

## National Council On Ageing And Older People



### CRIME

#### Ageing in Ireland Fact File No. 11

The level of crime against older people remains low in Ireland, in comparison with other countries. The evidence indicates that over the last twenty years, crime against older people has increased significantly, but crime of this nature tends to occur in cycles, with some years much worse than others. Crimes against property are more frequent than crimes against the person.

#### Crime Against Older People

- The crime against older people that causes most concern is attacks on people living alone in remote areas. The number of these attacks varies significantly from year to year as the following figures indicate.<sup>1</sup>

**Table 1: Attacks on older people living alone in remote areas.  
Select figures 1984-1997**

Year	Number of attacks
1984	432
1988	118
1991	66
1992	66
1993	80
1994	69
1995	97
1996	148
1997	121

Source: Review of the Scheme of Community Support for Older People (1999)

- A 1993 study commissioned by the Council involved interviews with 909 older people living in the community. Table 2 shows the crime experiences of older people reported in this study. The study also compared older people's experience of crime in 1993 with a 1977 survey.<sup>2,3</sup>

**Table 2. Older people's experiences of crime 1993**

Persons	Burglary (%)		Vandalism (%)		Assault/mugging (%)	
	Happened in last 3 years	More than 3 years ago	Happened in last 3 years	More than 3 years ago	Happened in last 3 years	More than 3 years ago
Urban males	9.1	10.2	9.7	7.0	2.2	4.3
Urban females	9.7	9.7	4.9	4.9	2.0	4.5
<b>All urban older people</b>	<b>9.5</b>	<b>9.9</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>5.8</b>	<b>2.1</b>	<b>4.4</b>
Rural males	3.4	4.3	2.2	3.9	0.4	2.2
Rural females	4.3	4.3	2.6	3.0	0.4	2.6
<b>All rural older people</b>	<b>3.9</b>	<b>4.3</b>	<b>2.4</b>	<b>3.5</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>2.4</b>
All males	5.9	6.9	5.4	5.2	1.2	3.1
All females	7.2	7.0	3.9	3.9	1.4	3.7
<b>All older people</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>6.9</b>	<b>4.6</b>	<b>4.5</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>3.4</b>

Source (Fahey, 1994)

- 6.6% had been burgled between 1990 and 1993, compared to 1.5% in the years 1974 to 1977. The level of burglary was higher in urban (9.5%) than rural areas (3.9%).
- 4.6% had experienced vandalism between 1990 and 1993, compared to 2.8% between 1974 and 1977. Again, the level of vandalism in urban areas (7%) was much higher than in rural areas (2.4%).
- 1.3% of older people were assaulted or mugged between 1990 and 1993; this figure is small, but a substantial increase on the 0.3% reported for 1974 to 1977. Once again, the level for urban areas (2.1%) was much higher than for rural areas (0.4%).
- Statistics from 1998, in Table 3, show that household burglary is the most prevalent crime against the elderly.<sup>11</sup>

**Table 3. Percentage of households that were victims of various crimes**

	Household burglary	Theft of vehicles	Theft of bicycles	Vandalism	Victims of any crime
<b>Age</b>					
<b>Under 25</b>	4.8	2.8	6.7	4.6	13.3
<b>25-44</b>	3.6	1.8	3.5	6.2	15.0
<b>45-64</b>	3.4	1.6	2.5	4.6	11.8
<b>65+</b>	2.9	0.9	1.1	2.8	6.7

Source: Quarterly National Household Survey, 1998

### Older People's Perceptions of Crime

- Table 4 shows older people's perceptions of crime as recorded by the 1993 survey.

