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Policing New Zealand: Perspectives of Rural and Urban Police Officers

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ABSTRACT

This thesis presents an exploration into rural and urban police officers' perceptions and experiences of their work in Northland, New Zealand. Although international research has already investigated police officers' rural and urban experiences, there is a lack of similar literature in New Zealand. The only studies conducted within the New Zealand Police (NZP) have resulted in contradictory data, creating a debate about whether there is a difference in policing rural and urban areas. A study by Winfree and Taylor (2004) into whether the perceptions of NZP staff differed in rural, small town or metropolitan areas found little difference between either the NZP personnel themselves, or their perceptions of policing. This contrasts with research by Jaeger (2002) and Goddard and Jaeger (2005), who explored not only policing but also the strategies utilised within the roles. Goddard and Jaeger proposed that there are significant differences between officers in rural and urban areas.

The current research attempts to resolve this debate, exploring both rural and urban perspectives through the use of Grounded Theory. Interviews with 16 police officers based in the Northland District were conducted to capture the essence of their experiences. Seven key categories emerged: community, job role, management, safety, the judicial system, police culture, and family and personal life. These were placed under the core category of 'Boundaries'. It emerged that rural officers found it difficult to implement boundaries due to their isolation and need for a working relationship with the community. Urban officers, however, described how the implementation of boundaries enabled them to work effectively in their environment. Consequently, this research found that there is a difference in the rural and urban policing experience, supporting the findings of Goddard and Jaeger (2005).

It is hoped that the individual themes and overall findings from this research will stimulate further investigation into the experience of policing. While it only explored one New Zealand Police District, the information contributes to a deeper understanding of police perspectives and experiences.

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