9 Youth in rural areas

Young people are vital for any type of society – but certainly more important for rural communities as their future depends on them. If young people cannot continue living in these communities, the demand for services and other types of consumption decreases, and consequently the community breaks down. Paradoxically, young people are far too often seen as a source of local problems. This chapter attempts to characterize both sides of this coin using available official statistics. It starts with demographic, socioeconomic, and lifestyle differences among young individuals in Sweden as background for understanding regional differences in offending and victimization among youth. This is followed by a discussion of factors associated with youth crime and victimization in rural areas; apparently they are similar to those in urban areas. As much as possible, the Swedish case is compared with the international literature, often from examples coming from British and North American research. The systemic nature of criminogenic conditions that is relevant for small municipalities in Sweden is exemplified here by two phenomena.

- i The south is home to domestic criminal motorcycle groups that have confirmed links to a number of criminal activities. The impact of these organizations and their networks of influence in rural areas opens up for controversy as younger members may belong to the community.
- ii Young people flow into Sweden after being recruited in their home towns, outside Sweden. The rural–urban link is illustrated by tracing individuals' journeys from regions in the Baltic countries to urban Sweden. Thus, young people become cross-border commodities and are often forced to engage in activities orchestrated by grounds that look like criminal networks.

The chapter concludes with a summary of the specificities of the Swedish case.

Youth in Swedish rural areas

In Sweden, the exodus of young people from rural areas to larger urban centers is nothing new, but after decades of relative population stability, the 1990s and particularly 2000s saw new waves of population concentration in Sweden. The

country has the strongest trend of urbanization since 2005 in Europe, and young individuals have historically made up a significant share of this inflow to urban centers. Urbanization means that mid-sized and big cities are growing not primarily because people are coming from the countryside, but because the cities are receiving higher immigration from abroad and, for some, have a positive net birth rate (Örstadius, 2014). This development is not geographically homogeneous. Nowadays 141 of the 290 municipalities are experiencing a decline in population. The city regions and their hinterlands are growing, while rural and peripheral areas end up generally losing population (Amcoff & Westholm, 2007; Magnusson & Turner, 2000).

Youth concentrates in big cities: only 22 percent of the rural population is composed of children and adolescents (Karlsson, 2012). The population structure in municipalities outside Sweden's major cities can be described as fairly representative of the entire country. During the past 40 years, the proportion of children and adolescents has decreased, while the proportion aged 65 and over (especially women) has increased (Karlsson, 2012). If current trends persist, in the future several local rural municipalities will fail to offer citizens the vital services the community needs, including basic services.

Population shifts, particularly of young people, affect density of acquaintance-ship, that is, the degree to which members of the community know each other (Weisheit & Donnermeyer, 2000). If people move out, such social ties are broken and may generate socioeconomic instability and "normlessness" (e.g., Kaylen & Pridemore, 2011; Kim & Pridemore, 2005). Changes in residence also mean that young people's daily routines are altered (e.g., longer commutes between residence and workplace), hypothetically putting them at a higher risk of becoming a crime victim than they may have been previously. The situation becomes particularly problematic for young people living in rural areas that have long distances to major labor market areas. Without access to private motor vehicles, public transportation may also be a limiting factor, as buses or trains may not operate frequently on limited geographical routes (Ceccato & Dolmén, 2011).

Other effects on community life may occur when emigration is selective (age, gender, and education related), often leaving behind the poorly educated elderly – and males. In countries like Sweden and Australia, women more often are the ones that leave for study and work. Barclay, Hogg, and Scott (2007) suggest that instead of being a matter of choice, the decision to leave reflects limited economic and cultural opportunities available to young women in many rural communities. Nilsson (2013) shows that in 2012, 44 percent of people aged 24 years old started a college education, but there are large differences between urban and rural municipalities. More than three-quarters of youth in the metropolitan area go to university, while less than one-fifth does in the sparsely populated rural municipalities. There are also gender differences by type of municipality. The greatest difference between the sexes is found in rural municipalities: 21 percentage points between the proportion of men and women who go to university. In municipalities in sparsely populated regions and manufacturing municipalities, too, the differences are relatively large. The smallest difference between

females and males that go to university is found in big cities, such as Stockholm and Gothenburg, with 13 percentage points. In the tourism-intensive municipalities close to major cities, the differences are also relatively small. Attainment of college education strongly correlates with the educational level of the parents and the likelihood of further study.

Not only women but young people in general may feel alienated from mainstream values in rural areas, undervalued and under supported (Barclay et al., 2007). In Sweden, not all young people want to move to the cities but many still “jump ship” for big cities. Knape and Strömbäck (2012) report young people’s expectations about the future in Sweden. Using the text of 500 letters from secondary school students from north to south municipalities in Sweden, the material was later published by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SKL). The message is clear: many youngsters would prefer to stay where they live now. Knape and Strömbäck (2012) exemplify the motivation of a youngster in northern Sweden.

Norrland is an obvious option for me because I would like to see children grow up without the stress in the South. They should have the forest and nature around the corner. The fantastic air in Norrland is not harmful to anyone.

(Notes from a student from Arjeplog)

So why are so many leaving? Young people describe their lack of choices by raising a number of issues that flag for the root for the problems. Young people from rural municipalities were invited to point out what was needed for them to stay and, for those who had already left, to return to their home villages. Box 9.1 summarizes the list (Knape & Strömbäck, 2012).

Box 9.1 Youth’s wish list for remaining in rural areas

- 1 **More jobs for young people.** A good job is the most common dream for the future.
- 2 **Housing that fills the needs of young people at reasonable rents.** This is important to those who have already moved away and face problems finding affordable housing in larger cities.
- 3 **Better schools.** Young people want a choice of secondary schools in their locality.
- 4 **Opportunity of living an environmentally friendly life.** These include convenient public transport, safe bike lanes, electric cars, local food, and alternative energy sources.
- 5 **Having an attractive community.** Creating features that can become a tourist attraction and that they can be proud of, such as a “cool building,” sculptures, or a park.
- 6 **More meeting places for young people.** Creating a culture of acceptance of young people and their leisure needs.
- 7 **Good and accessible healthcare.**

This “wish list” contains an explicit call for the basics of a rural community (e.g., school, housing, healthcare) as well as an implicit request for better understanding of youth’s needs and lifestyle (e.g., meeting places, environmentally friendly lifestyle, attractive landscape). In small municipalities, many services have already been closed down or merged with other community functions. As young people move out, schools may be obliged to close, too. In other cases, secondary education cannot be offered in the local community because there are too few students. Moreover, some mid-sized cities receive a net influx of young people, who may face a housing deficit or rental prices not affordable by the young because of high demand. Similar expectations are found elsewhere (Barclay et al., 2007; Donnermeyer, Jobes, & Barclay, 2006; Woods, 2011).

