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Presentation title: Does policing help or hurt? Examining the longitudinal relationship between police contacts and delinquency in Norway

The question about whether criminal justice contacts increase or decrease future delinquency has been central to Criminology and the study of individual-level criminal trajectories for over a century. However, previous studies suffer from both limited geographical diversity and low internal validity, and few analyses have been able to appropriately account for time-stable individual characteristics that may drive the observed relationship between delinquency and criminal justice contacts. The goal of this study is, therefore, to empirically test the relationship between police contacts and subsequent delinquency using an individual-level fixed effects design that follows the same individuals over time. While not a complete safeguard against selection on unobservables, the analysis provides a direct test of the fundamental premise of the Population Heterogeneity argument, which stipulates that between-individual differences in offending can be explained by differences in an underlying criminal propensity – such as low self-control, temperament, or hyperactivity – that remains stable over time. The analysis is based on four waves of longitudinal data collected from approximately 2100 respondents over a 13-year time period, where self-report data on delinquency measured at each time point is combined with administrative data on police contacts between each time point. Preliminary results from both regular OLS and individual-level fixed effects models show that coming in contact with the police is associated with an increase in self-reported delinquency, also after previous delinquency and (most) other relevant individual characteristics are accounted for. The results are thus in line with the State Dependence rather than the Population Heterogeneity argument, and provide tentative support for Labelling Theory's postulation that criminal justice contacts increase rather than decrease criminal behavior.