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Royal Canadian Mounted
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✓ ELDERLY VICTIMIZATION

A

SURVEY REPORT

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PROLOGUE

The Crime Prevention Centre is the Policy and Operational Support Unit for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Crime Prevention/Police Community Relations. Staff research, develop and recommend policies and programs on a Force-wide basis. The axis of the research and program development focuses on crime analysis and problem identification, the latter being best determined through the holistic approach. Through these mediums, our goal is prevention programs that will successfully reduce crime and the fear of crime.

In consideration of budgetary restraints, this Centre is developing preventive initiatives that are amenable to various types of crimes and that are cost effective. Crime Prevention is an alternative response in reducing many crime problems that is available to all law enforcement agencies.

AUTHOR'S FORWARD

The purpose of this paper is two-fold:

1. to identify a crime problem, "victimization of the elderly", that is becoming more serious every year. Although statistical evidence relevant to crimes rates and the elderly are not available, we do know via the media and police officers on the street that such victimization is occurring.
2. to alert police officers to the present "global" situation in relation to the victimization of the elderly in this country and to assist them in identifying the scope of the problem in their specific locals. Suggestions are offered for dealing with this area of concern of the police in their professional role and everyday life.

Numerically, the increasing population of senior citizens (65+), will represent a larger percentage of Canada's voting populace. In the future the elderly may lobby politically and publicly to influence the various economic and social policies suitable to their perceived needs. However, what about Canada's current elderly population? Do we really understand their needs and problems? What can we do that would improve the quality of life for the elderly in Canada today?

Nature of the Problem

Every victim of crime suffers some degree of trauma. The elderly, by virtue of their advanced age may experience greater hardships following victimization than members of other age groups. Their increased fragility may cause them to suffer longer from physical or psychological injury. Financial losses or the loss of irreplaceable possessions can prove to be a great shock to them. Beyond these material considerations, the elderly suffer most from fear of crime. For many, this fear permeates their very existence and quality of life.

This perceived or actual vulnerability has dictated a life style of self-imposed imprisonment. Many senior citizens attempt to hide themselves behind locked doors and windows. For a great number, particularly those in urban centres, this has become a reality of an old age lost in a new generation of social change. Many are of an era in which awareness and alertness about crime was not necessary as they did not have to concern themselves about crime against their person, a problem to which following generations have become conditioned.

Some are the prey of the "conman" because of their naivety and loneliness, to purse snatcher and robber because of their fragility, inflation because of fixed incomes and the fear of assaults on their person as their means of self protection is limited. The fear that prevails in the minds of many elderly is not a self-conceived illusion. As expressed by a spokesperson of their generation,

"Although I have taken new security measures, I am left with a sense of insecurity and a new reality: that lights and locks do not a fortress make, and the only things really separating them from me are double paned windows. That reality greets me each time I return home and ask myself, Has anyone been here? And at night, as I lie in bed listening to the walls creek and settle, the thought, what was that? no longer occurs. Instead, I now wonder, Who is that? (1)

Fear is well documented as being a burden to those who perceive crime as threatening to their well being. Fear is measureable through the actions of the individual particularly when that individual alters his or her life style because of crime. That change can be measured through their interaction with their environment. Fear is contagious and is readily transmitted to the neighbour, friend or throughout the community. As suggested by John Rye:

"Fear of crime is one of the deadlier aspects of criminal activity - deadlier, not necessarily to the victim of a specific crime, but to the community as a whole. It is nourished with each crime committed. Its consequences are more pervasive than the effects of any actual crime. It is an intangible whose cost cannot be allocated to each crime committed, yet its overall cost can be seen in the decline and the deterioration of any community ... (2)

George Sunderland in addressing the issue of elderly victimization states:

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"The fear of being victimized often impose a different life style upon the older person, who imprisons herself or himself at home and severely limits any outside travel owing to such fears. In addition to increasing efforts to help older persons reduce the risk of criminal victimization, the law enforcement officer must also try to reduce perceived crime fears to realistic levels so that this imposed life style is not unnecessarily restrictive." (3)

During the past decade, the victimization of elderly persons has become more evident. Recognition of the problem has been documented in police journals, periodicals and through the news media identifying the various types of offences usually committed against the elderly as well as the social and economic variables that are contributing to this problem. The literature also indicates specific programs that have been developed for the elderly that would give them some measure of security.

