

English summary

Municipal crime rates in Sweden. A statistical study.

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There are substantial differences in the crime levels in Sweden's local authority areas, as can be seen from the official statistics of reported offences produced by the National Council for Crime Prevention. Comparisons based on these statistics do not always present a fair picture however.

This report presents the results from a statistical study which compares crime levels in Sweden's local authority areas in a more sophisticated way than has been attempted before. Besides numbers of inhabitants, the use of statistical methods – in this case stepwise regression analysis – allows us to take account of other factors in the various municipalities that are likely to have an effect on crime levels. These might include the size of social welfare payments per inhabitant, for example, or the proportion of the population in what are termed criminally active age groups. By taking a large number of such factors into consideration, it is possible to calculate the crime level we would expect to find in the respective local authorities given their profiles on those factors whose combined effect on crime levels is greatest. The results provide a picture of which local authority areas have a higher crime level than we would expect to find given their profiles, and which have a lower than expected crime level.

The calculations conducted in the study relate to the levels of theft and violent offences in the different local authorities. These calculations are based on the average number of offences per inhabitant during the period 1997 to 1999. A classification of the country's local authorities employed by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities has been used in order to divide

the municipalities into suitable groups for analysis and comparison. Not all of Sweden's local authorities can be compared in a meaningful way. For a number of reasons, Sweden's three metropolitan municipalities are not included in the study.

Using the statistical method chosen for the study, it is possible to calculate the difference between the local authorities' expected crime levels and the levels of crime actually reported. Since some degree of uncertainty is unavoidable in analyses of this kind, the results must be interpreted with some caution. For this reason, exact figures are not presented in the report, with the local authorities instead being divided into five categories on the basis of how much their actual reported crime levels deviate from the expected levels once structural conditions have been taken into account. The categories are labelled substantially higher crime levels than expected, higher than expected, expected, lower and substantially lower than expected.

Among other things, the results show that approximately one third of the 285 local authorities studied generally have an actual level of reported crime that lies close to the expected level. The analyses of theft offences show that 37 municipalities have a substantially higher level (at least 20 per cent higher than expected) and that 40 local authorities have a substantially lower level (at least 20 per cent lower than expected). As regards violent crime, 53 local authorities have a substantially higher level, whereas 55 present a substantially lower level. A further finding is that certain local authorities have substantially higher than expected levels of both theft and violent offences. The tables included in the report present those municipalities whose crime levels are higher or lower than expected. The appendices present findings for all local authorities.

The study takes into account virtually all those structural factors which may be assumed to have an effect on the municipalities' crime levels and for which register data are available. These factors or conditions are primarily of a kind that the local authorities would find it very difficult or impossible to affect themselves, at least in the short term. They are grouped in categories labelled resource levels, social contacts, criminal opportunity structure, participation and the demographic characteristics of the municipal population. Rather more concrete examples of the conditions in the study include the proportion of the population who are unemployed, levels of moves into and out of the municipality, different age groups, the level of tourism and the level of electoral participation among the municipal population.

Within a local authority, there may be factors other than those included in the statistical model that exercise a decisive effect on the crime level. It is therefore essential that individual, and often more qualitative factors within the local authorities are taken into account in the subsequent comparisons and analyses.

The factors included in the statistical models explain approximately half of the differences in the municipal crime levels. The causes of the remaining differences between local authorities ought to a large extent to be of a kind that it might be possible to affect in a way that would be of significance for

the crime level. This might to some extent be a question of the decisions that are made and the work conducted on a wide front in a particular local authority, and to some extent a question of more pronounced crime preventive measures.

To begin with, the findings from this study answer the question of whether the crime level in a certain local authority is high or low. The results may also be used as the basis for direct comparisons between different local authorities. In order to make decisions as which concrete measures ought to be employed in order to reduce crime within a local authority, it is essential however to supplement the results produced in the statistical study. This requires more thorough surveys and analysis of crime at the local level, of what it is that lies behind a high or a low crime level respectively and of what can be done in order to affect this level. The results may also be used as a basis for decisions regarding the distribution of resources within local authorities and the justice system.