



“After God is Police”: Lived Experiences of Rural Police Officers in Trinidad and Tobago

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3 **Title: “After God is Police”: Lived Experiences of Rural Police Officers in Trinidad and**
4 **Tobago**

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7 **Abstract**

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10 **Purpose**

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12 In Trinidad and Tobago, there is significant reliance on the traditional and centralized police
13 service to engage in crime response and suppression in urban and rural areas. In this regard,
14 policing scholarship has largely focused on the impact of policing within urban areas,
15 producing a gap in knowledge on what policing rural spaces entails. Despite this, there is some
16 understanding that policing rural spaces can engender diverse challenges and calls for
17 variability in policing strategies. The current study examines the lived experiences of police
18 officers stationed in rural communities in Trinidad and Tobago.

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25 **Design/methodology/approach**

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27 Using the descriptive phenomenological approach, semi-structured interviews were conducted
28 with eleven police officers stationed in rural communities throughout the country.

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31 **Findings**

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33 Interviewees narrated the importance of community dynamics and community specific needs
34 in shaping their roles and functions when operating in and serving these communities. Three
35 major themes were identified: (1) network activity in policing; (2) engagement in localistic and
36 service-oriented approaches and (3) community-specific challenges.

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41 **Originality/Value**

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43 The findings suggest that while there is an emphasis on traditional law enforcement
44 responsibilities, in the rural context, police responsibilities and duties are constantly being
45 redefined, reframed, and broadened to meet the contextual community and geographic specific
46 diversities and demands.

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51 **Keywords:** Rural policing, Trinidad and Tobago, rural communities, policing challenges,
52 policing, networked activity, localised approaches, service-oriented

Introduction

Within criminological scholarship, the Global south and the rural space are commonly forgotten spheres for discourse (Mutongwizo, 2022). Policing scholarship has routinely focused on the urban metropole of the Global North, with a clear disparity on knowledge of policing from a rural perspective within global peripheries. Presently, little is known about the policing of rural spaces in Trinidad and Tobago. To address this need, the current study explores the experiences and subjective understandings of policing the rural space in Trinidad and Tobago. Using a phenomenological methodology, the study interrogates police officers' lived experience of working in rural communities.

Trinidad and Tobago, the southernmost island in the Caribbean archipelago, has a historical legacy steeped in dispossession, European expansionism, and colonialism (Brereton, 1996). This legacy has influenced and produced manifestations of policing that are militarized, centralized, reliant on a top-down approach and in terms of legitimacy, closely tied to government and less accountable to the public (Matrofski and Lum, 2008; Wallace, 2021). Originating in 1592 by Spanish colonialists, but later following the British Colonial Model, the islands' system of policing and its structures have their origins in the racial, ethnic, and cultural tensions from the nation's colonial past (Brereton, 1996; Wiener, 2008; Epstein, 2012; Johnson, 2017). Despite the country's present independent republican status and substantial reforms in policing, the Trinidad and Tobago Police Service (TTPS) continues to reflect the British Colonial Model, via its uniform, rank and structure and approaches that control a subjugated population (Wallace, 2021).

Existing policing debates are acutely focused on responses to urban criminality and its relationship to the urban community (Watson and Kerrigan, 2018). Such research characterizes the police as legalistic, reactive, and strictly enforcement oriented, seemingly insensitive to legal and human rights and giving priority to the economic elites (O'Dowd, 1991; Trotman, 1986; Matrofski and Lum, 2008; Wilson *et al.*, 2011). Further critiques note the estrangement between the police and citizens, where the police "treats the policed, like subjects rather than citizens." (Johnson *et al.*, 2014, p. 956). This has impacted public perception as officers, who are viewed with contempt and described as lazy, uneducated, and corrupt (Bowling, 2010; Wallace, 2021). While research has captured these colonial continuities in policing and police institutions, such efforts are concentrated on large urban areas with minimal attention to the rural landscape. This has created a gap in the understanding of the variability in policing and

