



# AN ANALYSIS OF CLEARANCE RATES

FOR CRIMES COMMITTED AGAINST  
OLDER PEOPLE IN NORTHERN IRELAND  
BETWEEN 2010/11 AND 2016/17.



**Hourglass**

safer ageing · stopping abuse

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## About Action on Elder Abuse

Action on Elder Abuse (AEA) was established in 1993 with the aim of preventing the abuse of older people. It is a membership organisation with over 300 individual and group members throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland. These include older people, local and national voluntary organisations, academics, health authorities and trusts, and social services departments. It works proactively with statutory organisations and is variously described as a 'critical friend' and as a 'social entrepreneur'.

The charity is seeking an environment in which the abuse of older people is no longer tolerated. It is seeking to encourage public and practitioner recognition of elder abuse and to facilitate policies, procedures and cultures that both abhor and challenge such abuse.

Simultaneously, the charity recognises that it operates within an adult protection environment, and consequently seeks to ensure that its work benefits all adults at risk of abuse or exploitation.

Action on Elder Abuse (AEA) Northern Ireland is part of the wider Action on Elder Abuse organisation, and is the only charity in Northern Ireland working exclusively to safeguard and protect older people from all forms of abuse. Established in May 2015, AEA Northern Ireland works within the unique legal and policy context of Northern Ireland, with tailored services to support older people and challenge elder abuse at every level and in all its forms. We seek a society which values age, where older people can live their lives free from harm, and where there is a zero tolerance of elder abuse.

We aim to prevent the abuse of older people by:

- Raising awareness of the wide range of abuse and harm older people experience including physical, sexual, emotional/psychological, financial abuse and neglect .
- Providing direct advice, guidance and support to older people at risk of abuse or in need of protection, as well as those concerned about an older person.
- Engaging with older people, practitioners and policy makers to improve prevention and protection through delivery of conferences, seminars, information materials and policy briefings.
- Campaigning for the best possible support and prevention frameworks.

## Background and Context

Crime and crime victimization can have a devastating effect on all those who experience it, from the victims who suffer from violence and theft, the emergency services who have to deal with its environmental and social consequences, and the unaffected member of the public who feels stress and fear after seeing media constructed articles on crime in the news.<sup>1</sup>

Detrimental psychological, physiological, and social effects of crime are common and the risk of these effects is especially prevalent for older people, who suffer from a weakened physical condition, as well as other assorted age-related effects.<sup>2</sup> As such, while people over 65 are statistically the age group in the UK at the least risk of being a victim of crime, older people as victims of crime is an extremely significant and worrying phenomenon, and one that deserves closer attention in both public and academic areas. As Mathew Hall notes, although older people have long been thought to encapsulate the “ideal victim” of crime (blameless, weak, and vulnerable) this has not translated itself into attention in the policy sphere.<sup>3</sup> Even in the academic sphere, older people as victims of crime or abuse have until recently been ignored in favour of research on crimes against children and young people.<sup>4</sup>

Experiencing crime, especially violent crime – leaves older people at risk of suffering physical harm and injuries, from broken bones, to sexual diseases, punctured organs, or even death. The experience of one form of crime or abuse alone could also lead to a consequential effect- It may leave an older victim disproportionately at risk of “polyvictimization” – that is multiple abuses or crimes occurring to the same victim.<sup>5</sup>

Just as worrying for older victims of crime, especially those concerning sexual assault, rape, or violence is the psychological risk of crime, i.e. an increase in depression, anxiety, or even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for the victim.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Andrew J. Baranauskas and Kevin M. Drakulich, "Media Construction Of Crime Revisited: Media Types, Consumer Contexts, And Frames Of Crime And Justice," *Criminology*, 2018, , doi:10.1111/1745-9125.12189. BARANAUSKAS, A. J. and DRAKULICH, K. M. (2018), MEDIA CONSTRUCTION OF CRIME REVISITED: MEDIA TYPES, CONSUMER CONTEXTS, AND FRAMES OF CRIME AND JUSTICE. *Criminology*. . doi:10.1111/1745-9125.12189

<sup>2</sup> Age UK. "Later Life in the United Kingdom" (April, 2018) [https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/late\\_life\\_uk\\_factsheet.pdf](https://www.ageuk.org.uk/globalassets/age-uk/documents/reports-and-publications/late_life_uk_factsheet.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Matthew Hall, "Older People, Victims and Crime," in *Victims, Crime and Society: An Introduction*, ed. Pamela Davies, Peter Francis, Chris Greer, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2017).

<sup>4</sup> Matthew Hall, "Older People, Victims and Crime," in *Victims, Crime and Society: An Introduction*, ed. Pamela Davies, Peter Francis, Chris Greer, (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2017).

<sup>5</sup> Holly Ramsey-Klawnsnik, "Older Adults Affected by Polyvictimization: A Review of Early Research," *Journal of Elder Abuse & Neglect* 29, no. 5 (2017); doi:10.1080/08946566.2017.1388019.

<sup>6</sup> Robert Kohn et al., "The Consequences of Violence on the Mental Health of the Elderly," *Violence and Mental Health*, 2014, doi:10.1007/978-94-017-8999-8\_8.

In a 2003 study of distraction burglary amongst ethnic minorities and older people, Thornton et al found that 9% of older victims had enough symptoms for a categorical diagnosis of PTSD one month after the crime, reducing to 2.3% at three months after the crime.<sup>7</sup>

Older victims may also be less able to recover psychologically or physically than victims younger than them, and as such may be in greater need of welfare or medical assistance, putting greater strain on underfunded local services, the taxpayer or HCS agencies.<sup>8</sup>

As well as being a risk to older people's psychological or physical health, a secondary result of crime may also potentially be the dislocation, disengagement and social isolation of older victims from their friends, families, and communities. Lachs et al noted that those older adults who had experienced violent crime were at a significantly increased risk of being placed in a care home than those who hadn't had such an experience.<sup>9</sup>

While Morrall et al noted crime induced changes in behaviour, revolving around lack of confidence and fear especially with women, regarding attitudes towards going out alone or going out after dark.<sup>10</sup>

For older people, who already have an increased risk of isolation and loneliness,<sup>11</sup> further disengagement with family and communities post victimization could potentially be fatal<sup>12</sup> or cause serious health defects, with elderly social isolation being linked to an increased risk for all cause mortality, diminished immune function, and cognitive decline.<sup>13</sup>

Fear of crime can be just as damaging to the social network and capital of older people, as concern about crime or feeling unsafe in their local community or neighbourhood is a key determinant for quality of life for older people in the UK.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>7</sup> A7 Thornton, Amanda, Chris Hatton, Caroline Malone, Tamsin Fryer, David Walker, Joanne Cunningham, and Nazia Durrani. "Distraction Burglary amongst Older Adults and Ethnic Minority Communities." PsycEXTRA Dataset, 2003. Doi:10.1037/e649772007-001. 33 8  
<https://www.niacro.co.uk/sites/default/files/publications/Cost%20of%20crime%20in%20NI-%20DOJNI-%20Jul%202010.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> Mark Lachs, David Burnes, and Karl Pillemer, "Prevalence of and Risk Factors for Elder Abuse and Neglect in the Community: A Population-Based Study," *Journal of the American Geriatrics Society* 63, no. 9 (August 27, 2015):. 10 P. Morrall et al., "Crime and Health: A Preliminary Study into the Effects of Crime on the Mental Health of UK University Students," *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 17, no. 9 (2010): , doi:10.1111/j.1365-2850.2010.01594.x. 825 11 A. Steptoe et al., "Social Isolation, Loneliness, and All-cause Mortality in Older Men and Women," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 15 (2013): , doi:10.1073/pnas.1219686110. 5797 12 A. Steptoe et al., "Social Isolation, Loneliness, and All-cause Mortality in Older Men and Women," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 15 (2013): , doi:10.1073/pnas.1219686110. 5797 13 A. Steptoe et al., "Social Isolation, Loneliness, and All-cause Mortality in Older Men and Women," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 110, no. 15 (2013): , doi:10.1073/pnas.1219686110. 5797 14 Allison E. Smith et al., "Determinants of Quality of Life amongst Older People in Deprived Neighbourhoods," *Ageing and Society* 24, no. 05 (2004): , doi:10.1017/s0144686x04002569. 809

Media reports of crime that concern the wider area or indeed even the wider nation may also contribute to stress or anxiety as older people may be more likely to experience altruistic fear, that is, a form of fear concerning others whose safety they care about, i.e. friends, family or colleagues.<sup>15</sup> With this in mind, below standard clearance rates for older victims can only worsen feelings of fear among those over 65.

This work follows on from October 2014 research conducted by the Commissioner for Older People of Northern Ireland on clearance rates for crime against older people in Northern Ireland between 2007/2008 and 2012/13. Clearance rates (also known as detection rates) are used as a measure of crimes solved by the police and are calculated by dividing the number of crimes where a charge has been laid, or “cleared” by the overall number of crimes recorded. For a case to be cleared, it normally requires at least one individual to have been arrested for the offence, charged, and then turned over to the Public Prosecution Service for Northern Ireland (PPSNI) for prosecution.

