Elder Victimization

Elder victimization is an important subset of crime. While people age 65 and older experience the same crimes as the rest of the population, they are at increased risk for certain types of victimization, including financial victimization, neglect, and physical, sexual, or emotional abuse. Researchers estimate that approximately 10% of the population will be victimized after the age of 65; however, studies have also shown that elder victimization is highly underestimated. Persons with degenerative diseases or cognitive disabilities—including dementia, Alzheimer’s, and Parkinson’s—or who are living in institutional settings, such as hospitals or nursing homes, are often not included in survey results. Additionally, studies have demonstrated that while elderly individuals are most commonly maltreated by family members or acquaintances, violent victimizations reported to the police are most commonly perpetrated by strangers. Maltreatment is not always a criminal offense, but the intimate nature of many of these victimizations means that elderly victims are less likely to report offenses committed by someone they know.

Trends

From 1995 to 2015, the rate of violent victimization against individuals age 65 and older declined about 24%, from 6.8 violent victimizations per 1,000 individuals to 5.2 in 2015. In comparison, the total rate of violent victimization declined by 74% between 1995 and 2015, from 70.7 per 1,000 individuals to 18.6. In 2015, the rate of violent victimization against women age 65 and older was both higher than the rate for men in the same age group and 2.4x greater than the previous year’s rate. However, violent victimization rates for this age group have not been consistently greater for men or for women over the past 20 years. In contrast, researchers estimate that elderly women experience maltreatment more frequently than men.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Overall Population</th>
<th>Age 65+</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1997</td>
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<tr>
<td>1999</td>
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<td>2001</td>
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<td>2003</td>
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<tr>
<td>2013</td>
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<tr>
<td>2015</td>
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Did You Know?

Almost 50% of individuals with dementia are abused or neglected by their caregivers.

Injuries to older adults from violent crime account for more than $5.3 billion annually in direct medical care.

Individuals age 65+ are more than 30% more likely to lose money to financial fraud, compared to individuals in their 40s.

Younger elders have a higher risk of victimization, possibly because they are more likely to live with a spouse or adult children—two groups that are often abusers.

Individuals who were abused earlier in life are at greater risk of victimization as they age.

Individuals with less social support are more likely to be victims of abuse as they age.
Although the violent victimization rate of individuals age 65 and older is less than the national rate, crimes against this age group are the least reported. In 2015, 45% of surveyed victims of violent crime over age 65 also reported that crime to the police. However, the National Center for Elder Abuse estimates that less than 5% of individuals over the age of 65 report their victimization to the police.

In 2015, 51% of violent crime victimizations against people older than 65 involved victims who did not know their perpetrator; 44% were committed by an acquaintance, relative, or intimate partner.

Residents of nursing homes are also vulnerable to abuse, neglect, or exploitation by nursing home staff and fellow residents. A study of nursing home facilities found that more than 50% of staff admitted to engaging in physical violence, mental abuse, or neglect of older patients. Furthermore, nearly 1/4 of the 190,592 complaints filed against nursing homes in 2012 constituted resident-on-resident physical or sexual abuse.

A 2009 study found that the vast majority of elder maltreatment is committed by someone familiar to the victim. Emotional and sexual maltreatment are most frequently committed by either a partner, spouse, or acquaintance; neglect by a child or grandchild; and physical maltreatment by a partner or spouse.

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**Table: Violent Elder Victimization**

- Stranger (51%)
- Acquaintance (26%)
- Other relative (9%)
- Intimate partner (9%)
- Unknown/Not specified (5%)

**Table: Types of Complaints Against Nursing Homes**

- Physical abuse: 29 (50%)
- Physical or sexual abuse by another resident: 22
- Psychological abuse: 21
- Gross neglect: 14
- Financial exploitation: 7
- Sexual abuse: 7

**Table: Perpetrator of Most Recent Maltreatment**

- Spouse/Partner: 25
- Acquaintance: 19
- Children/Grandchildren: 10
- Other relative: 7
- Stranger: 3


**C** X. Q. Dong, “Medical Implications of Elder Abuse and Neglect,” *Clinics in Geriatric Medicine* vol. 21, 2(2005): 293–313