Meeting places, such as community centers or local youth associations for the young in rural areas may be the only adult-free zones in the community. When they are not open, or when social belonging is denied in certain places, the local pizzeria or gas station may become the gathering place. Harsh winters impose a number of limitations on “just hanging around” with friends in public places. Still, public places such as in interstitial spaces between commercial areas, parks, and school grounds are places where young people are visible. What is an inoffensive youth gathering to most locals can be a source of discontentment to others. In worse cases, they are labeled “the source of the problem” and a symbol of disorder in the local community. Barclay et al. (2007, p. 107) provide examples of when youth are considered trouble in rural Australia, as they may be noisy and have high visibility in public places. The authors point out that young people’s visibility and behavior (running, yelling, skateboarding, or bicycling) make them an unwelcome group whether or not they break the law. This puts them in the spotlight but not always in a positive way. Many young people may feel they do not belong, as they are not supported and valued as a group. Youth may perceive safety walks and other safety interventions as intrusive (for details see Chapter 13).

Rye (2006) suggests that although young people’s vocabulary for describing their rural environments (in Norway) echoes that of adults, the literature suggests that young people are less likely to subscribe to the idyllic version of rurality. In particular, they seem to emphasize the narrower range of opportunities in rural areas, particularly those related to the limited range of public and private services, especially with respect to leisure and entertainment. In Sweden, Pettersson (2013) indicates a “love–hate relationship” between youth and their rural community, even for those who have already left. The author shows examples of how rural areas can exert a pull effect on young people and, at the same time, how they push them away, lacking attractive qualities.

Life opportunities for those who remain in rural areas are shaped by overall societal contexts that, despite variation over time and space, still reproduce known patterns of choices for family and friends. For some, the prospect of not being able to break out of their parents’ patterns is a motivation to leave the countryside. In an ethnographic study, Jonsson (2010) attempted to interpret the everyday lives of some young people and their notions about the future when

the survival of rural communities is at risk as a result of the shift from a welfare model to a market-oriented one. The author found that despite differences such as gender and resources, in most cases, youth who remain tend to follow their parents' paths in terms of jobs and lifestyle. This is not to say that the values of young people in rural areas are not constantly changing, quite the opposite. Woods (2011) shows through examples that youth identity formation in rural areas is a complex process that involves in some cases behavior conformity but also testing the boundaries of expected behaviors.

Some changes in values favor rural living, while other changes challenge the rural community. With the emergence of information and communication technology (ICT), for instance, new ways of communication and socialization provide a range of new opportunities in jobs and leisure but at the same time impose challenges to the traditional schemes of social life in rural areas. Some examples are sports and leisure associations. Sandberg (2012) shows, for instance, how Swedish sports associations in rural areas are affected by recent changes in society and struggle to remain alive. Sports associations are experiencing severe problems in the recruitment of new members, volunteer trainers, and board members. According to the author, the shift in societal values has affected people's attitudes toward local associations, forcing the associations to become more market-oriented and adapt their activities to the short-term demands of certain target groups. The study also shows an ongoing conflict between urban and rural associations which in particular concerns the allocation of resources and other political priorities, where rural areas are often the losers.

Youth health and mortality in rural and urban areas

Children's and young people's health and socioeconomic conditions in Sweden are good, even compared to other welfare countries. Sweden – with the other Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands – is among the countries where economic vulnerability of families with children is least extensive (Biterman, 2013). In an era of remote communication, Swedish kids and teenagers have no problem accessing the Internet and the like regardless of where they reside in the country. How is Sweden doing in other dimensions of quality of life?

Sweden is not as much in the forefront in terms of the older kids as it is for children. Symptoms on reduced mental wellbeing are more common among Swedish 15-year-olds than in other European countries. Drug use is less common among Swedish youngsters, while alcohol consumption is at an average European level (Biterman, 2013). There are regional differences in consumption of alcohol, tobacco, and drugs, and trends in consumption vary also by drug type (CAN, 2013). There has been a decrease in youth offending and victimization in recent decades but not homogeneously across the country, and it is rarely related to poor socioeconomic conditions alone (Bäckman, Estrada, Nilsson, & Shannon, 2013).

Symptoms of worry and anxiety among young people have increased since the 1980s regardless of their origins, family circumstances, socioeconomic situation,

employment, or social status. The larger the city, the higher the proportion of young people suffering from symptoms of anxiety and worry (Figure 9.1). Young women in rural areas have fewer psychological problems than those living in larger cities. However, for young people who live in small towns the risk of dying in a car accident is several times higher than the risk for young people who live in the three metropolitan areas of Stockholm, Gothenburg, or Malmö.

It is unknown whether mental health affects the mortality of young people in rural areas. What is known is that, between the ages of 15 and 24, young men are more than twice as likely to die as young women are. Although not broken down into rural and urban, data show that in 2011, 136 women and 316 men died aged 15–24 years. The reason for this was that accidents and suicides are more common among young men. Since the early 1990s, suicides have declined in all age groups except 15–24, where suicide has become somewhat more common. Death by alcohol consumption, which in this age usually involves acute alcohol poisoning, has been higher among young men in the 2000s than in the 1990s (Socialstyrelsen, 2013). International literature suggests that in many cases the suicide of a young adult living in a rural setting can be attributed to drug and alcohol use (see e.g., Barclay et al., 2007).

Figure 9.1 Percentage of people who reported mild or severe symptoms of anxiety or anxiety by gender, aged 16–24 (data source: Socialstyrelsen, 2009, p. 83).

Notes

Averages for the years 1988/1989 and 2004/2005. Metropolitan areas=big cities, suburban municipalities, larger cities, and commute municipalities; middle size municipalities=manufacturing municipalities and other municipalities, more than 25,000 inhabitants; rural municipalities=sparsely populated municipalities (less than 7 residents/km² and fewer than 20,000 inhabitants) and other smaller municipalities.

Youth jobs, unemployment, and “no-job-no-education”

Counties in Sweden with large portions of rural population tend to have a slightly larger share of youth without employment, education, or in training (around 13 percent) than those with large urban areas (around 9 percent), such as Stockholm. Sweden tends to have higher youth unemployment than the average for European countries among younger adolescents: the unemployment rate was 34.3 percent among persons aged 15–19, while it was 18.0 percent among 20–24 year olds. Note that unemployment rates include those in education or seeking jobs (Broman & Samuelsson, 2013).

