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# HO/RT1culture: Cultivating police use of Home Office Road Traffic 1 form to identify active serious offenders

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## ABSTRACT

*Self-selection policing is the term given to the identification of serious active offenders by dint of their commission of more minor infractions. The paper explores the feasibility of using the non-production of documentation as required after the issue of an instruction to do so (form HO/RT1) as a way of identifying active, serious offenders. Such non-producers (no shows):*

1. *were more likely to have recorded offence histories on the Police National Computer (PNC);*
2. *had offence histories comprising two or more offences, significantly more than offending 'shows';*
3. *had offended more recently than offending 'shows';*
4. *were found to have an offence history including serious offences;*
5. *typically offended after HO/RT1 issue, demonstrating that their offending was more current than historical.*

*The implications of these results for operational policing are contended to be substantial, and are discussed.*

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

Recent research has focused on the feasibility of identifying active, serious offenders from their commission of lesser infractions of the law, many relating to relatively minor road traffic or motoring 'summary' offences (Roach, 2004, 2007). This method of 'offender self-selection' is so termed because, in committing minor offences, those engaged in more serious criminality are regarded as 'offering themselves' for further, legitimate, police attention. While many experienced and shrewd police officers will need no persuasion about this, the incorporation of self-selection as a general policing style will require substantial reorientation of police training and operational practice. Further, the application of such a strategy requires much sensitivity,

since the majority of citizens who self-select will not be active offenders. They will need persuasion that the additional attention they can expect under self-selection is justifiable in the wider scheme of crime control.

An increasing number of well documented and high profile cases have swelled support for the utility of this method in identifying serious offenders from minor offences. Often quoted examples include Peter Sutcliffe, the Yorkshire Ripper, arrested initially for displaying false number plates and the notorious US serial killer 'Son of Sam' apprehended on the basis of a ticket issued for parking illegally in front of a fire hydrant. Of course, a police officer presented with the opportunity to make a connection between the presenting minor offence and the more serious undisclosed offence will not necessarily take it. Self-selection offers the opportunity for the exercise of the policing craft, and is not a substitute for it. However, few would dispute that the provision to a police officer of a legitimate reason to question a group of whom a non-trivial proportion would be revealed as more serious offenders is an opportunity not to be lightly forgone. An additional, more recent, example is provded by the Madrid bombings, where one bomber was stopped in his car by police for speeding on his way to the target. Had police been more aware of offender self-selection and the importance of minor offences, then maybe they would have searched the car and found a boot full of explosives. But of course we shall never know.[1]

One early source for the utility of offender self-selection as a tool for uncovering serious criminality is a pioneering study of illegal parking in disabled bays, in Huddersfield, England. Findings indicated that one in five who had committed this seemingly minor offence had outstanding warrants for the arrest of the registered keeper of the vehicle, or other characteristics which would have excited immediate police attention (Chenery, Henshaw, & Pease, 1999). Such findings hold important implications with regard to understanding offending patterns and criminal careers and, in turn, for policing and the criminal justice system, with regard to detecting and dealing with serious and prolific offenders.

Support for the 'versatile offender' can be found in much of the recent literature on criminal careers, which identifies a significant proportion of offenders as 'crime versatile', as opposed to 'specialised' (eg Blumstein, Cohen, Roth, & Visher, 1986; Svensson, 2002). In a recent study matching criminal DNA samples, offender versatility was again supported with a significant number of murderers and sex attackers in the sample who were found to have committed a drug related first offence (Townsley, Smith, & Pease, 2005). Many serious offenders behave consistently in their disregard for the law, often infracting minor laws (such as illegal parking in disabled bays) as well as those laws considered serious and indictable. Such a perspective of criminality is also consistent with Cohen and Felson's (1979) 'Routine Activity Theory' (RAT) in which offenders are seen as committing offences where opportunity avails itself. To sum up, our approach is simply that 'those who do big bad things also usually do little bad things' (Roach, 2004, 2007).

