

**A STUDY OF CRIME, DISORDER, AND SOCIAL CONTROL IN RURAL AND  
REMOTE COMMUNITIES**

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## **ABSTRACT**

There is a tendency to think of rural and remote communities as idyllic settings secured by a strong sense of social cohesion, a low incidence of social and physical disorders, and resilient social ties between community members. This idyll myth around life outside urban areas resulted in a lack of interest among researchers and limited knowledge about people's experiences of living in rural and remote communities, notably related to crime, disorder, and social control. Furthermore, for the few studies which do look at non-urban communities, the conceptual approaches used to define rurality and remoteness are generally insufficient to account for the diversity of characteristics constituting rural and remote spaces.

Against this backdrop, this thesis seeks to explore and understand the experiences of people living in rural and remote communities more thoroughly. Focusing on key criminology and criminal justice issues, it examines whether and how crime, disorder, and social control may be experienced differently across urban, rural, and remote areas. It does so by proposing a more suitable conceptual framework for thinking about rurality and remoteness. Specifically, it argues that relative geographical isolation is a defining feature that underpins an urban-rural-remote continuum. This continuum intersects with human activities in a way that constrains and enables differently social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder, and social control.

Substantively, this thesis looks at three specific topics: behavioural health-related police encounters, public satisfaction with the police, and perception of crime and safety. It examines how these social outcomes vary across urban, rural, and remote communities. The results of each of these studies contribute to the topic it examined, thus extending our knowledge regarding life outside urban areas. However, overarching this thesis is two additional contributions. First, this thesis provides more evidence to dispute the enduring myth that rural and remote communities are

purely idyllic localities. Second, it proposes a framework capable of a more precise comparison of urban, rural, and remote communities compared to conventional approaches.

Ultimately, this thesis aims to show that we cannot rely solely on evidence from studies conducted in urban settings if we want to understand the dynamics of our societies fully. If we are genuinely interested in comprehensively understanding social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder, and social control, we must pay attention to life outside urban areas. What is more, the evidence in this thesis suggests that some of the issues of interest to urban scholars may be even more salient outside urban areas. Accordingly, rural and remote communities should be studied in their own rights and not merely as a peripheral matter.

## **RÉSUMÉ**

Nous avons tendance à considérer les communautés rurales et éloignées comme des endroits idylliques avec un fort sentiment de cohésion sociale, une faible incidence de troubles sociaux et physiques, et des liens sociaux résilients entre les membres de la communauté. Ce mythe autour de la vie en dehors des zones urbaines a entraîné un manque d'intérêt chez les chercheurs et une connaissance limitée des expériences de vie des gens dans les communautés rurales et éloignées, notamment en ce qui concerne la criminalité, les désordres et le contrôle social. De plus, dans les quelques études qui portent sur les communautés non urbaines, les approches conceptuelles utilisées pour définir la ruralité et l'éloignement sont généralement insuffisantes pour rendre compte de la diversité des caractéristiques constituant les espaces ruraux et éloignés.

Dans ce contexte, cette thèse cherche à explorer et à comprendre plus en profondeur les expériences des personnes vivant dans des communautés rurales et éloignées. En se concentrant sur ces enjeux critiques à l'étude de la criminologie et de la justice pénale, elle examine si et comment le crime, les désordres et le contrôle social peuvent être vécus différemment dans les zones urbaines, rurales et éloignées. Elle le fait en proposant un cadre conceptuel plus adapté aux réflexions sur la ruralité et l'éloignement. Plus précisément, elle soutient que l'isolement géographique relatif est une caractéristique déterminante qui sous-tend un continuum urbain-rural-éloigné. Ce continuum interagit avec les activités humaines d'une manière qui contraint et permet différemment les phénomènes sociaux et les processus liés aux crimes, aux désordres et au contrôle social.

Fondamentalement, cette thèse examine trois sujets spécifiques : les interactions avec la police pour des raisons de santé comportementale, la satisfaction du public à l'égard de la police ainsi que les perceptions vis-à-vis la criminalité et la sécurité. Elle examine comment ces résultats

varient entre les collectivités urbaines, rurales et éloignées. Les résultats de chacune de ces études contribuent au sujet qu'elles ont examiné, élargissant ainsi nos connaissances sur la vie hors des zones urbaines. Cependant, à travers cette thèse, on retrouve deux contributions supplémentaires. Premièrement, cette thèse fournit plus de preuves pour contester le mythe persistant selon lequel les communautés rurales et éloignées sont des localités purement idylliques. Deuxièmement, elle propose un cadre permettant une comparaison plus précise des communautés urbaines, rurales et éloignées par rapport aux approches conventionnelles.

En somme, cette thèse vise à montrer que l'on ne peut pas se fier uniquement aux connaissances issues d'études menées en milieu urbain si l'on veut comprendre pleinement les dynamiques de nos sociétés. Si nous sommes véritablement intéressés par une compréhension globale des phénomènes sociaux et des processus liés à la criminalité, aux désordres et au contrôle social, nous devons prêter attention à la vie en dehors des zones urbaines. De plus, les résultats de cette thèse suggèrent que certaines des questions d'intérêt pour les chercheurs urbains peuvent être encore plus pertinentes en dehors des zones urbaines. Par conséquent, les collectivités rurales et éloignées devraient être étudiées à parts égales et non simplement comme une question périphérique.



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## **DEDICATION**

To my son, Théodore, born just in time to give me the final encouragement and motivation needed to finish this thesis.

## **FOREWORD**

This thesis is the sole work of the author, Jean-Denis David, including the substantive chapters, all published as individual articles in peer-reviewed journals. This thesis was funded by a Doctoral Fellowship from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada. The data were assessed at the Carleton, Ottawa, Outaouais Research Data Centre (COOL-RDC), part of the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN). This service is provided through the support of the University of Ottawa, the Université du Québec en Outaouais, the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Science and Humanity Research Council, and Statistics Canada. Nevertheless, all views expressed in this work are those of the author.

## **INTRODUCTION**

### **1. Context: Demystifying Rurality**

It is common when browsing through public and academic descriptions of rural areas to come across narratives suggesting idyllic localities, where social ties between community members are strong, where social values and moral structures are resilient, and where the quality of life is remarkable (Baylina and Berg 2010, Bunce 1994, Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014, Haigron 2017, Ruddell 2022, Short 2006). While there is no doubt that life outside urban areas has much to offer, these conceptions of rurality perhaps reflect a desire and aspiration more than reality. In an era of urbanization, industrialization, and modernization, scholars argue that rural spaces have been constructed in our collective imagination as sanctuaries, as places of stillness and purity, as destinations for escapism from the chaos of contemporary life (Baylina and Berg 2010, Bell 2006, Bunce 1994, DuPuis 2006, Hall 2020). However, these depictions fail to consider the numerous challenges rural communities face. These problems include, among others, an ageing population, housing shortages, unmet healthcare needs, disappearing labour and employment opportunities, food and resource scarcity, and the disproportionate impact of climate change (Canadian Rural Revitalization Foundation 2015, Glasgow and Brown 2012, Hardin-Fanning and Rayens 2015, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2004, Kipp, Cunsolo, Vodden et al. 2019, Nyström 2021, Scelza 2012, Sibley and Weiner 2011).<sup>1</sup>

In Canada and other western countries similarly, these challenges are rendered even more deleterious in the context of rural Indigenous communities as they additionally face the ongoing legacy of settler colonialism, which includes overt and systemic racism, land displacement,

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<sup>1</sup> Not all rural communities face the same challenges or face these challenges to same extent. However, these latter are common among non-urban areas.

socioeconomic marginalization and intergenerational trauma (Monchalin 2016, Palmater 2014, Rudin 2006, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015).<sup>2</sup> A striking example of this deleterious legacy is the fact that several Indigenous communities in rural and remote Canada still lack access to clean and safe drinking water (Bradford, Bharadwaj, Okpalauwaekwe et al. 2016).

The perpetuation of the idyll myth surrounding rural spaces has done a great disservice to communities in non-urban areas, if only from the lack of interest among researchers and the resulting dearth of knowledge as to the experiences of people living in these areas. Undoubtedly, urban communities are prolific settings for research given the wide range of social and political dynamics animating the constitution of cities, including neighbourhood disadvantage, racial segregation, residential instability, disorders, collective efficacy, social networks, and immigration (Brunton-Smith and Sturgis 2011, Hipp 2007, Hipp 2010, Lyons, Vélez and Santoro 2013, Papachristos and Bastomski 2018, Quillian and Pager 2001, Sampson, Raudenbush and Earls 1997, Sampson 2012, Shaw and McKay 1969, Thrasher 1936, Zimmerman and Messner 2010). However, this focus also resulted in a whole segment of society being almost entirely overlooked.

While the absence of robust knowledge on the experiences of people living outside urban areas impacts most of the social sciences, rurality has been a particularly understudied and undervalued research area within the fields of criminology and criminal justice (Donnermeyer, Jobes and Barclay 2006, Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014, Hogg and Carrington 1999). Although researchers have increasingly recognized the importance of spatial contexts for understanding social processes and phenomena related to crime, disorder and social control, this body of research has primarily focused on the influence of varying urban spaces on these outcomes,

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<sup>2</sup> While the Indigenous population in Canada is urbanizing quickly, there remains a strong connection between Indigeneity and rurality (Goldmann 2012, Statistics Canada 2017a). In 2016, almost four out of every ten Indigenous person (38.9%) lived in a rural area (Statistics Canada 2017b).

specifically neighbourhoods (e.g., Brunton-Smith and Sturgis 2011, Hipp 2007, Krivo, Peterson and Kuhl 2009, Papachristos and Bastomski 2018, Quillian and Pager 2001, Sampson and Bartusch 1998, Sampson 2003, Sampson 2012, Stewart, Baumer, Brunson et al. 2009). Nevertheless, evidence suggests that we should pay more attention to the occurrence and proceeding of these social phenomena and processes in non-urban areas.

Indeed, police-reported crime statistics suggest that although more crimes are recorded in urban areas, crime rates – especially violent crime rates – are commonly higher in rural areas. For instance, in Canadian provinces, the crime rate was 23% higher in rural areas than in urban areas in 2017. This difference was driven mainly by incidents of physical assault, mischief and disturbing the peace (Perreault 2019b). That same year, while accounting for less than 7% of all young women aged 24 years old or less in Canada, those living in the northern part of the country experienced 17% of all violent crimes experienced by that group. This includes physical assault, sexual assault, criminal harassment, and deprivation of freedom-related offences, of which a large part was committed by an intimate partner (Rotenberg 2019). Finally, in 2021, the rate of homicide was 1.3 times higher in rural areas (David and Jaffray 2022).

Furthermore, despite the extant literature being somewhat sparse, evidence suggests that the role of law enforcement in rural communities is significantly different compared to urban areas (Ruddell 2022). For instance, the police are often one of the few public services available in non-urban areas (Brine 2015, Donnermeyer, DeKeseredy and Dragiewicz 2016, Rantatalo, Lindberg and Hällgren 2020, Schissel 1992, Yang, Gill, Kanewske et al. 2018). As a result, they are often tasked with performing duties not generally executed by their urban counterparts, such as providing health and social services, managing permits and licenses, and administering driving license tests (Huey and Ricciardelli 2015, Maguire, Faulkner, Mathers et al. 1991, Payne, Berg

and Sun 2005, Wood and Trostle 1997). Other studies suggest that police officers in rural communities often benefit from more informal relationships with community members, thus fostering greater collaboration and cooperation (Falcone, Wells and Weisheit 2002, Frank and Liederbach 2003, Holmes, Painter and Smith 2017, Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Payne et al. 2005). However, they often lack the resources to appropriately respond to calls for services (Ceccato 2016, Donnermeyer et al. 2016, Huey and Ricciardelli 2017, Schissel 1992).

Another shortcoming of the extant literature has been its conceptualization of rurality. Among the few studies that pay attention to rural communities, these latter are often viewed as monolithic, with a clear line drawn between urban and rural based on the size of the population and ignoring the diverse array of community characteristics found within rural spaces.

"[W]e know that not all cities are alike and the same can be said about rural places. Yet, the myth of rural homogeneity is a long-held assumption that continues to hinder the development of rural crime research. It presumed that heterogeneity was a trait intrinsic to the urban milieu, that homogeneity was a trait characteristic of people and group within specific rural communities, and that all or almost all rural communities were similar" (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014:7)

For instance, some communities are close enough to cities to enable daily commutes, while others are only accessible by plane; some communities benefit from access to local health and social services, while others require travelling to the nearest population centre, hundreds of kilometres away; some communities have a local industry that offers jobs, while others saw their livelihood disappearing (Alasia, Bédard, Bélanger et al. 2017, Chan, Hart and Goodman 2006, Sherman 2009, Sibley and Weiner 2011). Accordingly, it remains largely unclear how the heterogeneity of rural communities influences the course and manifestation of fundamental social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder, and social control.

In sum, the almost singular focus of the extant literature on urban areas led us to overlook the evidence suggesting that beyond the limits of cities lay a whole host of unique and dynamic

realities which could enrich our understanding of critical social phenomena and processes both in general and specific to criminology and criminal justice. Blinded by an idealized conception of rurality, the body of knowledge on people's experiences outside urban areas continues to be very limited. However, until the scope of research interests is broadened beyond urbanism, our knowledge is bound to be limited by a narrow understanding of critical social phenomena, despite claims of exhaustivity and generalizability.

## **2. Conceptualizing Rurality (and Remoteness)**

The first hurdle in studying life outside urban areas lies in conceptualizing and defining rurality. A common way is to classify communities based on the size of their populations. However, as mentioned, this categorization offers a limited perspective on the makeup of rural spaces (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014). Alternatively, scholars have relied on classification schemes which emphasize differences around various qualities that purportedly define rurality, such as the type of social relationships between inhabitants and the underlying social structures of these societies (Dasgupta 2001, Lobao 1996). For instance, Becker (1949) distinguished between "sacred" (i.e. rural) and "secular" (i.e. urban) societies, whereas the first is characterized by the valuing of traditions and rituals and the second is characterized by the valuing of progress and innovation.<sup>3</sup> Others focus instead on differences in the type of economic activities occurring within communities, such as the agricultural and extractive sectors in rural areas and the manufacturing and service-providing sectors in urban areas (Lobao 1996). Nevertheless, these efforts at conceptualizing rurality often overstate the demarcation that exists between urban and non-urban communities by attempting to fit them squarely within ideal types. Furthermore, these approaches

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<sup>3</sup> As mentioned by Dasgupta (2001) several of these earlier approaches do not use the terms "urban" and "rural." However, "they all attempted, at least by implication, to articulate the foundation of pre-urban and urban social orders in contrasting terms" (p. 8).

continue to reduce the complexity and diversity of rural space to a limited number of characteristics.

Developing a perfect definition of rurality that can account for the heterogeneity of rural spaces entirely is perhaps unrealistic, and thus, conceptualizations are bound to be purpose-dependent (Hart and Casey 2012). Nevertheless, it is possible to devise a conceptualization that views rurality as more than a set of restrictively defined categories. To do so, we must first consider the connection between spatiality and social life.

At the basis of this conceptualization approach is the notion that human activities are inevitably situated in space, unable to be disconnected from where they occur (Gans 2002, Giddens 1984, Lefebvre 1991, Löw 2016, Soja 1985). This condition becomes evident when we consider how human activities transform natural spaces (i.e. ensembles of physical and material proprieties) into what several scholars differentially refer to as social spaces, places, environments, or settings. This transformation happens when people begin to use a space, attribute meaning and value to a space, delimit a space through borders and boundaries, and work in and with a space (Gans 2002). Social spaces “are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly; new or old; accessible or not” (Gieryn 2000:472). It follows that social spaces are simultaneously ensembles of physical and material proprieties geographically situated and social objects influencing and influenced by human activities (Gans 2002, Gieryn 2000, Löw 2016). To use a space is to “provide the settings within which interaction occurs. [Space] is not to be described merely in terms of its physical properties but how it is used for human activities, how it provides for the contextuality of social life” (Urry 1991:164).



An example of these principles can be found in the literature on crime and place, where studies show how inequalities are differentially distributed across city neighbourhoods and how the resulting distinct contexts of these neighbourhoods are associated with the occurrence of crime, violence, and disorder (Anderson 1999, Blau and Blau 1982, Hipp 2007, Morenoff, Sampson and Raudenbush 2001, Sampson and Wilson 1995). Explanations for this spatial distribution of inequalities are varied. However, recurring explanations include the ongoing legacy of historical residential segregation based on factors such as race and social class, the economic organization of cities, the inequitable distribution of resources across neighbourhoods, the enduring hierarchies of neighbourhood preferences among citizens, and gentrification (Brown-Saracino 2017, Hwang and McDaniel 2022, Massey and Denton 1998, Wilson 1987). In this example, the physical locations of neighbourhoods and their relative positions to one another (i.e. physical and material dimensions) serve as the basis for understanding these social phenomena and how the usage of these spaces generates the conditions for inequalities, crime, violence, and disorder (social dimensions).

Given these facts, we propose that a conceptualization of rurality should be based on the relative geographical isolation of communities. From the perspective of physical and material dimensions, this conceptualization implies that rural communities exist as counterparts to urban communities based on a relationship of location and distance. The relative geographical isolation resulting from this relationship underpins varying degrees of rurality and remoteness. In other words, communities exist on an urban-rural-remote continuum (Bourke, Humphreys, Wakerman et al. 2012, Lobao 1996, Wakerman 2004). We introduce in this conceptualization the notion of remote communities to represent the reality of some people living in areas characterized by extreme geographical isolation, where life is likely very different from typical urban and rural

areas. For instance, we can think of the northern parts of Canada's territories (i.e. Yukon, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut), where some communities are only accessible by plane or boats, and the nearest population centres are several hundreds of kilometres away.

This conceptualization simultaneously denotes the social dimensions emerging from how these spaces are used and how people deal with their physical and material properties. For instance, the number of people who reside in a given community or the uneven distribution, availability, and accessibility of services across communities implies different ways of using these social spaces. Indeed, we know that rural and remote communities tend to have smaller populations and fewer available services than urban areas (Alasia et al. 2017), a situation emerging as both the condition and outcome of the isolation: it “captures the trade-off between access to resource-rich, high population-density areas and the cost of travel to those areas; or alternatively, it captures the likelihood that resources will be placed in a given area as a result of the number of people who could and would reasonably access it” (Doogan, Roberts, Wewers et al. 2018:130). In short, we argue that the relative geographical isolation underpinning the urban-rural-remote continuum intersects with human activities, leading to distinctive realities for those residing in these areas.

In sum, this conceptualization provides a more nuanced approach to examining rural and remote communities compared to the common classification methods. It better represents the diversity and complexities of communities outside urban areas by considering rural and remote communities not as ideal types but as points on a continuum which underlies several social dimensions. For instance, a study proposing a newly developed index of rurality and remoteness using relative geographical isolation as its basis found strong correlations between the relative geographical isolation of communities and various measures of accessibility, including access to overall health services, ambulatory services, hospitals, nursing and residential care, and social

assistance. In other words, as the remoteness of communities increases, the accessibility of those services decreases (Alasia et al. 2017). These findings suggest that mobilizing relative geographical isolation as the defining feature of rurality and remoteness results at the same time in denoting how the realities of living in rural and remote are different compared to urban areas and how variations in remoteness changes those experiences. This inference is explored more thoroughly in this thesis.

### **3. Research Objectives and Thesis Structure**

Given a limited extant literature, this thesis seeks to more thoroughly explore and understand the experiences of people living in rural and remote communities. Focusing on key criminology and criminal justice issues, it examines whether and how crime, disorder, and social control may be experienced differently across urban, rural, and remote areas.

This exercise serves two objectives. First, it aims to extend our knowledge regarding life outside urban areas. Second, by comparing urban, rural, and remote communities, it aims to show further that we cannot rely solely on evidence from studies conducted in cities if we wish to fully understand the dynamics of our societies. We argue that the relative geographical isolation underpinning the urban-rural-remote continuum intersects with human activities in a way that constrains and enables differently social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder, and social control. Accordingly, rural and remote communities should be studied in their own rights and not merely as a peripheral matter.

The thesis comprises three standalone articles connected by their contribution to answering the research objectives above. Each of these articles contributes new insights to improve our understanding of the experiences of people living in rural and remote communities, but it also

contrasts and compares them to their occurrence in urban areas. The thesis concludes by synthesizing the findings from these three articles through a final discussion.

The first article, *"Police Encounters for Behavioral Health-Related Reasons in Rural and Remote Communities: A Canadian Study,"* published in *Rural Sociology*, examines variations in self-reported encounters with the police for behavioural health-related reasons across urban, rural, and remote communities. Given an exacerbated lack of resources and the police's extended role in rural and remote communities, it examines the possibility that the probability of encountering the police for behavioural health-related reasons is greater in these communities compared to urban communities.

The second article *"Satisfaction envers la police dans les communautés rurales et éloignées,"* was published in the journal *Criminologie*. This article looks at variations in citizen satisfaction with the police. It argues that the variations in communities' geographical isolation constraints and enables differently police practices across the urban-rural-remote continuum resulting in community members perceiving the police and their work differently.

The third article, *"Rethinking Perceptions of Crime and Safety in Rural and Remote Communities,"* published in the *British Journal of Criminology*, examines variations in people's perceptions of crime and safety across urban, rural, and remote communities. It proposes that the relative geographical isolation of communities interacts with social life in a way that differently impacts perceptions of crime and safety.

