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CANADIAN URBAN VICTIMIZATION SURVEY

Criminal Victimization of Elderly Canadians

Bulletin

6

CRIMINAL VICTIMIZATION OF ELDERLY CANADIANS

Statistics Canada reports that over the decade 1971-1981 the number of elderly* people in the Canadian population increased by about 35%, compared to a 13% increase in the total population and a 14% decrease in the number of children. In 1971 there were 1.7 million elderly people, representing 8% of the population. By 1981 the number of elderly had increased to 2.4 million, or 9.7% of the population. Demographic projections indicate that by the year 2000 there will be in the order of 4 million elderly people, representing 11% of the population. When the "baby boom" Canadians reach the age of 65—around the year 2031—it is expected that this percentage will almost double to 21%, for a total elderly population of 6 million.

Given these projections it is not surprising that elderly Canadians are receiving an increasing amount of attention from planners, policy makers,

researchers, academics and social service practitioners. And, as part of this emerging awareness of their needs, criminal victimization of elderly people has become an important focus of concern to researchers and policy makers in the criminal justice system.

The findings of the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey reported here describe the incidence of criminal victimization of the elderly, the nature and consequences of victimization, and the attitudes and concerns of elderly Canadians towards crime.

A number of qualifications must be introduced prior to the analysis. The statistical estimates made on the basis of the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey data refer only to people living in the seven cities covered by the survey, and only those living outside of institutional settings such as homes for the aged. Statistics Canada reports

that 8% of elderly people live in collective households such as institutions for the aged and that 30% reside in small urban and rural areas. These populations were not covered by the survey. Finally, the survey sought to assess the extent of *criminal* victimization among elderly Canadians. The following discussion, therefore, does not consider the financial, psychological and social "abuses" often referred to in gerontological studies.

A discussion of the survey and full definitions of the eight offence categories can be found in Appendices 1 and 2.

* The term "elderly" is ambiguous; age and the aging process obviously do not affect everyone in the same way and do not produce the same social and physical consequences for all. For the purpose of this exploratory investigation, "elderly Canadians" are defined as those 65 years of age and older.

Incidence of Victimization

For the year 1981, there were in the 7 cities surveyed an estimated 702,000 incidents of personal victimization of people over 16 (sexual assault, robbery, assault, and theft of personal property), and 898,100 household victimizations (break and enter, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property and vandalism). The data reveal a sharp "age decline" in the rates of personal and violent victimizations: the elderly were victims of fewer than 2% of all personal victimizations while the

youngest age group (16 to 24) were victims of almost one-half.

Despite prevailing perceptions of the frequency of victimization of elderly people, the survey findings are consistent with those of British and American victimization surveys in showing that elderly people were relatively rarely victimized. The rates of violent and personal victimization of elderly people were about one-sixth those for all adult residents of the seven cities surveyed. Those in the 16 to 24 age group, the

highest risk group, were twelve times as likely as elderly people to have been personally victimized (Table 1).

As was the case with other age groups, elderly males were about three times more likely than elderly females to be robbed and assaulted. Elderly females, on the other hand, were much more likely than elderly males to be the victims of personal theft; there were 18 thefts per 1,000 elderly females as compared to 7 thefts per 1,000 elderly males.

Table 1
Incident Rates by Age

Seven Cities

Type of Incident	Rates per 1,000 Population				
	16-24	25-39	40-64	65 or older	All Age Groups Combined
Sexual Assault	9	3	1*	**	3.5
Robbery	21	9	5	4	10
Assault	123	62	20	8	57
All Violent Incidents	154	74	25	12	70
Personal Theft	134	73	38	13	70
All Personal Incidents	288	147	63	25	141

* The actual count was low (11 to 20), therefore caution should be exercised when interpreting this rate.

** The actual count was too low to make statistically reliable population estimates.

Although the focus of this bulletin is on personal crimes committed against elderly people, they are also the victims of household crimes. The survey data allow us to estimate that 43,600—or about 10% of the elderly residents of the seven urban centres—experienced an incident of break and entry into their homes, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property or willful damage of their property. These victimization experiences will be examined in detail in a forthcoming Bulletin focussing on household crimes.

