

ARTICLE

Swedish police officers' strategies when interviewing suspects who decline to answer questions

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Abstract

Purpose: Research-based interviewing techniques typically rely upon suspects being, at least partially, responsive and engaged in the conversation. To date, the scientific literature is more limited regarding situations where suspects exercise their legal right to silence. The present study aimed to examine Swedish police officers' self-reported strategies when interviewing suspects who decline to answer questions.

Methods: A total of 289 police officers responded to a national survey that included questions about handling silence. The participants worked with a wide range of criminal cases, including financial crimes, fraud, violent offences, domestic abuse, volume crime and traffic violations. We used content analysis to examine their written responses to the open-ended question: *'What, if any, strategies do you use when interviewing suspects who speak very little or not at all?'*

Results: Four main categories were identified relating to (1) question strategies (e.g. asking the questions anyway, using silence), (2) information strategies (e.g. emphasizing the benefits of cooperating and informing about their legal right to silence), (3) supportive strategies (e.g. being friendly and asking about reasons for silence) and (4) procedural strategies (e.g. changing interviewers and conducting multiple interviews). Practitioners working with violent crimes

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reported meeting silent suspects more frequently compared with practitioners working with other criminal offences.

Conclusions: The results provide an initial exploration into the various strategies used by police interviewers when questioning suspects who decline to answer questions. Further research is necessary for understanding and evaluating the ethics and effectiveness of such strategies.

KEYWORDS

interrogation, law enforcement, police interview, survey, suspect

BACKGROUND

Suspect interviews constitute a crucial phase when investigating different types of crimes (Hartwig et al., 2005). During these interviews, suspects should be given a chance to respond to the criminal allegations directed towards them. In many countries, suspects have the right to remain silent and not provide self-incriminating statements to the police (Berger, 2013). The fundamental right to not testify against oneself is also stated in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1966; Article 14). However, regulations differ across countries regarding decisions to directly terminate the police interview if the suspect chose to exercise their right to silence (e.g. May et al., 2021). In Sweden, police are permitted to continue to ask questions, although the suspect is entitled to respond with silence or state 'no comment'. Furthermore, suspects might be willing to participate in the interview but chose to remain mostly silent or simply offer denials. Suspects' right to silence, though ethically and legally important, often present a challenge for law enforcement when investigating crimes (Soukara et al., 2002). Both guilty and innocent suspects can have reason to decline to answer questions during police interviews (e.g. following legal advice from their attorney). Law enforcement thus need to carefully balance their investigative demands and right to pose questions with the legal right to silence (for an in-depth discussion, see Morgan & Stephenson, 1994). The strategies used during questioning should be ethically justifiable and non-coercive, and particular care should be given with vulnerable suspect populations (see Gudjonsson 2018, 2021). To date, few studies have investigated the strategies used by police when questioning suspects who exercise their right to silence. The present study addresses this limitation by examining Swedish police interviewers' experiences of interviewing suspects who remain silent or speak very little.

During the last decades, researchers have begun examining and emphasizing the advantages of using information-gathering interviewing techniques over accusatory and guilt-seeking approaches (e.g. Brimbal et al., 2020). Several promising research trajectories for handling silence have been proposed involving supportive techniques, including taking a humanitarian and open-minded approach (e.g. Vanderhallen et al., 2011), using different rapport-based strategies (e.g. Vallano et al., 2015), building trust (e.g. Brimbal et al., 2020) and following Motivational Interviewing Principles (Surmon-Böhr et al., 2020). Field research have illustrated the usefulness of applying information-gathering techniques that build upon skillful rapport-based questioning rather than coercive techniques (e.g. Alison et al., 2014; Brimbal et al., 2021). Likewise, surveys examining convicted offenders' self-reported experiences have also highlighted the importance of supportive and humanitarian interviewing techniques to facilitate their disclosures of information (e.g. Read et al., 2009).

