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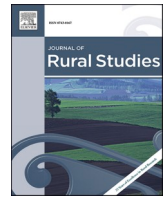
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Crime and safety in rural areas: A systematic review of the English-language literature 1980–2020

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ABSTRACT

This article explores the nature and frequency of crimes and people's safety perceptions in rural areas using a systematic review of the literature. It explores four decades of English-language publications on crime and safety in rural areas from several major databases; mainly Scopus, JSTOR and ScienceDirect. The number of retrieved documents was 840, of which 410 were selected for in-depth analysis and their topics later categorized by theme. We found that rural crime research took off after the mid-1980s and experienced an increase during the 2010s. Despite the domination by North American, British and Australian scholarship, studies from other parts of the world (including the Global South) are increasingly being published as well. Publications on rural crime patterns (e.g., farm crime) compose over one-fifth of the reviewed literature. This together with rural policing/criminal justice and violence constitute the three largest themes in rural criminology research. With ever-increasing links between the local and the global, this review article advocates for tailored multilevel responses to rural crimes that, more than ever, are generated by processes far beyond their localities.

1. Introduction

Until recently, criminology has neglected the nature and levels of crime outside the urban realm. This is no surprise as crime tends to concentrate in large urban areas and police resources are directed to the areas perceived as problematic. Yet, there are many reasons why scholars, decision-makers and society should care about crime and safety in rural areas. First, low crime rates in rural areas are mistakenly taken as a sign that crime is not a problem for those living there (Yarwood, 2001). Second, we argue that crime is not simply an urban phenomenon; it embodies the characteristics of the environment in which it is embedded, and in certain cases, crime commission is only possible within those situational, rural contexts (e.g., Stassen and Ceccato, 2020). Finally, crime in rural areas is in constant transformation given local and global influences, which imposes challenges for policing and, not least, for the long-term sustainability of rural areas.

In this article we examine the growing body of literature on crime and safety in rural areas via a systematic review of four decades of publications, from 1980 to 2020. We focus on English-language literature (in Scopus, JSTOR, and ScienceDirect) using articles, books, and book chapters, and exclude so-called 'gray literature' as much as possible. Furthermore, we exclude studies dealing with emergency

services overall and focus instead on the governance of safety issues, namely the role of the police and policing. While including rural fears not solely based on crime but also on the 'other', we do not include, e.g., farmers' fear of GMO development, or safety perceptions in terms of fear and anxiety due to natural hazards such as hurricanes, and similar.

While systematic reviews are largely associated with the field of healthcare and medicine, they have also been applied in fields of social sciences (Dacombe, 2017), business management (Adams et al., 2017; Campbell et al., 2018), STEM-research (Bilotta et al., 2014; Borrego et al., 2014; Martins-Melo et al., 2022), as well as crime and safety (Ceccato et al., 2019, 2022a). There are a number of advantages of systematic reviews compared to other types of reviews. For one, the systematic reviews are well-established and have long been standardized (Moher et al., 2009). Compared with scoping reviews and traditional literature reviews, systematic reviews aim to minimize bias and provide reliable findings; this through systematic data collection and an often included meta-analysis of the results (Khan et al., 2003; Munn et al., 2018). Systematic reviews produce better consistency and generalizability of the findings as they can open the opportunity to be reproduced by others (Gopalakrishnan and Ganeshkumar, 2013). For a relatively smaller but growing research field such as rural criminology, a systematic review is especially important for continuously updating the

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current knowledge bank.

This systematic literature review follows and complements the existent compilations of rural crime literature by Hubbard et al. (1980), by Marshall and Johnson (2005) and on rural policing by Tucker (2015), as these previous reviews were neither systematic (Higgins and Green, 2011) nor comprehensive as they mainly focused on the United Kingdom and the United States. Later, Weisheit (2016) systematically reviewed rural crime research from outside the United States from 2000 to 2014, but excluded books and book chapters, and strictly focused on rural crime (e.g. types of crime, methodologies and the definitions of ‘rural’). These reviews called for the need to determine differences in crime between urban and rural areas and whether there exist systematic differences in crime rates across areas associated with factors such as the socio-demographic makeup of the areas. Because some of these calls remain unanswered, and some emerging questions are of increasing relevance, we argue for the need of an updated systematic review of the literature on crime and safety in rural areas that also includes studies which can provide a general picture of the governance of safety in the most sparsely populated areas of the globe.

Finally, the importance of this review for rural criminology and for the field of rural studies overall is that it serves as guidance for researchers for further studies, highlighting potential future research questions. It also provides easier access to information for decision-makers and practitioners, improving the chances that the concerns raised here can actually become part of the policy agenda.

2. Definitions and research questions

In this section we highlight basic concepts as a reference to the reader. However, note that a review of this kind collates many different concepts and definitions coming from different approaches to crime and safety, which can be inconsistent between different studies. For example, some definitions of ‘rural’ involve population size while others are based on proximity to urban centers, or one study dedicated to crime prevention could refer to social crime prevention, while another is focusing on situational crime prevention. The review is a way to update these definitions or highlight knowledge gaps and missing perspectives.

Rural areas – The term ‘rural’ is generally employed to describe non-urban or peripheral regions (Barclay et al., 2007, p. 3). Rural is composed of a diverse set of communities with different characteristics and needs that share a number of qualities and challenges (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013, p. 90). Although estimates indicate a global rural population of 45% on average, it includes only 15% the continental European population (UN, 2018). Note however that these figures are based on nationally defined shares estimated from very different definitions; not only do the thresholds of rural versus urban vary, but also the types of employed metrics. There are variations in what a rural environment may encompass in different parts of the globe, from idyllic, remote rural areas to poorly connected areas on the urban fringe. Even within a nation there can exist a large 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” (Marshall and Johnson, 2005, p. 7). For a review of rural areas in relation to crime and safety, see Ceccato (2016b) and below.

Rural communities – are “places with small population sizes/densities, areas where people are more likely to know each other’s business and come into regular contact with each other” (Websdale and Johnson, 1998, p. 102) and have been identified as different from urban areas (Rogers et al., 1988). This aspect of social interaction challenges Tönnies’ ‘black and white’ dichotomy of *gemeinschaft* and *gesellschaft* and perhaps makes obsolete any type of traditional notion of community (Ceccato, 2016b). For the purposes of this article, we adopt the term *rural areas* as a generic term to capture what North American readers may think of as ‘suburban and non-metropolitan areas’ (divided into dense inner suburbs, ‘mature suburbs’, ‘emerging suburbs’, and the still rural ‘exurbs’) to ‘rural remote communities’; British readers the notion

of ‘countryside’; and Australian readers ‘the outback and the bush’, the outback being a sparsely populated area more remote than the bush, which includes any location outside the main urban areas.

Remoteness can be associated with the rural, but as Barclay et al. (2007) observed, the exact distance that designates what places are remote and the exact number of people that distinguishes rural are on a sliding scale. The notion of remoteness may involve the economic profile of an area, land use, and productive systems (Woods, 2005).

Rural crime – The statement that the socially constructed nature of rural criminality is visible by its absence in rural environments (Hogg and Carrington, 1998) illustrates the difficulties of detecting crime in the rural. Traditionally, rural crimes are crimes that take place in rural areas; some are ordinary crimes, such as burglary and fights (crimes against property or a person), while others are more specifically related to the opportunities for crime that only occur in rural areas. Rural crime includes farm crime, such as theft of tractors or cattle and property crimes against the unit of production (farm), but also acts that cause harm to nature or wildlife, also called environmental crime (excessive levels of air, water, or soil pollution, deforestation in natural reserves, injuries of animals and wildlife) (Ceccato, 2016b).

Safety – is a term with a fluid definition. Some disciplines refer to safety as a subjective feeling (i.e. related to perceived risk) whereas others consider it as the opposite of actual risk (i.e. safe is something that is non-criminogenic). In this study, we use ‘safety’ or ‘safe’ to refer to both a non-criminogenic environment and/or the perception of safety by an individual who declares feeling free from the fear of crime.

Fear – is “an emotion, a feeling of alarm or dread caused by expectation of danger” (Warr, 2000, p. 453).

Crime prevention – “entails any action designed to reduce the actual level of crime and/or the perceived fear of crime.” (Lab, 2007, p. 24).

Rural crime and rural policing – Policing is no longer a job only for the public police force. Yet “[t]here has always been, and still is, a difference between police work and organization in urban and rural areas.” (Furuhagen, 2009, p. 13). Fenwick and Slade (2011) suggested that rural policing is different from urban policing, requiring active community engagement to be effective. The impact of resource availability and level of crime results in lower-ranking officers often completing work that in other settings would be assigned to officers of a higher rank and/or from specialist units.

Global South – according to Mahler (2017), this term is used to refer to economically disadvantaged nation-states and as a post-cold war alternative to “Third World”. Geographically, this region is made up of Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Pacific Islands, and the developing countries in Asia, including the Middle East.

2.1. Research questions

This systematic literature review consists of two parts. The initial section covers a *bibliometric analysis* providing a snapshot of the width of the literature within rural criminology, and aims to respond to the following questions:

1. When and where have most studies on rural crime, safety and crime prevention been published? By whom are these studies carried out (authors, in which countries)? Is it a gender-balanced field?
2. Which are the main research themes within research on crime, perceived safety and crime prevention in rural areas? What are the current emerging topics?

Following the bibliometric analysis is an *in-depth literature overview*, presenting a deep dive into what is currently known about crime, safety and crime prevention in rural areas. In this section we answer the following research questions:

1. Which are the most common types of crimes studied in rural areas? Who are the rural offenders?

2. Which theoretical approaches are used to explain, predict and prevent rural crime?
3. Are police-recorded crimes increasing in rural areas? What are the current and past patterns and trends of rural crime?
4. What is the nature of crime in rural areas? How do temporal, environmental, and other contextual factors influence crime in rural areas?
5. How does fear of crime operate in rural contexts?
6. Which are the features of studies on rural policing and crime prevention?

3. Methodology for the bibliometric analysis

In the Cochrane Handbook (Chandler et al., 2022) a systematic review is described as seeking “...to collate all empirical evidence that fits pre-specified eligibility criteria in order to answer a specific research question.” The aim is to give a comprehensive overview of the existing literature on a precisely defined subject (Adèr et al., 2008). There are multiple methods of performing a systematic review but most include a number of common stages. Most importantly is to first define a research question and the criteria for inclusion of relevant data and exclusion of non-relevant data (Khan et al., 2003). Then the data search must be planned and specified based on the protocol stated in the first stage. The raw data is comprised of articles on the chosen subject, which are usually collected through the internet via electronic archives and using proper formulation and manipulation of search terms based on the set criteria (Adèr et al., 2008; Khan et al., 2003). Following this step, the data is studied in more detailed (identifying elements such as methodology or outcome of the research) then also judged against the set inclusion criteria to assess eligibility of the research. Finally, ‘the evidence’ are analyzed and compared, usually through tabulation and statistical methods (Khan et al., 2003).

In this systematic literature review, we used two complementary

methods for data collection: (1) a systematic search using JSTOR, Scopus, ScienceDirect and (2) manual additions based on recommendations by a selection of researchers from the Rural Crime user list: ruralcrime-bounces@lists.osu.edu. From these 840 publications in total, 329 were selected (Fig. 1), first eliminating duplicates and later excluding those that were not relevant. We adopted the systematic review protocol of type PRISMA-P 2015 (Moher et al., 2015) to support inclusion based on five criteria of importance:

1. Studies devoted to the understanding of rural crime in areas of different degrees of rurality.
2. Studies that examine the safety, fear, or victimization of certain groups of individuals in one or multiple rural contexts, or a comparison of urban and rural. This can include groups based on gender, age, socio-economic background, race/ethnicity/nationality, and more.
3. Studies that provide new theoretical approaches to rural criminology, rural safety and fear of crime.
4. Studies devoted to crime prevention in rural contexts.
5. Studies that explore criminal justice and how such systems operate in rural areas, including policing and, for example, aspects such as distance to such services.

Sets of keywords were selected with respect to each search database, with the aim of returning as many relevant publications as possible (Table 1). The selection process was initiated by examining the publications’ titles to consider their relevancy.

