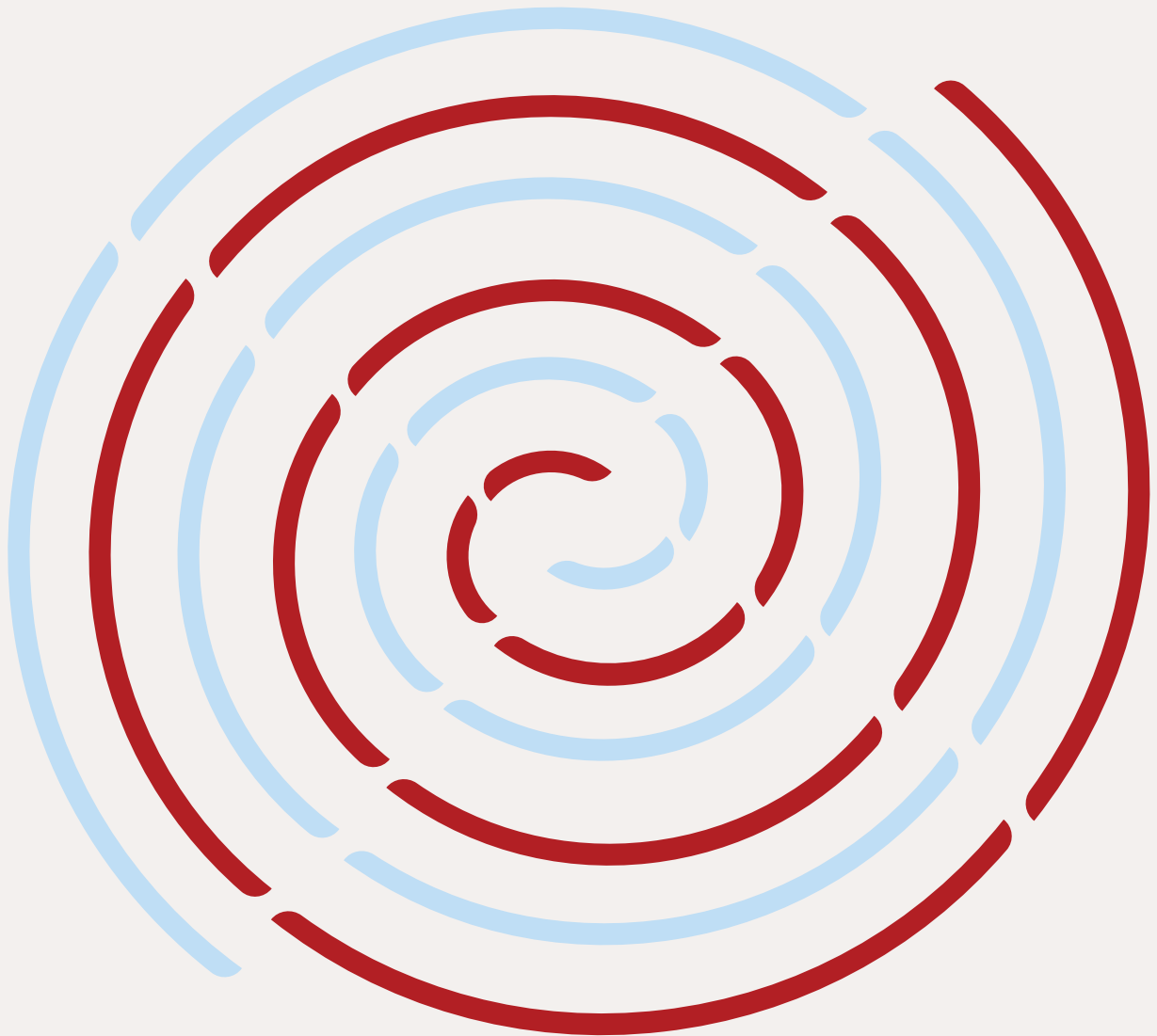


Understanding Policing Delivery

Case Studies & Final Report



**Kia Tika Ai, Kia
Tōkeke Ai**
Make Fair and
Just Decisions

Understanding Policing Delivery

Understanding Policing Delivery is an independent research programme looking at fair and equitable policing for Māori and for other communities.

Both the Articles and the Principles of Te Tiriti o Waitangi serve as foundational to the programme, along with the following values of kaitiakitanga, manaakitanga, whakamana, whanaungatanga, and aroha ki te tangata.

In the context of Understanding Policing Delivery, whanaungatanga has sat at the core of our way of working. It has brought together and created strong relationships between the different champions who have embarked on this journey of work.



With contributions from the UPD Operational Advisory Group and UPD Ethics Committee.

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Understanding Policing Delivery
Phase 3

End of Project Report



Research Team

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Executive summary

This report summarises key results from a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing within Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research¹ in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police).

The research has been carried out in iterative phases, utilising quantitative and qualitative data underpinned by Māori-centred methodology. This research is part of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) wider study that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment.

Policing is a complex issue and many of the challenges facing Police are wicked problems². Policing alone cannot resolve deeply rooted inequity; it is one institution in a larger structural system that is perpetuating inequity and limiting opportunity for marginalised communities. However, for policing to be effective in supporting long-term social change, it must align itself with public health approaches that emphasise prevention and intervention. This means understanding where police fit into the

broader context of societal welfare and working collaboratively with other institutions to prevent crime at its source.

Addressing disparities in policing and in our wider society is crucial for building trust between Māori communities and the Police, enhancing social cohesion, and creating a more equitable society that honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi. This report considers the future of policing and the role of the Police in creating safer communities. We (Ihi Research) acknowledge the courage and openness shown by the New Zealand Police through their active participation in this research.

¹ This report should be read in conjunction with the Phase 1 and Phase 2 reports which can be found on Ihi Research's website: <https://www.ihiresearch.co.nz/>

² Wicked problems are social or cultural issues frequently seen as intractable (Huey, Ferguson & Schulenberg, 2022).

Key Findings

Combined Phase 1 and 2 results indicate variability within policing delivery. There is evidence of harmful, discriminatory policing practices alongside evidence of relational, culturally responsive policing delivery as experienced by Māori and other communities. Analysed data also highlights examples of police innovation that indicate practical, diversity-responsive and whānau centred policing approaches. These projects emphasise the importance of police willingness to learn through engagement with others. Innovation cases demonstrated how police were encouraged to work in partnership with others, and in the process, this enabled officers to witness more empathetic and whānau-centred approaches. This, in turn, encouraged officers to change their own practices, supporting individuals and whānau in more culturally responsive and effective ways.

These policing innovations, which foster trust and partnerships with marginalised communities, need further investment and resourcing to move beyond pilot projects. There is an urgent need to address the social determinants of crime, not just respond punitively to symptoms. People in marginalised situations, whether they are victims or perpetrators of crime, are quickly judged as making poor choices, but their circumstances often mean they have limited choices to make. To ensure more equitable and fairer policing delivery, justice must enhance the lives of the most disadvantaged within our country. This requires a whole of systems approach and a structural change to justice within our society.

Systems that impact policing for fairness and equity

Combined Phase 1 and 2 analysis suggests that instances of inequity and bias do exist in the policing system, but they can remain undetected as they operate at differing levels; structural, systemic, institutional, individual and interpersonal.

The first ‘structural level’ underpins all other levels. It indirectly influences policing delivery yet is typically unseen in the analysis of Police data. Results emphasise that Police operate within a much larger a political and social system that has consistently undermined the health and wellbeing of particular groups. Analysis of Phase 1 and 2 data emphasises that structural bias and the enduring impacts of colonisation, particularly intergenerational trauma for whānau, underpin inequitable policing delivery. This has been emphasised by previous reports (Royal Commission of Inquiry, Abuse in Care, 2024; Jackson, 1987).

As a result, these communities are more likely to be exposed to police intervention in their lives. For example, Phase 1 evidence revealed that individuals from low socio-economic communities faced harsher impacts of penalties due to inequitable road fines. Data from both phases highlights intersectional issues involving gender, ethnicity, and mental health inequities. Public dissatisfaction submissions analysed in Phase 1 included discriminatory comments criticising equitable police actions that supported Māori and the Trans/LGBTQIA+ community. These dissatisfaction submissions exposed racist and homophobic beliefs held by the particular public groups, who rejected policing for fairness and equity.

The second ‘systemic level’ demonstrates the influence of State systems that have been created by the underpinning legislative, regulatory and political structures. These systems including health, education, justice, employment, housing and welfare, have contributed to inequitable outcomes for marginalised communities. Combined analysis of Phase 1 and 2 data highlighted failures in these systems, particularly evident in mental health, where TASER data showed an over-representation of people in mental distress being subject to police use of force. Case studies revealed the intergenerational impact of the State Care system, adverse childhood experiences and trauma, especially among gang whānau, alongside the impacts of

family violence and incarcerated parents. These experiences, combined with early negative interactions with police, contributed to long-standing community distrust of law enforcement across generations.

The third ‘Institutional level’ relates to the Police as an institution and the influence of organisational practices that result in bias and inequity. The Police as an organisation is hierarchical with ranks of different status. The culture of conformity to authority (according to rank structure) within the Police can stifle critical dialogue about bias and unfair treatment. Lower-ranking officers can be discouraged from reporting misconduct or challenging discriminatory practices, as seen in Phase 1 internal complaint data. Combined analysis reveals institutional contradictions and competing Police sub-cultures, with stated values like ‘Commitment to Māori and the Treaty’ and ‘Valuing Diversity’ not consistently upheld. For example, Phase 2 data highlights inequities in paid time for Diversity Liaison Officers (DLOs) in the rainbow innovation space, suggesting resourcing priorities may not align with the organisation’s stated values.

Phase 1 analysis shows that inequitable prosecution rates contribute to the overrepresentation of Māori in the justice system, with Māori being 11% more likely to be prosecuted than NZ Europeans, given similar circumstances. As the frontline of the justice system, the Police have significant potential to influence outcomes and implement strategies to reduce this disparity and promote more equitable treatment. Phase 1 and 2 results reveal variability in policing delivery, with evidence of both harmful, discriminatory behaviour alongside evidence of empathetic policing practices experienced by Māori and other communities. Harmful policing can occur at the fringes of standard operating procedures due to a lack of oversight and a culture of justification. Police Innovation cases highlight practical, diversity-responsive policing

approaches. These policing practices, which foster trust and partnerships with marginalised communities, need further investment and resourcing to move beyond pilot projects and ensure more equitable policing across Aotearoa New Zealand.

Finally, the combined analysis highlights the ‘interpersonal and individual level’ (values, beliefs and behaviour of police officers). This is the level that is most often seen as it pertains to New Zealand Police. While most complaints and dissatisfaction are expressed in relation to a personal interaction, our analysis indicated it may not necessarily be the personal skills of the officer, but organisational, systemic or structural influences contributing to inequitable treatment.

Evidence from Phases 1 and 2 indicates there are three conditions that impact officer interactions and may perpetuate inequity. The three conditions include:

- opportunities to learn through training and mentoring
- time and resources
- officer disposition

For example, the evidence highlights an overemphasis on tactical force options over de-escalation training and leadership development, impacting organisational learning and officer decision-making. Limited resources pressure officers to make value-based judgements about who deserves their time, impacting disadvantaged marginalised communities, including Māori, Pasifika³ men, and those in mental distress. Phase 1 and 2 analyses emphasise how police conduct, compassion fatigue, and resourcing challenges, affect community trust, with positive officer-community partnerships and mentoring being key to improving practices and building trust.

³ In this report we use the term ‘Pasifika’ whilst acknowledging the debates around this term that does not account for the diversity of Pacific peoples.

Conclusion

In summary, this research has identified patterns of bias, unfair treatment and inequitable policing delivery alongside evidence of innovative, humanistic⁴ and whānau-centred police practices. The opportunity to ensure a fairer and more equitable policing delivery lies in our ability to invest in and build safer communities together. In Aotearoa New Zealand, equitable policing delivery and any reorientation must

acknowledge and uphold the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of systems change, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are utilised.

In summary, we need to value and support quality policing and at the same time, address embedded inequity, looking after and investing in the most disadvantaged in our communities.



⁴ Humanistic policing is an approach that emphasises the integration of police support and control functions while recognising the importance of both individual and organisational needs. This perspective in policing focuses on creating a more empathetic and community-oriented style of policing that balances traditional duties with a focus on human dignity and social wellbeing (Smith, 2018).

Introduction

Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is an independent research programme looking at fair and equitable policing for Māori and for other communities.

Examining the nature of Police-community encounters is critical if New Zealand Police is to achieve its overall vision that Aotearoa will “be the safest in the world” (New Zealand Police, 2024b, para 1). Effective policing relies on public faith, trust and confidence as this enables Police officers to discharge their duties in a manner that keeps members of the public safe (Kumar et al., 2022).

Given the importance of maintaining community confidence, “police must always prioritise the maintenance and continuous building of trust” (Daniels-Shpall, 2019, p. 1). Within Aotearoa, trusting community-Police relationships is the Government’s “cornerstone” of policing delivery (New Zealand Police, 2024a, para 1). Yet do all communities trust New Zealand Police, and is policing delivery fair, equitable and safe for all? Police themselves have raised questions about equity and fairness in policing delivery and have called for “deeper thinking”, particularly around

the overrepresentation of Māori and Pasifika males in use of force data (New Zealand Police, 2021, p. 119).

Equity⁵ focuses on fair distribution of resources and opportunities based on individual or group needs to achieve just outcomes, ultimately working towards a society where such differential treatment is no longer necessary (Braveman et al., 2022). Aotearoa New Zealand has had a long-standing attachment to ideas of equity and justice (Treasury NZ, 2015), the concept of ‘a fair go’ for all has been a cornerstone of our national identity (Brookes, 2020). It was this sense of fairness that motivated Māori and Pākehā to create the Waitangi Tribunal in 1975 (Erueti, 2021). However, longstanding issues of inequity in our justice system, the unfair distribution of the law, and the reach of the police into some communities and not others, continue to strain relationships within our society.

⁵ Equality primarily centres on equal distribution and treating everyone the same, while equity acknowledges and accommodates the diverse starting points and unique needs of individuals (PWC, 2023).

A major challenge across the justice landscape is the quest for a more fair and accessible justice model, that addresses the drivers of crime and succeeds in reducing offending and victimisation (Goddard, 2021). Research has demonstrated that discriminatory policing practices pose significant threats to public health and human rights, particularly for marginalised communities (Bor et al., 2021). Equitable policing is necessary to protect public health and human rights.

This report summarises and discusses key results that emerged from a two-year investigation undertaken by Ihi Research in partnership with the Police and community members to better

understand equity and fairness in policing within Aotearoa New Zealand.

This report⁶ is structured in three sections.

Section 1. Briefly describes the background, aims and methodology of Ihi’s research.

Section 2. A summary of key results from Phases 1 and 2.

Section 3. Achieving systems change for fairer and more equitable policing within Aotearoa.



⁶ Information presented here should be read in conjunction with Ihi Research’s previous UPD research reports that can be found on the Police website <https://www.police.govt.nz/sites/default/files/publications/upd-ihl-phase-one-report.pdf>

Section 1. Brief description of the research, aims and methodology

Understanding Police Delivery (UPD) is an ambitious NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police’s operating environment.

In particular, the research seeks to study three key areas of police-community interactions:

1. Who police stop and speak to, and how police engage with them,
2. Decision-making around the use of force, and
3. Decision-making around laying charges.

Ihi Research investigated these aspects of police-community interactions, with a particular focus on Māori. The research has generated empirical data on:

- the nature of police-community interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and

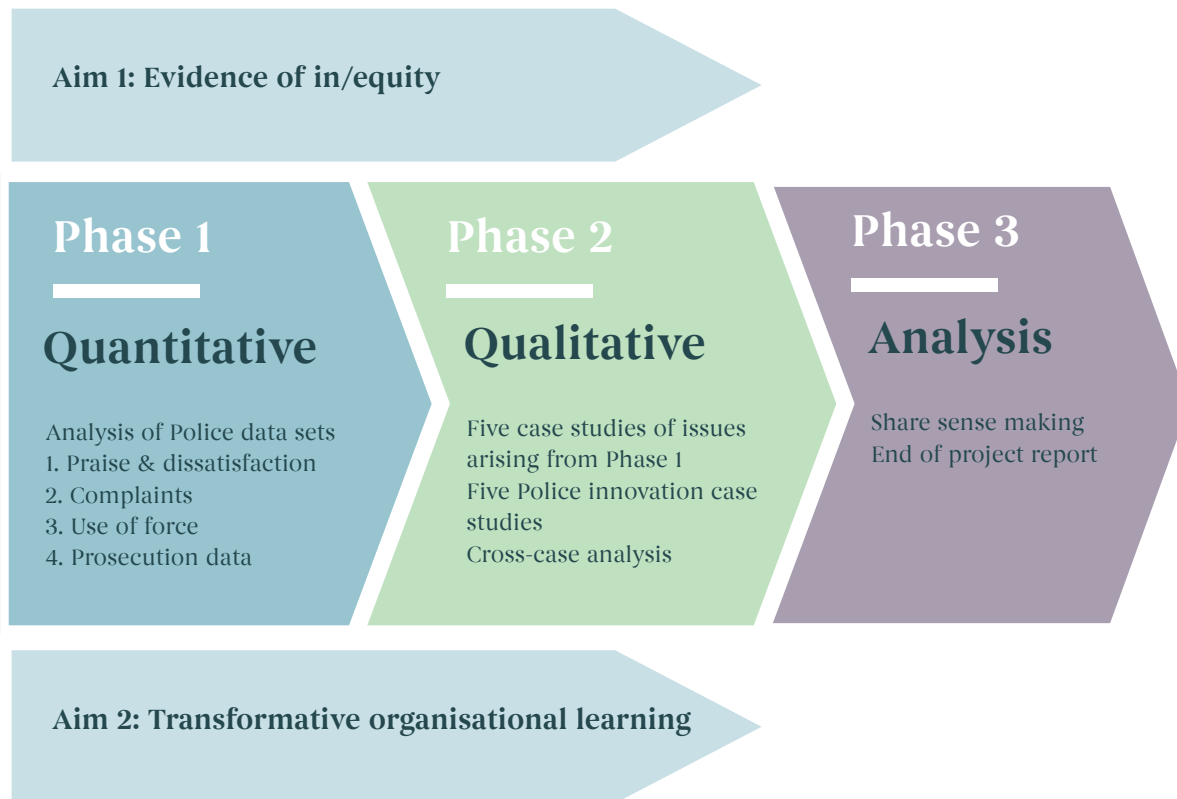
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of police-community interactions.

A ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009) methodology underpins the research approach that was also informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁷). This approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, ensuring Māori were involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The research was undertaken over a two-year period (2022-2024) and occurred over distinct phases as outlined in the following figure.

Phase 1 examined qualitative and quantitative evidence already held by the Police (Praise and

⁷ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation”; “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p.1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

Figure 1: Methodological approach



Dissatisfaction, Complaint data, Use of Force data [in particular TASER deployment and use] and Prosecution data.

Phase 2 data was qualitative in nature, involving semi-structured interviews with 69 participants, including diverse community members, researchers, advocates and police officers. These interviews formed the basis of 10 descriptive case studies. Five of these were focused on communities of interest, and five were focused on sites of police innovation. Cross-case analysis was then undertaken to generate specific themes related to policing delivery within and across specific groups and the extent to which fair and equitable policing was evident.

A final sense-making hui was undertaken with members of the Operational Advisory Group, the UPD and Ihi researchers to review the data and provide guidance for this report (End of Project Report).

Section 2. A summary of key results (Phase 1 and Phase 2).

The purpose of the Phase 1 study was to investigate data already gathered by NZ Police, (praise/dissatisfaction/complaints/use of force and prosecution data) with a lens of fairness, equity and/or bias. The intention of this analysis was not to judge whether this data is right or wrong but to learn what patterns exist across the data and what this might tell us about police interactions with different communities.

Table 1. Overview of Phase 1 evidence reports, key results and recommendations

Ihi Research Evidence Report	Key Findings	Recommendations
Report 1. Analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction Feedback.	<p>Inequity is a systems issue Analysis of public praise and dissatisfaction submissions (n=610) indicates that inequity exists in the policing system and that it operates at differing levels; structural, institutional, individual and interpersonal.</p> <p>Issues of intersectionality Forty-one reports of dissatisfaction data were identified as expressing an inequity or bias issue. Almost half (19/41) of these were from Māori. Dissatisfaction comments also related to females in family harm situations, expressing that they had not been treated fairly by the police and felt unsafe due to police actions and/or inactions. Around a third (7/25) of these comments were from wāhine Māori.</p> <p>Six dissatisfaction submissions were sent in by people who are neuro-diverse, disabled, suffer from anxiety and/or experience speech, hearing and communication challenges. Two of these were from wāhine Māori.</p> <p>Unfair treatment Three submissions noted how inequitable fines and practices resulted in harsher penalties for those who were already in vulnerable situations. The impact of fines on low-income earners is disproportionate to those on higher incomes resulting in unequal treatment.</p> <p>Societal prejudices There were also negative public comments about supportive, equitable Police decisions and practices towards Māori (through public use of te reo Māori) and police support for the Trans/ LGBTQIA+ community.</p> <p>Police conduct influences community trust and confidence Praise submissions indicate community members value having respect shown to them, even when they are in the wrong, and/or in highly stressful and traumatic situations. Police conduct impacts how community members view the experience, influencing their trust and confidence in the Police.</p> <p>Valuing Diversity and Commitment to Māori less evident in public praise data Analysis of praise data demonstrates Police values in action, particularly professionalism, respect, integrity and empathy. 'Valuing Diversity' and the 'Commitment to Māori and the Treaty' are Police values that are less evident in public praise data.</p>	<p>A whole of systems approach is now needed to recognise how inequity exists and operates (both within Police and across society).</p> <p>The Police Service Experience Group adopts the use of the new 'equity' coding framework used to analyse data for this research report.</p> <p>Analyse data in relation to issues of intersectionality, particularly how characteristics of race/ethnicity, gender/sexualities, socio-economic status, dis/ability influence the way police behave and interact with diverse communities.</p> <p>Feedback from the public should be encouraged, with particular emphasis on collecting praise and dissatisfaction data from under-represented communities. Police should work with these communities to determine the best methods for gathering this information.</p> <p>The Ministry of Justice and Police should review the current fines system from an equity lens. The impact of fines on low-income earners comparable to high-income earners is disproportionate.</p> <p>'Valuing Diversity' and the 'Commitment to Māori and the Treaty' are Police values that are less evident in public praise data. It is recommended that Police consider and operationalise what this 'looks like' in terms of front-line policing behaviour and institutional Police culture.</p>

Ihi Research Evidence Report	Key Findings	Recommendations
<p>Report 2. Analysis of Complaints data.</p>	<p>External Complaints Demographic data analysed from external public complaints indicated the majority of complainants were male (52%) and NZ European (44.4%). Almost twenty percent (19.6%) were Māori, 7.6% were Asian, 3.2% were Pasifika Peoples, 11.5% were European other, 2.2% were MELAA3 and 11.5% were Unknown/Other. Patterns across the data sets indicated that over 60% of the complaints were from those aged between 31 and 64. There were only eight complaints from individuals under the age of 18, and 48 complaints from those over 64. Approximately 20% of the data is from 18–30-year-olds.</p> <p>Racism and Police Cultural Capability Thirty-seven complaints were coded under ‘racism or racial profiling’, and 36 complaints concerned the cultural capability of the police in their interactions with members of the public who were from another culture.</p> <p>Disproportionate use of force There were 54 complaints about use of force by police. Sixty-six percent of these complaints were men, and 55% were Māori. The level of force described in the complaints tended to be more serious for Māori and Pasifika Peoples. Not all complaints were from those who experienced the force directly. There were a small number of complaints from members of the public who complained about the level of force they witnessed from the police.</p> <p>Police conduct at Family Harm events Sixty-four complaints referenced family harm events. In these complaints, the public appears to be complaining about the quality of the police interaction. Eighty-three percent of these complaints were from females. Twenty-three percent were from Māori, and 53% were European. In the majority of these complaints, females believed the police had handled the event poorly. A theme that arose in these complaints was that women felt further victimised because of their interactions with the police.</p> <p>Mental Health/Disability There were 23 complaints regarding police interactions with those who were experiencing a mental health crisis or had a disability. It is clear from the complaints in this theme that complainants are often distressed when police are attending, and the police response to mental health is not always seen as appropriate by the complainant.</p> <p>Unprofessional police conduct There were 117 complaints that concerned road policing or traffic stops. Analysis of this data indicates the attitude of the officer (for example rude and unprofessional) generated the greatest proportion of these complaints. Across complaint data was the use of inappropriate or unprofessional language by police officers in interactions with the public. These complaints described the use of swearing, racialised and dehumanising language.</p>	<p>Police analysis of complaints should include a thematic analysis of fairness and equity and intersectionality patterns across all data over time. This includes how characteristics of race/ethnicity, gender/sexualities, socio-economic status, dis/ability influence the way police behave and interact with diverse communities. This is important because Police state they are committed to delivering fair and equitable policing.</p> <p>Without this data Police have no way of knowing if their service delivery is fair to all communities and that they are keeping diverse communities safe. In addition, such analysis can be used in Police training and professional development to improve Police cultural competency and engagement with diverse communities.</p> <p>Feedback should be actively sought from marginalised communities that are not evident in the complaints data such as the Rainbow community, disability community and migrant/refugee communities.</p> <p>Police should review procedures around search without a warrant with a community-focused ‘fairness’ lens.</p> <p>Complaints, particularly in social harm (family harm events and mental health) should be monitored and reported on annually to understand the impact of social and health-related issues.</p>

Ihi Research Evidence Report	Key Findings	Recommendations
Report 3. Analysis of TASER data.	<p>Results highlight patterns in relation to police decision-making and police interactions around TASER events and discharge. Findings indicate that an individual's physical appearance, including ethnicity, size, gender, age, prior offences (or flags) and police assessment of an individual's mental health and/or distress can influence decision-making.</p> <p>Māori and Pasifika males are over-represented in tactical options reporting and TASER use.</p> <p>There are examples of officers TASERing for non-compliance, particularly when individuals did not get down on the ground quickly enough. They appeared to be TASERed to be subdued or dropped to the ground in order to be arrested.</p> <p>Time and resources also appeared to impact an officer's use of TASER, as their reports mentioned the need to resolve a situation quickly and/or if they were alone.</p> <p>The use of TASER tactics to deal with mental health/suicide situations indicates that mental health callouts or flags impact decision-making. Both TASER camera footage and narrative reports indicate that police perceived individuals at these events as unpredictable and unsafe.</p> <p>Evidence in some TASER camera footage and narrative reports appeared counter to the New Zealand Police policy about TASER use. Over a third of instances involved individuals fleeing, evading, and/or decamping. There were 1,101 events involving TOR tactics where an individual is coded as 'fleeing or decamping'. In 305 of these events, a TASER was shown, and in 54 events, the TASER was fired. The New Zealand Police TASER policy states that it is only appropriate to TASER an individual when they are fleeing to avoid arrest and when police believe the individual poses an imminent threat of physical harm to themselves or others. In addition, even when using a TASER against a fleeing subject is justified, police must consider the additional risk of injury to the subject following an uncontrolled fall.</p> <p>Officer experience, confidence and communication skills appear to impact decision-making over the use of TASER. Less experienced officers appear to have a lower tolerance for aggressive or resisting behaviour. Observations of non-firing events noted officers who appeared confident and remained calm in challenging and unpredictable situations were more likely to de-escalate situations by responding in a calm and measured manner. Observational analysis of TASER camera firings and non-firings, demonstrates variability in the communication skills of officers and their ability to de-escalate tense and chaotic situations, keeping themselves and others safe.</p>	<p>Strengthen TASER governance within New Zealand Police. In line with recommendations from other studies, there should be community involvement in TASER review and governance. This should include a joint health/justice review of TASER use with individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis, including the lack of 'health system' response for these individuals.</p> <p>Increased de-escalation training opportunities for police officers, particularly responding in a more empathetic way to those experiencing a mental health crisis.</p> <p>An examination of levels of perceived aggression and what constitutes 'assaultive and aggressive behaviour'. Including examination of how racial/gender bias through size, gender, ethnicity perception and stereotype may increase exposure of some individuals to force.</p> <p>Adopt a learning orientation and transactional shift in the current perception of failures. Police need to be able to acknowledge and talk about stereotype bias and understand how this might have implications for their own decision-making, particularly under threat.</p>

Ihi Research Evidence Report	Key Findings	Recommendations
<p>Brown (2024) Quantitative study focuses solely on decision-making around laying charges.</p>	<p>External Complaints This study was undertaken by Dr Paul Brown with data collected over five years alongside the Evidence Based Policing Team. The data included 141,230 unique offenders.</p> <p>Ethnicity Māori are 11% more likely to be prosecuted than NZ European, given all other variables remain constant.</p> <p>Age was shown to be a strong predictor of the likelihood of prosecution. Findings suggest that while the likelihood of prosecution increases with age, this relationship is true up to a point when offenders start approaching retirement age, the likelihood of prosecution decreases.</p> <p>Gang membership/Prior convictions Gang membership, having prior convictions, and having a high number of proceedings in both the short and long-term significantly increased the likelihood of prosecution, and for some crimes, greatly increased the likelihood.</p> <p>Gender There was no evidence to suggest that gender was an influential factor overall. However, for certain crimes such as dangerous driving, threatening behaviour, and property damage, the likelihood of prosecution for males was significantly higher than females. Females were significantly more likely to be prosecuted than males for offences regarding trespassing and possessing illicit drugs.</p> <p>Relating these results back to the aims of the UPD project, to understand whether bias exists in prosecution decision-making, there is evidence that certain demographic factors influence the likelihood of an offender being prosecuted (e.g., age, being Māori, having prior convictions, etc.). However, findings from this study cannot dictate a causal relationship between factors and prosecution decisions, only evidence of an association.</p> <p>Where associations exist, however, it does warrant further investigations into why these discrepancies exist, and what can be done to correct them.</p>	<p>That studies of prosecution data continue periodically to monitor how things are changing in prosecutions, and whether that change is positive or negative.</p> <p>This study, and any future study employing a quantitative approach, can identify factors influencing prosecution decision-making, and quantify the scale of the effect, but not why it occurs. Further investigation is required to understand why these discrepancies occur and what can be done to correct these discrepancies if needed. Mixed research methods, where quantitative studies along with more in-depth qualitative methods are used to investigate these findings, may reveal greater insights.</p> <p>Although the sample size of the modelling data set was more than sufficient, better standards regarding data collection and recording would improve analyses further. Although this is outside of the scope of this project, it is an example that data quality and integrity are important if we wish to obtain excellent insights into NZ policing services.</p>

Phase 2 was co-designed between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the Police, based on analysis of Phase 1 data. This phase is qualitative in nature and comprised of 10 exploratory case studies. Five case study sites are centred on communities of interest, and five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation.

The key inquiry question for Phase 2 is: How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

The five communities of interest include:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui communities.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori experiencing family harm.
- Gang communities.

The five Police innovation cases include:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).

- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

At the completion of the case studies, cross-case analysis⁹ was undertaken to explore similarities and differences. This analysis highlighted consistent variability in the quality of policing delivery. There was evidence of biased, harmful and discriminatory policing practices as experienced by Māori and other communities. In contrast, innovation cases provided insight into practical applications of policing practices that were responsive to diversity and empathetic. These examples of relational policing practices provide opportunities to ensure more equitable and fairer policing delivery for all communities in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Several key themes emerged from cross-case analysis. These are outlined in the following table.

⁸ Further information on the themes that emerged is provided in Appendix 1.

Table 2. Key themes from cross-case analysis

Key Themes	Evidence from analysis
The importance of relational trust in police-community partnerships	<p>Community case studies evidenced the impact of adverse childhood police interactions/experiences as compounding intergenerational and embedded distrust in the Police. When coupled with perceived police bias and stereotyping, this shared history has produced the foundation for oppositional relationships. This is particularly evident where whānau have been contained, arrested and/or criminalised for perceived ‘immoral’ and/or ‘abnormal’ behaviour as determined by the State. Intergenerational trauma related to State Care abuse, and the failure of police to protect victims was evidenced in the Gang Community of Interest case.</p> <p>Community distrust in the Police has an impact on whether an individual feels comfortable enough to make a complaint. The absence of this data means police misconduct in marginalised communities goes unreported and unmonitored. Furthermore, a lack of mechanisms to monitor equitable policing practice means the effectiveness of new equity-driven innovations and initiatives are not well understood or leveraged for wider institutional change.</p>
Police and community leadership as drivers of change	<p>The analysis emphasises the critical importance of both police and community leadership in promoting fairer and more equitable approaches and in addressing social determinants of harm. Police culture and behaviour is heavily influenced by middle and senior police leadership. This includes police sergeants, team leaders as well as inspectors and more senior leaders. The influence of police leadership as committed to equity and fairness is demonstrated in innovation cases. Conversely, the lack of support from police leadership in innovative spaces appears to limit the ability of officers to use alternative policing approaches. Analysis suggests there is a connection between leadership support in innovative spaces, adequate resourcing, managing high workloads, and aligning values.</p> <p>Community leadership in the context of police innovations is also emphasised as a key theme in the interview findings and recognises the inherent expertise and experience of local leaders within their hāpori. Additionally, well-resourced community partners support shared aspirations in the police innovation space and can drive change within their communities. Cross-case analysis suggests authentic and well-resourced partnerships can shift and improve long-standing police behaviour and culture and rebuild community trust in the Police.</p>
The need to address long-standing police sub-cultures, beliefs and norms about ‘unworthy’ Māori and other communities	<p>Dehumanising and discriminatory police behaviour is evidenced by the use of racist, sexist/misogynistic, ableist police language, alongside excessive use of force and disproportionate responses. Discriminatory police practices are compounded by intersectionality issues. For example, Māori trans sex workers and Māori gang whānau report they are more likely to be stopped and approached by police. Hyper-surveillance and profiling by police can also lead to escalated and heightened police interactions.</p> <p>There was evidence of long-standing, harmful policing beliefs about people’s ‘deservedness’ and ‘worthiness’ across community cases. Discriminatory police behaviour was underpinned by questions around who is a genuine ‘victim of crime’ and who is ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’ of higher levels of police support. ‘Unworthy’ examples were evident in police interactions with wāhine Māori experiencing family harm cases, whānau experiencing mental distress, and gang whānau. In particular, wāhine Māori reported experiencing limited time, care and attention by police as victims of crime. Furthermore, evidence suggests the presence of discriminatory police behaviour was associated with police subcultures that remained unexamined.</p>

Key Themes	Evidence from analysis
<p>The need for enhanced Police training, mentoring and continuous learning opportunities</p>	<p>The analysis highlights gaps in current Police college training and the need for more situated learning opportunities in relation to alternative approaches when interacting with whānau and other diverse communities. Participants described inadequately trained and inexperienced young officers as often unable to effectively or equitably respond to marginalised communities.</p> <p>Furthermore, interviews with police officers raised concerns that many young officers are often mentored by officers with similar levels of training and experience, so there were less opportunities to learn on the job.</p> <p>There was a lack of a robust evidence base in de-escalation training content, flagging concerns about the subsequent impact of similarly researched content on policing delivery. There appears to be a disconnect and misalignment between Police training methods and crime reduction aspirations, suggesting that some traditional policing practices work to exacerbate crime and are ineffective at reducing crime rates.</p> <p>There also appears to be an over-investment in training tactical options that can be used inappropriately and inequitably with marginalised communities. This imbalance in training will do little to improve trust and confidence in policing delivery.</p> <p>Innovation cases acknowledge progress in enabling police officers to openly interrogate their beliefs and practices in safe and honest ways. Officers talked about how different and powerful these types of learning opportunities were. For example, when police deliberately engage with ‘lived experience’ advisory groups and listen to, and act on their concerns – more equitable policing approaches are evident. Being actively involved in research and development discussions about equity and fairness facilitated by outsiders has also proven beneficial. It has enabled police officers to view their practices through others’ eyes and to feel valued by others as they improve their policing practices.</p> <p>Concerns were expressed by interviewed officers about the efficacy of current diversity training modules for police. These were viewed as largely ineffective without simultaneous practical application. In particular, innovation cases highlight how police officers have learned to improve their cultural responsiveness and their communication and relational skills via the mentoring of community-based kaimahi and other professionals.</p>
<p>Improved Police resourcing is needed to ensure fair and equitable policing delivery.</p>	<p>Resourcing is an indication of what is valued within an organisation. As mentioned above, there are clear imbalances in the current resourcing of training opportunities for police officers. Analysis demonstrates that more emphasis is placed on tactical training, particularly with the new TASER 10s, but resource is lacking for evidence-based training for de-escalation and relational skills. De-escalation training and culturally safe, relational approaches require further investment and value within the Police.</p> <p>Time is a resource, and cross-case analysis highlights inequities in paid time for police officers who are in dual roles, particularly for Diversity Liaison Officers (DLO) in the rainbow innovation space. Interview findings highlight a gap in terms of measuring the impact or effectiveness of training and modules on Police practice and culture. For example, Rainbow 101 is a 30-minute online module offered to police staff who may have had a negative interaction with members of rainbow/takatāpui communities. However, this module is currently not mandated and there is no mechanism to measure the effectiveness of this training on future police interactions with rainbow/takatāpui communities.</p> <p>Extra resourcing is needed for embedded research and development within the community innovation space. Currently, some police innovations do not measure their effectiveness, particularly in relation to policing outcomes and changes to policing delivery. A greater focus on outcome data and more inclusive community feedback mechanisms can improve policing knowledge of delivery.</p> <p>Participants raised concerns about police compassion fatigue and police burnout as well as inadequate resourcing for small, rural, isolated police stations.</p>

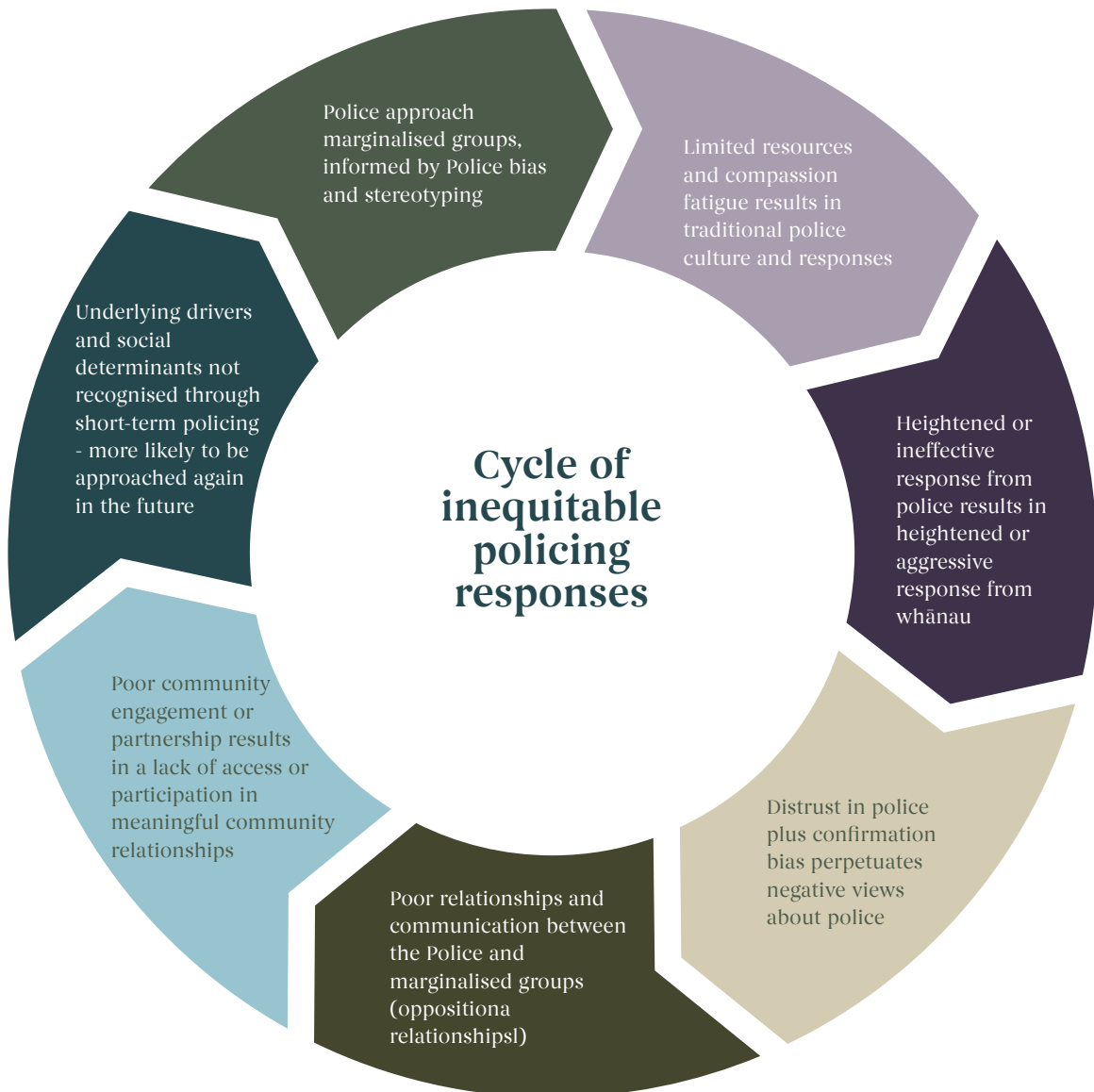
Cross-case analysis illustrates the interdependence of such findings, emphasising a rippling and cyclic effect of policing delivery and how it affects trusting relationships and sustainable outcomes for whānau and the Police. The following figures highlight these dynamics.

Figure 2 shows a cycle of inequitable policing responses, based on policing assumptions of deservedness. This impacts on policing delivery and outcomes. For example, in Figure 2, police stop and approach particular communities, and these encounters can be informed by unquestioned assumptions, reinforcing inequity and bias. Due to the scarcity of policing resource - (staff levels and time), there is pressure on police officers to resolve reports of crime or victimisation quickly. Analysis suggests police officers can

make judgements about which victims they see are more deserving of their time and effort and which are not. This means some communities are underserved. The ineffectiveness of policing delivery sustains community feelings of mistrust and a lack of confidence. The relationships between marginalised communities and police remain in an oppositional state and the cycle continues. Police in turn are frustrated by the ineffectiveness of their actions with specific communities and this contributes to compassion fatigue.

The cycle below is an example of a technical approach defined by Gluckman (2018) whereby system practices are taken for granted and causality is not openly questioned.

Figure 2: Cycle of inequitable policing responses



Gluckman (2018) argues that the policing and justice systems typically rely on technical change within a system while essentially keeping the system as is. The status quo becomes a “comfortable” but ineffective state that keeps producing the same results (Gluckman, 2018, p. 24). Furthermore, this cycle demonstrates how it is possible that early experiences of police interactions can predict later police intervention and interaction in life, contributing to a group of minority communities which are over-monitored and underserved by current systemic and institutional practices. This was evident throughout multiple community case studies, where adverse childhood experiences of the police were present for those people who later had engagements or were monitored by the police.

In contrast, the following figure (Figure 3) demonstrates a fairer and more equitable approach to community-based policing. In this approach, the cycle of inequitable policing changes. In the following figure Police acknowledge the need for change and innovative

ways of working with communities. They attempt fairer and more equitable policing approaches that align with local community aspirations and needs. There is a focus on resourcing for innovation, alongside an acknowledgement of the importance of community-police partnerships to better address crime and victimisation rates. There is a heightened awareness of social determinants of community harm that need to be addressed. Police learn new approaches through engagement with kaimahi, who have the expertise, community networks and trust to engage whānau. Police are open to learning through these new arrangements, relationships and partnerships. They are exposed to different ways of viewing Police delivery and are given time and resource to work innovatively. These partnerships not only improve policing delivery but build community trust and confidence in Police. This is an example of what Gluckman calls “adaptive change” (2018, p. 24). This approach tackles the underlying problem by altering the original characteristics of the system, as well as the context in which it operates and networks. This is demonstrated in the following figure.

Figure 3: Changing the cycle: Leading to equitable, fairer and community-based policing responses



Section 3. Achieving systems change for fairer and more equitable policing within Aotearoa.

The overall purpose of this research has been to understand ‘to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police’s operating environment’ (UPD).

Data from all phases of this research indicates patterns of inequity and bias across the Police system influenced by inequitable wider societal structures. Inequity and unfair treatment are evident across different levels; structural, systemic, institutional and interpersonal.

Previous research emphasises how racial bias exists at these different levels (Tompson et al., 2021; Waitangi Tribunal Report, 2019; Waitangi Tribunal Report, 2017). In addition, racial bias intersects with other forms of discrimination. Intersectionality holds that the traditional models of oppression impacting people, such as

those based on race/ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economic status, dis/ability, sexual orientation and age, do not act independently of one another. Rather these forms of oppression interact creating a system underpinned by multiple forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991).

The following figure highlights these varying levels that influence fairness and equity in policing delivery that are underpinned by power dynamics, social hierarchies and assumptions of deservedness and justice.

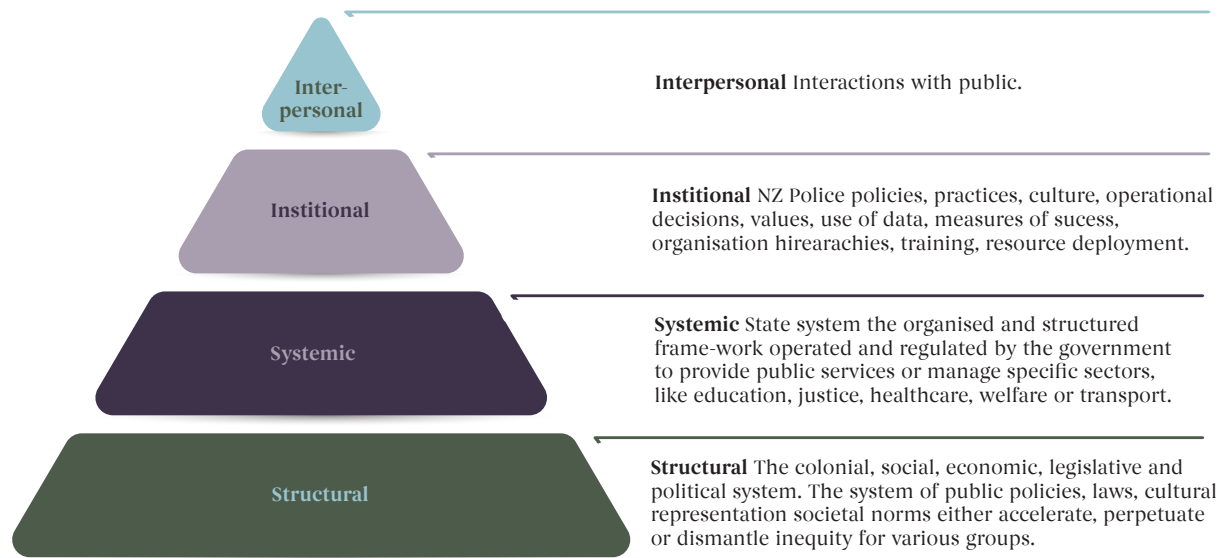


Figure 4: The different levels of bias influencing equity and fairness in policing delivery.

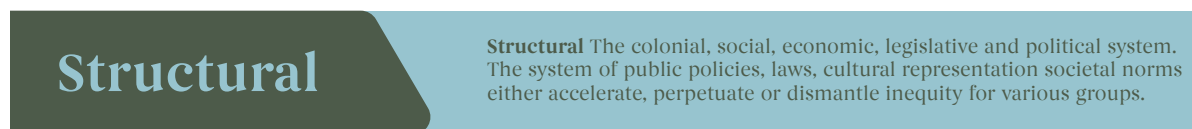


Figure 5. The Structural level

Structural

The first ‘structural’ level forms the base of the pyramid. This level is often unseen and remains unexamined in discussions of policing delivery. Yet analysis from our research of Police encounters with Māori and other marginalised communities demonstrates it is deeply rooted in Aotearoa New Zealand’s colonial history and ongoing structural inequalities. These structural implications are not always clearly visible in the above levels, and most likely are not examined in interpersonal relationships, despite their influence. However, as the basis of the pyramid, they exist as influencing and predicting all later levels and involve presuppositions about how the world works (Salmond, 2012), often

unconsciously setting the foundations of the diagram.

Police operate within an inherited political eco-system and structural framework that has consistently undermined the health and wellbeing of Māori and other marginalised communities, and as a result, they are more likely to be exposed to police intervention in their lives. There is significant evidence that demonstrates how successive government policies and legislation have worked to undermine whānau, hapū and iwi structures (Reid et al., 2017). Mikaere (1994) observes that this undermining was not just the result of colonisation and structural racism but an essential part of the process.

Colonial structures in New Zealand, including the Westminster-style system of government, have systematically and deliberately marginalised Māori communities⁹ since the 19th century (see Appendix 2). The imposition of British legal and political systems undermined traditional Māori governance structures and decision-making processes, leading to a loss of autonomy and self-determination (Bargh, 2013). The establishment of a unitary state with centralised power in Wellington further eroded the authority of iwi and hapū, while the introduction of individual land ownership disrupted collective land management practices that were central to Māori social and economic organisation (Boast, 2008). These colonial structures entrenched Pākehā dominance in political institutions, with Māori representation limited to just four designated seats in Parliament for much of New Zealand's history (Sullivan, 2016).

The marginalisation of Māori communities has been perpetuated through ongoing institutional racism and the prioritisation of Western knowledge systems and worldviews in government policy and practice. Despite the introduction of the Treaty of Waitangi Act 1975 and subsequent efforts at bicultural reform, many argue that fundamental power imbalances remain embedded in New Zealand's governance structures (O'Sullivan, 2007). The continued use of majority decision-making processes in Parliament and local government bodies often fails to adequately protect Māori rights and interests as guaranteed under Te Tiriti o Waitangi (Jones, 2016).

The colonial political and legislative system has fuelled inequities creating adverse social and economic factors which influence Māori and other marginalised interactions with Police (Tauri, 2009; Ministerial Advisory Committee on a Māori Perspective for the Department of Social Welfare, 1988). As a result, Māori have higher rates of ill health, unemployment, incarceration, family violence, homelessness, drug and alcohol

addiction, mental health issues and reduced educational opportunities when compared with their non-Māori peers (Cram et al., 2022; Hynds et al., 2016; Kaiwai et al., 2020; McIntosh, 2019a; McIntosh, 2019b; Pihama et al., 2019; Savage et al., 2021; Waitangi Tribunal, 2017; Waitangi Tribunal, 2019). Intergenerational trauma, increasing socio-economic disparities and poverty, lack of culturally appropriate and adequate mental health and AOD support, coupled with the failure to adequately resource culturally appropriate support and healing approaches, have perpetuated the risk for Māori.

