

The Impact that COVID-19 had on the Capacity and Capability of the Police: A Comparison Between the Police in New Zealand and the United Kingdom

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Research Article

ABSTRACT

In early 2020, Coronavirus (COVID-19) became a pandemic and a worldwide health crisis. In response, governments implemented a number of restrictions, including lockdowns, social distancing, and the requirement to wear face masks. These restrictions were enforced by the police. This article examines the impact that the pandemic had on the capability and capacity of the police in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The examination indicates that COVID-19 had a significantly impacted on both the New Zealand Police and the police in the United Kingdom, but in different ways. The police in the United Kingdom were more affected by the number of sworn staff who were incapacitated by the virus, whereas the police in New Zealand were affected more by the number of incapacitated civilian staff. New Zealand also experienced an increase in reported crime, while the United Kingdom experienced decreases in most crimes, except for anti-social behaviour, organised crime, and cyber-related offences, which all increased.

Keywords: *policing, COVID-19, New Zealand Police.*

INTRODUCTION

The New Zealand Police, as with police agencies around the world, were at the forefront of enforcing government restrictions imposed as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020 and 2021. The role of the police around the world was expanded to include enforcing government restrictions on the movement of people within the community and issuing notices to those who breached the restrictions during the pandemic (Patterson, 2021). This led to the police interacting with people who may have had the virus, who were symptomatic or were carrying the virus.

Police officers have sworn to uphold the law and report for duty. Police officers cannot work from home, cannot stop engaging with members of the community, and cannot stop attending calls for service. To perform their duty, police officers engage with community members, which increases the risk of them contracting COVID-19. Having large numbers of police staff absent from work because of COVID-19 could significantly affect the delivery of police services and the occurrence of crime. This research seeks to examine the impact that COVID-19 had on the New Zealand Police, the delivery of their services and the level of crime during 2021 in comparison to that experienced by the police in the United Kingdom. The research will also compare the impact that COVID-19 had on the capacity and capability of the New Zealand Police with that experienced by the police in the United Kingdom. The article does not review issues pertaining to the legitimacy of the actions taken by the police enforcing the COVID-19 legal requirements, although these are referred to in the discussion to assist with the analysis of the findings.

The first part of this article reviews the literature on COVID-19, the health mandates that were introduced as a response to the pandemic and the impact that the pandemic had on the occurrence of crime and calls for police service. The research methodology used is explained, followed by a comparison of the impact of the pandemic on policing in New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

THE IMPACT OF COVID-19

In early 2020, the world experienced a devastating pandemic from the Coronavirus disease (COVID-19).¹ The virus was extremely infectious, and as a result, numerous countries implemented travel bans, isolation, distancing requirements, rules for wearing face masks, and stay-home orders (World Health Organization, 2022). When the world was experiencing the first wave of the virus in mid to late March 2020, most countries implemented lockdowns of communities and cities to prevent the spread of the virus (Halford, 2022; Meyer et al., 2022).

The enforcement of mandated restrictions was delegated to the police. This had a profound effect on policing and the police, especially with how they interacted with minority communities (Gorton et al., 2022; Jones, 2020; Kyprianides et al., 2022; Maskaly et al., 2021). The enforcement of the mandates was fundamentally different from day-to-day policing, and administering the directives imposed by the mandates became a new function of policing. It extended the boundaries of what the police and the public had previously determined was appropriate for the police to carry out (Ghaemmaghami et al., 2021; Kyprianides et al., 2022; Maskaly et al., 2021). It was not known how the mandates would be enforced because any direction that was given by governments was ambiguous, and in some cases, led to the

¹ This is an infectious disease caused by the SARS-CoV-2 virus (World Health Organization, 2022).

questioning of the legitimacy of the police to enforce community health mandates (Bradford et al., 2020; Ghaemmaghami et al., 2021; Kyprianides et al., 2022).

Governments around the world determined that the police were essential for their response to the virus and that they were the appropriate institution to enforce any restrictions (Nielson et al., 2022). These views were held even though the virus entailed a health-based approach for which the police did not have the appropriate training or equipment (International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020). Because preparation for enforcing the mandates was limited, police officers and staff were at risk of exposure to the virus (Bates, 2020; International Association of Chiefs of Police, 2020; Nix et al., 2021). Any police officer who contracted the virus needed to isolate, resulting in personnel shortages (Halford, 2022; Halford et al., 2020; Schuppe, 2020). In New York City, for example, by May 2020, the New York City Police Department had more than 5,000 officers test positive for COVID-19 and 41 officers died from the virus (Rummler, 2020). This was similar to what the Detroit Police Department experienced. More than 6% of their officers tested positive, and more than 35% were quarantined (Eligon & MacFarquhar, 2020).

The involvement of the police in enforcing the COVID-19 mandates can be interpreted as an expansion in the role and scope of the police. As well as having the responsibility of enforcing COVID-19 mandates, in recent years, they have become more involved in responding to other public health (Murray et al., 2018; Vitale, 2017) and social issues, such as homelessness (Goodison et al., 2020; Vitale, 2017). The expansion of responsibilities of the police has been seen as a change in policing that includes the management of vulnerability (Enang et al., 2019).

