Understanding the motivations of fleeing drivers: Individual factors

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background and context

The New Zealand Police ('NZ Police') contracted the research team to deliver two pieces of research on fleeing driver events. The focus of this report is on the first piece of research, which aimed to identify and outline the motivations, circumstances and decision-making processes that are reported by individuals who have fled from Police, and their passengers.

These pieces of research fit within a broader programme of research being undertaken by NZ Police on fleeing driver events. The purpose of this programme of research is to better understand the facilitators and factors involved in fleeing driver events, with the view to ensuring that Police chase policy fits with the empirical evidence for how Police chases are best conducted to keep drivers, Police, and the wider community safe.

Methodology

The aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of the motivations of drivers who flee from police. In particular, the research aimed to examine in greater detail the motivations, circumstances and decision-making processes of individuals who flee from police.

A qualitative research design was employed in the current research. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 40 individuals who had been involved in a police pursuit, either as a driver or a passenger. Approximately half of the participants were aged under 20. There was a relatively even split of participants who identified as Māori (40%) and those who identified as Pākehā (48%), with the remainder identifying as Pasifika (13%). Participants were predominately male (70%).

In the interviews, participants were asked to describe the emotions, thoughts and circumstances they experienced before, during, and after the police pursuit. Participants were also asked about what has changed for them since being in a pursuit, and what their previous experiences with police had been like prior to the pursuit.

Findings

- A large majority of the individuals we spoke with indicated that the decision to flee coincided with engagement in other illegal activity. As such, the possibility of being punished for these activities was spoken about by many interviewees as being a primary motivator for deciding to flee from Police. There were multiple factors that contributed to this motivation, including the idea that fleeing was "worth the risk" to avoid perceived harsh consequences for the illegal activities, and the idea that fleeing provided a good chance of getting away.
- Thrill-seeking and related motivations were not identified as a primary motivator by interviewees. While participants reported a general willingness to flee from police if they were signalled, it was very rare for participants to report plans or deliberate intentions to initiate a police pursuit. Similarly, participants did not report deliberately initiating pursuits so that they could share videos or stories with peers, however an increased status among peers was seen as one positive "side-effect" of being in a pursuit.
- Negative perceptions of police, including previous negative interactions with police, general anti-police attitudes, and a perception of being unfairly harassed or being on a different

"team" to police, were also commonly reported as factors contributing to or justifying the decision to flee from police. These perceptions

- Substance use was a prominent theme throughout the interviews, with many participants reporting that they were under the influence during chases and/or carrying drugs when they were first signalled by police. Many participants felt that they would not have fled if they were sober, as their decision-making was impaired by the substances and made them less conscious of the consequences.

- Very few participants mentioned specific mental health issues or diagnoses as a contributing factor in fleeing driver events. However, a number of participants mentioned general life stressors that were pervasive in their childhood or current life. Participants reported that these negative life experiences led to a pattern of maladaptive coping responses and a general disregard for their own wellbeing, which contributed to a general sense of apathy for their own safety and the consequences of being in a police pursuit.

- Common emotions experienced before, during and after a police pursuit included panic, fear, adrenaline, and regret. Positive emotions or thoughts regarding the pursuit tended to be more prominent after the chase was over, with the actual pursuit being a scary or stressful experience for many participants.

- Many participants were confident about their ability to successfully evade police, largely based on previous experience and confidence in their driving ability and strategies to get away. Some participants, particularly younger people, reported deliberately driving in a dangerous manner in order to prompt police to abandon the pursuit.

- In general, participants either did not know what the potential legal consequences for failure to stop were, or thought that they paled in comparison to the penalties facing them for the other activities they were engaged in at the time of the pursuit. This was supported by a general belief that successfully pursuing fleeing driver charges was difficult for police and prosecutors.

Conclusions

A prominent pattern in the findings was that reported motivations and experiences of participants were relatively consistent across ages. Young people did not report substantially different motivations or thought processes to older drivers, although they were more likely to report driving dangerously during a chase, sometimes as a means of encouraging police to call off the chase. There were also no motivations or themes that were identified specifically for people of specific ethnicities, although Māori and Pasifika participants were more likely to report previous negative experiences with police and general anti-police attitudes as primary motivations for fleeing.

The findings of the current research align well with the primary conclusions from a recent literature review completed by NZ Police on the potential motivations of young fleeing drivers.[1] The review identified perceptions of police (including negative attitudes toward police, negative interactions between young people and police, and perceptions of fair and respectful treatment) as being a key motivator for young people who decide to flee from police. The current research also confirmed the important distinction between *intention* and *willingness* to engage in fleeing driver events highlighted in the literature review; participants in our sample indicated that while they were

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[1] Mora, K. and Jones, R. (2019). *Understanding the motivations of fleeing drivers: Literature review of youth motivations*. Wellington: Evidence Based Policing Centre, NZ Police.

generally willing to engage in pursuits if seen as "necessary", there was very rarely an intention to seek out pursuits.

Further aligning with the findings of the literature review, the current study also identified that participants, including both young and older drivers and passengers, tended to engage in fleeing driver events within the context of broader risky or anti-social behaviour, including drug use and stealing cars. The current research was not able to explore the additional suggestions made in the review regarding the neurological development of young people and its relationship with fleeing driver events.

It is hoped that the findings of the current study provide some useful preliminary evidence to both inform current policy regarding police chases, and directions for future research in the area of fleeing drivers.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The New Zealand Police ('NZ Police') contracted the research team to deliver two pieces of research on fleeing driver events.

The first piece of research (referred to internally at NZ Police as Research Tranche 3, and the focus of this report) aimed to identify and outline the motivations, circumstances and decision-making processes that are reported by individuals who have fled from Police, and their passengers.

The second piece of research (referred to internally at NZ Police as Research Tranche 4) aimed to understand the role that traditional and social media plays in affecting public and offenders' perceptions of fleeing driver events; results from this research project have been provided as a separate report.

These pieces of research fit within a broader programme of research being undertaken by NZ Police on fleeing driver events. The purpose of this programme of research is to better understand the facilitators and factors involved in fleeing driver events, with the view to ensuring that Police chase policy fits with the empirical evidence for how Police chases are best conducted to keep drivers, Police, and the wider community safe.

METHODOLOGY

The key features of the methodology for the current research are outlined in the sections below, including the primary research aim, the key research questions, and the research sample.

Research aim and key research questions

The aim of this research was to gain a better understanding of the motivations of drivers who flee from police. In particular, the research aimed to examine in greater detail the motivations, circumstances and decision-making processes of individuals who flee from police.

The key research questions guiding the research were as follows:

1. What reasons do individuals report as to why they flee from police?

2. What do offenders who are under the influence of alcohol/drugs say as to why they flee?

3. What are the influences of mental health on decision-making, in both initiating and continuing pursuits?

4. Are there cultural factors that influence fleeing driver behavior?

5. What emotions and thoughts do fleeing drivers experience before, during and after a pursuit?

6. Do offenders who flee police believe they will be apprehended?

    6.1. What are the reported relative benefits to delaying apprehension?

    6.2. Do offenders have a perception of whether police will pursue in general, and does this influence their decision-making?

