

Seniors and Perception of Crime.

Introduction:

Everyone must face the realities of ageing. Situations vary as do the ways people deal with growing older.

Regardless of the circumstances however, older people say they worry about crime, and many (the majority) fear becoming victims of crime.

As a group, older people can be a powerful and active force, as individuals they often can be vulnerable and may need help.

Media reports of crime and violence which are often skewed and sensationalized can often lead to insecurity and concern about one's personal safety.

Public perceptions of crime are just as important as statistics. Feeling safe is a most important quality about a community.¹ Home and personal safety are issues that concern the community in general. Older people in particular need to feel safe and secure to continue living independently.

The elderly are "creatures of habit", dislike change and are alert to loud sounds and noises. Insecurity or fear immediately stems from that unrecognized sound or object. Research shows that people aged over 55 years are least likely to become victims of crime, especially violent crime. . . . nevertheless, the senior is less able to cope than a *non senior*, due to frailty, problems with mobility, failure to heal as quickly as a more able person.

The ability of a senior to replace stolen or damaged property may be limited and their lives may be permanently affected.

The loss of treasured possessions and family heirlooms can be quite devastating. Having to go through the victimization of the crime, filing a police report, making a statement and possibly appearing in court is nerve-racking to any individual but tremendously so to an older adult who may be somewhat confused or disorientated as to the process.

"The Federal Government is strongly committed to helping older Australians feel more safe and secure. We also support the National Crime Prevention Program's report's finding that creating safer communities for older people while reducing their fear of crime is the priority."

Encouraging older people to be physically and socially active will help reduce their fear of crime and contribute to healthy ageing.

The report found that local government organisations were best placed to deliver these initiatives with help from Commonwealth and State/Territory agencies responsible for addressing crime reduction and fear of crime.

Source: <http://www.aic.gov.au/media/latest.html>

Attitude;

There is a perception that senior's personal attitudes, opinions and possible depression can contribute to their 'perceived' isolation. Many isolated seniors indulge in self-pity or are too proud to ask for help. Seniors may either want others to feel sorry for them or want to be able to take care of themselves, perhaps unrealistically.

Source: Univ. of North Carolina (UNC)

Seniors believe that they are ‘easy targets’ and are aware of their diminished strength and mobility, they realize that chances of outrunning or fighting off an attacker would be slim.

Victimisation of the older person results in withdrawal, perpetuated fear of the unknown, inability to function 100% on a daily basis, and possible lasting injuries which may never heal properly.

Source EAPA

Service Provider and Caregiver Perspectives;

The *Service provider’s* are the groups that perform (includes *Caregivers*) the function of transport for example.

The role of seniors groups can play an increasing role in the well being of seniors and in the recommendation of facilities that might enhance confidence and safety.

Whilst *Caregivers* provide services to a loved one that many other people hire an agency to perform. Caregivers could be considered community members; they are also service providers in that they meet the needs of a senior on a daily basis.

Source: Univ. of Nth Carolina (UNC)

Research Findings:

Surveys carried out through out the world; seem to confirm that many older people are unduly fearful of being a victim of crime. It generally is accepted that although the elderly are victims of the same kinds of crime as the general population they are thankfully ‘under victimised’ in violent offences and theft, but are over victimized in fraud related offences.

Though recent studies of victims of crime in Australia have shown that senior citizens represent *only 4%* of victims of crime there is continuing evidence that elderly people feel particularly vulnerable to crime and this impacts on their quality of life.²

However, consumer fraud is more prevalent than any other form of crime experienced by older people.

WA Community Policing Unit (1993)

Violent crimes have more of an impact and are more destructive even though there are fewer incidents.

Seniors although they make up the smallest proportion of crime victims, feel very vulnerable to being victims of crime for the following reasons:

- Fear of crime.
- Frailty and vulnerability
- Inability to for back in retaliation

Source: abuse@eapa.asn.au (Lillian Jeter)

In Canada in 1999, there were 1.3 homicide victims per 100,000 people over 65 and over. That’s much lower than the 2.3 rate among 15-24 year olds and the 2.6 rate among 25-44 year olds.

