

2003/5

# Lethal violence in the crime statistics

# Contents

<b>FOREWORD</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>THE OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY</b>	<b>4</b>
Data and research method	4
<b>SWEDISH TRENDS IN LETHAL VIOLENCE REPORTED TO THE POLICE SINCE THE 1950s</b>	<b>5</b>
Factors that may affect statistics relating to offences reported to the police	5
Cases of lethal violence overestimated in official statistics	7
Only a small proportion of events reported related to actual cases of lethal violence	8
Description of the cases registered incorrectly	10
Negligent homicide	12
<b>SUMMARY OF SOURCES OF ERROR IN RELATION TO FATAL VIOLENCE</b>	<b>14</b>
Concluding remarks	15
<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>16</b>

## Foreword

Crimes reported to the police have been presented in the official crime statistics since the 1950s. This means that there are statistics covering a substantial period of time, which makes it possible to follow crime trends. Crime statistics overestimate the actual number of cases of lethal violence, however. This has been known for a long time, and is a result of the fact that deaths are reported as cases of lethal violence as soon as there is a suspicion that a crime may have been committed. Over the course of the subsequent legal process, the death may turn out to have been the result of natural causes, for example, but it is nonetheless offences reported to the police that constitute the basis for the crime statistics.

There is much to suggest that there may have been an increase since the beginning of the 1990s in the extent to which the statistics relating to reported offences overestimate levels of lethal violence. One of the reasons suggested for this is that the registration of offences reported to the police was computerised at this time. This procedural change involved the disappearance of many of the controls built into the manual registration system.

According to the official crime statistics, 223 cases of consummated murder, manslaughter, assault resulting in death and infanticide were reported to the police in 2002. This constitutes the highest number of cases registered in modern times. During the spring of 2003, the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ) determined that Mikael Rying, a criminologist working at the county police authority in Stockholm, would be given a special assignment to conduct a detailed study of all offences of this kind reported to the police, in order to determine the actual number of cases of lethal violence that occurred in Sweden during the year 2002. The assignment also included studying the number of reported cases of negligent homicide (other than those that occurred at workplaces or in relation to road traffic accidents) that ought actually to have been categorised as lethal violence.

In addition to the objective of determining the actual number of cases of lethal violence in 2002, the results will also serve as the basis for the development of new routines for the presentation of these offences. Work to modify the presentation of the statistics has already been started, and will involve the creation of parallel routines specifically for the presentation of lethal violence in the statistics.

*Jan Andersson*  
Acting Director General

*Barbro Loogna*  
Acting Head of Division

## The objective of the study

The objective of this survey is to describe the background to the problems associated with the presentation of lethal violence in the official crime statistics and to specify the actual number of cases of lethal violence that occurred in Sweden in the year 2002.

### Data and research method

The official crime statistics are based on the information relating to reported offences registered by the police. According to the coding instructions employed by the police in relation to reports of lethal violence, these offences, with the exception of infanticide, are to be recorded as murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death (BRÅ, 2003). According to the crime statistics, a total of 219 cases of consummated murder, manslaughter and assault resulting in death were reported during the year 2002. This study also includes the four cases of infanticide reported during the same year, and thus a total of 223 offences are covered.

Research has shown that each year during the 1990s, a number of cases of lethal violence have been recorded under the rubric "negligent homicide" (Rying, 2000 and 2003). For this reason, the study has also reviewed the 65 cases categorised by the police as negligent homicide that do not relate to road traffic accidents or injuries sustained at work.

All offence reports relating to the crime types referred to above were collected by the National Council for Crime Prevention from the respective police authorities. These documents were then examined, and where necessary contact was established with the investigating officer at the police authority in question in order to clarify whether or not an offence had been committed. By means of this method, with the exception of a few cases where the police investigation was still underway at the time of the study, it has been possible to establish the number of actual cases of lethal violence reported in 2002.

