

If you have issues viewing or accessing this file, please contact us at NCJRS.gov.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION

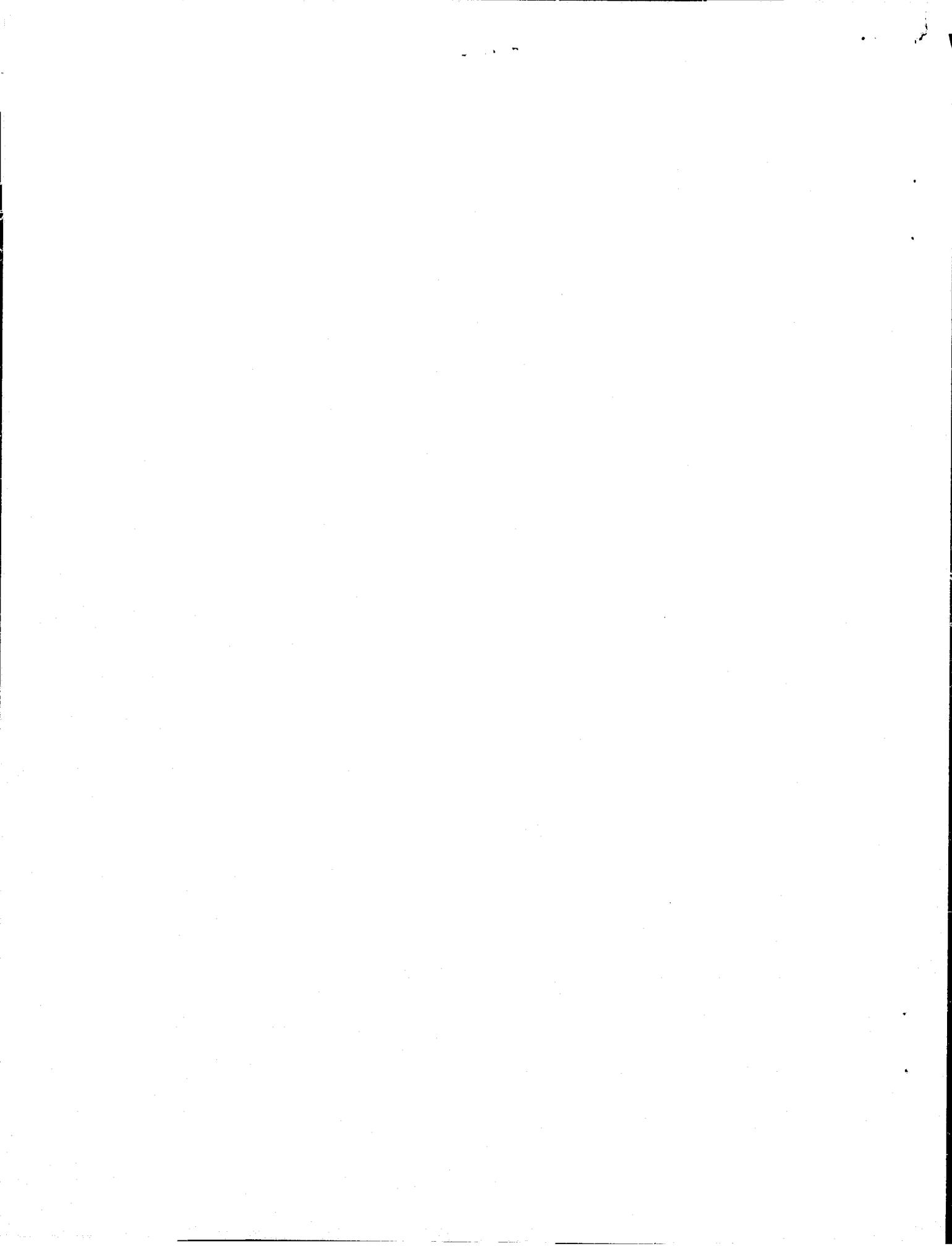


LAW ENFORCEMENT ASSISTANCE ADMINISTRATION

PROGRAMS FOR SENIOR CITIZENS

48883

February 1978



Crimes against the elderly are of major concern to the Law Enforcement Assistance Administration. The unhappy circumstances in which many of the elderly live out their lives are well documented. In the constellation of problems facing senior citizens, crime and fear obviously loom large.