### **Published Article - Reference:**

David, J.-D. (2023). Police Encounters for Behavioral Health-Related Reasons in Rural and Remote Communities: A Canadian Study. *Rural Sociology*, Online First: <https://doi.org/10.1111/ruso.12471>

### **PAPER 1:**

## **POLICE ENCOUNTERS FOR BEHAVIORAL HEALTH-RELATED REASONS IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES: A CANADIAN STUDY<sup>1</sup>**

Evidence suggests police officers are increasingly called upon to respond to incidents related to mental health issues, emotional problems, and substance abuse. Many have raised concerns regarding their involvement in such incidents. Yet, little is known about these encounters in rural and remote communities despite evidence suggesting that the context of non-urban areas should matter. Accordingly, this article proposes to examine variations in self-reported encounters with the police for behavioural health-related reasons across urban, rural, and remote communities. Using data from the 2014 General Social Survey, a representative sample of the Canadian population, we assess these self-reported encounters from two different angles: encounters for one's own behavioural health crisis and encounters for a family member's behavioural health needs. While findings on the former are inconclusive, those examining police contacts for a family member suggest that living in rural or remote communities is significantly associated with a greater probability of experiencing such situations relative to living in urban areas. Furthermore, this probability increases with the relative geographical isolation of communities. These results are discussed in light of the rising concerns regarding our reliance on the police for such incidents and the need to account for the situation of rural and remote communities.

### **1. Introduction**

Scholars and mental health advocates have raised concerns about the increased reliance on law enforcement to respond to mental health crises and concomitant issues such as substance abuse (Canadian Mental Health Association 2020, Cardinal and Laberge 1999, Franz and Borum 2011, Herbert, Beckett and Stuart 2018, Saunders and Marchik 2007). Studies highlight frequent encounters between the police and individuals suffering from these behavioral health-related issues for events both criminal and non-criminal in nature (Brink, Livingston, Desmarais et al. 2011,

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Charette, Crocker and Billette 2011, Coleman and Cotton 2010). Most attribute this situation to the de-institutionalization of mental health and persistent budgetary constraints that prevent adequate access to health and social services (Blais, Roy, Boivin et al. 2019, Cardinal and Laberge 1999, Engel 2015). As a result, the police are often the only resource available to intervene during these crisis incidents (Alpert 2015, Cardinal and Laberge 1999, Herrington and Pope 2014). However, this recourse to law enforcement is not without its concerns. Some stress the inadequacy of police training to appropriately respond to such incidents (Hails and Borum 2003, Herrington and Pope 2014). Others argue that police involvement only serves to widen the net of the criminal justice system to include issues better addressed by health and social services (Herbert et al. 2018, Herrington and Pope 2014). There are also concerns that the nature of these encounters heightens the risk for police use-of-force incidents (Johnson 2011, Morabito and Socia 2015, Ontario Human Rights Commission 2014).

While the extant literature is growing and our understanding of this crucial issue is becoming increasingly richer, it is notable that we find in this body of research few studies on behavioral health-related police encounters outside urban areas (Brine 2015, Yang et al. 2018). Undoubtedly, urban communities are prolific settings for understanding this complex matter. Increasingly, studies have highlighted the importance of environmental factors on the occurrence of behavioral health-related police interventions focusing on the distinctive spatial distribution of call-for-service across the urban landscape (Vaughan, Hewitt, Andersen et al. 2015, Vaughan, Ly, Andresen et al. 2018, White and Goldberg 2018, White, Goldberg, Hibdon et al. 2019). However, evidence suggests that the context of rural and remote communities could also play a crucial role in the occurrence of these encounters (Brine 2015, Durbin, Lin and Zaslavsky 2010, Lockwood, Lizarraga, Kochanowski et al. 2021, Yang et al. 2018).

First, the lack of accessible social services and mental health professionals said to underlie this phenomenon is likely much more prevalent in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. In fact, this lack of accessibility is not limited to behavioral health-related services. For instance, such urban/rural differences in access to resources also affect general healthcare facilities (e.g., hospital and clinics), economic infrastructures, housing, and food accessibility (Belanger and Stone 2008, Chan et al. 2006, Duncan 1996, Hardin-Fanning and Rayens 2015, McCann, Ryan and McKenna 2005, Sibley and Weiner 2011). Second, despite rural and remote police services also facing resource shortages, they often remain one of the few public services available in communities (Brine 2015, Donnermeyer et al. 2016, Rantatalo et al. 2020, Schissel 1992, Yang et al. 2018). As a result, police officers in rural and remote communities are often tasked with performing duties not generally executed by their urban counterparts (Adorjan, Ricciardelli and Spencer 2017, Decker 1979, Huey and Ricciardelli 2015, Lockwood et al. 2021, Maguire et al. 1991, Payne et al. 2005). Against this backdrop, it is conceivable that police officers in rural and remote communities play a more significant role in responding to behavioral health incidents than their urban counterparts. However, the extant literature has yet to compare the occurrence of these encounters between urban, rural, and remote communities.

Accordingly, this article proposes to examine variations in self-reported encounters with the police for behavioral health-related reasons across urban, rural, and remote communities. It does so by examining the likelihood of reporting such incidents based on where a person lives using data from the 2014 Canadian General Social Survey. This study is grounded in the structuration theory (Giddens 1984). This theory is useful because its principles allow us to conceive rurality as a continuum that simultaneously considers core properties of urban, rural, and remote areas and how they interact with police-community relations. Ultimately, given the

exacerbated lack of resources and the police's extended role in rural and remote communities, we hypothesize that the probability of encountering the police for behavioral health-related reasons is greater in these communities compared to urban communities.

This article makes contributions at two levels. First, it contributes to a better understanding of rural and remote policing, which remains an understudied area in criminology and criminal justice (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014). Second, it does so specifically in the context of behavioral health-related police encounters, a critical issue at the moment (Canadian Mental Health Association 2020, Ontario Human Rights Commission 2014), for which little is known from the perspective of rural and remote communities (Brine 2015, Yang et al. 2018). Ultimately, such an inquiry is essential, given the raised concerns regarding the police's involvement in such incidents, including their limited training, the potential for the undue criminalization of mental health, and a heightened risk for police use-of-force incidents.

Before presenting the results, we first provide an overview of the distinctive characteristics of rural and remote policing and how it intersects with behavioral health-related incidents. Next, we outline the theory of structuration leading to a conceptualization of rurality. Finally, we provide a detailed account of our research questions and hypotheses in light of the literature and our theoretical framework.

## **2. Rural and Remote Policing and Behavioural Health**

A recurring theme in the policing literature is the necessity for rural and remote police officers to take on roles not traditionally assigned to law enforcement, including those held by other service providers such as social workers, counselors, psychotherapists, by-law officers, and the like (Adorjan et al. 2017, Decker 1979, Huey and Ricciardelli 2015, Maguire et al. 1991, Payne et al. 2005, Wood and Trostle 1997). For instance, police are called upon to settle neighbor and



family disputes, assist in dealing with wildlife, and respond to other complaints unrelated to law enforcement, including assist in providing health and social services, deal with intoxicated people and noise complaints, help with lost and found objects, manage permits and licenses for firearms, lottery and liquor, and administer driving license tests (Huey and Ricciardelli 2015, Maguire et al. 1991, Payne et al. 2005, Wood and Trostle 1997). While some of these tasks may be undertaken by urban officers, perhaps in smaller municipalities, it more strongly characterizes rural and remote policing. In fact, rural and remote police officers spend a significant portion of their time responding to such calls, often exceeding the time spent performing their formal roles and duties as law enforcement (Huey and Ricciardelli 2015, Payne et al. 2005).

We may explain this situation by a lack of appropriate access to resources, infrastructures, and services in most rural and remote communities (Bachrach 1983, Belanger and Stone 2008, McCann et al. 2005, O’Kane and Tsey 2004, Ryan-Nicholls and Haggarty 2007). In fact, the police are often the *only* public service available in non-urban communities (Decker 1979, Wood and Trostle 1997). These demands placed on law enforcement in rural communities are compounded by a relatively significant number of social and health-related problems in these areas, including substantial socioeconomic inequalities, housing shortages and overcrowding, social and physical disorder, and a severe incidence of mental illness and substance abuse (Donnermeyer et al. 2016, Gomez and Pruitt 2016, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2004, Lambert, Gale and Hartley 2008, Wood 2011).

The intersection of these complex social realities provides a context for behavioral health-related police encounters to be experienced differently in rural and remote communities relative to urban settings. For instance, evidence suggests that increased distance from health services result in decreasing use of these services by people, which may result in a greater incidence of unmet

behavioral health needs in rural and remote areas (Brine 2015, Chan et al. 2006, Sibley and Weiner 2011, Wong and Regan 2009). In that regard, a study by Yang et al. (2018) suggests that the police ultimately become the only available resource to help people experiencing a behavioral health crisis. Moreover, the inaccessibility of these health services leaves few options to police officers when responding to such incidents other than custody (Morabito 2007, Yang et al. 2018). Of course, these challenges are not unique to rural and remote areas. There continues to be a lack of appropriate services in urban areas, and urban police officers still often have to resort to custody when responding to these incidents. However, the above literature suggests that these challenges appear to be exacerbated in rural and remote communities.

Other studies also indicate police officers outside of urban areas often benefit from more informal relationships with community members, thus fostering greater collaboration and cooperation (Falcone et al. 2002, Frank and Liederbach 2003, Holmes et al. 2017, Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Payne et al. 2005). For instance, familiarity with officers often means that people contact them directly without going through the formal complaint channels (Payne et al. 2005). However, this familiarity may not hold true in the most remote communities where limited duration postings result in a lack of profound and long-lasting relationship between police officers and communities (Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Ruddell, Lithopoulos and Jones 2014, Schissel 1992). Indeed, it is frequent for police officers to be assigned to remote communities for a limited time before returning to less isolated communities. These informal relationships with community members also provide a context for behavioral health-related police encounters to be potentially experienced differentially in rural and remote communities. Specifically, community members may perhaps feel more inclined to request police assistance in times of crisis.

### 3. Theoretical Background

Increasingly, researchers recognize the importance of space in social life. For instance, studies have examined the impact of various community characteristics on crime and health (e.g., Fagan, Wright and Pinchevsky 2014, Hipp 2007, Papachristos and Bastomski 2018, Sampson 2012). However, this body of research has primarily focused on the influence of varying urban spaces on these outcomes, namely neighborhoods. Accordingly, we chose to ground this study in a theory that envisions space more fundamentally, giving us the flexibility to conceptualize rurality while also conceptualizing the connection between spatiality and social practices. Specifically, we draw from Anthony Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration as a lens to make sense of rural and remote police officers' work in the context of behavioral health, which the literature suggest is significantly different from the work of urban police officers. The relevance of this theory for such an inquiry was established in other studies and theoretical accounts focusing on the impact of space on rurality and on health-related outcomes and practices (Bernard, Charafeddine, Frohlich et al. 2007, Bourke et al. 2012, Frohlich 2001).

The foundation of Giddens' (1984) theory of structuration is a refutation of the opposition between the ability of individuals to act freely (i.e., agency) and the constricting power of structures on individual actions, which typically divides social theories. Instead, the theory proposes a duality of structures. This scholar views structures as both the condition and the outcome of human activities (Giddens 1984, Lazar 1992). Specifically, the recursive nature of social practices produces and reproduces structures, which shape the daily activities of both individuals and collectivity. In this sense, structures are an organized set of rules and resources emerging from repeated social practices that are simultaneously tapped into by people in the

execution of their daily activities leading to the formation of social systems, a dynamic process that the author calls structuration (Giddens 1984).

Of particular interest to us is the centrality of the notion of spatiality in the theory of structuration. Giddens (1984) argues that human actions and social life cannot be disconnected from their location in space. Natural spaces –the ensemble of physical and material proprieties of given locations – play an essential role in social life. This is particularly true when they transform into what scholars have variously termed social spaces, places, environments, or settings. This transformation happens when people begin to use a space, attribute meaning and value to a space, delimit a space through borders and boundaries, and work in and with a space (Gans 2002). Social spaces “are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly; new or old; accessible or not” (Gieryn 2000:472). It follows that social spaces are simultaneously an ensemble of materials geographically located and social objects influencing human activities (Gieryn 2000). Accordingly, Giddens (1984) refers to these social spaces as locales: “[It] refers to the use of space to provide the settings within which interaction occurs. Locale is not to be described merely in terms of its physical properties but how it is used for human activities, how it provides for the contextuality of social life” (Urry 1991:164). In sum, how these spaces are used influences the production and reproduction of social practices, and therefore, the structuration of social systems (Giddens 1984).

Following the principles detailed above, we argue that relative geographical isolation is a defining feature of rural and remote communities. From the material properties perspective, this conceptualization implies that rural and remote communities are counterparts to urban communities through a relationship of location and distance with varying degrees of rurality and

remoteness (Bourke et al. 2012, Wakerman 2004). In sum, urban, rural, and remote communities exist on a continuum based on the degree of geographical isolation. However, this definition simultaneously denotes social dimensions emerging from how these spaces are used and how people deal with their material properties. For instance, the number of people who reside in a given community or the uneven distribution, availability, and accessibility of services across communities implies differential ways of using these social spaces. Indeed, we know that rural and remote communities tend to have smaller populations and less available services than urban areas, a condition and an outcome of the geographical isolation (Doogan et al. 2018). In short, we argue that the degree of geographical isolation underpinning the urban-rural-remote continuum intersects with human activities in a way that constrains and enables differently social practices and the structuration of social systems.

#### **4. Current Study**

As previously indicated, this article proposes to examine variations in self-reported encounters with the police for behavioral health-related reasons across urban, rural, and remote communities. Specifically, we explore two separate mechanisms that may lead to a call for police services during a behavioral health crisis. Each mechanism generates a unique research question as follows:

**Question 1.** Are contacts with the police for one's own behavioral health-related issues more likely in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas?

**Question 2.** Are contacts with the police for a family member's behavioral health-related issues more likely in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas?

While the first mechanism may be the more obvious way we tend to think of behavioral health-related police encounters, the second mechanism considers the vital role of family members during these incidents. First, studies suggest that relatives frequently initiate these police interventions in an effort to seek assistance and care for the individual experiencing a crisis. In fact, it appears that

it is one of the most common ways in which police are requested to provide assistance (Brink et al. 2011, Yang et al. 2018). Second, given that this study uses self-reported data, it is important to consider that people experiencing severe behavioral health-related problems are often under-represented in social surveys, given known sampling biases and the difficulty of accessing this population (Cheung, ten Klooster, Smit et al. 2017, Pierce, McManus, Jessop et al. 2020). As a result, self-reported behavioral health-related police encounters may be under-represented in the survey. Accordingly, including police encounters reported by family members may contribute to examining incidents that would otherwise be unaccounted for in self-reported data.

Our theoretical framework and the literature suggest that police practices are modified by the context of the rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. First, rural and remote police officers are often required to bridge the resource and service availability gap, including social and health services, a situation not experienced as acutely by their urban counterparts. Second, informal relationships between police officers and people living in rural and remote communities are more frequent compared to urban areas. As a result, residents feel more comfortable approaching the police to resolve issues, even when they are not related to law enforcement. The convergence of these unique realities leads us to hypothesize the following:

**Hypothesis:** the probability of encountering the police for behavioral health-related reasons is greater in rural and remote communities compared to urban communities.

We contend that this hypothesis can be applied to encounters both for one's own behavioral health-related issues and for a family member's behavioral health. It is important to note that not all rural and remote communities face the same level of constraint and challenges. Accordingly, we may envision these realities as a function of the previously defined urban-rural-remote continuum based on communities' relative geographic isolation.

The choice to mobilize citizens' self-reported incidents instead of police-reported calls-for-service records comes from methodological and operational considerations. Calls-for-service records have the advantage of including all behavioral health-related incidents responded to by police officers, and they contain crucial information on the context of the incident. However, it also has limits in the context of this study. Our conceptualization of the urban-rural-remote continuum implies that there are varying degrees of rurality and remoteness. Accordingly, it requires data capable of representing a large range of rural and remote communities. Currently, call-for-service data in Canada requires getting access to incident records directly from individual police services, making ensuring a representative sample of rural and remote areas across the country extremely challenging. Inversely, the self-reported data mobilized in this study comes from a representative survey of the Canadian population, including data from respondents residing in the country's most geographically isolated regions. Accordingly, we argue that it provides a more optimal avenue for examining our research questions, given that it emphasizes distinct contextual factors and challenges based on the level of geographical isolation of communities.

## **5. Methodology**

### ***5.1. Sample***

This study draws from the 2014 Canadian General Social Survey (GSS). This cross-sectional representative survey of the Canadian population gathers, among other things, information on people's experiences with the criminal justice system, criminal victimization, and their views regarding community safety and the criminal justice system. The sample includes 35,167 respondents aged 15 or older living in a private household. Respondents living in the ten provinces were interviewed by phone, while those living in the territories were interviewed by phone or in person. This approach yielded a response rate of about 50%.

The complex sampling design of the survey requires the data to be weighted. This is done using individual sampling weights provided by Statistics Canada, which account for respondents' unequal selection probability. Furthermore, multivariate models were adjusted using bootstrap replication weights also provided by Statistics Canada to yield inference appropriate variance. The data was accessed through Canadian Research Data Centre Network.

## ***5.2. Outcome Variables***

Respondents were asked about any contact they might have had with the police in the twelve months preceding the survey. Two questions regarding the context of these encounters are related to behavioral health. First, respondents were asked whether they had contact with the police for their own emotional, mental, and/or substance use problems (1=Yes; 0=No). Second, they were asked whether they had contact with the police for a family member's emotional, mental, and/or substance use problems (1=Yes; 0=No). Respondents were advised that the referent to the police excludes security guards, fire marshals, by-law officers, and others who have no authority to make arrests.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to separate mental health/emotional problem incidents and substance use problem incidents. However, substance abuse is a frequent corollary of mental illness (Volkow 2001). Accordingly, mental health and substance use are often intertwined in behavioral health-related police encounters (Borum, Swanson, Swartz et al. 1997, Cardinal and Laberge 1999, Coleman and Cotton 2010). Moreover, studies suggest that access to appropriate care and treatment for people experiencing comorbid mental health and substance use problems is often difficult (Coughlin, Pfeiffer, Ganoczy et al. 2021, Harris and Edlund 2005). This situation could potentially result in a higher probability of contacts with the police. Accordingly, despite



these elements not being able to be separated, it reflects an important reality of experiencing behavioural health problems that potentially impact these police encounters.

### **5.3. Predictor**

Our conceptualization of rurality and remoteness is anchored in communities' geographical isolation, leading to a definition accounting for both the material and social properties of rural and remote communities. To account for this underlying reality and the envisioned urban-rural-remote continuum, we are mobilizing the index of remoteness developed by Alasia et al. (2017) at Statistics Canada. This index measures the relative geographical isolation of communities based on its proximity to population centres found at a distance that would allow for regular access and the population size of those centres. This latter acts as an indicator of resource and service availability. Using census subdivisions as reference points, this continuous index measures the relative geographic isolation of communities on a scale ranging from 0 to 1: zero represents a densely populated area (i.e., the center core of a census metropolitan area), and one represents a highly isolated area (e.g., most northern parts of the territories). However, for greater ease in interpreting the estimated coefficient from the multivariate models, we rescaled the variable to range between 0 and 10. Accordingly, each unit increase represents a significant step in terms of geographical isolation. We used the version of the index derived from the Canadian census data applicable when the survey was conducted (i.e., 2011).

This index of remoteness provides an innovative way of operationalizing rurality and remoteness as a point on a continuum rather than using a dichotomous urban-rural indicator to account for the context of rural and remote communities, a strategy adopted by most prior research in the area. Such an approach allows us to identify nuances associated with varying degrees of geographical isolation. For example, Alasia et al. (2017) compared this new index to the standard

geographical tools used by Statistics Canada and found that it provides a more sensitive measure of rurality and remoteness while including the most critical dimensions of those standard tools (e.g., population size, metropolitan influenced zone (MIZ)). Moreover, the index has proven to be highly correlated with measures of accessibility (correlations above 0.7), including access to overall health services, ambulatory services, hospitals, nursing and residential care, and social assistance. In other words, as the remoteness of communities increases, the accessibility of services decreases. Accordingly, the authors argue that it “provides a reasonable approximation for the measurement of accessibility” (Alasia et al. 2017:28). This feature is especially relevant to our study, given the premise of our research hypothesis.

#### ***5.4. Covariates***

Our analysis adjusts for a wide range of sociodemographic covariates and risk factors associated with behavioral health-related police encounters. When contacts with the police are related to one's own behavioral health needs, these covariates inform us on the characteristics of the people more at risk to experience these encounters. For contacts with the police for a family member, sociodemographic indicators inform us of the characteristics of people who are more likely to interact with the police for such incidents. For example, this can include encounters because they requested assistance from the police or because the police approached them because their relative was subject to a police intervention.

Common to both angles are the following fundamental sociodemographic variables: the sex of respondents (1=Male; 0=Female); the age of respondents; the highest degree earned by respondents (1=High school diploma or more; 0=No high school diploma); and respondents' main employment status in the twelve months preceding the survey (1=Employed; 0=Unemployed). We also account for respondents' self-reported ethnic identity. Specifically, we include one variable

indicating that respondents self-identify as Indigenous (1 = Yes; 0 = No) and the other that respondents self-identify as black (1 = Yes; 0 = No).<sup>2</sup> While Indigenous and black people have their own unique history in Canada, as well as their own political and social context, both have a complex and difficult relationship with the police, which may impact their likelihood of encountering the latter (Monchalin 2016, Wortley and Owusu-Bempah 2011). Furthermore, Indigenous peoples represent a large segment of the population in rural and remote communities, often exceeding the non-Indigenous population (Ruddell and Jones 2020, Statistics Canada 2017a). Accordingly, it is necessary to account for the potential impact of being Indigenous or black on the outcome variables.

In models examining police encounters for one's own behavioral health crisis, we adjust for key risk factors, namely a respondents' relative behavioral health. This inclusion serves to account for the varying risks of encounters with the police associated with respondents' relative behavioral health. We include the following dimensions: respondents' self-rated mental health (1=Poor; 2=Fair; 3=Good; 4=Very good; 5=Excellent); the number of times in the past month that respondents' had five or more drinks on the same occasion (0 to 31); respondents' consumption of cannabis (1=Yes; 0=No); and respondents' consumption of other non-prescription drugs including magic mushrooms, cocaine, speed, methamphetamine, ecstasy, PCP, mescaline or heroin (1=Yes; 0=No). It should be noted that cannabis was still a criminalized substance in Canada at the time of the survey. Finally, we also account for the experience of homelessness (1=Yes;0=No), given that it has been identified as a risk factor for police encounters, including for behavioral health issues (Roy, Leclair, Côté et al. 2020).