The literature suggests that the total number of financially self-reliant elderly are in fewer numbers than those who have neither the financial nor physical mobility and are, as well, socially handicapped by fixed incomes. This latter group is limited, by necessity, to living in subsidized senior citizens' complexes or their old neighbourhood, for they can only afford to meet their daily needs. As reported by the Canada Council on Social Welfare a large number of senior women account for the poor in this group and are the most vulnerable of the elderly as they are often widowed and alone. It is this group that suffer significantly from personal victimization or the fear of it. The older the senior becomes, the more vulnerable he or she is.

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For many of the elderly, their security, or sense of security, lies in the urban environment for it is the neighbourhood setting in which they feel most comfortable, treasuring the memories of friends and family, past and present. The elderly who reside in the urban setting have become more prone to victimization than their counterparts in the rural areas. This does not suggest that the elderly who reside in rural areas are not victimized. The extent and degree of victimization differs within geographic settings. The rural communities still maintain a significant degree of the "neighbour concept" and "lending a helping hand". Within the urban setting the "neighbour concept" has diminished. Among urban communities, the elderly residing in certain areas of the city, i.e. suburbia, are less likely to be victimized than those residing in the higher density and older neighbourhoods. The later areas have become characteristic of the more transient population and contribute to the decline of that environment. Nonetheless, urban or rural, the number of incidents of elderly victimization is rising and for many, it is a problem of such consequence that it affects the quality of their lives.

It is evident that the elderly have become targets of specific crimes. They are seen as an easy target for those who have chosen to prey upon them. The extent or frequency of this specific victimization is controversial. When compared to the national crime rates the elderly are the least victimized. However, in crimes of purse snatching, frauds and robbery, there is evidence that the elderly are victimized as much as other age groups. The issue of reported crimes against the elderly should not be the sole criteria to determine the seriousness of the problem. Nor should statistics alone

be used as a basis for the redeployment of police resources to deal with this special problem. It is imperative that we also consider fear and the deprivation suffered by victimized seniors. Monetary loss on a fixed income, loss of irreplaceable possessions and memorabilia, physical harm and fear of victimization lead, for many, to the deterioration of mental health, personal security and dignity. Although these results of victimization touch upon the "grey areas" and are difficult to measure, they are a reality to the elderly. The literature supports this evaluation through research and documented experiences, particularly of those who have been victimized. Current studies and literature in this area suggests that although deprivation is intangible, it is a significant and important variable not to be overlooked in the future.

Currently there is activity among Canadian and American law enforcement agencies striving to develop and implement prevention strategies to reduce or remove opportunities for victimizing the elderly. Complementing these preventive strategies is the promotion of self-help, education and awareness programs which have initiated much interest within the elderly population. Most notably in the United States senior citizens have become organized not only at local and state levels but nationally, giving them an effective voice in surfacing and presenting many of their social and economic problems. Organizations such as the National Retired Teachers Association (N.R.T.A.) and American Association of Retired Persons (A.A.R.P.) have done much to effectively act on behalf of their peers. The principal mandate of these organizations is to:

"Assist the elderly in achieving retirement lives of independance, dignity and purpose. The two associations encourage older Americans to remain active in community and public affairs, provide legislative representation at all levels of government, and sponsor services to help them stretch fixed retirement income. The Associations also publish magazines and other materials of special interest to older persons." (4)

This type of organizational structure on behalf of the elderly has yet to be achieved in Canada.

In order to appreciate the importance of the task before us, and just what the increase of elderly victimization will mean to police response and resources, the following statistics will provide the reader with an overview of the demographic trends in Canada.