Any discussion of "numbers" can create a misleading impression. Statistics seem cold and impersonal and a discussion of victimization rates may seem to be an expression of callous disregard for the human element. But crime victims are people, not numbers. No matter how large or small, victimization figures represent physical or mental anguish suffered by real people and the loss of property which diminishes the quality of life for individuals.

LEAA is sensitive to the fact that the ultimate value of victimization statistics is the opportunity they present to address the human needs they represent.

Statistical Indicators

Despite what common sense and newspaper headlines seem to indicate, statistics show that the elderly are not more likely to be victimized by crime. In fact, a substantial body of data indicates that the more than twenty million elderly throughout the country are far less likely to be criminally victimized than are young persons, whether by personal offenses or by crimes against household property.

LEAA established and funds the National Crime Panel, which is a program designed to develop information not otherwise available on the nature of crime and its impact on society by means of victimization surveys of the general population. The surveys are conducted for LEAA by the Bureau of the Census. Within each locality surveyed, samplings are made of households and commercial establishments representative of the area, in order to elicit information about experiences, if any, with certain crimes of violence and theft. Events that were not reported to the police are included, as well as those that were.

These victimization surveys are supplying criminal justice officials and legislative bodies with new insights into crime and its victims. Among the information being produced by the surveys is data on types of victims and information necessary to compute the relative risk of being victimized. The first results of the National Crime Panel programs were made available in three reports during 1974. These were followed by additional reports in 1975, 1976, and 1977.

The victimization studies show that the highest rate of victimization occurs in the young age groups, with each older group having progressively lower rates. Persons 65 and over had the lowest rates of all. This was true for each of the categories "crimes of theft," "crimes of violence," and "household crimes." Only for the category "personal larceny with contact" -- purse snatching and pocket-picking -- did older persons record rates at parity with those for all citizens within the scope of the surveys.

A summary of the pertinent data from the Victimization Survey follows:

Personal and household crimes: Victimization rates for the general and elderly populations, United States, 1973

Type of Crime	Rate for the general population	Rate for the elderly population
	Based on 1,000 persons age 12 and over	Based on 1,000 persons age 65 and over
Personal crimes		
Crimes of violence ¹	32	8
Robbery	7	5
Robbery with injury	2	2
Robbery without injury	4	3
Assault	25	3
Aggravated assault	10	1
Simple assault	15	2
Crimes of theft	91	22
Personal larceny with contact ²	3	3
Personal larceny without contact	88	19
	Based on 1,000 households headed by persons age 12 and over	Based on 1,000 households headed by persons age 65 and over
Household crimes		
Burglary	91	55
Household larceny	107	47
Motor vehicle theft	19	5

NOTE: Detail may not add to total shown because of rounding.

1. Includes data on rape, not shown separately.

2. Includes purse snatching and pocket picking.

The surveys show that the personal crime rates among senior citizens were six or seven times lower than those for persons age 20 to 24. However, additional survey findings on personal crimes have shown a distinct correspondence between increased age and a greater chance of victimization at the hands of strangers. In 82 percent of the surveyed crimes of violence against elderly persons, the offender was identified as a stranger, compared to 66 percent among victims in the general population.

The survey data have led to some tentative conclusions about the physical burden of crime. Although they were victimized relatively less often by personal crimes of violence during the surveyed period, about 12 percent of victimizations involving crimes against persons age 65 or over resulted in hospitalization.

With respect to crimes against household property, there is again clear evidence of an association between increasing age and diminishing victimization. Among households headed by persons aged 20 to 24, for example, burglary rates were more than two times higher than those for households headed by the elderly. For household larceny, the rate was about three times higher for the younger age group.

These lower victimization rates in no way minimize the severity of crime's effects upon older people. These statistics may cast a cold light on reality, but they do not measure the misery of fear, the apprehension, and the terror,

which keeps many of the elderly in our cities virtual prisoners in their homes and apartments. More than one-half of the oldest persons surveyed indicated that they had limited or changed their patterns of living in order to minimize their risk of victimization.

