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Policing Rural and Remote Areas of Iceland:

Challenges and Realities of Working Outside of the Urban Centres

Birta Dögg Svansdóttir Michelsen

**Félagsvísindadeild
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12 eininga lokaverkefni

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Bachelor of Arts-prófi í lögreglu- og löggæslufræði

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Abstract

With very few exceptions, factual and fictionalized the portrayals of the police and law enforcement are almost always situated in urban settings. Only 'real' police work occurs in the cities while policing in rural and remote areas is often depicted as less critical, or in some cases non-existent. In a similar fashion, much of the current academic literature has focused on police work in urban environments. It is only in the past five years that the academic focus has turned its attention to the experiences of police officers who live and work in rural and remote areas. To date, no such studies have yet examined the work of police officers in rural and remote areas of Iceland. This thesis forms a part of a larger scales, exploratory, qualitative study which examines the experiences of police officers who live and work in rural and remote districts of Iceland. Eight transcripts, from a total of twenty-three semi-structured, qualitative interviews, were selected randomly and subjected to thematic analysis. Four strong themes emerged from the data: Verbal Communication Skills, Emotional Labour, Dirty-Work and Boundaries between being on and off duty. This study found that all four of these aspects occur, in both urban and rural policing environments, however, they are magnified when the officers work alone, and with there being long all distances and time to the nearest back-up or support. Rural officers can rarely if ever, blend back into society when they end their duty, but rather remain on public display when both on and off duty in these non-urban areas.

Úrdráttur

Nánast undantekningalaust hafa ímyndir lögreglu og löggæslu myndast með sjónarhorni beint að þéttbýlislögreglu. Þessar svokallaðar ímyndir ýta undir þann skáldskap að aðeins „raunverulegt“ lögreglustarf á sér stað innan þéttbýlis en ekki í dreifbýli, á meðan er löggæslan í dreifbýli og á afskekktum svæðum verður fyrir minni gagnrýni og jafnvel í sumum tilvikum engri. Að því sögðu hefur mikið af núverandi fræðiritum beinst að starfi lögreglu í þéttbýli. Á síðastliðnum fimm árum hefur fræðileg áhersla beint athygli sinni að reynslu lögreglumanna sem búa og starfa á landsbyggðinni og afskekktum svæðum. Hingað til hafa engar slíkar rannsóknir enn kannað störf lögreglumanna á landsbyggðinni og afskekktum svæðum á Íslandi. Þessi rannsókn er hluti af stærri mælikvarða, gagnarannsókn, eigindlegri rannsókn sem skoðar reynslu lögreglumanna sem búa og starfa í dreifbýli og afskekktum umdæmum Íslands. Átta afrit, úr samtals tuttugu og þremur hálfskipulögðum, eigindlegum viðtölum, voru valin af handahófi og voru tekin til þemagreiningar. Fjögur sterk þemu komu fram úr gögnunum: Munnleg samskiptahæfni (e. Communications), tilfinningalegt vinnuafli (e. Emotional labor), óhrein vinna (e. Dirty Work) og mörk milli þess að vera á vakt eða utan vaktar (e. Boundaries between on and off duty). Við yfirferð gagnana kom í ljós að allir þessir fjórir þættir koma fyrir, bæði í þéttbýlis- og dreifbýlisumhverfi, en þessir þættir magnast upp þegar lögreglumenn vinna við aðstæður eins og skort á stuðningi, aukin vegalengd eða aukinn tíma í næsta stuðning. Lögreglumenn sem vinna í dreifbýli eiga erfiðara með að blandast aftur inn í samfélagið þegar þeir hafa lokið vaktinni sinni og oftast en ekki þurfa þeir að fórna einkalífi sínu fyrir starfið.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Police work is often described as one of the most challenging professions in any society. Officers often need to go beyond their own strengths to maintain their professional and ethical positions. Generally, when people think about the police, the usual thought that comes to mind is law and order. However, rural policing is far from being just about law and order: Rural and remote places are known for fewer crime rates, but that does not mean that rural policing is more straightforward than urban policing, it is far from being easy. Much of the policing research has been focused on police work in the urban environment. In past ten years, the focus has turned to policing in urban and remote areas, the first study on police environment and challenges in rural and remote areas was carried out by Dr. Anna Souhami. Her study focused on police work and living within the rural and remote community in which police officers work.

