

Gender differences in prosecution of police assault in Sweden

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In Sweden, prosecutors randomly assigned to cases of police assault are sixteen percentage points more likely to investigate rather than dismiss the case if they are female, according to a study published July 22, 2020

in the open-access journal *PLOS ONE* by Kristine Eck from Uppsala Universitet, Sweden and Charles David Crabtree from Dartmouth College, US.

As current protests around the world make clear, [police violence](#) is a global problem—despite systems in place designed to discipline police violations of citizens' rights. In this study, Eck and Crabtree examine whether police assault claims are treated equally, or if biases found in other contexts appear here as well—while focusing on the less-studied [prosecutor's](#) role in judicial outcomes (as opposed to the judge's role, for which more data and research are available).

The authors focused their analysis on nineteen prosecutors (eight female, eleven male) of 2,304 police assault cases in the Swedish system during the years of 2013-2016—almost the entire population of non-fast-track complaints filed during this period—for many reasons: Sweden is one of the most gender equal countries in the world, suggesting that effects around gender found here are more likely to be significant and generalizable to other contexts; Sweden's Separate Public Prosecution Office randomly assigns its prosecutors to cases and the prosecutors are all equivalent to one another in terms of age (averaging 58 years old), workload, and career experience; and the complaints system is easily accessible to potential claimants (damages paid are generally very small, making it unlikely for false complaints to be filed).

After being assigned a complaint, the prosecutor must determine whether or not the case should be investigated—in this sample, prosecutors pursued investigation 68 percent of the time (1,556 cases). After collecting this case data, Eck and Crabtree used statistical modeling and analyses to investigate whether case outcome varied based on the gender of the assigned prosecutor.

Their results showed that female prosecutors investigated almost 78

percent of filed cases, while male prosecutors only investigated around 60 percent of the cases they were assigned.

Though there's clearly an observable correlation regarding prosecutor gender and case investigation, it's important to note that the data and [study design](#) cannot explain the causation behind why female prosecutors are more likely than their male colleagues to investigate claims of police officers assault. However, the authors suggest future research look to rule out the possibility that common characteristics shared by female (and male) prosecutors, like education, personal experiences, or partisanship, may be driving the observed differences.

Crabtree summarizes: " In Sweden, women prosecutors are 16 percentage points more likely to investigate claims of [police](#) assault than their male counterparts."

More information: Eck K, Crabtree C (2020) Gender differences in the prosecution of police assault: Evidence from a natural experiment in Sweden. *PLoS ONE* 15(7): e0235894. [DOI: 10.1371/journal.pone.0235894](#)

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