Undoubtedly one of the key factors in the low rates of victimization of elderly people is their reduced exposure to high-risk situations encountered during evening activities outside the home. Compared to younger people, the elderly do not go out very often. Only 10% of elderly people reported more than 20 evening activities outside the home each month as compared to about 45% for those between the ages of 25 and 39, and 70% for those younger than 25. This reduced exposure is probably due, in part, to lifestyles associated with occupational and marital status. Many homemakers and retired people will be at home much of the time and hence away from situations where violent crime occurs, and their presence at home may have some deterrent effect on potential offenders. About 90% of elderly people in the survey were retired or were homemakers and they were less often victimized than other elderly Canadians. Similarly, those who were married or widowed were less frequently victimized than

were those separated from their spouses.

To say that elderly people are victimized less frequently because they go out less often does not completely explain their low risk of victimization. The data show that even those who went out frequently were less likely to be victimized than were younger people (see Table 2).

Clearly, the nature of the evening activity is an important consideration in estimating exposure to risk. The data reveal that elderly people were less likely to go to high-risk areas such as bars, but when they did they were as much at risk of being victims of personal theft as were younger people, and were more likely than others to be victims of robbery.

Impact of Victimization

The relatively low rates of crime against elderly people should not lead us to minimize the problem. When elderly people were victimized they were more likely than other age groups to be seriously victimized. The ratio of more serious to less serious crimes was higher among the elderly than among younger people. The ratio of robberies to personal thefts, for example, was 30 to 100 among the elderly and only 15 to 100 among other age groups (Refer to Appendix 2 for the order of seriousness of offences.)

In addition, while elderly victims were no more likely than younger victims to have suffered injuries as a result of the victimization, the consequences of their injuries were typically more serious. For example, elderly victims who were injured were twice as likely as younger victims to have required medical and dental attention.

The financial impact of the victimization experience was also more severe for elderly people than for any other age group (Table 3). The mean net dollar loss was no higher for elderly people than for others, but because of their relatively low annual incomes, loss as a percentage of income was more than twice as high for elderly victims as for others.

Fear of Crime

A consistent finding of victimization surveys has been that despite relatively low rates of victimization, women and elderly people express fear of crime more often than do men or younger

Table 2
Incident Rates for Violent Offences by Age and Average Number of Evening Activities Outside the Home Per Month

Seven Cities

Age	Rates per 1,000 Population			
	Evening Activities			
	0-9	10-19	20-29	30 or more
16-24	86	92	122	206
25-39	35	57	71	122
40-64	20	21	28	47
65 or older	10	13	22	**

** The actual count was too low to make statistically reliable population estimates.

Table 3
Loss as a Percentage of Household Income For All Incidents Seven Cities

Age Group	Mean Household Income	Mean Gross \$ Loss as a % of Income	Mean \$ Recovery as a % of Income	Mean Net \$ Loss as a % of Income
16-24	25,200	0.8	0.4	0.4
25-39	27,300	1.4	0.7	0.7
40-64	26,000	1.5	0.7	0.7
65 or older	12,600	2.5	1.1	1.4

people. In the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey fear of crime was measured by responses to the question, "How safe do you feel walking alone in your neighbourhood after dark; very safe, relatively safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?" The survey data reveal that women were more likely to be fearful than men, elderly people more likely to be fearful than younger people, victims generally and victims of violence in particular more likely to be fearful than non-victims or victims of property offences. The group most likely to be fearful, were elderly women who had recently been victimized, especially those who were victims of violent offences (Figure 1).

The three major factors which researchers suggest account for the increased fear of crime among elderly people are their overall perceptions of crime as a social problem, their direct experience with crime, and their general sense of vulnerability.

