4 Rural–urban crime trends in international perspective

Since the mid-1990s, many countries have witnessed substantial and widespread drops in crime. Major decreases in crime were first observed in the United States, where violent crime including homicide fell 40 percent during the 1990s and attracted much international attention (Blumstein, 2000; Blumstein & Rosenfeld, 2008; Farrell, Tilley, Tseloni, & Mailley, 2010; LaFree, 1999; Levitt, 2004). Though there is little consensus on the reasons for this decline, the trend has been confirmed in many countries using data from the International Crime Victims Survey, with declines in all types of crime except burglary (Tseloni, Mailley, Farrell, & Tilley, 2010). Some claim some sort of “universality of the crime drop” (Levitt, 2004), as supposedly the decrease in crime affected all geographic areas and demographic groups. However, there have been efforts to question this “universal nature of the crime drop” that focus on broad explanations for such crime reduction (Parker, 2008). Still, most of this literature is based on cross-national studies or focused on urban centers only (see e.g., Tseloni et al., 2010). Most studies do not regard urban–rural differences in the decrease as a relevant issue in its own right (but see e.g., Levitt, 2004).

This chapter starts by comparing crime rates in Sweden with those in the United States and the United Kingdom. In all three countries, urban crime rates are higher than rural ones, regardless of definitions of crime types and how rural areas are conceptualized. An alternative to relying solely on official police statistics is to complement them, as much as possible, with data from national crime victim surveys, as it is done in this chapter. Despite the limitations of these sources of data, they are the most reliable data available for representing the geographic distribution of crime in Sweden and elsewhere. First, trends in crime rates and prevalence are compared in a selection of countries as background for the Swedish case. This chapter discusses evidence about the so-called “convergence hypothesis” of urban and rural crime rates. Then, the analysis focuses on specific types of violent and property crimes in rural areas, drawing conclusions for rural areas across countries whenever possible. The chapter also discusses crime variation by groups of individuals (including repeat victimization), but the focus is on crime variations over time in selected rural communities. The concept of population at risk using both resident population and floating population (by vehicle traffic) is also discussed. What the chapter does not do is to speculate about
possible reasons for these trends, as it would not be wise to assume general explanations for the drop and completely immature to pose specific causes for urban–rural crime trends at the national level. Yet, this is an important new territory for future research that is beyond the scope of this book. The chapter concludes with a summary of the urban–rural trends in crime in Sweden and internationally and a request for better understanding of these trends that, at least in some places, are making rural areas more similar to urban ones.

Urban–rural crime trends

Are rural areas becoming more criminogenic? Crime victimization disproportionately affects more urban than rural residents, regardless of crime trends, country, or differences in rural–urban contexts. Although some would claim that crime is eminently an urban phenomenon, recent changes in rural–urban relationships have affected regional criminogenic landscapes; apparently this process is making individuals who live in some rural areas more exposed to crime than in the past. It is suggested that this trend goes undetected often because changes do not affect homogeneously rural areas. Victimization may also be selective and unequal across social groups and environments. Evidence on how these changes affect criminogenic conditions is difficult to ascertain because, as we will discuss in this chapter, it may be hidden under general “decreasing” or “stable” trends. By standardizing crime by population (not considering crime levels or prevalence only), this chapter later attempts to systematically look at concentration of victimization. This is relevant because, if rural crime increases, it could be either because there are more rural victims or the same number of victims who are victimized more often (repeat victimization).

In the United Kingdom, crime is decreasing regardless of area or data source (Home Office, 2011). In Sweden (Table 4.1) and, to some extent, in the United States (Levitt, 2004), the trend is patchier but still decreasing. In Sweden, some rural areas are more criminogenic now than they were previously. Police records over 15 years show that urban and accessible rural areas are at higher risk of crime than the most remote ones but that the increases converge toward the year 2014. Although the trends diverge somewhat in urban and rural areas, the short-term directions of change seem to track one another quite closely up to 2014, when rates dropped to levels similar to those found in 2002 (Figure 4.1). The biggest increases are in violence, criminal damage, and some types of property crime. Crime victim surveys in Sweden, although covering only five years, show a more stable picture, indicating a declining trend in crime.

In the United States, total crime rates for urban counties have declined, whilst crime rates in rural counties have increased, particularly for violent crime (Deller & Deller, 2010; Weisheit, Wells, & Falcone, 1994). As Fischer (2011) suggests, from the 1970s through the 1990s, the equation “big city equals violent crime” was often taken for granted. During the past 20 years, there have been signs in the United States that rural and urban crime rates are converging (Deller &
Deller, 2010). Fischer (2011) suggests that the view of the 1970s and 1980s that associated big cities with “danger” may be fading away.

Kneebone and Raphael (2011) provide evidence of this convergence. In a study covering 5,400 communities located within the 100 largest US metropolitan areas, both violent and property crime were found to have declined significantly between 1990 and 2008, with the largest decreases occurring in cities. The Kneebone–Raphael analysis divided suburban communities into four types: “dense inner suburbs,” “mature suburbs,” “emerging suburbs,” and rural “exurbs.” On average, the inner suburbs experienced major declines in rates of violent crime, although not as great as the core cities. But the more outlying suburbs experienced little change or even increases in rates of violent crime. Violent crime rates dropped by almost 30 percent in cities, while property crime fell by 46 percent. Though city crime rates remain considerably higher than rates in the suburbs, smaller decreases in suburban violent and property crime rates over this time period narrowed the gap. In 90 of the 100 largest metropolitan areas, the gap between city and suburban property crime rates narrowed between 1990 and 2008. Cities and high-density suburbs saw violent crime rates decline, but predominantly rural communities experienced slight increases that are not explained by their changing demographics.