A relatively large proportion of young people in the labor force commute to neighboring countries such as Denmark or Norway to work. Men commute more often than women, but up to 24 years, women make up the majority. In 10 years, the number of cross-border commuters from Sweden to Denmark and Norway more than doubled. Above all, Norway attracts young Swedes, and cross-border commuting is especially prevalent among young people aged 16–29 (Hanaeus & Wahlström, 2014). For many young people, this is an opportunity to have a break after high school studies and to earn money to travel abroad before pursuing higher education. In both Norway and Denmark, the wage levels are higher than in Sweden, which also attracts workers.

Youth leisure and ICT use in rural areas

Recreational activities play important functions in people’s lives. This is particularly true for those who live in rural communities where activities are limited in comparison with urban areas. For young people, leisure and sport centers may be the only parent-free zones available to them. The local pub, news agent, and pizzeria as well as the local hotel or gas station are also meeting places for youth. Leisure in rural areas fills another important role. Leisure activities demand professionals in the local community, either paid employees or volunteers, such as sports coaches, trainers, temporary staff, and field workers. Although controversial, recreational activity centers are also said to have a preventative effect against crime.

In Sweden, leisure for young people is closely associated with various sports activities as well as the use of computers (e.g., playing games) and the Internet (e.g., social media). For young women, book reading is also a relatively common activity (SCB, 2009). Regional differences are apparent in recreational activities. Fishing and hunting are common leisure activities in rural Sweden, as would be expected. Recreational fishing is a distinctly male activity, and differences between men and women increase with exercise frequency. Among young women, the lower percentage of women fishing (19 percent) can partially be explained by factors related to family formation, which may also apply to many other recreational activities (SCB, 2009).

Regardless of location in the country, the Internet is the most important news source among young people, according to Findahl (2013). Based on a national Internet users’ survey, the author also reports that one-third of young people’s

Internet time is spent on social networks in Sweden. More people in the city than in the countryside use a tablet. Among the overall population, the city and the countryside show no significant difference when it comes to the use of the Internet (89 and 88 percent, respectively) and mobile phone (95 percent). On the other hand, more people have smartphones in cities (71 percent) than in rural areas (61 percent), and use it for a longer time (6.8 hours a week versus 5.7 hours). Most have access to broadband in both the city and countryside, but, as might be expected, more people are without broadband in rural than in urban areas: 6 and 4 percent, respectively.

In a study about young people's activities in two rural areas in Sweden, Berg and Holm (2004) found gender differences regarding computer game use, in particular, and in areas such as movies (thrillers for boys and comedies for girls) differences between boys and girls in the city and in the countryside. Young people at risk are extra vulnerable to media exposure in rural areas, as they may be isolated from mainstream community activities. As the authors suggest, the risk in excessive use of media is that it can encourage escapism or abnormal consumption of computer games, for example, and surfing the Internet. There are already groups for users addicted to computer/games and pornographic and sex webpages.

Young homeless in rural areas

Homeless youth can be found both in urban and rural areas and, as shown in the research below, they are often associated with big cities. Young homeless people face specific challenges in rural areas where basic support services may not be available to the same extent as in large cities. There are no generally accepted definitions of homelessness. Homeless youth are individuals who are not more than 21 years of age (often regarded as under 18) for whom it is not possible to live in a safe environment with a relative and who have no other safe alternative living arrangement. Implicit in this definition is the notion that homeless youth are not accompanied by a parent or guardian (Haber & Toro, 2004).

Regardless of country, the young homeless show numerous examples of victimization of different types before becoming homeless and later in their lives. In the United States, for instance, the histories of boys typically include physical abuse during childhood and physical assault on the street, while the experiences of girls are more often marked by sexual abuse during childhood and on the street (Cauce et al., 2000). In Sweden, boys and girls may express higher incidences of depression and various behavioral problems after the period of homelessness compared to people with fixed residences (Svärd, 2001, 2010). There are no good estimates of the number of juveniles or young adults who become homeless after being in jail. In the United States, Toro, Dworsky, and Fowler (2007) follow a number of cases. A shelter for homeless youth in New York City reported that approximately 30 percent of youth they serve have been detained or incarcerated. Interestingly, 49 percent also had a history of out-of-home care placement before incarceration.

In the United States, young homeless people are concentrated in urban areas, while rural areas have more unsheltered persons in families compared to urban areas. Few differences have been found when urban, suburban, and rural homeless youth have been compared (Cauce et al., 2000). Most reports indicate that people who are homeless in rural areas are somewhat younger than those in urban areas (Robertson, Harris, Frit, Noftsinger, & Fischer, 2007). Ethnic minorities are overrepresented among homeless regardless of age. In both rural and urban areas, the majority of people who are chronically homeless are unsheltered, which means living on the streets, in cars, abandoned buildings, and other places not meant for human habitation (Sermons & Henry, 2010). In the United States, about 50,000 youth sleep on the streets for six months or more. Urban areas have a higher total rate of homelessness than rural areas, approximately 29 homeless people per 10,000, while rural areas have a rate of 14 per 10,000, this figure including all ages. There are 13,000 who experience repeated incidences of homelessness (9 percent) and 15,000 who remain homeless over long periods of time (10 percent) (National Alliance to End Homelessness, 2014).

In Australia, it is estimated that there are 100,000 homeless, half are under 24 years old and 10,000 are children. The largest single cause of homelessness in Australia is domestic and family violence, which overwhelmingly affects women and children. Homelessness is also an issue for indigenous people living in both urban and remote environments. In 2003, indigenous people comprised 10 percent of clients in social services in urban areas, 21 percent in regional areas, and 71 percent in remote areas. For this group, eviction was a more common reason for accessing a service in urban and rural areas than those living in remote areas. The issue for indigenous people is simply that the existing housing stock does not have the capacity to house the indigenous population at reasonable household occupation levels (Australian Government, 2008).

The prevalence rates for homelessness among young people vary regionally in the United Kingdom. In England, Scotland, and Wales only “statutory homeless” people are entitled to housing. Most statistics are based on this group. The percentages are highest in Scotland, including Orkney and Shetland. Rural areas of Northern Ireland tend to mirror rural England, with lower numbers of young people being accepted as homeless. While this almost certainly reflects the wider definitions of prioritized need in Scotland, it may also reflect higher levels of need, though this cannot be established for certain. In England, authorities with the highest rates included 12 of the 32 London boroughs and several authorities in a few coastal towns; Wales, Swansea, Cardiff, much of the south coast were all prominent. The highest rates of homelessness in Northern Ireland were in Belfast and other regional centers. Lower rates of prevalence of homelessness among youth are found in the rural areas of the north of England and the south-west of England, for instance. Authorities in Scotland and Wales tended to report higher numbers of homeless young people than in England. Particularly in rural areas, homelessness can be associated with fracturing of young people’s social networks, as they often have to move away from their previous home area to

access housing and support services. Homeless people are unlikely to be from minority ethnic backgrounds in Scotland, Wales, or Northern Ireland but they make up the majority of homeless people in England, particularly in London (Quilgars, Johnsen, & Pleace, 2008).

