Safety and Security in Remote, Rural, and Regional Policing

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Abstract

Policing outside of the metropole is unlike what we have come to know about policing. The rural, regional and remote (RRR) policing environment is shaped by environmental, organisational, community and criminality contexts that produce unique safety and security issues. This article examines these issues for RRR police and their families in Tasmania, Australia. Drawing on interviews with eight officers and observations of five officers in two districts, we find that both distance and isolation, and closeness (or propinquity), shapes the safety and security of RRR police. This article documents the individual strategies deployed by RRR officers to ensure their and their family's safety, the gaps in policy and practice, and the necessary changes to the work conditions, station security, and housing arrangements of RRR officers. Addressing a gap at the juncture of RRR policing and police safety and security, this research considers what can be done to enhance the capacity of RRR officers to remain in RRR deployments.

Policing outside of the metropole differs from what we know about policing. There are unique challenges to the rural, regional and remote (RRR) policing environment, which are shaped by environmental, organisational, community and criminality contexts that produce specific safety and security issues for RRR police. Existing literature on police safety and security covers a wide range of topics, such as risks involved in responding to specific jobs or in specific spaces (Ellis et al., 1993; Larsen et al., 2016; Soltes et al., 2021), accidents and injuries (Ferguson et al., 2011; International Labour Organization, 2012), fatigue and its impact on safety (Elliott & Lal, 2016; Vila, 2006; Violanti et al., 2012), and police psychological impact and wellbeing (Craven et al., 2019; International Labour Organization, 2012; Tuckey et al., 2010) including, more recently, 'moral injuries' (Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017).

There is some work that focusses on the risks involved in solo patrols, such as assault (Bailey, 2008; Boydstun et al., 1977; Wilson et al., 1990), but also legitimacy and integrity (Anderson & Dossetor, 2012). The older studies on assault risk contain methodological weaknesses (Wilson & Brewer, 1992) and contradictory findings as to whether there is more or equal risk of harm for single officers. Some of the issues raised in this work mirror that captured in existing work on risks faced by RRR officers, which we review below. However, generally, work on safety, security and risk for police does not tend to mention the unique risks encountered by RRR officers.

We first situate our study in the Tasmanian RRR context, however, the relevance of this research expands beyond the local context with more policing organisations the size of Tasmania Police in the world than large police organisations, and most policing in the Global South being undertaken in RRR locations. While there is an extensive body of work on RRR policing, there is limited existing research into the Australian context (see, Jobes, 2003; Scott & Jobes, 2007; see, Harkness, 2015 for agricultural policing; Baker, 2019 for protest policing).[1] In addition, little of the RRR policing research focusses on officer safety and security. Our review of literature and the context of RRR policing is presented through a lens of criminality, community, environmental and organisational factors and how these produce safety and security challenges. After outlining our methodology, we present our findings using the same lens further showing how RRR policing is shaped by these contexts.

Drawing on interviews and observations in two districts, we examine these issues for RRR police in Tasmania, Australia, and consider the impact on them and their families. We find that both distance and isolation, and the closeness (or propinquity) of the local community shapes officer safety and security. Propinquity – rather than trust – is a core concept shaping the RRR policing environment and refers to the closeness in these communities in terms of place (proximity), time (shared events), relation (kinship) and affinity of nature (similarity) (Asquith & Rodgers, 2021). This better captures the intimately

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[1] Scott and colleagues have investigated the unique characteristics of policing in remote, predominantly Aboriginal communities (e.g, Scott et al., 2021; Dwyer et al., 2021; Cunneen, 2007), but the context in those studies is different from that in Tasmania, where there are no predominantly Aboriginal remote communities.

networked communities of RRR Tasmania, where trust has historically been fraught, contingent and easily undermined.

We conclude this article with a review of policy and practice in Australia, arguing there is a lacuna here and in the research on RRR policing, especially as it relates to the safety and security of officers and their families. Failure to systematically address this will only hamper officer retention rates. Adding to the body of work on RRR policing, and police safety and security, we consider what can be done to enhance the capacity of RRR officers to remain in RRR deployments.

Tasmanian Rural, Regional and Remote Context

Tasmania, about 250km south of the mainland of Australia (Discover Tasmania, 2022), has an area of 64,519 square kilometres (see Figure 1 for location of Tasmania in context on map of Australia). This increases to 68,401 square kilometres when its islands are added (Geoscience Australia, 2022), three of which are inhabited: Bruny Island; Flinders Island; and King Island. Tasmania is roughly the size of West Virginia in the United States or the Republic of Ireland (refer to Figure 2 for satellite view of Tasmania).