## Swedish trends in lethal violence reported to the police since the 1950s

According to the official crime statistics, the number of crimes of lethal violence in Sweden has increased from between 50 and 100 cases per year during the period 1950-1964 to between 100 and 200 cases per year thereafter. In the year 2002 this figure increased to reach a record level of 223 cases (Figure 1).

Thus there has been a doubling in the number of reported offences since the year 1965. Even if there has been an increase in the actual number of cases of lethal violence, this does not account for the whole of the increase registered in the official statistics. There are other factors that also serve to explain this increase, such as major alterations in the procedures used to produce the official crime statistics for example. As can be seen from Figure 1, there are three “peaks” in the trend for this category of offences that may require explanation, in the period 1965-68, in the year 1979, and then from 1992 onwards.

### Factors that may effect statistics relating to offences reported to the police

On January 1<sup>st</sup> 1965, a major reorganisation of the official crime statistics took place at the same time as the police service was nationalised and the Penal Code came into effect. In combination, these events had a major effect on the contents of the crime statistics, not least in relation to lethal violence (SCB, 1993).

In 1964, 78 cases of lethal violence were reported to the police, whilst the corresponding figure for 1965 was 201. A review of the reported offences revealed that the increase was in reality much more modest (Sveri, 1974). Whilst sixteen of the offences reported in 1964 were categorised under the rubric “assault from which death resulted”, 114 such offences were reported in 1965. The inspection of the reported offences showed that the correct figure for 1965 was in fact 24 offences. The remaining reports related to other forms of crime, such as break-ins at news/ confectioners shops, shoplifting and fraud. A high, if somewhat decreasing level of lethal violence was also recorded as having been reported to the police during the two subsequent years.

The higher level of crimes recorded in 1979 relates to the so-called hospital murders, where an individual employed at a large hospital was reported for 27 cases of murder by poisoning against patients

The trend towards a higher level of reported lethal violence took place for the most part between the 1950s and the mid 1970s. Thereafter, the curve flattens out and lies relatively stable at an average of 134 offences per year until the beginning of the 1990s. From the year 1992, the number of reported cases of lethal violence increased to a level that is considerably higher than it has been previously. Although data do show that the number of cases did in fact rise that year, the net increase was not as substantial as the gross increase (Rying, 2000). Once again, the substantial increase in the number of reported offences is

probably related to a major reorganisation of the basis for the crime statistics, which in this case was initiated in 1992. This was the year when the police's new offence reporting system (Rationell Anmälans Rutin – RAR), began to be used on a large scale, to be introduced across the whole of the country a few years later. The new system involves the police officer to whom an offence is reported entering the report directly into a computer. Once the report has been made out, it is immediately registered in a database. This database then constitutes the source for the information delivered by the National Police Board (Rikspolisstyrelsen - RPS) to the National Council for Crime Prevention, which then constitutes the basis for the official crime statistics.

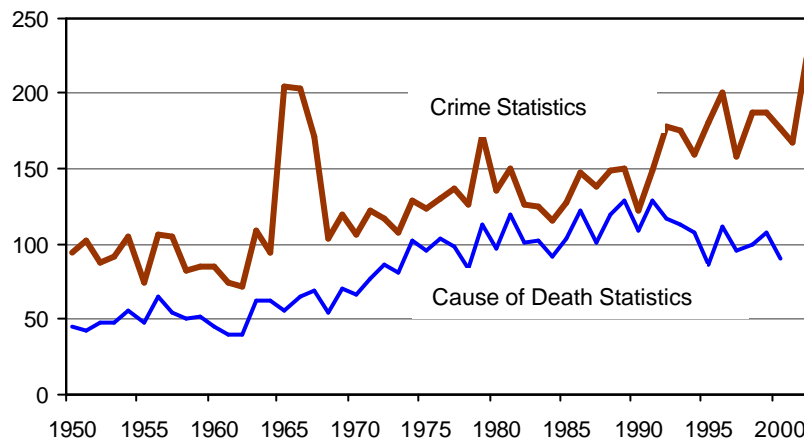


Figure 1. Number of cases of consummated murder, manslaughter, infanticide and assault resulting in death reported to the police in Sweden, and other forms of assault recorded in the cause of death statistics during the period 1950–2002. Sources: Statistics Sweden (SCB), the National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ), and the National Board of Health and Welfare (Socialstyrelsen).

