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Exploring seniors perceptions of crime: a report of a social survey conducted in the city of Nedlands

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SCHOOL OF COMMUNITY AND LANGUAGE STUDIES
Centre for the Development of Human Resources

EXPLORING SENIORS' PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME:

A Report of a Social Survey Conducted in the
City of Nedlands

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EXPLORING SENIORS' PERCEPTIONS OF CRIME: A REPORT
OF A SOCIAL SURVEY CONDUCTED IN THE CITY OF
NEDLANDS

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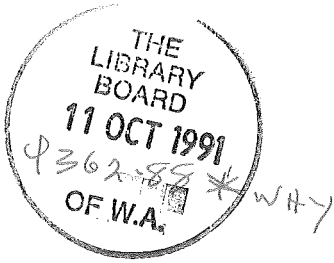


TABLE OF CONTENTS

Table of Contents	3
Abstract	5
Notes on the Division of Labour	7
1.0 Exploring Fear of Crime	9
2.0 Survey Methods	17
3.0 History - Memory	23
4.0 Present Concerns	27
5.0 Accommodation and Target 'Hardening'	33
6.0 Awareness	39
7.0 Ideal World	45
8.0 Conclusions	51
9.0 Recommendations	55
10.0 Bibliography	57
11.0 Appendices	
One : Table 1- Victimization Rates	61
Two : Interview Schedule	63

ABSTRACT

In this exploratory survey we investigated the perceptions of, and fear of crime in elderly persons. Interviews were conducted with eighteen elderly residents of the City of Nedlands, an age-heterogeneous community which enjoys a high socio-economic status. Due to the small number of people interviewed the survey is qualitative in character but reflects the perceptions of a particular segment of metropolitan elderly persons. It was shown that the participants consider that there is more crime, of a more serious and threatening nature, in present times than there was fifty years ago. There was no indication of fear of becoming victims of crime, however those who had been victims showed a greater concern. Most indicated that they felt secure in their present accommodation. None felt insecure enough to want to shift. Their lack of fear was demonstrated by the adoption of only basic security measures. Activities were not curtailed to any great degree, other than those that could also be attributed to age related activity decreases. Their concern regarding the increase in crime was not a personal concern but more a societal concern.

NOTES ON THE DIVISION OF LABOUR

Diana Whyte drafted the interview schedule, interviewed all field respondents, collated the data, drafted the original manuscript, and was responsible for the writing and word-processing.

David Wiles conceived the project in 1989, linked researcher and agency, and provided theoretical, critical, and editorial feedback throughout the research process.

Tessa Tarrant provided the agency auspice and the survey sample, along with ongoing collaboration, advice and encouragement.

1.0 EXPLORING FEAR OF CRIME

1.1 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

There is a generally held view in society that the incidence of crime is increasing. It is also suggested that there is a greater degree of violence in the crimes that are committed. This has led to a concern within the community in general and amongst seniors in particular. As a result measures have been instigated on community and commercial levels to address this perceived problem.

The Police Department of Western Australia has taken the initiative in community education, the major contribution being the introduction of a Neighbourhood Watch Scheme which is a self-help programme co-ordinated by the Office of Crime Prevention and in association with the State Government Insurance Office. The Office of Crime Prevention has also produced publications dealing with help and advice on personal, property, and neighbourhood protection. These publications have been supported by various insurance and assurance Companies.

At the commercial level there has been an increase in companies providing alarm and security systems to cover cars, homes and businesses. The use of these deterrents is encouraged by insurance companies because increasing crime results in higher premiums to their policy holders.

1.2 LITERATURE REVIEW

David Biles (1983) looked at the issue of the elderly as victims of crime and their fear of crime. He reported on the first National Crime Victims Survey, conducted in 1975 and published in 1979, with a sample of 18,694 persons. It was shown that the sixty years and over age group had a lower victimization rate than all other age groups over all offences (see Appendix One).

However in that survey it was indicated that the elderly were more fearful than other groups, as shown below :

Table 1 : HOW SAFE INDIVIDUALS FEEL WALKING ALONE IN THEIR NEIGHBOURHOOD AT NIGHT : BY AGE

Years	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Very safe	24.2	24.4	27.2	28.3	29.3	29.5	23.1
Reasonably safe	52.6	48.7	48.7	48.1	49.2	45.8	43.7
Somewhat unsafe	16.1	18.4	16.3	16.3	13.3	15.3	17.8
Very unsafe	7.1	8.5	7.8	7.3	8.2	9.4	15.4

(n = 18,694)

Biles (1983, P 22)

Biles claims that there is a danger that that this anxiety can cause a restriction in social and recreational activities. Even though the incidence of crime against the elderly is less than offences against the general population, the effects and consequences are often more profound. The prominence given by the media to crimes against the elderly is also likely to increase fear.

Later figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics report Victims of Crime Australia 1983, published in 1986, confirm that increasing age equates with lower rates of victimization, as can be seen in the Table below :

Table 2 : VICTIMS OF PERSONAL CRIME PER THOUSAND OF ALL PERSONS IN EACH AGE GROUP BY TYPE OF OFFENCE (a) RATES PER THOUSAND

Age yrs	Type of offence					Total
	Sexual asslt. (b)	Motor veh. theft	Robbery	Other theft	Assault	
15-19	7	3	11	106	67	163
20-24	14	19	12	106	67	185
25-29	10	10	6	79	50	135
30-34	6	8	4	58	36	98
35-39	4	10	7	57	32	98
40-44	--	12	4	46	24	79
45-49	--	9	5	43	23	72
50-54	--	5	4	37	20	64
55-59	--	5	3	28	12	46
60-64	--	3	--	24	10	38
65-69	--	4	--	16	5	28
70-74	--	5	--	16	--	24
75 and over	--	--	--	23	--	25
Total	5	8	6	59	34	98

(a)

Rates are based on persons aged 15 years and over with the exception of sexual assault rates which are based on females 18 years and over. (b) Sexual assault questions were asked only of females aged 18 years and over.

(ABS. May, 1986 Cat. 4506.0 p.11)

Fattah (1986) also confirms that official criminal statistics and victimization surveys in the United States, Europe, Canada and Australia indicate that increasing age correlates with a decreasing likelihood of being a victim of crime, and that the victimization that does occur is unlikely to be violent. The life-style of the elderly is seen as the major contributing factor to this low incidence. They are less likely to spend time away from home and therefore not as likely to associate with offenders. Even though the elderly have a low victimization rate they do express high levels of fear of victimization. When they are victims of crime the effects are likely to be more severe physically, psychologically, and financially.

Thus active participation of the elderly themselves in crime prevention policies and strategies is recommended to reduce the incidence and impact of victimization.

