



# **Crime in Rural Areas: A Review of the Literature for the Rural Evidence Research Centre**

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# **Crime in rural areas: A review of the literature**

## **1 Introduction**

### **1.1 Background**

In August 1999, two men attempted to burgle a house in the village of Enmeth, Norfolk. The owner of the house, Tony Martin, had other ideas and upon entering, shot at the burglars, killing one of them. Martin was jailed for murder the following year (a sentence later reduce to manslaughter).

A long-standing rural ideal is that the countryside is a crime-free place to live (Mingay, 1989). However, crime is by no means non-existent in rural areas. Nevertheless, until recently, the criminological literature has almost exclusively focused on cities and urban problems. The Martin case, received a great deal of media attention and prompted concern that rural crime problems were not being adequately addressed (Aust & Simmons, 2002; Jones, 2003; Mawby, 2004). In response, the 2000 Rural White Paper (DETR, 2000) placed crime in rural areas as a high priority area.

### **1.2 Research aims and objectives**

This paper was commissioned by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) to examine existing research literature regarding crime in rural areas. The aim of the review is to identify the problems experienced in rural areas, as well as to set an agenda for further research to generate a better understanding of the problems and methods of resolving them.

Specifically, the objectives of this review are to explore the following issues:

- The scope and extent of research concerned with rural crime in both the UK and elsewhere;
- how rates and concentrations of crime compare between rural and urban areas;
- the extent of particular crime problems associated with rural areas;
- differences in perceptions of crime between urban and rural areas;
- differences in models of policing between rural and urban areas;
- to consider the implications of the findings for crime reduction policy and practice; and
- to identify gaps in the current literature to shape priorities for further research.

## **Methodology**

In order to draw out the maximum amount of relevant information from the UK and abroad, this review took a three tier methodology: Initial scoping, cross-referencing, and supplementary data collection and analysis.

### *Initial scoping phase*

Searches for relevant literature were conducted on several academic databases, including:

- The Web of Knowledge;
- PsychInfo;
- Bath Information and Data Services' (BIDS) International Bibliography of the Social Sciences;
- the Cambridge Scientific Abstracts Internet Database Service; and
- the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (NCJRS).

In addition, internet searches were carried out to identify publicly available documentation from government and non-governmental sources.

### *Cross-referencing*

Following the initial scoping phase, several iterations of cross-referencing, citation and author searches were carried out to build a comprehensive and detailed library of information related to rural crime and related issues. Care was taken to assess the quality of the material investigated with respect to degrees of bias and methodological imperfections.

### *Data collection and analysis*

Finally, up-to-date official crime statistics were collated and analysed to include information not necessarily referred to in the available literature.

## **1.3 Structure**

This review begins in Section 2 with a discussion of the issues inherent in the definition of rural and urban areas. While most people will understand the concept of a rural/urban dichotomy, in reality, the term is surprisingly difficult to define and operational definitions differ remarkably.

In Section 3, the reader is presented with official facts and figures concerning the extent of crime in rural areas and how this compares to crime in urban areas. There will be a focus both on volume crimes that are recorded as official key performance indicators (KPIs) and those that are not.

Section 4 examines the experience of crime in rural areas. It discusses why the same crimes that occur in urban areas can affect victims differently when experienced in rural areas. It also considers crimes that are a particular problem in rural areas and others that are specifically 'rural' in nature.

Section 5 considers whether patterns of crime in rural communities are consistent with existing criminological theory and how particular

characteristics of rural areas may explain differences between rural and urban crime rates. Potential implications for future crime trends are also discussed.

In Section 6 we discuss how crime in rural areas has historically been addressed and provide a summary of current policing and crime reduction strategies in rural areas. Finally, Section 7 summarises and concludes by discussing the implications of the review on current policy and practice, highlighting gaps in the literature on rural crime, and setting an agenda for future research.

## 2 Defining 'rural'

The term 'rural' is a concept that is easily understood at a common-sense level, yet difficult if not impossible to define (Anderson, 1999). In this section, we discuss the dimensions of 'rurality' and how it has been defined in the extant research concerned with crime, before discussing a new classification.

What is immediately apparent from the literature is the variation in how areas are classified as rural and urban from one study to the next. Even official government statistics fail to use consistent criteria across departments (See ODPM, 2002).

### 2.1 Dimensions of rurality

The problem lies in capturing the many *types* of rural areas that exist. These range from commuter settlements on the fringe of large towns to remote farms many miles from the nearest urban settlement. In much of the literature, rural areas have been defined in terms of the population size and/or density of a settlement. However, it has been suggested that the demography of an area represents just one of four dimensions of the meaning of rurality. The other three being economical, social structural and cultural (Weisheit, Falcone & Wells, 1996) These dimensions are summarised as follows:

*Demographical* – Demographical classifications such as settlement size and population density describe the area in physical terms and provide objective, measurable criteria for classification. However there is little agreement between studies on where the lines should be drawn between rural and urban. For example, some definitions consider settlements below 1,000 residents to be 'rural' (e.g. Australian Bureau of Statistics; see Carcach, 2000), others below 2,500 (U. S. Bureau of the Census; see Weisheit & Donnermeyer, 2000) while other settlements are considered predominantly rural with up to 10,000 residents (e.g. Countryside agency, 2004a).

*Economical* – The stereotype of a rural place is where people 'live off the land' (Weisheit *et al.*, 1996) and are therefore employed in agriculture or fishing etc. However, modernity has brought technological and economic developments that have increased manufacturing, service provision and tourism as sources of employment in rural areas. In the UK, agriculture now accounts only for 7.5 per cent of employment in rural areas (Cabinet Office, 2000).

*Social structural* – Rural areas are sometimes described as being 'close knit'. This term refers to the idea that people in rural areas have high levels of social intimacy with social connections being more immediate, more intense (often based on kinship) and more complete (based on informal biographical knowledge rather than formal role positions) (Weisheit *et al.*, 1996).

*Cultural* – This refers to distinct sets of attitudes, beliefs, values, knowledge systems and behavioural habits that are thought to characterise people living in rural areas. Amongst other stereotypes, rural culture is seen as being traditional, slow to change, relatively intolerant of diversity and unaccepting of outsiders (see Weisheit *et al.*, 1996).

Regardless of the accuracy of these stereotypes, it is clear that the relationship between rural and urban areas is neither dichotomous nor unidimensional. Instead, demographic, economic, social, and cultural characteristics are all part of a multidimensional construct of rurality. The problem lies in how to capture and analyse these dimensions consistently.

## **2.2 Further definitional issues for analysis**

### **2.2.1 Relativity**

What is considered rural in one country may not correspond to what is considered rural in another. To illustrate this, consider that there are very few locations in England and Wales that are more than a one hour drive from a significant urban centre. In contrast, the distances between isolated American or Australian farming communities and an urban centre can be many times this distance. Some Alaskan villages, for example, are so remote they are difficult to reach by aeroplane. What is considered rural in the UK may be considered almost suburban in larger countries.

### **2.2.2 Level of analysis**

The issue is confounded even further when looking at areas of different levels of geographic resolution. For instance, some studies examine levels of crime at the small area level, such as 150 or so households, whilst other studies consider trends at the level of the county. What can be considered a rural county, for example, may contain a mixture of rural, urban and suburban settlements. In America, classifications of rural goes as far as classifying rural 'states' and some have even compared rural and urban countries (see Weisheit *et al.*, 1996). This problem is a quintessential example of the Modifiable Areal Unit Problem (MAUP, Openshaw, 1984), which is concerned with the impact on analyses of area level indicators of any kind when aggregating data to different levels of geographic resolution. To illustrate the issue, imagine that we wish to establish the risk of crime in an area. To do so, we take the average of the crime risk for two areas. The two areas differ significantly, with one area having a high crime rate, the other little or no crime. In this case, the average crime rate will be somewhere between the risk in the two areas, thereby accurately representing the risk of crime in neither. Thus, the level of analysis chosen can drastically affect the conclusions drawn.

### **2.2.3 Heterogeneity**

There is also considerable variation between rural areas. Williams (1999) argues that "the experience of living on a remote Scottish island may be as different from living in a large suburban village in Oxfordshire as living in a city

such as Durham is from living in another such as Birmingham” (p. 163). Over generalising rural areas into just ‘rural’ will miss these qualitative differences. Thus, just as aggregating results across a variety of different areas can be problematic (see MAUP above), failing to recognise that risks may vary considerably even between ‘similar’ areas can also result in a misleading picture of crime risk. This type of misinterpretation is an example of the ecological fallacy (e.g. Durkheim, 1897), an example of which would be that whilst farms are generally at a lower risk of being burgled, all farms are at a uniformly low risk. In reality, however, many farms may be at a very high risk of crime.

### **2.3 A new rural and urban classification**

In early 2002, five Government organisations<sup>1</sup> sponsored a project to produce a new definition and classification of rural and urban areas. A consortium consisting of specialists in geography, computing and town planning undertook the work<sup>2</sup>. The aim was to provide a more consistent approach to the use of urban and rural definitions.

The outcome of the project was a new set of definitions that classified rurality based on the properties of hectare sized areas of land. These hectare grids are then aggregated up to classify rurality for three different administrative boundaries, these being the local authority district, ward and census output area (COA)<sup>3</sup>. Three measurement criteria make up the new definitions:

- Settlement form – each hectare grid square in England and Wales is associated with a particular settlement type: dispersed dwellings, hamlet, village, small town, urban fringe and urban (>10k population).
- Sparsity or remoteness – each hectare grid square is given a sparsity score based on the number of households in surrounding hectare squares up to a distance of 30 km.
- Function<sup>4</sup> – each hectare grid square is classified by the number and type of commercial addresses located within the area.

The new classification system allows for eight categories of rurality at the COA level; four settlement types (urban, town and fringe, village, and hamlet and dispersed) in either a sparse or non-sparse local setting. While these classifications are based on demographic characteristics, the fact that they are available at the COA level means that they can be used with other data sets. For instance, this allows correlations to be calculated between rural

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<sup>1</sup> The Countryside Agency; Defra; ODPM; the Office for National Statistics (ONS); and the Welsh Assembly Government.

<sup>2</sup> The South East Regional Research Laboratory (SERRL) at Birkbeck College; the School of Town and Regional Planning at Sheffield University; the School of computing at the University of Glamorgan; and Geowise Ltd of Edinburgh

<sup>3</sup> Census Output Areas were introduced for the 2001 census. They are the smallest statistical geography for which Census information is available. There are 175,434 Output Areas in England and Wales, each one containing approximately 125 households. Collectively they provide the building blocks for larger police districts, boroughs, counties, etc.

<sup>4</sup> The measure of function is not included at Output Area or Ward level.

categories and census data, such as income, age and other socio-demographic indicators. Suggestions for further research looking at the association between levels of crime, economic conditions, and the social and cultural heterogeneity of rural settlements are given in Section 7.

As mentioned above, studies concerning rural issues determine rurality in many different ways, with most not explicitly stating how classification is determined (Weisheit *et al.* 1996). Other than brief descriptions of how the official crime statistics define rurality, this paper will not attempt to clarify which criteria are used in each study it cites and consequently does not intend for any conclusions to be made based on comparisons between them. Instead, the purpose of this review is to highlight issues emerging from the literature that may be indicative, though not conclusive, of the rural *status quo*. The reader is encouraged to consider these issues whilst reading the review, and will be reminded of them at relevant intervals.

## **2.4 Current rural definitions in relation to crime statistics**

In Britain, official crime statistics are derived from two different sources of information: Crimes that are reported to, and recorded by, the police (police recorded crime data), and a self-report victimisation survey conducted annually by the Home Office, the British Crime Survey (BCS). For each wave of the BCS, a representative sample of around 40,000 respondents aged 16 or over in England and Wales are questioned regarding their experiences of crime over the previous 12 months.

The need for the two data sources is reflected in the strengths and weaknesses of each data set. For instance, in England and Wales only 42 per cent of crimes are reported to the police, and subsequently only 74 per cent of these are recorded. Hence, only 31 per cent of all crime is represented in police recorded crime data (Dodd, Nicholas, Povey & Walker, 2004). Thus, the BCS is used partly to provide a more accurate estimate of crime prevalence than police recorded crime and partly to provide an estimate of how much crime goes unreported. Recorded crime data, however, provides a greater level of precision concerning when and where crimes take place. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, victims typically report crimes to the police shortly after they take place, meaning that they know the exact date on which they took place and where they occurred. In contrast, whilst respondents of the BCS are asked about their experiences over the last 12 months, they are not asked precisely where any crimes occurred. Moreover, it is possible that, as a consequence of memory distortions or other factors, they may include information about crimes that occurred more than 12 months ago, a phenomenon known as *telescoping*. Thus, whilst the BCS may provide a more representative picture of crime problems at the national level, recorded crime data provides a more accurate picture of exactly when and where crime problems occur at the level of the local police force geography.

Official statistics generated using police recorded crime data and the BCS are prime examples of how the definition of 'rural' differs, even within the same

government office. In fact, not only does each source use different definitions of rurality but each also defines rurality in more than one way. Table 1 describes the classifications used for each and their characteristics.

**Table 1:** Crime statistics and rural classification

Official Crime Statistics	Rural definition based on	Source of Classification	Classifications	Level of Analysis	% of total households defined as 'rural' <sup>5</sup>
British Crime Survey	ACORN <sup>6</sup> (A Classification of Residential Neighbourhoods)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demographic</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Housing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• Urban</li> <li>• Inner-city</li> </ul>	Household	25%
British Crime Survey	ONS (Office for National Statistics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multi-level analysis of 1991 census variables<sup>7</sup></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural</li> <li>• Suburban</li> <li>• Urban</li> </ul>	Household	20%
POLICE		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population density</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Most rural</li> <li>• Less rural</li> <li>• Middling</li> <li>• More urban</li> <li>• Most urban</li> </ul>	Police Force Area	unspecified
POLICE	CDRP categories	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Population density</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 density bands ('Least dense' to 'Most dense')<sup>8</sup></li> </ul>	Local Authority	9%

As Table 1 illustrates, BCS and police recorded crime statistics use very different criteria for rural classification and classify areas at different levels of geographical resolution. Therefore, the two sources cannot be directly compared with each other with much confidence. It is possible that the BCS, being based on more finely defined rural and urban ACORN categories and at a more focused level of analysis, is more likely to give a clearer picture of rural crime (Countryside agency, 2004a).

