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Crime and Apprehension Plague the Elderly: Four Federal Agencies Try to Help

*The data indicate that a significant number of the elderly are victimized, that the victimization rate is increasing, and that the older American in the inner city is disproportionately the victim of crime.**

Today victimization is a major social problem for the elderly. Of the 22 million men and women in the United States who are 65 or older, more than 60 percent reside in metropolitan areas. The majority live in the high-crime areas of the inner city, in close proximity to those most likely to attack them—the unemployed and teenage dropouts. Women, often living alone, form the large majority of these elderly persons. Because of low, fixed incomes, the elderly cannot afford to move to the “safer” suburbs. Most are entirely dependent upon public transportation which is more readily available in the inner city. These inner city elderly are more likely than the rest of the population to be victimized repeatedly, often by the same offender or offenders. They tend not to report the crimes against them because of fear of reprisals.

Statistics, however, cannot reflect the special difficulties experienced by the elderly when they become the victims of crime. Social scientists agree that most persons who are mugged, robbed, burglarized, or swindled experience stress over and above the actual damage, physical injury, or economic loss. For the elderly, that stress is exacerbated, and the consequences of their victimization extend far beyond the actual crime itself. Twenty dollars stolen from an elderly person represents a much greater loss

than the same amount taken from a person with a job. To the elderly, that loss may represent a week's rent or half the month's food ration. To an older person living alone, lack of a television set often means that he is deprived of a major source of contact with the world outside. An injury to an older person's leg or hip during a mugging may take significantly longer to mend, causing partial or complete immobility in a wheelchair or even institutionalization.

As great as the real costs of crime are to the urban elderly, they still do not compare with the costs resulting from their fear of crime. Repeatedly, those elderly surveyed in public opinion polls acknowledge that this fearfulness is the most serious problem in their lives, causing them greater stress than ill health, loneliness, or lack of economic security. The fear of fear is impossible to calculate. Who can measure the stress of the elderly New York woman who sleeps in the foyer of her apartment, her coat nearby, so that she can run out the front door if robbers once again jimmy her bedroom window as they have done three times before?

“They are virtual prisoners in their homes and apartments because of fear of crime,” says Charles R. Work, former LEAA Deputy Administrator. “I used to walk these streets in peace,” says a Missouri woman. “I wasn't afraid of nothing. Now I can't even sleep in peace. I'm afraid someone's going to bust in. I got no money, but these young punks don't know that. They're liable to come in and kill me for not having any.”

To resolve the problems of victimization and the fear it engenders, major changes are needed in the law enforcement and social service agencies which

exist in our large cities. Even more important, the very fabric of the inner city neighborhoods must be repaired, and citizens—both young and old—must be involved in working together and with public agencies to prevent crimes. These are not small changes, but they are finding increasing support both nationally and locally. Morton Leeds, Special Assistant to the Deputy Assistant Secretary for Assisted Housing of the Department of Housing and Urban Development, described the situation as follows:

When we view the extraordinary fragility of the life of the older person; the bitterness of rejection by society at large; the eating up of meager assets by inflation; the successive insults of the aging process itself; the inability to work creatively at economically producing tasks; the dispersal of the reassuring family—in light of all the foregoing—the impact of crime on the old can be catastrophic. Perhaps we need to reexamine the role of the victim and the total impact of crime. If the given crime has strong social causes . . . then the consequences for the society must imply some form of either correction, assistance or restitution on the part of the society for the victim. Here again the elderly can prove to be pioneers. Our collective sense of guilt for our neglect can perhaps push us to devise new solutions, rather than have us assert that the incident that happens to the older individual is an individual event out of a social context.

— HUD Challenge
July, 1977

*Report: Subcommittee on Housing and Consumer Interests, Select Committee on Aging, U.S. House of Representatives, April, 1977

Seeking these "new solutions," four Federal agencies have joined in funding a major new effort aimed at combatting crime against the elderly. The workings of this national program are described below.

