

# SUMMARY

## Crime victims' contacts with the justice system

An augmentative study based on the Swedish Crime Survey  
2006–2008 and focus group interviews



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Crime Survey 2006–2008 and focus group  
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A summary of report 2010:1

**Brå – a centre of knowledge on crime and measures to combat crime**

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brottsförebyggande rådet – Brå) works to reduce crime and improve levels of safety in society by producing data and disseminating knowledge on crime and crime prevention work and the justice system's responses to crime.

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This report is a summary of the Swedish report *Brottsoffers kontakter med rättsväsendet*, 2010:1 which can be ordered from Fritzes Kundservice, 106 47 Stockholm.  
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# Foreword

The treatment received by crime victims at the hands of the justice system should be characterised by consideration and professionalism. This is important for several reasons. When the agencies of the justice system create a sense of confidence and security, this increases both the crime victim's chances of recovery and the chances of ensuring that the justice system will function effectively while at the same time safeguarding the legal rights of the individual. The perception that crime victims are well-treated by the police, prosecutors and the courts is also important for the public's confidence in the justice system more generally. Against this background, it is not surprising that the agencies of the justice system have for a long time now been working to improve their treatment of crime victims. During the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century alone, a wide range of initiatives have been taken to improve the situation of crime victims. The objective of this report is in part to identify well-functioning aspects of the justice system's work, but also to focus on aspects that may still require further consideration in relation to the justice system's contacts with the victims of crime.

This publication represents a translation of an abridged version of the principal report published in connection with the study *Crime victims' contacts with the justice system*, which in turn constitutes part of a more extensive research and development project that has been conducted at the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention, entitled *The public's contacts with and confidence in the justice system*. The project has already resulted in two reports based on data from the Swedish Crime Survey (SCS), the one an analysis of *Relationship violence against women and men* (Brå 2009:12), the other a study of *Teenagers' confidence in the justice system and their propensity to report crime* (Brå, 2009:20). This, the main report from the project, presents on the one hand a more detailed, quantitative analysis of Swedish Crime Survey data on public attitudes towards and experiences of the justice system, and on the other a qualitative analysis of data from focus group interviews conducted with crime victims. The report is first and foremost intended for those working in the police, the prosecution service and the courts, but its target audience also includes others who come into contact with crime victims in various ways, such as voluntary support organisations and the social services.

The report has been written by Madeleine Blixt, Klara Hradilova Selin and Olle Westlund, all of whom work as research analysts at the National

Council. Valuable comments on the manuscript have been provided by Bo Nilsson, Lecturer in Ethnology at the University of Umeå and Eva Tiby, Professor of Criminology at the University of Stockholm.

In addition, the National Council has benefited greatly from the assistance of the members of a reference group comprising representatives from a number of relevant agencies and organisations: Mikael Björk, of the prosecution service; Ulf Hjerpe, of the Crime Victim Compensation and Support Authority; Eva Larsson, of the Swedish Association for Victim Support; Lotta Nilsson, of the National Board of Health and Welfare; Camilla Lyckman, of the National Courts Administration and Inka Wennerberg, of the National Police Board. Valuable contributions have also been made by Margareta Hydén, Ann Hellströmer, Bo Hägglund and Magnus Lindgren.

Stockholm, September 2010

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# 1. Introduction

Over recent decades, crime victim issues have increasingly become a focus of attention, both in Sweden and internationally. A series of measures and reforms have been implemented in order to improve the opportunities available to crime victims to obtain support, assistance and protection. The criminal justice system has also focused on the situation of crime victims in a variety of ways. In spite of this increased interest, however, a number of failings have continued to be noted in practice, not least in relation to the provision of information and the treatment received by crime victims.

The work of the justice system should proceed from the public interest and the needs of the individual. There are several reasons why it is important that crime victims receive considerate and professional treatment from the justice system professionals with whom they come into contact, and also that they are made to feel confident in the criminal justice process. Firstly, this improves the victim's chances of recovery. Crime victims who feel that they are being supported by the criminal justice system and by those around them can also be expected to contribute more to the criminal justice process, e.g. by giving evidence in court. It is also likely that the treatment crime victims receive from the police, prosecutors and the courts has an effect on public attitudes towards and confidence in the justice system, which may in turn lead to more crime victims reporting their experiences to the police. This places substantial demands on the agencies of the justice system, not least in terms of their accessibility and their level of service provision.

Experiences of the contact with the justice system are complex and include needs, perceptions and expectations relating to amongst other things justice, professionalism, empathy and understanding. At the same time, the justice system comprises a large number of different groups of professionals who meet crime victims in different situations and under somewhat different conditions, depending on the nature of their different tasks. In addition to factors such as gender, age and ethnicity, therefore, the nature of experiences of contacts with the justice system may also vary depending on the type of crime to which an individual has been exposed, the stage of the criminal justice process at which the contact occurs and the

agencies and professional groups with which a given individual comes into contact.

Against this background, it is important to study how crime victims<sup>1</sup> perceive their contacts with the agencies of the justice system, and this is the intention of the current report. Besides presenting a more general picture on the basis of data from the Swedish Crime Survey (SCS), a number of focus group interviews have been conducted with victims of crime. Qualitative data of this kind, in the form of personal narratives, provide a deeper understanding of what may be concealed behind the standardised answers of statistical surveys. This more in-depth analysis focuses on two groups of crime victims that have been the focus of special initiatives: *youths* (aged 16–24) and individuals exposed to *relationship violence*. In addition, a number of individuals who work with crime victims have also been interviewed.

The objective of the report is to *describe and analyse crime victims' experiences of the justice system* and to *provide a basis for making improvements* in this area. Although the justice system is actively working with issues relating to the treatment of crime victims, and while a large number of measures have already been introduced (see Section 3), the report's principal objective is that of attempting to identify areas where there may still be deficiencies and opportunities for improvement. The central research questions addressed by the report are as follows.

