

RURAL CRIME AND RURAL POLICING PRACTICES
(MULTI CULTURAL LAW ENFORCEMENT)

BILAL R. MUHAMMAD
Detroit Police Department
Detroit , MI

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ABSTRACT

Crime and police practices vary from one community to another i.e. city to city and county to county. The study of rural crime and rural police practices can provide insight into police behavior in different communities. Many of the studies regarding police practices have been conducted in urban areas. Research related to rural policing practices and crime is limited, however current trends indicate that crimes that were once deemed urban specific are now becoming issues in rural communities. It is safe to say that rural communities differ from urban communities regarding police practices and crime. Therefore it is important to understand the differences and similarities between rural and urban policing practices and crime. However in light of the limited research conducted it is imperative that we understand how rural crime and rural justice vary across rural communities. The results of the research related to rural policing and crime revealed contradictions that need to be explained. Some of the studies indicated that homicide is higher in rural areas, whereas others note the opposite. It is not clear if the differences were the result of sampling, the definitions used, or the regional variations. Studying these issues across rural areas and between urban and rural areas is useful because it provides information about larger patterns and suggests what works and does not work in policing and crime prevention.

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INTRODUCTION

Compared with urban areas, little is known about rural crime or policing. It appears that rural crime rates have been lower than urban crime rates, however patterns of rural crime indicate the exporting of urban problems to rural areas. Urban drug trafficking has been seen as a driving force behind the spread of drug use and the development of gangs in rural areas. Crimes unique to the rural area include agricultural crimes and wildlife crimes. Phenomenon of rural culture that affect law enforcement include a mistrust of the government, informal social control among citizens and a reluctance to share internal problems. Rural officers often work with lower budgets, less staff, less equipment and fewer written policies, however rural police appear to be more respected and efficient than urban officers. The differences among rural and areas and the differences between rural and urban areas have implications for law enforcement and crime patterns. This paper will contain a Historical review of the research literature related to rural crime and rural policing. The paper will attempt to answer the following questions: what crimes are unique to rural areas, if rural crimes and urban crimes are converging, are urban crimes being exported to rural areas, what are the effects of crimes unique to rural areas on the economy and what are the police practices employed in rural areas.

BACKGROUND AND SIGNIFICANCE

Compared with urban crime and policing, little is known about rural crime and rural policing. One problem with studying rural areas in order to gain insight into rural crime and policing practices is the tendency of many rural communities to keep

community problems within the community. Other reasons, which may account for the limited amount of knowledge related to rural crime and policing practices is rural communities reliance on informal controls, mistrust of the government and the unwillingness rural communities to fully cooperate with reporting to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI's) Uniform Crime Report Program (UCR). Another example of how little attention rural crime and rural policing can be found in the brief one – page section in the International City Management Association's (ICMA's) 447 – page book Local Government Police Management (Garmire,et al., 1982). The ICMA is considered as the definitive reference on municipal police administration. The distinctions between urban and rural policing are considered nominal and are rapidly disappearing. This implies that rural policing is fundamentally the same as urban policing. Further the one – page acknowledgement cited in the 1982 edition is totally absent of in the latest edition of ICMA's book.

Further evidence of the overall lack of knowledge regarding rural departments in the United States has been revealed in the inability to calculate the exact number of agencies. This issue has been a matter of concern for many years. For instance, the 1967 President's Commission on Law Enforcement estimated that the United States had approximately 40,000 separate police agencies (U.S. Department of Justice, 1977:428). By the early 1980's the estimated number of police agencies was greatly reduced to 19, 691.60. In the early 1990's the number of police agencies was estimated at approximately 15,000.61 while the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) estimated the number of police agencies at approximately 17,000.62. The disparity between the aforementioned estimates may be the result of the numerous special policing districts /

agencies and the many, small rural police departments that sometimes have no full – time officers.

Another issue that may impede the study on rural crime and rural policing is defining not only what is rural, but also what is a rural police agency. The stereotypical rural police agency is a small sheriff's office similar to the television program "The Andy Griffith Show". This stereotype does not acknowledge the other agencies involved in rural policing, such as the State police, rural municipal departments, State – level conservation departments, the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), park rangers, the railroad police, or tribal police who operate on Indian reservation.

