



Commissioner for **Older People**  
for Northern Ireland

**An analysis of the clearance rates  
for crime against older people in  
Northern Ireland  
2007/08 to 2012/13**



## Contents

1. Foreword.....	3
2. Background and context. ....	5
3. Impact of crime against older people. ....	7
4. Methodology .....	9
5. Findings. ....	10
6. International examples .....	19
7. Conclusion.....	20



## 1. Foreword



In my Corporate Plan, “Hope, Confidence, Certainty”, I outlined my strategic priorities, focusing on the issues which I believe will bring about real and positive changes for older people in Northern Ireland. In order to establish what the key issues were, I asked older people and older peoples’ organisations about what mattered most to them. One of the issues which echoed through this engagement was a lack of confidence amongst older people that if they are the victim of crime, that they will see that crime followed up quickly and decisively, and that the perpetrator will be brought to justice.

Crime against older people is something which is universally condemned across our society. Although the level of violent crime and burglary against older people is relatively low in Northern Ireland, each incident is traumatic for the victim and causes fear amongst the wider population.

When a crime is committed, the measure of the rate at which the police resolve the crime is known as the crime clearance or detection rate.<sup>1</sup> Historically, crime clearance rates for violent crime and burglary have been significantly lower for victims of crime who are over 65 than in most other age groups. This statistic does nothing to reduce the fear of crime amongst older people, and raises questions as to why many of those who perpetrate crimes against older people are not being held accountable for their actions.

Despite some efforts to tackle this issue, my research suggests that crime clearance rates for older people still remain unacceptably low, and so it is no surprise that fear of crime continues to remain a key concern amongst older people.

As Commissioner for Older People, my key function as stated in the Commissioner for Older People Act (Northern Ireland) 2011 is to safeguard and promote the interests of older people, and so one of my strategic priorities which I identified in my Corporate Plan is to improve the poor clearance rates of crimes committed against older people.

Older people deserve to have confidence that if they are the victim of crime that they can be certain that every effort will be made to bring the offender to justice, and that their case will receive the same treatment and attention as any other victims of crime.

By publishing this research I hope to highlight the relatively low level of detection and prosecution rates related to crimes against older people and to raise awareness of the impact of crime against older people. I will be calling on the PSNI and the Northern Ireland Policing Board to address this important issue to ensure that real and measurable targets to improve clearance rates for crimes against older people are put in place. Given that eradicating fear of crime is identified within the Programme for Government 2011-2015 (2016), I hope that the Northern Ireland

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<sup>1</sup> Resolved crime is where the offender receives some formal sanction such as being charged or summonsed, cautioned, reprimanded or given a final warning.

Executive will also see the importance of improving crime clearance rates as a way of achieving one of their key strategic objectives for this term of government; *“Priority 3: Protecting Our People, the Environment and Creating Safer Communities; Tackle crime against older and vulnerable people by more effective and appropriate sentences and other measures (DOJ).”*

Using targets and acting swiftly to bring perpetrators to justice will help build confidence and reduce the fear of crime amongst older people, and send a clear message to would-be offenders that they will be brought to justice.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Claire Keatinge', with a stylized flourish at the end.

Claire Keatinge  
Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland  
October 2014

## 2. Background and Context

The role and function of the Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland was created in 2011 under legislation introduced by the First and deputy First Minister. A Corporate Plan has been developed highlighting the Commissioner's strategic priorities. In assessing the issues affecting older people one of the recurring themes was the fear of crime. As such, a key strategic objective for the Commissioner for Older People (COPNI) is to investigate and improve the poor clearance rates for crimes against older people.

Clearance rates, also known as detection rates, are a measure of the rate at which police resolve crimes.<sup>2</sup> The Commissioner wishes to challenge and support the criminal justice system to significantly improve the clearance rates for crimes against older people and to raise awareness of the impact of crime against older people.

Crimes against older people can significantly and negatively impact on their quality of life, health and well being and their sense of security in their home and communities.<sup>3</sup> Statistical data indicates that older people are less likely to be victims of certain types of crime than those in other age groups; people aged 65+ years make up 13% of the population in Northern Ireland and account for less than 2% of victims of violent crime.<sup>4</sup> However, although older people are less likely to be victims of crime than other age groups, there remains a significant fear of crime amongst older people<sup>5</sup> and this can have a devastating impact on older people.

The PSNI stated within their own policy directive PD10/06 'Preventing and Responding to Crime Against Older Persons' last updated in 2010, that "statistics would indicate that the clearance rate for violent crime and burglary are significantly lower for victims over 65 than in most other age groups."

Poor clearance rates can only exacerbate the fear of crime amongst older people in our communities. It has recently been announced in Scotland that crimes against older people will be given increased scrutiny by the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (COPFS). The COPFS has said the policy reflects an ageing population and the disproportionately negative impact crime can have upon older people.

The Commissioner met with senior PSNI representatives in February 2013. In this meeting the PSNI stated that clearance rates had recently improved but they were still too low. Asking what could be done to improve clearance rates, the PSNI view was that crime prevention was the best method.

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<sup>2</sup> Resolved crime is where the offender receives some formal sanction such as being charged or summonsed, cautioned, reprimanded or given a final warning.

<sup>3</sup> Crown Prosecution Service, 2013, Prosecuting Crimes Against Older People

<sup>4</sup> NISRA 2008

<sup>5</sup> Fear of Crime (October 2010), Centre for Ageing Research and Development in Ireland (CARDI) <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-24522872>

COPNI representatives met again with senior PSNI officers in April 2013. The PSNI presented their most recent data and stated that there was no longer an issue with the relatively low clearance rates for crime against older people. COPNI later conducted an analysis with this data and found that a trend of low clearance rates for crimes against older people still existed.