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3 the conditions under which police work can be carried out in the rural setting. Consequently,
4 there is a need to explore the policing of rural spaces in Trinidad and Tobago and the diversity
5 it presents in understandings of policing.
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10 11 **Rurality and Policing** 12

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14 Scholarship on policing in the rural context have continuously cited that police officers
15 in such settings experience a different set of challenges from their urban counterparts (Decker,
16 1979; Weisheit *et al.*, 1994), and therefore different orientations towards policing. In some
17 rural spaces, police work specifies a traditional law enforcement approach, that is, reactive in
18 nature with little discretion in handling certain types of crimes like their urban counterparts
19 (Decker, 1979). However, these traditional functions vary due to the nearness of place,
20 relations, and affinity in the rural setting (Payne *et al.*, 2005; Asquith and Rodgers, 2021).
21 Additionally, rural residents' expectations of officers' involvement in a wider array of
22 community service-related functions widens officers' roles and responsibilities (Jiao, 2001).
23 As such, policing the rural space becomes romanticized as a community-based affair, grounded
24 in networked activity, closely associated with community, reliant on goodwill resources and
25 social capital (Cain, 1973; Yarwood, 2015).
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36 When policing the rural space, officers are required to engage with a variety of
37 community-related and mundane police and non-police issues, ranging from addressing land
38 disputes and obscene language to checking on animals (Decker, 1979; Payne *et al.*, 2005).
39 Moreover, in these settings, deviance is seen as a community problem (Falcone *et al.*, 2002).
40 As such, responses to deviance and crime are addressed in the least invasive way, as rural
41 residents prefer that officers adopt a problem-solving approach (Jiao, 2001). However, many
42 suggest that the social closeness between officers and community members in rural
43 communities creates a dynamic where officers are more likely to represent the values and
44 customs of the community and therefore handle incidents through informal ways (Pelfrey,
45 2007; Weisheit *et al.*, 1994). This not only demonstrates commitment to the rural value
46 structure, but the exercising of discretion based on the social mores of the community
47 (Cawthray and Bull, 2023; Dinnen and Allen, 2013). Such findings suggest that rural police
48 agencies have a community policing orientation, which frequently incorporates problem-
49 oriented approaches, and engagement in a wide array of service activities due to their proximity
50 and accountability to the community (Decker, 1979).
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3 However, some argue that how policing occurs in the rural space can neither be highly
4 generalised nor minutely specified. Maguire *et al.* (1991) argue that the rural police do not fit
5 any one style of policing and is best depicted as a 'doing everything style'. The absence of
6 social or other emergency service providers (Riccardelli, 2018), as well as the lack of
7 specialised departments within the force in the rural area means that the rural police officer
8 often engages in disparate functions and tasks. Huey and Riccardelli (2015) found that rural
9 officers in Eastern Canada aspired to hold either the law enforcement or social worker role,
10 which they saw as being associated with their perceptions of what it means to be a 'police
11 officer'. Additionally, most officers felt that they performed tasks related to less desirable
12 roles, such as knowledge work or peacekeeping.
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21 While scholarship agrees that policing the rural is not monolithic, there is a failure to
22 adequately explore the differing ruralities which exist outside the Global North (Ceccato,
23 2015). In Trinidad and Tobago, approximately 47% of the estimated 1.3 million population,
24 resides in rural areas (World Bank, no date). However, conceptualizations of rural within island
25 settings vary sociologically and empirically. Although rural communities are characterised by
26 their distinctiveness from urban environments and sense of local identity and solidarity (Greider
27 *et al.*, 1991; Weisheit *et al.*, 1994; Weisheit *et al.*, 2006), they vary in density, income levels,
28 proximity to urban areas, land use (agricultural, fishing, forestry, etc.), availability of resources
29 and infrastructure as well as the cultural context of familiarity, sense of community and
30 belonging (Gallent and Gkartzois, 2019; Watson and Harry, 2022).
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39 Noreiga-Mundaroy (2021) describes rural areas in Trinidad and Tobago as not
40 necessarily secluded, homogenous, not all agrarian, and as distinct embodiments of unique
41 characteristics that differ from community to community. The unique characteristics are the
42 communities' distances from urban centres with considerable access to urban centres;
43 interactions with external influences as well as hubs to attain necessary goods and services;
44 and communications with foreign and local tourists daily as they accommodate, bargain, and
45 entertain. As such Noreiga-Mundaroy (2021) ascribes that the country's rural communities are
46 'peripheral' locations existing within distinct, fluid, evolving embodiments of diverse cultures,
47 lifestyles, and interactions. Like other jurisdictions it is probable that these features shape both
48 crime and policing and engender diverse experiences for police officers in rural spaces
49 (Fenwick, 2015; Riccardelli, 2018). Moreover, rural communities within global peripheries
50 such as Trinidad and Tobago may have more complicated cultural representations of people
51 with different experiences, and values, (Noreiga- Mundaroy, 2021), that may impact the social
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3 balance and relations between these communities and the police. Therefore, there is a need to
4 explore how the police addresses the rural locale, its population, geographic demands, social
5 climate, and criminal activities.
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10 11 **The Current Study**

