



# CRIME AND THE ELDERLY

\* (R.W. Whitrod, C.V.O., Q.P.M., M.A., B.Econ., Dip.Crim. (Camb))

---

## INTRODUCTION

A recent National Opinion Poll of 2005 respondents throughout Australia revealed that from a list of twelve social problems, "crimes of violence" ranked second only to unemployment as the one people were most concerned about. As in earlier polls, the results showed that "respondents over 40 years of age" was the group most concerned about these crimes.

The results are reflected in the outcome of a more intensive but smaller survey which discloses a similar finding. It found that anxiety about crime generally, and a more personal fear that they could become the victims of an attack, seem to be constantly in the minds of elderly folk.

This worry detracts from their sense of overall wellbeing, and restricts their daily behaviour patterns. In extreme cases fear of this violence leads to increasing isolation, and sometimes to virtual self-imprisonment as the aged seek refuge from the threat.

Isolation means absence of social interaction. Bowlby has well documented the consequences of inadequate social contact for the very young. At the other end of the age scale, the elderly seem to suffer similar effects from isolation. Their personalities appear constricted and shallow.

Investigations have demonstrated a correlation between personal happiness and successful interaction with other people. However personal well-being has a number of other components, economic, biological, psychological and physical about which little appears to be known. As yet there has been no systematic assessment of the impact of crime on these components. It is therefore not possible at this stage to provide any quantitative measure of just how much an elderly person's quality of life is changed through the impact of crime.

This paper looks at the relationship of elderly people and crime from the four possible aspects: that of offender, victim, of witness, and of voluntary worker in the criminal justice system. It points to significant gaps in our understanding of this relationship, recommends ways of remedying these deficiencies, and suggests the elderly receive improved community protection.

The study begins by recalling that all societies found it necessary to introduce forms of social control to ensure that the rights of their members are not breached by other individuals. Broadly speaking, criminal laws are those rules which provide punishment for acts which the community regard as a major threat to its survival.

While some conservatives may still think of the criminal law as having a religious base, it is now well recognized as essentially a man-made concept. It can be responsive, therefore, to the changing needs of society, no matter how tardy this response may be.

In the past it has recognised only two major age divisions: children and adults. It is because of their immaturity and high degree of dependence that children traditionally have been given wide-ranging protection. The elderly, fewer in number than the children, generally remained sheltered within the

large family household, and so did not appear to require the same amount of safeguarding by the community. The family were their guardians.

But time, with its inevitable change, does not exempt the family structure from its effects. There are now less children, smaller households, and perhaps as a result, some 30% of all females over 60 years of age in this country live alone. They number nearly 300,000 women, while males in this category, number 100,000. Together they total a significant proportion of our population, and present a vulnerable target to certain types of criminal.

Major changes are also occurring in penal philosophy. This is partly caused by the growing recognition of the failure of the rehabilitation model, and partly from developments in the ethics of equity.

These changes are reflected for example, in the Senate Bill revising the US Federal Criminal Code. This revision sets out that the severity of punishment should be based only on the gravity of the crime. The offender's personality, his mental condition, his prior record, indeed none of his individual attributes have the same importance as the seriousness of the crime when being sentenced.

The significance of this change from the elderly person's point of view is that if the principle becomes accepted judicially in this country they might have increased confidence in the criminal justice system. A confidence that the punishment will fit the crime. They could believe that in this way it would offer a greater deterrent against repetition and imitation, and so reduce the threat to their well-being.

Historically our legal classification of crimes into felonies, misdemeanours, and simple offences was based on the differing degrees of social harm which they caused, but nowadays the distinctions are blurred. Social scientists prefer to use the terms, traditional crimes, organised crimes, white collar crimes, and political crimes to distinguish the various classes of unlawful acts.

The term "traditional crime" described behaviour which has been defined as criminal for a very long time. It includes such things as murder, assault, rape, robbery, burglary and stealing. These are the offences that the media usually refer to when they speak about a "crime wave."

In this paper I propose to concentrate more on them because they are the offences which seem to cause the most stress to the elderly. This is not to say that offences in the other categories do not present any threat to them. White collar crime, for example, may well cause the loss of their life's savings, political crime may mean the hijacking of their aircraft, and organised crime may provide opportunities for their grandchildren to be hooked on drugs.

