

# SUMMARY

English summary of Brå report No 2006:5

## Threats and violence against Prison and Probation Service Staff

# Threats and violence against prison and probation service staff

**English summary of the Swedish report Hot och våld mot  
kriminalvårdens personal, report nr 2006:5**

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

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention 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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# Preface

Personnel in the Swedish Prison and Probation Service work closely with offenders and clients, some of whom are sentenced for serious violent crimes. Many of these offenders and clients are substance abusers with documented psychological problems. It is not unusual that personnel use different degrees of force. This applies for prisons, detention centres and during transport when offenders are in custody, as well as probation. These unique conditions can imply that personnel are subject to threats, harassment or violence from offenders and clients. Attempts to map the extent of this problem have been carried out before. But the prevalence is still unknown and the need to study the problem in more detail remains, including the risks that threats and violence pose to the system. In this light, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) was tasked by the government in 2005 to study the scope and nature of threats and violence to Prison and Probation personnel and their families. The task included an analysis of how threats and violence can influence decisions made by personnel, and an assessment of the need for preventive measures. The aim is to build a knowledge platform as a basis for continued work within the Prison and Probation Service in relation to responding to, following up and preventing incidents of threat and violence against employees.

This survey has been carried out by Sven Granath, Andreas Gårdlund and Lotta Nilsson, all research analysts at Brå, and Erik Grevholm, Chief Coordinator. Professor Malin Åkerström, Lund University also made valuable contributions to the report. The Prison and Probation Service assisted greatly with data collection work. During the enquiry, both employees and offenders in the Prison and Probation Service assisted in a number of ways, not least by sharing their experiences. We would like to express our gratitude.

Stockholm, February 2007

*Jan Andersson*  
Director-General

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Coordination Director

# Introduction and method

As a step in the measures being taken to improve levels of security in the Prison and Probation Service, the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) was tasked by the Swedish government in 2005 to describe the extent and character of threats and violence against Prison and Probation Service staff. On the basis of the results, one element of the commission involved analyzing the potential consequences of threats and violence for employee work performance and examining the need for additional measures to prevent employees being exposed to threats and violence. The study covers all branches of the Prison and Probation Service and should provide the basis for the continued consideration of ways to improve the safety of Prison and Probation Service staff.

## Existing research emphasizes the role of frustration

International research has noted that threats and violence from inmates against staff are not usually premeditated, acts conducted in an attempt to gain any benefits, or to cause major disruption, but first and foremost take the form of spontaneous reactions to the frustration inmates feel towards what they experience as incomprehensible and unfair decision-making systems (see e.g. Silberman, 1995 and Worthley, 2002). Amongst other things, the research emphasizes such risk factors as inflexible and harsh formal systems of regulation in prisons and prison units, and young and inexperienced staff which include a large proportion of men. The experience of neighbouring Nordic countries also indicates that threats and violence appear to be reactions to the frustrations inmates feel, rather than premeditated acts intended to cause major disruption (see e.g. Alatalo, 1998; Alatalo, 2003; Gustavsson and Svedberg, 2002; Hammerlin and Strand, 2005; Danish Prison and Probation Service, 2006). The response strategies discussed include the importance of a clear set of rules and regulations, the uniform enforcement of such rules and regulations, clarity about the consequences of incorrect behaviour, trusting relationships between inmates and staff and the capacity among staff members to communicate various types of decision in an acceptable manner.

## A broad research strategy

Several methods have been employed to produce an overview of the problems associated with threats, harassment and violence. Both the theoretical and methodological points of departure employed in the study are to a large extent based on an earlier report published by the National Council for Crime Prevention, which investigated and analysed the extent and character of threats and violence experienced by different occupational groups working with and within the justice system (Brå, 2005).

