ABSTRACT

CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS AND POLICE DETECTIVES

By Jill N. Hupp

The purpose of this research is to explore how students and police detectives view crimes against older adults, and how their views are related to their knowledge and attitudes about aging. Surveys were collected from 123 students from sociology, criminology, and gerontology courses at a Midwestern university and 36 surveys were collected from detectives at a local police department. Information on the participants’ general knowledge and attitudes of aging and of crimes against older adults was collected. The overall findings of this research suggest that there is a lack of knowledge about general aging issues and criminal issues among the respondents. The data also suggest that there is ageism in how crimes against older adults are viewed from both the student and detective populations.
CRIMES AGAINST OLDER ADULTS: PERSPECTIVES OF STUDENTS AND POLICE DETECTIVES

A Thesis

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Chapter 1

Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

Introduction

A 94-year-old woman, living in an assisted living facility, was punched in the head by a worker; someone that she knew and trusted (St. Petersburg Times, February 15, 2005). In this case the victim reported her attack, with support from other workers in the facility; but not everyone has the chance or proper resources to do so. Elder victimization, which includes abuse and other crimes, has not been properly addressed by either the criminal justice field or in the academic fields of gerontology or criminology.

While professionals working in specialized elder victimization services, such as Adult Protective Services (APS) and Ombudsman Programs, are well trained on these issues of concern, first response personnel who are helping older adults who have been victims of crime may not be specifically trained. Although these professionals, particularly police officers and detectives, are well educated in the criminal field, they may still need to be trained specifically on crimes against older adults. One way to find out if there is a need for this type of training is to assess how these individuals view crimes against older adults, and how these views are related to the knowledge and attitudes they have about aging. These two research questions will be addressed in this study.

In addition to the police officers and detectives who help older victims of crime or abuse, future professionals in the field would benefit from education about crimes and aging. Specifically, are criminology and gerontology students being well educated on this topic? In order to answer this question, students from these classes are also included in the study. In addition, students from an introductory sociology course are included for comparison purposes. Even though the students from these classes are not first responders in the criminal field, many of them in criminology and gerontology programs will work with older adults who have been victimized. This makes it important for academic programs to make sure that students are well educated about general aging issues, as well as victimization issues facing older adults. Including them in this study
will allow the researcher to gain an understanding of how current students view crimes against older adults, and how these views are related to their knowledge and attitudes about aging.

Even though the primary purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the perspectives of students and detectives on crimes against older adults, there is an overarching purpose that this research might ultimately contribute to helping with the rising problem of elder victimization by increasing awareness among those working first hand with this vulnerable population. With better training, they will be able to better address this rising problem and also act as stronger advocates for the victims.

**Background/Literature Review**

Criminology students and police detectives have basic knowledge and understanding of the crimes that face the American people, but how do they view crimes against older adults? Gerontology students also should have a basic understanding of crimes facing older adults, but how educated are they on these issues? How are these views related to their knowledge and attitudes about aging? By asking these questions, we can gain a better understanding of the education and training given to these individuals, and better assess whether more training on this topic is necessary. The following few pages will include a literature review of ageism, ageism in the criminal field, elder/criminal victimization, elder abuse, elder homicide, and solutions for elder abuse. These topics reach the heart of the research questions being asked for this study.

**Ageism**

An important question raised in this work is: why would professionals or students view crimes against older people differently from crimes against those that are younger. Does ageism enter into the decision making process when one views a crime? Are we less likely to investigate the death of an older person, when the cause is unclear? Since ageism might be a factor in the analysis of this research study, it is important to define ageism and to discuss how it can be a factor in the criminal justice field.
A good definition of ageism is “a process of systematic stereotyping of and discrimination against people because they are old, just as racism and sexism accomplish this with skin color and gender. Old people are characterized as senile, rigid in thought and manner, old-fashioned in morality and skills…Ageism allows the younger generations to see older people as different from themselves; thus they subtly cease to identify with their elders and human beings” (Eglit, 2005 pg. 59). As this definition suggests, there are many ways in which a person can be ageist. Humor is one way to express ageism, and most of this is in a negative light (Palmore, 2005). “The majority of humor about the aged shows ageist attitudes, some is ambivalent, and very little shows positive attitudes” (Palmore, 2005 pg. 87). Another way ageism is expressed is through imposing treatment based on stereotypes, which originates from a person’s prejudice (Eglit, 2005 and Falk & Falk, 1997). Following is a typical scenario of an older person experiencing ageism based on another’s perception of them.

Rosalyn Abner was not invited to the confirmation party of a young neighbor even though she had chauffeured this youngster and his siblings many times. She had also supported these neighbors’ business ventures whenever they wanted to sell something to Mrs. Abner. She was later told by the parents, “They were mostly young people at the festivities, you wouldn’t have enjoyed it” (Falk & Falk, 1997, pg. 17).

The kind of ageism presented in this example is based on others’ views and perceptions of the older population. These views and perceptions were the main drive for much of the ageism in the past, and also much of it today (Falk & Falk, 1997).

