

Rural Crime

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INTEGRATING RESEARCH
AND PREVENTION

edited by
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ALLANHELD, OSMUN PUBLISHERS

ALLANHELD, OSMUN & CO, PUBLISHERS, INC.

Published in the United States of America in 1982
by Allanheld, Osmun & Co. Publishers, Inc.
(A Division of Littlefield, Adams & Company)
81 Adams Drive, Totowa, New Jersey 07512

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Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Carter, Timothy J.
Rural crime.

(Studies in crime and deviance in American society)
Includes index.

1. Rural crimes—United States—Addresses, essays,
lectures. 2. Crime prevention—United States—Addresses,
essays, lectures. 3. Juvenile delinquency—United States
—Addresses, essays, lectures. 4. Offenses against
property—United States—Addresses, essays, lectures.

I. Donnermeyer, Joseph F. II. Phillips, G. Howard
(Garland Howard), 1926- . III. Title. IV. Series.

HV6791.C36 364.1'0973 81-65018
ISBN 0-86598-023-3 AACR 2

82 83 84 / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Printed in the United States of America

We depart from the traditional
dedication to offer our admiration
and thanks to Professor G. Howard
Phillips, the man who pioneered the
field of rural crime and its
prevention.

THE OTHER EDITORS

List of Figures

2.1	The U.S. Rural Crime Index (Uniform Crime Report, 1959–1978)	22
4.1	The U.S. and Ohio Rural Crime Index	52
4.2	Percent of Offenses by Major Categories of Crime Occurring to Ohio Rural Residents as Reported by Victims	55
4.3	Percent of Offenses by Major Categories of Crime Known to Ohio Sheriffs for the Period June 1974 through May 1975	56
4.4	Percent of Crimes Reported to a Law Enforcement Agency by Category	57
5.1	Mean Scores of Four Subgroups for Peer Approval from Three Peer Reference Groups	78
5.2	Level of Rural Delinquent Behavior by Level of Perceived Peer Approval for Delinquency	79
8.1	Conditions Affecting Involvement in Vandalism among Rural Youth	141
10.1	Crime Analysis Process	172
10.2	Crime Analysis in Rural Crime Prevention Planning	173
15.1	Percent of Offenders Apprehended by Ohio Sheriffs in Rural Areas Compared to the Rural Population by Age Categories	228

List of Tables

2.1	Percent Change in FBI Total Crime Index for Urban and Rural Areas, 1960–1979	23
2.2	The Proportion of Reported Violent and Property Offenses for Urban and Rural Areas, 1960–1979	24
2.3	Reported Violent and Property Crime Rates, Percentage Change and Proportions for Urban and Rural Areas, by U.S. Census Region, 1974–79	26–27
3.1	Number and Percent of Criminal Incidents, by Type of Incident	37
3.2	Comparative Victimization Rates for Pike County, Indiana (1978) and National Crime Study, by Metropolitan and Non-Metropolitan Areas (1977)	39
3.3	Proportion of Pike County Households and Persons to which One or More Property Crime Victimizations Occurred, by Place of Residence	41
3.4	Proportion of Pike County Households and Persons to which One or More Property Crimes Occurred, by Number of Persons in Household	42
3.5	Proportion of Pike County Households to which One or More Household Level Property Crimes Occurred, by Age of Household Members	43
3.6	Percentage Distribution of Household-Related Victimizations to Older Households in Pike County, by Place of Residence and Household Size	44
3.7	Percentage Distribution of Personal Larceny Victimizations in Pike County, by Sex and Age	46

4.1	Percent of Households Containing Rural Ohioans Who Were Victims of Burglary, Theft, or Vandalism by Occupation of the Head of the Household	58
4.2	Percent of Households Containing Rural Ohioans Who Were Victims of Burglary, Theft, or Vandalism by Number of Persons in the Household	59
4.3	Percent of Households Containing Rural Ohioans Who Were Victims of Burglary, Theft, or Vandalism by Age Group	59
4.4	Percent of Households Containing Rural Ohioans Who Were Victims of Burglary, Theft, or Vandalism by Income	60
4.5	Percent of Households Containing Rural Ohioans Who Were Victims of Burglary, Theft, or Vandalism by Religious Affiliation	60
4.6	Percent of Households Containing Rural Ohioans Who Were Victims of Burglary, Theft, or Vandalism by Degree of Acquaintance with Neighbors	62
5.1	Percent Who Answered "Never" to All Items in Nine Delinquency Scales	71
5.2	Percent Who Answered "Very Often" to the Most Frequently Admitted Offenses	72
5.3	Family Structure of Rural and Urban Respondents	74
5.4	Crosstabulation of Home Satisfaction by Rural Family Structure	75
5.5	Crosstabulation of Rural Juvenile Delinquent Behavior, by Sex, for Control Measures of Home Satisfaction, Parental Control, and Conformity to Parental Expectations	76
5.6	Crosstabulation of Rural Conformity by Home Satisfaction	77
5.7	Crosstabulation of Rural Juvenile Delinquent Behavior by Nights Out with Peers and by Having Delinquent Friends	80
5.8	Crosstabulation of Home Satisfaction by How Many Friends Rural Parents Know	81
5.9	Crosstabulation of Having Delinquent Friends by Rural Home Satisfaction	82
5.10	Crosstabulation of Rural Conformity by Having Delinquent Friends	83
6.1	Self-Reported Delinquency Rates by Type of Residence	94-95

