

CRIME AND THE ELDERLY

St. Petersburg, Florida

1974 - 1975

Crime Analysis Division
St. Petersburg Police Department
St. Petersburg, Florida

37812

CRIME AND THE ELDERLY IN ST. PETERSBURG

St. Petersburg, Florida, has long been known as a haven for elderly citizens. Mild climate, relatively inexpensive living costs and an active, established elderly community, provide strong inducements for retirees to move to the City. Florida ranks fourth among states in the total number of elderly residents, representing a 37% population increase since 1970. According to our current population estimates, 236,372 persons reside within the corporate limits of St. Petersburg. Of this population, approximately 37% or slightly over 88,000, are 60 years of age, or older, representing a sizable portion of our population.

Further study of the "over 60" population segment reveals that slightly over half (55%) are female and a majority (94%) are white. Most residents reside in the central city area and 51% subsist on less than \$5,000 a year. Roughly 31% live in the \$5,000-\$10,000 a year bracket, and only 3% have an average annual income of more than \$20,000.

Crime

We do not intend to portray the elderly resident of St. Petersburg as helpless or incompetent. However, because of their physical limitations, low income, and high concentration in a rather small area of the City, they are particularly vulnerable to certain types of crime. In response to this recognizable "fact of elderly life," the St. Petersburg Police Department will be taking very definite steps to prevent elderly residents from becoming victims of crime and, if victimized, to assist them in recovering losses suffered.

It is therefore essential that we understand crime as it relates to the elderly. This problem definition stage was completed by the Crime Analysis

Division of the Planning Bureau in early 1976. Statistics show that, for the most part, persons 60 and over are not "over-victimized" in relation to their percent of total population. During the 1974-1975 time period, 39,862 crimes in the following categories were reported in St. Petersburg: homicide, sexual battery, robbery, aggravated and simple assault, residential burglary, auto burglary, pickpocketing, purse snatching, larceny of auto parts, bicycles, from buildings, miscellaneous larceny, and auto theft. Of these 39,862 crimes, persons 60 and over were victims in 6,288 cases, or 16%.

While this overall picture is not alarming, within certain categories elderly persons are over-victimized in relation to their representation in the City's population. For example, persons 60 and over were victims of robbery in 28% of the reported cases in 1974, and 40% of the incidents in 1975. Their homes were burglarized in 27% of the 1974 burglaries and 22% of those occur in 1975. 31% of the reported pickpocketings in 1974 and 53% in 1975 involved persons 60 and over as victims.

The most glaring over-representation was noted in the category of purse snatching. Of the 518 cases, persons 60 and over were victims in 358 instances, or 69%. This figure warrants careful attention from a crime statistics standpoint as well as evaluating its effect on the victim.

To most, the loss of the money in a wallet or purse would prove more an inconvenience than a devastating loss, as one could rely on savings or other sources. However, to an elderly person the loss of the money on their person would prove disastrous since it may well be all the money they have. The experience of being "accosted" and the loss of personal mementos may also prove damaging from a psychological standpoint.

All things considered -- the age of the victim, the possibility of a long, and costly, recuperation period as a result of injuries sustained, the loss of money needed for basic living necessities, and the long-lasting fear associated

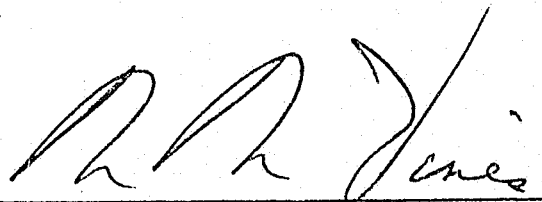
with being a victim of a crime -- the elderly person faces an entirely different set of problems when he or she becomes a victim of crime.

Response

The St. Petersburg Police Department will take several courses of action to address the problem of crime and the elderly. Through our Crime Analysis Division we are already providing information to field units when a noticeable pattern of crime develops, such as purse snatchings with elderly persons as victims, so that these units may take appropriate steps.

We plan to implement an "Aid to Elderly Victims" by mid-1977, providing a wide range of crime prevention and victim services to elderly residents. The Police Department's Research and Development Division, working with the City's Office on Aging, the American Association of Retired Persons, the Office of Crime Prevention, and other associations of retired persons, will develop a program designed specifically for elderly residents. This program, as currently envisioned, will include financial aid services, crime prevention information, a referral service for elderly victims, and transportation to court hearings where the testimony of elderly victims is required.

The "Aid to Elderly Victims" program will provide services to a very important segment of our City's population and will go a long way toward making St. Petersburg a safer community for all its residents and visitors.

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "M. M. Vines", is written above a horizontal line.

M. M. Vines, Chief of Police

INTRODUCTION

"Crime and the Elderly" is an analysis of those St. Petersburg residents aged 60 and over and their exposure to criminal elements. Elderly victims will be examined first, noting the incidence of personal crimes, property crimes, and those offenses with qualities of each -- "street crimes". Senior Citizens were implicated as suspects in 586 crimes during the two-year period; incidents will be detailed.

