

PERCEPTIONS OF PERSONAL SAFETY

AMONGST OLDER
AUSTRALIANS

Susan Quine and Stephen Morrell

School of Public Health
Faculty of Medicine
University of Sydney

Background

There is public perception

(partly attributable to the media)

that older people are disproportionately the victims of crime and are greatly concerned for their personal safety.

Study Objective

- To identify at a population level
- the perceptions of older people for their personal safety in their home and neighbourhood,
- And the predictors of these.

Methods

- Cross-sectional study design
- Telephone survey
- Older Persons Health Survey data
- Logistic regression analysis of responses from randomly selected older Australians (65+ years) living independently in the community (n=888,1)

Results

- The vast majority of respondents reported feeling safe 'all' or 'most of the time'
- in their Home (96%)
- In their Neighbourhood (92%)

Feeling safe in Home by Gender

Frequency	Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%
All the time	2,627	68.5	3,156	62.6
Most of the time	1,013	26.4	1,617	32.1
Some of the time	146	3.8	206	4.1
Never	1	0.0	0	0.0
Frequency not stated	49	1.3	66	1.3
Total	3,836	100	5,045	100

Feeling safe in Neighbourhood by Gender

Frequency	Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%
All the time	2,314	60.3	2,630	52.1
Most of the time	1,203	31.4	1,931	38.3
Some of the time	260	6.8	389	7.7
Never	2	0.1	1	0.0
Frequency not stated	57	1.5	94	1.9
Total	3,836	100	5,045	100

Relationship with Age

Feeling safe 'all the time'

did NOT decline with increasing Age.

Feeling safe in Home by Age

Age group	Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%
65-69 yr	991	70.2	872	61.7
70-74	768	67.1	851	61.9
75-79	486	67.3	685	61.1
80-84	259	67.8	450	63.9
85-89	95	67.4	239	69.7
90+	24	77.4	52	70.3
Age not stated	4	100.0	7	43.8
Total	2,627	68.5	3,156	62.6

Feeling safe in Neighbourhood by Age

Age group	Males		Females	
	N	%	N	%
65-69 yr	871	61.7	748	52.9
70-74	674	58.9	728	53.0
75-79	436	60.4	545	48.6
80-84	224	58.6	373	53.0
85-89	86	61.0	193	56.3
90+	20	64.5	37	50.0
Age not stated	3	75.0	6	37.5
Total	2,314	60.3	2,630	52.1

Variables entered into the logistic regression model

- 1 self rated health
- 3 sociodemographic (age, location, living arrangement)
- 3 socioeconomic (educational level, financial situation, home ownership)
- 3 emotional well-being (feeling: depressed, worthless, hopeless)
- 2 outlook for the future (no main hope, fear)

Logistic regression analysis

- Some variables were predictors of feeling safe in both the home and neighbourhood,
- whereas other variables were specific to either the home or the neighbourhood.

Home and Neighbourhood

As might be expected, feeling safe in the Home 'all the time' was a consistent and strongly significant predictor ($P < 0.0001$) of feeling safe in the Neighbourhood 'all the time', and vice-versa, for both men and women.

No main hope for the future

Significant only for women.

Having no main hope for the future was a negative predictor for women feeling safe in the home ($p = 0.01$) and neighbourhood ($p = 0.01$)

No main fear for future

- Having no main fear for the future was a positive predictor of feeling safe in the Home, and in the Environment, for both men and women.
- In the Home it was more strongly associated for women ($p < 0.0001$) than men ($p = 0.0166$), whereas
- In the Neighbourhood the associations were more similar, women $p = 0.0012$, men $p = 0.0006$.

Specific data on types of fear

Respondents were also asked: "What is your main fear or concern for the future?"

Respondents expressed fears for self, family and others. The types of fears were categorised.

Fears for self were predominantly concerns about one's own health, loss of independence and nursing home admission. Fears about one's personal safety as a victim of crime were NOT voiced.

Discussion

Clearly, the perception that older Australians are greatly concerned with their personal safety, and of being disproportionately targeted as victims of crime, is not supported by these findings.

The main message from the analyses conducted here is both consistent and positive.

The vast majority of older Australians living independently in the community feel safe 'all' or 'most of the time', both in their Home and in their Neighbourhood.

Implications

- These are important findings because they emphasise that, rather than being focused on personal safety issues, older Australians are focused on other aspects of their lives and the lives of their family, and on broader societal issues.