

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 23

**Searching for patterns of victimisation
and safety perceptions in rural areas in
four countries**

Chile, Nigeria, Spain and Sweden

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DOI: 10.4324/9781003395522-26



Routledge

Taylor & Francis Group

LONDON AND NEW YORK

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Introduction

In many parts of the world, rural areas are seen as a retreat from the problems of urban living, because of their natural beauty and a slower pace of life. Frequently, the low crime rates in rural areas are used as a reason to dismiss the importance of addressing rural crime and safety concerns (Yarwood, 2001), a perspective that clearly neglects the profound impact of crime on the well-being of local residents. These places may be situated near suburbs, small towns or other remote areas, each possessing unique identities that may not conform strictly to either rural or urban classifications. Agreement is reached with Jansson (2013) who suggests that the real issue lies not in merely acknowledging the distinctions between urban and rural settings but in understanding the nature of the often-overlooked places that exist in the “grey area” between the urban and the rural.

This chapter contributes to this knowledge base by characterising the nature of victimisation and people’s safety perceptions of people living in areas of the rural-urban continuum in four case studies located in distinct country contexts: two study cases report on victimisation and residents’ safety perceptions in rural communities in Chile and Spain and two study cases look closely at farmers’ victimisation and safety perceptions in Sweden and Nigeria. These groups were surveyed in order to cast light on the following research questions:

- 1 How commonly do people in different parts of the world experience crime in rural areas? Which are the most common types of crimes? Who is mostly affected by crime?
- 2 How common is reporting of criminal incidents? What are the reasons for under-reporting?
- 3 What characterises respondents’ safety perceptions? Are there similarities and/or differences? Are there any lessons from this tentative comparative framework?

DOI: 10.4324/9781003395522-26

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Understanding safety conditions in this “rural-urban continuum” is important because it helps law enforcement agencies develop targeted initiatives to address the safety needs of those who live in these areas.

Victimisation and safety in rural contexts: a brief overview

Rural crimes encompass unlawful activities occurring in rural areas, involving a wide spectrum of offenses spanning from typical crimes like burglary and acts of violence, which entail offenses against property or individuals, to those distinctly linked to rural settings. Rural crime encompasses also agricultural-related offenses, such as the theft of farm equipment or livestock, often targeting the productive assets of farms. Additionally, it may include acts that harm the natural environment or wildlife, often referred to as environmental crimes (Ceccato, 2016). A significant issue is that crimes in rural areas often go unrecorded, posing a significant challenge to official crime statistics and trend analyses (Barclay et al., 2004; Rantatalo et al., 2021). Various factors influence the under-reporting of crimes, including geographic isolation, limited police presence, trust in criminal justice, restricted access to victim support services and the stigma associated with specific crimes, like domestic violence or sexual assault (Rennison et al., 2013).

People’s perceptions of safety are influenced by factors at different levels: individual; environmental; and more general level factors. The first category pertains to individual factors influencing the experience of fear. Gender, age, disability and prior victimisation impact an individual’s perception of safety. Victimisation is often shaped by person’s gender and other personal traits (Whitzman, 2007). However, research has indicated that an individual’s susceptibility to crime and fear of crime is determined by the interplay of multiple individual characteristics (Crenshaw, 1989).

The second category involves contextual factors within the environment, encompassing aspects such as rural versus urban settings, neighbourhood types and the distinctions between different types of rural economies. The third level comprises global factors, which are less tangible but wield significant influence in shaping the overall levels of declared fear. This is because, as suggested by Hope and Sparks (2000), people’s responses to risk are not solely a product of their immediate surroundings and circumstances, but are also influenced by their perception of their place within a broader societal framework of narratives, conflicts, troubles and insecurities (which might be influenced by local media but also worldwide conditions, such as pandemics, wars and global and national economic uncertainty). In summary, fear in rural areas, like in any other setting, is a complex issue influenced by a combination of these factors and individual experiences. Addressing fear often requires a multi-faceted approach that considers the unique challenges and strengths of rural communities.

Study areas and research designs

Four distinct study areas, each centred on a unique country context, were explored with a particular emphasis on the experiences of farmers and rural villagers. These study areas offer valuable insights into the safety challenges faced by individuals in diverse rural settings. Two cases are related to safety conditions of farmers in Sweden and Nigeria and the other pair are devoted to study of rural populations in Spain and Chile. With these two pairs of countries, safety conditions of countries of the Global North (Sweden and Spain) and of the Global South (Chile and Nigeria) are considered. These four countries are depicted in geographic context in Figure 23.1.