Ageism in the Criminal Field

This research examines how one’s knowledge and attitudes about aging and crimes affects one’s perception of crime. Even though professionals in the criminal field have recently received training on cultural sensitivity, older adults have been ignored in this “movement of specialized training” (Lachs et al., 2004). Some however, have raised the argument that including older people in training as a “special population” is itself ageist. In response others have argued that functional disabilities increase with age and this in turn could make older people more vulnerable targets of crime (Lachs et al., 2004). The following is an example of how ageism could occur when examining a crime.
Thomas Green, a seventy-year-old gentleman with an unblemished driving record, was hit in the rear of his new 1995 Plymouth by a teenager who was joyriding with a carload of other youngsters. Mr. Green had traveled at a normal speed when this accident occurred. When the police arrived, they immediately held Thomas responsible since he was wearing thick glasses and “no doubt had traveled too slowly.” They listened to the teenager although he had caused the accident by speeding (Falk & Falk, 1997, pg. 16).

As America ages, “we can expect the prevalence of police interactions with older people to increase (Lachs et al., 2004). First responders will experience this increased interaction, as will detectives, policy makers, researchers, and community advocates. It is advisable to “consider the enormous influences this [older] population will have on daily police activity, and how law enforcement might be uniquely trained to improve quality of life for older citizens” (Lachs et al., 2004). Some have suggested that specialized training might be one solution to a possible problem of ageism in the criminal field. Another solution, which is already in play, is the Elder Justice Act that will help enhance training about older adults to law enforcement personnel. This act also “supports a number of research and data collection activities that should begin to define this problem not only in social service terms but as a “crime” problem. This is absolutely critical if law enforcement is to ever develop the necessary responses” (Thomas, 2002).

Now that a basic understanding of ageism in the criminal field has been established, an explanation of elder/criminal victimization will be presented.

**Elder/Criminal Victimization**

Elder victimization includes all criminal and abusive acts directed toward older adults. Criminal victimization is defined as any act against a person that is punishable by law, such as sexual assault, robbery, burglary, felonious assault, and homicide. Some types of elder abuse fall within the category of criminal victimization, such as physical, sexual, and financial abuse. Crime itself is defined as “an act proscribed by law and subject to punishment. It can be an omission instead of an act, namely a failure to act where the law imposes a duty to act” (Encyclopedia of Crime and Justice, Volume 1, 2002). Other kinds of elder abuse are not punishable by law, such as emotional and psychological abuse. Even though offenders of non-criminal abuse cannot be arrested,
organizations such as Adult Protective Services can intervene and potentially help stop this abuse from continuing. Many of the perpetrators of elder abuse are known by their victim whether it be a family member, friend, or caregiver (Soos, 1999 & 2000). Not all crimes against older people are committed by someone who is known to the victim.

On November 4, 2005, a 65-year-old woman died from stab wounds after she was attacked inside her apartment building for the elderly and disabled. She was stabbed multiple times and the suspect left the knife in her throat. This case is still unresolved, but it is believed that the suspects’ apparent motive was robbery, based in part on evidence that the assailant had broken into the victim’s apartment (The Boston Globe, November 5, 2005). This is a perfect example of criminal victimization against older adults. Another type of criminal victimization that deserves further explanation is elder homicide. Research has been conducted on homicides against older people, and it shows that there are many of these homicides that are undetected. This research also suggests that law enforcement personnel, as well as medical professionals, need to be better educated about elder victimization, specifically homicides (Soos, 1999 & 2000). The following literature on elder abuse and homicide will provide more in-depth look at this elder victimization problem, and also gives more support for the education of professionals and students who might work with victimized older adults.

**Elder Abuse**

Kathryn Melanson, a 47-year-old, who lives with her husband, Thomas, was arrested on October 5, 2005 and accused of raiding her 89-year-old father’s bank and investment accounts between 2000-2004. Her father’s accounts showed a shortfall of over $180,000 (The Hartford Courant Company, October, 6, 2005). This is a typical case of the rising problem of financial abuse against older people, which is most commonly defined as “the illegal or improper use of an older person’s funds, property, or resources” (National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse website, www.preventelderabuse.org, 2005).

As you can see elder abuse is a complex problem that can emerge from several different causes, and that often has roots in multiple factors (American Psychological Association website, www.apa.org, 2005). Such factors can be found in the typology of
the elder abuse offenders, which has already been identified by elder abuse researchers (Holly Ramsey-Klawsnik, 2000).

“Elder abuse is an all-inclusive term representing all types of mistreatment or abusive behavior toward older adults. This mistreatment can be an act of commission (abuse) or omission (neglect), intentional or unintentional, and of one or more types: physical, psychological (or emotional), or financial abuse and neglect that result in unnecessary suffering, injury, pain, loss or violation of human rights, and decreased quality of life” (Wolf, Generations, Summer 2000).

Based on the most recent year for which data on elder abuse are available, it was found that in the 43 participating states, a total of 473,000 cases of elder abuse were reported in 2000 (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2005). As shocking as this number may seem to some people, it should still be considered that seven states did not report, which could account for hundreds of thousands more cases. An even more shocking number is the estimated (unreported and reported) 1 to 2 million elder abuse incidents that happen every year (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2005).

