

Crime, Peoples and Places

Perspectives on Rural Safety and Justice

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ISBN: 978-1-032-49798-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-1-003-39552-2 (ebk)

First published 2025

Chapter 1

**Victimisation, safety and policing in
areas on the rural-urban continuum**

Aims, scope and structure

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003395522-2



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LONDON AND NEW YORK

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Aims, scope and structure

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Introduction

Rural areas are diverse, both in terms of geography and the safety challenges they encounter. Take, for instance, crime against farmers in the two different contexts of South Africa and Sweden (DN, 2021; Harding, 2020). Farmers are harassed, bitten or killed, and while they may share similar experiences as crime victims, they differ radically in the contexts in which they are embedded. In South Africa, farmers may face crime driven by complex factors such as historical land disputes, socioeconomic inequalities and political tensions, while in Sweden, crime could be influenced by distinct issues like environmental activism, rural isolation or the unique challenges within a particular temporal country's sociopolitical landscape.

Yet, the search to identify commonalities and patterns in crime events is not new or exclusive to rural criminology. In some areas, crime can be endemic; that is, criminal activities are an inherent part of the social and economic fabric of the place, deeply ingrained in the local conditions. In others, crime is brought from external forces where criminogenic networks may connect individuals without regard for national borders, creating challenges for crime prevention and policing.

A major challenge is that current knowledge about the nature of crime in rural places is scattered, and data upon which existing relevant evidence relies have been collected across widely different periods using different methodologies. This makes for a weak base for action to identify patterns of commonalities and/or differences and is much less useful for practical interventions. Another challenge is the way the rural areas are portrayed. While rural and urban areas represent contrasting environments, they exist on a continuum rather than being dichotomous. Lines between them can blur as the urban fringe, and suburban areas share characteristics of both what we traditionally denominate 'rural' and 'urban' areas (Woods, 2004, 2010). Globalisation, technological advancements and changing economic trends influence the development of criminogenic conditions in space and time: they are imposing new challenges on the police and demanding new modes of crime prevention and policing. Yet, most secondary data classify these locations

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as either part of the urban or rural environment. To deal with these current challenges and unravel the particularities of these environments, surveys have been used for this book to inform about the experiences of crime and safety perceptions across the globe.

This book stems from the need to question the nature of crime beyond cities and generate a cohesive knowledge of rural criminology that reveals experiences and perceptions of crime and criminal justice responses in rural areas recognising local and regional country contexts. The book builds upon previous work by a large and increasing body of research on rural criminology and aims to characterise the nature of victimisation, people's safety perceptions, policing and crime prevention practices in rural areas internationally.

Adopted throughout is the notion of the rural-urban continuum as a continuous scale of analysis that acknowledges that rural localities can differ in their criminogenic conditions based on their geography and contexts. The spectrum of rurality stretches from areas that are located close to large towns or on the fringe of major cities that are different from those areas located close to small towns, or in isolated spots, or in vast, remote locations far from any type of urban reference (Ceccato & Abraham, 2022). Differences along the rural-urban scale derive from the fact that variations in population size and density induce variations in a few factors such as anonymity, division of labour, informally and formally prescribed relationships and symbols of status, which are independent of personal acquaintance (Dewey, 1960). The use of the rural-urban continuum as a frame of analysis has implications for how criminogenic conditions of these areas are studied because, in a globalised, interconnected world, these places may be rural in some respects and urban in others.

Unique features of this volume

There are five key, unique features of this volume. The first is that it casts a *global and comparative look at areas on the rural-urban continuum* by reporting survey findings conducted in 19 countries with comparable themes: (i) crime and victimisation in rural localities across the world, (ii) safety and fear, (iii) practices of policing and police trust and (iv) crime prevention practices. The collection is made up of individual jurisdiction-specific studies from case studies from all continents (other than Antarctica) and seven chapters covering cross-cutting themes that have been chosen because they are theoretically relevant to the understanding of crime and safety in areas of the rural-urban continuum. They cover topics that are not dealt with in the surveys, such as environmental crimes, LGBTQI+ and women's safety, but also cross-cutting aspects of victimisation and under-reporting as well as crime prevention and trust in the police.