In light of the aforementioned issues that appear to impede a comprehensive study of rural crime and rural policing i.e., mistrust of the government, and failure to report crimes, along with the migration of urban crimes i.e., Drug trafficking, and gangs to rural areas further research related to rural crime and rural policing practices is warranted.

LINKAGE BETWEEN RESEARCH PROBLEM AND SPSC COURSE

Rural crime and rural policing practices are directly linked to the Multi cultural Law Enforcement course presented. Rural cultures differ from urban cultures socially, economically, ethnically and geographically. As noted in the Multi Cultural Law Enforcement lecture it is imperative that Police Officers have an understanding and cultural a awareness of neighboring communities, including their population make up and police practices. Metropolitan Detroit has many neighboring communities that range from semi rural to rural. Having knowledge of crimes specific to these rural areas and the current policing practices employed in these areas would be extremely helpful in the

event that officers from the Detroit Police Department were required to patrol neighboring rural areas.

LITERATURE REVIEW

RURAL CRIME VERSUS URBAN CRIME

In an overview of the research literature, Weisheit, Falcone, and Wells (1994) indicated that current research concludes that crime is less frequent in rural areas. It has been speculated that greater informal controls in rural areas protect against high crime rates (Smith, 1980). The belief that crime is less frequent in rural areas is supported by recent Uniform Crime Reports (UCR) data that present crime by type and population group. UCR index crimes for 1990 revealed several interesting patterns:

- Index offence rates, including homicide, are higher for urban areas than for rural areas.
- The gap between rural and urban crime is greater for violent crime than for property crime.
- The rank order of offences for property crime is roughly similar for urban and rural areas. That is, larceny is the most common crime and motor vehicle theft is the least common crime in both areas.
- The greatest difference between rural and urban crime is robbery, which occurs almost 54 times more often per 100,000 citizens in urban areas.

- The rank order of violent crimes is thrown off by the large rural – urban difference in robbery.
- The urban rate is much higher for crimes with the most similar rates across areas, such as rape.

Substantial rural – urban differences are also found from national household victimization surveys such as the National Crime Survey (NCS). The 1990 NCS reported that the percentage of households indicating any form of victimization in urban, suburban, and rural areas was 30 percent, 23 percent and 17 percent respectively. A researcher found that approximately 25 percent of victimizations of rural residents occurred away from their communities, while this was true for only 10 percent of urban residents. It was concluded that rural residents were more vulnerable to robbery when visiting urban areas (Smith, 1980). This means that the comparisons of victimization rates probably understate the difference in victimization between the two areas.

Instead of comparing rural and urban areas, some studies have considered rural areas alone (Smith, & Huff, 1980).

In addition, a number of researchers have concluded that rural areas experiencing rapid growth will also experience a disproportionately large increase in crime. In 21 of 23 studies, crime grew even faster than the population in rural communities with rapid population growth. Researchers speculated that “the accumulated findings may best be explained by narrowly focusing on changes in community social structure that accompany rapid growth and result in impairment of informal social controls, particularly the declines in a community’s density of acquaintanceship (Freudenburg, & Jones, 1991,).

The literature review will focus on rural crime and rural policing issues and compare the differences and similarities as they relate to urban crime and urban policing. Thus, a good understanding of rural crime requires not only an appreciating how it differs from urban crime but also how rural crime and rural justice vary across rural communities.

TRENDS IN RURAL CRIME

There has been concern that rural and urban crime rates are converging, and the issue has raised considerable debate. Some have argued that with modern communication and transportation, rural and urban differences are shrinking through what has been called “massification” (Fischer, 1980).

Overall UCR data do not support the idea that crime rates in rural and urban areas are converging. One problem with UCR is that crimes of particular concern as emerging issues in rural areas such as gang activity and drug trafficking are non index offences and are not reported by population density.

The NCS data show that the percent of household reporting victimization for any crime dropped from 1973 through 1990 across both urban and rural areas. There is little support for the argument that urban and rural crime rates are converging.