Jones (1987) looked at the fear of crime among 159 elderly tenants of bungalows and flats in council estates in British urban areas. Respondents were asked what they felt most anxious about, and what they considered other elderly neighbours felt most anxious about. The results are shown below :

Table 3 : CURRENT ANXIETIES OF A SAMPLE OF ELDERLY PEOPLE

Personally anxious about	%	Other elderly people anxious about	%
Health issues	31	Health issues	4
Crime related matters	13	Crime related matters	40
Range of other issues	13	Range of other issues	5
Money	8	Money	8
The future	5	Isolation/loneliness	8
Don't know	27	Don't know	33
No reply	<u>3</u>	No reply	<u>2</u>
	<u>100</u>		<u>100</u>
(n=159)			

In relation to crime-related matters these seniors saw others as being more anxious than themselves. This would indicate that the fear of crime is more a social concern than a personal concern. This would be influenced by the fact that the number of people who had actually been victims was low, as indicated by the table compiled from daily records of 1,818 properties over a six month period, as shown below :

Table 4 : NUMBERS OF CRIME-RELATED INCIDENTS
OVER SIX MONTH PERIOD AMONG ELDERLY TENANTS

Crime-related incidents	-3 Winter -3 Summer	
Months		
Vandalism & youth nuisance	26	16
Attempted break-ins	6	9
Break-ins & theft	15	12
	<u>47</u>	<u>37</u>
(n=1,818)	Jones (1987, p 194)	

1.3 AUSTRALIAN DATA

The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] (1990a) provides statistics for the predominant criminal offences in Australia over three years. They are shown below :

Table 5 : Predominant Criminal Offences

	1986	1987	1988
Murder no.	299	309	294
Assault(a) no.	55,783	62,041	71,412
Break and enter no.	283,923	302,863	323,241
Motor vehicle no.	132,959	125,427	126,903
(a) Includes serious and non-serious assault and sexual assault			

Reproduced from ABS Pamphlet AGPS 90/20457

These figures identify burglary as the main type of offence, and indicate a decrease of 2 per cent for murder, a 28 per cent increase for assault, a 14 per cent increase in break and enter and a 5 per cent decrease in motor vehicle theft between the years 1986 and 1988.

The equivalent total population figures for the same period are :

Table 6 : Australian Demographic Statistics-Estimated Residential Population Figures

1986	1987	1988
Population 16,139,000	16,398,900	16,697,000

(ABS. March, 1990 Cat. 3101.0)

This represents a 3 per cent increase in the total population for the same three years.

The Office of Crime Prevention of the Western Australian Police Department provided details of offences for the City of Nedlands from statistics which are supplied for the Neighbourhood Watch Program. For the five months from March to July 1990 there were 467 offences recorded. This represents an average of 93.4 offences per month. The following table shows the offences by type and frequency :

Table 7:TYPE AND FREQUENCY OF OFFENCES IN NEDLANDS 1990

OFFENCE	MARCH	APRIL	MAY	JUNE	JULY	TOTAL
FRAUD	-	1	-	-	-	1
MISC/ PERSON	-	-	1	-	-	1
ROBBERY	-	-	1	-	-	1
ARSON	1	-	1	-	-	2
ASSAULT/ COMMON	5	-	-	1	2	8
BRK&ENTER/ (COMM)	18	13	31	14	29	105
BRK&ENTER/ (RES)	9	12	10	12	5	48
DAMAGE	8	4	14	10	23	59
M/VEHICLE ON PREMISES	1	2	2	2	3	10
STEALING (COMM)	2	-	3	1	3	9
STEALING (RES)	33	17	19	18	27	114
STEALING (RES)	27	13	27	17	25	109
	<u>104</u>	<u>62</u>	<u>109</u>	<u>75</u>	<u>117</u>	<u>467</u>

1.4 SUMMARY

It was the issue of how this perceived and demonstrated increase in crime was likely to affect seniors that suggested a local survey to evaluate the perception of fear of crime among seniors. The elderly have been portrayed widely in the media as being susceptible to crime. This view was also expressed in the publication Positive Steps-Help & Advice on Personal Safety which, while acknowledging that the media sensationalised events, noted that in fact :

....not all, particularly women and the elderly, can feel safe.

Far too many are afraid of becoming victims of harrassment, robbery and assault. (p.1.)

Current examples of media coverage can be seen in the local newspapers :

Elderly man bashed. The West Australian, August 25, 1990, p.13
 Hoodlum jailed for elderly man attack. The West Australian, August 25, 1990, p.30
 Hearing date set for granny killer charges. The West Australian, June 14, 1990, p.49
 Elderly woman raped. The West Australian, July 9, 1990, p.32
 ... sex attack on an arthritic pensioner.... The West Australian, June 8, 1990, p.31
 Agony of an old lady. Daily News, November 17, 1989, p.10-11.

Thus media stories often dwell on violent crime and the vulnerability of aged persons.

Returning to the local scene, the brutal assault and murder in January 1989 of an 84 year old widow, living alone in a house in the City of Nedlands, raised the research question of how seniors in that area perceived crime and the extent of their fear of crime.

2.0 SURVEY METHODS

2.1 NEDLANDS ELDERLY PERSON'S HOME SUPPORT SERVICE (NEPHSS)

Initially advice and co-operation was sought from NEPHSS. Over the years NEPHSS and the "Aged Studies" course have enjoyed mutual collaboration including student placements, one example of which was a research project involving 142 seniors (Wiles and Brienne, 1989). This service was established in August 1982 and is staffed by a full-time Co-ordinator, a part-time clerical worker and volunteers. They provide a range of services aimed at assisting the elderly persons of the City of Nedlands to maintain a quality lifestyle while remaining in their own homes. Statistics for the month of June 1990 show that there were 514 clients and 93 volunteers registered. During that month 482 services were delivered to 134 persons. There were 341 jobs done by 55 volunteers involving an estimated 492 volunteer hours. Several of the clients of the service are also volunteers.

2.2 SURVEY SAMPLE

Tessa Tarrant, the Co-ordinator of NEPHSS, selected and approached eighteen people to participate in the Survey. These people were either volunteers or clients of the service, or both. The table below shows their involvement with the service.

Table 8 : RESPONDENTS AS USERS/VOLUNTEERS OF NEPHSS

	VOLUNTEER	CLIENT	V/C(a)	C/V(b)	TOTAL
NUMBER	NIL	10	7	1	18

(n=18)

(a)Volunteer/client-mainly volunteer

(b)Client/Volunteer-mainly client

It is to be noted that the selection process of the respondents excluded people that were already known to be fearful. This was due to a concern that the interview might increase that fearfulness. However the respondents that were selected were not known to be fearless.

The respondents all enjoyed reasonable health and were mobile and active. Many still drove their own cars and were involved in outside events such as bowls, bridge and musical activities.

