Exploring the Influence of Life Course Turning Points on Elder Financial Exploitation

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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF LIFE COURSE TURNING POINTS ON
ELDER FINANCIAL EXPLOITATION

By

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I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, John, and son, Vincent. They bring more joy, happiness, and laughter to my life than I ever thought possible.
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ABSTRACT

Elder Americans have consistently reported a lower risk of criminal victimization for most other offenses than do adolescents and younger adults; however, certain types of financial exploitation disproportionately impact elders. As the proportion of the elder population grows at a faster rate than other age cohorts, incidents of financial exploitation among this age group are expected to continue to increase and further challenge the American ideal of retirement. In addition, it is anticipated that the baby boomer generation will be wealthier than any preceding generation of retired Americans. Declines in physical and mental capabilities and significant life changes experienced by many elder citizens, coupled with the perception of wealth, have made this population a prime target for financial exploitation.

Although the number of reported cases of elder financial exploitation has been increasing, the associated theoretical and empirical research on the risk factors, protective factors, and circumstances remains limited. By integrating elements from several prominent criminological theories, this dissertation explores the utility of using the components of a life course perspective to explain patterns of financial exploitation vulnerability among a sample of retirement community residents. Prior research and official data from reported cases of elder financial exploitation give limited attention to the dynamics of changing life circumstances that may have an impact on or precipitate incidents of financial exploitation. Using tenants from the life course perspective, this study explains how age-graded changes influence elders’ vulnerability for experiencing financial exploitation.

This dissertation will use data on reported incidents of financial exploitation made to a Florida county sheriff department and Seniors vs. Crime (a primarily volunteer-based organization affiliated with the Florida Attorney General’s office that provides investigation and mediation services to elders who believe they have been financially exploited). The study will also use qualitative data from focus group discussion sessions and in-depth individual interviews with residents of the largest active-living retirement community in the United States. The findings from this study highlight the significance of identifying and understanding the relationship between age-graded life events and circumstances that may influence an elderly individual’s vulnerability for financial exploitation. The study’s limitations and policy implications of the findings are discussed and suggestions are made for future research.
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

The Problem

Elder Americans have a lower risk of criminal victimization for most offenses than do adolescents and young adults. However, rates of financial exploitation among the elderly have been increasing in recent years and it is currently the most common form of self-reported elder abuse in the United States (Morgan & Mason, 2014). The elderly are targeted more frequently than are younger generations for financial scams involving telemarketing fraud, charitable donation fraud, real estate fraud, caretaker fraud, healthcare fraud, lottery/sweepstakes fraud, and automobile and home repair fraud (AARP, 1996; National Adult Protective Services, 2016; National Council on Aging, 2017). As the elder population grows at a rate disproportionate to other age cohorts, incidents of financial exploitation among this age group are likely to continue to increase and further challenge the American ideal of retirement. In addition, it is anticipated that the baby boomer generation will be wealthier than any preceding generation of retired Americans (Brandon, 2008) and this generation represents the largest percentage of homeowners in the United States (Foong, 2013). Actual and perceived declines in physical and mental capabilities and age-related life changes experienced by many elder citizens, coupled with their perception of wealth, have made this population a prime target for financial exploitation.

According to former Attorney General Eric Holder, one in five elder Americans report being the victim of some form of financial exploitation each year. Recent studies have indicated that reported incidents of elder financial exploitation resulted in over $36 billion of financial losses annually (True Link, 2015). Of that, $16.8 billion came from deceptive, but legal, tactics specifically designed to take advantage of and financially exploit elders. However, importantly, official statistics do not capture the full extent of elder financial exploitation because a substantial number of cases go unreported. Former Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, estimated that for every one reported case of elder abuse or financial exploitation, there are as many as 24 cases that are not reported. Elders do not readily report incidents of financial exploitation for a variety of reasons ranging from fear of retaliation (FBI, 2015), embarrassment (Deevy & Beals, 2013), general distrust in law enforcement’s ability to provide assistance (Reisig & Holtfreter, 2007), and being dependent upon the person who is
exploiting them (Payne, 2005). In addition, many forms of financial exploitation involve some degree of victim participation or compliance (e.g. initiating contact with or providing personal financial information to the perpetrator), resulting in feelings of embarrassment or culpability, which may also hinder the victim’s decision to report (Titus, 2001).

Beyond the billions of lost dollars, victims of elder abuse and financial exploitation are at an increased risk for emotional distress, physical health problems, and premature death (National Adult Protective Services, 2016). In general, elderly victims of all forms of crime (violent, property, economic) suffer greater relative losses, costs, and harms than do younger crime victims (Cook, Skogan, Cook, & Antunes, 1978). Comparatively, elders tend to be physically weaker, frailer, and have lower incomes than younger people. Thus, physical injuries and financial losses may impact the elderly more severely than younger victims (Cook, et al., 1978). Further, it is estimated that 954,000 senior citizens are skipping meals each day as a result of financial exploitation (True Link, 2015). Despite the consequences of victimization and the increasing prevalence of this social problem, the theoretical and empirical research on the risk factors, protective factors, and circumstances of financial exploitation among the elderly has not kept pace. The available research is limited, and in many instances, the conclusions drawn across studies are contradictory.

Criminological theories that seek to predict and explain victimization risks and trends have generated a sizable amount of empirical research in the last several decades. The most frequently studied are routine activities theory, victim precipitation theory, and the lifestyle-exposure theory. According to prior research, existing criminological theories of offending can also be used to identify correlates of victimization (Goergen & Beaulieu, 2010; Piquero & Hickman, 2003; Schreck, Stewart, & Fisher, 2006). For example, a growing body of research has found support for a relationship between criminal victimization and levels of low self-control, which is a commonly studied correlate of offending (Holtfreter, Reisig, & Pratt, 2008; Holtrefeter, Reisig, Leeper Piquero, & Piquero, 2010). However, to date, little research has investigated the relationship between age, aging, and victimization over the life course; with the exception of a handful of studies that have found correlations between declines in both offending behavior and victimization in late adolescence and young adulthood. Thus, the pathways and correlates of victimization as individuals enter mid-to late-adulthood are not well understood. Theories of victimization have not sufficiently addressed the role that significant age-graded life
events, age-graded routine activities, and changes to an individual’s social bonds and networks, factors that have been found to decrease victimization earlier in life, may have on an individual’s risk of experiencing crime in their elder years.

The life course perspective of offending has consistently found a curvilinear relationship between offending and age. Rates of offending tend to peak during the adolescent years and decline steadily thereafter. This relationship has, by in large, been attributed to the development of strong social bonds in young adulthood. The social bonds of employment and marriage, identified by Sampson and Laub’s (1993) theory of age-graded social control, result in strong ties between one’s spouse, to conventional societal norms, and the accumulation of social capital, thereby increasing the likelihood of criminal desistence. Daigle, Beaver, and Hartman (2008) found that the bonds developed through marriage in young adulthood also result in a decreased risk for victimization. Based on this logic, it is plausible that if social bonds begin to weaken and change in late adulthood, an individual’s victimization risk may increase because of the absence of such protective factors.

A theoretical framework that considers the salient aspects of the aging process and of age-specific life circumstances may be capable of capturing the individual characteristics, life events, and changes in behavior patterns that put some elder citizens at risk of criminal victimization and financial exploitation. Applied more generally, the life course perspective can, and has been used to, provide a framework for understanding how chronological age, relationships, life transitions, and social changes affect an individual’s behavior (Elder, 1994; Hutchinson, 2005). Specifically, the perspective highlights the ways in which unique aspects of the aging process combine with, interact with, and can be interrupted by life events, or turning points, to influence an individual’s overall well-being (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997). Life course perspectives are guided by the assumption that age-graded social phenomena coupled with the associated historical, ecological, and socioecomic contexts in which lives develop have profound impacts on the circumstances, decisions, and outcomes of an individual’s life (Elder, 1985). For example, attending college, obtaining stable employment, getting married, and embarking on parenthood mark some of the major events that influence future directions and pathways through life, which may also include an individual’s risk for crime and victimization. Significant events in one’s elder years, such as retirement, children moving out of the home, moving to a retirement community, changes in social support networks, major medical/health events, the death of a
spouse/partner, and declines in cognition may result in marked transitions or turning points that influence an individual’s life trajectories and pathways through their senior years. During older age, individuals are likely to experience transitions and turning points that are the opposite of the protective transitions and turning points experienced earlier in adulthood, thereby impacting their overall victimization risk. These life course components can be integrated with existing theories of victimization and crime to create a more complete understanding of the risk and vulnerabilities elders may experience.

**Current Study**

In his 2010 Sutherland Award address to the American Society of Criminology, Francis Cullen encouraged a paradigm shift within criminology towards age-graded theoretical exploration and development and away from theories that are limited to the adolescent years (Cullen, 2011). Although referring to theories of offending, his reasoning is valid and applicable to theories of victimization as well in that it is important to understand the vulnerabilities and protections against victimization not only during the adolescent and young adult years but also before and after (McGee & Mazerolle, 2015). This dissertation will explore the utility of applying an age-graded theory of late-life victimization, using tenants from the life course perspective, by identifying and describing patterns of elder financial exploitation vulnerability among a sample of retirement community residents. The following propositions will be explored to determine if and how 1). Characteristic age-related changes in physical and/or cognitive health may influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation; 2). Characteristic age-related changes in sociogenic factors may influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation; 3). Generational differences may influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation; 4). Changing social bonds may influence elders’ risk for financial exploitation; and 5). Historical and geographical factors may influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation, especially those related to living in a retirement community. The sixth research question will identify if there are factors that may be protective against financial exploitation. Given the many types of financial exploitation, this study will also address whether differing life course turning points are more commonly associated with certain types of exploitation.

The data for this dissertation come from a mixed-method exploratory case study of elder financial exploitation conducted in the largest active-living retirement community in the United
States. The retirement community is located across three counties in Florida and has a population that exceeds 105,000 residents age 55 or older, with 70 percent age 65 or older. Complaint data from Seniors vs. Crime (a volunteer organization affiliated with the Florida Attorney General’s office that provides investigative and mediation services for elderly victims of financial exploitation) and arrest data from the local county sheriff’s office will be analyzed to provide descriptive and aggregate incident information on reported cases of elder financial exploitation in the retirement community.

Prior research and official data from reported cases give limited attention to the dynamics of changing life circumstances that may have an impact on or precipitate incidents of elder financial exploitation. In addition, elder financial exploitation is underreported to authorities. Thus, to obtain a more detailed understanding of the relationship between age-graded life course trajectories, turning points, and elder financial exploitation, this dissertation will rely primarily on qualitative data from focus group discussion sessions and in-depth individual interviews with residents of the retirement community. The focus group discussions and interviews elicited data on life changes, routine activities, decisions, perceptions, and consequences associated with financial exploitation.

In sum, the life course perspective examines how life events, human agency, historical events, geographic location, and socioeconomic contexts influence future directions, decisions, and events. Using quantitative and qualitative data, this dissertation will explore a series of research questions to determine the association between turning points that occur in late-adulthood with financial exploitation. Implications for policy, practice, and future research will also be discussed.

Dissertation Overview

This dissertation includes six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and overview of the problem of elder financial exploitation and the limited amount of theoretical and empirical research. Chapter 2 provides an overview of the available empirical and theoretical literature on the growth of the elderly population in the United States, common life transitions experienced by the elderly, and elder financial exploitation. Chapter 3 provides a discussion of the theoretical framework utilized in this dissertation; the major tenants of life course theory will be described and integrated with routine activities theory and the criminal hotspots literature. The theoretical
applicability to elder financial exploitation victimization will also be discussed. Chapter 4 provides a description of the data, research questions, and research methods employed in this study. Chapter 5 provides the results and findings. Chapter 6 provides an overview of this dissertation’s findings, theoretical extensions and advancements, details the limitations, and provides suggestions for advancing policy, practice, and future research regarding aging and victimization vulnerability.
CHAPTER 2

PRIOR RESEARCH

Growth of the Elderly Population in the United States

The rapid aging of the United States population has resulted in a profound demographic change in states across the country. According to the United States Census Bureau, the large growth of the elderly population that has been occurring since the 1990s is expected to continue for decades to come. The 2010 Census revealed that 97 percent of all counties in the United States experienced an increase in their number of residents 65 years of age or older. In 2000, there were approximately 35 million people in the United States 65 years of age or older. As the baby boomer generation continues to age, the Census Bureau projects that by 2020 there will be over 55 million people 65 years of age or older and by 2050, the number of Americans 65 years of age or older will surpass 88.5 million (Vincent & Velkoff, 2010). Figure 1 provides the actual and projected growth of the senior citizen population in the United States from 2000 to 2050. In addition, Americans are currently experiencing unprecedented longevity; the number of Americans who are living longer lives, many to be older than 100, is also increasing.

The elderly population encompasses an extremely diverse group of Americans, some are among the wealthiest while others are among the poorest in the nation, they come from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, some live in retirement communities, some live in the same home they have lived in for decades, some are employed full time, and some require full-time medical care (Himes, 2001; Vincent & Velkoff, 2010). The effects of the diverse aging population are felt throughout American society and social institutions, impacting families, communities, healthcare systems, and the criminal justice system, among others. The elderly population will enter late-adulthood with different experiences than prior generations, many were children of the Great Depression, many women worked full-time outside of the home, more will either be divorced or have experienced a divorce than ever before, and more will be childless. These differential experiences have resulted in an elderly population that is unique from those of past American generations. Preparing for the changes and challenges requires an understanding of demographic trends and life events characteristic of aging and elderly populations (Himes, 2001). For the purposes of this study, it is important to understand the life circumstances, turning
points, and transitions that influence the behaviors and vulnerabilities of elder Americans, which may increase their risk for financial exploitation.

**Life Transitions of the Elderly**

As individuals age and move across age categories, expectations for their behavior, responsibilities, life circumstances, and access to social resources change. As with entering adolescence and adulthood, entering late-adulthood presents a series of normative and nonnormative changes, challenges, transitions, and experiences that require adjustment. Sociogenic and physical/cognitive health changes and issues can influence an elderly person’s risk and experience of a variety of negative life consequences, including physical abuse and financial exploitation (Kaplan & Berkman, 2016). Changes to familial structure and marital status, living arrangements, financial status, typical daily activities, and care-giving responsibilities are specific examples of characteristics that may influence an elderly person’s risk of financial exploitation. Oftentimes elder individuals must accept services for household chores, adapt to illnesses, and cope with the loss of their spouse, which may also influence their behavior and can expose vulnerabilities. Importantly, everyone experiences changes in their own way and life events can have differential effects, depending on the conditions in which they occur and the support or resources available to the individual at the time (George, 1993). Therefore, factors or turning points may influence one elder citizen more or differently than another.

Retirement is often the first major life transition experienced by those entering late-adulthood. Many older American workers actively seek retirement (Hardy & Quadagno, 1995); however, it can have consequences for their physical and emotional health and on the quantity and quality of their social support systems. However, the direction and magnitude of the effects will likely differ across individuals depending on their reasons for retirement, attachment to work and coworkers, and social life outside of work. Surveys have found that about one-third of retirees have difficulty adjusting to certain aspects of retirement (Kaplan & Berkman, 2016). Transitioning to a fixed income, reductions in income, and changing social roles have been cited as the most difficult aspects of retirement. According to a nationally representative telephone survey of 1,620 Americans over 60 years old, 15 percent of respondents were not confident that
their finances would last through their retirement years (National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, National Council on Aging, & United Healthcare, 2015).

In addition to retirement, relocation and the thought of possible relocation are significant transitions that elderly citizens must confront that may produce different degrees of stressors than the same turning points would have when they were younger. Elders may relocate several times during their senior years; to a retirement community, to a smaller home, in with their children or other family members, or into a medical care facility. While the relocation to a medical care facility may be required or necessary, the relocation to retirement communities is most often a choice that many elders look forward to making and enjoying for many years. The number of elderly Americans residing in active-living adult retirement communities is increasing and some expect between 20 and 30 percent of all new housing business by 2020 to be from active-living adult retirement communities (Becker, 2001; MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2011). In determining where and if to move to a retirement community, many elder citizens are inclined to look for communities that offer independent and relatively maintenance-free living and recreational amenities (Logan, 2014). Elders tend to migrate from Northeast and Midwest states southward towards Arizona, Florida, Texas, North Carolina, and South Carolina. Florida ranks first in migration or as a relocation destination among people 55 to 74 years old; however, it has been experiencing increased competition from North Carolina in recent years.

While some elders prefer to relocate to warmer climates and to retirement communities, a recent nationally representative survey of elder Americans found that 56 percent of respondents had not moved in over 20 years and 75 percent indicated that they intended to live in their current home for the rest of their lives (National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, National Council on Aging, & United Healthcare, 2015). Additional research has found that a majority of individuals say they prefer to retire close to home, near their families, friends, and other longtime personal/professional ties (Klebba, 2005; Suchman, 2001). These findings indicate that there may be fundamental differences between elders who choose to relocate to active-living retirement communities and those who choose to age in place.

Demographic trends have also shown that more than 50,000 people over the age of 70 left the common retirement states of Arizona, Florida, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Texas between 2012 and 2014 and relocated to California, Illinois, Michigan, New Jersey, and New York. Researchers hypothesize that many of these elders are moving to be closer to family
members or other support systems because they are not as healthy or wealthy as they were when they initially moved after retirement (Retirement Living, 2016).

Declining physical and cognitive health are other age-graded turning points and life-events that elder Americans often experience and must adjust to. Two of every 10 Americans over 70 years indicated that they could not live independently or accomplish daily tasks without assistance (National Association of Area Agencies on Aging, National Council on Aging, & United Healthcare, 2015). These turning points may require that the elder citizen relocate to an assisted living facility, have strangers enter their home to help with medical care or housework, or sign over access to their finances for someone else to manage. Cognitive ability in adulthood is a strong predictor of an individual’s ability to maintain their independence (Bharucha, Panday, Shen, Dodge, & Ganguli, 2004), use technology (Czaja, Charness, Fisk, Hertzog, Rogers, & Sharit, 2006), and perform instrumental and routine daily activities (Allaire & Marsiske, 1999; Boot, Stothart, & Charness, 2013). Declines in cognition may also be associated with an increased risk of elder abuse and neglect (MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2009) and an increased likelihood of financial exploitation (Kemp & Mosqueda, 2005). In addition, elders may also be faced with changes in their marriage or to their marital dynamic as a result of declining physical and cognitive health. While many people believe that they and their partners will age together, in some instances, the role of a spouse evolves to that of caregiver presenting a new series of challenges and changes.

Bereavement affects many aspects of an elderly person’s life. Social interaction and companionship decrease and social statuses change due to retirement and as members of the elder’s social network begin to relocate and/or pass away. Research in gerontology has found that the death of a spouse affects men and women differently. Specifically, in the two years after the death of a wife, the mortality rate of men tends to increase, especially if the wife’s death was unexpected (Kaplan & Berkman, 2016). In addition, bereaved individuals are at an increased risk of declining health status and clinical depression.

Prior research has indicated that age-graded life transitions and turning points influence individuals’ actions, behaviors, experiences, and emotional and physical health. However, only a limited amount of research has considered how these changing life transitions may influence elder citizens’ risk of criminal victimization, and more specifically, financial exploitation. The life course theoretical framework will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3 with an emphasis on
how discrete life events, societal and geographic conditions, and personal agency can create or interact with one another to influence behavior. In the section that follows, the available research about elder financial exploitation and the associated risk and protective factors will be presented.

**Financial Crimes and Exploitation of the Elderly**

Elder financial exploitation (sometimes referred to in the literature as financial abuse, financial mistreatment, or fraud) is complex and encompasses a broad spectrum of conduct and behaviors perpetrated against elderly citizens. While not specific to elders, Titus, Heinzelmann, and Boyle (1995: 54) define financial exploitation as “the deliberate intent to deceive with the promise of goods, services, or other financial benefits that in fact do not exist or that were never intended to be provided.” What is omitted from Titus and colleagues’ definition, and are particularly relevant to the elderly population are common consumer protection related issues of unfair and deceptive practices related to misleading or misrepresented advertising, car repair problems, or contractual disputes. For the purpose of this dissertation, elder financial exploitation refers to the illegal, inappropriate, or unethical taking or use of money or the financial assets of an elderly citizen without their knowledge, consent, or full understanding.

Research has produced conflicting findings about whether elders are more likely to be victims of financial exploitation than younger adults. Some studies have found that the elderly are more likely to be victims (AARP, 1996; AARP, 1999; Struck, 2006) while others have found that they are not more likely (Muscat, James, & Graycar, 2002; Pak & Shadel, 2006; Policastro & Payne, 2015). However, there are certain types of financial exploitation for which the elderly do appear to be more targeted and victimized than their younger counterparts, including telemarketing scams, charitable donation fraud, lottery/sweepstakes fraud, healthcare fraud, caretaker fraud, and home repair fraud (AARP, 1996; National Adult Protective Services, 2016; National Council on Aging, 2017). The empirical evidence on why elders may be targeted more frequently for certain types of financial exploitation is not well developed.

A recent study of elderly Arizona and Florida residents found that over two-thirds of respondents had experienced an attempted fraud in the two years prior to the survey (Holtfreter, Reisig, Mears, & Wolfe, 2014). In addition, during the same time period, the researchers found that one-in-five respondents reported being the victim of financial fraud. However, it is difficult to estimate the national prevalence because cases are underreported, the definition of “elderly”
varies across states, and there are many forms of exploitation, not all of which are criminal but rather civil or consumer protection matters that are unethical and inappropriate (Curtis, 2006). Further, there are methodological differences in self-report surveys that may result in variation in reported prevalence rates. Advocacy groups and consumer protection agencies, with the primary focus of developing national prevalence estimates, have conducted most of the large national-level surveys and academics have relied on smaller and more local-level samples to explore causality by identifying common risk factors (Holtfreter, et al., 2014). For example, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) and AARP have each conducted nationally representative surveys of 2,000-3,000 people to gauge the national prevalence of financial exploitation (these surveys were of the general population and estimates for the elderly were extrapolated). Academics have not been readily focused on generating national estimates but rather conducting smaller-scale surveys aimed at identifying victim characteristics and risk factors. For example, Policastro and Payne (2015) conducted a study of 746 elderly Virginia residents to obtain a better understanding of the differing types of crimes impacting elders based on varying lifestyle characteristics. Given these limitations and differences in priorities, researchers, government officials, and practitioners agree that available prevalence estimates are incomplete.

**Prevalence and Types of Elder Financial Exploitation**

In 2011, the FTC conducted a nationally representative survey of 3,638 adults over the age of 18. Through this study, it was estimated that 7.3 percent of adults between the ages of 65 and 74 had been victims of financial fraud, and 6.5 percent of adults 75 and older had been victims. The most common type of financial exploitation identified involved fraudulent prize promotions. The FTC study also found that targeting and victimization rates did not appear to be significantly higher among the elderly population, in contrast to other studies that have found elders to be impacted more frequently by financial exploitation (Morgan & Mason, 2014). An important caveat is the FTC survey was not elder specific and only considered a limited amount of financial exploitation types in their survey questionnaire.

