

Help the Aged

Crime and Older People

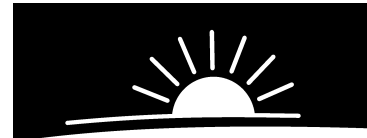
Notes of a Round-table meeting hosted by Help the Aged

DECEMBER 2004

Help the Aged's vision is of a future where older people are highly valued, have lives that are richer and voices that are heard. The Charity is working to combat poverty, reduce isolation, defeat ageism and to promote quality in care.

Company limited by guarantee
Registered in England No: 1263446
Registered Charity No: 272786
Registered Office: 207-221 Pentonville
Road, London, N1 9UZ

Crime and Older People



Help the Aged

Notes of Round- table meeting

Attendees

Alan Burnett	Help the Aged
Paul Cann (Chair)	Help the Aged
Lawrence Christensen	Help the Aged
David Denyer	AARP050
Stephen Farrell	Keele University
Roger Fisher	Home Office
Henry Holmes	Torrige Handyperson Scheme
Tom Hoys	Age Concern
David Lloyd	GLF
Eileen McCormack MBE	LOPSG
Chief Superintendent McGoldrick	ACPO Scotland
Edi O Farrell	Action on Elder Abuse
Lysa Ralph	Help the Aged
Corine Rechais	Islington Victim Support
Kathryn Roper	Crime Concern
David Sinclair	Help the Aged
Meirion Thomas	Safer Merthyr Tydfil
A Thornton	Lancaster University
Mary Turner	Kensington and Chelsea Pensioners Forum
Anna Upson	Home Office

Background

Help the Aged has long been interested in how crime impacts on older people. Through our policy, campaigning and service provision, we have engaged in activity to understand and combat crime against older people for many years.

The latest set of Home Office statistics *Crime in England and Wales 2003-2004* revealed that the risk of being a victim of crime fell from 40% in 1995 to 26% in 2003/04. Men and women aged 75 remain least likely to be victims of all types of crime and only 1.8% of householders aged 75 and over were victims of burglary compared to 8.6% of those aged 16-24 .

In October 2004, and following the publication of the most recent crime statistics, Help the Aged pulled together a group of experts to discuss the current issues around crime policy, with a view to taking forward debate internally and externally.

The seminar heard presentations by Roger Fisher, of the Fear of Crime team at the Home Office, Alan Burnett, Senior Policy Officer at Help the Aged, and Lysa Ralph, Senior Safety Manager at Help the Aged.

The seminar produced a wide range of views and messages, one of the most recurring themes being the diversity of the older population and the dangers of assuming all older people (between the ages of 50-110) have the same needs.

The views expressed in this document are those of the individuals who attended and not necessarily those of Help the Aged. Help the Aged will undertake to review the recommendations made and consider how we can take the debate forward.

Help the Aged
December 2004.

Introduction

Participants covered a wide range of issues during the course of the day's discussion. Below we capture the key points raised under a series of subject headings – reflecting the main themes of the day rather than the flow of the conversation. Recommendations from across the discussion are drawn out at the end of the document.

Crime Statistics

In August 2002, the Home Office produced *Crime, Policing and Justice: The Experience of Older People*. This excellent publication pulled together the findings of the British Crime Survey relevant to older people, but since then crime statistics have not been published broken down by age, and this has left a significant gap. Help the Aged has urged the Home Office to publish a new version of the publication and commit to update it every 2 years.

Whilst good quality statistics are vital, there remain concerns that the media, policy-makers and government all play a part in misusing statistics on crime and older people. Dr Burnett highlighted how a local newspaper had inappropriately used statistics around crime in the Finsbury Park area and had risked raising the levels of fear amongst older people. The voluntary sector, Government and the media, all should work better to ensure the media are briefed better and more responsibly about crime statistics to facilitate better reporting.

