

Police as knowledge brokers and keepers of the peace:

Perceptions of community policing in Tuvalu

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Abstract

Pacific Island Countries (PICs) face externally driven changes, including an international human rights agenda. Tuvalu was the first PIC to develop a National Action Plan on human rights, with a focus on improving the circumstances for women, children, and people with disabilities. Achieving these objectives requires a whole-of-government approach and a comprehensive process of community consultation. This study, undertaken at the request of the Tuvalu Police Service as part of a community consultation process, aimed to explore perceptions of policing. Interview participants ($N = 79$) included community members ($n = 63$) and police officers ($n = 16$). English translations of interview transcripts were systematically coded and analysed thematically. Alcohol misuse was identified as a central cause for concern associated with disharmony in families and communities. Community members recognised various resourcing constraints, but nevertheless expected a high standard of police service delivery. Reflecting a community policing ethos, both groups endorsed roles for police officers as knowledge brokers and keepers of the peace. Participants emphasised the need for police to work together with community leaders to find ways to bridge the gaps between the traditional and formal justice systems. Future research is needed to explore ways to better align the formal and traditional systems that contribute to progress on human rights.

Keywords: Pacific Island Countries, community policing, hybrid justice, human rights.

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Introduction

The governments and policing organisations of Pacific Island Countries (PICs) face a range of shared geographical, historical, and political challenges. These challenges include providing police services in multi-island contexts that are spread over large geographical areas; navigating the complexities of traditional and formal justice systems that coexist as a legacy of colonial histories (George 2017); and relying on aid from development partners to meet national targets and international agendas (Lawson 2017, Newton 1998). Alongside these shared challenges, PICs have their own unique cultural contexts and local concerns. Diversity in PICs is reflected in sub-regional groupings of Melanesia, Micronesia, and Polynesia (Iati 2017, Lawson 2017), conflict-affected states and those with relative political stability (Dobell 2007), and larger and smaller island states (Oppong 2016). Much existing research on policing in the Pacific region focuses on conflict-affected states such as Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands, where international police deployments have been involved in long-term policing development programs (see e.g., Harris and Goldsmith 2012). However, to better understand the unique challenges for policing in countries of the Pacific region, a need exists for research in a broader range of countries and contexts.

This article focuses on the specific case of Tuvalu, a small state, and low-lying, multi-island country. Like many Polynesian countries, Tuvalu has relative political stability, access to labour markets (e.g., through international seafaring roles and bilateral agreements with New Zealand and Australia), and a high degree of Polynesian ethnic homogeneity amongst inhabitants (Dobell 2007). Tuvalu was the first PIC to develop a *National Human Rights Action Plan 2016-2020* (Attorney General's Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016). Referred to as the National Action Plan, it aligns with *Te Kakeega III, National Strategy for*

Sustainable Development 2016 to 2020 (Government of Tuvalu 2016) and the *United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (United Nations 2015). The focus of the National Action Plan is improving human rights for women, children, and people with disabilities. It reflects a commitment to the associated treaties ratified by the Tuvaluan government. To achieve the goals that are set out in the National Action Plan, the Government emphasises the need for a whole-of-government approach, which explicitly includes policing and justice and working with development partners. For example, the Tuvalu Police Service is involved the Pacific Police Development Program – Regional (PPDP-R), a component of Australian Federal Police (AFP) international engagement (AFP 2017). It has also been involved in the Partnerships for Pacific Policing Program (3P) and the Pacific Prevention of Domestic Violence Program (PPDVP), which are affiliated with New Zealand Police (Allen & Clarke, 2017). The Government also emphasises consulting communities on a range of issues (Attorney General’s Office and Pacific Community 2016).

In the policing context, community consultation is consistent with a community policing philosophy (Segrave and Ratcliffe 2004). While it has been argued that community policing means different things in different contexts (Fleming 2010), a consistent element is the use of community engagement strategies to identify problems and partnership approaches to solve them (Cordner 2014). Community policing ideally reflects an overarching framework for policing organisations. Under this framework, other approaches can be incorporated as needed (e.g., responsive policing practices during disasters and emergencies; Segrave and Ratcliffe 2004). Community policing in various forms has been applied in many places internationally. Yet arguably, it may be particularly applicable in small and regional communities (Putt 2010), including those in Pacific Island Countries such as Tuvalu (Newton 1998). However, successful implementation of community policing requires both community and organisational support (Putt 2010).

In line with a community policing ethos, the Tuvalu Police Service requested research on police-community relations (Watson 2017) as a follow-up to an earlier study (McMurray 2014). This article draws from the larger nationwide community consultation project and reports the findings of interviews with police officers and community members. Specifically, the purpose of interviews was to gain insights into community and police officer perceptions of crime-related issues in communities, satisfaction with policing, and suggestions for improvements. The article first provides an overview of the Tuvaluan context and background to the study. Next it describes the research methodology and reports the findings from analysis of interview data. The article discusses what the findings reveal regarding the expectations of police and suggestions for improvements in community policing. It concludes by identifying implications for practice and further research.

Tuvaluan Context

Tuvalu is a multi-island country located in the Pacific Ocean approximately halfway between Hawaii and Australia. It is comprised of three low-lying reef platforms and six atolls, which have central lagoons and associated islets. Tuvalu's geographical features make it an idyllic paradise on the one hand, and susceptible to the impacts of rising sea levels on the other (Levine 2012). Tuvalu has received international media attention on its plight. The country took a strong stance on climate change when it hosted the 2019 Pacific Islands Forum, with former Prime Minister Enele Sopoaga referring to Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison's stance on the matter as 'neo-colonial' (Handley 2019, 'Pacific Island leaders' 2019). As a developing state, Tuvalu's isolation and lack of natural resources make it economically vulnerable. The Tuvaluan government obtains revenue from foreign purchase of fishing licences and sales of the 'dot tv' domain name, as well as drawing from the Tuvalu Trust Fund, which was established in the 1980s (Oppong 2016). Tuvalu has limited internet

bandwidth and radio broadcasts; it does not have local print media or national television broadcasts, although foreign programs can be accessed via satellite.