SPECIAL ISSUES AND EMERGING PROBLEMS

Data on violent crime in selected California counties were used to argue that the gap between rural and urban was less important than their relative patterns of change

over time. The statistics demonstrated that changes over time in urban counties were followed by changes in rural counties, and one researcher concluded that cultural change continually generated in major urban areas diffuses to smaller cities and then to the rural areas (Fischer, 1980). Cultural cycles, whether they be violent crime, fashion, or inventions, begin in urban areas and ripple out through the countryside. This argument is consistent with the contemporary observations about the expansion of urban drug trafficking and gangs into rural areas.

Stereotypically, gangs are a problem that involves inner – city youths. Some contemporary gang research includes no discussions of gangs in suburban and rural areas (Huff, 1990). However, there are numerous discussions of how urban street gangs diffuse out to the countryside (Weingarten, & Coates, 1989). Many of these discussions see drug trafficking as the driving force behind the spread of gangs to rural areas a move facilitated by an improved highway system.

While the focus is primarily on urban street gangs in rural areas, biker gangs have a long history of criminal activity in rural settings (Abadinsky, 1989).

Another problem is substance abuse, including alcohol and illegal drugs. This issue has two dimensions: use by rural citizens and criminal drug trafficking organizations in rural areas. Alcohol, among the most popular mind – altering drugs, is of particular concern in rural areas. Each year more people are arrested for driving under the influence (DUI) than for any other single offence, and (DUI) is more common in rural areas (Jacobs, 1989).

Self-report surveys have been used to compare rural and urban areas. One survey found that rural youth began using both legal and illegal drugs at a younger age, but a higher percentage of urban youths were users (Macintosh, et al., 1979).

Arrest statistics have been used as an indirect way to compare drug use. Researchers compared drug arrest data in North Carolina for urban and rural counties between 1976 and 1980 and concluded that rural arrest were consistently lower, and no evidence was found that rural and urban rates were converging (Belyea, & Zingraff, 1985).

Recent reports suggest that patterns of urban drug use is spreading to rural areas (Treaster, 1991).

The issues of drug trafficking and production in rural areas is less understood. Some reports suggest that rural areas may serve as production sites for methamphetamine, designer drugs, crack, and marijuana (Wiengarten, 1989). Other reports indicate that rural areas have become important transshipment points for drugs destined for urban areas (Weingarten,& Coates,1989). The problem is exacerbated by an improved highway system and the large number of isolated airstrips set up for corporate farms and for cropdusters serving rural areas.

There are good reasons to believe that vice and organized crime are features of the rural environment (Potter,&Gaines,1990). Small communities near major highways often have problems with prostitution set up for truck drivers. Also, areas that are traditionally involved in moonshining and bootlegging and use some of the same routes and expertise to transport drugs, stolen auto parts, and other illegal merchandise. In 1989, the so-called "Corn bread Mafia," operating out of Kentucky, was discovered to

have marijuana operations in at least nine states. By April of 1990, 86 people were arrested as part of the operation, and the government had confiscated 475,000 pounds of marijuana on 33 farms (Yetter, 1989). At the same time, a group of more than 30 people operating out of the southwest, who called themselves the “Company,” ran an elaborate indoor marijuana operation. At the time of the groups’ arrest, approximately \$1 million in growing equipment was seized by authorities (Weingarten, & Coates, 1990).

The nature of rural interactions means that crime such as rape, homicide and assault are more likely to occur among acquaintances than in urban areas. This, combined with the greater distrust of government, may also mean that the police are less likely to be called when these crimes happen. Given these factors, both investigation and preventing violent interpersonal crimes in rural areas may require different strategies than in urban areas.

Related to the issue of violence, though less well documented, are the so-called “hate groups” in rural areas. Many of these groups are based on a combination of anti-Semitism, racism, fundamentalist Christianity, and deep suspicion of government (Coates, 1987).

Most of the crimes discussed thus far (e.g., homicide and rape) occur in both rural and urban areas. Some crimes, however, are peculiar to the rural setting. For example, rest – stop crimes and crimes related to the presence of interstate highways are both growing concerns. In addition, special rural crimes include wildlife and agricultural crimes.