Biobio and Valparaiso regions in Chile

According to the National Institute of Statistics, in 2017, the estimated population for the Biobio region in southern Chile was 1.5 million people, and 11.4 percent of them reside in rural areas. The Valparaiso region is located next to the Metropolitan region, with a total population of 1.8 million, and 9.0 percent of them live in rural areas (INE, 2017). The demographic landscape underscores the significance of urban areas, as 87.8 percent of the population resides in cities in Chile, compared to 12.2 percent in rural areas. Santiago, the capital city in the Metropolitan Region, houses over 40 percent of the population nationwide, with 96.3 percent living in urban municipalities (INE, 2017). Nonetheless, the importance of rural settings is evident owing to geographic characteristics, with 83 percent of the land falling under rural municipalities' jurisdiction. Certain regions, such as La Araucania, Ñuble and Los Rios, have a higher percentage of rural populations, often associated with increased rural poverty rates (PNDR, 2020).

The country's policing system is centralised under the political authority of the Ministry of Interior and Public Safety and comprises two national police agencies: Carabineros de Chile (preventive police) and Policía de Investigaciones (investigative police). Historically, crime prevention strategies have primarily focused on urban areas, with rural contexts receiving less attention, both in policy agendas and research initiatives. For that reason, the exploratory study conducted surveyed a diverse group of women and men aged 18 years and older ($N = 105$) residing in 15 mixed and rural municipalities, classified according to the National Policy of Rural Development (PNDR), reflecting the diverse demographics across these regions.

The rural area of Elche in Spain

The study site in Spain includes 27 districts outside the urban area of Elche, belonging to the province of Alicante in the Valencian Community. The main activity of this region has been agriculture, mainly citrus. Although this remains the most relevant activity of the region and represents an important

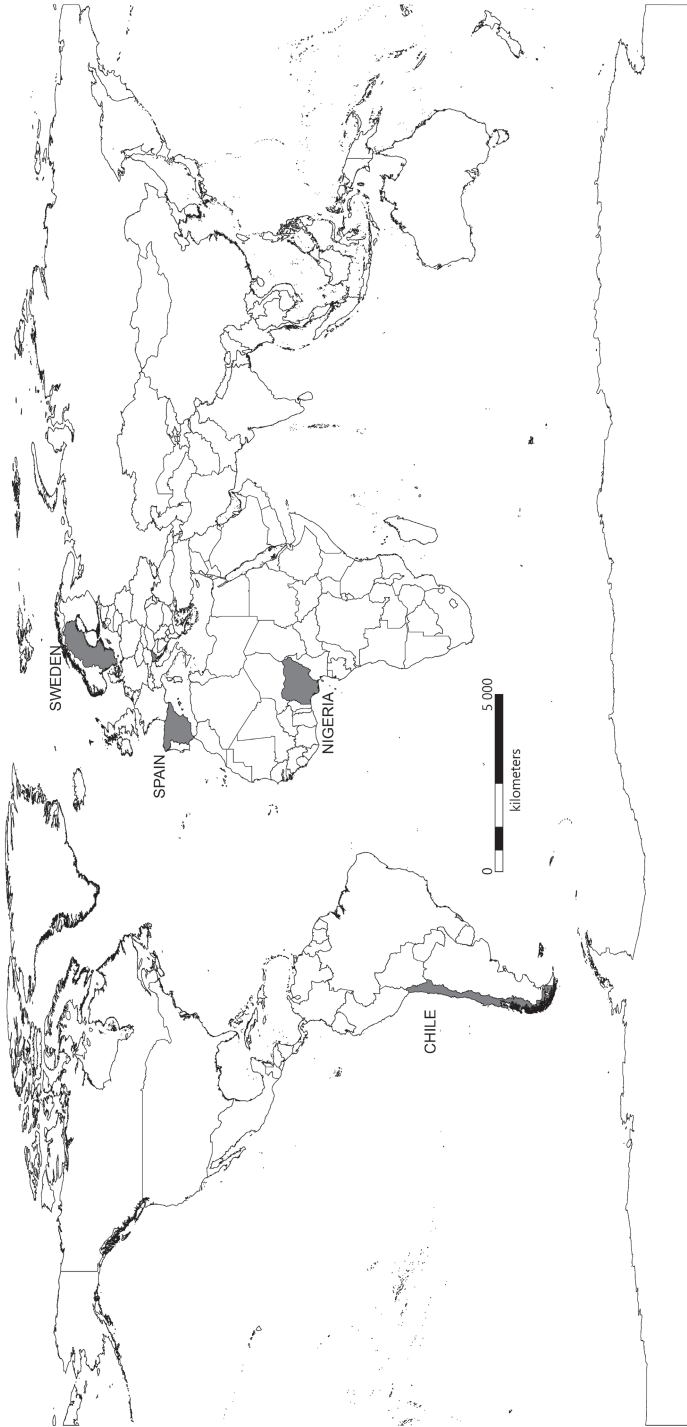


Figure 23.1 The country-cases in Chile, Nigeria, Spain and Sweden in global geographic context

agricultural area at national level, the rural exodus and industrial development have caused a strong depopulation of the area throughout the twentieth century. However, more recently there has been an increase in the population in some municipalities, owing to people leaving the city looking for cheaper housing or in quieter surroundings, although they work in the urban centre and commute between the city and the rural area. There are also people who have homes on unused agricultural farms, or with low levels of production, which are used as a second residence, enjoying them on weekends and remaining empty the rest of the time.

