

Presentation title:

Testing a theoretical model to help explain and predict where people will offend relative to their past activity locations

Speaker: Sophie Curtis-Ham (New Zealand Police, New Zealand)

Co-authors: Wim Bernasco (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, The Netherlands), Oleg Medvedev (University of Waikato, New Zealand), Devon Polaschek (University of Waikato, New Zealand).

Crime investigation and prevent activities can be aided by predictions of where someone will offend relative to their routine activity locations—such as where they live, work, go to school or visit family and friends. A recent extension to crime pattern theory explains why and how people are more likely to commit crime near some of their activity locations than others. This theoretical model proposes that offending is more likely where, and when, offenders have reliable knowledge (affected by the frequency, recency and duration of their past activities there) that is relevant to the future crime (affected by the similarity of those past activities to the future crime). But the empirical research on which the theory was built had not examined these constructs systematically. This presentation summarises several studies that explicitly tested hypotheses derived from the theoretical model, to address gaps in its empirical support, using police data on offenders' activity locations preceding a range of offences. This research reveals variation—in line with theory—in associations between different types of activity location and subsequent crime locations, and highlights the importance of including both reliability and relevance factors when modelling or predicting offenders' crime location choices from their activity locations.