However, research is scarce regarding police interviewers' self-reported practices when interviewing suspect who remains silent or speaks very little. Focus has instead primarily been placed on

examining procedures intended to capture suspects' understanding of these concepts (e.g. comprehension of Miranda rights; see Blackwood et al., 2015). Little attention has been paid to countries where the suspect interview is not directly terminated after the right to silence has been evoked. One exception is Soukara et al. (2002), which investigated the experiences of British police detectives when interviewing suspects through a survey that included questions about handling silence and 'no comment' responses. The British police stressed the importance of being prepared, having patience and posing all the relevant questions regardless of the suspects' responses. Another exception is a field study by Moston and Engelberg (1993) examining 133 British interviews with suspects who exercised their right to silence. Five different strategies were identified among the police interviewers; avoidance (terminating the interview), downgrading (keeping the suspect talking about other topics), persistence (continuing to ask questions), upgrading (introducing evidence) and realization (commenting on the use of silence, for example that the interview is a chance to give their side of the story).

The current study was situated in Sweden. The Swedish Police Authority is currently in the initial phases of creating a national interviewing model following the development in other countries (e.g. the UK, Norway). However, at the time of data collection, no model had yet been implemented that all police interviewers were required to follow (Granhag & Magnusson, 2021). Decisions regarding the interviewing method were instead largely up to each police interviewer. There are some legal regulations in place which impact the suspect interview procedure. According to the Swedish Code of Judicial Procedures (chap 23. §12), 'the use of knowingly false information, promises or hints of special advantage, threats, force, and questioning for an unreasonable length of time, must not be employed during a questioning aimed at eliciting a confession'. Furthermore, suspects should be informed about their right to silence and that they do not have to participate in the investigation (Swedish Decree on Preliminary Investigations, §12). Police academies across Sweden generally emphasize the use of information-gathering techniques and advise against coercive approaches (Granhag et al., 2013). The available (albeit limited) body of Swedish case studies give examples of interviews following research-based recommendations, as well as coercive interviews involving minimization and maximization techniques that can increase the risk of false confessions (Granhag & Magnusson, 2021).

This exploratory study aimed to explore Swedish police interviewers' experiences of interviewing silent suspects. Using a qualitative approach, we examined police interviewers' responses to the following question: *'What, if any, strategies do you use when interviewing suspects who speak very little or not at all?'.* We also explored the estimated prevalence of silent suspects among practitioners working with different types of criminal cases including financial crimes, fraud, serious crimes, domestic abuse, volume and traffic crimes.

METHOD

The study was part of a larger project that was preregistered on the Open Science Framework (https://osf.io/nwabp/?view_only=f3129be3e3cb432ca90c6e7615863ee2). We followed all local laws and requirements for the ethical conduct of research involving human participants. The applicable laws did not require external review for the present research.

Eligibility criteria, recruitment and participants

To be eligible for participation, the participants had to be employed by the Swedish Police Authority and indicate they had experience conducting suspect interviews during the last five years. The digital survey was distributed using Qualtrics. First, we shared a link to the survey in a Facebook group for

police employees (approximately 10,000 members). We also shared the survey on our research group's social media accounts (Facebook and Twitter) and contacted police officers with whom we are personally acquainted for assistance distributing the survey. The survey was open for responses for a total of 8 weeks (May–June, 2018). The initial wave of data collection did not yield a sample large enough to meet our preregistered stopping rule (at least 100 valid responses). This stopping rule was determined based on considering what we thought was practically feasible as well as statistical power considerations for the larger project of which the present paper is a part (power = .80 for $r = .27$ with $N = 100$). A second wave of data collection was therefore carried out (January–February, 2019) by contacting coordinators at the seven Swedish police regions asking for assistance distributing the survey. Due to the various recruitment methods, we cannot calculate a precise response rate. No compensation was offered for taking part in the survey.