**Table 4. Older people's perceptions of crime, 1993**

Persons	Burglary (%)		Vandalism (%)		Assault/mugging (%)	
	Very much a problem	A bit of a problem	Very much a problem	A bit of a problem	Very much a problem	A bit of a problem
Urban males	11.4	2.9	10.9	21.2	5.4	16.2
Urban females	10.7	26.3	6.2	24.4	3.7	15.7
<b>All urban older people</b>	<b>11.0</b>	<b>27.9</b>	<b>8.2</b>	<b>23.0</b>	<b>4.4</b>	<b>15.9</b>
Rural males	1.7	11.3	0.0	6.5	0.0	3.5
Rural females	3.5	8.7	1.3	3.5	0.9	0.0
<b>All rural older people</b>	<b>2.6</b>	<b>10.0</b>	<b>0.7</b>	<b>5.0</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>1.7</b>
All males	6.0	19.3	4.8	12.9	2.4	9.0
All females	7.1	17.7	3.8	14.2	2.3	7.9
<b>All older people</b>	<b>6.6</b>	<b>18.5</b>	<b>4.2</b>	<b>13.6</b>	<b>2.3</b>	<b>8.5</b>

Source (Fahey, 1994)

- Comparison between the 1977 and 1993 surveys are possible and show that older people's worries about crime increased over the period.
- Older people's perception of burglary as 'a bit of a problem' or 'very much a problem' had almost doubled, from 12.7% in the 1977 survey to 25.1% in the 1993 survey. In 1998 19% of males and 40.3% of females over the age of 65 felt unsafe walking in their neighbourhood after dark.<sup>11</sup>
- 17.8% regarded vandalism as a problem (either 'very much a problem' or 'a bit of a problem') compared to 12.8% in 1977.
- 10.8% regarded the risk of assault or mugging as a problem, almost twice as many as in 1977 (5.8%).
- For all types of crime, older people in urban areas were more likely to be worried than older people in rural areas.
- In 1998 54.1% of females and 43.2% of males aged over 65 years described crime in Ireland today as a very serious problem.<sup>11</sup>
- In a study of older people living in the community which was carried out by the Council in 2001 (HeSSOP), 89% reported feeling safe or very safe. Of the 11% of older people who felt unsafe, 71 % were women. A total of 36% of all older people living alone felt unsafe.<sup>5</sup>
- Those living in rural areas were more likely to feel unsafe than those in urban areas, 13% versus 8%.

### **Age Groups at Risk of Crime**

- Despite their fear of crime and the fact that they are one of the most vulnerable populations to crime, the evidence indicates that older people are less likely to be victims than those in other age groups. In Britain, for example, young people's homes are 30% more likely to be burgled, and 16–30 year olds are six times more at risk of being mugged than older people.<sup>6</sup>
- Nevertheless, older people are more afraid of crime, and fear, especially of violent crime, rises with age.<sup>7</sup> As noted above, this fear increased significantly over the period 1977–93.<sup>2</sup>

- There is also evidence that some older people are at increased risk of crime. This is especially true of those living alone, those with impaired mobility or without security equipment and those living in urban or isolated areas.<sup>8</sup>
- Older people's probability of experiencing crime may be exacerbated by a number of factors, including their sense of their own vulnerability and a mistrust of financial institutions, which may induce them to keep cash in their own homes.
- Lack of telephones may make older people more vulnerable. However, on a positive note, the Council's 2001 study of older people living in the community (HeSSOP) found that only 4% of 937 older people lacked a telephone.<sup>5</sup> 19% of the sample population in the HeSSOP study owned a fully functioning personal alarm, although this seemed to have little bearing on how safe they felt.<sup>5</sup>

