

AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE OF CRIMINOLOGY

CRIME AND THE ELDERLY

Adelaide: 23rd. -25th. February, 1993.

CRIME, SAFETY & THE ELDERLY: Imperatives for research, policy formulation and action.

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ABSTRACT

During the last decade, elder abuse has gradually emerged as an issue of societal concern in Australia to police, and other Government and non-Government agencies. The issue of abuse and maltreatment of the elderly in residential institutions has received considerable attention at both State and Federal levels. By contrast, until recently, comparatively little research has been undertaken to establish the nature and extent of the crime and safety issues associated with the ageing process and experienced by the elderly in other settings.

This paper reviews the published Australian literature relating to elder abuse in non-residential institutional settings. In identifying differing views concerning the nature and incidence of elder abuse, it suggests the consequent dilemma for Australian police, and other agencies, in allocating resources and in formulating operational policies to address the crime and safety issues experienced by the elderly.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years the status and welfare of the ageing have become matters of growing concern within many sections of the Australian community- As Australia's population grows older, both in terms of average age, and also as a percentage of the total population, the issue of individual rights of elderly persons, and the extent and nature of the physical, financial and emotional protection which should be afforded to them, has received increasing attention from a number of Government and non-Government agencies, including the police.

The problem of abuse and maltreatment in institutional settings has been recognised at both State and Federal levels. Legislation has been introduced by several State Governments, and by the Commonwealth Government, which has endeavoured to define and protect the consumer rights of the recipients of residential institutional aged care services; to preserve and establish standards for the care of the elderly; and generally to enhance the status and well-being of the elderly.

Adult guardianship legislation¹ and retirement villages legislation are examples of acknowledgement at a State level of the need to afford special protection to the aged. At a federal level, the Commonwealth Government instituted a major program of aged care reform in 1986. This has included a major survey of conditions in aged care residential institutions and culminated in the publication of a major discussion paper² and the Ronalds Report³ in 1989. The principal recommendations of that report were subsequently implemented by the *Community Services and Health Legislation Amendment Act (No 2) 1989* which received the Royal Assent in January 1990. '

Until relatively recently, therefore, debate on the protection of the elderly and their rights has tended to concentrate on protection in an institutional context. Yet, in 1986 less than 6% of persons over 60 years of age (0.75% of the total population) lived in Nursing Homes or Homes for the Aged while, by contrast, in the same age-group, over four times as many elderly persons in fact lived alone.⁴ However, the role and function of the police, and the issue of elder abuse or maltreatment in other than institutional settings, has been largely ignored until recently.⁵ This paper, therefore, undertakes a critical review of the published Australian literature relating to elder abuse in non-residential institutional settings. In identifying the differing themes concerning the nature and incidence of elder abuse, it suggests the consequent dilemma for the police, and other Government and non-Government agencies, in allocating resources and in formulating operational policies to address the whole range of crime and safety issues embraced by the expression 'elder abuse'.⁶

¹ Adult guardianship legislation is not limited in application to residents of aged care institutions.

² Ronalds, C.: "I'm Still an Individual". Department of Community Services and Health: Canberra, 1989.

³ Ronalds, C.: Residents' Rights in Nursing Homes and Hostels -Final report. Department of Community Services and Health: Canberra, 1989.

⁴ Castles, I. Census 86 -AUSTRALIA IN PROFILE: A Summary of Major Findings, (Catalogue No. 2502.0), Canberra, Australian Bureau of Statistics, pp.61-66. Castles, I. Census 86 -Cross Classified Characteristics of Persons and Dwellings. (Catalogue No. 2498.0), Canberra, Australian Bureau of Statistics, pp. 160.163.

⁵ NSW Police Service, Directions on Ageing in New South Wales: Crime and Safety, Sydney, New South Wales Premier's Department (Office on Ageing), 1990, pp. 21.

