

The ideal victims? Women with intellectual disability as victims of prostitution-related crime

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In Sweden several recent prostitution-related offences where the victims were women with intellectual disabilities (IDs) have created problems for criminal investigators and prosecutors. Based on court documents and interviews with police, prosecutors and social workers, and drawing upon Christie's notion of the 'ideal victim', four legal cases were analysed. Obtaining solid witness accounts from the victims was usually difficult. Several had a personal relationship with the defendant and were initially reluctant to provide a proper witness statement. Different types of psychological, social, and cognitive support had to be arranged to facilitate the process. As the analysis shows, there is a clear need to improve the skills and methods of professionals working within the legal system to ensure that the rights of individuals with IDs are properly met within the justice system, and that the quality of the police's work with them can stand up to scrutiny.

Keywords: intellectual disability; judicial system; preliminary investigation; procuring; prostitution

Introduction

In recent years four criminal cases in Sweden, all of them quite similar to one another, have attracted significant media attention. They concern women with intellectual disabilities (IDs) who, according to the prosecution in each case, had been financially and sexually exploited through prostitution and procuring (Fagerström 2009; Magnusson 2010; Nilsson 2008; Younes and Bävman 2010). The media outcry caused by these cases stemmed from the fact that all of the women in question had an ID, and that, at the time the offences were committed, two were aged only fourteen. In the media discussions, the women were also seen as having been victimized in a number of additional ways. This understanding was nevertheless not fully shared by the courts, thus highlighting an apparent discrepancy between the more general public opinion about what is entailed in being a victim of crime, and judicial interpretations.

The question of victimhood can usefully be approached with a point of departure in Christie's (1986) observation that the conferment of a victim status is never unambiguous or objective in nature, but rather has more to do with the subjective perceptions held by the various parties involved in the process. Christie addresses this

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question with the help of his famous concept of the ‘ideal victim’, which he defines as follows:

With the term ‘ideal victim’ I do not think of the person or category most perceiving herself or himself as a victim. Nor do I think of those in the greatest danger of being victimized or most often victimized. These might or might not be included. *By ‘ideal victim’ I have instead in mind a person or a category of individuals who – when hit by crime – most readily are given the complete and legitimate status of being a victim.* (Christie 1986, 18; italics in the original)

Christie goes on to describe a set of personal attributes and external circumstances that are likely to result in the conferring of complete and legitimate victim status on a person. The ideal victim is often sick, very young, very old, or has a disability (or represents a combination of these attributes). However, moral aspects also play a major role. At the time of the crime, the ideal victim is presumed to have been carrying out a legitimate activity. Thus the ideal victim is blameless for what happened, having neither intentionally nor consciously exposed her- or himself to the likelihood of crime by, for example, purposefully being in the ‘wrong’ place at the ‘wrong’ time. Lack of prior personal contacts between the victim and the perpetrator(s) is, furthermore, often of significance here. Yet, for persons to be ascribed ideal-victim status, it will typically not be enough that they evoke empathy based on their perceived weakness, good moral conduct or respectable life; it is also important that they possess certain capabilities and strengths, such as the ability to speak up and demand victim status for themselves.

The concept of the ideal victim, Christie maintains is, furthermore, a relational notion having, as its counterpart, the concept of the ideal offender. The ideal offender is characterized by attributes that encourage judgement and condemnation rather than empathy, compassion and positive estimation. The ideal offender is forceful and strong and can be ascribed malevolent intentions. Adding to the negativity of this image is often the circumstance that the ideal offender is also engaged in a less than respectable activity or occupation, and engages in social relations whose moral qualities can be questioned.

Accordingly, it is at the outset important to note that the individuals whose cases are discussed in this article bear some resemblance to the ideal victim. They are all *women*, they all have *IDs* and, at the time of the offences, two of them were very *young*. When, for example, discussing victimhood and people with ID, it is clear that they are quite often perceived as passive, vulnerable and in need of protection (Hollomotz 2009, 2011). At the same time, there are several factors in this study that make this stereotypical picture of vulnerability more nuanced and more complex (see even Hollomotz). The concept of the ideal victim is based on the necessary and defining alter ego, the non-ideal victim. In other words, Christie’s model contains an interesting continuum, where in the analysis of individual cases, both ideal and less ideal positions are crucial. In the current study this is fundamental as we are looking at the situations of real people, who at the time that they became victims of crime, were not consistently in the ideal position. On the contrary, their circumstances were much more complex.