The impact of this political/legislative inequity is particularly evident in the stark disparity in how crimes associated with poverty are treated compared to those linked to wealth and greed. Crimes such as theft and family violence, often rooted in socioeconomic disadvantage, tend to receive harsher punishments than white-collar crimes like tax evasion or wage theft. Marriott (2018) highlights this inequality within New Zealand, noting that welfare fraud, predominantly committed by those in financial hardship, is treated more punitively than tax evasion, which is typically perpetrated by more affluent individuals. Welfare fraudsters are more likely to be prosecuted and receive prison sentences, while tax evaders often face lighter penalties or avoid prosecution altogether. This disparity extends to the collection of debts, with welfare debts pursued more aggressively than tax debts. Such differential treatment reinforces existing social inequalities and disproportionately impacts Māori and other marginalised communities, who are overrepresented in lower socioeconomic groups and the criminal justice system (Marriott, 2018).

Phase 1 evidence highlighted differential treatment through inequitable road fines resulting in greater harsher impact of penalties for individuals from low socio-economic communities. Phase 1 and 2 results also stressed issues of intersectionality (the connections

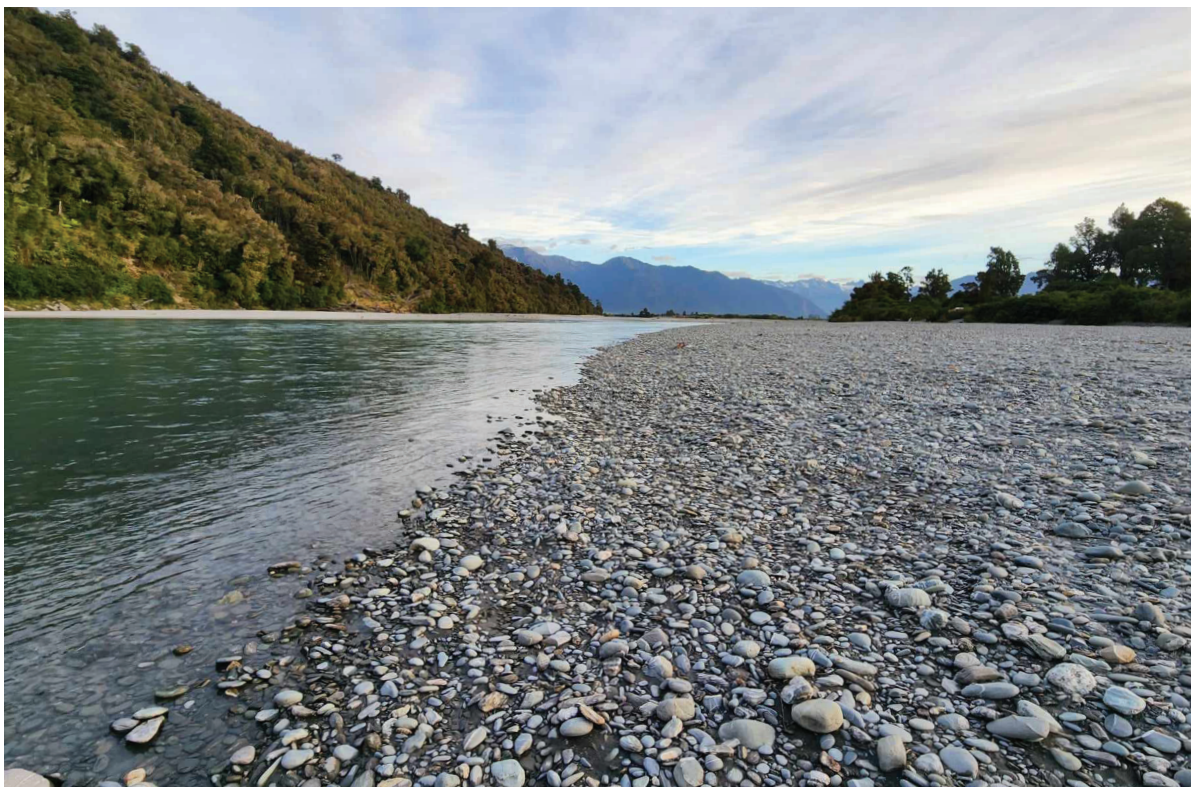
⁹ This is also relevant for other marginalised communities including the disabled community and takatāpui who are not adequately represented in decision-making structures within Aotearoa New Zealand.

between gender, ethnicity, mental health) that were related to biases and assumptions not only in policing delivery, but also wider society. For example, there were negative public comments in dissatisfaction submissions about supportive actions taken by the Police to proactively address equity issues. These comments complained about positive Police actions and practices towards Māori (such as the use of te reo Māori) and Police support for the Trans/LGBTQIA+ community. Equitable Police behaviour was seen as ‘undemocratic’ by some members of the public who revealed racist, homophobic beliefs in their submissions.

Government policies have a significant influence on state systems like the Police, which in turn affects equity in society. Research has shown that conservatives tend to hold more positive attitudes towards the police compared to liberals, regardless of police conduct (Navarro & Hansen, 2023). This ideological divide can lead to disparities in how different segments of society perceive and interact with police. Coupled with New Zealand's three-year government cycle,

political ideologies can inhibit positive societal change, like achieving equity or lowering crime rates. The short electoral cycle tends to encourage politicians to focus on short-term goals and quick fixes rather than long-term, systemic changes needed to address complex issues (Stanley, 2020).

The limited time frame of three years may not be sufficient to fully implement and evaluate the effectiveness of complex social policies, making it difficult to determine what works in areas like crime reduction or improving equity. Different governments have different priorities, which can lead to a lack of sustained focus on issues like equity or crime reduction over multiple electoral cycles (Goldsmith, 2024). Furthermore, the short cycle may make governments more sensitive to public opinion and media coverage, which this research has shown can be at odds with evidence-based approaches to complex social issues, potentially hindering progress towards achieving equity and lowering crime rates (Boomen, 2018).



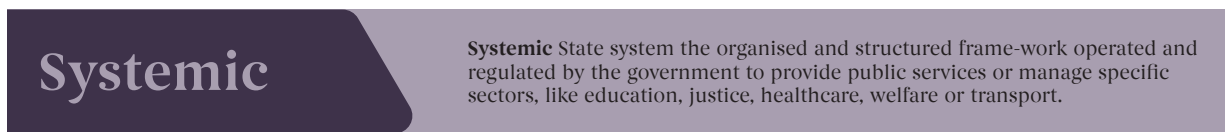


Figure 6. The Systemic level

Systemic

The second ‘systemic level’ of the figure demonstrates the influence of State ‘systems’ that have been created by the underpinning legislative, regulatory and political structures. These State systems including health, education, justice, employment, housing and welfare, have contributed to inequitable outcomes for marginalised communities who are then exposed to increased police intervention in their lives.

In 1987, Moana Jackson wrote, “The justice system does not exist in isolation from the society it serves” (p. 10). He acknowledged “the influence of the social, educational, and employment strategies upon which people who come into contact with justice processes, and the way in which the processes react to maintain these structures” (Jackson, 1987, p. 10).

The justice/policing systems are entrenched in the same cultural foundations as other major social structures, such as the education system and are “inevitably influenced and shaped by the same cultural values and ideals” (Jackson, 1987, p. 12). The clear racial differentials of ‘success’ ‘ability’ and ‘streaming’ in terms of educational achievement and employment “indicate that our vocational and education structures are institutionally racist” (Jackson, 1987, p. 12).

Since Moana Jackson’s report, the Waitangi Tribunal has heard claims about the racial inequity of the justice system, the health system, Oranga Tamariki and the State care system. It is widely accepted that these failures of the State to adequately provide for Māori is a breach of Te Tiriti o Waitangi and has, in many cases, increased the exposure of Māori to police intervention in their lives.

Agencies that operate within these systems (health, education, justice, housing, welfare) utilise Police to enforce inequitable practices and policies therefore implicating the Police and creating intergenerational harm and community mistrust. In the recent Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care (2024), evidence was given demonstrating that Police upheld racist, homophobic and ableist State laws and policies, turned a ‘blind eye’ to State Care abuse and neglect (Royal Commission of Inquiry Abuse in Care, 2024; Smale, 2021) and failed to understand their role in the disproportionate representation of Māori in the criminal justice system (Jackson, 1987; Royal Commission of Inquiry Abuse in Care, 2024). Evidence from our research indicates that Oranga Tamariki, Kāinga Ora, and the absence of an adequate mental health system, draw on Police resources and through their own inequitable practices, perpetuate inequity.

The challenges identified in Phases 1 and 2 of this research indicates inequitable policing delivery is symptomatic of wider structural, systemic and institutional policies and actions that are grossly inadequate and have failed to uphold Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations. Structural and institutional racism equates to “inadequate action” and “inaction in the face of need” (Waitangi Tribunal Report, 2019, p. 21). Complaint data in Phase 1 indicated failures in other systems, particularly evident in mental health and an inappropriate Police response to what is essentially a health issue. Complainants noted that a Police approach was not always the best response when people are in mental health crisis. This was further reinforced by analysis of TASER data demonstrating the over-representation of people in mental distress.

The continuing failure of State systems has contributed to individuals' and communities' experiences of trauma. The intergenerational impact of the State Care system and the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences were highlighted in interviews. Often communities most at risk are those considered less deserving of empathy, resource and support. Of the eight wāhine interviewed, six had experienced trauma in their youth, which has had long-term impacts on their lives. These experiences included, but were not limited to, family violence, incarcerated parents, State care, exposure to alcohol and drugs, physical, sexual, and social harms, and negative interactions with law enforcement. Women in relationships with abusers often find

that the cycles they experience mirror their childhood experiences and are exacerbated by other challenges they may be facing, such as addiction, lack of opportunity, and poverty. Interviews highlighted the systemic response to family harm treating incidents as isolated events, failing to capture the complexity of family harm and how abusers can use the system to perpetuate harm.



Institutional

Institutional NZ Police policies, practices, culture, operational decisions, values, use of data, measures of success, organisation hierarchies, training, resource deployment.

Figure 7. The institutional level

Institutional

The third ‘institutional level’ relates to the Police as an institution and the influence of organisational practices that result in bias and inequity. Police organisational features that contribute to inequity are multifaceted and deeply ingrained in institutional structures and practices. Organisational culture, including values, norms, and unwritten rules, can perpetuate biases and discriminatory practices, often unconsciously (Acker, 2006). The ability for police to improve fairness and equity in police behaviour and decision-making is therefore influenced by police institutional culture as well as leadership. Reynolds (2020, para 12) states that institutional police culture is impacted by underlying assumptions about acceptable behaviours that can be tolerated within police groups and sub-groups. Over time accepted behaviour moulds into cultural norms and these are heavily influenced by police leaders and in particular, middle leaders or supervisors such as Sergeants. As Reynolds notes “How do these members develop these internal assumptions about the organization? They follow their leaders” (Reynolds, 2020, para 12). Previous studies have found police culture validates the importance of “emotional self-control and masculinity” resulting in considerable pressure on officers to appear tough and not weak or vulnerable (Porter & Lee, 2024, p. 2215). Anything that deviates from these cultural norms can negatively affect careers (Porter & Lee, 2024).

In addition, resource allocation, including opportunities for development, training, and career advancement, can lead to inequities when not distributed fairly (DiTomaso et al., 2007).

Decision-making processes, including who has input and how information is analysed and shared, can contribute to unequal outcomes (Kanter, 1977). Lack of diversity in organisational analysis can lead to blind spots in recognising and addressing inequities (Nkomo & Hoobler, 2014). For example, The hierarchical structure and power dynamics within an organisation can create and maintain bias, particularly when leadership positions are dominated by certain demographic groups (Castilla & Benard, 2010). Formal and informal organisational policies and practices, such as hiring, training, promotion, and compensation processes, can inadvertently favour certain groups over others (Kalev et al., 2006). As organisations grow and become more complex, it can become more challenging to ensure equitable practices across all levels and departments (Kalev, 2009).

Baker (2018) contends that the nature of Police organisations as complex social systems may be a principal reason for failure¹⁰. Studies designed to investigate errors in complex systems that are tightly coupled¹¹ like aviation and medicine, agree that errors are the product of human failings and poorly designed systems (Schwartz, 2018). When failures occur, almost always human error has contributed. Information is perceived and processed incorrectly, careless mistakes made, and occasionally individuals act recklessly or maliciously. But faulty systems also play a role. For example, technology can be confusing, rigorous schedules can fatigue workers, organisational culture can stifle productive communication, and policies can put workers in situations where they must make difficult decisions under high-stress conditions (Schwartz, 2018). For example, analysis of Phase 1 use of force interactions

¹⁰ Failure in this context is referring to acts of police violence and overreach of force in policing incidents.

¹¹ A tightly coupled system means that components rely on each other to operate effectively.

indicates that systems set up within the Police to ‘flag’ risk, are not always reliable¹² and may prime officers to respond more aggressively.

The Police as an organisation is hierarchical with ranks of different status. The culture of conformity and rank structures within Police can stifle critical dialogue about bias, resulting in the continuation of inequitable practices. Rank structures and conformity to authority within Police organisations can reinforce existing biases by discouraging lower-ranking officers from reporting misconduct or challenging discriminatory practices, as seen in internal complaint data in Phase 1. Sixteen internal complaints (police complaining about other officers) occurred during the three-month research period, reporting discriminatory behaviour and unfair treatment. These included descriptions of bullying and harassment, sexism, subcultures of police, and negative impacts on police work.

Analysis of Phase 2 data also highlighted participant concerns about police compassion fatigue and police burnout as well as inadequate resourcing for small, rural, isolated police stations. Previous research has indicated New Zealand Police suffer from post-traumatic stress (PST) injury as a result of being exposed to violence and traumatic events (New Zealand Police Association, 2021). Comparative analysis highlighted that PTS symptoms were more widespread amongst New Zealand Police when compared with New Zealand military personnel (New Zealand Police Association, 2021).

It was considered “that the culture of police could sometimes lead to a perception that officers could cope with extreme, repeated events. Combined with a lack of trust in police management, that could be a barrier to officers seeking help” (New Zealand Police Association, 2021, para 18). The lack of institutional resourcing and unsupportive organisational culture can also

influence whether an officer seeks help for their own mental health.

In this research, there is evidence of institutional contradictions and competing Police subcultures. For example, the stated values of Police that are supposed to underpin policing delivery, include ‘Commitment to Māori and the Treaty’ and ‘Valuing Diversity’. However, Phase 2 data emphasises inequities in paid time for police officers who are Diversity Liaison Officers (DLO) within the rainbow innovation space. Resourcing can be an indication of what is valued within an organisation. For example, results from Phases 1 and 2 indicate there is more institutional support for hands-on, pain compliance tactical operations training and resourcing rather than de-escalation communication training.

Cross-case analysis emphasises the critical importance of both Police and community leadership in promoting fairer and more equitable approaches in policing delivery and in addressing social determinants of harm. Yet these innovation cases appear as pilot projects with limited time and resourcing, that are not yet embedded within the organisation. Analysis suggests there is a connection between Police leadership support in innovative spaces, adequate resourcing, managing high workloads, and aligning values. Innovation cases emphasise the opportunities for improving equity and fairness in policing. However, further recognition and increased resourcing are needed to ensure these do not remain pilot projects.

The research has shown Police culture and behaviour are heavily influenced by middle and senior police leadership. This includes police sergeants, team leaders as well as inspectors and more senior leaders. The influence of police leadership committed to equity and fairness is demonstrated in innovation cases. Conversely, the lack of support from police leadership in innovative spaces appears to limit the ability

¹² For example, disability is coded under IM mental health flag which increases the potential use of force and misinterpretation of compliance, particularly for people with communication challenges. Family Harm is coded to both victims and perpetrators of violence which can prime the response of police to incidents.

of officers to implement alternative policing approaches.

Phase 1 and 2 results identify the variability in the quality of policing delivery. There is evidence of discriminatory and harmful police behaviour alongside humanistic and empathetic policing practices. Subcultures of Police were also present in Phase 1 analysis, further emphasising the influence of middle and senior leaders. Individual officers reported through internal complaint procedures, the presence of negative Police hierarchies and sub-cultures, which influenced officer's perceptions of safety at work. Systems within Police, including flags held on individuals, could be unreliable or misinformed, leading to problematic or harmful officer behaviour. Analysis demonstrates harmful policing delivery is at the 'edge' of standard operating procedures (SOP). These practices are permitted by the institution due to the lack of oversight, bystander behaviour and/or ineffective monitoring of poor behaviour.

Phase 2 analysis highlights gaps in current Police college training. There is a need for more situated learning opportunities in relation to alternative approaches when interacting with whānau and other communities. Participants described inadequately trained and inexperienced young officers as often unable to effectively or equitably respond to marginalised communities. Furthermore, through interviews with police officers there were concerns that many young officers were often partnered with officers with similar levels of training and experience meaning there were less opportunities to learn on the job from experienced mentors.

Research has shown that such institutional biases can manifest in various ways, including over-policing of certain communities, disproportionate use of force, and higher rates of prosecution for minority groups (McIntosh & Workman, 2017; Webb, 2009). For example, a study by Tauri (2019) found that Māori are more likely to be stopped, searched, and arrested than

non-Māori, even when controlling for factors such as offence type and criminal history. Institutional biases are often deeply ingrained and can persist even when individual officers do not hold explicit prejudices. They may stem from historical practices, cultural misunderstandings, or a lack of diversity within police ranks (Quince, 2021).

A key feature of developing an organisational approach that might address both systems and human behaviour to improve equity, is the ability to learn and adapt to support success (Argyris, 1991; Koerner & Staller, 2022). In order to create a system that supports continuous improvement and effective equitable decision making, there is a need to focus on failures and variations in the system, seeking to understand how and why these occur, and adjusting systems to support success (Reason, 2000). This requires a transactional shift in the current perception of failures, in particular, that officers justify action rather than acknowledging that conflict situations could have been managed in other ways. In terms of addressing bias in the system, this requires police to be able to acknowledge and talk about biases and understand how their 'mental models' of people and situations might have implications for their own decision-making, particularly when under threat. This also requires an organisational culture that supports open inquiry and challenging learning conversations about fairness and equity rather than one that forces officers into having to justify their actions.

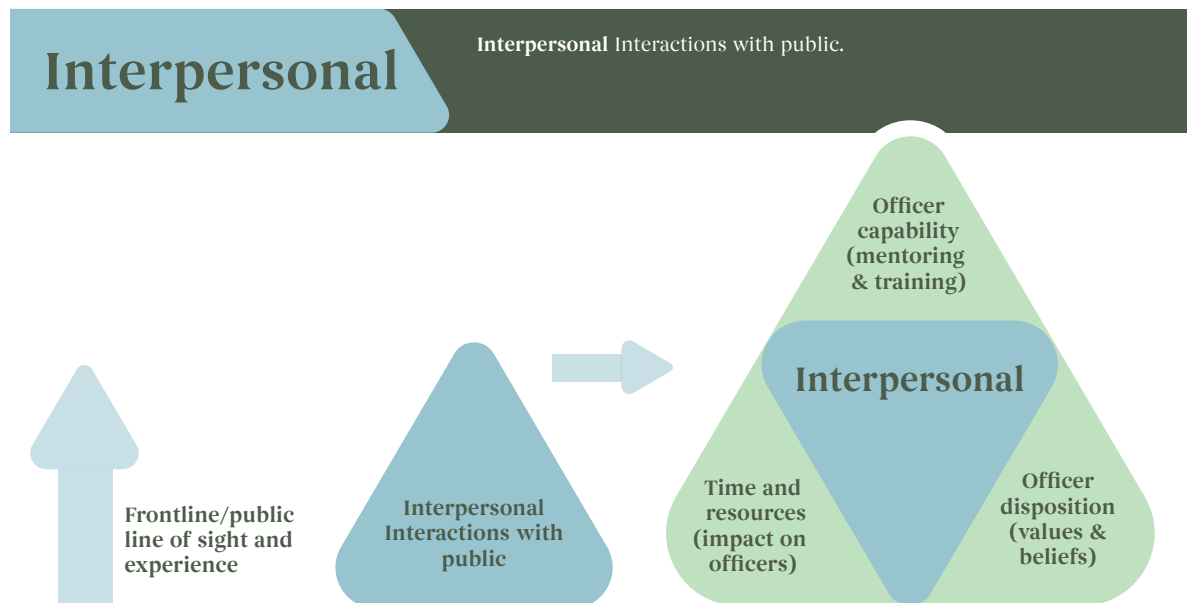


Figure 8. The interpersonal level

Interpersonal

Finally, at the top of the pyramid is the interpersonal level' (values, beliefs and behaviour of police officers). This is the level that is most visible to the public. While most complaints and dissatisfaction are expressed in relation to a personal interaction, our analysis indicated it may not necessarily be the personal skills of the officer, but organisational, systemic or structural influences contributing to inequitable treatment.

Evidence from Phases 1 and 2 indicated there are three conditions that impact officer interactions and may perpetuate inequity¹³. These conditions interact within the varying contexts and situations that police encounter in community interactions¹⁴. In turn, however, both context and situation are open to the officer who perceives, interprets and acts on the data they perceive from the context (Staller et al., 2022).

¹³ Conversely when conditions are optimal these factors also influence policing positively. See Appendix 3.

¹⁴ While the 'situation and context' within which police-community interactions occur is important, it is outside the brief of this research to delve into this more deeply. However, it is important to note, context is heavily influenced by the structure and systems within our society (crime determinants).

Training and mentoring	Time and resources	Disposition
Officers may not have the experience or are in new situations. They may be unprepared and lack training, and this can result in a poor interaction.	Officers may make a bad decision due to time pressure. Communication during and/or after an event may be poor resulting in community dissatisfaction.	Officers have personal dispositions related to feelings of deservedness, particularly in relation to diverse and marginalised communities. They make values-based decisions that they justify but are on the edge or outside of SOP.
The emphasis on use of force tactical options may mean officers revert to training scenarios increasing the likelihood that force will be used.	Officers may opt for force options as they may resolve an issue quickly. However, these interactions leave victims feeling unheard and unsafe.	Mocking language escalates situations. Belief that victims deserve outcomes or that outcomes are brought on themselves.
Mentoring or oversight of officers may be insufficient or perpetuate organisational subculture.	Interactions are transactional and task orientated.	Them vs us attitudes lead to confrontational interactions and overly aggressive responses.
Training for middle leaders (e.g. sergeants) is primarily command and control as opposed to management/leadership/learning focused often inhibiting organisational learning.	Time and distance from back-up, or officers being outnumbered may mean the officer feels at risk and uses higher levels of force.	The way warranted or unwarranted searches are conducted can leave lasting negative impacts, particularly for children.
Culture of Justification – Acceptance (bystander) of poor behaviour – Insufficient oversight and monitoring		

Table 3. Three conditions that impact officer interactions and may perpetuate inequity

Results from this research highlight the pressure on police officers due to finite policing resourcing (time pressures, opportunities to learn, crime and victimisation rates caused by social determinants of harm). In the context of scarce institutional resourcing, police are often pressured to make immediate judgements about who is deserving of their time and effort. Police ‘discretionary decision-making’ has been found to enable unfair and inequitable distribution of resources to victims and potential victims of crime (Hohl & Stanko, 2021). Our analysis indicates that inequitable policing delivery can be tied to discretionary decision-making, deservedness, unquestioned assumptions, and bias.

The concept of ‘deservedness’ is related to which communities are worthy of Police resourcing, time and effort and which are not. This was emphasised in a research study conducted on distributive justice and policing within England over a 16-year period between 2004 and 2020 (Charman & Williams, 2022). Police have a lot of

discretion in terms of how they respond to crime and victimisation within specific communities. This discretion can be viewed as an allocation of police time and effort within their investigations, as well as how much attention and effort are made to adequately address community feedback and concerns (Charman & Williams, 2022). For example, individuals can be judged by Police officers for their own circumstances, particularly when they are victims of crime (Charman & Williams, 2022).

Research has established a relationship between community perceptions of fair treatment in policing and police legitimacy (Charman & Williams, 2022; McLean, 2020). However, in marginalised communities, individuals can be judged unfairly for making “poor choices” and these personal choices are viewed as responsible for their disadvantage (Charman & Williams, 2022, p. 406). Deservedness is likened to assumptions of who is entitled to meaningful support, including police time, attention and justice, because they have ‘earned’ it and are

viewed as ‘true victims’. In contrast, people who are deemed as ‘undeserving’ are unworthy of further investigation (Charman & Williams, 2022, p. 413). This is evident in research on policing delivery affecting communities with high rates of crime and victimisation (Charman & Williams, 2022) and is exacerbated by resource scarcity.

Charman and Williams (2022) argue “the criteria of deservedness” aligns to police officer judgements and biases related to the “ideal” or “genuine” victim of crime (p. 417). Officer biases are influenced by their perceptions of a victim’s age, race and gender as well as their circumstances, relationships and group memberships. For example, police officers were less likely to act if they judged a victim to be “implicated in the offence” (Charman & Williams, 2022, p. 417). Less action and attention were paid to victims of crime who were gang members, those who were under the influence of drugs or alcohol and/or sex workers.

Phase 1 and 2 analysis highlights the intersection of deservedness, resourcing and training. In this research, the concept of deservedness was evident in multiple complaints and dissatisfaction submissions as the community described interactions with officers that left them feeling targeted, racially profiled, or judged. This was particularly evident in complaints from:

- Wāhine who were victims in family harm situations,
- Māori and Pasifika men and decisions around use of force,
- individuals who were mentally distressed.

It appears in the data that individuals who are experiencing a mental health crisis are also stereotyped by police in a decision-making model. Several of the TASER discharge narratives described individuals who are experiencing mental distress as ‘unpredictable’. Officers noted the desire to maintain distance from the individual, increasing the likelihood of a TASER discharge (as it is ideally discharged from a

distance). Research has found that there is bias associated with mental illness and perceptions of unpredictable behaviour and loss of control, triggering emotional reactions such as fear (Angermeyer & Dietrich, 2006; Aubé et al., 2023; Boysen & Vogel, 2008; McCarthy et al., 2021). Submissions also indicate that police are not appropriately trained to deal with individuals who are mentally unwell and in crisis.

Both Phase 1 and 2 demonstrated how police conduct influences community trust. Phase 1 Praise data noted that when personal interactions reflected the values of the Police, they were valued by the public. Phase 2 analysis, particularly of innovation cases, emphasised the contribution of new partnerships with communities, situated learning and mentoring opportunities and how these contributed to improved officer practices.

When these three conditions, training and mentoring, time and resource and personal values are aligned they can impact positively on police officer behaviour. For example, interactions where officers have the right training, supportive mentoring, adequate resource, time to deal with challenging situations, while demonstrating police values that are reinforced, then it is likely interactions with the public will go well (see Appendix 3).

While interpersonal behaviour may be the most visible point of police-community interactions, it is a result of the impact, and to some extent failings, of the other structures within the overall system. How the Police as an organisation respond to interpersonal bias, including availability and appropriateness of training/mentoring, time and resource as well as inappropriate values/actions has a bearing on these actions. The failure of other State systems (health, housing and education) puts pressure on police to respond to crisis situations they are not prepared for, such as mental health. Finally, the political and legislative decisions, in turn determine police actions, such as recent gang and patch legislation.

The future of policing in Aotearoa New Zealand

Addressing disparities in policing and within our wider society is crucial for building trust between Māori communities and Police, enhancing social cohesion, and creating a more equitable society that honours Te Tiriti o Waitangi.

Despite having a publicly funded healthcare system and social welfare programmes, significant disparities persist, particularly for Māori and Pasifika peoples, in areas such as health, education, housing, and economic outcomes (Reid et al., 2019). With public opinion polls showing that roughly 70% of New Zealanders believe income disparities are too large and support government action to reduce inequality (Rashbrooke, 2021), there is a clear mandate for implementing equity-focused policies and practices that can create a more just and prosperous society for all New Zealanders.

We (Ihi Research) mihi to the New Zealand Police for having the courage to undertake this research that investigates the role of the Police

in contributing to inequity in our society. There is no better time to have critical conversations about the role of the Police in our society.

Safer Communities Together

The New Zealand Police (1989) has long recognised the value of community-oriented policing strategies in building trust and improving relationships between Police and Māori communities. The "Safer Communities Together" motto adopted by the New Zealand Police reflects a shift towards community-oriented policing that began in the late 1980s and early 1990s. This approach emphasises

collaboration between the Police and the community to prevent crime and enhance public safety (New Zealand Police, 1989). The motto was introduced as part of a broader strategy to build trust and improve relationships with diverse communities across New Zealand. It signifies a commitment to working in partnership with the public, rather than simply enforcing the law in isolation (Young & Tinsley, 1998).

Safer communities together implies that all the varied and diverse communities within Aotearoa need to work together, in partnership with Police and each other, to create a safer society. However, with this partnership strategy in mind, we should question the role the Police play as an institution within this partnership. This research demonstrates that not all communities experience police ‘safety’ or consider the police as ‘facilitators of safety’. In addition, some communities within Aotearoa view each other with suspicion and, at times, with contempt. Phase 2 data demonstrated that communities often most at risk do not see the police as safe or helpful, but rather as a threat to their safety.

The role of Police in creating safer communities is deeply intertwined with broader social determinants, including economic and social inequalities that exacerbate victimisation and crime. Research has shown that policing interventions are often shaped by power imbalances, with marginalised communities disproportionately bearing the brunt of enforcement (Lee et al., 2023). These power differentials are often rooted in historical injustices, particularly for Indigenous communities in colonised countries, where policies aimed at erasing language and culture have compounded social and economic disadvantages (Fernando, 2018). The result is a cycle in which policing not only responds to crime but also reproduces the very social conditions that lead to criminal behaviour in the first place (Deivanayagam et al., 2021). This phenomenon raises the critical question: to what extent does policing itself reinforce the

inequalities that justify its continued presence?

This research has demonstrated safety issues for some communities. This includes the criminalisation of people in mental distress, wāhine Māori victimised through family harm, the presence of trauma and adverse childhood experiences, drug and alcohol harm, rainbow/takatāpui communities, people living in poverty, and the use of force against people in health facilities or in State care. Is policing a reasoned response to these communities, or is it exacerbating the conditions/determinants that lead to crime occurring, therefore perpetuating inequity? To achieve a ‘safer community together’ we must interrogate who is being policed, what behaviours and acts are positioned as criminal and why punitive action is the state’s primary response to such incidents (Deivanayagam et al., 2021).

The traditional reactive model of policing, which focuses on apprehending criminals after crimes occur, has been widely criticised for its inability to foster long-term community safety (Gilmour, 2024). Instead, scholars and practitioners argue for a new systems approach that views crime as a social disease, much like a public health issue (Ramsden, 1994). This perspective emphasises prevention through early intervention and collaboration with health and social services, particularly for marginalised groups that have historically been over-policed and under-served (Gilmour, 2024).

By framing crime as a result of structural conditions rather than individual moral failings, a public health approach to policing has the potential to not only reduce crime but also improve public perceptions of police (Gilmour, 2024). However, it is essential to recognise that privileged groups often benefit from a version of safety that is predicated on the harm inflicted upon marginalised communities, a dynamic that must be addressed if equity is to be achieved (Deivanayagam et al., 2021). Over-policing, inequitable prosecution rates and inequitable

road fines create disproportionate harm for marginalised groups. Not only does over-policing or focus on minority groups and inequitable penalties create disproportionate harm, but it also contributes to systemic oppression, creating a difficult environment for change in socio-economic opportunities. This highlights the systemic nature of these issues, underscoring the need for comprehensive reforms that go beyond traditional policing to address the root causes of crime.

Addressing root causes, not just responding to symptoms

Policing in its traditional form has often been reactive, focusing primarily on apprehending criminals after a crime has occurred. This approach has been critiqued for its failure to tackle the root issues that lead to crime, such as poverty, systemic inequality, and intergenerational trauma. In countries like Australia and Canada, policing has been used historically and contemporarily as a tool of colonial control, exemplified by policies like the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families (Deivanayagam et al., 2021). This colonial legacy has contributed to cycles of criminalisation and victimisation that persist today. To break these cycles, a shift in policy is needed, one that addresses the social and structural factors that lead to criminal behaviour (Lee et al., 2023).

Findings from the Whanaketia report into State and faith-based abuse in care further highlight the need for police in Aotearoa New Zealand to critically examine their role in contributing to and preventing harm. The report underscores the need for reforms in the way Police handle cases involving vulnerable populations, particularly those in care settings (Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care, 2024). Phase 2 research also indicates that police were complicit in abuse in care by returning children to abusive

care placements and failing to investigate. This is particularly true when considering gang activity, which should be seen as a symptom of broader societal issues rather than the cause (Sebire, 2021). Recent changes in gang legislation may require the police to act in ways that may perpetuate harm to those who were abused in care and as a result joined gangs – this is counter to addressing root causes, and redress for survivors. Reactive policies and legislation contribute to the cycle of disengagement, further reinforcing beliefs on oppositional relationships with some communities.

Policing alone cannot resolve deeply rooted inequity; it is one institution in a larger structural system that is perpetuating inequity and limiting opportunity for marginalised communities. However, for policing to be effective in supporting long-term social change, it must align itself with public health approaches that emphasise prevention and intervention. This means understanding where police fit into the broader context of societal welfare and working collaboratively with other institutions to prevent crime at its source.

Improved training, oversight, and trauma-informed approaches will be essential for ensuring the Police are not complicit in perpetuating harm. By collaborating with other social services, and partnering with community organisations and iwi, like we have seen in the Phase 2 innovation cases, Police can play a crucial role in addressing the root causes of crime, preventing harm, and building trust within the communities they serve.

Police building trust and legitimacy with all communities

In order to build trust, Police must first acknowledge the historical legacy of policing Māori within Aotearoa. Across community cases, there is evidence of long-standing distrust

in Police, particularly from early exposure to negative police interactions in childhood. Cross-case analysis of Phase 2 data highlights the presence of long-standing Police sub-cultures, beliefs and norms about ‘unworthy’ Māori and other communities. Policing beliefs about ‘deservedness’ and ‘worthiness’ are evident across community cases, including questions around who is a genuine ‘victim of crime’ and who is ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’ of higher levels of police support. ‘Unworthy’ examples are evident in police interactions with wāhine Māori experiencing family harm cases, whānau experiencing mental distress and gang whānau.

Phase 2 community case studies emphasised the impact of adverse childhood police interactions/experiences that embedded whānau distrust in the police. When coupled with perceived police bias and stereotyping, this shared history has produced the foundation for oppositional relationships. This is particularly evident where whānau have been contained, arrested and/or criminalised for perceived ‘immoral’ and/or ‘abnormal’ behaviour as determined by the State.

Wāhine Māori report experiencing limited time, care and attention by police as victims of crime. Analysis of community cases also emphasised dehumanising and discriminatory police behaviour as evidenced in the use of racist, sexist/misogynistic, ableist police language. Furthermore, there are reports of excessive use of force and disproportionate responses, including hyper-surveillance and deliberate targeting by police and these discriminatory practices are compounded by intersectionality issues. Intergenerational trauma within Māori communities has created an adversarial relationship between the police and some communities. Cross-case analysis emphasised the importance of relational trust in the building and strengthening of police-community partnerships.

Analysis of Phase 2 Police Innovation cases offer an opportunity to understand how

long-standing challenging relationships with marginalised communities might be improved. The importance of the Police building trust and legitimacy through authentic partnerships with local iwi and hapū has proven beneficial in the innovation cases. Partnership, co-location and place-based approaches enables police officers to work alongside kaimahi who are often employed by the local iwi and are deeply connected to and trusted by local communities. In the innovative case studies, there is evidence of community-based, relational policing approaches that are dependent on these connected relationships and underpinned by shared values. Research into effective community policing approaches emphasise the importance of trusting community-Police relationships (Charman & Willams, 2022). Effective community policing is proactive, preventative and problem-orientated and is driven by community aspirations and needs (Charman & Willams, 2022). The quality and continuity of police officer community relationships is also emphasised (Charman & Willams, 2022).

Cross-case analysis demonstrates the importance of sustaining police innovations within communities, particularly to embed partnership approaches with hapori Māori, hapū and iwi. This requires extra resourcing for both the Police and the communities they are partnering with. Results indicate community-based kaimahi have, at times, been tasked with upskilling officers without extra resource in recognition of their time and expertise. Partnership innovations need to be valued by the Police and resourced adequately. There is a danger that progress made within police-community innovations will be lost, further cementing beliefs that policing delivery only works for the most ‘worthy’ citizens. Innovation ‘pilot’ projects involving police officers who come and go can also leave officers and community members to be despondent and wary of engaging in new initiatives.

Engaging with communities as partners fosters mutual understanding and respect. Police

officers participating in community events, problem-solving forums, and youth mentoring programmes build positive relationships, leading to increased trust and cooperation. This collaboration also empowers communities to identify and address issues proactively, further enhancing community safety.

There needs to be encouragement and systemic change to enable the New Zealand Police and other agencies to work together and accommodate shared learning. Police and health educators seldom work across agencies, are often geographically separate and adopt differing philosophical and practical approaches. However, the innovation case of Co-Response Teams indicated shifts in institutional culture toward more permeable boundaries to enable police and mental health practitioners to work more collaboratively.

Police reducing/preventing criminalisation and breaking cycles

The traditional (criminal) justice system often fails to address the underlying issues that led to criminalised behaviour, increasing the likelihood of recidivism. A public health approach focuses on rehabilitation and reintegration, partnering with social services and mental health professionals to provide support and resources to individuals exiting the criminal justice system. This reduces the chances of them re-offending, creating safer communities in the long run.

The need for an evidence-based approach has been emphasised by Gluckman (2018) in his analysis of crime and prison data within Aotearoa. He argues that political debates about policing, law and order within Aotearoa are driven by “dogma and belief” rather than best evidence on what works (Gluckman, 2018, p. 14). His analysis of crime data emphasises the need for evidence-based approaches to prevention

and intervention, as well as imprisonment and rehabilitation. Gluckman (2018) reinforces the need to move beyond “simplistic” “binary” political themes such as the need to be “tough or soft on crime” (p. 4).

Phase 2 cross-case analysis highlights that extra resourcing is needed for embedded research and development within the community innovation space. Currently, analysis indicates some police innovations do not measure their effectiveness, particularly in relation to policing outcomes and changes to policing delivery. However, interviews with stakeholders and police indicate the situated partnership approach to addressing social harm in the community has been effective, both for police and for those experiencing harm.

To enable the Police to be a learning organisation, there must be shared analysis of Police data, particularly as it relates to equity and fairness. Police innovation cases demonstrate how engagement in research opened police officers’ eyes to new interpretations of policing delivery, leading to more equitable police practices. Officers talked about the power of their engagement with the Operational Advisory Group (OAG) as part of the UPD project. Other officers talked about how they saw their practice differently by listening to people with lived experiences of mental distress describe policing encounters. It is not just data that is important, but the interpretation of evidence that is needed to enable the police to continually learn to improve and build trust and legitimacy with diverse communities.

This research highlighted the need for an increased focus on de-escalation and communication tactics for frontline officers. The emphasis on other tactical options is likely to increase the likelihood that police will respond with force, and force interactions are more likely to result in charges, keeping individuals in cycles of offending. Equipping officers with evidence-informed de-escalation training, alongside mentoring and reinforcing the value of

de-escalation, may result in safer communities for both the Police and public.

Police learning to use data and feedback from the community

One purpose of this research was to understand how Police data can influence policing delivery to be more equitable. Police collect and analyse crime data to identify hotspots, trends, and risk factors, along with public submissions, complaints and use of force data. This information can be used to understand patterns of inequity, indicating where other systems may be failing, as well as institutional gaps, alongside inequitable practices and individual officer behaviour.

However, cross-case analysis indicated that distrust in the police had an impact on whether an individual felt comfortable enough to make a complaint. Oppositional beliefs partnered with poor police interactions appeared to contribute to disengagement, leading to groups and individuals that do not want to be 'involved' with the police, in any way. The absence of this data means police misconduct in marginalised communities often goes unreported and unmonitored. Furthermore, a lack of mechanisms to monitor equitable policing practice subsequently fails to measure the effectiveness of new equity-driven innovations and initiatives. A deliberate focus on gathering voices 'not typically heard' goes hand in hand with building trust and partnership within marginalised communities.

In addition, the focus should not solely be on gathering data, but on how it is interpreted and understood. Terms like "frequent fliers," often used by police and health services, reflect a negative view of individuals who frequently seek support (Heyman, 2024). Evidence gathered in Phase 2 suggested when police listen and respond appropriately to community concerns and needs more trusting relationships develop. In addition, involving community members in

analysis creates a more inclusive environment that identifies and addresses systemic barriers, understanding issues from community perspectives, improving support and fostering confidence.

This research noted a culture of justification in policing that appears to hinder officers' ability to learn and improve their practice. This culture, characterised by a tendency to defend and rationalise actions rather than critically examine them, creates an environment resistant to change and growth (Loftus, 2010). When officers feel compelled to justify their actions at all costs, they may become less open to feedback and less willing to acknowledge mistakes or areas for improvement. This defensive positioning can lead to a form of cognitive rigidity, where officers become entrenched in established ways of thinking and acting, even when these may be ineffective or problematic (Skogan, 2008).

Furthermore, this justification culture can stifle innovation and creativity in problem-solving, as officers may be reluctant to try new approaches for fear of failure or criticism (Chan, 1997). This mindset can also impede the development of reflective practice, a crucial component of professional growth in policing (Bergman, 2017). By prioritising the defence of current practices over critical self-examination and learning, a justification culture ultimately undermines the potential for meaningful improvement in policing practices and officer development (Bradford & Quinton, 2014).

An overt focus on interpersonal behaviour as the main cause of negative police conduct may also encourage a culture of justification, where officers act and think in a way that protects themselves from penalty, rather than engaging in learning or acceptance. Police behaviour can and does have an impact on interactions, and personal accountability is important for learning, however both systemic and structural failings also contribute to poor conduct and outcomes. Ensuring that incidents or activities are reviewed

with a lens of equity, incorporating all aspects of Police practice, will further encourage personalisation and justification.

Police working to address systemic biases

While police are influenced by other inequitable systems, they also play a significant role in reinforcing systemic bias and other forms of oppression that exist in systems like healthcare, education and welfare. The intersection of policing with healthcare and education highlights how these institutions often collaborate to maintain oppressive hierarchies. In healthcare, for example, research has shown that police are frequently involved in managing individuals experiencing mental health crises, leading to harmful outcomes for marginalised populations (Klein, 2019).

In education, the issue of student non-attendance and truancy in schools is framed as a legal, compliance and disciplinary matter. Although truancy is not a crime, evidence indicates truancy has a connection with young people becoming offenders, or victims of crime (New Zealand Police Association, 2022). According to Breen (2024) in her analysis of failed government responses to truancy, cross-party political solutions are essential to address underlying causes. “New Zealand’s poverty rate and cost-of-living crisis, as well as housing shortages, bullying and a youth mental health crisis appear to be having an effect on truancy rates” (para 18). Māori and Pasifika students in low decile schools are most represented in the truancy statistics (Lubeck, 2022; Ministry of Education, 2020).

The failure of the health and education systems, means Māori are more likely to be victims of crime and are imprisoned at higher rates contributing to social and economic marginalisation. This in turn limits their access to quality healthcare, education, and employment opportunities. The siloed nature of these systems in Aotearoa

New Zealand contributes to the perpetuation of inequity. The compartmentalised approach often fails to address the interconnected nature of social issues and their root causes (Boston & Gill, 2017). For instance, health outcomes are closely linked to education, housing, and economic factors, yet these services are typically delivered in isolation from one another (Came et al., 2019). This fragmentation can lead to inefficiencies, duplication of efforts, and gaps in service provision, disproportionately affecting marginalised communities, especially Māori and Pasifika peoples (Reid et al., 2019).

The lack of coordination between agencies can result in individuals and their whānau/families having to navigate multiple complex systems simultaneously, creating barriers to access and engagement (Baker et al., 2019). Furthermore, the siloed approach fails to recognise and address the cumulative effects of systemic racism and colonisation across multiple sectors, which are key drivers of inequity in New Zealand (Came et al., 2020). To effectively tackle inequity, there is a growing recognition of the need for more integrated, holistic approaches that break down these silos and address the social determinants of health and wellbeing in a coordinated manner (Baker et al., 2019).

Opportunities to address such long-standing issues can be found in the Police Innovation cases. Within the Co-Response Team (CRT) innovation case partnerships between police and mental health clinicians, aimed to bridge the significant gaps in mental health services and ensure a safer response for people in mental distress. By hosting mental health professionals within police stations and working together on the frontline, the model ensures that people in mental distress receive timely and appropriate care. Working with other professionals was a very new experience for police involved in the CRT. They were accustomed to making their own decisions, taking advice from others to inform decision-making led to new practices and improved outcomes. Engaging with and learning from other professionals ‘on the ground’ as well

as from those with lived experience of mental distress was powerful.

The Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH) innovation case to address family harm illustrated the importance of relationships between WNPH and local hapū and iwi. The partnership honoured Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, and embedded Māori values and tikanga throughout the innovation. Building strong relationships with local iwi at the onset of the WNPH sites was noted by respondents as a critical enabler to an effective collaboration. In this innovation WNPH kaimahi worked as the ‘tuakana’, and police kaimahi as the ‘teina’. Police practice improved through situated learning, as kaimahi introduced Police to new practices. Examples of new policing approaches included arriving to the house of a whānau with kai; building trust and connection through whanaungatanga first; responding to a family harm event by checking the wellbeing of the whole whānau including tamariki; and referring whānau to additional community supports to address some of the underlying drivers of harm.

The innovation cases emphasise the importance of police willingness to learn through engagement with others. Innovation cases demonstrated how police were encouraged to work in partnership with others, and in the process, this enabled officers to witness more relational and whānau-centred approaches. This, in turn, encouraged officers to change their own practices, supporting individuals and whānau in more culturally responsive and effective ways.

Police reducing the burden on justice system

The Police have a role in reducing the burden on the justice system, particularly in addressing the overrepresentation of Māori. The Police, as the frontline of the justice system, have significant potential to influence outcomes and implement strategies that can lead to more equitable

treatment and reduced incarceration rates for Māori. Phase 1 analysis demonstrates inequitable prosecution rates are contributing to over representation in the justice system.

Alternative resolution methods present an avenue for reducing the burden on the justice system. Initiatives such as iwi panels, which focus on repairing harm and addressing underlying factors contributing to offending, can be effective in diverting low-level offenders from the formal justice system (Rutherford, as cited in *The Lawyer*, 2016). While these innovations are available to police, analysis from Phase 1 indicates that alternative resolutions may require more work than opting for traditional prosecution pathways, due to time and resource, officers often opt for the traditional pathway. Reducing load and encouraging use of alternative resolutions may reduce the burden in the justice system.

The effective use of discretionary powers by police officers is another important factor. As noted earlier, police can use their discretion more effectively to divert Māori offenders from formal prosecution when appropriate, particularly for minor offences. This approach can help prevent unnecessary escalation of minor infractions into more serious involvement with the justice system, trapping individuals in justice cycles.

The metrics used to measure the success of legislation can either increase or decrease the burden on the justice system. For example, focusing heavily on arrest rates can lead to over-enforcement and unnecessarily push more people into the system (Dilulio et al., n.d.). An overemphasis on fast response times could result in rushed interactions and more arrests for minor infractions, increasing the caseload for courts (Dilulio et al., n.d.). The choice of metrics can also influence public perception and trust in the Police. An excessive emphasis on crime control metrics like arrest rates can lead to violations of civil liberties or ignoring community satisfaction, which is problematic since public confidence in the police is an important predictor of overall

feelings of community safety and compliance with the law (Abraham et al., 2024). By carefully selecting performance metrics that encourage problem-solving, community engagement, and appropriate use of discretion, police can help reduce unnecessary burdens on the justice system while still effectively addressing public safety needs (Zürcher & Sloomweg, 2024).

Police play a multifaceted role in reducing the burden on the justice system and addressing the overrepresentation of Māori. Through community policing and resourced partnerships, more effective approaches can be found. These can include alternative resolution methods, targeted prevention, and judicious use of discretion, whilst addressing internal biases. In these ways Police can significantly contribute to more equitable outcomes.

Enhancing officer wellbeing

Phase 2 cross-case analysis raised participant concerns about police compassion fatigue and police burnout. There were concerns raised about adequate resourcing for small, rural, isolated police stations. Time pressures, feeling undervalued as a police officer and a lack of adequate resourcing to perform important community work can contribute to burnout (Gomes et al., 2022). Research on police burnout indicates that burnout syndrome occurs over time and is linked to a build-up of mental and physical stress that occurs from engaging in highly complex and stressful jobs that are not adequately resourced (Gomes et al., 2022). Studies also highlight how burnout can lead to more aggressive police behaviour and higher staff turnover (Brough et al., 2016; Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006).

Evidence from this research indicates there are pockets of police internal culture, supported by station leaders, that continue to undermine officer wellbeing. Internal police cultures can

significantly impact officer wellbeing, often in detrimental ways. The review of the Metropolitan Police Service revealed a culture of institutional racism, sexism, and homophobia, which created a hostile work environment for many officers (Casey, 2023). Harmful internal police culture can lead to increased stress, mental health issues, and reluctance to seek help. Police officers are at risk of developing poor mental health due to the challenging nature of their work, yet many are hesitant to seek mental health care due to stigma within the police culture (Luo et al., 2024). The police occupational culture often stigmatises any mention of mental illness, creating barriers for officers experiencing mental health issues such as compassion fatigue and PTSD (Hakik & Langlois, 2023). Additionally, the culture of denial and defensiveness about these problems, as highlighted in the Casey report, further exacerbates the situation by impeding necessary reforms and support systems (Casey, 2023). This environment not only affects individual officers but also impacts the overall effectiveness of the police in creating safer communities.

Police officer wellbeing is crucial for promoting more equitable outcomes in policing. When officers are physically and mentally healthy, they are better equipped to make sound judgments, manage stress, and interact positively with the community. Conversely, officers with better mental health and resilience are more likely to approach their duties with empathy and cultural sensitivity, leading to more equitable treatment of diverse communities (Purba & Demou, 2019). In addition, research suggests burnout can be alleviated when officers feel valued by others for the beneficial work they do within communities. Being valued by others increases feelings of job satisfaction, which in turn protects officers from experiencing burnout (Gomes et al., 2022).

