



Police Methods in Vulnerable Areas

Kristofer Nilsson

2026-09-24



Aim

- The aim of the dissertation is to contribute to more effective crime control, particularly in relation to gang violence in vulnerable areas. More specifically, the dissertation draws on the traditions and perspectives of *evidence-based policing* and *translational criminology*, with a particular focus on the transfer of knowledge into police practice and the development, implementation, and evaluation of police methods.
- The dissertation focuses on how the police understand and respond to local crime problems, and what approaches and methods they use in their work against gangs and gang violence in vulnerable areas.

PhD project

"The only people who have read my dissertation and seen the results are my supervisor and me..."

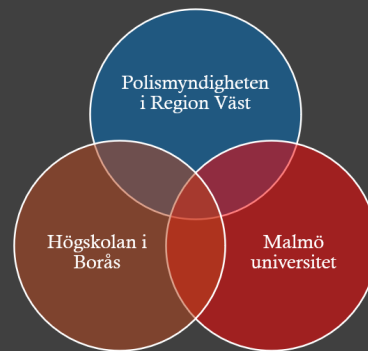
PhD program in Criminology, 240 ECTS credits, Police Methods in Vulnerable Areas

Compilation dissertation (two studies and four articles)

Main supervisor: Charlotta Thodelius, University of Borås/Faculty of Police work

Supervisors: Micael Björk, University of Gothenburg
Manne Gerell, Malmö University

Examiner: Caroline Mellgren, Malmö University



Start 1 mars
2023

VT2031 - Disputation



Study 1

Mapping police methods – a quantitative study conducted in two “waves” examining the methods used to address criminal actors and gangs in vulnerable areas.

- Survey 1: National survey collecting data from all 98 local police districts (management perspective)
- Survey 2: Regional survey focusing on the West Police Region (response officers and community police officers)
- Based on a number of commonly used methods and approaches
- Descriptive statistics comparing police regions and local police districts

	Våren 2025	Våren 2029
Delstudie 1	Enkät 1 ✓	Enkät 1
	Enkät 2 ✓	Enkät 2



Study 1

Survey 1: National survey collecting data from all 98 local police districts (management perspective)

Response rate: 95% (93 of 98)

Survey 2: Regional survey focusing on the West Police Region (response officers and community police officers) $n = 143$

THEMES:

- Knowledge
- Use
- Effectiveness
- Evaluation

Preventive exclusion orders
Situation analysis with other actors in the local community
Work against the criminal economy
CCTV
Reducing new recruitment to gangs
Procedural justice (creating legitimacy)
Person-based intervention (stop and search)
Focused deterrence (e.g. GVI)
Mapping criminal individuals
Police work in hot spots
The crime triangle
Evidence-based approach
The phase model/Fasteorin
The SARA model
Problem-oriented policing (POP)



Study 2

A qualitative study focusing on police officers' experiences of work in field-based practice

Data collection:

Ethnographic study using participant observation in the field (approximately six months)

West Police Region, 3 periods in different local police districts

Start: Oct. 2026

What works?

Interested in how police officers conceptualize the problem of gang crime and in different approaches

- Why does it look the way it does?
- How does the police work to address gangs?
- Which methods appear to work best?



Study 2: Methodological challenges

Dual roles as police officer and researcher:

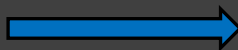
- Step into the police role when necessary
- Duty to report (Police Act, Section 9)
- Primarily a researcher—not a police officer;
- Confidentiality obligations as a researcher (Public Access to Information and Secrecy Act)
- Trust and consent

Previous research:

Early examples of police officers observing the police
United Kingdom, Holdaway (1983), Young (1991)
Sweden, Holgersson (2005)

Examples of the police being observed by others
United States, Stuart (2016)
Sweden, Granér (2004), Pettersson (2012), Björk (e.g., 2009, 2016, 2021)

Eurocrim, Warsaw, 9-12 sept. 2026



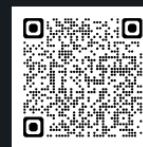
Studying Police from Within: Reflections on Ethnographic Research in Operational Policing

This poster presents methodological considerations for an upcoming ethnographic study of operational police work within the Swedish Police Authority.

WHY ETHNOGRAPHIC?

The aim of the study is to examine how policing against criminal networks and evidence-based methods are applied in everyday police practice.

Ethnography is particularly suitable for studying policing, as many aspects of police work, such as informal decision-making, situational assessments and professional culture, are difficult to capture through quantitative or document-based methods.



CONTACT INFORMATION

Kristofer Nilsson

Doctoral Student in Criminology

Faculty of Health and Society, Malmö University; Faculty of Police Work, University of Borås, Sweden

✉ Kristofer.nilsson@hb.se, kristofer.nilsson@mau.se

☎ +46 725 874156

METHOD FOR IMPLEMENTATION

By following police officers in their operational work, the study seeks to understand decision-making processes and practical reasoning from the perspective of practitioners themselves. This approach provides insights into how policing methods are interpreted, adapted, and implemented in practical contexts.

- An ethnographic approach based on participant observation in operational environments
- The researcher accompanies police officers on patrol and in their daily activities

CHALLENGES

- Insider position provides access to the field and contextual understanding
- The researcher's dual role as both police officer and researcher
- Issues related to role management, trust and consent are central considerations in the research design.
- Confidentiality in the role of a researcher
- Handling of sensitive information
- A police officer's duty to report crimes
- Step in as a police officer if necessary
- How do the police and other people perceive me?

Eurocrim
Warsaw, Poland 2026



Thank you and questions!

Contact:

✉ Kristofer.nilsson@hb.se

✉ Kristofer.nilsson@mau.se

✉ Kristofer.nilsson@polisen.se

☎ +46 0725-874156

