

Gender and Rural Policing: Lack of Opportunities for Male Police Constables in Rural Police Departments in Trinidad and Tobago

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Abstract

Within the past two decades, there has been increased research interest in rural policing on a global level. While most of those studies were oriented in the United States, Britain, Canada, and Australia, there is a slowly growing corpus of literature on rural policing in the Global South, including the Caribbean. Most of the studies on rural policing have examined rural policing in the context of domestic violence, mental health, administration of justice, conditions of employment, and female issues. Unfortunately, most of these scholarly efforts have not examined male police officers as a distinct group. As conjecture and media reports suggest that male police officers in rural locales in Trinidad and Tobago are treated indifferently, the current research effort presents data gathered from thirteen male police constables attached to rural police stations on the island. This research aims to understand whether this group of police officers suffer from lack of opportunities due to the rural location of their police stations. Three themes: (1) lack of access, (2) fathering/parenting challenges, and (3) favouritism, emanated from the data. Several forms of opportunities that are for male police officers attached to rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago also emanated from the data and these are presented and discussed.

Keywords: gender; policing; rurality; police constables; lack of opportunities; Trinidad and Tobago

Introduction

The majority of policing scholarship originates from urban areas (Pelfrey, 2007; Weisheit et al., 1994), notably from the United States, Great Britain, and Australia (Oddsson et al., 2021). However, within recent times, there is an emergent body of scholarship on rural policing in global contexts as efforts are being made to ‘fix the gap’ between urban and rural policing (See Bowden & Pytlarz, 2022; Ceccato, 2021; DeKeseredy, 2015, 2021; Donnermeyer, 2015; Mulrooney et al., 2024; Wallace, forthcoming). Unfortunately, this emerging research tradition has not yet taken a firm grip in the Caribbean, inclusive of Trinidad and Tobago, despite the majority of the island being deemed rural by World Atlas (n.d.). The author of this article submits that as a consequence, there are gaps in knowledge creation and transference as well as opportunities for contribution to scholarship on the under-researched issue about the lack of opportunities for male police officers in rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago.

Intersectionality was originally conceptualized by Crenshaw (1989) to consider interconnections between race, gender and class, however, it can be applied to rural policing as police officers employed at rural police stations face specific challenges and lack of opportunities that cannot be transposed to their urban colleagues or universalised from research conducted on urban policing. The use of intersectionality in rural policing is underused, but not new. In fact, its usage in rural policing research has found support from rural policing scholars (Carrington et al., 2014) who argue that intersectionality, a framework that resists privileging any particular social structural category of analysis, but is cognisant of the possible power effects of colonialism, class, race, and gender, can provide to scholarly support for research on rural policing. With the pronouncement by in mind, the author of this article submits that the concept of intersectionality should be extended to include the current study on rural policing as it involves the intersection of gender and spatial localities and its infrequent usage in rural policing scholarship is an existing weakness within the rural policing studies.

While there is much research covering gender and policing (DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2020; Rabe-Hemp, 2009; Sanders et al., 2022; Wooff, 2022; Yalley & Olutayo, 2020), much of this work does not originate in, or focus on the Caribbean (inclusive of Trinidad and Tobago). Further, a great amount of the research is focused on females in policing and when such research is conducted on men, it is usually on men in urban police departments and this hardly ever includes an examination of challenges faced by policemen employed at rural police stations. Further, as emphasis on rural policing is broad, this study employed a narrower, more dedicated focus on male police constables in rural police locales, who form the majority of police officers in Trinidad and Tobago’s jurisdiction. Therefore, a potential outcome of this scholarly endeavour is that the findings may be new and novel and contribute substantially to policing in general as well as on rural policing.

This current research effort is aimed at answering two research questions (RQ), namely: (1) When compared to male police constables in urban police station, are male police constables in rural police stations afforded equal opportunities, and (2) What opportunities are lacking for male police constables employed at rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago.