The problem in detecting serious offences is their relative rarity. Minor offences are often easier to detect than the usually infrequent, unpredictable and isolated serious ones. Logic suggests, therefore, that to focus on lesser offences would provide an additional tool for identifying serious offenders (ie those lesser offences found most likely to be committed by this group). This has profound implications for policing, promising an efficient method of uncovering serious offenders by concentrating on 'trigger' minor offences. It complements

more traditional methods such as gathering information from the public, knowledge of offending patterns and the targeting of 'known' offenders.

Schneider (2005) in her study of the relationship between shop theft and burglary found that 80 per cent of prolific burglars admitted committing this (generally considered) lesser offence with more than 50 per cent admitting to doing so every day. Schneider's findings offer additional support for the offender self-selection approach. In committing the more minor offence of shop theft, individuals are 'self-selecting' for increased police scrutiny — scrutiny that may uncover the shop thieves as 'burglars on their day off' (Schneider).

Schneider's study aside, most research on 'offender self-selection' has focused on the commission of road traffic (motoring) offences (Roach, 2004, 2007). The principal reason for this revolves around the notion that although only a minority of drivers are criminals, a vast majority of criminals are drivers (West Midlands Police, 1997). The challenge for the offender self-selection approach lies in identifying which minor traffic offences serve as the most reliable indicators of more serious offending, ie which can appropriately be used as 'trigger' offences (Roach, 2004, 2007). Trigger offences in their commission warrant further police attention as they are the most likely to pay dividends in uncovering active, serious offenders. However, such police attention must also impose the minimum of inconvenience upon members of the public (Roach, 2007), to whom the logic of self-selection policing must be communicated.

Although research in this area is still in its infancy, several other studies have produced findings that link various traffic offences to more serious criminality. In a study of serious traffic offenders it was found that those repeatedly offending were likely to be engaged in mainstream criminality, with a drink driver, for example, twice as likely to possess a criminal record as a random member of the public (Rose, 2000).

A study investigating a link between fixed penalty notices (FPN) for minor traffic offences and concurrent criminality, found that the likelihood increased the higher the number of FPNs an individual held. It was not the imposition of a single or specific FPN that suggested the perpetrator was engaged in concurrent criminality but the number of FPNs incurred: the higher the number, the more likely the concurrent criminality (Wellsmith & Guille 2005).

A small, localised study of visitors to a Young Offender Institution (YOI) found that one in six visitor drivers had committed a motoring offence en route to the YOI. A significant number of such visitors were found on the Police National Computer (PNC) for prior offences, some serious. Several were identified as active, serious offenders (eg wanted on warrant, disqualified drivers, burglars) and arrested as a result of further police scrutiny (Roach, 2007). This study is on the margins of the emerging self-selection literature in that visiting a prisoner friend is not a criminal offence. While the context yielded a high 'hit rate' of identified criminality, it should not itself be used as a trigger. In this case, automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) scrutiny provided the trigger, not the visit per se.

An incidental finding from Roach's (2007) study was that 25 per cent of drivers issued with the form Home Office Road Traffic 1 (HO/RT1) failed to produce the required documents (ie did not comply). The form HO/RT1 required them to produce their documents (eg driver's licence and insurance certificate) on request, or at a police station for checking within 28 days (the time period has recently been reduced to 7 days). Roach (2007) raises the following questions. Why do so many fail to produce? Is it because they have something

to hide? Is it because of a general contempt for criminal justice? Is it, in short, that the 'little bad thing' of failing to produce is a flag of the 'big bad things' in which they are also engaged. Their active criminality is a possibility worth exploring.

A recent inquiry by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) into the murder of Hayley Jane Richards (by her ex-partner, Hugo Quintas) detailed a complaint that there had been at least one opportunity to arrest him when local traffic police stopped him for having a damaged nearside tail light (IPCC, 2006). The officers concerned were not unduly suspicious and simply issued him with an HO/RT1. A PNC check was carried out to ascertain the owner of the vehicle but a force intelligence check was not requested. Had it been, it would have identified Quintas as wanted by police for a serious assault on Richards and tragic events may never have unfolded as they did. Quintas had, two months previous to the murder, been issued with a previous HO/RT1 with which he failed to comply. The Criminal Justice Unit had failed to take any action.

