



# Afrophobic hate crime

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# Afrophobic hate crime

English summary of Brå report 2022:7

# Summary

With the exception of hate crimes based on general xenophobic and racist motives, Afrophobia is the most common motive found among reported hate crimes in Sweden. Nevertheless, there is a lack of more detailed knowledge on Afrophobic hate crime. This report has been written at the instruction of the Swedish government, to develop the knowledge base on Afrophobic hate crime in order to improve the opportunities to prevent these offences. The study presents a description of Afrophobic hate crimes and the settings and contexts in which they occur. The report also examines the consequences of these crimes for victims, as well as Afro-Swedes' experiences of, and confidence in, the criminal justice system.

The study has employed both a quantitative and qualitative approach. The analyses are based partly on a review of more than 430 cases of Afrophobic hate crime reported to the police, partly on 26 semi-structured interviews with people who themselves have experience of victimisation. Brå has also compiled the experiences of several interest groups with Afro-Swede memberships, and has gathered knowledge from a number of experts and researchers within the field. In addition, a seminar has been held with representatives from different parts of the criminal justice system.

## Mostly verbal abuse, but violence is also common

The study's analysis of police reports shows that these offences are dominated by incidents of defamation and harassment. Together with a third, related category, unlawful threat, these mostly verbal attacks account for around sixty percent of the reported incidents. The N-word is common, as are other derogatory terms alluding to the person's colour or origin. Dehumanising expressions appear regularly, such as referring to the victim as a monkey, and some reports also contain references to the slave trade, racial biology and white power. The attacks are directed at both individuals and Afro-Swedes as a group – the latter by scrawling Afrophobic expressions in various locations or by using them in various online forums. These incidents are typically classified as *agitation against a population group*, and account for one in five of the police reports. Afrophobic hate crimes are also characterised by a high incidence of violence compared to many other types of hate crime (almost one-fifth of reports). This violence is particularly severe in the case of attacks by strangers in public places – incidents that often lead to physical injuries.

## Wide variation in location of crime and relationship to offender

The results clearly show that Afrophobic hate crime can take different expressions and occur in many different contexts. The most common crime locations described in the police reports are streets, squares and public transport, but schools and workplaces are also common (and are often the location of repeated offences against the same person). Afrophobic hate crimes also occur in the vicinity of the victim's home and on the internet. This means that there are few places where Afro-Swedes are not at risk of becoming victims. The relationship between the victims and perpetrators of Afrophobic hate crimes also varies, from perpetrators who are complete strangers to people the victim meets almost every day (such as neighbours, colleagues and classmates). Afrophobic hate crimes sometimes occur in the context of intimate relationships, although this is relatively uncommon in the police reports examined in this study.

## Men more likely to be perpetrators, smaller gender differences among victims

While three quarters of the perpetrators were men, the difference between women's and men's exposure to Afrophobic hate crimes was relatively small overall, according to the police reports. In most crime categories, there were slightly more men among the victims (six of ten), with the exception of defamation, where women accounted for more than half. The gender differences were also relatively small in those cases involving violence, although slightly more of the victims were men. Injuries were somewhat more common in these cases. The violence had often taken place in public, regardless of whether the victim was male or female.

Sexualised or misogynistic expressions were used in just over a quarter of the reports involving a female victim, with the term "N-whore" commonly being used in these cases. Men, on the other hand, were more likely to have been victimised in their professional roles, and the victims were also usually men in the small number of police reports relating to unlawful discrimination or those where someone had been victimised by a police officer or a security guard. The interviewees described similar experiences, with women being more likely to report experiences of sexualised abuse, while men were more likely to describe negative stereotyping by police officers.

## Many of those involved are young

The victims include a high proportion of children and young people. This is particularly true in the incidents involving violence, where almost four out of ten victims were under 18. The youngest victim in the reviewed reports was seven years old, while older victims were rare – the oldest was 51. However, the

perpetrators ranged broadly in age (from ten to 80 years), but here too there was a significant proportion of young people, with almost one in four being a minor.

