

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

*By*

**Ex-Detective Chief Superintendent Brian Steele**

*And*

Dr Amanda Thornton, Clinical Psychologist, Mental Health Services of Salford NHS Trust, who assisted in understanding older person issues and victims' responses to crime.

*And*

Claire McKillop, Assistant Distraction Burglary  
Co-ordinator, who has assisted in all aspects of the research.

*And*

Detective Sergeant Helen Dover who prepared the Chapter "The Statistically-based Victim Profile in West Yorkshire".

*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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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 and his team of Community Constables.

Thereafter, the quest to create a community-wide multi-agency prevention strategy for Leeds was dependent upon the emergence of a leader to champion the cause. I am extremely grateful to Clare Morrow from Yorkshire Television who formed and led the steering group which subsequently acquired Home Office funding to establish the initiative. Moreover, her leadership skills continue to prove essential in our quest to implement the more radical elements of the Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative.

## 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 many of the crimes go unreported to the police, thereby preventing an appreciation of the true extent of the problem. The people who carry out these crimes are conmen who usually trick, or infrequently, force their way into the homes of the vulnerable to steal their valuables. Some offenders work alone, others in teams, and most are part of an underground network where victim information is traded or sold from one offender to another.

Detective Sergeant Dover researched the West Yorkshire Police criminal statistics to identify the demographic and housing profile of those most likely to become victims of distraction burglaries. Mr Steele comments and adds observations regarding the perceptions of older victims and their reactions to becoming victimised.

Ex-Detective Chief Superintendent Steele embarked upon a series of interviews with bogus offenders, the majority of whom were serving long periods of imprisonment for

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-agency programmes to address the six objectives, and at the time of writing each of these initiatives are well under way. A further, shorter report will be published in the future detailing the successes and failures encountered in this work.

A team is being commissioned by the Home Office to evaluate all aspects of the Leeds Initiative, and their report may be beneficial to those contemplating the creation of a distraction burglary strategy.

The Leeds Initiative is unashamedly designed to meet the unique circumstances of the Leeds Community, but it is believed that many of the processes and tactics employed are transferable and suitable for universal application. It is hoped therefore, that at least

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 trespassary. The offender gaining entry by trickery with the intention to steal has not therefore been granted a valid right of entry and is liable for the offence of burglary.

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. In extreme cases successful prosecutions have been instituted against such bogus property repairers but in the vast majority of cases the high level of proof required to incur criminal liability precludes prosecution in favour of civil disputes over poor quality workmanship. Ruthless criminals exploit this ambiguity by conducting minimal work at exorbitant charges, knowing that the police will not intervene and that the victims have little prospect of achieving a civil remedy.

### 3. Bogus Offenders

It will be evidenced later in this work that it is common for some offenders to commit both distraction burglary and bogus property repair type crimes dependent upon the circumstances in which they encounter their victim. An interesting proposition from the offender interviews is that if the opportunity safely presents itself, many bogus property repairers will take the opportunity to steal from their victims, whereas those criminals who specialise in distraction burglaries are less likely to commit bogus property repair scams. This differentiation is, of course, quite logical, as distraction burglars are unlikely to have the tools and props necessary to purport to be property repairers.

Although the lack of statistical records makes it difficult to be certain, it appears that more people become the victim of bogus property repair scams than become the victim of distraction burglary. Moreover, the largest sums of money taken in single cases are usually obtained from bogus property scams rather than distraction burglaries.

Henceforth in this work the term *bogus offender* will be intended to incorporate offenders who commit distraction burglary and /or bogus property repair scams.

Similarly, the Leeds Initiative's mission to prevent distraction burglaries against elderly victims equally includes the objective of protecting the elderly from bogus property repair offenders.

### Neighbourhood Groups

The Leeds Metropolitan District houses 36 Neighbourhood Groups, each of which is run by one or more full-time paid employees who work with the support of volunteers, to provide services for the older people living in their catchment area.

Neighbourhood Groups are in addition to, and completely separate from, the local Neighbourhood Watch groups and the two organisations should not be confused.

### **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.

Distraction burglars rarely commit crime in the areas they reside. The fact that they engage their victims in conversation tends to compel offenders to commit crime where they are not known. The investigation of such crimes often places heavy demands upon the criminal intelligence, forensic science and surveillance support services. Moreover, those problems are further exacerbated by some bogus property repairers successfully claiming that their actions merely amount to a civil wrong, making any investment of police resources into the investigation to no avail.

These investigative difficulties are compounded by some victims being reluctant to report crimes, and where they do so, are sometimes reluctant to continue to be supportive of a protracted investigative process involving statement making, identification procedures, committal proceedings, adjournments and giving evidence in court. It is difficult to assess the extent of this problem, but there are examples of bogus offenders exploiting the criminal justice procedures to inconvenience witnesses by contesting each stage of the legal process. These were clearly evidenced with a series of bogus property repairers arrested in 1998 by Operation Hamelin detectives and again in 1998 in a number of West Yorkshire cases. It is understandable, therefore, that some

witnesses are reluctant to embark on the potentially traumatic journey through a criminal investigation.

Doubts are currently being expressed, by detectives and members of the public, of some police forces' commitment to formulate and execute robust strategies to prevent and detect distraction burglaries against the elderly. Moreover, the Service's low-key approach probably to some extent compounds the reluctance of elderly victims to report such crimes. Many of these victims already suffer embarrassment at having been conned by the offender and are anxious not to extend their discomfort by becoming embroiled in police investigations. The true extent of bogus offender criminality is therefore extremely difficult to assess.

It is not surprising that the creation of the BCU system has been accompanied by bogus offences being seen as peripheral rather than core features in the Divisional Policing Strategies, especially when they are notoriously difficult to investigate and amount to a small percentage in the overall number of Divisional burglaries. Moreover, there is a growing belief that the over-stretched, under-resourced Police Service, perhaps unwittingly, focuses its efforts upon key performance indicators and that a 'what is not measured does not get done' culture prevails. There is a belief amongst many that bogus offences will not receive the prevention and detection efforts that the target victims deserve unless such crimes are given a separate classification in the Police Force annual statistical returns.

### The Scale of Offending

Statistical assessment of the scope of the problem is notoriously difficult. In 1997 the dark figure of crime in respect of distraction burglaries was exemplified when Steele

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 robust investigation and successful prosecution of bogus offenders. It is argued rather, that more emphasis should be placed upon the preventative elements of an anti-bogus offender campaign. The proactive targeting of prolific offenders is an essential element of contemporary intelligence-led policing methods and has a central

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 victims differ greatly from one person to another. Prejudiced perceptions of the capabilities of older people create two obstacles which must be overcome. Firstly, a failure to learn, listen, respect and act upon the assertions and evidence provided by older victims. Secondly, the failure to identify and implement appropriate prevention measures in respect of those older persons who are disadvantaged by the loss of cognitive and/or physical abilities when to do so would enable them to safely live an independent life in the community.

The current autonomous BCU policing system is not ideally suited to address cross-border crime, especially where the offenders travel long distances. BCU Commanders are understandably reluctant to undertake intensive investigations into a small number of burglaries committed within their division by transient criminals, hence the poor detection rate for distraction burglaries. Moreover, a proactive policing strategy to bring about the arrest of such offenders invariably involves moving surveillance, which is expensive and resource intensive, making the sustained use of such tactics prohibitive.

There is a need for the development of cost effective multi-agency strategies to prevent and detect elderly people from becoming the victims of bogus offences.