It was perceived that if the police were to enforce COVID-19 restrictions, this could affect their ability to undertake their core functions, such as preventing and responding to crime (Ashby, 2020; Halford, 2022). Several researchers have examined the impact that enforcing COVID-19 restrictions had on the reactive and proactive activities of the police. They studied whether there was any change in the number of calls for service and the type of calls for service (Ashby, 2020; Dai et al., 2021; Demir & Park, 2021; Koziarski, 2021; Lersch, 2020; Miller et al., 2021; Mohler et al., 2020; Nix & Richards, 2021; White et al., 2022), and whether there were any changes in the level or types of crimes occurring while the police were enforcing the COVID-19 mandates (Halford et al., 2020; Meyer et al., 2022; Wolff et al., 2022). The results of the various studies were mixed and indicated that the trends in calls for service were different, depending on the type of call and the city being examined (e.g., see Ashby, 2020; Baier, 2020). The differences were highlighted in research undertaken in Houston, Texas, where it was found that calls for property crime and traffic-related activities decreased but calls for violent crime increased compared to previous years (Neilson et al., 2022). In similar research undertaken in Tempe, Arizona, White et al. (2022) found that the weekly average number of calls for service after the first wave of the pandemic declined by approximately 22% from pre-pandemic levels. While research that examined the cities of Los

Angeles and Indianapolis found that calls related to burglaries decreased in Los Angeles, but not in Indianapolis and that robbery calls decreased significantly in Los Angeles, but only marginally in Indianapolis (Mohler et al., 2020). In more detailed research that examined the calls for service in 10 of the largest cities in the United States, it was found that the impact of the virus was not uniform across the cities and there was substantial variation in the changes, depending on the city and the type of crime that formed the basis for the call (Ashby, 2020).

Research has also been undertaken to examine the impact of COVID-19 on police activities. In a survey of more than 1,000 police executives in the United States and Canada, it was found that by 23 March 2020, there had been changes in police operations during the first wave of the pandemic (Lum et al., 2020a). The research found that 43% of responding agencies had stopped or significantly changed their type of response, depending on the type of call for service. Fifty-seven percent of responding agencies reported that they had experienced a decrease in the number of calls for service, 61% had implemented policies to reduce proactive traffic stops, and 73% of respondents limited the delivery of community-oriented policing services.

In later research that examined the second wave of the pandemic, it was found that by 10 May 2020, 53% of the responding agencies were continuing their policies that limited proactivity, and 64% had maintained limited community-oriented policing services (Lum et al., 2020b). In a similar survey of police executives from 27 countries, it was found that by May 2020, 83% of the responding organisations experienced some changes to problem-solving or community policing activities, 78.3% had made changes to their patrol strategies, 68.2% had decreased the number of traffic stops undertaken, 60.9% had a decrease in officer-initiated activities, 43.4% had a decrease in calls for service, and 34.8% had a decrease in the deployment of their tactical teams (Maskaly et al., 2021).

Researchers have also examined the impact that COVID-19 had on the occurrence of crime (Abrams, 2021; Campedelli et al., 2021; Koppel et al., 2022; Payne et al., 2020; Piquero et al., 2020; Stickle & Felson, 2020). It was initially thought that COVID-19 would significantly impact the occurrence of crime and the reporting of crime in various ways (Ashby, 2020; Bump, 2020; Farrell & Tilley, 2020; Mohler et al., 2020). It was believed that because cities were in lockdown, people would spend more time at home and that offences such as domestic violence and child abuse would increase (Halford et al., 2020). Early research indicated that there were initial increases in domestic violence in Australia, Argentina, Brazil, China, India, Italy, Mexico, Spain, Sweden, and the United States (Campbell, 2020; Nix & Richards, 2021; Piquero et al., 2021; Richards et al., 2021) and that hate crimes that were directed towards people of Asian descent had increased (Gover et al., 2020). However, Halford et al. (2020) found that domestic abuse decreased by 45% in the United Kingdom in 2020 compared with 2019. It was also believed that because people would be at home, burglary and offences that occur in entertainment areas, such as fighting in a public place, would decrease (Halford et al., 2020). However, before COVID-19, several countries, including

the United States, had experienced a decrease in the occurrence of violent crimes, although there was evidence the decline was slowing (Wolff et al., 2022).

Researchers who examined the impact that COVID-19 had on crime found that all recorded crimes in the United Kingdom had declined by 41% compared to five-year averages (Halford et al., 2020). However, there was some variation in the decrease depending on the type of crime. Shoplifting decreased by 62%, theft by 52%, assault by 36%, and burglary by 25% (Halford et al., 2020).

In research that examined crime data from January 2018 to December 2020, in 28 of the 70 largest cities in the United States, the number of homicides was higher in 2020, as was the theft of motor vehicles but the number of robberies decreased (Meyer et al., 2022). In other research that reviewed data from 23 cities in the United States, there was no statistically significant increase in homicides, but drug crimes, violent crimes, and most property crimes decreased during the first lockdown (Abrams, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic impacted many aspects of society, including how the public viewed the enforcement of health mandates. The pandemic also impacted policing and the police, especially how the public viewed the enforcement of lockdowns and social distancing. This article examines and compares how the pandemic affected the police in the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

METHODOLOGY

In early 2022, Halford (2022) published an article that examined the impact that COVID had on police demand, capacity, and capability in the United Kingdom from January 2020 to June 2021. The research design was based on a mixed methods approach and the surveying of police staff. The Freedom of Information Act² was used to request information from the 43 police services in the United Kingdom. Twenty-five of the 43 services (58%) responded to the request. Those in the police services were asked 16 questions about the impact that COVID-19 had on their capacity and capability. Halford also surveyed the police staff to understand the effect that COVID-19 had on their organisation's operational capacity and the capability of specialist units. The survey provided more detailed information, which was used to support the findings and the interpretation of the Freedom of Information requests (Halford, 2022).