Carrington (2007) also suggests that rates for violent crime and property offenses have been growing at faster rates in rural Australia, where crime, particularly violent crimes, is not a predominantly urban phenomenon. In Sweden, as in the United States and, to some extent, the United Kingdom, a convergent pattern between urban and rural areas is found more often in crime rates from police statistics than in data from crime victim surveys (Table 4.1).
Table 4.1 Trends in violent and property crimes from police records and crime victimization surveys in Sweden, the United States, and United Kingdom, by areas

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Police records</th>
<th>Violent</th>
<th>Victimization surveys</th>
<th>Violent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Property</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:

1. Increase refers to an increase in crime rates.
2. Slight decrease/stable refers to a slight decrease or stable crime rates.
3. Decrease refers to a decrease in crime rates.
4. Stable refers to stable crime rates.

Source: Various national crime statistics.
Sources
1 The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ), police-recorded data.
2 The Swedish National Council for Crime Prevention (BRÅ), crime victimization surveys.
3 Kneebone and Raphael (2011), based on FBI and census data.
4 US Department of Justice (2011) based on crime victimization surveys.
5 Higgins et al. (2010) based on police-recorded data.
6 Higgins et al. (2010) based on BCS – British crime and victimization survey data.
7 Higgins et al. (2010) based on BCS – Community Safety Partnership.

Notes
* Burglary, car-related theft, robbery, and vandalism.
** But increased serious assault in small towns and rural areas.
*** Stable for sexual violence across areas, increase for drug offenses for all areas.
**** But similar trends for both rural and urban, reduction for all areas.
i Remote rural (RR) areas are more than 45 minutes by car from the nearest urban neighborhood with more than 3,000 inhabitants, whilst Accessible Rural (AR) areas are 5–45 minutes by car from urban locations with more than 3,000 inhabitants. Municipalities with more than 3,000 inhabitants and reachable within 5 minutes by car are regarded as Urban Areas (UA).
ii Divided areas into “core cities” and suburban communities of four types: dense inner suburbs, “mature suburbs,” “emerging suburbs,” and the still rural “exurbs.”
iii Large cities have a population of 100,000 or more, while small cities have a population of less than 100,000.
iv Predominantly rural areas are those classified as rural districts with at least 80% of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. They also include rural districts with at least 50% but less than 80% of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. Significant rural areas are those classified as districts with more than 37,000 people or more than 26% of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns. Predominantly urban areas are those classified as major urban districts with either 100,000 people or 50% of their population in urban areas with a population of more than 750,000 but also large urban districts with either 50,000 people or 50% of their population in one of 17 urban areas with a population between 250,000 and 750,000. Other urban includes districts with fewer than 37,000 people or less than 26% of their population in rural settlements and larger market towns (Home Office, 2012, pp. 41–42).
In England, for burglary and offenses against vehicles there is some evidence of a narrowing of the disparity in crime rates between urban and rural areas (Higgins, Robb, & Britton, 2010). However, overall police-recorded crime figures for England in 2009/2010 show that crime rates in areas classified as predominantly urban were higher than in areas predominantly rural. Trends in levels of police-recorded crime were similar between 2002 and 2010 (Figure 4.2). A similar trend is found when looking at rates from crime victim surveys in England and Wales. The risk of being a victim of crime was 23 percent in urban areas and 16 percent in rural areas. The risk that a household was victimized was also higher in urban areas than in rural areas (18 percent compared to 12 percent). Trends in household crime incident rates have been broadly similar in urban and rural areas in England and Wales. Levels of household crime decreased 30 percent in urban areas and 26 percent in rural areas between the 2001/2002 and 2009/2010 surveys. Burglary, vehicle-related theft, and vandalism showed similar trends in both urban and rural areas, with decreases in all three crime types (Higgins et al., 2010).

Keeping in mind that violent crime and property crime might be defined differently in the penal code of each country, the next section discusses differences in the trends in these offenses.

**Property crimes**

Urban areas are often more criminogenic than rural areas not because they concentrate lots of people per area (and some degree of social control) but because

![Figure 4.2](image-url)  
*Figure 4.2* Increase in offending rates in England per area, 2002–2010 (total crime per 10,000 inhabitants, 2002/2003 = 100) (source: Home Office, 2011).
urban areas offer more opportunities for crime (that is, stock of goods) than rural ones do. This assumption is particularly true for property crimes.

Overall property crime rates are decreasing, but there are exceptions in all selected countries. In the United States, in 2005 the rates of burglary, motor vehicle theft, and household theft were the highest for households located in urban areas. However, rates of burglary were somewhat higher for rural households than for suburban households, but lower than for urban households. Suburban households were victims of motor vehicle theft and household theft at rates higher than those of rural households. Households in every region of the country experienced declines in property crime, and the trend is similar for all areas: 51 percent of inhabitants who experienced a decrease in property crime rates from 1993 to 2005 were living in urban areas, whilst suburban areas had declines of 54 percent and 49 percent for rural areas (US Department of Justice, 2011) (Table 4.2).

In the United Kingdom, crime statistics show that rural areas experience lower levels of robbery and theft of motor vehicles than in urban areas. However, crimes such as theft from a motor vehicle appear to be a disproportionate problem for rural residents (Marshall & Johnson, 2005, p. 26). Aust and Simmons (2002) noted that the incidence of property crimes increases as population density increases. Robbery seems to be a particularly urban phenomenon. Dodd, Nicholas, Povey, and Walker (2004) reported that more than half of all recorded robberies take place in just three police force districts: the Metropolitan, Greater Manchester, and West Midlands, which comprise 24 percent of the population. The Metropolitan police force alone is responsible for recording 40 percent of all robberies in England and Wales. Similar proportions were found in 2009/2010 by Higgins et al. (2010).

