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Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics Profile Series

Seniors as Victims of Crime

2004 and 2005

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Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics

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Note of appreciation

Canada owes the success of its statistical system to a long-standing partnership between Statistics Canada, the citizens of Canada, its businesses, governments and other institutions. Accurate and timely statistical information could not be produced without their continued cooperation and goodwill.

Preface

This series of profiles provides analysis on a variety of topics and issues concerning victimization, offending and public perceptions of crime and the justice system. The profiles primarily draw on results from the General Social Survey on victimization. Where applicable, they also incorporate information from other data sources, such as the Census of the Population and the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting Survey.

Examples of the topics explored through this series include: Victimization and offending in Canada's territories, Canadians' use of crime prevention measures and Victimization of older Canadians. This is a unique periodical, of great interest to those who plan, establish, administer and evaluate justice programs and projects, or anyone who has an interest in Canada's justice system.

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Highlights

- According to the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS), seniors were three times less likely than non-seniors to experience a victimization in the 12 months preceding the survey (10% versus 31%).
- Seniors were far less likely than their younger counterparts to experience an assault, a sexual assault or a robbery. The violent victimization rate reported by seniors was almost four times lower than for 55 to 64 year olds (12 versus 45 incidents per 1,000 population), and almost 20 times lower than for 15 to 24 year olds (226 incidents per 1,000 population).
- Senior males were more likely than senior females to be victims of violent crime. In 2005, overall rates of police-reported violent crime were 1.5 times higher among senior men than senior women (200 versus 131 per 100,000 population).
- In 2005, police-reported data found that nearly 5 in 10 senior victims were victimized by a family member compared to 4 in 10 for non-senior victims. The most common perpetrators of family violence against seniors were adult children (35%) and current or previous spouses (31%).
- Although seniors may be perceived as being more frail and vulnerable than their younger counterparts, they were no more likely to sustain injuries. Over two-thirds (68%) of violent incidents involving seniors did not result in any physical injuries, a figure that was comparable to the proportion of incidents involving non-senior victims.
- Seniors experienced theft of personal property (such as money, credit cards, jewellery, purse, wallet or clothing) at a rate that was far lower than other age groups. The senior rate was less than half that of 55 to 64 year olds (22 versus 51 incidents per 1,000 population), and almost eight times lower than the rate for 15 to 24 year olds (165).
- Households with only senior residents were nearly three times less likely than all Canadian households to experience a break and enter, a property theft, a motor vehicle theft or vandalism (87 compared to 248 incidents per 1,000 population).
- Seniors' feelings of personal safety have improved over the last five years. In 2004, 92% of older persons reported feeling satisfied with their overall level of safety from crime compared to 89% reported in 1999.

Introduction

Concern over the victimization of older Canadians has heightened with the realization that in the coming decades, there will be a dramatic increase in this segment of the population. There are numerous implications for Canadian society as a result of our growing senior population including meeting their health and caregiving needs. While the financial situation of seniors has improved since the 1980s (Gannon et al., 2005), higher levels of physical and mental vulnerability and dependency among seniors indicate a need for ongoing care. As a result, the need to quantify and understand the extent and nature of victimization of older adults has become increasingly important.

Using data from self-reported victimization and police-reported surveys, this profile examines the nature and prevalence of violent and property crimes against seniors. The report also examines characteristics of offences committed against seniors, such as the level of reporting to the police, the proportion of incidents involving weapons and the proportion of incidents causing injuries to the victim. Furthermore, information on seniors' fear of crime, the prevalence of spousal abuse as well as seniors' risk of telemarketing fraud is also presented.

Demographic profile of seniors in Canada

Seniors¹ constitute one of the fastest growing population groups in Canada. The 2001 Census revealed that there were nearly 4 million seniors aged 65 years and older, accounting for 13% of the nation's population.

Projections indicate that by 2031, seniors will comprise between 23% and 25% of the Canadian population (Figure 1) (Bélanger et al., 2005). Ageing baby boomers², low fertility rates and an increase in life expectancy will all contribute to the expected doubling of the proportion of seniors over the next 25 years.

Text box 1

How this study measures violence against seniors

In Canada, there are two main data sources that measure the extent and nature of violence against older adults: police-reported crime data from the Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) survey and self-reported victimization data from the General Social Survey (GSS).

The incident-based UCR2 survey is a non-nationally representative survey that captures detailed information on individual criminal incidents reported by police, including characteristics of victims and accused such as their age and sex. Many factors can influence the police-reported crime rate, including the willingness of victims to report crimes to the police; reporting by police to the UCR survey; and changes in legislation, policies or enforcement practices. For instance, when victims do not report incidents to police, those incidents will not be reflected in official crime statistics.

The UCR survey collects data on a number of violent crimes, including: homicide, sexual assault, robbery, major assault (includes aggravated assault (level 3) and assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2)), common assault (level 1), criminal harassment, uttering threats, extortion, kidnapping, abduction and other violent offences.

One way to estimate the extent of crime that is not reported to police is through the GSS victimization survey. Because the GSS asks a sample of the population about their personal victimization experiences, it captures information on crimes whether or not they have been reported to police. The amount of unreported victimization can be substantial. For example, in 2004, only 33% of violent victimization incidents were reported to the police. As a result, victimization surveys usually produce much higher rates of victimization than police-reported crime statistics.