The Policing Plan (2012-2015) produced by the Policing Board outlines the need to improve services to victims of crime, particularly the most vulnerable in our society<sup>6</sup> with reference made to older people and COPNI. As such, COPNI has decided to raise this issue with the Policing Board. This report is intended to highlight the issue of persistent low clearance rates for certain crimes against older people and to bring this to the attention of the Policing Board to ensure that measures are put in place to improve outcomes for older people.

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<sup>6</sup> Policing Plan 2012-15, update for 2013/14, Protective Policing

### 3. Impact of crime against older people

Crime can have a devastating and lasting impact on an older person, both physically and mentally. When a crime is committed against a person aged over 60 years old, research shows that they may be less able to recover psychologically and mentally than if they were at an earlier point in their lives. The fear of crime can also be damaging to the well-being of the older person whereby that fear can alter state of mind and their level of social interaction. Studies have frequently shown that isolation is a key precursor to the onset of illness and the fear of crime can precipitate such isolation.

As part of the Reducing Burglary Initiative<sup>7</sup> launched by the Home Office in 1999 a short survey was conducted on burglary. The survey found that;

*“Victims of burglary were 2.4 times more likely to enter residential care in the two years following than their non-burgled neighbours.”*

These figures give an indication of how severely burglary can negatively impact upon the health of older people.

Whalley and Gately (1991)<sup>8</sup> noted that older people can suffer more pronounced financial loss from crimes as their ability to recover lost financial wealth is diminished because they may no longer be in work. It is often the case that the support networks older people once enjoyed are not as robust as they previously were due to friends and family members having passed away.

Whalley and Gately (1991) also highlight that even minor injuries sustained as a result of crime can result in a disability as the ageing process impedes the ability of the body to repair itself. Traumatic brain injuries affect older people more frequently than the young and research has shown that an older person’s ability to recover from such an injury is impaired in comparison to someone of a younger age.<sup>9</sup>

The concept that older people view the consequences of crime more severely is supported by the statement of Professor David McLean QC;<sup>10</sup> *“fear of crime is about not just the chances of victimisation but the perceived consequences. Greater anxiety on the part of the elderly about their safety on the streets may be because they see the physical, emotional and financial consequences of victimization as greater than do the young.”*<sup>11</sup>

The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) in England and Wales has noted the often profound impact of crime upon older people with special provisions being made in their policy on prosecuting crimes against older people.<sup>11</sup> The CPS stated that

<sup>7</sup> Reducing Burglary Initiative, Roger Donaldson (2002)<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20110220105210/rds.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/pdfs2/r198.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> Whalley, Peregrine W F; Gately, Brien C, Crimes against older people ; Elderly victims. Australian Police Journal, 45(2) 1991; 58-63

<sup>9</sup> Impact of Age on Long-term Recovery From Traumatic Brain Injury, Arch Phys Med Rehabil. 2008 May; 89(5): 896–903.

<sup>10</sup> HC Deb 29 October 1996 c57w

<sup>11</sup> Crown Prosecution Service, Prosecuting Crimes against Older People, 2008

crimes against older people are under-reported to the police and also recognised the effect that the fear of crime can have upon older people and their quality of life.

In order to improve outcomes for older people who are the victims of crime, it is necessary to identify the principal factors influencing the low clearance rates for crimes against older people in Northern Ireland.

The analysis in this report serves to make the argument for the introduction of specific and measurable targets to increase clearance rates for crimes committed against older people to be put in place so as to seek to improve overall outcomes. Older people must be assured that when a crime is committed against them, all necessary actions are taken to collect evidence and ensure the best chance of someone being brought to justice for the crime committed.

## 4. Methodology

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland has conducted an analysis using official PSNI statistics, published on July 5 2013. These national statistics are in the public domain and can be viewed at [www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates\\_statistics.htm](http://www.psni.police.uk/index/updates/updates_statistics.htm). The figures used cover the period from April 2007 to March 2013. An analysis across this six year period gives a clearer overall picture as short term fluctuations may give a distorted view of events.

Three categories of crime account for over for almost 9/10 crimes against older people:

- (i) burglary;
- (ii) criminal damage;
- (iii) theft (other theft and vehicle theft).