Senior Population (1901-1976)

Since the early 1900's Canada's senior population (65+) has grown significantly in relation to the National population.

CHART I Number/Percentage of 65+ In Total Population - 1901-1976

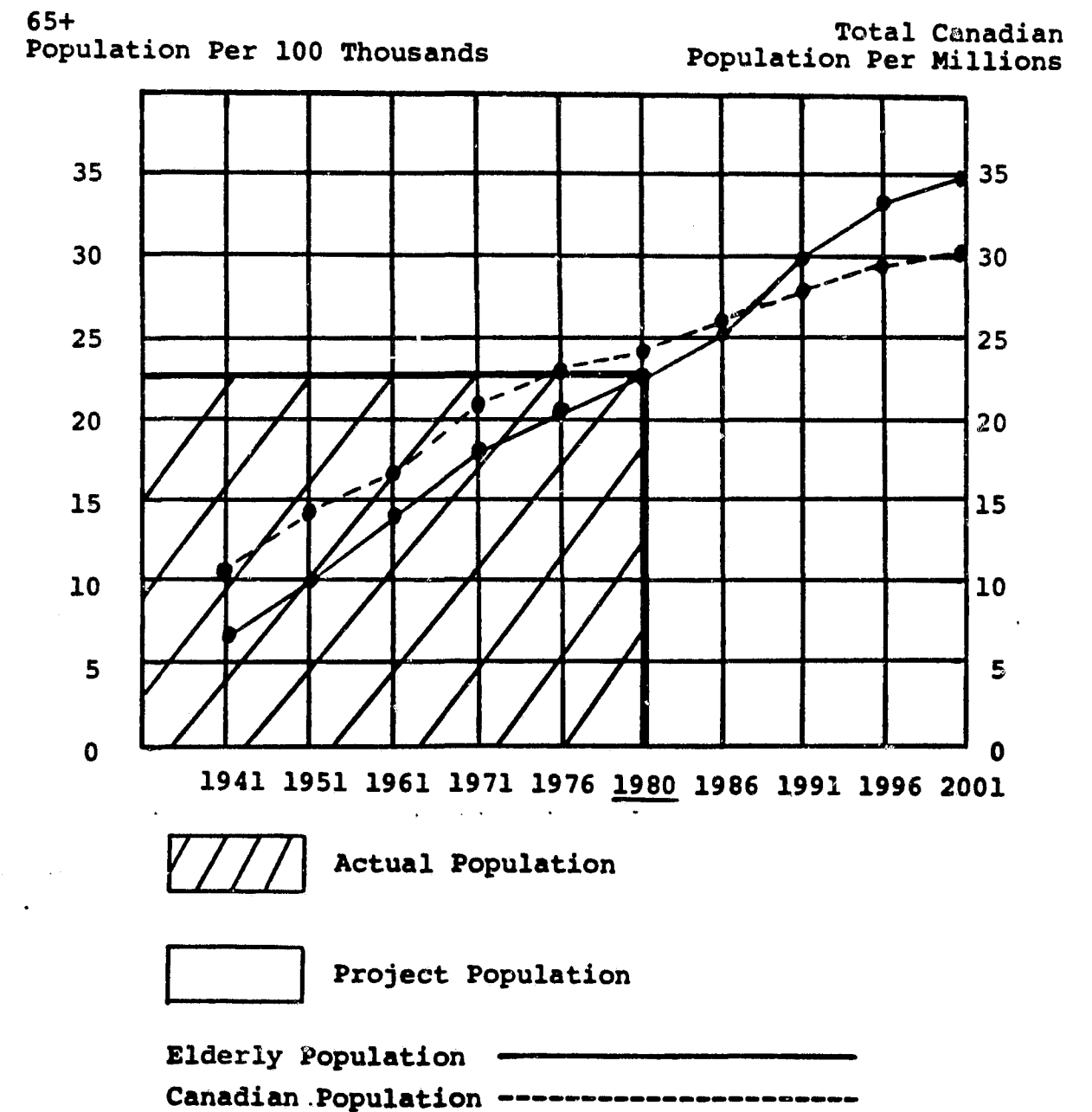
Year	1901	1921	1941	1961	1976
Number	271,201	420,244	767,815	1,391,154	2,002,345
%	5.0	4.8	6.7	7.6	8.7

