Crimes Against the Elderly Report

2009-2011

TENNESSEE BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION

901 R.S. Gass Boulevard
Nashville, Tennessee 37216-2639
(615) 744-4000
Facsimile (615) 744-4500
TDD (615) 744-4001

July 31, 2012

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Each year the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation releases annual reports of crimes reported by law enforcement agencies to the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS) program in five different reports. The TIBRS data contains a wide range of incident level information including victim and offender demographics. In addition to the usual annual reports, the Crime Statistics Unit focused on a data subset of older victims of crime for the last three years of reported data. According to the 2010 United States Census, the nation's population is growing including America's elderly population. The data for the Tennessee Census shows the same trends.

Unfortunately, even with various groups advocating for them and state law specifically punishing those who victimize them, the number of elderly crime victims has grown over the past three years. Their sometimes reduced mobility and trust of others makes them easy prey for offenders. We believe looking at the data reported to TIBRS for older crime victims will be beneficial for policy makers since the U.S. Census data indicates that this population is growing.

Sincerely,

Mark Gwyn
Director

The nation's population is growing according to the 2010 United States Census. Mirroring this trend in growth is America's elderly population. Elderly, for our purposes, is defined as individuals age 65 or older. The 2010 census documented the elderly population as representing 13.4% of the nation's population.

There is a vast array of publications, studies, and advocacy groups highlighting the problem of Elder Abuse. Elder Abuse can present itself in multiple forms including fraud, assault, and neglect. Past works have noted that as compared to other abuse types, the criminal justice system's response, reporting, and data analysis of Elder Abuse is lacking (Krienert, Walsh, & Turner, 2009). A majority of the Elder Abuse research and literature comes from other disciplines and fields such as Gerontology, Public Health, and Law. Elder Abuse is broadly defined as the mistreatment or abusive behavior towards older adults (Krinert, et. al., 2009). The absence of a detailed definition has "led to broad and divergent practices and applications" (Krinert, et. al., 2009, p. 328). Because the mistreatment and abuse of elderly can take so many forms, comparison of data and/or findings across studies is difficult.

Utilizing data from the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System (TIBRS), crimes occurring from 2009 to 2011 against the elderly population were analyzed. The state of Tennessee has been a 100% NIBRS state since 2001. The Tennessee Bureau of Investigation serves as the collecting agency of all TIBRS data in the state. All law enforcement agencies are mandated by Tennessee law TCA 38-10-101 et seq. to report crime statistics.

Elderly as a Vulnerable Population

There has been very little consensus in the research literature concerning the definition of "elderly". Definitions vary from individuals aged 60 and over to 67 and over. For our purposes, *elderly* will be operationalized as those individuals aged 65 and older. This group is particularly vulnerable to crime victimization. Though generally regarded as well "respected members of society to be held in high regard" (Krienert & Walsh, 2010, p.53), the elderly are not omitted as targets of crime. To the contrary, the elderly are vulnerable targets due to commonly found characteristics of this age group such as diminished physical capacity and mobility. Additionally, the elderly are often targeted in fraud and identity theft crimes.

Provisions for Protecting the Elderly

Historically having great potential to become victims of neglect, abuse, and crime, the elderly population is often provided additional safeguards to protect against victimization. One such provision in the state of Tennessee is a law, Tennessee Code Annotated 71-6-102 which identifies "advanced age" as being sixty years of age or older; this particular legislation addresses abuse and neglect for various age groups. The Tennessee Code Annotated 71-6-101, also referred to as the Tennessee Adult Protection Act, requires the reporting of adult abuse, neglect, or exploitation cases. Any individual suspecting adult abuse is mandated to report these cases so that state protective services can prevent further abuse, neglect or exploitation.

There are numerous agencies at the national and state level that advocate for the Elderly population. Such agencies take on the responsibility of promoting public awareness of special issues directly affecting this protected class of people. Designated by the state of Tennessee to act in this capacity is The Tennessee Commission on Aging and Disability (TDAC). The TDAC's mission statement asserts that "TDAC brings together and leverages programs, resources, and organizations to protect and ensure the quality of life and independence of older Tennesseans and adults with disabilities" (website, 2012). Even with agencies specifically established to advocate for this protected population, numerous cases of

elderly abuse and maltreatment often are underreported (Jackson, S. L. & Hafemeister, J. D., 2010). As such, it should be noted that even fewer cases are reported to law enforcement. The current study only includes crimes against the elderly reported to TIBRS by Tennessee law enforcement agencies.