Research design

The key research questions were answered through the use of a qualitative research design. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a total of 42 individuals who had been involved in a police pursuit, either as a driver or a passenger. Two interviewers conducted each interview, and an effort was made to match participants who identified as Māori or Pasifika with an interviewer who identified as Māori.

In the interviews, participants were asked to describe the emotions, thoughts and circumstances they experienced before, during, and after the police pursuit. If participants had been involved in more than one pursuit, they were asked to talk about the pursuit they remembered the best in the first instance, with areas of similarity or difference with the other pursuits being explored by the interviewer after this. Participants were also asked about what has changed for them since being in a pursuit, and what their previous experiences with police had been like prior to the pursuit.

Participants were typically interviewed over the phone, and interviews tended to take between 20-40 minutes to complete. Twelve interviews with young people were conducted face-to-face in an Oranga Tamariki residence. Participants were provided with a koha (a $50 supermarket voucher, or similar) in recognition of their contribution to the research.

All participants provided written or verbal informed consent to participate in the research. Ethics approval for the research was obtained from the University of Canterbury Human Ethics Committee, ref HEC 2020/26. Additional ethics approval was also obtained from Oranga Tamariki prior to engaging with young people recruited through Oranga Tamariki.

Research sample

Interviews were conducted with a total of 42 individuals. Two of these individuals were removed from the research sample because they had fled police on foot rather than in a car; this left a total of 40 individuals included in analyses. Of these individuals, 15 (38%) had been drivers in a police pursuit, 19 (48%) had been passengers, and six (15%) had been both a driver and a passenger.

Participant demographics are provided below in Table 1. Approximately half of the participants were aged under 20. There was a relatively even split of participants who identified as Māori (40%) and those who identified as Pākehā (48%), with the remainder identifying as Pasifika (13%). Participants were predominately male (70%).

Table 1. Sample demographics

Age Groups					
	Under 20	20-24	24-39	40+	Total
Total	22 (55%)	2 (5%)	13 (33%)	3 (8%)	**40**
Gender					
Male	16	2	8	2	28 (70%)
Female	6	0	5	1	12 (30%)
Ethnicity					
Māori	12	0	3	1	16 (40%)
Pasifika	1	2	2	0	5 (13%)
Pākehā	9	0	8	2	19 (48%)

Participants were recruited by the research firm, Research First. A convenience sampling approach was used, with potential participants identified through screening existing research panel members, and through contacts from community and government organisations such as Oranga Tamariki. A snowballing strategy was also employed, whereby interviewees were asked if they could identify anyone who might be eligible for the research. Although the sampling strategy was not randomised, the variety of recruitment methods employed for the research resulted in a relatively diverse group of participants; some participants had been involved in a number of police pursuits, whereas others had only been involved in one pursuit. There was also a mixture of education levels, types of employment, and previous criminal histories among research participants.

Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to extract the key findings from collected data. Thematic analysis is a method used in qualitative research to identify, analyse, and report patterns within data.[2] Thematic analysis has been described as a flexible research tool due to the fact that it is independent of theory and epistemology.

Interviews were transcribed and uploaded into NVivo. The researchers then re-read all interview transcripts and independently generated a list of "initial codes" that represented recurring themes in the data. The researchers then met and reviewed the initial codes they had developed, mutually agreeing upon a set of final themes and sub-themes that comprehensively and accurately captured both the research questions and the initial codes. Two researchers then coded all transcripts against these themes and sub-themes, and the coded transcripts were reviewed to finalise and synthesise findings across these themes.

The approach to thematic analysis in the current research could be considered an inductive or "bottom-up" strategy to identifying themes and patterns in the data, whereby the themes identified were linked and primarily influenced by the data rather than influenced by any preconceived theoretical interest.[1]

FINDINGS

The sections below outline the key findings of the current research. These findings are organised around five key themes:

1. Motivations for fleeing

2. Impacts of substance use

3. Life stressors

4. Emotions

5. Consequences/punishment

Several sub-themes were identified for most of these top-level themes and are also discussed in the relevant sections below. Differences in the occurrence of particular themes and sub-themes by ethnicity and/or age are also noted in the sections below, where relevant.

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[2] Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101.

Theme One: Motivations for fleeing

One of the primary themes extracted from the data related to research question one, or the motivations that individuals reported as to why they fled from police. Under this theme, several distinct motivations (or sub-themes) were identified:

Proximal cause/motivator

- Fleeing is worth the risk
- Fleeing provides a good chance of getting away
- Too far gone
- Peer influences
- Fear of mistreatment

Willingness/predisposition

- Automatic/habit
- Anti-police attitudes
- Different teams

As suggested above, the primary motivators for fleeing drivers can be loosely categorised into those that provide a proximal motivator to flee, or those that support a predisposition or general willingness to be involved in a police pursuit. The former can be considered more as the primary reason why someone chooses to flee in the moment, whereas the latter could be considered a pre-requisite or threshold for fleeing to even be considered as an option for drivers.

There was often significant overlap in the motivations for fleeing, and there was often more than one motivation present for an individual police pursuit. The sub-themes explored below should therefore not be considered as mutually exclusive, but should instead be viewed as a range of different factors that contribute to the overall decision to flee.

Notably, thrill-seeking or related concepts were not identified as primary themes in the motivations for fleeing. In other words, it was very rare that participants stated they intentionally sought out police pursuits for fun or an adrenaline rush. Instead, participants reported understanding that a police pursuit was a possible outcome of the other behavior they were engaged in and that they would be willing to get in a pursuit if they were signaled by police, but that being in a pursuit wasn't a primary goal.

> *"I don't intentionally try to get in a chase. I'll drive around normally, [but] as soon as I've seen a [police car] I think f**k that, I'm off."*

> *"So it's more like you'll steal a car and drive around and you don't really care if you get in a cop chase, but it's not like you're looking to get [in a pursuit]."*

Fleeing is worth the risk

A large majority of the individuals we spoke with indicated that the decision to flee coincided with engagement in other illegal activity. As such, the possibility of being punished for these activities was spoken about by many interviewees as being a primary motivator for deciding to flee from Police. Table 2 below provides a break-down of the reported illegal activity that participants were engaged in at the time of the pursuit; note that individuals may be counted across multiple categories if they were engaged in multiple illegal activities at the time.