The age range of the respondents was from sixty-nine to ninety-five years as shown in Table 10 :

Table 9 : AGE AND GENDER OF RESPONDENTS

GENDER	AGE RANGE					TOTAL
	65-69	75-79	80-84	85-89	90+	
MALE	-	-	-	2	-	2
FEMALE	1	4	6	4	1	16
(n=18)	1	4	6	6	1	18

All respondents were living independently with minimum assistance. The majority of the respondents were female and living alone, mainly in their own homes as shown in Tables 11 and 12 :

Table 10 : MARITAL STATUS AND GENDER

GENDER	MARRIED	SINGLE	WIDOWED	DIV. SEP.	TOTAL
MALE	1	-	1	-	2
FEMALE	2	1	12	1	16
(n=18)	3	1	13	1	18

Table 11 : ACCOMMODATION AND TYPE OF TENURE

TENURE	HOUSE	UNIT	DUPLEX	TOTAL
OWNER	13	-	1	14
TENANT	1	2	1	4
(n=18)	14	2	2	18

Most of the respondents were long-time residents of the City of Nedlands and had also occupied their present accommodation for a considerable time, as shown in the following table :

Table 12 : LENGTH OF STAY IN CURRENT ACCOMMODATION AND IN THE CITY OF NEDLANDS

	NUMBER OF YEARS						TOTAL
	LIVING IN	0-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	
PRESENT ACCOMMOD.	5	1	1	3	3	5	18
CITY OF NEDLANDS	4	-	1	1	3	9	18
(n=18)							

One third had lived at their present address, and one half had lived in the City of Nedlands for half a century or more. These data would indicate a level of residential stability of the respondents and suggest a satisfaction with their locality.

2.3 THE INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

An initial planning meeting was held on 14 June 1990 between Dr David Wiles, Ms Tessa Tarrant and Mrs Diana Whyte when the aim of the study was defined as being an examination of the perception and fear of crime among seniors. At this time nine guidelines were determined, and it was from these guidelines that the interview schedule was designed (See Appendix 2). The questions endeavoured to ascertain the perception of fear among seniors and also to gauge the knowledge and use of security aids. Care was taken to ensure that the questions themselves would not create fear.

The knowledge and use of security aids was of interest to NEPHSS which has noticed a certain resistance to the use of such devices. The service does provide extensive literature on aids that are available, and publications that are aimed at security of self and possessions. In August this year NEPHSS offered a seminar on 'Self Protection for the Elderly'. This seminar was based on Worksheets from a project funded by the Commonwealth Health Department in co-operation with the Tasmanian Health Department (Smith, 1985). The purpose of the Project was 'to develop a training program for the elderly to promote self protection awareness and skills to enhance their quality of life' (p.1). The aim was to give elderly people a commonsense approach to their self protection and security and enable them to continue their usual activities with confidence (p.4). There was an attendance of fifteen people at the seminar.

2.4 THE INTERVIEWS

All the interviews were conducted by the main author, who due to other work commitments, could only run them in the evenings or at weekends. Initially it was thought that this could present a problem but in practice it did not do so. The whole interview process was facilitated by the Co-ordinator of NEPHSS and her assistant.

They made the initial approach to the respondents with a brief outline of the survey. The interviewer then telephoned to make an appointment for a suitable time. Eighteen people were interviewed over a four week period. Nine of these interviews were done at the weekend and nine on weekdays. The earliest of the weekday interviews was conducted at 4.00 pm and the latest at 5.30 pm. The willingness of the respondents for the late afternoon or early evening interviews was in contrast with the experience of interviewers in the Southcare Aged Needs Survey (Wiles and others, 1990). In that survey fieldwork it was found that it was generally not possible to visit before 10.30 am or after 4.00 pm as it was at this time that the people were performing their routine chores. Clearly then, field researchers should be sensitive to the needs of their particular target groups, and should be wary of drawing theoretical conclusions from quite small samples.

The respondents of this survey then, did not find the early evening time an intrusion, with the main comment being that they only had themselves to consider. However interviews at these times were consciously restricted to enable them to be concluded in daylight hours, though two exceptions occurred when the respondents obviously wanted to continue with general conversation.

The length of the interviews varied in time from one to two hours. The hospitality of the interviewees at times included refreshments. All the interviews were conducted in the respondents' homes. One married couple was interviewed, with the interviews being conducted concurrently. On another occasion two neighbours were interviewed in the one house, again with the interviews being conducted concurrently. There was no obvious disadvantage to the joint interviews but it is conceded that in general it is preferable to interview independently, as there could be transference of ideas or hesitation in answering some questions.

The respondents were all very willing, but sceptical about the value of their contribution. A few showed slight apprehension about the prospect of the interviews, which they acknowledged afterwards, when they indicated relief at it having been more pleasant than they had anticipated.

The willingness and pleasant hospitality of the respondents was due in no small part to the fact that the interviews had originally been arranged by NEPHSS. The high regard in which the service is held was very apparent, and it is felt that the reason that the respondents agreed to participate, was in some way an acknowledgment of that regard.

2.5 DATA PROCESSING

The Personal Data page of the Interview Schedule was given an interview number which was recorded on each page of the schedule. This facilitated the collection of data on which the personal data had a bearing. The interview schedule had been designed to allow the data to be divided into separate headings, with the questions on separate sheets. On completion of the schedules they were separated into ten files, one for the personal data page and nine for each page of the questions. A summary data sheet was used to record all 'yes' and 'no' and closed question answers. Qualitative data, obtained from open questions and general comments, were summarised for each file. Five headings were then decided upon and the files allocated to the appropriate headings.

3.0 HISTORY - MEMORY

3.1 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

There is a general inclination to view times past as 'the good old days'. This view was reflected in the response to Questions 1.a and 1.b regarding memories of fifty years ago. It is to be noted that one half of the respondents were living in the same locality fifty years ago (see Table 12) and therefore there is a direct relation to past and present in these seniors' comparisons. Two of the respondents were recent arrivals from South Africa, two would have been in the United Kingdom fifty years ago, and one was from West Australian country areas. The remainder of the respondents had experience of urban living similar to their present situation.

3.2 SURVEY RESULTS

Table 13 shows a unanimous positive response to Question 1.a.

TABLE 13 ; PERCEPTION OF MORE CRIME IN THE COMMUNITY TODAY THAN FIFTY YEARS AGO

	YES	NO
More Crime	18	0
(n=18)		

Seniors were unanimous in the view that crime had increased over the past half-century, and these responses were accompanied by very definite comments as listed:

Definitely! (8 people)
 I should say so! - it is common
 knowledge.
 I should think there is! - among the
 young.
 Oh Heavens yes!
 Well and truly.
 Without hesitation.
 No question.
 Certainly do.

When asked what crimes were most prevalent fifty years ago the seniors found it difficult to name them. When they did name them it was in mild terms with comments such as : 'a bit of stealing'; 'burglary-but not much'; 'thieving-but not much'; 'would steal a bit of fruit-but not vandalise the vines'.

Table 14: CRIMES PREVALENT FIFTY YEARS AGO

Burglary/thieving	7
Stealing	4
Murder	3
Pilfering	2
Petty larceny	1
Nil	4
	<u>21</u>

(n=18) *multiple answers

The question elicited a greater response in terms of what was *not* prevalent fifty years ago. This is shown in the following responses :

There was no rape then.
 It is hard to work out, can't remember it being a criminal era, there was nothing significant.
 We never thought about crime, we always left doors open, at night we left everything open.
 I used to walk through the bush and along lonely roads, there was no threatening or aggression, even with troops around.

I really can't remember any, you see I lived in the country.

I can't think of any really, I would go shopping and leave the back door open.

There weren't many houses then, no crime.

I could walk anywhere at any time.

I could walk out of the house and not lock it, I have never been burgled.

