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Juvenile Delinquency and Victimisation: Urban vs Rural Environments

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Researchers and practitioners are increasingly concerned about juvenile delinquency and victimisation as complex social problems. These two phenomena span across the rural–urban dimension, but little research has been dedicated to studying the influence of geographic variables on juvenile delinquency and victimisation. Even though crime rates and fear of crime are generally higher in urban areas, and crime varies heavily across the rural–urban dimension, it is not absent in rural communities. Studies have tended to generalise findings about juvenile delinquency and victimisation from urban areas to rural areas. Early studies found that delinquency rates were higher in densely populated urban areas, but later studies indicated that rural delinquency is also a growing concern. For example, some researchers found that rural youth are at higher risk of being victimised and bullied. Risk and protective factors are similar for both urban and rural youth, but the relative impact of those factors differs across communities. Studies have also found differences in access to various services, commodities, and facilities across the rural–urban spectrum. There is a shortage of studies in Slovenia that focus on studying the urban and rural dimensions of juvenile delinquency and victimisation. The only study in Slovenia that adequately addressed these issues was the Second International Self–Report Delinquency Study (ISRD2). Although this study did not find any statistically significant differences between the two settings, we believe that this does not indicate that crime in rural communities is not worthy of attention. Future studies should focus more on comparing urban and rural regions and qualitatively address juvenile delinquency and victimisation. Rural areas also require preventative place-specific policies and services.

Keywords: juvenile delinquency, juvenile victimisation, urban and rural environments, crime, Slovenia

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1 Introduction

Childhood and especially adolescence are crucial phases in the development of juveniles and the formation of future responsible adults, which is why considerable attention is being paid to what young people do and how they behave (Dekleva, 2004). Juvenile delinquency causes societal concern worldwide, and researchers have long studied why certain juveniles are more violent, more delinquent and less conformist than others (Marshall & Enzmann, 2012). Juvenile delinquency stands out as a unique criminological phenomenon mainly due to the particular biological, psychological, and social characteristics of juveniles and their unique legal position in the criminal justice system (Filipčič, 2015).

The term delinquency is usually only used to denote deviant behaviour of juveniles and refers to behaviour patterns that are often characterised by repeat offending (Azeredo, Moreira, Figueiredo, & Barbosa, 2019; Dekleva, 2010). It includes various forms of deviant behaviour among children and adolescents who violate specific social rules that are assessed as harmful to them (Filipčič, 2015). The content of delinquency is very heterogeneous and includes committing criminal offences (e.g. violent crime, property crime), misdemeanours (e.g. vandalism, disturbing public order) and other forms of deviant and maladaptive behaviour, which can often be regarded as status offences[4] as well (Filipčič, 2015), such as bullying, cyberbullying, truancy, running away from home, curfew violations, disobedience of authority figures, smoking tobacco, drinking alcohol, driving cars, and behaviours related to sexuality, and other subcultural elements (Cardwell, Bennett, & Mazerolle, 2020; Dekleva, 2010; Farrall, Gray, & Jones, 2020).

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[4] Offences that are only punishable by law and frowned upon when committed by juveniles (smoking tobacco, excessive drinking, driving cars, etc.) (Dekleva, 2010).

Researchers, professionals, and policymakers are also increasingly concerned about the victimisation of juveniles, which takes many forms and is associated with many problems, such as subsequent criminal activity, health issues, and diminished prospects for the future, which can persist throughout the victim's life (Schreck, 2014; Turanovic, 2017). Turanovic (2017) defines victimisation as a traumatic and stressful life event with many negative emotional, physical, cognitive, and behavioural consequences. One of the most common types of victimisation is peer victimisation or bullying, which is a serious and common problem negatively affecting the well-being of juveniles that can weaken their social bond to school and can lead to scholastic problems, negative relationships with peers, somatic and mental health problems, and limited opportunities for prosocial development (Copeland, Wolke, Angold & Costello, 2013; Gastic, 2008; Havik, Bru, & Ertesvåg, 2015). Many criminologists agree that juvenile delinquency and victimisation are related, that there are many similarities between offenders and victims and that they often come from the same population (Chappell & Maggard, 2020; Cuevas, Finkelhor, Turner, & Ormrod, 2007; Turanovic & Young, 2016).

Juvenile delinquency and victimisation persist as complex and costly social problems, which span geographic contexts (Blackmon, Robison, & Rhodes, 2016), but very little research has been done on studying geographic variables and influences of different environments on delinquency and victimisation. The majority of criminological studies have been conducted in large urban areas, and very little research has been done in smaller urban cities or across the rural dimension (Kaylen & Pridemore, 2013; Wells & Weisheit, 2004). Criminologists have long assumed that most of the findings and knowledge obtained from studies in urban areas can also be applied to rural settings (Blackmon et al., 2016). They have treated rural areas, as Kaylen and Pridemore (2013: 170) put it, like "miniature versions of urban areas, with similar social processes occurring on a smaller scale". This article attempts to show the importance of studying crime and delinquency in rural areas as well as in urban areas; it shows the differences between rural and urban environments and their influence on crime and types of crimes, and it suggests that different approaches, tactics, and preventative measures should be applied when approaching the problem of crime in rural settings. The article provides a comprehensive review of selected international and Slovenian studies. It explains the differences and similarities in risk and protective factors influencing juveniles in urban and rural settings. It concludes with a discussion about the need for future endeavours in rural criminology and geographical comparisons.