- What are the guidelines and conditions that determine how the different justice system actors work with the victims of crime?
- How do those who have been exposed to crimes (which have been reported to the police) perceive their contacts with the different agencies of the justice system (police, prosecutors and the courts) and with injured party counsel?
- Which groups of victims are most satisfied with their contacts with the justice system, and which are most dissatisfied, and what factors are associated with these positive and negative experiences?
- How extensive are crime victims' needs for support and assistance? To what extent is support and assistance offered by and received from voluntary organisations, employers and the social services?
- In what ways are crime victims' experiences of the justice system associated with their confidence in the criminal justice system?
- How do young crime victims (aged 16-24 years) and individuals exposed to relationship violence perceive their experiences of the justice system?

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<sup>1</sup> The term crime victims relates here to physical individuals who themselves state that they have been the victims of crime. This does not of course mean that relatives, justice system staff or organisations of various kinds cannot also be victims of crime. It should also be noted that use of the term crime victims is not intended to suggest that victimhood constitutes a characteristic of certain individuals, but rather that it is something that has occurred in the lives of these individuals.

## 2. Method

The report's empirical sections include both statistical analyses of survey data and a qualitative analysis based on focus group interviews with crime victims.

### **The Swedish Crime Survey (SCS)**

The Swedish Crime Survey is an annual telephone survey based on a large random sample of the Swedish population (aged between 16 and 79 years). The SCS includes questions on amongst other things whether crimes experienced by the respondents have been reported to the police, and on crime victims' experiences of and confidence in the police, prosecutors, injured party counsel and the courts. It also asks about their experiences of the trial. The SCS data set also contains information on the respondents' backgrounds, which makes it possible to analyse the experiences of different subgroups of the population. The results of this section of the survey have in part been presented in an earlier report from the National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå 2009:2, see also The Swedish Crime Survey 2009, a summary of the report 2010:2). One issue that has not previously been addressed, however, is that of the experiences of individuals who have been exposed to different types of crime, and their needs for support and assistance. This report examines data from the 2006, 2007 and 2008 waves of the SCS<sup>2</sup>, comprising a total of approximately 37,500 interviews. More detailed information on the survey is available in the technical report (Brå 2009:3<sup>3</sup>).

### **Focus group interviews with crime victims and victim support staff**

The qualitative sections of the study are based on focus group interviews conducted with crime victims. Interviews were conducted with men and women exposed to relationship violence (four men and eleven women), and also with young people (aged 16 to 24) who had been exposed to various types of crime (one interview with three young women and one

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<sup>2</sup> The section on contacts with the justice system is based only on data from the 2007 and 2008 waves of the SCS.

<sup>3</sup> Swedish version only.

with four young men). The interview participants were recruited with the assistance of the staff at the Swedish Association for Victim Support, the Victim Support Centre for Men in the county of Stockholm and a support centre for young crime victims.

The crimes experienced by the interview participants had occurred between one month and three years prior to the interviews. The timing of the interview may be significant, since the emotional effects of exposure to crime may be more powerful the more recent the experience and memories of an event can change over time. Research has also shown that the degree to which crime victims are satisfied with their contacts with the police declines over time (Lindgren 2004).

The National Council has also interviewed staff from the different organisations that assisted in recruiting the focus group participants. These interviews were conducted in order to develop an understanding of the type of situations and experiences that may be regarded as being more or less common in the context of their contacts with victims of crime.

### 3. The justice system's work to improve the treatment of crime victims

The question of how best to work with crime victims is naturally a focus of continuous attention among those who work in the justice system. It is in the interests of the police, the prosecution service and the courts to take steps to ensure the quality of their work and to increase the level of knowledge and confidence of both the public in general and crime victims in particular. Doing so can reasonably be expected to increase the likelihood that more will choose to turn to the justice system if they are exposed to crime and that their experiences of the justice system, when they do so, will match their expectations.

#### **The obligations of agencies of the justice system**

The work of the police, prosecutors and the courts is governed by formal guidelines. The obligations of the police are regulated by the Police Ordinance and the Ordinance on Criminal Investigations. These state amongst other things that the police *should* provide all citizens with advice and support and that they *shall*, when appropriate, inform individuals who have been exposed to crime about the rules governing the right to injured party counsel<sup>4</sup> and/or a support person<sup>5</sup> and about those relating to the issuance of restraining orders. If victims so desire, the police *shall* inform them about various decisions taken in their cases.

The obligations incumbent upon the prosecutor are regulated in the Code of Judicial Procedure. It is the task of the prosecutor, at the request of the crime victim, to prepare and present the crime victim's private

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<sup>4</sup> A crime victim may apply to be assigned an injured party counsel and such counsel are assigned by the courts. The work of injured party counsel is undertaken by barristers and associate lawyers. Their task is to safeguard the injured party's interests in the case and to provide support and assistance to the injured party.

<sup>5</sup> Support persons may also be arranged via the Swedish Association for Victim Support. These can help crime victims work through their feelings by means of providing counselling. Support persons may also provide information and assistance to crime victims in the context of contacts with various public sector agencies. They may also explain the court process and accompany the victim to court.

claims (e.g. for damages), provided that no major inconvenience will result and that the claim is not manifestly devoid of merit. In those cases where the prosecutor also assumes the role of chief investigating officer, the prosecutor's obligations are also regulated by the Ordinance on Criminal Investigations. One thing that is not always known to the public in general, or to the injured parties in criminal cases, is that the prosecutor is required to observe the principle of objectivity, which means that he or she must consider the rights of both the injured party and the defendant. At the same time, the prosecutor is required to provide the support and assistance that the injured party has a right to demand, without allowing a conflict of interests to arise.

The victim-related work conducted by the National Courts Administration and the courts more generally is also most commonly focused on the treatment received by all those people who come into contact with the court system in various ways. There are no directives with a more general focus on the treatment of crime victims, although some directives do exist relating to the courts' obligations in the area of service provision. Provisions of this kind are found, for example, in the Administrative Procedure Act and in the Ordinance (2003:234) on Time Limits for Producing Judgements and Decisions etc. In addition, the government can specify various reporting requirements relating to the treatment of amongst others witnesses and injured parties in its annual letter of appropriations to the Swedish Courts.