Figure 1

Map of Australia with Tasmania in context
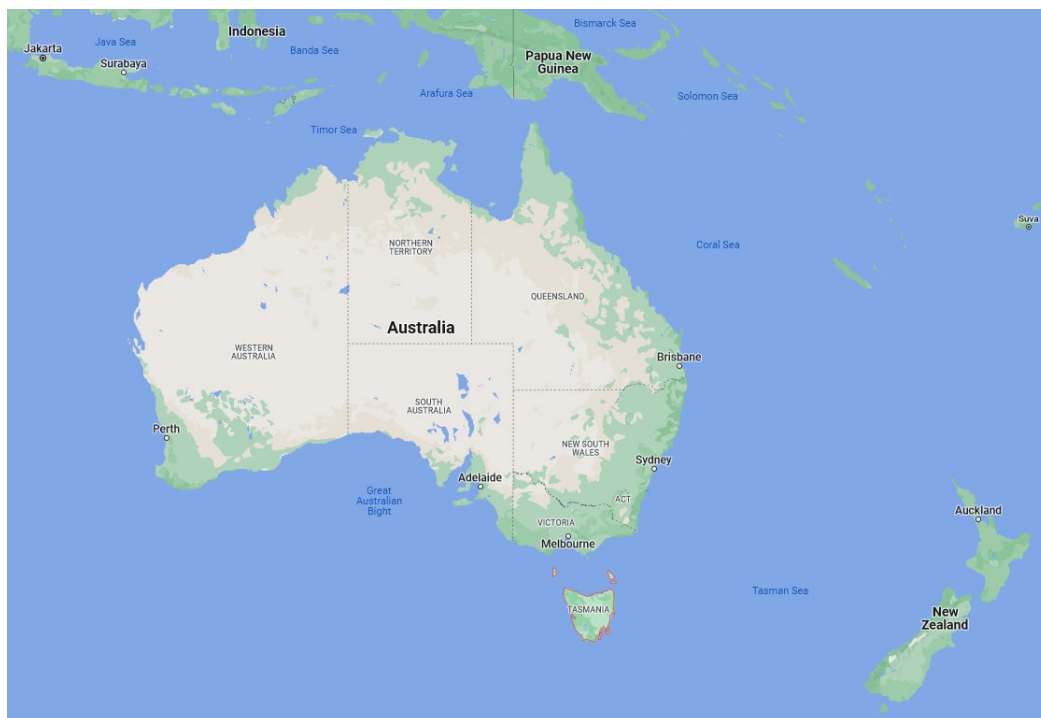
Source: Google Maps, 2022

Figure 2

Satellite View of Tasmania

Source: Google Maps, TerraMetrics Map Data, 2022

The population of Tasmania at the time of the 2021 Census was 558,000 (ABS, 2022b). According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS, 2014) classification, *all* of Tasmania is categorised as regional, rural or remote, yet distance from the two major cities – Hobart and Launceston – is relatively small (2.5 hours) in terms of mainland Australian geography. Based on this classification, areas outside of Devonport, Launceston and Hobart are Outer Regional, Remote or Very Remote. These are the areas classified as RRR for the purposes of this study with population numbers and proportion shown below (Table 1).

Table 1

Tasmanian Population and RRR Dispersion

ABS Classification	Population (June 30 2020)	Total RRR population	% RRR population
Inner Regional (for our purposes, considered metropolitan or urban: Devonport, Launceston, Hobart)	367,487	-	-
Outer Regional	162,780		
Remote	7,897	173,293	32%
Very Remote	2,616		

Source: ABS 2022a

RRR Policing Contexts and Challenges

The contexts of policing outside the metropole produce unique safety and security issues for police, many of which are not considered in recruit training, and rarely imparted to those officers and their families deployed to RRR communities. RRR police must negotiate unique criminality, environmental, organisational and community challenges (refer to Figure 3).

Figure 3

Safety and Security Challenges of Rural, Regional and Remote Policing

While some officers actively choose to work in RRR communities, all are required to do so at some point in their careers, even if these postings are transitory (i.e., the minimum

tenure is Tasmania is two years). Given that all officers must negotiate these deployments, it is necessary to understand the contexts and challenges of RRR policing.

Criminality Factors

There is less reported crime in RRR communities than in urban areas generally (Ceccato, 2015). With less reported crime (Barclay, 2017; Ceccato, 2015), police are enabled to respond quickly, and have higher clearance rates (Falcone et al., 2002). RRR communities also have distinct patterns of crime. For example, higher rates of street violence and domestic and family violence (DFV) in rural Australia contribute to the higher rate of *violent* crime compared to metropolitan areas (Barclay, 2017; Campo & Tayton, 2015). The higher likelihood of firearm ownership in RRR spaces results in an increased likelihood that DFV incidents involve a firearm (Mancik et al., 2020), along with being a general concern in responding to all types of crime in these spaces (New Zealand Police, 2021b; Ricciardelli, 2018).

Illicit drug use, which can contribute to other crime, such as burglary (Jobes, 2003), is higher (National Rural Health Alliance, 2015). Isolated regions may also host large scale drug cultivation and drug importation (Jobes, 2003). Alcohol consumption at risky levels is more likely among RRR populations (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019). Outcomes of alcohol consumption, such as violence and drink driving have higher rates (Barclay, 2017; Campo & Tayton, 2015). Owing to greater distances and sparser public transport options, driving under the influence of alcohol is a particular concern (Weisheit, 2010). Perhaps because of the poor quality of non-urban roads and infrastructure, as well as the higher rates of alcohol consumption, the likelihood of death or serious injury is several times higher for RRR drivers than for urban drivers (Blackman et al., 2006).

Agricultural areas also experience unique crimes related to farm equipment, machinery and stock theft (Barclay, 2017; Ceccato, 2015). Vandalism to crops or infrastructure, arson and biosecurity offences can occur in these areas (Barclay, 2017). Unpopulated spaces can invite environmental crimes, such as dumping of waste, theft of water, trafficking of wildlife, and hunting (Barclay, 2017; Brisman et al., 2014). Protestors against ongoing or proposed land use (such as clear felling, water redistribution, fracking) are largely unique to non-urban areas (Woods, 2016).

Research on police and community perspectives often cite the belief that most rural crime is committed by outsiders (Archbold, 2015; Ceccato, 2015; Jobes, 2003; New Zealand Police, 2021b). Tourists, seasonal workers, traveller communities and new residents are believed to disrupt community harmony (Somerville et al., 2015), although Marshall and Johnson (2005 in Somerville et al., 2015) note the lack of proof for the actual threat from these groups. Shifting populations also contribute to crime levels in RRR spaces, such as migrant work communities around resource booms (Archbold, 2015; Scott et al., 2011). Attributing crime to 'outsiders' may assist in strengthening the social relationships of insiders

but it also contributes to the silencing of the 'rural horror' (Bell, 1997), especially as it relates to domestic violence.

