

### **Vania Ceccato & Jonatan Abraham: Crime and Safety in the Rural: Lessons from Research**

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The monograph, *Crime and safety in the rural: Lessons from research*, is part of the Springer Briefs in Criminology Series, which covers cutting-edge research across the broad field of criminology and criminal justice. As the title suggests, the monograph focuses on rural criminology, more particularly on a comprehensive overview of topics of crime and safety in rural settings. Crime knows no territorial boundaries and has always existed across the rural-urban spectrum. Urban, suburban and rural areas are linked and intertwined in many aspects (environmentally, culturally, economically, etc.), so it is crucial not to isolate the areas when studying them or put too much focus on researching only crime or other phenomena in urban areas. The monograph presents an endeavour from the authors Vania Ceccato and Jonatan Abraham to further the knowledge, understanding and development of the field of rural criminology. It consists of ten chapters, which address why it matters to study crime and safety in rural areas, current knowledge and research, discussion of offenders and victims, safety perceptions, the work of the police and other criminal justice agencies, crime prevention and safety interventions, implications for practice, and recommendations for future work and study.

In the introductory chapter, the authors explain how, not until recently, criminologists have largely ignored the study of crime and its characteristics outside of urban areas. There are multiple reasons why studying crime and safety in rural areas should not be overlooked. The authors do not see rural areas as homogenous entities but rather discuss a rural-urban continuum, which comprises all the varied rural environments – from remote and desolate areas to accessible areas bordering urban environments. The chapter also presents the aims and scope of the book, introduces basic concepts and discusses the need for new evidence on crime and safety in rural areas in alignment with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015). The second chapter motivates and gives reasons why it matters to recognise, study and prevent crime, and ensure safety in rural areas. It lists and presents 20 reasons, from the heterogeneity and complexity of the rural areas, to common misconceptions, crime underreporting, policing and crime prevention models neglecting rural challenges, to how crime and safety are intertwined dimensions of sustainable rural development, etc. In the third chapter, the authors perform a systematic literature review covering four decades (1980–2020) of research on crime and safety in rural

areas. Most of the studies recognise that criminology has, for a long time, relied on urban findings and understanding of rural crime and offenders. Crime prevention programmes have, as well, been centred on urban areas and then directly applied to rural areas, completely ignoring the unique characteristics and needs of the rural settings. Social Disorganisation Theory was one of the most common criminological theories applied to rural areas and explaining rural crime (Shaw & McKay, 1942).

Chapter four provides examples of crime trends on the rural-urban continuum in several countries, explaining how crime fluctuates over time. The authors also focus on offenders in rural areas, discussing a “typical rural offender”, offenders being characterised into two categories (residents or visitors), rural youth as offenders, and specifically consider farmers as offenders, and offenders of environmental and wildlife crime. The chapter also discusses the types of victimisation that most affect rural residents, such as property crime, violent crime, hate crime and discrimination, licit and illicit drug use, environmental and wildlife crime, and organised crime. The fifth chapter discusses how rural areas are often romanticised and perceived as safe and idyllic environments. Rural areas are generally linked to higher perceptions of safety among their residents, however, that is not always the case. Rural crime has also often been perceived as the result of the urban influence of individuals or groups that do not fit into the idealised construction of rurality and rural community, such as foreigners, seasonal workers or local youth. The authors shift their attention to police and criminal justice in chapter six. In general, formal rural policing is characterised by isolation and higher dependency on informal policing and on the community in which they live. Rural police need to organise and prioritise their work differently than police in urban areas, yet research on policing has again focused mostly on urban areas. Rural policing is different from urban policing, and officers in rural areas usually carry out more informal work, know their residents personally, and even engage with them outside of work. In this way, the informal social control in rural areas is strengthened. Rural police also tend to prioritise crime prevention and service activities, but one of the main challenges that rural police face is that they usually cover large areas, which makes it harder for them to respond to crime and police the area effectively. In chapter seven, the authors describe crime prevention policies and initiatives, which have long been urban-centric, and present examples of crime prevention and

interventions in rural areas. Crime prevention in rural areas relies mainly on community policing, such as neighbourhood watch schemes and patrols, and creating local partnerships to better tackle safety problems. One of the main goals of rural crime prevention is youth crime and delinquency, for juveniles are often perceived as disorderly, associated with licit and illicit drug use and abuse, and are at risk of developing and accelerating criminal careers. Other typical rural issues that crime prevention focuses on are policing and prevention of drug crime, farm crime, domestic violence (mostly violence against women), and environmental and wildlife crime. As mentioned previously, not enough attention has been given to problems in rural contexts, but the fast-growing research on this topic in recent years promises changes.