Current knowledge is scattered, and data upon which existing relevant extant literature relies have been collected across widely different time periods. Rural victimisation constitutes an example of the fragmented body of

knowledge currently found in rural criminology. The seminal study by Donnermeyer (1982) exemplifies the perspectives on victimisation in the rural United States in the early 1980s. This was followed by a UK study by Laird et al. (1999) using results of a survey of Scottish farmers.

These studies inspired a national farm crime project in Australia (that was undertaken in the early part of the twenty-first century by Anderson and McCall (2005) and work by Elaine Barclay in New South Wales that led to the creation and deployment of a survey to farmers in Victoria by Harkness in 2015 and 2018 and replicated by Mulrooney in New South Wales in 2020. Elsewhere, rural victimisation surveys have been deployed in the last decades to groups of rural communities, such as farmers in Sweden (see, for instance Lantbrukarnas Riskförbund, 2012), the Jönköping survey reported in Ceccato (2016) and later with a new survey to animal farmers as reported by Ceccato et al. (2022). Another example is the analysis of victimisation surveys with samples of the rural population, such as in Japan (Shimada & Suzuki, 2021).

The second novelty is *methodological*, namely the attempt to establish a comparative framework for analysis across countries using survey data. By focusing on an identical set of themes, surveys of residents in rural areas around the world, the aim is to examine the nature, type, settings and extent of victimisation in rural areas; assess their safety needs; and examine current practices and policies that can respond to such needs. Even though the surveys are not identical, they all contain similar questions on the four themes in the local language. Chapter 3 is devoted to the making of the data collection and analysis and the comparability of country cases. The sample in each case will vary from 94 to 3,815. Indeed, missing from existing research outputs is cross-national and comparative work that is based on two or more countries. Crime reporting rates in rural areas are lower than those in urban areas and affected by several factors, such as distance to the police station (Stassen & Ceccato, 2019) but also a high tolerance level for several criminal behaviours as suggested in Australia by Barclay et al. (2004). These issues will be discussed both in the country cases as well as in the cross-sectional chapters of the book.

Third, the book is unique in the sense that it adopts a more holistic approach by considering the *intersectionality of safety* of those living in rural areas. Intersectionality addresses how various aspects like gender, race and economic status intersect to shape discrimination (Crenshaw, 1989) and relates to victimisation by illustrating how individuals with multiple marginalised identities may face compounded forms of discrimination and violence. The book presents examples from a variety of country contexts worldwide, giving voices to people living in rural areas from multiple countries in both the Global North and the Global South. Never has there been published a comprehensive, empirically based, internationally focused comparative volume of rural crime that draws upon such a wealth of survey data. Despite an increase in rural crime research, most aspects of crime and safety perceptions in rural contexts have been overlooked until recently.

Fourth, the chapters are written by a varied group of researchers stemming from different research fields, from criminology, law, political science, to geography, sociology and planning. This *multidisciplinary approach* not only fosters a well-rounded understanding but also brings together a range of methodologies, insights and viewpoints. Even though attempts were made to follow a similar template for all country case studies, by featuring a diverse group of researchers, the chapters benefit from a collective wealth of knowledge, encouraging a more nuanced and inclusive exploration of the topic, ultimately enhancing the overall quality and relevance of the content and analysis.

Fifth, several research avenues remain open for further investigation, in general, and from a sustainability perspective, in particular. In a globalised world, social, economic and environmental knowledge forms the foundation for practices aimed at ensuring the availability of resources for future generations while balancing environmental health, economic viability and social equity (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, 2020). Crime and the fear of crime pose significant threats to sustainability both in the Global South and in the Global North. There is an ongoing controversy about the adequacy of these terms regarding geographical boundaries or regional entities – see for example Hollington et al. (2015) – and usage of these terms may not adjust to the demands of long-term sustainability. The *Global South* encompasses Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Pacific Islands and developing countries in Asia, including the Middle East, while the term *Global North* is used as a synonym for developed countries, often Western Europe and North America.