A focus on officer wellbeing and a supportive internal police culture can help address systemic issues within policing that contribute to inequitable outcomes. By prioritising officer wellbeing through comprehensive support

programmes, training in emotional intelligence, and promoting a culture of ethical decision-making and support-seeking, Police can create an environment where officers are more likely to recognise and challenge long-held assumptions. This, in turn, can lead to more fair and equitable policing practices, ultimately improving trust and relationships between Police and marginalised communities.

Achieving a just and equitable society within Aotearoa New Zealand

In summary, this research has identified patterns of bias, unfair treatment and inequitable policing delivery alongside evidence of innovative, empathetic, humanistic and whānau-centred police practices. The opportunity to ensure a fairer and more equitable policing delivery lies in our ability to invest in and build safer communities together. In Aotearoa New Zealand, equitable policing delivery and any reorientation must acknowledge and uphold the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi, ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of systems change, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000).

Phase 1 and 2 data emphasise that structural bias and the enduring impacts of colonisation, particularly intergenerational trauma for whānau, underpin inequitable policing delivery. This has been emphasised by previous reports (Jackson, 1987; Royal Commission of Inquiry Abuse in Care, 2024). A reorientation to policing must acknowledge these deeper issues and strengthen partnerships with Māori to address the social determinants that lead to crime.

There is an urgent need to address the root causes of crime, not just respond punitively to symptoms. People in marginalised situations, whether they are victims or perpetrators of

crime, are often judged as making poor choices, but their circumstances often mean they have limited choices to make. To ensure more equitable and fairer policing delivery, justice must “work to the benefit of the least advantaged in society” (Charman & Williams, 2022, p. 406). This requires a systemic, whole of systems approach and a structural change to justice within our society.

Policing is a complex issue. To do their job fairly and equitably police need the trust and support of all our communities, but they also need the right resourcing, including but not limited to:

- Sufficient police numbers to increase police and public safety.
- High-quality modern equipment.
- Relationship focused roles (such as Gang Liaison roles, Gang Harm Reduction Teams, Diversity Liaison Officers).
- Access to effective training, mentoring, and professional development.
- Attractive remuneration.

We need to value and support quality policing and at the same time, look after and invest in the most disadvantaged in our communities.

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Appendix 1

Phase 2 Cross-case Analysis

Figure 9. Common themes across community case studies

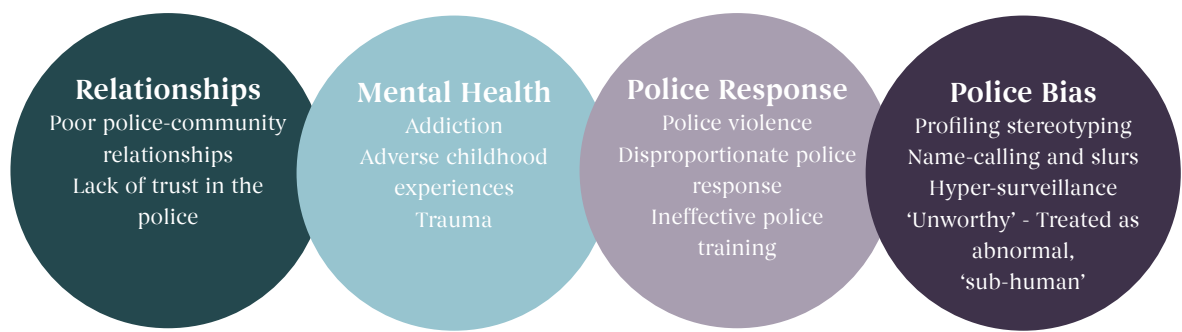


Table 4. Community case study specific themes

Community case study	Themes
Rainbow/Takatāpui communities	Stigmatisation Feeling undeserving of police protection Judged by the police Early interactions with the police
The impact of the use of TASER on individuals and their whānau	Neurodiversity Existing health conditions
People experiencing mental distress	Trauma Stigmatisation Suicide Neurodiversity Variability of policing delivery
Wāhine Māori experiencing family harm	Wāhine/women feeling silenced Likely to resolve issues without police Early exposure to family/sexual violence/addiction Early interactions with the police State care Feeling undeserving of police protection Judged by the police
Wāhine Māori experiencing family harm	Suicide Early interactions with the police Oppositional relationship (Gangs vs. Police) Enforcement without pathways

Figure 10. Common themes across innovation case studies

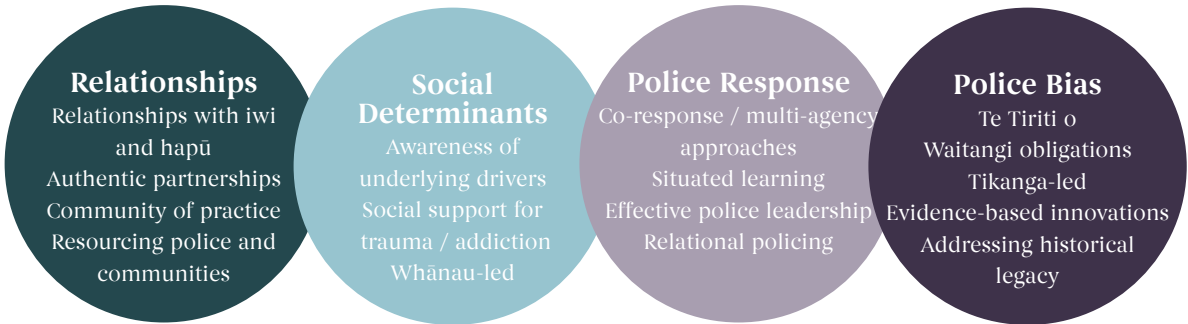


Table 5. Innovation case study specific themes

Innovation case study	Themes
Operational Advisory Group (OAG)	Safe space/open relationships to interrogate practice Kaupapa Māori principles Whakawhanaungatanga
De-escalation	Influence of existing officers on new recruits Lack of evidence base in de-escalation content Continuous, on the job training
Co-Response Team (CRT)	Police as default mental distress responders Lack of specialist mental health response training Lived experience / other perspectives informing police practice Learning from other professionals (de-escalation)
Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH)	Community providers as ‘tuakana’, police as ‘teina’ Led by iwi/Māori values and tikanga Impact of older officers on younger/new recruits Supporting whānau aspirations beyond family harm
Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC)	Preventative approach to gang-related crime Community-led innovation Stigmatisation of gangs Police gang innovations are siloed, incompatible

Appendix 2

Legislation directly or indirectly negatively impacting Māori

This includes but is not limited to:

- 1.** New Zealand Constitution Act 1852: This Act established New Zealand's parliamentary system but based voting rights on individual property ownership. Because Māori land was typically owned communally, this effectively disenfranchised most Māori from voting in early elections.
- 2.** Native Land Acts (1862, 1865): These acts established the Native Land Court, which facilitated the conversion of Māori customary land into individual titles. This process often led to fragmentation and alienation of Māori land, making it difficult for Māori to maintain collective ownership and manage their land effectively.
- 3.** Suppression of Rebellion Act 1863: This act allowed for the summary execution or penal servitude of individuals convicted by courts martial of assisting in rebellion against the Crown. It was applied retrospectively and without the right of appeal, further suppressing Māori resistance efforts.
- 4.** New Zealand Settlements Act 1863: This act allowed the government to confiscate land from Māori tribes deemed to be in rebellion against the Crown. The New Zealand Settlements Act allowed for the seizure of land from Māori, regardless of whether individuals were directly involved in rebellion. This meant that even Māori who were not actively participating in rebellion could lose their land if they were in areas designated for confiscation. The confiscated lands were often redistributed to European settlers, including military settlers, as part of the colonial strategy to assert control and establish permanent settlements. This led to significant land loss for Māori, impacting their economic base and social structures. It also limited their political influence and ability to meet property-based voting requirements.
- 5.** Public Works Act 1864: This act enabled the government to take Māori land for public works projects such as roads and railways. Māori land was often preferred over European-owned land for such purposes because the government could pay less compensation or none at all.
- 6.** Māori Representation Act 1867: While this Act created four parliamentary seats specifically for Māori, it was a compromise that limited Māori representation to a fixed number of seats, irrespective of their population size. On a population basis, Māori were underrepresented compared to European settlers.
- 7.** Native Schools Act of 1867. This Act established a system of village primary schools under the control of the Native Department and was part of a broader

government policy aimed at assimilating Māori into Pākehā society. The Act required that instruction be conducted entirely in English, which contributed to the erosion of the Māori language and culture.

- 8.** Native Land Act 1873: This act allowed the Native Land Court to fragment Māori land ownership, leading to individualisation of titles. The process often resulted in the sale of land to settlers, significantly reducing the land base available to Māori communities.
- 9.** *Wi Parata v Bishop of Wellington* 1877: Although not legislation, this court case declared the Treaty of Waitangi a "simple nullity," undermining Māori land rights and sovereignty. It set a legal precedent that diminished the Treaty's role in protecting Māori interests.
- 10.** The Education Act 1877 further centralised education in New Zealand and established the state primary school system. This system reinforced British cultural superiority and aimed to de-culturalise Māori.
- 11.** Māori Prisoners' Trials Act 1879 was a significant piece of legislation that impacted Māori involved in the peaceful resistance at Parihaka. This Act was enacted in response to the non-violent protests led by Te Whiti-o-Rongomai and Tohu Kākahi, where Māori ploughmen began ploughing confiscated lands in Taranaki to assert their rights and ownership. The Act facilitated the detention of Māori protesters without trial. Many of the ploughmen arrested under this Act were held in prisons in the South Island, such as in Dunedin and Hokitika, often under harsh conditions and without the benefit of due legal process. The legislation was part of a broader strategy to suppress Māori resistance to land confiscations. It exemplified the use of legal mechanisms to undermine Māori autonomy and assert colonial control over contested lands.
- 12.** Māori Prisoners Act 1880 was a significant piece of legislation in New Zealand's history, primarily because it allowed for the detention of Māori without trial during a period of heightened tension and conflict over land rights. The Act allowed for the continued detention without trial of Māori prisoners who had been involved in the non-violent resistance campaigns at Parihaka. It allowed for their detention to be extended beyond their original sentences, effectively meaning Māori involved in the protests could be held indefinitely at the government's discretion.
- 13.** Dog Registration Act 1880: Imposed a tax on dogs, disproportionately affecting Māori who relied on dogs for work and livelihood.
- 14.** West Coast Reserves Settlement Act 1881: This act established a system of leasehold titles for Māori land, which allowed settler farmers to lease Māori land for a fraction of its value, further alienating Māori from their land.
- 15.** Parihaka Incident (1881): The government forcibly occupied Parihaka, a settlement known for peaceful resistance against land confiscations. This event symbolised the suppression of Māori autonomy and resistance.
- 16.** Native Lands Rating Act 1882: This act imposed rates on Māori land, which were often higher than those on European land. The difficulty in paying these rates led to further alienation of Māori land, as unpaid rates could result in land seizure by local authorities.

- 17.** Old Age Pensions Act 1898: Māori were entitled to receive an old-age pension, but at a lower rate than non-Māori. They initially received only two-thirds of the pension rate provided to Pākehā.
- 18.** Māori Lands Administration Act 1900: This act aimed to reduce Māori protest over land loss by establishing Māori Land Councils. However, these councils were later reconstituted with reduced Māori representation, limiting Māori control over their land.
- 19.** Tohunga Suppression Act 1907: This act aimed to suppress the role of tohunga (Māori spiritual and healing leaders) and replace traditional Māori healing practices with Western medicine. It was part of broader efforts to assimilate Māori into European cultural norms.
- 20.** Native Land Act 1909: This act prevented Māori from adopting children according to Māori custom, impacting family structures and contributing to the placement of Māori children in state care when they lacked legal guardianship.
- 21.** Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act 1915. This act allowed the government to purchase land and allocate it to returning soldiers, providing them with the opportunity to settle on farms. Māori soldiers were largely excluded from the benefits of the Discharged Soldiers Settlement Act after WWI. The assumption was that Māori had access to tribal lands, and therefore did not need additional land allocations.
- 22.** Prevention of Crime (Borstal Institutions Establishment) Act 1924. This act established the framework for borstal institutions in New Zealand, which were designed as reformatories for young offenders aged between 15 and 21. Māori youth were disproportionately represented in borstal populations. Māori youth were often placed in state care or borstals for minor offences, as the justice system at the time emphasised punishment and institutionalisation over rehabilitation and community-based solutions (Te Ara, n.d.; Abuse in Care Inquiry, 2021).
- 23.** Child Welfare Act 1925: Established the Child Welfare Branch and Children's Courts, which had the authority to place children in State Care. Māori children were often over-represented in these systems due to socio-economic factors and systemic biases.
- 24.** Social Security Act 1938: Although this act introduced a comprehensive social security system, Māori often faced discrimination in accessing benefits. This was partly due to administrative practices that disadvantaged Māori, such as requiring proof of residence and employment that was more difficult for Māori to provide due to different living and working conditions.
- 25.** Legislation Overruling Māori Inheritance Customs (1950s onwards): A series of laws overruled Māori inheritance customs, meaning children adopted under Māori custom could no longer inherit Māori land from their adoptive parents, further disrupting traditional Māori social structures.
- 26.** Pepper potting (1950's and 60's): This policy aimed to integrate Māori into Pākehā society by dispersing Māori families among predominantly Pākehā neighbourhoods. This approach was intended to encourage assimilation by isolating Māori from each other, thereby promoting the adoption of Western lifestyles and reducing the formation of Māori-dominated areas, which were feared to become "ghettos" of deprivation.

27. Māori Land Amendment Act 1952: This act allowed for the conversion of uneconomic shares in multiply-owned Māori lands for sale to other owners or the government, leading to further land alienation.

28. Land and Income Tax Act 1954: The tax system historically disadvantaged Māori landowners by not recognising the unique nature of Māori land ownership and its communal aspects. This led to higher tax burdens on Māori land compared to similar European-owned land, affecting the economic prosperity of Māori communities.

29. Māori Reserved Land Act 1955. These acts established and perpetuated a system where Māori land could be leased out under terms that were often disadvantageous to the Māori landowners.

30. Adoption Act 1955: Codified adoption practices around a nuclear family model, disregarding Māori customs of whāngai (informal adoption within extended families). This led to Māori children being placed with non-Māori families or in State Care.

31. Māori Affairs Amendment Act 1967: This act facilitated the conversion of Māori freehold land with few owners into general land, further alienating Māori from their land. It was seen as a "last land-grab" and faced significant protests from Māori communities.

32. Mental Health Act 1969: This act governed the compulsory treatment of individuals with mental health issues. Māori were often over-represented in mental health institutions, where they faced culturally inappropriate treatment.

33. Criminal Justice Act 1985. The Act allowed for a three-month sentence aimed at providing a "short, sharp shock" to steer

young offenders away from crime. Māori youth were disproportionately represented in the criminal justice system, and thus were more likely to be subjected to these boot camp-style interventions. This often led to further marginalisation and disconnection from their communities.

34. Oranga Tamariki Act 1989: While this act aimed to incorporate Māori perspectives by prioritising placements within whānau, hapū, or iwi, implementation has been criticised for not fully addressing systemic issues, leading to continued over-representation of Māori in State Care (NZFVC, 2024).

35. Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act 1992: This act continued the trend of compulsory treatment, with Māori disproportionately affected due to systemic biases in mental health assessments and care.

36. Marine and Coastal Area (Takutai Moana) Act 2011: Attempted to resolve contradictions between Māori traditional claims and European marine law but faced criticism for inadequately protecting Māori rights.

Note: It wasn't until the mid-20th century that significant legal frameworks began to address racial discrimination. The Race Relations Act of 1971 was a pivotal piece of legislation that prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, nationality, or ethnic origin, marking a significant step toward addressing such issues. Prior to this, discriminatory practices were often challenged through activism and advocacy rather than through legal means.

Appendix 3

Conditions influencing police interactions

Conditions for inequity	Conditions for equity
<p>Training and mentoring</p> <p>Officers may be inexperienced or in new situations; be unprepared and lack training, and this results in a poor interaction/outcome.</p> <p>The emphasis on use of force tactical options may mean officers revert to training scenarios increasing the likelihood force will be used.</p> <p>Mentoring or oversight of officers may be insufficient or perpetuate organisational sub-cultures.</p> <p>Training does not equip officers with the cultural competency to negotiate complex, highly charged or emotional situations with Māori, Pasifika peoples and other diverse ethnic communities.</p> <p>Officers must justify the decisions they make. This limits opportunities for learning.</p> <p>Training for middle leaders (e.g. Sergeants) is primarily command and control as opposed to management/leadership/learning focused and this inhibits organisational learning.</p>	<p>Training and mentoring</p> <p>Officers are well-trained in pre-service and in-service. Training equips officers to safely manage challenging situations. Mentoring by experienced officers enhances situational learning.</p> <p>Well-evidenced de-escalation training is an integral part of officer development. They are highly skilled communicators.</p> <p>Police values are paramount at all times.</p> <p>Officers have the ability to learn from their mistakes.</p> <p>Cultural competency is explicitly taught and developed through situational learning.</p> <p>Sergeants and other middle leaders are well-supported and trained as effective personnel managers and leaders.</p>
<p>Time and resources</p> <p>Officers may make a bad decision due to time pressure. Communication during and/or after an event may be poor resulting in community dissatisfaction.</p> <p>Officers may opt for force options as they may resolve an issue quickly, however, these interactions leave victims feeling unheard and unsafe.</p> <p>Interactions are transactional and task orientated.</p> <p>Time and distance from back-up, or officers being outnumbered may mean the officer feels at risk and uses higher levels of force.</p>	<p>Time and resources</p> <p>Officers are able to take the time to listen, considering the experiences and perspectives of the people they serve. They resolve situations with empathy whenever possible.</p> <p>Communication is respectful and builds trust.</p> <p>A high quality of communication during and after events is maintained.</p> <p>Police have adequate resourcing so front-line staff are not placed in dangerous situations due to a lack of resources.</p>

Conditions for inequity	Conditions for equity
<p>Disposition</p> <p>Officers have personal dispositions related to feelings of deservedness, particularly in relation to diverse and marginalised communities. They make values-based decisions that they justify but are on the edge or outside of SOP.</p> <p>Mocking language escalates situations. Belief that victims deserve outcomes or brought it on themselves.</p> <p>Them vs us attitudes lead to confrontational interactions and overly aggressive responses.</p> <p>The manner warranted or unwarranted searches are conducted can leave lasting negative impacts, particularly for children.</p>	<p>Disposition</p> <p>Officers are professional and respectful in their approach and their language. They value difference and diversity.</p> <p>They are calm and confident and seek to de-escalate situations.</p> <p>Awareness of historical, social and societal issues that lead to crime.</p> <p>Officers are cognisant of the power they hold and take that responsibility seriously.</p> <p>They do their job professionally and seek to minimise the negative impact they may have on whānau as they execute warrants, bail checks and searches.</p>
<p>Underpinned by:</p> <p>Culture of justification – acceptance (bystander) of poor behaviour - Insufficient oversight and monitoring</p>	<p>Underpinned by:</p> <p>Culture of learning – calling out behaviour in opposition to Police values and identifying areas for improvement – ongoing training, coaching and mentoring</p>



Police interactions with
wāhine Māori
experiencing
family harm

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Police Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of praise and dissatisfaction data, complaint data as

well as use of force data as it related to TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

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Research Team

Olivia Martin, Dr Anne Hynds, & Letitia Goldsmith (2024). Police interactions with wāhine Māori experiencing family harm. Phase Two Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

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Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study explores the interactions between the Police and wāhine Māori experiencing family harm and the implications for understanding equity and fairness issues within policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In Phase One we analysed praise and dissatisfaction data, along with complaint data. Analysis revealed women, particularly wāhine Māori, expressed that police handled family harm events poorly. Police interactions during family harm events often left wāhine feeling further victimised. Some felt their concerns were not taken seriously or were dismissed when they attempted to engage with police to raise issues of family harm. The UPD Panel wanted to further investigate police interactions and decision-making as they engage with wāhine Māori experiencing family harm and how findings will assist the Police to better address equity and fairness in policing delivery.

To further investigate this issue, eleven participants were interviewed. Eight wāhine were identified for their lived experience, and three people for their professional work and advocacy work supporting wāhine Māori experiencing family harm and their engagement with the Police. Several themes emerged from interview analysis:

- Early exposure to police and adverse childhood experiences.
- Wāhine reluctance to contact police and police bias.
- Wāhine labelled as perpetrators.
- Variability in quality of police response.
- Relationships: The importance of engagement and connection.
- Understanding the complexity of family harm.
- Police training, the importance of leadership and resource constraints.

All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. The purpose of the UPD research is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

Family violence is an enduring problem within societies globally, and is a significant concern within Aotearoa. Currently, we experience one of the highest rates of family harm in the OECD (New Zealand Government, 2021; NZ Police, 2021) and on average police attend a family violence episode every four minutes (Gerrard, 2018).

The prevalence of violence¹ in families in Aotearoa has been described as a hidden pandemic (Radio New Zealand, 2021). It can be difficult to get a true account of family violence as it is often unreported (Arathoon et al., 2021).

National family violence figures reflect the disproportionate rate of minority and ethnic communities affected by family harm. According to data, 36% of Māori adults have experienced some form of intimate partner or sexual violence during their lifetime (Ministry of Justice, 2021) and children are present at nearly two-thirds of all family violence incidents police respond to (New Zealand Police, 2021). Intimate Partner Violence (IPV) is estimated to affect one in three women in Aotearoa with women experiencing higher rates of death through IPV (Fanslow & Robinson, 2011) with wāhine Māori disproportionately affected (Wilson et al., 2019).

These adverse and often covert incidents occurring within homes have lifelong impacts.

For example, 80% of child and young offenders that come to the attention of the State have experienced family violence (Gerrard, 2018). The estimated disadvantages of experiencing or witnessing family violence affect children and women significantly including increased risks of auto-immune diseases, poor mental health outcomes, addiction, and heightened mortality rates (Fanslow & McIntosh, 2023).

The term 'family violence' encompasses a broad spectrum of behaviours ranging from inadvertent, isolated, and minimally harmful acts, through to deliberate, ongoing and severe physical, sexual and emotional violence (Fanslow & McIntosh, 2023). Family violence events occur along a continuum, and often the more minor acts of violence, such as manipulation or emotional abuse, predict future severe violence eventuating. Family violence can largely be described as a 'symptom' of underlying social and psychological issues, that are both compounding and complex, but are associated with many of

¹ There are different terms used in the literature to describe family harm, such as whānau violence, domestic violence, intimate partner violence, intrafamilial violence and child abuse.

the drivers of other social concerns (Gerrard, 2018). Furthermore, minority communities are disproportionately represented within these other social disparate figures, which evidences the interconnected and exacerbating nature of these social concerns (Wilson et al., 2019).

Resolving violence within homes highlights a complex and multifaceted issue, and is often attributed to being a symptom of wider harm and socio-economic difficulties such as poverty, drug use and inter-generational trauma (New Zealand Police, 2023). There is consistent evidence to highlight the connections between harm within homes and other types of harm occurring elsewhere such as youth offending and gang relations (New Zealand Police, 2023).

To compound issues research suggests most people who experience family violence do not access support services (Carswell et al., 2020). It has been reported that most family violence victims (more than 90%) are aware of support organisations but that only about a quarter (23%) of those aware have contacted them (Carswell et al., 2020). The secretive nature of these events leaves gaps in current data including low reporting rates and why prevalence of family violence is high.

There are a range of complicating factors that prevent victims from asking for help or leaving a violent situation (Douglas, 2019; Fanslow & McIntosh, 2023; Wilson et al., 2019). Some of the contributing difficulties include the compounding psychological impacts of abuse, monetary limitations including poverty, the effects of isolation and social control, fear of retaliation or losing children to the State (Wilson et al., 2019). Often, intergenerational trauma and experiences of systemic abuse, exclusion, and failure of the state mean that wāhine Māori particularly feel isolated and apprehensive in contacting police or services (Mikaere, 1994; Wilson et al., 2019). Whānau experiences of current services and the system show they are fragmented, difficult to navigate, culturally unresponsive and punitive, and that they did not account for the broader historical and cultural

context which has bred family violence within whānau Māori (Carswell et al., 2020; Leonard, 2020).

International family violence studies (Carswell, 2006; Wolf et al., 2003) have investigated, through qualitative methods, why victims struggle to access services and support. They found that victims' perceptions of police responses significantly impact their likelihood of contacting first responders again (Carswell, 2006). The initial contact between police and victims of family violence is especially important and significantly impacts how victims engage with future support (Douglas, 2019). By the time victims of domestic violence contact the police, it is rarely a first or isolated incident of violence in their home due to fears of retaliation, losing children, or psychological tactics (Wilson et al., 2019).

An analysis of family homicide deaths in Australia throughout 2000-2020 highlighted police inactions and profound failings which contributed to the unsafe situations of many Indigenous women, leading to preventable death (Cripps, 2023). A coronial inquest included within the report labelled the actions and inactions of police as 'profound systemic racism' (Cripps, 2023, p. 293), highlighting the importance of first responder's education and actions towards women experiencing domestic violence.

In Aotearoa, a study by Lennox (2021) explored young women's perceptions of procedural justice during their interactions with the New Zealand Police. Male police officers typically presented a risk rather than safety to these young women, mainly due to most officers being male and "unknown" (Lennox, 2021). Citing statistics from the New Zealand Police (2020), Lennox argues, "Despite recent public efforts in NZ to encourage more women to enter the police force, the institution is still male-dominated, both in culture and in quantity" (2021, p. 108).

Data gathered from victims of domestic violence emphasise the influential impacts of first contacts and attitudes of first responders:

“I remember going to the central police station and talking to the guy on the desk and telling him that I was afraid. He said, “What do you want us to do? What do you think we can do?” ... I kind of thought I wish I’d never gone there.” (Wilson et al., 2019, p. 33). Qualitative studies undertaken in Queensland, Australia, reflect similar findings, and identify the importance of positive and appropriate police responses that can save the lives of domestic violence victims (Douglas, 2019).

According to recent data, family harm was the Police’s single largest demand type for frontline responders (New Zealand Police, 2021). Yet a recent study from Aotearoa emphasised unsafe and unsupportive responses from police as they engaged with transgender, non-binary, Māori and disabled people experiencing family violence, intimate partner violence and/or sexual violence (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2024). Participants within the study described “how police involvement made them less safe and, in some cases emboldened the abuser, often through police inaction” (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2024, para 2).

International studies highlight the problem of compassion fatigue that first responders such as police can experience as they attend frequent, traumatic and stressful situations such as family harm events (Violanti & Gehrke, 2004; Voth Schrag et al., 2022). Compassion fatigue as experienced by police officers can be exacerbated due to insufficient “organizational efforts” to recognise and respond appropriately to such stressors (Violanti & Gehrke, 2004, p. 75).

The complexities and cumulative stresses of family violence often lead to inadequate responses that do little to help wāhine, whānau and children to leave violent relationships. Instead, judgemental and negative responses further isolate them from the supports they need the most, exacerbate low service utilisation rates, low reporting rates, and further isolation (Wilson et al., 2019). International research, including studies by Wilson et al. (2019) and Douglas (2019), emphasise the critical importance of empathic police attitudes, engagement in promoting harm reduction and enhancing safety for women in society.



Interview findings

The following section includes a collation of interview findings across five key themes and a final discussion including a summary of findings and advice to the Police.

Early exposure to police and adverse childhood experiences

The prevalence of adverse childhood experiences among wāhine who have experienced family harm was a recurring theme across the interviews. Of the eight wāhine interviewed, six had experienced trauma in their youth, which has had long-term impacts on their lives. These experiences included but were not limited to family violence, incarcerated parents, State care, exposure to alcohol and drugs, physical, sexual, and social harms, and negative interactions with law enforcement.

Women in relationships with abusers often find that the cycles they experience mirror their childhood experiences and are exacerbated by other challenges they may be facing, such as addiction, lack of opportunity, and poverty. Both the literature and interview findings clearly indicate that these early experiences have lasting psychological impacts and has shaped their lives and perceptions.

“I was raised in family violence and drugs for most of my younger years. And then at an early age, 14, went into my own domestic violence relationship ... and I had my son in that relationship.” (Participant)

Family violence is often viewed by both victims and perpetrators as a private matter distinct from other crimes. This perception influences wāhine to try to resolve incidents within the relationship rather than involving authorities. Among the interviewed wāhine, adverse childhood experiences frequently included harmful interactions with law enforcement, such as witnessing home raids or their own parents being arrested. These experiences contributed to a deep distrust in Police and a shared intergenerational reluctance to engage with authorities.

“I grew up in a home where family harm, those kinds of things were normal. Incidents like that, the police were never portrayed as good. I can remember them coming over, busting in the

house with guns and stuff, we were all scared. And that kind of reiterated everything that we were told, that these people definitely weren’t our friends.” (Participant)

The recounting of these experiences by wāhine highlights how interactions with police, the justice system and prisons shape familial dynamics and perceptions of safety. These perceptions are further influenced by personal encounters characterised by perceived injustice and aggression which reinforce pre-existing biases. When police arrive at a call-out, it is possibly their first interaction with the person involved. However, for the women interviewed, the concept of the police is loaded with preconceptions and earlier traumatic interactions.

“The police raided my house. They walked on mattresses that were in the lounge, they strip-searched me without a female constable there on the main street. They threatened to lock up my moko who was only 16, it was terrible ...” (Participant)

In turn, wāhine reported the impact of police attending their home and the impact that this had on their own children. They discussed how these interactions continued cycles of intergenerational trauma and perpetuated negative attitudes toward the police.

“Remember there’s kids in there and former trauma, whether it’s the police causing it or the family, but kids don’t understand. All they see is a dad or a māmā and, you’re locking up one of them. And that’s a trauma in itself. That memory sticks.” (Participant)

Wāhine reluctance to contact police and police bias

Wāhine interviewed for this case study discussed their reluctance to call the police. Two of the eight wāhine interviewed did not contact the police during family harm events, rather neighbours alerted the police. As previously stated, these

wāhine held the belief that it was better to try and sort family harm events themselves rather than ring the police.

"I never would've rung the police. Because it's not how I work, we sort things out ourselves. We don't need to involve them in these sorts of things." (Participant)

For those who did contact police, they believed that police came with pre-existing biases and misconceptions about their situations. They felt this was particularly apparent when victims were already known to the police or had previous callouts for family violence. One wāhine who had contacted the police multiple times for family violence shared that she felt the police judged her as being responsible for these events and stopped taking her concerns seriously.

"When you are getting talked down to by the police officer after being abused mentally and physically and then being told, 'Oh, it's happening again. It's a bit pathetic, isn't it?' that just makes you feel worse. But yeah, they'd be quite rude to people who were around as well. They would restrain him and arrest him and stuff. But to me, it was kind of like, 'when are you going to learn?' One time, he was beating me in the kitchen, and I was afraid he wasn't going to stop. I had to pretend to be knocked out. He left the room, and I grabbed the phone and then the Police were knocking at the door, come and got him and the officer was like, 'Get up.' And I couldn't actually physically. I was crying. They were like, 'Ugh.' Rolling their eyes. It was humiliating, really, because you ring them for support." (Participant)

The incident described above left her feeling ashamed and as if she were a burden, even though she reported only contacting the Police when she feared for her life. This sentiment was not unique; multiple wāhine who shared their narratives expressed similar feelings, especially if they had contacted the Police more than once. Some of the behaviours described demonstrate police preconceptions were overt, such as arresting the victim or misidentifying the victim

as the perpetrator. However, many were more subtle, including disparaging comments, general unfriendliness, and hostility, which left women feeling ashamed.

"The police pretty much thought I was the problem. They wouldn't believe me when I'd ring about a break in. I felt so awful, so unsafe. There were other times when he pushed me, he had come into the house and hit me. And I remember one officer saying to me 'where's the marks on your body then?'" (Participant)

For one wāhine, the emergency phone line was a significant barrier. They described a time when they called the Police as they were fearing for their life, however, they did not get a response.

"When I was getting physically abused, definitely they were crap as shit. It was quite frustrating even trying to talk to the operator who just kept saying, 'police, fire, ambulance', that can clearly hear there's someone bashing you, but still keeps repeating those words ... that phone call was frustrating ... and I'm trying to tell her to hurry up because they're taking forever ... they didn't turn up. We managed to get away ... but the Police rang back two days later to apologise. We could have been dead by the time they turned up." (Participant)

This is an important finding as it demonstrates that police behaviour and responses during callouts has an impact on women reporting future incidents.

Wāhine labelled as perpetrators

Wāhine felt that police had a high level of discretion in their practice, particularly regarding reporting. The process of reporting an incident typically involves the police speaking to those involved and identifying a victim and a perpetrator in their report. Several wāhine and service response workers reported instances where victims were coded as perpetrators.

"Because I was the one that was intoxicated, and

I was the one hysterically crying and screaming out for help the police charged me instead of him. They listened to him over me because I was overwhelmed and over the top.” (Participant)

“I think a lot of it has to do with what the partner (abuser) says when police get there to assess the event. Who is heard more? In the future if they’re (wāhine) at high risk of being assaulted, possibly killed, they’re not going to ring the police again” (Stakeholder)

When asked to elaborate on why they believe this occurs, multiple issues emerged. One conclusion was that police lacked understanding of the complexities of violence and abuse. The cycles that wāhine are caught in often involve social, financial, psychological, and physical violence. Abusers often ‘appear’ well. At the time wāhine contact the police, they reported being in a heightened emotional state, possibly engaging in reactive abuse, or under the influence of alcohol and drugs. The appearance of the perpetrator influences how police exercise their discretion in reporting.

“He was extremely psychologically abusive. I felt like how he portrayed me to the police is what they ran with. Obviously that I was crazy. And it was a time of my life I was extremely emotional. I couldn’t believe this was happening to me. Nobody was listening to me, nobody was hearing me, and then I’m getting these police reports back that aren’t accurate. Just had a baby, this big divorce, abused, it was as if because I was emotional, I got the label of being crazy.” (Participant)

Interviewed social service providers described how cycles of abusive relationships left wāhine unstable, reactive, and often using drugs and alcohol. They believed police perceived the women as ‘crazy’ or ‘hysterical’, labelling them perpetrators of the abuse. It appeared that multiple callouts also influenced police use of discretion, with police becoming frustrated with women stuck in violent relationships. This failure to understand the complexity of the situation for wāhine appeared to weaken police efforts to protect victims and hold offenders accountable,

resulting in ongoing distrust of police by some wāhine.

“Well, I’ve got PTSD. I’ve been diagnosed with PTSD. I obviously have a complete distrust in the Police. If they turned up on my doorstep tomorrow, I wouldn’t answer the door. It’s really sad because I have friends who are police officers.” (Participant)

“I’ve felt really let down by the Police. Every time I have to ring them, I ask for the report on the incident, and to see I’ve been labelled as the aggressor in these incidents. What the hell?” (Participant)

Variability in quality of police response

Interview analysis highlighted variability in the quality of the police response as they engaged with wāhine. Despite many of the wāhine having negative experiences, around half of the interviewed cohort could recount at least one positive interaction with the police. These positive experiences had a lasting impact on their perceptions of the police and the incidents in which the police were involved. For some, this meant their reluctance to involve police in domestic issues, such as family violence, lessened due to the positive engagement.

“Sometimes you feel like they will protect you, and then other times, they’re the last people you want to go to, because you feel like they’ll make it worse.” (Participant)

Although the significance of these positive interactions is clear in the data, findings show that police officer conduct is extremely varied. The changing nature of policing means that wāhine often see multiple officers at one incident and fail to receive follow-up information. A positive experience with one officer can be negated by a negative response from another attending officer. Wāhine describe the police as unpredictable and in some cases oppositional.

“I still say it to this day, and I teach my kids,

there's pigs and there's policemen. Policemen do the job and they want to deescalate and empower the community. And then there's pigs that all just, they profiled you. They'll talk to you in any way. They're a gang of their own as far as I'm concerned." (Participant)

Interviews suggest variability in the quality of policing response may be due to lack of resources, insufficient training and lack of back up support. An expert in family violence noted that police in rural, isolated communities were left on their own to respond to complex community issues, including family harm incidents without adequate organisational support. The continued lack of support contributed to police inadequacy in responding to family violence as well as other issues such as compassion fatigue.

"Isolated rural communities' police are on their own, any back up is coming out of (town), and they're 45 minutes away. So for the police officer in an isolated community, they're going out there on their own, they're doing their best. Are they family violence experts? Hell no! ... (rural community) has the highest rate, head of population, for meth use in the country. It's leading the stats in suicide. They have no police presence. ... so it's not surprising that police officers are just trying to deal with episodes rather than seeing the continuing patterns of harm impacting communities." (Stakeholder)

Relationships: The importance of engagement and connection

The complexities of family violence left some wāhine interviewed feeling isolated, wary of new connections or organisations, and reluctant to share too much. Fragmented relationships with the police only exacerbated their feelings of isolation. However, many of the wāhine who agreed to be interviewed were previously or currently involved with a Kaupapa Māori service provider. They described the relationships they had with social service workers and organisations as a clear enabler of change. Service providers from these organisations

prioritised relationships, as one worker said, *"if you haven't got that whakawhanaungatanga, you haven't got anything"* (Stakeholder).

Findings indicate that fragmented relationships appear to impact engagement between police, social service organisations and wāhine experiencing family harm. While stakeholders reported going to callouts with police, they felt that the association with police could impact negatively on their ability to engage with wāhine.

"Police sometimes do a co-deploy. Which means I go over with them, but the thing about that is I'm reserved because I don't want to be associated with them. Then it stuffs up my engagement." (Stakeholder)

In interviews, wāhine and stakeholders identified several pressures on quality relationships including:

- A lack of continuity in engagement: Often inconsistent and unpredictable relationships due to organisational roster systems, different officers and varied approaches, which increased distrust and a reluctance to engage.
- Impact of negative experiences: Previous negative police – wāhine/ victim interactions, including those from childhood, meant whānau and wāhine wanted to 'sort things themselves.'
- Biases and pre-conceived notions: Wāhine reported feeling judged by police and that this impacted their ability to arrive at an incident without bias. They reported that pre-conceived notions were uninformed and often misogynistic in nature.
- Challenges in advocacy: Wāhine felt they faced barriers advocating for themselves in both the policing and justice systems. Misunderstandings, dismissive attitudes, lack of awareness or escalated underlying issues contributed to victims feeling blamed. This was particularly so for

wāhine who reported being emotionally distressed, gang affiliated, having multiple callouts and/or were under the influence of drugs and alcohol.

Similarly, the importance of positive relationships was evident in the data. Wāhine talk about the services they had engaged with, and the enablers for positive change. Service providers described how some wāhine were resistant or even aggressive in the first interaction. Service providers described using de-escalation techniques, positive body language and language, and not holding grudges. This approach can change the perception wāhine have about service providers, making them more likely to engage in support.

“The first time I go to a house they will say fuck off. Then we get another call, and the second time they’ll say just leave us alone. Then another one, and she’ll talk to me. I don’t personalise it, because I’m a professional.” (Stakeholder)

Social service providers interviewed who are working with wāhine experiencing family harm emphasise the importance of being in a professional role when engaging. By being an attending officer, or social worker, it was imperative to uphold a level of compassion and conduct that will not always be received or returned. They described how women and children were often at the lowest point of their life having been exposed to physical, emotional and psychological abuse. They described the importance of understanding the power dynamics present between a professional and a victim.

Interview data indicated that when wāhine had positive relationships with police, it increased feelings of safety and understanding when seeking help. One wāhine describes the importance of the gendered nature of the response, having a female officer support her, while the male officers dealt with her partner.

“I was in the shower when they arrived, then all of a sudden, the female police officer announced herself. As I said, the female cop was absolutely lovely. She was really caring, made sure I could grab my clothes and get changed and everything. And the male cops stayed out of the room, and were dealing with my partner and everything.” (Participant)

In addition, positive interactions included officer’s use of de-escalation techniques that reduced volatile situations as experienced by wāhine. Being able to calm the situation quickly ensured wāhine and tamariki felt safe.

“She could see my kids were heightened straight away, and she explained to them, ‘Mum’s not in trouble. She’s not getting locked up. I just need to talk to her for adult conversation’. And I thought that was good, because she could clearly see they were worried straight away. They’re like, ‘What’s happening Mum?’ So I believe that was a good thing. I’ve had a few good interactions. I’m not saying they’re all bad.” (Participant)

Participants described positive interactions where they felt the officer made an effort to build a relationship with them, asked questions and demonstrated compassion. Understanding cultural nuances was also important. In some situations, participants noted police officers showed respect for tikanga/cultural protocols in their home, such as taking their shoes off when entering a house. Other positive interactions included police who showed compassion, demonstrated respect and did not make judgmental comments about their personal situation, their living arrangements, and/or how they presented.

The relationship between police, service providers, and wāhine in family harm situations appears to be crucial when supporting wāhine and their whānau to be safe. Service providers described how collaboration ensured that women received timely assistance, appropriate resources (including safety alarms), and ongoing support tailored to their specific needs. One service provider saw the initiation of the

Resilience Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC) programme in their community as a positive pro-social development.

“They (Police) call in ... because we work in a marae. They just call in for a cuppa and have a talk about what’s going on in the community. If there’s been call outs, they’ll come to us after and say ‘Hey we had a call out for family violence for this person, can you go out and see them?’” (Stakeholder)

Interviews with wāhine indicated that the programmes they had engaged with were making a difference in their lives.

“That mana wāhine programme, has been really valuable to me. Especially while my partners away, but I think it will help me too when he’s back. Like., it’s just given me something more positive to focus on, being in the community rather than kind of hanging out on the outskirts and thinking I don’t belong.” (Participant)

Understanding the complexity of family harm

Family harm is a multifaceted issue that encompasses various forms of abuse, including emotional, psychological, financial, and physical harm. Participants described facing multiple layers of abuse that extended beyond physical violence. For instance, financial abuse left wāhine without resources, making it difficult for them to leave abusive relationships. One participant reported being cut off financially, which exacerbated their sense of isolation and helplessness.

“I had \$300 in my bank when I left. He cut me off from everything, and nobody would listen to me.” (Participant)

Wāhine discussed instances of emotional and psychological abuse that went unnoticed by police, and for some enduring years of emotional

abuse which intensified after the breakup. They described their partner manipulating ‘the system’ and using institutions to further control them and influence police judgement.

“I found records of his phone calls ringing and texting the police saying that I have BPD [borderline personality disorder] all sorts. He was ringing my doctors saying ‘oh she’s crazy’ ... it was an awful time, and the police didn’t help at all.” (Participant)

The complexity of the lived reality of wāhine in family harm situations highlighted the importance of police training to identify and respond to these non-physical forms of abuse. Police must recognise the power imbalance which is exacerbated through labelling wāhine Māori ‘at fault’, and how this further contributes to dynamics of coercive control and manipulation by abusers.

“An example of a case this week, so we go and do a home visit and next thing we’re in court getting a protection order to keep this wāhine safe. Little do we know he’s already been in there that morning to get one. Family court became another weapon to use against her.” (Stakeholder)

As one family harm expert notes, the systemic response to family harm treats incidents as isolated events, failing to capture the complexity of family harm and can in fact enable abusers to use the system to perpetuate harm.

“All I’m saying is our system is set up to deal with things as isolated, separated incidents and events. Which completely goes against what family violence is. Coercive controlling behaviour, power, and control around all of those dynamics. So I think the whole system needs an overhaul.” (Stakeholder)

Police training, the importance of leadership and resource constraints

Participants, including experts, support workers and wāhine reported their concerns that not all police were sufficiently trained to respond appropriately to family harm situations. Wāhine noted a lack of police de-escalation techniques, insufficient safety awareness, and other issues that affected the reporting of incidents and their feelings of safety. Furthermore, service response workers reported that police needed more training to understand the implications of psycho-social harms of family violence. They reported that police are essentially providing an emergency service which is a short-term intervention, however many family harm situations are complex and long-term.

“I can’t recall a time where they’ve de-escalated it to be honest. They’ve definitely escalated the situation and made it worse. With all those little comments.” (Participant)

“Someone obviously called the police, which is good. But the thing is, when the police get there, they’ll talk to him and talk to her, but only a few metres apart. He can see her and is watching what she says. I don’t know why the police don’t pick up on these cues. It goes back to knowledge and engagement.” (Stakeholder)

Social service providers suggested training needed to focus on the complexity, intersectionality, and the confluence of other factors which influence family harm dynamics. Participants discussed how police needed to know and recognise signs of intimate partner violence, financial control, ongoing emotional and psychological abuse, the use of the system to control, and the impact of having children involved. Participants felt that further training around understanding the complexities of family violence, abuse, and trauma informed support would improve policing response. Police leadership in ensuring police officers understood the dynamics of family harm was extremely important, yet rare.

“I take my hat off to this police area commander, who organised a relief for this police station on the day of the workshop. The sergeant and at least three or four of the staff all turned up at the family violence training with community groups. First time in my experience that the entire police service, the police station, all the staff at the station had turned up to a family violence community funded training ... Police are a very hierarchical organisation. And leadership is very important.” (Stakeholder)

Discussion

Case study results provide crucial insight about the nature of Police interactions with wāhine Māori experiencing family harm, which was a key theme of Phase 1 analysis of complaint data¹. These results align with other studies (New Zealand Family Violence Clearing House, 2024, 2022) that emphasise the importance of improving police interactions in family harm and intimate partner violence events. However crucially, case study findings can also inform current policing delivery and resourcing to better support officers responding to family violence situations.

It appears that a critical step in improving the quality of police delivery for wāhine Māori experiencing family harm involves addressing the misconceptions and biases officers may hold. Training programmes need to focus on educating police about the complexities of family violence, including the physical, psychological, social, and financial dimensions of abuse.

Wāhine in this study reported feeling emotionally or mentally distressed, and for some they were under the influence of drugs or alcohol as they engaged with police. Understanding these behaviours as symptoms of prolonged trauma rather than indicators of culpability may shift the police's approach from one of judgement to one of support. Training must also include learning about the dynamics of family violence and the impact of intergenerational trauma. Adverse childhood experiences, including early negative interactions with police fuel generational distrust in police and prevent wāhine from seeking help.

Understanding how past trauma influences present behaviours can help officers respond more empathetically and effectively.

An issue identified in this study is the variability reported in police conduct and the quality of policing response. Wāhine reported seeing multiple officers and experiencing inconsistent approaches. Stakeholders reported that consistent, respectful and reliable engagement helps build trust and ensures that victims feel supported throughout the process. In addition, positive engagements, where officers demonstrate compassion, cultural sensitivity, and non-judgment, appear to have a lasting impact and can encourage wāhine to seek help in future incidents. Police leadership is critical to improving police officer knowledge and policing delivery, enabling officers to build positive connections with whānau and community groups addressing family harm within specific regions.

¹ For further information about this please refer to the following report. Leonard, C., Sanaei, N., Hynds, A., & Leonard, J. (2024). Evidence Report 2: Analysis of complaint data. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/668203523b9c3d11027006a8/t/66c5ad42d7baf06c6bdc103/1724230990227/WEB+Ihi+Police+Report+2.pdf>

Wāhine reported variability in the use of de-escalation techniques by police officers and safety awareness at family harm events. Positive police behaviours can be used in training such as the use of non-confrontational methods and the importance of creating a safe response for victims. Practical steps, such as ensuring victims are questioned in private, separating the involved parties during arrests, can significantly improve a victim's sense of safety and trust in police interactions.

The importance of building and maintaining positive relationships with wāhine cannot be overstated. Engagement should go beyond responding to incidents; it should involve proactive community outreach and

relationship-building with stakeholders/service providers. It is clear that ongoing partnerships between police and community-based family harm service providers is pivotal for supporting wāhine, regardless of whether they have left a relationship or not.

Participants noted the challenges posed by limited police resources, particularly in rural areas. There is a clear need for increased funding and resources dedicated to family harm units. This includes providing officers with the necessary tools and organisational support to handle the ongoing emotional toll of dealing with repetitive and severe family harm cases, potentially reducing compassion fatigue and improving overall response quality.



Advice

Two key points of advice emerged from analysis to improve police engagement and response to wāhine Māori experiencing family harm.

1. Enhance police training and include de-escalation techniques and greater safety protocols

Enhanced police training to include non-confrontational and de-escalation methods that prioritise safety and reduce further harm for the whole whānau. As part of family harm response training, Police staff should reflect on personal biases and learn about the complexities and drivers of family harm to better respond to women and wāhine Māori during family harm events. Innovative and empathetic approaches to family harm responses should be supported and championed by Police leadership.

2. Strengthen Police partnerships with Kaupapa Māori organisations and community-based services working to address family violence

Foster and resource ongoing collaborations between Police and family harm service providers to support the diverse and specific needs of wāhine and communities impacted by family violence. This includes recognition of the supports and services available in the community to support affected wāhine and whānau in addressing the social determinants and drivers of family harm.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019²). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the

Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

²As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Police interactions with
**people
experiencing
mental distress**

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research's Phase One analysis highlighted the variable effectiveness of current police approaches towards people experiencing mental distress. Results highlighted reports of police stereotyping and bias, as well as incidents involving use of force (TASERs) on people experiencing mental distress. While the focus of this case study is to explore how police

engage with people who are mentally distressed, it also relates to the use of force, and to the criminalisation of mental health issues, which can lead to police decisions to lay charges.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

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Research Team

Dr Anne Hynds, Tanita Bidois, Olivia Martin, & Negeen Sanaei (2024). Police interactions with people experiencing mental distress. Phase Two Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

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Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study was identified as one of the communities of interest to better understand police decision-making and engagement with diverse groups.

In Phase One we analysed a range of data that highlighted the ineffectiveness of current Police approaches towards people experiencing mental distress. Results highlighted incidents of Police stereotyping and bias, poor treatment, lack of resources, and inadequate mental health training for officers (Ihi Research, 2023). The UPD Panel wanted to further investigate Police interactions and decision-making as they engage with people experiencing mental distress and how findings will assist NZ Police to better address equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants for this case. These included people with lived experience of mental distress and who had interactions with Police, whānau/family members, as well as senior researchers and mental health professionals/community advocates. Several themes emerged from qualitative analysis:

- People experiencing mental distress – ‘An undeserving and criminalised community’
- The presence of trauma and desperate cries for help.
- Individual Police officer behaviour and variation in quality of policing.
- Division within the Police – what is their role?
- Police mental health and compassion fatigue.