2 Rural and Urban Environments

Traditionally, areas of human settlements have been divided into urban (cities, metropolises) and rural (towns, villages, hamlets, etc.) (Gollin, Jedwab, & Vollrath, 2016), while some include both urban and rural elements and are therefore labelled as suburban. The dichotomies between the settlements are often blurred because of urbanisation and the concomitant suburbanisation. However, the differences between urban and rural areas are still relevant both in spatial and developmental terms (Konjar, Kosanović, Popović, & Fikfak, 2018). According to the latest data, just over half of the world's population lives in densely populated urban areas. At the same time, trends suggest that by 2050, around 68% of the population will live in urban areas (Ritchie & Roser, 2018). Urban areas are nonhomogeneous communities and researchers often describe them as mosaics, which are characterised by diverse social groups and particular economic and cultural attributes of the population (Hipp & Roussell, 2013). Urban environments are characterised by population size, high population density, and a diversity of social groups, as migrants from other areas and countries often inhabit them. Social life in urban environments is sometimes defined as an 'organic society' characterised by frequent interactions between strangers; impersonal contacts; the absence of a feeling of sharing common interests; the absence of feeling of belongingness; and anonymity (Rebernik, 2008).

Urban environments may be defined by the following: 1) the global population is ageing, and so is the population of urban areas, 2) megacities and metropolises have become the driving force of the economy, 3) demographic inequality is growing (the gap between the wealthiest and the poorest is the largest in the last 30 years), 4) migrations are essential to urban areas (in addition to migrations from rural areas, illegal migrations also stand out), and 5) urban dwellers are characterised by feelings of insecurity and perceptions of growing risks – violence and fear of crime are the most common daily concerns, while new risks, like terrorism, tighter social control, and diseases, have emerged (United Nations Human Settlements Programme, 2016). Pirnat and Meško (2020) also note that urban areas face problems of housing issues, unemployment, and cultural frictions.

Rural areas differ in many ways from urban areas. Donnermeyer (2020) states that nearly 50% of the world's population lives in rural areas, where the term 'rural' generally describes non-urban or peripheral regions. He also notes that "there is no such thing as a single rural sector anywhere in the world, but rather a wide and varied collection of localities with smaller populations and population densities." Anderson (1999) explains that areas can be defined as rural

in several ways, such as low population density, employment in 'rural' activities, or settlements under a specific size. The rural–urban division may seem straightforward at first, but the construction of rural versus urban life is quite different from the definitions of rurality used within rural communities (Kraack & Kenway, 2002).

There are different levels of rurality and rural communities differ from one another (Brown, 2003). Rural areas vary widely: 1) whether their economies are based on agriculture, tourism, service, exploitation of natural resources; 2) whether they have low or high levels of violence; 3) whether they are close to urban areas or physically remote; 4) whether they are experiencing population growth or decline; and 5) whether they have diverse or homogeneous ethnic and racial populations (Weisheit, 2016). Meek (2006) gives an excellent example of two types of rural environments – a small but thriving market town with a wide variety of facilities and services, and a remote farming community with few commodities and facilities (no school, shops, public transport) – where both are considered and referred to as rural, even though they are entirely different in many ways. Because of this rich diversity, the need to recognise a more plural concept of rural has arisen, and further sub-classifications of rural as well (e.g. remote rural, accessible rural) (Chakraborti & Garland, 2004).

Rural areas are generally characterised by higher social cohesion, informal control, and less physical disorder (Bruinsma, 2007). Besides the visible differences and contrast in the environment, population densities and levels of urbanisation, other significant demarcations between urban and rural communities are 1) interpersonal social interactions and social ties (frequency and trust); 2) common interests; 3) feeling of belongingness; 4) knowledge of other inhabitants in the community; 5) different types of solidarities; and 6) different values and traditions (Bučar Ručman, 2019; Meško, 2020). Rural areas are also characterised by strong community cohesiveness, which occurs when inhabitants believe they are bound together or can coexist peacefully despite their differences (Roche & Hough, 2018). They also believe that a cohesive society is one with shared morality and low crime rates, where interpersonal bonding occurs across social, ethnic and religious groups, and where organisations with public functions are not resented but contribute to an orderly way of life.

2.1 Crime and Fear of Crime

In many societies, life in rural areas has long been perceived as idyllic, pleasant, peaceful, law-abiding, and trouble-free, whereas life in urban areas has in contrast been perceived as dangerous and associated with deviance and disorder (Carrington, Donnermeyer, & DeKeseredy, 2014; Harris, 2020). Crime is often considered absent in rural communities, which is why justice policy and practice have long centred on urban areas, and efforts to combat crimes in rural areas have been minimised (Harris, 2020; Smith, 2020). The level of crime significantly varies across the urban–rural spectrum, and both environments exhibit much diversity in the contributing criminological factors (Meško, 2020). Several early studies have shown that crime rates are higher and more concentrated in densely populated urban areas (Glaeser & Sacerdote, 1999; Laub, 1983; Pavlović, 1998) compared to rural areas. Many criminological theories studying urban crime focusing on various aspects of crime (offenders, victims, neighbourhood and society) have been developed over the last half-century. However, these theories demonstrated promising results when applied in urban areas, but the more rural the localities became, the less effective these theories were in explaining crime (Meško, 2020).

Urban environments offer their residents greater employment opportunities, better wages, and a wider variety of services and facilities. On the other hand, they also expose their inhabitants to various sources of danger, which reduce their quality of life (Pirnat, 2021). Crawford and Flint (2009) note that urban environments produce multiple forms of crime, deviant acts and related victimisation, leading to public concern, fear of crime and victimisation. Residents of urban areas with high crime rates feel less safe, are less trusting, and view the community they live in more negatively (Pirnat & Meško, 2020). The risk of victimisation is a quarter to a third higher in the urban population in all countries than in the population in non-urban environments (van Kesteren, 2015). The largest proportion of crime in European urban environments is property crime. The most common crimes are committed on vehicles (automobile and bicycle thefts) (van Dijk, van Kesteren, & Smit, 2007). In addition to the extent of crime and victimisation, studying the distribution of victimisation in urban environments is also essential. Crime is concentrated in specific spatial units, and the more urbanised an environment is, the higher the crime rate is (especially in urban centres) (Weisburd, 2015).