Fear of Crime

One of the current Home Office Public Service Agreements sets a target for reduction in fear of crime – the target is to reduce crime and fear of crime to 2001 levels by 2006. Whilst the latest set of statistics around fear of crime are not broken down by age, they reveal a general positive trend, with 13% of adults (of all ages) reporting high levels of worry about burglary in 2003/4, compared to 15% in 2002/3 and 26% in 1994. Worry about car crime has fallen by 2%, from 17% in 2002/3 to 15% in 2003/4 and concern about violent crime fell by 5% over the last year, from 21% to 16%. The proportion of adults with a high level of worry about anti-social behaviour has decreased from 21% in 2002/3 to 16% in 2003/4.

However fear of crime is a very emotive and controversial subject. Official surveys reveal that the levels of fear of crime amongst older people are way in excess of the actual and relative risks that they face. Whilst it is vital to encourage people to be aware of risks and take sensible precautions to reduce risk, it is sometimes difficult to present prevention messages without actually increasing the fear of crime.

There are contrasting views as to whether people's fear of crime plays a part in reducing actual crime. A small degree of fear of crime ensures that people are prepared and will take action to reduce crime. Therefore some argue that if we reduce fear of crime too far, crime will actually increase as a result of increased complacency.

There are also some concerns as to whether efforts to reduce actual crime, have the effect of increasing fear of crime. For example, installing home security devices into the home of a person who has never before been fearful of crime may actually increase their fear of crime. The Torridge Handyperson scheme has taken the approach that they don't want to

“install fear of crime” and they therefore attempt to use language that doesn’t scare people. Government and the voluntary sector should consider how they use language in crime prevention initiatives, in order to ensure that fear of crime is not increased.

In 2004, Farrall and Gadd (*The Frequency of the Fear of Crime*) argued that about 15% feel a high level of fear and less than one in ten frequently experience high levels of fear. Farrall argues that fear of crime is actually lower than that expressed by Government statistics. He argues that very few people are actually fearful of crime and older people are no more or less likely to be fearful than the rest of society. He also contends that men are more fearful than women, but that they are less likely to admit this level of fear.

Since the 1960s, fear of crime has been measured by surveys asking a question such as “how safe do you or would you feel walking in this area after dark”. Whilst in the 1960s we knew very little about how people respond to surveys, we now know that there are a number of major problems with the way in which this question is asked, for example:

- The use of the word “How” implies someone feels at least some degree of safety.
- “Do you or would you” combines actual and hypothetical fear.
- “in this area” (typically meaning within 15 minutes of home) can be irrelevant as some people would never go 15 minutes from home anyway.

Farrell argues that whilst Government should keep the current measure as benchmark, it should also adopt new survey question which would better highlight the real levels of fear of crime. The Italian Office of Statistics is interested in taking this suggestion on and are considering asking questions which would take the form of “have you felt fearful” and “how fearful have you felt”.

There remain two other concerns about how crime statistics are generally obtained and presented:

- There is an expressive component of surveys, which participants sometimes use to send messages of anger, disappointment or annoyance to policymakers. However, policymakers, academics and the media read questions in one-dimensional way
- If you ask an individual about crime or fear of crime you get high levels of concern, however, if you ask an individual what their main concerns are, crime is often not a top priority.

Reassurance

There is much that can be done to help reassure older people including:

- Making police officers and wardens accessible, visible and helpful.
- Responding to media ‘scare stories’
- Presenting statistics which are local, varied, reliable and up-to-date and providing people with information on the reality of risk.
- Improving the environment and reducing disorder – e.g. vandalism, litter and graffiti etc
- Providing support (and compensation) for victims and keeping them informed, especially about what happens in court
- Offering practical advice and assistance on home security
- Obtaining the needs and views of older people and encouraging them to get involved with crime prevention initiatives.
- Improving detection and conviction rates (e.g. using smart policing, CCTV cameras, better street lighting and neighbourhood watch schemes)

The impact of victimisation

There is strong evidence of the value to victims of home security services, Victim Support and other crime prevention services. Evidence suggests that victims want public authorities and the voluntary sector to “let the people know how to feel safe”.