Since rural policing has not been the subject of any significant research there is a lack of understanding of the challenges and differences between working as a police officer in rural areas and in urban environments. Resources, specialist and management departments are usually located in urban areas, it can appear that urban policing is 'real' police work, and it is not uncommon for urban located officers to look down on their rural colleagues. As Falcone and partners have stated, rural and small-town police are portrayed as amateurs by large-urban police departments and ignored by police scholars and public policy which makes rural policing a pale reflection on a dominant policing model (Falcone, Wells and Weisheit, 2002). Due to omission of police scholars, the police training is still focusing attention on training new recruits for work in urban environments instead of rural and remote areas. Even though the

training should be focused on the rural environment since urban areas can have a wide range of support and back up at short notice, but rural officers often work alone with significant distance from back up both in kilometres and time range. It is quite clear that one size does not fit all, and the training and working environment are far from being the same for urban and rural officers. The experiences of rural and remote officers are now, these past few years recognized as a valid area for academic study and research.

Iceland is 103,000 km² in size with a population of 364,134 and grows 2% between years, which makes it the most sparsely populated country in Europe (Hagstofa Íslands, 2020). Reykjavík, the capital and Southern peninsula region are the most populated areas of Iceland, or two-third of the population are in that area. Therefore one-third of the population lives in rural and remote areas of Iceland. Iceland has 72 municipalities, only ten municipalities have combined population over 5000, 33 municipalities over 1000 people combined and 39 municipalities have combined population under 1000. However, the lowest combined population is under 100 and is divided into seven municipalities (Hagstofa Íslands, 2020). Even though Iceland is a small land, the people manage to spread all over, making police district spread their places to serve their community and land. Iceland has nine police district, and only two of them are urban once, which makes seven districts in Iceland a rural policing. Urban districts are the capital, 1.043km² with four police stations, 279 general officers and population over 220.000. There is Southern peninsula region, 818km² with four police stations plus the international airport, 100 officers and population of 27.829 people.

Rural and remote districts after size are, South region, 24.689 km² with five police stations, 47 officers and population of 28.399. Northeastern region, biggest rural

district not in size but overall due to population, 23.300 km² with four police stations, 45 officers and population of 30.600 people. Eastern region, 22.592 km² with six police stations, 47 officers and population of 13.173 people. Northwestern region, 12.592 km² with one police station, 17 officers and population of 7.322 people. Westfjords region, 9.354 km² with three police stations, 22 officers and population of 7.115 people. The western region, 9.520 km² with six police stations, 29 officers and population of 16.662 people. Finally, Westman Island, 17,3 km² with one police station, ten officers and a population of 4.326 people. As shown, the size and population in rural areas of Iceland are massive, and the majority of Icelandic police is working in rural and remote areas.

Most of the rural places in Iceland have long drive and time range due to police response, and that also means that back up is also far away. Not only is there a lack of back up but the environment makes the police work for rural officers more difficult because of the weather, which is so unpredictable, it can snow one minute and be sunny the next and another unknown factor such as earthquakes, like in 2010 when Eyjafjallajökull erupted and 2014 in Bárðabunga and other natural events. Iceland is a very popular place to visit. It comes around 2.000.000 tourists every year, only that can be a challenging for rural officers since almost all tourist places in Iceland are out of the capital and since Iceland is so popular the tasks that police needs to attend to increases with every tourist that comes and does understand the laws in Iceland.

The aim in this thesis though is the main challenges that rural officer face as working and living in rural and remote areas of Iceland, the three specific questions that will be focused on answering in this thesis are:

- What are the key challenges for police officers working in rural and remote areas of Iceland?
- What do the police officers see as positive or negative aspects of working in rural and remote areas of Iceland?

