

# TELEMASP BULLETIN

## TEXAS LAW ENFORCEMENT MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STATISTICS PROGRAM

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### Senior Citizen Programs

#### Introduction

Children, women, and the elderly represent citizens with special needs. According to Harpold (1994), the elderly are at or near the top of the victimization list.

In the years ahead, an increasing proportion of the population will be made up of elderly persons. This trend, combined with other social forces, will result in an increased number of senior citizens left vulnerable to criminal victimization (p. 11).

Elderly victimization may stem from their being prone to physical injury, and "many elderly are unprepared to cope with the financial burden of prolonged care because of fixed incomes and lack of insurance" (Zevitz & Rettammel 1990:25-26). Although some elderly own their homes and are well-established with material possessions, this has taken a lifetime to accumulate, and their paychecks have been drastically cut in order to receive pensions from their former employers.

Concurrently, however, the elderly also represent a large, mostly untapped resource for law enforcement agencies through volunteer programs. In 1994, the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) commissioned a study of volunteerism of the elderly in law enforcement departments. "Ninety-eight percent of agencies using volunteers said they would recommend the use of older volunteers to other law enforcement agencies that do not currently utilize volunteers" (AARP 1994:14).

Enter (1991) concluded:

What impact will the elderly victim have upon the American police? First, given the pronounced fear

of crime by the elderly, the calls-for-service-related tasks (i.e., checking for prowlers) will probably increase for law enforcement agencies. Second, on a more positive note, the increased use of the elderly in 'crime watch' programs and other voluntary roles in criminal justice is likely to rise (pp. 72-73).

This Bulletin offers insights into preparations for better serving the elderly through training generalist patrol officers and investigators in the needs of senior citizens during police interactions, community education efforts, inter-organizational cooperation issues, and elderly volunteerism within law enforcement agencies. A relatively new concept, the professional "law enforcement gerontologist," will also be discussed.

#### The Survey

Of 34 returned surveys, four (11.8%) represented departments that operate a specialized unit to deal with elderly/law enforcement issues. Additionally, three (8.8%) reported training officers in interacting with the elderly beyond the annual training required by the Texas Commission on Law Enforcement Officer Standards and Education (TCLEOSE).

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## Specialized Units and Officer Training

As shown in Figure 1, only four departments (11.8%) have specialized units for handling cases involving senior citizens—the Harris County Sheriff's Department's Community Services; Grand Prairie Police Department's Victim Assistance Outreach; San Antonio Police Department's Sex Crimes and Family Violence Unit; and the Houston Police Department's Elderly Crime Prevention Unit. These units vary in length of existence, from two years by the Grand Prairie Police Department to eleven years by the Harris County Sheriff's Department.