Table 2. Number of participants who reported being involved in illegal activity, by activity type

	In a stolen car	Warrant for arrest	Breach of bail/parole conditions	License restrictions	Possession of drugs	Possession of other contraband (e.g., guns)	*Total participants*
Ethnicity							
Māori	12	4	2	5	3	2	*16*
Pasifika	5	4	1	1	0	1	*5*
Pākehā	5	4	1	11	5	3	*19*
Age							
Under 20	15	6	3	10	2	2	*22*
20 - 24	2	1	0	1	0	0	*2*
25 - 39	5	5	1	4	4	2	*13*
40 +	0	0	0	2	2	2	*3*

Being in a stolen car was common among younger fleeing drivers and those who identified as Māori. Breaching license restrictions were also common among younger fleeing drivers and those who identified as Pākehā, whereas possessing drugs or other contraband was more common among older fleeing drivers.

Because of this involvement in other illegal activities, many of the participants (n = 30, 75%) mentioned that fleeing from police was "worth the risk" in order to avoid what was considered as relatively harsh punishment for those activities. This was reported slightly more commonly by Māori (n = 15, 94%) and Pasifika (n = 4, 80%) participants than Pākehā participants (n = 11, 58%).

> *"Cause if I run and get away then I don't get charged. It's like the risk. Get away with it, or if I don't I'll get charged"*

Many of the participants spoke about the decision to flee as a relatively automatic response to first seeing the police lights, as often their first thought was the need to avoid capture and the related consequences of this. Avoiding prison time was a commonly-reported consequence that participants wanted to avoid by fleeing, as was losing their license or car.

> *"An instant choice, you know. Like, look my life is sort of ruined either way. So I made the choice to run from the police officer."*

> *"I don't even try and think about it. Just keep in the back of my head that I am going to lose my license, so that is as bad as it gets. So that's about it."*

One primary factor in this thinking process is that participants largely felt that the potential punishment for the failure to stop would not add much to their charges that they would be facing if they were caught for the other illegal activities. They therefore believed that fleeing would provide a good opportunity to avoid these harsher consequences, with relatively few additional costs if they were caught.

> *"It's more I don't want to get caught. Like, I feel as if the punishment will be the same. Yeah, attempting to get away is a better option."*

> *"Because usually if I'm in the car we're going to get arrested and I don't really care about the extra charges."*

Fleeing provides a good chance of getting away

Inherent in the idea of fleeing police being "worth the risk" was the belief that fleeing provided individuals a good chance of successfully evading police. Many participants (n = 15, 38%) reported that this belief was based on previous experiences of getting away during a police pursuit, or from hearing these types of stories from family members or friends.

> *"I've been in a chase once before when I was 13 and I thought it was all good because we didn't crash or get caught or nothing. So I thought it would be all good to do it again."*

> *"I thought that I could get away because I had enough distance between myself in the patrol car that I didn't think he'd see my number plate. And I thought I had a chance so I tried it."*

The theme of successfully evading police and some of the techniques that participants reported using to increase the chances of successful evasion are explored further in the section on the Consequences theme below.

Too far gone

Another prominent sub-theme that related to the two sub-themes above was the idea that participants were already "too far gone" by the time they were signalled by police, and they did not feel that stopping was a legitimate option for them. This line of thinking was reported by 23 (58%) participants, and was more common among participants who identified as Māori (n = 13, 81%) or Pasifika (n = 3, 60%) than participants who identified as Pākehā (n = 7, 37%); this sub-theme was relatively consistent across ages.

These participants reported that the decision to flee was a relatively automatic reaction related to an initial assumption or feeling that they were in a large amount of trouble already. The need to flee was often reported by these participants as the only salient option when they were first signalled by police.

> "I just wanted [the driver] to keep going. I was like f**k, if I get caught now I'm done. I was like, if we keep going I don't need to worry about being caught."

> "I was traveling probably about 140 k's an hour. And I went past an off duty cop about twenty minutes out of [town] and they radioed ahead and I sort of figured that they had done that. And as I came into [town] there was about four or five cops sitting there waiting and I just straight away thought "I'm off, I can't stop.""

Once the pursuit began, these participants felt that there was even less reason to stop because of the additional trouble they were likely in.

> "Yeah, so it's like you could either pull over or who knows? It's kind of like digging yourself deeper."

> "The only feeling I had was, "I've got to get the f**k out of here"... I just thought "f**k it." But at the same time I was thinking, "the cops already know who I am, they already know who it is they're chasing." But my main plan was to get away and they can catch me later."

Peer influences

It was common for participants to have passengers with them during a police pursuit, with 88% (n = 35) of all participants reporting at least one experience of being in a pursuit with other passengers in the car. As such, peer pressure or other peer-related influences were mentioned by 15 (38%) participants as one of the reasons why they fled from police. This was a relatively consistent theme across ethnicities and ages.

For some participants, there was a tendency to engage in antisocial activities with others, and as explained above, these activities were often associated with getting into police pursuits. For young people, this commonly involved stealing cars and going for "joy rides" or "gas runs" (where a stolen car is filled with petrol and then driven away without paying for the petrol), whereas for older participants this often involved buying or transporting drugs with others.

> "Cos I was like dropped out of school at the time and I had nothing to do and yeah, I just started thinking about stealing cars and stuff. And then I met a few people who did it, then started doing it."

Other participants reported a more direct influence of the peer group before or during the pursuit, with participants reporting that they did not want to look "weak" in front of others in the car, or that they got direct positive reinforcement from other peers in the car.

> *"That's like, probably it's worse [being in a chase alone]. Because there's no people cheering you on to like go faster."*

> *"It was the cool thing to do at that point in time. To look cool in front of the girls."*

Another direct role that participants reported peers having in a pursuit was to provide them advice during the chase (*n* = 10, 25%). For some individuals, this gave them more confidence that they would successfully evade police and made them more likely to flee. This was because peers would help drivers by giving advice on where to go or what to do to evade police, and would also be able to take over driving if the initial driver became fatigued. For this reason, some participants reported that having peers in the car reduced the impact of fear and panic in their decision-making, thereby increasing their chances of successful evasion.

> *"So when you're in a car … with your mates, they kind of give you advice on what to do. You're not … having to make all the decisions yourself."*

Although social media was not reported as a reason why people would choose to flee from police, a large number of participants (*n* = 17, 43%) did mention that a positive "side-effect" of being in a police pursuit was a perceived increase in status among peers, or having a good story to tell friends afterwards. A small number of participants mentioned wanting to get on Stuff.co.nz in particular.

This theme was relatively less common for Pākehā participants (*n* = 5, 26%) and participants between the ages of 25 and 39 (*n* = 3, 23%), but was otherwise consistent across ages and ethnicities.

> *"We would meet up later with some of the other boys and we just talked about it. Like "what did you guys get up to today?" "We got in a mean chase.""*

Participants reported that stories of police chases were commonly shared in youth residences or in prison, or amongst other peers who were also involved in similar activities. This was more commonly by direct word of mouth or by sharing videos on phones, rather than by posting on social media. Some participants, particularly younger participants, also mentioned that during a police pursuit they would try to "one up" the previous stories they had heard; in this respect, hearing about police pursuits from others would influence their behaviour during the chase, but was not reported as a primary motivator for wanting to get in a pursuit in the first place.