Data Collection

For the current study, data was collected from the TIBRS database. All Tennessee law enforcement agencies are required by law to submit criminal incidents into the Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System. TIBRS is an incident based reporting system designed to collect information on every single crime occurrence and on each incident and arrest within the occurrence. An incident, as defined by TIBRS is "one or more offenses committed by the same offender, or group of offenders acting in concert at the same time and place" (Data Collection Manual, 10th Ed., p.2). In order to submit incidents to TIBRS, agencies must first classify the offense. Events can be categorized as either a Group A Offense or Group B Arrest. Group A offenses can be broken down into three distinct types: (1) Crimes Against Persons – these include such offenses as assaults, forcible sex offenses, and homicides; (2) Crimes Against Property – these include offenses such as burglary, fraud, larceny/theft; (3) Crimes Against Society – these include offenses such as drug/narcotic, gambling, and weapon law violations. There are eleven Group B offenses including such crimes as disorderly conduct and driving under the influence. Unlike Group A, only arrestee data is reported for Group B crimes and only one offense (the most serious) may be reported per incident. Due to the nature of the current study, Group B data was not included. Rather, only TIBRS Group A offenses classified as Crimes Against Persons and Crimes Against Property occurring between 2009 and 2011 were utilized. Because this study focuses on individual victims from a particular age group, Group A Crimes Against Society were found to be irrelevant. TIBRS data is available to the Crime Statistics Unit for query and research purposes. Though focusing on the elderly victims of crime, reported victims from other age ranges will serve as comparison groups. As such, the entire study population (N) will consist of all individual victims of Crimes Against Persons or Crimes Against Property reported from 2009 through 2011.
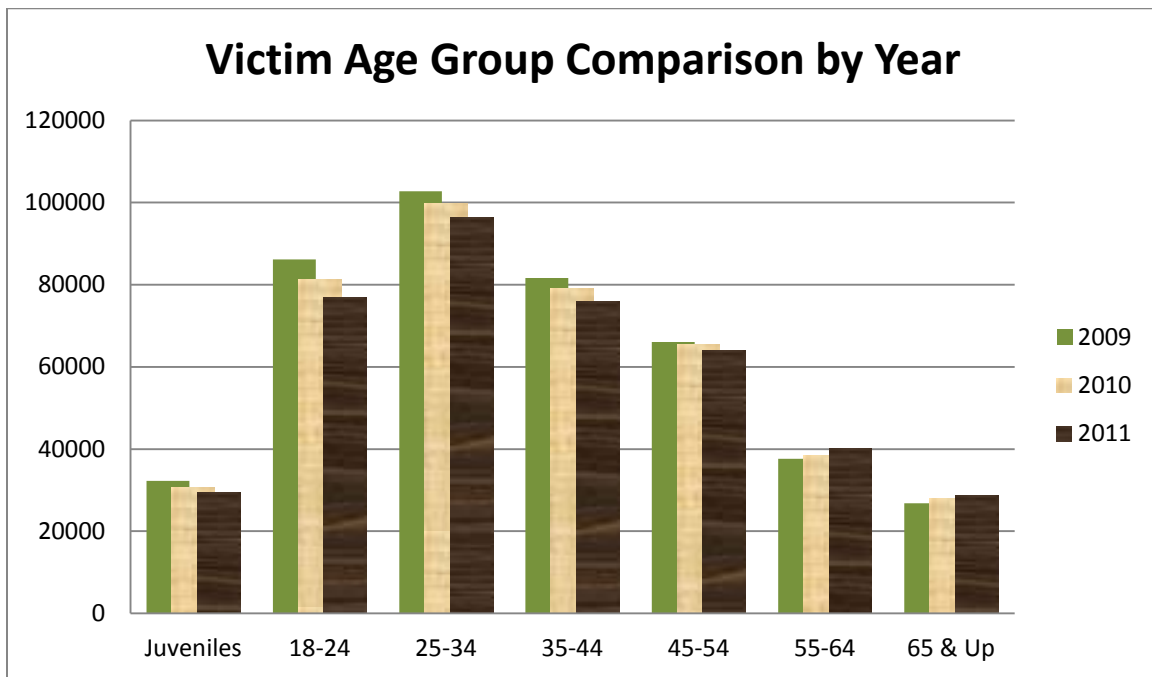
Method

This report is an analysis of three years of TIBRS data collected from 2009 through 2011. More specifically, the study focuses on crime victims 65 years of age and older, hereafter referred to as *elderly*. By utilizing three years of crime data, various trends and changes in elderly crime in the state of Tennessee can be identified. After a comprehensive look at the data, specific offenses, data elements, and relationships were identified for further examination.

Four Group A categories were analyzed: Robbery, Burglary, Assaults, and Fraud. Robbery and Burglary offenses were examined specifically using the Location Type "Residence/ Home" as a focal point. All four TIBRS reportable Assault offenses committed against the elderly were explored with regards to Weapon Types used, Injury Type reported, as well as Victim to Offender relationships. A hot topic in elderly crime literature over the past decade focuses on Fraud offenses. Similar to research findings across the United States, Tennessee has seen an increase in the number of Fraud victims ages 65 and over. Various offense characteristics of these crimes are reviewed.

Overview of Reported Offenses with Elderly Victims

The Elderly have steadily increased as targets of crime over the past three years. Per the parameters of the study, only offenses classified by TIBRS as Crimes Against Persons and Crimes Against Property were included in the analysis. Though the overall number of TIBRS offenses decreased each year from 2009 to 2011 (2009 N= 453,355, 2010 N=441,898, 2011 N=430,684), there was an increase in the number of elderly victims. Elderly victims increased 7.0% while the total number of victims decreased 5.0% in the state of Tennessee. There are a number of factors that may contribute to the increased victimization of the elderly.