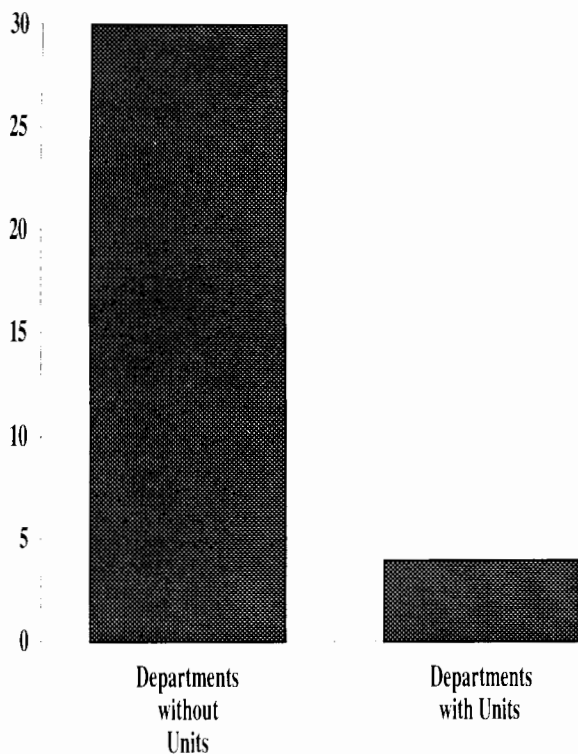


Figure 1

### Departments with Specialized Elderly Case Units

The Grand Prairie and Houston police departments and the Harris County Sheriff's Department specialize in elderly-related training beyond the TCLEOSE-mandated annual training. Although all three departments train their officers in elderly victimology topics, they vary in their approach to senior services. Grand Prairie's police department focuses on services to elderly victims, the Harris County Sheriff's Department emphasizes training its unit's officers to instruct the elderly in awareness and prevention techniques, and the Houston Police Department trains its officers in all aspects of police services to the elderly. It should be noted that this is not to say that one approach is better than the other, but rather, to illustrate three diverse systems.

The four units also differ in terms of personnel and mission or responsibilities. The Harris County Sheriff's Department's unit employs seven officers responsible for county-wide community programs, and the San Antonio Police Department's unit utilizes 20 officers who handle follow-up investigations on all cases except murder and coordinate its senior citizens' responses with social service providers. Although the Grand Prairie Police Department does not employ officers in its unit, four civilians perform victim assistance duties. One officer in the Houston Police Department handles all calls pertaining to the elderly, media coordination, and training of community policing and storefront officers.

Eight responding departments (23.5%) provide specialized sensitivity training for generalist patrol officers or investigators regarding elder abuse, other crimes against elders, or responses to calls for assistance from senior citizens. Topics include recognizing symptoms of abuse, the social services network, communications skills for the hard-of-hearing, sight-impaired or mentally challenged, local senior programs, Alzheimer's patients, telephone fraud, state resources, communicating with the elderly, and spotting at-risk seniors.

More diversity was found in the types of investigative units receiving referrals of elder abuse as shown in Figure 2. Ten agencies (29.4%) send cases to a generalist or area investigator. Seventeen (50%) refer elderly abuse to "Crimes Against Persons" investigators, three agencies (8.8%) refer cases to "Domestic Violence" investigators, and four (11.8%) assign cases by the type of offense. The Texas Department of Public Safety assigns referrals to the Texas Rangers. The El Paso Police Department refers cases to the "White Collar Crimes" division if the amount of loss by a senior citizen exceeds \$10,000.

The data indicate that the preferred method of assignment of elder abuse cases is not by the type of offense, but rather, to specifically designated "Crimes Against Persons" investigators, followed by generalist investigators. This method of assignment is possibly due to budgetary constraints, especially in smaller departments, which require investigators to be more diverse resulting in fewer "specialist" investigators.

## Community Education Efforts

For law enforcement agencies to best serve their elderly constituents, it is first necessary to know what their opinions and concerns are. This is best accomplished by surveying senior citizens on crime-related topics. Ten departments (29.4%) are currently or have previously surveyed senior citizens. One reporting agency conducted its last survey in 1994; two in 1997; two in 1998; and one in 1999. The Lubbock Police Department surveys its elderly on an annual