On the other hand, these latter categories, because they do not require physical agility so much, and usually need more professional knowledge, do present more suitable opportunities for older persons to participate as offenders.

It is unlikely, of course, that all elderly people will be affected in the same way by the impact of these crimes, for the older population is more diverse than any other age group.

By diverse, I mean, that by the very process of living through many experiences the elderly are much more individual than any group of younger people. As a result there are big differences in social responses and in their personal circumstances. Only slowly are we accumulating knowledge in this area, and lack of adequate data pose problems for researcher and practitioner.

For example, although some older individuals are obviously financially secure and well able to look after themselves, frequently others are in a state of dependency resembling that of a child. Mentally they can regress to a similar state of immaturity, and the physical and financial consequences of being an elderly victim of an attack are more serious than for a younger person.

American scholars have divided the impact of crime on the elderly into four aspects: the economic aspect, the health aspect, the aspect of isolation, and the fear of crime. From data more readily available to them they have drawn some useful conclusions and proposed possible remedies.

To repeat their exercise in Australia is a difficult task. It is only within recent years that government agencies and criminological institutions have begun to collect and collate even elementary data in this field. Nobody has yet undertaken a serious study of the social impact of criminal offences. It follows that courts are still largely left in ignorance of the social consequences of the crimes for which they are deciding the most appropriate penalty.

There is also a paucity of information in this country on the degree of involvement of older people as victims of criminal attack. Being aware from common experience that older Australians come under official notice more frequently as victims than they do as offenders, it could be thought that police files and academic research would mirror this state of affairs.

But this is not so. Social scientists have historically concentrated on crime causation and treatment of offenders, rather than on the wider, social consequences of crime. Academics have not been alone in this approach. Voluntary welfare agencies and even experienced practitioners in the system have done likewise.

Every Australian police department, for instance, possesses a modus operandi section which contains a comprehensive record of individual offenders. None maintains a similar account of crime victims. As a result no police force can provide a classification of victims by personal attribute. This means they have no breakdown by age, nor is this information readily available from any other source, if at all.

### **The Elderly as Offenders**

It will be understood that stemming from this imbalance much more is known about offenders than about their victims.

Queensland regularly publishes the age groupings of admitted prisoners. This information (1975/76) shows that in admissions in the 60 years plus group there were 5 for offences against the person, 17 for offences against property (5 for fraud 2 for arson), 22 for offences against good order (15 insufficient means of support), and 9 for traffic offences.

Tasmanian gaol information is more extensive although the number of prisoners is smaller. It reports age groupings by sex, previous imprisonments, family size, marital status, birthplace, education level, and type of offence. Of the 7 over 60 years admitted (1977/78) for 11 offences, 6 were native born and the other from Victoria. Of the 11 offences, 7 were for drunkenness, 2 for stealing and the other two for forgery.

New South Wales prison statistics continue their age groupings right up to 75 years of age. In that State there were (1975/76) 5 admitted for murder or serious assault who were over 60 years or more, 1 for robbery (female), 1 for sexual assault, 5 for fraud (1 over 70), 45 for property offences, 5 for traffic, 92 for good order offences (vagrancy 40).

One of the many difficulties in studying the participation of the elderly as offenders is not knowing if the system processes aged offenders differently. One study reports that Israeli police seek to avoid prosecuting the aged by closing their files and by the courts simply dismissing charges. The same study notes that Israeli families try to conceal the criminality of any of their elder members.

There is no published Australian information on this point. Police instruction manuals do not contain any specific policy direction, and decisions seem to be left to the investigating officer's own discretion. Personal experience is that elderly abortionists were unlikely to receive special consideration, but aged shopstealers might, depending upon the circumstances of the case.

The social phenomena that advancing age is accompanied by declining criminal involvement was noted 30 years or more ago. A more recent examination of arrest records in the USA disclosed that the age group 55 years plus was represented by 2% of all arrests.

FBI data disclose a trend by the aged group towards offences of violence. Aggravated assault and murder are the two most common of the serious types of offences for which aged people are arrested. One explanation put forward for this development is that crimes of violence are generally against victims known to the attacker. As social interaction diminishes with age the remaining personal relationships become more intense, and are therefore more likely to result in violent conflict when differences occur.