Community Factors

There are stereotypes about rurality that shape a common imagination and are relevant to understanding RRR policing. The 'rural idyll' represents a crime-free place that is safe and quiet, and has a sparse population and close community (Bell, 1997; Scott & Hogg, 2015; Somerville et al., 2015). Propinquity is a key aspect of these communities, as the links between community members provide an informal social control network, which requires little formal policing to ensure order and safety. The mutual knowing and surveillance of a close community means it is regarded as safe (Somerville et al., 2015), with the rural community being perceived as one that has close-knit, intimate connections, and is relatively crime free. Here, outsiders are considered as the danger (Ceccato, 2015; Scott & Hogg, 2015). Yet, the idyll is equally matched by the 'rural horror' (Bell, 1997) that is generated from the isolation and tyranny of distance, which can mean police may be too far away to impact on victimisation or offending.

Environmental Factors

Isolated locations create specific policing challenges. Homes, other police, and call out locations situated far apart can isolate both officers and those seeking help (Campo & Tayton, 2015; Griffiths, 2019; Ricciardelli, 2018). Isolated properties located at distance from the small towns that host police outposts make it more difficult to attend emergencies in surrounding communities. Other environmental factors include terrain, road quality and weather. Mountainous locations mean windy narrow roads and notoriously variable road quality (Dixon & Welch, 2000; Tziotis et al., 2006). Adding black ice or snow to the mix can make day-to-day driving between calls considerably challenging (Ricciardelli, 2018). For officers policing in the isolated islands of Scotland, weather is often a cause of uncertainty (Souhami, 2020). Sudden weather changes result in the cancellation of flights and ferries, and roads being cut off. Weather can also contribute to frequent power cuts and signal disruption limiting external communication (see also, Slade, 2013). Telecommunications challenges can be common to isolated locations, even without extreme weather (Griffiths, 2019; Ricciardelli, 2018).

Organisational Factors

Organisational factors shape the work experiences of any occupation. However, in RRR policing these factors can accentuate risk. Staffing and equipment limitations are common concerns. Additionally, limited training and clashes between strategic priorities and management styles shape risks. Material constraints are a concern for many officers across several studies. Vehicles are not necessarily fit for purpose, such as for transporting suspects or for the rough terrain or low-lit areas of some environments (NZP, 2021a; Ricciardelli, 2018). Officers mention ageing vehicles, weapons and technology (Falcone et al., 2002;

Ricciardelli, 2018; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004; NZP, 2021b). Station safety is another critical material factor with concerns raised about the level of security for some RRR officers in New Zealand (NZP, 2021a).

Human resource constraints are a defining organisational factor of RRR policing. Unlike the large patrols and area commands of the city, remote police stations often deploy fewer than five officers. While smaller stations are now less common due to neo-liberal accounting of police resources,[2] there are sometimes only one or two officers in some stations, translating to only one or two officers on shift at a time. Down time is difficult to negotiate given that shifts are not commonly back-filled when officers take leave, and breaks between shifts are difficult to schedule (Ricciardelli, 2018). Police may feel emotionally obligated to keep working, so as to not leave their colleagues or the community short of support (Ricciardelli, 2018), and in some cases, are organisationally obligated to be available 24/7/365. These factors exponentially increase with officers making up for other officers on stress leave themselves becoming stressed and not getting enough down time (Ricciardelli, 2018). Recruitment challenges enhance these factors with many police having no interest in being deployed to RRR roles.

Training is another organisational factor shaping the experiences of RRR police. Recruit and regular officer training has an urban focus that does not prepare officers for the unique factors of RRR policing. Officers in Northern Scotland reported that training did not include content such as: having to cover all aspects of policing; geographic isolation; and the nature and significance of community relationships to RRR policing (Slade, 2013). The skill development required is shaped by the RRR environment, which can range from the need to safely manoeuvre rough terrain vehicles to sea rescues (Slade, 2013). Access to upskilling can also be limited with training courses for specialist skills being delivered in cities and human resource limitations restricting officers' ability to attend these courses (NZP, 2021b; Slade, 2013).

Finally, clashes between state, national and local priorities also shape RRR policing priorities and approaches (Fenwick 2012; Griffiths, 2019; Jobes, 2003). Centralised command may question local knowledge and approaches (Griffiths, 2019; Wooff, 2016; Yarwood & Cozens, 2004) despite the granular knowledge and relationships local officers have of their communities (Wooff, 2016).

Safety and Security Challenges in RRR Policing

The combination of these environmental, situational and organisational contexts shapes the safety and security challenges in RRR policing, and these risks emerge in a number of ways, such as when responding to incidents, driving, responding to protests and animal incidents, and the safety and security of family members. Single officer stations or

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[2] Fewer smaller stations means fewer local stations, and larger stations covering larger areas, often vast distances.

patrols amplify the challenges of the RRR environment and are a norm for many RRR officers. This raises concerns about officer safety, efficiency, and accountability (Anderson & Dossetor, 2012; Griffiths, 2019; NZP, 2021a; Ricciardelli, 2018). Focussing specifically on 'domestic disturbances', Huey and Ricciardelli (2017) identify three core issues in responding to calls: lack of police (have to go alone); geography (distance, time); technology (radio coverage).

While the risk of working alone is organisationally mediated by the concept of backup (Ricciardelli 2018), this is challenging in places with few police and vast distances between call out locations (Buttle, Fowler & Williams, 2010; Ricciardelli, 2018; Slade, 2013). Weather compounds this (Souhami, 2020). Police find these situations frustrating, and raise concerns about being held accountable if someone is harmed, but are also aware of their own risks (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017; Ricciardelli, 2018). Some commands are stricter about not intervening in dangerous situations to reduce the risks (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017). Living and working in close communities also impacts community confidence in police capability to respond, given it is often known how many police are in town and are on shift (Huey & Ricciardelli, 2017).