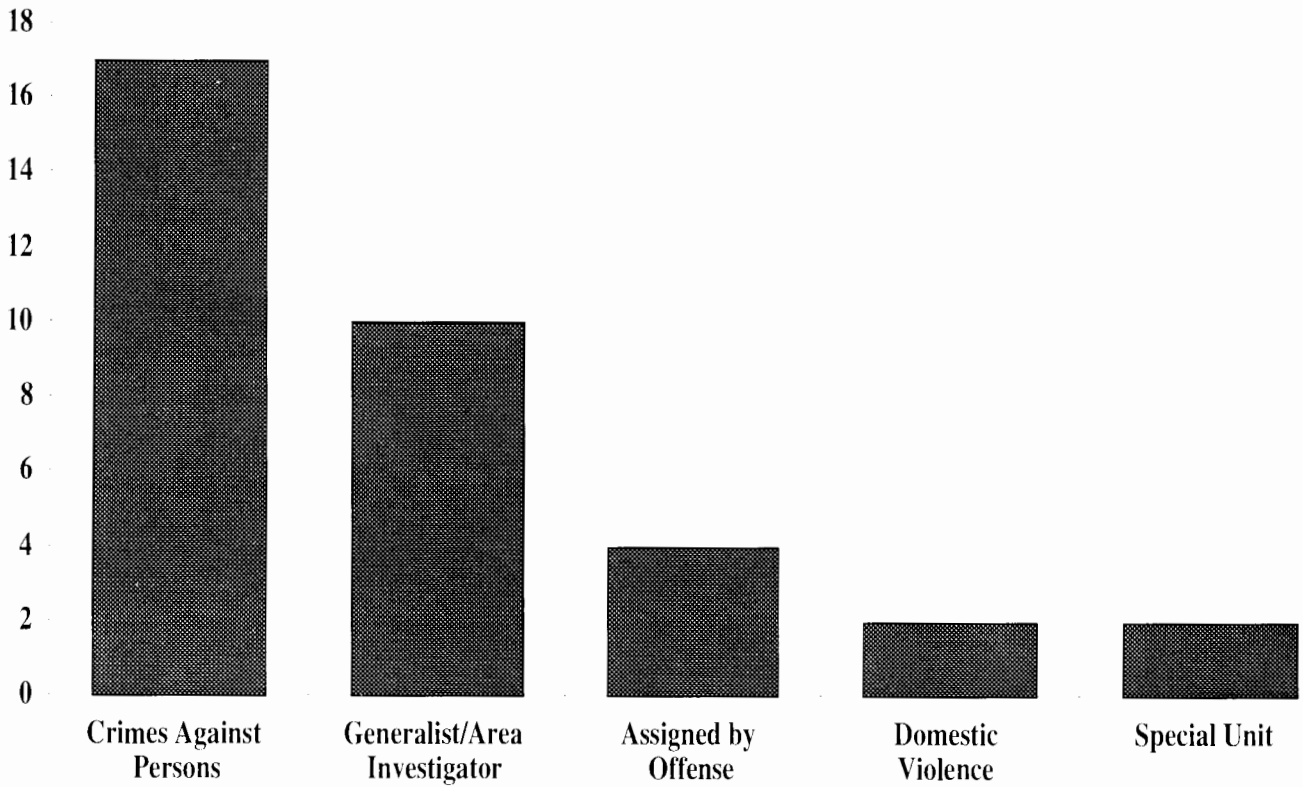


Figure 2

Units Handling Elder Abuse Cases

basis, while the El Paso County Sheriff's Department and the El Paso Police Department are currently in the process of surveying seniors through the "Triad" program which was formed through cooperation between the AARP, the National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), and the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP) for purposes of crime prevention focusing on the elderly (Cantrell 1994; Harpold 1994). One department did not report its last survey date.

The next step in the process of more effectively serving the elderly community is to meet and speak with its members, educating them on police-related issues and crime prevention. Thirty-two responding departments (94.1%) send officers to speak to senior citizens' groups on these topics. Table 1 illustrates the types of gatherings where police address crime-related issues such as scams, cons and frauds, general crime prevention, robbery prevention, personal safety, mugging and purse snatching, traveling safety, and driving safety.

Table 1

Types of Senior Citizen Gatherings Addressed by Police on Crime-Related Issues

Type of Gathering	Number of Agencies
Retirement Communities/ Senior Centers	8
AARP/Senior Groups	7
Senior Citizen Police Academies	3
Church Groups	2
Crime Watch/Neighborhood Watch	2
Health Fairs	1

The La Marque Police Department and the Fort Bend County Sheriff's Department assist the elderly through a computer program known as "R.U.O.K." or "Are You Okay?" This senior safety program, known by both names, is a high-tech method for keeping abreast of the condition of senior citizens at the local level.