A nationally representative telephone survey of 5,777 adults over the age of 60 found that 5.2 percent of respondents indicated that a member of their family had financially exploited them in the prior year. The most common type of financial exploitation reported involved family members spending their money without permission (Acierno, Hernandez-Tejada, Muzzy, &
Steve, 2009). This survey was part of a general study about elder mistreatment, not restricted to financial exploitation, and it asked respondents about a limited number of financial exploitation types perpetrated only by family members in the prior year. A survey of 2,000 elderly residents in Arizona and Florida reached a similar conclusion in that the most common types of reported financial exploitation incidents were taking money without permission, taking and/or selling property without permission, and forged signatures (Holtfreter, et al., 2014). However, this study did not address the relationship between the victim and perpetrator.

A study of 1,300 elderly respondents over the age of 65 found that the most common types of exploitation included those perpetrated by telemarketers and through sales (Muscat, Graycar, & James, 2002). A 2010 telephone survey of 2,503 respondents, 973 of which were over the age of 55, found that the most commonly reported types of financial exploitation perpetrated against the elderly were credit card theft, misrepresentation of the price of a product or service, and unnecessary home, automobile, and/or appliance repair (Huff, Desilets, & Kane, 2010). The survey conducted by Huff and colleagues is more comprehensive than the others because it asked respondents about a wider range of financial exploitation victimization events.

The results of the aforementioned surveys suggest that there may not be a dominant form of financial exploitation that makes up the majority of incidents experienced by elder citizens, but rather there are a number of different types of financial exploitation that can occur on a day-to-day basis. The inconsistency in determining the most common types of elder financial exploitation is likely due to how the surveys defined financial exploitation. Some studies use a narrow definition because they are only interested in studying a specific type, while others employ a more broad definition, such as “the inappropriate taking or use of money”, which could be the result of financial exploitation related to investments, identity theft, consumer fraud, home repair, or family member perpetrated exploitation. These factors have left us without a reliable prevalence estimate of elder financial exploitation in the United States. For example, former Attorney General Eric Holder indicated that approximately 25 percent of elders had experienced an incident of financial exploitation in the prior year; True Link (2015) reported that 36.9 percent of elders had experienced financial abuse in the previous five years; and the FTC (2011) reported prevalence rates to be between 6.5 and 9.1 percent in the prior year. Thus, the currently available prevalence estimates range from 6.5 percent to 36.9 percent. However, these percentages likely underestimate the true extent of the problem because researchers agree that financial exploitation
of the elderly is underreported both to officials and in self-report surveys (AARP, 2003; FINRA/WISE, 2006; Johnson, 2002). Surveys have indicated that between 20 and 50 percent of victims do not report financial fraud or exploitation to authorities.

To clarify and better categorize the many varieties of elder financial exploitation, the following three categories have been used: acts committed by primary contacts, secondary contacts, and strangers (Payne, 2005). See Table 1 for a list of commonly perpetrated exploitation types by primary contacts, secondary contacts, and strangers. A primary contact includes anyone with whom the elderly individual has a close relationship: children, relatives, and caregivers, for example (Payne, 2005). Several studies have reported that primary contacts, particularly children and caregivers, commit more acts of financial exploitation than secondary contacts and strangers (Hafemeister, 2003; Tatara, Blumerman Kuzmeskus, Buckhorn, & Bivens, 1998). Specifically, research has indicated that 60 percent of perpetrators were the adult children of the victims (Stiegel, 2002) and the National Adult Protective Services Association indicated that 90 percent of fraud reported to agencies across the country is perpetrated by family members or “trusted others” of the elderly victim. Exploitation committed by primary contacts takes many forms (Blunt, 1996; Hafemeister, 2003; MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2009; Payne, 2005). However, in most instances, the victim has granted the offender the authority to manage some or all of their funds because they were no longer able to do so. The offender then mismanages or takes the money for personal use.

A secondary contact is someone with whom the elderly individual has some contact: contractors, home repair technicians, medical professionals, and banking representatives, for example (Payne, 2005). In instances of exploitation perpetrated by secondary contacts, the victim and offender typically have some form of communication with one another prior to the incident occurring, in many cases, the contact is face-to-face and the victim seeks out the services of the perpetrator. The most commonly cited type of exploitation committed by secondary contacts involves investments; examples include investments in fake businesses and inappropriate long-term annuity transfers (AARP, 2003; Holtfreter, Reisig, & Pratt, 2008; MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2009; Pak & Shadel, 2011; Rother, 1983). Another common type of exploitation by secondary contacts is related to home repairs. This category involves any type of contractor exploitation, and misleading, unnecessary, overcharged, or fraudulent home, appliance, or television repairs (Holtfreter et al., 2008; Rother, 1983; Van Wyk & Mason, 2001).
Strangers are individuals whom the elderly individual does not know and often has no face-to-face contact. Contrary to the research that has found relatives and more specifically, the adult children of victims to perpetrate most incidents of financial exploitation of the elderly, other research has found that strangers perpetrate a significant amount of elder financial exploitation and whereas only 34 percent is perpetrated by family members (MetLife Market Institute, 2011). Identity theft, phishing (obtaining personal information from an individual through deceit), fraudulent Internet sales, lottery/sweepstakes scams, IRS scams, charitable donation scams, and grandparent scams are common types of financial exploitation perpetrated by strangers. There is typically no direct communication or contact between the victim and offender during incidents of stranger-based exploitation (with the exception of those that are perpetrated by strangers entirely over the telephone). A large and growing proportion of stranger-based exploitation are perpetrated through the use of technology.

To date, few studies have examined the motivations and characteristics of the perpetrators of elder financial exploitation (Hafemeister, 2003). The available research suggests that most perpetrators are males between the ages of 30 and 60 (Hafemeister, 2003; Johnson, 2002; MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2011; Stiegel, 2002). Hafemeister (2003) and Jackson and Hafemeister (2011) found that perpetrators were more likely to be chronically unemployed, mentally ill, abuse substances, and be financially dependent upon the victim. In addition, offenders tend to be charismatic and successful in gaining the trust and confidence of their elderly victims (Johnson, 2002). Perpetrators may use a name similar to that of a well-known and well-established organization, act as though the victim is lucky to have received an offer or opportunity, or expresses concern for the well-being of the victim or their family. In general, for most types of elder financial exploitation, Johnson (2002) found that offenders used tactics of coercion, intimidation, deceit, abuse, empty promises, and/or isolated the victim from their social support networks or other concerned individuals. In addition, studies have concluded that perpetrators of telemarketing fraud do not randomly call telephone numbers, but rather, have detailed databases, referred to as “lead lists” or “mooch lists”, that include the information of people who have high incomes, shown interest in promotions, or those who have been exploited in the past (Shover, Coffey, & Sanders, 2004). Thus, at least when discussing telemarketing perpetrators, it appears that they are well informed about the lifestyles and characteristics of their potential victims.
In sum, while the prevalence of known financial exploitation is believed to be increasing among the elderly population, the research about risk factors and protective factors is limited and not conclusive. There is also very little theoretical explanation for the causes of financial exploitation, and criminal victimization more broadly, among members of the elderly population. Marie-Therese Connolly, a Senior Scholar at the Woodrow Wilson International Center and former director of the Department of Justice’s Elder Justice and Nursing Home Initiative, said:

What we know about elder abuse lags some 40 years behind child abuse and 20 years behind domestic violence. We don’t know why it occurs, how often it occurs among several populations, how much it costs, what practices and programs are most effective in addressing it, what the relationships are among its various forms, or how to detect and prevent it. We don’t even know how to define what a successful intervention looks like (Whitcomb, 2012).

Connolly made these statements in 1999. As this literature review demonstrates, it does not appear that the empirical and theoretical knowledge base of elder financial exploitation has since improved. Complicating research on elder financial exploitation is that incident rates, circumstances, risk factors, protective factors, and reporting behavior appear to vary significantly depending on the type of financial exploitation. The remainder of this literature review will detail what is known about the risk factors, protective factors, reporting behavior, and current theoretical explanations of elder financial exploitation.

**Risk and Protective Factors of Elder Financial Exploitation**

As discussed in the section above, there are numerous known types of financial exploitation impacting elderly Americans and it is very difficult to estimate national prevalence (Holtfreter, et al., 2014; Johnson, 2002). Each type of exploitation has distinct characteristics, risk factors, and circumstances. Common among them are, unlike younger victims of financial exploitation, the elderly find it more difficult to recoup their losses by returning to the workforce, and the monetary losses have more long-term physical and emotional consequences. Elderly victims are also at an increased risk of losing access to adequate food, housing, healthcare, and/or independent living (Curtis, 2006; True Link, 2015). Further, with the exception of identity theft and credit card fraud, all other forms of financial exploitation among the elderly are underreported (it remains unclear how the rate of underreporting compares across generations).
Much of the early research on financial exploitation attempted to study and profile victims as a whole, without considering the specific type of exploitation. Therefore, the results were mixed and largely inconclusive. Recent research has begun to differentiate between exploitation types in determining the related risk and protective factors (Johnson, 2002; Pak & Shadel, 2007). Studies of investment and lottery fraud victims conducted by AARP and FINRA in 2003 and 2006, respectively, revealed that there were distinct demographic, psychological, and situational differences between victims of each of the studied fraud types. These two studies were the initial catalyst for researchers to begin exploring and identifying differences in the risk factors for varying types of elder financial exploitation to determine which kinds of people fall for which types of scams most frequently. The research on lottery victims found that they were more likely to be females over 70, of lower education and income, living alone, and be less financially savvy (AARP, 2003; FINRA/WISE, 2006). The research on investment fraud victims found that victims were more likely to be males between the ages of 55-62 years old, married, wealthy, financially savvy, and open to sales pitches (AARP, 2003; FINRA/WISE, 2006).

The sections below highlight six categories of risk factors, including age-specific factors related to physical and cognitive health, social bonds, financial factors/knowledge, routine activities, personality traits, and demographics. In addition, the common types of financial exploitation that elder citizens are most susceptible to are discussed along with the risk factors.

**Age-Specific Factors.** Prior research has demonstrated that cognitive ability is related to an individual’s degree of independence, decision-making, and risk of financial exploitation (Arvanis, 2005; Blunt, 1996; Choi, Kulick, & Mayer, 1999; Hall, Hall, & Chapman, 2005; MetLife Mature Market Institute, 2009; Rabiner, O’Keeffe, & Brown, 2005). As individuals age, their cognitive functions tend to decline, resulting in more difficulty in making sound decisions, which may increase their risk for experiencing financial exploitation. There is also evidence that areas within the brains of elders change as a result of normal age progression in ways that make them less able to detect distrustful, dishonest, or misleading people (Castle and Taylor, 2012).

Another characteristic of the aging population is declining health. The literature suggests that physical problems (AARP, 2003; Choi et al., 2000; Hafemeister, 2003; Hall et al., 2005), declining, poor, or failing health (Acierno et al., 2009; Biggs et al., 2009), and needing assistance with daily activities (Acierno et al., 2009) are all risk factors for financial exploitation.
Specifically, Choi and colleagues (2000) found that physical impairments were related to improper or illegal management of funds, assets, or property, while Acierno and colleagues (2009) found that both needing assistance to complete daily tasks and poor health were related to victimization vulnerability in the form of having money taken and spent without permission (disappearance of funds), forging signatures (forgery), and forced signatures. Johnson (2002) reported that if an elderly citizen is cognitively impaired, and/or has hearing or vision difficulties, he or she might be more easily manipulated, in part, because of decreased confidence in their own abilities or perceptions.

**Social Bonds.** As social bonds change during late-adulthood, individuals may become susceptible to financial exploitation. Many older adults experience changes in their social networks as a result of divorce, retirement, relocation, the death of a spouse, death of friends, and changing physical and cognitive abilities. Research has suggested that both divorce and the death of a spouse are risk factors for financial exploitation (AARP, 2003; Alves & Wilson, 2008; Anderson, 2007, 2013; Hafemeister, 2003; Rabiner et al., 2005). Holtfreter and colleagues (2014) found that being unmarried increases the likelihood of experiencing the improper or illegal management of funds, assets or property, and forgery. However, other research has produced contradictory results. True Link (2015) reported that the loss of a spouse was not a risk factor for any form of elder financial fraud or exploitation. AARP (2011) found that being married made those over 50 years old more likely to be victims of exploitation related to investments, although those elders who were not married were at an increased risk of exploitation through lottery scams. In addition, strained relationships with children might also put older citizens at risk for financial exploitation (Hall et al., 2005).

An individual’s social support networks, primarily those of their family and co-workers, are major factors that can influence the effects of life course transitions (Hagestad, 1990). Elder citizens experience an array of changes to their social support networks as they age and the effects may be manifested in financial exploitation through different mechanisms. Social isolation and living alone are risk factors for some forms of financial exploitation among the elderly (Arvanis, 2005; Rabiner et al., 2005; Stiegel, 2002), notably, related to financial exploitation through phony charity scams (Rother, 1983). Additional research has corroborated and expanded these results and found that elderly Americans with limited social support
networks and bonds are at increased risk of financial exploitation by telemarketers (AARP, 1996); improper or illegal management of funds, assets, or property (Choi et al., 1999, 2000); and for theft, forgery, and forced signatures (Acierno et al., 2009). For example, telemarketing researchers have argued that the elderly are often targeted by perpetrators because many are confined to their homes due to declining health or disabilities, and therefore, are isolated, lonely, and looking for companionship (Baginskis, 1998). Curtis (2006) noted that separate from feelings of loneliness, which may lead to some elders seeking companionship from fraudsters, social isolation might also lead to financial exploitation because of more logistical or practical considerations in that the elder does not have any friends or family members in the immediate area from whom to seek advice or protection. Conversely, overdependence on one caregiver, advisor, or family member, particularly if they are financially dependent on the elder, may lead to exploitation if that individual seeks to control or further isolate the victim.

Marrying an elder citizen has become an increasingly common and popular way to perpetrate incidents of financial exploitation that make it difficult for family members, caregivers, or authorities to help stop the abuse (McKissock, 2016). In most instances, getting married is an easy process that is nearly impossible to challenge and for most cases, is not punishable under any law. Marriage provides spouses with wide access to each other’s assets, both during life and after death. Predatory marrying occurs when an individual marries an elder citizen with the intention to of gaining control of their finances and oftentimes results in social isolation from the elder’s family and well-intentioned social support networks.

Employment status may also impact the elderly citizen’s vulnerability for financial exploitation. However, employment is a complex risk factor, just as it is a complex correlate related to criminal desistance. For example, Holtfreter and colleagues (2014) found that elders who are employed were at greater risk for financial exploitation through the improper or illegal management of funds, assets, or property, and forgery, but that retirement put the individual at greater risk for financial exploitation from shopping fraud. Acierno and colleagues (2009) found that unemployment put elderly individuals at a slightly greater risk for financial exploitation by family members and employed elders are at greater risk for financial exploitation by strangers. While a correlation between employment and financial exploitation has been identified, it is unclear why. For example, are employment and retirement related to financial exploitation because of the social bonds and social status provided by a job, or because of financial factors?
**Financial Factors and Knowledge.** Research has also indicated that financial-related variables may impact the likelihood of elder financial exploitation (Hall et al., 2005). In general, research has suggested that the elderly who are not in charge of managing their own financial assets are more susceptible to financial exploitation (Choi et al., 2000; Rother, 1983). However, like the other risk factors discussed thus far, financial factors and knowledge as risk factors vary by exploitation type. Rother (1983) concluded that lower income elderly individuals are at an increased risk for financial exploitation related to investments; while Anderson (2007) reported that lower income individuals are at greater risk for consumer exploitation through various sales techniques and pressures.

An individual’s level of debt and expected income may also influence their likelihood of victimization. In a sample of the general public (not an elder-specific study), Anderson (2013) found that individuals with higher levels of debt were three times more likely to fall victim to financial exploitation compared with those with no debt. However, it is important to highlight that the association between debt and exploitation may be mediated or caused by a risk-taking personality or low levels of self-control (Anderson, 2013). For example, the same risk-taking behavior that put someone in debt also may make him or her more susceptible to financial exploitation from get-rich-quick schemes through phony investments, lotteries, or sweepstakes.

Financial knowledge may also play a role in an elders’ vulnerability for financial exploitation in that elderly individuals who pay little attention to their financial accounts are at an increased risk for victimization. In addition, Curtis (2006) found that a general lack of knowledge about financial, legal, and insurance matters is a risk factor for financial exploitation. Curtis (2006) also reported that inexperienced and unsophisticated investors were more likely to fall victim to exploitation related to investments schemes.

**Routine Activities.** The daily activities and routines of an elderly individual may also influence their risk of financial exploitation. Prior studies have included both daily social activities outside of the home and Internet shopping behavior as measures of routine activities. However, attention has not been given to the specific types of activities that may influence their risk. Muscat and colleagues (2002) found that elderly individuals who left their home at least once a week were more likely to be victims of financial exploitation than those who stayed at home. It is not clear from this study which type of financial exploitation the elderly are more
susceptible to as a result of their routine activities or how and why there was an increased vulnerability for exploitation. Research has also found that frequent Internet shopping increases the likelihood of financial exploitation (AARP, 1999; AARP, 2011; Holtfreter et al., 2008). However, similar to the prior research on routine activities, it is unclear how or why Internet shopping increases an elder’s risk for financial exploitation. For example, is the elder victimized as a result of visiting and purchasing from fraudulent websites, is their credit card information being compromised from the lack of security measures in place on their computer, or are they lonely and isolated which may increase their risk of other forms of exploitation as well?

In their study of Arizona and Florida elder residents, Holtfreter and her colleagues (2014) found that routine activities were protective factors. Specifically, it was found that socializing with friends, family, and neighbors outside of the home protected elders against financial exploitation. The researchers concluded that failing to engage in the specific routine activities explored in the study (socialization outside of the home with family, friends, and neighbors), increased the likelihood of having money or property stolen. However, while participation in the routine activities was found to be a protective factor, the precise mechanisms that insulate elders are unclear. For example, do the observed routine activities provide social support networks that offer protection from exploitation? Or, are elders who are more likely to participate in social activities outside of the home less likely to experience financial exploitation for other reasons that may be confounded with their social schedules?

**Personality Traits, Emotions, and Demographics.** Risk-taking behaviors and low levels of self-control also appear to be correlated with elder financial exploitation (AARP, 1999, 2003; Anderson, 2013; Holtfreter et al., 2008; Holtfreter et al., 2014). Levels of self-control among the general population do not significantly predict financial exploitation (Anderson, 2013), however, an increased risk of financial exploitation among elderly individuals with low self-control has been documented (Holtfreter et al., 2014). Holtfreter and her colleagues found that, among a sample of elderly Arizona and Florida residents, low levels of self-control was a significant risk factor for shopping fraud victimization. While a correlation was found, the survey included only two attitudinal-related questions of self-control.

Other personality characteristics have also been identified that may be correlates of elder financial exploitation, namely, being generally trusting of others and stubbornness. A study by
AARP (2003) concluded that elders who identified themselves as being overly trusting of people were more likely than others to fall victim to financial exploitation as a result of telemarketing tactics (AARP, 2003). Additionally, Members of the Denver District Attorney’s Office have observed that victims of financial exploitation who reported to their office were overly trusting and charitable (Curtis, 2006). Conversely, the same members of the Denver District Attorney’s Office noted that some elder victims tend to be overly stubborn in that they refuse to seek help when needed and would not ask for a second opinion. However, it was unclear which types of financial exploitation were most likely to be reported by the trusting and stubborn individuals.

There is also evidence that certain emotions may increase an elderly individual’s risk of financial fraud or exploitation. A recent study of 139 participants ranging in age from 30-85 (71 participants were between 65 and 85 years old), found that feelings of anger or excitement increased an elders’ susceptibility to fraud, despite whether or not they found various advertisements to be credible (Parker, 2016). Excitement and anger, referred to in the psychological literature as “high arousal” emotions, were found to be more likely to lead elders to make risky decisions when exposed to misleading advertisements, as compared to feelings of depression, boredom, or exhaustion which are “low arousal” emotions (Parker, 2016). The presence of “high arousal” emotions did not result in an increased risk among the younger study participants.

Emotions and mental health may also be predictive of financial exploitation among the elderly (Choi et al., 2000; Hafemeister, 2003; Hall et al., 2005; Stiegel, 2002). Specifically, depression, loneliness, anxiety, and mental pathologies may increase one’s risk of financial exploitation. For example, Choi et al. (2000) found that depression made the elderly more susceptible to improper or illegal management of funds, assets, or property. Feelings of loneliness have also been linked to an increased risk of victimization as a result of romantic scams because the elder is seeking companionship.

Demographic and background characteristics, including gender, race/ethnicity, age, and education level may be more predictive of financial exploitation than personality traits. Two AARP studies (2003, 2011) found that among individuals over 50 years old, men are more likely to be the victims of exploitation related to investments, while women are more likely to be victims of exploitation as a result of lottery scams. Holtfreter et al. (2014) found that men were more likely to be victims of identity theft, while women were more likely to victims of
exploitation through shopping scams. One explanation for these findings may be that the elderly engage in gendered routine activities that put men and women at risk for different types of financial exploitation.

While the research is in its infancy, the type of exploitation also appears to vary by age. As with gender, this may be influenced by age-specific routine activities. To illustrate, research suggests that those over 74 years old were more susceptible to exploitation as a result of lottery scams (AARP, 2003), while individuals between 60-70 years old are most at risk for exploitation from telemarketers (Alves et al., 2008) and sales (Carcach, Graycar, Muscat, 2001). Carach and colleagues noted that aging might change the routine activities of elders, which may influence the type of victimization. However, it is important to note, other research has concluded that old age alone is not a reliable predictor or correlate of financial exploitation (Johnson, 2002).

Elder minorities are at a greater risk for financial exploitation than are elderly whites. Specifically, Anderson (2004, 2007, & 2013) found that racial and ethnic minorities are at an increased risk for billing fraud, financial assistance fraud, and exploitation as a result of investments. Holtfreter and colleagues (2008) found that African Americans were also more likely to fall victim to exploitation through home repairs, investments, and telemarketing scams. More recent research conducted by Holtfreter and colleagues (2014) found that minorities were at a greater risk for all types of exploitation, but especially for charity scams. However, it is unclear what factors may be driving these findings.

Research has also suggested that elderly individuals who are more educated are more likely to fall victim to exploitation from telemarketing tactics (AARP, 1996) and to be targeted for fraudulent activities in general (AARP, 1999; Johnson, 2002; Van Wyk & Mason, 2001). Johnson (2002) found that elderly victims of financial exploitation are more educated, informed, and socially active than it was previously reported or would be expected.