Whether this is a trend in Australia has not yet been determined. Certainly judging by reported crimes, assaults constitute between 30%-40% of all the more serious offences committed by persons over 60 years of age, but the numbers are small. In NSW assaults are second to sexual offences committed by those over 60 years. A study in more depth could show any tendency for the American pattern to be followed, and if so, there may be some preventive action which could be adopted to lessen the impact.

### **The Elderly as Victims of Crimes**

The community has been slow to realise the significance of its ignorance about victims generally. Attempts are now being made, mainly by academics, to rectify this error of judgment. Practitioners seem to be slower to appreciate the advantages to be gained by acquiring this information. Evidence is accumulating that if more attention is directed to the role of the victim in criminal events, the resulting knowledge can mean an improvement in prevention methodology and an increase in apprehension rates. This has special applicability to elderly victims for their routines are more stabilised and the co-operation more assured.

But even in this newer research the term "victim" is still being confined to those persons who were the primary target of the criminal. Belatedly there is increasing recognition that in each criminal event there are other classes of "victim" who are likely to be harmed by it.

Individuals who are emotionally close to the immediate victim, such as spouse, parent, children or intimate friend form one such class. Another class of victim contains all those people whose lifestyle is seriously impaired because of their fear of crime. Finally the last class includes nearly everybody in the community for it consists of people who are compelled to pay increased taxes to cover the costs of police, prisons, parole, probation, aftercare, courts; carowners who pay increased insurance charges to reimburse losses caused by arson, theft, damage; and homeowners who pay higher council rates to make good the wilful damage caused by vandals. Elderly persons form a substantial part of each of these classes.

## **Economic Impact on Victims**

There was an earlier reference to four aspects of the impact of crime on the elderly. As regards the first, that is, the economic, it is dominated by the fact that most incomes of older persons are at a lower level. Especially is this so in times of monetary inflation. Elderly victims appear to frequently lack assets which they can readily convert into cash to meet emergencies. In these circumstances an unexpected loss, such as a robbery or a theft of a pension cheque can impose a strain on the victim. It may be remembered that not long ago pension cheques were stolen from 67 letterboxes in central Canberra. One of the victims was reported in the local press as saying that she didn't have a penny to fall back on. There may well have been other pensioners in that group in similar distress.

Unfortunately little is known of the social impact of these types of theft and other crimes. Even if the judiciary are not enthusiastic at the prospect of having to consider even more reports before deciding sentence, spokesmen for victims are urging that this information is just as relevant as prisoner's antecedents.

The elderly, on average, are probably not robbed of large sums but it may represent a substantial part of their wealth. To assess the degree of hardship involved we would need to know not only the total amount stolen but its proportion of the victim's income. This latter point is relevant because it seems that many elderly victims have to absorb their loss within the first couple of welfare payments after the theft.

The loss tends to fall hardest on the lowest income class because generally they do not use credit cards or bank accounts to any extent. After settlement of account each fortnight any money left over is simply kept and carried around in a purse. When this is stolen they lose their entire store of cash.

## **Elderly Victims' Health Aspect**

In regard to the health aspect it is well known that as people grow older they usually become more fragile and less physically capable of defending themselves. Around the age of 55 years changes in sensory perceptions become measurable. From this point onwards people take longer to perceive and to process information being received through the senses. Vision becomes defective because of cataracts and glaucoma, and eye peripheral capacity shrinks. Often hearing is impaired and physical mobility restricted. These developments do not go unnoticed by criminals seeking easy marks. In Queensland a few years ago a small team of confidence men, posing as reliable tradesmen, defrauded over 100 householders. They offered a large discount to elderly homeowners on the price of painting their roofs. Then having painted only the visible sections, they asked for total payment and departed. The elderly were unable to climb on to the roofs to check the work, and indeed in some cases were unaware for some time that they had been cheated.

The American experience has been that purse snatching has been a serious matter for elderly women caught unprepared by their attackers. These are young criminals who normally work in two's, one knocking the victim down while the other grabs the purse. Due to their advanced age the victims often suffer dislocations and fractures from the brittleness of their bones. Effective pursuit is out of the question as their young assailants well know. I am unaware of any Australian data on this offence.

