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Meeting the Needs of the Senior Community Through
Community Policing and TRIAD

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ABSTRACT

More people are reaching advanced old age than ever before. In 1900, the over sixty-five age group accounted for just four percent of the United States population. By 1980, the proportion of people over the age of sixty-five had increased to just over eleven percent. Statisticians have projected that between 1989 and 2030, the sixty-five plus population will double, and the population of age eighty-five plus will triple.

The diminished physical skills of these citizens and their lack of understanding of the service available from law enforcement agencies make senior citizens more vulnerable to the criminal element. Therefore, in the spirit of the community policing concept, the International Association of Chiefs of Police and the National Sheriffs' Association joined the American Association of Retired Persons to develop a strategy to enhance law enforcement service to Senior Americans. An organization called TRIAD resulted from these discussions in 1988. Law enforcement agencies work together with leaders of the senior communities through TRIAD to identify problems and fears of the seniors and to educate the seniors concerning the police service.

Law enforcement administrators are extremely busy persons. Administrators give their attention to the programs that are interesting to them at the time or that are emphasized to them. Therefore, it is imperative that law enforcement administrators select subordinates who have special interest or skills in specific areas to oversee and maintain programs such as TRIAD after the pacts are signed, and new programs capture their attention. Most agencies have personnel who have such special talents and interests. Many of these personnel are not sworn peace officers, but are civilian employees who can serve their agency at less cost than using sworn personnel.

Table of Contents

Section	Page
Introduction	1
Historical, Legal, or Theoretical	2
Review of Literature or Practice	5
Discussion of Relevant Issues	8
Conclusions and Recommendations	11
Bibliography	

Introduction

Between 1989 and 2030, the sixty-five plus population is expected to double. By 2030, the elderly will be proportionately more in number than young people in the population: twenty-two percent will be sixty-five plus and twenty-one percent will be under eighteen. The population age eighty-five plus is expected to triple during that time (Police Executive Research Forum, Module II-4). The number of Senior Americans who are victims of crime is ever increasing. The diminished physical skills of these citizens and their lack of understanding of the service available from law enforcement agencies make senior citizens more vulnerable to the criminal element. Many Senior Americans are reluctant to report crimes from fear of retaliation or a feeling that law enforcement agencies simply do not appreciate their problems.

This project is an investigation of the necessity of a coordinator in a law enforcement agency assigned to work through an organization like TRIAD to address the needs and concerns of the community of Senior Americans. The project includes three steps. The first step includes a review of books, journals, and statistical reports concerning the increasing number of Senior Americans and the increasing number of offenses against Senior Americans. The second step includes a study of TRIAD and how to implement this program. The third step concerns the duties of a coordinator to serve the TRIAD through a committee known as a S.A.L. T. (Seniors And Lawmen Together) committee. This project is intended primarily for review by the Abilene Police Department. The information presented in this project, however, is useful to other police chiefs, sheriffs, and leaders of the Senior Americans.

The intended outcome of this project is to reinforce the knowledge held by law enforcement administrators of the increasing potential for the victimization of a rapidly

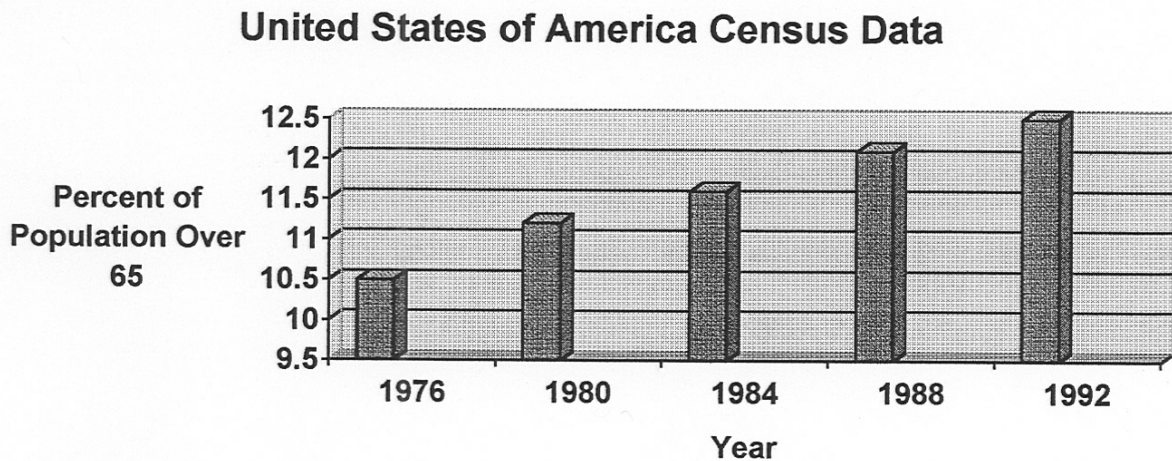
growing segment of the population, the Senior Americans. It is intended to make them aware of TRIAD, a vehicle that can improve the relationship between law enforcement agencies and Senior Americans. It is also intended to present the need for a member of the law enforcement agency to be available to address the needs of the Senior Americans. This member of the law enforcement agency can be either sworn or non-sworn.