The present paper explores the utility of offender self-selection as a tool for uncovering serious criminality, by detailing a study focused on a wider sample of motorists issued with an HO/RT1 than was available to the author in the study cited above (Roach, 2007). The hypothesis is that failure to comply with this routine legal requirement reflects chronic and possibly serious criminality in a proportion of those so failing.

Reasons for non-compliance with HO/RT1 are likely to include:

- the driver not having had any current motor insurance;
- the driver not having had a current Ministry of Transport test certificate (MOT) for the vehicle;
- the driver travelling in a stolen vehicle;
- the driver having an identity other than that disclosed to the police officer;
- the driver being prevented from complying by another party (eg a criminal spouse);
- the driver not wishing to draw any police attention to him/herself for fear of exposing serious criminality;
- a general belief in the impotence of policing and criminal justice, often all too justified amongst those imbued in criminality.

All these putative reasons, except having an identity other than that disclosed to the police officer, assume that the police will not pursue them for failure to produce documents as required by HO/RT1. In many cases (see below), the writer has observed this to be a fair assumption.

Before moving onto an explanation of the method used in this research, it is pertinent to introduce the purpose of the HO/RT1, the legal requirements which it imposes and its current level of use in routine policing.

## The HO/RT1 process

The Road Traffic Act 1988, ss. 164 and 165, as amended by the Road Traffic Act 1991, enable a police officer to demand the production of a driving licence, insurance details, MOT and other relevant documents, by the driver of a motor vehicle. If these documents are not at hand, the driver must 'produce' them at a police station within seven days, failure to do so being a prosecutable offence.

Where the offence appears to the officer to involve obligatory endorsement, and the driver concerned does not produce the requested documents at the scene, an officer may issue an HO/RT1 requiring the individual to produce them within seven days at a police station geographically convenient to the driver. Officers should conduct a PNC check of the vehicle and driver and

can, at their discretion, also conduct local force intelligence checks before the HO/RT1 is issued. In cases where an individual is charged with a substantive offence, it appears commonplace not to issue an HO/RT1, the more serious crime taking precedence, for example driving whilst under the influence of alcohol.

Generally, there is some consensus on HO/RT1 usage between forces, at least in terms of policy. However, in other respects HO/RT1 usage appears to be a matter of individual force policy, with differences relating both to the wider utility of HO/RT1 (ie beyond just checking insurance documents and vehicle ownership), and also to the administrative burden associated with extensive use. Devon and Cornwall Constabulary (2005), like most forces, have issued guidance to their officers that, if drivers are unable to produce documents at the scene, HO/RT1s *must* be issued to all drivers of motor vehicles in the following circumstances with the request to 'record details':

- at the scene of *all* road collisions, even if no further action is anticipated against any of the drivers;
- when reporting a person for any offence other than by way of a fixed penalty ticket.

The South Wales Police Authority (2004) states that HO/RT1s for the production of driving documents can only be issued by officers in the following circumstances:

- to persons involved or suspected of being involved in a road traffic collision;
- to persons who are reasonably suspected of committing a road traffic offence;
- to the driver/keeper of a motor vehicle, or person supervising a provisional licence holder, who fails to produce immediately any relevant documentation for inspection.

There is also individual officer discretion to 'muddy the waters' a little more as the IPCC report (IPCC, 2006, p. 52) into the murder of Hayley Jane Richards acknowledges:

An officer has a certain amount of discretion when it comes to stopping a vehicle and that [sic] it is not always necessary to do a PNC check on its occupants. It would be down to the circumstances and the type of offence committed.

In fact, as a result of conversations with several officers, the author has found that officer discretion is paramount in deciding whether a driver is issued with an HO/RT1. A specific, but unnamed officer, when asked by the author to help clarify the thought and decision processes which officers engage in when stopping a vehicle, described it thus:

Once stopped and the driver cannot produce his documents, there and then, the officer then has the option of issuing a HO/RT1. However, first the officer would normally check PNC to see if there is any insurance for the vehicle in question. If it comes back insurance held and the driver appears legitimate the officer will probably use discretion and not use a HO/RT1. If however, the driver cannot produce his licence or there is no insurance for the vehicle held on PNC, the officer then has the discretion to issue the HO/RT1. If the officer stops a car and is not happy with the driver, and the driver cannot prove who he is then the officer has the option of arresting the driver for no document . . . Once identity has been established the officer could decide to release and issue a HO/RT1. Basically, if the person is arrested for any offence we would try to establish he had documents for his car

whilst in custody. If this is not possible then a HO/RT1 could be issued.