Twenty one per cent of seniors feel very or somewhat unsafe when they go out after dark, compared to 18% of those aged 45-64.

The perception of crime can be almost as dangerous as the crime itself, says RCMP Cpl Garry Begg.

Source; Langleyadvance.com

Crime is 'Abuse';

Crime against a senior commonly involves abusive or violent behaviour initiated by some person(s) who may well be known to the victim.

It can be in the form of;

- Physical violence.
- Psychological abuse.
- Financial abuse.
- Sexual violence, or
- Neglect, through abuse.

The result of these experiences may show signs and symptoms within the victim in the following manner;

- Depression, fear, anxiety or passivity.
- Unexplained physical injuries.
- Dehydration or lack of food.
- Poor hygiene.

Councils and crime;

What has the council got to do with crime prevention?

Research here and overseas shows that a community becomes safer when police, local government and community members work together.

Council's are well placed to address issues of crime prevention and community safety, they are close to the community, and influence many of the things that matter to how people live.

Local Government in Western Australia has had a role in crime prevention for a number of years, particularly through involvement with Neighbourhood Watch, Community Policing and the Safety House Program.

Council decisions and actions in planning, environment, urban design, and welfare provision, all have an impact on community safety.

Community safety requires a holistic approach and cooperative efforts at the local level and cannot be the sole preserve or responsibility of any one agency or organization including the police. The police role is primarily about responding to crime and detecting and arresting offenders. The community as a whole, including Council, residents and local businesses must assist in preventing crime.³

In 1989, some of Florida's most effective crime fighters were 'unleashed' through the creation of the Attorney General's vs. Crime Project. This effective unit has allowed seniors to become involved in not only their own protection, but also that of their fellow citizens. Source: www.seniorsvscrime.org

Conservative estimates indicate that Councils in the metropolitan area of Western Australia are expending in excess of \$15 million on crime prevention and community safety related issues.

Councils in Western Australian regional centers and smaller communities are also expending resources on crime prevention and community safety initiatives.

Local councils are developing partnerships and alliances with State and Federal government agencies, non-government organisations, community groups and residents to develop initiatives to provide safe communities.

It is frequently reported by Councils to the Association that one of the top priorities for community members is to live in a safe and secure environment. Local Governments has recognized that this cannot be achieved without partnerships and alliances firstly between all spheres of Government and also with the community at large.

Source: Inquiry into Crime in the Community: Victims, Offenders and Fear of Crime

The aims and objectives of a Crime Prevention Plan are to;

Sustain an intersectional partnership between council and relevant departments of state and Federal governments, government agencies, the community and business, building on existing strategic alliances and the Police services.

Research current data on criminal and antisocial behavior in the city.

One of the main reasons that seniors may be vulnerable is that they are isolated within the community. Lines of communication break down. Contact with others, including law enforcement officials, may be infrequent.

The core of an operation especially setup to involve seniors is an ‘Advisory Council’, composed of law enforcement members, the local council and groups such as Neighbourhood Watch and seniors groups.

This ‘Seniors Watch group’ could recommend programs, increase communication, and recruit older volunteers to help with its objectives.

These could include:

- Surveying seniors to determine their crime related concerns.
- Locating or preparing a list of currently available services and programs for seniors.
- Planning and implementing crime prevention programs or services
- Operating an ongoing channel for information exchange between the community’s seniors and law enforcement, as well as advocating and advising on programs.
- Helping seniors become more fully informed about the workings of the criminal justice system.
- Recruiting seniors as volunteers for hands on action in services and programs.

Source: www.nbc4/family/876586/detail.html

Consult with the community;

Identify priorities for strategic direction in implementing the plan and decrease in crime and social incivility;

Seniors can benefit from an information source that provides them with;

- Assist with strategies to increase crime reporting.
- Provide assistance to victims for moral support, to assist in access to personal services and counseling and to act as a guide through the criminal justice system.
- Offer crime prevention education addressing personal safety precautions.
- Demonstrate steps to make property less attractive and available to thieves and vandals.

- Develop ways to help detect and stop the abuse of older people, through “buddy networks” and other programs. Provide abuse prevention education.
- Train seniors about the nature of frauds and scams and how to recognize those who perform them.

