

Reporting honour crimes to the police

Social workers' perspectives on benefits and costs

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Abstract

We examine how Swedish social workers and experts perceive the benefits and costs of reporting honour crimes to police. The number of actions and inactions that constitute honour crimes has increased since the law changed to include non-violent controlling behaviours. Honour crimes are collective offenses involving close victim-offender relationships. As such, they are associated with low reporting and a high dark figure. Through interviews with eleven social workers and professionals, we analyse the benefits of reporting, including accessing resources, protecting victims, deterring perpetrators, achieving justice, raising societal awareness, and building competencies among police and prosecutors. The costs of a victim involving police include the possibility of re-traumatisation, the escalation of danger from vindictive families, and damage to trust in support services. Our interviewees noted that the resource situation has improved and argued for a victim-centred response that acknowledges self-determination while recognizing the legal obligation to report crimes against minors. To increase reporting rates, there should be better coordination between police and social services, more specialized training, and an increased prioritization of honour crimes in the justice system.

Vi undersøger, hvordan svenske socialarbejdere og eksperter opfatter fordele og omkostninger ved at anmelde æresrelaterede forbrydelser til politiet. Antallet af handlinger og undladelser, der er kriminelle, er steget, da loven nu også omfatter ikke-voldelig kontrollerende adfærd. Æresrelaterede forbrydelser er kollektive lovovertrædelser med tætte relationer mellem offer og gerningsperson, faktorer der er forbundet med lav anmeldelsestilbøjelighed og derfor et stort mørketal. Gennem interviews med elleve socialarbejdere og fagfolk analyserer vi fordelene ved anmeldelse, herunder adgang til ressourcer, offerets sikkerhed, afskrækkelse af gerningspersoner, retfærdighed, øget samfundsmæssig bevidsthed og opbygning af kompetencer hos politi og anklagere. Omkostningerne ved at mobilisere politiet består af mulig re-traumatisering af ofre, øget fare fra hævngherrige familier og mindsket tillid til



socialarbejdere. Vores interviewpersoner bemærkede, at ressource-situationen er blevet forbedret og argumenterede for en offercentreret indsats, der anerkender selvbestemmelse, samtidig med at den retlige forpligtelse til at anmelde forbrydelser mod mindreårige respekteres. For at øge anmeldelsesraten bør der være bedre koordinering mellem politi og sociale tjenester, mere specialiseret uddannelse og en overordnet prioritering af æresrelaterede forbrydelser i retssystemet.

Keywords

Honour crimes; Police reporting; Victim-offender relationship; Collective norms

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Introduction

Thousands of Swedish youths are believed to be restricted by honour-related cultural norms in their daily lives (Strid et al., 2021), but the actual extent and severity of the problem is masked by low reporting rates (Brå, 2018). Honour crimes have been regulated in Sweden since a ban on female circumcision, forced marriages, and child marriages was introduced in the 1980s. Since then, several laws have expanded what actions and inactions are considered honour crimes. The legal definition now includes non-violent controlling behaviors, providing misleading information to hide honour crime, and criminal responsibility for those who do not act to prevent them (Skr. 2007/08:39). An honour motive is an aggravating circumstance and sanctions are up to six years imprisonment (Björktomta, 2019; NCH, 2022). This expansion of what constitutes honour crime aggravates the problem of low reporting. Mobilizing police is the first step in the legal process and the primary way the justice system obtains its cases (Goudriaan et al., 2004), but honour crimes are notoriously difficult to prove. Sometimes the evidence must document inactions, underlying motives, and subtly controlling behaviours (Cinthio et al., 2022; Heydari et al., 2021; Olsson and Bergman, 2021). The close social proximity between victim, offender, and accomplices, is a factor that generally depresses reporting rates (Felson et al., 2002; Hansen et al., 2021; Wolf et al., 2003).