Given their relatively high level of fear of crime, one might expect that elderly people would be more likely than others to believe that crime is a serious social problem and that crime rates are high and rising. Findings from the survey reveal, however, that fear of crime among elderly people may not be based on their overall perceptions of crime. Elderly respondents were not

unduly concerned with crime nor were their perceptions of the level of crime in their neighbourhoods "unreasonable" when compared to the perceptions of other respondents. They were no more likely than were younger respondents to believe that there was a serious crime problem or that crime in their neighbourhood was high and rising. Like younger residents, elderly urban residents perceived the level of crime in their own neighbourhoods to be lower than that in the rest of the city. All categories of respondents rated the level of crime in their own neighbourhoods as relatively low and stable and the level of crime in their city as increasing.

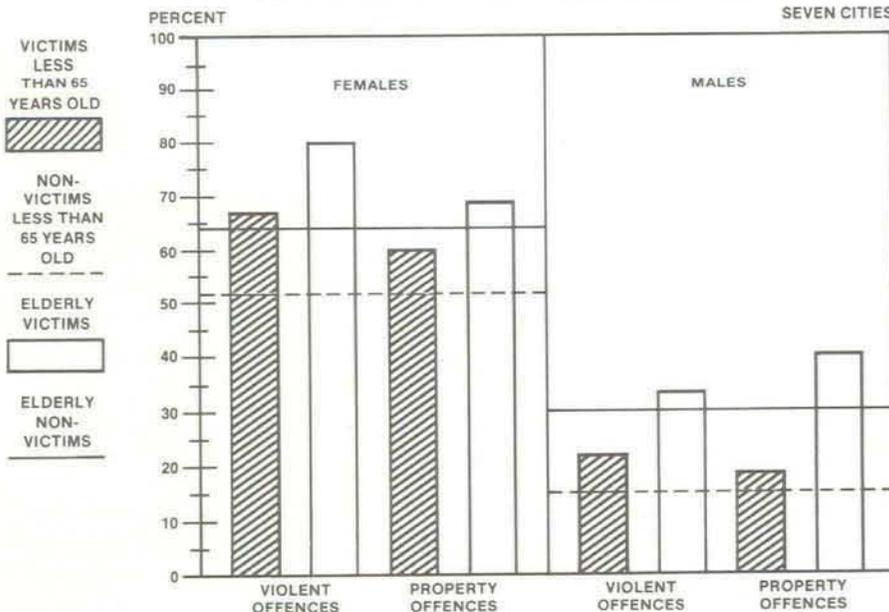
The effect of direct recent experience with crime (victimization during the survey year) increased the likelihood that elderly men and women would express fear for their personal safety. This increase in fear was, however, similar for victims of all ages, suggesting that direct experience with crime, based on recent victimization experience, contributes only marginally to the increased fear of crime among elderly people.

The survey also measured direct experience with crime by questioning respondents on whether they had been victims of a serious crime prior to the reference year of the survey. Contrary to what might be expected, the incidence of prior victimization was no higher for elderly respondents than for other age groups, suggesting that less serious incidents were forgotten over time. Respondents were reporting prior victimization experiences "serious enough" to be remembered. The data indicate that the traumatic effects of these victimizations may be more pronounced and longer lasting on women than they were on men (Figure 2). Although elderly women were consistently more likely than younger women to express fear for their personal safety, the data suggest that the effects of a previous victimization experience on elderly women were especially acute; about three-quarters of the elderly women who had reported some previous victimization also expressed fear of walking alone at night.

Among elderly people who had been victimized prior to the survey year, the type of victimization strongly influenced whether they expressed a fear of walking alone at night in their neighbourhoods. The key factor appears to be whether they were attacked. Nine of