Although the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) does not fall under the jurisdiction of the Home Office, police recording practice is governed by Home Office Counting Rules (HOCR).<sup>16</sup> To decide whether an incident will be recorded as a crime, the HOCR requires

“An incident will be recorded as a crime (notifiable offence)

1. For offences against an identified victim if, on the balance of probability:
  - a. The circumstances as reported amount to a crime defined by law (the police will determine this, based on their knowledge of the law and counting rules), and
  - b. There is no credible evidence to the contrary.
2. For offences against the state the points to prove to evidence the offence must clearly be made out, before a crime is recorded.”<sup>17</sup>

As Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services notes, “the rules place an obligation on the police to accept what the victim says unless there is “credible evidence to the contrary”, [however] the following reasons are insufficient to justify not recording a crime:

<sup>15</sup> Karen A. Snedker, "Altruistic and Vicarious Fear of Crime: Fear for Others and Gendered Social Roles," *Sociological Forum* 21, no. 2 (2006): , doi:10.1007/s11206-006-9019-1.165 <sup>16</sup> <https://www.psni.police.uk/globalassets/inside-the-psni/our-statistics/police-recorded-crime-statistics/documents/crime-user-guide.pdf>

<sup>17</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/721595/count-general-jul-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721595/count-general-jul-2018.pdf)



- The victim declines to provide personal details
- The victim does not want to take the matter further; or
- The allegation cannot be proven.”<sup>18</sup>

Police recording practice in Northern Ireland is also guided by the National Crime Recording Standard (NCRS). Both the HOCR and the NCRS promote an ethical and victim orientated approach to crime recording. As the HOCR notes “A belief by the victim (or a person reasonably assumed to be acting on behalf of the victim, that a crime has occurred is usually sufficient to justify its recording.”<sup>19</sup>

Looking at victims of crime aged 60 and over, the 2014 analysis noted that three categories of crime accounted for over 9/10 crimes against older victims. Theft-burglary, criminal damage, and theft (other theft offences and theft-vehicle offences). The report found that crimes against older people have lower clearance rates in seven out of the nine crime categories (sexual offences, robbery, theft-burglary, theft-vehicle offences, other theft offences, criminal damage, and other crimes against society.) It contended that, if the nature of the crime was 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.”*

Overall the report found that there was a sizable difference in clearance rates for those under 60 in comparison to those over 60.<sup>20</sup> (17% for victims under 60, and 9% for victims over 60.)

In Brown and Gordon’s very recent 2018 study on older victims of crimes access to procedural justice and clearance rates in Northern Ireland, they note that a key theme is the failure of the Northern Ireland criminal justice system to identify and support vulnerable older victims of crime.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>18</sup> HMIC, “Crime-recording Process,” HMICFRS, , accessed September 18, 2018, <https://www.justiceinspectorates.gov.uk/hmicfrs/our-work/article/crime-data-integrity/crime-recording-process/>. <sup>19</sup>[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/721595/count-general-jul-2018.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/721595/count-general-jul-2018.pdf)

<sup>20</sup>[https://www.copni.org/media/1131/final\\_an\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_clearance\\_rates\\_for\\_crime\\_against\\_older\\_people\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland.pdf](https://www.copni.org/media/1131/final_an_analysis_of_the_clearance_rates_for_crime_against_older_people_in_northern_ireland.pdf)

<sup>21</sup> Kevin J. Brown and Faith Gordon, “Older Victims of Crime,” *International Review of Victimology*, 2018, doi: 10.1177/0269758018791426.

This is corroborated by reports from the Criminal Justice Inspectorate of Northern Ireland (which in 2012 reported that in their opinion in Northern Ireland that fewer than half of those adult victims who were vulnerable, were being identified as such<sup>22</sup>) and Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (which in 2016 reported that in the year between March 2014 and March 2015, the PSNI only flagged 2% of its cases as concerning a vulnerable victim, this was in contrast with 10.7% of cases being flagged in England and Wales.)<sup>23</sup> Brown and Gordon go on to discuss a number of different factors that help explain the disparity between crime clearance rates for older victims (in their study over 55s) and younger victims – remarking in particular on the higher vulnerability and lower resilience levels of older victims, as well as other factors like not wishing to be seen as a burden or stress or fear of giving evidence in court, which may “heighten reticence to engage with the justice system.”<sup>24</sup>

As such, this piece of research by Action on Elder Abuse Northern Ireland endeavours to illuminate any ongoing trends in crimes against older victims in Northern Ireland, and the PSNI response to it. Primarily to see whether clearance rates have improved since 2010 for victims over 65 in Northern Ireland, and to elucidate as to the difference, if any, that exists between the clearance rate of younger victims under 65 and victims over 65.

## Methodology

Action on Elder Abuse (AEA) has conducted an analysis of clearance rates for older victims (over 65) of crime in Northern Ireland, using the Police Service of Northern Ireland (henceforth PSNI) national statistics, publicly available to read at <https://www.psnipolice.uk/inside-psni/Statistics/>

Much like the 2014 report conducted by the Commissioner For Older People of Northern Ireland between 2007 and 2013,<sup>25</sup> this AEA Northern Ireland report has found that the three most common crimes for older victims in Northern Ireland between 2010/11 and 2016/17 were theft-burglary (8462 cases between 2010/11 and 2016/17), all other theft offences (7805 cases between 2010/11 and 2016/17) and criminal damage (9413 cases between 2010/11 and 2016/17.)

<sup>22</sup> Cited in Kevin J. Brown and Faith Gordon, "Older Victims of Crime," *International Review of Victimology*, 2018, doi: 10.1177/0269758018791426. 15 <sup>23</sup> Cited in Kevin J. Brown and Faith Gordon, "Older Victims of Crime," *International Review of Victimology*, 2018, doi: 10.1177/0269758018791426. 15

<sup>24</sup> Kevin J. Brown and Faith Gordon, "Older Victims of Crime," *International Review of Victimology*, 2018, , doi:10.1177/0269758018791426. 17

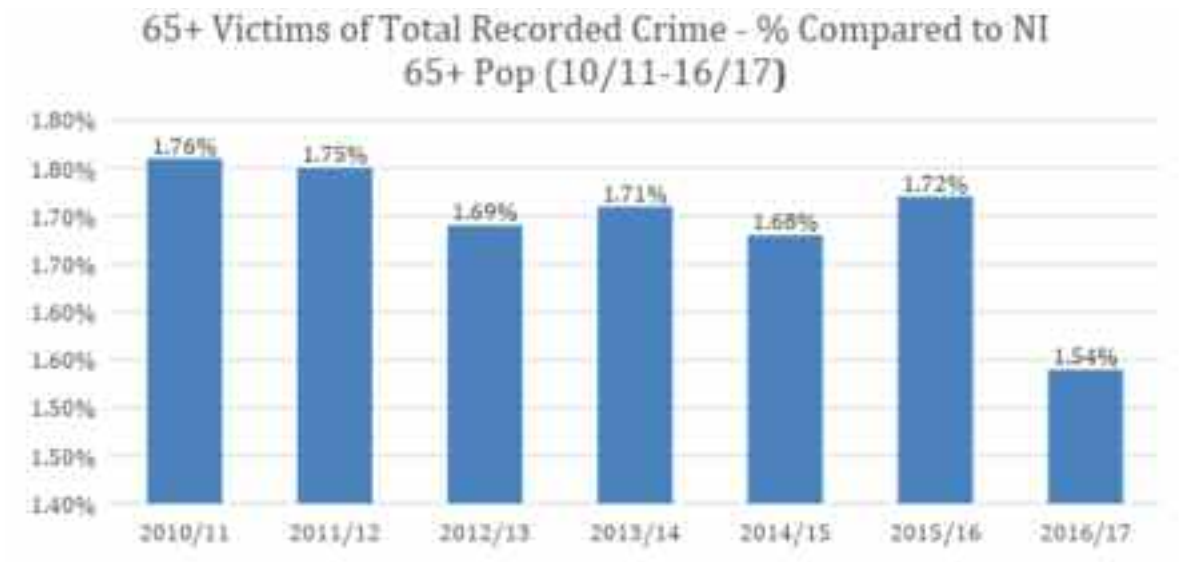
<sup>25</sup> [https://www.copni.org/media/1131/final\\_an\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_clearance\\_rates\\_for\\_crime\\_against\\_older\\_people\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland.pdf](https://www.copni.org/media/1131/final_an_analysis_of_the_clearance_rates_for_crime_against_older_people_in_northern_ireland.pdf)



However, these two reports cannot be too closely compared to identify broader trends in clearance rates in older victims, as unlike the previous report, this piece of AEA Northern Ireland research defines older victims as those being over 65, as opposed to 60.

Thankfully, the prevalence of victims of crimes aged over 65 in Northern Ireland is still relatively low, as the chart below shows, over the 7 years between 2010/11 and 2016/17 victims of crime aged 65 or over did not account for more than 1.76% at their highest point in 2010/11 in relation to the wider over 65 population of Northern Ireland.\*

However one must look at this figure with a degree of scepticism and reflect on instances of “abuse” which may not be considered as part of these figures representing these categories or levels of crime. As such- the number of those over 65 who are victims of “crimes” or “abuse” may be much higher than recorded.



\*(These statistics do not account for those victims of crime whose age is unknown)

## Findings

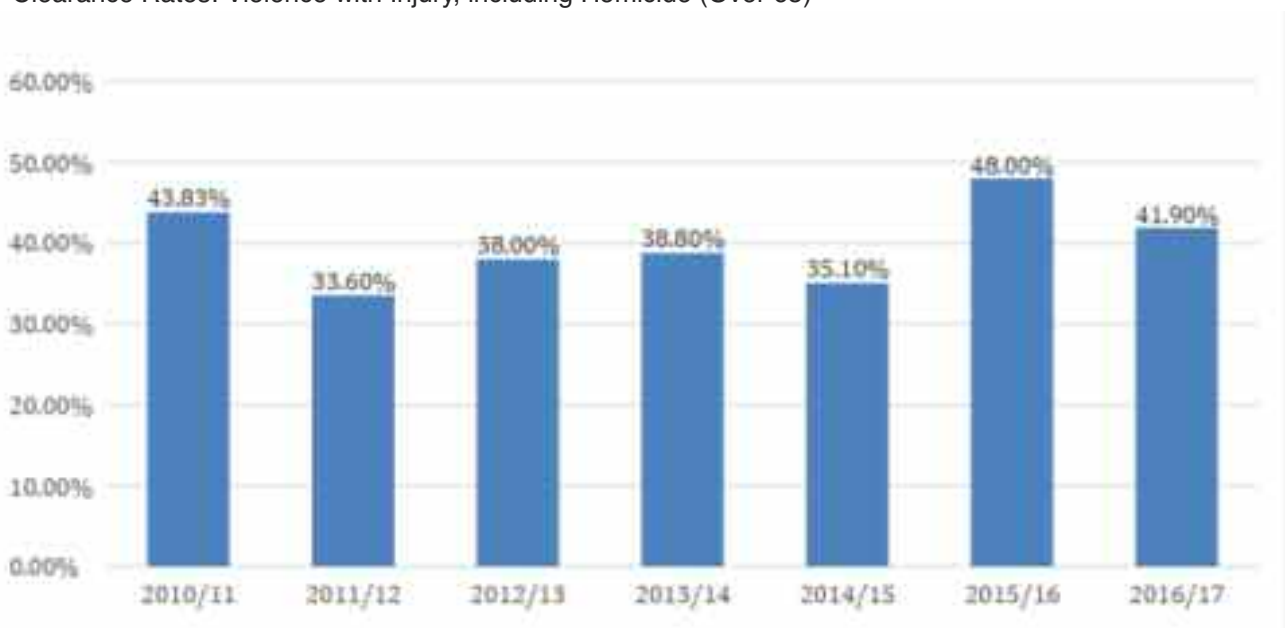
This section illustrates the key findings of the analysis of Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) statistics in relation to crime clearance rates for older people for a range of different offences.