⁶ In this paper, the term "elder abuse" is defined to describe any form of criminal victimisation of the elderly, including financial exploitation. The term is also extended to cover other forms of exploitation which may not involve strict criminality, but which nevertheless exploit the physical, emotional or financial frailties of the elderly, and which may involve, for example, forms of coercion or harassment generating fear or distress. Apart

2. THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction.

The items selected for review are presented in chronological order of publication. They do not include press and other media reports; documents prepared for the internal use of Government and other agencies, particularly the police; general statistical publications and victims of crime surveys; adult guardianship literature; and general community policing literature. To the extent that such material does not specifically address aspects of elder abuse, even though it may contain information of indirect relevance, it is considered not relevant to, and beyond the purpose of, this paper.

The material reviewed discloses two broad themes in the public discussion of elder abuse: first, the initial emergence of elder abuse as an unacceptable societal phenomenon in Australia; and, second, as the existence of elder abuse is increasingly accepted, a growing concern with formulating appropriate responses to elder abuse.

The growing public awareness, acknowledgement and acceptance of elder abuse issues during the 1980's will be seen to have been impeded by lack of specific empirical research data, and, consequently, any precise understanding of the dimensions of the problem. The literature reveals two opposed and contradictory attitudes to the existence of elder abuse. As a matter of convenience in this review, these opposing schools of thought are termed "realist" and "academic/statistical" respectively. Initially, writers advancing the "realist" view relied on evidence to support their opinions which was largely anecdotal and drawn from their professional involvement and contact with the elderly. The "realist" view suggests that the elderly are particularly susceptible to certain types of criminal victimization; are disproportionately victimised when compared with other age groups; have fears for their safety and security peculiar to their age group; and that the impact of criminal activity and other forms of exploitation and harassment may often be greater on the elderly than on other age groups. More recently, the "realist" view has been supported by both qualitative and quantitative research data.

By contrast, the "academic/statistical" view reflects a more theoretical approach to the issue of elder abuse. Writers expressing this view have argued that *sophisticated, standardised and reliable* ⁷ victimisation surveys in fact demonstrate that the elderly are generally less likely to be victims of crime than other age groups. This view implies that abuse should be equated with criminal behaviour and suggests that elder abuse exists more in the perception of certain sections of the community, rather than in reality. In effect, this view denies the experience of those directly concerned with providing services to the elderly, and ignores more recent research.

Review.

1. The Old as Offenders and Victims of Crime.

(Sydney: Institute of Criminology, Sydney University Law School, 1981).

Australian elder abuse literature appears to commence with the publication of these proceedings. This seminar did not focus exclusively on elder abuse but on a wider range of crime and safety issues affecting the elderly and associated with the ageing process. Those

from obvious forms of physical abuse (assault, torture, confinement, molestation & sexual assault), elder abuse may also involve psychological abuse, financial exploitation and neglect.

⁷ Sutton, A.J. : 'Crime and the Elderly Person: Problems of Fear and .Alienation' *The Old as Offenders and Victims of Crime* (Sydney: Institute of Criminology, Sydney University Law School, 1981, p.18).

papers which did consider aspects of elder abuse were concerned essentially to establish its existence, or otherwise, as a phenomenon within Australian society and, in general terms, reflected two schools of thought. Some writers (e.g. S.J. Duncan & E. Bohnhoff respectively) accepted that there were particular crime and safety issues affecting the elderly thereby establishing the "realist" view. By contrast, other writers (e.g. A.J. Sutton) reflected the "academic/statistical" view and doubted the existence of any substantial volume of elder abuse.

2. Biles, D : 'Crime and the Elderly'.

(*Australian Journal on Ageing*, 1983, v. 2, pp. 22-23).

This article represents an endorsement of the "academic/statistical" school of thought. Biles referred to statistical data from victimisation surveys not considered by the Sydney seminar and suggests that victimisation rates for the age group over 60 years are significantly lower than equivalent rates for nearly all other age groups. The significance of this paper is that it has subsequently been widely quoted in subsequent articles and papers and appears to form the basis of the "academic/statistical" view.