The R.U.O.K. program is customized toward elderly "clients" or "customers" who are living alone. To become a client, a senior citizen completes an application listing information such as next-of-kin and personal physician. After the application is completed and returned to the police department, the data are entered into the agency's computer program.

At least once a day, the computer automatically dials the individual's home telephone. When the phone is answered, a recording from the department asks if the senior citizen is well. If all is well, the person simply hangs up the phone; if not, he or she is instructed to hang up and dial 911. If no one answers, the computer will redial up to four times at 15- to 20-minute intervals, and if there is still no answer, an instant alert is given to the police who physically check on the individual.

There are drawbacks to the service, however. First, customers of the "Are You Okay?" program must notify the police department in advance if they are leaving on vacation or for a prolonged period of time so that computer-generated calls will not be placed until they return home.

Second, if a senior citizen owns an answering machine, it may answer during a call from the police computer. If this occurs, the computer will register the call as "answered." This may prove tragic if the individual is incapacitated and cannot come to the phone and the answering machine handles the call.

Finally, if the customer is on the Internet on the only phone line, the computer will constantly register as a busy signal, which ties up the R.U.O.K. system. The potential problems include summoning a police response when none is needed, possibly resulting in interrupted service to other clients until the call can be completed. The La Marque Police Department, however, reported that the "Are You Okay?" system works quite well despite the potential problems, which are likely to be reviewed and upgraded as new systems are developed.

Senior community education alone will not completely eradicate victimization of the elderly. Institutions that regularly interact with senior citizens should be trained on how to help the police protect the elderly. Enter (1991) contends that

it would be logical to assume that victimization of this age group will substantially increase, simply because the elderly will represent the greatest target population for the criminally minded. This is especially true because the elderly have become one of the more wealthy segments of our population (p. 72).

Twenty-one agencies (61.8%) reported that they provide training to financial institutions and chambers of commerce about related types of crimes that target the elderly. Topics addressed in these seminars include scams and frauds, senior safety awareness, general crime prevention, community service education, and elderly abuse. Many agencies reported that crime prevention officers and detectives speak at these seminars, and the North Richland Hills Police Department utilizes its Seniors And Lawmen Together (S.A.L.T.) speakers' bureau which is an advisory council to Triads (Cantrell 1994). The cooperation of financial institutions, however, is not always guaranteed. The San Antonio Police Department reported that it provided training to the degree that financial institutions would participate. Interestingly, the Victoria Police Department assumes a proactive position. Local banks call the police department in the event that an elderly person withdraws a large amount of cash, usually in excess of \$3,000.

### Inter-agency Cooperation

Providing proper services to senior citizens involves much more effort than can be handled by a single law enforcement agency. Organizations other than law enforcement agencies must also cooperate actively to ensure success. As illustrated in Table 2, 13 departments (38.2%) have a specific AARP representative available to consult regarding police-related issues. Seventeen departments (50%) have a Triad serving in their immediate area of operations, and 11 departments (32.4%) have both a specific AARP police representative and a Triad actively serving in their area of operations.

Table 2

#### Senior Citizens' Resources Available in Area of Operations

Resources	Number of Agencies	Percent
Active Triad	17	50.0
Specific AARP Representative	13	38.2
Specific AARP Representative and Active Triad	11	32.4

Of those departments with Triads, 14 have formed a S.A.L.T. advisory committee. Additionally, 12 departments participate in the Triads by attending meetings or other activities.

A Victims' Assistance Program is one of the most vital organizations that police should employ to aid seniors. This program is a priceless source of referrals and additional information for departments. Thirty agencies (88.2%) reported Victims' Assistance Programs in their areas of operation that were accessible to the elderly.