## **Elderly Victims – Aspect of Isolation**

The third aspect, that of isolation, has already been referred to. It is a problem especially for the older person who lives alone with criminally attractive items such as expensive jewellery. Living alone has special difficulties. Police experience has been that older folk in this category are vulnerable to the wiles of the confidence man. Because of grief over the death of a

spouse, or from feelings of being unwanted, or just from sheer loneliness and consequent urge to get into conversation with anybody at all, they can more easily fall for the reassuring promises of a false pretender.

They may have difficulty in reading small print, or in hearing explanations, and may be too embarrassed to ask for them to be repeated. Once an elderly victim loses her savings in this way she often worries that her family will consider she is no longer capable of looking after herself.

Certainly the provision of telephones at lower rates must have reduced this isolation for many old people. In 1974 telephones were connected to 66% of all housing in this country, but aged persons living in their own homes had a higher connection rate of 77%. On the other hand elderly tenants were connected in only 51% of homes. This facility should mean that the elderly can more readily obtain advice about propositions being put to them.

In the USA over 90% of all households can be reached by telephone. Despite this widespread provision, the American elderly still continue to fall for fraudulent offers. A recent Californian study showed that, of one type of swindle, the average age of the victim was 70 years, that elderly folk made up 90% of victims, that the average loss of each victim was \$2,000, that most of the offenders were never caught, and that most of the money was never recovered.

Police experience is that confidence men are intelligent operators who carefully select their victim. Their schemes are well designed so that prosecution is often difficult and sometimes not possible. This applies with some force to the health field where quacks find gullible victims who are seeking cures not forthcoming from orthodox medicine. The elderly get trapped into expensive, long term, and usually useless treatments, or into unsuitable nursing accommodation. Sister Lee Banton recently publicised such conditions in Victoria where she claimed one in eight special accommodation houses for the aged were exploiting its inmates.

## **Fear of Crime**

The fourth aspect, fear of crime, is generally considered to be the biggest source of stress by criminal activity. This is because it extends well beyond the primary targets. American studies suggest that this fear produces mental stress far in excess of what the crime rates justify. On the other hand some researchers claim that the elderly's fear of crime is rational, that one quarter of older victims are again attacked or robbed within two years, and that police patrols cannot prevent even a small percentage of the crimes on older persons.

Perhaps it is only to be expected that in a new area of study initially there will be confusing, even conflicting results from different investigations. Early information tends to come from the two extremes; aggregate statistics which at best only enable broad generalisations to be drawn, and anecdotal or single incident material which provides ample detail but allows little scope for developing generalised findings.

One major obstacle to the discovery of more knowledge about fear of crime by the elderly is the ambiguity of the word "fear". An early study (1967) used general anxiety about crime as an indicator of "fear". Five years later another researcher separated concern for crime as a public issue from the risk of personally becoming a victim. He called the assessment of the risk "fear". An even later study distinguished between assessments of becoming a victim and the resultant feeling of fright. "Fear of crime" was equated with the feelings of fright.

Following this distinction, "fear of crime" has tended to be treated as an emotional response, with all the attendant problems of defining and measuring an internal state of mind.

Psychologists have explained that fear is an emotional response to a punishment which individuals will work to avoid, terminate, or escape from. Man behaves much like other

animals when confronted with such a threat – fight, flight or freeze.

For various reasons most research has concentrated on using behavioural change as a convenient indicator of the degree of fear. Although it is well known that rarely is there a one-to-one relationship between emotion and behavioural response, it has been thought that the correlation was sufficiently high to give acceptable levels of validity and reliability.

Congalton and Najman found in a NSW survey that victims tended to be younger than non-victims, more likely to be males than females, and from homes with a higher income than non-victims. But in a follow-up study they found that females were more concerned about crime than males, the elderly much more than the young and poor much more than the wealthy.

Although there have been later and perhaps more sophisticated enquiries, Congalton and Najman's results summarise the seeming paradox about people's fear of crime, i.e. those least at risk have the most fear.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics conducted a General Social Survey in 1975 which included questions on crime and victimisation rates. The results were published in 1979. These showed that the likelihood of Australian citizens being a victim of crime was low by American standards. Overall the ABS figures tended to reflect the American findings that fear of crime is highest in big cities, places where the elderly reside.

