

The Formulation of a Strategy to Prevent and Detect Distraction Burglary Offences Against Older People

By

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And

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The views expressed in this document are those of the members of the Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative Team, and not necessarily, those of National Distraction Burglary Task Force.

Where the National Distraction Burglary Task Force agrees with our assertions those excerpts will appear in their Best Practice Guide.

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Acknowledgements

Police officers from numerous police forces throughout the United Kingdom have provided assistance in the completion of this work. However, special mention should be made of the contributions from Detective Inspector Kenny Rogers and Detective Constable Peter McCloud from Strathclyde Police, and Detective Constable Bob McDonald from Lothian Borders Police and Brian Lavery from the Royal Ulster Constabulary, whose support was invaluable in conducting the research.

Following the interview of a number of bogus offenders it was decided to hold a multi-agency seminar at Leeds University to mobilise public support for this initiative. This conference proved a major milestone in the creation of the Leeds Initiative and the success of the conference could not have been achieved without the splendid contributions of Inspector Simon Ramsden a a m0 une inen ac -0.1tribut-mmhausopublpector Simon Ra

Preface

“Who’s that knocking at the door?”

In 1997 ex-Detective Chief Superintendent Brian Steele led an investigation into the violent murder of Isabel Gray, an 82-year-old lady who lived alone at Crossgates, on the outskirts of Leeds. Police enquiries revealed that professional criminals from the bogus offender community were probably responsible for Miss Gray’s murder, but no one has ever been prosecuted for this horrific crime.

Police investigations reveal a distressing picture with increasing numbers of criminals specialising in the commission of distraction burglaries against older people; moreover

their crimes. Mr Steele collated information identifying how offenders learned, planned and undertook their crimes; what factors deterred them from attacking a potential victim; and conversely what attracted the offender to target a home or elderly person(s). The information gleaned from the offenders may be of assistance to others engaged in preventing the commission of distraction burglaries.

Following the collation of information from offender interviews, ex-Detective Chief Superintendent Steele invited representatives from professional and voluntary organisations to a conference at the Leeds University. Keynote speakers highlighted social and criminal issues relating to distraction burglaries and Mr Steele focused upon crime prevention issues revealed in the offender interviews. The conference delegates then broke into workshop groups and considered the mechanics of developing a multi-agency prevention strategy.

The workshops gave birth to a multi-agency Steering Group which formulated an ambitious strategy commonly referred to as the 'Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative'. The steering group successfully acquired £554,000 Home Office funding to finance the establishment of the Leeds district-wide scheme to prevent and detect distraction burglaries against older people.

In January 2001 Mr Steele retired from the Police Service and was appointed to the post of Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator for Leeds, and tasked with managing the city's Distraction Burglary Strategy.

The Initiative is supported by the Home Office, West Yorkshire Police, Leeds Metropolitan Council, Social Services, Yorkshire Television, and numerous private, public and voluntary sector organisations.

Steele's research has led to the assertion that a crime prevention strategy focusing upon the following six key points will not only significantly reduce the incidence of bogus offending, but also improve the quality of life of older people living independent lives in the community:

1. Older people not keeping unnecessary sums of money in the home.
2. Educating older people to make proper use of the door-chain.
3. Educating older people not to admit visitors to their homes unless sure of their authenticity.
4. Persuading older people not to employ or deal with unexpected doorknockers.
5. Implementing social networks around vulnerable older people to reduce their social isolation.
6. Educating key agencies/ personnel on the ageing process and late life issues.

The Leeds Initiative has established specialist taskforce groups to design and implement co-ordinated multi-

some of the Leeds experiences may be of benefit to others engaged in the battle against bogus offenders.

This paper therefore includes two perspectives for consideration by persons implementing a bogus offences crime prevention plan. Chapters 1 to 7 are primarily concerned with the collation and presentation of evidence drawn from people and settings throughout the country, and the information should be equally relevant to anywhere within the UK. Chapter 8 details how elements of the research material have been extracted to develop tactical plans underpinning the Leeds Initiative. As such this chapter may be more relevant to geographical areas with a similar older adult support service infrastructure to the one in place in Leeds.

Explanation of Terminology

1. Distraction Burglary

Section 16 of the Theft Act 1968 defines burglary as: -

Section 9 (1)(a)

Where a person enters a building or part of a building as a trespasser with intent to

1. Steal therein
2. Commit unlawful damage therein
3. Inflict grievous bodily harm on any person therein
4. Rape any woman therein

OR

Section 9 (1)(b)

Where a person having entered a building, or part of a building, as a trespasser,

1. Steals or attempts to steal therein or
2. Inflicts or attempts to inflict grievous bodily harm therein

Where an offender gains access to a building by deception, for example by pretending to be a member of the Water Board entering to inspect the water supply, when in fact he is a criminal entering with intent to steal, the occupant has been deceived as to the purpose of the entry, which therefore remains trespassary0p1

Similarly, if one offender tricks the house occupant into stepping out into the garden, for example to look at a faulty drainpipe, whilst an accomplice sneaks unobserved into the house intending to steal, both offenders are involved in a joint enterprise. Both are equally liable for the offence of burglary, albeit only one of the offenders actually entered the house with intent to steal.

2. Obtaining Property by Deception

Section 16 of the Theft Act 1968 states that the offence of obtaining property (eg money) by deception is committed where:

A person by deception dishonestly obtains property belonging to another, with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it.

The means used by bogus offenders to deceive their victims cover a myriad of different circumstances, some of which can be identified as crimes whereas others are clearly morally wrong, but are very difficult to prove to be criminal offences.

Where an offender deceives the victim into handing over ownership of property in return for the provision of property or services which the offender never intended to provide, this offence is clearly committed. Example: the offender obtains money as the pre-payment for repairs to the victim's house when the offender never intended to do the work.

Problems arise, however, in the circumstances where the offender deceives the victim into paying for services and only provides a poor quality service. It can be quite difficult to determine whether a criminal offence has been committed or whether the

circumstances merely amount to a civil dispute between the property repairer and the householder in respect of shoddy workmanship.

Professional criminals have long used this situation to exploit householders' naiveté by conducting poor quality and perhaps unnecessary work at outrageously inflated charges.

Henceforth in this work the term *bogus offender*

The Current Situation

“How have we got here, and what’s happening now.”

The Situational Environment

The 1990’s heralded a demanding period of significant change for the British Police Service. The organisational structure and working practices were significantly changed with financial control and discretion for the deployment of resources being devolved from Headquarters to the Basic Command Unit (BCU) Superintendent. Many of the BCU Commanders eagerly embraced the opportunity to manage their own budgets, and imaginative local deployment strategies achieved significant statistical improvements in pursuit of Divisional and Force objectives. These successes present an exciting future for the Service and are likely to ensure the continuation of the BCU system for the foreseeable future.

The empowerment of local BCU Commanders is, of course, accompanied by responsibility to ensure that the Commander meets his/her performance targets. In such a scenario there is unrelenting pressure for the Commander to achieve his/her targets, which are largely measured by statistical returns. The number of crimes reported and detected, the reduction in the commission of specific crimes, the time it takes to answer a telephone, and the time it takes for an officer to arrive at the scene of a crime are all typical key performance indicators, upon which the Commander’s success or failure is measured. It is clear, therefore, that volume crimes are the areas upon which Divisional Commanders can best achieve their targets. Petty thefts, burglaries and assaults committed by offenders who live locally are the focus of the Divisional Commander’s policing plan. On the other hand, the lesser incidence of serious crime committed by

travelling criminals domiciled elsewhere cannot be given the same amount of time or effort. Indeed, there is a sense in this approach. Volume crime has detrimental effects upon the lives of a large proportion of the community whereas serious crime impacts upon a small minority. A massive deployment of police resources is often necessary to detect a single crime committed by an offender from another region, whereas a similar use of valuable resources on volume crime can prevent and detect quite a large number of crimes, with the effect upon the key performance indicators being axiomatic.

conducted an investigation targeting two prolific bogus offenders. Some indication of the level of under-reporting may be evidenced when these offenders stated that they had committed approximately 500 crimes prior to their arrest. The investigation team could only trace a record of 60 of these crimes, many of which had been recorded as intelligence reports rather than crimes, usually with the officers making reference to such factors as “elderly, confused person”, and “there does not appear to have been anything stolen”.

Research by Dr Thornton, a Doctor of Clinical Psychology specialising in older people issues, and confirmed by the work of Steele when interviewing bogus offence victims (Age Concern Interviews 2000), reveals that some victims of bogus offences actually realise that they are being victimised during the commission of the crime. However, rather than running the risk of confronting the offenders whom they fear might then resort to violence, the victim will continue to pretend that they are still being hoodwinked. The percentage of such victims who do, or do not, then make a complaint to the police is of course difficult to assess.

These problems of under-reporting are exacerbated by the fact that victims who are the subject of criminal deceptions by bogus property repairers, grossly inflating their charges for shoddy work, are rarely ever recorded as crimes, usually being written off as civil disputes.

