



Antisemitic hate crime

Contemporary experiences from Jewish congregations and organisations.

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) - centre for knowledge about crime and crime prevention measures

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This report is a summary of the Swedish report Antisemitiska hatbrott. Samtida erfarenheter från judiska församlingar och organisationer. 2025:9
© Brottsförebyggande rådet 2025
urn:nbn:se:bra-1262
ISSN 1100-6676

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This summary can be downloaded from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention's website,
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organisations

English summary of Brå report 2025:9

Summary

The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (Brå) has been tasked by the Government to conduct a study of antisemitic hate crime and of insecurity and fear of exposure to such crime as it is experienced by Jewish congregations and organisations in Sweden. Brå has also been instructed to highlight the consequences of victimisation and insecurity, and whether representatives of Jewish congregations and organisations have experienced changes in exposure to hate crime and insecurity and their consequences following the terrorist attack by Hamas and other militant groups against Israel in October 2023.

The Government remit also included a supplementary remit – to describe police reports designated as involving hate crime with antisemitic motives registered between 7 October and 31 December 2023 and compare these with the corresponding period in 2022. The report from the supplementary remit was presented in May 2024 (Brå 2024a).

A qualitative approach has been used to examine experiences and perceptions of exposure, insecurity and fear. This has taken the form of interviews with representatives of Jewish congregations, associations, organisations and federations, including Jewish schools and elderly care homes with a Jewish profile. In all, 17 interviews were conducted with 21 individuals.

All those interviewed are considered key informants from their Jewish institutions, with knowledge of their own organisation's or congregation's exposure to hate crime. They have also been able to provide an insight into victimisation and experiences of insecurity among those who work for the Jewish institutions and the institutions' members. The study has examined the interviewees' experiences of antisemitism and insecurity from a broad perspective, which means that the study also covers incidents that do not necessarily constitute crime within the meaning of the law, and feelings of insecurity that may not solely be due to exposure to hate crime or other expressions of antisemitism.

Interviews allow for a deeper understanding of how the interviewees perceive victimisation and its consequences, and of how fear and insecurity affect them and their activities. However, the results of the interviews cannot provide a picture of the extent of antisemitic hate crime. Nor can

they be generalised to the entire Jewish minority or all Jewish institutions and their experiences of victimisation and insecurity or their consequences.

Wide variation in exposure to antisemitic hate crime and harassment

The interviewees' narratives indicate a wide variation in the degree of exposure to antisemitic incidents during the past five years among the different Jewish institutions that were interviewed. Several interviewees stated that it is unusual for their institutions or premises to be affected by hate crime. Reasons for this may be that their institutions have no premises or that they intentionally maintain a low profile.

It was primarily the representatives of Jewish congregations who stated that their institutions have been subjected to regular exposure to hate crime and other forms of antisemitism. Such exposure is often perceived as coinciding with dates that are important either to Jews or to radical nationalist groups, such as Kristallnacht or Jewish holidays, or with incidents in the Middle East. The nature of such exposure is reported as including everything from abuse and harassment to vandalism, hate and threats.

The most common form of exposure described as affecting the interviewed Jewish institutions was hate messages and threats via letters, telephone calls and email. In their mildest form, these messages may urge the congregation to actively take a position on the conflict between Israel and Palestine, while others are much more aggressive and may contain death threats and extreme antisemitic rhetoric. The interviewees also described incidents such as vandalism in the form of stones being thrown at windows, Stars of David spray-painted on the façade of congregational buildings, objects depicting Zyklon-B gas canisters being placed outside Jewish buildings and attempts at forced entry.

Several report hate and threats directed at staff or members

A number of interviewees stated that representatives of the institutions have been the target of hate or threats, or have been subjected to harassment in private or at their workplaces via email, letters or telephone. The content of the messages may be directed at the institution, the individuals themselves or the Jewish minority as a whole.