6.2	Correlation Matrix of Access to Desirable Social Roles with Delinquency Categories for Rural Farm Youth	97
6.3	Correlation Matrix of Youth Needs with Delinquency Categories for Rural Farm Youth	98
6.4	Correlation Matrix of Negative Labeling and Self-Esteem with Delinquency Categories for Rural Farm Youth	99
6.5	Correlation Matrix of Alienation Dimensions with Delinquency Categories for Rural Farm Youth	101
7.1	Frequency of Drug Use and Age When Drug Was First Used among High School Students in a Rural County of Ohio	112
7.2	Comparison of Ohio Sample with National Drug Use Data for High School Seniors	113
7.3	Reasons for Taking Drugs	114
7.4	Place Where Drug Was First Used and with Whom Used	115
7.5	Where the Respondent Would Seek Aid for Someone They Cared For Who Has a Drug Problem	116
7.6	Zero Order Correlation for Selected Independent Variables and Frequency of Drug Use	117
8.1	Frequency of Participation in Acts of Vandalism among Rural Youth	129
8.2	Self-perceptions of Vandalistic Behavior by Rural Youth	134
8.3	Involvement of Rural Youth in Acts of Vandalism and Marital Status of Household Head	136
8.4	Involvement of Rural Ohio High School Sophomores in Acts of Vandalism and Self-perception about Participation in Family Activities	137
8.5	Involvement of Rural Youth in Acts of Vandalism and Membership and Participation in Church Activities	138
8.6	Involvement of Rural Indiana High School Juniors in Acts of Vandalism and Participation in Extra-Curricular Activities	139
10.1	Universal Factors for Crime Analysis	170
10.2	Planning and Implementing a Comprehensive Rural Crime Prevention Program	177

Preface

The impetus for this book stems from the need to document the rapidly emerging rural crime problem and to supplement the limited information available to address this issue from a crime prevention approach. Our work with sheriffs, rural police officers, officials of the court, academicians, community leaders, and interested citizens has revealed only a meager scattering of relevant materials to approach this expanding problem. Most rural crime prevention materials to date consist mostly of worked over ideas designed for urban situations or the best guesses of persons concerned with a particular problem. An increasing number of classes, workshops, and community action programs aimed at developing a fundamental understanding of rural crime prevention has finally pressed us to seek the most appropriate materials we can assemble. To accomplish this we have tried to cover rural crime prevention from the viewpoint both of the researcher and the practitioner. In essence, we go from the theoretical to the applied, recognizing the role of each.

Basically, what we have attempted to accomplish in this book is a "state of the art" commentary on rural crime prevention. We have tried to examine the problem in a general sense (i.e., national data), as well as with some specific case studies. Those of us who have addressed the problems of rural America over time are aware of its diversity. Thus, crime prevention programs must ultimately be locally oriented. We have

included several in-depth studies of local crime problems in order to give insight and ideas to persons confronted with a variation of the problem in specific areas of the nation.

As will be apparent in the early chapters, rural crime is property-oriented and perpetrated by youth. Thus, rural juvenile delinquency is examined from several vantage points, but all in a rural context. It is the belief of the authors that a basic understanding of the problem is paramount to developing rational response programs.

Understanding the problem is only the first step toward resolution. Ultimately, rural crime prevention programs tailored to address the problem at the local level are where the rewards culminate.

To deal with this subject matter, we selected authors with solid reputations in crime prevention who could apply knowledge to the problem within specific situational contexts. A police officer discusses rural crime prevention from the perspective of a working policeman; several national crime prevention specialists and administrators share their insights and experiences on this subject; professional researchers discuss theories of crime prevention as well as findings from the application of these theories; and community educators discuss practical approaches to educational efforts.

We hope this book provides the reader with a balanced collection of practical and professional insights into rural crime prevention.

The Editors

Acknowledgments

The editors are indebted to the following persons for lending their knowledge and skills to the completion of this book.