The actual travel to incidents, attending traffic stops and general travel raises another safety issue for RRR police. Fewer officers, combined with environmental factors, means that police officers experience increased challenges to respond to critical calls (Buttle et al., 2010). These can combine with vehicle quality, fatigue and animal hazards to increase safety issues. Additional factors include the length of time spent driving, combined with the higher speed and the stress of arriving too late (Ricciardelli et al., 2018). Ricciardelli and colleagues (2018, p. 7) described driving as "probably the most 'risky' yet often underrated, even unrecognized risk", and stated that no training or experience can counter resource needs and environmental factors.

The effects of propinquity shape the safety and security of RRR police. With few police officers in town and a close community, officers are well known. Living in a "fish bowl" (Slade, 2013, p. 121) means reduced privacy, which hinders the safety and security of RRR police. Under close scrutiny, an officers' reputation reverberates to their family, who are also closely scrutinised and surveilled by community members (Slade, 2013; Souhami, 2020). In a New Zealand Police study, many participants stated that "their partners and families feel 'owned' by the community" (NZP, 2021b, p. 41). Officers' partners are expected by the community to pass on messages and play an unpaid assistance role (Buttle et al., 2010; Fenwick, 2012; NZP, 2021b; Slade, 2013).

The more explicit day-to-day risks of being known as a police officer in a small community extends to home life with an officer's home address often being publicly known, and the dwelling sometimes attached or adjacent to the police station. This risk can then extend to family at home or in the community. In a Canadian national survey of 827 officers who work in Indigenous communities, Ruddell and Jones (2018) found statistically significant differences between police in urban and rural areas for a number of concerns,

including intimidation of an officer's family by local residents. Two studies interviewing New Zealand RRR officers found officer concerns about people turning up at their homes at all hours (Buttle et al., 2010; NZP, 2021b). These visitors would sometimes be "drunk and aggressively banging on their doors" and officers "spoke about how scary it is for young children to see and hear disorderly behaviour at their homes at all hours" (NZP, 2021b, p. 41). Others mentioned families' fear of being harmed in their homes, or their own fear of their family being harmed (Buttle et al., 2010, p. 602). Asides from these two studies, the safety and security of officers' families remains unexplored. In this article we discuss these and other risks as they relate to RRR police in two Tasmanian regions.

Methodology

Given the significant gaps in knowledge about RRR policing, the pilot project on which this article reports was designed to explore the everyday policing of RRR communities, including the propinquitous relationships or affinity between RRR police and their communities, how communities engage with their local police to enhance their safety, and how they achieve safety without police engagement.

The fieldwork for this study was undertaken by Asquith (Author 2), but all other aspects of the project were conducted collaboratively with Rodgers (Author 1). Over a period of 18 months, the study involved building relationships with policing, emergency services, and community within each of the five pilot sites in Tasmania – three in the southern district and two in the western district – prior to the start of fieldwork in 2018.[3]

Pilot sites were identified through a three-stage process, which sought willingness and approval to participate from Tasmania Police, local District Commanders and RRR officers.

The pilot research sites met two of the three initially identified conditions:

- remote community
- small police contingent (<5)

The third pilot site criteria – recent critical incidents such as bushfires, floods and political protests – became irrelevant at the time of fieldwork; officers who nominated to be shadowed by Author 2 were not sited in regions that had a recent history of these critical incidents. However, all five sites had a history of these events, and many police and community participants referenced this in their interviews.

The furthest distance between the single officer patrols observed and other patrol or hub regions was between 40 minutes and one hour depending on the availability, rostered days off and annual leave taken by officers in adjoining areas. Distance between patrols was also influenced by where in each of the patrol areas police were at the time they were

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[3] The pilot study did not include any research with officers in the third, northern policing district.

deployed to another patrol area, region, or even another site within their area. In some sites, the distance covered by a single officer patrol could extend to two or more hours of driving.

Research Methods

To explore the various aspects of RRR policing, this project deployed a range of research methods to collect real-time and reflexive data. In addition to shadowing community events and interviewing community members, Author 2 undertook extended observation research with RRR officers, after which each RRR officer participated in a work history interview. Methods were:

1.   Observational research of police practices in remote Tasmanian communities

An emerging method of police research is ethnography that is often undertaken by way of 'shadowing' officers (Bartkowiak-Théron & Sapey, 2012) in their ordinary tasks. Observation focussed on officers' encounters with the community and considered the ways in which RRR police negotiate their relationships with community. Observations with five officers were conducted each over a five-day period over 12-hour shifts, and a field diary was kept to document thoughts, feelings, encounters, and discussions.

2.   Guided career history interviews with police officers

Career history interviews were also undertaken with five officers, focusing on:

- pathways to RRR policing;
- relationships to community (and how this has changed over time and deployment);
- guiding principles of working with community; and
- individual high points and low points of working in remote communities.

In addition, interviews were conducted with supervisory officers in each district to explore the relationship between management policies and local policing priorities, and to assess the role of regional police culture in influencing local police practices. Interviews were also conducted with two officers who were acting as relief in the research sites when permanently deployed staff were on leave. In total, eight RRR officers were interviewed, with most interviews lasting over 90 minutes.

All officers interviewed were from Tasmania. Some had grown up in the region they worked in or in another Tasmania RRR area, which gave them some knowledge of how a small community operates. Perhaps as an artefact of their experience growing up in RRR communities, three officers had chosen to remain in their RRR posting beyond the minimum requirement.

This research received a full, high-risk ethics approval (#H12928) from the Western Sydney University Human Research Ethics Committee. Officers who participated in the research are de-identified throughout this article and allocated a number to distinguish them.

