Notes for the Rural Criminologist: Conducting Field Research with Rural Law Enforcement

Jessica Rene Peterson (ORCID: 0000-0001-6830-7218)
Assistant Professor
Department of Criminology and Criminal Justice
Southern Oregon University, United States

Correspondence: Jessica Rene Peterson; petersonj@sou.edu

Abstract

Drawing primarily on research with law enforcement officers in rural East Texas, this research note explores the practical challenges of conducting qualitative research with rural police and provides tips for successfully overcoming the barriers that arise. Conducting qualitative research in a rural setting, especially with rural law enforcement agencies and officers, presents unique challenges. As with all rural investigations, defining 'rural' and identifying a target space to study is the first substantial hurdle. Once a rural community has been identified, the researcher will face issues related to the geographic distance or isolation of their chosen community that can affect their physical access to the research site and data. Traveling to and navigating rural spaces requires extensive preparation that may be easily overlooked if the researcher is accustomed to collecting data in and from urban cities and agencies. Additionally, and perhaps more significantly, challenges involving sociocultural access accompany rural research projects. Regarding law enforcement specifically, the intersection of the rural community's culture, dense social networks, and an often-distinct occupational police subculture can either be advantageous, or present obstacles, to successful completion of research. Furthermore, the rural researcher must consider their physical and emotional safety when interviewing, engaging, or participating with first responders. Backup may be delayed due to the geographic expansiveness of an agency's jurisdiction and the fact that few officers are patrolling at a given time, and treatment in the event of a tragic encounter may be limited due to the lack – sometimes simultaneously in quantity and quality – of healthcare facilities and providers.

Keywords: rural police; rural criminology; qualitative methods; research challenges; field research

Field research is the most time-consuming and often costly endeavor that a researcher may attempt. This type of investigation requires skills beyond those of a technical or statistical nature that are often the focus of graduate training. Inherently, the particular skills needed are partly dictated by the field itself, making research preparation a highly individualized process. The specific setting, population, and more influence the approach needed to complete a successful project. A setting that is often missing from discussions of criminological field research is that of a rural location.

Researchers embarking on field research with rural law enforcement will face uniquely intersecting challenges, as well as potential opportunities for gaining tremendous insight into the rural justice system. The purpose of this research note is to discuss the ways in which field research in *rural* communities differs from that conducted in urban locations. The note focuses on obstacles in conducting research in rural settings with the rural law enforcement population, but also explores advantages provided by the rural location. The first hurdle, as with all rural-centric research endeavors, pertains to defining the rural field. Challenges contacting, reaching and working in the field – primarily involving geographic location and isolation, sociocultural access, and researcher safety and well-being – follow. Each section will include a discussion of each challenge or advantage and, when applicable, include specific approaches by which to address, overcome or accommodate them in order to successfully complete meaningful field research.

This note is informed by – and will reference for examples – qualitative research conducted in rural Texas in the United States with city and county-level law enforcement agencies in 2018 and 2019 (prior to the COVID-19 pandemic). The author was embedded in five law enforcement agencies for four months; engaging in 'ride-alongs' with officers at each department for 12 weeks and then conducting semi-structured focused interviews with 30 officers over the course of the remaining month. The agencies were located in counties with between 5,000 and 48,000 residents, including municipal agencies serving populations between 500 and 16,000. Furthermore, the communities where the participants lived and worked had a strong tradition in the agricultural industry.

Although Texas represents only one state in the Southern region of the United States, the communities in the study embody characteristics broadly associated with "the rural", including traditional and conservative political ideologies and religious identities, tight-knit social networks, and geographic isolation and distance from urban centers.

Defining Your Field

Rural-based research in any subject of study is rife with questions about definitions. Historically, federal agencies and organizations have approached geographic categorization from an urban-normative lens, working hard to develop formal definitions of locations and communities that address degrees of urbanity; "rural" simply became the leftover. For example, the United States Census Bureau defines rural as "any population, housing, or territory NOT in an urban area" (USCB, 2016) and researchers in the United States have long

relied on imprecise delineations of "nonmetropolitan counties" to identify rural communities (DuBois, 2020). Global standards for identifying "the rural" have similarly struggled, with definitions of population density and "degree of urbanization" only being agreed upon in 2020 by the United Nations (United Nations Economic and Social Council, 2020). Essentially, formal definitions of rural spaces rely on loose categorization and characteristics such as total population, population density, and proximity to metropolitan areas (Dijkstra et al., 2020; Ratcliffe et al., 2016; USCB, 2016).

