

A review of *Rural Crime Prevention: Theory, Tactics and Techniques* by Alistair Harkness (ed.)

London: Routledge, 2020, 344 pp.

ISBN: 9781138625143

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Historically, criminology and crime prevention initiatives have ignored crime, deviance, and social control in rural areas. For years, rural criminologists, including the editor of, and contributors to, *Rural Crime Prevention: Theory, Tactics and Techniques*, have argued that examining crime and societal reactions in nonmetropolitan areas is necessary not only to confront the myths surrounding rural areas, but also to decrease crime costs (e.g., social, economic), to ensure safety and security, to improve rural citizens' overall health and well-being, and assist drastically overburdened and under-resourced rural criminal justice systems. In Chapter 2, Donnermeyer correctly points out that while official crime data are notorious for a lack of reliability, they are still widely used in studies of rural crime instead of methods (e.g., surveys) that offer a more accurate picture of rural offending and victimization. Furthermore, urban place-based explanations like social disorganization theory continue to be erroneously applied despite the fact that there are rural-specific situational factors (e.g., remoteness) that contribute to crime and societal reactions outside the metropole.

The main objective of this anthology is to offer analyses, considerations, and assessments through academic and non-academic voices of international crime prevention initiatives that address the diverse and distinct features of rural areas. Harkness achieves this goal by including 20 chapters written by scholars and practitioners from a range of disciplines and different countries, including those based in Canada, the United States, Mexico, the United Kingdom, Ireland, Sweden, Finland, Australia, South Africa, and Brazil. The contributors use broad definitions of the concepts of "rural," "crime," and "crime prevention," and they challenge others to do so as well. Their offerings, too, have important implications for theory, measurement, data collection, policy, and practice. Additionally, answers to these important questions are provided: Is a crime rural only when it takes place in a particular geographic area? Is a crime rural only when the victim(s) or offender(s) (whether person, tangible or intangible object, or place) are situated in these settings? What does this mean for crimes that occur online and are spaceless?

Each chapter rejects the false narrative that rural spaces are homogenous, idyllic, crime-free areas that warrant selective inattention. As well, every chapter makes explicit that crime prevention is a shared responsibility that requires collaborative efforts from a variety of stakeholders (i.e., community members, practitioners, scholars, service providers). The contributors also remind us to carefully examine rural communities' structures, institutions, and



socialization needs, such as transportation, resources, funding, and technology, because as Harris observes in Chapter 4, “Overlooking how community can be harnessed not only to combat crime, but to exclude, or, as a weapon, will limit the effectiveness of crime prevention” (p. 51).

Indeed, to be truly effective, rural crime prevention efforts must prioritize communities’ geographic and cultural features. Noted by Alvarez-Rodriguez and her colleagues in Chapter 7, in certain cases, these efforts may not be consistent with normative or human rights standards, but they develop out of local stakeholders identifying their issues and determining what is needed. Context, mechanisms, and outcomes should all be thoughtfully considered before introducing any new schemes. These are particularly important when applying crime prevention efforts to historical environments, animals, or working with communities and groups with a history of being marginalized, excluded, or exploited.

Some of the contributors, including Smith (see Chapter 6), focus on the ways in which technology can help prevent crime. For example, in Chapter 3, Bowden and Pytlarz sensitize us to the fact social media can help build community with those outside your geographic area. As pointed out in other chapters, social media can also alert authorities and play a major role in educational and awareness campaigns.

Another strength of this anthology is that it recommends several new research directions, such as fraud, heritage crimes, involvement of organized crime networks, private and civilian initiatives, and arson. The role of social media in educational and awareness campaigns is deemed to be especially important and warrants more empirical, theoretical, and policy attention. For instance, an Appalachian Youth Creator, Stoudt (2021) posted a blog about what the Tik Tok platform means for the region:

It’s not just a way of illustrating beauty, it’s a means for Appalachians to tell their own stories... Tik Tok users are being exposed to a region that for too long has been shut out and isolated, but instead of being presented even more narratives about a region who are “poor” and “useless,” they’re seeing a region that offers serenity, even in abandoned places.

Statements like this buttress claims that social media can effectively challenge myths about rural settings and people, but as is often stated, more research is necessary. So is more empirical work on issues not covered in Harkness’ collection. These include rural corporate crimes, state-sanctioned violence (e.g., police brutality, abuses and harms in carceral settings and medical treatment), the rise of missing and murdered Indigenous women, sex trafficking, water resources and protections, and chemical spills and waste from oil and mining extractions.

In sum, Harkness’ path-breaking volume brings together an international cadre of scholars and practitioners to suggest innovative means of preventing crime in rural and remote locales. It is essential reading for scholars, students, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to enhance their knowledge of rural crimes and the best means of responding to them in the twenty-first

century. Just as many rural crimes know no geographic boundaries, nor does our learning. This collection illustrates that whether we are students, scholars, practitioners, or community members, we can all learn from one another. Responding to rural crime and implementing effective crime prevention strategies demands our shared responsibility no matter where we are located.

References

Stoudt, M. (2021). *TikTok and the Appalachian aesthetic: What the video platform means for the region*. 100 Days in Appalachia. Retrieved from <https://www.100daysinappalachia.com/2021/04/tiktok-and-the-appalachian-aesthetic-what-the-video-platform-means-for-the-region/>