Program on Criminal Justice and the Elderly

The tragic effect of crime on our elderly prompted a group of concerned citizens to form in 1977 the first multi-faceted national program directed specifically toward crime and the elderly. The central role in this effort is played by the national Program on Criminal Justice and the Elderly (PCJE), part of the National Council of Senior Citizens in Washington, D.C.

Designed to test ways to curtail victimization of the elderly and to improve society's response after a crime has occurred, the program is part of NCSC's Legal Research and Services for the Elderly under the direction of David H. Marlin. The program has completed its initial planning and is now engaged in coordinating local projects with national direction provided by Director Victoria Jaycox and her staff.

At the local level, PCJE coordinates seven demonstration projects in six major cities—Chicago, New York (two projects), New Orleans, Los Angeles, Milwaukee, and Washington, D.C.—all of which are implementing strategies to reduce the rate and impact of crime against older citizens. Six of these projects center around neighborhoods which have high crime rates and high concentrations of senior citizens, while the Chicago program has adopted a city-wide approach.

Three of the projects—New York City's Senior Citizens' Crime Assist-



ance and Prevention Program, New Orleans' Elderly Victimization Assistance and Prevention Program, and Milwaukee's Crime Prevention-Victim Assistance Project for Senior Citizens—are sponsored by local community action agencies with Federal funding for two years of some \$1.5 million from the Community Services Administration.

The other four projects—Chicago's Senior Citizens' Community Safety Program; Los Angeles' Security Assistance for the Elderly (Senior SAFE); Washington, D.C.'s Model Anti-Victimization Project; and New York City's Senior Citizen Anti-Crime Network—are supported by the Administration on Aging, with two-year funding of \$1.7 million. (See Figure A.)

The Neighborhood Programs

The seven projects have four common objectives:

- To reduce the opportunities for and the fear of crime among the elderly;
- To provide immediate post-crime assistance for elderly victims;
- To strengthen neighborhood capacity to protect its older citizens; and
- To help develop public and private community resources to serve the elderly and prevent victimization.

To achieve these objectives, the seven local projects are implementing similar activities with varying emphases, depending upon local factors. The programs all provide victim assistance services to elderly persons. Usually the programs receive the names of victims from the local police and from social service agencies. Project staff contact the victims immediately and, after explaining the program, make an assessment of what the victim might need. The case workers then try to secure whatever help the elderly person requires either directly or through referral to another social service agency. The types of services being provided include crisis counseling, transportation, home care, medical aid, replacement of lost

documents, emergency food and clothing, temporary shelter, and legal aid. Project workers maintain regular contact with their elderly clients to make sure that all the needed services are delivered and that no further problems result from the crime.

The geographical areas covered and the specific procedures used to provide victim assistance vary among the projects. The Senior Citizens Anti-Crime Network (SCAN) in New York, for example, focuses its victim assistance activities on one borough while the other New York project, Senior Citizens' Crime Assistance and Prevention Program (SCCAPP), and the New Orleans program direct their efforts at residents of two designated target areas which have high crime rates and a large percentage of elderly residents. Both the Milwaukee and Chicago projects, however, are providing services to victims on a city-wide basis.

All of the programs offer crime prevention education to senior citizens. Techniques are explained so that the elderly can modify their behavior, both in the street and at home, to make themselves less vulnerable to crime. The local court system is also often described thus helping to prepare senior citizens who may become involved in the processing of criminal cases, either as victims or witnesses. Again, approaches utilized by the seven projects vary. In New York, SCAN's training specialist teams with police crime prevention experts to offer seminars throughout the city and to help prepare a standardized crime prevention manual for senior citizens and a crime prevention training module for police officers. SCCAPP has developed a packet for elderly individuals and groups which contains pamphlets and fact sheets on a number of crime prevention strategies. The New Orleans program uses a local volunteer group, Women Against Crime, to conduct its presentations, while the Milwaukee project uses skits and role-playing to dramatize the most impor-

tant crime prevention techniques.