### **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 necessary to have some understanding of why these persons are targeted, what makes them particularly vulnerable and what factors might act as a deterrent to offenders.

Whilst this may largely be a matter of common sense, it was felt that statistically-based research should be undertaken to explore and document the demographic and housing profile of distraction burglary victims which could assist in the formulation of an effective strategy. The hope was that this would enable targeted crime reduction initiatives to be focused where they would have most effect in reducing the incidence of bogus offences and thereby better protecting those elderly persons whose circumstances put them at risk of being a victim of a distraction burglary.

Detective Sergeant Helen Dover therefore collated and analysed distraction burglaries recorded in West Yorkshire. West Yorkshire incorporates widely divergent geographical areas such as the cities of Leeds and Bradford, a spread of larger and smaller towns, and rural areas with a host of small villages and hamlets. Crimes for analysis were

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.

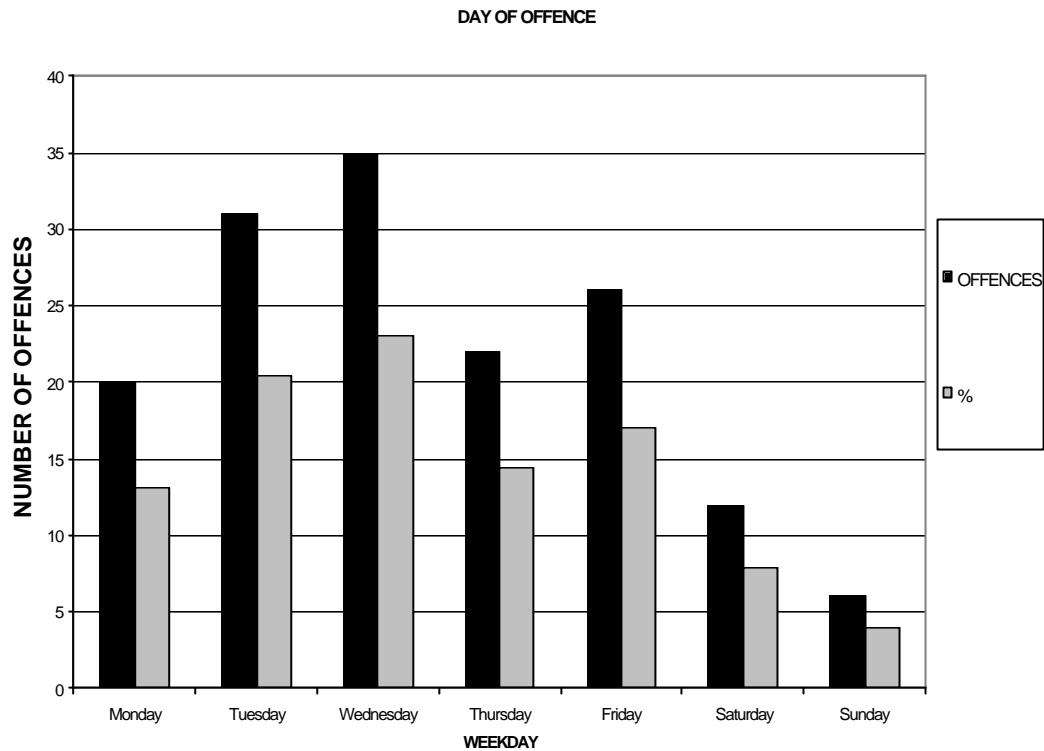
Crimes were compared for the following features:

- 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



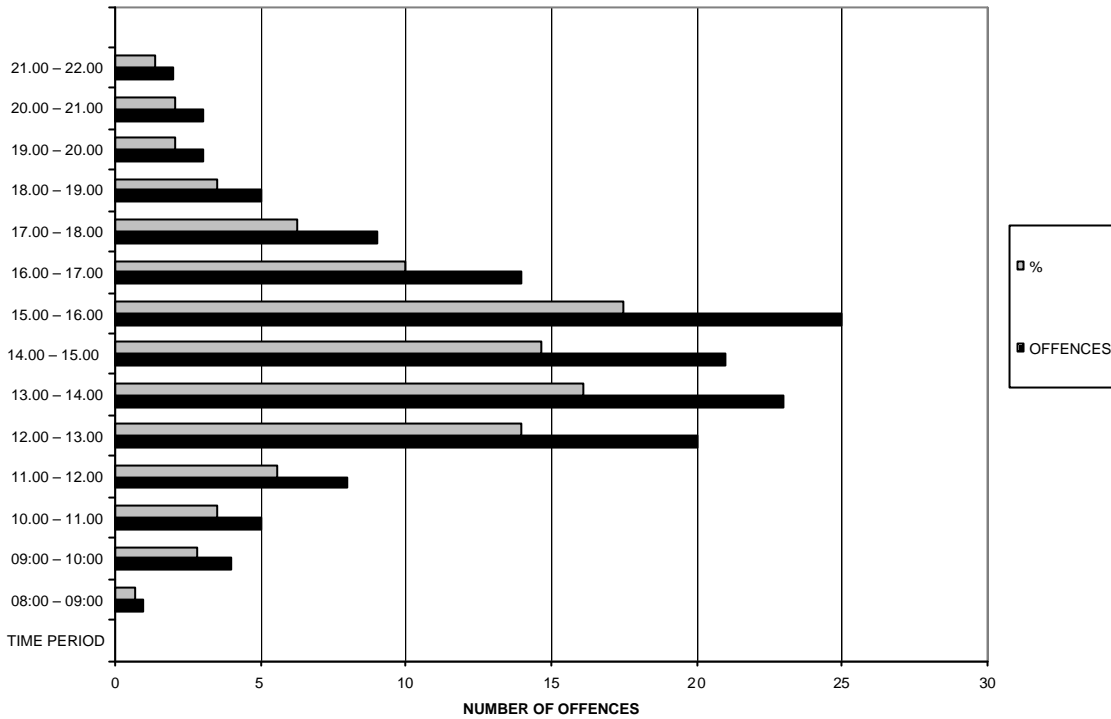
Sample size:152

*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**

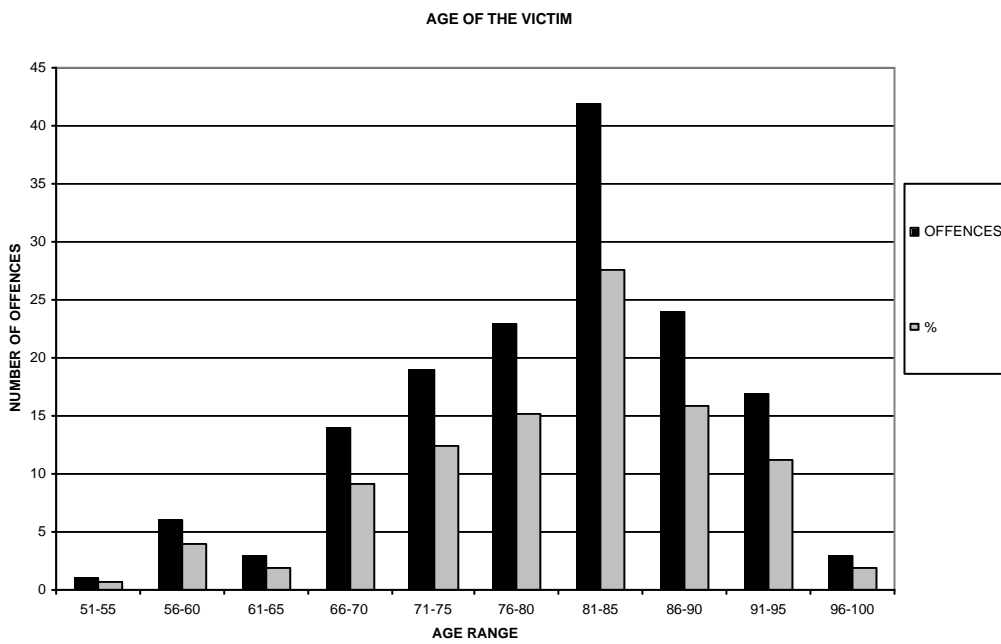
Sample Size: 143



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**



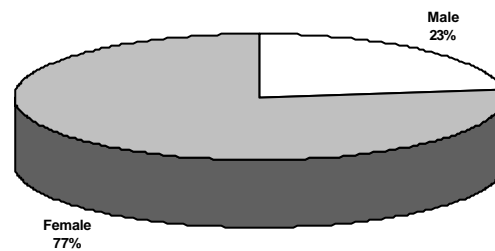
Sample size: 152



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*

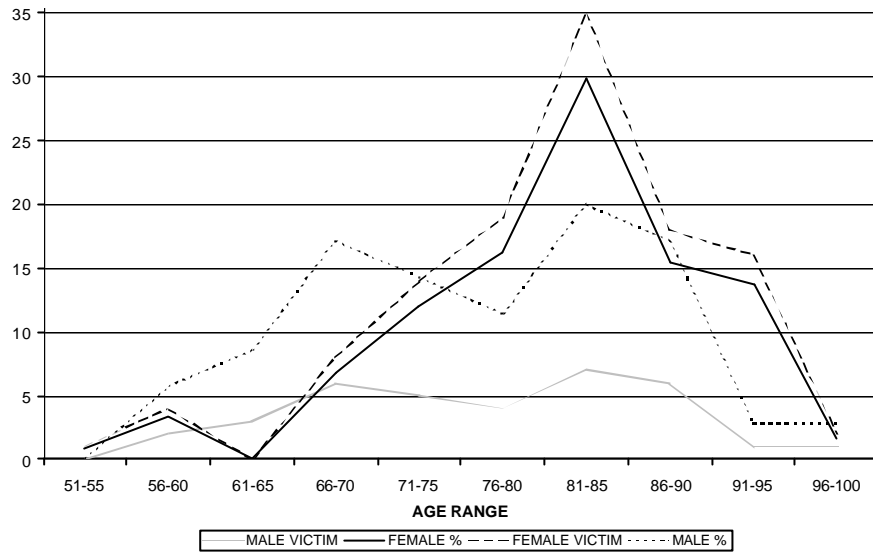


Sample size: 152

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.

## GENDER AND AGE OF THE VICTIM

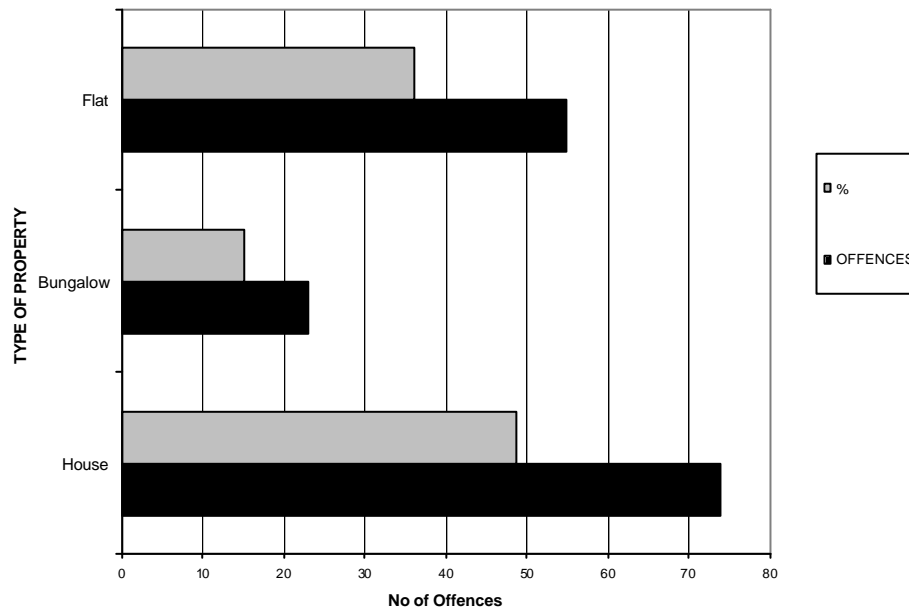
**Figure 5**



Sample size:152

## PROPERTY TYPE

**Figure 6**



## PROPERTY TYPE AND FEATURE

**Figure 7**

	HOUSE		BUNGALOW	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Detached	9	12.16	4	17.39
Semi-detached	21	28.38	7	30.44
Terraced	28	37.84	4	17.39
Not known	16	21.62	8	34.78

**Figure 7a**

	GROUND FLOOR		UPPER FLOOR		NOT KNOWN	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
Flat	26	47.27	21	38.18	8	14.55

Sample size: 152

Whilst guidelines dictate that property type information should be included in the MO section of crime reports, unfortunately this does not always happen. Where such information is shown it is usually restricted to the building type. Rarely is any detail recorded regarding the location of the property (eg secluded/ rural etc) or the visual characteristics (eg run down/ neglected etc). This makes meaningful analysis of such factors difficult and unreliable.

### **Conclusion**

In terms of identifying those factors that put elderly persons at risk, it is true to say that studying the available victim information was not particularly helpful. Little or no information was available for example regarding whether the victims were in sheltered accommodation, disabled or living alone. Factors such as these could be extremely

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 of 99% of offenders being white, but could easily fail to identify bogus offences committed by ethnic minority offenders against ethnic minority victims where the crimes may be less likely to be reported to the Police.

Steele is beginning to have serious doubts about the accuracy of the white crime perception. The offender interviews clearly illustrated a "white crime" situation but it must be recognised that the majority of the offenders interviewed were serving long periods of imprisonment and tended to reflect the more professional and prolific offenders of distraction burglary. Recent anecdotal interviews with victims and support agency staff conducted by Steele and McKillop suggest that some degree of bogus offending occurs against ethnic minority groups.

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.

### **Older People Issues and the Impact of Crime**

“They are past it. They have had their day. Or so we tend to think.”

The previous chapters provide an overview of the crime of distraction burglary from both a policing and offenders’ perspective. The current chapter aims to provide an overview of older person issues, an appreciation of the impact of crime on the victim, with specific reference to the older victim; consideration of protective mechanisms for victims; and guidelines on interviewing and supporting older crime victims. The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative recognised the need to gain an understanding of these issues so that their recommendations would reflect the needs and capabilities of this client group.

#### Older People Issues

At the present time, 18% of Britain’s population is over 60, and the number of people over 60 is projected to increase from 10.7 million to 12.2 million by 2021 (National Statistics, 2000).

We also know that women can expect a longer life than men; where currently the average life span for men stands at 78.8 years, for women it stands at 82.6 years (DoH, 1992). This translates to there being twice as many women as there are men over the age of 75. As we know that the average age of the distraction burglary victim is 81, then it is less surprising that women are over-represented in these figures.