We recruited a total of 307 participants, 289 of which provided data relevant for the present study (143 women, 138 men, 8 did not state their gender). Of those, 227 were police officers (with 2 years of training at the police academy), and 62 were civilian officers (with a degree in other relevant fields). The distribution of participants working specific crime types were as follows: financial crime ($n = 8$), fraud ($n = 40$), serious crime ($n = 66$), domestic crimes ($n = 21$), volume crime ($n = 106$) and traffic crimes ($n = 7$). The remaining participants ($n = 41$) chose 'other' as their response option. When asked to elaborate, most reported that they handle a wide range of crimes as patrolling officers or first responders. A few participants indicated other types of crime, including crimes against children, cybercrimes and narcotics. The participants had between 0 and 40 years ($M = 11.5$, $SD = 8.9$, $Mdn = 10$) of experience conducting suspect interviews.

Questionnaire

The survey contained nine sections, with the fifth section being the focus of the current study. The first section comprised an information sheet outlining the purpose of the study and the rights of research participants. The second section asked about the police officers' employment form and the type of crimes they usually investigate. The third and fourth section contained questions about interviewing preparations and tactics. The fifth section included an item asking participants to estimate how many suspects say very little or nothing during their interviews (the scale consisted of 10 response options between 0–100%, starting with 0–10%, 11–20% and so on), followed by an open-ended question asking: *'What, if any, strategies do you use when interviewing suspects who speak very little or not at all?'* Sections six to eight contained questions about interviewing goals, documentation procedures and language interpreters. Lastly, the ninth section consisted of demographic questions.

Qualitative analysis of open-ended responses

Content analysis was used to identify and categorize different strategies for handling silence (for a similar approach, see Ernberg et al., 2022; Magnusson et al., 2020). The main author, who is experienced analysing qualitative survey data, coded the responses following an inductive data-driven approach and created code labels that closely matched the content in the responses (e.g. 'I always try not to be judgmental', 'I condemn the crime but not the person'). Broader codes were thereafter created, and closely related codes were merged into sub-categories (e.g. 'Do not judge'). A preliminary structure was created containing overarching categories and sub-categories for each open-ended question. Inter-rater reliability was calculated on the preliminary structure, during which another author coded 20% of the responses. The agreement rate was high with 96.7% agreement across all codes. Lastly, quotations to exemplify different strategies were selected and translated to English.

RESULTS

Frequency estimates

Participants were asked to estimate the frequency of suspects who are silent or speak very little during their interviews. A total of 289 participants responded to this item. See [Table 1](#) for an overview. Police interviewers who primarily investigate serious or domestic crimes provided higher estimates of the proportion of suspects who remain silent, compared with those who primarily investigate financial crime or fraud, $\chi^2 (9) = 21.04, p = .012$, and those who primarily investigate volume crimes or traffic crimes, $\chi^2 (9) = 20.44, p = .015$. Interviewers who primarily investigate financial crimes or fraud did not significantly differ in their estimate of the proportion of suspects who remain silent compared with those who primarily investigate volume crimes or traffic crimes, $\chi^2 (7) = 13.25, p = .066$.

Police interviewers working finance and fraud cases stated that they rarely encountered this problem, with most participants (62.5%) estimating that between 0 and 10% of their cases involved silent suspects. Among participants working volume and traffic crimes, around one third (36.3%) estimated that 0–10% of suspects were silent. A similar estimate (32.2%) was found among police interviewers working serious and domestic cases. Differences between the different case types could be observed when examining the higher estimates in the distribution. Specifically, 28.8% of the police working serious and domestic crime estimated that between 51 and 100% of suspect remained silent. This estimate was less common among police working volume and traffic crimes (10.6%) and finances and fraud cases (4.1%). See [Figure 1](#) for a visual overview.

Strategies when interviewing suspects who are silent or talk little

A total of 184 police interviewers responded to the open-ended question asking about strategies when interviewing silent suspects. Four main categories were identified relating to (1) question strategies, (2) information strategies, (3) supportive strategies and (4) procedural strategies. See [Table 2](#) for an overview.