Figure 1

Caribbean Sea and the Location of Trinidad and Tobago



(Source: Vector Maps, Wikimedia Commons)

Gender, rurality and policing

In scholarship on rurality, the term ‘rural’ is a contested concept that has been viewed a great diversity of place that are ‘non-urban’ (Harkness et al., 2022). However, to quote Harkness et al. (2022, p. 1) “...this dichotomous delineation is grossly inadequate because it neglects the consideration of the nuances of geography, demography, attitudes, culture and issues of access.” Thus, what may be construed as rural in the USA, may be viewed as urban in most small Caribbean countries. Further, Harkness et al. (2022) submit that while definitional contestation is a source of healthy and constructive debates among criminologists studying rurality, it complicates comparisons across different regions of the world. As a result of the vastness of international jurisdictions in the Global North, findings from those studies are important. However, differences in conceptualizations of ‘rural’ between and among countries in the Global

North and those in the Caribbean, for example, Trinidad and Tobago, with smaller land masses, have the potential to impact the applicability of Global North findings to Trinidad and Tobago.

With the aforementioned pronouncement by Harkness et al. (2022) in mind, the author of this article did not include the definition of rural on the semi-structured interview guide, but left it open to the participants to decide if they were employed at rural police stations within the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS). If the participants considered their police station to be rural, the researcher verified the information by conducting a check of the station's location and thus triangulated the information and considered the participant fit or unfit to participate in the study. In Trinidad and Tobago, data on rural policing and rural police officers in the country is almost non-existent and evidence on their operations is largely missing. In Trinidad and Tobago, rural is officially defined using "specific characteristics for rural: *to wit*, population density below 200 persons per square kilometre, more than 40 agriculture holders or more than 48 hectares under agriculture cultivation, and remoteness to main urban hubs" (Noreiga, 2021, p. 151). Therefore, this research conceptualizes rural based on the definition espoused by Noreiga (2021).

Working at rural police stations and thus experiencing rural isolation is a key challenge for all police officers. For example, in Trinidad and Tobago, the public transportation system is weak, internet access is weak, and telephone signals non-existent or pithy in some rural communities. Additionally, public health and emergency facilities are far off and it is extremely difficult if police officers do not own a vehicle and/or must use public transport. Instructively, while the TTPS employs male and female police officers, with approximately twenty-six per cent being female police officers, conjecture suggests that opportunities are not equal for male and female police officers within the TTPS or for male police officers located at urban and rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago.

Further, it appears that female police officers are given preferential treatments in some instances. For example, Wallace (2020) submits that based on interviews with male police officers in the TTPS, it appears that female police officers in the TTPS are given special preferential treatment in certain cases, for example, pregnancy and maternity leave as well as due to issues associated with being mothers, including, but not limited to events involving the supervision of children. It also appears that female police officers are more likely to be given desk jobs, flexibility of working hours and/or stationed at police stations close to their places of abode. Additionally, for male police constables in the TTPS, limited opportunities may be exacerbated due to an unwritten convention within the TTPS that 'rank' has its privileges. This means that as individuals move upwards from the rank of Constable to Corporal and Sergeant, they are granted certain benefits and privileges that are unavailable to Constables. This position is corroborated by Silvestri (2017) who points out that values and culture vary among ranks in policing inclusive of areas of specialization and gender.

While there is available scholarship on gender and police work, much of this work generally focusses on women and the challenges they face. For instance, the scholarship on gender and policing has indicated that female police officers tend to be promoted less frequently, experience lower retention rates, and are far more likely than men to experience hostility in their working milieus (Brown & Silvestri, 2020; Human Resources Development Canada, 2000; Yu, 2020). As it relates to gender and police work, Shelley et al. (2011) argue that the time-based arrangements of police work, for example, shift work and overtime are disadvantageous to policewomen.

Shelley et al. (2011) also submit that part-time and flex time work have served as both enablers and disablers of police women in that policewomen who utilize these schemes are viewed in the words of Silvestri (2018, p. 316) as not being the “ideal worker”. On the other hand, gender is nominally featured in the scholarship, and as Yalley and Olutayo (2020) point out, being a male is not only implicated in the performance of a policeman’s job, but also in his domestic relationships. Walkate (2004) supports this position as she suggests that policing has negative consequence on the intimate relationships of males in policing and this includes parental challenges. Nonetheless, as a result of the focus on females in policing, little is known about the challenges that male police officers face in the conduct of their policing tasks and even sparser is literature expounding on they face at rural police stations.