The HO/RT1 issue process therefore does not appear to be driven by specific policing policy or guidance. Indeed, as the officer quoted above also said, 'So as you can see the issue of a HO/RT1 is very much at the discretion of the officer and there are no fixed rules'. Officer discretion should, therefore, be considered an important confounding variable and is discussed later in this paper.

Once issued, the front of the HO/RT1 must not be altered in any way. If a mistake is found, or an officer is asked to clarify a discrepancy, corrections must be made by way of statement. In their notebooks, officers should record the circumstances of issue of the HO/RT1 for use in any subsequent court proceedings.

When the required documents are produced at a police station (as a result of a HO/RT1 issue) the form HO/RT2 is completed immediately. When none (or only part) of the required documentation is presented, a reminder is sent but if it is not acted upon, then the force central ticket office issues a court summons to the offending driver. The author has found substantial supporting evidence that this does not always happen, particularly when a driver has given false details. The police do not have time to exhaust every avenue in pursuit of those deliberately failing to comply with the HO/RT1 process and a significant number of people are never traced or prosecuted.

Recently, with regard to many police forces in England and Wales, if officers have any doubts about a driver's identity they are permitted to inform that driver of their intention to take a thumbprint or photograph at the time of issuing the HO/RT1.

This paper details the proportion of individuals who do not comply with HO/RT1 requirements, suggests reasons they might not so comply, and establishes a link between HO/RT1 non-compliance and serious criminality. This paper focuses on the extent to which HO/RT1 non-compliance can be considered a tool of offender self-selection, assisting police to uncover more serious criminality from the relatively minor infraction of not producing vehicle/driving documents.

## METHOD

### Sample

All the HO/RT1s issued by the Lancashire Constabulary Central Ticket Office on 1 December 2004 constitute the sample. Although this specific date was aribitrarily selected, choice of a day in 2004 permits comparison of offending histories before and after HO/RT1 issue. In total 129 HO/RT1s were issued on this date across Lancashire.

### Participants

Those to whom HO/RT1s were issued were not aware of the study. All personal information (ie names, addresses, vehicle registration numbers and information of any previous recorded offences) was kept on the Lancashire Constabulary computer system/network. All criminal history checks were conducted by staff based at Lancashire Constabulary, Preston Division, using both the PNC and the SLEUTH (Lancashire Constabulary Intelligence) databases. Officers were considered as 'only doing what they should have anyway', by responding to HO/RT1 issues.

### Procedure

A simple database was created detailing all those issued with an HO/RT1 in Lancashire on 1 December 2004. Variable fields were created for HO/RT1 issue number, name, address, postcode, vehicle registration number and reason for issue. 28 days from

the date of issue, the HO/RT1 disposals in question were tracked using the Lancashire Constabulary Central Ticket Office computer system and outcomes entered on a database accordingly. This period was considered long enough to establish an outcome of the process flowing from HO/RT1 issue as the recipients were required to comply with HO/RT1 conditions within seven days. Disposal outcomes distinguished those who had 'complied fully' from those considered 'possible prosecutions', as they had either produced only part of the required documentation, or had not produced any at all.

Police staff from Lancashire Constabulary, Preston Division, conducted a background analysis of all the participants (as discussed above), with particular focus on any known offending history or intelligence to that effect. This information, appropriately anonymised, was entered on our database allowing comparison of whether an individual complied/did not comply with the HO/RT1, whether they had offending histories and whether they were active, serious offenders around the time of HO/RT1 issue. The results are set out below.

## RESULTS

From a total HO/RT1 cohort of 129 individuals, 105 (81 per cent) were issued to male and 24 (19 per cent) to female drivers.

Driver age ranged from 17 to 83 years, with a mean of 32 years and a standard deviation of 12 years. Ages did not differ by gender (independent means $t$ test).

