



Understanding the motivations of fleeing drivers: Media influences

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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 second piece of research, which aimed to understand the role that traditional and social media plays in affecting public and offenders' perceptions of fleeing driver events.

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 current research aimed to examine the effect of media and social media coverage on:

- Perceptions of the general public on who is involved in fleeing driver events and why based on their exposure through the media
- Attitudes of the general public (especially young people) towards social media posts related to fleeing driver events
- How social media plays a role in fleeing driver behaviour (e.g. is it a motivating factor for fleeing drivers to post footage of their behaviour?)

A qualitative research design was employed in the current research. A total of twelve focus groups were facilitated with groups of up to 8 people in Christchurch, Auckland and Gisborne. Focus groups were differentiated by participant age (individuals aged under 25, or aged 25 and over) and offending history (individuals who had a self-reported proven charge in criminal court, and individuals who did not). A total of 90 individuals participated across the focus groups.

In each focus group, participants were asked to discuss their thoughts on police chases in New Zealand, including how often they occur and how they typically end, who is involved in police chases, and about their exposure to media and social media coverage of police chases. Discussion points were the same for every focus group.

Findings

- Traditional media reporting did not appear to have a large conscious influence on people's perceptions of fleeing driver events, with participants instead largely reporting a distrust of media reporting. It was believed that the media had a bias toward reporting negative outcomes like crashes, rather than "good news stories" like fleeing drivers safely being captured.
- Participants reported that they instead placed more trust in information about police pursuits that they heard from friends and family, or through members of the general public posting on social media sites like Facebook. Across participant types, engagement with social media content posted by the fleeing drivers and/or passengers was relatively low and was generally seen in a negative, rather than positive, light.

- Despite a general reported distrust of media reporting, participants' perceptions of fleeing driving events appeared to be influenced by the type of stories typically reported in traditional media. For instance and despite evidence to the contrary, participants believed that fleeing drivers tended to be young and motivated by thrill-seeking, and that most pursuits ended in crashes.
- One of the most common perceptions about police pursuits was that they are dangerous, both for the individuals involved in the chase and members of the general public. For this reason, participants generally supported the idea of greater discretion and higher thresholds being used by police officers in deciding when to pursue. Participants also supported the use of alternatives to police pursuits, such as helicopters or a greater emphasis on investigation to identify and arrest offenders.
- Participants, including offender participants, were generally unaware of what the legal consequences are for fleeing from police. They reported a desire to have more information on this. Despite this, some participants believed that the punishment for fleeing drivers needed to be harsher, although many participants also endorsed the idea that any consequences needed to address the underlying reasons for the fleeing behaviour.

Conclusions

Because of the perception of media bias, participants generally reported that they would like to see more "good news stories" about police chases (e.g., instances where the driver is successfully stopped by police without injury to themselves, the police officers, or members of the general public), and more information about the fleeing drivers themselves, including the consequences for fleeing. Additionally, because of this general lack of unbiased information available to the general public, many participants reported beliefs that were contradictory to data collected on fleeing driver events. There is currently an aura of mystery or uncertainty surrounding police pursuits in New Zealand, and there is therefore the opportunity for more accurate and representative information about fleeing driver events to be communicated to the broader public, including dispelling myths about who flees, how pursuits usually end, and the idea that fleeing drivers are merely thrill-seekers.

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) 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; results from this research project have been provided as a separate report.

The second piece of research (referred to internally at NZ Police as Research Tranche 4, and the focus of this report) aimed to understand the role that traditional and social media plays in affecting public and offenders' perceptions of fleeing driver events.

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 aims, the research sample, and the approach to analysis.

Research aims

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 the effect of media and social media coverage on:

- Perceptions of the general public on who is involved in fleeing driver events and why based on their exposure through the media
- Attitudes of the general public (especially young people) towards social media posts related to fleeing driver events
- How social media plays a role in fleeing driver behaviour (e.g. is it a motivating factor for fleeing drivers to post footage of their behaviour?)

