

SHSU professor investigates trends for elderly and crime

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While the elderly represent the fastest growing segment of the population, too little is known about the nature and scope of crime impacting this generation. Victoria Titterington of Sam Houston State University is trying to change that with a series of studies that examine the elderly and crime.

The [elderly](#), defined as persons over the age of 65, currently represent about 12 percent of the [population](#) nationally. But with the [baby boomer generation](#) aging, that number is expected to double by 2030. While the elderly are only a minority of [crime victims](#), they are at higher [risk](#) for property crimes, self-neglect and abuse, Titterington found in a 2010 report she prepared for the Texas Crime Victims' Institute.

Reports of elder abuse in domestic settings have increased dramatically, according to several sources, and the University of Chicago's National Social Life, Health & Aging Project estimated that 13 percent of older Americans suffer some form of abuse. Titterington said those figures may be grossly underestimated; for example, the 2004 Survey of State Protective Services said elderly abuse victims range from 100,000 to one million annually. Further, female seniors are at greater risk for abuse than older men.

Financial swindles are one of the fastest growing forms of abuse, according to the National Center for Elder Abuse in their 2009 statistics. The elderly also suffer more self-neglect, and these particular victims are generally depressed, confused or extremely frail.

In one study, Titterington and Napoleon Reyes of Sonoma State University studied [homicide](#) and the elderly in three major cities, including Houston, Chicago and Miami, between the mid-1980s and the mid-1990s. This research indicates that compared to younger victims, older homicide victims are significantly more likely to be female, to be killed by family members, and to be killed in the course of a robbery or other felony.

In another study, co-authored with SHSU Ph.D. student Jeanne Subjack, the two examined the overall and spousal sex ratios of homicide offending in Texas' six largest cities. The results showed that these sex ratios are low for homicide in general, meaning that women represent a significant minority of offenders. For example, for the period of 1976-2007, for every 100 male offenders in El Paso, there were only 10 female homicide offenders. However, women's representation as homicide offenders is significantly larger in the case of spousal homicides. Across these six cities for this 30-year period, there was a range of 17 to 96 female (and a mean of 56) spousal homicide offenders for every 100 males who were killing spouses/intimate partners. Though the spousal sex ratios of killing were large for both younger and older couples, the levels of spousal homicide offending for males and females has seen a significant reduction in these cities, as well as nationally.

Historically, the criminal justice system has not been a major player in [elder abuse](#), but more and more police are dealing with these issues on the street. In fact, federal legislation, The Elder Justice Act, was passed in 2010, as part of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act. It is designed to address many of the weaknesses in current federal and state programs dealing with the [abuse](#), neglect and exploitation of older people.

Provided by Sam Houston State University

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