Finally, security has become an important part of the contemporary *social sustainability* narrative as a safe environment enables the fulfilment of the most basic human needs. This is made clear in the objectives of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which was adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015. In areas of the rural continuum, achieving security within the context of social sustainability entails tailored strategies that address the unique challenges of rural environments. Emphasising a collaborative approach involving local communities, governments and relevant stakeholders is essential to cultivate a sense of safety and well-being conducive to the sustainable development goals outlined in the United Nations 2030 Agenda. In Chapter 26, these experiences are discussed in more detail with examples from Sweden and Namibia.

Definitions and main theoretical cornerstones in rural criminology

In this section, the most common terms used in this edited collection are defined. This set of definitions and terms is expected to support the reading of the chapters that follow. First, fundamental concepts are articulated so that readers will gain a cohesive understanding of key terminology, facilitating a more nuanced engagement with the diverse perspectives presented in

subsequent chapters. The definitions used by each author in each country context may slightly differ, so these definitions serve more as a navigational tool, enhancing comprehension and ensuring a coherent and informed exploration of the book's thematic content. Second, attention turns to the main theoretical cornerstones for the book, by reviewing the current literature in rural criminology. This section is based on the analysis of four decades of literature on rural criminology published elsewhere (Ceccato & Abraham, 2022). To underlie the analysis of crime and victimisation, social disorganisation theory, environmental criminology and theories in policing and crime prevention are considered. Discussed, for instance, is situational crime prevention; and underlying safety perceptions are a set of theories around fear and their impact on individuals.

'Crime' is an action or omission, which constitutes an offense and is punishable by law. However, in this book, crime is loosely used as a synonym of criminality, victimisation or criminogenic conditions of a particular place. 'Rural crime' includes acts of crime that may only be possible when embedded situational contexts that are found in areas on the rural-urban continuum. For instance, theft of cattle (Fleisher, 2002), and crimes against nature and/or wildlife (Lowe et al., 1996). As suggested by Ceccato and Abraham (2022), 'crime in the rural' refers to all types of offences that take place in rural contexts: for instance, drug-related crimes (Weisheit & Brownstein, 2016), residential burglary (Wilhelmsson & Ceccato, 2015) or street crime (Glosser, 2016; Sampson, 1983).

Since the 1980s, rural criminological studies have been characterised by diverse theoretical traditions. One prominent criminological approach applied to rural crime is social disorganisation theory. The theory posits that structural disadvantage fosters crime, with offending emerging when weakened social controls fail to enforce legitimate behaviour. The theory provides a framework for understanding how social conditions in rural settings may impact criminal behaviour, such as population mobility, income, unemployment and degree of urbanisation consistently correlate with crime (Allen & Cancino, 2012; Barnett & Mencken, 2002; Fafchamps & Minten, 2006; Jobes, 1999; Ukert et al., 2018). Although Jobes et al. (2004) found support for the theory in rural areas, economic factors showed weaker relationships with crime than social factors such as population diversity and family stability.

Environmental criminology theories, including routine activity theory and situational crime prevention, have also played a role in the analysis of rural crime and policing. Routine activity theory focuses on the everyday activities and routines of individuals, emphasising the role of opportunity and the absence of capable guardians in facilitating crime. In rural areas, routine activity theory has been applied to study how the lack of formal surveillance, limited law enforcement presence, and the isolated nature of certain rural environments – remoteness – create opportunities for criminal activities. Moreover, situational crime prevention aims to reduce the opportunities for

crime by altering the immediate environment or situation. Applied to rural areas, situational crime prevention involves implementing strategies such as improved lighting, better security measures for agricultural equipment and community watch programmes. By addressing specific situational factors in rural settings, this theory seeks to minimise the likelihood of criminal incidents (see, for example Aransiola & Ceccato, 2020; Ceccato, 2015; Harkness, 2020; Harris & Harkness, 2016). One example includes the analysis of environmental crime, and the first studies in this area were concerned with crime geography and prevention (for example Ceccato & Uittenbogaard, 2013; Cowan et al., 2020; Maingi et al., 2012; Stassen & Ceccato, 2020).