The eighth chapter proposes a research agenda based on the most central topics and research areas worthy of attention in rural areas. These involve: the possibility of redefining certain concepts, definitions and theories; the use of proper methods to be able to compare areas on the rural-urban continuum; research on teaching rural criminology skills; endemic offenders and criminal motilities; research on the illicit spaces of organised crime; situational conditions of crime and fear; more knowledge about the nature safety in privately owned, public places (bars, restaurants, bus stations, etc.); domestic violence in homes; LGBTQ+ safety needs; new information technologies, which have implications for both offending and crime prevention; policing and digitalisation; sex trafficking and prostitution; corruption and financial crimes; animal abuse and farmers' victimisation; an escalation in energy demand and its impact on rural crime; environmental and wildlife crime and green criminology; effect of climate change on crime and safety; and rural safety as a public health issue. The authors offer reflections on several issues of crime and safety in areas on the rural-urban continuum, and propose recommendations on how to respond to them in chapter nine. To work towards achieving the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2015), it is fundamental to implement a system of safety guidelines adapted to specific areas on the rural-urban continuum at both national and regional levels. On the local level, the authors propose a set of suggestions on how to respond to the problem of crime and safety. First, it is important to identify the problem and obtain useful knowledge about it. It is important to adapt safety initiatives to the unique needs of the communities and groups of individuals and not simply import preventative models based on other contexts. Secondly, it should be considered who should be involved in the work, for coordinated action of interdisciplinary groups is required to provide safe and sustainable rural environments. The third suggestion focuses on regaining the trust and confidence of residents in the police and other criminal justice authorities, and educating them on how to implement

measures to deter crime. In conclusion, to ensure safety in the areas on the rural-urban continuum, interventions and models must be tailored to existing conditions in the areas, for example, geographical obstacles, trust in police, rural access and unequal access to services.

In the concluding chapter, the authors emphasise that expanding knowledge on rural crime and safety is key for the future of criminology, especially rural criminology, which is a fast-growing and diverse field of research. Rural areas are often stereotypically perceived as idyllic, but they have their own difficulties. Rural residents may overall experience less victimisation and fear of crime than urban residents, but this trend can significantly vary between countries and even within different socioeconomic groups. Rural communities may exclude or even be hostile towards outsiders and those that do not fit in. The authors also note that the study of rural crime and safety should be more interdisciplinary, and include theories and methods from disciplines such as geography, psychology and computer science. The issues of crime and safety in the areas on the rural-urban continuum can easily be addressed with the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and can also be drivers of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). Rural areas are, without a doubt, in need of place-specific policies, preventative measures, interventions, law enforcement services, and rehabilitation measures (Weisheit, 2020).

*Crime and safety in the rural: Lessons from research*, presents a comprehensive overview of the most relevant topics and issues relative to rural crime. It can serve both as introductory literature to rural crime and criminology, or offer new insights to those already familiar with research in this area. The monograph presents essential reading material for those dealing with or who are interested in rural criminology. It can also serve as valuable educational material for practitioners in the field of ensuring safety and crime prevention in the areas on the rural-urban continuum. The strength of the monograph is that it presents the issues of crime and safety in rural areas in a clear and concise manner, discusses why it is important to study rural crime and implement place-specific policies and interventions, and connects crime and safety to dimensions of sustainable rural development. The 2030 Sustainable Development Goals balance three dimensions of sustainable development (environment, economy and social conditions) (United Nations, 2015). Accounting for the safety needs of those living in the rural-urban continuum worldwide is crucial to achieving more sustainable communities and society in general.

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## Literature

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3. Weisheit, R. A. (2020). Preventing rural alcohol-and drug-related crime. In A. Harkness (Ed.), *Routledge studies in rural criminology: Rural crime prevention – Theory, tactics and techniques* (pp. 97–108). London: Routledge.