All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. It is important to note that this is not an evaluation of police delivery but an exploratory case study. The purpose is not to make generalisations but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in Policing delivery. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

There is plenty of evidence that demonstrates how traditional police responses to mental health crises are ineffective, often leading to criminalisation, unnecessary use of force, detainment, and inadequate care for those in distress (Davey et al., 2021; Hallet et al., 2021; Laniyonu & Goff, 2021; Suwarno, 2021; Thom et al., 2024).

In general police are unprepared to handle mental health crises, leading to potentially harmful outcomes for individuals in distress. In particular the use of police equipment (e.g., TASERS, handcuffs, police vehicles) and settings (e.g., cells) during these interventions often stigmatise and escalate the situation (Thom et al., 2024).

The potential criminalisation of people experiencing mental distress is concerning, particularly as Police are not qualified to diagnose and/or aren't trained appropriately to respond to such events (Thom et al., 2024). Police are the entry point into the criminal justice system and have become default front-line mental health workers (Thom et al., 2024). Wittmann et al. (2021) identify significant gaps in the evidence base, as previous research often focuses on reporting the experiences of police officers who interact with people experiencing mental distress, rather than the people themselves. Therefore, this case study provides an opportunity to better understand the nature of police decision-making as they engage with diverse community groups and to

consider the implications for equity and fairness in policing delivery.

What defines mental distress?

Enduring mental distress is described as relatively common within Aotearoa, with almost half of the population (47%) experiencing it within their life-time (Te Whatu Ora, 2024). Mental distress is defined as a change in “thoughts, feelings and behaviours” where people “may not feel like they are their usual selves” for a period of time (Te Whatu Ora, 2024, para 1). The Health Promotion Agency (2018) views mental distress as a state of mind that moves “beyond standard definitions of depression and anxiety to include feeling isolated, overwhelmed by stress and not able to cope” (p. 4). People experiencing mental distress are often judged, discriminated against and treated harshly which in turn impacts their overall wellbeing and their ability to find support (Mental Health Foundation, 2022). Whilst the experience of mental distress affects all communities, studies suggest it is

more likely to be experienced by “Māori, Pasifika Peoples, people aged between 18-24 years old, rainbow communities, and people living with disabilities” (Mental Health Foundation, 2022, p. 2). These communities are at risk of “double discrimination” in their everyday interactions as they already experience negative stereotypes, ableism, gender bias and racism (Mental Health Foundation, 2022, p. 2).

Environmental and social determinants of mental distress

Considerable evidence highlights and links the social determinants of mental distress including poverty/socioeconomic disadvantage (Ashton et al., 2016; Kirkbride et al., 2024). Adverse childhood experiences are related to socioeconomic disadvantage, child maltreatment, and social isolation (Danese et al., 2009). The New Zealand Dunedin longitudinal study documents childhood maltreatment as a “predictor of adult depression” (Danese et al., 2009, p. 1136). Such findings are echoed by Kirkbride et al. (2024, p. 76) that “traumatic events contribute substantially to mental health inequalities”. Traumatic events can include environmental disasters, such as extreme weather events (Haase, 2023) and pandemics and associated lock-downs (Bell et al., 2022). Studies have highlighted how such events disproportionately impact people with pre-existing mental health issues (Bell et al., 2022).

The lack of trauma-informed care for people experiencing mental distress, coupled with chronic underfunding and mental health service failures has had devastating impacts. According to one government report “the high prevalence of mental illness among prisoners means that the Department of Corrections is managing more people with mental illness than any other institution in New Zealand” (The Department of Corrections, 2017, p. 4).

Findings from a ground-breaking five-year study within Aotearoa investigated the experiences of whānau/citizens who experienced mental distress

and their engagement with Police (Gordon et al., 2024; Thom et al., 2024). This research was extensive involving direct observations as police engaged with people experiencing mental distress, police documents and interviews with police officers (Thom et al., 2024). Importantly, interviews with whānau/citizens who have lived experience of mental distress and interactions with Police were included in this study (Gordon et al., 2024). Findings emphasise the presence of trauma as “significant” in contributing to mental distress and is related to “multiple, severe, and sustained traumatic events, circumstances, or experiences that occurred from childhood through to adulthood” (Thom et al., 2024, p. 5).

Intergenerational and historic trauma was also recognised in a study by Thom et al. (2024) as contributing to mental distress as experienced by Māori communities. Such findings are consistent with international research. For example, Cripps (2023) cites a number of research studies (such as Allen & Clarke Consulting, 2022; Dudgeon et al., 2022, 2021; Groves et al., 2022; Martin et al., 2023) on key issues related to Indigenous people’s social and emotional wellbeing. Cripps states that these studies show that Indigenous people’s mental health is strongly linked with housing and homelessness, support for family violence, suicide prevention, and the connections between family, kinship and Indigenous communities that lead to improved social and emotional wellbeing (Cripps, 2023). Cripps (2023) also states that whilst Indigenous communities have endured the traumatic impacts of colonisation, forced displacement and cultural dispossession, suicide is now the leading cause of mortality within these communities.

In Aotearoa, Māori disproportionately feature across social determinants of mental distress. As a result of colonisation and structural racism, Māori have higher rates of ill health, unemployment, incarceration, family violence, homelessness, drug and alcohol addiction and reduced educational opportunities when compared with their non-Māori peers (Cram et al., 2022; Hynds et al., 2016; Kaiwai et al., 2020; McIntosh, 2019a, 2019b; Pihama et al., 2019; Savage

et al., 2021; Waitangi Tribunal, 2017; Waitangi Tribunal, 2019; Waitangi Tribunal Report, 2023). The acceptance of negative stereotypes associated with marginalisation can negatively impact on police practices. The Thom et al. study found “examples of biased, racist, and discriminatory pre-judgements of whānau/citizens, which then shaped how frontline police officers responded” to those experiencing mental distress (2024, p. 7).

As a result of marginalisation and discrimination, Māori suffer a significant burden of mental illness and are disproportionately represented within specialist mental health services (Tapsell, 2017). Durie (1985) has argued extensively that the traditional Western approach to health and wellbeing is ineffective for Māori. He argues that the Western approach emphasises “personal dysfunction and socio-economic inequalities” whilst for Māori, hauora (health and wellbeing) is more about holistic cultural dimensions that impact the whole community as well as their whenua (Durie, 1985, p. 483). The introduction of Western psychiatry in New Zealand has also contributed to intergenerational trauma for Māori whānau (Thom et al., 2024) by ignoring spiritual and cultural explanations for whānau experiences judged as “psychotic” or “schizophrenic” (Taitimu, Read & McIntosh, 2018, p. 153). Western psychiatry is representative of ongoing colonisation and structural mechanisms that attempt to eradicate the spiritual, cultural mental and physical health of whānau Māori (Cohen, 2014; Taitimu et al., 2018). Structural mechanisms include past and present legislation and policies and practices that fail to account for Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations on the part of the Crown, resulting in institutional inequalities experienced by Māori (Jackson, 1987). Psycho-social mechanisms include the acceptance and internalisation of the “cultural superiority” delusion, culminating in “a sense of shame, shame of their culture and shame of their ethnicity” (Reid et al., 2017, p. 28).

Brave Heart used the term ‘Historical response trauma’ to explain the “cumulative emotional and psychological wounding over the lifespan and across generations, emanating from massive group experiences” (2003, p. 7). Historical

response trauma “often includes depression, self-destructive behaviour, suicidal thoughts and gestures, anxiety, low self-esteem, anger, and difficulty recognising and expressing emotions. It may include substance abuse, often an attempt to avoid painful feelings through self-medication” (Brave Heart, 2003, p. 7).

Stigma and discrimination

Individuals facing mental health challenges often avoid seeking help due to fears of the criminalisation and stigma of mental health, negative attitudes, and potential repercussions such as being subject to restraint, separation from family, loss of employment, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Bailey et al., 2018). Often the result of avoiding support for mental distress is a worsening of their condition until they eventually enter the system under a compulsory treatment order or through the criminal justice system (Patterson et al., 2018). Despite increased awareness, stigma and discrimination remain deeply entrenched in societal attitudes and institutional practices.

Fears of discrimination and negative attitudes towards government agencies including Police disproportionately affect Māori, revealing systemic barriers to accessing appropriate support. Ihi Research findings from Phase One data indicate that individuals identifying solely as Māori exhibit lower levels of trust and confidence compared to Māori/NZ European and the general population (59% versus 62% and 69%) (Ihi Research, 2023, p. 6). According to a quote from He Ara Oranga, “whānau are fearful of our Ministries. Fearful of mental health. Fearful of Oranga Tamariki taking their children. Fearful of Police who take away their dads. Whānau are on the back foot before anything that happened, just because they are Māori” (Patterson et al., 2018, p. 62). Intergenerational trauma and the effects of colonisation compound these issues, emphasising an additional dimension to the challenge of addressing the criminalisation of mental health in Aotearoa New Zealand (Patterson et al., 2018).

Before the deinstitutionalisation of mental illness in Aotearoa, people diagnosed as suffering from mental illness or intellectual disabilities received support within psychiatric hospitals (Breen, 2021). Researchers note that “like prison inmates, institutionalised people had little or no contact with their family/whānau”, highlighting the negative treatment many people suffering mental illness experienced within these hospitals. Since the closing of these institutions, the burden of responding to mental health distress has fallen on the Police through the introduction of the Mental Health Compulsory Assessment and Treatment Act 1992 (van der Harst, 2021).

Many Māori and Pacific children and adolescents viewed as troublesome and disordered during the 1970's, were forcibly committed to the Child and Adolescent Unit at Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital even though they didn't have a medical diagnosis of mental illness (Savage et al., 2021; Smale, 2022; Stanley, 2016). As wards of the State, they were subjected to physical, sexual and psychological abuse (Smale, 2022; Stanley, 2016). Dr Selwyn Leeks was the lead psychiatrist at the Child and Adolescent Unit where he tortured and abused children and young people, and many of them were Māori (Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, 2022; Every-Palmer & Sutherland, 2023). Finally, formally acknowledged as “torture” by the Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry it was reported “the torture survivors experienced included electric shocks, often without anaesthetic, applied not just to the temples but to the limbs, torso and genitals. They were given excruciatingly painful and immobilising injections of paraldehyde, administered by staff as punishment or as an improper form of aversion therapy, not for legitimate medical reasons. Children and young people were held in solitary confinement and deprived of their liberty, sometimes for days or weeks on end. The atmosphere in the unit was one of intense fear” (Abuse in Care Royal Commission of Inquiry, 2022, p. 4). In 1977 police conducted an interview with him following allegations of child abuse and torture (Smale, 2021). Transcripts from the police interview demonstrate the police officer seemingly coaching Leeks into providing an

answer that made ‘the victims out to be liars’ (Smale, 2021). Leeks described children in his care as ‘the bottom of the barrel’ inferring that they were not worthy of Police efforts and as a doctor employed by the State, his views held more authority and were more trustworthy (Smale, 2021). The continual lack of Police action and commitment to fully investigate allegations of criminal offending at Lake Alice Psychiatric Hospital by Dr Leeks and others since the 1970s highlights prejudice and discrimination within the New Zealand Police that has not been fully addressed (Smale, 2022). Acknowledgement of the past and utilising an intersectional approach is critical for understanding the context of people in mental distress engaging with the Police today, particularly for Māori.

The criminalisation of mental distress: Unfair and inequitable treatment

Studies highlight that police often use force on people experiencing mental distress (Davey et al., 2021; Hallet et al., 2021; O'Brien et al., 2021). In addition, police intervention then leads to criminal justice and often imprisonment, as opposed to healthcare treatment (Hallet et al., 2021). Criminalisation of mental distress has emerged as a “dominant theme” in previous studies related to how New Zealand Police respond to people experiencing mental distress (Thom et al., 2024, p. 97). Police response typically includes the use of force and restraints including handcuffs, TASERs, Police cells, and Police dogs. Such approaches are inappropriate given many people in distress are “unwell and have not committed any illegal activity” (Thom et al., 2024, p. 97). Research both within New Zealand and overseas emphasise that people experiencing mental distress are more likely to be killed by Police or suffer serious harm when compared with the general public (Laniyonu & Goff, 2021; O'Brien et al., 2021; Suwarno, 2021). For example, a study of police shootings in New Zealand states people with mental distress are more likely to be killed in armed encounters with Police when compared with non-mental health events (O'Brien et al., 2021). Whilst it was not

possible for O'Brien and colleagues to ascertain the ethnicity of cases resulting in fatalities, young males were overrepresented (O'Brien et al., 2021). Increasingly, there is concern regarding how New Zealand Police perceive and engage with diverse communities experiencing mental distress (Li et al., 2018).

Police officer's mental health

Finally, it is important to note there are increasing concerns about the mental health of police officers (New Zealand Police Association, 2021). Previous research has indicated New Zealand Police suffer from post-traumatic stress (PTS) injury as a result of being exposed to violence and traumatic events (New Zealand Police Association, 2021). Comparative analysis highlighted that PTS symptoms were more widespread amongst New Zealand Police when compared with New Zealand military personnel (New Zealand Police Association, 2021).

It was considered "that the culture of police could sometimes lead to a perception that officers could cope with extreme, repeated events. Combined with a lack of trust in police management, that could be a barrier to officers seeking help" (New Zealand Police Association, 2021, para 18). The lack of institutional resourcing and unsupportive organisational culture can also influence whether an officer seeks help for their own mental health (New Zealand Police Association, 2021).

Research on police burnout indicates that burnout syndrome occurs over time and is linked to a build-up of mental and physical stress that occurs from engaging in highly complex and stressful jobs that are not adequately resourced (Gomes et al., 2022). Studies also highlight how burnout can lead to more aggressive police behaviour and higher staff turnover (Brough et al., 2016; Burke & Mikkelsen, 2006). Time pressures, feeling undervalued as a police officer and a lack of adequate resourcing to perform important community work can contribute to burnout (Gomes et al., 2022).

Internal police cultures can significantly impact officer wellbeing. The review of the Metropolitan Police Service in London revealed a culture of institutional racism, sexism, and homophobia, which created a hostile work environment for many officers (Casey, 2023). Harmful internal police culture can lead to increased stress, mental health issues, and reluctance to seek help. Police officers are at risk of developing poor mental health due to the challenging nature of their work, yet many are hesitant to seek mental health care due to stigma within the police culture (Luo et al., 2024). The police occupational culture often stigmatises any mention of mental illness, creating barriers for officers experiencing mental health issues such as compassion fatigue and PTSD (Hakik & Langlois, 2023). Additionally, the culture of denial and defensiveness about these problems, as highlighted in the Casey report, further exacerbates the situation by impeding necessary reforms and support systems (Casey, 2023). Such police environments not only affect individual officers but also impacts the overall effectiveness of the police in creating safer communities (Casey, 2023).

The purpose of this case study is to better understand the nature of New Zealand Police engagement with diverse participants who have experienced mental distress and determine whether this is reflective of equitable and fair treatment. In addition, it provides New Zealand Police with learning opportunities to be more aligned with stated Police core values, including 'Commitment to Māori and the Treaty', 'Empathy' and 'Valuing Diversity' (New Zealand Police, 2024, para 4).

Interview findings

To further investigate what informs Police decision-making as they engage with people experiencing mental distress, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten participants. The following section includes a collation of interview findings across five key themes and a discussion of findings and advice to the Police.

People experiencing mental distress – ‘An undeserving and criminalised community’

Interview analysis emphasised the marginalised and vulnerable positions of people experiencing mental distress alongside the criminalisation of mental illness. People experiencing mental distress were often viewed as ‘behaving badly’, ‘abnormal’ ‘responsible for their own situations’ and ‘a waste of time’. They were viewed by some police officers as undeserving and unworthy of appropriate help or attention. Participants with lived experience of mental distress who had interactions with Police described being treated as criminals. Whilst police interactions were variable, participants described the use of force, restraints, arrests, containment and court time.

Participants highlighted the presence of negative stereotypes associated with people experiencing mental distress. Deficit labels such as ‘nutters’ and being seen as ‘barking mad’ were evident within interview transcripts. This stigmatisation and marginalisation was also evident through an inadequate police response and the failure of wider social services and of the health care system to provide proper care for people. However, people with lived experience wanted Police and others to understand that with the right supports and trauma-informed care, recovery was possible.

“I wish I could tell the police officers who attended my call out ... I have recovered ... I have gone on to gain an honours degree and I have a great job, a stable life....” (Participant)

Interviews emphasised the lack of an appropriate mental health response and that untrained police officers were the default frontline responders. Participants explained that although individual police officers may be reluctant to use such approaches, there were often no other options.

“There's a heavy weight on some frontline officers when they need to use force and use cells to contain people experiencing mental distress. It's not good for people experiencing distress and it's not good for the frontline officers, and it's still happening in many districts ... the impact of handcuffs, cells, and dogs, and people are just experiencing distress. They haven't done anything criminal.” (Stakeholder)

The presence of trauma and desperate cries for help

Mental distress was often related to trauma, including the experience of sexual violence, assault, physical and psychological abuse. Participants with lived experience described feelings of extreme anxiousness and of being in desperate situations when police showed up. They described feelings of vulnerability, of ‘fight or flight’ and intense feelings of shame related to trauma. At times they talked about self-medicating with alcohol and drugs to dull their pain which exasperated their interactions with police and family members.

“I tried to kill myself twice ... I think the biggest driver of those attempts was the shame of the sexual abuse. At that point in time, I was drinking ... I had stopped attending school because I'd get so anxious that I would be physically sick ... the shame was so unbearable that I wanted to kill myself.” (Participant)

Participants also spoke of unresolved grief and post-traumatic stress underpinning mental health distress and the challenges in finding appropriate help and support. The experience of mental distress could be related to “multiple” traumatic events including adverse childhood events. These involved incidents of family violence, drug and alcohol harm within families, and experiences of sexual abuse. Mental distress was also related to head injuries, neuro-diversity and disabilities such as Tourette's syndrome, bi-polar disorder and foetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD). It was linked to

intergenerational trauma and physical and sexual abuse as experienced within the State care system. Tamariki and rangatahi experiencing mental distress through trauma were often on “the pipeline to jail” according to whānau who were interviewed.

“Mental health has always been a factor in relation to who ends up in prison and particularly for our young people” (Participant)

Traumatic experiences with police fuelled participant distrust, reinforcing beliefs that police believed participants experiencing mental distress were unworthy and not deserving of proper assistance. Distrust in Police was often a lasting legacy according to these participants.

“My brother has trauma, he was in the Special Forces and went to Afghanistan ... now, his life is just barely held together, and there's only shame for him. There's nothing to actually help him ... his situation has gotten so bad ... and he just wanted help. He was saying to the cops, ‘I'm a veteran, you guys. Here's my veteran fucking sponsor. Can you please call them? It's all good’. And they didn't give a fuck ... they arrested him ... he got charged with resisting arrest and then all the charges got dropped ... but nothing changed for him ... he hates the Police ... it's actually just so devastating.” (Participant)

“People who experience mental distress are more likely to be victimised. So, it's a real worry if people don't feel safe in reporting a crime to the Police because of previous negative experiences.” (Stakeholder)

Whānau or friends who made urgent 111 calls often expected that help would come. Whānau who were interviewed were desperate, believing their family member would finally get the help they needed when police arrived. They were exhausted after battling health and social service systems and getting nowhere. There were no options for those who couldn't afford to pay for appropriate trauma-informed care and many needed addiction services. Whānau described

feelings of betrayal, particularly if police arrested a family member after a 111 call for help, only to find their whānau member was bailed back to the family home without appropriate support or help.

Individual police officers and variation in quality of policing response

Interview analysis emphasised variation in the quality of policing response and officer behaviour. This included positive, professional and helpful examples of police interactions with people experiencing mental distress. These were associated with officers conveying an ethic of care and the use of de-escalation communication techniques such as active listening. Participants described 'acts of kindness' as police officers took time to approach the person, acknowledging their stress and anxiety and being honest and transparent in their communication. Participants were grateful for police responses that lowered the stress out of a situation by being calm and showing genuine respect for people regardless of their situation.

“So, we attended a call out with Police ... a person was worried about their colleague at work, and worried that person was really unwell. This was one of the most superb events I went to in terms of how the police responded ... because we turned up and the person who was distressed said, ‘Oh, you're going to TASER me, aren't you?’ He was so frightened looking at them with all their getup on and he could see the TASER. ‘What's going to happen? I'm going to be TASERed’, and the way they defused that by saying, ‘I'm not here to hurt you. I know I'm not the right person to be helping you with what you're going through, but I just want to take you to where we need to go to get you some support,’ and it just defused the situation.” (Stakeholder)

In contrast unprofessional and unsafe police responses were associated with escalating tension and stress, particularly for people experiencing mental distress and for their friends and whānau.

Unprofessional and escalating police responses were associated with the use of unnecessary force, yelling, issuing multiple instructions that people struggled to understand, as well as officer abruptness and rude behaviour. In these situations there was no effort to understand the person or acknowledge their situation. In one distressing situation, after an attempt to take their own life, a young participant recalled being told 'they were going to set a police dog on me'. Participants who described unprofessional and/or brutal police behaviour were fearful of police intervention and distrusted police officers.

Finally, variation in policing response could be related to geographic areas. Mental health crisis workers in rural, isolated areas were completely reliant on Police and one participant was deeply grateful for the professionalism and compassion of officers they worked with.

"I admire the police officers so much actually, because they dealt with some really, really volatile, unpleasant situations. When a person is acutely unwell and needs safe containment in hospital there were nil facility for in patient care in my rural area and therefore a need for transporting to secure unit with assistance from police. This was a frequent occurrence. Because there's no ward in the small rural town I was working in. So, we were completely reliant on police, and the officers I worked with demonstrated respect for people ... for their dignity." (Stakeholder)

Division within the Police – what is their role?

Analysis highlighted mixed messages and division within the police force regarding their role in keeping communities and people safe. Interviews with researchers who had conducted extensive field work including direct observations and interviews with police officers and people experiencing mental distress emphasised this.

in the Police about what their actual role is. Is it go hard after criminals, or are they there to

help people feel safe? So, if it is about helping communities feel safe, then people experiencing mental distress should be able to experience that feeling of safety through their interactions with the Police ... I found real division in the Police." (Stakeholder)

There was also expressed concern that police officers who demonstrated empathetic approaches were not always supported or validated by their direct supervisors and colleagues. This lack of validation meant that individual officers could feel pressured to use less empathetic approaches.

Police mental health and compassion fatigue

Some interview participants emphasised concern for the mental health and wellbeing of front-line police officers. A key concern was their own mental health given that police are often exposed to traumatising experiences.

"The police officers I worked with, some of them seem so young to me. Young men and women dealing with very highly intense, emotional situations. They are often the people that will find the person that's gone through the process of suicide. So, they are really exposed to some pretty horrendous stuff." (Stakeholder)

Compassion fatigue and burnout were specific challenges facing police as they struggled to maintain care for people experiencing mental distress. A lack of appropriate resourcing to provide appropriate help for people in these situations added to officer stress and fatigue.

"I know a lot of our police definitely have compassion fatigue ... a really big reason is because the system isn't resourced so Police can't do what they want to do for people. And so they get really sick and tired of the whole situation." (Participant)

Discussion

This case study delves into interactions between the New Zealand Police and individuals experiencing mental distress. The experience of mental distress and police decision-making and response was examined through diverse and multiple perspectives.

This exploration is crucial for understanding the challenges faced by marginalised communities and informing more equitable and effective policing practices. Results from interview analysis aligned with results from previous research. Combined analysis is structured around several themes that highlight systemic issues in policing and mental health responses.

Criminalisation of mental distress

The research underscores how traditional police responses to mental health crises often lead to the criminalisation of individuals in distress. Participants frequently reported being treated as criminals despite not engaging in illegal activities. The use of force, restraints, and police equipment such as handcuffs and police vehicles were common, often exacerbating the distress rather than providing relief. Negative stereotypes and stigmatisation were pervasive. Terms like

"nutters" and perceptions of people in distress as "unworthy" or "abnormal" were reported. Such attitudes contribute to inadequate responses and reinforce discrimination for people experiencing mental distress.

Trauma and mental distress

A significant link was identified between trauma and mental distress. Participants' narratives highlighted experiences of sexual violence, physical abuse, and psychological trauma as core components of their distress. This trauma often led to self-medication with drugs or alcohol, complicating their interactions with the Police.

Similar to other research studies undertaken within New Zealand (Gordon et al., 2024; Thom et al., 2024) people experiencing mental distress also wanted Police to understand that recovery was possible with the right support and trauma-informed care.

Inadequate mental health response

The interviews revealed that police officers, often untrained in mental health, are the default responders to crises. Despite individual officers' best intentions, the lack of appropriate mental health resources and training means that police responses can be harmful. Participants called for better trauma-informed care and support systems.

Distrust in Police and systemic barriers

Participants reported long-standing distrust towards the Police, often stemming from personal or family experiences of mistreatment. This distrust is particularly pronounced among Māori who face compounded discrimination and historical injustices.

Whānau and families expressed deep frustration and helplessness in dealing with mental health crises. They often turn to the Police as a last resort, hoping for support, but instead the result is criminal charges for their loved ones.

Previous research highlights that people with mental distress are more likely to be victims of crime and need to feel safe reporting these incidents (Bailey et al., 2018; Evangelista et al., 2016). The negative interactions with police, however, often deter them from seeking help, perpetuating a cycle of victimisation and neglect.

Variation in the quality of Police engagement, compassion fatigue and police culture

Interview analysis highlighted variations in individual police officer behaviour and in the quality of policing response. Similar to other research studies, personal accounts emphasised examples of very effective, compassionate and humanistic police approaches, alongside ineffective, aggressive and escalating police practices (Gordon et al., 2024; Thom et al., 2024). There is expressed concern that police officers who demonstrate more empathetic practices may not be validated by peers or supervisors. These findings suggest division within the Police, regarding their role in responding to mental distress situations and what it means to keep communities safe. There were also concerns for police mental health and compassion fatigue given a lack of resourcing, training and on-going support.



Advice

Based on the findings, several recommendations have been made to improve police decision-making and responses to individuals experiencing mental distress, focusing on fairness, equity, and effective support.

1. Ongoing resourcing and enhanced learning opportunities through community partnerships.

Updated comprehensive training programmes for police officers when interacting with people in mental distress alongside opportunities for refresher courses. This should include authentic community and whānau engagement to build trust in the Police and acknowledge the importance of collaboration with local organisations and government agencies. Validate police officers who use empathic and human centred approaches as they engage with people in mental distress and ensure adequate Police resourcing to address officer's compassion fatigue and burn-out.

2. For the Police to formally acknowledge and apologise for their part in the abuse of tamariki Māori and other children in State care.

Acknowledge and address long-standing biases and beliefs within the Police that meant many tamariki Māori and other children were subjected to continued abuse in State care due to inadequate Police investigations. This failure has contributed to intergenerational trauma and mental distress for survivors and their whānau.

3. Policy and legislative reforms

Advocate for policy changes that shift the response to mental health crises away from the criminal justice system and towards health and social services. This could involve reviewing and amending laws that currently lead to the criminalisation of mental distress. Ensure that police policies are aligned with stated core values such as Te Tiriti and commitment to Māori, empathy and valuing diversity and that these core values are reflected and validated in everyday policing practices.

4. Integrated mental health and emergency response systems

Establish integrated response teams that include mental health professionals who can provide immediate and appropriate care during crises. These teams should be equipped to handle situations without resorting to criminalisation or the use of force. Create resourced partnerships between police, kaupapa Māori community providers, Iwi services to ensure a coordinated approach to mental health crises, offering comprehensive wrap around support.

Conclusion

The case study highlights critical issues in the policing of mental health crises and underscores the need for comprehensive reforms to ensure equitable, fair and compassionate responses. By implementing the recommended changes, the New Zealand Police can better serve individuals experiencing mental distress, fostering trust and safety within communities. The findings and advice aim to support a shift towards a more integrated, trauma-informed, and culturally responsive approach to mental health and policing.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019¹). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the

Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

¹ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Police interactions with

Gang communities

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them;
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of praise and dissatisfaction data, complaint data as

well as use of force data as it related to TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around ten descriptive case studies¹. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

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Research Team

Dr Catherine Leonard, John Leonard, & Olivia Martin (2024). Police interactions with Gang communities. Phase Two Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

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¹ A full list of descriptive case studies and a description of the methodology is provided in Appendix 1.

Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study explores the interactions between New Zealand Police and gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand particularly as they relate to equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The study utilises interviews with various stakeholders, including gang members, police liaison officers, and community workers, to understand the historical context, current interactions, and potential solutions for improving these relationships. The methodology emphasises ethical considerations, with participants providing informed consent and feedback on the draft report.

The following themes have been collated from 11 interviews with 12 individuals who affiliated to a variety of gangs in New Zealand, individuals who worked with gangs in Police liaison roles, or supported Police/gangs in community positions, and an academic who works in the area:

- Gang - a blunt and problematic term.
- Police as facilitators to State care and the origin of indigenous gangs.
- The changing dynamics of indigenous gangs.
- The impact of early life experiences between gang members and police.
- Interactions with police from the perspective of gang participants.

- Potential solutions – supporting an appetite for change.
- The importance of relational policing.
- Police/community perspectives on policing gangs.
- Recruiting police with experience and skills.
- The emphasis on enforcement and incarceration.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, direct contact and through grassroots social enterprise that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Recruitment processes may influence the data as while gang participants had gang affiliations/membership, they came from a pro-social perspective and were not currently engaged with Police. All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report.

The purpose of the UPD research is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

Aotearoa New Zealand reportedly has more gangs per capita than any other country, and one of the highest gang membership rates per capita in the OECD (Bradley, 2021; Davis, 2022; Deuchar, 2009).

Gangs in Aotearoa differ from those in other countries as they are relatively organised, featuring patches, hierarchical structures, and established roles (Gilbert, 2013). The two largest gangs, the Mongrel Mob and Black Power, are predominantly Māori, however, it's important to note that while gangs are often perceived through a racial lens, membership is not exclusively determined by ethnicity. Defining the term "gang" in the New Zealand context presents significant challenges due to the complex and evolving nature of these groups. Researchers and policymakers have grappled with creating a comprehensive definition that encompasses the diverse range of gang structures, activities, and cultural identities present in New Zealand (Gilbert, 2013). The term "gang" often carries negative connotations and can be stigmatising, particularly for Māori and Pacific Island youth who may be unfairly labelled based on their ethnicity or social connections (Roguski & Tauri, 2012). Additionally, the line between legitimate social groups and criminal organisations can be blurred, making it difficult to establish clear criteria for what constitutes a gang (Eggleston, 2000).

The New Zealand Police have attempted to address this issue by distinguishing between "New Zealand gangs" with predominantly Māori and Pacific Islander membership, outlaw motorcycle gangs, and local street gangs (Dennehy & Newbold, 2001). However, these categories do not fully capture the nuances of gang formation and membership in contemporary New Zealand society. As a result, the definition of "gang" remains a contentious

and evolving concept in both academic and policy discussions (Gilbert, 2013).

Regardless, the relationship between gang members and crime has been well-documented, with identified gang members tending to commit crimes more frequently than other offenders (Tamatea, 2017). In May 2024 the Police commissioner In May 2024, the Police Commissioner Andrew Coster reported that gang members are responsible for a significant portion of crime in New Zealand, accounting for 8 percent of all violence and 18 percent of serious violence (NZ Herald, 2024, para 2).

The history of gangs in Aotearoa New Zealand is intertwined with the impacts of colonisation, urbanisation and marginalisation, which have been identified as key drivers of Māori gang membership (Brown et al., 2023). Although early gang populations were predominantly Pākehā, the significant migration of Māori from rural papakāinga to urban centres marked a tipping point, leading many disenfranchised Māori to join gangs (Brown et al., 2023). However, over time gang communities are now predominantly situated in some of the country's most deprived areas (Brown et al., 2023). These regions face significant levels of deprivation and material hardship, which create substantial barriers, particularly for children. This geographical dispersion of gangs underscores the connection between socio-economic challenges and the prevalence of gang activity in specific locations (Brown et al., 2023).

Historical accounts reveal that State institutions served as pipelines into the prison system, facilitating a pathway that many young Māori would follow into gang life. The State's involvement in these individuals lives inadvertently created environments where gang affiliation became a viable option for survival and belonging (Savage et al., 2021). Furthermore, violence perpetrated by staff members in State facilities played a crucial role in shaping the behaviours and attitudes of young people (Brown et al., 2023). Ex-wards of the State, who became gang members, described how the violence they experienced and witnessed taught them that such behaviour was an acceptable mechanism to control their environment and others (Husband, 2021; Savage et al., 2021). The institutional violence fostered a culture of mistrust towards the system and gangs became a means of expressing violent resistance (Savage et al., 2021).

The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Abuse in Care in New Zealand, established in 2018, has recognised the significant connection between State care experiences and gang formation. The inquiry has actively engaged with gang members and their families, acknowledging them as an important part of the survivor community. In August 2022, the Commission attended a historic joint hui organised by Hikoi Nation, where around 200 gang members and their families shared their experiences of abuse in State and faith-based care. The Waitangi Tribunal has noted that an estimated 80 to 90 percent of Mongrel Mob and Black Power gang members had been in State care (Abuse in Care, 2024a). This connection highlights the complex relationship between institutional care, trauma, and gang affiliation in New Zealand, emphasising the importance of addressing historical abuse to prevent future social issues.

In the late 1960's the first specific mention of the gang appeared in media reports in response to events at the Hastings Blossom Festival (Gilbert, 2010). The annual event inadvertently provided a platform for the gang to gain visibility marking the beginning of a transformation from a loose collection of rebellious youth into a more organised and recognised entity in New Zealand's social landscape. In 1982, Kelsey and Young described the 'moral panic of Māori gangs' in Aotearoa New Zealand. Kelsey and Young

(1982) argued that societal reactions to gangs were disproportionate to the actual threat they posed, fuelled by sensationalist media coverage and public anxiety. Their work critically analysed how 'moral panic' led to increased social control mechanisms, including stricter legislation and intensified policing. Kelsey and Young (1982) argued that these measures, while intended to curb gang activities, often failed to address the underlying social issues that led to gang formation.

Recently, observers have again highlighted the role of the media in supporting moral panic and the subsequent exacerbation of youth and gang crime in Aotearoa New Zealand (Walters, 2022). The years 2021 and 2022 saw a rise in discourse surrounding gangs in Aotearoa, especially with the added complexities of heightened anxiety due to the COVID-19 global pandemic (Davis, 2022). Political rhetoric and the media presented an almost united front against gangs, perpetuating the notion that gangs should be forced out of existence (Gilbert, 2022). Research has identified that high-profile events, referred to as 'sentinel' events, can serve to drive legislative and policy changes through significant community and political responses (Gilbert, 2022; Walsh, 2020).

The Ōpōtiki gang tangi in June 2023 is one such recent example of a 'sentinel media event' that had significant ripple effects on public discourse, political rhetoric, and policy proposals in New Zealand. This event, centred around the funeral of a Mongrel Mob Barbarians president, became a focal point for discussions about gang presence, community safety, and law enforcement strategies. Interestingly, the Ōpōtiki tangi exposed a disconnect between national narratives and local experiences. While politicians and some media outlets painted a picture of a town under siege, local voices, including Mayor David Moore, argued that the situation was being used as a "political football" and that the community was largely carrying on as normal (Fallon, 2023). This disconnect highlights how sentinel media events can sometimes distort or oversimplify complex local realities. However, it also brought to the forefront questions about the integration of gang members in local life, the adequacy of police resources, and the balance between respecting mourning rituals and maintaining public order. Interestingly, despite

crime statistics trending downward, recent survey data indicates that the public perceived an increase in crime, with gang activity seen as a key factor (Brown et al., 2023).

Evidence of bias and unfair treatment towards Māori and gang members was highlighted in the UPD Phase 1 analysis undertaken by Ihi Research in collaboration with Dr Paul Brown (Leonard & Brown, 2024). Part of this research analysed prosecutions data collected over five years alongside the Evidence Based Policing Team. The data included 141,230 unique offenders. Analysis indicated Māori are 11% more likely to be prosecuted than NZ European, given all other variables remain constant. Gang membership, having prior convictions, and having a high number of proceedings in both the short and long-term significantly increased the likelihood of prosecution. For some crimes, this greatly increased the likelihood of prosecution.

Since the early 1970s, numerous reports and strategies have been developed in response to concerns about gangs emerging as a significant social issue in New Zealand (Tamatea, 2017). As part of these efforts, initiatives like the Community Education Initiative Scheme (CEIS) were introduced to address the root causes of gang membership and mitigate gang-related harm. The CEIS aimed to reduce gang involvement by providing alternative pathways through community support, education, and employment opportunities, with a particular focus on marginalised Māori and Pacific Island communities, who were disproportionately affected by gang recruitment. This initiative reflected a growing recognition that gang problems in New Zealand were not solely criminal justice issues, but also social challenges that required community-level interventions (Gilbert, 2010; Newbold, 2016).

The Gang Harm Insights Centre in New Zealand was established in 2020 as part of a multi-agency effort to better understand and address gang-related harm across the country, followed by the establishment of the National Gang Unit in 2024. These initiatives aim to provide a more coordinated and targeted approach to gang-related

crime and harm. The Police Gang Intelligence Centre (GIC) collects data from various agencies to disrupt illegal gang activities and support gang-connected families through wrap-around services, educational opportunities, and youth mentoring programmes.

Another significant effort is the creation of the National Gang Unit, district-based Gang Disruption Units, and gang liaison officers, who focus on targeted enforcement and community safety, drawing on the successes of previous operations like Operation Cobalt¹. While gang liaison officers play a role in navigating cultural issues and improving police relationships with Māori communities, their specific impact on reducing gang harm is not clearly outlined in available sources. However, data indicates that there has been an increase in charges suggesting that initiatives like Operation Cobalt do result in further criminalisation (New Zealand Police, 2023a).

The Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC) work programme, agreed by Cabinet in September 2019 and led by Police, combines enforcement action with tailored social intervention to simultaneously address the harms and drivers of organised crime (New Zealand Police, 2020, 2023b). The programme is supported by a dedicated ROCC Secretariat hosted by police and implemented by 11 partner agencies. Central to the ROCC approach is engaging with partners, iwi, and communities to build resilience to the harms caused by organised crime.

Based on the available information, the impact of these initiatives in reducing gang harm appears to be mixed and not extensively documented. It's worth noting that a more comprehensive evaluation of the gang liaison officer programme and its outcomes would be necessary to accurately assess its impact on reducing gang-related harm in New Zealand. These initiatives reflect a comprehensive approach that combines enforcement with social support to mitigate the impact of gangs on New Zealand communities.

¹ For further information on Operation Cobalt refer to <https://www.police.govt.nz/news/release/operation-cobalt-passes-new-milestone-50000-charges-laid-500-firearms-seized>

Interview findings

The following section includes a collation of interview findings across key themes and a final discussion including a summary of findings and advice to the Police.

‘Gang’ – a blunt and problematic term

Interview findings confirm the term ‘gang’ is problematic due to its broad and often inaccurate application. ‘Gang’ currently encompasses everything from highly organised crime syndicates to clubs or individuals/family members with no criminal intent. While there are individuals within gangs who commit serious crime, a blunt, all-encompassing term complicates law enforcement and harm reduction efforts. Labelling all gang members ignores the fact that many members are not involved in criminal activities, and that many criminals do not belong to gangs. Furthermore, participants noted the importance of distinguishing between indigenous gangs formed due to rural-to-urban migration, the impacts of State care abuse and the structural reforms of the 1980s, from organised crime. Participants felt police often conflated these distinct entities leading to a lack of understanding and fuelling ineffective responses.

“You get this generic word, gang, which is everything from highly organised crime, right through to some Polynesian kid with a scarf in his back pocket on the way home from church, dropping a bloody block off the motorway. You know what I mean? It’s such an elastic term as to be useless. While there are genuine harms, it’s [the word gang] not well understood and absolutely they are used politically.” (Participant)

Police as facilitators to State care

As noted in the literature, the development of indigenous gangs in New Zealand is intricately linked to the socio-historical and colonial State care context. During interviews, many of the participants discussed growing up in very difficult circumstances and forming protective relationships with other young people, which eventually evolved into gangs.

While the contribution of abuse in State care to the formation of indigenous gangs is well documented, interviewees discussed their perception of police contributing to and perpetuating harm by returning them to State custody where they were sexually and violently assaulted.

“The amount of times I wanted to fucking get revenge on the police for what they’d done, the amount of times I wanted (to kill the person) who run the boys’ home. With the cops holding me, and delivering me for the beating, and I wanted to kill him. As they brought me back into the boys’ home ... the first thing I remembered was the police torture, being smashed over my head. Half of it, I can’t remember.” (Participant)

“When the police were just putting me in foster homes, putting me here, putting me there, treating me like that number, it just reinforced what I already knew.” (Participant)

One participant described how being a State ward meant they had no protection from police. They saw the aggressive practices of police as abuse similar to what they experienced in State care. This resulted in their trauma and anger being directed at the Police.

“Because the cops think it’s great when they strip-searched, because they’ve got that power, same as when you’re in the boy’s home and they’d strip-search you. The problem with the police, in the old days, they thought they had ultimate power to abuse anybody, especially with brown skin, and the problem back in the old days is they thought they were so powerful, and could get away with it, especially with State wards.” (Participant)

The powerlessness experienced in State care and the power exerted over them by police led them to want to find belonging and protection in gangs. Findings indicate that the treatment of youth by the State continues to be a precursor to gang affiliation. A younger participant discussed more recent abuse in care placements which,

like the older members, led them to view the State or 'the system' as the enemy.

"The reason I'm telling you this [about abuse in the child welfare system] is because that's when I really pulled the fingers at the system, bro. The court system, child, youth, and family, the police, all of them. I started to gravitate towards gangs and tinny houses and stuff like that. I became pretty dark. Obviously, the more involved I got into gangs and those types of people; the police started to not like me more. ... But yeah, it just, I guess, I became more and more aggressive." (Participant)

Police participants also acknowledged the role of the State in the creation of the gangs, particularly the role of State institutions like Borstal. However, they did not identify the implications of Police being viewed as accomplices of State care abuse, or the role they played in returning children to places where they were abused.

"Next thing they're in Borstal. And it's in Borstal they learnt that sexual violence and physical violence can control people." (Stakeholder)

"The State, even though they're apologising ... we are still doing it to this day." (Stakeholder)

One individual who experienced State care abuse described a lifetime of trying to heal from the trauma and not seek revenge.

"So, with the Police, the hardest thing I found over the years we had come from is to calm the mind to not get revenge. What happens when somebody comes through trauma like me? You want revenge on the Police." (Participant)

The impact of early life experiences between gang members and police

Nearly all the life narratives shared by participants reflected a background of instability, family violence and physical and/or sexual abuse. One

participant recounted being forced onto the streets at 11, surviving through connections with other youth in similar circumstances. Another highlighted the absence of parental guidance, leading to an early life of hustling for survival and developing a cautious stance towards authorities.

"I grew up in a, 'Once were Warriors' home and people getting killed and stuff, and I was out on the streets. I was chucked out of home at 11. So, I was on the streets ... and had to survive. I already knew how to survive. That's how we connected really, because we're survivors." (Participant)

Early interactions with police were marked by consistently negative experiences that reinforced distrust and adversarial relationships. From a young age, police presence was associated with disruption and fear rather than protection and support.

"We'd always be wary of them [Police], and we knew to be careful of them. We had no trust from them back in those days as well. My first interaction with them was them coming to arrest the older brothers." (Participant)

One participant recalled the role of police in family separations, contributing to a perception of police as agents of instability. Incidents such as aggressive house searches further cemented the view of police as aggressive, abusive and unjust, with one recounting the trauma of being in a house that was raided as a teenager.

"My first main bad experience with them was when they busted my house, I was a teenager by then. They busted our house with the armed offenders and stuff. They must be the crew who is really here to take care of business. They roughed us up, rag dolled us around and all that sort of stuff. But what I didn't like then, and what I still don't like, is how they just go into our houses, tip everything up for the littlest things. I feel like they've just abused their authority." (Participant)

The narratives also described the allure of the gang life. Compared with their own personal experiences, participants perceived the gang as a portrayal of material wealth, strength, safety and camaraderie. They described how they were drawn to the visible symbols of success and toughness exhibited by gang members, which contrasted sharply with their own challenging and often powerless circumstances.

"They've got the high life and they've got the toys and they've got this and that, and I listened to the way they were talking and how it was sort no big deal and whatever, and it's just like, 'Oh, yeah. This sounds like a bit of me. I can do this, I can be tough, I can live this life'." (Participant)

Interactions with police from perspective of gang participants

Police and gang participants described how the relationship between gang members and the Police has been marked by oppositional hostility and mutual distrust. Participants reported that Police viewed gangs as direct threats to societal norms and public safety, intensifying the adversarial relationship as they attempted to enforce the law on those they saw as actively defying it. The dynamic was described as a cyclical conflict where gangs and police provoke each other, leading to entrenched opposition.

"They are the epitome of the bogeyman hate for police - cops and robbers. That yin and yang, they are the exact opposite of us. And how dare you want to live outside the norms of the law when I'm here keeping everybody safe? It's a real kicker for some cops." (Stakeholder)

Several gang members reflected on their past behaviours and relationship with the police, acknowledging a pattern of crime and confrontational attitudes. From a young age, they learned not to engage with law enforcement. They described past interactions, admitting to provoking officers and being aware of the legal limits during encounters. They discussed the negative consequences of their actions and

acknowledged that some gang members have carried out terrible crimes.

"I do not defend some people's behaviours. You know what I mean? There have been terrible, terrible things done and truly despicable behaviour. I understand that disgust." (Participant)

"Naturally, I'd get searched illegally quite often. It's a common occurrence, but I look at my behaviour and I'm like, 'well, I kind of brought that upon myself'." (Participant)

Most participants described instances where they felt targeted by police, especially younger individuals, regardless of whether they had visible affiliations. They recounted being frequently stopped, often due to tattoos or being on bikes, which they perceived as discrimination. Several interviewees believed police attempted to escalate interactions with gang members to provoke charges, particularly with younger members. Older members described intervening with young members to manage interactions and prevent unnecessary confrontations, emphasising the need to remain composed during encounters with police.

"They pull us over with an attitude. I'm sharp enough to play the game when it comes time to, when they're pushing for a response ... I make sure that I govern the situation and the communication when it's getting out of hand. 'I'll do the talking here,' because I know what the police are trying to pull." (Participant)

Gang members' accounts of their interactions with the police reveal a consistent pattern of aggressive and often humiliating/de-humanising behaviour from police officers. Many describe being suddenly and violently subdued during arrests, such as being slammed to the ground and tightly handcuffed.

"All of a sudden, you've got some 100-kilo police officer's knees in the middle of your back and your head squished hard into the floor." (Participant)

Gang members described police using force that was excessive, which they believed was designed to dehumanise and humiliate rather than detain them. This included actions outside standard operating procedures such as police spraying pepper spray on a glove and rubbing it on their face, tipping water over their head when handcuffed (described as waterboarding), strip searches, aggressive house searches, and police making inappropriate comments and laughing during arrests.

One participant reflected, "They take special delight in humiliating you," indicating they believe some officers derived satisfaction from exerting physical and psychological control over them. These experiences reinforced their perception of the police intentionally exacerbating hostility between themselves and gang members or associates. When asked if they had complained about police use of force or attitude, all responded that they had not.

"No. I've never really seen a point in any of that [laying a complaint]. I guess, for me, and it's still to this day ... I always get a bit weary on not just the police but the system in general. Is my complaint even going to matter?" (Participant)

Several participants noted the emotional and psychological dimension of police behaviour towards gang members. They noted that many officers seem to carry their own unresolved trauma and emotional struggles, which they believed manifest as aggression and hostility. "A lot of those people behind that badge are hurt people," one member noted, suggesting that the officers' personal issues contributed to their conduct. Despite recognising the humanity of the officers, many of the gang members described being treated as 'sub-human'.

"Just because you've got a badge. It's like that saying, 'healed people heal people, and hurt people hurt people'. A lot of those people behind that badge are hurt people. They haven't quite done the mahi on themselves. We all need to be doing that. Yeah ... that will change everything. If they were addressing their traumas and their issues amongst the Police force." (Participant)

In some of the interviews whānau were present, and discussed the impact of the gang life and interactions with police on their whānau and particularly their children. They described police searching their house and/or raiding the houses of their whānau who were not involved in gang activities as traumatic and distressing. One whānau shared how their son had died during a police chase after a car hit him on his motorbike.

"He was patched up, and he knew he had just got his bike back, and he didn't want it taken off him again. He was on the way down to [city] to come to see our dad [who was] dying. He just wanted to get there fast. ... It came out that they pretty much just took his jacket off, and then just left him, pretty much to die ... he had to wait for an ambulance ... you know, because he was a gang member. And that's what the people were saying. 'Oh, he's just a gang member' even the woman that hit him said. 'Oh, he's just a gang member'. They lied. They lied, right through the reports, and they blamed him. They just blamed him for just running. Yeah. And they turned up that day, eh, when he passed away in the hospital, the cops. Yeah, they've just been dickheads ... just trying to get information out of us. For me, I lost it. That's it for me. You took my son. For me, that's how it felt. He was running, because he didn't want that [his bike] taken off him. That's how I was feeling. (Participants)

One wahine described the challenges of overcoming police stigma due to her husband's association with gangs, despite not having any convictions or participating in any gang activity. She felt having gang affiliation in their whānau affected their daughter's job prospects and that she was unfairly judged by police, despite having a clean record herself.

"... [we] are actually trying to make our lives different, like him and I with our kids and our whānau. We've made a hell of a big difference. We're still together, we got our kids, they're all good kids, we survived that, but we still get that stigma of a gang. Our daughter, she's a prime example, she went to get a job and the ripples come up on her sheet. They [police] would go through my Facebook page and see a picture

and they'd say, 'Oi, you've got a gang member. You know your husband is in a gang,' and it's like, 'What? Everyone's got affiliations with a gang'. ... Because of that stigma over my head, and yet my record is clean.” (Participant)

The impact of positive interactions with police

Gang participants expressed that while their positive interactions with police were uncommon, they did occur and left a significant impression. One of the interview participants recalled an officer who took time to support him when he was in a State care institution. It was the first time that he had a positive experience with a police officer; this experience humanised the officer and initiated a seed of change that eventually led to him turning his life around.