The research discussed in this article used a design similar to that used by Halford (2022). The research compares the experience of the police in the United Kingdom with that of the New Zealand Police. The New Zealand Police were chosen as a comparison because the political system in New Zealand is modelled on the British system (the Westminster model)

² The Freedom of Information Act 2000 provides public access to information held by public authorities in the United Kingdom. The Act covers any recorded information that is held in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, with a legal obligation to reply unless specific criteria are present.

and uses a concept called separation of powers. Furthermore, the New Zealand Police follow the British policing tradition and are unarmed, while much of New Zealand's law, such as its common law tradition and constitutional framework, has been inherited from the English legal system.

The New Zealand Police, similar to the police in the United Kingdom, have not released any information about the impact COVID-19 had on their capacity and capability to deliver services. To conduct this research, a request was made to the New Zealand Police using the Official Information Act 1982 to obtain information regarding the absence of police officers and staff owing to the impact of COVID-19. A survey of staff who were employed by the New Zealand Police was not included in the research. Two methodological steps were used in the research. The first was an analysis of the data obtained under the Official Information Act request that was made to the New Zealand Police and the second was comparing this data with the findings of Halford's (2022) research. The two steps were used to answer the research question: What was the impact that COVID-19 had on the capacity and capability of the New Zealand Police in comparison to the impact that was experienced by the 43 police forces in the United Kingdom?

The level of reported crime in England and Wales and New Zealand during 2020 and 2021 is also reviewed to provide context to the examination of the impact of COVID-19 on the police in New Zealand and the United Kingdom. The review is undertaken to determine whether the level changed during COVID-19 and whether COVID-19 may have impacted police demand. A regression analysis was completed on the New Zealand data and Table 1 presents the parameter estimates and standard errors of the data for 2021.

	Parameter Estimate	Standard Error	P-value
Intercept	-2930.13	5910.01	0.631
Reported crime 2021	38.41	8.15	0.000

Table 1: Parameter estimates for linear regression of the New Zealand Police staffing level and change in reported crime in New Zealand in 2021

In August 2022, an Official Information Act request was sent to the New Zealand Police for information on the number of police officers and staff who had reported absent from work or were required to self-isolate because they had contracted COVID-19 or were a close contact of someone who had contracted COVID-19. Information at the Police District level for the period 1 March 2020 to 31 December 2021 was requested. This period was selected because it covered the initial lockdown of the country in March 2020 to when the legislation was relaxed that allowed retail businesses and restaurants to open.

In September 2022, the New Zealand Police replied to the Official Information Act request. The police advised that there was no information available on the number of staff who were isolating owing to COVID-19 or who had contracted COVID-19 in 2020 as it wasn't

a requirement to collect this type of data at that time (New Zealand Police, 2022b). However, the police were able to provide the information for the 2021 calendar year. The information that the New Zealand Police supplied has been used as the basis for the following analysis and discussion.

The analysis and discussion of the impact that COVID-19 had on the New Zealand Police has been based on the data obtained from the Official Information Act request. The data provided was the actual number of police officers and casual and other staff who were absent owing to COVID-19 in the 12 New Zealand Police Districts, the Royal New Zealand Police College, and Police National Headquarters. The data supplied was classified into three categories: Requests for Self-isolation, Requests for COVID related Special leave, and Requests for both Self-isolation and COVID related Special leave.

The data was converted into a percentage of the specific category of employee by using the information on staff numbers that was documented in the Annual Report of the New Zealand Police 2020/21 (see New Zealand Police, 2021). The conversion was undertaken to enable a comparison between the 12 districts and the two different types of employee categories. It was not possible to compare the data by using the total number of employees for each district.

THE RESPONSE OF THE NEW ZEALAND GOVERNMENT TO COVID-19

The first case of COVID-19 in New Zealand was reported to health authorities on 28 February 2020. On 14 March, the New Zealand Government directed that anyone entering New Zealand had to self-isolate for 14 days. Shortly after this, on 19 March, the borders were closed and only New Zealand citizens and permanent residents could enter the country. At the same time, the government introduced a four-tiered alert level system (COVID-19.govt.nz, 2022).

On 25 March 2020, the country moved to the highest alert level and was placed into lockdown until 25 April 2020. The country was locked down again from 17 August 2021 to 31 August 2021. When the lockdown was lifted, the Auckland area remained at the higher alert level of 4, while the rest of the country moved to level 3. This meant that the borders in the Auckland area needed to be controlled, and responsibility for this was designated to the police. The entry into Auckland was controlled until 21 September 2021, when the level was lowered to the same level as the rest of the country (COVID-19.govt.nz, 2022). From September to December 2021, different areas across the country experienced changes in alert levels, from 1 to 3, but enforcement action by the police was not required.

THE IMPACT THAT COVID-19 HAD ON THE NEW ZEALAND POLICE

The imposition of alert level 4 and the entry restrictions into Auckland were enforced by the New Zealand Police. The police maintained visible patrols and reinforced the guidelines on what the public should do under alert level 4 restrictions (New Zealand Police, 2020a).

Information about the occurrence of crime during the first lockdown was made available by the New Zealand Police (see New Zealand Police, 2020b), but they did not do this during the country-wide lockdown in 2021. Therefore, the discussion that follows is based on the information that the New Zealand Police provided for the 2021 calendar year.

The percentage of officers who contracted COVID-19 or applied for special leave because of the virus varied by police district. The five northern districts (Northland, Waitemata, Auckland, Counties Manukau, and Bay of Plenty) had high numbers of officers with the virus or who had requested special leave. The percentage for these districts was Northland, 6.6%, Bay of Plenty, 6.9%, Auckland City, 11.4%, Waitemata, 16.1%, and Counties Manukau, 16.5%. Other than Northland, the four other districts are populous. Northland was included in this group because of its proximity to Auckland City and many people commute between the two locations. For this reason, Waikato should have also had a high percentage, but only 3.8% of the officers in the district either contracted the virus or applied for special leave. The next highest percentage of those affected by the virus were staff and recruits at the Royal New Zealand Police College, with 6.3%.