Research design

A qualitative research design was employed in the current research. A total of twelve focus groups were facilitated with groups of up to 8 people in Christchurch, Auckland and Gisborne. Focus groups were differentiated by participant age (individuals aged under 25, or aged 25 and over) and offending history (individuals who had a self-reported proven charge in criminal court, and individuals who did not)¹. This meant there were three focus groups for each possible age x offending history combination (one in each of Christchurch, Auckland and Gisborne).

¹ Note: the previous offending did not need to be related to fleeing driver events.

Each focus group was facilitated by two members of the research team, with one or two additional researchers observing the focus groups and taking written notes; to encourage honesty and openness within the context of a relatively sensitive topic, the focus groups were not audio- or video-recorded. Focus groups took place in person; due to COVID-related restrictions, two of the focus groups in Gisborne were facilitated under Level 2 conditions, which included appropriate social distancing within the room.

In each focus group, participants were asked to discuss their thoughts on police chases in New Zealand, including how often they occur and how they typically end, who is involved in police chases, and about their exposure to media and social media coverage of police chases. Discussion points were the same for every focus group.

The focus groups were conducted for approximately 90 minutes each. Participants were provided with a koha (an \$80 supermarket voucher) 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.

Research sample

A total of 90 individuals participated across the focus groups. Due to the selection criteria for each focus group, there was a relatively even split between participants aged under 25 and those aged 25 and over, and participants with and without a criminal history.

Participant demographics are provided below in Table 1. Overall, 22% ($n = 20$) of participants identified as Māori, 44% ($n = 50$) as Pākehā, 3% ($n = 3$) as Pasifika, 11% ($n = 10$) as other ethnicities, and 19% ($n = 17$) did not report their ethnicity. Approximately half of the participants identified as male (52%, $n = 47$), with 47% ($n = 42$) identifying as female and 1% ($n = 1$) identifying as gender diverse.

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 participants 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; participants in the offending groups had varied offence histories, including some who had been involved in fleeing driver events. There was also a mixture of education levels and types of employment among research participants.

Table 1. Participant demographics

	Age	
	Under 25 (<i>n</i> = 44)	25 and above (<i>n</i> = 46)
General Population (<i>n</i> = 49)	<i>n</i> = 25	<i>n</i> = 24
Ethnicity		
Māori (<i>n</i> = 10)	5	5
Pākehā (<i>n</i> = 17)	7	10
Pasifika (<i>n</i> = 0)	0	0
Other (<i>n</i> = 5)	3	2
Not recorded (<i>n</i> = 17)	10	7
Gender		
Male (<i>n</i> = 23)	12	11
Female (<i>n</i> = 25)	12	13
Diverse (<i>n</i> = 1)	1	0
Offenders (<i>n</i> = 41)	<i>n</i> = 19	<i>n</i> = 22
Ethnicity		
Māori (<i>n</i> = 10)	4	6
Pākehā (<i>n</i> = 23)	10	13
Pasifika (<i>n</i> = 3)	1	2
Other (<i>n</i> = 5)	4	1
Not Recorded (<i>n</i> = 0)	0	0
Gender		
Male (<i>n</i> = 24)	14	10
Female (<i>n</i> = 17)	5	12
Diverse (<i>n</i> = 0)	0	0

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.

The detailed written notes taken during the focus groups were uploaded into NVivo. The researchers then read all focus group notes 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 areas of primary research focus and the initial codes. The written notes were then coded against these themes and sub-themes, and the coded notes were then 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 the research team’s preconceived theoretical interest.²

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

FINDINGS

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

1. Media
2. Who runs, and why
3. Perceptions of chases
4. Punishment for fleeing

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 the different of focus group are also mentioned below, where relevant.

Theme One: Media

One of the key findings from the research was that media reporting did not play a large conscious role in public perceptions of police pursuits. Instead, the single prominent sub-theme extracted from the research related to media reporting was that the **“Media is biased.”**

Participants did report remembering a small number of stories about police pursuits in the media; these were particularly salient if the stories reported on local incidents, or incidents that people emotionally resonated with (e.g., where the fleeing drivers were young [for the young person focus groups], or where the incident involved injury to an innocent bystander). However, the general perception was that these media stories were biased, and only told a sensationalised version of events. This opinion was expressed equally by general population (63 references) and offender (66 references) focus groups, as well as by the under 25 (61 references) and 25 and older (68 references) focus groups.