Add to this the diminished activity and increased infirmity that may accompany aging, and there appears a group of people who are infrequently in high-risk crime situations. In the usual sense of the word, they may not be victimized, but such fragile "safety" exacts a high price by restricting their freedom to go about normal activities and lessening their peace of mind.

There is little question about the vulnerability of senior citizens -- physical, psychological, and financial. The theft of a television set to a younger person with a relatively good income is certainly a misfortune; to an elderly person on a fixed income and living alone, it can be a tragedy. Similarly, the fear of physical violence is particularly debilitating to the elderly, and the theft of a Social Security check may deal a devastating blow to meager financial resources. LEAA is aware that for this group of people the needs are immediate and the response must be prompt.

The LEAA Program

Under the LEAA block grant program, the major portion of funds is distributed to the states on a population formula basis. Each state, through a designated state planning agency, distributes these funds in accordance with a comprehensive statewide plan for improvement of law enforcement and criminal justice.

The plan reflects the state's determination of its own needs and priorities. LEAA neither approves nor disapproves grant applications for funds under the jurisdiction of the state planning agencies.

When the LEAA program was extended for three years in 1976, Congress took note of the special needs of senior citizens. Each state's comprehensive plan must provide for the development of programs and projects for the prevention of crime against the elderly. The 1976 Amendments also established an Office of Community Anti-Crime Programs, with responsibility to disburse funds to community and citizens groups to enable their participation in crime prevention activities. Services to assist the elderly was specifically identified in the reports accompanying the legislation as one area of appropriate focus under this program.

A small portion of LEAA's appropriation for action programs is retained by the Agency for use as a discretionary fund. LEAA utilizes this money to assist programs of national scope and to provide special impetus for innovative and experimental programs. LEAA is supporting research and action projects which we hope will help to diminish the impact of crime and fear of crime on older people.

Action Programs to Assist the Elderly

Particular emphasis has been given to the problems of the elderly poor in public housing. In Syracuse, New York, for example, LEAA block grant funds have been used for special security patrols and safety measures for elderly public housing residents.

Plainfield, New Jersey, is equipping its senior citizens' housing complex with closed-circuit television equipment and resident security aides. Montgomery County, Maryland, has initiated a project which will create a specially-trained Criminal Justice Response Team consisting of a police officer and social worker to assist elderly crime victims.

In the St. Louis County, Missouri, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, an educational program is being launched to alert and advise the public, especially those in high school and the elderly, how to protect themselves from criminal consumer fraud. A senior citizen escort service and an emergency telephone response system for elderly residents of the Crown Heights section of Brooklyn, New York, is underway. Other programs for the elderly are underway in South Bend, Indiana, Trenton, New Jersey, Cleveland, Ohio, and Portland, Oregon.

LEAA has also joined with HEW's Administration on the Aging in supporting a \$211,000 program to aid Kansas City's elderly crime victims. Kansas City found that its elderly citizens were being particularly victimized by burglaries. This project includes public education programs on ways to reduce crime, target-hardening efforts -- better locks and so forth -- and involvement of social service agencies with the criminal justice system to provide better service to older citizens. This project is emphasizing citizen and community involvement to help reduce crime against the elderly. Citizens are participating in the planning of priorities and activities, as well as being part of the decision-making process.

The Pennsylvania Governor's Justice Commission, the state planning agency, recently awarded \$150,000 in block grant funds for a program designed to reduce crime against the elderly, as well as fear of crime, in West Philadelphia. The Police Department of Philadelphia and the Citizens Crime Commission are joining in the project, which will increase special police patrols, develop a media campaign to focus attention on crime prevention for the elderly, and help reduce losses from stolen Social Security checks or cash. If successful, the program will be broadened to protect the more than 230,000 persons over age 65 living in Philadelphia.