3. Whitmont, D. & Austin, M. : 'Rights of the elderly'.

(*Legal Service Bulletin*, 1983, v.8, pp. 167-171)

This article documents some results of a phone-in survey of abuse of elderly people conducted by the Redfern Legal Centre in March, 1982. It is primarily concerned with the existence of abuse in residential institutional settings, and how lawyers and legislative initiative might help elderly abused persons pursue their complaints and establish their rights. It nevertheless sought to raise the general level of public awareness concerning abuse and to stimulate discussion which might lead to greater acknowledgement of the problem and, subsequently, remedies and reform.

4. Alzheimer Society of Victoria: Aged Abuse: Who Cares?

(Proceedings of a seminar held in Melbourne, 1986).

This is a collection of eight papers all of which address the seminar theme: "The Unrecognised Problem of Aged Abuse: Does it merit a policy?" Although it is apparent that this question should be answered affirmatively, the conflicting "realist" and "academic/statistical" schools of thought are still evident. However, these proceedings reflect a greater acceptance of "realist" view and a growing willingness to acknowledge the existence of elder abuse, even if its nature and extent could not be determined with any precision. Three papers were contributed by police (H. Adams, W.H. Robertson and J.P. Buck) which describe the growing police awareness in Victoria of the special problems experienced by the elderly and offer a rationale for police intervention. This seminar discussion progressed beyond simply debating the existence of elder abuse to a consideration of possible strategies and agencies for intervention and prevention and suggests a growing acceptance of the "realist" school of thought.

5. Hiller, A.: 'Some Recent Developments in Community policing - Part II'.

(*Australian Police Journal*, 1986, v. 40, pp.111-116)

An informative article which documents the growing police interest in New South Wales in developing crime prevention programs for the elderly. It also records the establishment, within a community policing framework, of a NSW Police task force to institute a planning and research program to identify the crime and safety issues involving the elderly.

6. Ridley, C. : 'Elder Abuse'.

(*South Australian Social Worker*, 1987, v. 4, pp. 7-9)

This paper was originally presented at a conference in South Australia and provides persuasive anecdotal evidence of elder abuse in the community from a social worker at a major South Australian hospital.

7. Austen, M.A.: 'Crime and the Elderly'.

(*Australian Crime Prevention Council Journal*, 1989, v. 10, pp.41-47)

This article by a magistrate reflects the "realist" view. The author identifies particular and peculiar vulnerabilities of the elderly and argues for a police policy of pro-active intervention to assist the elderly in protecting themselves. She endorses and acknowledges NSW police initiatives in this regard.

8. Green, L: The Vulnerability of the Aged to Criminal Exploitation (Interim Report).

(Adelaide: National Police Research Unit, April, 1989)

This report was produced by the National Police Research Unit (NPRU) as part of research commissioned by the Australian Police Ministers' Council in November, 1988. It was released in April, 1989, as an interim report in anticipation of the national workshop organised by the NPRU two months later. It was based on a series of interviews with elderly victims of crime and on an extensive literature review and included an extensive bibliography which is dominated by references to North American literature.

It is an interesting and contradictory document, and also somewhat disappointing. It concluded that the elderly were particularly vulnerable to certain types of crime and suggested that they were often particularly fearful for their own personal safety and security to the extent that such fears often significantly interfered with their enjoyment of life. Paradoxically, however, the principal recommendation of this report is that the elderly are less likely to be criminally victimised than other age groups and that, although further research is desirable, there is essentially no problem which needs any significant allocation of police resources. This conclusion is consistent with the "academic/statistical" view and apparently rejects, or at least ignores, the evidence of overseas research and literature suggesting the contrary. It represents a significant contribution to the public discussion and literature but it is suggested that its conclusions are not supported by the analysis of research data and literature. It is poorly referenced.

9. National Police Research Unit: "Crime and the Elderly".

(Collection of papers from a national workshop held in Adelaide. June.1989)

This item comprises fifteen papers contributed by invited participants to a national workshop convened by the NPRU. The participants included politicians, police, academics and others directly associated with the provision of services to the aged. The discussion again reflected the differing and opposing "realist" and "academic/statistical" views. However, while the "academic/statistical" view remains unchanged, the "realist" view was increasingly justified by reference to overseas, particularly North American, research data and expanded to consider what might be done by police to prevent this form of abuse.