In Sweden, headlines that youth homelessness is increasing have become frequent lately,¹ at least for the larger cities. Homeless rates in Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö are slightly higher but do not differ much from the rates of other Nordic capitals (Benjaminsen & Dyb, 2008). Little is known about the phenomenon across the country. In Stockholm, young homeless constituted 17 percent of the total homeless (2,892) in 2010, but that number was on the rise. Youth homeless often consist of males who have some sort of psychiatric disorder and/or addiction problems, but there are young women, too. Some are temporarily homeless (Stockholms stad, 2010). The truth is that, for several reasons, it is difficult to get reliable data on children and young people 0–21 years living in unsafe housing conditions (Svärd, 2004, 2010). The picture of youth homelessness is patchy, composed of different types of statistics and qualitative accounts based on case studies, often focusing on big cities. What is known is that around 2,500 youngsters were affected by eviction notices between 2008 and 2010. That figure does not include rentals in the “black” market.

Another group overrepresented among the homeless in Sweden is composed of undocumented migrants, and those figures are particularly uncertain for children and youth. Estimates range between 10,000 and 50,000 people and between 2,000 and 3,000 children in this group. Another group of “potentials” are teenagers living in overcrowded conditions. Interviews by Andersson and Svärd (2008) with children in Sweden show that overcrowding was particularly stressful for the teenagers, who would consider living somewhere else as an alternative. Again, this was based on youth living in big Swedish cities.

Another report shows that about 11 percent of youth in secondary school who leave home prematurely do so to escape a parent or partner or because they are thrown out by a parent or partner. Threats of violence, mental and physical abuse and assault are a few crucial factors. Nearly half of young people were 15 or younger when they left home. The majority was girls and left home several times. The report also mentions a survey of Swedish municipalities in 2010, in which half indicated that they had a “roof-over-head guarantee” for individuals who were homeless. Many municipalities do their own surveys of the number of individuals living in homelessness, and every sixth municipality, or about 17 percent, reports an increase in the proportion of young people under 21 years old who are homeless. One-quarter of municipalities have also noticed an increase in families at risk of homelessness. They are both small and large municipalities spread all over the country (Stockholms stadsmission. 2011). These figures, despite being general, are indicators of the existence of youth homeless across the country, at least for some time. It is however unsure how this vulnerability put these young people at risk for addiction, offending, and victimization. What is known is those that are already homeless tend to have problems of addiction of alcohol and drugs (Stockholms stad, 2010).

Alcohol and drug abuse among youth

Youth living in the smallest communities are not immune from substance abuse problems (Edwards, 1995). In the United States, despite popular notions that substance abuse is essentially an urban phenomenon, recent data demonstrates that it is also a significant problem in rural America. Rural youth now abuse most substances, including alcohol and tobacco, at higher rates and at younger ages than their urban peers (Pruitt, 2009). Edwards (1995) finds that community risk for youth substance abuse is not simply a matter of population density or proximity to urban areas. Rural and urban youth differ in many ways, such as economic conditions, ethnic representation, and proximity to drug sources. Pruitt (2009) also suggests that limited social services and healthcare infrastructures undermine the efficacy of programs toward youth dependency of drugs and alcohol in rural areas. The engagement of school in young people's lives after school hours may be fundamental to keep them away from trouble. For instance, Shears, Edwards, and Stanley (2006) found a strong negative correlation between school bonding and substance use, no matter the level of rurality. Results also suggest that school bonding might act as a preventative to drunkenness and marijuana use in the most remote communities.

In the 1990s, Edwards (1995) compared substance use by youth by community size and found that there is little difference in the percentage of youth using alcohol by community size, but the use of alcohol causes more problems for rural youth than for youth living elsewhere. The author suggests that this may be in part because fewer alternative leisure activities are available to rural youth and drinking becomes one of the primary purposes for congregating, which may lead to more consumption at any given time. Less surprisingly, the author found a lower level of drug use among youth in very small, rural communities than among those in larger rural and metropolitan communities. In the 2000s, adolescent substance use in rural communities was equal to or greater than urban use for many substances. Rural teens abuse virtually all drugs at rates greater than their urban counterparts, whether cocaine (associated more with urban areas) or methamphetamine (associated more with rural areas). Differences are noticeable between different ethnic groups. Moreover, non-metropolitan youth and young adults are significantly more likely to engage in binge drinking. Rural youth also abuse hallucinogens at higher rates than their urban counterparts (Pruitt, 2009; Shears et al., 2006). The contrast between the rural communities illustrates that even communities similar in size and geographic location can have very different youth drug-use profiles.

In the United Kingdom, rates of illicit drug use among young people (15–16 years old) in England and Wales are high but have been decreasing since the 1990s. According to the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA, 2012/2013), two in five 15-year-olds in the United Kingdom have tried cannabis. This number is higher than anywhere else in Europe. Along with Spain, the United Kingdom also has the highest number of young cocaine users. The European School Survey Project on

Alcohol and Other Drugs (ESPAD, 2012) found that 26 percent of boys and 29 percent of girls in the United Kingdom had indulged in binge drinking at least three times in the previous month. As many as 42 percent of boys and 35 percent of girls admitted they had tried illegal drugs at least once. According to a report published by the Home Office (2012–2013), frequent drug users compose 3.1 percent of the total young population in urban areas and 1.8 percent in rural areas. However, statistics from British Crime Survey reveal the proportion of 16–24 year olds reporting use of drugs in the preceding year was practically the same in rural and urban areas, 23 percent and 22.4 percent, respectively (Hoare, 2009). Although “illegal drug use may not only be seen as part of many young people’s lifestyles but, significantly, part of the lifestyles of young living in rural areas,” little is known about drug use in rural areas (Barton, Storey, & Palmer, 2011, p. 149).

Compared with youth in other European countries, fewer Swedish adolescents consume alcohol, but those who drink do it in greater quantity. This is clear from the 2012 ESPAD survey. In Sweden, less than 40 percent of 15–16 year olds drank alcohol in the 30 days preceding the time of the survey, while in countries such as Denmark, Germany, and Greece more than 70 percent of 15–16 year olds consumed alcohol. Although alcohol consumption is on the decrease throughout Europe, the trend is clear in Sweden. The decrease in alcohol consumption has also been confirmed by Ring (2013) (Table 9.1).

