The Darker Side of Rural Masculinity: Second and Third Order Impacts of Low Help-seeking Behaviour Following the Trauma of Victimisation

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Abstract

It is recognised by researchers globally that crime in the rural space is lower than the urban equivalent. This is not always the lived experience of rural communities, despite the reporting of crime being low. The issue of rural masculinity potentially plays a key role in the likelihood of rural victims reporting a crime to the police. However, it is argued that the same factor influences the failure of rural victims to seek help for the trauma of victimisation, leading to second and third impacts associated with becoming a victim of rural crime.
This exploration of the issue of rural masculinity delves into the wider impact it has on crime experiences, crime reporting, and help-seeking post-victimisation. This discussion goes further to suggest that the persistence of rural masculinity could be creating a darker, more toxic rural masculinity that has a much broader impact on the wider rural communities. The question of whether this toxic rural masculinity is more widespread than initially thought is explored, as is the idea that those who exhibit this toxic machismo may be more likely to exhibit the control lost through victimisation in other ways. Recommendations are made for further research to address the questions raised.

Keywords: toxic rural masculinity, rural machismo, victims, offenders, help-seeking

Introduction

It has long been recognised that rural spaces project a particular image to the outside world of bucolic countryside, rolling hills, and a place free from crime (Mingay, 1989). Recent literature has challenged this concept, highlighting that rural areas are increasingly being targeted by organised criminality, leading to extensive impacts across financial, social, and psychological burdens (Deller & Deller, 2010; NFU Mutual, 2023; Smith, 2020; 2022; 2024). Nevertheless, the level and severity of rural crime are often misunderstood in policing and service provision. This is despite a long-standing recognition that rural crime is linked to organised criminality, and patterns showing an increased trend in organised activity in the UK (CPS, 2022; NFU Mutual, 2023; Sambrook, 2016; Smith, 2010). In England and Wales, despite some isolated examples of best practices, there is a tendency for rural crime to be defined in different ways and a lack of consistency in the way rural crime is recorded across forces. This makes it difficult to understand the true level of crime in the rural space, and almost impossible to map (Barclay, 2017; Weisheit et al., 2006). This often means that any crime that happens in a rural location is classed as rural crime, rather than a graduated approach to categorising rural crime as set out by the authors here (Figure 1). Despite this need, for this discussion the term 'rural crime' will be used to consider all crimes that would affect rural communities; and the term 'rural community' will be used to encompass those living and/or working within both rural and farming communities.

Figure 1

Graduated definition of crimes in the rural space (Author's Own)

However, there is a darker side to rural life that permeates through rural society affecting crime, criminality, victimisation, and help-seeking. The issue of traditional rural masculinity (Connell, 1995; Smith, 2018) has developed in the literature over several decades, particularly since the middle of the last decade of the twentieth century onwards. Despite this, there is very little in the literature that considers how this traditional rural

masculinity influences, and is influenced by criminality and victimisation. This paper will discuss how masculinity manifests in the rural space, and how criminality and victimisation acts and interact to create a darker, trauma-informed masculinity with a toxicity that may change rural communities irrevocably. Furthermore, consideration as to whether a trauma-informed approach to helping and supporting the victims of criminality in the rural space could be adopted to influence how victims respond to crime, but also how service providers need to consider the impact of rurality on responses to crime.

Rural Masculinity

The study of masculinity as an academic field came to the fore in the latter part of the twentieth century, with key insights being made independently across the globe in 1987 that masculinity does not relate to biology or psychology, but rather is socially constructed across differing spaces (Brod, 1987; Kaufman, 1987; Connell, 1987; Phillips, 1987). From this key revelation, it was recognised that masculinity needed to be understood based on the society or community on which it was focused. Rural masculinity has been a growing topic of discussion in the academic literature since the middle of the 1990s (Brandth,1995; Campbell & Bell, 2000; Connell, 1995). While the concept of rural hegemonic masculinity was developed by describing rural man as strong, stoic, dirty, and rugged (Gustavsson & Farstad, 2022), it was quickly recognised by Connell (1995) that hegemonic masculinity as a social construction leads to a position of multiple masculinities as a result of different communities having different identities. When applied to the rural space, hegemonic masculinities can differ based on economic, cultural, and geographic changes to the rural (Kenway, et al., 2006), or the exclusion of 'others' whether that be women (Leyshon, 2005), or those who do not naturally fit into the cultural norms of a particular community (Leyshon, 2005; Campbell, 2000).

Campbell & Bell (2000) talk about two concepts within the discussion of rural masculinity: the 'masculine rural' and the 'rural masculine'. The former relates to how masculinity is constructed within the rural space, for example, the idea of the farmer as male leaving the role of farming women invisible. The latter refers to the way the notion of rural helps support the ideas of masculinity with male-dominated examples becoming accepted and legitimised beyond a simple social construct. It is this approach to understanding rural masculinity that drives the need to discuss this issue as a plural concept – rural masculinities – as it is not one, fixed concept but rather what is seen as normal and acceptable within different communities. The work of Sachs (1983) pre-empts this duality of rural masculinity by concluding that women had become invisible farmers, but also considers that the male visible farmers are not always seen as men, but rather they are visible as the construct of these rural masculinities. However one considers rural masculinities, it is clear that the general perception of rural remains male oriented. While Pini (2008) has been critical about the duality of rural masculinities presented by Campbell & Bell (2000) arguing that they both become indistinguishable, Brandth & Haugen (2005) highlight the usefulness of this approach as an indicator of how gender and rurality combine in multiple ways.

Seminal work from Brandth (1995) explored how rural masculinities extend beyond rural in general to encompass rural industries such as agriculture, and later forestry (Brandth & Haugen, 2005). Historically, these industries have been very much male-dominated, and remain so despite the rise in rural women playing a part in agriculture and entering the forestry industry. This is epitomised by Brandth's (1995) work exploring how tractors are advertised to appeal to traditionally more male characteristics of power and control. This work was extended by Brandth (2006) who highlighted that women who drive tractors experienced feelings of mastery and control making them feel like 'kings' (p. 22), although very little of their on-farm work involved driving the tractor. However, the same study also found that women farmers often felt uncomfortable about the expectation to be tough across both their work and personal lives. Further work by Brandth (2019) concluded that the traditional role of the rural man in agriculture persists, despite some blurring of gender boundaries through changes in caregiving. This traditional role of the rural man can be seen globally in varying degrees despite the multiplicity of rural masculinities (Ní Leíme et al., 2022; Liu & Jianhong, 2021; Gospodarczyk, 2024). Indeed, the work by Gospodarczyk (2024) highlights the influence that political movements have on the perception of rural masculinities, with urban residents being described as 'fake' masculinity compared to the rural 'true' masculinity among the farming community.