Previously, the offence reports had been written out on a typewriter and checked by the duty officer, who also filled in the offence code. A further check then took place at the RPS before the report was registered in the database used to supply the information for the crime statistics. Thus levels of control over the contents of police reports were greater prior to the introduction of RAR, and there were fewer individuals involved in the registration of offences.

It is therefore important to make careful preparations when changes are introduced that may effect the crime statistics. A careful analysis must be conducted into the problems that may arise, and of the needs of the parties affected by the changes. In this way it will be possible in the future to avoid the mistakes that have been made in connection with previous changes, and which have led to errors appearing in the statistics relating to reported offences.

## Cases of lethal violence overestimated in the crime statistics

As the above presentation shows, there have been large errors in the levels of lethal violence recorded in the official crime statistics for a little over ten years now. An earlier study of trends in lethal violence in the Stockholm local authority area during the period 1951-1991 found that the proportion of incorrectly registered cases increased over time (Wikström, 1993). This may indicate that the large proportion of incorrectly recorded cases of lethal violence found in today's crime statistics may be the result of a relatively long process.

It must not be forgotten that the whole of the system that serves to weave together the requirements of the police and the crime statistics respectively is subject to an inbuilt problem. The system on which the crime statistics are based, i.e. the police's offence report system, RAR, was in the first instance developed for the purposes of police work, and not for use in the production of crime statistics. This involves problems when this information is then used as the basis for the official crime statistics. A murder that is reported twice does not constitute a problem for the police in the short term, for example, but results in the registration of two murders in the crime statistics. Given that an average of only 90-100 murders are committed in Sweden each year, incorrect reports of this kind have a disproportionate affect over the course of a given year.

The information recorded in the crime statistics thus shows a greatly exaggerated number of offences of this kind. In order to retrieve the information required to be able to determine whether a reported offence actually constitutes a case of lethal violence, a manual review has to be conducted of the offence reports themselves. This method was employed in a study of all cases of lethal violence reported in Sweden during the period 1990-1998 (Rying, 2000). The study showed that an average 43 per cent of the reported offences related to incidents that were not in fact cases of consummated lethal violence. Instead, these incidents related to such things as acts of lethal violence committed abroad, suicides, accidents or cases of natural death which may at first have been perceived as cases of lethal violence.

In order to develop a conception of the actual prevalence of lethal violence, crime statistics are sometimes compared with cause of death statistics (e.g. Knutsson, 1984, Olsson, 1996, Rying, 2000). A comparison of this kind covering the period 1950-2000 (cause of death data are as yet not available for subsequent years) shows a strikingly similar trend over time, with certain exceptions (Figure 1). There is a certain level of discrepancy between the two sources throughout the entire period, but the extent of this difference increases substantially during the 1990s. One of the reasons for the large difference during the period 1965-1968, as was previously mentioned, is to be found in the incorrect registration of incidents as lethal violence that occurred in connection with the reorganisation of the official statistics in 1965.

In the study of lethal violence in Sweden during the period 1990-1998 referred to above, a comparison was conducted between the cause of death statistics and the actual incidents that remained once incorrectly recorded cases had been removed from the analysis (Rying, 2000). The study showed that there were differences between the two sources, both on a yearly basis and in total.

These differences were substantially smaller than those found in relation to the number of cases recorded in the official crime statistics, however, and totalled an average of approximately ten cases per year. There may be several reasons for these differences, including amongst others differences in the sources on which the statistics are based and the definitions employed, differences between legal and medical perceptions, differences in the populations covered and incorrectly recorded cases.

In summary, then, there are differences between the number of cases and the data on which the cause of death statistics are based on the one hand and actual levels of lethal violence (once incorrectly recorded cases have been removed) on the other. The cause of death statistics for a given year are published later than the crime statistics. A comparison of these statistical series once they have been published may lead to a greater understanding of why certain cases are recorded by the one set of statistics and not by the other, which might in time serve to reduce levels of error.