In Sweden, a drop in property crime rates was observed in the same period based on police statistics. Data from crime victim surveys also shows a declining trend for nearly all property crimes in Sweden compared to other EU countries. The prevalence rate for car thefts, car vandalism, burglary, shoplifting, and theft of bicycles is decreasing, following a declining trend also experienced in countries that took part in the International Crime Victimization Surveys (ICVS) between 1992 and 2004–2005. The exceptions are fraud and robbery in small towns (Tables 4.4 and 4.6). Going against the figures recorded in most ICVS countries (Van Dijk, van Kesteren, & Smit, 2007), the prevalence of fraud and robbery in small towns has increased in Sweden. With the advance of ICT and sales over the Internet and through telemarketing, people living in remote areas of Sweden may run a risk of becoming a victim of crime similar to people living in the Swedish capital. This fact per se requires new ways of understanding crime dynamics and crime prevention that go beyond existing administrative police boundaries.

Robbery, regarded as a violent offense, seems to follow the trend for violent crimes more than the trend for property offenses. Both police statistics and national victim surveys show that households in urban areas are more vulnerable to property crime (residential burglary, car theft, theft from cars,
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>404.8</td>
<td>384.7</td>
<td>358.3</td>
<td>335.8</td>
<td>311.1</td>
<td>274.2</td>
<td>256.3</td>
<td>222.1</td>
<td>212.8</td>
<td>215.3</td>
<td>216.3</td>
<td>214.7</td>
<td>200.0</td>
<td>–50.6*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suburban</td>
<td>305.1</td>
<td>297.2</td>
<td>280.6</td>
<td>252.6</td>
<td>238.0</td>
<td>204.5</td>
<td>181.4</td>
<td>163.7</td>
<td>156.7</td>
<td>145.3</td>
<td>144.8</td>
<td>143.2</td>
<td>141.4</td>
<td>–53.7*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>246.4</td>
<td>245.2</td>
<td>228.4</td>
<td>206.4</td>
<td>191.7</td>
<td>173.5</td>
<td>159.8</td>
<td>152.6</td>
<td>131.9</td>
<td>118.3</td>
<td>136.6</td>
<td>134.4</td>
<td>125.1</td>
<td>–49.2*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: US Department of Justice (2011, p. 7).

Note
* Burglary, car-related theft, robbery, and vandalism.
bicycle theft) than households in rural areas. The pattern is similar in terms of car theft and theft of or from vehicles. For overall property crimes, there has been a decrease of about 30 percent (Table 4.3), mostly in car-related thefts. Note that the prevalence of burglary in small towns and rural areas has been unchanged since 2006 while for urban areas a decline of about one-quarter has been recorded.

Police statistics show that this pattern is not spatially homogeneous, as it varies by crime type and is particularly concentrated in urban areas. Whilst rural areas record increases in burglary, car theft, and robbery, urban areas have experienced a decrease in almost all types of theft. For instance, the number of “hot spots” in urban municipalities (municipalities with high theft rates close together) dropped, whilst in remote rural areas the number was nearly constant in the same period, and in some accessible rural areas the number of hot spots increased, particularly in southern Sweden. The difference in levels of theft by area was tested using one-way Anova with a post doc Scheffe test for 2007 (Table 4.4). The average of thefts by area significantly dropped from 16.46 in the urban areas to 13.90 in the accessible rural. Remote rural had a slightly higher average in 2007. Municipalities showing concentrations of total thefts increased in number in 2007, and compared with 1996 the pattern has become more polarized. In the most recent decade, the core of hot spots shifted, from Stockholm to Skåne County. In the next chapter, these geographical shifts will be discussed in more detail as well as possible explanations for such spatial variation in property crime rates.

**Violent crimes**

Kowalski and Duffield (1990) find that in rural areas the potential for violence decreases as individualism is reduced and cohesion is strengthened. Residents of a small community are more likely to know one another socially than in a larger city, and this informal guardianship leads to lower rates of crime in rural settings (Freudenburg, 1986). Still, rural areas are not free from violence, though in rural areas most violence happens among acquaintances. Capsambelis (2009) suggests that attention should be paid to domestic violence and neighborhood dispute calls in rural areas, because over time they may escalate into assault or even homicide.

Although isolation is a criminogenic characteristic of rural areas, there is an assumption that urbanity means higher anonymity among people (especially neighbors), which leads to lower social control, and thus the likelihood of successful completion of crime (Kaylen, 2011). The positive association between urbanity and crime rates does not always hold for all locations. When testing hypotheses in multiple European countries, Entorf and Spengler (2002) find that the proportion of the workforce that is agricultural (in other words, rural labor force) has a significant negative impact on homicide in Denmark and positive impact on homicide in Spain and Finland. Furthermore, it had a significant negative correlation with serious assault in Denmark, Germany, and the Netherlands.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan city</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>% change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fraud</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>2.8</td>
<td>27.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town and rural area</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>1.8</td>
<td>2.0</td>
<td>2.4</td>
<td>2.6</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>2.5</td>
<td>8.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan city</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>–14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Burglary</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1.0</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>–22.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town and rural area</td>
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<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan city</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>12.1</td>
<td>11.9</td>
<td>12.4</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>–27.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total property</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>12.5</td>
<td>12.2</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>11.0</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>–24.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town and rural area</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>8.7</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>7.7</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>–31.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

and a significant positive correlation in Spain. After an extensive review of literature on rural homicide in Europe, Kaylen (2011) concludes that “much of our knowledge about rural homicide comes from studies of rural violence or homicide more generally that briefly suggest explanations for rural homicide . . . theoretical tests of crime and violence in rural Europe are scarce.”

