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# Crimes against older people in Victoria

Previous studies have indicated there is a lack of reliable evidence regarding the prevalence of elder abuse in Australia, with no prevalence data available for Victoria1,2. The available information estimates that 1–10% of older people in Australia have experienced elder abuse2. However, studies suggest there is likely considerable under-reporting, with indications older people may be less likely to report abuse than younger people1. There is no consensus on the definition of elder abuse, but there is broad agreement between definitions that elder abuse is a harmful act perpetrated against an older person by someone they trust. Elder abuse often also constitutes family violence2, however it can occur outside the family context, such as by a friend or paid carer1. Abuse may be physical, sexual, financial, psychological, social or neglect3.

This paper examined all offences recorded by Victoria Police that occurred during the 10 years to 31 December 2017 where the recorded victim was an older person. It is important to note some forms of reported elder abuse may be considered a civil matter, and therefore not be recorded as a criminal offence. It is not possible to determine whether a victim trusted a perpetrator from police data, and therefore whether or not recorded offences represent elder abuse. Where available, this paper includes information on the type of relationship recorded between the alleged perpetrator and victim. Older people are defined as those aged 65 years or over, in line with definitions used by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Older age is not necessarily linked to increased vulnerability, but ageing can be related to other factors associated with greater vulnerability (such as physical disability)2.

This study uses sub-incidents as its counting unit. A criminal incident can comprise multiple offences, which are recorded as separate sub-incidents. A sub-incident is a distinct course of criminal action and represents one type of offence (for example, serious assault). As the Crime Statistics Agency does not hold court outcome data for recorded crime statistics, it should be noted that all sub-incidents and perpetrators are alleged and may not go on to be prosecuted.

1. Did the annual rate of crimes against older people change during the 10-year period?

*The annual rate of recorded crime against older people peaked during 2016 at 1,983 per 100,000 people aged 65 years or over.*

Over the 10-year period there were 141,550 recorded sub-  
incidents involving an older victim. The annual number   
  
peaked at 18,427 in 2016, decreasing to 16,438 in 2017 (Figure 1). A Kendall’s rank order correlation showed that during the period there was a statistically significant increase (*N*=120, τb=0.62, p<0.001). Further examination revealed this was primarily driven by *Theft* and *Burglary/break and enter*.

To adjust for population growth over the period, rates per 100,000 older people in the population were calculated. The annual rate of victimisation per 100,000 older people followed a similar (though flatter) trajectory to the number of sub-incidents, also peaking in 2016 (Figure 1). There were 109,187 recorded older victims during the study period, with 56.1% recorded as male and 42.5% as female (1.4% had no police-recorded sex). However, the proportional sex representation in the general population was the reverse (over the same period around 46% of the general population aged 65 years or over was male, with 54% female4). Therefore, for this cohort the victimisation rate for males was higher than for females.

Figure 1. Annual rate of victimisation per 100,000 and total number of recorded crimes against older people

2. What offences most frequently involved older victims?

*The most frequently recorded offence type involving an older victim of crime was Theft.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| CSA Offence Subdivision | Number | % |
| Theft | 64,795 | 45.8 |
| Burglary/break and enter | 34,991 | 24.8 |
| Property damage | 25,224 | 17.9 |
| Assault and related offences | 7,974 | 5.6 |
| Deception | 2,798 | 2.0 |
| Stalking, harassment and threatening | 1,961 | 1.4 |
| Arson | 1,323 | 0.9 |
| Sexual offences | 696 | 0.5 |
| Robbery | 645 | 0.5 |
| Dangerous and negligent acts endangering people | 573 | 0.4 |
| Homicide and related offences | 209 | 0.2 |
| Abduction and related offences | 84 | 0.1 |
| Blackmail and extortion | 62 | < 0.1 |
| **Total** | **141,335** | **100.0** |

Further analysis in this paper will focus on *Property and deception offences* and *Crimes against the person5* as thesecategories of crime accounted for 99.8% of the sub-incidents involving an older victim (n=141,335).