Question strategies

Ask the questions anyway

The most-reported strategy ($n = 66$) when interviewing silent suspects was to ask the prepared interview questions anyway regardless of the suspect's response. This practice was described as important to both provide the suspect with the opportunity to respond, as well as to show during an upcoming trial that the questions had indeed been asked during the criminal investigation:

TABLE 1 Estimated frequency of suspects staying silent or speaking very little divided by the type of crime the respondent investigates ($n = 289$)

Crime type	<i>n</i>	0–10%	11–20%	21–30%	31–40%	41–50%	51–60%	61–70%	71–80%	81–90%	91–100%
Finance and Fraud	48	62.5%	20.8%	6.3%	6.3%	0.0%	0.0%	2.8%	2.8%	0.0%	0.0%
Serious and Domestic	87	32.2%	19.5%	13.8%	2.3%	2.3%	4.6%	5.7%	10.3%	8.0%	1.1%
Volume and Traffic	113	36.3%	20.4%	16.8%	10.6%	5.3%	2.7%	3.5%	4.4%	0.0%	0.0%
Other	41	41.5%	12.2%	17.1%	9.8%	4.9%	2.4%	4.9%	4.9%	2.4%	0.0%

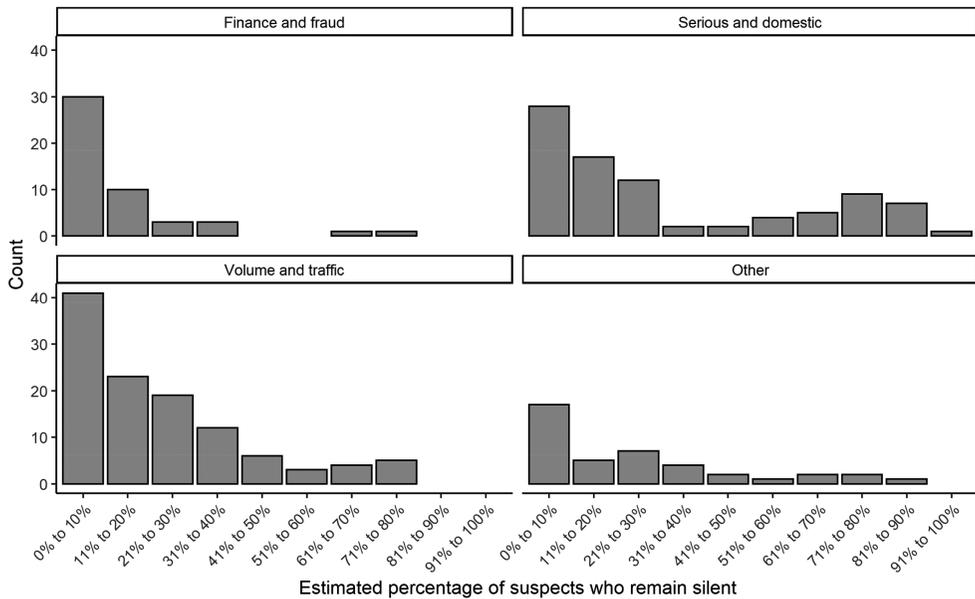


FIGURE 1 Distributions of estimates of the percentage of suspects who remain silent. Bars represent raw frequency counts

TABLE 2 Categories and sub-categories for open-ended responses on strategies when suspects are silent or speak very little ($n = 184$)

Categories	Sub-categories	n	%
Question strategies	Ask the questions anyway	66	35.9%
	Use silence	28	15.2%
	Talk about other topics	21	11.4%
	Repeat and rephrase	12	6.5%
Information strategies	Benefits of cooperating	45	24.4%
	Legal right to silence	32	17.4%
	Disadvantages of not cooperating	13	7.1%
	Present evidence	8	4.3%
Supportive strategies	Be friendly and create contact	20	10.9%
	Ask about reasons for silence	14	7.6%
	Do not judge	7	3.8%
	Build their trust	5	2.7%
Procedural strategies	Change interrogator	5	2.7%
	Conduct multiple interrogations	5	2.7%