To Decrease fear of crime, and

Set up instruments for evaluating and monitoring the prices including the effectiveness of the committee.

Facilitate and develop a neighbourhood which has strong social bonds, where people take pride in their street and ‘own’ their public spaces, where the needs of all groups in the community are met and where people regard the area as an attractive and safe place to live and work

How do you prevent crime?

The pain of prevention is to make crime harder to commit and reduce the supply of my divided offenders, to reduce the opportunity, strengthen the penalties, keeping in mind that offenders will move neighbourhoods where there is increased opportunity.

Source: EAPA Assoc (Lillian Jeter)

Active Ageing Taskforce;

This ‘taskforce was setup by the W.A. Government. Office of Seniors Interests and Volunteering, in September 2002.

The commitment was to develop a policy framework for well and also frail seniors of the community.

- Investigate the feasibility of setting up an elder abuse prevention service unit to provide specialist advisory services.
- In conjunction with the Dept of Consumer and Employment protection identify how seniors can best be protected against fraud and deception.
- *The need to look at violent crimes committed by those outside the family in the community etc.*

Active Ageing is about realizing a person’s capacity for social, physical and mental well-being throughout their life as well as providing the systems and supports to provide care and protection should that person require assistance.

The Elder Abuse Prevention Association;

The Elder Abuse Prevention Association (EAPA) is an association of researchers, practitioners, educators, and advocates dedicated to protecting the safety, security, and dignity of Australia’s most vulnerable citizens. It was established in 2002 to achieve a clearer understanding of abuse and provide direction and leadership to prevent it.

The Elder Abuse Prevention Association will combat elder abuse and neglect by raising public awareness of the issue, through re-establishing the value and importance of older persons in our community, and by advocating priorities for the safety and welfare of all older persons throughout Australia.

Source: Elder Abuse Prevention Assoc. www.eapa.asn.au

Extent of Elder Abuse in Australia;

Overseas studies estimate that between 2% and 5% of older people are victims of abuse. Few Australian studies have been conducted on the prevalence of elder abuse. A study of Hornsby Ku-ring-gai Geriatric and Rehabilitation Service clients in New South Wales who were over 65 years of age and living in the community, found 4.6% had experienced physical, psychological or financial abuse or neglect (1992 figures). Australian studies indicate abuse is experienced by older people across all cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. Up to two thirds of older **people who are abused are women**

The Challenge;

The challenge for Australian society as a whole is to ensure that all older Australians live a safe and confident life not only as part of our communities, but that they also feel safe and secure within those communities.

Points;

Of those older persons living in the 'safety' of a retirement village... what might be the % of crime committed against this group compared to the elder persons in the wider community?

A negative aspect to the perception of senior security shows that 'village' type estates are becoming increasingly preferred than to living in 'suburbia'.

On a personal level... I'm aware of a senior couple who recently sold their unit in suburbia for a unit in a village.

Also, but more importantly, seniors are continually depicting as 'bashed' seniors in the media.... and measures that are required for safety, ie, *barred windows that should be locked at all times!*

There are numerous publications; some supplied from Government sources that suggest/recommend measures that will create awareness of suspected dangerous situations. This to my mind automatically instills in the person a sense of 'fear' that, *this could happen to me.*

The role of Council Rangers could be broadened to compliment current duties?

Sources:

- (1) *Health & Well-being. Gov't of SA (SIS)*
- (2) *Crime and older people. Chief Insp Des Hunter, WA Police*
- (3) *Manly Crime Prevention Plan (part 1) 2000-2001*
- (4) *Elder Abuse. Wayne Fielding. (Vic Police)*
- (5) <http://www.aic.gov.au/media/latest.html>
- (6) *Univ. North Carolina (UNC)*
- (7) *United Against Crime, US. (Part of, Nat. Crime Prev. Council.)*
- (8) *Elder Abuse Prevention Program (EAPA) Melb. Australia.]*
- (9) *LangleyAdvance (US)*

Much of the sourced material is *as supplied*, however comments/suggestions have been added to, with respectful consideration to the original writers.