Historical, Legal or Theoretical Context

Throughout its history, the law enforcement community has faced many different challenges. One such challenge consists of the unique problems of the senior citizens of the community. As the new millenium is upon us, new medical techniques and modern scientific discoveries make it possible to extend the life expectancy of the human race. In addition, the children who were born in the post World War II baby boom will soon enter the ranks of the Senior Americans. We all go through the aging process. We may not want to admit that we are growing older or that we cannot do all the things we once did, but the fact is, aging slows some of our abilities (Godwin, 68).

More people are reaching advanced old age than ever before. In 1900, the over sixty-five age group accounted for just four percent of the United States population. By 1980, the proportion of people over the age of sixty-five had increased to just over eleven percent. By 2030, twenty-two percent of the population will be over sixty-five years old (police Executive Research Forum, Module II-4). One has only to look at the Census of the United States of America to gain a better perspective of this increase in the population of Senior Americans. The

following graph shows the increase of the percentage of the population over the age of sixty-five from 1976 through 1992 (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1976 - 1992).



Senior Americans are often pawns in frauds that are costing all Americans millions of dollars each year. U.S. Senator William S. Cohen has conducted research into health care fraud. Senator Cohen has learned that health care fraud is quite a lucrative endeavor. This fraud does not discriminate against any part of the system. No single type of health care provider group dominates the market on health care fraud. These offenders run the gamut from small companies or practitioners who occasionally pad their Medicare billings to large criminal organizations that steal millions of dollars from Medicare, Medicaid, and other insurers (Cohen, 6). Some experts have even said that some criminals who once distributed cocaine are switching from drug dealing to health care fraud schemes because the chances of being caught are so small, and the profits are large (Cohen, 7). This type of crime against Senior Americans requires that we educate these citizens about such fraud.

During the early 1970s, officials in New York City became increasingly aware and concerned about the rising number of crimes being committed against Senior Americans. Consequently, they established a citywide program that was designed to protect, educate, and assist their senior citizens. The city tasked the Department for the Aging as its official advocate and planner for the needs of its older citizens. After only two years of operation, this program became highly successful. Lines of communication among senior citizens' action committees, the Department for the Aging, and law enforcement personnel were established (Morello, 147).

A new concept that emphasizes community cooperation in combating these problems is succeeding in a number of areas throughout the Nation. This innovative concept is the TRIAD Program. The TRIAD concept emerged in 1987 when several members of the International Association of Chiefs of Police (IACP), National Sheriffs' Association (NSA), and members of the American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) met to consider mutual crime prevention concerns and to plan for the future. The chiefs and sheriffs who met believed it important to develop a strategy to enhance law enforcement services to Senior Americans and to expand efforts to prevent their victimization (Cantrell, 19-20). The American Association of Retired Persons, the International Association of Chiefs of Police, and the National Sheriffs' Association signed a cooperative agreement in 1988 to work together to reduce both criminal victimization and unwarranted fear of crime affecting Senior Americans (Heath). Texas Attorney General Dan Morales addressed the first-ever Texas TRIAD Roundup in August 1997. At that conference, he told peace officers and senior citizens that there would be 3.5 million Senior Texans by year 2020. This number will be the third largest senior population in our nation (Texas Triad News, 1). On August 19, 1997, the heads of the law enforcement agencies in Taylor County, Texas signed a TRIAD agreement with representatives of AARP and Attorney General Dan Morales (Heath).

Review of Literature or Practice

Herman Goldstein has written that in an attempt to form a tailor-made response to certain aspects of crime, police departments might find themselves working with various services for Senior Americans to deal with problems of fear that may exist (H. Goldstein, 45). Police agencies must identify the size of the population of Senior Americans in its community and the types of services that population needs now and will need in the next ten years (Godwin, 68).

Some of the problems related to aging include decreased physical strength and mental alertness, lack of economic resources to meet medical expenses or increased living costs, and reduced contacts with or even isolation from the community. When the elderly citizens are victimized, they are more likely than younger crime victims to face offenders armed with guns and to be accosted in or near their own homes (Kratcoski, 87).