Participants reported that in particular, the media is biased toward reporting pursuits with negative outcomes only, such as where the chase ended in crashes, injuries, and/or death. They also felt that the stories very rarely represented the fleeing driver’s perspective, or the perspective of their friends and family. It was also noted by participants that they very rarely saw what the ultimate outcomes were for the fleeing driver, such as the outcomes of any criminal justice proceedings. Instead, the news cycle tended to move on relatively quickly after reporting on the initial aftermath of the pursuit. Participants across all focus group types therefore reported that they would like to see more “good news stories” about police chases, such as instances where the offender had been captured without injury, and more information about the fleeing drivers themselves, including the consequences for fleeing (more on this related to the “Punishment for fleeing” section below.)

Because of this general lack of trust regarding the media, people’s perceptions of police pursuits tended to be more consciously affected by word-of-mouth stories participants had heard from others in their social circle, from television or movies (including *Police 10-7*), or from content posted by members of the general public on social media, particularly on community Facebook pages (e.g., videos or stories from members of the public who witnessed a local chase). This type of content generally involved bystander reports or videos of police pursuits, rather than content posted by drivers or passengers during the pursuit or by traditional media organisations. Some participants, particularly those in the under 25 focus groups, reported seeing videos posted by drivers or passengers during pursuits, but these tended to be from countries outside of New Zealand. People also reported generally negative or apathetic reactions to the people in those videos, rather than

seeing the videos as “cool” or something that they were encouraged to emulate. Participants instead typically endorsed the idea that sharing these kinds of videos was a bad idea, given that it may lead to being identified and arrested.

Although most people reported a general distrust and lack of engagement in media stories about police pursuits, it became apparent from participants’ voiced perspectives on police pursuits that the media may be having a subconscious impact on these perceptions. This idea is explored more specifically in the sections that follow.

Theme Two: Who runs, and why

The sections below outline findings related to participants’ perceptions of the people who choose to flee from police, and their motivations. These findings have been structured around key sub-themes that received the most references in the coded focus group notes:

- Something to hide
- Fear of consequences
- Young and male
- Negative perceptions of police
- Not thinking
- Thrill-seeking

Something to hide

One of the most common reported perceptions of the type of person who flees from police is someone with something to hide i.e. someone who is involved in other kinds of offending. This was a theme that was equally common across all focus groups.

Common behaviours that participants believed these fleeing drivers to be involved in included driving stolen cars, being under the influence, having contraband in the car (e.g., drugs, firearms), or being on license restrictions.

Many participants reported that these perceptions originated from personal experience (or that of people they knew), or based on rationalisation of why people would want to flee in the first place. As noted in the separate research report based on interviews with fleeing drivers and/or passengers,³ this was indeed a common motivation reported by individuals who had been involved in fleeing driver events.

Fear of consequences

Related to the above, participants reported believing that people who flee from police are likely trying to avoid punishment or consequences for being involved in these other illegal activities. This was also a theme that was equally common across all focus groups.

Participants reported that the kinds of consequences these individuals may be trying to avoid included losing their license, having to pay fines (which some wouldn’t be able to afford), losing their job, or being sentenced to prison time.

³ Cording et al. (2020). *Understanding the motivations of fleeing drivers: Individual factors*. i.e. the research report from Research Tranche 3.

As with the “Something to hide” sub-theme described above, many of the fears perceived by participants in the focus groups were also reported by individuals interviewed for the Tranche 3 research.

Young and male

Participants generally thought that males were more likely to be involved in fleeing driver events than females; this was a belief held across all focus groups. Many participants also believed that fleeing drivers were also predominately teenagers or young people, although this was particularly the case for participants in the 25 and older focus groups (representing 74% of references made across groups); younger people did not endorse this belief as commonly.