Many of the articles, studies, and reports identified in this literature review do not provide empirical cause-effect tests of risk factors; rather they provide descriptive accounts compiled with summary statistics. Accepted conventional wisdom in criminology is that correlates of a problem do not necessarily indicate causation, thus, conclusions drawn from the existing literature may be misleading. Additionally, the studies used different definitions and measurements of the age ranges that constitute elderly and of financial exploitation and were not guided by theoretical frameworks. Therefore, it is unknown whether and to what degree certain
behaviors or characteristics are risk factors, protective factors, predictors, or correlates of elder financial exploitation. Consequently, the prior research does not yield conclusive generalizations regarding the causes, prevalence, and importantly, effective methods of prevention. Rather, the prior research is largely descriptive with often-conflicting findings and interpretations. See Table 2 for an overview of the differing types of elder financial exploitation and associated risk factors. Table 2 provides an illustrative example of the complicated and conflicting interpretations of the available research on elder financial exploitation. The table is divided into six sections that correspond to the risk factors described above and include specific indicators of the general risk factor and associated common types of financial exploitation.

**Reporting Behavior of Elder Financial Exploitation Victims**

In 2012, then United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, Kathleen Sebelius, estimated that for every one reported case of elder abuse or financial exploitation there may be as many as 24 unreported cases. Numerous self-reported surveys of elders regarding their experiences with financial exploitation have found that it is greatly underreported. It is important to note is that in many instances, the elder victim is so reluctant to tell authorities about their experience, that oftentimes the reporting party is not the victim themselves, but a family member, friend, caregiver, or advisor (Curtis, 2006). In a survey of 973 elder respondents, Huff and colleagues (2010) found that of 262 incidents of household financial exploitation, 133 were reported (approximately 50 percent), with 64 (approximately 24 percent) of them being for credit card fraud. When focusing solely on reporting to the police as opposed to banks, credit card companies, or other non-law enforcement agencies, only 9 percent of incidents were reported to the police. This further suggests that official statistics underestimate the prevalence of various forms of financial exploitation against elders. Studies have shown that credit card fraud and identity theft are the most commonly reported type of financial exploitation because in most instances, the victim does not know the perpetrator and banks or other financial institutions will only refund lost money if a police report has been filed. Therefore, studies relying only on cases reported to the police are likely misleading and overlook numerous incidents and types of elder financial exploitation. Thus, conclusions drawn from studies using official statistics must be viewed as representing only a fraction of the total incidence of elder financial exploitation.
Prior research has identified several reasons why incidents of elder financial exploitation are underreported. In cases of exploitation involving a primary contact, the perpetrator is likely to be a relative of the victim or someone upon whom the elderly victim is dependent (Johnson, 2002; Jones, 1996; O’Neill & Flanagan, 1998). As a result, the elderly victim may not report their victimization due to fear of retaliation, losing their caretaker, losing their independent living situation, or fear that their loved ones may be prosecuted (Curtis, 2006; FBI, 2015; Robinson, Saisan, & Segal, 2015). Some victims are also concerned that they will not be able to care for themselves and reporting would result in placement in a nursing home or long-term care facility.

In addition to having a relationship with the perpetrator, the elderly victim may be ashamed or unwilling to discuss being scammed for fear of stigmatization and/or embarrassment (Deevy & Beals, 2013; Curtis, 2006; FBI, 2015). Additionally, surveys of elderly victims have found that in many instances, especially in cases of exploitation related to investments, lotteries/sweepstakes, or responding to misleading advertisements, the elder believes that they are all or partially to blame for their victimization (Curtis, 2006; Johnson, 2002). For example, the victim may believe that if not for his or her actions, the exploitation would not have happened or that they should have known better.

Third, the elderly victim may fail to report financial exploitation because they are unaware they have been scammed or that the scam is a criminal offense (Deevy & Beals, 2013; FBI, 2015; Pak & Shadel, 2007). Similarly, they may not report their experiences because they do not know where to report the victimization (Robinson et al., 2015) or because they distrust law enforcement’s ability to do anything to help, whether it be apprehending the perpetrator or helping to recover any lost money (Curtis, 2006; Reisig & Holtfreter, 2007).

Further, there are several incident- and individual-level factors that have been identified that may influence whether or not the elderly citizen chooses to report their victimization. Specifically, females, those with higher levels of education, and victims who lost a large sum of money are more likely to report victimizations than are men, those who are less educated, and victims who lost a smaller amount of money or believe that the loss is not significant (AARP, 1999; Deevy & Beals, 2013). As previously mentioned, certain exploitation types appear to be more frequently reported than others. Credit card fraud and identity theft have higher reporting rates than other forms of financial exploitation because many financial institutions and credit card companies require a police report as part of their reimbursement requirements.
Theoretical Perspectives Explaining Elder Financial Exploitation

Jackson and Hafemeister (2013) found that most research on elder financial exploitation has been devoid of a theoretical framework. However, consistent with other general research on victimization, the authors contend that it may be helpful to employ existing criminological theories to explain the increasing prevalence and risk factors associated with elder financial exploitation, while simultaneously cautioning that based on the extant literature, the causes and characteristics of victims and offenders do not fit squarely within a particular theory. Theories that have most often been used to explain the prevalence and risk factors of financial exploitation among the elderly are the general theory of crime and routine activities theory.

General Theory of Crime

According to Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) general theory of crime, impulsive and risk-taking individuals often have low levels of self-control, and thus, are more likely to engage in crime and other risky behaviors which could lead to victimization (Holtfreter, Reisig, & Pratt, 2008). In general, self-control reflects an individual’s ability to regulate their behavior. For example, people with higher levels of self-control are more likely to delay gratification and effectively control their impulses. A recent meta-analysis of 66 studies also indicated that low self-control might make individuals more vulnerable to victimization (Pratt, Turanovic, Fox, & Wright, 2014). Individuals with low self-control may increase their risk of financial exploitation in two ways. First, they may place themselves in situations where financial exploitation is likely without first considering the environment or potential negative consequences of their actions (Holtfreter et al., 2008). This observed correlation between low self-control and victimization may explain what makes some people targets for financial exploitation and places them in the presence of motivated offenders, two of the principles of routine activities theory. Second, low levels of self-control may limit an individual’s ability to successfully plan for their financial future, which may make financial exploitation more likely. For example, Moffitt and colleagues (2011) found “financial planfulness” (e.g. establishing and maintaining investment funds, retirement plans, and home ownership) to be related to higher levels of self-control among adults.

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argued that levels of self-control are established by about eight or nine years of age and remain stable over an individual’s life course. The research on
elder financial exploitation has not considered this issue, leaving several fundamental questions unanswered: If low levels of self-control are stable over the life course, what changes in late adulthood would make financial exploitation more likely? Or, if self-control is stable over the life course does that make repeat victimization more likely among individuals with low levels of self-control? If so, is it just that the type of victimization is manifested differently across the life course (for example, financial exploitation in late life as opposed to violent victimization in earlier life)?

**Routine Activities Theory**

Routine activities theory has been the most commonly studied theory of elder financial exploitation. According to Cohen and Felson’s (1979) theory, opportunity is what determines the likelihood of victimization. Routine activities theory has been used to explain crimes against the elderly, in general, and financial exploitation, specifically (AARP, 1999; Holtfreter et al., 2008; Holtfreter et al., 2014). According to the theory, individuals would be at an increased risk of victimization if they are perceived to be a suitable target, place themselves in situations with motivated offenders, and no capable guardians are available. In other words, the theory provides an explanation for how conventional daily activities can impact an individual’s victimization risk. Importantly, routine activities can both decrease or increase one’s risk of victimization.

The elderly may be perceived to be attractive targets to offenders for a number of reasons. Elderly individuals control over 70 percent of the nation’s wealth, make up the largest group of homeowners throughout the country, and tend to have predictable financial transactions and patterns (e.g. receive monthly checks, write checks, and use cash). Elders with diminished cognitive ability, severe illnesses, or physical impairments may be less likely to realize that they have been defrauded, may be dependent upon their abuser, and are less likely to take action against their abusers. In addition, elderly individuals are more likely to live alone or in the care of strangers. These general living situations can simultaneously provide motivated offenders and few capable guardians (Payne, 2005). Although these factors may make elders as a collective more attractive to offenders, it remains unclear what individual-level factors lead to victimization. In other words, if all elders are suitable targets, what explains the variability in victimization among this age group? In addition, it is unclear how elders may place themselves in situations with motivated offenders, which would presumably increase their risk of various
types of financial exploitation. Specifically, how and why are the activities of elders different from younger generations? And, why would we expect the activities of elders to differentially increase their risk of financial exploitation but not for other generations? Further, it is also unclear how the absence or presence of capable guardians may influence the likelihood of financial exploitation. Are the elderly more or less likely to be or have capable guardians regarding their finances and financial decisions that may impact their vulnerability for exploitation?

Although empirical and theoretical interest in understanding elder financial exploitation has been increasing in recent years, the aforementioned theoretical explanations are not associated with compelling tests and numerous questions remain unanswered. In addition to the questions presented above, some additional questions that must be addressed through future research are: What is the prevalence of elder financial exploitation in the United States? How do risk factors and protective factors vary for different types of financial exploitation? What is the role of prior victimization on subsequent victimizations?

**Conclusion**

A majority of the available research on elder financial exploitation has primarily consisted of descriptive accounts compiled with inconsistent definitions and operationalizations that have largely been devoid of theoretical explanation. Thus, reliable conclusions regarding risk factors, protective factors, prevalence, consequences, and effective prevention policies are limited. Studies have documented that elder Americans are targeted for various forms of financial exploitation and the prevalence is expected to continue to grow, along with the aging American population. However, a current and reliable estimate of the national prevalence is unknown because cases of financial exploitation among the elderly are dramatically underreported to authorities and in self-report surveys. Elder Americans are hesitant to report financial exploitation because they are fearful of retaliation, fearful that they will lose their independence, unaware of victimization, dependent upon their exploiter, or unsure of where to report.

The existing research has produced contradictory results in many instances because studies vary greatly in their definitions and conceptualizations of which age ranges constitute elderly and in their definitions of financial exploitation. A synthesis of the available empirical
and theoretical literature indicates that the commonly studied risk factors vary greatly based on the type of exploitation. What is missing from the current understanding of elder financial exploitation is a theoretical or explanatory framework that is capable of describing the factors that explain variation among the elderly population’s risk for all types of financial exploitation.

Existing research has paid little attention to the role that changing life events or turning points may have on an elder’s vulnerability for financial exploitation, and criminal victimization in general. An understanding of these factors may help to provide an explanation of why some elders are victimized, why others are not, why some are victimized multiple times, and how an individual’s routine activities, demographics, and geographic location may influence their risk of victimization. Specifically, a theoretical framework should be able to explain if and how risk factors and protective factors change over the life course and what the role of life events, or turning points, is in influencing an elders’ risk of financial exploitation.

The life course perspective represents a framework that is capable of integrating relevant theoretical explanations and extending the current understanding of a generally under-studied topic. Given the versatility, explanatory capability, and the increasing attention being given to the life course perspective for explaining behavior within the field of criminology, it is plausible that this theoretical framework, that considers a more holistic or integrative approach may be better suited for providing a more compelling explanation of elder financial exploitation. A life course approach to explaining elder financial exploitation is capable of integrating elements from theories on the aging process, routine activities, self-control, and criminal hotspots to provide a more complete and compelling explanation of financial exploitation among the elderly. Such a framework will be proposed and discussed in the following chapter.
Figure 1: Actual and Projected Growth of the Elderly Population in the United States, 2000-2050

Source: Data from the Bureau of Justice Statistics, U.S. Census Bureau
### Table 1: Common Types of Financial Exploitation by Victim-Offender Relationship

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Contacts</th>
<th>Secondary Contacts</th>
<th>Strangers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abuse of Power of Attorney</td>
<td>Appliance/Auto Repair</td>
<td>Fraudulent Internet Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disappearance of Funds</td>
<td>Billing</td>
<td>Grandparent Scams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embezzlement</td>
<td>Financial Assistance</td>
<td>Identity Theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extortion</td>
<td>Home-repair</td>
<td>IRS Scams</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Signatures</td>
<td>Identity Theft</td>
<td>Lottery/Sweepstakes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forced Financial Changes</td>
<td>Insurance</td>
<td>Phishing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgery</td>
<td>Investment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Theft</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improper Management of Funds</td>
<td>Telemarketing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Brancale, Blomberg, Pesta, Ranson, and Campion (2016).*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Risk Factors</th>
<th>Types of Financial Exploitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>AGE-SPECIFIC FACTORS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive impairment</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds; Abuse of power of attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Declining, poor, or failing health</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds; Disappearance of funds; Forced signatures; Forgery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental health problems</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical health problems</td>
<td>Home repair; Medical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>SOCIAL BONDS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Divorced</td>
<td>Abuse of power of attorney; Improper or illegal management of funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married</td>
<td>Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unmarried</td>
<td>Lottery; Improper or illegal management of funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social isolation</td>
<td>Telemarketer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Living alone</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds; Abuse of power of attorney</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Few social supports</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds; Forgery; Forced signatures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed</td>
<td>Forged signatures; Disappearance of funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds; Forgery; Forced signatures</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Retired</td>
<td>Shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>FINANCIAL FACTORS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower income</td>
<td>Investment; Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High-level of debt</td>
<td>Billing; Financial assistance; Investment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Potential change in income</td>
<td>Financial assistance; Billing; Telemarketer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not managing own assets</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Homeowner</td>
<td>Improper or illegal management of funds; Home repair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>ROUTINE ACTIVITIES</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Active social life</td>
<td>Telemarketing; Sales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet shopping</td>
<td>Fraud targeting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working outside of the home</td>
<td>Telemarketing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>PERSONALITY TRAITS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-control</td>
<td>Shopping; Identity fraud</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trusting personality</td>
<td>Telemarketing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 2- continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Specific Risk Factors</th>
<th>Types of Financial Exploitation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>DEMOGRAPHICS</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Between 60-70 years old)</td>
<td>Telemarketer; Shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age (Over 74 years old)</td>
<td>Lottery</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Lottery; Shopping</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Investment; Identity theft</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minority</td>
<td>Billing; Financial assistance; Investment; Telemarketer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More educated</td>
<td>Billing; Financial assistance; Investment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Source: Adapted from Brancale, Blomberg, Pesta, Ranson, and Campion (2016).*
Table 3: Examples of Turning Points during Adolescence/Young Adulthood and during the Elder Years

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adolescence/Young Adult Turning Points</th>
<th>Elder Adult Turning Points</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Graduation from high school</td>
<td>Exiting the workforce/retirement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering and graduating from college</td>
<td>Children leaving the home</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering the workforce</td>
<td>Relocating to age/health-restricted area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotions and career changes</td>
<td>Significant changes to physical ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marriage</td>
<td>Increasing frequency of health issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raising children</td>
<td>Cognitive declines</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 3
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Introduction

There have only been a limited number of attempts to explain the victimization patterns of the elderly, especially those related to financial exploitation, through the application of criminological theories, leaving the understanding of this growing social problem incomplete (Goergen & Beaulieu, 2010). Most of the available research on elder financial exploitation has consisted of descriptive statistics, generalities, and a limited amount of narrow theoretical exploration and testing. As briefly introduced in the preceding chapter, Cohen and Felson’s (1979) routine activities theory and Gottfredson and Hirschi’s (1990) general theory of crime are the two criminological theories that have been applied to the study of elder financial exploitation. However, questions and issues remain unaddressed. For example, these are theories of criminal offending that have been applied to victimization and have been tested mostly with samples of adolescents and young adults. Therefore, it remains questionable whether the predictive mechanisms are the same for older adults as they are for younger adults. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi, self-control is established during childhood as the result of effective parenting and remains relatively stable throughout a person’s life. If low levels of self-control predict victimization of the elderly, it would be expected that these individuals have experienced numerous victimizations over their life. However, research has not readily addressed this issue. According to Cohen and Felson, crime occurs in the presence of a motivated offender, suitable target, and in the absence of a capable guardian. Research on routine activities theory has been generally supportive and found that an individual’s lifestyle and daily activities can influence their risk of victimization. However, as with the existing research on self-control, studies have primarily focused on the adolescent and young adult years. As an individual ages, their daily activities and routines likely do change, but more research is needed to explain if and how these changing activities influence the victimization vulnerability of elder citizens in ways that are different from those identified among young adults.

The two theories that have been applied to the study of elder financial exploitation do not necessarily provide a complete or compelling explanation for why some individuals experience financial exploitation, why others do not, and why some experience multiple victimizations. In
addition, the theories are not equipped to explain why people may be more vulnerable to certain types of financial exploitation during their elder years as compared with their younger years. Or if perhaps they are not more vulnerable during elderhood but rather have experienced numerous victimizations throughout their life and the victimization has just manifested as financial exploitation as opposed to another form of victimization. A lifetime of repeat victimization may be indicative of routine activities or low self-control, however, as these factors change or are combined with salient aspects of the aging process, the type of victimization may change as well. For example, low self-control and/or routine activities may result in a young adult being out late at night in risky areas, whereas low self-control and/or routine activities may result in an elder adult investing in a business as a means to “get rich quick”. Each of these examples may lead to victimization in different ways but both are the result of an individual’s level of self-control and/or routine activities.

There are normative life events that may change in ways that increase a person’s vulnerability for victimization during late life, for example, retirement, physical limitations, cognitive declines, and changes in social support networks, among others. These age-graded changing life events have the capacity to impact and alter the daily activities of elder Americans and thus, may make them suitable targets for exploitation and place them in the presence of motivated offenders. In addition, a growing percentage of elders are relocating to retirement communities, which may be inadvertently creating hotspots for financial exploitation targeting and victimization by placing residents in the presence of motivated offenders. A multi-factor life course approach that emphasizes the process of aging and the unique turning points experienced by older adults may be able to effectively confront some of the unanswered questions from the theoretical explanations of victimization provided by routine activities theory and the general theory of crime. It may also provide a more complete explanation of the risk factors and protective factors associated with financial exploitation of the elderly.

Thus, an integrated theoretical perspective with the goal of explaining victimization of the elderly, using financial exploitation as an empirical example, represents a unique contribution to the field. Using a life course framework and incorporating elements from routine activities theory, the general theory of crime, and criminal hotspots, a more compelling explanation of elder financial exploitation may be possible. This chapter will begin with a brief discussion of the theories of victimization that have been used to explain the financial exploitation of the
elderly by highlighting some of the limitations and remaining questions that may be addressed with a more integrative approach. The chapter will then present a description of the life course perspective, and provide a brief overview of life course criminology. The chapter will conclude with a framework for an integrated, age-graded theoretical approach that will be further explored by addressing six research questions using unique quantitative and qualitative data.

**Theoretical Explanations for Victimization**

The theory most frequently applied to the explanation of elder financial exploitation has been routine activities theory. Cohen and Felson’s (1979) theory assumes that opportunity is the foundation of criminal occurrence. Routine activities theory is based on the hypothesis that offenders make rational choice decisions prior to engaging in criminal behavior. According to the theory, crime is most likely to happen along with the convergence of three factors: motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardians. The theory focuses on the circumstances of the criminal event in general and emphasizes the relationships between the behavior, patterns, and activities of both victims and offenders. Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo (1978) were among the first to advance the idea that the likelihood of criminal victimization may be a function of the victim’s lifestyle characteristics. Specifically, the lifestyle exposure model proposed by Hindelang and colleagues found that there are various demographic correlates of victimization that function as indicators of an individual’s way of life that may expose them to crime. The correlates identified were age, race, sex, income, and marital status. In sum, the theoretical developments from Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo and those of Cohen and Felson indicated that lifestyles are important correlates of victimization because as they vary, an individual’s risk for victimization varies as well.

The empirical research related to elder financial exploitation using routine activities theory has focused primarily on the general daily activities (e.g. frequency of leaving the house) of elders and less on what precisely may make them suitable targets and located within the proximity of motivated offenders without capable guardians. In a survey of 2,000 elder residents living in Arizona and Florida, researchers sought to explore the relationship between the daily activities of elders and their risk for financial exploitation. Hotfreter and colleagues (2004) concluded that there are certain factors related to the lives of some elders that act as protective factors against financial exploitation. Specifically, the researchers found that elders who
routinely participated in daily social activities outside of the home were less likely to be victims of financial exploitation than were elders who did not. This finding is largely inconsistent with the general hypothesis of the theory in that the more out-of-home activities a person participates in, the more likely they are to be victimized. It seems that there may be other factors influencing victimization risk (e.g. other individual-level factors or type of victimization). Thus, the precise reasons why elders with more active social lives outside of the home were less likely to be financially exploited than elders who spent more time in their homes remains an empirical question.

There is a growing recognition among international researchers and policymakers that the elderly population, in general, is vulnerable for many forms of victimization and mistreatment, including financial exploitation (World Health Organization and International Network for the Prevention of Elder Abuse, 2002). There are certain factors that may make the elderly population suitable targets for crime (i.e. perception of wealth, declining health and cognition, and the reluctance to report victimization), but it remains unknown what explains the observed variation in victimization patterns and what the individual-level predictive factors are for various forms of criminal victimization and financial exploitation. More research is needed to explain what factors may make elders suitable targets for victimization and what it is about their daily activities or life patterns that may place them in the presence of motivated offenders more frequently, or in a different capacity, than during younger years. In sum, routine activities theory identifies factors that may increase elders’ risk of financial exploitation however, questions remain.

Fundamentally, what makes an elder citizen a suitable target? Are these factors the same as those that may place them in the presence of motivated offenders? And, are the factors that increase a young adult’s risk of victimization applicable to elder adults?

Gottfredson and Hirschi’s general theory of crime assumes that levels of self-control are established through effective methods of parenting by the time a person is eight or nine years old and that these levels remain relatively stable over the life course. A majority of the empirical tests of this theory are related to criminal activity. Research has demonstrated that people with lower levels of self-control are significantly more likely to engage in criminal and deviant behavior than people with higher levels of self-control. While less frequently studied, subsequent research has found that victims of crime are also more likely to have lower levels of self-control.
(Holtfreter, et al., 2008; Schreck, 1999). People with low self-control more commonly place themselves in risky situations where victimization is most likely to occur.

Research has also identified correlations between low levels of self-control among the elderly and an increased risk for financial exploitation (Holtfreter et al., 2008). However, the existing studies do not provide insights into prior victimizations. Specifically, whether the individual has experienced various forms of victimization over their lives due to low self-control and if perhaps, the manifestation of the victimization has become financially related during elderhood. It is also unclear how much of the observed variation in elder financial exploitation can be explained by low levels of self-control, how low levels of self-control increase the likelihood of exploitation among the elderly (especially if they have not experienced victimizations or exploitations throughout their life), and if people with low levels of self-control are more or less likely to experience certain types of financial exploitation.