Urban local communities are thus characterised by the prevalence of personal victimisation, a higher level of crime due to environmental influences, and the prevalence of the physical and social disorder in neighbourhoods (van Dijk et al., 2007). Sociodemographic factors (e.g. gender, age, socioeconomic status) are related to the vulnerability of individuals and influence their fear of crime (Hale, 1996). Income and education are essential factors in fear of crime. The fear of crime is higher in poor and less educated people than in the wealthier and those more educated (Meško, Šifrer, & Vošnjak, 2012). Numerous studies have also highlighted the link between low

social cohesion and high crime rates, which is essential for understanding the relationship between crime and neighbourhoods, communities, and even the wider society (Kaylen & Pridemore, 2012; Roche & Hough, 2018). Community cohesion is significantly weakened in urban environments due to population size and density, explaining the higher crime rate (Roche & Hough, 2018). In addition to poorer social relations in communities, an essential trigger of fear is perceived disorder in neighbourhoods, which can be present in many urban communities. Physical (deserted buildings and cars, rubbish, graffiti, vandalism) and social (public drinking, beggars, youth gangs, using drugs in public places) disorders are considered indicators of a neighbourhood's disarray, the perceived cause of crime, and increased fear of crime (Meško et al., 2012).

Although official statistics may suggest higher crime rates in urban settings, this does not provide a completely realistic picture of the diversity of rural settings and the wide range of variations of crime that occurs there (Doucet & Lee, 2016). Lee (2008) comments that, although many rural communities may not have much violence in terms of standard index crimes, some communities exhibit reasonably high rates of violence per capita and exhibit it persistently over time. Although rural areas experience typical crimes such as robbery, theft, vandalism, and violence that also take place in urban areas, the nature and context of some crimes are indigenous to rural settings (Ceccato, 2016). Crimes such as farm theft (e.g. theft of livestock, machinery, fuel), land conflicts, trespassing and rubbish dumping are not common in urban areas (Ceccato & Ceccato, 2017). The most prevalent rural crimes[5] are property crimes (e.g. burglary, larceny, theft, trespassing and vandalism), family violence (especially violence against women), interpersonal disputes with elements of violence, licit and illicit drug abuse, and cultivation and production of illicit drugs (Ceccato & Dolmen, 2011; Weisheit & Brownstein, 2016).

Rural areas are usually smaller regarding the population, but they cover vast areas. Rural crimes are affected by several situational factors, which may not be present in urban areas, creating unique crime opportunities and challenges. Their most apparent factors are remoteness, small and/or dispersed populations and fewer police officers (Aransiola & Ceccato, 2020). Weisheit & Donnermeyer (2000) note that the geography of rural areas in terms of physical distance and isolation also determines the quality of surveillance and police response time. Several studies have found that the inhabitants of rural communities generally have higher levels of trust (mainly because of their small size where members know each other well), less disorder, and cleaner surroundings, higher levels of informal social control, and social cohesion, which is why some rural communities effectively police themselves (Bruinsma, 2007; Meško et al., 2012; Smith, 2020). In this context, we want to refer to Harris (2020), who warns that the concept of 'communities' poses challenges, for the term is often used uncritically. The author explains that a community is not an all-encompassing or inclusive entity, where groups are identified not only by those included but also by those excluded. That is why the victimisation of marginalised persons can be overlooked, and the perceived danger of 'outsider' groups, cast not as members of the community but contributing to the crime problem, persists.

3 Juvenile Delinquency and Victimization in Different Settings

Adolescents are involved in many types of delinquent behaviour as offenders and as victims (Taefi, Görgen, & Kraus, 2013). Rates of delinquency vary widely across communities, but the majority of criminological research has focused on urban areas and paid scant attention to rural areas (Carswell, Maughan, David, Davenport, & Goddard, 2004; Osgood & Chambers, 2003; Wells & Weisheit, 2004), which is why the portrait of delinquent behaviour is incomplete. Kaylen and Pridemore (2013) also point out that studies on rural crime or delinquency have suffered from data measurement and collection problems, making many studies of rural crime challenging to compare with those focusing on urban crime. Rural communities are often characterised by the 'rural idyll', seen as a pleasant environment in which to raise children and perceived by many young people as safe places to live in (Francis, 1999). However, they usually gravitate towards urban communities, offering more work opportunities, services, and commodities. Rural adolescents are often perceived as 'anti-idyll' and seen as introducing crime and immorality within rural communities (Kraack & Kenway, 2002).

Early American studies set on exploring juvenile delinquency rates (e.g. Laub, 1983) found higher rates in densely populated urban areas (especially near the city centres). Shaw and McKay (1942) developed their social disorganisation theory based on observations in Chicago, where they found the lowest rates of juvenile delinquency on the outskirts of the city. However, other studies produced mixed or different findings indicating that rural delinquency could be a growing concern (Hope & Bierman, 1998; Nelson, Coleman, & Corcoran, 2010). Granted, crime rates are generally higher in urban areas. Still, the difference is not as significant as might

[5] Definitions of 'rural crime' are varied and problematic as well. Nurse (2013) observes that "practitioners and policymakers operate different classifications. Thus no consistent definition of rural crime exists across the criminological or policy literature."

be expected, and rural areas show substantial variability in crime rates as well (Osgood & Chambers, 2003). Stummvoll, Kromer, and Hager (2010) found that in Austria, juvenile delinquency does not seem to be an exclusively urban phenomenon, for frequencies of alcohol consumption, theft, and violence show slight variation and seem to be similar in both urban and rural areas. Weenink (2011) compared Dutch rural and non-rural delinquency and found that rural adolescents were slightly less likely to engage in delinquent behaviour.