Formal administrative definitions of rural are certainly a meaningful starting point for those wishing to immerse themselves in a rural community, but their significance stops there. More holistic definitions – as provided by rural criminologists including Joseph Donnermeyer, Walter DeKeseredy and more (see for example DeKeseredy, 2021; Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014; Harris & Harkness, 2016) – include many characteristics that are attributed to the rural and are helpful in recognizing and understanding the field in which one will study. For example, beyond the low population density and characteristics mentioned earlier, the communities in the current example study share a lack of social services and resources, concentrated and chronic poverty, and a lack of diversity that are not uncommon for rural locations.

The question of definition will not be satisfactorily answered here for everyone. A broader discussion of the issues regarding definitions of rural can be found in Rennison and Mondragon's chapter in *Research Methods for Rural Criminologists* (2022). Assuming much attention, care and reason has contributed to the identification of a field, the breadth of this note can begin.

Making Initial Contact in Your Field

Deciding who to contact, what to do and where to conduct research is certainly a feat, and contacting potential participants and gaining initial access to the rural study population and field can be daunting. Leaning on local social connections and professional networks can be incredibly helpful in securing a conversation with a gatekeeper about your project and goals. Although beneficial in most research endeavors, such utilization of connections can be particularly advantageous in rural field research as rural communities are often removed from active researcher partnerships (Francis & Henderson, 1994) and are more likely to be suspicious or distrusting of outsiders (Francis & Henderson, 1994; Keller & Owens, 2020; Weisheit et al., 2006).

Relatedly, many urban and larger agencies in a United States context – or those that have a strong connection with a research University – are accustomed to interacting with students and researchers and may have a well-defined internship or partnership program in place to accommodate such relationships. Remote rural agencies are less likely to have these established partnerships and may not be prepared for such accommodation. For example, some agencies that I initially contacted for the current example study were confused by my interest in working with them and thought that I was a student journalist interested in writing

a story about rural police. Authorization of my presence was accomplished via a hand-written contract, handshake or verbal agreement with my initial agency contact rather than by filing an existing form with the Human Resources Department. Although the novelty of this process may cause confusion at the beginning, the lack of bureaucratic procedures can greatly decrease the time – and headache – between initial contact and the research start date.

Even without prior connections, it is not impossible to establish relationships with individuals in the rural field. As the sole researcher in the current example study, I reached out to multiple agencies via cold-calling and emailing and secured five agencies for my project within a few weeks. Being professional yet relatable, and forthcoming about my purpose in a meaningful but non-academic manner helped establish my credibility when speaking to contacts for the first time. Some agency contacts may want to meet in-person before agreeing to participate, which segues into the next topic of discussion; reaching your field.

Reaching Your Field

Inherently, the rural field will be at least somewhat removed from other locations. The level of remoteness can differ and depends on the specific community chosen. In the case of the current research example, the target communities were within 100 miles (161 kilometers) of my residence in downtown Dallas, Texas. Traveling such a distance requires ample time and funds. It took between 45 minutes and 2 hours to drive from Dallas to each community included in the study. As law enforcement officers from five communities were included in the sample and I was interested in building rapport with participants and becoming familiar with the community prior to data collection, I drove to one community each day Monday through Friday. This continued for a total of approximately 12 weeks. Considering travel time alone, 1.5 hours to 4 hours each weekday was spent traveling to and from the rural communities of interest.

Over the course of four months used for rapport-building and data collection, my vehicle incurred 10,000 miles (16,093 kilometers) on the odometer. The price of petroleum – particularly during price spikes – can make such an endeavor incredibly costly. The wear and tear on a vehicle from extended continual travel, some of which may be through harsh road conditions, can increase project costs for the researcher as well. Additionally, by nature of the geographic location, field research in rural communities may require short or extended stays in the target communities. The 100-mile, two-hour radius was specifically chosen in the current study to avoid the accruement of more costs associated with hotel lodging and dining.

Relatedly, quality directions on how to locate appropriate paths to a rural community – and when those paths are accessible – may be sparse or non-existent. County roads, unpaved dirt roads, flooded roads, waterways, or a complete lack of roads may characterize the path to isolated and remote locations. Using tools such as Google Maps or other GPS locating services can certainly help, but they may not be current or accurate. Furthermore, the connectivity gap between urban and rural communities worldwide (International

Telecommunications Union, 2021) means that a researcher may not be able to rely on cellular phone service or Internet access necessary to use said services.