The dark figure of crime impedes efforts to reduce violence and social control, undermines deterrence principles, efficient allocation of resources and competent policymaking (Biderman and Reiss, 1967; Gill, 2002; Ousey and Lee, 2010). Understanding the unique complexities, dilemmas and impediments in reporting honour crimes is key to improving society's protection of victims. Social workers are often the first to learn about honour crimes and they serve a key function in connecting victims with the criminal justice system. In 2014, Socialstyrelsen published a recommendation that suspicion of honour crimes involving children and young people should be reported to the police (Baianstovu et al., 2019; Olsson and Bergman, 2021). In this study, we explore the perceptions of social workers and professional experts in Sweden regarding the benefits and costs of reporting honour-based crimes

to the police. By analysing qualitative interview data, we identify the factors that influence reporting decisions. This can improve victim protection and inform strategies to increase reporting in cases of honour crimes.

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Review

The term honour crime refers to several offenses that in some way constitute non-legal punishment, committed collectively in the name of family honour (Cooney, 2014). Honour, in this context, can be defined as a form of social status based on force, rather than wealth, leadership, participation, or education (Black, 2011: 71). In some cultures, women's behaviors are sources of honour for the entire family (Björktomta, 2019; Chesler, 2010; Heydari, 2021; but see Idriss, 2022, about male victims).

Quantifying the problem is fraught with definition problems and poor data availability. A first approximation is that around 5,000 women are murdered by their family every year and honour is believed to be a motive in many of these cases (United Nations Population Fund (,2000). For every killing where honour is a motive, many more victims are warned, sent away, subtly pressured, tolerated, or otherwise dealt with without resorting to violence (Cooney, 2014; Jacques and Moeller, 2023). Recent Swedish research has estimated the extent of a broader conceptualization of honour crimes. Strid and colleagues (2021) used three surveys of 15-year-olds in Stockholm, Gothenburg and Malmö ($n = 6002$; response rate 82%) to examine honour-based violence and oppression. They estimated that 14% of respondents lived under honour-related norms, with significantly higher prevalence in Malmö (23%), where 59% of those affected were girls. Girls with low-educated and foreign-born parents were particularly vulnerable, facing isolation, violence and strict control from family members or relatives. Similarly, Björktomta (2019) interviewed 11 young female victims (aged 16-20) with non-Swedish-born parents who reported experiencing control and punishment from others when seeking help from counselors, midwives, or social workers. These punishments took various forms-physical, psychological, social, and symbolic-aimed at socialising daughters into norms of obedience and chastity to preserve family honour.

From the perpetrator's perspective, both gender and cultural explanations emerge. Cinthio and colleagues (2022) examined 12 court verdicts and 13 interviews in Sweden and found that perpetrators justified their actions based on notions of family honour and female chastity. Chesler (2010), in an analysis of 230 media-reported honour killings from 1989 to 2009, found that 58 % of victims were killed for being too independent or "westernised". However, in Grip and Dynevall's (2024) study of 16 prison clients in Sweden convicted of honour-based violence, all interviewees claimed that their actions were driven by emotions and impulses rather than ideology. In western societies, honour crimes may also be understood as efforts to maintain cultural identity (Cooney, 2014). It is not only sexism, religion, culture, but also "the systematic marginalization and stigmatisation of minorities and social groups have led them

to rely more on traditional honor codes as a kind of informal social control, exacerbating honor crimes” (Heydari et al., 2021: 86). Beyond navigating legal frameworks, social workers contend with social norms related to immigration policy (Olsson and Bergman, 2021; see also Bondeson, 2003). Reporting honour crimes extends beyond the relationship between the social worker and the victim and includes the tension of not subjecting ethnic minorities to undue cultural disrespect (Baianstovu et al., 2019).

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Theoretical framework

We position our study theoretically within the criminology on reporting crime to police. This research understands the decision to mobilize police as a trade-off between costs and benefits. The reporting party considers the time, effort and other resources incurred from reporting. These are weighed against the potential benefits of recovering stolen property, arresting an aggressor, stopping a crime in progress, and more abstract awards such as obtaining justice. This research is mostly based on quantitative studies of individual characteristics of victims and offenders, victims’ relationship to offenders, types of crimes, and differences across countries, cities (Baumer, 2002; Goudriaan et al., 2004). The most important factor that increases reporting propensity is the severity of the offense (Avakame et al., 1999; Moeller and Jacques, 2021; Tarling and Morris, 2010), while close social proximity between victims and offenders is associated with lower reporting rates (Felson et al., 1999; 2002).