In an effort to address the particular needs of local areas, the demonstration projects are organizing and supervising "neighborhood strengthening" programs. These strategies, aimed at strengthening the sense of identity in an area and getting citizens to team together to combat crime, are being run by local volunteer groups with support from program staff. In Los Angeles, the project is enrolling people in the police department's "Neighborhood Watch" program, in which citizens are organized on a block-by-block basis to watch out for their neighbors and to be sensitive to signs of potential criminal activity. The Washington, D.C. Anti-Victimization Project is organizing 700 senior citizens in three high-rise apartment buildings on a floor-by-floor basis to run a similar program. The SCAN program in New York has formed task forces composed of neighborhood groups in two target areas which have chosen their own approaches to crime prevention. They include civilian street and auto patrols, escort services for senior citizens going shopping or to banks, tenant lobby patrols to identify all strangers in buildings, and "buddy systems" in which senior citizens are responsible for checking on the safety and knowing the whereabouts of each other on a regular basis. To help deter crime, all projects are encouraging and assisting elderly residents to participate in Operation Identification, a crime prevention program run by local police departments. Under this program, citizens have their property engraved with identification numbers and then display a sticker announcing their participation in the program. The goals are to deter burglary and to improve chances of recovering property which has been stolen.

Most programs have also been sponsoring residential security surveys for interested senior citizens. These may be conducted by trained program staff or teams of staff and local police. Chicago is utilizing retired firemen

who are experienced in the survey of home security and safety hazards. Surveyors perform comprehensive reviews of older persons' homes or apartments, checking items such as doors, windows, and locks. Some of the programs can pay for both new equipment like door viewers or locks and their installation. Others only have resources to pay for the equipment and are utilizing other community programs or volunteers to make installations.

Projects are also providing advocacy for public policy changes which will reflect the seriousness of the problem of crime against the elderly. Each project has its own local advisory committee, which may include administrators from the police department, courts, social service agencies, criminal justice organizations, and senior citizen groups. These committees help to plan program activities and insure that the interests of all segments of the community are represented. Staff spend considerable effort in making local organizations sensitive to the problems of elderly crime and establishing links with as many agencies as possible, so that the elderly will receive efficient care and attention. Lobbying has even extended to the State level. SCCAPP has organized an ad hoc elderly crime planning group and has adopted a series of resolutions recommending legislation affecting the elderly and crime. These include recommendations for funding emergency aid for elderly victims, expansion of senior citizen crime prevention and assistance programs, stricter enforcement of municipal security codes, and the development of elderly witness assistance projects to encourage older victims not to drop out of the criminal justice system. These resolutions are under consideration by members of the New York State Assembly.

The National Program

At the national level, the neighborhood programs are coordinated and assisted by the Program on Criminal

Justice and the Elderly. The program is designed to provide an evaluation of the demonstration projects, to conduct national research, and to function as a resource center for information on the problem of crime against the elderly.

These activities are supported by grants from the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration (LEAA) of the Department of Justice, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, the Community Services Administration, and the Administration of Aging. LEAA has provided \$200,000 for one year to the program to carry out the project coordination and support functions as well as to conduct national research on victimization of the elderly. HUD's grant of \$200,000 covers a two-year evaluation study of the program's impact in selected neighborhoods. The program has in turn subcontracted with the Behavioral Sciences Laboratory (BSL) at the University of Cincinnati to conduct surveys for the evaluation. In addition, CSA and AoA have provided the national program with \$32,000 and \$43,000 respectively to provide a 14-month appraisal of project activities and operations.

The National Committee on Crime and the Elderly, which functions as a forum for discussion of issues and concerns about crime and the elderly, acts in an advisory capacity to the program on matters of national policy. The committee is made up of representatives from national agencies for the elderly, staff members of Congressional committees dealing with the problems of aging, and the directors of the seven local agencies sponsoring the demonstration projects.