Furthermore, it is important to note that the individuals’ legal status as crime victims depends not only on their ability to garner public sympathy, but is also premised on the ability of the prosecution and the police during the preliminary

investigation to obtain witness statements and gather technical evidence that, beyond reasonable doubt, form proof of the fact of being victimized as a result of the offence committed.

Background

While it is generally acknowledged that individuals with disabilities are particularly vulnerable to crimes such as prostitution, there has been very little research on persons with ID as victims of crime in prostitution and prostitution-like contexts. Moreover, existing research and knowledge about IDs and prostitution is generally insufficient and understandings of the problem are frequently anecdotal in nature (see e.g., Brunovskis and Surtees 2007; Lewin 2002; McCarthy 2000; The National Board of Health and Welfare 2008). Overall, a picture based on reports from care providers and professionals in the criminal justice system, emerges of persons with ID as unreliable or incompetent witnesses, (Sanders et al. 1997; Valenti-Hein and Schwartz 1993). In particular, women with ID are often described as having negative experiences with police officers, thus discouraging them from future contact with authority figures (Sanders et al. 1997). Similar findings have been reported by, for example, the Swedish Disability Federation (Finndahl 2005), where women with ID who have become crime victims have frequently found that the police do not believe their stories, many saying that they were unsure as to why the report they had made had failed to result in police investigation and charges.

Persons with ID rarely appear as witnesses in court, especially in cases where they are both the victim and the sole witness testifying against a defendant (Kebbell and Hatton 1999; Sanders et al. 1997). The distrust that, in this context, professionals show to persons with ID has been explained by their lack of knowledge about these people and their life circumstances (Cederborg and Lamb 2008; Kebbell and Hatton 1999). In one study, for example, it was found that even where practitioners had knowledge about ID, they lacked knowledge about the effects and consequences of the disabilities in question (Kvarfordt, Purcell, and Shannon 2005). Moreover, as Petersilia's (2001) review of the literature in the field reveals, attitudes, stereotypes, and myths held by the public concerning persons with ID are similarly prevalent among members of the police force, contributing to the conviction of many police officers that people with ID lack credibility as court witnesses.

Consequently, it has been suggested that within the judicial system there is a need to become more familiar with ID, though, for example, additional training and educational programmes (e.g., Keilty and Connelly 2001; Kvarfordt, Purcell, and Shannon 2005). Those within the judiciary and the court system who are already knowledgeable about ID could, in this context, be used as consultants in areas, such as, for example, appropriate and inappropriate questioning strategies (Kebbell et al. 2001).

In Sweden, the preliminary investigation and the trial are largely based on oral statements obtained from the victim and the accused. It is therefore of great importance that professionals in the justice systems are familiar with interview techniques deemed reliable for victims with ID. In their study of the interview techniques used by Swedish police officers working with children and young adults with ID, Cederborg and Lamb (2008), for instance, found that police officers appeared to question all alleged victims in a similar fashion, irrespective of their responsiveness, or the nature of disability of the person being questioned.

Other professionals working within the justice system have also been found to use inappropriate questioning strategies and interview techniques in their meeting persons with ID (Cederborg and Lamb 2008; Kebbell and Giles 2000; Kebbell, Hatton, and Johnson 2004; Perry et al. 1995). In the worst case, reliance on such techniques, it is suggested, may not only complicate the task of these professionals, but also have deleterious effects on the persons being questioned or interviewed (Cardone and Dent 1996).

At the same time, interviewing methods have now been developed and indeed widely used in other domains, which are better suited for this particular group of people. Bull (2010), for instance, has proposed an interviewing procedure that involves four consecutive phases: (1) The establishment of good communication with the witnesses by helping them to relax; (2) an effort to elicit as much free narrative as possible; (3) presentation of actual interview questions of an appropriate type in a carefully considered order; and (4) creation of a meaningful closure.

Taken as a whole, the research clearly points to the strong possibility that distrust of the witness/alleged victim, combined with a lack of sufficient knowledge and use of appropriate methods among the police and professionals working within the justice system can lead to complications in legal processes involving persons with ID. Despite this, hardly any research has been conducted in the area, and, to the best of our knowledge, none whatsoever on prostitution and procuring cases, where the victims are individuals with ID. In an attempt at beginning to fill this gap, this article looks at four different legal cases from Sweden all of which involve prostitution-related offences and in which the victims were women with ID. In discussing the findings, the aim is to describe and analyse problems and solutions identified by the police and the prosecution service during the preliminary investigation phase of such cases.