### Only a small proportion of the cases reported to the police actually related to lethal violence

According to the official crime statistics, then, 223 crimes of lethal violence, i.e. murder, manslaughter, assault resulting in death and infanticide were reported in Sweden in 2002. Of these, only a minority actually constituted cases of lethal violence. Thereafter an additional offence has been added, but this has not been included in the current study.

#### FINDINGS FROM THE STUDY

<b>Correctly registered offences (in accordance with instructions)</b>	124
Lethal violence in Sweden	91
committed in 2002	88
committed prior to 2002	3
Lethal violence abroad	24
Conspiracy to murder (not consummated)	9
<b>Incorrectly registered offences</b>	89
Attempted or preparatory offences	11
Alcohol/drug related poisoning, suicide, accidents or natural death	28
Reported more than once	25
Other or unknown non-criminal cause	25
<b>Unclear if an offence has been committed</b>	10
Insufficient evidence of crime	2
Investigation underway at time of study	8
<b>Total</b>	223
Lethal violence reported in Sweden in 2002 (see above)	91
Lethal violence recorded as negligent homicide	7
<b>Sum of reported cases of lethal violence in Sweden in 2002</b>	98



A victim of the lethal violence could be identified in connection with 91 of the 223 reported cases of lethal violence examined in the study (i.e. in 41 per cent of the offences). In a further eight cases, at the time of the study, the investigation was still underway into whether or not the incidents were in fact cases of lethal violence. Even if all eight of these incidents turned out to constitute cases of lethal violence, the reported offences have still been correctly classified less than half of the time. This means that the problems associated with the presentation of lethal violence in the crime statistics that were experienced during the 1990s remain, and that these problems are even clearer now than they were then. At no time during the period 1990-1998 was the proportion of actual cases lower than that indicated by the preliminary results for 2002 (Figure 2).

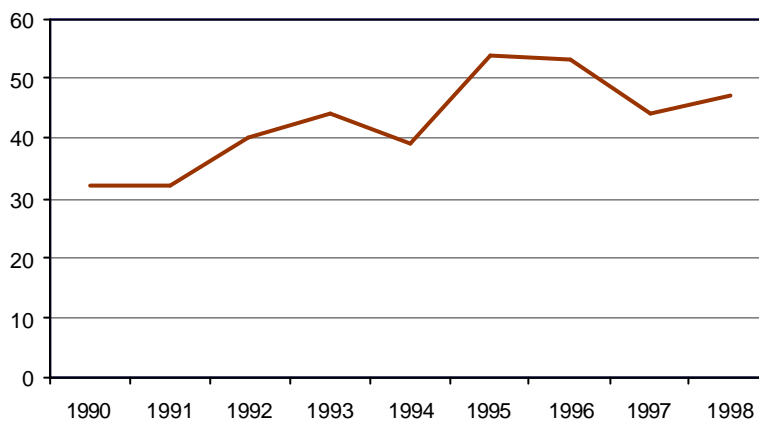


Figure 2. Proportion (per cent) of incorrectly registered cases of consummated murder, manslaughter, assault resulting in death and infanticide during the period 1990-1998.

Of the 91 offences actually committed, 88 occurred during the year 2002. Together with the seven offences that were found in the review of the cases categorised as negligent homicide, and which are presented below, a total of 95 persons fell victim to incidents of lethal violence in Sweden in 2002. It should once again be noted that there are a further eight cases where it has as yet not been possible to establish whether or not the incident in question constituted a case of lethal violence.

In three cases, then, the offences were committed earlier, namely in 1993, 1999 and 2001 respectively, but these offences were not discovered and reported until 2002. It is not particularly uncommon for offences to be reported that were committed during previous years. In the study of lethal violence during the 1990s referred to above, such cases were found among the offences reported in all of the years covered by the study bar one (Rying, 2000). Among all the offences reported during 2002, including those that were classified incorrectly, 30 had been committed prior to the year 2002.