The National Committee developed the early research and planning behind the program itself. The concept was first proposed to LEAA in 1975 by the Milwaukee Social Development-Community Relations Commission which then took the lead in organizing the national advisory group. The National Committee is still headed by Anthony Maggiore, Associate Direc-

tor of the Milwaukee Commission.

The National Evaluation

In order to learn more about successful techniques of crime prevention and victim assistance and how to mount a successful program, the program is conducting a careful, two-pronged evaluation of the seven demonstration projects, including an assessment of the programs' impact in eight target neighborhoods located in four cities, and an assessment of the activities the projects are implementing.

The evaluation of program impact in the eight neighborhoods is being sponsored by HUD and is intended to measure whether the program as a whole has "made a difference"—whether there were any measurable changes in the neighborhoods where the programs operate. Information is being collected through telephone surveys by the Behavioral Sciences Laboratory. One survey has compiled data on the characteristics, experiences, and attitudes of 200 elderly persons in each of eight selected target neighborhoods being serviced by the project. This data will serve as the profile of the neighborhoods before the demonstration projects became operational there. Some of the variables measured are the elderly's fear of crime, what protective measures they have taken, and their recent victimization experiences. A year later, BSL will again survey the elderly in these neighborhoods to determine if their experiences or attitudes have changed as a result of the projects' existence.

This impact evaluation is also attempting to determine the effectiveness of the demonstration projects in meeting the needs of elderly victims. Some of the victims are being surveyed about the quality of the services received from the projects and other agencies to which they are referred, whether they could have done as well on their own, and the impact of crime on their lives. Their responses will be compared with victims who have not received any services

and with the general population of the elderly in the neighborhoods.

While the impact evaluation will provide important information on the social benefits of the demonstration projects, it will provide few answers to critical questions about the processes which the programs use—their activities, operations, and any changes in the local environment which resulted because of the projects' existence. Because this kind of information is needed as a management tool to modify operations while the projects are in operation, CSA and AoA are providing funding to PCJE to carry out such an assessment. Using a combination of on-site observations, interviews, and audits of activity data compiled by the projects, this assessment provides quick feedback to both the funding agencies and the projects themselves on any problems which should be addressed.

The findings from this evaluation of the demonstration projects will be reported in several manuals which will summarize the evaluation findings and provide practical information on how to set up an effective victimization prevention and assistance program for the elderly.