<sup>5</sup> For comparison, the new definition of 'rural' described above classifies 19.6% of the population in non-urban categories (Countryside agency, 2004a).

<sup>6</sup> Although the ONS classification is available to the BCS, the ACORN classification is more commonly used (Aust & Simmons, 2002)

<sup>7</sup> For information on the ONS classification of areas see Hales, Henderson, Becher, and Collins (2000)

<sup>8</sup> Density bands 1 and 2 are classified as 'rural'

### 3 The extent of crime in rural areas

In order to provide an indication of the level of crime in rural areas, this section looks at crime from both sources of official crime data in Britain (BCS and Police recorded crime). These statistics are collected for the major volume crime categories: Burglary, vehicle crime, criminal damage and violent crimes. Mention is also given to the extent of other crimes not given much coverage in official statistics. The perception of crime in rural areas and crimes that are specifically 'rural' in nature are described in Section 4. In this section, the reader should remember that the sampling procedure used in the BCS excludes those under the age of 16, and hence does not include crimes committed against this age group.

#### 3.1 Property crime

The proportion of households that were victim to property crime by area type (as reported in the 2003/2004 BCS) is set out in Table 2.

**Table 2:** Percentage of households<sup>a</sup> victimised in 2003/2004

	Rural	Non-rural			Rural:Non-rural ratio (1: )
		Urban	Inner-city	Total Non-rural	
<b>Burglary<sup>b</sup></b>	1.9%	3.3%	5.3%	3.5%	1.86
Theft of vehicle	0.5%	1.4%	2.8%	1.5%	3.04
Theft from vehicle	4.5%	6.7%	8.5%	6.9%	1.52
Attempted vehicle theft	1.7%	2.9%	4.8%	3.1%	1.80
<b>All vehicle-related theft</b>	6.5%	10.3%	15.3%	10.7%	1.65
Criminal damage to vehicle	3.7%	6.7%	7.5%	6.8%	1.84
Criminal damage to the home and other property	1.8%	3.0%	3.3%	3.0%	1.69
<b>All criminal damage</b>	5.0%	7.9%	7.0%	7.8%	1.56

<sup>a</sup>Vehicle crime figures are based on vehicle owning households only; <sup>b</sup>burglary with entry and attempted burglary. Source: British Crime Survey 2003/2004

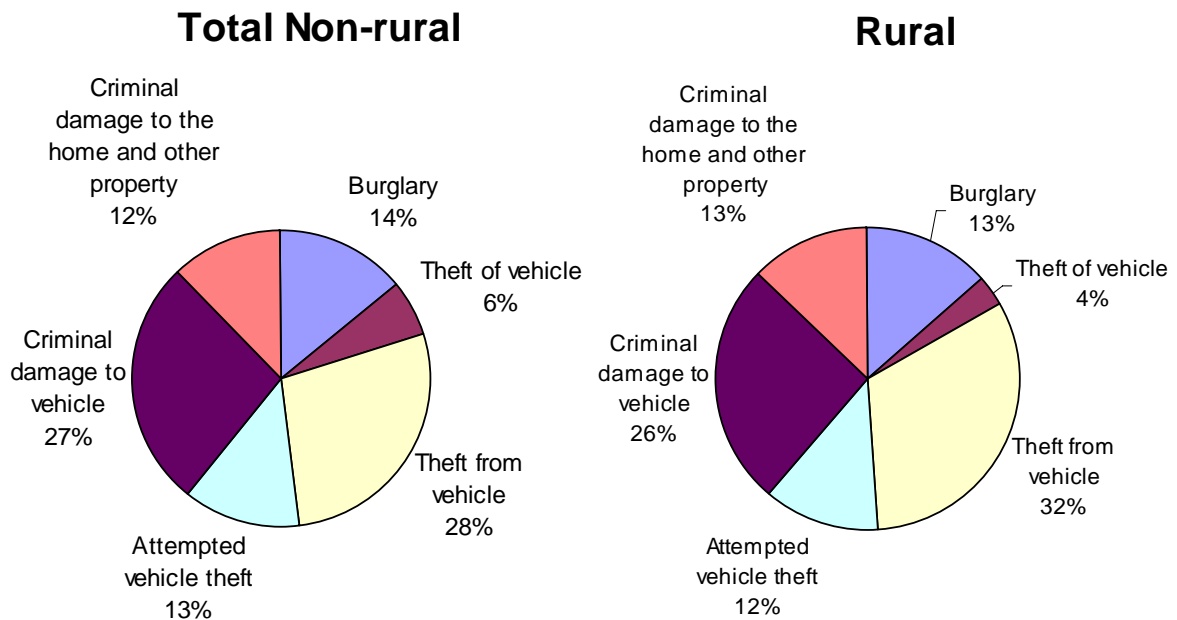
Table 2 shows that people living in rural areas experience a lower risk of crime than people living in urban and inner-city areas for all major property crime categories. The pattern of victimisation, however, is very similar. The three most prevalent crimes in each area: theft from vehicle, criminal damage

to vehicle and burglary were the same and in the same order of prevalence across all areas.

The ratios on the right of Table 2, derived by simply dividing the figure for the non-rural areas by that for the rural areas, show an interesting pattern. For most property crimes, risk of victimisation is between one and a half to nearly twice as likely for those living in non-rural areas compared to those living in rural areas. However, for theft of vehicles, non-rural households are three times more likely to be victimised. Thus, whilst crime risks in general appear to be lower in rural areas, relative to urban areas, some crimes are more likely to occur than others. In particular, whilst the risk of having a car stolen is much higher in non-rural areas, the difference between the risk of having items stolen from a vehicle across the two types of area is much less evident.

Considering property crime in a different way, Figure 1 shows what proportion of the total number of acquisitive crimes recorded in the BCS are accounted for by each type of property theft in rural and non-rural areas. As can be seen, the pattern of victimisation is remarkably similar for most categories of offences. The biggest difference lies in a higher proportion of theft from a vehicle in rural areas (32%) compared to non-rural areas (28%). Interestingly, this difference is slightly offset by a greater proportion of theft of a vehicle in non-rural areas (6%) than rural areas (4%).

**Figure 1:** Rural and non-rural proportions of property offences (BCS 2003/2004)



Thus, compared to non-rural areas, in rural areas there will be a slightly greater focus of policing resources directed towards dealing with thefts from vehicles. Mirrlees-Black (1998), looking at 1997 BCS data, suggested vehicle-related thefts formed a higher proportion of crime in rural areas than in non-rural areas due to higher levels of vehicle ownership.

Although police recorded data is based on different rural/urban classifications and refer to proportions of the population (rather than households) the data available for comparative acquisitive crimes, shown here as Table 3, indicate that it reveals a similar patterns of results. For instance, the ratios for the rural/urban comparisons are of a similar order of magnitude with the ratio for theft of vehicles the most pronounced and the ratio of theft from vehicle the least.

**Table 3:** Police recorded property crime figures 2003/2004 (% of population)

	Rural	Non-rural	Rural:non-rural ratio (1: )
Burglary	0.93	1.92	2.05
Theft of vehicle	0.26	0.59	2.27
Theft from vehicle	0.67	1.23	1.84

Source: Police recorded crime data 2003/2004.

### 3.1.1 Arson

The Arson Prevention Bureau (2003) suggests that farms are particularly vulnerable to arson due to their isolation, open boundaries and the availability of readily ignitable material. Although there is no official national data on the extent of arson in rural areas, the Arson Prevention Bureau's report states that about 1,700 buildings and 66,000 acres of grassland are destroyed by fire in UK farms every year. It is claimed that half of these fires are started deliberately, either as vandalism or for insurance fraud.

As much as 40 per cent of businesses that suffer arson attacks never trade successfully again. Thus, arson has a considerable impact upon farms in the UK, with implications for the economical sustainability of these communities. As such, further work concerned with arson in rural areas is clearly warranted.

## 3.2 Violent Crime

Police recorded crime data for the whole of England and Wales, such as that summarised in Table 4, reveal that, as with property crime, urban areas have a greater recorded violent crime rate than rural areas, particularly with regard to robbery. It is interesting to note that the rate of sexual offences, while low in both rural and non-rural areas, shows the smallest ratio.

**Table 4:** Police recorded violent crime figures 2003/2004 (per % population)

	Rural	Non-rural	Rural:non-rural ratio (1: )
Violence against the person	1.19	1.98	1.66
Sexual offences	0.07	0.11	1.58
Robbery	0.03	0.21	6.02

Source: Police recorded crime data 2003/2004.

Even though the BCS categorises violent crime differently to recorded police data<sup>9</sup>, as shown in Table 5, results from the BCS are similar to recorded crime in that the risk of victimisation is shown to be greater in urban areas for all offences. The degree of this difference is smaller, however. For example, the likelihood of victimisation from mugging, which is the most similar offence to robbery, is only two and a half times greater in urban areas (compared to six times greater as reported in police recorded statistics).

**Table 5:** Percentage victimised of violent crime in 2003/2004

	Rural	Non-rural			Rural:Non-rural ratio (1: )
		Urban	Inner-city	Total non-rural	
Domestic	0.4%	0.6%	0.6%	0.6%	1.50
Mugging	0.4%	0.9%	1.7%	1.0%	2.49
Stranger	1.1%	1.8%	2.2%	1.8%	1.68
Acquaintance	1.1%	1.4%	1.8%	1.4%	1.32
All violence	2.7%	4.4%	5.8%	4.6%	1.69

Source: BCS 2003/2004

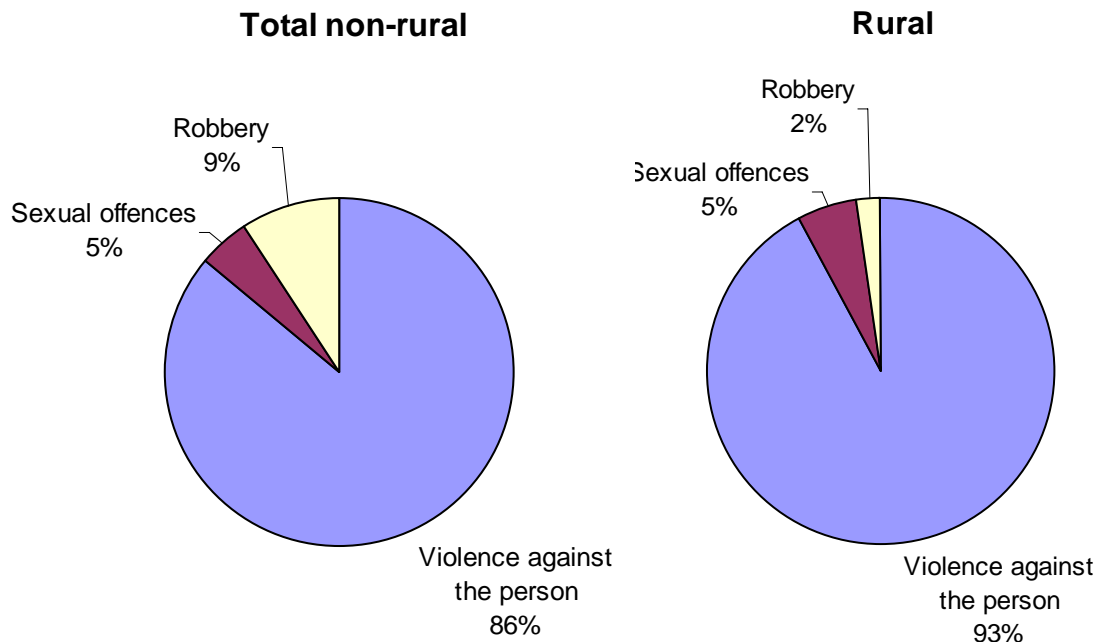
One of the limitations of the BCS is that incidents are always related back to where respondents live rather than the precise location of where an incident occurred. Whilst this presents no problem for property crimes such as burglary, where the offence location and the victim's home residence will be the same, this is not the case for all types of crime and presents a particular problem for violent crimes (with the exception of domestic violence described in more detail below). For instance, crimes such as robbery or assault, may occur at a variety of locations, not all of which will be within immediate proximity of the victim's home location, occurring instead in areas where they work or socialise. For such crimes then, it is possible that figures from the

<sup>9</sup> The BCS categories of violent crime are: Domestic violence (all violent incidents, except mugging, which involve partners, ex-partners, household members or other relatives); Mugging (robbery, attempted robbery, and snatch theft from the person); Stranger violence (common assaults and woundings in which the victim did not know any of the offenders); Acquaintance violence (woundings and common assaults in which the victim knew one or more of the offenders, at least by sight). NB. Sexual offences are not included as part of the survey.

BCS could provide a misleading picture. This may be particularly the case in rural areas on the fringe of large cities or urban areas. In support of this, Dodd *et al.* (2004) suggest that many of the violent crimes reported to the BCS by residents living in rural areas in the south east of England will have occurred in, and hence been recorded by the police in the London region. It is likely, therefore, that much of the discrepancy shown above between the BCS and police recorded violent crime can be attributed to differences in the way that crime is measured between the two sources.

