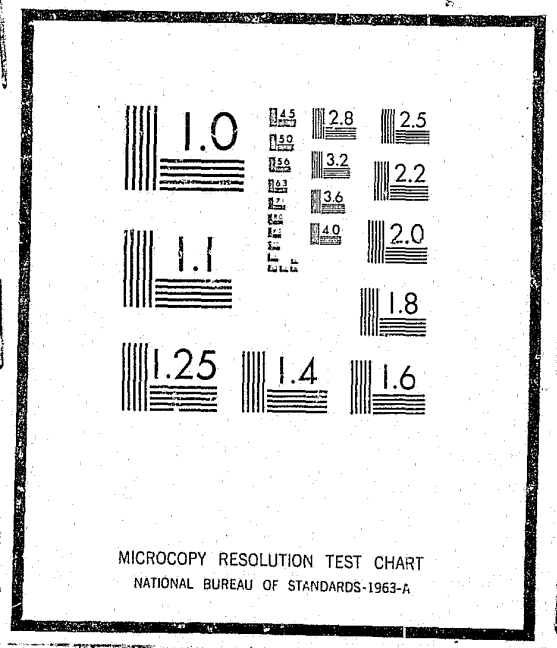


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CRIME AND THE SENIOR CITIZEN, CAUSE, EFFECTING PREVENTION

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Crime...an anti-social act resulting in a psychological or physical gain to the perpetrator, and a commensurate loss of often geometrical proportions of the victim, is particularly an acute problem when addressed to the senior citizen. Why do I say a commensurate loss of often geometrical proportions to the victim?

This is expressed, because, many times the gain to the criminal does not begin to compensate for the loss to the victim. For example, a victim purchases a t.v. for \$200 the criminal steals it and sells it for \$25, however, for the citizen to regain this, particularly an elder citizen on fixed income, this creates a hardship to the point where, in many instances, recovery of the loss or replacement of the loss is never achieved.

Why is this particular to our senior citizens?

Most often our elder members of society are the ones least able to defend their persons and property, therefore they are the ones who are the most vulnerable to criminal attacks. Let us consider their plight. Due to the aging process most senior citizens are unable to sustain a physical assault without suffering injury of a serious nature, therefore this creates a difficulty in the physical protection of themselves.

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In many instances their abilities to perceive the environment about them and to react to it has diminished in line with deterioration of their faculties. Thus, not being able to adequately see, hear, or even in some cases communicate or travel, they have difficulty in recognizing a threat as it approaches them; they have difficulty in expressing the need for assistance once the threat arrives, and they have difficulty in fleeing if that opportunity does exist.

Some elder citizens have lived through a period where a 'man's word was his bond' and being basically honest themselves they tend to trust all persons. Due to this, as well as a general greater respect for official entities, the older citizen is especially prone to fraud victimization.. Since many of these members of our society live on small fixed incomes, their only saving grace enabling survival is the funds which they have laboriously saved throughout their lives. The victimization of this elder citizen group creates hardship which is difficult for us still in a productive part of our lives to comprehend. Therefore, when they are victimized by almost any crime offense they are the ones certainly least able to suffer the physical attributes of the crime as well as recover what ever losses may have occurred.

Often we hear of victimization which virtually wipes out the capability of the victim to be an independent and self-supporting entity. Then the victim may suffer mentally as she or he becomes a burden to his family or society at large.

Now we come to probably the most crucial fact of victimization of the elder citizen. This is, in the final analysis, the one fact which probably contributes more greatly to their victimization than any other; apathy. Yes, apathy. We hear so much of this in our present day society where citizenry states "I don't want to get involved."

We must keep in mind our elder citizen is in a different classification as far as productivity and involvement to begin within our society. Our society is unique in that today many of our elder citizens are cast aside by their families as a burden, and placed into homes or other areas which do not lend the family atmosphere of togetherness, closeness and protectiveness. Therefore, apathy and the elder citizen often fall hand-in-hand. Since this member has assumed the role of a spectator which can only be determined as one no longer involved in the workings or present day functions of our society in which he exists.