Data Analysis

Interviews were transcribed and copies provided to participants for review. Once approved by interviewees, the data were uploaded into NVivo qualitative data management software for detailed coding. Codes were informed by themes from existing research and inductively co-coded between the researchers. Thematically coded responses were analysed in terms of key issues. The observations from the researcher's fieldwork diary added context to this data, and aids reflection on how observations of relationships between police and community align or diverge from what was stated in interviews.

Limitations

While the number of interviews may appear limited, eight interviews are adequate to provide data saturation in inductive thematic analysis for at least 80 percent of themes (Guest et al., 2020). Further, the week-long observations with five different officers produces rich data to supplement interviews. A consideration of additional Tasmanian or other Australian regions would have strengthened the findings; however, as a pilot study the scope was naturally limited to test the theory and methodology. Another limitation generated from the participant and site selection was that, contrary to most Tasmania Police officers, three participants remained in RRR postings beyond the minimum requirement. The selection of pilot sites, and thus the findings, may be skewed because of this.

Findings

Given the significant corpus of data (over 400,000 words; and a 200-page notebook of diary entries), this article focusses primarily on the data collected shadowing and interviewing RRR officers about their and their family's safety and security. While these issues were raised consistently by all police participants, they were not the only concerns discussed by officers. As with similar research on police outside the metropole, our participants were equally concerned about crime, and how and when they engage the community and on what matters. In this article, however, we explore more mundane, everyday safety matters that can make or break a RRR deployment. As with the existing literature on rural crime and policing, the matters of most importance to our participants were organisational, environmental, community, and criminality factors. What is clear throughout these sections is how these categories are inextricable and merge with each other to produce the safety and security challenges of RRR policing.

Organisational Factors

The employment conditions of RRR officers were a dominant theme in the data, with officers discussing the safety and security challenges this brought to many aspects of their roles, particularly for single officer stations and suspect transport, but also for hub towns that had multiple officers. Combined with limited staffing, distance impacted RRR officers' capacity to be available to their communities, which created isolation and made some policing strategies unsustainable. Unlike other Australian states, the island location for Tasmania Police meant that "there's nowhere to go in Tasmania… people hide, but if they run, there's nowhere to run to"; yet, "while 18 or 22 [kilometres] doesn't sound very far, it's a long windy road… the tyranny of distance can be a big barrier to patrolling areas when there's only one of you" (Officer 8, 2018).

In Tasmania, RRR officers are mandated to transport detainees from their patrol areas to the closest city for processing and overnight detention. Policy also dictates that a multi-response team is required when responding to an incident involving interpersonal violence; especially in the case of DFV (Tasmania Police, 2018). The safety and security issues involved in working solo, and leaving the community short staffed, was a constant concern and major contributor to stress for RRR officers. Strategies adopted by Tasmania Police to offset the risk of single officer patrols were regarded by some RRR officers to complicate work, even if it was the best approach for safety and security and supported by the Police Association of Tasmania.

Officers often commented on the benefits and challenges of single officer patrols. There was a friction between "being your own boss, in effect" (Officer 6, 2020) but also, "once things start to get dicey you do start thinking, yeah OK, I probably do need that second person" (Officer 7, 2020). There was assertion of the community's need for a local station by many officers in single officer patrols. While they acknowledged there are some "hairy moments" (Officer 4, 2020), the absence of a local officer would significantly impact the development of important police-community relationships that may prevent crime or escalation of violence. Nevertheless, numerous officers believed that single officer stations were bound to be closed, potentially as a consequence of "people get[ting] relaxed about it, and that's when they get into trouble" (Officer 7, 2020). Perhaps single officer patrols would be phased out, as Officer 7 thought, because "I don't think it's safe, full stop".

Single officer patrols are supported by a hub town in each region, with a single hub in each of the two districts studied. This is a base more highly staffed, from which officers can be deployed to support those working solo when circumstances dictate, such as with violent incidents, especially DFV. Yet, distances between the incident and the hub town could mean up to two hours before adequate support arrives. The multi-member response policy (Tasmania Police, 2018) was devised in response to harm or injury sustained by single officers responding to critical or violent incidents. While sensible, it can be challenging for RRR officers to adhere to when dealing with calls involving, for example, a woman being

assaulted by her partner on an isolated property. One officer mentioned that while they have not yet been in that situation, they would attend a scene with their lights and siren on whilst waiting for their backup, and would intervene if they witnessed any violence regardless of when their backup was scheduled to arrive.

Another organisational issue brought up across the research sites was the requirement regarding not detaining suspects in local stations and having to transport them to the closest city. While some hub stations can detain people for a limited time and may be able to draw on the resources of local health services, for the most part, suspects had to be transported simply to have a forensic nurse collect a blood sample for a drug or alcohol test. In one district, the maximum one-way duration of this journey to the city was two hours, and in the other five hours, which meant that the RRR officer was away from their patrol area for most of their shift. Officer 7 (2020) notes that in their location there is:

> … a cell but it's not compliant, so we can't actually hold them. There are ways around it. We sometimes have to just—If someone's just a drunk or something you can find ways of holding them just until they're sober. But for the most part, yeah, they go to [the city] or you find some other alternative. There's a lot of arrests by appointment … [We] figure out when is a good time for them, and then you take them up. (Officer 7, 2020)

However, in cases of violent crime or where others have been harmed (e.g., vehicle manslaughter) there are no alternatives to transporting suspects long distances from the scene of the crime. Policing approaches and policies devised in the context of city policing clearly have their drawbacks in the context of RRR policing.

Environmental Factors

Officers often couched their concerns about safety and security by reference to their colleagues working on more remote islands. Bruny or Flinders islands, for example, were discussed by three officers, who had in the past been deployed to these island patrols even though these locations were not included in the study. Some greatly appreciated the opportunities that come with these remote deployments as it allows them to know and work closely with small local communities. But officers also recognised such deployments as prime examples of how situations can quickly become the "hairy moments" of working solo in an isolated location.