Table 1. Crimes against older people by Offence Subdivision

The most frequently recorded offence type involving an older victim of crime during the 10 years was *Theft*, accounting for 45.8% of sub-incidents (Table 1). The next most commonly recorded offence types in order were *Burglary/break and enter*, *Property damage* and *Assault and related offences*. Together these four offence types accounted for 94.1% of the crimes against older people during the study period.

3. How did the relationship between older victims of crime and perpetrators vary by offence type?

*The perpetrator was known to the victim in 62% of crimes against the person and 4% of property and deception offences.*

Overall, the relationship type was recorded as unknown for 79.3% of sub-incidents. For the majority of these (87.0%), police did not identify or record an alleged offender (n=97,420). Across all offence types the perpetrator was known to the victim in 9.1% of sub-incidents and not known to the victim in 11.7% (Table 2). The victim was considered to have known the perpetrator if the recorded relationship type was a current partner, former partner, family member or “other” known relationship type (this includes acquaintances, neighbours and other known persons).

The victim knew the perpetrator in 62.1% of *Crimes against the person,* while this was the case for 4.1% of *Property and deception offences*. These results should be interpreted with caution as there was an unknown relationship type recorded in 85.2% of *Property and deception offences*, while this was the case for 16.7% of *Crimes against the person*.

*Around one-third of assaults were committed by a family member, with 60.8% of these perpetrated by the victim’s child.*

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| CSA Offence Subdivision | Current partner | | Former partner | | Family | | Other known person | | Not known to victim | | Unknown | |
| N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Abduction and related offences | 8 | 9.5 | 0 | 0.0 | 24 | 28.6 | 15 | 17.9 | 25 | 29.8 | 12 | 14.3 |
| Assault and related offences | 624 | 7.8 | 118 | 1.5 | 2,744 | 34.4 | 1,951 | 24.5 | 1,585 | 19.9 | 952 | 11.9 |
| Blackmail and extortion | 0 | 0.0 | 1 | 1.6 | 10 | 16.1 | 14 | 22.6 | 9 | 14.5 | 28 | 45.2 |
| Dangerous and negligent acts endangering people | 20 | 3.5 | 7 | 1.2 | 53 | 9.3 | 53 | 9.3 | 245 | 42.8 | 195 | 34.0 |
| Homicide and related offences | 17 | 8.1 | 4 | 1.9 | 37 | 17.7 | 29 | 13.9 | 91 | 43.5 | 31 | 14.8 |
| Robbery | 0 | 0.0 | 0 | 0.0 | 20 | 3.1 | 19 | 3.0 | 276 | 42.8 | 330 | 51.2 |
| Sexual offences | 26 | 3.7 | 7 | 1 | 17 | 2.4 | 332 | 47.7 | 173 | 24.9 | 141 | 20.3 |
| Stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour | 110 | 5.6 | 52 | 2.7 | 804 | 41.0 | 469 | 23.9 | 182 | 9.3 | 344 | 17.5 |
| *Crimes against the person subtotal* | *805* | *6.6* | *189* | *1.5* | *3,709* | *30.4* | *2,882* | *23.6* | *2,586* | *21.2* | *2,033* | *16.7* |
| Arson | 1 | 0.1 | 0 | 0 | 15 | 1.1 | 15 | 1.1 | 40 | 3.0 | 1,252 | 94.6 |
| Burglary/break and enter | 7 | < 0.1 | 20 | 0.1 | 221 | 0.6 | 277 | 0.8 | 3,883 | 11.1 | 30,583 | 87.4 |
| Deception | 2 | 0.1 | 6 | 0.2 | 154 | 5.5 | 225 | 8.0 | 609 | 21.8 | 1,802 | 64.4 |
| Property damage | 81 | 0.3 | 61 | 0.2 | 1,532 | 6.1 | 837 | 3.3 | 2,615 | 10.4 | 20,098 | 79.7 |
| Theft | 15 | < 0.1 | 10 | < 0.1 | 534 | 0.8 | 1,242 | 1.9 | 6,728 | 10.1 | 56,266 | 86.8 |
| *Property and deception offences subtotal* | *106* | *0.1* | *97* | *0.1* | *2,456* | *1.9* | *2,596* | *2.0* | *13,875* | *10.7* | *110,001* | *85.2* |
| **Total (all offence types)** | **911** | **0.6** | **286** | **0.2** | **6,165** | **4.4** | **5,478** | **3.9** | **16,461** | **11.7** | **112,034** | **79.3** |