FIGURE 1

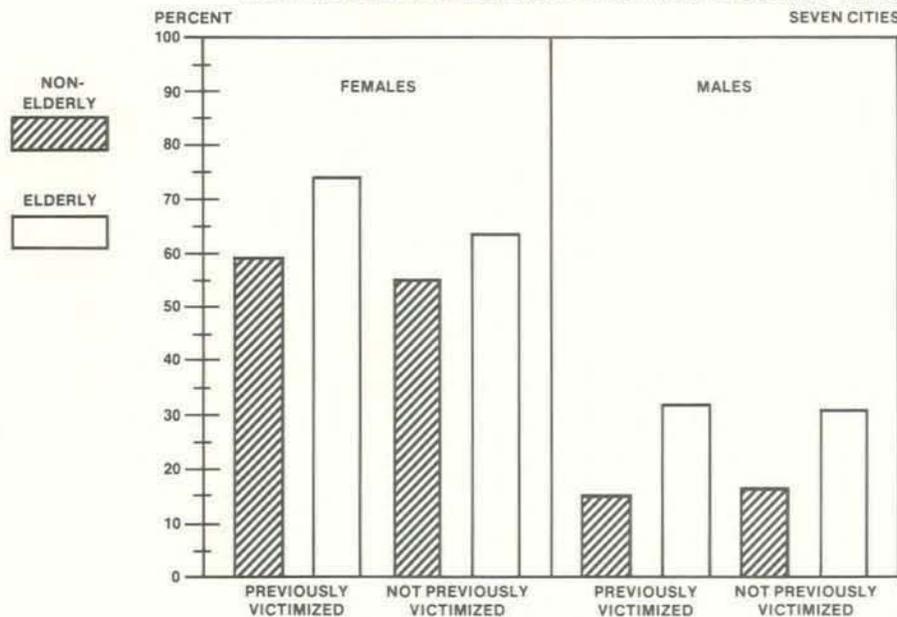
PROPORTION WHO FELT UNSAFE¹ WALKING ALONE IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD AFTER DARK BY AGE, SEX AND TYPE OF VICTIMIZATION EXPERIENCE IN SURVEY YEAR



¹ Combines "very unsafe" and "somewhat unsafe" categories.

FIGURE 2

PROPORTION WHO FELT UNSAFE¹ WALKING ALONE IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD AFTER DARK BY AGE, SEX AND VICTIMIZATION EXPERIENCE PRIOR TO THE SURVEY YEAR



¹ Combines "very unsafe" and "somewhat unsafe" categories.

every ten elderly women and five of ten elderly men who had experienced an attack with loss of property feared for their personal safety. Those who had been attacked but had not also suffered property loss were somewhat less likely to be fearful—80% of women and 35% of men. Those who had experienced only property loss or damage were the least likely to be fearful—70% of women and 30% of men. Increased fear related to a previously experienced violent offence is not restricted to elderly people. These same patterns are evident among women aged 40 and older and among men aged 50 and older, but not among younger victims.

Fear for one's personal safety cannot be explained entirely by first-hand experience with crime. Many elderly people who expressed fear of crime had not been victimized. Research suggests that fear may be related to the social and physical vulnerability—real and perceived—of some segments of the population. Elderly people in general and elderly women in particular may be more fearful because they are, or perceive themselves to be especially vulnerable and anticipate that the consequences of victimization would be especially severe.

For example, irrespective of age, those who were retired or were homemakers were more likely than others to fear for their personal safety (Table 4). Perhaps the separation from social networks encountered in the normal round of work activities increases feelings of vulnerability and consequently fear of crime. Given that about 75% of elderly men and 90% of elderly women were retired, it is not surprising that they were more likely than younger

people to fear for their personal safety. Similarly, the loss of a marital partner tended to increase the likelihood that people would be fearful. Widows and widowers were more likely to be fearful than were those who were still married or who had never married (Table 5). Furthermore, elderly people living alone were generally more likely to fear for their personal safety than were those living with other adults (Table 6). Although the most fearful were elderly women, in particular those living alone, it was also evident that elderly men living alone were far more likely to be fearful than were any other males.

The more often elderly people engaged in evening activities outside the home each month, the less likely they were to express fear for their personal safety. As shown in Table 7, the differences between elderly and non-elderly people were most striking for women. Elderly women who engaged in 20 or more evening activities outside of their homes each month were actually less likely to express fear for their personal safety than were their younger counterparts. Further research is needed to establish whether elderly people went out more often because they were less fearful or whether they were less fearful because they went out more often. These data are, however, consistent with those from the British Crime Survey (BCS) in showing a relationship between fear of crime and a reduced number of evening activities outside the home. The BCS found that although those who did not go out in the evenings were more likely to be fearful, few people gave fear of crime as a reason for not going out.