As regards victimisation among members of the Jewish congregations and organisations, it was mainly different expressions of antisemitism at the workplace or at school that were described in the interviews. These included antisemitism being disguised as jokes in email correspondence and chat forums, or in interaction with others.

Hate and threats in social media

The interviewees described social media as a forum in which the institutions and their members are commonly exposed to hate and threats. This was particularly true of the exposure that affects youth associations. The interviewees stated that there is a correlation between the degree of exposure and the participation of the organisations in various public contexts, such as media interviews, and also how much media attention is focused on Jewish organisations in general.

Greater risk of exposure to hate crime or antisemitic harassment among individuals with a public profile or who are visibly Jewish

The interviews present a clear picture that prominent representatives of the Jewish community in Sweden are at greater risk of exposure to antisemitic harassment, as they can be identified more easily. This is true of the periods both before and after 7 October 2023. Several stated that those who have public roles in their institutions, such as the chair of the board or individual board members, are at greater risk of exposure to hate crime and antisemitism.

As regards victimisation among members, several interviewees stated that it is enough to be recognised or otherwise identified as Jewish for there to be a risk of being exposed to antisemitism. This may involve visibly Orthodox Jews or those who display other kinds of Jewish symbols (such as a Star of David). Exposure to antisemitism among those who are visibly Jewish was described as having been high both before and after 7 October 2023.

Children are reportedly more exposed than older people

Several interviewees described children and young people as experiencing particularly high levels of victimisation. The interviewees described situations in which children of all ages were exposed to antisemitism in school. Several highlighted exposure to physical violence among older boys, but also other incidents such as harassment, threats and non-sexual

molestation. Interviewees also described that children are also exposed to victimisation at home, through their participation in various activities and in online chats and forums.

Exposure comes from various different sources

Exposure to antisemitism among the interviewed Jewish congregations and organisations was described as emanating from a wide range of different sources, from people of diverse backgrounds and from different environments. Antisemitism must therefore be understood as a social problem that exists within broad segments of the population. The interviewees stated that their institutions and members have been exposed to hate crime by radical nationalist groups, that there is a major threat from violent jihadist environments, and that they perceive that antisemitism can be found within Swedish politics.

One difference after the terrorist attack against Israel on 7 October 2023 is that antisemitic incidents were described as having been directed against the Jewish minority from unexpected sources, such as individuals from the majority population who the interviewees feel had not previously expressed antisemitic sentiments.

Several interviewees perceive increased exposure after 7 October 2023

One common component in the interviews was the perception that expressions of hatred and other antisemitic sentiments have escalated after the terrorist attack by Hamas and other militant groups on 7 October 2023. The interviewees reported increased levels of victimisation, especially among their members and those who perform work for the Jewish institutions. But they also described increased antisemitism against the institutions themselves. Several described that the influx of antisemitic messages to their institutions after 7 October 2023 had been so great that it has been perceived as 'a dam being opened'. Several stated that their institutions have been greatly affected by hate and threats, particularly in social media, and that there has been no decrease in this form of victimisation. For example, some representatives of youth organisations stated that hate targeting the organisation's social media accounts has increased to such an extent that those who moderate these accounts have suffered from burnout.

Antisemitic hate crime and harassment after 7 October 2023 is more often perceived as being linked to the war in Gaza

The nature of the incidents after 7 October 2023 was described in the interviews as for the most part being similar to that of the incidents prior to 7 October 2023. Even prior to October 2023, Jewish institutions have experienced an increase in the level of hate and threats when the conflict between Israel and Palestine has intensified. In the same way as prior to 7 October 2023, the interviewees stated that it was most common to receive hate messages via email and letters. The main difference described was that the hate messages have been more frequent and that they are more often linked in some way to the war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. This may involve demands for Jews to take a position on the conflict or to convince the Israeli government to end the war. Representatives of the Jewish institutions also feel that they are often considered responsible for the Israeli government's decisions and its consequences.