The percentage of officers affected by the virus in each of the districts and officers available for deployment are presented in Figure 1. The figure compares the percentage of officers available for duty (the capacity of the police to deliver its services) against the percentage of reported absences in each district. This allows the impact that COVID-19 had on the percentage of officers available for duty to be examined.

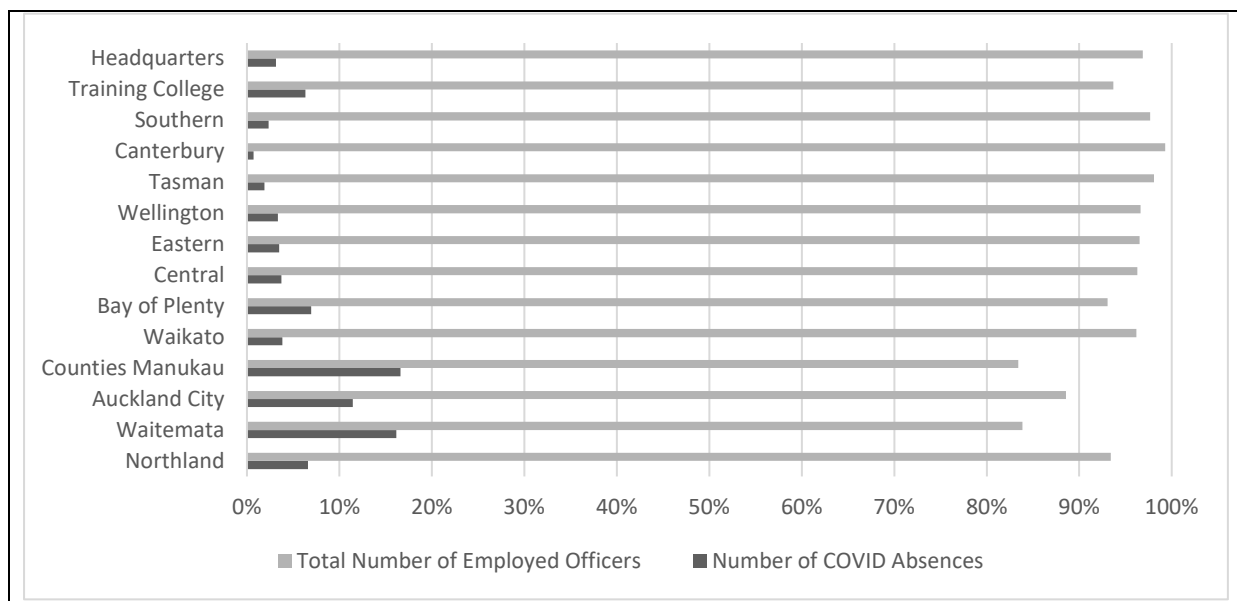


Figure 1: Percentage of Police Officers who were Available and Unavailable owing to COVID-19 Related Absence
Source: New Zealand Police (2022b)

An analysis of the impact that COVID-19 had on casual and other staff presents a different result. Although the same five districts (Northland, Waitemata, Auckland, Counties Manukau, and Bay of Plenty) had the highest percentages of casual and other staff who were affected by COVID-19, the Central and Eastern districts had more than 10% of their casual and other staff affected with 12.5% and 11.7%, respectfully. The district most affected was the Bay of Plenty, which had 35.7% of its casual and other staff in isolation or on special leave. This information is presented in Figure 2. Overall, the average percentage of casual and other staff affected by COVID-19 was 9.1% compared to sworn staff, which was 6.8%.

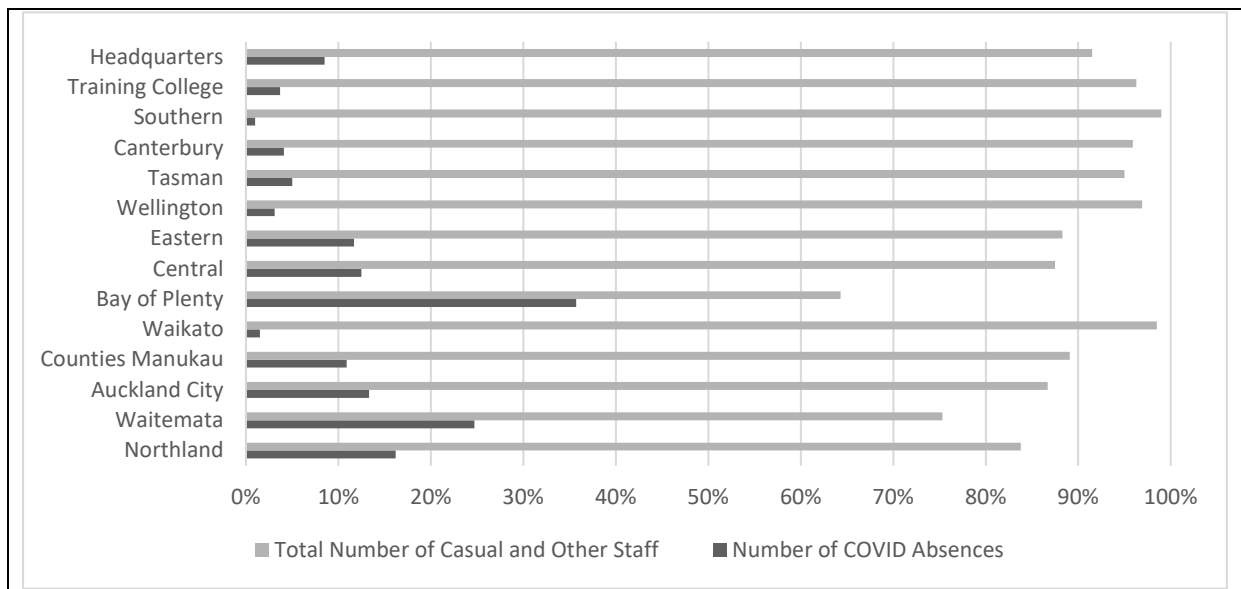


Figure 2: Percentage of Casual and Other Staff Members who were Available and Unavailable owing to COVID-19 Related Absences
Source: New Zealand Police (2022b)

