

#52 (STIJN RUITER)

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Stijn Ruiter is a Dutch sociologist who specializes in environmental criminology and why crime happens where it does. We chat about translating policing research across national boundaries, and in particular, his role as research program leader for a new initiative, What works in policing: Towards evidence-based policing in the Netherlands.

Nigel Powers (Michael Caine):

All right, Goldmember, don't play the laughing boy. There are only two things I can't stand in this world: People who are intolerant of other people's cultures, and the Dutch.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Welcome to Reducing Crime. I'm Jerry Ratcliffe. Well, there's, at least, one point on which I can disagree with Austin Powers' father in that clip from Goldmember, and that's about the Dutch. They tend to be pretty cool. So, it was nice to spend an hour or two in an English pub garden this last summer with my old friend, Stijn. Stijn Ruiter, and you can judge whether I pronounce that right in a minute, is a quantitative sociologist from the Netherlands, who's published extensively in both Dutch and English.

Since 2009, he has worked at the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement known by the Dutch acronym NSCR, and he is also a full professor at Utrecht University. His work focuses on geographic and environmental criminology and in understanding why crime happens where and when it does. At NSCR, he's also involved in testing policies and practices to prevent crime. His work has been funded by the Dutch Research Council, the Netherlands Ministry of Justice and Security and the Netherlands Police. He's currently a research program leader

for a new initiative, What works in policing: Towards evidence-based policing in the Netherlands, a collaboration between the Dutch Ministry of Justice and Security, the Netherlands Police, and NSCR.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This last summer, we met at a conference in the English town of Harrogate, and it being a British town, it had a pub or three. So, we found Hales Bar, the oldest one in town, and settled in for an adult beverage as you do after a long day of academic-ing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers, mate.

Stijn Ruiter:

Cheers. That's good.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Can't remember the last time I sat in a pub drinking a pint of bitter. It's been a while.

Stijn Ruiter:

Or going to a conference.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, I know. Right?

Stijn Ruiter:

Abroad.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes.

Stijn Ruiter:

These virtual conferences we had, but other than that...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I've stopped, pretty much stopped doing virtual conferences.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. I hate it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You have to do all the work.

Stijn Ruiter:

Without the benefits.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. None of it. No. You just stare at a camera, you don't get to see any of the audience. You're going to hang out with people afterwards, you don't get any interaction with questions afterwards. And there's no going to the pub. You just switch the camera off and go back to doing what you were doing which just sucks.

Stijn Ruiter:

And the conferences are... Even though many people think it's about the presentation and the exchange of ideas, it's also about meeting up with people to make new plans. And that's better over a beer and that it is, or G-and-T in my case.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There we go. So, you managed to get away from work?

Stijn Ruiter:

We consider this work, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Touché.

Stijn Ruiter:

It's part of the job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers again, then.

Stijn Ruiter:

Cheers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Academics working hard.

Stijn Ruiter:

Sessions are over.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

For today.

Stijn Ruiter:

For today. So, we have a drink.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. Before we start, help me out. First of all, tell me your name.

Stijn Ruiter:

Stijn.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Stijn.

Stijn Ruiter:

Ruiter.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Ruiter. Yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

The R at the start and the R in the end.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Stijn Ruiter. Yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

Dutch people will recognize that, but...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Tell me about NSCR and how long you've been there.

Stijn Ruiter:

It's actually a Dutch acronym for the Netherlands Institute for the Study of Crime and Law Enforcement, which is a research institute, a national research institute. So, it's not a university, it's not a department, it's research only. It's originally set up 30 years ago on the initiative of the Ministry of Justice who wanted research institute with more fundamental questions on crime and law enforcement, long term research, rather than short term policy only.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How does that work with your policing colleagues?

Stijn Ruiter:

This is 30 years ago.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay.

Stijn Ruiter:

30 years ago, the idea of the Ministry of Justice, which has its own research department aimed at answering policy questions like, okay, in parliament, question arises, the minister needs to answer.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay.

Stijn Ruiter:

And the research department answers those questions.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, they're the short term shit hits the fan, we need an answer on this thing now?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yes. 30 years ago, criminology, or crime research had disappeared virtually in the Netherlands, and at the ministry, they thought we want independent research with more fundamental research questions in the Netherlands. So, they reached out to the Dutch Science Council to set up this institute.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, great.