A total of just over 2,600 (out of a sample of approximately 4,000) of a total of around 9,000 employees in the four branches of the Prison and Probation Service responded to a questionnaire survey. This questionnaire survey forms the basis for a large portion of the results. Prisons were selected for inclusion in the study using a proportional stratified sampling procedure. Strata were formed based on the security level of the prisons, which in this case concerned open, closed or closed with maximum security cells. A simple random sample of prisons was then drawn within each stratum. Remand centres and probation service offices were selected using a simple random sample. All the country's prison service transportation offices were included in the sample. The employee sample then included all those who had received payment in connection with

employment at the selected facilities of the Prison and Probation Service between February and November of 2005.

The response rate was 66 percent. The non-response is fairly evenly distributed across the respondents' sex, the type of facility in which they worked and, generally speaking, also across the number of hours the respondents had worked in 2005. Employees that had worked less than a month in 2005 constitute an exception in this context, however, as only 20 percent of this group responded to the survey. Brå's assessment is nonetheless that the questionnaire survey should produce a largely representative picture of the victimisation experienced by Prison and Probation Service staff during the period covered by the study, with the exception of employees who only worked for a short time during this period. The level of victimisation identified, however, is dependent on the way victimisation is measured. The manner in which questions are formulated, for example, is of major significance in the current survey, as it is in other similar studies. The greatest merit in examining levels of victimisation over a specific period of time does not rest in establishing the overall level, but rather in the opportunity it provides to present detailed comparisons between various types of victimisation, between different branches of the Prison and Probation Service, between men and women, and so forth.

Some 20 *interviews* were also conducted with employees who had been exposed to threats or violence and with people who are or were inmates of a Prison service facility. In addition, close to 300 *incident reports* (which Prison and Probation Service employees are required to complete when they have been involved in some kind of negative episode) have been reviewed. Some ten *study visits* were also undertaken, in the context of which *interviews were conducted with key individuals* at remand centres, prisons, transportation service offices and probation service facilities.

# The prevalence of threats, harassment and violence

## Threats are more common than harassment and violence

The picture that emerges from the questionnaire survey is that approximately one-quarter (26 percent) of Prison and Probation Service staff reported that they had been subjected to threats, harassment or violence from inmates or clients at some point in 2005; see Table 1. (In this context, harassment does not refer simply to provocative comments, but rather to what are perceived as serious acts of harassment with the intention of causing lasting discomfort.) Threats are more common than harassment, which is in turn more common than violence; see Table 1. Staff working in remand centres are subjected to these acts slightly more often than staff working at prisons and in the transport service – and significantly more often than staff working in the probation service. Staff working at remand centres are those most exposed to threats, while transport service staff constitute the group most often exposed to violence. Less than one (1) percent of respondents had been exposed to some form of vandalism, and as a result this type of victimisation is not discussed further in this report.

Table 1. Proportion of staff subjected to threats, harassment, violence or vandalism in 2005. Presented for the different branches of the Prison and Probation Service and for the total sample. Proportions in percent, confidence intervals, numbers of victims and numbers of respondents.

Branch of prison service	Subjected to threats	Subjected to harassment	Subjected to violence	Subjected to vandalism	Subjected to threats, harassment, or violence (vandalism excluded)
Prison	23,6 ± 2,4 281 (n=1189)	10,1 ± 1,7 117 (n=1153)	5,6 ± 1,3 64 (n=1150)	0,7 ± 0,5 8 (n=1150)	26,2 ± 2,5 317 (n=1209)
Remand centre	27,6 ± 3,2 211 (n=764)	10,2 ± 2,2 76 (n=743)	8,9 ± 2,0 66 (n=744)	0,9 ± 0,7 7 (n=744)	30,1 ± 3,2 238 (n=791)
Transport service	24,5 ± 5,1 67 (n=274)	5,0 ± 2,6 13 (n=262)	10,8 ± 3,7 29 (n=268)	0 0 (n=268)	25,4 ± 5,1 72 (n=284)
Probation service	8,0 ± 2,8 28 (n=351)	4,6 ± 2,2 16 (n=348)	0,6 ± 0,8 2 (n=341)	0,3 ± 0,6 1 (n=341)	12,1 ± 3,4 43 (n=356)
Total	22,8 ± 1,6 587 (n=2578)	8,9 ± 1,1 222 (n=2506)	6,4 ± 1,0 161 (n=2503)	0,6 ± 0,3 16 (n=2503)	26,0 ± 1,7 686 (n=2640)