The structure of this thesis is as follows. The introduction section comes after a review of the current literature regarding rural and remote policing. Followed by the methodology, which is used to answer the main questions of this thesis, same section includes the data method and explanation of analyzation. The next sections will examine the four themes that emerged from the data, followed by a discussion section. Finally, the thesis will come down to the conclusion and recommendations sections.

Chapter Two: The Current Literature

The work of police officers in urban centers has been the subject of a significant number of academic studies over recent decades (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011). The work of police officers in rural and or remote areas is only now beginning to attract the attention of the academic community. One notable study was conducted by Anna Souhami in 2019. She studied the work of police officers in the rural and remote islands of Scotland. Souhami examined the significant differences between urban and rural policing practices. Academic studies have been moving more closer to rural policing past years. Those studies mainly focused on social factors and crime rates rather than the effect it has on a police officer working in rural and remote areas (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011). Rural and remote officers frequently work alone with their nearest back-up and or support being many kilometres and perhaps hours away. Even though the police should be the same in rural and urban areas they are not, as Weisheit, Falcone, and Wells (1994) argue, "citizens expect rural police, in general, to take on a wider range of tasks than are expected of urban police". They need to be self-reliant and to have excellent communicational skills (Souhami, 2019). Small communities, especially those that are rural and or remote the communication is crucial when it comes to policing, in rural areas the tasks are different than in urban ones, rural community often look at the officers with ownership and ask them to handle tasks that do not concern the police at all (Buttle, Fowler and Williams, 2010). These tasks can sometimes lead to the blurring of professional boundaries between police and the people in the community, such as officers feeling like living in a 'goldfish bowl' with live surveillance cameras as the community watches every move they make (Souhami, 2019). In a study by May, Marsden, Kurti and Holloway (2013) they argue that safety concern for employees who work in rural and

remote areas can increase stress and anxiety, for example, the police; “police were more likely than health and education professionals to express concerns about home visits, working on their own and going about their own business in the community where people might know who they are” (May, Marsden, Kurti and Holloway, 2013:6). Factors that also increases stress in rural and remote areas are inactivity, due to small community the crime rates are usually low and tasks according to that, which makes officers feel like they can describe themselves as a ‘data entry clerk’ (Huey and Ricciardelli, 2015) due to the amount of time they spend in front of a computer.

Goodwin, Groth and Frenkel (2011) define emotional labor as; an employee that uses strategies to control their emotions when interacting with customers in order to meet with emotional requirements, known as display rules. As in many front-line services, the emotional labor is integral in day to day work, and employee's well-being is the result of the emotional labor consequences (Goodwin, Groth and Frenkel, 2011). These display rules come in three forms such as surface acting, deep acting and emotional expression (Schaible and Gecas, 2010). Emotional labor is a big part of an officer's life; police officers use these three forms of display rules when they interact with citizens in the line of duty. Surface acting is when you display emotions but do not embrace them when you interact with others (Schaible and Gecas, 2010), such as victims or accused when it comes to the police. In other words, police are told to show emotions and empathy ‘on the surface’ toward ‘customers’ but required to hide their own true emotions. However, the deep act is when a police officer is required to embrace the customers emotions even though it is opposed to their own emotions in order to fulfil the customer's

needs (Schaible and Gecas, 2010). Emotional expressions are also something that officers are required to do; this act comes in a form such as:

...requirements of officers to make someone afraid, express sympathy, express surprise, express disgust, express anger, apologize to someone and express friendly emotions (Schaible and Gecas, 2010).

Police officers can experience emotional labor on a daily bases. One known effect of the emotional acting is burnout; officers feel that their genuine emotions cannot match with the emotional display rules (Kwak, McNeeley and Kim, 2018). This masking of felt emotions can be a significant issue for police officers who live and work in rural and remote areas. The feeling isolation due to shortage of back-up and being in a community 'fishbowl' can make the lives of the officers working in these areas challenging, and sometimes, stressful.