Agricultural crimes have an impact on the country as a whole through escalating food and insurance prices. Illustrating the scope of the problem, 80 percent of the Iowa farmers surveyed said they were the victims of theft over a 3 – year period. UCR data do not separate agricultural crime from other offences. However, each year the UCR does list specific items of theft and the rate at which these items are recovered. Among the listed items is livestock, which accounts for losses of approximately \$20 million each year, only about 17 percent of which are recovered. The following are selected incidents of agricultural crimes:

- \$1 million in annual thefts of avocado, lime and mango fruit in Florida.
 - \$1 million in annual losses to timber thieves and vandals in western Washington alone.
 - \$2 million in annual losses from pesticide thefts.
- \$30 million a year lost to theft from California farmers.

Researchers have cited anecdotal evidence that organized crime was active in several states (Swanson, & Territo, 1980).

Wildlife crimes like agricultural crimes are primarily rural phenomenon. Wildlife crimes, especially poaching, have become a major concern for conservation police officers. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, during FY 1990 wildlife shipments entering and leaving the United States had a declared value of more than \$1 billion (U.S. Department of the Interior, 1990). According to a 1986 publication, the estimated replacement cost of illegally harvested fish and wildlife exceeded \$45 million in Illinois, while the poaching of deer alone was estimated to cost Pennsylvania more that \$93 million a year (Pash, 1986).

Many rural residents have poached to provide food for themselves and their families, while others have prided themselves on simply killing a wildlife “Trophy” (Bristow, 1982). It was found that for many poaching was seen as a test of wit and skill between the poacher and the game warden. Many poachers were proud that they could easily outmaneuver the technology and the complex modern strategies of the game warden. In addition, poaching may reinforce the rural mistrust of outsiders and of government (Forsyth, & Markckesc, 1993).

The effects of geography alone pose serious problems for rural justice, having an impact on such things as response time and the speed with which support services can be provided. One study contradicts UCR data and suggest that the homicide rate in rural areas is higher, and because access to medical treatment in rural and urban areas is different, even if the violent act is the same in both (Mayhew, & Levinger, 1977).

Rural officers can expect a longer wait for backup. Geographic isolation can be a problem for many rural officers who patrol alone and whose interactions with suspects have no witnesses. The large geographic areas covered by some rural police also make responding to calls more expensive and time consuming than in urban areas.

The presence of guns is another is another area in which rural and urban populations differ. It has been observed that gun ownership is much more prevalent in rural areas where more than double the number of residents owned guns than their urban counterparts (Wright,& Rossi, 1983; Daly, 1983). While many of the rural gun owners are hunters who use rifles or shotguns, the percentage of citizens owning handguns has also been higher in rural areas than in central cities (23 versus 15 percent). It is sometimes assumed that the availability of guns is relevant to gun related

violence, but the case of rural areas show that the relationship is far more complex. While rural residents are more likely to own guns, it appears they are less likely to use guns in the commission of crimes. It has also been found that crime was lowest in counties with the highest rates of legal firearm ownership (Bordua, & Lizotte, 1979). Similarly, a 1990 report by the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) found that the rate of crimes committed with handguns was more than three times as great in urban areas 5.9 per 100,000 in central cities versus 1.7 per 100,000 in non-metropolitan areas (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 1990)

High rates of poverty have long been associated with high rates of crime. Crime has been less frequent in rural areas, although poverty has been common in rural America. For example, of the 159 high poverty counties in the United States in 1979, only six contained a city with a population of 25,000 or more (Weinberg, 1987). Further, the 1986 poverty rate in rural areas was 50 percent higher than in urban areas (Garkovich, 1991).

The economic problems facing rural areas can be expected to not only affect the nature and extent of the crime, but the resources available to rural law enforcement. Where tax bases are small, rural police departments are likely to be seriously understaffed and without important resources.