Source: Statistics Canada
Catalogue 98-800E

... 7

Between 1901 and 1976, Canada's senior population has grown from 271,201 to 2,002,345 an increase of 1,731,144. In 1976 senior citizens represented 8.7% of our National population as compared to 5% in 1901. At year 1976, the increase in the number of seniors was seven times greater than in 1901 while at that same time the general population growth was only four times greater.

CHART II Past and Projected Growth Of 65+ In Total Population - 1941-2001



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Between 1971 and 1976 Canada's population as a whole rose by 6.6% whereas the senior population increased by 14.8%. (5) In essence Canada's growth in senior population is increasing at a larger rate than the total population. As this trend continues, barring any sudden change in demographic trends as a result of disasters, epidemics or international strife, the growth rates of seniors will exceed that of the National growth rate by the year 1987-1988 and will continue to do so into the year 2001 as indicated in Chart II.

Statistics Canada as a result of their demographic projections for the year 1976 to year 2001 state that over the forthcoming 25 years Canada should experience significant changes in demographic patterns particularly within the senior group. Based on their projection, senior population at year 2001 would range between 3,387.3 to 3,462.4 million. This represents an approximate increase of 71% in the senior population as compared to the reported senior census (1976) of 2,002.3 million.

What is significant in the 65+ group is the increase of elderly population from 1971 to 1976 and that 92% of the elderly are between the age of 65 to 84, (CHART III). Based on Statistic Canada's future population projections for this same age bracket, the years 1980 and 2001 will proportionately represent the same percentage.

CHART III

Age Group	Population 1971	Distribution 1976	Population Difference	Growth Rate
65 - 69	619,960	720,815	100,855	16.2%
70 - 74	457,380	533,725	76,345	16.7% 92%
75 - 79	325,510	362,705	37,195	11.4%
80 - 84	204,170	220,560	16,390	8.0%
85 - 89	100,010	112,380	12,370	12.3% 8%
90 Plus	37,380	52,160	14,780	39.5%
	1,744,410	2,002.345		

The significant increase of Canada's 65+ population during the past decade is attributable to heavy immigration periods prior to the 1950's as well as the early 1900's being marked by high birth rates. Canada's future 65+ population will be heavily influenced by the baby boom experienced in the 1940's and 1950's. Improved medical and social services are having a profound effect on 65+ longevity which is evident in the increase of the elderly population, notably the 85 to 89 and 90+ bracket, (CHART III). Between 1971 and 1976 these two groups reflect an increase of 12.3% and 39.5% respectively. Future projections indicate corresponding increases. Based upon this trend, one could predict that in future, man's longevity will increase proportionately with improved medical and social technology and will impact on all age groups, particularly the 65+ group.