A chart is provided indicating the number of elderly victims and suspects, and a comparison with the total number of offenses occurring in each crime category.

CRIME AND THE ELDERLY - 1974 AND 1975

Crime	1974			1975			% Change # of Vics 1974-1975	Suspects 60 & Over	
	Total Crime	Vics 60 & Over	% Total	Total Crime	Vics 60 & Over	% Total		1974	1975
HOMICIDE	33	5	15%	16	3	19%	-40%	2	1
RAPE (Sexual Battery)	81	3	4%	90	5	5%	+67%	0	0
ROBBERY	844	238	28%	805	319	40%	+34%	0	0
AGGRAVATED ASSAULT	968	34	3%	1298	45	3%	+32%	28	37
SIMPLE ASSAULT	2265	104	5%	2348	97	4%	-7%	38	69
RESIDENTIAL B&E	5124	1364	27%	6627	1445	22%	+6%	4	7
COMMERCIAL B&E	1950	--	--	1306	--	--	--	1	2
AUTO B&E	1449	130	9%	1299	131	10%	+1%	1	0
PICKPOCKET	54	17	31%	32	17	53%	0	2	1
PURSE SNATCH	278	184	66%	240	174	73%	-5%	0	0
SHOPLIFTING	1602	--	--	1798	--	--	--	95	250
LARCENY -									
AUTO PARTS	1914	303	16%	2029	296	15%	-2%	1	0
BICYCLE THEFT	2284	52	2%	1662	45	3%	-13%	0	1
FROM BUILDINGS	1159	120	10%	825	92	11%	-23%	4	4
MISCELLANEOUS	2144	394	18%	2614	556	21%	+41%	13	20
AUTO THEFT	783	56	7%	597	59	10%	+5%	1	4
T O T A L	20982	3004	14%	20187	3284	16%	+9%	190	396

ELDERLY VICTIMS

Personal Crimes

HOMICIDE

Eight of the 48 homicide victims during the two-year period 1974-1975 were elderly citizens. Four were in their 60's; 3 in their 70's; the eldest was 92. Victims included five white females, two white males, and one black male.

Six cases were closed with arrest; and 2 cases were "closed exceptionally" when the suspects killed themselves. Suspects included seven white males, ages 25 (2), 26 (2), 64, and 76 (2); and one black female, age 60. Assailants have not been identified in two incidents, and these cases remain under investigation. Two died at the hands of robbers, three deaths were subsequent to domestic quarrels, one apparently the result of a death pact, and one died from injuries inflicted by a mentally unstable grandchild. Circumstances were unknown in the remaining incident.

Weapons varied -- one rifle, three revolvers, and a strangling device. Three died from blows to the head; implements included a telephone, a hammer, and a board. Seven of the incidents were perpetrated within the victim's residence.

Time of occurrence was another interesting factor. The summer months, especially August, were heavily represented, claiming 5 of the 8 victims. Seven of the eight were daytime incidents; six of these staged between 1000-1500 hours. Three of the murders occurred on Wednesday.

RAPE

Eight of the women victimized by sexual assault during 1974-1975 were elderly citizens. All were white; six were in their 60's, 1 in her 70's, and the eldest was 90. Suspect information yielded 5 black males and 3 white males. Suspect age ranged from 16-40.

Premise varied: one victim was assaulted in her vehicle; three were asleep in their residences when an intruder burglarized the premises and raped them. Two others were victims of attempted rape when the suspect broke into their homes. Two women were working in their yards when accosted.

Three cases were closed with arrest and five remain open.

Weekends during March and April appeared to be the most vulnerable time for these attacks, 50% of them occurring between the hours of 2:00-3:00 A.M.

ASSAULT

During 1974-1975, 280 elderly persons were victims of assault. In 79 of these incidents a weapon was employed, thus qualifying the case as "aggravated." Hands and miscellaneous striking instruments were favored modes of force. Guns were utilized in 7% of the cases; knives were slightly more frequent. Only 52 victims sustained injuries of a serious nature; the remainder reported only minor abrasions or no injuries at all.

ASSAULT - cont'd

Victims were white in 80% of the cases, black in 20%. The most frequent age bracket was 60-65 years of age, accounting for 40% of the elderly victims. Victims were acquainted with their assailants in 157 incidents; 14% of these were married couples engaged in a domestic quarrel. Family members were involved in 20 cases. Victims and suspects were strangers in 44% of the assaults. This is an atypically high percentage when compared to stranger-on-stranger assaults within the general public. Suspects were white in 58% of the incidents, black in 34%, and unknown in the remainder.