It is difficult to clearly list the measurable effects of the ageing process as substantial individual differences are evident. Some people will experience minimal decline in later life, or be able to compensate so well for slightly reduced abilities caused by ageing that

the changes will be negligible. It is important, therefore, that we do not make assumptions about a person on the basis of age alone, and indeed, we must remember that a majority of world leaders are over 60 and people successfully complete degree courses into their 90's. The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative emphasises the need for all organisations to recognise the individual needs and abilities of older people and of their right to independence.

Recognising that the majority of older people are equipped with more than adequate physical and cognitive skills, we must still be aware that the ageing process to a greater or lesser extent affects everyone. There are demonstrable physical and psychological changes in people at around the age of 60 to 65 years:

- 7% of people aged 65-74 years and 16% of people aged 75+ are either blind or severely visually impaired (Crandall, 1980).
- 32% of people aged 70-80 years and 50% of people over 80 years have serious hearing difficulties (Herbst, 1982).
- Similarly, the taste, smell and touch senses of all will, to some extent, deteriorate with the onset of older age.
- Approximately 600,000 people in Britain suffer from a dementia, an abnormal ageing process, which causes cognitive, behavioural and emotional changes. This corresponds to only 6% of people over 65 years. The incidence of dementia does increase with age, but still only 20% of people aged 85-89 will experience a dementia. (Goldsmith, 1998). It must be emphasised that dementia does not necessarily accompany old age, and that many of the minority population suffering from dementia successfully live independent lives in the community.

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 measurably different from someone brought up in the year 2000. Factors such as wages paid into the hand and not the bank; business more regularly (and safely) conducted on the doorstep (e.g insurance man etc); less need for heightened security and scrutiny of credentials, and a time where people often left their front doors open. These examples are meant to demonstrate how a person's early experiences will impact on their current behaviour. The Leeds Initiative recognises the need to understand



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.

(b) Selective focusing on a favourable dimension.

This involves comments such as “at least he didn’t get my…” type response.

(c) Creating a hypothetical world.

“It could have been worse, he could have attacked me” response.

(d) Construing benefits from the victimising event.

“This has made me realise what is important to me”.

(e) Favourable outcome comparisons.

“I have heard of people having to go into homes after this. I think I have coped well under the circumstances”.

It is not surprising that crime victims are 1.5 times more likely to be depressed and 2.7 times more likely to report being suicidal. Moreover, individuals experiencing multiple victimisation are at greatest risk of suicide (Sorensen and Golding, 1990), and post-traumatic stress disorder is common.

Some people are better able to cope with becoming a victim of crime than others. There are marked individual differences in coping abilities, but detrimental vulnerability factors include acute illness, chronic illness, deterioration of health, hunger, anger, fatigue, loneliness, death, poor problem-solving ability, substance abuse, chronic pain and poor impulse control (Freeman and Simon 1989).

### Crime and Older People

Older people rate fear of crime as their most serious personal problem (Yin 1980), and 75% of older victims report an increased and prolonged fear of crime after becoming a victim (Berg and Johnson 1979). Older people feel more vulnerable to crime for several reasons:

**Physical factors** (diminished strength may make them feel powerless to resist a male perpetrator),

**Environmental factors** (older people often live in urban areas with high crime rates),

And social factors (older adults often live alone and so are easier to burglarise) (Antunes et al., 1977).

One early study suggested that older people most often fear house burglary, robbery in the street, stolen cars and consumer fraud (Sundeen and Mathieu, 1976). Residential burglary involves a gross violation of a persons 'primary territory', intruding on their safe area, and threatening their sense of control and feelings of security. As older people spend a large proportion of their time within their home, an intrusion upon this space can have more devastating consequences. Finally, given that distraction burglary incorporates both a burglary and a deception, two of older persons' most feared crimes, then fear of this crime, and its impact, cannot be under-estimated.

It is also interesting to note that American research carried out over 25 years ago demonstrated an older persons potential vulnerability to distraction burglaries. The study suggested that confidence games and deceptive practices accounted for 2 out of the 5 crimes to which older people most frequently fall victim (Gross, 1976.)

Older peoples' diminished physical capabilities and the seriousness of the consequences of loss of money or injury make the impact of crime more damaging. In addition, Becoming a victim of crime can seriously impact on an older person's behaviour, causing lifestyle changes such as a reduction in social activities (trips to stores, banks, and social meetings (Feinberg 1977)).

## 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 crime, victims need to feel that something has changed for the better, if they are to both feel and be safer in the future. Security measures in the form of target hardening have a role to play, but in distraction burglaries the victim has usually admitted the offender into the home. We must therefore arm such victims with the personal knowledge and ability to prevent a reoccurrence.

### Changing the focus of blame

If we focus upon the point of view that the criminal was so clever that he would have fooled anyone, this leaves the victim feeling powerless and vulnerable to re-victimisation. Similarly, if we emphasise that the victim is, by nature, too trusting, then

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.)

Identifying future behaviour changes which might lessen the likelihood of re-victimisation, will be enhanced if accompanied by social support networks. Social support is multi-faceted and includes:

- 1) *Emotional support*, which provides acceptance and opportunities to ventilate emotions, and can prevent the victim from assessing the world as threatening, untrustworthy and rejecting. Positive efforts can be made to raise the victim's self-perceived competence and worth, which are often affected as a direct result of the crime.
- 2) *Tangible support* in the form of money to replace lost possessions and re-establish feelings of security. Assistance in the form of escorts and transportation can be especially valuable in the crime aftermath.
- 3) *Informational support* in the form of guidance and advice to assist the victim in problem-solving or in dealing with the crime will be equally beneficial.

Regardless of its form, aid from others appears to be an essential component of victims' ability to cope with a victimisation (Bard and Sangrey, 1986). In addition, research tells us that those who subsequently join community action programmes do not fear crime to the same extent and have more control than those who use avoidance behaviours alone (eg target hardening, alarms, not going out alone at night etc. (Cohn et al 1978)).

Finally, the support contribution of the police and judicial system cannot be underestimated. Subsequent contact with the police to receive reports outlining the progress of the enquiry has marked therapeutic effects on the victim. Engaging victims in the

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.
- It will be advantageous in appropriate circumstances to make a video-recording of the witness statement. This may be especially relevant with sick or frail victims.



- 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:

- ✓ Do not make any assumptions on the basis of old age
- ✓ Build rapport – a professional who attaches importance to their relationship will achieve better outcomes.
- ✓ Allow time for a victim's anxiety to decrease – this will increase the reliability of the information received.
- ✓ 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.
- ✓ Cut down outside distractions. Make sure the TV is turned off, and the dog is in the other room, etc.

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

### **Résumé of Bogus Offender Interviews**

“They don’t need the money, we do.”

At the outset of this research Mr Steele was an experienced Detective with 32 years service, and had served as an Operational Detective at every rank from Constable to Chief Superintendent. During his service he successfully conducted a number of investigations leading to the arrest and conviction of bogus offenders, and was well conversant with bogus offender practices. However, whilst compiling this report, he has attempted to disregard preconceptions in favour of concentrating upon the information supplied by the interviewees. That said, past experience played a key role in developing meaningful communication and interpreting the information given.

Steele commenced to gather the offenders’ perspective to crime by closely questioning convicted bogus offenders about their criminal histories and methods of committing the crime.

A total of 21 offenders were interviewed, and were selected because they were prolific offenders who held a good relationship with at least one police officer, and were prepared to co-operate with the researcher. Steele had not previously met any of the offenders, all of whom were referred to him by other police officers.

Of the offenders interviewed, two of them were in their teens, five were in their 20’s, twelve were in their 30’s, one was in his 60s and one in his 70s.