What exactly am I referring to in stating that the elder citizen often is a spectator of society?

First, let us make an examination of the term 'society' to try and gain insight. As defined by Webster's dictionary, society is: "a community, nation or group having common traditions institutions and collective interests and activities." The key to our understanding and insight is "common traditions in collective interests and activities." Obviously, many of our senior citizens have been alienated from our rapidly changing society. Our nation since the 1950's has undergone massive changes in

every field of endeavor. Our social customs in many aspects are totally different today than merely twenty years ago, and are still evolving into even newer formats. Thus, the citizen who has lived in the relatively stable time periods of social activity leading to this time or physical and social change, often is unable to relate to this new and changing environment. Social scientists have long recognized a particular human attribute of resistance to any change within social entities or institutions even when such change was for the better. This is often because we become accustomed to a particular set of environments and any change represents a threat to our existence. Therefore, large portions of our elder citizenry are relative outsiders hearing the massive changes around them, afraid to play the game of life under the new rules. This results in a withdrawing from the main stream of life to an existence in the past or an existence in a position of almost limbo. They are afraid to get involved and yet not able to go back to the past, creating a feeling of not wanting to get involved, a feeling of fear due to the lack of ability to equate their present lives to the world around them.

We, inside of society, equate this as apathy, but, is it really? Could it be that we are not providing the necessary ingredients to enable this knowledgeable and experienced segment in our society to become involved, much to the detriment of the elder citizen and to the commensurate loss to society as a whole. What then is the answer to this puzzling problem? How may we most effectively reach, motivate and involve the elder citizen of today? How may we remove the psychological barriers which bind many into this non-involved status?

There are many variables to this particularly puzzling problem and many possible solutions all of which would have to be gauged in terms of effectiveness and time required. But, of the many areas to which we may turn only one answer truly seems to have the greatest opportunity at the most acceptable cost. This one factor has behind it thousands of years of success and is probably the major factor of development of mankind to achieve the accomplishments which he has achieved. This one element, the successful media, this motivating factor must truly be contained in one word only. Communication.

You, the reader, say 'of course, any fool can see that'. But, there are many who do not recognize this factor as one of such dynamic proportions. So, now that I have armed you with a weapon of success the great problem has been resolved, we will communicate. But merely announcing the solution is insufficient, for additionally, many variables exist and even yet the methodology is not clear.

How should we proceed:

We shall continue through the rest of this dissertation to attempt to establish a ground work and a minimum basic requirement in each of the many areas of this communication problem.

First and foremost, in order for any communication to have a degree of success we must insure a common media is available. The most basic media, of course, is the spoken word. But, in many communities the spoken word consists of more than one language. It then becomes incumbent upon us, as the communicators, the ones who wish to provide the communication and

motivation to provide the means and channels.

In my community, for example, we have a large proportion of Cuban emigrants. Thus, our language is Spanish and English. We have accordingly provided a staff of personnel able to communicate in both languages. We have taken the first important step, we have provided the ability to communicate.

It is not always enough to merely have the media for communication available, one must take his message to the public. For example:

Recently Operation Identification was founded as a major impact program, whereby, citizens marked their property with their drivers license number, enabling rapid identification of items and property which otherwise would possibly not be returned to them in the event of recovery due to theft. An additional attribute of such marking is the enabling of the police to establish ownership quickly, thereby resulting in more effective arrests for possession of stolen goods. Many police agencies had great hopes of the potential effectiveness of such a program and immediately rushed to purchase electric engravers. Shortly thereafter, they publicly announced the availability of such programs and the usage of these tools as a free public service. All the citizen had to do was to come to their agency to borrow one.

Most of these programs have failed. Not because it was a bad idea or concept, but rather because the idea did not take note of the previously explained apathy of the people. The citizens stayed away in droves. This program is most successful when the message through common media is taken to the public, handed to them at their door, thereby involving the public without the public needing to get involved.