## Prison officers the most victimized group

If only responses from employees who worked the entire year and who have a great deal of direct contact with inmates or clients are considered, a larger proportion are found to have been victimized. All in all, approximately 40 percent of Prison and Probation Service employees at prisons, remand centres and the transport service report that they have been victimized in some manner. Prison and Probation Service staff working in the transport service were the most victimized; one-fifth of this group had been exposed to violence. Probation officers constitute the group least exposed to incidents of all three types – and consequently also the group least exposed to any kind of incident. Prison managers and prison officers constitute another staff category that is exposed to threats, harassment and violence to a substantial extent; 35 percent of employees in this category had been subjected to incidents of this kind. Levels of victimization are also relatively high among medical staff and psychologists, at 22 percent.

A review was conducted of other relevant studies conducted in Sweden, but it was found to be impossible to compare the results from the Prison and Probation Service study with exposure to work-related threats and violence in other occupational fields (e.g. AFA Försäkring, 2006; Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2002; Swedish Work Environment Authority, 2004; Brå, 2005; National Audit Administration, 2002).

Both the threats and incidents of harassment reported in the study are usually verbal in nature. The incidents of violence typically consist in blows or kicks that either do not lead to injuries, or that lead to injuries not requiring medical treatment.

Staff that have previously been subjected to incidents of this kind are more likely to be victimized again; see Table 2 (also see Brå, 2001). Although there are a number of reasons that results of this kind should be interpreted with caution, they nonetheless suggest that victimization may to some extent be concentrated to specific segments of staff, which may therefore require a special concentration of support and preventive measures (see also Brå, 2001).

Table 2. Proportion of staff subjected to threats, harassment or violence in 2005, and proportion previously subjected/not subjected to these acts. Respondents who worked throughout 2005, and at least two years in total. Presented for the different branches of the Prison and Probation Service and for the total sample. Percent.

Occupational field	Of which victimized in 2005. Percent.
<i>Prison</i>	
Victimized before 2005	51
Not victimized before 2005	9
<i>Remand centre</i>	
Victimized before 2005	48
Not victimized before 2005	10
<i>Transport service</i>	
Victimized before 2005	56
Not victimized before 2005	2
<i>Probation service</i>	
Victimized before 2005	17
Not victimized before 2005	8
<i>Total</i>	
Victimized before 2005	45
Not victimized before 2005	8

## Unusual to be victimized while off duty and unusual for family members to be victimized

Threats, and particularly violence against off-duty staff do occur, but they appear to be uncommon. In the same way, people close to staff members are at times subjected to threats related to the staff member's job, but this is also relatively uncommon; violence of this kind is even more unusual. However, five percent of Prison and Probation Service staff working at remand centres report that threats have been directed at people close to them. For the most part these cases appear to involve threats directed towards the employees themselves, which also include people close to them, rather than threats that are directly expressed to a family member.

# Victims, perpetrators and risk situations

## Young men victimized most

The questionnaire survey very clearly indicates that in all branches of the Prison and Probation Service, men are subjected to threats, harassment and violence to a greater extent than women (information also available from The Prison and Probation Service, 2005). According to interviews with inmates, this may be related to the fact that the most risky tasks are most often performed by men, that there exists some form of respect for women among the prison service clientele, and that male staff are perceived as being more strict than their female counterparts. Another finding indicates that young staff members working at remand centres, prisons and at probation facilities are subjected to these acts more often than their older colleagues. The general age pattern followed by victimisation may be related to the fact that inmates are more provocative towards young members of staff. In the transport service, however, it is the older members of staff that are more often exposed to the behaviours examined. This may be because they more frequently carry out foreign transports, which involve particularly high levels of risk. The most pronounced risk groups are comprised of men under 30 years of age working in prisons and men under 45 years of age working in remand centres. Women over the age of 45 constitute the group exposed to the lowest levels of victimization, both in prisons and remand centres.

