

Regional trends revealed for meth labs

April 27 2017, by Anna Kellett

Helensville and Hamilton were two of the meth lab hot spots identified in the first geographic study of clandestine meth lab distribution in New Zealand.

Strong regional trends were identified in the research from the University of Auckland.

Researchers Dr Daniel Exeter and Dr David Newcombe from the University's School of Population Health say that by mapping the location suburbs of [laboratory](#) seizures and performing cluster analyses of the data from NZ Police between 2004 and 2009, they were able to identify five hot spots of clandestine laboratory activity.

"There were more methamphetamine laboratories seized than expected in the north of the North Island, with clusters located in central Auckland, west Auckland, Hamilton, and the Far North," says Dr Exeter.

The research findings were published this week in the journal *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* in the first New Zealand study to investigate the geographical distribution of meth labs in New Zealand and explore potential socioeconomic and ecological predictors.

The aims of the study were firstly to determine there were places in NZ where there were more clandestine meth labs than we'd expect.

"If we did find any so-called hot spots, we were interested in what socioeconomic characteristics in those places might help explain their

presence."

Dr Exeter says, "We found a strong regional variation in the presence of clandestine meth labs in New Zealand.

"The upper half of the North Island, particularly in parts of Auckland, was consistently identified as having a high concentration of clandestine laboratories, even after adjusting for population size."

Four socioeconomic factors did have a mild influence on the distribution of clandestine laboratories. The research, using 2006 Census data, found areas with a younger median age, lower median income, higher levels of socioeconomic deprivation and rural land use type were at greater risk for harbouring clandestine laboratories.

"But none of the factors were able to explain the presence of all five of our initial clusters," says Dr Exeter.

"The persistence of the Helensville and Hamilton clusters (after adjusting for these four socioeconomic factors), suggests there are other unknown factors influencing the geography of clandestine methamphetamine laboratories in the North Island," he says.

The research, which looked at data from 2004 and 2009 and a recent update of that data from the New Zealand Police for the 2010-2015 period, showed there were 561 clandestine meth lab seizures reported between 2010 and 2015.

The annual count of seizures reduced from 130 in 2010 to 68 during 2015, and the majority of seizures (57 per cent) between 2010 and 2015 occurred at residential localities.

Only nine per cent of labs were found in the South Island between 2010

and 2015. But the majority (69 per cent) were located in the upper North Island.

"This figure included seizures in commercial properties (such as factories) with residential facilities located within that property," says Dr Exeter. "This was consistent with the findings from 2004-2009.

"Areas identified as '[hot spots](#)' of clandestine meth lab activity represent an opportunity to target prevention and treatment resources, including community-level interventions and educational campaigns," says Dr Newcombe.

"If community awareness of the harms associated with meth labs is an influential factor in clandestine meth lab presence, then educational campaigns may be effective at changing community attitudes towards methamphetamine use and manufacture," he says.

"This research also demonstrates the utility of geographic techniques in displaying health and crime data. Future law enforcement and public health intervention efforts would benefit from incorporating GIS into their surveillance and data management infrastructure," says Dr Newcombe.

"For instance, a national clandestine methamphetamine laboratory registry accessible to the public may be beneficial to potential home owners and renters who want to ensure their families are protected from exposure to methamphetamine contaminated properties," he says.

Further research was needed to understand the scope of the threat.

More information: A. V. Howell et al. The Geography of Methamphetamine Manufacture in New Zealand Between 2004 and 2009, *Policing: A Journal of Policy and Practice* (2017). [DOI](#):

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