



ILLiad TN: 217796

Borrower: RAPID:CSH

Call #: Periodical

Lending String:

Location: Periodical

Patron:

**Mail
Charge
Maxcost:**

Journal Title: Journal for specialists in group work.

Volume: 11 **Issue:** 2

Month/Year: 1986**Pages:** 107-

Shipping Address:
NEW: Main Library

Article Author: Burke, Margaret J

**Fax:
Ariel:**

Article Title: Peer Counseling for Elderly Victims
of Crime and Violence

Imprint:

ILL Number: -8113329



Notice – Warning Concerning copyright Restrictions

The Copyright Law of the United States (Title 17, United States Code) governs the making of photocopies or other reproductions of copyrighted materials. Under certain conditions specified in the law, libraries and archives are authorized to furnish a photocopy or other reproduction. One of these specified conditions is that the photocopy or reproduction is not to be used for any purpose other than private study, scholarship, or research. If electronic transmission of reserve material is used for the purposes in excess of what constitutes "fair use," that user may be liable for copyright infringement. This institution reserves the right to refuse to accept a copying order if, in its judgment fulfillment of the order would involve violation of Copyright Law.

Peer Counseling for Elderly Victims of Crime and Violence

Margaret J. Burke
Richard L. Hayes

A community-based training program is described in which elderly peer counselors work with elderly victims of crime and violence.

An increase in reported crime against the elderly and the fear of victimization have given rise to a number of prevention programs (McQuade, 1976; Waters, Fink, & White, 1976). Older adults are becoming involved in activities that enable them to help other elderly individuals (Waters & Epstein, 1980; Waters, Fink, & White, 1976). In addition to the help they provide for others, elderly volunteers often receive benefits for themselves through a renewed sense of usefulness, which enhances their sense of well-being (Romaniuk & Priddy, 1980; Romaniuk, Priddy, & Romaniuk, 1981).

After being involved in a peer-counseling project for the elderly, one volunteer reported:

I personally have gotten an inner feeling of good each time I've contacted a client. I have learned new skills that have helped me to talk to people. I have been able to communicate with elderly people. This knowledge keeps me active even though not young in years. . . . I felt that I had given of myself to help someone else. The feeling of having helped an unfortunate person gives me a good inner feeling.

Margaret J. Burke is professor of education and Richard L. Hayes is associate professor of education, Bradley University, Peoria, Illinois.

Another volunteer in the same program saw herself as a part of an ever-widening circle of involvement, "like a skipping stone. The experience of watching and enjoying and growing from the constant and seemingly unending circling effect of a small beginning with undetermined broadening and ongoing action." She concluded that she is "much strengthened and enthusiastic" about the work she is doing and that she is "growing in a great number of ways while sharing with clients."

These elders are volunteers in a peer-counseling project that is part of the prevention efforts of one midwestern community that is responding to threats against its elderly citizens. Like so many who participate in programs as counselors to their peers (Carroll & King, 1985), these elderly volunteers enjoy the benefits that come from helping others. In this article we examine the effects of this project on its participants.

PEER COUNSELING FOR OLDER ADULTS

Violence against elderly persons is increasing. Older Americans are victimized at a rate of 169,000 violent crimes per year (8 per 100,000), suffer 1.5 million common

thefts, are victims of 750,000 residential burglaries, and lose 80,000 automobiles to theft each year (U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, 1984). Interestingly, these rates are actually lower than those of other age groups. Unlike younger victims, however, the elderly are less likely to cope successfully with their reactions to crime. Indeed, older persons often list crime as one of their greatest fears (Norton & Courlander, 1982).

In efforts to protect themselves, the elderly often lock themselves in their own homes. Norton and Courlander (1982) pointed out that senior citizens who stay home become social isolates who actually become more frightened by sensationalized accounts of criminal activity in the electronic and print media. And when the elderly do talk to one another, the discussion soon turns to the topic of crime. Yet, the passing on of information about local experiences with crime only increases the opportunity for what Sunderland (cited in Norton & Courlander, 1982) calls "vicarious victimizations" (p. 388). For elderly victims of crime, the solution to their problems lies not so much in information, nor even what kind, but rather in the circumstances under which it is received.