Notably, although data supports the idea that fleeing drivers are predominately male, a majority of fleeing drivers recorded in NZ Police data are aged in their mid-20s (approximately 30% of fleeing drivers in New Zealand are aged 20-24 and 20-25% aged 25-29, with a median age of 25-26⁴). It is therefore likely that this common perception that most fleeing drivers are younger (particularly among older participants), relates to media coverage of fleeing driver events that result in crashes or injuries (as these are predominately the types of fleeing driver events that get covered in the media). The idea that the media biases perceptions of the gender and age of fleeing drivers was an idea that some of the focus groups explicitly discussed.

Negative perception of police

Many focus groups talked about the possibility of some of these fleeing drivers being scared of police due to previous negative experiences, or a history of being stopped by police. In Gisborne in particular, some participants also expressed that this fear and history of negative experiences may have led to an overall lack of trust and respect for the criminal justice system and those involved, including police.

Participants reported that this motivation for fleeing was likely to be more relevant for individuals identifying as Māori or an ethnic minority, or people who felt unfairly targeted by police.

Again, this was indeed a sub-theme identified in the interviews conducted with fleeing drivers and passengers for Research Tranche 3.

Not thinking

Ten of the 12 focus groups discussed “not thinking” as a primary factor among fleeing drivers. These individuals were described as reacting more out of panic or “fight or flight” responses to being signalled by police, rather than engaging in any considered decision-making regarding fleeing.

Four of these 10 focus groups attributed this motivation specifically to young people, although interestingly three of these groups were aged 25 and older. This suggested that the idea of blindly panicking and having no primary motivator or thought driving the fleeing behaviour was something that older people applied to younger people, rather than being a concept that young people themselves endorsed. This concept also seems to contradict the idea of fleeing drivers having something to hide or a desire to avoid facing consequences, a motivation that was reported equally by younger and older drivers in the interviews for Research Tranche 3.

⁴ Figures based on a recent Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) review of fleeing driver events using a random sample of events in 2017; 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>.

Thrill-seeking

The idea that fleeing drivers were motivated purely by thrill-seeking was mentioned in 10 of the 12 focus groups, however this idea often received relatively little support or consideration from most focus group participants when it was raised. This concept received approximately two references per focus group, compared with approximately six references per group for the “Something to hide” sub-theme.

This general lack of support for thrill-seeking being a primary motivator for fleeing drivers is consistent with findings from the Research Tranche 3 interviews, with very few participants reporting that they deliberately sought out pursuits for fun or thrill.

Theme Three: Perceptions of chases

The following sections provide an overview of focus groups’ perceptions on common outcomes of police pursuits, and whether police pursuits are needed. These findings are structured around five sub-themes that were commonly discussed in the focus groups:

- Chases are dangerous
- Not chasing is problematic
- Discretion seems necessary
- Discretion is problematic
- Alternatives to chasing

Chases are dangerous

One of the most common perceptions about police pursuits was that they were incredibly dangerous, for both the individuals involved in the chase (fleeing driver/passengers and police), and for other members of the general public. All of the groups mentioned the danger involved in pursuits, including dangerous driving and speed leading to a substantial risk of injury and/or death.

A majority of the groups (8 out of 12) endorsed the perception that most police pursuits end in crashes or death. This is not supported by administrative data, which shows that of the 3,796 recorded fleeing driver events in 2017, 626 (16.5%) ended in a crash, 69 of which were associated with serious or fatal injury (1.8% of total pursuits).⁵ This common perception is therefore likely to be related to the over-representation of these types of pursuits being reported on in the media; this is likely to be on a subconscious level, given that only a few of the focus groups raised the possibility of this bias in their perceptions.

Focus groups were split as to whether, of the remaining pursuits, most fleeing drivers are caught or successfully evade police. General population focus groups tended to endorse the perception that most fleeing drivers are caught, whereas offender focus groups were more likely to report the perception that fleeing drivers more commonly manage to evade police. Either way, most focus group participants reported that it was rare to see stories about fleeing drivers either being caught safely (i.e. without crashes or injury) or successfully evading capture, aside from stories on shows such as *Police 10-7*.