There was no organised crime.

I can't remember any in particular, I don't think that there was much crime then.

I would have to scratch my head; you could leave the doors open.

I can't remember much in the way of crime.

3.3 SUMMARY

The indications are that crime fifty years ago was of no concern to the respondents. The crime that was reported was seen as non-threatening or of a petty nature. When commenting on the crimes that *were not* committed seniors could, by inference, reflect their current concerns. The most predominant theme would be the ability at that past time to feel secure within their own homes, without having to take any security measures and also to walk abroad at any time without fear.

4.0 PRESENT CONCERNS

4.1 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Just as there is an inclination to consider times past as being 'good' there is also an inclination to consider the present as 'not so good'. This view is reflected in the long and comprehensive list of crimes perceived as being prevalent today (see Table 15). For all that there is a perception of an increase in crime this is not reflected in the respondents' concern with security. A general comment made by the respondents was that *they* were not fearful, they knew others that were, but they were not. These findings are similar to those of Mawby (1986) who found that the elderly were more likely than younger people to identify crime as a problem, but were in fact less fearful of crime than other groups. This was linked to their lower risk of victimization. However Field (1987) found that the elderly were more vulnerable to crime, and that the fear of crime affected their well being and morale, even though they have lower victimization rates than younger people in most categories of crime.

4.2 SURVEY RESULTS

The perception of present day crime was quite extensive as can be seen in the following table :

Table 15 : PERCEPTION OF CRIMES MOST PREVALENT TODAY

Break-ins/burglary	11
Theft/stealing/robbery	9
Car theft	7
Violence/aggression/bashing/ uncontrollable crime	7
Drug taking	5
Rape	4
Murder	3
Juvenile Crime	3
Child abuse	1
Homosexuality	1
Sexual crime	1
Molesting	1
Offensive phone calls	1
White collar crime	1
	<u>55</u>

(n=18) *multiple answers

When compared to Table 14 it can be noted that burglary, theft and stealing are still the crimes of highest incidence, with an increase in incidence in the present day. The appearance of car theft would be related to the increased number of cars per capita. Most significant is the inclusion of a high number of violence and related crimes, as is the variety of crimes named in the present day list.

The perception of increased crime was not reflected in the respondents' concerns with their own security. A majority indicated that they had no concerns, as shown in the following table :

Table 16 : CURRENT SECURITY CONCERNS

	YES	NO	UNSURE
Concerned	5	12	1

(n=18)

The reasons given by the five positive respondents were not specific as to *why* they were concerned but were more general. They concentrated more on what they *did*, as can be seen in the following responses.

I am not over-anxious but careful. If I were anxious I could not stay by myself. I draw the curtains at night. I am concerned being by myself. I feel more secure now with security windows.

I am careful and don't go out at night alone. I lock myself in at night, and depend on the dog. I'm not as fearful now as when first widowed fifteen years ago.

I'm fearful at times but put it out of my mind. I'm fearful of someone breaking in.

I have security doors and windows so I can keep the window open. I lock up when I go out. I have been broken into three times.

As could be expected, these five respondents replied "yes" to question 5a which asked if they took security precautions. However one of the respondents had none of the aids specified in question 5b. Of the other four, they all had security doors and windows and one had a house alarm.

One of the respondents had had their home broken into three times, and one twice. One of them lived in the same street as a victim of Edgar Cooke, who committed multiple murders in the area in 1962. Another lived in the vicinity of and knew, Dora Byrne, the victim of the 1989 murder previously mentioned.

These findings concur with those of Lee (1983) who found that fear of crime was indicated by previous direct or indirect victimization experiences.

The respondent who was 'unsure' had a recent experience of an attempted break-in. Prior to that she had no concerns, since she had thought it would never happen to her. She admits now to sometimes being scared to be by herself. She now has security doors and windows, and locks doors, and leaves a light on.

Seven of those respondents who indicated that they had no concern with their security gave reasons for their lack of concern. Four of them gave details of the security precautions that they took, and presumably this was one of the reasons for their lack of concern. Three of them professed to being 'not nervous' and one admitted leaving the screen off the bedroom window to allow the cat access. Another would go out into the garden at midnight 'snail stalking', but had ceased walking in the street in the evening. Two of them maintained that if some one really wanted to break in, that they would do so.

When asked what caused them greatest concern, the fear of physical assault was predominant, as can be seen in the following table :

Table 17 : PERSONAL CRIME RELATED CONCERNS

Concern	Number
Physical Assault	15
Loss of possessions	4
Invasion of privacy	3
Nil	1
	<u>23</u>
<u>(n=18) *multiple answers</u>	

There were not many comments following this question. There did not appear to be a great fear of physical assault but it was the consequence that they considered the least desirable. Loss of possessions did not seem a great concern, since seniors either saw them as replaceable or felt that they did not have much worth taking anyway. One respondent claimed to be concerned about all three types of crime because of a feeling of vulnerability. She claimed that once, if someone was caught stealing that they would run away, but that now they would stay and be aggressive.

4.3 SUMMARY

The perception of a higher incidence and greater variety of present day crime reflects a concern for society in general. Seniors reported lack of concern for their security would indicate that they have no great fear of being victim of the perceived crimes. The respondents that had been victims showed a greater concern. The concern of physical assault could be seen as reflecting a perception of an increase in violence. These findings chime with those of Dowd (1981) who found that older people were more likely to report fear of crime and be more disapproving of violent behaviour.

Table : 18 ACCOMMODATION PROVIDING GREATEST SECURITY

TYPE	NUMBER
Medium density	1
Suburban home	2
Unit in village complex	7
No difference	8
	<u>18</u>
<u>(n = 18)</u>	

Units in a village complex were considered as most secure by two fifths of the respondents. The perceived benefits of living in such a complex ranged from having people around, a telephone and buzzer in one's room, more lighting and a supervisor. This consideration was qualified by remarks to the effect that even though they might be more secure, seniors would not necessarily want to shift to one.

One of the two respondents who did live in a complex indicated that she would not like to live in a house by herself. She had moved into her unit the same time as her now deceased husband had entered a Nursing Home, so had no experience of living in a house alone. Another respondent who lived in a house, and had indicated that she thought the type of accommodation had no bearing on security, said that she would only move into a complex for health reasons. This same respondent had had the experience of a prowler around the house for about a week.

The satisfaction with their present accommodation was shown in remarks such as :

I am quite secure in my own home.
 If you are going to be attacked it does not matter where you are.
 I do not want to go into a unit.
 I feel secure here.
 To be honest, I do not want to go anywhere else.
 I have no feeling of insecurity.
 Personally, I am quite secure here.
 I like living in my own home and do not want to shift.
 A suburban home is probably the least secure, but I would not consider moving unless it were imperative.