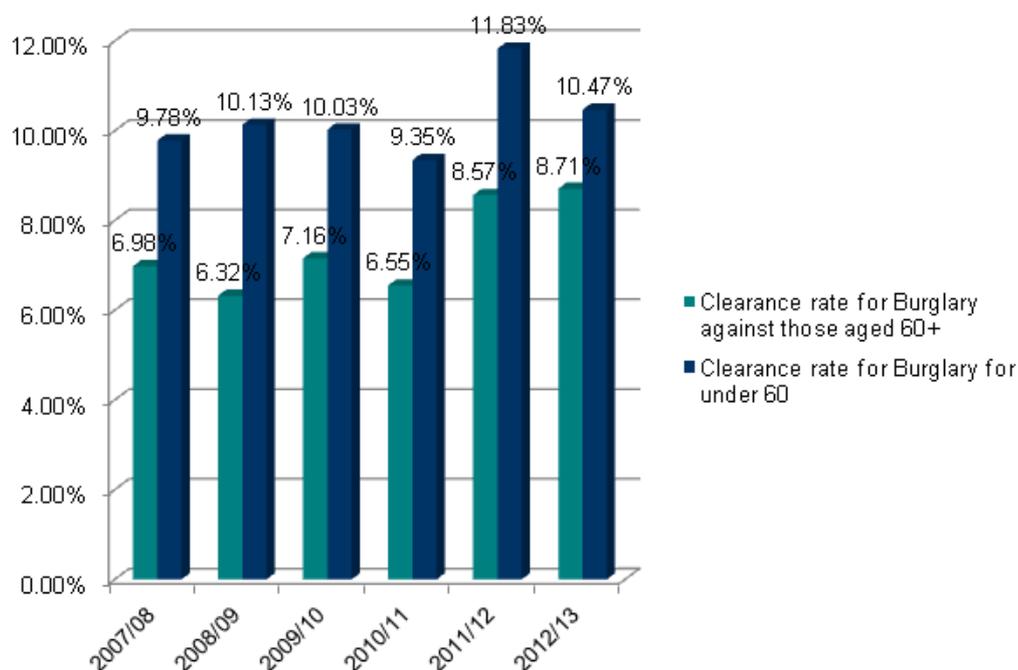
NP. As these crimes make up the majority of crimes against older people, the clearance rates of these particular crimes have been examined in close detail. Fortunately, violence with injury and sexual assault are relatively uncommon amongst older people and account for a small percentage of total crime against those aged 60+. Robbery has also been examined in close detail.

(Please note these statistics do not account for those victims of age unknown).

## 5. Findings

This section illustrates the key findings from the analysis of PSNI statistics in relation to crime clearance rates for older people for a range of different offences. Definitions in relation to specific offences have been taken from the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969.<sup>12</sup>

### **Burglary**



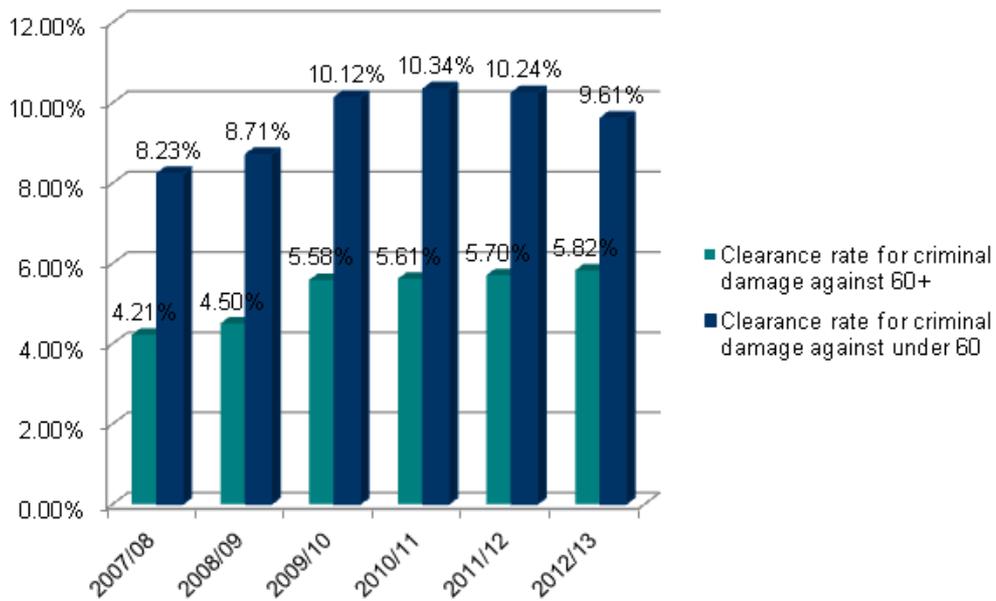
### **Analysis**

- From the 2007 financial year to the end of March 2013, 10,203 people aged over 60 were victims of burglary. Of these 10,203 victims, only 753 saw their case cleared. This equates to a clearance rate of 7.38%. Those under 60 who were victims of burglary during the same period could expect to see 10.2% of cases cleared.
- Burglary as defined by the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 is “entry (or attempted entry) to a building as a trespasser with intent to either (a) steal property from it (including stealing or attempting to steal), (b) inflict grievous bodily harm or (c) commit unlawful damage to property whilst inside.”<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1969/16/contents>

<sup>13</sup> <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/apni/1969/16/contents>