CHART IV 65+ Population - 1981-2001
Projected Male/Female Life Expectancy Ratios

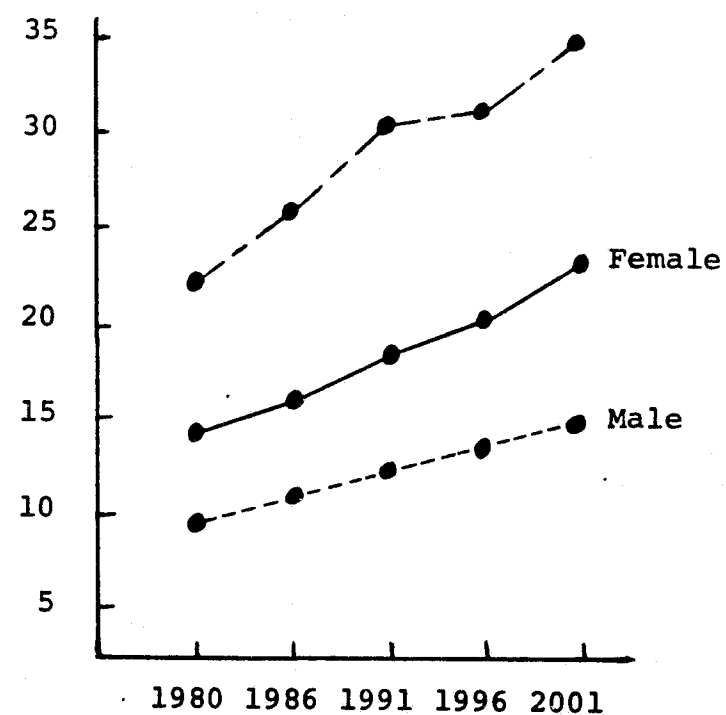
Year	1980	1981	1986	1991	1996	2001
Male	969.8	990.5	1,094.3	1,221.9	1,319.4	1,383.0
Female	1,285.4	1,323.6	1,531.7	1,777.1	1,955.9	2,079.5
% Difference	24.5	25.2	28.5	31.2	32.5	33.5
Number	2,255.2	2,314.1	2,626.0	2,999.0	3,275.3	3,462.5

Source: Statistics Canada
Catalogue 91-520
(Abridged)

CHART V

65+ Population
Per 100 Thousands

Projected Population Ratio
65+ Male - Female



Female 65+ ———●———
Male 65+ - - - - -●- - - - -
Male & Female 65+ —●—●—●—●—●—

Charts IV and V illustrate that within the elderly population, the number of females exceed that of the males by a significant proportion. The 1980 projection (Chart IV) indicates that there are 24.5% more females than males in the 65+ group and by 2001 this will increased to 33.5%. The life expectancy over the past decades has increased. Today at reaching age 65, the average man can expect to live for another 13.7 years while the average woman can expect to live another 17.5 years. (6) Within the 65+ group approximately 50% of the female population are widowed as opposed to approximately 15% of the male population.

In essence, Canada is facing a significant demographic change in its total population from 1976 to 2001, a period of 25 years. In light of those observations what will this change in senior population mean to law enforcement agencies in the course of the delivery of police services?

It is reasonable to project that with increasing numbers of elderly citizens we should expect a rise in victimization as well. Based on this assumption; it is imperative that Canadian law enforcement agencies, in the delivery of reactive and proactive service, be prepared for a problem which if ignored, may reach significant proportions. This would create a manpower drain on existing police resources, as well as an economic strain on victimized elderly and resultant high social costs. Objective proactive policing methods already available to us would significantly reduce reactive police investigation and administrative costs. However, more important, they would reduce or remove the opportunity of elderly victimization and those related economic and social costs.

PREVENTIVE PROGRAMMING

Reduction of Opportunity

Recent research is now supporting the theory that a large percentage of crimes are crimes of opportunity and such crimes are being committed by "amateurs".

It is suggested that the three elements prerequisite to a criminal action occurring are that the offender must have:

- i) DESIRE there must be motivational factors to stimulate the offender (psychological and/or sociological)
- ii) ABILITY it must be within the capability of the offender to commit the offence, i.e. frauds - shoplifting - B & E as opposed to safe attacks and computer thefts.
- iii) OPPORTUNITY must present to the offender easy opportunity of access to commit the offence with minimal risk in detection. Purse snatching and various thefts (automobiles, bicycles, etc.) would fall within this category.

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While much of crime prevention strategies, even the concept of the criminal justice process is based on the idea of changing criminal behaviour, a whole range of initiatives based upon the victim's behaviour holds promise.

Philosophically as well as practically, the "reduction of opportunity" approach attempts to remove or reduce the opportunity for criminal acts before they occur. This does not suggest crime prevention will eradicate crime, however, a well balanced crime prevention program stressing "reduction of opportunity" can reduce crime if we place the opportunity beyond the reach of most amateur criminals.