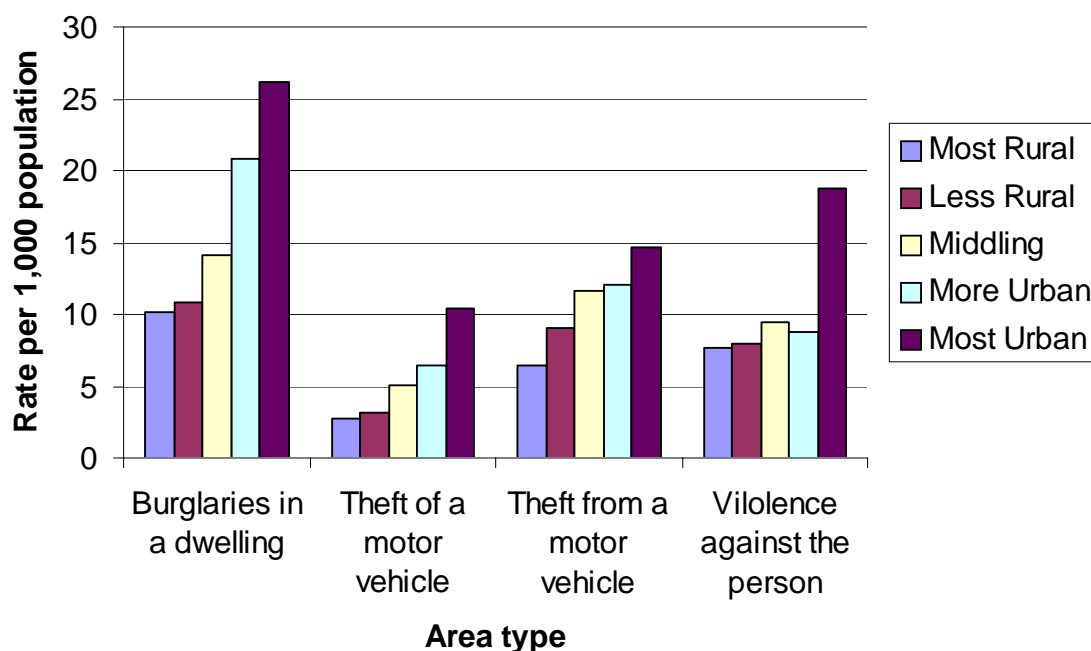
Figure 2 shows the proportions of violent crime in rural and non-rural areas as recorded by the police. As can be seen from the figure, robbery accounts for only two per cent of all recorded incidents of violent crime in rural areas, whereas in urban areas robbery accounts for 9 per cent of violent crime. Sexual offences share the same proportion of violent crime in both areas.

**Figure 2:** Rural and non-rural proportions of violent offences (Police recorded crime data 2003/2004)



Looking at recorded crime data for the year 2000-2001, Aust and Simmons (2002) noted that whereas the incidence of property crimes increases as population density increases, the same is not true for violent crime. Instead, they noted that violent crime was specifically concentrated in the highest population density band, with roughly equivalent risks being evident for the other types of area. This is illustrated in Figure 3, which shows that the risk of becoming the victim of violent crime in rural areas and urban areas that exclude cities is very similar.

**Figure 3:** Recorded crime rates per 1,000 population<sup>a</sup> by area type (2000/2001)



<sup>a</sup>Burglary is for 1,000 households

The offence of robbery appears to be particularly concentrated. Dodd *et al.* (2004) reported that 60 per cent of all recorded robberies take place in just three police forces: the Metropolitan, Greater Manchester, and the West Midlands. The Metropolitan police force alone is responsible for recording 40 per cent of all robberies in England and Wales. These figures suggest that robbery, in particular, may be disproportionately associated with inner-city areas.

### 3.2.1 Domestic violence and sexual assaults

Domestic violence and sexual assaults are crimes that are known to be particularly under-reported (Walby & Allen, 2004). It is estimated that only 21 per cent of female domestic violence victims (7% of male victims) come to police attention. For sexual assaults the reporting rate is even less, being 15% for completed rape; 12 per cent for serious sexual assault; and, 13 per cent for less serious sexual assault.

Similarly, due to the face-to-face nature of questioning, figures from the BCS are likely to represent an under-estimate of the prevalence of these types of crime (Mirrlees-Black & Byron, 1999). The 2001 BCS, however, included a Computer-Assisted Self-Interviewing (CASI) questionnaire which aimed to increase the rate of reporting due to the added privacy and sense of anonymity it offered<sup>10</sup>. The CASI survey found prevalence rates to be three times higher for women and ten times higher for men than that typically reported in the BCS.

<sup>10</sup> For a number of reasons, such as the subjective interpretation of what constitutes a 'crime' as well as memory issues, CASI statistics, too, are not thought to be completely reliable (see Mirrlees-Black, 1999; Walby & Allen, 2004).

**Table 6:** Domestic violence and sexual assault victimisation by area (% victims once or more)

	Rural	Urban	Inner-city
<i>Females</i>			
Domestic violence	3.3%	4.1%	7.0%
Sexual assault	1.2%	2.2%	3.0%
<i>Males</i>			
Domestic violence	1.8%	2.4%	2.7%

Source: 2001 CASI BCS (Walby & Allen, 2004)

Table 6 shows the rate of reporting of domestic violence and sexual assault as found in the 2001 CASI BCS by area. The results show that domestic violence against women appears to be particularly concentrated in inner-city areas, being over twice as prevalent as it is in rural areas (for males this difference is not so pronounced). However, there is only a small difference in the prevalence rates for rural and urban areas. Sexual assault (which in this case includes serious and less serious assaults) also appears to be more prevalent in urban areas. Walby and Allen (2004) suggested that the higher rate of domestic violence associated with inner-city areas runs parallel with the finding that inter-personal violence is associated with a lack of economic resources.

Domestic violence is also an extremely concentrated phenomenon, with particularly high levels of repeat victimization reported. Walby and Allen (2004) note that the average female domestic violence victim experiences 20 incidents in one year. Unfortunately, data concerning repeat domestic violence victimisation, or repeated victimisation of any other type of crime for that matter, are not routinely published by the police or Home Office.

At the time of writing, the Countryside Agency and Crime Concern are conducting research looking into the extent of domestic violence problems in rural North Wiltshire which hopefully will shed more light on such problems in rural areas (Countryside agency, 2004a).

### **3.3 *Antisocial behaviour, drug abuse and racism***

There is some evidence that facilities for young people in rural areas have diminished rather than increased in recent years, with the village pub often the only source of entertainment. Anderson (1997) suggests that young people are therefore increasingly likely to be found hanging around and drinking, misusing drugs, making unwelcome noise and committing petty acts of vandalism. Indeed, in Scotland, Anderson (1997) reports that more incidents of vandalism are recorded in the countryside than in the city. Table 7 shows the perception of antisocial behaviour by area type as reported in the 2002/2003 BCS.

**Table 7:** Experience of antisocial behaviour by area type 2002/2003  
 (2001/2002 in brackets)

<b>Proportion saying it is a fairly or very big problem in their area</b>	<b>Rural</b>	<b>Urban</b>	<b>Inner-city</b>
Noisy neighbours or loud parties	5 (4)	10 (11)	18 (18)
Teenagers hanging around on the streets	19 (16)	36 (36)	48 (45)
Rubbish or litter lying around	19 (16)	36 (34)	52 (50)
Vandalism, graffiti and other deliberate damage to property	20 (18)	37 (37)	54 (53)
People being attacked/harassed because of their race/colour	2 (3)	9 (9)	18 (20)
People using or dealing drugs	17 (16)	34 (33)	50 (49)
People being drunk or rowdy in public places	12 (12)	26 (24)	33 (31)

Source: 2002/2003 BCS

Table 7 suggests that those who live in rural areas experience lower levels of antisocial behaviour than non-rural and inner-city residents. However, antisocial behaviour in rural areas is perceived to be rising. Between the 2001/2002 and 2002/2003 BCS the proportion of rural residents who reported that antisocial behaviour was a fairly or very big problem rose in five out of the seven categories. Unfortunately, a breakdown of antisocial behaviour by area type was not reported in the most recent version of the BCS (Dodd *et al.*, 2004).

Table 7 also shows that substantially fewer rural residents perceive drug use to be a problem than those in urban areas. However, a review of research into drugs prevention programmes in rural areas (Henderson, 1998a) concluded that a principle distinguishing feature of rural areas was the reluctance of people to acknowledge there was a problem. The review goes on to suggest that drugs are widely available and commonly used in rural areas and that some studies indicate that its use is on a par with urban areas.

The 2002/2003 BCS shows that racial violence is considered an issue by nine times as many inner-city respondents than rural. This is not surprising given the relatively smaller population of ethnic minorities in rural areas compared to urban areas (Denham & White, 1998). However, for those ethnic minorities who do live in rural areas, there is growing anecdotal evidence to suggest that the prevalence and impact of racism is causing considerable problems. Chakroborti and Garland (2003) conducted a survey of ethnic minorities in rural Suffolk and found that 70 per cent had experienced racial harassment during the previous twelve months and eleven per cent said they experience harassment on a daily basis. Interviews revealed that the problem was exacerbated by the reaction to the terrorist attacks of September 11 2001.

Further anecdotal evidence suggests similar problems exist in rural Cornwall, Devon and Somerset (Jay, 1992) and that these attitudes do not appear to be waning (Dhalech, 1999). Jay (1992) reports of Asian families being forced to leave their homes and businesses because of hostility from other villagers – their premises having been repeatedly vandalised – and of restaurant owners and workers experiencing racial abuse and threats, and having graffiti scrawled on the walls of their premises.

Similar to the perception of the drugs problem in rural areas, it has been noted that a predominant 'no problem here' approach to racial issues exists and that this is a major problem in itself (Dhalech, 1999; Jay, 1992). This is especially pertinent since the 2000 rural white paper goes so far as to suggest that, relative to the number of ethnic minority people in an area, racist incidents and crime may be more common in the countryside than they are in urban areas (DETR, 2000).

### **3.4 Trends in rural crime**

One of the main limitations of police recorded crime data is that it is a measurement of recorded crime, or organisational processes (Wilkins, 1964) and not crime itself. As such it is subject to change as a consequence of changes to police recording practices over time and between police forces. For example, Aust and Simmons (2002) note that in 1998, changes to the counting rules saw the incidence of violent crime more than double. Dodd, Nicholas, Povey & Walker (2004) suggest that changes in recording practices, such as the introduction of the National Crime Recording Standard in April 2002, continue to account for an apparent increase in some crimes, particularly a 12 per cent rise in violent crime that occurred between 2002/2003 and 2003/2004. Furthermore, what is considered 'criminal' may also vary over time (as indeed between regions or countries, Sellin, 1938), complicating the issue still further.

Since the BCS is not subject to problems associated with changes in police recording practices or the public's willingness to report crimes to the police, it provides a more reliable indication of trends over time. Figure 4 shows the prevalence in rural areas of three types of crime over the last six sweeps of the BCS.

**Figure 4:** Percentage victimised at least once in rural areas (source: BCS)

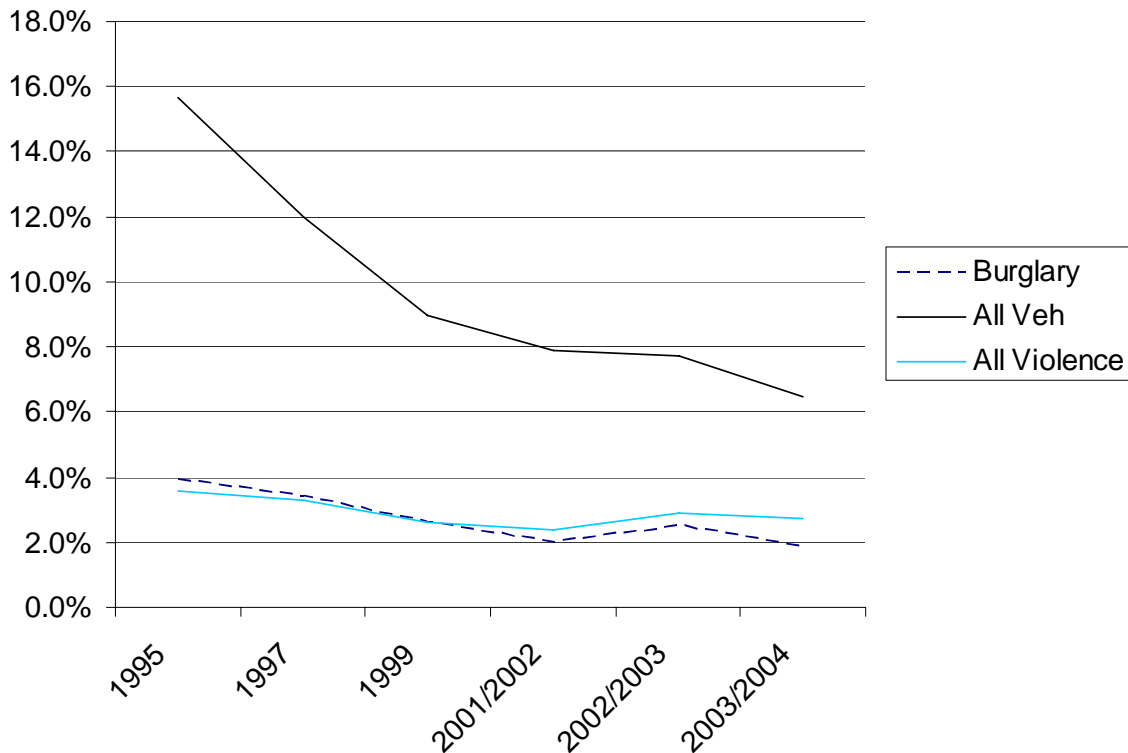


Figure 4 shows that, for each crime type, the risk of victimisation appears to decay over time. However, it is worth noting that crime in non-rural areas has also fallen during this time. In fact, the rate of change in the two types of area has been very similar, suggesting that changes observed in rural areas simply reflect those observed elsewhere.