As part of a major LEAA program designed to promote better treatment for crime victims, witnesses, and jurors, the Eastern Oklahoma Development District, which includes 49 incorporated communities, has begun a program which will compile statistics on crimes against the elderly and their special needs. Crime prevention programs geared to the age group will be created and law enforcement officers will be trained in special techniques for responding to elderly crime victims. Problems which confront older citizens when they are called upon to be witnesses or jurors will be identified and eased.

The National Council of Senior Citizens has launched a nationally coordinated program designed to reduce crime committed against senior citizens and to assist elderly crime victims. Called the "Program on Criminal Justice and the Elderly, both LEAA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development are contributing \$200,000 to the effort. The program assists, coordinates, and

evaluates seven projects in six cities: New York (2 projects), Los Angeles, Chicago, New Orleans, Milwaukee, and Washington, D.C. All the projects have similar objectives, but each has a local sponsor and are planning approaches unique to the city and neighborhoods served.

Another LEAA program which has direct implications for the elderly is the National District Attorneys' Association's Economic Crime Project. The targets of this 3.5 million dollar effort are the fraudulent schemes -- auto repair, home improvements, land swindles -- that bilk millions of dollars from unsuspecting citizens, many of them in the older age bracket. Forty-four district attorneys' offices throughout the country are affiliated with the project, reaching approximately 29 percent of the population of the United States.

Research and Demonstration

LEAA's research center, the National Institute of Law Enforcement and Criminal Justice, is moving creatively on several fronts to bring some measure of relief to the elderly. Several devices developed under Institute research could mean new freedom and security for older people. The Institute has developed a reliable low-cost burglar alarm for homes and apartments. Current estimates indicate that the alarm device could be marketed at a lower cost than current systems, thus putting it within reach of people on fixed incomes.

Many crimes are crimes of opportunity, encouraged by the ready accessibility of doors and windows that can be opened fairly easily. Through Institute-sponsored tests, standards have now been developed for doors and windows which,

if incorporated into state building codes, could make them far more resistant to illegal entry.

Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design

In many communities, the environment is custom-made for crime. Streets are poorly lit and deserted. Bus and subway stops offer natural lurking places for the criminal. People are afraid to venture out -- especially the elderly -- or they move about in fear and suspicion. Little by little, the sense of community which once existed in our cities and neighborhoods crumbles.

Several years ago, the National Institute sponsored a landmark research study of public housing units in New York City by planner-architect Oscar Newman. Newman tested the effects of changes in the physical environment on crime and fear. The results were dramatic. Comparisons were made in two housing projects identical in population density and social characteristics. The only difference was physical design -- one was principally high-rise; the other a group of small, walk-up buildings. The difference in crime rates was amazing: The high-rise building had 65 percent more crime.

High-rise buildings studied were unwatched and unwatchable. Hallways, elevators, and lobbies were accessible to everyone, watched by no one, and feared by all. In the walk-up building, where a few families shared a common hallway or entry, the residents knew each other and more actively observed what was going on in and around their building.

Other housing units were redesigned, and the results were the same. Altering the physical design of the buildings encouraged residents to look out for their families and neighbors. For the elderly, this protective approach, called "Crime Prevention Through Environmental Design," can help restore confidence and peace of mind.

Environmental design projects particularly aimed at the elderly are underway in Portland, Oregon, and Minneapolis, Minnesota. Residents are encouraged to carry a minimum of cash. Low-cost transportation, improved bus shelters, and telephones for summoning emergency aid are being utilized. Special financial services for low income elderly people are being implemented by local banks. It is hoped that the programs will reduce incentives for purse snatching and street robbery where elderly persons have been particularly victimized.

Compensation, Restitution, and Other Aid to Victims of Crime

Certainly prevention of crime before it occurs must remain the first priority of law enforcement officials. However, the criminal justice system must also be responsive to the needs of persons who have been victimized. The problems of victims of crime must be regarded with at least the same concern as is given the human and civil rights of criminals and those accused of crime.

The LEAA program is designed to promote adoption of innovative operational programs. Thus, the Agency does not provide funds to make direct compensation to victims of crime. The effects of direct compensation programs have been studied, however, and support is being provided to other efforts to assist victims.