The state of policing and rural policing in Trinidad and Tobago

Scholarship on policing in Trinidad and Tobago is focused on police departments in urban areas. This leads researchers and citizens to view policing and police stations on the island as being filled with a large numbers of detectives, modern technology, crime scene analysts, and traffic and response teams. However, this is a fallacy of immense proportions as the genesis of policing in Trinidad and Tobago was urban-centric because the earliest police stations on the island were located in ‘urban’ or ‘settler areas’ of the island where sugar cane was planted, for example, St. Joseph and Port-of-Spain. This previous position of situating police departments in urban areas generally holds true today despite newer police stations being located in rural areas.

From a historical perspective, many police stations in rural areas of Trinidad and Tobago were housed in former plantation houses of defunct sugar cane estates. Instructively, many of these rural police stations were only replaced after being condemned by the Health Inspectorate on the island as being unfit for human habitation and abandoned after protestations by the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service Social and Welfare Association. Wallace (2020) points out that many police stations in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago are inadequately resourced, suffer from lower staffing levels, less training and developmental opportunities, and inferior technology as well as inadequate facilities for female police officers, and these

conditions can facilitate a situation where a great majority of police officers at rural police stations are males (Wallace, 2020).

Instructively, Mawby and Yarwood (2011, p. 1) suggest that “studies of rural policing have fallen off the edge of many research agendas.” With the aforementioned pronouncement of Mawby and Yarwood (2011) and Wallace (2020) in mind, the dual focus of this study on: (1) male police officers, and (2) rural policing, is important as scholarship on male police officers in rural policing as well as on rural policing in Trinidad and Tobago is almost non-existent and evidence on their operations are largely absent. As a result of the foregoing, the author of this heuristic study submits that it was important to disentangle the complex research topic of policing by a separate, distinct, and critical analysis by gender (male police officers) of rural policing and thus allow for a more systematic understanding of the phenomenon under inquiry.

Theoretical framework

This study is undergirded by two theoretical concepts, namely: (1) ‘abstract policing’ or more distanced policing (Terpstra et al., 2019), and (2) the ‘totality of rural space’ or (a) rural locality, (b) representations of the rural, and (c) lives of the rural (Halfacree, 2006). Terpstra et al. (2019) submit that the concept of ‘abstract policing’ means that, both internally and externally, the police operate at a more distanced position from their constituents. Terpstra (2021) also argue that police officers and their supervisors have become more distanced and this makes it increasingly difficult to create and maintain personal relationships between junior and senior police officers. Further, this distance is partially caused by the physical (remote) location of police stations.

The ‘totality of space’ is not a creation of criminology and criminal justice, but rather it comes from geography and is best explained by Halfacree (2006). Notwithstanding the genesis of the ‘totality of rural space’ and its three related concept: (1) rural locality, (2) representations of the rural, and (3) lives of the rural, it can be used to explain policing in rural contexts. In fact, Halfacree (2006) submits that the model is applicable to all rural places and rural studies (though its content may be diverse). According to Halfacree (2006) the totality of space is a three-fold model of space where rurality location is associated with everyday perceptions of space which structures everyday reality, whilst at the same time being rooted within that reality. For Halfacree (2006), rural or spatial practices can also be traced to established rules and norms, and to the lived space. The second component of the model is representations of the rural (representations of space). This component refers to the rural space being conceived and expressed through signs, jargons, and codifications (Merrifield, 2000) and are expressed through housing and workplace, for example. The third tenet of the ‘totality of rural space’ as espoused by Halfacree (2006) is spaces of representation or diverse and sometimes illogical images and symbols which are associated with the furores of the space directly lived.

