challenge. In combination with family members' unwillingness to accept help, the fear

experienced by officials when faced with the need to make uncomfortable decisions (on out-of-home placements or child protection reports) may have a negative impact on the likelihood of children receiving support from public sector agencies (van Dijk, Kleemans and Eichelsheim 2018). Risk analyses and contingency planning may be required to allow intrusive decisions to be taken, even when this results in individual officials coming under threat (Brå 2017).

Develop outreach-based exit programmes

This report has shown that periods during which elders are absent can lead to generational shifts and conflicts in criminal networks but may also provide opportunities for network exit. When elders are placed on remand, convicted, or move abroad, their ability to exercise control over youngers may be weakened. Since elders may be both 20-year-olds and 16-year-olds, justice system measures are not the only means of producing such windows of opportunity. The decisions of social welfare committees to place children in care (in accordance with the Young Offenders Act or the Social Services Act) and convictions that result in youth custody may all serve to weaken the degree of control exercised in relation to the youngest network participants.

There may therefore be reason to develop a greater level of contingency planning for such events than exists today. Continuous information sharing between the police and the social services may be an important requirement for the ability to create and identify such windows of opportunity, for example, in connection with plans to conduct raids focused on elders in leading positions within a network. The SNCCP would argue that outreach, motivational, and intrusive measures focused on youngers could be introduced as a natural part of the police planning of measures directed at network elders, and of the police's collaboration with social services. Settling issues of remit and the requirements for information sharing in advance, and establishing contact channels and communicating them to the right officials, will produce the conditions necessary to be able to act swiftly when opportunities arise. Methods of this kind have been developed at the Violence Reduction Unit in Glasgow (Graham 2016, Violence Reduction Unit 2020, GIRFEC 2022). Such methods are also in line with the new collaborative model presented in the report of a governmental assignment focused on young people's involvement in organised crime (Polisen 2023c).

The model involves establishing local consultative bodies with the aim of ensuring that methods for information sharing, inter-agency contacts, and operational collaborations are well-established, thus making it possible to act quickly when the time is right.

Exit programmes for young people are one of the measures that should be made available (in connection with windows of opportunity) to a greater extent than is the case today. The Police Authority, the Prison and Probation Service, the National Board of Institutional Care, and the National Board of Health and Welfare have been instructed by the government to strengthen and develop the work of providing support to those wishing to exit organised crime throughout the country (Justitiedepartementet 2021, Polisen 2023a). The National Board of Institutional Care has been instructed to formulate and implement guidelines for identifying more such individuals among those placed in the agency's youth care institutions, and to work to create trust and to motivate young people to leave criminal networks in collaboration with the social services. The social services will have the task of providing measures to facilitate the exit process when youths' institutional placements come to an end.

The SNCCP would like to emphasise the importance of exit programmes being implemented in a professional manner, and of ensuring that such programmes are a safe environment for young people. A report presented to the government by the agencies described in the previous paragraph notes that there is an urgent need to introduce special requirements, and opportunities to conduct checks, to ensure that the external actors contracted to provide exit programmes by municipalities are trustworthy and professional (Polisen 2023a). In cases where children living at home with their families are under threat from criminal networks, it may be necessary to relocate entire families for their safety. Such intensive protective measures may require substantial resources and lead to organisational pressures both within and between municipalities.

Use local crime prevention collaborations to prevent grooming

Recruitment into criminal networks can also be prevented within the framework of ongoing local crime prevention work (Brå 2020c). It is important that schools and the providers of organised recreational activities

are not only included in collaborative structures focused on individual young people (CITs, SSPR) but are also involved in the broader, statutory local crime prevention work conducted by the municipalities.

Regular information sharing between the social services, schools, recreational organisations, and the police in the context of these actors' systematic analyses of local problems may be necessary for those working with children to be able to identify and prevent attempts at grooming. For example, the observations of field workers, community police officers, and school staff may together provide a basis for action plans focused on *where* (which locations) and *when* (for example, during school holidays) the risk of elders establishing contacts with children is greatest, and how such contacts might be prevented.