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<sup>2</sup> Indigenous identity includes First Nations, Métis or Inuk (Inuit), and First Nations includes Status and Non-Status Indians. Respondents born outside of Canada were not asked the question about the Indigenous identity. They were coded as "non-indigenous."

In models assessing predictors of police encounters initiated by a family member, we include available contextual variables related to respondents' familial situation. They include their marital status (1 = Married/Common Law/Widowed; 2 = Divorced/Separated; 3 = Single, never married), whether they live in a multigenerational household (1 = Yes; 0 = No), the size of their household (i.e., number of people), and the number of relatives and friends to which they feel close to. Studies show how family members play a crucial role in the social support system of people experiencing behavioral health-related problems (Clark 2001, Maimon, Browning and Brooks-Gunn 2010, Perese and Wolf 2005). Accordingly, people's familial situation could have an impact on our dependent variable in two possible ways. First, people with large families or people with family members to whom they are close may be more likely to experience contacts with the police for a family member's behavioral health. For instance, it could be that they are more likely to be present to request assistance when the family member is experiencing a crisis or more likely to ask for police to conduct a welfare check. As mentioned, police interventions are frequently initiated by relatives to seek assistance and care for the individual experiencing a crisis (Brink et al. 2011, Yang et al. 2018). The other possibility is that people with large families or people with family members to whom they are close are less likely to experience contacts with the police for a family member's behavioral health because they are there to provide emotional support and assist in time of crises, thus reducing the likelihood of encounters with the police. Either way, it is likely that respondents' familial situation plays an important role in terms of contextualizing behavioural health-related police encounters. Accordingly, we need to adjust for this context.

**Table 1. Sample Statistics**

	Percent/Mean	S.D.	Weighted N <sup>a</sup>
<b>Outcomes</b>			
Police Encounter for a One's Own Behavioral Health	0.9%		29,448,024
Police Encounter for a Family Member's Behavioral Health	2.6%		29,437,577
<b>Predictor</b>			
Index of Remoteness	1.44	1.18	29,516,669
<b>Covariates</b>			
Sex (1 = Man)	49.4%		29,516,669
Age	45.97	18.69	29,516,669
Education Attainment	85.1%		29,037,518
Employment Status	57.4%		29,245,935
Married/Common Law/Widowed	65.9%		29,500,834
Divorced/Separated	6.5%		29,500,834
Single (Never Married)	27.6%		29,500,834
Indigenous	3.3%		29,427,830
Black	2.5%		28,960,122
Multigenerational Household	3.1%		29,516,669
Household Size	2.99	1.47	29,516,669
Number of close relatives/friends	12.63	1.47	28,902,067
Self-Reported Mental Health	4.05	0.94	29,147,313
Alcohol Consumption	0.80	2.32	28,956,554
Cannabis Use	6.9%		29,087,729
Other Non-Prescription Drugs Use	0.7%		29,100,077
Experienced Homelessness	1.7%		29,133,519

a. Descriptive statistics were produced using a *frequency weight* approach which multiplies each respondent by their assigned sampling weight.

### 5.5. Analytical Strategy

We proceeded with weighted logistic regression models regressing each of the two outcome variables on the index of remoteness while adjusting for the covariates identified above. This approach allows us to assess the probability of encountering the police at least once for behavioral health-related reasons based on where respondents live in terms of their communities' relative geographical isolation while accounting for other key characteristics.

**Table 1** shows that police encounters for behavioral health-related reasons are generally rare, whether that be personal encounters or for a family member. This observation is not surprising

given that encounters with the police are overall infrequent within the general public (Boyce, Rotenberg and Karam 2015). Nevertheless, there are potential problems in modeling rare events. There is a danger of underestimating the probability of events leading to biased estimations in small sample sizes. However, simulation studies suggest that this potential problem can be sufficiently minimized when using a larger sample (Bergtold, Yeager and Featherstone 2018, King and Zeng 2001). According to Bergtold, Yeager, and Featherstone (2018: 542), “[p]roblems with small sample bias occurred most often in models with sample sizes of less than 500 observations and most severely with models having less than 200 observations.” Our unweighted sample exceeds 30,000 respondents.

Various statistical methods have been developed to account for rare-event and small sample size biases (e.g., exact logistic regression; penalized maximum likelihood estimation or Firth Method). However, these approaches were not available in the context of this study which uses data from a complex survey design requiring the use of sampling weights and bootstrap replication weights. Nevertheless, we attempted to approximate the extent of possible bias by comparing the results of a standard logistic regression with those of a logistic regression with the Firth method using the unweighted data. The estimated parameters were almost identical except for marginal variations at the decimal level. While the results are not generalizable to the population, they suggest that the sample is large enough for issues associated with rare events to be appropriately alleviated.

The results are primarily reported using odd ratios, a ubiquitous and easily obtainable metric for assessing the association between predictors and dichotomous outcomes (Austin 2010, Muller and MacLehose 2014). One potential pitfall of this approach is that odds ratios often overestimate the relative risk of outcomes, and yet, they are often misunderstood as equivalent

(Muller and MacLehose 2014). However, when outcomes are relatively rare events, as in this study, odd ratios and relative risk measurements are approximatively equal; thus, their interpretation is akin (Austin 2010). When it comes to the main predictor (i.e., index of remoteness), the results are supplemented with the use of predicted probabilities to assess the relationship between encounters with the police for behavioral health-related reasons and where a person lives in terms of their communities' relative geographical isolation.

## 6. Results

### *6.1. Encounters with the Police for One's Own Behavioral Health*

**Table 2** presents the results of the weighted logistic regression models for encounters related to one's own behavioral health problems. The first model assesses the association between the identified covariates and the outcome variable, excluding the index of remoteness. The model is statistically significant (Wald  $X^2 = 20.84$ ; D.F. = 11;  $p < 0.05$ ). First, findings suggest that young men with lower socioeconomic status are considerably more likely to report having had at least one contact with the police for behavioral health-related reasons. Specifically, men are 55% more likely than women to report having experienced this type of police encounter ( $b = 0.44$ ; S.E. = 0.20;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\exp(0.44) = 1.55$ ). Furthermore, with every one standard deviation decrease in age, the likelihood of having a contact with the police increases by 82% ( $b = -0.60$ ; S.E. = 0.11;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $1/\exp(-0.60) = 1.82$ ). Finally, respondents with a high school diploma or more are less likely to report having had at least one contact with the police for behavioral health-related reasons compared to respondents without a high school diploma ( $b = -0.61$ ; S.E. = 0.26;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\exp(-0.61) = 0.54$ ).

**Table 2. Weighted Logistic Regression Models - Encounters with the Police for One's Own Behavioral Health**

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Estimated Parameters			Odd Ratios			Estimated Parameters			Odd Ratios		
	b	S.E.	Sig.	exp(b)	95% CI		b	S.E.	Sig.	exp(b)	95% CI	
<b>Covariates</b>												
Sex	0.44	0.20	*	1.55	1.04	2.29	0.44	0.20	*	1.55	1.05	2.30
Age <sup>a</sup>	-0.60	0.11	***	0.55	0.44	0.68	-0.60	0.11	***	0.55	0.44	0.68
Education Attainment	-0.61	0.26	*	0.54	0.33	0.90	-0.59	0.25	*	0.55	0.34	0.91
Employment Status	0.14	0.23		1.15	0.74	1.80	0.13	0.23		1.14	0.74	1.78
Indigenous	0.97	0.31	***	2.64	1.42	4.87	0.86	0.33	**	2.36	1.23	4.57
Black	-0.34	0.76		0.71	0.16	3.17	-0.28	0.76		0.76	0.17	3.38
Self-Reported Mental Health <sup>a</sup>	-0.42	0.09	***	0.66	0.55	0.78	-0.42	0.09	***	0.66	0.55	0.79
Alcohol Consumption <sup>a</sup>	0.02	0.06		1.02	0.90	1.16	0.02	0.06		1.02	0.90	1.16
Cannabis Use	0.87	0.32	*	2.39	1.28	4.46	0.87	0.32	**	2.39	1.27	4.44
Non-Prescription Drug Use	1.66	0.51	**	5.26	1.94	14.34	1.69	0.51	***	5.42	2.02	14.71
Experienced Homelessness	1.24	0.35	***	3.46	1.73	6.85	1.25	0.35	***	3.49	1.76	6.92
<b>Predictor</b>												
Index of Remoteness							0.08	0.06		1.08	0.96	1.21
<b>Intercept</b>												
	-5.38	0.26	***				-5.51	0.28	***			
Wald X <sup>2</sup> (D.F.)	20.84 (11)			***			19.55 (12)			***		

a Standardized variable.

\*p < 0.05; \*\*p < 0.01; \*\*\*p < 0.001



However, respondents' employment status did not reach statistical significance. When it comes to respondent self-reported identity, findings suggest that Indigenous peoples are considerably more likely to experience at least one contact with the police for behavioral health-related reasons ( $b = 0.97$ ;  $S.E. = 0.31$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). In fact, they are 2.6 times more likely to have experienced this type of police encounter compared to non-Indigenous respondents ( $\exp(0.97) = 2.64$ ). Results regarding black respondents were inconclusive, given that it did not reach statistical significance.

Second, when examining variables related to respondents' relative behavioral health and other risk factors, the results are consistent with expectations. For instance, with every one standard deviation decrease in respondents' self-reported mental health (i.e., lower relative mental health), the likelihood of at least one police encounters for behavioral health-related reasons increases by 52% ( $b = -0.42$ ;  $S.E. = 0.09$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $1/\exp(-0.42) = 1.52$ ). Similarly, the use of cannabis ( $b = 0.87$ ;  $S.E. = 0.32$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) and other non-prescription drugs ( $b = 1.66$ ;  $S.E. = 0.51$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ) is estimated to lead to a greater likelihood of experiencing such encounters ( $\exp(0.87) = 2.39$  and  $\exp(1.66) = 5.26$ , respectively). In the case of alcohol consumption, the results are inconclusive, given that the estimated coefficient does not reach statistical significance. Finally, as expected, having experienced homelessness is associated with a 3.5 times greater likelihood of experiencing at least personal encounters with the police for behavioral health-related reasons ( $b = 1.24$ ;  $S.E. = 0.35$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\exp(1.24) = 3.46$ ).

The second model adds the index of remoteness to the analysis. Overall, the model remains statistically significant (Wald  $X^2 = 19.55$ ;  $D.F. = 12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Adjusting for respondents' relative behavioral health, the sociodemographic characteristics of respondents and respondents' other risk factors, the results suggest that the association between the index of remoteness and the outcome variable does not reach statistical significance ( $b = 0.08$ ;  $S.E. = 0.06$ ;  $p > 0.05$ ). In other words, the

estimated coefficient involves too much uncertainty to be appropriately assessed, leading to inconclusive results.

Further analysis led to the conclusion of a confounding effect with respondents' Indigenous identity. First, results from a weighted bivariate Pearson product-moment correlation suggest a statistically significant and positive relationship between the index of remoteness and police encounters for one's own behavioral health ( $r = 0.018$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Next, removing the Indigenous identity variable from the weighted logistic regression model results in a statistically significant and positive association between the index of remoteness and the outcome variable. Potential explanations are discussed in the discussion section.

## ***6.2. Encounters with the Police for a Family Member's Behavioral Health***

**Table 3** presents the results of the weighted logistic regression models for encounters related to a family member's behavioral health problems. The first model assesses the association between the identified covariates and the outcome variable, excluding the index of remoteness. The model is statistically significant (Wald  $X^2 = 13.27$ ; D.F. = 11;  $p < 0.05$ ). First, we observe that women are more likely to have at least one contact with the police because of a family member's behavioral health ( $b = -0.41$ ; S.E. = 0.11;  $p < 0.05$ ). In fact, they are 51% more likely to experience such incidents compared to men ( $1/\exp(-0.41) = 1.51$ ). Next, findings suggest that employed respondents have a greater likelihood of having experienced such an encounter compared to unemployed people ( $b = 0.46$ ; S.E. = 0.13;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\exp(0.46) = 1.58$ ). The results also suggest that divorced and separated respondents are more likely to encounter the police for a family member's behavioral health compared to respondents either married, living in common law or widowed ( $b = 1.07$ ; S.E. = 0.18;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\exp(1.07) = 2.92$ ).

**Table 3. Weighted Logistic Regression Models - Encounters with the Police for a Family Member's Behavioral Health**

	Model 1						Model 2					
	Estimated Parameters			Odd Ratios			Estimated Parameters			Odd Ratios		
	b	S.E.	Sig.	exp(b)	95% CI		b	S.E.	Sig.	exp(b)	95% CI	
Sex	-0.41	0.11	***	0.66	0.54	0.81	-0.41	0.11	***	0.66	0.54	0.82
Age <sup>a</sup>	-0.02	0.08		0.98	0.84	1.14	-0.02	0.08		0.98	0.84	1.15
Education Attainment	-0.09	0.16		0.91	0.66	1.26	-0.04	0.17		0.96	0.69	1.33
Employment Status	0.46	0.13	***	1.58	1.22	2.04	0.46	0.13	***	1.58	1.22	2.04
Married/Common Law/Widowed	ref.	...		...	...	...	ref.	...		...	...	...
Divorced/Separated	1.07	0.18	***	2.92	2.07	4.15	1.09	0.18	***	2.97	2.09	4.25
Single (Never Married)	0.18	0.16		1.20	0.87	1.65	0.21	0.16		1.23	0.89	1.70
Indigenous	1.16	0.17	***	3.19	2.30	4.44	0.98	0.17	***	2.66	1.91	3.71
Black	0.24	0.44		1.27	0.54	2.97	0.33	0.43		1.39	0.59	3.26
Multigenerational Household	0.20	0.32		1.22	0.65	2.31	0.19	0.33		1.21	0.64	2.30
Household Size <sup>a</sup>	0.29	0.08	***	1.34	1.14	1.57	0.30	0.08	***	1.35	1.14	1.58
Number of Close Relatives/Friends <sup>a</sup>	-0.04	0.08		0.96	0.82	1.11	-0.06	0.08		0.94	0.81	1.10
<b>Predictor</b>												
Index of Remoteness							0.13	0.03	***	1.14	1.06	1.22
<b>Intercept</b>	-4.02	0.18	***				-4.27	0.20	***			
Wald X <sup>2</sup> (D.F.)	13.27 (11)			***			12.75 (12)			***		

a Standardized variable.

\*p &lt; 0.05; \*\*p &lt; 0.01; \*\*\*p &lt; 0.001

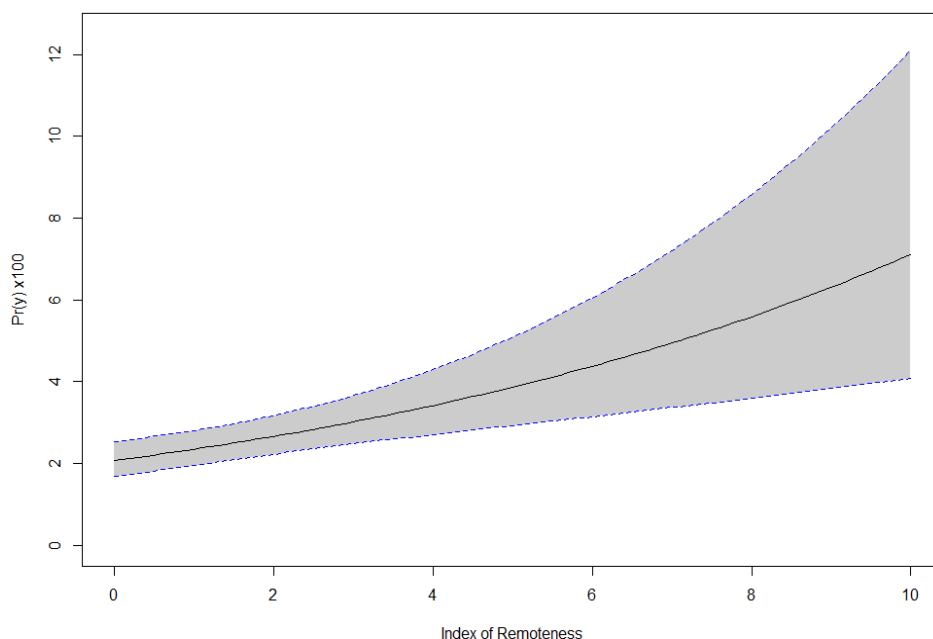
Again, we observe that Indigenous individuals are considerably more likely to experience such an encounter with the police compared non-Indigenous ( $b = 1.16$ ;  $S.E. = 0.17$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). In fact, they are 3.2 times more likely to have experienced at least one time this type of police encounter ( $\exp(1.16) = 3.19$ ). Finally, findings suggest that with every one standard deviation increase in household size, the likelihood of having at least one contact with the police for a family members' behavioral health increases by 34% ( $b = 0.29$ ;  $S.E. = 0.08$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ;  $\exp(0.29) = 1.34$ ). All other covariates included in the model did not reach statistical significance. Accordingly, their association with the outcome variable could not be assessed.

The second model adds the index of remoteness to the analysis. Overall, the model remains statistically significant (Wald  $X^2 = 12.75$ ;  $D.F. = 12$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). Adjusting for respondents' sociodemographic characteristics and their familial situation, the results suggest a positive association between the index of remoteness and the outcome variable ( $b = 0.13$ ;  $S.E. = 0.03$ ;  $p < 0.05$ ). In other words, with every unit increase on the index of remoteness which denote an increasing relative geographical isolation in respondents' communities, there is a 14% increase in the likelihood of having at least one contact with the police for a family member's behavioral health ( $\exp(0.13) = 1.14$ ).

**Figure 1** further illustrates this relationship in terms of predicted probabilities. For an average person living in a community situated at zero on the index of remoteness (i.e., densely populated urban center), the predicted probability of encountering the police for the behavioral health problems of a family member is 2.1%. Comparatively, for an average person living in a community situated at five on the index of remoteness (i.e., rural area), the predicted probability is 3.9%. Finally, a similar person living in a community situated at ten on the index of remoteness (i.e., highly remote area), the predicted probability is 7.1%. However, readers should beware of

the increasing uncertainty associated with the predicted probabilities when approaching the upper limit of the index of remoteness. This is due to fewer respondents living in those remote communities.

**Figure 1. Predicted Probabilities, Encounter with the Police for the Behavioural Health-Related Problems of a Family Member by the Index of Remoteness**



**Note:** Marginal effects based on the estimated coefficients of Model 2. The predicted probabilities were generated by keeping other variables fixed at their mean or modal value.

## 7. Discussion

This study sought to assess whether the police play a more significant role in responding to behavioral health incidents in rural and remote communities relative to urban areas. Through the lens of the theory of structuration, it argued that the pervasive lack of resources and the police's extended role in these communities lead to a greater likelihood of encountering the police for behavioral health-related reasons compared to urban communities. Our results provide evidence supporting this hypothesis. While findings pertaining to the contacts with the police for one's own behavioral health were inconclusive, they suggest that living in rural and remote communities is

significantly associated with a greater probability of experiencing at least one encounter with the police for a family member's behavioral health issues compared to urban areas. After adjusting for the covariates detailed above, the findings suggest that with every increase in the relative level of geographic isolation of people's communities, there is an increased probability of reporting such an encounter.

Further investigation in the inconclusive results for personal encounters suggests a confounding effect between respondents' Indigenous identity and where they live along the urban-rural-remote continuum. These results could be explained by the fact that Indigenous peoples represent a large segment of the population in several rural and remote communities in Canada, more so than in urban areas (Statistics Canada 2017a). Furthermore, evidence suggests that they experience a higher prevalence of mental illnesses, emotional problems, and substance abuse issues compared to non-indigenous individuals (Boyce et al. 2015, Kielland and Simeone 2014). This is generally explained by the ongoing impact of settler-colonial policies aimed at assimilating Indigenous peoples (Monchalin 2016). As a result, they were found to have a higher probability of encountering the police in various situations, including for behavioral health-related reasons (Boyce 2016). Accordingly, they may represent a significant portion of the people who have reported such encounters in rural and remote areas in the survey giving rise to irreconcilable uncertainty around the estimated model parameters for the index of remoteness's unique effect.

That being the case, the results from the angle of encounters for a family member are conclusive: living in a rural and remote community is associated with a greater probability of at least one contact with the police for the behavioral health of a relative. Accordingly, we conclude that, under certain conditions, the police are likely to play a greater role in responding to behavioral health incidents in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. While the estimated

coefficient and the associated predicted probability suggest that the magnitude of the effect size is modest, we need to put these results in the context of everyday interactions with the police. As mentioned, encounters with the police for any reason is a rare event within the general public. Accordingly, the fact that an average person living in a remote community has a 7.1% predicted probability of experiencing at least one such encounter compared to a 2.1% predicted probability for a similar person living in a densely populated area is considerable. Furthermore, if we consider that these types of contacts are generally associated with people experiencing crises, these reported probabilities are likely to be compounded when accounting for the relative behavioral health of people's family members. However, this information was not available within the survey.

The current study is not without limitations. First, the data is limited to interactions with the police that occurred in the twelve months preceding the survey, and information on the frequency of those encounters is not provided. Indeed, a person may have had more than one encounter with the police for the same reason within the observation period. Our results suggest that a person's chances of at least one contact with the police for behavioral health-related reasons is potentially higher in rural and remote areas. However, it might not be the case when accounting for the total number of these encounters experienced by each respondent. Furthermore, no contextual information was available on the circumstances surrounding the encounters with the police other than the fact that it was for behavioral health-related reasons. For instance, it is unclear if the encounter was initiated by the respondents themselves, a relative, a bystander, or the police. We also do not have information on the outcome of the encounter, whether it led to an arrest, use of force, referral for treatment, or other outcomes. This additional information would certainly have provided a more nuanced understanding of such encounters.