Methods

The article is based on a case study undertaken as part of a larger, currently ongoing three-year exploratory study conducted in four major Swedish cities. The overall aim of the larger study is to examine the ability of different professionals to identify the vulnerability of men and women with ID in prostitution or prostitution-like contexts, and how, and in what ways, if at all, such professionals take account of these issues in their work.

Participant recruitment for the ongoing larger study has been based on both snowball and strategic selection procedures. Prospective participants who have knowledge or experience of working with individuals with ID who are, or have been, engaged in prostitution or similar activities and have become crime victims have been identified. These professionals work within the legal system (the police, the public prosecutor's office), social services agencies, habilitation centres, NGOs and special schools, and thus comprise all of those professionals included in the present case study. For the purposes of this article, four separate court cases were identified and analysed. Selection of these cases, from two of the four cities in which the larger study is being conducted, was based on their paradigmatic and high-profile nature and, for the same reasons, not only was a large amount of information available about them, but it was also possible to more easily make contact with the professionals who had worked on them. Here, however, it should also be kept in mind that, at least in Sweden, prostitution cases involving women with ID are

relatively uncommon. That this is so, it can safely be presumed, is a result of the difficulties social workers have in identifying the combination of prostitution and ID, and the police have in gathering sufficient evidence to show that a crime has in fact been committed (see e.g., Kuosmanen and Starke 2011, 2013).

Definition

The term ID is used here in a broad sense. It encompasses both the individual's functional disability, as well as the societal barriers that make it difficult for a person with an ID to be included in society on the same basis as others. In this case the focus is on the juridical system. The four women in this article have all been diagnosed as having a mild ID and, at different periods in their lives, all have received varying types of support.

Data collection

For this case study, individual interviews were carried out with a total of nine professionals. In addition, interviews in groups of various sizes were conducted with twelve persons. Both individual and focus group interviews were conducted in locations either chosen by the study participants or selected as a result of practical expediency. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. A total of 21 professionals working in two different cities, all of whom, at one point or another, had been involved in one or more of the four court cases considered, were interviewed and the transcripts analysed. The court documents studied were obtained from the relevant district courts and courts of appeal.

Analysis

The analysis of the empirical material contained in the interview transcripts and other texts was primarily inductive. Through a careful reading (and re-reading) of these texts, different patterns could be noted in the data, which were continuously analysed as a means of allowing the identification of new perspectives. This method involved several steps. The first was to identify, consolidate and thematize interesting aspects from both the interviews and court documents. The focus was mostly on problems and solutions identified by the police and the prosecution during the preliminary investigation phase. The second step was to categorize these summaries through the analysis of the ways in which they related to one another. The third was to interpret and analyse the whole material according to its own terms (Kvale 1997). The fourth step involved developing more theoretically driven and deductive interpretations of the findings, drawing inspiration, in the main, from Christie's (1986) work on the notion of the ideal victim. Using this model, it was possible to deepen the analysis and link the findings to a more general discussion regarding victimhood and the justice system.

The quotations from the interview material presented in this article were selected to highlight the participants' reasoning and to identify events, phenomena, and/or processes illustrating their experiences. For the sake of brevity, digressions from focal issues have been removed, with omissions indicated by ellipses. In translating the quotes from their original Swedish into English, particular care was taken to preserve

the original character and content of the participants' own words. All the translations have been made by the authors.

Ethical considerations

The study methods were approved by the regional research ethics board in the region, where the study was conducted. Given the fact that the sample size was relatively small and the study participants could thus easily be identified, information about the participants is provided in a manner aimed at preserving confidentiality. In this article, all of the interviewees' names have been changed, and any information that could reveal their identities has been omitted, as have the names of localities and other potential identifiers.

Results

The presentation of the results begins with a brief description of the four court cases in focus (Cases A, B, C, and D) with an emphasis placed on their initial phases. This is followed by a closer examination of the procedures employed and the different dilemmas encountered when, during the preliminary investigation phase, complications arose.