The SNCCP would also like to emphasise that the police have a particularly important role to play by working actively in socially disadvantaged areas, being visible, disrupting the open drug trade, and conducting outreach work in relation to young people. In addition, local collaborations against black market apartment rentals may also be of significance to the work to prevent young people becoming involved in criminal networks. This report has shown that apartments are used both for criminal purposes (for example, for packaging drugs, and as call centres for fraud activities) and to develop and strengthen ties between young people and network elders (cf. Brå 2022c). Other forms of asset-focused measures may also make it more difficult for older network offenders to make a display of the extravagant lifestyle that serves to facilitate their contacts with young people.

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Appendix

Appendix 1 Offences linked to suspects from the Cylinder Model population

Which types of crime are committed by young people in criminal networks? In order to examine the types of offence for which individuals in criminal networks are suspected at different ages, records have been obtained from the SNCCP's Unit for Criminal Justice Statistics of the offences for which the individuals in the Cylinder Model population have been registered as suspects. These data include all suspected offences linked to each personal identity number registered in the Cylinder Model – a total of just over 442,000 suspected offences.

In order to examine which offences are committed by individuals at different ages, based on comparable conditions, only suspected offences registered during the period 2018-2021 have been included in the analysis.[59] Since the principal aim of the analysis is to examine the over- and under-representation of different offence types at different ages, additional restrictions have been imposed. An individual can be registered in the Cylinder Model several years in a row, and by several different local policing areas. Since it is important from an analytical perspective to ensure that a single individual only appears in one of the age groups employed in the analysis, each individual has been included in the analysis on the basis of their age at the time of the most recent Cylinder Model data collection in which they were included. Since the SNCCP's Register of Suspected Offenders only includes offences linked to suspects aged 15 and over, individuals under the age of 15 have not been included in the data presented in Table 6.

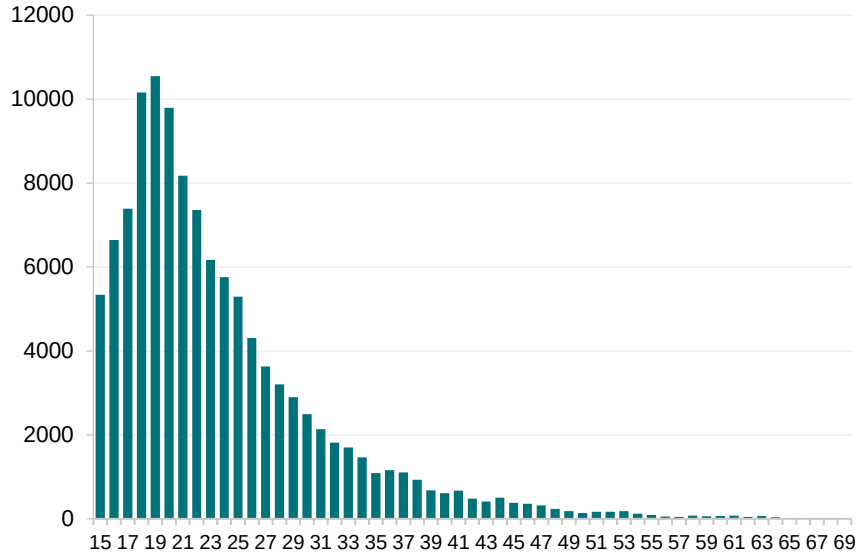
Table 6: Number and proportion of registered suspects among the Cylinder Model population for the years 2018-2021, by age group.

Age	15-17	18-21	22-25	26 and over	Total
N	1,111	2,522	1,949	3,280	8,862
Percent	12.5	28.5	22.0	37.0	100

[59] If all offences linked to a suspect had been included, the comparison would also have included years in which the younger members of the population had not reached the age of criminal responsibility.

Between 2018 and 2021, just over 116,000 suspected offences were registered as being linked to the 8,862 individuals included in the analysis. Figure 2 shows that individuals aged up to 21 years account for almost one-third of the suspected offences and that almost three-quarters of the suspected offences have been linked to individuals under the age of 30. Although the population exhibits a high level of registered suspected offending, the age-crime curve for this population nonetheless peaks at age 19 and then declines with age (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Number of suspected offences linked to registered suspects in the Cylinder Model population for the years 2018-2021, by age at the time of the offence.



Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit and the SNCCP's Register of Suspected Offences; data processed by the SNCCP.

Table 7 presents the distribution of suspected offences by offence type and age group. In order to simplify the presentation, crime codes for similar offences have been combined. It is worth noting that the age groups presented are not comparable with one another in terms of the number of individuals included in each age group.