Nationally, the recorded figure of distraction burglaries in 2000 was just over 16,000 per year and reveals a wide geographical spread over urban and rural areas. These figures do not include, however, the most serious of bogus offender crimes where the offenders have moved outside of their usual MO and have for some reason subjected the victims

to violence. Such crimes are usually recorded as robberies or even, on rare occasions where the victim sustains fatal injuries, as homicide. It is perceived by the researcher that there is a growing readiness amongst younger bogus offenders to resort to intimidation or even violence in the pursuance of their crimes. (See Chapter 5, Bogus Offender Interviews).

The following factors (collated during Steele's interviews of bogus offence victims in Leeds during 2000) appear to be major contributors in the under-reporting and under-recording of distraction burglary:

1. Victims not appreciating that their property has been stolen, believing they may have lost or mislaid it.
2. Victims are embarrassed at having fallen for the deception and are too ashamed to report the crime (sometimes even to close relatives and friends).
3. Victims sometimes become aware that they are being duped but fear of physical violence prevents them from taking action.
4. Victims do not wish to become embroiled in unsympathetic criminal justice procedures and wish to avoid the trauma of attending identification parades, give evidence in court, etc.
5. Victims sometimes adopt the stance that nothing serious has happened to them and do not wish to inconvenience others by reporting the crime and thereby being the catalyst to creating unnecessary work for the police and other agencies, or to causing worry for their relatives.
6. Victims are afraid they would be subject to threats and intimidation from the offenders if they made a complaint to the police.

The Detection versus Prevention Balance

“Should we bolt the stable door before or after the horse has left?”

The Scottish Police Service, ably led by Strathclyde Police, have adopted an effective approach to addressing bogus offender crime with all Forces co-ordinating together under the pro-active banner of “Operation Hamelin”.

Operation Hamelin is a fine example of how bogus offender crime can be addressed with a high-profile public awareness initiative being accompanied by high-profile targeting of offenders. The success of this initiative is unquestioned but the researcher has some reservations about a strategy where a large element of the initiative is focused upon the targeting of offenders. The pro-active targeting of suspects, incorporating road checks, real-time collation of criminal intelligence and proactive surveillance of suspects, places excessive demands upon police resources and Hamelin tends therefore to rely more upon intermittent periods of intensive activity rather than lower profile but unrelenting, systematic prevention and detection work. Moreover, Steele asserts that any strategy founded upon deterrence by the successful prosecution of offenders (especially where the investigation involves moving covert surveillance to gather evidence) will place disproportionate demands on police resources when comparing the opportunity costs with the use of the same level of resources against volume crime.

These observations should not be read as inferring that the researcher believes there is limited value in the investigation and successful prosecution of bogus offender crime. It is

role to play in any distraction burglary strategy. Steele postulates, however, that a significant reduction in the incidence of crime, where offenders travel long distances across police boundaries to commit crime, can best be achieved by focusing attention upon reducing the opportunities for them to commit crime at their destination. This would reduce the need for involving surveillance to the scene of the crime, or stopping them en route, or attempting to trace them post-commission of the crime. Steele affirms, therefore, that the main focus of a successful anti-bogus offending strategy should be upon prevention accompanied by safety net targeting of offenders responsible for a much-reduced pool of crimes. Such an emphasis has the potential to maximise the quality of life for our older community whose confidence will be bolstered by the tangibly improved prevention plan. Moreover, bolting the stable door before the horse leaves is cheaper and more effective than chasing the horse over the moors.

Statement of the Problem

Bogus offences are committed against the most frail and vulnerable members of the community who are least in a position to protect themselves or their property and who sometimes do not even appreciate that they have been made the victim of a crime. Where older adult victims subsequently realise that their life savings, family heirlooms or other valued items have been stolen, they often experience a substantial breakdown in health preventing them from continuing to live an independent life in the community and may even cause early death. The breakdown in the quality of life of an elderly victim also affects near relatives who have difficulty in coming to terms with their inability to provide the necessary care and support.

Older people often have deep-rooted attitudes and beliefs making it difficult to change life styles and behavioural routines to better protect themselves from becoming a victim

of crime. These factors are exacerbated by problems that sometimes accompany ageing, such as short-term memory loss, dementia, and perception impairment. However, there is often a tendency by younger people to fail to understand that it is a minority of older people who suffer these symptoms and to generally underestimate older people's abilities. Steele and Dr Thornton strongly emphasise that the needs and capabilities of individual

The Statistical profile of the West Yorkshire Victim

“This is white crime committed by white offenders against white victims, or is it?”

Whilst comparatively rare, at least in terms of “reported” crime, distraction burglaries are targeted against highly vulnerable members of the community. Information gleaned from the offender interviews clearly indicates prolific offending and that only a small proportion of these crimes are reported to the police.

In order to identify the most effective method of tackling distraction burglaries it is

taken from the West Yorkshire Police computerised crime recording system (CIS) over a two-year period (1998-1999). Crimes were selected using Modus Operandi coding to identify “distraction” type offences. Study of the actual MO was not undertaken as this was covered by offender interviews. A total of 152 crimes were used for comparison.

The original intention was to conduct as detailed analysis as possible of the victim information, including features of the home itself. Unfortunately this was not possible due to the lack of relevant information contained in the crime reports. Comparison was therefore restricted to that information which was included in all, or the majority of, the crime reports.

Not all of the 152 crimes were used for all of the comparisons because some lacked the necessary detail. For this reason the sample size varies between classifications.

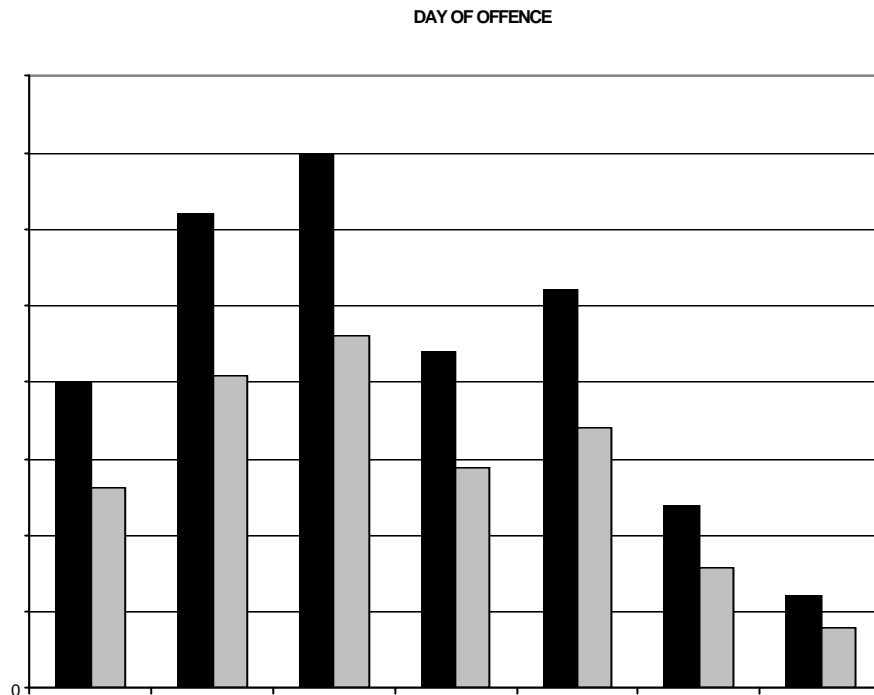
Crimes were compared for the following features:

- Day of offence
- Time of offence
- Age of the Victim
- Gender of the victim
- Gender AND age of the victim
- Property type (house/ bungalow/ flat)
- Property type AND feature (Detached/ semi/ terraced – ground floor/ upper floor)

Percentages shown are % of the sample used for that comparison.