49 (38 per cent) drivers had failed to produce the required documentation within the 28-day period ('no shows') and were therefore considered 'prosecutable', leaving 80 (62 per cent) who had fully 'complied' ('shows').

Background recorded offence checks (PNC) identified almost 30 per cent ($n=44$) of the cohort as having a recorded offence marker, leaving 70 per cent ($n=85$) who did not. A simple two by two contingency table showed a statistically significant association between the no show group and the existence of a PNC offence history ($\chi^2=18.65$, $df=1$, $p<0.001$). 57 per cent of those who failed to show were found to have such a history.

### Shows and no shows

Neither sex nor age was associated with show/no show status. A total number of 360 offences were on record against members of the cohort. 75 per cent ($n=269$) of these had been committed by the no show group. The no show group was found to have a number of recorded offences almost five times greater than the shows (no shows $M=5.7$, $SD=11.17$; shows $M=1.2$, $SD=4.8$). See Table 1.

An independent samples $t$ test indicated a significant difference between the two

**Table 1: Number of recorded offences per group**

| Group | Total number of people in group | Total number of recorded offences | Mean number of recorded offences | Range of number of offences | Std dev |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Show | 79 | 91 | 1.15 | 0–39 | 4.8 |
| No show | 47 | 269 | 5.72 | 0–58 | 11.17 |
| **Total** | 126★ | 360 | 2.85 | 0-62 | 8.5 |

★ An offence history could not be determined for three individuals.

groups with regard to number of recorded offences ($t$=−3.193, $df$=124, $p$=0.001, two-tailed). Not only did significantly more of the no show group have recorded offence histories, but this group had (at least historically) a much higher *rate of recorded offending*. Since they were no older than the shows (indeed they were on average two years younger), the difference is not because they had had longer to accumulate a record. Further, 42 per cent ($n$=20) of the no show group had offence records which comprised more than three separate offences, whereas this was only 6 per cent ($n$=5) for the show group.

A statistically significant difference was found between the show and no show groups with regard to specific offence types. In volume, the no show group had committed significantly more offences against property, theft, fraud and deception, driving whilst disqualified, and weapons offences. This group had also committed significantly more of what are termed 'police, courts and probation offences' where the individual fails to turn up to a compulsory meeting (eg for sentencing, or bail) or gives false details. In sum, 30 per cent of the no show group had a history of non-compliance with such legal requirements as opposed to less than 4 per cent of the show group. Not surprisingly those with a history of non-compliance failed to comply with the HO/RT1 issued.

A simple contrast of criminal records between shows and no shows does not, of course, indicate that the no shows were criminally active at the time of HO/RT1 issue and that is the necessary condition for self-selection policing to be viable. The next section addresses the timing of the criminality of the two groups.

### Shows, no shows and timing of offending relative to HO/RT1

As discussed previously, all PNC checks were carried out in April 2006, with the HO/RT1 date being 1 December 2004. This afforded opportunity to conduct before and after analysis of offending, a criminal career window incorporating offences prior to and after 1 December 2004 (date of HO/RT1 issue).

Individuals in the cohort were assigned to one of four categories:

1. non-offenders (ie no recorded offence history);
2. those who had recorded offending *before their HO/RT1 issue only*;
3. those who had offending recorded both *before and after* HO/RT1 issue;
4. those who had recorded offending dating *after HO/RT1 issue only*.

Table 2 details the number of individuals in each category by show/no show status. The mean age for each group (in years up to April 2006) is also tabulated.

As can be seen from Table 2, 25 per cent of those comprising the 'no offence history' category were no shows. This finding is consistent with general estimates of HO/RT1 non-compliance for the general driver population (Cheshire Constabulary (n.d.) estimate it to be as high as one-third). The percentage was seen to increase from 25 per cent of those in the 'no offence history' category, to 50 per cent of those in the 'recorded offending after HO/RT1 issue only' category, to 57 per cent of those in the 'recorded offending before HO/RT1 issue' category, to an overwhelming 80 per cent of those in the 'before and after HO/RT1 issue' category. This indicates strongly that, overall, those most likely not to show had committed offences both before and after the issue of the HO/RT1.