There are two coastal municipalities, with a high tourist presence in the summer months. In addition, these municipalities, especially the less urbanised ones, are still inhabited by people dedicated to agriculture who have always lived far from the urban centre. It is therefore evident that these communities are constituted of inhabitants with different profiles depending on their lifestyle and their relationship with the municipality. The questionnaire was distributed online and was answered by 210 participants. In its design, aiming to strike a balance between the need to maximise information and reduce the questionnaire's duration and complexity, population diversity was considered instrumental and varied forms of victimisation were sought, which could have been suffered by any of the citizens residing in the area, from cyber fraud to theft of agricultural products.

Farmers in northwest Nigeria

Nigeria is situated on the Gulf of Guinea, and stands as the most populous nation in Africa and boasts the continent's largest economy. The average household size in the rural regions is 5.42 (compared to 4.50 in urban areas), and approximately 52 percent of the population is younger than 20 years (NBS, 2020). Covering a vast land area of 910,770 square kilometres, of which 76 percent is agricultural, Nigeria faces the challenge of under-utilising its agricultural land. Less than half (44%) of this vast expanse is currently in use, with only 6.5 million hectares designated for permanent crop farming and 28.6 million hectares dedicated to meadows and pastures, including approximately 3.14 million hectares of irrigatable land, though less than 7 percent of it was utilised in 2022 (Kamer, 2022). Agriculture remains a vital sector in Nigeria's economy, particularly in rural areas where subsistence farming is prevalent. However, rural farming faces threats from increased theft, including cattle rustling and violent conflicts, resulting in fatalities and farmland destruction.

The Nigerian study focuses on farm theft against rural farmers in the northwest region of the country, surveying five states that collectively represent 21 percent of Nigeria's population, where over half of the population relies on wet season farming for their livelihood. A total of 1,029 questionnaires were administered, garnering a pleasing response rate of approximately 96 percent, predominantly among male participants (89%) with

diverse educational backgrounds and ages, offering insights into the complex rural farming landscape in Nigeria.

Farmers in Sweden

The Kingdom of Sweden is the largest Nordic country in terms of size and population, and is also Europe's most sparsely populated country. In rural areas, the combination of distant police stations and sluggish police response times is believed to have had an adverse impact on the reporting of crimes, especially those of a minor nature (LRF, 2020). For this empirical research, a focus was placed on Swedish farmers, in particular animal farmers. A first national survey was undertaken, and is representative of all agricultural entrepreneurs with over 10 hectares (24.7 acres) of arable land. Responses from 548 farmers were combined with a second survey that was distributed to approximately 9,800 Swedish farmers. The initial response rate was estimated at 56 percent, and the results are based on 3,815 responses. Farmers who engage in animal production were contacted initially through email and then subsequently through social media, using contact information obtained from Statistics Swedish's Agricultural Register. Of the respondents, 72 percent were men and 28 percent were women, with a mean age of 54 years (20–89 years). Ninety-two percent lived on the farm/facility, 77 percent were cohabiting/married and 30 percent had children under the age of 20 at home. Sixty-three percent of the farmers define their property as being small, 30 percent middle size and 8 percent as large.

The surveys of this study explored the nature, type and extent of victimisation and safety perceptions among rural respondents including farmers in the different country contexts. An empirical, cross-cultural study presents opportunities for comparison but also challenges. Even though all countries applied questions in these three dimensions – victimisation, under-reporting and safety perceptions – questions and time scale varied from case to case which make any comparative attempt a difficult or, in some issues, an impossible task. For example, while in Chile the question of victimisation looked back over 12 months, in Spain the time frame was 5 years. Another issue was that although most of the crimes were similar – property crimes, violence or vandalism – the countries list of offences differed which obviously affects the victimisation rates reported in the tables. These comparability challenges were found across all countries used in this analysis. A detailed description of the questions used in each dimension (see Table 23.1). This means that any direct comparison between country cases should be cautiously considered.