⁵ 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>.

Not chasing is problematic

As a result of the perceptions of pursuits being dangerous, all groups also reported the belief that if police didn't chase, there would be less harm caused as a direct result of chases. That said, 10 of the 12 groups agreed that stopping police pursuits entirely would be problematic. Participants reported that not chasing fleeing drivers could lead to a lack of respect for police and a perception that they were not "doing their job".

Potentially related to the perception that most fleeing drivers had "something to hide", focus group participants also generally endorsed the idea that crime rates would increase if police stopped pursuing fleeing drivers, as this would no longer be a deterrent. This deterrent effect was often endorsed by focus group participants, but it's unclear how reliable this notion is given that most participants interviewed for Research Tranche 3 indicated that they were willing to get into a police pursuit if needed, and that this generally did not stop them from engaging in other illegal activities.

Discretion seems necessary

Participants across all types of focus groups were therefore generally supportive of police pursuits continuing in some capacity. However, in recognition of the danger of police chases, participants also generally endorsed a reduction in the number of pursuits police initiated, or an increase in the threshold of the types of offender behaviour that would trigger a pursuit.

In order to achieve this reduction in police pursuits, focus group participants generally endorsed the idea of police officer discretion in determining both when the benefits of a initiating a pursuit outweighed the safety risk, and when a pursuit should be called off early, again due to safety concerns.

Participants acknowledged the difficulty of having strict frameworks around this decision-making process, but generally expressed the view that police chases should be limited to instances where the offender was known to have engaged in relatively serious offending; there was less support for police initiating a pursuit for a failure to stop for a routine traffic stop, for instance. That said, some people did endorse pursuits in this instance, given the perception that fleeing drivers generally had "something to hide".

Factors that participants reported should be considered in the assessment of pursuit initiation or abandonment included safety-related factors (such as speed, area, time of day, type of car, the age of the driver/passenger(s), and driving behaviour), and whether other options were available e.g., the officer could identify the driver and follow up with them later.

Discretion is problematic

That said, many of the groups noted that officer discretion can also be problematic; this was slightly more common among offender focus groups, who represented 64% of total references to this sub-theme. Participants noted that allowing for discretion meant that officer-related characteristics would have more of an impact on whether a pursuit was initiated or continued. These characteristics could include heightened emotions, or a greater tendency for thrill-seeking.

Participants also reported that allowing too much discretion left room for what might be considered unfair targeting or discrimination based on the ethnicity, age, gender, or criminal history of the fleeing driver or their passengers.

[Alternatives to chasing](#)

Noting that there was a general consensus that police pursuits were required in some circumstances, all groups also endorsed the belief that there are suitable alternatives available or potentially available to police officers aside from chasing.

Many of these alternatives centred around increased investigative work to replace the need for catching offenders “in the moment”. These included tracing number plates (although participants noted issues with this approach if the car was stolen), or using CCTV to track fleeing drivers.

Some other alternatives suggested by focus group participants involved techniques that might help to stop the pursuit at an earlier stage, such as the use of helicopters (this received the most support across groups, including by offenders), co-ordinating police units to cut the driver off further up the road, road spikes, and use of GPS. Notably, the focus groups in Christchurch were held soon after the NZ Police trial of the Eagle helicopter in Christchurch. A number of the groups, including the young offender group, specifically identified the helicopter as a deterrent for fleeing and suggested that the presence of the helicopter during the trial had made them more reluctant to engage in behaviour that might attract police attention and/or result in a pursuit (e.g., taking cars for “joy rides”). This was because there was a perception that the presence of the helicopter reduced the likelihood of being able to successfully evade police during a pursuit.