The next analysis examined the combination of the percentage of officers and the percentage of casual and other staff. The officer and casual and other staff who were absent have been combined to create a percentage of total staff (officers, casual and other staff) in each district. This had a smoothing effect on the percentage of absences in each of the districts, as all districts had either a higher percentage of officers who were absent or a higher percentage of casual and other staff who were absent. This information is presented in Table 3. As in the previous analyses, the main police districts affected by COVID-19 were the five

northern districts (Northland, Waitemata, Auckland, Counties Manukau, and Bay of Plenty). The highest percentage recorded in the five districts was Waitemata, which had 16.9%, followed by Counties Manukau, 15.9%, Auckland City, 11.7%, Bay of Plenty, 9.3%, and Northland, 7.5%. The least affected district was Canterbury, which had less than 1%.

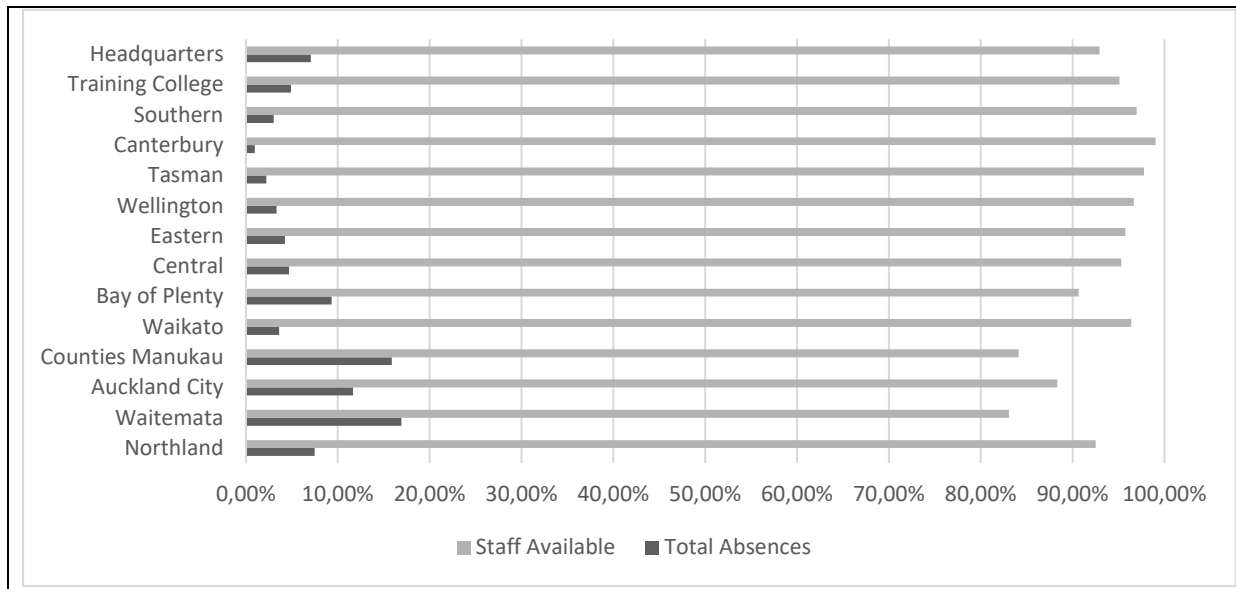


Figure 3: Percentage of Total Staff who were Available and Unavailable owing to COVID-19 Related Absences
Source: New Zealand Police (2022b)

The percentage of total staff who were not available only included staff who were affected by COVID-19 and did not include staff who were absent for any other reason, such as being injured, attending a bereavement, ill, child or family member ill, or maternity leave. If the number of staff who were absent were to be combined with those who were absent owing to COVID-19, then this would result in a higher number of staff absences and the number of staff who were available for duty would be lower.

COVID-19 also appears to have impacted the total number of reported crimes in New Zealand for each of the districts for 2019 to 2022 (June year). The number of reported crimes for 2019–2022 is presented in Figure 4. The figure shows the districts that experienced an increase in the level of crime in 2021 and 2022 compared to 2019 and 2020. The Bay of Plenty and the Tasman districts experienced a higher level of crime in 2021 than in 2022, while the other 10 districts experienced an increase in 2022 compared to 2021. The districts with the largest increases in crime between 2019 and 2022 included four of the northern districts (Northland, 15.8%, Waitemata, 17.8%, Auckland, 15.8%, and Counties Manukau, 20.3%) and Waikato, Eastern, Wellington, Canterbury, and Southern all experienced an increase of more than 12%. Only Bay of Plenty, Central and Tasman experienced increases of less than 10%.