Compared to suburban and urban youth, rural youth report more risk-taking behaviours, such as frequent tobacco use, sexual intercourse, weapon carrying, and higher pregnancy rates (Atav & Spencer, 2002). Rural–urban patterns of licit and illicit drug use among adolescents present a mixed picture. Studies over the past few decades indicate that rural adolescents use alcohol, tobacco, or other substances at a greater rate than their urban and suburban peers (Aronson, Feinberg, & Kozlowski, 2009) or that they are at least on par with urban adolescents in this regard (Gfroerer, Larson, & Colliver, 2007). Studies overall suggest that alcohol use is somewhat higher in urban areas, while alcohol abuse is higher in rural areas (Dixon & Chartier, 2016). A possible explanation for this may be the different relationships of young people with their parents in rural environments (compared to urban environments). Children are very quickly acquainted with the role that alcohol plays in the lives of their parents or other adults and soon realise that it is consumed on various occasions (at births, weddings, at home, outside, in the family, on holidays, on weekdays, even while driving) and can be used as a holiday gift, a reward for success, and can be found even in many patriotic songs (Lavš, 1994). This can be especially true on farms in rural areas where juveniles spend a lot of their time working and being around their fathers, who frequently follow an established pattern of alcohol consumption and often violence. Moreover, many parents do not find it controversial if a juvenile tries and drinks alcohol before the age of 18 – some even prefer to see their children drinking around them in a controlled environment.

Weisheit (2020) reports that drinking and driving is much more frequent in rural areas, which can be explained by rural residents being more dependent on driving because alternative transportation is not as available as in urban areas. Among other things, young in rural areas are often acquainted with driving at a very young age. From an early age, parents put small children on a tractor or in a car, and they usually know how to drive and operate them long before their urban peers. Therefore, it is also not surprising that juveniles in rural areas are more likely to drive under the influence of alcohol. The rural–urban gap in marijuana use has also shrunk over time, and recent evidence suggests similar levels of use between the different communities (Habecker, Welch-Lazoritz, & Dombrowski, 2018). Growing evidence from international studies also indicates that peer victimisation rates are higher in rural schools. Eisler and Schissel (2004) found that more students in rural areas (19%) reported being afraid of getting hurt in school as compared to their urban peers (14%). Rural students (13%) also reported experiencing more physical victimisation than urban peers (10%). Dulmus, Theriot, Sowers, and Blackburn (2004) found that 82% of American students in a rural school setting experienced some form of victimisation at least once during the previous three months. The prevalence of students involved in bullying in Norway's rural areas was also higher than or equal to those in larger cities (Olweus, 1993).

3.1 Risk and Protective Factors of Adolescents

There are several similarities in the dynamics of the development of antisocial behaviour and juvenile delinquency in both urban and rural youth. An extensive body of research links risk factors to delinquent behaviour among adolescents (Hawkins et al., 2000). Research suggests that multiple protective factors decrease the likelihood of youth involvement in criminal activity and offending, even where risk factors are significant (Jessor, van den Bos, Vanderryn, Costa, & Turbin, 1995). Nelson et al. (2010) note that it is not expected that rural and urban adolescents will have different risk and protective factors[6] but that the relative impact of those factors may differ in different communities. One would expect much in common between rural and urban areas, but some rural communities have distinctive characteristics that could lead to various sources for delinquent behaviour. Nelson et al. (2010) found similarities across geographical contexts regarding community risk factors in urban and rural youth. The causes of youth crime in rural areas are similar in many ways to those in urban areas: socio-economic stress, family breakdown, quality of parent/child relationships, abuse and neglect, negative experiences at school, peer pressure, and licit and illicit drug abuse (Barclay, Hogg, & Scott, 2007). Links between poverty and delinquency have been found in rural and urban areas (Blackmon et al., 2016). Ferdoos and Ashiq (2015) speculated that delinquency is simply a natural by-product of urbanisation and modernisation, which provides an environment conducive to committing offences.

In rural areas, kinship relationships and their effects on youth behaviour are often stronger, and interactions among people in small communities are likely to be more person-

[6] Risk and protective factors are individual, social, and environmental elements whose presence usually increases or decreases the probability of delinquent behaviour (Nelson et al., 2010).

alised than in urban areas, which explains why adolescents' behaviour is usually under more social control and surveillance (Barclay et al., 2007). Although rural adolescents are exposed to more informal social control, this does not necessarily reduce the likelihood of their engagement in delinquent behaviour (Weenink, 2011). Stronger effects of family and school risk factors can be found in rural communities, whereas personal and peer risk factors are more vital in urban communities (Nelson et al., 2010). Rural young people face stressors that are mainly non-existent in urban areas, such as geographic isolation, fewer community resources, restricted social networks, and limited public transportation (US Department of Justice, 2001). Rural adolescents also report low rates of attachment to school, high rates of misbehaviour and dropping out of school, which can be explained by negative school experiences such as bullying and victimisation (Witherspoon & Ennett, 2011). However, Pirnat and Meško (2020) found that students from rural areas perceive less deviant behaviour among youth and more social cohesion and community responses to security problems.