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14 This study explored the experiences and views of police officers stationed in rural areas across
15 Trinidad and Tobago. To capture the subjective nature of officers' understandings of working
16 in the rural context, the study utilised a descriptive phenomenological approach.
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22 **Participant Recruitment and Sampling**

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24 To begin participant recruitment, a sampling frame was created consisting of all ((76)
25 police stations within the nine policing divisions in Trinidad and Tobago. To identify and select
26 rural police stations, the researchers used governmental data sources. Nineteen police stations
27 were identified as being located within a rural area. The location of these stations: Southwestern
28 (4), Southern (4), Eastern (5), Northeastern (1), Northern (1) and Central (1) Tobago (3)
29 policing divisions. While the concept of rural is problematic to define, areas characterised as
30 rural were distinct from urban environments in relation to its geographical distribution, society
31 and culture, economy, environment and ecosystems, and infrastructure (Government of
32 Trinidad and Tobago, 2011). To recruit participants from these stations, the researchers sought
33 permission from the Commissioner of Police of the TTPS.
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43 Once approved, researchers employed a purposive sampling strategy, as this ensured
44 that selected participants were able to offer the most insight and information on policing
45 experiences in the rural context. The criteria for inclusion were officers with a length of service
46 at the rural station of no less than six months. The selected stations were contacted via
47 telephone, however only 11 stations responded positively, with 2 stations notifying that they
48 had merged with another station. These stations were located in the Southwestern (3), Southern
49 (2), Eastern (2), Northeastern (1), and Tobago (2) policing divisions. While the TTPS has an
50 estimated 6742 officers, approximately 2% are assigned to rural stations (3-6 officers assigned
51 to a rural station). Potential participants at the stations were identified by the officers in charge
52 of the station (this was based on availability) and were contacted via telephone and/or email.
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3 Invited participants were provided with a brief description of the study, and interview
4 appointments were made.
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7 Eleven police officers (seven men and four women) were interviewed. Participants
8 were of varied ranks, educational backgrounds, and lengths of service within the TTPS as well
9 as the rural setting. Participants ranks ranged from constable to inspector with approximately
10 three years to thirty-two years' service. Officers' length of service at the rural station ranged
11 between two years to nine years. To ensure anonymity, participants were assigned code names
12 based on the order interviewed. At the start of the interviews, participants gave verbal consent
13 to participate in the study, be recorded, and the use of their anonymised responses in published
14 research. Participant recruitment stopped once the researchers found they had reached
15 theoretical saturation.
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26 **Data collection**