10. Green, L : The Vulnerability of the Aged to Criminal Exploitation (Final Report).

(Adelaide: National Police Research Unit, August, 1989).

The Final Report changed little from the Interim Report. It included a series of appendices which identify internal police documents and reports relating to policing initiatives for the protection of the elderly. However, its conclusions reflect the same conflict and inconsistencies apparent in the Interim Report and recommended that the elderly should not be singled out in the development of special crime prevention initiatives. The conclusion, that the problem of elder abuse might require more direct action but that any such initiative

should await the results of further research, reflected the conflicting "academic/statistical" and "realist" views. The suggested conclusions seem not to be supported by the preceding analysis of the literature, and, in effect, disregard the "realist" contributions to the workshop (including that of Gately, the officer in charge of the NSW Police Aged Services Unit at the time), and the NPRU's own empirical research.

11. Ronalds, C.: 'I'm Still an Individual'.

(Department of Community Services and Health: Canberra, 1989).

This document was released as a discussion paper by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health. It invited public comment on the matters arising from research commissioned by the Commonwealth Government so that any such contributions could be taken into consideration in the preparation of the final report

(see below: next item)

12. Ronalds, C.: Residents' Rights in Nursing Homes and Hostels - Final report.

(Department of Community Services and Health: Canberra, 1989).

This was the final report contemplated in Ronalds' discussion paper identified above. Both documents arose out of research commissioned by the Commonwealth Government concerned to investigate the welfare and status of the elderly in residential aged care institutions. They concluded that the elderly were subject to widespread abuse in that environment. In commenting upon the release of the discussion paper, Mr Staples said that the research had *found abuses were commonly entrenched in the daily routines of almost all homes and hostels.*⁸ Accordingly, there was a need to define and enforce standards of care and individual rights of the elderly.

These publications contribute to the general literature on aged abuse in Australia and offer further evidence of elder abuse. They go beyond simply suggesting the need for appropriate social intervention and make a number of recommendations, subsequently implemented by legislation, by which the elderly may be protected from abuse, exploitation and harassment in residential institutions. These documents represent a significant evolution or progression in the public discussion of elder abuse despite their focus on institutional abuse.

13. Clarke, R. V. : 'Crime and the Elderly'.

(*Journal of the Australasian Society of Victimology*, 1990, v.1, pp.15-20)

This paper was the keynote address delivered to the NPRU workshop in Adelaide. In suggesting that elder abuse was more likely to exist as a perception of certain sections of the community, rather than as a reality, it reflects the "academic/statistical" view. Clarke also reviewed some of the American literature and, as a basis for discussion, suggested a broad definition of abuse which did not simply equate abuse with criminality

14. Green, L. : Examining the Vulnerability of the Aged to Criminal Exploitation.

(*NPRU Review*, 1990, v. 6, pp. 22-29)

15. Clarke, R. V.: Why are the Elderly less at risk of Predatory Crime?

(*NPRU Review*, 1990, v. 6, pp. -30-33)

These two articles are related and are considered together. Green's article argues that for predatory types of crime (such as housebreaking, car theft, fraud, robbery, assault, sexual offences, etc.), except handbag snatching, the elderly are the least victimised group in our society. She also asserts that the physical and financial impact of violation is not necessarily

⁸ Minister for Housing and Aged Care. Media Release dated 8th February, 1989.

greater than for younger age groups and that it would be *erroneous*⁹ to depict the elderly as a particularly vulnerable group. She also doubted the extent to which fear of victimisation is a major concern of the elderly. Her article reflects the statistical school of thought and her suggestions concerning the extent of fears and impact contrasts with the tenor of other Australian literature on this subject.

Clarke's article builds upon the assertion that¹⁰ *it is now well established that the elderly are less at risk of predatory victimisation than younger age people*. His article addresses and reflects the hypothesis that this may be attributable to the fact that the elderly are more likely to remain at home.