DAY OF OFFENCE

Figure 1



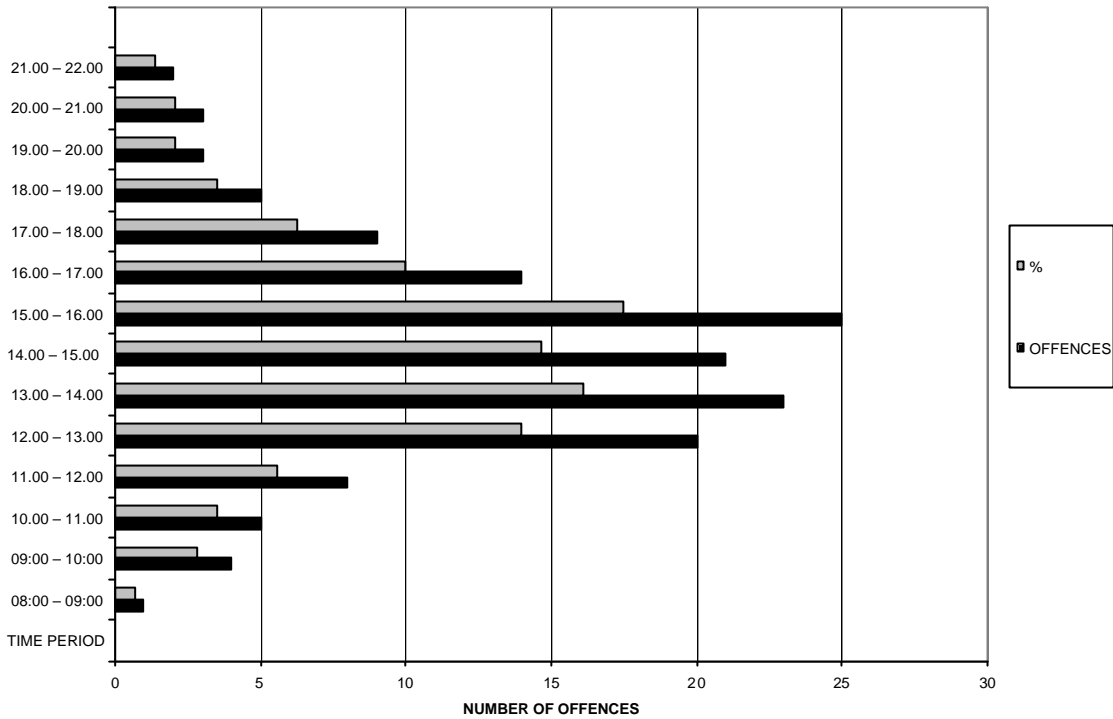
Sample size:152

The low number of offences committed over the weekend is to be expected as offenders often pose as workmen to commit these crimes. It was anticipated that offenders might be influenced by the day of the week on which pensions are paid as this might mean more cash in the house. Unfortunately the available data did not permit analysis of this theory. However, information from the offender interviews suggests that it is not a factor as many criminals who commit this type of crime travel long distances to do so and would not therefore have the necessary local knowledge. They are also more interested in “relieving” victims of their life savings rather than one week’s pension.

TIME OF OFFENCE

Figure 2

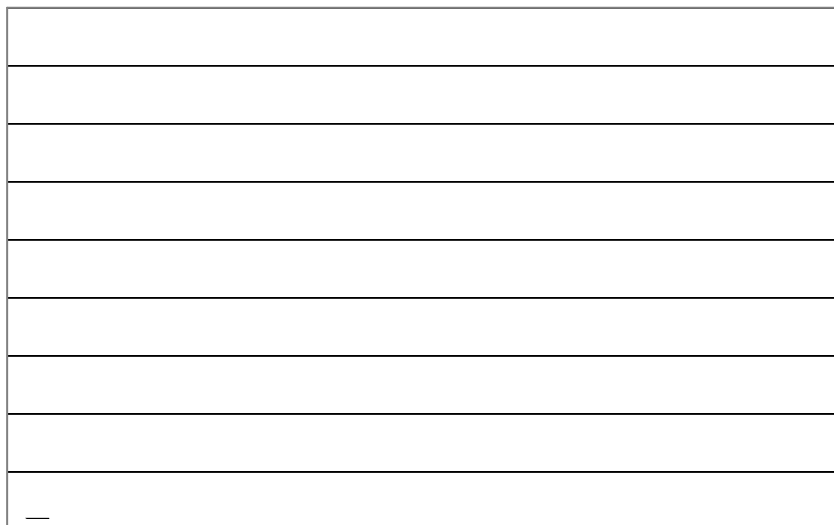
Sample Size: 143



The spread of times when offences are committed is not surprising, again because many offenders pose as workmen or other officials and would therefore commit their offences during “working hours”.

AGE OF THE VICTIM

Figure 3

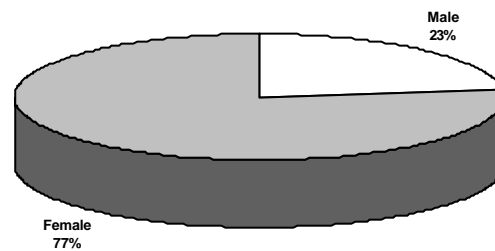


Sample size: 152

This data appears to illustrate that offenders prefer to target more elderly victims who are perhaps physically less able to defend themselves or their property. It also illustrates the offender's belief that older victims are perhaps mentally less agile, and therefore potentially easier to "con", and less reliable as witnesses in any subsequent investigation. This is backed up by information from the offender interviews. The 'decrease' in victims over 85 years of age is accounted for by the declining numbers of citizens in the higher age groups.

GENDER OF THE VICTIM

Figure 4



Sample size: 152

Statistically, females live longer than males and there are therefore less elderly men in the population than there are women. (OPCS 1993). Also, among pensionable aged citizens, there are more women than there are men living alone in the community. Offenders may also see women as more vulnerable in terms of physical frailty and therefore less likely to offer resistance.

PROPERTY TYPE AND FEATURE

Figure 7

	HOUSE	BUNGALOW
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relevant in terms of victim selection by the offender and therefore also useful to support organisations etc. in identifying potential victims.

However, such comparisons as were undertaken produced results that could largely have been anticipated. This was useful in confirming both 'professional opinion' (Support Agencies, Police etc) and the information given by the offenders.

The exercise also highlighted the need for improvements in the gathering and recording of information. This is important, as a lack of accurate and relevant information impacts not only on effective prevention strategies, but also on investigation and detection.

The database analysis also failed to identify the racial origins of victims. Many practitioners in the field assert that distraction burglary is a white crime predominantly committed by white offenders against white victims. Offender research (including analysis of Operation Liberal's offender database) confirms these perceptions in respect

It is tentatively suggested that an unquantifiable number of offences against ethnic minority households appear to be committed by locally residing offenders. The tales used to enter a household and the lack of distinct professional aplomb by the offenders appears to suggest that lesser proficient white criminals are involved. Examples of these MO's include visiting homes of pregnant Asian women who have received traditional gifts of gold jewellery to mark the event. It is postulated that these MO's indicate some local knowledge and therefore suggests someone living locally is involved in the crime. Such incidents cast doubt on the exclusivity of the white crime theory, so far as the origins of victims are concerned. However, there is little statistical or anecdotal evidence to suggest that black or Asian offenders are committing these types of crime.

It is clear that the high level of under-reporting of bogus offences makes it difficult to be sure that bogus offences are the almost exclusive domain of white offenders targeting white victims. The researcher therefore suggests that this is an area deserving of a structured research plan to improve our appreciation of the situation. It is understood that the National Distraction Burglary Taskforce is initiating work in this area and Steele, as Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, hopes to research the relevance of these arguments in the near future at Leeds.

Chapter 4

Older People Issues and the Impact of Crime

“They are past it. They

Although these aforementioned sensory changes are recognised by services, very few organisations issue staff identification cards that can be easily read by an older person with such impairment. Similarly, we continue to produce printed documentation targeted at older people without giving adequate thought as to how it can best be designed to assist easy assimilation by older people. The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative seeks professional advice on the formatting of all written and verbal material to ensure it appears in an older person friendly format. Through work with its community partners, the strategy endorses this practice within their own organisations.

In addition to the physical and cognitive changes associated with ageing, the Leeds Initiative also deem it important to consider other late life issues that might impinge on a persons vulnerability to distraction burglary. For example, older people spend a larger proportion of their time in their own homes, without contact from others. Issues such as bereavement affect older people more frequently given their older aged friends and siblings. Anecdotally, police interviews note how some distraction burglars peruse the 'deaths column' in newspapers to identify victims. Awareness raising of these potential risk factors is therefore incorporated into the Leeds multi-agency initiative.

Finally, the experiences of someone brought up in the 1920s and 1930s will be

these processes and understand those factors that will be called into play on the doorstep.

The impact of crime

“So what do I do now I am a victim?”

Research tells us that becoming a victim of crime can impact on our feelings of well-being and can shatter the assumptions that we make about ourselves and the world around us. (Janoff-Bulman, 1985). Three key assumptions that are particularly affected by victimisation are:

1. The belief in our personal invulnerability. To some extent we live our lives with the attitude that it will not happen to us. When something does happen to us it challenges our self-protective strategies and beliefs.
2. The perception of the world as meaningful. Victims now face living in a hostile world, where people cannot be trusted. Events are seen as unpredictable and do not make sense.
3. The perception of oneself as positive. Victims recognise that they have been singled out for misfortune. They have to face their own powerlessness, helplessness and neediness.

In an attempt to rebuild shattered assumptions and minimise the impact of the crime, victims often invoke the following minimisation techniques (Taylor 1983).

(a) Downward Comparisons.

An attempt to preserve self-esteem by claiming that there are many people worse off than oneself, and that by comparison, the self is not to be pitied or derogated.

The importance of the Police Response

“Do police officers realise that what they say and do might determine whether a victim of crime recovers his/her dignity and sense of well-being?”

In the aftermath of the crime older adult victims are prone to trauma and anxiety to a degree which impairs their thought processes and prevents best recollection and their ability to relate the circumstances of the crime.

