



## Combating unlawful influence in sports

*A closer look at harassment, threats, violence, and corruption*



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English summary of Brå report 2018:5

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

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

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## Summary

This study addresses harassment, threats, violence, and corruption in organised football, ice hockey, basketball, and bandy. The study focuses specifically on unlawful influence, i.e. events where the victim perceives that the purpose was to *influence* them when exercising their profession. It is a qualitative study that primarily addresses men's sports at the professional level. The study also includes a review of victimisation of sports journalists, sports photographers, and supporter police in connection to their sports-related professional activities. Furthermore, there is an explorative section included in the study that examines whether offences of a more system-threatening nature exist in organised sports.

The study is based on 106 interviews with individuals from the above mentioned professions, and others with relevant knowledge and experience. A majority of the respondents have recounted their own experiences of victimisation, primarily regarding harassment and threats. Respondents who have not been victimised themselves have contributed with the knowledge and experience they have obtained through work. In addition, 86 acts from the Swedish Police Authority, the Swedish Economic Crime Authority, and the Swedish Tax Agency have been reviewed. Interviews and reviews of acts have also been complemented with observations from five matches at the men's professional level. Participant observations have been conducted for all sports that are included in the study. Four seminars have been conducted with a reference group comprising participants from all sports studied, TU (*Tidningsutgivarna* – the Swedish Media Publishers Association), the Swedish Police Authority, and the Swedish Sports Confederation.

### Different functions, specific kind of victimisation

The study shows that specific functions are subject to specific kinds of incidents. This is referred to in the study as *occupational risk situations*. A total of 17 occupational risk situations have been identified, based on analyses of interviews and acts.

Some functions have similar occupational risk situations, regardless of the type of sport in question. In other words, there appear to be significant similarities between, for example, the victimisation of a football player and that of a basketball player. This means that regardless of the sport with which the victim is associated, the factor that largely determines the situation in which incidents occur is one's professional role. Consequently, the results of this report can most likely be applied to other sports in addition to those included in the study. However, it appears that there are a number of factors that are significant in terms of the extent and frequency

of victimisation of individuals in various functions. These factors can be associated, above all, with the financial situation, turnover, and audience composition of the sport.

In order to facilitate the analysis of victimisation, a total of six groups have been created, based on the occurrence of similar occupational risk situations: 1) players; 2) referees; 3) management functions; 4) service; 5) public order and security; and 6) investigators, reporters, and observers.

Tables 1 and 2 shows the occupational risk situations based on each group. Table 1 shows occupational risk situations associated with harassment, threats, and violence, and table 2 shows risks associated with corruption. Certain occupational risk situations occur in both groups and appear in both tables.

**Table 1. Occupational risk situations: harassment, threats, and violence**

	Athletes	Referees	Management function	Service	Safety, security	Investigators, reporters, observers
Significant visibility	X	X				
Non-performance	X		X			
"Prohibited" transfers	X					
Decision-making		X	X		X	
Key role in connection with match fixing	X					
Admonitions and reprimands				X		
Ticket and entrance controls				X		
Responsibility for safety issues					X	
Intervention and controls					X	
Investigatory journalism						X
Position on certain types of issues						X
Exposure due to decisions taken by other people						X

**Table 2. Occupational risk situations: corruption**

	Athletes	Referees	Management function	Service	Safety, security	Investigators, reporters, observers
Key role in connection with match fixing	X	X				
Possibility to earn money on athletes	X					
Selection of referee		X				
Buying athletes			X			
Selection of sponsors			X			
Decision-making			X			
Relationship-building work				X	X	