Policing in any environment, be it urban or rural, can include the necessity of engagement in what is known as 'dirty-work'. This concept naturally links to emotional labor, working on a difficult case, where violence, or drinking even suicide, where the officer in a small community makes it more likely that they know the victim or accused (Oliver and Meier, 2004). However, the definition of 'dirty work' can take forms; Hughes (1958) describes 'dirty work' as a work that:

It may be simply physically disgusting. It may be a symbol of degradation, something that wounds one's dignity. Finally, it may be dirty work in that it in some way goes counter to the more heroic of our moral conceptions. (Hughes, 1958: 49–50)

Police concept of dirty work is exactly as Hughes describes it, physically disgusting action that can lead to humiliation wounded dignity

or, a heroic action to others. Mary Douglas (1966), however, states that 'Dirt is matter out of place, [it] offends against order. Eliminating it is not a negative movement, but a positive effort to organize the environment'. Douglas is arguing that dirty work is not a negative thing if something it is a work that needs to be done and is done in any kind of profession to maintain society.

Police officers often need to use coercive force in their line of work that otherwise would threaten the peace of citizens. However, the decision-making whether or not to use coercive force is not always straightforward. In many situations the police officer may not be sure if they have used too much or too little force, either way, the decision to use force can prevent the situation from going 'wrong' (Dick, 2005). Some professions are tainted with 'dirty work' due to their tasks in their line of work, such as police work. Why police are tainted as 'dirty work' can have many reasons, such as:

. . . are viewed as the fire it takes to fight the fire . . . that they in the natural course of their duties inflict harm, albeit deserved, and that their very existence attests that the nobler aspirations of humankind do not contain the means necessary to ensure survival (Bittner, 1970).

Rural officers are often considered as 'peace-keepers' rather than crime fighters as is often the perception of urban police officers (Dick, 2005); however, the tasks carried out by officers in rural and remote areas are no less 'dirty work'. Rural officers often need to deal with lethal accidents, domestic violence and suicides alone or remain at the scene for a significant length of time while they await the arrival of back-up, supervisors and or specialist departments. On this basis, the number of 'dirty work' events may be lower in the rural and remote areas than in urban settings; however,

the length of time that the officer is exposed both directly (at the scene) or indirectly (in the community afterwards) is often greater.

In this section, the examination of the literature regarding police working in rural and remote areas was overviewed. That showed where studies have been made and how this thesis aimed at themes that emerged from the data. The themes from the data include communication, boundaries between on and off duty, dirty work and emotional labor. The chapter that follows will describe how the data was collected, managed and analyzed by the researcher.

Chapter Three: Method and Data Analysis

A review of the limited literature was conducted at the start of the thesis process. The data for this study had been collected by the thesis supervisor. This data was presented to the researcher for analysis. This is a small-scale, exploratory, qualitative study, and therefore, the data was presented in the form of interview transcripts. The researcher received eight anonymized interview transcripts to analyze and code. Therefore, the researcher did not need to engage in any data collection neither all of the ethical requirements that the data collection process entails. The issue of confidentiality was a significant matter, and the researcher ensured that the transcripts were secured and locked with a password protected device.

The main task of the researcher was to subject the interview data to thematic analysis (David and Sutton, 2011). Thematic analysis is a method of analyzing qualitative data where the researcher carefully examines the data to a deeper level to identify common patterns. Thematic analysis is used to explore explicit and implicit meanings within the data by coding and analyzing the text or in this case, the interviews (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012). It requires that “researchers rely on their own analytic judgment about what is meaningful and important for answering the research question” (Clarke and Braun, 2014).

The researcher read each transcript several times and became very familiar with the content (David & Sutton, 2011). Quotes were highlighted, and cross-checked against similar quotes from each of the eight transcriptions. Then these quotes formed the basis of the themes that are identified and are set out below. The eight participants have been given a pseudonym to ensure confidentiality; these names are Icelandic from Norse mythology.

The themes that emerged from the data are Dirty Work, Emotional labor, Communication, and Boundaries between on and off duty.