With a total population of approximately 10,645 people, a village lifestyle is characteristic of most of the country (Central Statistics Division [CSD] 2012). The island of Funafuti is home to over half of the population, with 6,716 residents (CSD 2017) and is referred to as the nation's capital. More specifically, Fongafale is the most populous part of Funafuti atoll, and is considered the only urban area of Tuvalu. It has the only hospital and airstrip, and relatively high-density housing, as people from other islands relocate there for work (CSD 2012). The 'outer islands' have been characterised by depopulation (CSD 2017) and more limited access to modern conveniences, including electricity, running water, water storage, and waste collection and disposal (CSD 2012).

Tuvalu has long been subject to global influences. From the 1860s until the early 1900s, many Tuvaluans were kidnapped as slaves bound for South America, while others were kidnapped or coerced, in a practice known as 'blackbirding', to work on sugar cane plantations in Australia and other parts of the Pacific (CSD 2012). To protect it from foreign invasion, Tuvalu, along with the neighbouring multi-island country of Kiribati, became a protectorate of the British Empire from 1892, and then a colony from 1915 (Levine, 2012). During colonisation, Kiribati and Tuvalu were referred to as the Gilbert and Ellice Islands (Levine 2012). Christianity was introduced to Tuvalu in the 1860s by Pacific-based members of the London Missionary Society. Communities were subsequently designed around a central church and community hall; pastors achieved high status alongside the traditional chiefly leadership and counsel of community elders (Pratt and Melei 2018). Tuvalu was recognised as a protectorate separate from Kiribati in 1975 and the name Tuvalu was reinstated. Gaining independence from the British in 1978, Tuvalu joined the Pacific Islands

Forum, where it is recognised as facing unique challenges as a smaller island state (Lawson 2017, Oppong 2016).

Hybrid Systems

In the Pacific region, the state does not have a monopoly on justice. Rather, there exists plurality in justice (Dinnen and McLeod 2009).

Government

During the colonial period, a modified version of the British Westminster system of government was introduced in Tuvalu (Oppong, 2016). While lawmaking is a gendered pursuit internationally, in the Pacific region the gender divide is particularly pronounced. A study of 82 democratic countries found that only Tuvalu, Nauru, and Palau had no female representation in national politics (Högström 2012). PICs including Vanuatu, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, and the Federated States of Micronesia were also amongst those with the lowest rates of female participation. Indeed, since 1978, Tuvalu has had only three female government ministers and it is a current goal of the Tuvalu government to increase representation (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT] 2019).

Alongside the modified Westminster system, the traditional chiefly approach to community leadership largely remained intact. The *Falekaupule* are traditional local government assemblies on each island, usually composed of men aged 50 years and over, who deliberate on bills that are before parliament. The *Falekaupule Act* (1997) aimed to incorporate traditional institutions into local governance reform. However, rules governing traditional institutions are not well-codified into law, making them subject to interpretation. Further, limited opportunity exists for participation by women and younger people under 50 years of age (Oppong 2016). Provisions exist to include women at the lower tiers of local government, such as the *Kaupule*, which is the island council or executive arm of the *Falekaupule*. Members of the *Kaupule* are elected and in 2017, of 48 members overall, three

were women (Pacific Women Shaping Development 2017). In practice, women's active participation at higher levels of decision making is impeded by tradition, resulting in inadequate consideration of the impacts of new laws on women and girls.

Justice

Like its government, Tuvalu's justice system is characterised by hybridity. In Polynesian countries, traditional justice mechanisms have operated at the community level. These systems involve the notion of shame, which is shared amongst family members, as opposed to a Western model of individual guilt (Braithwaite 2015, Pratt and Melei 2018). A study involving interviews with eighteen Tuvaluan leaders (community elders, church representatives, and police officers) highlighted the role of strong social bonds and the interdependencies associated with communal living in facilitating social control (Pratt and Melei 2018). The main traditional approaches to dispute resolution were at the levels of families, led by elders of the relevant extended families; the church, through counselling, teachings, and home visits; and the community, led by chiefs, community elders, and church ministers (Pratt and Melei 2018). Agreements made within this approach to dispute resolution embody the interconnectedness of family and community. They provide a stark contrast to a decision made by a distant official in the formal justice setting (Braithwaite 2015). However, Tuvaluan leaders perceived a decline in the relative influence of traditional approaches to justice (Pratt and Melei 2018). In their views, externally driven social change, such as mandated human rights and the consequent rise of individualism made young people in Tuvalu less likely to focus on community needs and leaders' requests. The availability of alcohol and impacts of climate change (e.g., inadequate water supplies, contamination, and dead fish) did little to promote social cohesion and traditional bonds (Pratt and Melei 2018).

Traditional justice is often public and dominated by senior male community members (Bull *et al.* 2019; United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] 2017). Pressure may be placed

on the (mostly) women and children who are the victims of physical or sexual violence to accept an apology or a gift at the family or community level, with no further consequences for the offender. They may face pressure to reconcile (Wurtzburg 2003). Consequently, women may regard formal justice as more likely to address their concerns about issues such as domestic violence (AusAid 2008). However, even when it comes to formal or state-administered justice, research in Melanesian countries has illustrated that traditional leaders sometimes act as gatekeepers (George 2017). Women and children may be discouraged by conservative religious sources of authority from making formal reports about crimes of violence against them (George 2017). Further pressure not to report can come from families or communities both for fear of reputational damage (Bull *et al.* 2019, Rankine *et al.* 2017) and the wish to avoid punishment of the offender by Western style means (George 2017, McLeod 2009).

