



Crimes against the elderly in Italy, 2007–2014



Claudio Terranova^{a,*}, Greta Bevilacqua^a, Margherita Zen^b, Massimo Montisci^a

^a Legal Medicine and Toxicology, Department of Legal and Work Medicine, Toxicology and Public Health, University Hospital of Padova, via G. Falloppio n.50, Padova 35121, Italy

^b Division of Rheumatology, Department of Medicine, University of Padova, via Giustiniani n.2, Padova 35128, Italy

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 27 February 2017

Received in revised form

15 June 2017

Accepted 24 June 2017

Available online 27 June 2017

Keywords:

Elderly

Violent and non-violent crimes

Robbery

Legal medicine

ABSTRACT

Crimes against the elderly have physical, psychological, and economic consequences. Approaches for mitigating them must be based on comprehensive knowledge of the phenomenon. This study analyses crimes against the elderly in Italy during the period 2007–2014 from an epidemiological viewpoint. Data on violent and non-violent crimes derived from the Italian Institute of Statistics were analysed in relation to trends, gender and age by linear regression, T-test, and calculation of the odds ratio with a 95% confidence interval. Results show that the elderly are at higher risk of being victimized in two types of crime, violent (residential robbery) and non-violent (pick-pocketing and purse-snatching) compared with other age groups during the period considered. A statistically significant increase in residential robbery and pick-pocketing was also observed. The rate of homicide against the elderly was stable during the study period, in contrast with reduced rates in other age groups. These results may be explained by risk factors increasing the profiles of elderly individuals as potential victims, such as frailty, cognitive impairment, and social isolation. Further studies analysing the characteristics of victims are required. Based on the results presented here, appropriate preventive strategies should be planned to reduce crimes against the elderly.

© 2017 Elsevier Ltd and Faculty of Forensic and Legal Medicine. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Crimes against the elderly have consequences for public health and criminal justice.^{1–3} The extent of the phenomenon is not yet fully known^{1–3} and may increase as the population ages; the world's population of persons aged 60 or older is expected to increase from 900 million in 2015 to about 2 billion in 2050,^{1,4} and may expose more elderly people to danger from criminal actions against them.

The elderly, conventionally defined as subjects over the age of 65,⁵ represent a vulnerable category.^{1,6} Factors increasing the profiles of the elderly at such risk can be identified at individual, relational, community and socio-cultural levels.^{1,2,7,8} Individual risk factors include poor physical health, cognitive impairment, frailty, low education level, economic insecurity, and single marital status (unmarried, divorced, widowed)^{1,2,4,5,9,10}; relational risk factors refer to dependency on or relationship difficulties with the

abuser^{1,2,4,5,11,12}; and community and socio-cultural risk factors include social isolation, lack of social support, changed family structure, migration of offspring, and discrimination against older people (ageism).^{2,4,13}

These risk factors may expose the elderly to both violent^{2,3} and non-violent^{10,11,13} crimes. Violent crimes (homicide, sexual violence, and personal injury) are offenses entailing the use of force or injury to the body of another person; non-violent crimes (burglary, theft, arson, and vandalism) do not include the use of any force and are usually related only to economic damage to the victim. Particular crimes are reported in specific contexts: neglect, maltreatment and isolation are described in nursing homes and care institutions,^{1,14,15} and financial crimes,^{16,17} such as phishing (attempts to steal confidential and sensitive data via the Web)¹⁸ and other types of internet fraud, are related to the use of new technologies.

Regardless of the type of felony, the physical and psychological consequences are more serious in the elderly than in other age groups.^{19,20} This is due to the intrinsic vulnerabilities of elderly people and are manifested as aggravation of comorbidities, poorer quality of life, loss of self-confidence and autonomy, and increasing experience of discomfort, fear, distress, anger, and/or

* Corresponding author. Department of Legal and Work Medicine, Toxicology and Public Health – University Hospital of Padova, via G. Falloppio n.50, 35121 Padova, Italy.

E-mail address: claudio.terranova@unipd.it (C. Terranova).

depression.^{1,21–26}

Strategies implemented to prevent crimes against the elderly and to mitigate the consequences have included public and professional awareness campaigns, screening of potential victims and abusers, caregiver support interventions, and programs for diagnosis, rehabilitation and support of victims.^{4,27} Any approach to these problems must be based on evidence of their scale, trends, distribution, causes, and risk factors.²⁷ National statistics on crimes suffered by the elderly may represent a useful tool to evaluate the phenomenon as a first step toward the development of efficient, effective and sustainable intervention strategies.²⁷

The main purpose of this study is thus to analyse the scale and trends of violent and non-violent crimes against the elderly in Italy during the period 2007–2014. A secondary aim is to compare crimes against the elderly with those targeting other age groups.