The police and other support agencies have key roles to play in minimising victim trauma/ anxiety, and in initiating the rehabilitation process. Following the discovery of the crime, police officers are often the first symbol of authority to interact with the victim, and the officer's initial actions may determine the progress, or otherwise, of the victim's eventual journey to recovery and state of normality.

It will often be beneficial, therefore, to delay the taking of a written witness statement to a later date when the victim's emotions have been stabilised. Such witnesses will benefit from being encouraged to write down their recollections in the interim period, for use as an aide-memoir.

The police labour under a number of target performance indicators such as response time to the incident, but people are far more likely to judge the officers by what they do upon arrival than how soon they get there. Displaying a sense of empathy with the victim is crucial. Victims report that relationships with the police are contingent upon whether the officer seems to understand and is emotionally moved by their plight (Stephens and Sinden, 2000). Moreover, victim satisfaction with police sensitivity and

response to a burglary is related to lower victim upset and greater feelings of security (Brown and Harris, 1989).

It should be clearly understood that for victims, listening and talking constitute a necessary first step to helping them; and when the police are unwilling or unable to do this, the recovery process can be interrupted, and it is then easier for victims to attribute hostile attitudes to the police.

Providing Support to Older victims

“Tell them how to help themselves. Give the victim control of the future”.

Everyone is unique, and not all older people will require the same level of support, but crime victims have to rebuild their shattered assumptions about the world and themselves. Moreover, many will be reluctant to openly voice their concerns and fears, adopting a silent approach to coping.

Fear of crime will continue if the victim's circumstances remain the same as before the crime occurred. After the cri

this will leave the victim feeling foolish and powerless to change their 'inbuilt personality'. However, if we focus upon the victim's behaviour at the time of the crime incident, and identify how to amend it to prevent a re-occurrence, we have given the victim the positive opportunity to protect himself/herself in the future.

Winkel et al (1994) identified that when a criminal victimisation is attributed to the victim's behaviour at the time, then the same event is more strongly perceived to be controllable in the future. In addition to this, when the victimisation is perceived as a result of a 'slip in behaviour' at the time, this provokes stronger intentions to take preventative measures in the future. It triggers the idea of personal control over victimisation risks, increases belief in oneself, strengthens the belief in the use of preventative measures, and explicitly links action with increased safety.

Police officers and the support agencies should, therefore, carefully analyse the circumstances of the particular crime under investigation, and identify the victim's actions which contributed to their being victimised (usually improper use of the door-chain, and over-trusting doorstep behaviour.) Care should be taken to explain in a non-blameworthy, non-judgemental manner, the actions the householder should have taken which would have prevented the crime, and how observance of the advice given will better prevent a future revictimisation. This procedure should be built upon by Victim Support and any other agency involved in providing support to the victim's rehabilitation process (e.g. Neighbourhood Group and Neighbourhood Watch personnel).

Social support

"Social support is considered an asset to the extent that it promotes the preservation or recovery of valued resources". (Hobfall et al 1990.)

judicial system ensures continued trust and confidence in the police and offers reassurance to the victim.

Conclusion

Comparatively minor amendments to procedures, accompanied by co-ordinated multi-agency action to support older victims of bogus offences can significantly reduce the impact of crime, reduce the fear of crime, reduce the likelihood of re-victimisation and better equip them to enjoy an independent lifestyle in the future.

Not all older victims will wish to increase their social networking following the crime, but even developing a better knowledge of their community can be of benefit.

A multi-agency action plan incorporating the following measures may be of significant benefit to victims of bogus offences:

- § The first police officer attending the crime scene should use this first visit to concentrate upon relieving victim anxiety and building rapport
- § Sufficient details should be taken to record a crime and initiate the police investigation, but a statement of evidence should not be taken until victim trauma subsides
- § Victims should be encouraged to informally write down their recollections in trigger-point form whilst awaiting the appointment to make a written statement to the police. This would need to be saved and entered as evidence.
- § The victim should be encouraged to have a “friend” present throughout their interactions with the police to provide support.
- §

- § The police officer should encourage blame to be attached to a 'slip in behaviour' at the time of the crime, rather than to the offender or to the victims' personality.
- § The first police visit should be accompanied by detailed scene examination to maximise the potential of securing evidence of the offenders (Further research is on-going regarding scene examination).
- § Adopt repeat police visits to inform victims of the progress of the enquiry.
- § Victim Support staff should be introduced to the victim at the earliest opportunity, so that they can quickly commence work to reduce victim trauma and anxiety levels.
- § On-going social network support will be of significant value to victims. Such on-going support will be beyond the resources of Victim Support and can be best supplied by the Neighbourhood Network Groups and Neighbourhood Watch personnel.

Adoption of the following tactics will engender more effective communication with an older person:

- ü Do not make any assumptions on the basis of old age
- ü Build rapport – a professional who attaches importance to their relationship will achieve better outcomes.
- ü Allow time for a victim's anxiety to decrease – this will increase the reliability of the information received.
- ü Be cognisant of older adult cognitive abilities and social circumstances. Older people might need more time to formulate a response. Allow gaps and silences after asking a question.
- ü Cut down outside distractions. Make sure the TV is turned off, and the dog is in the other room, etc.

ü Keep language simple and use shorter sentences, and avoid irrelevant information, as this can confuse the person.

Chapter 5

Résumé of Bogus Offender Interviews

“They don’t need the money, we do.”

Eleven of the offenders were members of the itinerant travelling community, of the remaining ten, eight were of fixed address but travelled long distances from their home to commit crimes. The remaining two offenders were not members of the travelling community but travelled the country extensively, staying for short periods at lodging houses and hotels before moving on to continue their lives of crime.

All 21 interviewees were prolific offenders who had been proficient in their commission of bogus offences. Eleven of them had a serious alcohol or drugs problem. Nine of them subjected their elderly victims to violence; 7 of these blamed drug addiction as the cause of the violence whilst two blamed alcohol. Interestingly, one had developed a drug addiction shortly before his arrest and was of the opinion that the degree of intimidation he used when committing crime was rising in line with his increasing dependence. He admitted that he was sure he would have injured a victim had he not been arrested when he was.

All the offenders interviewed were white males. Whilst there is no attempt to draw the conclusion from the number of offenders interviewed by the writer, Steele asserts that bogus offending is **predominantly** a white crime, committed by white offenders upon white victims. In addition, Steele suggests that the accounts given by these interviewees represent the typical means used to deceive victims by bogus offenders of their age and background.

There are two notable weaknesses in the interview methodology:

Firstly, the absence of a female offender in the research group. Whilst the majority of bogus offenders are white males, it is not uncommon for them to be assisted by white

female partners, or for white females to act alone, but it is emphasised that the majority of criminal partnerships involve white male accomplices.

Secondly, it is not typical for 50% of bogus offenders to have inflicted violence upon their victims. This imbalance in the research group was caused by the availability of prisoners prepared to participate in the research. Those offenders serving extended periods of imprisonment were found to be those most willing to participate in the research – those serving long sentences were offenders most likely to have inflicted violence upon their victims. However, the violent offenders interviewed all spoke of the earlier pre

All but two of the offenders interviewed usually worked in conjunction with one or more accomplices when committing crime, although very occasionally some of them reported “pulling a job” alone.

Interview Structure

Steele originally intended that a prepared structured series of questions would be put to each offender in the same order. A structured questionnaire was prepared, but the requirement to build rapport with each offender, prior to commencing the questions made it impracticable to abide by this process. The initial difficulties were compounded by the offender replies drifting out of sequence with the questions. This led to the adoption of a semi-structured interview, during which the researcher made copious notes. This system gave the offenders the freedom to relate their experiences at will. Where necessary, the researcher interspersed key questions into the offenders’ free narrative to elicit answers to the recurring themes examined later in this chapter.

Interview Locations

The interviews ran for a minimum period of 2.5 hours and the longest lasted for 5 hours. The majority were conducted in prisons, with special visiting arrangements having been made available by the prison governor, usually incorporating segregated accommodation away from the other prison inmates. One such interview at HMP Saughton was recorded live by a Yorkshire Television camera crew, and sections were later broadcast in the Yorkshire region.

A police supergrass detained under protected confinement was interviewed in segregated prison accommodation. Another supergrass living under a false identity was interviewed in a public house side-room.

A number of other offender interviews were conducted by producing prisoners to a local police station where they were able to be intervi

reference to key facts in the offenders' antecedents had a cautionary affect upon, and engendered respect from, the prisoner.

In one of the supergrass interviews the offender's court depositions were obtained and used to test the information supplied. The researcher was astounded at the accuracy of the prisoner's recollection of cases committed years earlier and believes that this situation was typical of the standard of information supplied by all the interviewees.

The prisoners interviewed were not given money, tobacco or any other gift in return for co-operating with the interviews. However, on two occasions barristers cited their clients' co-operation in the research to High Court Judges, and at least one prisoner has cited his co-operation in an application for parole.

Conscience issues amongst bogus offenders

"We are professional criminals who only get caught when we get stupid."