The LEAA Victim/Witness Program supports the provision of assistance to victims of and witnesses to crime so that these persons will not only be given relevant and sensitive attention, but will be motivated to cooperate more readily with personnel in the criminal justice system. If victims and witnesses receive sensitive and concerned treatment, they will respond by being less apathetic and more willing to report criminal incidents to appropriate authorities. Increased crime rates seen in recent years are due, in part, to increased reporting of crime and better information collecting methods. Many citizens have renewed faith in the fact that they can be helped by the criminal justice system.

A key feature of LEAA's program is the establishment of victim and witness centers. Victim centers are often located within police departments. There, specially trained officers concentrate on the alleged offenses and try to relate to the victims to provide the direct assistance needed. Centers are often geared to meet the needs of special classes of victims, such as rape victims or elderly persons.

Witness centers are usually established in a court. Here the witness is able to receive orientation as to what will be expected of him or her in court. The centers provide a climate supportive of the witness. Services may include transportation, child care services, scheduling notification, and any necessary protection.

A recent study by the Center for Criminal Justice and Social Policy at Marquette University examined the needs and problems of citizens in their roles as victims and witnesses, both in relation to the criminal act and citizen participation in the criminal justice system. The study found that victims frequently incur a number of financial costs not reimbursed by insurance. The average non-reimbursed medical costs for 300 victims experiencing physical injury was about \$200. The average non-insured costs for property replacement and repairs was \$373 as a result of the crime incident.

While nearly two-thirds of victims are likely to have some insurance protection, one-third, largely in the lower income population, do not. These are the persons commonly victimized by violent crime.

Another Marquette study for LEAA analyzed the different and proposed operational programs for crime victim compensation. The study indicated that victim compensation programs could be effective, particularly in reducing the impact of crime on lower income persons.

Many state victim compensation programs have an indemnification feature, where convicted offenders pay fines used for compensation payments to victims. All offenders pay into one general fund. Recently, the concept of restitution has received a great deal of attention as an alternate method of compensating victims. Where the offender contributes cash or services to a victim, the offense becomes more closely linked with the sanction.

Restitution can take the form of repayment for damages or losses directly to the victim by the offender or it can be in the form of work or services to the community. LEAA is interested in this concept and is supporting a program to help fund and evaluate projects in several states. The potential benefits of restitution programs for elderly crime victims is obvious. While restitution cannot alleviate the pain of crime, its application can surely help lessen the burden for those upon whom crime impacts most severely.

Senior Citizen Involvement in Anti-Crime Programs

In addition to the numerous efforts supported by LEAA to directly reduce crime and fear of crime experienced by the elderly, the Agency is supporting activities which seek to involve senior citizens as participants in anti-crime programs. One example is the San Diego Police Department's Crime Analysis Unit, which has been using the services of 13 senior citizens since August 1977.

Four couples and five single retirees translate raw data from crime reports into coded messages and feed them into a computer file used by police to help solve serious crimes through faster suspect identification. The "Integrated Criminal Apprehension Program (ICAP) augments police ability to deploy patrol forces. The key is rapid access to information about crime and criminals. During one five-week period, the senior citizens coded more than 700 robbery cases.

The program frees police for police work, while providing a part-time job for the workers. These senior citizens play an important role in deciding likely suspects in violent crime. It is but one example where the services of elderly persons are being utilized to help reduce crime.