### Elderly Departmental Volunteers

Mutual cooperation between law enforcement and the elderly is beneficial to both parties. Senior citizens have much they can offer by volunteering their spare time to assist law enforcement departments from time-consuming, often tedious tasks, thereby affording officers and other personnel an opportunity to better serve the community at large (AARP 1994; Cantrell 1994; Enter 1991; Edelman 1982).

The value of relying on senior volunteers in law enforcement agencies is apparently already known. Twenty-two responding departments (64.7%) employ senior volunteers and, of these, 13 actively recruit senior volunteers through a variety of methods (Table 3). Table 4 lists 27 types of activities performed by senior volunteers and the number of agencies that use their senior volunteers in these capacities. Activities range from "routine," such as filing and data entry, to more unique ones, such as assisting investigators, surveillance, and disaster assistance. Table 5 indicates the percentage of senior volunteers in the various agencies. Although almost half of the departments with senior volunteers serving in their departments have ten or fewer, three reported having more than 50. The San Antonio Police Department reported that their 69 senior volunteers comprise 37 percent of their total volunteer force. Further, the El Paso County Sheriff's Department employs 85 seniors, and the El Paso Police Department has 110 senior volunteers in its departmental staff.

**Table 3**

#### Methods of Recruiting Senior Volunteers

Method	Number of Agencies
Citizens Police Academy	6
Volunteers in Policing	5
Citizens on Patrol	3
Community Events	2
Community Recruiters/Coordinators	2
Newspaper	1
Television	1
Word-of-Mouth	1
During Calls-for-Service	1
Community Leader Referrals	1

**Table 4**

#### Types of Activities Performed by Senior Volunteers

Type of Activity	Number of Agencies
Administrative/Filing/Clerical	15
Data Entry	7
Receptionist/PR/Info Booth/Displays	7
Handicapped Parking Enforcement	4
Pawn Ticket Data	3
Statistics	3
Records	3
Bicycle Registration/Safety	2
Crime Victim Assistance	2
Citizen Contacts	2
Document Disposal	2
Jail Assistance	2
Vehicle Maintenance	2
Manning Substations	1
Assist Officer Training	1
Citizens' Police Academy	1
Coordinating Volunteers	1
Crime Prevention	1
Grafetti Hotspot Surveillance	1
Auto Theft Hotspot Surveillance	1
Child Fingerprinting	1
D.A.R.E.	1
License/Permit Processing	1
Parades	1
Disaster Assistance	1
Crime Scene/Assist Investigators	1

**Table 5**

#### Number of Senior Citizen Volunteers

Number of Senior Volunteers	Number of Agencies
10 or Fewer	10
11-20	3
21-30	2
31-40	3
41-50	0
More than 50	3
Not Reported	1

In addition to routine volunteer duties, the San Antonio Police Department utilizes its senior volunteers in graffiti surveillance and auto theft hot spots. Additionally, the Victoria Police Department relies on its seniors to assist in some disaster operations, while volunteers in the Grand Prairie Police Department and the El Paso County Sheriff's Department assist with jail duties. The Tyler Police Department uses senior volunteers to assist in the operation of police substations, and the North Richland Hills Police Department uses seniors to assist, through role playing, in the training of new recruits and the Tactical Team. Finally, the Carrollton Police Department's senior volunteers help with crime scene duties.

Besides volunteer activities, 15 departments (44.1%) have a "Citizens On Patrol" (C.O.P.) program. Table 6 illustrates the percentage distribution of the riders who are senior citizens. As shown, at least half of the riders in the "Citizens On Patrol" program are senior citizens.

**Table 6**

**Percentage of "Citizens on Patrol" Riders  
Who Are Over 50 Years Old**

Percentage over 50 Years	Number of Departments
0-25%	1
26-50%	4
51-75%	7
76-100%	1
Not Reported	2

In sum, senior volunteers can provide a wide variety of services to aid in the smoother or more successful operations of law enforcement agencies. Relations between law enforcement and senior citizens are reciprocal; each provides services to the other, and each benefits from the services of the other.