### Violence with injury (including homicide)

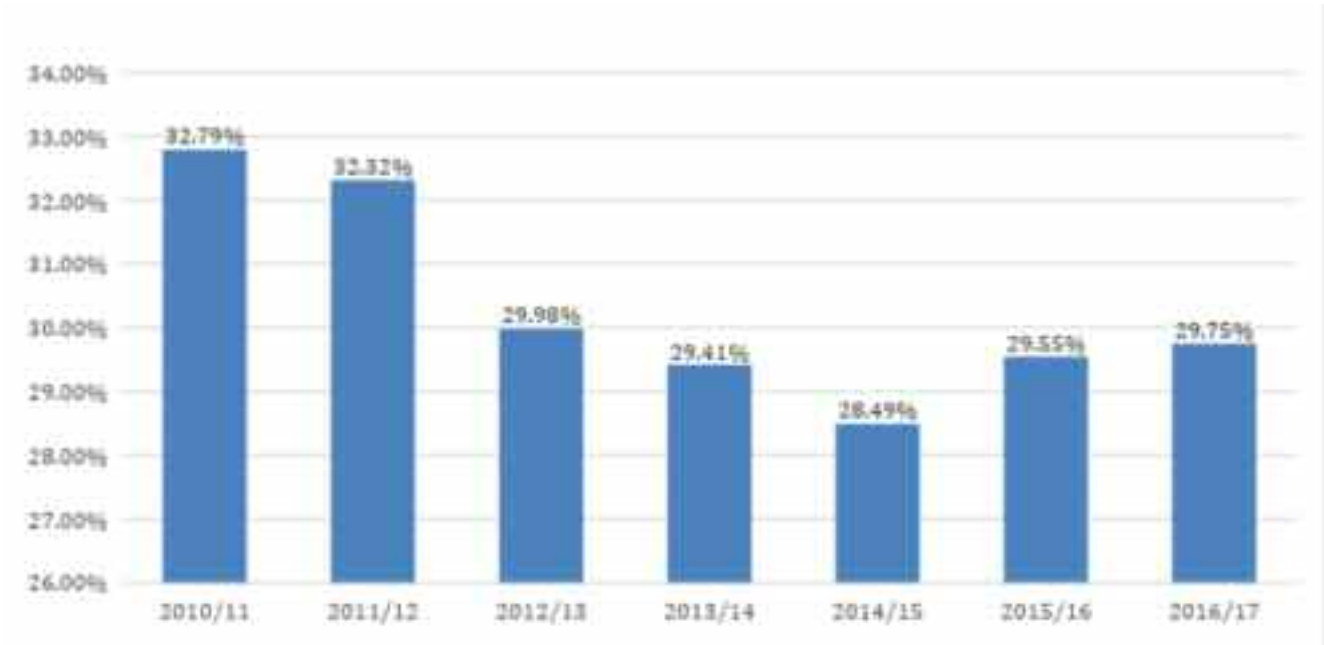
According to the PSNI crime report definition, violence with injury “Includes offences classifications such as attempted murder, causing death or serious injury by driving, assault with intent to cause serious harm and assault with injury. The largest volume of offences would be seen in assault with injury, for example assault occasioning actual bodily harm” (AOABH).

From 2010/11 to 2016/17, 1531 people over the age of 65 were victims of violence with injury (including homicide.) This denotes 1.9% of total victims. Of these victims, only 589 saw their cases cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 38.47%. The number of people under 65 who were victims of violence with injury (including homicide) was 80,838. Of these victims, 24,830 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 30.72%. This equates to a 7.75% difference.

Clearance Rates: Violence with Injury, including Homicide (Over 65)



Clearance Rates: Violence with Injury, including Homicide (Over 65)

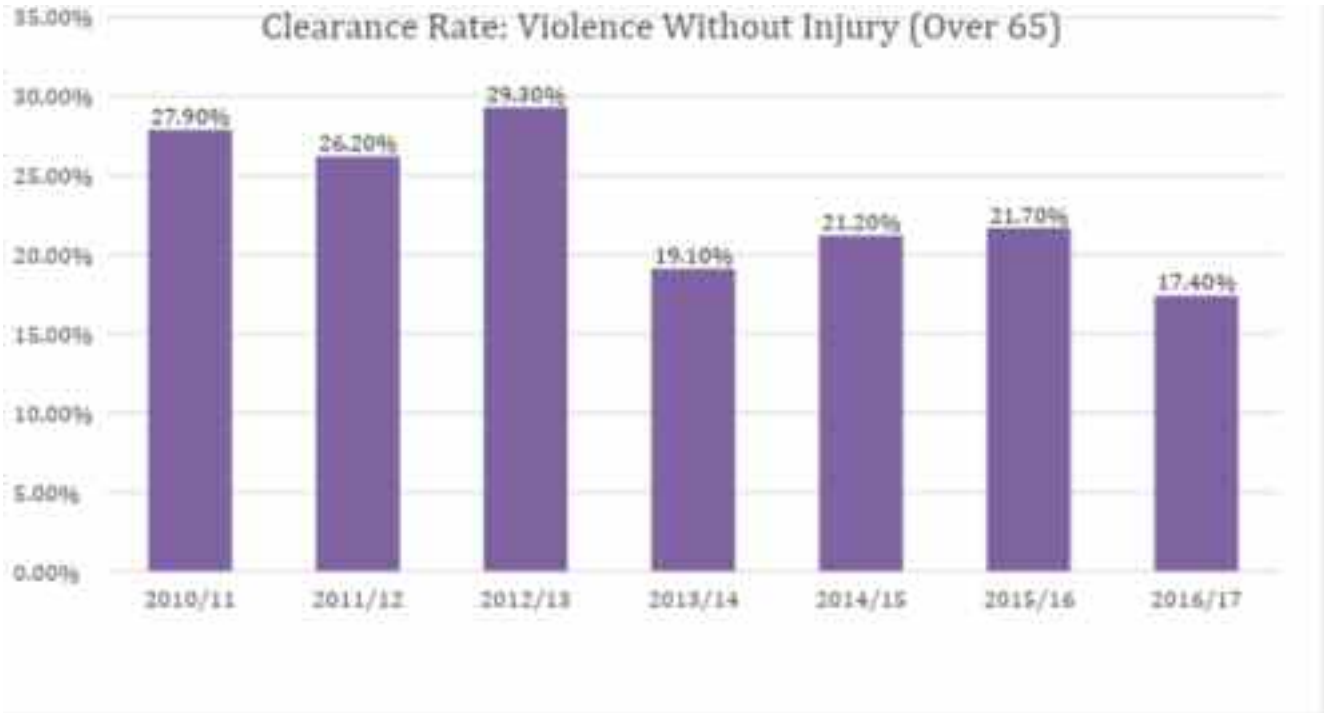


## Violence without injury

According to the PSNI crime report definition, violence without injury “includes classifications such as threats to kill, harassment, assault without injury, kidnapping, cruelty to children/young persons & child abduction and modern slavery. Offences of assault without injury would be the largest in terms of levels recorded within violence without injury.”

From 2010/11 to 2016/17, 2716 people over the age of 65 were victims of violence without injury. This denotes 3.1% of total victims. Of these victims, only 582 saw their cases cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 21.42%. The number of people under 65 who were victims of violence without injury was 85,148. Of these victims, 20,446 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 24.01%. This equates to a 2.59% difference.