Theoretical explanations that only take into account factors that are related to the day-to-day activities of elders or levels of their self-control without considering the age-graded transitions and life events commonly experienced by most elders may be overlooking an important correlate of victimization or financial exploitation vulnerability. The life course turning points may be factors that are driving or influencing routine activities, social control, or decision-making abilities. These factors may also help to explain different patterns of victimization. In addition to understanding the salient life events, or turning points, that impact an individual’s pathways or trajectories through life, the application of a life course perspective is capable of integrating and exploring external factors, such as the role of social networks and geographic location on an individual’s risk for victimization and financial exploitation.

Geographic location has been found to be an important correlate of both an individual’s propensity for engaging in criminal activity and their risk for various forms of victimization. Studies on the geography of crime and victimization have found that crime is not randomly distributed across streets, communities, or cities but rather there are identifiable areas that have higher than average rates of crime and victimization (Sherman, 1995). Ecological characteristics of an area or a disproportionate number of suitable targets may result in an area developing a higher than average crime or victimization rate and thus, becoming a criminal hotspot. These factors are important because people, in general, understand that their risk of victimization is higher in some areas and adjust their behavior accordingly. The ability of an integrated life
course framework to incorporate elements of geographic location into the study of victimization and financial exploitation represents a unique and important aspect of this study, which increases the appeal of applying a life course approach to elder victimization and financial exploitation.

The life course perspective provides a framework for studying changes, conditions, and events that influence an individual’s pathway through life. As will be discussed below, through the study and understanding of the historical events and geographical locations, age-related turning points and transitions, linked lives, and the role of human agency, a more complete understanding of an elder citizen’s vulnerability for victimization and financial exploitation may be possible.

**Life Course Criminology**

Glen Elder (1994: 4), a pioneer in the sociological study of the life course as it relates to the intersection of human lives, human choice, historical context, and geography on behavioral outcomes indicated, “Life course thinking has diffused across disciplinary boundaries and specialty areas within particular disciplines.” Consistent with Elder’s observation, life course criminology has become a popular framework for explaining the changing offending trajectories across the adolescent and young adult years. Although the study of the life course within criminology takes a slightly more narrow approach than the sociological perspective, both place a strong emphasis on social factors that can alter individuals’ pathways through life and on their associated developmental consequences. The socialization processes during adolescence and young adulthood that lead to criminal desistence dominate the theoretical and empirical research interests of criminologists. Genetics, biology, early childhood behavior, and developmental trajectories have been gaining increasing attention from researchers, however, the entire life course, especially the factors and processes of aging and the turning points experienced in mid-to late-life have received much less attention.

Life course criminology is a theoretical perspective that is primarily concerned with the study of changes in offending and problem behavior over time, specifically related to social bonds acquired during late adolescence and young adulthood. The fundamental hypothesis of life course criminology in explaining offending is that the social ties established and strengthened during adulthood to work, family, and community, explain changes in criminality. In their age-graded theory of social control, Sampson and Laub (1990) contend that involvement with adult
social institutions produces informal social control, which decreases an individual’s likelihood of engaging in criminal and deviant behavior, and increases their likelihood of desistence.

Criminological scholarship has commonly found that marriage, employment, and enlistment and service in the military all provide turning points toward desistence (King, Massoglia, & MacMillian, 2007; Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998; Laub & Sampson, 2003; Piquero, Brame, Mazerolle, & Haapanen, 2002; Sampson & Laub, 1993; Warr, 1998). Work and employment have been considered important factors in many theories of crime, especially that of life course criminology, because while working, people are likely to experience close and frequent contact with conventional others (Sampson & Laub, 1990; Warr, 1998) and because the requirements and expectations of the workplace are likely to discourage crime and deviance (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Employment, and more specifically, the transition into work, has been found to partially explain the observed relationship between age and desistence from crime (Uggen, 2000). As previously discussed, the existing criminological literature has not explored these relationships over time or across the life course; with the exception of the studies that have focused on childhood trajectories, most research has examined transitions from adolescence to young adulthood. Until recently, the exploration of victimization patterns across the life course was also largely neglected within the discipline.

**Victimization and Life Course Criminology**

Criminological research has begun to explore changing rates and patterns of victimization with the application of life course concepts. However, much of the research is fragmented and has been tested piecemeal. In general, studies have found that there is variation in patterns of victimization over time, with children, adolescents, adults, and the elderly experiencing different types of crime at varying rates. Life course researchers have also found that there is a victim-offender overlap, in that many offenders are also victims, which may be driving some of the observed variation in victimization rates over the life course. This relationship has been referred to as one of the most robust findings within the field of criminology (Lauritsen & Laub, 2007; Schreck et al., 2015). Much of the criminological research on victimization and the life course has focused on this specific correlation between offending and victimization. During the late-adolescent and young adult years, factors have been identified that influence declines in both victimization and criminal behavior, namely, that of the strong social bonds established through
Marriage and employment. Studies have found that victimization rates tend to peak in mid-adolescence, along with criminal behavior, and then decline.

Marriage and employment are the two most commonly studied factors that are believed to influence the nature of the victim-offender overlap. Although it is generally accepted that an individual’s likelihood for engaging in crime and experiencing victimization peaks during adolescence and declines steadily thereafter, fundamental questions remain unanswered regarding the variation and likelihood for victimization over the life course. Namely, what are the victimization patterns and trends among adults in mid- and late-life? And does the likelihood for all forms of victimization continue to decline along with the propensity for criminality as individuals age? Some researchers contend that the association between offending and victimization will fluctuate at different stages of an individual’s life (Laurietsen, Sampson, & Laub, 1991). However, the research has not readily progressed beyond adolescence and adulthood to explore the unique social factors impacting victimization or exploitation of the elderly. While it is not theoretically expected that there would be an increase in offending rates among the elderly, rates of some types of financial exploitation do appear to increase during the elder years, contrary to what would be expected from the findings on the victim-offender overlap, but consistent with a routine activities and integrated life course theoretical framework.

Schreck and colleagues (2015) highlighted that the life course perspective can provide a way for conceptualizing the observed variation in behaviors and expected outcomes at different life stages. Just as life course research on desistance has identified social bonds as being protective factors, researchers have also found that strong social bonds generally protect against criminal targeting by offenders (Schreck et al., 2015). While this has been studied mostly among adolescents, the logic may apply to adults and elders in that as certain relationships become more significant to individuals, they also become more protective. Therefore, the decline in victimization commonly observed during young adulthood may be attributable to the presence of high-quality adult relationships with others and with social institutions. However, the longitudinal study by Schreck and colleagues (2015) was unable to account for social factors in the decreasing magnitude of the victimization-offending association. The authors found that the effects of victimization decreased each year, regardless of how strong bonds were to a person’s family members or to their work.
Daigle and colleagues (2008) examined the role of marriage and employment in reducing an individual’s victimization risk over the life course. The authors found that marriage was a strong predictor of desistence from victimization, but did not find support for a protective factor from employment. The authors speculate that the likely reason for this relationship is, as Sampson and Laub found, marriage may operate as a mechanism of informal social control that provides social capital. And, the decision to marry may reflect a cognitive change within the individual that reflects their decisions to refrain from other risky behaviors that would also influence their likelihood of victimization. Lastly, Daigle and her colleagues also noted that marriage might provide protection from criminals and provide guardianship, factors that are likely to decrease an individual’s risk of victimization. Importantly, the life course victimization studies by Schreck and colleagues and Diagle and colleagues are restricted to the young-adult years and their findings may not be applicable to elders.

The existing life course studies of victimization represent solid empirical and theoretical tests, although they are limited in that they do not focus on the years after young- and middle-adulthood. However, even the most compelling of the victimization studies may be unsatisfactory explanations of elder financial exploitation because they do not address the social, health, and cognitive factors associated with the aging process that may influence an elder’s risk of victimization and exploitation. Miethe and Meier (1994: 32) stated, “Differences in lifestyles are socially determined by the individuals’ collective responses or adaptations to various role expectations and structural constraints…that both enable and constrain one’s behavioral choices.” Thus, the theories that do not consider various age-graded socially determined lifestyles, responses, adaptations, and constrains may be overlooking fundamental correlates to victimization, especially those that may result in someone becoming a target for victimization or exploitation. There are likely multiple trajectories of victimization that vary based on the life experiences of individuals that existing research and theories have yet to thoroughly capture.

Further, there is a limited amount of research on life course tenants and elder victimization and financial exploitation, however, one study has found that seniors who experienced a serious and negative life event were more likely to experience financial exploitation (Anderson, 2011). Specifically, the study indicated that elders who experienced a negative life event in the past two years (e.g. death of a family member or close friend, loss of a job, or serious illness or injury to themselves or a member of their family) were two and a half
times more likely to experience financial exploitation than an elder who had not experienced a negative life event (Anderson, 2011).

The study of the life course emphasizes entire life trajectories of individuals and the factors that influence behaviors and outcomes. The criminological theories that focus solely upon criminal involvement, desistence, and victimization in adolescence and young adulthood are neglecting a substantial portion of the life course, both before and after, which may present crucial turning points and factors in the study of crime and victimization. In addition, given the observed relationship between victimization and offending, studying trajectories of victimization may also provide important insight into offending patterns and behaviors over time.

The Life Course Perspective

When expanded beyond the more narrow application that is common in criminology, the life course perspective may be used to provide a more complete and compelling framework for explaining victimization and exploitation in late-life. The sociological study of the life course framework includes the exploration of trajectories of change, the social meaning of age, intergenerational social patterns, geographical locations, and the effects of macro-level historical and political events on the behavior and well-being of individuals over time.

The life course perspective began with longitudinal studies on child development during the 1920s and 1930s. Many of these studies followed participants until late life, and in doing so, researchers identified a series of issues, life changes, and outcomes that could not be addressed using the available theories of the time. Elder (1998) noted that these issues included the recognition that lives are heavily influenced by historical context, geographic location, and that the study of a person’s life must include new ways of thinking about their daily patterns and interrelated dynamics between family, friends, and coworkers. The multiple trajectories and the turning points experienced by individuals as they age and their developmental implications are fundamental elements of the life course.

According to the life course perspective, an individual’s pathway of development, or trajectory, combines with, interacts with, and can be interrupted by events, or turning points, to influence their overall well-being (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997). Trajectories are long-term patterns of stability and change that contain multiple turning points (George, 1993). Marriage, schooling, and career are commonly experienced trajectories. A turning point is a dramatic change, which is
shorter in duration than a trajectory, in an individual’s life course (Elder, 1998). Weddings, divorces, graduations, and promotions are commonly experienced turning points. Early turning points can have enduring consequences and can affect later turning points or outcomes by setting various cumulative advantages and disadvantages in motion (Elder, 1998). In other words, there are age-graded trajectories, such as those of careers and family, which are subject to dynamic changing conditions, or turning points, that may influence an individual’s future life direction, behavior, decisions, and circumstances.

The life course perspective can and has been used as a framework for understanding how chronological age, relationships, life transitions, geographic location, and social change interact to impact an individual’s behavior (Hutchinson, 2005). Figure 2 provides a general theoretical model of how a life course perspective can explain the ways changing life course factors impact individuals’ behavior, life events, circumstances, and well-being. The specific turning points that are illustrated in the model are discussed in detail below. It is important to note that the components can individually influence behavior and life pathways, or one or more can interact to influence behavior and life pathways. There are four fundamental principles that characterize the life course perspective. They include: (1) socio-historical events and geographical location, (2) timing of lives, (3) linked lives (social ties to others), and (4) human agency and personal control (Elder, 1994). These components show how and to what extent social change can alter people’s lives. The changes can be positive or negative and may manifest as short-term effects, or in more long-term, persistent changes that alter the individual’s entire life direction. The next section will provide an explanation for how life course turning points can influence behavior and future life events and will provide a foundation for the explanation of victimization and exploitation vulnerability among the elderly that will be explored in the section that follows.

**Component One: Socio-Historical Events and Geographic Location**

An individual’s pathway through life is embedded in and transformed by the social conditions and events occurring during the historical period and geographical location in which the person lives or has lived (Elder, 1998). Specifically, social events and/or conditions can shape an individual’s perceptions, choices, experiences, and behaviors, which in turn have the potential to alter their life trajectories and produce subsequent turning points or transitions. Behaviors and decisions do not occur in a vacuum, but rather are influenced by and relevant to
external societal events, historical characteristics, and geographical locations. Historical factors and geographic locations also influence behavior and decisions by providing opportunities and placing constraints on individuals’ lives.

Historical events can permanently alter the lives of individuals who experience them. Examples of events that may alter life course trajectories include geopolitical events, political elections, economic cycles, and widespread social and cultural ideologies. Socioeconomic, ecological, and societal/historical changes that occur in conjunction with discrete individual life events may increase the likelihood that a turning point will result in a changing trajectory. Thus, these factors will differentially affect peoples’ respective life histories depending on the point in the life course when the individual experiences these historical events. Historical events may also result in differences in the ways people interact with others.

Elder and Rockwell (1978) noted that physical geographical locations are significant factors in the life course perspective in that they provide the settings for family, neighborhood, community, and individual development over time. Individuals interact with their geographic locations on a daily basis and many develop a sense of identity based on their hometowns or cities of residence. An individual’s neighborhood may require they avoid certain streets, develop a sense of toughness and expectation of conflict, or alternatively, produce a genuine degree of openness and trust in their neighbors. Geographic locations can also expose people to various risks (pollution, crime, traffic, for example) and provide for the interaction with others. Each of these factors are likely to either directly or indirectly impact the well-being and behavior of individuals.

Component Two: Timing of Lives

Timing of lives refers to a sequence of transitions (known as turning points, discrete life events, or life changes) that occur and subsequently impact an individual’s behavior and life trajectory (Elder, 1985). A turning point is an “alteration or deflection in a long-term pathway or trajectory that was initiated at an earlier point in time” (Sampson & Laub, 2005: 16). Many life events require that individuals temporarily adapt and change their behavior; however, an event becomes a turning point when the event(s) result in long-term or significant changes to behavior or life. Rutter (1996) identified two features of turning points, first, they cause marked changes
in an individual’s context or circumstance, and second, they create or close off opportunities for success or achievement, social networks and relationships, and/or an individual’s self-concept.

Multiple turning points that occur in a short period of time and the timing of the turning point(s) in an individual’s life are significant factors that determine the impact that the turning point will have (Elder, 1998). Thus, certain events or transitions may be more impactful and differentially impactful depending on when they occur. Elder and Rockwell (1978) note that the “stressfulness of a life change” will depend upon three considerations: first, the nature of the change, second, the individual’s life history, experiences, expectations, and adaptive skills that they bring to the change, and third, the temporal context of the change and its relation to other events.

Just as marriage, attending college, enlisting and serving in the military, obtaining employment, and parenthood mark some of the major life events that influence pathways through young adulthood; retirement, home relocations, major medical/health events, declines in cognition, the death of a spouse, or the loss of independence may result in marked transitions or turning points during one’s elder years. During elderhood, individuals are also likely to experience many social and biological (physical and/or health) age-graded trajectories and turning points that are opposite of the protective transitions and turning points experienced earlier in adulthood. Table 3 provides a list of examples of common turning points and transitions experienced by adolescents and young adults that are, in many respects, opposite of those experienced during one’s elder years.

In addition, the life course perspective places emphasis on the social organization and meaning of age. Age grades are defined by societal norms that indicate appropriate behavior, roles, and time schedules for various age cohorts (Elder, 1975). Age-graded transitions typically result in a change in status, social identity, and/or roles. Further, it is assumed that periods of life, such as childhood, adolescence, adulthood, and elderhood have socially defined acceptable positions and rights that an individual may have within society (Hagestad & Neugarten, 1985). It is important to note that the life course perspective also assumes that progress along trajectories is age-graded. If certain trajectories or turning points occur too early or too late, based upon societal norms, individuals’ success may be impacted. For example, getting married and having children before graduating from college and beginning a career may make the life outcomes and financial success, especially early on, difficult to achieve.
Life course research has identified adaptive problems of various turning points throughout the aging process. Specifically, marriage, childbirth, divorces, changes in work life, and residential relocations, are significant life events that may pose adaptive problems for individuals. Adaptive problems include any form of difficulty in adjusting to the life change resulting in an unsuccessful or delayed transition. Adaptive problems are more likely if the trajectory or turning point occurs at a time other than when it is socially acceptable, for example teenage pregnancies may result in the woman delaying or foregoing college resulting in long-term difficulty in obtaining financial success. Hagestad and Neugarten (1985) found that there was a relationship between long-term health issues and adaptive problems experienced earlier in life as a result of various negative or challenging turning points.

Component Three: Linked Lives

The component of linked lives emphasizes the role of social ties, bonds, and/or networks between individuals. The life course perspective recognizes that individuals’ lives are interdependent upon one another and are characterized by shared relationships that are reciprocally connected on several levels (Elder, 1998). The idea of linked lives is central to human development and is often observed and studied in models of personal networks of friends and family over time (Elder, 1998; Granovetter, 1973). For example, during childhood, a person’s social network primarily consists of family, during adolescence, ties to parents and family may begin to loosen as teenagers develop strong relationships with friends and individuals outside of their immediate family. During young-adulthood, people continue to develop their social network through school, work, and marriage. Throughout adulthood, relationships with one’s spouse and children become fundamental. Social networks also change during elderhood as individuals retire, relocate, become ill, and pass away. During late-life individuals may come to depend on a caregiver, which also has the potential to change the dynamics of their social networks.

In addition to having an impact on normative age-graded progress throughout life, large-scale historical or societal events and geographic location also have the capacity to influence relationships and social ties. Research has found that stressful life events, such as the death of a family member, may change familial relationships and ties to an individual’s social network (Elder, 1998). These events can trigger patterns of stress and vulnerability, or alternatively, can
promote adaptive behaviors and resilience. Thus, the ability to adapt to life course changes varies depending on an individual’s resources or support. Elder (1998) noted that lives are lived interdependently, and social and historical influences are expressed through this network of shared relationships.

**Component Four: Human Agency**

The final component, according to the life course perspective, assumes that individuals are active agents who not only mediate the effect of social conditions, but also make decisions and set goals that shape their social structure. Individuals have the capacity to engage in “planful competence”, which refers to the thoughtful, proactive, and self-controlled processes that underlie both their short-term daily decisions and their long-term life choices (Elder, 1995). However, the ability to make specific decisions and choices depends on the opportunities available and constraints placed on the individual. Some individuals are able to select the pathways they follow throughout life, this is known as human agency, while others tend to be more heavily influenced by external factors. However, it is important to note that human agency and the associated life choices are not made in a social vacuum, all life choices are contingent on the opportunities and constraints of social structure and cultural values.

Characteristic of the life course perspective is that early conditions, opportunities, and decisions will impact later life outcomes and circumstances. In other words, the past has the potential to shape, change, and influence the present and future. The timing and conditions of earlier life events and behaviors can oftentimes set up a chain reaction of experiences that change the direction(s) of their lives. Also fundamental is that chronological age and the associated roles, privileges, and expectations significantly matter to the behavioral outcomes and life events of individuals. Thus, for the purposes of studying life course experiences and aging, it is important to examine and consider both the status of being an older adult and the process of aging as each will influence current life circumstances and future trajectories. The following section will apply the aforementioned theoretical components to late-life and explore the ways various life course turning points can result in an increase in an individual’s vulnerability of victimization and financial exploitation during their elder years by integrating other theories and research. Elements of the criminological theories of routine activities, the general theory of crime, and criminal hotspots have each independently been studied as explanations for
victimization and, to some degree, elder financial exploitation. However, they each fit well within the four life course components, and may be better suited to explain elder financial exploitation when integrated and examined from an age-graded perspective.

**An Age-Graded Life Course Perspective of Late-Life Victimization**

Theories can either be broad or narrow in scope depending on the phenomena they seek to explain. The intention of some theories is to explain a limited amount of behaviors (sexual assault, for example) or to explain a more encompassing amount of behaviors (all criminal acts, for example). Some criminologists believe that the most desirable theories are those that are able to effectively explain the widest range of phenomena with the fewest statements (Wilcox, Land, and Hunt, 2003), however, there is no consensus within the discipline about what constitutes the appropriate scope of a theory. The primary objective of this dissertation is to propose an alternative theoretical perspective of elder victimization using financial exploitation, which is a growing and under-studied phenomenon, as an empirical example. The perspective is intended to be sufficiently broad in scope, while using a specific example as a preliminary explanation of the theory’s ability to explain elder victimization.

The perspective begins with the assumption that there is, in fact, variation in victimization patterns and rates across the life course. This assumption was drawn from the existing research discussed in the preceding chapters and sections on the life course and victimization, the victim-offender overlap, theories of victimization, and prior research on elder financial exploitation. This age-graded perspective of late-life victimization will be built upon the four life course concepts described in the previous section and will incorporate elements from routine activities theory, the general theory of crime, and research on criminal hotspots. A more general age-graded theory may be useful in addressing some of the remaining questions left unanswered by the existing theories of victimization, specifically those related to financial exploitation of the elderly.

In his seminal work, *The Sociological Imagination*, C. Wright Mills (1956) encouraged a “big picture” study of problems, events, and people by considering and addressing broader historical and sociological contexts. To provide a more accurate understanding of a selected social problem, Mills argued that it is necessary to observe the event in a variety of circumstances, understand its history, provide an understanding of change over time, and
investigate any interaction effects. A life course approach to elder financial exploitation is consistent with Mills’ arguments in that a holistic approach may be the best method for adequately understanding and confronting social problems. The initial organizing concepts of the perspective, derived from a synthesis of relevant research and theory, will be presented and integrated in the sections that follow. The foundation of the perspective is based on the four general components that are common in the sociological study of the life course on how various interrelated social factors influence, create, and modify individuals’ behaviors and life outcomes.

**Component One: Sociohistorical Events and Geographic Location**

The first tenant of the life course perspective highlights the importance of studying and understanding the ways in which sociohistorical events and geographic location influence an individual’s life. Sociohistorical events are large-scale incidents that impact a sizeable number of people simultaneously. Individuals in distinct age cohorts are likely to be impacted by sociohistorical events differently depending on how old and what their social roles were during the time. In addition, sociohistoric events have the capacity to produce lasting generational differences in beliefs and perceptions among individuals in different age cohorts.

Historical events can directly alter the lives of individuals by changing their life trajectories. Historical events can also indirectly alter the lives of individuals by influencing their perceptions and ways of thinking, which may change their life trajectories. A commonly studied large-scale sociohistorical event that has been addressed using a life course perspective is the Great Depression (see Elder, 1994). People living through this time may have lost their jobs, homes, and life savings, which directly altered their trajectories. Individuals may also have been indirectly impacted through changing perceptions about finances and the government or banking institutions. These beliefs may have led the individual to become more frugal and careful about spending habits or reluctant to invest or place their money in banks in fear that they would lose their life savings again.