### **Justice system initiatives**

A large number of initiatives have been undertaken in order to improve the way crime victims are received and dealt with by the justice system. At the beginning of the new millennium, the various agencies of the justice system were instructed to jointly develop a method to enable the police, prosecutors and the courts to monitor crime victims' perceptions of their treatment. A pilot study was conducted, the results of which showed that crime victims were on the whole satisfied with their contacts with justice system actors, but that all three agencies performed poorly with regard to the provision of information. The study also found that there was a desire among victims to be able to meet with the prosecutor earlier and that some victims had been required to wait in the same room as the defendant (Lindgren and Qvarnström 2003). The report from the study noted that these were problems that have long been a subject of discussion and that further efforts and improved collaboration were required on the part of the justice system agencies.

## 4. Crime victims' contacts with the justice system according to the Swedish Crime Survey

This section describes crime victims' contacts with the justice system, their needs for support and assistance and their confidence in the justice system on the basis of data from the Swedish Crime Survey (SCS). The majority of the results are based on data from the 2007 and 2008 waves of the survey<sup>6</sup>. It should be noted that for some analyses the unit of analysis employed is crime incidents while for other analyses it is the individual victims.

### Contacts with the justice system

Slightly over 20 percent of SCS respondents reported having been exposed to crimes over the course of the previous three years that had then been reported to the police. One quarter of these respondents had been exposed to crime more than once. One-fifth of the incidents involved threats or violence of some kind.

It was most common for the victims to report the offence themselves, either alone or together with someone else. One quarter of the incidents had been reported by someone else. The majority, approximately two-thirds, of the offences were reported by phone, and one-third had been reported by means of a direct contact with the police (Table 1).

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<sup>6</sup> The data relating to the majority of items on contacts with the justice system from the 2006 wave of the SCS cannot be used as a result of an error in the interview guide. Certain other questions are only answered by a small number of respondents who have been exposed to crime, which means that data from all three waves of the survey are required and the 2006 wave is thus included in some analyses.

**Table 1. Means of reporting offences experienced during the previous three years, by sex and age. SCS 2007–2008. Percent.**

	Telephone	Direct contact	Internet
<b>All respondents</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>4</b>
Males	61	35	3.5
Females	67	29	3.5
16–19 years	49	44	6
20–24 years	52	44	4
25–44 years	66	29	4.5
45–79 years	65	32	2.5

Differences between males and females and between the different age groups are small with regard to the method of reporting. Young people tended somewhat more often to report offences by means of direct contacts with the police however. It was also somewhat more common for the offence to have been reported by someone other than the victim among the youngest group of respondents (aged 16–19).

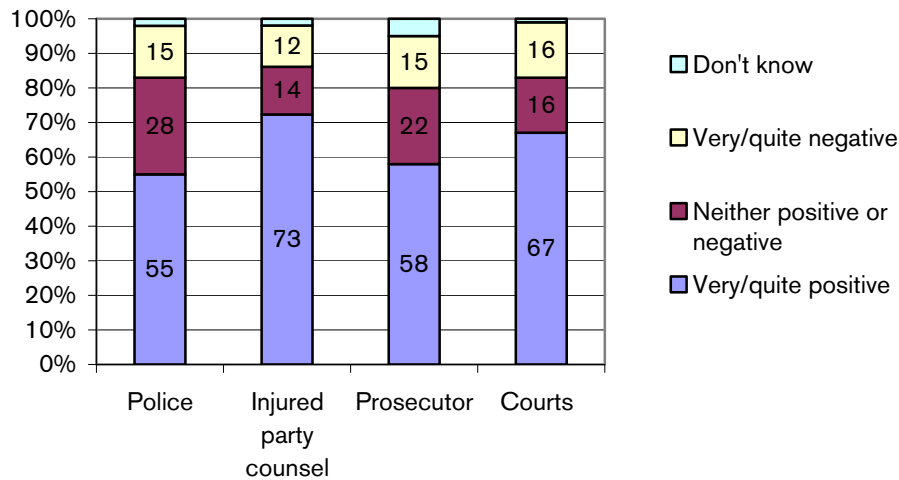
### **How do crime victims perceive their contacts with the different agencies of the justice system?**

Over half (55 percent) of those exposed to offences that had been reported during the previous three years reported positive experiences of their contacts with the police (Figure 1). A total of fifteen percent described their experiences as quite or very negative. Those who reported having had *direct contacts* with the police were more satisfied than those who had reported offences via the phone or online.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> 60 percent of those who reported having had direct contacts with the police in the 2007 and 2008 waves of the SCS stated that their experiences of the police had been quite or very positive. The corresponding figures for those who reported offences via the telephone or online were slightly over 50 percent and 40 percent respectively. It is only theft offences that can be reported via the internet.



**Figure 1. Experiences of the police, injured party counsel and prosecutors, and experiences of the treatment received in court in connection with exposure to crime and a subsequent court appearance. SCS 2007–2008. Percent (n=5287, 331, 531 and 531).<sup>8</sup>**



Slightly under two percent of SCS respondents reported having participated in a court trial in connection with exposure to crimes reported to the police within the previous three years. Of those who had been assigned injured party counsel, a large majority were satisfied with their counsel (73 percent). Somewhat fewer were satisfied with their contacts with the prosecutor, with just over half reporting quite or very positive experiences.

On the whole, the majority (67 percent) reported being satisfied with the treatment they had received when attending court in the capacity of an injured party. Further, the majority also felt that they had been given sufficient information prior to attending the trial. However, almost 30 percent felt that they had been given insufficient information. The majority (just over 70 percent) felt that it was very easy or quite easy to understand what was happening during the trial. Only three percent felt that this was very difficult.

### Which crime victims are most satisfied and which are most dissatisfied?

In order to examine which groups of crime victims are most satisfied and most dissatisfied with their contacts with the justice system respectively, the study has employed on the one hand a balance measure<sup>9</sup>, and on the other multivariate logistic regression analysis. It should be noted that in all of the groups studied (females, males, young people, older people, Swedish and non-Swedish born, groups with more and less advanced edu-

<sup>8</sup> The response alternatives in relation to the treatment received in court are very/quite satisfied, neither satisfied nor dissatisfied, and very/quite dissatisfied.