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28 The principal method of data collection used in phenomenology to gain descriptions of
29 experiences is the one-to-one interview (Giorgi, 2009). This enables open conversation, free
30 verbal expression on the part of the respondent, reciprocity between participants and
31 researchers as well as opportunities for probing follow-up questions by researchers
32 (Moustakas, 1994; Kallio *et al.*, 2016; Magaldi and Berler, 2020). In-depth semi-structured
33 interviews conducted over three months online via the Microsoft Teams. The use of the online
34 platform allowed for flexibility in interview locations and times. Officers were also reminded
35 that participation was voluntary and that they could, without penalty, withdraw at any time or
36 refuse to respond to any question.
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44 Chan *et al.*, (2013) notes that in phenomenological studies efforts should be made to
45 put aside repertoires of knowledge, beliefs, values, and experiences in order to accurately
46 describe participants' life experiences. The interview protocol consisted of open-ended
47 questions that had an experiential focus. Participants were asked to describe their experiences
48 of policing in general and policing the rural setting. They were further asked to reflect on how
49 the rural location impacted their roles and responsibilities, job context and relationships with
50 the community. Probing questions were also used based on participants responses. To ensure
51 that participants felt comfortable, the researchers also asked the participants questions about
52 their background and their overall experiences of policing (outside their appointment at rural
53 stations). A pilot of the interview protocol was conducted to ensure the validity of the interview
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3 questions. Afterwards, the researchers amended some questions to ensure participants were
4 able to articulate their experiences clearly. Interviews were conducted until the researcher's
5 reached saturation and were unable to provide further information.
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10 11 **Data Analysis** 12

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14 As phenomenological research can be analyzed in a myriad of ways (Finlay, 2013),
15 data were analyzed using thematic analysis as prescribed by Braun and Clarke (2006; 2021).
16 Firstly, researchers transcribed and read transcripts extensively to gain clarity and
17 familiarisation with officers' experiences. Transcripts were imported to NVivo for coding and
18 researchers met via MS Teams, to share ideas and notes that emerged about individual
19 interviews and the dataset. In this process, relevant and meaningful segments of the transcripts
20 were identified and discussed, with the application of codes that captured the meanings
21 presented. To generate themes, researchers reviewed the transcripts to identify shared meanings
22 throughout officers' experiences. Codes were reviewed and organized based on similarity in
23 ideas. Themes were developed based on the shared experiences expressed by officers, and those
24 that effectively answered the research questions. Codes were collated and placed under a
25 relevant perspective theme. To ensure that the perspective themes identified were appropriate,
26 capturing the shared experiences of the officers and representing the most important shared
27 meanings related to officers' experiences of rural policing, researchers checked the identified
28 themes against both the coded extracts and the entire dataset. During this process, the
29 researchers pondered on if or how the proposed themes fit into the wider context of the
30 research. Consequently, similar perspective themes were uncovered and those were combined.
31 Subsequently, each theme was reviewed and confirmed to present a singular concept and
32 revealed a specific facet of rural police officers' jobs as expressed by the participants. Theme
33 names were discussed among the researchers and agreed upon namely: network activity in
34 policing, engagement in localistic and service-oriented approaches, and community-specific
35 challenges. Each researcher took responsibility for reviewing a theme and drafting a synopsis
36 for the specified theme, which was then reviewed by the other researchers. To complete the
37 process, researchers expanded and finalised their assigned theme, incorporating direct
38 quotations from the data, which added greater insight into officers' experiences of policing
39 rural spaces. After this process, other aspects of the write-up were completed and the final
40 document was compiled, reviewed, and edited by all researchers.
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Results

The analysis identified themes which characterised police officers nuanced experiences of policing the rural locale. These experiences were linked and influenced by the community context. For many the rural community, that is the people, place and space impacted approaches to policing and policing functions. Policing functions were impacted by the relational and spatial dynamics of the various communities. While officers noted that their vital role as upholding the law, in rural areas, functions were at times outside the mandated remit, which presented opportunities for and challenges in policing. The following themes were derived from the analysis: network activity in policing, engagement in localistic and service-oriented approaches, and community-specific challenges.

Theme 1: Network activity in policing the community: Community support and Collaboration

Data in this study revealed the nature and strength of police-community relationships in the rural setting. Officers' presence and engagement with rural community members created positive perceptions of police work, increased avenues for public-police collaboration and significant community support. Officers believed that a close relationship with residents, and their willingness to act quickly in all matters resulted in residents' willingness to share information and gain community's trust:

Officer #7: The community views me as an excellent police officer... I have an excellent relationship with the community.... whatsoever happen in the community and they give me an insight they know that I would deal with it expeditiously, so they are not afraid to call me on anything. They know that I am one person who does take the information and deal with it. We have an excellent, excellent relationship.