Overcoming Challenges with Reaching Your Field

To prepare for the challenges of physically accessing a target rural community, researchers should locate the community well in advance using physical or digital maps and human guides if necessary. At least one 'practice travel' may be necessary to familiarize oneself with the roads and climate, as well as grocery and fuel options provided by the community. Being aware of major landmarks, neighborhoods or sections of the community may come in handy in the event of an unexpected extended stay, loss of GPS access, or simply as a way of better understanding a resident or participant's stories and conversation. In addition, confirming the actual amount of time needed to reach the field allows for more effective time management and scheduling of data collection.

Field research in rural communities brings increased and potential extra costs that should be carefully assessed. Namely, these expenses include petroleum and lodging but may also include purchased meals and snacks away from home, increased vehicle maintenance or unique vehicle repairs, and emergency preparation materials and equipment. When unexpected delays arose in the example study, I was able to stay with family nearby to avoid the need for securing last-minute lodging accommodations. However, vehicle-related expenses, such as the approximately USD $1,400 total petroleum bill over four months, were not avoidable. Rural field researchers may need to explore multiple or enhanced funding options to accommodate increased and unexpected project costs; forgetting to include extra mileage and time when calculating budgets and grant proposals will hinder completion.

Working IN Your Field

Once a field has been identified and physical contact has been made, the nature of the primary obstacles faced by the researcher shift. This is the execution stage of the project where the researcher's actions and in-the-moment decisions affect participants' behaviors and responses in the field and, ultimately, data quality (Small & Calarco, 2022, p. 14). Engaging in fieldwork with police officers in rural spaces is accompanied by unique challenges to sociocultural access and researcher safety and well-being that can affect interactions in the field and resulting data quality.

Sociocultural Access

In addition to physical access, sociocultural access is incredibly important in field research as trust between participants and the researcher is essential for meaningful data (Peterson, 2022). Regardless of the parameters used to define a specific rural field, the target population and resulting sample pool will inherently be constrained by the community and/or agency's smaller size in a rural setting. Thus, extra challenges and confidentiality concerns accompany participant recruitment. If, for example, one wishes to study decision-making by

female officers in rural settings, recruitment will likely need to take place in multiple agencies and communities to obtain an acceptable sample size. Not only does this exacerbate some of the previously discussed challenges when reaching *multiple* fields, but potential participants may feel that their privacy is at risk; if a single female officer works at a particular agency, it may be easy for community members or readers of future publications to identify her based on her responses. This confidentiality risk may discourage rural residents from participating in research.

Density of acquaintanceship is a common characteristic of rural communities (Freudenberg, 1986). In a single rural community, residents tend to know one another, have local generational family roots, and share similar backgrounds and beliefs (Websdale, 1998; Weisheit et al., 2006). Those shared values tend to lean conservative regarding expectations of family, gender, sexuality, religion, and politics (Parker et al., 2018).

Additionally, and consequently, a rural community is often demographically homogenous. While "rural culture" is not monolithic and every rural community does not share the same values and goals, each individual rural community is characterized by a strong social organization (Donnermeyer & DeKeseredy, 2014). As an outsider wishing to infiltrate such dense social networks and strong community bonds, the rural criminologist must rely on reputable gatekeepers to gain full access to the field (Peterson, 2022).

Accessing Rural Police

Gaining sociocultural access to law enforcement agencies and officers involves careful navigation of a space where many may feel misunderstood, suspicious, and unfairly evaluated by those outside of their occupation (Morin et al., 2017). In rural communities where agencies are removed from mainstream attention and lack familiarity with researcher partnerships, suspicions may increase. Establishing rapport and mutual respect with police officers that leads to open and honest sharing can be quite a challenge. Situating that challenge in a rural setting characterized by dense social networks and distrust of outsiders only increases the difficulty in securing sociocultural access. However, some characteristics of this environment can become advantageous to the researcher who penetrates the metaphorical wall.