In 1998, more than 550,000 cases of elder abuse were reported, and among the known perpetrators of this abuse, 90 percent of them were family members (Administration on Aging website, Elder Abuse, 2005). Two-thirds of the perpetrators were adult children or spouses. With such a high percentage of elder abuse being committed by a family member, it is not hard to believe that this is a problem that can be easily “hidden under the shroud of family secrecy” (National Center on Elder Abuse, 1999). Although many people perceive elder abuse and neglect as a problem limited to nursing home settings, it is important to rid people of this false assumption and ensure they know that most elder abuse and neglect happens at home and that many perpetrators are the caregivers (American Psychological Association website, www.apa.org, 2005). The complex problem of elder abuse can emerge from many different causes, but in the end this abuse leads to personal losses that can be devastating to the victim, including the loss of independence, home, life savings, health, dignity, and security (National Committee for the Prevention of Elder Abuse website, www.preventelderabuse.org, 2005).
Who abuses – and why? The answer to this question would be extremely beneficial to those professionals in the field of criminal justice, and to the prospective professionals. Knowing the types of elder abuse offenders will likely be involved with, could ultimately help in identifying a suspect in an elder abuse or homicide case. Ramsey-Klawsnik (2000) identifies types of elder abuse offenders: (1) the overwhelmed, (2) the impaired, (3) the narcissistic, (4) the domineering, or bullying, and (5) the sadistic. This typology is based on different factors such as caregiver stress, impaired caregivers, personal gain, need to have power and authority, and taking pleasure in their victims’ fear (Ramsey-Klawnsnik, 2000).

Elder Homicide

Dolores Carr, 78, had reported being burglarized three times and robbed once at her home in the summer of 2005. When her son came to visit her on November 3rd, 2005, he found her in the dining room - dead and horribly beaten. A window in the back of her house was broken, suggesting a robbery (The Buffalo News, November 3, 2005). Some have termed it eldercide (Soos, 1999), others geronticide (Brogden, 2001), but whatever you call it, killing older adults is the “ultimate elder abuse” (Soos, 2000). Dolores Carr reported multiple burglaries to the police that happened in and outside her home, but it seems that there was nothing done to help her ensure that this would not happen again. Ultimately, her life was taken, and maybe by the same offenders that previously robbed her. What has become a major concern for some professionals in the criminal, medical, and academic field are not homicides, such as this one, but the number of crimes that are undetected.

Nick Glumac was a 73-year-old man who was declared dead on June 19, 1999. Nick had been struggling with cancer for a while, and it seemed to finally take his life. By his side throughout the past year was his caregiver, Heather Shaw, who lived with him rent-free. She helped bathe and feed him, and give him his medications. Nobody had suspected Heather of killing Nick, but it finally came out that she had been slowly poisoning him by putting antifreeze in his coffee (Cheshes, 2002).

This is just one case of an initially undetected homicide, but people like Joseph Soos, a former homicide detective, believe hundreds, maybe thousands, more older
people are victims of a “gray murder” – which is defined as the unlawful homicide of a person, age 65 years or more, conducted with malice aforethought solely to benefit the offender and in such a manner that is was misclassified or undetected due to age-presumption on the part of the medical-criminal justice-social services communities (Soos, 2000). Mr. Soos once stated in an interview: “You see an old guy like me lying dead on the floor. As long as I don’t have any bullet holes in me, as long as I haven’t been beaten, the television is there, the door is secure, I don’t have a rope around my neck – what is the cause? Natural death (Cheshes, 2002).”

Soos’ Gray Murders project is intended to assist the working cop, prosecutor, adult protective services investigator, doctor, nurse, paramedics, and other to recognize, prevent, detect and prosecute unrecognized homicides of older adults (Soos, 1999). This study has shown that there are many homicides of older adults that are being overlooked and it pushes for the training of these professionals, who work with older adults who could be victims, about the criminal issues facing the older population. Others agree with Soos that many investigatory procedures are flawed and it is important to educate people in the field about the older population (Brogden, 2001, Payne, 2003, and Scripps Gerontology Center, 1987).

The Bureau of Crime Statistics 2000 update showed that homicide rates have overall been declining. It also showed that homicides rates of older people have been declining, but do these numbers include this ‘hidden epidemic’ of gray murders? According to Soos, Brogden, and Payne, who want to create awareness about elder victimization, so crimes such as these might never be overlooked again.

Elder victimization is a rising problem and educating people about this issue will help ensure that these crimes are not being overlooked. The main purpose of this study is to understand the perceptions of students and professionals concerning older people as victims of crime and abuse. In reaching this purpose, we might also address the overarching problem of elder victimization.
Solutions for Elder Abuse

What can be done to help older adults feel safer in their own home? The few specific elder abuse and homicide cases that were shared in the previous pages are very similar to hundreds, if not thousands, more that occur every year. In order to prepare for such an increase, professionals in the criminal field should be confident in their knowledge about older adults. This is a concern that some in the criminal and academic fields have already begun addressing (Payne and Berg, 2003, Soos, 1999, Scripps Gerontology Center, 1987, Payne, 2003, and Payne et al., 2001).

There are certain societal attitudes, such as the devaluation and lack of respect for older adults, which make it easier for elder abuse to continue without detection or intervention (American Psychological Association website, 2005). The only way to overcome these attitudes is to be proactive and to educate people about older adults and the problems and stereotypes they face on a daily basis. Groups in Ohio that are raising awareness about elder abuse and neglect to the public, and also educating older adults about what they can do, include the Ohio Elder Abuse Task Force and Pro Seniors. The Ohio Elder Abuse Task Force stated that their goals in 2004 included:

1) Increase public awareness of the prevalence and impact of elder abuse.
2) Educate the public on identifying and reporting elder abuse.
3) Educate the public on risk factors and preventative measures.
4) Provide legislators with relevant information to make informed policy decisions on elder abuse.