Rural–urban differences in social interaction and institutions are frequently attributed to corresponding differences in value systems. For example, rural residents are markedly more traditional concerning gender roles. They are more likely to uphold a clear distinction between the activities of men and women, which is why it is plausible to expect a more significant gender gap in delinquent behaviour among rural adolescents (Bock, 2004). Another example of cultural differences is alcohol use and the frequency of visiting pubs, which is more prevalent among rural adolescents (Weenink, 2011). Some researchers (Nelson et al., 2010; Pruitt, 2009) note the urban–rural differences in access to extracurricular youth activities, community cohesiveness, access to social services, educational services, mental health treatment, availability of flexible employment options for parents, degree of ethnic variability in the population, and community norms regarding religious practice.

4 Urban–Rural Comparisons of Crime and Juvenile Delinquency in Slovenia

Local communities in Slovenia are divided into rural and urban communities, but demarcations are rarely uniform (Vlaj, 1998). Slovenia presents a curious case as the border between these environments is often blurred, and smaller towns and villages dominate it, and only in two Slovenian cities does the population exceed or is close to 100,000 (Ljubljana and Maribor), so some smaller towns are a mixture of urban, suburban, and rural environments. Eurostat's (2018) urban–rural typology also confirms the low level of urbanisation in Slovenia compared to other EU countries. According to the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia, most Slovenian residents (44%) live in rural areas, 36.5% in areas with intermediate density (suburban), and only 19.5% in urban areas (Bučar Ručman, 2019). Slovenia has 69 settlements that were given the status of a 'city', and officially has 212 municipalities (11 regarded as urban, and others as rural) (Gov.si, n.d.). After Slovenia's independence in 1991, various factors triggered suburbanisation, and people and businesses moved away from the city centres to suburban or even rural areas (Rebernik, 2014; Uršič, 2015). Especially those that sought out life in the countryside but in the vicinity of cities found a balance between the benefits of both urban and rural environments. Despite marked social and cultural differences between rural and urban dwellers, the Slovenian countryside cannot be compared to the remoteness of some of the rural areas in some of the other European countries and particularly in the United States.

Pavlović (1998) found that reported crime in urban areas is much higher than in rural areas. In Slovenia, approximately 75% of all crimes are committed in urban or densely populated areas. A comparison of urban and rural environments in Slovenia showed statistically significant differences in the characteristics of crime and fear of crime between rural and urban settings (Meško et al., 2012). Crime in Slovenia is dominated mainly by property crime, followed by economic crime and crime related to domestic violence (Generalna policijska uprava, 2019). The study also recorded more crime in urban areas, where property and economic crime were more common, while rural crime was characterised by ecological crime, interpersonal violence and domestic violence. Eman and Hacin (2018) confirmed that the crime rate in urban areas has declined by about one-fifth in recent years, and they reaffirmed the link between crime and unemployment in urban areas. The higher crime rate in urban environments generally stems from specific social processes, social structures, and weakened social control (Pirnat & Meško, 2020). According to international research, the level of community cohesion in Slovenian local communities overall is high but higher yet in rural areas (Meško, Sotlar, Lobnikar, Jere, & Tominc, 2012). Urban communities in Slovenia are characterised by higher victimisation and higher fear of crime (Meško et al., 2012; Pavlović, 1998). The most threatening factors that residents perceive are economic uncertainty, signs of disorder, disturbance of public order, and crime (Pirnat & Meško, 2020). Research conducted by Lobnikar, Prislan, and Modic (2016) showed that the relationship between inhabitants and police is stronger in rural communities. This coincides with perceptions of crime and disorder being higher in urban areas, where community bonds are weaker.

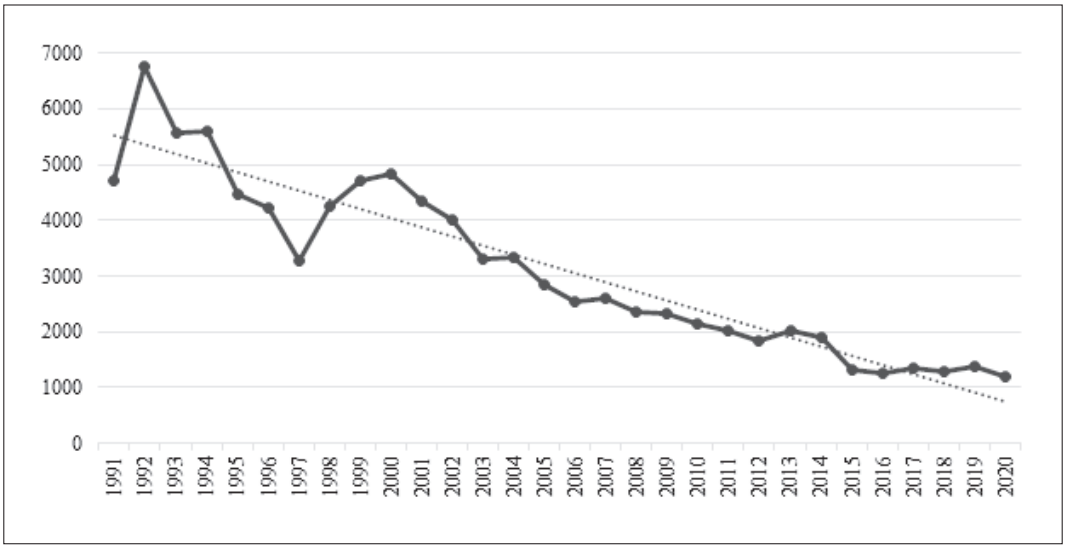

Figure 1: Prevalence of juvenile crime through the years 1991–2020
(Filipčič, 2004; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2021a)