Table 3. Staff risk groups at prisons and remand centres. Proportions of staff members that were subjected to threats, harassment or violence in 2005, by sex and age. Respondents who worked throughout 2005. Percent.

Prison	Proportion victimized	Remand centre	Proportion victimized
Men under 30 years of age	61	Men 30-45 years of age	54
Men 30-45 years of age	45	Men under 30 years of age	50
Women 30-45 years of age	31	Women under 30 years of age	48
Women under 30 years of age	30	Women 30-45 years of age	33
Men 46 years of age or older	27	Men 46 years of age or older	32
Women 46 years of age or older	15	Women 46 years of age or older	6

## Perpetrators most often young men

The inmates or clients who subject staff to threats, violence or harassment are predominantly males (92 percent). Many of the inmates who subjected prison staff to these acts were relatively young. Thirty-six percent were between the ages of 25 and 30, which constitutes an over-representation given the proportion this age group comprises of the prison population. Eighteen to twenty-four year olds are also over-represented. There is no evidence to indicate that the length of the sentence being served plays a significant role in this context.

The people who were subjected to threats, harassment and violence in 2005 were asked a number of follow-up questions about the perpetrator involved in the most serious incident to which they had been exposed. The responses indicate that twelve percent of the individuals who subject staff to these acts are believed to belong to criminal groups, such as motorcycle gangs. An estimated fifteen percent are believed to have been under the influence of alcohol or narcotics at the time of the incident. The proportion of inmates who were under the influ-

ence of narcotics or alcohol was particularly high in relation to incidents occurring within the probation service (33 percent). The proportion was also high in the context of incidents of violence that had occurred in prisons (20 percent) and remand centres (21 percent). Of the people who subject staff to these acts, an estimated fourteen percent were deemed to have been suffering from an acute mental illness at the time of the incident; the majority of these cases involved acts of violence. The review of incident reports also indicates that at least half of the people who appear in these reports are also known to have made threats and committed acts of violence prior to the incident described in the report.

## Victimization most common at closed, low-security prisons

There are substantial differences between the prisons included in the material as regards the prevalence of staff exposure to threats, harassment and violence. The proportion of staff members exposed to such incidents ranged from a low of twelve percent to a high of 58 percent. An analysis of prison size, the sex distribution of staff members and whether inmates are male or female does not indicate that factors of this kind have any major impact on the differences found between prisons. The four prisons found to have the lowest levels of staff victimization included institutions from quite different security classes. The four prisons with the highest levels of staff victimization were all Class E prisons, i.e. closed prisons with the lowest security classification. It appears that the risk of being subjected to threats, harassment and violence is higher at prisons in this security class.

Threats, harassment and violence are most common in cell areas in both prisons and remand centres. In prisons, threats are also relatively common in isolation units whereas violence is relatively common in support units. In remand centres, a significant proportion of acts occur in the admissions area, which is obviously the site of a risk situation.

## Risks associated with the communication of negative information

A particularly critical situation at both prisons and remand centres arises when inmates receive some sort of negative information or when they are reprimanded. It may involve a visit request being denied or being asked to stop making noise. Another risk situation at prisons arises when staff members break up fights between inmates. One circumstance that is emphasized by both inmates and staff is the inconsistency with which staff enforce rules and regulations, since this creates frustration. There appears also to be some uncertainty as to what rules actually apply, which can also contribute to feelings of frustration and thus increase the risk for threats, harassment and violence. One particularly critical situation in the transport service appears to involve the transport of individuals, who are being refused entry or deported, to other countries. Most incidents occur in the course of transfers into and out of cars, boats, planes, etc. Over half of the threats made to probation service employees are delivered by phone, and otherwise occur primarily in the reception area of the probation office.