<sup>9</sup> One common way of interpreting data on levels of public confidence is by asking whether the proportion of respondents giving positive responses exceeds the proportion giving negative responses. This produces a form of confidence "ledger", in which we compare the credit (% with a positive view) against a deficit (% with a negative view), see e.g. Roberts 2004. The "balance" measure employed in the present analyses is constructed on this basis, by subtracting the proportion of a given group who report a negative attitude from the proportion reporting a positive attitude. The measure can vary between -100 and +100.

cational levels and groups living in different types of housing), the proportion reporting positive experiences of the different justice system agencies is in the majority (Table 2).

**Table 2. Balance measures describing experiences of contacts with the police, injured party counsel and prosecutors, and the treatment received in court in connection with exposure to crime during the previous three years. SCS 2007–2008. Presented by sex, age and national background.**

	Police n=5287	Injured party counsel n=331	Prosecutor n=531	Courts n=531
All respondents, aged 16–79	40	61	42	51
Male	43	48	32	48
Female	47	78	57	56
16–19	30	80 (n=45)	50	74
20–24	30	48	47	42
25–44	41	64	40	47
45–79	42	55	41	52
Sw-born, both parents Sw-born	41	74	45	59
Sw-born, one parent Sw-born	39	56	38	46
Sw-born, both parents born abroad	41	25 (n=14)	46(n=23)	68(n=23)
Born abroad	36	45	38	29

*Highest levels of satisfaction found among females, young people and persons born in Sweden*

The clearest and most consistent pattern in Table 2 is that the females exposed to crime reported more positive experiences of the various agencies of the justice system than males. One explanation for this could be that more females than males had direct contact with the police when reporting an offence. This is not in fact the case, however, since the SCS data show that the female respondents had reported offences by phone more often than their male counterparts (Table 1). The pattern noted may instead in part be a result of the justice system treating female complainants differently compared to males. A doctoral thesis by Yourstone (2008), for example, indicates that this type of positive discrimination does occur.

Young people exposed to crime reported more positive experiences of their contacts with the agencies of the justice system than their middle-aged and more elderly counterparts. The youngest group of respondents in particular (those aged 16–19) reported positive experiences of the injured party counsel and the courts. The only exception relates to the police, where it was the youngest respondents who reported the worst experiences. Younger respondents also reported that they had received sufficient information about the trial to a greater extent than their older counterparts. At the same time, a larger proportion of the older respondents reported having found it very difficult to understand what was happening during the trial.

Finally, the table also shows that crime victims born outside Sweden reported more negative experiences of injured party counsel and being more dissatisfied with the treatment they had received in court than their Swedish born counterparts. The differences are not as clear in relation to contacts with the police and prosecutors. Similarly, both persons born

outside Sweden and those with parents born outside Sweden reported that it was difficult to understand what was happening at trial to a greater extent than others. At the same time, however, they reported that the information they had received prior to trial was sufficient/insufficient to more or less the same extent as others.

*Those exposed to threats and violence, and those who have previously been indicted for offences, report the most negative experiences of the police*

Comparing percentages or a balance measure provides a descriptive picture of how different segments of the population, such as women, men, young persons or the elderly, have answered the questions posed by the SCS. Some of the differences noted may however, statistically speaking, be explained by a third factor. The responses of the males might, for example, reflect the fact that this group includes a much greater number who have themselves committed offences, with the results perhaps reflecting the significance of this criminality rather than of gender. By employing logistic regression analysis it becomes possible to examine the effect of each characteristic or circumstance when the remaining variables in the analysis are held constant, which is a way of controlling for spurious correlations of the type just described. An analysis of this kind is presented below, which focuses on the respondents' experiences of the police – the agency with which the largest number of those who come into contact with the justice system will have dealings. Table 3 presents both balance measures for crime victims' experiences of the police and odds ratios from a logistic regression analysis which includes several factors relating to demographic characteristics, levels of resources and experiences of both exposure to and involvement in crime. An odds ratio smaller than 1 means in this case that the “risk” of reporting negative experiences of the police is lower than that of the reference group associated with a given variable, independently of any differences in the other factors included in the analysis. On the other hand, an odds ratio greater than 1 is interpreted as indicating a higher risk in relation to that of the reference group.

When the other factors included in the multivariate analysis are held constant, the risk for negative experiences of the police in relation to exposure to crime remains higher for males and persons born outside Sweden than it is for females and persons born in Sweden (Table 3). Described in terms of quantifiable probabilities, the analysis shows that the likelihood of reporting negative experiences of the police is approximately 75 percent higher for males than it is for females. As regards age, on the other hand, the risk of having negative experiences of the police is greater among individuals older than 45 than it is among their younger counterparts, once the other factors included in the analysis are taken into consideration.

The analysis also shows that crime victims with lower levels of education were also significantly more likely to report negative experiences of the police by comparison with those who had continued further in the education system. Housing type and region of residence do not however appear to have any statistically significant effect on the nature of the respondents' experiences of the police, as is also indicated by the results based on the balance measure.

The largest differences were not found between groups based on different demographic characteristics, or on levels of resources, but rather be-

tween individuals with different experiences of crime. The largest excess risks for having negative experiences of contacts with the police were found among those who had been exposed to crimes involving threats or violence and those who had themselves been indicted for offences during the previous three years. The likelihood for individuals from these groups to have reported negative experiences of the police was twice that of those without these characteristics. For respondents who had themselves been indicted for offences, the value of the balance measure is close to zero (3), which means that the proportion reporting negative experiences of the police was more or less the same size as the proportion who reported positive experiences. Those who had been indicted for offences were the most dissatisfied with the treatment they had received from the courts, however. They also reported that the information they had been given prior to the trial was insufficient, and that it was difficult to understand what was happening in court, to a greater extent than respondents who had not been indicted for offences. Finally, those who had reported exposure to more than one crime to the police over the previous three years were also more likely to report negative experiences of the police than respondents who had only reported a single crime during this period.