Combining all *Crimes against the person*, 6.6% were committed by a current partner, 1.5% by a former partner, 30.4% by a family member, 23.6% by an “other” known person, and 21.2% by a stranger. Around one-third (34.4%) of *Assault and related offences* were committed by the victim’s family

Table 2. CSA Offence Subdivision by relationship type

member (n=2,744). Further examination revealed 60.8% of these cases were perpetrated by a child against their parent (n=1,667). Almost half (47.7%) of *Sexual offences* were committed by an ‘other’ known person, with further examination revealing 29.5% of these cases were committed by a co-resident (n=98). Forty-four per cent of *Homicide and related offences* were committed by a stranger, with the majority (69.2%) of these cases for *Driving causing death*.

For *Property and deception offences* with a known relationship type (14.8%), the majority were committed by a stranger. However, this differed across offence types. For *Deception* sub-incidents, 13.8% were committed by someone known to the older person, with the largest proportion of these cases committed by an acquaintance (29.5%), followed by the victim’s child (15.8%).

4. How did the victim’s age vary by offence type?

*Sexual offences had the largest proportion of victims aged 85 years or older.*

Combining all offence types, the victim was aged 65-74 years in 66.3% of sub-incidents, aged 75-84 years in 25.9% of sub-incidents and aged 85 years or over in 7.8% of sub-incidents. The victim’s age varied by the type of offence (Figure 2).

Figure 2. CSA Offence Subdivision by victim age group

*Sexual offences* was the offence type with the largest proportion of victims aged 85 years or over, with this age group accounting for one-third (33.9%) of sub-incidents for older people. The offence types with the next largest proportions of victims aged 85 years or over were *Homicide and related offences* (16.3% of sub-incidents), and *Deception* (12.9% of sub-incidents).

Conversely, *Blackmail and extortion* and *Stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour* were the offence types with the largest proportion of victims aged 65-74 years, with this age group accounting for 79.0% and 78.4% of sub-incidents respectively.

5. Where did crimes against older people take place?

*Almost 60% of sexual offences took place at a nursing home or healthcare facility.*

Overall 61.6% of sub-incidents took place in a residential location (Table 3). The offence types with the largest proportion of sub-incidents occurring in a residential location were *Burglary/break and enter* (94.8%) and *Stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour* (77.2%).

Combining all *Crimes against the person*, 9.5% were recorded at a nursing home or healthcare facility, with this figure driven by *Sexual offences* (57.6%) and *Assault and related offences* (8.8%). Sixty per cent of *Homicide and related offences* occurred in a community location, with three-quarters (76.2%) of these cases for *Driving causing death.* Conversely, of the 71 sub-incidents recorded in a residential location, 90.1% were for *Murder* or *Attempted murder*.

Across all offence types, 10.4% of sub-incidents were recorded at an “other” location type. The highest proportion was recorded for *Deception* sub-incidents (44.9%), with 42.9% of these cases taking place at a financial location (such as at a bank or ATM) and 41.9% taking place at a retail location (such as at a shopping complex or supermarket).