Table 7: Number and proportion of registered suspects among the Cylinder Model population for the years 2018-2021, by age group and offence type.

Age	15-17		18-21		22-25		26 and over		All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Robbery	1 293	47.1	910	33.2	266	9.7	275	10.0	2,744	100
Unlawful coercion	102	36.8	73	26.4	47	17.0	55	19.9	277	100
Obstruction of justice	591	35.8	523	31.6	220	13.3	319	19.3	1,653	100
Rape/attempted rape	136	30.1	145	32.1	67	14.8	104	23.0	452	100
Assault	2 087	28.0	2,190	29.4	1,302	17.5	1,866	25.1	7,445	100
Criminal damage	566	27.4	579	28.0	369	17.8	554	26.8	2,068	100
Violation of personal integrity offences	237	25.8	283	30.8	133	14.5	265	28.9	918	100
Handling explosives	15	25.0	14	23.3	14	23.3	17	28.3	60	100
Unlawful threats/molestation	1,365	23.5	1,469	25.3	1,053	18.1	1,915	33.0	5,802	100
Theft/breaking and entering	1,691	23.0	1,796	24.4	1,236	16.8	2,638	35.8	7,361	100
Violence against a public servant/ resisting arrest	499	18.5	822	30.5	606	22.5	766	28.4	2,693	100
Narcotics, possession	3,365	18.1	7,065	37.9	3,834	20.6	4,357	23.4	18,621	100
Extortion	287	16.5	633	36.5	319	18.4	496	28.6	1,735	100
Kidnapping/unlawful deprivation of liberty	102	15.8	243	37.6	123	19.0	178	27.6	646	100
Perjury	45	15.6	101	35.1	53	18.4	89	30.9	288	100
Receiving stolen goods	249	15.3	456	28.1	268	16.5	652	40.1	1,625	100
Other sex offences	10	14.9	14	20.9	14	20.9	29	43.3	67	100
Narcotics, use	2,623	12.9	8,120	39.8	4,670	22.9	4,997	24.5	20,410	100
Murder/ attempted murder	166	12.8	488	37.7	314	24.2	327	25.3	1,295	100
Weapons offences	449	12.2	1,225	33.4	855	23.3	1,140	31.1	3,669	100

Offences against the Knives Act	**417**	**11.8**	**1,017**	**28.9**	**883**	**25.0**	**1,208**	**34.3**	**3,525**	**100**
Narcotics, transfer	567	11.3	2,073	41.1	1,171	23.2	1,227	24.4	5,038	100
Fraud	505	11.1	1,470	32.2	1,044	22.9	1,545	33.9	4,564	100
Economic crime incl. benefit fraud, excl. money laundering	198	10.7	278	15.1	249	13.5	1,118	60.7	1,843	100
Offences against the Alcohol and Tobacco Act	21	9.5	36	16.3	56	25.3	108	48.9	221	100
Money laundering	195	7.3	942	35.1	751	28.0	798	29.7	2,686	100
Road traffic offences	901	7.1	3,887	30.5	3,103	24.3	4,871	38.2	12,762	100
Smuggling offences	15	5.3	83	29.4	73	25.9	111	39.4	282	100
Causing an explosion	8	4.8	48	28.7	55	32.9	56	33.5	167	100
Unlawful handling of smuggled goods and taxable goods	6	4.7	12	9.3	5	3.9	106	82.2	129	100
Doping offences	21	2.2	182	18.8	255	26.3	512	52.8	970	100
Narcotics, production	0	0.0	13	15.5	16	19.0	55	65.5	84	100
Other crime codes	638	13.5	1,473	31.1	1,156	24.4	1,467	31.0	4,734	100
Total	19,370	16.6	38,663	33.1	24,580	21.0	34,221	29.3	116,834	100

Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit and the SNCCP's Register of Suspected Offences; data processed by the SNCCP.

Another way of examining what characterises the suspected offences of the youngest individuals in the Cylinder Model is to focus exclusively on the distribution among the 15-17-year-olds. This group was registered for a total of 19,370 suspected offences during the period 2018-2021.

Table 8 presents the distribution of these suspected offences by offence type, from the most common to the least common. The table shows that a large proportion of the suspected offending of the youngest members of the Cylinder Model population involves typical forms of youth crime – including theft, criminal damage, driving without a licence, and assault, all of which are offence types committed by young people who do not go on to develop a high-frequency criminal career or to become involved in criminal networks. However, almost one-third of the offences relate to some form of drug offending. A relatively substantial proportion of the young Cylinder Model individuals' suspected offences are also comprised of crime types that are uncommon among young people, such as weapons offences, fraud, obstruction of justice, and extortion.