Property Crimes

RESIDENTIAL B&E

82% of the City's elderly citizens own their own homes, the most popular of which is the single-family dwelling. Mobile homes are becoming a more frequent homesite for the elderly, and only a very small percentage are housed in nursing homes or boarding houses. 9% of the senior populace spend from 6-9 months per year in another portion of the country.

During 1974-1975, 11,751 residents of St. Petersburg reported their homes victimized by burglars. Approximately 1/4 of these were elderly citizens, 60 years of age and older. Home owners were white males and females in 92% of the incidents. Victims were frequently at home during the burglary, often asleep inside or doing chores in the yard.

Culprits were not spotted in 81% of the cases. In the remaining, suspects were almost exclusively males, one-fourth of them white and three-fourths of them black. The vast majority were described as under 19 years of age.

Entry was gained forcibly in 59% of the cases, and no force was necessary in 27%. 380 residents reported attempts only. Front doors were the most popular entry, either left unlocked or pried open by the burglar. Jalousied windows and doors made the elderly particularly vulnerable.

Most incidents were perpetrated during daylight hours; however, approximately one-third of the victims were unable to establish the time of occurrence.

Cash was by far the most frequently stolen commodity. TV's and jewelry were also popular theft objects. Most victims sustained losses in the \$10-\$50 range. No losses were reported in 24% of the cases.

VEHICLE OFFENSES

860 senior citizens reported burglaries or larcenies to their vehicles. This represented 13% of all such incidents occurring during the two-year period. Incidents occurred both day and night, scattered throughout the week. It was often difficult to establish the exact time, due to their infrequent use of autos.

Victims were white in 90% of the cases. Suspects were not observed 86% of the time. Batteries and gasoline were the most frequently stolen commodities.

115 incidents of auto theft were reported by this age group during

1974-1975. This accounted for only 8% of the total number of stolen vehicles. Over 1/2 of them were parked on commercial streets and parking lots. Victims facilitated the theft by leaving vehicle doors unlocked in 67% of the incidents, and the car keys either in the ignition or elsewhere within the vehicle in 29%. Chevrolets were desired theft objects in one-third of the cases.

Another important mode of travel for the elderly is the bicycle or adult tricycle. 97 of these cycles were stolen during this two year period.

Street Crimes

The elderly, as well as the rest of the populace have been caught up in rising "street crime," easy prey for the young on the prowl for quick cash. They have become frequent victims of such crimes as robbery, purse snatch, and pickpockets.

ROBBERY

Elderly citizens were the target of robbery in 557 incidents during 1974-1975. They comprised 34% of the total robbery occurrence. 442 cases were classified as "unarmed," while 115 of the victims were threatened and/or injured by weapons, thus changing the crime status to "armed." Culprits chose guns as weapons in 62 cases.

524 of these senior citizens were white. The majority fell in the 65-70 age range, with the eldest being 93 years of age. 45% sustained no injuries; however, 44% of them suffered abrasions; 3% fractures.

Suspects were black males in 77% of the incidents, white in 16%, and not described in 6%. Most were in the 16-19 age range.

PICKPOCKETING

86 pickpockets occurred during the years 1974-1975, with 34 victims being 60 years of age or older. 85% occurred during daylight hours, with Wednesday being the most popular day. Three-fourths of the victims were males, 88% were white. Suspects were most often young, black males.

PURSE SNATCH

The elderly were extremely vulnerable to purse snatchers. Females 60 and over accounted for 358 of the 518 victims.

Incidents were staged almost exclusively along heavily traveled sidewalks. Friday was the most popular day, and the hours from 1:00 to 5:00 p.m. were especially vulnerable. Losses were generally in the \$10-\$25 range.

Suspects were described as white males in 17% of the incidents, black males in 74%. Approximately two-third of the culprits were teenagers.

ELDERLY SUSPECTS

The elderly were implicated as suspects in 586 crimes during the 1974-75 time period. The number of perpetrators aged 60 and over increased 108% from 1974-1975. The largest single category was shoplifting, in which 345 elderly citizens were suspect. Their favored theft objects were food products. Clothing and medical-related articles were also shoplifted. White males were most frequently named as culprits. In 85% of the incidents property losses were less than \$10. Almost one-half of the cases were staged on Friday or Saturday; 1:00-4:00 p.m. was a favored time span.

Persons over 60 were suspect in 65 aggravated assaults; 44 occurred on residential premises, with 25 involving the use of guns. Victims and suspects were married in 10 cases. 12 incidents were stranger-to-stranger confrontations. Saturday evenings were the favored time.

107 simple assaults involved elderly suspects. Most victims were acquainted with their assailants and engaged in an argument on Friday or Saturday in the late night hours.

Elderly citizens were also listed as suspects in 3 homicides, 11 residential and 3 commercial and 1 auto burglary, 3 pickpockets, 1 auto larceny, 1 bicycle theft, 5 auto thefts, and 41 larcenies of a miscellaneous nature.

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