### Law Enforcement Gerontologists

None of the departments surveyed employ and/or contract with persons designated as professional "law enforcement gerontologists." This section will explain the concept, which is viewed by some administrators and practitioners to be the next major program implementation in law enforcement services to the community.

Law enforcement gerontology was initiated due to a lack of concern about crime by classical gerontologists. According to Rykert (1994),

Police administrators recognize that crimes against the elderly require ardent attention by law enforcement. In response, some administrators have created an innovative, specialized position within their agencies—the law enforcement gerontologist. Law enforcement gerontology is the branch of law enforcement science concerned with aging (p. 5).

The purpose of the law enforcement gerontologist is to address crimes against the elderly by "melding existing gerontological research with the law enforcement mission" (Rykert 1994:5). The primary responsibilities and mission of law enforcement gerontologists are to act as a liaison between police administrators and senior citizens.

By developing a rapport with the elderly, officers assigned to this position can pinpoint specific problems that impact that segment of the population and then recommend ways to minimize the risk of victimization. Law enforcement gerontologists can also alert the senior citizen community to ongoing scams being committed against the elderly. Finally, law enforcement gerontologists can involve the elderly in volunteer projects. Involving senior citizens in the fight against crime serves a two-fold purpose. It allows them to feel that they can impact on the crimes being committed against their peer group, and it allows the law enforcement community to benefit from the valuable services this group can offer (Rykert 1994:5-6).

Rykert (1994) further outlines the critical need for law enforcement gerontologists in the future:

Law enforcement gerontologists may well be a critical position in the next decade. These gerontologists can provide police administrators with valuable information on which to base department policy regarding the elderly. Police administrators should plan now for the changing demographics of tomorrow. America is an aging society (p. 9).

Currently, law enforcement gerontologists are utilized in Illinois, Rhode Island, Florida, and Delaware (Rykert 1994).

### Conclusion

Few departments have specialized units that specifically address problems faced by senior citizens, and fewer still offer extra training in working with the elderly, other than training mandated by TCLEOSE. In that most agencies surveyed do not have the funding available to prepare elderly-specialist officers or units, it is important that generalist officers are fully prepared to handle many types of cases effectively, including those involving senior citizens.



The same is true for departments that refer elderly abuse cases to either "Crimes Against Persons" or generalist investigators.

Although few departments actively survey senior citizens about their needs and concerns, the vast majority provide speakers to retirement communities and senior citizen groups on crime prevention and safety issues. Additionally, most agencies surveyed work with financial institutions on assisting their elderly clients in crime prevention. Some departments offer innovative programs for assisting in monitoring the safety of the elderly, such as "R.U.O.K."

Several departments have good working relationships with such agencies as AARP in which efforts to protect the elderly are coordinated, and several agencies actively participate in Triads. Fortunately, most departments also reported having a Victims' Assistance Program accessible to the elderly.

Most departments rely on the services of senior volunteers to assist with the day-to-day routine of their agencies. The majority that do make use of this resource report actively recruiting senior volunteers through a myriad of efforts. Most agencies reported that a large percentage of their volunteers and C.O.P. riders were senior citizens.

Although at present the surveyed departments do not contract with or hire "law enforcement gerontologists," perhaps more interest and research will be generated in law enforcement gerontology.

In sum, although the current state of police services to the elderly is not at the highest level it could be, departments are continually employing ways of providing innovative levels of service to their senior citizens. This will result in an ever-improved system of law enforcement services to the senior citizen community.

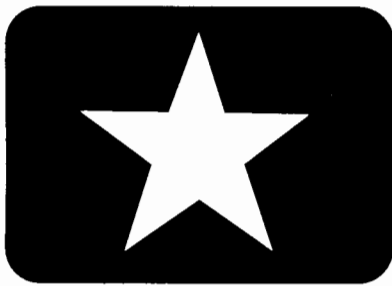
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