Fig. 1 shows the process of determining the publications’ eligibility. Titles indicating that a publication’s topic fell outside the scope of the study were excluded (Full-text articles excluded, with reasons (n = 314)). Others were either classified as included or needing further consideration. Titles and keywords deemed to fit any of the five criteria outlined above were included in the selection. A number of ambiguous

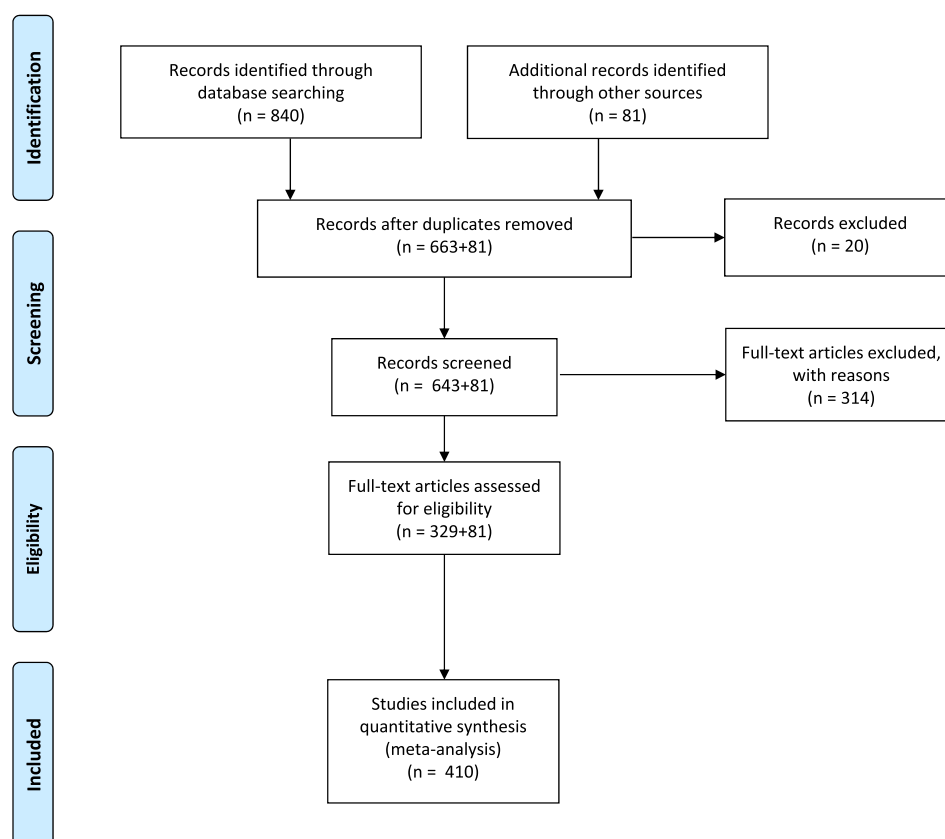


Fig. 1. The methodological steps to perform the literature search based on five selection criteria adapted from Moher et al. (2009).

Table 1
Search on keywords in JSTOR, Scopus, ScienceDirect.

Database	Keywords	Further Limitations	Results
JSTOR	ti:(rural* OR farm*) AND (crim* OR safe* OR fear*) OR ab: (rural* AND (crim* OR fear*) AND (prevent* OR drug* OR polic*))	1980-forward, Subject areas: Agriculture, Geography, Criminology and Criminal Justice, Law and Sociology	120
Scopus	TITLE (crim* OR fear*) AND TITLE-ABS-KEY (rural* OR farm*) OR TITLE-ABS-KEY (rural* AND (prevent* OR drug* OR polic*)) AND PUBYEAR > 1979 AND (LIMIT-TO (SUBJAREA, "SOCI"))		474
ScienceDirect [in title, abstract, keywords]	Rural crime Rural crime prevention Rural policing [+“crime” in general search field] Rural fear [+“crime” in general search field]	1980–2020	134 16 65 31
Total			840

cases were identified, where either the link to the rural was somewhat weak or the theme was close but not exactly meeting the criteria. Such cases were resolved through discussion between the review's authors (an informal reliability test), and the publication was included if there was an agreement that it fell within the scope of the study (considering the closeness to the five criteria). During the subsequent process of categorizing the publications, each was reconsidered for inclusion or exclusion (Studies included in quantitative synthesis ($n = 410$)).

4. Findings

The review's findings are presented in two sections: the bibliometric analysis and the in-depth analysis of the literature by research theme organized by frequency.

4.1. Bibliometric analysis

4.1.1. Number and types of retrieved documents

Of the 410 eligible publications (of which 81 were added manually) that constitute the basis for the analysis, 78% were journal articles and the remainder were books and book chapters. Fig. 2(a) shows the percentage of publications on crime and safety in rural areas by year, of the total of 410 retrieved documents. According to Fig. 2(b), several books and handbooks were published in the past five years; a few allowed open access publications of individual chapters. An example is *The Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology* from 2016. Fig. 2(c) shows the percentage of publications by gender of the first author.

4.1.2. Evolution of the field

From 1980 to 2000 the number of publications grew slowly, then started to accelerate up to 2011 when there occurred a significant increase the number of publications. The themes of the articles have a somewhat similar distribution over time with, the majority found in the later part of the 2010s. One of the relatively earliest publications in our time frame (1980–2020) was a compilation of North American literature on rural crime prevention and criminal justice (Hubbard et al., 1980) that reviewed studies dated back to the early nineteenth century on rural-urban differences of crime and victimization. Also of relevance was an early article written by Laub (1981) in which he investigated the variation in crime reporting to the police among victims in urban, suburban and rural areas. Using National Crime Survey victimization data from the United States, the study found no variation within the spectrum

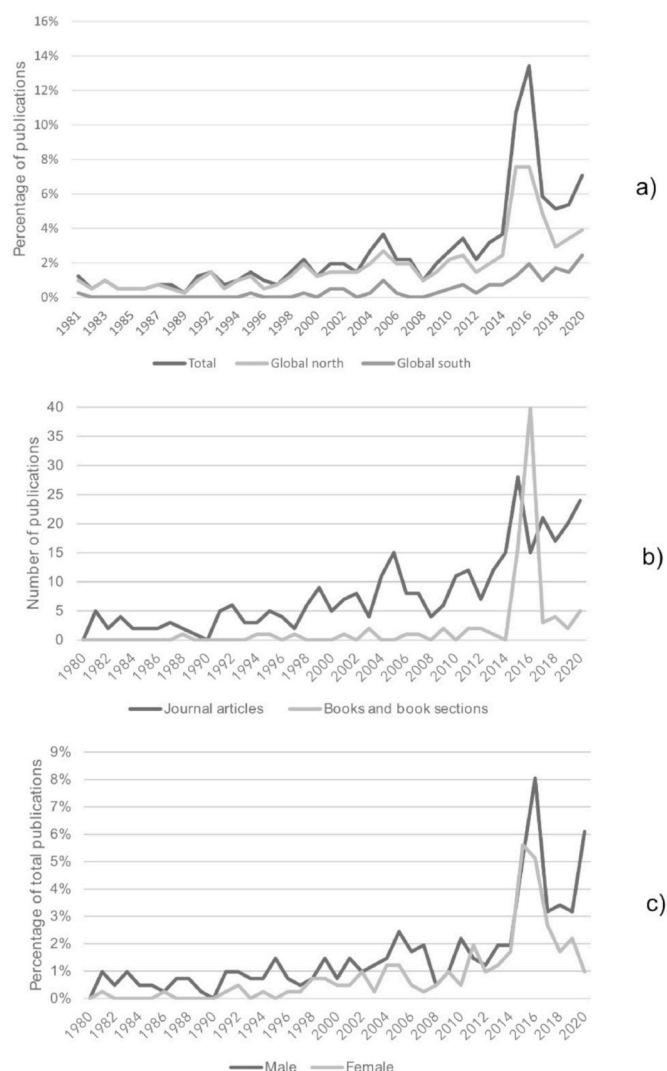


Fig. 2. (a) Percentage of publications each year 1980–2020 including distribution by study area ($n_{\text{Total}} = 410$, $n_{\text{North}} = 296$, $n_{\text{South}} = 66$). (b) Distribution of journal articles compared to books and book sections over time ($n_{\text{Journal}} = 321$, $n_{\text{Book}} = 89$). (c) Percentage of publications by male and female authors ($n_{\text{Total}} = 410$, $n_{\text{Male}} = 266$, $n_{\text{Female}} = 143$).

when it came to reporting crimes such as rape, robbery, assault and personal larceny, although the reasons for *not* reporting did vary with the level of urbanization. One of the most recent articles was published by Arisukwu et al. (2020) and exemplified informal crime prevention practices in rural Nigeria. Using surveys, the study showed that poor safety perceptions were linked to crime victimization and poor police presence.

The high peaks in publication numbers came in 2015 and 2016 when a special issue on rural crime and community safety with an interdisciplinary perspective was published in the *Journal of Rural Studies* in 2015 (Ceccato, 2015k) and the *Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology* with contributions from all continents was published in 2016 (Donnermeyer, 2016). The general increase in scholarship may also be associated with the newly created Division of Rural Criminology as part of the American Society of Criminology in 2018 and the establishment of The International Society for the Study of Rural Crime Inc. in 2019. While studies of the Global North have dominated over the years, studies of the Global South have increased during the past decade, following the overall trend (Fig. 2(a)).

4.1.2.1. Country of origin (study area and lead author affiliation). The

study areas in the 410 publications spread out over 52 different countries (Fig. 3a). Examples from the United States were the most common, with 150 publications focusing on crime and fear in rural America. The United Kingdom was the next most studied country with 46 publications, followed by Australia, Canada and Sweden (Fig. 3b). Among non-western countries, India and China have been popular study areas, with the former focusing on less common topics such as discrimination and political corruption in rural areas.

Authors were most frequently affiliated with universities and colleges in the United States, which occurred in 50% of the cases. British academic institutions came second, followed by Australian, Swedish and Canadian universities. In the Global South, Brazil, India, Malaysia, and China were the most common locations of universities. Publications by female lead authors ($n_{\text{female}} = 143$) were the most common in United States, Sweden, United Kingdom, Australia and Canada. Interestingly, almost all other university affiliations of female lead authors were located in the Global South ($n = 26$) rather than other countries in the Global North ($n = 7$). The gender of lead authors will continue to be discussed below. In total, there were 316 unique lead authors.

4.1.2.2. Gender of the lead author. The overall gender split among the lead authors is 65% male ($n_{\text{male}} = 266$) and 35% female ($n_{\text{female}} = 143$), excluding one publication that had a lead author whose gender could not be identified. What should be noted is that the categorization of gender was based on a binary understanding of gender for ease of management, and identification was based on the authors' names with further investigation employed when there were uncertainties. Between 1980 and 1999 the gap was larger than average, with 80% male lead

authors. The years 2011 and 2015 are the notable instances when female lead authors were more common than male (Fig. 2(c)).

Regarding themes, publications on rural violence were more often written by female lead authors; it was the topic in 22% of all publications written by female lead authors versus 12% by male (and 15% of the total). Of the publications on violence, a total of 52% had female lead authors, and when specifically looking at papers studying domestic violence, the share increased to 65%. In a contrasting example, the theme of policing and criminal justice was slightly more popular among male lead authors, making up 24% of all publications by male lead authors versus 17% by female (and 21% of the total).

4.1.2.3. Studies by types of methodology. Of the 358 publications in which the research design and methods could be classified: 51% were qualitative pieces, 33% fell along the spectrum of quantitative methods and 15% were a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods (see Fig. 4). Regarding qualitative pieces, interviews, fieldwork, focus groups and literature reviews were considered qualitative methods, along with analyses of text or verbal statements, visual media, and real-life experiences. Theoretical pieces were also included in this category. Interviews were the most favored method in qualitative pieces, but purposes varied, e.g. creating profiles of rural offenders, assessing experiences of rural community members as well as law enforcement and other authorities.

Media content analyses were most often considered qualitative, as when analyzing depictions of rural crime and residents in movies and news media (Eduful et al., 2020; McClanahan and Linnemann, 2018; Young, 2017), but could be quantitative if the resulting data was translated into numerical representations (Stassen and Ceccato, 2020).