Victimisation in higher education

Several also highlighted that they have seen an increased level of victimisation among Jewish students and researchers in higher education. This involves both exposure to antisemitic slurs and bullying and an increased sense of insecurity, partly due to the pro-Palestinian encampments that have grown up on many campuses. Some researchers have also reportedly been sent home because universities cannot guarantee their safety.

Victimisation is perceived as affecting both men and women, but the interviewees described several examples of gendered expressions

Previous studies have not identified any major differences between men and women in exposure to antisemitism. Nor have the interviewees in this study indicated that there are any major differences in exposure based on gender. However, their descriptions of incidents reveal several examples of flagrantly sexually derogatory, gendered epithets, such as 'Jew whore' or 'Zionist c**t'.

Normalisation of extreme antisemitic rhetoric

While the interviewees perceive the number of antisemitic incidents to have increased, several also described a shift in norms regarding what it is permissible to say about Jews in the media, at demonstrations and in society as a whole. They feel that the language used has become more extreme and that things that were not previously said are being expressed

more freely and in many different contexts. This normalisation is also described as to some extent being internalised among Jews themselves, in the sense that being constantly exposed to hateful comments has led to several of the interviewees experiencing a certain desensitisation, with such comments no longer bothering them as much as they used to.

Fear and insecurity

Brå's interviews show a wide variation in levels of insecurity and fear of being exposed to antisemitic hate crime and harassment. Some interviewees do not experience any significant amount of insecurity, while others – primarily those whose institutions have repeatedly been exposed to antisemitic hate crime – feel a stronger and persistent anxiety that their institutions will be exposed to hate crime. Anxiety and insecurity were also described as possibly being latent and as being activated in connection with high-profile incidents aimed at the Jewish minority in Sweden or other countries, or when the level of conflict between Israel and other countries in the Middle East increases.

One factor that was described as linked to increased insecurity and fear in Jewish organisations was having premises or property that needs to be protected. Several stated that they were worried that their premises would be subjected to vandalism or that members would be victimised in connection with their participation in events or activities.

Fear and concern that staff who are more in the public eye at institutions will be affected

Fear of victimisation varies depending on how visible one is. Brå's interviews show that many of the interviewees are more concerned about others than themselves. Some explained this by saying that there were others at their institutions who have a more public profile and are thus at greater risk of being targeted. At the same time, there is also an awareness that they themselves can be exposed to hate crime as representatives of a Jewish institution.

Fear and concern about terrorist attacks against Jewish institutions is described as having increased after 7 October 2023

The interviews show that concern and fear of being exposed to a possible terrorist attack has increased since 7 October 2023. Several interviewees felt that it is a question not of if but when something will happen,

particularly since it has become known that individuals working for foreign states – so-called proxies – have been used to carry out attacks against Jewish and Israeli targets in Sweden.

Members' fear and insecurity

Several interviewees feel that a larger proportion of their members have felt a sense of fear and insecurity after the terrorist attack on 7 October 2023. This is manifested in such ways as members completely or partially avoiding organised events, or calling to ask about security arrangements in order to assess whether it feels safe to participate.

Consequences

The interviewees described that their own experiences of victimisation can have major consequences, in combination with their perceptions of acquaintances' exposure and the portrayal of antisemitic acts of violence in various media. As a whole, the interviews show that victimisation, insecurity and anxiety have many consequences for Jewish institutions, their staff and members. Some of the interviewees expressed a form of despair over the situation that has developed, while others described a more pragmatic approach.

Several have felt the need to strengthen their institution's physical security after 7 October 2023

The interviewees stated that they have been forced to increase their already extensive security measures after the terrorist attack on 7 October 2023. Increased security is perceived as contributing to a sense of safety, but it is also seen as potentially being highly limiting for the institutions, as they become less open. One year after the terrorist attack, several of the interviewees' institutions still had restricted opening hours, and some offered no activities at all. Interviewees from several of the Jewish institutions also stated that a significant proportion of their institution's funds are used for security measures.