Summary

This study identified that the annual number of recorded crimes with victims aged 65 years and over increased during the past 10 years. After adjusting for population growth over the period, the rate per 100,000 older people followed a similar (though flatter) trajectory, with a peak in 2016. Rates were higher for males compared to females. *Theft* was the most frequently recorded crime against an older person. Around one-third of *Assault and related offences* were committed by family members, with 60.8% of these cases perpetrated by a child against their parent. *Sexual offences* had the largest proportion of victims aged 85 years and over (around one-third). Almost three in five *Sexual offences* took place at a nursing home or healthcare facility, while across all offence types around three in five took place at a residential location.

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1 State of Victoria (2016). Royal Commission into Family Violence: Volume V report and recommendations, Parliamentary Paper No. 132.   
2 Australian Law Reform Commission (2017). Final report 131: Elder abuse – A national legal response. Sydney: Commonwealth of Australia.  3 Department of Health (2012). Elder abuse prevention and response guidelines for action 2012-2014. Melbourne: State Government of Victoria.   
4 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2017). Australian demographic statistics, September 2017. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. 5 Crime Statistics Agency (2015). Offence Classification. Melbourne: Crime Statistics Agency. Available at <https://www.crimestatistics.vic.gov.au/about-the-data/classifications-and-victorian-map-boundaries/offence-classification>

Table 3. CSA Offence Subdivision by location type

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Offence subdivision | Residential | | Nursing home or health care facility | | Community | | Other\* | | Unknown | |
| N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % | N | % |
| Abduction and related offences | 55 | 65.5 | 2 | 2.4 | 18 | 21.4 | 9 | 10.7 | 0 | 0.0 |
| Assault and related offences | 4,728 | 59.3 | 703 | 8.8 | 1,741 | 21.8 | 698 | 8.8 | 104 | 1.3 |
| Blackmail and extortion | 38 | 61.3 | 1 | 1.6 | 1 | 1.6 | 12 | 19.4 | 10 | 16.1 |
| Dangerous and negligent acts endangering people | 187 | 32.6 | 9 | 1.6 | 338 | 59.0 | 24 | 4.2 | 15 | 2.6 |
| Homicide and related offences | 71 | 34.0 | 10 | 4.8 | 126 | 60.3 | 1 | 0.5 | 1 | 0.5 |
| Robbery | 134 | 20.8 | 6 | 0.9 | 353 | 54.7 | 134 | 20.8 | 18 | 2.8 |
| Sexual offences | 204 | 29.3 | 401 | 57.6 | 44 | 6.3 | 31 | 4.5 | 16 | 2.3 |
| Stalking, harassment and threatening behaviour | 1,514 | 77.2 | 30 | 1.5 | 216 | 11.0 | 114 | 5.8 | 87 | 4.4 |
| Crimes against the person subtotal | 6,931 | 56.8 | 1,162 | 9.5 | 2,837 | 23.2 | 1,023 | 8.4 | 251 | 2.1 |
| Arson | 697 | 52.7 | 1 | 0.1 | 493 | 37.3 | 83 | 6.3 | 49 | 3.7 |
| Burglary/break and enter | 33,169 | 94.8 | 186 | 0.5 | 279 | 0.8 | 1,230 | 3.5 | 127 | 0.4 |
| Deception | 910 | 32.5 | 32 | 1.1 | 161 | 5.8 | 1,257 | 44.9 | 438 | 15.7 |
| Property damage | 18,453 | 73.2 | 100 | 0.4 | 4,770 | 18.9 | 1,530 | 6.1 | 371 | 1.5 |
| Theft | 26,965 | 41.6 | 1,678 | 2.6 | 15,268 | 23.6 | 9,545 | 14.7 | 11,339 | 17.5 |
| *Property and deception offences subtotal* | *80,194* | *62.1* | *1,997* | *1.5* | *20,971* | *16.2* | *13,645* | *10.6* | *12,324* | *9.5* |
| **Total** | **87,125** | **61.6** | **3,159** | **2.2** | **23,808** | **16.9** | **14,668** | **10.4** | **12,575** | **8.9** |

\*Includes locations such as car parks, farmland and gaming venues