



Understanding Crime and Rural Communities: Theory, Policy and Practice

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Existing understandings of crime are focused predominantly on urban environments: this workshop focuses on expanding comprehensions of crime within regional, rural and remote contexts across Australia. This will address a significant knowledge deficit and produce a range of theoretical and practical outcomes to improve criminal justice responses to rural, regional and remote offending.

This Workshop has four principal objectives:

- to develop a stronger understanding of conceptualisations of rurality in a contemporary Australian context;
- to expand present understandings of dimensions of rural, regional and remote crime;
- to facilitate an interdisciplinary dialogue which fosters collaborative and creative understandings of rurality and rural crime;
- to disseminate scholarly outputs that contribute to expanding awareness, knowledge, discourse and debate regarding rural crime

Rural criminology scholarship – which has in the past existed on the periphery – is growing as a sub-discipline of criminology and criminal justice studies (see for instance, Donnermeyer's edited Routledge Handbook of Rural Criminology 2016). In large part, this boom has been motivated by governmental, community and academic recognition that, despite stereotypes and images of the 'rural idyll' (Bell 2006), crime exists in the rural landscape. Myths about peaceful, crime-free areas beyond the cityscape persist, but in fact rural crime is multi-faceted (Harkness, Harris & Baker 2016). Existing work tends to focus narrowly on understanding crime control in 'the rural' as the same as that in 'the urban', thus there is a need to widen the scope of investigations into initiatives that prevent victimisation and offending in rural areas. By drawing upon a diversity of cross-disciplinary perspectives, a much more nuanced appreciation for crime causation and criminal justice responses in non-urban Australia will be achieved.

The workshop themes are tied together by an overarching focus on space and place. Notions of 'place' and 'context' will emerge throughout contributions to this Workshop. Participants will discuss fixed locations (such as farms, fields, community and public spaces, national parks, art galleries and museums), borderless zones (those hosted by the internet and computer-mediated communication), as well as

engaging with the broader notion of rurality (which is defined largely although not solely in geographic terms).

Seven key themes have been identified which dovetail with the Workshop objectives and elucidate key issues in rural spaces:

Theme One: Rurality

Rurality will be considered, first and foremost, to appreciate what is meant by “rural”, and will examine the role of place and space. ‘Space’, as opposed to ‘place’ has not been given due consideration in mainstream Western studies, because spaces are ever changing, constantly made and remade, shaped and – indeed – underscored by social, political, economic and cultural ideologies. These notions will be explored and debated, taking into account definitions of rurality, emerging Southern Criminological frameworks, history and contexts of rural crime in Australia, and representations of crime in film, television and literature.

Theme Two: Politics of crime in rural landscapes

Rural sites are also political spaces shaped by particular types of narrative and rhetoric. Exploring how politics and the rural are intertwined is central in understanding how crime is positioned in relation to rurality. Examining this theme includes accounting for how both electoral processes and media portrayals shape the discourse and rhetoric of rural crime.

Theme Three: Rural communities and civil society

It is widely noted in the canon of relevant scholarly literature that communities with high levels of collective efficacy also have correspondingly low rates of crime. To date, much research has examined how collective efficacy functions in urban settings. Much less literature explores this phenomena in relation to rural communities. In order to understand how rural communities might respond to crime, we need to consider their unique dynamics, including fly in - fly out workers, and how the dynamics of rural communities might change with influxes of sea changers and tree changers who may lack strong community ties.

Theme Four: Rural crime and non-human victimisation

Crime does not occur only against humans in rural settings. Indeed, crimes against non-humans which impact environmental, wildlife, heritage and cultural sites comprise significant aspects of crime in rural communities. The victimisation of non-humans has a broader impact on the community, disrupting tourism, polluting the environment, and destroying biodiversity unique to rural environments.

Theme Five: Dimensions of rural crime

This theme will focus on human victimisation as a dimension of rural crime. In a rural setting, this can occur in a variety of ways including through alcohol and drug use, acquisitional crime such as the theft of livestock, guns and tools from farms, and interpersonal and family violence. The rural is also a site of protest when landholders and other concerned citizens protesting against resources developments like

fracking and coal mining deny access to sites of exploration and are consequently arrested and charged.

Theme Six: Rural criminal justice responses

Institutional responses to crime can differ between urban and non-urbanised settings. Flowing throughout the Workshop will be an examination of criminal justice responses to offending behaviours in rural, regional and remote Australia. Typically these behaviours are mediated through the courts, including through Indigenous sentencing courts which function within a restorative justice framework. Workshop participants will also explore how corrections, sentencing and other penalty responses function within rural communities, including how offenders may integrate back into small communities where anonymity or a 'fresh start' may be more difficult to achieve.

Theme Seven: Colonisation, culture and crime

The consequences of colonisation will feature throughout discussions over both days, and will form the basis for a dedicated Workshop session. Here, Indigeneity and colonisation will be considered: impacts, lessons and future directions. Land rights, access to justice and Indigenous legal relations will be examined in both practical terms identifying existing problems and importantly proposing solutions. The emergence of Indigenous Criminology is central to this theme, exploring as it does Indigenous peoples' contact with criminal justice systems in contemporary and historical Australian context.