Two thirds of the respondents indicated that they took some particular security precautions and one third indicated that they took no particular precautions as shown in the following table :

Table 19 : PARTICULAR SECURITY PRECAUTIONS

RESPONSE	NUMBER
YES	12
NO	<u>6</u>
	<u>18</u>

(N = 18)

The number indicating that they took particular precautions was not reflected in the response to the usage of specific security aids as shown in the following table :

Table 20 : SPECIFIC SECURITY AIDS

AID	YES	NO	TOTAL
Security doors	7	10	17
Security windows	6	11	17
House alarm systems	1	16	17
Personal alarm systems	1	16	17

*One respondent would not give details for 'security reasons'
 (n = 17)

The response to the question *why* they took precautions was again not specific, instead they volunteered what they *did* or *did not* do. There were only three direct responses to the question, these being :

due to attempted break in,
as a deterrent- main reason for
security, and just in case some one
tries to break in,

When seniors took precautions, what they *did* were in general fairly low key, *common sense* precautions such as :

Table 21 : SECURITY PRECAUTIONS TAKEN

PRECAUTIONS	NO.
Lock doors and windows	11
Secure windows (nails, screws, paint, screens)	3
Leave lights on	2
Won't walk dog at night	2
Dead-locks, bolts on door	2
Full blinds	1
Latch door during day	1
Don't leave keys	1
Don't open door at night	1
No high bushes at windows	1
Allow street light to shine on house	1
	<u>26</u>
<u>(n=17) *multiple responses</u>	

5.3 SUMMARY

It can be concluded that most seniors feel secure in their present accommodation. Even those that see other types of accommodation as being more secure do not feel *fearful* enough to want to move. Two thirds indicated that they took particular security precautions, however this was not reflected in the use of particular security aids. Their precautions were generally what they saw as commonsense approaches of locking or securing doors and windows, not walking abroad at night, illuminating the house, and not leaving keys available. Such measures were greater than what they did fifty years ago, when they felt no need for even these basic precautions. There are some differences here with the findings by Kennedy (1985) who found that people who were most likely to be fearful were females who lived alone and had resided in the same place for a long time in a heterogeneous neighbourhood. The majority of our respondents filled this criterion. However Kennedy also found that fear was not so high for those who lived in a single-family dwelling, which is the predominant accommodation of these respondents in Nedlands.

6.0 AWARENESS

6.1 INTRODUCTORY NOTES

As mentioned earlier the increase in the incidence of crime has prompted action within the general community. Many of the security aids and much of the education has been directed specifically towards seniors. The Office of Crime Prevention of the Police Department of Western Australia has prepared a booklet entitled Safety Advice for Seniors which covers five areas; the home, out and about, money, legal matters and sexual assault. The NSW Premier's Department's Office of Ageing has dedicated one of a series of nine papers on ageing, to Crime and Safety. This paper looks at home safety and security, road safety, street crime and safety, elder abuse, and addresses planning for the future (NSW Police Service, 1990). The Commonwealth Department of Health and the Tasmanian Health Department produced the previously mentioned resource kit Self Protection for the Elderly (Smith, 1985) which is aimed at promoting self protection awareness and skills.

There is also a range of aids designed to give seniors living alone a feeling of greater security. Personal alarms are designed to summon help in case of medical or any other emergency. Now as clients and volunteers of NEPHSS, these respondents had access to a range of security information and the opportunity to attend protection workshops.

6.2 SURVEY RESULTS

A majority of the respondents professed to be aware of available information and aids as shown in Table 22 :

Table 22 : SECURITY AWARENESS

	YES	NO
Aware (n = 18)	17	1

The respondent who claimed 'no' awareness confessed to receiving pamphlets but not reading them or taking much notice. This same respondent, an eighty-four year old widow who had lived in the the same house and locality for thirty-eight years, took no specific security precautions and had none of the specified aids. She found no difference in the security of accommodation and had no security concerns. She was the respondent who left the flyscreen off the window to allow access into the house for the cat. She did admit to cease leaving the key in the door after the Edgar Cooke murders in 1962.

Four of the respondents attributed their awareness to knowledge obtained from NEPHSS. Nowthe high level of awareness did not follow through to their knowledge of specifically named aids and publications, information of which is available at NEPHSS.

TABLE 23 : SECURITY KNOWLEDGE

AID	NUMBER AWARE
Medic Alert Bracelet	14
Personal Alarms	7
Publications	5
House Alarms	<u>2</u>
	<u>28</u>
(n = 18) *multiple answers	

The medic alert bracelet was the best known aid, but they were not used by the respondents. One respondent said that she should wear one but doesn't, another said that she had one for a while, and another said that she used to wear one but had misplaced it. While personal alarms were known of generally only seven persons knew of a specifically named aid. One respondent said that she had been thinking of getting one. Insofar as security publications were concerned, these were known to only five people. Some of the respondents thought that they might have read them, but could not recall them by name. While only two people could name a particular house alarm, that was the one provided by Toc H. One of these respondents had made enquiries and was awaiting information. The other respondent did not consider this a desirable alarm. The one respondent who did have an alarm could not recall the name of it. Most of the respondents knew of the alarms in general and knew of friends or neighbours who had them. There was some scepticism about the value of alarms, with stories of frequent false alarms with resulting lack of response.

The awareness of the Neighbourhood Watch Scheme and the level of informal watch arrangements is indicated in Table 24 shown below :

Table 24 : NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH AWARENESS

	YES	NO	TOTAL
Knowledge of Neighbourhood Watch	15	3	18
Member of Neighbourhood Watch	9	9	18
Informal Watch Arrangements	9	9	18

(n = 18)

Some four fifths of the respondents professed an awareness of Neighbourhood Watch. The three respondents who had no knowledge all thought that the question referred to Safety House, which is a safety system aimed at providing refuge for children who are in danger of harrassment when on the street.

Half of the respondents were members of Neighbourhood Watch and half had some informal watch arrangements. Four of the respondents who were members also claimed to have an informal watch arrangement. However there were four respondents who were not members and neither did they have any informal watch arrangements. One of these four had heard of Neighbourhood Watch and thought it a good idea but had taken no action. Another had put her name down but had not heard any more.

The watch arrangements appeared fairly informal and ranged from very casual to fairly regular assistance. With some people it was just a matter of clearing mail when some one was away and 'keeping an eye out'. With others it was a regular check each day to see that all was well.

Some expressed the opinion that the effectiveness of Neighbourhood Watch was limited in these days when many householders were away at work all day. Another opinion was that people keep to themselves these days. Very often the only person around during the day was a senior.

The respondents who had neighbours of long standing appeared to have the strongest arrangements. One 89 year old widow who had lived in the same house for forty five years and had long term neighbours thought the scheme wonderful and effective. An 88 year old widower who had lived in the same house for thirty seven years and still had the same residents in four of the eight houses that had been built and occupied at that time, expressed a similarly high satisfaction with Neighbourhood Watch.

6.3 SUMMARY

The respondents professed a high awareness of security measures and knowledge of Neighbourhood Watch. This awareness was not reflected in more specific knowledge of security aids and publications or participation in programmes. The relative lack of personal concern is another indication that they see the need for security as more a societal need than a personal one. There appeared to be an amount of apathy, and possibly even a resistance, to taking any more than basic precautions. Higher level precautions and use of security aids were for 'other' people.