Methodology

The aim of this research is to build on existing scholarship about rural policing while expanding the available scholarship by adding a distinct dimension, that of the voice of male police constables in Trinidad and Tobago regarding the lack of opportunities for their professional and personal development. Only male police constables were invited to participate in this study. This approach was premised on the noted reality of policing as well as on previous research. Instructively, the study was conducted using male police officers as policing is traditionally and inherently masculine (de Guzman & Frank, 2004; Lockwood & Prohaska, 2015) as in the case with the TTPS. Therefore, it was easier to access male police officers in rural police locales when compared to their female counterparts, who generally spend less time at rural police stations due to inadequacy of accommodation (in some instances). Additionally, the use of a small sample size, the only male police officers in this study on Trinidad and Tobago is aligned to previous research on policing on the island (difficulty accessing female police officers due to the masculine nature of the job). For instance, previous research by Johnson et al. (2020) on policing in Trinidad and Tobago used a male only sample of twelve senior police officers, while Cleghorn et al. (2024) in their study on rural policing in Trinidad and Tobago utilized eleven police officers which included four female participants.

The study adopted a qualitative methodology via online semi-structured interviews with the participants using an ‘insider’ approach. Insider status is frequently referenced in research (Wilkinson & Kitzinger, 2013) and this status aided the researcher. Indeed, as a former police officer in the TTPS, connections were developed with police officers over the past thirty-five years and this assisted the researcher with the data collection as an ‘insider’ aided by a gatekeeper (a police Sergeant attached to a rural police station). This approach is supported by Helpers and Nhan (2021) who posit the view that using police officers to recruit others is a way to enhance the representativeness of the sample and to avoid other participants being acquainted with researchers.

Instrumentation

The instrument used to gather the data was an online semi-structured interview guide that contained three sections and twenty-seven questions. The instrument was created by the researcher using previous literature as a guide (Cleghorn et al., 2024; DeKeseredy & Rennison, 2020; Wooff, 2022; Yalley & Olutayo, 2020) as well as observable gaps in the literature. Some questions on the interview guide included, but were not limited to: “Have you experienced challenges when conducting policing in rural areas?”, “To what extent do police officers in rural police stations face the same challenges when compared to police officers in urban areas”, “As a male police officer employed at a rural police station, what are the major challenges you face?”

and, “What are your recommendations to assist male police officers in rural communities to overcome challenges faced?”

Data collection

Data were collected by way of an online semi-structured interview with the study’s participants from mid-November to mid-December, 2023 and lasted four weeks. A flyer highlighting the study was sent to several police chat groups, two gatekeepers, as well as police commanders in rural police stations of the TTPS indicating that interested individuals should contact the researcher. As there was much distance between the researcher and the participants who were spread throughout several Police Divisions in Trinidad and Tobago, an online approach was utilised to gather the data. On confirmation of interest and verification of participants being employed at rural police stations, the semi-structured interview guide was sent to the participants with instructions to complete and return the interview guide within seven days. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to the participants and return of the interview guide taken as consent. This approach yielded thirteen participants.

The interview guide was pretested using five police officers attached to rural police stations and who did not form part of the final sample and this enhanced the validity of the research protocol. There was not set number of participants to be interviewed for the study and interviews were conducted until the researcher realised that the data had reached saturation point (no new knowledge was being gained from further interviews). The number of interviews conducted before saturation was reached (N=13) is consistent with the tenets of qualitative research because qualitative research is focused on attaining an in-depth understanding of the experience (Patton, 2015; Tracy, 2013) where a large “n” does not equate to quality or rigour.

Data analysis

Analyses of the completed interview guides were conducted as soon as the interview sheets were returned to the researcher. In this study, narrative analysis, specifically, phenomenological analysis, was used to analyze the data emanating from the narratives of the participants and to answer the RQ. Broadly speaking, this kind of analysis relies on rich narrative data, is participant-centered, and emphasizes interpretation, induction, discovery, and co-construction of meaning, rather than deduction and confirmation (Hill & Knox, 2021). More specifically, when using phenomenological analysis within narrative analysis, the focus is on the subjective experience of the narrator and how they interpret and make sense of their experiences. Using this form of analysis, this researcher analyzed the language used to describe the experiences of the participants, their emotions and the ways that they constructed meaning from their experiences and this was useful in understanding how the male police officer participants in this study constructed their lives and their experiences.

The analysis involved the following steps:

1. Identification and creation of the research questions.
2. Collecting narratives (stories) of the participants for analysis.
3. Coding the narratives using inductive coding to organize participants' stories by their life events.
4. Grouping life events, reading and re-reading life events.
5. Creating an account which identified the main events.
6. Creating a nested story structure that identified the main and sub-scenarios and themes emanating from the participants' narratives.