[Theme Four: Punishment for fleeing](#)

The sections below outline the primary findings related to focus group participants’ thoughts on the consequences or punishment for fleeing drivers. These findings are structured around the common patterns in responses related to this theme, including:

- What is the punishment?
- Punishment is inadequate
- Look beyond the fleeing

[What is the punishment?](#)

The most common-subtheme related to punishment was that participants generally did not know what the potential legal consequences for fleeing drivers were; this was a theme endorsed by 10 of the 12 focus groups. The two groups that did not mention this were both under 25 groups, one offender and one general population group – for these groups, at least one focus group member knew about the potential punishment through personal experience or that of a friend or family member.

Participants consistently reported the desire to know more about the potential punishment for fleeing drivers. They reported that media stories very rarely reported on legal outcomes for fleeing drivers, generally because in the stories that are covered, the fleeing driver died, or the media does not return to the story once the case had been finalised in the criminal justice system.

[Punishment is inadequate](#)

Despite most participants reporting that they did not know what the consequences or punishment for fleeing drivers were, all groups discussed the perception that the current punishment for fleeing drivers was inadequate. This was an idea particularly strongly endorsed by the 25 and older focus groups (accounting for 74% of total references), and by the non-offender focus groups (accounting for 65% of total references).

Participants generally discussed the idea that harsher punishments would create more of a deterrent for fleeing police, and was tied in with a broader perception that the criminal justice system was too lenient on offenders.

[Look beyond the fleeing](#)

In contrast to the discussion around harsher penalties for fleeing drivers, there was also discussion across the groups about the need for any consequences or justice response to fleeing drivers to understand and address the underlying reasons for fleeing in the first place (e.g., addiction problems). Participants reported that only punishing drivers for fleeing was like attacking the symptom, but not addressing the cause.

This was a theme more commonly endorsed by 25 and older focus groups (accounting for 70% of references), and offender focus groups (accounting for 61% of references). This was also a theme that was more common in the Gisborne focus groups than those held in other locations (accounting for 65% of total references).

CONCLUSIONS

The primary finding from the current research project was that the media, including social media, does not have a large conscious influence on the general public's perceptions of fleeing driver events. Individuals tend to believe that the stories they are hearing in the media are biased, and instead place more weight on information they hear from word of mouth, or through social media posts from members of the public who witnessed the chase. That said, people generally report that they do not see a lot of content about police pursuits on social media, and report that they are generally indifferent or unimpressed if they do see videos posted by fleeing drivers or their passengers; this was also reported by young people and individuals with criminal histories. Notably, many of these videos are filmed in countries outside of New Zealand.

Because of this perception of media bias, participants generally reported that they would like to see more "good news stories" about police chases (e.g., instances where the driver is successfully stopped by police without injury to themselves, the police officers, or members of the general public), and more information about the fleeing drivers themselves, including the consequences for fleeing. There is currently an aura of mystery or uncertainty surrounding police pursuits in New Zealand, and there is therefore the opportunity for more accurate and representative information about fleeing driver events to be communicated to the broader public, including dispelling myths about who flees, how pursuits usually end, and the idea that fleeing drivers are merely thrill-seekers.

Because of this general lack of unbiased information available to the general public, many focus group participants reported beliefs that were contradictory to data collected on fleeing driver events. This includes wide-spread beliefs that most police pursuits involve teenagers or young people, and that a majority of police pursuits end in crashes or death. These misconceptions likely result from the stories that are selectively reported by the media, and could potentially be combated by the release of more accurate representations of common fleeing driver events and their outcomes, as desired by participants in the focus groups.

Although the qualitative data collected in the current research project were a rich source of information about the general public's perceptions of fleeing driver events and their relationship to media coverage, 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

other ethnically diverse populations. This limits the ability to draw strong conclusions about general perceptions for these groups.

The other prominent limitation is the recruitment method employed in this study. Focus group participants were generally recruited from existing research panels. Although these research panels are broadly representative of the general population, it is likely that the type of individual who signs up for research panels and is comfortable engaging in a focus group environment reflects a certain portion of the New Zealand population. In particular, it is likely that this recruitment approach made it less likely for more chronic or serious offenders, including young offenders potentially influenced by social media, to participate in the research. Further research could look at sampling more directly from this population.

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.