## Description of the incorrectly recorded cases

The findings presented in the table show that a large number of offences are incorrectly registered as cases of lethal violence. Many of these registration errors could probably have been avoided if there had been a wider variety of coding options, and if police knowledge of the coding regulations had been adequate.

Within the category of offences that have been correctly registered we find amongst other things *incidents of lethal violence that were committed abroad but reported in Sweden and conspiracy to commit murder or manslaughter*. It must be pointed out that these offences have been registered in accordance with the coding instructions or accepted registration praxis. It is questionable, however, whether these offences ought to be presented as cases of lethal violence in the Swedish crime statistics.

Among the offences included among the cases of *lethal violence committed abroad*, there are *inter alia* several reported offences relating to lethal violence reportedly perpetrated in the former Yugoslavia. In the county of Skåne, for example, one offence report includes fifteen murders committed in the former Yugoslavia in 1992. Offences of this kind have been reported in Sweden more or less throughout the 1990s, largely as a result of the stream of refugees arriving in Sweden from Yugoslavia during this period. In addition, a number of offences are included that were reportedly committed in the Middle East, for example. In the study of cases from the 1990s, there were also many recorded offences relating to crimes committed in Chile during the 1970s. These cases were for the most part reported in 1998 when Chile's former dictator, Pinochet, was arrested in London. The consequence of these reported offences is that the cases to which they refer are presented as "Swedish" crimes in the official crime statistics. This situation could be avoided if offences committed abroad were to be presented separately.

According to the coding instructions, *conspiracy to commit murder or manslaughter* should be recorded under the same offence code as consummated cases of lethal violence when an offence report is made out. For this reason, conspiracy offences are registered as consummated offences. The crime itself involves an individual exhorting one or more others to kill the intended victim. This need not therefore mean that there is a victim of an actual incident of lethal violence. A separate offence code or presentation of conspiracy offences together with attempted murder or manslaughter would serve to overcome this problem.

The category *incorrectly registered offences* contains a large number of incidents not related to lethal violence.

There are no instructions as to how incitement to murder or manslaughter should be coded, nor is there a specific offence code for this crime. One likely cause for this situation may be that, according to the coding instructions, there is no such category of offences to report. This crime involves a person having succeeded in getting one or more persons to kill somebody. Thus there should already be a completed offence report relating to the killing itself, on which the individual suspected of inciting the offence should be registered. Since none of these offences were found to relate to a dead person, they should have been reported as conspiracy to murder. In addition, the question arises as to whether

the content of the crime categorisation was clear to the officers who wrote up the offence reports. If not, the incorrect recording of these types of crime ought to be reduced if training in the coding of offences were to be improved.

According to the coding instructions, both *attempted murder or manslaughter* and *preparing to commit* murder should be coded using one of the codes available for “attempted murder or manslaughter”, something which had not always happened. The offences that had been incorrectly recorded in relation to these categories of crime have thus been coded as consummated offences. This may have been caused by neglect in the course of the coding process. Further, it ought not to be possible to register an incident as lethal violence when there is no dead victim involved.

In many other cases, it is a question of incidents having been reported that appeared at first sight to involve lethal violence. It may be that a person was found dead and the cause of death was unclear. In order to devote the major police resources that are as a rule put in place in cases of lethal violence, a completed offence report is required. Amongst other things, police technicians are called in order to secure possible evidence relating to a perpetrator, for example, or a possible murder weapon. In some such cases, the forensic medical examiner finds that the death does not involve a crime. In these cases, however, the incident nonetheless remains recorded in the crime statistics, since these are based on offence reports. Examples of cases of this kind include suicide, alcohol or drug poisoning, accidents, deaths by natural causes or illness, or deaths resulting from unknown but non-criminal causes.