The current elderly population in the United States has experienced numerous sociohistorical events that may have differentially influenced their trajectories and life pathways. Many members of the current elderly population were children of the Great Depression, witnessed (or served in) World War II, the Korean War, and/or the Vietnam War, experienced the Civil Rights Movement and the Women’s Rights Movement, witnessed the terrorist attacks
of September 11, 2001, and lived through the financial crisis of 2008, among others. It is likely that one or several of the aforementioned sociohistorical events either directly or indirectly altered the life pathways or trajectories of individuals, which could impact their victimization vulnerability. While pinpointing the exact historical event that resulted in a transition or turning point and in which way the individual’s trajectory was impacted, is empirically difficult, historical factors are important to consider when studying the lives of individuals and their decision-making. This may be especially difficult to accomplish with cross-sectional quantitative research designs. Qualitative studies are likely better suited to address the issues and impacts of sociohistorical events and their role in influencing an elder’s victimization likelihood because a more nuanced description will be possible.

The second fundamental principle of life course theory is that of the role geographic location plays in the lives of individuals. An individual’s physical environment has the capacity to influence their turning points, experiences, perceptions, and life trajectories. As with sociohistorical events, geographic location can both directly or indirectly alter an individual’s pathway through life and result in experiencing various turning points. Also, the age at which a person lived in a certain area may result in differential life experiences. For example, people who were raised and lived in the Northeast compared with those who were raised and lived in the Deep South during the Civil Rights Era, or those who grew up in disadvantaged versus advantaged neighborhoods, likely have had very different life experiences that have shaped their behaviors, experiences, and perceptions.

The life course tenant of geographic location assumes that the physical locations in which a person lives impacts all aspects of their lives. Routine activities theory and research on criminal hotspots also highlight the importance of geographic location in impacting individuals’ lives, although specific to patterns of crime and victimization. Routine activities theory and research on criminal hotspots emphasize that crime occurs nonrandomly. There has been a substantial amount of research indicating that there is spatial variation in crime in relation to the social environment (for examples see Eck, Chainey, Cameron, Leitner, & Wilson, 2005; Sherman, Gartin, & Buerget, 1989; Taylor & Gottfredson, 1986). According to routine activities theory, the rate at which crime occurs in certain areas is directly related to the convergence in time and location of the three elements of routine activities (suitable target, motivated offender, and the absence of a capable guardian). Studies have also shown that the same people and places are
more likely to be repeatedly victimized because there are some areas in which crime is clustered, these are known as hotspots or high-crime areas. It is important to note that some locations can experience a variety of crime and victimization types, or a certain type of offense may dominate the crime and victimization rate of a given area.

Research has differentiated between crime hotspots and high-crime areas. A hotspot is a small geographic unit where crime is concentrated, such as a street or intersection. A high-crime area is also a geographical area, however typically larger than a hotspot in which crime is concentrated, such as a public housing project or an area that is geographically bound. High crime areas and hotspots are areas that have greater than average criminal events, or a greater than average risk of victimization. Essentially, hotspots and high-crime areas refer to “concentrations of individual events that might indicate a series of related crimes” (Eck et al., 2005: 2). Sherman (1995) compared the criminal careers of places and offenders and determined that estimates of future crimes may be six times more predictable by their location than by the identity of the offender.

Because crime is not spread evenly across states, cities, counties, or neighborhoods, but rather is clustered in some areas and absent in others, people use this information to shape their daily routines and activities. They may avoid certain streets, they may lock their cars, leave their doors unlocked, or may befriend strangers. Individuals understand that their risk of victimization varies by location and circumstance and therefore, is greater in some areas than it is in others. Scholars have argued that this behavior shows that people are unreasonably fearful of crime in some areas and not others (Eck et al., 2005). While this is likely to be true in many instances, it also shows that individuals understand that crime is not evenly distributed across locations. Eck and colleagues (2005:1) indicated that “people might be mistaken about the risks of some places, but they are not mistaken about their risk of being a victim of crime is not geographically constant.” Thus, a person’s routine activities are likely to be based on their perceived risk of victimization in a given location. These beliefs may not only influence the day-to-day activities of people, but also play a role in determining where they are going to live long-term.

Routine activities theory helps to explain why crime is often concentrated in specific areas and not present in others. In particular, the theory highlights how behavior is regulated among residents, patrons, and outsiders in specific areas or places (Eck et al., 2005). For example, individuals can regulate their own behavior by avoiding certain areas or taking
precautions to protect themselves and their belongings, and businesses can regulate the behavior of outsiders by installing security cameras, metal detectors, or gates surrounding their communities. Business regulations can prevent criminal activity and victimization through early intervention, they can attract people who desire a well-regulated place over ones that are less regulated, and can repel people who desire a less-regulated location (Brantingham and Brantingham, 1995).

Gated communities became popular across the United States beginning in the mid-1980s as fear of crime and perceived vulnerabilities began to necessitate, for some people, the use of walls and gates to provide security (Blakley and Snyder, 1998). Security has been cited as a primary reason for why residents choose to purchase homes in gated communities. Residents also routinely cite that the gates provide for the regulation of traffic, solicitations, and ensure order in their communities (Blakley and Snyder, 1998). In other words, the gates keep unwanted people out and wanted people in. These regulations have been studied as part of the third tenant of routine activities theory, that of capable guardians. It is assumed that locations with more regulations are more likely to prevent crime and victimization. While residential gates do create the perception of less crime among residents, research has found marginal effects, at best, of the actual crime prevention provided by residential guard gates (Blakely and Snyder, 1998). People who live in gated communities feel safer, but may not actually be safer. Research has found that the fear of crime tends to be low among all members of the elderly population, but are lowest among those who live in age-homogenous communities (i.e. retirement communities) compared with those who live in more age-heterogeneous areas (Akers, La Greca, Sellers, & Cochran, 1987). Akers and colleagues’ (1987) survey of 1,410 elderly residents indicated that they feel more protected from victimization when residing in areas with more people in their age cohort. This is an important finding because it shows that geographical location is significant in influencing an elderly individual’s fear of crime.

Routine activities and lifestyle researchers have underscored the importance of examining the context and conditions of neighborhoods in their studies of victimization risk. However, the literature on financial exploitation has not readily considered neighborhood or community-level factors. One study of telemarketing fraud perpetrated among the elderly found that neighborhood-level factors were more strongly correlated with telemarketing victimization than was age alone (Policastro and Payne, 2015). Given the limited research in this area, little is
known about how neighborhood context may shape individuals’ perceptions and risks of financial exploitation. Although most research on hotspots has been related to policing strategies specific to drug market areas and locations with increased rates of gun-related violence, the logic may be applicable to specific areas with high concentrations of suitable targets, motivated offenders, and no capable guardians.

Routine activities and geographic location may act as mediators between age, turning points, and elder financial exploitation. Given that elders in general are perceived to be suitable targets, it is plausible that areas with high concentrations of elders will represent a criminal hotspot or high-crime area. Many elders live in retirement communities, assisted living facilities, nursing homes, and/or memory care facilities, which may be unintentionally creating areas with high rates of financial exploitation, or criminal hotspots. Specifically, the high concentration of elders in these areas may present a group of suitable targets, surrounded by motivated offenders, and, depending on the regulations and security measures of the location, an absence of capable guardians. Further, the lifestyles advertised, supported, and created by the facilities or communities can impact the routine activities or daily patterns of residents, which may indirectly influence their risk of victimization or financial exploitation. Therefore, elements of criminal hotspots and routine activities theory may complement and clarify the life course tenant of geographic location as it relates to risk of financial exploitation of the elderly. The life course perspective tells us that geography matters, routine activities theory and criminal hotspots may show precisely how geographic location matters for victimization patterns of the elderly.

Component Two: Timing of Lives

Timing of lives refers to the capacity and likelihood that significant life events, or turning points, will modify transitions and trajectories and redirect an individual’s life pathway. Many societal roles, responsibilities, and expectations are age-graded and the timing of turning points is a significant factor that determines if and to what extent the individual will experience a life-altering change in their trajectory.

The societal roles, expectations, and perceptions of the elderly are fundamentally different than those of children, adolescents, and young adults. Thus, because turning points are age-graded, if they occur too early or too late, based on societal standards, they have an increased likelihood of negatively impacting the life of the individual. Further, opportunities and
constraints placed on the individual and multiple turning points that occur in a short period of time also lead to an increased likelihood of a negative life outcome.

The elderly experience a variety of turning points that are unique to their location in the age strata, and oftentimes, opposite to those they experienced and worked towards in their younger years. There are various socially defined turning points and transitions that elders typically experience, as well as a variety of health- and cognitive-related factors and issues that can interact with the sociogenic turning points to produce vulnerabilities and negative life outcomes. The first major societal-imposed turning point that many elders experience is retirement. While most people look forward to retiring, it has the potential to create difficulties for individuals, especially in the first few years after leaving work. Udo (2011) reported that nearly 39 percent of retirees indicated that their health declined much more rapidly than they expected in the years immediately following their retirement. However, these findings may be confounding retirement with simply getting older. This may be an observed correlation and not causation. In addition, statistics have also indicated that the rate of divorce among people over the age of 50 is increasing in the United States and some researchers believe that retirement is a major driving force behind the observed rise. Pascale and Primavera (2012) found that many couples are not prepared to spend so much uninterrupted time with their spouses and come to find that many of their interests have changed, leading to divorce after retirement. In addition, as has been observed in criminological literature, employment often creates strong social bonds and attachments to coworkers, who can sometimes become confidants and friends outside of the workplace. Working can also create a sense of purpose and provides financial security and stability while employed individuals can look forward to and work towards promotions and raises. Upon retirement, many of these factors are missing from the individual’s life, which can create feelings of depression, loneliness, and a loss of self-esteem, among others, which may result in some victimization vulnerabilities.

Relocation is another significant turning point in the lives of many elder citizens. While individuals in other age cohorts also frequently relocate, the process may be more stressful for older people. Aside from the physical process of moving itself, relocating to a new area requires that the individual develop an entirely new social network. For example, upon moving, people must find new doctors, service providers, and grocery stores, among others. In addition, people must meet their new neighbors and establish new social networks. Long-standing and dense
social networks have been shown to protect against mistreatment, therefore a break or weakening in the networks may result in vulnerabilities for victimization and financial exploitation.

Physical limitations, an increasing frequency of illness, and declining cognition also are age-graded turning points that may impact an elder’s vulnerability for victimization and financial exploitation either directly or indirectly. For example, health concerns and physical limitations can make it necessary that an outsider enter the home of the elder to conduct household chores and maintenance or manage their finances, which can directly result in victimization or financial exploitation and represents a change to their support networks.

Lastly, victimization and/or financial exploitation, in and of themselves, may also be significant turning points in the lives of individuals that permanently alter their trajectories. A traumatic or salient victimization or financial exploitation event can result in the individual making changes to their perceptions and daily activities as a result of the experience. Depending on the nature of the event, the victim’s personality, and their social support networks these changes, or the associated consequences from the exploitation event itself, may lead to either an increase or decrease in their risk of future financial exploitation. For example, criminological research has found that repeat victimization is a relatively common occurrence among some people, specifically, studies have found that once a person has been victimized, they are more likely to be victimized again (Daems, 2005).

Component Three: Linked Lives

The quality, strength, and timing of social ties are important factors that influence individuals’ trajectories and turning points. Social ties are also significant factors in determining how an individual responds to turning points, life events, historical events, and changes in geographical locations. Conversely, the reciprocal is also true: stressful life events, historical events, and geographic locations each have the ability to influence the quality, strength, timing, and significance of an individual’s social bonds and networks.

The process of aging and elder-specific turning points (discussed in the section above) result in marked changes to the social structure, network, and salience of the social bonds and networks of elder citizens. As individuals age, they experience various normative turning points and trajectory changes such as retirement, an increasing frequency of health issues, physical limitations, and cognitive declines. Each of these turning points represent stressful life events
that can pose adaptive challenges for the individual depending on the strength of their social support networks. Many elders are also faced with the difficult task of caring for an ailing spouse and must learn to adjust to life after their spouses pass away. When people marry, they likely envision spending their lives with their significant other and aging together. However, health diagnoses and cognitive changes can render one spouse to be the other’s caregiver, which completely changes the nature, roles, responsibilities, circumstances, and expectations for the relationship.

Physical limitations, health issues, and cognitive declines may also result in elders requiring someone to come into their home to administer medical care, take care of household chores, or manage finances. The inclusion of a caregiver or home aide in the lives of elders also changes the structure of their social support networks and may result in victimization, depending on the intention of the caregiver and the health/cognition of the elder.

Social networks can be an important correlate of well-being among elder adults (Litwin & Shiovitz-Ezra, 2011). Commonly studied within the field of social gerontology, network density refers to the cluster of relationships a person has and their varying degrees of “closeness” to one another. Networks that consist of people who all know each other well and understand the unique aspects of the elder’s life are referred to as being tight-knit. These networks tend to include the children, grandchildren, and siblings of the elder adult. Networks that are not tight-knit tend to include individuals who do not know each other and usually live in “nonoverlapping social worlds” (Schafer & Koltai, 2014). Research has found that elders who have low network density, or a social network that is not tight-knit, are at an advantage, in some respects, over elders who have more dense networks. The benefits to elders of having a lower density network are increased privacy, feelings of power and control over their own affairs, and an increased level of self-esteem (Cornwell, 2009; 2011). However, more dense networks also appear to have distinct and significant advantages for the long-term well-being of elders. Being embedded in, or central to, a tight-knight network provides more opportunities for support and companionship which are essential for elders during periods of grief and health-related issues or concerns (Haines & Hurlbert, 1992).

A recent study conducted by Schafer and Koltai (2014) found that elders with more dense social networks had a significantly lower risk of mistreatment than elders whose social networks were not as dense or tight-knit. However, the authors did find that among the elders who had
dense networks and were mistreated, the perpetrator(s) were most likely to be part of the elders’ social network. Because research has found elder mistreatment and financial exploitation to be closely related (Morgan & Mason, 2014), this logic likely also can be applied to individual’s vulnerability for victimization and financial exploitation. Given the findings from the existing research, it is possible that social networks can be either risk factors or protective factors for elder victimization or financial exploitation depending on the density and intention of the individuals within the network. The degree of protection the density of the social network provides varies with the type of victimization and financial exploitation. For example, strong social networks may be better at preventing exploitation from secondary contacts and strangers and less likely to prevent against exploitation from primary contacts.

**Component Four: Human Agency**

The life course perspective places a significant emphasis on the assumption that the lives of individuals do not occur in a vacuum, but rather that they are heavily influenced by social, historical, and geographic conditions in which lives unfold, and by the people within their social networks. However, the life course perspective also recognizes that people are active participants in their lives and have the capacity to make decisions that can counteract social forces. However, the ability an individual has to make decisions depends on opportunities available to them and constraints placed upon them by society, history, geography, and others. The capacity of an elderly individual to actively alter their life and make decisions for themselves can be influenced by a variety of external and internal factors. Their life experiences and perceptions, their social bonds, their geographic location, their physical health, and their cognitive ability all likely impact and interact with one another to alter the way an individual may make decisions.

Cognitive declines can directly or indirectly influence an elder individual’s risk for victimization and financial exploitation in a number of ways (Kemp and Mosqueda, 2005). Cognitive ability in adulthood is a strong predictor of the ability to maintain independence (Bharucha, Panday, Shen, Dodge, and Ganguli, 2004), use technology (Czaja, Charness, Fisk, Hertzog, Rogers, and Sharit, 2006), and perform instrumental daily activities (Allaire and Marsiske, 1999; Boot, Stothart and Charness, 2013). Each of these factors may be important in determining the victimization or financial exploitation vulnerability of an elder. Changes in cognitive capability can require that someone else manage the finances of the elder, which could,
depending on the intention of the person who is handling the finances, lead to exploitation. In addition, cognitive limitations may also lead to an individual making decisions that are not well thought-out or in their best interest at the time. Depending on the severity of the cognitive issue, it may also be a reason that financial exploitation of the elderly is underreported in that some may not know that they have been victimized.

In addition, research has also indicated that changes in the brain of elders, as a result of the natural aging process, may influence their vulnerability for financial exploitation. Specifically, elders may be less able than younger generations to analyze the facial expressions of others and successfully determine if they are untrustworthy or dishonest (Castle and Taylor, 2012). The region of the brain that has been linked to interpreting cues of trustworthiness in others appears to function at a lower level in elders than it does in younger individuals. Elders may be less likely to detect suspicious facial expressions or body language in people that make them less trusting. The researchers concluded that older adults might be especially vulnerable to interpersonal scams or solicitations in which they are unable to detect the subtle cues of untrustworthiness. Thus, observed differences in trust between generations may be attributable to structural changes in the brain due to aging (Lloyd, 2012). The inability to successfully detect subtle cues of dishonesty may lead to the inability of elders to make sound decisions regarding their finances if faced with someone looking to scam them.

As previously discussed, a correlation between low self-control and financial exploitation of the elderly has been identified (Holtfreter et al., 2008; 2014). This was primarily observed because low self-control resulted in individuals placing themselves in risky situations. Low levels of self-control may result in elders taking risks with their finances through lottery scams and investments in business opportunities that are fraudulent. Based on the criminological literature on self-control and crime, it is likely that individuals with low self-control make hasty decisions without properly thinking about or researching the possible consequences of their actions. In addition, low self-control may limit an individual’s ability to successfully plan for their financial future. For example, Moffitt and colleagues (2011) found “financial planfulness” (e.g. establishing and maintaining investment funds, retirement plans, and home ownership) to be related to higher levels of self-control among adults. Therefore, low self-control may influence an individual’s ability to make sounds decisions regarding their finances, which could lead to financial exploitation.
Conclusion

Figure 3 provides a general theoretical model depicting how age and life course principles can lead to elder victimization or financial exploitation. Figure 4 provides a life course theoretical model that integrates aspects of routine activities theory, and criminal hotspots to show how these combined factors may lead to victimization or financial exploitation of the elderly. Important to note in each of the theoretical models is that the life course concepts can directly and independently lead to victimization or financial exploitation or two or more of the concepts can interact with each other, leading to victimization or financial exploitation. For example, a life course turning point, such as the death of a spouse, can directly lead to financial exploitation or the turning point can interact with a change in geographic location and social bonds which together may lead to financial exploitation.

The four life course components can be integrated with elements from established criminological theoretical explanations of victimization. In the chapters that follow, the degree to which and utility of exploring the influence of age-graded life course turning points on elder financial exploitation will be presented.
Figure 2: A General Theoretical Model of the Life Course Perspective
Figure 3: A Life Course Theoretical Model of Financial Exploitation
Figure 4: An Integrated Age-Graded Theoretical Model of Financial Exploitation
CHAPTER 4
DATA AND RESEARCH METHODS

Introduction

This study seeks to contribute to our knowledge of financial exploitation in late-life. Data come from reported cases of financial exploitation of the elderly, arrests made for financial crimes with an elderly victim, focus group discussions, and individual interviews with residents of the largest active-living retirement community in the United States. This study explores the utility of applying an integrated and life course framework to the explanation of elder financial exploitation using unique qualitative and quantitative data. The study will rely primarily on qualitative data with the quantitative data being used for triangulation and to provide context.

Despite the rich history of qualitative research in the social sciences, criminology has become dominated by quantitative studies that rely on large datasets compiled with data from self-reported surveys or official records. While quantitative methods do have many advantages, it is important for researchers to select the method of inquiry that can best answer their specific research questions. In choosing the most appropriate analytic method, researchers must determine which method will be feasible, provide the most accurate account of the phenomena being studied, and adequately address the desired goal(s) of the research project (McCall and Simmons, 1969). In some instances, that may not be most effectively accomplished through statistical analyses, but rather through a much more detailed and personal interaction with respondents or subjects. Despite the chosen analytic method, the ultimate goal of scientific inquiry should be to provide the most comprehensive assessment of a given problem, advance theory, and mold policy.

This dissertation will rely heavily on qualitative data due to the limited amount of available knowledge, the underreporting of incidents to authorities, and because there are no existing datasets that effectively examine the risk factors, protective factors, and circumstances associated with aging and the financial exploitation of the elderly. In general, prior studies are incomplete, fragmented, and inconsistent with one another in their conceptualizations, definitions, and findings, which also makes the use of more exploratory research methods suitable for this study. In addition, the available literature gives little attention to age-graded life events and dynamics that may have an impact on or precipitate incidents of elder financial
exploitation. Because of the limited amount of existing data, relatively limited understanding, and contradictory findings from the available literature, more theoretical exploration is required and an in-depth understanding is preferred which makes the reliance on qualitative data desirable and appropriate for this dissertation. The current study is designed to add to the theoretical knowledge of elder financial exploitation by providing a more detailed and nuanced understanding of various life course turning points that may act as precursors or risk factors by focusing on qualitative aspects of aging and life in a large active-living retirement community.

Data for this study come from reported incidents of financial exploitation, focus group discussion sessions, and individual interviews with residents of a large active-living retirement community located in central Florida. Florida is a particularly favorable state to conduct research on the elderly because Florida is the most popular retirement destination in the United States and a large proportion of the state’s population is elderly. Approximately 19 million residents currently live in Florida, and the elderly account for nearly 25 percent of entire state population. Florida is home to the greatest percentage of elderly citizens in the country (Pew Research Center, 2015). In 2014, the Office of Economic and Demographic Research in Florida reported that between 2010 and 2030, Florida’s population is forecast to grow by 4.8 million people. The elderly will account for most of the growth, representing 56.9 percent of the gains. During that 20-year period, the state’s elderly population is expected to nearly double.

Conducting elder-related research in Florida is also beneficial because there are a large and growing number of active-living retirement communities. The retirement community where the data was collected is the top-selling master-planned community in the United States, selling approximately 200-250 new homes per month (Logan, 2015). According to U.S. Census estimates, the population of the retirement community surpassed 100,000 residents in 2013 and it continues to grow at a steady pace. The median age is 66, 98 percent of the residents are White, 94 percent are United States citizens, 78 percent of residents are married, 22 percent of residents are single (11 percent are widowed, 5 percent have never been married, and 7 percent are divorced), 47 percent of residents were born in the Northeast and 33 percent were born in the Midwest, and income and housing costs vary widely. To maintain its status as an official age-restricted retirement community, at least 80 percent of the homes must be occupied with at least one person over the age of 54 and individuals under the age of 19 are not permitted to live the community for more than 30 consecutive days. The community is designed for active-living
elders with numerous town squares, sports and recreation centers, golf courses, swimming pools, movie theatres, and restaurants. There are also over one thousand resident-operated clubs and social organizations.

Data

This study utilized a mixed methods approach that included an extensive review of the literature, the analysis of secondary incident data from Seniors versus Crime (SvC) and the local county sheriff’s department and qualitative data analysis of transcripts from one focus group discussion with SvC volunteers, four focus group discussions with residents, and 35 individual interviews with residents. The focus group discussion topics and interview instruments are included in Appendix C. The data come from a larger, more general, project on elder financial exploitation that was funded by Merrill Lynch and completed by researchers from the College of Criminology and Criminal Justice at Florida State University.