### **3.5 Repeat victimisation**

Recent research has demonstrated that in addition to crime being concentrated in particular areas (so called 'hot spots' of crime), crime is also typically concentrated on particular victims or properties (for a review, see Pease, 1998). For instance, analyses of the BCS concerned with repeat victimisation demonstrate that only 2 per cent of victims account for 41 per cent of all property crime (e.g. Ellingworth, Farrell, & Pease, 1995), and the risk of crime increases significantly following initial victimisation. Similar results are apparent for all types of crime ranging from fraud (Wood, Wheelwright, and Burrows, 1997) to domestic violence (Walby & Allen, 2004). In addition, analyses of recorded crime data show that when repeat victimisation occurs, it does so swiftly (e.g. Johnson, Bowers, & Hirschfield, 1997). Furthermore, repeat victimisation appears to be a feature of high crime areas (e.g. Trickett, Osborn, Seymour, & Pease, 1992) and for burglary at least, is committed by prolific offenders (Everson & Pease, 2001).

The study of repeat victimisation thus has implications for understanding more precisely the nature of the crime problem in an area and for crime prevention

policy. Police forces in England and Wales, and throughout the rest of the world for that matter, do not routinely identify incidents of repeat victimisation. The reason for this is that to measure repeat victimisation requires the availability of detailed crime data relating to individual incidents of crime. Data that identifies individual victims of crime is not available at a national level. Thus, at this moment in time, the easiest way to estimate the extent of repeat victimisation in England and Wales is by analysing data from the BCS. Analysis of BCS data for the year 1999 (Aust & Simmons, 2002) suggests that residents of rural areas were significantly less likely to fall victim to household crime more than once than their urban counterparts. Twenty-nine per cent of victims in rural areas were repeat victims of crime, compared to 38 per cent in non-rural areas. It has been suggested that repeat victimisation in rural areas is low because crime rates are generally low (Gilling & Pierpoint, 1999). This suggestion certainly chimes with the key findings discussed above. However, for violent offences, repeat victimisation was almost as high in rural areas (45%) as it was in non-rural areas (47%).

The reasons why patterns of repeat victimisation differ between crime type are unclear, but they may be a reflection of the different nature and motivation underlying these types of offences. However, the implications for crime prevention should be clear – a crime should trigger preventive action focused on the victim. This issue is returned to in the following sections.

### **3.6 International comparisons**

Bearing in mind differences in interpretation of the term 'rural', patterns of crime in rural areas outside the UK bear striking similarities with that found within it. For instance, the 2002/2003 National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS), the American equivalent to the BCS, showed victimisation of property crime was 21.6 per cent, 14.5 per cent and 12.8 per cent for urban, suburban and rural areas respectively (Catalano, 2004). This suggests that risk of property crime was on average, 70 per cent higher in urban areas than rural. A similar ratio was found for violent offences which have rates of 3.1 per cent, 2.1 per cent and 1.8 per cent for urban, suburban and rural areas respectively. These ratios of rural to urban crime are remarkably similar to those reported in UK victimisation surveys (see Table 2 and Table 5).

Similar to the situation in the UK, the perception in the US was that rural crime was increasing relative to urban crime. Looking at NCVS data from 1993 to 1998, Duhart (2000) reports that on average although both violent and property crimes were consistently more prevalent in urban areas than suburban and rural areas, the rate in urban and suburban areas were declining at a greater rate than rural. More recently however, Catalano (2004) reports that violent crime in rural areas has dropped nearly 20 per cent over two years, whereas in urban areas this fall was only ten per cent. Likewise, property crime in rural areas dropped over ten per cent from 2000/2001 to 2002/2003, whereas in urban areas the fall was only 0.7 per cent. A cursory look at the rates of victimisation over the ten years from 1993 to 2003 suggests that rises and falls in crime appear to happen first in urban areas

followed by rural. Indeed, over this ten year period, the fall in property crime in both areas is comparable: 46.6 per cent in urban areas and 44.6 per cent in rural areas.

Like the BCS, the NCVS showed that patterns of victimisation are not uniform across crime types. As in the UK, people in urban areas are considerably more at risk of motor vehicle theft with levels of victimisation three times greater in urban areas (1.3%) than rural areas (0.4%) (Catalano, 2004). Likewise, the risk of robbery was 2.3 times greater in urban (0.37%) than rural areas (0.16%). On the other hand, there were little differences in the rates of rape and sexual assault (0.08% urban; 0.06% rural), and the rate of domestic burglary, although highest in urban areas, was higher in rural areas than in suburban ones (3.9% urban; 3.1% rural, 2.4% suburban).

In New South Wales, Australia, theft of a motor vehicle and robbery again stood out as predominantly urban crimes, reported consistently more often in Sydney than surrounding rural areas<sup>11</sup> (see Pennings, 1999). Unlike the statistics in the UK and America, however, rural areas showed higher crime rate for malicious damage, breaking and entering, assault, sexual assault and drug offences. Further, Carcach (2000) noted that crime rates were highest in either highly accessible or very remote areas rather than those in between, with violent crime particularly prevalent in remote rural areas.

The Australian studies aside, the finding that rates of crime are lower in rural areas compared to urban areas appears fairly robust. Van Dijk's (1999) analysis of the International Crime Victim Survey (ICVS) concludes that, across 55 different countries, urbanisation is the strongest factor explaining risk of victimisation, at least for more serious crime. More recently, Tseloni, Wittegrood, Farrell, and Pease (2004) compared burglary victimisation in England and Wales, the US and The Netherlands and found that urbanisation was significantly related to burglary across all surveys.

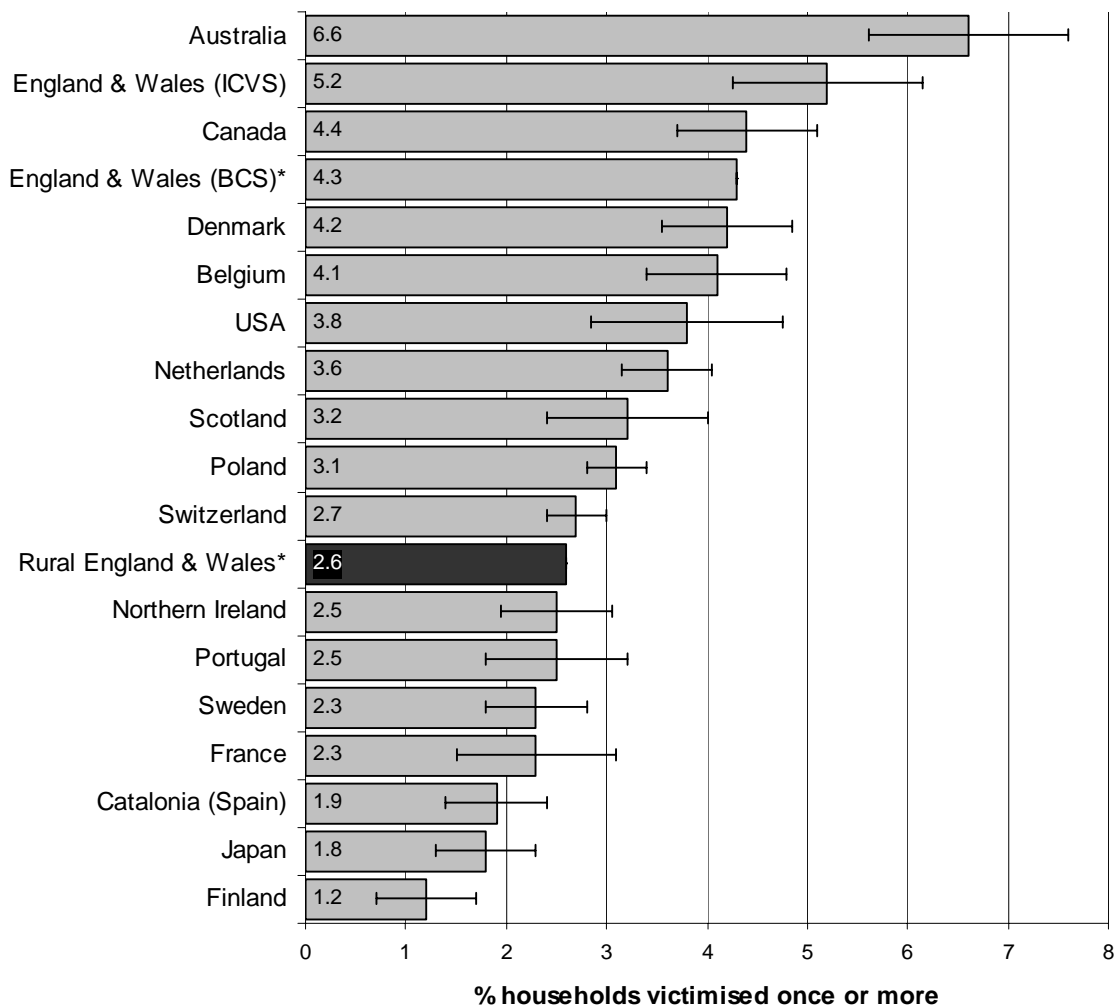
In addition to examining how rates of crime compare in rural and non-rural areas across different countries, data from international surveys can serve as a useful barometer against which to compare prevalence rates in rural areas in England and Wales with the national averages for other countries. For instance, we may ask the question, is the rate of burglary in rural areas in England and Wales higher or lower than the average in other countries? To explore this issue, crime risks in rural areas, as measured by the 2000 BCS (i.e. the same year as the ICVS), were compared with the national average crime rates for the 17 industrialised countries surveyed in the 2000 ICVS. It is important to note that for the ICVS, the number of people surveyed in each country was much smaller than that for the BCS, being between 1000-3000 (compared to over 20,000). Thus, it is likely that the prevalence rates for the ICVS will be less precise than those for the BCS. The survey method used in the two surveys also differs with interviews being conducted face-to-face for the BCS and over the phone for the ICVS.

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<sup>11</sup> In this study, 'rural' referred to all police districts in New South Wales outside of the Sydney metropolitan area. This includes areas that would certainly be considered 'urban' if other classification criteria were used.

Notwithstanding these issues, this type of comparison provides a useful context for considering crime risks in rural areas. Figure 5 shows that for burglary, according to the BCS, around 4.3 per cent of households suffered one or more incidents of burglary in 1999. According to the ICVS, the average figure was slightly higher (around 5.2%). However, the confidence limits<sup>12</sup> for the ICVS suggest that the true prevalence rate for England and Wales was between 4.2 and 6.1 per cent. Thus, the BCS estimate is within the range estimated by the ICVS. Considering the prevalence of burglary in rural areas in England and Wales, the figure is around 2.6 per cent of households. Equivalent data, although available for the ICVS, classifies 'rural' areas as those with less than 100,000 population and is therefore incomparable. However, what is apparent is that this rate, while lower than the average rate across all countries in the ICVS (3.3%), it is still higher than the national averages of 7 of the 17 countries surveyed (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5:** Prevalence of burglary and attempted burglary by country

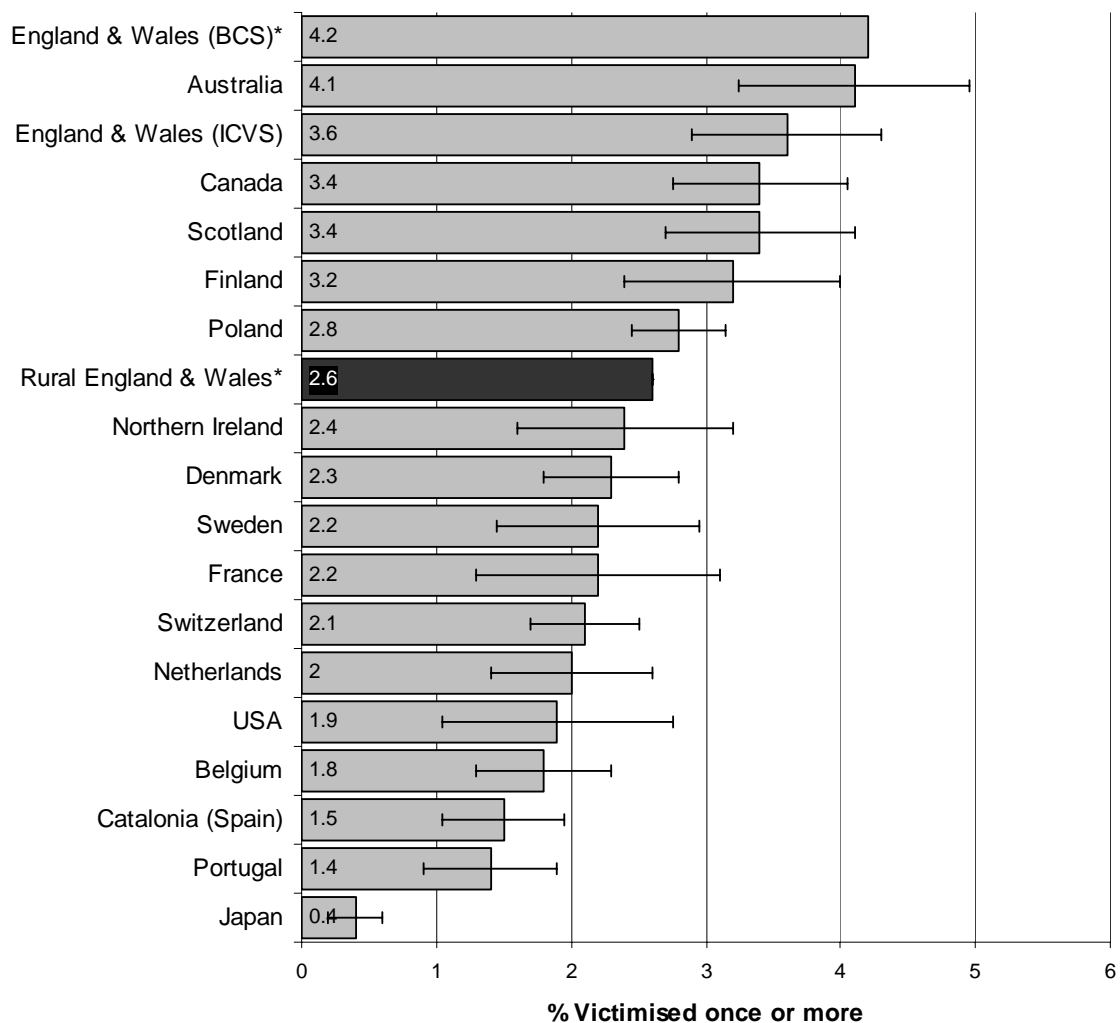


Source: 2000 ICVS (\*2000 BCS)

<sup>12</sup> Confidence limits are not readily available for the BCS.