> *"Yeah, like who can do the longest, who can get the most attention, who can drive on the opposite side of the road the longest. S**t like that."*

> *"When you hear a story of someone [who] got away from seven [police] cars at night … then you're like, "you know what, I'll get eight cop cars. And then I'll do two more." It's real dumb, like you're young, you think those sorts of things are cool."*

Fear of mistreatment

A large number of participants (*n* = 11, 30%) reported that a primary motivator for fleeing from police was the fear of how they would be treated if they were caught. This motivation was more commonly reported by participants who identified as Māori (*n* = 6, 38%) or Pasifika (*n* = 2, 40%) than by participants who identified as Pākehā (*n* = 3, 16%), and was also more common for participants under the age of 20 (*n* = 8, 36%).

For most of these participants, this related to a reported fear of being physically or verbally mistreated by the police officer(s) chasing them. This was typically based on previous experiences

with being arrested and handled by police officers in a way that they perceived to be unnecessarily physical or harsh, or based on similar stories they had heard from family members or friends.

> *"Most of the time? I was scared I was going to get a hiding from the cops."*

Being bitten by police dogs was also a common fear reported by these participants.

> *"If I see a dog car, then I won't run. But if I don't see a dog car then I will jump out and run."*

Automatic/habit

For many participants (*n* = 16, 40%), fleeing from police was more of a habitual response to being signalled, rather than a conscious decision in the moment. Being involved in police pursuits was a relatively common occurrence for these participants, often within the context of broader patterns of antisocial lifestyles or environments.

> *"Yeah I would think of the repercussion, but of course, at the time I'm not thinking about them in a practical way. I'm thinking "f**k this, I'll be in the sh**." And it's something about when you're brought up in that way, you don't want things being taken from you. Especially a car from the police."*

> *"It was just natural for me, like I saw the lights and thought "f**k boom"… It's like a habit you get, especially being from Auckland because it is like the capital of high speeds."*

Similarly, a number of participants, (*n* = 12, 30%) reported that the decision to flee was made relatively automatically and without any conscious thoughts or consideration of options. Once the pursuit started, participants reported that panic, fear and/or adrenaline would typically kick in, and the only thought would be the need to successfully get away from police.

> *"There was no concern it was just go, just drive. See how far we can drive. Just drive, just go."*

The habitual flee response was more commonly reported by participants who identified as Pākehā (*n* = 9, 47%) or Pasifika (*n* = 3, 60%) than those who identified as Māori (*n* = 4. 25%); there were no overt patterns by age. Conversely, Māori were more likely to report making an automatic decision to flee without any conscious thought process (*n* = 7, 44%, compared with approximately 20% for both Pākehā and Pasifika participants); again, there was no discernible pattern by age. This may relate to the higher rate of Māori who reported fearing mistreatment by police officers or general anti-police attitudes; see next section.

Anti-police attitudes

For many participants (*n* = 15, 38%), fleeing from police tied in with a broader pattern of anti-police attitudes; these would manifest as explicit anti-police thoughts immediately prior and during the pursuit. In this respect, fleeing from police seemed like a legitimate option within the context of a general distrust of police. For these individuals, these anti-police attitudes were enough to make them unwilling to stop for police when signalled, particularly when they believed that they hadn't been doing anything wrong, or that they were being unfairly targeted by police.

> *[Interviewer: why would you not stop for police?] "I don't know. I just hate the cops to be honest."*

> *"So there was no reason for it, they had their lights on … It was a combination of me going, "oh f**k this, not again" … and [the passengers] the same thing, "Oh nah, f**k those guys." And then I'm like, "Yep, right, f**k those guys" and off we went."*

For some participants, these anti-police attitudes included implicit principles that they would never stop for police when signalled, no matter what they were doing at the time.

> *"I have one good mate [and] we have a little bit of a thing we used to say like 'non-stop policies'."*

Many participants noted that these attitudes and reactions to being signalled by police came back to not having respect for police and their authority. Because these individuals did not trust or respect police, fleeing from police became a reasonable and almost automatic choice.

> *"I don't know the people's situations but if people had respect for the police then they wouldn't do those things."*

> *"It became like a borderline harassment thing. Like you actually felt like you couldn't actually leave your driveway without there being a problem, and if there was a problem you just need to get the f**k out of there. That's kind of how it became. And that goes right into the respect that we should have had for them."*

These low levels of trust and respect were often spoken about as being a result of previous negative experiences with police (as discussed above), or based on the beliefs and behaviour displayed by others in their social circle during childhood and into adulthood. Of note, a small number of participants reported a perception that police officers would shape the way they initially notified and updated Police Communications about a fleeing driver event in order to increase the chances that the officers would be allowed to initiate and continue a pursuit. This included perceptions such as officers inaccurately reporting the speed they were going, the behaviour of the fleeing driver, or the general driving conditions. Participants reported that this perceived dishonest behaviour on the part of police officers increased their negative perceptions of police and feelings of unfair attention, and made them feel more justified in not respecting the officer's request to pull over.

These anti-police attitudes were more commonly reported by participants who identified as Māori (n = 9, 56%) or Pasifika (n = 3, 60%) than those who identified as Pākehā (n = 3, 16%). This could be related to the higher rates of Māori and Pasifika participants reporting previous negative experiences with police, as outlined in the previous section on the Fear of Mistreatment sub-theme. These general anti-police attitudes could also help to explain why more Māori participants report the decision to flee as a more automatic response to seeing police lights, rather than a case-by-case consideration of the options.

Different teams

Related to the anti-police attitudes outlined above, for some participants (n = 10, 25%) there was a perception of "them versus us" when it came to police pursuits. These participants saw themselves as being on a different "team" to police, often because they believed they had been unfairly targeted or harrassed by police in the past.

This was more commonly reported by participants aged over 40 (n = 3, 100%) than participants in lower age brackets (proportions ranged from 0% to 23%), and was relatively consistent across ethnicities.

> *"I wouldn't go so far as to say a bit of a game but it wasn't taken with the seriousness that it should have been. It became a real combative us versus them. And I think it actually all started with frustration at the police and their attitude towards what we were doing when we weren't actually doing anything wrong."*

Police pursuits were thereby often considered an opportunity for fleeing drivers to "get one over" on the police, or to "win" in some fashion. Some participants also reported a desire to make police officers "work" for their salary.

Because of this oppositional stance toward police, participants reported that they often experienced feelings of satisfaction and/or power both during the chase and when they managed to successfully evade police. Although not explicitly mentioned as a motivator by participants, these feelings would likely act as a strong reinforcer that would encourage future fleeing.