A feature of the offender interviews was the ease with which the offenders talked about

money without her even realising she had been done. We would be miles away before she realised we had taken her stache of money from the bedroom.” This eagerness to boast of the ability to deceive vulnerable elderly people (some of whom were almost defenceless) clearly shows that the offender, and often his relatives and associates, do not perceive any wrong in committing these types of crimes. Recurring themes included:

“They don’t need the money, whereas we do

Whilst the bogus offender community now appears to condone violence against elderly victims, their moral rejection of any sexual assault committed against elderly victims remains intact. Whilst such inconsistencies might appear illogical we are still left with the position that an offender's relatives and associates may not protect them for crimes involving sexual assault, whereas they probably will for crimes when the violence used was necessary to secure the theft of valuables.

Classification of Bogus Offenders

The most obvious differentiation between offender types is the segregation of those who commit distraction burglary offences from those who commit bogus property repair crimes. As stated earlier, most bogus property repair offenders will commit a distraction burglary if the opportunity arises, whereas those who specialise in distraction burglaries are usually unable to commit bogus property-type crimes because they do not have the tools and other props needed to purport to be tradesmen.

The offender interviews and analysis of the offenders contained in Operation Liberal's database clearly suggests a preponderance of bogus offenders are members of the travelling community. That said, a significant number of offenders are also drawn from permanently resident communities throughout the country. Some of these criminals travel great distances to commit crime and it appears that only the less professional criminals commit crime in the locality in which they predominantly reside.

Violent Offenders

The majority of bogus offences do not involve the commission of violence and it appears that it is only a small minority of bogus offenders who resort to violence. During the offender interviews the below-mentioned reasons were specified as causes of violence:

1. Psychopathic Offenders

A very small number of offenders are persons who actually enjoy inflicting violence upon others. It should be noted however, that none of the offenders interviewed placed themselves in this category and were merely citing colleagues/accomplices who were of this disposition. The researcher has therefore been unable to explore this category and mentions it only out of academic interest, nor does he in any way attempt to quantify its relevance.

2. Abused Offenders

One offender claimed that having been the victim of child abuse by an older relative had left him with a sub-conscious violent hatred of elderly people. He maintained that this was the root cause of him resorting to violence whilst committing bogus offences against older adult victims. Whilst the writer accepts this explanation from the offender concerned, it does not enable the quantification of the number of offenders resorting to violence because of this type of trigger, and this may be an isolated case of little value to the an7 maylveTc Tc rom le vTj 18tttempt to quantify its the an7

crime. However, with the passage of time and the rich rewards from their crimes many developed a drug or drink dependence. The development of such dependency limited both their ability to deceive and their willingness to patiently continue a deception with a doubting potential victim. Their urgency to get the valuables and leave the scene often caused them to abort the deception and use violence to quickly acquire the money to feed their need for drugs/ drink. These offenders are likely to conduct a more disorganised and untidy search of the premises with an increased likelihood of leaving forensic evidence at the scene.

Whilst most bogus offences are committed during weekday working hours, drugs and alcohol-

ostensibly may not be connected to distraction burglary type offenders. This type of crime is usually committed by the more ruthless, professional and experienced distraction burglars. The search of the premises will usually be conducted in a disciplined manner with the offenders wearing gloves and leaving little forensic evidence at the scene.

Common themes from the Bogus Offender Interviews

As stated previously the bogus offenders interviewed by Steele were eager to talk about their past criminal activities and often wished to dwell upon a specific case or successful aspect of their modus operandi, making it impossible to confine the conversations to a pre-planned structured interview. Mr Steele, however, periodically introduced questions targeted at key areas relevant to the research to reveal common themes in the offenders' past experiences and practices. The questions and answers follow below:

Distraction Burglars

Q. Where did bogus offences originate? *(When put to a permanent resident offender).*

A. "It was in Leeds following the gales in the 60's. Good class criminals took advantage of the urgent need for house repairers and made a killing. It all started there. The travellers copied it off us. The Leeds Prop teams were known as the best."

Q. How did bogus offending first begin? *(When put to a member of the travelling community.)*

A. "It began in the travelling community. It's gone on for years and been passed from generation to generation. Outsiders have mixed with us travellers and started copying it but they are not as good as us."

Q. How did you first learn your trade as a distraction burglar? *(When put to offenders from the travelling community).*

A. "My uncle/ father began teaching me when I was 8 years of age. The first one we used was for me to hide a ball in the garden. I would knock on the door and tell the old bewer (lady) that I had lost my ball in the garden. She would come out and help me look for it. My uncle would then sneak in the house and steal her money. She never saw him. She would not know that she had been done; by the time she realised the money was gone, if she was old and confused she might not be sure where she put it. The police might never even be told about it."

Q. How do you select the people you target?

A. "Old people living alone are best, but I have done many a couple and some young ones as well."

"I've bought a few target victims. When I was in prison I shared a cell with a lad who had a long list of TIC's."

"If they're getting confused or disabled that helps."

"We sometimes follow them back from the Post Office or after they have been shopping. You can see they're struggling so it's worth following them home."

"I have snatched handbags from old bewers (*ladies*) and found their addresses inside and gone back later and done them at home. I've even posed as police when going to their house."

"If you go to a house and the woman won't let you in I sometimes put it on ice and go back a few months later hoping she has started to fail. You want to see smudged lipstick and food stains on their clothes. This shows they are starting to lose it. If their hubbies died they soon go down quickly, sometimes within weeks; you can just walk in on them. They're past caring. They will sit by and let you take what you want. They don't report it to the police either."

"We keep an eye on the obituary columns in the local papers and at the crematoriums. We don't usually go straight in but put it on ice. We'll give it a while 'til the survivor's stopped caring what's happening and then go do it."

Q. How do you target the houses you attack?

A. "Sometimes we just drive around looking for old people's houses. You can tell them by the old paintwork and net curtains or by the overgrown gardens. Hand rails are a give-away, so is invalid cars in the yard."

"I like sheltered accommodation. Once you get through the outside door they (*older people*) are all gathered together for you. They often have nameplates on each door. You can use the neighbours' nameplate to help you get in. You just quote the neighbour's name and say they sent you. It makes it easy to give a story to get in."

"My dad never did council houses, but I do. I've had some good tickles there. I like hoarders, people who have piles of newspapers and things. That's a good sign in any house. Some people sit in squalor with just an old chair and table, but they're always saving for something. Old rundown houses are as good as any and there is more chance of the money being in the house because they're not spending it."

"Sometimes one of our older ones have been to a house doing work in the garden or something and have been paid cash without the bewer (*sic*) going to the bank to get it. There's bound to be more money there. Some of the older prop men of us don't like stealing from the house anymore because they think they've been seen there. They'll give us the job and we'll pay them a cut or sometimes give them a soft touch in return."

Q. How do you persuade the occupants to let you, a total stranger, into their homes?

A. "Tell them their house is in danger of falling down. They're so frightened they'll go wobbly straight away and let you in."

"I would often say I did not want to enter their house at all. I would tell them not to be afraid and not to let me out of their sight. I would take them round the side of the house to look at a drainpipe or something. My partner would then slip into the house without being seen. He'd get the money and we'd leave without them knowing they'd been done."

“Tell them there’s something wrong with water, gas or electricity and they’ll panic and let you in. They don’t know how to check to see everything’s OK and they know everybody needs these services so they let you in easily.”

“Some are so lonely you just have to smile and talk nice and they’ll let you in because they want to talk to you. I have taken money off people like that bit by bit for months. I even exchanged Christmas presents with one but I took him for loads in the end.”

“Offer to sell or do something very cheap. People are so greedy they cannot resist a bargain. Once you are in you can then turn the screw.”

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after each job so the police do not connect them together, especially if they're a few miles apart. We choose a story to match the house. Sometimes we don't make our mind up which story we are using till we see the occupant."

"Good bogeymen travel long distances to do jobs. They're not known there and cannot

Q. Why do some people resort to the use of violence against their victims?

A. "It's usually the drugs that cause it. They're so out of their heads on gear they lose it or sometimes they're so desperate for drugs they lose patience and get rough to quickly get the money and get away for their gear."

"There's not many do it. Naughty ones we call them. It's when they're drunk and it goes wrong."

"Sometimes you just know there's good pickings at the house and they won't let us in. We wait for it to be just falling dark and keep knocking on the door until they answer it, then we force our way in, but we only do it when we are sure there's enough money to make it worthwhile. Most don't have the bottle to do that type of job. Only the best do it like that."

"I never got violent 'til I started on 'h' and crack. I lost it then, I just hadn't the patience and wanted to get it done to go score."

"When I was out of my head on gear I wasn't as good at conning them, and they'd realise what was going on so I had to get naughty (*violent*) to get the money."

"I started roughing them up without realising then when I started treatment in prison we realised it was all down to the being sexually abused when I was young by an old man. It left me hating all old people and that's why I was doing it."

Q. How many crimes will you commit in a single day?

A. "I once got done for 15 jobs committed within a mile of each other in just over an hour and a half. I think that's the best I've done; it's usually less."