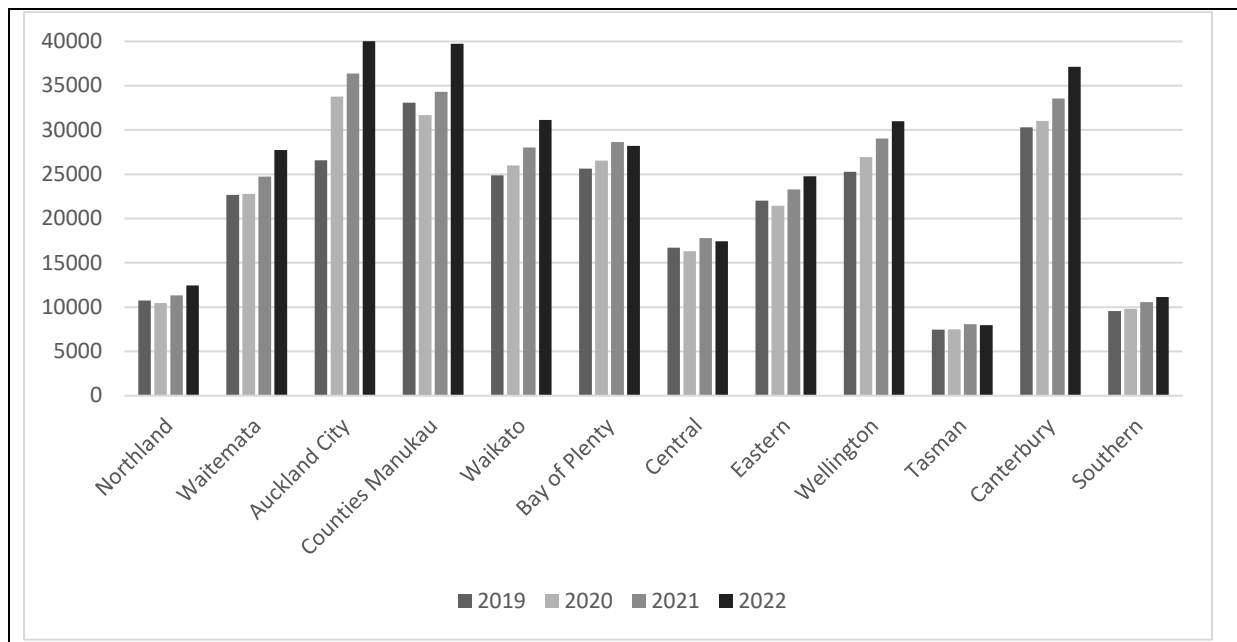


Figure 4: Total Reported Crime (Number of Victimisations) by Police District
2019 to 2022 (June Year)
Source: New Zealand Police (2022a)

AN ANALYSIS OF THE IMPACT THAT COVID-19 HAD ON THE NEW ZEALAND POLICE

Information about the percentage of police officers, the percentage of casual and other staff, and the percentage of these two groups who were absent from work owing to COVID-19 and the percentage of staff who were available for duty is presented in Figures 1 to 3. From the analysis, staffing levels in the five northern districts (Northland, Waitemata, Auckland, Counties Manukau, and Bay of Plenty) were the most affected by staff absences owing to COVID-19.

Comparing the data in Figures 1 and 2, in most of the districts, the percentage of casual and other staff who were absent owing to COVID-19 was much higher than that of police officers who were absent. The districts with a higher percentage of police officers who were absent rather than casual and other staff who were absent included Counties Manukau, Waikato, Wellington, and Southern. The districts with a higher percentage of casual and other staff who were absent owing to COVID-19 were Northland, Waitemata, Auckland City, Bay of Plenty, Central, Eastern, Tasman, and Canterbury. In six of the districts (Northland, Bay of Plenty, Central, Eastern, Tasman, and Canterbury), the percentage of casual and other staff who were absent was more than double that of police officers who were absent. The Bay of

Plenty district had more than 36% of their casual and other staff absent owing to COVID-19, Waitemata had 25% and Northland, Central and Eastern all had more than 12%.

The total number of police officers, the percentage of police officers who were absent and the percentage of casual and other staff who were absent owing to COVID-19 are presented in Figure 3. The percentages in the figure are based on the total number of staff in a district. This method was used because it provides a more accurate representation of the impact that COVID-19 had on the workforce of the New Zealand Police. Adding the percentage of police officers who were absent in a district with the percentage of casual and other staff who were absent would be meaningless and would not provide an accurate picture of the impact that COVID-19 had on the New Zealand Police. An example of why this would be meaningless can be demonstrated by adding the percentage of police officers who were absent in the Bay of Plenty district with the percentage of casual or other staff who were absent in the district (6.9% +36%). This would yield a percentage of 42.9. However, using the information provided by the New Zealand Police, if the number of absences is added together and using the total number of staff for the district, the percentage is 9.3.

The information the New Zealand Police provided enabled the three categories of Self-isolation, Special Leave and Self-isolation with Special Leave, by district, for police officers and casual and other staff to be examined. Self-isolation of officers accounted for the highest percentage of absences at a national average of 2.9%, followed by Special Leave at 2.4%, then Self-isolation and Special Leave, both at 1.6%. In comparison, Special Leave accounted for the highest percentage of absences for casual and other staff at 3.7%, followed by Self-isolation and Self-isolation with Special Leave both at 2.7%.

THE IMPACT THAT COVID-19 HAD ON THE POLICE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Halford's (2022) research highlighted the impact that COVID-19 had on the capacity and capability of the 43 police forces in the United Kingdom. The research revealed that in April 2020, approximately 10% of all police officers were absent owing to the virus. This increased to more than 20% in January 2021. Less than 2% of police staff members were absent owing to COVID-19 in April 2020, and approximately 4% were absent in January 2021.

In an analysis of officer and staff absences, Halford asserted that nearly double the number of police officers compared to the number of police staff reported absent owing to contracting COVID-19 or because they were self-isolating after having contact with a person who had the virus during 2020 and 2021. However, the claim was based on the actual number of police officers and staff and not on the percentage of police officers or staff in each of the police forces.