“He said to me, ‘I’m going to work with you,’ and I thought, ‘What the fuck do you mean going to work with me?’ He goes, ‘I want to take you home for a Sunday roast,’ and I thought the pig was joking. Took me home to meet his mum, and I thought, ‘Fucking pigs have families.’ I was horrified. I just thought they were just natural pigs, ... and they’re just assholes to us. They’re born assholes. Well, I met his mum. She made me a lovely Sunday roast, because I didn’t see my parents during all this. You don’t. They don’t want to fucking know you ... he brought me my first album, and I thought, ‘Fuck, I’m not used to this act of kindness,’ and what he was trying to teach was what I needed to learn. He started teaching me things. He wanted me to understand what empathy meant, about my actions hurting other people, and I said, ‘What the fuck is empathy?’ I don’t even know how to spell the word. I don’t even know how to pronounce it, back in those days that’s a big word to me. I had to learn it.” (Participant)

Several participants discussed positive interactions with police when they were victims of crime. One shared a specific incident where police responded promptly and professionally

to a burglary. This was their first positive experience with law enforcement, challenging previous negative perceptions. In one interview a participant talked about how the police dealt with them when their mother was murdered².

“She got murdered, but they were quite helpful. They were unbelievable. Yeah, they dragged me through a road that I’d never seen of them. You know, they’d open your doors up, brought me in, treated me fucking respectfully then.” (Participant)

When discussing positive interactions, participants noted that ‘not all officers are bad’, but that they often lacked conflict resolution skills and tended to react rather than respond thoughtfully. They emphasised the need for better conflict resolution training, a critical skill for police officers which they felt would significantly improve their relationship with their community.

“Yeah, conflict resolution’s one is the big one for me. That’s the biggest weapon they’ve got. It’s not the TASERS.” (Participant)

“I understand that all police officers aren’t bad, but a lot of the police ... and especially young ones that do not have any conflict resolution, they’ve only been really taught to respond (aggressively). Not even to respond, they’re actually reacting.” (Participant)

One participant described how police supported them to sustain changes they were trying to make in their lives.

“I’ve definitely had good interactions with them. I guess the more I went through those rehabs and got in trouble with them, they knew that I was trying to change my life and stuff like that. They would give me, say, pre-charge warnings rather than charging me and stuff. The last interaction I had with them, I was pepper sprayed and arrested and that for drunk and disorderly. And then, they gave me that pre-charge warning and gave me the benefit of the

² Not gang or family harm related.

doubt. And then, ever since then, I've sorted my shit out. Got clean and sober and I'm halfway through an apprenticeship.” (Participant)

Potential solutions – supporting an appetite for change

Since the emergence of gangs in the 1970's, gang dynamics have shifted as members have aged and society has changed. Older members described the influence of cultural movements and programmes that have helped transform gangs from largely criminal entities to more complex social structures that reflect broader Māori societal values. Interview participants noted that when indigenous gangs were first established in the 1970's they were made up of pre-dominantly young men, however fifty years later these gangs have matured into an intergenerational whānau structure.

“When we first came there in 1978 ... we were a gang. But at that event the other day, it was whānau. And the impact of the kohanga reo movement, kura kaupapa Māori, wānanga Māori, and all these things, and programmes like E Tū Whānau, have shifted the dynamic. So, you've now got a demography that is similar to Māori society in general. I'm a great-grandfather, I've got grandkids and great grandkids. There was no one around in those days who knew our lived realities and therefore could exert a bit of moral suasion.” (Participant)

During interviews, all gang participants discussed the importance of supporting change, but also how difficult it could be to bring about personal change and wider change within gang culture. Participants talked about reassessing their priorities as they matured. One individual expressed a shift from loyalty to the gang to prioritising their responsibilities as a parent, recognising the children they brought into the world as their primary commitment. The narrative highlights a personal realisation about the value of family and the importance

of breaking away from old, destructive ways of thinking. The struggle to align with new values while remaining connected to family within the gang underscores the complex dynamics of change and loyalty.

“You know, you mature, you have some realisations and then you start to see the world a lot different. One thing that I tell the boys and that really hit me is that this thing that I've joined, I was willing to give my life for as a gang member ... but then the kids that I brought into this world were created by me. So, my responsibilities are to them, to my creations, the things that I brought into this world. Now, I'll give my life to that now as opposed to this. There are times where I've wanted to leave because I don't align with the old ways of thinking, but why I've stayed is because those kids that I brought into this world that I'm responsible for, and they're my family. When I look at this gang that I was going to leave, a majority of them are my family.” (Participant)

Several of the participants discussed the impact of early trauma and abandonment on their life, emphasising the need for compassion and understanding from authorities as they tried to heal as adults. For many of the participants addiction played a greater part in their offending than their gang affiliation. Several discussed contemplating or attempting suicide and the importance of both compassion and timely support to enter into rehabilitation and sustain change.

“I think just realising, ‘I don't want to die’. I've hung off a ceiling and I've stabbed myself and I've really seriously tried to take myself out of this world and I'm still here.” (Participant)

Turning points for several individuals involved a compassionate police officer, a judge, or a mentor that demonstrated care and connection. For some participants, while still active in the gang, they noted the opportunity and potential for change for the whole gang, not just individuals.

"We are at the point where we realise that we need to heal. If we want to be the people that our kids deserve. The meth stuff and it's all ran its time, the violence, it's all had its time and it's time for change. It's time for change. So that's where I believe we are at." (Participant)

"Even in our gang space, our gang members are saying, what gangs looked like in the '80's is not what they're like now. Very family focused. They want to focus on their wahine, on their children, getting jobs." (Participant)

They discussed how they shared trauma with other gang communities who in the past they considered enemies. This participant noted that they shared a common mindset rooted in their experiences of trauma, abuse, and disconnection. Their aspiration was to transform gang culture by replacing criminal activities with positive cultural practices such as kapa haka and family events, to foster a healthier environment for their children.

"I don't go around hating the [gang] or any other gang because I see that they have the same mindset that birthed them all. They come out of the same trauma - they've just found their own symbol, but they have the same brokenness, we were, the gangs were born out of the State care, out of trauma and abuse and disconnection. I've been able to heal myself and find my, connect with my deeper self and my culture. So why not share that with the boys who need it as well? Yeah. That's my whole, my thing is not to be a criminal. My thing is our gang is not going to go away, but all the criminal activity and that, we can get rid of that stuff. We could do kapa haka down at the marae. We can have family days instead of parties. And that's all the stuff that I'm instilling. And if I was to walk away, then that stuff won't be happening there." (Participant)

This was reinforced by a police participant who felt that there was an appetite for change in some of the gangs.

"... (we) really need to talk around the aspirations ... there is an appetite from the gangs themselves. They've done 20 years of meth, and that's a generation." (Stakeholder)

However, both police and gang participants noted that there were barriers faced by gang whānau making changes due to deeply ingrained systemic issues. Participants expressed concern that current decisions and policies are exacerbating tensions and fostering resentment towards police and government agencies, particularly among Māori, Pacific peoples, and gang communities. They argued that these measures not only fail to address the root causes of crime such as inequity and poverty, but also risk alienating future generations, creating an environment of unrest and squeezing already pressured communities.

"Even they [gang members] are saying, 'We want to be able to do that, but we are being locked out of certain supports and services.'" (Stakeholder)

Participants emphasised that the current system fails to provide adequate support and viable pathways for individuals seeking a different life. They point out that without offering alternative opportunities, such as employment, drug rehabilitation services or education, individuals are left with little choice but to remain within the confines of their gang identities. Additionally, policies and practices that criminalised poverty, such as the cost of driver licensing, were seen as perpetuating cycles of criminality. The emphasis on punitive measures over support and rehabilitation, especially regarding health issues like drug addiction, were seen as counterproductive. They felt the system's transactional nature, focusing on enforcement without providing pathways to support and change ultimately targeted the most vulnerable without looking at opportunities for long-term sustainable change.

"If there is nowhere for them to go to when we do the enforcement, how do they leave? How do

they get help? So, we are locking off the ability to actually affect change, and transformational change. We are very transactional in this space at the moment.” (Stakeholder)

Investing in work opportunities

Interviews highlighted the importance of providing work opportunities as a foundation for change for gang members. Participants discussed how in the past they had become involved in community projects which had shifted the focus from criminal activities to constructive enterprise, fostering a sense of purpose and contribution. However, significant challenges existed. Interviewees described deep-seated cynicism and distrust from authorities and the public, fearing that such initiatives might lead to theft or other criminal behaviours. They believed that this scepticism paralysed efforts to provide gang members with legitimate work.

“Gabrielle, the cyclone. There was an opportunity there for them to get some work because [leader] said, ‘Oh, hey man, I’ve got 20 young members that are not doing anything.’ I said, ‘Okay, cool’. So I spoke to the council and police and said, ‘Hey, look, we can get these guys in to do some work and they can give back.’ And they’re like, ‘Oh, yeah, but they’ll keep the shovels, or they’ll keep the wheelbarrows and they’ll be casing out houses to burgle, and then they’ll be standing over the supervisors.’ I’m like, ‘Man, cynicism is paralysing.’ Because that is exactly what this is.” (Stakeholder)

Collaboration between pro-social gang leaders and authorities were reported as effective in addressing community needs during the COVID-19 pandemic. Yet, these efforts were not sustained, leading to frustration among participants who saw the potential for ongoing positive change. Interviewees felt that work programmes had historically shown promise, helping members develop work patterns, earning legitimate income, and feel valued, however political decisions dismantled these initiatives

increasing the likelihood that individuals would engage in illegal activities. They felt the long-term benefits of work programmes, including crime reduction and enhanced community safety, are often overlooked in favour of short-term political gains.

“Over COVID, so Wally Haumaha and a team of us got together with pro-social gang leadership, I suppose you could say, because what was happening was the Civil Defence and other distribution agencies, our guys were either too difficult to deal with, or they were scared or whatever, and those families weren’t getting the support that was required. So, every Friday we’d have a hook-up on the phone, why the fuck they haven’t continued with this, I do not know. And anyway, we’d sort stuff out. Out of that came a much stronger wāhine led process that has been happening. I’ve seen it in the Mob, and I’ve seen it in the Blacks.” (Participant)

Work and employment were noted as crucial to bringing about sustained change. Supporting legitimate business activities so that gang members could replace illegal activities to make money and support their whānau was seen as an important mindset shift.

“You know, instead of making them go to the meat works like their grandfathers did or start at the bottom and be on the lollipop for the rest of their life. Some of these people are actual leaders, they’re actually something in the community. Let’s help them to launch their own business and run their own businesses. That’s the mindset that’s going to make the changes around here. All right, let’s get rid of that form of income that you’ve known. You’ve obviously shown you can actually run a business.” (Participant)

The importance of relational policing

Interviews highlighted the importance of a relational approach to policing emphasising

that building strong relationships with gang communities can result in short and long-term benefits. Participants wanted to see gang members who are striving to bring about positive change within their communities receive support from the police.

“They’re making it easier for police because we know the ones that want to engage in change and the ones that don’t, that’s what we should be focused on. But we blab about transnational crime. Oh, that’s transnational gangster, transnational bullshit. They can’t even organise a piss-up. You know what I mean?” (Stakeholder)

Police participants recognised that effective communication and mutual respect can foster trust, even in the most challenging situations. However, maintaining these relationships required a balance between enforcement and empathy, with discretion being crucial. They acknowledged that challenges arise when officers who understand community dynamics face risks of not adhering strictly to protocols. However, the officers discussed the importance of focusing on co-determination, stakeholder partnerships, and understanding the broader social context as essential for meaningful change and effective policing.

“[reflecting on resolving an issue with a gang member using relationships] It was just around trying to mitigate risk for that community, relationships at the front of mind. The young whānau was something that I considered, and the history of us bowling in doors with guns and creating more harm.” (Stakeholder)

“If the police don’t maintain the relationships they have to the same degree, they are going to go, and they’re not going to come back, man. Because at the moment, we are on a real precipice when it comes to either pulling this back now or getting ... not control of the gangs ... but turning them into the clubs and kaupapa that they are, or they will become criminal entities.” (Stakeholder)

Several gang participants interviewed also supported a relational approach to policing, emphasising that communication and collaboration between police and gangs can lead to safer communities. They acknowledged that traditional policing methods have been ineffective over decades and highlight the importance of building relationships and strategic planning. They believed that cooperative effort and planning was beneficial for both Police and gangs as it prevents small incidents from escalating, is a better use of resources, and maintains public, Police and gang safety. Mutually respectful relationships and communication appears key to fostering positive change.

“Coster’s sort of thing of policing by community consent is dead bloody right.” (Participant)

“After looking at things over 60 years, some of them must have to look back and they’ve realised that the way that they’ve been policing isn’t working. So, they’ve [police] formed some groups within them, just like we’ve formed people within ourselves who are looking for solutions. If there’s an incident, they’ll ring me and say, ‘Hey bro, this has happened’. So, then we sort of get together and see how we can stop something small from becoming big. It’s that communication, it’s that stuff that we do that happens in the background that’s actually changing what happens around here. It’s actually the strategic plans that are put in place, the conversations that we have. That’s the difference. And we’re building that relationship. Because, as we all know relationships are the key.” (Participant)

Police/community perspectives on policing gangs

Police officers who worked with gangs acknowledged that while the work was rewarding it was also challenging. They discussed the impact of compassion fatigue, where the continuous need for empathy becomes increasingly difficult particularly with individuals who

resist change. They described how compassion fatigue stemmed from relentless, back-to-back tasks that eroded an officer's ability to maintain compassion. Despite starting with good intentions, officers experiencing compassion fatigue shifted to a more transactional mindset, focused on completing tasks quickly rather than seeking better outcomes. This was exacerbated by Police being under-resourced.

“Deep down, everyone joins, and they're good people, and they want to do the right thing. But when you've got compassion fatigue, your decision-making is very cut, as in short. You are not looking for better outcomes, you're just looking to get this piece of work out of the way so you can roll onto the next piece of work, and that's that under-resourced stuff.” (Stakeholder)

This appeared to be particularly evident when working with gang whānau. Police described gang members as the antithesis of law enforcement, embodying opposition to societal norms, which can be challenging for officers who see themselves as protectors of society. They acknowledge that officers often faced verbal hostility, especially from Māori gang members, which was difficult to deal with.

“A lot of my Pākehā colleagues do cop a lot of shit verbally, from a lot of Māori [gang members] ... they do get that. I mean, and as much as we shouldn't react to it, everybody's a human at the end of the day, and you're going to have different buttons that will be pushed.” (Stakeholder)

“We talk about the cops being oppositional and they sure as hell can be, but there is an extreme degree of provocation when it comes to the gangs, and I think a warranted degree of concern around violence.” (Stakeholder)

Recruiting police with experience and skills

Police recruitment and training was identified by police participants as important to supporting

a relational policing approach. They noted that recruitment process protocols meant that recruits often came from similar backgrounds and their exposure to the reality of social harm and social inequity was often limited. While they recognised that recruits are generally good people from functional backgrounds, they also believed that many lacked understandings of the impact of intergenerational social harm. While there have been efforts to diversify the Police force, participants felt that current recruitment criteria may not adequately consider the cultural and social connections of potential officers, particularly Māori and Pacific people who may have gang-affiliated relatives.

“We have such criteria that it's a six degrees thing ... Pacific people, they often sit in church with their cousins who might be gang members. It's a fine line. I would suggest that if you want to get Māori staff from areas where gang issues need to be addressed or done better ... then maybe we need to talk in our recruitment processes there, because we are not six degrees, we're two degrees. That's the Pacific. I'm sure it's the same for Māori.” (Stakeholder)

Police participants reported that there appeared to be an inherent systemic bias in the recruitment process, whereby diversity in appearance is sought but not in thinking, causing additional pressures on Māori and Pacific recruits and police.

“What they do is they recruit, they want a brown face, but they want you to be white in thinking. They want diversity in look, but not in thought. You need to tow the party line. It's always a lot harder for Māori and Pasifika to join police. You get put through the ringer a lot more, you have a lot more interviews to make sure you're going to be appropriate ... and then they go about trying to beat the Māoriness out of you. For some it happens, some stay true to who they are ... and that's why we have a lot of problems with our Māori and Pasifika staff outside of work, drinking and stuff and using ... I've done it, used alcohol as a tool to cope. Yeah, it's not the way to do it.” (Stakeholder)

The emphasis on enforcement and incarceration

There were expressed concerns about the heavy enforcement lens being applied to gangs, driven by an investigation-focused mindset that favoured incarceration over rehabilitation. They expressed concerns about the heavy enforcement lens being applied, driven by an investigation-focused mindset that favoured incarceration over rehabilitation. Participants argued for a more nuanced approach that invests in sustainable outcomes and engages individuals in a journey of change. They emphasised the importance of understanding the underlying causes of gang involvement, such as trauma, addiction and poverty. New proposed gang legislation was seen as a short-term, politically motivated measure that fails to address the deeper, systemic issues contributing to gang affiliation, and instead, would likely perpetuate cycles of criminalisation without offering meaningful support or alternatives for change.

“There's a whole lot of unlearning that we need to do as a country, to be fair. Gang offending is just a symptom of what's going wrong in the country. If everything was fine, we wouldn't have gangs. But it's not, but we like to pin all our woes on gangs.” (Stakeholder)

Additionally, participants noted the adverse effects of political swings on long-term strategies, suggesting that the legislation is designed to appease political interests rather than create lasting change. They emphasised the need for a bipartisan, long-term approach to tackle intergenerational trauma and the root causes of gang involvement.

“It is a political football. It means that we're short-term and unfocused. I think this is a long, long-term game. This needs some bipartisan type of agreement around how we do it. Because undoing years and generations of trauma, and intergenerational transfer of that, is going to be something that's done over decades, not years.” (Stakeholder)

Participants also highlighted the failure to target significant sources of harm, such as white-collar criminals and the need for a broader societal shift in understanding and addressing the issues leading to gang formation and activity. Overall, the new gang patch legislation was seen as a step backward, undermining previous efforts to work constructively with gang communities and fostering a more punitive, less effective approach. Participants pointed out that recent legislation to ban gang patches and association may not effectively reduce crime and could lead to further marginalisation of gang members, potentially exacerbating tensions. These legislative changes are expected to have an enormous impact on ‘who Police stop and talk to’, a key research focus for this UPD study.

One major concern was the potential for the broad application of the term ‘gang’ resulting in the over-policing of Māori and Pacific communities, further straining police-community relations.

They've (Police) invested in this relational thing, don't kill it ... my fear is, where did Hamas start? When you've seen your uncle, father, whatever, cruelly and unfairly treated, which is what this potentially might lead to. And I was interested the other day in [young gang members] death and the [gang] came down with balaclavas, and no patches....” (Participant)

Participants stressed that addressing intergenerational trauma and the socio-economic factors contributing to gang involvement requires a more holistic and trauma-informed approach. Additionally, they cautioned that the focus on gang patches is cosmetic and does not address the deeper issues, advocating for engagement and understanding as more effective long-term solutions. For those on both sides, who had spent a significant amount of time investing in positive relationships between gangs and Police, the change in legislation was disheartening.

“I struggle with it to the point where, do I want to be here when all of this rolls out, if it's rolling out like that? So, I'm questioning my own placement here. I will not give up on my integrity

or my values, and for helping people. But if it were up to me, equal amounts of resource would be sunk into both things.” (Stakeholder)

“I think gang membership, that doesn't define criminal activity. So, they're not even targeting criminal activity right now. It's just gang membership.” (Stakeholder)

Discussion

The complex relationship between gangs and law enforcement in New Zealand is deeply rooted in historical trauma, systemic issues, and a cycle of distrust that continues to shape interactions and policies today.

Analysis indicates that gang members viewed the police as playing a significant role in perpetuating the documented harm caused in State care and justice institutions. This appears to be crucial in understanding the deep-seated distrust that underpins police-gang relationships. Narratives demonstrate that for older members and their whānau, the role of Police in aiding State abuse continues to impact relationships. These findings have contemporary implications as Police are currently enforcing Oranga Tamariki orders. This is particularly concerning given that abuse in State care persists³ despite the inquiry (Abuse in Care, 2024b; Oranga Tamariki, 2023).

Interviews reveal a consistent pattern of negative experiences, where police actions are perceived as aggressive, dehumanising, and often discriminatory. The use of excessive force, strip searches, and invasive house raids contribute to a cycle of mistrust and antagonism voiced in interviews. Participants recount how these interactions reinforced their adversarial stance towards the Police, viewing them as enforcers of a system that targets and oppresses them. However, instances of positive interactions are also noted, where compassionate policing has led to meaningful change and improved relations.

³ There has been an increase in the number of children harmed and the number of findings of harm although the number of children in care has declined over the past five years. 9% of all children in care have findings of harm.

Interviews note that despite the negative public perception, gangs play a crucial role in the lives of their members by providing a sense of community and belonging. For many individuals, gang membership transcends criminal activities, functioning more as an extended whānau unit that offers support and stability. However, the experiences within gang communities are diverse and often overlooked in public discourse. Particularly, the perspectives of women and children associated with gangs are frequently absent from literature and discussions, representing a significant gap in our understanding of gang dynamics (Brown et al., 2023).

Whānau interviewed in this case study described emotional and psychological impacts through direct exposure to Police intervention in their lives, known as vicarious trauma. In addition, negative early life interactions with Police, coupled with whānau perceptions of Police as 'an enemy' appears to fuel intergenerational cycles of oppositional behaviour. Research suggests that approaches focusing solely on individual change, without considering the broader family context, are likely to have limited success (Brown et al., 2023). Therefore, a more holistic approach that acknowledges the complex family structures and support networks within gang communities is necessary for addressing gang-related issues and supporting those who seek to leave gang life.

Recent legislative measures aimed at curbing gang activities, such as fines for wearing patches and dispersal notices, are raised in the interviews. Analysis demonstrates that punitive approaches are seen as politically motivated

and ineffective in addressing the root causes of gang affiliation. Instead, they risk exacerbating tensions and driving gang activities further underground. Police/community participants note the importance of recruiting and training officers who draw from these communities. Furthermore, they emphasise the importance of continued support throughout their career.

Both Police/community and gang participants advocated for a relational policing approach, emphasising the importance of building trust and mutual respect between police and gang communities. Participants highlighted the need for conflict resolution training for police officers, better support for gang members seeking pro-social changes, and the importance of addressing intergenerational trauma. The case study underscores the potential for change within gang communities, noting that many members aspire to transform their lives and contribute positively to society. Initiatives that focus on providing work opportunities, supporting legitimate business activities, and fostering cultural connections are seen as crucial steps towards sustainable change.

In conclusion, while limited in scope, this case study provides an analysis of the complex relationship between the New Zealand Police and gang communities. It underscores the historical and socio-economic factors that have shaped these interactions and highlights the need for a more nuanced and empathetic approach to policing. By focusing on relational policing and addressing the root causes of gang affiliation, the study suggests that meaningful and lasting change can be achieved, ultimately benefiting both the police and the communities they serve.

Advice

- 1.** Continue to invest in gang liaison roles and gang harm reduction initiatives building strong, positive relationships with gang communities. Relational policing can foster trust and cooperation, making it easier to address criminal activities and prevent harm.
- 2.** Provide police officers with extensive training in conflict resolution to equip them with skills to de-escalate situations and handle confrontations calmly and respectfully. This involves consistent, respectful, and empathetic interactions, recognising the humanity of gang families, and avoiding the use of excessive force and dehumanising practices. Training should include an understanding of gang whakapapa, the role of the State care system and Police complicity as outlined in Whanaketia.
- 3.** Revive and expand collaborative projects between Police, local councils, support services and pro-social gang leaders (like those during the COVID-19 pandemic and Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC¹) initiatives).

¹ Multi-agency approaches such as ROCC, providing comprehensive support systems that address the root causes of gang affiliation, such as trauma, addiction, and poverty should continue to be funded by government. This includes offering accessible culturally appropriate rehabilitation services, educational opportunities, and community-based support networks to assist gang members and their families.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the

Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via

Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Police interactions with

Rainbow/ Takatāpui communities

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction data, Complaint

data as well as use of force data as it related to TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

Acknowledgements

Ihi Research wishes to acknowledge and thank all interview participants in the Phase Two study.

He mihi nui tēnei ki ngā kaiwhakauru katoa i whai wāhi mai ki tēnei rangahau. Ko tō koutou kaha, ko tō koutou māia, ko tō koutou pono i tāpae mai i ngā kōrero nui whakaharahara, hei painga mō te katoa. Ka nui te aroha me te whakawhetai ki a koutou katoa. E mihi nui ana.

Research Team

Tanita Bidois, & Dr Anne Hynds (2024). Police interaction with Rainbow/Takatāpui communities. Phase Two Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study explores the interactions between the Police and members of rainbow/takatāpui communities as it relates to equity and fairness issues within policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In Phase One we analysed complaints data and identified very few police complaints made by members of rainbow/takatāpui communities. The UPD Panel wanted to investigate the longstanding relationship between the New Zealand Police and rainbow/takatāpui communities including current engagement and advice for relationship improvements moving forward.

The following themes have been collated from ten interviews with members of rainbow/takatāpui communities, LGBTQIA+ partner agencies, an academic, and Police staff.

The following five themes were identified across interviews:

- The prevalence of discrimination and bias towards rainbow/takatāpui communities.
- Poor relationships between rainbow/takatāpui and the Police.
- Intersectional realities for rainbow/takatāpui communities.
- How police culture and beliefs impact the kind of policing rainbow/takatāpui receive.
- Lack of resourcing/time.

While sexual and gender orientations are noted where relevant, interviewees were asked their preferred pronouns, however, gender neutral pronouns 'they/them' have been used to present the data in a way that minimises reader bias. 'Rainbow' is used in this case study as a blanket term for many diverse gender and sexual identities and expressions within the LGBTQIA+ community, and 'takatāpui' is used to represent the many identity expressions for Māori who identify within the rainbow community. There is recognition that not all interviewees would identify with either of these terms.

Community participants were identified for their lived experience, professional work, and advocacy work as rainbow/takatāpui members or allies with a focus on interactions and engagement with the Police. Police participants were selected for their current contributions to the Police rainbow innovation space as either members of the rainbow community or an ally. All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. The purpose of the UPD research is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in Policing. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

The criminalisation of takatāpui

The history of engagement between the New Zealand Police and rainbow/takatāpui communities provides insights into systemic attitudes on gender and sexuality in the police force since early colonisation. Historical and contemporary literature and data highlights tensions between the two groups, with notions of homophobia, transphobia, and racism impacting Police practice. Natasha Hope-Johnstone and Brandon Johnstone (2022, para 2) acknowledge the existence of takatāpui in Aotearoa “as long as people have been here”, adding that the loss of pūrākau and stories of queer tūpuna (ancestors) are the result of “cultural genocide”. Colonisers introduced British laws that reinforced gender and sexuality binaries that were inherently incompatible with the fluid identities and sexuality expressions of takatāpui at the time (Hope-Johnstone & Johnstone, 2022).

The adaptation of the English Laws Act in 1858 went on to criminalise buggery, or sexual relations between men, in the late 19th Century, further stigmatising queer gender and sexuality expressions in legislation (Hamley et al., 2021). In 1867, New Zealand enacted legislation similar to that in England at the time which sentenced men to a maximum sentence of life imprisonment for acts of buggery (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2022b). It is important to note that there was no equivalent legislation against sex between women at the time, although queer

women still endured social stigmatisation (Ministry for Culture and Heritage, 2022a). These dichotomous narratives on gender and sexuality norms during this time would continue to impact takatāpui in contemporary Aotearoa, with the legacy of systemic attitudes within the Police and other organisations steeped in this early legislation (Hamley et al., 2021).

Archival data from 1910-1960 provides insights into the psychological models and treatments for homosexual men convicted of sodomy and other indecent crimes at this time, introducing early deviance discourse and the medicalisation of homosexuality (Brickell, 2021). Brickell (2021, p. 4) includes a quote from the Controller-General of Prisons at the time, Berkeley Dallard, who in discussions about short-term imprisonment for convicted homosexual men spoke of them as “sexual perverts” who were “slightly defective” and that the only sufficient punishment for their crimes was castration. The archival data noted the attitudes of mental hospital staff at the time in that they regarded homosexuality “as the result of an interaction between physiology and tainted heredity”, commonly advocating for castration also (Brickell, 2021, p. 5).

Homophobia and the Police

After the de-medicalisation of homosexuality in the 1970s, the Homosexual Reform Act was enacted in New Zealand in 1986 that no longer criminalised homosexual acts between consenting men over 16 years of age (Praat & Tuffin, 1996). However, the Human Rights Commission 1977 did not include “sexual orientation as illegal grounds for discrimination”, and this was not revoked until 1993 (Praat & Tuffin, 1996, p. 58). This update meant that the Police could no longer exclude police applicants based on their sexual orientation, although attitudes about homosexual officers in the force remained (Praat & Tuffin, 1996). Officer Frank discusses their homosexual grade system where Police categorise homosexual men as either good or bad, and that without knowing if a homosexual man was a paedophile, they must remain suspicious. In their inability to distinguish between the grades, Frank asks “what makes that guy that is bumming these boys any different than that guy up there who’s shown a bit of class about being homosexual” (Praat & Tuffin, 1996, p. 63).

The exclusion of gay men into the Police force was justified by the public’s opinion of homosexuals in general, with Officer Carl stating “now I’m opposed to homosexuals who perform dressing up as women being part of a police service because I’m quite convinced that the vast majority of the public will not accept”, adding that “surveys have shown that you know there would be a loss of confidence in the Police and I more importantly I treasure our integrity” (Praat & Tuffin, 1996, pp. 68-69). Praat and Tuffin (1996) argued that this justification likely reinforced and attempted to conceal existing homophobic ideals within the Police.

Pride and the Police

Although the legalisation of same-sex marriage was enacted in New Zealand in 2013, rainbow communities continued to experience

discrimination from the Police. In 2018, a series of articles were published on the requested attendance of the Police at the Pride Parade and the Auckland Pride Board’s (APB) subsequent condition that they can only attend out of uniform (Murphy, 2018). Murphy (2018) explored the whakapapa of the relationship between the Police and the Pride Parade, connecting how violence from the Police against rainbow communities in the past has resulted in the APB’s focus on peace and safety for attendees (Murphy, 2018). In consultation about parade attendees, APB noted that “the visibility of the police uniform, in particular, had made them [some members of the LGBTQI community] feel less safe about participating in the Auckland Pride Parade” (Murphy, 2018, para 9).

O’Connell Rapira and Hartendorp (2018, para 6) also discuss the historical and contemporary context behind the Auckland Pride Board’s decision to ban police uniforms, noting that these uniforms represent “oppression and violence” for many queer people and people of colour. The authors urge that this historically oppressive relationship is acknowledged and healed, noting that rainbow police cars do not address long-held homophobic and transphobic attitudes within the Police (O’Connell Rapira & Hartendorp, 2018). The introduction of rainbow police cars in the North Island in 2018 and the South Island in 2023 aimed to promote and acknowledge diversity (Cosgrove, 2023), however, negative comments about these cars have demonstrated homophobic views from the public (Ward, 2018).

Intersections of oppression

Connections are also made by O’Connell Rapira and Hartendorp (2018) between homophobia, transphobia, and racism experienced by rainbow communities during Police engagement, reiterating the importance of an intersectional perspective when evaluating this relationship. Further to this, the treatment of Māori transwomen by the Police continues to attract

news headlines for mistreatment, misgendering, and the evidence of existing transphobia within the New Zealand Police (O’Connell Rapira & Hartendorp, 2018; Walton, 2022). Kuia in the takatāpui community have long discussed the fear they have in the Police and the violence that they experienced as a result of transphobic views (O’Connell Rapira & Hartendorp, 2018). The APB community also highlighted their issue with Corrections attending the Pride Parade as this organisation often exhibits problematic treatment of trans and LGBTQIA+ inmates (Murphy, 2018). After a trans inmate was raped twice, she reported this to the acting principal corrections officer (PCO) who responded by asking “what do you expect? You’re in a men’s prison. If you don’t like it, go to the women’s” (Murphy, 2020, para 12).

In response to a police officer mistreating, misgendering and then breaking the ankle of a transwoman in 2022, the Human Rights Commission urged the New Zealand Police to address their treatment of trans people (Walton, 2022). The woman reported to the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) about the details of the incident, with the IPCA reporting that

this incident was a result of a “wider systemic problem” (Walton, 2022, para 8). In 2019, a study reported that 42% of trans and gender diverse people had reported misgendering from the Police even though they had shared their correct gender and pronouns (Walton, 2022). Counties Manukau District Commander Superintendent Shanan Grey noted that “respect and valuing identity are two of our core values”, although the data from 2019 and this incident highlight “deeper cultural issues within the police force” (Walton, 2022, para 3).

Members of rainbow communities continue to express fears around the kind of treatment they might experience from the Police and other groups, often resulting in under-reporting of crimes committed against them (Lee, 2021). This literature review provides evidence of homophobic and transphobia views within the Police and the importance of both addressing these long-standing beliefs and rebuilding relationships with these communities as critical for improved and more equitable policing in Aotearoa.



Interview findings

The following section includes a collation of interview findings from ten participants across five key themes and a final discussion including a summary of findings and advice to the Police.

The prevalence of discrimination and harm towards rainbow/takatāpui communities

Across each of the community interviews, evidence shows experiences of discrimination and harm towards rainbow/takatāpui communities exists from both wider society and the Police. Interviewees shared that they felt undeserving or excluded from police safety responses as rainbow/takatāpui and were often subjected to discriminatory and harmful treatment by the Police. One interviewee notes:

“There are certain things like making us take our bra off and stuff like that and taking wigs off. The others I do feel for because I see one of my sisters and they used to torment her and take her wig off. I used to see how they used to beat her up because I'd be in there and I'd see her. Their hair is their thing. Without it, she looks crazy and she's just not the same person without it.” (Participant)

Discrimination against gender and sexuality expressions by the Police is noted as harmful, with interviewees sharing their experiences of being intentionally misgendered, police using dead names¹, and enduring name-calling and abuse relating to their identity. Interviewees connect this mistreatment with negative attitudes within the Police about non-binary gender expressions and transgenderism. Through one Police engagement, an interviewee was told “you were born a male, not a f**king female, so why are you trying to act like a female?” In a different interaction, the interviewee shares:

“There was this one time I got smacked over the head with a bat twice, and I told them my head was sore, and they did not take me to go get my head checked out. And then I went straight to jail after that, and I had been up for seven days on drugs, on meth, that time. And then there was another time when I was only 16, and then they tried to say that I had assaulted somebody, and then they ripped me to the ground ... I don't

know if it's because of my family or they just don't like gays, but I'm pretty sure it has to do with the gender.” (Participant)

An officer who works with rainbow communities noted the changes made within the police force in the past 20 years to address discrimination and bias in policing towards LGBTQIA+, urging that good communication is key to positive interactions. The officer asserts the importance of open conversations with the communities they engage with to ensure that the correct pronouns and names are used and then updated in the database for future reference. However, it is unclear how this new database mechanism is mandated or monitored.

‘Rainbow 101’ was launched in January 2023 and provides police kaimahi with guidelines on engaging with rainbow communities, however, police kaimahi note that this module is currently not mandated. One police officer who identifies as a member of the rainbow community shares their gratitude for this module and notes that they are hopeful that discrimination towards rainbow/takatāpui communities from the Police reduces over time as a result.

In asking interviewees what they would say to the police officers involved, many of them spoke about just wanting to be treated as ‘human’ and with respect. While efforts have been made within the New Zealand Police to address discriminatory policing practice against these communities, UPD interview data indicates that many beliefs within the Police remain biased.

Intersectional realities for rainbow/takatāpui communities

Interviewees who identify as rainbow/takatāpui often endure discriminatory treatment from society and the Police across intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity, mental health status, and disability. Interview data indicates that gender/sexuality and mental health is a

¹ Birth name of a transgender person that has been changed through gender transition process.

particularly oppressive intersection, with several interviewees noting the intentional targeting by Police of rainbow/takatāpui members who are under the influence of drugs and/or alcohol or who are observed as 'heightened' or in emotional or mental distress.

*"They are always looking for someone who will get heightened. If you stay calm, unfortunately then you're getting barraged with verbal abuse, physical abuse, and this underlying incentive by the police in regard to the working girls ... the things that come out of their mouth are just f**king frightful and I'm surprised that all of us aren't actually killing ourselves."* (Participant)

Drug and alcohol addiction was noted as a common mental health reality for several of the interviewees, particularly for rainbow/takatāpui sex workers. None of the interviewees who had suffered from addiction had ever been referred for addiction support services through their interactions with the Police, and noted that being 'drunk' and/or 'high' meant they were more likely to be heightened when approached.

An academic who identifies as takatāpui and understands much of the context around Māori and the justice system noted the perpetuation of harmful stereotypes about rainbow/takatāpui through police engagement.

"If you live in your little bubble and you're only encountering people outside your bubble in circumstances that portray them at their worst or at least not at their best, then that's going to feed into stereotypes and views that you might have of them, because you're not seeing all the healthy well-adjusted takatāpui going off to work or raising their families or whatever." (Participant)

A police officer who is a member of the rainbow community notes the difficulty other officers face in engaging with communities through an informed and intersectional approach. They note:

"You've got some people who are gender diverse that also have mental health stuff going on as well, and it's educating people that you work with that they don't have mental health issues [because they're trans], or they're not trans because they've got mental health issues. That's the big one ... the two can exist independently." (Stakeholder)

While ethnicity for rainbow/takatāpui interviewees is noted as a contributing factor towards poorer treatment from police, the main intersecting oppressors across interview data relates to non-normative gender and sexuality identities/expressions and mental health/addiction.

Poor relationships between rainbow/takatāpui and the Police

When questioned about their relationship with the Police, interviewees shared feelings of powerlessness, mistrust, little engagement with LGBTQIA+ partner agencies, and poor communication. For many community interviewees, they either did not know that police complaints were an option or were aware of this mechanism but were apprehensive about making a complaint out of fear of repercussion. A police interviewee notes that they are unable to address mistreatment towards these communities without complaints, however, mistrust in the Police and other factors deem this mechanism ineffective.

For rainbow/takatāpui sex workers who often endure increased surveillance by the Police in certain cities, making police complaints about mistreatment from the Police is not an option.

"I just felt like I didn't have the right resources ... we were going to be in the city, and they were still going to be there ... and you can't beat them because they're a big gang and they've got so much more to say. And they intimidate you too. They're really intimidating. And if you do say

something towards them, they will come at you harder. They will watch you on camera and try and get you for anything.” (Participant)

One interviewee spoke of their pleas to the Police about an increase in hate crime and hate speech towards the trans community, noting the subsequent inaction of the Police as a result. The interviewee also spent time with a representative from the Muslim community who noted a similar threat of increased islamophobia and hate crime leading up to the Christchurch Mosque attacks, and that these concerns were largely ignored by the Canterbury Police.

As a trans person themselves, the interviewee spoke of the additional safety precautions their community faces including not posting their location online when travelling, removing their details from the electoral role, and the installation of home security cameras.

“Just so many efforts for personal safety. If I’m travelling, I don’t post about where I am until I’m back home. The additional mental load that is on so many people in the community is really massive. And I think the lack of a response from police, especially about the hardcore hate, hate speech stuff just allows it to continue to fester because there’s ... no one saying, ‘Hey, no, this isn’t okay’.” (Participant)

One police officer acknowledged that they are unable to undertake meaningful work with rainbow communities without collaboration with partner agencies. However, another interviewee working at a LGBTQIA+ agency noted the little attempts made by their local Police to build relationships with rainbow communities, sharing that other agencies hold similar views about Police inaction and poor relationships. While the police officer shares their intentions for better community engagement, they note limitations in terms of resourcing and time.

While interview data indicates poor relationships between groups, interviewees who identify as rainbow/takatāpui shared possible solutions

for improving this relationship moving forward. One interviewee noted the positive relationship between the New Zealand Prostitutes Collective (NZPC) and the Police in one district, and the subsequent impacts on outcomes for sex workers in their engagement with the Police as a result.

Furthermore, interviewees note the importance and impact of regular wānanga, whanaungatanga, and open dialogue with rainbow/takatāpui communities to ensure current and evolving needs and aspirations can be addressed and supported.

How Police culture and beliefs inform police interactions with rainbow/takatāpui communities

Evidenced across the case study themes, interview data highlights the presence of longstanding conservative beliefs and norms within the New Zealand Police that perpetuate that perpetuate poor interactions and outcomes for rainbow/takatāpui communities engaging with the Police.

“I mean, as a whole, it’s a conservative body. And I think the same things that are causing the kind of treatment of trans-sex workers are the exact same things that are causing a lack of action here. And it’s like a system, like devaluing of queer lives and experiences. And again, it’s like that intersectional weaving. The Police are there to prop up the power of the colonial state.” (Participant)

Enduring conservative beliefs and norms about gender and sexuality in particular are noted by interviewees as a reflection of wider societal views and early colonial ideologies. Within the Police force itself, notions of homophobia and hyper-masculinity have impacts on one police interviewee who notes feeling unsafe to express their own non-binary gender identity within the workplace. Another interviewee notes:

“Lots of research has shown that there is a

poor level of trust within Māori communities towards the Police, and when we think that takatāpui occupy often a marginalised position, even within Māori communities, alongside the general colonial imposition of gender and sexuality norms and with what I understand to be quite a hyper-masculine culture within the Police, then my intuition is that this is why takatāpui fare particularly badly in interactions with the Police in a one-on-one basis.” (Participant)

Interviewees raised concerns about the type of training offered in Police College and through frontline work in terms of engaging and supporting rainbow/takatāpui and other marginalised communities. Suggestions from community interviewees included training that incorporated colonisation education and the implications of gender/sexuality norms through Christianity. A police interviewee notes the progress made in terms of Police College training to ensure that the lived realities of several marginalised groups are now mandated at this early stage of recruitment.

Community interview data also indicates the influence of conservative values held by older police staff in particular and their reluctance to shift these views. One police officer noted the following example of how views are transmitted in the Police:

“An example I could give would be my old sergeant having thoughts and opinions on a certain group of people and they would voice those opinions, but they’ve just voiced that to 20 staff who now think it’s okay.” (Stakeholder)

In discussing the presence of these views within the workforce, one officer states the following individual-level action to address these biases:

“Language is being challenged and we are trying to emphasise the importance of holding people to account and just getting people to think more about what they’re saying and how they’re saying it and who they’re saying it to.” (Stakeholder)

Alongside training, community interviewees urge police officers and workers to address their own personal biases and spend time working through their own trauma and healing in efforts to better respond to and support marginalised communities.

Lack of resourcing/time

Interview data from Police kaimahi correlates poor community relationships and outcomes with little resourcing and time. One interviewee notes that the introduction of diversity liaison officers (DLO) in the early 2000s was an innovation in response to a murder of a member of the rainbow community at the time. However, the DLO role is noted as voluntary and is held by officers on top of their usual role, creating challenges in terms of how much capacity they have to create meaningful and enduring community engagement and networks. One police staff member states the following about the DLO role:

“So they can get a lot of flak when in actual fact people don’t realise that actually they’re doing [the DLO role] through their passion. So they might not hear from somebody for a long time ... or it might be that they’re stretched somewhere else.” (Stakeholder)

The staff member notes that if more resourcing was available, they would love to see the DLO as a paid role so that supporting rainbow/takatāpui communities is not limited to Police being ‘reactive’. Police also note that the ability for DLO’s to work in the rainbow innovation space is often limited by leadership and whether or not their leaders provide the space and time to complete this work. This often results in DLO’s implementing this work outside of their working hours. They would also like to see an increase in the DLO workforce across Aotearoa with the inclusion of other marginalised community representatives and supports.

Issues raised by community interviewees indicate a less than empathetic approach from

some Police when responding to certain events involving rainbow/takatāpui members who may be under the influence or heightened. In terms of responding to people who are heightened or volatile, one officer notes:

“And sometimes if somebody is heightened or under the influence, then we have to use our own assessment of how to best deal with that person in the best timeframe without risking injury to us or them. You know what I mean? It's not as simple as giving people time if time is not on our side.” (Stakeholder)

A lack of time during an event response can then lead to police officers making quick assessments on the spot which may or may not always result in the best outcome for the individual involved. A lack of time/resource combined with intersections of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and/or mental health discrimination and biases held by the Police may result in the poor interactions noted by rainbow/takatāpui interviewees in their interactions with the Police.



Discussion

Community interviews indicate the presence of conservative views about non-conforming gender and sexuality expressions/identities within the Police that influence the type of policing rainbow/takatāpui communities receive.

Intentional misgendering, using dead names, and disrespecting an individual's gender identity indicate that police policies are not mandated or effective in reducing harm. While police interviewees discuss the rollout of various LGBTQIA+ innovations or solutions to address these concerns, it is unclear how the efficacy of these initiatives will be measured. Alongside a reluctance by rainbow/takatāpui communities to make police complaints about mistreatment, the frequency and severity of negative police interactions are also not monitored effectively.

Interviewees indicate that intersections of oppression across gender, sexuality, mental health status, and addiction are particularly challenging and that current police interventions do little to recognise or address underlying drivers of certain crimes. Drug and alcohol addiction, particularly for rainbow/takatāpui sex workers is particularly distressing, and interview data suggests that police interactions perpetuate harm for these groups. As a result of this treatment, community interviewees report feeling undeserving of safety responses and support from the Police, urging officers to simply

treat them as 'human' in the future. Interviewees are interested in strengthening this relationship, suggesting whanaungatanga, wānanga, trust building, and good faith between groups.

Transgender people shared the extreme measures they take to ensure their daily safety in response to rising hate crimes against their community. Police inaction regarding reports of increased trans hate crime and hate speech signals to transgender communities that their safety concerns are not prioritised. The presence of homophobia and hyper-masculinity within the Police creates unsafe spaces and interactions for rainbow/takatāpui communities and police staff, suggesting that system-level biases and beliefs need to be challenged. Alternatively, interview data suggests that the Police continue to mostly focus on reactive responses rather than preventative approaches due to a lack of resources, time, and support from leadership. Under-resourcing and limitations restricts DLO's from building impactful community relationships that could provide sustainable and preventative impacts for these communities in their engagement with the Police.

Advice

- 1.** Organisation-wide policies and mandatory training to be enforced alongside effective measuring tools to address and monitor the mistreatment of rainbow/takatāpui community members beyond the current police complaints mechanism.
- 2.** Increased resourcing to the DLO network to allow this role to become a funded stand-alone role within the community, with at least one paid DLO role in each police district. Additional resourcing for DLO's should allow for increased time spent building and maintaining relationships with partner agencies with the backing of leadership, including mental health providers and local rainbow/takatāpui communities.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration

between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

The impact of the
**use of TASER on
individuals and
their whānau**

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction data, Complaint data as well as use of force data as it related to

TASERs. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

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He mihi nui tēnei ki ngā kaiwhakauru katoa i whai wāhi mai ki tēnei rangahau. Ko tō koutou kaha, ko tō koutou māia, ko tō koutou pono i tāpae mai i ngā kōrero nui whakaharahara, hei painga mō te katoa. Ka nui te aroha me te whakawhetai ki a koutou katoa. E mihi nui ana.

Research Team

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Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study explores TASER use on participants, by the Police as it relates to equity and fairness issues within policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In Phase One we analysed TASER tactical options reports, footage of TASER events and pulse logs. Since the introduction of TASER in New Zealand in 2010, their use has increased at a rate exceeding population growth, with patterns of overrepresentation consistent with international findings, particularly among ethnic minorities, men, and individuals with mental health conditions (Ihi Research, 2024). The UPD Panel wanted to investigate the experiences of people who have been TASERed by the Police with a particular focus on Māori, and people experiencing mental ill-health.

The following themes have been collated from seven interviews with individuals who have been TASERed by the New Zealand Police, and one whānau member and an academic/advocate.

All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. The purpose of the UPD research is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

New Zealand Police use various tactics to manage or restrain individuals, including the use of TASERs. In 2023, TASERs were presented in about a quarter of all incidents where tactical options¹ were used (New Zealand Police, 2024, p. 23). In 20% of these cases (396 events), the TASER was fired (New Zealand Police, 2024, p. 23). Most situations involving TASERs were resolved by using the device to "laser paint," meaning it was aimed at the individual without being fired (New Zealand Police, 2024).

Limited research, particularly in New Zealand, pertaining to the use of TASER on individuals makes this study significant. New Zealand Police Tactical Options reports describe the use of TASERs in the community on an annual basis from a Police perspective. However, there is a lack of research from the perspective of individuals who have been TASERed and their whānau. The purpose of this case study is to better understand the impact and first-hand experiences of individuals who have been TASERed. This case study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of fairness and equity within New Zealand Police delivery by exploring these narratives.

In Phase One of this project, Ihi Research independently analysed Police data relating to TASER discharge. Data, including analysis of TASER camera footage and police officer reports of TASER incidents, identified potential safety risks for individuals being TASERed (Ihi Research, 2024). Gaps were apparent in police reports of TASER use on individuals. For example, analysis indicated police narratives justified TASER use, but did not question the inability of individuals to comprehend commands, although incident footage and descriptions indicate this may have been the case. The age of individuals (particularly younger individuals under 14 years or older individuals 65+ years) and the potential impact of both physical and psychological trauma was

not recorded, despite evidence that the age of the individual may increase the likelihood of the TASER incident resulting in injury or trauma.

In addition, analysis indicated the use of TASERs is not evenly dispersed throughout the community but is patterned by physical appearance, ethnicity, gender and mental health (Ihi Research, 2024). Māori and Pacific males are overrepresented in the TASER data, and this has far-reaching consequences for trust and community-Police relations. Currently little is known about the impact of TASERing the young, the aged, the vulnerable and how the TASER experience may further traumatise already harmed individuals.

There were five individuals who were interviewed for this case study who had been TASERed, one whānau member and an advocate. We acknowledge that the individuals interviewed for this case study were in contact with police under suspicion of a crime. However, we also recognise their fundamental right to be treated with dignity and respect, regardless of their legal circumstances. This approach is aligned with the principles of the New Zealand Bill of Rights Act 1990, which upholds the right of all individuals, including those who may be suspected or convicted of an offence, to be treated with humanity and respect for their inherent dignity. The Act reinforces that these rights are essential

¹ A tactical option is a specific method or tool used by police to manage, control, or resolve a situation that involves potential conflict or threat. These options range from non-physical approaches like verbal communication and de-escalation techniques to physical measures such as hand-to-hand control, use of tools like OC spray, TASERs or batons.

to ensuring a just and equitable society, irrespective of one's legal status.