Findings

This section details the patterns of victimisation (including near-repeat), crime reporting and perceptions of safety across these four national contexts. The questionnaires used in these countries varied, so direct comparisons of

Table 2.3.1 Questions used in the four country-cases

	Nigeria	Sweden	Chile	Spain
Victimization	<p>Have you been a victim of farm theft in the last year (2022–2023 farming season)</p> <p>– Theft includes of</p> <p>(a) farm Produce</p> <p>(b) livestock</p> <p>(c) machinery</p> <p>(d) registered vehicle</p> <p>(e) equipment and tools (f) supplies and input (g) personal item (h) others, specify: _____</p>	<p>Have you personally or someone else in your family ever been exposed to any form of crime such as theft, robbery or violence? Has your business operation ever been exposed to protests, harassment, trespassing, vandalism, the release of animals, personal attacks in media or similar due to you being an animal producer? 2017–2020</p>	<p>Have you been a victim of any crime in the last 12 months? Theft of machinery and work vehicles, theft of equipment and supplies, theft of farm animals, theft of products/produce, personal theft (money, personal goods), threats (physical or property), robbery, assault and burglary.</p>	<p>Below is a list of different property crimes and we ask you to answer if you have suffered any of them during the last 5 years. If yes, please indicate if you have reported this crime (I have not suffered it, I have suffered it and I have always reported it / I have suffered it and I have never reported it / I have suffered it and I have always reported it.</p>
Under-reporting	<p>Thinking about the most recent farm theft, have you reported the incident to the police? Options were “Yes” and “No”</p>	<p>Did you report the crime(s) to the police that happened between 2017 and 2020? Options were “Yes” and “No”</p>	<p>Have you reported the crime/incident to the police? Options were “Yes” and “No”</p>	<p>I have been victimised but I have never report it.</p>

(Continued)

Table 23.1 (Continued)

	<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Chile</i>	<i>Spain</i>
Reasons for under-reporting	Why were you reluctant to report the theft from your farm to the police?	Why did you not report the incident/ crime?	What are the main reasons for not reporting the crime you were victimised?	What are the main reasons for not reporting the crime you were victimised?
Safety perceptions	How do you feel currently about farm theft in your locality? The options reported here are – farm theft is a “very serious issue” or a “serious issue”	Have you been worried about being a victim of crime (you, family, property, personal) in the last 12 months?	Do you think you would be a victim of crime in the next 12 months? (Yes/No)	How concerned do you feel in general about crime in your area?

specific figures between countries have been avoided. Instead, the goal is to discern broad trends that could inform future research.

Victimisation by groups

Rates of crime victimisation vary across gender and among different age groups anywhere, regardless of the study setting. The pattern of victimisation rate also differs across these groups depending on the category of the population being studied. Table 23.2 shows responses from victimisation surveys among farmers in Nigeria and Sweden, as well as among rural population in Chile and Spain.

Of those farmers that reported being victims of crime in Nigeria, about 85 percent of respondents are men while only 15 percent are women. Similarly, in Sweden, about 78 percent are men while only 22 percent are women. Ordinarily, perhaps the proportion of respondents in the surveyed sample may explain why more men were observed to be victimised than women. It is important, therefore, to note that in both Nigeria and Sweden, when the data were analysed to reveal within gender variations in the rate of victimisation, women were observed to be more proportionally victimised than men. In the case of Nigeria, for instance, 89 percent of all women respondents reported being victims of crime compared to only 63 percent of the men’s population.

Turning to rural crime victimisation in Chile and in Spain, it was observed that women were more victimised than men (see Table 23.2). About 65 percent of those who reported being victims of crime in Chile are women, while only 35 percent are men. A similar pattern was observed in Spain where about 56 percent of victims of rural crime are women while 44 percent are men, but in this case 57 percent of the sample are woman and 47 percent men, so women and men are similarly victimised in this case.

Table 23.2 Victimisation by the number of respondents

		<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Chile</i>	<i>Spain</i>
		<i>Farmers</i>		<i>Rural population</i>	
		<i>N = 1,029</i>	<i>N = 3,815</i>	<i>N = 105</i>	<i>N = 210</i>
		<i>Avg. rate of victimisation</i>	<i>Avg. rate of victimisation</i>	<i>Avg. rate of victimisation</i>	<i>Avg. rate of victimisation</i>
Gender	Total	66% (675)	21% (685)	19% (20)	68% (142)
	Women	15% (101)	22% (193)	65% (13)	56% (79)
Age	Men	85% (574)	78% (492)	35% (7)	44% (62)
	Total	66% (675)	21% (629)	N/A	67% (142)
	18–49 years	51% (344)	34% (207)	75% (15)	61% (87)
	50–65 years	41% (277)	49% (311)	20% (4)	33% (47)
	Older than 65	8% (54)	17% (111)	5% (1)	6% (8)

Considering the age groups of victims, there are fewer young victims among farmers in Nigeria and Sweden than there were among the rural population in Chile and Spain. About 51 of those that reported being victims of crime in Nigeria are within the age range of 18–49 years old, and even fewer (34 percent) were observed in Sweden. However, looking at patterns of victimisation among rural population, about 75 percent in Chile and 61 percent in Spain of those that reported being victimised were within the age bracket of 18–49 years. It is also observed that there are fewer victims among the older group (older than 65 years) across both the rural population and farmers that were studied. However, the proportion of victims within the older group, again, is much higher when the data was standardised to focus on the total population of each age group.