William E. Snizek

Full Professor, Department of Sociology
Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University

Simon Dinitz

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The Ohio State University

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City College of New York and City University of New York

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Contents

List of Figures	ix
List of Tables	xi
Preface	xv
Acknowledgments	xvii
<i>Part One</i> THE DIMENSIONS OF RURAL CRIME	1
Introduction	3
1 Crime in the Countryside—A Prologue <i>Edward Sagarin, Joseph F. Donnermeyer, and Timothy J. Carter</i>	10
2 The Extent and Nature of Rural Crime in America <i>Timothy J. Carter</i>	20
3 Patterns of Criminal Victimization in a Rural Setting: The Case of Pike County, Indiana <i>Joseph F. Donnermeyer</i>	34
4 The Ohio Rural Victimization Study <i>G. Howard Phillips and Todd N. Wurschmidt</i>	50
5 Family, Peers and Delinquency: A Rural Replication of Urban Findings <i>Kathleen Weinberger Natalino</i>	66
6 Delinquency Patterns of Farm Youth <i>Martin G. Miller, Eric O. Hoiberg, and Rodney F. Ganey</i>	87
7 Frequency of Drug Use Among Rural High School Students <i>Ted L. Napier and Mary Christine Pratt</i>	104

8	The Nature of Vandalism Among Rural Youth <i>Joseph F. Donnermeyer and G. Howard Phillips</i>	124
	<i>Part Two</i> THE PREVENTION OF RURAL CRIME	147
	Introduction	149
9	The Role of Theory in Rural Crime Prevention <i>Robert L. O'Block, Todd N. Wurschmidt, and Joseph F. Donnermeyer</i>	152
10	The Role of Crime Analysis in Developing Rural Crime Prevention Programs <i>R. Paul McCauley</i>	166
11	A Practitioner's View of Combatting Crime: With Special Reference to Programs for the Elderly <i>George Sunderland</i>	182
12	Crime Prevention Philosophy and Practice <i>B. M. Gray</i>	197
13	The Operative Approach to Crime Prevention <i>Edmund G. James, Jr. and Steven D. Gladman</i>	209
14	Community Resources for Crime Prevention in Rural Areas <i>Gwendolyn D. Hall</i>	216
15	Preventing Youth Involvement: The Role of Family and School <i>Todd N. Wurschmidt and G. Howard Phillips</i>	224
16	Rural Law Enforcement and Crime Prevention: A Role in Transition <i>Gary R. Wilson</i>	241
	Index	257
	Authors	263

PART ONE

The Dimensions of Rural Crime

Introduction

The readings in Part One, “The Dimensions of Rural Crime,” are presented in two sections: 1) the extent and nature of rural crime, and 2) rural juvenile delinquency. In the first section, the reader is given an overview of the extent and nature of rural crime and an analysis of the important factors hypothesized as contributing to the growing problem of rural crime. The focus of the second section is rural juvenile delinquency. Here, differences in urban and rural delinquency patterns are identified. Also, two juvenile delinquent behaviors, that is, involvement in drug use and vandalism, are analyzed in detail.

The Extent and Nature of Rural Crime

Information pertaining to the extent (rates) and nature (offense and offender/victim characteristics) of rural crime is presented in this section. The information is obtained from two sources: official police statistics (*Uniform Crime Reports*) and victimization reports. While neither source provides a totally accurate measure of the true crime rate, together they yield valuable information pertaining to the consequences of crime for both official and private citizens. Additionally, if police and victim crime rates are compared, information on the differences between these rates may be as important as either rate alone. Therefore, official police

statistics, victimization reports, and a comparison between the two are necessary for a thorough analysis of the extent and nature of rural crime.

Three out of the four chapters in this section utilize these information gathering strategies. Chapter 2 is based on national official police statistics, while Chapter 3 is a rural victimization survey. Chapter 4 presents information from both official police statistics and victimization report data.

Official police statistics and victimization reports yield two separate measures of crime, each with inherent difficulties associated with their respective source of information (i.e., police or the victim). An understanding of these inherent difficulties is necessary for proper interpretation and application of the findings presented in these chapters.

OFFICIAL POLICE STATISTICS

Official information pertaining to crime includes statistics, as well as police, court, probation, parole, and prison records. However, all such official sources of criminal statistics provide inadequate measures of the true crime rate. Faced with such a measurement problem, researchers often follow the advice of many who maintain that the value of criminal statistics as a measure of criminality decreases as the measurement procedures takes the researcher further away from the actual crime. In practice, this means that police statistics are more accurate measures of crime than court statistics and court statistics are more accurate than prison statistics.

The most widely used police statistics are the *Uniform Crime Reports* (UCR). These reports are gathered annually by participating police departments, sheriffs, and state police throughout the United States. The local police reports are sent to the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) where they are collated and published under one cover. The UCR contains both formal complaints made to the police, and police arrests. Arrest statistics are categorized by age, race, and sex. Because the majority of crimes known to the police are not cleared by an arrest, they are generally preferred to arrest statistics as a measure of crimes committed.

There are several problems associated with the use of police statistics, particularly with respect to crimes known to the police. First, police statistics yield an "official rate" which represents an unknown proportion of the true crime rate. That is, more crimes are actually committed than are reflected in the official crime rate, because not every offense is reported. Second, police statistics are sometimes suspected of being used for political purposes. For example, high official crime rates may be