TASER use in Aotearoa

TASERs were initially trialled in Aotearoa New Zealand after a Police review into the fatal police shooting of Stephen Wallace, a Māori male in Waitara, on April 30, 2000 (New Zealand Police, 2008). The Police TASER trial was conducted from 1 September 2006 to 31 August 2007. The trial noted there was the "potential to realise benefits such as a reduction in firearms presentations, assaults on police officers, and injuries to subjects if TASERs were available more widely as a tactical option for New Zealand Police" (New Zealand Police, 2008, p. 18).

As part of the evaluation of the trial, New Zealand Police reviewed documents, including Official Information Act requests, parliamentary questions, and ministerial correspondence, revealing concerns about the disproportionate impact on vulnerable populations, particularly Māori and Pacific communities, and those with mental health issues (New Zealand Police, 2008, p. 34, p. 123). Submissions highlighted concern regarding the risks of psychological and emotional trauma (New Zealand Police, 2008, p. 123). Despite these concerns, the initial trial was considered successful, leading to the introduction of TASERs into the New Zealand Police force in 2009, with routine carriage by frontline police beginning in 2015 (den Heyer, 2020, p. 356; New Zealand Police, 2015).

Since their introduction, the concept of "mission creep" in the use of TASERs by New Zealand Police has been a subject of debate (O'Brien et al., 2011). Mission creep refers to the gradual expansion of the use of TASERs beyond their original intended purpose. O'Brien et al. (2011) noted that while TASERs were initially introduced as a less-lethal alternative to firearms in high-risk situations, their use has expanded to include lower-risk scenarios and for ensuring compliance. Soar et al. (2009) reported that TASER deployments in

New Zealand increased significantly in the years following their introduction, with a notable rise in the use of TASERs for compliance rather than as an alternative to lethal force. This expansion of use has raised concerns regarding the deployment of TASERs on vulnerable populations, particularly those with mental health issues (Billing, 2024; O'Brien & Thom, 2014). The most recent Tactical Options report indicates that the proportion of TOR events with TASER use has been relatively stable over the last five years (New Zealand Police, 2024).

Health impacts

The published health impacts of TASER use on individuals has been the subject of considerable controversy. Research on TASER safety has some notable limitations. Many studies are conducted with animals or healthy people, but in real-life situations, people who are TASERed are often under the influence of alcohol or drugs, have mental or physical health issues, or both (den Heyer, 2020; Eisler et al., 2017; Independent Office for Police Conduct, 2021; Neuscheler & Freidlin, 2015; New Zealand Police, 2018). This means the studies do not fully reflect what happens in everyday situations. Also, much of the research focuses only on short-term effects, like changes in heart rate or stress, and doesn't explore possible long-term impacts (Baliatsas et al., 2021).

There are concerns about conflicts of interest in TASER research because some studies are funded by, or connected to, the company that makes TASERs, AXON (formerly TASER International) (O'Brien & Thom, 2014). This has led to claims that these studies are biased in favour of the company (Heubl, 2020; Independent Office for Police Conduct, 2021; O'Brien & Thom, 2014). Many of these studies report only minor physical or psychological effects from TASER use. However, organisations like Amnesty International have been raising concerns about the harmful effects of TASERs in policing since they were first introduced (Amnesty International, 2007, 2011).

Research on injuries caused by TASERs in the field generally divides injury into two categories: primary injuries, which come directly from the electric shock or the probes penetrating the skin, and secondary injuries, which result from falls caused by muscle incapacitation (Childers et al., 2020). Primary injuries are often minor, such as burns or small puncture wounds, but more serious injuries can occur depending on where the probes hit (Childers et al., 2020). For example, dart penetration has caused injuries to the eyes (Chen et al., 2006), genitals (Theisen et al., 2016), fingers (de Courcey, 2021), and even the brain (Delavar & Thompson, 2021). In rare cases, there has been a fatal injury to a foetus, leading to miscarriage (Mehl, 1992). The findings of TASER research are often conflicting. Some studies suggest TASERs do not significantly affect heart conditions or breathing (Levine et al., 2007), while others report that breathing can be seriously compromised, and in some cases, TASER use can lead to sudden cardiac arrest and death (VanMeenen et al., 2013; Zipes, 2012).

Reports of secondary injuries caused by TASER use describe a range of traumatic injuries (Defence Scientific Advisory Council Sub-Committee on the Medical Implications of Less-Lethal Weapons, 2012), including spinal fractures (Winslow et al., 2007), broken jaws and teeth (Kucher, 2016), broken noses and eye socket fractures, as well as brain injuries like epidural hematomas, subarachnoid haemorrhages, and skull fractures (Mangus et al., 2008). Other severe injuries include brain damage due to lack of oxygen (Scruggs et al., 2010). Kroll et al. (2016) describe two cases where people with mental illness died from falls caused by TASER-related muscle incapacitation.

In a 2017 investigation by Reuters in the United States, 1,005 incidents where people died after being stunned by a TASER used by police were examined (Eisler et al., 2017). Autopsies were available for 712 of these deaths, and in more than one-fifth of the cases (153), the TASER was listed as a cause or contributing factor in the death. The authors highlight a troubling trend, noting that many of those who died were vulnerable individuals, often unarmed and in psychological

distress (Eisler et al., 2017). In New Zealand, there have been no deaths directly linked to TASER use by police. However, the Independent Police Conduct Authority (IPCA) has found instances where TASER use by police officers was deemed unjustified (Independent Police Conduct Authority, 2017a, 2017b, 2019, 2020, 2023).

Most studies on TASER use focus on physical harm, but there are concerns about the psychological effects as well. A recent report from the UK found that people not only experienced physical harm from TASERs but also highlighted the psychological damage caused by the experience (TASERD, 2023). The report noted that people with mental health issues were more likely to be subjected to repeated and prolonged TASER discharges.

In New Zealand, a University of Auckland study showed a clear pattern of TASERs being used more often against people with mental health problems, raising concerns about the serious risks involved for this vulnerable group (O'Brien et al., 2011). Researchers note concern that TASERs could cause serious injuries or make existing mental health conditions worse when used on individuals in crisis (O'Brien & McKenna, 2007; O'Brien & Thom, 2014). White and Ready (2010) suggest that people with mental illness may be at a higher risk of death after being TASERed, possibly due to the psychotropic medications they are prescribed.

While the psychological impact on families of people who have been TASERed hasn't been widely studied, research on police interactions with people in mental health crises provides some clues. Families often report feelings of trauma, distress, and helplessness after their loved ones are subjected to forceful police actions, including TASER use (Baker & Pillinger, 2020). These feelings can lead to long-term psychological issues, including anxiety, depression, and PTSD.

By drawing on the perspectives of those with lived experience, as well as their families, supporters, and an advocate this case study aims to explore how different people describe the experience of being TASERed by New Zealand Police

¹ Electrical pulses are discharged from the TASER in one or more probes.

Interview findings

The following section identifies six key themes from interview data and a final discussion including a summary of findings.

Injury and impact of TASER use

People subjected to TASER use reported experiencing immediate physical pain. They described injuries resulting from TASER deployment included bruises, facial fractures, chipped teeth, and puncture wounds caused by the device's prongs. However, the most significant injuries appeared to stem from the TASER's primary effect: muscle incapacitation. This sudden loss of muscle control caused several of the individuals to fall without the ability to brace themselves, leading to potentially serious impact injuries.

"I fucking landed on my nose. I thought my nose was broken." (Participant)

"There was blood all on the ground and stuff like that because I literally just landed straight on my face." (Participant)

"I blacked out because I landed on my face. I didn't actually know what was going on until I was in the police car." (Participant)

Participants described the initial physical and psychological shock of being TASERed.

"Felt like my whole body was in pain, like in a specific spot. Your whole body you can't move, you can't do anything. I wanted to yell I wanted to make noise, but my mouth wouldn't open." (Participant)

"I pissed myself, straight away." (Participant)

"My heart rate was pulsing like fuck. I just felt so weird, it felt like how you get stung by an electric fence but 100 times worse. It was one instant. You don't even think, all you hear is, phht.... They never said anything about tasing. That's another thing they don't do ... I don't know what they're meant to say, 'Or I will use my TASER', but nah, he just did it straight bang." (Participant)

One participant described difficulty recalling the incident due to memory loss right after the incident.

"I can't remember much of it. It made my brain a bit cuckoo. It was just a brain freeze, like boom, or a flash and you just don't recall something. And then the next thing I recall, I'm in the back of the car, I can feel my arm pissing out with blood, and the dog. ... just feeling fucking all through my body, and I could just feel my heart going." (Participant)

Some interviewees reported experiencing psychological trauma, including ongoing fear, anxiety, and paranoia. They described feeling overwhelmed, shocked, and unable to process what was happening both during and after the incident. Several participants mentioned feeling disoriented and unable to respond to questions, particularly when the police attempted to interview them soon after the event.

"I was caught off guard that day. It's definitely psychologically affected me and physically because my teeth are chipped and stuff now, I feel embarrassed and just generally worried about things when I'm talking to people. I cover my mouth and stuff, so it has affected me physically and mentally, and my mum also." (Participant)

"He was trying to take statements from me, trying to tell me 'Why have you been breaching' and all that stuff. I said, 'I don't want to talk right now. I can barely understand what you're saying.' My mind was just moving a thousand miles an hour. I just wanted to sleep. I was asking for a blanket, and he is like, 'No, you can't have a blanket. You can't have a blanket.' And I was like I can't just sleep. So, it was quite confusing." (Participant)

The TASER incidents left lasting psychological impacts on some individuals, resulting in trauma and heightened sensitivity to police encounters. These experiences manifested as increased anxiety and fear, particularly during subsequent interactions with police officers. Even seemingly benign encounters could trigger distress and paranoia in affected individuals. This reaction was especially pronounced in cases where TASERs had been deployed without warning or when the subjects had their backs turned to the officers during the incident.

“After that instance, I got bail and would always be worried about my surroundings and everyone around me because I was caught off guard that day. It's psychologically affected me and physically.” (Participant)

Post incident, some individuals reported what they felt was a lack of medical attention and support from police officers. Despite sustaining injuries, they felt they were not provided with adequate medical care or offered mental health assessments. One interviewee was offered medical care after being processed and was then referred to a local Māori social service provider for support, however this type of support was not afforded to all interviewees.

“The things I was saying just went unheard. I was asking to see a doctor and stuff like that because I didn't feel well.” (Participant)

Participants felt the injury and impact suffered was disproportionate to their alleged crime. While most participants acknowledged that they were in the wrong, they believed they were TASERed for non-compliance and not because the police perceived them as a threat.

Profiling and targeting by the Police

Many interviewees revealed that their interactions with police extended beyond isolated TASER incidents, suggesting they were already known to the police. However, these individuals felt they were being unfairly profiled or targeted, with some claiming that specific officers repeatedly singled them out. During the TASER-related encounters, interviewees reported unprofessional behaviour from police officers, including the use of insulting language and what they perceived as unnecessary force.

“That same police officer was the one that arrested me on multiple occasions and then eventually TASERed me as well ... it felt like a vendetta rather than a course of justice by the end of it. Like when he raided my mum's house, he had the paperwork there, and then he refused to let my mum look at

the paperwork.” (Participant)

“I heard all the police laughing saying, ‘Oh, that was the mean shot. You got him well’.” (Participant)

Some individuals felt they were being arrested without valid reasons. They reported being accused of crimes without enough evidence, which then led to confrontations and the use of force. In one instance, the participant stated the Police had mistaken his identity and they were not charged for any crime post incident. They believed they were targeted because of their appearance, and that police bias influenced these interactions, resulting in more frequent stops, searches, and confrontations without justifiable cause.

“First of all, they need to stop profiling people, that's what they did to me they always assumed I was doing something wrong.” (Participant)

Profiling came up often in the interviews. Māori and Pacific participants shared that they felt they were unfairly singled out by the police. They believed their race had a significant impact on how police approached and treated them.

“When you're brown, shit, it's just that, and that's how I think too. It's like, fuck all. If you're born with a skin colour, you're just born with a disadvantage in society. As tough as people want to take it or not, but you actually are.” (Participant)

Lack of trust in the Police

Being TASERed had a significant impact on participants' attitudes toward the Police, increasing their distrust and reluctance to seek help from Police in the future. While acknowledging the potential for emergency situations requiring Police involvement, interviewees remained wary of contacting the Police because of past negative experiences and being TASERed. Although they recognised that individual officers could influence their perception, the interviewees still expressed a deep and lasting distrust of the Police as an institution.

"I had trust in them to a degree, but not after that [TASER incident]. So yeah, I think it's definitely how individuals act rather than [the Police] as a whole, because I think that in an instance like that [they] can change your whole mind on the Police." (Participant)

Early interactions with police officers, especially during childhood, appear to have shaped individuals' perceptions of the Police. Witnessing the use of force on family or friends or being TASERed themselves during these formative years contributed to their distrust. Analysis of interview data indicated that after experiencing a TASER event participants identified feeling intimidated by the police and the uniform. They described how seeing the uniform triggered anxiety and brought back negative memories, especially during episodes of mental distress.

"It's the whole uniform thing as well. See, most of us get a little bit anxious around a uniformed police officer." (Participant)

The impact of pre-existing health conditions

Several individuals interviewed who had been TASERed reported having pre-existing health conditions. Two participants said they tried to inform the police about their condition before being TASERed but felt ignored, despite repeatedly alerting the officers. The interview data showed particularly poor outcomes for those experiencing a mental health crisis during the TASER incident. One interviewee, who suffers from schizophrenia, described being unable to understand the TASER warnings from the police due to their condition. They also shared that their attempts to inform the officers about their psychotic state were unsuccessful.

"Can you just give me some space. And they're like, 'No, no, no. Put your hands up. Put your hands up'. I was like, 'Nah, fuck off! Fucking hell I'm telling you I'm not good right now. I'm having a psychotic episode. I'm going into my psychosis now'." (Participant)

Participants expressed concern about the police decision to use a TASER, especially when some had health conditions that they felt could have been made worse by the incident. They discussed the potential for serious harm or even death, stressing the importance of greater accountability and awareness from the police.

"They need to be more aware. If you're going to TASER someone, consider what could happen—the person could hit the ground, have a heart attack, or even die. They need to be held more accountable. Just because they have the power to do it ..." (Participant)

One whānau member discussed their concern that if their child was to be TASERed again with the heart condition they have, it could be life threatening. They were concerned that the physical trauma might be more pronounced in a young person due to their smaller size.

"The reality is my son lives with tachycardia. So, in fact, he's probably more at risk of harm from TASERing. So yeah, so absolutely upset, and now I fear greatly because of his tachycardia disorder, that if anything like that was to be repeated, it could set off a heart attack." (Participant)

This parent discussed how police saw their child's behaviour as non-compliant and argumentative rather than influenced by their diagnosed neuro condition. They had offered to talk to local police about their teenager's condition after interaction with Police, but their offer was not taken up. This response left the whānau member feeling that police were not open to improving their understanding of their teenager and how to deal with them.

"Like if you can't see it, you won't see it. You just see a badly behaved [person], you make the assumption, this person is violently behaved, outrageously ... wants to harm us, therefore we better use our equipment. Whereas if you actually understand that they're dysregulated, they're anxious, they're having a mental health crisis. You've got a 14-year-old who had been assessed

as having the brain of an eight or nine-year-old at that time, in terms of his reasoning capacity. Who would TASER an eight or nine-year-old?" (Participant)

Whānau described how the experience of being TASERed was deeply traumatic for their teenager. They worried that it had led to long-term psychological effects such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and an ongoing fear of authority figures.

Ethical and moral issues of TASERing

A recurring theme across the data was the feeling that police were ethically wrong in using force against individuals who were vulnerable, young, or mentally unwell. The whānau member described how the incident had led to distrust in police. It had impacted their interactions and relationships with the State entities as their teenager was in respite care at the time of the incident.

"I had no contact from the Police, no contact from the social worker. There were three agencies involved. There was a disability agency. None of them mentioned it. That suggests to me a complete cover up, doesn't it? That they knew that was wrong. And they also knew that I would hit the roof. Our son is very triggered by any interchanges with police. So his anxiety levels go up massively, even when they're being friendly and walking past him. But he's so triggered that he always thinks they're coming to get him." (Participant)

Finding out that their child had been TASERed especially without notification, caused significant distress within the family, leading them to question the role of the Police in keeping the community safe.

"Rage... Rage, anger, shock, horror. Just like, which country are we living in here? Is this Aotearoa or am I back in a country that abuses human rights?" (Participant)

Another participant was 15 or 16 years old at the

time of their TASER incident. They indicated that they did not really understand what was happening at the time, due to their age and cognitive development. Reflecting on the incident they felt that it was unfair to have been TASERed at such a young age.

"Well, looking back at it now, they knew I was that young, and they should have used that amount of force on a person at that age. Yeah, 15 or 16 ... (as) a full-grown man, I understand, but to a young teenager, you know their brains probably not developed, you don't have to use that amount of force." (Participant)

A researcher and advocate discussed their concerns that TASER was viewed as only having short term effects, however there were likely long-term impacts regarding public trust and confidence in Police in New Zealand.

"There's a huge blind spot there where people think getting TASERed is just a little electric shock for a while, but there are short-term and long-term effects. I'm quite surprised no one's even mentioned the potential detriment to people suffering from mental health issues in a long-term manner because, PTSD and inability to recover from the traumatic experience of being TASERed and admitted to hospital, or in a psychotic episode and TASERed in the community and already fearing police. For example, just means that that's going to perpetuate the lack of engagement with those services and their level of trust." (Stakeholder)

Police communication and training

Interviews revealed significant concerns regarding police communication and training, particularly in relation to understanding community needs, addressing neurodiversity and responding to mental health crises. Interviewees unanimously agreed that police needed enhanced training to improve their communication skills and develop a deeper understanding of the impact of complex health needs on behaviour. These insights highlighted the importance of bridging the gap

between police practices and the diverse needs of the communities they serve

“I do think they need more training and need to be clearer about what is happening. People need to understand what is going to happen, if you don’t know what’s happening it’s an instant shock.”
(Participant)

Four of the participants interviewed reported they were experiencing a mental health condition that impacted their ability to make decisions when they were stressed, under pressure or experiencing an ‘episode.’ They felt that this impacted on their interaction with police and the response of the police. In some incidents participants felt that if they were approached differently the incident may have ended differently. Some described feeling as though they were ‘under threat’ at the time and this exacerbating the situation.

“It’s that whole thing about being co-regulated. If you understand the situation and a person, you can offer co-regulation. Whereas, they’re just going threat, threat, threat, fight, fight, threat, threat.” (Participant)

Discussion

The purpose of this case study is to better understand the experiences of people who have lived experience of the impact of being TASERed, and to consider the implications this has for equity and fairness in police decision making. There are limitations to this study including the small sample size, however issues raised in the interviews have implications for police practices, including consideration of the impacts on individuals, those in mental distress, Māori, and youth.

Implications of being TASERed

Participants reported various consequences of being TASERed by police. The most severe impacts included a facial fracture and chipped teeth resulting from falling forward, as well as cognitive and psychological effects. Many interviewees also disclosed pre-existing mental health and other medical conditions that may have been exacerbated by TASER deployment. Given the severity of harm described in this small sample, it is crucial for police to carefully consider the proportionality of force when justifying TASER use.

The 2023 Tactical Options Report acknowledges this concern, stating that there is "growing recognition that some people may be especially vulnerable, and this vulnerability may exacerbate the risks of using force against them" (New Zealand Police, 2024, p.42). New Zealand Police policy requires officers, when

safe and practical, to gather information about potential vulnerabilities before using force. These vulnerabilities include factors such as age, size, and mental health, among others. Indicating New Zealand Police require officers to consider the impact of the force used on potentially vulnerable individuals, however the Phase 1 Report into TASER use indicates that this consideration was not apparent in the officer event reports (Ihi Research, 2024).

This study indicates that being TASERed has an impact on the psychological wellbeing of participants particularly immediately post event. Participants reported cognitive effects such as "brain fog," difficulty thinking, memory loss, drowsiness, and confusion immediately after being TASERed. These findings align with a study by Kane and White (2016), which found that TASER exposure caused statistically significant reductions in verbal learning and memory. Participants in that study showed short-term

dementia like declines in cognitive function, raising concerns about their ability to understand their rights during interrogations. The interviewees in this case study echoed this, suggesting that individuals need time to recover cognitively after a TASER incident before being questioned. It appears from this study the health support provided post TASER incident is variable.

Implications for individuals in mental distress

This study identifies implications for individuals who were experiencing mental distress. Earlier in this project, analysis of TASER data identified high rates of mental distress exhibited or reported in TASER events. While not all of these events were mental health callouts or were identified clinically as mentally unwell, police reported many individuals were exhibiting significant mental distress (Ihi Research, 2024). In this study four of the six individuals indicated that they were experiencing mental distress or a mental health event, at the time of being TASERed. Taken together these findings underscore the critical importance of police vigilance, continuous monitoring, and a thorough understanding of the potential implications and harm that could result from using force on individuals who are in a vulnerable mental state.

This is especially important when individuals are harmed by TASERs as a preventive measure to stop them from harming (or risking harm to) themselves by some other means (Billing, 2024). In this study participants felt that officers could have used less force in the interaction, particularly those who were experiencing a mental health crisis at the time of incident. In the 2023 Tactical Options Report, there were 9,763 police force actions taken to prevent suicide or self-harm, or action taken under the Mental Health (Compulsory Assessment and Treatment) Act 1992 (New Zealand Police, 2023, p. 16). While a small proportion of these incidents involved the use of a TASER the rate at which Police are responding to mental health events is concerning.

Several participants in this study reported feeling that TASERs were used on them to enforce compliance rather than to counter assaultive behaviour. This perception aligns with findings from a review conducted by the Independent Office for Police Conduct (IOPC) in the United Kingdom, which identified concerns about potential TASER use for compliance purposes in nearly a quarter of the cases examined (Independent Office for Police Conduct, 2021).

It is crucial to recognise that non-compliance does not necessarily indicate full cognitive understanding of the situation and refusal to given instructions. The United Kingdom IOPC review (Independent Office for Police Conduct, 2021) uncovered evidence that some officers failed to identify and consider how vulnerabilities, such as mental health issues or language barriers, might affect an individual's behaviour and their ability to understand and comply with instructions. These findings highlight the importance of officers accurately assessing situations and considering potential vulnerabilities before resorting to TASER use.

Implications for Māori health

It is well documented that individuals who may have co-morbid health conditions, are more likely to suffer from ill-effects of being TASERed (Zipes, 2012; VanMeenan et al. 2013). This is particularly concerning for Māori men, as they are both more susceptible to poor health and to being TASERed, demonstrating the connection between health and justice equity.

Māori men face significant health disparities compared to non-Māori New Zealanders, experiencing higher rates of chronic conditions that could potentially increase their vulnerability to adverse effects from TASER use. Māori men are more than twice as likely to die from cardiovascular disease and 1.5 times more likely to be hospitalised for heart disease, and 1.4 times more likely to have high blood pressure compared to non-Māori adults (Heart Research Institute NZ, 2024). Additionally, Māori have a higher lifetime prevalence of mental

health disorders, with 31.3% experiencing anxiety disorders, 26.5% substance use disorders, and 24.3% mood disorders (O'Brien et al., 2010). These underlying health conditions could potentially exacerbate the physiological stress caused by TASER deployment (Brasholt et al., 2020).

In addition, the prevalence of these chronic conditions among Māori emerges at earlier ages, meaning they experience a disproportionate impact on both quality and quantity of life (Gurney et al., 2020). Māori men die on average eight years earlier than European/other men (Te Whatu Ora, 2023). This health inequity intersects with use of force inequity, as Māori are overrepresented in use of force events by police and are potentially more susceptible to health impacts (New Zealand Police, 2023). While current research suggests that the risk of adverse health outcomes due to TASER exposure is generally low, as stated previously, most studies have been conducted on healthy, physically fit individuals in controlled settings (Baliatsas et al., 2021). The combination of higher rates of chronic disease and increased likelihood of experiencing police use of force, including TASER, creates a compounded risk for Māori men.

Pacific men face similar health challenges and disparities as Māori men when compared to the European/other population in New Zealand (Te Whatu Ora, 2023). The combination of health disparities and overrepresentation in TASER incidents may put Māori and Pacific men at a higher risk of harm, reflecting both systemic inequities in policing and broader health inequities. This situation underscores the critical need to address both health and justice disparities in New Zealand to ensure equitable outcomes.

Implications for youth

This study involved two participants under the age of 16 at the time they were TASERed: one who was interviewed and another who was the child of a whānau member interviewed. Although limited, research suggests that TASERs may have more severe effects on younger individuals (Kroll et al., 2019; Zipes, 2012). For neurodiverse youth, these risks are particularly concerning due to heightened sensitivity. As noted by Sprague et al.

(2018), "the intense pain and muscle contractions caused by TASERs could be especially traumatic for individuals with autism spectrum disorders or other neurodevelopmental conditions" (p. 78). Moreover, TASER use could worsen pre-existing conditions in neurodiverse youth, as individuals with mental health issues or developmental disorders are more prone to negative outcomes from police use of force (Copenhaver & Tewksbury, 2019).

Research indicates that TASER-related stress on youth under 16, whose brains are still developing, could have long-term consequences. For example, Gau and Mosher (2017) found that youth exposed to police use of force, including TASERs, reported higher levels of anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress than those who had not. In this study, young participants described ongoing psychological impacts such as increased anxiety and fear of the police. While most police interactions are positive, adverse encounters or negative perceptions of police contact can detrimentally affect various aspects of children's and youth's well-being. (St John et al. 2022).

The study also raises concerns about the ability of youth to understand or follow police instructions, particularly those who are neurodiverse. Cognitive impairments can lead to miscommunication which in turn can escalate situations unnecessarily (O'Brien et al., 2011). Behaviours like avoiding eye contact, stimming or repetitive movements, associated with autism spectrum disorder, may be misinterpreted as signs of guilt or non-compliance (Wallace et al., 2021). Consequently, there is a need for specialised police training to recognise neurodiversity, adapt communication strategies, and use appropriate de-escalation techniques (Copenhaver & Tewksbury, 2019).

Using TASERs on children, especially those in state care, as in the case of one youth in this study, raises human rights concerns. The state has a duty to protect vulnerable children, and TASER use may undermine this responsibility, particularly when less harmful options are available. Children in care, who are already more likely to encounter police, may be at greater risk of experiencing police force, potentially worsening existing trauma (Lambie & Randell, 2013).

This issue also raises compliance issues with international human rights standards, including the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), which emphasises protecting children from violence. The UNCRC's Article 19 explicitly states that children should be protected from all forms of physical or mental violence, abuse, or neglect (United Nations, 1989). The UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has recommended prohibiting TASER use on children, as seen in its 2016 observations on the United Kingdom (UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, 2016). Furthermore, the United Nations Guidance on Less-Lethal Weapons in Law Enforcement (2020) stresses the need for stringent restrictions on the use of such weapons on children (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 2020).

Overall, using TASERs on children, especially those in state care, appears inconsistent with international human rights standards, which prioritise protecting children from harm and acting in their best interests. Police should reconsider TASER use on minors and seek alternative, non-violent approaches in situations involving children under the age of 18.

Implications for trust in police

Research from the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand consistently demonstrates a strong link between police use of force and public trust and confidence in police (Bradford et al., 2017; Murphy et al. 2014; O'Brien et al. 2019). Studies show that when individuals perceive police use of force as fair and justified, it positively influenced their trust in police. Conversely, perceptions of excessive or unjustified force significantly eroded public confidence. Research from New Zealand supports these findings, highlighting the importance of perceived fairness in police actions, including use of force, in shaping public trust (O'Brien et al. 2019).

In this study all participants believed that their TASER event could have been resolved with less force, and in some cases, they felt they had been treated unfairly or were profiled because of their

ethnicity. Participants discussed how this changed their perception of police including a reluctance to seek help, increased fear and anxiety. In addition, the whānau member interviewed similarly described a loss of trust, increased anxiety when around police, and concern that their child may be treated unfairly.

The use of TASERs in these cases has had a clear impact on trust in the police, extending beyond the individuals involved to their whānau. Research shows that mistrust of the police is particularly prevalent among Māori, who report longstanding issues of distrust and overrepresentation in the criminal justice system (Jackson, 1988; Tauri, 2009; Tauri, 2014). This mistrust is not only directed at individual officers but also towards the police as an institution, which can affect the willingness of Māori to seek help from or cooperate with the police (New Zealand Police & Te Puni Kōkiri, 1998). The misuse of force exacerbates this mistrust and further undermines relationships between Māori and police.

² According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), a child is defined as any human being below the age of 18 years, unless under the law applicable to the child, majority is attained earlier.

Advice

1. Consider prohibiting TASER use on children. In exceptional cases where TASER deployment is unavoidable an independent review to ensure children's rights and well-being are protected should be undertaken.
2. Implement in-service and ongoing training on the use of TASERS on individuals with mental health conditions, in mental distress or who are neurodiverse, emphasising de-escalation and safe intervention strategies for individuals experiencing mental health conditions.
3. Ensure TASER training addresses the risk of serious injury from falls caused by muscle incapacitation and establish consistent procedures for responding to TASER-related injuries.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration

between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhivai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Police Innovation Case

De-escalation

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction data, Complaint

data as well as use of force data as it related to TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

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Research Team

Dr Catherine Leonard (2024). De-escalation. Phase Two Innovation Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

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Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study was initiated to explore the use of de-escalation techniques in policing, particularly as they relate to issues of equity and fairness within policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In Phase One, we analysed the use of force (TASER) data and noted that some police officers were particularly effective at de-escalating potential conflict situations. The Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) Panel wanted to further investigate de-escalation to understand how the New Zealand Police are working towards increasing their capability to de-escalate situations with diverse communities. Five interviews were held with Police participants from across Aotearoa New Zealand.

The following themes have been collated from five interviews:

- The nature of policing and need for de-escalation training.
- Pre-service Police communication/de-escalation training.
- Cultural considerations.
- The importance of in-service training.
- Barriers: time and resources.

Participants were identified for their experience and knowledge of Police tactical options and communication. All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. It is important to note that this is not an evaluation of Police communication and de-escalation but an exploratory case study. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing, the purpose of the UPD research. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

A distinguishing characteristic of Police is the mandated authority to use force against citizens to enforce the law; it is also one of the most controversial aspects of policing (Bittner, 1974; Fyfe, 1988). New Zealand evidence indicates the overall prevalence of use of force during all citizen interactions is very low between 95 and 99 percent of all encounters are resolved without force and when force is used the overall severity is low. (New Zealand Police, 2023).

However, evidence of inequity in police application of force internationally has led police, particularly in the United States to search for policies, training, equipment, and techniques that can make police-citizen encounters safer, more equitable, and more effective for all parties involved (Isaza, 2020). De-escalation training has been widely promoted as best practice to reduce harms during police citizen encounters, particularly as it relates to police use of force (Engel et al., 2020; Isaza, 2020; PERF, 2016; President's Task Force, 2015;).

Analysis of literature indicates that there is a paucity of Aotearoa New Zealand based research, therefore this literature review draws on research primarily from the United Kingdom and the United States. International proponents of de-escalation training argue that it will reduce the rate at which police use force by providing officers with better skills to resolve conflict without the use of force, particularly during highly confrontational situations (Olivia et al., 2010).

Use of de-escalation tactics has been noted as being particularly important for marginalised communities as it may improve conflict relationships, trust and legitimacy (Engel et al., 2020). Locally and internationally, and ethnic minorities continue to express concern about what they see as police using overly aggressive tactics and unfairly targeting minorities with excessive force (Neilson, 2020; Nichols, 2024) which in turn creates mistrust of the system within that community (Daniels Shapell, 2019, p. 41). However, at the same time there is increasing concern about the safety of police officers in our communities (New Zealand Police, 2022).

Critics of de-escalation training have suggested that employing de-escalation tactics could potentially jeopardise officer safety either by prompting slow reactions in volatile scenarios or by advocating methods that are counter to traditional use-of-force training principles (Blake, 2017; Gilbert, 2017; Jackman, 2016). While there is no research to validate these concerns, equally there is limited research demonstrating

how de-escalation training might reduce the use of force in the community (Engel et al., 2022). Internationally, very little is known about ‘the impact of de-escalation training on police citizen interactions, including the effect on the frequency and severity of officer’s use of force and/or subsequent injuries to citizens or officers during these interactions’ (Engel et al., 2022, p. 201). Evidence from the United States demonstrates that even when implemented, there is wide variation in the types of de-escalation training offered to police (Todak & White, 2019). This is important because variation in training makes the application of findings from evaluations difficult to generalise (Isaza, 2020).

However, research suggests that certain types of police training may be associated with the tendency to use force. A United States study found that if training hours focused on using force it actually increased the likelihood of fatal shootings (O’Guinn, 2024). Similarly, Dayley (2016) found officers are primed to use force rather than de-escalation options due to an overemphasis on force during training sessions. In this research, survey results showed an 8.9 to 1 ratio of training hours on force versus de-escalation. Dayley (2016) recommended that police trainers strive to achieve parity in training hours across both force and de-escalation topics. They also recommended that scenario-based training be emphasised to provide experiences to draw upon, and that the scenarios mirror real-world probabilities (Dayley, 2016).

In the most comprehensive review of de-escalation research, Engel et al. (2020b) identified 64 de-escalation training evaluations. The vast majority examined effectiveness in medical or mental health contexts. Since 2020, researchers have conducted only very few studies examining the influence of de-escalation training on officer behaviour. Four relied on the Integrating Communications, Assessment, and Tactics (ICAT) de-escalation training programme (Engel et al., 2020b, 2022; Goh, 2021; Isaza et al., 2019), with another using the Tact, Tactics, and Trust training (Wolfe et al., 2020). Evaluating the ICAT model, Engel et al. (2020b) found statistically significant

reductions in use of force incidents (-28%), citizen injuries (-26.3%) and officer injuries (-36.0%) in the post training period. The analyses show robust, consistent and immediate impacts on use of force counts after training (Engel et al., 2020a, p. 200). Research on the ICAT approach indicates that officers found de-escalation skills particularly valuable in defusing encounters with individuals in emotional or behavioural crises (Isaza, 2020). Officers reported increased confidence in handling critical incidents following training, illustrating a positive shift in their preparedness and approach. While it appears that ICAT training had an immediate positive effect on officer attitudes towards the use of force, the effects were noted to dissipate with time (Isaza, 2020).

Across the five United States based studies, the researchers found a statistically significant change in officers’ perceptions in how they should act towards and react to citizens. However, only three (Engel et al., 2020b, 2022; Goh, 2020) examined how the training affected use of force patterns, with all showing statistically significant declines in uses of force (Steele et al., 2020). Available evidence suggests that supervisors may effectively influence use of force priorities among officers. Engel et al. (2020a) found that supervisors who were more receptive to ICAT training on average had more positive perceptions of supervising ICAT skills of their subordinates compared to supervisors who were less receptive to the ICAT training programme (Engel et al., 2020a). Research shows that officers often emulate the behaviours and priorities of their supervisor therefore, these leaders provide an important model for officers (McManus et al., 2019).

A review of impact research in the United States indicates that de-escalation training/programmes have been found to be successful when aimed at target groups such as youth and individuals who are mentally unwell. As an example, Mehari et al. (2021) evaluated a police training workshop on de-escalating situations with trauma-exposed youth using a participatory action framework. The mixed-methods research involved 98

police officers and recruits aimed at increasing the knowledge of adolescent development, trauma impact, and de-escalation skills. Results showed increased knowledge about adolescents, improved self-efficacy, and decreased anxiety among participants when dealing with youth (Mehari et al., 2021). The study concludes that brief interventions can effectively enhance police officers' interactions with adolescents, suggesting further research to determine if these improvements lead to reduced use of force in real-world situations (Mehari et al., 2021).

Similarly, Compton et al. (2022) reported that Crisis Intervention Team (CIT) training in the United States had significant positive impacts on police officers' interactions with individuals experiencing mental health crises. CIT-trained officers demonstrated improved knowledge about mental illnesses, more positive attitudes, increased self-efficacy, reduced stigma, enhanced de-escalation skills, and better referral decisions compared to non-CIT officers (Compton et al., 2022). Studies from the United States found that CIT training improves officers' preparedness, ability to identify and respond appropriately to individuals with serious mental illnesses, and comfort in interacting with consumers and their families (Bahora et al., 2010; Wells & Schafer, 2006). Additionally, CIT training has been shown to reduce social distance stigma towards individuals with mental illnesses and improve officers' attitudes regarding the aggressiveness of people with schizophrenia while also increasing support for local treatment programmes (Watson et al., 2017).

Changing police use of force policies and training to incorporate de-escalation tactics is one of the most routinely recommended police reform measures internationally (Engel

et al., 2022). However, de-escalation training for police officers is reportedly challenging to implement. Financial constraints coupled with the lack of robust scientific evidence mean that implementation is often suboptimal (Isaza, 2020). In addition, regular refresher courses are required as research emphasises that skills learned in initial training diminish without reinforcement (Isaza, 2020).

Executive support and recognition are crucial for sustaining the effectiveness of de-escalation training. Isaza (2020) recommends that police leadership reinforce the benefits of de-escalation by highlighting and rewarding officers who successfully manage crisis situations, thereby incentivising the application of learned skills. Furthermore, police executives should identify leaders and mentors to promote de-escalation principles and tactics among officers. It's important to note that training alone, without appropriate corresponding policies and accountability structures, will not result in the necessary reform to effect change at the street level (Isaza, 2020). This requires the development of evidence-based methods to measure the use of de-escalation techniques and understand any factors that may inhibit officers from effectively applying these skills (Isaza, 2020, p. 11).

Ultimately, research indicates that effective de-escalation training holds promise in reducing the reliance on forceful interventions during police-citizen interactions, potentially enhancing safety outcomes for both officers and the public (Engel et al., 2020a). International research indicates that de-escalation training not only saves lives by reducing injuries but also addresses critical issues of police legitimacy and public trust, making it a vital enhancement in contemporary policing strategies (Isaza, 2020).

Interview findings

The following section includes a collation of interview findings across five key themes and a final discussion including a summary of findings and advice to the Police.

The nature of policing in Aotearoa New Zealand and the need for de-escalation training

Policing has undergone significant changes over the years, with interview participants reporting a notable increase in the demands placed on frontline staff. Officers now face more complex situations, particularly involving mental health and family harm incidents. Experienced officers interviewed for this case noted that when they were trained, de-escalation was not a priority, but they now believe it has become essential as officers frequently encounter individuals in crisis.

“As a frontline police officer, ... de-escalation when I started, wasn't really something that was ... let's just be honest and say ... was (n't) encouraged.” (Participant)

The current training and experience levels of frontline staff were areas of concern for the officers interviewed. Many frontline officers in New Zealand are relatively young and inexperienced, often only a few years out of Police College. This leads to situations where new recruits are mentored by slightly more experienced officers who themselves may lack comprehensive training in de-escalation. The experience of the frontline highlights the need for better training and support systems to ensure that officers are adequately prepared for the challenges they face on the job.

“The people that they're working with have probably only gone through the college two years ahead of them, if you're lucky, frontline staff are very, very young, very, very inexperienced. It's the blind leading the blind. So, they weren't trained well. They don't know what they're doing. So, when the raw recruit comes out and learns off them, the communications poor.” (Participant)

Officers discussed how over time the emphasis of policing has shifted from a command-and-control approach to one that requires

understanding and managing sensitive situations, particularly when dealing with domestic disputes and mental health crises. De-escalation techniques were seen as particularly important when dealing with individuals who were mentally unwell and who may not respond well to traditional command methods. The shift in policing strategies reflects the changing nature of the job and the recognition that a more nuanced approach is necessary for effective policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Nine themes/techniques recurred in the interviews regarding the importance of de-escalation.

1. Lowering emotions and realising rationality

Participants described the aim of de-escalation as ‘lowering a person’s heightened emotions and increasing their rational thinking, leading to better decision-making’. Participants reported the process requires time and effective communication, simply telling someone to “calm down” is ineffective.

2. Communication is the first tactical tool

Communication with citizens is a key tactical option within the Police framework, participants noted it was often overlooked in favour of more immediate physical responses. However, they also noted spending time talking to de-escalate a situation can reduce the need for force and save significant paperwork time.

3. Using equipment to de-escalate when necessary

Participants reported there is a delicate balance between using communication and physical force. Sometimes presenting a show of force such as a TASER, can act as a de-escalation tool by making individuals aware of potential consequences. Participants stated this is most effective when accompanied with de-escalating/supportive language.

4. Building trust through communication

Participants described the importance of explaining what will happen next in reducing fear and resistance. For example, reassuring a person about the process and offering small comforts can significantly calm a volatile situation.

5. De-escalation in community and protest situations

De-escalation techniques are not limited to individual interactions but are also vital in managing community protests and conflicts. Participants noted the importance of both immediate (in-crisis) and long-term (relationships with groups – such as gang, protest groups) de-escalation approaches. Participants described how establishing relationships with communities can pre-empt potential conflict situations.

6. Initial engagement matters

Participants described how an initial interaction with an individual can set the tone for the entire encounter. They noted the importance of using de-escalation techniques from the beginning of an incident to help break down barriers and reduce the automatic heightened response often triggered by the police attending a crisis, particularly when in police uniform.

7. Understanding crisis escalation

Participants discussed the importance of recognising that people in crisis and are on a continuum of escalating emotions. Intervening effectively requires understanding the reasons/motivations for the escalation and providing a circuit breaker.

8. Active listening to understand

Active listening involves truly hearing and understanding what a person in crisis is saying, participants noted is essential for building rapport and influencing a change in situation. Actively listening not only calms individuals but

also helps in identifying subtle cues and threats that might be missed otherwise.

9. Voice tone, cadence and volume

Participants discussed how communication techniques such as modulating tone, cadence, and volume can significantly impact the interaction, preventing escalation and fostering cooperation. The ability to recognise the right moment to take control comes with experience. For individuals experiencing mental health crises, the way in which police communicate is crucial as it provides reassurance and clarity in chaotic situations.

Overall, the interviews demonstrated the importance of nuanced, empathetic communication in policing, highlighting the role of communication in preventing conflict and ensuring better outcomes during critical incidents. All participants stressed the importance of comprehensive communication and de-escalation strategies in police training, particularly for interactions with individuals in crisis. Recruits must be trained to recognise that people they encounter are often in heightened emotional states, which can impair rational thinking and decision-making. As one instructor noted,

"A lot of the time the people we deal with have got heightened emotions and their rational thinking isn't where it could be or should be. What we try to do is we want to lower their emotionality and raise their rationality because people are less emotional, when people are more rational, they make better decisions." (Participant)

Participants stated training should include practical exercises that teach officers how to actively listen and respond to the subtle cues indicating a person's emotional and psychological state. Examples were given distinguishing between different types of threats and using appropriate de-escalation tools such as the importance of communicating when presenting a TASER, being clear about what is happening, giving forward facing instructions,

and the importance of listening but also acting confidentially and humanely.

“There is definitely a need for the tactical training for options, but sometimes I think we are too quick to use them. And as I've said, ... the five minutes you spend, extra five minutes you spend talking to somebody could save you an hour or more of paperwork.” (Participant)

Interviewees discussed the need for de-escalation training to include a mix of communication skills, empathy, and situational judgement to effectively manage crises and reduce the likelihood of escalation. Using de-escalation techniques consistently can help break down barriers between police and the community, shifting the focus away from ‘the threat of a uniform’ and reducing the heightened responses that often accompany police presence.

Police communication/de-escalation training

Communication and de-escalation training at the Police College is taught within the tactical options training, which includes empty-handed control tactics, OC spray, TASER use, and handcuffing. The training is designed around the tactical options framework, the TENR threat assessment, and communication techniques¹. Instructors emphasised that communication should be central in the tactical options framework, yet it is often overlooked.

“People lose sight of that ... communication should always be number one.” (Participant)

At Police College, recruits undergo four lessons focused on the importance of communication including body language, tone, and respectful interaction. These lessons highlight principles of dealing with difficult and emotional people. Instructors reported that the practical application of these skills is often limited by the current training structure and scenario designs.

They raised concerns about the effectiveness and consistency of the training, noting that there is a lack of robust evidence base informing police training in de-escalation. Without research and an analysis of best practice, instructors believed the training may fail to equip officers with the necessary skills to manage high-stress situations effectively:

“The de-escalation is only roughly 8 to 10 hours of the nearly 90 hours of defensive tactics that we deliver ... we teach it, we deliver it, and like all our training, it's just an introduction. They don't get a lot of chance or an opportunity to practice those skills in a training environment.” (Participant)

Participants reported that the current training programme does not provide enough practical application and realistic scenarios to effectively learn de-escalation techniques. Despite an increase in tactical communication training hours, there is a perception that the training still only pays lip service to tactical communication. The Police pre-service programme is heavily time-constrained, leaving little room for recruits to practice and refine their de-escalation skills. Additionally, instructors, who are not always experts in communication do not always emphasise the importance of the training or convey the necessary skills effectively. There is also a lack of coaching and assessment to ensure recruits can apply what they have learned.

Interviews with police trainers highlighted that while recruits are informed about unconscious bias, they often lack practical exercises to actively address and mitigate these biases.

“They get told about unconscious bias throughout training, but when they come to me for this lesson, they've never actually done any exercises or anything to try and draw that bias out.” (Participant)

Additionally, there is uncertainty about the content in the diversity and cultural training programme and why this might be important when teaching communication skills.

¹ An overview of the programme can be found in Appendix 2.

"I think they get that training around the diversity, around the culture stuff in this new 20-week programme. I haven't seen it personally, so I'm not sure what it looks like." (Participant)

Participants noted that continued training in communication and de-escalation was disproportionate to other force based tactical options.

"The current FST (Frontline Safety Training) which is the follow on from the FSED (Frontline Safety Enhanced in Districts) is exceptionally heavily focused on tactical options such as OC Spray, TASER and Firearms... 99% of the training is based around tactical appointments. When you look at the Tac Comm and De-escalation time on the training ... it pales compared to all other training." (Participant)

Participants stated that to improve de-escalation training more time should be dedicated to practical application involving scenarios designed by experts or video examples of real-life situations using de-escalation techniques. Instructors felt there was a need for more focused training on communication styles and de-escalation techniques tailored to handling people in crisis. Emphasising the importance of effective communication from the outset can prevent the development of bad habits and ensure better interactions between police officers and the community.

There is a call for involving specialists including psychologists, mental health practitioners, and the Police negotiation team in particular, to provide more in-depth, evidence-based practical training, and ensuring recruits are well-equipped to handle real-world situations effectively. The police negotiation teams have over 130 trained negotiators who are regularly refreshed in their training in de-escalation, across the country. They were identified as an underutilised resource that could be used to deliver district training.

Cultural considerations

Participants indicated that for police officers to ensure effective and respectful interactions with diverse communities they had to have some cultural knowledge. Participants highlighted the importance of engaging with individuals in a culturally appropriate manner such as starting a conversation by establishing who you are and where you come from rather than using a formal police introduction. Understanding the trauma and historical context impacting Māori was seen as important by some participants as failing to acknowledge these aspects could lead to escalation rather than de-escalation. The significance of the initial interaction cannot be overstated; a simple question about someone's background can set the tone for the entire encounter. Moreover, given the multicultural nature of society, officers must be knowledgeable about the specific cultural dynamics of the areas they serve to communicate effectively and avoid misunderstandings.

"To be able to communicate well in a calm, detached manner with Māori requires an understanding of the trauma that has occurred before, because a lot of times, ... it may present as a family harm incident, it may present as a firearms incident or youth and gangs or a shoplifting incident. All of that, it doesn't matter how it presents, it raises its head in different forms. If our people aren't prepared for that conversation, then they brush over it, they try to ignore it because they're not ready for the conversation, and then it just continues to escalate." (Participant)

For this participant recognising the historical trauma and systemic issues that have affected Māori was seen as important for building trust and improving police-community relations. By integrating cultural considerations into their communication practices, participants believed it would go some way in ensuring more effective service delivery for Māori.

The importance of in-service training

Continuous learning and on-the-job training were noted as crucial for police officers to master de-escalation techniques effectively. While communication training at the Police College reportedly provided a foundational understanding of managing rational thinking and controlling physiological responses, the real test they reported came on the frontline. Interviewees noted the importance of mentors who are passionate about de-escalation to provide practical examples and reinforce training concepts. Participants emphasised the importance of regular debriefings of incidents, allowing officers to reflect on their actions, identify areas for improvement, and apply lessons learned to future situations. In addition, they saw role modelling by experienced officers as vital as it reinforces the use of de-escalation tools and communication strategies.

“We need the cops to be trained with techniques, then come out to work and then do stuff and then have that regularly debriefed and examined and reflected on so that they can actually go, ‘I think I didn’t really apply that tool taught in college very well or I did apply that tool and it didn’t work that well for me. I’m not going to use that one so much anymore. I’m going to do this different thing’. And then over time that will make them truly experienced.” (Participant)

Barriers: time and resources

It is clear from interviews that time and resources are critical yet often scarce when implementing de-escalation techniques in the field. Officers expressed that while investing more time and resources into de-escalation training and implementation is ideal, the time and resource pressure in the system means changes are slow and challenging to enact. The tension of time, particularly when dealing with non-criminal mental health or family harm issues, often forced officers to prioritise other pressing demands,

leading to suboptimal outcomes. Additionally, the high volume of calls and limited staffing, such as only three incident cars covering a vast area, exacerbate these challenges. Participants noted that effective de-escalation often required time to allow individuals to calm down whether due to drugs, alcohol, and/or mental health issues. However, the lack of time and resources frequently resulted in situations escalating to physical intervention, which could have been avoided with better support and more time.

“Once you get to a place where things have escalated out of control and there’s no way to bring it back down other than time. But unfortunately, our staff run out of time ... and then, the escalation just becomes physical, and I think that’s when we end up sometimes in a space where there’s no other option, but physical intervention. It’s just sad because I think some ... yeah, unfortunately, things just escalate out of control.” (Participant)

The tension between police officers using force to swiftly resolve interactions with citizens and taking the time to de-escalate situations through communication was reported as a challenge. On one hand, the use of force can provide immediate control over potentially dangerous situations, ensuring the safety of officers and the public. However, this approach can exacerbate tension, leading to a breakdown in trust between the individual and officers. Conversely, defusing a conflict without physical force often takes patience and dialogue. However, this requires more time and may not always be feasible in rapidly evolving, high-risk scenarios. As this participant pointed out - it is not always practicable to de-escalate situations completely, but just enough to ensure force is not required.