Women with IDs as victims of prostitution-related crime: Four cases

The cases considered in this article came to the police's attention in different ways. In Case A, the defendant (a man aged 42 at the time of his arrest) chatted with young girls and stored child pornography on his computer. Following his divorce, his former wife reported him to the police for assault and battery, disclosing at the same time his contacts with underage girls. The police launched a preliminary investigation and were able to identify a 14-year-old girl with Asperger's syndrome among those with whom he had been in contact and had met. The man had, however, terminated his relationship with her in the meantime only to marry an 18-year-old woman, also with ID. The police nevertheless continued to be interested in him, having learned of rumours about prostitution activities taking place in his apartment. Subsequently, information surfaced about the 18-year-old wife featuring on sex contact websites, with her husband acting as her pimp. Following an investigation, the police searched the couple's apartment, which one of the police officers interviewed describes in the following way:

We raided their address on 7 December. There we grabbed [name], and this girl [name] was taken in for questioning, although she of course wasn't suspected of any wrongdoing. We could pretty quickly see that not everything was quite the way it should be. At that point it's really difficult to really see what's going on; she's just totally shocked, really jittery and upset . . . she just sat there in the corner and cried, you know what I mean? And we've of course gone in at 6:30 in the morning and pulled her out of the bed, and it's our special squad in full gear who've done that and stormed the place. So you can very well understand if someone gets really shocked and upset about it.

This kind of intervention could indeed be experienced as highly dramatic, not least by the young woman in question. Her husband had only minor offences on his previous record. A second man later charged in the same case, for having taken

photographs of the woman, which he later uploaded onto a website he set up for the purpose of selling sex, had no previous convictions. The two men had come to know each other through their mutual interest in child pornography.

Similarly in Case B it was through a prostitution investigation that the police learnt of a 30-year-old woman who sold sex on the Internet. The case was first picked up for its apparent connections to procuring. This quickly became clear, as explained by one of the police officers:

He was running this phone operation at the time, handling the contacts with the clients and driving there every day to collect the money she had made. And he really took a nice share of her income, to put it that way, compared to other [similar] cases [that this officer was familiar with]. This guy took home half of what she made. And you could notice that she had trouble with – she could just barely read and do some simple maths, like counting three 500-crown notes, that's what she managed. But not how much it was in total, like 1,500 crowns for example; just that it was three 500-crown notes.

The woman and the 45-year-old man in question had come to know each other after he had found her selling sex on the Internet, an operation that he wanted to be a part of and further develop. As it turned out, the two also shared an interest in sadomasochism. The man had no record of prior convictions, was skilled with computers, had his finances in good order, and led an ordinary social life.

In Case C, it was unclear how the 14-year-old girl with ID had first come into contact with the individuals later procuring her for sex. The court documents from the district court, however, reveal that she had been using drugs and alcohol and needed money. Two older girls, aged 16 and 17, whom she considered friends, had then started arranging clients for her with whom to have sex. Both of these 'friends' had prior convictions on their record. The two of them collected the proceeds, giving, according to the girl, nothing to her. The operation continued for approximately four months, but ceased when one of the elder girls assaulted the 14-year-old. The girl's foster mother noticed the bruising and filed a police report.

Case D resembles Case C in that in it, too, the victim was a 14-year-old girl. She had run away from her foster home, seeking her way to the outer suburbs of her hometown to sell sex in exchange for money to finance her alcohol and drug use. The initial course of events is described in the district court documents in the following way:

On [date] she ran away from the home in which she lived, making her way to the borough of [name] in the city of [name]. To be in the [name] borough represented an adventure for her, and when there she intended to purchase drugs for her personal use. On the way there she consumed alcohol, and upon arriving at the centre of the borough, was intoxicated. As she attempted to sell sex there, she encountered [name] who presented himself to her as [name], telling her he was 17 years of age. The two had sexual intercourse inside the public toilets located in the centre of [name]. Following the intercourse, [name] asked her whether she wanted the two of them to be together and him to act as her pimp. She answered in the affirmative.

One month later, she again ran away to the same suburb where she proceeded to have sex in exchange for drugs and a place to stay overnight. The case differs from the other three in that the events played out over two shorter, separate periods during which she had absconded from her foster home. Another difference is that in this case there were several defendants, a total of ten men charged with different kinds of

offences ranging from procurement, the purchase of sex and rape. Some of the men involved had no previous convictions.