Halford (2022) also found that there was a trend that related to the size of a police force and the number of reported absences. From an analysis of the data, Halford claimed that smaller sized police forces were more affected by the absences of police officers than

larger sized forces. This was mainly because of self-isolation. Self-isolation was also the main reason for the absences of police staff across the police forces in the United Kingdom.

Halford also examined the impact that COVID-19 had on the demand for police services and his research found that property crimes (theft, robbery, burglary, shoplifting) had decreased more than other crimes. There had also been a significant decrease in violent offences, including homicide, but there were significant increases in anti-social behaviour, organised crime, and cyber-related offences. The total level of reported crime in the United Kingdom between 2015 and 2022 is presented in Figure 5. From April 2015 until March 2019 there was a steady increase in the total number of reported crimes in the United Kingdom, but between April 2019 and March 2020, there was a decrease in the total of reported crime. The total of reported crime started to increase again in April 2020.

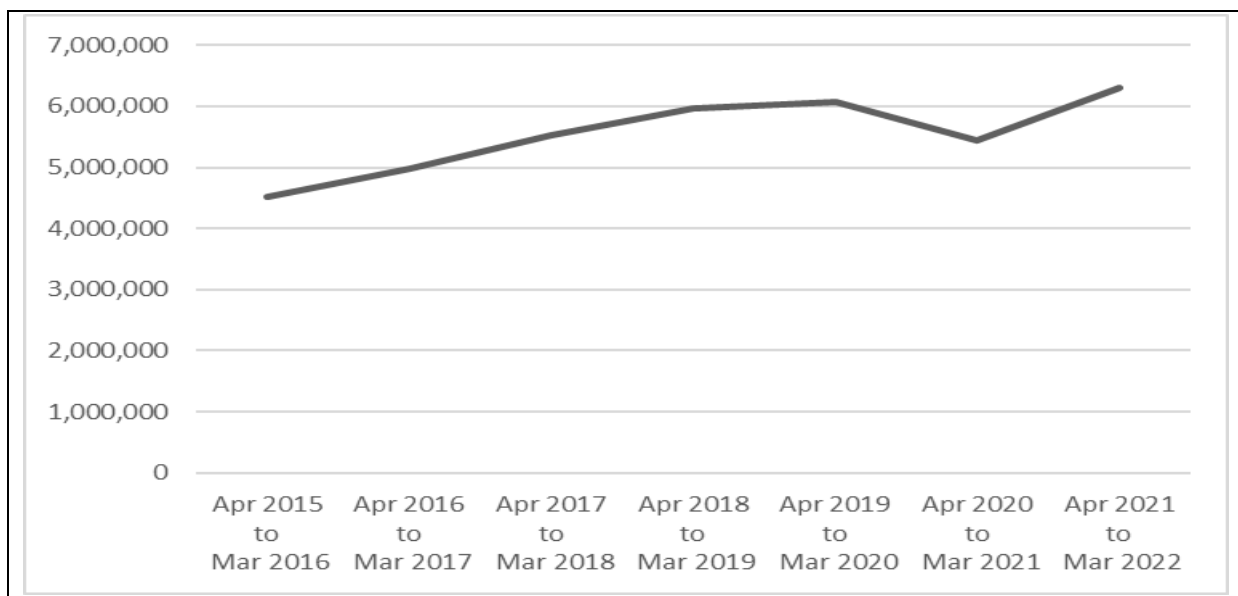


Figure 5: Total Reported Crime in the United Kingdom April 2015 to March 2022
Source: Office for National Statistics (2022)

A COMPARISON OF POLICING IN THE UNITED KINGDOM AND NEW ZEALAND DURING COVID-19

This section compares the effect that COVID-19 had on the police in the United Kingdom with that which was experienced by the New Zealand Police. Although there was a difference in the form of data that was provided by the police in the United Kingdom with that supplied by the New Zealand Police, the substance of the data is comparable. The main difference between the two sets of data is that the data used to examine the police in the United

Kingdom is a time series for the period January 2020 to June 2021 and the information that the New Zealand Police provided is panel data for the 2021 calendar year.

The research compares the police forces in both countries and examines the percentage of police officers who were not available owing to a COVID-19 related absence. The percentage of New Zealand police officers affected by COVID-19 varied from 16.6% in the Counties Manukau district to 1.9% in the Canterbury district, giving a national average of 6.8%. In comparison, the percentage of police officers in the United Kingdom affected by COVID-19 was 10% in April 2020 and this increased to 20% in 2021. This implies that the police in the United Kingdom were more affected by COVID-19 than the New Zealand Police. This was despite some of the New Zealand Police districts having the same percentages of affected officers as police forces in the United Kingdom experienced.

The findings from the comparison of the percentage of the casual and other staff who were not available owing to COVID-19 in the two countries are different. The percentage of casual and other staff who were not available in the New Zealand Police districts varied between 1.5% and 35%, with a national average of 9.2%. The percentage of police casual and other staff in the United Kingdom varied between 2% in April 2020 and 4% in January 2021. This review shows that although some police districts in New Zealand had a similar percentage of casual and other staff who were not available, eight districts had double to more than five times the national average percentage of staff who were not available.

The level of reported crime in the two countries has also been compared. In the case of New Zealand, all 12 police districts experienced an increase in the level of crime in 2021 compared to 2019 and 2020. Although some individual police forces in the United Kingdom had increases in some crimes for the period the research data covers, the total level of reported crime dropped approximately 10.5% compared to the previous year.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of the information has highlighted that COVID-19 impacted both the New Zealand Police and the police in the United Kingdom, but in different ways. In New Zealand, across all the police districts, the total reported crime increased significantly in all categories, except for abduction and harassment. While in the United Kingdom, there were significant decreases in total reported crime, except for anti-social behaviour, organised crime, and cyber-related offences. As Halford (2022) noted, the increases in organised crime and cyber-related offences would have meant that the police forces in the United Kingdom would have had some difficulty in investigating these types of crimes as they require experienced and specialist investigators. However, the police in both countries would have had to carefully manage their resources to balance the reactive and proactive demands made of them while responding to COVID-19. In New Zealand, police staff were temporarily transferred around

the country to manage the two occasions when the government closed the border around Auckland.