Pro Seniors is an organization that is dedicated to helping older adults maintain their independence by empowering them, by protecting their interests, and by helping them access resources (Pro Seniors website, www.proseniors.org, 2005). This organization offers legal hotline services, and provides free legal and long-term care help to older adults. Another service of Pro Seniors is their Ombudsman investigators, who handle complaints about home care and adult care facilities.

These two organizations are just a few examples of the kind of services that will change the way people view older adults and how older adults view themselves. They are part of the solution to overcoming the growing problem of elder abuse and neglect.
Existing Research on Students and Law Enforcement Personnel

Although not much research has been conducted on the perspectives of students and detectives on crimes against older adults, there are a few studies that are beneficial to discuss. These studies take a closer look at students, but also include some professionals in the criminal field.

Brian Payne and Bruce Berg (2003) conducted research on criminal justice students’ understanding, or misunderstanding, on issues facing older adults. In this study, Payne and Berg compared the attitudes of criminal justice students about older persons, to the attitudes of members of three occupational groups: nursing home administrators, nursing home professionals, and police chiefs. They argue that it is important for criminal justice students to have an understanding of issues facing older adults for the following four reasons:

1) With the older population already growing, a number of occupations and professions dealing with older persons will be available to the college graduate.

2) Regardless of the occupation where criminal justice students eventually land, they will, in one way or another, work with older persons.

3) When current criminal justice students are in positions of power to make decisions of policy, they will be confronted with a number of important decisions about ways to meet the needs of older persons.

This study was conducted to determine what students think about the older population and whether certain intervention strategies are needed to better educate younger persons about older members of their community. In general, the findings of this research showed that students seem to see social issues as important to older persons, but not crime problems. As the previous pages have shown, crime is a very important issue for the older population. In their study recommendations, Payne and Berg suggest that students need to be better educated about issues facing older adults. A few of their suggestions include:

1) Encouraging gerontology classes as a portion of college and universities’ general education or liberal arts requirements for all college students.

2) Offering courses that focus exclusively on crime in the lives of older adults.
3) Encouraging students to volunteer in programs offering services to older persons.

Another study conducted that also shows the importance of educating students and law enforcement officers about issues facing older adults is *Attitudes about Sanctioning Elder Abuse Offenders Among Police Chiefs, Nursing Home Employees, and Students* (Payne et al. 2001). This research stressed that it is important to understand how various individuals perceive the role of the criminal justice system in preventing cases of elder abuse and victimization.

1) Students of sociology and criminal justice have likely only read about various types of abuse – including elder abuse – but are beginning to develop attitudes and perceptions regarding these behaviors and the individuals who perpetrate them. So it is very important for students to be properly educated about older adults and criminal issues they face (Payne et al., 2001).

2) It may be necessary to raise the consciousness of the police and prosecutors so they pursue elder abuse cases (Payne et al., 2001).

3) Regardless of the sub-culture, structure, or daily experiences of the groups, cases of elder abuse permeate the boundaries of society and effective handling of the cases requires an integrated response, whereby nursing home practitioners and law enforcement officers cooperate in intervening in and preventing such offenses (Payne et al., 2001).

The findings of these two research studies show that in battling elder abuse and victimization, we must educate those in the criminal and educational fields about issues facing older adults. By educating students of criminal justice, they can begin their career without, or with little, stereotypes against older adults. In educating those who are already in the criminal field about elder victimization, they will be better prepared to handle cases involving any of these issues. After reviewing the research literature on elder abuse and victimization, it is apparent that it is important to ensure that students and detectives are well educated about the older population and the issues they face.
Chapter 2

Methodology

The purpose of this research study is to better understand how students and police detectives understand aging and crimes against older people. The project will focus on knowledge and attitudes about aging, with a concentration on the age of the victim, in order to determine if age makes a difference in how crimes are investigated or viewed, both at the college level (where future professionals are trained) and at the professional level (detectives). The general outcome expected from this research is an understanding of the role that the age of the victim plays in investigating/viewing a crime, and whether the participant’s views are related to their knowledge and attitudes about age that the participants hold. The main research questions asked during this study are: How do college students and detectives view crimes against older people? How are these views related to their knowledge and attitudes about aging? In order to best answer these questions and successfully complete this research project, it will be approached quantitatively through a structured survey of police and University students.

Sample

The convenience sample for this study was students enrolled in introductory sociology, upper level criminology, and upper level gerontology at a Midwestern University. I chose the introductory sociology class as a base comparison for the other two upper level classes. Criminology and Gerontology classes were chosen because they are two programs that should be knowledgeable about aging and crimes against older adults. The detectives are part of an urban police department, where the primary researcher currently has an internship. Students completed the surveys before, during, or after their class time. A total of 165 surveys were handed out to the students and a total of 50 surveys were handed out to the detectives. The final count of surveys from the students was 123, and the detectives were 36, a total response rate of 74%. It should be emphasized that in neither case are these samples random, and thus are not representative
of students or detectives. As an exploratory study to learn more about this topic, this methodology is practical and appropriate.