Moreover, officers suggested that the community's way of life, relationships and social dynamics existent promoted community safety by engendering cooperation, comradery and information sharing with the police. These experiences suggested that within the rural context, elements of plural policing such as the civilianization of policing and safety are pervasive.

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3 *Officer #3: Thank God for the community, because they are close knitted and they look*
4 *out for each other, they help us. Without them, all now my hair more grey. When you*
5 *go out, you speak with people, and you have a like a relationship then with the*
6 *community. They would tend to have that kind of bond with you then that if anything,*
7 *they will call and say you know, so and so is the case. If they see a strange person, they*
8 *would call and say 'hear what, we see in a strange man walking around, we never saw*
9 *him before.*

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16 *Officer #2: [the rural area] is one that is very close knit, we can't function without the*
17 *community. So let us say there's a stranger in the village, for example, people are*
18 *watching the person, watching the individual, they might come and say 'officer, this*
19 *guy comes out only at night, so I want you all to keep an eye on him.' Now remember,*
20 *we [have] to temper that with doing your work eh because without that information you*
21 *might not know the guy or know the individual. ...The community is your lifeline where*
22 *you [are] getting your information.*

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29 Additionally, spatial characteristics and the cultures of rural communities afforded officers
30 greater ability to understand and become acquainted with residents as well as respond to
31 community specific needs. For officers, close interactions coupled with the intimate connection
32 and familiarity among villagers promoted positive perceptions of the police and provided
33 opportunity for increased collaboration, cooperation and partnership between residents and the
34 police.
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40 *Officer #5: Because it is such a close-knit environment you interact more with the*
41 *community. It is a small area. If you go out on patrol, you would know the shop man by*
42 *his name. You would see a school child and you would say this is Jason's daughter or*
43 *this is Jason's son, because you are interacting with everyone. I believe that we more*
44 *interact with the people and because of the size of the community. When it's school time*
45 *you go to the schools. You interact with the teachers in the schools, [even] the health*
46 *centres. You know these people and the police have good interactions. The health*
47 *centre would call the police if they are having anything and the police would show up*
48 *[and support].*

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56 Participants' comparisons of their policing experiences of rural and urban communities
57 revealed the differences in the communities and the impact such had on police-community
58 relationships. For many officers, community members in the rural context shared and
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perpetuated levels of favour, respect and appreciation for the role and function of police officers compared to the urban context.

Officer #6: [In urban policing] you have to be more assertive ...[residents] hate the police. So already you kind to have your guard up when you're dealing with them. [For example] a little 5-year-old child watching you as a police [officer] and screwing up his face. It's just the culture. It is not just the person who committing the crime, but the mother, father, brother, sister who actually encouraging it. Whereas here, it don't really have much of that. [It's] two different culture shocks that you will get. You would think you know, it's Trinidad ... no, [it's like] there is two different countries; here is one country and Port of Spain is the next country.

Theme 2. Engagement in localistic and service-oriented approaches

Officers' experiences of working in these rural locations highlighted engagement in legalistic traditional approaches adapted to the rural spaces they served, as well as more localistic approaches. Many participants acknowledged that their day-to-day experiences were quite similar to their urban counterparts, however the context of the rural setting made their experiences of these duties different. Differences experienced were in the rates of crimes being reported at stations as well as the overall traffic in the rural stations. The localistic approaches discussed in their experiences were relative to the social characteristics of community members, the various industries within the community, the close-knit nature of these communities as well as the community needs where they were stationed.

Officer #3: Because of the level of education, or the ability to understand...they [community members] don't understand at a certain level, they don't comprehend. So sometimes you have to come down and you know speak to them differently for them to kind of understand and still yet sometimes they don't...

Officer #6: The other day I lock up [arrested] a guy... he breached a protection order, and I lock him up [arrested], and I didn't even put a handcuff on him. That is just how good it is and the level of respect you have...