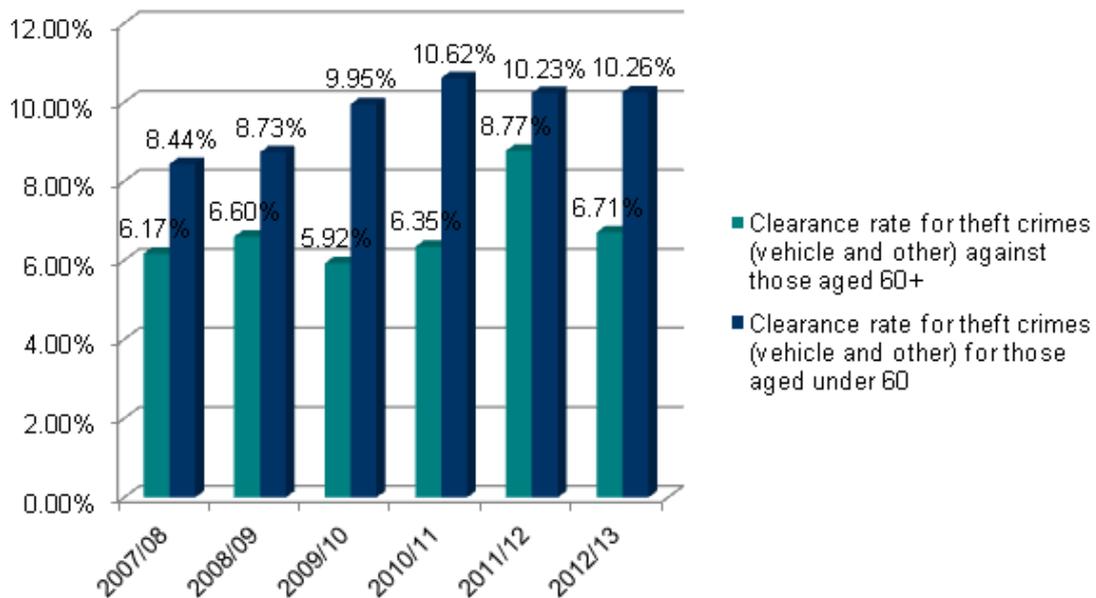
## Criminal Damage



## Analysis

- For the same period the PSNI recorded 14,762 cases of criminal damage against older people. Of those 14,762 cases, only 764 cases were cleared. This equates to a clearance rate of 5.18% of cases involving criminal damage where the victim was aged 60+. For victims under 60 years old the clearance rate rises to 9.53%, almost double that of older victims.
- Criminal Damage is defined as: arson (endangering life and not endangering life), damage to a dwelling, damage to a building other than a dwelling, damage to a vehicle and other criminal damage.

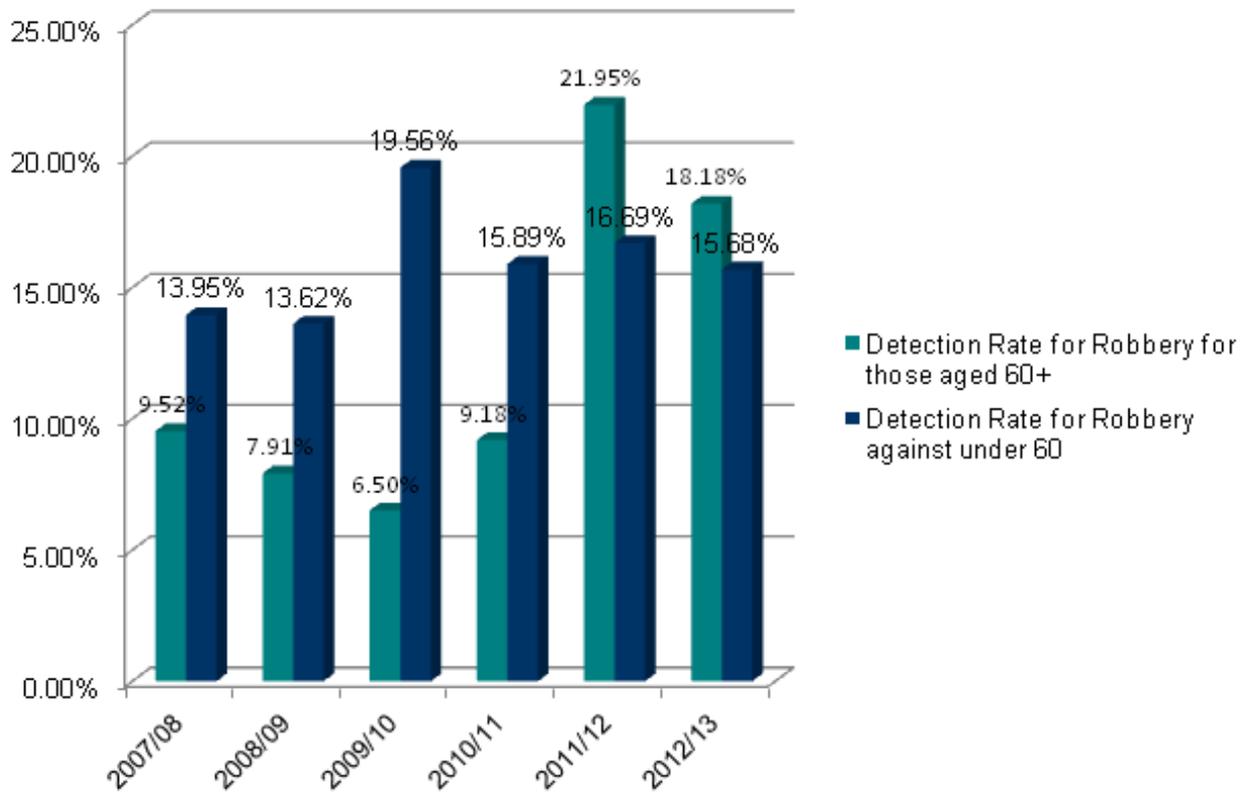
## Theft



### Analysis

- From April 2007 until March 2013, 12,165 cases of theft (vehicle and other) were recorded against those aged 60+; of those 12,165 cases 826 were cleared. This equates to a clearance rate of 6.75%. Those victims of theft aged under 60 experienced a clearance rate of 9.7%.
- Theft can be defined as follows: vehicle theft, theft in a dwelling other than from automatic machine or meter; theft by an employee, theft of mail, dishonest use of electricity, Theft from automatic machine or meter, Other theft or unauthorised taking, making off without payment and blackmail.