Unlike the range of violent crimes collected by the UCR survey, the GSS collects data on three violent crimes based on Criminal Code definitions. These include sexual assault, robbery and physical assault. In addition, the GSS also collects detailed victim characteristics on property crime that are not available through the UCR police-reported data.

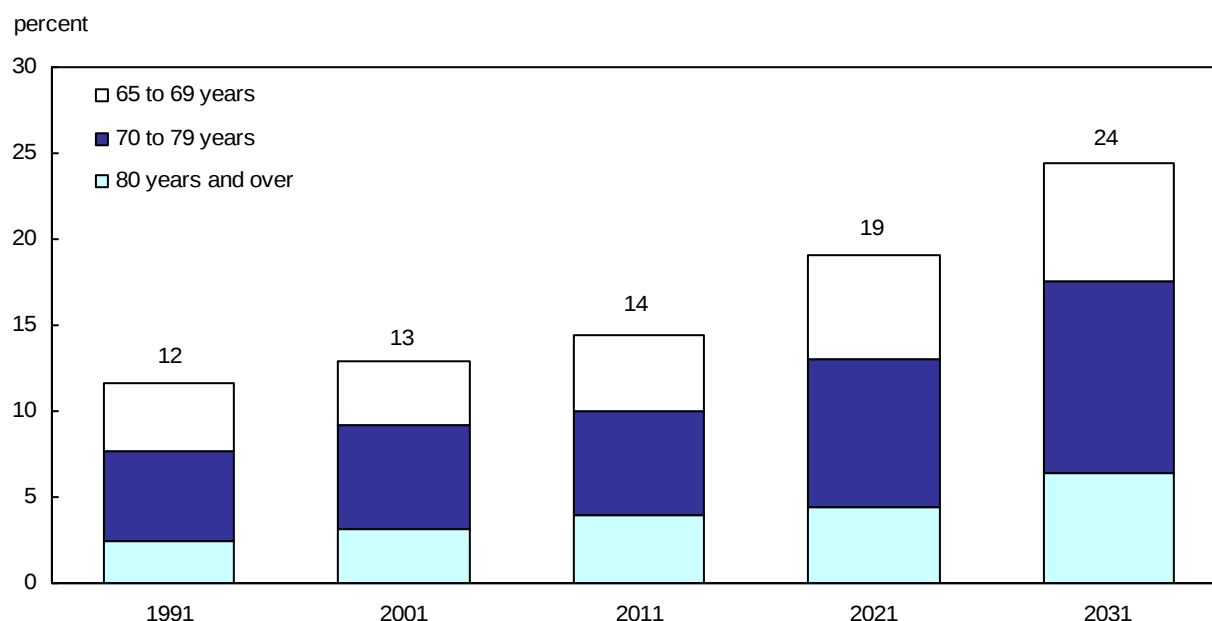
Despite the benefits of victimization surveys, they do have limitations. For one, they rely on respondents' perceptions and their ability to report events accurately. Also, victimization surveys are unable to reach the most vulnerable seniors who may not have access to a telephone, those who have cognitive impairment or disability, those living in an institution such as a nursing home, and those who are ill or isolated. For these reasons, general household surveys may also under-estimate the extent of victimization against older Canadians.

For additional information about these data sources, refer to the Methodology section.

This is particularly true of those aged 80 years and older, the age group that is increasing at the fastest pace. From 1991 to 2001, their numbers soared 41%, from approximately 660,000 to 932,000. It is estimated that by 2011, the number of older seniors in Canada will reach 1.3 million.

The 2001 Census also indicated that fewer seniors are living in health care institutions and more seniors are living with a spouse, with adult children or living alone³ (Statistics Canada, 2002). This shift reflects changes in how Canadians care for their elderly. Community-based care as opposed to institutional care has become the preferred method of caring for seniors, and much of this has fallen to family and friends (Frederick and Fast, 1999).

Figure 1
By 2031, seniors will comprise nearly 25% of the population



Source: Statistics Canada, 2001 Census Analysis Series; Profile of Canadian families and households: Diversification continues.

