

55921

121

PART VII: CRIME

The Special Problems of the Older Citizen

While crime is a problem of mammoth proportions which everyone in this country faces, it is the elderly who often feel its impact most seriously.

Recent statistics show that as a group the elderly (age 65 and over) are least likely of all age groups to be the victims of crime. Yet, the elderly are more vulnerable to certain crimes, such as confidence schemes and fraud. Moreover, the elderly feel the impact of almost any crime more seriously, primarily because of their physical limitations and disabilities, but often because of their lack of adequate economic resources to cope with serious losses.

Though the elderly are subject to the same kinds of crimes as the rest of the general population, they are victimized at differing rates. Of the more serious crimes against older citizens burglary is the number one offense nationwide. Following it are robbery, grand larceny, auto theft, nonviolent pursesnatching, assault, rape and sexual molestation, and homicide.

What Can Be Done?

This booklet does not pretend to answer the question as to what you as an individual and elderly citizens as a group can do to combat the crime problem in America. However, it can

offer you tips on reducing the impact this problem can have on members of this age group.

Crime Prevention--Using What's Available

The best means of preventing crime from happening to you is to know what resources are available to you and how to use those resources.

Police and Prosecutors

The most obvious resource available to any potential crime victim is the police. Yet, one of the major impediments to effective police response is the failure to report crimes. This failure is especially a problem among elderly victims. Too often they do not report personal or household crimes to the police out of a belief that, because of a lack of proof, they can accomplish nothing by reporting an incident, or out of a belief that the incident is not important enough to warrant police attention. A third factor in the non-reporting of crimes, especially of those relating to crimes of fraud, is the feeling of guilt and embarrassment that older citizens often feel when they have been "duped" by an artful con man. But if the police are to be of any use at all in preventing and solving such crimes, older citizens must overcome their reservations about turning to the police for help.

In addition to dealing with police, elderly crime victims need also to cooperate more with prosecutors. Like all citizens, they must be willing to expose criminal activity and

to cooperate with district attorneys and the State Attorney General's office in prosecuting criminals. How effective these officials are in pursuing criminal prosecutions will depend to a large degree on the cooperation they have from citizens. So if you have been attacked or burglarized or victimized by a swindle or a con game, contact the police or your local district attorney immediately. Their phone numbers are listed in the phone directory and they are there to serve you!

Other Programs

A number of useful programs to assist in crime prevention have been set up throughout the state. The programs described here do not exist in all or even most areas of the state, but they could serve as models for programs in your area.

Milwaukee County Neighborhood Security Aide Program

The Neighborhood Security Aid program has a staff of 102 people trained in fire fighting, fire inspection, basic police skills and social service referral. Though not a police force or a private security agency, they do assist the police by informing them of criminal activity. They perform also a number of other services directed primarily at older adults.

One of these services is to provide neighborhood escorts to help older adults get to and from buses, churches, nutrition sites, stores, doctors' offices, and the like. Another is to publicize the various private and public social service agencies available in the area and

to help residents obtain the benefits of them.

A third service the Aides perform is to inspect locks and other security measures you have installed in your home and to recommend improvements that will increase your home security. The Aides also encourage older citizens to watch for signs of criminal activity around the homes of their neighbors and around local shops and businesses. The Aides themselves, though unarmed, are radio-equipped to call in suspicious activity.

If you have questions about the Aides program or need assistance--perhaps to establish something like it in your own neighborhood--contact the program director, William W. Chase, in care of:

Neighborhood Security Aide Program
Courthouse, Room 1
901 North 9th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233
(414) 278-5021

Homes Security Program of Racine

Another program, recently introduced in the Racine area, is the Homes Security Program which the Racine Police Department runs in cooperation with the Racine County Housing Authority. The purpose of the program is to inform residents of Racine County, particularly the elderly, how to make their homes more secure. Under the program, the Racine Police Department installs free of charge in the homes of elderly residents living close to high crime districts new locks, plexiglass window shields

and a number of other security devices. So successful has the program been that it has been expanded beyond the boundaries of the City of Racine to cover the entire county.