Additionally, critical perspectives on rural criminology and the intersectionality of safety have dominated the past two decades, with contributions from North America, Australia and the United Kingdom. Critical perspectives in rural criminology explore issues such as economic disparities, access to resources and the impact of policies on rural communities. This approach goes beyond traditional criminological theories to consider broader social, economic and political factors influencing crime in rural areas (Carrington et al., 2014; DeKeseredy et al., 2007; Donnermeyer, 2007, 2012, 2017, 2018; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2013; Donnermeyer et al., 2013; Garland & Chakraborti, 2006; Robinson & Gardner, 2004; Rogers & Pridemore, 2016; Smith & McElwee, 2013; Somerville et al., 2015; Yarwood, 2010; Yarwood & Edwards, 1995). A particular aspect of this research area is a general consensus that much remains to be done on the intersectionality of safety (Crenshaw, 1989) in rural contexts as previously discussed. More attention should be paid to how, when and why gender intersects with age, class and ethnic belonging, which together may result in multiple dimensions of disadvantage, victimisation and/or poor safety perceptions.

We also consider the two UN-Habitat dimensions of safety and security: *actual* and *perceived*. Actual safety/security refers to the risk of becoming a crime victim, measured by a variety of metrics and crime statistics, while perceived safety/security refers to people's safety perception through the lens of fear and anxiety. Safety is applied as a general term to indicate people's safety perceptions, and sometimes, more specifically, low levels of fear of crime. 'Fear of crime' has historically been referred to as the individual's perceived probability or risk of becoming a crime victim (Brantingham et al., 1986). Ferraro (1995), however, argues that fear of crime is rather the emotional response expressed in relation to potential victimisation, anxiety about crime in general or symbols of crime. In this book, a more inverse concept is referenced, namely the perception of safety, where a low perception of safety indicates a high fear of crime and vice versa.

People living in rural areas often declare feeling safer overall than people living in urban areas. However, safety perceptions reflect unbalanced levels of victimisation such that the poor are over-represented among crime victims. Individual characteristics (age, gender, disability) are also important aspects that determine levels of fear (Brå, 2014; Nilsson & Estrada, 2006; Tseloni

et al., 2010). The study of fear of crime has traditionally been explored through an urban-centric lens in criminological literature, predominantly emphasising theoretical frameworks and specific forms of victimisation. This approach has often neglected to address the unique issues and challenges related to victimisation in rural contexts (Ceccato, 2017, 2022).

Traditionally, research behind the theory has also split fear into situational and dispositional fear. Dispositional fear is a stable and generalised aspect of an individual's fear response, reflecting a consistent tendency to experience fear across a range of situations. An individual with a dispositional fear of isolation may feel anxious not only when standing at an isolated bus stop in the middle of the night in the countryside but also when contemplating the idea of being alone in general, irrespective of the specific situation. Situational fear is tied to specific contexts or stimuli: for instance, situational fear may occur when walking alone in a dimly lit alley at night due to the perceived risk of encountering danger in that specific situation (Gabriel & Greve, 2003). Both types of fear contribute to the complex emotional landscape of individuals, impacting their responses to various challenges and circumstances in different ways.

Understanding the impact of fear is crucial for policymakers, researchers and community leaders seeking to address fear of crime and create environments that foster both safety and well-being (Jackson & Gouseti, 2012). Fear can influence people to alter their daily routines, travel patterns and activities. Individuals may avoid certain places or activities perceived as risky, leading to changes in behaviour aimed at minimising exposure to potential threats, place and time avoidance. Fear of crime may erode trust in institutions responsible for public safety, such as the police and criminal justice system. Perceptions of inadequacy in addressing crime can lead to decreased confidence in these institutions, such as a reduction in trust in the police. These aspects of the impact of fear are especially relevant for individuals living in rural areas.