> *"…how would I describe it? I don't know, just getting one up on them all the time. Wouldn't necessarily go so far as to say we did it for fun, but it was definitely satisfying when you could do that."*

Theme Two: Impacts of substance use

Substance use was a prominent theme throughout the interviews, with many participants reporting that they were under the influence during chases and/or carrying drugs when they were first signalled by police. This section outlines four key sub-themes that were identified relating to the impact of substance use on fleeing driver events:

- Wouldn't have happened sober
- Impaired driving
- No fear
- Influence of methamphetamine

Wouldn't have happened sober

A large number of participants ($n = 18$, 45%) reported that being under the influence at the time of the pursuit was a large contributor to fleeing; this was a relatively consistent theme across ages and ethnicities. Of these participants, 11 specifically reported being drunk, seven reported using meth, and five reported using cannabis in the lead-up to the pursuit (some participants reported using multiple substances).

Participants reported that being under the influence impaired their decision-making, and created an intense feeling of needing to escape when they saw the police lights.

> *"At the time, before the high speed, I was feeling like we weren't even gonna get caught. But it was because I was under the influence of weed, I had really stupid thinking."*

> *"All three of them I was on meth. I feel that when I was high it made me not think too far ahead of the consequences of doing that, we just needed to get away. Especially when you're high people around you are all so high and they have drugs on them. We wanted to get away because we had drugs on us."*

Participants reported that they were often under the influence at the time of the pursuit due to circumstances leading up to chases, which often involved socialising with other friends or planning to go to parties.

Although being under the influence of substances was viewed as a primary factor in the decision to flee for some participants, others were typically sober during pursuits. For some, this was so that they could think more clearly and make better decisions if they were chased by police, and/or when they were carrying out other illegal activities.

> *"I was always sober … I can stay under control when I'm sober, cos like when you're wasted or on drugs you don't think straight."*

> *"Probably half of them [I was under the influence] but the other half was sober because we were doing crime at the same time."*

Impaired driving

Another prominent theme related to the effect of substance use on fleeing driver events was participants reporting that being under the influence had a negative impact on their driving ability (n = 14, 35%). This was more commonly reported by participants who identified as Māori (n = 8, 50%) than those who identified as Pasifika or Pākehā (proportions around 20%), and was also more prominent among participants under age 20 (n = 9, 41%) and over age 40 (n = 2, 67%).

Participants reported that being under the influence during a chase often led to more dangerous driving, and less regard for the safety of themselves and others. Participants also reported that it led them to making poorer decisions, which sometimes resulted in crashes. These realisations often came after the pursuit was over, rather than being something that participants were consciously aware of at the time of the pursuit.

> *"Even the road code tells you that you know, driving affects your concentration and perceptions and that. But like, with meth , you're a little bit more easy. Like you play music real loud and like you might go into the curve, may go through a house or something you know. But like with alcohol it's kind of like [out of it] because like the drugs were made for different highs, you know? Yeah, just weird that it affects your driving, you know?"*

No fear

Another common reported effect of being under the influence during a police pursuit was the lack of concern for safety. Participants reported that being under the influence made them less worried about getting caught or being injured as a result of the chase, meaning that they were more willing to flee.

> *"In the car the girls were saying, "We're going to die". That just adds to the s**t pile, you know. Like that's enough to tip you over, like if we're going to die it might as well be in a ball of flames. But I wasn't concerned about anyone else's safety and that is because I was so drunk. Like, now I would be concerned."*

> *"Look you know, when you're high as f**k on the drugs … there's no self-worth and any love for yourself. You have sort of a disregard for your own life really."*

Influence of methamphetamine

Methamphetamine use and/or possession was not initially identified as a key sub-theme from the interviews, however the influence of methamphetamine on fleeing driver events was identified by NZ Police staff as being of particular interest and has therefore been separately explored in the analysis.

As noted above, seven participants (18%) reported methamphetamine being involved in the fleeing driver event they were involved in; there may have been others for whom methamphetamine was a factor, but who did not choose to specifically talk about this.

For some of these participants, methamphetamine was seen as the primary reason why they decided to flee from police. Often this was because of the way in which methamphetamine impaired their judgement when they were first signalled by police, making them more likely to flee.

> *"I should have pulled over, but I was high on meth so I didn't."*

> *"Because I was so high, the only feeling I had was, "I've got to get the f**k out of here.""*

Others noted that this increased impulsivity also extended to behaviours during the chase, with the perception that their driving was more dangerous and reckless when they were under the influence of methamphetamine.

> *"I was taking methamphetamine and stuff … It made my decision making probably a lot more crazier, like smashing through gates and stuff."*

A small number of participants (*n* =3, 7.5%) also reported that methamphetamine often made them feel paranoid, both when the police signalled for them to stop (thereby providing motivation to flee) and after the chase was over.

> *"No, I don't think [I would have gotten in chases if not using meth] because I have no reason to think … like I always thought there were other things going on rather than the reason they were trying to stop me."*

Some participants considered police pursuits to be part of a broader chaotic and unpredictable lifestyle that was associated with heavy or chronic methamphetamine use. This included a history of involvement with police and the criminal justice system resulting from their methamphetamine use. The increasingly serious consequences participants were facing as a result of their chronic use and mounting criminal history were therefore reported as a primary motivator for fleeing by many methamphetamine-involved participants, particularly when they were in possession of methamphetamine at the time; this related to the previous themes of "Fleeing is worth the risk" and "Too far gone".

> *"Been heavily involved in meth, recently charged with supply and numerous other charges … I wasn't supposed to be driving, the police had a fair idea that I was involved in the meth. They came up behind me and I slammed my crutch on the gas pedal and off I went."*

> *"The only thing that I can think of is that I just didn't want to get caught with the P on board."*

Theme Three: Life stressors

Very few participants mentioned specific mental health issues or diagnoses as a contributing factor in fleeing driver events, aside from possible substance use disorders and/or paranoia associated with substance use. However, a number of participants mentioned general life stressors that were

pervasive in their childhood or current life (n = 12, 30%).[3] This was particularly common among participants aged 25 to 39 (n = 7, 54%) and 40 or over (n = 3, 100%), but was relatively consistent across ethnicities.

These participants reported adverse childhood experiences, such as violence and disruption at home, as well as dropping out of school at a young age, poor physical health, and loss of contact with children. Participants reported that these negative life experiences led to a pattern of maladaptive coping responses and a general disregard for their own wellbeing, which contributed to a general sense of apathy for their own safety and the consequences of being in a police pursuit. For many of these participants, police pursuits became a normalised part of the relatively chaotic lives they were leading at the time.