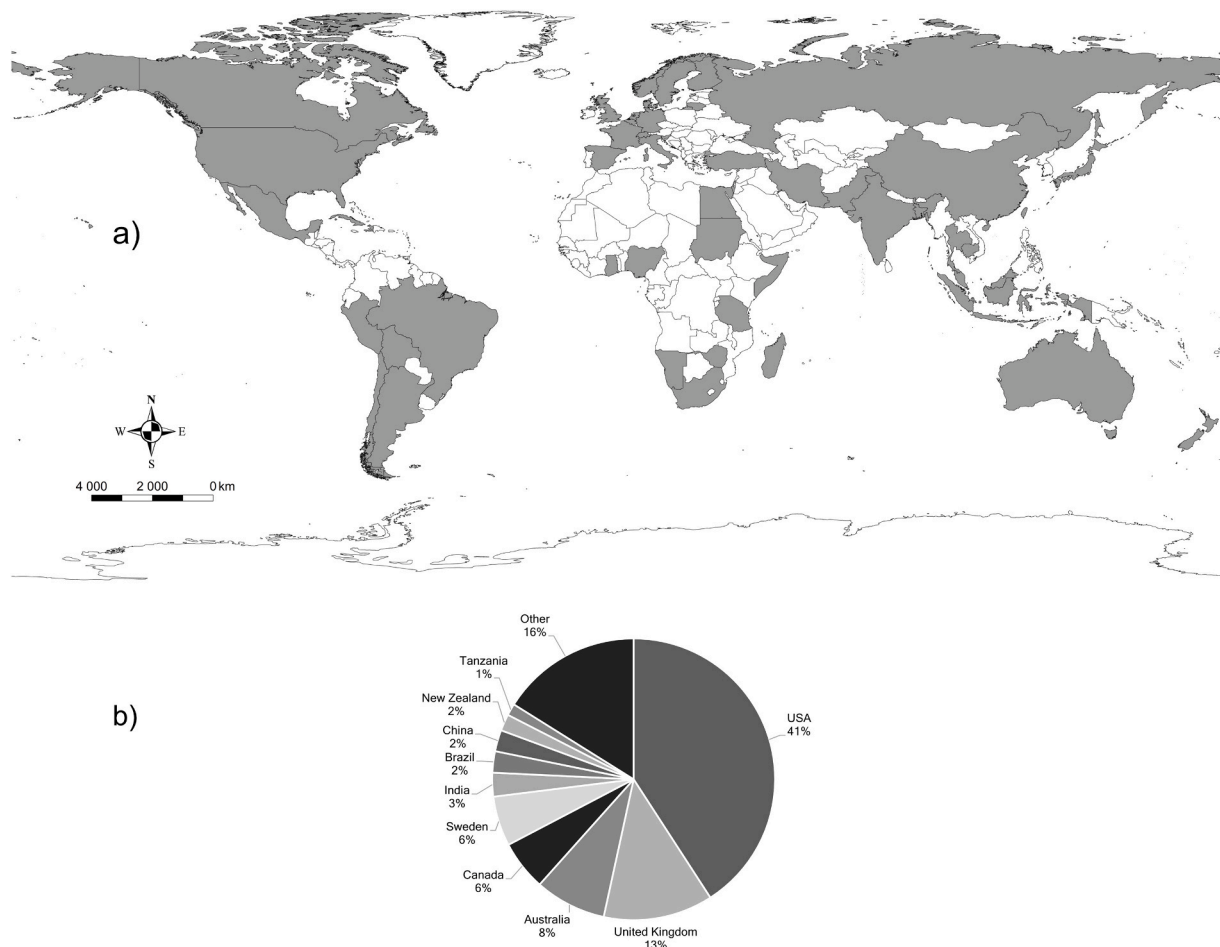


Fig. 3. a) Geographical coverage of publications by studied areas ($N = 367$) and b) the distribution of countries as study areas. The total of publications refers to all studies with reference to a study area.

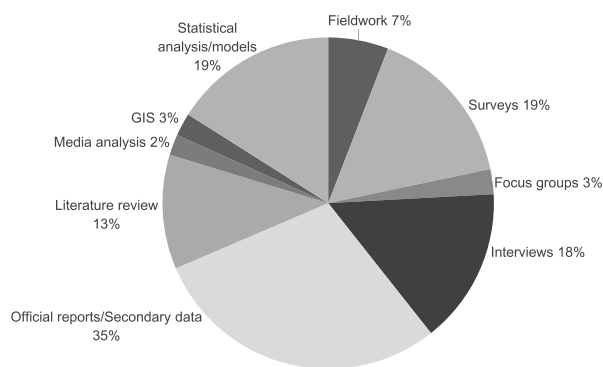


Fig. 4. Most common types of methods in publications on crime and safety in rural areas (N = 410).

Similarly, surveys are generally designed to provide both quantitative and qualitative data, but when a study translated surveys responses into numerical values (e.g. Yes = 1, No = 0, or Likert scales), it was classified as either quantitative or mixed methods. In one such example, Bouley and Wells (2001) conducted a telephone survey to assess the attitudes of rural residents to juvenile crime and criminal justice, and used a Likert-scale for the possible responses. Independent variables included age, race, gender, education, marital status and income, and the results were compiled to show how proportions of each variable group responded.

Among the quantitative analyses, the majority used descriptive statistics, such as frequency analysis of survey results or (secondary) crime data and different types of regression models, and often presented numerical results, such as crime rates, statistical relationships between variables and proportions of survey respondents. In general, statistical analyses and GIS were always considered quantitative. Such publications often intended to assess the impacts of different variables on crime rates in rural areas or assess the level of victimization or perception of crime among survey respondents. In one example of a quantitative piece, Arthur (1991) aimed to identify socioeconomic predictors of violent and property crime in the rural counties of Georgia, United States and it made use of official statistics from the Georgia Bureau of Investigation. An OLS (ordinary least squares) regression analysis utilized aggregated average annual counts of offenses (1975–1985) and variables such as population size, proportions of race and age (also from official sources) to estimate the effect of each independent variable on property and violent crime.

4.2. In-depth analysis by research theme

In order to perform a thematic analysis, we assigned one or two themes to each publication. The largest percentages of the publications (21%) were about general trends and patterns of crime in rural areas, as well as policing and the rest of the criminal justice system, including the court system and prison industry (Fig. 5). A total of 15% of the publications focused mainly on violent crimes, of which 38% covered domestic violence and violence against women while the rest were regarding general street violence and other. Fear of crime was also a major theme of the publications (n = 57), of which 78% were related to fear of crime, 10% to fear of “others”, and 12% to both. The theme of rural crime prevention also appeared in a notable number of the studies (10%), of which 46% covered police-based prevention and community efforts and 22% focused on technological preventions like security alarms and CCTVs (while the rest covered both types).

More minor themes (i.e. less than 10% of all publications) included crimes against the environment and animals like poaching and pollution; crime theory in a rural context; drug production, distribution and use in rural areas; property crime such as theft and burglary; discrimination and exclusion; organized crime; as well as other efforts to further current rural criminological theories and concepts. ‘Other’ includes publications which were rather distinct from any of the other chosen themes and were mainly unique topics. Overall, of the 410 publications, 330 (80%) were about crime, 46 (11%) about fear and/or safety perceptions, and 34 (8%) about both crime and safety perceptions.

The in-depth analysis is organized according to the 12 major identified themes, ordered by frequency of publications. Each main section provides a short summary of the theme’s bibliometric statistics, followed by a more in-dept overview of the topic, including, but not limited to, historical and contemporary data, current challenges, comparisons with urban contexts and between the experiences of the Global North and Global South. Additionally, a number of sub-themes discuss each of them in detail. Note that on occasion references can be made to articles that is outside the period of analysis, which is only to provide further context and support of established points.

4.2.1. Theme 1 – general crime patterns, trends and offenders in the rural

Over a fifth (21%, n = 85) of the reviewed publications covered general patterns and trends of crime in rural areas. Some of the earliest studies published (in the covered time period) were in this category, although 51% were still published from 2010 onward. Most commonly, these studies utilized secondary data and official records (56%) and performed statistical analyses (35%) to reach their objectives. Crime patterns and trends in rural areas in the United States were studied the most often, followed by British, Australian and Canadian cases. In

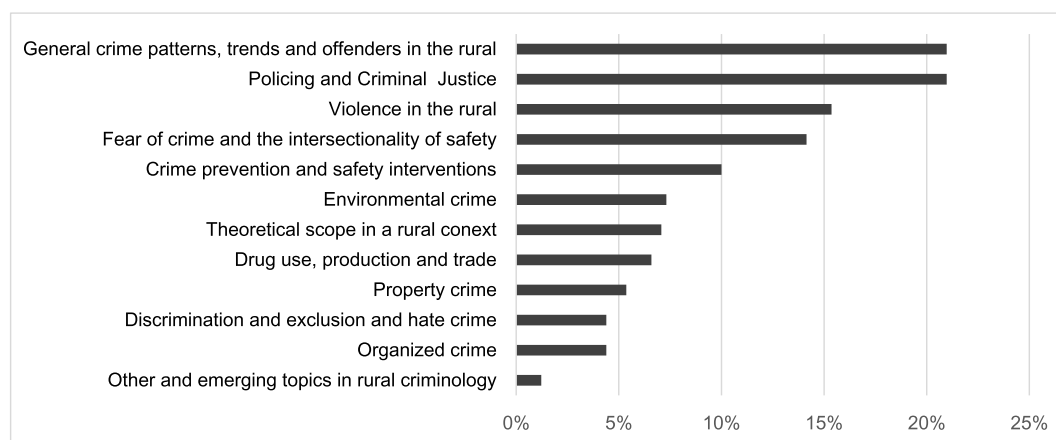


Fig. 5. Identified themes in publications 1980–2020 collected in Scopus, JSTOR and ScienceDirect (N = 410), where each publication was assigned a maximum of two themes.

general, studies on countries of the Global South were published more recently, with China and Brazil appearing the most frequently. Other examples include Haiti (Brewis et al., 2020), Zimbabwe (Mafumbabete et al., 2019), Nigeria (Osakwe and Osakwe, 2015), Pakistan (Davaryar, 2016), and India (Wardhaugh, 2005).

While relatively few studies have performed investigations of rural-urban differences in the decrease, the general consensus is that in most countries rural areas have lower rates of crime than urban areas, with a few exceptions (Ceccato, 2015j; Kaylen et al., 2019; Laub, 1983; Mawby, 2015). However, ‘lower crime rates’ does not equal ‘no crime’, and rural areas are not simply less dense versions of urban towns, but differ greatly in nature, culture and context (Ceccato, 2015a). Cebulak (2004) emphasized that rural areas are governed by their own circumstances of crime causation and pointed to findings of rural crime rates continuing to rise while city crime had been decreasing. In reality, a narrow focus on general crime trends hides the fact that rural areas have become more criminogenic for certain crime types and subsets of groups (Bachman, 1992; Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011). Furthermore, methodological difficulties in comparing crime levels among countries still constitute a limiting barrier in the study of trends in crime in rural areas (Deller and Deller, 2010).

Similarly, although the international evidence also shows signs of converging crime rates between rural and urban areas, this is not the case in all countries, and not for all types of crime (e.g. Carcach, 2000; Marshall and Johnson, 2005; Osgood and Chambers, 2003). The rates of rural crime can differ greatly between countries as well. Ceccato (2015j) compared crime rates in the United States, the United Kingdom and Sweden. In the United Kingdom during the studied period, crime decreased in all areas independent of the data source; and although urban areas experienced higher crime rates, there was evidence of the differences decreasing. Furthermore, rural areas also experienced higher rates of theft from vehicles than suburban areas. In the United States, the declines in both violent and property crimes were much smaller in non-metropolitan areas compared to larger towns. In fact, it has been suggested that non-lethal violence has increased on average in rural and some suburban areas. There is evidence that rural towns experiencing fast growth due to e.g. expansion of fossil energy production or casino game development – often called “boomtowns” – are especially vulnerable to crime (Archbold, 2015; Park & Stokowski, 2009, 2011; Ruddell, 2017; Stokowski, 1996). For example, Ruddell et al. (2014) found that in 2010–2012, violent crime decreased by 25.6% in non-“boom counties”, but increased by 18.5% in counties that had been impacted by oil expansion. Some Swedish rural areas have also experienced higher crime rates than they did previously, with higher rates of violence than the national trend (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011). From 1996 to 2010, urban and accessible rural areas in Sweden had a higher risk of crime than remote rural areas, but then the trendlines started to converge (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013). Australia and Canada are two exceptions where many rural areas have had higher rates of property and violent crime than some metropolitan areas (Barclay, 2017; Rudell and Lithopoulos, 2016; Tyler, 1998).

In the Global South, other, yet similar trends have been observed. In Brazil, violent crimes in particular have been on the rise nationally but have undergone a much steeper increase in rural areas, especially in areas with lower levels of urbanization (Ceccato and Ceccato, 2017; Justus et al., 2016; Scorzafe et al., 2015). Home break-ins in the rural parts of the Malaysian state of Johor have been noted to be at the highest levels in the country (Hamid and Toyong, 2014). Violent crime in the Turkish countryside has differed from inner-city violence, with offenses like honor killings, land disputes and family feuds (Cayli, 2014).

The link between higher population density and higher crime levels may simply not be applicable for all types of crime. Battin and Crowl (2017) showed a significant negative relationship between property crimes and population density, and little to no significant relationship regarding violent crimes. However, the patterns of crime are not necessarily homogenous among similar areas either. In the United

States, the variance among highly non-metropolitan areas has been shown to be equal to or greater than that among metropolitan areas in terms of crime rates and contextual variables (Wells and Weisheit, 2004). Crime pattern prediction efforts have struggled in areas with low population density due to unequally distributed crime (Kadar et al., 2019). However, offender groups based on age, race and sex have been shown to behave similarly in terms of crime patterns in both urban and rural areas (Laub, 1983).