The Racine Police Department also has published a very useful pamphlet, entitled Home Security, which details a number of safety measures any citizen can take to secure his or her home more adequately. For further information contact:

Martin G. Defatte, Director,
Crime Prevention Unit
City of Racine Police Department
730 Center Street
Racine, WI 53403
(414) 633-6311, Ext. 236

Whistle Stop Program of Milwaukee

The Whistle Stop Program exemplifies a way that community citizens can assume a greater degree of responsibility for preventing crimes and for aiding crime victims.

Essentially what the Whistle Stop Program does is to supply citizens with whistles to use in signaling trouble in the neighborhood. Through cooperation with neighbors persons having whistles are able to use them to summon help from other persons within hearing distance. On hearing a signal of distress, neighbors dial the police and report that they are making a whistle stop call, then state clearly the address and, if possible, the nature of

the crime. Reports are that the program has been successful not only in bringing aid to the victims of crimes, but also in preventing a number of crimes in progress, such as pursesnatching and burglaries.

To find out more about the Whistle Stop Program contact the

Milwaukee County Crime Prevention Commission
901 North 9th Street
Milwaukee, WI 53233
(414) 278-5004

None of these programs--Security Aides, Home Security, Whistle Stop and the like--can by itself, or even in combination with police assistance, prevent all crime. However, as available resources, they should be used. Even if they serve to prevent only one older citizen from being victimized, that citizen could be you.

What If I Have Been the Victim of a Crime?

If you have been victimized, you should be willing to cooperate with police and prosecutors. In other words, you must report crimes as soon as possible and be willing to work with the prosecutor in convicting the criminal. Your cooperation may involve you as a witness in a criminal trial, but the effort you make will reduce future danger of crime to yourself and other persons. Unfortunately, even if the criminal is caught and convicted, you still may be left with physical and mental injuries or a loss in property.

On January 1, 1977, the new Crime Victims Compensation Program, which compensates victims for personal injuries resulting from crimes, went into effect in Wisconsin. The program covers bodily harm and related injuries, such as psychological damage resulting from a crime, but not property loss or damage. It compensates the victim for medical and pharmaceutical costs, along with wages, up to a maximum amount of \$10,000 for all costs. In the case of death the program will pay up to \$2000 for burial expenses. However, persons receiving Medicare or Medicaid may be excluded from receiving medical payments.

How Do I Get Victim's Compensation?

The law requires police and sheriffs' offices throughout the state to provide victim's compensation application forms to anyone who has been the victim of a crime. If you are victimized, you must file this form within two years after the offense in order to become eligible for the compensation.

The state will determine whether your injury is covered by the program. If it is, the state will reimburse you for medical expenses and wages lost due to the injury. Wages will be paid at the rate of two-thirds your regular wage rate up to \$189 per month. If you are not currently employed, the state will use the highest monthly wage rate you earned during the past five years as your regular wage rate.

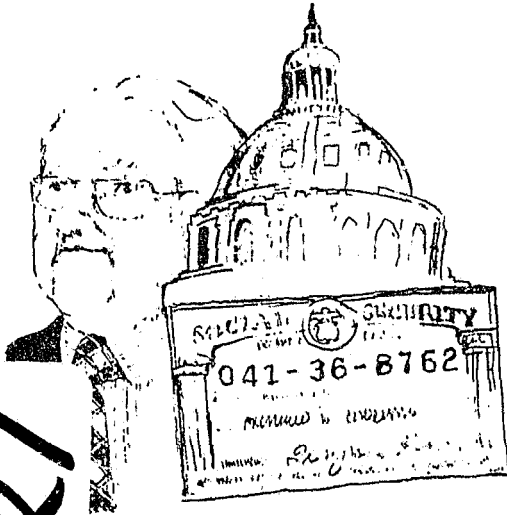
If the state finds that you have suffered no financial hardship, it may deny you payments. However, the burden is on

the state to prove that no hardship exists.

Address any questions you have about the program to the

Department of Industry, Labor and
Human Relations
P. O. Box 7159
201 East Washington Avenue
Madison, WI 53702
(608) 266-2651

Senior Citizens & The Law



55920-
55921

Prepared by the

Center for Public Representation
520 University Avenue
Madison, Wisconsin 53703

Under a grant from the
Bureau of Aging,
Division of Community Services
One West Wilson Street
Madison, WI 53702

END