The estimated average annual consumption of alcohol by ninth graders is almost 3 liters for boys and just less than 2 liters for girls (CAN, 2013). This compares with a total population average annual consumption of about 9 liters of pure alcohol. This downward trend in alcohol consumption among ninth graders has many different potential causes, and the fact that young people start to drink later in life is one. They start drinking when they are about 13 years old, and in 2012 one in three ninth graders had alcohol-related problems after consumption, including fights, accidents, injuries, relationship problems, financial loss or theft, poorer school performance, and unwanted or unprotected sex.

Young people in Swedish rural areas consume on average 1.6 liters less than youth living in large cities, Stockholm being the leader (Guttormsson, Andersson, & Hibell, 2004), but there are regional differences in consumption of alcohol. Urban counties and high-density counties such as Skåne, Stockholm, and Västra Götaland tend to have higher rates of consumption among youth than rural and more remote areas of northern Sweden. Southern Sweden reports high numbers for several related indicators of alcohol consumption, while Stockholm County is high in terms of experience with drugs and daily tobacco use.

The threat of the Internet as a source of drugs has been said to be overestimated, at least for young people. As many as 2 percent of girls and 3 percent of boys in ninth grade, and 2 percent of girls and 5 percent of boys in the second year of upper secondary school have used a drug bought over the Internet. Spice and its variants are the most common group of substances available. Friends or acquaintances are commonly the main source of the drug. A little more than 1 percent of young people have themselves bought a drug online (CAN, 2013).

Table 9.1 Usage patterns among Swedish students (year 9) who used drugs, 2000–2013 (%)

	<i>N</i>	<i>Use of cannabis</i>	<i>Use of other narcotics only</i>	<i>Use of both</i>	<i>Use of narcotics in the previous 30 days</i>	<i>Use of narcotics 6 or more times</i>	<i>Debut in use of cannabis at age 14 or younger</i>
2000	455	59.5	8.0	24.0	26.1	28.8	–
2001	503	53.1	10.0	30.4	27.2	34.3	41.8
2002	438	58.6	7.6	25.8	32.5	34.3	47.5
2003	376	61.6	9.9	20.9	26.2	33.9	55.4
2004	396	61.0	6.2	24.0	32.5	34.5	41.5
2005	376	57.0	9.2	25.9	31.1	34.6	41.7
2006	304	50.4	12.9	24.1	31.1	32.1	38.9
2007	299	49.9	11.7	33.2	25.5	35.1	33.2
2008	300	54.5	7.1	31.1	28.7	34.1	41.6
2009	415	56.1	8.2	28.3	28.3	38.3	42.4
2010	404	61.0	7.6	23.8	32.6	39.7	38.5
2011	385	50.4	9.6	29.7	22.1	41.5	46.0
2012	313	61.2	3.4	26.7	27.1	39.4	40.8
2012 ¹	334	64.6	6.9	24.9	32.4	41.0	35.6
2013	322	66.2	5.3	21.9	32.1	43.8	41.9

Source: Gripe and Leifman (2013).

Note

1 From 2012, Spice is included as cannabis.

Table 9.2 Alcohol, narcotics, and tobacco among Swedish students (year 9), 2012–2013 (%)

<i>Region</i>	<i>Use of alcohol in the previous 12 months</i>	<i>Smoke daily</i>	<i>Use sometimes narcotics</i>
Stockholm County*	53	4	8
Skåne*	57	5	8
Västra Götlands County*	53	5	7
South Sweden (Kronoberg, Kalmar, Gotland, Blekinge, and Halland)	58	3	6
Central Sweden (Uppsala, Södermanland, Östergötland, Värmland, Örebro, Västmanland, Dalarna, and Gävleborg)	51	4	6
North Sweden (Västernorrland, Jämtland, Västerbotten, and Norrbotten)	49	3	4

Source: Gripe and Leifman (2013).

Note

* These counties contain the three metropolitan areas: Stockholm, Malmö, and Gothenburg, respectively.

Chapter 8 shows that drug production is at a relatively low level, around 1 percent of all crimes (BRÅ, 2012). It is unknown how much production affects use, but people who produce drugs are believed to be addicts themselves. In Sweden, most illegal laboratories found by the police in 2006 manufactured amphetamines, but other synthetic drugs, such as methamphetamine, were also produced (Rikspolisstyrelsen, 2007). Smuggling of drugs and alcohol contributes to overall consumption, but the statistics are not broken down by age. Local newspapers have also reported a few cases of the use of acetone by young people in rural areas for drug production. Karlsson (2013) indicates that only a few percent of the population use anabolic androgenic steroids and they are mostly young males (20–30 years old), individuals who have an interest in working out and competition, or members of criminal gangs, and use the drug to improve their performance.

Youth offending in rural areas

Poverty and deprivation alone are rarely the sole cause of youth-related problems in rural areas but are clearly important predictors of youth offending (Barton et al., 2011; Bäckman et al., 2013; Estrada & Nilsson, 2012; Ford, 2008; Osgood & Chambers, 2003). Many of the potential wellsprings of youth crime are similar in many ways to those in urban areas: socioeconomic deprivation, family breakdown, abuse and neglect, and drug and alcohol abuse (Barclay et al., 2007; Donnermeyer, 1995). Donnermeyer (1995) posed the following question: Why do rural young people commit crime? For the author, the answer relates to economic, social, and cultural forces. Institutions that reinforce law-abiding behavior have become weaker, while peer and other groups that encourage law-breaking behavior have gained in influence. These factors create conditions in which some rural communities are more likely to exhibit weaker social control and/or stronger influences from deviance-reinforcing peer and other groups. These are certainly the necessary conditions but still do not explain relationships between an individual's circumstances, addiction, and offending. Some of these young people receive little attention from society until they become "trouble" and attract disproportionate attention from the criminal justice system afterwards.

The truth is that young people grow and interact simultaneously in different social contexts in which family, school, peers, and the community are central. Many of the risk factors for addiction and/or crime may be at work in different ways depending on the environment in which they are exposed (e.g., Wikström, Ceccato, Hardie, & Treiber, 2010), either rural or urban. Barclay et al. (2007) mention studies that point out aspects of contemporary rural life that impose additional pressures on young people. For instance, small populations and the fact that everybody knows everybody in rural communities also mean that anything young people do, suffers more social control by the community than in big cities. In this section, a brief discussion of factors related to criminal involvement are discussed taking into account as much as possible the rural–urban differences in the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Sweden.