Older Canadians as victims of crime

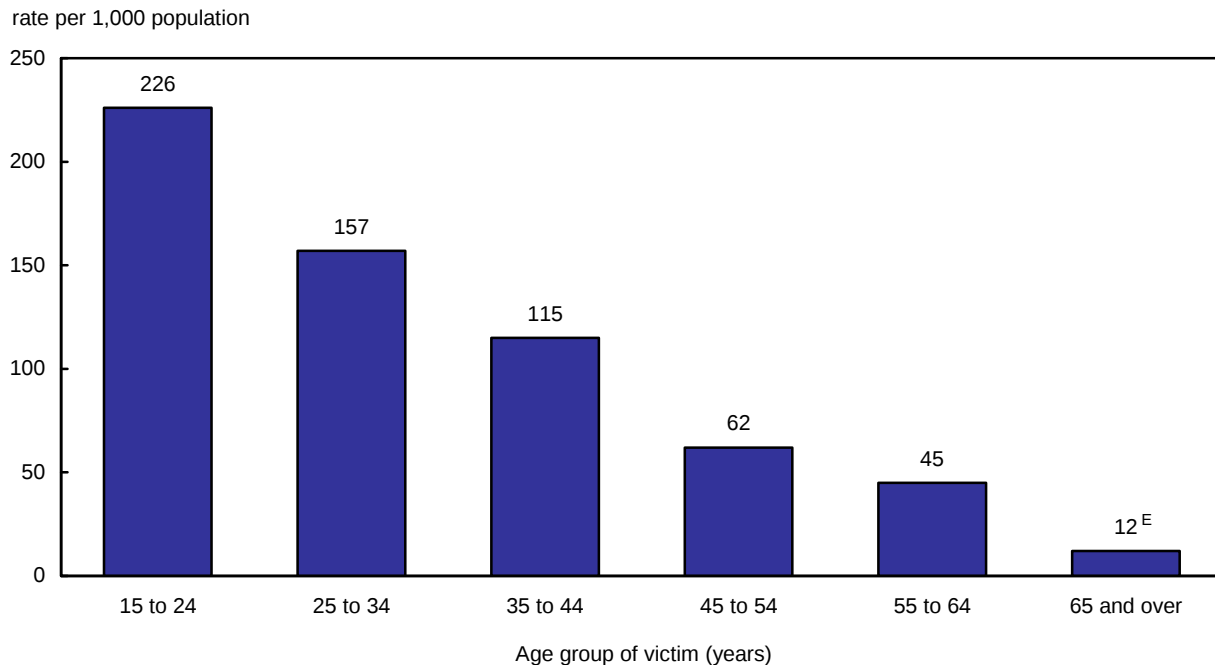
Seniors experience lowest levels of victimization

Based on information provided by respondents to the 2004 General Social Survey (GSS) on victimization, 10% of seniors experienced at least one victimization in the 12 months preceding the survey. This figure was unchanged from what was found in 1999, the last time the survey was conducted, and was three times lower than the level of 31% for Canadians under the age of 65.

When looking at the risk of violent crime, it was found that seniors were much less likely than their younger counterparts to experience an assault, a sexual assault or a robbery. In 2004, there were approximately 12 self-reported violent incidents for every 1,000 seniors (aged 65 years and over). This rate was almost four times lower than the violent victimization rate recorded for those aged 55 to 64 (45 per 1,000), and almost twenty times lower than the youngest group aged 15 to 24 (226 per 1,000) (Figure 2). These findings are consistent with results from the 1999 GSS.

Police-reported data also show that seniors experience the lowest rates of violent crime. Based on a subset of 122 police services⁴, the rate of violence against older adults in 2005 was 160 violent incidents for every 100,000 seniors. This was less than half the rate recorded for the second oldest segment of the population or those aged 55 to 64 (404 per 100,000), and 14 times lower than the rate recorded for the highest-risk age category, those between 15 and 24 years of age (2,317 per 100,000).

Figure 2
Seniors have lowest rates of self-reported violent¹ victimization, 2004



^E use with caution

1. Violent offences include sexual assault, physical assault and robbery.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

Among the different types of police-reported violent crimes, common assault (level 1 assault) was the most prevalent offence committed against senior victims (61 incidents per 100,000 seniors) as well as non-senior victims (487 per 100,000), yet the senior rate was nearly 8 times lower. Similarly, rates for major assault (levels 2 and 3⁵) were 9 times lower for seniors than non-seniors (18 compared to 171), and rates for robbery were 3.5 times lower for seniors compared to non-seniors (32 compared to 116 per 100,000) (Table 1).

In examining trends in violence against seniors, it was found that the rate of violence against seniors increased from 143 to 172 victims per 100,000 seniors between 1998 and 2005. This increase largely occurred at two points in time: between 1998 and 2000, followed by three years of decline, and a second increase occurred between 2003 and 2005.

Male seniors experience higher levels of violence⁶

Police-reported data also reveal that senior males were more likely to be victims of violent crime than senior females. In 2005, overall rates of police-reported violent crime were 1.5 times higher among senior men than senior women (200 versus 131 per 100,000). In contrast, there was very little difference in overall rates between male and female victims under 65 years of age (1,176 versus 1,170 per 100,000).

Among the different types of violent offences, the most notable differences in rates between male and female senior victims were for major assault (26 compared to 12 per 100,000 population), uttering threats

(42 compared to 22 per 100,000 population) and common assault (77 compared to 48 per 100,000 population), with rates for males that were 1.5 to double those of females (Table 1).

Sexual assault was the only violent offence for which senior females had higher rates than their male counterparts (6 versus less than 1 per 100,000). This finding supports research that has found that females in general are much more likely than males to be victims of sexual assault (Kong et al., 2002).