## Manipulators and the effects of a reputation for violence

The study has a particular focus on unlawful influence. The description of individuals who are involved in these types of crimes, who we refer to as manipulators, is based on the respondents' own descriptions. A number of respondents described many of the manipulators who appear in sports

as “difficult to manage”. They appear to act rationally and have a reputation for violence, and also have the capacity to carry out their attempts to influence. When a manipulator has a reputation connected to violence, for example by belonging to a gang, the attempt to influence is customarily described as significantly more frightening than an attempt to influence made by someone without such a reputation. The concentration of manipulators with a reputation for violence renders victimisation in sports different from, for example, victimisation in public agencies. This is because victimised public agency personnel customarily meet manipulators who act alone, are motivated by emotions, and often cease their attempts to influence when their matter has been closed (Brå 2016:13). The type of manipulator is therefore relevant in terms of how the victim tends to react to the attempt to influence them. Previous research has shown that strategic attempts to influence require greater organisational preparedness than impulsive attempts to influence that take place in a heightened emotional state (Brå 2016:13). The picture that emerges from the study is that individuals with various functions in football and ice hockey are victims of attempts to influence by individuals with a reputation for violence to a greater extent than those with corresponding functions in basketball and bandy.

## Attempts to influence that threaten the democratic process

The study also shows that, in certain cases, manipulators with a reputation for violence attempted to influence how members would vote at the clubs’ annual meeting. According to respondents, this may, for example, involve frightening other members into abstaining from voting. Several respondents state that the democratic process of clubs in Sweden is unique and worth preserving. At the same time, other respondents call attention to the problem that characterises democracy in a club, namely that one member/one vote is put aside if members are frightened into abstaining from voting.

According to a number of respondents, these attempts to influence are mainly made by individuals who belong to certain fractions of the clubs supporters. There are also examples where manipulators have attempted to influence investigative sports journalists. In these cases, the purpose seems to be to prevent victims from publishing negative articles about certain clubs or groups.

## Economic crime in sports

This study shows that there are various types of economic crime that occur in the context of sports. These crimes are primarily matters that can be associated with the structure of non-profit organisations, although there are matters which can be linked specifically to sports. In this regard, non-profit associations are no exception – to the contrary, they can entail particular risks for economic criminality due to their unregulated nature. (Brå 2016:10, Swedish Police Authority 2017). The review of acts also reveals a number of cases of suspected match fixing. This involves, among other things, goalkeepers and players who are offered five-figure amounts to influence the outcome of games. In other words, certain cases regard suspected bribery offences.

## Brå's assessment

### What does this mean in terms of prevention?

The study shows that certain acts to influence occur in a heightened emotional state, while other acts appear to be both more strategic and more rational. These different types of acts to influence require different preventive measures. The employer has the primary responsibility for the work environment. By working towards an open culture and taking incidents seriously, the organisation signals from the top down that this is prioritised, which is central to prevention.

A number of victimised respondents state that they do not have any lingering concerns about harassment that takes place in a heightened emotional state on single occasions and which is directed against them in their professional role. Some acts that take place in a heightened emotional state and that are aimed at certain functions can most likely be prevented through communication- and interaction exercises. In addition, stadium design and clear, well-considered working routines contribute to preventing these incidents.

Incidents that are carried out by manipulators with a reputation for violence are generally more difficult to handle than those that occur in a heightened emotional state. Their acts are described as more strategic and rational, and constitute examples of more elaborate cases of unlawful influence. Being a victim of this can be very strenuous. These manipulators can, among other things, focus on individuals, and attempts to influence can be carried out both at the stadium and online. Internet lynch mobs and 'naming and shaming' of victims are examples of methods used by these manipulators.

These acts are difficult to prevent, but individuals in professions particularly exposed to these kinds of strategic attempts of unlawful influence need support after they have been victimized. Support by colleagues and debriefing are two examples of methods that can be helpful after an incident. In order for the methods to work, it is important to work towards an open culture where victims feel safe and want to talk about their experiences. Another method that can be used in certain cases is stress exposure training. The method involves developing people's capability in dealing with stressful situations so that they become more resistant to attempts to influence. This involves, primarily, attempts to influence that take place in connection to personal meetings, for example in conjunction with intervention and controls.





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