In the context of our study, the most direct benefit of reporting is to help the victim get away from violence (Brå, 2010). Direct costs come from engaging in the judicial process that involves waiting while the police investigate, and providing them with information, and perhaps going to the police station to fill out forms. If a suspect is prosecuted, the victim may have to attend court to provide testimony (Tarling and Morris, 2010). These costs are weighed against an assessment of how likely it is that perpetrator will be brought to justice (Goudriaan et al., 2004). Whether the police are willing and able to pursue the matter effectively, is referred to as discretionary and non-discretionary factors in the reporting process (Braga and MacDonald, 2019). The discretionary factor is influenced by the relationship between citizens and authorities. Some segments of society are less likely to report and aid in investigations because they have lower trust in police (Brå, 2018; Ousey and Lee, 2010). The non-discretionary factors concern police’s ability which refers to the resources available for investigating the crime, including the number of police, but also the quality of evidence, witnesses (Brunson and Wade, 2019). Gottfredson and Hindelang (1979) compared discretionary and non-discretionary factors and found that the severity of the crime was the most important determinant for how many resources police devoted to clearing a crime.

Our concern in the present article is to examine the interviewees’ decisions on mobilising police. We distinguish between direct benefits and costs and

more distal indirect benefits and costs but note that this is for illustrative purposes as the consequences of decisions cannot be known beforehand (Leclerc and Wortley, 2014). No decision entails only costs or benefits, and we assume that social workers weigh the utility of their decision, i.e. benefits minus costs, and choose the best outcome or the least bad outcome (Bentham, 1970). This is, of course, not a strict utility maximising perspective since the social workers do not have all the required information, nor the capacity to make an optimal decision. Their decision is “bounded” by things like culture and emotions (Cornish and Clarke, 1986) and reflects their assessment of what is as “satisfactory” as possible outcome given the options available (Simon, 1955).

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Data and methods

This study adopts a small-scale qualitative research design to examine perspectives on honour crimes. The data was collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with eleven participants, including social workers and professionals in the field. Participant recruitment began by reaching out to County Insurance, the Resource Center Honor Scania, and the Resource Team Honor Malmö. Study information was also disseminated through RCH Scania’s newsletter, which targets practitioners working with honour-related crimes across Skåne. Most responses came from Malmö and Lund, resulting in a sample concentrated in these two cities. Additionally, professionals were recruited through snowball sampling from Sweden’s three largest cities to ensure diverse geographical and professional perspectives. The social workers in this study are practitioners who actively handle cases reported to social services. The professionals have worked in a supportive role with the victims previously or/and are currently working with honour-related crimes in various capacities (e.g., training of practitioners, research, government projects). Participants’ experience in working with honour-based violence ranged from 2 to over 25 years.

The interviews were guided by a pre-designed guide, which ensured consistency in addressing key themes across participants while allowing for flexibility. Follow-up questions and opportunities for elaboration were incorporated to capture nuanced responses and deeper reflections. This approach aligns with qualitative research methodologies aimed at obtaining rich, detailed data and uncovering the complexity of the phenomena under investigation (Denzin and Lincoln, 2018). Interviews averaged about 45 minutes, were audiotaped and transcribed verbatim. They took place in various locations (e.g., participants’ workplace, social services office, and two were online). We subjected the interviews to a straightforward thematic analysis (Bryman, 2006) with initial broad tags related to police mobilization. The first author sifted through the data to create narrower distinctions, and we decided on emergent categories on potential benefits and costs. Since these categories

are quite broad, we subsequently added the distinction between direct and indirect costs and benefits. The final coding step involved discussions on how social workers assess police's discretionary and non-discretionary approach to honour crimes.