In summary, the multivariate analysis indicates that the greatest risk for having negative experiences of contacts with the police is found among victims who are male, victims who are older rather than younger, victims who were born outside Sweden, victims who have not been through further or higher education, victims who have been exposed to crimes involving threats or violence, victims who have reported more than one offence to the police and victims who have themselves been indicted for offences in the past three years.

With a small number of exceptions, the same tendency is also found in relation to contacts with other justice system actors, i.e. injured party counsel, prosecutors and the courts. One exception is that persons with no further or higher education did not report more negative experiences than others of injured party counsel. Similarly, persons born outside Sweden and persons exposed to crimes that had involved threats or violence were no more likely than others to report negative experiences of their contacts with prosecutors. These results should however be interpreted with caution, since the data set contains relatively few cases in these instances (the number of individuals who have had contacts with these actors is significantly smaller than the number who have been in contact with the police).

**Table 3. Balance measure values and odds ratios from a logistic regression analysis of negative experiences of contacts with the police following exposure to crimes reported to the police during the previous three years. SCS 2007–2008.**

	Balance measure <i>Positive minus negative experiences of the police</i>	Odds ratio <i>Negative (quite/very) experiences of the police</i>
<b>All respondents</b>	40	
<i>Sex</i>		
Female	47	1.00
Male	43	1.74*
<i>Age</i>		
16–19	30	1.00
20–24	30	1.46
25–44	41	1.31
45–79	42	1.82*
<i>National background</i>		
Sw-born, both parents Sw-born	41	1.00
Sw-born, one parent Sw-born	40	1.13
Sw-born, both parents born outside Sweden	39	1.04
Born outside Sweden	35	1.26*
<i>Education</i>		
Pre-further education	33	1.44*
Further education	42	1.20
Post-further education	41	1.00
<i>Housing type</i>		
House	41	1.00
Flat/apartment	39	1.07
<i>Region</i>		
Stockholm/Gothenburg/Malmö	41	1.00
Large town	41	1.04
Small town/rural	37	1.21
<i>Crime category</i>		
Involved threats or violence	34	2.07*
No threats or violence	41	1.00
<i>Reporting frequency</i>		
Reported once during past three years	44	1.00
Reported more than once during past three years	27	1.81*
<i>Involvement in crime</i>		
Indicted in past three years	3	2.20*
Not indicted past three years	41	1.00
-2 Log likelihood		4 422,79
Nagelkerke R2		0,075

\*p<0,05

## What are crime victims' needs for support and assistance?

### Being offered and receiving support and assistance

In the 2006-2008 waves of the SCS, those exposed to a number of crimes against the person were asked whether they had been offered the support and assistance of a voluntary organisation, such as a victim support organisation, following their exposure to the offence. The responses varied somewhat by the type of offence to which the respondents had been exposed (Table 4). On average, respondents reported having been offered support and assistance of this kind in connection with almost 10 percent of the reported incidents of victimisation. Of these, support and assistance had also been received from a voluntary organisation in connection with approximately half of the incidents. Support and assistance had been received most often in connection with sex offences, violence and threats, and least often in connection with exposure to residential burglary.

The social welfare committees have the task of working to ensure that crime victims receive support and assistance. As can be seen from Table 4, however, respondents reported having received support and assistance from the social services in connection with only a very small proportion of the reported incidents of robbery, sexual offences, violence and threats. As regards robbery, violence and threats, it was much more common for the respondents to have received support and assistance from their employers (this having been the case in connection with almost half of the reported incidents of victimisation).

**Table 4. Respondents' reports of having been offered and having received support and assistance from a voluntary organisation (e.g. Swedish Association for Victim Support), the social services or their employers. SCS 2006–2008. Proportion of victimisation incidents in percent.**

	Offered support and assistance <i>voluntary organisation</i>	Of which received support and assistance <i>voluntary organisation</i>	Received support and assistance <i>social services</i>	Received support and assistance <i>employer</i>
Burglary (n=186)	10	26	-	-
Robbery (n=142)	11	41	1,5	45
Sex offences (n=62)	11	69	2	-
Violence (n=395)	10	51	4	49
Threats (n=440)	6	49	3	51

- Not relevant.

An analysis of differences in support provision to female and male and younger and older victims of *violence* respectively shows that a somewhat larger proportion of the younger respondents (aged 16–24) had received support from their employers (55 percent), which might in part be due to the fact that younger respondents more often have jobs that make them particularly vulnerable to victimisation (e.g. check-out staff). Further, the proportion who had received assistance from a voluntary organisation was lowest among the youngest respondents and highest among those aged 45 or over. Female respondents tend to have been offered and par-

ticularly to have received support more often than their male counterparts. This is true first and foremost in relation to assistance from voluntary organisations and from the social services, but to some extent also in relation to support provided by employers.

The question of being offered and of having received support and assistance of some kind is only one aspect of this issue, however. It is just as important to know what type of assistance crime victims actually need. A study by the Swedish researcher Magnus Lindgren (2004) shows that the most serious problems faced by victims following exposure to assault, robberies of the person and burglaries usually relate to the victims' emotional reactions to these crimes (slightly over half of the crime victims studied by Lindgren stated that this was the worst aspect of the crime, irrespective of the type of offence they had been exposed to). Other problems that may arise as a result of exposure to crime vary more markedly with the type of crime involved, e.g. physical injuries among those exposed to assault, financial losses (robbery) and practical problems among those exposed to burglary.

## Confidence in the justice system among those who have had contacts with its agencies

### **Confidence lower among those who have been in contact with the justice system**

It is of course desirable that crime victims' contacts with various actors in the justice system should be permeated by confidence and that they should ideally also lead to increased levels of confidence in the justice system. SCS respondents are asked questions about their confidence in the justice system, its agencies, and the work of these agencies at the time of the survey. Table 5 presents confidence balance measures (the proportion reporting high levels of confidence minus the proportion reporting low levels of confidence) for different groups of crime victims.