Table 1
Number and rate of senior (65 years and over) and non-senior victims of violent crime by offence type and sex, reported to a subset of police departments, 2005

Offence type	Total victims		Senior victims (65 years and over)					
			Total		Sex of victim			
	number	rate			Female		Male	
	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate
Homicide/attempts	1,046	5	51	2	23	1	28	2
Sexual violations (levels 1,2,3)	15,111	66	108	4	104	6	4	0
Major assault (levels 2 and 3)	34,601	151	536	18	201	12	335	26
Common assault (level 1)	98,544	431	1,815	61	830	48	985	77
Robbery	23,964	105	949	32	483	28	466	36
Criminal harassment	12,794	56	254	8	148	9	106	8
Uttering threats	38,556	169	904	30	371	22	533	42
Other violent violations ¹	13,388	59	191	6	89	5	102	8
Total	238,004	1,040	4,808	160	2,249	131	2,559	200

Offence type	Total victims		Non-senior victims					
			Total		Sex of victim			
	number	rate			Female		Male	
	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate	number	rate
Homicide/attempts	1,046	5	995	5	228	2	767	8
Sexual violations (levels 1,2,3)	15,111	66	15,003	75	12,807	130	2,196	22
Major assault (levels 2 and 3)	34,601	151	34,065	171	11,670	118	22,395	224
Common assault (level 1)	98,544	431	96,729	487	50,347	510	46,382	463
Robbery	23,964	105	23,015	116	7,671	78	15,344	153
Criminal harassment	12,794	56	12,540	63	9,541	97	2,999	30
Uttering threats	38,556	169	37,652	189	17,842	181	19,810	198
Other violent violations ¹	13,388	59	13,197	66	5,395	55	7,802	78
Total	238,004	1,040	233,196	1,173	115,501	1,170	117,695	1,176

0 true zero or value rounded to zero

1. Other violent offences include unlawfully causing bodily harm, criminal negligence causing bodily harm, other assaults, kidnapping, extortion, hostage-taking, explosives causing death or bodily harm, arson and other violent violations.

Notes: Excludes incidents where the sex and/or age of the victim was unknown.

Data are not nationally representative. Based on data from 122 police departments representing approximately 71% of the population of Canada in 2005.

Rate per 100,000 population for the geographic areas policed by the UCR2 respondents, based on populations provided by Demography Division, Statistics Canada.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Profile of violent crimes against seniors

Half of violent incidents against seniors reported to police

In general, when a violent crime is committed, it is more likely that the police will **not** be notified (Gannon and Mihorean, 2005). According to self-reported victimization data, about half (51%) of all violent incidents committed against seniors were reported to the police. While there is no statistically significant difference in reporting rates between seniors and non-seniors overall, police-reporting rates among 15 to 24 year olds were considerably lower (24%).

Most senior victims know their perpetrator⁷

The latest police-reported data found that both senior victims and those under the age of 65 were more likely to experience violence at the hand of someone known to them⁸, such as a family member, a friend or an acquaintance (64% compared to 69%). This is also confirmed through the GSS victimization data. However, seniors were victimized by a stranger in 36% of violent incidents, compared to 31% of incidents committed against non-senior victims (Table 2). This could partly be explained by the fact that as individuals age, their physical and cognitive abilities decrease which could heighten seniors' vulnerability to stranger-related victimization.

There were also some differences between seniors and non-seniors with respect to the known perpetrators. For example, seniors were more likely than non-seniors to have been victimized by a family member (48% compared to 39%), and less likely to have been victimized by a friend or acquaintance (52% compared to 61%).

The most common perpetrators of family violence against senior victims were adult children (35%) and current or previous spouses (31%). Victims under 65 years of age were most likely to be victimized by their spouse (60%), followed by a parent (15%) or sibling (10%) (Table 2).

Table 2
Number and proportion of senior (65 years and over) and non-senior victims of violent crime by relationship to accused, reported to a subset of police departments, 2005

Relationship of accused to victim	Age of victim			
	65 years and over		Less than 65 years	
	number	percent	number	percent
Stranger	1,519	36	63,303	31
Known to the victim	2,648	64	140,985	69
Family	1,267	100	55,403	100
Spouse/ Ex-spouse	392	31	33,236	60
Parent	102	8	8,277	15
Child	443	35	3,932	7
Sibling	143	11	5,663	10
Extended family ¹	187	15	4,295	8
Friends, acquaintances, other	1,381	100	85,582	100
Friend or acquaintance	1,145	83	72,618	85
Business relationship	226	16	11,613	14
Criminal relationship	10	1	1,351	1
Total violent incidents	4,167	100	204,288	100

1. Extended family includes aunts, uncles, cousins and all others related to the victim through blood, marriage, adoption and/or foster care.

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Excludes incidents where the victim's sex, victim's age and/or relationship of the accused to the victim was unknown.

Data are not nationally representative. Based on data from 122 police departments representing 71% of the population in Canada in 2005.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Violent incidents against seniors do not commonly result in injuries

Injuries resulting from a violent incident are relatively infrequent for both seniors and younger victims. Although seniors may be perceived as being more frail and vulnerable than their younger counterparts, they were no more likely to sustain injuries. According to self-reported victimization data, over two-thirds (68%) of violent incidents involving seniors did not result in any physical injuries. This is similar to the proportion recorded for violent incidents involving victims less than 65 years of age.