Sometimes it is difficult to get the suspect to talk. In such situations, I always ask all the necessary questions anyway, so that the suspect cannot claim in court that he has not received the question before and has not been able to answer it. Therefore, it is important that the suspect received the question but chose not to answer it. (Police officer mainly investigating traffic crimes, 9 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Asking their questions without receiving a response was sometimes described as a tedious task that required patience. However, it could also be a strategy for eliciting new information from suspects:

To still ask questions and at least get the answer 'no comment'. Then you can somehow get a sense of what the suspect reacts to and sometimes you can get unexpected outbursts or even suspects who want to refute something and through that get a conversation going. (Police officer mainly investigating volume crimes, 1 year of experience interviewing suspects).

Use silence

Another common strategy ($n = 28$) was to use silence as a method for getting the suspect to talk. The police interviewers described how they stayed silent and waited for the suspect to initiate the conversation. They could also use long pauses of silence after asking a question to encourage the suspect to respond. Using silence as an interviewing strategy could be effective according to the interviewers:

Wait out the suspect by using silence back, then they almost always start talking about something. (Police officer mainly investigating financial crimes, 6 years of experience interviewing suspects).

However, a few participants described that it only worked sometimes and usually not with more experienced criminals:

Sometimes my own silence can get a silent suspect to speak, but that is so rare. (Civilian officer mainly investigating domestic crimes, 7 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Talk about other topics

Participants ($n = 21$) also described the value of talking about other aspects of the alleged event to get the suspect to start talking. This could for example include discussing what happened before and after the alleged crime or talking about other points in time that could be relevant for the investigation. Another topic mentioned by several participants was to talk about the suspects' emotions during the alleged event and how they felt about the allegation:

Connect it back to something they said earlier and ask them to tell from there, try to structure the timeline of events, for example what happened between this and that. Ask them to describe how it felt instead of trying to get the facts when they stop talking. (Civilian officer mainly investigating volume crimes, 6 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Repeat and rephrase

Lastly, some participants ($n = 12$) reported repeating and rephrasing their questions when suspects chose not to respond. This could either be achieved by returning to key topics throughout the interview or by reformulating questions to be more open-ended to encourage the suspect to speak more freely:

To ask many questions. Rephrase important questions and ask them again later in the interview. (Civilian officer mainly investigating fraud, 6 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Information strategies

Benefits of cooperating

Some participants ($n = 45$) described that they informed the suspect about the potential benefits of cooperating as a strategy for handling silence. Most commonly, the participants reported that they emphasized that the interview was a chance for the suspect to give their version of the story:

If they say nothing, I usually tell them that this is their opportunity to tell what happened from their perspective. At that point, you may only have witness interviews, photos, surveillance footage, forensic evidence etc., but the suspect's story is completely missing. The prosecutor must then make their decision based on the available evidence—that is, completely without the suspect's story. The suspect interview is their chance and opportunity to give their statement. (Police officer mainly investigating volume crimes, 7 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Other benefits that were brought up in the responses included the possibility of providing an alibi or other information that could help show their innocence:

If you are innocent and have nothing to hide, a statement can help give an alibi and also provide us with information to check so that the suspicion can be written off at an earlier stage. (Police officer mainly investigating serious crimes, 20 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Legal right to silence

This category included responses ($n = 32$) about the suspect's legal right to silence. There seemed to be a consensus among participants that even if the right to silence could be frustrating from an information-gathering standpoint, it is an important ethical consideration that needs to be accepted and upheld. Some participants described how they always inform suspects about this right during the initial stage of the interview:

If a person does not want to talk or answer any questions at all, I usually at least ask some relevant questions so that it is clear that the person had the opportunity to answer but declined. At the same time, I always initially inform them about the right to be silent, but that I will still ask some questions, which the person then can choose whether to answer or not. (Police officer mainly investigating domestic crimes, 7 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Other participants talked about how the presence of a defender might influence the suspects' choice to exercise their right to silence:

The trend right now, among suspects who are arrested or detained, seems to be that they say, 'No comment'. It has become much more common. I have no remarks about that because they have usually agreed with their lawyer before the interview about what to say or if they do not want to make a statement before the trial. (Police officer mainly investigating volume crimes, 35 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Disadvantages of not cooperating.

