

CHAPTER 8. SPECIAL CONSIDERATIONS REGARDING ELDERLY RESIDENTS

52. SPECIAL PROBLEMS AND OPPORTUNITIES REGARDING THE ELDERLY. The vulnerability of elderly residents to crime and vandalism constitutes a special dimension of the problem of residential security, whether in the context of an all-elderly project or one where both elderly persons and families reside. Aside from the direct threat of such crimes as robbery and assault, the elderly are also susceptible to the greatest hardships resulting from vandalism. For example, if elevators are put out of order by vandals, elderly residents will be virtually imprisoned in their apartments. At the same time, there are special opportunities for effective security where the elderly are involved. Elderly residents themselves are not a source of crime and vandalism. They tend to be acutely concerned about security, and are usually disposed to offer the fullest cooperation in a security program.
53. SEPARATION OF THE ELDERLY AND YOUNGER FAMILIES.
- a. Security Advantages of Separation. There are generally good security reasons for giving serious consideration to a policy of housing elderly people in buildings or projects separate from those provided for family occupancy. The elderly do not commit crime and vandalism, but are prime targets for offenses by younger residents of family projects, including the casual vandalism of juveniles. Exclusively elderly buildings can be effectively secured by relatively simple controls on access. However, the question of whether a policy of separation is wholly desirable, taking all of the social implications into account, is beyond the scope of this Handbook.
  - b. Conversion of Buildings or Projects. Where the option is available (e.g., an LHA which owns and manages a number of buildings or projects housing a mixed elderly-family population), one measure to be considered is conversion of one or more existing buildings or projects to exclusively elderly use. This solution usually requires extensive remodeling, and may thus be an expensive one. An LHA or sponsor who is contemplating new construction, of course, has the option of designing the building for exclusively elderly occupancy from the start. Where other properties are under the same Management, such new construction may make it possible to shift present elderly residents of family projects, as well as to accommodate the new elderly residents.
  - c. Partial Separation. Short of complete separation of the elderly from families, there may be opportunities to assign the elderly

to particular mixed buildings or projects, to separate floors or wings, or to particular units which are more conducive to their protection. Older residents might be thus assigned to a building with particularly strong design and hardware features or with no large families.

- d. Locational Factors. The location of the project assumes particular importance in regard to security for elderly residents. The prime criterion is a generally low level of neighborhood crime, although the probable effect of introducing a large number of vulnerable elderly persons must be assessed along with favorable conditions. Elderly residents, whether in an all-elderly project or a mixed project, should be near shopping, medical clinics, check-cashing facilities, churches, recreational centers, and public transportation.

54. SECURITY FOR THE EXCLUSIVELY ELDERLY PROJECT. Where the population of the project is exclusively elderly, the key to good security is keeping unauthorized persons from entering the premises. The following measures deserve particular attention in this setting (see Chapter 4 above for further details):

a. Security Within Buildings

- (1) Control of access should not be difficult where an elderly population is housed in a high-rise structure. The number of secondary doors should be kept to the absolute minimum necessary for safety and convenience, and should be kept locked from the outside at all times. There should be only one doorway for ordinary ingress and egress, and its security must receive prime attention.
- (2) Visual monitoring is the best solution to control of the lobby entrance in all-elderly buildings. This may be provided by a stationary guard, closed circuit television, or by positioning the project office so that Management personnel can maintain surveillance and control during working hours. Strict screening is more feasible in all-elderly projects than in those housing families with children. During all hours when such measures are not operative, or wholly effective, the lobby door should be kept locked, and should be equipped with an annunciator system.
- (3) Lobby Surveillance can be further strengthened by designing the building so that the lobby is an extension of the lounge or social room, and is thus visible to persons sitting or participating in activities in the latter area. Elevators and mailboxes should also be positioned for high visibility

SECURITY PLANNING FOR  
HUD-ASSISTED MULTIFAMILY HOUSING                      CHAPTER 8

from the lobby. An unusual but highly effective design feature of one high-rise building for the elderly is a large see-through mirror which permits casual surveillance of the lobby by the resident manager and his family from the living room of their adjacent ground-floor apartment.

- (4) Emergency call buttons should be installed within individual dwelling units. Though primarily designed for use in medical emergencies, these devices serve a security function as well.
  - (5) Electronic surveillance and alarm systems tend to work well in buildings for the elderly, because of the cooperation of residents and the relative ease of distinguishing intruders from residents and their guests.
- b. Security of Grounds. A "fortress" strategy might possibly be extended to the entirety of the grounds of an elderly project, with an enclosure and controlled access gates, but a more common measure is to enclose a yard or terrace as a protected area for sitting and recreation in high-crime neighborhoods. Special attention should be given to the outside approach to the building's entrance. The door should be near, and clearly visible from, the street; dense shrubbery or other opportunities for concealment should be avoided; and the area should be well-lighted. If at all possible, lobby surveillance should extend to the outside approach. Parking lots and garages are another type of area requiring particularly strong security measures in projects for the elderly. Perhaps the most effective measure for protecting parking lots is a location near the building which is subject to continuous surveillance from the lobby and its approaches, social rooms, and a number of dwelling units. Lighting should be extraordinarily bright (subject to energy-conservation measures), because physical perception diminishes with age.
- c. Resident Participation. In exclusively elderly projects, there is usually a particularly high degree of resident concern and cooperation regarding security. Ordinarily, elderly residents feel a strong sense of community, at least among themselves, and are ready to join enthusiastically in programs of mutual benefit. Because of their concern and the fact that they tend to spend much of their time on the premises, older people provide excellent agents for surveillance. Moreover, they have the time, as well as the willingness, to provide appropriate volunteer services incident to security and related programs. There are generally excellent opportunities for the involvement of the residents' organization in a security program. Management