Research has further shown that rural masculinities are being seen and perpetuated much more widely across rural communities, with this idea of rural men being the center of a patriarchal society driving perceptions of what that rural man should look like and behave like. Work conducted by Areschoug (2024) has highlighted a developing subculture among young men in rural Sweden who reject those influences considered urban and modern during a period of urban-rural counter-migration, seeing those incomers as posing a threat to their traditional rural lifestyle. The rural space and their traditional way of living were considered to be threatened by urban modernity leading to their position being considered homophobic and racist. Turnock (2021) also highlights the presence of elements of rural masculinities seen in the gym. This research found that traditional rural masculinities were present in rural gyms through for example the derision aimed towards a gym user who wore weightlifting gloves who was mocked for not wanting to get callouses on his hands. Furthermore, Turnock concludes that the move towards a more globalised approach to gym-going, including marketing towards women and a broader range of services, meant that these rural men sometimes felt that they had lost their social space at the 'iron church' (p. 114) leaving them with no respite from feelings of despair about their socio-economic position and loss of traditional indicators of masculinity, thus impacting their mental health.

It is argued here that the existence and perpetuation of traditional rural masculinities provide a lens through which to explore the realm of rural men's mental health which remains a silent crisis (Roy & Hočevar, 2019). It is documented that farmers have a higher psychological morbidity, leading to higher rates of suicide (Chiswell, 2022; Hounsome et al., 2012). However, it is argued that this issue extends beyond the farming community to the broader rural community due to the social, economic, and political changes taking place within rural communities both in the UK and beyond. Despite the increasing openness among

farming and rural communities to talk about mental health, the continued presence of these rural masculinities create an air of cognitive dissonance, with rural men failing to acknowledge their mental health concerns, not seeking help, and projecting an image of business as usual in order to maintain the perception of this tranquil, rural idyll (Mingay, 1989).

However, despite the extensive research exploring rural masculinity in its various guises, there remains a lack of data that helps in the understanding of the prevalence of traditional rural masculinity, and its effects both good and bad. While the cited research provides insights into the various forms that rural masculinity can take and the consequences that may arise from it, researchers often continue to be reliant on proxy measurements to understand the roles of men and women in the rural space. Such proxies may take the form of research relating to rural domestic abuse (Carrington & Scott, 2008) or rural migration (Areschoug, 2024). More research is needed to explore the real extent of rural masculinity in modern society, hypermasculine behaviour in both rural men and women, and the rise of the 'countrycore' and 'trad wife' movements (Bright, 2024; Simpson, 2024). Moreover, more empirical evidence is needed to underpin a clear characterisation of rural domestic abuse offenders as currently, most are too broad and urban-centric (Gilchrist et al., 2003), and overlook the enabling factors that the rural space brings.

Rural Masculinity and Risk-taking

Rural masculinity is often associated with risk-taking; indeed, it is often celebrated within communities and farming culture as demonstrating resilience and the ability to adapt and overcome, fulfilling the traditional role and expectation of physical strength and endurance, (Turbett, 2024). Farming and forestry are undertakings fraught with challenges, weather, daylight time, and economics, so the ability to overcome challenges is highly valued. Lone work is often a reality of these occupations and can enhance feelings of self-reliance and masculinity. A review of farm accident reports reveals stress and fatigue are two key components of farm accidents, (Irwin & Poots, 2018) and when combined with lone working becomes a significant risk factor. Rural masculinity is likely the key driver in pushing rural men to continue work in poor weather, in the dark, when tired, etc as they are embedded in a form of traditional patriarchal communities where the community dynamics can make people feed diminished if they ask for support or assistance.

However, it is not only physical undertakings where rural men adopt risky behaviours. Research by Alston and Kent (2008) has shown that rural men, in general, adopt more risky health behaviours than women in terms of smoking, alcohol use, driving, and physical activities. These behaviours can be interpreted as a demonstration of manhood and a manifestation of rural masculinity. Recent studies have also shown links between rural masculinities and other forms of risk-taking behaviour (Turbett, 2024), including rape, sexual assault, domestic violence, and murder. These are all crimes that emphasise male control and dominance and can thrive in isolation, where victims are geographically and socially constrained from communication.

Manifestations of rural masculinities can be public or private but come together to form a toxic mix of attitudes towards change. Given the role of the male in the traditional rural environment is founded on being the protector and provider, change to the environment that appears to threaten or diminish that position can result in conflict (Alcade, 2011). Changes such as the arrival of incomers can be seen as a threat to the 'rural lifestyle' and provoke resistance within predominately young men (Areschoug, 2024) and this behaviour can similarly be seen as a form of risk-taking as it challenges the societal norm and potentially brings them into contact with law enforcement. These are of course extreme examples, however problematic rural masculinity thrives in isolated geographies where social isolation may not just result from poor public transport infrastructure or lack of vehicle access but may be compounded by poor mobile phone reception (Rural Services Network, 2024). The following section considers the role of rural masculinity through the lens of criminal victimisation.

Rural Masculinity and Crime Victimisation

The impact of crime and victimisation on rural communities is little understood, and little research has been undertaken to explore this issue. However, the impact of agricultural crime on farmer psychological well-being has been explored by Smith (2020; 2022), finding that crime sits high on the list of stressors within the farming community, only preceded by weather, finance, and government regulation. Furthermore, the impact of crime on farmer mental health is both broad and deep in its effects, with many farmer participants reporting experiencing suicidal tendencies as a direct result of victimisation. This being the case, it is argued that criminality and victimisation should be carefully considered in relation to the trauma experienced by those in the rural space and the impact it can have on rural masculinities. It is noted that trauma affects how victims see themselves, the world around them, and the people they interact with (Office for Victims of Crime, no date), as such a trauma-informed approach to supporting rural victims of crime requires an understanding of the wider implications of how rurality affects victimisation, and how this, therefore, affects the social, physical, and emotional aspects of everyday life for those victims.