SvC is a primarily volunteer-based organization that is affiliated with the Florida Attorney General’s Office. The organization employs one executive director, five region directors, and the remaining staff members are volunteers. A majority of the volunteers are over the age of 50 and act as advocates and mediators with the mission of helping to protect elders from consumer fraud and help individuals to recoup losses that are the result of financial exploitation or fraud. SvC provided data on 3,734 reported cases of financial exploitation that were made to their organization by residents of the retirement community from 2010-2015. The analysis of this data included the identification of the most common forms of financial exploitation, the amount of money lost and recovered, and basic characteristics of the victims. Data on 93 arrests for the financial exploitation of elderly victims from the local county sheriff department was also analyzed. The sheriff data is intended to complement the SvC data and provide a more complete depiction of the financial exploitation cases that are reported to authorities by retirement community residents. These data will also be used as a means of triangulating some of the themes identified in the literature and through the focus groups and interviews.

Resident focus group and interview participants were recruited through newspaper advertisements, flyers with information about the study that were left at the SvC offices and posted on bulletin boards throughout the retirement community, and through two Town Hall
meetings hosted by members of the research team. The Town Hall meetings were held in November 2015 at two local recreation centers on consecutive days. The meetings included a description of the study, an introduction of the research team, a summary of prior research, and cursory analyses of the SvC case data. These presentations also included a discussion of Merrill Lynch’s involvement in the project by a Merrill Lynch representative. Attendees were asked to provide contact information if they wished to participate in later focus groups or interviews. If residents did not attend the Town Hall meetings but learned about the research project through advertisements or flyers, they were asked to contact the research team directly with their phone number and/or e-mail addresses for follow-up. Members of the research team contacted all interested participants to schedule their participation in one of four resident focus group sessions or individual interviews.

A focus group discussion with nine SvC volunteers (four females and five males) was held after the Town Hall meetings and prior to the resident focus groups. This focus group was intended to obtain information from the volunteers about cases that they have handled and their perceptions on the various risk and protective factors of elder financial exploitation occurring in the retirement community. Four resident focus groups were then conducted during two consecutive days in February 2016. The resident focus groups centered on six topics: financial exploitation incidents, financial exploitation methods and perpetrators, risk and protective factors, the role of financial planners/advisors, reporting behavior, and policy issues related to financial exploitation against the elderly. The purpose of these focus groups was to better understand the issues related to financial exploitation experienced by residents of the retirement community. The focus group discussions were recorded and later transcribed.

Forty-five residents participated in the focus groups and were asked to complete a brief information card prior to the start of the discussions. Thirty participants completed and returned the cards, all were White non-Hispanic, 17 were female, 13 were male, and the average age was 70. Eighteen residents lived in the Northeast prior to moving to the retirement community, three lived in California, seven lived in the Mid-West, and two lived in South Florida. Sixty-three percent of participants were married, 10 percent were widowed, 20 percent were divorced, the remaining were single (either never married or were currently separated). Forty-six percent of participants had been victims of at least one financial exploitation incident and all indicated they had been targeted at least once since moving to the retirement community.
Individual interviews were conducted in-person at the SvC office or the local branch of the public library located in the retirement community. In the event that in-person interviews were not possible, interviews were conducted via telephone (six total interviews were conducted over the telephone). An American sign-language interpreter was present for the focus groups and interviews to aide residents who were hearing impaired. Four members of the research team attended the first two interviews in order to identify the most successful strategies for the interviews. Two members of the research team, one interviewer and one note-taker, attended each subsequent interview. Every interview was recorded and later transcribed. The focus groups and interviews elicited data on life changes, daily activities, and perceptions and consequences of elder financial exploitation. The interviews also asked questions about the nature and circumstances of the financial exploitation incident, when applicable. If the interviewee had not experienced financial exploitation, questions were asked about targeting attempts and what, if anything, the respondent does to protect themselves from possible exploitation. The data used in this study come from the transcripts of the focus groups and semi-structured individual interviews. The interviews contained primarily predetermined questions that were asked to every individual, however, the interviewers were able to probe respondents if necessary. Several experts reviewed the interview instrument and it was pilot tested prior to being administered to residents in the retirement community.

Thirty-five residents participated in the in-depth individual interviews from late-March through mid-June 2016. All interviewees were White, non-Hispanic, and the average age was 73. Seventeen interviewees were male, 18 were female, and they had lived in the retirement community for an average of 7.4 years. Upon relocating to the retirement community, all interviewees lived at least four hours away, with most moving across the country, either East from California or South from New England or the Midwest. Eighteen were married at the time of the interview, ten were widowed, six were divorced, and one was single (never married). Three residents reported having completed high school, eight attended some college, 17 completed a bachelor’s degree, and seven received an advanced graduate degree. Since moving to the retirement community, 19 interviewed residents reported being victims of financial exploitation at least once, and 16 reported being targeted at least once for financial exploitation, but had never been victimized.
As previously mentioned, everyone who participated in the study had previously lived in a location that was at least four hours away from the retirement community. Thus, all members of the sample experienced the major life transition of relocation after retirement. While this limits variability and makes testing the external validity and generalizability of the research findings imperative for future research, it also represents a unique aspect of the data. Relocation is a significant turning point in the lives of elder citizens that was explored through the qualitative data analysis to determine its relationship to financial exploitation. The respondents were also able to provide comparisons between their previous home(s) and the retirement community.

Participants were sought from a variety of mediums; however, a limitation of the study is that a random sample of residents was not generated. Given constraints of the study, random sampling was not used, but rather convenience sampling, in that residents of the retirement community self-selected to be part of the study. The goal of the initial study and this dissertation was not necessarily to maximize the number of participants but rather to become saturated with descriptive and exploratory information (Padgett, 1998). Oftentimes with qualitative research, there becomes a point of diminishing returns in that not much new information is added with each additional interview (Mason, 2010). This was the case with the in-depth interviews; while each of the specific incidents were different from one another, the general themes, and patterns remained similar across the residents. Mason (2010) conducted a study to determine the appropriate sample size of qualitative research studies and found that the average sample size of interviews was 31. However, Mason (2010) noted that the most important factor in determining suitable sample size was that of saturation. Saturation was achieved approximately by the 25th interview. However, all 35 individual interviews are included in the data analysis.

**Research Method**

Ideally, all life course research would employ a longitudinal research design and follow participants for much of their lives to understand the consequences of developmental changes. Unfortunately, longitudinal data is scarce, especially data that contains measures or variables involving elder citizens and information on their criminal victimization or financial exploitation experiences. Due to data limitations, most life course research examines short-term transitions rather than the more long-term trajectories of an individual’s life (George, 1993). A majority of
the existing life course studies examine the effects of transitions at one point in time on a subsequent outcome and explain the processes by which transitions influence later life events. This dissertation will use a similar approach in that it will use data from discussions with elder citizens about their experiences with financial exploitation and the circumstances, factors, and life course turning points that led to them and the associated outcomes or consequences.

The topic of inquiry and goals of the research project largely dictated the methodology and data that was used in this dissertation. One of the primary objectives of qualitative research methodology is to develop and refine concepts, two fundamental goals of this study. Data was needed to more fully explore the interactions between age, the process of aging, and financial exploitation. Specifically, data was required that addressed the interactions and experiences of elder individuals, their social support networks, and their communities in relation to the research questions regarding elder financial exploitation that were identified from the prior literature. Thus, the focus group and interview data obtained through the FSU and Merrill Lynch study are appropriate for accomplishing the goals of this study.

In sum, one of the primary strengths of qualitative research is that it provides data with depth and detail that can create an understanding of the phenomena and life experiences of the individuals and topics included in the study. Obtaining the more nuanced description that was preferred was not possible through secondary data analysis alone. Official data give limited attention to the dynamics of changing life circumstances that may have an impact on or precipitate incidents of elder financial exploitation and research has found that it is underreported to authorities. The current study was designed to provide a more detailed understanding of various age-graded life course turning points as precursors, or risk factors, by focusing on the dynamic qualitative aspects of changing life circumstances as a result of the aging process and living in the largest retirement community in the United States.

**Establishing Trustworthiness**

As with all forms of empirical research, it is imperative to provide checks and balances to maintain acceptable standards of scientific inquiry. Some researchers believe that quantitative research provides standards that are more rigorous; however, there are various methods that can be applied to qualitative research to ensure that the study meets conventional standards of scientific inquiry through measures of reliability and validity. Reliability refers to the
dependability, stability, consistency, and predictability of findings. To check the reliability of a study, common questions that are asked are, Can the findings be replicated? Are the measures used accurate? How much error is there in the measuring instrument? Validity refers to a measure that accurately reflects the concept it is intended to measure. Methods of doing so involve asking the same questions to the same people at different times, or asking the same questions to others, and identifying patterns of similarities and differences across individuals. Checks to a qualitative study’s reliability and validity are necessary and findings should be triangulated (or cross-checked) when possible. Content analyses, historical document reviews, and the accounts of others can be useful methods of triangulation.

Padgett (1998) identified six specific strategies for enhancing the rigor of qualitative research: prolonged engagement, triangulation, peer debriefing and support, member checking, negative case analysis, and auditing. Strategies employed in this dissertation included triangulation and negative case analysis. Conclusions from prior literature, quantitative data and information provided from other residents during the focus groups and interviews will be used to triangulate and validate the information provided and the overall study findings (Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). Validation commonly occurs in qualitative data through the repeating of themes by other respondents. Shenton (2004) indicated that the views and experiences of multiple respondents can and should be verified against each other. In this dissertation, each question was asked in the same manner to each respondent, making responses comparable, adding to their validity.

In qualitative research, negative case analysis can also be used to enhance rigor and verify findings and interpretations (Padgett, 1998). Negative case analysis involves a reexamination of every case, after the initial analysis is completed, to determine whether characteristics or properties of the emergent themes were applicable to all cases (Guba, 1981; Miles & Huberman, 1994). In general, negative case analysis aims to identify any deviations from patterns or themes that emerged from the data. Outliers or anomaly cases are identified, presented, and described in the following chapter.

Denzin and Lincoln (1994) emphasized that qualitative research can also maintain acceptable standards of scientific inquiry through measures of transferability to ensure confidence in the accuracy of the findings. Transferability is an important aspect of qualitative research and means that other researchers can apply the findings of the study to their own work.
To ensure the transferability of the findings, this dissertation provides descriptive accounts of the respondent’s answers and thorough interpretations of the identified themes and patterns. In addition, the focus group and interview questions that we asked are included in Appendix C. As noted by Guba and Lincoln (1989), validity was also established by using direct quotations that objectively capture individual respondents’ experiences and show researcher neutrality.

An additional method of establishing and showing the trustworthiness of the findings and ensuring their reliability is through inter-coder reliability. Social science research that relies on coded in-depth semistructured interview transcripts rarely reports, describes in detail, or provides measures of inter-coder reliability. Further, it is rather common for researchers to refrain from reporting whether or not they even addressed the reliability of their codes and coding procedures in their publications. Some researchers contend that qualitative research is unique and should not be judged by the same criteria of reliability and validity, as are quantitative analyses (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Others have been skeptical about whether or not dependable estimates of inter-coder reliability can be generated because of the oftentimes subjective and complex nature of many qualitative data transcripts (Weinberger et al., 1998). A final group of researchers has indicated that measures of inter-coder reliability are in fact useful concepts that allow the reader to have a higher degree of confidence in the codes and findings of a study (Krippendorff, 1995; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

However, there is no established methodology or standard for an acceptable degree of inter-coder reliability when using coded interview transcript data (Campbell, Quincy, Osserman, & Pedersen, 2013). What is deemed an acceptable level of inter-coder reliability varies considerably by researchers and across studies (Dunn, 1989). For example, Hodson (1999: 51) indicated that an inter-coder reliability rate of 79 percent or greater constituted a “relatively high degree of reliability” whereas Fahy (2001) indicated that rates between 70 percent and 94 percent were acceptable to exceptional. Hruschka and his colleagues (2004) and Krippendorff (2004) each argued that acceptable standards of inter-coder reliability were not as strict or formulaic for exploratory research. It is important to note that much of the social science research that addresses the reliability of coding has been focused on content analysis and field notes, historical documents, and observations of videotaped behavior (Campbell, et al., 2013). This is an important distinction because interviews, especially those used in this dissertation, tend to elicit
open-ended and rather extensive and detailed responses to questions that may require several codes.

The goal of the measure of inter-coder reliability used in this study is to provide readers with a reasonable degree of confidence that the codes and coding procedures can be reproducible by others and not based on any unintended bias from the author. The focus group and interview transcripts were coded in their entirety by the dissertation author and a group of four research assistants coded a random sample of transcripts, using a random sample of coding themes to determine an accurate comparison of the codes and establish inter-coder reliability. Researchers have indicated that it is “acceptable to assess inter-coder reliability on a sample of the text” (Campbell et al., 2013: 300; Krippendorff, 2004). However, there is little agreement about how large the sample should be; some indicated that an appropriate sample may be as small as five to ten pages of one transcription document (Miles & Huberman, 1984), while others recommend using ten percent of the entire set of documents (Hodson, 1999).

The entire list of codes was randomized using Microsoft Excel and the first four codes were then chosen. The sample of selected primary codes to be used as a measure of inter-coder reliability included historical influence, geographical influence, reporting decisions, and health turning points. The focus groups, victim interviews, and nonvictim interviews were also listed, in the order that they were administered, into Excel and randomized. The first focus group, first two victim interviews, and first two nonvictim interviews that were listed were selected as the sample to be coded by the research assistants. Krippendorff (1995; 2004) indicated that the ability to divide the transcripts into meaningful conceptual segments depends on the qualifications of the coder regarding the subject matter and theoretical components, not the ability to merely identify words or phrases. Thus, when coding, the trained research assistants were asked to code based on units of meaning, rather than naturally given units, sentences, paragraphs, or pages, for example (Campbell et al., 2013).

The measure of inter-coder reliability was calculated using the percent agreement method which involved dividing the number of agreements by the total number of agreements and disagreements for all codes combined (Campbell et al., 2013; Miles & Huberman, 1984). There are statistical tools that can be used to calculate an inter-coder reliability rate (e.g., Cohen’s Kappa and Krippendorff’s Alpha). However, they each have various assumptions that must be met and were not appropriate for use in this dissertation. For example, alpha assumes
that all codes have the equal probability of being used in each transcript. This does not apply in
the focus group and interview transcripts as respondents may have discussed various life course
factors and others may not have. Second, alpha assumes that all coders have the same
qualifications. This criterion was not met because the dissertation author was more
knowledgeable than the research assistants about the topic of elder financial exploitation. Third,
the possibility that multiple codes can and were used in a given unit creates problems for
calculating inter-coder reliability with some statistics because they require that one code be
applied to a unit of text. Consistent with Campell and colleagues (2013), the intent of coding was
not to create variables for use in statistical analysis but rather for theoretical exploration. Thus,
the percent agreement method was chosen as an acceptable measure of inter-coder reliability.
Although there is limited consensus about the appropriate methods of coding semistructured
interviews within the social sciences, this study does align with similar prior research studies in
terms of establishing trustworthiness. The inter-coder reliability rate was 93 percent (198
agreements and 213 total agreements and disagreements across the sample of transcripts using
the sample of codes).

In sum, to ensure the trustworthiness of the study, the coding scheme and findings were
discussed in rich detail with direct quotes, findings were triangulated, and four trained research
assistants have coded a sample of transcripts and provided a measure of inter-coder reliability.
Given the series of checks and balances, readers can be reasonably confident in the reliability of
the study’s results.

Data Analysis

The first step in the analytic process involved analyzing descriptive statistics from the
quantitative data obtained from SvC and the local county sheriff on reported cases of financial
exploitation. Data are provided that show the number and type of reported incidents, the
characteristics of the exploitation event itself, the relationship between the victim and offender
(when available), and the resolution of the case (when available). The specific information about
the event includes the age and gender of the victim, the type of exploitation, and the amount of
money lost.

The qualitative data analysis was accomplished by first coding the focus group and
interview transcripts using NVivo software (version 11, for Mac). NVivo is a software package
for analyzing text-based files. Data was organized using the constant comparative method (Glaser, 1965; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) where line segments of the transcribed focus groups and interviews were reviewed to determine which codes fit the concepts. Each code was consistently compared to the others to identify similarities, differences, and general thematic patterns. Once the transcripts were coded using the themes that emerged from existing theory and research and themes that emerged from the data, patterns, and trends were identified.

The analysis of the focus group and interview transcripts utilized a hybrid deductive and inductive approach. Deductive and inductive approaches were used to identify patterns in the data through the use of thematic codes. The study began with a deductive approach where an existing theory is explored, refined, and advanced based on systematic analysis of the qualitative data. Traditionally, quantitative research methods are reserved for deductive research, and qualitative research methods are reserved for inductive inquiries. However, the methods can be effectively applied interchangeably and can be used together.

Deductive analysis means that the thematic codes and/or categories will come from existing theory and research. This method of analysis is also known as theory-driven research and is the more common method of data analysis within criminology. In short, deductive logic can be referred to as reasoning that progresses from the general to the specific. For example, a theory is identified, hypotheses are generated, and the theory is tested using data to determine if the hypotheses are supported. Quantitative statistical techniques and the laws of probability provide strong frameworks for testing hypotheses and making statements about the level of certainty of generalizability of the findings, which is why most quantitative research takes a deductive approach. However, qualitative research can also be effectively undertaken using a deductive method of inquiry.

Inductive analysis means that the thematic codes largely come from the data themselves rather than being imposed prior to data collection and analysis (Patton, 1980). This process is also known as grounded theory and is a systematic process that involves the discovery of a theory through data collection and analysis (Martin and Turner, 1986). Inductive logic can be referred to as reasoning that progresses from the specific to the general. In inductive research, the first step is to begin by examining events or phenomena within the data to identify larger constructs to understand the relationships. In short, the data is used to build the theory as
opposed to the data being used to test the theory. When new phenomena is being explored and the important factors are not yet known, inductive qualitative methods provide a strong framework for exploring the unknown. Figure 5 provides a diagram of the hybrid inductive and deductive research design utilized in this study. The figure combines the methods and steps of both types of inquiry.

NVivo was used to record and categorize descriptive and demographic information about the interview respondents using case classifications and classification attributes. Each of the respondents were classified based upon their victimization status: victim, non-victim, and repeat victim. After the interviews were assigned a case classification, descriptive information from each interview was further categorized using the attributes listed in Table 4. This information was used to compare responses across interview questions, as the attributes allow for the filtering and analysis of responses. For example, all responses made by repeat victims who were female or over the age of 80 can be selected independently of the other respondents to draw comparisons between groups. Importantly, more detailed and descriptive information from each of the attributes were also coded in the following data analysis step. The attributes consist only of numerical values or brief categorical descriptions for filtering purposes.

The next data analysis steps involved a deductive approach, which included applying pre-set thematic codes to the focus group and individual interview transcripts; this is commonly referred to as substantive coding (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). After the transcripts were coded using a list of pre-set codes, the transcripts were analyzed using an inductive approach in which the theoretical patterns (codes) were derived directly from the data. This is commonly referred to as selective coding and is completed after the core variables have been identified (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Thematic codes were added and revised throughout the data analysis stage as new themes and patterns emerged. Identifying patterns in the data is fundamental to developing a strong and compelling argument that can be used to describe, refine, or advance a theory. Table 5 provides the final list of the thematic codes used for analyzing the focus group and individual interview transcripts. The table also includes definitions of each code. The primary codes are broad constructs and comprise the first level of organization. The secondary codes (and in some instances sub-codes) are more specific and detailed descriptions of the primary codes.
Research Questions

Data will be organized using thematic codes derived from the deductive and inductive research designs described above. Using the patterns, trends, and themes identified, six research questions were addressed in this study, which were derived from the age-graded theoretical framework of late-life victimization and financial exploitation that was proposed in Chapter 3, which represents an integration of the available literature on elder financial exploitation, criminological theories of victimization, and components of life course theory. The research questions listed below will be discussed in detail in the following chapter. The goal of this study is to produce a more complete and compelling explanation of elder financial exploitation among a sample of retirement active-living community residents and exploring the utility of explaining financial exploitation with a life course turning points framework.