To recruit students for participation in this study, the primary researcher worked with professors at the University. To recruit detectives from the urban police department, the primary researcher got the approval of the supervising Lieutenant of all detectives. The researcher met with this supervisor and explained the study to him, and will also present the findings to him after the research is completed. There was no monetary compensation for participating in this study. Compensation will be in the form of sharing results, in which the researcher will offer to present her research to the police department and all classes that participated in the study.

Survey

The measurement tool used for this research study is a structured survey. This survey consists of questions that address the participant’s knowledge and attitudes about aging (general and crime specific), and a case scenario about the investigation process during a crime, which will concentrate on the age of the victim. The length of time for filling out each survey was between 15 and 20 minutes. The first section of the survey, which tests the participants’ knowledge and attitudes about aging, includes questions about; the ability of older drivers, prevalence rates of mental health problems and Alzheimers, and nursing home use of older people (refer to Appendix A, questions 1-13). After analyzing the answers to the questions in this section, the researcher will understand the general knowledge and attitudes that the participants have about the older population.

The second section focused on crimes against older adults. Areas covered in this component of the survey include rates of elder victimization, unreported incidences of elder abuse, family and caregiver abuse, and homicides against older adults (refer to Appendix A, questions 14-26). The answers from this section will give the researcher a basic understanding of the knowledge and attitudes the participants have about crimes against older adults. The last section of the survey includes a case scenario that addressed questions of investigation tactics. Half of the participants answered the first case scenario, and half answered the second case scenario. The only difference between
the scenarios is the age of the victim; every other detail is exactly the same (refer to Appendix A, case scenarios A and B). After each case scenario, all respondents answered questions regarding the initial investigation techniques for the case scenario. This component of the survey includes questions regarding an autopsy, further investigation, foul play, and cause of death of the victim (refer to Appendix A, case scenario questions).

Study Limitations

There are limitations of this study within areas of sampling, sample size, and survey questions. To get the participants for this study, a convenience sample was used. There was no random selection of participants, and therefore they were not representative of the larger population of students and detectives. The sample size for this study was relatively small, and therefore presents limitations in generalizing the findings of this research to the larger population. Within the survey tool used for this study the True/False questions limit the choices that the participants had to choose from, therefore forcing them to choose True or False and not giving them an option of ‘not sure’ or ‘don’t know’. All of these limitations must be kept into consideration while analyzing the findings of this research.
Chapter 3

Findings

This chapter presents findings from surveys conducted with University students enrolled in three courses; upper level gerontology, introductory sociology, and upper level criminology, and detectives working on an urban police force. This chapter will include a description of survey respondents and an analysis of major findings.

Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents

The first section includes demographic data that were collected from both students and detectives. In total, 159 respondents completed the surveys. Of these surveys, 123 (77%) were completed by students from a Midwestern university, enrolled in three different classes, and 36 of them were completed by police detectives. A description of the student characteristics in each of the three separate classes (Introductory Sociology (N=56), Criminology (N=35), and Gerontology (N=32)) is presented below in Table I.

The average age of the student population is 20.4, with the three classes being relatively close in age, although the criminology class students are slightly older. Two-thirds of the students are female, although three-fourths of the gerontology students were female, compared to 57% of the criminology students. The introductory sociology class consists of mostly freshmen and sophomores, the criminology class consists of mostly juniors and seniors, and the gerontology class is evenly spread through all four years of school.

The detective respondents, as a group, have considerable experience on the police force. Respondents report on average almost 22 years on the force and their average age was almost 46. The majority of detectives who responded were male (86%). This reflects the demographic patterns of the detectives on the force. The police units that completed the surveys include: General Assignment, Homicide, Special Victims Unit, Grand Theft Auto, Sexual Assault, Robbery, and Burglary.
### Table I

#### Student Characteristics

<table>
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<th>Intro Sociology</th>
<th>Criminology</th>
<th>Gerontology</th>
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N = 56           N = 35               N = 32             N = 123

### Table II

#### Detective Characteristics

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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Years on police force (avg.)</td>
<td>21.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 36
**Knowledge About Aging**

In the first stage of the analysis, data will be presented from the survey questions designed to identify the respondents’ knowledge about aging. The section consisted of 26 True/False questions, in which thirteen questions focused on general aging issues, and thirteen concentrated on crime and older adults.

*Table III,* shows an assessment of general aging knowledge, criminology and aging knowledge, and a total score for students. The general knowledge results show the gerontology students recording a slightly higher average score; however, the differences across classes are not statistically significant. Small sample sizes lower the probability of finding significant differences across groups.

The criminology class had a significantly higher score than the other students on the crime and aging questions. For example, criminology student’s averaged 64% correct, compared to 57% of the gerontology students. In looking at total score, the criminology student’s scored slightly higher as well, driven by their stronger performance on the crime and aging section. On average, the total average scores for the students were relatively low, taking into consideration that these questions were True/False.

The detectives’ knowledge of aging, as compared to the students are presented in *Table IV.* On average the detectives had a higher proportion of correct answers than the students overall. On the general aging questions, the detectives recorded 74% correct compared to 70% for the students. Only the gerontology students had a higher score in this area. None of these differences are however, statistically significant. For the questions that concentrate on crime and aging, the detectives recorded higher scores than the students, and this difference is statistically significant. The average detective score was 73%, compared to 61% for the students. This direction of difference and significance holds true in the comparison between the detectives and each of the three classes.