Despite these limitations, we are confident that these results provide useful information to make strides in better understanding behavioral health-related police encounters. As mentioned, this study contributes to a better understanding of these police interactions in non-urban areas specifically and contributes to our understanding of rural and remote policing more broadly, two subjects which remain largely understudied (Brine 2015, Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014, Yang et al. 2018). Given the raised concerns regarding the police's involvement in behavioral health incidents, our findings suggest that we should pay attention to the specific context of rural and remote communities. In fact, it suggests that, under certain conditions, the police are likely to play a greater role in responding to these incidents in rural and remote areas compared to urban communities. Moreover, reducing encounters between the police and people suffering from behavioral health problems presents itself as a vital undertaking. A recently published statement from the Canadian Mental Health Association (2020) emphasize this issue:

“A properly funded mental health care system would not only allow us to better respond to mental health crises, but allow for earlier intervention and treatment to help prevent mental health crises in the first place. Experiencing a mental health crisis is not a crime, and the response must be a healthcare response, not a law-enforcement response.”

Our results suggest that any strategy aimed at reducing encounters between the police and people suffering from behavioral health problems must not overlook the situation of rural and remote communities as these encounters are certainly not a uniquely urban phenomenon.

This study also contributes key insights and avenues for future research. First, it highlights the fact that a comprehensive understanding of behavioral health-related police encounters requires the perspective of urban communities, and rural and remote areas. Indeed, our findings suggest that their specific contexts matter in the occurrence of these encounters. Second, it highlights the fact that using a dichotomous urban-rural indicator is not enough to account appropriately for the context of rural and remote communities. This study suggests that the relative level of geographic



isolation of communities increases people's probability of experiencing at least one behavioral health-related police encounter. Accordingly, it gives credence to the notion that urban, rural, and remote communities exist on a continuum and that the varying degree of rurality and remoteness matters for these encounters. Finally, based on the results presented in this paper, the opportunity and the need for future studies comparing behavioral health-related police encounters across urban, rural, remote communities is clear. This includes examining the contextual and subjective dimensions of our findings (i.e., understanding variations in the circumstances that led to these encounters and people's views of these encounters) and furthering the present analysis through more precise and sophisticated variables that can capture the intricacies of these encounters. This additional information will certainly help provide a richer understanding of such encounters.

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### **BRIDGING PAPER 1 AND PAPER 2**

This thesis explores whether and how crime, disorder, and social control may be experienced differently across urban, rural, and remote areas. As such, it argues that relative geographical isolation is a defining feature of rurality and remoteness. This feature leads to social life being experienced differently in rural and remote compared to urban areas, including when it comes to the criminological topics being explored in this thesis.

The first paper contributes to corroborating this assertion. Findings suggest that living in a rural and remote community is associated with a greater probability of at least one contact with the police for the behavioural health of a relative. This probability increases with the relative geographic isolation of where people live. Accordingly, we conclude that, under certain conditions, the police are likely to play a greater role in responding to behavioural health incidents in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas.

The second paper builds on this knowledge and further examines the main assertion of this thesis. It does so by examining a new topic: variations in citizen satisfaction with the police. It argues that the variations in communities' geographical isolation constraints and enables differently police practices across the urban-rural-remote continuum resulting in community members perceiving the police and their work differently. The results presented in this paper corroborate this contention.

Ultimately, combining these two papers extends our knowledge regarding life outside urban areas. Furthermore, they show that we cannot rely solely on evidence from studies conducted in cities if we wish to understand our societies' dynamics fully. Finally, they provide empirical evidence that show that the framework proposed in this thesis is capable of a more precise comparison of urban, rural, and remote communities compared to conventional approaches.

### **Published Article - Reference:**

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### **PAPER 2:**

## **SATISFACTION ENVERS LA POLICE DANS LES COMMUNAUTÉS RURALES ET ÉLOIGNÉES<sup>1</sup>**

Nos connaissances scientifiques sur les relations police-communauté en milieux ruraux et éloignés sont limitées. L'article a pour objectif de clarifier ces connaissances en examinant les variations sur le plan de la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police à travers un continuum urbain-rural-éloigné. En utilisant la théorie de la structuration, nous envisageons, dans cette recherche, que le contexte des communautés rurales et éloignées apporte des contraintes et permet des pratiques policières différentes de celles de leurs collègues en milieux urbains, engendrant des variations quant aux perceptions des citoyens de la police. Grâce au recours aux données de l'Enquête sociale générale de 2014, les résultats suggèrent qu'il existe effectivement des variations importantes en fonction du lieu où les gens habitent. Particulièrement, la satisfaction des citoyens en matière de rendement décline avec l'isolement géographique des communautés rurales et éloignées comparativement aux communautés urbaines. Plus encore, la satisfaction des citoyens quant aux compétences interpersonnelles des policiers est plus élevée dans les communautés rurales comparativement aux régions urbaines. Toutefois, elle décline avec l'isolement géographique des communautés éloignées. Ces résultats contribuent à l'information nécessaire au développement de politiques publiques et de pratiques policières ayant le potentiel d'améliorer les relations police-communauté.

### **1. Introduction**

Nos connaissances scientifiques sur le travail des policiers en milieux ruraux et éloignés ainsi que sur les relations que ces derniers entretiennent avec les membres des communautés sont sans contredit modestes, voire limitées (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014). En fait, nos connaissances sur la police sont issues presque entièrement d'études menées dans de grands centres métropolitains comme Chicago (Reiss 1971), Londres (Manning 1977), Paris (Fassin

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<sup>1</sup> L'article découle de la thèse de doctorat de l'auteur, celle-ci étant financée par une bourse d'études supérieures du Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines du Canada (CRSH). La thèse et l'article ne sont toutefois pas des produits du CRSH et les opinions et points de vue émis ne reflètent en aucun cas ceux du CRSH. L'auteur aimerait remercier profondément Jason Carmichael pour son encadrement dans la rédaction de la thèse et, par extension, de cet article.

2011), Oakland (Wilson 1968) et bien d'autres (ex.: Ericson 1982, Skolnick 1966, Westley 1953). Ce déséquilibre s'explique en grande partie par une vision souvent stéréotypée des réalités vécues dans les communautés rurales et éloignées (Donnermeyer et al. 2016, Mawby 2004). Par exemple, nous retrouvons fréquemment le récit selon lequel ces communautés sont des havres de paix et de tranquillité où règne une grande cohésion sociale en raison de valeurs et de normes sociales partagées ainsi que d'une faible diversité (Hogg and Carrington 1998, Hogg and Carrington 1999). Plus encore, nous présumons souvent que les policiers en milieux ruraux et éloignés sont parfaitement intégrés dans leur communauté, bénéficiant d'une coopération et d'un soutien étoffé des citoyens, soit une situation idéale (Mawby 2004). Or, les études sur le sujet, bien que limitées, suggèrent que ces suppositions sont malavisées.

C'est dans ce contexte que la présente étude cherche à contribuer à la démystification des réalités en milieux ruraux et éloignés en ce qui a trait aux relations police-communauté. Pour ce faire, elle a pour objectif de fournir une analyse empirique d'une thématique sous-développée dans cette littérature, notamment des perceptions des citoyens de la police. Plusieurs éléments motivent cet intérêt. Premièrement, les données suggèrent que le taux de crimes violents est particulièrement élevé dans les communautés rurales et éloignées, souvent même plus élevé que dans les communautés urbaines (Allen 2018, Beattie, David and Roy 2018, Perreault 2019a, Rotenberg 2019). En contrepartie, les services de police dans ces communautés font généralement face à un manque de ressources et d'infrastructures pour répondre à de tels incidents (Ceccato 2016, Donnermeyer et al. 2016, Huey and Ricciardelli 2017, Schissel 1992). Cette situation a certainement le potentiel d'influencer la satisfaction des citoyens quant au rendement des policiers. Deuxièmement, il est vrai que certains policiers en région bénéficient d'une plus grande familiarité avec les membres de la communauté comparativement à leurs collègues en milieu urbain (Falcone

et al. 2002, Frank and Liederbach 2003, Payne et al. 2005). Or, ce n'est pas toujours le cas. Par exemple, dans les régions éloignées, les affectations des officiers à ces détachements pour une durée limitée auraient pour effet d'empêcher le développement de relations communautaires et engendreraient des pratiques policières beaucoup plus contraignantes (Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Ruddell et al. 2014, Schissel 1992). Cette situation a également le potentiel d'influencer la satisfaction des citoyens quant aux compétences interpersonnelles des policiers.

Conformément, notre objectif est de mener une analyse portant sur les variations du niveau de satisfaction des citoyens envers la police selon un continuum urbain-rural-éloigné. Ayant recours à la théorie de la structuration de Giddens (1984), nous proposons que le contexte des communautés rurales et éloignées contraint et permet la production et la reproduction de pratiques sociales distinctes quant au travail des policiers, les différenciant ainsi de leurs collègues urbains. Bref, ces différentes réalités engendrent des variations concernant les perceptions des citoyens de la police.

Mieux comprendre les perceptions des citoyens de la police est un exercice essentiel pour le bien-être de nos communautés. En effet, les études démontrent que la satisfaction, et subséquemment la confiance<sup>2</sup>, joue un rôle important dans le fait que les citoyens perçoivent la police comme une institution légitime. Elle promeut également une relation fondée sur le consentement envers son autorité (Tyler and Huo 2002, Tyler 2004). Conséquemment, les citoyens sont plus enclins à coopérer volontairement avec la police, à soutenir les initiatives policières ainsi qu'à adhérer volontairement aux lois et aux décisions des policiers (Jackson and Sunshine 2007, Tyler and Huo 2002, Tyler 2004, Tyler and Fagan 2008). Ainsi, en précisant nos connaissances

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<sup>2</sup> La satisfaction envers la police est argumentée comme étant une forme de perception antérieure et motivatrice de la confiance en la police.

sur les perceptions des citoyens envers la police dans différents contextes et milieux, nous générons de l'information nécessaire au développement de politiques publiques et de pratiques policières qui auront le potentiel d'améliorer les relations entre la police et les communautés. Ceci est particulièrement saillant dans le contexte des communautés rurales et éloignées puisqu'il y a un manque important de données probantes sur ces relations.

Avant la présentation des résultats, nous proposons d'abord une brève recension de la littérature sur la satisfaction envers la police afin d'assurer une compréhension du contexte et des implications de ce type de perceptions, notamment du point de vue canadien. Ensuite, nous nous penchons sur les réalités uniques des communautés rurales et éloignées en lien avec le travail des policiers ainsi que leurs relations avec les communautés. Finalement, nous présentons les principes de la théorie de structuration, soit notre cadre théorique, nous permettant ainsi de conceptualiser la notion de ruralité et de développer nos hypothèses de recherche.

## **2. Satisfaction envers la police au Canada**

La satisfaction est une forme de perception aux propriétés uniques. Toutefois, elle est souvent confondue avec d'autres types de perception, notamment la confiance (Bolger, Lytle and Bolger 2020, David 2020). La satisfaction sous-tend une évaluation postérieure vis-à-vis des attentes. Bref, lorsqu'on répond à nos attentes ou les surpasse, nous sommes satisfaits (David 2020, Roché 2016). L'évaluation peut découler d'interactions directes avec des policiers et de sources d'information indirectes comme les médias, les médias sociaux et les expériences d'autrui (David 2020). En somme, la satisfaction envers la police en tant qu'institution naît et s'infère grâce à l'accumulation des actions individuelles exécutées par ses représentants (Tyler and Huo 2002).

À cet égard, lorsque nous envisageons la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police, nous le faisons souvent en lien avec des métriques de performance, par exemple grâce à son efficacité à



assurer la sécurité des citoyens, la rapidité avec laquelle elle répond aux incidents et sa capacité à faire respecter la loi. En effet, plusieurs études et rapports gouvernementaux se sont intéressés à ces questions de performances, et ce, depuis de nombreuses années (par ex.: Larsen and Blair 2009, Mazowita and Rotenberg 2019, Percy 1980, Priest and Carter 1999). Après tout, ces métriques sont au cœur du travail des policiers.

Or, la police est beaucoup plus qu'une institution dédiée à la prévention de la criminalité et au maintien de l'ordre. Son rôle dans la société se joue également dans les relations qu'elle entretient avec les citoyens (Girling, Loader and Sparks 2000). En tant que présence autoritaire dans les communautés, la manière dont elle interagit avec les gens a été observée par de nombreuses études comme une composante essentielle des considérations citoyennes envers la police (Girling et al. 2000, Jackson and Sunshine 2007, Murphy 2009, Skogan 2005, Sunshine and Tyler 2003). Ces derniers réclament de la police un traitement juste, équitable et respectueux (Sunshine and Tyler 2003, Tyler and Blader 2003). Plus encore, par ces actions auprès des membres des communautés, la police a un devoir symbolique important en ce qui a trait à la reconnaissance et la légitimation de leurs besoins, leurs demandes et leurs champs d'intérêt (Loader 1997). Ainsi, la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police s'envisage également d'un point de vue relationnel.

Au Canada, les données les plus récentes suggèrent que les gens sont généralement satisfaits du travail des policiers. Par exemple, en 2019, près de huit Canadiens sur dix habitant dans les provinces indiquaient que la police fait un bon travail ou un travail passable pour ce qui est de faire respecter la loi (79 %). Lorsqu'il s'agit de traiter les personnes équitablement, ce sont plutôt 68 % des Canadiennes et des Canadiens qui indiquaient que la police fait un bon travail ou un travail passable (Ibrahim 2020). Néanmoins, ce n'est pas toute la population qui partage cette

satisfaction. Par exemple, les Autochtones et les personnes appartenant à la « minorité visible » ont généralement un taux d'insatisfaction plus élevé, particulièrement sur le plan des compétences interpersonnelles des policiers (Boyce 2016, Cotter 2015). Ceci se comprend notamment par les relations complexes et difficiles entre la police et les communautés racisées au pays (Cao 2014, Sprott and Doob 2014). Plusieurs autres facteurs jouent un rôle important en ce qui a trait à la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police. Ceux-ci incluent les interactions avec la police, les expériences de victimisation ainsi que les caractéristiques sociodémographiques des citoyens (Bolger et al. 2020, Cotter 2015). Par conséquent, nous pouvons conclure que la satisfaction est une perception qui change en fonction du contexte, des expériences et de l'environnement.

### **3. La police dans les communautés rurales et éloignées**

Comme mentionné préalablement, bien que la littérature soit grandement pauvre en ce qui concerne notre sujet, les études existantes soulèvent le fait que les réalités uniques des communautés rurales et éloignées font en sorte que le travail des policiers, ainsi que leurs relations avec les citoyens, est différent de celui dans les régions urbaines. D'ailleurs, ces différences ont le potentiel de moduler la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police.

Premièrement, les données démontrent que les communautés rurales et éloignées font souvent face à des taux de crimes violents beaucoup plus élevés comparativement aux centres urbains (Allen 2018, Ceccato 2016, Hogg and Carrington 1998, Hogg and Carrington 1999, Rotenberg 2019, Wood 2011). Par exemple, en 2017, le taux d'homicides dans les communautés rurales et éloignées des provinces canadiennes était environ 30 % plus élevé que dans les régions urbaines. La même année, les services de police dans ces communautés ont rapporté deux fois plus de voies de fait, de méfaits et d'incidents liés au trouble de la paix (Perreault 2019a). Qui plus est, la violence envers les femmes est particulièrement persistante dans les communautés rurales et

éloignées (DeKeseredy 2021). Par exemple, la violence intime envers les femmes de 24 ans ou moins représentait 17 % des crimes violents dans le nord du Canada en 2017, bien qu'elles ne représentent que 7 % de la population locale (Rotenberg 2019). Les policiers en milieux ruraux et éloignés interviennent également en réponse à des taux élevés d'abus de drogues et d'alcool ainsi qu'à une grande prévalence de désordres sociaux et physiques (Ruddell and Jones 2020).

En contrepartie, les services de police dans ces communautés font généralement face à un manque de ressources et d'infrastructures pour répondre à de tels incidents (Ceccato 2016, Donnermeyer et al. 2016, Huey and Ricciardelli 2017, Schissel 1992). Par exemple, nous ne trouvons parfois que deux policiers responsables de plusieurs centaines de milliers de kilomètres carrés de superficie, incluant des communautés qui ne sont accessibles que par avion, par bateau ou par une route temporaire l'hiver (Ruddell et al. 2014). Ces contraintes opérationnelles ont certainement le potentiel d'influencer la satisfaction des citoyens quant au rendement des services de police, incluant leur capacité à assurer la sécurité des communautés ainsi que la rapidité avec laquelle ils répondent aux appels. Or, toutes les communautés rurales et éloignées ne font pas nécessairement face au même degré de contraintes.

Deuxièmement, la littérature scientifique souligne que les approches des policiers en milieux ruraux et éloignés sont souvent différentes de celles de leurs collègues en milieux urbains. Ceci découle du fait que leurs relations avec les membres des communautés s'avèrent beaucoup plus informelles (Crank 1990). En effet, ces policiers sont d'ordinaire mieux ancrés dans leurs communautés, vivant et partageant les mêmes réalités que les citoyens. Plus encore, la taille des populations est généralement beaucoup plus petite comparativement aux métropoles, favorisant une plus grande familiarité avec les membres des communautés. De ce fait, les approches sont fréquemment plus à même d'être ajustées pour répondre aux besoins des communautés (Falcone

et al. 2002, Griffiths and Clark 2017). Par exemple, les études suggèrent que les policiers reçoivent fréquemment des demandes de services par des canaux informels (p. ex. : appel à la maison). Ils interviennent souvent également de manière à résoudre les situations en usant de modes alternatifs (p. ex. : autres que la criminalisation) (Frank and Liederbach 2003, Griffiths and Clark 2017, Holmes et al. 2017, Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Payne et al. 2005, Ruddell et al. 2014). Toutefois, ces relations informelles n'ont pas que des avantages :

*[The] lack of anonymity can contribute to feelings of being trapped by one's job [...] Officers working these places report that residents seldom make the distinction between work and non-work hours and often approach off-duty officers on the street to discuss police-related matters or appear at an officer's home to report offenses. That familiarity might contribute to the expectation of leniency, especially since many of these officers try to participate in local activities to reduce the social distance between the public and police and be part of the community (Ruddell et al. 2014:783).*

Dès lors, ces relations informelles n'auraient pas nécessairement lieu dans les régions les plus éloignées. Les policiers y connaîtraient un niveau de satisfaction d'emploi relativement faible menant à des rotations fréquentes et des déploiements de courte durée. Ceci a pour effet d'engendrer un faible niveau d'implication dans les communautés et une déconnexion face aux besoins de ces dernières (Griffiths and Clark 2017, Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Ruddell et al. 2014, Schissel 1992). De surcroît, ces policiers auraient tendance à appliquer la loi de manière beaucoup plus étroite et à avoir moins recours à leurs pouvoirs discrétionnaires pour régler les conflits (Schissel 1992). Ces relations police-communautés différentes pourraient vraisemblablement avoir une incidence sur les perceptions des citoyens en ce qui concerne le travail des policiers, notamment d'un point de vue relationnel.

#### **4. Cadre théorique**

Dans cette étude, nous avançons que les réalités uniques des communautés rurales et éloignées – comparativement aux régions urbaines – ont le potentiel d'influencer le travail des

policiers ainsi que leurs relations avec les citoyens. Ces différences exercent subséquemment une influence sur la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police. Dès lors, il est primordial de formuler un cadre théorique qui tient compte des interrelations entre l'action humaine, la vie sociale et la spatialité pour donner un sens à ces différences. Toutefois, peu de théories intègrent directement la notion d'espace. Celle-ci est généralement considérée comme un élément périphérique ou est tout simplement ignorée. Nous trouvons néanmoins une exception à cette règle dans la théorie de la structuration proposée par Anthony Giddens (1984). Dans cette théorie, la notion d'espace est développée comme un élément constitutif du déroulement de l'action humaine et de la vie sociale. Dans la section qui suit, nous allons exposer les principes de cette théorie avec un accent particulier sur la notion d'espace. Par le fait même, nous proposons une conceptualisation des communautés rurales et éloignées. Afin de développer nos hypothèses de recherche, nous faisons ensuite un retour sur la littérature scientifique pertinente en fonction de notre cadre théorique.

#### ***4.1 La théorie de la structuration et l'espace***

La théorie de la structuration de Giddens (1984) réfute l'existence d'une antinomie entre la faculté d'action des individus et l'influence des structures sur le cours de la vie sociale. Celle-ci propose plutôt une dualité des structures. La nature récursive des pratiques sociales est vue comme productrice et reproductrice de structures, et ces dernières conditionnent à leur tour le déroulement de l'action humaine. Les structures se présentent dès lors comme des ensembles de règles et de ressources produites et reproduites dans un processus dynamique que Giddens (1984) nomme « structuration ». Essentiellement, « la structure est à la fois la *condition* et le *résultat* des pratiques qui constituent les systèmes sociaux » (Lazar 1992:404).