“That’s why I say (use) de-escalation because you only need to de-escalate them enough (to arrest them if necessary).” (Participant)

Discussion

While local evidence is sparse, international research suggests that de-escalation training can reduce the use of force incidents, citizen injuries and officer injuries (Engel et al., 2020). Findings from the interviews support claims in the literature that de-escalation training requires time and resource which are limited.

In addition, interviews indicate that the current training lacks an evidence-based foundation, with no integration of research or best practices into the curriculum. Participants recommended that the training should also incorporate essential topics such as unconscious bias, equity, fairness, and effective policing of vulnerable communities. Interview analysis indicates a disconnect between the de-escalation training and other critical content taught in silos at the Police College, including diversity, cultural content and unconscious bias.

Participants interviewed highlighted the importance of de-escalation techniques, particularly when dealing with family harm and mental health cases which are increasingly prevalent. However, there is no involvement of family harm or mental health practitioners in developing the course content, leading to a gap in practical, scenario-based training. Lavoie et

al. (2022) describe a collaborative approach to developing specialised training for frontline officers involving diverse community experts and stakeholders in the co-design and production process. The resulting programme focused on developing core competencies in relational policing, de-escalation, and mental health crisis response. It provided officers with multiple opportunities to practice alternative crisis management strategies in scenarios that might typically lead to the use of force. This approach could be used to transform police training by incorporating community perspectives and emphasising non-violent resolution techniques.

Additionally, findings suggest there are no formal continuous in-service training to support the reinforcement of de-escalation techniques, leaving coaching and feedback highly dependent on individual supervising officers. This lack of a consistent approach results in a fragmented

and inadequate learning system for supporting and reinforcing de-escalation learning among officers. Participants pointed out the need for support from leadership and a cultural shift within the Police force to prioritise de-escalation over more physical and invasive tactics. They acknowledged that while training is crucial, the overall approach to policing must also evolve to support these practices, ensuring that officers are equipped to handle volatile situations calmly and effectively. Bennell et al. (2021) note the importance of securing organisational support for de-escalation training, including policies and accountability structures.

Participants emphasised the importance of communication training for police officers when interacting with diverse populations, particularly given the disproportionate use of force rates across different groups. Effective communication and de-escalation techniques are crucial for ensuring the safety and protecting the rights of all community members, especially those who are mentally unwell, disabled, or neurodiverse (Thacher, 2024). These individuals may react unpredictably or struggle to comply with commands, making it essential for officers to recognise and respond appropriately to such situations (Leydier, 2022). De-escalation and communication training can equip police with the skills to manage challenging encounters, reducing the likelihood of misunderstandings and excessive force (Thacher, 2024). This approach not only promotes fair and respectful treatment in line with legal and ethical standards but also helps alleviate pressure on healthcare and judicial systems. By preventing unnecessary hospitalisations, incarcerations, and legal actions stemming from mishandled health crisis situations, properly trained officers can contribute to more positive outcomes for both individuals and the broader community (Wallace et al., 2022).

Implementing co-designed integrated de-escalation training may contribute to more equitable outcomes for diverse communities including Māori. Māori are over-represented in use of force incidents and lay more use of force complaints than non-Māori (See Phase One UPD Evidence reports). Improving communication may go some way in improving historical and systemic inequities, promote cultural sensitivity, and reduce disparities in policing practice. De-escalation training may strengthen community relations and ultimately contributing to a more just and effective policing system. Research suggests that de-escalation techniques may help rebuild trust by demonstrating respect and understanding, a commitment to reducing harm, and fair and equitable treatment. This case study indicates that co-designed, integrated de-escalation training may be key to achieving more equitable outcomes in policing.

Advice

- 1.** Allocate increased resources for communication and de-escalation training at both the Police College and in each district. Ensure officers have sufficient time to practice these skills, receive ongoing coaching, and recognise that communication training time is as valuable as other tactical options.
- 2.** Implement co-design processes with diverse community stakeholders to develop and integrate specialised training modules. Focus on improving responses and reducing use of force when interacting with diverse populations, including individuals who are mentally unwell, neurodiverse, or from other vulnerable groups.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 descriptive case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration

between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Appendix 2.

Lessons in Tactical Communication at Police College.

The **"TA01 - Introduction to Tactical Communication"** lesson at the Royal New Zealand Police College introduces recruits to the principles and benefits of tactical communication, emphasising its importance for police work. The lesson, which includes a 50-minute classroom session and independent study using a resource book, aims to ensure recruits understand and can explain why tactical communication is used by police. The session includes defining tactical communication, discussing its five foundational principles—dignity, asking rather than telling, providing reasons, offering options, and giving second chances—and its benefits such as enhanced safety, reduced stress, and better public interactions. The training incorporates practical discussions, video analysis, and emphasises professional communication reflective of Police values.

The **"TA02 - Dealing with Difficult People"** lesson at the Royal New Zealand Police College focuses on teaching recruits the principles of tactical communication, particularly in challenging interactions. Over a 50-minute classroom session, recruits learn the benefits of tactical communication in operational settings and are introduced to the AWOCA process—Ask, Why, Options, Confirm, Act—designed to manage difficult subjects fairly and effectively. The session includes an introduction, a review of tactical communication principles, and a detailed explanation of dealing with cooperative, uncooperative, and passive-aggressive individuals. Recruits participate in scenario-based exercises to practice and apply AWOCA, followed by a debrief to discuss what worked, body language considerations, and the benefits of motivational options. The lesson concludes with a summary emphasising the structured use of AWOCA in police operations.

The **"TA03 - Dealing with Abuse and Insults"** lesson at the Royal New Zealand Police College trains recruits in handling abusive and insulting subjects through tactical communication. In a 50-minute classroom session, recruits learn and practice techniques such as venting, blocking, and verbal redirection which are essential for maintaining professionalism and defusing volatile situations. The lesson includes a review of previous tactical communication principles, the AWOCA process, and introduces specific techniques like verbal deflectors, paraphrasing, and showing empathy. Through scenario-based exercises and video analysis, recruits apply these techniques in realistic settings followed by debrief sessions to discuss effectiveness and body language considerations. The session concludes by emphasising the importance of professionalism and integrating these techniques with other communication strategies.

The **"TA09 - Dealing with Emotional or Agitated Subjects"** lesson at the New Zealand Police College focuses on teaching recruits how to effectively use tactical communication to manage individuals in emotional or agitated states. In a 50-minute classroom session, recruits learn to recognise core emotions such as grief, anger, frustration, fear, and embarrassment that influence behaviour. Techniques covered include showing empathy, paraphrasing, deflecting focus, and using a "stuck record" approach. The session includes scenario-based exercises to practice these techniques followed by debriefs to discuss their application and effectiveness. The lesson emphasises understanding emotional influences and applying appropriate communication strategies to de-escalate situations while maintaining professionalism.



Police Innovation Case

Operational Advisory Group

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction data, Complaint

data as well as use of force data as it related to TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

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Research Team

Letitia Goldsmith, John Leonard, & Dr Anne Hynds (2024). Operational Advisory Group. Phase Two Innovation Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. As noted by New Zealand Police the UPD research “is being conducted with Police staff, Māori and communities to ensure it benefits from the experience and insights of public facing staff alongside evidence from those with lived experience” (New Zealand Police, 2024a, para 2).

An essential component of the UPD research is the Operational Advisory Group (OAG). It was formed in early 2022 through the UPD programme to bring together a diverse range of operational police staff. The inclusion of operational police staff was to ensure the research into potential systemic bias was informed by frontline insights, observations, and advice from the Police's operating environment. Police staff who engaged in the OAG come from different districts, and were diverse in rank and role, length of service, gender, ethnicity and perspectives. Importantly the OAG “is chaired by Superintendent Scott Gemmell (Ngāpuhi), Tāmaki Makaurau Director: Partnerships” (New Zealand Police, 2024b, para 3).

This case study was identified as one of the police sites of innovation to better understand police experiences and learning opportunities as they engaged in the OAG. The UPD Panel wanted to further investigate officers' experiences as part of the wider research process to investigate equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Five police officers were interviewed, who had engaged in the OAG process over two years. All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. It is important to note that this is not an evaluation of the OAG but an exploratory case study. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery, which is the purpose of the UPD research. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

To better understand the evidence around the use of the OAG within a wider research partnership involving Police, a short literature scan was undertaken. Several themes emerged from literature analysis.

The need for innovation – investigating equity and fairness in policing delivery

Ensuring community trust and confidence in the New Zealand Police that their policing delivery is fair and equitable is clearly essential. Plenty of studies both within New Zealand and overseas have shown how police use of force and pretextual police stops disproportionately affect Indigenous communities, people of colour, people with disabilities, people experiencing mental distress and LGBTQ+ populations (Baroness Casey Review, 2023; Te Atawhai o Te Ao, 2021; The Network of Public Health Law, 2020; Pihama et al., 2019; Jackson, 1987). Yearby (2020, p. 1) cites Professor Alan Freeman arguing that the law largely “legitimatises the existing social structure and especially class relationships within that structure.” There are increasing calls to critically examine links between policing and justice systems and their impact on health and wellbeing for marginalised communities. Certainly, racial bias and discrimination within policing culture has been studied extensively in the US and UK, however some have argued further research is

needed within New Zealand (Tompson, et al., 2021). In line with Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations there are calls for organisational change within the Police, to “enhance police relationships with Māori” (Te Whaiti & Roguski, 1998, p. 2)

The uniqueness of the OAG within a wider research partnership focused on equity and fairness

A review of existing literature found a dearth of research globally on police innovations such as the OAG and its function within a wider research programme focused on investigating equity and fairness in policing delivery. It is important to note that due to the scarcity of research in this field the majority of reviewed literature originates from the United States and the United Kingdom. Whilst the UPD and OAG could be considered world leading, further research would be needed to determine long-term impacts on policing delivery for equity and fairness, as well as enablers and barriers to organisational change.

Police learning approaches for equity and fairness

There is a growing body of evidence related to procedural justice in policing (Mazerolle & Terrill, 2018; Owens et al., 2018; Weisburd et al., 2022). According to Mazerolle and Terrill (2018) procedural justice policing is key to ensuring equity and fairness in policing delivery. These authors argue procedural justice relies on four key principles underpinning police interactions with the public. These are:

- treating people with respect
- being neutral in their decision making
- conveying trustworthy motives
- giving citizens a voice during the encounter” (Mazerolle & Terrill, 2018, p. 1)

Owens et al. (2018) examined the effectiveness of procedural justice training on police behaviour in Seattle. The training emphasises the importance of understanding the process of police interactions. Owens et al. (2018) findings showed some improvements in officer communication and reduced use of force, particularly with individuals experiencing homelessness. Wood et al. (2020) also found the procedural justice training led to improvements in policing behaviour, resulting in 10% decrease in police use of force and a 6.4% reduction in complaints against officers.

Recently Weisburd et al. (2022) conducted a randomised controlled trial to evaluate intensive training in procedural justice across crime hot spots within targeted American cities. They found procedural justice training can lead to more procedurally just Police behaviour, including less disrespectful treatment of people within high-crime places and reduced crime incidents as reported during the experimental period. However, results indicated little change in regard to community perceptions of procedural justice or police legitimacy within these communities (Weisburd et al., 2022).

Other common training programmes to address discriminatory policing delivery include unconscious or anti bias workshops alongside diversity training (Spencer et al., 2016; Young, 2023). Whilst these training programmes aim to reduce discriminatory police practices and improve community relations, research indicates mixed results (Lai & Lisnek, 2023; Spencer et al., 2016). For example, a comprehensive study was undertaken by Worden et al. (2020) to evaluate the ‘Fair and Impartial Policing’ (FIP) training programme implemented by the New York Police Department. Despite involving over 15,000 officers, study results found no significant correlation between the training and reductions in racial disparities across various policing activating, including stops, searches, use of force and arrests. Similarly, Skogan et al. (2015) conducted an impact evaluation of the Chicago Police Department’s procedural justice training programme. Whilst this study found some positive short-term effects on officer attitudes, there was limited evidence of sustained behavioural changes in policing delivery. Skogan et al. (2015) emphasised that police organisational culture and existing practices often overshadowed the impact of equity training initiatives.

Mazerolle and Terrill (2018) also stress the importance and influence of broader organisational policing cultures “when seeking to implement and assess” the impact of procedural justice training programmes (p. 2). These authors argue that studies that have revealed positive impacts, related to procedural justice training can quickly wear off (Mazerolle & Terrill, 2018; Thompson, 2016). Citing results from Thompson (2016) Mazerolle and Terrill, (2018) argue that training in procedurally just policing will not improve policing delivery “without paying attention to building a culture that embraces the principles of procedural justice, not just for the entire organization, but also for individual workgroups and individual officers” (p. 6). Owens et al. (2018) argue that a key challenge to implementing procedural justice training includes the resistance from some police officers, and in particular middle leaders or supervisors who view it as ‘soft’ policing or

difficult to implement in high-stress situations.

The ability for Police to improve fairness and equity in police behaviour and decision-making is therefore influenced by Police institutional culture. Reynolds (2020, para 12) states that institutional Police culture is impacted by underlying assumptions and acceptable behaviours that can be tolerated within police groups and sub-groups. Over time accepted behaviour mould into cultural norms and these are heavily influenced by police leaders and in particular, middle leaders or supervisors such as Sergeants. As Reynolds notes “How do these members develop these internal assumptions about the organization? They follow their leaders” (Reynolds, 2020, paras 12). Previous studies have found police culture validates the importance of “emotional self-control and masculinity” resulting in considerable pressure on officers to appear tough and not weak or vulnerable (Porter & Lee, 2024, p. 2215). Anything that deviates from these cultural norms can negatively affect careers (ibid)

Police research partnerships

According to Worden and McLean (2022) long-term research partnerships with police organisations can be very beneficial, provided they are founded on trust and openness as well as joint-work leading to practical solutions. Internationally, academics, external researchers and community groups have collaborated with police using a variety of methodologies to investigate and improve policing policy and delivery (Aplin, 2023; Worden & McLean, 2022; Dixon, 2018).

Within Wales and England Independent Advisory Groups (IAGs) were established following the flawed investigation of the murder of a black teenager, Stephen Lawrence, by London’s Metropolitan Police (Dixon, 2018). While they are not research partnerships as such, IAGs were established as a result of evidence highlighting widespread institutional racism within the Police. One goal of the IAGs has been to “improve communications with groups not

usually in dialogue with the police” (Dixon, 2018, p. 688). Dixon argues that IAGs can act as critical friends enabling police to “have access to candid, independent advice on their policies and practices” from diverse community perspectives (2018, p. 695)

In recent years there has been a focus on researching ‘with’ Police, rather than ‘on’ Police (Fyfe, 2015; Goode & Lumsden, 2018). Ensuring a ‘culture of engagement’ is critical to police research partnerships, whereby external researchers work collaboratively with police front-line staff and police research analysts on specific issues (Fyfe, 2015, para 3). Critical to research partnerships is “open and transparent dialogue” (Goode & Lumsden, 2018, p. 87). It is imperative that police research partnerships are “outward facing”, sustained over time” and are “allowed to take the kind of risks inherent in genuine learning” (ibid).

Despite increased focus on participatory and collaborative research approaches, these are often short-term and may not lead to sustained improvements in policing delivery (Goode & Lumsden, 2018). The effectiveness of research partnerships often depends on the willingness of police departments to engage with researchers and implement changes based on findings. Telep and Somers (2019) note that the impact of research on policing practices requires effective management and implementation strategies to translate findings into actionable changes on the ground. External factors outside of the control of police such as sudden government funding cuts and austerity measures can derail important partnership work (Fyfe, 2015). In addition, the “challenge for police research is to find a way of helping inform police decision making at a time when public and political pressures for ‘quick fixes’ are growing” (Fyfe, 2015, para 3).

Conclusion

Ensuring fair and equitable policing delivery is critical for ensuring that all communities have trust and confidence in New Zealand Police. Ihi Research's UPD Phase 1 report has found evidence of unfair treatment, in particular that Māori are disproportionately subject to force and disproportionately prosecuted by law enforcement compared to NZ Europeans.

Whilst unconscious bias training and diversity workshops are popular amongst police departments, international research indicates mixed results and a lack of impact over time. In contrast, studies examining procedural justice training have shown promise in improving officer communication and reducing use of force. Yet the long-term impacts of such training are not yet known. Police institutional cultures play a significant role in shaping officer behaviour and decision-making over time.

Long-term research partnerships between police organisations and researchers can be beneficial in investigating and improving policing policy and delivery. These partnerships, if founded on trust and openness can lead to practical solutions. The effectiveness of research partnerships depends on the willingness of police to commit to the process, to engage with researchers and implement changes based on findings.

A review of existing literature found a dearth of research on Police innovations such as the OAG and its function within a wider research partnership with New Zealand Police focused on investigating equity and fairness in policing delivery. In this regard the UPD and OAG can be considered world leading, however this partnership has yet to be evaluated.



Interview findings

To further investigate the impact of the OAG, within the UPD programme, semi-structured interviews were conducted with five police officers who had engaged in the OAG. Through analysis of the interview data, the following themes were identified:

- Engaging in the OAG: A rare and unique experience.
- The power of listening to voices not typically heard.
- Leadership for fairness and equity.
- Impacts on behaviour and decision-making.
- Concerns raised – where to from here?

The following section explores these results and presents a final discussion with key recommendations.

Engaging in the OAG: A rare and significant learning experience

Interview analysis revealed that for these participants, being a member of the OAG was a transformative experience that had profound impacts on their personal and professional lives. Participants explained that the OAG had provided officers with a rare psychologically safe space, where they could openly and vulnerably discuss career struggles, personal impacts and/or confront how they may have lost their sense of purpose over time. For some their engagement in the OAG was the most valuable and transformative learning experience of their careers.

Critically, the OAG meetings cultivated a safe space for vulnerability. Officers could openly discuss their most difficult days and how incidents have personally and professionally impacted them. Enabling conversations around equity and fairness in policing delivery that was based on police data was both confronting and empowering. By bringing together a diverse group of officers and being facilitated by outside researchers, the OAG facilitated deeper understanding and appreciation for what each member brought to the discussion.

“So it has morphed as an environment where people feel that they can say what their worst day in police was and how it's affected them, which has opened a discussion around equity and a discussion around fairness. Because when you've got that and it's individually affecting you, it may be very different. You may see exactly the same thing as your work colleague right here, but the impact is very different. And so there's automatically an equity element to that.” (Participant)

A contributing factor for these participants was the focus on establishing relationships of trust that enhanced the cohesion of the group. The leadership style of the OAG Chair Scott Gemmell and his insistence on using Maori principles to guide group processes has been viewed as a key enabler. In particular the focus on whakawhanaungatanga was seen by participants as vital for building the cohesive dynamic and an integral part in the success of the group.

“... a Māori kaupapa seems to work ... things like whanaungatanga if it's done in a really natural way, letting people just speak to their own perspectives, ... it can be quite powerful.” (Participant)

The power of listening to voices not typically heard

Participants who were interviewed appreciated being part of the OAG. They described the experience as unique and ‘eye-opening’ and not something that was usual practice within New Zealand Police. It was unusual for officers of different rank and status to meet together over time and collectively reflect on evidence that emphasised diverse community perspectives related to fairness and equity within policing delivery.

“I've never had the opportunity or the knowledge that the OAG has given me, just looking at it from other people's perspectives.” (Participant)

It was particularly unusual to have candid discussions with each other without feeling the need to be defensive. When officers felt their perspectives were genuinely valued and they could contribute meaningfully, it made the OAG opportunity feel special and worthwhile.

“And listening to those stories has been very cool. The other part to OAG has been the openness of each member basically within a really, I suppose it's a private setting, but being able to talk about some of those things that officers have really struggled with over the years and how they are still struggling with some of the things that they've borne witness to or been required to do. And so in that way, although not originally the purpose of OAG it's been quite a unique outcome of OAG that's just organically happened.” (Participant)

Participants described how they were exposed to new perspectives and ways of thinking that were outside their normal police experience. Open discussions provided insights that expanded officers' worldviews, particularly as they related to issues of fairness and equity within policing delivery. In turn, officers respected that the evidence gathered was rigorous, data-driven and independently analysed. Evidence-based discussions expanded their understanding of how others view complex issues in policing and society.

As the research moved forward, officers described the impact of new findings and insights, identified potential hurdles, and a path towards driving positive policing practices. Being exposed to evidence collected by independent researchers was impactful in prompting new ways of thinking and awareness.

“So it's nice to get people who provide some science behind it all and experts who can do the expert stuff. What we do is, we get cops to do cop stuff. It's nice to get people from outside to use their expertise to look at our work rather than us looking at our own.” (Participant)

“There's always meetings with progress, new things have been found out or have had some hurdles along the way. That's still progress. ... And it actually provoked more questions too. This is the evidence we have. All right, let's ask, ‘how did we get here?’ All that kind of stuff, rather than playing the defensive cards.” (Participant)

Participants reported the OAG having a profound impact on broadening their perspectives and increasing their awareness around ethnicity, diversity, disabilities, and intersectionality. Presentations from researchers exposed considerations and perspectives they had never considered before, despite decades on the job. The concept of intersectionality – how different identities and challenges compound to create multi-layered impacts of marginalisation, beyond ethnicity – was particularly eye-opening. Some officers reported that as a result of their engagement in the OAG, they were changing the way they stopped and talked to people. They were now taking time to patiently explain processes, rights, and legal procedures to people, rather than rushing through.

Leadership for fairness and equity

Interviews emphasised the importance and value of the collaborative and inclusive leadership approach taken by the OAG. In particular interview participants acknowledged the leadership and influence of the OAG Chair Scott Gemmell, for fostering an environment of openness, honesty and trust related to fairness and equity in policing delivery. His leadership approach set the tone for frank discussions without fear of repercussions from differing views.

“It's the leadership of the OAG, the inclusiveness of it, the openness of it. Traditionally, the only people you get in these panels are experts, ranked, and from certain parts of the organisation, not everybody. I like that this is a whole slice of everybody. From every way

you can slice it, there's a part of everybody in OAG.... And I think Scotty brings that a lot, ... there's no rank, no egos, no personalities, no nothing. And he starts that. And we always do, whakawhanaungatanga, knowing backgrounds. And again, if we're talking about partnerships, I can't be a partner or trust you if I don't know you." (Participant)

Participants felt this inclusive and supportive environment not only enhanced the effectiveness of the group but also contributed to their personal and professional growth. Participants noted the value in adopting a flat structure within the OAG, avoiding the rigid hierarchy they are accustomed to in the police force. This enabled genuine interactions and collaboration across ranks, empowering officers of all ranks to provide critical frontline insights, advice and context to inform the research findings.

Improved and more equitable police behaviour and decision-making

Participants who were interviewed described how their behaviour and decision-making had changed and improved as a result of being engaged in the OAG. They explained that prior to the OAG, they focussed on meeting immediate goals and gaining approval from superiors, often without considering the broader impact of their actions.

"To be in this group, you've actually had to look at yourself and do some reflection. And I can honestly say, looking at some of the stuff I've done that was the norm, was it the best thing for society as a whole going forward? Probably not. Did it get me a tick in the box ... did it get me the pat on the back from my sergeant? Yes it did." (Participant)

Increased self-awareness, understanding the impact of negative stereotypes and internal biases was a result of engaging with the OAG. Officers who were interviewed reported they

were now having open conversations with colleagues discussing how changes in awareness were now informing their decision-making and in particular who they stopped and talked to.

"As we turned around behind it [the car], we had a discussion. So, are we stopping this car because it's a shitty car, or subconsciously did I see that it's a male Māori who's done absolutely nothing wrong, but looks a bit rough, a young fella. And so, what am I pulling him up for?" (Participant)

Officers who were interviewed reported they were now focused on engaging differently with whānau/families affected by police actions and addressing their concerns honestly. These actions helped to mend and strengthen relationships. An example of this shift is when an officer took the time to explain an arrest to whānau, transforming their initial anger into understanding and cooperation.

"... we went into a house and arrested a guy, almost tasered him, but we didn't, but the family were really angry, and then when we left with him, I went back in and I explained why he was arrested. I've dealt with him for years, so once I started to bond with them and say, 'Look, as you know, he can lose his temper really quick and I didn't want anyone to get hurt'. So they acknowledged that as well, and there was just that little bit of rapport building before I left, instead of just walking away, just taking the time it went from them being angry at police to shaking our hands and saying, 'Thanks ... it's good you got them out of here'." (Participant)

Interviews highlighted the OAG teams may be gradually influencing other work groups within the police force. As members transition into different areas, these participants carried with them the reflective practices and empathetic approaches fostered by the OAG. Participants believed this slow diffusion of new perspectives is contributing to broader cultural shifts, promoting a more thoughtful community-focussed policing model.

For example, some OAG members are now engaging in pre-charge discussions with their colleagues to understand the motivations behind an offender's actions and the feelings of the victims involved. Officers who were interviewed reported they were now exploring alternatives such as Te Pae Oranga Iwi Community Panels and other warnings or resolutions with the goal of behavioural change and a reduction in rates of reoffending. These interview participants believed such changes were being recognised by Te Pae Oranga Iwi Community Panels; by acknowledging top referral performers they have fostered healthy competition among other sections to increase their own referral numbers, potentially leading to more referrals overall and greater organisational impact.

However, participants also explained that in adopting these alternatives they needed to justify their decisions more rigorously. They reported an unintended consequence was a greater administrative burden, that required more meetings and discussions compared to the straightforward process of sending cases to court. Such findings reveal institutional and systemic barriers to ensuring fairness and equity in policing delivery.

Concerns raised – Where to next?

Despite the positive impacts that engagement in the OAG has had on interview participants, there were also expressed concerns. Some of these were related to the implementation of the UPD research findings. Participants questioned whether the work would drive changes in policing practices, or simply end up as another report sitting on a shelf.

“We don't want it to be a book that sits on a shelf, but is it going to be or is it going to be implemented or something there? So I'd just like to see what happens after this? Where to next? The journey's been amazing.” (Participant)

They reported the lack of a clear organisation-wide plan for how to disseminate and apply the findings across different roles and levels in the police force. There did not appear to be a unified plan around who is best positioned to effectively communicate and “sell” the findings and spearhead their application in different districts and units, especially around sensitive topics like bias and racism which can make audiences defensive.

Participants also shared concerns that lower ranking officers may not have the credibility, skills, or capacity to educate those above them about implementing recommendations from the research. They shared their fears that officers with strongly entrenched mindsets may be unwilling or may struggle to critically examine their own potential biases highlighted by the research. Overcoming institutional resistance to investigating issues of fairness and equity in policing delivery was seen as pivotal to successful implementation of any recommendations.

“So I'm a sergeant and I run a team of 12 and I can influence them, but if you have a couple of negative sergeants on other sections and they can influence them the other way. So there is that negativity on other sections and they have a different mindset.” (Participant)

Whilst OAG members who were interviewed were passionate about the impact their engagement had on their thinking and behaviour, they also wanted to know how the research findings were going to be supported and implemented over time.

Discussion

The Operational Advisory Group (OAG) serves as a pivotal innovation within the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme, aimed at fostering equity and fairness in New Zealand policing. By integrating diverse operational police staff into its processes, the OAG has become a transformative platform that offers several strengths while facing notable challenges.

Strengths

Diverse and Inclusive Representation: The OAG includes police officers from various ranks, roles, and backgrounds, ensuring a broad spectrum of perspectives. This diversity is crucial in understanding the complex nature of equity and fairness in policing. Interviews suggest the OAG provides a platform for voices that are typically underrepresented in police decision-making processes, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the issues at hand.

Safe Space for Open Dialogue: The OAG has successfully created a psychologically safe environment where officers can openly discuss their experiences and struggles without fear of judgement or repercussions. This openness is vital for candid conversations about sensitive topics such as bias and discrimination, which are often difficult to address within the hierarchical and traditionally rigid police structure.

Impactful Leadership: The leadership of Superintendent Scott Gemmell and the application of Māori principles, such as

whakawhanaungatanga (building relationships), has been instrumental in establishing trust and cohesion within the group. This leadership style has facilitated a non-hierarchical, inclusive setting that encourages genuine interactions and collaborative problem-solving.

Enhanced Awareness and Professional Growth: Participation in the OAG has led to significant personal and professional development for officers who were interviewed. Evidence-based group discussions has prompted officers to reflect on their biases and the broader implications of their actions. The exposure to new perspectives and rigorous, evidence-based discussions has broadened their understanding of issues related to fairness and equity within New Zealand policing.

Influence on Policing Practices: Officers have reported changes in their behaviour and decision-making processes, particularly in how they interact with and treat community members. There is a noted shift towards more patient, respectful, and transparent interactions, influenced by the insights gained from the OAG

discussions and the emphasis on procedural justice.

Challenges and limitations

Short-term and Uncertain Impact: The OAG is still in its early stages and is dependent on external research partnerships. The long-term impacts of this police innovation remain uncertain. There is a need for sustained efforts and ongoing support to ensure that the positive changes observed among participants are translated into enduring organisational practices.

Limited Scope and Representation: While the OAG includes a diverse group of officers, the number of participants is relatively small. This limited scope may constrain the ability to generalise findings and implement widespread changes across the police force. The experiences and insights of the few cannot fully represent the complexities and nuances of the entire police organisation. There is also a need for sustained research partnerships with broader community groups, particularly marginalised groups who are most affected by policing practices.

Systemic Reform: Although interviewed officers believed engagement in the OAG had profound influences for them, they also acknowledged not all of their police colleagues were as receptive to change. The deep-rooted nature of police culture and the difficulty in shifting long-standing norms and practices is likely to be a key challenge over time. The focus of the OAG has primarily been on individual-level changes rather than addressing systemic issues within the police force. Comprehensive organisational support and structural reforms are essential for tackling the broader cultural and systemic barriers to equity and fairness in policing.

Dependence on External Factors: The effectiveness of the OAG is also influenced by external factors such as continued funding and political support. Sudden changes in these areas could potentially undermine the progress made and limit the sustainability of the group's efforts.

Advice

- 1. Integrate Systemic Reforms:**
Efforts should be made to integrate the UPD findings and insights from the OAG into broader organisational policies and practices. This includes addressing systemic barriers to equity and fairness and ensuring that the cultural shifts promoted by the OAG are supported by structural changes within the police force.
- 2. Sustain Long-term Research Partnerships with OAG style engagement:**
To ensure the sustainability of the OAG's initiatives, it is crucial to secure long-term funding and political support. Additionally, establishing ongoing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms will help to track progress, measure impact, and adapt strategies as needed to maintain and expand the positive changes observed.

In summary, by addressing these challenges and gaps, the OAG has the potential to significantly enhance equity and fairness in New Zealand policing, contributing to improved community trust and confidence in the Police.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration

between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Police Innovation Case

Co-Response Team

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction data, Complaint

data as well as use of force data as it related to TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

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He mihi nui tēnei ki ngā kaiwhakauru katoa i whai wāhi mai ki tēnei rangahau. Ko tō koutou kaha, ko tō koutou māia, ko tō koutou pono i tāpae mai i ngā kōrero nui whakaharahara, hei painga mō te katoa. Ka nui te aroha me te whakawhetā ki a koutou katoa. E mihi nui ana.

Research Team

Dr Anne Hynds & Madeline Shelling (2024). Co-Response Team (CRT). Phase Two Innovation Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

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Introduction

This exploratory case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study was identified as one of the police sites of innovation to better respond to people experiencing mental distress.

In Phase One we analysed a range of data that highlighted the ineffectiveness of current Police strategies for people in mental distress, with reports of Police stereotyping and bias, poor treatment, lack of resources, and inadequate mental health training for officers (Ihi Research, 2023). The UPD Panel wanted to further investigate the Police and mental health co-response innovation to understand how New Zealand Police are addressing equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Four professionals were interviewed including senior police staff, police officers and mental health nurses/clinicians. They were identified

for their experience and knowledge of one co-response model operating in a large urban area. All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. It is important to note that this is not an evaluation of the Police co-response model but an exploratory case study. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery, which is the purpose of the UPD research. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

According to recent statistics, Police attended ‘just over 77,000 mental health-related incidents’ in the last financial year (Wells, 2024).

This places a high demand on frontline police while potentially putting people experiencing mental health crises at unnecessary agitation and risk. Whilst mental distress has been defined in various ways, definitions commonly emphasise a condition that is recoverable and generally not permanent. For example, the He Ara Oranga - Report of the Government Inquiry into Mental Health and Addiction defined mental distress as “a recoverable social, psychological, traumatic, spiritual or health disruption” (Patterson et al., 2018, p. 36). Te Whatu Ora defines mental distress as a change in “thoughts, feelings and behaviours” where people “may not feel like they are their usual selves” for a period of time (2024, para 1). The Health Promotion Agency (2018) views mental distress as a state of mind that moves “beyond standard definitions of depression and anxiety to include feeling isolated, overwhelmed by stress and not able to cope” (p. 4).

Criminalisation of mental health

Within mental health literature both in Aotearoa and internationally, the criminalisation of mental health is widely recognised as a damaging response for those experiencing mental health

crises and reflects a concerning association between law enforcement and mental health experiences (Patterson et al., 2018; Shapiro et al., 2015). The pervasive involvement of police as the primary response to mental distress call-outs results in a heavy burden on police who are not specifically trained in mental health responses.

In Aotearoa, mental health legislation authorises Police to transport individuals deemed to be experiencing a mental health crisis, to designated facilities, including emergency departments and police stations (Every-Palmer et al., 2022). Experiencing a mental health crisis and being met with a police response and usage of police equipment (i.e. handcuffs, being transported in marked cars, being placed in cells), can lead people to feel viewed and treated as criminals rather than as people with urgent health conditions (Every-Palmer et al., 2022). Mental Health Foundation Chief Executive Shaun Robinson was interviewed on Radio New Zealand about the use of mental health co-response teams (Hickman, 2023). He stated that people in mental distress are vulnerable and require a health-led response (Hickman, 2023). Noting the “high prevalence of Māori in mental health statistics” Robinson argued that iwi inclusion in co-response teams was crucial (Hickman, 2023, para 8). Although health facilities are preferred, instances where individuals are placed in

police cells is particularly concerning for those experiencing severe mental distress (Every-Palmer et al., 2022; Patterson et al., 2018). This type of experience can be associated with escalations of aggression that can result in unnecessary detainment or hospitalisation (Every-Palmer et al., 2022).

Police are also hesitant about being the primary responders to mental health callouts (Every-Palmer et al., 2022). In New Zealand, police express concerns about mental health callouts, with 93% feeling that these consume too much time and that such calls “should not be a Police job” (Every-Palmer et al., 2022, p. 22). Similarly, in Australia, Evangelista et al. (2016) note that police often complain of long wait times with the mental health patients they respond to for psychiatric assessments, leading to an increased risk of criminal charges instead of accessing mental health services. They also feel unequipped for mental health crisis interventions, lack of support from the mental health system, and perceive an added workload. Systemic shortcomings and the inadequacy of current police responses to individuals in crisis have been consistently highlighted, emphasising the need for alternative interventions and responses (Patterson et al., 2018).

An overview of co-response models

The adoption, development and uptake of co-response or non-police response models to mental distress are increasingly becoming commonplace around the world (Bailey et al., 2018; Every-Palmer et al., 2022; Puntis et al., 2018; Shapiro et al., 2015). Commonly referred to as a ‘co-response’ model, other terms are used globally and can include ‘mobile crisis intervention teams’, ‘Crisis Resolution Teams (CRT)’, ‘Crisis Assessment and Treatment (CAT) teams’ or ‘tri-response teams’ (Bailey et al., 2018; Evangelista et al., 2016; Heffernan et al., 2022; Puntis et al., 2018). All are typically referring to an inter-agency collaboration between police, mental health, or substance abuse professionals, and sometimes including medical personnel like paramedics or police officers with specific mental health training (Bailey et al., 2018; Puntis et al., 2018).

Co-response teams typically share several common objectives. They are primarily aimed at incorporating mental health expertise during police encounters to minimise the likelihood of individuals in crisis being detained in police custody. The intent of these teams is to divert people away from the criminal justice system and facilitate connections to appropriate mental health resources (Bailey et al., 2018; Heffernan et al., 2022; Puntis et al., 2018). Additionally, these teams aim to de-escalate crises, prevent injuries, reduce unnecessary involuntary detentions and emergency department presentations, and alleviate distress experienced by individuals during such incidents (Bailey et al., 2018; Heffernan et al., 2022; Puntis et al., 2018). Evidence suggests that co-response teams are generally achieving these aims, providing a more effective response to mental health crisis and reducing the criminalisation of mental health all whilst utilising police time and resources better (Lamanna et al., 2017).

In Toronto, Lamanna et al. (2018) found that co-response teams had lower injury and arrest rates compared to police-only teams, and that while co-response teams reported having higher rates of escorts to hospital, they also had lower involuntary escorts and reduced emergency department handover times. Their findings also revealed that service users valued crisis responders with mental health knowledge, including skills in crisis de-escalation and familiarity with mental health conditions and resources to be an empowering and compassionate approach. In comparison, their service users reported experiences with police-only teams to be more variable and included experiences of being treated as a criminal (Lamanna et al., 2018). This research indicated that the CRT model has the potential to reduce harm from the stigma and criminalisation of mental health.

Development of New Zealand's Co-Response Model

In response to the increasing demand for more appropriate and effective mental health crisis interventions in Aotearoa New Zealand and following recommendations from the Mental Health and Addiction Inquiry, a Mental Health

Co-Response Team (CRT) was launched in 2020. This 12-month pilot programme, comprising personnel from Wellington District Police, Wellington Free Ambulance, Capital and Coast DHB and Mental Health, Addiction, and Intellectual Disability Service (MHAIDS), the CRT offers specialised assistance during emergency mental health callouts.

An evaluation by Every-Palmer et al. found positive outcomes of the CRT model including reduced use of powers under the Mental Health Act, reduced reliance on emergency departments, police cells and resources, and a more appropriate and effective response to mental distress (Every-Palmer et al., 2022). The CRT pilot showed benefits such as resolution of matters at the point of contact with provision of wrap-around services, improved information sharing, cultural safety, and a perceived decrease in the risk of violence. Qualitative findings from interviews with CRT service users also found that whānau reported that the CRT successfully de-escalated mental health crises. Additionally, whānau that were interviewed who had previously sought mental health help for service users preferred the CRT to other crisis mental health services they had experienced (Every-Palmer et al., 2022).

The crises that precipitated CRT intervention were highly stressful for whānau, however all whānau participants were highly appreciative of the CRT's work. The CRT's engagement and de-escalation skills were viewed as effective, decreasing the risk of violence and the need for use of force. Police themselves also found that the CRT model was a positive addition, citing reduced wait times in ED, better use of Police resources, and feeling like they could meet the needs of people experiencing mental distress in a much more positive and effective way (Every-Palmer et al., 2022).

Supporting these qualitative findings, the previous Minister of Police, Ginny Anderson, highlighted a 30% reduction in police time when a mental health worker was present, emphasising

the efficacy of the collaborative approach (Hickman, 2023). However, it is important to note that while there is support for an innovative approach to assist people experiencing mental distress, the New Zealand Police Association do not believe Police should be involved unless there was a risk to a person's safety (New Zealand Police Association, 2024). According to the Police Association a plan is being formulated "to shift some of its 80,000 mental distress callouts each year away from a Police-led response to a multiagency response" (New Zealand Police Association, 2024, para 3).

Police Association president Chris Cahill has stated "the association would like to see a response model that did not include police at all. They are not qualified, and they are not who people suffering mental distress need" (New Zealand Police Association, 2024, para 12). More recently the present Police Minister, Mark Mitchell, released plans for "dedicated emergency response teams" to deal with mental distress and family harm events, to be established by 2026 (Wells, 2024, para 1).

Conclusion

In conclusion, previous studies have highlighted Police co-response models as innovative, promising approaches to better serve individuals experiencing mental distress. Evaluations highlight the numerous benefits of such approaches, including reduced demands on Police time, less reliance on emergency departments and Police cells, and improved outcomes for individuals and their whānau/families. By diverting mental health-related crises away from the justice system and towards mental health professionals, co-response models optimise Police time and resources, and encourage a safer response to people experiencing mental distress. However, there are concerns about the role of Police within co-response approaches and whether they should be involved at all.

Interview findings

To further understand the specific learning opportunities and issues for professionals working in co-response teams, semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants. These included police officers and mental health professionals who had direct experience of one co-response model operating within New Zealand. It is important to note that the makeup of the co-response teams varies considerably across the country and in the following case study, involved front-line officers as well as mental health clinicians.

The following section includes a collation of interview findings across four key themes and a final discussion including a summary of findings and advice to the Police.

The urgent need for innovation

Participants emphasised the urgent need for this type of innovation to better respond to people experiencing mental distress. There was expressed concern that police have become the default first responders to mental health crises. This is despite police lacking specialised training. This situation often leads to unnecessary demands on police time, inadequate handling of incidents and can result in people being unnecessarily detained or subjected to force.

“So one of the purposes is to reduce demand on frontline police, because we are going to most of these calls when we don't really need to, they can be dealt with in a better way. There is a need to provide a service where you're not getting a police officer turning up to your house, you're actually getting a health response, a health-led response, not a police justice response. If you break that down further, the co-response model prevents people from being unnecessarily detained legislatively when it doesn't have to happen. It prevents unnecessary use of force, because of the reaction response police get, and the stigmatisation that comes with police officers historically with mental health patients being the detainer of a mental health patient. And less people in our cells for the wrong reasons, less people waiting in Hospital Emergency Departments for the wrong reasons. It's providing the patient a better experience at the other end, and a better outcome.” (Participant)

The co-response model seeks to alleviate these pressures by integrating mental health professionals into the response teams, allowing for more appropriate and compassionate care. This approach not only reduces the demand on police but also prevents the stigmatisation and potential harm that can occur when mental health issues are treated as criminal matters.

“So, we provide an emergency response into the community that is a joined-up, connected response between police and mental health with the aim of troubleshooting early on, triaging, and sharing of knowledge that really helps orientate the right kind of response that responds to the person's presentation in the right way. We've got a very big interest in turning this around for people, but it's about making sure that the right assessment is done at the time. And often there's a group of people, that are very hard to engage with, they have some behaviours that can be really challenging for those around them. It's easy for others to say, 'Oh, they're just bad' And that may not be the case at all, because when they get the right care and treatment, they don't behave in those ways.” (Participant)

Participants stressed that both police officers and mental health clinicians in the co-response teams were ‘hand-picked’ for their suitability. There was expressed concern that these were very specialised roles and that co-response team members needed a high level of skills and knowledge related to empathetic approaches, communication skills, mental health diagnosis and collaboration. Police officers who were chosen were viewed as having empathic approaches and could be motivated to contribute as they themselves had family members or friends who had experienced mental health challenges.

Partnerships to create safer communities

The co-response model at this site fosters a partnership approach between police and mental health clinicians, aiming to bridge the significant gaps in mental health services. By hosting mental health professionals within police stations and working together on the frontline, the model ensures that people in mental distress receive timely and appropriate care.

"We attended a call ... a young man who was suicidal in a semi-rural park. The frontline officers got there and then we weren't that far behind. I ended up talking to him for about an hour because that was my job. That was my focus at that time. I didn't have to rush off anywhere else, I was able to make an assessment about his safety, talk about his distress, help us manage his distress in that moment, and work with him on a plan. I referred him through to the acute mental health team and then sorted out with him where he needed to go to continue to feel safe and we contacted a family member. By that time, he was quite a lot calmer. I linked him in with an acute service. I'd spoken to family, and he connected to his family and then he received some follow-up from the acute service." (Participant)

The co-response partnership is seen as an extension of emergency services, providing a specialised response to mental health incidents. The presence of clinicians allows for better assessments and decision-making, reducing unnecessary hospital visits and detentions. Through the co-response method clinicians can access mental health and hospital data that then guides an individualised approach to people experiencing mental distress.

Working with other professionals was a very new experience for police involved in the CRT. They were accustomed to making their own decisions, and so taking advice from others to inform decision-making was a very new approach. Engaging with and learning from other professionals 'on the ground' as well as from those with lived experience of mental distress was powerful. The involvement of a Lived Experience Advisory Committee ensured that the voices of those who have experienced mental health issues and had interactions with police were heard and integrated into the design of the response strategies. Engaging with this Committee had a profound impact on attending police officers, with one participant describing it as an 'eye opener'.

"At the very start, at the advice of NZ Health, we brought in LEAC, which is a Lived Experience Advisory Committee and they're actually people who have been mental health patients, who talk about their experiences ... what it's like to have a police officer turn up, ... versus what it's like to have a health practitioner turn up, and what their preferences are, and how they like to be spoken to, and dealt with, and that they're not criminals. And they went through those actual live scenarios of what they had experienced. I was quite embarrassed ... just listening to their experiences of police turning up. So it was well worth it to hear from them." (Participant)

The benefits of a safer policing response to people in mental distress

One of the most profound impacts of the co-response model is its contribution to a safer and more informed police response. Officers in the co-response teams have gained valuable insights into mental health, learning de-escalation techniques and understanding the nuances of mental health crises.

"The nurses have a very calm approach, coming down to the patient's level, and the way they talk and discuss things with the patient. Working with the nurses we get a better understanding with the empathy side of things. We are more understanding of what distress the person could be going through because we get the empathy coming from the nurses, the clinicians with us so we get more ideas about this. After an incident we debrief ... it's good to get both perspectives, police and mental health professionals of each incident. So it's like police have a very much a safety cautious debrief and then the nurses come with quite a holistic patient-orientated debrief. And we can have quite open discussions about everything." (Participant)

"When the co-response team turns up, it can be a bit of a surprise that there's a mental health clinician in the car with us and whānau are surprised in a positive way going, 'Wow,

this is amazing to get an expert here straight away'. So a lot of the whānau have seen that the mental health system can be quite slow and delayed and there's always a lag in getting help or treatment. But to have a nurse that turns up and generally is the first one on the scene with us, it's a surprise in a positive way. I've been previously frontline for 18 odd years. Before this it was police are there to help but also can arrest you at anytime. So there is that anxiety. The whānau and the patient are always on edge because we're frontline, the bad guys can take you away anytime. But now with health and now the co-response team, we explain that our role is purely mental health related and to help the patient. We are now seen as the helpers, not the ones that can lock you up at the same time." (Participant)

Participants spoke about the positive impacts of having the co-response team housed in stations and going to meetings where they talked to front-line police officers about best practice when dealing with people in mental distress.

"The co-response team go to my frontline line-ups where they can talk to other officers, and share guidance on dealing with particular people, or they enter plans for them if it's a regular caller. And some of that has actually created a difference in how police officers in the general frontline work group manage and deal with people and have a better understanding of what their actual challenges are." (Participants)

Having mental health professionals situated within police stations encouraged other frontline officers to seek advice when needed. Clinicians talked about "a deliberate open-door policy for all police". They explained it was common for individual officers to come into their office and talk about challenges or issues they faced when dealing with the public, believing this was a 'safe space'. Some had approached CRT members to talk about their own thinking and mental health concerns. The partnership approach between Police and mental health professionals

had led to many positive benefits, including a more informed and empathetic approach to individuals in distress.

The need for expanded partnerships and further funding

Despite its success, the co-response model is not yet fully operational and lacks 24/7 availability. There are calls for sustained funding and expansion to ensure that innovation can be extended and integrated with other agencies, including social services and medical professionals. The current co-response team in this case study site doesn't yet involve paramedics, something that interview participants advocated for. They also called for an expanded multi-agency approach, engaging appropriate community services and NGOs, to address social determinants of mental distress.

Interviews emphasise that mental distress is often rooted in broader social issues such as personal trauma, substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, family harm and sudden life changes such as natural disasters and pandemics. A significant portion of police calls regarding mental health can be related to these social stressors rather than clinical mental health crises. This distinction highlights the need for a response model that can address the social roots of distress and provide appropriate support without defaulting to law enforcement. Participants were excited about further partnerships planned for including linking in with iwi social services to provide more support for people in social distress that was often linked to mental distress.

"We need better linking in with NGO services that are very, very community-based, that is a key part of it. And what I know about where someone is living in a really disadvantaged community and there's lots of poverty and homelessness and all those sorts of things, if that person has mental illness and a head injury

or is a significantly disadvantaged person. It is not reasonable to expect that the same amount of resource will make it all better. What we find is that a total wraparound of double the amount of resource makes a huge difference. Absolutely huge difference, but it's expensive. It's going to cost more, and it requires more coordination ... but it's a good investment.” (Participant)

However, whilst participants spoke positively about the many benefits of an integrated, multi-agency led approach there was some questioning regarding the role of Police.

“I still don't think it's the core role of the police officer, and that's why it's better, cause we now have a health practitioner in that work group. You wouldn't ask a health practitioner to go to a justice job, and say, 'Go and deal with that by yourself'. We're in a workspace that's not necessarily for police.” (Participant)

Despite such concerns, interview participants were adamant that the co-response model was having significant benefits for all concerned. In particular, this case study underscores the transformative power of partnerships to create safer communities for people experiencing mental distress. The integration of mental health professionals into emergency response teams offers a more compassionate and effective solution to mental health distress.



Discussion

This case study provides further insight into the importance and impact of Police partnership and innovation emphasises the need for more humane approaches in responding to people experiencing mental distress.

Although this case study is based on a small number of interviews, participants largely confirmed literature review findings.

As highlighted earlier, traditional police responses to mental health crises in Aotearoa New Zealand have been ineffective, often leading to criminalisation, unnecessary detainment, and inadequate care for those in distress. In general, police lack the specialised training needed to handle mental health crises, leading to potentially harmful outcomes for individuals in distress. In particular, the use of police equipment (e.g., handcuffs, police vehicles) and settings (e.g., cells) during these interventions often stigmatise and escalate the situation. The Co-response innovation aims to provide immediate, specialised care during mental health emergencies, reducing the need for police involvement and improving outcomes for those in crisis.

Four key themes emerged from interview analysis. These were:

- The urgent need for innovation.
- Partnerships to create safer communities.
- The benefits of a safer policing response to people in mental distress.
- The need for expanded partnerships and further funding.

Participants interviewed described the many benefits (intended and unintended) that have emerged through this partnership. Decisions about the best approach were based on specific data, and mental health professionals took the lead. Their presence during callouts was seen as enhancing the quality of care and reducing the perception of criminalisation.

Police officers involved in the Co-Response Team have gained valuable insights from these interactions, leading to better handling of mental health incidents. Learning de-escalation techniques and more empathic approaches was often mentioned. By being situated within police stations, mental health clinicians were also available to frontline officers which encouraged informal chats and safe spaces to discuss specific situations or concerns.