Clearance Rates: Violence without Injury (Over 65)



Clearance Rates: Violence without Injury (Under 65)



## Sexual offences

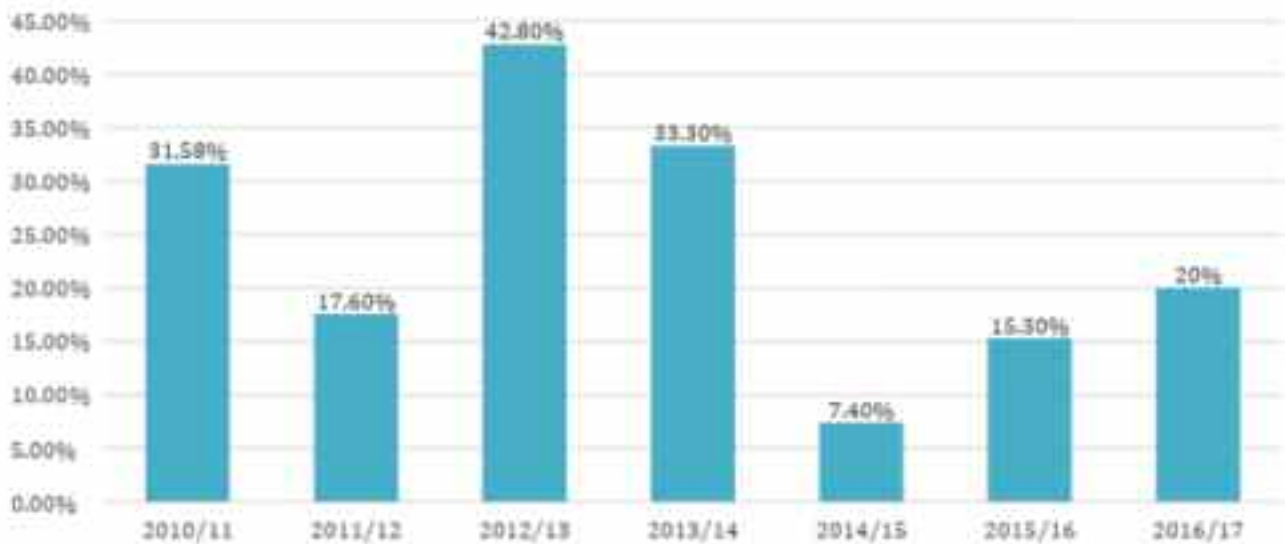
According to the PSNI crime report definition, “The classification of sexual offences is split into rape and other sexual offences. Among the offences included within other sexual offences are sexual assault, sexual activity, sexual grooming, exposure and voyeurism”.

From 2010/11 to 2016/17, 283 people over the age of 65 were victims of sexual offences. This denotes 4.2% of total victims. Of these victims, only 38 saw their cases cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 13.42%. The number of people under 65 who were victims of sexual offences was 6441. Of these victims, 121 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 18.82%. This equates to a 5.4% difference.

Clearance Rates: Sexual Offences (Over 65)



### Clearance Rates: Violence with Injury, including Homicide (Over 65)



## Robbery

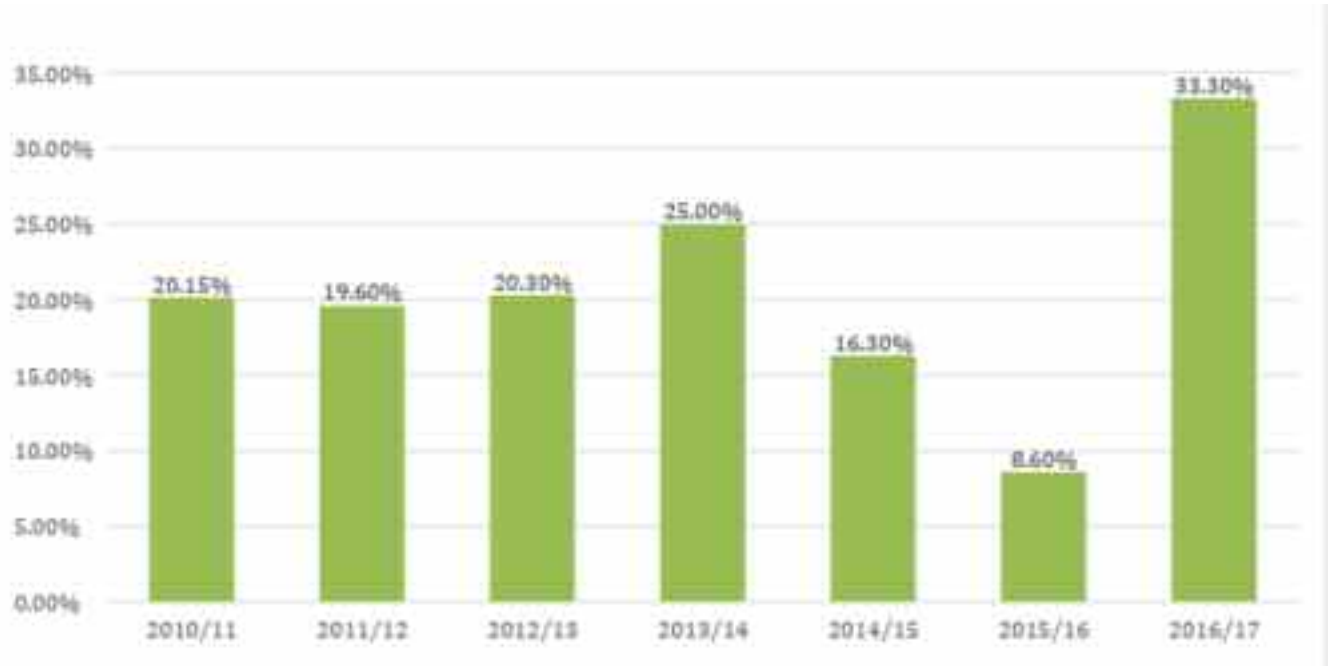
Robbery as defined by the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 is,

“(1) A person is guilty of robbery if he steals, and immediately before or at the time of doing so, and in order to do so, he uses force on any person or puts or seeks to put any person in fear of being then and there subjected to force”<sup>26</sup>.

From 2010/2011 to 2016/17, 392 people over the age of 65 were victims of robbery. This denotes 9.3% of total victims. Of these victims, only 79 got their case cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 20.15%. The number of people under 65 who were victims of robbery was 3837. Of these victims, 558 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 14.41%. This equates to a 5.74% difference.

<sup>26</sup> Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, c 16, s 8 (1)

Clearance Rates: Robbery (Over 65)



Clearance Rates: Robbery (Under 65)

Clearance Rates: Violence without Injury (Under 65)





## Theft - Burglary

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*

From 2010/2011 to 2016/17, 8462 people over the age of 65 were victims of theft - burglary. This denotes 17.5% of total victims. Of these victims, only 652 got their case cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 7.71%. The number of people under 65 who were victims of theft-burglary was 39,889. Of these victims, 3909 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 9.80%. This equates to a 2.09% difference, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 18.82%. This equates to a 5.4% difference.

Clearance Rates: Theft-Burglary (Under 65)



### Clearance Rates: Theft-Burglary (Under 65)



## Theft - Vehicle Offences

Theft-Vehicle Offences as defined by the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 is

“Taking of vehicles and other conveyances without authority....Subject to subsection (7), a person shall be guilty of an offence if, without having the consent of the owner or other lawful authority, he takes any conveyance for his own or another's use or, knowing that any conveyance has been taken without such authority, drives it or allows himself to be carried in or on it.”<sup>27</sup>

From 2010/2011 to 2016/17, 2290 people over the age of 65 were victims of theft - vehicle offences. This denotes 6.6% of total victims. Of these victims, only 376 got their case cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 16.41%. The number of people under 65 who were victims of theft-vehicle offences was 32,513. Of these victims, 6081 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 18.70%. This equates to a 2.29% difference.

<sup>27</sup> Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, c 16, c 12 (2)

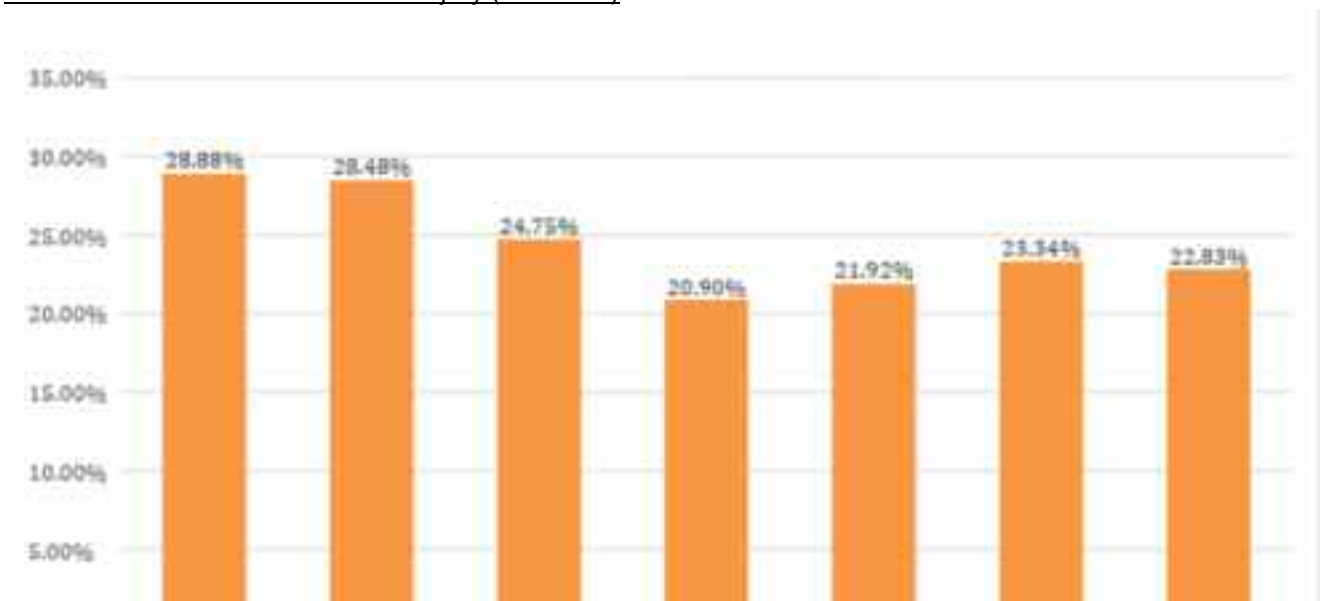
Clearance Rates: Theft-Vehicle Offences (Over 65)



Clearance Rates: Theft-Vehicle Offences (Under 65)



Clearance Rates: Violence without Injury (Under 65)