Table 4

Proportion Who Felt Unsafe¹ Walking Alone in their Neighbourhood After Dark by Age, Sex and Occupational Status

Seven Cities

Occupational Status	Females		Males	
	Less than 65 years old	65 or older	Less than 65 years old	65 or older
Working	54	53	17	22
Looking for Work	57	**	23	**
Student	52	**	12	**
Retired	69	66	28	32
Keeping House	59	64	45	**

¹ Combines "very unsafe" and "somewhat unsafe" categories.

** The actual count was too low to make statistically reliable population estimates.

Table 5

Proportion Who Felt Unsafe¹ Walking Alone in their Neighbourhood After Dark by Age, Sex and Marital Status

Seven Cities

Marital Status	Females		Males	
	Less than 65 years old	65 or older	Less than 65 years old	65 or older
Single	54	64	14	34
Married/ Common-Law	56	65	18	30
Widowed	60	65	25	36
Separated	56	67	20	39
Divorced	57	58	18	37

¹ Combines "very unsafe" and "somewhat unsafe" categories.

Table 6

Proportion Who Felt Unsafe¹ Walking Alone in their Neighbourhood After Dark by Age, Sex and Living Arrangement

Seven Cities

Living Arrangement	Females		Males	
	Less than 65 years old	65 or older	Less than 65 years old	65 or older
Lives Alone	56	67	16	40
Lives with Other Adults ²	55	64	17	29

¹ Combines "very unsafe" and "somewhat unsafe" categories.

² The survey asked only about co-habitants aged 16 or older.

Table 7

Proportion Who Felt Unsafe¹ Walking Alone in their Neighbourhood After Dark by Age, Sex and Average Number of Evening Activities Outside the Home per Month

Seven Cities

Evening Activities	Females		Males	
	Less than 65 years old	65 or older	Less than 65 years old	65 or older
1-9	61	68	23	36
10-19	55	59	17	25
20-29	53	44	16	24
30 or more	51	30	14	20

¹ Combines "very unsafe" and "somewhat unsafe" categories.

Apparently, those factors which reduce the risk of victimization by reducing exposure are the same factors which increase fear of crime. Retiring from the labour force and seldom going out of the home in the evenings may reduce the risk of victimization; they also reduce the social networks which provide support. The survey data, then, confirm the association between social isolation or "disengagement" and fear of crime. There is some indication that elderly people curtail their activities because of fear of crime; they engage in far fewer evening activities than other age groups. At the same time, such withdrawal or isolation—whether a result of fear of crime or other factors associated with aging—may well aggravate the sense of vulnerability and fear felt by elderly people.

Recognizing the important and complex link between fear of crime and the social and economic life of communities, groups in the U.K. and the U.S. have launched experimental programs to reduce public fear of crime. The results of these programs will contribute to our understanding of fear and may help inform policies and programs in Canada.

Attitudes Toward the Police

Canadians in the seven cities rated their local police as doing a good job. As shown in Table 8, favourable ratings of police increased with age for respondents who had been victimized in the survey year as well as for those who had not; elderly people rated police highly on approachability, promptness in responding to calls and general enforcing of laws. As with those in other age groups, however, the elderly did not rate the police highly on supplying crime prevention information.

The survey also obtained victims' impressions of how well the police handled their particular cases. Elderly victims of personal violent crimes (sexual assault, robbery and assault) were favourably impressed with how the police handled their cases. Approximately three-quarters said that the police responded promptly and that they were courteous, and two-thirds said that the police did a good job of keeping them informed of the progress of the investigations (Table 9). Elderly people who had experienced theft of their personal property or household offences rated the police even more

highly on these measures. Nevertheless, that one-third of elderly victims of violence and about one-quarter of victims of property offences reported that they were not kept up to date with the progress of their cases indicates an area where improvements in the treatment of elderly victims by the criminal justice system can be relatively easily accomplished. The high regard in which the police are held by elderly urban residents suggests that the police can play a central role in improving the response of the criminal justice system to elderly victims of crime.