> *"And part of the reason was, I was scared to go home. I was too scared to go home. So I used to just hang out with friends all night, cos I knew if I went home late I would have got a hiding so might as well just stay out all night cos I didn't want to get a hiding … So instead of going home or going to eat with my friends or family, I just went and stole stuff."*

> *"And then, when my children were taken away from me, I just got so heavy into drugs and I didn't really care. You know, it was just my lifestyle that I was living. And [police chases] just came along with that lifestyle. At the time, it didn't faze me. I didn't really care. It just made me kind of think of how to be smarter."*

Theme Four: Emotions

There were relatively consistent themes in the types of emotions that participants reported experiencing before, during and after police pursuits. These primary emotions are explored in the following sub-sections:

- Panic
- Fear
- Adrenaline/thrill
- Positive emotions
- Regret

Panic

Many participants (n = 16, 40%) reported feeling an intense sense of panic as soon as they saw the police lights, which continued (and perhaps intensified) during the chase. This emotion was relatively consistently reported across ethnicities, but participants under the age of 20 (n = 5, 23%) were less likely to talk about this than participants in other age groups.

Participants reported that the panic was particularly exacerbated if they had contraband in the car, or were worried about getting caught for other reasons such as breaching license conditions or bail/parole conditions.

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[3] Given the strong relationship between life stressors and experience trauma, and increased rates of mental health issues, it is possible that participants were in fact experiencing mental health issues but did not specifically identify this during interviews. Either way, it was apparent from participants' reports that these life stressors and traumatic experiences had a large impact on their behavioural and interpersonal functioning, even if this did not reach the threshold of a diagnosable mental health condition.

> *"My mate was on his phone, he was on his restricted and he didn't have his seat belt on. So I pointed the cop out to him and he was like, "Oh shit" and started freaking out."*

The panic that many participants reported feeling made it more difficult for them to focus on what was happening in the moment, or to consider options other than continuing to flee. For some participants, this led to an increase in speed and dangerous driving, in an attempt to evade police.

> *"I can't slow down. I can't control the speed. If I'm on that adrenaline, I just kept panicking pretty much. Just a lot of panic."*

> *"Yeah, I think I just panic too much. So I drive on the other side of the road and turn my lights off."*

For a small number of participants, this experience was so negative that it was enough to discourage them from getting into another chase, particularly given the association between panic and poor driving leading to an increased likelihood of crashing.

> *"But that's the one thing I would never do again is a high-speed. Just you know, so many kids have been killed. Cos that was my first ever high-speed. I just was freaking out."*

Fear

Related to this feeling of panic reported by participants, many participants reported being afraid during the pursuit. This fear related to a number of different potential outcomes, including being caught (n = 10, 25%), of the potential punishment if they were caught (n = 22, 55%), and/or of crashing or being injured (n = 12, 30%).

Being afraid of crashing or being injured was more common among participants who identified as Māori (n = 7, 44%) compared with participants who identified as Pasifika or Pākehā (both around 20%), but was relatively consistent across ages. The fear of crashing was extremely common for passengers during the pursuit, although drivers did mention this fear as well, particularly if they were going faster than they would otherwise in an effort to get away. This fear most often did not, however, cause drivers to stop fleeing.

> *"I remember saying to everyone in the car, "We're dying tonight". No point in putting your seat belt on, I was so deep in it aye."*

> *"So you're scared, not just about the cops and going to jail, you're scared about seriously hurting yourself."*

Passengers would often report telling the driver to stop as a result of this fear, but drivers would commonly continue fleeing, or they would pull over to let the passenger(s) out before driving off and continuing to flee.

> *"I think I was more worried about myself than I was the other person. I was more worried about getting out. It didn't last that long, but it was still long enough. So yeah, he let me out … and then he took off."*

Some participants reported that hearing about other people dying in crashes, particularly people they knew, as being a turning point for them in deciding not to flee from police anymore. This seemed to be one of the more salient deterrents for many people, in addition to going to drug rehabilitation or other clinical programmes.

> *"You learn from your mistakes. And what I mean by that, it's like some of my friends won't even jump in the car because their older brothers died from high speeds. One of my friends died, another one of my friends has died. I am on a road to learning about that stuff."*

> *"I have friends that crashed and they got really bad injured. And seeing that, this is definitely going to stop me from stealing cars now."*

Notably, participants did not often report being worried for others in the immediate area during the pursuit. But for some participants, this was a realisation that became more conscious and persistent after the pursuit had finished.

> *"The thing I was more worried about was if we crashed and someone died or we crashed into a car that had kids in it and hurt them. I still have nightmares about it, like crashing into people and that. It's scary because if you and I were in that and you lose control and that, there's nothing you can do because you can't stop your car from rolling."*

> *"I didn't think I was gonna get caught. Which is some A-grade arrogance and disregard for other people, which I recognise now. It's where I was at in the moment, you know."*

Adrenaline/thrill

Twenty-two (55%) participants reported experiencing adrenaline or thrill associated with the police pursuit. This was relatively consistent across ethnicities, but was slightly more prominent for participants under the age of 20 (n = 14, 64%) and less prominent for participants over the age of 40 (n = 1, 33%).

Participants tended to report adrenaline as an outcome of the pursuit or as something they were already experiencing before the chase started, rather than as a primary motivator for starting the chase

> *"Like your adrenaline spikes up. That's what my adrenaline is like, triggered on … police chases and stealing cars and s**t."*

Many participants reported that the adrenaline tended to be related more to fear or panic during the chase, rather than being a positive experience at the time.

> *"[I was] just pumped with adrenaline with a hint of fear, you know. I was pretty cooked."*

> *"Well, you just get an adrenaline rush pretty much. It's kind of fun, kind of scary sometimes."*

However, this adrenaline was more commonly associated with positive feelings after the chase, if individuals managed to get away from police.

> *"Yeah, I would say my emotions were probably surprised from [getting away]. That was quite a new move. Like I said, it was the first time and only time. It was like, maybe if I'm honest, like exhilarating really."*

Positive emotions

Other participants more explicitly reported experiencing positive emotions or thoughts related to the chase (n = 16, 40%). These emotions were more commonly reported by participants who identified as Pasifika (n = 4, 80%) than participants who identified as Pākehā or Māori (around 30% each), but was relatively common across all age groups.

As with the feelings of adrenaline, these positive feelings tended to manifest after the chase was over. For many participants, these positive emotions related to the sense of satisfaction, power, or relief from safely evading police.

"I'd say it was definitely more of an adrenaline kick but I wouldn't go so far as to say it was thrilling. It wasn't like, "F**k yeah, this is awesome!" it was just like, "f**k the police." So the satisfaction was a relief … it was like, "Thank god."

"It wasn't anything new to us, it was more trying to give the people that we were giving a ride a good feeling."

Participants did not often report that these emotions made them want to get in another chase, although this was the case for a small number of participants.

"Interviewer [What kind of conversations did you end up having about that night after the whole incident?]. That we needed to do it again."

Regret

A large number of participants (*n* = 43%) reported experiencing regret after the chase was over. This was not reported more commonly for any particular age group, but was more commonly reported by participants identifying as Māori (*n* = 9, 56%) or Pasifika (*n* = 3, 60%) compared with those identifying as Pākehā (*n* = 5, 26%).