One large obstacle when predicting crime trends and patterns is the underreporting of crime to the police. Reviewed studies presented multiple factors which affected the ability and willingness to report crime in rural areas. These included physical aspects of the area, such as a higher degree of isolation and remoteness to proper services which constituted barriers to reporting, with many support networks being centered in urban areas and on urban victims (Owen and Carrington, 2015). In general, the seriousness and type of the offense dictated the likelihood of reporting. Laub (1981) showed that in the United States, for crimes such as rape, assault and personal larceny, there was no significant difference in rates of reporting between urban and rural areas. However, the reasons for not reporting differed, where regarding rape, for example, urban residents felt there was “nothing to be done” or referred to a lack of proof, while rural residents more commonly referred to it being a “private or personal matter”. Burglary and auto theft were reported to a greater extent, mainly due to insurance purposes (Ceccato, 2015c). Furthermore, it has been shown that the close-knit communities of rural areas can lead to lower official reporting rates of highly interpersonal offenses like domestic violence. Victims can be ‘silenced’ through informal social controls such as gossip, feelings of dishonor and shame of being a domestic violence victim, which all threaten the victim with ostracization by fellow community members (Abrahams and Jewkes, 2010; Owen and Carrington, 2015). The real or perceived lack of anonymity can further decrease the likelihood of crime being reported, where even the police may be acquaintances with the victim and/or offender and spread sensitive information (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011; DeKeseredy and HallSanchez, 2016).

4.2.1.1. Offenders in rural areas. Is there a typical rural offender? This is a difficult question to answer as research mainly reflects those individuals who are caught by the police and not those hidden behind unreported offenses. Barclay et al. (2004a) suggested that the *Gemeinschaft*-like qualities within rural communities encourage crime but who the law breaker is varies by the context and normalization of certain behaviors (Ceccato et al., 2022b; Donnermeyer, 2016). Research has reported that the offender who typically acts in the rural is often: male, a new resident, itinerant or tourist (see e.g., Smith, 2010; van Daele and Beken, 2010); a local, and young (Baldwin, 1994); a farmer (Smith and McElwee, 2013b). Residents who commit crimes have been found to include long-term residents, newcomers and seasonal workers, while visitors who commit crimes include vacationers, travelling criminals and commuter criminals (Mawby, 2015).

Overarching social structures may create and shape the offenders. Porter (2011) noted that changes in rural-urban relationships such as a population shift from cities to suburbs may show a link between the mobility of criminal offending and people through migration or commuting. Smith (2010) mentioned urban criminal gangs targeting agricultural operations (for high value equipment in particular), travelling criminals or “itinerant crime groups” (van Daele and Beken, 2010) as well as urban criminals relocating and settling in rural communities to facilitate offending. As another example, female offenders have been found to be influenced by the public and private patriarchal marginalization of women that restricts their mobility and economic and social freedoms, which has its own unique expression for rural women (Parker and Reckdenwald, 2008).

A number of studies have been conducted on prison inmates to create profiles of offenders (Blurton and Copus, 2003; Lilliot et al., 2017). Berg

and DeLisi (2005) analyzed a sample of former correctional clients and attempted to assess an image of the rural career criminal. The authors concluded that rural career criminals are relatively harmless, but that severe cases of repeat offenders often suffer from mental health issues, substance abuse and a low education level. The rural juvenile offender has been central in several studies. Subjects have ranged from young drinking offenders (Baldwin, 1994), young cannabis farmer networks (Bouchard and Nguyen, 2010), as well as comparisons of offending between rural and non-rural minority youths (Gale and Wundersitz, 1986; Vazsonyi and Trejos-Castillo, 2006).

4.2.1.2. Farm crime. Agricultural operations like farms are highly associated with rural areas and have been a vital part of the discourse on rural crime. Donnermeyer et al. (2011) provided two descriptions of farm crime: *ordinary crime*, which includes general theft of livestock, machinery and equipment, vandalism, dumping of waste, trespassing and illegal hunting; and *extraordinary crime*, which includes organized crime such as production of marijuana/cannabis and methamphetamines. Urban crime may be a larger concern in terms of volume, but the impacts of farm crime are not insignificant, as farming is an integral part to both national economies and global trade, food safety and security (Barclay, 2016; Swanson, 1981). For example, in the United Kingdom the annual cost of farm crime to the economy has been estimated at 45 million pounds (Morris et al., 2020) and in northern Sweden, the annual cost of diesel theft amounted up to 7 million Swedish kronor (Ceccato, 2015d). Local consequences include loss due to theft, loss in work time and as well as impacts on victims' mental health (Barclay, 2016; Ceccato, 2015d; Saltiel et al., 1992; Smith, 2020). Farmers can also be more vulnerable to and more fearful of crime than other rural groups (Bankston et al., 1987), with farm victimization having increased over a longer time (Jones, 2012; Sugden, 1999). While agricultural crime has been noted as an increasing problem, it has largely been neglected by criminologists (Jones, 2010).

Several of the reviewed studies were dedicated to the policing and prevention of farm crime and emphasized the difficulty to do so, mainly due to the lack of available and detailed data from official sources that fail to distinguish between farm crime and other types of crime (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013; Mears et al., 2007a), further perpetuated by the lack of reporting by farmers to the police (Barclay et al., 2004b; Ceccato, 2015i; Mears et al., 2007b). The low report rate by farmers may be due to low levels of trust (considering reporting as a waste of time), fear of being excluded by the community, but also traditionally having a higher tolerance for or even expectation of certain crimes, such as crop theft for subsistence (Bunei et al., 2016; Ceccato, 2015i; Donnermeyer, 2017). Farmers tend to be somewhat lax with farm security, perhaps due to perceptions of low crime (Barclay and Donnermeyer, 2002; Smith, 2019). The growth of industrial farming has also increased the scale of farm crime, as it now entails the organized theft of crops and farm equipment that are smuggled into other countries (Jones, 2012; Swanson, 1981). Opportunity models have been found to be relevant for preventing farm crime. Barclay and Donnermeyer (2011) applied routine activity theory, situational crime prevention and crime pattern theory on farm security in Australia. Findings showed that, e.g., a higher visibility of farm sheds and other buildings from the residence was linked to lower crime of most types, while the vicinity to highways increased the risk of being victimized by malicious damage, illegal hunting, and trespassing. Accessible rural areas in Sweden have been found to experience the highest rates of theft of tractors, diesel and other fuels, and drug production, compared to remote rural and urban areas (Ceccato, 2015d).

Farm crime also includes farmers as the offenders, which is a perspective that has been virtually ignored by mainstream criminology (Donnermeyer, 2016). For example, it has been found that while drug use is comparably lower among rural versus urban residents, rural areas are very prominent places of drug production such as cannabis and

methamphetamines (Ceccato, 2015d; Weisheit and Brownstein, 2016; Weisheit et al., 1993). Synthetic drug production can lead to higher levels of theft in the surrounding areas, due to the need for production materials or "fast cash" to purchase the drugs (Ceccato, 2015d; Smith and Byrne, 2019). Farmers may also subject workers to poor living conditions and environmental hazards, as well as threats, violence and sexual assault (Barrick, 2016). Other offenses include illegal criminal enterprises e.g. within the meat trade (Smith and McElwee, 2013a) and environmental wildlife crimes such as environmentally hazardous facilities and the illegal killing of predators or 'pests' (Enticott, 2011; Gargiulo et al., 2016).

4.2.2. Theme 2 – policing and criminal justice

Rural policing and rural criminal justice systems has been a strong theme from the start of our time period and tied for first place for the most covered theme within rural criminology (21% of all publications). Of the publications covering this theme, the methods used were mainly secondary data (34%), interviews (24%), surveys (17%) and statistical analyses (15%). The United States was the most frequently studied area, followed mainly by the United Kingdom, Canada and Australia but also Tanzania. Despite being one of the earliest and most written about topics in our time period, systematic studies of urban and small-town policing were non-existent before the 1970s (Payne et al., 2005). Some of the more comprehensive works were published in the late twentieth century, including the work of Weisheit et al. (1995) and Sims (1988).

Community policing refers to the efforts of various state, volunteer and private agencies (e.g. businesses and resident groups) to partner with police in a certain area, harnessing the social control efforts of these bodies and aligning them with the efforts of the official crime control agencies (Yarwood, 2014). As such, rural policing is understandably expected to be different from urban policing because among other things "officers in these agencies typically know the citizens personally, have frequent face-to-face contact with them, and engage in a variety of problem-solving activities that fall outside of law enforcement" (Weisheit et al., 1994, p. 549). Mawby and Yarwood (2011) made the point that examining rural policing can reveal more about rural society. Or, the other way around, it is impossible to understand rural crime and justice without understanding the rural environment (Weisheit et al., 1995).

Payne et al. (2005) summarized research on rural law enforcement in the United States, including three major findings regarding policing styles in small towns. Firstly, crime prevention and service activities were prioritized by rural police, while urban police focused on arrests and enforcement of the law. Rural policing has been less about experiencing life and death decisions and more about "balancing the challenges of remoteness, isolation and a lack of nearby back-up with community expectation and problem solving" (Wooff, 2015, p. 294). The second major finding showed that rural police were expected to carry out additional tasks compared to urban police, due to the remoteness or lack of social services in rural areas. Thirdly, rural policing also included more informal work, such as solving residents' other problems (such as family counselling, help with filing for welfare, driving elderly to buy groceries, etc.) and providing non-compensated services to the community (Weisheit et al., 1995). Conversely, more serious events like violent victimization are left unreported to police by one in four rural residents, despite the injury being so serious that the victim needed medical attention (Kaylen and Pridemore, 2015).

4.2.2.1. Police organization. Ceccato (2015h) described two accepted schools of policing in rural areas: the Anglo-Saxon tradition, which involves community-based and civil forms of policing by often unarmed guards and constables; and the continental tradition, which is more linked to armed forces and authoritarian forms of control. The Anglo-Saxon school has mostly evolved in the United Kingdom and the United States, while the continental school originated in France and has

remained in Germany, Italy and other parts of southern Europe. Over time the focus of police control has been transformed, as in rural provinces of Canada for example, where police previously acted more upon public disorder and controlling “dangerous classes” than on serious crime, which changed due to spikes in violent crime and the transition of the provincial police to the Canadian federal police force (Lin, 2007).

Police agencies have also hired local citizens, sometimes referred to as ‘civilianization’ (Crank, 1989; Weisheit et al., 1995). This practice has been met with controversy, with some viewing it as undermining police structure, but in rural areas the practice may strengthen the close-knit bond between the community and the police. In fact, the concepts of cooperation and building relationships between local agents and the police to reduce crime and fear of crime, often referred to as ‘community policing’, has increased in popularity, especially in the United Kingdom, and has long been an established system in Japan (Ceccato, 2015h; Takahashi, 2016).

Police presence has lessened in the rural areas of the United Kingdom and Sweden and has increasingly become more centralized (Ceccato, 2016a; Lindström, 2015), which, coupled with budget constraints and public pressure for more visible policing, may explain the increase in rural community policing and alternative policing (Yarwood, 2015; Yarwood and Edwards, 1995). Community policing may come in the form of neighborhood watch programs (Shernock, 1986; Yarwood and Edwards, 1995), safety audits, night patrols and other types of civilianization. However, Yarwood (2015) discussed how community initiatives can be problematic as it is often the local elite of rural communities that engage in policing which leads to the exclusion of ‘unwanted groups’, criminal or not. Therefore a distinction must be made between “demands to reduce crime and demands to exclude activities or people that are threatening to the elite rural ideal” (Mawby and Yarwood, 2011). Commonly targeted groups by community initiatives include youth, visitors and ethnic minorities, rather than any of the participants of the policing initiatives (Yarwood, 2015).

The policing of marginalized groups comes with several issues and challenges. For example, influxes of Latino immigrants into rural areas of the United States have entailed policing challenges, as language barriers and preconceived notions inhibit communication with and trust in the police (Culver, 2004). Taylor et al. (2015) showed that the perceptions of police fairness and police efficiency are interdependent and somewhat affected by factors of race and place. For example, in the United States, white residents in rural counties perceived significantly higher fairness than non-white residents in both urban and non-urban areas. The policing of indigenous peoples living in rural areas has also historically entailed subjugation (Behrendt et al., 2016; Cunneen, 2016, 2020; Griffiths, 2019; Jones et al., 2016; Yarwood, 2007), especially in Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States, which has led to continued distrust and tension between law enforcement and residents. Ruddell et al., 2014b found that more remote and inaccessible aboriginal settlements in Canada had several times higher crime rates and per capita costs of policing than the national average.

4.2.2.2. Rural criminal justice machine. Other aspects of the criminal justice system have also been studied over the years. Rural courts, prosecution and sentencing, and general experiences of the criminal justice system by rural residents have been examined within different contexts (Austin, 1981; Bond-Maupin and Maupin, 1998; Campbell et al., 2014; Ferrazzi and Krupa, 2018; Romero, 2020; Steiner, 2005; Zaller et al., 2016). The effects of legislation on policing have also been addressed in a number of studies, such as on the policing and legal processing of rural youth (Ricciardelli et al., 2017; Wright, 1997), racial targeting of Latino immigrants (Gómez Cervantes et al., 2018) and public disorder related to environmental protests (Parker, 1999).