Table 8: Number and proportion of suspected offences among individuals aged 15-17 from the Cylinder Model population during the period 2018-2021, by crime category.

Crime category	n	Proportion (%)
Narcotics, possession	3365	17.4
Narcotics, use	2623	13.5
Assault	2087	10.8
Theft/breaking and entering	1691	8.7
Unlawful threats/molestation	1365	7.0
Robbery	1293	6.7
Road traffic offences	901	4.7
Other crime codes	638	3.3
Obstruction of justice	591	3.1
Narcotics, transfer	567	2.9
Criminal damage	566	2.9
Fraud	505	2.6
Violence against a public servant/resisting arrest	499	2.6
Weapons offences	449	2.3
Offences against the Knives Act	417	2.2
Extortion	287	1.5
Receiving stolen goods	249	1.3
Violation of personal integrity offences	237	1.2
Economic crime incl. benefit fraud, excl. money laundering	198	1.0
Money laundering	195	1.0
Murder/attempted murder	166	0.9
Rape/attempted rape	136	0.7
Kidnapping/unlawful deprivation of liberty	102	0.5
Unlawful coercion	102	0.5
Perjury	45	0.2
Offences against the Alcohol and Tobacco Act	21	0.1
Doping offences	21	0.1
Smuggling offences	15	0.1
Handling explosives	15	0.1
Other sex offences	10	0.1
Causing an explosion	8	0.0

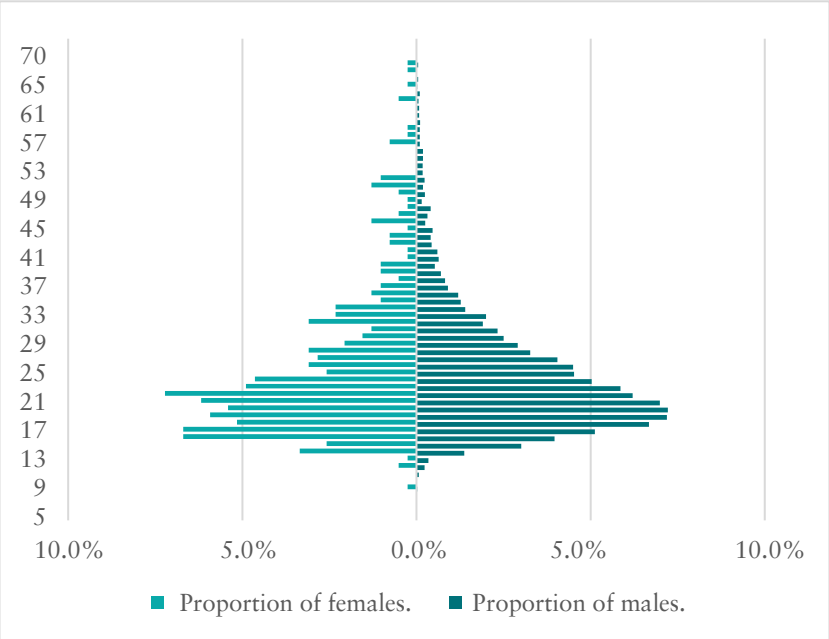
Crime category	n	Proportion (%)
Unlawful handling of smuggled goods and taxable goods	6	0.0
Total	19,370	100

Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit and SNCCP's Register of Suspected Offences; data processed by the SNCCP.

Appendix 2 Suspected offences linked to individuals registered in the Cylinder Model, by gender

The most recent data reported by Sweden's local policing areas to the Cylinder Model included a total of 388 females. These comprise four percent of the Cylinder Model population. The age distributions of the males and females included in the Cylinder Model are relatively similar (Figure 3).