It can be as many as 20 but that's unusual. Around 10 I suppose. What usually happens is that you keep going 'til you have made enough for that day. If you got one big hit, whether it was a few thousand quid or good jewellery, we'd stop and get away. If we'd less we'd keep going 'til we got a few hundred or got fed up."

"When I was on gear I would stop as soon as I had enough money to buy my drugs. I had to fight the withdrawals."

"It's difficult to say. If we did a job and we thought they might phone the police, or a neighbour or someone had been looking at us we would get right away from that area so we might not have time to do anymore that day. If it was going well we'd carry on till we'd got a big lot of money then we'd just get away quickly again. The more we stole the bigger the risk for us. That was how we saw it."

"We always stopped after a naughty one. We might do another in another county if we'd time and we hadn't got much money but you can expect the police to be called to a naughty one so we'd get out of it."

The Bogus Property Repairer (Static or Travelling).

Q. How do you so easily persuade householders to employ your services?

A. "It's easy. If you tell them their house is in need of immediate repair or it will immediately deteriorate beyond repair, they're so frightened they'll give you the job in panic."

“We often quote low prices, say for example seven pounds and then ask for £170. They get confused and pay up reluctantly. A good way is to quote the price in yardage. That confuses them and you can bump up the charge easily.”

“I sometimes quote an exorbitant charge to see their reaction. If it’s bad I can drop it

“Another team may have been and done work there and found them to be a soft touch, or they’ve been paid in cash. They might be moving on or feel it’s risky to go back and do it again. They’ll sell us the house for a cut of our take or we might give them a soft touch of our own in exchange.”

“If someone pays out in cash without going to the bank to draw money out you know there’ll be more money in there, so they’ll be done again for sure.”

“Often we just go knocking on likely looking doors till we find someone who takes us up. It’s a matter of recognising those who have money and we can control”.

“What I really like is people who live on their own and have no-one to confide in. We can just keep going back to their house, talking to them and making them happy and pretending to do a bit of work. We can take thousands off them in a matter of weeks without anyone finding out and stopping us.”

“I sometimes follow old gimmers (sic) back to their house. We park up outside the Post Office or Age Concern and places like that. You can see the confused people who are struggling and we follow them home.”

Q. How did you trick your victims out of the larger sums of money?

A. “It’s always by getting a confused gimmer with a poor memory. We just keep going back and getting paid over and over again for the same job. We take them to the bank to draw out the money when they’ve none left in the house. I took £75,000 off one old lady in a week. That’s why I’m here, I went too far with that one.”

“You have to be able to weigh them up. Some you need to keep liking you and you keep saying you’ve found new faults at the house. You keep their trust and friendship and you can take all they’ve got, with others you have to be more forceful saying the work’s got to be done and you want paying only for what you’ve done. Make them feel
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“The trick is never admit anything if you get arrested. Always claim to be legit. Say it

These offenders easily steal large sums of money from their victims, and it appears that many offenders probably commit in the region of 500 crimes plus before receiving a punishment of imprisonment.

A number of factors combine to improve the offenders' chances of avoiding detection:

1. They often travel long distances to the scene of their crime, and leave the vicinity immediately after committing the offence, making it difficult to identify and trace them.
2. There is often a significant time delay before the victims realise that they have had money stolen or that they have paid money for work which has not been done.
3. Some older victims make poor witnesses, albeit a much smaller number than most people realise.
4. There is gross under-reporting of these offences.
5. Many incidents are written off as civil disputes rather than being recorded as criminal offences.

Whilst we all like to think we are individuals with unique behaviours, bogus offenders have recognised our common behavioural patterns which they exploit to gain entry to homes and then to locate secreted valuables.

Most members of our community have undergone life-long socialising pressure to respond positively to reasonable requests from persons visiting our homes (particularly from those in authority) and this is especially typical in older generations. As such, there appears to be an innate reluctance among house occupants to challenge the authenticity of visitors to our homes and/or to check the identification details supplied. It is clear that bogus offenders have developed expertise in exploiting the perceived social

norms in doorstep etiquette. We must now formulate simple but effective prevention plans to frustrate the opportunities to commit these crimes.

A Problem-Solving Approach to Preventing Bogus Offences

In this chapter, consideration is given to the adoption of a problem-solving approach to preventing bogus offences against older adults, whilst having regard to the information revealed during the interviews of the bogus offenders and the late life issues inherent with the ageing process.

The commission of a bogus offence usually involves the coming together of the three essential elements of the crime at a common location:

a) The older adult victim b) The offender c) The property to be stolen.

A problem-solving approach to the prevention of bogus offences identifies that the householder's doorstep is usually the point immediately preceding the meeting of the three elements necessary for the commission of the crime. The doorstep is therefore the final defensive barrier at which the battle to prevent bogus offences can be won or lost. If we can equip older adults with the necessary doorstep skills and prevention hardware to repel offenders (and unwelcome visitors) at the door, this will frustrate the

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adult occupant is more vulnerable to becoming a victim due to physical frailty and/or limited communication abilities, then more sophisticated technology such as the security systems provided by In Touch, Senior Link, etc may be required to assist the

such authenticity checks. These widespread social inhibitions create the opportunities

Raising Community Awareness

Bogus offenders have long enjoyed anonymity and their illegal operations have been conducted under a cloak of secrecy. Raising awareness amongst all sections of the community will impede the opportunities for the commission of bogus offences.

The pre-requisite for a successful awareness campaign is the design of different publicity materials to meet the differing needs and expectations of the various target audiences. Publicity materials targeted at older adults should be designed to be easily read and assimilated by the target audience.

Reducing Social Isolation

Many older people are particularly vulnerable to bogus offences because of their isolated lifestyles. The provision of a surrounding social network will not only improve their ability to repel offenders but also improve their quality of life. Moreover, introducing social network support services to the victims of crime will enhance the recovery process.

Prison Inmate Rehabilitation Programmes

The bogus offender interviews outlined earlier in this work reveal that such offenders view the targeting of older adult victims and even the use of violence against them as legitimate practice. However, the same interviews unveiled the recurring “they don’t need the money, we do” and “it was their fault we used violence, they should not have resisted” type statements. The responses provide good starting points to change attitudes amongst prison inmates attending rehabilitation training programmes.

Chapter 8

The Formulation of a Multi-Agency Strategy to Prevent and Detect Distraction Burglaries Against Elderly Victims in Leeds

This chapter provides an historical overview of the development of a multi-agency strategy to prevent and detect distraction burglaries against elderly victims in Leeds.

formulation of a prevention and detection strategy. The delegates then sub-divided into facilitator-led workshops and the below-listed recommendations agreed:

1. All the organisations present should commit themselves to support a bogus offences prevention plan.
2. Distraction burglaries should be included in the district's Community Safety Plan.
3. A Steering Group should be formed to lead and implement a co-ordinated multi-agency bogus offences prevention and detection initiative.
4. The Steering Group should raise funds to finance a prevention and detection plan.

Clare Morrow, the Head of News and Current Affairs at Yorkshire Television, took the lead in developing a steering group consisting of delegates from Leeds Business Cares in the Community, the police, the Community Safety Partnership, Age Concern, Neighbourhood Watch, the Local Government office, and the Neighbourhood Groups. These persons were later joined by representatives from Victim Support, Zurich Insurance and Trading Standards. (Please see appendix 1 for the details of the Steering Group membership.)

Distraction burglaries were subsequently included in the area's Community Safety Plan, and a bid was formed under the Targeted Policing Initiative to finance the district's Distraction Burglary Prevention and Detection plan. The bid included the cost of a full-time salaried post of Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator and a part-time assistant to lead the development of the initiative. In October 2000 the Steering Group were informed that their bid for £55

Mr Steele successfully applied for the post of the area's Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator and in January 2001 retired from the Police Service to take up his new role based at Age Concern Leeds. From the outset of the initiative all the participants involved committed themselves to forming a truly democratic, co-ordinated, multi-agency initiative. Such a resolve precluded partisan tactics such as pre-meeting lobbying in favour of open, rational, agreed decision-making processes. This conviction to observe open democratic process most certainly slowed early progress in favour of regular widespread consultation. It is believed, however, that the alleviation of partner suspicions and the recruitment of total, if sometimes tacit support for the agreed decisions, more than compensated for the time expended in lengthy consultations. Moreover, the genuine support engendered amongst the participants is expected to carry the scheme through any difficulties encountered in the future.

The Formulation of the Prevention Strategy

Numerous facilitator-led multi-agency workshops have been held, the most notable of which were sponsored by Yorkshire Water and Barclays Bank, and led to the adoption of a short term prevention plan targeting the 5 key points listed below:

1. To educate older people not to unnecessarily keep sums of money in the home
2. To educate older people to make proper use of the door-chain
3. To educate older people not to allow entry to visitors if in doubt as to their authenticity (if in doubt, keep them out)
4. To educate older people not to give employment or deal with cold caller visitors to their homes
5. To implement social network support around older people living in comparative social isolation.