Offenses classified as Burglary were the most often reported offense for elderly victims each year from 2009 through 2011. Burglary is defined by TIBRS as "the unlawful entry into a building or structure with the intent to commit a felony or theft" (TIBRS Data Collection Manual, 10th ed., 2012, p. 65). The second most frequently reported offense was Destruction/Damage/Vandalism followed closely by Theft – All Other Larceny.

TIBRS collects demographic information of all victims in reported incidents. This information allows for a better understanding of who, within the elderly population, is being victimized and with what frequency. Overall, males are more likely to be victimized than women. When comparing races, Whites are overwhelmingly more prone to becoming crime victims than any other race accounting for 83.2% of all victim races. This is approximately five times that of Black victims, who represent 15.7% of elderly victims. Collectively, the races American Indian/Native American, Asian/Pacific Islander, and Unknown only made up one percent of all elderly victims over the three year period.

Frequency Table of Elderly Victim Gender and Race by Year

	2009		2010		2011		Total	
	Number	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**	**Number**	**%**
GENDER								
Female	12,148	45.3	12,904	46.1	12,880	44.9	37,932	45.4
Male	14,549	54.3	15,004	53.6	15,759	54.9	45,312	54.3
Unknown	112	0.4	80	0.3	70	0.2	262	0.3
Total	26,809	100.0	27,988	100.0	28,709	100.0	83,506	100.0
RACE								
White	22,068	82.3	23,370	83.5	24,045	83.8	69,483	83.2
Black	4,431	16.5	4,325	15.5	4,385	15.3	13,141	15.7
American Indian/ Alaskan Native	73	0.3	86	0.3	77	0.3	236	0.3
Asian/Pacific Islander	16	0.0	23	0.0	18	0.0	57	0.0
Unknown	221	0.8	184	0.7	184	0.6	589	0.7
Total	26,809	100.0	27,988	100.0	28,709	100.0	83,506	100.0

In an attempt to find a basis for the large gap seen in victim race and gender, previous research literature concerning population and life expectancy was consulted. A 2006 report, focused on describing the demographic context of longevity change in the United States, notes several well-documented differentials in life expectancy. According to this research, distinct sex and race differentials exist in Americans' longevity. Over the past century, female life expectancy has exceeded that of males. The reason for this contrast "involves the complicated interplay of a host of biological, social, and behavioral conditions" (Shrestha, L, 2006, p. 11). There also exists a disparity between the life expectancy of whites versus blacks. Though the gap between the two races has significantly decreased since the turn of the century, black persons live, on average, 5.3 fewer years than their white counter parts (Shrestha, 2006). Black males are reported as the most disadvantaged group with an average life expectancy of 69 years in 2003, 6.3 years less than their white counterparts. This disparity between black and white men has remained consistent since the mid 1950's (Shrestha, 2006). Projections provided from the Social Security Administration suggest mortality will continue to improve at about 0.7% each year.
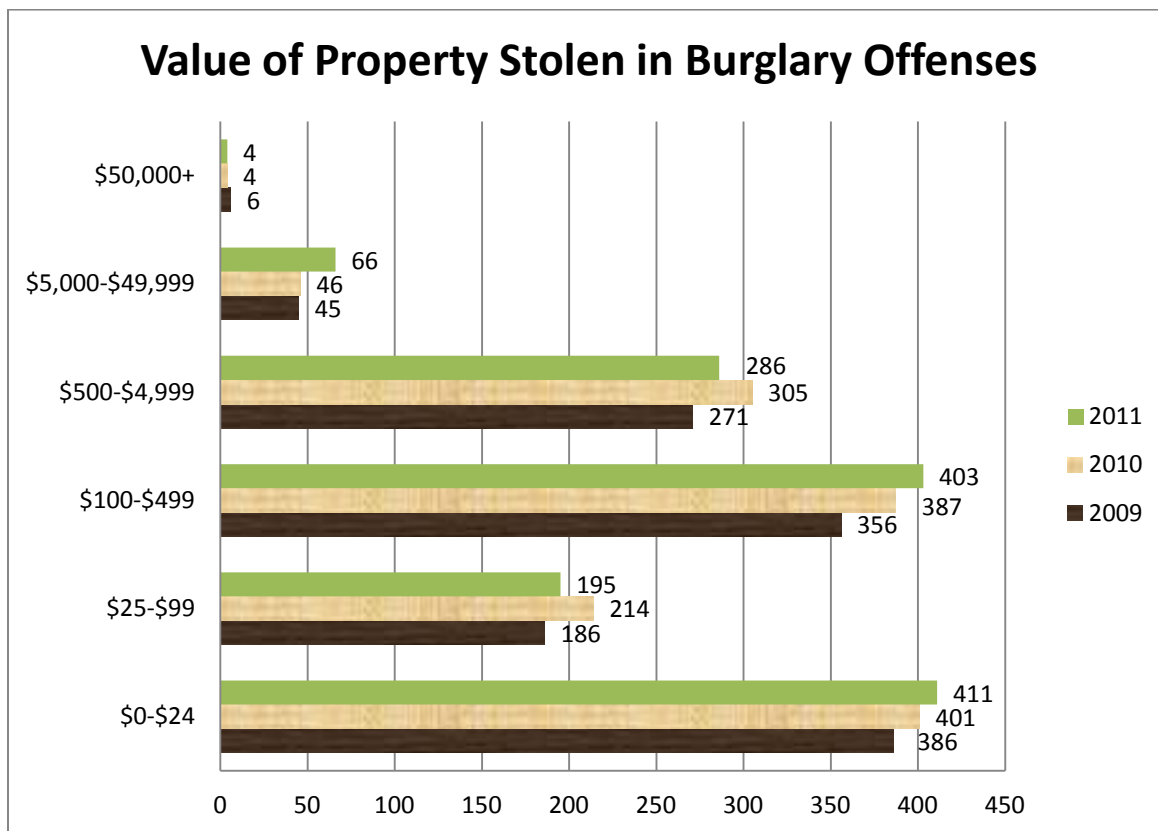
Though a very strong argument, differentials in life expectancy should not be the sole variable considered when examining the differences seen in races of elderly victims in Tennessee. Another potential contributing factor could be underreporting of crimes. When conducting crime research, the issue of victims not reporting crimes to authorities should always be considered. The reasons for non-reporting vary from case to case and are difficult to determine. Cultural differences may also account for variation in reporting of crimes by different races.