Chapter Four: Discussion

The previous chapter explained how the data used in this thesis was obtained and analyzed. This chapter will set out and examine the four themes that emerged from the data. The themes are 1. Communication, 2. Boundaries between on and off duty, 3. Dirty work, and 4. Emotional labor. Why these themes emerged from the data is because how all the interviewees had a similar answer to the same questions, which gives that conclusion that rural officers are against the same challenges that have not yet been studied. These four themes have a big part in rural officers' lives and seem to be lost in the public's awareness.

Theme One: Communication

In rural areas, communication is very important when it comes to policing. Same as said here above, officers often work alone or with a shortage of back up, which means that they need to communicate well to have situations under control. However, rural officers often have dedicated good communication skills early on since they have to live and work in the same community. Like in Iceland, rural and remote officers say that communications are necessary for all kind of situations and living in a small community can help the officers by knowing most of the people in their policing area. Different type of communications can depend on where you work:

“There was some fight downtown or something, and there were some police officers from RVK to help us, and we went down there, and there were some guys... they look very mean, high on drugs and the guys from RVK was ready with the teargas, batons and everything and I just walked straight into them, shook hands with them. The problem was over.” - Mímir

“You have to be able to sit down in the kitchen with some people and have a cup of coffee and talk to them for one hour, just one talk like that can solve a big problem, and stop things from escalating.” - Mímir

“Yeah. I have seen that happen when police officers come from the city, and they are starting to work, and something happens, they blow up the situation.” - Þór

Mímir and Þór both indicate that there is a difference between communications in urban and rural areas when it comes to solving problems. One of the differences between urban and rural is the time. Rural officers often describe that they have more time to solve incidents due to fewer tasks and crime in rural areas. However, rural areas have more distance between places which means more time for back up to arrive. Therefore communication skills are necessary to maintain control of the situation that occurs.

As shown, they both say from different cases which rural communication worked better than physical action like urban officers were ready for, the reason for urban officers to be ready to get physical but not the rural is the personal knowledge between citizen in remote areas, urban officers usually have less time to deal with each case due to numbers of tasks going on, urban officers often have a new incident waiting before they arrive at a new case. Like Mímir said, in rural communities you need to be able to communicate with the people in the community without having to be physical, this is crucial in rural areas, and often than not, communication is enough because of close and personal knowledge within the community.

“We have to bend around the box of law without going from it but talk more.”

- Óðinn

Theme Two: Boundaries between on and off duty

Boundaries within a rural and remote community are different from urban ones. Urban officers go home after duty and merged into the community as citizens; however, rural officers go home but never feel like their off work (Buttle, Fowler and Williams, 2010). The reason why is that the rural community lack boundaries, such as when an officer is off duty, they should not contact him with law and order matters but somehow do that because of personal connections, in such a small community where everyone knows everyone. When you are an officer, citizen boundaries can be a thin line, in such fact that wanting to help people in need and serve the community needs but still have that personal life, such as going out with friends or family events. People often do not realize those police officers are rational human beings with desire to enjoy life off duty, therefor officer who is off duty is always seen as a person in uniform only because he is known by the whole rural community as the police officer in the town. Lack of these boundaries are common in rural areas of Iceland:

“Yeah, and they always come to you. My phone is almost as much called as the police phone, texting, Facebook, Instagram, they find a way.... Completely, they call at any time.” - Frigg

“Yeah. Of course, they might call me or something; they are interested, they saw me in the media involved in something, it is just a human thing, you want to know.” - Heimdallur

“I think the main difference is, when you finish your work in RVK then you just go out and disappear in the population, but here you don't do that. You just work out of here, and while you are walking home, you always are the policeman. I think that is the main difference.” - Týr

Other thing that comes with boundaries between on and off duty is the lack of freedom off work, such as doing normal things like others such as going out for a drink, have a dinner with a family, going to the grocery store and so on without being watched like a criminal. Officers in rural areas of Iceland find themselves without any personal life:

“I think it is necessary, especially when you are living in small... because everybody noticed if you are too drunk or you are doing something that is off... it is not good for you because then people do not... your trust will get down.” - Sigyn

“If I go out on life, dance club, I cannot be very drunk, just have a few, that is better. I have to wear seatbelts, I am not speeding, I have to be a role model for other people because if I do something wrong everybody is talking about it.” - Óðinn