Police-reported data also show that violent crime does not necessarily result in physical injuries to the victim. Based on data from a subset of 122 police services in 2005, nearly sixty percent (58%) of senior victims of violent crimes did not sustain an injury. This compares to 55% of victims under the age of 65 years (Table 3). This could partly be explained by the fact that over half of all violent incidents committed against seniors were common assaults and threats, which are among the least serious types of violent crimes.

When an injury was sustained, by either a senior or a non-senior victim, it was most often minor in nature requiring no professional medical treatment or only some first-aid. Minor physical injuries were reported by 33% of senior victims and 36% of non-senior victims.

Table 3
Level of injury of senior victims (65 years and over) and non-senior victims by sex, reported to a subset of police departments, 2005

Level of injury	Total victims		Senior victims (65 years and over)					
			Total		Sex of victim			
	number	percent			Female		Male	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Unknown	15,871	7	328	7	149	7	179	7
No injuries ¹	131,168	55	2,774	58	1,324	59	1,450	57
Minor physical injuries	84,645	36	1,575	33	716	32	859	34
Major physical injuries	5,816	2	95	2	41	2	54	2
Death	504	0	36	1	19	1	17	1
Total	238,004	100	4,808	100	2,249	100	2,559	100

Level of injury	Total victims		Non-senior victims					
			Total		Sex of victim			
	number	percent			Female		Male	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Unknown	15,871	7	15,543	7	8,287	7	7,256	6
No injuries ¹	131,168	55	128,394	55	66,587	58	61,807	53
Minor physical injuries	84,645	36	83,070	36	39,244	34	43,826	37
Major physical injuries	5,816	2	5,721	2	1,274	1	4,447	4
Death	504	0	468	0	109	0	359	0
Total	238,004	100	233,196	100	115,501	100	117,695	100

0 true zero or value rounded to zero

1. No visible injuries were noted at the time of the incident or the violation did not involve the use of weapons or physical force against the victim.

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Excludes incidents where the sex and/or age of the victim was unknown.

Data are not nationally representative. Based on data from 122 police departments representing 71% of the population of Canada in 2005.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Major physical injuries were not common among either senior or non-senior victims. Specifically, 2% of senior and non-senior victims reported major physical injuries. There was very little difference in injury levels between male and female senior victims of violence.⁹

Most violent incidents against seniors do not involve a weapon

Both the self-reported victimization survey and police-reported survey show that weapons are not commonly used in violent incidents against senior victims. In 2004, the accused had a weapon in 36% of violent incidents committed against senior victims, a figure that is consistent with the proportion reported by non-seniors.¹⁰

According to police-reported data, weapons were present in 16% of violent incidents against seniors compared to 18% against non-senior victims. Among the types of weapons present during incidents against seniors, knives and other piercing instruments (6%) and 'other' weapons (5%) such as fire, poison or motor vehicles were the most common. Physical force is also included as a possible weapon due to its potential to cause harm or injury. Physical force was used against just over half of senior and non-senior victims (56% versus 58%) (Table 4).

Table 4
Weapon present during violent incidents against senior (65 years and over) and non-senior victims by sex, reported to a subset of police departments, 2005

Method of violence	Total victims		Senior victims (65 years and over)					
			Total		Sex of victim			
					Female		Male	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Unknown or no weapon ¹	57,730	24	1,319	27	602	27	717	28
Physical force	137,304	58	2,709	56	1,359	60	1,350	53
Weapon	42,970	18	780	16	288	13	492	19
Firearms	6,417	3	106	2	31	1	75	3
Knife/other piercing instrument	15,605	7	268	6	89	4	179	7
Club/blunt instrument	8,670	4	166	3	68	3	98	4
Other weapon ²	12,278	5	240	5	100	4	140	5
Total	238,004	100	4,808	100	2,249	100	2,559	100

Method of violence	Total victims		Non-senior victims					
			Total		Sex of victim			
					Female		Male	
	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent	number	percent
Unknown or no weapon ¹	57,730	24	56,411	24	29,860	26	26,551	23
Physical force	137,304	58	134,595	58	70,990	61	63,605	54
Weapon	42,970	18	42,190	18	14,651	13	27,539	23
Firearms	6,417	3	6,311	3	2,134	2	4,177	4
Knife/other piercing instrument	15,605	7	15,337	7	4,953	4	10,384	9
Club/blunt instrument	8,670	4	8,504	4	2,614	2	5,890	5
Other weapon ²	12,278	5	12,038	5	4,950	4	7,088	6
Total	238,004	100	233,196	100	115,501	100	117,695	100

1. The weapon was not known or no weapon was involved in the incident. Includes threats.

2. 'Other weapon' includes explosives, fire, motor vehicle or any device used to poison.

Notes: Percentages may not add up to 100% due to rounding.

Excludes incidents where the sex and/or age of the victim was unknown.

Data are not nationally representative. Based on data from 122 police departments representing 71% of the population of Canada in 2005.

Source: Statistics Canada, Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics, Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey.

Seniors experience lower levels of spousal violence

In addition to quantifying the nature and extent of self-reported general criminal victimization in Canada, the 2004 GSS measured spousal violence using a scale of 10 questions, which included physical and sexual violence as defined by the *Criminal Code* that could be acted upon by the police.