The National Research Effort

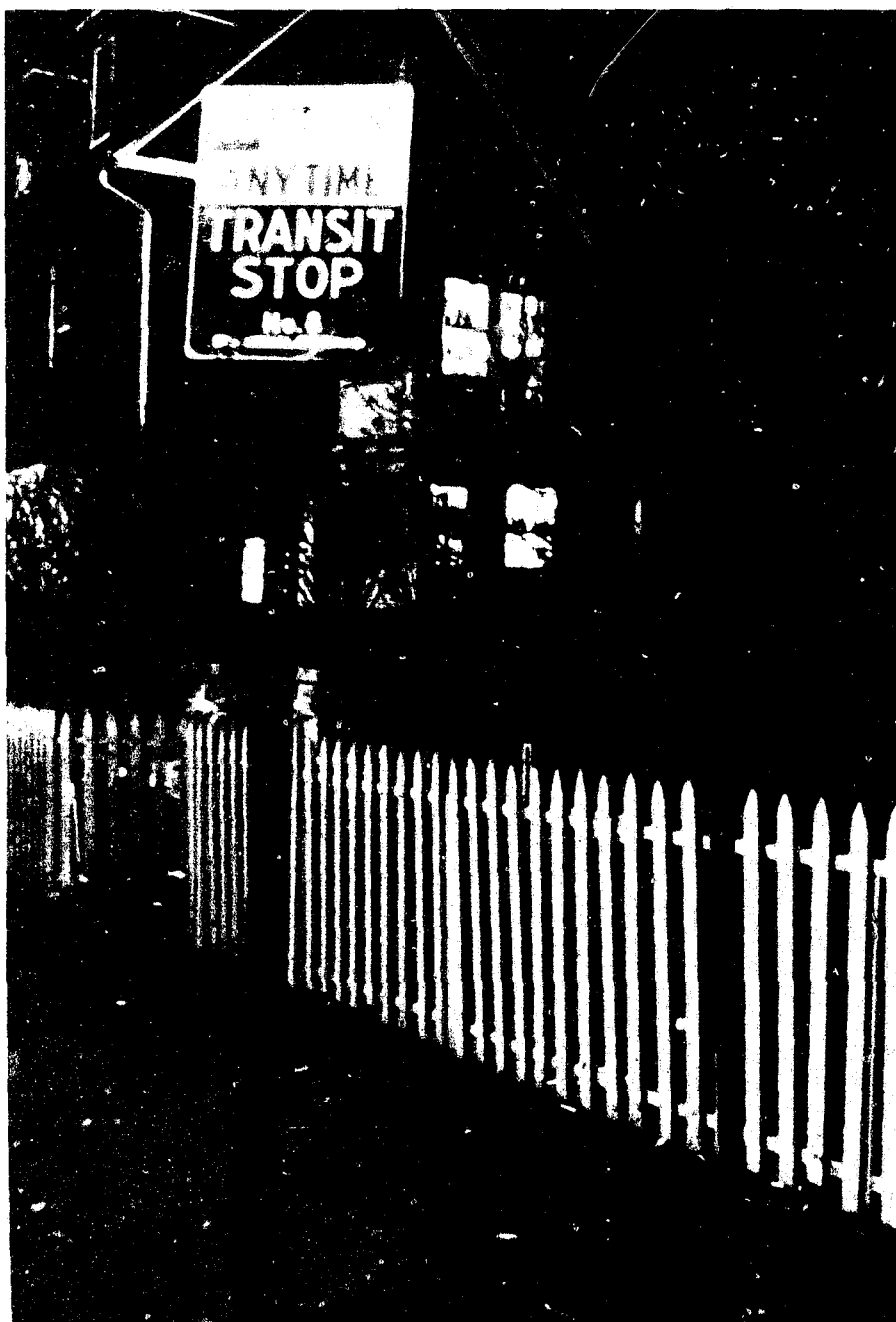
Until recently, most research on crime victims has focused on the interaction between victims and offenders, rather than on the needs of a victim after a crime has been committed. There has been a conspicuous lack of data on what happens to an elderly victim as that individual travels through the various agencies and processes of the criminal justice system. Research by the Program on Criminal Justice and the Elderly is attempting to fill these information gaps with a multi-jurisdictional assessment of the treatment of the elderly victim, following that person through the system, from his or her initial contact with the police or community agency until the final disposition of the case. Program researchers are examining the attitudes of representatives of various organizations and agencies which deal with the elderly. This aspect of the research is oriented not only to criminal

justice system personnel (police and prosecutors) but also to representatives of other agencies regularly dealing with the elderly, such as local Social Security Administration offices, State welfare departments, housing authorities, and medical facilities. The research seeks to determine which practices and programs are especially beneficial to elderly victims, as well as those which are detrimental or ineffective.

The research will concentrate on New York City, Los Angeles, New Orleans, and Milwaukee. The range in

size, location and differences in the criminal justice and social service systems among these cities gives the study an opportunity to address both general and specific problems and to make comparisons on a number of important factors. On the basis of these research findings, recommendations will be made for improvements in the procedures used and services available for elderly crime victims.