This lack of knowledge about differences in the nature of violence in urban and rural areas is revealed by an analysis of decreasing crime rates comparing urban and rural areas in the United States. Levitt (2004, p. 167) presents the percentage decline in homicide, violent crime, and property crime from 1991 to 2001 by region in the United States, urban–rural, and city size. He indicates that “in each of these subgroups and for all crime categories, the trend has been downward. Crime declines in the Northeast outpaced the rest of the country, whereas the Midwest was a laggard.” The greatest reduction in crime occurred within metropolitan statistical areas and especially in large cities with 250,000 or more inhabitants. As regards violent crime in particular but also property offenses, rural areas showed much smaller declines in both absolute terms and percentages. For instance, Levitt (2004) shows that the homicide rate per 100,000 inhabitants in large cities fell 12.9 per 100,000 (from 26.2 to 13.3), while the drop in homicide rates for cities with populations less than 50,000 was only 1.5 (from 4.3 to 2.8). This fact certainly indicates potential differences in the nature of homicide between urban and rural areas in the United States during this time period.

In the United States, Kneebone and Raphael (2011) point out that violence in non-urban areas is less related to the demographics of these areas nowadays than it has been in the past. They suggest that violence in rural and some suburban areas has increased on average, whilst the inner suburbs experienced major declines in rates of violent crime, although not as great as the core cities. The inner regions of metropolitan areas have shown major declines (Figure 4.3). However, this trend does not hold if trends in homicide are taken into account, which possibly means that in suburban areas violence has increased but, for various reasons, has become less lethal. Statistics on homicide also show that trends have been similar for more than three decades for urban areas in the United States but not for all types of rural areas (Figure 4.4). Although urban homicide rates varied, from 8.9 to 2.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2008 (with the

Table 4.4 Differences in theft in urban areas, accessible rural, and remote rural

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Areas</th>
<th>Theft mean</th>
<th>F-test</th>
<th>Scheffe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Urban areas (1)</td>
<td>16.46</td>
<td>14.23*</td>
<td>(1) and (2)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accessible rural (2)</td>
<td>13.90</td>
<td></td>
<td>(1) and (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remote rural (3)</td>
<td>14.58</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Dolmén (2010).

Note

* Significant at 95% level and above.
percentage increase converging in 2005), in rural areas the rate has been less than 2.0 since the early 1990s. Baharom, Muzafar, and Royfaizal (2008) also show signs of a divergent trend using state-based statistics: crime rates in the overwhelming majority of states are diverging from the national average (in only eight cases are crime rates converging). The US Department of Justice (2011) shows, for instance, that homicides in which the offender was known to be an intimate (spouses, ex-spouses, boyfriends, girlfriends, and same-sex partners) have declined in cities of all sizes and types. However, since the mid-1980s, the percentage of homicides committed by an intimate has been larger in rural areas than in suburban or urban areas. See Chapter 10 for more details on violence against women in the United States.

In Sweden, violence also seems to be increasing in rural areas, according to police records. Statistics show that more violent offenses occurred in 1990s and 2000s in rural areas than if they had followed the national trend. The trend is the same when violent acts are standardized by resident population. Despite being available since 2005, the national crime victim survey does not confirm such an increase in violence rates but actually shows a decrease. For all types of violent crimes, people living in urban areas tend to be more exposed to crime than those living in smaller cities or rural areas – but there are exceptions. Robbery has shown an increase in small towns and rural areas since 2005. There was no significant difference in the prevalence of assault between urban and rural areas (Table 4.5), or harassment (a crime often committed by someone the victim knows).

In the United Kingdom, Aust and Simmons (2002) note that violent crime was specifically concentrated in areas of the highest population density, with
roughly equivalent risks evident for the other types of area. This was later confirmed by Marshall and Johnson (2005), who indicate that the risk of becoming the victim of a violent crime in rural areas and urban areas, excluding cities, was actually similar. In 2009/2010, 54 percent of the total of selected serious offenses involving a knife were recorded in rural police forces. In more urban police forces, knives were involved in a greater proportion of recorded serious offenses than was the case in more rural forces (Higgins et al., 2010). Kaylen and Pride more (2013) find that indicators of social disorganization are not a good explanation of the variation in rural crime rates. They suggest that previous links between rural violence and social change, lifestyles, alcohol consumption, and specifically rural concerns demand new empirical testing.

For homicide, for instance, Granath et al. (2011) show that although rates are low in Sweden, urban areas tend to have higher rates than rural areas. Compared with its neighboring country Finland, Sweden shows relatively low homicide rates. Drunken brawl-related homicides between unemployed alcoholic men cause most of the difference in the structure and rate of homicidal crime between Finland and Sweden (Granath et al., 2011, p. 93). In both countries, some rural areas are also in the upper top range of homicides. In the north, although there are few cases, they produce high rates in relation to the total resident population. For more details, see Chapter 5.

There are places where violence is prevalent in rural areas. Rural areas in Australia show a higher rate of violent crimes than property crimes. Carcach (2000) finds that in rural Australia violent crime outdoors was particularly
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan city</th>
<th>2005</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008</th>
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<th>2010</th>
<th>2011</th>
<th>2012</th>
<th>% change</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assault</td>
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<td>−41.3</td>
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<td>1.6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Robbery</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>0.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.4</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>0.6</td>
<td>49.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan city</td>
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<td>14.0</td>
<td>13.6</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>13.7</td>
<td>13.0</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>13.2</td>
<td>−12.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>12.9</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.8</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>11.3</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>−18.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town and rural area</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>10.6</td>
<td>10.0</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>9.5</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>−7.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

prevalent in some remote rural regions. Rural areas also showed a higher crime rate for malicious damage, breaking and entering, assault, sexual assault, and drug offenses. Carrington (2007) suggests that family violence, domestic assault, assault, and sexual assault are growing at a faster rate in regional Australia and are consistently higher in some rural localities than state averages.