Similar to what was found in overall levels of crime and victimization against seniors, the GSS found that seniors were less likely than their younger counterparts to experience violence at the hands of a spouse. Less than 1% of all seniors with a current or previous spouse reported experiencing any type of violence by a partner in the 12 months preceding the survey, compared to 2% of those under the age of 65.

Similarly, seniors were the least likely among all age groups to report having suffered emotional or financial abuse. Approximately 8% of seniors with a current or previous spouse reported having experienced emotional or financial abuse in the 5 years preceding the survey, compared to 13% of those in the second oldest age group (55 to 64) and 31% of those in the youngest age group (15 to 24). While emotional and financial abuse are not defined as crimes in the *Criminal Code*, research has found that emotional abuse can be a precursor to physical violence in a relationship (Wilson, Johnson and Daly, 1995; Pottie Bunge, 2000).

Seniors less likely to be homicide victims

Lethal violence is also lowest among seniors compared to other age groups. In 2005, there were 49 homicides committed against older adults (25 men and 24 women), representing 7% of all homicides committed in Canada. This translates to a rate of 1.16 homicides per 100,000 seniors. This rate is slightly lower than the rate for the next oldest age group 55 to 64 year olds (1.30) and three times lower than the rate for 15 to 24 year olds (3.58).

Over the past 30 years, homicide rates against older adults have been gradually declining. The rate of senior homicides decreased 4% between 2004 and 2005, and is currently half the peak rate recorded in 1976 (2.52 per 100,000 seniors).

Seniors as victims of property and household crimes

In addition to concerns seniors may have about their risk of violent victimization, many seniors may also be concerned about becoming victims of property or household crimes. Police-reported data do not provide detailed information on the characteristics of victims of property and household crimes. However, through the GSS, it is possible to examine the extent of theft of personal property involving seniors as well as the extent of household crimes such as break and enter, vandalism, theft of motor vehicles and theft of household property within senior households.

Text box 2

Seniors at higher risk of telemarketing fraud

While there are no national statistics on the extent of telephone fraud experienced by Canadians, it has been recognized that unlike other types of crimes, seniors are particularly vulnerable to telemarketing fraud. According to PhoneBusters¹¹, Canada's anti-fraud call centre, between 1996 and 2003, 84% of the total dollar loss through telemarketing prize and lottery occurrences was accounted for by victims over 60 years of age.

Furthermore, a 2003 U.S. National Fraud Information Center report found that those aged 60 years and over represented 34% of all victims of telemarketing fraud that year.

Some of the reasons cited for the increased risk among seniors include: many seniors have substantial savings or assets, seniors are assumed by fraudulent telemarketers to be more trusting and polite towards strangers, and elderly persons are often home alone with little or no contact with family members.

In recognition of seniors' elevated risk of telemarketing fraud, the Senior Busters program was developed to address and reduce the level of fraudulent telemarketing against seniors. This program consists of volunteers that are over the age of 50 who assist senior victims of telemarketing fraud by providing them with advice and emotional support in order to help them regain their strength and dignity. The program's volunteers also assist seniors with reporting telemarketing fraud by contacting family members, local police agencies and elder abuse committees.

Theft of personal property includes theft of such things as money, credit cards, clothing, jewellery, a purse or a wallet. Unlike robbery, the perpetrator does not confront the victim.

Similar to what was found with patterns of violent victimization, seniors experienced personal theft at a rate that was much lower than other age groups. Specifically, there were 22 incidents of theft of personal property for every 1,000 seniors. This rate was less than half that of 51 per 1,000 for the next oldest age group (55 to 64 years), and almost eight times lower than the rate of 165 for the youngest age group of 15 to 24 year olds.

While in general, females were more likely than males to be the victim of personal property theft (100 versus 86 per 1,000 population), there was no statistically significant difference between male and female seniors in their rates of theft of personal property (23 and 21 incidents per 1,000 population, respectively).