Another interesting observation is that the variation in the rate of victimisation among rural crime victims in Chile and Spain appeared to be wider between younger (18–49 years) and older population (50–64 years) while the pattern observed for farmers in Nigeria and Sweden tend to be narrower. One explanation is that, as crime opportunities differ across age groups (especially for personal crimes such as robbery and assault), it is assumed that younger people in the rural survey would provide more opportunities to offenders than the older population based on their routine activities. In the case of farmers, however, the opportunities are assumed to be similar across different age groups since the targets are items located within farm rather than individuals.

Victimisation by crime types

Victimisation can take shape in rural areas in several ways, depending on the specific crime types and the unique characteristics of rural communities. Crime victimisation often involves property crimes, such as theft, burglary and vandalism. Theft of agricultural equipment, livestock or crops, break-ins and burglaries of rural homes, farms or storage facilities while vandalism of rural properties, such as damaging fences or barns where the animals are with the intention to release or steal them. Some of these crimes are more typical among farmers. Assuming that farmers live more isolated than rural villagers, we notice the effect of more crime opportunities among rural villagers in Chile and Spain than among farmers in Sweden and Nigeria (Figure 23.2).

Burglary is a prevalent offence reported by the rural villagers, possibly owing to their proximity to urban centres, as a result of an influx of offenders from nearby cities. Enhanced transportation networks, such as highways and roads, can simplify the movement of criminals between urban and rural areas, enabling criminal activities in both settings. Criminal organisations may concurrently operate in urban and rural locales, with offenders transitioning between these regions to engage in a range of offences, including burglary, as part of their broader criminal activities. Research elsewhere has shown that the perception of rural properties as vulnerable and less secure can attract

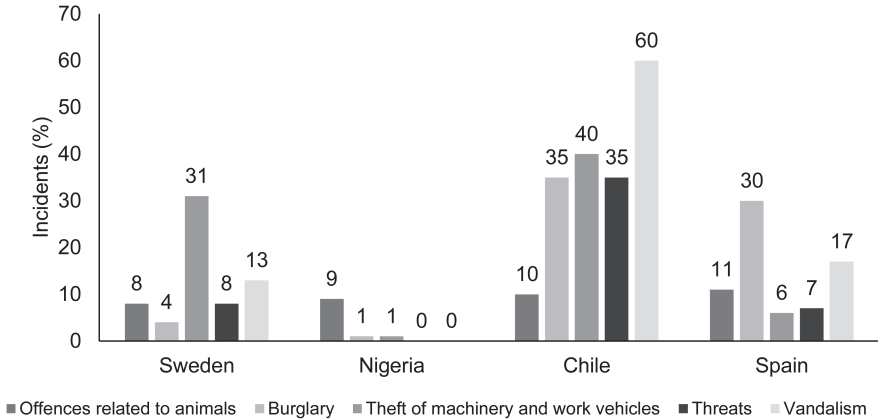


Figure 23.2 Types of offences among farmers in Sweden and Nigeria and among rural villagers in Chile and Spain (data for threats and vandalism are not available for Nigeria)

criminals from urban areas looking for opportunities for theft. Thus, unattended homes can be tempting targets (Shimada & Suzuki, 2021).

However, theft of machinery and work vehicles are common both among farmers but also among rural villagers, in Chile and Sweden, where this offence composes more than a third of incidents. Records of vandalism/physical damage are also declared by respondents both among rural villagers and among farmers (for a discussion about vandalism in rural context, see Donnermeyer and Phillips (1982). This evidence corroborates the notion that certain areas may express more urban threats than rural, regardless where they may be found in the rural-urban continuum. Depending on rural people’s lifestyles, they may become equally victimised as their urban counterparts. Another example is the fact of farmers in Sweden are more victimised by fraud and other offences over the internet and telephone than from any other type of offence (Cross, 2020). In Spain, 30 percent of rural villagers declare also being victims of fraud. Threats/assaults account for 35 percent in the Chilean rural villages, 7 percent in Spain and 8 percent in Sweden. No information was available for Nigeria.

Near repeat victimisation in rural areas

Near-repeat victimisation is a concept applicable to both urban and rural settings, involving a recurring pattern of criminal activity (Chainey, 2021). It entails the likelihood of a specific location, individual or property, recently victimised by a crime, becoming more susceptible to a subsequent similar crime within a relatively short timeframe (Grove et al., 2012). This phenomenon holds significance as it indicates that criminals tend to revisit locations or targets that have yielded successful outcomes in the past. Both Chile and

Spain country cases did not report information about near repeat but for Nigeria and Sweden a large share of the population experienced recurring pattern of victimisation. For Nigeria, 62 percent of respondents declared experienced near repeat victimisation.