These feelings of regret related to a number of different factors, including the realisation that they could have died in the chase, feeling like fleeing had been a "stupid" decision, or worrying that they would be caught for the chase at a later point.

"I regretted that whole thing straight away. I just, imagine if like you know, a kid got hit. Or we ran someone over or something. I would never forget it."

"I mean afterwards when we got out of the car, we looked at each other and we were like, "Bro we are f**ked, you know, we're pretty much f**ked". And I mean, the adrenaline was still there so we were sort of just taking in what happened and sort of had a laugh about it, but at the same time, not like a funny, that was fun. It was kind of the laugh that is like "we are f**ked."

For some participants these feelings came in the immediate aftermath of the chase, whereas for others these feelings of regret came many months or years later, after they had the chance to reflect on their previous behaviours and lifestyle.

"I've changed that way of thinking, like it just doesn't get me anywhere. So yeah, I'm ashamed of that part of my life. But now I'm kicking myself because now I'm in a straight head, right frame of mind and now I don't have a license for [a long time]."

For some participants, the regret was also related to a sense that they could have done more to stop the unnecessary deaths of friends or family members related to crashes following a pursuit.

"I would probably tell them not to do it, not to encourage them to do it. Because yeah, five people are dead now and they were all youth when they died."

Theme Five: Consequences/Punishment

The final theme extracted from the interview data related to the final key research question on the perceived consequences of being in a pursuit. The findings related to this are summarised around four key sub-themes:

- Likelihood of getting caught
- Techniques to get away
- No fear of consequences
- Pleading ignorance

Likelihood of getting caught

As mentioned in a previous section, most participants felt that there was a good chance of getting away during a police chase; this was generally based on previous experience of successfully evading police, and a confidence in their own driving ability.

> *"I know how to drive … If I'm getting away, I'm getting away and the only times I've been caught is when I've crashed."*

Participants felt more confident about being able to get away if they were in an area that they knew well (and would therefore not get caught in dead-ends), or if they were in a fast car. Some participants also mentioned that they would only travel at certain times of the day when they thought it would be easier to escape; for most people this was at night when there was less traffic on the road, but some people thought that it was better if it was during the day when there was more traffic because they perceived police were less able to get around traffic as well, and they were more likely to call the chase off.

> *"Most of the chases have been in [region] where I live, so I have known the area pretty well. I had one in [a city I didn't know] but I just kept to the main roads."*

> *"[The chance of getting away was] 50/50. I knew since I was in the s**t car, I was going to crash and the motor had f**ked out because it just kept tapping on 100."*

Although most participants thought there was a good chance of getting away during the pursuit itself, some participants, talked about getting caught a few hours or days after the chase (*n* = 7, 18%). This was typically through the use of camera footage, license plates, or being identified by a witness or the police officer chasing them. Because of this possibility, a small number of participants reported that they would stop fleeing once they knew that the pursuing police officer had gotten close enough to see who they were, or see their license plates.

> *"Well the last time actually I thought I'd got away. I thought they had abandoned pursuit, then I pulled into someone's address that I knew and the next minute they all turned up there."*

A number of participants reported that they would increase their chances of successfully evading police by intentionally driving in a dangerous manner, in order to prompt police to call off the chase (*n* = 11, 28%). This was particularly common among younger participants aged under 20 (*n* = 8, 36%) or between the ages of 20 – 24 (*n* = 1, 50%), and for participants who identified as Māori (*n* = 7, 44%) or Pasifika (*n* = 3, 60%) compared to those who identified as Pākehā (*n* = 1, 5%).

> *"I was just driving on the wrong side of the road … because the Police have to pull off."*

> *"Well it's just dangerous driving. I mean, if you're in a 50km area in the CBD or a civilian area and you're doing 100km, they're gonna abandon pursuit."*

Some participants noted that this did not always happen as expected, and this was often the times when they were caught.

> *"As soon as you drive on the wrong side of the road [police] are meant to be pulling off. But at that time [when I got caught] they decided not to."*

Techniques to get away

In addition to the techniques used by some participants to encourage police to call off the chase, some participants talked about utilising techniques while fleeing that made them more confident that they would be able to evade police (*n* = 23, 56%). This increased confidence to flee when signalled by police, because participants felt that there was a better chance of getting away.

> *"I have a strategy about getting away. The strategy is about turning corners and stuff like that to get away from them because it slows them up."*

A number of these participants mentioned explicitly planning how they would escape if they got into a police pursuit (*n* = 14, 35%); this was typically when participants were engaged in behaviours they knew were likely to draw attention from police, but sometimes happened at the start of the chase, in consultation with other passengers in the car.

> *"Well usually all my mates would be listening to the scanner anyway. And someone would ring me during the police chase and give me pointers on where to go and where they're looking and if they've identified me and what not."*

Some common techniques reported by participants included speeding (*n* = 15, 38%) and pulling over and turning off their headlights (*n* = 3, 7.5%).

> *"You just drive as fast as you can, and yeah that's pretty much it."*

Another technique that some participants spoke about was swapping drivers during the chase or once they realised that they were going to be caught (*n* = 6, 15%). Swapping drivers during the chase was sometimes to change the driver over to someone more skilled at driving, and at other times to be replace the driver with someone "fresh" or less panicked.

> *"She [the driver] just couldn't [keep going], she was folding I guess. You know, when you have the police behind you it's a lot of pressure, you're not thinking straight, we were drunk as well."*

On the other hand, swapping the driver at the end of the chase was often a response to the possible consequences for the original driver. This could either be that the original driver was on release or driving conditions, or that they had the potential of facing more severe consequences due to their age or criminal history.

> *"He was driving first and I swapped seats with him ... Because he was older than me and cos I didn't want him to go to jail."*

> *"So he jumped out to distract the cops. My cousin then was going to jump in the passenger's [seat], and I was gonna jump in the driver's [seat] so they didn't get a serious charge."*

Swapping drivers was therefore seen as a reasonably successful way of increasing the chances of evading capture, or evading severe consequences if caught.

No fear of consequences

In general, participants either did not know what the potential legal consequences for failure to stop were, or thought that they paled in comparison to the penalties facing them for the other activities they were engaged in at the time of the pursuit.

However, some participants we spoke with specifically spoke about the consequences for fleeing from police being relatively light (*n* = 11, 28%). This was both in terms of the perceived impact of the specific punishment for fleeing itself, but also in terms of sentences often being applied concurrently, which meant that the sentences for the other offending often overrode the punishment for fleeing. This reinforced the idea that fleeing from police was "worth the risk" to avoid these harsher penalties, particularly given that fleeing was perceived as providing a good chance of getting away.

> *"I have had 11 or 12 police chases and I have gotten away the majority of the time. And in times I've been caught the cops have just done bugger all so it is worth it"*

Young people commonly spoke about the youth justice system having far less serious consequences than the adult justice system, which meant they were less worried about any potential consequence of fleeing.