Of the no shows, almost 30 per cent were actively criminal, in the sense that they were officially processed for offences during the 18 months *following* the no show. This contrasts with some 8 per cent of the shows. Further analysis was concentrated on

**Table 2: Offending histories before and after HO/RT1 issue**

| Offender categories | HO/RT1 shows | HO/RT1 no show | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| No offence history<br>*Mean age 32.7* | 64 | 21 | 85 |
| Before HORT1 issue only<br>*Mean age 29.9* | 9 | 12 | 21 |
| Before and after HORT1 issue<br>*Mean age 27.7* | 3 | 11 | 14 |
| After HORT1 issue only<br>*Mean age 33* | 3 | 3 | 6 |
| **Total** | 79★ (62%) | 47★ (37%) | 126★ |

★ Three criminal histories were incomplete (one show and two no shows) so a complete analysis was impossible.

those who offended in 2005, up to a year after HO/RT1 issue, in order to guage further whether the no show group represented the active criminal contingent. Table 3 details those who committed offences in 2003, 2004 and 2005, and whether they belonged to the show or no show group. As can been seen, considerably more of those from the no show group committed a recorded offence in 2004 (most around the time of the HO/RT1 issue) than those in the show group, suggesting that a significant percentage of non-compliers are committing, or go on to commit further offences close to the HO/RT1 issue. Fewer of those in the no show group offended the year before, or more than a year after, HO/RT1

issue, again supporting a hypothesis that those who do not comply do not do so in orderr to mask concurrent offending.

The offender categories were collapsed into two categories by including 'the before and after HO/RT1 issue' with 'after only'. The logic for this approach is that the key issue is whether criminality followed HO/RT1 issue, and whether there had been recorded criminality before issue is of limited interest. Indeed, it might be said that HO/RT1 no show provides a particularly useful flag of active criminality in the absence of prior recorded offending. The results were statistically significant ($\chi^2$=10.87, $df$=1, $p$<0.01). The criminality of the no shows is therefore not one of mere historical interest.

Those who comprise the 'before and after' and 'after only' categories should justifiably be considered '*active*' offenders (the 'active group'). An overall finding was that 28 per cent of no shows would be active offenders. Consequently, further police scrutiny of HO/RT1 no shows would pay huge dividends with regard to identifying active offenders. Having identified a link between no shows and active offending,

**Table 3: Offending histories before and after HO/RT1 issue**

| Year | HO/RT1 show group | HO/RT1 no show group |
|---|---|---|
| 2003 | 43% | 57% |
| 2004★ | 10% | 90% |
| 2005 | 50% | 50%★ |

★ HO/RT1 issued in December 2004.

focus switched to a more detailed analysis of criminal careers and offence seriousness.

## HO/RT1 no shows as active, serious offenders

Offence histories were analysed further to see whether a no show could be linked to more serious criminality. Analysis was conducted which focused on the type of offence committed by the active group. Table 4 summarises the offence types for the active group, comprising 14 individual offence histories.

As can be seen from Table 4, the PNC histories of the active offender group indicate participation in serious criminality. For example, half the group had committed offences against the person (including violence), two-thirds had committed public order offences (including threatening behaviour), and one-third had drugs convictions. Also important was the high proportion of the active group who had committed theft (79 per cent). The prior offence of most interest when distinguishing those likely not to comply with a HO/RT1 is police, courts and prison (PCP). This type of offence goes some way to explaining the reasons for a no show. The

**Table 4: A summary of recorded offences for the 'active' group**

| Type of offence | Number of offenders committing (n=14) |
| --- | --- |
| Offences against the person | 7 (50%) |
| Offences against property | 7 (50%) |
| Theft and kindred | 11 (79%) |
| Public disorder | 9 (64%) |
| Driving whilst disqualified | 5 (36%) |
| Police, courts and prison (PCP) | 10 (71%) |
| Drugs | 5 (36%) |
| Air-guns/weapons | 3 (21%) |
| Fraud and kindred | 4 (29%) |

analysis of HO/RT1 disposal outcomes which follows explores this further.