7.0 IDEAL WORLD

7.1 INTRODUCTION

There was an initial reluctance to propose measures for crime prevention. Most of the seniors considered that it was a task of a magnitude beyond them. However, they replied after some consideration, and offered not only preventative measures but also suggestions as to what they thought were the causes of present day crime.

All but one of the respondents had been married. The majority of the married respondents had brought up families and there was a great emphasis on family life. They saw the decline of family life as a major cause of crime, and the return to a more cohesive family life as a preventative measure. Their view of a desirable family life was an historical one and built on their own experiences. It was sensed that they found it hard to accommodate the current reality of single parent and two working parent families.

7.2 SURVEY RESULTS

After their initial reluctance the seniors provided a comprehensive list of measures which they saw could lead to a lowering of the incidence of crime, and also what they saw as being the cause of the current increased incidence. Such measures are shown in table 25.

In that table there were only four punitive measures suggested and these measures were put forward by only two of the respondents, both of them female. Three of the respondents advocated *against* gaol. One stated that 'gaol is no good', another 'gaols are not best for young people, they come out worse', and another 'people should not be locked up'.

Neither were there many specific preventative measures suggested. Two respondents advocated more police involvement. One respondent expressed an opinion that there was inadequate policing, another saw that there were more police already, and yet another said that you could not rely on the police *all* the time.

Table 25 : CRIME PREVENTION MEASURES

	RESPONSES
SCHOOL/FAMILY LIFE (15)	
A return to a stronger family life	3
More discipline in school and home	2
More parental control of children	2
Children need to be taught to give	1
A need to set and maintain standards	1
Mother should be at home	1
Show children that they are wanted	1
Parents should spend more time with their family	1
Alternative ways of demonstrating manhood, valour, how to dare, talent, virtue, craftsmanship	1
Introduce systems of qualifications and rewards, make them public.	1
Training in speech, manners, appreciation of others	1
CONSTRUCTIVE (10)	
Rehabilitative schemes	2
Corrective training institutions	1
Provide occupation for youth	1
Increase self esteem, self reliance	1
Provide more employment	1
Supervise people on the dole, make them work	1
Provide alternative challenges and rewards that will engender constructive desires	1
Promote positive thinking, do it as a community drill	1
Ascertain and fulfil needs of people who commit crime	1

NEIGHBOURHOOD (7)	
People to be alert, aware, observant	3
Neighbourhood watch	2
People to help each other	1
A more cohesive neighbourhood	1
PREVENTATIVE (5)	
More Police Patrols	2
Prevent people with criminal inclinations getting together	1
Provide more lighting	1
Mark Furniture	1
PUNITIVE (4)	
Bring back hanging and flogging	1
Humiliate in front of friends	1
Name offenders	1
Bring back death penalty for somethings like rape and murder	<u>1</u>
(N= 18) *MULTIPLE ANSWERS	<u>41</u>

Table 26 : CURRENT CAUSES OF CRIME

	RESPONSES
SCHOOL/FAMILYLIFE (10)	
People don't live as a family	1
Both parents work	1
Not enough love	1
Children rule the parents	1
Not enough supervision of the really young	1
Parents are leaving children and going out	1
The advent of cars and TV	1
Drink kills, it is at the bottom of crime	1
Lack of conversation in the home because of TV	1
Fundamentally lack of education and follow up of education	1

YOUTH ISSUES (8)

Juveniles do not get punished enough	1
Youth need to be propped up too much	1
Kids are bored	1
Kids are the main problem	1
The young want everything now	1
Louts have a lack of direction	1
Drugs - Why do they take them?	1
Juvenile crime generated by fragmented families	1

(N = 18) * MULTIPLE ANSWERS

It was clear that they thought that the answer lay in improving the social fabric of society, mainly through a return to traditional values. There was an emphasis on neighbourhood involvement, people looking after themselves and each other. However the main emphasis was on family life. They thought that a major concern was the youth of today, and by inference considered them the main perpetrators of crime. There were many suggestions aimed at youth, through the family. More control and discipline were seen as being basic. The two male respondents stressed the need for education. One saw the lack of education as a cause, while the other saw education as a cure.

The constructive suggestions were both preventative and rehabilitative. It was seen that there was a need for occupation and guidance. There was a focus on the individual as a person and the necessity of looking at their needs.

7.3 SUMMARY

It can be concluded that most respondents considered that an ideal world could be obtained by a return to the values of the 'good old days'. In their view the increase of the incidence of crime could be attributed mainly to the breakdown of the family unit.

The seniors did not consider that severe punitive measures, particular preventative measures, or increased police involvement, were necessary to right the wrongs of the world. Rather, they saw that this was most likely to be achieved by providing constructive rehabilitative measures, addressing the needs of the offenders, encouraging parental control, instilling discipline, recreating a strong family unit, and being neighbourly.

8.0 CONCLUSIONS

The survey has indicated that the seniors do not have a high personal fear of crime. They have a well defined awareness of the increase of crime and a perception of an increase in violence. They profess a knowledge of security aids and measures, but in fact adopt fairly basic precautions. Those that have been victims of crime show a higher degree of fear and take greater precautions. Their way of life does not appear to have been curtailed to any great extent by fear of victimization. Many relate diminished night-time activities but this is possibly due just as much to change of lifestyle with their increasing years. For instance, Golant (1984) found that half of a sample of 400 people sixty years and over engaged in nighttime activity once a month or less.

Seniors consider the precautions that they now have to take as a decline from the 'good old days' to the present 'not so good' days. The seniors' ideal world would appear to be that of fifty years ago in terms of social and moral values. Their view of crime indicated that they considered that it was a problem of the young. This perception reflects reality to some extent, but could also arise from the media emphasis on youth as perpetrators of crime, just as the media puts an emphasis on seniors being victims of crime.

Their call for a return to traditional values would be a return to family life as they knew it in their childhood and how they brought up their own families. It is to be remembered that the 'wayward youth' of today are likely to be of an age with their grandchildren, or possibly, in the case of the older respondents, their great grandchildren. Furthermore, their concern was not for crime itself but more for the cause of crime, and ways to remedy the ills of society that lead to crime. Again there does not appear to be a personal concern, more a societal concern.

The survey findings were from a relatively small sample (n=18). The respondents were all over sixty nine years with thirteen being over eighty years, and all but two were women. They all received some level of services from NEPHSS but none were housebound or very frail. All but two lived alone and the majority lived in single detached houses which they owned. Most were long term residents and had lived in the locality for most of their adult lives. Only two had been victims of crime, which was non-violent, but most had knowledge of others that had been victims.

Their comfortable urban lifestyle, financial security, reasonably good health, and demonstrated satisfaction with their situation, would all be reflected in their apparent lack of fear of crime.

The perception of increased crime did not translate into a fear of crime. La Grange (1987) had concluded that the amount of fear of crime experienced by older people had been exaggerated. Ward (1986) found that more than half of 1185 persons over 60 years felt safe all the time. He also found that fear of crime was likely to be higher for women, those living in urban areas, those with reduced health and reduced financial resources. The respondents in this sample conformed to the first two criteria but not the last two, which would indicate that many elements and variables need to be considered when measuring the fear of crime.