## All Other Theft Offences.

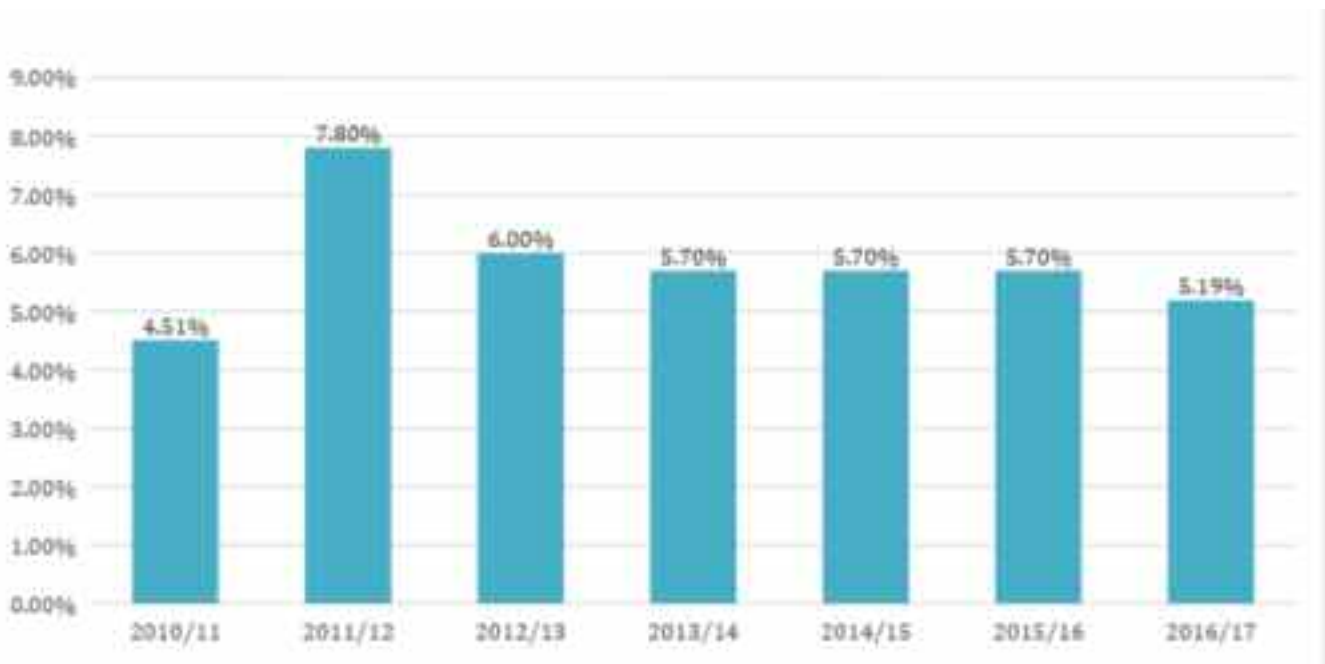
The basic understanding of theft as defined by the Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969 is,

*“A person is guilty of theft if he dishonestly appropriates property belonging to another with the intention of permanently depriving the other of it; and “thief” and “steal” shall be construed accordingly<sup>28</sup>.”*

As such, “all other theft offences” include such offences as obtaining property by deception, false accounting, blackmail, handling stolen goods, advertising rewards for return of goods stolen or lost, suppression of documents, and false statements by company directors.

From 2010/2011 to 2016/17, 7805 people over the age of 65 were victims of all other theft offences. This denotes 10.2% of total victims. Of these victims, only 529 got their case cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 6.78%. The number of people under 65 who were victims of all other theft offences was 68,923. Of these victims, 3927 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 5.70%. This equates to a 1.08% difference.

Clearance Rates: Theft-Burglary (Under 65)



<sup>28</sup> Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, c 16, s 1 (1)

### Clearance Rates: All Other Theft Offences (Under 65)



## Criminal Damage

Criminal Damage is defined by the Criminal Damage (Northern Ireland) Order 1977:

*“A person who without lawful excuse destroys or damages any property belonging to another intending to destroy or damage any such property or being reckless as to whether any such property would be destroyed or damaged shall be guilty of an offence.*

*(2) A person who without lawful excuse destroys or damages any property, whether belonging to himself or another—*

*(a) Intending to destroy or damage any property or being reckless as to whether any property would be destroyed or damaged; and (b) Intending by the destruction or damage to endanger the life of another or being reckless as to whether the life of another would be thereby endangered;*

*Shall be guilty of an offence.”<sup>29</sup>*

From 2010/11 to 2016/17, 9413 people over the age of 65 were victims of criminal damage. This denotes 8.9% of total victims. Of these victims, only 733 got their case cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 7.77%.

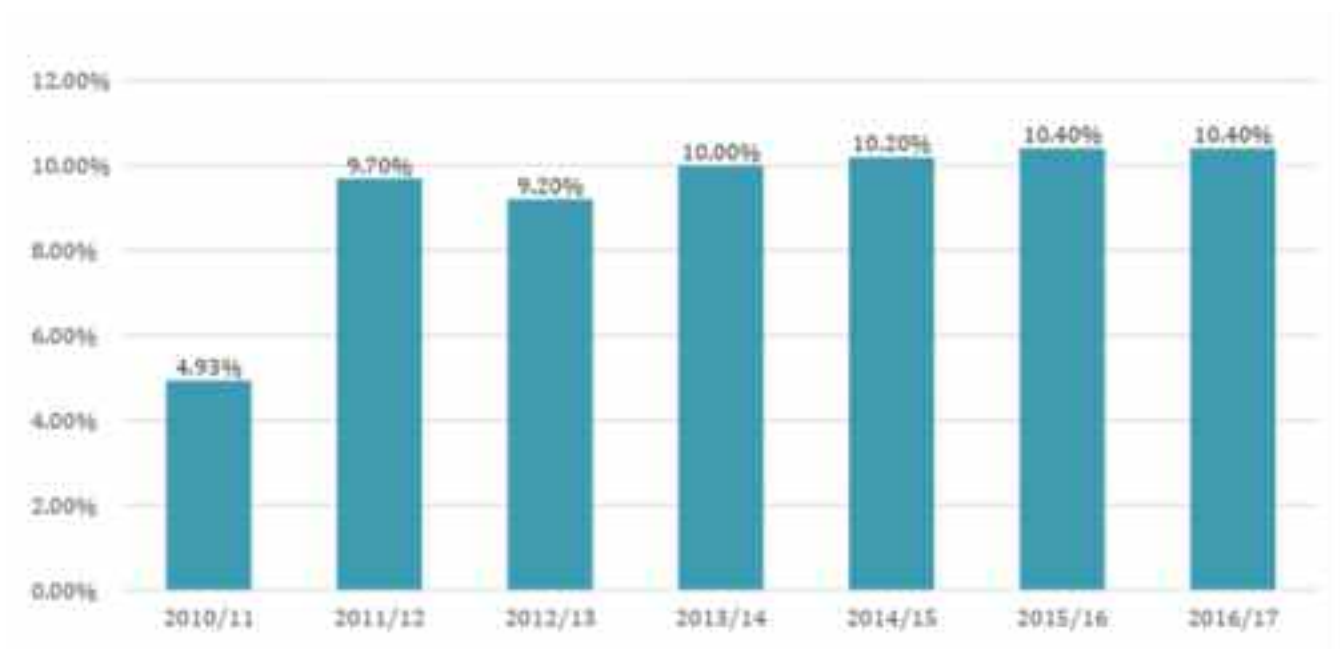
<sup>29</sup> Criminal Damage (Northern Ireland) Order 1977 No. 426 (N.I. 4) A 3 (1), (2)

The number of people under 65 who were victims of criminal damage was 96,774. Of these victims, 8996 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 9.30%. This equates to a 1.53% difference.

#### Clearance Rates: Criminal Damage (Over 65)



#### Clearance Rates: Criminal Damage (Under 65)

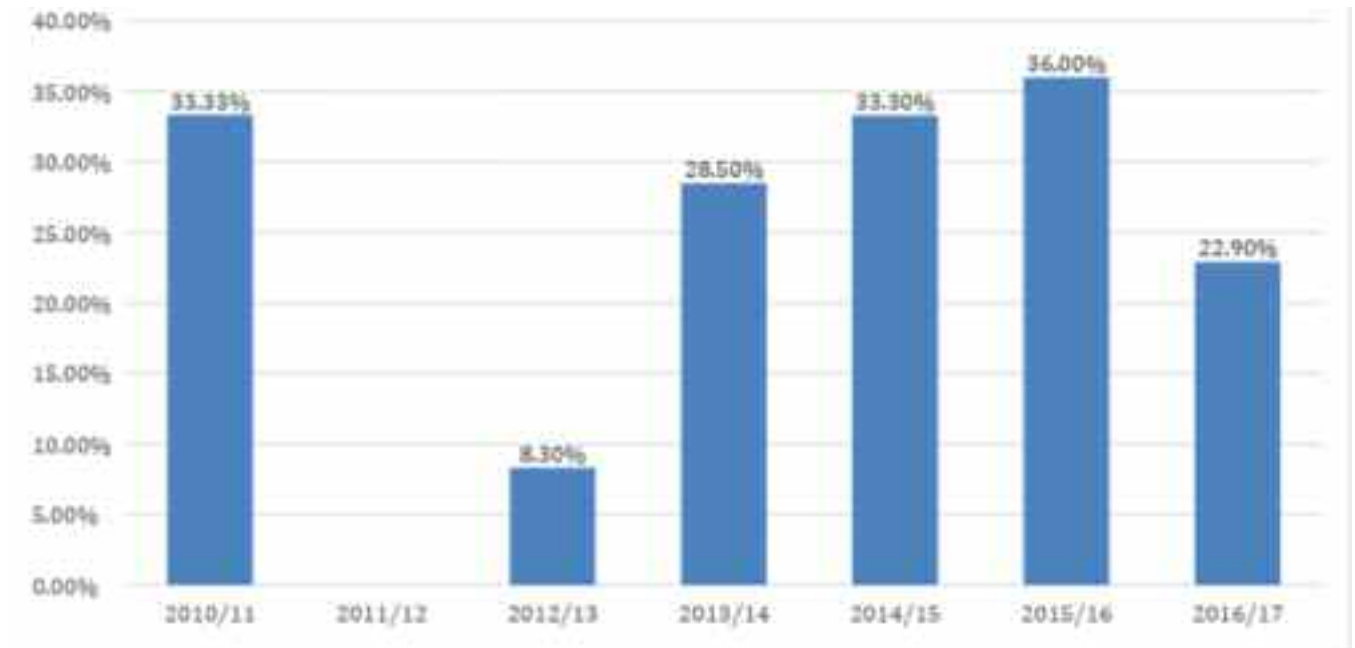


## Other Crimes against Society

According to the PSNI crime report, there is a wide range of offence types included within this classification, such as dangerous driving, forgery offences, trafficking of drugs, violent disorder, possession of drugs or weapons, going equipped for stealing, perverting the course of justice and obscene publications/protected sexual material.