The table shows that, in total, confidence is lower among those who report exposure to crime. There is also a very clear tendency for individuals who had both been exposed to a crime against the person and had chosen to report the crime to the police, and who had thus been in contact with the justice system (most often only with the police, but in some cases also with other agencies) to have reported lower levels of confidence in the justice system than those who had been exposed to a crime against the person but who had chosen not to report the offence. The table shows further that crime victims who had participated in a trial, i.e. those who had been in contact with all three agencies of the justice system, reported lower levels of confidence than those who had reported offences to the police but not participated in a trial. These tendencies are clearer among male respondents than among females and there are also differences between different age groups. The one group that deviates from this pattern is that comprised of the youngest group of respondents (aged 16–19). In this group of respondents there are no differences in levels of confidence between those crime victims who had reported offences against the person and those who had chosen not to report them. And in contrast to the

other age groups, those young respondents who had participated in a trial reported higher levels of confidence in the justice system than those who had reported offences to the police but had not subsequently gone on to participate in a trial. These differences may be due to differences in the support and treatment received from the justice system by victims of different sexes and from different age groups. Differential treatment of this kind may on the one hand be viewed as problematic, but on the other hand as an indication that the support provided by the justice system is of significance to crime victims and that supportive measures are meaningful in relation to the perceptions that crime victims have of the way they have been treated by justice system agencies.

On the whole, however, with the exception of the youngest age-group, the data suggest that the level of confidence in the justice system declines the further respondents proceed in the criminal justice process. The groups of respondents who reported the lowest levels of confidence in the justice system were males and persons aged 20–24 who had been exposed to crimes against the person that they had then reported to the police. The tendency towards lower levels of confidence the further into the criminal justice process respondents had come cannot however be definitively confirmed on the basis of the SCS data, since it has not been possible to follow individuals over time. It is possible, for example that those victims who went to court may already have had lower levels of confidence in the justice system even prior to the contacts reported in the survey.

“Confidence” is a complex concept and may mean different things to different people.<sup>10</sup> The focus group interviews conducted in connection with the study provide insights into the situations which lead crime victims to perceive that the justice system has not lived up to expectations or has let them down (see below).

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<sup>10</sup> For some, the simply formulated question as to whether they have confidence in the justice system may lead to answers based on whether or not they believe the justice system is capable of identifying and convicting offenders. Others interpret the question in such a way that their answers reflect the extent to which they feel the police (which is usually the only agency most members of the public have any contact with) do as good a job as they can given the resources available to them. For still others, their answer may reflect the extent to which they feel that the state takes responsibility for maintaining a just society.



**Table 5. Confidence in the justice system as a whole among different groups of crime victims. SCS 2007-2008. Balance measure (high confidence minus low confidence).**

	Males	Females	16-19 years	20-24 years	25-44 years	45-79 years
All respondents (n=29 803)	37	49	51	40	43	42
Exposed to crime during past year (n=7 851)	24	37	38	25	32	28
Exposed to crime against the person* during past year, not reported to police (n=2 283)	16	30	24	25	23	22
Exposed to crime against the person* during past year, reported to police (n=802)	4	24	24	3	13	16
Crime victims who have reported offences in past three years (n=6 314)	23	39	35	28	31	32
Crime victims who have participated in a trial in the past three years (n=514)	11	32	46	13	13	22

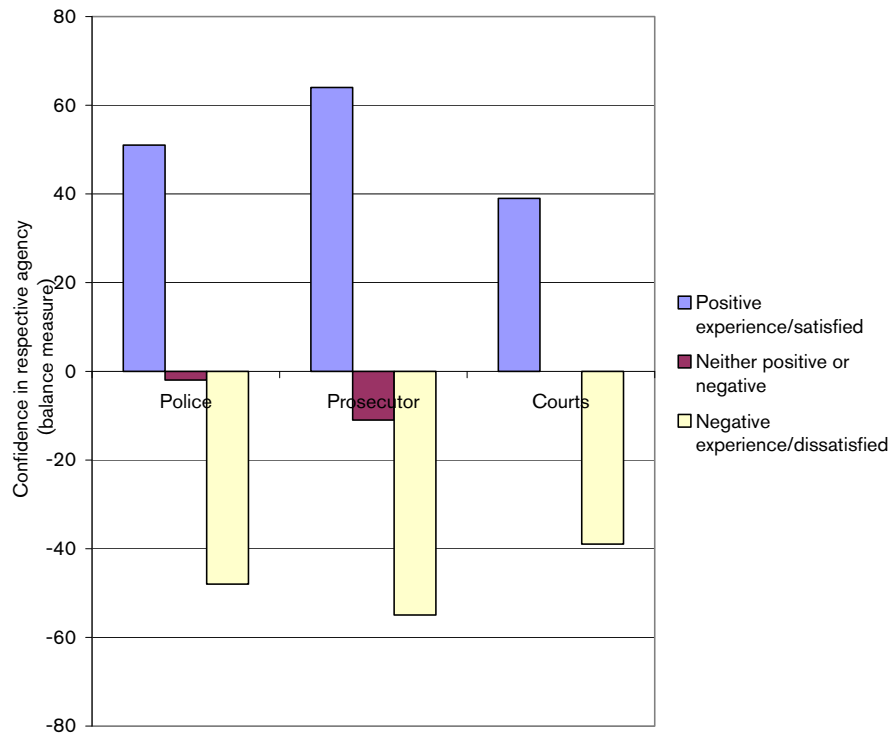
\*Crimes against the person here include violence, threats, robbery, sex offences and harassment.