These 5 main prevention objectives are accompanied by interlocking support tactics:

- To improve the investigative techniques used to detect bogus offences
- The development of protocols to assist the rehabilitation of older adult victims of distraction burglaries
- The development of a multi-agency protocol to control the actions of organisations conducting business by means of home visits
- Educating key agencies/ personnel on the ageing process and late life issues.

The below-listed processes were identified as being the precursors to achieving our objectives. A taskforce, consisting of individuals with the necessary expertise, has been established to conduct a series of workshops in pursuance of each objective.

METHODOLOGY

Raising Awareness -213j 3.75 847f -0.13 cesteam43 ss or theh

person issues. Dr Thornton has proved invaluable in securing support for the implementation of user-friendly tactical amendments to meet the needs of older adults.

The following tactics are being employed to raise awareness:

Public Information Talks:

The Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator and the Assistant Co-ordinator regularly give talks to national and local policy-makers, key agencies and older adults.

Drama Presentations to Older People:

Feelin' Good Theatre Group from the West Yorkshire Playhouse have written a number of scenarios focused upon highlighting the 5 key doorstep etiquette objectives, and will travel around older peoples' groups presenting humorous and dramatic scenarios illustrating them. The Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator advises the group on criminal matters and Dr Thornton advises on how best to tailor the presentations to make the underlying messages easily assimilated by older people.

Some concern has been expressed regarding the need to avoid unnecessarily increasing older persons' fear of crime. It must be remembered, however, that motivating older people to modify their behaviour can be better achieved by increasing their arousal, be it through humour or drama. Older people are unlikely to change their behaviour without being presented with good reason to do so, and to this end, increasing their anxiety levels a fraction is judged a legitimate process. The presentations will be monitored and evaluated by collating the perceptions of the older adult audiences to ensure we strike the right balance in affecting behaviour without causing inappropriate fear of crime.

Intergenerational Work in Schools:

The Leeds multi-agency initiative believes that much unease between older and younger people is caused by misunderstandings due to a lack of communication. Two pilot schools projects are being designed involving older people resident in the schools' catchment areas being invited into classrooms to participate in school activities with a view to reducing social isolation. The Feelin' Good Theatre Group will enact scenarios before pupils and older adults to raise awareness of the issues regarding distraction burglary to prompt discussion topics. It is believed that improving communication between older adults and school children will alleviate misunderstandings and reassure the elderly, thereby improving their feelings of well-being.

Educational Videos:

Publicity Posters, Leaflets, etc:

For many years numerous organisations have produced a wealth of publicity posters, pamphlets etc. to inform older people of the facilities and events available to them. Unfortunately, not all such publicity materials have been specifically designed to meet the special needs of the target audience. Print size (at least font 14), colour background (black on yellow), style of presentation (simple, short sentences) etc. should all be designed to meet the perception abilities of older people. Dr Thornton vets and advises upon the design of all the Distraction Burglary Initiative publicity materials to ensure they are user-friendly for older people.

Taskforce Members:

Leeds Initiative is attempting to create clear guidelines as to how, when and where the written statement should be taken and under what circumstances the taking of the statement should be video-recorded.

Research by Dr Thornton has identified that immediately following the commission of the crime, elderly victims will often be too traumatised to give a detailed, accurate account of their experience and additional facts may be recalled when trauma subsides. The practice of police taking a statement of evidence from witnesses on first attending the scene can therefore prove counter-productive at court proceedings when variations to the original statement due to better later recall are attacked by the defence as false elaborations.

Section 33 Criminal Justice Act 1988, as amended by the Youth Justice Act 1999, provides that a witness statement may be read in court in their absence where the deponent is:

Dead; or

Physically or mentally unfit to attend; or

Is outside the United Kingdom and it is impractical for them to attend; or

After reasonable steps he cannot be found; or

He has made a statement to a police officer, or similar investigator, and is prevented from testifying either physically or through fear.

In deciding whether to permit the reading of the statement to the jury the trial judge will have to consider the full circumstances in which the statement was taken, and especially the mental condition of the deponent at that time. A video-recording showing the making

of the statement may assist the judge to ensure his decision best meets the interests of justice.

Additional witness statements taken from the victim's relatives or friends as to the deponent's mental competency at the time of making the statement are advisable to assist the trial judge's decision. If doubt arises from any quarter as to the victim's competency at the time of making the statement, a qualified medical opinion should be sought, and presented in evidence.

R V Hobstaff, 1993, sets a precedent regarding victims giving evidence of the detrimental effects they have suffered as a result of the crime in question. The ill effects referred to are usually physical injury, but it may well be that the Hobstaff principle is applicable to most bogus offences committed against vulnerable elderly victims. Such evidence of the harm suffered to the victim's health and sense of well-being, especially in any victim .34

2. A second offender often lies in wait outside of the house awaiting his cue to enter unseen by the occupant(s). The delay holding point may be another area where forensic evidence is deposited.
3. The offenders will often touch internal doors on higher or side edges, rather than in the vicinity of the door handle. Similarly drawers etc. may be opened in an unconventional manner.
4. Bogus offenders often examine documentation within the home and such items (especially insurance policies, pension books, etc.) may be worthy of forensic examination.
5. In many cases an accomplice who was unseen by the victim will have entered the premises to search for valuables. Scene examiners may benefit from focusing upon the bedroom used by the occupant(s) and by examining those areas most likely to be touched by someone searching for hidden valuables. Such an approach should also be adopted for other rooms, especially when no large stash of money has been stolen, and it can be assumed that the offenders made an extensive search trying to locate one.
NB: a room may have been searched even if there is no visual sign of entry.
6. Experience has revealed that many offenders carefully wipe fingerprints from surfaces they have touched within successful crime scenes and that they are sometimes more prone to error when inadvertently touching door and garden-gate type surfaces upon vacating the crime scene.

7. Enquiries may reveal nearby premises where the offenders failed to gain admittance to homes. The garden gates and external door and window surfaces of a neighbouring property may reveal forensic evidence that would have been cleared away had the offenders successfully committed a crime there.

8. Careful consideration should be given to requesting offender E-fits from older witnesses. Ageist prejudice should not deter officers from this course of action. In most cases, the complainants will have held face-to-face conversations with the offender(s) and will be able to recognise them again. It would probably be advantageous to allow victim anxiety/ trauma levels to subside prior to commencing the E-fit constructions, although it is important to bear in mind that best results are obtained from E-fits made within the first 3 days following an incident.

A full-time Scenes Of Crime Officer has been employed to attend the scenes of all bogus offences in the Leeds District and it is intended that he will develop best practice techniques for the examination of the crime scenes. This work is at its very beginnings but to date has achieved limited success.

It will be interesting, however, to see if the employment of a dedicated examiner has beneficial effects upon victim satisfaction with police performance. Research clearly illustrates the special needs of older victims and the therapeutic steps towards recovery acquired from meaningful police communication during early encounters. That said, the prime function of SOCO's is to secure evidence from the crime scene, and careful performance evaluation will occur to ensure we derive best value from these services.

Taskforce Members:

West Yorkshire Police, the Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, Assistant Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, representatives from Victim Support, Neighbourhood Network Groups, Neighbourhood Watch and Dr Thornton.

The First Checkpoint Scheme

Examination of the offender interviews reveals how bogus offenders exploit householder fears that their home is urgently in need of repairs to trick them into employing the offender's services. We do not believe that we will be successful in preventing householders from employing such doorknockers without giving the occupants easy access to bona-fide contractors who can be relied upon to do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

First Checkpoint is a scheme that originated in Worthing and has been copied in Leeds where the office holds a list of approved bona-fide contractors whose details are supplied to members of the public. To secure inclusion on the approved list the contractors are subject to extensive vetting including police checks, Trading Standards checks, reference checks and work inspection. Where a householder subsequently commissions a contractor from the approved list, the contractor is required to pay a percentage of the fees to First Checkpoint to finance the scheme. Volunteers will be recruited to undertake and assist in the numerous tasks inherent with the scheme. The establishment of First Checkpoint has been heavily funded but it is hoped that the Leeds Scheme will be partially self-financing by March 2003.

Taskforce Members:

The First Checkpoint Scheme consists of two full-time paid employees who are managed by the Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator and work under the overall direction of the Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative Steering Group.

The Control of Cold Calling at homes

The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative team is convinced that any successful distraction burglary prevention strategy should include protocols controlling the behaviour of persons conducting business by means of home visits.

We deprecate the prevalent attitude which places the responsibility of checking a

offenders cold calling at homes, and more than compensate for the additional work incurred.

This Task Force is attempting to formulate the following short and long-term strategies:-

Short-term Strategy

- ü To agree a protocol for all organisations conducting business involving household visits in the Leeds Metropolitan District.
- ü The protocol should be clear, user-friendly to vulnerable householders, and should permit easy verification of the visitor's authenticity.
- ü The underlying principle of the protocol is to transfer the responsibility for verifying a visitor's authenticity from the householder to the visiting organisation.
- ü Member organisations are asked to accept responsibility for the production and distribution of leaflets and other documentation necessary to publicise the agreed protocol.
- ü All organisations to work together to initiate the necessary publicity to educate the community about the agreed protocol.