Stijn Ruiter:

I've joined it in 2009 coming from a sociology department.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's okay. I won't hold that against you. You know we're drinking buddies. On the law enforcement side of things, how's that working out? Because I know you are now working on an initiative...

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... to think about expanding the knowledge base in policing.

Stijn Ruiter:

It's actually interesting because NSCR, the R in Dutch is law enforcement.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What's the Dutch word?

Stijn Ruiter:

[foreign language 00:05:34]

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, I'm not going to pronounce that.

Stijn Ruiter:

No. But the C is crime. So, NSCR an institute's really seen as a criminological institute, but very much quant oriented research, even though we have the full gamut. But the impression it has to many is like, ah, that's a lot of stats. And I'm a quantitative sociologist, criminologist.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I knew there was one somewhere, found you.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yes. So, at the Institute, we have been doing a lot of crime research using police data. Right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

So, we receive all the wealth of data from these agencies, and then, we analyze crime, often, actually, with an interest to understand criminal decision making like offended decision making, also, testing theories about offended decision making.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Especially, I know a lot of your work and it's in... that's probably why I wanted to talk to you, because a lot of it's really neighborhood-based, it's about opportunities...

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Or smaller like-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, down to the streets...

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... and corners and that kind of stuff. It all has a real practical policing flavor to it.

Stijn Ruiter:

There you go.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Because that's where policing operates.

Stijn Ruiter:

Exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a corner, it's a neighborhood, it's a street, it's a block issue.

Stijn Ruiter:

Exactly. So, we have been using police recorded crime data for understanding crime problems, where it concentrates, why it concentrates there, but how police reacts to this, we haven't really studied much. There's a lot of interest in crime studies in itself. And I'm also on the fence, I like fundamental scientific understanding, and I think, actually, good theory has practical value.

Stijn Ruiter:

You need to understand the mechanisms to be able to address problems.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're going to blow the minds of a few people just by saying that they actually need to understand... I mean, most theories are kind of useless, but there are a few key theories that are really worth knowing.

Stijn Ruiter:

Grand theory, maybe not, but mechanisms, that drive the problem, right? A better understanding-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Why on this corner and not two blocks away.

Stijn Ruiter:

Exactly. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Why is that crime here and not a couple of blocks away or on the next street?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. And ultimately, it's the offender who decides where to commit the offense. It's not a neighbor wanting to be victimized. So, you need some understanding of offender decision making. A large part of the research of my colleagues at the Institute have been involved with that, but it has this practical value to police.

Stijn Ruiter:

They do hotspot maps, and what have you, and they also should want to know why crime concentrate where it does in order to be most effective.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, what's been the receptivity of your police colleagues?

Stijn Ruiter:

We always had really good contacts with certain police departments. The Netherlands is slightly differently organized, and for example, in the US, the police departments tends to be really local.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

What makes you think the US is organized?

Stijn Ruiter:

No, no, no. In terms of-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The idea of being organized, come on.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. No. But the US have many departments. We actually currently have only one.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. That's in the last 10 years.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, 2013. So, we used to have large units, and they merged into one force. In the Netherlands, we say police service, rather than force.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Of course. That's a good idea. How's that working out?

Stijn Ruiter:

Obviously, this was actually such a big change. People had to be shifted to different places, different positions inside this organization. And you have higher management like chief is far removed from city level problems.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Stijn Ruiter:

It's a longer chain of command, and it's still hierarchical organization like it is everywhere.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think that's been beneficial?

Stijn Ruiter:

In some ways, and in others, it's not. For me, it has been beneficial in that it also led to standardization of... For example, data, right? They're using the same sorts of systems throughout the entire Netherlands.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think it's made Holland safer?

Stijn Ruiter:

I'm skeptical about that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Anything to do with policing, healthy skepticism is not a bad idea.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. No, no. Yeah. No. Yeah. So police do their best trying to address problems, however, and we see this in many countries, police remain very reactive, rapid response. Is that very effective, ultimately, to address crime problems? I don't know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But that's not the whole of policing.

Stijn Ruiter:

No, exactly.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But it's still better than having 18,000 departments.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. But the Netherlands are a small country. We used to have 25 forces.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And you thought 25 was too many. That's hilarious.