## Motives and consequences

### **Often spontaneous frustration, but at times intended to instil fear and demonstrate power**

The fact that threats and violence against staff seem most often to be the result of spontaneous reactions to frustrations can be linked to the fact that many incidents arise during charged situations such as in the course of an argument, in connection with the communication of reprimands and negative information in prisons, in connection with admissions at remand centres and during transportation to foreign countries. Instances of threats, harassment and violence of this kind do not usually appear to constitute part of a strategy intended to produce any form of benefit for the perpetrator. The results of the questionnaire survey regarding the most serious incidents to which staff members had been exposed indicate that the motives underlying these incidents appear to be more or less evenly distributed across spontaneous frustrations and a desire on the part of the inmate to intimidate or demonstrate power; see Table 4. In these cases too, the act may often be the result of a spontaneous reaction and not part of a thought-out strategy to gain advantage.

Table 4. Respondents' assessments of the principal motives of inmates or clients in incidents of threats, harassment or violence as reported in the questionnaire survey. Percent.

Motive	Prison (n=478)	Remand centre (n=354)	Transport service (n=105)	Probation service (n=50)
Nothing, just an expression of rage, disappointment, frustration or anger	41	40	51	48
To intimidate in order to obtain a concrete action or decision	15	18	24	20
To scare into submission or passivity	17	12	4	10
Demonstration of power	11	16	8	14
To protect one's own criminal activity	1	1	-	-
To improve status of self or the group	7	3	3	6
To gain access to information	1	-	-	-
Revenge	4	6	4	2
Other	3	4	6	-
Total	100	100	100	100

There are differences between cases where the act is reported to have been motivated by a desire to intimidate or demonstrate power and cases where frustration constitutes the reported motivation. In the first group of cases, it is slightly more common for the victim to be a woman, for the perpetrator to be a man, and to belong to a criminal group and for the victim to have previously been victimized by the same perpetrator. It is also slightly more common for victims to perceive that threats are likely to be realised and that the incident leads to the victim experiencing a lasting sense of fear. Incidents that are motivated in this way appear to involve premeditated acts intended to influence staff attitudes and conduct. It is also more common for victims to report that the motive was a desire to intimidate or demonstrate power in cases of serious harassment, than in cases involving direct threats or physical violence.

### **Few suffer serious injury but many experience fear or discomfort**

The physical injuries sustained by victims are generally not of a serious nature, even if there are isolated cases involving serious injury. However, many staff members experience fear and discomfort after being subjected to threats and harassment even though the consequences are usually short term; see Table 5.

Threats and harassment that lead to lasting fear are typically delivered by older inmates, for example, and inmates belonging to criminal groups. A larger proportion of women and of older employees have experienced an extended period of fear.

Table 5. Experiences of fear or discomfort after being threatened or harassed. All branches of the prison and probation service. (n).

Experienced fear	Threats (n=598)	Harassment (n=226)
Experienced fear or discomfort for an extended period of time after the incident	82	35
Experienced fear or discomfort for a short period of time after the incident	308	108
The act did not result in lasting fear or discomfort	198	79
Unable to make an assessment	10	4

### **Work performance may be affected**

All in all, the responses to the questionnaire and the interviews indicate that threats, harassment and violence do not usually lead to any substantial direct consequences for the victim's work performance. Approximately one-third of respondents indicated that they hesitated before carrying out, or completely avoided a specific task or that their work performance had been affected in some other way following the most serious incident to which they had been exposed. Consequences of this nature are more common in response to serious incidents of harassment than in connection with threats or violence. It is also clear that consequences of this kind are more common when the motive for the act is reported to be a desire to intimidate or to demonstrate power than when it is the result of general frustration. Thus although it is unusual, threats, violence and primarily harassment can affect staff work performance, which may impact negatively upon the functioning of the Prison and Probation Service. In light of this, it is important to attempt to ensure that all incidents are reported to management and assessed at the workplace.