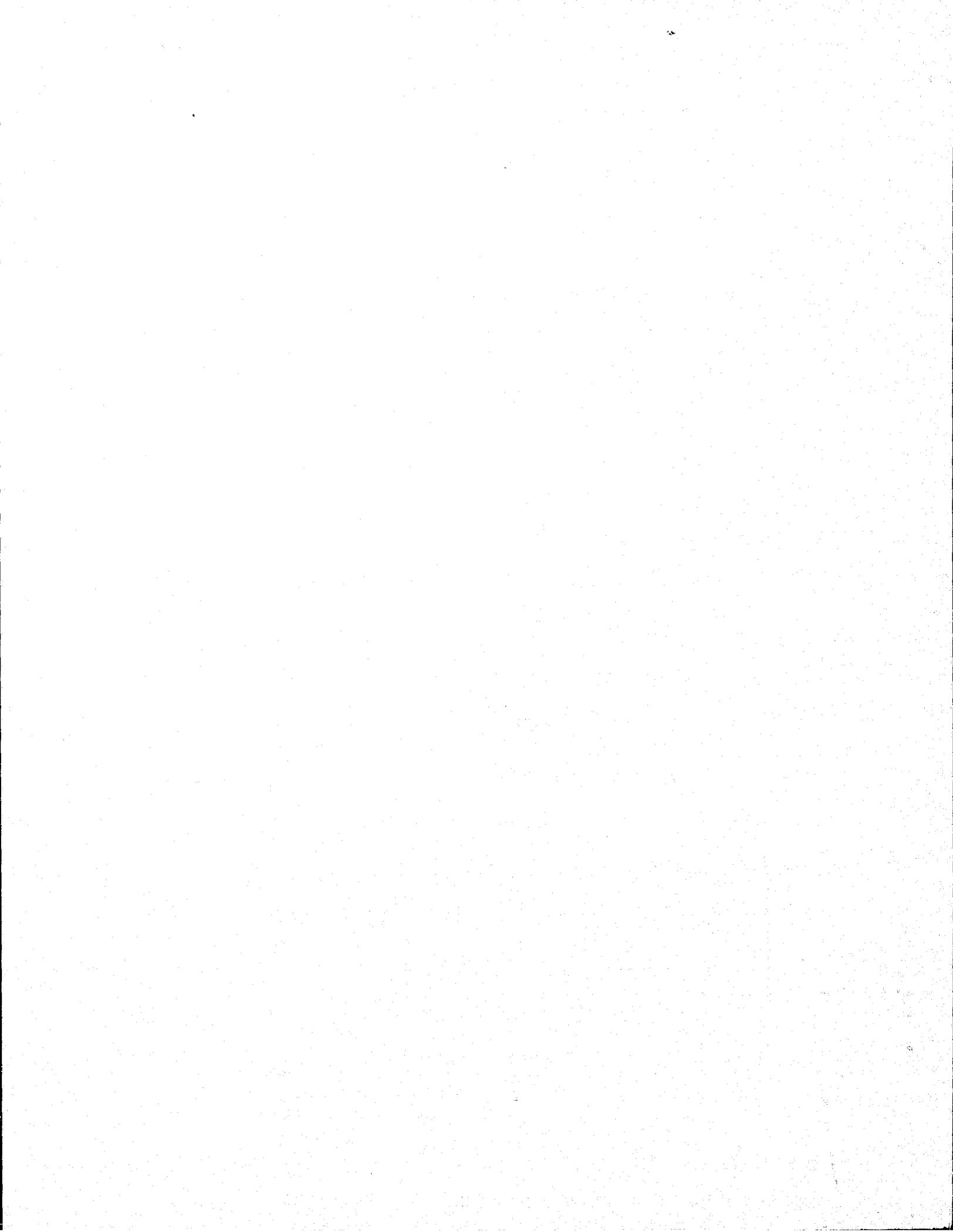
In Cottage Grove, Oregon, a small group of older people visit the homes of other elderly persons and provide tips on household security. The volunteers learned that many senior citizens had problems dealing with certain public service agencies and they now help handle such situations.

In Sun City, Arizona, retirees are active in Neighborhood Watch, a self-help community crime prevention program supported by LEAA. It encourages neighbors to look out for each others' property and guard against burglary. The group also assists police with traffic control at community, civic, and athletic functions.

In Maricopa County, Arizona, retired engineers designed and built a collapsible leg restraint for use by police officers transporting prisoners. They developed the device in a laboratory they built in the department's crime resistance bureau.

Police in the 101st Precinct in Queens, New York, call on elderly and disabled persons to back up various positions held by civilian employees. For example, older persons monitor police radio, take messages, and handle telephone calls.

While the Nation's elderly have special needs which must be effectively addressed by the law enforcement and criminal justice community, they can also make a significant contribution. The Law Enforcement Assistance Administration plans to continue to encourage projects aimed at senior citizens.



END