Rural communities often have very different experiences following victimisation than many of their urban counterparts, often driven by the geographic isolation and the distance of these communities from centralised police (Abraham & Ceccato, 2022; Marshall & Johnson, 2005; Mawby, 2004; Smith & Somerville, 2013). As with rural masculinity, the detailed empirical data relating to rural crime remains insufficient. In England and Wales, statistics relating to rural crime are limited to those of insurance claims released every year via the NFU Mutual Rural Crime Report (NFU Mutual, 2024). The myriad of caveats that go with these data have been raised elsewhere (Smith & Byrne, 2017). Police data is problematic if researching rural crime in the UK as there remains inconsistency in the way such crimes are recorded and not all police forces use the same crime recording system (Office for Statistics Regulation, 2024), and high turnover rates of control room staff as illustrated by an FOI response from Dyfed-Powys Police (Dyfed-Powys Police, 2024) means that it is hard to keep on top of rural crime training (among other training) with call handlers.

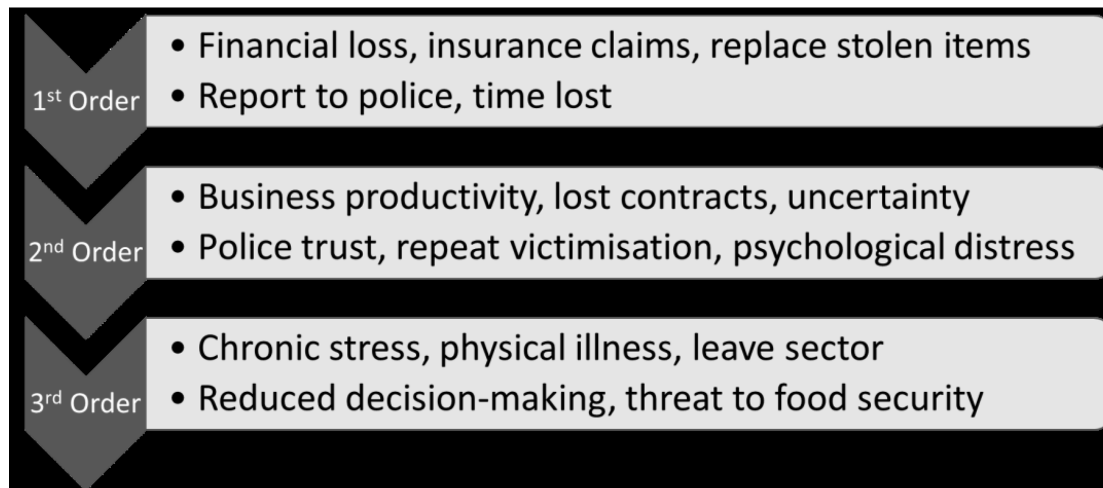
As a result of the broad range of factors affecting rural communities, balancing the day-to-day stressors that affect those who live and work in the rural space can be challenging. Those stressors can include geographic and social isolation, transport issues including public transport, poor infrastructure including digital, lack of affordable housing, and poor service provision including health and financial services (Lobley et al., 2004). In addition, farmers and rural businesses also experience stressors including weather, government regulation, machinery breakdown, and finance (Kearney et al., 2014; Olson & Schellenburg, 1986; Smith, 2022, Walker et al., 1986). In most cases, these communities manage the stress that is experienced due to these and other factors and are able to function fully within their own lives and work. However, while these stressors are generally managed it may well be the case that it would only require an unexpected act, action, or event to challenge the management of these regular stressors and increasingly create psychological trauma for the victim, whether direct or indirect. It is argued that crime is one of those unexpected events that disproportionately affect rural communities and creates a challenge to the ontological security of the rural victim (Smith, 2023). Ontological security is the idea of one seeking consistency of self across space and time (Innes & Steele, 2014), and the security this brings to daily life. From a farming perspective, this enables the daily management of regular stressors as noted above in a clear way to enable the continuity of farming. Innes & Steele (2014) go on to highlight that trauma, such as crime, is a significant challenge to this stability and security of self. As a result of the psychological effects of the acute impact of crime on ontological security, there is the potential for poor decision-making as a direct result of the criminal action and the stress related to it, as well as the ongoing stress created by this poor decision-making (Smith, 2023; Starcke & Brand, 2012).

Despite the potential wide-reaching impact that crime can have on decision-making in rural communities, both long- and short-term, the nature of rural masculinities often means that the effect of criminality is experienced and addressed in ways that would not necessarily look appropriate to those who might be looking from the outside in. Although focusing on the effect of farm crime, Figure 2 illustrates the potential impacts that crime can have beyond immediate action, and much of these would be relatable across the wider rural community. This figure enables consideration of short- (1st order), medium- (2nd order), and long-term (3rd order) consequences of victimisation.

Despite research highlighting the issue of suicide in the farming community being grossly underestimated (Lobley, 2005; Lobley et al., 2019, Smith, 2020; 2022), something which is reflected across the wider rural community (Casant & Helbich, 2022; RHI Hub,

Figure 2

First, Second, and Third Order Effects of Farm Crime (Source: Smith, 2023)



2022), crime-related psychological trauma continues to be exacerbated through the perpetuation of rural masculinities. Due to the perception that there is a need to keep up appearances and portray the role of the strong, stoic rural man, beyond the reporting of the crime to the police – something which in and of itself is not guaranteed – little may be said about the experience of victimisation by the victim whether it is psychological, social, or economic. The denial of any psychological effects directly relating to rural crime may be experienced. Regardless of whether the crime event was the theft of small tools or a violent attack on the individual person, the psychological effect will be evident from increased depression or anxiety, anger, paranoia, inability to sleep, avoidance behaviour, suicidal tendencies, as well as other indicators of psychological distress (Smith, 2020; 2022). It is recognised that the denial of psychological distress, particularly over time, can lead to much wider implications in relation to the physical health of victims (McFarlane, 2010; Salleh, 2008). With this is coupled the issue of low levels of help-seeking behaviours among rural men following crime-related trauma, along with other traumatic experiences (Bryant & Garnham, 2014; Roy, Tremblay & Robertson, 2014; Thornicroft, 2008). It is arguable that, as a result of the denial of trauma and the lack of help-seeking following crime victimisation, the subsequent chronic psychological and physical implications combine with the need to conform to the established rural masculinities. This can create a much darker side of rural masculinities, and suggest the possible emergence of a more toxic rural masculinity (TxRM) which may enable the development of less socially acceptable methods through which rural masculinity is displayed and asserted.