The ABS results followed also the earlier survey findings of Congalton and Najman in that the elderly reported most fear of crime although they had lower than average victimization for most types of offences. It has been suggested that one explanation of this fear is the elderly's feeling of impaired physical capacity to meet a criminal and to survive the attack unscathed. The ABS had similar data about women – they reported greater fear of crime.

However it needs to be remembered that these conclusions were drawn from a single question: "If you are out walking alone in your neighbourhood at night would you feel very safe, reasonably safe, somewhat unsafe, or very unsafe?" For many respondents this would be a purely hypothetical question. Their answer might depend on a number of factors. It also restricts the threat to one geographical area in which they might spend much or little time.

Some ongoing research which is attempting to measure the number of occasions over a set period of time when the fear of crime is actually experienced, and to assess its intensity and duration, is revealing that home neighbourhood can represent a place of safety. Individuals leave this safe area to work in more dangerous places, such as banks, chemist shops, drive-in liquor stores where there is more reason to anticipate a robbery. Fear of crime may be also created not in response to one's own safety, but because of a threat to someone emotionally close. Both of these findings may modify earlier results when they are published.

Since fear of crime seems to be only thinly spread through the Australian community, single instances of high fear become more important. One source of this high fear is that experienced on occasions by victims whose offender has threatened reprisal and is presently in custody. This kind of fear seems to be focussed on an attack within the home, and not necessarily in the neighbourhood.

Fear of crime is a complex emotion that seems to be influenced by a wide range of variables. These include demographic factors, type of personality, amount of exposure, mental and physical health, degree of emotional support, perception of risk, and previous experience as a victim.

Official strategies to reduce the amount of fear in a community may well differ from those employed to reduce actual crime. Traditionally police forces see their aim as preventing and detecting crime. Certainly by achieving this aim as effec-

tively as they can, they may well be reducing fear of crime in their communities in the long run. Probably most forces would argue that this is the end of their responsibilities. Perhaps they are right. But if they are, on whose shoulders does it fall to tackle the problem of fear of crime.

Peel introduced the concept of the modern style police force to ensure that the citizens of London could walk its streets in safety. But if people's fear for their safety prevents their using the streets, measures to reduce the incidence of crime have only limited effect. People seem to need that reassurance which was provided by the visible presence of a constable.

### **The Elderly as Witnesses**

It may be the same factors that make people, especially the old, seek for visible support by the police, that tend to make them poor witnesses when they have to appear in court. It is their deterioration in physical and mental capacities which make them more vulnerable to attacks in the streets and also causes them to have a poor reputation when they appear in the witness box.

When they do appear they seem to be bewildered by the experience. Often this bewilderment seems to spring from an inadequate briefing of what to expect. Seldom are they offered any rehearsals.

From personal observation and from anecdotal reporting it appears that many elderly victims, when they appear as witnesses, have a misconception that the Crown Prosecutor acts for them in the same way as the defence counsel looks after the interests of his client. When they discover this is not so, they are further confused.

Because of impaired vision or hearing, and failing memory they sometimes can only recall vague outlines or descriptions of events when more precise details are required if a jury is to be convinced beyond doubt.

Even given a sympathetic court they tend to become more easily flustered under persistent examination.

For these reasons elderly witnesses as a class have a poor reputation. This need not be so but the remedy in most instances calls for more time to be spent with them before the trial. Time is a commodity in short supply with an active police officer, and expensive when dealing with lawyers.

### **The Elderly as Volunteers**

For some time elderly volunteers have been participating in the criminal justice system but not because of any deliberate policy to recruit retired individuals. Primarily they have assisted welfare organisations set up to help in the rehabilitation of offenders. In this way they have made a useful and inexpensive but limited contribution.

There is now a belated recognition that the elderly constitute an increasing reserve of manpower usable in all sectors of the criminal justice system. Only slowly have government agencies begun to realise that by bringing citizens into their work they can establish new contacts with the community they serve.

An unplanned but most valuable spinoff from the English practice of using civilians on a regular basis as special constables has been a better understanding by the whole community of the problems facing the police. Australian police unions have however consistently opposed the introduction of a similar practice in this country. It may be no coincidence that the English police are held in higher esteem by their people.