The prison industry has mainly been examined in the United States, although exceptions include Meek (2006) who studied British,

incarcerated, rural youth and their experiences, and Baloch (2013) which focused on female prisoners in Pakistan; where rural inmates were observed to be more disempowered and vulnerable within the justice system. However, with over two million incarcerated people, the United States has the largest prison population in the world, and it disproportionately consists of marginalized groups: people of color, the poor and the mentally ill (Perdue, 2018). Previously prisoners were largely held in urban areas, but during the 1990s, prisons were rapidly built outside of cities. Governing authorities in rural areas have presented rural prison development as financially beneficial, but rural county constituents have also historically objected, possibly due to fears of decreasing land values and increasing crime rates (Daniel, 1991). And while rural prison development may potentially boost economies through increased job opportunities and tax revenue, they may also exacerbate poverty and exclusion of certain community members, such as marginalized ethnic groups (Bonds, 2009). Furthermore Perdue (2018) described how prison counties have been found to have higher poverty rates and lower per capita income than counties without prisons.

4.2.3. Theme 3 - violence in the rural

As many as 15% of all reviewed publications were devoted to violence. Most studies on rural violence were fairly recent (68% were published from 2010 onward), but older studies often focused on overall violent victimization, such as Wilkinson et al. (1984) and Petee and Kowalski (1993), while more recent ones focused on domestic violence (e.g. (DeKeseredy, 2020; DuBois et al., 2019; Rennison et al., 2012; Van Hightower et al., 2000).

Rural and suburban areas have generally experienced lower rates of violence than urban areas, especially interpersonal violence. This is also true for domestic violence and violence against women, where in countries like the United Kingdom and Sweden it has remained concentrated in inner-city areas (Ceccato, 2015l). In the United States during the 1970s, violent victimization rates per 100 000 persons above 12 years of age were 1568, 924, and 793 for urban, suburban and rural areas, respectively (Laub, 1983). Kaylen et al. (2019) provided a similar comparison of aggravated assault rates in areas with different levels of urbanization between 1988 and 2005, once again showing that urban areas experienced higher rates. However, what was also observed was that the decline in crime was much greater in urban areas than in rural areas. Kowalski and Duffield (1990) found that in rural areas the potential for violence decreases as individualism is reduced and cohesion is strengthened. Residents in a small community are more likely to know one another socially than in a larger city, and this informal guardianship leads to lower rates of crime in rural settings (Freudenburg, 1986).

Exceptions to the overall trend have been found in Russia, for example, where the rural-urban gap in murder rates has narrowed over time, and in Sweden where certain trends have shown higher than expected levels of violence in rural areas compared to the national average (Ceccato, 2015e; Chervyakov et al., 2002). In Canadian provinces, patterns have tended toward rural areas specializing in violent crime (Carleton et al., 2014). Ceccato (2015j) found that certain types of violence have been increasing in rural spaces, such as non-lethal violence and where the offender is an intimate. In fact, most rural violence happens among acquaintances. Capsambelis (2009) suggested that more attention should be paid to domestic violence and neighborhood dispute calls in rural areas, because over time they may escalate into assault or even homicide.

Of all the publications identified as studies on violent crime, 62% were related to street violence. Topics here included examining assault and homicide (Petee and Kowalski, 1993; Ray and Simons, 1987), gun violence (Hemenway et al., 2020; Hemenway and Solnick, 2015; Kalesan et al., 2020; Rocque, 2012; Singh and Singh, 2005), as well as drug- (Webster et al., 2010) and gang-related violence (Anderson et al., 2016). Other publications focused on why unique rural interactions and events may be a reason why trends of violent crime and crime in general need

additional supplemental data sources and not just one sole source of data, such as the American Uniform Crime Report (UCR) or National Crime Victimization Survey (NCVS) (Berg and Lauritsen, 2016).

While most studies were based on experiences of rural violence in the Global North, there were examples of studies from the Global South as well, the Brazilian rural patterns of violence (Ceccato and Ceccato, 2017; Steeves et al., 2015) and the effects of lighting on homicide (Arvate et al., 2018), the case of the Somali pirates (Collins, 2016), violence in Turkish rural regions (Çaya, 2014), estimations of homicide rates in Cambodia (Broadhurst, 2002), and violent farm crime in Zimbabwe (Rutherford, 2004). With rural inhabitants often lacking resources and social capital compared to urban residents, the link between social disorganization, poverty, and violent crime in rural areas has been noted in a multitude of papers (Lee and Slack, 2008; Melde, 2006).

4.2.3.1. Domestic violence, violence against women. A total of 38% of the studies on violence were dedicated to domestic violence and a broader focus on violence against women, but also to topics such as child abuse (Calvert and Munsie-Benson, 1999; Dawson and Wells, 2006; El-Hak et al., 2009). Overall, the gender split among the lead authors was nearly fifty-fifty, with 52% women. For the studies focused on violence against women and domestic violence, female lead authors were in the majority (65%), breaking the overall trend.

A whole branch of rural criminology literature specializes in domestic violence (against partners and children) and in intimate partner violence (IPV) in particular, which describes physical and sexual violence, stalking, or psychological harm by a current or former partner or spouse – more often against women. In the United States, for instance, intimate femicide, or murder of women by their current, previous or potential partners, is one specific crime type that has been found to be on the rise as well as proportionally higher in percentage in rural areas than in urban and suburban areas (DeKeseredy et al., 2016). Yet, the issue has not been prioritized, which may be due to a lack of awareness and education (DeKeseredy, 2020) and to an overall normalization of the problem. Such normalization makes the problem invisible, and under-reporting is the result of both the victims' silence as well as the silence, tolerance and negligence of the social circles surrounding the victims (Gracia, 2004). Neighbors in rural areas may have a higher tolerance for certain acts than in urban areas (Anderson, 1999), and privacy norms dictate that they “keep their mouths shut” or “keep out of other people's business.”

In rural areas, barriers to reporting crime and receiving support can be more palpable for women who have been victims of violence and can entail a higher degree of isolation due to long distances, poverty and the gender-role dynamics within couples (Ceccato, 2015). Women often have less access to cash, property or other assets, with men or their extended family often controlling those resources directly or through family trusts (Wendt, 2016). Distances between residences in rural areas are often greater than in urban centers, which makes it difficult for neighbors to discover any violence that occurs (DeKeseredy et al., 2004). Additionally, if the woman decides to seek help, it is not always easy to get away from the residence (Websdale, 1998). The nearest women's shelter may be many miles away, and the distance may be exacerbated by poor or no public transportation (Lewis, 2003), and limited or sporadic access to the internet or mobile phones (DeKeseredy and Joseph, 2006). As a result, official data on domestic violence and/or violence against women in rural areas are significantly problematic. Although studies on violence against women in the Global South are still scarce, examples can be found in DeKeseredy et al. (2018), Jewkes et al. (2005) and Abrahams and Jewkes (2010).

4.2.4. Theme 4 – Fear of crime and the intersectionality of safety

A total of 14% of the publications were dedicated to perceptions of safety and fear of crime. In studies on this theme, surveys was the dominant method of choice (53%), followed by interviews (22%). As

with many other identified themes, the United States and the United Kingdom were the more studied countries followed by Australia and Canada, but rural fear in New Zealand was also studied several times. The Global South was not as present in this theme, and mainly included India (Patel, 2020), Mexico and Central America (Wladyka and Yaworsky, 2017), Pakistan (Baloch, 2013) and Turkey (Karakus et al., 2010).

We found that the reviewed literature can be broken down into three categories of factors as regards to fear and/or safety perceptions in rural areas – individual factors, contextual factors and global factors, described here. The *first* category relates to individual factors that affect fear. An individual's gender, age and disability affect safety perceptions but also previous victimization. Although victimization is often influenced by gender and other individual characteristics (Whitzman, 2007); Madan and Nalla, 2015), research has shown that it is the intersection of some individual characteristics that determines an individual's vulnerability to crime and fear of crime. This intersectionality, as a theory, has been used to analyze how social and cultural categories interact (Crenshaw, 1989) to explain varied levels of safety perceptions (Gainey and Seyfrit, 2001). Within our sample of fear of crime studies, gender frequently appeared as a notable variable. It has been found that both urban and rural women express greater fear than men, due to higher vulnerability to sexual assault in conjunction with other victimization (Little et al., 2005; Pleggenkuhle and Schafer, 2018). Lack of perceived safety can also have numerous inhibiting effects on the quality of life, especially in terms of women's mobility and physical activity (Timperio et al., 2015). Studies on women's fear of crime have typically been dominated by accounts of urban women (Panelli et al., 2004) but Cates et al. (2003) found that exceptions include Cates et al. (2003), which found that negative perception of “noxiousness of crime” had a greater correlation with crime reporting for rural women than men, while at the same time women perceived police intervention as less effective. Although it has been found that urban women may fear crime to a greater extent than rural women (Timperio et al., 2015), it has also been shown that rural areas have their own unique structures and relationships with criminal behavior. Little et al. (2005) presented a study on New Zealand and the United Kingdom, where the notion of rural space being safer than its urban counterpart was common even among rural women. It seems fear may primarily be fear of strangers, which in turn may come at the cost of missing crime committed by local community members (Panelli et al., 2004).

Other studied individual factors linked to fear of crime and perceptions of safety include age (Patel, 2020; Wallace & May 2005) and race (Whitfield et al., 2018). While elderly persons are generally more fearful of victimization than other groups, rural elderly may have higher perceptions of safety due to better community protectiveness, as well as stronger social capital and community bonds (Amegbor et al., 2018; Ollenburger, 1981). Lee (1982), however, showed that elderly farmers may be more fearful of victimization than other rural residents, which follows other findings on fear among farmers (e.g. Saltiel et al., 1992; Smith, 2020; Bankston et al. (1987). Intersections between age and race have been found by Bachman et al. (2011), who showed that while differences in perceptions of safety among white and African American youth in school were mainly small, white students living in urban areas showed significantly higher fear, while the opposite was true for African American students. This was partly explained by the racial composition of different communities, where urban areas were more heterogenic while rural and suburban areas were more densely populated by homogenous ethnical groups.

The *second* category comprises the contextual factors of the rural environment, e.g. neighborhood type, village and country contexts. Over our time period, a number of studies showed that rural areas generally seemed to be linked to higher perceptions of safety among their residents than urban areas (Avery et al., 2019; Ball, 2001; Bankston et al., 1987; Belyea and Zingraff, 1988; Karakus et al., 2010; Menard, 1987; Rotarou, 2018). Rural attributes such as remoteness and

geographical isolation may have a positive impact on perceptions of safety (e.g. less accessibility for potential offenders), while at the same time open and less dense areas may increase worry (Panelli et al., 2005). Rural residents have in some cases reported greater worry of being alone at night and becoming victims of burglary compared to their urban counterparts (Mawby, 2007). Rural-to-urban migrating residents have been observed to feel less safe when relocating to urban areas than urban-to-urban migrants (Kennedy and Krahn, 1984). The perceptions of safety among rural college and university students have also been observed in different contexts (De Angelis et al., 2017; Pritchard et al., 2015), as well as the perspectives of rural businesses and their perceptions of quietness and order depending on the nature of their location (Mawby, 2004). On the one hand, clearly defined private space is necessary to improve perceptions of safety, but on the other hand, barriers and fortress-like structures can generate fear and suspicion. On the Australian frontier, historical defensive architecture can be seen as “physical manifestations of settler fear and aboriginal resistance” (Grguric, 2009). Overall, it appears that contextual factors, in this case physical situational factors in rural areas, have not been paid as much attention as individual and social factors.

The *third* category is composed of global factors, which are less tangible but still very important in defining overall levels of declared fear. Fear, in this case, as suggested by Pain and Smith (2008), is central to the terrain of everyday lived experience, rather than a straightforward relationship between the individual and a variety of societal structures; fear is embedded in a network of moral and political geographies. International literature confirms that this process goes hand in hand with long-term social and economic exclusion and discrimination related to factors of gender, ethnicity, and length of residence (Babacan, 2012; Chakraborti and Garland, 2011; Garland and Chakraborti, 2004; Jensen, 2012; Scott et al., 2012). Many of the reviewed studies that addressed global factors emphasized the social and cultural constructions of rural fear of crime, “cultural threat” and fear of the “other” (Ceccato, 2015f; Scott et al., 2012; Scott and Hogg, 2015; Yarwood, 2001; Yarwood and Gardner, 2000). Rural crime has often been perceived as the result of intrusion by urban influence and other local, marginalized groups, for example seasonal workers or local youth (Ceccato, 2015g, 2017; Little et al., 2005; Yarwood, 2010). This can also be observed in the case of “boomtowns”, i.e. smaller towns experiencing rapid growth in both economy and population. Krannich et al. (1985) showed that while actual victimization experiences in boomtowns did not differ from non-boomtowns, the perceived fear was significantly higher. Media consumption has also been shown to explain some fear of crime, although the relationship was not significant in accounting for perceptions of disorder (Lytle et al., 2020). Norris and Reeves (2013) noted that the link between fear of crime and rural residents that subscribed to authoritarian ideals had a larger impact when the “threat” was framed as outsider criminals compared to when it was a local issue. Additionally, there is the “outsider’s” perception of safety. Such studies addressed topics ranging from the victimization of domestic tourists in New Zealand (Buttle and Rodgers, 2014) to minority fears of genocide (Farrell et al., 1983). Chakraborti and Garland (2003) examined attitudes toward crime and fear among migrants and minority groups in British rural areas, revealing widespread victimization and fear, as well as mistrust of the criminal justice system due to a perceived lack of support.