The Peer Counseling for Older Adults project was initiated in 1977 in response to local concerns about the lack of services to elderly victims of crime in central Illinois. Senior citizen volunteers were recruited through the local media and service organizations to provide needed services for the elderly who live in their communities. The peer-counseling project is a multilevel intervention that (a) involves older adults directly in their own continuing development through training in the use of basic counseling skills (Egan, 1982), (b) uses the talents and energies of the elderly as helpers (Priddy & Knisely, 1982), and (c) trains peer counselors to serve as advocates for other, older adults (Wineman & James, 1973).

Senior citizen volunteers, numbering nearly 100 since the project's inception,

alert elderly persons to ways in which they might protect themselves, their homes, and their possessions. In addition, the volunteers, who work as trained peer counselors, provide assistance to and support for elderly victims of crime and violence. The peer-counseling project is actually comprised of two related programs. One is intended to reduce crime and fear of victimization among the elderly and the other is intended to train peer counselors.

OPERATION SENIOR SECURITY

The first of the two programs, Operation Senior Security (OSS), was started in 1977. Designed to be educational, OSS is a crime prevention approach that attempts, through the use of films, slide presentations, lectures, and discussions, to alert elderly persons to the existence of potential threats to them and their residences. Elderly volunteers are trained by professionals from law enforcement and social service agencies to be knowledgeable about the various elements of the awareness program. Programs are presented at sites that older adults tend to frequent. To date, prevention and survival information has been shared with 31,136 adults through 628 presentations (V. Boucher, personal communication, September 12, 1985).

OPERATION VICTIM SUPPORT

On July 1, 1979, Operation Victim Support (OVS) was added to provide training for peer counselors in both OSS and OVS. The model for training elderly peer counselors was developed by the first author, drawing from the general literature on counselor training and, in particular, the training of paraprofessional counselors (see, for example, Carkhuff, 1969, 1980; Danish & Hauer, 1973; Egan, 1982; Ganiokos, 1979; Ivey, 1968).

Training Design

The training seminar covers a total of 30 hours, divided into ten 3-hour modules. Each module emphasizes both didactic and experiential activities and is designed to involve the participants in learning about themselves and the helping skills they already possess, as well as providing opportunities for acquiring new interpersonal skills.

Summary of the Modules

Module 1 is introductory in nature. Participants are given an overview of each module to highlight the progressive nature of the 10 sessions. In addition, get-acquainted activities are used, which provide participants with opportunities to get to know one another through the use of self-disclosure (Jourard, 1971) and active listening skills (Egan, 1982).

Module 2 introduces peer counselors to Rogers's (1958) core conditions and focuses on helping relationships. As in all the modules, an emphasis is placed first on one's personal reaction to and experience with what is being emphasized. Then, a transition is made to applying the skills to others with whom the peer counselors will be working.

Module 3 focuses on attending behaviors (Ivey, 1968). The primary emphasis is on active listening and using four listening responses: reflection, paraphrase, clarification, and summary (Cormier & Cormier, 1979).

Module 4 deals with feelings and empathy, focusing primarily on participants' feelings, both past and present (Alpaugh & Haney, 1979).

Module 5 continues to emphasize feelings through a series of brief vignettes that illustrate typical crimes and violence experienced by elderly persons. Participants learn to identify and respond to feelings. Later, peer counselors are divided into groups of three to practice feeling respon-

ses in role playing situations (Alpaugh & Haney, 1979; Ivey, 1968).

Module 6 deals with issues related to the communication of content. Listening responses of restatement, clarification, and summary are demonstrated and practiced in both small- and large-group activities (Cormier & Cormier, 1979).

Module 7 focuses on problem solving and decision making. Small-group brainstorming sessions on topics such as how to protect one's home, how to protect oneself on the street, how to overcome isolation, and where to get help provide peer counselors with references they may use to assist others to take steps to improve their situations (Alpaugh & Haney, 1979; Egan, 1982).

