Describing the scale and composition of calls for service in Detroit

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In the spirit of a recent contribution by Ratcliffe (2021) published in *Crime Science* this short paper describes the scale and composition of public demand for police services in Detroit, United States, during 2019. Findings broadly confirm those by Ratcliffe, namely, that a considerable proportion of police time is spent resolving a diverse array of (non-criminal) calls for service, including public health incidents. The temporal and spatial patterning of different types of public demand for police services are often distinct. The data and code to replicate analyses are made openly available.

## Introduction

Amidst austerity measures, growing public expectation, and scrutiny, understanding the public demand for police services has become a priority among evidence-based policing researchers and practitioners (Boulton et al., 2017). Without a grasp on the scale (‘how much?’) and composition (‘what type?’) of police demand, we are likely to observe sub-optimal and inequitable outcomes for the public, the inappropriate distribution of public funds, and unnecessary strain on officers (Ellison et al., 2021; Lum et al., 2021). Understanding the characteristics public demand for the police has become particularly pertinent following recent calls to rethink, and some cases, radically reform, the role and reach of contemporary police forces (Lum et al., 2021).

A study from Ratcliffe (2021) in *Crime Science* sought to describe the complexity and diversity of public demand for police services in Philadelphia, United States. The study was motivated by the recognition that police spend a considerable proportion of deployed resource resolving incidents which fall outside the traditional crime-fighting role of the police. Instead, the origins of public demand for the police can often be attributed to a lack of supply and/or accessibility failure in other organisations, such as those providing support for people requiring (mental) health assistance (Dijk & Crofts, 2017; Wood et al., 2021). The study’s findings provided data-driven evidence to suggest that the police indeed spend considerable amounts of time dealing with incidents that could be resolved by other – often more appropriate – agencies. Comparable findings were subsequently reported in the United States across multiple (anonymised) police jurisdictions (Lum et al., 2021). In advance of recent contributions, this short paper aims to describe the public demand for police services in Detroit, United States, using open data and open code which can be used to reproduce the findings.

## Measuring demand

Using computer aided dispatch (CAD) data from the Philadelphia Police Department (PPD) the Ratcliffe (2021) study provided a breakdown of calls for service in a typical year, defined as 2019 (pre-COVID-19). Incident descriptions (e.g., investigate person) were classified into general categories, namely, community issues, crime, medical/public health, proactive policing, quality of life, and traffic duties. Recognising that frequency counts of calls for service do not necessarily reflect the amount of police resource consumed by each incident, raw counts were supplemented by the time consumed by police officers dealing with each incident type. Findings indicated that around 55% of officer shift activity time was spent on crime incidents, with the remainder of time allocated to incidents involving medical/public health (9%), the community (7%), proactive policing (5%), quality of life (14%) and traffic duties (11%). Focusing on medical/public health incidents, findings indicated that calls concentrated in particular areas of the city and during particular hours of the day.

The City of Detroit publish calls for service data through their open data portal.[[1]](#footnote-21).

## Temporal patterning

## Spatial patterning

## Discussion

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Ellison, M., Bannister, J., Lee, W. D., & Haleem, M. S. (2021). Understanding policing demand and deployment through the lens of the city and with the application of big data. *Urban Studies*, 0042098020981007.

Lum, C., Koper, C. S., & Wu, X. (2021). Can we really defund the police? A nine-agency study of police response to calls for service. *Police Quarterly*, 10986111211035002.

Ratcliffe, J. H. (2021). Policing and public health calls for service in philadelphia. *Crime Science*, *10*(1), 1–6.

Wood, J. D., Watson, A. C., & Barber, C. (2021). What can we expect of police in the face of deficient mental health systems? Qualitative insights from chicago police officers. *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, *28*(1), 28–42.

1. <https://data.detroitmi.gov/> [↑](#footnote-ref-21)