Long term Strategy

- ü To employ psychologically based principles when designing the basic specifications for the next generation of identification card design.
- ü To introduce technology into individual households occupied by the most vulnerable and elderly to assist their decision-making as to whether to admit a visitor to their home. (e.g Senior Link, In Touch security systems).

Taskforce Members:

The Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, the Assistant Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, Dr Thornton, and representatives from Yorkshire Television, Yorkshire Water, British Gas, Yorkshire Electricity, Powergen, Transco, Leeds Hospital Trust, the Leeds Metropolitan Council, British Telecom, Parish Councillors, the Fire Service Neighbourhood Watch and Unity Housing.

Community Action Budget

Many of the voluntary organisations supporting the Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative will need financial assistance to implement their agreed tasks in support of the scheme. Other groups will wish to complement the Area Plan with imaginative local initiatives designed to meet the unique circumstances of the catchment area they serve. A budget of £50,000 has been allocated to pump prime individual support initiatives up to a maximum of £500 per initiative. All local organisations are entitled to make bids from this budget which is managed by the part-time Assistant Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator.

Initially the need for this central budget had been perceived as being necessary to persuade and assist existing groups to finance their support for the district's prevention plan, and indeed, in some cases that exactly describes some of the bids received. However, as enthusiasm for the distraction burglary initiative has grown, some neighbourhood groups have developed exciting and innovative initiatives which complement rather than form part of the district plan, and it is extremely pleasing that they can be given some financial help towards their implementation.

Target Hardening

The Leeds Distraction Burglary prevention plan is based around older people making proper use of the door-chain when responding to visitors to their home. Leeds is in the fortunate position that most older people's homes are already fitted with door chains and where one is absent, free provision can usually be arranged from one of the many projects already in existence in the city.

One must accept, however, that some people who wish to live an independent life in the community, whether because of physical disability or cognitive impairment, will not be capable of walking to the door, correctly using the door chain, and verifying the authenticity of visitors. The Leeds Initiative is therefore exploring a number of remote, control-room door monitoring schemes, and especially those where the door can be opened from the control room. Such systems are seen as essential to enabling particularly vulnerable older people to continue to live an independent lifestyle. This type of technology is comparatively expensive to install, and has additional monthly running costs. However, it is believed that the installation and monitoring expenditure is more than offset when compared against hospital in-patient or residential care costs incurred when such people's right to an independent lifestyle is sacrificed.

The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative is committed, therefore, to trialing the use of these systems and will develop clear eligibility criteria to ensure fair distribution of the systems we are able to finance.

In the longer term the Leeds Initiative will be looking to raise funds to extend the availability of these systems to maximise

**the opportunities for older people with failing abilities to
continue to safely live independent lives.**

Conclusion

This report reveals a disturbing picture of organised, professional criminals specialising in the commission of bogus offences against older adults, and especially targeting those whose frailty and isolated lifestyle makes them vulnerable. Many of these criminals commence committing bogus offences as early as 7 or 8 years of age and are often taught their criminal skills by a relative or family friend.

Some bogus property repairers look upon their criminal enterprises as the family business and have no compunction in taking large sums of money, indeed in some cases the life savings, from older adults.

The main tactic employed by bogus property repairers to evade prosecution is to do some work, however small and however shoddy, to the victim's property, and if arrested, to claim that the customer has contracted to a bad deal, rather than to have been the subject of a criminal offence. These tactics often prove successful and there appears to be a reluctance (perhaps justifiably) for the police to become involved in such cases.

Most bogus offenders operate in teams of two or more persons, and in certain circumstances, they trade potential victims to a different team, thereby ensuring that such victims are plundered to the full whilst minimising the risk of the offenders being prosecuted.

employ the offenders to rectify the imaginary fault. The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative has attempted to disarm these tactics by establishing a First Checkpoint scheme whereby householders have free access to a list of approved contractors known to do a fair days work for a fair days pay; making it unnecessary to employ the services of door knockers. It is suggested that the establishment of a First Checkpoint type scheme is an essential element to any bogus offending prevention plan.

The practice of purporting to be from the public utilities is regularly used by offenders to gain entry to households for the purpose of stealing. It appears older adults readily admit such visitors because of the belief that the supply of essential services is of prime importance. It is surprising, therefore, that there is an absence of uniformity in the practices employed by the various utility services conducting business by means of home visits. The researcher deprecates the practice of organisations conducting business by means of cold calling to homes, because such practices present the cover

locations, the offenders have a repertoire of tactics for tricking the occupants into divulging the money's location. It is suggested that any awareness raising campaign directed towards older adults should highlight the danger of keeping money in the home and promote the practice of keeping monies in the bank or similar institution.

Violent Bogus Offences

The incidence of violent bogus offender crime is small and quite difficult to quantify, because such crimes are recorded as robberies and often not recognised as being the work of bogus offenders.

It appears that the easy money to be made from bogus crime leads to a number of offenders developing drink and/or drug dependence. These offenders are more prone to resort to violence whilst committing bogus offences. The researcher draws interesting connections between violent bogus offenders and the times of the day and the day of the week on which they commit their crimes, as well as the manner in which they search the premises. These propositions are drawn from 21 offender interviews, and whilst the connections postulated appear common sense, they maybe worthy of further examination in the future.

It is suggested that the majority of bogus offences are committed by offenders from the travelling community, a group of persons who are reticent to avail themselves of drink/drug treatment programmes. There is therefore a strong argument for proactively mounting recruitment campaigns to treatment programmes in the vicinity of large traveller caravan parks. It is surprising that the Leeds Initiative has not piloted such tactics as part of their prevention plan.

The Ruthless, Rational Offender

The offender interviews highlight the activities of the most ruthless members of the bogus offender fraternity whom the researcher has described as the ruthless rational offender. These offenders target victims suspected of holding large sums of money or valuables (usually jewellery) in their homes, but who will not succumb to the offenders' attempts to gain entry by deception. Upon failing to gain entry, the ruthless rational offenders will retire from the house and return one early evening when they will gain entry by force, overpower the occupant and take their valuables. This cold-blooded use of force illustrates the folly of keeping money in the home and reinforces that the target hardening of older adult homes is essential to prevent a small number of bogus offenders, as well as mainstream conventional burglars, from breaking and entering to steal.

The Police Response

Whilst bogus offenders have continually developed their expertise in the commission of crime, the police service has been traversing a period of significant change. Chief Constables have devolved financial control and increased discretion for the deployment of resources from Headquarters staff to the Divisional Commanders. The empowerment of local commanders has been accompanied by an obligation to ensure that their Divisions reach their key performance targets. These objectives are probably more readily achieved by deploying resources towards the prevention and detection of volume crime rather than by focusing on the smaller number of more serious offences. It is not surprising, therefore, that the small incidence of bogus offences (16,000 reported in Britain in 2000) has sometimes been viewed as a peripheral matter in the Divisional Policing Plans. These problems were compounded by bogus offences often falling below the level of serious crimes investigated by Central Squads, and in many areas

there has often been an absence of any specific plan or unit to deal with bogus offences. The marginalisation of bogus offences has been exacerbated by gross under-reporting of bogus offences against older adults.

It is suggested that the marginalisation of bogus offences could be remedied by giving them a separate classification in the annual statistical returns, in accordance with the presumption of a “what gets measured gets done” culture prevailing within the police service.

The National Distraction Burglary Taskforce

It is extremely pleasing that in 2000 the Home Office recognised that bogus offences were being inadequately controlled and established a National Distraction Burglary Taskforce to assist in the development of a national and local initiatives.

Local Initiatives to prevent and detect bogus offences.

It is asserted in this work that the creation of an effective, comprehensive prevention and detection plan is dependent upon the police, professional and voluntary sector organisations adopting localised, co-ordinated multi-agency plans. This localised approach is seen to be necessary to ensure that the bogus offence plan interlocks with the various unique policies and procedures operating in the area. It is also suggested that the success of a local bogus offence scheme is dependent upon its inclusion in the area’s Community Safety Plan.

The impact of crime

The debilitating effects sustained by bogus offence victimisation can vary from mild anxiety through to such severity that the victims no longer have the will or confidence to

live independently and are compelled to seek refuge in sheltered or residential care. In extreme cases such victims may even suffer early death, but in the absence of an overt serious physical injury, causation cannot usually be proved to support a charge of

The doorstep is the barrier from where the householder can successfully repel bogus offenders. Proactive raising awareness, and doorstep etiquette development programmes must be implemented to better equip more older adults with the ability to repel such offenders. These programmes should be specifically tailored to meet the perceptions, abilities and needs of all older adults. The Leeds Initiative has employed a

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The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative Steering Group

Chair: Clare Morrow – Yorkshire Television

Appendix Chair Morrow

Additional copies of the report can be obtained form the