In any case police administrators, faced with demands for service which outstrip their ability to meet them, have few options open. They can improve their efficiency with their present resources and all forces are seeking to do this by operational and organisational changes. They can eliminate some of their extraneous responsibilities depending upon the amount of public pressure to retain them. They can meet the increased

demand by enlarging their services but covertly at a lower standard. They could seek assistance from volunteers to undertake some of the less skilled tasks now using up the time of trained officers. One such example would be in the follow up of breaking offences. Volunteers could reinterview complainants to ascertain if they have any additional information to offer, and at the same time convey to them that the police still retain interest in their complaint.

Elderly volunteers can offer experience, knowledge and personal contacts in the business world and in the local community. In Adelaide one elderly citizens' association (The Thursday Group) has sponsored a voluntary organisation to assist victims of crime. The Victims-of-Crime Service (VOCS) arrange for previous victims of serious crimes to offer advice and friendship to more recent victims, and provides a back-up programme staffed by retired persons.

VOCS provides a public voice for victims, sets out to monitor the effectiveness of the criminal justice system in providing for the security of citizens from criminal attack, supplies information about the actual risk of crime, and the ways that individuals and organisations can best protect themselves from that threat.

By using retired people VOCS has been able to operate without a government grant. Because of this VOCS feels free to be objective in its criticisms of the services provided by the government. It plans to introduce a lock-exchange, a telephone report centre for the isolated, a witness assistance programme which will include the provision of creche and kindergarten facilities when parents have to go to court. VOCS encourages all victims to attend court hearings, juvenile as well as adult, to ensure their rights are respected.

VOCS has found that elderly volunteers are grateful for an opportunity to feel wanted again, to know they are performing a worthwhile service, and once more to form part of a working team. Because the capacities of elderly volunteers vary greatly VOCS has learned that care has to be exercised in the selection and training stages. On the other hand discipline is easy to maintain (and there is no mention of striking!)

Some of the elderly, because of ill health or other restriction, can only join in VOCS' activities by correspondence or telephone. They are finding satisfaction however, in writing letters to the press, to their M.P., and to other community leaders urging support for some of the reforms VOCS is campaigning for.

VOCS' experience in utilising elderly volunteers provides support for the claim that voluntary assistance need not result in lower standards of performance. However, it seems that this activity needs clear aims and objectives, and regular evaluations.

## Recommendations

It has been said that "until a society can with impunity protect equally the rights of both the offender and the victim, it is lacking in justice." For some considerable time society has sought to provide adequate protection for the rights of the offender. Yet the time is overdue when there should be equal attention paid to the rights of victims, especially those of the older victim.

When courts are deciding sentence a good deal of information about the offender is submitted for the court's consideration as to what should be their decision. In other words the offender is "individualised" and seemingly the outcome is more tailored by the attributes of the offender than those of the victim about which the court knows little.

No doubt influenced adversely by the early procedures in England which graded penalties by social class of the victim, our present system makes scant reference to the status of the current victims. In recent times there has been some commun-

ity pressure for the return or retention of the death penalty for those criminals convicted of the murder of a police officer or of a warder in the execution of their duty, but otherwise no mention is made of the individuality of the victim.

A recommendation to one State Government that the courts be given a more balanced opportunity to consider the seriousness of a major crime by being provided with a social impact statement has met with silence. It is understood that the proposition lacks favour because it would use up some of the court's time. Justice does require equal consideration, a principle which obviously needs wider recognition. If one party cannot have that consideration then neither should the other, but it would be better if both could.

American experience has been that with the growth in numbers of the elderly living alone, and their increased exposure to attack by young criminals, more offences are occurring. It is a matter of some regret that as yet inadequate records handicaps the preparation of a convincing case for more legal protection for our older citizens.

This paper has sought to direct attention to the lack of data in this country bearing on the plight of the elderly. The introduction of computer networks in police recording systems, and the establishment of State Bureau of Criminal Statistics are proving to be wise moves. With a little additional staff their most valuable but limited output could be greatly expanded.

Presumably in the meantime, however, we must wait the accumulation of data on which to build a plea for greater protection for the elderly. Public opinion polls already assert that a large majority of the community seek heavier penalties.