Pour Giddens (1984), la notion d'espace est centrale à ce processus, car elle joue un rôle constitutif dans l'existence des systèmes sociaux et se manifeste dans son interaction avec l'action

humaine et le cours de la vie sociale. L'auteur argumente que nous ne pouvons pas négliger le fait que les individus et les collectivités sont inévitablement situés dans l'espace. Pourtant, nous avons tendance à envisager ce dernier comme une surface plane sur laquelle les phénomènes sociaux se produisent de manière indépendante (Giddens 1984, Massey 2013). Or, il joue un rôle crucial dans la structuration de la vie sociale, notamment lorsque les espaces naturels, c'est-à-dire un ensemble de propriétés physiques et matérielles, se transforment en espace social. Cette transformation a lieu lorsque nous utilisons l'espace et que nous lui donnons un sens et une qualité (Gans 2002)<sup>3</sup> : « *[they] are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly; new or old; accessible or not* » (Gieryn 2000:472). C'est dans cet ordre d'idées que Giddens (1984) fait référence à l'espace social en termes de « *locale* » : « *[it] refers to the use of space to provide the settings within which interaction occurs. Locale is not to be described merely in terms of its physical properties but how it is used for human activities, how it provides for the contextuality of social life* » (Urry 1991:164). Ainsi, les modes d'utilisation de l'espace dans ses propriétés sociales et matérielles façonnent la production et la reproduction des pratiques sociales de manière à contraindre et à faciliter la structuration des systèmes sociaux (Giddens 1984).

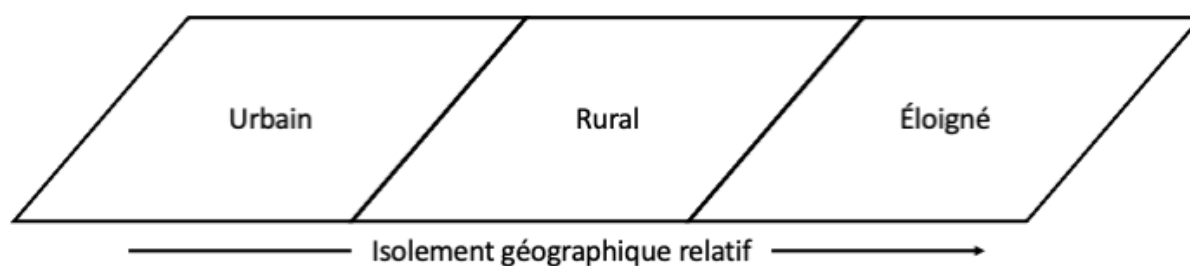
Dans notre étude, les espaces sociaux qui nous intéressent sont ceux des communautés rurales et éloignées définies ici par leur degré d'isolement géographique. Cette propriété matérielle sous-tend un rapport de localité et de distance face aux régions urbaines. De surcroît, les communautés rurales et éloignées sont définies comme existant en contrepartie aux communautés

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<sup>3</sup> Giddens (1984) s'inspire grandement de la littérature géographique scientifique pour développer les notions d'espace et de temps dans sa théorie. Dès lors, nous retrouvons plusieurs principes équivalents sur la spatialité articulés à la fois dans les travaux de l'auteur et dans la littérature extérieure à la théorie de la structuration. De ce fait, nous formulons notre cadre théorique à partir des deux littératures.

urbaines. Plus encore, cette définition sous-entend des variations dans le degré de ruralité et d'éloignement (Bourke et al. 2012, Wakerman 2004). Bref, cette conceptualisation envisage les régions urbaines, rurales et éloignées sur un continuum basé sur le degré relatif d'isolement géographique (Figure 1). Ce rapport implique également des propriétés sociales qui émergent en raison de la manière dont l'espace est utilisé. En somme, nous soutenons que le degré d'isolement géographique des communautés rurales et éloignées interagit avec l'action humaine (c.-à-d. l'utilisation de l'espace) de manière à contraindre et à faciliter des formes de pratiques sociales et une structuration des systèmes sociaux qui les distinguent des urbaines.

**Figure 1. Continuum urbain-rural-éloigné**



#### **4.2. Hypothèse**

À titre récapitulatif, il convient de noter que l'article a pour objectif d'examiner les variations dans le niveau de satisfaction des citoyens envers la police selon le continuum urbain-rural-éloigné décrit ci-dessus. Notre argument central est que les communautés rurales et éloignées comme espace social contraignent et permettent la production et la reproduction de pratiques policières différentes de celles en milieu urbain. De ce fait, ces différences occasionnent des variations dans le niveau de satisfaction des citoyens envers la police.

En effet, compte tenu du taux de criminalité élevé et de l'incidence accrue de désordres de toutes sortes dans les milieux ruraux et éloignés, contrastés par un manque de ressources et

d'infrastructures policières pour répondre à de tels incidents comparativement aux milieux urbains, nous proposons l'hypothèse suivante :

**H1 :** La satisfaction des citoyens en matière de rendement décline avec l'isolement géographique des communautés rurales et éloignées comparativement aux communautés urbaines.

Plus encore, les relations police-citoyens plus informelles dans les régions rurales et éloignées comparativement aux communautés urbaines pourraient vraisemblablement avoir une incidence positive sur la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police, notamment d'un point de vue relationnel. Or, ce n'est pas nécessairement le cas dans les communautés les plus éloignées où les policiers sont des étrangers y travaillant pour une durée limitée. Nous proposons donc l'hypothèse suivante :

**H2 :** La satisfaction des citoyens quant aux compétences interpersonnelles des policiers est plus élevée dans les communautés rurales comparativement aux régions urbaines. Toutefois, nous envisageons un point de bascule où cette satisfaction décline avec l'isolement géographique des communautés.

## 5. Méthodologie

### 5.1. Échantillon

La présente étude mobilise l'Enquête sociale générale (ESG) de 2014 de Statistique Canada portant sur les expériences des citoyens avec le système de justice, leurs expériences de victimisation et leurs perceptions des acteurs judiciaires<sup>4</sup>. Il s'agit d'un échantillon probabiliste et représentatif de la population canadienne âgée de 15 ans ou plus, vivant dans un ménage privé. L'échantillon inclut les données de 35 167 répondants, soit un taux de réponse de 50 %. Les répondants des provinces furent contactés par téléphone et ceux des territoires, par téléphone ou

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<sup>4</sup> Bien que Statistique Canada ait recueilli des données pour ce même sondage en 2019, celles-ci ne sont pas encore disponibles aux chercheurs au moment de rédiger cet article.



en personne. L'accès aux données a été obtenu par l'entremise du Réseau canadien des Centres de données de recherche (RCCDR)<sup>5</sup>.

Compte tenu de la structure d'échantillonnage complexe de l'ESG, les données doivent être pondérées pour être représentatives de la population canadienne. Ceci est fait à l'aide des poids de pondération individuelle fournis par Statistique Canada pour chacun des répondants. Ces poids sont égaux à la probabilité inverse que les répondants avaient d'être sélectionnés. Lorsqu'ils sont utilisés dans le cadre de données descriptives, chaque observation est multipliée par son poids de pondération de manière à équilibrer la composition de l'échantillon. Ceci a aussi pour effet d'augmenter la taille de l'échantillon. Dans le contexte des analyses multivariées, ils sont utilisés de manière à considérer le poids relatif de chaque répondant tout en gardant la taille d'échantillon égale à sa version non pondérée. Plus encore, les analyses multivariées furent ajustées à l'aide de poids « *bootstrap* » dans le but d'assurer une variance appropriée pour les inférences statistiques.

## 5.2. Variables

*Satisfaction envers la police.* L'enquête contient six variables portant sur la satisfaction des répondants envers le travail des policiers dans leur communauté (1 = mauvais ; 2 = passable ; 3 = bon) : a) assurer la sécurité des citoyens du voisinage ; b) répondre rapidement aux appels ; c) faire respecter la loi ; d) informer le public sur la prévention d'actes criminels ; e) avoir une attitude ouverte, invitant à la discussion ; et f) traiter les personnes équitablement. À l'instar de Sprott et Doob (2014), nous regroupons ces variables en deux grandes catégories de satisfaction, soit la satisfaction en termes de performance (items *a*, *b*, *c* et *d*) ( $r = 0,43/0,62$ ;  $\alpha = 0,82$ ) et la satisfaction

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<sup>5</sup> L'accès aux données a été rendu possible notamment par le financement du RCCDR par le Conseil de recherches en sciences humaines (CRSH), l'Institut de recherche en santé du Canada (IRSC), la Fondation canadienne pour l'innovation (FCI) et Statistique Canada. Bien que cette recherche et ces analyses soient basées sur des données de Statistique Canada, les opinions et les points de vue émis ne reflètent en aucun cas ceux de Statistique Canada.

en termes de compétences relationnelles (items *e* et *f*) ( $r = 0,61$ ;  $\alpha = 0,76$ )<sup>6</sup>. Des corrélations bivariées suggèrent de fortes associations entre les items de ces regroupements ainsi qu'une grande cohérence interne. Dès lors, nous avons combiné ces items de manière à obtenir le ratio moyen de satisfaction de chaque répondant, soit la somme des scores pour chacune des variables, divisée par le nombre de variables. Ainsi, le score de chaque répondant sur ces variables indexées continue de varier entre 1 et 3.

*Index d'éloignement.* Pour mesurer le degré d'isolement géographique des communautés qui sous-entend notre définition du continuum urbain-rural-éloigné, nous avons recours à l'index d'éloignement développé par Alasia et al. (2017) à Statistique Canada. Cet index mesure l'isolement géographique relatif des subdivisions de recensement en fonction de leur distance avec de grands centres urbains (c.-à-d. ceux accessibles de manière normale) ainsi que la taille de la population. Statistique Canada définit une subdivision de recensement comme étant une unité géographique désignant une municipalité ou encore une région que l'on considère équivalente pour des fins statistiques (Alasia et al. 2017, Statistique Canada 2017). Variant entre 0 et 1, un score de 0 sur l'index représente une communauté populeuse comme celle du centre-ville d'une métropole (p. ex. : Toronto, Vancouver ou Montréal), alors qu'un score de 1 sur l'index représente une communauté hautement isolée comme celle retrouvée dans les régions les plus nordiques des territoires (p. ex. : Cape Dorset, Arctic Bay ou Kuujjuaq). Chaque répondant s'est vu attribuer un score sur l'index d'éloignement en fonction de la subdivision de recensement dans laquelle il réside. Le score moyen sur l'index d'éloignement parmi les répondants est de 0,14, soit un échantillon plutôt urbain (Tableau 1). Ceci est tel qu'attendu puisque la population canadienne est

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<sup>6</sup> Le coefficient alpha de Cronbach n'est toutefois pas recommandé avec moins de trois variables.

majoritairement urbaine (Statistics Canada 2011). Nous avons utilisé la version de l'index basé sur les données de recensement en vigueur lors de la collecte de l'ESG (c.-à-d. 2011).

Il convient de noter que les concepteurs de l'index considèrent un score de 0,4 comme un tournant pour l'éloignement des régions. La majorité des subdivisions de recensement se trouvent entre 0,2 et 0,4 sur l'index. Par exemple, cet intervalle inclut des subdivisions de recensement avec une population d'environ 50 000 habitants à proximité d'agglomérations populationnelles de taille moyenne. Au-delà de ces valeurs critiques, les auteurs considèrent que les communautés font état d'un isolement géographique modéré. Par exemple, à partir de ce point, nous commençons à observer des communautés avec un manque d'accès à des services (p. ex. : services financiers et légaux). Elles sont considérées comme étant réellement isolées à partir d'un score de 0,6, soit une caractéristique particulièrement typique des communautés dans les territoires (Alasia et al. 2017). Il faut néanmoins souligner que ces valeurs critiques ne sont que des points de repère et ne servent pas à trancher définitivement les communautés urbaines, rurales et éloignées, car comme il a été mentionné, ces communautés se trouvent sur un continuum.

*Variables sociodémographiques et contextuelles.* Nous ajustons pour plusieurs variables sociodémographiques et contextuelles qui furent identifiées comme étant conséquentes dans l'étude des perceptions de la police (Bolger et al. 2020) : le sexe des répondants (1 = homme ; 0 = femme), leur âge ; leur niveau de scolarité (1 = diplôme secondaire ; 0 = pas de diplôme secondaire), leur statut d'emploi au cours des 12 mois précédant l'enquête (1 = avait un emploi ; 0 = sans emploi) et leur identité autochtone (1 = oui ; 0 = non) ou leur identité noire (1 = oui ; 0 = non). Nous ajustons également pour différents types de contacts avec la police au cours des 12 mois précédant l'enquête (1 = oui ; 0 = non) : au moins un contact pour des raisons d'application de la loi (c.-à-d. contrôle routier ; arrestation), au moins un contact pour des raisons auxiliaires (c.-

à-d. : victime, témoin), au moins un contact pour des raisons de santé comportementale (c.-à-d. : santé mentale ou abus personnel de substance ou sévices par un membre de sa famille), et au moins un contact pour d'autres raisons. Finalement, nous ajustons pour le fait d'avoir été victime d'un crime (1 = oui ; 0 = non).

**Tableau 1. Données descriptives de l'échantillon**

	Pourcentage/ Moyenne	É.-T.	N <sub>pondéré</sub>
Satisfaction envers la police - Rendement	2,61	0,48	22 226 837
Satisfaction envers la police - Relationnelle	2,64	0,53	25 303 759
Index d'éloignement	0,14	0,12	29 516 669
Sexe	0,49		29 516 669
Âge	45,97	18,69	29 516 669
Niveau de scolarité	0,85		29 037 518
Statut d'emploi	0,57		29 245 935
Identité - Autochtone	0,03		29 427 830
Identité - Noire	0,03		28 960 122
Contact avec la police - application de la loi	0,13		29 427 237
Contact avec la police - raisons auxiliaires	0,11		29 352 299
Contact avec la police - santé comportementale	0,03		29 436 157
Contact avec la police - autre	0,16		29 415 659
Victime d'un crime	0,19		29 516 669

### **5.3. Stratégie analytique**

Pour analyser les variations du niveau de satisfaction envers la police à travers le continuum qui sous-entend les communautés urbaines, rurales et éloignées, nous avons eu recours aux modèles de régression linéaire. Nous avons notamment régressé les deux mesures de satisfaction envers la police (c.-à-d. rendement et relationnelle) sur l'index d'éloignement. Ces modèles ajustent également pour les variables sociodémographiques et contextuelles identifiées préalablement. Cette technique est particulièrement utile, car elle nous permet de dériver le niveau de satisfaction prédit des répondants en fonction de l'isolement géographique relatif de leur communauté, soit le facteur principal qui sous-entend notre conceptualisation des communautés

rurales et éloignées<sup>7</sup>. En d'autres mots, pour chaque point sur l'index d'éloignement, nous dérivons le niveau prédit de satisfaction des citoyens envers la police. Ensuite, nous pouvons visualiser ces prédictions sur un graphique démontrant le niveau de satisfaction en fonction de l'endroit où les répondants habitent sur le continuum urbain-rural-éloigné.

Une analyse préliminaire des données, ajustant pour les variables sociodémographiques et contextuelles, démontre que les relations entre l'index d'éloignement et les variables de satisfaction envers la police étaient mieux représentées par une modélisation quadratique, autant sur le plan de la satisfaction en matière de performance qu'en matière relationnelle. Dès lors, les modèles de régression linéaire qui suivent comprennent l'index d'éloignement ainsi que l'index d'éloignement élevé au carré pour refléter cette relation quadratique.

## 6. Résultats

Le Tableau 2 présente les résultats des modèles de régression pour la satisfaction envers la police. Le Modèle 1 qui traite de satisfaction en matière de performance est statistiquement significatif ( $F = 55,97$  ;  $dl = 13$  ;  $p < 0,05$ ) et la valeur du  $R^2$  suggère un pouvoir explicatif faible ( $R^2 = 0,07$ ). Ajustant pour les variables sociodémographiques et contextuelles, les résultats suggèrent que cette association est statistiquement significative, notamment pour ce qui est du paramètre quadratique de l'index d'éloignement ( $p < 0,05$ ).

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<sup>7</sup> Une approche multiniveau a été considérée pour cette analyse, soit les répondants nichés dans leur subdivision de recensement, puis dans leur province/territoire de résidence. Toutefois, les modèles inconditionnels générés durant l'analyse préliminaire indiquaient des coefficients de corrélation intraclasse très faibles. Ceci suggère que les répondants à l'intérieur des agrégats ne sont pas plus similaires entre eux qu'avec les répondants à l'extérieur de leur agrégat respectif. Bien que l'index d'éloignement soit dérivé au niveau des subdivisions de recensement, cela n'empêche pas une possible association avec les variables dépendantes (Leyland and Groenewegen 2020) (Leyland and Groenewegen 2020).

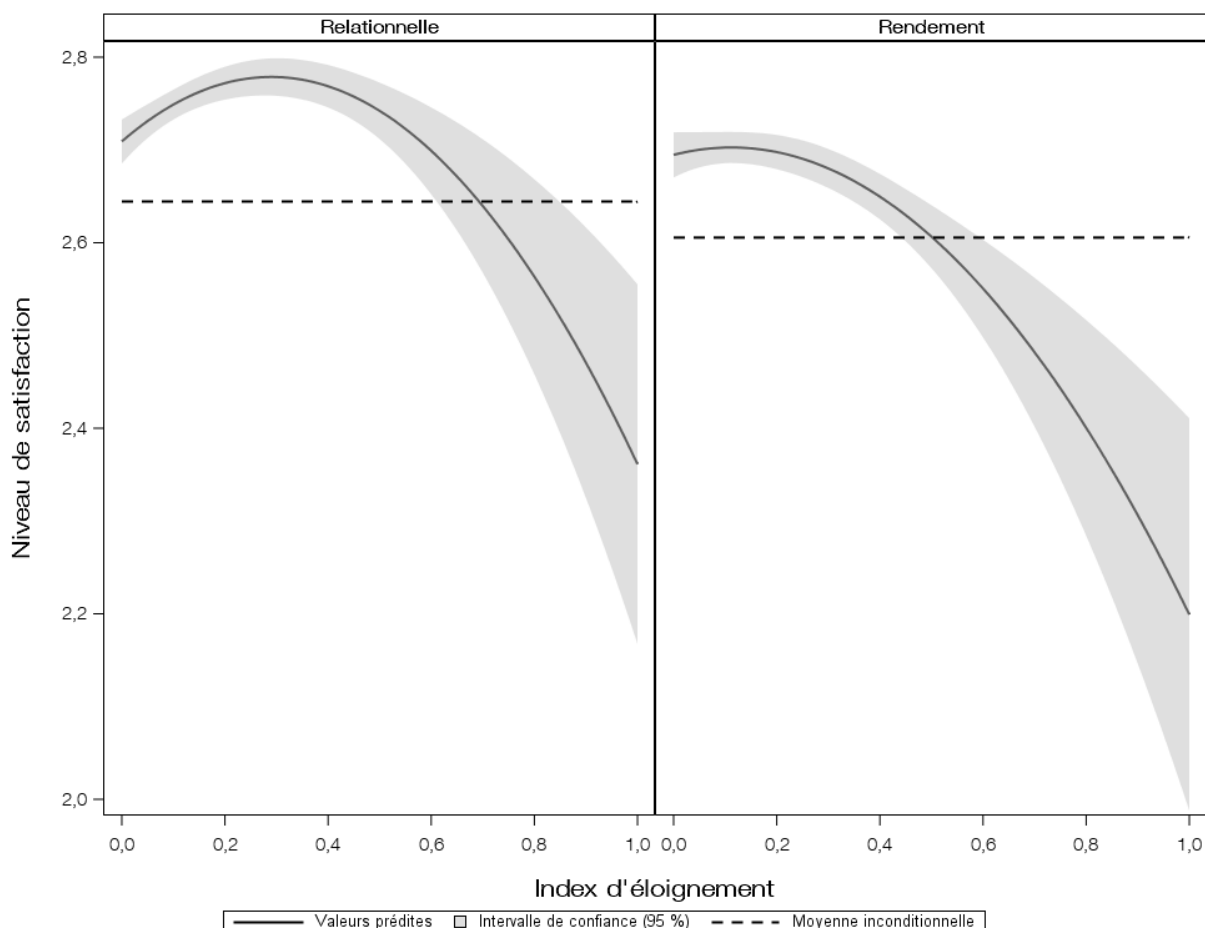
Tableau 2. Modèles de régression linéaire (pondérés)

	Modèle 1					Modèle 2				
	Satisfaction envers la police - Rendement					Satisfaction envers la police - Relationnelle				
	<b>b</b>	<b>E.-T.</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>IC (95 %)</b>		<b>b</b>	<b>E.-T.</b>	<b>Sig.</b>	<b>IC (95 %)</b>	
Sexe	-0,03	0,01	**	-0,04	-0,01	-0,03	0,01	***	-0,05	-0,02
Âge <sup>a</sup>	0,05	0,00	***	0,04	0,06	0,06	0,00	***	0,06	0,07
Niveau de scolarité	-0,03	0,01	*	-0,05	-0,01	-0,03	0,01	*	-0,06	-0,01
Statut d'emploi	-0,01	0,01		-0,03	0,01	0,01	0,01		-0,01	0,03
Identité - Autochtone	-0,12	0,03	***	-0,17	-0,07	-0,14	0,03	***	-0,19	-0,08
Identité - Noire	0,00	0,03		-0,05	0,06	-0,13	0,04	***	-0,20	-0,06
Contact avec la police - application de la loi	-0,05	0,01	**	-0,08	-0,02	-0,11	0,02	***	-0,14	-0,08
Contact avec la police - raisons auxiliaires	-0,05	0,02	**	-0,08	-0,01	0,01	0,02		-0,03	0,04
Contact avec la police - santé comportementale	-0,13	0,03	***	-0,19	-0,06	-0,19	0,04	***	-0,26	-0,12
Contact avec la police - autre	-0,04	0,01	***	-0,07	-0,02	-0,03	0,01	*	-0,06	-0,01
Victime d'un crime	-0,19	0,01	***	-0,22	-0,16	-0,18	0,02	***	-0,21	-0,15
Index d'éloignement	0,14	0,10		-0,05	0,34	0,48	0,10	***	0,29	0,67
Index d'éloignement au carré	-0,64	0,19	***	-1,01	-0,27	-0,83	0,18	***	-1,18	-0,48
<i>Point d'intersection (b<sub>0</sub>)</i>	2,73	0,02	***	2,70	2,76	2,73	0,02	***	2,70	2,76
<i>F (dl)</i>	55,97 (13) ***					56,07 (13) ***				
<i>R<sup>2</sup></i>	0,07					0,07				

\* p < 0,05; \*\* p < 0,01; \*\*\* p < 0,001.

a Variable standardisée.