Reported and Unreported Crimes

The positive regard in which the police are held by elderly people is also reflected in their reporting of crimes. For all types of crime, reporting increased with age, from 40% of incidents reported when victims were under 25, to 53% when victims were over 65 years old (Figure 3). The reasons given by elderly victims for not reporting crimes were similar to those given by younger victims: they did not perceive any benefits to reporting the incidents, primarily because they were seen as too minor (67%) or because they felt the police could not do anything about it (60%).

Elderly victims were slightly less likely than younger victims to perceive the danger or costs of reporting to be a major factor in their decision to report a criminal victimization (Table 10). They were less likely than were younger victims to report that they feared revenge by the offender, that they were concerned with protecting the offender, that they considered the act of reporting inconvenient, that they considered their victimization a personal matter, or that they were concerned with the attitudes of the police and the courts.

Prevention of Victimization

Victimization survey data can be used to identify the ways in which people try to protect themselves and their property from crime. There is an important distinction to be made between victimization prevention and crime prevention. Victimization prevention is used to describe activities such as the changing of activity patterns to reduce one's attractiveness as a target or to reduce one's exposure to risk. Crime prevention strategies, on the other

Table 8

Proportion of Victims and Non-Victims Who Rated Police Favourably By Age

Seven Cities

Aspects of Police Behaviour	16-24		25-39		40-64		65 or older	
	Victim	Non-Victim	Victim	Non-Victim	Victim	Non-Victim	Victim	Non-Victim
Enforcing Laws	47	54	50	58	61	66	65	70
Responding Promptly	40	42	48	47	58	56	66	58
Approachability	51	54	61	61	72	69	75	67
Supplying Crime Prevention Information	36	37	38	42	43	46	45	46

Table 9

Proportion of Elderly Victims Who Perceived Police Response to be "Good"

Seven Cities

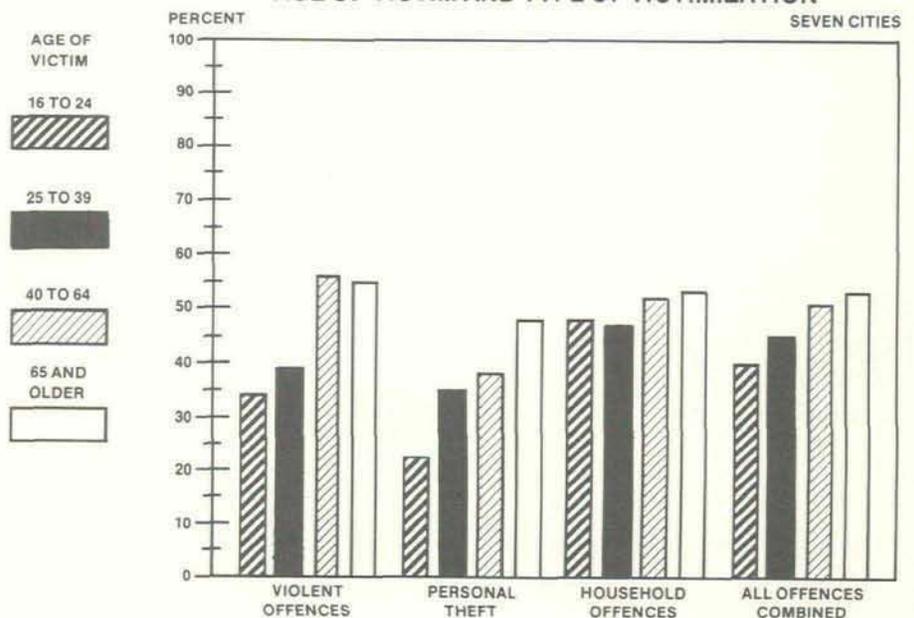
Type of Crime	Aspects of Police Behaviour			
	Promptness	Courtesy	Keeping Victim Informed	Overall Case Handling
Violent Crimes	74	78	67*	63*
Personal Theft	77	76	66	73
Household Crimes	83	85	66	71

* Possible answer categories were "good", "average" and "poor".

* The actual count was low (11 to 20), therefore caution should be exercised when interpreting these proportions.