The positive value of these articles is questionable. Green's article contributes little new material. Clarke's article might almost be considered trivial. There are a range of obvious and possible explanations to account for his suggestion that the elderly are less likely to be victims of predatory crimes, such as sexual assault or car theft, which were neither considered nor discussed.

16. NSW Police Service: *Directions on Ageing in New South Wales: Crime and Safety*.
(Sydney: Office on the Ageing, NSW Premier's Department, 1990)

This policy document addressed a range of crime and safety issues affecting older people. It repeated the conclusions found in the NPRU's Final Report, thereby perpetuating the "academic/statistical" view, and specifically asserted that the available evidence suggests that the elderly are less likely to become victims of crime than other citizens. However, it also stated that the elderly harbour genuine, but probably unfounded, fears for their personal safety and security which nevertheless justify the police enquiring how their fears and concerns can be best addressed. It made eighteen recommendations, the last being to the effect that the Office on Ageing establish a Task Force to *address the elder abuse issue*¹¹, which has since been implemented.

17. Whalley, P.W.F. & Gately, B.C. : 'Elder Abuse: The Response and Role of the Police'.

(*Australian Journal on Ageing*, 1990, v. 9, pp. 18-22)

This article discusses the establishment and operation of the Aged Services Unit within the NSW Police Service, and its role in identifying and addressing crime and safety issues affecting the elderly. In recording the emergence of elder abuse as a topic of general concern and in considering police responses to elder abuse, it endeavoured to promote discussion concerning the nature of police intervention. In particular it considered the reliability of the quantitative data upon which the "academic/statistical" approach seems to be based.

18. McCallum, J.; Matiasz, S. & Graycar, A.: *Abuse of the Elderly at Home: The Range of the Problem*.

(Canberra: National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, 1990).

This report is limited to a consideration of elder abuse in the home. It describes a research project in South Australia and accepts and demonstrates the existence of elder abuse in that State. It considers conduct which may constitute abuse and argues for a vigorous research program to provide a basis for further policy development and to clarify the roles of specific agencies, including the police. In demonstrating the existence of abuse in South Australia,

⁹ P.22.

¹⁰ P.30.

¹¹ P.23.

this report is cautious in suggesting particular rates of prevalence. It notes, however, that¹² *reasonably good surveys around the world show a prevalence rate of elder abuse of about three percent after age 65 years.*

19. Barron, B., Cran, A., Flitcroft, J., McDermott, J. & Montague, M. : *No Innocent Bystanders: A Study of Abuse of Older People in Our Community.*

(Melbourne: Office of the Public Advocate, 1990)

This report is based on Victorian research. It is concerned with abuse in residential settings, both institutional and private, by carers. The following were excluded from the research: relationships between older people and others which were non residential or non friendship relationships; crime or assault on the street or at home by strangers, and discrimination in the provision of goods and services. Nevertheless, in attempting to define the concept and analyse existing mechanisms for detection and intervention it offers a basis from which further discussion may proceed and makes a significant contribution to the literature. It argues that¹³ *awareness is the beginning of change and explained that this report has been developed so that changes can be initiated to make life safer, securer and less agonising for some older people.* The report suggests that¹⁴ *far more abuse is suspected or is actively recognised than is ever reported.* It also notes that there is a general consensus overseas literature that the prevalence rate for abuse is about 3% and that¹⁵ *there is no reason to suppose ... that Australian society is any different.*

20. Whalley, P.W.F. & Gately, B.C. : 'Crime, Safety and the Elderly'. '

(*Australian Police Journal*, 1991, v. 45, pp. 58-62)

This article confirms the views expressed in the earlier article by the same authors. It makes no new contribution to the literature and public discussion of elder abuse, but is directed to a different audience in this journal.

21. Kurrle, S.F.; Sadler, P.M. & Cameron, I.O. : 'Elder abuse -an Australian case series'.

(*The Medical Journal of Australia*, 1991, v. 155, pp.150-153)

This article documents a study of fifteen elderly persons identified as the victims of abuse who were treated at a North Sydney hospital. Despite the small scale of this research, it provides further evidence that elder abuse may be more prevalent in Australia than generally acknowledged.