Robbery & Burglary

Two Group A offenses, Robbery and Burglary, were closely examined. In all three years from 2009 to 2011, the elderly were most often victims of Burglary. Each year the number of Burglaries committed against this group increased. Approximately, one in ten Burglary victims were 65 years or older during the study period. In 2009, there were 5,697 reported burglaries which accounted for 20.4% of all crimes committed against the elderly; that number rose to 6,019 (20.6%) in 2010 and increased again in 2011 to 6,199 (20.6%).

Between 2009 and 2011, the location type Residence/Home was reported in an overwhelming majority, 90.5%, of the Burglary offenses committed against elderly individuals. This finding is also true of the general population as well with 92.8% during the study period. Each year from 2009 through 2011 victims aged 65 and older accounted for approximately 10 percent of all Burglaries offenses reported with the location of Residence/Home. Though this may seem to be an underwhelming figure on its own, analysis of the TIBRS data reveals that only 6.6% of all victims reported in incidents between 2009 and 2011 were elderly.

One study found the elderly were nearly four times more likely than individuals 64 or younger to become victims of robbery (McCabe and Gregory, 1998). In Tennessee, there were 1,194 elderly victims of Robbery from 2009 to 2011, which only accounts for 1.3% victims within this age group. Of the 1,194 Robberies, 46.4% were documented as having the Location Type: Residence/Home.

The above graph documents the frequency of property reported stolen 2009 through 2011 according to its property value in burglary offenses committed against the elderly.

Fraud

In recent years, the increase in elderly victims of fraud offenses has been highlighted not only in the research literature, but also in local and national media. There is a growing concern over the senior citizen population as easy prey for opportunistic offenders. One study projects that the "financial exploitation of elderly people is expected to proliferate over the next decade as this population and its vulnerability to exploitation continues to grow rapidly" (Jackson, S. L. & Hafemeister, J. D., 2011, p. 9). Tennessee Incident Based Reporting System has five applicable offenses categorized as Fraud. These include Fraud –False Pretenses, Fraud – Credit Card/ATM, Fraud – Impersonation, Fraud- Welfare, and Fraud –Wire. Between 2009 and 2011, 6,275 Fraud offenses were reported as having a victim aged 65 or older. Of all victims of Fraud Offenses reported during the study period, elderly people accounted for 12.9% of all victims. Fraud – Credit Card/ATM is the most frequently reported Fraud offense. This is true for not only for the elderly, but also applies to all other age groups.

Fraud Offenses & Extortion	2009	2010	2009-2010	2011	2010-2011
	Total	Total	% Change	Total	% Change
Extortion/Blackmail	11	9	-18.2%	18	63.6%
Fraud - False Pretenses	707	770	8.9%	**737**	4.2%
Fraud - Credit Card/ATM	829	944	13.9%	868	4.7%
Fraud - Impersonation	407	388	-4.7%	408	0.2%
Fraud - Welfare	1	4	300.0%	0	-100.0%
Fraud - Wire	53	44	-17.0%	77	45.3%
Total	2,008	2,159	7.5%	2,108	5.0%