Officer #8: There is a village council set up in the [community] area just like all the other districts... and meetings we would have had with them in the past they always

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3 *speak about lack of police presence, visibility of police, so we try to show that visibility*
4 *as much as possible and we do like road checks.*
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7 Alongside the application of more localistic approaches, officers also noted the more service-
8 oriented style in comparison to their urban counterparts. Officers' experiences included
9 engaging in a number of roles outside their traditional duties. These service-oriented tasks were
10 also dependent on the rural community characteristics:
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15 *Officer #1: Sometimes somebody may come and make a report... like just this morning*
16 *a man came and said that his neighbour's dog [faeces] on his step and I asked what he*
17 *wants us to do.*
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21 *Officer #2: Last time one of my colleagues... she just did a medical course... she had*
22 *to offer first aid to a gentleman who was diving and got hit by a boat engine. So she*
23 *had to put the first aid to use. You had to know where all of the banks are. Well [rural*
24 *area] has one ATM [Automated teller machine] but sometimes they come off and they*
25 *might need to get currency, so you might send them to the ATM... you have a library in*
26 *[rural area] which has internet service and most tourists come out, they want to check*
27 *their email so you send them...you have to know your village. You had to know where*
28 *to send these people, where to send tourists when they come. They might want to get*
29 *something to eat. You had to know the restaurants. where to send them... You have to*
30 *know a bit of everything, not that everybody could know everything You have to try*
31 *to keep yourself well balanced.*
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40 *Officer #3: Some persons in the community, they expect the police to do everything for*
41 *them.*
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44 *Officer #6: A lot of people we get to help, even though we are not getting paid to*
45 *help...to certain people because we are acts as doctors, lawyers, teachers, counsellors,*
46 *everything outside of the TTPS*
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50 *Officer #6: It really not supposed to be for me [the officer] to be doing this*
51 *because... they [the police service] have sections for these things like gender-based*
52 *[Gender Based Violence Unit] and these kind of thing...the point is they don't go to*
53 *gender-based to make the report is the station they harassing. So probably when you*
54 *now going in and it's 3 a.m. after you up from since 8 the last morning and you going*
55 *and rest... and the station phone ring, you have to get up to go and deal with them,*
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3 *because them quarrelling. So you do things and try to avoid that to happen. Like you*
4 *know this house is a trouble house. So everyday you try to go up there ask them how*
5 *they going ...if they start counselling yet, if they doing anything...*
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9 Such service-oriented approaches were often the result of the remote nature of the rural
10 communities where officers represented the only source of immediate regulatory authority to
11 the local population. Moreover, the slow-paced nature of station activity often meant that
12 officers found it necessary and possible, albeit begrudgingly to do 'extra'. However, these
13 approaches were often oriented towards the community and their specific needs.
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18 *Officer #3: We will deal with it for ourselves because remember our station is not*
19 *so busy, so they would figure that we have enough time to deal with those reports other*
20 *than those who work in [urban area].*
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26 **Theme 3: Community specific challenges of Rural Policing: Coastal versus Landlocked** 27 **Communities**