Another important area of research is the work directed toward a critical examination of statutory victim compensation programs. Twenty-four

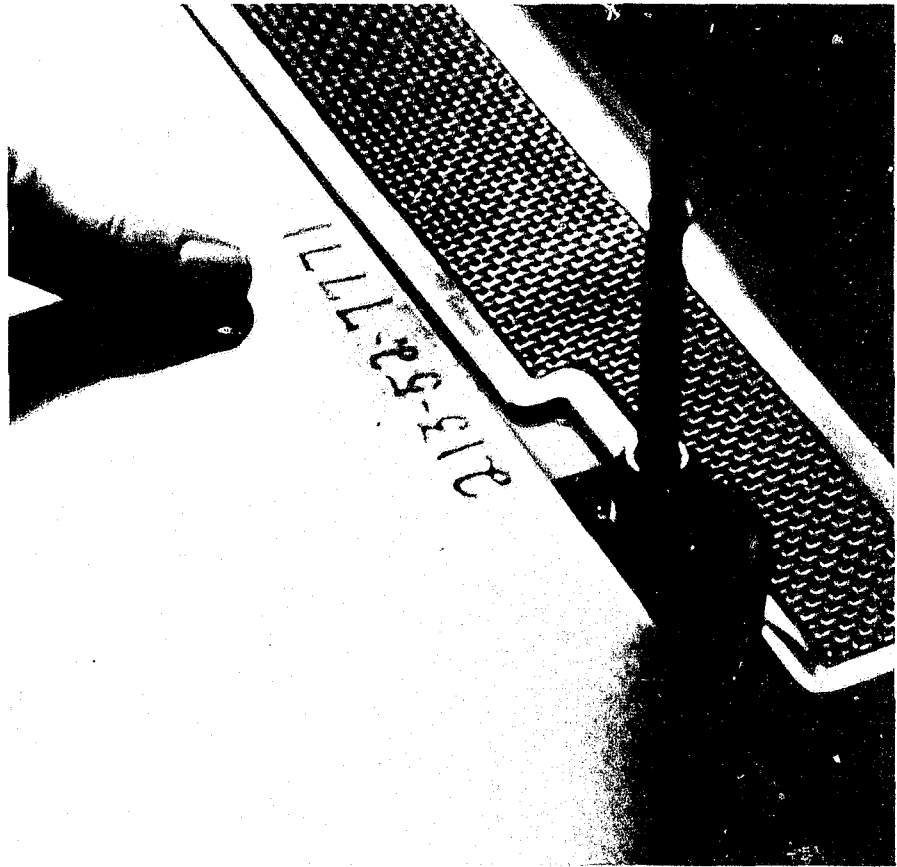


states now have some form of victim compensation legislation on their books, and 16 other states are considering such legislation. Since 1965, Congress has been considering Federal legislation which would reimburse States with compensation programs for a portion of their expenses. The provisions and requirements of any Federal legislation will be extremely important since it will provide an immediate stimulus for new State compensation programs and for expansion and changes in existing programs. The PCJE analysis of existing State programs and legislative proposals now pending before the 95th Congress will provide recommendations for victim compensation legislation which will meet the critical needs of elderly victims.