Stijn Ruiter:

No, no, no. In the '80s, we had municipal police and federal police, and then, we had these 25, and it was now merged into one service. But clearly, you still have the old units also with their own practices.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I know you're trying to work on a project to get people thinking within law enforcement in the Netherlands about evidence-based policing. How's that going?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, it's great. This is an initiative which is a collaboration between the Ministry of Justice, Netherlands Police, and NSCR, to set up a program so that we can have staff to do research project with police. Not just from our ivory tower, but literally, with police. It's really a program which has a subtitle towards evidence-based policing in the Netherlands.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You don't have to get there.

Stijn Ruiter:

Well, no, yeah, but I think EBP in general, we are all working towards.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's all about the journey, man. It's all about the journey.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, no, yeah. But we say... I don't know whether this translates well in English, like a dot on the horizon where we try to go and-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think you mean you hope there's a light at the end of the tunnel, and with a bit of luck, it's not a train coming straight towards you at speed.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. There might be trains, for some projects. I mean, plenty of obstacles. So, this is one of the benefits of this national police service.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But they did the same thing in the UK, even though they have 43, 44. It's just we don't have that kind of level of thing in the US. So, what's the goal? Is it to try and help people learn what evidence-based policing is?

Stijn Ruiter:

No. Do it also.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. No, I mean...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. Do it.

Stijn Ruiter:

... you also need to learn it, but we do synthesize research. Like you're having systematic reviews of literature, that's a part.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How much is that is doing your own reviews, and how much of that is simply translational work? I mean, most of it's written in English.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I know you struggle with the English language. You're only just getting the hang of it.

Stijn Ruiter:

Thank you. People might have noticed by now, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Better than half the English speakers I know. I mean, you are, obviously, completely confident, familiar in the literature, but that's not going to be the situation across the board in the country.

Stijn Ruiter:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No. The Netherlands is one of the most educated countries I've ever been in. But...

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. So, clearly, there are these resources out there mainly in English like you say, the college of policing, what works center...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

In the UK, yep.

Stijn Ruiter:

... in the UK. The initiative of central alum at George Mason, right? Like these...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The matrix.

Stijn Ruiter:

The matrix, indeed. All these initiatives are simply out there to synthesize existing knowledge. Like look, we know this is effective, or this is promising, or this doesn't work, this backfires, and these are in English. So, I don't expect Dutch cops to read this.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There was a long pause there. It's like you don't expect Dutch cops to read English, or you don't expect Dutch cops to read.

Stijn Ruiter:

No, no, to read this. Yeah, no, no. Well, right? That translational activity really needs to happen. The things that I write for academic journal is boring to them, boring to you maybe.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Not at all. I find them fascinating.

Stijn Ruiter:

Okay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Everything you write is just super.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Like my work is absolutely fascinating.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah. Totally. I'm-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've read everyone of my articles, aren't you?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah. And books. I do quote them or I point police decision makers towards these sort of resources and they do read English, so...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's annoying. The Dutch cops, to me, are very much like the Scandinavian cops. Oh, yeah. Which language do you want to talk in today? Dutch preferably.

Stijn Ruiter:

Dutch preferably. Right. Well-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Then, they'll throw in some, yeah, the European language or English language.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

English is in Europe. You know what I mean? It's like the Scandinavians, you run into the random street cop and they're like, oh, yeah, I'll do English or Norwegian and Swedish, whatever you want. It's just a different level of education in terms of linguistics, that's expected. It's always humbling. You know what they say, don't you, right?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

If you speak three languages, you're trilingual. If you speak two languages, you're bilingual. And if you speak one language, you're English or French. I mean, it's so... I just lost all my French listeners.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, I know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Like the four of them.

Stijn Ruiter:

But back to the translational activity, I'm not going to redo the matrix. I'm not going to redo the bubble plot of the what works center. What we will do though is for each project that we do, we generally start with a systematic review of the

literature with search criteria and a double coding and all that, do we have this body of knowledge? What's in it? And only then, we turn to our own empirical research.

Stijn Ruiter:

Evidence-based policing is not only about this effect to that, or we have this intervention, does it work? What's the effect of an intervention? It's also about getting a better understanding like of a phenomenon, a crime phenomenon, or some other problem and descriptive research.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

This is a rigorous approach to it. I love everything you're talking about. What's been the receptivity of your police colleagues, especially people working frontline in policing to this kind of level of effort to look at topics?