FIGURE 3

PROPORTION OF INCIDENTS REPORTED TO POLICE BY AGE OF VICTIM AND TYPE OF VICTIMIZATION



hand, aim to reduce crime and hence risk of victimization for all members of a community. Although each of these approaches have merits, profound consequences can result if either is taken to extremes. Of particular concern is that many elderly people may be withdrawing from public life in attempting to reduce their risk of victimization.

These data complement the abundant literature documenting the "disengagement" of elderly people from the institutionalized structures of work, family and social relations and the consequences of this disengagement on the self-perceptions, definitions and attitudes of elderly people. Such disengagement seems to increase the fear of crime which in turn can result in further isolation from the social support sys-

tems which help reduce the fear of crime among elderly people and assist them to cope with victimization experiences.

Personal measures undertaken by elderly Canadians to prevent victimization show little difference from those in other age groups despite their greater fear of crime. Although elderly persons were somewhat more likely than younger residents to have "changed their activity patterns" in order to protect themselves or their property from crime, they were likely to have done no more than install new locks. About 20% of all respondents reported this strategy, regardless of whether they had expressed fear of crime.

Elderly Canadians were less likely than others to have heard of commu-

nity crime prevention strategies (Table 11) and less likely to have participated when they did know of these programs. Victims in all age groups were more aware of crime prevention programs and participated to a greater degree than did non-victims. Elderly people most likely to have heard of and to have participated in the programs were those who had experienced a break and enter or household theft.

Despite their fear, then, a surprisingly small proportion of elderly people were aware of and participated in community crime prevention programs. In fact, those who felt most fearful were least likely to participate in organized, community based crime prevention programs. Fear does not seem to motivate elderly people to seek out and become involved with crime prevention activities. As noted earlier, some elderly people were somewhat critical of the police for not supplying them with crime prevention information. These findings indicate the need for specific strategies to inform elderly citizens of the existence of crime prevention programs and to elicit their participation in these programs.

Table 10

Reasons Given for Failure to Report Incidents to the Police by Age of Victim

Seven Cities

Reasons	16-24	25-39	40-64	65 or older
Percent of Unreported Incidents				
No Perceived Benefit				
Too Minor	66	67	67	67
Police Couldn't do Anything	61	64	61	60
Nothing Taken/Items Recovered	21	20	18	21
Costs Outweigh Benefits				
Inconvenience	27	24	20	18
Fear of Revenge	5	3	3	2
Concern with Attitude of Police or Courts	9	8	6	5
Personal Reasons				
Protect Offender	7	5	4	4
Personal Matter	15	10	6	7
Reported to Another Official	10	9	8	8

Percentages do not add to 100% since respondents could cite more than one reason for failure to report any one incident.

Table 11

Proportion Aware of and Participating in Community Crime Prevention Programs

Seven Cities

		Neighbourhood	Operation	Block Parents	
		Watch	Identification	Aware	
		Aware	Participating		
Elderly	Victims	35	49	19	65
	Non-Victims	44	34	12	57
Non-Elderly	Victims	47	69	18	79
	Non-Victims	41	30	14	63

Conclusions

Elderly people, relative to others in urban centres in Canada, are rarely the victims of the types of crimes measured by the survey. It appears, however, that the consequences of victimization are more severe for elderly than they are for younger people. For example, the financial loss and injury resulting from the victimization experience are more severe for elderly people than for people in any other age group. There are also preliminary indications that the emotional consequences of criminal victimization are especially severe for elderly people.

The data are consistent with those from other countries in showing that, although rarely victimized, elderly people were more fearful of crime than any other members of society. That fear of crime is apparently not linked to actual risk of victimization has been the subject of several studies which have also attempted to demonstrate the consequences of this fear on individual elderly people and on communities in general. Though still inconclusive, the findings suggest that for many elderly people, fear of crime results in a reduction of social activities and in social withdrawal. Undoubtedly, this isolation

compounds the problem by reducing social support networks which can themselves alleviate fear of crime and assist elderly people in coping with the consequences of crime when it does occur. Recognizing this, some major cities in the U.S. have launched programs designed to reduce fear of crime among their citizens and to encourage participation in community crime prevention programs.