Senior households three times less likely to be victimized

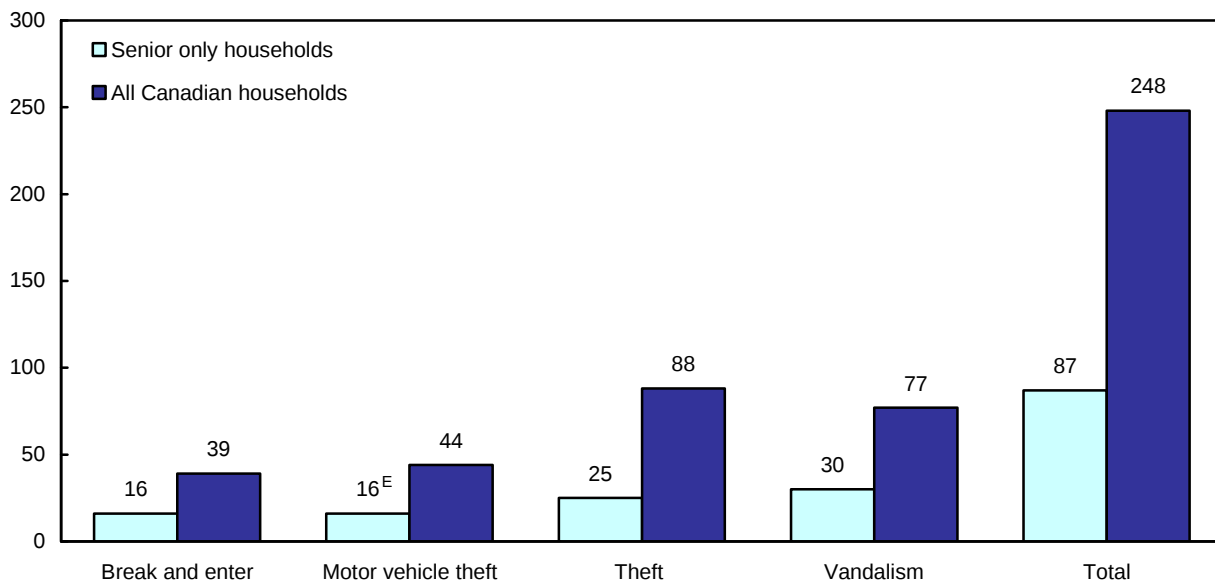
The 2004 GSS found that households with only senior residents experienced household crimes (including break and enter, theft of household property, theft of motor vehicles and vandalism) at a rate of 87 incidents for every 1,000 senior households in Canada. This rate is nearly three times lower than the rate for all Canadian households (248 per 1,000).

Among the different types of household crime, the highest rates for senior households were for vandalism (30 incidents per 1,000 senior households) and theft of household property (25 incidents per 1,000 senior households). Rates of break and enter and theft of motor vehicles were much lower, with both occurring at a rate of 16 incidents per 1,000 senior households.

By comparison, the highest rates for all Canadian households were for theft of household property (88 incidents per 1,000 households), followed by vandalism (77), theft of motor vehicles (44) and break and enter (39) (Figure 3).

Figure 3
Senior households¹ nearly three times less likely to be victimized, 2004

rate per 1,000 households



^E use with caution

1. Based on those households consisting of residents 65 years and older. Household property crimes include attempted and actual incidents.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

Table 5
Number and rate of senior household victimization by household characteristics, 2004

Household characteristics	Total Canadian household victimization ¹		Total senior household victimization ^{1, 2}	
	number (thousands)	rate per 1,000 households	number (thousands)	rate per 1,000 households
Location of home				
Rural	420	164	25	61
Urban	2,786	269	158	93
Household income (dollars)				
0 to 14,999	136	160	16	64 ^E
15,000 to 29,999	363	223	31	65 ^E
30,000 to 39,999	317	257	26	118 ^E
40,000 to 59,999	599	267	25	113 ^E
60,000 and over	1,229	300	26	167 ^E
Don't know/not stated	561	197	59	76
Household size				
1 person	611	178	92	74
2 persons	961	219	86	107
3 persons	658	317	0	0
4 or more persons	977	323	0	0
Type of home				
Single detached	1,903	247	113	102
Semi-detached, row house, or duplex	584	323	30	128 ^E
Apartment	614	213	33	51 ^E
Other	62	215	F	F
Don't know/not stated	43	184	F	F
Ownership of home				
Owned	2,140	242	148	104
Rented	1,020	267	34	54 ^E
Don't know/not stated	45	189	F	F
Length of residence				
Less than 1 year	549	317	19	188 ^E
1 to 3 years	631	278	10	60 ^E
3 to 5 years	423	272	F	F
5 to 10 years	591	271	29	99 ^E
10 or more years	965	196	118	88
Don't know/not stated	46	180	F	F
Total	3,206	248	183	87

0 true zero or value rounded to zero

^E use with caution

F too unreliable to be published

1. Includes break and enter, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property and vandalism. Includes attempts.

2. Based on only those households consisting of residents 65 years and older.

Note: Figures may not add up to totals due to rounding.

Source: Statistics Canada, General Social Survey, 2004.

Research has identified certain factors related to an increased risk of household victimization. These include: location of home in an urban setting, short periods of residence, higher household income, higher number of household members, and living in semi-detached, row houses or duplex homes. Similar to the profile of all Canadian households, these factors were also found to increase the likelihood of victimization in senior households (Table 5).

Seniors' satisfaction with personal safety has improved

According to the 2004 GSS, seniors' feelings of personal safety have improved over the last five years, with 92% of older persons reporting feeling satisfied with their overall level of safety from crime, compared to 89% reported in 1999. This increase closes the gap between seniors and younger Canadians, resulting in fairly consistent levels of safety between seniors and non-seniors (92% compared with 94%).

Levels of fear varied between seniors and non-seniors when engaging in certain evening activities. For example, 17% of seniors expressed concern about being home alone in the evening compared to 20% of non-seniors, and 21% of seniors felt somewhat or very worried walking alone in their neighbourhoods after dark compared to 15% of non-seniors.

The GSS also found that seniors were less likely than non-seniors to employ certain crime prevention measures to protect themselves and their property from crime. For example, older Canadians were less likely than those under the age of 65 to have ever changed their activities or avoided certain places in order to reduce their risk of victimization (23% versus 37%). They were also less likely to have taken a self-defence course (6% compared to 14%).