Stijn Ruiter:

It varies, right? Some love it, and literally, call me up, send me a WhatsApp message, like, look, we're totally excited. I want to do another RCT with you, before we even finished previous one.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People actually do that?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's never been my experience. That is only... When I run projects. It's a former student of mine though.

Stijn Ruiter:

Okay. No, but this helps. I mean, it's a relational thing also.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But what's the general level of understanding of evidence-based policing would you say in the police in the Netherlands?

Stijn Ruiter:

Well, the police, it's an organization of 65,000 people in the Netherlands, and it's not a profession. Frontline officers, do they really read up? I don't think so.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

More of a job, yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

It's a job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's not yet become...

Stijn Ruiter:

No.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... [inaudible 00:16:03] a profession.

Stijn Ruiter:

We're working towards it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Do you think this is the right balance, then? A little bit of synthetic review, and then, pushing forward to actually doing real projects? I'm just trying to figure out what the lessons are for people who want... There aren't many people out there with police departments with 65,000 employees, but the principles are the same. I can't think of any right now. What have you learned about how to get evidence-based policing up and running, improving people's understanding and getting projects working?

Stijn Ruiter:

It's early days, for us.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. But you haven't been shut down yet, right?

Stijn Ruiter:

No, no. But we haven't been evaluated yet, also. It's a five-year thing. There's an extension clause for an extra five. So, it is actually, to them and to us, a long term investment.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I think that's needed. I once spoke to Mark Evans in New Zealand, he said to get real change going, to move from one position to where something like evidence-based policing becomes normalized, takes, at least, five years. Where are the struggles?

Stijn Ruiter:

We signed this agreement, and then, you need to go from, okay, but now, we have this pot of money and how do we spend it on a concrete project? You could think of a million projects, right? Like police deal with...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But yeah, it's not just crime, right?

Stijn Ruiter:

No, not at all. And it might be my bias, because I sort of start from criminology, crime studies in reading about EBP or EBP-research that gets published, I see a lot of crime, and frontline policing, patrolling and all these experiments. You've been involved in it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I mean, I like working on projects that actually help the frontline guys and girls out.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. But the frontline guys and girls don't only deal with crime, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Exactly. Exactly.

Stijn Ruiter:

Right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm working on a project right now that's all about working with a vulnerable population.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. At this conference, we'll be presenting research that tries to replicate one of your studies, calls to service, what are they about? What types of problems, and how much time gets spent on addressing these problems?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

I think you found roughly 50% in Philadelphia is crime-related, and then, there's health-related and community-related and-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Some mishmash of things that seemed to have no commonality to them. You can put them in broad categories, but that's very generalized.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, but have police receive training to address these problems?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. Grief, no.

Stijn Ruiter:

No. There you go. So...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's not to say they don't do a good job, but it's very much learning on the job how to deal with people with mental health problems, how to deal with people in homelessness, stray animals, for crying out loud.

Stijn Ruiter:

I mean, just by just showing this, with numbers, I mean that's our business.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a good start.

Stijn Ruiter:

You could show, look, yeah, they deal with crime. But also, this, this and this, it's also a starting point to get the discussion going like, oh, do we need to train them to address crime problems?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I know that you are also working, not just with criminology types, but people from a range of disciplines.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

How's that working out?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, that's great. Criminology itself is not a discipline. Right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

People are very undisciplined, yes.

Stijn Ruiter:

No. True. But there are geographers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Totally good. Quite right too.

Stijn Ruiter:

Sociologists.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, well, that's okay.

Stijn Ruiter:

People with law background, psychology. I mean, the humanities and social sciences. It's all there, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Data science and computer people?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, data science, computer science. So, we had this senior researcher position, and we had applicant from the human movement sciences.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Human movement is a science?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, I mean, yeah, makes sense. Right.

Stijn Ruiter:

They mainly study sports and how to perform under pressure. But you see the analogy there, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

She had already been involved with research projects, also, with the police academy, training for performing under pressure. When she applied, like, yeah, that's interesting.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's some really interesting ways to take something like that for critical instant work, or just for simple interactions with people that go well, or go south.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. There is some research out there on performing, but that research is, then, often on individual performance in training sessions. But police work is often teamwork, so that complicate it. How do you deal with challenging situations as a team?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, it's funny that you say that, because I was at an incident where an officer was dealing with somebody from the vulnerable community who clearly had some behavioral health challenges going on, and she was doing a great job. A sergeant turned up, just took the wrong approach, yeah, and pulled ranked.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, started getting involved when the lead officer should have been left to deal with it. And it went south after that. The guy ends up in handcuffs on the floor for... And I'm looking at this going, there was absolutely no need for this to end up in this manner.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Okay. They are going to start bringing in beer barrels right behind you. I think they'll have to pause this for a moment. Hold on.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. That's okay.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah, it's time to catch up with a drink. I mean, we can't sit in a beer garden and not drink, so...