Moreover, formal systems are also often male-dominated (Forster 2011, George 2017). For example, workforce data from the Tuvalu Police Service from 2017 indicate that of a total of 100 sworn police officers from constable to superintendent (plus a Commissioner), seven were female. Of female officers, one was a senior constable and six were constables (personal communication, T. Melei, 27 February 2018). All were stationed on the main atoll of Funafuti, with no female representation on the outer islands. While female officers comprised 10% of the Land Force of 70 officers, the Maritime and Prison arms of the organisation had no female representation. Notably, however, in line with the human rights agenda, the Tuvalu Police Service has established a Domestic Violence Unit (European External Action Service 2019).

Key Social Issues

Previous research suggests that despite an international focus on gender-based violence, the main concern amongst Tuvaluan communities is alcohol consumption.

Alcohol Misuse

McMurray (2014) reported that of 564 community members surveyed from three of Tuvalu's islands, 71% of were concerned about alcohol misuse. Research undertaken amongst Tuvaluan school students aged 13-15 years (with a 90% response rate) for the Global School-Based Student Health Survey (GSHS) found a gender divide in alcohol consumption. In all, a greater proportion of boys (22.2%) than girls (5.1%) reported drinking alcohol on one or more occasions in the previous 30 days. Further, many more boys (22.5%) than girls (2.9%) reported drinking so much that they were really drunk one or more times in their lives (World Health Organisation [WHO] 2013).

Whereas alcohol in Tuvalu was once available only from fermented 'toddy' (the sap from cut palm fronds) and was consumed at the end of a working day, it is now increasingly imported. Problematic use of alcohol may also be associated with its use as payment for labour in some instances (Pratt and Melei 2018). Arguably, new attitudes to alcohol consumption may have enter the country as Tuvaluan people who work overseas return home. However, few social services are available in Tuvalu to assist people to overcome alcohol abuse (Power *et al.* 2015). Internationally, taxes, licences and bans are typically used to regulate alcohol consumption, although they do not tend to regulate the production or consumption of toddy or home brew (Power *et al.* 2015). In Tuvalu, the *Alcoholic Drink Act 2008* regulates the sale and consumption of alcohol and includes licencing provisions for toddy production.

Gender-Based Violence

In McMurray's (2014) study, only 7% of participants expressed concern about domestic violence. Despite this, 12.5% of respondents reported that they or someone in their household had been the victim of domestic violence in the previous year. In fact, amongst respondents from the island of Nui, domestic violence accounted for 27% of crime reported in the survey

(McMurray 2014). Underreporting of domestic violence is often due not only to shame and stigma, but also to justification of violence (The Equality Institute 2019).

Although both men and women can be subjected to domestic violence, it is well documented that women are more likely to be subjected to more severe forms of violence and to suffer negative impacts on health (WHO *et al.* 2013). Ecological models highlight the need to consider contributing factors to domestic violence at several levels. These include the individual, the relationship and family dynamics, the community context and gender norms, the society and its laws, and global influences on economies and discourses (Fulu and Miedema 2015). Characteristics of societies with high levels of gender-based violence include rigid gender norms that limit opportunities for women and girls to participate in social, political, and economic life and the tolerance of violence as an approach to conflict resolution (Miedema and Fulu 2018).

The World Health Organisation's Multi-Country Study (WHOMCS) documented that the rate of intimate partner violence against women in Tuvalu, whether physical, sexual, or both, was 37% (lifetime prevalence; and 25% in the previous 12 months; CSD *et al.* 2009). This compares with a worldwide average of 35% (WHO *et al.* 2013) and a range in the Pacific region from 25% in Palau to 68% in both Kiribati and Papua New Guinea (UN Population Fund 2019). Reflecting international research, a study in Tuvalu found even higher rates of gender-based violence victimisation amongst women and girls with disabilities (Tavola 2018). Demonstrating the severity of the violence in Tuvalu, approximately half of the sample of ever-married women aged 15-49 years who had experienced domestic violence reported associated physical injuries (CSD *et al.* 2009). When compared with data from 60 participating countries, the highest proportion of boys aged 15-19 years who endorsed such violence (83%) was found in Tuvalu (UNICEF 2014). Seventy percent of both men and women in Tuvalu perceived that violence by a husband against his wife was justified in

certain instances (CSD *et al.* 2009). The endorsement of violence was associated with low educational attainment. For men, post-secondary education was strongly associated with lower endorsement of violence (CSD *et al.* 2009).

In some Pacific Island Countries, legislation may not have been updated to adequately address domestic violence (Forster 2011). However, the *Family Protection and Domestic Violence Act* (2014) was recently introduced in Tuvalu. Researchers have cautioned that when new legislation is introduced, police and court officials need training to ensure that they do not discourage women from reporting gender-based violence (George 2017). This need has been recognised in the National Action Plan (Attorney-General's Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016).

The Present Study

This article draws from a larger project, which was conducted at the request of the Tuvalu Police Service (Watson 2017) and based on earlier work by McMurray (2014). Consistent with a community policing ethos and Tuvaluan governmental objectives, interviews were part of a nationwide community consultation. They provided an opportunity for community members and police officers from the main outer islands to express their views about policing practices in their communities. We aimed to obtain participants' perceptions of the key issues and challenges for policing in their communities, as well as potential avenues for improvement, both in general and for key crime concerns.