### **Distance protects – and creates risk**

One of the factors that appears to serve to protect staff from being negatively affected by these acts on a repeated or more serious basis is the possibility of transferring an inmate if an incident is of a sufficiently serious nature – or of switching probation officers. The distance between decision-makers and the inmates who are affected by their decisions is another factor that probably creates a form of protection against attack. However, there appears to be a tendency for people who have been victimized and who experience fear to adopt a colder and more cautious stance towards inmates, which may contribute to a worsened prison climate and thus also to an increased risk of – and worsened protection against – threats, harassment and violence.

## **Dealing with threats and violence against staff**

### **Not everything is reported to management**

A large proportion of victims stated that they reported the most serious incidents they had been exposed to (largely violent incidents) to management; see Table 6. Less than half stated that they had reported indirect threats, i.e. harassment to management. It appears that a slightly smaller proportion of incidents were reported to the incident reporting system than were reported to management. Here too, violent incidents were reported most often, and instances of harassment least often. It is also clear that only a very small proportion of the total number

of incidents resulted in a police report being filed, although a not insignificant proportion of the violent acts had been reported to the police.

Table 6. Victims who informed a supervisor, filed an incident report or filed a police report for threats, harassment or violence; by branch of the Prison and Probation Service. (n).

Informed/reported	Prison	Remand centre	Transport service	Probation service
<b>Supervisor</b>				
Threats	177 (n=276)	118 (n=205)	25 (n=66)	19 (n=27)
Harassment	59 (n=107)	32 (n=74)	3 (n=9)	5 (n=15)
Violence	54 (n=72)	57 (n=73)	19 (n=28)	3 (n=4)
<b>Incident report</b>				
Threats	113 (n=274)	104 (n=203)	30 (n=65)	6 (n=27)
Harassment	31 (n=108)	20 (n=74)	3 (n=9)	1 (n=13)
Violence	45 (n=72)	55 (n=73)	20 (n=29)	3 (n=4)
<b>Police</b>				
Threats	48 (n=272)	18 (n=202)	7 (n=65)	2 (n=27)
Harassment	6 (n=106)	1 (n=74)	0 (n=9)	1 (n=13)
Violence	21 (n=68)	16 (n=71)	3 (n=29)	3 (n=4)

It is clear that a great many incidents – especially incidents involving threats and in particular harassment – are not reported to the incident reporting system. The objective of this system is to detect threats, harassment and violence against staff and to enable them to be monitored in a comprehensive manner.

#### **Action is taken, but not consistently**

The picture that emerges from the study is that concrete measures are often taken at the workplace when staff are subjected to threats or violence, and that management has been informed of what has taken place; see Table 7. Measures are most commonly taken following acts of violence. The most common actions taken are that the person who was victimized receives counselling in the form of debriefing or that the inmate is transferred, or that a new probation officer is assigned. However, there are also many instances where no concrete action is taken subsequent to reports of threats, harassment and violence. Typically in these cases, however, the threats and violence were considered relatively minor and were not perceived as being particularly intimidating by the staff members subjected to them. The findings also show that many such cases have arisen as a result of some form of temporary frustration. It should be noted, however, that instances of harassment at prisons, which are reported to have led to feelings of discomfort more often than other types of incident, are less frequently reported to management, and thus less frequently result in concrete action being taken.

Table 7. Measures taken in response to incidents of threats, harassment or violence reported to a supervisor; by branch of the Prison and Probation Service. (n).

Measure	Prison	Remand centre	Transport service	Probation service
Following threats				
No action	102	79	22	11
Counselling	39	19	3	3
Inmate transferred	53	30	-	-
New probation officer (probation service)	-	-	-	4
Other	13	8	0	2
Number victimized*	175	117	25	19
Following harassment				
No action	43	19	3	5
Counselling	5	2	0	0
Inmate transferred	11	8	-	-
New probation officer (probation service)	-	-	-	0
Other	4	1	0	0
Number victimized*	58	30	3	5
Following violence				
No action	30	33	15	2
Counselling	15	15	4	1
Inmate transferred	12	10	-	-
New probation officer (probation service)	-	-	-	0
Other	4	2	0	0
Number victimized*	53	55	19	3

\*The number of measures does not sum to the number of victims since several different measures can be taken.