Fear can also be revealed by silence, in other words, underreporting crimes to the police. Examples in the reviewed literature discussed the differences in reported rates of domestic violence across Sweden as a sign of differences in gender contracts (Ceccato, 2016b, 2018). Low rates of reported violence against women has been associated with a ‘code of silence’ imposed by patriarchal community values and a fear of ostracism if violence becomes public (DeKeseredy et al., 2012). Ceccato et al. (2022b) showed that crimes against farmers are highly underreported partially because they think the police cannot help them, and lack of satisfaction with the police has been shown to have a link with higher levels of fear (Lytle and Randa, 2015).

4.2.5. Theme 5 – Crime prevention and safety interventions

Publications on crime prevention and improving safety constituted 10% of the total. The earliest study within our time frame appeared in 1986 (Shernock, 1986), while 41% of the studies were published after 2015. The most utilized method was surveys (37%), followed by secondary data (34%), and interviews and statistical analyses (22% respectively). Crime prevention in the United States was studied the most, while Australia, Sweden and Tanzania were present in more studies than the United Kingdom.

There are obstacles to preventing crime in rural areas. The perception of the ‘rural idyll’ may both diminish the perceived need for rural crime prevention and make residents complacent about their personal security. As with other crime research, crime prevention programs have long been urban-centric, ignoring unique rural contexts, challenges, and patterns of crime as well as the heterogeneity of rural places (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013; Smith and Huff, 1982). It has been argued that there is a need for a more diverse understanding of rural community concepts and better descriptions of context (Bell and Hall, 2007). The rural-urban relationship is also continuously transforming, where the importance of physical space for committing crime is decreasing due to, for example, the expansion of ICT-networks (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013).

Technological measures in rural areas have not been studied as extensively as other types of measures, but the studies that exist examined e.g. technological approaches to prevent farm theft (Harkness and Larkins, 2020), housing design to prevent break-ins (Hamid and Yusuf, 2013) and effects of lighting on reducing violent crime (Arvate et al., 2018). Aransiola and Ceccato (2020) reviewed applications of modern technologies in situational crime prevention and found that traditional measures (locking doors, guard dogs, raising fences, etc.) were still the most common in rural areas, while modern measures (CCTV, security lights, alarms and drones) were generally more supplemental. CCTV and alarms have been shown to have little to no effect on preventing crime, especially on farms, but have proven better at detecting and monitoring wildlife crime (Aransiola and Ceccato, 2020; Liedka et al., 2019). There is evidence that lighting plays a positive role in deterring crime – security lights for farm crime (Aransiola and Ceccato, 2020) and regular street lights for violent crime (Arvate et al., 2018).

Crime prevention in rural areas has mainly been characterized by forms of community policing and local partnerships, e.g. neighborhood watch schemes, farm watch and patrols, etc. (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013), as formal policing has often been more prioritized and funded in urban areas (Buck et al., 1983). Participatory policing (like neighborhood watch schemes) has been shown to contribute to reducing fear and improving relationships with the police, but also suffer from considerable social bias (Yarwood and Edwards, 1995). Participants are often white, male, and from average-to higher-income households (Lab and Stanich, 1994; Shernock, 1986; Smith and Lab, 1991; Yarwood and Edwards, 1995). As such, these initiatives are perceived to be controlled by the local, rural elite and focusing more on the exclusion of marginalized groups perceived to threaten the rural elite, rather than on reducing crime (Mawby and Yarwood, 2011; Yarwood, 2015). In rural Sweden, there have been broader crime prevention initiatives focused on creating local partnerships, although it appears that volunteers have not played a large role in direct crime prevention measures and local partnerships; rather members of the initiatives work as part of the police organizations or municipalities (Ceccato, 2015h). In the Global South, crime prevention via community participation is especially prominent, such as in Nigeria (Arisukwu et al., 2020) or efforts of ethnic vigilante groups like the Sungungu people in Tanzania (Bukurura, 1995; Jakobsen, 2016; Kudo, 2020; Mkutu, 2010), although more physical prevention measures like CPTED (Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design) have also been researched, as in Iran (Molaei and Hashempour, 2020).

In the late 1990s in countries like the United Kingdom, crime legislation and policies came into force where there was a shift in moving responsibility to local authorities for policing and crime prevention

(Pierpoint et al., 1998) and in Australia where policies emphasized residents' personal responsibility regarding crime control (Lupton, 1999). Pierpoint et al. (1998) argued that rural areas may have a greater need for authorities with different political agendas to cooperate, which complicates forming local crime prevention initiatives. Rural Australians, while willing to acknowledge the role of personal responsibility, recognized the social structural aspects of crime and continued to expect governing agencies to address problems they felt were beyond their control (Lupton, 1999).

Youth are one of the main concerns regarding crime prevention in rural areas due to the risk of early career criminals, the common perception of being disorderly, and the association with drug and alcohol addiction (Ceccato, 2015b). Often the solution has been to try to keep young residents 'busy'. Efforts to combat substance abuse among youths in Slovenia have included stricter regulations for the sale of alcohol and presenting anti-drug propaganda in schools (Petrovskiy, 2020). Further challenges are found regarding farm crime, as the lack of data from official sources makes it difficult to predict crime patterns (Ceccato and Dolmen, 2013; Mears et al., 2007a). Situational conditions seem to be highly linked to farm crime, but security practices do not seem to be linked to victimization rates (Barclay and Donnermeyer, 2002, 2011). DeKeseredy (2020) described points that can help prevent rural violence against women: education and creating awareness of the problem are important initial steps, although an overly critical tone may backfire. Placemaking has been brought forward as a way to create trust and shared history in the community through festivals, music and art, which can be used to confront expressions of rural patriarchy (see also DeKeseredy et al. (2009) for a similar potential application of second-generation CPTED principles to prevent violence against women). Finally, men's mindsets and understanding of violence against women must be transformed to rework detrimental, trained behaviors.

4.2.6. Theme 6 – Environmental crime

Crime against the environment and wildlife was the theme identified in 8% of all the reviewed publications ($n = 30$). Studies on environmental crime were mainly conducted in the past decade, with 94% having been published in 2011–2020, although the oldest in our time frame was published in 1996 (Lowe et al., 1996). The lead author was male in 63% of the cases. Among the methods identified ($n = 45$), most publications utilized secondary data in their analysis (27%), followed by interviews (19%) as well as reviews of other research (14%). The United States was the most studied area under this theme (20%) but shortly followed by the United Kingdom and Sweden (13%). Studies on the Global South included countries like Brazil (Carmenta et al., 2019) and Indonesia (Saptawan et al., 2020), as well as African examples focusing on Ghana (Eduful et al., 2020).

Over half of the publications (52%) were related in some sense to poaching and illegal hunting of animals, including older pieces such as Osborne (2016) and Archer (1999), while the remaining publications were related to pollution, use of illegal pesticides, dumping of hazardous materials, animal abuse, environmental justice, intentionally set forest fires and environmentally hazardous industries like mining (Brisman et al., 2016; Ceccato, 2015d, 2015i; Gargiulo et al., 2016; Lovell, 2016; Perdue, 2018; Salvador, 2016; Stassen and Ceccato, 2020; Wisniewski et al., 2019).

Among the publications related to illegal hunting, a large number observed how the act could be viewed as a political protest for justice or general defiance against authorities (Holmes, 2016; Højberg et al., 2017; Pohja-Mykrä, 2016; von Essen et al., 2015), or a clash between cultural subsistence hunting and authorities (Antunes et al., 2019). Multiple studies discussed how environmental crime in general can be perceived as 'folk crime', i.e. illegal acts that are perceived by the offenders and other community members as not so criminal, dangerous or harmful (e.g., von Essen et al., 2016; White, 2016). A notable type of folk crime is the illegal killing of animals by hunters and farmers (see e.g., Enticott, 2011; Wagner et al., 2019). The study by von Essen et al. (2017) found

tendencies of accepting and justifying the illegal killing of wolves by Swedish hunters, although the hunters distanced themselves from the crimes by discussing them through the "veil of anonymity".

Among the articles regarding pollution, perspectives included individuals like farmers being victims of environmental crime (Barclay and Bartel, 2015), but also farmers as offenders (Lin, 2015; Ruiz-Suárez et al., 2015) as well as larger companies like oil and coal industries in rural areas and their effects on the environment, residents and livestock (Opsal & O'Connor Shelley, 2014). McDowell (2013) delved into the topic of environmental racism and presented a case study of the historically African American rural town of Mobile, Arizona. The case told the story of how a community with limited social and political capital managed to organize and resist against placing an additional land fill in the area. Similar to illegal hunting, both offenders and local residents seem to have a more accepted view of illegal dumping and pollution than of 'conventional' crime. To conclude, this section has showcased the relevancy of understanding rural contexts in the field of green criminology (for more extensive reviews of the topic, see e.g., White (2013) and Nurse and Whyatt (2020)).

4.2.7. Theme 7 – Theoretical scope in rural context

The body of research focused on the theory in rural criminology encompass 7% of the publications, which have aimed to develop a theoretical foundation for a research area that was, until recently, not given much focus by criminologists. These publications have expanded on definitions, concepts and theoretical models. Half of the studies were published between 2015 and 2020, often written in the United States and United Kingdom but also in France, Slovenia and Australia (Barclay, 2017; Harris and Harkness, 2016; Hodgkinson and Harkness, 2020; Meško, 2020; Mouhanna, 2016). Any attempt to summarize these theoretical traditions may fail to reveal the complexity each of them applied to the rural because of the overlaps and synergies between these theoretical traditions. One example, social disorganization theory suggests that structural disadvantage breeds crime and that offending occurs when impaired social bonds are insufficient to enforce legitimate behavior and discourage offending. The legacy of social disorganization theory (Bursik, 1999; Kornhauser, 1978; Sampson, 1986; Shaw and McKay, 1942) is strong in rural criminology. It was also visible among the more quantitative studies in this review (see e.g., Ceccato and Dolmen, 2011; Kaylen and Pridemore, 2011; Osgood and Chambers, 2003; Rogers and Pridemore, 2016). However, many such studies failed to detect specific dynamics that fit the rural environment (as were found to fit the urban environment) and called for a reassessment of the conclusions drawn about how social disorganization and crime are related in rural areas. In an attempt to question the legacy of social disorganization theory, Donnermeyer (2014) suggested that there are multiple forms of social organization (instead of social disorganization) in rural environments, allowing individuals to simultaneously participate in multiple networks, some of which may be criminal (for more detail, see Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy, 2013).

Environmental criminology and approaches under the umbrella of 'crime science' also comprised an integral part of the reviewed rural crime literature, including applications routine activity theory and situational crime prevention to rural areas in different countries (e.g., Aransiola and Ceccato, 2020; Ceccato, 2015k; Harkness, 2020; Harris and Harkness, 2016). Furthermore, critical perspectives in rural criminology and the intersectionality of safety heavily dominated the past two decades of reviewed studies, with numerous contributions to the field from North America, Australia and the United Kingdom (Carrington et al., 2014; DeKeseredy et al., 2007; J. J. F. Donnermeyer, 2017; Donnermeyer et al., 2013; Donnermeyer, 2007; Donnermeyer, 2012; Donnermeyer, 2018; Donnermeyer and DeKeseredy, 2013; Garland and Chakraborti, 2006a; 2006b; Robinson and Gardner, 2012; Rogers and Pridemore, 2016; Smith and McElwee, 2013b; Somerville et al., 2015; Yarwood, 2010; Yarwood and Edwards, 1995).