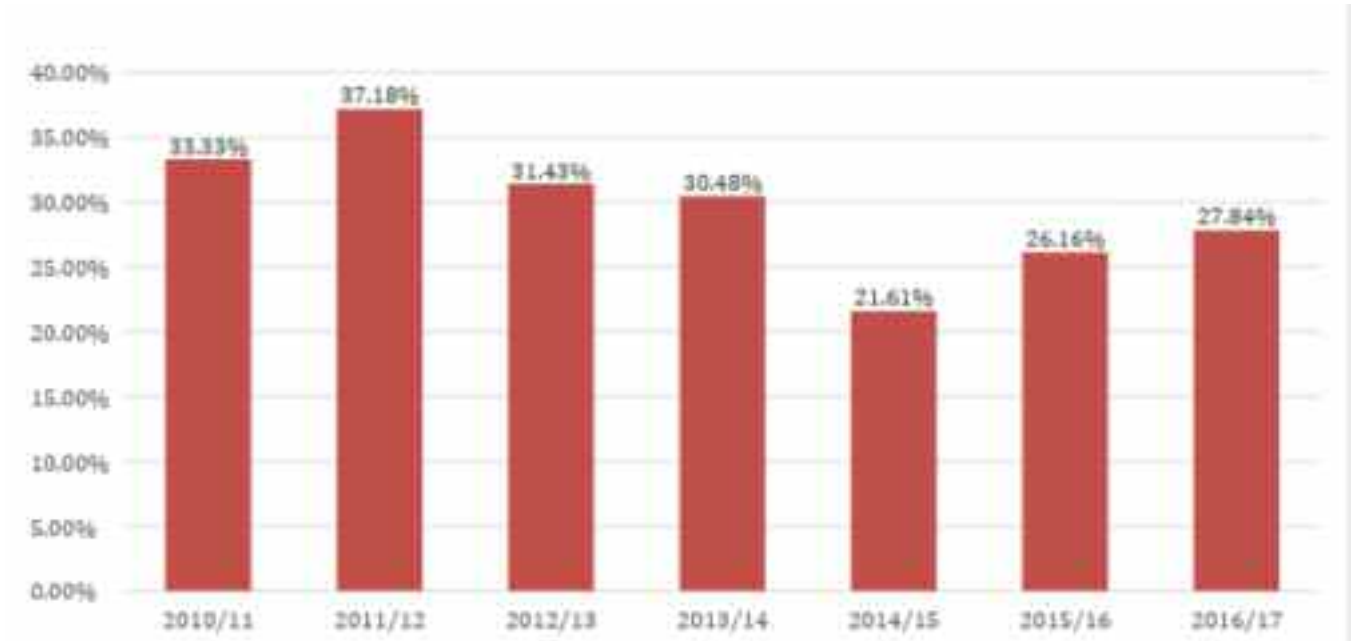
From 2011/12 to 2016/17, 140 people over the age of 65 were victims of “other crimes against society.” This denotes 4.3% of total victims. Of these victims, only 30 got their case cleared. This represents a clearance rate of 22.90% In comparison to this, the number of people under 65 who were victims of other crimes against society was 3144. Of these victims, 901 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 28.66%. This equates to a 5.76% difference.

Clearance Rates: Other Crimes against Society (Over 65)





### Clearance Rates: Other Crimes against Society (Under 65)



### Total Recorded Crime

In total from 2010/11 to 2016/17, 33,022 people over the age of 65 were victims of crime. Of these victims, only 3985 in total got their cases cleared. This represents a total clearance rate for victims over 65 of 12.07%. This donates 7.4% of total victims. In comparison to this, the number of people under 65 who were victims of crime was 411,427. Of these victims, 72334 saw their cases cleared. As such, the clearance rate for those victims under 65 during the same period was 17.58%.

However, there appear to be a couple of positives visible in the data for victims over 65. Since 2012/13, clearance rates have steadily progressed (albeit extremely marginally) year on year – from 10.00% to 11.60% in 2016/17. In contrast to this, clearance rates for those victims under 65 have been much more inconsistent and unpredictable, overall falling from 19.47% in 2011/12 to 17.62% in 2016/17. However, even though a growth in clearance rates over the last few years is visible for those victims over 65, we mustn't lose sight of the fact that 88.40% of cases for victims over 65 since 2010/11 have not been cleared, nor that there is a 6.2% difference in the overall clearance rates between those victims who are over 65 and those who are under 65.

<sup>27</sup> Theft Act (Northern Ireland) 1969, c 16, c 12 (2)

Clearance Rates: Total Recorded Crime – All Offences (Over 65)



Clearance Rates: Other Crimes against Society (Under 65)



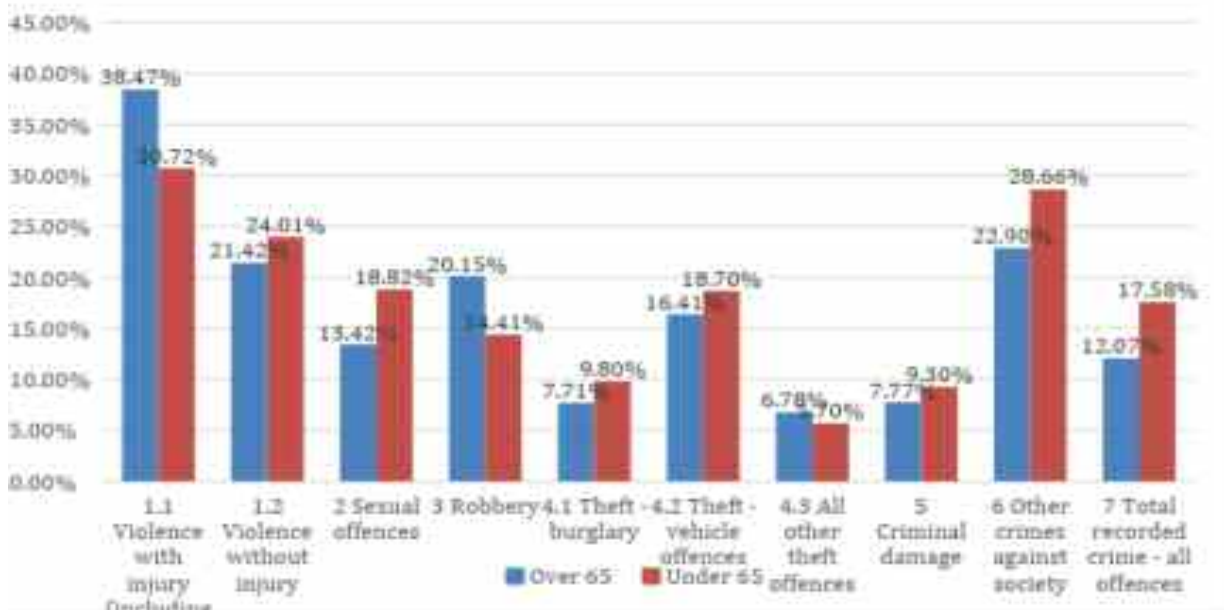
## Overall Analysis of Clearance Rates

From the charts below it can be seen that there are only three crimes where victims over 65 have higher clearance rates than those under 65, “Violence with injury, including homicide” (38.4% to 30.72%), “Robbery” (20.1% to 16.41%), and “All other theft offences” (6.78% to 5,70%).

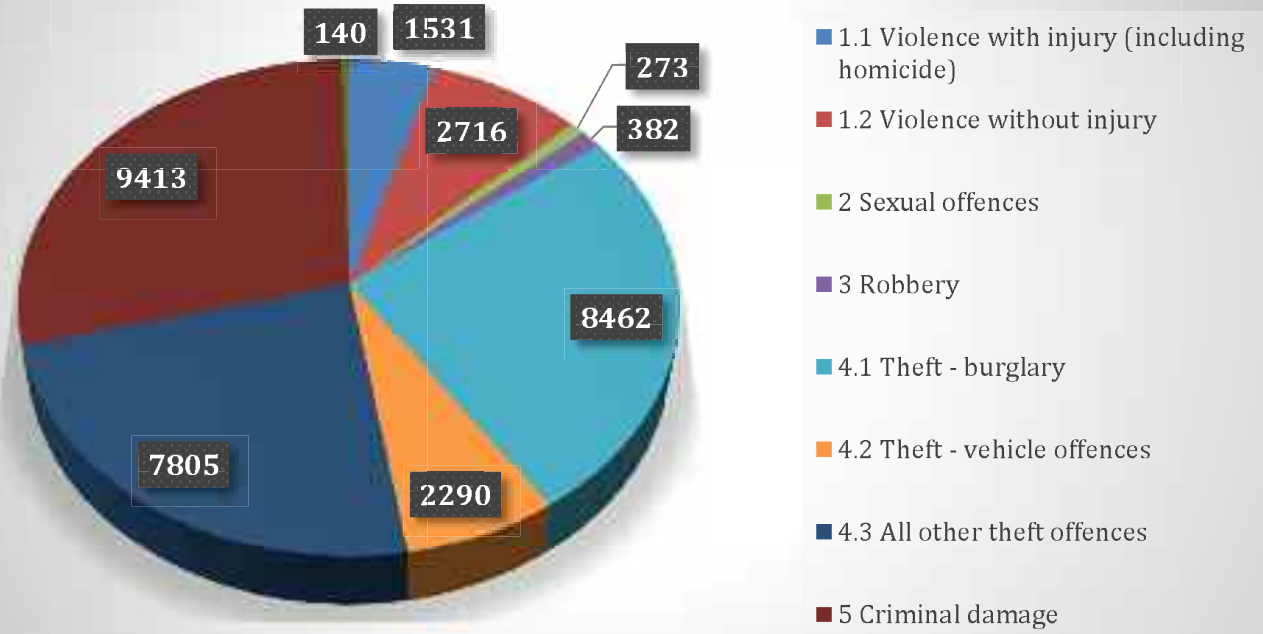
As such, the clearance rate is higher for those victims who are under 65 in the other 6 crime categories (Violence without injury, sexual offences, theft-burglary, theft-vehicle offences, criminal damage, and other crimes against society).