Using the approach mentioned above, the researcher focused on the male police constables as the unit of analyses, examined their narratives as contained in the transcripts of their interviews, and constructed meanings through their lens. In order to answer the research questions and generate themes, the researcher reviewed the participants' narratives in an attempt to glean shared meanings. Codes were grouped based on similarities and themes developed based on shared experiences of the participants as contained in the transcripts of their narratives. These themes were then rechecked for consistency against the dataset. The analysis of the data yielded rich, thick descriptions of the participants' experiences through their narratives which revolved around lack of opportunities due to being stationed at rural police stations (Geertz, 1973).

Participants

The participants in this study were thirteen (N=13) male police constables attached to rural police stations throughout Trinidad and Tobago. To maintain anonymity and confidentiality, participant's names, police stations and Police Divisions are not reported in this article and the police constables referred to using pseudonyms (for example, male police constable with ten years of service). When distilled, the data revealed that the participants' years of service ranged from two to twenty-eight years with an average of 12.7 years of service. Eight of the participants in the study were biological fathers with children ranging from less than one year old to twenty-five years old, three of the participants were stepfathers to children between the ages of five and fifteen years, and two of the participants were not fathers.

Findings

This study is premised on the need to consider allegations of a lack of opportunities for male police constables in rural locales as well as to enhance our understandings of gender and rural policing. As the study was qualitative in nature, verbatim quotes from the participants are used to illuminate the voice of the participants (Wallace et al., 2021) and to enhance rigour and

transparency. There was unanimity among the participants in relation to RQ1 (When compared to male police constables in urban police station, are male police officers in rural police stations afforded equal opportunities) as all participants opined that when compared to their male colleagues in urban police station, they were lacking in, and not afforded equal opportunities. For instance, a police constable with fifteen years of service submitted:

“Because we are seen as being behind God’s back, we have limited opportunities.”

Another participant with 26 years of service opined:

“Because we are so isolated from the seniors in town [headquarters] and hardly have opportunities to interact with them, we sometimes face oppressive behaviours from our immediate supervisors.”

In a similar vein, and quite coincidentally, two male police officers with seven and fifteen years of policing service and who were employed at different rural police stations stated quite emphatically: “Out of sight and out of mind”, while the male police officers with seven years’ service added “Opportunities are provided for officers who are constantly in the face of the executive. Some of my batches up North [urban areas] have gone on four and five training courses, however, I am yet to attend one.”

Answers to RQ2 (What opportunities are lacking for male police constables employed at rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago) were numerous, however, the top five responses were: (1) lack of opportunities for training; (2) limited to no opportunity to access updated policing tools (computers, GIS etc.); (3) limited opportunities for effective parenting; (4) lack of opportunity to interact with executives of the TTPS; and (5) lack of staffing which reduced opportunities for proper community involvement. Participants with up to ten years of policing service (n=6) indicated that the areas where opportunities were lacking were to access to updated policing tools (firearms, GPS in vehicles, data mining software, body worn cameras, drones etc.) and lack of staffing which reduced opportunities for community engagement. On the other hand, participants more than eleven years of policing service (n=7) reported that the areas where opportunities were most lacking were in the areas of training, effective parenting, and opportunities to interact with the executive of the TTPS.

Themes

Three major themes emanated from this study, namely: (1) lack of access, (2) fathering/parenting challenges, and (3) favouritism. These are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Theme 1 – Lack of access

This theme, lack of access, was a unanimous thread running throughout the narratives of the participants. This lack of access was both chronic and wide-ranging. The participants generally agreed that they were lacking in access to updated policing tools (firearms, GPS in vehicles, data mining software, body worn cameras, drones etc.), staffing (which reduced opportunities for community engagement), educational opportunities, healthcare, and recreation as the police stations and in some instances, the communities where they work lacked such facilities.

Theme 2 – Fathering/parenting challenges

Fathering/parenting challenges were the second-most prevalent theme emanating from the dataset of the male police constables.

