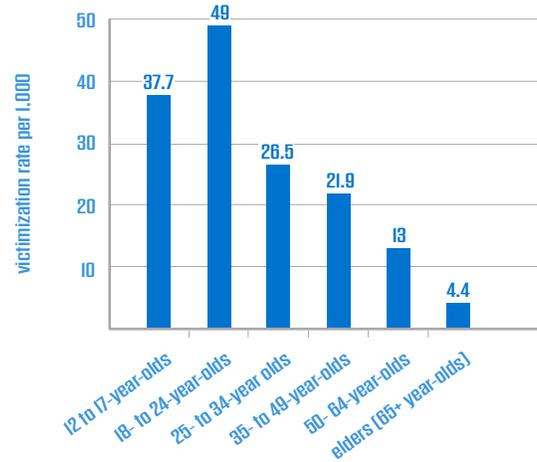


As the U.S. population ages, crimes against “the elderly” are gaining greater attention by researchers, policymakers, and the general public. Despite this increased interest, one initial—and unresolved—issue is how best to define “elderly.” While age 65 and above is commonly used, this definition varies across studies, state laws, and service providers such as Adult Protective Services. Another concern is that a single category of “elderly” is too broad no matter what age demarcation is used. Older adults vary widely in factors associated with victimization risk, such as their access to resources and support as well as physical and mental capacity.

Victimization data from the National Criminal Victimization Survey (NCVS) provide national rates of non-fatal crimes involving elderly victims. Studies based on police-based statistics focus on single states or groups of states that collect requisite incident-level information, particularly the age of the victim. Currently, national Uniform Crime Report data do not provide these details. NCVS data show that older adults overall have the lowest reported victimization rates in comparison to other age groups. Both victim- and police-based data indicate that the victimization experiences of older adults span all types of crime. Among these crimes, elder abuse and financial exploitation are of particular interest for victim service providers and policymakers. Isolation, reliance on caregivers, and decreased physical or mental capacity can increase older people’s exposure to physical and mental abuse. In addition, older adults—especially those on the brink of retirement or otherwise viewed as having resources to exploit—may be targeted for these crimes.

NCVS VIOLENT VICTIMIZATION BY VICTIM AGE, 2011



Violent Crime

- In 2011, people 65 years and older made up 12.8 percent of the U.S. population.¹ This age group experienced the lowest rate of violent victimization reported to the NCVS at 4.4 such victimizations per 1,000 persons age 65 and older, compared to 18 to 24-year-olds who experienced the most violent victimizations reported to the NCVS at 49 per 1,000 persons age 18 to 24.²

- One study examining police-reported homicides in several states highlighted the variation across age groups typically combined as “elderly.” When disaggregating the over-age-65 population into three categories, victim and incident characteristics differ between the “oldest old” victims (age 85 and older) and “young old” victims (age 65 to 74). A higher percentage of the oldest victims are female (60.6 percent compared to 41.0 percent), killed by family members (30.0 percent compared to 15.8 percent), and killed by personal contact weapons (37.5 percent compared to 15.8 percent).³
- In one study in Tennessee, 55 percent of elderly victims (65 and older) experienced no injury in an aggravated assault reported to police while 45 percent experienced injuries. Of those who experienced injuries, the majority (47 percent) were apparent minor injuries, followed by severe laceration (20 percent), other major injury (15 percent), possible internal injury (8 percent), and apparent broken bones (7 percent).⁴
- In one study in Michigan between 2005 and 2009, 3 of 10 victims over the age of 65 who had reported violence to the police were victimized by their own child or grandchild. Also, 38 percent of violent victimizations of female victims over the age of 65 involved the victim’s child or grandchild, while 23 percent of male victims over the age of 65 involved the victim’s child or grandchild.⁵

¹ Calculated from United States Census Bureau, *Age and Sex Composition in the United States: 2011*. (Washington, DC: United States Census Bureau, U.S. Department of Commerce, 2012), table 1, accessed September 19, 2013, <http://www.census.gov/population/age/data/2011comp.html>.

² Jennifer L. Truman, *Criminal Victimization, 2011*. (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice, 2012), table 5, accessed September 17, 2013, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv11.pdf>.

³ Lynn A. Addington, “Who Are You Calling Old? Measuring ‘Elderly’ and What It Means for Homicide Research,” *Homicide Studies*, 17: 134–53, tables 1 and 2.