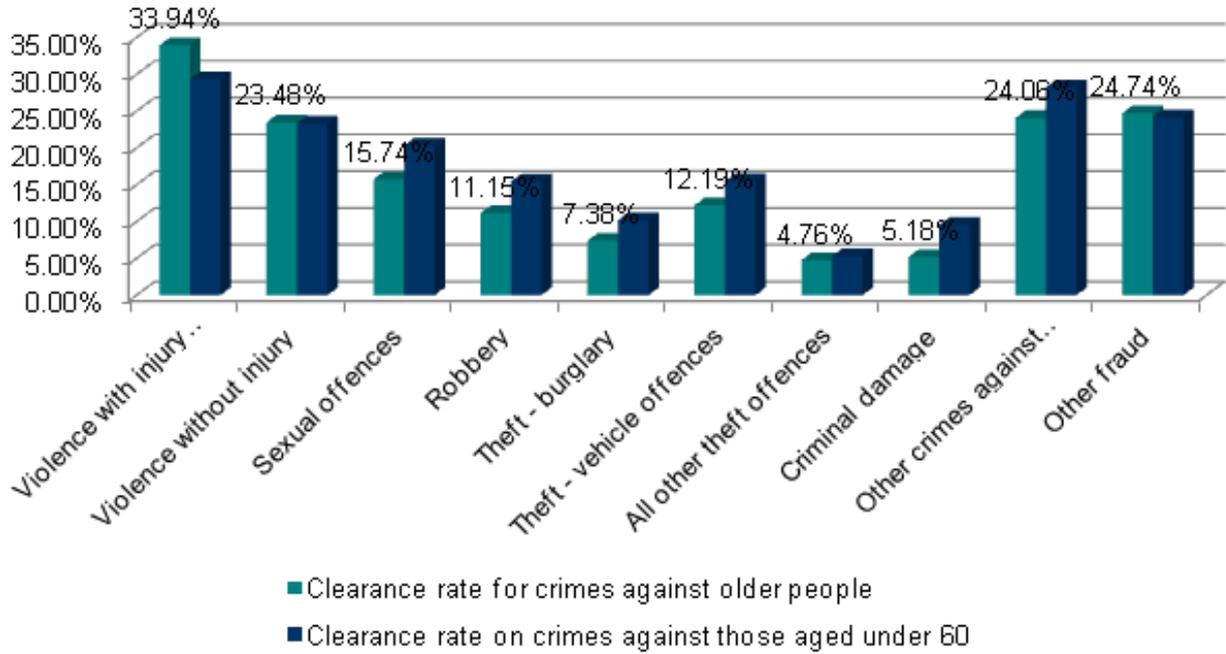
## Robbery



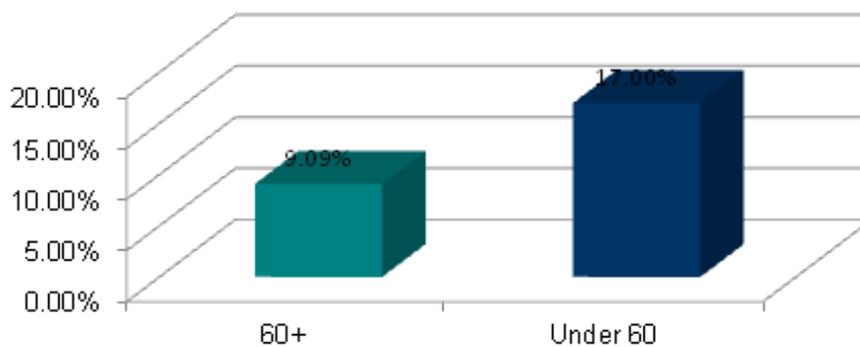
**Finding:** For this six year period, the statistics demonstrate that burglary, theft and criminal damage have consistently lower clearance rates when the victim is 60+ years.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Police Recorded Crime Statistics in Northern Ireland 1998/99 to 2012/13  
[http://www.psni.police.uk/directory/updates/updates\\_statistics/update\\_crime\\_statistics.htm](http://www.psni.police.uk/directory/updates/updates_statistics/update_crime_statistics.htm)

### Overall analysis of clearance rates from 2007 to 2013



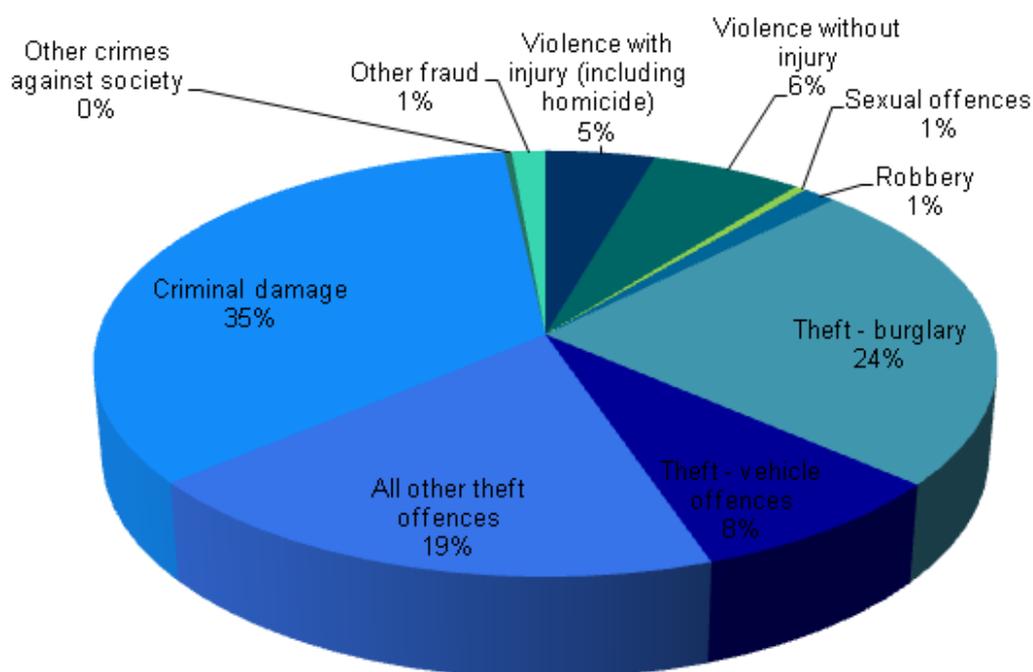
### Overall clearance rate for older people compared to those under 60 from 2007 to 2013