The same is true in communication, especially when considering communications with the senior citizen segment. It is not merely to be able to communicate, we must take our message, our communication to them. We cannot wait for them to come to us, for if we do, our message will not reach the very ones needing it most. Often those who are victimized are the ones who feel it cannot happen to them, it always happens to the other person. These people will be the last to come to us, therefore, they should be the first that we go to.

Then the next problem in the communication process is the communication itself. Now that we have established the media and the sense to take that media to the public we are faced with a multi-faceted problem.

What do we say, and how do we say it? Of particular concern is the need for diplomacy when dealing with elder personages not to mention tact.

We should never make the error of presenting an attitude of knowledgeability or superiority to any senior citizen.

This can only cause resentment and further reinforcement of feelings of a lack of belonging and a lack of participation desire. Therefore, first, we must choose the message we wish to communicate and the length of its desired effect; then place it into a format which will effectively communicate our message having the necessary or desired effect and in a manner of diplomacy and co-operation rather than in a manner of knowledgeability informing lack of knowledge.

To merely inform the elder citizen of his or her need to be more observant of the individual's environment will have little appreciable effect and the time span of such warnings effectiveness will in many instances be less than desirable. Our elder citizens are not robots which will react to every suggestion made, nor without adequate reasoning behind such communication, will the desired attention span be placed upon it by the citizen. Therefore, we, the communicators, must prepare our messages so that they will re-enforce themselves in importance and their personal benefits to the receivers of our communication.

Presently, most crime prevention communication with the elder citizenry is being conducted by police specialists and a few concerned organizations such as the American Association of Retired Persons. The need not only for expertise in the areas of the subject matters to be covered, but also in the area of public speaking is imperative.

We have all heard the old saying "It is not what you say but how you say it." This is still a true adage. Yes, it is vitally important that we be knowledgeable, but, it is just

as important that we be able to communicate that knowledge in an usable, understandable, acceptable and a compassionate manner. Few people have a natural ability to readily communicate in an enlightened manner but for those who are not so blessed there are many forms of training available. For example; the Toastmaster's Clubs around the world help to provide a media and forum whereby untrained persons in the public speaking field can gain experience, impromptu, to communicate readily and effectively, and hear critical critiques of a constructive fashion from their peers.

Additionally, if such an organization is not available in your particular area, by practicing, as well as paying attention to the persons in the audience or the individuals to which he speaks, one may acquire a gradual ability to communicate in an educational and yet enlightening manner. So, now we have a media of communication, the ability to take that media to the elder citizenry, the knowledge of the subject matters and the ability to communicate in an educational and entertaining fashion.

The next facet to appraise is the effect which is desired both in physical and procedural change as well as time effectiveness.

It should seem obvious we don't wish to merely serve as an entertainment for the elder citizen, but as a catalyst for preventive change. Therefore, our commentary must be based upon the achievable and reasonable criteria for suggested greater security. To make suggestions which are beyond the

physical or financial limitations of the receivers of our information, would be non-sequitur to our mission. We must then of "effectiveness/necessity" be reasonable in our recommendations. Often I have found crime prevention specialists or persons dealing in that area with senior citizens, to have a tendency to over-emphasize particular programs and suggestions which are virtually non-effective to begin with or in which the effectiveness is highly in doubt. These programs should be eliminated or reduced to their proper position of importance and programs of greater importance be pushed on a more effective level.

Probably the least addressed of the areas previously mentioned is that of the 'time effectiveness' of our communications. Is it effective to simply communicate a message without providing a means of upholding and re-enforcing the interest of those effected? Of course not. Therefore, it is incumbent upon us to provide a continuing forum to consistly maintain and motivate the elder citizen. We must personally show them, continually, that our mission is not merely to do a job, but, that we have a genuine interest in their welfare.