The criminological literature has long shown that being male is by far the most common risk factor for offending. Crime-prone youth come from poor socioeconomic conditions, which affect family relationships and health, more often than others. Adolescents who come from a family with long-term social allowance assistance or who have a parent who was sentenced to prison are more likely than others to commit repeat offenses. Having a single parent also increases the chances of a child's criminal activity. School-related factors, such as grades, truancy, and dropping out, have been previously shown to have clear connections with juvenile delinquency. Ethnic minorities are often associated with greater engagement in youth offending, which has partly been explained by cultural differences, social exclusion, and the discriminatory exercise of authority by the police and judiciary (for a summary of these factors, see Bäckman et al., 2013; Payne & Welch, 2013). Do rural youth differ from those living in large urban areas in relation to offending risk factors?

Rural per capita rates of juvenile arrest for violent offenses are significantly and consistently associated with residential instability, ethnic diversity, and family disruption in non-metropolitan communities in Florida, Georgia, Nebraska, and South Carolina (Osgood & Chambers, 2003). Family disruption, in particular, appears to be a critical element of social disorganization in non-metropolitan communities. The study results diverged from the standard findings for urban areas in that they indicated no association between poverty and delinquency. These findings support Shaw and McKay's contention that it is not poverty per se but an association of poverty with other factors that weakens systems of social relationships in a community, thereby producing social disorganization (Osgood & Chambers, 2003).

Kaylen and Pridemore (2011) contest the degree of generalizability of social disorganization as an explanation of the distribution of youth violence to rural areas. The nature of social structure and its impact on social relations in rural communities may be different from that in urban communities. As examples, the authors refer to findings that collective efficacy (Sampson, Raudenbush, & Earls, 1997) or social capital (Bourdieu, 2000) moderates the effects of social structure on crime.

When social capital is put to the test, its effect on crime is not as neat as might be expected. Deller and Deller (2010) suggest that, although the impact of social capital on crime is significant (that certain elements of social capital have a strong negative association with rural crime rates), this effect is not the same for all types of crime. Moreover, while the results of this study suggest that higher levels of social capital have a dampening effect on rural crime, these findings are highly dependent on the measures used as "social capital."

On a small scale, social capital may have an effect on the wellbeing of young people living in rural areas or in isolated communities. Björnberg (2010) shows an example of children and young people living in communities waiting to be granted residency in Sweden. In a period of uncertainty for asylum seekers and other immigrant families, contact with relatives in their home country, friends, as well as persons in official contexts, the schools, and healthcare are all fundamental to wellbeing and future achievement.

Trends and geographical patterns of youth offending

Crime rates among young people declined between 1995 and 2011, but a recent study from the Swedish National Board of Health and Welfare shows that the group that engages in criminal activities as teenagers and young adults suffers consequences that may last their whole lives. The report shows that youngsters who have been convicted of crimes have significantly worse health in young adulthood compared to those without a criminal record, especially when it comes to alcohol and drug abuse. Young people who are prosecuted as teenagers or young adults are also at a significantly higher risk to remain outside the labor market in middle age (Bäckman et al., 2013). The good news is that, as previously mentioned, criminal involvement at young ages has decreased.

National surveys show that the proportion of students in ninth grade (15 years old) who report they committed any theft-related action, such as burglary, receiving stolen goods, shoplifting, or bicycle theft, has declined, from 66 to 45 percent, a decline evident throughout Sweden (Ring, 2013). Theft and criminal damage decreased most. The author suggests that attitudes toward committing crime have become less permissive. For example, the percentage of students indicating that they would think it was “okay” or “pretty okay” if their buddies shoplifted in a store decreased, from 27 percent in 1997, to 17 percent in 2011. Strong family ties and better social control by adults seem to be related to less crime involvement. Those who commit crime hang out with friends who are more often crime prone and they have overall a more permissive attitude toward crime.

The pattern of youth violent crime is more fragmented when assessed in three different cohorts (from 1965 to 1985). The proportion of young people prosecuted for assault increased for these cohorts, while there is no evidence that young people’s use of violence and exposure to violence has increased, as victims and self-assessment studies show. For serious violence requiring medical attention or resulting in the victim’s death, both hospital data and mortality statistics indicate levels have been stable in recent decades (Bäckman et al., 2013).

The decrease in offending among youth in Sweden is not geographically homogeneous. A report from BRÅ (2007) shows that for Skåne County, in south Sweden, for example, where the third largest city of the country is located (Malmö), levels are significantly higher for two of the three types of crime studied (vandalism and violent crime). Another source shows a similar trend in the arrest of minors. Skåne is also the county where young minors are most often put in jail in Sweden, followed by the Stockholm metropolitan areas. A police district in the municipality of Malmö alone accounts for two-thirds of nearly 600 arrests in 2011 (Bubenko, 2013). For Västmanland and Stockholm counties the situation is similar, whilst for the remote Västernorrland County and the inland county of Jönköping the situation is reversed. In the two latter counties, the proportion of adolescents who report involvement in crime is consistently low for all types of crime. Figures 9.2 and 9.3 illustrate the change in percentage of youth involvement in thefts and violence in

Figure 9.2 Change in percentage of youth (15 years old) who reported that they committed theft, 1995–2005 (source: BRÅ, 2007).

1995 and 2005. Violence clearly shows a more urban pattern than thefts do. Note that all percentage changes are significantly higher in two metropolitan areas: Stockholm and Malmö.

Despite this decrease in youth offending, Hellgren (2010) shows that all metropolitan counties – Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö – as well as Sweden as a whole have experienced an increase since 2000 in the number of 15–20 year olds suspected of assault. The increase is said to be associated the so-called “enforcement waves” targeting particular crimes. The author suggests that this is not an indicator that youth violence is increasing. Vulnerability to violence or the threat of young people has not increased during the

Figure 9.3 Change in percentage of youth (15 years old) who reported that they committed violence, 1995–2005 (source: BRÅ, 2007).

same period. Victimization surveys and life-conditions surveys as well as school surveys indicate no increase in victimization among 16–24 year olds and 16–19 year olds. In the worst case, levels can be interpreted as relatively stable, and in the best case we can speak of a slight decrease in the number of young people exposed to any violence or abuse. The link between alcohol consumption and violence is not clear among those under 18 years old. The amount of alcohol consumed by ninth graders has increased since 1995, but violence has not. These findings apply to all counties and for Sweden as a whole. The author suggests that it is possible that alcohol becomes more relevant and shows a clear correlation with violent crime when young people turn 18 and therefore become more mobile.

Youth and organized crime

Southern Sweden, particularly the Skåne region, is known for its organized crime. In a brief study of youth organized crime groups in Skåne, Cruce (2004) finds that they are composed of young members (15–17 years old) with an overrepresentation of foreign-born adolescents. About 90 percent of these criminal organizations are composed of boys. The gangs are mostly in large urban areas in western Skåne. These areas are disadvantaged, characterized by segregation and a high proportion of unemployed persons. The crimes committed by the groups are mainly theft and vandalism, violent crimes, and drug offenses. Some offenses are preceded by active planning, while others are spur of the moment. Working in crime prevention with these groups is a challenge, and at best only temporal effects are achieved as the group moves to another location. The author suggests that these organized criminal groups demand enhanced cooperation with society's other actors (more than the police) who have to work with a long-term form of intervention based on in-depth relationships with these youngsters.