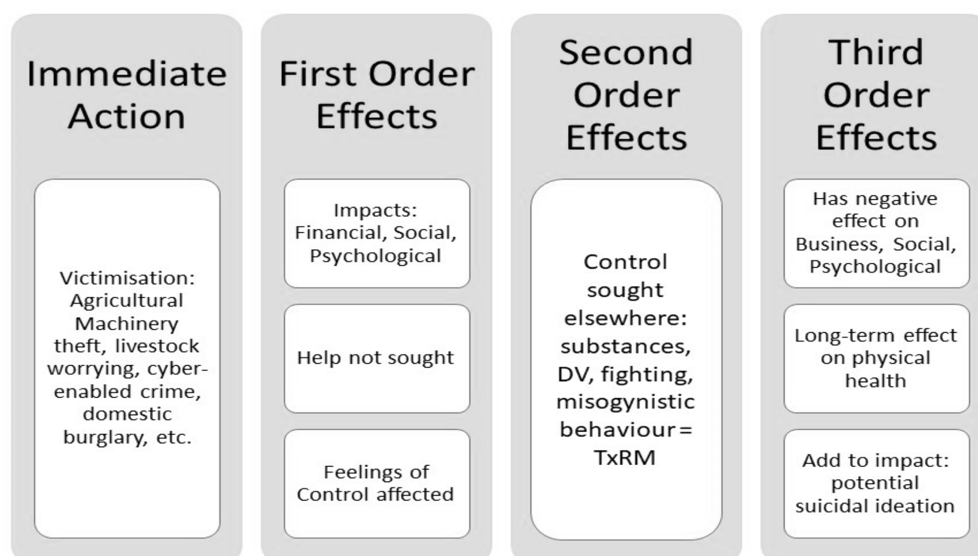
Alcade (2011) has explored migrant men and masculinities and identified that the ‘destabilization of masculinity’ can often lead to violence. It is arguable that across rural masculinities it is not necessarily about violence, but rather a loss of control that is the key driver for the development of this TxRM. Due to the unexpected nature of the crime, it is further argued that this is a key factor in the destabilisation of the traditional rural

masculinities thus leading to rural men having to find an alternative source of control when this control over their property, person, or business has been challenged. This control may be seen in the form of violence, but it may also be displayed through alcohol or substance abuse, or an increase in misogynistic behaviour. By adapting the idea of second and third-order effects as illustrated in Figure 2 above, this process from victimisation through to the need to redirect control and further long-term consequences can be mapped as shown in Figure 3.

It is argued that these second and third-order effects in response to the immediate criminal act are only experienced as a result of the need to fit into the idealised rural masculinity, but leads to increasingly problematic issues relating to the development of this TxRM. This then continues to exacerbate the initial issues of rural men denying the psychological impact of crime, and their lack of help-seeking. This contextualisation of rural men's response to crime is of course not applicable to all but is underpinned by international research showing that women, in general, are more likely to seek help (Levi et al., 2015; Günney et al., 2024). However, it is questioned whether the same would apply when rural women are victimised as a result of the development of the TxRM. The following section explores this concept.

Figure 3

Impact of Non-Help Seeking Behaviour among Rural Men (Author's Own)



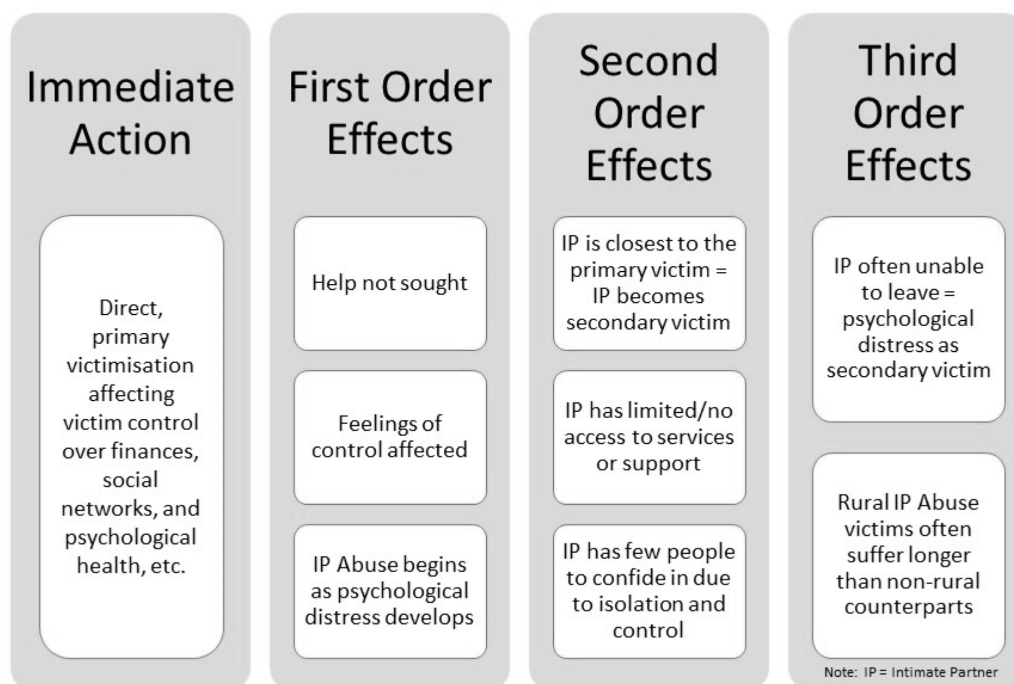
Toxic Rural Masculinity and Rural Women

As a result of the internalising of the trauma of victimisation, it is argued that some rural men may assert their dominance and their control through other means. Often this may be through cars or machinery, or partaking in sports such as rugby or golf. However, in some cases, the need to control manifests through this more toxic rural masculinity leading to issues relating to alcohol or substance abuse, fighting, or more worryingly through domestic abuse of rural women. The issue of domestic abuse in the rural space has become a much