## Brå's assessment

In accordance with the task assigned to Brå by the government, the focus of this report has been directed at producing a picture of the extent and character of threats and violence against Prison and Probation Service staff. The report primarily provides a description of the problem that can serve as a point of departure for the work needed in this area. The Prison and Probation Service is in a good position to assess which methods may be utilised in the context of additional measures to prevent and combat the problem. Brå will therefore not be making concrete recommendations. Brå's contribution will instead consist in illuminating a number of problem areas and areas where action is urgently needed to improve the existing situation.

### Admission of inmates

In remand centres in particular, a large proportion of incidents occur in connection with the admission of inmates, which makes the admissions procedure a critical factor. The study shows, for example, that approximately one-quarter of the remand centre staff members who have been subjected to threats, were victimized in connection with admissions. There are thus good reasons to focus special interest on this particular critical factor both in the context of the routine work of the Prison and Probation Service and in connection with efforts to improve preventive measures.

### **Foreign transports**

Fewer than one in ten of the transport operations undertaken by the transport service involve transporting a client out of the country. However, the material indicates that over half of all cases involving threats and violence against transport service staff occur in the course of these uncommon transport operations whose objective is to deport individuals or refuse them entry to the country. Thus foreign transports constitute a risk situation that needs to be taken into consideration in the context of efforts to combat and deal with threats and violence against transport service staff.

### **Placement of inmates aged 25 to 30**

One finding, which has also been reported in the context of international research in this area, is that relatively young inmates between the ages of 25 and 30 tend to be responsible for a larger proportion of threats and violence against prison service staff than other groups. Thus, placing too many inmates from this category together in wings and units should perhaps be avoided to the extent that this is possible. However, the current situation faced by prisons in terms of full capacity and over-capacity reduces the freedom to orchestrate placements in this way.

### **Knowledge of criminal groups and deviant behaviour**

A significant number of inmates and clients who subject staff to threats and violence are members of criminal groups, mentally ill or disturbed, or under the influence of alcohol or drugs. According to both previous research and the findings presented here, staff experience people who demonstrate this type of deviant affiliation or behaviour as particularly intimidating. In light of this, it is essential that staff have a sound knowledge of these groups as well as of what kind of behaviour can be expected from them. Naturally, it is important that efforts to neutralize criminal groups and to prevent substance abuse produce results, even if the task of preventing substance abuse among probation service clients is particularly difficult.

### **Young male staff**

The results of Brå's study show that relatively young male staff constitute the group subjected to threats, violence and harassment to the greatest extent. This may in part be due to young inmates wishing to demonstrate their standing vis-à-vis young staff members, and to the fact that young male staff members perform tasks that may provoke threats and violence from inmates and clients to a greater extent than other staff. Irrespective of the underlying causes of this phenomenon, there may be reason to consider whether special measures are needed for this group of employees, or at least to ensure that the measures introduced are adapted so that they really reach and make a difference to this group.

### **Closed, low-security prisons**

Of the nineteen prisons in the questionnaire survey with the highest proportion of victimized staff members, four were Class E prisons. These are closed prisons with the lowest security status. This may indicate a need to pay particular attention to conditions in Class E prisons and to review the needs of these institutions and possible measures to meet these needs.

### **Serious harassment**

Incidents of serious harassment are less common than threats, but are at least as common as violence. There are also other reasons to justify paying special atten-

tion to this particular type of victimization. In some cases, serious harassment can lead to victims experiencing lasting fear and discomfort. Harassment often seems to be a premeditated act that can affect the victim's future work performance, and is the type of victimization that is least often reported to supervisors, in incident reports and to the police. In prisons, harassment is the type of victimization that most rarely leads to concrete action being taken in the form of providing counselling for the victim, for example, or the transfer of the inmate.