In the current example, some of the officers I rode with had no experience providing a 'ride-along' or had only done so with family members. Although this lack of experience with researchers required more explanation and navigation of a completely new relationship, it also translated to fewer expectations regarding the relationship. Additionally, lack of experience with the research process also eliminated the battle with research fatigue (Ashley, 2020). This status can be advantageous for the rural criminologist who is allowed and able to engage with community residents and agency actors in more intimate ways and gain insight from a variety of perspectives. For example, while riding along with officers in Texas, I participated in routine walk-throughs of the local school buildings. I was able to watch officers interact with children and casually speak with teachers about their experience with

and perceptions of local police. Everywhere we went, I was able to engage curious others working in justice-adjacent agencies or community centers without rigid formality.

Researcher Safety and Well-Being

As mentioned above, visiting a rural space often means giving up reliable cellular phone service or WiFi/Internet access. From a safety perspective, one may be unable to contact loved ones or service-providers in the event of emergency situations. Running out of fuel on a seldom-traveled road may require a lengthy wait until an individual passes and is willing to provide aid. One late night after spending time with an officer on an evening shift, I almost hit a deer which sprinted across the dark road at the last minute in front of my vehicle. I pondered my response had I made contact with the animal, and determined that my only choice would be to rely on a Good Samaritan.

Conducting field research with rural law enforcement involves researcher presence on the front line. Police officers are first responders and sitting in the passenger seat on a ride-along means the researcher may also be the first to arrive at a scene. Approximately one-half of local law enforcement agencies in the United States employ fewer than 10 commissioned officers and, although small agencies are not always rural, non-urban agencies tend to be small (Hyland & Davis, 2019; Weisheit et al., 2006). Some rural police agencies may have as few as one officer on duty at a given time. Access to back-up support from other officers in the event of a dangerous confrontation is limited or non-existent. Relatedly, availability of medical facilities and hospitals, as well as level of care and ability to serve various medical needs in said facilities, is often lacking (Marcin et al., 2016).

Some agencies and officers may provide instructions on how to operate their radio system to call for help in an emergency, show you how to access emergency weapons, or provide bullet-proof vests. However, there is no standard for these practices; in fact, only one agency provided (and actually required) that I wear a vest when riding with officers. In one ride-along with a county agency, a deputy who was serving a felony warrant at a known 'drug house' asked me to honk the horn on his service vehicle if I saw anyone run out of the back door. Not only was I vulnerable as a civilian in this potentially dangerous situation, but requests such as this also come with ethical considerations for the researcher.

Beyond physical safety concerns related to rural policing duties, rural criminologists working in the field with police may experience stress and fatigue at the emotional level. Staying in 'front-stage' mode or engaging new people in small talk for extended periods of time can be emotionally draining, especially for those who are introverted or need to escape social interactions to recharge. Conversely, spending time in an extremely remote location may be socially isolating. The researcher may be separated from family, completely alone, or simply feel like an outsider (Thummapol et al., 2019). In a homogenous rural community, characteristics that differentiate the researcher from the rest of the residents may exacerbate feelings of loneliness, alienation, or even fear of safety.

The visibility of a marginalized status in a particular community may vary. A person of color (POC) in a predominately white community, for example, may be more likely to have their marginalized status known, as opposed to someone with a non-heterosexual orientation in a predominately heterosexual community. Although both may experience a marginalized status in the field, that experience can differ greatly. Study participants may not recognize some researchers as being part of a marginalized group and even make inaccurate assumptions about the researchers' background. Such oblivion can be advantageous to the researcher who is able to enjoy insider status while remaining an "invisible outsider" (Peterson, 2022). However, this misattribution of identity may also subject the researcher to dehumanizing insider language (e.g., negative commentary about children with "two mommies or two daddies" when a researcher is assumed to be heterosexual). In the current study, community residents often made comments indicating their assumptions about my religious affiliation, political beliefs, ideas of morality, and gender and sexuality that were unattributable to any self-disclosure.

Additionally, accompanying police officers in their daily routine may result in exposure to violence or traumatic events that is not typical for a day in the life of academia or research. Such exposure can have significant effects on a researcher's mental health. Calls for service related to violent events tend to occur at lower frequencies in rural communities, but the incidents that do occur and enter local police awareness are more likely to involve intimate personal knowledge among everyone present, including the officer(s) (Fenwick, 2015). Officers may share information about their relationship with the involved parties that provide more context and, thus, make an incident more emotionally impactful. Most researchers will lack the training and experience that aid in coping with exposure to these incidents, so self-regulation and care are necessary to protect mental and emotional wellbeing.