To quote a participant with five years of policing service:

“As a father with a young child, working in one of the most rural police stations in the TTPS, I have limited opportunities to be an effective parent as I spend most of my time travelling to and from work and then resting when I am on my off days as I live quite a distance from where I work. I am basically a telephone father.”

Another male officer attested to being faced with the challenge of parenting/fathering as he quipped:

“In Trinidad and Tobago, women often use the term deadbeat dads without knowing there are many of us who want to be proper fathers to our children but the system is so skewed to women who are mothers. It is real difficult to provide in-person guidance to my two teenage children and this is not for want of trying” (Male police constable with twelve years’ service).

Theme 3 – Favouritism

The theme favouritism was observed in the narratives of three male police officer participants in this study. In one instance, a male police officer submitted: “I was given a notice for reaching work late three times in one month, while a female who only works day shifts reached late on nine occasions and was not even given a verbal warning. I am a single father, while she is married. If that is not favouritism, then what is?” In a similar vein, another participant with eighteen years of service stated “When you are working in the booneys (bush, rural areas) where every police knows the other, favouritism is normal, especially if you are a

woman police with children or you and the Sergeant in charge of the station good [have a good relationship].” A male police officer with six years of policing experience noted, “Female police officers at my station are notoriously famous for being favoured. For instance, they arrive late for work and leave early for home with no sanctions, but male officers in similar situations are taken to task.”

Discussion

More than 40 years ago, Cain (1973) highlighted the distinctiveness of rural policing, with its isolating and lonesome nature. The purpose of this article was to examine rural policing, to determine through the lens of male police constables attached to rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago whether they felt the impacts of isolation, whether they were afforded equal opportunities when compared to their urban colleagues, and to unearth evidence regarding opportunities that were lacking for male police constables at rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago.

The participants in this study submitted unanimously that their male colleagues stationed at urban police stations in Trinidad and Tobago were afforded greater opportunities than they were. The participants also identified a host of opportunities that were lacking and this included training, access to updated policing tools, reduced opportunities for effective parenting, interaction with police executives, and reduced opportunities for community involvement in policing. In explaining the lack of opportunities faced, the participants discourses were their first-hand experiences and not vicarious in nature. Interestingly, the findings emanating from the constables with less than ten years of service can be attributed to their relative recent graduation into policing, while the findings from the more experienced constables reflects their long-term placement at rural police stations.

Though the situation of male police officers in rural policing in Trinidad and Tobago is distinct, the findings of this study indicate that there are similarities to other jurisdictions as the findings demonstrate support from previous studies. Quite notably among these studies is Stenbacka (2022) whose study on rural policing within Sweden’s context suggest lack of research and resources for police officers in rural police departments in a similar vein to Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, the findings emanating from the semi-structured interviews with male police constables in rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago should not be trivialized or taken for granted as these were the lived experiences of the corpus of participants. For as Giddens (1984) points out, social activities of humans are recursive and are created by people expressing themselves as actors. Further, Stones (2005) proffer the view that structures guide people’s actions through memory traces (recollection of events) and that they reproduce structures through interactions. In sum, knowledge gained by individuals are gleaned through

interactions with their personal situations. Therefore, the participants' experiences should be embraced as these are their experiences from interacting with personal situations.

The findings of this study demonstrates the intersectionality of gender and policing by highlighting the limitedness of opportunities for, and challenges faced by male police officers attached to rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago. The findings of the current study by way of answers to the RQ and themes of parenting challenges and lack of opportunities are aligned with previous scholarship by Yalley and Olutayo (2020) and Walkate (2004) who submit that a policemen's jobs can be negatively impacted by gender via their domestic relationships as it presents challenges to effective parenting.

The data used to answer the research questions highlight a lack of opportunities for those police officers who participated in the study, while the themes emanating from the dataset illuminated challenges faced in the pursuit of their duties as a result of being placed at rural police stations. This position is supported by the theories used to undergird this study, namely: (1) 'abstract policing' or more distanced policing (Terpstra et al., 2019), and (2) the 'totality of rural space' or (a) rural locality, (b) representations of the rural, and (c) lives of the rural (Halfacree, 2006). Indeed, the police officer participants indicated that rurality as encompassed by the three tenets of the 'totality of rural space' impacted their lives.