Methodology

A formal letter of request for the project was made by the Prime Minister's Office, Government of Tuvalu, to the Vice Chancellor and President of the University of the South Pacific. The request was processed and subsequently approved under University's standards for research project applications and funding procedures. In addition to research approvals required by the University, island-specific approvals were obtained in consultation with the

Tuvalu Police Service, Youth Department, Gender Department, Attorney General's Office, and the People Lawyer's Office.

Sampling and Participants

Participants ($N = 79$) consisted of 63 community members and 16 police officers from Tuvalu's eight most populous islands. The remaining island of Niulakita is administratively a part of Niutao as it has a resident population of only 18 people (CSD 2012) and no police officer; however, community members from that island were able to participate in the national survey associated with the project (Watson *et al.* 2019). A purposive interview sample (Tranter 2013) was selected to ensure that it included participants from different islands, age groups, and roles in the community (young people, civil servants, and community elders). The community sample included religious leaders from each of 10 affiliations. Participants from the Tuvalu Police Service consisted of officers of various ranks on the main island of Funafuti and one officer per island from the outer islands (where 1 to 5 police officers are stationed). A summary of participants can be seen in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Materials and Procedure

A structured interview guide consisting of eight open-ended questions was adapted from focus group questions used in previous research (McMurray 2014). It first asked participants about the main crime-related issues in the community, the adequacy of police responses to those issues, and the constraints faced by police. It then asked about how police could contribute to improvements in issues faced by communities; specifically, gender relations; drunk and disorderly behaviour; policing in general; police-community relations; and adopting or adapting traditional methods of conflict resolution into police practices.

Interviews were conducted face to face in Tuvaluan language by a team of trained research assistants. Recordings of interviews were translated into English by research

assistants with a high level of proficiency in English and the requisite transcription skills. Responses to each question were tabulated and labelled with the participant's island and group (i.e., police officer and rank, or community member and role).

Data Analysis

Using the resulting English translations of interviews, we undertook a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006). Data were coded exhaustively, by first reading transcripts multiple times, and highlighting codes in text to reflect key ideas expressed at the phrase, sentence, or paragraph level. For the question about key crime-related concerns, only data given in response to that question were coded. Otherwise, transcripts were coded in their entirety. Similar codes were grouped together to form key themes with associated subthemes. The numbers of police and community participants who endorsed each theme and subtheme were recorded in a spreadsheet. Frequencies are reported in the results section to indicate the relative endorsement of themes and subthemes. Illustrative quotes are used to illuminate participants' context. To maintain anonymity, participants are referred to by type (police officer or community member and role), and main (Funafuti) or outer island location. To maintain participant anonymity, further demographic information is not reported.

Results and Discussion

We first outline participants' main crime-related concerns, their sources of dissatisfaction with policing and their understanding of the constraints faced by police. We then discuss themes identified in the analysis about how policing can be improved in Tuvalu.

Disturbances of the Peace in the Community and Family

Reflecting findings by Pratt and Melei (2018), participants referred to various frustrations that they perceived as a backdrop to crime. These included environmental issues, such as climate change, drought, and limited water supply; and social issues, such as influences from the outside world, poverty, and overcrowding.

Participants typically referred to crime as ‘disturbances of the peace’ in the family or community. Almost all participants of both police (100%; $n = 16$) and community groups (95.2%; $n = 59$) consistently reported that alcohol was a central factor in disturbing the peace in the family and community; only three community participants did not refer to alcohol misuse. While several participants acknowledged that alcohol could be misused by women and men of different age groups, some participants explicitly referred to problematic alcohol consumption by young people, and more specifically, by young men. This reflects the gender divide on self-reported alcohol consumption patterns amongst Tuvaluan teenagers (WHO 2013). Crimes associated with alcohol use that were reported by participants can be seen in Table 2.

[Insert Table 2 about here]

While community members were primarily concerned about disturbances of the peace in the community, police officers were equally concerned about disturbances in the family. The police participants’ emphasis on domestic violence reflects their role in intervening in response to reports of such violence under new legislation. Although several participants mentioned vulnerable groups such as children and people with disabilities throughout their interviews, very few explicitly reported concern about child abuse. In part, this may reflect tolerance of corporal punishments of children at school and home (UNICEF 2017). Public education on this issue forms part of the National Action Plan (Attorney-General’s Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016).

Although most crimes and sources of conflict were associated with alcohol, a notable exception was land disputes, which were regarded as an expected part of island life. Additionally, a small number of participants noted that domestic violence was not always associated with alcohol use, although it could be exacerbated by alcohol misuse.

Satisfaction with the Police

Many community (52%; $n = 33$) and police (31%; $n = 5$) participants stated that the role of police was to ‘keep the peace’, ‘enforce the laws’ or do their duty’ in the community. According to participants’ accounts, this typically meant taking crime seriously; providing patrols on foot, bicycle, or other vehicle; responding to calls for assistance; protecting vulnerable people; and conducting investigations. While a substantial proportion of community participants thought that police officers were doing their job well or mostly well (38%; $n = 24$), the majority expressed one or more sources of dissatisfaction.

Community (32%; $n = 20$) and police (38%; $n = 6$) participants agreed that poor response time was an issue. By the time police arrived at an incident scene, the troublemaker may already have left, or a crowd may have gathered. Additionally, over half of the community participants (57%; $n = 36$) and one-quarter of police participants (25%; $n = 4$) cited a lack of professionalism. This included a perception of inconsistent and biased treatment by police, mainly in favour of family members and friends but also in favour of senior community members. A lack of professionalism also included police officers using unnecessary force against community members and arriving at incident scenes under the influence of alcohol. While police officers’ use of alcohol use might be anticipated if calling on police after hours, it had also reportedly occurred during working hours.