For violent crime, the two surveys use slightly different measures. The BCS considers incidents of domestic violence, mugging, and assaults, whereas the ICVS looks at incidents of robbery, personal theft, sexual assaults and assaults and threats. Nevertheless the two surveys cover roughly equivalent types of violent crime. According to the BCS, the proportion of adults suffering one or more incidents of violent crime in 1999 was 4.2 per cent. For the ICVS, the equivalent estimate was 3.6 per cent (with confidence limits between 2.9 to 4.3). Thus, as with burglary the estimate from the ICVS was slightly higher than that for the BCS, although consideration of the confidence limits suggests that the two do not differ significantly. Figure 6 demonstrates how the violent crime rate in rural areas in England and Wales compares to the national rates of other countries.

**Figure 6:** Prevalence of violent crime by country



Source: 2000 ICVS (\*2000 BCS)

For rural areas in England and Wales, the prevalence rate of violence was 2.6 (per cent of adults). This rate is higher than the average ICVS rate of 2.4, and higher than that for 11 of the (other 16) countries surveyed as part of the ICVS, including the USA. However, as noted above it is possible that victims who live in rural areas may have experienced the violent offences reported in the

BCS in non-rural areas. Thus, care should be taken when interpreting these data. Further research would be required to unpack this issue.

### **3.7 Summary**

On the basis of official crime statistics, it appears that rural areas in England and Wales experience lower levels of crime than urban areas. Indeed, in recent years, rural areas also appear to have benefited from the same sorts of reductions in crime that have been observed elsewhere in England and Wales (Aust & Simmons, 2002). In line with previous findings (e.g. Aust & Simmons, 2002; Kershaw, Budd, Kinshott, Mattinson, Mayhew, & Myhill, 2001), there is also no evidence to say that the difference between crime in rural and urban areas is narrowing. Importantly, crime is not just less in rural areas because there are less people – per person or per household rates are also lower in these areas in England and Wales.

However, simply because rural areas experience less crime does not mean that crime is not an issue in those areas. While the risk of some crimes appear to be much greater in urban areas – namely robbery and theft of a motor vehicle – other crimes such as theft from a motor vehicle appear to be a disproportionate problem for rural residents. Furthermore, although care should be taken when interpreting the ICVS due to the relatively small sample sizes used, international comparisons suggest that crime rates in rural areas in England and Wales are higher than the national crime rates for many other countries.

In addition, Mirrlees-Black (1998) draws attention to the fact that the pattern of burglary was different between rural and non-rural areas. In urban and inner-city areas, low-income households are more at risk of burglaries than high income households. In contrast, this pattern is reversed in rural areas. This demonstrates that the difference between rural and urban crime is not just a matter of magnitude, but that qualitative differences may also exist. This implies that different criminological processes may be in operation. Such differences can have implications on crime theory and on how crime is tackled in rural areas. These implications are discussed in Sections 5 and 7. The next section, however, discusses the qualitative differences between crime victimisation in rural and urban areas.

## 4 The experience of crime in rural areas

Knowing the extent of crime in rural areas only presents a partial picture of the problem. It is likely that the experience of crime in rural areas differs qualitatively as well as quantitatively from urban areas. This section looks beyond actual crime statistics in order to shed light on problems that may be different in, or unique to, rural areas.

### 4.1 Rural perceptions and fear of crime

For many people, whether falling victim to crime or not, simply fearing the possibility of crime can have a detrimental effect on quality of life. It has been suggested that fear of crime has the potential for greater harm than actual victimisation due to the effect of long-term stress (Williams, McShane & Akers, 2000). Rural areas can be quiet, dark and relatively desolate. It could be speculated that these are all factors that could contribute to a sense of vulnerability and unease. Indeed, Lawtley and Deane (2000) speculate that fear of crime in rural areas may be higher than in urban areas, despite the fact that crime levels are lower.

There has been considerable debate as to how fear of crime should be conceptualised and measured (see Farrall, Bannister, Ditton, & Gilchrist, 1997; Jackson, 2004; and Williams *et al.*, 2000). For example, distinctions have been made between fear of specific crime types and a 'free-floating' general anxiety of victimisation (Ferraro & LaGrange, 1987). Williams *et al.* argue that the term 'fear of crime' might best be replaced by the term 'worry about victimisation' until a consensus is achieved on what 'fear of crime' actually entails. It is beyond the remit of this review to enter into this discussion. Consequently, Table 8 and Table 9 show the levels of general anxiety and worry of specific crime type by area as reported in the 2002/2003 BCS.

People can fear something greatly even if they perceive the likelihood of it occurring is slim. However, although not entirely related, it seems reasonable to assume that people's perception of the likelihood of victimisation contributes in some way to a person's feelings of fear and anxiety and consequently their quality of life (for a discussion, see Gabriel & Greve, 2003). Table 10 shows the perceptions of the likelihood of victimisation by area type as reported in the 2002/2003 BCS.

**Table 8:** Proportion feeling very unsafe.

	Rural	Urban	Inner-city
Walking alone after dark	8%	13%	21%
Alone in home at night	1%	1%	2%

Source: BCS 2002/2003

**Table 9:** Proportion of adults very worried about crime, by area type

	Rural	Urban	Inner-city
Burglary	9% (9%)	15% (16%)	26% (23%)
Theft of a car	10% (11%)	17% (19%)	29% (24%)
Theft from a car	9% (9%)	14% (16%)	25% (23%)
Mugging	8% (8%)	15% (16%)	25% (24%)
Physical attack	9% (10%)	15% (16%)	24% (23%)

Source: BCS 2002/2003 (BCS 2001/2002 in brackets)

**Table 10:** Proportion who think it is very/fairly likely that they will be a victim in the next year

	Rural	Urban	Inner-city
Burglary	17% (17%)	23% (22)	29% (31%)
Theft of a car	23% (22%)	29% (32%)	39% (46%)
Theft from a car	26% (26%)	33% (34%)	42% (49%)
Mugging/robbery	8% (8%)	16% (15%)	27% (30%)
Stranger attack	7% (7%)	14% (14%)	23% (23%)

Source: BCS 2002/2003 (BCS 2001/2002 in brackets)

Table 8 and Table 9 clearly show that anxiety and worry of crime is less in rural areas compared to urban and inner-city areas. This is the case both generally (Table 8) and across all crime types (Table 9). Table 10 suggests that rural residents perceive the likelihood of becoming a victim of crime is also less than urban residents' perceptions. These findings are not surprising considering that actual victimisation rates are lower in rural areas.

Although the level of concern for all types of crime is less in rural than non-rural areas, the most recent state of the countryside report (Countryside agency, 2004a) notes that despite falling crime in rural areas, the level of

concern has remained the same and if anything has shown a slight increase, a finding echoed in Table 9. Importantly, this is in contrast to non-rural areas, for which the perception of crime risk appears to be decreasing over time.

The difference between actual and perceived crime risks can be vast. For example, it is overwhelmingly women and the elderly who fear violent assault (ONS, 2001), yet this is a crime suffered predominantly by young men (Dodd *et al.*, 2004). Unfortunately, data published as part of the BCS do not examine these patterns across different areas. Thus, it is possible that women in rural areas are more worried about crime risks than those in other areas. Equally, the reverse could be true,

One explanation for why the fear of crime in rural areas has not fallen in line with changes in the risk of crime, as it has in urban areas, is that when crime does occur it receives disproportionate attention. Mingay (1989) suggests that an enduring perception of the countryside is that it is a safe-place. Therefore, when a serious offence does occur in the countryside it conflicts with this imagery and leads to the perception of rising crime. Indeed, much of the attention in Britain toward crime in rural areas has been as a consequence of the Tony Martin case. A more extreme example occurred in Ireland in the 1990s where a small number of highly publicised rural murders spurred major changes in crime policy. In contrast, a steady but prolonged rise in crime in Dublin, which coincided with a steady increase in the use of heroin, triggered little response since 'crime was what you would expect in Dublin' (McCullagh, 1999).

It has also been questioned whether people who are fearful of crime in rural areas are fearful of the crime itself or are actually fearful of the threat to their rural 'idyll' (Cloke, 1993). Williams (1999) suggests that such threats might be responsible for rural residents viewing antisocial behaviour as more serious than it really is (Williams, 1999).

In line with this, a survey conducted in a number of villages and small towns in the rural district of Tynedale (North-East of England), has offered some intriguing findings (Jackson, 2004). The results suggested that residents' day-to-day risk perceptions were influenced by a symbolic 'fit' between crime and a range of things that have come to be associated with crime. These included perceptions of young people 'hanging around', rubbish and graffiti, and the presence of individuals and groups who are 'different', with different values and who behave in unpredictable ways. These individuals and groups may have represented unwelcome social developments into the rural areas studied with regard to the familiarity and diversity of interaction, the breakdown of social cohesion and consensus, and the loosening of moral standards and behavioural norms. Moreover, Jackson (2004) suggests that physical incivilities can create a sense that the neighbourhood is not 'owned' by people and authorities, that social order has been disrupted by certain people who lack acceptable values and a sense of respect. Thus, in resident's minds these 'stereotypical' groups are used as 'scapegoats' that can explain the problems experienced in the area (Pickering, 2001).

## **4.2 Qualitative differences between rural and urban victimisation**

The same offences can be experienced very differently in different contexts (Lawley & Deane, 2000). For example, Despite evidence suggesting that the prevalence of domestic violence in rural areas is less than it is in urban areas (see Section 3.2.1), the physical and social isolation, a lack of support services for victims, rural culture and poor transport may all exacerbate its impact in rural areas. In order to discuss these issues, it is useful to consider them in relation to the effects of each of the dimensions that are thought to define rurality (see Section 2.1). These effects are, demographical, economical, social structural and cultural.

### **4.2.1 Demographical and economical effects**

Many rural areas suffer from restricted access to support services due to their sparse populations and physical isolation from urban settlements. Organisations such as Women's Aid and Rape Crisis tend to find it easier to obtain funding in densely populated areas, and sometimes struggle to provide a service to surrounding rural areas. The Countryside Agency and Save The Children (2003) found gaps in service provision, from education to housing, for children affected by domestic violence in rural areas. Henderson (1998b) suggests that, because of inadequate service provision, rural victims of domestic violence may simply not know where to go for help.

Similar service constraints may also have a detrimental affect on the provision of drug and alcohol support services (Lawley & Deane, 2000) as well as probation services (Davies, 1999). Thus isolating offenders seeking help, as well as the victims.

Physical isolation is often compounded by inadequate public transport links. This can impact upon a victim's willingness to report and respond to incidents of crime. For instance, when women do seek help regarding domestic violence, the distance to the nearest refuge will often mean victims will have to move, possibly away from their families with little or no public transport to maintain contact (Lawley & Deane, 2000).

Exacerbated by inadequate public transport, the theft of a vehicle can also disproportionately affect rural victims, since many of these victims will rely on their vehicles for work. This has possible implications for the local economy.

In small areas, Williams (1999) suggests that even a theft from a phone box can cause disproportionate inconvenience and concern in rural areas if this results in it being out of action, since it may be the only phone box in the area. Worryingly perhaps for the offender, this added inconvenience may also result in a more severe sentence being passed by a rural magistrate, compared to that given for a comparable offence in an urban area.

#### **4.2.2 Social Structure and cultural effects**

In close-knit communities, it has been speculated that women may fear ostracism if they speak out about male violence (Williams, 1999). In addition, neighbouring rural residents may have a higher tolerance of certain acts such as racial harassment and antisocial behaviour due to a cultural tendency for communities in rural areas to keep ones own counsel (Williams, 1999). This may be especially applicable in cases of domestic violence in areas where a traditional obedience to husbands prevails and a feeling exists that problems should be kept within the family (Anderson, 1997; Derounian, 1993).

Social isolation can create further problems, such as the perceived lack of anonymity in rural areas and the consequent worry of confidentiality. Williams (1999) suggests it can be very difficult for women in rural areas to even visit the doctor's surgery. Henderson (1998a) suggested that a similar lack of perceived anonymity leads to drug users fearing identification when seeking help.

Social isolation can be particularly problematic for ethnic minority groups (Dhalech, 1999). This leads to a lack of confidence when seeking advice and information, and in reporting racial discrimination and abuse.

It can be seen how many of these issues could lead to problems in rural areas going un-reported. However, much of this is conjecture is based on anecdotes and opinion. More research is needed in order to substantiate these theories.

### **4.3 Rural Specific Crimes**

#### **4.3.1 Farm crime**

Since the main issue is crime *risk*, it has been suggested that insurance companies may provide a reliable source of data (at least for theft) (Coombes, Wong, Charlton and Atkins, 1994). Coombes *et al.* suggest that insurance data, while not necessarily able to estimate actual levels of crime (only the amount of claims), can be used to examine trends that can be compared both temporally and spatially. In contrast, neither the BCS nor police recorded crime data can reliably do both.

The National Farmers Union's (NFU) insurance company (NFU Mutual) suggests that in 2003 claims for theft of property on UK farms (excluding tractors) totalled an estimated £11.5 million (NFU Mutual, 2004). This reflected a general decrease in theft in rural areas from the previous year (NFU Mutual, 2004), which followed a small increase the year before that (NFU Mutual, 2003) (measured by the overall monetary value). However, what is significant in both years is the large regional variations with the value of insurance claims rising as much as 41 per cent in the North West while decreasing 26 per cent in the South West/South East in just one year (NFU Mutual, 2004).