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-violence phase of their criminal careers, giving a valuable insight into how their actions changed to include violence with the onset of a drink and/or drug problem.

Nevertheless, the main purpose of this research is to identify the salient means of how offenders identify and exploit victims, and there is no clear evidence to suggest that this would vary amongst male and female offenders and /or those using force.

19 of the offenders varied their MO's, selecting the one which would work best within the circumstances in which they met their victim. The other two offenders were consistent with their MO irrespective of the setting in which they operated.

The offenders who committed bogus property repair-type crimes commented that they were prepared to take any opportunity to also commit a distraction burglary, whereas the teams of distraction burglars appeared to only commit that type of crime.

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 interviewed at length with minimum disruption caused to the prison authorities.

### Guarantees of Anonymity and Freedom from Process

Prior to starting each interview the researcher went to great lengths to guarantee the interviewees that their identities would be protected, and that no attempt would be made to use the information supplied to prefer additional charges, TIC's (taken into consideration) or write-offs against any person. These pledges have been honoured.

The only occasion that the prisoner anonymity and no process guarantees caused concern was in the case of a prisoner serving a sentence for murder, for which he had an appeal against conviction pending. During the interview the offender explained and admitted his part in the killing. Despite serious misgivings the researcher has held this information in confidence and will not renege on his pledge to the prisoner.

Such ethical dilemmas will inevitably arise when conducting research by means of offender interviews and anyone embarking upon such a course of action must determine their standpoint on these issues at the outset. Ethically it is suggested that the standpoint reached should be agreed with the prisoner, and subsequently observed.

### Verification Checks

Prior to each interview, the researcher checked the prisoners' previous convictions and their criminal intelligence records. Where possible Steele also spoke to the officer in the case for the prisoner's last conviction. This background information facilitated early veracity checks in the offender interviews. Moreover, the researcher's ability to make

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 their commission of bogus offences against the elderly. Whilst some of the offenders expressed regret at the harm they had caused to their older victims, all but one offender spoke with boastful pride of their ability to deceive their victims into accepting false stories and thereby parting with their money. Some offenders became so proficient in the practice of their deception that they would await meeting their potential victim before deciding which of the two offenders would take the lead speaking part and which "tale" they would use. Informal competitions were held between criminal partners to decide whom was the more accomplished of the two. A regular comment was words to the effect of "we took pride in getting in the house, conning the old lady, and stealing her



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. They don’t spend it, that’s why it’s hidden away. They don’t need it”.

Offenders took pride in their ability to convincingly deceive their victims, but if it became necessary to use force to secure the victim’s valuables then this too was deemed acceptable. Indeed, the use of such force was even countenanced by the offenders’ relatives. One offender’s wife said:

“It’s not his fault that he had to hit her. She should have just handed the money over and she would have been alright. She brought it on herself”.

However, the fact that it is usual for offenders refer to their violent crimes as “naughty ones” clearly shows that they are not entirely at ease with inflicting violence upon older victims. Conversely, the fact that they use such a comparatively emotionless term indicates they can accept the use of violence in appropriate circumstances.

The prevailing standard in criminal morality which views frail, older adults as legitimate targets, even to the extent of inflicting violence, may well explain the perceived rise in bogus offences. If such offences are seen as morally legitimate crime by the offenders’ relatives and by fellow prison inmates, it will be extremely difficult to successfully place such offenders into rehabilitation programmes intended to prevent re-offending when released.

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 analysis process.

### 3. Drug Dependant and Alcoholic Offenders

The majority of the offenders interviewed outlined how they began their criminal careers as bogus offenders taking great pride in visiting the homes of older people and conning their way in and leaving without the occupants realising they had become the victim of a

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-driven offenders are more likely to additionally commit crimes at the weekend and outside working hours to obtain money to feed their habits.

#### 4. The Rational Ruthless Offender

A number of the distraction burglars interviewed made reference to the situation where they visit a house intending to steal but the occupant(s) reject the offender's attempt to gain entry and repel them at the doorstep. Where this class of offenders are convinced that money and valuables (in particular jewellery) are present, they will return later, usually just as darkness falls, and overpower the occupant(s) as they open the door in response to a knock. The occupant(s) will be subdued inside the premises by one offender whilst the second enters the bedroom used by the occupant(s) and searches for a locked drawer, cupboard or wardrobe for a receptacle (often a biscuit tin or chocolate box) containing their savings. If this initial search does not reveal the occupant's valuables they will simply intimidate and even beat the occupants until they declare where the money is hidden. These violent distraction burglaries are much more likely to be reported to the police who will usually record a crime of robbery, which

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.

**Offender classification and their behaviour at the scene of crime.**

Offender Classification	Usual timing for commission of offences	Usual search Techniques	
		Tidy/Untidy	Depositing Forensic Evidence at Scene
Non-Violent Experienced Distraction Burglar	Working hours Monday-Friday perhaps including Saturday morning.	<b>Tidy.</b> Usually leaves no overt sign that search has occurred.	<b>Disciplined search technique leaving little evidence at scene of crime dependent on experience.</b>
<b>Drink Or Drugs-Driven Violent Offender</b>	As above but also extending to Saturday and Sunday and outside working hours due to need to feed craving.	Increased likelihood of untidy search.	Increased likelihood of forensic evidence being left at the scene.
<b>Ruthless, Rational Violent Offender</b>	Weekdays, in early evenings or just falling dark (prior to occupants retiring to bed).	<b>Tidy.</b> Search will usually start in bedroom used by occupant(s).	Disciplined search with minimum evidence left at scene.

NB: Where offenders have made disciplined house searches the best chance of forensic evidence may be from any nearby houses they visited but were repelled on the doorstep by the occupants, especially from garden gates, etc.

**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. *(Taken into consideration)* I bought the details off the TIC list. He told me the soft touches that were good for a lot of money. I bought the job I'm doing time for *(murder)* off his TIC list."

"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 hobbies 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”.

**Q. What ‘props’ do you use to assist in the commission of the crime?**

**A.** “I always looked on my car as a prop. I’d park it straight outside the window to impress. It was never registered in our name.”

*NB: Some bogus offender teams carefully avoid their vehicle being seen by a victim.*

“It is dead easy to make a good id card. If I was posing as police I would go in the police station and pick up a crime prevention leaflet. I’d cut off the Force badge and name and mix that on a card with details we’d typed on. We have printers who’ll do it for us. I always had good id cards for any company I wanted. Everyone has leaflets with the company logo on so it’s easy to get a good id card for any major company.”

“I had the right clothes for whatever I was saying I was from. Suit collar and tie or florescent jacket. It’s easy to do.”

“I have had id cards with telephone numbers on. If they rang to check they’d get my partner on his mobile round the corner. I’d say ring the number and check and they’d feel OK then and let me in.”

“We had magnetic name plates to fix to the side of the van with a mobile number. It made us look legit. Sometimes we stuck paper business names and details on the side and changed them a lot.”

**Q. How can you so easily and quickly find the occupants’ money?**

**A.** “The best place is in the bedroom they sleep in. You look for the locked drawer or cupboard or wardrobe. Force that and you’ll usually find their stache in a biscuit tin or chocolate box or sometimes in a locked tin. It’s easy. If it’s not there you sit with the old gimmer (*sic*) and offer them a service saying it’s a pity they are not a pensioner because they’d be entitled to a discount. When they say they are you tell them you need to inspect their pension book to get the number, and you watch where they get their pension book from because their money’s probably there if it isn’t in the bedroom.”