In addition to these key problems, several community participants (11%; $n = 7$) expressed dissatisfaction about the perceived lack of alignment between government-made laws and unwritten community rules.

Constraints on Policing

Participants acknowledged that the sources of dissatisfaction that they reported were partly explained – although not excused – by various constraints. One example of a constraint on policing, acknowledged by a small number of community participants (11%; $n = 7$) was

that police officers were not able to enforce community rules unless they had been made into bylaws. This meant that issues of importance to community members could be seen to be ignored or disregarded by police officers. Most other issues could be partly explained by resourcing constraints, both in terms of human resources and equipment and infrastructure.

Human Resources

Particularly on the outer islands, approximately one-third of community (33%; $n = 21$) and two-thirds of police (69%; $n = 11$) participants reported that the low number of police officers posed a problem for effective police work. Police officers could be outnumbered in responding to calls, making it difficult to resolve an incident and placing police officers at risk of harm. Low numbers of police officers on outer islands meant that on some islands there was not always an officer on duty. Police officers had to prioritise tasks carefully and some community members perceived that issues of importance to them, such as preventing people from driving without a licence, were a low priority for police officers, despite the potential threat to community safety.

Low numbers of police officers also meant that police would have to deal with their own family and friends in the course of their work, contributing to perceived and actual bias in police treatment of community members. Throughout the interviews, several community (6%; $n = 4$) and police (13%; $n = 2$) participants mentioned the lack of female police officers. On outer islands, this constraint presented challenges for culturally appropriate interactions. Given culturally defined respectful avoidance relationships that restrict interactions between male and female cousins, there could be difficulties for male police officers in addressing offending and victimisation of certain female relatives. One participant explained:

Sometimes there is a lady found drunk and they send a police officer – but they are cousins...and so the police cannot do a thing because they are related – he cannot handle

the matter. So, it is better for a male officer to counsel men and a female officer to counsel women. (Civil Servant, outer island)

Another suggested some people may be more comfortable to report certain crimes such as domestic violence to a female officer. Strengthening women's inclusion in policing and gender-sensitive training for all police officers form part of the National Action Plan (Attorney-General's Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016).

The need for police training was raised by community (13%; $n = 8$) and police (13%; $n = 2$) participants. For some it was a source of contention that police officers would be sent to the outer islands with little policing experience. Additionally, some commented that police officers on the outer islands may not receive as many opportunities for professional development as those in Funafuti, which would limit their knowledge and ability to carry out their duties professionally. Training for police officers, including those in outer islands, is part of the National Action Plan (Attorney-General's Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016).

Equipment and Infrastructure

Both police (50%; $n = 8$) and community members (29%; $n = 18$) reported that a lack of equipment contributed to lengthy response times. For example, suitable vehicles were in short supply, meaning that if an incident occurred on the other side of a larger island or at the same time as another incident, it would be difficult for police officers to respond promptly. Further, it was unsuitable to transport a drunken person on a motorbike due to the potential for injury to the person. Other equipment that was not readily available to police officers included items that are standard issue in other jurisdictions, such as handcuffs. A few participants mentioned torches, breathalysers, and tasers. (However, it is unclear from the data whether a need exists for tasers in community policing in Tuvalu.)

Additionally, community (16%; $n = 10$) and police (19%; $n = 3$) participants mentioned a lack of infrastructure such as police accommodation, office space, police cells ('as we need to separate men from women' [Police Officer, outer island]), and communication technology. The lack of infrastructure was particularly problematic in the outer islands. To report crime, community members would phone or present in person. However, if police officers were not present (e.g., 'police on this island tend to vacate their houses in order to host teachers' [Reverend, outer island] 'if he went out looking for food in order to survive' [Police Officer, outer island]) this would add to the delay. Communication between officers and to the headquarters in Funafuti could also be challenging due to unreliable communications systems. The limitations of telecommunications, particularly in Tuvalu's outer islands, has been identified as an area in need of improvement in line with the sustainable development strategy, *Te Kakeega III* (Government of Tuvalu 2016).

Suggested Improvements

Participants' made several different types of suggestions to improve policing at the community level in Tuvalu. As may be anticipated, over half the community (52%; $n = 33$) and almost two-thirds of police (63%; $n = 10$) participants suggested filling the identified gaps in resources. This included providing more police officers, improved working conditions and training, as well as the requisite equipment and infrastructure. To address bias, three participants suggested that police officers could be based on islands other than their home island. Additionally, participants focused on ways to improve policing with existing resources, through police officer's roles as agents of change and by working together with leaders as a bridge between systems.

Agents of Change

Community members reported the expectation of a high standard of personal and professional conduct from police officers. Community participants (44%; $n = 28$) suggested

that police officers should give priority to their role and duty as a police officer. Doing so meant knowing the role well; responding promptly; doing their duty with empathy, love and patience; prioritising key problems; and critically, understanding the island's culture and traditions. Some participants suggested that if police officers were to lead by example, following both the government-made laws and traditional community rules, others would be encouraged to do the same.

Educating the Community. One of the main ways in which participants thought that police officers could contribute to improved communities was through their role as educators and knowledge brokers, a role often associated with intermediaries in management and health care contexts (see e.g. Conklin *et al.* 2013), in this case between the government and communities. Throughout the interviews, approximately half the community (52%; $n = 33$) and most police (94%; $n = 15$) participants stressed the importance of community consultations, workshops, awareness programs, outreach programs, and youth programs. Participants suggested general awareness programs to inform the community about the police officer's role, laws and the potential consequences of breaking them, the need to report a crime to the police straight away, and insights any recent national or international training that police had received.