more prominent aspect of rural research on health (Peek-Asa et al., 2011; Mantler et al., 2021), feminist (Hall-Sanchez, 2016; Wendt & Cheers, 2004), criminological (Mesko, 2020; DeKeseredy, 2024), and geographical (Pederson et al., 2023) perspectives. To highlight the key aspect of rurality in this discussion, the authors will refer to this issue as Rural Intimate Partner Abuse (RIPA). While it is recognised that it is predominantly women who are the victim-survivors of domestic abuse in the rural space, this provides an inclusive approach to the discussion to recognise that it may not always be women who are the victim. In following this inclusive approach, Figure 4 builds upon the idea of short- and long-term consequences of victimisation by modeling how a criminal act could then lead to RIPA without being gender-specific. It is recognised that TRM can influence how rural women compete in a historically patriarchal environment through hyper-masculinity (Smith, 2018). Nonetheless, when considering how the direct victimisation of the rural man links to RIPA, Figure 4 sets out the potential short- and long-term consequences of that initial event.

Figure 4

Rural Intimate Partner Abuse (RIPA) due to TxRM (Author's Own)



The strength of the traditional values around the role of rural women tends to be magnified due to the persistence of the traditional rural masculinity, and the patriarchal constructs of society (Farhall et al., 2020). This idea that women stay at home, do domestic work and raise the children while the man is the breadwinner is seen across all sections of rural communities (Davhana-Maselesele et al., 2009), but the effects of this belief can quickly lead to situations where the rural man feels the need to assert overt control over the woman as a result of the loss of control having experienced victimisation. While this does not happen in every case, the existence of traditional rural masculinities and the influence this has on how a

person responds to victimisation can trigger the development of a TxRM. This leads to the need for ‘control othering’, with rural women often seen as deserving of such displaced control due to their subordinate position in this patriarchal rural society. The issue of RIPA and the challenges it presents are exacerbated by isolation – both geographical and social (Ragusa, 2017; Wendt & Hornosty, 2010). Rurality in and of itself can often be a barrier to victim-survivors seeking help, whether that be informal help from their social group (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; DeKeseredy & Hall-Sanchez, 2017), or formal help from police, victim support, or refugees (Hornosty & Doherty, 2002; Lichtenstein & Johnson, 2009; NRCN, 2019). Indeed, the very social structure of rural communities can prevent victims from speaking up and seeking help. RIPA often lasts 25% longer in many rural areas, with the likelihood of reporting RIPA being half that of the urban equivalent (NRCN, 2019). Figures from the Crime Survey of England and Wales show that there is no significant differences in the likelihood of being a victim of domestic abuse between rural and urban locations (ONS, 2020). It is notable that by the year ending March 2023, ONS data makes no mention of levels of rurality/urbanity in its analysis of these data (ONS, 2023). It is arguably the confounding factors of rurality that may well lead to these figures, including geographic isolation, stigma, and traditional rural views. Abusers may have a position of importance within the community, and as such have a level of protection from accusations that victims do not experience as the accuser. The persistence of the patriarchal structure of rural communities tends to afford rural men a position of power within those communities, often seeing men in high-profile roles such as ministers, councilors, or even policemen (Bosch & Bergen, 2006; NRCN, 2019). As a result, the female victim is often left stigmatised and ostracised from her community for challenging the male-dominant perspective of the rural space. This ostracisation becomes particularly noted if the women try to leave the abuser and take the children, they often find themselves accused of breaking up a family (George & Harris, 2014; Neilson & Renou, 2015). This position of the rural man being more important, and more likely to be believed, is added to by the actions of ‘abuser allies’ (Bancroft, 2002), where other community members, and even those in support services, support the abuser and state publicly that he would not do something like that in a bid to discredit the victim-survivor (George & Harris, 2014; Farhall et al., 2020; Wendt, 2009).

Geographic isolation plays an equally important role in the inability of the rural man to explore support following victimisation, and the development and continuation of the TxRM. It also plays an equally important role in the help-seeking of rural women as secondary victims. For the victim-survivors of RIPA, leaving an abusive relationship and getting help presents challenges due to the very fact that there are very few rural areas that provide the support services needed, with most to be found in urban areas that may be a few miles or a few hundred miles away. Police are increasingly centralised in urban locations, making it hard to report the abuse in the first place, often due to the control exerted by the abuser with mobile phone and travel being monitored and rationed (Woodlock, 2017; Harris & Woodlock, 2023). Furthermore, even if the abuse is reported to the police, the next steps in the process will very much depend on how the police accept and act on the investigation. On the basis that rural communities remain quite tight-knit, even if there were more female rural police officers (Prior, 2024) the appearance of a marked police vehicle at the victim’s home

will not help the situation behind closed doors (Cloke, 2006). Rural women worry about the implications of leaving an abusive relationship as it is likely to lead to them having to leave the family home to where they will have emotional and family ties and will likely have little or no financial support (Wendt, 2009; Wendt & Hornosty, 2010). Martz & Sarauer (2000) noted that an additional issue seen in help-seeking from RIPA victim-survivors relates to the lack of refugees in or close to rural communities. Rural women leaving abusive relationships generally have to rely on refugees in urban areas which, as noted by Hornosty & Doherty (2002), often do not understand what it means to be a rural woman and how that differs from more urbanised women. Furthermore, it has been well noted that the COVID-19 pandemic had a significant impact on domestic violence occurrences per se (Berniell & Facchini, 2021; Bright, Burton & Kosky, 2020), however the impact on rural communities was magnified and intensified partly due to often conflicting public health information, but also due to the inability to seek support from service providers to avoid or escape from violence (Moffitt et al., 2022).