### **Effects of Crime on Older People in Domestic Settings**

- There is evidence that older people are particularly likely to experience physical and psychological ill-effects following crime victimisation. This may be due to the lower ability of older people to recover from the impact of severe stressors. The experience of crime may also exacerbate feelings of helplessness, an established precursor to disorders such as depression and anxiety.<sup>8</sup>
- The increased sense of vulnerability caused by crime against older people also affects non-victims. Following a previous spate of crimes, a survey examined the level of fear among 207 older people in County Galway.<sup>9</sup> The survey found that while only 5% of respondents had suffered either a physical attack or been burgled, 72% reported feeling upset by the recent crimes.
- The sample displayed considerable levels of fear as a result of the crimes: 25% reported an increased distrust of strangers, 23% had installed some form of security or defence and 8% went out less often.
- This was combined with an acute awareness of vulnerability as conveyed by the media: at the time of the above-mentioned County Galway study, 80% had televisions and 70% read newspapers.
- Older people's well-being is affected at least as much by their perception of their level of personal safety as by their actual experience of crime. The widespread media interest in sensational violence against older people may contribute to feelings of vulnerability.

### **Prevention of Crime Against Older People**

- Because of considerable disquiet over attacks, a number of measures were introduced in 1996 to combat crime against older people. Initially, a tax allowance of up to £800 at the standard rate was introduced to enable the installation of security alarms over

the period 1996–98. It was widely accepted that this measure would be of no benefit to most older people as they do not pay tax. A Task Force on Security for the Elderly was established by the then Department of Social Welfare in 1996<sup>1</sup> and was instrumental in developing a number of initiatives, notably the Scheme of Community Support for Older People. The scheme is administered by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs. It provides funding to older people for certain types of security equipment. Grant aid is channelled through voluntary organisations which have undertaken to identify older people in their area in need of the assistance provided under the scheme. Between 1996 and 1998, the Scheme received 62,000 applications and disbursed £12.4 million. Demand increased each year over the previous year. See Table 5.

**Table 5. Summary of Scheme of Community Support for Older People 1996-98**

	1996	1997	1998
Number of applicant groups	528	839	940
Number of individual applicants	14,944	21,783,	25,518
Amount disbursed	£2.6m	£4.8m	£5.0m

Source: Review of the Scheme of Community Support for Older People (1999)

- For 78% of community groups, socially-monitored alarm systems were the single largest item of expenditure under the scheme.
- For 48% of community groups, their initial source of contact with the scheme was through the Garda Síochána: 44% of applicants had their first contact with this Scheme through the community group's local office. Other important initial sources of contact were word of mouth (16%) and the Garda Síochána (10%).
- Data do not exist to allow the impact of the scheme on the level of crime against older people to be measured. Overall crime fell in Ireland between 1996 and 1998 and it is likely that this also was the case for crime against older people. The specific impact of this Scheme on crime against older people cannot be measured quantitatively.<sup>1</sup>
- Benefits of the scheme include greater peace of mind for older people, health benefits and greater community awareness of security issues and older people's needs.

## Reference Material

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- 3 Whelan, B.J. and Vaughan, R.N., 1982 *The Economic and Social Circumstances of the Elderly in Ireland*. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.
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- 8 O'Neill, D. *et al.*, 1989. Effects of Burglary on Elderly People. *British Medical Journal*, 298, 1618-9.
- 9 Grimes, S. *et al.*, 1990. Impact of Crime on the Rural Elderly. *Irish Medical Journal*, 83, 22-3.
- 10 Task Force for the Elderly, 1996. *Report to the Minister for Social Welfare*. Dublin: Stationery Office.
- 11 Quarterly National Household Survey, 1998. *Crime and Victimization*. Sept–Nov 1998. Central Statistics Office.

## Useful Contacts

Garda Síochána: in emergencies dial 999.

Garda Síochána: to discuss confidential information relating to crime dial 1800 666 111.

Garda Síochána: Dublin Metropolitan Area Headquarters, Harcourt Square, Dublin 2. Telephone 01 666 6666. Also local offices/stations throughout the country.

Victim Support Helpline. Telephone 1800 661771.

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National Council on Ageing and Older People  
22 Clanwilliam Square  
Grand Canal Quay  
Dublin 2  
01 676 6484/5  
01 676 5754  
email : [info@ncaop.ie](mailto:info@ncaop.ie) [www.ncaop.ie](http://www.ncaop.ie)