Choosing police as I work profession, you are not only choosing a career. You are choosing a lifestyle; this lifestyle does not only affect your own life but also your whole family. Officers mate and children are often affected when the officer is working and living in rural and remote area. Being an officer's family requires patient and strength, working as an officer gives you less time with family, and everything that you do both on and off duty is judged, this judgement can circle back to the family in a small community. Like the sentence, “word travels fast”, especially in small communities. Family life for officers can be tricky:

“Yes. My family has to be ready to be in this job with me on some part.” - Óðinn

“And also you have to maintain this reputation of a person yourself because if you act like an idiot when you are not at work, and people know about it, it is a lot harder to be a police officer when you just have to realize you are choosing a lifestyle not a job”. - Fenrisúlfur

“My daughters did not like it when they were younger when they were on the bicycle “you have to wear helmets” it is their duty until 15. They are older, some of them now using helmets.” - Óðinn

“..it affects all your family because if your kids act in some kind of way, if he drives to fast and people notice it, people start talking about it and that affects the police officers in that area... I think it affects your whole family being a police officer in a small area. When you do something, they know that you are the wife of a police officer or your dad is a police officer.”
- Fenrisúlfur

Balancing being on and off duty can be difficult, not only because of boundaries but also when officers need to deal with cases that might have an emotional labor and then seeing the person that was involved in the public. Officers often have hard time knowing when to draw the line by being an officer or themselves when it comes to interactions in public or at work:

“It is a good side and a bad side. It is always difficult for a policeman in a small town to give a ticket to your friend or relative, it can cause some turbulence. You have to follow a very certain line to be able to go through your job.” - Mímir

“You will think twice. Then we also come back to this, we live in the same society, the people you are dealing with is just your neighbour or your children’s teacher. You think it through and maybe there is one in the lifetime that this person has been in this situation.” - Sigyn

Theme Three: Dirty Work

Or I like to call it, hard emotional work. An action or a case that can be physically disgusting or emotionally difficult, such as serious road accidents, suicides, child abuse, murder and so on. Several of the participants in this study described how they attended and managed a range of incidents in rural and remote area that can fall into the definition of ‘Dirty Work’, and how rural type of ‘Dirty Work’ can be different from urban ones.

“In RVK you are just like one tooth in a whale, but here you are everything, you are usually max 2 at a shift, a lot of the times you are alone and you start it and you finish it. In RVK you can always get help if it is drug related, sexual, squad, or if you need a cleaning crew after a suicide, nothing is like that here, you do everything, you are the first one on the scene you have to both assist and help, you will have to research it and picture it and then you basically have to clean up after yourself and then be in contact with the persons affected with the accident for a while after”. - Frigg

As Frigg suggests, difference between urban and rural is the role you need to play, such as being in the urban area you are just “one tooth in a whale” but in rural and remote area you need to be everything, from first help to detector and even following the case to court. The need for being ‘everything’ in rural areas is due to shortage of back up and officers on duty. Frigg also described a case that she

was ordered to attend on her own due to no back up available and how she manages to find a solution to it:

“I am alone, and the ambulance came, and I am like “okay, I get back-up from the ambulance” out came a really small girl, older man, and a summer doctor, so I said they are not going in because I cannot secure the area and they are not going there because I have no back-up in them whatsoever.... they were always calling on the radio that there is nobody reachable in Small Town, nobody is coming, I am alone, and I asked them if they could call out the second ambulance because I know that one of the drivers is from the coast guard, big guy, and another one also a big guy, I can use them, I know them and I train with them, I know I can use them”. -

Frigg

This quote shows how rural officers can find a solution to a back-up shortage by knowing the people in their community and use that at their advantage. Officers are usually the first ones on the scene when something happens, in rural areas, being the first on scene can be tricky especially when you are on your own.

“In the bus accident I was the first policeman, but one nurse... and three minutes later there was a crowd of people”. - Þór

“Also, when you work in these places, you must have the ability to wait for the specialist to come and be able to protect the crime scene as you wait.