One method by which the elderly could receive blanket protection would be by imposing a penalty adjusted to the age of the older victim. An additional mandatory penalty of 10% of the customary penalty (fine or sentence) for each year the victim's age exceeds 65 years. This seems an attractive, if oversimple proposition which practical lawyers may tend to reject because of possible difficulties in its application. Lawyers are conservative in the main and so this suggestion may lack appeal. If it does nothing else than convey to them that their clients are troubled by the present inequalities in the system, and are moving for a change, it has served some purpose. Hopefully of course, it would not rest there.

Legislative change is not sufficient by itself. Adjustments are needed in other areas. In law enforcement astute administrators may already be considering a transfer of staff from specialist duties with juvenile divisions into a new aged persons section. American police agencies have a number of programmes already successfully operating which might prove transportable.

An American criminologist, Gilbert Geis, has commented: "It would be pleasant if respect for the elderly were built into our social values, as it was said to be among the Chinese of an earlier period. But our killers and our crooks, both the commercial world and the underworld, are rational predators. They select as their victims persons least able to defend themselves adequately."

Our aim should be to deter offenders from preying upon our elderly. Publicity about such an action would demonstrate to the older generation that we do indeed care about their welfare.

The police will accept that they bear a major share of the responsibility for preventing and detecting crime, but probably will balk at the suggestion that they extend this responsibility to include fear of crime.

The police understandably are in something of a dilemma. While their visible presence on patrol provides a high level of assurance, their crime prevention strategies which urge people to fit better burglar alarms, lock steering wheels, refrain from carrying large sums of money, and the like, can have the opposite effect.

Either of two other government departments may be better able to undertake the co-ordinating role that is needed in any overall programme to reduce fear of crime. Community Welfare because of its interest in well being generally, Health because of its responsibility for mental health.

The difficulty about giving responsibility to a government body is the likelihood that the average citizen will feel little if any need to become personally involved — others are being paid to do the work, why should he volunteer.

I suspect that the British policing system became less effective when the responsibility for police was transferred from small local watch committees of volunteers to more remote bureaucratic controls.

Much has been written about the essentialness of community participation if crime is to be controlled at an acceptable level. It would seem even more necessary in the case of fear of crime because of the bigger range of social factors involved.

If we can provisionally accept the maxim that those who

benefit most should contribute most, then the group most likely to benefit from a reduction in the fear of crime is the elderly. In many ways they are qualified to act as co-ordinators of any community action, and to do this with least cost to an already overburdened taxpayer.

Among the increasing number of retired people are those with proven administrative capacity from a variety of occupations, such as headmasters, engineers, business managers, and there are others well equipped to supply back-up skills.

Perhaps, initially, one regional group could be established on an experimental basis, say, The Belconnen Crime Committee or Council, which could be a reception point for local views and the enlistment of local volunteers in a programme to reduce fear of crime. Such a programme would be worked on jointly by all the official and unofficial agencies involved. If it costs little, why not provide this type of opportunity for our older citizens to further utilise and even develop their capacity to contribute to the common good.

## Roadside repair or weekend workshop.

Millions choose **Swarfega**

**HAND  
CLEANSER  
to finish  
the job.**

**'ITS MAGIC'**

*Ask for it by name.*

Available at most hardware, department and auto shops.

Other sizes: 2kg, 4kg, 20kg, 55kg, 190kg.

Wide range of dispensers available.

**Swarfega** gets dirty hands really clean.

NEW  
Handy  
Dispenser Pack  
With Refills  
Available



### ADVERTISEMENT

After finishing those essential yet "dirty" jobs around the house, what do you use to clean your hands? Is it safe and effective? Is it messy and unpleasant?

Soaps are too mild to be effective against deeply ingrained greasy dirt.

Scouring powders and sandsoaps shift dirt by breaking or even removing the top layer of skin as they cleanse. They cause discomfort, and leave hands vulnerable to infection.

Powerful solvents like turps, kero and petrol

are unpleasant, and harmful to the skin. So what should you use?

The answer is Swarfega. Powerful, effective and formulated to deep cleanse the grimeiest hands without irritation or damage to the skin.

Swarfega contains lanolin, and is now available in a handy dispenser pack which ensures economical use. Doesn't leave a grimy mess so is ideal for kitchens, laundry or garage.

Dare you risk using anything less than Swarfega? Always keep a pack on hand.