Unfortunately, the concept of the TxRM is still present within rural and farming communities even without the impact of the trauma of victimisation. One recent example is a story posted on the Farmers Weekly website (Kay, 2024) about the treatment of young female farmers by their male counterparts, expressing anecdotes of degrading behaviour, language, and reports tantamount to sexual assault. It is notable that this story was published at the time the authors were writing this paper, as it brings into stark focus the need for rural men to be better educated and supported to try and offset the emergence of this new, potentially dominant, TxRM that is driven by nothing more than peers and social norms.

The patterns seen here are sadly not limited to the discussion of the impact of TxRM through a gender-informed lens. The issues experienced also extend into the related, but distinct, area of hate crime.

Toxic Rural Masculinity and Hate Crime

Hate crime is most closely related to urban areas, however, they can occur anywhere regardless of socio-economic status or geography. However, tackling hate crime in rural areas can be challenging as victims are often scared to identify themselves within a community setting with isolation playing a key part in exacerbating the issue. Not only does trauma create the potential for primary victimisation, and the loss of control experienced, to become something darker, but hate crime further creates this secondary victimisation and hate-related trauma among those targeted.

Hate crimes can be motivated by biases against many things, including race, ancestry, sexual orientation, religion, gender, gender identity, disability, or language. This list is not comprehensive, as one of the issues when dealing with hate crimes is the lack of data, particularly in the rural context. Hate crimes are generally underreported and as such the true extent of occurrence in rural settings is likely to be underestimated (Ruback et al., 2018). In the UK there is no one piece of 'hate crime' legislation, rather it falls under the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, which includes racially and religiously aggravated offenses (Jolliffe and

Farrington, 2020). Hate crime can manifest itself in a variety of ways from physical and verbal assault to vandalism of property. Within rural communities Gypsies and Travellers are considered high risk communities (James, 2015), which has led to them being included in hate crime policy as a vulnerable community. However, the perception amongst many rural dwellers, and law enforcement is that they are a problematic community (James, 2020). According to the Gypsy-Traveller advocacy group, Friends, Families and Travellers (no date), 44% of British adults openly express negative attitudes towards Gypsy, Roma and Traveller communities. This can take the form of using pejorative terms such as 'pikey' to openly discriminate against them in housing, access to services or the establishment of sites for dwelling. There is evidence that discrimination extends to access to health services (McKey et al., 2022), which for a population which has poor life expectancy and suffers high levels of suicide is thought to have highly negative impacts, especially on mental health (Quirke et al., 2022). As such, the second and third order impacts of potential secondary victimisation reach far beyond simply the immediate hate crime event. It is arguable that a trauma-informed approach to support could encompass both the primary victim and the secondary victim in similar ways given the wide-reaching effects the TxRM exhibits in relation to loss of control and psychological impact. The LGBT community is often considered to be invisible in the rural community, with small close-knit communities making it less comfortable to disclose their sexual identity compared to large more cosmopolitan urban areas, they also reportedly receive more victimisation and discrimination than their urban counterparts (Rickard &Yancey, 2018).

Discrimination and victimisation are often seen as less of a risk within the countryside where a narrative of close community, everyone knowing each other, and doors unlocked to welcome visitors pervades. The reality is somewhat different, and it is difficult to pin down exactly what the drivers of rural discrimination are. It is highly likely that the lack of diversity in rural areas leads to a lack of understanding or acceptance of what is perceived as differing culture or lifestyle from the rural 'norm'. All societies engage in categorisation of people, but here we are seeing discrimination formed from a complex mix of history, socio-economic factors, socio-cultural practices, and intergenerational influence which manifest themselves in disparaging beliefs about a group. It is arguable that it is these influences that present themselves more overtly when the TxRM is driving behaviour and decision-making. Through 'social learning' those perceived as 'outsiders' may be seen as a threat to the rural idyll even though they may have been part of the rural social landscape for generations. The question of whether rural discrimination differs from urban discrimination must be focused on the victims through a trauma-informed approach. With social isolation due to rurality, lack of intervention services, lower levels of policing, and often poor telecommunication services the trauma of primary victimisation can magnify the prejudice and bias these vulnerable communities encounter. However, the greatest impact may come from the fact that many agencies, often urban-based do not see rural discrimination (Garland & Chakraborti, 2006), distracted by the lens of the rural idyll. The following explores how TxRM inhibits help availability and seeking.

Help Availability and Help Seeking

The trauma of rural criminality is, as has been discussed, creating a darker side of rural masculinities that is having wider implications on victimisation within the rural space. While primary victimisation is creating immediate, short- and long-term trauma, the low levels of help-seeking among predominantly rural men leads to the development of the TxRM, exacerbation of the trauma impact, feelings of loss of control, and the need to regain control in another way, sometimes leading to the secondary victimisation and trauma discussed in this paper. This TxRM is developing despite the wide range of help available to both direct and indirect victims. Certainly, in the UK support is available from the police and victim support in relation to the crime itself. Help extends beyond this to encompass rural religious organisations, health providers such as rural GPs (General Practitioners), and various rural and mental health charities including RABI (https://rabi.org.uk/), Farming Community Network (https://fcn.org.uk/), YANA (https://www.yanahelp.org/), and the Yellow Wellies campaign (https://www.yellowwellies.org/). These organisations are focused on the provision of support to rural and farming communities across a range of issues. However, despite such services being available to support victims of crime, and rural communities more broadly, the impact of the hegemonic rural masculinities coupled with the development of the TxRM driven by the impact of victimisation but also other acute traumatic events, behavioural and practical barriers remain steadfast in the blocking of help-seeking behaviour among rural communities. Of course, some of the more practical barriers to help-seeking have been discussed above – geographical isolation, control of travel and communications, social ostracism – but it is the impact of behavioural barriers that often are the root cause of rural men not seeking help and support when they have experienced victimisation, thus leading to the secondary victimisation discussed in this paper.