Results for the total score on aging quiz, the detectives scored significantly higher than the students, with an average of 73% correct for the detectives, compared to 65% for the combined student group. The total score for the detectives was significantly higher
than the gerontology and introductory sociology classes. The comparison between detectives and criminology students was not statistically significant.

**Table III**

Scores on Aging Quiz  
(average percentage of students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aging Test Scores</th>
<th>Intro Sociology</th>
<th>Criminology</th>
<th>Gerontology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>64.7</td>
<td>66.4*</td>
<td>64.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Aging Section</td>
<td>68.2</td>
<td>68.8</td>
<td>74.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Section</td>
<td>61.7</td>
<td>64.4*</td>
<td>56.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 54        N = 35        N = 30

**Table IV**

Scores on Aging Quiz  
(average percentage of total students and detectives)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Aging Test Scores</th>
<th>Detectives</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Score</td>
<td>73*</td>
<td>65.2*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General Aging Section</td>
<td>73.5</td>
<td>69.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Crime Section</td>
<td>72.8*</td>
<td>61.2*</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 119        N = 33

*Score differences were statistically significant based on the ANOVA analysis.
Case Scenario Responses

As described in the methodology chapter, half of the students and detectives were provided a case scenario where the age of the victim was 40, and the others responded to a scenario where the victim was 80 years old. The scenario explained an incident where a man was found dead, lying fully clothed on his bed. This man had no history of any health problems, and the case scenario does not give the cause of death of the victim. The reason for having this section as part of the survey was to see if there were differences in the way respondents view crimes when only the age of the victim varied. After reading the case study, respondents answered an open-ended question about the cause of death for the victim. These responses were later recoded into four mutually exclusive categories; Foul Play, Suicide, Can’t Say, and Natural Causes.

Student’s results from the case scenario are presented in Table V. In analyzing responses to the scenario about the 40 year old victim, differences do exist between the classes. Roughly the same proportion of sociology and gerontology students felt the victim died from some type of foul play, but a lower percentage of criminology students responded that way. There were no criminology students who thought the victim committed suicide, whereas a significantly higher proportion of gerontology students (20%) answered this way. The sociology students had the highest percentage of the three classes in answering ‘can’t say’ (23%), compared to no gerontology students answering this way. The majority of all three classes felt that the victim died of natural causes, which included death from heart attack, stroke, old age, and any other health related deaths. The criminology students identified ‘natural causes’ more often than the other two classes (77% criminology, 50% sociology, 60% gerontology).

A review of student responses to the case scenario when the victim was 80 years old victim in the case scenario shows some differences, but none reaching statistical significance. More gerontology students felt that the 80 year old victim died of ‘foul play’ (20%), compared to 7% of the criminology students. Almost none of the respondents in any of the classes felt that suicide was a probable cause of death for the older victim. Once again, the majority of the students from each class felt that the victim died from ‘natural causes’, with the highest percentage coming from gerontology students (80%), followed by criminology students (71%), and then sociology students (64%).
Table V

Case Scenario Responses
(percentages for students)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>40 yr old / 80 yr. old:</th>
<th>Intro Sociology</th>
<th>Criminology</th>
<th>Gerontology</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cause of Death</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foul Play</td>
<td>19.2 / 16</td>
<td>17.6 / 7.1</td>
<td>20 / 20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>7.7 / 4</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
<td>20 / 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t Say</td>
<td>23.1 / 16</td>
<td>5.9 / 21.4</td>
<td>0 / 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural cause</td>
<td>50 / 64</td>
<td>76.5 / 71.4</td>
<td>60 / 80</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 56                  N = 35                 N = 32

*These data tested with Chi-Square analyses.

The analysis also includes a comparison between students and detectives on these two case scenario options. Data comparing the responses of the 40 and 80 year old victim case scenarios are suggestive of possible differences; however, none of the differences are statistically significant. Although some of the findings are potentially interesting, the small sample sizes of the groups simply do not allow for a comparison of these three variables across the classes. Table VI shows the combined student group and the detectives. Some differences are noted between these two groups for the two scenarios. In both groups, respondents were significantly more likely to assume that the 80 year old victim had died of natural causes compared to the 40 year old victim. The proportional differences were larger for the detectives where 22% of officers felt that natural causes was the probable reason for death, compared to 50% for the 80 year old victim. Again, while substantively significant in some cases, small sample sizes, especially for the detective group, limit definitive conclusions from this analysis.
Students were also more likely to assume ‘natural causes’ for the 80 year old, but the differences were smaller than the detective group (60% for 40 years old versus 70% for 80 years old). The detectives were also much less likely to have a definitive conclusion about the cause of death for the 40 year old victim. Sixty-one percent of detectives responded ‘can’t say’ to the 40 year old case, compared to 33% for the 80 year old. Interestingly, the students were much less likely to say ‘can’t say’ than the detectives. For example, for the 40 year old victim 12% of the students answered in this way, compared to 61% of the detectives. Many of the detectives wrote that more investigation was needed to be done before a cause of death could be determined.