It is not a born gift to be able to do that”. - Mímir

However, the data showed that many of the cases that rural officers attend to in rural and remote areas are suicides or fatal accidents and these quotes below will show

how many of the participants mention attending incidents what could also be linked to emotional labor:

“I think most of the cases we have had to go there... regarding suicides maybe, people commit suicides in these small places. Serious accidents, I remember I had to go to [small town] once because there was a tourist who fell from the cliffs down to the shore and it was a fatal accident”. - Mímir

“Suicides, both with shooting and hanging and stuff like that, car crashes, violence, domestic violence, so much actually, rapes”. - Frigg

“That was the most difficult thing I have ever done, little baby”. - Óðinn

“Yeah, there was a very bad accident in [common tourist place] a few years ago when one woman died there. I was more in east from my police station and I was the first one there” - Þór

This quote will be mentioned again below; however this part of the quote has a strong connection to both ‘Dirty Work’ and ‘Emotional labor.’

“I think from all the suicides that I have gone through, shooting, hanging, pills, name it, I think that one affected me the most because first of all, his face was completely blown off....”. - Frigg

As all of the quotes above have shown, the rural and remote officers need to attend to many different forms of ‘Dirty Work’ incidents. However, the most common ones are fatal accidents or suicide. That does not mean that these are the only thing that rural and remote officers need to deal with; however, these are the cases that impact most

on the emotional health of the officers and therefore are a big challenge of rural officers live.

Theme Four: Emotional labor

Emotional labor is one of the difficult parts of the policing. When officers apply for police work, the one of the main factors is the need for good emotional health. The reason cannot be argued for, police officers often need to deal with cases that have hard emotional labor. However, that comes with the police work and policing is well known for being hard emotional work profession. Rural officers often need to deal with incidents than include emotional labor, such as suicides, vehicle accidents, cases that include children or any tasks that can have an impact on persons emotions. Iceland has many tourists, with all that amount of people on the roads the accidents increases, unknown laws for foreigner will be broken, however, humans are still humans and cases such as violence, child abuse and suicides will occur in rural same as urban areas. All these tasks can impact on officers' feelings no matter how long the officers have worked as a police officer or how many times they deal with the same kind of incidents:

“Accident was not in my area, but we go over there. That was the most difficult thing I have ever done, little baby. Some of the policemen didn’t want to go to it, it is okay to say it if you don’t... there was one time we had 10 police officers inside two hours, it was a very special moment.” - Óðinn

“What I hate about the job, when you go into a home, couples, they are arguing, there are some kids, maybe fighting, it is very difficult, you are dealing with the people that are very high temper, it is better to be in war. I

often feel very angry... take the man down the challenge in that is to keep it, try to take it down.” - Óðinn

“... one year, I think it was 2017, I went to 5 or 6 deadly accidents that I had to deal with.” - Þór

“Yeah, we had to wake him up with the news because he wasn’t even supposed to survive, but I think from all the suicides that I have gone through, shooting, hanging, pills, name it, I think that one affected me the most because first of all, his face was completely blown off, he never lost consciousness, and I fought him, I have never fought a faceless man.” - Frigg

“I haven’t counted how many suicides I had to go into in these rural areas, because the suicide rate in Iceland is rather high, but I don’t think it is so much higher than in other countries compared to population. We have had 30,40,50 suicides per year. But if you have a suicide in a small place where 100 people live, it affects everyone in the area.” - Mímir

All these difficult calls that officers need to face do have big impact on officers' emotions and dealing with these cases in rural areas increases the stress due to lack of support or back up:

“there was an hour until we would get help from Ak, that was because of the weekend... We didn’t get help until it was over, he was in the hospital and we were going through work at the scene, because you can’t go away.”
- Frigg

“It is stress everywhere to be a policeman; everything can be a stress factor. I think, police officer working alone in small places... and they know if something happens there is one hour wait for help, they can maybe get some ambulance service, they are usually quick to the scene.” - Mímir

Stress is a common factor in first help work. Burnout in police work is well known, officers go beyond their own strength and do not seek help, but now these days it is more known to seek help for memories or emotions that cause pain or distress. Burnout is a big problem in modern society when it comes to profession in first help but now it has been more for discussion in public and not kept as a secret like something that needs to be hidden. Seeking help is normal and necessary to acknowledge when it comes to keep officers working in the police force (Oliver and Meier, 2004).