La Figure 2 illustre cette relation avec le niveau de satisfaction prédit des répondants en fonction de l'isolement géographique relatif de leur communauté. Nous pouvons constater au départ qu'une augmentation de l'index d'éloignement a pour conséquence un certain accroissement du niveau de satisfaction (entre 0 et 0,2). Or, ce changement est plutôt marginal et ne représente pas une variation significative d'un point de vue pratique. Ceci concorde avec le fait que la partie non quadratique de l'index d'éloignement dans le modèle de régression ci-dessus n'est pas statistiquement significative. En somme, nous concluons que les répondants vivant dans les communautés urbaines populeuses ont un niveau de satisfaction envers la police relativement élevé en matière de rendement. On retrouve un niveau de satisfaction similaire dans les communautés urbaines un peu moins populeuses et vraisemblablement dans les communautés rurales moins isolées près des centres urbains (entre 0,2 et 0,4). Or, passé ce point, cette satisfaction diminue de manière générale avec l'isolement géographique des communautés rurales et éloignées. En d'autres mots, chaque augmentation de l'index d'éloignement entraîne une diminution du niveau de satisfaction envers la police en matière de rendement. Ultimement, ce niveau de satisfaction diminue bien en deçà de la moyenne inconditionnelle. Il convient de souligner à nouveau que ces valeurs critiques ne sont que des points de repère et ne servent pas à trancher définitivement les communautés urbaines, rurales et éloignées, car comme mentionné préalablement, ces communautés se trouvent sur un continuum.

**Figure 2. Effet marginal**

**Note :** Figure illustrant le niveau de satisfaction prédit des répondants en fonction de l'isolement géographique relatif de leur communauté. Cette prédiction a été générée en maintenant les variables sociodémographiques et contextuelles à leur moyenne ou leur valeur modale.

Le Modèle 2 qui traite de satisfaction en matière de compétences relationnelles est statistiquement significatif ( $F = 56,07$  ;  $dl = 13$  ;  $p < 0,05$ ) et la valeur du  $R^2$  suggère un pouvoir explicatif faible ( $R^2 = 0,07$ ). Ajustons pour les variables sociodémographiques et contextuelles, les résultats suggèrent que l'association entre cet aspect de la satisfaction et l'index d'éloignement est statistiquement significative ( $p < 0,05$ ). Nous pouvons constater au départ qu'une augmentation de l'index d'éloignement donne lieu à un accroissement marqué du niveau de satisfaction envers



la police d'un point de vue relationnel (Figure 2). Toutefois, comme prévu, nous observons un point de bascule à partir d'un isolement géographique relatif d'environ 0,4. Allant de l'avant, chaque augmentation de l'index d'éloignement provoque une diminution de la satisfaction envers la police menant à un niveau bien en deçà de la moyenne inconditionnelle. Comme souligné préalablement, un score de 0,4 est un tournant pour l'éloignement des communautés et s'agit du point à partir duquel les communautés sont considérées comme modérément isolées.

En somme, nous concluons que les répondants vivant dans les communautés urbaines populeuses (entre 0 et 0,2) ont un niveau de satisfaction envers la police en matière relationnelle plus faible que les répondants vivant dans les communautés urbaines peu populeuses et ceux dans les communautés rurales moins isolées près des centres urbains (entre 0,2 et 0,4). Les répondants habitant dans les régions ayant un indice d'éloignement variant entre 0,4 et 0,6 ont des niveaux de satisfaction comparables, mais inversement. Toutefois, dans les deux cas, cette satisfaction est plus élevée que pour les répondants vivant dans les communautés les plus éloignées (à partir de 0,6).

## **7. Discussion**

Cet article s'inscrit dans une tentative de démystification des réalités en milieux ruraux et éloignés en ce qui a trait aux relations police-communauté. Particulièrement, notre objectif était de mener une analyse des variations du niveau de satisfaction des citoyens envers la police à travers le continuum qui sous-entend les communautés urbaines, rurales et éloignées. La théorie de la structuration de (Giddens 1984) nous a permis de formuler un cadre théorique qui donne un sens aux interrelations entre l'action humaine, la vie sociale et la spatialité, notamment en ce qui a trait aux pratiques policières. En somme, la prémisse de cette étude était que le contexte des communautés rurales et éloignées, comme espace social, contraint et permet la production et la

reproduction de pratiques policières différentes de celles en milieu urbain, menant à des perceptions de la police variées chez les membres vivant dans différentes communautés.

Comme nous l'avons exposé, les résultats de notre étude suggèrent qu'il existe des variations importantes dans le niveau de satisfaction des citoyens envers la police en fonction du lieu où ils habitent. Particulièrement, cette satisfaction en matière de rendement décline avec l'isolement géographique des communautés rurales et éloignées comparativement aux communautés urbaines. Ceci s'explique potentiellement par les contraintes opérationnelles auxquelles les services de police dans ces communautés font face, comme le laisse entendre la littérature. Plus encore, la satisfaction des citoyens au sujet des compétences interpersonnelles des policiers est plus élevée dans les communautés rurales comparativement aux régions urbaines. Toutefois, elle décline avec l'isolement géographique des communautés éloignées. Ceci se conçoit potentiellement par des relations police-communauté beaucoup plus informelles et familières dans les communautés rurales, mais qui périclitent dans les communautés éloignées.

Sans contredit, notre étude fait face à certaines limites. Premièrement, les items de satisfaction concernant les compétences relationnelles des policiers sont quelque peu limités. Il aurait été intéressant de pouvoir examiner certaines dimensions interpersonnelles que la littérature indique comme étant importantes dans les communautés rurales et éloignées, par exemple la familiarité des citoyens avec les policiers locaux. Deuxièmement, les données ne permettent pas d'établir un lien de causalité entre l'isolement géographique, les propriétés sociales associées à cet isolement et le niveau de satisfaction envers la police. Troisièmement, bien que l'ESG soit un échantillon représentatif de la population canadienne, il est vraisemblable que certaines populations marginalisées soient sous-représentées, certaines d'entre elles ayant des relations difficiles avec la police, ce qui influe sur leurs perceptions de celle-ci (p. ex. : personnes en

situation d'itinérance ou personnes incarcérées). Finalement, les modèles de régression n'expliquent que 7 % de la variance des variables dépendantes. Ceci implique que malgré la saillance des variables incluses dans les modèles, ces dernières n'expliquent pas à elles seules l'entièreté des variations au niveau de la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police. Néanmoins, notre analyse atteint son objectif en contribuant à étayer et générer des connaissances scientifiques essentielles sur le travail des policiers en milieux ruraux et éloignés ainsi que sur les relations que ces derniers entretiennent avec les membres des communautés.

Premièrement, le contexte des communautés rurales et éloignées semble donner lieu à des relations police-communautés qui les différencient de leurs collègues en milieux urbains. Ceci suggère donc que de tenir pour acquis que le travail de ces policiers en milieux ruraux et éloignés est tout simplement la version idéale du travail des policiers en milieux urbains est malavisé. Au contraire, notre étude suggère que beaucoup de travail est nécessaire pour améliorer la satisfaction des citoyens envers la police qui est particulièrement défaillante dans les communautés plus isolées. Par exemple, les personnes vivant en milieux ruraux et éloignés sont particulièrement insatisfaites avec la performance de la police. Deuxièmement, notre analyse suggère que les personnes vivant dans les régions rurales ont un taux de satisfaction relativement élevé envers la police en matière de relations interpersonnelles. Ceci corrobore jusqu'à un certain point l'idée selon laquelle les relations police-communautés sont meilleures dans ces communautés que dans les régions urbaines. Or, contrairement à ces préconceptions, cette satisfaction semble décroître avec l'isolement géographique des régions éloignées. Ce constat nous rappelle donc qu'il n'existe pas qu'une seule forme de ruralité. En fait, il existe de nombreuses variations et différences contextuelles à l'intérieur des régions rurales et éloignées qui ont vraisemblablement le potentiel d'influencer le travail des policiers d'une communauté à l'autre ainsi que leurs relations avec leurs

membres. En somme, ceci nous amène à conclure qu'il faut transcender une approche qui dichotomise l'urbain et le rural, comme c'est fréquemment le cas dans nos études.

En conclusion, préciser nos connaissances sur la police dans les communautés rurales et éloignées est nécessaire compte tenu du manque de données probantes pour l'élaboration de politiques publiques et de pratiques policières adaptées. Or, la nécessité d'un tel exercice sous-tend également des considérations plus larges en ce qui a trait à l'état de notre discipline. Si la criminologie rurale a été négligée dans la littérature anglo-saxonne (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014), elle fut pratiquement oubliée dans la littérature francophone. En effet, nous trouvons difficilement des études en français qui abordent le sujet de manière plus que superficielle. Au Canada, ceci est d'autant plus déplorable vu que la population qui gagnerait le plus à profiter de la recherche criminologique en français n'y est pas toujours bien représentée. En effet, outre les métropoles québécoises, et malgré une urbanisation grandissante, la francophonie canadienne demeure fortement ancrée dans les régions rurales du pays (Beaudin and Forgues 2006, Cao, Chouinard and Dehoorne 2005, Castonguay 2005). Le développement d'une criminologie rurale francophone se présente donc comme une nécessité.

## **8. Références**

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### **BRIDGING PAPER 2 AND PAPER 3**

As previously suggested, the second paper provided evidence to corroborate the main assertion of this thesis: the relative geographical isolation of communities along the urban-rural-remote continuum leads to people experiencing social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder, and social control differently. It did so by examining variations in citizen satisfaction with the police. It found that satisfaction in terms of police performance decreased in rural and remote areas compared to urban areas. However, satisfaction in terms of the police officers' relational competences increased in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. Nevertheless, there is a turning point where this satisfaction starts declining as the relative geographical isolation of where people live increases.

The third paper continues the examination of the main assertion of this thesis by looking at a third topic related to crime, disorder, and social control. It explores variations in people's perceptions of crime and safety across urban, rural, and remote communities. It proposes that the relative geographical isolation of communities interacts with social life in a way that differently impacts perceptions of crime and safety.

Again, the combination of these papers extends our knowledge of people's experiences living in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. They show that a comprehensive understanding of the social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder, and social control requires the perspective of not only urban communities but also rural and remote areas. Finally, they provide empirical evidence to show the salience of the conceptualization and operationalization of rurality and remotes proposed in this thesis.

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### PAPER 3:

## RETHINKING PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME AND SAFETY IN RURAL AND REMOTE COMMUNITIES

This article examines variations in people's perceptions of crime and safety across urban, rural, and remote communities, with relative geographical isolation as the defining feature of rurality. Using data from a 2014 representative survey of the Canadian population, our findings suggest that these perceptions are much more nuanced than previously considered. While they tend to be more favourable in rural areas than urban areas, citizen perceptions begin to deteriorate with the relative geographical isolation of communities. In the country's most remote regions, these perceptions are estimated to be even poorer than in urban areas. In sum, rural and remote communities are not the idealised settings so often portrayed in public and academic work.

### 1. Introduction

There is a tendency to think of rural and remote communities as idyllic settings secured by a strong sense of social cohesion, a low incidence of social and physical disorders, and resilient social ties between community members (Baylina and Berg 2010, Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014, Haigron 2017, Short 2006).<sup>13</sup> However, empirical literature suggests that such an idealised conception is ill-founded (Carrington and Scott 2008, Hogg and Carrington 1998, Hogg and Carrington 1999). In fact, in Canada and many other western countries, we observe a disproportionate occurrence of violent victimisation in non-urban areas, including intimate partner violence, physical assaults, and homicides (Allen and Perreault 2015, Allen 2018, Ceccato 2016, Perreault 2019a, Rotenberg 2019, Wendt 2016, Wood 2011). For example, the rate of violent crimes against women and girls aged 24 and younger in northern Canada was *three times* higher

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<sup>13</sup> However, evidence suggests that these assumptions may be changing in some regions (see Hall 2020).

compared to their counterparts in southern Canada and *four times* higher than the overall Canadian average in 2017 (Rotenberg 2019:3).<sup>14</sup> This situation is particularly striking given that, in absolute numbers, most crimes occur in urban areas, and we tend to think of violence as an inextricably urban phenomenon (Hogg and Carrington 1999).

Nevertheless, compared to their urban counterpart, few studies examine rural and remote citizens' wellbeing in their communities, including perceptions of crime and safety (Little, Panelli and Kraack 2005, Lytle, Intravia and Randa 2020). Perhaps this scarcity of research reflects the stereotypical conception of rurality detailed above. For the few studies that did, the empirical evidence generally suggests that fear of crime is lower in non-urban areas compared to urban areas (Baumer 1985, Kennedy and Krahn 1984, Krannich, Berry and Greider 1989, Pain 2000, Silverman and Della-Gustina 2001). These findings are undoubtedly unexpected given the reported occurrence of violent crimes in these regions. Furthermore, some evidence suggests that rural and remote residents are more responsive to victimisation risks (Bankston, Jenkins, Thayer-Doyle et al. 1987, Kennedy and Krahn 1984). Still, others suggest that social changes, including rural migration, urban geographical expansion, and declining traditional values, have been eroding people's feeling of safety, thus making it more comparable to urban communities (Crank, Giacomazzi and Heck 2003, Hunter, Krannich and Smith 2002, Little et al. 2005, Norris and Reeves 2013, Pain 2000, Scott, Carrington and McIntosh 2012).

While these studies have contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon, they nevertheless provide a limited picture of perceptions of crime and safety in rural and remote communities. Similar to most criminology and criminal justice studies, they are limited in their conceptualisation and operationalisation of rurality. They generally conceptualise rurality as a

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<sup>14</sup> Northern Canada is mainly rural and remote with the majority of the population living the southern parts of the country.

dichotomy (i.e., urban-rural), equating rurality to living in an area with a small population size (e.g., Baumer 1985, Crank et al. 2003, Kennedy and Krahn 1984, Norris and Reeves 2013), therefore ignoring other vital dimensions (e.g., the proximity to population centres and resource and service accessibility). Operationally, these studies often use small sample sizes drawn from select locations, thus limiting the generalizability of their findings (e.g., Benedict, Brown and Bower 2000, Hunter et al. 2002, Lytle et al. 2020, Norris and Reeves 2013, Scott et al. 2012). Indeed, the diverse array of community characteristics found within rural and remote regions is not well represented. As stated by Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy (2014:7), "we know that not all cities are alike and the same can be said about rural places. Yet, the myth of rural homogeneity is a long-held assumption that continues to hinder the development of rural crime research." Accordingly, it is largely unclear how the heterogeneity of rural and remote communities influences the course and manifestation of fundamental social processes related to crime. While there is no perfect definition of rurality as these definitions are inevitably purpose-dependent (Carrington and Scott 2008, Hart and Casey 2012), we argue that a more comprehensive approach is nevertheless possible and warranted for the study of people's perceptions of crime and safety.

Against this backdrop, we propose to examine variations in citizens' perceptions of crime and safety across urban, rural, and remote communities through a more comprehensive conceptualisation and operationalisation of rurality. Drawing from several theoretical insights on the connection between spatiality and society, we argue that the relative geographical isolation of communities is the defining feature that underpins their distinctive realities along the rurality continuum. This fundamental property interacts with social life in a way that differently impacts perceptions of crime and safety.

Such an exercise is necessary for developing evidence-based social policy attuned to the needs of communities instead of stereotypical assumptions. It requires salient, precise, and detailed data on the experiences of people living in rural and remote communities, something missing from the extant literature. It is also crucial to moving beyond an urban-centric study of crime and its effect on communities. Indeed, rurality has remained an understudied and undervalued research area within the field of criminology and criminal justice (Donnermeyer et al. 2006, Hogg and Carrington 1999). However, until the scope of research interests is broadened beyond urbanism, our field is bound to be limited by a narrow understanding of important social phenomena, despite claims of exhaustivity and generalizability.

We begin by providing a brief overview of the current literature on perceptions of crime and safety, focusing on its meaning and the known antecedents. Next, we outline our theoretical framework allowing us to make sense of the fundamental contribution of spaces within society, leading to our conceptualisation of rurality. We then integrate relevant information on how the identified antecedents unfold in non-urban communities compared to urban areas. Cumulatively, this knowledge will allow us to formulate hypotheses regarding citizens' perceptions of crime and safety across urban, rural, and remote communities.

## **2. Perceptions of crime and safety**

The meaning and antecedents of people's perception of crime and safety have been highly debated within the extant literature and continue to generate intense scholarly debate, namely as it pertains to the concept of fear of crime (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987, Hale 1996, Hipp 2010, Jackson 2004, Lee 2001, Walkate 1998). Nevertheless, recent theoretical and empirical work appears to have been able to bring more clarity to our understanding by considering its multi-dimensionality. Traditionally, citizens' assessment of crime as a problem in their communities was



understood as being directly related to concerns, worries, and anxieties at the prospect of becoming the victim of a crime (Ferraro and LaGrange 1987, Hale 1996). However, findings suggest that such a conceptualisation is incomplete as perceptions of crime and safety also articulate crucial social and cultural dimensions. Indeed, they simultaneously embody expressive concerns about the state of society and communities. These include, for instance, lay judgments about social order, social cohesion and values, and community stability (Farrall, Jackson and Gray 2009, Jackson 2004, Jackson 2008). In fact, it appears that the fear of victimisation is not an everyday concern for most people (Farrall and Gadd 2004, Gray, Jackson and Farrall 2008, Jackson 2004). Instead, when people express unease about crime and the associated risks, they generally reflect on a whole host of socially and culturally salient issues (Girling et al. 2000, Jackson 2004):

"Crime acts as a lightning rod—a metaphor for social problems in the local community and to wider society. Attitudes toward crime express a range of complex and subtle lay understandings of the social world—broader social values and attitudes about the nature and make-up of society and community, the value placed on crime in its symbol of deterioration, and all the implications that flow from both its prevalence and its impact. Perhaps people are not 'fearful' of personally being victimised as often as we think; rather, they are expressing their social concerns through the symbolically dense concept of crime" (Jackson 2004: 963).

It follows that people's perceptions of crime and safety may be more diffused than traditionally considered. Instead, it involves both experienced events of concern about crime and social judgments about the state of society and communities, socially and culturally conditioned (Farrall et al. 2009, Jackson 2004, Jackson 2008).

Indeed, the social cues that contribute to a person being concerned about crime depend on the context of that individual (Garland 2001, Jackson 2008). Concerns about crime and the associated risks are experienced by "socially situated individuals who inhabit the complex of practices, knowledges, norms and subjectivities that make up a culture" (Garland 2001:147). Accordingly, perceptions of crime and safety are differentiated and stratified within society based

on a person's social positioning, including individual and environmental characteristics, but also beliefs about social norms, and values which are in many ways tied to a person's place in society (Garland 2001, Jackson 2008). For instance, studies show that the convergence of a single social status (e.g., gender, racial identity, or socioeconomic status) and the social context of urban neighbourhoods (e.g., racial composition, inequalities, and collective efficacy) contribute to people experiencing and assessing crime and safety differently (Hipp 2010, Sampson and Raudenbush 1999, Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). As such, an understanding of citizens' perceptions of crime and safety requires a detailed examination of the context in which a person evolves.

In sum, this brief overview provides a path forward for understanding citizens' perceptions of crime and safety across urban, rural, and remote communities. It suggests that expecting variations is reasonable given the unique context of rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. Consequently, in the next section, we explore the context of social life in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas as it pertains to the underlying dimensions of these perceptions. We first outline a theoretical framework linking social life with spatiality, leading to our conceptualisation of rurality.

### **3. Spatiality and social life**

Scholarly interest in the connection between crime and place has a long tradition in criminology and criminal justice. This body of research generally focuses on spatial variations in the course and manifestation of fundamental social processes related to crime across the urban landscape. We can think most notably of research into social disorganisation and the neighbourhood effect (Bursik 1984, Park and Burgess 1925, Sampson and Wilson 1995, Sampson 2012, Shaw and McKay 1969). From these studies emerged a clear understanding that when it

comes to facing crime and delinquency, where a person resides matters. Nevertheless, the urban-centrism of this literature makes applying its principles challenging in the context of this study, notably when it comes to conceptualising rurality. Accordingly, we propose to draw from broader theoretical insights into the connection between space and social life to make sense of how perceptions of crime and safety may vary across urban, rural, and remote areas.

At the basis of our conceptualisation is the notion that human activities are inevitably situated in space, unable to be disconnected from that location (Gans 2002, Giddens 1984, Lefebvre 1991, Löw 2016, Soja 1985). This condition becomes evident when these human activities transform natural spaces (i.e., ensembles of physical and material proprieties) into what several scholars differentially refer to as social spaces, places, environments, or settings. This transformation occurs when individuals and social groups begin using natural spaces (Gans 2002, Lefebvre 1991). Indeed, social spaces "are made as people ascribe qualities to the material and social stuff gathered there: ours or theirs; safe or dangerous; public or private; unfamiliar or known; rich or poor; Black or White; beautiful or ugly; new or old; accessible or not" (Gieryn 2000:472). It follows that social spaces are simultaneously ensembles of physical and material proprieties geographically situated and social objects influencing and influenced by human activities (Gans 2002, Gieryn 2000, Löw 2016). For example, referring back to the literature on crime and place, studies clearly show how inequalities are differentially distributed across city neighbourhoods and how the resulting distinct contexts of these neighbourhoods are associated with the occurrence of crime, violence, and disorder (Blau and Blau 1982, Hipp 2007, Morenoff et al. 2001, Sampson and Wilson 1995).