The charts above are a graphical representation of the average clearance rate for each type of crime for an older person aged 60+ and someone under 60 from 2007 to 2013. From the chart it can be seen that crimes against older people have lower clearance rates in seven of the ten crime categories. When we consider the nature of crimes most likely to affect older people, criminal damage (14,762 cases), burglary (10,203 cases) and other theft (8,134 cases), the clearance rate is lower for each of these offences when the victim is an older person.

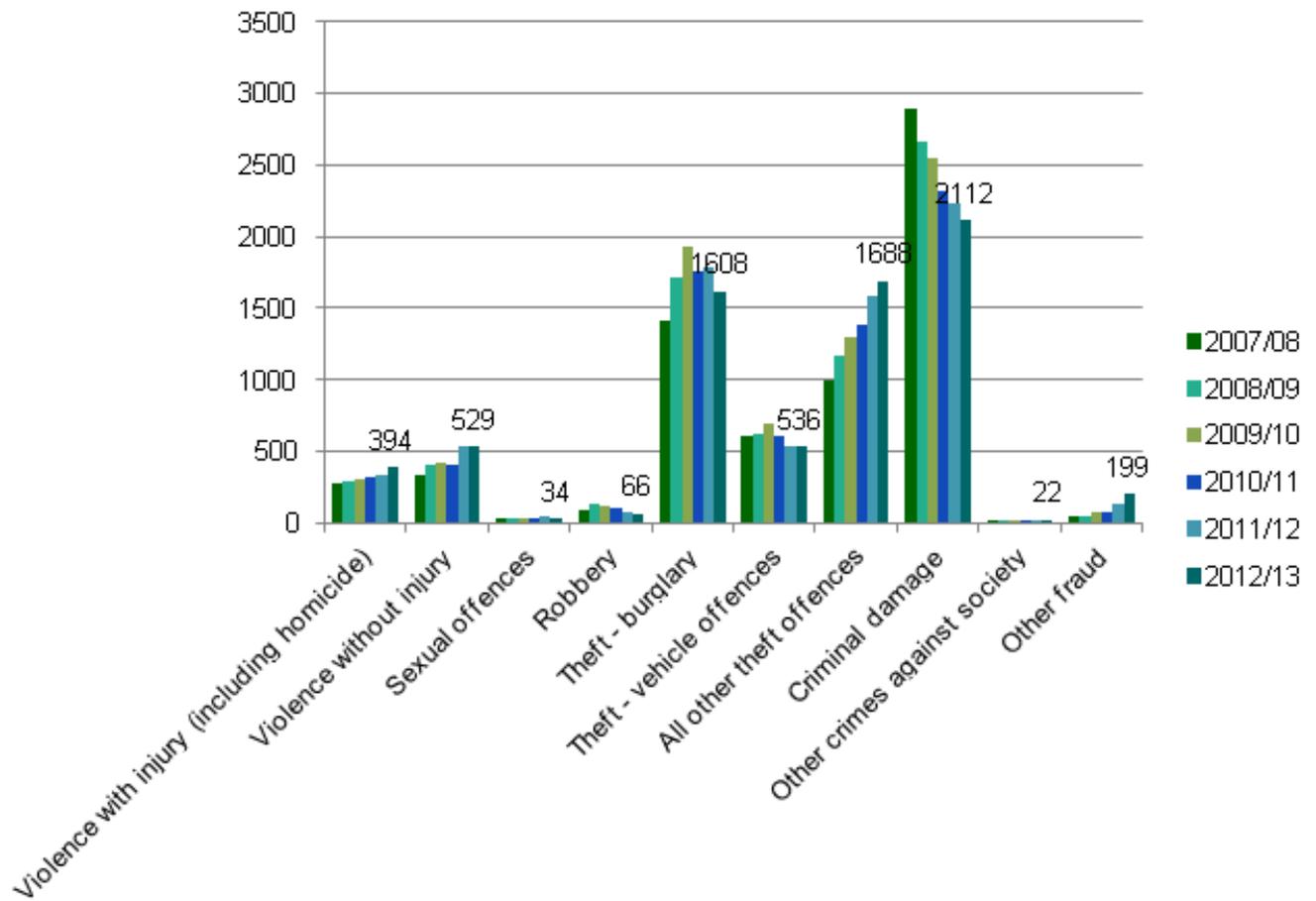
Over the six year period examined, if the nature of the crime is not considered, victims of crime, for those under 60 years old, were almost twice as likely to see their cases cleared as those aged 60 and over. The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland believes that older people should have the right to expect the same level of crime clearance as victims under 60, particularly considering the often disproportionate effect crime can have on them.