The inclusion of people with lived experience of mental distress in an advisory role has informed and improved the CRT's approach within this case study site. This highlights the importance of partnering with community groups as well as other government agencies. There were calls to expand the co-response partnership with a specific focus on addressing the social determinants of mental distress. Interviews emphasise that mental distress is often rooted in broader social issues such as personal trauma, substance abuse, poverty, homelessness, family harm and sudden life changes, including natural

disasters and pandemics. The need to develop and strengthen partnerships with local iwi and trusted NGO community services was also highlighted.

Whilst there were many benefits highlighted, there were also some concerns. Police officers and clinicians were 'hand-picked' for the role, and interview participants stressed not everyone would be effective in such roles. Recently, the Minister of Police, Mark Mitchell, announced plans to have dedicated emergency response teams for both mental health and family harm noting it will be difficult to find enough trained mental health professionals to meet increasing demand. He also acknowledged that police will still attend events if there are significant safety risks (Wells, 2024). This means police will still attend situations whereby they are confronted by someone experiencing mental distress. Therefore, all police officers need access to de-escalation training and ongoing mentoring and support to better assist people experiencing mental distress.

Advice

- 1. Develop and strengthen iwi/community partnerships and collaborations**
Engage and collaborate with iwi and local non-government organisations to ensure the CRT model is responsive to the diverse and unique needs of communities. This should include opportunities for community knowledge sharing, lived experience, collaboration, and funded partnerships through authentic community engagement.
- 2. Enhance police training and socialise health-led response when supporting people in mental distress**
Commit resource and provide specialised training for all police officers in mental health crisis intervention, focusing on de-escalation techniques, understanding mental health conditions, and the social determinants of mental distress. Continue the shift towards a health-led response model where mental health professionals are the primary responders to mental health crises, with police involvement required only where safety concerns arise.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledge bases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the

Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Police Innovation Case

Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC)

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction data, Complaint data as well as use of force data as it related to

TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around 10 descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

Acknowledgements

Ihi Research wishes to acknowledge and thank all interview participants in the Phase Two study.

He mihi nui tēnei ki ngā kaiwhakauru katoa i whai wāhi mai ki tēnei rangahau. Ko tō koutou kaha, ko tō koutou māia, ko tō koutou pono i tāpae mai i ngā kōrero nui whakaharahara, hei painga mō te katoa. Ka nui te aroha me te whakawhetai ki a koutou katoa. E mihi nui ana.

Research Team

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Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study explores the Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC) innovation as it responds to organised crime through the building of resilience in local communities.

While the ROCC work programme is early in its development, the UPD Panel wanted to investigate ROCC to better understand the impact of this innovation as it relates to equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The following themes have been collated from five interviews with ROCC staff:

- Community providers as drivers of change.
- Community-led approach to organised crime prevention and harm.
- Shift in police response to organised crime.

- Alternative approach to gangs.
- Local leadership and champions.

Participants were identified by the Police based on their knowledge and contribution to the ROCC innovation and rollout. All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. The purpose of the UPD research is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in Policing. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

Introduction

The prevalence and impact of organised crime harm on communities remains topical in Aotearoa New Zealand. In May 2024, Police Commissioner, Andrew Coster, reported that gang members currently “commit a large amount of crime in New Zealand – 8 percent of all violence and 18 percent of serious violence” (NZ Herald, 2024b, para 2). Recent legislation targeting gangs and organised crime include fining gang members wearing patches, dispersal notices to reduce contact between gang members, and the establishment of a National Gang Unit (NZ Herald, 2024b). However, people who work with gangs and their whānau are not convinced about the proposed efficacy of punitive approaches to gangs, with some opposition politicians claiming that these laws are “dog whistle politics and anti-Māori”

(NZ Herald, 2024a, para 5). These claims are particularly relevant when considering notions of equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In 2019, Cabinet announced the Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC) innovation, a community focussed work programme to address and combat organised crime “by combining social and economic intervention with targeted enforcement action” (New Zealand Police, 2020, para 2). The ROCC work programme was designed as a collaborative local response to organised crime by addressing drivers and supporting affected whānau (Eggleston, 2024; New Zealand Police, 2020). As an alternative approach to addressing organised crime, ROCC is a multi-agency innovation between the Police, government

agencies, iwi, and community providers which supports the building of community resilience to reduce local crime and harm (Eggleston, 2024). In discussing the importance of this resilience, Southern District ROCC Co-ordinator Cynthia Farley notes that it is about “having a strength and collaboration within the communities so that organised crime can’t operate” (Eggleston, 2024, para 7).

From 2021, the first ROCC sites were established in areas with high rates of harm and where existing community organisations were providing relevant support to families affected by organised crime and police responses (New Zealand Police, 2024). Since then, work programmes have been launched in Hawke’s Bay, Wairoa, Te Tairāwhiti, Ōpōtiki, Kawerau, Whakatāne, Invercargill, Gore, Mātaura and Counties Manukau, and in 2024, plans were in place for the opening of the ROCC innovation on the West Coast, Northland and Porirua (New Zealand Police, 2024). At the launch of the West Coast site in 2024, Superintendent Tracey Thompson summarised the ROCC work programme as follows:

“It’s about addressing the harm in the community we are seeing caused by methamphetamine, and the effect it has on our youth and whānau. While Police provide an enforcement response, through ROCC coming to the West Coast, holistic support and restorative processes will help address the root cause of offending. ROCC is a positive programme to support our communities and whānau to thrive.” (Police, 2024, para 7)

Gangs and organised crime in Aotearoa New Zealand

Data indicates increases in gang membership and crime in Aotearoa New Zealand over the past decade. However there is still little research undertaken on the “spatial predictors and drivers” of gangs (Breetzke et al., 2022, p. 1155). Armon Tamatea (2015, para 7) argues that while gangs attract a disproportionate amount of “attention and resource from law enforcement

and correctional agencies worldwide” there is still little known about desistance from gang life and crime. Tamatea (2015, para 3) notes that gangs in New Zealand endure a ‘triple prejudice’ in the justice system across “ethnicity, low socioeconomic status, and antisociality”, noting the intersecting oppressors experienced by gang members. In 2006, the Ministry of Social Development conducted research on gang membership and reported that “economic deprivation, disorganised parenting practices, parental disengagement, and the provision of gangs to act as a proxy family unit” as risk factors for joining a gang (Breetzke et al., 2022, p. 1156).

However, research presented as part of the New Zealand Royal Commission of Inquiry into State Care Abuse has emphasised State failure to protect young Māori and Pasifika children in State care during the 1950s-1999. Recruitment into gangs was due to the widespread abuse and trauma many children experienced while in State care (Savage et al., 2021). Differential negative treatment of tamariki and rangatahi Māori in particular has been an enduring feature of State care, culminating in intergenerational trajectories from ‘care to custody’ (Jackson, 1988; Savage et al., 2021; Stanley, 2016). The appeal of gang membership was found in the promise of protection or power within a threatening environment, as well as a potential future source of support and income (Henwood, 2015; Stanley, 2016). According to Stats NZ (2024) Māori make up 19.6 percent of the national population, but make up around 52 percent of the New Zealand prison population (Ministry of Justice, 2023). Evidence presented to the Waitangi Tribunal also emphasised the connection between State care and gangs “noting that an estimated 80 to 90 percent of Mongrel Mob and Black Power gang whānau” had been a ward of the State (Abuse in Care, Royal Commission of Inquiry, 2023, para 8).

Links between deprivation, diversity and gang crime highlight the socioeconomic, cultural, and ethnic factors that drive gang membership and crime (Breetzke et al., 2022). Maxwell (2023) argues that myths about the interconnectedness of Māori and gangs as ‘entwined’ fails to recognise

the disproportionately poor social and wellbeing outcomes for Māori that drive some individuals to join gangs, highlighting larger systemic issues in the context of hardship and gangs (para 7). In recognition of the harm caused by organised crime in communities, the Cabinet Social Wellbeing Committee (2019) noted the following response in terms of addressing organised crime in Aotearoa New Zealand:

“Organised crime is a particularly complex social, economic, community, and criminal issue. An effective response requires a community development, prevention focus to address the harm to wellbeing and build the resilience of affected communities combined with law enforcement activity to create an untenable operating environment for organised crime.”

While new government legislation seeks to reduce gang membership and crime through more traditional measures, the ROCC innovation utilises an alternative approach to organised crime that values community service providers, lived experience, and the building of community resilience (Eggleston, 2024). As a new initiative, evaluations on the efficacy of the ROCC work programme are yet to be undertaken. However, the long-term and intergenerational aspirations of this innovation may not be evident for many years to come. Interview data collected by kaimahi working in the ROCC innovation aim to provide further insights, challenges, and advice for this work programme moving forward to reduce organised crime and harm and to build resilient and connected communities.



Interview findings

The following section includes a collation of interview findings from five participants across five key themes and a final discussion including a summary of findings and advice to the Police.

Community providers as drivers of change

Collaboration and trusted partnerships with government agencies and community groups already working in this space is noted as a key theme for the ROCC innovation. Interviewees mentioned local workshops to discuss the unique needs and aspirations of communities and the subsequent development of community-led initiatives to respond to organised crime and harm.

“I think first and foremost, ROCC is all about building partnerships. And partnerships take time and communities have to build that trust versus doing all that and then having to spend the money pretty much straight away.”
(Participant)

Through a commissioning approach, the ROCC innovation invited both existing and new local initiatives to apply for funding to deliver solutions for supporting whānau affected by organised crime in the community. Participants noted the importance of funding and resourcing capable and trusted existing services in the community as part of ROCC, highlighting the collaborative nature of this innovation.

“It really felt like it was our first time putting into action the concepts around social sector commissioning or social investment and listening to the voice of the community rather than just tendering for a programme and for a particular outcome for a particular price.”
(Participant)

For families struggling with drug use, ROCC kaimahi noted the lack of resources currently available to community social service providers for addressing and supporting people affected by addiction without additional funding. Alongside a lack of funding, one interviewee who works at a community drug and mental health initiative noted their difficulty in engaging with whānau as a result of additional barriers around accessing support. Interviewees note that extra

funding through the ROCC innovation seeks to address these gaps so that the existing mahi can continue.

Furthermore, one interviewee notes that their ability to provide flexible contracts is an enabler towards enabling community wellbeing, with recognition that current services are already demonstrating efficacy because they understand the needs of their local community.

“I would like to think government agencies see this as an aspirational opportunity to be part of rather than a tick box exercise. I'm a government agency, I must turn up, I've turned up to the box, but to actually see the value in what ROCC is trying to do because I see the work happening even if ROCC wasn't in place.”
(Participant)

Interview data notes the importance of the ROCC innovation and funding, however, recognises that communities and under-resourced service providers are already addressing whānau outcomes relating to organised crime harm and prevention. Building resilient communities is now better enabled through ROCC funding, allowing communities to continue this important work.

Community-led approach to organised crime prevention and harm

Interview data highlights the importance of a community-led approach to addressing organised crime and harm through ROCC with a focus on long-term and intergenerational impacts for whānau and communities. This includes the resourcing of existing and new community initiatives that provide support and services through alternative approaches. Interviewees also noted the importance of lived experience as part of ROCC development and delivery, shifting away from traditional policies responses towards this community-led approach.

“And there was an effort and a focus to get a lived experience perspective. So people who are living the experience of living with maybe a whānau member or someone who's lived with the effects of methamphetamine, trying to gain perspectives from people who have been involved in organised crime or gangs.”
(Participant)

Alongside the inclusion of lived experience perspectives is the inclusion of a whole of whānau approach to addressing organised crime through recognition that outcomes affect every whānau member.

“It can be a whānau focused approach ... so often we find that actually where a young person is affected by substance use or mental health issues, sometimes it's the younger siblings that are [also] affected and they may not be yet presenting as problematic or as coming to detention, but no doubt they're being affected.”
(Participant)

A community-led approach also acknowledges the importance of support for whānau after the Police have responded to an event, with recognition of the implications of arrests for the whole whānau. This includes the acknowledgement that hardship or economic insecurity is likely inevitable for whānau and tamariki as a result of arrests and imprisonment, and that in attempts to create resilient communities, local supports and services are required.

“So if you're going to arrest the captain, all those families, those women, and those children have nothing because the men control that household. So we were able to go in and say look, it's the middle of winter. We will organise firewood. We have food parcels, all these things to make sure that you are cared for while this other part is happening.” (Participant)

The use of a community-led and focussed approach to addressing organised crime prevention and harm seeks to build local whānau resilience through a community vision

of long-term and intergenerational outcomes for whānau. This approach shifts away from short-term goals in terms of reducing organised crime, and recognises the enduring eco-system of organised crime and drug use that can impact families intergenerationally.

Shift in police response to organised crime

This collaborative innovation between the Police, the Ministry for Social Development, and local community providers has required the Police to undertake an alternative approach when addressing local organised crime. One interviewee notes that this shift away from traditional policing towards community collaboration and partnership challenges stereotypes about the Police as being concerned only with ‘enforcement’. Interview data also indicates that some police acknowledge that traditional ‘enforcement’ approaches aren’t “necessarily always going to be the fix or the best option for whānau” in the context of organised crime.

This shift is also having impacts on the relationship and trust the community have in the Police, with one interviewee noting the following anecdote:

“She talked about how different this was as a police officer being able to go in and have the conversation and from a care and empathy perspective, she'd never experienced that before.” (Participant)

Police interviewees discuss the importance of a long-term and preventative approach to organised crime by recognising and supporting these whānau as valued members of the community. Underlying drivers of crime including systemic barriers are noted by an interviewee who discusses the complexity of issues affecting whānau connected to organised crime. Working alongside community providers and other agencies ensures police officers are

socialised into this new approach, recognising the impact of situated learning through the ROCC innovation.

“They were genuinely invested in this approach ... [they] understood that a policing alone approach was not going to resolve any of the issues that actually, if we were looking at a systemic and generational change, that actually we had to be looking far more broadly and looking earlier to intervene earlier and more holistically.” (Participant)

This shift in approach has prompted officers to consider the impacts of their arrests on the whole whānau in efforts to achieve long-term outcomes for whānau and the community.

“There is definitely a huge shift ... for the older policemen that I've spoken to, they use very targeted enforcement. But now are having that conversation where they are shifting, ‘Okay, if we take that person out, what is going in?’ So even just that mindset and those questions coming through ... that's something that I would say has been a huge change.” (Participant)

While interviewees note some shifts in police culture through this innovation, one interviewee reports the lack of police engagement from their experience, suggesting that there is room for growth and increased commitment by the Police overall.

“I would love the idea that every officer who dealt with things like family harm and at-risk youth actually went through a ROCC introduction just to say, ‘Hey, we're here. This is how it works. Make sure you reach out to your community partners, get involved.’ That would be great because right now it probably happens in pockets.” (Participant)

Alternative approach to gangs

Alongside a shift in police culture and approach to organised crime, interview data highlights the importance of shifting perspectives and

assumptions made about gangs, gang members, and their whānau. The building of relationships with gangs and their whānau through this innovation has already proven effective during a police raid where established trust allowed ROCC kaimahi to support the whānau with financial support after the event.

“But three years ago ... fallout would've occurred and whānau would have to pick up the pieces, to deal with it. But actually because of the mahi we've been doing in the ROCC space, we were trusted prior to the raid to be engaged, aware and start planning around the social service response for the whānau who were left in the community with potentially no access to income supports.” (Participant)

One police interviewee notes the importance of continuing to build relationships with active gang members and their whānau as opposed to encouraging them to leave the gang, shifting focus towards addressing anti-social behaviours and crimes that are harmful to the community. In terms of recent legislation to ban gang patches, the police interviewee argues that they are unsure about the practical application of this law and that this may cause additional and unnecessary harm for whānau.

“Because if I've got a dad, a patched member taking his kid to play sport for example, why would the police cop be wrestling that man at the side of the road and making a real embarrassing situation for media and everything else when the dad's doing the right thing by supporting his kid and taking him to sport?” (Participant)

The interviewee argues that this legislation works against the trust and relationship building of the ROCC innovation which is particularly concerning when it comes to prison release and opportunities to support gang members back into society. In terms of this legislation and moves towards boot camps for youth offenders, the police interviewee notes that these attempts are outdated, with recommendations for approaches that “encourage and empower” whānau.

Local leadership and champions

The driving of this innovation by dedicated leaders and champions in the Police and the community is noted as a critical enabler of ROCC. Interview data suggests that there is some uncertainty or insecurity around the longevity of an alternative innovation such as ROCC, highlighting the importance of strong leaders and drivers of this kaupapa to ensure it maintains momentum.

Through this leadership, interviewees note the ability to keep ROCC structured and to ensure that there is a mechanism for feedback on challenges and improvements moving forward.

“So you've got that champion that's pushed [this innovation] across the line in a sense and given it some momentum ... I think then there does need to be some continued leadership to go back to some of the things I was talking about before, to keep it coordinated, to keep it shaped, keep it structured, to make sure that people are communicating things that are going really well which can be shared ... challenges can be shared.” (Participant)

Dedicated Police leaders in the ROCC innovation are noted for spending additional time with the communities they seek to support, building relationships and informing hapori about what resilience to organised crime may look like for them. For kaimahi, the support of dedicated Police leadership creates space for this innovative approach and allows communities to engage in a meaningful and equitable way.

“We've got to be driving it, we've got to be committed, and we've got to have passionate people who want to do the work while we are working with our partners to reduce demand by having the right treatments accessible but equitable because we don't at the moment. And then building up our community resilience. So when we take care of one drug distribution, another one just doesn't start up.” (Participant)

Interview data highlights the importance of leaders and champions particularly within the Police to ensure the continuation of this pilot innovation through this early development stage. Dedicated Police leadership has the potential to influence other police officers working in this innovation and making greater impacts on Police culture in the context of organised crime.



Discussion

As a new work programme, interview data on the ROCC development has provided important insights into addressing organised crime through this multi-agency approach.

Interviewees noted the importance of community service providers as critical enablers for this innovation as evidenced in the flexible yet targeted commissioning approach for this work programme. Furthermore, interview data reiterated trust and relationship building as foundational to ROCC, and that the Police and other participating government agencies should prioritise community relationships and networks. Alongside community networking, interview data highlighted the importance of holding local workshops so that whānau and providers were involved in the co-design of the ROCC work programme that addressed the unique needs of their community. This included participation and guidance from whānau with lived experience to ensure solutions and supports are tailored accordingly.

Interview data also indicated the impact of community collaboration and dedicated leadership as an effective approach to addressing organised crime, with recognition of social and economic drivers of gangs. Examples of the ROCC innovation in action include the provision of kai and firewood to an individual's whānau after being arrested for a gang-related crime and understanding the ripple effects of organised crime for the whole whānau. The use of a holistic approach to organised crime shifts away from traditional short-term policing practice or 'enforcement' style tactics towards long-term aspirations that have intergenerational impacts for whānau. This shift in police response for participating officers has started to achieve positive outcomes including an empathetic response to organised crime, acknowledgement of underlying drivers, and recognition that arrests and imprisonment further harms communities.

Further to this early shift in police practice is a police shift in perspective on gangs, gang members, and organised crime that better align to the aspirations and outcomes of the ROCC work programme. Building relationships with gang members and their whānau has proven effective in one instance where this established trust allowed ROCC providers to support a whānau after the arrest of a family member. One police interviewee has highlighted the current and potential benefits for the ROCC programme as it develops over time, and recommends that police gang innovations compliment one another.

Research and interview data indicate the underlying drivers of organised crime as complex and connected to disproportionately poor social and economic outcomes for families and communities. Although ROCC is in the

early stages of development, interview data suggests promising outcomes for whānau and communities in efforts to become more resilient from organised crime and harm. Promising outcomes include stronger community partnerships, trust and relationship building between the Police and whānau, and reduced organised crime and related harm.



Advice

1. Invest in Police-community collaboration and leadership as an alternative approach to supporting whānau affected by organised crime, with recognition of the social and economic drivers of crime.
2. Continue to evaluate outcomes from ROCC (both short-term and long-term) and identify both enablers and barriers towards effective innovation and change.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration

between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.

Police Innovation Case

Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke

Understanding Policing Delivery

This report is part of the second phase of a two-year investigation into equity and fairness in policing in Aotearoa, New Zealand, led by Ihi Research in collaboration with Ngā Pirihimana o Aotearoa/NZ Police (Police). Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) is a NZ Police research programme that seeks to identify whether, where, and to what extent bias exists at a system level in the Police's operating environment. In particular, the research aims to investigate three key areas of Police-community interactions:

1. Who Police stop and speak to, and how Police engage with them,
2. decision-making around the use of force, and;
3. decision-making around laying charges.

The research aims to generate empirical data on:

- The nature of these interactions,
- the decision-making and interactions involved, and;
- whether fair and equitable outcomes occur in the context of Police-community interactions.

Ihi Research has undertaken separate investigations as part of the UPD study and collected and analysed data across different phases. Phase One involved the analysis of data already held by Police. This included analysis of Praise and Dissatisfaction data, Complaint

data as well as use of force data as it related to TASERS. Specific findings and gaps in the Phase One research informed the development of the Phase Two study.

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and is centred around ten descriptive case studies. Five case study sites are centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites are centred on communities of interest. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: How well and in what ways do Police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?

This report presents one exploratory case study as part of Ihi Research's Phase Two research.

Acknowledgements

Ihi Research wishes to acknowledge and thank all interview participants in the Phase Two study.

He mihi nui tēnei ki ngā kaiwhakauru katoa i whai wāhi mai ki tēnei rangahau. Ko tō koutou kaha, ko tō koutou māia, ko tō koutou pono i tāpae mai i ngā kōrero nui whakaharahara, hei painga mō te katoa. Ka nui te aroha me te whakawhetai ki a koutou katoa. E mihi nui ana.

Research Team

Tanita Bidois, Dr Anne Hynds, & Kate Standring (2024). Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH). Phase Two Innovation Case Study. Understanding Policing Delivery. Ihi Research.

Introduction

This case study is one of ten case studies completed by Ihi Research in Phase Two of the Understanding Policing Delivery (UPD) research programme. This case study explores the collaborative family harm innovation, Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH), as it relates to equity and fairness issues within policing in Aotearoa New Zealand.

In Phase One we analysed data and identified disproportionately poor outcomes and Police interactions for wāhine Māori in particular during family harm callouts. The UPD Panel wanted to investigate the efficacy and approach of Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke in addressing and improving family harm outcomes and interactions from the Police for whānau Māori and other marginalised communities.

The following themes have been collated from five Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH) interviews with both WNPH kaimahi and collaborating Police kaimahi in four WNPH sites across Aotearoa. This includes three police kaimahi interviews, a WNPH kaimahi focus group and an individual WNPH kaimahi interview. Through analysis of the interview data, the following five themes were identified:

- Iwi/Māori collaboration with the Police.
- Community of practice.
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke approach to family harm.
- Police systems and culture.
- Intersectionality and Police bias.

Participants were identified for their experience and knowledge of the WNPH innovation and family harm approaches. To ensure the anonymity of interviewees, this case study includes the use of gender-neutral pronouns and the removal of specific job titles and roles. All participants gave informed consent and were given the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft report. It is important to note that this is not an evaluation of Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke as an innovation but an exploratory case study. The purpose of the UPD research is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing. An overview of the methodology and ethical procedures can be found in Appendix 1.

Review of existing literature

The context of family harm in Aotearoa

Family violence in Aotearoa has been described as a ‘hidden pandemic’, impacting all communities with devastating outcomes (Radio New Zealand, 2021, para 1). Exposure to family violence and trauma and “inter-generational social disadvantage” are noted as two of the leading factors for committing serious crimes that lead to imprisonment (Monasterio et al., 2020, p. 11). The New Zealand Police state that “family violence is a subset of family harm” and they use the latter term “to encapsulate a holistic view of issues occurring within a family”, noting factors that can contribute to family harm such as poverty, lack of safe and secure housing, mental illness and AOD issues (New Zealand Police, 2023, p. 47). Police report that Māori and Pacific groups are disproportionately impacted by family harm and note that “family harm-related calls for service have risen by more than 50 percent over the past five years”, taking up a “significant” portion of police time and resources (New Zealand Police, 2023, p. 12).

Innovative Police approach to family harm

The New Zealand Police have a clear stated vision to make Aotearoa “the safest country it can be” (New Zealand Police, 2023, p. 1). To achieve this

goal Police have established partnerships “to prevent crime and harm and ensure everybody can be safe and feel safe” including at home (New Zealand Police, 2023, p. 1). Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke – Thriving Children, Strong Families, Resilient Communities (WNPH) is a kaupapa founded in partnership between the New Zealand Police, iwi, whānau, and several government and non-government agencies to reduce family harm. It was conceptualised in 2015 as part of the Police Commissioner’s Policing Excellence the Future initiatives, that sought to improve police process and shift their approach to family violence away from “enforcement-centred” methods (Love et al., 2019, p. 12). The Police note “that strict enforcement action alone has not been effective in preventing or reducing (frequency and severity) repeat instances of family harm” (Love et al., 2019, p. 12). The approach of WNPH seeks to address family harm “by identifying and supporting whānau to address many of the underlying contributing issues” (Love et al., 2019, p. 12).

WNPH initiatives work alongside whānau to create alternative responses post initial police attendance at a family harm event. The aim is to address immediate safety needs whilst reducing family harm, re-victimisation, and re-offending in the future, particularly for Māori and Pasifika families (Fry, 2022; Walton & Brooks, 2019). First established in 2016, WNPH initiatives are located in various regions and

each initiative was co-designed to meet the specific needs of the communities they aim to support. Since its inception in 2016, the impact and outcomes of the different WNPB kaupapa have undergone extensive evaluations using various methodologies, including three outcome evaluations (Walton & Brooks, 2019, 2020; Walton, 2021) a process evaluation (Love et al., 2019), a Social Return on Investment (Schulze & Hurren, 2021), and an evaluation on the additional Proceeds of Crime funding for WNPB ki Ōtepoti (Leonard & Arahanga, 2023).

The reduction of family harm

In 2019, Walton and Brooks completed an outcome evaluation of the WNPB initiative in Counties Manukau as one of the first three programme pilots launched in 2016. The evaluation compared data from half of the districts population who had received WNPB supports, with the other half of the district who had not (Walton & Brooks, 2019). Walton and Brooks (2019) utilised the newly developed New Zealand Crime Harm Index (CHI) which supported evaluators to understand the severity categorisation of family harm incidents. The outcome evaluation reported a 15% reduction in family harm, and the use of the New Zealand CHI determined that WNPB had a significant impact in reducing repeat offending. While the evaluation did not include explicit data about changes in police practice or approaches, it highlighted the effectiveness of preventative models like WNPB, and early intervention supports.

Additionally, the WNPB Eastern/Tairāwhiti process evaluation was also conducted in 2019 by Love et al. The evaluation assessed how WNPB was implemented in this region; who was and was not participating; successes and recommended improvements; and the perception of this initiative from iwi, Police, non-government organisations and other key groups. The process evaluation used a kaupapa Māori methodology through qualitative inquiry

including face-to-face interviews and focus groups (Love et al., 2019). The evaluation noted that the results from this 20-month-old WNPB initiative were encouraging and were supported by shifts in Police focus away from traditional law enforcement processes towards greater engagement and understanding with whānau.

Challenges noted in the evaluation included the lack of critical rehabilitation services in the region and the limited capacity of community workers to implement WNPB. However, researchers acknowledged this early implementation stage and supported the ongoing development and overall improvement of WNPB in Eastern/Tairāwhiti. Additionally, police involved in this pilot noted the additional emotional stress as a result of working more closely with family harm, with the authors reporting that police officers are often not trained or prepared for this level of engagement (Ibid, 2019).

Social return on investment

The social return on investment (SROI) model is used to measure the social and economic benefits of an initiative, policy, or service to society beyond initial outcomes. This model was used to measure the return on investment of several WNPB sites as part of evaluation processes. In 2021, Schulze and Hurren from BERL conducted a social return on investment (SROI) on Whiria Te Muka in Te Tai Tokerau. Whiria Te Muka was launched in November 2017 as a unique partnership between several Te Hiku iwi and the Police to reduce and prevent family harm while striving towards Mana Tangata (Schulze & Hurren, 2021). The Whiria Te Muka initiative sits in conjunction with WNPB and utilises a solutions-focused approach to reducing family harm for Te Hiku whānau, hapū, iwi, and hapori. The SROI calculation indicated that for each \$1.00 invested in Whiria Te Muka the return on investment was \$4.07, demonstrating the effectiveness of this initiative in reducing family harm rates and decreasing pressure on various

agencies and social services. The evaluation also noted a “change in mind set and approach to whānau by Police” and the removal of “pre-conceived biases” from police as points of change in addressing family harm (Ibid, 2021, p. 6).

Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke ki Ōtepoti

In 2022, Walton and Westerman completed an outcome evaluation of WNPH in Southern Police District, examining the performance of this Ōtepoti initiative against data from the National Intelligence Application (NIA). The establishment of the WNPH in Southern Police District in 2019 provided a contrast of data between 2015-2021 of which conclusions were drawn from comparative data pre and post implementation. The findings of the evaluation reported that WNPH ki Ōtepoti was effective in reducing family harm in the region, however researchers note the results are somewhat misleading and difficult to navigate.

The evaluation also noted that the reduction of harm was higher for whānau who had engaged with and created a WNPH plan, however it is unclear how much engagement Police had with this part of the process. The evaluation reported that the use of data pre and post implementation does not consider “that the time periods considered may have themselves inherently contributed to the reduction in offending” and that the use of a before and after model “lacks a true comparison group” (Walton & Westerman, 2022, p. 26).

In 2023, Ihi Research conducted an evaluation on additional Proceeds of Crime funding that supported the employment of additional Kaiāwhina at WNPH ki Ōtepoti. The evaluation noted that Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke ki Ōtepoti uses a Whānau Ora model that is culturally responsive to deliver their preventative supports and services (Leonard & Arahanga, 2023). The additional funding supported greater

collaboration and integration of service for whānau affected by family harm and highlighted the effectiveness of further investment for capability and capacity building in WNPH (Leonard & Arahanga, 2023).

Conclusion

Over the past five years, evidence continues to demonstrate that the WNPH model has been successfully adapted in various regions and that this police partnership approach to addressing family harm is effective in reducing harm, re-victimisation, and re-offending. Evaluation evidence highlights the success and outcomes achieved, as well as key enablers and challenges. Each WNPH initiative has been co-created to implement specific solutions to family harm concerns and needs in each region, highlighting the effectiveness of iwi and Police partnerships and community-led approaches to family harm reduction.

The success of WNPH is attributed to a community-led focus which differs greatly from a top-down agency-led approach through Integrated Service Response (ISR) (Fry, 2022). Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke has been commended for maintaining a preventative focus in comparison with ISR, utilising a more responsive approach with whānau Māori in particular (Ibid, 2022). Evaluations on WNPH also provide opportunities for improvement, making recommendations about ongoing development and capacity building across the various initiatives. While these evaluations do demonstrate the success of WNPH across Aotearoa, not all of the reports articulate in detail how a change in Police behaviour or practice has contributed to these outcomes. This provides an opportunity to undertake a case study on WNPH to better understand how Police manage and respond to family harm through this innovative approach.

Interview findings

The following section includes a collation of interview findings from four interviews and one focus group across five key themes and a final discussion including a summary of findings and advice to the Police.

Iwi/Māori collaboration with the Police

This key theme recognises the importance of relationships between Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH) and local hapū and iwi, honouring Te Tiriti o Waitangi obligations, and embedding Māori values and tikanga throughout this innovation. Building strong relationships with local iwi at the onset of the WNPH sites is noted by respondents as a critical enabler to an effective collaboration. One interviewee reflects on their initial lack of iwi consultation in the early stages of one WNPH site, noting that other sites took time to consult with iwi and co-design a strategy for this mahi together.

“They had started off completely police-led and had left iwi out of the journey. And so, it's been a really long road for them. So, we were adamant that we weren't going to do that, and we were going to pursue it differently.” (Participant)

This collaborative process allows local iwi values, aspirations, and tikanga to be included in the design of each WNPH site and that through ongoing strong relationships each innovation site can evolve and grow over time alongside iwi. In reflection of the relationship between one WNPH site and the local iwi, one interviewee notes:

“That relationship has continued on with the next district commander that's come in, in terms of upholding that mana and status that [Rūnanga] have, and the importance of their voice within the space. So, police have definitely been on a journey here for the last 10 years around understanding what partnership means alongside [Rūnanga], and so that's been really awesome to see and to watch that grow.” (Participant)

There is some recognition in the data of rural WNPH sites having greater capability to build and maintain stronger iwi and community relationships, with one interviewee identifying this difference in comparison to urban WNPH sites who support larger populations. One

interviewee noted the effectiveness of employing iwi-led kaimahi at their site who foster strong community and whānau relationships, and recommended that other rural towns implement similar roles.

Through these iwi and hapū relationships is the inclusion and embedding of Māori values and tikanga within each WNPH sites, including the use of karakia, mihi whakatau, noho marae, te reo Māori use, tikanga, and Māori values. Through implementing Māori values within one WNPH site, the interviewee noted their alignment of Māori values and tikanga to existing Police values.

Interview data and insights highlighted the effectiveness of an iwi and Māori led approach to the WNPH innovation, suggesting that this approach is a catalyst for change.

Community of practice

“I think collaboration across [the community] is really, really important. I think absolutely understanding the needs and aspirations of whānau is critical.” (Participant)

The importance of building strong community relationships and connections is a common theme throughout the interview data. Additionally, data indicates that successful collaboration cannot occur without involvement of local communities of practice. Alongside strong iwi partnerships, the interviewees indicated the importance of including government and non-government organisations (NGO), community groups, and whānau voice in addressing family harm outcomes and interventions at each site. WNPH kaimahi noted their own strong relationships with government agencies including Oranga Tamariki and mental health providers and the subsequent positive impact on whānau outcomes as a result.

The data recognised the existing expertise in each community and how WNPH kaimahi and police utilise these skills and connections to

further support whānau beyond family harm outcomes. However, there are issues raised around how under-resourced many NGOs are even though there are some expectations that these organisations will support Police interventions and initiatives.

“We also keep talking about wanting this to be community-led, so we can't just expect community to do it on top of everything else that they're doing. Let's find some funding that actually invests in strategic-level leadership in the community to be able to step in and drive this kind of mahi.” (Participant)

The relationship between WNPH kaimahi and police is an important discussion point in the data as the partnership between iwi-led kaimahi and police officers raises issues around power imbalances, resourcing, values, and training. Additionally, data indicates that WNPH kaimahi could be considered the ‘tuakana’, and Police kaimahi as the ‘teina’ of this innovation, particularly as WNPH kaimahi leverage their existing community relationships and whānau-centred responses to family harm. Interviewees noted the disproportionate burden that is often placed on some WNPH kaimahi to train police officers, lead cultural work and workplace tikanga.

Further to this, police rotation procedures at WNPH sites further burdens kaimahi who are often tasked with training and educating new officers about this family harm approach. One interviewee adds:

“So, there's a real heaviness for the partner or iwi agency in these spaces because you're not only carrying, potentially, phenomenal work with whānau, but you're carrying this extra load of teaching and educating. And that's not necessarily recognised by those that you're working alongside. It's definitely not recognised by police in their rotation policy, which is really harmful.” (Participant)

As WNPH sites continue to develop and mature over time, a focus on strengthening iwi, community, and partnership relationships are critical to the efficacy of this family harm approach. It also highlights the reality that police are unable to effectively address family harm outcomes without the involvement of the communities they serve, and that involvement in a strong community of practice is critical for Police innovations and whānau wellbeing.

Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke approach to family harm

The interview data indicates some shifts in family harm approaches by the Police as a result of Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke. This new approach uses an empathetic lens to recognise the wellbeing of the whole whānau and the underlying drivers of harm. Interview data suggests that Police kaimahi, who most often respond to family harm through a traditional policing lens, are shifting their approach through opportunities of ‘situated learning’ in the WNPH innovation. There is recognition of Police kaimahi as ‘teina’ within this context, and that by engaging with whānau and communities through WNPH kaimahi they are able to learn this new approach on the job.

Interviewees noted a shift in police kaimahi towards a whole of whānau approach to family harm where the impacts of harm for tamariki and other family members are acknowledged and supported in some instances.

“So, we've moved from a very much family violence/family harm focus to more of a wellbeing focus, knowing that people who are struggling with family harm have a whole lot of underlying complexity and every other government agency has a part to play in that. So, it's been a really important journey that we've been on to understand that if we deal with the social stressors in return you're going to be able to influence the symptom of family violence.” (Participant)

Examples of this new police approach in the data include arriving to the house of a whānau with kai; building trust and connection through whanaungatanga first; responding to a family harm event by checking the wellbeing of the whole whānau including tamariki; and referring whānau to additional community supports to address some of the underlying drivers of harm. Inherent in the WNPH approach is the inclusion of Māori values and tikanga, with interviewees noting the impact this inclusion is having on the way police respond to harm events. Additionally, the culture within some of the WNPH sites, often led by WNPH kaimahi, aligns to the values of the kaupapa itself, and is demonstrated in the way staff are treated and supported in the workplace.

The WNPH kaupapa also allows kaimahi and police to discuss and support the aspirations of whānau as part of their family harm response, shifting focus beyond this isolated event towards sustainable and intergenerational whānau wellbeing. One kaimahi noted the following common response from police officers working in the WNPH kaupapa:

“This is actually how I thought policing was going to be. I've actually got the ability to walk alongside these families and support them at this time and work with them in preventing family harm from being a thing in their life.”
(Participant)

A rural and iwi-led WNPH site noted the positive response they receive from whānau when a familiar face arrives at their door, adding that the team will often decide who will attend a family harm event based on which kaimahi has connections to which whānau. They also noted that intergenerational distrust of the Police and trauma associated with the police uniform pose as barriers towards meaningful engagement between WNPH and whānau. While an iwi-led approach is not possible across all WNPH sites, this insight reiterates the importance and impact of maintaining strong community and whānau relationships through this innovation.

Police systems and culture

Interview data indicates some positive shifts in police culture and behaviour as well as further opportunities to improve police participation and collaboration in Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke. There is acknowledgement of some long-standing policing values and attitudes that are incompatible with the WNPH kaupapa, however, interviewees are observing shifts away from traditional police culture. One interviewee noted that this shift away from traditional family harm responses and policing practice allowed officers to support whānau in a different and more effective manner.

“It really helps to demonstrate that when we respond differently, we think differently. We can get so many amazing outcomes that reinforces the need to do things differently. I believe that it did create a cultural change for those that were working within that environment. So, there was the broad training that happened, which changed the way people approached family harm.” (Participant)

The data also highlights the lack of training frontline officers receive on family harm events and underlying drivers, and that the Police College still focusses heavily on crisis training. While the WNPH kaupapa has been effective in influencing police culture and responses to family harm, interview data suggests that additional training outside of this innovation is required to better implement new approaches to family harm throughout the Police. Furthermore, the effectiveness of situated learning for Police kaimahi as noted in the interview data suggests alternative ways of shifting police culture and approaches.

Across some WNPH sites, interviewees noted the imbalance of power between the Police and kaimahi and that in some instances this unwillingness to relinquish power had implications on the effectiveness of the innovation. While themes in the data indicated that the Police are unable to effectively serve

communities without the support of local partners and agencies, sites that maintain power imbalances face additional challenges to service delivery.

“We’ve been on this journey a really long time. We’ve had some really big conversations, but police are still not ready to hand over the power that sits in here. They’re not ready to fully trust.”
(Participant)

An iwi-led WNP site that operates without this power imbalance reports positive interactions with whānau and family harm results, suggesting that shifts away from traditional policing practice and control is essential for innovation.

Intersectionality and Police bias

Notions of racial and unconscious biases are discussed as ever present in the Police, and interviewees note that these biases continue to impact on how police officers respond to family harm events and other crimes involving various marginalised groups.

“If you were Māori or Pacific Islander stopped by police in town on a Thursday, a Friday or Saturday night, you were eight times more likely to end up in the report.” (Participant)

Interviewees urged the importance of allowing for open conversations about racial bias in the Police, and that accountability should be placed on senior management and leadership to role model non-discriminatory policing. Interview data also noted that these open conversations can create space for greater police innovations that respond to family harm and other crimes through a wellbeing lens.

Interviewees discussed the importance of embedding Te Tiriti o Waitangi principles within WNP sites as Police to promote authentic partnership. There is some discussion about additional education on Te Tiriti in the context of the Police, and that bias and misunderstanding can emerge without spaces for open and honest dialogue. Additionally, an interviewee discussed

the delivery of decolonisation training to police and how this module created an opportunity for discussions about colonisation. This programme included the history and impact of colonisation for Māori, providing a potential opportunity for police to connect colonial actions with contemporary justice outcomes for Māori.

In discussing notions of bias in the Police, one interviewee notes the relationship between racial bias and the presence of ‘Pākehā culture’ within the institution that often views the world in binaries.

“Pākehā culture I think is also often driven by systems that force people into an ego-driven way. It’s very individually focused, as opposed to collectively focused.” (Participant)

On the topic of gendered bias, one interviewee observed that female rather than male officers were more inclined to respond to family harm events empathetically. Simultaneously, there is interview data that highlights the presence of ‘boys club’ dynamics and sexism within the Police that is noted as a reflection of wider and long-standing societal views about women and gender roles. Notions of sexism and misogyny within the Police are problematic in the context of family harm events as Ihi Research analysis in Phase One indicates particularly poor interactions from the Police with wāhine Māori in family harm events, alluding to intersections of oppression across both ethnicity and gender.

Another common theme in the data is the emergence of younger police recruits in comparison to older police officers and workers and the differences in values and beliefs across generations. Interviewees acknowledge the positive impacts of recruiting younger police officers who often hold more progressive views about ethnicity and gender, highlighting the simultaneous influence of long-serving police officers and outdated values and beliefs on the police force.

Discussion

The Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke innovation has developed significantly since the first pilot sites were established in 2016, with interview data highlighting significant new approaches, enablers, challenges and advice for improvement moving forward.

Interview findings recognise the importance of building and maintaining strong and collaborative relationships with local iwi, including the embedding of iwi aspirations and tikanga within each WNPH site. While some earlier WNPH sites did not prioritise these relationships initially, data suggests that working alongside iwi long-term ensures this innovation aligns with the evolving needs and aspirations of local iwi and whānau.

WNPH sites that are iwi-led rather than Police-led also report greater outcomes and engagement with their local communities, linking to assertions in the data that Police should relinquish their power. The trusted and already established community relationships and networks fostered by iwi-led and WNPH kaimahi is a critical enabler to the success of this kaupapa, highlighting these kaimahi as leaders or ‘tuakana’ within this innovation. For Police, poorer community engagement, the Police uniform, and intergenerational mistrust are noted as barriers to meaningful engagement with whānau, suggesting that without the relationships and approach of WNPH kaimahi,

this innovation would not be as effective in addressing family harm.

Power imbalances within various sites see WNPH kaimahi carry disproportionately high workloads including training and leading tikanga and cultural work which is often not recognised or resourced appropriately by the Police. This burden also often sees WNPH kaimahi uphold the whānau-centred approach to responding to family harm where whānau aspirations, underlying causes of harm, and whole of whānau wellbeing are considered and supported. While WNPH kaimahi are burdened with this additional work, leading this work has been impactful in changing police behaviour and approaches to family harm. These shifts in police responses reiterates the efficacy and importance of situated learning opportunities alongside formal training modules.

Situated learning through the leadership of WNPH kaimahi also includes the practicing of tikanga and Māori values which are inherently driven by a whānau-centred and holistic approach. Longstanding racial bias in the

Police evidenced in interview data is innately incompatible with this alternative approach to family harm response, forcing Police kaimahi to confront their own unconscious biases and beliefs about certain communities. Police kaimahi who participated in this interview urged the importance of open and safe dialogue within the Police about colonisation, Te Tiriti o Waitangi, racism, sexism and other uncomfortable yet important topics to address and challenge biases within this workforce.

Additionally, the recruitment of younger police officers who often hold more progressive views are reportedly challenging long-held conservative views and beliefs held by some kaimahi within the police force. Data indicates that conservative and discriminatory views act as barriers towards meaningful and equitable policing in WNPH, further highlighting the importance of addressing these underlying stereotypes and judgements across the police force.

While WNPH sites continue to demonstrate reductions in family harm rates for the communities they serve, barriers affecting increased capacity include resourcing, high workloads, and population sizes in larger cities. Alternatively, the shared interest in building and maintaining trusted community and whānau relationships, the influence of situated learning on Police behaviour and culture, and outcomes and shifts already achieved through WNPH highlight the potential impact of collaborative iwi and police innovations in creating more equitable policing practice in Aotearoa New Zealand.



Advice

- 1.** Increased resourcing and recognition for Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke kaimahi and partners as ‘tuakana’ and leaders of this innovation. This includes the relinquishing of Police authority over this kaupapa to allow WNPH kaimahi and partners to lead this space in a collaborative way that aligns to iwi and whānau aspirations and needs.
- 2.** Additional opportunities for all Police staff to undertake training through situated learning activities alongside existing training modules and learning methods.

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Appendix 1.

Phase Two Methodology

Ihi Research has employed a methodological approach that is ‘Māori centred’ (Cunningham, 2000) and ‘Māori focused’ (Baker, 2009). A Māori centred and focused approach acknowledges and upholds the goals of Te Tiriti o Waitangi ensuring Māori are involved in all stages of the research, that mātauranga Māori (knowledge) is privileged, and both Māori and non-Māori methods and tools are used (Baker, 2009; Cunningham, 2000). The methodology is further informed by Police relationship agreements already in place (Ināia tonu nei, 2019⁴). The approach ensures mātauranga and tikanga Māori are used appropriately, alongside other knowledgebases such as improvement science for complex human systems (O’Flaherty & Sethi, 2020).

Phase Two: Exploratory Case Studies

Phase Two is qualitative in nature and centred around 10 exploratory case studies. The selection of these cases was undertaken in collaboration

between Ihi Research, the UPD panel and the Police, based on Ihi Research’s final analysis of Phase One data. The key inquiry question for Phase Two is: *How well and in what ways do police interact with Māori and other communities of interest?*

Five case study sites were centred on cases of Police innovation, and five case study sites were centred on communities of interest. The five community of interest cases were centred on Police interactions with:

- Rainbow/Takatāpui community.
- People who had been TASERed, and their whānau.
- People experiencing mental distress.
- Wāhine Māori and family harm.
- Police interactions with gang communities.

⁴ As a Te Tiriti partner, Police signed the Mana Ōrite agreement with Ināia Tonu Nei, as part of the Crown’s Criminal Justice Summit in August 2018. The agreement acknowledges the need for “healing and transformation;” “whereby Māori no longer experience institutionalised racism” and “whānau and communities will be empowered” (Ināia tonu nei, 2019, p. 1). Police, as a Crown agency, are tasked with ensuring fairness and equity in policing.

The five Police innovation cases explored Police interactions in:

- The Operational Advisory Group (OAG).
- De-escalation.
- Co-Response Team (CRT).
- Whāngaia Ngā Pā Harakeke (WNPH).
- Resilience to Organised Crime in Communities (ROCC).

Exploratory case studies can be descriptive in that they focus on participant experiences, which allows for flexibility and discovery. The case study is bounded, centred on an individual or small groups and can be in qualitative, narrative form (Merriam, 1988; Ogawa & Malen, 1991). Exploratory cases have essential characters (individuals or groups) who describe their experiences and perceptions of a central issue/problem/innovation.

These types of case studies can generate insights regarding the meanings people attach to a “phenomenon of interest” (Ogawa & Malen, 1991, p. 271). In this regard an exploratory case method approach was chosen to explore the findings that emerged from Ihi Research’s initial investigations (Phase One).

Ethics

A bespoke Ethics Committee was established for the UPD project to give independent advice on ethical considerations in relation to the methodologies and approaches of the research teams, including Ihi Research. The Ethics Committee is chaired by Distinguished Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith (Ngāti Awa, Ngāti Porou). Other members include Emeritus Professor Poia Rewi (Ngāti Manawa, Tūhoe, Te Arawa, Ngāti Whare, Tūwharetoa), Dr Waikaremoana Waitoki (Ngāti Hako, Ngāti Māhanga), and Dr Patrick Thomsen (Sāmoa: Vaimoso, Vaigagā).

Ihi Research was required to submit project plans for each phase of the research and has received ethical approval by the UPD Ethics Committee. This includes ethical approval for Phase Two.

Participant interviews and qualitative analysis

In total, sixty-nine participants took part in case study interviews. Thirty-five participants identified as Māori, four were Pasific people and thirty were Pākehā/New Zealand European. Participants were located across Aotearoa, in large urban centres as well as smaller rural locations.

Participants were invited to be interviewed via social media, through direct contact and via grassroots social enterprises that Ihi Research have longstanding relationships with. Participants were given detailed information about the research and what their involvement would entail. Individuals and whānau who were not paid professionals were offered a koha in recognition of their time and expertise.

All participants gave informed consent prior to engaging in interviews. Participants were informed of the purposes of the research and what would happen to the information they provided. Participant information forms and consent forms were discussed with participants prior to their interviews. They were informed that all interview information, including audio files, handwritten notes and meeting transcriptions were to be securely locked in a locked filing cabinet or a password protected computer file. Ihi Researchers and transcribers have all signed confidentiality agreements. Ihi Research destroys all personal information, including audio recordings, interview transcripts and case study meeting notes one year following the release of the final report.

Interviews were conducted at a time and place that suited case study participants. The majority were face to face interviews, but some were via Zoom or over the phone. Some participants chose to take part in focus groups and others preferred individual interviews. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. A member checking process was undertaken at different stages to ensure accuracy of participant views. Interview transcripts were sent back to participants for their review and approval prior to analysis.

Case study analyses

Interviews were analysed using thematic analysis (Silverman, 1998). This meant the main themes described in each of the cases were identified inductively. Draft case studies were then written up and sent back to individual case study participants for review and comment. Once finalised, cross-case analysis was undertaken. This involved an in-depth exploration of similarities and differences across cases. Cross-case analysis was undertaken independently by three Ihi Researchers, who then met as part of a peer review process to determine overall themes.

Considerations

It is important to note that the Phase Two research is not an evaluation of Police delivery but rather provides exploratory and descriptive case studies around Police interactions with specific communities and Police innovations related to the overall aim of the UPD research. The purpose is not to make generalisations, but to explore the issues as they relate to equity and fairness in policing delivery.



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