Modules 8 and 9 are practice sessions in which participants use the information, skills, and techniques presented earlier. As in previous sessions, participants begin by responding to written situations devised by the instructor and progress to role playing peer-counseling situations with victims (Ivey, 1968).

Module 10 involves building bridges between participants' experiences in the program and their future activities as peer counselors. The program director explains the contact and case reporting processes. At the end of the seminar, participants are presented with certificates indicating that they have completed the peer-counseling seminar and are ready to work as OVS peer counselors in their communities. The certificates serve to affirm the volunteers' efforts and provide a tangible outcome to symbolize their success.

ONGOING SUPPORT FOR PEER COUNSELORS

Monthly, 2-hour sessions are held for peer counselors throughout the year. These sessions are held in the recreation room of one of the retirement living facilities in the community. This site was selected because it is easily accessible to the elderly peer counselors who either use public

transportation or drive their own cars; it has a private parking lot adjacent to the building. The recreation room is located on the entrance floor, thus alleviating the necessity of climbing stairs. The room itself is conducive to comfortable arrangements, with sufficient seating in chairs of various sizes and shapes to accommodate the needs of the elderly; they are movable, which allows for open, large, circular arrangements, as well as small-group discussion clusters, as suggested in Ganikos (1979).

Because all the residents of the facility are elderly, the peer counselors feel more comfortable and at home among their peers. They are not strangers coming into an area populated by various age groups. They have many things in common with the residents who, in the exchange, derive much satisfaction from sharing their "home" with the peer counselors. This open atmosphere promotes interactions of the peer counselors with the permanent residents as well as interactions among the peer counselors, a phenomenon Carroll and King (1985) called "interpersonal group awareness" (p. 6). The peer counselors have stated that the friendly, relaxed atmosphere of the meetings has been an incentive for them to get together each month, thus contributing to the group's cohesiveness (Schriesheim, 1980).

These sessions, which are conducted by the OVS coordinator and the instructor for the seminars, fulfill several purposes. First, peer counselors are provided with up-to-date information on various subjects that are of general interest to older individuals. These items typically include a list of community events and activities, organizational calendars of events, schedules of senior outings, and symposia designed for senior citizens. This information is shared with older adults at the OSS presentations (Carroll & King, 1985; Ganikos, 1979b).

Second, peer counselors are informed of changing local, state, and national legislation that affects the lives and well-being of senior citizens. Timely issues include

such items as the availability of door-to-door transportation, the rising cost of medical care and changes in Medicare and Medicaid, the status of social security, and changes in local, state, and federal taxes that have an impact on the daily living expenses of the elderly.

The third reason for the monthly sessions is to increase and to reinforce continually the peer counselors' knowledge of community resources, including the addition or deletion of programs or services, the relocation of agencies, and the requirements for assistance under special programs for the elderly and the poor. Speakers from social service agencies, public utilities, law enforcement agencies, and governmental, housing, and private agencies within the city and surrounding communities each present an informational session, followed by an opportunity for the peer counselors to ask questions. Presenters have discussed such topics as various frauds perpetrated on the elderly, living wills and other legal concerns, insurance, and substance abuse among the elderly. The speakers usually provide literature to which peer counselors may refer in their work. The peer counselors provide feedback to the presenters, and in this respect, serve as a small group of advocates for other elders in their communities.

Finally, as suggested in research on elderly support groups (Petty, Moeller, & Campbell, 1976), the monthly sessions serve as a support group for the peer counselors themselves. New friendships are formed and increased involvement in community life, issues, and concerns is evident as the peer counselors share their successes and frustrations and receive input from each other as they try to assist elderly victims.

CURRENT STATUS AND EVALUATION

Approximately 35 to 45 peer counselors remain actively involved in both Opera-

tion Senior Security and Operation Victim Support. The numbers vary depending on the counselors' availability, particularly during vacation periods. The demographics of the group are similar to those of the elderly population in general (U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging, 1984). The peer counselors range in age from 60 to 90+ years, Whites and Blacks are represented at approximately a 2:1 ratio, and educational backgrounds vary from individuals who completed the eighth grade to one person who had a doctoral degree. Although no specific information is available on educational attainment of all participants, the majority of the peer counselors are high school graduates. Women, half of whom are widowed, slightly outnumber the men (18 to 14 at last count). Among the active counselors there are five couples who work as teams on victim referrals.