### Crimes against older people from 2007 to 2013

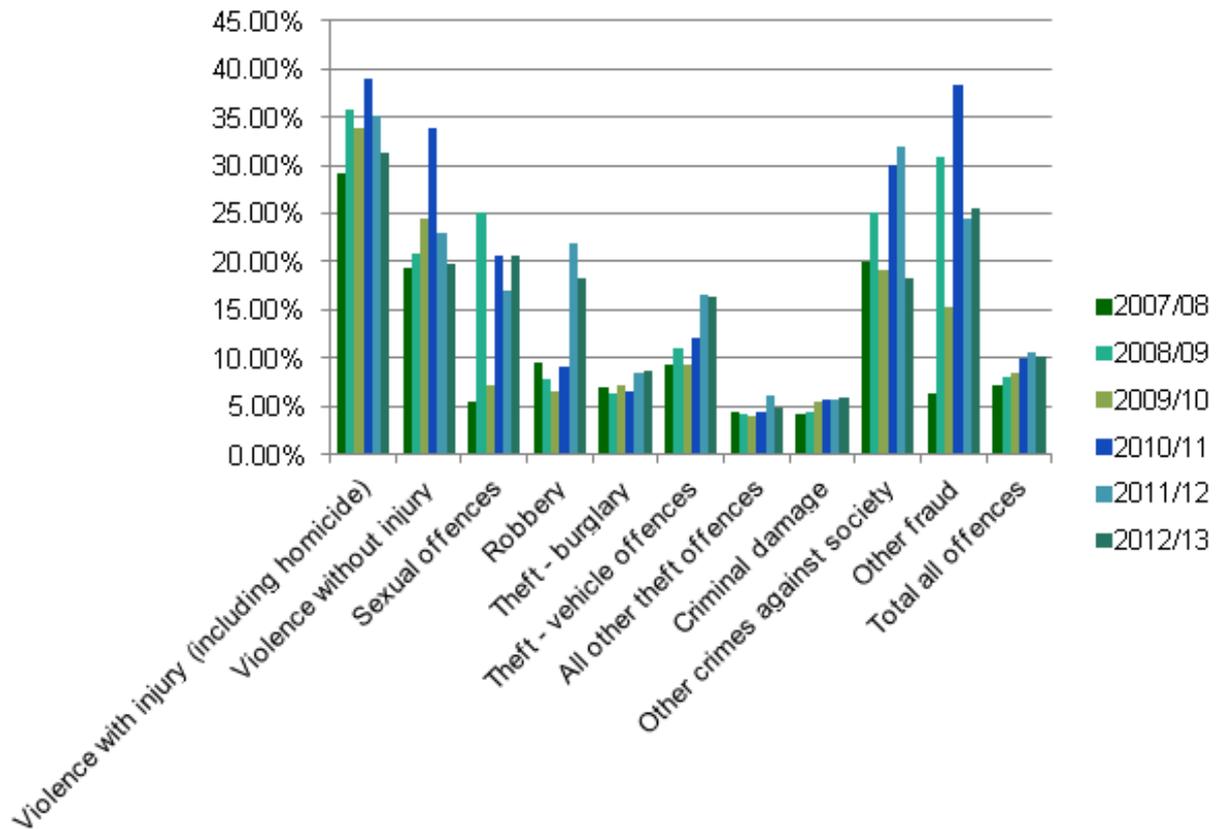


**Finding:** Criminal damage, burglary and theft (other and vehicle) account for almost nine out of ten crimes against older people with the remaining six categories making up the rest. Fortunately violent crime with injury is relatively uncommon against older people with just over 2% of all violent crime enacted against them. Nevertheless, in the year 2012/13, 394 incidents of violent crime with injury were reported where the victim was aged 60 and older.

**Number of recorded crimes against those aged 60+ in each crime category  
2007 to 2013**



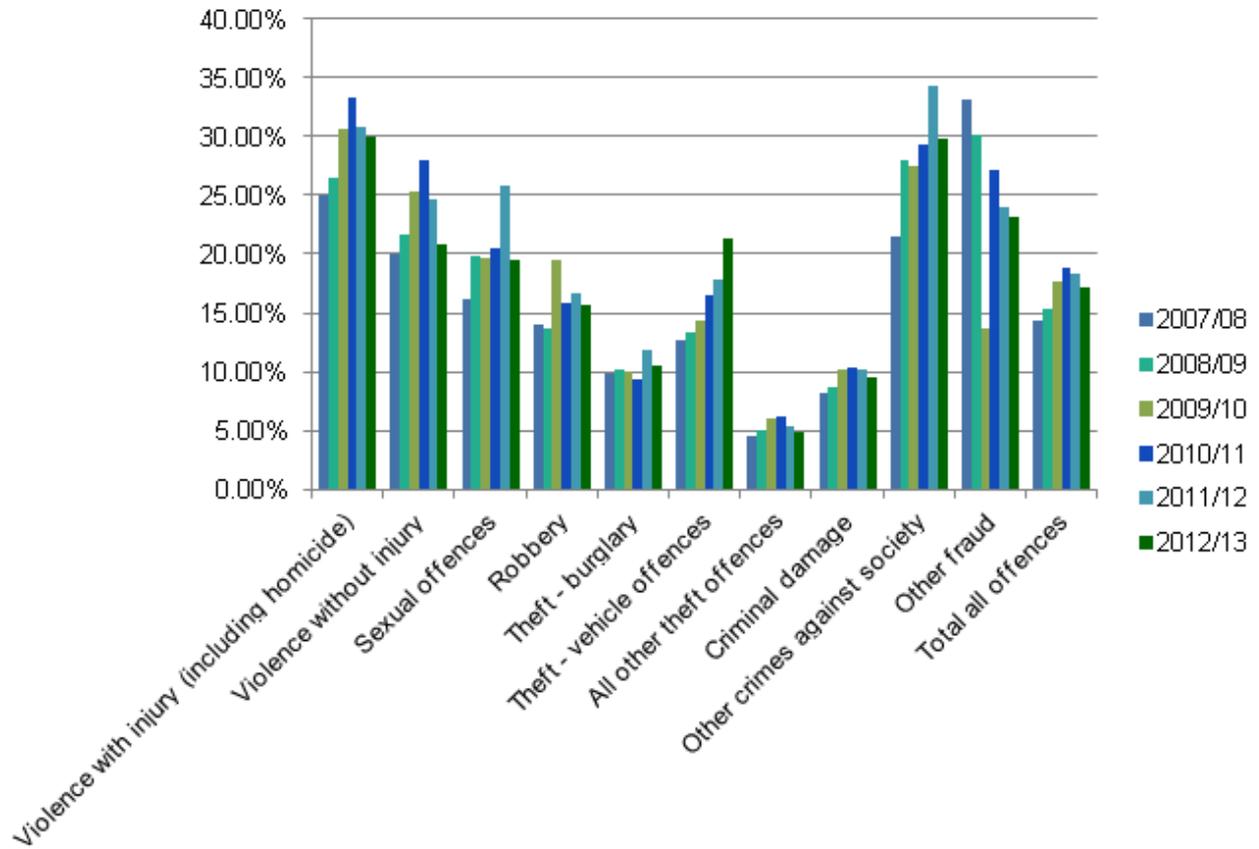
### Changes in the clearance rates for 60+ victims by each crime category 2007 to 2013