It is important to recognize that "reduction of opportunity" has its limitations. A number of crimes may not be amenable to this approach; for example, crimes between willing participants (conspiracies), homicides and various assaults.

Promotion of the "reduction of opportunity" theory would require an extensive awareness and education program designed to meet the needs of the elderly. Implementation must be done carefully so as not to overemphasize or increase citizen fear levels.

Police Managers

As managers of police resources we are not going to resolve all the social ills that are contributing factors to crime and deviant behaviour. By the same token we cannot resolve all the crime problems and related social problems that are being experienced by the elderly. However, most

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law enforcement agencies do have the available resources that, if prioritized in their proper perspective, would reduce the problem and improve the quality of life for those senior citizens in need of preventive service.

Research indicates that the majority of crimes committed against the elderly are avoidable through the medium of education and awareness programs. I suggest to the reader that "awareness" is the key to practical programming, not only in responding to elderly victimization but also for the benefit of the police managers in the deployment of available resources. As police managers are we truly aware of the degree or extent of elderly victimization within our communities? Do we have a clear understanding and appreciation of the physical process of aging; or the myths that have been stereotyped along with the course of aging? For example, aging does not necessarily retard one's mental abilities. Research has proven that the individual can maintain and increase their mental capabilities and learn new skills with increased age provided health problems or mental inactivity do not interfere.

This does not suggest that the police manager or officer become a gerontologist. It does suggest that if we are to be effective in responding to elderly victimization and its related psychological/social side effects, that you require a working knowledge of the aging process and how it affects individuals. Police have always had a compassion for the elderly, but, little or no training on how to effectively deal and communicate with them.

Police managers have access to the most current techniques in crime prevention, problem identification and problem solving methodology. Police have the organizational skills and expertise in the promotion of preventive strategies amenable to any age group that would assist in reducing or resolving many problems.

An abundance of pamphlets and brochures are available that would assist the elderly in recognizing a potential "con game"; how to better protect or target harden their homes against burglaries; or the most favourable method of avoiding a potential assault or theft when walking in their neighbourhood. However, literature alone in this instance may not be an adequate educational device. Many of the elderly may not receive the information. Of those who do receive it, many may be unable to read or comprehend the message. Words alone will not be sufficient to describe "con games" such as the "pigeon drop", "bank examiner", "the switch game" or the "home repairman".

In the majority of Canada's cities and towns, senior groups have been formed as social and recreational units that serve their interests. These groups are accessible to the police. Contact would be personalized and at the same time would communicate that we are there as a resource to the elderly.

Police officers, well versed in elderly victimization, would be able to respond to any questions that the elderly may have regarding potential or actual offences and preventive strategies. The elderly within their own social

units or combined units could be organized and trained on prevention initiatives and would in turn be advisors to their peers with the police acting as a resource. The elderly could organize their own "fan out" system of dispersing information. Use of the elderly in the "awareness" program could also minimize the "fear" concept of victimization. A well designed "awareness" program must convey a message that would not only reduce the opportunity of victimization, but also decrease levels of "fear".

CONCLUSION

Programs for the elderly would not be complex nor would they be costly. At the outset, police man hours would be required to initiate this challenge. The police would be the catalyst in organizing the programs. The greatest resource of the police will be the elderly - our challenge, to organize the elderly to help themselves. Within the elderly population is the talent, experience and expertise of many vocations and professions. The elderly are a valuable resource to the police and community. We should not overlook this asset in light of crime prevention philosophy and community responsibility; "Working Together to Prevent Crime".

APPENDUM

A sequel paper will follow this article and will be addressing the issue of elderly victimization from the police managers' point of view. Discussion will focus on three areas:

- i) Preventive programs available and current strategies employed that reduce the opportunity of victimization and the fear of crime.
- ii) Educational/awareness and self-help programs as well as resource organizations that are active and instrumental in advancing the betterment and quality of life for senior citizens.
- iii) The feasibility of utilizing senior citizens as a volunteer resource service to law enforcement agencies in the field of crime prevention.

FOOTNOTES

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