Throughout the seminars, the participants are asked to provide feedback on the individual training modules. Their reactions and suggestions are noted by the director of training and are taken into consideration when future seminars are planned and conducted. In a recent evaluation session, a sampling of peer counselors were involved in a more formalized evaluation. Twenty-four respondents, approximately two-thirds of the counselors who remain actively involved in working with elderly victims, participated.

Volunteers were asked to consider what they had gained and how they had grown from involvement in the peer-counseling project, and shared their thoughts and feelings by responding to the following two broad questions.

Question 1: What have you learned from being a part of this group? Responses to this question indicated that the peer counselors acquired new skills or that they improved and refined communication skills they had been using on a trial-and-error basis. After training, they thought they had a better understanding of the benefits of attending behaviors and listen-

ing and responding techniques, as well as correct timing and usefulness in communicating with others. As one respondent stated, "I learned to listen to all ideas. . . . I had a habit of thinking once I gained information and assimilated it, there was no more—that further opinions were unnecessary, a waste of time."

In addition, respondents indicated that through their work with other older adults, they had come to know their communities better and were more aware of facilities, opportunities, and services available to the elderly. Another benefit derived from being a part of the peer-counseling group was an increased awareness and appreciation of individual differences. Yet, as one participant expressed, "meeting people from all walks of life [helped me] to realize how much we are alike in many ways."

A fourth result of involvement in the peer-counseling group focused on the participants' perceptions of aging and the realization that "we are never too old to learn or to make ourselves better people." Some referred to learning new skills and to expanded areas of interest. Others expressed a strong sense of pride and personal satisfaction that they were able to cope better when helping or working with clients. "Increased ability in problem solving and self-management" gave one respondent the confidence that "I may be able to solve problems that happen to me myself." In sum, the things respondents learned in the project had been, in the words of one participant, "reinforcing against the rigidity of old age!"

Question 2: How have you personally changed or grown as a result of your participation in this group? Several respondents shared that they had gained insight into other's lives and a feeling of fellowship and satisfaction from helping others. One respondent in particular felt "more secure in the work I am doing" and that feeling had spread beyond the confines of the group itself to include better and more satisfying relationships with "my family and friends [who] gain from

my being a better person with a healthy mental attitude.”

The volunteers felt better about themselves in relationships with others. Some areas of growth they mentioned included an improved ability to share their own problems, increased awareness of others and a deeper interest in and concern for people, greater tolerance of family and friends, more outgoing with other people, and having more poise in meeting new situations. Nearly all the respondents indicated a strong sense of “fellowship [from] helping people in my age group” and “a more at-home feeling when I do.”

One respondent summed up her feelings about being a member of the peer-counseling group in a manner that perhaps speaks best for all the respondents:

Before I became a member of this group, I felt alone. I had retired, and did nothing. I learned about facilities for retirees to go to pass the lonely hours, especially after my husband passed away soon after I joined the group. Now, I feel a closeness with the interaction of my fellow men and women. I truly feel useful, especially when I have an assignment and I can help my fellow man with a problem. I feel less sorry for myself and this makes me feel good about me.

More than anything they might have said, the fact that all 24 respondents requested continued monthly meetings highlights the importance of this group for its members. They wanted to improve their helping skills and to supplement their knowledge about various sources of assistance to enable them to help others better by sharing their knowledge with them.

CONCLUSION

Experience with Operation Victim Support and Operation Senior Security demonstrates the efficacy of using elderly peer counselors as part of a systematic, community-based prevention program for elderly victims of crime and violence. Be-

yond the direct benefits to the victims themselves in terms of reduced anxiety, decreased vulnerability, and increased social mobility, the participants in the programs report renewed capacities to relate to others. The use of the elderly as peer counselors demonstrates once again the wisdom in using indigenous paraprofessionals to provide counseling services (Carkhuff, 1968). As one member explained, “The discipline of getting myself here this early in the morning has been good for me. This is an important group and I am glad that I am a part of it.”