Chapter synopsis

This book is comprised of four parts and 30 chapters. **Part I** consists of three chapters. Following this introductory chapter, which presents the subject area, definitions and scope, Chapter 2 provides a literature review and Chapter 3 describes the research design and common methodology shared by the contributors in the 19 country cases. Figure 1.1 illustrates the structure in the diagram below.

Part II is composed of the 19 country cases, presented in alphabetical order. Each chapter in this part includes basic information about the country, including aspects such as population size and characterisation of rural areas in the country. This is followed by the empirical study drawing from original survey findings per study case. Common topics in these country-specific chapters are victimisation in rural areas, under-reporting and more general

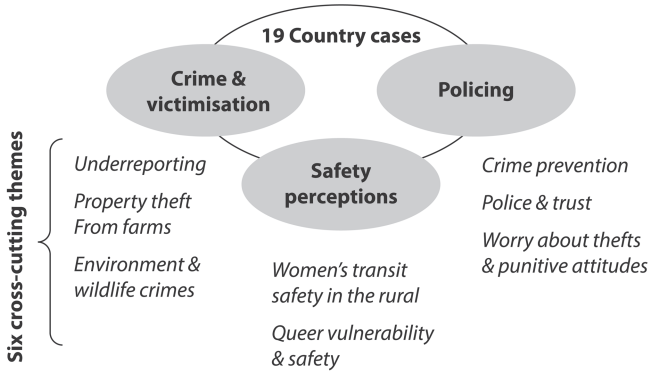


Figure 1.1 The structure of the book

considerations of crime reporting practices. Chapters also consider perceptions of safety based on responses to survey and the proportion of those who worried about becoming crime victims. These chapters also assess trust in the police and satisfaction with the work of police and whether respondents have taken any special measures to prevent crime from occurring. The final section of each chapter briefly summarises the main findings from the case study and makes suggestions for future research and practice.

Part III encompasses a number of themes associated with the research questions. Each of these ‘cross-cutting’ chapters was overseen by a group leader tasked with assembling data from each selected country case. These chapters comprise a theoretical foundation, empirical analysis, subsequent results, conclusions and recommendations for both research and practical application. The seven cross-cutting chapters attend to (i) victimisation, underreporting and safety in rural areas, focussing on Chile, Nigeria, Spain and Sweden (Chapter 23); (ii) police and trust, focussing on the cases of Australia, Ireland, Kenya and Slovenia (Chapter 24); (iii) crime prevention practices, with the cases of Australia, Germany, South Africa and England (Chapter 25); (iv) environmental and wildlife crimes in Sweden and Nigeria (Chapter 26); (v) women’s safety in two rural contexts, the cases of India and Sweden (Chapter 27); (vi) ‘Queer’ vulnerability in rural Poland and Sweden (Chapter 28); and (vii) property theft from farms, worry about thefts and punitive attitudes, the cases of Australia and the United States (Chapter 29).

Part IV contains one chapter. The goal of this chapter is to compare general trends and draw conclusions from them. The editors collected information for this comparative analysis from all the researchers by asking them to respond to a specific set of questions. Results of this comparative framework provide an overview of the main lessons based on evidence from country cases from different parts of the world. The chapter also synthesises lessons for ongoing and future research and practice reform. Drawing from the empirical findings considered in the book, as well as the extant international

literature on rural criminology, the editors propose in Chapter 30 a suite of recommendations to improve safety among those who live in rural areas.

Concluding remarks

This book addresses the fragmented state of current knowledge on crime across various rural localities, emphasising the need for a global perspective. The novelty of the book lies in its global and comparative approach, presenting findings from 19 countries and exploring themes such as crime, victimisation, safety, policing and crime prevention in rural areas. By adopting a multidisciplinary approach, the chapters are written by researchers from various fields, enriching the exploration of rural criminology. The book aims to contribute to a more cohesive understanding of rural criminology and hopefully providing valuable insights for researchers, policymakers and practitioners.

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