Locking their car doors (64% compared to 58%) and staying home at night for fear of going out alone (15% compared to 9%) were the only precautionary measures more likely to be engaged in by older adults.

Summary

With the increasing proportion of seniors in Canada, there has been a growing concern about their risk of becoming victims of crime. According to self-reported and police reported data, seniors experience the lowest levels of violent and property crimes compared to their younger counterparts. However, according to PhoneBusters, Canada's anti-fraud call centre, seniors may be more vulnerable to telemarketing fraud. Seniors' level of satisfaction with their overall personal safety has improved over the last five years.

Methodology

Data Sources

General Social Survey on Victimization

In 2004, Statistics Canada conducted the victimization cycle of the General Social Survey for the fourth time. Previous cycles were conducted in 1988, 1993 and 1999. The objectives of the survey are to provide estimates on the extent to which people experience incidences of eight offence types (physical assault, sexual assault, robbery, theft of personal property, break and enter, motor vehicle theft, theft of household property and vandalism), examine risk factors associated with victimization, examine reporting rates to police, and measure fear of crime and public perceptions of crime and the criminal justice system.

The target population for the GSS includes all non-institutionalized persons 15 years of age and older. The 2004 GSS had a sample size of 24,000 households across the provinces. Individual households were selected using Random Digit Dialing (RDD) yielding a response rate of 75%. The use of telephones for sample selection and data collection means that the 2004 GSS sample in the provinces only covers the 96% of the population that had telephone service.

Data limitations

The data that appear in this profile are based on estimates from a sample of the Canadian population and are therefore subject to sampling error. Sampling error refers to the difference between an estimate derived from the sample and the one that would have been obtained from collecting data from every person in the population.

This profile uses the coefficient of variation (CV) as a measure of the sampling error. Any estimate that has a high CV (over 33.3%) has not been published because the estimate is too unreliable. An estimate that has a CV between 16.6% and 33.3% should be used with caution and the symbol 'E' is used.

When comparing estimates for significant differences, we test the hypothesis that the difference between two estimates is zero. We construct a 95% confidence interval around this difference and if this interval contains zero, then we conclude that the difference is not significant. If however, this confidence interval does not contain zero, then we conclude that there is a significant difference between the two estimates.

In addition, non-sampling errors may have also been introduced. Types of non-sampling errors may include the refusal by a respondent to report, a respondents' inability to remember or report events accurately, or errors in coding and processing of the data. In addition, individuals who could not speak English or French well enough to complete the survey were not included. For these reasons, the victimization data should be used with caution.

Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) Survey

The Incident-based Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR2) survey collects information on criminal incidents reported to, or detected by police including detailed characteristics of victims, accused persons and the incidents. In 2005, detailed data were collected from 122 police services representing 71% of the population of Canada. Other than Ontario and Quebec, the data are primarily from urban police departments. As such, the reader is cautioned that these data are not geographically representative at the national or provincial levels.

The UCR2 Trend Database contains historical data that permits the analysis of trends in the characteristics of incidents, accused and victims. This database currently includes 62 police services that have reported to the UCR2 survey consistently since 1998. These respondents accounted for 51% of the population of Canada in 2005.

Homicide Survey

The Homicide survey began collecting police-reported data on homicide incidents, victims and accused persons in Canada in 1961. When a homicide becomes known to the police, the investigating police department completes a survey questionnaire which is then forwarded to the Canadian Centre for Justice Statistics (CCJS).

The homicide count for a particular year represents all homicides reported in that year, regardless of when the death actually occurred. The survey was revised in 1991 and again in 1997 to include additional variables such as previous conviction histories, employment status of the accused and victim, and whether the victim precipitated the incident with the use or threat of force.

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Endnotes

1. Throughout this paper, the terms 'seniors', 'elderly persons' and 'older adults' are used interchangeably and refer to persons aged 65 years and older.
2. Persons born between 1946 and 1965.
3. Nearly half (47%) of all seniors lived with a spouse or partner, another 27% lived alone, 13% lived with their adult children and less than ten percent (7%) lived in health care institutions. The remaining 7% of seniors reported other living arrangements.
4. The subset of 122 police services represents 71% of the population of Canada in 2005.
5. Major assault includes assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm (level 2) and aggravated assault (level 3).
6. Comparisons of self-reported (GSS) violent victimization rates for senior male and female victims were not available due to small sample sizes.
7. Includes only those incidents that involved a lone perpetrator.
8. Includes only those incidents where police-reported information on the victim-accused relationship was available. The proportion of incidents where the relationship was unknown is similar for both seniors and non-seniors.
9. Excludes incidents where the sex was unknown.
10. Excludes incidents of spousal physical and sexual assault.
11. PhoneBusters is a national anti-fraud call centre jointly operated by the Ontario Provincial Police and the RCMP. PhoneBusters is a Canadian central agency that collects and disseminates information to the appropriate law enforcement agencies on telemarketing, advanced fee fraud letters (Nigerian letters) and identity theft complaints. The data collected at PhoneBusters are a valuable tool in evaluating the effects of various types of fraud on the public. It also helps to prevent similar crimes from taking place in the future.

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