Small qualitative studies can contribute knowledge to the examination of emergent substantive issues (Patton, 2015). The rational framework of benefits and costs is based on a scientific ontology that aims at compatibility with quantitative studies (Pawson and Tilley, 2009). We hope to achieve complementarity with the existing criminological research by developing a theory on honour crimes in contemporary Sweden. We do this by explicating the mechanisms that promote or inhibit police mobilization. We aim to uncover something novel about the processes involved in social workers' and professionals' considerations on reporting honour crimes to police – something that we cannot discern from surveys and reporting rates. We use a small sample and do not purport to generalize to the population of social workers in Sweden. Rather, our aim is to present the findings in a manner where the considerations are transferable to other contexts, and with this we hope to contribute to a common understanding of the issue that can help better protect victims and generally make policy more effective.

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Findings

We structure the findings section by first describing the benefits of reporting in terms of direct and indirect benefits. Next, we do the same for the costs. We address interviewees' perceptions of how discretionary and non-discretionary factors influence their decision-making along the way.

Direct benefits

Interviewees first considered whether they would be able to improve the victim's situation, and this was framed in terms of accessing resources: *"Victims can get proper support and help from society in various ways both short and long term. Protection, care, treatment but also compensation and vindication"* (Interview 8). This interviewee noted that the severity of the offense increased benefits of getting police involved:

"Yes, I think that you can get more help and support, and above all connected to abduction. That is where social services completely lack the opportunity to do certain things but where the police have other opportunities. So there are definitely occasions when it is advantageous to report to the police and where I would 100% report to the police." (Interview 3)

With these two factors, resources and severity, the remaining necessary component for police mobilization is initial information: *"If information comes to light, you contact the police"* (Interview 10). Ultimately, the criminal justice

system can protect victims by putting offenders in prison: *"To truly protect the child, the perpetrator may need to be imprisoned"* (Interview 9), providing at least temporary relief and physical safety for the victim, and: *"a sense of security that that person is not out in the city or in society and does not pose a physical threat for a longer period"* (Interview 4). Penal consequences for the perpetrators can also benefit victims by restoring their sense of agency. This interviewee emphasized the importance of reporting to the police regardless of the expected outcome:

"I think it is important to report to the police. We don't really need to only talk about honor but also other types of violence and so on. It is very important so that, and it is the same thing that it is very important to make a report to social services. To place the responsibility where it belongs." (Interview 1)

Honour-based violence and oppression can leave victims feeling powerless and violated (Olsson and Bergman, 2021), and police involvement can help restore confidence: *"The child feels that society supports them and confirms this treatment isn't okay"* (Interview 9). This affirmation is important, especially given the ambivalence many victims feel about whether they did the right thing:

"It can have a kind of symbolic value in getting confirmed in a very clear way that this that I have been exposed to is not okay, it is not even legal, it is a crime and I have the right to go on with a police report and tell it and then let the law decide what happens. And it can feel, for some it can feel like an important part of the process." (Interview 4)

These direct benefits to the victim represent key factors that interviewees weigh when considering reporting. In the next section, we turn to the more indirect, or abstract, societal-level benefits they discussed in extension of the immediate help to victims.

Indirect benefits

Laws are normative and certain actions are prohibited, so reporting crimes to uphold those laws is viewed positively. The interviewees stressed the communicative effects of reporting honour crimes, as *"it sends signals, not just to children but also to parents and others about what is criminal"* (Interview 8) and *"signals to citizens how society views things. So, it's absolutely preventative"* (Interview 11). Reporting cases gives the legal system the opportunity to demonstrate these values, and improve the integration of cultural minority groups in Swedish society, by holding perpetrators accountable:

"It is very important to place the responsibility where it belongs. If the police don't get these cases, they will never be able to investigate and judge them. And then it becomes a kind of parallel society where we also somehow think that maybe it's not that bad. Or that you protect the perpetrators in some way and have a culture of silence in it. That they take care of it within their own and so on. I think it is very important that we have legislation in place. We have to try it, and we have to see that it holds all the way." (Interview 1)

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Deterrence is a communicative process, and criminal convictions are the strongest illustration. This interviewee noted how criminal sanctions may also serve this preventative function: *"I think it's good that it comes up, that it's visible, so it's very good. To show that this is not allowed and that there is at least a risk of punishment and that maybe it will make people think twice hopefully and back off"* (Interview 7). Criminological research generally emphasizes the risk of criminal conviction as more important than the eventual sanction, making reporting crucial (Brå, 2018; Moeller, 2021). More criminal cases enable the development of the specialized knowledge required, and *"now there are specific people working with this. There are prosecutors with special knowledge"* (Interview 11). Despite this improvement, as the next section details, the complexities and the potential costs reveal the difficult tradeoff involved in the decision. Lastly, for the benefits, several interviewees explained that the available resources had improved. The law on paper is basis for law in practice and their normative content have wider implications for Swedish society's efforts to protect victims:

"But there was no legislation specifically targeting honor-related violence, and it wasn't particularly easy to talk about this issue either. Because it became a question that was also heavily linked to racism and Kurds. It was a very complicated political issue. It's only in the last 5-6 years that we can talk about this without falling into the racist trap. There's a huge difference regarding legislation, room for action, and ability to protect young people who are in honor-related oppression and context. It has been a very long advocacy process. There was almost nothing when we first started working with this basically". (Interview 11)

Direct costs

Illustratively, our interviewees had more to say about the costs of reporting honour crimes. The most immediate costs, also recognised in the broader criminological research on mobilising police, pertain to the effort devoted to participating in the process (Avakame et al., 1999; Tarling and Morris, 2010): *"it takes a long time from reporting to interrogation ... it's very difficult in all crimes in close relationships"* (Interview 8). While interviewees primarily related concerns about improving the victim's situation, sometimes, especially for less serious offenses, the long-term consequences could outweigh the benefits of mobilising police. For minors especially, the experience involves intense upheaval. They may have just disclosed their situation to social services for the first time, and are then placed in a shelter, where they meet many new people, and on top of that they must go to police questioning:

"I would say that most of the minors where a police report has been made, they are not positive about it. Then I also think that the police report often happens quite early in this whole process, maybe in connection with them being placed. And there is also a lot that the young person is going through then. They have just maybe talked about their situation, come into contact with social services, maybe for the first time even, been placed in a housing, there are lots of new people and then they are going to go to police questioning." (Interview 4)

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Police questioning can be quite traumatic. They are often taken from school to be questioned, sometimes by officers not in uniform, leaving the child confused and frightened:

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"You get picked up at school with a representative, you have a safety person from the school with you, you get taken to a police station. As a young person, you might think, what the hell, you don't have police clothes on, how are you police really? You sit in a room where you are being filmed. And most of the time you get questions that you understand what the consequences will be if you say the answers to them. And afterwards they get to meet social services, you get to know that's okay, now we are going to talk to your parents. How does that feel? The children get scared. So, it gets very traumatising. So, it's hard to know how to do it in a better way." (Interview 2)

Next the victim gets an attorney and is accompanied to filmed interviews by their caseworker and social services representative. The environment is made as comfortable as possible, but the support personnel wait outside and are not in the actual interviews. Many reported cases are dropped because the victim does not want to continue with the process of testifying: *"many did not want to report to the police. And many police reports were dropped because they did not want to testify or participate in questioning"* (Interview 6). Sometimes the victim expected that *"It won't lead to anything"* (Interview 2), and therefore refused to participate which means that their expectation becomes real because authorities often cannot proceed without them: *"(T)hey won't participate in questioning, they won't help in any way and you'll kind of ruin their lives a bit. So I'm like, for what benefit are we doing this now? And for whom?"* (Interview 3) Convictions often rely on victim testimony (for more on lack of witness cooperation see Brå, 2012).

Another perspective on this issue is that it is about resources, a non-discretionary factor. Some interviewees had negative experiences with the police not taking them seriously or cases being dropped: *"I unfortunately think that this is also a resource issue. Like this, yes, we put most of the resources on crime and serious crimes and so on. And then this becomes a bit like this"* (Interview 5). The resource situation has improved but varies across the country: *"They (police) do have an organization where they have honour coordinators. They have police officers who have special knowledge about talking to children and knowledge about honour and so on ... But it's not spread throughout the whole organisation"* (Interview 1). What happens after reporting could be *"a bit of a lottery"* (Interview 3), and *"if you're lucky it can be really good. If you're unlucky it can be quite bad. It depends on the competence of whoever handles it"* (Interview 9). Even as awareness of honour crime grows, the resource question also applies to training and education among social workers and police, but also better routines at the workplace. The variations and inconsistencies in police response represent a layer of complexity in the reporting decision. Beyond these direct costs, the interviewees discussed several broader, indirect costs that factor into their considerations.