The most often compromised item utilized in Fraud against the elderly was Credit Card/ATM. This is also true, according to TIBRS data, of the general population. Much of the financial crime and exploitation literature report that the elderly are victimized by people they know. More specifically, the majority of victims are related to their offenders; others are taken advantage of by some acquaintance. The current study does not report victim to offender relationships for Fraud Offenses as TIBRS classifies Frauds as "Crimes Against Property". As such, most victims are documented as being businesses, organizations, etc. and individual Victim to Offender relationship information is not collected.
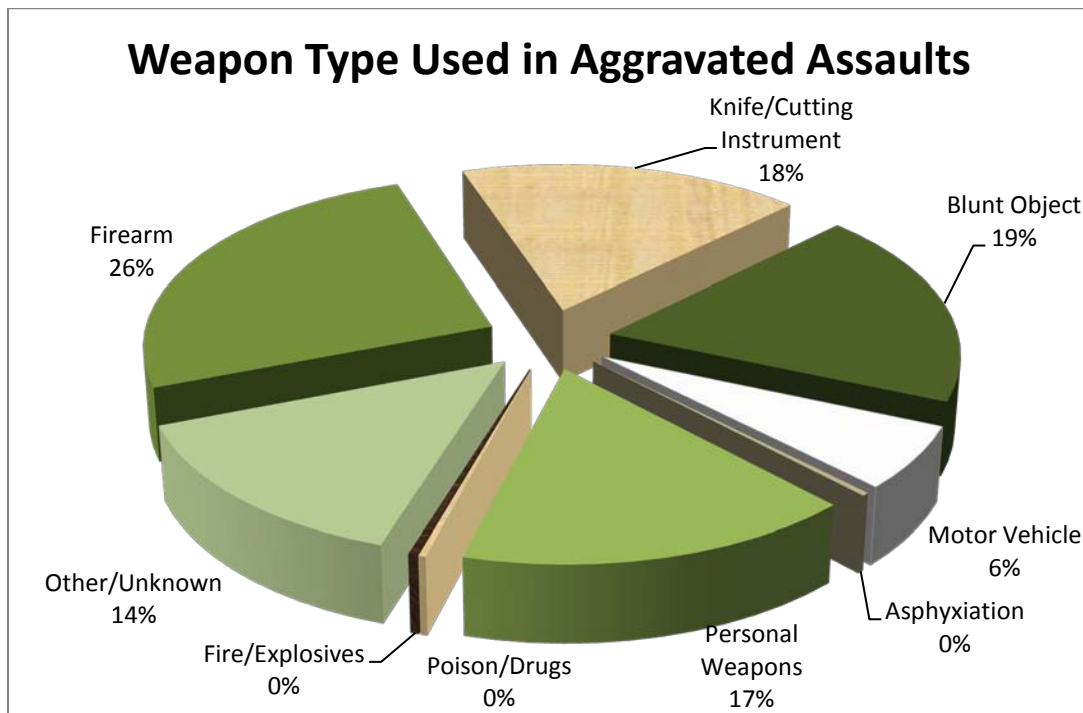
Assault Offenses

The four TIBRS Assault Offenses were reviewed to identify the prevalence of assaults committed against elderly victims. It was found that of the four assaults, Simple Assault was the most often reported offense. There were 1,360 Simple Assaults reported in 2009, 1,377 in 2010, and 1,492 in 2011. Over the three year period, Simple Assaults accounted for 51.1% of all assaults offenses against the elderly while aggravated assaults made up 17.1% (1,424). As compared to the assault victims in all other age groups, elderly victims reported fewer Simple Assaults by about 9.0%, while the number of Aggravated Assaults was comparable with a one percent difference between the elderly and all other age groups (who reported 18.1% of assaults as Aggravated).

Aggravated Assault, by TIBRS definition, requires the use or presence of a weapon and/or severe bodily injury. Of the reported 1,643 weapons utilized in Aggravated Assaults, firearms accounted for the greatest majority at 422 (26.0%).

Injury Type in Aggravated Assault	
Victim Injury	Number
Apparent Broken Bones	47
Possible Internal Injury	51
Severe Laceration	133
Apparent Minor Injury	314
None	827
Other Major Injury	103
Loss of Teeth	4
Unconsciousness	21
Total	**1,500**
Injury Type in Simple Assault	
Victim Injury	Number
Apparent Minor Injury	1,929
None	2,300
Total	**4,229**

Various injury types reported in assaults, both simple and aggravated, showed Apparent Minor Injury as the most frequently reported injury type. It should be noted that this type of injury must be paired with a type of weapon in order to meet the TIBRS definition for Aggravated Assault. An incident reporting only minor injuries absent a weapon could not be reported as an Aggravated Assault, but rather is more fitting to be classified as a Simple Assault.

