Summaries

*Justitiële verkenningen* (Judicial explorations) is published six times a year by the Research and Documentation Centre of the Dutch Ministry of Security and Justice in cooperation with Boom Juridische uitgevers. Each issue focuses on a central theme related to judicial policy. The section Summaries contains abstracts of the internationally most relevant articles of each issue. The central theme of this issue (no. 6, 2015) is *Elder abuse.*

**Exploring the nature and extent of elder abuse**

*I. Plaisier and M. de Klerk*

Older people can become victims of abuse by someone they know and whom they depend on, such as family, friends or professional caregivers. Elder abuse is not always intentional, sometimes it is due to care falling short. Conducting a study to explore the prevalence of elder abuse is difficult. Commissioned by the Dutch State Secretary for Health, Welfare and Sport, the Netherlands Institute for Social Research (SCP) has brought together the current knowledge on this topic using the most recent data drawn from qualitative research, surveys of older persons, professionals and volunteers, and record data. The sources together do not produce an unambiguous picture of the actual number of victims in the Netherlands. All sources produce far lower figures than the estimated 200,000 based on a study of twenty years ago. The numbers found depend strongly on the research method and definition of the phenomenon.

**Dutch policies against elder abuse**

*J. Pattiwael and I. Brons*

This survey covers the Dutch Health Department’s policy against elder abuse, which is described in the program *Actieplan ‘Ouderen in veilige handen’.* Elder abuse can involve physical and/or psychological violence, but also negligence and financial abuse. To combat elder abuse it is crucial to create a climate in which the problem can be discussed openly. Also various actors on the regional and local level in society should be involved to prevent and tackle the problem. Homecare services and other social workers have been trained to signal elder abuse.
and provide help when the burden for informal caregivers becomes too heavy.

**System abuse: doing justice to the views of the elderly**  
*J. Lindenberg, Y. Mysyk and R.G.J. Westendorp*

Two approaches have dominated the way elder abuse is explained and defined: the intrapersonal and interpersonal approaches. More recently, an environmental approach is emerging that takes into account contextual factors. This approach also meets the perspectives of older individuals themselves better. They describe how they feel abused or neglected by the system – by the way in which we organize our institutions. Institutions mirror our society and are shaped in interaction with societal norms and expectations. This influences the way in which older individuals are looked upon, are being approached, and how they see themselves within these institutions. This system abuse is currently beyond the scope of the most commonly used definitions and approaches of elder abuse. However, it is important to acknowledge system abuse, because it makes explicit how older individuals feel abused by and within our institutions. The distress and harm that they experience can therewith be acknowledged and prevented.

**Stress in caring, attachment behavior and interaction**  
*T. Royers*

Caring for someone can be very strainful. In this article the author states that stress reactions are not necessarily due to the burden of the emotional or practical care load itself. More important factors are the individual capability to regulate emotions and the way in which care-seeker and caregiver interact on emotional topics such as pain, panic, sorrow, depression, and anger. The author starts from the attachment theory and describes the importance of attachment for someone who feels threatened, sick or fearful. Deep stress may hinder the caregiver to be aware of the thoughts, emotions and acts of the other person. Several effective and non-effective interaction patterns are described. The author argues that without self regulation the risk of care derailing and mistreatment will be substantial while the need for external regulation grows.
Mental incapacity and the power of attorney
C.G.C. Engelbertink
A legal document appointing one or more people to help a person make decisions or to make decisions on the person’s behalf is a power of attorney (levenstestament). It is meant to be used in situations when illness prevents a person to make decisions that need to be made. In the levenstestament certain trusted people have been given the authority to manage money affairs, property and medical decisions on behalf of the ill person. The document is registered. The author argues that mental incapacity can also be temporarily or partially.

The prosecution of financial abuse of the elderly
L.M. Cremers and E.J.H. de Kluijs
In this article the authors discuss the opportunities and challenges they experience from the criminal investigation of financial exploitation of the elderly. By sharing knowledge and experience, they stress that the all party approach in this distressing problem, from the viewpoint of criminal investigations, will achieve the best results. This article could thus be seen as a first step, and invitation, to discuss future interventions and policymaking on fighting the exploitation of the elderly to prevent, detect and investigate these crimes.

Robberies on private homes of the elderly: a rare but violent crime
B. Rovers and S. Mesu
In recent years the total number of violent robberies in the Netherlands has gone down sharply, but the number of robberies on private homes doesn’t decline. Especially robberies on private homes of the elderly are notorious for the level of violence used by the attackers, while the loot is often negligible. In this article the authors investigate this offense. Chances of becoming a victim are very small, but people who are robbed in their own homes often face severe violence. On the one hand these high violence levels and consequential injuries are related to the age of the victims: the elderly resist the attackers more than younger people do, and because of their age they are more vulnerable to physical attacks. On the other hand the high levels of violence are typical of (all) robberies on private homes: the unknown space and the unpredictable behavior of residents contribute to this. Most of these robberies are poorly planned and executed. This also explains why so many of these incidents turn nasty. The elderly are not
specially targeted, the reasons they are robbed do not differ from other robberies on private homes: the attackers expect an easy accessible and substantial loot. In many cases both assumptions turn out to be wrong. Risk factors and prevention options are discussed.

Victimization and elderly people. A quantitative view on the Dutch situation

M. Akkermans

Older people are less frequent a victim of violence, crime against property, vandalism as well as cybercrime. This probably can partly be explained by the fact that elder people find themselves relatively less often in situations (think of public space, cyberspace) where the stakes of being victimized are high. Almost half of the older victims of violence know their offenders. Mostly they are from the same neighborhood. The majority of the violent offences against older people thereby occur in their everyday surroundings. Even though older people experience criminal offences less often, their attitude, the way they look at crime and adapt their behavior accordingly does – in most cases – not differ from the average Dutchman. Their fear of being victimized is equal to other age groups as is their assessment of the risk of being victimized and their behavior in avoiding unsafe places in their neighborhood.