Hearing of witnesses and other evidence

In all these legal cases, witness testimonies were often pitted against one another as technical and/or other evidence was frequently vague, indefinite, or altogether non-existent. The quality of the witnesses' or victims' descriptions of the events therefore played a major role. These descriptions should as closely as possible follow a particular model of oral testimony that is approved in legal contexts (Bengtsson 2010). The story that is told is to be delivered spontaneously, without guidance from the interrogator or any other party. The testimony should be full, detailed, and exhaustive and, in giving an account of dates, times, places, events, and people, should not contain contradictions. Even the demonstration of appropriate feelings or sentiments is of importance in this connection. The person giving the account needs, furthermore, to be able to repeat it on different occasions and not to change it in any essential way. On the other hand, if the accounts given on different occasions too closely resemble one another, they can be perceived as something rehearsed and memorized, thus having less value as a source of evidence.

Hearings during the preliminary investigation

Only in Case B could the hearings be carried out without the emergence of major complications. The interrogator in the case was experienced in interviewing children, and reported having found it necessary to adopt a similar approach when questioning this woman. The questions had to be concrete and very clear, with levels of abstraction kept at a minimum. The woman herself was very forthcoming during the hearings, giving an impression of being credible and reliable. The police search of her home yielded additional information on her that confirmed her credibility. As one of the police officers we interviewed reported:

When we raided her place and searched it . . . the money that she had made she turned out to have, like, just stuffed in this backpack that was hanging on the bed frame, a bit like Pippi Longstocking-style. So her own share that she had gotten for it, which was about 50 per cent – the other 50 per cent was taken by her pimp – she kept it in that backpack. And when we counted it, it more or less corresponded to the number of clients that she said she'd had per day over the period of time that we could confirm that the operation had been going on.

The amount of money found in the backpack was consistent with what the woman stated in her account, thus enhancing her credibility. It also became clear during the investigation that, over time, the man had pressured the woman to start selling a greater variety of increasingly advanced forms of service. The woman's testimony, supported by other evidence unearthed during the investigation and the search of the home, provided a solid foundation for the prosecution's case in the court.

Also in Case A the interrogator in charge of the questioning possessed specialist skills that made her more prepared for hearings involving people with ID. From the very first hearing, she understood that the young woman being questioned probably had some form of disability. Proceeding based on her understanding and knowledge of people with ID, the interrogator posed questions that were concrete and avoided

all abstract formulations and concepts. She presented no more than one question at a time, and allowed her interviewee to determine the pace of the hearing. Little by little, a relationship of trust can be seen being established between the two of them, thus facilitating the process in subsequent hearings. One of the more sensitive questions posed by the interrogator, at least at the outset, had to do with the woman's relationship with her spouse, the defendant suspected of pimping his wife. As the interrogator explains:

I was really very careful at the beginning because – I mean, I could see how she, like, how she actually did see this guy as someone who had saved her from something, right? So that it was out of the question to put her questions that would have, so to speak, presented him as someone bad or evil; you had to instead say things like 'Right, how nice of him to, like, sit outside and keep an eye on things so that nothing would happen to you when you were receiving customers.'

The point about the woman being 'saved' from something must here be understood against the background of her personal history of having been severely maltreated as a child, by her own father particularly. This experience meant that she saw the new relationship as something that allowed her to escape from her oppressive former life. For this very reason, it also took time for the woman to start understanding that her husband had not always treated her well.

In Case C, the preliminary investigation was delayed several times due to the high pressure of work for specially trained child interrogators. Five months after the investigation had first been launched, the interviewing of the 14-year-old girl in question was entrusted to two police officers without any experience of conducting interviews with children or persons with ID. As one of these officers later reported, the obstacles faced in the hearing process were not only caused by the girl's disability; they also had to do with her reluctance to talk about her sexual experiences to two young male police officers in front of whom she felt embarrassed.

The main problem with the girl's testimony had to do with the fact that she had trouble locating events in terms of both time and place. This was connected to her being under the influence drugs at the times the offences took place. The time lag of six months also meant that sufficient technical evidence could not be secured, and that it was difficult to find witnesses. As one of the two investigating officers observed, without the confession of the two older girls charged in the case the outcome of the process would have probably been very different.

Of all the four cases, Case D was the most complicated, especially in its preliminary investigation stage. The girl involved, aged 14 at the time of the offences, was in a psychologically fragile state and at first did not even want to come to the interviews. The prosecutor tried employing different interrogators with training in child interviewing, one of whom finally succeeded in establishing a good relationship with the girl. At first, the interrogator and the girl met in more casual contexts without any formal hearing ever actually taking place. The police further experimented by hearing her in her own home environment, but this turned out to be problematic as the girl's foster mother would constantly intervene in the proceedings. The interviews were therefore moved to the premises of a special child interview facility. Even there, the verbal part of the hearings turned out to be difficult, as the girl had trouble staying focused, spoke in an extremely low voice, and remained unable to provide any clear central narrative in her account.