Additionally, participants suggested that police officers could provide workshops (sometimes in partnership with other organisations) for the whole community on gender equality. As one participant explained:

...this topic of gender-based violence is very new to all of us and that means there is not a big understanding among people about this issue. I think the right thing to do is to educate people on how important this issue is, how it differs from our traditional way of living, and how it is supposed to be handled (Civil Servant, outer island)

To ensure that outer islands were not left behind, several participants thought that police in Funafuti could make use of national radio to share workshops. In addition to providing general guidance, the police officers' role includes providing advice and information to members of specific groups who may be unaware of their rights and responsibilities under the law (e.g., owners of alcohol-related businesses; newly married couples; alcohol users). These suggestions align with the National Action Plan (Attorney General's Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016).

Enforcing the Laws. To further contribute to preventing alcohol misuse, community (11%; $n = 7$) and police (38%; $n = 6$) participants suggested that police officers could be more proactive in the regulatory space. This included checking that businesses held the appropriate licences and complied with licensing provisions, with attention to their hours of operation, the sale of alcohol to intoxicated persons, and the sale of alcohol to minors.

Regarding domestic violence, several participants mentioned that prior to the introduction of legislation in 2014, domestic violence was regarded as a family matter. When it occurred, often a female victim would return to her 'real family' for a period. By contrast, the new law enabled police officers to enter the family home, arrest the alleged offender, take that person into custody, and possibly charge them with an offence to be heard in court. Half of the community (51%; $n = 32$) and over two-fifths of the police (44%; $n = 7$) participants explicitly mentioned police intervention to remove the offender from an incident scene for various crime types. Specifically, this suggestion was made by community (44%; $n = 28$) and police (19%; $n = 3$) participants for drunk and disorderly behaviour. Similarly, it was made by community (21%; $n = 13$) and police (25%; $n = 4$) participants for domestic violence cases. This suggests some community support for new legislative measures to address domestic violence in line with human rights initiatives. Additionally, three participants explicitly stated that it was good to have police involvement in these cases.

Some participants suggested that detaining the person in a police cell for a short period (e.g., up to 24 hours) would allow the person to become calm or sober. Then community (11%; $n = 7$) and police (25%; $n = 4$) participants suggested that the police officer would advise them of laws and consequences. In some instances, police would also address their families to help prevent future instances of the same offence. The suggested purpose of detention was therefore mostly to prevent further incidents; however, several participants mentioned punishment. One participant suggested that a deterrent effect:

This law I can see helps not only the people who commit the crime, but it also sets an example to others. Life being in a prison cell for 24 hours is hard with mosquitos, smell and no bed to sleep properly. (Reverend, Funafuti)

Although participants were interested in removal of the offender from an incident scene, few discussed formal charges and prosecution in court. Most participants' responses made little distinction between detaining someone briefly in a police cell and sentencing them to a prison term, although some made it clear by stating things like: 'put him or her in jail for many years' (Young Person, outer island).

Working with Leaders as a Bridge between Systems

By far the most consistently emphasised suggestion to improve policing in Tuvalu was for police officers to work together with community members, leaders, and others such as service providers. Almost all community (90%; $n = 57$) and police (89%; $n = 14$) participants mentioned working together, developing and maintaining good relationships, and communicating well with each other. Community participants welcomed police officer involvement in all facets of community life, including attending community functions and council meetings.

Developing Bylaws. Working together with the elected island council (*Kaupule*) was seen to facilitate a shared understanding between police and the community. Community

participants (35%; $n = 22$) suggested that opportunities might be identified to develop bylaws that would help to merge laws and unwritten community rules. Key examples of desirable bylaws that had been passed in some islands included: banning the sale and consumption of alcohol on Sundays; banning drinking in designated areas of the community; and banning public drinking in groups. Participants valued this approach:

On this island, no one is allowed to drink in the village. If you get caught by the police, they will take you to the island's meeting hall to be counselled. The maximum number of people who can drink publicly in the village is three, but there is a boundary beyond which you can drink. If you cross the boundary, you will be invited to the meeting hall by the old men.... As far as I have seen, things have improved since our *Falekaupule* made this rule. (Community Elder, outer island)

Once bylaws were passed, police officers could make a stronger contribution to the community by enforcing them; thereby acting as a bridge between the two systems.

Seeking Support from Leaders. Participants emphasised a reciprocal relationship: Community members should report crimes to the police and police officers should seek assistance from the community (often via community leaders) when needed. For example, if more manpower was needed, leaders could ask some men to assist the police. The *Falekaupule Act 1997* states that 'it shall be the duty of every Falekaupule and of every Kaupule to use its resources to assist the police in the detection and prevention of crime within the area of its authority' (Part V, Section 41). In line with this, some councils of the outer islands already funded local 'special' or 'island' police to assist government police officers with human resources:

On this island, that is what we practice here. So, there are four special police we have to assist the police officer, especially at times of occasion, like Christmas and New Year. (Community Elder, outer island)

Participants' comments about the special police and the way that they worked together with police officers were unanimously positive.