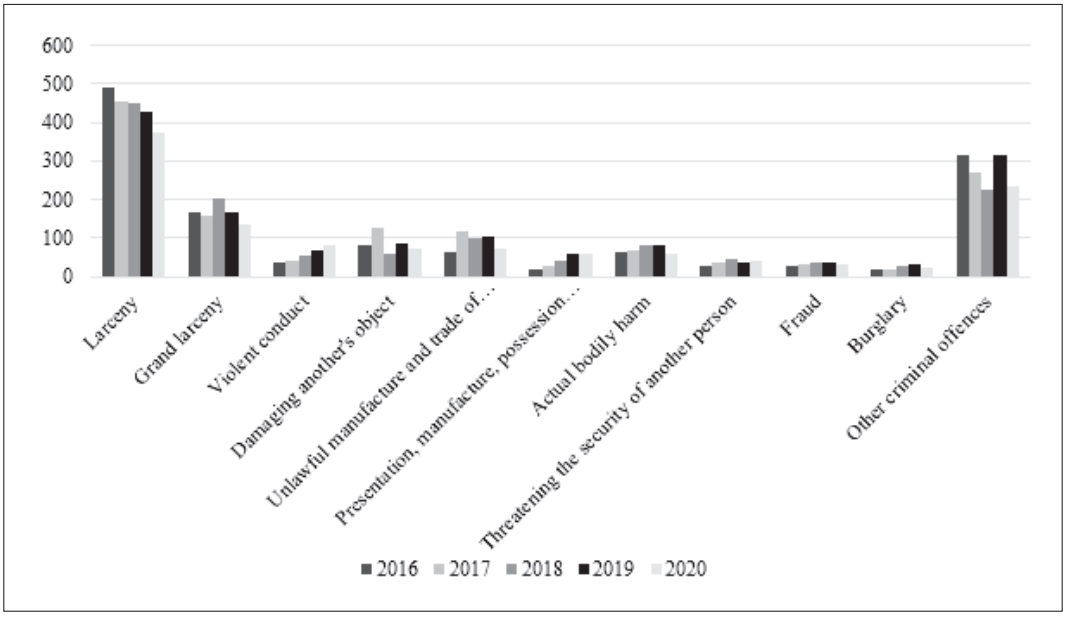

Figure 2: Most prevalent types of juvenile criminal offences from 2016–2020
(source: Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2021a)

Available official data on crime, published annually by the police, show only the total number of crimes committed by juveniles. They do not publish youth crime specified by municipality or environment. Figure 1 clearly shows the sharp decline in the number of juvenile criminal offences since 1991. After an increase in crime in 1992 (from 4,709 to 6,770), the number of offences, except for a slight rise between 1998 and 2000, has been steadily declining to this day (2019 – 1,384,

2020 – 1,194). Police data for the first half of 2021 show that the police detected 492 juvenile crime offences, which is less than the average over the last five years (674) (Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2021b). Juvenile delinquency accounts for only about 2% of total crime on average and has been declining sharply for almost two decades. Dekleva (2010) offers a plausible explanation for the steady decline in crime, which can hypothetically be linked to two events: 1) juvenile delinquency ceased to be an important social issue (juveniles became calmer, less violent, depoliticised and uninterested in protesting), and 2) the adaptation of the police and the changed conditions of the judiciary system after 1995 to its reduced capacity. In the last few years (2016–2021), the most common crimes among juveniles,[7] as also depicted in Figure 2, were: larceny (the most common); grand larceny; unlawful manufacture and trade of narcotic drugs, illicit substances in sport and precursors to manufacture narcotic drugs; damaging another's property; actual bodily harm; solicitation of people under fifteen years of age for sexual purposes; violent conduct; presentation, manufacture, possession and distribution of pornographic material; threatening the security of another person; fraud (especially prevalent in 2021); burglary; counterfeiting money; and abuse of personal data (especially prevalent in 2021) (Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2021a, 2021b).

There are various Slovenian studies on juvenile victimisation, bullying and violence amongst juveniles, and some studies even did a more comprehensive survey of juvenile delinquency (e.g., Meško & Bertok, 2013). The only research that has come close to studying juvenile delinquency and victimisation across the geographical dimension in Slovenia was the *International Self-Report Delinquency Study 2* (*ISRD2*). Dekleva and Razpotnik (2010) were part of this international study and conducted it in Slovenia between 2005 and 2007, on adolescents from 5 Slovenian cities (one large city – Ljubljana, two medium city – Celje, three small cities – Jesenice, Kočevje, and Piran), and found only relatively small and rarely statistically significant differences in the prevalence rates (delinquent acts, risk behaviours and victimisations) between the large and four smaller cities. They only found statistically significant differences in 7 of the possible 36 studied phenomena and higher prevalence rates in the large city (Ljubljana). The only surprise was vandalism, more frequent than theft in smaller cities but less frequent in the large city. The authors explained these slight differences in that Slovenia is a small country, where distances between regions and cities are small. No significant differences in cultures, economy, and social control have developed between urban, suburban, and rural parts. Taefi et al. (2013) also noted that the similarity of urban and rural data could be explained by the proximity of the urban and rural regions. Many students likely regularly commute between both spaces.

Although Dekleva and Razpotnik (2010) found no statistically significant differences between the cities used in their sample, that does not necessarily indicate the differences between urban and rural juvenile delinquency do not exist. Their study about juvenile delinquency was the first and only one to include in their sample towns that are not predominately regarded as urban. However, as mentioned previously, rural environments vary significantly, and rural localities in proximity to smaller cities or, on the other hand, small remote villages are not comparable and differ in many ways. The fact remains that in the last decade, there has been a lack of studies in Slovenia on juvenile delinquency and victimisation, let alone studies that compare juvenile delinquency for different (urban vs rural) environments.

