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Sweden's Lund University researcher faces prosecution for study that showed most rapes are committed by immigrants

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Prof Kristina Sundquist and Ardavan Khoshnood. Co-authors of the study that shows majority of rapes in Sweden were committed by immigrants (Images: Lund University/Twitter/Bulliten)

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Professor Kristina Sundquist, Lund University, Sweden and two of her colleagues are facing **prosecution** by the Board of Appeal for ethical review, a body that reports to the Swedish Ministry of Education. The reason behind the investigation initiated by the body is the research paper that was submitted by Sundquist that shows most rapes that happened in Sweden were committed by immigrants.

The body would not investigate whether Sundquist and the co-author of the paper, Professor Ardavan Khoshnood, were given “ethical license” to handle “sensitive data” on the ethnicity of the criminals accused of rape in the country. Interestingly, the aim of the study was not to target any group or community but to find out common denominators like health issues, social and employment status among perpetrators. The results were, according to Khoshnood, surprising for the team as well.

Reports suggest that the ethical authority is aiming to issue some sort of punishment to the authors of the paper. In a statement, the body said, “I don’t see anywhere that ethical permission is sought to test the hypothesis if immigrants are overrepresented in statistics on convicted rapists. The scientists were also criticized for insufficient evaluation as they failed to indicate how their research should “reduce exclusion and improve integration.”

Notably, Sundquist is the most cited professor at the university regarding social research. Sadly, she would face an investigation for publishing an allegedly “unauthorized research report”. She may face prosecution for the conclusion of her study that shows that the majority of the rapes were committed by immigrants to the country.

Details of the study done by Prof Sundquist

The paper titled "Swedish rape offenders – a latent class analysis" [PDF] was published in February 2021. The conclusion of the study was based on 3,039 rape convicts between the period of 2000 and 2015. It is noteworthy that the data does not include the influx of migrants from the Middle East and Africa from 2015 till date that increased exponentially due to the unrest in those regions.

The study was conducted because, as per the paper's introduction, there was an increase in the rates of sexual crimes, including rapes in the country. "Knowledge of who the offenders of these crimes are is therefore of importance for prevention," it added.

As per the researchers involved in the study, the aim of the study was not to specifically target the ethnic background but to see if they had anything common among them, such as employment, social status, health issues and more. The ethnic profile of the culprits was among the supporting data, but it was not possible to ignore.

Sundquist mentioned in a statement that immigrant status was merely a variable. She said, "Immigrants were just a variable, and it turned out to be quite a remarkable discovery as there were many immigrants and foreign-born people in this group."

During the data analysis, the researchers found that out of 3,039 offenders included in the study, 59.2 per cent were immigrants. Out of these, 47.7 per cent were born outside Sweden. The researchers recommended further investigating the higher number of immigrants indulging in sexual crimes and taking contextual characteristics of these offenders into account during further studies.

The paper also pointed out the fact that the majority of sexual crimes go unreported. The data taken from the Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention showed that around 23,200 sexual crimes were reported in 2019. Out of these, 38 per cent were rapes and aggravated rapes. The annual Swedish Crime Survey of 2019 put an estimate that 5.6 per cent of the total population between the ages of 16 and 84 had been victims of sexual crimes.

The study further suggested 9.4 per cent of females and 1.4 per cent of males have reported they were victims of sexual crimes. Notably, between 2008 and 2018, the cases of rape increased by 45.4 per cent. According to the data available, the number of offenders found guilty of sexual offences has been stable since 2008. However, since 2009, the rate of cases solved by the Police has gone down to 31 per cent in 2009. In 2016, only 11 per cent of such cases were solved.

Sundquist's study noted that while 47.7 per cent of offenders were born outside Sweden, 11.5 per cent had at least one parent born outside the country. 40.8 per cent of the offenders were born in Sweden. Among those who were born in Sweden but their parents were born outside, 40.7 per cent had mothers born in Western countries while 33.9 per cent had fathers born in Western countries. 19.8 per cent of the offenders had mothers from the Middle East/North Africa, while the same for fathers stood at 24 per cent.

Of the offenders who were born outside Sweden, 34.5 per cent were from the Middle East/North Africa and 19.1 per cent from Africa. Several studies had been conducted in the past they aligned with the current results. Though such studies were not common, none had been threatened with prosecution in the past.

The intimidation tactics

As the professors face prosecution for merely publishing the results based on the data that is available with Sweden authorities, it is unclear how hiding the information about the social and ethnic background of the offenders would improve the inclusion of the immigrants. Interestingly, one of the authors of the study is himself an immigrant.