Another less common information strategy ($n = 13$) was to emphasize the potential disadvantages of not cooperating with the police. This included not providing their version of events that could help the

police investigate the allegation. Some participants described that they might explain that if the case is taken to court, this could have negative effects on the suspects' credibility:

Sometimes you talk about the disadvantages of not answering the questions, that their credibility decreases if they wait to answer questions until the trial. (Police officer mainly investigating serious, domestic and volume crimes, 24 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Others discussed that the lack of cooperation could make it more difficult for the suspect to show their innocence:

But by not commenting on the accusations themselves or the evidence at hand, then they do not defend themselves very well. It happens that someone says, 'I have nothing more to say and you can write it down'. (Police officer mainly investigating volume crimes, 11 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Present evidence

The last information strategy discussed by the participants ($n = 8$) was to present evidence to get the suspect talking:

Review the evidence, list things/events/observations and show whether other unknown perpetrators could have committed the crime. (Civilian officer mainly investigating fraud, 6 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Some stressed the importance of being strategic with the timing of the evidence presentation and to not give too much information away initially. Another participant talked about trying to create pressure on the suspect by disclosing evidence:

Try to create cognitive pressure by presenting the information you have in a way that makes it difficult for the suspect to be silent or say no comments without it becoming very strange. (Police officer mainly investigating serious crimes, did not specify years of experience).

Supportive strategies

Be friendly and create contact

The police interviewers ($n = 20$) described the value of being friendly and creating a connection with the suspect.

I work according to the words from my teacher at the Police Academy: 'There is no one who can resist kindness'. And I know that it works because suspects often start to talk after a while if they are met with kindness combined with thorough investigative work. (Police officer mainly investigating fraud, 25 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Small gestures of kindness include asking if the suspect wanted a cup of coffee, or bigger gestures like asking if they needed something sorted out when in isolation. The participants also discussed the use of small talk as a conversational icebreaker, including talking about the weather, sports and similar

non-threatening conversation starters. Other topics included asking about the suspects' childhood or personal interests. Some talked about trying to find common ground with the suspect. Talking about other things could be a first step towards talking about the criminal allegation:

Get them talking about something else that has nothing to do with the case. Talk about their interests and then gradually shift towards details about the crime. (Police officer mainly investigating serious crimes, 4 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Ask about reasons for silence

Another strategy reported by the participants ($n = 14$) was to address any underlying reasons behind the suspect's silence. This could for example include memory loss, treats towards the suspect and their loved ones, and that some suspects do not want to provide information that could hurt other suspects. Asking questions about reasons for silence was described as a potential way to get the suspect to start talking:

I try to get answers as to why he does not want to answer the questions; is he scared, under threat, are the other perpetrators his close friends or does he just not want to say anything. (Police officer mainly investigating border crimes, did not specify years of experience).

Do not judge

A few participants ($n = 7$) discussed the importance of staying objective and non-judgmental when meeting silent suspects. This could include explaining to the suspect that while they condemn the crime, they do not judge the suspect as a person:

Trying to explain that I have seen and understand most things, that situations and circumstances can make people make wrong choices. Trying to show respect for people, even though I condemn the crime, always keep in mind that there are reasons why people end up in crime, that not everyone has had the same conditions and childhood/parent relationship that is needed to become a law-abiding citizen. In such a climate, it is usually easier for the person in question to lighten their heart. (Police officer mainly investigating serious crimes, 20 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Build their trust

The last supportive strategy found in the data ($n = 5$) was to talk about the importance of building up the suspect's trust towards the interviewer. Building trust could take time and might not be possible with all suspects:

In my experience, it takes time to create trust and a good atmosphere. This is not always possible due to several different factors. (Police officer mainly investigating volume crimes, 15 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Specifically, trust was described as particularly important in cases involving sensitive topics including domestic abuse and violent crimes:

Sometimes several interviews are required to get the suspect to trust you enough to talk about the incident. This is especially important in domestic cases and in more severe

serious crimes. (Police officer mainly investigating serious and domestic crimes, 25 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Procedural strategies

Change interviewer

Five participants discussed the potential need to change the interviewer as a strategy for overcoming silence. This could either be done directly or by asking the suspect if he or she wanted to change the interviewer:

Try to get an explanation as to why the question is not answered. Dissatisfied with the interviewer? Suggest changing interviewers. (Police officer mainly investigating serious crimes, 30 years of experience interviewing suspects).

Conduct multiple interviews

Lastly, another strategy discussed by five participants was to conduct multiple interviews over time. This could provide more time to establish trust between the suspect and interviewer. Multiple interviews could potentially also be effective when used in connection to having disclosed evidence in a prior interview:

If the case is strong, we can sometimes disclose large amounts of evidence at an individual interview and let it go for a few days and then hold a new interview and hope that the suspect sees the benefit of talking. (Police officer mainly investigating serious crimes, 10 years of experience interviewing suspects).

DISCUSSION

This survey examined Swedish police interviewers' self-reported strategies when questioning suspects who stay silent or speak very little. The results suggest agreement regarding the importance of adhering to information-gathering principles. This is largely in line with the course curriculums offered by the Swedish Police Academies, where the focus has been on emphasizing such techniques and warning against the risks of guilt-confirming questioning (Granhag et al., 2013). Importantly, beyond the ethical importance of avoiding coercive techniques, research demonstrates the superiority of using information-gathering techniques in terms of the quality of information gained from the interview. Specifically, whereas guilt-confirming techniques (e.g. minimization and maximization) come with increased risks of obtaining false information, techniques focused on gathering information produce similar confession rates without increasing the likelihood of false confessions (e.g. Meissner et al., 2014). However, the use of silence, which was one of the more common questioning strategies among our participants, could have a rapport-building quality as well as be more confrontational depending on the context (Kelly et al., 2013).

While mainly adhering to information-gathering principles, we observed substantial variation in the police interviewers' self-reported strategies when conducting interviews with silent suspects. Several possibilities could help explain these findings. First, the sample included police interviewers investigating a wide range of different crimes. Understandably, some strategies identified in the current material (e.g. conducting multiple interviews, changing interviewers) will not be applicable to less severe cases with limited resources. Nonetheless, large variations in interviewing tactics were also

recently observed in Sweden in another study examining police interviewer's experiences, specifically questioning suspects of child sexual abuse (Magnusson et al., 2021). Likewise, small-scale field and case studies with suspects who speak have highlighted the use of different techniques during Swedish suspect interviews (Granhag & Magnusson, 2017). Given that Sweden, at the time of data collection, had not implemented a national interviewing model that all interviewers were required to follow, it is possible that the lack of standardized guidelines provided more opportunity for individual variation between interviewers. However, as Sweden are currently working towards implementing a national model based on the PEACE framework, future studies may see less variation over time (Magnusson et al., 2021).

Furthermore, we also observed differences in the police interviewers' estimations of suspects who are silent or speak very little across different criminal investigations. Specifically, police interviewers who worked with serious and domestic crimes reported that they more frequently encountered silent suspects compared to police interviewers working finance/fraud cases and volume/traffic crime. Being accused of violent crimes come with increased risks, such as loss of employment, harsher sentencing and stigmatization. Suspects in serious/domestic cases can consequently have more reason to exercise their right to silence compared with suspects of other crime types. Access to legal advice could be another contributing factor that is more common in serious/domestic cases compared with volume/traffic crimes (e.g. see Morgan & Stephenson, 1994).

According to our participants, the use of silence could also differ between different suspects within the same crime category. Soukara et al. (2002) reported similar lines of reasoning among British police detectives. Many participants in the present study remarked, for example that career criminals and gang members often use silence or 'no comment' as their primary counter-interrogation strategy. Experienced criminals may have an increased understanding of legal procedures, as well as perceived and actual threats associated with talking to the police. Informal rules could also be related to silence during suspect interviews, such as the importance of maintaining respect, protecting other group members, and belonging to a culture expected to follow a collective code of silence (Skinnari et al., 2019).