In 1997, in response to amongst other things cases of this kind that had been incorrectly recorded, the National Council for Crime Prevention introduced a new offence code labelled, *specification of offence deferred awaiting investigation* with the offence code “000” (BRÅ, 1998). The idea was that this code could be employed where the cause of death was unclear, for example. The measure appeared also to have an effect. The number of reported cases of lethal violence fell sharply in 1997 by comparison with the previous year, from 199 offences in 1996 to 157 offences in 1997. But as early as the following year, the number of reported offences rose sharply again, despite the fact that the number of actual incidents of lethal violence increased only marginally (Rying, 2000). The question is why the provision of this new opportunity for reflection did not have the desired effect. One hypothesis is that information on the new offence code had not been disseminated to the required extent.

A number of cases have been categorised as *false reports*, and often relate to persons suffering from mental illness who report incidents of lethal violence that have not taken place other than in their own imaginations. During the 1990s an average of four such cases were recorded per year, as was also the case in 2002.

*Repeat reporting* accounted for slightly over ten per cent of the cases of lethal violence reported over the course of 2002. These may be divided into two principal groups:

- *Re-registration of old cases* that were originally reported prior to the introduction of the RAR offence reporting system. Here it is a question of old cases that are to be re-examined. In order to be able to deal with new information in these cases, the routines require that a new report is made out in the RAR system. This means that old offences are presented as new crimes in the crime

statistics. One example relates to a presumed murder that was committed in 1982 and that was now to be re-examined. In this situation, the police are forced to complete a new offence report for the reasons just described.

- The same *case is registered several times in connection with the same investigation*. In several cases, more crimes have been registered than were actually committed. One example of this phenomenon may be found in a case where there were two victims, but which was recorded as involving three victims; and where, in addition, the offence report was completed twice. This means that a total of six offences were registered, of which only two were correct. Furthermore, the two offences actually involved had been committed several years earlier.

In another case, five offences were reported even though only one crime had been committed. This offence report contained three reported incidents of murder and two reported incidents of negligent homicide. It is clear that there was a lack of knowledge as to how to work with the RAR system in this case.

Incorrectly registered offences of this kind, in combination with the reported offences committed abroad, constitute the largest group of incorrectly recorded cases. Not least for this reason, it is important to find solutions to the problems described here. In addition, as has been mentioned earlier, each year there are both correctly and incorrectly recorded offences which were committed prior to the year in which they were reported. The largest proportion of incorrectly registered offences nonetheless do relate to cases where a deceased person figures in the investigation. Usually, the question of whether or not the incident actually involves a crime is resolved within the space of a week or so.

In summary, then, there are major problems with the data which serve as the basis for the official crime statistics. As was described above, there are obvious problems built into the system whereby the same data are employed by two different end-users with quite different requirements, namely the police and their investigative operations on the one hand, and the National Council for Crime Prevention and its production of crime statistics on the other.

## Negligent homicide

According to the instructions for the coding of criminal offences, all cases of lethal violence, besides infanticide, should be reported as murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death. There is much to suggest, however, that every year many cases of lethal violence are reported as negligent homicide. This category of offences may be coded in accordance with three sub-groups relation to such homicides: in connection with road traffic accidents, in connection with accidents in the workplace and 'other' cases. In order to investigate whether there were cases of lethal violence concealed among the negligent homicide offences, an earlier study examined all reported cases recorded in the 'other' category for the years 1990 and 1995 (Rying, 2000 and 2003). Preliminary data indicate that there were a number of such cases recorded among the negligent homicides and these are presented later in this section. The first two categories, i.e. those relating to road accidents and accidents at the workplace were not deemed to be relevant, even though isolated cases of incorrect recording cannot be ruled out.

For these reasons the current study conducted a review of all 65 reported cases of negligent homicide - 'other' (offence code 0392), from 2002. In 31 of these cases, violent crime was suspected as the cause of the negligent homicide. According to the coding instructions, these cases should have been reported as murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death, which they had had not been. Seven of the 31 offences finally showed themselves to have constituted cases of consummated lethal violence. In one case the investigation is still ongoing into whether the incident had involved lethal violence. This means that almost half of these negligent homicide offences should have been reported as murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death, and that slightly over ten per cent of them showed themselves after investigation to have constituted cases of consummated lethal violence.