There is a strong case for developing new ways of describing victims of crime as highlighted by Susan Smith in her research (Published in Geography in 2003):

‘The overriding theme from my fieldwork was the pervasiveness, intensity and damaging effects of (fear of) crime ... It was divisive, isolating and unrelenting ... Fear of crime is linked to poor health, yet the real finding is that fear of crime can be a shorthand for the fear of many other things ... I would wish to deconstruct the notion of ‘victim’ in favour of a label which is more empowering to those who are at risk

Health and Crime

Roger Donaldson in the Home Office has published research on the experiences of Older Burglary Victims which highlights that elderly victims of burglary (in sheltered housing) decline in health faster than non-victims of a similar age. The research highlighted that two years after the burglary, victims were 2.4 times more likely to have died or to be in residential care than their non-burgled neighbours.

Indices of Multiple Deprivation

The Indices of Deprivation 2004 (ID2004) were published in April 2004 following a two stage consultation process. ID2004 measures deprivation levels for every, so-called Super Output Area (i.e. the smaller area – previously done by ward) and local authority area in England. Separate Indices at Super Output Area (SOA) level are provided for each of the seven domains of deprivation: (Income, Employment, Health deprivation and Disability, Education Skills and Training, Barriers to Housing and Services, Crime the Living Environment). ID 2004 allows all 32,482 SOAs to be ranked according to how deprived they are relative to each other. This information is then brought together into one overall Index of Multiple Deprivation 2004 (IMD2004). There are also two supplementary indices: the Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDAC) and the Income Deprivation Affecting Older People Index (IDAOP).

Using the IMD, it is possible to map the distribution of older people, low income and high crime. Taking Portsmouth as a case study, Dr Burnett highlighted, how mapping these distributions could highlight those areas of the country where crime resources could and should be targeted. IMD could be used not just by Government, but also by the voluntary sector to target resources e.g. there is scope to match Senior Safety services to these areas.

Those poor areas where crime levels are high, tend to be areas where there is a low take-up of home contents insurance. The ABI, working with the NCC are conducting some work on this issue and are due to report in Spring 2005.

Anti-social behaviour

It is clear that anti-social behaviour has a major effect on levels of fear of crime amongst older people. It is thought likely that anti-social behaviour is a key factor in creating high levels of fear of crime amongst older people – particularly given the low likelihood of older people being the victim of actual crime.

It was recently estimated that 66,000 reports of anti-social behaviour were made to agencies in England and Wales on one day in Sept 2003. This equates to 13.5 million reports per year or one every two seconds. The cost of anti-social behaviour (not including the social costs suffered by victims and communities) has been estimated at £14 million per day or around £3.4 billion a year.

The Government states that there are three main Types of anti-social behaviour:

Street scene: begging; anti-social drinking; street prostitution and kerb-crawling; street drugs market.

Nuisance neighbours: intimidation and harassment; noise, rowdy and nuisance behaviour; hoax calls; animal related problems; vehicle related nuisance.

Environmental crime: criminal damage / vandalism; graffiti and fly-posting; fly-tipping; litter and waste; abandoned vehicles; fireworks misuse.

Issues will vary at local level and there is a real art to identifying what the key local issue is. One attendee quoted the example of a murder of drug offender in a village proving to be less worrying to a local community than the theft of a lawnmower. There is an issue of social distance and if the crime is unlikely to effect you it doesn't tend to impact on your fear of crime.

The Home Office have introduced new targets from April 2005 on antisocial behaviour. There is also a new target around prolific and priority offenders. The Government is asking local crime prevention officers to identify 15- 60 people causing concern in a community (not necessarily those in serious crime/persistent offenders).

Elder abuse

In March 2004, the House of Commons Health Select Committee defined elder abuse as 'a single or repeated act or lack of appropriate action occurring within a relationship where there is an expectation of trust which causes harm or distress to an older person'.

It is generally accepted that there are five types of abuse – physical, psychological, financial, sexual and neglect. There remains relatively little hard evidence on the prevalence and circumstances of different types of abuse directed at (often vulnerable) older people. However, national surveys have found that the proportion of abuse amongst people of pensionable age may be around 5%.