Despite the overall decrease, a survey of NFU Mutual's 598 agents suggested that 60.5 per cent of its customers thought that rural crime had increased, compared with only 7.9 per cent reporting they thought it had fallen (see NFU Mutual, 2004). In addition, 82 per cent said they were more worried about crime now than they were a year before. Again, this finding suggests that people in rural areas have a perception that crime is increasing, despite the official statistics suggesting otherwise.

The NFU suggests that expensive tools such as welders, chainsaws and power drills are regularly stolen from farmsheds (NFU Mutual, 2004). Larger items such as 4x4 vehicles, tractors and all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) are also at risk along with diesel needed to drive such vehicles. In Craven, North Yorkshire, the problem was apparently so pronounced that the police took the unprecedented step of contacting all owners of a particular model of Land Rover in the area to warn them that nearly one in ten had been stolen since the beginning of the year. Moreover, the NFU report that there is a perception that thieves are becoming increasingly more organised and executing well-planned night raids, to steal heavy machinery in particular.

Theft of livestock can also be a problem in some areas (Anderson, 1997). In Australia, livestock theft constitutes the most common type of farm crime, costing the industry an estimated A\$72 million in 2001/2002 (see McCall & Homel, 2003).

It seems possible that theft in rural areas, particularly from farms and other isolated properties, is qualitatively, as well as quantitatively different from theft that occurs in urban areas. This may have implications on crime prevention both in theory and in practice. Unfortunately, while the NFU speculate on what items are commonly stolen, this appears to be based more on anecdotes than on hard data. Indeed, insurance claims, despite the argument put forward by Coombes *et al.* (1994), possibly under-represent the theft of small, low value items while potentially over-representing theft of more valuable items that might be the subject of a higher proportion of both legitimate and fraudulent claims. There is therefore a need to collect more detailed data on rural theft describing exactly what items are stolen, how often and from where, and consequently where these items end up. This issue is returned to in Section 5.

#### **4.3.2 Environmental and wildlife crime**

Although crimes against the environment do occur in urban areas, due to the isolation of many rural areas, environmental crime in the countryside can be particularly problematic (Weisheit & Donnermeyer, 2000). Such crimes include fly tipping, dumping of toxic waste, and illegal clearing of trees. It is estimated that simply clearing up other people's waste costs each farm an average of £300 a year (NFU, undated,a)

Wildlife crime encompasses a range of offences including trading in endangered species, poaching, and acts of animal cruelty such as badger baiting, and cock and dog fighting (Countryside agency, 2004a). However, statistics on the levels of these offences are not officially collated. It has been noted that such crimes are hard to quantify not least because accurate figures

do not exist on domestic and wildlife populations and that in many instances, the crime has no human witnesses or victims (Anderson, 1997).

The RSPB, however, reports that bird crime has been on a downward trend over recent years (RSPB, 2002). Nevertheless, the organisation believes that this may have been the result of the foot and mouth crisis restricting access to large parts of the countryside. The organisation suggest, however, that reported figures represent only a fraction of the total number of incidents that take place. Such offences include shooting, poisoning and taking of birds as well as illegal egg collecting. Links have also been suggested between some forms of wildlife crime, and other forms of drug-related, violent and property crime (see Anderson, 1997).

The issue of wildlife crime in the countryside has received considerable attention in recent years. Fox hunting is an apposite example of how crime is a cultural construct. Whereas foxes have been legally hunted for centuries, it seems likely that the activity will soon become a criminal offence. Whether or not this is right or wrong is beyond the scope of this paper. However, there are activities associated with hunting that are criminal in their own right. Similar to fox hunting, hare coursing involves large groups of people hunting hares with the aid of dogs. Although hare coursing is not as yet illegal, it is illegal to do so without permission from the land owner. An NFU survey (NFU, undated,b) found that 53 per cent of farmers in East Anglia had been threatened or attacked by illegal coursers, some seriously, for not permitting coursing on their land. Attacks included an arson attack on a farm, one farmer's son needing hospital treatment, and one group of coursers trying to run over a farmer in their car.

## 5 Explaining current levels of crime in rural areas and anticipation of the future

Definitional issues regarding what is rural and what is not aside, the findings discussed above provide an indication of the extent of crime problems faced in rural areas, and that rural crime problems, although similar, differ quantitatively and qualitative from urban crime problems. As should be clear from this literature, however, there has been relatively little empirical research concerned specifically with crime in rural areas. Most research that has focused on rural areas has been based on anecdotal evidence backed up by ungrounded theoretical explanations. Where empirical data have been collected, this has mostly been in order to contextualise urban statistics. Consequently, most criminological theory has been developed on the basis of research concerned with crime in urban geographies.

It has been argued that 'theories of crime that purport to be general theories are too often theories only of urban crime' (Weisheit & Wells, 1996, p. 394). However, Laub (1983) concluded that most 'urban' theories of crime and delinquency are likely to apply in rural settings, at least in relation to offender characteristics, because of the striking similarities between the two areas in terms of offenders' age, sex, race, and so on. It is unlikely, however, that all 'urban' theories will be entirely relevant to both.

Nevertheless, in an attempt to understand why crime might appear to be lower in rural areas, a useful starting point is to consider more general research concerned with factors associated with elevated crime risk<sup>13</sup>. According to routine activities theory (Cohen and Felson, 1979), a requisite for a crime to occur is the convergence in space and time of a motivated offender, the absence of capable guardians against crime and the availability of suitable targets. In the sections that follow, we will consider each of these factors in turn.

### 5.1 *Motivated Offenders*

Considering the availability of offenders in particular areas, research concerned with the life-course of offending, or the age-crime curve may be instructive. Studies consistently show that the peak age in offending occurs between the ages of 16 to 20 (e.g. Francis, Soothill, & Fligelstone, 2004), with offenders of this age typically committing more opportunistic, and less serious offences such as non-violent property crime and the handling of stolen goods. Data from the 2001 census, shown in Table 11, indicate that fewer people in their twenties, and more people over 45, live in rural than urban areas

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<sup>13</sup> In addition to helping us understand why the existing patterns might be as they are, this discussion also has important implications for anticipating how things may change in the future. Where the discussion focuses on criminological theories, this will be limited to an exposition of the important points and the interested reader will be referred to other reading material for more in-depth discussions.

(Countryside agency, 2004a). Thus, given that the age profile of rural communities tends to be somewhat older than that of other locales, this may suggest that there will be a smaller active offender population that lives and offends within rural areas.

**Table 11:** Age profile by area

	<b>Urban areas</b>	<b>Rural areas</b>
15-24	13.1%	10.6%
25-44	30.5%	26.4%
45+	37.7%	44.9%

Source: adapted from Countryside agency (2004a)

Moreover, offender activity and crime incident rates have been found to be higher in areas that are more deprived in social and economic terms in various locations in Britain, including Cardiff (Herbert 1977), Merseyside (Hirschfield et al 1995) and Sheffield (Baldwin and Bottoms 1976). Research also consistently demonstrates an association between area deprivation and both property offences (e.g. Block 1979) and violent crime (Curry & Spurgel 1988). Add to this the finding that offenders typically commit crimes within close proximity to their residential locations (e.g. Wiles and Costello, 2000; Rengert, Piquero, & Jones, 1999) and this suggests that offenders frequently live and offend within deprived areas. The 2004 State of the Countryside report suggests that rural areas suffer from less unemployment and have higher rates of income (Countryside agency, 2004a). Thus, on the basis of these findings it seems reasonable to suggest that there may be a lower concentration of offenders living in rural areas, which may in part explain the lower levels of crime typically observed.

In relation to the socio-demographic characteristics of rural areas, according to the countryside agency (2004a), over the last four years there has been a net migration of around 352,000 people into rural areas. This could substantially affect the socio-demographic mix of the residential population. Consequently, there is a concern that there is an increasing in-migration of affluent newcomers, which will mean that the subjective and objective relative deprivation within rural areas will increase (Cloke & Davies, 1992), with possible implications for peoples' motivation to commit crime. Further research would, of course, be required to confirm or refute these hypotheses.

## **5.2 Capable Guardians against crime**

Capable guardians are not limited to police officers or their crime reduction partners, but may for instance include neighbours or passers by. For instance, the availability of people in an area increases the level of natural surveillance, which can increase an offender's perception of the consequent chance of apprehension should they commit a crime, thereby discouraging offending behaviour (see Felson and Clarke, 1998 for a discussion of the rational offender).

### 5.2.1 Density of acquaintanceship and informal control

People living in small communities are more likely to know one another socially than people living in large cities. The degree to which members of the community know each other is termed 'density of acquaintanceship' (see Weisheit & Donnermeyer, 2000). It has been suggested that a high density of acquaintanceship leads to increased watchfulness of citizens (informal surveillance), which in turn leads to lower rates of crime (Freudenburg, 1986).

This is closely related to the concept of social disorganisation which is defined as the inability of community members to achieve shared values or to solve jointly experienced problems (Bursik, 1988). Social disorganization theory suggests that offending occurs where impaired social bonds are insufficient to encourage or enforce legitimate behaviour and discourage deviant behaviour. (Bottoms & Wiles, 1992). In relation to this, it is apparent from the BCS (Dodd *et al.*, 2004) that relative to the average risk across all households, the risk of being the victim of burglary is doubled for households where the householder has been resident for less than one year. One interpretation of this finding is that, relative to other residents, such householders will have had less opportunity to form social bonds. More direct evidence in support of this theory comes from a study by Osgood and Chambers (2000) which demonstrated that juvenile violence in rural areas was associated with rates of residential instability, family disruption, and ethnic heterogeneity – all components of social disorganisation. In addition, it has been reported that levels of neighbourhood activity in the UK are strongly associated with population size (see Countryside agency, 2004a).

Weisheit & Donnermeyer (2000) suggest that density of acquaintanceship is facilitated by the relative stability of the local population. It has been suggested that rural citizens less frequently change addresses than urban citizens and often stay in the same county, or house, for several generations. Considering fear of crime, this tends to be greater in rural areas which are subject to rapid change. Williams (1999) notes that this was first observed in America in the 1980s, where settled communities experiencing rapid population growth and social change also experienced an increase in people's fear of crime, although this was not accompanied by an increase in actual levels of crime itself.

The social disorganization theory, however, is far from accepted by all commentators. Barclay, Donnermeyer, and Jobes (2004) suggest that high cohesiveness within communities may actually enable the commission of some crimes due to increased tolerance and 'techniques of neutralisation' whereby people develop a set of justifications that allow them to excuse their, or their neighbour's deviant behaviour.

Notwithstanding these issues, as was highlighted above, in recent years more people are moving into rural areas than are leaving them – possibly due to the perception that the countryside is a crime-free place to live (Yarwood, 2001). It is conceivable that this trend of counter-urbanisation is disturbing the stability of rural populations, forming class divisions and reducing density of

acquaintanceship. All of which could impact upon levels of crime or residents fear of it in the future.

### **5.3 Suitable targets**

Having discussed the role of the availability of offenders within rural areas and the impact of informal guardianship, our discussion will now turn to the third element of what Felson (2002) refers to as the chemistry for crime, the availability of suitable targets or potential victims.

#### **5.3.1 The opportunity structure of crime**

A number of theories have emerged over the last twenty years that highlight the importance of opportunity in relation to crime (see Felson & Clarke, 1998). These theories all argue the case that crime is an interaction between the offender and the setting. Felson and Clarke argue that no crime can occur without the physical opportunities to carry it out and therefore opportunity should be considered as a 'root cause'.

Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) articulated a crime pattern theory that attempts to explain why crime is distributed in geographical space as it is. For instance, why are some areas hot spots of crime whilst others are not? Firstly, they distinguish between *crime generators*, *crime attractors* and *crime neutral areas*. The first of these are areas in which large numbers of people are attracted for reasons unrelated to crime. These would include shopping precincts, leisure facilities or transport hubs. This type of area generates the chemistry for crime as a by-product of high area usage both by offenders and potential victims. For instance, upon visiting a shopping precinct for legitimate reasons, offenders may become aware of good opportunities for crime and subsequently take advantage of them.

In contrast, crime attractors are those areas in which well-known opportunities for offending exist that attract offenders to them for the purpose of offending first and foremost. Examples of this type of area include red-light districts or large insecure car parks. Finally, crime neutral areas are those that do not attract offenders from elsewhere, nor do they generate high levels of crime as a consequence of the volume of people that they attract. Instead, the crime experienced within them is largely due to the activities of local offenders. The Brantingham's point out that, of course, no area will be defined exclusively in terms of one of the three area types. Some areas may be crime attractors for one type of crime, whilst being a generator or crime neutral area for others. Moreover, areas may be a crime generator for a while and subsequently become a crime attractor. Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) validate the theory by demonstrating that in Cambridge crime risks vary by type of land use in a way consistent with their hypotheses. For instance, crime rates were highest in areas with sports clubs or restaurants, whilst they were lowest in areas that included iron mongers or tailors.

Of the three types of area discussed, rural areas are perhaps most likely to be described as a mixture of crime neutral areas or crime generators. However, this will to some extent vary across rural areas depending on their proximity to other areas and offender's awareness of them. Thus, thinking of rural areas in these terms may help to explain why they appear to experience lower rates of victimisation than other areas. It may also highlight the implications of the possible impacts on crime that changes in land use within rural areas might have. For example, if the residential population within rural communities continues to increase, this may be followed by an increase in recreational and other facilities which could generate new opportunities for crime.

The places in which offenders commit crimes is not surprisingly believed to be influenced by their routine activities – the places where they live, travel to work, visit friends, or enjoy social or leisure activities. Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) provide a way of thinking about an offender's awareness space in terms of nodes, paths and edges. Nodes are people's everyday destinations, such as those examples provided at the start of this paragraph. Pathways are the networks, such as streets or footpaths, along which people travel to get to their routine destinations (nodes). Edges are either physical or perceptual barriers that distinguish different areas along pathways. Examples include different types of land use on either side of a road, or areas unfamiliar to an offender that border familiar ones. As a result of travelling to and from different nodes (via pathways), offenders routinely pass a variety of areas which may offer opportunities for crime. Risks of crime can be particularly heightened at the edges of an offender's pathways. This is because they will be able to move freely and blend in at these locations, whilst they may not go so unnoticed in the areas beyond the edges, as these will, by definition, be unfamiliar to them. One implication of the theory is that rural areas that share a border with a high crime area may be more susceptible to crime than other similar rural areas that are more isolated from offenders' routine activities. Unfortunately, as far as the authors are aware, there exists no research that has examined this issue in the rural context.