5 Discussion

Juvenile delinquency and victimisation are both unique criminological phenomena that cause much societal concern and make many policymakers and politicians apprehensive of deviant juvenile behaviour. The phenomena span across the rural–urban spectrum. Both urban and rural environments exhibit much diversity concerning the volume of various crimes and the criminological factors that contribute thereto. Though overall crime and victimisation rates are higher in urban areas than in rural areas, the difference is not as significant as is widely assumed.

Various early studies have found that crime and juvenile delinquency were more concentrated in densely populated urban areas. Still, urban crime rates have been declining across most industrialised countries since the mid-1990s (Blackmon et al., 2016). Crime rates in Slovenia grew exponentially from Slovenia's independence in 1991 until 2013 (from 42,250 to 94,483 offences), with the most significant increase in the second half of the 1990s, and then again began declining to the present day (53,485 offences in 2020) (Generalna policijska uprava, 2013; Ministrstvo za notranje zadeve, Policija, 2021a). In terms of juvenile delinquency, crime rates have been sharply declining since 1992 (as shown in Figure 1). On the other hand, some scholars noticed that rural crime and delinquency – unlike urban crime and delinquency – are not steadily declining and are a growing concern, requiring more attention from researchers and practitioners (Blackmon

[7] Juvenile crime in Slovenia comprises general criminal offences, for which juveniles aged 14 to 17 are charged (Resolucija o nacionalnem programu preprečevanja in zatiranja kriminalitete za obdobje 2019–2023 [ReNPPZK19–23], 2019).

et al., 2016). Thus, even if crime is declining in general, it is still necessary to discuss crime prevention because: 1) crime has not been eradicated, and certain types of crime have even begun to increase; 2) crime data is problematic, as most crime goes unreported or undetected; 3) there are still debates about what has led to reductions in certain types of crime; 4) declines in crime have mainly been urban and uneven, and have not seemed to translate to rural communities; and 5) crime prevention has primarily focused on urban settings or has used the same crime prevention strategies for rural areas as well (Hodgkinson & Harkness, 2020).

As presented in official statistics, juvenile delinquency shows only a fraction of the overall juvenile delinquency rates (Junger-Tas & Marshall, 1999). To more accurately represent its prevalence, it can be measured through victimology studies and self-report studies. The self-report method is advantageous, for it gives a more accurate assessment of the actual situation, provides an insight into relationships between reported and unreported offences, and measures how many juveniles are delinquent when they start being delinquent, how severe the violations are and how often they commit them (Taefi et al., 2013). Self-report methods in the context of juvenile delinquency attempt to measure behaviour that is punishable by law, usually covert, socially unacceptable, and morally condemned (Junger-Tas & Marshall, 1999). The best-known internationally comparative study on juvenile delinquency and victimisation is the *International Self-Report Delinquency (ISRD) study*. The ISRD study has four goals: to measure the prevalence and incidence of offending and victimisation; to test criminological theories about correlates of offending and victimisation; to develop policy-relevant recommendations; and to develop a methodology to study self-report delinquency in different cultural contexts (Marshall, Neissl, & Markina, 2019). While all methods have limitations, the self-report method is regarded as a reliable and valid research method within its domain of application (Kivivuori, Salmi, Aaltonen, & Jouhki, 2014).

As mentioned, there is no consensus, which would apply globally, on which localities belong to the rural sector and Slovenia presents a specific situation for the distinctions between urban, suburban, and rural areas are often blurred. This unclear distinction can present difficulties for researchers when they try to study and compare the characteristics of the environments and the prevalence of crime. Nevertheless, no Slovenian research has yet focused on studying geographic variables and the influences of various geographical contexts on delinquency and victimisation. The only study that included in their sample cities that were not predominately regarded as urban was the *International Self-Report Delinquency Study 2 (ISRD2)* study conducted by Dekleva and Razpotnik (2010). They found no statistically significant differences between Ljubljana and smaller Slovenian cities. This could mean Slovenia is too small and does not have sufficiently significant cultural and geographical differences between regions and cities, but it is also possible that the problem of delinquency is also common in rural communities and is not as negligible as some early international studies claim. It is also not correct to claim that the ISRD2 study compared urban and rural samples, for the smaller cities chosen in the study cannot be defined as rural, but more suburban or a mixture of suburban and rural. In that way, we do not have any tangible findings from Slovenian studies comparing rural and urban juvenile delinquency and victimisation.

Juveniles comprise the part of the population that will take responsibility for the development of society in the future. Therefore it is expected by society that they are be educated, respectful, unconflicted individuals who adhere to specific social rules because they are one of the most crucial support pillars of the society. However, it seems that occasional delinquent acts are part of young people's normal social and psychological maturation process. In certain cases, such acts can become risky, as minor offences can develop over time to more serious delinquency and accelerate the development of a criminal career. Future research should focus on studying rural juvenile delinquency and compare it to delinquency in urban areas. Future studies should also answer several questions, such as: to what extent are the delinquency patterns in rural areas similar to those in cities? Do the exact causes of delinquency enter the picture? Are risk and protective factors similar, and how do they influence adolescents? The existing criminological delinquency theories should be tested and validated in rural areas on rural youth as well. Rural areas also need place-specific and specialised policies, preventative measures, interventions, law enforcement services, and rehabilitation measures, not those that purport to be 'national' while being directed solely toward urban settings (Weisheit, 2020).