The rise of the TxRM may be exacerbating the existing masculinity-driven issues in help-seeking already noted in the academic literature (Piatkowski et al., 2024; Roy et al., 2014; Seidler et al., 2018), leading to reduced help-seeking behaviour as a result of the perception of the need to comply with traditional gender role norms. However, it may be the case that such expectations of hegemonic rural masculinities drive low levels of help-seeking behaviour. Some of the behavioural barriers to help-seeking that should be considered are briefly considered here.

Cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) may be contributing to the poor help-seeking often seen among rural men and victims of rural crime per se. This is driven by the myriads of underlying attitudes, values, and goals that affect our everyday decision-making, and despite the wish to be healthy and able to make important contributions to society, sometimes our behaviour does not reflect our real attitudes and beliefs (McGrath, 2017). When considering crime-informed trauma, it is often the case that the victim recognises the impact this event has had on their mental health and the need to seek support and guidance to address the consequences being noticed. However, those underlying attitudes and beliefs surrounding hegemonic rural masculinities relating to being strong and stoic, being able to deal with things yourself, and the continuing stigma around mental health, all conspire against the wish

to seek help (Gough & Novikova, 2020), and therefore the victim remains silent. This approach, as discussed above, may in some cases lead to the development of the TxRM and the need to assert control in other walks of life.

Gambler's Fallacy (Cowan, 1969) is a concept identified within behavioural science that underpins the thought processes after victimisation, and the overconfidence that they will not be victimised again, so they should not need to bother anyone. This concept represents the false belief that such a random event is less likely to occur if the event has happened recently (Suetens & Tyran, 2012). When applied to rural criminality, it suggests that a victim may consider themselves unlikely to be a victim more than once, and so treat victimisation and its impact as a one-off event not requiring any further time or thought investment to overcome. Of course, it is argued that a single crime event may be enough to trigger crime-related trauma, and if the victim is not equipped to deal with the psychological, social, and economic fallout of that event, then that one event may be enough to trigger the onset of TxRM-type responses. Furthermore, if the victim does indeed believe that they could not be unlucky enough to be a victim a second time and then is targeted again, this could have a cumulative effect on the crime-informed trauma that the victim may experience due to their holding of the belief that this could not happen to them again.

However, despite these and other behavioural barriers that may well come into play in such situations as rural victimisation and subsequent help-seeking choices, the key barriers often stopping rural men from seeking help are reduced to the idea that they do not have the time to report what has happened and find support through one of the organisations mentioned above, but primarily that the adherence to the concept of rural masculinities means that they do not want to be seen as weak by their peers and other community members (Alston & Kent, 2008; Bryant & Garnham, 2014). Their fear of the community finding out that they have sought help to address the crime-informed trauma they have experienced sadly over-rides any thoughts of self-preservation that they may have in the weeks and months following victimisation. As a result of this self-imposed denial, the ramifications of one act can be far-reaching in the primary victim's bid to regain control somewhere in their lives. The key challenge for those supporting rural victims is to understand and explore how to get both primary and secondary victims to access the services available to them by working through the influence of the TxRM and the continuing urbanity of victim support services. Such an approach is considered in the following discussion.

Could a Trauma-Informed Approach to Supporting Rural Victims Help?

The above discussion has highlighted the wider impact that rural criminality can have on victims if underlying attitudes and beliefs are driven by hegemonic rural masculinities. While such hegemonic rural masculinities can be a good thing when times are good, these ideals do have a negative impact when stressors are brought to the fore (Alston & Kent, 2008). As a result, it should be recognised that crime-related trauma can have a much more extensive effect on victims that exist far beyond the immediate crime event. It is arguable that trauma-informed approaches to supporting victims of crime in the rural space have a lot to consider in light of hegemonic rural masculinities, low levels of help-seeking, and the TxRM

development within rural communities. This section provides an overview of some of these considerations following what is understood from this discussion about how criminality and masculinities intertwine.

To better support victims of crime in the rural space, regardless of crime type, service providers of all kinds that support victims whether police, healthcare professionals, religious organisations, rural organisations, and those charities not wholly rural-focused, need to work with rural communities, victims, and perhaps even academia. This approach will enable a better understanding of how rurality can amplify the effects of victimisation. By doing so, a collaborative discussion can begin that will shed light on the range of second and third order effects of victimisation. Furthermore, this approach would allow a much broader understanding among key stakeholders as to what they can do to address crime-related trauma in the rural space. By taking this approach, it would enable those organisations to effect timely and appropriate interventions to better support victims of crime, whether that be primary victims or secondary victims. Of course, this must be coupled with a recognition of the barriers to help-seeking that are driven, enhanced, and subsequently reinforced by the existence of hegemonic rural masculinities and developing TxRM directly resulting from primary victimisation. If service providers could work collaboratively to explore ways of bringing their services to the rural communities affected, this would certainly be a step in the right direction. Whether that is a pop-up shop approach allowing rural communities to access several services under one roof at regular intervals, or mobile services would be down to individual and local needs (BBC, 2023; Nye, Winter & Lobley, 2022).

It is arguable that the multi-service approach would potentially have much wider success as it would allow residents to access several services in one visit, and it would also allow access to sensitive services without other community members knowing exactly what help an individual is seeking, thus addressing at least part of the barriers to help-seeking. There are pockets of innovative practice across England and Wales. Some examples include Our Somerset Health Hubs for Farmers (Our Somerset, 2023), The Farming Life Centre in Derbyshire (The Farming Life Centre, not dated), and the extension of a Shropshire mobile health and wellbeing service (Shropshire Council, 2023). However, while these are showing promising steps in the right direction, there could be better integration of a much wider range of services included in such interventions. This might include police, representation from religious groups, financial guidance, or specialist mental health support services. Furthermore, ensuring regular attendance in rural communities might be beneficial. This approach is being increasingly explored through academic research in relation to the provision of health services (Russell et al., 2022) and more general services including finance and business advice (Kantar & Svrznjak, 2019). It is argued that such hubs would be more accessible for victims of crime if they were offering shared services rather than simply a police hub, or a mental health support hub in a bid to overcome the issue of help-seeking stigma.

Linked to this is the need for rural service providers to understand that rurality not only creates barriers to seeking help for victimisation, it can also act as a shield for offenders.