Overcoming Challenges with Working in Your Field

Building rapport with respondents is essential to effectively gaining sociocultural access in field research. Law enforcement officers are inclined to view themselves as 'human lie detectors' and are often inherently suspicious of civilians. Being transparent and genuine in approach will create a trusting foundation for the researcher-respondent relationship. It is also important for the rural criminologist to remember that they are learning from the practitioners; education and research knowledge alone do not make one equally versed in the practicality of a specific job and officers tend to value practical experience over research (Telep & Lum, 2014). Officers will appreciate a researcher who is receptive to hearing about their experience. In the example study, I was able to leverage my familiarity with the general region in which the target communities were located as I grew up in a nearby rural location. Having been born into a police family also helped me gain recognition with officers that was closer to that of an 'insider'. Relying on shared commonalities or leveraging your shared social networks in a place of dense acquaintanceship is especially advantageous in overcoming barriers to sociocultural access.

Just as unique preparation is needed to reach the rural field, so too is preparation needed to work in the rural field. As mentioned, relying on Google Maps is not likely to be of benefit if cellular service is inaccessible, so having a physical map is a must. Having ample physical tender (cash) in hand may be necessary in the situation where local gas/petrol stations close early or the local restaurant cannot process credit cards or contactless payments. Additionally, although morbid to consider, some researchers may find it 'better safe than sorry' to carry materials for identification purposes – driver's license, contact names and numbers for family members, and so on – in the event of severe injury or death while accompanying police officers in their duties. These practices can help alleviate some physical safety and well-being concerns.

Researchers working in the rural field may need to consciously manage their research expectations, effectively balancing both transparency and caution. It can be incredibly disheartening to drive two hours to a target community just to find out that a scheduled interview has been cancelled; or to interview a participant who refuses to provide detailed descriptions; or to spend the day taking field notes where it feels that nothing of research relevance or interest occurs. On the two-hour drive back home, these encounters may feel like failures and cause the researcher to question their study purpose or significance. This becomes a perfect time for the all-to-well-known imposter syndrome to take hold and threaten project completion. Starting field research with realistic expectations (for example, about generalizability and 'failures') and understandings (such as time and money constraints) will build resilience for working in the field.

Finally, mental preparation for emergency situations, such as a secured plan in the event of a dangerous event or backup strategies for travel, is helpful. It may be of use to designate time in a daily or weekly routine to process, decompress and address any troubling effects from personal or emergency encounters. The need for such time may be especially relevant for those who experience a marginalized status in their field. Yoga became an important and dedicated weekly practice for me throughout the example project.

Conclusion

The purpose of this research note has been to orient the rural criminologist – or researcher dabbling in rural spaces – to the unique challenges and advantages of conducting rural field research. Methodological courses and teachings have long centered urban data and experiences, leaving rural-focused researchers to figure it out as they go. This trend has been changing recently with the publication of work such as *Rural Sociologists at Work: Candid Accounts of Theory, Method, and Practice* (Bakker, 2015); *Inside Ethnography: Researchers Reflect on the Challenges of Reaching Hidden Populations* (Boeri & Shukla, 2019); and *Research Methods for Rural Criminologists* (Weisheit et al., 2022).

For those working specifically with justice-related agencies in rural settings, different resource availability, cultural considerations, and more, can affect a researcher's project preparation. Understanding what to expect when defining the field, making initial contact

with the field, reaching the field, and working in the field will greatly aid the rural fieldwork process.

References

Ashley, F. (2020). Accounting for research fatigue in research ethics. *Bioethics, 35*(3), 270-276. https://doi.org/10.1111/bioe.12829

Bakker, J.H. (Ed.). (2015). *Rural sociologists at work: Candid accounts of theory, method, and practice*. London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315675763

DeKeseredy, W.S. (2021). *Woman abuse in rural places.* London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003009290

Dijkstra, L., Hamilton, E., Lall, S. & Wahba, S. (2020, 10 March). *How do we define cities, towns, an rural areas?* World Bank Blogs. Retrieved from https://blogs.worldbank.org/sustainablecities/how-do-we-define-cities-towns-and-rural-areas

Donnermeyer, J.F. & DeKeseredy, W.S. (2014). *Rural criminology.* London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203094518

DuBois, K.O. (2020). Rural isolation, small towns, and the risk of intimate partner violence. *Journal of Interpersonal Violence, 37*(5-6), NP2565–NP2587. https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260520943721