While discussing the necessity of multi-member response teams, Officer 7 (2020) noted that:

> … it surprises me a lot that Bruny Island has only one [officer]. That's ridiculous. I find that totally ridiculous … Well, if something big happened there, you would literally have to get a chopper in … that would be the quickest response you can get … And I just think that's crazy. … It seems crazy to me that we would allow

one person to be in charge. And I understand that it won't become an issue until something happens, but something's going to happen.

The increased isolation that came with remote deployments was clear when Officer 1 (2018) reminisced about "a bit of a stint, somewhere like Bruny Island". The officer suggested that such deployments as Bruny Island should be term limited because of "[t]hat feeling of isolation when that last ferry goes. I don't know… Even on your days off, you can't, you can't leave the place" (Officer 1, 2018). Officer 1 (2018) recounted a related, though more intense risk, emerging from the multi-member response approach.

Officer 1 discussed how offenders refused to leave when asked by the caravan park owner; because it involved violence, the Bruny Island officer was mandated to request back up. Given that it was late evening, the ferry was not running, so:

> The job ended up going for hours, and they got the helicopter down there... No, actually, they had to can that. They ended up getting the boat down because the weather was too bad [for the helicopter]. But the cost involved with this one job, by the time they got down there it was about 5 o'clock in the morning… [Bruny Island officer] goes round and deals with it in five minutes, and it was all over Red Rover… There's always going to be that exception that they're trying to cover, but, yeah, sometimes you get the ability to use your common sense taken away. (Officer 1, 2018)

While this policy is clear and sensible, officers sometimes feel conflicted about not being able to provide immediate response to critical incidents. This conflict arises because officers feel complicit in the violence, but also because they recognise that the lack of immediate response to critical incidents flows to the whole community and damages police legitimacy and propinquitous relationships. In inquiring about what other strategies might address this disparity between rules and practices, some officers talked of "flying squads" stationed at hub towns, whose only job is to provide back up in critical incidents. As noted by Officer 7 (2020), there "used to be something like that [flying squad]. I've heard of something like that, but I've never seen it, so I don't know if it's one of those pipe dreams or something". The ability to quickly provide backup is in the remit of hub stations; however, they have their own local response needs, often exceeding capacity of the staffing allocated to these more highly populated, hub towns.

In this context, RRR officers were supported by colleagues from other single officer stations in the region. This places further demands on officer resourcing, particularly during times of staff leave or rostered days off. During observations, there was one period where a sole officer was covering not only their vast patrol area, but also two other patrol areas as two officers were on leave and neither position was backfilled in their absence. This officer raised concerns that he—and the multi-member response team—would not reach a critical incident in time given they could have been over two hours from the furthest location across the three patrol areas. The background anxiety of not getting there in time played on RRR officers'

minds constantly. The trauma inherent to policing can be magnified in propinquitous policing, when police officers care for their communities and are cared for by communities in return. Traumatic incidents, when combined with the constant fear of being too late, created the conditions for vicarious trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to grow and flourish.

Community Factors

Shaped by propinquity, close-knit RRR communities are a key contextual factor for the safety and security issues experienced by RRR officers and their families. On completing work for the day, city officers are largely not identifiable as police. They blend into the community and are not watched and analysed constantly. This type of anonymity is rarely enjoyed by RRR officers; they are always seen as a police officer with their movements and behaviour under watch by their community. This is especially stark if they live in the house assigned by Tasmania Police, as one officer highlighted:

> It came all about when the neighbours across the road were using a set of binoculars to look at us through the window. The way the windows were set up in the lounge room when the sliding door to the kitchen was open, and you then had the silhouette of the kitchen window. You can see right through the house. (Officer 3, 2018)

While most officers certainly wanted to engage with communities, they also wanted to be left alone at home while off duty. The visible and known police house created a tension here. The lack of privacy and security that follows was particularly felt by one officer who moved to work in a RRR community with his wife and young children. The police house had no security fence enclosing the property and, more than once, community members had entered his property and knocked on the front door. On one occasion, a drunk and abusive man confronted his daughter when she opened the door whilst the officer was away from the station. His daughter was traumatised, which led him to question his ongoing placement in that RRR community.

During the time of the research, this RRR officer decided to seek a redeployment back to the hub town owing to the ongoing safety and security issues with the police house being attached to the station. Members of the community did not recognise the impact of expecting the officer to always be available and did not hesitate to knock on the door of the house if he did not answer at the station. There was an ongoing impact of the young daughter being frightened by the drunk and abusive man and she was constantly afraid of this man coming back to hurt her. The barrier separating home and work became too porous for this officer and his family.

In addition to requesting more secure housing, some police officers deliberately kept their city properties in order to "fly out" of the RRR town when off duty to maintain some privacy. Propinquitous relationships can be extraordinarily enriching for some officers, but

they can also negatively impact officers and their families. Only three of the officers who participated in this research opted to live in the house provided by Tasmania Police, and all three mentioned privacy and security. One senior officer suggested that "my personal view is nowadays it's not… I think having police stations and police houses right next to each other is not good" (Officer 5, 2018). Like Officer 3, who mentioned that a neighbour had a telescope aimed at their police residence, Officer 8 chose to keep their house in the city to relocate on days off to maintain some privacy.

Police families were used by some communwity members to create added tension and difficulties for the police officers:

> … I remember going into the pub once with my girlfriend and a group of mates…
> and one of the druggies abusing my girlfriend trying to get me to fire up and get
> me to have a fight with him whilst he's got an extra ten blokes behind him and
> stuff like that, so trying to draw you into their issues. (Officer 4, 2020)

The strain of RRR policing on families led officers to leave postings. The unstated requirement of being constantly 'on show' as an RRR officer was something that one officer and their partner were not prepared to accommodate in the long term. Some officers also maintained their anonymity and personal space by deliberating choosing not to participate in community events and activities, which had increased the challenge in developing the relationships critical to effective RRR policing.