### Quality of contacts with justice system actors is central to the respondents' level of confidence

Although it is not possible on the basis of the SCS data to directly determine whether the respondents' contacts with the justice system had themselves contributed to increases or decreases in their levels of confidence, the analyses nonetheless show that the respondents' perceptions of these contacts do co-vary with their levels of confidence in the justice system. Figure 2 presents balance measures for crime victims' confidence in the police, prosecutors and the courts by their reported experiences of their contacts with the respective agencies. The correlation is very clear: the better the respondents' experiences of their contacts with the police or prosecutors, or the better their perceived treatment in court, the higher their level of confidence in the work of the relevant agency.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>11</sup> The SCS data also show that negative experiences of the police, injured party counsel, prosecutors or the courts are associated with low levels of confidence in the justice system as a whole at the same time as positive experiences of the individual agencies are associated with high levels of confidence.

**Figure 2. Confidence in the police by experiences of the police (n=5279), confidence in the prosecutor by experiences of the prosecutor (n=528) and confidence in the courts by experiences of the courts (n=528) among respondents who had reported offences during the previous three years. SCS 2007–2008. Balance measures.**



### Confidence in relation to support and assistance received

A final question examined relates to the extent to which having received support from various actors may have affected the respondents' confidence in the justice system. It is conceivable that those who had received support had also been provided with information and may have developed a better understanding of the work of the justice system. The results do not indicate any such tendencies, however, in relation to support from either victim support organisations, the social services or from employers. This might then be interpreted as indicating that it is the work of the agencies of the justice system themselves that affects crime victims' confidence in the justice system – irrespective of whether or not they receive assistance from these various sources of support.

## 5. Focus group interviews with crime victims on the justice system

This section presents a summary of the results of the focus group interviews conducted with crime victims and support centre staff. The objective of the interviews was to develop an augmented understanding of the general tendencies described by the SCS data. The focus is directed at two groups of victims who have already been the target of a range of justice system initiatives: adults exposed to relationship violence and youths exposed to serious crimes against the person (rape, assault and robbery).

### The women's stories

The women described wanting the police to give more consideration to the state of mind of crime victims and to adapt their treatment and methods of information provision accordingly (by not blaming the woman, for example, by quickly separating the parties and by giving the woman time to describe her experiences and to digest any information provided). These views were often related to apparent inexperience on the part of police staff.

*– When they came you were in pieces. You were scared, shaken, everything. And then they ask you what has happened to you: “Which arm did he hit you with first?” “I can’t answer that. No idea!” You sit there like a paralysed idiot, just trembling.*

Another common theme was that the police should become better at securing evidence in order to avoid “my-word-against-his” situations, and thus avoid the risk of the prosecutor deciding not to pursue the case. Interview participants expressed a desire that prosecutors and injured party counsel should meet and sit down with the victim and that the police should show the victim that they were both familiar with the case and

motivated. A desire was also expressed that in those instances where a case was not prosecuted, prosecutors should take care to explain the reasons for this in a way that the victim could understand (i.e. by giving reasons that could be concretely related to the case itself). The women felt that it was also important that court staff showed more understanding and respect for the fact that the victim is in a very vulnerable situation during the trial (e.g. by initially and then successively explaining what is happening and what is going to happen during the trial, by not behaving in a way that suggests indifference and by suppressing any disturbances from members of the public). It was also felt important that representatives of the various agencies of the justice system improve their levels of collaboration by holding joint meetings with victims.

## The men's stories

The interviews with men exposed to relationship violence raise the question of the justice system's treatment of atypical crime victims. The men were very aware of the fact that the world in general views violence as something that a real man would be able to protect himself against. They spoke of a lack of alternatives and described their situation as one in which whatever they did would be wrong:

*– You can't fight, you can't do anything back. If you did you'd get done straight away. You're well aware of that.*

*– Then I actually said to the judge "I'm not hear because I'm complaining that it's an unfair boxing match, where we're in different weight classes. You do understand that I'm not even thinking about fighting back?"*

The ideas and suggestions that emerged from the interviews with the men included recommendations primarily focused on police and prosecutors and one recommendation related to both the social services and all the agencies of the justice system. The men expressed a desire that the police should be more open to the possibility that men can also be subjected to violence by their partners and that they should act in such cases in accordance with their usual routines for registering an offence report, investigating the offence and providing information on the different forms of support and assistance that may be available locally (which is to say that their not doing so is perceived as discriminatory). Like the women, the men expressed a desire that prosecutors, in their capacity as chief investigating officers and as those that indict offenders, should explain the reasons for the decisions taken in a way that the victim is able to understand (reasons that can be concretely related to the case in hand). The men emphasised that it is essential that not only the police, but also the social services, are open to possibility that men can also be the victims of relationship violence. They argued that the actions of the social services may affect the actions of the police, further increasing the risk for discrimination.

## The youths' stories

As has been noted, the results of the SCS indicate that confidence in the justice system is lower among those whose cases have continued the whole way through the justice system than it is among those whose contacts with the justice system went no further than the original reporting of the offence to the police. This may appear worrying, but the study also shows that those who have had positive experiences of the justice system report higher levels of confidence. Teenagers between the ages of sixteen and nineteen deviate from this pattern, however. The relatively high levels of confidence reported by this group are also found among those who have had experience of the court system, and by comparison with older respondents, their experiences of going to trial are altogether more positive. The special efforts focused on the treatment given to young crime victims may thus have produced results. It is not entirely easy for young people to know who does what in the justice system, however, as is exemplified by the following quote from a young woman who participated in the National Council's focus group interviews:

*– I was surprised when I understood that it was the prosecutor who was going to do everything in court. And my lawyer [injured party counsel] was more of a support person, who supported me through everything and explained and answered questions.*

The analysis of the views expressed by the youths who participated in the focus group interviews also showed that they would like the police to consider the benefits of adopting a more supportive approach in relation to young crime victims, rather than a neutral or more reserved approach. The youths thought it would be a good idea for prosecutors to prepare young crime victims for court, by putting to them the uncomfortable questions that might be expected to come at trial from the defendant's lawyer. They too, like their adult counterparts, expressed a need to have decisions not to proceed further with the case, either prior to trial or following a court judgement, explained to them, together with the motivations for these decisions, in a comprehensible manner. Several of the youths wanted the courts to identify and prevent disturbances from members of the public in the courtroom in order to help the parties involved to tell their stories. They also felt it would be a good thing for representatives from the various agencies of the justice system to consider adapting the way victims are treated and information collected to the age, level of maturity or other characteristics of the individuals concerned.