Fenwick, T. (2015). Learning policing in rural spaces: 'Covering 12 foot rooms with 8 foot carpets'. *Policing: A Journal of Policy & Practice, 9*(3), 234-241. https://doi.org/10.1093/police/pav015

Francis, D. & Henderson, P. (1994). *Commuity development and rural issues.* [Community Development Briefing Paper No. 6]. Action with Communities in Rural England, Cirencester; Community Development Foundation. Retrieved from https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED397998.pdf

Freudenberg, W.R. (1986). The density of acquaintanceship: An overlooked variable in community research. *American Journal of Sociology, 92*(1), 27-63. https://doi.org/10.1086/228462

Harris, B. & Harkness, A. (2016). Introduction: Locating regional, rural and remote crime in theoretical and contemporary context. In A. Harkness, B. Harris & D. Baker (Eds.), *Locating crime in context and place: Perspectives on regional, rural and remote Australia* (pp. 1-12). Sydney: The Federation Press.

Hyland, S.S. & Davis, E. (2019, 24 October). *Local police departments, 2016: Personnel.* [Report] U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved from https://bjs.ojp.gov/library/publications/local-police-departments-2016-personnel

International Telecommunications Union. (2021). *Measuring digital development: Facts and figures, 2020* [Report]. Retrieved from https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Statistics/Pages/facts/default.aspx

Keller, E.M. & Owens, G.P. (2020). Traditional rural values and posttraumatic stress among rural and urban undergraduates. *Public Library of Science ONE, 15*(8), https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0237578

Marcin, J.P., Shaikh, U. & Steinhorn, R.H. (2016). Addressing health disparities in rural communities using telehealth. *Pediatric Research, 79,* 169-176. https://doi.org/10.1038/pr.2015.192

Morin, R., Parker, K., Stepler, R. & Mercer, A. (2017). *Behind the badge.* [Report]. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from https://assets.pewresearch.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2017/01/06171402/Police-Report_FINAL_web.pdf

Parker, K., Horowitz, J.M., Brown, A., Fry, R., Cohn, D. & Igielnik, R. (2018). *What unites and divides urban, suburban and rural communities.* [Report]. Pew Research Center. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2018/05/22/what-unites-and-divides-urban-suburban-and-rural-communities/

Peterson, J.R. (2022). Gaining access to rural communities. In R.A. Weisheit, J.R. Peterson & A. Pytlarz (Eds.), *Research methods for rural criminologists* (pp. 43-54). London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003118657-4

Ratcliffe, M., Burd, C., Holder, K. & Fields, A. (2016). *Defining rural at the U.S. Census Bureau: American community survey and geography brief* (ACSGEO-1). United States Census Bureau. https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/reference/ua/Defining_Rural.pdf

Small, M.L. & Calarco, J.M. (2022). *Qualitative literacy: A guide to evaluating ethnographic and interview research.* University of California Press. https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520390676

Telep, C.W. & Lum, C. (2014). The receptivity of officers to empirical research and evidence-based policing: An examination of survey data from three agencies. *Police Quarterly, 17*(4), 359-385. https://doi.org/10.1177/1098611114548099

Thummapol, O., Park, T., Jackson, M. & Barton, S. (2019). Methodological challenges faced in doing research with vulnerable women: Reflections from fieldwork experiences. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 18*, 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919843022

United Nations Economic and Social Council. (2020). Implementation of the 2020 World Population and Housing Census Programme and the methodology for delineation of cities and urban and rural areas for international comparison purposes. United Nations Statistical Commission [51st session]. Retrieved from https://unstats.un.org/unsd/statcom/51st-session/documents/2020-14-DemographicStats-E.pdf

United States Census Bureau. (2016). Rural America: How does the Census Bureau define rural? [Interactive map explaining and illustrating rural America data]. Retrieved from https://storymaps.geo.census.gov/arcgis/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=9e459da9327b4c7e9a1248cb65ad942a

Websdale, N. (1998). *Rural women battering and the justice system: An ethnography*. Sage. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452232041

Weisheit, R.A., Falcone, D. & Wells, L. (2006). *Crime and policing in rural and small-town America* (3rd edn.). Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Weisheit, R.A., Peterson, J.R. & Pytlarz, A. (Eds.). (2022). *Research methods for rural criminologists.* London: Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003118657