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Mine's almost empty.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right? Well, take this as opportunity for refill. Hold on. You want another drink?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, please.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Why not? I'll pick the beer barrels.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There was a small interlude here where they wheeled in more beer barrels. Now, look, I'm not saying that our conference drank so much that we were responsible for exhausting the town's beer supply, but I'm not saying we weren't responsible for it either.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers to round two.

Stijn Ruiter:

Cheers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Lass behind the bar was telling me this place has been a pub since 1766.

Stijn Ruiter:

Wow. Wow.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. Oldest pub in Harrogate.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. This one?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. We find our spot.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. I know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right around the corner, handy. What we're talking about? Where we before the beer barrels arrived?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. I've talked to French academics about policing in France, and I have spoken to French academics and German academics and people in Scandinavia. It seems like mainland continental European policing seems to be lagging behind in terms of adoption of an evidence-based data driven-kind of intelligence-led movement a little bit more than some agencies appear to be in sort of Canada or Australia, New Zealand.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. It's very Anglo-American.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yeah. It's an English-speaking thing. Right?

Stijn Ruiter:

English speaking thing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, is it just because people not been exposed to it because it's not their primary language?

Stijn Ruiter:

I-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Which would be fair.

Stijn Ruiter:

No, but the ideas are universal. You don't need to be able to read English to understand that in order to find out whether something works, or is effective. Part of the antagonism that I've encountered. It's experiments. No, it's not only experiments.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

No.

Stijn Ruiter:

So, there's that.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yep.

Stijn Ruiter:

But there's also new public management again. We need to measure everything and put in stats, and ultimately, it's about dealing with the problems, and maybe you need to be interested in the problem and whether the problem is reduced. But in new public management, it is about how many arrests were made. And some antagonists actually bring this up, now, we shouldn't do this because you're the data guy, right? You'll present, again, the wrong figures.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You've hit on something that's so often lost which is we really do want to focus on outcomes.

Stijn Ruiter:

Outcomes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

The impact on the community and the public.

Stijn Ruiter:

And you need to know the effort, also.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Sure. And how much work is done is good to know, but that's not the end of the story. What the outputs are, how many arrests have been made is not the end of the story.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, but these are easily measurable often. And also, crime is relatively easy to measure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Has this been an easy sell to people? Has it been easy to help people understand that goal between outputs compared to what we really want as outcomes?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. If you sit down and explain, look, we are not in the business of just presenting numbers and pointing fingers, like it went wrong. What academics are often also blamed for, at least, in the Netherlands, like in policing studies from the ivory tower, looking at police, criticizing police, no, it's actually jointly learning.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Externally without really appreciating the context.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is it common for academics in the Netherlands to go on ride-alongs, and to really work closely with police?

Stijn Ruiter:

Well, some do, some don't. I think we should and ride-alongs, or just sit at the police station. For example, this is an interesting project that will be soon starting. Citizens come with their problems to police. Right? They report a problem.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I'm familiar with that.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Either it's an emergency, then, you call 112 in the Netherlands. Non-emergency, different phone number like 311 in the US. And then, you say, yeah, there's something happened. Burglary. The offender's long gone. You return after a weekend away, so it's not an emergency anymore. So, you want to report a crime. They say, well, come to the station, will file a crime report. That's the start of criminal justice, and everything in criminal justice follows.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Flows from that, yep.

Stijn Ruiter:

Formally requesting the public prosecutor's office to look into this problem. And whether they do, that's not a decision. I mean...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There's certainly so many agencies we can fix. One at a time. Okay.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah, yeah, no, sure. The problem might be that burglary, and then, the crime gets reported, and that's a start. But it might also be completely different nature, the problem. Like fight with a neighbor. Is that best addressed with a criminal justice response, or should we think of alternative responses to this problem? If the knee jerk response, or the only response possible is we file a crime report, it's a start of criminal justice.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Stijn Ruiter:

Also, what are the expectations of this citizen reporting that problem? Do they want the problem solved? What do they want?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I don't reject the notion that we should consider other agencies, but I also don't accept the notion that other agencies will necessarily perform that much better than sending the police. Because I've seen the police, over the last 30 to 40 years, attending a whole range of social issues that weren't crime problems and not necessarily doing a bad job.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, I keep an agnostic open mind about this, because I think the assumption that some kind of social service agency will automatically be better than the police, I prefer to test that rather than just make any assumptions about it.