1. Are there characteristic age-related changes in physical and/or cognitive health that influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?
2. Are there characteristic age-related changes in sociogenic factors that influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?
3. Are there generational differences that may influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?
4. Do changing social bonds influence elders’ risk for financial exploitation?
5. Are there certain ecological/geographical or sociogenic factors associated with living in a retirement community that influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?
6. Are there factors that may reduce an elders’ risk of financial exploitation?
Figure 5: Deductive and Inductive Logic Model
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Male or Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year of birth</td>
<td>Year respondent was born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marital Status</td>
<td>The marital status of the respondent at the time they experienced financial exploitation or were targeted. Responses were grouped using the following: Married, Divorced, Widowed, Single-Never Married, Widowed-Living with Partner</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Highest level of education completed. Responses were grouped using the following: High School, Some Junior College, Junior College, Some College, College, Some Graduate School, Graduate School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the employment status of the respondent at the time they experienced financial exploitation or targeting. Responses were grouped using the following: Retired, Retired-but working new job, Still Working</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time Retired</td>
<td>This attribute is a numerical value that represents the length of time the respondent had been retired at the time they experienced financial exploitation or were targeted.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time in Retirement Community</td>
<td>This attribute is a numerical value that represents the number of years the respondent has living in the retirement community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prior Residence</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the geographical location in which the resident lived prior to moving to the retirement community. Responses were grouped using the following: Southeast-not Florida, Florida, Northeast, Mid-West, West</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of Time in Prior Residence</td>
<td>This attribute is a numerical value that represents the number of years the respondent lived in their prior residence before moving to the retirement community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family within 2 Hours</td>
<td>This attribute is a numerical value that represents the number of family members the respondent has that lives within 2 hours of their home in the retirement community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change in family network</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the change in family networks after the respondent moved to the retirement community. Respondents were asked if they have more, less, or no change in the amount of family living near them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4-continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Attribute</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change in friendship network</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the change in friendship networks after moving to the retirement community. Respondents were asked if they have more, less, or no change in the number of close friends living near.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daily time spent on the Internet</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the amount of time respondents spent on the Internet each day. Responses were grouped using the following: Never, 1-5 hours, More than 5 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participation in recreational groups</td>
<td>This attribute is a numerical value representing the number of days per week residents participate in recreational groups outside of their home.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary purpose for using the Internet</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the primary reason respondents use the Internet. Responses were grouped using the following: Email, Social Media, Research, News/Weather</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virus Protection</td>
<td>This attribute refers to whether or not the respondent has virus protection on their computer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Who handles finances in household</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the individual in the respondents’ household who most frequently handles the financial decisions. Responses were grouped using the following: Self, Spouse, Joint-self and spouse, someone else</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Advisor</td>
<td>This attribute refers to whether or not the individual has a financial advisor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit report</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the frequency with which residents check their credit report. Responses were grouped using the following: Never, Rarely, Annually, Quarterly, Monthly, Weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gamble at casinos</td>
<td>This attribute refers to whether or not the respondent gambles at casinos. Responses were grouped using the following: Never, Rarely, Annually, Monthly, Weekly, Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lottery</td>
<td>This attribute refers to whether or not the respondent plays the lottery. Responses were grouped using the following: Never, Rarely, Annually, Monthly, Weekly, Daily</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shred documents</td>
<td>This attribute refers to whether or not respondents shred documents prior to throwing them away.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation type</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the type of financial exploitation that the respondent experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Targeting type</td>
<td>This attribute refers to the type of financial targeting that the respondent experienced.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Primary Code</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<td>--------------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical Influence</td>
<td>This code refers to the life course principle of historical influence. Specifically, exploring whether there are perceptions of generational differences among the elderly and younger age cohorts that may increase or decrease their risk of experiencing financial exploitation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Generational Differences)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Code</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Health Turning Points (Timing of Lives)</td>
<td>This code refers to the life course principle of timing of lives. Specifically, the significant age-graded changes to an individual’s health, physical, mental, or cognitive, that may have influenced their risk of financial exploitation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sociogenic Turning Points (Timing of Lives)</td>
<td>This code refers to the life course principle of timing of lives. Specifically, the significant age-graded changes to an individual’s life that may have influenced their risk of financial exploitation.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human Agency</td>
<td>This code refers to the life course principle of human agency. Specifically, exploring the individual-based factors that influence decision-making.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Primary Code</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social Bonds and Networks (Linked Lives)</td>
<td>This code refers to the life course principle of linked lives. Specifically, whether there are</td>
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<td>changes to social bonds or networks upon retirement, moving, or the aging process that may</td>
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<td></td>
<td>influence risk of financial exploitation</td>
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<td>Socialization</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Social network larger in the retirement community</td>
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<td>Social network smaller in the retirement community</td>
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<td>Support network</td>
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<td>Routine Activities</td>
<td>This code refers to the routine activities or actions of respondents.</td>
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Table 5- continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Primary Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Secondary Codes</th>
<th>Definitions and Sub-Codes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrator Contact</td>
<td>This code refers to the type of perpetrator.</td>
<td>Primary Contact</td>
<td>Refers to family, close friends.</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Secondary Contact</td>
<td>Refers to companies, service providers.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Stranger</td>
<td>Refers to someone not known.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting Decisions</td>
<td>This code refers to the reporting decisions of respondents.</td>
<td>Decision for reporting</td>
<td>Refers to the decision respondent gave for reporting their financial exploitation or targeting attempt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Decision for not reporting</td>
<td>Refers to the decision respondent gave for not reporting their financial exploitation or targeting attempt.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consequences</td>
<td>This code refers to the consequences experienced by the respondent as a result of the financial exploitation or targeting.</td>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>Refers to the emotional consequences of the exploitation event.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Financial</td>
<td>Refers to the financial consequences of the exploitation event.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Interactions with others</td>
<td>Refers to a change in the way the respondent interacts with others.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>Refers to the physical consequences of the exploitation event.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Recommendations</td>
<td>This code refers to any recommendations made by respondents for changes to public policy and/or practice regarding the investigation and/or prevention of elder financial exploitation.</td>
<td>Education</td>
<td>Refers to the need for policymakers and practitioners to provide more education about the risk and protective factors of elder financial exploitation.</td>
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<td>Publicity</td>
<td>Refers to the need for the media to publicize incidents of elder financial exploitation.</td>
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<td>Tougher Laws</td>
<td>Refers to the need for tougher laws punishing people convicted of financially exploiting an elder victim.</td>
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CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

This chapter begins with a discussion of the descriptive statistics from the sheriff office and Seniors versus Crime (SvC) data and continues by addressing each of the six research questions presented at the end of the previous chapter. The arrest data obtained from the local county sheriff office contained less descriptive information and fewer cases than the SvC data. Many study participants indicated that they did not feel as though local law enforcement did enough to pursue and arrest individuals accused of perpetrating acts of financial exploitation against the elderly. The SvC volunteers, many of whom have retired from careers in law enforcement, reaffirmed the sentiments from the residents and emphasized that it is not by choice but rather due to legal constraints. For example, during the SvC focus group, it was mentioned that the elderly are most likely to report incidents of financial exploitation perpetrated by strangers. Therefore, the individual may not have a lot of information to provide law enforcement about where to find the alleged offender, or the alleged offender may live outside of the jurisdiction of the law enforcement agency, which limits their legal ability to pursue the case. SvC volunteers also indicated that law enforcement sometimes places a low priority on certain instances of financial exploitation because they are not likely to have charges filed or pursued by prosecutors because many of the reports of financial exploitation are classified as civil matters. The data obtained on arrests from the local county sheriff largely confirms what the residents felt and SvC volunteers had observed—that cases are under-pursued by law enforcement.

Descriptive Sheriff and Seniors vs. Crime Data

From 2010 through 2015 there were 93 arrests made by the local county sheriff for financial-related crimes of a victim over the age of 65 who lived in the retirement community. As shown in Table 6, most arrests were for grand theft and theft by abandonment. In subsequent discussions with the local sheriff deputies, they indicated that the grand theft arrests were for the theft of physical property, mostly for the stealing of golf carts, not related to instances of financial exploitation. Because this study is focused on financial exploitation, the property
related offenses were removed and the number of arrests decreased to 32. As shown in Table 7, the financial exploitation offenses had fewer arrests made over the six-year period.

Victim ages ranged from 65-85, with the mean age of 71. There were 13 female victims and 19 male victims. Those arrested ranged in age from 22-56, with a mean age of 34. Twenty of those arrested were males and 12 were female. Only one of the victims had a known relationship to the arrested individual. In this case, the individual was arrested for forgery, and was the child of the victim. This is also consistent with prior research and discussions with SvC volunteers and residents that formal criminal justice system reporting and pursuit of elder financial exploitation cases is rare, especially when the victim and offender have a relationship with one another.

The data received from SvC contained reports of 3,734 cases of financial exploitation of a person over the age of 65 who lived in the retirement community from 2010-2015. Of the reported cases, 222 (5 percent) were referred to local law enforcement for handling. Forty-two percent of victims were male and 39 percent were female (gender for the remaining 17 percent was missing from the data) and their average age was 67 years old at the time of victimization. The average amount of money recovered by SvC was $6,112.

Table 8 provides a description of the types of reported complaints that were handled by SvC. Home service repairs and disputes with contractors were the most frequently reported types of exploitation. The category labeled “assist” in Table 8 refers to cases where SvC volunteers provided assistance to an elderly resident, but did not formally work on their behalf. During the focus group discussion with SvC volunteers, it was indicated that these most commonly were answering brief questions about the legitimacy and authenticity of telephone calls or emails from the IRS, police department charities, and banks or financial institutions. The descriptive information obtained from the SvC data is consistent with prior research and confirms many of the patterns that emerged from the interviews. Specifically, several research studies and the resident interviews ranked financial exploitation related to home services/maintenance as the most commonly perpetrated type of elder financial exploitation in the retirement community. In addition, less than half (39 percent) of the cases reported to SvC were resolved with a monetary recovery or to the satisfaction of the victim. The relatively low-resolution percentage lends credit to the sentiments felt by many residents that cases of financial exploitation simply are “lost causes” and that they may be better off not reporting their experiences. Many residents indicated that reporting their experience would be a “hassle” and that “nothing would be done, so why
bother?” The data also show that there does not appear to be a gender gap between those individuals who chose to report their victimization.

The following sections will explore each of the six research questions proposed at the end of the previous chapter and will be used as the foundation for developing an integrated age-graded framework of late-life financial exploitation and an agenda for future research.

**Age-Graded Cognitive and Physical Health Factors**

The first research question asks: Are there characteristic age-related changes in physical and/or cognitive health that influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?

This section captures the potential consequences of age-graded cognitive and physical health-related turning points on financial exploitation. Many respondents who experienced an incident of financial exploitation indicated that common age-related cognitive and health-related turning points or changes did play a role in their financial exploitation. Risk factors related to chronic health conditions, physical injuries, physical limitations, and cognitive declines were mentioned 21 times by 12 interviewed residents. Women mentioned health turning points more frequently than men as being catalysts for their experiences of financial exploitation. Women were also more likely than men to feel that cognitive changes and declines, either in themselves or their spouses, resulted in financial exploitation. Health diagnoses were more likely to result in financial exploitation among individuals who had limited social support networks. In addition, each of the respondents who experienced multiple instances of financial exploitation (repeat victims) indicated that they were dealing with major health issues that they believed contributed to their victimization.

Victims who were between 65 and 74 years old mentioned health issues 15 times, whereas those 75 and older mentioned health issues 6 times. Table 9 provides an overview of the number of times and type of health issues mentioned by interviewed residents in each age group. Victims of investment fraud were most likely to mention health turning points to be reasons for their exploitation, followed by medical scams, and home repair/maintenance. Table 10 provides an overview of the types of exploitation that residents experienced who indicated that it was either all or partially the result of a health-related issue. The number of times each of the respondents mentioned their health issue is also included in the table.
The health and cognitive factors that were cited by victims as reasons leading to financial exploitation included a broken pelvis, cancer diagnoses, dementia, and Alzheimer’s disease. Health factors influenced financial exploitation in three different ways. First, chronic pain or illnesses left several respondents and/or their support systems desperate for relief, increasing their willingness to try options that may have seemed skeptical had they not been distracted and feeling hopeless, which ended up leading to them being financially exploited. Second, one respondent indicated that because of a broken hip, they were required to hire someone to help clean their home and, as a result, were exploited. Finally, the most commonly cited reason health factors led to financial exploitation was because the issue had consumed the lives of the individual and/or the lives of their spouses and as a result, they were unable to give enough attention to reading contracts or researching the companies or individuals who exploited them.

Respondents who experienced an incident of medical-related financial exploitation indicated that they were desperate for relief and willing to try anything to feel better. For example, residents said that medical professionals regularly host widely advertised seminars in the retirement community claiming to be able to provide relief for chronic conditions without surgery. One of the victims said that his wife was advised to have a double knee replacement but was too nervous, attended one of the seminars and spent $5,000 on the spot for a laser procedure that was guaranteed to alleviate all of her pain. However, after paying, her knees were not better, and the couple has been unable to recoup their losses.

Victims of investment-related exploitation routinely indicated that they were simply too consumed with their, or their spouses, cognitive or physical health issue to carefully read documents prior to signing them. In speaking about their case of financial exploitation, one respondent said, “When you’re consumed with a major event in your life, a lot of the time you lose the ability of focus, or the desire to be a little bit more skeptical.” This respondent’s spouse had been recently diagnosed with Alzheimer’s disease and he was unable to do the due diligence he otherwise would have done regarding making changes to their financial portfolio. Another respondent who experienced an incident of investment-related financial exploitation said, “As we age, and if we become to be alone, and our mental capacities aren’t as sharp as they once were, we lose that ability to be inquisitive and ask the extra questions and make ourselves more susceptible to fraud.” As a final example, a respondent who experienced two separate instances of investment-related financial exploitation and one instance of exploitation related to home
services, in the months following a cancer diagnosis and a divorce after 40 years of marriage said simply, “Sometimes you're just not capable of making the right decisions.”

Victims of financial exploitation related to home services, repairs, or maintenance indicated that because of their specific physical health issue or limitation, they were forced to have someone perform housework or maintenance that they otherwise would have been able to do themselves. For example, one victim said: “I don't usually get somebody to come in and clean my house, but when you have a fractured pelvis, you can't do much.”

The quotes below, made by two financial exploitation victims, provide illustrative descriptions of the causes of their experiences.

When you have a major health event, you just find out you have cancer; you’re undergoing cancer treatment. Now someone comes along and says your car needs a major repair, your house needs a major repair. You’re dealing with the stresses of the health situation, you don’t want to deal with this other stuff. ‘Alright, this is going to cost me $4,000.’ If you have it you’re not going to question it, if you don’t have it, maybe you’ll question it and say, ‘Well geez, where am I going to get the money to spend this?’ But if I have $15,000 sitting in my checking account and someone comes and tells me, ‘You took your car in for an oil change and you need tires.’ And I’m dealing with cancer treatment, it’s like ‘alright, fine, put four new tires on the car.’ It’s a lesser of two evils.

You can be married, you can have a social infrastructure, you’re just consumed with the stress of the health situation. I just had heart attack, I just had cancer. Spouse has heart attack, spouse has cancer. Something, you know, just found out about terminal diseases—you have to deal with now, you’re not mentally prepared to deal with the issue.

Tables 9 and 10 show that mental health issues were not described as factors leading to the financial exploitation of any of the victims interviewed in this study. However, a mental health diagnosis of depression was found to be a significant predictor of elder financial exploitation in the prior research (Choi et al., 2000; Hafemeister, 2003; Hall et al., 2005; Stiegel, 2002). However, members of the resident focus groups did believe that feelings of depression could potentially lead to financial exploitation, especially feelings of depression related to losing one’s spouse, although none of the study participants had experienced this directly.

Health factors were mentioned by only one of the SvC volunteers as common reasons why they see individuals entering their office to report financial exploitation. Thus, individuals
who experience exploitation as a result of a health diagnosis may be less likely to report their experience than victims who experience financial exploitation because of another factor.

Changes in age-related cognitive and physical health do appear to play a role in leading up to the financial exploitation of some individuals interviewed in this study. Primarily because the age-graded health issues made it difficult for the individual to make sound decisions or judgments like they were able to do prior to becoming consumed with their or their spouse’s health condition or event.

**Age-Graded Sociogenic Factors**

The second research question asks: Are there characteristic age-related changes in sociogenic factors that influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?

Sociogenic factors were mentioned as being risk factors or catalysts for exploitation more frequently than were health turning points, a total of 60 times, in 18 of the individual interviews, and in each of the five focus groups. During the focus group discussions, sociogenic factors were mentioned as leading to financial exploitation 16 times by residents, and six times by the SvC volunteers (the remaining 38 times sociogenic factors were discussed originated in the individual interviews). Interviewed women mentioned sociogenic changes more frequently than did men. The women who participated in the individual interviews indicated that sociogenic changes influenced their risk of financial exploitation 31 times whereas men indicated sociogenic factors seven times. There was no variation in age and discussions of sociogenic factors as risk factors for financial exploitation in the individual interviews (19 times by respondents ages 65-74 and 19 times by respondents ages 75 and older). Sociogenic factors were most commonly believed to be precursors, all or in part, to instances of exploitation related to home repairs, auto sales, and investments.

Victims of financial exploitation with smaller social support networks in the retirement community cited sociogenic risk factors more frequently than did those with larger social support networks. Table 11 provides a description of the type of sociogenic turning points experienced by financial exploitation victims who indicated that they experienced changes to their social support networks after moving to the retirement community. As illustrated in the table, victims with fewer family members living within two hours of their home (as compared with their prior residence) and fewer close friends, reported that sociogenic factors were precursors to their
instance of financial exploitation more frequently than did those who indicated they had more friends and family members living near them in the retirement community.

The commonly mentioned sociogenic turning points influencing financial exploitation were changes to the marital dynamic, namely divorce, death of a spouse, and becoming their spouse’s caregiver, relocating to the retirement community, and retirement. The factors related to living in and life in the retirement community, whether a protective factor or a risk factor, will be discussed in a section that follows. However, the decision to move, the trip itself, and settling into the new home, were coded as being sociogenic factors related to relocation to the retirement community.

Widowed women felt especially vulnerable and targeted for financial exploitation in the retirement community. The women indicated that there were multiple reasons why being a widow increased their risk of experiencing financial exploitation, or why being a widow directly led to them experiencing financial exploitation. First, the death of their husband resulted in feelings of loneliness. As such, they believed that these feelings clouded their judgment regarding making sound financial decisions throughout their marriage. Second, the widowed women indicated that they were not familiar with how to manage finances because their spouse was the one who was responsible for making those decisions. For example, one of the participants in the resident focus groups was the leader of a bereavement support group and told the story of a woman she met with the previous morning: “She had never even signed a check before. She was in a panic and susceptible to someone coming in and saying ‘let me help you.’”

Men and women who participated in the focus groups and interviews also perceived widowed women as being suitable targets. Focus group participants agreed that there are a greater percentage of widows living in the retirement community than many other neighborhoods they were familiar with. During two of the resident focus group discussions, it was mentioned that local funeral homes advise women not to publish obituaries about their spouses, or if they do, to ensure they are vague because local residents and some companies will read them to learn about the widow in an attempt to take advantage of them financially. For example, one resident said, “Most of the funeral homes here will explain that you—you may wish to not put a obituary in the local paper.” Another study participant said:
…there is someone who reminds women to never put an obituary because you are a target and the minute that that goes in there, some crook is reading that and seeing so that they can make a connection with you. ‘Oh your husband was an air force pilot, I was a pilot too,’ and they use that.

Two widowed women who experienced multiple instances of financial exploitation said that they felt they were alone and had no one to help them make large financial decisions or purchases. One of the women felt that it would be “inappropriate” to ask her neighbor’s husband to accompany her to the car dealership when her car was in need of routine maintenance.

The death of a spouse, illness of a spouse, and divorce were mentioned as being important changes to marital dynamics that led to financial exploitation among some respondents. These changes created other, greater, concerns that consumed their lives and therefore, they were unable to focus on properly handling their finances and vetting service providers like they were able to prior to the marital issue. The quote below illustrates how one woman characterized the role of her divorce in her case of financial exploitation:

The guy was really very slick, and I was going through a divorce, and he just made me feel like I was an okay person, where I was feeling really badly about myself at the time. So he got me in. They were long conversations. We’d stay on the phone for an hour. It was all about my life and that kind of stuff, and I just got sucked into it.

Relocating to the retirement community also created substantial stress for many respondents. Residents were required to find new doctors and service providers, which in some instances, led to their exploitation. In addition, study participants indicated that they were inundated with knocks on their doors, postal mail, and phone calls immediately after moving in from companies or individuals looking to provide services. Many of these contacts were believed to be attempts to financially exploit the new retirement community residents.

Retirement also emerged as a reason for financial exploitation among some of the interviewed respondents. One individual indicated that they had a particularly difficult transition from working everyday in the corporate world to retirement. Three others said that the transition away from working everyday was not necessarily the problem but rather due to more logistical concerns of not having enough money every month and the desire to ensure they had enough money to make ends meet. Because of these concerns, the residents attended investment
seminars that were advertised in the local newspaper about various alternative investment options. For example, one interviewed resident who invested nearly $100,000 in a phony business said:

My husband was getting ready to retire from...the military...we, of course, just like everybody else, wanted to make sure that we had enough for our old, old age. And so, we went out seeking different things...The [local newspaper] always has all of these dinners and everything to go to. We really, honestly, went to it for more the investment part than the free dinner.

Life course theorists have found that there are various factors that may increase the likelihood that a turning point will create a long-term change in the individual’s life. One of those factors is the presence of multiple turning points or factors that occur in a relatively short period of time. This assumption was found to be true of many respondents in this study regarding age-graded sociogenic changes, most notably among the individuals who experienced multiple instances of financial exploitation. To illustrate, one female respondent said, “We were only in the house a few months and my husband had a stroke, and then he died.” Several months after her husband passed away, she experienced financial exploitation. Thus, the presence of sociogenic factors alone have the potential to lead to financial exploitation, and when more than one turning point occurs in a short amount of time, financial exploitation may be more likely.

**Generational Differences**

The third research question asks: Are there generational differences that may influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?

Although not mentioned as frequently as the other life course factors, some residents did believe that there are generational differences that may make elders targets for financial exploitation. Generational differences were mentioned as being risk factors ten times, by eight individuals, it is important to note, these differences were mentioned almost equally by the interviewed victims (6 mentions) and nonvictims (4 mentions). Thus, it appears that both groups of interviewed respondents sense that there may be a difference between elders and younger generations when it comes to matters of trust and obligation regarding finances and providing
services. All eight of the elders who felt that generational differences were risk factors were over the age of 75; six were female and two were male.

The ways in which the participants believed that generational differences influenced their risk of victimization were primarily associated with elders being overly trusting because of the way they were raised. In each of the instances, the reference was either made to elders leaving their front doors unlocked while growing up, believing that a “handshake sealed the deal”, and a person’s “word was their bond.” The quote below is representative of the sentiments of many focus group and interview participants in this study:

> We are more trusting, we are of the era where you did trust people. We grew up trusting people. Our parents didn’t lock the front door; we lived in small towns with lot of people. We knew everyone and you were just more trusting. And I think that a lot of people still are.

An additional eight interviewed residents and five focus group participants indicated that they were too trusting (but not explicitly stating that most elders were, nor attributing it to perceived generational differences), which is why they had been financially exploited. It was also not clear if the respondents would characterize themselves as being trusting their entire lives or if this characteristic emerged during their senior years or after moving to the retirement community. Having a trusting personality was also mentioned by the SvC volunteers and in the prior literature, as a possible risk factor for elder financial exploitation. The frequency and context in which trust was mentioned as a risk factor was related to differences between the elderly and younger generations and as a result of the retirement community creating false feelings of security and trust in its residents (the latter will be discussed later in this chapter).

In addition, several elders also indicated that they were targeted because they are a more secretive generation and do not want to share their personal or financial business with others. During the focus group discussion about reporting decisions, an elderly couple agreed that: “It’s just kind of how we was raised. We’d do anything for somebody, but we don’t ask for help.” The quote below provides more detail from one interviewed resident on her perceptions of why some elders may be more secretive and less likely to discuss their financial exploitation with others, which may also lend credence to the evidence that elder financial exploitation is an underreported event:
Yeah, but I would think that older people, because of the era they come from, they're very secretive, so if they got something for nothing, they're not really gonna tell anybody. Or if they were scammed, they're really not gonna tell anybody. And that's the difference between my sister and myself, she's eight years older than me. There's a whole different era of growing up.

Interestingly, during the focus group with the SvC volunteers, there was emphasis placed on the younger generation being out to scam elders because of their perceived vulnerabilities. However, residents, either in the focus groups or interviews, did not once mentioned that it was the younger generation’s fault, but rather placed all of the responsibility on themselves for being victimized; always stating that it was their generation that was too trusting, or it was because they were raised to be nice, polite, and secretive. The SvC volunteers did allude to many elders’ desires to being polite, but firmly placed responsibility on the younger generation for exploiting their kindness.

**Age-Graded Changes to Social Bonds**

The fourth research question asks: Do changing social bonds influence elders’ risk for financial exploitation?

Prior to addressing this research question, it is important to note that all interview respondents and many participants in the focus group discussions indicated that their social networks and bonds did change during their senior years, and most notably, upon moving to the retirement community. This quote made by one of the focus group participants summarizes the sentiments of many of the elders interviewed in this study regarding their social network: “They're dying off. As my grandmother used to say… ‘That's the worst part about getting old…your friends go.’” One of the primary factors influencing the changes in the social support networks was retirement. The respondents indicated that they considered many of their coworkers to be close friends, and would frequently go to them for advice. When asked in a follow-up question if they still keep in contact with any of them, less than half said that they did. The others said that they did not speak with them as often as they would like and they primarily kept in touch through social media.