Among the criminological approaches to explain crime in general,

the theory of social disorganization has had some of the greatest influence. Population size, mobility and stability, income, unemployment and degree of urbanization are some of the conditions that have consistently been found to have a relationship with crime (Allen and Cancino, 2012; Barnett and Mencken, 2002; Fafchamps and Minten, 2006; Jobes, 1999; Ukert et al., 2018). Jobes et al. (2004) found support for the application of the theory in rural areas, but economic factors (poverty, income, etc.) were observed to have a weaker relationship with crime than social measures (population diversity and mobility, family stability, etc.). Furthermore, intra-rural variations warrant studies per se. For example, it was shown that two rural settlements with similar demographics (in terms of ethnicity in this case) but with different level of social cohesion had vastly different levels of crime (Jobes et al., 2005). Several studies have inferred that the application of social disorganization theory and other urban-based concepts are insufficient to fully explain rural crime (Deller and Deller, 2011; Kaylen and Pridemore, 2013; Sacco et al., 1993). Moreover, Rephann (1999) revealed in their analysis that non-metropolitan crime has been shaped by rural development efforts, a change in demographics through immigration and diversity, and an expanded economy, and thus has moved closer to resembling crime in urban contexts. The structural density of neighborhoods has been shown to be positively correlated with crime victimization, and was noted to have a stronger relationship in rural areas than in urban areas (Sampson, 1983). In summary, research within this theme has called for new conceptual models of structural conditions to explain crime that are specifically tailored to rural contexts.

4.2.8. Theme 8 – drug use, production and trade

Drugs in the rural was the theme in 7% (n = 27) of the reviewed publications. Research on rural drug use and production seem to be on the increase, with 59% of such publications coming in the past five years. The gender split among the lead authors was nearly sixty-four, male and female, respectively. Interviews was the most common method, appearing in 37% of these publications, followed by secondary data analysis (33%) and use of statistical analyses such as regression models (26%). Following the overall trend, the United States was the most studied area within the theme, followed by Australia, the United Kingdom and Sweden. South America showed a stronger presence here than in other themes, showcasing papers on drug production and use in countries like Peru, Bolivia, and Brazil.

The focus of most studies was on the problem of substance abuse (e.g. Gundy et al., 2016; Hay and Gannon, 2006; Milano et al., 2017). Typically, these studies examined links between drug and alcohol abuse and criminal behavior, and provided background characteristics of the drug users (e.g. Hakansson et al., 2008; Kalesan et al., 2020; Orsi et al., 2018; Oser et al., 2011; Petrie et al., 2010), but also included the factors of mental and physical health (Martire and Larney, 2011; Nordfjærn et al., 2013; Stallwitz, 2016; Webster et al., 2007, 2010). The rest of the publications were dedicated to the actual production of drugs in rural contexts (e.g. (Weisheit et al., 1993). Some studies also focused on the policing of drug crime and the negative effects of the war on drugs on rural inhabitants (e.g. (Abadie et al., 2018; Shukla et al., 2019; Zaller et al., 2016). Stippel and Serrano-Moreno (2020) described the interaction between the continuous adaptations of anti-drug policies and the cultural importance of the coca leaf in Bolivian rural areas. The relationship between drugs and rural youth also featured (Ceccato, 2015m; Donnermeyer, 2015; Gomez and Pruitt, 2016) where it was commonly pointed out that for a long time rural youth have surpassed their urban equivalents in drug consumption, especially in the United States.

Studies on drug production included marijuana cultivation and methamphetamine production in the rural United States (e.g. (Garriott, 2016; Weisheit and Brownstein, 2016) as well as older pieces (in our time frame) on organized drug production, networks with the rural population and related violence in Peru (van Dun, 2014). Anderson (2018) studied the opium poppy cultivators of the Karen people in

Thailand and provided the perspective of how restricting ethnic minorities' rights can lead to drug production becoming a last means of survival. Some of these studies also fell under the theme of organized crime, discussed in Theme 11.

4.2.9. Theme 9 – property crime

A total of 5% of the reviewed publications focused mainly on property crimes such as larceny and burglary (n = 19), of which 68% were published in the past decade, and 57% had female lead authors. Surveys was the most common method, present in 32% of the studies, while statistical analyses such as regression models were utilized in 26% of the articles. The United States and the United Kingdom were the most common study areas, followed by Sweden, Australia and Malaysia.

Among these publications, property crime was presented in different contexts. An investigation of auto theft in both urban and rural areas and possible prevention measures was found in the study by Clarke and Harris (1992). Over two-fifths of these publications were related to farming, and often discussed the thefts of agricultural equipment, fuel and livestock and how to prevent such crimes (e.g., Barclay and Donnermeyer, 2002; Jones, 2012; Mears et al., 2007a). Bunei et al. (2016) described the shift in perceptions and crime patterns of agricultural theft in a historical, African context, from partly accepted folk crime to sometimes violent forms of crime. Examples of the latter were also presented in the study by Fleisher (2002) on the Kuria people and cattle theft in Tanzania. Finally, Hamid and Toyong (2014) illustrated the need for home security in elderly people's residences to prevent home break-ins, while Wilhelmsson and Ceccato (2015) assessed the effects of burglary on Swedish housing prices in non-metropolitan areas. Stack (1995) applied routine activity theory to burglary, and found that crime opportunity was positively correlated with burglaries in rural areas, independent from disorganization effects.

4.2.10. Theme 10 – Discrimination, exclusion, hate crimes

Research on different forms of discrimination and exclusion in rural areas (4%, n = 18) have been conducted in the last two decades (the oldest from 2001, by Chandra and Pradhan, 2001). Of the methods, use of secondary data (19%) and interviews (15%) appeared most among the studies, followed by surveys and literature reviews (11% each). The gender split among the lead authors was 65% male and 35% female. Breaking the general trend, India and United Kingdom were the two most studied areas, followed by Brazil and the United States.

The reviewed publications focused on e.g. racism and hate crime (Forrest and Dunn, 2013; Garland and Chakraborti, 2006a; 2006b; Palmer, 1996; Ruback et al., 2018), displacement of indigenous groups (Jobes, 2004) as well as rural bullying (Evans et al., 2016). Studies in India focused on discrimination in the caste system in the rural parts of the country in particular (Akhtar, 2020; Chandra and Pradhan, 2001; Panda and Guha, 2015). Other studies included the documentation of Eastern Europeans' experiences in semi-rural areas of the United Kingdom (Lumsden et al., 2019), as well as examining the use of racialized fear of crime and the rise of the extreme right in the Flemish countryside in Belgium (Schuermans and de Maesschalck, 2010). Among the publications on discrimination and displacement, a number were related to governmental infringement on rural populations' land, and especially that of indigenous peoples, in such areas as in Brazil and Cuba (Anderson, 2018; Canofre, 2017; Cunneen, 2016; García, 2011). Evans et al. (2016) emphasized the importance of factors such as level of isolation and restriction of social networks when comparing bullying of rural and urban youth and assessing the probability of risky behavior.

4.2.11. Theme 11 – Organised crime in rural areas

Rural organized crimes can take many forms – including theft, drug production, trafficking, food fraud and counterfeiting, as well as street violence from gangs and larger organizations and networks (e.g. Somerville et al., 2015; Xi, 2018). A total of 5% of the reviewed publications were related to this theme (n = 17), with 89% of those published in

2014–2020 and two-thirds by male lead authors. Regarding the study area, one-third of the publications focused on the United States and one-fourth on British examples. Other studies were mainly situated in Latin America, including Peru, Brazil, Mexico and Cuba. More than two-fifths (42%) of the publications utilized interviews as a method for data collection, while 19% employed field work. We further categorized different types of rural organized crime into the subthemes below:

- **Organized drug trade** – Studies under this subtheme were deeper explorations into rural drug operations. The rural drug production industry was given a general overview in (Weisheit and Brownstein, 2016), who discussed the manufacturing and distribution operations of methamphetamine and marijuana from lone ‘meth cooks’ to the Mexican cartel. Related studies looked at the concept of rural criminal entrepreneurship and the networks formed within and outside of the local communities (e.g. (Clark et al., 2020; Davis and Potter, 1991). De Souza Mello Bicalho and Hoefle (1999) presented a study focused on organized crime in northeast Brazil related to cannabis cultivation and its intensifying effects on local family feuds and envy-inspired violence. Similarly, the study by van Dun (2014) examined illegal networks and the relationship between local cocaine producers’ drug bosses and the rural community; where the authors noted how the mere presence of illicit activities may not necessarily be the cause of violence.
- **Gang crime** – Rural gangs are not a recent phenomenon but have only recently received the same attention as urban gangs. The role of inequality and the disconnect between migrant and native community members have been highlighted as reasons why young people engage in gangs (Glosser, 2016). Watkins and Taylor (2016) showed that the likelihood of young people joining a gang was equal among youth from urban, suburban and rural areas. The relevance of continued research on rural gangs is further emphasized, as studies such as that by Anderson et al. (2016) revealed a disproportionate amount of gang-related crime in the rural, western part of Pitt County, North Carolina compared to the general population.
- **Human trafficking** – A subject of increasing relevance is the prevalence of human trafficking in rural areas, which can be related to both sexual exploitation and forced labor. In general, the reviewed studies showed that there exists a certain lack of knowledge and preparedness to tackle the issue in rural areas, with government officials and professionals being less aware and less likely to have received training in the subject (Cole and Sprang, 2015; Kumar et al., 2020). While sex trafficking of women and children is the more well-known form of human trade, there were a number of studies that focused on trafficking in order to exploit labor, particularly within the farming industry (Barrick, 2016; Byrne and Smith, 2016). The intersection with green criminology was also studied, providing a take on the link between environmental harm and exploitation of labor, as in Brisman et al. (2016) and Brisman et al. (2014).
- **Other forms of organized crime** – Other research topics included organized food fraud and theft by farmers, as with the illegal halal meat trade (McElwee et al., 2017; Smith and McElwee, 2013a), as well as mafias emerging as illegal suppliers of sand and oil in rural India (Michelutti, 2019).

4.2.12. Theme 12 – Other and emerging topics in rural criminology

New contributions, especially from the Global South, comprised 2% of the reviewed publications (n = 8). All of these were published in 2011–2020, with 62,5% male and 37,5% female lead authors. The countries of study were dominated by examples from the Global South, including India, Bangladesh, Ghana and China. Analysis of secondary data was present in 38% of the publications, with interviews and literature reviews in a quarter each. This theme included rare topics such as rural prostitution, as in Scott (2016), where it was noted that the high informal control in rural areas may have minimized street prostitution but had not minimized such activities in private homes or brothels.

Other examples involved crimes against girls in Africa; see e.g. responses to criminalizing female genital cutting by Shell-Duncan et al. (2013).

The imposition of binary gender norms in rural environments is not well researched (but is becoming an area of interest) in terms of both those who transgress gender in their daily lives (LBQTI+, safety and rurality) and those whose lives are lived within such constraints. Yet, the rural ‘other’ was presented in a number of studies that deal with sexuality and safety. Bell (2000), for instance, is a seminal study on cultural constructions of rural gay masculinity in the United States, showed a blurred rural-urban divide. More recently, Conner and Okamura (2021) illustrated the advantages of living in rural areas for LGBT + rights advocates while DeKeseredy et al. (2014) showed that the way the media portrayed the sexuality of rural inhabitants (no matter their gender and sexual orientation) was distorted and served the interests of particular rationalities of abuse.

Cheng and Urpelainen (2019) provided a look into criminal politicians and their effects on communities in rural India, where politicians with criminal charges were linked to exacerbating household poverty. Similarly, Banerjee et al. (2014) studied criminal politicians in India but from the perspective of rural voters and whether they were indifferent or ignorant to the corruption. Meng (2016) examined corruption related to land use expropriation leading to protests and violence in rural China. Nasrin (2011) contributed with a study of the rural customs of dowry practice in Bangladesh. And, finally, in Barclay et al. (2016) addressed pedagogy with four statements on teaching rural criminology, where the final point made was the importance of connecting and contextualizing specific cases of rural crime to general criminological theories and concepts. Finally, a body of studies devoted to historical rural criminology was identified in the reviewed literature. Studies varied from rural police and policing, and the meaning and social context of crime in preindustrial times to criminal justice. They included cases in the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, Malaysia, Germany, Spain and Argentina; see e.g. the studies by (Rugh, 2002); (Poole, 2008); (Stickley and Pridemore, 2007); (Kheng (1981); Johnson (1992); (Shakesheff, 2003); Mantecón and Movellán (1998); Palacio (2001) Rydström (2005); Oden (2005) and Graybill (2005). For property crimes in particular, see Kilday (2014) and Jones (2016).

5. Discussion of the results

Criminology is both urban-based and urban-biased, and although things are changing, it is no surprise that rural crime consistently ranks among the least studied social problems in criminology (Barclay et al., 2004a; Ceccato, 2016b; DeKeseredy, 2015; Donnermeyer, 2012). One reason for this lack of attention to crime in the rural is perhaps the widespread belief in a dichotomy between urban and rural – the former being criminogenic, and the latter problem-free, idyllic, and healthier and friendlier than the urban. Still low crime rates in rural areas are often taken as a sign that crime and safety are neither a priority nor a problem for those living there (Ceccato, 2017; Little et al., 2005).

