

The Fear of Crime and the Older Adult

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, more than 3 of every 1,000 people age 65 or older, and nearly 11 of every 1,000 people age 50 to 64, fell victim to violent crime in 2009. A single victimization can frighten an entire community of older adults. They abandon patterns of visiting friends, going to worship, shopping, and other social interaction. The American Nurses Association states that “secondary victimization” can lead to hypervigilance, suspicion, and paranoia. This condition becomes more acute when violent crimes occur.

Older people fear the possibility of crime, even if they have not been victims. Some individuals take precautions and continue with their lives. Others acutely alter their lifestyle or withdraw, debilitating themselves.

The U.S. Department of Justice states that, among victims of nonlethal violence, persons 65 and older are about 6 times more likely than younger persons to never go out at night. For the isolated or incapacitated older adult, perception of the outside world is based on, and frequently skewed by, media reports, which often sensationalize crime.

Consequences of Crime

Impact

Victimization of older adults has far-reaching consequences, including slower injury recuperation. Physical and emotional trauma both can lead to incapacity.

Income

Both violent and nonviolent crimes affect older adults financially. According to the AARP, purse-snatchers and pickpockets more often target older victims. The Department of Justice recorded more than 57,000 victims of robbery age 50 and over in 2009. Financial loss can do irreparable damage to a limited budget as well as to emotional well-being.

Independence

Victimization may destabilize an older person’s sense of security. It can compromise his or her will to cope with future problems.

Why Older Adults Are Targets

- ★ *Lack of Awareness:* Know where you are and what is going on around you. Stay alert.
- ★ *Body Language:* Keep your head up, swing your arms, stand straight.
- ★ *Wrong Place, Wrong Time:* Don’t walk alone, especially in unfamiliar or high-crime neighborhoods. If you sense something is wrong, get away quickly.

Home Safety Tips

- ★ Lock your doors and windows, use deadbolt locks, install a good security system, pin your windows, and ensure your home exterior is well lit at night.
- ★ Install a panoramic peephole and use it when answering the door.
- ★ Trim plants away from windows and doors. Plant prickly bushes under windows and never leave a ladder or chairs outside the home that can be used to gain entry.
- ★ Never hide keys outside your home. Keep your keys handy as you approach your house or vehicle.
- ★ Use a timer to turn on lights, radio, and TV while you are away to give the impression that someone is home.
- ★ Cancel newspaper and other deliveries when you plan to be gone for extended periods.
- ★ Ask for ID from service and delivery people. If you remain suspicious, call the company.
- ★ If you live in an apartment building, avoid going into the laundry room or garage alone.
- ★ Join a Neighborhood/Apartment/Window Watch, a Triad, or a Citizen Patrol.
- ★ If you arrive at home and suspect a break-in, DO NOT go inside. Call 911 from a cell phone or neighbor's home.
- ★ Never let people know that you live alone. Record voice mail messages in the plural. Use initials on your mailbox and in phonebook listings.
- ★ Always keep your cell phone charged for use in emergencies.
- ★ When using social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, Blogger), do not broadcast dates you plan to be away from home.

Tips for Law Enforcement and Community Leaders

Address older adults' often unwarranted fear of crime. Develop or expand crime prevention programs to help these individuals realistically assess and reduce victimization risk:

- ★ Prepare crime statistics on victimization of older adults. Explain what, when, and where crimes occur.
- ★ Dispel unwarranted or exaggerated fears. Surveys can indicate if statistics mirror actual criminal activity.
- ★ Plan a crime prevention education campaign to reach older adults—briefly, clearly, and often.
- ★ Expand on crime prevention programs for older adults offered by other agencies.

Resources

Boys & Girls Clubs of America

1275 Peachtree Street NE
Atlanta, GA 30309-3506
(404) 487-5700
info@bgca.org
www.bgca.org

Federal Bureau of Investigation (Uniform Crime Reports)

935 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20535-0001
www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/ucr

National Crime Prevention Council

2001 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 901
Arlington, VA 2220
(202) 466-6272
Fax: (202) 296-1356
www.ncpc.org

**National Criminal Justice Reference Service
Juvenile Justice Clearinghouse**

PO Box 6000
Rockville, MD 20849-6000
(800) 851-3420
TTY: (877) 712-9279
<http://1.usa.gov/AkWPpX>

National Neighborhood Watch

National Sheriffs' Association
1450 Duke Street
Alexandria, VA 22314-3490
(703) 836-7827
nw@sheriffs.org
www.usaonwatch.org

**U.S. Department of Justice
Office of Justice Programs**

810 Seventh Street, NW
Washington, DC 20531

Bureau of Justice Statistics

(202) 307-0765
askbjs@usdoj.gov
<http://bjs.ojp.usdoj.gov/>

Juvenile Justice/Delinquency Prevention

(202) 307-5911
askojp@usdoj.gov
www.ojp.usdoj.gov/programs/juvjustice.htm