Weapon Type Used in Aggravated Assaults

- Knife/Cutting Instrument 18%
- Blunt Object 19%
- Motor Vehicle 6%
- Asphyxiation 0%
- Personal Weapons 17%
- Poison/Drugs 0%
- Fire/Explosives 0%
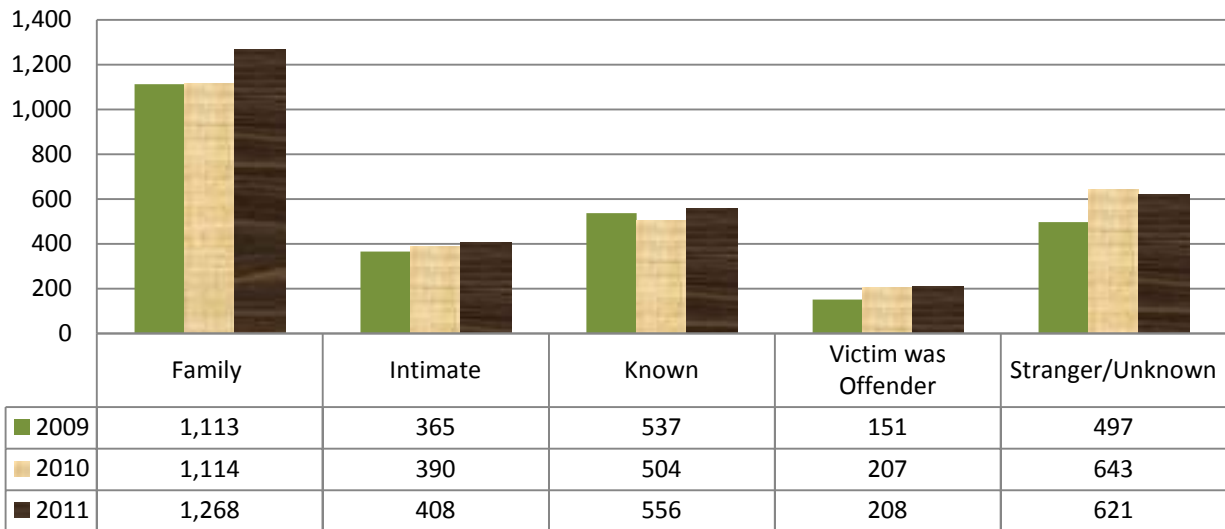- Other/Unknown 14%
- Firearm 26%

Who Should Elderly Fear?

In an effort to identify the relationship between elderly victims of crime and their corresponding offenders, the TIBRS data element Victim to Offender (V-O) Relationship was examined. When looking at all offenses from 2009 to 2011, several trends in V-O relationships emerged. The most often reported relationship was Parent, closely followed by Unknown (see Table to right for ten most frequently reported V-O relationships). During the three years, there were fluctuations in frequency of reported V-O relationships. Some relationships that showed a decrease from 2010 to 2011 included: Neighbor (-16.9%), Stranger (-20.9%) and Other Family Member (-5.5%). Some V-O relationships that increased from 2010 to 2011 included Boyfriend/Girlfriend with a percent increase of 17.1; Unknown increased by 44.0 percent; and a 37.1 percent increase in Victim

Frequently Reported V-O Relationships 2009-2011	
V-O Relationship	Number
Parent	1,835
Unknown	1,589
Stranger	1,283
Acquaintance	1,125
Grandparent	857
Spouse	705
Victim was Offender	566
Otherwise Known	545
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	401
Neighbor	395

was Offender relationship. The Victim was Offender relationship is utilized in TIBRS to describe offenses in which an individual is both the victim and the offender. An example of this would be a fight between two individuals resulting in minor injuries to both people. In TIBRS, this would be classified as a Simple Assault with two victims and two offenders and the relationship of Victim was Offender. Though only two individuals were involved in the assault, each person is both the victim and the offender.
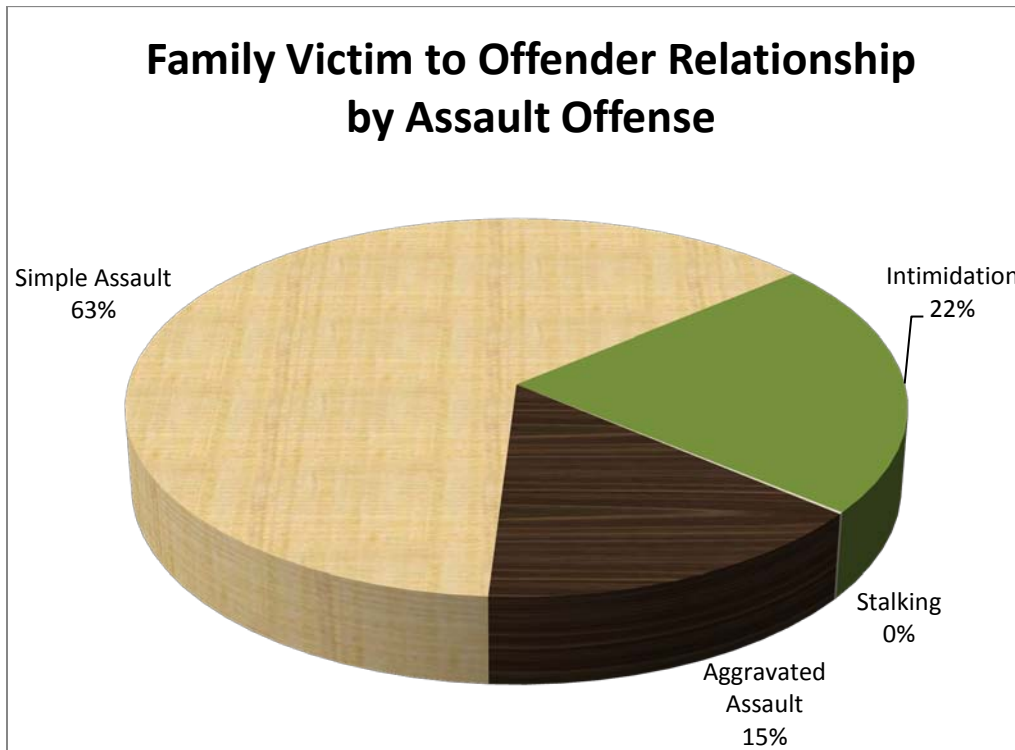
The data revealed that offenders of Assault Offenses are overwhelmingly known by the elderly victim. Of the 2,896 assault offenses with elderly victims in 2011, 41.4% were committed by family members. Another 13.3% of victim to offender relationships were documented as Intimate, which includes Spouse, Ex-Spouse, Common Law Spouse, Boyfriend/Girlfriend, and Homosexual relationships. By far, the most commonly reported familial Victim to Offender relationship was Parent. Such reported cases indicate that the crime perpetrated against the elderly victim was committed by his or her child. During the study period, a total of 1,807 Parent VO relationships were reported for assault offenses alone including 277 Aggravated Assaults and 1,187 Simple Assaults. Grandparent V-O relationship was the next most frequently reported having 833 over the course of the study. This data provides support for previous and current research literature on the topic of Elder Abuse which has found family members and/or acquaintances to be primary offenders of Elder Abuse.