Despite some clear efforts in the past decade, the process of establishing specific concepts and definitions, methods and theoretical frameworks tailored for rural contexts is still a work in progress, as the urban models and theories continue to dominate main stream criminology research. While there are notable works published in the 1980s and 1990s, it appears that the field of rural criminology started its slow acceleration in the early 2000s, to reach its current peak starting in the mid-2010s. Crucial questions regarding whether a new set of concepts and definitions, methods and theories is necessary or even desirable to capture the reality of crime and safety in rural contexts are yet not answered (or, to some extent, even stated). There are also related issues of data scarcity and methodological adequacy in rural contexts that should be discussed. Similarly, the way official data are recorded and manipulated – as the urban dictates the norm for data collection – leads to potential accuracy issues and biases. As such, there exists a need to further develop the very fundamentals of rural crime research, in

particular new approaches to better characterize environments along the spectrum of the rural-urban continuum.

As demonstrated by this review, the field of rural criminology has become more dynamic and quite diverse in terms of research topics, covering common crime types such as violence and property crime, but also environmental crime, organized crime, domestic violence, drug production and distribution, as well as responses to crime with policing, crime prevention and fear of crime. Reviewed studies have included the perspectives of a range of different societal groups such as women, ethnic minorities and indigenous peoples, youth and farmers, to name a few. More commonly, in our review, we found critical perspectives of the rural, particularly in relation to the process of globalization of the countryside, the global impact of organized crime on peoples and communities, as well as new facets of social exclusion in rural contexts and gender relationships. In the early 2000s, researchers noted the exclusionary aspects and expressions of xenophobia that could take place in 'tight-knit' rural communities. The rural offender is often viewed as the 'other' – from the outside (i.e. strangers, tourists, and new and temporary residents), but also based on age, race or other factors; in other words, people who for some reason or another do not fit into a community's idealized perception. It has been noted that quick changes in demographics (e.g. in boomtowns) increase fear of victimization, although the actual victimization rates do not necessarily reflect this. There are not many studies that have focused on the differences between offenders from the 'outside' and those endemic to the rural environment, i.e. how their targeting and offending may differ from each other. These comparisons are also lacking between different types of rural communities, e.g. between remote and accessible rural areas, or between poorer and more affluent areas.

In this review, although limited by the keywords and restrictions applied in the search for publications, rural criminology as a field appeared to *not* be as interdisciplinary as others, with the majority of studies coming strictly from the school of criminology/sociology (although some studies also came from other social sciences such as psychology, anthropology and geography). For example, the roles of (urban) planning and governance in explaining and preventing rural crime were not as present as one might have expected, perhaps reflecting a neglect of rural areas in general by researchers and local and national authorities. The intersections of crime and political and ideological attitudes within communities appeared in a few studies but this topic is also relevant for future expansion. The physical and mental health effects of crime on rural residents have been analyzed (mainly in relation to drug use), but often as an adjacent issue to crime; whereas how crime impacts residents' health in a more direct manner can be investigated to a much greater extent. The implications of creating and expanding technologies and their networks on facilitating, committing, and preventing crime is also a topic relevant for future studies. Cyber-crime for example is independent of the restrictions that more tangible forms of crime impose on the offenders, making rural residents more accessible targets for crimes such as fraud and threats. With an increasingly larger share of the global population being connected to the internet in some shape or form, including countries of the Global South, this is an area that demands further attention. Under the theme of crime prevention, most publications studied formal and community policing, with little focus on the potential uses of technology in preventing crime in rural areas, as well as rural-urban differences in effectiveness. Additionally, the implications of implementing these technological measures is also a topic worthy of study; for example, the accessibility and affordability of various interventions/measures for rural versus urban residents, as well as measuring their effects on reducing fear of crime (versus crime itself).

Furthermore, there are other phenomena that are relevant in rural studies but that did not appear as research themes among the reviewed publications. For example, the displacement and movement of crime and people to and from rural areas could be explored in much more depth. While the effects of sudden population increases in rural areas have been

covered in terms of boomtowns, more specific trends such as counter-urbanization have been discussed to a much lesser extent. With the continuous development and growth of countries in the Global South, there exists a need for research not only focusing on rural areas per se, but also on the realities of rural areas from a non-western-centric perspective.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

This article reviewed and synthesized a growing body of literature on rural criminology that has recently drastically increased. Rural criminology is a rich field of research that contributes to criminology and other related disciplines as well as to policy and practice. However, the knowledge that is currently available can be perceived as segmented. Most publications were from Anglo-Saxon countries, such as the United States (e.g. Ohio State, Illinois State and West Virginia Universities) followed by the United Kingdom, Australia, and Canada. More recently, book chapters and articles have also been published by authors in India, Malaysia, Brazil, China and a few African countries, constituting examples of rural criminology research carried out in the Global South. From 1980 to 2000 the number of publications grew slowly, but we observed a major increase after 2011. Articles often featured in indexed journals such as the *Journal of Rural Studies*, the *Journal of Criminal Justice* and *Crime prevention and Community Safety*, and among the edited volumes, the *Routledge International Handbook of Rural Criminology* is an important reference in the field. The lead authors have tended to be male, but the gender gap has decreased in the past decades, with noticeable variations depending on the theme of study. More importantly, while rural criminology is a field that embraces the legacy of several theoretical traditions, it is slowly but surely opening to a more diverse set of perspectives, well befitting the demands of the 2030 sustainability agenda as well as the challenges that characterize twenty-first century criminology.

In terms of methods, approximately half the reviewed publications were qualitative pieces, a third fell along the spectrum of quantitative methods, and the rest was a mix of qualitative and quantitative methods. Yet, studies showed major variations in methodology and type of crime investigated, ranging from domestic violence to drug production and environmental wildlife crimes, responses to crime such as policing and crime prevention, as well as observations of various characteristics of both offenders and victims. Furthermore, while studies based on and in the Global North still dominate, in the past decade the rural areas in the Global South have gained more attention. There has been an increasingly critical lens applied to studies of rural areas, especially regarding how beneficial and inclusive the notions of community are.

Overall, research has shown that crime has decreased over the years in many parts of the world, with rural areas in most countries having exhibited lower rates of crime than urban areas (with a few exceptions). During the past decades, there have been signs that rural and urban crime rates are converging (urban decreasing and rural increasing), but crime underreporting and difficulties in comparing crime rates (definitional, theoretical and methodological) across geographies still constitute a limiting factor in the analyses of crime trends. A very small set of studies has examined the spatial and temporal characteristics of rural crime. The literature has also addressed some of the typical offenders in rural areas, but how deviant behavior may be normalized among locals as well. This systematic review has illustrated interesting examples of how globalization, organized crime, new ideological trends and ICT have influenced criminogenic conditions in the countryside (e.g. computer-based fraud, illegal animal rights activism, drugs, wage thefts, slavery, animal abuse, slavery, racism).

It should be recognized that the literature is quite definitive about the complexity of rural areas and how their nature affects what occurs there in terms of crime, its victims and safety perceptions, policing and crime prevention. There is a realization that criminology has relied on urban understandings of rural crime and rural offenders for decades.

Researchers are calling for models that can better explain the mechanisms behind rural crime, victimization and crime prevention. This also includes improving understandings of the intersections of demographic, ethnic and socioeconomic factors, cultural contexts and situational conditions unique to rural areas. Furthermore, there is also need for comparative analyses based on more than just a rural-urban dichotomy, such as inter- and intra-rural analyses. This would further cement the complexities of rural areas per se without the need for comparisons with the urban norm. Crime prevention programs have long been urban-centric, ignoring the uniqueness of rural contexts. Therefore, new ways to explore crime and safety along a *rural-urban continuum* can be a future area of research.

More so than gender, the variables of race and ethnicity have been the focus of various various topics within rural criminology, and especially in studies of countries with notable histories of racial and ethnic inequality within their populations. For example, this includes the United States with comparisons among white, black and Latino populations in rural areas, and Canada and Australia with their respective indigenous populations. The Global South has also provided a few examples of rural minority studies (e.g. Brazil, India and Thailand), but this topic does have room for expansion. Overall, race has been considered across a very diverse set of research themes including the race of both offenders and victims, and covering topics on violence, drugs, hate crimes, fear of crime, and policing and criminal justice. Simultaneously, the rural culture of the exclusion of strangers and others that do not fit into the community's idealized image has been prevalent, and which may be a different issue in urban areas as they often have more diverse populations. Overall, future research should focus on marginalized groups, who, whether based on ethnic background, gender or sexual orientation, clearly have unique experiences with crime and safety in rural areas separate from urban areas.

Our review of the literature has identified several additional areas where more research is needed. First, research on the implications that new information technologies have on rural offending and prevention. On the one hand, communication via social media platforms by police forces has become much more than a public information channel (Dai et al., 2017) as it affects the public's perception of the police as well. Research should investigate the nature of information sharing via social media by police officers in both rural and urban areas and whether such practices improve police legitimacy. On the other hand, it is unclear which are the new types of offenses that are facilitated by these new technologies. For instance, overdose cases have been linked to apps used for drug delivery by traditional mail to one's door in northern Sweden, and in other countries drones have been used to deliver drugs.

Second, there is little existing research on gender issues in policing and crime prevention, although the barriers to reporting crime and accessing support for women have been studied on occasion. There are a few studies on women as rural offenders, including a few historical studies, but otherwise the gendered nature of breaking the law has also been somewhat neglected in rural crime studies. LBQTI + safety needs and the othering process they experience is an emerging field of research that has started attracting more attention in the past few years.

Third, another 'eternally' under-researched topic in rural criminology is to what extent offenders are outsiders or endemic to the community. Local criminals may be accepted as 'part of the community' and their crimes are not reported because their actions are normalized. Studying criminal motilities is important for crime prevention but requires access to data that are currently either scarce, confidential or unavailable due to geoprivacy regulations.

Fourth, we need to assess what situational conditions can tell us about rural crime and perceptions of safety in rural environments and to what extent they impress features typically related to rurality. Fifth, we need studies that investigate policing practices in relation to minorities (LBQTI in particular) in rural communities. And finally, the physical and mental health impacts of crime and fear of crime on rural residents is still an area that needs further attention, especially when the internet

has made individuals more vulnerable. We expect that research into these topics can inform researchers, practitioners and policy makers and help them make rural places safer, more inclusive and more sustainable.

6.1. Limitations

Note that it is a difficult task to estimate how many studies were *not* published in journals linked to SCOPUS, JSTOR and ScienceDirect, which means it is not possible at this stage to estimate the 'dark figure' of material published elsewhere as well as unpublished materials. Conclusions drawn here are based on hundreds of publications which are more likely to show 'expected' results than studies that are uncertain or with 'unexpected' results. In addition, it is important to keep in mind that the reported studies utilized different methods and theoretical approaches, which makes it difficult to compare findings, over and above differences across rural contexts. Various reviewed studies showed, for instance, how socio-demographic and economic factors affect rural crime and safety perceptions in rural areas, but it is unclear to what extent differences might merely be an artefact of the data and methods even when similar methods were applied. Future research could critically assess the use of systematic reviews in rural studies and how the limitations could be overcome.

Yet, despite these limitations, a systematic literature review can be useful for researchers, as it provides an up-to-date, structured overview of the recent or current research themes in rural criminology. The combination and reporting of these studies compose more than sum of their parts. The review itself adds value (Wee and Banister, 2016) because research gaps are revealed, functioning as guidance for researchers looking for under-researched or future topics in this area. In addition, a systematic review of the literature indicates emerging areas on the research frontier, reflecting not yet fully clear processes that link criminogenic conditions typical of rural areas in an interlinked, globalized world. For practitioners, a systematic, international review of research topics can inform them about the most common rural safety problems as well as the types of interventions that have been implemented around the world, possibly indicating what works and what does not, which is fundamental in the discussion of safety as an integral part of social sustainability in rural areas (UN, 2019).

This review is as such not intended to only be of interest for rural criminologists. Those engaged in rural studies in general should find information answering many questions fitting their interests. First, this review greatly contributes to the understanding of rural realities; what experiences and norms are found in rural areas and how rural residents' behavior differ spatially and temporally, or as offenders and victims. Second, it informs us of how general theoretical models and definitions may or may not be applicable on rural areas and dwellers. Third, it is highly relevant for those engaged in rural development, as it provides a fuller picture of how local rural economies can be impacted by crime, and how rural development efforts (e.g. resource extraction and tourism) may in turn impact rural crime and safety. Finally, the review covers a range of topics linked to sustainable development, including: prevention of environmental and wildlife crime, the impact of domestic violence and social norms on rural women, as well as the differing experiences related to crime and safety for those living in the Global North versus Global South. To summarize, it is not only desirable but necessary to recognize the significance of crime and safety issues in rural areas; any understanding of the rural is otherwise left incomplete.

Author statement

Conceptualization: **Vania Ceccato**; Execution of search for literature: **Jonatan Abraham**, analysis of the material and writing of the review: collaborative work **Abraham & Ceccato**.

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