2. Materials and methods

This is a population-based study on crimes committed against persons aged 65 or older in the period 2007–2014 in Italy. The data were taken from the Italian Institute of Statistics (ISTAT)²⁸ and include all felonies reported to the police. Felonies are actions prohibited by the Italian Penal Code and linked to criminal sanctions. Data collected by law enforcement agencies are analysed by ISTAT, a public research organization, and the main producer of official statistics serving citizens and policy-makers (<http://www.istat.it/en/>). The European Statistical System, including Eurostat and the statistical offices of all Member States, guarantees that European and Italian statistics produced in all EU Member States are reliable, based on the same methodology, with data comparable among different countries (<http://www.istat.it/en/>). Data are freely available to users.

Statistics on felonies against life, individual safety, and property were analysed and evaluated, with particular focus on first- and second-degree murder, manslaughter, attempted homicide, personal injury, sexual violence, robbery, computer and other types of fraud, criminal usury, criminal property damage, theft, purse-snatching, and pick-pocketing.

According to the Italian Penal Code, first-degree murder is any intentional murder, second-degree murder is the death of a person resulting from an act intended to cause bodily harm; manslaughter is the killing of a human being without deliberation, due to negligence, imprudence, incompetence, or non-observance of rules. Personal injury is physical or psychological damage resulting from physical aggression; sexual violence is a sexual act committed without valid consent on the part of the second person; robbery is taking money or goods by force or intimidation; fraud is a crime performed with dishonest methods to deprive another person of something deemed to be valuable; computer fraud is a financial offense committed through a computer network; criminal usury is charging higher than the maximum legal amount of interest for lending money; criminal property damage, theft, purse-snatching and pick-pocketing share the same meanings given to them in other EC countries.

Following the literature on delinquency,^{29,30} felonies were grouped into non-violent and violent acts (Table 1). For homicide, manslaughter and robbery, the specific circumstances of the event (available in the ISTAT database) were also included.

The phenomenon was analysed in relation to gender, age, and changes over time. The age groups used for comparison with individuals over the age of 65 were 18–24, 25–34, 35–44, 45–54 and 55–64. Direct standardization for all ages was performed according to European Standard Population 2013.³¹ Data were analysed by linear regression, Student's t-test, and calculation of the odds ratio with a 95% confidence interval.³² All analyses were performed with

Table 1
Violent and non-violent acts.

Violent acts	Non-violent acts
Homicide	Fraud
Attempted homicide	Computer Fraud
Second-degree murder	Criminal usury
Manslaughter	Criminal property damage
Personal Injuries	Theft
Sexual violence	Purse-snatching
Robbery	Pick-pocketing

IBM SPSS Statistics 23.0 for Windows (Chicago, IL)³³ and GraphPad Prism 5.01 (GraphPad Prism, 2009).³⁴

3. Results

In the period 2007–2014, the elderly constituted on average 20.5% of the Italian population. Elderly victims represented 68,161 persons involved in 657,142 violent acts (10.37%) and 1,990,822 out of a total of 12,895,233 non-violent criminal acts (15.43%). The totals, means and standard deviations (SD) for each type of crime are listed in Table 2.

After direct standardization for age, means and SD for violent and non-violent crimes are listed in Table 3. Personal injuries and robberies were the two violent felonies committed at the highest rates of all crimes against the elderly (mean \pm SD 6.53 \pm 0.46 and 5.91 \pm 1.44, respectively). Among non-violent acts against the elderly, theft was the crime with the highest rate (314 \pm 48.76).

According to linear regression analysis, trends of violent crimes remained stable for most of the felonies committed during the study period; a significant increase was observed only for residential robberies ($F = 6.67$; $p = 0.04$). Trends of violent crimes against the elderly per 100,000 violent crimes are shown in Fig. 1.

According to linear regression analysis, 2007–2014 involved a trend of increasing non-violent crimes, including computer fraud ($F = 12.07$; $p = 0.01$), criminal usury ($F = 7.04$; $p = 0.03$), theft ($F = 10.64$; $p = 0.01$), and pick-pocketing ($F = 5.66$; $p = 0.05$); trends per 100,000 of non-violent acts are shown in Fig. 2.

The rate of felonies committed against men over the age of 65 is higher than that for women over 65, except for sexual violence, pick-pocketing and purse-snatching (Table 4). Student's t-test shows significant differences between the means for violent and non-violent felonies targeting men and those targeting women, apart from mafia- and robbery-related homicides and residential robbery (Table 4).

Linear regression analysis shows that, as regards violent crime, subjects over 65 are more at risk than other age groups in relation to homicide rate (higher than the homicide rate observed in the 18–24, 35–44 and 55–64 age groups) and residential robberies (higher than the rate observed in all other age groups). Street robberies were more frequent against subjects aged 18–34 (Fig. 3) and robbery was more frequent in victims aged 25–34; personal lesions were more frequently carried out in all younger categories, compared with the elderly.

As regards non-violent crimes, the elderly were at higher risk than other age groups of pick-pocketing and purse-snatching ($p < 0.05$) (Fig. 3), but not computer fraud or other non-violent felonies.

4. Discussion

Following the aims of this study, we analysed the scale and trends of violent and non-violent crimes against the elderly, and then compared crimes against the elderly with those targeting

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/4760652>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/4760652>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)