



RURAL, REGIONAL AND REMOTE POLICE IN TASMANIA: OFFICER AND FAMILY SAFETY AND SECURITY

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PURPOSE OF THIS BRIEFING NOTE

This Briefing Note is about the unique safety and security issues faced by police officers and their families when working in rural, regional and remote locations in Tasmania.

BACKGROUND

- Recent research into the experiences of rural, regional and remote (RRR) police in Tasmania found safety and security issues affecting officers and their families.
- According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2014), most of Tasmania is categorised as regional, rural, or remote.
- Rural communities can have close-knit, intimate connections, with everyone knowing everyone and everyone's business. These contexts can aid police work, but also create difficult conditions for police.
- Two New Zealand studies raised concerns about the families of RRR officers (Buttle, 2010; New Zealand Police, 2021), including fear of families being harmed and people turning up at their homes at all hours.
- In Tasmania, there is no longer police induction or orientation for RRR police.
- General police training does little to prepare officers (or their families) for these contexts.
- It is unclear if other Australian jurisdictions provide specialised training or induction to prepare RRR officers. There is training around specialist crime and policing, such as rural/farm crime, but this does not address the broader context of RRR policing.
- Community members who participated in the study also raised concerns about the safety and wellbeing of local officers, especially when they were first deployed to RRR communities and were unfamiliar with the local crime contexts.

ISSUE

The context of policing in RRR communities means police and their families face unique safety and security issues not encountered by their city colleagues. This affects police wellbeing, is a health and safety issue, and can reduce the time that an RRR officer will remain in the community. This then has impacts on the community as situational knowledge and relationships are key to successful RRR policing (Harkness, 2015; Jobes, 2003; Slade, 2013). A critical part of the role of RRR police is balancing communities' needs and the safety and security of themselves and their families.

The 2018-2020 study undertook observation and interviews of eight police officers across two regions in Tasmania and three additional interviews with RRR supervisors in the same regions. Individual and overall experiences are considered here.

One officer had a drunk and abusive person knock on their door while they were not home. Their child answered and was traumatised by the event, now in fear that the person is going to come back and hurt them.

Another officer had ongoing privacy violations.

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)

One officer who participated in the research stated,

... 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. (Officer 4)

RRR police in Tasmania reported issues such as community members knocking on their front door while they were off-duty, being under constant scrutiny by the community, and experiencing harassment in public spaces when off-duty.

Overall, while most officers certainly wanted to engage with communities, they also wanted to be left alone at home while off duty. Some officers addressed this issue by maintaining their homes in the city and using the option to leave the community when off-duty so they could have some privacy.

Some officers also maintained their anonymity and personal space by not participating in community events and activities, which hindered the development of relationships critical to effective RRR policing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Policing organisations must consider the unique contexts of RRR policing and provide preparation and support for officers and their families to protect their safety and security. We recommended that Tasmania Police:

- (re)creates a training program to be completed prior to any application to work in RRR communities;
- creates a manual for RRR officers and their families detailing the unique conditions of these deployments and the support available;
- ensure protocols are developed for responding to the unique issues officers and their families may face, such as community members knocking on doors of officers' homes, along with governance to monitor these protocols; and
- considers the viability of police houses attached to RRR stations, especially regarding security and surveillance.

For the full study see [this link](#).

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Suggested reference

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