⁴ This statistical overview cites a study of elder victimization in only one state, Tennessee, because comprehensive national-level data on this topic were not available. Calculated from Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Crime Statistics Unit, *Crimes Against the Elderly Report, 2009–2011*. (Nashville, TN: Tennessee Bureau of Investigation, Crime Statistics Unit, 2012), 7, accessed September 18, 2013, http://www.tbi.state.tn.us/tn_crime_stats/documents/CrimesAgainstElderlyReport2009_2011.pdf.

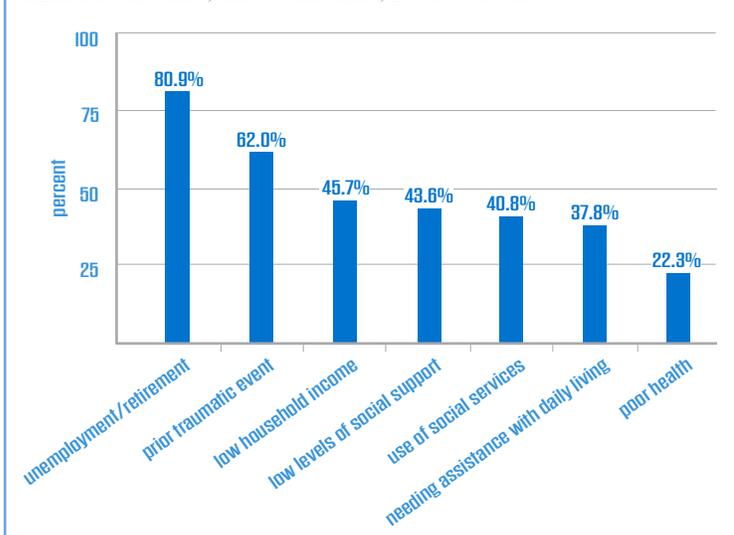
⁵ Erica Smith, *Violent Crime against the Elderly Reported by Law Enforcement in Michigan, 2005–2009*. (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Department of Justice 2012), 1, accessed September 18, 2013, <http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/vcerlem0509.pdf>.

- According to the FBI in 2011 in the United States, 607 people age 65 or older were murdered, or 4.8 percent of all murder victims whose ages are known.⁶
- Of those 607 homicide victims age 65 or older, 267 (or 44 percent) were female, compared to 22 percent of homicide victims of all ages.⁷

Elder Abuse

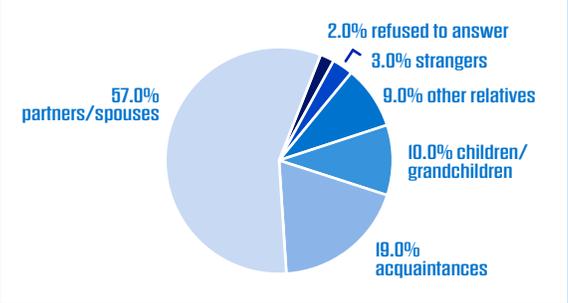
- In a nationally representative survey of adults age 60 and older, 1.6 percent reported that they had experienced physical mistreatment in the past year, and 5.2 percent were currently being financially exploited by family members.⁸
- In the same nationally representative survey of adults age 60 and older, contextual factors associated with a risk of elder mistreatment include the following: being unemployed or retired (81 percent); a prior traumatic event (62 percent); low household income (46 percent had less than \$35,000 per year combined for all members of the household); low levels of social support (44 percent); use of social services (41 percent); needing assistance with activities of daily living (38 percent); and poor health (22 percent).⁹

ELDER MISTREATMENT, AGE 60 AND OLDER, BY RISK FACTOR



- According to the nationally representative survey of adults age 60 and older, 76 percent of perpetrators of physical mistreatment were family members. Of those perpetrators, 57 percent were partners or spouses, 10 percent were children or grandchildren, and 9 percent were other relatives. Acquaintances accounted for 19 percent of physical mistreatment, and strangers made up 3 percent.¹⁰

PERPETRATORS OF PHYSICAL MISTREATMENT OF ELDERS (AGE 60 AND OLDER)



- In the same nationally representative survey of adults age 60 and older, less than 1 percent reported sexual mistreatment in the past year. Of those who were sexually abused, 16 percent reported the mistreatment to the police and 52 percent said they were sexually mistreated by a family member, with partners and spouses making up 40 percent.¹¹
- According to the nationally representative survey of adults age 60 and older, adults between 60 and 70 are at three times the risk of being emotionally abused compared to adults over the age of 70.¹²
- According to the nationally representative survey of adults age 60 and older, about 5 percent (or 1 in 20) reported emotional mistreatment in the past year. Of those, only 7.9 percent reported the mistreatment to law enforcement.¹³
- According to the nationally representative survey of adults age 60 and older, perpetrators of emotional abuse were most likely family members, such as partners or spouses (25 percent), children or grandchildren (19 percent), and other relatives (13 percent). Twenty-five percent of perpetrators of emotional abuse were acquaintances, and 9 percent were strangers.¹⁴