“If I can’t find the money I pretend my mobile’s not working and ask to borrow money to make an urgent call. That will usually at least get their purse.”

“Sometimes you can see they are really on edge and just want you out of the house. When they are frightened like this you can play on it. I once had a woman so on edge I fined her on the spot for having a dirty door. She paid up just to get me out of the house she was so frightened.”

**Q. What precautions do you take to avoid detection?**

**A.** When we go out grafting we’ll travel miles from the site. 150 isn’t unusual. We’ll do job after job till it gets too hot and then move on. Sometimes we will change the story

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 be recognised. Old people make bad witnesses so you're unlucky if you get caught. If you are caught the trick is never to admit it. Insist on an id parade. Fight the committal. Keep going for adjournments at Crown Court. The worry caused to the old witness will probably kill them off before the trial starts. This often helps us get off. Lots of cases fold, or because it weakens the prosecution case we can get a good plea bargain."

"Our strongest point is not to let the householder know they have been done. If you get the money without them knowing they will think they have lost or misplaced it. Sometimes they are frightened to declare it because they had more than they are allowed when they are drawing benefits so they dare not tell anybody."

"Most good bogey teams work in two's. There's less chance of being grassed up. Sometimes you have a third who stays with the car as driver but mostly you do it in two's".

"If you just work with travellers there's not much chance of being grassed up. It's easy for people in your community to grass each other up and the grass can move and hide. There's nowhere for travellers to hide. We are all part of the same community. We all come across each other on the road or on sites. If you cross one traveller you cross all his family and travellers can't hide like you can. You'll always be found on the sites. We all know each other's business, so we don't grass."

"You won't get us placing our money in banks in our names. We know you'll get it if we're arrested. Our money goes into our parents' accounts so you cannot seize it as proceeds of crime. We won't make that mistake again."

"We like to go on jobs four up. We keep changing around who talks to the occupant and who sneaks in, and changing the two who go to the house so that the different descriptions make it harder for the Police to connect the jobs."

"We take money and jewellery; it's easy to get rid of and easy to hide. I sometimes bury the jewellery near the caravan until there's enough to weigh in. We all have bent jewellers who'll buy our gear and say nowt (*sic*). One used to switch off the camera on his shop door when we were going to weigh in jewellery."

"I like to park the car out of sight of the house I am doing so they cannot give a description of it. I want it nearby in case we have to make a quick getaway, so I try and get it just out of sight round a corner or junction".

**Q. If you sometimes don't decide what story to tell until you see the occupant, it must be difficult to co-ordinate with your accomplice. How do you get around this difficulty?**

**A.** "It's easy. Sometimes we'll enter together but when the householder is present we'll talk in Romany about who's to do what and the one who's found the money can tell the other what's happened in our language. The householders don't understand and haven't a clue what's going on."

**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 and they think they've got a bargain even though I'm still ripping them off."

"A good way is to knock on the door and discuss it. If it's work to the exterior and they say they want to think about it you just demolish a bit of it that's in good condition. They have got to give you the job then. If they start complaining you just say there was a misunderstanding and they accept that."

"It's good to go to a house saying you're working on another house on that street and you have noticed a similar fault on their house."

"If I see someone has had good work done at a posh house, say for example a new stone drive laid. I go to the drive and have my photo taken shaking hands with someone. I then show the photo to a potential victim giving it as an example of my good work and that I am shaking hands with the house owner who was delighted with the drive."

"People living on their own are easier to persuade. It doesn't really matter whether it's a man or a woman. If you smile with them and talk to them they're glad to have your company. You can keep going back and take their money bit by bit and really you're making them happy 'cos they're lonely. The trouble is we run out of patience and take too much at once and that's when things start going wrong."

**Q. How do you get the householder to hand over money when the work has not yet been done?**

**A.** "We usually quote work that they cannot check up on. They cannot check the roof so they have to take our word that it's been done."

"Sometimes I just ask for a deposit, or for money to buy materials and then never go back and do the job."

"I sometimes got them so wound up that they were not sure what work I was supposed to have done. I would then keep going back making them pay over and over again for work that had never been done."

"Some people think they have a chance of keeping control if they pay by cheque. I just have them make the cheque payable to someone else. It might be a licensee or a friend. They get a cut for handling the cheque and they will never name me as being involved. They'll just say the cheque was for a debt they were owed and give a false name."

"Our trick is to start demolishing good bits of their house. That makes them desperate for you to repair it all. I then get the payment and never return."

**Q. How do you select your victims?**

**A.** Sometimes you just pick out the house as you are driving around. You can see it's the home of an old gimmer (*sic*) who's struggling to keep up with it. They're easy meat."

“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 stupid and that you’re doing the best for them. It’s a matter of judging how best to control them.”

“The thing is you’ve got to stop them discussing it with anyone else that’s why it’s best if they live on their own. If they start talking with someone else they might smell a rat.”

**Q. How do you avoid prosecution?**

**A.** “Firstly I make sure I’m difficult to identify. I have business cards and magnetic signs on my van but they’re just mobile numbers and can’t be traced to me. The trick is to make sure you do a little bit of work. It doesn’t really matter how poor the work is. As long as you’ve done a bit you can claim it’s not a crime, just that the householders had a poor deal. The police won’t get involved if the householders just had a bad business deal.”

“The trick is to have a business identity. A name and telephone will do. I go for the mobiles where you buy a card and it’s not traceable to you. You can just throw it away if it’s getting hot. If the police do trace you, you can claim you’re bona fide but in the main they’ve little chance of tracing you after you’ve done the job. They have got to catch you at it to have a chance, and if they come to the house while you’re there you just do more work so they’ve no chance. I only got caught ‘cos I got greedy through drugs and went too far.”

“The trick is never admit anything if you get arrested. Always claim to be legit. Say it must have been someone else if they swindled them. Ask for an id parade. The more you wriggle the less chance of the police pushing it.”

“Discredit the complainant’s ability. Pick holes in their accounts. It makes the police more likely to drop it and say it’s a civil dispute.”

“Old people are rotten witnesses. Dispute what they say. The police won’t want to try a case on their evidence alone.”

**Q. How many scams did you do before you were caught?**

**A.** Literally hundreds. Well over 500.

**Q. Will you return to this type of crime when you are released from prison?**

**A.** “Definitely. It’s what I’ve been trained all my life to do. I will teach my son the business as soon as he’s old enough. But I won’t teach him to do the naughty ones. He’ll have a good living as long as he’s careful and does a little bit of work at each house.”

**Q. Do you ever commit distraction burglaries?**

**A.** “If it’s safe I will steal while I’m in the house.”

“Not anymore. I did when I was younger but I don’t want to risk a sentence now. If I find a soft touch and I know there’s more money because they paid in cash. I’ll sell the house to a younger team who’ll go do it themselves. I’m happy just to take a cut nowadays. I’m too old to go to prison again so I stick to prop jobs.”

**Q. What deters you from committing offences?**

**A.** The worst thing is nosy neighbours. You can never be sure they have not telephoned the police and they might make good witnesses.”

“I don’t like home helps, especially if they are the type that take time to talk to the old people. They can pick up what we’re doing.”

**Q. What effect do “Neighbourhood Watch Area” signs have on you?**

**A.** None at all. Signs don’t make any difference. It’s people looking across at what we’re doing who are dangerous. You cannot be sure they won’t call relatives or the police and we’ll be caught in the house.”