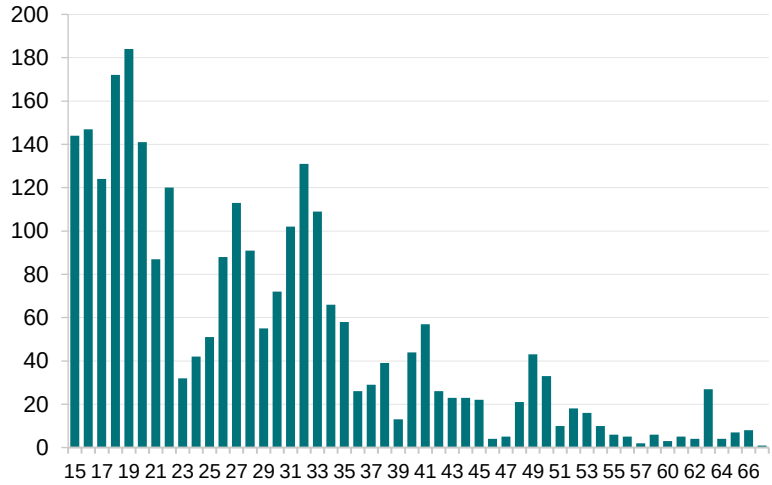
Figure 3: Age distributions for females and males included in the Cylinder Model. Proportions in percent.



Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit; data processed by the SNCCP.

The females account for a total of just over two percent of the total number of suspected offences linked to the individuals in the Cylinder Model during the period 2018-2021. As for males, the number of suspected offences among females is greatest for those aged 19 (Figure 4). The trend for females aged over 19 differs somewhat from that found in the Cylinder Model population as a whole, however, where the height of the age-crime curve declines rapidly during the early twenties (see Figure 2).

Figure 4: Number of suspected offences linked to females in the Cylinder Model during the period 2018-2021, by age.



Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit and SNCCP's Register of Suspected Offences; data processed by the SNCCP.

Women aged over 25 account for more than half of the suspected offences linked to females in the Cylinder Model. This can be compared to the situation in the Cylinder Model population as a whole, where the same age group accounts for just under 30 percent of the total number of suspected offences. The Cylinder Model includes 62 females aged 15–17, who have been linked to a total of 415 suspected offences. The corresponding number of boys aged 15-17 is 1049, and these have been linked to a total of 18,955 suspected offences. In this age group, the girls have been registered for an average of seven suspected offences, the boys for an average of 18.

Generally speaking, the most common offence types for which 15-17-year-old boys and girls have been registered as suspects are similar – girls have also primarily been registered as suspects in connection with drug offences and assault. Assault offences are a more common part of the girls' suspected offending (approximately 20 percent the suspected offences) than of the boy's offending (approximately 10 percent of the suspected offences). A further 20 percent of the girls' suspected offending relates to unlawful threat and molestation offences. Among the boys, these offence types account for just under seven percent of their suspected offences. It should be noted, however,

that these differences in the numbers of suspected offences linked to boys and girls mean that gender-based comparisons should be interpreted with a great deal of caution. It is likely that the different offence proportions say more about the type of girls that are registered in the Cylinder Model than about the types of offences generally committed by girls with links to criminal networks. It is also important to note that several interview participants described the use of girls for certain assignments as being motivated by the fact that females are less likely to be detected by law enforcement.

Table 9: Number of registered suspected offences linked to individuals aged 15-17 in the Cylinder Model, and the proportion that each offence type comprises of the total number of suspected offences registered for Cylinder Model males and females respectively in this age group, for the most common offence types for which 15-17-year-olds were suspected during the period 2018-2021.

	n (total)	Proportion of girls' suspected offences	Proportion of boys' suspected offences
Narcotics, possession	3 365	13.3	17.5
Narcotics, use	2 623	8.2	13.7
Assault	2 087	21.0	10.6
Theft/breaking and entering	1 691	10.8	8.7
Unlawful threat/molestation	1 365	20.2	6.8
Robbery	1 293	0.0	6.8
Road traffic offences	901	3.4	4.7
Other crime codes	638	2.7	3.3
Obstruction of justice	591	5.3	3.0
Narcotics, transfer	567	0.5	3.0
Criminal damage	566	2.4	2.9
Fraud	505	2.4	2.6
Violence against a public servant/resisting arrest	499	1.2	2.6
Weapons offences	449	1.0	2.3

Source: National Operations Department's intelligence unit and SNCCP's Register of Suspected Offences; data processed by the SNCCP.