Clearance rates for crimes against older people improved from 2007/08 to 2012/13 in every category except for crimes against society (which has a very small number of crimes). This is a positive trend but it must be noted that in some instances (criminal damage and all other theft) the improvement was very limited and that by and large the clearance rates still lag behind those for crimes against people aged 59 or less.

Since April 2007 there has been little change in the police recording methods for clearance rates so such changes cannot account for any variances over time.

**Clearance rates for crimes against those aged under 60 years for each crime category 2007 to 2013**



## 6. International examples

Some examples of the initiatives taken by police forces around the world are summarised below:

### ***Milwaukee grey squad***

An initiative launched by the Milwaukee Police Department in 1980 involved the formation of an older victim specialisation unit known as 'the grey squad'. Officers working with the unit received specialised gerontological training tailored to improving interaction with older people. Research into the effectiveness of this program showed that older victims who dealt with the elderly victimisation unit felt more satisfied with the efforts of the police than those victims who were dealt with by ordinary police.<sup>15</sup>

### ***CATE- Miami***

Miami, the largest city in Florida which is often known as the retirement home of the US, has a specialist unit within its police department known as Crimes Against the Elderly or CATE. Specially trained CATE Officers are deployed throughout the city, where they maintain close contact with the senior citizens in their assigned areas. One of the roles of these officers is to develop a rapport with the resident older person, instilling a high level of confidence that police are present to protect them and respond to their needs.

### ***Seniors Assistance Team - Ontario***

Ontario's senior population is growing at a rapid rate. As the "baby boomers" (born between 1946-1965) age, the seniors population is expected to reach 6.7 million in 2021 and 9.2 million in 2041 (nearly one in four Canadians). In fact, the growth of the senior population will account for close to half of the growth of the overall Canadian population in the next four decades. As a result of these staggering statistics, the OPP established a Seniors Assistance Team Coordinator to deal with issues that will arise surrounding this growth.

The purpose of the Seniors Assistance Team is to research and monitor crime trends with respect to the impact of seniors/elder abuse and vulnerable persons' activity in Ontario in order to develop community education, referral to resources, police training as well as operational strategies to lessen the impact of victimization.

Source: Ontario Provincial Police <http://www.opp.ca/ecms/index.php?id=151>

### ***ElderLine - Mumbai, India***

Mumbai police launched ElderLine in 2005, a helpline targeted at the isolated Elderly in Mumbai. ElderLine is equipped with an advanced GPS-based tracking and dispatch system so that when a person calls Elderline, his/her exact location is revealed to the police. The helpline is manned not only with police personnel but medical experts, financial advisors and counsellors so that older people who call can receive support on a wide range of issues.

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<sup>15</sup> Gerontologist. 1991 Feb;31(1):92-101. Factors related to elderly crime victims' satisfaction with police service: the impact of Milwaukee's "Gray Squad". Zevitz RG, Gurnack AM.

## 7. Conclusion

If older people in Northern Ireland are to lead their lives relatively free from the fear of crime then confidence in the police to effectively bring offenders to prosecution is paramount. The Police Service of Northern Ireland's official statistics illustrate that there is a lower clearance rate for crimes in which older people are the victims.

Minister of Justice, David Ford, announced in May 2013 a £60,000 initiative aimed at tackling the fear of crime amongst older people. The initiative is a partnership between the Department of Justice and Age Sector Platform. This initiative is to be welcomed; however campaigns to alleviate fear of crime must be supported by action from the PSNI to demonstrate affirmative action on the issue and affect real change in outcomes.

Directors of Adult Social Services have congratulated police authorities in England, Wales and Northern Ireland for coming together under the collective name "Operation Liberal" to offer advice and help for professionals working with older people who might be threatened in their own homes.

So-called 'distraction crimes' occur when criminals, often working in gangs, gain entry to older people's homes and use distractions to help them burgle and steal. Information packs are being made available to health and social care staff to help them identify high risk individuals and to provide them with the means of identifying when this type of crime has happened and to provide them with the opportunity to share any information with the police.

The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland continues to challenge and support the PSNI and Policing Board to investigate potential methods for improving the clearance rate for crimes against older people. Police departments abroad have started their own initiatives aimed at tailoring their services for older people and undoubtedly valuable lessons can be learned from international experience.