Other consequences of victimisation or fear are that the interviewed institutions engage in self-censorship or stop their external communications completely, and this has a negative impact on their voice and visibility. Furthermore, several interviewees stated that they have had to organise support and crisis counselling for staff and members.

Stress and restricted freedom

A prominent theme in the interviews was an increase in mental health issues, anxiety and stress among those who perform work for the Jewish institutions and among members. Several interviewees also stated that they have developed a more prominent security mindset in their everyday lives to minimise the risk of victimisation, which in various ways limits the way they live.

One example is that several refrain from displaying Jewish symbols when using public transport or spending time in certain areas. Several also stated that they constantly have to decode their surroundings and appraise the contexts in which it is safe to openly display Jewish symbols or speak about being Jewish. This is perceived as stressful and several interviewees stated that they therefore avoid certain places, areas or stores where they feel unsafe. The interviewees also described other types of security measures, including deleting personal data on the internet or making security adjustments at home to protect themselves and their families.

Some of the interviewees also described a lack of hope for the future when it comes to living as a Jew where they currently live, and that they had friends and acquaintances who, after 7 October 2023, talked about emigrating or moving within Sweden in order to live more freely as Jews.

Victimisation after 7 October 2023 has led to both isolation and a strengthened sense of Jewish community

Several interviewees stated that the terrorist attack on 7 October 2023 has resulted in more Jews isolating themselves in contexts in which they are not demonised and where they can express their thoughts and feelings together with others who share similar experiences. Some also reported a kind of emotional isolation that occurs when they, as representatives of a Jewish institution, cannot talk about their own exposure because they do not want to make the situation worse for others.

In the interviews, a Jewish context was described as providing both a sense of safety and the opportunity to talk about everyday matters, and also an opportunity to spend time in an environment in which you can avoid unpleasant conversations and the feeling of being questioned as a Jew. Several stated that the victimisation they have experienced after 7 October 2023 has also strengthened their sense of community in various ways. For example, some congregations have gained more members or attracted more

people to take part in their activities. One reason is that the sense of community has been necessary to deal with the crisis.

Important areas for further measures

Several interviewees stated that there is still a lack of knowledge about antisemitism, its complexity and the forms in which it can be manifested. This in turn contributes to a perception that there are deficiencies in the way social institutions respond to antisemitism. The school system and the police are two actors that are perceived as not taking sufficient action against antisemitism.

Several feel that school managements and teachers do not confront students or adults who expose Jewish children and teachers to antisemitism. They also feel that their experiences of victimisation are minimised or ignored, or that the behaviour is excused. Brå's assessment is therefore that both awareness-raising and preventive measures are needed in schools so that school managements and staff are able to identify contemporary expressions of antisemitism and feel confident in how they can actively combat such expressions.

Confidence in the way the police handle antisemitic hate crime is described as low, with interviewees stating that they do not have faith in the police's ability to identify and investigate antisemitic hate crime. They also feel that they are not always believed or taken seriously when they report such offences. In turn, these factors affect the willingness to report antisemitic hate crime. In light of the interviewees' accounts, it seems unfortunate that the Swedish Police Authority has not been given a renewed mandate with regard to awareness-raising measures. In this respect, Brå's view is that there is a risk that the effect of the awareness-raising efforts already carried out within the police may decline over time. Brå's recommendation is therefore that the Swedish Police Authority should continuously focus on awareness-raising measures regarding contemporary expressions of antisemitism.

Brå's interviews show that Jewish institutions have regularly strengthened their security in various ways. This is due to their regular exposure to antisemitism, along with security threats that often occur in connection with international incidents and in particular incidents linked to the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The interviews also indicate that the dialogue with the police, and the protection offered, varies between Jewish

institutions in different parts of Sweden. Brå's assessment is therefore that there may be reason to monitor the protection and support offered to Jewish institutions by the Swedish Police Authority.