Criminality Factors

Forms of RRR crimes and the community's response to that crime shapes the safety and security of officers as these factors create the environment in which officers can respond and some of the limitations of responses. As with any location, RRR police depend on community reporting of crime and their follow up in the provision of evidence and/or witness statements. And, not unlike urban communities who may have strained relationships with police, RRR community members hesitate to formally involve police in community issues. Two explanations shaping the lack of community engagement are linked closely to the contexts of RRR policing: retribution and community justice.

Communities may hesitate to report to police due to a fear and likelihood of retribution. Too often, officers talked about the unwillingness of community to formally report crimes; however, some officers noted that this may be due to a lack of community knowledge about what evidence police need to act. As noted by Officer 5:

> So it's well and good that you ring up anonymously but sometimes you have to
> be prepared to step up to the plate and give your name and be prepared to go
> along to court to give the evidence… And I can't do anything just on an
> anonymous phone call that's not even going to go to court… I think that's where
> the public have this issue of understanding. (Officer 5, 2018)

This demonstrates the conflicted relationship some community members have with police. Whilst they would prefer to not make a formal statement about a crime they witnessed, "they'll possibly be the next person [who] will probably be ringing up claiming about what's occurred in their street" (Officer 5, 2018). As noted by Asquith and Rodgers (2021, p. 49), "[w]hile the community wants RRR police to respond wholeheartedly to their victimisation, they do not make the link between their demand for service and their unwillingness to provide evidence when others are victimised". This can lead to situations where the community perceive the officer as ineffectual, when police inability to act stems in large part from the community lack of capacity or unwillingness to formally report.

This community ambivalence can mean that an investigation "falls at the last hurdle" (Officer 6, 2018) for lack of willing and able victims or witnesses making a formal complaint and being prepared to give evidence in court if the matter proceeds. While "they're my eyes, and I wouldn't get half the things done or problems solved without their help" (Officer 6, 2018), too often what is seen by community – and is recognised as a concern for most of the community – is not able to be investigated for want of a formal complaint. The fear of retribution in some communities was so strong that officers felt there was little they could do in the short term. RRR officers believed that building rapport over the longer term may lead to the type of propinquity needed to overcome what was in some cases intergenerational conflict, offending and victimisation.

When fear of retribution is strong, and core or long-term community members dominate what can be said about crime in the community, sometimes the community will take action themselves, as this exchange highlights.

> *Interviewer:*   Does the community fill that gap? By local justice?
> *Interviewee:*   They don't come to me and tell me that, but I always hear that sort of stuff third, fourth, fifth hand. So they're not coming "Oh, you don't have to worry about…"
> *Interviewer:*   … the chainsaw's appeared.
> *Interviewee:*   Yeah, that's, the chainsaw is back; yeah, that kind of thing. It doesn't always happen, but I think with a longer standing ... The people that have been here the longest, those families that have respect of everyone around, if their chainsaw gets stolen, as an example, then usually that's probably the chainsaw that comes back. (Officer 6, 2018)

As noted by Asquith and Rodgers (2021, p. 50), "[c]ommunity pressure – whether by shaming, exclusion, or threats of violence – can be a strong driver in the community's willingness to report to police, or in worse cases, deputise themselves to resolve the issue". This type of "community justice" occurred in all five communities involved in this pilot study.

Officer 7 (2020) and Officer 5 (2018) noted that the tendency for communities to mete out their own justice is amplified in cases where alcohol or drug abuse is a driving

factor. The link between alcohol-fuelled violence and sporting events was one particularly mentioned, as Officer 7 (2020) narrated:

> … they go a bit off the show, a punch on. [But] no one wants to provide statements … Every now and then they'll have a punch-up and it'll be reported, but it'll be reported in a very minor way. It'll be like, "Oh no, he's just drunk. He's just angry. This has happened. I don't want to report it. I don't want to do anything about it". So there's a lot of orders that we put out, but not a lot of charges I guess. (Officer 7, 2020)

In their report to Tasmania Police, Asquith and Rodgers (2021, p. 48) argue "[t]his undelegated power to manage the problems themselves is a powerful device to ensure social compliance in a community". Yet unregulated 'community justice' can replicate and regenerate long-standing community divisions, and damage the rapport and propinquity shared between RRR officers and their communities. In addition to the safety concerns that are a constant for officers working in communities with intergenerational feuds, frustration over their inability to act contributes to moral injury, which is a known contributor to PTSD (Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017).

Discussion

Understanding the full ecology of RRR policing, and the four factors that merge to produce RRR officer safety and security – organisational, environmental, community and criminality – is critical in developing better strategies for supporting RRR officers. In identifying the driving factors to RRR officer safety and security, policing organisations are better able to prepare police for the unique contours of RRR policing.

More robust policy and standard operating procedures may mitigate the harms and risks encountered. Equally, transitioning away from single office patrols may enhance RRR officer safety. Some policing organisations are moving away from these deployments, preferring instead to incur the expense of deploying two or more officers to each patrol. Western Australia Police, despite its vast geographical patrols and wide dispersion of residents, ceased deploying single officers in 2008 – although, they are permitted to act alone in crime prevention and administrative matters (Anderson & Dossetor, 2012). Yet, in a jurisdiction as small as Tasmania, the solutions to the problems of RRR officer safety and security may be found in different recruitment and training strategies, and innovative use of human resources rather than the cessation of single officer patrols. Policing organisations have long baulked at the idea of part time officers, even for officers with significant caring responsibilities (Charlesworth & Whittenbury, 2007), but this may be a strategy that enables RRR communities to retain "their" officer, whilst also supporting officers and ensuring their safety and security.