Resource Center for Information

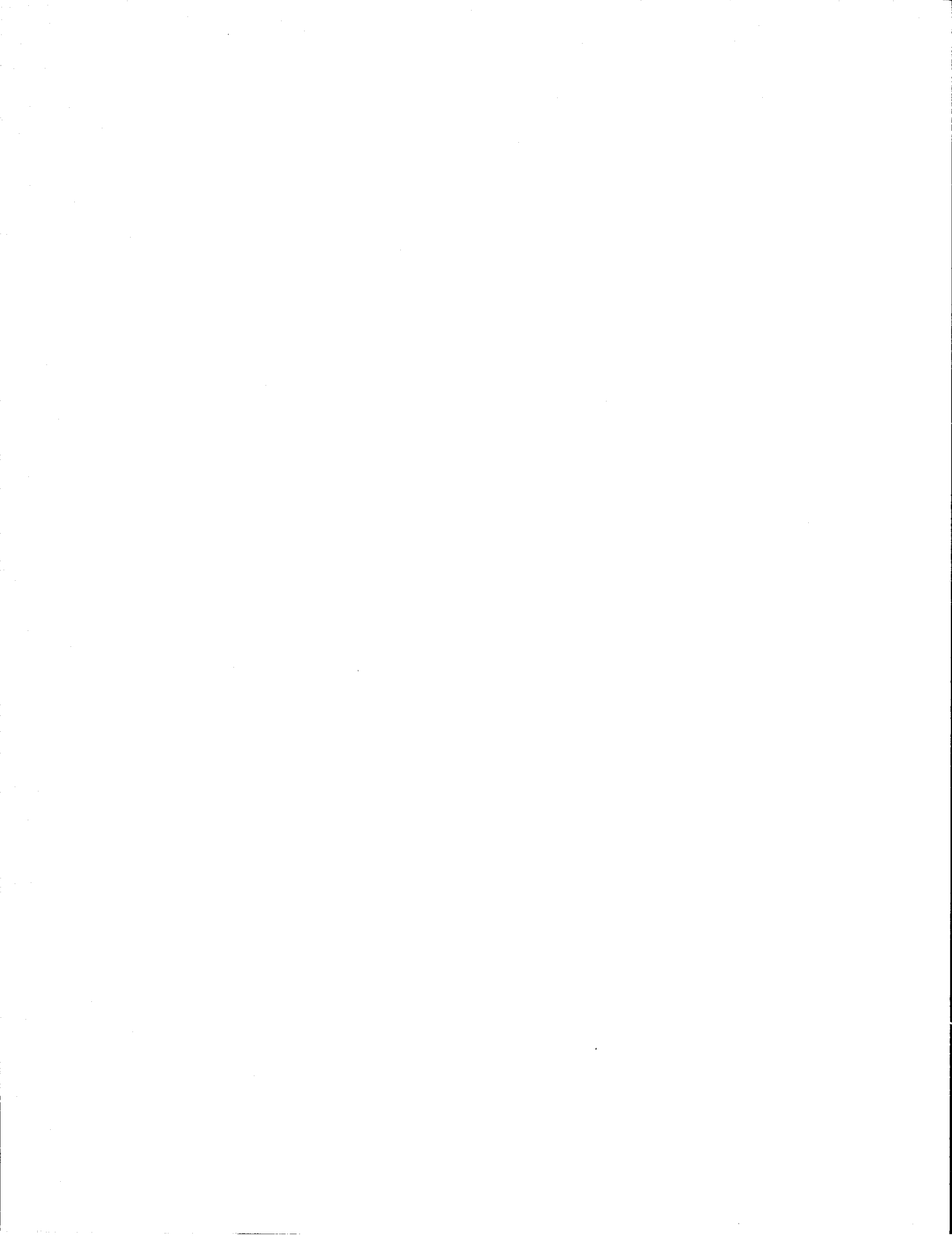
A final function of the national Program on Criminal Justice and the Elderly is the development of a resource center for information on programs and research on crime and the elderly. Training materials, lists of resource persons, project directories, and bibliographies are all being assembled by program staff. The program's resource center will also act as a referral service directing inquiries to other appropriate sources or projects. Plans also call for the program to develop and distribute a series of reports bringing research findings to the attention of the general public and policy makers.

This aspect of the national program is intended to develop a comprehensive picture of the state of the art concerning crime and the elderly. Persons interested in planning new programs, implementing activities, or conducting research will be able to utilize this resource center. As with the other components of the Program on Criminal Justice and the Elderly, its ultimate beneficiaries are our elderly. Only with the kind of sound, well-documented information which the program is attempting to supply can we hope to find solutions to the problem of crime and fear of crime among the elderly and to ultimately improve the quality of their lives.



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