Indirect costs

Honour crimes often involve so many people in the extended family and community (Cooney, 2014), *"It's a collective that drives these issues"* (Interview 10) and even a few years ago *"police didn't understand the collective pressure and how shame and guilt are connected to it"* (Interview 11). This interviewee stressed the need to avoid stereotyping and discrimination, to avoid discretionary concerns in the process. Not all collective norms in families are problematic – the key is when they clash with children's rights and Swedish law. Professionals need to understand the full spectrum of honour-related issues, not just the most extreme examples: *"There is a fine line where a collective's norms clash with rights. That's where you must learn the difference. They don't always need to do that"* (Interview 6). We consider this an indirect cost as it is slightly more distal in time than the immediate direct costs of participating in the legal process.

Many victims, especially children, are very reluctant to participate in police investigations against their parents or other family members, even if they are being victimized by them, they *"want to remove themselves from the violent environment and live another type of life themselves"* (Interview 4). Victims' reluctance stems from not wanting their family members to be punished: *"you don't want to harm your family, you don't want your family to be punished or maybe that one of the parents or brothers or relatives should end up in prison"* (Interview 5). Reporting a close family member is complicated for victims, like intimate partner violence (Felson et al., 2002; Wolf et al., 2003): *"It's always like that with violence in close relationships. Problems. You are going to report a close relationship. A sibling, a parent, a relative. So that it already there becomes very complicated and difficult"* (Interview 6). It is even more complicated when the crime is rooted within a broader community. Rumors can spread quickly, and families may go to great lengths to try to cover up social services' involvement to avoid losing face in the community: *"How do you explain to the surroundings that now these rumors are spreading about us, and it affects our honour, but we can't maintain it. It gets very problematic and unfortunately most often not very good"* (Interview 2).

Reporting can leave the victims socially ostracized and isolated from extended family and community (Baumer, 2002; Björktomt, 2019), at an age where they do not have the psychological and practical resources to cope with being alone. The duality of victims' feelings towards their families further complicates the situation. Even if the home environment was violent, threatening and unsafe, it could also have been loving and warm – it was still their family: *"There needs to be an understanding that even if the home has been a violent, maybe unsafe, threatening environment in different ways, it can also have been a loving and warm environment because somewhere it is also one's family"* (Interview 4). They *"are very careful to say that I love my family ... It's too high a price in some way"* (Interview 1).

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It can also take time after the acute crisis for the youth to sort out their feelings about everything. For many, breaking from their family is a gradual process that takes time, sometimes involving leaving and returning multiple times. Professionals need to understand this and have tools to work with this *"pendulum process"* (Interview 4).

Confidentiality rules add yet another layer of complexity. This interviewee emphasizes that their role is to provide voluntary support, not punishment. Social workers have a duty of confidentiality unless they learn of crimes against minors: *"You also have the right to be anonymous. You have the right to be anonymous and we have confidentiality. Except then if we find out that there are minor children who are at risk of being harmed"* (Interview 5). The interviewee noted that in their experience, police investigations often ran parallel to their own work with little insight or information sharing between them, making it difficult for her to assess the police's knowledge and handling of honour crimes: *"Because of this kind of confidentiality. Sometimes if we got consent, we could take part in the investigation or that we got to send. But it was like two parallel tracks. And that we had our information and our investigation. The police had theirs. Hard to say"* (Interview 6).