In comparing responses of students to detectives for the scenario about the 40 years old category, some significant differences were identified. A higher proportion of students answered that the 40 year old died from ‘natural causes’, as well as ‘foul play’. For the 80 year old case scenario, proportionately more students than detectives identified ‘natural causes’ and ‘foul play’, but these differences are not significant. Overall, there was more variability in the detective’s responses across the scenarios than there was of students.

Table VI

Case Scenario Responses
(percentages for total students and detectives)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause of Death</th>
<th>Total Students</th>
<th>Detectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Foul Play</td>
<td>19 / 14.8</td>
<td>5.6 / 0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Suicide</td>
<td>8.6 / 1.9</td>
<td>11.1 / 16.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Can’t Say</td>
<td>12.1 / 13</td>
<td>61.1 / 33.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Natural cause</td>
<td>60.3 / 70.4</td>
<td>22.2 / 50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 123               N = 36

*Chi-Square analyses were conducted on these data.
Chapter 4

Implications

Implications for research

Although much research has been conducted on elder abuse and older people as victims of crime, little research has been conducted about the education that police officers, detectives, and students receive on this subject. We know that there are between 1 and 2 million cases of elder abuse every year, but only 4-5 hundred thousand of these cases are actually reported (National Center on Elder Abuse, 2005). This suggests a problem in identifying older adults who have been victims of crime or, and indicates that further research is needed to address the problem of unreported and overlooked cases. Results of this and other studies suggest that further research should be conducted on the education of first responders and students to better recognize crimes against older people. (Soos, 1999 & 2000, Brogden, 2001, and Payne and Berg, 2003).

Future research on detectives and first responders

The findings from this study show that detectives had the highest scores on the aging quiz, but they also had the highest differences in their scenario responses comparing the 40 and 80 year old victims. This shows that age of the victim could be an important factor as detectives make decisions about crime. Even though the detectives seemed to be relatively well educated on general issues and criminal victimization issues against older adults, age was still a factor in their assessment of the case scenario. Further research on those working in the criminal field should be conducted in order to clarify why the detectives from this study have relatively high knowledge about older adults and crimes against older adults, but are still influenced by the victim’s age while investigating crimes. Future research should not only include detectives as the subject population, but also first responders such as police officers and emergency medical technicians. The sample size and sampling frame for future studies on this subject should also be more systematic and larger so generalizations can be made.
The importance of conducting future research on first responders will intensify as the population ages. As previously stated, crime and abuse of older people is on the rise, and so are the numbers of cases that go unreported. Also, there seems to be a ‘hidden epidemic’ of elder homicide in which first responders and investigators may assume the victim died of natural causes, simply based on their age (Soos, 1999 & 2000). Future research on this subject is needed because first responders and investigators are the groups that can make sure victimized older adults’ voices are being heard, and can put a stop to the initial ageist assumptions that arise when first responding to and further investigating crimes against this vulnerable population.

**Future research on students**

The findings from this study show that all groups of students recorded a relatively low score on the aging quiz. The introductory Sociology course had the lowest scores overall, but they were not far off from the scores of the Criminology and Gerontology students. The lower scores of the Sociology students were not a surprise, considering the majority of them were freshmen and sophomores who have taken fewer classes than the students in the other two classes. It was expected that the Criminology and Gerontology students would earn higher scores than they actually did. The findings from this research suggest that there is a lack of knowledge of this subject. Future research would be beneficial in better understanding the lack of knowledge these students have in this subject. This research should also have a much larger sample size than that used in this study, so that generalizations can be made. It is especially important for Criminology and Gerontology students, who will be the most likely of all students to work with victimized older adults, to have a strong hold on the issues facing older adults. Being confident that these students are well educated on crimes facing older adults, is essential in helping this vulnerable population overcome the assumptions that society has about them.

**Implications for Practice**

Although future research is needed to fully understand the problem at hand, it is extremely important not to delay any action being taken in the field, including both the criminal and educational fields.
Educating Detectives and First Responders

Assuming that the age of the victim may influence the course of action taken by the investigator, better training is needed to avoid any undetected crimes against older adults. Even though the findings of this research show that detectives earned a much higher score overall than the students, they still had the highest percentage difference between the 40 and 80 year old case scenarios, thus suggesting age is a factor when assessing the case scenario. The detectives did record higher scores on the aging quiz. This suggests that maybe the solution to educating first responders should not just focus on the facts on aging, but in addition providing them with hands on experience. This experience may include working first hand with older adults through other organizations such as senior centers, family services, volunteer programs, or adult protective services. Giving these groups a chance to spend valuable time with healthy older adults might rid them of any negative stereotypes about aging. In the long run, this could help reduce problems such as the ‘hidden epidemic’ of homicides against older adults, where many first responders are initially assuming the victim died of natural causes.

Training services for first responders and investigators that focus on criminal victimization of older adults, as well as general aging issues, is necessary. Further research on this subject will be needed to help design these training programs. The importance of this education is invaluable, and will provide local agencies, such as police departments, with tools to help them prepare for the rising problem of older people as victims of crime, abuse, and even homicide. With first responders and detectives being well educated on these issues, it will once again give older victims a chance to escape from the negative assumptions placed on them by society.