When it became time to discuss events of more sexual nature, the girl would clam up, saying that it was her private business. She also refused to recount any of the information that she had previously disclosed. The interrogator, when interviewed for this study, felt that, while this position was perfectly understandable, at the same time it was important for the investigators to know certain details of her sexual encounters and have her describe again in court the events that she had previously talked about.

Despite all the efforts of the prosecution to support her in giving her testimony, it became clear that, as the case progressed, the girl's verbal testimony would be relatively weak. Nevertheless, the interrogator and the prosecutor had noticed that she was far better in communicating her experiences with the help of pictures. As the prosecutor later described it:

She was not too keen on talking, so – ‘Can I see some pictures?’ instead. She was quite good at that, you know. So then we tried to figure out who had been there on the scene, and we showed her pictures saying ‘had this person here had been there?’, and, ‘Can you tell us something about it?’ And I found her to be very clear about all that happened, like ‘Nah, I didn’t have any sex with him’ and ‘with him I did’ and so on.

In this particular case, the girl was also provided with the opportunity to give testimony over the Internet (chat interview), allowing her to answer questions by typing answers on a computer. This was found to work better than oral questioning. Compared to the ideal model of a witness testimony as described above, however, which among other things stresses its verbal and spontaneous nature, a chat interview or a hearing conducted with the aid of images and pictures may nevertheless be perceived as sub-standard in this respect.

Other complications during the preliminary investigation

According to the experience of Swedish police working with trafficking and procurement cases over the last ten years, it is more of a rule than an exception that women are threatened into silence, and that it is difficult to make them come forward as witnesses (Swedish National Police Board 2010, 2011). Sometimes, a personal and possibly close relationship with the trafficker or procurer can also contribute to women's and girls' reluctance to speak about certain things and circumstances. This, then, makes the work of the police considerably more difficult, forcing them to look for other forms of possible evidence to establish that the alleged offence has actually taken place.

In three of the four cases discussed above, both a personal relationship and violence, or the threat of violence could be said to have exerted a negative influence on the process. Not only was one of the girls physically abused (Case C), but threats to her safety had also been made during the preliminary investigation. On one occasion, for instance, following threats made to harm her, the investigating officers had to provide police protection for her.

In Cases A and D there was a personal relationship with their victimizer. This meant that although there was an emotional bond tying the girls and women to the men exploiting them, at the same time as they could also be afraid of these men and their friends. One of the girls (Case A) married a man who, purely physically, was twice her size and 25 years her senior. As she described it during her hearing, he only

needed to raise his voice for her to become scared. This man also seemed to have developed an ability to steer and manipulate the young persons he met. He was able to talk her into prostitution by praising her sexual abilities, saying, among other things, that she was particularly good at oral sex.

In Case D, although there was no obvious threat to the 14-year-old girl's security during the preliminary investigation, the situation changed markedly as the process went on. The threats made were directed not as much at the young girl as they were at the judicial system itself and those representing it. The judge initially scheduled to take the case received threats and decided to withdraw. Similarly, the prosecutor also received threats, managing, however, to complete her task under police protection. All in all, there were a total of 10 individuals ultimately charged in the case, most of whom knew one another before. According to information from the police, some of them had specialized in taking advantage of certain groups of people, such as the elderly or, as in the present case, persons with ID.

Discussion

The focus in this article has been on the problems emerging during the preliminary investigation phase of a criminal case. The quality and adequacy of the preliminary investigation, for example, when it concerns obtaining witness testimonies, frequently plays a crucial role for the prosecution's ability to establish the elements of the charge and secure a conviction (see e.g., Cederborg and Lamb 2008).

In all four of the cases considered, the interrogators attempted to make use of approaches and techniques adapted to the communicative styles of the women being interviewed. Yet it was only in Case D that this took place as a conscious strategy involving an interrogator trained in child interviewing. In all the other cases, the specialist skills that could be put to use by the interrogators seemed to be determined purely by chance. Our own analysis, just like those more general analyses of previous research (e.g., Cederborg and Lamb 2008), shows that training and experience in child interviewing can considerably contribute to the improvement of the quality of the witness testimonies obtained. From our own interviews it became apparent that such training is today received by increasing numbers of police officers, a development that can only be said to be commendable.