### **The uniform enforcement of rules**

Previous research on threats and violence against Prison and Probation Service staff has emphasized the frustration experienced by inmates in trying to understand what they perceive as an incomprehensible decision-making apparatus, where decisions are experienced as unfair and unpredictable. Both the inmates and employees interviewed in connection with this study report that the unclear and inconsistent enforcement of rules and regulations contributes to frustration, which can then contribute to the occurrence of threats and violence. The uniform enforcement of rules and regulations appears to be an important element in efforts to combat the occurrence of threats and violence against staff; the same is true of ensuring that staff and inmates have access to information regarding what rules apply.

### **Communicating negative information and giving reprimands**

Previous research and the results of the current study show that the single type of situation in which threats or violence against staff most commonly arise is when staff members communicate negative information or reprimand inmates or clients. Negative information may relate to such things as medication, prison leave, visits and telephone restrictions. Reprimands relate to factors such as an inmate being asked to stop making noise or being told that he or she may not smoke. The fact that such a large proportion of incidents of threats and violence are related to situations of this kind indicates that there is a great deal of room for improvement as regards the capacity to communicate information in a way that reduces the risk of threats and violence.

### **Positive contact and communication**

International research into threats and violence in the context of the corrections system emphasizes the importance of positive contact and communication between staff and inmates or clients. Experiences also emerged in the current study to indicate that communication methods can play an important role in relation to whether a contact develops into a situation involving threats or violence. There is thus good reason to work to safeguard and further develop efforts related to achieving trusting, positive contacts and communication between staff and inmates or clients.

### **Informing management**

Not all instances of threats, harassment and violence are reported. Three out of four acts of violence are reported to management, but it is not good that one-quarter of all acts of violence are not brought to their attention. There are very good reasons for attempting to ensure that all cases of threat, harassment and violence should be brought to the attention of management and, thus, the employer. In this way, the assessment of what has occurred is transferred from the victimized individual to management (also see Brå, 2005). This may also be an important element in preventing segments of staff from becoming accustomed to being subjected to pressure, leading to a risk of negative effects on work performance. In addition, this will lead to more information regarding the situation

at different institutions becoming available, which may be important for work related to security, clients and staff.

### **Reporting incidents**

As the situation stands today, only a small proportion of all incidents are registered in the most important system designed to record and follow levels of staff victimization within the Prison and Probation Service as a whole, namely the incident report register. A new IT-based solution intended to improve system functionality is currently being tested. This type of system development is essential, and will hopefully produce substantial improvements. Staff awareness of the incident reporting system needs to be improved, as does their understanding of the importance of actually reporting the incidents that occur. It would also be desirable for more information to be collected in a systematic manner than is the case today.

### **Measures taken to support victimized staff**

Brå's study shows that it is currently relatively common for incidents reported to management to result in concrete measures being taken at the workplace, particularly counselling in the form of debriefing and the transfer of the inmate. However, it is not at all uncommon for no concrete measures to be taken. Even if many incidents are perceived as being of a relatively minor nature and do not lead to intimidation or injury, it is still important that incidents of this kind be carefully evaluated to exclude the possibility that there may be needs that require addressing.

### **Measures taken to combat repeat victimization in the form of threats, harassment and violence**

Individuals who have previously been victimized appear to be at greater risk of being victimized again. This means that action taken on behalf of victimized staff need not only be a way of dealing with what happened, but can also be an opportunity to prevent future victimization among individuals at high risk of being subjected to threats, harassment and violence again.

### **Training**

The problem of exposure to threats and violence has been highlighted, and has been assigned a relatively central role in the general training programme for new employees in the Prison and Probation Service. A large majority of employees who complete basic training today appear to receive relatively detailed course modules on subjects of significance for the prevention of threats and violence from inmates and clients, and for dealing with incidents of this kind. However, recurrent courses are required that build further on the elements taught and practiced in basic training in order to develop staff capacity to handle threats and violence, e.g. attitudes, discussion techniques and self defence. In light of the results presented in this report, there may be reason to tailor further training so that it includes elements that are of major importance to the risk of being subjected to threats or violence, for example, when staff communicate various types of negative information, intervene in fights between inmates, admit individuals to remand centres and conduct foreign transports.

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