Honor- and revenge-related crimes are also part of the rural culture of violence in some parts of the world. For instance, İçli (1994) discusses the phenomenon of homicide related to revenge between families in rural Turkey, known as blood feuds. Disputes over land, resources, and matters of honor are often the root of conflicts that continue over generations. Honor killing is not rare in rural areas of South Asia, in countries like Pakistan and India, and also occurs in Turkey and other countries in the Middle East.

Dramatic changes resulting from industrialization, the transition from a planned to a market economy, population shifts, and political instability have had different effects on rural violence. In some rural areas in the transition states of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, violent crimes, including homicide and assault, were prevalent despite the fact that urbanity was still a key factor explaining regional differences in crime rates (Ceccato, 2007; Ceccato & Haining, 2008; Kerry, Goovaerts, Haining, & Ceccato, 2010). According to Kaylen (2011), the collapse of the Soviet Union has been shown to affect rates of violence in rural communities in Russia, Belarus, and Lithuania. In countries such as Estonia (Salla, Ceccato, & Ahven, 2011), the link between alcohol and violence has also been established for rural areas, particularly areas with a high proportion of ethnic minorities.

The hypothesis of convergence of rural–urban crime trends

Although rural areas traditionally experience lower levels of crime than urban areas do, international evidence shows signs of convergence of crime trends between rural and urban areas in some countries but not for all, and not for all types of crimes (e.g., Carcach, 2000; Marshall & Johnson, 2005; Osgood & Chambers, 2003). The key issue for criminologists is perhaps not to check whether the convergence is happening but rather whether it can be checked in different country contexts. It is the view here that testing the hypothesis of rural–urban crime convergence is a challenge for a number of reasons.

The first challenge is methodological, as it relates to changing proportions in the demographics of each area (e.g., because of migration) and areal categories (e.g., changes in boundaries over time) that affect both numerator (number of crimes and victims) as well as denominator (population at risk). It is important to note the value of population at risk. When it decreases in an area whilst crime remains stable, it might be assumed that crime increased in the area while actually the mechanisms associated with the change were related to emigration and not to the criminogenic features of the area. Moreover, biased victim samples can boost victimization incidence, for instance, urban victimization versus rural victimization (see e.g., the case of Eastern European samples discussed in Tseloni et al., 2010).
The second challenge is related to repeat crimes against the same victim (Davis, Weisburd, & Taylor, 2008; Tseloni et al., 2010). Of course, this is particularly important when the basis for analysis is crime victim survey data, because repeat incidents impact international crime reduction. Assumptions about trends in crimes with high repeat victimization should therefore be interpreted with some caution (for instance, violence against women or harassment) (BRÅ, 2014b). Tseloni et al. (2010) found, for instance, that a decline in personal theft to a large extent was associated with a decline in repeat incidents against the same victims. Osborn and Tseloni (1998) investigate factors that differ in repeat victimization from those that explain an isolated crime experience. They highlight the need to consider what they call “risk heterogeneity,” which refers to the fact that some individuals or targets are more attractive than others and may remain so over time, leading to repeat victimization. In Sweden, this “risk heterogeneity” is often discussed under the discourse of “victimization-related inequality.” Victimization-related inequality is often associated with the notion that a group of individuals is targeted more often than other groups in society rather than an individual is repeatedly victimized, although it may mean the same thing.

In Sweden, for instance, Nilsson and Estrada (2006) suggest that the reason behind the overall stability in victimization rates in relation to police records is that these rates hide an increasing polarization between different groups of society. For richer groups, the exposure to violence has stabilized since the mid-1980s, whilst the proportion of those victimized has become significantly greater among the poor. Overall, the National Council for Crime Prevention warns researchers to be careful in drawing conclusions based on data from crime victims’ surveys by small geographic areas or within groups (BRÅ, 2014a).

Another challenge that makes the hypothesis of crime convergence hard to test is the difficulty of untangling differences in “unexplained heterogeneity” (Osborn & Tseloni, 1998) in crime targets in urban and rural areas. For instance, “[t]wo households can face risks which are systematically different from each other even when these households have identical measured characteristics” (Osborn & Tseloni, 1998, p. 308). The greater the level of unexplained heterogeneity, the poorer the predictability of crime risks (Tseloni et al., 2010). This issue concerns the dynamics of crime and their context in rural areas, for instance, how farms are differently embedded and exposed to local and regional routine activities. In Sweden, crime follows a north–south divide. Southern rural municipalities tend to be more criminogenic, because they are often accessible communities and more exposed to local and regional flows of people and goods than northern rural municipalities are (Ceccato & Dolmén, 2011). When violence rates are considered, there is a need to distinguish between violence caused by strangers (often in public places or outdoors) and that initiated by people who know each other and, not rarely, are intimates (often in the domestic sphere). The first type of violence is typical of urban environments (street robbery, assault) while domestic violence and violence among acquaintances is overrepresented in rural statistics of violent encounters.
Differences within rural areas and how they affect crime and its nature should also be noted in this context. One example is how the economic base in rural areas generates crime. An economic breakdown of the local economy, associated with high unemployment and demographic decay, may lead to anomic conditions and then more crime in certain areas. On the other hand, the convergence may also be happening in rural areas that are exposed to a temporary or continuous influx of population, that is, individuals bringing in themselves as well as goods (potential targets). Thus, an increase in crime here is associated with healthy rural economies. Rural touristic municipalities in Sweden tend to experience seasonal variations in crime rates, often dependent on visitor inflows. These municipalities also tend to have several service sectors (restaurants, hotels) that are not found in municipalities with a more “traditional” economic structure (mining, forestry), which may produce extra social interactions that could be criminogenic.