## HO/RT1 disposal outcomes

To access criminal history information, the driver must have at least reported his name (or supplied a plausible identity). There is a case for saying that those who could not be traced are more active and prolific than other no shows.

Analysis of HO/RT1 disposal outcomes for the 49 no shows suggested that 10 had been classed as 'untraceable', for several different reasons. First, untraceable may mean that the individual issued with the HO/RT1 had given a false name and address to the issuing officer, with the intention of avoiding a subsequent court summons. The false name given did not have a criminal record. Second, one no show showed his documents on his designated court date, possibly because he had found them at the last minute but, more probably, he intended to waste court and police time which is quite a common practice.

At the time of HO/RT1 issue, only one of the ten 'untraceables' was known to the PNC for prior offences, yet two committed offences within six months of the HO/RT1 issue (driving whilst disqualified and burglary). This left seven completely unknowns, possibly active, serious offenders of which the police had no knowledge. If a previous finding that 57 per cent of the no show group had criminal histories is applied to the untraceable group, then at least six of this group should be justifiably considered active offenders. The fact that they gave false details indicates that this is very probably a conservative estimate.

What exactly constitutes 'untraceable' should be the subject of future research. The author compared the addresses given by those said to be untraceable with the electoral register for 2004 (the period of study) and found that half of the identities

given matched people on the electoral register. The names were registered at the addresses given. What is not known at present is to what extent police tried to trace these individuals further. For example it could be that these were names and addresses of people known to a no show driver but not those of the driver himself or herself. Those not on the electoral register at all are more understandably untraceable.

Of the remaining 40 no shows, all received penalties for having failed to provide evidence of adequate motor insurance, MOT, and some failed to produce a driving licence. Only one driver was convicted of 'deception' by giving an officer false details. A discussion of the findings and implications for policing now follows.

### Predicting from shows and no shows

Perhaps, at this juncture, it is pertinent to provide a brief recapitulation of the findings of this small study so far as a basis for the next analysis. It was found that no shows differed from shows with regard to an increased likelihood of:

- having a recorded offence history, comprising
- a greater number of recorded offences,
- of both a serious nature and more recent in occurrence.

A multiple linear regression analysis was performed to ascertain which of the above variables was the most significant predictor of a no show, and in reverse what would be predicted about an offender by an HO/RT1 no show. Age was added to identify any influence that it might have on no show prediction, although age had already been discounted previously as a significant factor in no shows. The criterion (dependent) variable selected was show/no show and the four predictor variables were: number of offences, recency of offending (up to HO/RT1 issue), offending since HO/RT1 and

age. The adjusted $R^2$ for the full model was 0.75 ($F(1, 39) = 4.259$, $p<0.05$ (using stepwise method). The only significant variable was recency of offending ($\beta=0.314$, $p=0.046$); age, number of offences and offences since HO/RT1 were not found to be significant additional predictors in this model.

The results showed that recency of offending was the strongest predictor variable accounting for 75 per cent of the overall variance. That is, whether individuals would be shows or no shows was dependent on the recency of their offending: those having offended most recently to the HO/RT1 issue were those most likely not to show. The implications of this finding will be addressed fully in the discussion section which follows.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

### Why police should focus on no shows

The hypothesis was that a significant proportion of those who fail to comply with HO/RT1 would be engaged in active criminality, including serious offending. A number of important findings can be drawn from the analysis in support which, when added, provide a rudimentary profile of those likely not to show, and what this might mean in terms of the police uncovering active, serious offenders.

- No shows were found significantly more likely than shows to have recorded offence histories (PNC).
- No shows were found significantly more likely to have offence histories comprising two or more offences than offending shows (many had three or more).
- No shows were found to have offended more recently than shows.
- No shows were found to have an offence history including serious offences.
- A significant number of no show disposal outcomes could not be traced, suggesting

the commonality of drivers giving false names and addresses.

- The offending of no shows typically followed HO/RT1 issue, demonstrating that their offending was more current than historical.