and the residents' organization should make special

SECURITY PLANNING FOR  
HUD-ASSISTED MULTIFAMILY HOUSING

CHAPTER 8

efforts to conduct a continuing program of formal and informal instruction on security, reminding residents of the functions of particular security measures and how the resident can best cooperate. In particular, residents should be clearly informed about electronic surveillance systems, security personnel, procedures for reporting offenses or suspicious incidents, procedures for safeguarding dwellings during extended absences, and how best to respond to individual confrontations with criminals. Fears and rumors should receive the prompt attention of Management and the residents' organization. One protective measure particularly suited to the exclusively elderly project is a "buddy system," whereby pairs or groups of residents take the responsibility for looking out for the welfare of each other on a daily basis. While this is widely used for the primary purposes of maintaining an alert for accidents and other medical emergencies, it is obviously a useful security measure, particularly for persons living alone.

- d. Community Involvement. While special opportunities for community involvement in the protection of elderly residents also extend to those living in mixed elderly-family projects, all-elderly projects are especially conducive to this type of assistance. Generally sympathetic community attitudes toward the elderly can be focused on the exclusively elderly housing project. Local agencies may be persuaded to bring their services to the project on a regularly-scheduled basis, and on-site facilities should be provided for such services as medical check-ups and recreational programs. Some all-elderly projects make their meeting rooms available to neighborhood organizations in return for various types of direct or incidental involvement in the lives of the residents. Such arrangements provide an additional element of surveillance.

55. SECURITY FOR ELDERLY RESIDENTS OF FAMILY PROJECTS. Where the elderly live alongside families in the same project, their security must largely depend upon the general level of security for the project and all of its residents. However, there are some special measures which can provide additional protection to older residents in this situation. Assignment to units with particularly strong security characteristics has already been suggested in subparagraph 53c above. A similar technique is to provide special interior or exterior areas for sitting, strolling and recreation, restricted to elderly or general adult use. This at least provides places where the elderly can get out of their dwelling units without threat or annoyance from juveniles. It also encourages informal surveillance and social contacts which further mutual protection. The "buddy system"

can be used in mixed projects, as

4/74

Page 68

SECURITY PLANNING FOR  
HUD-ASSISTED MULTIFAMILY HOUSING CHAPTER 8

well as all-elderly projects, and non-elderly residents are often more than willing to watch out for their older neighbors; the residents' organization might undertake this and other services for elderly residents. Even if special security measures cannot be justified for the benefit of nonelderly residents alone, the presence of older persons may argue for their adoption, perhaps on a limited or concentrated scale. For example, police or security guards might be instructed to exercise prime surveillance of the elderly and their dwelling units. If the vulnerability of elderly residents is an important factor in attracting crime by nonresidents, the security of all residents can be enhanced by eliminating that vulnerability.

56. SECURITY OFF THE PREMISES. One of the most serious aspects of security for the elderly is the threat of attack within the larger neighborhood in which they live. It is often especially hazardous for the older resident to perform the ordinary errands necessary to his or her daily life, such as buying groceries and cashing assistance checks. Residential security for the elderly must therefore take special account of their security needs within the larger neighborhood. Identification of relatively safe, as well as convenient, neighborhood facilities and pedestrian routes can be helpful as a part of a program of security education for older persons. New elderly residents should be briefed about especially dangerous areas and advised of options for safer use. It may be possible to make arrangements with the police to exercise heavier surveillance over neighborhood routes and facilities frequented by the elderly. Merchants, and perhaps crossing guards for school children, can assist with surveillance of elderly persons. In many instances, particularly where all-elderly projects are concerned, merchants and community organizations arrange transportation for shopping, church attendance, recreational outings, and other activities. In some communities, merchants will make free deliveries to the elderly, on a group or individual basis. Protection may be furthered by arranging for elderly residents to travel in groups to banks, grocery stores, churches, clinics, or other points within the neighborhood. Younger residents, or even police or security guards, may accompany elderly individuals or groups. In all-elderly low-income projects, "check days" (days of the month when assistance checks are regularly received) may require special protective arrangements. See paragraph 51 above. Finally, the support and assistance of the nonresident children or other relatives of elderly residents should be enlisted to the fullest extent possible. Such persons often need only suggestions as to how they may be of help. Among the many possibilities are providing safe transportation for check-cashing, shopping, and other

errands.

4/74

Page 69