**Repeat and inequality in victimization**

A high percentage of crimes against individuals are committed against a small portion of the population. In the United Kingdom, the risk of being a victim of any household crime was higher for households living in the most deprived areas than for those in the least deprived areas in England. For burglary, for instance, while there have been sharp declines in burglary rates in the most deprived areas since 2001/2002, rates have remained broadly flat in the least deprived areas (Higgins et al., 2010). In some countries, such as Australia, unequal victimization has an ethnic-demographic dimension (Cunneen, 2007) and, in the United States, also a health dimension linked to an increase in cases of violence related to climate change (Mares, 2013).

In Sweden, as in other countries, victimization is unequal as previously noticed by Nilsson and Estrada (2006). Limited by data/sampling limitations, inequality in victimization cannot be tested by areas, because socioeconomic data from crime victims’ surveys is not appropriate for meaningful analysis. Hypothetically, what could be done is to divide data by group and area over time as was done by Parker (2008) in the United States. She shows that homicide trends for distinct groups (blacks, whites, black males, black females, white females, and white males) varied greatly when compared to total homicide rates in an area. The decline in homicide rates involving whites started as early as 1980, whereas the overall decline in homicide rates began in the early 1990s. Also, racial disparities in homicide rates varied considerably over time: larger in the 1980s, narrowing in the 2000s. This does not mean that this is not an important issue. On the contrary, decreases in crime rates have been revealed thanks to crime prevention initiatives that target specific groups of victims to avoid repeat victimization.

Recent figures (BRÅ, 2013) show that more than half of crimes against persons (abuse, threats, sexual offenses, robberies, fraud, and harassment) were against a small group in the population (1.6 percent of the population, representing 14 percent of the people exposed to crime). Less common is repeated exposure to
crime against property: about 3 percent of crimes against property are reported to have been committed against the few who have suffered four or more offenses in the same period in 2011. Repeated victimization is not randomly distributed in a population in Sweden. For instance, it is mainly young people who are victims of violence (four times or more), most commonly in the 20–24 age group. Women are slightly more common as repeat victims than men are, lone households and households with a single parent, and people with pre-secondary education or less. People who are foreign-born are overrepresented among those who are victimized on four or more occasions compared to those who are native Swedes (BRÅ, 2013). These statistics cannot easily be split by geographical area without compromising their quality. However, there are indirect indicators that point to greater repeat victimization in larger urban centers, as youth and foreign-born tend to be concentrated in large cities. Differences between counties are quite small (BRÅ, 2013), but Västmanland, Örebro, Stockholm, and Skåne generally rank somewhat higher than the other counties, which is largely expected and in line with the results of previous measurements.

Table 4.6 shows that repeat victimization is more accentuated in metropolitan areas, but for those who are victimized four times or more there are no major differences between urban and rural areas. Note that for violence, the percentage is the same for those who are victimized four times or more (violence against women or violence among people who know each other are certainly feeding the number of repeat victimization). Fraud might also be affecting the numbers of repeat victimization in rural areas, as this type of crime has increased in municipalities outside the metropolitan areas (Table 4.3). See also Lantbrukarnas-Riksförbund (2012).

These findings on repeat victimization in Sweden hold both research and policy implications. Previous research (e.g., Tseloni et al., 2010) indicates that repeat incidents influence crime rates. Thus, interventions that aim at reducing crime rates must support known victims to decrease their future risk of being victimized again. A recent review performed by BRÅ (2012a) based on 31 studies (no reference to urban–rural differences) suggests that repeat victimization can be tackled and be effective in preventing crime. The impact on crime varies with

Table 4.6 Repeat victimization, Sweden, 2012, by crime type and area (%)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Metropolitan city</th>
<th>Victim Once</th>
<th>2–3 times</th>
<th>4 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>2.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town and rural area</td>
<td>9.9</td>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Metropolitan city</td>
<td>10.2</td>
<td>8.5</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Property</th>
<th>Victim Once</th>
<th>2–3 times</th>
<th>4 or more</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Large city</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>7.5</td>
<td>2.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Small town and rural area</td>
<td>7.0</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

the effectiveness of prevention interventions and the way they are put into practice (note that the studies were based on burglary, domestic violence, and sexual victimization). BRÅ (2012a) indicates that information and education for victims are not as effective as those tailored to specific situational crime interventions.

Future analysis of repeat victimization in rural areas should therefore be more sensitive to the types of crime that affect those who live there. This issue is discussed in detail below. The analysis of repeat victimization should aim to do the following:

1. **Consider the sparse and remote populations.** Although repeated crime victim data is useful, it is collected in a way that gives little attention to the specificities of certain types of crime that often lead to repeat victimization. For instance, violence caused by a known offender tends to happen more than once to the same victim. Knowledge on this type of crime is limited based on aggregated analysis from crime victim surveys. Such surveys do not allow disaggregation by small geographical units or by different socio-demographic groups because of limited sampling procedures. Similarly, little can be said for the whole of Sweden about fraud over the Internet that focuses on rural victims.

2. **Be specific to rural crime.** Repeat crimes against the same victim are a phenomenon typical among certain farmers. The Farmers’ Safety Survey (Lantbrukarnas Riksförbund, 2012) shows that half of those who have been victims of crime were victimized twice or more times in the preceding two years. Farmers in southern Sweden more often than the national average suffer repeat victimization. In this case, their properties are more often the target than they themselves are, but being a victim of fraud is still the second most common type of crime they suffer, after theft of fuel and farm equipment and other products. At present, support to these victims is limited to a few specific areas and associations (for instance, Sweden CrimeStoppers) as crimes against farmers are not considered as a priority in local crime prevention councils (for more details, see Chapter 12). Knowledge about their protection practices and what works is not available at the national level despite the Farmers’ Safety Survey and National Crime Victim Surveys.