Near-repeat victimisation is a concept that underscores the importance of analysing and responding to crime patterns, not only in urban but also rural settings. For Nigeria, it was observed that 13 percent of respondents did not know if they had experienced a near repeat and a quarter of respondents affirm that near repeat was not present. In Sweden, 58 percent never experienced a near repeat victimisation while 42 percent declare they were near repeat victimised. Understanding these patterns can help law enforcement agencies and rural communities take proactive measures to reduce the risk of recurrent criminal incidents. It is important when law enforcement agencies can use data analysis and predictive policing tools to identify areas or properties at increased risk of near-repeat victimisation.

Crime under-reporting to the police

There are large differences in crime reporting practices to the police. As expected, respondents from the farmers survey in Nigeria and in Sweden tend less often to report crime to the police than those respondents who answered the survey in rural villages in Chile and Spain. Remoteness and difficulty in accessing police services might explain the differences in reporting rates between farmers and villagers answering this question. Previous research has shown that people in rural areas may be less likely to report crimes to the police for several reasons (Carcach, 1997; Kaylen & Pridemore, 2015; Mulrooney et al., 2022; Ruddell & O'Connor, 2022).

In this analysis, the most important reasons for crime under-reporting were the police/criminal justice system would not do anything about the crime (it would not lead to any action), half of the farmers in Nigeria and more than a quarter in Sweden would not report for this reason (Figure 23.3). In Sweden, although farmers show trust in the police, they “know” that they cannot count on them “if anything happens”, either because of long distances or because of few police resources (Ceccato & Dolmen, 2013; Ceccato et al., 2022). Police stations may be understaffed and under-resourced, leading to the perception that the police are ill-equipped to handle certain types of crimes effectively. In Nigeria 17 percent of interviewed farmers declare talking about crime victimisation to local vigilantes (this alternative was not available for other country cases) most likely because local vigilante groups are composed of community members who are well-known and trusted by the residents. This familiarity and trust can lead victims to feel more comfortable sharing their experiences with these groups rather than with the often less familiar and sometimes ill-equipped, inaccessible local police.

The second most significant reason for not reporting crime was that respondents felt that the crime was not serious enough. Previous research indicates there to be a tendency to downplay certain types of offenses as

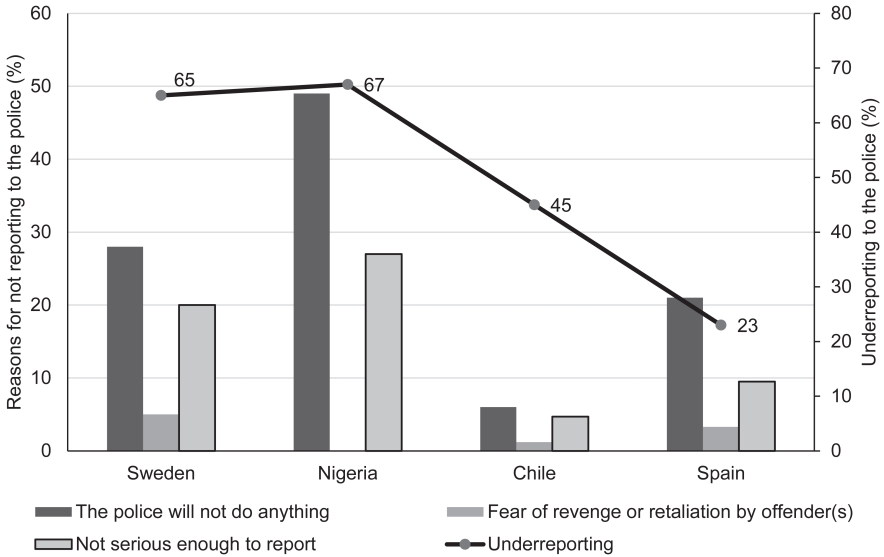


Figure 23.3 Under-reporting crime to the police (right axis in %) and examples of reasons for not reporting crime to the police (left axis in %)

inconsequential, in a context which crime is “normalised” and part of everyday life in rural areas (Barclay & Donnermeyer, 2007; Barclay et al., 2004; Ceccato, 2015; Ceccato & Abraham, 2022). This might be because in certain cases they knew the perpetrator (4% in Nigeria and 3% in Spain, for example). Individuals may prefer to address minor disputes or conflicts informally within their community or among involved parties, rather than involving law enforcement (Barclay & Donnermeyer, 2007; Barclay et al., 2004). In close-knit communities, individuals may be influenced by the opinions and attitudes of their peers and neighbours. If the prevailing sentiment is that the crime is not serious, people may be less likely to report it. However, the reason might be a different one: in Sweden and in Spain, about 5 percent of respondents declared being fearful of revenge or retaliation by offender(s). Other reasons include (but are not limited to) the fact that it was difficult to know if it was actually crime (11% in Sweden; 23% in Spain), being able to solve the problem without the police (9% in Chile; 7% in Spain), as the international literature shows through private investments in crime prevention and security technologies (Aransiola & Ceccato, 2020; Aransiola et al., 2022). Other reasons varied from 3 to 8 percent of responses in these country cases.