In cases involving adults who do not want to report, confidentiality usually takes precedence, unless the crime is extremely serious. Here they may prioritize building trust. Transferring the problems at home to the criminal sphere alters the dynamic and could jeopardize the social worker's standing with the young person. This is especially salient in cases involving more psychological forms of oppression and abuse, where it can be hard to reach the threshold for criminal prosecution: *"... the victim loses confidence in us if we do something against their will. (...) maybe you don't dare to be open about your vulnerability"* (Interview 5). By preserving that trust, there may be a chance of the victim agreeing to make a report later: *"To instead build on the relationship you have with the person. And in that case in the long run, further ahead, report to the police. Because you have the person with you"* (Interview 3). Confidentiality and trust-building considerations represent yet more factors interviewees must weigh carefully in the reporting decision: *"Police have one task and social services another ... sometimes it can be in the child's best interest not to make a police report"* (Interview 9), *"healthcare can leak like a sieve. Schools were sometimes a complete disaster"* (Interview 10). In some cases, reporting against victims' wishes not only damages that trust, but can invalidate their experiences.

If the police investigation was ultimately dropped because the victim would not participate, the parents took this as vindication and proof that they had done nothing wrong: *"So what they are saying is that your girl does not want to participate and then they cannot conduct a preliminary investigation. But the parents did not take that, but they took this paper as proof that we have not done anything"* (Interview 2). The case may end up being dropped due to insufficient evidence, which can leave the victim feeling betrayed after taking

the very difficult step of reporting: *"The police report is dropped because there is not enough. And in that, the victim carries a feeling that no one trusted me"* (Interview 1). Lastly, reporting can increase risks to the victim. Retaliation against the victim implies that violence may escalate after they report the crime, placing them at even greater risk: *"Because many times the violence escalates when you have told. Then you become more vulnerable"* (Interview 1). This makes it critical to have robust protection and support in place for victims. Reporting may not necessarily improve the situation for the victim, especially if they confided in someone about their situation and it gets reported: *"What does it create? What are the risks for the victim?"* (Interview 5). Some interviewees pointed out that reporting could anger the extended family and make them more vindictive: *"What I think is that it can maybe be even more dangerous for the victim so that the family becomes even angrier and more vindictive"* (Interview 7), *"they get out [of prison]. And who gets blamed?"* (Interview 10). If the reporting results in retaliatory actions, this can irreparably shatter victims' trust in the support services, reducing their proclivity to seek assistance or disclose abuse in the future. Reporting can thus undermine social services' efforts to protect and support victims, and these indirect costs underline the unique challenges honour crimes constitute for Swedish society.

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Discussion and conclusion

Before discussing how social workers and professionals perceive the benefits and costs of mobilizing police in response to honour crimes, we reiterate how they share rationales with others who consider reporting. Social workers have discretion concerning the decision to report. They considered the potential benefits of the formal path where the prospect is contingent on perceptions of police's ability to seek justice. This assessment reflects the crime seriousness and the likelihood of convicting the offender. If justice was unlikely to be achieved, the cost of reporting may be greater than the benefits because the victim's trust in the system and cooperation with the social worker might be compromised (Jacques and Moeller, 2023). Our framework for organizing the findings in benefits and costs is simple and the categories are not neatly delineated. Rather than being distinct, they represent continuums that can be difficult to distinguish, especially as concerns whether direct or indirect benefits and costs as this pertains to our assessment of the distance from the legal process.

Based on the responses in our interviews, there are important potential benefits to reporting to the police but also risks and challenges that must be carefully weighed on a case-by-case basis. The benefits of reporting were typically framed in terms of access to resources (Goudriaan et al., 2004) and obtaining a sense of justice on behalf of the victim and society in a broader



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sense (Baumer, 2002). In high-risk situations with very severe offenses like abductions, the unique capabilities and resources of law enforcement are essential to securing victims' safety. Similar resources are not available to social services, and mobilizing police could save victims from future offenses (Goudriaan et al., 2004). Interviewees also noted that the risk of criminal prosecution may deter potential perpetrators from committing honour crimes. This refers to the more indirect, abstract benefit of justice, and the less abstract aim of providing the criminal justice system with cases (Biderman and Reiss, 1967). This indirect benefit of contributing to the functioning of the criminal justice system generally motivates reporting (Baumer, 2002), and for a relatively new form type of crimes, reporting can help make the specific issue more visible in society. By reporting incidents to police, social workers can send a powerful normative message that this form of violence and oppression is unacceptable and will not be tolerated in Sweden.