Problems in deploying police officers were acknowledged in the research of the police forces in the United Kingdom, as the public perceived that the police were not as visible during the pandemic as they had been previously and that there had been a lower level of response to incidents reported to the police (Clements & Aitkenhead, 2020). In relation to New Zealand, there were no mainstream media articles or any research undertaken that found any perceived decrease in the visibility of the police during the pandemic or that the police were not attending incidents when requested by the public.

The New Zealand Police and the police forces in the United Kingdom may have faced problems in managing the increases and changes in crime because both had similar percentages of officers who were unavailable, although the percentage of New Zealand police officers fluctuated depending on the district. However, the New Zealand Police may have been more agile in responding to the impact of COVID-19 than the police forces in the United Kingdom as the New Zealand Police are a national force, whereas each force in the United Kingdom would have had to absorb the increase and change in the occurrence of crime by itself. This discussion implies that the police in both countries may have had a limited ability to meet their reactive and proactive responsibilities effectively due to the decreased number of officers available to respond to reported crimes. Any limit in the availability of officers would have been exacerbated by the extra enforcement and social demands placed on them because of the pandemic.

One factor that may have influenced the capability of the police during the pandemic was the additional law enforcement requirements that the pandemic created. How the police in each country responded to enforcing their COVID-19 restrictions was one of the main differences between the two countries. Between 31 December 2020 and 19 July 2021, the police in England and Wales issued 118,963 Fixed Penalty Notices (FPNs) under COVID-19 Emergency Health Regulations (National Police Chief's Council, 2022) and between 27 March 2020 and 31 May 2021, the Scottish police issued 20,410 FPNs and carried out 150,000 COVID-19 related interventions (Scottish Centre for Administrative Data Research, 2022). In comparison, between 27 April and 8 June 2020, the New Zealand Police responded to 7,531 violations, issued 6,352 verbal and written warnings, and undertook 991 prosecutions (Patterson, 2021). After June 2020, the New Zealand Police took an educational approach to breaches of the COVID-19 restrictions and only issued verbal warnings to offenders (Patterson, 2021).

On a population basis, the police in the United Kingdom enforced the COVID-19 restrictions more (181.5 people per action) than the New Zealand Police did (664 people per action). The number of FPNs issued, the number COVID-19 interventions undertaken and the increase in some reported crimes would have had a similar effect on the capacity and

capability of the police in the United Kingdom as the significant increase in reported crime had on the capacity and capability of the New Zealand Police during the pandemic.

This research provides a foundation for planning for any future pandemics. Operational and human resource planning for any future pandemic or large-scale crisis will benefit from this research. The difference in the experience of the police forces in the two countries during the pandemic enables police planners to consider a variety of different scenarios that include an increase or decrease in reported crime and a large number of police officers or casual and other staff not being available (Clements & Aitkenhead, 2020). Considering the various scenarios should ensure that the police are well prepared for any future pandemics.

There are several limitations in this research. The first is that the police in both the United Kingdom and New Zealand did not record detailed information in relation to staff availability and absences because of COVID-19. However, the record keeping of staff availability by the police forces in the United Kingdom was better than the records kept by the New Zealand Police. The New Zealand Police did not record staff absences during 2020, which meant the situation in New Zealand in 2020 could not be compared to that in the United Kingdom in 2020. Consequently, the information regarding the police forces in the United Kingdom for 2020 had to be compared with the 2021 information that was supplied by the New Zealand Police. Another limitation was that the 2021 information that was supplied by the New Zealand Police was only available on a district basis, not a monthly basis.

The findings from this research provide a basis for further research examining the impact of pandemics or other scenarios where the services of the police are impacted by large numbers of their staff being absent. The findings also highlight that events such as pandemics impact different types of police staff at different levels. This is a point that requires further research.

CONCLUSION

This study involved two steps. The first was to examine the impact that COVID-19 had on the capacity and capability of the New Zealand Police and then to compare the findings with the findings of Halford's (2022) examination of the impact that COVID-19 had on the capacity and capability of the 43 United Kingdom police forces. The review found that COVID-19 had similar effects on the police forces in both countries, but also revealed significant differences. The differences were not anticipated, as both countries had implemented similar COVID-19 restrictions, including the lockdown of communities.

An analysis of the information that the New Zealand Police supplied revealed that there did appear to be an effect on the capacity or capability of the police during the 2021 calendar year. The regression analysis of the New Zealand crime data revealed that the level of reported crime was influenced by the number of absences due to COVID-19. The finding

was not given that some districts had up to 20% of their officers (national average of 6.8%) unavailable for duty and other districts had more than 35% of their causal and other staff (national average of 9.1%) being unavailable owing to COVID-19 related absences. This finding is similar to that experienced by the police forces in the United Kingdom. Halford (2022) found that COVID-19 had a substantial impact on the police forces in the United Kingdom and that they experienced decreases in the capacity and capability of their core functions, such as response, investigation, and community policing.

The contradictions experienced by the police in New Zealand compared to the police in the United Kingdom provide an opportunity for police planners to explore a range of different planning scenarios to ensure that the police have the contingent capacity and capability to effectively respond to any future pandemics and they can retain the trust and confidence of the public.

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