Respondents safety perceptions: farmers and rural population

Before discussing the trends in safety perceptions, it is worth noting that the survey questions regarding fear of crime varied from country to country. While in Nigeria and Spain the question asked respondents about fear about

crime in the area at that particular moment, Sweden asked about fear of crime in the last 12 months (that is, a focus on the past) while in Spain the question focused on the future (for example, do you think you would be a victim of crime in the next 12 months). Keep in mind that these differences most certainly account for some of these differences discussed below between these country cases. Despite these limitations, trends are compared and a tentative explanation is offered.

Safety perceptions are a driving factor shaping attitudes towards victimisation and policing. On the one hand, farmer participants from Nigeria and Sweden declared concerns related to possible crime victimisation: 71 percent and 57 percent respectively. On the other hand, the rural population observed in Chile and Spain also reported concerns about being worried about future victimisation incidents nearby them but to a lesser extent (see Table 23.3): as many as 39 percent of participants from rural settings in Chile and 41 percent of respondents in Spain reported fear of crime as a relevant issue regarding public safety perceptions.

The results for women's safety perceptions across the countries require a careful interpretation. Women's responses from farmers in Sweden and Nigeria show lower levels of fear of crime than men in both countries. A potential explanation could be associated with less exposure to traditional crime risk factors more present in the urban or peri-urban contexts or higher levels of informal social control in farmers' communities. Another reason is also that the surveys did not include questions about domestic violence, sexual violence and harassment.

In the case of women residing in towns and villages in Spain and Chile, it is noted that there is a higher percentage of fear of crime among women than men in Chile (71%). In the case of Spain, 65 percent of women participants

Table 23.3 Safety perceptions and concerns about crime victimisation

		<i>Nigeria</i>	<i>Sweden</i>	<i>Chile</i>	<i>Spain</i>
		<i>Farmers</i>		<i>Rural population</i>	
		<i>N = 1,029</i>	<i>N = 3,815</i>	<i>N = 105</i>	<i>N = 210</i>
		<i>Avg. rate of fear</i>	<i>Avg. rate of fear</i>	<i>Avg. rate of fear</i>	<i>Avg. rate of fear</i>
Gender	Total	71% (731)	57% (2170)	39% (41)	41% (86)
	Women	14% (103)	30% (637)	70% (29)	65% (56)
	Men	86% (628)	70% (1533)	29% (12)	35% (30)
Age	Total	71% (731)	52% (2003)	39% (41)	41% (86)
	18–49 years	53% (387)	37% (745)	78% (32)	56% (48)
	50–65 years	39% (285)	46% (932)	19% (8)	38% (33)
	Older than 65	8% (59)	17% (326)	2% (1)	6% (5)

in the survey declared being in fear of crime in the area they live compared to men. While the sample was slightly more female-dominated, 47 percent of women reported feeling unsafe compared to 33 percent of men. However, it is important to mention methodological differences and sample size may account for some of these differences, limiting a proper gender-based analysis of safety perceptions.

The rural-urban continuum is a relevant concept to understand how safety perceptions are disseminated across settings and populations observed in this chapter. One interpretation relies on routine activities where fear of crime is situated to experiences, places and risk factors (Rengifo & Bolton, 2012) observed in the rural communities. An additional interpretation regards emotional factors (Guedes et al., 2018) owing to the subjective dimension of fear of crime perceptions shaped by vicarious victimisation, traditional media coverage and social media exposure. Safety perceptions are no longer situated exclusively in the urban domain.

Discussion of the results

Understanding the variations in rates and patterns of crime victimisation among different groups is critical to developing crime control policies and improving prevention strategies. In this comparative study, it was found that the patterns of crime victimisation appeared to vary by age groups and by gender in different rural contexts. Before any comparative trend is drawn here, it is important to highlight that non-identical surveys have been used which might highly affect the figures observed in these tables and graphs shown in this chapter. Differences in survey methodology, data collection techniques or the way questions are framed can lead to variations in reported victimisation rates and safety perceptions. The composition of the samples in these two surveys is not representative of the broader population. If the farmers' surveys had different demographic makeup or included fewer individuals who were at higher risk of victimisation, this could lead to lower victimisation rates among young people in that survey. Despite these limitations, the figures presented here are illustrative of the types of crime and safety problems that are similar, regardless of context.