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30 Officers' experiences revealed challenges that were community specific as well as
31 universal to the police service (occurring in both rural and urban areas). For many, the
32 challenges encountered had an impact on how policing occurred in their communities. Officers
33 suggested that the challenges identified as universal to the police service such as the lack of
34 resources, mainly vehicles, equipment, and manpower. Moreover, there was a belief that urban
35 stations were better equipped, and the slow-paced and unbusy nature of the rural station meant
36 their community needs were not seen as a pressing priority.
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43 *Officer #6: But I guess it is a nationwide thing that the police service lacking where we*
44 *don't have resources...they don't have people; they don't have proper working vehicles.*
45 *Sometimes you can't even respond to a report because you don't have a vehicle in the*
46 *station...it's a nation-wide thing. Like even things like printers and thing we have to put*
47 *up [our] own money. Sometimes the phone not even working. People trying to call, and*
48 *they can't even get through. Just little basic things.*
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52 *Officer #3: I still trying my hardest because I really don't want to deal with*
53 *that...because it ain't have no printer...it ain't have this and that ...sometimes the*
54 *Corporal will walk with his own printer and you know save the day.*
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3 *Officer #10: I would say the resources like the vehicles. Being in a slower station I*
4 *would say like resources would be prioritised for the busier stations like more vehicles*
5 *and stuff so presently that is an issue that we are facing right now. Currently we are*
6 *sharing a vehicle.*
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11 For many officers, the lack of resources seemed amplified in the rural community due
12 to the community-specific challenges they encountered. Such challenges were also different
13 between rural spaces that were landlocked versus coastal. Officers stationed at coastal rural
14 areas discussed the influx of irregular Venezuelan migrants through illegal channels of entry
15 and the impact this had on their limited resources. Additionally, officers noted the lack of
16 interagency support in addressing these issues and recounted their frustration of policing such
17 areas as they augmented the challenges experienced as earlier discussed.
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24 *Officer #3: And we don't have the support of the Coast Guard because they don't have*
25 *any equipment to deal with like a vessel of interest.*
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28 *Officer #2: ...we have to do the Coast Guard job... we are doing immigration job as*
29 *well ...They always calling to tell you about a vessel, that approaching the bay. How*
30 *the vessel reach the bay? Ain't the vessel have to pass somewhere in the water, where*
31 *the Coast Guard supposed to be patrolling to reach the bay..... So why you bothering*
32 *the police to tell the police a vessel approaching the bay when I believe you supposed*
33 *to call the Coast Guard and say well, look a vessel now leave the Venezuelan border*
34 *and they coming over into our border and you all go and see what going on. No, they*
35 *rather wait until the vessel reach the edge of the shore, coming onto the land to call the*
36 *police for the police to go and check it out.*
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44 While the absence of specialized services within rural communities increased
45 engagement in more service-oriented activities, it also resulted in the performance of functions
46 outside of their policing mandate which presented its own challenges. While many officers
47 accepted and on occasion appreciated these non-policing tasks associated with their service-
48 oriented approaches, they often found them to be burdensome. Further, officers noted that
49 community members expected them to address and mediate issues in the community such as
50 civil-related land and domestic issues as well as responding to calls that were outside their
51 remit and control. Such expectations created a further strain on limited resources.
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58 *Officer #6: Let's just say...well, police we're not supposed to be getting involved*
59 *in domestic things, as in land wise and say well this my land, and your land and these*
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3 different things. Yeah, you know you might entertain it and you might go and assist
4 them and try to see how best you can help them.
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7 Officer #2: So everything, and when I say this I don't mean to sound bad, everything is
8 the police. So let's say for example, electricity goes or they need an ambulance, leh we
9 say an ambulance, right? ...the most basic thing. Somebody falls within the village
10 instead of calling the ambulance service they call the station. Let's say for example a
11 utility is out, current [electricity], water, they call the station 'Officer the current gone,
12 how long, do you know when it will be coming back?' So you find yourself having to be
13 a little of everything... You had to now call WASA [water company], you had to call
14 T&TEC [electricity company] ...and then you had to feed that information to the public
15 [the community].
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23 Officer #3: Remember, we are not superheroes, although they say 'after God is
24 police' ... We are not superheroes.
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30 Discussion