### Summary of Interviews.

The interviews reveal a highly complex, well-organised criminal sub-culture of bogus offenders, who target the most vulnerable, elderly persons in our community. Many bogus offenders commence their criminal careers as young as 7 or 8 years of age and serve a long apprenticeship during which they develop expertise at reading the thought processes and behaviour of their potential victims.

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 vast majority of attempts to commit this type of crime.

Short-term prevention plans should focus on:

1. Equipping homes with the basic target hardening hardware essential to prevent entry to visitors at the doorstep (ie door-chain, door scopes, door locks). Where an older

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 occupant's decision whether or not to admit a doorknocker

2. Instilling householders with the knowledge, ability and desire to employ proper doorstep skills when answering the door:-

- ✓ Correct use of the door-chain,
- ✓ Check the authenticity of the caller,
- ✓ If in doubt keep them out,
- ✓ Do not employ or deal with door knockers.

3. Persuading householders not to unnecessarily keep cash in the house.

The implementation of a successful bogus offending prevention plan will probably require that the aforementioned short term measures be supplemented by a selection of additional, longer-term measures, examples of which are:

#### Multi-agency Protocol for conducting business by means of home visits

Despite the adage that the English person's home is their castle, in contemporary Britain the norm has evolved whereby the onus of establishing the legitimacy of a visitor to someone's home rests upon the householder. It is very much a matter left to the householder's discretion as to whether and how they should check a visitor's authenticity. A mistaken sense of good manners, or feelings of embarrassment etc make many people, especially amongst the older adult age group, reluctant to make

such authenticity checks. These widespread social inhibitions create the opportunities to easily enter homes by subterfuge, a situation which the offenders exploit to the full.

The development of local protocols whereby all major organisations conducting business by means of home visits accept responsibility for pro-actively proving their bona fides would make it more difficult for offenders to unlawfully gain entry by purporting to be employees of a legitimate company.

These multi-agency protocols could be supported by long-term education programmes/ public information materials to inform the general public of the code of conduct to be expected from legitimate business visitors and the householders could anticipate the means by which authenticity would be proved. Public expectations can thereby be changed so that the responsibility of proving authenticity is transferred to the visitor. This situation would effectively remove the false cloak of legitimacy under which many bogus offenders currently operate.

### Intergenerational Work

Imaginative schemes can be implemented where older adults visit their local schools and participate in classroom work to improve understanding and communication. These initiatives can reduce the social isolation of participating older adults, bolstering their defences against bogus offender victimisation.

### 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.

The research clearly indicates that bogus offenders are prolific offenders. Whilst it might be that such rehabilitation programmes only prevent a minority from re-offending, this could still make a significant reduction in the number of offences committed. Moreover, if such programmes merely diverted such criminals from the use of violence against older adults, some might view this a worthwhile success.

#### Improved Investigation Procedures

It appears that minor amendments to the police investigation process will have major benefits to the victim's welfare and improve the quality of evidence recorded. This is especially significant in relation to the method and timing of the taking of the written witness statement.

#### Care, Support and Rehabilitation Protocols

A focused, co-ordinated, multi-agency initiative to assist victims of bogus offences to cope and recover from the impact of the crime will be of notable benefit to older adults.

#### Drug/Drink Offender Rehabilitation Programmes

A significant proportion of bogus offenders belong to the travelling community; members of which are reticent to avail themselves of drink and drug rehabilitation programmes. In view of the offender interviews evidencing the link between drug/drink dependency and the use of violence against victims, it may be beneficial to recruit such dependants from the travelling community onto treatment programmes. These proactive recruitment campaigns might be especially effective when located in the vicinity of the larger caravan parks.

**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 the Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative and details the tactics incorporated into their prevention and detection plan. It is suggested that any prevention and detection initiative should be designed to interlock into the unique circumstances of the local community concerned, and as such it is unlikely that the Leeds scheme could effectively be transposed elsewhere. However, it is hoped that some elements of their strategic and tactical development may be of benefit to others, and especially those implementing initiatives in geographical areas bearing similarities with Leeds.

**Introduction**

The Leeds Metropolitan District is uniquely placed to successfully formulate a prevention strategy to protect its elderly community from crime because of the Council's foresight in the 1990's of establishing 36 separate Neighbourhood Groups strategically located at different sites throughout the city.

Each Neighbourhood Group is run by one or more full-time member of staff who is/are supported by a number of volunteers. The services and activities provided by each group vary to meet the needs of the older people in their catchment area, but usually include a community hall where older people can meet for leisure activities, luncheons etc., the provision of information/ advocacy services and target hardening equipment.

The services mentioned above grossly understate the magnificent care and support provided by these 36 Neighbourhood Groups, but go some way to illustrate the central role such groups play in the lives of a significant proportion of the older adults in Leeds. It goes without saying that the Neighbourhood Group staff have established communication links with the older people in their community, and that they provide a firm, professional and established foundation upon which a crime prevention policy to protect older adults can be built.

The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative is closely linked with the Neighbourhood Groups who are core members involved in the implementation of each strand of the prevention strategy.

### The Beginning

In August 1998, a meeting was convened at Leeds University, where all agencies providing care and support to the Leeds Metropolitan District elderly community were invited to hear presentations from keynote speakers outlining the professionalism of bogus offenders and the scope of their activities.

Robust efforts ensured that the key local policy-makers were well represented and it is interesting to reflect how many of the attendees arrived not knowing the meaning of the term “distraction burglary”. The effectiveness of the awareness-raising programme is illustrated by the fact that the term is understood throughout most sections of the Leeds community.

Mr Steele presented an overview of the crime prevention issues revealed in his interviews with bogus offenders and all present were invited to participate in the

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 £554,000 to finance the initiative had been granted, and the work in developing the scheme began in earnest.



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**

This taskforce is required to raise awareness of bogus offending issues throughout the entire Leeds Metropolitan District. Its target audience is the community as a whole, including professional and voluntary agencies, and especially the older people whose doorstep behaviour we wish to alter to increase their home safety. Raising awareness amongst the professional and voluntary sector organisations initially encountered minor difficulties not least because the earlier work done by some member organisations to assist older adults had been designed without paying particular attention to the special needs of the target audience.

Dr Thornton, a leading clinical psychologist specialising in older adult issues, has been recruited as team advisor and her remit includes educating key members on older

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:

Yorkshire Television has been commissioned to make three training videos each designed to meet the needs of its target audience i.e. older people, professional and voluntary organisations which support older people; and the police. It is envisaged that videos for older people will be played at their community meetings etc. and also be taken to the homes of the housebound by volunteers from the Neighbourhood Network groups or members of Neighbourhood Watch. Training will be given to the volunteer showing the video, so that they can give well-informed comment and explanations to the audience. It is hoped that the ensuing discussions will develop better understanding of our aims amongst target audiences.

### Local Information Television Slots:

Yorkshire Television occasionally broadcast public information messages and efforts are being made for some of these slots to be dedicated to key distraction burglary issues such as checking the identification of cold callers to households.

### 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:

The raising awareness taskforce consists of the Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, the Assistant Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, and representatives from Yorkshire Television, West Yorkshire Playhouse, The Leeds University Students Union, the Neighbourhood Network Groups, Victim Support, and Neighbourhood Watch. The members are advised on older people issues by Dr Thornton.

## **Police Interviews of Older Adult Victims**

Little meaningful research has been conducted as to the best practice methods of how, when and where to interview older adult victims of distraction burglary.