As a point of departure from existing literature is the finding of favouritism extended towards female police officers at rural police stations. For instance, Shelley et al. (2011) submit that part-time and flex time work is an enabler and disabler for female police officers. However, in this study, male police officers at rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago intimated that part-time and flex time work is distinctly favourable for their female counterparts even when their (male and female) familial circumstances are the same. Further, that female police officers benefit to a greater extent from part-time and flex time work than male police officers and that while male police officers are penalised for late arrivals, female police officers do not face similar disciplinary actions.

Limitations and directions for future research

All studies suffer from limitations (Aguinis & Edwards, 2014) and this study is no exception. For example, the study was a dedicated study on male police officers and their perceptions of a lack of opportunities for them due to being stations in rural locales. Therefore, the study lacked inputs and insights from female police officers at rural police stations. With this in mind, future studies on rural policing in Trinidad and Tobago should include female police officers in the sample. Additionally, the study was limited by the small numbers within the sample (N=13), and this can impact generalizability of the findings. However, the rigorous nature of the methodology and the use of a gatekeeper to access participants ensured positives

influences on the study and remedied the defects of the study. These positive influences included, but were not limited to, sharing of clear information with the purpose of the research, the gatekeeper being motivated with a positive attitude to the research and supported from participants within the gatekeeper's environment (see McFadyen & Rankin, 2016 for support). Despite the aforementioned limitations, this article makes a valuable contribution to both the policing and rural policing scholarship in Trinidad and Tobago and the Global South.

As this study contains limitations, future research should be conducted in an attempt to mitigate these limitations. In fact, it is argued that highlighting limitations of a study opens up avenues for future research (Perez Mengual, 2023). With this in mind, additional research using a larger sample should be conducted to further investigate the rural policing experiences of male as well as female police officers in Trinidad and Tobago. Further comparative research should also be conducted with urban-based and female police officers in rural police communities to determine whether they hold similar views as this would provide enhanced understandings of whether male and female police officers in rural locales are shaped differently or similarly.

Recommendations

The findings of this study highlight the need for the executive of the TTPS to place greater focus on male police constables attached to rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago in relation to the opportunities that are lacking for this group of individuals. Based on these findings, it is also imperative that the executive of the TTPS develop strategies to alleviate the lack of opportunities identified and faced by male police officers at rural police stations within the TTPS. It is imperative that some form of interventions are created and afforded to male police officers stationed at rural police stations as they (male police officers) argue that the workload and distance from their families places a great burden on them to effectively function as fathers to their children and husbands to the spouses.

Conclusion

This study set out to examine whether male police officers attached to rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago are lacking in opportunities due to rurality of location as well as the nature of those limited opportunities. Data gleaned from thirteen male participants revealed a general undercurrent of a multiplicity of lacking opportunities due to rurality of location. Importantly, this research exceeds the mere academic exercise of a journal publication, because it is also aimed at policy interventions to mitigate the challenges of rural policing. There is no doubt that journal publications are much sought after due to the 'publish or perish' aphorism in the academic community (De Rond & Miller, 2005). However, primarily, the author of this article sought to amplify the voices of male police officers at rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago. The author of this article is also hopeful that by creating and transferring knowledge on

the lack of opportunities faced by male police officers in rural police locales in Trinidad and Tobago, the evidence provided will spur some form of action from the executive of the TTPS.

In line with the clarion call by Matthews (2016) for a more ‘public criminology’ as well as the pronouncement that “a great deal of criminological investigation is poorly conceived and researched . . . theoretically weak, methodologically inadequate and has little or no policy relevance” (Matthews, 2016, p. 2), it is also hoped that this research will enable policy formulation and intervention to address the concerns raised by this study’s participants. Further, it is hoped that the findings emanating from the current study will assist in improving the availability of opportunities for male police officers in rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago. Finally, by illuminating the experiences of male police officers at rural police stations in Trinidad and Tobago, hopefully, their existential experiences will now become less hidden, greater understood and light shone upon rural policing. In sum, the author’s desire is to bring to the forefront the lack of opportunities for male police constables at rural police stations on the island so that the executive of the TTPS can learn and adapt their policing practices away from its current urban-centric moorings.

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