Another type of organization criminals use is the motorcycle gang. These gangs recruit young people but are not seen as youngsters' organizations. The two most influential criminal motorcycle gangs (Hells Angels and Bandidos) were initially based in the southern cities of Malmö and Helsingborg and in Stockholm. After the mid-1990s, the number of these mobile criminal organizations expanded significantly, and, in the mid-2000s, they were represented in 24 municipalities in Sweden. Geographically, they are mainly in southern Sweden and have expanded into smaller rural communities.

The business of criminal motorcycle gangs includes financial crime, drugs, extortion, and theft crimes. The local police often know who the members are and focus on disrupting their activities in different ways. It is more difficult to intervene when members come from the local community. One way to obstruct them has been to prevent these groups from buying or renting premises in a community. Surveillance on certain points where they meet is said to have helped to hamper their business. Although raids against the club premises and members' homes are common, it is unclear how much these disturbances affect local crime in these communities. To answer this question, Hilldén (2006) examined whether municipalities' crime rates were affected by the existence of criminal motorcycle gangs. The author used a panel of municipal data for the years 1996–2003 as a basis for the analysis. Findings show that the number of reported crimes actually decreased as criminal motorcycle gangs were established in the municipality. Interestingly, Hilldén (2006) finds similar results in an examination of the long-term effects of these criminal organizations on crime reporting rates. The author suggests that this decrease may be the result of a deterrent effect developed because of gang presence and/or by intimidation and other methods used by the gangs that lead to fewer reported crimes.

In 2007, the Police in southeast Sweden (Östergötland County) started tackling the problem of criminal motorcycle gangs, and the effect on reported crime was the opposite. Nissle (2009) found an increase in reported crime from year to year for most categories of crime associated with organized crime (assault,

extortion, drug trafficking, and financial crimes). This was also confirmed when the author broke down the statistics at the municipality level, where biker gangs have been active. Drug offenses are mostly driven by criminal motorcycle gangs. There was a fairly significant increase in drug reported offenses in Norrköping and Linköping when the police started targeting these criminal motorcycle gangs (as these crimes were more targeted by the police). In one of the municipalities, the motorcycle gang left and a declining trend in crime records was observed.

Youth as victims of crime: regional differences

The proportions of young people who say they are victims of violence have not increased in recent years. The proportion of victims of serious violence is about the same level as in the 1980s. Since the 1970s, around 15 individuals aged 10–24 years have died as a result of violence each year. Boys are more vulnerable to abuse than girls. Girls are in turn considerably more exposed to sexual violence than boys. Furthermore, there is a clear pattern in which young men are more often a victim of violence in public places, while violence against young women occurs more often indoors. BRÅ (2007) shows that between 1995 and 2005 an annual average of nearly one-third of ninth-grade pupils in Sweden were victimized by crime: theft of bicycles, wallets, or other valuable property in the 12 months preceding the survey. Rural counties, especially in northern Sweden, often have the lowest level of reported victimization by theft among young people: Västernorrland, Jämtland, Norrbotten, and Dalarna. Västmanland exhibits higher levels than the national average but not greater than Örebro County, in the center inland of the country, where 37 percent of youth have been victimized.

The urban–rural divide is clearer for declared victimization by violence among youth. The lowest proportions of adolescents (around 10–12 percent) who report exposure to or the threat of serious violence are found in the counties of northern Sweden. The highest levels are found in Stockholm and Skåne counties, where the average is around 17 percent. Figures 9.4 and 9.5 show the geography of victimization among youth by county.

Local demand, global supply: when young people become cross-border commodities

Much has been in the news about human trafficking and its consequences for those involved and for society in general. In Sweden, human trafficking is thought to be the tip of the iceberg of other crimes, often organized by criminal networks that connect rural areas (in the country of origin) with urban areas (in the host country) across multiple borders. Since the Swedish crime code (human trafficking for sexual purposes) came into force in 2003, records indicate a doubling: 22 to 40 cases in 2013 (BRÅ, 2014). As much as 65 percent of the cases were recorded in the most urban counties of Stockholm and Malmö alone, one-third of these cases referring to children under 18 years old. As with any other type of organized crime, these numbers reveal only a small part of the problem.

Figure 9.4 Change in percentage of youth (15 years old) who were victimized by theft, 1995–2005 (source: BRÅ, 2007).

Wennerholm (2002) suggests that the causes of trafficking are complex, intertwined, and context-specific, with poverty and unequal gender relations the key underlying root causes. The situation of women and children in countries of origin, the profit motive, the ease with which trafficking occurs, and the demand for women and children for different exploitative purposes are principal supply and demand factors.

About 10 years ago, the Youth Shelter in Stockholm was put in touch with 71 young people with unclear identities who were apprehended committing crimes. As suggested by the report from the Administrative Board of Stockholm County (2007), one-third of these individuals were younger than 18 years old, coming from

Figure 9.5 Change in percentage of youth (15 years old) who were victimized by violence, 1995–2005 (source: BRÅ, 2007).

central Europe, northern Africa, and former Soviet states, particularly Baltic countries. They were brought to steal, rob, and/or engage in prostitution. The link between rural and urban is clear in some of the cases in the report. They leave the small villages in which they are recruited to go to big cities where they find a lucrative market. One example is the case of “Maria,” a young woman who was recruited in a small town in a Baltic country. In her early teens, Maria began working at nightclubs in the small town where she was born. She wanted so badly to be independent, that she was thrilled when some men asked her, “Do you want to come with us to Sweden?” But what she perhaps hoped was the road to financial independence became something completely different. Her stay in Sweden meant instead serving men in Stockholm under the control of pimps. As the report reveals,

a day in Maria's life could progress in a mental vacuum created by the use of alcohol and drugs, sexual abuse, and violence of all types. It has been 10 years since this group became a symbol of the local effects of organized crime, and the problem remains. Vulnerable young people come from poor backgrounds, some having grown up in an orphanage or as street children, others perhaps sold into a criminal network by their parents. They are reluctant to cooperate with the Swedish authorities because they are terrorized by stories made up by the criminals who brought them to Sweden. "It is a fact that they do not perceive that they have something to gain by telling the truth. The threat from the adult criminal who 'owns' them is greater than the help we can offer," says a representative of the Youth Division.