Leonard A. Sipes, Jr. has written that Seniors Americans have a serious crime problem. He has stated that persons age sixty-five and over share the highest rate of purse snatching victimization with the twenty to twenty-four age group. They have the highest rate of robbery victimization where the offender completed the theft, as well as the highest rate of robbery where the victim was attacked. Senior Americans are also frequent targets of fraud and abuse (Sipes, 45). Arnold Goldstein reminds us also that the community of Senior Americans is more susceptible to fear of being victims of crime than are other age groups. In his works, Goldstein has written that Senior Americans in society represent a special group, primarily because of their vulnerability. Although they may not be victimized more than other age groups in society, the effects of victimization are especially devastating to older people (A. Goldstein, 25). According

to Yin, there are three dimensions to fear of crime: a cognitive, an emotive, and a behavioral dimension. The cognitive dimension is the perception that one is exposed to and vulnerable to victimization. It also recognizes that victimization has serious consequences. The emotive dimension is the sensation of flight in relation to the threat of crime. The behavioral dimension refers to activities such as purchasing firearms, avoiding streets at night, installing security systems, and not trusting neighbors (Yin, 31). Fear of crime includes an assessment of the risk of victimization coupled with an appraisal of the seriousness of crimes committed. Surveys have been conducted which show that Senior Americans suffer the highest level of fear of crime of the age groups surveyed (Yin, 55).

It is often asserted that Senior Americans are actually victimized far more frequently than police statistics indicate, because Senior Americans are especially reluctant to report the offenses due to fear of retaliation or a sense of shame. We can also argue that regardless of the frequency of victimization, the impact of an offense on Senior Americans is much more devastating economically, physically, and psychologically than it is for younger citizens. Senior Americans generally have fewer financial resources making economic loss from criminal offenses devastating in many instances. Furthermore, the fragile physical condition of many senior citizens renders them more susceptible than are younger citizens to serious injury. A survey conducted by the u. S. Department of Justice also showed that sixty percent of the population of Senior Americans is female. Females comprise only about fifty percent of the rest of the population (U.S. Department of Justice Analytic Report, 3).

Fear of crime among Senior Americans is a factor that must be considered. There are many facets to the impact of crimes on Senior Americans, but fear of victimization is more of a problem than crime itself (Costa, 13). Fear among Senior Americans is real. This fear of crime

might not be realistic when compared with the probability of being victimized, but this fact is of little significance to these citizens. Senior Americans have varying degrees of concern about crime. Some make important changes in lifestyle and even deprive themselves because of fear. Others worry needlessly about being victims, even when the statistics show a low probability that anything will ever happen (Costa, 21). Paul Hahn wrote that more than one half of the Senior Americans he surveyed indicated they had limited or changed their patterns of living in order to minimize their risk of victimization (Hahn, 10). Further, fear may be perceived either in terms of doubt about one's own capacity to deal with the situation or of the magnitude of the threat. "If threat is perceived, behavior is modified so as to cope with the threat" (Goldsmith, 26). Many Senior Americans are trapped in the inner city in the larger communities. They are victimized because they are there, not necessarily, because they are seniors. Victimization of Senior Americans is not a problem of volume. The problem is how Senior Americans perceive themselves as victims (Edelman, 58).

Discussion of Relevant Issues

There are several relevant issues to consider in evaluating the need or appropriateness of having a person in a law enforcement agency whom would be tasked with coordinating that agency's goals with those of the community of Senior Americans. The first issue consists of recognizing that the community of Senior Americans is indeed at risk of becoming victims of crime and how adversely such victimization will affect them. The second issue consists of the law enforcement agency's evaluation of the TRIAD concept to ascertain if it is a feasible alternative for them. The final issue is whether a law enforcement agency should assign personnel to

represent the agency to the senior community and to keep the agency advised of the needs and fears of the Senior Americans.

Consider an elderly lady. She lives alone in a house long since emptied of family in an area that has been her home for most of her life. She is old, barely subsisting on monthly checks from the government and a small pension. Her home has become a prison in a neighborhood increasingly populated by persons she does not know or understand, by hordes of children who seem undisciplined, and by bored young men with nothing to do. She is among a growing number of citizens of our community who are frightened of their neighbors and many times the police officers (Edelman, 57). In the past fifteen plus years, crime against Senior Americans has become an important political issue. Public awareness of the problems of Senior Americans has increased. This public awareness fueled by media accounts of crimes against Senior Americans, spurred law enforcement agencies to undertake a series of initiatives to address this issue. These initiatives were oriented toward crime prevention, public education, victim assistance and data gathering. Organizations comprised of Senior Americans played a large part in increasing public awareness of the issues involving these citizens (Edelman, 60).