⁶ Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the United States, 2011*. (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Justice, 2012). Expanded Homicide Data Table 2, accessed September 19, 2013, <http://www.fbi.gov/about-us/cjis/ucr/crime-in-the-u.s/2011/crime-in-the-u.s.-2011/tables/expanded-homicide-data-table-2>.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ron Acierno et al., "National Elder Mistreatment Study," (U.S. Department of Justice grant report, NCJ 226456, March 2009), 5, accessed September 18, 2013, <https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles/nij/grants/226456.pdf>.

⁹ Social services include senior centers or day programs, physical rehabilitation, meal services, and social services or health services provided in home visits. Ibid.

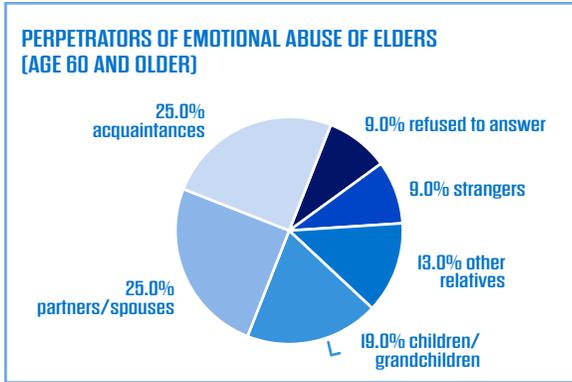
¹⁰ Ibid., 9.

¹¹ Ibid., 9, 46.

¹² Ibid., 8.

¹³ Ibid., 38.

¹⁴ Ibid., 7.



- In a 2012 nationally representative survey of over 2,000 adults age 40 and older, those age 65 and older were more likely to be targeted by offenders and more likely to lose money once targeted. Upon being solicited for fraud, older respondents were 34 percent more likely to lose money than respondents in their forties.¹⁹ +

- In a localized study of adults age 65 and older who reported to Adult Protective Services in one county in California for suspected physical elder abuse, 72 percent who had been abused within 30 days prior to examination had bruises; of those, 90 percent knew the cause of their bruises. In the same study, 56 percent of the abused adults had at least one bruise 5 cm or larger compared to only 7 percent of adults who were not abused.¹⁵

Financial Crime

- A 2010 Internet Crime Complaint Center study discovered a trend in the increasing number of incidents of Internet crime reported by those individuals in the 50 to 59 and 60 and older categories.¹⁶ The 2011 study found little change in the age groups that filed complaints between 2010 and 2011.¹⁷
- Of those who reported both crimes and their age to the Federal Trade Commission in 2012, people 60 and older made 26 percent of fraud complaints compared to 22 percent in 2011 and 15 percent in 2010. Those 60 and older made 19 percent of identity theft complaints compared to 15 percent in 2011 and 13 percent in 2010.¹⁸



¹⁵ Aileen Wigglesworth et al., "Bruising as a Marker of Physical Elder Abuse," *Journal of the American Geriatric Society* 57, no. 7 (2009): 1191-94, accessed September 4, 2013, <http://www.pekdadvocacy.com/documents/eldercare/Bruising.pdf>.

¹⁶ Internet Crime Complaint Center, *2010 Internet Crime Report*, (National White Collar Crime Center, 2011), 6, accessed September 4, 2012, www.ic3.gov/media/annualreport/2010_IC3Report.pdf.

¹⁷ Internet Crime Complaint Center, *2011 Internet Crime Report*, (National White Collar Crime Center, 2012), 9, accessed September 18, 2013, http://www.ic3.gov/media/annualreport/2011_IC3Report.pdf.

¹⁸ Federal Trade Commission, "Consumer Sentinel Network Data Book for January-December 2012," [2013], 10, 14, accessed September 18, 2013, <http://ftc.gov/sentinel/reports/sentinel-annual-reports/sentinel-cy2012.pdf>.

¹⁹ Applied Research & Consulting LLC, "Financial Fraud and Fraud Susceptibility in the United States: Research Report from a 2012 National Study," (New York, NY: Applied Research & Consulting LLC, 2013), 3, accessed October 3, 2013, http://www.finrafoundation.org/web/groups/sai/@sai/documents/sai_original_content/p337731.pdf?utm_source=MM6utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=Foundation_News_091213_FINAHtt://.