Included in these six are the two categories which affect victims over 65 the most, criminal damage (9413 cases between 2010/11 and 2016/17) and theft-burglary (4670 cases between 2010/11 and 2016/17) – as such for the two crimes that disproportionately affect older people, there is statistically a much lower chance that these crimes will get solved if you are a victim over 65.

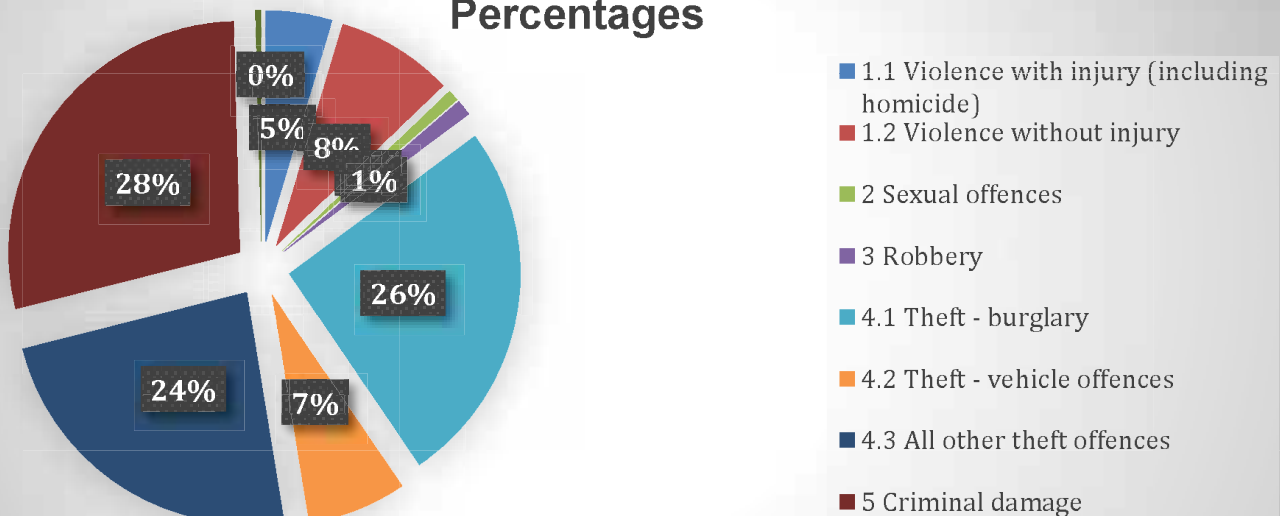
Overall Analysis of Clearance Rates from 2010/11 to 2016/17



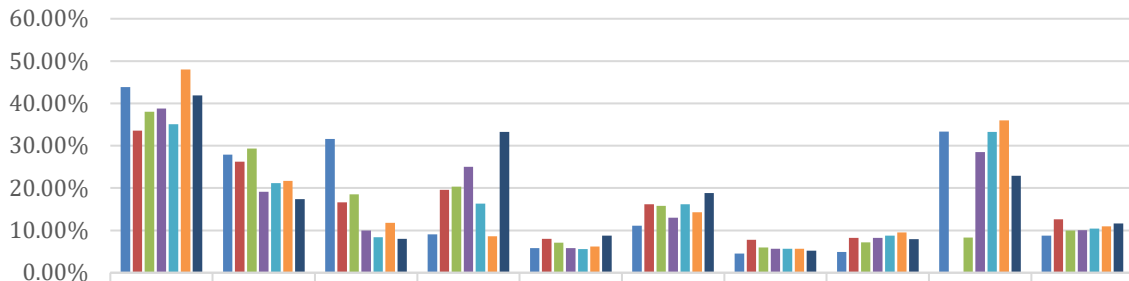
## Crimes against victims over 65 from 2010/11 - 2016/17 Numbers



## Crimes against victims over 65 from 2010/11 - 2016/17 Percentages

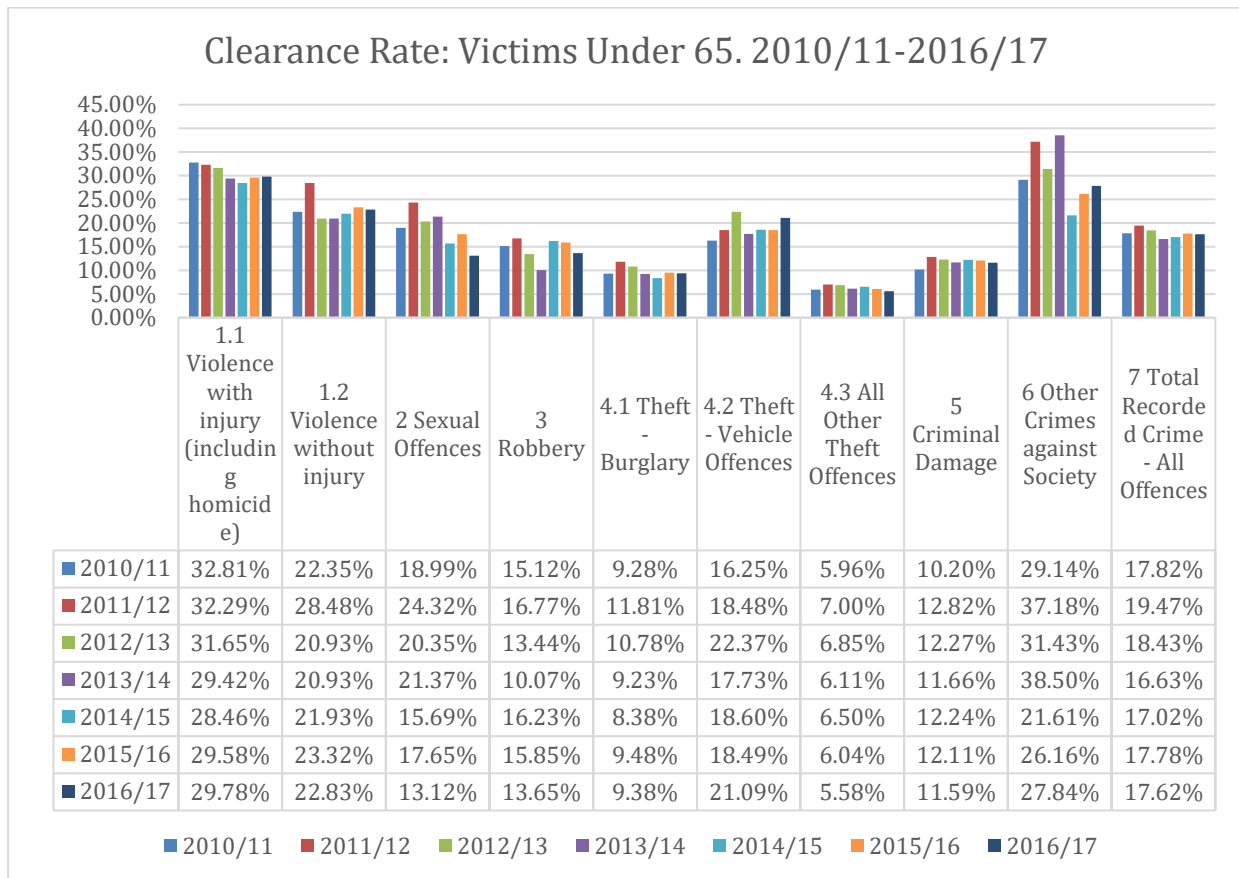


### Clearance Rate: Victims Over 65. 2010/11 - 2016/17



|           | 1.1<br>Violence<br>with<br>injury<br>(including<br>homicide) | 1.2<br>Violence<br>without<br>injury | 2 Sexual<br>Offences | 3<br>Robbery | 4.1 Theft<br>-<br>Burglary | 4.2 Theft<br>- Vehicle<br>Offences | 4.3 All<br>other<br>Theft<br>Offences | 5<br>Criminal<br>Damage | 6 Other<br>Crimes<br>against<br>Society | 7 Total<br>Recorded<br>Crime-<br>All<br>Offences |
|-----------|--|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------|----------------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------|---|--|
| ■ 2010/11 | 43.83%   | 27.90%                               | 31.58%               | 9.09%        | 5.85%                      | 11.08%                             | 4.51%                                 | 4.93%                   | 33.33%                                  | 8.79%  |
| ■ 2011/12 | 33.60%   | 26.20%                               | 16.60%               | 19.60%       | 8.00%                      | 16.20%                             | 7.80%                                 | 8.25%                   | 0.00%                                   | 12.61%   |
| ■ 2012/13 | 38.00%   | 29.30%                               | 18.50%               | 20.30%       | 7.10%                      | 15.80%                             | 6.00%                                 | 7.20%                   | 8.30%                                   | 10.01%   |
| ■ 2013/14 | 38.80%   | 19.10%                               | 10.00%               | 25.00%       | 5.80%                      | 13.00%                             | 5.70%                                 | 8.20%                   | 28.50%                                  | 10.07%   |
| ■ 2014/15 | 35.10%   | 21.20%                               | 8.40%                | 16.30%       | 5.60%                      | 16.20%                             | 5.70%                                 | 8.80%                   | 33.30%                                  | 10.44%   |
| ■ 2015/16 | 48.00%   | 21.70%                               | 11.80%               | 8.60%        | 6.20%                      | 14.30%                             | 5.70%                                 | 9.50%                   | 36.00%                                  | 10.96%   |
| ■ 2016/17 | 41.90%   | 17.40%                               | 8.00%                | 33.30%       | 8.80%                      | 18.80%                             | 5.19%                                 | 7.90%                   | 22.90%                                  | 11.65%   |