One tool based in the concept of Community Oriented Policing designed to combat the victimization of Senior Americans is the TRIAD. A TRIAD consists of a three-way effort among a sheriff, the police chief(s) in the county, and AARP or older/retired leadership in the area who agree to work together. The primary goals are to reduce the criminal victimization of Senior Americans and to enhance the delivery of law enforcement services to this population. A TRIAD provides the opportunity for an exchange of information between law enforcement and Senior Americans. It focuses on reducing unwarranted fear of crime and improving the quality of life for seniors. A TRIAD is tailored to meet the needs of each community and is guided by a senior

advisory councilor S.A.L.T. committee (Heath). Since the initial meeting in 1987, the National Sheriffs' Association and the International Association of Chiefs of Police have held joint crime prevention meetings during their mid-year conferences as well as during their annual conferences. The importance of the TRIAD concept was confirmed in March 1990, when the FBI hosted seventy-five chiefs, sheriffs, and AARP volunteers from throughout the United States in an effort to establish a national agenda on crime and the elderly, (Miller, 15). By 1991, five states including New Mexico, Kentucky, Louisiana, Illinois, and Florida had signed statewide TRIAD agreements (Miller, 15). A TRIAD assesses the needs of a particular community. Areas with serious crime problems may focus on crime prevention measures and victim assistance. Where Senior Americans are not often targets of crime, the S.A.L.T. Council may decide to concentrate on reassurance programs, training for law enforcement personnel, and involving volunteers within the law enforcement agencies. The TRIAD concept is a philosophical agreement to combine the leadership, talents and insight of law enforcement and Senior Americans to focus on present and future strategies for reducing victimization of seniors (Heath). Many crime analysts predict that the mission of the law enforcement community in the future will be balanced between high technology and what is known as high touch. High touch is defined as high involvement with the citizens of our communities. It is in this context that the TRIAD concept should be applied to increase awareness of the needs of the elderly in relationship to the services available from law enforcement (Miller, 16).

Since 1972, AARP's Criminal Justice Services Section has conducted research and produced training materials on the subject of crime and Senior Americans. In 1986, a conference on violent crime and its impact on Senior Americans was held at the FBI Academy. At this conference, eyes were reopened through horror stories of victimization, trauma and the

psychological impact of crime on elderly victims (Miller, 15). In 1988, representatives of the American Association of Retired Persons, International Association of Chiefs of Police, and National Sheriffs' Association signed an agreement establishing the concept of a national TRIAD program. The TRIAD concept is a philosophical agreement to combine the leadership, talents, and insight of these three national associations to focus on present and future strategies for reducing victimization of Senior Americans. Under the TRIAD agreement, each group commits itself to a collaborative effort to reduce victimization and help victims. The groups work to train law enforcement and criminal justice professionals about the needs of Senior Americans. The groups also train Senior Americans in crime prevention tactics. The TRIAD represents a shared responsibility to review the safety of Senior Americans and to make the community a safer and better place to live (Miller, 16).

Conclusions and Recommendations

This author has worked in the law enforcement field for more than twenty years. Administrators come and go, as do programs that are designed to provide better service to the community. Almost all law enforcement agencies have a Crime Prevention Division or a Community Services Division that includes crime prevention specialists in its complement of personnel. Personnel in other divisions of a law enforcement agency, such as patrol and investigative services, may have a keen interest in Community Oriented Policing ideals. They, however, do not regularly have sufficient time or resources to maintain contact with one specific sector of citizens like Senior Americans and to address their most current needs in a prompt and efficient manner.

Law enforcement agencies across the nation are becoming more aware of the necessity of adopting the philosophy of Community Oriented Policing. They are becoming more sensitive to the needs of specific groups of citizens. Modern medical technology combined with the large number of citizens born in the post World War II "baby boom" makes the population of Senior Americans the fastest growing population in the nation. The TRIAD philosophy is written to assist law enforcement agencies in addressing the needs of this growing number of citizens while educating the senior citizens about the needs and legal restrictions of the law enforcement community.

It is essential that a specific subdivision of a law enforcement agency be tasked with maintaining the ideals of the TRIAD agreement after the TRIAD is established. As time passes, other needs take the attention of law enforcement administrators, and administrations will change. The only things that will not change are the needs and fears of Senior Americans.

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