This study helps to provide a rudimentary profile of who is and who is not likely to fail to comply with an HO/RT1. The demonstrated utility of focusing on HO/RT1 no shows to help identify serious offenders demands the need for police to take HO/RT1 use seriously. With officers routinely conducting PNC checks for individuals being issued with an HO/RT1, the practical implications of this study are that:

- fingerprints should be taken from young male drivers as they are those most at risk of non-compliance;
- if PNC checks show a history of three or more offences, then the individual is likely to not show and to be engaged in active criminality, possibly of a serious nature: scrutiny should be directed at these individuals;
- if the individual has a record of recent offences, then he is likely to be an active offender and unlikely to show: scrutiny again should be employed;
- if PNC checks indicate recent offences of theft, burglary, public disorder and PCP, then a further background scrutiny should be employed;
- scrutiny of those who do not comply with HO/RT1 will most likely pay dividends and uncover offending of a more serious nature.

Of course, these recommendations are not mutually exclusive. An individual, for example, who has committed a recent burglary with a history of other offences, should be a priority for further scrutiny as the likelihood is that he is engaged in concurrent offending and will not comply

with the HO/RT1 (ie, will be a no show).

These findings, although holding strong implications for the use of HO/RT1, must be considered in an appropriate context. Non-compliance, on many occasions, may be the result of the driver not possessing the necessary documents, such as motoring insurance. Those with criminal histories will perhaps find such premiums extortionate and will instead take a chance by driving 'illegally' (as, for example, did the serial murderer, Fred West). There is no reason to doubt the research literature that this relatively minor infraction of the law is symptomatic of a wider disregard for the law.

Using HO/RT1 as a self-selection tool does not immediately identify a serious offender from one who is likely to commit a minor infraction, but the findings do indicate strongly that failure to equate those likely not to show with active and more serious criminality — by not digging a little deeper into the activities of this group — would be foolhardy, as exemplified in the IPCC inquiry into the murder of Hayley Jane Richards.

The age-old call for more research in this area is justified in this case, preferably on a much larger and wider scale covering the whole country, allowing for a wider appraisal of utility. That said, even the present limited results seem worthy of application by police forces across the country.

The application of these findings will depend upon public cooperation. Recent years have seen much criticism of the police for strict enforcement of motoring offences. Self-selection policing will require citizens, and especially motorists, to be prepared for, and not resentful of, fuller police checks being made when their vehicles are stopped. This consideration is noted in the IPCC inquiry into the Hayley Jane Richards murder, regarding the complaint that police failed to arrest the wanted

Quintas before the murder. The inquiry report concludes that:

> A police officer could declare that all drivers stopped under section 163 of the Road Traffic Act 1988 would have their identification details checked against the PNC and the local force intelligence database. Such a 'trawl' would undoubtedly, from time to time, lead a police officer to those liable to arrest and, no doubt, some arrests would follow. However, this was not the rule in Wiltshire Constabulary at this time and, were it to become so, it would need to enjoy public confidence if it were not to be perceived as just another unreasonable and oppressive extension to police surveillance, particularly by members of minority communities. (IPCC, 2006, p. 55)

However, the findings of this paper emphatically demonstrate a need for police officers to complete all checks as a matter of routine, not in order merely to identify those committing minor infractions of the law — such as a defective tail light — but because of the important links shown between such minor offending and more serious criminals. In essence, the utility of self-selection policing goes way beyond the full stop of simply identifying minor offences.

With regard to public support, communication of the reasons, on a case by case basis, is possible and very desirable. The motorist backlash in respect of HO/RT1 non-production should be less acute than it would be (for example) in checks on vehicles in disabled bays. This is because the perpetrator has both committed an offence initially, and failed to comply with legal requirements subsequently. Nonetheless, the public acceptance of self-selection policing is almost certainly the largest obstacle to its implementation, alongside the development of the policing skills necessary

for the detection of the more serious offending which seems to be linked with the failure to produce documentation. The findings of the Hayley Jane Richards inquiry should go some way to reducing the obstacles of public acceptance.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

## NOTES

(1) The author cannot locate an exact reference for this example but is convinced it was mentioned in one of the numerous BBC news reports covering the Madrid bombing. Silke (2003) states that a member of the group which targeted the World Trade Centre in the late 1990s was similarly stopped for speeding en route to his target.

(2) As per the Police National Computer on 10 April 2006.

(3) Up to April 2006.

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