Presentation title:

Lessons learnt evaluating a large scale initiative to improve police safety

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In 2022 New Zealand Police trialled the Tactical Response Model (TRM), a multifaceted initiative aiming to improve staff safety, in four of its twelve policing districts. The main elements of the initiative were additional training for frontline police, new police teams with enhanced tactical capability, and new intelligence teams and processes to support deployment of the new tactical police teams. The evaluation of this initiative was correspondingly complex, particularly when it came to evaluating safety outcomes and attributing these to different elements of the initiative (and the TRM system as a whole). With a view to sharing lessons learnt for real-world evaluations of such large-scale place-based policing initiatives—a common undertaking in environmental criminology—this presentation describes the challenges involved in measuring the effects of the TRM, and the methods used to overcome those challenges. Some challenges arose from the police administrative data available to measure outcomes, requiring analysis and triangulation of safety indicators across many different datasets. Other challenges arose from contemporaneous changes to operational policing and the criminal environment in both the trial and non-trial districts, which precluded a simple 'pre-post' comparison of the trial districts with any or all of the non-trial districts given they were poorly matched 'controls'. We describe the Controlled Interrupted Time Series analysis method used to estimate a more reliable counterfactual (what would have happened in the trial districts without the TRM) with which the trial districts were compared, and additional precautions taken in interpreting and drawing causal conclusions from the results of this method in the policing context.