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32 Officers' experiences of policing the rural highlighted the importance of community as
33 a variable in how policing occurs. The diverse social and geographical contexts of the rural
34 communities influenced policing relationships, approaches, and challenges. While officers
35 engaged in traditional law enforcement responsibilities and mundane aspects of policing such
36 as administrative tasks at the station and patrols, these were redefined and reframed by the rural
37 community. Moreover, the rural context broadened officers' views of the prevention and
38 service provision aspects of their job, reconceptualizing the traditional law enforcement styles
39 of policing they endorsed.
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47 In this study, while experiences of policing rural spaces consisted of socially close
48 relationships with the community and broad understandings of cultural awareness and
49 community life, it also acknowledged police officers as knowledge workers. Fenwick (2015)
50 indicates that paramount to effective policing in rural regions are understanding the
51 community's culture and power relations and then negotiating practice with its different
52 constituents. In this study policing approaches were culturally and contextually informed by
53 the environment, creating situated knowledge to negotiate order maintenance and shape their
54 responses (Pilkington, 2009; Wooff, 2017)). By situated knowledge, we refer to 'forms of
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3 knowledge that reflect the particular conditions in which they are produced, and at some level
4 reflect the social identities and social locations of knowledge producers' (Rogers *et al.*, 2013).
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6 The situated knowledge influenced by the social and spatial relations of the rural community
7 affected officers' application of powers and how they enforced the law. As such approaches to
8 policing the rural communities were associated with a more persuasive and non-coercive model
9 of social control, contradictory to discourse on policing in Trinidad and Tobago, that describes
10 officers as coercive, impolite, reactive or/ and negligent to calls for service (O'Dowd, 1991;
11 Pino and Johnson, 2011).
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18 Weisheit *et al.* (1994) in the examination of rural policing found that officers typically
19 know community members due to continued face-to face contact and engagement in a variety
20 of problem-solving activities that fall outside of traditional law enforcement duties. In this
21 study, officers noted that they engaged in face-to-face interactions with community members
22 while on patrol. For many, their day-to-day functions included fostering friendly relationships
23 and developing varying levels of closeness to the community while attempting to keep a
24 professional manner. This occurred in an environment where national public perceptions of the
25 police are largely negative due to widespread views of police corruption, brutality and partiality
26 (Maguire *et al.*, 2010; Adams, 2020; Pino, 2020). These judgements by members of the public
27 have resulted in low public trust in the police and a scant desire to collaborate and cooperate
28 with law enforcement officials. In this study, officers attempted to counter these negative
29 perceptions, through the development of relationships and affinity with communities.
30 According to Evans and Asquith (2023), officers' engagement in community life and
31 collaboration with community rural settings can build 'situated trust', as it allows the
32 community to be co-producers in their own safety and security.
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45 Putt (2010, p.38) suggests that the rural police officer is required to strike a balance
46 between local embeddedness cultivated through 'developing productive relationships' with the
47 community and 'being perceived as professional and impartial'. Officers in the study noted that
48 they were required to strike this balance through embracing professional legalistic persona,
49 while engaging in localized approaches to policing and responding to communities' needs
50 outside their remits. Moreover, the lack of regulatory plurality within rural spaces rendered
51 officers the sole source of security and authority, broadening policing tasks thus making
52 policing experiences more complex. The expansive nature of policing duties in the rural space
53 meant officers were also required to "balance the challenges of remoteness and the lack of
54 nearby back-up with community expectation and problem solving" (Wooff, 2015). As such,
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3 officers were required to engage in a 'do everything approach', as they were the only sources
4 of assistance in their communities. Characteristics such as a lack of other critical services, and
5 the remoteness of the rural community brought significant challenges to these officers.
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10 11 **Conclusion**

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14 Phenomenological studies have been critiqued for its sample size, instructions to
15 disregard prior knowledge and understandings of the phenomenon as well as the lack of
16 rigorous steps. Despite these limitations the current study elucidated subjective understandings
17 and live experiences of police officers in rural Trinidad and Tobago. Officers' descriptions
18 revealed nuanced policing practices that mixed traditional duties and responsibilities with
19 localized approaches, presenting unique challenges. Central to their understandings and
20 experiences was the influence of community in redefining, reframing, and reconceptualizing
21 these officers' practices. While there is some affinity to existing literature on rural policing, the
22 research provides valuable insights into the variability of policing rural spaces in the Global
23 South as well as implications for police practice. The research suggests that community and its
24 associated characteristics can strongly influence policing approaches. Moreover, it indicates
25 that policing practice is not one size fits all but there is a need for a context-specific approach
26 to policing that accounts for the distinct localities of place and space as well as characteristics
27 of community. As such it signals an interesting starting point for understanding policing in the
28 Global South and provides impetus for exploring more community and locality focused
29 policing approaches.
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