Accordingly, in line with this conceptualisation of social spaces, we define rural and remote communities by their relative geographical isolation. From the angle of physical and material

proprieties, this definition entails that rural and remote communities exist in relation to urban areas in terms of location and distance, implying varying degrees of rurality (Bourke et al. 2012, Lobao 1996, Wakerman 2004). In other words, communities exist on an urban-rural-remote continuum defined by their community's relative degree of geographical isolation. From the angle of social proprieties, this relative geographical isolation also denotes how spaces are used. For instance, we know that rural and remote communities tend to have smaller populations and fewer available services compared to urban areas (Alasia et al. 2017), a situation emerging as both the condition and outcome of isolation: it “captures the trade-off between access to resource-rich, high population-density areas and the cost of travel to those areas; or alternatively, it captures the likelihood that resources will be placed in a given area as a result of the number of people who could and would reasonably access it” (Doogan et al. 2018:130). Therefore, we argue that the relative degree of geographical isolation of rural and remote communities interacts with social life, leading to distinctive realities for the people residing in those areas. In the following section, we explore precisely how these distinct realities might influence citizens of rural and remote communities as it relates to perceptions of crime and safety.

#### **4. Crime and disorders in rural and remote communities**

Our theoretical framework leads us to argue that the context of rural and remote communities generates unique realities and challenges compared to urban areas. Ultimately, these differences have the potential to impact people's perceptions of crime and safety and their overall wellbeing in their communities. These differences generally arise under two conditions. On the one hand, some social phenomena may be experienced by people in both urban and non-urban communities. However, the context of the area intensifies or lessens their occurrence or proceeding. On the other hand, some social phenomena may be unique to different communities

along the urban-rural-remote continuum. The empirical evidence presented below suggests that antecedents of perceptions of crime and safety are indeed experienced differently across urban, rural, and remote communities in line with these two conditions.

As previously detailed, rural and remote communities experience a greater crime occurrence than we would generally expect based on a conventional (and stereotypical) depiction of rurality. In fact, the rate of police-reported crime in Canada was 23% higher in rural areas compared to urban areas in 2017. It includes firearm-related violent infractions (e.g., illegal discharge), criminal mischief, impaired driving, sexual offences against children, physical assaults, disturbing the peace infractions, and homicides (Perreault 2019a). Furthermore, as previously detailed, violent crimes against women are particularly prevalent in rural areas (DeKeseredy 2021, Rotenberg 2019). Moreover, there is an important occurrence of social problems within rural and remote communities compared to urban areas, including mental illness and substance abuse, social and economic inequalities, food scarcity, social and physical disorders, and housing shortages (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2004, Kelly, Lewin, Stain et al. 2011, Schissel 1992, Van Gundy, Jenkins Tucker, Stracuzzi et al. 2016, Wood 2011). While not unique to rural and remote communities, these social problems are compounded by a lack of adequate access to social and health services, more so than in urban areas (Belanger and Stone 2008, Duncan 1996, Hardin-Fanning and Rayens 2015, Sibley and Weiner 2011).

Taken together, these findings suggest that we should expect perceptions of crime to be higher in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas and perceptions of safety more deleterious. Indeed, this level of crime and social problems speaks to a potentially higher perceived risk of victimisation and perceptions of poor community wellbeing, including a diminished quality of life, a deterioration of social relations, and declining community stability, which were found to

be critical in the manifestation of perceptions of crime and safety. Despite these expectations, the extant literature has repeatedly shown that fear of crime is lower in non-urban areas (Baumer 1985, Kennedy and Krahn 1984, Krannich et al. 1989, Norris and Reeves 2013, Pain 2000, Silverman and Della-Gustina 2001). We argue that this contradiction is linked again to problems with the conceptualisation and operationalisation of rurality.

Our theoretical framework suggests that communities' relative degree of geographical isolation interacts with social life, resulting in distinctive realities along the urban-rural-remote continuum. Accordingly, our conceptualisation of rurality not only suggests differences between urban and non-urban communities (i.e., rural and remote) but also implies differences among communities on the rural to remote segment of the continuum. In other words, the occurrence of social phenomena may differ between highly geographically isolated communities (i.e., remote), such as communities only accessible by plane in the northern parts of the country, and marginally isolated communities (i.e. rural), such as small towns close to large urban centres.

When it comes to perceptions of crime and safety, empirical evidence suggests that such differences exist. For instance, data from Canada indicate that the high rates of crime and violence observed in non-urban areas are attributable mainly to the country's most northern and geographically isolated regions rather than the southern part of the country, which tends to be less geographically isolated. In fact, rural police services in the southern part of the country generally report crime rates lower than urban areas (Allen and Perreault 2015, Perreault 2019a). Accordingly, variations in perceptions of crime and safety should not be expected to only exist between urban and non-urban areas but all along the urban-rural-remote continuum based on the relative degree of geographical isolation. Given this conceptualisation of rurality and the empirical evidence detailed above, we expect people in rural areas to perceive less crime and feel more safe

compared to people in urban areas. However, we expect people to perceive more crime in more remote communities and feel less secure than people in rural communities.

## **5. Methodology**

### ***5.1. Sample***

This study draws from the 2014 Canadian General Social Survey (GSS). This cross-sectional representative survey of the Canadian population gathers, among other things, information on people's perceptions of crime, safety, and the criminal justice system. It also collects data on experiences with the criminal justice system and criminal victimisation. The sample includes 35,167 respondents aged 15 or older living in a private household. The survey has an overall response rate of approximately 50%. Interviews were conducted by phone with respondents living in the provinces. Respondents living in the territories were interviewed by phone or in person.<sup>15</sup> Given the survey's complex sampling design, the data is weighted using the sampling weights provided by Statistics Canada to ensure the sample is generalisable to the entire population. The analyses also utilise bootstrap replication weights provided by Statistics Canada to ensure inference-appropriate variance.<sup>16</sup> Data were accessed through the Canadian Research Data Centre Network.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that a more recent iteration of the Canadian General Social Survey (GSS) on the topic of victimisation is available (i.e., 2019). However, the geographical data needed to

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<sup>15</sup> Further information about the survey are available at Statistics Canada (2016).

<sup>16</sup> More information on Statistics Canada's complex survey design, including the use of weights, can be accessed at Statistics Canada (2015).

<sup>17</sup> This research was conducted at the Carleton, Ottawa, Outaouais Research Data Centre (COOL-RDC) part of the Canadian Research Data Centre Network (CRDCN). This service is provided through the support of the University of Ottawa, the Université du Québec en Outaouais, the Canadian Foundation for Innovation, the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Social Science and Humanity Research Council, and Statistics Canada. However, all views expressed in this work are our own.

conduct the analysis has not yet been fully released. Nevertheless, the objective of this paper is to examine the connection between where people live on the urban-rural-remote continuum and their perceptions of crime and safety (i.e., underlying social mechanism). The objective is not to assess the degree to which people feel safe or their assessment of crime in their community at a specific moment in time. Accordingly, despite this limitation, we are confident that the data mobilised permits a valid and robust assessment of the social mechanisms proposed in this article.

## **5.2. Dependent variables**

*Perception of Safety from Crime.* Respondent's perception of safety was assessed through their general satisfaction with personal safety from crime (1 = very dissatisfied; 2 = dissatisfied; 3 = neither satisfied nor dissatisfied; 4 = satisfied; 5 = very satisfied). They were also asked about specific situations:<sup>18</sup> whether they feel safe from crime walking alone in their area after dark (1 = very unsafe; 2 = somewhat unsafe; 3 = reasonably safe; 4 = very safe) and whether they feel safe from crime alone in their home in the evening or at night (1 = very worried; 2 = somewhat worried; 3 = not at all worried).

*Perception of Crime and Disorder in the Community.* Respondents' perceptions about crime in their community were measured by assessing the perceived level of crime in their neighbourhood compared to other areas in Canada (1 = lower amount of crime; 2 = about the same; 3 = higher amount of crime). They were also asked about the extent to which they thought various social issues were problems in their community (1 = not a problem at all; 2 = a small problem; 3 = a moderate problem; 4 = a big problem): noisy neighbours or loud parties; people hanging around on the streets; garbage or litter lying around; vandalism and deliberate property damage; people

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<sup>18</sup> Over the years, scholars have raised several operational problems with the use of situational variables as measures of fear of crime (see Gray et al. 2008, Hale 1996). However, in this context, they are used as broader and complementary assessment of people's social relationship with their environment, thus curtailing the problems raised in the extant literature.



attacked because of skin colour/ethnicity/religion; people using or dealing drugs; people being drunk or rowdy in public places. While not framed explicitly as criminal acts, these social problems generally constitute behaviours proscribed under provisions of the Canadian Crime Code. Furthermore, as detailed above, when people express concern about crime, they generally append related concerns, including the presence of social and physical disorders in the community (Jackson, 2004). Accordingly, we conceptualise these social problems as indicators of a potentially perceived crime problem in the community.

These variables were combined to form two latent variables (i.e., perceptions of crime and disorder and perceptions of safety). A preliminary confirmatory factor analysis suggests an appropriate fit of the data, including goodness-of-fit measures (RMSE = 0.023; CFI = 0.961; TLI = 0.950), factor loading (i.e., above a 0.4 threshold (standardised) and statistically significant), and factor items explained variance (between 0.116 and 0.574). Furthermore, as expected, there is a strong correlation between the two latent variables ( $r = -0.526$ ). In sum, it suggests that when respondents perceive a greater crime and disorder problem in their community, their perception of safety deteriorates. Conversely, when respondents are satisfied with their personal safety, they are less likely to perceive a crime and disorder problem in their community.

### ***5.3. Main independent variables***

*Index of Remoteness (i.e., Urban-Rural-Remote Continuum).* Our conceptualisation of rurality finds its defining feature in the relative geographical isolation of communities. This feature underpins the material and social properties of these areas. Accordingly, we are mobilising the index of remoteness developed by Alasia et al. (2017) at Statistics Canada to account for this reality

and the envisioned urban-rural-remote continuum.<sup>19</sup> This index measures the relative geographical isolation of communities based on two dimensions: the proximity of communities to population centres within a radius permitting daily accessibility and the population size of the population centres as a proxy for service availability. A population centre has a minimum population of 1,000 residents and a density of 400 residents or more per square kilometre. Most communities in Canada are accessible by the main road network. However, some communities are only accessible by air transport or a combination of transportation infrastructures (e.g., aeroplane, train, winter ice roads), excluding the main road network. As a result, the index also accounts for the transportation infrastructures available to communities. This continuous index measures the relative geographic isolation of communities on a scale ranging from 0 to 1 using census subdivisions (CSD)<sup>20</sup> as the reference points: zero represents a densely populated area (e.g., the core area of large cities), and one represents a highly isolated area (e.g., the most northern communities of Canada). For greater ease in interpreting the results, we rescaled the index between 0 and 10 so that each unit increase represents a significant step in the relative geographical isolation of communities.

This index provides an innovative way of operationalising rurality. It puts communities as a point on a continuum rather than using dichotomous urban-rural indicators or simply equating rurality to communities with a small population. Furthermore, Alasia et al. (2017) found that the index provides a more sensitive measure of rurality while still accounting for the most critical dimensions of standard operationalisation strategies and tools, including population sizes.

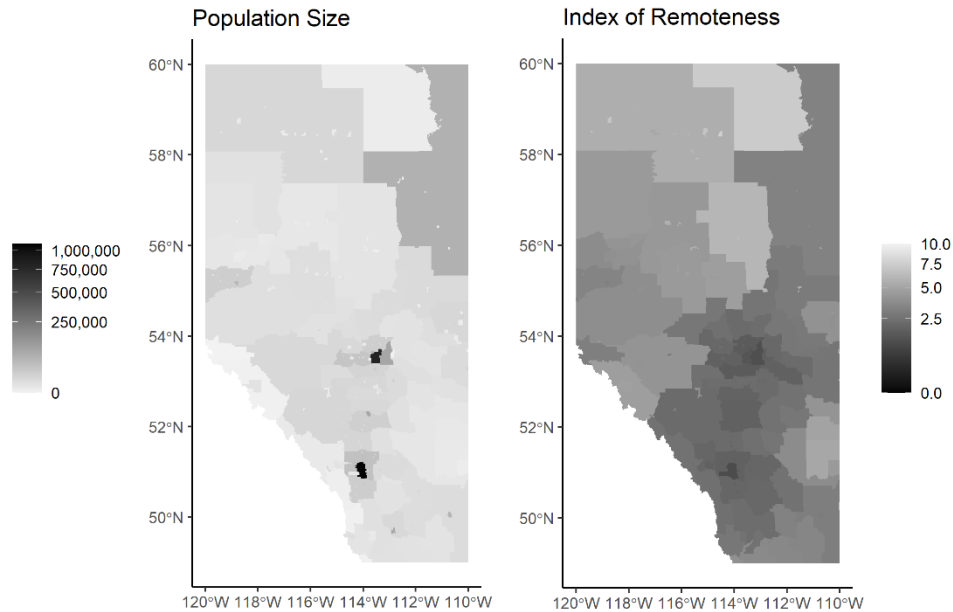
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<sup>19</sup> A similar index was developed in the United States, see U.S. Department of Agriculture (2020).

<sup>20</sup> Alasia et al. (2017:9) provides a definition of census subdivisions (CSD): “The CSD is an administrative geography that is a municipality or an area that is deemed to be equivalent to a municipality for statistical reporting purposes (e.g., an Indian reserve or an unorganized territory). Because of this correspondence with an administrative entity (the municipality), CSDs are the most commonly used territorial units for indicators that are intended to be used in policy analysis or program delivery at the local level.”

**Figure 1** illustrates this multi-dimensionality by mapping side-by-side the population size and the index of remoteness across CSDs in the province of Alberta using data from the 2011 census.

**Figure 1. Population Size and Index of Remoteness by Census Subdivisions, Province of Alberta, 2011 Census Data**



On the left panel, we observe two highly populated CSDs representing the cities of Calgary and Edmonton, both with populations of over 1,000,000 residents. However, we observe a sharp contrast outside these boundaries, with most CSDs having medium to small population sizes (i.e., below 150,000 residents). The two cities remain visible on the right panel given their status as population centres and their minimal level of geographical isolation. However, contrary to the population size mapping, we observe the influence of the two metropolises on the surrounding communities. Indeed, it appears as if the relative geographical isolation of CSDs radiates out of these population nodes, with bordering communities being less geographically isolated than the farthest communities. It is important to note that other dimensions enter the equation, including the transportation infrastructures in place and the influence of other smaller population centres

across the province. However, the sheer influence of these two metropolises is an excellent example of how the context of communities is affected by relative geographical isolation. For instance, people living in surrounding communities may commute to these cities for work or to access services and resources, which is more difficult in the more geographically isolated communities. In sum, conceptualising and operationalising rurality based uniquely on population sizes, as it is often the case, hides important nuances and contextual dimensions important for rural and remote communities' physical and social properties. The index of remoteness used in this study is able to overcome this limitation.

#### **5.4. Covariates**

*Sociodemographic Characteristics.* Citizens' sociodemographic characteristics have been associated with perceptions of crime and safety (Hipp 2010, Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). Accordingly, we adjust for the following covariates: respondents' gender (1 = men; 0 = women), age, highest degree earned (1 = high school diploma or more; 0 = no high school diploma); main employment status in the twelve months preceding the survey (1 = employed; 0 = unemployed) and self-reported race/ethnicity background (1 = Indigenous; 2 = black; 3 = other). We also consider whether respondents experienced at least one victimisation incident over the twelve months preceding the survey (1 = yes; 0 = no), assuming that this experience may alter perceptions of crime and safety (Smith 1991, Tseloni and Zarafonitou 2008).

Several other contextual factors are known to influence people's perception of crime and safety and their views of communities/neighbourhoods more broadly, including the length of time residing in a community, the sense of belonging, and people's lifestyle (Hipp 2010, Sampson and Raudenbush 1999, Sampson and Raudenbush 2004, Taylor, Gottfredson and Brower 1984). Among the variables available in the GSS, we selected the following indicators as covariates:

length of time respondents have lived in their current city or local community (1 = less than six months; 2 = 6 months to less than one year; 3 = 1 year to less than three years; 4 = 3 years to less than five years; 5 = 5 years to less than ten years; 6 = ten years and over), respondents' sense of belonging to their community (1 = very weak; 2 = somewhat weak; 3 = somewhat strong; 4 = very strong), and the average number of evening activities respondents go out for in a month (i.e., continuous variable).

**Table 1. Descriptive Statistics**

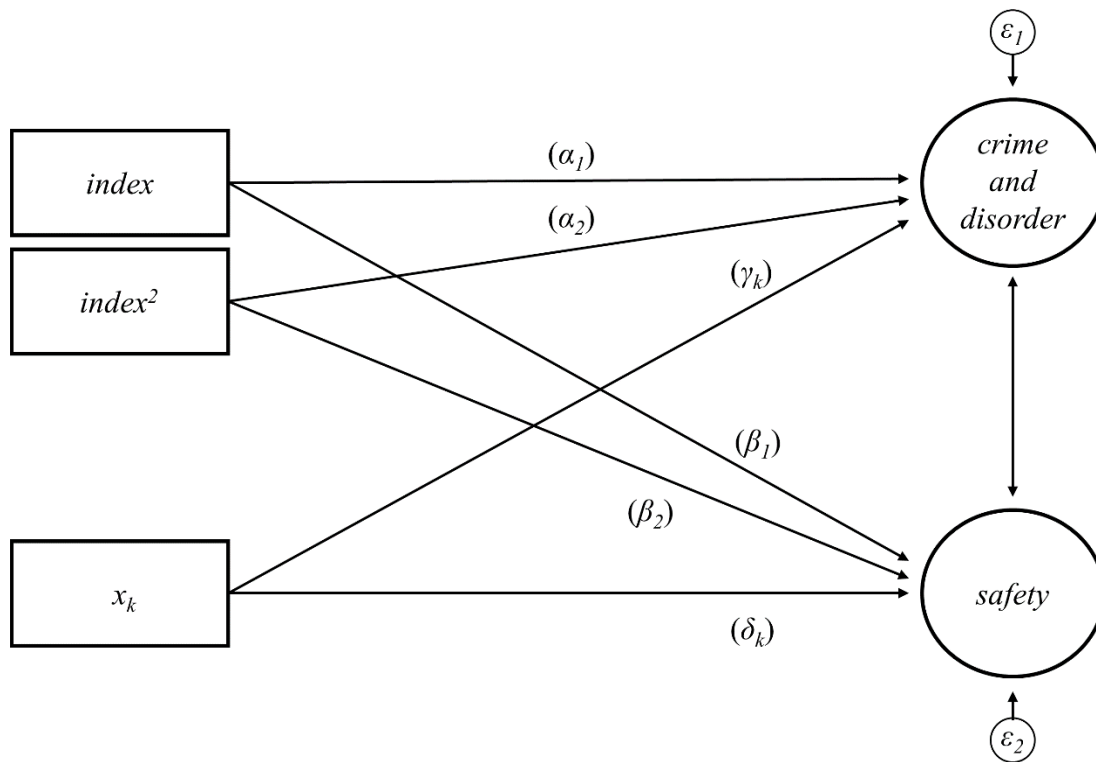
	Mean/ Percentage	Std. Dev.	N (Weighted)
<b>Perceptions of Safety</b>			
Satisfaction with personal safety from crime	4.24	0.74	29,172,270
Feeling of safety from crime - Walking alone at night	3.44	0.67	24,999,015
Feeling of safety from crime - Alone at home at night	2.88	0.34	27,742,399
<b>Perceptions of Crime and Disorder</b>			
Relative occurrence of crime in neighbourhood	1.28	0.54	28,780,882
Noisy neighbours or loud parties	1.32	0.64	29,442,275
People hanging around on the streets	1.26	0.63	29,373,277
Garbage or litter lying around	1.33	0.69	29,469,362
Vandalism/other damage to property	1.36	0.70	29,363,402
People attacked because of racial/ethnic/religious identity	1.10	0.42	29,004,662
People using or dealing drugs	1.35	0.75	28,121,402
People being drunk or rowdy in public places	1.27	0.63	29,264,063
<b>Urban-Rural-Remote Continuum</b>			
Index of Remoteness	1.44	1.18	29,516,669
<b>Covariates</b>			
Sex (1 = Men)	49.4%		29,516,669
Age	45.97	18.69	29,516,669
Education Attainment (1 = High School or More)	85.1%		29,037,518
Employment Status (1 = Employed)	57.4%		29,245,935
Indigenous (1 = Yes)	3.3%		29,427,830
Black (1 = Yes)	2.5%		28,960,122
Experienced Victimization (1 = Yes)	18.6%		29,516,669
Time Residing in the Community	5.47	1.05	29,458,189
Sense of Belonging	2.98	0.81	28,501,487
Number of Evening Activities	14.31	11.43	28,948,508

## 6. Analytical strategy

The analysis was conducted using structural equation modelling (SEM). This approach allows us to simultaneously estimate all theorised structures of association between our variables.

The latent variables representing the perception of crime and disorder, and the perception of safety are regressed simultaneously on the index of remoteness while adjusting for the identified covariates (**figure 2**). This analysis examines the potential for variations in perception of crime and disorder and perception of safety across urban, rural, and remote communities. The index of remoteness is included in the model in its quadratic form to account for our hypothesis, which foresees curve-linear variations in people's perceptions of crime and disorder and perceptions of safety based on the relative geographical isolation of where they reside. The complete specification of the model can be found in Technical Appendix at the end of the article.

**Figure 2. Structural Equation Model, Key Pathways**



## 7. Results

**Table 2** presents the results from the first model, which regresses the latent dependent variables representing perceptions of crime and disorder and perception of safety simultaneously on the index of remoteness while adjusting for the identified covariates. Goodness-of-fit statistics suggest a good fit of the data. Results also indicate that the correlation between the latent dependent variables remains negative and strong as expected. In other words, perceiving more crime and disorder in the community harms respondents' perception of safety. Conversely, when respondents are satisfied with their personal safety, they are less likely to perceive a crime and disorder problem in their community. The proportion of missing data is under 10%.