Victim to Offender Relationships
Assault Offenses with Elderly Victims

	Family	Intimate	Known	Victim was Offender	Stranger/Unknown
2009	1,113	365	537	151	497
2010	1,114	390	504	207	643
2011	1,268	408	556	208	621

Family Victim to Offender Relationship
by Assault Offense

Simple Assault 63%

Intimidation 22%
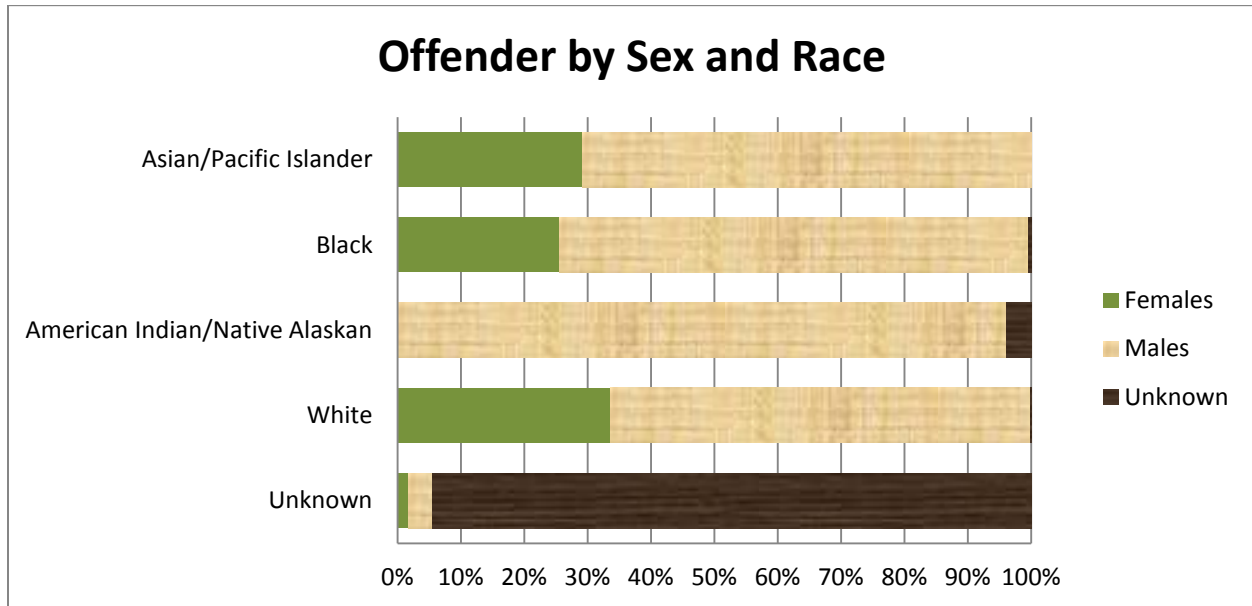
Stalking 0%

Aggravated Assault 15%

The chart above combines 2009 through 2011 assault offenses that reported a family Victim to Offender relationship.