Most is known about physical and verbal abuse in the home. Such risks to an older person arise chiefly from the behaviour of co-habiting family members. As far as financial

abuse is concerned older people living on their own and those with cognitive impairment are likely to be victims and perpetrators include paid carers and relatives. (Submission from King's College, London Institute of Gerontology to the House of Commons Health Committee on Elder Abuse 2003).

There remain evidence gaps and answers need to be found to such questions as – what are the causes and triggers for abuse? in what settings does it occur? what intervention can be initiated to detect and prevent abuse? and how can carers be supported so that the risk of elder abuse is minimised?

Technology and Crime

Technology can be two edged sword for older people, in terms of their fear of an vulnerability to crime. Whilst technology can play a part in reducing the direct personal contact between individuals and the rest of their community, for some people technology has the potential to reduce isolation. Telecare initiatives and developments in Smarthome technologies have potential to reduce crime and fear of crime, for example.

Distraction burglary

Whilst police records indicate an annual average of 19,000 reported distraction burglary crimes in England and Wales in 2001-3, this is likely to be a significant under-estimation of actual levels with anecdotal evidence suggesting that people are embarrassed at being a victim and they feel stupid that they have been 'taken for a ride'

In 2003, Amanda Thornton and Chris Hatten undertook a survey of Bogus Caller Crime on behalf of Help the Aged. We commissioned two NOP telephone surveys, the second concentrated on the experiences of older adults. Across the total sample 3.3% reported someone trying to trick their way into their home over the last twelve months, of which 54% reported that the caller had failed to gain entry, 18% had been let in and in 30% of cases entry had been gained uninvited

It is suggested that between 300-400,000 of the 60+ population of Britain may have been approached by distraction burglars in the past year, and 180,000 older adults have been victims, with 122,000 having had something stolen from them

Recent projects at a local level have highlighted the impact of distraction burglary on older people. The evaluation of the Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative, for example, concluded that:

- It is appropriate for anti-distraction burglary projects to focus upon older people. Those over 75 made up 72% of the victims, and were five and a half times more likely to suffer from this crime than those aged 65 to 74
- Vulnerability, linked to the ageing process, is a more reliable predictor of risk than age itself. Future research and practice should explore the factors beyond age that might shape the distribution of victimisation – gender, residential location, domestic living arrangements, physical and mental health and everyday lifestyle routines

The Future

Attendees recommended the following actions, from participant organisations:

Help the Aged should:

- Encourage the Home office to publish another version of “Crime, Policing and Justice: The Experience of Older People” and then commit to update it every two years.
- Continue to develop Seniorsafety services and Handivan
- Produce toolkits to help people feel better at home
- Continue to develop links with the Home Office Crime and Statistics divisions
- Continue to work with other organisations on elder abuse
- Continue to work on issues such as Isolation.
- Work with local authorities on anti social behaviour (e.g. anti graffiti paint & vandal proof bus shelters)
- Draw links between crime, work and health
- Develop relationships with key journalists on crime issues – undertaking some 1 to 1 briefings

The voluntary sector should:

- Consider the language used when talking about crime prevention
- Mainstream issues around older people
- Develop of broad links within the voluntary sector e.g. Help the Aged with the Children’s Society and the Suzy Lamplugh trust

The Government should :

- Consider the language used when talking about crime prevention
- Put the victim ‘at the centre’ of the criminal justice system
- Identify of ‘hot spots’ of older people living on low income and in areas of high crime as a guide to spatial targeting of programmes
- Continue to target work on anti-social behaviour and provide guidance as to what older people can do to combat it in different types of localities
- Put more effort into distraction burglary and elder abuse
- Work hard to improve cross government working on older people and crime.

The media should:

- Use responsible language when talking about crime and better represent crime statistics

A number of research needs were identified by participants:

- More qualitative research with older people about their attitudes to crime;
- Efforts to talk to the most isolated older people;
- More ‘age related’ statistics and research;
- Behavioural research into the specifics of ‘fear of crime’;
- Research into what works by way of reassurance;
- Quantification of the impact of victimisation.