Stijn Ruiter:

No, no, sure. Criminal justice response is finally in crime report, maybe criminal investigations, maybe we find a suspect, maybe we prosecute. But if the problem is of a different nature, maybe you need to... More like a restorative justice kind of approach.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right. You are doing some work on restorative justice with the police, aren't you?

Stijn Ruiter:

Well, we try to set up this, if the behavioral alternative of the frontline, the front desk of the police station is filing crime reports, then, you will never get to restorative justice, because you're already in the criminal justice and it's...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Can't you divert to a restorative justice process?

Stijn Ruiter:

We're trying to set up this study where we experimentally vary, whether the police actually sort of informs the citizen about this restorative justice option. Like, look, there's this restorative justice option, and there's actually an organization that does the mediation work.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Is that... they contract to you, did you create them?

Stijn Ruiter:

It's actually full of volunteers who are trained to do these. So, the organization exists. But whether the citizen knows that this is actually also an option, rather than see someone in court, that might actually resolve the conflict, or better address the problem than the court. Right? And we don't know, it might be worse.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It could make things worse. Exactly right. Yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

It might be worse, but we currently don't know. So, my champion in the Dutch police, who is a police officer, he wants to test this.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Give him a shout out.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah. So it's Ruben Boomsma. He's excited about this idea to do more EBP.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good for Ruben. Time for quick drink break. Because...

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

... I've got to be honest with you, this hand pulled bitter is very good.

Stijn Ruiter:

Nice. Enjoy it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You're also doing some work on looking at body worn camera footage and CCTV looking at police interactions.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yes. Well, the team is, right? In the research group, we have research is that will look at these citizen police situations, what happened in this situation, whether it got violent or whether de-escalation work, like techniques work. And it's great that there's so much footage now. As a fly on the wall, observe how it unfolds.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Body-worn cameras are universal?

Stijn Ruiter:

No. There are many.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Enough to make the project work?

Stijn Ruiter:

So, it's body worn camera, CCTV footage. And then, literally, looking at these situations play out. Whereas, in old days, you had to rely on how it was reported, how it was written up.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

Which has all its biases. Now, as an external observer, as a fly on the wall, we can sort of code what happens and try to learn, which is awesome. It's time-consuming though, like coding second by second video footage.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Well, one thing I have been impressed by is how diligent you are about being rigorous about the science. I noticed this, because there's a project you're working on, not only did you preregister the research with the open science Foundation on their website, you also tweeted about it simply just to put it out there.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. This is our commitment.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

To open science?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Why is this commitment to open science important to you?

Stijn Ruiter:

In science, it shouldn't be about the next publication.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Heresy. Heresy.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. No. Ultimately, we're...

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You'll get your academic card canceled for that.

Stijn Ruiter:

We're trying to-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Stop trying to change the world. You need to publish more.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, or less, but better research.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers to that.

Stijn Ruiter:

Cheers. So, pre-registration is part of the open science principles. You basically specify what you will do, how you will investigate, and stick to it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

But then, how do you cheat afterwards, fiddle the data?

Stijn Ruiter:

You don't. But this is, also, because it's a huge problem, that there is only positive evidence only. Look, we found it works. Where are all the publications of all these great initiatives that backfired, or that didn't work in the file drawer?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

All the fantastic ideas that people had that just crash and burn.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. No, but with good intentions. Yes. That's the learning.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's a really key part. We have to start normalizing that it's okay to fail. I tested that right in the middle of a gin and tonic. Sorry. But...