22. New South Wales Task Force on Abuse of Elder People: *Abuse of Older People in their Homes.*

(Sydney: Office on the Ageing, Department of Health and Community Services, 1992).

This document was released as a discussion paper by a task force established in 1991 by the NSW Office on Ageing to consider the issue of elder abuse in domestic residential settings. It contemplated production of a further report in the future and aimed to raise public awareness and generate discussion about elder abuse. It sought to define issues and invites submissions from individuals and organisations to assist the task force in the compilation of its final report. It is a simplistic, almost superficial, document with a peculiar and sparse list of references. However, it does briefly consider the role of police intervention. Its assertion that

¹² P.21.

¹³ P.19.

¹⁴ P.4.

¹⁵ P.28.

¹⁶ *Abuse of older people ... is a serious problem in NSW* may represent, at least for New South Wales, the demise of the "academic/statistical" view when the Final Report is formally published. Public discussion, therefore, may now proceed on the basis that elder abuse exists; the imperatives of debate, therefore, are to define and quantify the extent of such abuse, and then to detect and prevent it.

23. James, M.P.: *TRENDS AND ISSUES IN CRIME AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE, No. 37: The Elderly as Victims of Crime, Abuse and Neglect.*
(Canberra: Australian Institute of Criminology. June, 1992)

This paper distinguishes between conventional crimes such as robbery theft. fraud. rape and homicide, and the *more covert phenomena of abuse*.¹⁷ While suggesting on the basis of statistical data that the elderly are less at risk from most conventional crimes than poorer people, it accepts that perhaps 3% of the age group may experience some type of abuse. It identifies a range of fears held by the elderly and suggests the existence of a general community obligation to consider and address the crime and safety problems of the elderly.

24. Kurrle, S.F.; Sadler, P.M. & Cameron, I.D. : 'Patterns of elder abuse'.
(*The Medical Journal of Australia*, 1992, v. 157, pp.673-676)

This article builds upon the earlier report of the authors' research. It documents a study of 54 cases of abuse and suggests that the rate of occurrence of elder abuse in the study population is about 4.6%. Again, although the scale of the research is small. it represents some statistical material pointing to the existence of elder abuse in Australian society and must inevitably detract from the "academic/statistical" view.

3. CONCLUSION

In light of the preceding review, it is suggested that the literature and discussion of non-institutional elder abuse in Australia, and of the possible role of the police with regard thereto, has not been extensive. Despite the growing volume of reliable research data confirming the existence of abuse of the elderly in Australia in non-institutional settings, there is still no consensus concerning either the nature or prevalence of elder abuse. The suggestion that "studies show the elderly are the least likely to be victims of crime. constantly recurs in discussions of elder abuse. It appears, for example, in the preface by the Minister for Police in *Directions on the Ageing*;¹⁸ it has been attributed to the Commonwealth Minister for Justice;¹⁹ it appears in the introduction to the Call for Papers for this conference.

At best, this view is unhelpful because it is only comparative and provides in itself no objective assessment or indication of its prevalence. It may, in fact, be mischievous to the extent that it is intended, or perceived, to imply that the issue of elder abuse is either not a significant societal problem, or that its prevalence is exaggerated.

It may, in fact, even be incorrect. The available Australian statistics upon which this view is generally expressed to rest, such as they are, are based on criminal victimisation data which is derived principally from the two victims of crime surveys conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.²⁰ However, these surveys concentrated on traditional offences of assault, rape, car theft, etc., rather than on the more subtle forms of exploitation or abuse to which the

¹⁶ P.7.

¹⁷ P.1.

¹⁸ Ted Pickering, Minister for Police. Preface, p. v.

¹⁹ Senator Michael Tate. *The Canberra Times*, 5th. June, 1992.