### Five typical cases identified

Based on the context, the nature of the offence and the relationship between those involved, the studied incidents can be summarised as involving five types of cases, which appeared in both the police reports and the interviewees' descriptions:

- **Attacks by strangers.** These can occur in many different places and at many different times, but typically involve verbal abuse from strangers in public places, although these incidents can also occur online or by telephone.
- **Threats and violence at school.** These cases usually involve students as both victims and perpetrators, and often involve violence. The perpetrators are often boys, while the gender distribution among victims is more even. These reports relate mainly to schools outside Sweden's metropolitan regions.
- **Harassment from neighbours.** These cases primarily involve repeated incidents of harassment by both men and women.
- **Hate crime in the workplace.** These cases usually involve harassment from colleagues, customers or clients, often at workplaces where intoxication is present (e.g. restaurants or taxis) or at community institutions (e.g. treatment centres).
- **Hatred towards black people as a group.** This is not aimed at individuals, but at everyone in the group. It usually involves graffiti or online comments, and is often classified as agitation against a population group.

### Both short-term and long-term consequences

The impact of hate crimes and other expressions of Afrophobia varies from individual to individual, and also depends on the perceived severity of the incident and the individual's previous experiences. In the immediate aftermath of the incident, shock and fear are common reactions. Some interviewees (both women and men) also described longer-term consequences, such as depression and having to take sick leave. For some, repeated exposure to various forms of Afrophobia led to a sense of resignation and exclusion. The fact that Afrophobic hate crime can occur in many different contexts and settings may also lead to a state of constant vigilance, which is described in the literature as minority stress. In some of the interviews, the participants described experiencing an identity crisis linked to the image of who is Swedish being limited to the white majority population – this was particularly the case for those who were born in Sweden or who came to the country as very young children (for example through adoption).

## Several factors affect confidence in the criminal justice system

Many interviewees described having low levels of confidence in the criminal justice system, and particularly the police. Many of them, mainly men, have had experiences with the police that have led them to feel that the criminal justice system is more likely to view black people as suspects than as victims of crime. The reviewed police investigations revealed that the clear-up rates for Afrophobic hate crime are low, which is true for hate crimes in general, since these crimes are often difficult to investigate. There is also an awareness among interviewees that a police report rarely results in someone being held to account. At the same time, many of those who had reported offences to the police felt a sense of frustration over the investigation of their cases being discontinued so quickly. The perceived lack of a response from the criminal justice system, and also from other societal institutions (such as schools and workplaces) and from individuals who have witnessed a hate crime, may lead to a loss of confidence in society's ability to protect Afro-Swedes. In combination, this leads to a low propensity to report offences, which means that there is likely to be a significant underreporting of Afrophobic hate crime.

## Several ongoing projects and initiatives – but more can be done

The fact that Afrophobic hate crimes occur in many different contexts and settings means that a range of different actors have a role to play in preventive work. As well as the criminal justice system, these also include schools and employers, who have a duty to combat and deal with abuse; municipalities, who can restrict the dissemination of hate messages by promptly removing graffiti; and the moderators of internet forums, who have a responsibility to promptly remove posts that contain illegal content. At the same time, many measures focus on crimes that have already been committed, rather than on preventing them. There is also a risk of overlooking the significant proportion of incidents that take the form of attacks on individuals in public places, often by unknown perpetrators. This means that if Afrophobic hate crime is to be reduced, preventive work also needs to be directed at Afrophobia in general.

The Government recently published a programme of measures to tackle Afrophobia, which identifies four areas of importance for highlighting and combating Afrophobic hate crime: *More knowledge, education and research*, *Enhanced online prevention efforts*, *A more active criminal justice system* and *Civil society: increased support and improved dialogue*. Although several projects and initiatives are ongoing within these areas, Brå is of the view that more can be done to prevent Afrophobic hate crime and to safeguard the rights of victims and meet their needs for support. In this regard, Brå would particularly like to emphasise the need to highlight the specific characteristics of hate crimes against Afro-Swedes and the opportunities to provide victims with adequate support.

There is also a need to monitor the practical application of the knowledge generated within the field and the existing regulatory framework.