Results suggest a quadratic relationship from the index of remoteness on both outcome variables. For greater ease in interpreting these results, we estimated the marginal effect of the two latent dependent variables along the index of remoteness, which we plotted in **figure 3**. All covariates were held at their mean or modal value. As a reference point, Alasia et al. (2017) indicate that scores of two, four, and six represent critical values on the index. Large cities and surrounding communities are generally found around 1.5 on the index. However, most communities are located between two and four on the index. This range includes medium-sized cities, small towns, and rural areas with a certain proximity to population centres. At a score of four, communities are considered reasonably isolated, and beyond six, they are considered highly isolated. However, we must remember that the variable is continuous and represent a continuum of rurality and remoteness. Accordingly, these values are only reference points and should not be considered as clear thresholds.

**Table 2. Structural Equation Model of Perceptions of Crime and Disorder and Perceptions of Safety**

	Perceptions of Crime and Disorder			Perceptions of Safety		
	Coeff.	SE	Sig.	Coeff.	SE	Sig.
<b>Covariates</b>						
Sex	-0.023	0.006	***	0.308	0.011	***
Age <sup>a</sup>	-0.017	0.003	***	0.018	0.005	***
Education Attainment	0.000	0.007		0.038	0.014	**
Employment Status	0.020	0.006	**	0.017	0.011	
Indigenous	0.079	0.017	***	-0.056	0.027	*
Black	0.022	0.023		0.037	0.033	
Experienced Victimization	0.173	0.011	***	-0.219	0.014	***
Time Residing in the Community <sup>a</sup>	0.002	0.003		-0.003	0.005	
Sense of Belonging <sup>a</sup>	-0.058	0.004	***	0.112	0.005	***
Number of Evening Activities <sup>a</sup>	0.011	0.004	**	0.038	0.005	***
<b>Main Independent Variables</b>						
Index of Remoteness	-0.049	0.006	***	0.090	0.010	***
Index of Remoteness (Quadratic)	0.012	0.001	***	-0.012	0.002	***

\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

<sup>a</sup> a standardised variable for the model

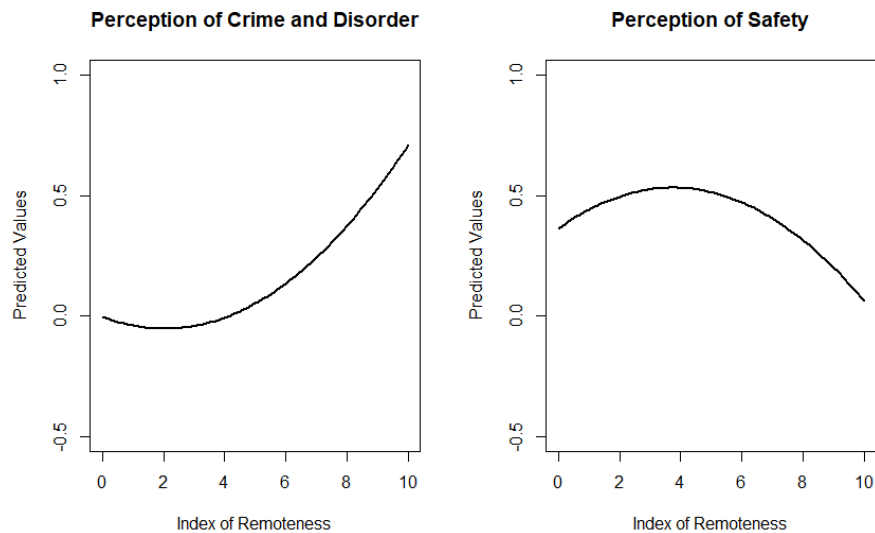
**Note:** Model estimated in *Mplus 7.4* with sampling weights and bootstrap replication weights. Goodness-of-fit statistics suggest an appropriate fit (RMSEA = 0.036; SRMR = 0.022). The proportion of missing data is under 10%. Correlation between the latent dependent variables is moderate ( $r = -0.505$ ).

Overall, we observe two curvilinear trajectories, which to some extent mirror each other. Beginning with the perception of crime and disorder, we observe that respondents tend to gradually perceive less crime and disorder with every increase in the relative geographical isolation of communities up to a score of approximately three on the index of remoteness. However, from a score of three onward, the trend reverses, and the perception of crime and disorder increases almost exponentially. It even surpasses highly urban communities, which are found at the lower end of the index. When it comes to the perception of safety, the inverse is true. Favourable perception of safety rises with every unit increase in relative geographical isolation, up to a score of approximately four on the index of remoteness. From there onward, however, perception of safety begins declining considerably. Again, it exceeds large urban areas, this time in terms of a



relatively unfavourable perception of safety. Ultimately, these results suggest that while perceptions of crime and disorder and perceptions of safety tend to be more favourable in rural areas compared to urban areas, there is a turning where it starts deteriorating with the relative geographical isolation of remote communities.

**Figure 3. Marginal Effect, Perceptions of Crime and Disorder and Perceptions of Safety by the Index of Remoteness**



**Note:** Results from the model (**Table 2**). All other variables were held at their mean or modal value. In cross-section models, the intercepts of latent dependent variables are fixed at zero.

## 8. Discussion

This study emerged from the observation that perceptions of crime and safety in rural and remote communities remain an understudied and undervalued research area. When studies do explore these crucial social judgments, they are generally limited by inadequate conceptualisations and operationalisations of rurality. This treatment of rurality has contributed to sustaining idealised and stereotypical accounts of the realities of living outside urban communities. Namely that these communities are idyllic settings where crime, violence, and social problems are few and where there is exceptional community wellbeing and thriving social ties between community members (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014, Hogg and Carrington 1998, Hogg and Carrington 1999).

The extant literature generally seems to corroborate these ideas through empirical evidence suggesting that fear of crime is relatively lower in these communities than in urban areas (Baumer 1985, Kennedy and Krahn 1984, Krannich et al. 1989, Norris and Reeves 2013, Pain 2000, Silverman and Della-Gustina 2001).

However, our findings tell a different story. They suggest that perceptions of crime (and disorder) and perceptions of safety in rural and remote communities are much more nuanced than previously reported. As we would expect based on the extant literature, rural communities were observed to have more favourable perceptions of crime (and disorder) and perceptions of safety compared to their urban counterpart. This includes, for instance, small towns and rural areas with a certain proximity to population centres. However, there is a tipping point where these perceptions start deteriorating. As the geographical isolation of communities starts increasing, we observed that people begin to perceive more crime and disorder in their environment and feel less safe. While these findings support our central hypothesis, they have also exceeded the predicted outcome in some ways. Instead of reaching a point where these perceptions were comparable with urban areas, they were estimated to be much worse once approaching the higher end of the geographical isolation scale. In other words, people living in highly isolated communities were found to perceive more crime and disorder, and feel less safe than people living in large metropolitan areas.

These results are undoubtedly in stark contrast with what we commonly envision about non-urban areas. Rural and remote communities are not the idealised settings so often portrayed in public and academic work. However, these results are not so surprising when we consider the broader literature, which shows that crime, violence, and social problems are commonplace outside urban areas, even sometimes being much more prevalent (Allen and Perreault 2015, Allen 2018,

Ceccato 2016, Perreault 2019a, Rotenberg 2019, Wendt 2016, Wood 2011). The conceptual homogenisation of rurality appears to have obscured the extant literature's ability to observe these variations (Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy 2014). Our conceptualisation and operationalisation of rurality were able to transcend these limits. By drawing from the theoretical insights on the connection between spatiality and social life and conceiving the relative geographical isolation of communities as the defining feature that underpins rurality, we were able to better capture to certain extent the heterogeneity of rural and remote spaces. Ultimately, this heterogeneity interacts with social life, leading to varying perceptions of crime and safety.

This study is not without limitations. First, the data used in this study was collected more than seven years ago. Accordingly, people's relative assessment of crime, disorder and safety in their communities may have changed significantly during this time. However, we are confident that the examined social mechanisms (i.e., theoretical framework) underlying the differences along the urban-rural-remote continuum remain salient to this day. Indeed, evidence from the broader literature suggests that despite variations in people's assessment of social objects over time, the core determinants of these judgements generally remain stable. For example, procedural justice is consistently observed as the most important determinant of perceived police and legal legitimacy, despite observations stretching over decades and across numerous countries (see Jackson 2018).

Second, our study examined lay judgments about crime, disorder and safety instead of objective measurements. However, we argue that these lay judgments are as crucial for understanding the wellbeing of communities, if not more. Studies show that people's views, opinions, and attitudes impact how they negotiate their lives and shape how they interact with the world. This is independent of whether these judgments are based on objective facts, subjective interpretations, or simple intuitions (Frank 1979, Tallman and Gray 1990). For instance, empirical

evidence show that unfavourable perceptions of crime, safety and disorder are associated with declining physical and mental health (Green, Gilbertson and Grimsley 2002, Pearson and Breetzke 2014, Sampson and Raudenbush 2004). Accordingly, in light of our results, there are causes for concern. The wellbeing of people in rural and remote communities may be particularly impacted by their perceptions of crime, disorder, and safety, which we found to be particularly dire in the most geographically isolated regions. While these possible consequences will need to be examined by future research, they demonstrate the significant implications of our research. Salient, precise, and detailed data on people's experiences living in rural and remote communities are needed for evidence-based social policy. Our research provides a framework capable of a more precise comparison of urban, rural, and remote communities compared to conventional approaches. Our proposed approach opens up the door for observing trends, patterns, and nuances that traditional methods would otherwise obscure.

In conclusion, while it has been clear for several decades that place matters when studying crime and concomitant issues, few have considered this effect beyond city neighbourhoods. This emphasis is not surprising given the wide range of social and political dynamics animating the constitution of cities, including neighbourhood disadvantage, racial segregation, residential stability, disorders, collective efficacy, social networks, and immigration (Brunton-Smith and Sturgis 2011, Hipp 2007, Hipp 2010, Lyons et al. 2013, Papachristos and Bastomski 2018, Quillian and Pager 2001, Sampson et al. 1997, Sampson 2012, Shaw and McKay 1969, Thrasher 1936, Zimmerman and Messner 2010). While there can be no question on the salience of these studies and the importance of their contribution, the urban-centrism of the extant literature led us to overlook the unique and dynamic realities of rural and remote communities. Once we start thinking of rurality as being composed of diverse social spaces in the same way as neighbourhoods within

a city, we open up the possibility for a wide range of sociological and criminological inquiries. Our research has provided support for such an approach, including insights into the critical social processes that may be uncovered as a result.

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## 12. Technical Appendix

The model illustrated in **figure 2** can be expressed as follows:

$$crime_i = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1(index_i) + \alpha_2(index_i^2) + \sum_{k=1}^K \gamma_k x_{ki} + \varepsilon_{1i}$$

$$safety_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1(index_i) + \beta_2(index_i^2) + \sum_{k=1}^K \delta_k x_{ki} + \varepsilon_{2i}$$

Here,  $\alpha_1$ ,  $\alpha_2$ ,  $\beta_1$ , and  $\beta_2$  represent a quadratic relationships between the index of remoteness and the latent dependent variables, perception of crime and perception of safety, which were previously defined. The set of covariates previously identified, denoted here as  $K$ , are indexed in  $k$ . They are observed as  $x_{ki}$  with  $\gamma_k$  and  $\delta_k$  representing the estimated parameters. This indexing simplifies our communication of the model's structure by focusing on the key pathways of interest. Ultimately, all covariates are estimated as unique parameters in the models. Finally,  $\varepsilon_{1i}$  and  $\varepsilon_{2i}$  represent the error terms that we assume to be independent and normally distributed.

## **DISCUSSION**

This thesis emerges in the context of limited knowledge about people's experiences of living in rural and remote communities, both generally and as it relates to crime, disorder, and social control. Furthermore, the extant literature about these experiences is shrouded by public and academic misconceptions of rurality and remoteness as idyllic places or as places of marginal significance. Accordingly, this thesis sought to contribute to the demystification of these communities and to help foster greater interest in studying life outside urban areas.

Central to this research was the conceptualization of rurality and remoteness. Starting from the principle that social life and human activities cannot be separated from where they occur, the conceptualization postulated that variation in the physical, material, and social characteristics of spaces result in social life and human activities being experienced differently across various locations. Following this principle, we proposed to define rural and remote communities based on their relative geographical isolation from urban areas resulting in an urban-rural-remote continuum. This definition captured rural and remote spaces' physical and material dimensions by including their physical locations and relative positions to population centres. It also captured the social dimensions of rural and remote spaces. This component was primarily evidenced through the research undertaken in this thesis which examined empirically how social phenomena and social processes related to crime, disorder, and social control are experienced differently based on where a person is living on the urban-rural-remote continuum.

### **1. Research Summary and Synthesis**

First, this thesis looked at the variations in self-reported encounters with the police for behavioural health-related reasons across urban, rural, and remote communities. It did so by examining the likelihood of reporting such incidents based on where a person lives. This line of



inquiry was premised on the observation that police practices are modified by the context of rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. First, rural and remote police officers are often required to bridge the resource and service availability gap, including social and health services, a situation not experienced as acutely by their urban counterparts (Adorjan et al. 2017, Decker 1979, Huey and Ricciardelli 2015, Lockwood et al. 2021, Maguire et al. 1991, Payne et al. 2005). Second, informal relationships between police officers and people living in rural and remote communities are more frequent compared to urban areas, thus promoting a more frequent recourse to police to resolve issues even when they are not related to law enforcement (Falcone et al. 2002, Frank and Liederbach 2003, Holmes et al. 2017, Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Payne et al. 2005). From these observations emerged the hypothesis that the probability of encountering the police for behavioural health-related reasons is greater in rural and remote communities compared to urban communities.

While findings pertaining to the contacts with the police for one's own behavioural health were inconclusive, they suggest that living in rural and remote communities is significantly associated with a greater probability of experiencing at least one encounter with the police for a family member's behavioural health issues compared to urban areas. This probability also increased with the relative geographic isolation of where people live. Accordingly, we conclude that, under certain conditions, the police are likely to play a greater role in responding to behavioural health incidents in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas. Given the raised concerns regarding the police's involvement in behavioural health incidents, our findings suggest that we should pay attention to the specific context of rural and remote communities. They highlight that a comprehensive understanding of behavioural health-related police encounters requires the perspective of not only urban communities but also rural and remote areas.

The second part of the research looked at variations in the level of public satisfaction toward the police along the urban-rural-remote continuum. It argues that the degree of relative geographical isolation of communities constraints and enables differently police practices across the urban-rural-remote continuum resulting in community members perceiving the police and their work differently. Indeed, evidence from the extent literature suggests that police service in rural and remote areas have limited resources to perform their duties compared to their urban counterparts (Ceccato 2016, Donnermeyer et al. 2016, Huey and Ricciardelli 2017, Schissel 1992), despite frequently facing higher crime rates and acute levels of social and physical disorders (Allen 2018, Beattie et al. 2018, Perreault 2019a, Rotenberg 2019). Furthermore, the relationships between police officers and citizens in rural and remote communities are characterized by more informal rapports (Falcone et al. 2002, Frank and Liederbach 2003, Holmes et al. 2017, Lithopoulos and Ruddell 2011, Payne et al. 2005). Accordingly, we would expect satisfaction in terms of police performance to decrease in rural and remote areas. However, satisfaction in terms of the police officers' relational competences would increase in rural and remote communities compared to urban areas.

Results corroborated these hypotheses. However, it also shows that in the case of police officers' relational competencies, there is a turning point where this satisfaction starts declining as the relative geographical isolation of where people live increases. In fact, this satisfaction level for people living in most remote communities was even lower than for people living in urban areas. This observation corroborates the argument that communities outside urban areas are not homogenous and suggest that contextual differences exist within non-urban areas. It also further supports the argument that the dichotomization approach typically used to conceptualize rurality and study life outside urban areas is insufficient. We must account for the heterogeneity of rural

and remote communities and its influence on the course and manifestation of fundamental social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder, and social control.

Finally, this thesis examined variations in citizens' perceptions of crime and safety across urban, rural, and remote communities. Drawing on the same insights on the connection between spatiality and social life, it was argued that communities' relative degree of geographical isolation interacts with social life, resulting in distinctive realities along the urban-rural-remote continuum. Specifically, that differences are not only found between urban and non-urban communities (i.e. rural and remote) but also among communities on the rural to remote segment of the continuum. Indeed, the extant literature suggests higher crime rates in non-urban areas. However, evidence suggests that this higher crime rate is concentrated in the more remote parts of non-urban areas (Allen and Perreault 2015, Perreault 2019a). Accordingly, we expected people in rural areas to perceive less crime and feel safer than those in urban areas. However, we also expected people to perceive more crime in more remote communities and feel less secure than people in rural communities.

The results corroborated these expectations. However, they also exceeded the predicted outcome in some ways by suggesting that people living in highly isolated communities perceive more crime and disorder, and feel less safe than people living in large metropolitan areas. These results help further emphasize the fact that rural and remote communities are not the idealized settings so often portrayed in public and academic work. They also help support the argument that if we are truly interested in a comprehensive understanding of social phenomena and processes related to crime, disorder and social control, we must pay attention to life outside urban areas and stop perceiving rural and remote communities merely as a peripheral matter. Moreover, the

evidence suggests that some of the issues of interest to urban scholars may be even more salient outside urban areas.

## **2. Contribution**

Individually, each article in this thesis contributed to the substantive topic it examined. Specifically, it extended our knowledge of behavioural health-related police encounters, public satisfaction with the police, and perception of crime and safety by focusing on the experiences of people in rural and remote communities and how they compare to people in urban areas.

Nevertheless, two other contributions overarch this thesis. First, this thesis provides more evidence to dispute the enduring myth that rural and remote communities are purely idyllic localities and, by extension, unworthy of serious scholarly attention. This research brought to light new evidence that communities outside urban areas experiencing multiple challenges and that these misconceptions about life outside urban areas resulted in a dearth of research and knowledge about these challenges. Although some of these challenges might be similar to what is experienced in urban communities, the findings suggest that the degree to which these challenges are problematic varies across urban, rural and remote communities. In some instances, they appear more deleterious in non-urban areas. Nevertheless, it does not mean that the solutions ought to be the same as in urban areas. Accordingly, the findings presented in this thesis contribute to a body of knowledge necessary for developing evidence-based social policy attuned to the needs of communities instead of stereotypical assumptions. Indeed, there continues to be a need for salient, precise, and detailed data on the experiences of people living in rural and remote communities, something missing from the extant literature.

Second, this thesis proposed a framework capable of a more precise comparison of urban, rural, and remote communities compared to conventional approaches. One of the main criticisms motivating this research has been the tendency of studies to view and operationalize rurality superficially, resorting to dividing communities as urban or rural based on their population sizes or other similar classification schemes. The empirical evidence presented in this thesis leads to the conclusion that the proposed approach opens the door for observing trends, patterns, and nuances that traditional methods would otherwise obscure. It emphasizes the heterogeneity of non-urban areas by accounting for how the relative geographical isolation of where people live change their experiences regarding crime, disorder, and social control. Ultimately, it shows that once we start thinking of rurality (and remoteness) as being composed of diverse social spaces in the same way, perhaps as neighbourhoods within a city, evidence suggests that we should find a wide range of social phenomena and processes, yet to be uncovered.

### **3. Limits**

Each article in this thesis had specific limits based on various methodological considerations. However, some limitations are common to them all. First, while this thesis proposed a better conceptualization and operationalization of rurality to what we commonly find within the extant literature, there is still room for improvement. It is clear from the empirical evidence presented that the relative geographical isolation of rural and remote communities is a powerful feature to help denote the physical, material and social dimensions of these spaces. However, this approach could benefit from integrating additional characteristics for an even more detailed perspective on the heterogeneity of non-urban areas, including the distinct cultural, economic, and political features that define various rural and remote regions.

Second, the three studies were solely based on Canadian data, and it is unclear to what extent some of the substantive findings are generalizable to other countries. As one of the world's largest countries, some realities may not apply to smaller ones. Still, the extant literature is composed of studies from several different countries, and despite differences, commonalities are observed for many findings that constitute the basis of our knowledge of life outside urban areas. Accordingly, this suggests that the results regarding behavioural health-related police encounters, public satisfaction with the police, and perception of crime and safety should echo entirely or partially the reality of other countries. Nevertheless, other findings regarding the proposed conceptualization approach to rurality and the demystification of life outside urban areas should be easily generalizable.

Finally, this thesis solely relied on quantitative evidence as the basis of its arguments and conclusions. While this approach was optimal for representing an extensive range of rural and remote communities, future inquiries on the topics explored in this thesis could benefit from a qualitative approach or a mixed-method approach to examine the contextual and subjective dimensions of our findings, such as the circumstances surrounding people's experiences of crime, disorder, and social control.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This thesis targeted the idealization of rural and remote communities for its inaccuracy but also for its hindrance to good research that produces salient, precise, and detailed information on the experiences of people living in rural and remote communities. To do so, we took a path that led us to examine some of the challenges and problems faced by people and communities in non-urban areas, focusing almost entirely on negative aspects of life outside cities. However, the reality of living in rural and remote communities mostly likely sits somewhere in between these two

extremes. In between the bucolic landscapes and the impact of high crime rates exist resilient communities persisting in the face of challenges through a combination of strategies that includes strong social networks, social capital, and civic engagement (Besser 2013, Cox and Hamlen 2015, Peters 2019, Redlin, Aguiar, Langelett et al. 2010).

This resiliency is a path for future crime, disorder, and social control research. Specifically, it would be interesting to research whether rural and remote communities face social problems differently than urban communities. Indeed, it is unclear how the centralization of policy-making to urban hubs contributes to a disconnect between the decisions being made and the realities of rural and remote crime, disorder, and social control, given the known misconceptions about life in rural and remote areas. In other words, how do these misrepresentations intersect with policymaking and whether rural and remote communities have to resort to alternative means of problem-solving to bridge the gap between reality and conceptions of reality within social policies. Indeed, we must think critically about the contribution of criminological evidence to policymaking as well as the lack of evidence, and how it impacts rural and remote communities.

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