Using Traditional Approaches. Almost one-third of community (30%; $n = 17$) and a smaller proportion of police (13%; $n = 2$) participants suggested that police officers should know and employ traditional approaches. For example, they should seek advice from the traditional leaders such as elders and ministers to help people to resolve their own disputes. One-quarter of community (25%; $n = 16$) and almost one-third of police (31%; $n = 5$) participants suggested that police seek assistance in the form of a traditional dispute resolution practice. Traditionally, a troublemaker is called by the leaders (old men of the village) to attend the meeting hall (*ahiga, maneapa, or falekaupule*). There they are counselled, advised, or disciplined by the leaders. For more serious infractions, the family of the person may also be asked to attend. As one participant explained:

According to traditions and customs, it is a shameful thing to anyone who is brought into community hall. This is a really big help to police officers to solve those kinds of antisocial behaviours. (Reverend, Funafuti)

Although Pratt and Melei (2018) noted that some traditional leaders perceived a decline in the relative importance of counsel by elders to community members, several participants offered a different view:

As we all know that people are more obedient to our traditional laws rather than our formal laws (Community Elder, Funafuti).

In the traditional system, if a person repeated the same mistake, the chief would impose a punishment. One-fifth of community participants (21%; $n = 13$) suggested that unpaid community work was a suitable option. Examples included clearing unwanted rocks from the lagoon, weeding or cutting grass on communal land, feeding animals on communal land, and delivering sandbags from the beach to the road to help level it. A small number of community

(10%; $n = 6$) and police (6%; $n = 1$) participants explicitly noted that some past traditional punishments, such as corporal punishment (e.g., beating) could no longer be used as they breached human rights agreements. It is notable that participants tended to suggest the traditional approach of unpaid community work for disturbances of the peace in the community, such as drinking on a Sunday or fishing in a conservation area, which are associated with island rules or bylaws. As one participant observed, in some cases:

...not only are they punished by the law but also from their villages, island or community. (Reverend, Funafuti)

Some community participants (10%; $n = 6$) suggested that it might be beneficial for traditional approaches to be formally recognised in the Constitution.

General Discussion

This study aimed to gain insights into Tuvaluan police officers' and community members' perceptions of crime-related issues, issues with policing, and potential improvements. The findings of the study support previous research that highlighted concern amongst community members (McMurray 2014) and leaders (Pratt and Melei 2018) about the misuse of alcohol in Tuvalu. Additionally, they confirm agreement amongst police officers and community members that alcohol is overwhelmingly associated with disturbances of the peace in the community and family. However, we found that while community members focused on disturbances of the peace in the community, police officers were equally concerned with disturbances of the peace in the family, reflecting their remit to address domestic violence. The lower levels of concern about domestic violence reported by community members may be associated with justifications of violence (CSD *et al.* 2009, The Equality Institute 2019, UNICEF 2014) and developing community knowledge in this area. It is encouraging, therefore, that the study found support amongst community members for police to remove alleged offenders from incident scenes involving both drunk and disorderly

behaviour and domestic violence. This suggests support for police involvement in domestic violence cases in line with recent legislation.

It is noteworthy that despite acknowledging the resourcing constraints faced by police officers, the community nevertheless expected a high standard of service delivery, with the ideals of prompt responses and professionalism. Importantly, the suggestions made by police officers and community members to improve policing were not limited to ideas that required additional equipment, infrastructure or human resources. They highlight the need for police officers in Tuvalu to be excellent communicators, with an important role as knowledge workers. Relatedly, they highlight the importance of police working together with the community and its leaders, suggesting that community consultation and engagement are valued very highly in Tuvalu. Overall, the suggestions for improvement reflected a community policing ethos (Cordner 2014, Fleming 2010, Segrave and Ratcliffe 2004) and were consistent with the directions of the National Action Plan in terms of widespread community consultation and education for justice professionals (Attorney-General's Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016). In line with previous research (e.g., Dinnen and McLeod 2009), this study highlighted the importance of traditional justice amongst community members in Tuvalu. The suggestions to better align formal and traditional laws and consequences warrant further discussion.

Aligning the Traditional and Formal Justice Systems

The question of aligning traditional and formal justice systems is an important issue for consideration alongside human rights initiatives and a community policing ethos. Most importantly, community members reported a need for more coherent justice; they sought greater alignment of the formal and traditional justice systems. The main benefit to the community of such alignment would be that once unwritten community rules were made into bylaws, police officers can enforce them, thus helping to address matters of community

concern. The findings of this study suggest that bylaws can operate alongside government laws to address the issue of misuse of alcohol and associated disturbances of the peace.

Unlike community members, however, police officers did not suggest that they should be involved in developing bylaws. Although community members may see police officers as the ‘face’ of government laws, police officers regard the making of law as being beyond the scope of their roles. However, their knowledge of existing governmental laws and endorsement of their role as knowledge brokers make police officers potentially helpful to the *Kaupule* members as they develop bylaws for approval by the *Falekaupule*. The bylaws developed in unique island circumstances may provide a valuable resource for other islands if they can be adapted appropriately to the specific community context.

Regarding traditional dispute resolution methods, police officers and community members alike endorsed the use of the traditional meeting hall, where community leaders would counsel or advise offenders. This type of approach is used in many forms worldwide (UNICEF 2017). It may be particularly valuable for diverting minor cases and cases involving young people from the more formal system (UNICEF 2017). However, the use of traditional justice mechanisms raises important questions about human rights initiatives; the dynamics of power must be considered. For example, the use of police discretion may result in biases in who has access to these approaches.

Further, the use of traditional dispute resolution approaches has been critiqued as a response to domestic violence cases (Forster 2011, George 2017). Although this study did not find support for traditional justice in response to domestic violence, broader gender-related considerations are also relevant for other offence types in which they are used. Specifically, questions arise as to the opportunities for women to be included in these systems, formally or informally, given the male dominance of traditional leadership. Women’s informal contributions may be unacknowledged (Greener *et al.* 2011). Further research on the

mechanisms of this traditional approach in the context of improving human rights for women, children, and people with disabilities (Tavola 2018) consistent with the National Action Plan would make a valuable contribution to international debate.