²⁰ Australian Bureau of Statistics, General Social Survey - Crime Victims, May 1975, (Catalogue No. 4105.0), Canberra, 1975; Castles, I. Victims of Crime - Australia, 1983 (Catalogue No. 4506.0), Canberra, Australian Bureau of Statistics, 1986, p.73.

elderly are, it is suggested, more likely to be exposed, and which may in fact fall short of criminal behaviour but which nevertheless constitute real sources of concern, harassment and abuse. Indeed, the 1983 survey reduced the scope of its survey by removing from its questionnaire questions about fraud, forgery, false pretences, etc., which had been included in its earlier 1975 survey.²¹

The quantitative data, therefore, are either silent or unhelpful, and the extent to which the elderly may be less likely to suffer sexual assault or car theft is hardly to be regarded as a reliable indicator of their vulnerability to other more likely types of abuse.

The dilemma which confronts agencies in allocating resources and formulating strategies for intervention is neatly illustrated by the response and perception of Australian police to this issue.²² Because of difficulties in definition and quantification, the allocation of community resources to the police, and by the police within their own budgets, for the prevention and reduction of elder abuse in Australia has necessarily been made in the past, and continues to be made today, on the basis of an intuitive perception of the nature and prevalence of this societal phenomenon, rather than on a rational basis. Generally, strategies for addressing elder abuse issues developed by police and other government and non-government agencies alike reflect no generally accepted philosophy for intervention, or consensus about the nature and extent of the problem to be combatted. If the realist view of elder abuse which now generally accepts a minimum prevalence rate of 3% is correct, then it is arguable that the allocation of resources for the prevention and reduction of elder abuse should be increased and that the problem of non-institutional abuse is at least as great as the problem of institutional abuse which has attracted significant Commonwealth and State attention and resources.

Meanwhile, the abolition by the New South Wales Police Service of the Aged Services Consultant, and the merger of that officer's duties with those of another police section in 1991, does not necessarily indicate that there is no problem, or that there is no role for the police. Rather, it is suggested, it indicates that the allocation of scarce financial resources can only be justified in terms of demonstrated need. In this regard, the anecdotal and qualitative evidence of non-institutional abuse is apparently less persuasive than so-called hard statistical data.

The immediate imperatives, therefore, for research, policy formulation and intervention, must be to identify, define and quantify the range of behaviour embraced by the term "elder abuse". Until the apparent inconsistency between the "realist" and "academic/statistical" views can be resolved, until, in fact, there is some common consensus about the nature and scope of the problem, the rational formulation of effective strategies for intervention will continue to be hampered.

Part of the problem may lie in the expression "elder abuse" and the convenient tendency to equate this concept with Criminality. It may be more useful to abandon this terminology in attempting to identify and quantify the phenomenon under consideration, and to describe more fully the particular types of behaviour and practices sought to be remedied. Until the problem can be described in its fullest extent, it is difficult to devise appropriate remedial strategies, or to justify the allocation of financial and other resources.

In order to resolve the contradictory themes suggested in the literature review, therefore, there needs to be agreement at least concerning the following matters -

²¹ Ibid., p. 73.

²² See generally: Whalley & Gately in the works cited.

1. Whether the elderly experience particular crime and safety problems by virtue of the ageing process, and, if they do, the nature of such problems;
2. Whether they are particularly vulnerable to certain types of criminal activity or to activity which, if not, illegal, is otherwise unacceptable, and, if they are, the nature, range and environment of such behaviour;
3. Whether the elderly are particularly apprehensive concerning any of the problems or behaviours identified in 1 and 2 above, and, if they are, whether it behoves the wider community to act to reduce or remove such fears.

Until agreement can be established concerning these issues, and the conflicting "realist" and "academic/statistical" views can be resolved, it will remain difficult to formulate comprehensive, effective and appropriate strategies for intervention. It is to be hoped that these issues will be among those addressed and resolved at this conference.

With regard, specifically, to the role of the police, assuming acceptance of the "realist" view, it seems appropriate, in view of the trend to community based policing in Australia, that the police should have a pro. active role to play both in identifying aspects of elder abuse and in acting to prevent it. This is not to suggest, necessarily, that they will be the only preventative agency involved. Rather. it is to suggest that the benefits of pro-active intervention, within a community policing framework. may already have been demonstrated in New South Wales by the history and operation of the Aged Services Unit within the New South Wales Police Service between 1986 and 1991.

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