Often officers of the law and their subsidiaries in contact with citizen groups express an attitude or feeling which is virtually one of superiority or at the very least a mild form of arrogance. To communicate with the public today we need to show a genuine concern in order to overcome past stereo-types of the police agencies. Police agencies in general still have the power system, the badge, the authority. But, instead of

forcing the decisions of a police officer upon the citizenry in general, more and more police agencies in their crime prevention efforts are beginning to turn towards to more creative and productive atmosphere of constructive mutual change for the benefit of all. This is something which cannot be accomplished overnight and is particularly difficult when dealing with officers of previous experience. However, through a genuine interest and true desire for effective change, pursued and re-enforced by the management levels of any police agency constructive change towards public service, rather than authority over the public sector, can be effected.

Additional medias should be developed which afford a methodology or an opportunity for communication on a protracted and prolonged basis. I therefore recommend that each agency having or giving consideration for programs of reducing victimization of elder citizens, seriously consider the establishment of an elder citizen crime watch organization. Such an organization should by necessity, be maintained and operated by the members themselves, with the police in an advisory role. The purpose is to enable not only the committed action of the senior citizen by enabling them to run their own organization but also, to free the police so they may communicate with other groups as well without being tied to one particular sector of the community. Time is a very important factor in any operation and the more effective use that can be made of each moment of time thereby creates greater channels of communication and greater effectiveness.

By forming an elder citizen crime watch organization we then, enable each member to learn rapidly and effectively the victimization patterns within his or her area. This is accomplished through the formation and maintenance of a mutual communication system. Usually this is formed in a pyramid type of operation. In the event of crimes in a given neighborhood under such a crime watch, the citizenry is notified by the police department to one or two contacts. Taken for example two contacts, these two would call four, these four would call eight and the eight would call sixteen, so forth and on

Within a short period of time each individual in the Citizens Crime Watch would be able to be knowledgeable in the current criminal offenses occurring in their area. This would increase the effectiveness of the police and encourage the citizens to become involved to the point where they can readily communicate with the police without fear of reprisal from suspects. But possibly the greatest advantage in the Citizens Crime Watch communication chain is the additional continual re-enforcement of the educational process of crime prevention with motivation through involvement. Thus, the effectiveness of any such program with the senior citizen is greatly enhanced. The more medias of communication which we establish, the greater the effectiveness of any program, the greater the effectiveness of the police.

Such a program will develop two basic fall-outs. First, it will create a broader basis of information for the police agencies to operate from; and second, it would increase communication to the private sector from the police, thereby creating

better public relations and more knowledgeable citizens. Thus, our attack against victimization proceeds through two fronts. First, reduced opportunity equals reduced victimization, and second, increased information creates increased police effectiveness.

Basically, we must attempt to renew within our elder citizen ranks the need to participate for their own well-being and self-edifications, as well as, for the good of society at large. This should be a constructive and positive feature of any program dealing with senior citizens.

Only through this type of participation and reduced victimization, comes normative features and through this type of creative application, a new spirit of productivity can emerge through these senior citizenry. In order to illustrate the potential of our senior citizens I wish to mention a true story.

I have an uncle who recently celebrated his 103rd birthday. This gentlemen is retired from the school system after having been the director of his local area. He is highly educated and very well socially enlightened and motivated. A couple of years ago after he achieved 100 years of age, he wrote and published a book which is entitled "How To Live To One Hundred and Enjoy It". Also well into his 90's he wrote and published a narrative history of the county in which he resides. This was no simple task. It involved many hours of research and studies. He was for many years, well into his 90's, an editor of a local newspaper. Now his body is beginning to fail him, but his mind

is still as sharp as ever. He has used his potential to the fullest extent. When I recently asked him how long he wishes to live, he stated to me, that he is getting tired but he needs approximately another 100 years in order to complete the things which he feels are important for him to accomplish during his life time.

This simply is an understatement to the fact that there are many productive areas which our senior citizens can perform in, not only in the protection of themselves, but also in the fulfillment of their true potential.

We should try to re-involve them in our society for their wisdom and experience is invaluable. This simply shows that if we re-involve this segment of our society into productiveness, not only would we have performed a service to reduce victimization, but we also enhance the productivity in the nature of life of these wonderful people, who in the past, have helped to make our country a place of freedom and strength.

END

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