Officers in our study often talked of being constrained by policies that are either devised for the context of city policing and/or were difficult to operationalise in the context

of propinquitous relationships. The requirement of rural officers in Tasmania to deploy multi-member response teams as a risk management strategy was discussed by all officers. Australian police officers are not advised to proceed without backup when incidents involve weapons (Queensland Police Service, 2020), occur at night-time (New South Wales Police Force in Anderson & Dossetor, 2012), or when they are banned from acting, such as highway patrols (Victoria Police, 2020b). In Tasmania, officers are required to request a multi-member response team in any violent or critical incident (such as domestic violence). This seemingly commendable approach to officers' physical safety was a factor in our participants' moral injuries (Papazoglou & Chopko, 2017), and a policy that appeared to secure officers physically may exacerbate psychological harm instead.

Of the Australian jurisdictions that continue to deploy single officers to patrol – New South Wales, the Northern Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and Victoria – it is the latter jurisdiction that has created the most robust policy for securing the safety of officers who work alone. Victoria Police (2020a; 2020b), as with Tasmania Police, use cluster or hub towns to support and bolster the resources available to single officer patrols, including the use of Cluster Supervisors. This role requires Cluster Supervisors to visit single officer patrols twice monthly, and to be responsible for the wellbeing of RRR officers. They are also responsible for the careful auditing and monitoring of workloads, rostering, and the impact of "excess night work" and the "unsociable and intrusive hours" often adhered to in the 24/7/365 context of single officer patrols. This approach also means that Victoria Police can make commitments to their communities for relief provided by members from the regional cluster (who know the local community), that visits are regular, and that the station remains open for a minimum of four hours (Victoria Police, 2020a, 2020b).

The impact of RRR deployment includes the effects on families. Relocating to RRR patrols can impact family relationships and children's learning and social development, and be costly for RRR officers, especially when they redeploy quickly after their RRR tenure. Each Australian jurisdiction deals with these familial impacts and costs differently. While jurisdictions adequately recompense RRR officers for the expenses related to relocating to and living in remote locations, and pay considerable loading on officers' wages, their willingness to respond to the wider familial costs of these deployments is limited. New South Wales Police Force (NSWPF) and Tasmania Police cover some education costs (such as new school uniforms, fees, and textbooks) (Police Association Tasmania, 2018), but only NSWPF offer compensation for the accommodation costs for children who need to board to complete their secondary education (NSWPF, 2017). More can be done by policing organisations to address these additional costs and barriers. For example, in their evaluation of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, the RCMP Review Committee (1989) suggested that person and social costs are also acknowledged and recompensed, such as employment strategies for partners, stress preparation and relocation counselling, and enhanced health and medical support (RCMPC, 1989).

With findings like ours on family experiences, in their major study in RRR policing, NZP (2021a; 2021b) note the "havoc" imposed on family life requires organisations to better

prepare families for being in the community's spotlight (and feeling 'owned' by the community) (see also, Buttle et al., 2010). They suggest that both RRR officers and their families should be provided with a comprehensive handover and are introduced to the community before deployment (NZP 2021a, 2021b). While these basic requirements are important, like us, New Zealand Police argued that organisational factors are just as critical to officer safety. Improved health and wellbeing services will assist RRR officers with the increased trauma generated in propinquitous relationships with community, but adequate relief staffing may avert that cost in the first place.

A final consideration is the lacuna in bespoke training for RRR officers, also raised by Slade (2013). RRR policing is different from city policing, yet all police recruits are trained as if they will only ever be deployed in the metropole despite most police organisations requiring at least one tenure in a RRR posting. While all police are provided training in community policing and engagement, no Australian police organisation prepares these officers for the propinquity and lack of anonymity that is a hallmark of good RRR policing. By osmosis, or more commonly by mistake, RRR officers learn the full ecology of their communities and their role in RRR communities. Increased training, shadowing of peers before deployment, and planned, staged handover and induction would go a long way to securing the safety and wellbeing of RRR officers.

Conclusion

Like previous Australian work on RRR policing (Harkness, 2015; Jobes, 2002, 2003; Scott & Jobes, 2007), we show the tensions of being both a law enforcement officer and community member in a small community where one is subject to close scrutiny and relationships are critical to successful police work. We differ from these previous contributions by examining how these elements inherent to RRR policing are related to the safety and security of RRR police and their families, and the critical policy gaps and options to address these challenges. Using a lens of organisational, environment, criminality and community conditions, we have shown that the safety and security challenges of RRR police cannot be divorced from these conditions and is produced by them. Future research can examine the wellbeing of officers in relation to day-to-day tasks, and how this differs across regions – metropolitan, rural, regional, remote – and beyond the islands of Tasmania. Addressing issues identified in this article, along with gaps in knowledge about the links between police workloads, roles, and wellbeing, are instrumental in understanding the safety of RRR officers and their willingness to remain in RRR communities.

Propinquitous policing – present in all, but generative in only two pilot sites – also created opportunities for the community to be 'deputised' to secure the safety of all. As deputies, locals backed up an officer confronted by a motorcycle gang in the local pub late at night, 'made it easier' for an officer to tell a mother that her only son was dead, and assisted a remote officer on multiple occasions in sea rescues – of people, and beached dolphins. While participants talked often of the employment conditions that shaped their and their families' experiences of risk and safety in ways not considered in the metropole, they also recognised

that many of these risks can be mediated by fostering propinquitous relationships with their communities.

Instead of reducing the number of support services in RRR communities (such as single office stations), this research shows that often local communities are better at identifying, resolving, and preventing their own safety risks when empowered to do so, and only need the resourcing to do so. Of all the reasons why RRR policing should be better resourced and supported by allied public health agencies, even in remote locations, it is that justice may be too late, officers may be harmed, and safety is public.

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