We have already taken a step in the proposed path of future study of juvenile delinquency, and Slovenia has re-joined the ISRD study. Slovenia last participated in the ISRD2 in 2005, and now the fourth sweep will be conducted (ISRD4) between 2020 and 2022 worldwide. This time the study in Slovenia will be conducted by a team from the Faculty of Criminal Justice and Security within the research programme *Safety and Security in Local Communities.*[8] The study will aim to identify and explain the experiences of juveniles with delinquency and

[8] Since the formation of the programme in 2015, the researchers from the programme have, with their scientific projects and publications, significantly contributed to the study of safety and security issues regarding safety and security in rural and urban communities, and have produced valuable information and insight for future studies.

victimisation, verify the validity of criminological theories, and make recommendations for prevention and intervention in the event of juvenile delinquent behaviour. The focus of the research will be on comparing juvenile delinquency and victimisation across the rural–urban dimension, which is one of the main goals of the research programme. The survey will be conducted in early 2022, and sampling is expected among 13- to 17-year-old adolescents from primary schools, gymnasiums, secondary and vocational schools in Ljubljana and Kranj, and specifically rurally oriented secondary and vocational schools. By reengaging in the study, we want to rekindle studying juvenile delinquency and victimisation, for research interest in this topic in Slovenia has declined significantly in the last decade, as Dekleva (2010) noted. Dekleva argues that the term juvenile delinquency is too broad, and as a central concept, it may no longer be sufficiently characteristic enough to describe contemporary engagement with delinquency-related topics. Another possible explanation for the decline in studies on juvenile delinquency could be the lack of funding for such studies. In Slovenia, there are several researchers studying bullying, victimisation amongst juveniles or family violence. Still, we hope that reengaging in the ISRD study will encourage the continuation of studying juvenile offenses and, above all, aid the attempt to compare rural and urban juvenile offending and victimisation in Slovenia.

Hansen and Lory (2020) describe how the Covid-19 epidemic has exacerbated problems that have been longstanding issues in rural communities and have influenced crime in the time of crisis. They describe how access to victims' services has become difficult due to government measures taken and changes in daily activities and how the risk of domestic violence has increased. This was especially true in the first few months of the epidemic when people were required to stay at home, and many adolescents could have suffered and been victimised while they had limited access to various help providers. The strain on rural victims' services and law enforcement was felt only a few months into the coronavirus pandemic (Hansen & Lory, 2020). Juvenile delinquency and victimisation during the Covid-19 epidemic will be another topic the Slovenian ISRD4 team will explore. We intend to study the impact of Covid-19 on self-reported criminal offences and victimisation of juveniles and juvenile familial relationships, tensions and distress they may have experienced during that time. We will make a rural–urban comparison of the results to see if experienced victimisation and reported delinquency vary between the communities and inhabitants of environments that have experienced more strain. It is also worth noting that during the Covid-19 epidemic, many things have shifted online (work, school, shopping, communication, other services), increasing the chances of cybercrimes exponentially and increasing the risks of online victimisation. Since juveniles spend most of their time online, the risk of victimisation has particularly increased for this group of the population. It is also likely that new forms of online delinquency connected to new technologies have developed. In our view, it would be beneficial if future studies were to focus on studying cybercrime and cyberbullying in the context of juvenile delinquency and victimisation, compare whether the prevalence of these phenomena differ in urban and rural areas, and pay special attention to the influence of the Covid-19 epidemic.

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Mladoletniško prestopništvo in viktimizacija: urbano vs ruralno okolje

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Raziskovalci in praktiki so konsistentno in vedno bolj zaskrbljeni zaradi mladoletniškega prestopništva in mladoletniške viktimizacije, ki še vedno ostajata kompleksna družbena problema. Ta dva pojava se raztezata tudi čez ruralno-urbane dimenzije, a zelo malo raziskav se je posvetilo preučevanju vpliva geografskih spremenljivk na mladoletniško prestopništvo in mladoletniško viktimizacijo. Čeprav sta stopnja kriminalitete in strah pred kriminaliteto v splošnem višja v urbanih okoljih, kriminaliteta močno niha čez ruralno-urbane dimenzije in ni odsotna v ruralnih skupnostih. Večina študij je ugotovitve o mladoletniškem prestopništvu in viktimizaciji posplošila iz urbanih na ruralna okolja. Zgodnje študije so pokazale, da so bile stopnje prestopništva višje v gosto poseljenih urbanih okoljih, vendar so kasnejše študije pokazale, da je prestopništvo v ruralnih okoljih vedno večji problem. Nekateri raziskovalci so na primer ugotovili, da so mladostniki v ruralnih okoljih izpostavljeni večjemu tveganju, da bodo viktimizirani in ustrahovani. Dejavniki tveganja in zaščitni dejavniki so podobni za mladino v obeh okoljih, vendar se relativni vpliv teh dejavnikov v različnih skupnostih razlikuje. Študije so ugotovile tudi razlike v dostopu do različnih storitev, blaga in ustanov upoštevajoč ruralno-urbane dimenzije. V Sloveniji primanjkuje raziskav, ki bi se osredotočale na preučevanje urbane in ruralne razsežnosti mladoletniškega prestopništva ter viktimizacije. Edina študija v Sloveniji, ki je ustrezno obravnavala ta vprašanja, je bila Druga mednarodna študija o samonaznanitvi prestopništva in viktimizacije (ISRD2). Čeprav ta študija ni odkrila statistično pomembnih razlik med obema okoljema, menimo, da to ne pomeni, da kriminaliteti v ruralnih skupnostih ni vredno nameniti raziskovalne pozornosti. Prihodnje študije bi se morale osredotočiti na primerjavo urbanih in ruralnih območij ter kvalitativno obravnavati mladoletniško prestopništvo in viktimizacijo. Izhajajoč iz pregleda literature, ruralna okolja potrebujejo posebne prilagojene oblike preventivnih dejavnosti.

Ključne besede: mladoletniško prestopništvo, mladoletniška viktimizacija, urbano in ruralno okolje, kriminaliteta, Slovenija

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