■ 2010/11 ■ 2011/12 ■ 2012/13 ■ 2013/14 ■ 2014/15 ■ 2015/16 ■ 2016/17



The Commissioner for Older People for Northern Ireland's research in 2014 identified a positive trend in clearance rates for victims over 60 between 2008 and 2013, with only "other crimes against society" not showing a result of higher clearance rates.<sup>30</sup> This report however, does not identify as many positive trends or levels of higher clearance rates for victims over 65. In total, there are five crime categories which show signs of higher clearance rates in 2016/17 as opposed to 2010/11, robbery, theft-burglary, theft- vehicle offences, all other theft offences, criminal damage, and total recorded crime – all offences.

Two of these categories show a sustained trend towards higher clearance rates for victims over 65s, criminal damage and theft-burglary. Apart from in 2016/17 where clearance rates went down slightly, criminal damage has been showing a positive upwards trend since 2012/13, and theft-burglary, has been showing an upward trend since 2012/13. However, while a trend towards higher clearance rates may be in evidence in these categories, they still show the lowest clearance rates for victims over 65, with neither categories clearance rates getting over 10%.

<sup>30</sup> [https://www.copni.org/media/1131/final\\_an\\_analysis\\_of\\_the\\_clearance\\_rates\\_for\\_crime\\_against\\_older\\_people\\_in\\_northern\\_ireland.pdf](https://www.copni.org/media/1131/final_an_analysis_of_the_clearance_rates_for_crime_against_older_people_in_northern_ireland.pdf)

Similarly, it is observable that there exists an incremental trend towards higher clearance rates when viewing the figures of total recorded crimes—all offences. From 2012/13, when clearance rates for victims over 65 were 10.01% to 2016/17 where clearance rates are now 11.65%, nevertheless as noted above this still signifies extremely low levels of clearance rates for victims over 65, and a result that is not in line with levels of clearance rates for victims under 65. Although the figures for theft-vehicle offences do not show a consistent trend upward in clearance rates, clearance rates have increased from just over 10% in 2010/11 to just under 20% in 2016/17.

On the other hand, there is cause for concern when looking some of the categories of crime perceived as the most serious - robbery and sexual offences. While these categories of crime have the lowest levels of recorded crime among victims over 65 and traditionally some of the highest levels of clearance rates, over the last few years the clearance rate for sexual offences has seen a pronounced swing downwards from over 30% in 2010/11 to under 10% in 2016/17 for victims over 65. Unfortunately the statistics do not give us any more information to interpret the cause for this severe downward movement, but, as with sexual elder abuse itself, it appears to be an extremely concerning problem that warrants further research. To a lesser extent, there has also been a large downward drop in violence without injury, from 28% in 2012/13 to 16% in 2016/17.

While the data for violence with injury (including homicide) included the highest level of clearance across the whole dataset (48% in 2015/16), clearance rates are currently at a lower level (41.90%) than they were in 2010/11 (43.83%) and 2015/16 (48.83%). However, on an encouraging note, these levels are much higher than those that exist for victims under 65, which suggests that not only is a victim over 65 far less likely to be the victim of a violence with injury (including homicide) crime than someone under 65, if they are a victim, the police are much more likely to clear the case than for a victim under 65. There exists a similar movement with other crimes against society, again although the clearance rates for this category represent some of the highest among all the data (36.00% in 2015/16, 33.30% in 2014/15), the most recent clearance rates are on a downward turn (22.90% in 2016/17, compared to 33.33% in 2010/11).

In comparison to this, there also appears to be a similar trend in clearance rate levels for victims over 65. In total, there are four crime categories that show higher rates of clearance for victims under 65, violence without injury, theft-burglary, theft- vehicle offences, and criminal damage. Much like victims over 65, only two crime category shows a consistent positive trend in clearance rates.



As the data shows, clearance rates in violence with injury (including homicide) started dropping from 2010/11 when they were 32.81% to 28.46% in 2014/15, and have only just begun climbing slightly again in the last couple of years ( 29.78% in 2016/17). Similar drops in clearance rates, punctuated by slight rises can also be observed in the categories, violence without injury (28.48% in 2011/12, 22.83% in 2016/17), and theft- burglary (from 11.81% in 2011/12 to 9.38% in 2016/17). Again, like for victims over

65, clearance rates for sexual offences have seen a substantial drop since 2010/11 - from 18% in 2010/11 to 13% in 2016/17 - Clearance rates for robbery and other crimes against society have also experienced drops since 2010/11 and 2016/17, from 15.12% to 13.65% and from 29.14% to 27.84% respectively.

When looked at through total recorded crimes-all offences, clearance rates for victims under 65 have stayed reasonably consistent, from 17.82% in 2010/11 to a slight fall to 17.62% in 2016/17, as noted above however clearance rates for victims under 65 are still 6.2% higher than they are if the victim is over 65.

As the data shows, there is currently a broad disparity between the levels of clearance rates for those victims under 65 and those that are over 65. This is unacceptable. As we have noted above, older people are far more likely to suffer from fear of crime and are far less resilient to the psychological or physical injuries that can follow serious crime, therefore if older people are to be able to live their lives in Northern Ireland as stress, anxiety, and crime free as possible, they must have full confidence in the PSNI and its ability to bring offenders to prosecution.

## Recommendations

A number of academic papers explore low levels of crime clearance rates and suggest potential solutions for improving them,

To help mitigate low clearance rates for older victims, Brown and Gordon recommend institutional and cultural reform for the PSNI and the PPSNI (Public Prosecution Service of Northern Ireland), especially in considering how victims are perceived as “vulnerable” or “intimidated” – they note that at present, such definitions are outdated and misleading, unintentionally leading to many older victims not getting the judicial or justice support that they need.<sup>31</sup> They specifically advocate for an increase in older voices in debates about policy making for vulnerable victims, and we agree with that wholeheartedly at Action on Elder Abuse Northern Ireland.

<sup>31</sup> Kevin J. Brown and Faith Gordon, "Older Victims of Crime," *International Review of Victimology*, 2018, , doi:10.1177/0269758018791426. 20

As well as this, there also may be some potential clearance level raising through the reform of certain policing techniques or policing models. Raising the idea of “rapid response policing” Vidal and Kirchmaier note that crimes where police officers arrived at the scene quicker were more likely to be cleared. Looking at the response times of Greater Manchester Police, they argue that a 10% increase in response time leads to a 4.7% point increase in the likelihood of solving the crime, noting that arriving at crime scenes quicker allowed police officers not only a larger chance of catching the perpetrator in the act, but also to quickly find witnesses to the crime and question them before their recollections of the event worsens.<sup>32</sup> They argue that this effect is most effective for thefts as opposed to crimes of violence, and as theft offences are the most common offences that victims over 65 suffer from, a quicker response time for police could lead to a higher clearance rate for theft crimes involving a victim over 65.

Similarly, in a 2015 study on homicide clearance rates in seven cities in America, Carter and Carter suggest that an increase in visible community policing can have a positive effect on both increasing levels of clearance rates – through gaining truthful information from local witnesses, as well as helping reduce victimization and fear in the general area where the crime occurs. “Police can build trust with citizens, reinforce legitimacy, and reduce fear of crime generally, and retaliation specifically, through an effective community policing approach.”<sup>33</sup> This theory is backed up by other studies that show community policing helps improve police investigations (Skogan et al 1999)<sup>34</sup> or can have a violence prevention effect. (Kenney et al 2010)<sup>35</sup>. In a 2015 editorial on elders and the criminal justice system, Blowers contends that community policing can have a broad positive effect on elderly people in the community, as long as effective training is given that understands the specific needs and challenges that older people face.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Jordi Blanes I Vidal and Tom Kirchmaier, "The Effect of Police Response Time on Crime Clearance Rates," *The Review of Economic Studies* 85, no. 2 (2017); doi:10.1093/restud/rdx044. 855 <sup>33</sup> David L. Carter and Jeremy G. Carter, "Effective Police Homicide Investigations," *Homicide Studies* 20, no. 2 (2015), doi: 10.1177/1088767915576996. 153

<sup>34</sup> Wesley G. Skogan, *On the Beat: Police and Community Problem Solving* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999). Cited in David L. Carter and Jeremy G. Carter, "Effective Police Homicide Investigations," *Homicide Studies* 20, no. 2 (2015), doi: 10.1177/1088767915576996 <sup>35</sup> Dennis Jay Kenney, Michael D. White, and Marc A. Ruffinengo, "Expanding the Role of Patrol in Criminal Sa Investigations: Houston's Investigative First Responder Project," *Police Quarterly* 13, no. 2 (2010); doi:10.1177/1098611110365687. Cited in David L. Carter and Jeremy G. Carter, "Effective Police Homicide Investigations," *Homicide Studies* 20, no. 2 (2015), doi: 10.1177/1088767915576996

<sup>36</sup> Anita N. Blowers (2015) Elders and the criminal justice system, *Journal of Crime and Justice*, 38:1, 1- 8, DOI: 10.1080/0735648X.2014.931509. 4



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