Appendix 3 Crime trends for a selection of offence types

Chapter 3, *Offending* presents the number of young people registered as suspects in connection with 13 offence types during the period 2012-2022. Table 10 instead presents how the proportion of young people registered as suspects in connection with these offences has changed over time. The table presents the proportion of the total number of registered suspected offences of each type that is accounted for by children aged 15-17 and 18-20, respectively. The presentation is intended to show the extent to which young people account for an increasing or decreasing proportion of the total number of suspected offences in these crime categories over time.[60]

Table 10. Total number of suspected offences per offence type and year, and the proportion of registered suspects (one suspected offence per offence type and year) aged 15-17 and 18-20, respectively, at the time of the offence.

Offence type	n/proportion	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Weapons offences	n	814	808	1061	1400	1312	1514	1805	2133	2490	2603	2 994
	Prop. 15-17	5%	6%	6%	7%	6%	7%	7%	8%	7%	9%	11%
	Prop. 18-20	12%	10%	10%	11%	12%	13%	12%	16%	16%	17%	17%
Murder of a male, with firearm	n	61	58	98	93	97	117	146	187	128	144	145
	Prop. 15-17	11%	3%	6%	15%	7%	3%	12%	10%	7%	15%	12%
	Prop. 18-20	13%	17%	11%	14%	26%	28%	23%	23%	22%	24%	37%
Attempted murder of a male, with firearm	n	155	162	145	159	196	218	193	258	-	-	-
	Prop. 15-17	4%	4%	4%	11%	5%	6%	5%	10%	-	-	-
	Prop. 18–20	16%	21%	10%	19%	17%	22%	25%	19%	-	-	-
Attempted murder of adult male, known to offender, with or without	n	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	261	276	254
	Prop. 15-17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4%	5%	9%
	Prop. 18-20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	16%	13%	13%

[60] Suspected offences that have resulted in an investigation in accordance with Section 31 of the Young Offenders Act relate exclusively to children under the age of 15. The table presents the total number of suspected offences that have resulted in a decision, by contrast with the official crime statistics which only present one suspected offence per person, year, and offence type. It is therefore not possible to estimate proportions on the basis of the figures presented in the official crime statistics.

[61] Cells that contain a dash (-) indicate that for that year, the crime code in question had not yet been introduced, had been discontinued, or had been replaced with a different crime code during the course of the year.

[62] Information on the crime codes included in the table, and on the relationship between the total number of suspected offences and the proportion of these offences accounted for by young people are presented in Table 11 in this Appendix.

Offence type	n/proportion	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
firearm												
Attempted murder of adult male, unknown to offender, with or without firearm	n	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	411	452	544
	Prop. 15-17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12%	10%	11%
	Prop. 18-20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	23%	24%	24%
Attempted murder of a male child, with or without firearm	n	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	54	57	59
	Prop. 15-17	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	41%	23%	39%
	Prop. 18-20	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	28%	28%	27%
Extortion	n	-	1146	1530	1531	1366	1505	1652	1950	2498	2200	1981
	Prop. 15-17	-	12%	10%	9%	11%	10%	13%	12%	12%	10%	10%
	Prop. 18-20	-	16%	14%	14%	13%	14%	12%	14%	14%	13%	14%
Narcotics transfer	n	4260	4435	4463	4200	4013	4340	4777	4840	5477	5415	5227
	Prop. 15-17	7%	8%	7%	6%	5%	7%	7%	7%	7%	8%	8%
	Prop. 18-20	16%	17%	16%	15%	17%	18%	19%	19%	17%	16%	18%
Fraud	n	9341	8494	8543	8624	7534	7710	8092	9814	12249	12451	12169
	Prop. 15-17	4%	5%	4%	4%	4%	4%	5%	5%	6%	5%	6%
	Prop. 18-20	12%	11%	11%	9%	10%	10%	11%	11%	12%	12%	11%
Robbery of a store, with firearm	n	161	243	180	211	223	191	177	99	88	75	57
	Prop. 15-17	19%	15%	24%	28%	22%	22%	18%	17%	11%	11%	16%
	Prop. 18-20	27%	28%	22%	33%	22%	38%	36%	35%	28%	36%	21%
Robbery of a person aged under 18, with firearm, outdoors	n	33	16	25	32	17	37	39	59	68	57	61
	Prop. 15-17	58%	63%	64%	59%	47%	51%	46%	68%	62%	58%	52%
	Prop. 18-20	36%	13%	24%	22%	35%	22%	33%	27%	31%	33%	33%
Robbery of a person aged under 18, with firearm, indoors	n	2	5	3	2	7	26	9	20	13	6	9
	Prop. 15-17	0%	0%	33%	0%	29%	31%	11%	45%	31%	50%	44%
	Prop. 18-20	0%	20%	0%	50%	29%	42%	67%	25%	38%	33%	33%
Other robbery with firearm	n	162	136	121	148	157	148	206	119	163	151	86
	Prop. 15-17	12%	7%	14%	13%	11%	11%	9%	16%	18%	20%	10%
	Prop. 18-20	27%	24%	26%	21%	27%	17%	33%	21%	20%	29%	27%

Source: SNCCP's crime statistics.