One fairly specific complication encountered in the four legal cases described here arose from the personal relationship that the women involved had with their procurers. In two of the cases (A and D), the procurer was either a boyfriend or a husband. This, at least initially, made the women clearly unwilling to testify against the men. In this respect, given their prior close personal contacts with those exploiting them, these women do not correspond with Christie's notion of the ideal victim, that is, as someone unknown to the offender. Even in the two other cases (B and C), the women knew the defendants and, moreover, their own initiative in starting to sell sex and their drug use meant again that they differ from the ideal, passive victim who is of good moral conduct and leads a respectable life. Their role and activity indicates that, rather than passive and vulnerable victims, in many situations they also express their own agency (Hollomotz 2009, 2011). This type of relationship and activity, however, distance them from the position of ideal victim, pushing them closer to its polar opposite, the non-ideal victim.

The circumstances that bring them closer to ideal-victim status are their ages (especially in cases of A, C and D), and the fact that they all had ID. From our

interviews with professionals and evidence of court documents, it becomes clear that these circumstances were seen as important in the construction of their victimhood. This was especially the case when the men exploiting them were both older and physically stronger. It is obvious that not only society in general, but also to some degree the judicial system, is influenced by general beliefs and myths about people with ID as being passive and vulnerable victims. In this context, these beliefs can actually have a positive effect for such victims of crime, as convictions might be easier to obtain. However, erroneous perceptions of vulnerability may also lead to inappropriate measures and overprotection that, instead, contribute to increased vulnerability in their life in general (Hollomotz 2009, 2011)

Based on these four legal cases, we can identify a number of factors contributing to the construction of the 'ideal offender'. Several of the defendants had prior convictions, including, amongst other things, offences involving child pornography. Even sadomasochistic role playing, widely seen as a negative deviation from the norm (Rubin 1984), was something that at least one of the defendants had been engaged in. As our interviews and the court documents indicate, several of the defendants had, furthermore, actively taken economic advantage of the women's activities in selling sex, in some cases also pressurizing them to sell more, and to carry out sexual acts of a more varied and/or advanced nature. In other words, the general conduct of most defendants could clearly be understood as morally less than honourable.

Ignoring for a moment the women's own active role and their pre-existing personal relationships with the defendants, there is nevertheless much in these cases indicating that they can be seen as examples of encounters between an ideal victim and an ideal offender. Nevertheless, one crucial attribute that Christie points to as a key characteristic of the ideal victim is missing from this picture that is, the ability to speak up and demand victim status for oneself. In several of the cases presented here, the women seem more to approach the position of a non-ideal victim. It was the women's ability to verbalize and difficulties in providing a witness testimony that proved to be the weakest links in the prosecution's case. Furthermore, they did not always view themselves as victims, at least initially. In these cases, the investigating police officers had then to act as providers of psychological, social, and cognitive support in order to enable a better articulation of the women's narratives and their developing awareness of themselves as crime victims. Thus one of the key findings in this study is the need to understand how an ID can be seen as a question of relational and social construction in legal contexts. Therefore, it is extremely important for the judicial system professionals to develop knowledge and well-functioning approaches to interacting and communicating with persons with ID, for example, in an interview situation (see even Gudjonsson and Joyce 2011; Keilty and Connelly 2001; Kvarfordt, Purcell, and Shannon 2005). Such knowledge, accompanied by well thought-out methods and approaches, we believe, would have an immediate impact on the quality of both the interviews conducted, and consequently, the testimonies obtained during an investigation. The same can be expected to hold for the courts' ability to interpret the accumulated evidence, including, not least, the statements obtained from witnesses and victims (see also Cederborg and Lamb 2008; Kebbell and Hatton 1999). The important thing here is not that the courts' evidence requirement should be relaxed or revised, but, rather, the need to create better conditions for persons with ID in legal contexts to ensure that their rights are properly met within the the justice system.

This study can thus be regarded as a contribution towards a better understanding of persons with ID as crime victims, especially in prostitution and prostitution-like contexts. Because the scope of the study was rather limited, it is difficult to draw general conclusions. Nevertheless the study contributes to the ongoing process of knowledge formation and theory development in this largely uncharted area, which, only now is beginning to attract the attention of scholars and practitioners.

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