Rural areas are more governed by informal social control than are urban areas. One study found that in rural areas shoplifting and employee theft were rarely reported to the police. Instead, most cases were handled informally. Informal control is facilitated by the fact that many residents of rural communities, including the local police, know each other socially. One factor that contributes to this is

the relative stability of the local population. Rural citizens less frequently change addresses, often staying in the same county or even the same house for several generations (Auletta, 1982). The low levels of mobility and low population density mean that rural law enforcement officers, such as sheriffs, are likely to personally know most offenders and their families. If a victim can identify a thief, for example, the sheriff is likely to know where to find the offender and to already know quite a bit about the offender and his or her family. A greater reliance on informal control is also consistent with a greater suspicion of government, particularly Federal and State governments, which are seen as insensitive to local needs. This suspicion of a strong central government is also reflected by the attitudes of rural residents, who are generally less supportive than urban residents of government programs that provide welfare, housing, unemployment benefits, higher education, and Medicaid (Swanson, Cohen, & Swanson, 1979)

Styles of policing in rural areas

Acknowledging the differences between rural and urban crime and culture, it should be expected that police in rural and urban areas should approach work differently. In a study of tasks regularly performed by police in 249 municipal agencies of differing sizes, small agencies were found to be more concerned with the crime prevention, medium sized agencies showed the greatest concern for providing non-crime services, and large agencies focused on enforcing criminal laws and controlling crime through arrest. (Meagher, 1985). Another researcher examined public opinion data about police role and found that the larger the community the more likely citizens

were to believe that police should limit their role to enforcing criminal laws (Flanagan, 1985). Conversely people from smaller communities were more likely to want police to perform a wide variety range of services because other social services are either nonexistent or are more remote than the police.

Styles of policing are partly a reflection of the relationship between police and the community. Urban officer's thought citizens less respected them. At the same time police in rural communities felt more public support for being tough, particularly with juveniles. Both urban and rural officers believed they were given public respect for different reasons. In urban areas, respect went to the position, and it was believed that a good way to improve public respect was through professionalizing the department. In contrast, respect was thought to be given to rural officers as individuals, who had to prove that respect was deserved. This was often done by establishing a reputation for toughness early in their career (Kowalewski, Hall, Dolan, Anderson, 1984).

Given the nature of rural culture and of social interactions in rural areas, it can also be speculated that police – community relations will be very different in rural and urban departments. In rural areas officers are likely to know the offenders and their families, just as the officer and the community will know his family. Rural officers are also more likely to know and appreciate the history and culture of an area and use that information in their work. Given the closer social ties between police and their community, it should be expected that rural officers will use policing styles that are more responsive to citizens in their area and that, in turn, local residents would be more supportive of the police. A 1991 Gallup survey found substantial rural – urban differences in the support that citizens showed for the local police. In urban areas, 54

percent of the citizens reported having a great deal of respect for the local police, whereas 61 percent of rural citizens reported this. The differences were much more pronounced when asked about police brutality, where 59 percent of urban residents thought there was police brutality in their area, but only 20 percent of the rural residents believed this (The Gallup Poll Monthly, 1991).

The same features rural policing that compels officers to be more responsive to the public also mean that rural police have relatively less discretion. An explanation for the high degree of police discretion found in urban areas compared to rural areas in the low visibility of police actions. The actions of police officer in smaller communities are known to most of the population because of the effective informal communication networks that are more highly visible. Small town police enjoy less latitude in deviating from dominant community values as a result (Eisenstein, 1982).

Organizational and community factors were found to have a different impact on the adoption of a legalistic police style in rural and urban areas. In urban areas characteristics of the police organization, such as the number of ranks or the ratio of administrators to sworn officers, were better predictors of police style than were characteristics of the community, such as percent minority or level of economic distress. In rural areas, the relationship was reversed, with community factors being more important than organizational factors. As might be expected, data suggest that rural departments are more responsive to the local community, whereas urban departments may be more sensitive to the dynamics of the police organization

The less formal nature of rural life, along with the small size of many rural departments, makes complex bureaucratic procedures less necessary for day – to day

operations, therefore rural departments are less likely to have detailed written policies in a variety of areas, a situation that can place them in legal limbo when problems arise.

Operating the county jail is among the primary duties of the local sheriff. While research has focused on urban jails, most jails are in rural areas. While urban jails tend to seriously overcrowded, rural jails have been more likely to operate under their rated capacity (Klofas, 1990). Rural jails are often older than urban jails and more poorly staffed. Because the fixed costs of running a jail exist apart from whether the cells are full or empty, the per inmate cost of running jails in rural areas has been about double that of urban areas. Further, the lack of staff and programming have meant that rural inmates less often are separated by age and less often supervised, which may partially account for their substantially higher rates of homicide, suicide, and death from illness and natural causes. In rural areas, the fiscal conservatism that leads to small budgets for jail structures and jail services may create problems for local sheriffs, who can still be held individually liable for the safety and welfare of inmates (Mays, 1988;Thompson, 1988).