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, no, you're right.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You answer the question while I drink my bitter.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah, yeah, yeah. You're absolutely right. And I think you often make this comparison to aviation, right?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's a bad thing to fail at when you're flying. Yeah.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. But you have tested parts of the plane or the motor of whatever, that has all been tested, without which, it wouldn't fly. And the same should apply to policing or to interventions in the social realm.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That might be one of the challenges is, as we move forward, we have to figure out how to almost reward failure. We need to reward innovation and trying things and be okay with failure. And I think in too many places, people are scared to try things in case they don't work, and that's simply us about face.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. And so, I'm in the science part of this business. Right? I collaborate with police, and we just want to find out. And finding out the answer could be, well, it doesn't work, or it needs to be tweaked. Or in this context, it works, and in the other, it doesn't. Or it backfires. It's all an answer to the question. We tried and we failed, or we tried and we were success successful, it's all fine.

Stijn Ruiter:

I'm agnostic. There's no normative necessarily. Like you first want to know, and if the aim is to reduce crime problems or other societal problems, yeah, that's a great aim, let's work towards it. But not every good initiative that you think is good will work, and we need to write that up.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That's the part, isn't it? Because people go into it with the best of intentions.

Stijn Ruiter:

Sure.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

I mean, nobody starts a project thinking, you know what, let's try this project because it's absolutely going to fail.

Stijn Ruiter:

No, that won't work. But you need to write this up.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Yes.

Stijn Ruiter:

And that's hardly done. So pre registration-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And we have to be okay with it being, I really wanted this to work, but you know what, it didn't. And I'm going to let everybody know that it didn't.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Because, then, the neighbors don't have to try again.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Right.

Stijn Ruiter:

Or they might, because they're in a different context and it might work in another context.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And we have to celebrate those people.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yes.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

We have to make a space for them to go, "Hey, guess what? I tried this and it failed catastrophically". Thank you. You have contributed to the science of that.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. So, we actually, again, with Ruben, we-

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Good for Ruben.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Good for Ruben. Yeah. So, he wanted to do this focus deterrence project in his police department. In Dutch, we call it [foreign language 00:33:11] which is basically a chat to stop, right? These offenders need to stop.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You make it sound so much nicer than an English.

Stijn Ruiter:

It's just stop.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And so, chap, would you mind kind of cussing that kind of nonsense out, would you mind?

Stijn Ruiter:

It's just a stop talk. So, I said, well, in Sacramento, there was this experiment where they basically rolled the dice, who gets the treatment, who doesn't. And after a year, they looked at the recidivism rate. Very promising results there.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Oh, that's good to hear.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. In Sacramento. So, we sort of tried to replicate the design, and I mean, you need to translate stuff to the Dutch context.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That makes sense.

Stijn Ruiter:

Try to replicate it as much as possible. And in September, October, we will find out, right? Like the interventions been done.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Let me shift forward, so I'm on the edge of my seat.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. Will this show similar results? We don't know.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

You mentioned the community, and our particular community of fellow conference goers are all back at the hotel bar having a drink. So, we probably should get back to join them.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah. That's sounds like a smart move.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

So, what's next for you, mate?

Stijn Ruiter:

The focus deterrence experiment hasn't even finished yet. Right? We don't know the results yet. And then, Ruben reaches out like let's try and do the restorative justice experiment to randomize them into offering the restorative justice response. That's the next thing.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And I think that's the key to what's really exciting about NSCR, because I've worked with you guys at NSCR and Henk Elfers and Wim Bernasco and yourself for a number of years, and you just have this close relationship, not only to the data, but also, with the people working with the data, and I think you're in a fantastic position. It's going to be great. Looking forward to seeing what you're getting up to.

Stijn Ruiter:

I'll try to preregister and publish.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

There you go.

Stijn Ruiter:

So, you can read it.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

And coming out and joining me for a drink?

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Cheers, mate.

Stijn Ruiter:

Cheers.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Honestly, that is a good pint.

Stijn Ruiter:

What is it?

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Calamity Brown. But you are on gin and tonic.

Stijn Ruiter:

Yeah.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

It's dutch gin. Yeah. There you go.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

That was episode 52 of Reducing Crime recorded in Harrogate, England in June, 2022. Visit reducingcrime.com/podcast for episode transcripts, as well as links to Stijn's research. New episodes are announced on Twitter at [@_reducingcrime](https://twitter.com/_reducingcrime), and I personally lurk at [Jerry_Ratcliffe](https://twitter.com/Jerry_Ratcliffe). Don't forget the underscores. Subscribe to this podcast at Spotify, SoundCloud, Apple, or basically wherever you pod, so you don't miss an episode.

Jerry Ratcliffe:

Be safe and best of luck.