Trends are clearer for certain offence types than for others. For weapons offences and murder, there has been a gradual increase in the proportion of young people registered as suspects over the past ten years. Young people aged up to 20 accounted for half of those registered as suspects for murder in

2022, which can be compared with the situation ten years earlier, when they accounted for approximately 20 percent. The proportions of young people among those suspected of fraud and drug transfer offences have remained fairly stable over time.

However, there are substantial problems associated with attempting to measure crime trends on the basis of this presentation. Firstly, the presentation only includes one suspected offence per offence type, person, and year, which means that the data underestimate the actual extent of offending. Secondly, new crime codes come into use during the course of a year, while others are discontinued, and thirdly, several crime codes may be combined for presentation in the official crime statistics, which makes it impossible to make comparisons across certain offence types over time. In 2019, for example, a number of crime codes were introduced with a focus on the nature of the relationship between the offender and the victim (family ties, offender known to the victim, offender unknown to the victim). Until 2018, the official crime statistics differentiated between attempted murder with and without the use of a firearm. From 2020, information on firearm use is no longer available, but it is possible to see the nature of the relationship that existed between the offender and the victim. This means that it is impossible to make direct comparisons of the number of suspected attempted murders between the periods 2012-2018 and 2020-2022. Table 11 presents the crime codes relating to the offence categories included in Table 3, Chapter 3, *Offending*, and in Table 10 above.

Table 11: Crime codes employed in presentations of crime trends for 2012-2022

Crime category	Crime codes
Weapons offences	2012–2017: 4007 2018–2022: 4073, 4074
Murder of a male, with firearm	2012–2022: 0313
Attempted murder of a male, with firearm	2012–2019: 0308
Attempted murder of adult male, known to offender, with or without firearm	2019–2022: 0328, 0336
Attempted murder of adult male, unknown to offender, with or without firearm	2019–2022: 0329, 0337
Attempted murder of a male child, with or without firearm	2019–2022: 9390, 9392
Extortion	2013–2022: 0940 2012 extortion was presented in combination with usury, and data for 2012 are thus not included in the table.
Narcotics transfer	2012–2022: 5005
Fraud	2012–2022: Crime statistics present a combined crime category containing all forms of fraud.
Robbery of a store, with firearm	2012–2022: 0864
Robbery of a person aged under 18, with firearm, outdoors	2012–2022: 9808
Robbery of a person aged under 18, with firearm, indoors	2012–2022: 9809
Other robbery with firearm	2012–2022: 0856

Source: List of all crime codes, SNCCP. *Klassificering av brott*: https://bra.se/klassificeringavbrott

How do young people become involved in criminal networks? What types of crime do young people commit in the networks, and what other types of assignments are they given, and why? How are young people controlled, and how do they advance up the network hierarchy? And what opportunities do young people have to leave criminal networks?

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Over recent years, the issue of the links between children and youth and criminal networks has attracted an increasing amount of attention, both in the media and the political debate. At the instruction of the government, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention has studied the relationship between young people and older individuals in criminal networks. The study is primarily based on interviews with individuals with experience of becoming involved in criminal networks as children, or who had themselves involved children in the activities of criminal networks, and on data from the agencies of the justice system.

The report shows that financial incentives associated with the drug trade play a central role in the involvement of young people in criminal networks. The networks are comprised of hierarchical age-based strata, and the most common means of advancing in this hierarchy is to recruit, exploit, and control a crew of "youngers". It is therefore often older children and youths (aged 15-20) who involve younger children (aged 12-15) in the networks. The necessary contacts are made possible by the presence and visibility of the networks in disadvantaged neighbourhoods and on social media.
The report is primarily intended for the government and parliament, agencies of the justice system, and organisations and professions working to reduce the inflow of children into criminal environments.

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