It is recognised that being the victim of crime can have serious consequences upon the lifestyles of older adults and may even reduce the victim's life span. When the police interact with older adult victims, great care must be exercised to minimise the victim's anxiety/trauma whilst still securing the best evidence for a witness statement. The

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 may include the victim's assertions. The court will also look for supportive evidence, especially from a suitably qualified medical practitioner, along with evidence from the victim's relatives or friends who have first hand knowledge of the situation.

It is intended that the Leeds Initiative will trial a system whereby the police officer first attending the report of crime upon a traumatised older adult victim will merely ask for a shortened verbal account of what has happened. The victim's free narrative will be written on a pro-forma designed for this purpose. Questions will be asked to collate sufficient detail for the recording of a crime, initiating a criminal investigation, and having regard to the common practice of offenders committing distraction burglaries in a series, to immediately circulate their descriptions.

Victims will be pro-actively encouraged to have a friend present throughout their interactions with the police.

The services of Victim Support will be arranged as soon as possible to commence the rehabilitation process of the victim.

A detailed statement of evidence will be taken at a later time convenient to the victim.

It is an unfortunate fact of life that the impact of bogus offender crime upon older victims can have serious detrimental effects to their health. Indeed, it may result in them moving into residential care or even dying in the period following the commission of the crime and prior to the matter coming to trial.

In bogus offence crimes committed against vulnerable, frail, older adults, it may be advisable to take an early statement outlining the impact of crime in case their health does deteriorate, resulting in death. It can be anticipated that the defence will claim the death is entirely due to old age and in no way connected to becoming a victim of crime, and in the lack of evidence of causation it is impossible to contradict these assertions. In such circumstances the taking of an early Hobstaff statement may be of benefit to the trial judge. Where our fears prove unfounded, and the victim enjoys a successful rehabilitation process a further Hobstaff statement can be taken approaching the trial date.

### **The Rehabilitation Process**

It is intended that in the case of bogus offence victims who live an isolated lifestyle, that upon first reporting the crime to the police, they be introduced to a friend. (For example from a Neighbourhood Group or the local Neighbourhood Watch). One of the friend's



roles would be to reinforce the 'Victim Behaviour Attribution Plan' to assist the victim to rebuild their self-confidence and sense of being in control. A further role would be to provide information of the social support network available to victims to maximise their recovery process. In the Leeds Initiative draft protocols are currently being agreed by the partner organisations on how to co-ordinate the provision of these services.

Taskforce members:

The Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, the Assistant Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator, representatives from West Yorkshire Police, West Yorkshire Police Scenes of Crime, West Yorkshire Police Criminal Justice Unit, Victim Support, West Yorkshire Playhouse, Neighbourhood Groups, Neighbourhood Watch, and Age Concern. They are advised by Dr Thornton.

### **The Forensic Examination of Crime Scenes**

Whilst it is appreciated that many bogus offences are committed by experienced criminals, the limited forensic evidence recovered from such crime scenes is disappointing. It is unusual for the bogus offender who engages the house occupant(s) in conversation to wear gloves and it may be fruitful to trial an imaginative approach to examining such scenes having regard to the following:

1. The offenders will often survey the target premises prior to entry, and this may involve eavesdropping through windows and letterboxes, which might be potential sites of forensic evidence.

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 visitor's authenticity on the householder. The work of Dr Thornton clearly illustrates that many householders, old or young, are reluctant to instigate such checks. The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative is attempting, therefore, to change the balance and to encourage visiting companies to accept responsibility for proactively proving their staff to be legitimate visitors to home occupant(s).

Such a transfer of responsibility will create additional time-consuming work for visiting organisations who are understandably concerned about these consequences. However, in view of the fact that cold home visits provides the cover under which much bogus crime is committed, all organisations have a moral responsibility to co-operate with implementing new, more effective practices of proving the authenticity of their staff.

A taskforce has therefore been created to develop acceptable protocols to address these issues. These protocols will hopefully include a uniform behavioural system by home visitors which will instil householders with an expected code of conduct - including the facility to make failsafe authenticity checks upon visitors to their home. The successful implementation of such protocols will severely impede the actions of bogus

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

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

### Long term Strategy

- ✓ To employ psychologically based principles when designing the basic specifications for the next generation of identification card design.
- ✓ 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.

The majority of bogus offenders take pride in their ability to deceive and manipulate their victims, and have identified that many older adults are susceptible to suggestions that their homes are in immediate need of repair. Such a suggestion appears to strike at the very heart of the older persons' sense of security and makes them prone to agreeing to

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 under which many bogus offenders successfully conduct their legal business. The Leeds Initiative has commenced negotiations with essential service suppliers to develop protocols regulating the manner of conducting home visits. This is a unique and ambitious strand to the Initiative, and it may be interesting to monitor its future developments.

The increasing professionalism of many bogus offenders is further evidenced by them employing structured methods of locating the householders' money after successfully gaining entry to a home. The offenders have recognised that many older adults secrete money in a locked drawer, cupboard or wardrobe situated in the bedroom they sleep in. This money is often stored in a chocolate box, biscuit tin or small locking metal container. On the occasions when the money is not secreted in the aforementioned

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 homicide.

The research material highlighted in this work suggests that the police and other agencies can help older adult victims to cope with the impact of crime and assist the victim's recovery to normality. The Leeds Initiative is piloting a multi-agency victim support package, the key features of which begin with the police adopting a sympathetic, understanding first response to the crime report. The officer's first priority is to reduce victim anxiety before eliciting evidence of the offence. The police action is followed by the provision of a co-ordinated multi-agency support network, involving Victim Support, the Neighbourhood groups and Neighbourhood Watch, designed to assist the victim's recovery. This rehabilitation scheme is at its very beginnings and is worthy of future monitoring to identify elements of good practice revealed.

### Crime scene examination

It is often said that the police have but one opportunity to examine a crime scene and this adage equally applies to bogus offence scenes. It appears that the police service has concerns about the limited forensic evidence elicited from some bogus crime scenes and this paper contains advice to assist crime scene officers with limited experience in the examination of bogus offence scenes.

### Doorstep Etiquette

A major recommendation recurring throughout this work is the need to recognise the skills and abilities of older adults and that their worth must not be undervalued.

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 creative approach to this work. A local theatre group will visit schools and community halls performing scenarios outlining the issues of distraction burglary, and involving the audience in role-playing. Yorkshire Television will produce 3 training videos to meet the unique needs of older adults, the police and the support agencies who work directly with older people.

## **The Future**

The year 2001 has seen a resurgence in police efforts to prevent and detect distraction burglaries but there is still much more that can be done to develop local strategies to better protect older adults from becoming the victim of such crime. It is hoped that this research paper may be of assistance to officers developing such strategies. It is suggested that best value can be achieved from reading this paper in conjunction with the National Task Force's "Best Practice Manual".

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## The Leeds Distraction Burglary Initiative Steering Group

**Chair:** Clare Morrow – Yorkshire Television

**Secretary:** Claire McKillop – Assistant Distraction Burglary  
Co-ordinator

### Membership:

Carmel Barr -	Home Office
Wendy Davies -	Burmantofts Senior Action
Keith Pape -	WY Police and representing the Crime and Disorder Partnership
Chris Robertson -	Zurich Insurance
Julia Lister	Gordons Cranswick Solicitors
Carol Wardman -	Age Concern Leeds
Eric Bishop -	Neighbourhood Watch
John Field-	Trading Standards
Sheila Mahon	Bramley Elderly Action
Trevor Buckroyd	Victim Support
Brian Steele	Distraction Burglary Co-ordinator

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**[www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hopra](http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/hopra)**