Educating Students

Even though not much research has concentrated on the education students are receiving on this subject, this research suggests a hole in the curricula of educational programs (Payne & Berg, 2003, Payne et. al., 2001, and Payne et. al., 2003). A harder look should be taken at Criminology and Gerontology programs, considering that these students did not score as well on the general aging and crimes sections of the quiz. An
immediate solution to this problem would be for university programs, especially in Criminology and Gerontology, to revisit and possibly revise their curricula in order to better educate students on this rising concern of older people as victims of crime. Not only should they be better educated about criminal issues facing older adults, but also on general aging awareness. Even though the students in this study did not show as big of a difference between the 40 and 80 year old case scenario compared to the detectives did, it might still be beneficial for them to work with older adults first hand in order to better understand aging. As previously stated, these students are the future practitioner who may be working with victimized older adults, and universities should be positive in knowing that the students in these programs are receiving the education and practice they need in order to prepare them for issues they might face during their career.
References


National Center on Elder Abuse. Elder Abuse Information Series No. 3. 2005.


Appendix A: Survey

Section 1

Please answer the following questions True or False.

(For this study, older adults means people 65 years of age and older)

1) Older drivers have fewer accidents per driver than those under age 65.  T F
2) Everyone becomes confused or forgetful after the age of 65. T F
3) Falls and injuries “just happen” to older people. T F
4) The majority of older adults are socially isolated. T F
5) Older persons have more injuries in the home than younger persons. T F
6) Suicide rates increase with age for men older than 45. T F
7) Major depression is more prevalent among older persons than among younger persons. T F
8) Families don’t spend much time caring for their older relatives. T F
9) In general, old people tend to be pretty much alike. T F
10) The majority of old adults are senile (That is, have defective memory, are disoriented, or demented). T F
11) The vast majority of older adults will at some point end up in a nursing home. T F
12) It is almost impossible for the average older person to learn something new. T F
13) The majority of older adults maintain interest in sexual relations. T F
14) Older adults have higher rates of victimization than younger persons. T F
15) Older adults are more fearful of crime than are younger persons. T F
16) Older adults are the most law-abiding of all adult age groups. T F
17) Elder abuse often goes unreported because older people might have a fear of losing their caregiver. T F
18) Most incidents of elder abuse happen in a nursing home. T F
19) Older people are less likely than younger people to face attackers who are strangers. T F
20) An older person who is physically attacked is more likely than a younger person to be physically hurt.     T F
21) Older persons are twice as likely as younger persons to be victimized in or near their homes.     T F
22) Older adults appear to be particularly susceptible to crimes motivated by economic gain.     T F
23) More than one million Americans age 65 or older have been injured, exploited, or otherwise mistreated by someone on whom they depended for care or protection.     T F
24) The majority of perpetrators of elder abuse and neglect are family members.     T F
25) Homicides of older adults are sometimes ruled as death by natural cause.     T F
26) Older women have a higher victimization rate than older men.     T F

Section 2

Case Scenario A

After a concerned neighbor informed police that John Smith, 80, had not been seen for almost a week, his apartment was searched. As police walked into John’s bedroom, they saw him lying on his bed, over the covers and with all his clothes on. It was clear that he had been dead for almost five days. John’s apartment was clean and all of his belongings seemed to be in order. John had no marks, bruises or any other obvious signs of a struggle that could have led to his death. Neighbors told police that John was a very likeable man, but it seemed that he kept to himself a lot. The only people who visited him in the past month were his family members and close friends. The only health problem that John had in the past five years was high blood pressure, but it was not of serious concern to his doctor. Other than this, he seemed to be a healthy man with many hobbies and everyday activities.
Case Scenario B

After a concerned neighbor informed police that John Smith, 80, had not been seen for almost a week, his apartment was searched. As police walked into John’s bedroom, they saw him lying on his bed, over the covers and with all his clothes on. It was clear that he had been dead for almost five days. John’s apartment was clean and all of his belongings seemed to be in order. John had no marks, bruises or any other obvious signs of a struggle that could have led to his death. Neighbors told police that John was a very likeable man, but it seemed that he kept to himself a lot. The only people who visited him in the past month were his family members and close friends. The only health problem that John had in the past five years was high blood pressure, but it was not of serious concern to his doctor. Other than this, he seemed to be a healthy man with many hobbies and everyday activities.

Case Scenario Questions
1) Do you think an autopsy should be conducted on Mr. Smith?
   a) Yes
   b) No

2) Do you think that further investigation is needed?
   a) Yes
   b) No

3) Do you think that there is any suspicion of foul play?
   a) Yes
   b) No

4) Using the information provided in this scenario, what is your best guess of what happened to John Smith?
Section 3

Demographic Characteristics (students)

1) What is your age? __________

2) What is your gender?
   a) female
   b) male

3) What is your major(s)? ___________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

Your minor(s)? ___________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

Thematic sequence? _______________________________________

4) What is your year in school?
   a) Freshman
   b) Sophomore
   c) Junior
   d) Senior

5) What are your career aspirations?
   _____________________________________________________________

   _____________________________________________________________

Demographic Characteristics (detectives)

1) What is your age? __________
2) What is your gender?
   a) female
   b) male

3) How many years have you been on the police force? ___________________________

4) What detective unit are you currently working in?
   _______________________________________________________________________
   How long have you worked in this unit? _________________________________

5) In a given year, what is your best guess of how many cases you work on where the victim is an older adult?
   _______________________________________________________________________
   What are the challenges, if any, of such a case?
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________
   _______________________________________________________________________