Similarly for victims, seeing their abusers face legal consequences was empowering, as it provided them with a sense of justice and validation that what happened to them was wrong and not their fault. This is particularly important in the context where young women are blamed for harming the family's social standing (Cinthio et al., 2022; Heydari et al., 2021). Interviewees noted that it was a benefit to victims to demonstrate that they were not culpable, and that the Swedish society supports them and has their best interests at heart. Our interviewees were dismayed at the low sanction threat because it reduced the deterrent effect of legislation. They emphasized the need to report cases, to support the ongoing legislative attention and recognize the need for criminal justice responses, and further build competencies among police and prosecutors (Brå, 2018; Moeller, 2021).

Our interviewees emphasized that police reporting carries serious costs and complexities. This is a dilemma for them as reporting against a victim's wishes can escalate the dangers they face. The victims' reluctance may stem from fear of vindictive retaliation, and alerting authorities to the honour-based crimes can enrage family members who have low confidence in Swedish authorities and prefer to handle problems informally. If the reporting results in retaliatory actions, this can irreparably shatter victims' trust in the support services. This was a recurring consideration among our interviewees. In some cases, the victim is reluctant or even opposed to involving law enforcement. Subjecting victims to a criminal investigation and prosecution against their will can be deeply traumatizing, exacerbating their guilt, shame and ambivalence about exposing their own families. Reporting can undermine social services' own efforts to protect and support victims (Cinthio et al., 2022).

While all the interviewees agree on control as a primary feature, where the collective enforcement of norms is consistently emphasized, there are notable differences in framing of honour crimes and oppression (Baianstovu et al., 2019). The interviewees demonstrate varied approaches to framing honour-related crimes and oppression, ranging from broad, intersectional

perspectives: *"we try to have as broad a view as possible and get in as much as we can ... we focus on intersectionality and consider various perspectives to understand who can be affected and why"* (Interview 3), to narrower, context-specific interpretations: *"It is violence and oppression tied to cultural and religious beliefs, often focused on women's purity, like forbidding premarital sex or physical contact with men outside the family"* (Interview 7). These contrasting perspectives highlight a tension between universalistic approaches, which seek to capture the complexity and interconnectedness of factors influencing honour-based violence (Interview 3), and particularistic approaches that focus on contextual specifics, such as religious and cultural traditions (Interview 7).

In conclusion, and given these weighty and often competing considerations, the interviewees generally advocated a nuanced, case-by-case approach centered on the victim's situation, needs and wishes. For children, reporting is legally required but could still be a difficult decision considering the need for maintaining a trusting relationship in the years to come. For adult victims, their right to confidentiality and self-determination was the default, only to be breached in cases of very serious crime. The interviewees emphasized the critical importance of empowering victims to make their own informed choices, guided by their own expert judgment of their safety, readiness to break from family, and need for continued connection to family. Even if the prospects of achieving a conviction are low due to the difficulty of proving the crime, social workers sometimes report trying to place the blame on the perpetrator. The myriad costs of reporting, from damaging trust to increasing danger, weigh heavily in interviewees' decision-making process around honour crimes. To increase reporting rates, honour crimes should be prioritized and provided with dedicated resources by the justice system to achieve more consistent, victim-sensitive investigations and prosecution. These systemic improvements are crucial to give victims the confidence to report and to see offenders meaningfully held accountable. Reporting to police should be encouraged and normalised while also respecting victims' agency and right to choose their own path.

In summary, our interviewees explained that police reporting is important but should be wielded with great care and sensitivity given the potentially life-altering stakes for victims. Crucially, mobilizing police gives access to resources and immediate protection. The justice system is indispensable but cannot resolve the underlying issues. Reducing honour crime requires a multi-pronged approach that empowers victims, strengthens communities to prevent harm, and intervenes with criminal law when necessary. Reporting honour crimes sends a normative message that these are criminal offenses that risk severe sanctions for perpetrators. Increased reporting builds expertise among social workers, police, and prosecutors and accomplices. It also supports the ongoing legislative work in this area. Building victims' trust, prioritizing their safety, and expanding their options for escaping abuse

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should be the guiding priorities. Moving forward, the perspectives of these frontline professionals illustrate both the potential and the challenges of police reporting to help honour crime victims reclaim their lives.

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