What distinguishes these incorrectly recorded offences is that they may be characterised as assaults where weapons were absent. In three of the cases, the victims were women, in two cases men and in a further two cases the victims were young children. In these cases, as in other cases where violent crime is suspected to be the cause of death, the offences had usually been categorised as aggravated assault and negligent homicide. For some reason, the police involved in coding these cases have misunderstood the coding instructions. Misunderstandings in relation to this issue have been occurring for some considerable time, however. The preliminary findings from a review of all the cases of negligent homicide from the years 1990 and 1995 indicates similar findings (Rying, 2003). In 1990, 25 reported offences were identified that might be described as violent crimes resulting in death, of which five finally showed themselves to be so, whilst the corresponding figures for 1995 were thirteen and three offences respectively. In addition, data from the county of Stockholm also show that a number of offences are recorded as negligent homicide each year that ought instead to have been reported as murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death.

Violent offences reported as negligent homicide have also been found to contain a large number of cases that had been incorrectly registered. Of the reported cases of negligent homicide from 2002 which were suspected of constituting cases of violent crime resulting in death, a majority were found to consist in something other than an accident or a death from natural causes. Thus the problem with the cases that were reported as consummated murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death remains.

In summary, then, the review of the cases of negligent homicide shows that there are a large number of cases that should have been reported as murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death. In turn, a large proportion of these incidents have been incorrectly registered as criminal offences. The major factor underlying the whole complex of problems is probably a misunderstanding of how one is supposed to report suspected or actual cases of violent crime resulting in death.

An additional consequence of the way in which a violent crime resulting in death is categorised relates to the fact that offences which require intent, such as murder or manslaughter have to be prosecuted within 25 and 15 years respectively according to the Swedish statute of limitations contained within the Penal Code, whereas this period is only ten years in relation to uncleared offences which do not require intent (BrB 35:1).

## Summary of sources of error in relation to lethal violence

### RISK FOR OVERESTIMATING THE LEVEL OF LETHAL VIOLENCE

- *Cases coded incorrectly.* The review of the study's primary data found a substantial overestimation of the level of lethal violence, by almost 60 per cent in 2002, and by an average of 43 per cent during the period 1990-1998.

- *Shortcomings in coding instructions in relation to lethal violence and all other types of crime.*

Offences committed abroad but reported in Sweden are counted as cases of lethal violence committed in Sweden. According to the instructions, conspiracy to murder should be coded as a case of consummated lethal violence.

- *In many cases, mistakes are made when an offence report is made out.* Examples of this include those cases of attempted murder or manslaughter or of preparing to commit murder that have incorrectly come to be reported as consummated offences. Another example relates to cases reported as incitement to murder. The act of incitement involves the suspect as a perpetrator in the offence, and this suspect should thus be linked to the original report relating to the murder victim.

- *On many occasions, the police are unsure of the cause of death at the beginning of an investigation.* The police have clearly not availed themselves of the opportunity to register reported offences under the rubric "specification of offence deferred awaiting investigation".

- *Incidents that have been reported on more than one occasion* comprise a large proportion of the registered cases.

- *Differences between medical and legal assessments of what is regarded as constituting lethal violence.* One example of differences of this kind may be found in those cases which the forensic medical examiner views as cases of lethal violence and which are thus reported as such, but which a court then determines not to be cases of criminal lethal violence, as may be the case with acts of self defence for example. This difference may lead to a certain overestimation of the level of lethal violence.

- *Crimes reported in different years from those in which they were committed.* The reviews of offence reports for both 2002 and for the period 1990-1998 show that offences are reported each year which have been committed in years other than those in which they were reported. Many of these cases relate to persons who had been missing for a short or longer period of time and who were then found to have been killed.