3. **Include a wide spectrum of crimes as well as harm.** Some events in rural areas may happen during a certain time, several times, until they are detected, or if ever detected. Crimes against wildlife and nature are typical examples of such events. Since offenders are often corporations (not individuals), the prevention for this type of repeat victimization imposes challenges. Moreover, the victim plays a different role from a person whose car is stolen, for example. A mining company is certainly only one of the actors that may be in court if a case of repeated water contamination has been detected by environmental inspectors (see Chapters 8 and 12 for more details). The complexity of these types of crimes calls for a more holistic perspective on repeat crimes against the same victim. Some of these include temporal aspects of victimization that are discussed in detail in the next section.
Monthly and seasonal patterns of crime

Crime variations over time can be relevant when comparing crime profiles across areas. Crime opportunities are neither uniformly nor randomly organized in space and time (Ratcliffe, 2010, p. 5), but they do follow rhythmic patterns of human activity. What determines these patterns? Some relate these temporal differences to the influence of weather on behavior, such as aggression (Anderson, Anderson, Dorr, DeNeve, & Flanaganan, 2000), whilst others associate to the indirect effects that seasonal variations in the weather have on people’s routine activities, namely vacation during summer or else structured activities (Brantingham & Brantingham, 1984; Cohen & Felson, 1979). In practice it is not always easy to untangle these factors into “weather-behavior” or “weather-routine activity-behavior.” Although no causal relationship has been claimed, links between weather and crime are fairly well established. One of the earliest studies was the work of Quetelet ([1842] 1969) who indicated that the greatest number of crimes against a person is committed during summer and the fewest during winter.

Studies in the United Kingdom reported in Field (1992) find strong evidence in England and Wales that temperature was positively related to most types of property and violent crime, whilst Tennenbaum and Fink (1994) find an overall rise in murders across the United States in the summer months. In the United Kingdom, maximum temperature and hours of sunshine both had a statistically significant positive relationship with the number of sexual assaults committed in a day (McLean, 2007). For a comprehensive review see Cohn (1990) and also Cohn (1993); Cohn and Rotton (2000); Harries, Stadler, and Zdorkwski (1984); Horrocks and Menclova (2011); McDowall and Curtis (2014). Ceccato (2005) evaluates the influence of weather and temporal variations on violent behavior in Sao Paulo, Brazil, one of few studies of this type on a tropical country. Overall, the results show that temporal variables (variations in people’s routines) are far more powerful than weather covariates in explaining levels of homicide for the Brazilian case. Despite a well-developed body of research, these studies make no reference to possible temporal variations in crime in rural areas.

Figure 4.5 shows variations in total crime in two rural touristic municipalities. Although crime varies seasonally, these variations reflect more population inflow during high season (potentially more targets and violent encounters) and changes in people’s routine activities in these municipalities (from structured to leisure activities) than the claimed effect of weather per se (such as temperature or humidity) on crime. These patterns have a number of implications.

Note that while crime increases during the summer on the island of Gotland, when relative high temperatures occur, the crime peak in Åre, the ski resort, is in the cold months of the year. This inverse crime pattern summer/winter indicates the impact of changes in routine activities on crime for people either living in or visiting these municipalities. For instance, short-term visitors – young people especially – would be tempted to engage in activities such as excessive drinking or public disturbance that they would not otherwise do in their home municipality because of the lack of anonymity. As Figure 4.5 illustrates, population
inflow may be periodical, as it is in touristic places, but still has the potential to affect crime records.

Although crime rates seem to increase during high season (summer on Gotland and winter in Åre), this rise may be just an artifact of a “poor” denominator, that does not take the population inflow into account. Crime rates shown in Figure 4.5 take only resident population into account. This is important, because the debate surrounding investment in the tourist industry in rural communities often includes assumptions that these activities may attract or stimulate disorder and crime. As suggested by previous studies (Park & Stokowski, 2009; Stokowski, 1996), this development is often expected to lead to social disruption and impoverish social control, but evidence shows mixed and sometimes contradictory results.

An alternative to resident population as denominator for crime rates is some indicator for population inflow. In a study by Stokowski (1996), vehicle traffic was compared with resident population to standardize crime levels. The study aimed to compare crime before, during, and after the initiation of gaming in three rural Colorado towns. The results show that while crime has increased in some offense categories, it was not proportional to the numbers of tourists visiting. To check crime in relation to population inflow, vehicle traffic data from the Swedish Transport Administration was used for a number of examples of tourist municipalities in Sweden. The data measures incoming traffic on one major road on Gotland as a proxy for tourist population inflow. Gotland is a good example because it is an island, with limited connections to the continent beyond boats and airplanes, certainly capturing most of the “real” vehicle traffic of the area.
Figure 4.6 illustrates crime in 2012 in relation to vehicle flow from January to December. As vehicle traffic flow increases, so does crime. This indicates that if crime is standardized by vehicle traffic (instead of resident population), a better measure of risk can be derived. The likelihood of an individual being a crime victim on Gotland as a whole is stable and perhaps decreases in certain months, because the tourist population rises more than the number of crimes. In this case, the pattern of risk of victimization is fairly constant from January to December. Of course, this is a rough measure of risk, and the number of arrests could perhaps be used as a reference for a complementary picture of crime risk over time. Again, the risk of victimization is unequal among population groups (youth run a higher risk than the elderly for street crime and violence) and geographically. Visby concentrates more of the tourist population during the high season (June–August) than the rest of the island and suffers disproportionately from seasonal problems (see Figure 4.6). Not all types of crime increase. Heavy drinking, aggression, social disturbances, and other types of violent encounters dominate the police records. The type of population that increases during the high season is also relevant to whether or not crime increases. In areas that attract families with children, population inflow may have little effect on crime, compared to attractions that receive groups that are more prone to get involved in fights.

