

In his *Midsummer Songs about Sobótka*, Jan Kochanowski praised rural life with the words *Peaceful countryside, merry countryside*. Are these words still relevant today? Is life in the countryside in contemporary Poland still peaceful and safe? Answer those and other similar questions requires research on rural crime. So far, rural crime has not been the leading research subject of any research projects carried out in Poland and problems of rural criminology, which is one of the fastest growing branches of criminology, have not been the subject of any publication in Poland. Therefore, there is a huge gap in Polish criminology and the planned project is designed to fill this gap. There is no doubt that crime in rural areas needs to be measured. Knowledge of the magnitude of crime and its distribution in the society is of theoretical and practical importance; it makes it possible, on the one hand, to explain this phenomenon and, on the other hand, to control it. Therefore, the main objective of the research will be to diagnose the phenomenon of rural crime. The specific objectives were to determine the scale, changes, and structure of the crimes characteristic of rural areas; to find out the factors conducive to the crimes committed in rural areas; to analyze the dark number of crimes committed in rural areas; to determine the specific characteristics of rural crime; and to study the role of and evaluate the formal and informal social control in rural areas.

The Polish countryside is constantly changing in many respects. In 2018, rural areas were inhabited by nearly 40% of Poland's population. However, rural communities are more diverse now than they were in the past. This is associated with the influx into rural areas of urban residents who seek peaceful and quiet surroundings, and tranquility. According to forecasts, in the future the rural culture will be shaped only to a small extent by farmers and the main role will be played by people without any links to agricultural production. This phenomenon is one of the variables that contribute, among others, to the material stratification of the Polish rural population and the families living in rural areas, and give rise to new disturbing phenomena, the development of which is shaped, among others, by the related processes of gentrification, deagrarianization, and proletarianization of rural communities. In addition, human capital is drained from the countryside and those who remain are often unemployed. In 2018, the unemployment rate in rural areas was 4.3% higher than in cities. In 2018, one in four rural households lived below the relative poverty line, compared to one in ten in urban areas. Rural poverty has primarily a feminized form, with the countryside showing a tendency to juvenilize and infantilize poverty. Poland's accession to the European Union has contributed to the acceleration of structural changes in rural areas resulting in beneficial transformations in agriculture. Farm owners invest and grow, but they also want to enlarge their farms, replace their equipment, and upgrade their technology. They often use farm equipment worth millions of zlotys, which is a "titbit" for thieves. While conducting research on rural crime in Poland, it is worth analyzing how the scale of this problem is influenced by organizational changes in the Police, because in the years 2007-2015 many Police stations in rural areas were closed.

Taking the above into account, it is worth examining how all these changes (and whether at all) affect pathological phenomena, mainly crime. There is no shadow of doubt that it is worth carrying out research activities aimed at understanding rural crime (its scale, structure, and etiology). The proposed quantitative research methods – in the form of surveys carried out among the inhabitants of rural areas – will make it possible to determine the characteristics of the section of reality that rural crime is. The research will be supplemented by individual in-depth interviews with rural residents aimed to find out what kind of crimes these inhabitants experience on a daily basis, what kind of crimes they do not report to law enforcement authorities (obscure number of crimes), who the most frequent perpetrators of these crimes are and why they commit crimes, whether rural inhabitants feel safe in their places of residence, and what their opinions about the activities of the Police in rural areas are. On the other hand, individual in-depth interviews with police officers will make it possible to supplement this research with the opinions of people who have direct contact with rural crime victims and perpetrators on the effectiveness of prevention activities in rural areas.

The research will result in a description of contemporary rural crime. This knowledge is important both in the theoretical dimension (contribution to the development of rural criminology) and in practical terms (its use by law enforcement agencies to take appropriate preventive measures and to combat rural crime). The results of the project will be presented at national and international scientific conferences and described in scientific papers published in Poland and abroad, and in a monograph.