Among farmers, men were more victimised than female respondents. However, if standardised by gender, such a pattern may vary by country, sample sizes and types of surveys. When victimisation rates among different age groups were compared, it was observed that the rate of victimisation among young people was lower in the farmers' surveys compared with youth who responded to the surveys in rural communities, perhaps because those living on farms are exposed longer to environments with less crime opportunities than those living in rural communities or close to urban areas. Another reason could be that young people in rural communities may be inclined do not report incidents of victimisation due to cultural factors, social stigma or fear of consequences, leading to under-reporting victimisation.

There are signs of under-reporting of crime to police in both Sweden and Nigeria. Crime under-reporting is a problem because it makes crime “invisible”. Addressing the under-reporting in rural areas requires a multi-faceted approach: that is, it requires raising awareness of reporting procedures, enhancing police accessibility, developing victim support services (for instance for domestic violence) and addressing the unique social and cultural dynamics influencing reporting behaviour in rural areas. It also demands allocating adequate resources to rural law enforcement agencies, including training, technology and personnel, is essential for improving response times and investigative capabilities.

Another issue of importance is near-repeat victimisation in rural areas which is a pattern of criminal activity where specific locations or properties in sparsely populated regions are at an increased risk of being targeted for similar crimes in a short timeframe, typically after an initial incident has occurred. If a farm experiences a theft of livestock, equipment or crops, it may be at an elevated risk of being targeted again, especially if the criminal believes there are valuable assets to steal or if security measures remain inadequate.

Farmers belonging to the samples both in Nigeria and Sweden declared being less safe than those rural residents answering the survey in Chile and Spain. Previous victimisation of farmers or of their families and/or properties might explain these differences in safety perceptions. Another possible explanation for the rural population in villages and towns is a variation in the exposure to victimisation or disorder because, for example, they may commute to nearby cities for work or other activities, making them more familiar with these incidents creating a different threshold of safety. Note that the surveys did not control here for previous victimisation within or across countries and neither gender/age differences of locations and samples which obviously could affect also these findings.

Conclusions and recommendations

In this comparative study across four diverse rural regions, examining victimisation, reporting and perceptions of safety, several challenges were encountered but also interesting patterns were observed. Samples varied in size, were not necessarily representative of their respective countries, and spanned different rural contexts. Two of the samples were predominantly farmers, while the other two represented a more heterogeneous rural population, which may not necessarily engage in agricultural work. Moreover, the use of different instruments and questionnaires further complicated the comparison of results. Notwithstanding these notable differences, data analysis did reveal common trends.

This study underscores the critical importance of addressing the unique challenges and vulnerabilities faced by rural communities in relation to crime

and safety perceptions. One of the striking observations is that certain rural offenses often go under-reported and therefore unprosecuted. Crime under-reporting is a reflection of the very real challenges that rural areas face in accessing police forces and perhaps low police trust. It is imperative these challenges are acknowledged and addressed to ensure that the rural population is not left behind and feeling vulnerable. Knowing where crime happens is fundamental, but equally important is to create programmes of crime prevention that are evidence based and adjusted to the reality of those who live in areas of the rural continuum.

A multi-faceted approach is needed to enhance security and justice in rural areas – one that involves not only strengthening law enforcement efforts but also fostering collaboration between various stakeholders. Rural communities often have a unique dynamic, and it is essential that local residents, volunteers and formal law enforcement agencies work together harmoniously to combat crime effectively and enhance safety. Moreover, interventions must encompass not only reactive but also proactive measures, including community engagement, education and awareness programmes. By promoting community cohesion and instilling a sense of responsibility among residents, rural areas can build their capacity to deter crime and respond to incidents more effectively.

The issue of utilising different instruments in our study should not be seen solely as a limitation but rather as an opportunity. It provides us with a chance to evaluate and compare the unique strengths and characteristics of each instrument and questions. This diversity of instruments, rather than hindering research, opens a path of learning about how international surveys ought to be tailored so as to comprehensively address the specific needs of those living and working in rural areas. Such a survey instrument could draw from the best features of the various surveys and perhaps offer a more holistic and adaptable approach to diverse contexts across areas on the rural-urban continuum.

In summary, the findings presented in this chapter serves to demonstrate to researchers, practitioners, policymakers, law enforcement agencies and community leaders the need to recognise people's victimisation and safety needs in areas of the rural-urban continuum on its own right. Addressing these issues is not only a matter of justice but also a means of fostering vibrant, resilient and safe rural communities.

Future studies should aim at collaboratively design of an identical survey instrument capable to detect trends and patterns in victimisation and safety perceptions in rural areas, allowing a better base for comparison between country cases than the one that has been done in this chapter. Despite several limitations, this study not only highlights the challenges but also presents a promising avenue for future efforts to refine and enhance the measurement of rural victimisation and crime-related fears in very different country contexts.

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