Although the risk of crime may be fairly constant over the year, there are “community costs” (Stokowski, 1996) associated with intense population inflow during the high season. Of course, some of these costs are compensated by economic gains, and overall the risk of being a victim of crime is relatively low. One of the tangible costs is new demands on local government (police officers,
Gotland, for instance, receives police reinforcements from the Stockholm area for specific events that attract many visitors. Moreover, local perceptions of violence and social disturbance in the streets and public places may lead to community fear and also has costs. Cases of violence are currently reported by media, which may also affect the attitudes of future tourists that would consider visiting. They may also be averse to visiting a place where reports show that the community is out of control and perceptions of crime have increased.

Figure 4.7 shows two other Swedish municipalities, Åre and Malung-Sälen, with crime and indicators of population inflow, January to December. Both municipalities have winter attractions, and the high season is December to April. In Sälen, traffic flow data captures population inflow and an increase in crime, but Åre shows a patchier pattern over the year. A potential reason for this mismatch could be that Åre has several attractions that attract visitors in summer, while in Sälen winter attractions dominate. It may also be that traffic flow data does not estimate the real population inflow in the winter (note that the data is

![Figure 4.7 Crime (%) in relation to the flow of vehicles passing into or out of two municipalities that are dependent on winter tourism: (a) Åre and (b) Malung-Sälen (sources: Swedish Transport Administration, 2012; BRÅ, 2012).](image-url)
based on two major roads only), partially because the vehicle traffic is not composed of passenger cars but trucks and other freight vehicles. Another reason for this mismatch is that the datasets are not from the same year: vehicle traffic flow data is from 2008, while crime data is from 2012.

The presence of a floating population – seasonal workers, tourists, and daily commuters – may change the dynamics of the communities where they spend time in different ways. For locals, social control may not be as effective as usual because of the relative inflow of population. Those who belong to the temporary population may be engaged in offenses, become victims, or act as guardians (Bucher, Manasse, & Tarasawa, 2010). Even when they stay in the country for months as temporary workers, they compose a heterogeneous group. Depending on their conditions in the country, some would keep a low profile and would not report the offence to the police even if they were victimized. Also, this group shows little motivation to intervene if anything happens (Ceccato & Haining, 2004; Reynald, 2010), as they are in transit or temporarily linked to that particular place. As an example, Chapter 6 illustrates the challenges of those who come to Sweden as temporary labor (for berry picking) in the summer in some rural municipalities.

Concluding remarks

This chapter shows that, not surprisingly, rural areas traditionally experience lower levels of crime than urban areas, but a comparative inspection of the international data sources for selected countries shows mixed, often declining, trends. This is the big picture. The “exceptions to the rule” are actually the most interesting part of the analysis, because they provide clues to further understanding what happens in both rural and urban municipalities. Thus, this chapter ends by indicating several crimes that need more attention in the Swedish rural context. These offenses are discussed in detail in Chapter 5 as well as in Chapters 8–10 and 12–14.

In the United States and the United Kingdom, a decrease in crime for all types of areas has characterized trends from both police statistics and victim surveys, but in Sweden police statistics show a slightly upward trend since the mid-1990s for a number of crimes. The tendency is toward convergence when crime increases are shown side by side for urban and rural areas since 2010. A more stable picture of victimization is found when looking at the past seven years of overall prevalence rates from national victims’ surveys. However, even there exceptions are found in victimization for certain crime types and areas. The prevalence of residential burglary and assault are stable across urban and rural areas. A key issue for future research in this context is to understand the causes of changes in crime rates in rural areas and how they relate to specific rural conditions for each area. Although crime in rural areas may not always be specifically rural, its nature fails to be fully understood by the current urban-based theories.

Are rural and urban crime rates converging? It is difficult to say. If it is happening, evidence cannot be based on official statistics as they are collected nowadays. Rural–urban convergence of crime rates may also be hidden under general
crime trends that disregard unequal victimization in rural areas or differentiated levels of crime-reporting practices. The challenges in dealing with the issues of crime trends over space are not limited to methodology or data quality. Crime trends have to be considered against a background of what is happening in these areas: changes in their economic base, each population’s socioeconomic and demographic challenges, and people’s routine activities – just to name a few issues. These conditions affect levels and processes of social control in these areas and, consequently, crime.

The concept of population at risk, using both resident population and floating population (by vehicle traffic), is discussed in high and low seasons. The chapter also highlights the need for and more nuanced evaluations of whether crime affects rural municipalities, as much of the debate on the impact of temporary population on local communities is often based on perceptions of increased crime.

Inequality in victimization by groups is still a major challenge when crime trends are compared between areas. Most of the groups that are overrepresented in repeat victimization against the same victims are found in urban areas, but for certain crimes and for frequent victimization the differences between those living in urban and rural areas are low or nonexistent. As it has been discussed in this chapter, the analysis of inequality in victimization demands an approach that is informed by crime, group, area, and time. The next chapter takes the first step toward a more nuanced picture of crime in rural areas by illustrating the cases of property and violent crimes in rural Sweden.

Note

1 Defined as the homicide of young women by their family members, because the perpetrators believe the victim has brought dishonor upon the family or community.

References