SPECIAL PROBLEMS

While rural and urban policing may share a variety of concerns, there are also problems either unique to the rural setting or are complicated by the rural environment. Funding received by many small municipalities not only makes staffing difficult, but may make it impractical for their department to tap into statewide systems for record checks or vehicle registrations. The self contained nature of rural communities make it difficult to

generate support for training, equipment, or services that would increase the routine interactions between the local agency and the state or national enforcement groups.

Rural officers are more likely to find themselves physically isolated but socially under a microscope. This is the inverse for many inner-city officers. The best example of can be found in conservation officers, whose work is often done alone in remote areas, with backup some distance away. Officers in small rural departments have fewer colleagues with whom they can socialize with off duty; they also have less privacy and more difficulty in separating their professional and personal roles.

PROCEDURES

A Historical review of the research literature related to rural crime and rural policing as well urban crime and urban policing was reviewed. Various Internet sites were visited and articles reviewed on line. There was a limited amount of information related to rural crime and rural communities.

RESULTS

The literature reviewed suggests that the issues related to rural crime and rural policing are complex and that additional studies of rural crime can be important in serving the rural community and understanding crime in general.

Compared with urban areas, little is known about rural crime or policing. It appears, however, that crime is less frequent in rural areas, and that “community

policing.” which many urban departments are attempting to employ, has been a long - standing practice of rural police departments.

Differences between rural and urban cultures have implications for rural crime and rural policing. Both rural and urban areas have pockets of extreme poverty, but the effects of poverty on crime are different in the two areas.

Differences across rural areas are large and vary by region of the country, across counties within a state, and sometimes even within a county. Illegal immigrants may be a concern in the Southwest, vandalism in the Midwest, and smuggling of tobacco and liquor in areas along the Canadian border. Therefore, national policies uniformly covering rural areas may be a mistake, unless those policies are tailored to fit local needs.

The research revealed that rest–stop, wildlife and agricultural crimes were unique to rural areas. The literature reviewed indicated that agricultural crimes, i.e., livestock theft, accounts for losses of approximately \$20 million each year. According. Wildlife theft according to a 1986 publication estimated the replacement cost of illegally harvested fish and wildlife to exceed 45 million. The literature review noted that UCR provided no support of rural and urban crime converging. However crimes noted as emerging issues in rural areas such as gang activity and drug trafficking are non – index offences and are not reported by population density. The literature reviewed revealed that police in rural areas provide a wide range of services. Police - community relationships are different. Rural officers are likely to know the offenders as well as their families. Rural officers are more responsive to citizens.

DISCUSSION

The literature reviewed provided data on crimes unique to rural areas along with past and current rural policing practices however, there were no current studies or in depth analysis found that related specifically to rural policing. The literature reviewed documented statistics on crimes that are being exported from urban areas to rural areas, however there was no research found noting the effect exported urban crime has had on rural policing practices. I feel that more studies are needed that focus specifically on rural policing practices. New studies should address what effect crime alien to the rural areas has produced and what techniques and adjustments rural law enforcement has made. I feel that reporting sources (UCR) should include urban crimes that are now found in rural areas. New studies in the area of rural policing will benefit rural law enforcement agencies throughout the country.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The literature reviewed revealed contradictions across studies that need to be explained. Some authors report that homicide is higher in rural areas, while others (including UCR data) suggest the opposite. It is unclear whether these differences are the result of the sampling, the definitions used, or the regional variations.

Precise meanings of the terms “rural and urban” are needed. While both terms are used everyday, there is no precise meaning upon which everyone can agree.

Additional studies are needed in the area of rural crime and policing. Studying these issues across rural areas and between urban and rural areas is useful in the same way that studies of crime across countries tell us much about larger patterns and suggest what works and does not work in policing and crime prevention.

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