Sweden is part of the northern market for prostitution. Wennerholm (2002, p. 14) states that young women from Russia and Estonia cross the border into Finland, Sweden, and Norway every weekend, sometimes encouraged by husbands or other relatives. In small villages in the country of origin, where social ties are strong, threats and harassment can have a tremendous impact on women and children, keeping them in compliance with the traffickers. Bus drivers, hotel and campsite owners, and pimps all make money on this. These informal criminal networks may be as dangerous as mafia groups. Stockholm is not the only destination in Sweden. Wennerholm (2002, p. 10) refers to other cases elsewhere in the country: "A 16-year-old Lithuanian girl found dead on a highway outside Malmö in southern Sweden. She committed suicide after escaping from an apartment where she earned her living selling sexual services."

In Sweden, prostitution is officially acknowledged as a form of male sexual violence against women and children and, since a 1999 law, sex buyers, if caught, go to jail. Just after the law took effect, the presence of foreign women in street prostitution was reported to have vanished, as the number of buyers reportedly decreased 75–90 percent (Gripenlöf, 1991–2002). Nowadays the lack of a presence of women in certain streets could be seen as an indicator that prostitution is winding down, as many contacts are made remotely and through dealers. Still, pimps, traffickers, and customers of sexual services knowingly exploit the vulnerability of young women who often come from the continent.

It is difficult to obtain precise statistics for the problem of young victims of human trafficking and sexual exploitation, especially outside big city centers. However, it is clear that this type of organized crime is often expressed at the local level, so it is important to quickly identify it when it happens. Local authorities in the host country must cooperate to identify the cases, but also authorities in the countries of origin – local and regional as well as national levels – must cooperate to fight organized crime and, in this case, the exploitation of young people.

Ekberg (2004) indicates that Sweden recognizes that, to succeed in the campaign against sexual exploitation, the political, social, and economic conditions under which women live must be improved through economic and social development action, such as poverty reduction and social programs focusing specifically on women. This political goal is legitimate but is hindered by a number of challenges, as the sources of these problems are beyond Swedish borders. Programs in countries of origin have been put in place together with

nongovernmental organizations to prepare local actors to fight trafficking. These programs are shown to be fundamental to protecting young girls through information, creating national networks against trafficking in each of the origin countries (see e.g., Wennerholm, 2002). Chapters 13 and 14 discuss suggestions for preventing crime against youth and women in more detail.

Concluding remarks

Youth are a major concern for those living in rural areas. Young people need schooling, healthcare, affordable housing, and leisure activities that are not always attainable locally. The need to provide the “basics” to young people is seen as fundamental, as it keeps alive hopes for survival of the rural community. There are also other concerns associated with young people that are not primarily related to young people (drinking, drug use, acts of delinquency, and crime) but do start to appear early in life and feed the image of young people as “troublemakers.” These two facets of rural youth are present in Swedish rural areas and, as shown in this chapter, elsewhere. It is suggested here that a more nuanced view of young people as a group is needed, going beyond the received dichotomy of young people as either “community saviors” or “troublemakers.” This current view, it is argued here, creates unreal expectations on young people and puts them under unnecessary pressure. Chapter 13 will illustrate some actions targeting young people, which could well become intrusive in the name of the “common good” of the community.

Another conclusion that can be drawn from this chapter is that one should avoid trying to generalize about rural youth’s conditions in Sweden, even in rural areas. For example, youth in sparsely populated areas in northern Sweden enjoy a number of advantages that may not be found in the south, and the opposite is also true, for those living in accessible areas. These advantages and disadvantages in terms of life opportunities are shaped by the specific dynamics of local contexts (family, school, community). The example of alcohol and drug addiction is typical. There is a need for better understanding of the community factors affecting differences in alcohol and drug use. In other words, why do communities with similar conditions end up with different outcomes in terms of drug and alcohol addiction? The same question can be posed concerning levels of offending and victimization among youth. Drug production, alcohol smuggling, and overconsumption of legal drugs among youngsters are topics that have to be included on a future research agenda.

That is not to say that we cannot find any trends that characterize both urban and rural environments. In an exploratory way, Table 9.3 shows 10 items – put side-by-side – that characterize rural youth’s conditions, levels of offending, and victimization in Sweden. The patterns that emerge suggest that for six items, rural areas are better off (better mental health, less housing shortage, less alcohol and drug addiction, offending, and victimization), while for five items urban areas are better off (large share of young people, wide range of entertainment, education, job opportunities, and access to ICT). Without claiming any causal relationship between areas and conditions,

Table 9.3 Summary of the characteristics of life conditions for youth in Sweden

	<i>Rural areas</i>	<i>Urban areas</i>
Share of young people	Low –	High +
Leisure/youth lifestyle	Low –	High +
Educational attainment	Low –	High +
Job opportunities	Low –	High +
ICT infrastructure and access	Similar +	Similar +
Housing shortage/homelessness	Low +	High –
Alcohol and drug addiction	Low +	High –
Victimization	Low +	High –
Offending	Low +	High –
Mental health conditions	High +	Low –

Table 9.3 illustrates potential starting points for future research. For instance, is the attractiveness of urban areas overstated by young people? Is there a mismatch between what rural areas can offer and what youth need and expect? Or can a place be at the same time both attractive and unattractive (this ambivalence has long been indicated by the push–pull effect, as suggested by Ravenstein, 1885)? Addressing these issues requires an extension of the research that goes beyond urban–rural comparisons.

Another way of seeing the problem beyond the urban–rural divide is considering young people influenced by (very) different regional contexts. This chapter also shows that there is a north–south divide in drug and alcohol consumption, offending, and victimization among young people. Youngsters living in municipalities within the triangle enclosed by Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö counties – the most urbanized area of Sweden – are often more exposed to alcohol and drugs, tend to suffer poorer mental health, and are more often involved in criminal activities and become victims of crime. It is also in this area where signs of organized crime involving young people are visible. The latter stretches beyond national borders, linking young women in the Baltic countries to large cities in Sweden, and between rural and urban areas, with recruitment of young males from suburbs to motorcycle gangs in the rural south.

The Swedish cases shown in this chapter illustrate that even the smallest communities are not immune to problems of substance use and crime. However, variability across communities makes it imperative that each individual community assesses its particular problems so that resources can be allocated appropriately. Chapter 13 takes these issues forward.

Note

- 1 *Dagens Nyheter*, November 19, 2007, Allt fler 80-talister bland Stockholms hemlösa [Ever more young people among Stockholm's homeless]; *Dagens Nyheter*, August 21, 2009, Lotsar ska hjälpa unga hemlösa att ändra sitt liv ["Pilots" to help direct young homeless to new lives]; SVT rapport February 1, 2011, Fattiga barn får ett utanförskap [Children in poverty made outsiders].

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