“Yeah, burn out. I think that will be our challenge to keep policemen in work, as safe, as happy as we possibly can do... And unhappy. You are not a good policeman if you are unhappy in your work. If you wake up in the morning and you just “I don’t want to go there” that is not good.” - Sigyn

“I have that as a rule that I go one time each month to therapy.” - Sigyn

“In a small community we have a group of... ambulance, fire department, we come together after every bad situation and we have a psychologist coming, briefing, meeting, it is very good, it wasn’t like that before.... You trust your team, you know everybody in the team, when the team is on the spot, you feel a whole lot better.” - Óðinn

“After a difficult case... You have to concentrate and think about something else.” – Mimir

Analysis of the data confirms that emotional labor is a common issue for police officers. Emotional labor is not limited to officers who work in urban environments. The data confirms that the rural officers in this study identified that the emotional aspect of their work has a significant impact on their professional and private lives. Emotional well-being is essential, and it needs to be better understood how rural police work can be a hard emotional work. The next chapter is the final section of this thesis and includes the conclusion and recommendations of this study.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

The work of police officers in rural and remote areas has only very recently attracted the attention of academic researchers. The work of police officers in rural and remote parts of Iceland have not been subjected to academic study, and so this thesis formed a part of a small-scale, exploratory, qualitative research project. The questions that this study set out to address are:

- "What are the key challenges for police officers working in rural and remote areas of Iceland?"
- "What do the police officers see as positive or negative aspects of working in rural and remote areas of Iceland?" and thirdly,
- "What are the challenges they face on daily basis as a rural officer and how that experience shapes their work and personal life".

What rural and remote officers have over urban officers is the environment that shape their work and personal life, in both positive and negative way. For example, knowing the people around them and their role in the community, however, that can also be negative when it comes to privacy and family life. When it comes to rural officers, they do not have the ability to blend in the community like urban officers, which leads to blurred lines between on and off duty. These blurred lines can impact negative emotions for officer that needs to deal incident that include people in their small community, however, when these main challenges are viewed, it can be seen that rural officers need to have excellent communication skills when it comes to working and living in the same area.

What was interesting about the data is that all eight participants in this study provided answers which could be coded and from the coding, four main themes

emerged. Each of the eight participants identified dirty work, communication, emotional labour and on and off duty boundaries as significant aspects of their work in rural and remote areas of Iceland. Without doubt, all of these issues taken in isolation would be important and potentially challenging. However, when all four come together because of an incident or event, then they are amplified and create significant personal and professional difficulties for not only the police officer but sometimes their family as well. This is where the professional boundaries of the isolated rural officer can be seriously tested.

One of the main differences between urban and rural policing is the size of the area that officers need to manage and the numbers of officers working in that area. As Frigg said: "Working in the city, you are just like one tooth in a whale, but in rural areas you are everything, usually, there are max two officers on shift at a time so many times you are on your own, and you start doing something you need to finish it". This quote is useful in that it explains the fundamental difference between urban and rural policing, the challenges that emerged in all interviews was that fact that these officers frequently or always work alone while on duty. The nearest back-up is often one hour away in good weather and during the working day. This can be difficult and more often than not, the urban officers do not attend any incidents without having back-up just a few minutes away.

As with all studies, this one has its limitations. One limitation is that only 8 out of the 23 interview transcripts were analyzed in this thesis, and so additional themes may have been identified in the full data set. Reviewing the limited literature revealed how few studies of rural policing there are across the globe. It is clear from this study that this is an ripe area and in need of further research. It is recommended that all police officers in rural and remote areas of Iceland should be interviewed and analyzed

to identify further similarities and differences, not just between urban and rural but also between rural areas. Any future study should focus upon the effect and impact that working in rural and remote areas has not just on the police officer but also their wider family.

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