

English summary

Juvenile robbery in Malmö and Stockholm

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The National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) has carried out a study of juvenile robbery in Malmö and Stockholm. The study is partly based on statistics relating to robberies reported to the police during the latter part of the 1990s, and partly on a questionnaire survey administered in the autumn of 1999. The questionnaire was answered by approximately 4,500 youths aged around 15 and 17 respectively.

The results show that police reports of robberies committed by juveniles have increased sharply. This increase may to some extent reflect a real rise in the number of robberies committed by juveniles, but also an increased propensity to report such robberies on the part of the youths who have been robbed. There is also some evidence that part of the increase might comprise incidents initially recorded by the police as "robberies" but of such a character that they are redefined as "thefts" at a later stage in the judicial process. Of the pupils in year 9 in October/November 1999 (approximately 15 years old), a little over 10 per cent of the boys and 5 per cent of the girls reported that they had been robbed since they started attending secondary school. These figures were more or less the same for the pupils in their second year in further education (around 17 years of age). In addition, approximately 10 per cent of the boys and 5 per cent of the girls reported having robbed other youths since they started attending secondary school. These figures apply both to those in year 9, and to those in further education.

Of the suspected perpetrators, 90 per cent were boys, commonly aged 15 to 17 and in many cases, though by no means always, from relatively disadvantaged residential areas. Youths born outside Sweden were substantially over-represented, whilst Swedish born youths with at least one foreign-born parent were not. Among those who were robbed, youths from relatively well off residential areas were somewhat over-represented, as were youths born in Sweden to two Swedish-born parents.

According to the school pupils, approximately half of the robberies by juveniles were committed during the daytime, and half were also committed despite the presence of an adult nearby. According to the pupils, the adults either didn't realise what was happening (25 per cent) or were aware of what was going on but chose nonetheless not to intervene (20-25 per cent). Alcohol and drugs were seldom a factor in these robberies. In the robberies reported to the police, the use of violence fell off substantially between the years 1995 and 1999 in both Malmö and Stockholm. The use of threats increased, however. Weapons were very rarely used (in less than 10 per cent of robberies). The number of robberies of mobile phones reported to the police underwent a dramatic increase, primarily during 1998 and 1999. Mobile phone robberies cannot however account for the increase in police-reported robberies that took place in 1997, nor that in Malmö during the first six months of 1999.

Incidents characterised either by no explicit threats or violence, or where such threats/ violence were present only to a very limited degree, account for a not insignificant part of the increase in robberies reported to the police. The victim was scared, very conscious of the threat posed by the perpetrators, and felt forced to hand over what the robbers demanded for fear of being beaten up. In the course of the process from the police report to the court hearing, it was not unusual for such incidents to be re-categorised as theft, sometimes in combination with threatening behaviour.

Approximately 60 to 70 per cent of the youths in the school survey reported that they would certainly report the incident to the police if they were robbed tomorrow. Around half of the youths who had been robbed said that they had reported the incident to the police. The most common reasons for not reporting a robbery to the police were a lack of confidence in the police and in the police's ability to arrest the perpetrators, the fact that they wouldn't get back what had been stolen whatever happened, and that the robbers wouldn't be punished anyway. Fear was also expressed that the perpetrators would get to know that the victim had reported them to the police.

Approximately 10 to 20 per cent of the pupils who had been robbed sustained physical injuries in connection with the robbery, a small proportion of these injuries were such that the individual in question sought medical attention. Around half reported feelings of humiliation, or outrage, or that they felt angry with themselves and so on as a result of the incident. Approximately 80 to 90 per cent felt hatred and the desire for revenge against the perpetrators, often reporting that these feelings remained with them for a long time. Around a third of the youths did not tell their parents that they had been robbed. Twenty-five of the 200 or so pupils who had reported being robbed to the po-

lice reported having been threatened in order to get them to withdraw the charges brought against the perpetrators. Twenty-four pupils ignored these threats, which in four cases led to the threats being realised, either in the form of assault or in further threats.

A large proportion of the youths either themselves, or in some other more or less immediate form, had some experience of juvenile robbery. A relatively large proportion of the robberies were committed by youths with an immigrant background, this proportion taking on even larger dimensions in the subjective perceptions of the youths themselves, which is significant since it is such perceptions which form the basis for future attitudes and value judgements. The physical, psychological and economic consequences of being robbed in this way are usually relatively limited, even if there are isolated instances where such consequences can constitute a serious violation of an individual's personal integrity. From an overall societal perspective, juvenile robberies and trends in such robberies may also have consequences for the values and attitudes held by the younger generation with respect to immigrants.

It is not self-evident that juvenile robberies have entailed an increase in juvenile offending in general, nor that this type of teenage crime is here to stay and will escalate. It would be unwise, however, to assume that such robberies are merely a temporary phenomenon, not least given the increased risk for hostility towards immigrants which may result. The responsibility for preventing this type of offending rests in part with the police, who in many areas have begun to prioritise measures focused on robberies by juveniles, but also with other social institutions and agencies such as schools, clubs, the social services, youth organisations, parents and so forth. Groups with a coordinatory role at the local level, such as the local crime prevention councils, may have an important role to play in this regard, working to increase the propensity to report offences, to provide support for victims and to attempt to neutralise any increases in anti-immigrant hostilities that may result. There might also be good grounds for revising, developing and working to increase awareness of the technical possibilities for quick, simple and secure blocking of (stolen) mobile telephones.