Interestingly, the identified strategies in the present study appear to reflect different underlying assumptions regarding the suspects' reasons for staying silent. Specifically, the supportive strategies seem to primarily draw upon more emotion-based reasoning, such as providing a supportive climate in which the suspect can feel secure disclosing a potential transgression (e.g. see Brimbal et al., 2020). On the other hand, the information-based strategies appear to rather target rationale decision-making processes involving the benefits and potential disadvantages of cooperating during the legal procedure. Furthermore, the procedural strategies focus more on expected changes in reasoning over time across the investigative process. Lastly, some of the identified questioning strategies included potentially memory-enhancing elements, such as using open-ended questions and talking about different points in time (see, e.g., Fisher & Geiselman, 1992). The question strategies also encompassed other demands on the police, for example being able to show that the suspect was given a fair chance to respond to questions during the preliminary investigation. Gaining a better understanding about the suspects' decision-making in different criminal contexts may help influence the development of effective and ethical strategies for overcoming silence during questioning (e.g. see Alison et al., 2013, 2014).

When interpreting these results, it is important to bear in mind the inherent limitations with survey data, including social desirability effects and difficulties estimating past experiences (Tourangeau et al., 2000). The current study only captures police interviewers' self-described interviewing practices. Consequently, the use of less desirable techniques (e.g. confrontational or unethical strategies) might be underreported. Further studies are needed to examine how these descriptions match the strategies exhibited during field interviews in different criminal cases. Detailed field analyses should also focus on the strategies and special measures used with vulnerable suspects (see Gudjonsson, 2018, 2021). Moreover, we cannot draw any conclusions regarding the effectiveness of the identified strategies from

the current data. Randomized controlled experiments intended to measure strategies for encouraging silent suspects to talk could be a way forward to reach this aim.

A broader concern relates to the generalizability of the present findings. Clearly, the procedures reported by Swedish interviewers will not be applicable in countries where the interview needs to be terminated if the suspect invokes their right to silence (e.g., the US). However, the results of our study are consistent with previous research on British police officers' strategies (Moston & Engelberg, 1993; Soukara et al., 2002). Future studies could employ multi-lab approaches to shed light on current practices when interviewing suspects who exercise their right to silence across different legal systems.

CONCLUSIONS

Little attention has been given to the strategies used by police officers when questioning silent suspects. We contribute towards filling this gap by investigating strategies reported by Swedish police interviewers when questioning suspects who remain silent or speak very little. Participants described strategies largely consistent with an information-gathering approach. However, the interviewers varied in their self-reported use of specific strategies. A better understanding about the underlying reasons behind silence may help inform the development and usage of different questioning strategies in these difficult situations. The concerns raised by practitioners should be an important source of information when addressing these questions. In addition to being consistent with legal requirements, it is highly important that any strategy intended to encourage the guilty to speak also protect the innocent from coercion and harm. Further research on how police handle suspects' silence is necessary for understanding and evaluating the ethics and effectiveness of such strategies.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST

All authors declare no conflict of interest.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Mikaela Magnusson contributed to conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; project administration; writing—original draft; writing—review and editing. **Emelie Ernberg** contributed to conceptualization; data curation; investigation; methodology; project administration; writing—review & editing. **Pär Anders Granhag** contributed to conceptualization; methodology; writing—review and editing. **Lina Nyström** contributed to formal analysis; writing—review and editing. **Timothy J. Luke** contributed to conceptualization; data curation; formal analysis; investigation; methodology; project administration; visualization; writing—original draft; Writing—review and editing.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The quantitative data that support the findings of this study are openly available on the Open Science Framework (OSF; <https://osf.io/nwabp/>). The qualitative data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The latter data are not publicly available due to ethical restrictions.

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