The actual increase of *fear of crime* with age has not been conclusively established. This is subject to many variables including isolation (Fattah 1986), physical limitations (Fielo 1987), living alone (Jones 1987), environmental cues (Ward 1986), social integration (Lawton 1981). LaGrange (1987) identifies problems in conceptualization and measurement in research on the fear of crime, by the use of nonspecific and global measures.

Life style factors were seen as relevant in actual lower victimization rates of the elderly. Fielo (1987) saw these factors as keeping the elderly out of harms' way, as did Fattah (1986), who found that the elderly tend to spend less time away from home. Mawby (1986) found that the elderly were less likely to live in high-crime areas.

9.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

Even though the survey sample did not demonstrate a high level of fear of crime, the recorded increase of crime indicates that measures need to be taken by all of the community. Statistics from the Office of Crime Prevention (Table 7) showed a degree of offences in the locality of the seniors interviewed. Also the latest report of the Australian Institute of Criminology The Size of the Crime Problem in Australia (West Australian, Tuesday October 23 1990, p.3) indicates a 70% increase of crime in the last decade, with Western Australia recording higher than the Australian average for theft and breaking and entering and stealing.

Due to a degree of resistance and apathy towards available security aids demonstrated by the survey sample, it is suggested that it is necessary to establish education programmes to encourage their wider use while taking care not to create any undue feeling of fear.

It is recommended that seniors be given the opportunity to take responsibility for their own security by means of active education programmes on personal and home safety. Encouragement should be given to developing strong neighbourhood participation in looking out for each other, which is in keeping with most seniors' perceptions of an ideal community. As mentioned in Crime and Safety (1990 p.3.) it is important that older people be made aware that they are not at high risk of becoming a victim of crime. This is also the message given in the keynote address at the national workshop on Crime and the Elderly (1990) by Professor Clarke.

Even though it has been established by many that the elderly are less likely to be victims of crime (Fattah 1986, Fielo 1987, LaGrange 1987, Mawby 1986, Lindquist 1982, Jeffords 1983, Ollenburger 1981, Dowd 1981, Tester 1989) the recorded overall increase in the incidence of crime must increase the possibility of victimization for some seniors and warrants preventative action.

Another area that requires further research is the question of the effect of crime on its elderly victims. It is seen that the impact is greater for seniors in many areas, such as physical, psychological, financial effects (Fattah 1986), limiting of outdoor excursions, reducing social contacts (Fashimpar 1984), and the national workshop on Crime and the Elderly found that seniors may be more vulnerable to a long term impact on their emotional well-being (1990).

Already Governments are addressing the subject. The NSW Office on Ageing has come forward with eighteen recommendations in their paper on Crime and Safety. The Western Australian Government addressed Community Safety in general and provided for continued support for the Office of Crime and Prevention and the Neighbourhood Watch Program in their Budget Outlook 1989-1990. The government has also provided for a Metropolitan Feasibility Study to look at the option of improving personal safety of seniors by way of Personal Alarms, and a Domestic Alarm Pilot Project. Crime and the Elderly was also the theme of a national workshop convened by the National Police Research Unit, the South Australian Commission for the Ageing and the Victims of Crime Services of South Australia held in Adelaide in 1990.

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APPENDIX ONE

**Table 1: VICTIMIZATION RATES PER 100,000 POPULATION
15 AND OVER BY AGE**

	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+
Break and enter	155.1	2397.2	2164.8	2523.3	1778.6	1748.7	1409.1
Motor Vehicle theft	418.7	1398.6	905.8	1262.5	865.1	436.4	55.1
Robbery with violence	77.2	534.3	54.1	163.1	159.8	160.5	97.8
Theft	6302.4	12603.2	11546.9	9148.9	6522.2	4427.3	2812.6
Fraud, forgery, and false pretences	860.8	3508.6	4818.3	4017.0	3217.6	1034.4	731.6
Peeping	1215.5	2562.9	932.9	1164.0	3713.3	1370.0	40.6
Indecent exposure	619.9	706.2	542.9	323.0	---	222.1	46.2
Rape, attempted rape	174.8	127.0	140.1	187.1	---	53.3	---
Nuisance calls	8612.0	18512.0	30671.3	27536.3	21634.7	16501.3	9246.7
Assault	3676.2	5792.4	1803.9	3205.0	759.9	1702.7	178.0



**WESTERN AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE
OF ADVANCED EDUCATION**

**SURVEY OF THE PERCEPTION OF FEAR OF CRIME AMONG
SENIORS**

INTERVIEW GUIDE**INTRODUCTION**

This survey is being conducted for research by the Western Australian College of Advanced Education, Claremont Campus, with the co-operation of the Nedlands Elderly Person's Home Support Service.

- 1) This information is confidential.
- 2) All questionnaires will be destroyed after compilation of the data.
- 3) No names will be used in the report.

PERSONAL DATA

Interview No.
Name
Year of Birth
Refusal
Sex	Male ... Female ...
Marital Status	Married ... Single ... Widowed ... Divorced ... Separated ... Living Together ...
Accommodation	House ... Flat ... Unit ... Duplex ... Other
Tenure	Owner ... Tenant ...
Length of Stay	Present accommodation
Years of residence	City of Nedlands

INTERVIEW NO.

5.a DO YOU TAKE ANY PARTICULAR SECURITY PRECAUTIONS?

Yes

No

5.b DO YOU HAVE ANY OF THE FOLLOWING?

Security doors

Security windows

House Alarm Systems

Personal Alarm Systems

Other

5.c IF YES WHY DO YOU TAKE THESE PARTICULAR PRECAUTIONS?

.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....
.....

INTERVIEW NO.

6.a ARE YOU AWARE OF THE SECURITY INFORMATION AND SECURITY AIDS THAT ARE AVAILABLE?

Yes

No

Don't know

6.b DO YOU HAVE ANY KNOWLEDGE OF THE FOLLOWING?

Personal Alarm Systems
Neva Alone System
Vital Call
H.E.L.P.

Medic Alert Bracelet

Publications
Safety Advice for Seniors
Positive Steps-Help and
Advice on Personal Safety
Look Out, Lock Up-A guide to
Protecting Your Home, Car
and Neighbourhood

House Alarms
Please Name
.....
.....
.....
.....

INTERVIEW NO.

7.a DO YOU KNOW ABOUT NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH?

Yes

No

Unsure

7.b ARE YOU A MEMBER OF NEIGHBOURHOOD WATCH?