If help is not sought, the potential for broader impacts creating a TxRM in those who have been a victim of crime, and thus becoming offenders themselves, increases as they search for a way to regain control lost in the crime event. A crime-related trauma approach to supporting victims must not only reach those primary victims, but also recognise how this affects other members of the rural community, whether that be rural women, BAME residents, LGBTQI+ members of the rural community, or others who may become victims of the impact of TxRM due to the lack of help-seeking following the primary crime event. By recognising not only the trauma created by the initial crime event but also the referred trauma that may be experienced by those who find themselves the victim of the TxRM-driven incidents, service providers can adapt their support. This may lead to establishing key protocols for approaching both primary and secondary victims of rural crime, understanding the wider implications of rural crime, and ensuring that all avenues to such referred trauma are identified and all victims supported. Such an approach would ensure a holistic trauma-informed approach to rural crime support that recognises the wider trauma-informed approach to address the underlying psychological issues that affect individuals, their families, and the wider community (Walker, 2021).

More work is needed to better understand whether direct and indirect victimisation have the same effect on those in rural communities, and indeed whether indirect victimisation could lead to similar second and third-order effects that can be seen in direct victimisation. This further work should consider whether indirect victimisation leads to similar support needs, but experiences similar lack of help-seeking. If these vary, how might that influence the development of the TxRM in primary victims and thus the trauma pathway experienced by both primary and secondary victims? Without some exploration of rural crime-related trauma, its impact on individuals, and recognition of the support needed specifically for rural victims, it is possible that such trauma will persist, and the victim will not receive the support needed in a timely manner. Without this kind of understanding and consistent application of tools and policies to support rural community members, the perpetuation of the wider impacts included in the TxRM will not be addressed successfully (Moreland & Ressler, 2021).

To try and address some of the issues surrounding help-seeking, service providers, rural organisations, and academia should consider how to engage better with rural communities to encourage more openness and help-seeking among all victims. Furthermore, the need to explore the underlying causes of secondary victimisation resulting from the development of the TxRM is key. In what circumstances do low levels of help-seeking enable the development of the TxRM; are there any mitigating factors; what are the patterns seen in primary victimisation and its effects and the progression to other methods of asserting control whether that be RIPA, hate crime, and how this progression might differ between the pathway to offending versus other control mechanisms such as substance abuse or sport.

Furthermore, pathways from primary crime-related trauma to trauma-informed control assertion should be mapped to aid in clear understanding for academics and practitioners alike. Such processes may shed light on the different ways in which rural crime-related trauma manifests and is then expressed through TxRM-related control, or mental

health crises and rural suicide. Such an approach to understanding rural crime-related trauma and the responses to it could further be employed to provide guidance and support for young farmers in a bid to move away from the developing TxRM being illustrated in the UK farming press. By considering this possibility, it may be that a trauma-informed approach to rural crime may well have much wider implications as being a proactive guide to support the young farming community to be better equipped to deal with the psychological, social, and economic impacts of such acute shocks such as, but not limited to, rural crime.

Conclusions

It is clear from this discussion that crime can have a wide-reaching effect on rural communities, and perhaps in some surprising ways. While some still perceive the rural space as an idyllic place with pasture and rolling green hills, for those that live in these communities, the truth can sometimes be far removed from this idealised perception. The impact of crime is often exacerbated by the persistence of the idea of the traditional, hegemonic rural masculinity which tries to protect the idea of a patriarchal society led by strong, stoic men. However, this traditional rural masculinity can lead to the development of a much darker, toxic rural masculinity where victims of crime internalise the social and psychological effects of being a victim sometimes leading to chronic issues with stress, risk-taking, poor decision-making, and poor mental health. Over time, if these issues remain unaddressed, the loss of control over their lives and life choices can lead to the development of this Toxic Rural Masculinity, or TxRM. One indicator of the presence of the TxRM may be the point where the victim becomes an offender, seeking to regain their sense of control by inflicting physical or psychological pain and trauma on others; women, travelling communities, LGBTQI+ community, ethnic minorities, and so on. It is this understanding that is required among those who can and do provide support for rural communities, whether it be victim support, mental and physical health services, the police, or family support services. By better understanding the challenges that traditional rural masculinity can present to rural victims in relation to risk-taking, committing secondary offenses, and help-seeking, those who provide support for rural communities can recognise when victims are in need of help. A trauma-informed approach may be key to offsetting the darker, more toxic, impacts of victimisation by enabling primary victims to feel safe and restoring their ability to make good choices and therefore rebuild their sense of control over their world.

By doing so this may reduce the chronic social and psychological impacts of criminality, and may indeed reduce the incidences of the types of secondary victimisation that are explored here. A similar approach could well be used to rebuild the sense of safety and control among those who have become indirect victims of the primary crime event through the effect of the TxRM on primary victim decision-making. By developing an understanding among support service providers of the challenges that rural life brings, and approaching victim support through a trauma-informed lens, this could indeed lead to a positive challenge to the TxRM, and also reduce the potential for re-traumatisation among primary and secondary victims.

It should be noted that this review does not consider how direct victimisation affects the mental health of rural women per se, their perception of hegemonic rural masculinities, whether they find themselves adopting a hypermasculine sense of self to be seen as equal to the rural men, and therefore how this might influence their own help-seeking behaviour. To ensure a trauma-informed approach to the support offered to rural victims of crime, more work is needed to better understand the different community personalities that can be found within the rural space. This would ensure that such trauma-informed support is grounded in clear, evidence-based, knowledge of rural people whether they be women, men, old, young, gay, straight, traveller, Christian, or Muslim. Such an approach will ensure that all victims are treated with equity and inclusivity, and that the darker side of rurality can be directly confronted.

In summary, this paper argues for the need to better support victims of crime within the rural space. This needs to be a coordinated effort across all service providers including the police, insurers, primary health care providers, and mental health services amongst others. Moreover, this support should be extended to create a holistic support network for rural residents and their families who have experienced the trauma of victimisation. Such as approach would require future research to explore how extensive changes can be made to the way rural crime is perceived, but additionally a change in the way that help-seeking is stigmatised within these communities. Only then can the pervasive nature of trauma-informed Toxic Rural Masculinity be tackled.

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