Focusing on people's routine everyday activities, the Brantingham's discuss their awareness spaces and how these develop. The land use in an area has a considerable impact upon who goes there as part of their daily routines. As discussed above, many people visit areas with high concentrations of recreational facilities, less perhaps will frequent rural areas. Many people will travel to the city to go to work, while less may commute to rural areas. The main point is that people can develop a detailed awareness of areas other than those in which they live, simply because they travel to them as part of their daily routines. This becomes particularly important in relation to crime when we consider the areas for which offenders are likely to develop such mental maps. One possibility for the relatively low rates of crime in rural areas, is that offenders that live in urban areas generally have little reason to travel to or through rural areas for legitimate reasons, and hence do not develop an awareness of them. However, if the theory is correct we would expect to observe higher rates of crime in rural areas where 'outsiders' are more likely to travel to. Examples of these types of area would include those where there are higher levels of tourism or where transport links take large numbers of

people through them or nearby. Indeed, there is a widespread belief that crime in rural communities is not committed by rural people, but by people travelling into the area from outside (Anderson, 1999). This belief is not new. The report of the Royal commission on the County Constabulary in 1841 reported concern that serious crime in country areas was increasingly the work of 'strangers from the great towns'. In 1841 it was believed the criminals were using newly opened rail and canal networks to target rural communities (see Anderson, 1999), while nowadays it is improving road and motorway networks that provide good access and an easy escape (Derounian, 1993).

Although it is possible that some criminals travel from the city to the country to commit crime, evidence suggests the majority of criminals commit crime close to where they live (Wiles & Costello, 2000; Rengert *et al.*, 1999). However, this evidence has been derived from a predominantly urban perspective. As far as the authors are aware, the question of whether rural areas that are frequently visited by outsiders are particularly at risk from travelling criminals remains unanswered in the research literature. If the answer to this question is in the affirmative then it would also have clear implications for the changing face of rural areas.

The above discussion provides a framework for thinking about some of the factors that may explain why crime appears to be lower in rural than urban areas. In the next two sections we will focus on more recent research concerned with the prediction of precisely where crimes will occur within an area and what is most likely to be stolen as a result of property offences.

#### **5.4 The communicability of risk**

As discussed above, research consistently demonstrates that one of the best predictors of crime risk is past victimisation. Thus, once victimised, the risk of (re)victimisation substantially increases. The implications of such findings are difficult to overstate. However, recent research demonstrates that a crime communicates more than this. In a series of recent studies, it has been shown that once a property has been burgled, houses in the near vicinity are at an increased risk of burglary for a short period of time (Johnson & Bowers, 2004; Bowers & Johnson, 2005). Thus, houses adjacent to a burgled home, and those on the same side of the street are at a particular risk of burglary for a short period of time. Similar patterns are evident for car crime (Johnson & Bowers, 2005). The assumption made is that the same offenders will typically be involved in crimes that conform to this spatial and temporal pattern.

In relation to burglary, this pattern also has been shown to be more evident in affluent urban areas (Bowers & Johnson, 2005). The authors of that research conceptualise burglars as being optimal foragers, seeking to maximise the rewards of committing crime, whilst minimising the effort and risks involved. In relation to this point, they suggest that burglary in affluent areas is perhaps less opportunistic and more planned than burglary in deprived urban neighbourhoods, with high-income homes being specifically targeted. Interestingly, this conclusion chimes with some of those already discussed in

relation to property crime in rural areas. Thus, given that offenders may have to travel greater distances in rural than urban areas, it seems possible that the communicability of risk that is particularly evident in affluent urban areas may also be apparent in rural ones. This would have clear implications for crime reduction. Alternatively, the distances over which many offenders may need to travel to offend in rural areas may mean that this type of strategy is less frequently adopted in rural areas. Unfortunately, no research of this kind has been conducted for rural areas to date.

## **5.5 CRAVED**

In addition to considering where crimes will occur, research has also focused on what items are most likely to be stolen in property crimes. Clarke (1999) posited that 'Hot Products' are those which are most likely to satisfy the acronym CRAVED. As Felson puts it '...[when stealing property] the offender has six problems to solve. He or she wants to be able to **C**onceal it, **R**emove it, have it **A**vailable, find it **V**aluable, **E**njoy it, and **D**ispose of it readily' (Felson, 2002, pp28-30, emphasis added). Cash is the ultimate hot product fulfilling each of the requirements of this model. Jewellery is another good example. A large TV although valuable is difficult to conceal and remove and hence is less likely to be stolen than lighter but equally valuable products. Offenders are more likely to steal items that are fun to consume, either because they can enjoy them themselves or dispose of them easily. Thus, popular CDs will be more likely to be stolen than classical ones.

It is possible that the difference between items stolen in rural and urban areas may reflect changes in some of these parameters. Firstly, some property, such as livestock and tractors, are not likely to be as available in urban areas. Other items, such as tools and heavy machinery, may be more concealable and removable in rural areas where items can be put into vans quickly and easily with less people around to witness the event. Felson (2002) notes that the weight of goods stolen increases as you move further away from the city, probably reflecting the mode of transport used in different areas. In the city, offenders are likely to travel on foot, whereas in the country they are likely to prefer cars or vans.

To reduce the theft of items that have been identified as being stolen in rural areas (e.g. tractors and tools and machinery), attention might need to be given to the other CRAVED properties. For example, tractor theft could be reduced by making tractors less removable using practical interventions that have been successful in reducing urban vehicle crime such as immobilisers or steering wheel locks. Heavy machinery and equipment theft could be reduced by property marking and other techniques that reduce the disposability of an item. However, the research concerned with this issue that was identified as part of the literature review was fairly anecdotal in nature, and hence there is a need for more systematic research to describe fully what types of property are taken in rural areas.

## **6 Tackling rural crime**

Crime prevention has developed largely in response to urban crime problems without much consideration for the rural context. This is because, historically, rural crime has not been considered serious enough to justify a preventive response (Gilling & Pierpoint, 1999). However, crime is different in rural areas. Even where the crime statistics look the same, the ways crime manifests itself and the effects it can have on its victims can be different. These differences need to be reflected in the ways rural crime is tackled (Lawtley, Deane, & Chamberlain, 2001). The following section describes how rural areas are currently policed and what strategies are being used to address rural crime issues.

### **6.1 Policing rural areas**

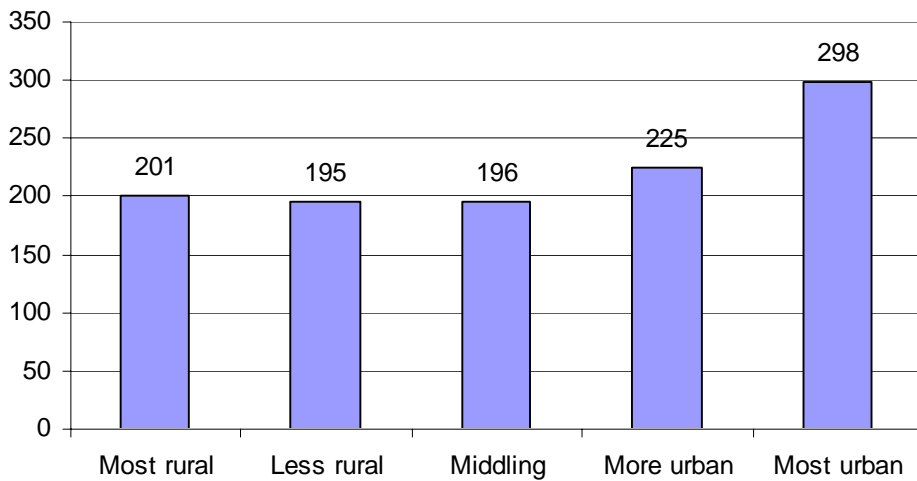
The romantic idea of a 'village constable', although arguably still part of the mythical rural idyll, has not been a reality since reforms in the structure of policing in the UK were introduced in the twentieth century, culminating in the 1964 Police Act (Mawby, 2004). The act introduced a radical review of policing and led to the amalgamation of police forces from 158 to 43 in the interests of efficiency (Yarwood, 2001). In light of these changes, many forces introduced systems which emphasised reaction to incidents rather than an integrated police presence. This had the effect of distancing themselves from the public both physically and metaphorically.

The emphasis on reactive policing has meant that most officers, stations and facilities are located in urban areas where, because of the greater population, the police have more incidents to deal with. This has seen the closure of many rural police stations, with others only receiving part-time staffing. In 1991, only two percent of rural parishes contain permanently staffed police stations (Lievalsey and Maynard, 1991). Calls for service from rural areas thus regularly involve officers travelling long distances from the nearest urban area thus increasing response time.

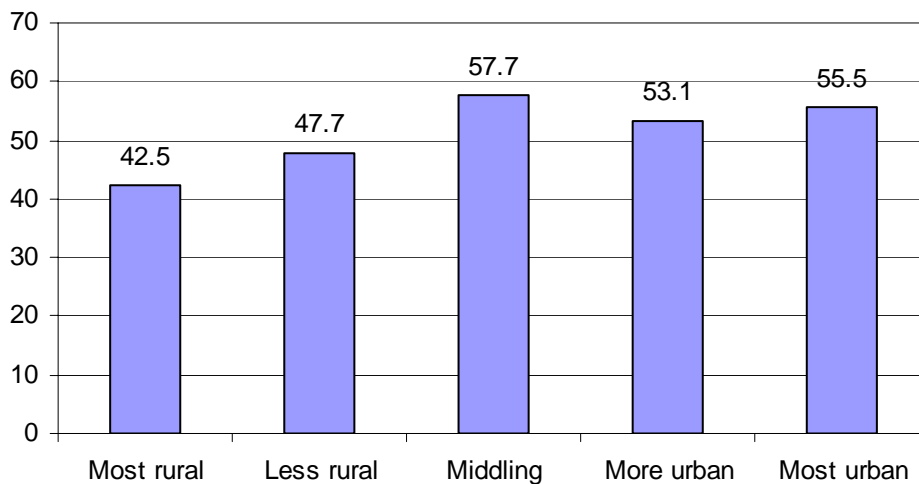
The difference in service levels between urban and rural areas is illustrated by the fact that 20 of the 31 English shire police authorities set separate response targets for urban and rural areas, typically 10 minutes for urban and 20 minutes for rural (Countryside agency, 2004a). However, in 2002, it was found that these targets were more often being met for rural than urban responses (Countryside Agency, 2003).

Figure 7 suggests that concern that rural areas have fewer police officers per resident is justified. However, in terms of the number of recorded incidents of crime per officer, rural areas have the fewest (Figure 8).

**Figure 7:** Average number of officers per 100,000 population by area type (2001). (Taken from Aust & Simmons, 2002)



**Figure 8:** Ratio of recorded crime to number of police officers (2001). (Taken from Aust & Simmons, 2002)



Despite concern from rural habitants that they are not being effectively policed, given the lower rate of crime in rural areas, it is argued that there is less need for such a police presence and that some rural areas are actually being over-policed (Young, 1993). Indeed, people in rural areas have consistently rated their local police as doing a better job than their urban counterparts (see Aust & Simmons, 2002; Sims & Myhill, 2001). The recent concern, however, appears to be related more with increasing inaccessibility of the police exacerbated by the imposition of centralised call systems and the closure, and limited opening hours, of local substations, rather than the actual service they provide (Mawby, 2004).

Where there is a police presence in rural areas, officers tend to be more integrated in the local community than their urban colleagues, who often have little direct connection with the areas they police (Dingwall, 1999; Young 1993). This heightened community integration leads to an increased level of

informal policing. Officers often find themselves mediating between a complainant and an alleged offender trying to enforce an agreed compromise by using the carrot of avoiding formal proceedings (Williams, 1999). The value of informal policing in rural areas has been widely stressed (e.g. Anderson, 1997; Weisheit, Wells & Falcone, 1994).

If the trend towards greater centralization continues to mean the withdrawal of police resources from rural areas, the current informality of rural policing may soon become a thing of the past (Williams, 1999).

## **6.2 Crime prevention strategies**

### **6.2.1 Improving rural policing**

The rural white paper (DETR, 2000) identifies physical distance and the isolation it causes as the main problems associated with rural policing. Further, long service response times and the perception of vulnerability in rural areas has contributed to a general dissatisfaction with centralised government. To resolve these issues, new policies and strategies have been introduced that place greater emphasis on community opinion and involvement in crime prevention, such as the introduction of 'special constables' and neighbourhood watch schemes

The 1998 Crime and Disorder Act was introduced to encourage 'joined up thinking' and partnership working. The Act places legal responsibilities on the police and local authorities to co-ordinate the development of crime and safety strategies on a local level. How the community is addressed is an important issue, however. There is a real danger that only dominant concerns will be heard, existing social divisions will be reinforced and that people in most need of help will be neglected (Williams, 1999). There is simultaneously a danger that those people and voices already perceived as a 'threat', and those that do not conform to the rural ideals of the majority, will not only be excluded from local decision making but may possibly even become victimised because of it (see Yarwood, 2001).

New technology being introduced may help to improve rural policing. For example, the Public Safety Radio Communication Project aims to improve mobile communication allowing officers to spend less time at the police station and more time on patrol. This will be especially helpful in rural areas where officers may patrol many miles from their station.

However, Mawby (2004) suggests that if the police are to strengthen their links with rural communities and to better reassure the most vulnerable, it is more than a matter of extra patrols but also an improvement in the accessibility of the police that is needed.