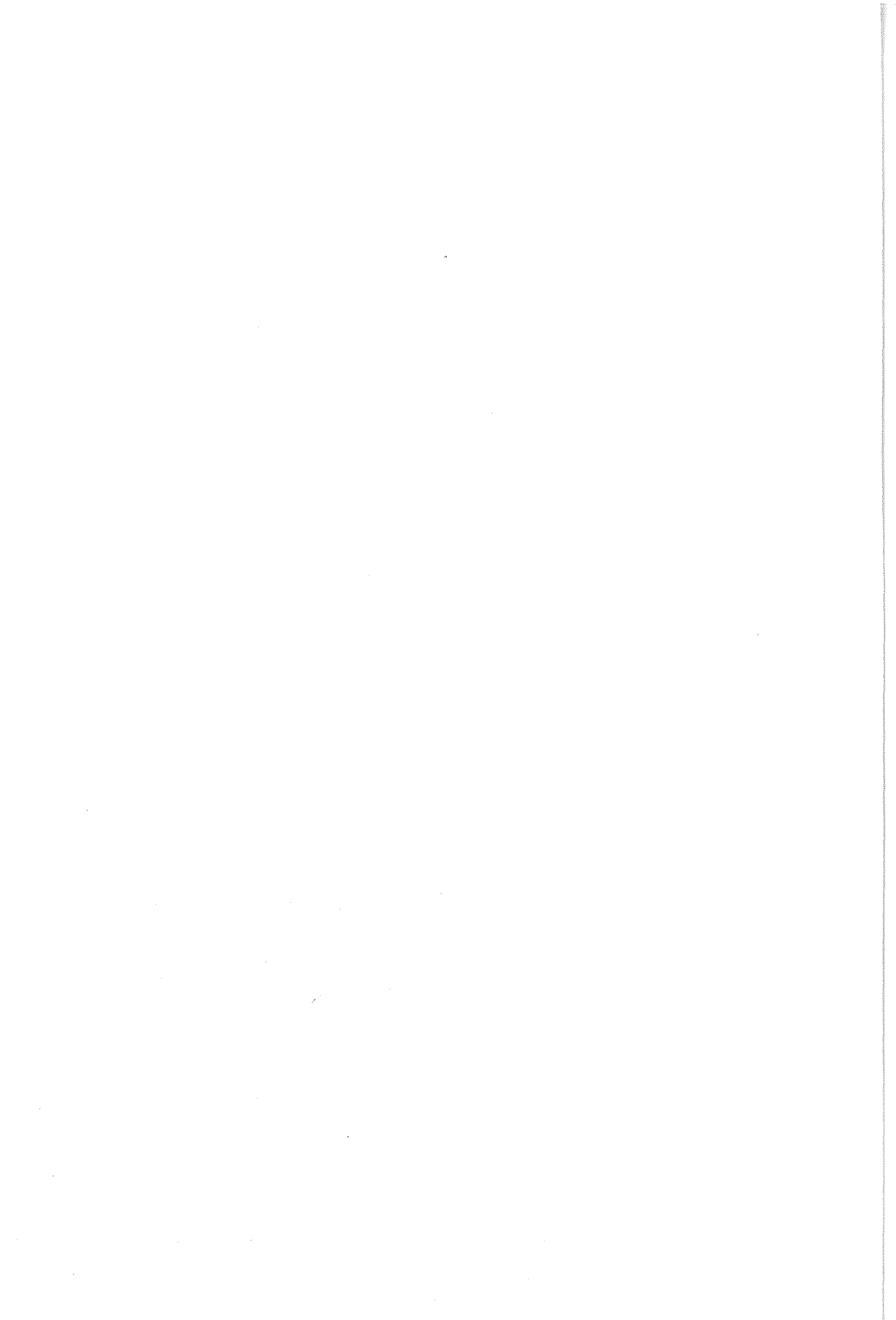
Yes

No

7.c DO YOU HAVE AN INFORMAL WATCH
ARRANGEMENT WITH NEIGHBOURS OR FAMILY?

Yes

No



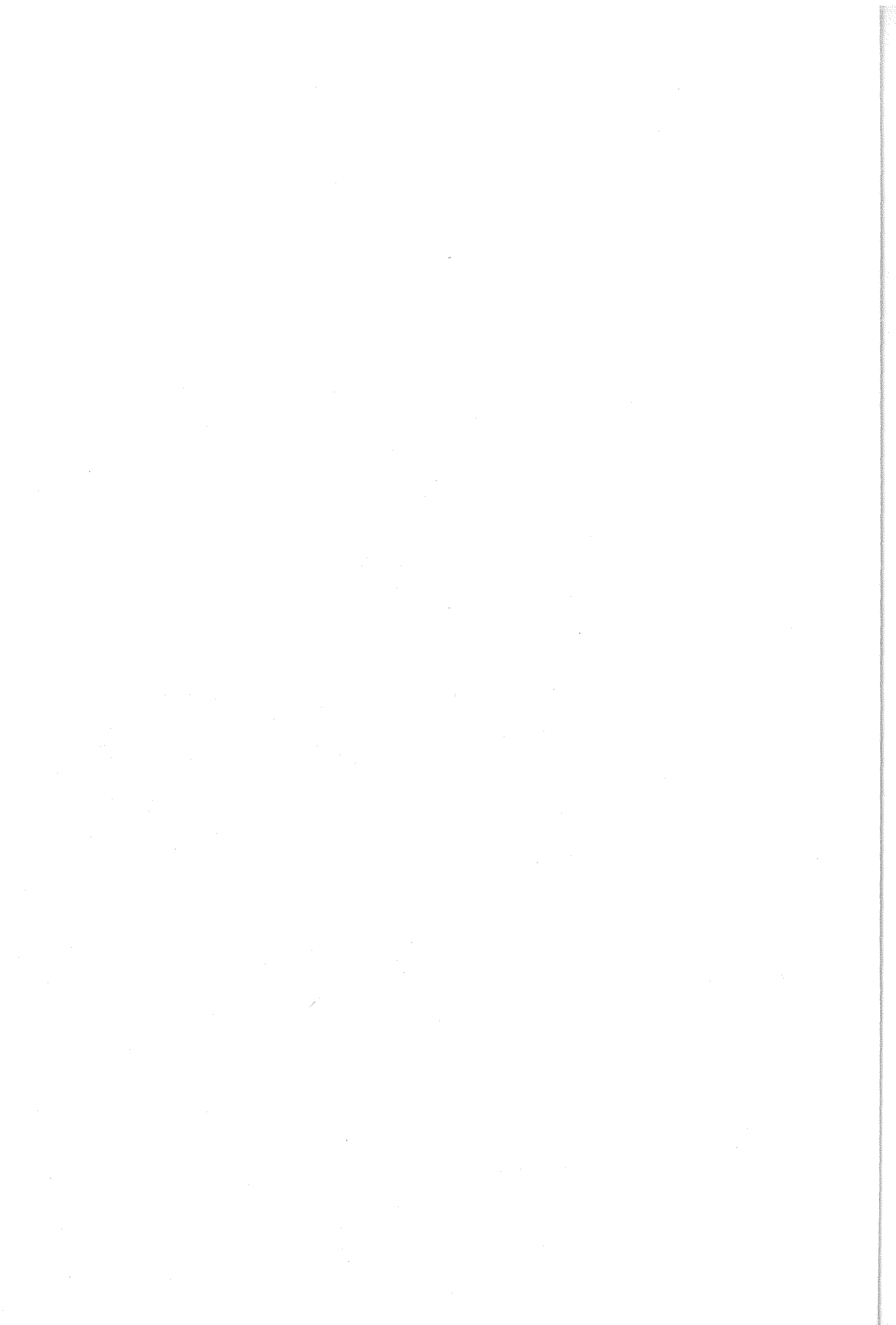
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