Elderly Canadians were less likely than the young to have heard of, and to have participated in, community crime prevention programs. Given the high regard in which the police are held by elderly people, it seems clear that police could play a central role in informing elderly citizens of community crime prevention efforts and in encouraging their active participation in programs.

The survey has also identified specific areas where detailed information is lacking. We do not know, for example, the extent of fear or perceptions of vulnerability related to incidents not measured by the survey but to which the elderly are apparently frequently exposed. These include fraud and offences occurring within institutions for elderly people. Nor do we know the effect of media reporting of crime and their portrayal of elderly victims of crime. More generally, a fuller understanding requires multi-disciplinary research incorporating the concerns of criminal justice practitioners and agencies concerned with the physical and emotional well-being of elderly Canadians.

Appendix 1

About the Canadian Urban Victimization Survey

Early in 1982 the Ministry of the Solicitor General, with the assistance of Statistics Canada, conducted a victimization survey in seven major urban centres: Greater Vancouver, Edmonton, Winnipeg, Toronto, Montreal, Halifax-Dartmouth and St. John's. A random sample of 61,000 residents 16 years of age or older were asked about their perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system, their experience of certain crimes, and the impact which criminal victimization may have had upon them.

Because of the relatively low incidence in any one year of some types of crimes included in the survey, very large samples are required to ensure that enough cases are "caught" to be statistically representative of all actual cases in the community under study. Sample sizes ranged from 6,910 in one city to 9,563 in another, with more than 61,000 telephone interviews completed by Statistics Canada interviewers overall. Telephone interviews were used because the cost of interviewing in person for such a large survey was prohibitive. Careful pretests in Edmonton, Hamilton and Greater Vancouver had proven that reliable data could be obtained through telephone interviews.

To maximize reliability of recall, respondents were asked to report on only those incidents which had occurred between January 1 and December 31, 1981. On the basis of these interviews, statistical estimates were made for the general population 16 and over in the seven cities. These statistically derived estimates for the population are used throughout this bulletin.

Victimization surveys can provide information about most, but not all types of crimes that are of major concern to the general public. Crimes such as murder or kidnapping cannot be uncovered using survey techniques, and were therefore excluded. "Victimless" crimes and crimes committed against commercial establishments were also excluded from this survey.

The eight categories of crimes included in this survey are: sexual assault, robbery, assault, break and enter, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property, theft of personal property and vandalism.

Appendix 2

Definitions and Limitations

The eight categories of crimes included in this survey are: sexual assault, robbery, assault, break and entry, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property, theft of personal property and vandalism. These offences are ranked in descending order of seriousness.

1. Sexual assault includes rape, attempted rape, molesting or attempted molestation, and is considered the most serious crime.
2. Robbery occurs if something is taken and the offender has a weapon or there is a threat or an attack. The presence of a weapon is assumed to imply a threat. Attempted robberies are also included in this offence category.
3. Assault involves the presence of a weapon or an attack or threat. Assault incidents may range from face-to-face verbal threats to an attack with extensive injuries.
4. Break and entry occurs if a dwelling is entered by someone who has no right to be there. "No right to be there" differentiates, for example, between a workman who is in a dwelling with the permission of the owner and steals something, and someone illegally entering the dwelling to take property. The latter would be classified as a break and enter as are attempts to enter a dwelling if there is some evidence of force or knowledge of how the person tried to get in.

5. Motor vehicle theft involves the theft or attempted theft of a car, truck, van, motorcycle or other motor vehicle.
6. Theft or attempted theft of household property.
7. Theft or attempted theft of money or other personal property (not household property).
8. Vandalism occurs if property is damaged but not taken.

Incidents which involved the commission of several different criminal acts appear in the tables only once, according to the most serious component of the event. Thus for example, if sexual assault, theft of money and vandalism all occurred at the same time, the incident would be classified in these tables as sexual assault. An incident would be classified as vandalism (least serious on the hierarchy) only if no other crime which is higher on the seriousness scale occurred at the same time.

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