Attempts to address the accessibility of police services in rural areas have included setting up a mobile police station in Gloucester and community-run

police contact points (see Countryside agency, 2004a). For example, a pilot scheme has recently been launched in Norfolk to provide limited police services in local post offices in the region. Although the pilot is still at an early stage for evaluation, the idea is being met with a mixed response (see BBC News, 2004).

### **6.2.2 Non-police strategies**

Although many sources of crime prevention advice prescribe recommendations as to how rural crime can be prevented (e.g. Deane & Doran, 2002; Crime Concern, 1995; and various crime prevention websites), these are based on 'urban' criminological theories and evaluated in urban areas. There is a paucity of research concerned with the impact of crime prevention interventions when implemented in rural areas. We discuss here those examples that we have been able to identify.

As discussed above, prior victimisation is an excellent predictor of future risk (see Pease, 1998). Not surprisingly then, in urban areas a number of interventions have been implemented to reduce repeat victimisation. For instance, in the original demonstration project, Forrester, Chatterton and Pease (1988) implemented a burglary reduction scheme that included the removal of coin operated utility meters and a focus on the prevention of repeat victimisation through so-called target hardening, which includes the installation of new locks and bolts to peoples homes where vulnerabilities exist. The scheme was hailed a success, reducing burglary in the area of operation by around 70 per cent. Other similar schemes concerned with burglary reduction (e.g. Tilley, 1993; Johnson, Bowers, Young, & Hirschfield, 2001) and car crime (Chenery, Holt, & Pease, 1997) have also been implemented with varying degrees of successfully, some more effectively than others. Those that have focused on preventing repeat domestic violence (Lloyd, Farrell, & Pease, 1994; Farrell and Buckley, 1999) have also reported positive impacts.

As discussed above, repeat victimisation is prevalent in rural and urban areas alike, though to a lesser degree in the former. As part of the Home Office's recent Crime Reduction Programme, two repeat victimisation burglary reduction schemes were implemented in a rural area in East Anglia. The evaluation of the scheme reported that it failed to register an effect (Jones, 2003). However, Jones attributed much of this failure to poor implementation. For instance, burgled homes only received preventive measures following two or even three burglaries rather than after the first offence, the model usually adopted in schemes of this kind. With this in mind, the results of the evaluation were hardly surprising and this means that the impact of such strategies in rural areas remains unknown, demanding yet further attention.

Neighbourhood watch covers 10 per cent of all homes in Britain. Variations on the theme include Farm Watch, River Watch, Horse Watch, Church Watch, Guest House Watch and even Milk Float Watch (Countryside Agency, 2004b). Evidence of the effectiveness of neighbourhood watch schemes is sketchy. Although the impact of neighbourhood watch schemes is notoriously hard to assess (Bennett, 1990), Laycock and Tilley (1995) concluded that the

effectiveness of neighbourhood watch style schemes varies highly from location to location and are therefore often very limited in effectiveness. In a survey of 69 neighbourhood watch schemes in rural Herefordshire, Yarwood and Edwards (1995) concluded that it was unlikely that the schemes played a major role in preventing crime since only five schemes claimed their intervention had ever led to police making arrests.

Yarwood and Edwards (1995) note the paradox whereby crime prevention initiatives, such as neighbourhood watch, are easiest to organize in the very areas where they are least needed, i.e. those with a high density of acquaintanceship and increased informal surveillance. What is more, volunteers involved in rural voluntary agencies are often those that are in the least need of help themselves being predominantly male, middle-class, retired people. Consequently, if schemes reflect social class rather than social need, there is a danger that police time and resources may be drawn into the wrong areas and away from the areas of need (Yarwood, 2001).

That being said, crime prevention initiatives have a number of functions apart from primary prevention: if they increase public faith in the police, provide a focus for community organisation, and bring people together to raise awareness of specific crime prevention measures, they have clearly served a function (Williams, 1999). Evidence from the Scottish Farm Crime Survey (Laird, Granville, & Montgomery, 1999) found that approximately two thirds of farmers surveyed believed that farm watch schemes were effective in reducing farm crime. Indeed, Yarwood and Edwards (1995), despite their criticisms and the absence of a measurable impact on crime, concluded that neighbourhood watch schemes did reduce fear of crime and improve feelings of security in rural areas.

## **7 Summary and conclusions**

This review has examined crime statistics in 'rural' areas and considered case studies and anecdotal accounts of the experience of crime in these localities. Much of the discussion has been framed relative to urban areas in England and Wales, but to provide a broader context, where relevant international comparisons have also been made.

It appears that both crime and fear of crime are less prevalent in rural areas than they are in urban areas, particularly inner-cities. However, this does not mean crime is not an issue in rural areas. There is a danger that perceiving rural crime rates to be lower than urban rates may foster the idea that less crime means no problem. Such sweeping generalisations about rural crime may mask quantitative and qualitative differences that exist between and within rural areas. Comparisons with crime rates in other countries suggest that crime risk in rural areas of England and Wales is higher than the national average for many other countries.

In general, rural areas suffer from very similar crimes to those suffered in urban areas, however the experience of being victim to these crimes may be very different. Further research, like that described below, looking at how, why and what crimes are committed in rural areas may help to reveal significant differences between urban and rural crime as well as providing necessary information to help local communities respond to their crime problems.

As part of the review, we have also provided a tentative commentary on why differences in the experience of crime between rural and urban areas may exist. However, what should be clear from the discussion is that currently there is little empirical evidence to enable the hypotheses to be tested in any robust way. Clearly what is needed is more focused empirical investigation into rural issues, devising and testing theoretical explanations which can then be used to inform policy and crime prevention practice in rural areas. In this final section consideration is given to the gaps in the research literature with a view to setting an agenda for further research. Implications for policy and practice are also discussed.

### **7.1 Further research**

It may be that crime in rural areas is considerably less complex than crime in urban areas due to potentially fewer acting and interacting causal factors. Therefore, studying crime in rural areas is important, not just in measuring and assessing rural crime problems, but in advancing criminological theory in general. Rural areas provide a large sample of areas with varying socio-demographic, geographic and economic profiles. The possibilities for research of both theoretical and practical importance are considerable. We have noted

some possibilities throughout the review, but will focus here on that which most urgently suggests itself.

### **7.1.1 Do crime risks vary across rural areas?**

First and foremost, basic research needs to be conducted to examine variations in crime between rural areas. Yarwood (2001) points out that while a rigid definition of rurality is necessary for comparative analysis with urban and rural data, it is important not to treat rural settlements as homogeneous entities. Instead, research needs to determine whether there are systematic differences in crime rates across different areas that are associated with factors such as the socio-demographic makeup of the areas considered.

In relation to this point, the finding that rural areas are typically associated with higher than average levels of affluence (see Section 5) raises the question of whether or not it is appropriate to simply compare average levels of crime in rural areas with those in urban areas. The reason for this is that the two types of areas may contain very different mixtures of affluent and deprived households. Consequently, general comparisons of crime rates in rural and urban areas may confound rurality with affluence, thereby reflecting the impact of the latter rather than the former on levels of crime. A more precise understanding of exactly *why* crime rates appear to be lower in rural areas that was not confounded for the reasons already discussed would also, of course, have clear implications for crime reduction more generally.

The recent development of a new area classification, which provides a systematic area classification at the small area level, should facilitate research of this kind. Used in concert with information concerned with land use, socio-demographic data and crime data it should be possible to examine crime rates in different types of urban settlement and, importantly, to tease apart the roles played by rurality and deprivation in determining the criminogenics of an area. For example, are crime rates higher in areas where tourism is greatest?

Given the apparent in-migration to rural areas, more research concerned with social disorganisation in rural areas could have important implications for the anticipation of future crime problems. If there is a strong relationship between levels of crime and the density of social acquaintanceship, then the current trend of counter-urbanisation could lead to an increase of crime problems in rural areas. Thus, the police and their crime reduction partners may need to consider preventive measures in areas where these kinds of changes occur. Only through properly executed research sensitive to the issues discussed in this review will it be possible to anticipate these problems and devise appropriate responses to them. Such research could usefully examine patterns within rural areas and perhaps be supplemented by case studies in urban ones, particularly those with similar socio-economic characteristics to rural neighbourhoods.

An exploration of the hypotheses generated by the crime pattern theory of Brantingham and Brantingham (1995) are also relevant here, particularly in relation to edges. An obvious research question would be to see if crime rates are higher in rural areas that border urban areas with high crime rates. A

variety of spatial econometric techniques have been developed that would allow such questions to be explored in a systematic way whilst controlling for the influence of other factors such as the socioeconomic makeup of the areas considered. If such patterns were apparent, the next question would be to explore possible avenues for crime reduction.

### **7.1.2 Where do the offenders come from?**

This leads us on to the issue of who commits crime in rural areas. Is the majority of crime committed by those who live within the area, or by offenders who 'commute' for the purposes of committing crime? Case studies conducted in a variety of areas with different demographic characteristics could be conducted to explore this issue. Answering such questions is important both for crime reduction theory and practice. Consider, for example, that if in an area the majority of crimes were committed by local prolific offenders, then the balance of crime control effort should be directed towards the detection of offences. If, however, it was apparent that the majority of crime was committed by travelling offenders who commit only a small number of crimes in the area, then crime reduction resources would more usefully be focused upon reducing opportunities for offending, as it would be apparent that the opportunities for crime were clearly evident to offenders but that the chance of detection would be limited.

A related question concerns the journey to crime. That is, how far do offenders travel to commit crime in rural areas? The research conducted to date concerned with the journey to crime has focused on crime in urban areas. However, due to differences in housing density and transport networks in rural and urban areas it is likely that the journey to crime will differ, with greater effort and transport perhaps required in rural areas. Moreover, to avoid recognition, offenders that live within rural areas, particularly those with a high density of social acquaintanceship, may tend to avoid committing offences within their own settlement, preferring instead to offend in other similar nearby areas. Determining the likely range over which offenders are generally prepared to travel and how they do it has implications both for crime detection and prevention. An investigation of whether offenders typically commit crime on their own or whether they work with co-offenders would also be of value. Research of this kind could be conducted by analysing police recorded crime data for crimes that have been detected, but it would be wise also to conduct interviews with offenders known to have committed offences within rural areas (for an example, see Wiles and Costello, 2000).

### **7.1.3 Repeat victimisation and crime reduction**

Over a decade of research has illustrated the importance of studying repeat victimisation. Whilst experiencing a crime can be traumatic, the impact of repeatedly being the victim of crime can be so affecting that the emotional experience can resemble bereavement (Shaw, 2001). As discussed, numerous evaluations have shown the positive impacts of concentrating crime prevention resources on the reduction of repeat victimisation. However the unsuccessful implementation of such schemes in rural areas means that their effectiveness in this context is still unknown. Importantly, successful

intervention requires a proper understanding of the problem (see Tilley, 1993). Yet, research concerned with repeat victimisation in rural areas is notable only by its absence. One possible reason for this is that identifying incidents of repeat victimisation from police recorded crime data is possible but no easy task (for a discussion, see Johnson *et al.*, 1997). However, the implications of the findings of research conducted in urban areas are so compelling that research into this phenomenon in rural areas is well overdue.

A natural extension to this area of research would be to examine the communicability of crime risks in rural areas. If crimes occur in a similar way to that observed in urban areas – where neighbours are also at an elevated risk following a burglary – this would have further implications for the prevention and detection of crime. For instance, Bowers *et al.* (2004) have developed a new crime mapping system for use in urban areas that can predict the future locations of burglary that far exceeds the accuracy of existing systems. Similar advances could be made in relation to the prediction of future crime locations in rural areas. Again, the possibility exists that such research would also have implications for our understanding of crime more generally.

Considering existing work concerned with crime reduction, the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 requires all local community safety partnerships to carry out in-depth audits of crime and disorder and develop strategies through which to deal with them. Due to the large number of partnerships in rural areas, an analysis of these partnerships strategies and their consequent effectiveness may be a useful avenue through which to evaluate and evidence existing crime prevention initiatives in rural areas. It is possible that the partnerships may also be potential vehicles through which to introduce and assess new, rural tailored, interventions.

#### **7.1.4 What affects perceptions of crime in rural areas?**

To better understand crime problems in rural areas and more appropriately tailor responses to them, more research also is needed into public perceptions of crime and community. Although Jackson (2004) has conducted research of this kind on a small scale, there is a need to test these ideas on a bigger stage. There are some promising ideas and perspectives out there that need to be put into practice. For instance, what social conditions are being articulated by public attitudes toward crime in rural areas? Are there issues of stereotyping and scapegoating? What function does seeing crime as a metaphor for social conditions play? Thus, research could usefully examine how people conceive social order, what they see as hostile to that social order, and why the issue of crime comes to articulate such things (and with what functions). A most fruitful line of enquiry would attempt to integrate some of the ideas that have been flowing out of recent qualitative and theoretical work into the fear of crime. A research project that integrates quantitative and qualitative methods would be ideal.

Such a perspective has implications for public demands on the police. If crime and anti-social behaviour are seen to weaken the ability of the community to impose its own values and standards of behaviour and moral discipline, then people may turn to the police to reassert this social order in addition to

reducing crime. To more effectively respond to public demands, we need to better understand the broad range of factors that motivate the need for reassurance and the form it may most effectively take. Such research would have clear implications for the way in which rural areas should be policed on a day-to-day basis and how resources can optimally be deployed to reassure the public and reduce crime.

## **7.2 Last words**

As discussed above, although less prevalent than in urban areas, crime *is* a problem in rural areas. Only through carefully executed research can the true extent and nature of the problem be understood and appropriate responses to it devised and implemented. In this final section we have discussed some areas of research that we think could be prioritised. Of course, many other avenues for research may be equally fruitful. For instance, a rigorous analysis of what items are most frequently stolen in rural areas could inform crime prevention policy or even legislation. Research concerned with antisocial behaviour could help unravel how this affects people's fear of crime, or determine whether it is an antecedent to more serious crime. Many other possibilities exist. The main issue is that there remain many more questions than answers and we probably don't know what we don't know.

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