REFERENCES

- Alpaugh, P., & Haney, M. (1979). *Counseling the older adult: A training manual* (2nd ed.). Lexington, MA: Heath.
- Carkhuff, R. (1968). Lay mental health counseling: Prospects and problems. *Journal of Individual Psychology, 24*, 88-93.
- Carkhuff, R. (1969). *Helping and human relations: Selection and training* (Vol. 1). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Carkhuff, R. (1980). *The art of helping* (4th ed.). Amherst, MA: Human Resource Development Press.
- Carroll, M., & King, V. (1985). The peer helping phenomenon: A quiet revolution. *Counseling and Human Development, 17*, 1-8.
- Cormier, W.H., & Cormier, L.S. (1979). *Interviewing strategies for helpers: A guide to assessment, treatment, and evaluation*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Danish, S., & Hauer, A. (1973). *Helping skills: A basic training program*. New York: Behavioral Publications.
- Egan, G. (1982). *The skilled helper* (2nd ed.). Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.
- Ganikos, M. (1979a). *Counseling the aged: A training syllabus for educators*. Washington, DC: American Personnel and Guidance Association.
- Ganikos, M. (Ed.). (1979b). *A handbook for conducting workshops on the counseling needs of elderly*. Washington, DC: American Personnel and Guidance Association.
- Ivey, A. (1968). Micro-counseling and attending behavior: An approach to prepracticum counselor training. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 15*, 1-12.

- Jourard, S. (1971). *The transparent self*. New York: Van Nostrand.
- McQuade, H.F. (1976). *LEAA's elderly crime victimization programs* (U.S. House of Representatives Subcommittee on Housing and Consumer Interests, Select Committee on Aging). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Norton, L., & Courlander, M. (1982). Fear of crime among the elderly: The role of crime prevention programs. *The Gerontologist*, 22, 388-393.
- Petty, B.J., Moeller, T.P., & Campbell, R.Z. (1976). Support groups for the elderly persons in the community. *The Gerontologist*, 15, 522-528.
- Priddy, J.M., & Knisely, J.A. (1982). Older adults as peer counselors: Consideration in counselor training with the elderly. *Educational Gerontology*, 8, 53-62.
- Rogers, C.R. (1958). The characteristics of a helping relationship. *Personnel and Guidance Journal*, 37, 6-16.
- Romaniuk, M., & Priddy, J.M. (1980). Widowhood peer counseling. *Counseling and Values*, 24, 195-203.
- Romaniuk, M., Priddy, J.M., & Romaniuk, J.G. (1981). Older peer counselors training. *Counselor Education and Supervision*, 20, 225-231.
- Schriesheim, J.F. (1980). The social context of leader-subordinate relations: An investigation of the effects of group cohesiveness. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 65, 183-194.
- U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging. (1984). *Aging America: Trends and projections* (Senate Publication No. 5142-7, 2nd printing). Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office.
- Waters, E., & Epstein, L.M. (1980). No person is an island: The importance of support systems in working with older people. *Counseling and Values*, 24, 184-194.
- Waters, E., Fink, S., & White, B. (1976). Peer counseling for older people. *Educational Gerontology*, 1, 157-170.
- Wineman, D., & James, A. (1973). The advocacy challenge to schools of social work. In B. Denner & R.H. Price (Eds.), *Community mental health: Social action and reaction* (pp. 217-230). New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.

How to Subscribe

Journal for Specialists in Group Work

5999 Stevenson Avenue
Alexandria, VA 22304

Yearly subscription rates
(4 issues): \$10.00 (members)
\$12.00 (nonmembers)

Name _____ Membership no _____

Organization _____

Address _____ Apt Suite _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____

Please charge my Master Card Visa Payment Enclosed

Charge no _____ Exp Date _____

Signature _____

SPECIAL NOTE: Additional information of multi-year rates and priority-delivery available from AACD Subscriptions, 5999 Stevenson Ave., Alexandria VA 22304.