> *"We were young and had nothing to lose. If we got caught we would just get put in the youth lock up so that was it. So it's really not much of a punishment for youth."*

Pleading ignorance

Further reducing the fear of serious consequences if caught, some participants reported that they could successfully avoid punishment by "pleading ignorance" if they were caught (e.g., stating that they did not see the lights), or insisting that they were not the ones who fled (*n* = 9, 23%).

Some of these participants believed that there is no way for police to prove that the driver saw the lights. So, if they continued to drive at a reasonable speed and just tried to evade pursuing police by making a number of turns, they would not be able to be charged with failure to stop.

> *"But then they came. I was hoping it wasn't for me but it was. And then when they were behind me, I thought I'd just go 50km ... to pretend I wasn't trying to get away. And then I just kept trying to go down different streets. But it didn't last that long, because obviously they're going faster than me. So, I didn't want to speed ... like try and show that I was getting away."*

There was also a general belief among some participants that police needed to catch them during the chase in order to successfully pursue fleeing driver charges. Otherwise, if police turned up later that day or the day after based on information like license plates, they would not be able to prove who was driving the car at the time.

> *"Well, I've never been charged for fleeing, because the cops would have to prove that you actually saw them, you know? And there's only so much stuff that they want to argue in court, of course."*

For some participants, this meant that they would only stop fleeing once they believed that police had strong evidence about who was driving the car (e.g., they were close and could physically see who was driving).

> *"And if [the police] say "why did you take off?" [I'd say] "Oh, I didn't even see your lights" kind of thing. Just ignorance. It's total ignorance."*

CONCLUSIONS

The findings from the current research project provide some preliminary understanding of the reported motivations of fleeing drivers in Aotearoa New Zealand, including individual and environmental factors that these individuals report contribute to fleeing.

Perhaps the most prominent motivation related to the desire to avoid punishment for other illegal activities individuals were engaged in at the time, including being in a stolen car, breaching bail/parole or license conditions, or being in the possession of drugs or illegal guns. Key factors in this motivation were a belief that fleeing provided a good chance of getting away from police, and that the consequences for fleeing were relatively minor compared to the other charges they potentially faced.

Somewhat surprisingly, very few participants, including young people, reported deliberately seeking out police pursuits, or enjoying the pursuit at the time. Instead, participants reported a general willingness to be involved in a pursuit if necessary, but no specific desire to do so. In fact, participants were often surprised or taken aback by the idea that people might deliberately try to get into a chase. This perhaps related to the common feelings of fear and/or panic that participants reported feeling during police pursuits.

Another prominent pattern in the findings was that reported motivations and experiences of participants were relatively consistent across ages. Young people did not report substantially different motivations or thought processes to older drivers, although they were more likely to report driving dangerously during a chase, sometimes as a means of encouraging police to call off the chase. This may confirm concerns reported by police staff in a recent Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) review, that fleeing drivers may engage in deliberately dangerous driving after learning of relevant policies that force a pursuit to be abandoned.[4] There were also no motivations or themes that were identified specifically for people of specific ethnicities, although Māori and Pasifika participants were more likely to report previous negative experiences with police and general anti-police attitudes as primary motivations for fleeing.

The findings of the current research align well with the primary conclusions from a recent literature review completed by NZ Police on the potential motivations of young fleeing drivers, although as noted above, many of the motivations highlighted in this literature review were equally applicable to

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[4] IPCA and NZ Police (2019). *Fleeing drivers in New Zealand: A collaborative review of events, practices, and procedures.* Wellington: Authors. Available from https://www.ipca.govt.nz/Site/publications-and-media/2019-media-releases/2019-mar-15---fleeing-drivers-joint-thematic-review.aspx.

the older participants in our sample.[5] The review identified perceptions of police (including negative attitudes toward police, negative interactions between young people and police, and perceptions of fair and respectful treatment) as being a key motivator for young people who decide to flee from police; this was also identified in the current research as a common theme reported by participants. Notably, negative attitudes toward police and perceptions of unfair treatment were not disproportionately reported by young people in our sample, but instead appeared to be a theme that cut across ages. Negative past interactions with police were disproportionately reported as a motivator for young fleeing drivers in our sample, however. The current research also confirmed the important distinction between *intention* and *willingness* to engage in fleeing driver events highlighted in the literature review; participants in our sample indicated that while they were generally willing to engage in pursuits if seen as "necessary", there was very rarely an intention to seek out pursuits.

Further aligning with the findings of the literature review, the current study also identified that participants, including both young and older drivers and passengers, tended to engage in fleeing driver events within the context of broader risky or anti-social behaviour, including drug use and stealing cars. Although not explicitly explored in the current research, it is possible that this could be linked with particular personality traits such as sensation-seeking and impulsivity, as suggested in the review. The current research was not able to explore the additional suggestions made in the review regarding the neurological development of young people and its relationship with fleeing driver events.

Although the data collected in the current research project were rich and provided a nuanced understanding of the experiences of people involved in fleeing driver events, there are a number of notable limitations. The first of these relate to the relatively small sample size for some populations in the study, including individuals identifying as Pasifika, and female drivers. This limits the ability to draw strong conclusions about themes for these groups.

The other prominent limitation is the sampling method employed in this study. A convenience sampling method utilising a snowballing technique was used to recruit participants for the research. Although we managed to recruit a diverse range of participants, it is likely that this lead to biases in who we spoke with for the research. In particular, the sample is limited to people willing to admit to being in a police chase, and who agreed to participate in the research. A large number of young people (although not all) were also recruited through Oranga Tamariki, which perhaps skews the young person sample towards individuals with more extensive criminal backgrounds and/or histories of trauma or disruption.

A third key limitation also associated with the sampling method employed for the current research is the retrospective nature of the study. The individuals we spoke with were recounting events that occurred months or even years previously, often in situations where the participant was experiencing heightened emotions or under the influence of substances. It is therefore possible that the motivations, thoughts and emotions recalled and reported by participants have been shaped and influenced by both conscious and subconscious factors over time and may not be an entirely accurate reflection of the true motivations or circumstances experienced at the time. For some participants, the motivations identified after the fact may also be viewed more as post-hoc rationalisations used by participants in an attempt to understand, rationalise, and/or justify their behaviour, rather than an accurate reflection of the true motivations at the time. It is also possible

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[5] Mora, K. and Jones, R. (2019). *Understanding the motivations of fleeing drivers: Literature review of youth motivations*. Wellington: Evidence Based Policing Centre, NZ Police.

that participants chose to report their experiences in a particular way to the interviewers in order to preserve their reputation or protect themselves from judgement or repercussions, although this risk was mitigated by having researchers who were independent from NZ Police.

It is hoped that the findings of the current study provide some useful preliminary evidence to both inform current policy regarding police chases, and directions for future research in the area of fleeing drivers.