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Book Review: Rural Crime and Community Safety

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Book Review

Rural Crime and Community Safety

Vania Ceccato
2016
New York, NY: Routledge
394 pages
\$54.95 (Paperback)
ISBN-10: 0415856434
ISBN: 978-0-203-72568-9 (ebook).

Rural Crime and Community Safety describes the special issues encountered in studying rural crime and crime prevention. Ceccato's work compares patterns in metropolitan and rural areas in Sweden plus data from the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and other countries. This topic is especially salient for social workers as rural populations, their needs and concerns, are a significant aspect of the profession. Social workers often interact with law enforcement, making incident rates, crime patterns and trends relevant to a portion of our client population.

Ceccato divides her book into five sections. The first discusses the complexity of rural crime and community safety. This section challenges the stereotypic view of rural areas as bucolic, crime free, and safe. The author points out that rural area crime rates appear to be low; however, crime significantly impacts rural residents' agency and perception of safety. Ceccato's work explores the where, how, and when of rural crime patterns thus increasing our theoretical understanding, leading to greater effectiveness of policies and programs for rural areas.

Rural crime patterns are dependent on demographic variables, population size, density, and geographic isolation. Historically, theories focused on social factors alone; however, current theories include individual personality factors. Ceccato's book is in sync with the social work viewpoint that explains human behavior as inextricably linked to her or his environmental context.

Part II begins by comparing crime rates and prevalence in Sweden with those of the United States and the United Kingdom. Additionally, this part looks at the inequality of victimization. Generally, crime rate patterns are predictable: urban crime is greater than rural crime. However, when crime is measured by victimization rates, rural and urban patterns differ. Ceccato suggests that in order to understand victimization rates a more nuanced approach is needed. Demographic, socioeconomic, and lifestyle differences produce different crime patterns in urban and rural areas; however, these factors do not affect victimization patterns. Urban and rural victimization patterns are similar. The effect of specific groups, locations, and times as well as proximity to criminogenic urban areas, gives a more accurate account of the crime problem.

The perception of safety among rural residents is the focus of part III. As with the study of victimization, the perception of safety in rural areas is more complicated than studies of fear of crime indicate. Fear of being victimized stems not only from crime rates, but also from local conditions, economic change, mobility patterns, and quality of life. Studies indicate that the level of fear influences the perception of crime risk which varies among socioeconomic groups.

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The next part addresses environmental and wildlife crime, drug production, youth crime, crimes against women, and farm specific crime in rural locations. Crimes specific to rural areas around the world include stealing diesel fuel, machinery, and tools as well as different types of fraud. Environmental and wildlife crimes include the unlawful use of chemicals detrimental to wildlife, littering and garbage dumping, and drug production. While these issues are similar internationally, some differences exist. For example, the United States and Australia find drug production in rural areas to be more prevalent than in Sweden.

Youth gangs create problems in every country, although the type of gang will vary. For example, in Southern Sweden motorcycle gangs predominate while there is greater diversity in the types of gangs in other countries.

Crimes against women, especially domestic violence, is a challenging problem for social workers. In Sweden, data show more violence against women living in urban areas; however, an increasing number of incidents are being reported in rural areas. Reporting violence, particularly when the perpetrator is known to the victim, is problematic in both rural and urban communities. The specific reason for this is unknown, but could include an increase in the willingness of victims to report violence, society's increased sensitivity to violence, and changes in laws and their enforcement.

The fifth section of Ceccato's book addresses the prevention of the above mentioned crimes in Sweden. Isolation, dependence on one's neighbors, and police living in the community all effect rural crime prevention. In over 300 rural Swedish communities, partnerships exist between police and volunteer crime prevention groups. Community groups generally lack overall knowledge about prevention of environmental and wildlife crimes, therefore the focus is prevention of youth crime.

Crime prevention groups address daily youth problems by engaging youth in free time activities such as recreational centers and activities. The mixed success of these programs reflects the attitudes of young people who may feel that the presence of adults, especially parents or police, is coercive and does not provide them with a space of their own.

Preventing abuse against women is a challenge in rural communities. One of the most successful programs has been the creation of women's shelters. However, most shelters are located in urban areas and are inaccessible to rural residents. For this reason violence against women is addressed with preventive programs aimed at potential perpetrators and those who are at risk for abuse.

The strength of Ceccato's book is her attention to the nuanced factors regarding rural crime and rural crime prevention. Additionally, the author's conclusions and hypotheses are supported by a copious amount of data. The thoroughness of this book can serve as a guide for future rural crime research and as a theoretical guide for practical application. While the author intends to place data from Sweden in an international context, she adds very little international data. Also, a more narrative description of the various situations would have added to the book's readability.

In order to understand field work, theories are necessary but hands-on experience determines a theory's relevance. Ceccato's book combines the two perspectives serving as a guide

for future academic research and a theoretical perspective for social work practitioners. It is the dialog between the two approaches that will move our understanding of rural crime and crime prevention forward.