Victim to Offender Relationship for Assault Offenses	2011		2010		2009	
	Total	% of Total	Total	% of Total	Total	% of Total
Family	**1,268**	**41.4%**	**1,114**	**39.0%**	**1,113**	**41.8%**
Child	1	0.0%	0	**0.0%**	1	0.0%
Stepchild	2	0.1%	1	0.0%	3	0.1%
Grandchild	0	0.0%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Sibling (Brother or Sister)	53	1.7%	36	1.3%	37	1.4%
Stepsibling	1	0.0%	3	0.1%	2	0.1%
Parent	633	20.7%	584	20.4%	590	22.2%
Stepparent	46	1.5%	44	1.5%	44	1.7%
Grandparent	331	10.8%	257	9.0%	245	9.2%
In-Law	86	2.8%	70	2.4%	68	2.6%
Other Family Member	115	3.8%	119	4.2%	123	4.6%
Intimate	**408**	**13.3%**	**390**	**13.6%**	**365**	**13.7%**
Spouse	262	8.6%	227	7.9%	208	7.8%
Ex-Spouse	18	0.6%	18	0.6%	10	0.4%
Common-Law Spouse	4	0.1%	0	0.0%	13	0.5%
Boyfriend/Girlfriend	122	4.0%	143	5.0%	132	5.0%
Homosexual Relationship	2	0.1%	2	0.1%	2	0.1%
Known to Victim	**556**	**18.2%**	**504**	**17.6%**	**537**	**20.2%**
Child of Boyfriend/Girlfriend	3	0.1%	0	0.0%	0	0.0%
Babysittee (the Baby)	0	0.0%	1	0.0%	1	0.0%
Friend	64	2.1%	49	1.7%	48	1.8%
Employer	12	0.4%	7	0.2%	6	0.2%
Employee	6	0.2%	9	0.3%	9	0.3%
Neighbor	126	4.1%	114	4.0%	138	5.2%
Acquaintance	345	11.3%	324	11.3%	335	12.6%
Unknown	**621**	**20.3%**	**643**	**22.5%**	**497**	**18.7%**
Stranger	186	6.1%	178	6.2%	200	7.5%
Unknown	435	9.7%	465	16.3%	297	11.2%
Victim was Offender	**208**	**6.8%**	**207**	**7.2%**	**151**	**5.7%**
Total	**3,061**	**100.0%**	**2,858**	**100.0%**	**2,663**	**100.0%**

The above chart details frequency of Victim to Offender relationships for Assault Offenses with elderly victims occurring between 2009 and 2011. Please note that some offenses may have multiple offenders which will be reflected in the Victim to Offender relationship accordingly. As such, the number of victim to offender relationships could be greater than the number of actual offenses reported.

Offender Demographics

Offenders were examined using incident-level data. As a result, the numbers represent offender(s) for each incident having an elderly victim reported in TIBRS between 2009 and 2011. If an individual is documented as an offender in more than one incident during this study period, that offender will be duplicated in the current data accordingly. This should accurately represent the number of offenders for separate incidents.

Offender by Sex and Race

A total of 65,220 offenders perpetrated crimes against the elderly between 2009 and 2011. Males were two times more likely to offend against this population than females (males – 28,182; females – 13,050). Approximately 36.8% of offenders' gender was documented as Unknown. As such, 1 in 3 elderly victims of all TIBRS offenses had Unknown offenders. Of the offenders with known race and gender (39,854), some trends in the data emerged. White offenders were more likely to offend than any other race at 74.5%. The second most frequently reported offender race was Black accounting for 25.3%. Combined these two races account make up almost 100.0% of reported offenders with known race and gender. Only 0.2 percent of offenders during the study period were not Black or White. These statistics are very similar to the victim demographic data which revealed only 1.0 percent of victims to be a race other than Black or White.

In addition to gender and race, offender age was also examined. Utilizing age groups (Under 18, 18 to24, 25 to 34, 35 to 44, 45 to 54, 55-64, and 65 and up), the variable of offender age was parceled out. Some notable findings included an inverse relationship between number of offenders and age group beginning with the 25 to 34 age range. There is a consistent decline in number of reported offenders as age group increases beyond the ages 25 to 34. Unknown made up the largest age group having 29,066 offenders of which 5.3% were reported as female and 13.3% male. Omitting the Unknown age group, analyses found the most prevalent offenders of elderly crime are individuals between the ages of 25 and 34 who account for 26.0%. Elderly offenders committing crimes against other elderly constitute the smallest age group of offenders at 4.8% over the three year period.

Conclusion

Results of this three year study (2009-2011) of TIBRS reported crimes against the elderly provide insight into the victimization of this vulnerable class of people. Population estimates in the state of Tennessee and across the nation suggest continued growth in people aged 65 and older. As such, the issue of violence against the elderly and Elder Abuse demands attention. Significant findings of the current study include the large number (over 90.0%) of robbery offenses against the elderly that occur at home. The evaluation of Location Type: Residence/Home in relation to Burglary and Robbery offenses is important when considering that many elderly are confined to their homes for various reasons while others tend to stay at home where they feel safe. Inadvertently, the elderly population becomes more susceptible to robberies and burglaries at home.

Another significant finding is the fact that the majority of elderly victims know their offender. More specifically, elderly victims of assault were approximately three times more likely to be victimized by someone they know than a stranger. This has major implications for the issue of Elder Abuse within the state of Tennessee. Though the definition of Elder Abuse varies across the literature, future studies could operationalize Elder Abuse by identifying concrete, measurable variables, such as number of assaults for the purpose of assessing the problem at the state level.

Though there are certain limitations to the current study, the intention is that the findings are informative and useful. As various agencies at the local and state levels advocate for protection of the elderly population, background research and assessment of victimization is very important. Offender and victim demographic profiles may be utilized to better understand who is being targeted for crime and by whom. Hopefully, this study gives perspective to the ongoing issue of elderly victims of crime and promotes further research as well as action concerning this issue.

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