## 6. Summary

This section is a summary of the full version of the report and some of the details might thus not be included in the abridged text above.

The work conducted within the framework of the justice system should proceed on the basis of the interests of the public and the needs of the individual. Earlier studies have revealed deficiencies in the way victims are dealt with in the criminal justice process, and a large number of measures have been introduced since the turn of the millennium in order to improve this situation. Measures of this kind need to be followed-up over a long period of time in order to determine what effects they have produced in practice.

The overarching objective of the current study has been to describe crime victims' experiences of the justice system and to provide a basis for making further improvements in this area. The study is based on two data sets: the annual Swedish Crime Survey (SCS), which includes several thousand respondents who have been exposed to crime during the years 2006–2008, and focus group interviews with two groups of crime victims – young people exposed to various types of crime and adults exposed to relationship violence – and also with individuals who work to provide support to these groups (producing a total of almost 30 interview participants). On the basis of the SCS it is possible to draw general conclusions about the situation and the experiences of crime victims. The focus group interviews provide various explanations as to why crime victims may perceive their contacts with the justice system in different ways.

### **Many crime victims satisfied, but not all**

Despite the fact that a substantial amount of effort has been devoted to improving the treatment of crime victims within the justice system, the SCS shows that there remains room for further improvements in this area. While more than half of those exposed to crime reported positive experiences of the justice system, approximately one in six reported negative experiences. These relate to not only the police but also prosecutors and the courts. The crime victims were most satisfied with their injured party counsel. One in four crime victims did not feel they had been given suffi-

cient information prior to attending court, and one in six felt that it was difficult to understand what was happening in court.

### **Groups that are particularly dissatisfied**

Those who report being most dissatisfied with their contacts with the police are males, respondents over the age of 45, those born outside Sweden, those with no post-secondary education, those exposed to crimes involving threats and violence, those who have reported more than one offence over the previous three years and those who have themselves been indicted for offences during this period. With a small number of exceptions, the same tendency is also found in relation to contacts with other justice system actors. As regards the specific offences to which the respondents had been exposed, the victims of robberies constitute the group reporting the highest level of satisfaction with their contacts with the police, while those exposed to threats, violence and harassment report the lowest levels of satisfaction. Those whose offences were reported via direct contacts with the police were more satisfied than those who had reported offences via the telephone or online.

### **Many victims receive support from their employers**

The SCS shows that the victims of approximately one in ten offences against the person had been offered support and assistance by a voluntary organisation and of these, help or support had been received in connection with approximately half of the incidents. Only a small proportion of the crimes resulted in the victims receiving support and assistance from the social services, whereas support and help had been provided by employers in relation to a much larger proportion of the incidents of victimisation (approximately half). In between ten and seventeen percent of the incidents, depending on the type of crime, the victims reported having felt a need for help and support that was not made available to them. Among the victims of violence there appears to be a correlation between a lack of assistance and a deterioration in the quality of life over the longer term, first and foremost among females and older respondents.

### **Links between contacts and confidence: a positive pattern among teenagers**

The SCS data indicate that levels of confidence in the justice system are lower among persons who have been exposed to crime than they are among others, and that those who have reported offences to the police have lower levels of confidence than those who have not reported them. Further, individuals who have participated in a court trial report lower levels of confidence than those who have not done so. This might be interpreted as indicating that crime victims have certain expectations of the justice system and that dissatisfaction sometimes results when these expectations are disappointed. One exception is found among the youngest respondents, aged 16–19, for whom the reverse is the case, and where higher levels of confidence are reported by those who have experienced the whole criminal justice process, including a trial, than by those who have only reported offences to the police. The SCS also shows that the

better the experiences crime victims have of their contacts with the police, prosecutors and the courts, the higher their level of confidence in the respective agencies. Cross-sectional surveys such as the SCS cannot however clarify causal relationships of this kind, since it is not evident whether the respondents' attitudes already existed prior to – or whether they were affected by – their contacts with the agencies concerned. However, the focus group interviews conducted with crime victims in connection with the study provide an indication of the extent to which these two phenomena may be related to one another.

### **Focus group interviews reveal a need for information and a sense of security, trust and confidence**

The focus group interviews conducted with young victims and victims of relationship violence provided valuable insights into the way crime victims can perceive their contacts with the justice system. The interviews revealed both positive and negative experiences of the police, prosecutors, injured party counsel and the courts. Among the factors that emerged clearly in the majority of interviews as being linked to negative experiences were that the information provided is often perceived as insufficient, that the justice system does not always succeed in instilling a sense of security and confidence and that victims were often initially viewed with suspicion – the men who had been exposed to relationship violence in particular felt that they were met with disbelief.

### **Additional conclusions in brief**

In order for victims' contacts with the justice system to start well during the initial phase involving the police, the contact must be based on a willingness to believe the victim's story, and consideration must be given to the crime victim's vulnerable situation and to variations in the ability of crime victims to digest information. The prosecutor's role may need to be clarified, and the decisions taken in the course of the criminal justice process may need to be explained in some detail. During the trial too, information and the treatment given to crime victims may need to be adapted to the needs of the individual. In this context, the report also discusses the important role played by injured party counsel, not least in relation to the provision of information and restorative support. The study provides support for the proposal of the Swedish Association or Victim Support that injured party counsel should undergo training resulting in certification. One section of the report discusses the issue of the justice system's ability to cope with atypical crime victims, in this case men exposed to relationship violence.

Another issue is that of the extent to which it is reasonable to expect that all crime victims will leave the criminal justice process with a sense of being satisfied. While the justice system has several obligations when it comes to the treatment of crime victims, it also has only a limited ability to provide various forms of support. The report emphasises the role of other actors and also the importance of clarity in relation to what it is that constitutes the principal task of the justice system. At the same time, the report also emphasises the need to chart and evaluate the effects of the efforts made by the justice system in relation to issues affecting crime victims.



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