### RISK FOR UNDERESTIMATING THE LEVEL OF LETHAL VIOLENCE

- *Cases coded incorrectly.* There is a risk that cases of lethal violence have been incorrectly coded as other types of crime. On the basis of the comparison conducted with the cause of death statistics, the number of such cases is likely to be fewer than the number of cases that involve a risk for overestimating levels of lethal violence.

- *Definition of lethal violence.* The survey presented above shows that some of the reported cases of negligent homicide - 'other' should have been recorded as cases of murder, manslaughter or assault resulting in death. One explanation for this may be that at the time when the offence was reported, the police assessment was that the offence had been committed without intent. This would place the case outside of the statistics that are normally presented as "lethal violence". The issue of intent ought really to be a matter for the judicial process and not for the police.

- *Undiscovered offences – missing persons.* Every year a large number of persons are reported missing in Sweden. Of these, a small number are never found. The study shows that some of these turn up as victims of lethal violence after a brief or somewhat longer period of time. There is a risk that additional cases of this kind remain undiscovered.

- *Undiscovered offences – fewer autopsies.* As a result of legislative changes, the number of autopsies conducted in Sweden has fallen since the 1970s (Veress, 1994). In certain cases, this reduction is viewed as having the potential to affect the possibility of determining whether or not an offence has taken place in connection with a given death (ibid). Further, changes have taken place with regard to which doctors are qualified to issue death certificates and cause of death certificates. This means, for example, that less qualified doctors get to decide whether or not an autopsy should be conducted. Another study has also shown that there are flaws in the routines related to those cases where unnatural deaths are reported to the police (Rammer et al., 1997). The study included 973 deaths from 1993 that occurred at different places around Sweden. When a death results from unnatural causes, the case should be reported to the police by the doctor. Of 121 such cases included in the study, no police report had been filed in 32 cases (26 per cent). No autopsy had been conducted in the same number of cases. There is data showing that 5-10 per cent of all violent crimes that result in death are discovered in connection with the forensic autopsy (ibid). This may mean that cases of lethal violence are not being discovered and registered as such.

## Concluding remarks

To summarise, the above presentation shows that there are major problems involved with attempts to specify the correct number of cases of lethal violence in Sweden on the basis of the official crime statistics. At the same time, there are good opportunities to affect this situation. On the basis of the results of this study, work has begun to develop measures that will minimise the risk for the various sources of error to affect the statistics relating to lethal violence.

## References

- BRÅ** (1998). *Kriminalstatistik 1997*. BRÅ-rapport 1998:3. Brottsförebyggande rådet. Stockholm: Fritzes.
- BRÅ** (2003). *Kodning av brott*. Stockholm: Brottsförebyggande rådet.
- Rammer, L., Gustavsson, E., Forsberg, M., Ahlm, K. and Eriksson, A.** (1997). *Brister i handläggningen av dödsfall utanför sjukhus*. Läkartidningen, Vol. 94 no. 50 1997.
- Ryning, M.** (1996). Dödligt våld. In: *Brottsutvecklingen 1994*. BRÅ-rapport 1996:4. Stockholm: Brottsförebyggande rådet. Fritzes.
- Ryning, M.** (2000). *Dödligt våld i Sverige 1990-1998*. En deskriptiv studie. Licentiatavhandling. Stockholm: Kriminologiska institutionen.
- Ryning, M.** (2003). *Problem med underlaget för redovisningen av dödligt våld*. Unpublished work in progress. Stockholm: Polismyndigheten i Stockholms län.
- SCB** (1993). *Rättsstatistisk Årsbok 1993*. Statistiska Centralbyrån. Göteborg.
- Sveri, K.** (1974). Våldet i samhället. In: *Nordisk Tidskrift for Kriminalvidenskap* no. 1 1974. G.E.C. Gads Forlag. Köpenhamn, Danmark.
- Veress, B.** (1994). *Obduktionernas antal minskar*. Läkartidningen, Vol. 91, no. 28-29 1994.
- Wikström, P-O. H.** (1993). *Dödligt våld; sociala sammanhang och trender*. Unpublished work in progress. Stockholm: Brottsförebyggande rådet.