The use of traditional practices beyond dispute resolution at the meeting hall was proposed by community members but not by police officers for disturbances of the peace in the community. While some participants acknowledged the potential human rights breaches associated with some customary punishments (such as beating), the use of traditional justice in conjunction with formal justice practices raises the ethical issue of punishment by two systems for the one offence (Corrin 2019). This concern has been discussed in an examination of the law in the Solomon Islands, which shares once shared a High Court Justice with Tuvalu. The Constitutions of both countries seem to allow formal law to ‘override’ customary law, but not the other way around – leaving open the possibility of double punishment (Corrin 2019). Further research can explore these issues in greater depth to determine how they can best be resolved in ways that align with human rights principles.

Limitations and Future Research

This study explored police and community relations in eight islands of Tuvalu and across a diverse range of participant groups. The use of a purposive sample was appropriate for this study because it ensured the inclusion of participants from different islands, age groups, and community roles. It was nevertheless a non-random sample and it cannot be assumed that the findings reflect the range of views of the broader community or the entire police organisation (Tranter 2013). Although the structured interview approach did not allow opportunities to explore issues raised by participants in greater depth, it provided consistency across multiple interviewers, islands, and participant groups (Travers 2013). As part of a national community consultation, this study necessarily reported the crime-related issues about which participants expressed concern, rather than their actual prevalence in communities. Future studies could

supplement participants' perceptions with other data sources such as victim support agencies and recorded crime statistics, disaggregated by age and sex among other characteristics, as outlined by Tuvalu's National Action Plan (Attorney-General's Office of Tuvalu and Pacific Community 2016).

Conclusion

This study explored police officers' and community members' perceptions of crime-related issues, policing challenges, and suggestions for improvement in the Tuvalu—the first PIC to implement a National Action Plan on human rights. It contributes to insights into police-community relations in a hybrid justice system in a time of externally driven social and environmental change. Overall, the findings of the study suggest support for a community policing ethos. Specifically, they suggest support for police intervention to keep the peace in communities and families. They endorse initiatives such as community awareness programs and strongly support police and community leaders working together. The findings align with whole-of-government initiatives outlined in Tuvalu's National Action Plan on human rights and recent legislation aimed at protecting families from domestic violence. By working together with leaders, community members perceived that police could help to improve the alignment of the formal and traditional justice systems to better address community concerns. Further research is warranted to explore how greater alignment of formal and traditional justice can be achieved in ways that support and protect the human rights of vulnerable groups.

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Table 1. Summary of interview participants' demographic data

Participant type	Sex, age, years' residence	Island/s (n), rank	Total
Community Members			
Religious leaders	male only	Funafuti (9)	9
		Nanumea (1), Niutao (1), Nui (1), Nukufetau (1), Nukulaelae (1), Vaitupu (1).	6
Community elders	male and female, over 50 years	Funafuti (3), Nanumaga (1), Nanumea (2), Niutao (1), Nui (2), Nukufetau (2), Nukulaelae (1), Vaitupu (1).	13
Civil servants	male and female, 30-45 years (each with 20+ years' residence on the island)	Funafuti (2), Nanumaga (2), Nanumea (2), Niutao (3), Nukufetau (1), Nui (2), Nukulaelae (1), Vaitupu (2)	15
Young people	male and female, 16-29 years (each with 10+ years' residence on the island)	Funafuti (2), Nanumaga (2), Nanumea, Niutao (2), Nui (2), Nukufetau (3), Nukulaelae (4), Vaitupu (4).	20
			63
Police Officers			
	male and female	Funafuti (Ranks: 1 superintendent, 1 inspector, 1 sergeant, 1 senior constable, 4 constables)	8
	male only	Outer Islands: Nanumaga, Nanumea, Niutao, Nui, Nukufetau, Nukulaelae, Vaitupu (Ranks: 1 former Commissioner, 1 senior constable and 6 constables)	8
			16
Total			79

Note. The Police Commissioner participated in the study as a community elder; however, he was included in the police subsample due to his extensive knowledge of policing practices.

Table 2. Crime types that participants associated with alcohol misuse

Crime problem	Reported by		
	Police Officers (N = 16)	Community Members (N = 62) ^a	Total (N = 78)
	% (n)	% (n)	% (n)
Disturbing the peace of the community (in general)	62.5 (10)	74.2 (46)	71.8 (56)
Fighting/assault	18.8 (3)	30.6 (19)	28.2 (22)
Shouting/swearing/making noise	18.8 (3)	22.6 (14)	21.8 (17)
Driving under the influence of alcohol (and associated accidents)	31.3 (5)	17.7 (11)	20.5 (16)
Underage drinking	6.3 (1)	17.7 (11)	15.4 (12)
Stealing (includes stealing/killing of poultry)	6.3 (1)	12.9 (8)	11.5 (9)
Trespassing	6.3 (1)	9.7 (6)	9.0 (7)
Public drinking in a group	-	6.5 (4)	5.1 (4)
Damaging/destroying property	6.3 (1)	3.2 (2)	3.8% (3)
Disturbing the peace of the family (in general, including arguments)	62.5 (10)	17.7 (11)	26.9 (21)
Domestic violence	50.0 (8)	6.5 (4)	15.4 (12)
Child abuse	6.3 (1)	1.3 (1)	2.6 (2)
Various offences (unspecified category)	6.3 (1)	16.1 (10)	14.1 (11)

Note. Participants reported multiple crime problems and therefore figures do not total 100.

^aOne community member's response to this question was unclear and excluded from the sample.