Also interesting is that ten interviewed respondents indicated that they did not have any children. This is consistent with findings from general reports about the current elderly population in that they tend to have fewer children than previous generations of elders. This has
created a marked contrast to the familial structure of previous generations which may play a role in the protection from financial exploitation. Aside from many not having children, many residents in this study did not have family members living near them, and many indicated that they did not have any family members who were still living. For example, “I have nobody. I don't have anybody... My brother passed away. My sister is lingering in a nursing home…and that's it.” The lack of familial bonds may represent a unique challenge for this generation in protecting against financial exploitation. However, consistent with prior literature, the remainder of this section details bonds between friends and neighbors.

Social bonds or social networks were mentioned 38 times by 21 individuals. Unlike the previously discussed life course components, this factor was discussed as having the potential to be either a risk factor or a protective factor. This finding is consistent with prior research on elder financial exploitation and on the social bonds of the elderly. The degree to which a social bond is a risk factor or protective factor depends on the intentions and degree of closeness between the individuals in the elder citizen’s social network. As mentioned, all interviewed elders indicated that they experienced changes to their social support networks upon moving to the retirement community; with the majority indicating that their social network of family and/or close friends was smaller in the retirement community. Having fewer family members nearby was the most commonly mentioned theme regarding changes to social support networks upon moving to the retirement community.

Many noted that the friendships they had prior to moving to the retirement community were stronger and they had deeper connections with their friends. Even though they may have more friends in the retirement community, participants indicated that the bonds were not as strong. Building strong social networks takes time, and many residents said they had not yet developed the same or similar meaningful friendships they had prior to moving.

However, two respondents did indicate that their social network was larger and stronger after moving to the retirement community. For example, one of the residents said, “I got a lot more close friends...here than I ever had back there. I have a dozen or more people who if I said I need $100, I’d have it in my hand.”

Also, all of the participants indicated that they have very active social lives; some said that they are now busy more days of the week than they were prior to moving to the retirement community. While most people said they are members of numerous clubs and participate in
various recreational activities, they also said their friends or acquaintances are not as strong as the ones they had prior to moving.

While discussing their social networks and bonds, the victims did not necessarily link the changes or declines in their social networks to their victimization. Rather, some indicated that they have noticed significant changes in their social support networks, but did not believe that it played a role in their particular experience. When looking at the quantitative count of social bonds, most people did experience a change and decline in their networks, however, when probed in the interviews and focus groups, the respondents did not believe that these changes were the catalysts for their experience(s) of financial exploitation. This is distinct from the other life course components in that the residents were able to draw a clear link between the turning point itself and a subsequent instance of financial exploitation.

Among the nonvictims, the consensus was that social support networks in the retirement community were protective and several discussed their participation in various recreational activities and memberships in neighborhood community watch groups as being protective against financial exploitation. One of the residents indicated that his social network was a protective factor against financial exploitation: “Socializing, that’s where I learn the most. I learn a lot from hearing the experiences of others.” Specifically, socialization with others provided opportunities for residents to learn about common fraud scams going around in the retirement community, making them aware of the scams before they could be taken advantage of.

While the residents who discussed the role of social bonds or social support networks indicated that they can function as either protective factors or risk factors, the SvC focus group participants indicated that changing social support networks were significant risk factors for elders living in the retirement community, especially given that they tend to have fewer close family members nearby. For example, the quote below from one of the SvC volunteers describes a case that she recently worked on that was perpetrated by aggressive sales people who befriended a woman who just lost her husband and had no support network:

I think she was very lonesome, and they were good sales people. They were her friends, and she was on first name basis with them. And of course she wouldn’t want hurt her friends, so if they were selling something, she would buy it.
The SvC focus group members indicated that one of the main tips they give residents for protecting themselves is to get to know their neighbors and try to develop strong bonds with them. Therefore, while the victims did not liken their experience with financial exploitation to changes or declines in their social network, the discussion and importance of strong social networks and bonds discussed by the nonvictims and SvC volunteers indicates that while the connection is likely not causal, they are correlated.

**Geographical Factors**

The fifth research question asks: Are there certain ecological/geographical or sociogenic factors associated with living in a retirement community that influence elders’ risk of financial exploitation?

Geographical influences were the most commonly mentioned thematic code. It was mentioned 202 times by 32 of the interview respondents and in each of the five focus groups. An equal number of interviewed men and women (n=16) mentioned the role of geographic factors in either protecting against or encouraging financial exploitation of the elderly. The number of times women addressed geographic factors was slightly greater than men. In total, interviewed victim and nonvictim women mentioned geographic factors 77 times whereas interviewed men mentioned geographic factors 75 times. The remaining fifty mentions related to geographic factors originated in the focus group discussion sessions.

During data analysis, geographical influences were coded as either regional differences (between Florida in general and the respondents’ previous home) or those specifically related to the retirement community. These components were then further broken down based on specific characteristics related to Florida laws and the presence of local offenders in the areas surrounding the retirement community. The more detailed codes emerged from the data themselves as part of the inductive data analysis. Factors related to the retirement community were mentioned 163 times compared with factors related to regional differences that were mentioned 39 times.

The sub-codes that emerged from the “retirement community” primary code were protective factors provided by the retirement community, the concentration of elders, a false sense of security, feeling targeted, residents become more trusting, required/desired home maintenance, and resident perception of wealth. The retirement community sub-code of “feeling
targeted” was the most commonly discussed factor associated with the geographic influence of the retirement community on residents’ likelihood and perception of financial exploitation. Another common theme that emerged was the immediacy of targeting attempts after the residents moved into their new homes. Most of the residents indicated that they began getting phone calls, postal mailings, and knocks on their door within the first few months of living in the retirement community. For example, one resident indicated, “[The landscapers] come routinely to everybody that moves into [the retirement community] under the guise of ’welcome wagon’.”

Tables 12 and 13 include the number of times geographic influences (regional differences and retirement community factors, respectively) were mentioned by the 32 interviewed residents’ victimization status and gender. As shown in each of the two tables, factors related to the retirement community were mentioned much more frequently than were regional differences. Table 14 illustrates the frequencies in which individuals who experienced changes to their social networks after moving to the retirement community mentioned geographic influences in relation to financial exploitation or targeting attempts. Both victims and non-victims whose social networks of extended family and/or friends were smaller since moving to the retirement community overwhelming mentioned geographic factors as risk factors for financial exploitation than did the residents who said their social networks were larger (n=117 and n=17, respectively). Table 15 shows the variation in discussions of geographic influences by victimization status and age.

Victims and non-victims who lived in the retirement community for five to nine years were more likely than interviewed respondents who lived in the retirement community for less than five years and more than ten years to mention the retirement community as playing a role in the number of financial exploitation victimizations and targeting attempts. Table 16 shows the breakdown of the number of times geographic influences were mentioned by victimization status and years lived in the retirement community. However, it is important to note that this may be due to the fact that the greatest number of participants had lived in the retirement community for an average of four to nine years.

Similar to the influence of social bonds and social networks, the retirement community was believed to be both a protective factor and a risk factor for financial exploitation by residents. The retirement community was portrayed as being a “golden dome” and simultaneously producing a “dome effect”. The SvC volunteers each indicated that the retirement
community created a “golden dome” of criminal opportunity because there are so many elders who are perceived to be wealthy living in one concentrated area. The area surrounding the retirement community is an economically depressed area, and it is believed that many of the individuals who financially exploit the elders live in the surrounding area and prey upon the residents. While the residents did not use the same terminology of “golden dome”, they did repeatedly indicate that they believed they were increasingly targeted for financial exploitation because of the concentration of elders, their perception of wealth, and the surrounding area being home to many offenders.

On the other hand, the retirement community has created a “dome effect” over its residents and resulted in them letting their guard down, created a false sense of security, and thus, led to financial exploitation targeting and victimization. The retirement community touts itself as being “America’s Friendliest Hometown” and has numerous guard gates at the entrance to each of the smaller neighborhoods that make up the larger retirement community. The retirement community also owns the local daily newspaper that the residents receive. The paper was called “the Happy Paper” by ten residents and was mentioned in each of the four resident focus groups. The paper owned by the developer only very seldom published stories about local instances of crime or financial exploitation. One focus group participant indicated that for the first two years she lived in the retirement community, she thought “the worst thing that happened were golf cart accidents.” These factors created the perception of safety among the residents, especially when they first moved in. During the focus group discussion, residents agreed that the only purpose of the guard gates was to “slow you down” and it was not until after they had lived in the community for a few years that they realized the gates were not providing any added security.

The retirement community was thought to be protective against incidents of financial exploitation by nine residents; five of them had been victims and four had not. The residents who thought the community was protective indicated that it was because of their participation in recreational activities and socialization. This is consistent with prior research (Hotfreter et al., 2014) and the life course tenant of social networks and bonds. However, each of the interviewed respondents indicated that they were much busier on a daily basis in the retirement community than they ever were before moving. Thus, just because individuals participate in activities outside of their home and have active social lives does not mean that they are automatically
protected from financial exploitation. Interestingly, one resident also said the retirement
community itself was a protective factor against exploitation attempts by the “IRS phone scam.”
In these instances, the retirement community regularly published stories and warnings about the
characteristics and prevalence of the scam attempts targeting the residents of the retirement
community.

Another factor that emerged during both the focus groups and interviews was the
prevalence of sales seminars hosted by financial planners, doctors, and funeral homes. Many
residents who attended the seminars felt they were preyed upon and taken advantage of as a
result of high-pressure sales techniques. The individuals hosting the seminars rent rooms in the
retirement community’s recreation centers or in local restaurants, typically offer a free meal, and
require that the residents provide their personal contact information prior to entering. Even if
they are not interested after listening to the seminar, the study participants indicated that they are
frequently called, sent mail, and routinely told that they should purchase the goods or services
because they were provided a free lunch and therefore, owe it to the company. It does not appear
that the individuals who host the seminars are vetted for authenticity by the retirement
community, and some residents believe that they are letting fraudulent individuals rent their
room space who have the sole intention of taking advantage of the elderly residents, exploiting
them when they are vulnerable.

Consistent with the life course perspective and the literature on criminal hotspots,
geography can be a significant factor in the lives of individuals. Elders move to the retirement
community with the understanding that the crime rate is low and they are protected by the guard
gates and living around other retirees. However, the factors that initially drew many residents to
the retirement community, because they thought they would be protected, are the factors that
they now believe have contributed to the extensive targeting of financial exploitation scams. The
most dominant theme that emerged from the focus group and interview discussions was that the
retirement community has created a hotspot for financial exploitation by placing a large (and
growing) number of elders, who are perceived to be suitable targets, around motivated offenders
who live in the local area, without any capable guardians. Thus, based on the findings from this
study, it appears that the tenants of routine activities theory have been found, and can be
explained by age-graded life course concepts. The quote below from one interviewed victim
depicts why they believe they are suitable targets living in the retirement community:
Seniors vs. Crime, every month at the new resident meeting, they say, ‘Look, we’re the type of people that are naïve, we’re polite, so we’re not going to get into somebody’s face and say don’t bother me.’ And it’s true, we’re a target-rich environment, we’re perceived to have money, we’re very polite society, we need the help—so that makes us the target-rich environment.

This resident’s account represents the complex nature of financial exploitation in the retirement community. It shows how life course components combined with routine activities has produced a hotspot for financial exploitation. Relocation to the retirement community represents a life course tuning point, coupled with the interaction and influence from their community, which for some, has resulted in the negative life event of financial exploitation.

An important caveat is that two of the victims of financial exploitation interviewed in the study experienced instances of stranger-based credit card fraud and these instances may not have been unique to or more likely to occur because of the geographical influence of the retirement community. Although the residents did believe that people specifically targeting elders compromised their credit cards at a local gas station and local restaurant. Therefore, the degree to which geographic location, in general, and the retirement community, in particular, influences instances of financial exploitation may depend on the type of exploitation.

Despite the common theme among the SvC volunteers, interviewed residents, and focus group participants that the retirement community represents a significant factor in the amount of financial exploitation targeting and victimization, only one resident indicated that they were planning to move out of the community. This respondent had not experienced an incident of financial exploitation, but had been targeted. The individual indicated they were moving because they had grown increasingly frustrated with the construction of the homes in the retirement community, which they believed was poor. Therefore, not one of the residents who participated in our study had any plans or thoughts about leaving the retirement community because of the frequent financial exploitation attempts. Each of the residents recognized that they were targeted more frequently since moving to the retirement community, but did not think about moving elsewhere because of it.
**Protective Factors**

The sixth and final research question asks: Are there factors that may reduce an elders’ risk of financial exploitation? All of the study participants indicated that they had felt targeted, at least once, for a financial exploitation scam since moving to the retirement community. Based on prior research and factors that emerged from the focus group discussions, several protective factors were addressed in the individual interviews to determine what and how certain factors may be protective against elder financial exploitation. All of the interviewed respondents said that they had virus protection on their computers that they updated regularly, all indicated that they routinely shred any and all financial-related mail (with a majority reporting that they shred anything with their name and address on it), and most checked their credit reports annually or had blocks/freezes on their credit. Thus, there was no variability found in the factors that prior research and many governmental and private agencies give to protect elders from financial exploitation. All study participants engaged in the recommended protective behaviors and some were still exploited.

When specifically asked what steps could be taken to reduce the prevalence of financial exploitation, three factors emerged from the analysis of the interview transcripts. Education, research, and being skeptical were the most commonly cited protective factors against financial exploitation. Education and research were each mentioned nine times, by four residents and three residents, respectively. Some of the study participants said that the best way elders can protect themselves from financial exploitation is to be skeptical or to have a skeptical personality. Skepticism was mentioned six times by six study participants. A couple who participated in one of the focus groups said that their cautious and financially conservative personalities are what initially attracted them to one another:

I wouldn't wanna use the word suspicious, but we are very, very careful and financially conservative. We're both pretty in step with what all of our financial things. That was one of the things that, I know it doesn't sound very romantic, but that was one of the things that drew us to one another, we both had very much the same inclinations on finances and that sort of stuff.
The quotes from two residents below highlight the importance that many of the study participants placed on self-education, through research and reading, on protection of financial exploitation.

I look at the fine print. And I tend to just read it, even if it takes a magnifying glass. So I think, I’ve just become more familiar with those kinds of things and how to protect myself.

I keep up-to-date about fraud or scams. I read all articles on scams. You really have to educate yourself. I’m not the do not call list and I still get a lot of calls. You have to be an educated consumer. No one can do a better job of watching out for you than you can.

One of the interviewed residents, who had not been victimized, but was targeted several times for financial exploitation scams since moving to the retirement community raised an important question when asked why they believe they have been able to withstand the targeting attempts.

I understand how. I wonder if I’ll understand and do it 10 years from now if I live to be 90? Seriously, I think I’m sharp enough to recognize anything. I won’t accept any offers of anything that looks too good to be true, I just won’t. I just ignore them and refuse to accept them. I just hang up on ’em. I just hang up. Anybody that calls, keeps pushing to sell something, I just hang up.

This resident’s concern about possibly not being able to withstand financial exploitation attempts as they age is consistent with prior research and the components of life course theory. As individuals age, their cognitive and physical health abilities change, their ability to identify potential threats may diminish, and as changes to their social networks and bonds begin to become more pronounced, they may be less able to withstand some of the financial exploitation attempts on their own. As will be discussed below, the study participants were more likely to identify individual-level factors as being the best ways for elder citizens to protect themselves. However, as they continue to age and various life course turning points and factors change and emerge, they may require more external support to withstand financial exploitation attempts and prevent potential victimization.
The aforementioned individual and personal-level factors (education, research, and skepticism) were mentioned more frequently by interviewed residents than were external factors that could be taken by the retirement community or government. The study participants agreed that the laws against and pursuit of elder financial exploitation by law enforcement and prosecutors was lacking. However, when asked specifically about what could be done to help reduce financial exploitation in the retirement community, they were not readily mentioned as factors that would help. The SvC volunteers were more likely than the residents to discuss the need for more enforceable laws and tools to help law enforcement pursue, investigate, and make arrests for financial exploitation crimes against the elderly. In addition, participants in the focus groups and interviews were asked specifically about policy changes or recommendations that may help protect elders from financial exploitation. Educational outreach from law enforcement, universities, and the government was cited overwhelming as an option over tougher laws and publicity of cases where arrests were made. Educational tools or seminars were mentioned sixteen times by fifteen participants whereas tougher laws and publicity were each mentioned once. As the quote below illustrates, residents were more likely to believe that financial exploitation protection should come from the individual:

I think it’s a given that the best way to stop senior fraud, is having the seniors more aware of it so that they can prevent it themselves. That’s number one. So anything that can be done to educate seniors how to avoid the fraud. So the biggest issue is to try to educate people and say, ‘Listen, think twice, don’t allow yourself to be put in that position.’ But it’s hard to do; it’s just hard to do.

Further, two residents indicated that they were victims of financial exploitation prior to moving to the retirement community. In their respective interviews, each of the respondents said that they learned from their experiences and made changes to the way they manage their finances, interact with salespeople, and research companies for services. For example, one of the interviewed respondents said, “I had an experience with a financial advisor that taught me a lot, and as a result I believe I'm reasonably cautious.” In addition, an individual who participated in one of the resident focus group discussions said she and her husband have been able to withstand financial exploitation attempts since moving to the retirement community because, “I think I'm better informed than the average bear. I'm very interested in what's going on, and we have a
personal history with my husband's mother was terribly scammed, just terribly. So we are alert to this stuff.”

The themes and patterns of protective factors that emerged from the resident focus groups and interviews are consistent with the life course theme of human agency. These themes show that individuals are active agents in their life outcomes and that lives do not completely unfold in a vacuum, but rather individuals can influence and create their own destinies. While these factors of human agency, education, research, and a skeptical personality all emerged as protective factors, limitations to an individual’s agency may also manifest itself as a risk factor. For example, the resident who indicated that they were currently able to withstand targeting attempts, however, they did not know if they would be able to do that as they continued to age represents an example of how human agency and abilities can change with age and possibly turn into risk factors.

In sum, several protective factors emerged through the focus group discussions with residents and SvC volunteers and the individual interviews; namely, education, research, and skepticism. The SvC volunteers were more likely than were the residents to point to the external factors of tougher laws and law enforcement as protective factors. Residents were much more likely to identify individual-level methods of protection.

**Discussion and Conclusion**

The findings presented in this chapter are in response to six specific research questions aimed at the preliminary exploitation of the utility of applying life course components to the study and explanation of elder financial exploitation among a sample of residents who live in the largest active-living retirement community in the United States. In general, the research questions sought to advance our current understanding of elder financial exploitation from a life course and turning points perspective.

The study participants did indicate that they experienced various turning points in their elder years. Some of them believed that the turning point led to their financial exploitation or made them more susceptible to targeting attempts. Health and/or cognitive changes resulted in residents’ direct need for services relating to medical care or their home and subsequently led to financial exploitation. In addition, some health-related turning points did not directly result in
financial exploitation, but rather created long-lasting feelings of pain and desperation, which clouded the judgment of some participants, and then lead to financial exploitation.

Sociogenic changes also had the capacity to either directly or indirectly result in financial exploitation of some participants. The primary sociogenic change that led to financial exploitation was a change to the marital dynamic. Specifically related to the death of a spouse, especially if that spouse was the one who managed most of the financial decisions or significant changes were needed regarding investments. Another sociogenic change that was believed to lead to financial exploitation was relocating to the retirement community. Many residents indicated that the move was very stressful and almost immediately after settling in to their new home, they began to be inundated with exploitation targeting attempts. All of the study participants moved at least two hours from their prior home that they lived in for numerous years, many for their entire lives.

Aside from the move itself, factors related to the retirement community were the most commonly mentioned theme from residents regarding financial exploitation or attempts. The residents believed that the retirement community has created a false sense of security, leading them to let their guards down, exposing them to financial exploitation targeting. This feeling has been supported in some of the limited amount of research conducted on gated communities. For example, in their study of gated communities and resident perceptions of safety from crime, Blakley and Snyder (1998) found that gates create a perception of safety and insularity. While residents may feel safer in some of these areas, they are not necessarily less likely to be victimized than someone who does not live in a gated community. The residents noted that the gates do nothing to keep offenders out. In addition, the retirement community has ordinances against door-to-door solicitations; however, residents indicated that this is not readily enforced.

The retirement community has created a hotspot for financial exploitation, in the opinion of many of the residents, because the areas surrounding the retirement community are economically depressed and home to many people who are targeting the elderly because they are perceived to be wealthy, ill, and polite, making them easy targets. The participants overwhelmingly felt more targeted for financial exploitation scams while living in the retirement community than they felt in their previous home.

Themes related to generational differences between the elderly and the younger generations who are most commonly exploiting them were also identified. The residents were
more likely to blame themselves and their generation for their victimization, indicating that they were too polite, nice, and trusting because of the way they were raised. These factors may be represented by differences in generational differences in thoughts, attitudes, and perceptions about trust, obligation, and workmanship. In addition, the participants said they were also unlikely to ask for help if needed, especially related to financial matters.

The SvC volunteers were more likely to place blame on the younger generation. The finding that elders were likely to place responsibility on themselves for their financial exploitation is also consistent with the research on low-levels of reporting among elderly victims. Research on reporting decisions has found that the elderly who are financially exploited had a sense of responsibility for all or part of their victimization. The vulnerabilities discussed by the SvC volunteers were related to the retirement community and local offenders, whereas the vulnerabilities discussed by the residents were more related to age, the perception of their wealth by local offenders, and generational differences. In addition, the trusting nature of many elders also emerged as a potential risk factor. However, the mechanisms in which trust can lead to financial exploitation are not fully understood. For example, generational differences and factors related to the retirement community were both cited as reasons the elderly are more trusting than younger generations and may be susceptible to financial exploitation.

Social bonds and networks were found to change in one’s elder years in ways that may lead to financial exploitation. Retirement and friends or spouses passing away were mentioned as the main changes elders experience to their social networks. In addition, moving to the retirement community created many changes to the social bonds and networks of the study participants. They indicated that they had fewer close friendships and less family members living nearby. While many elders said that they did have a fairly extensive group of acquaintances in the retirement community, and were busy participating in recreational activities most days of the week, the relationships they had with others were not as strong.

Education, research, and skepticism were the three factors most commonly cited as protective factors against financial exploitation. Law enforcement changes and tougher laws were potential protective factors that were more commonly mentioned by the SvC volunteers. Residents believed that protecting himself or herself was the primary responsibility of the individual, whereas SvC said that the government should be doing more to protect elderly residents from financial exploitation. Strategies that the retirement community could take to
protect its residents were not mentioned by any of the study participants, aside from possibly publishing more stories in the local newspaper about common financial exploitation attempts.

The themes that emerged for each of the six research questions were consistent with prior research, except for the role of the retirement community. The possibility that retirement communities may be creating hotspots for financial exploitation has not been addressed in the prior research. In addition, themes from the residents mostly align with those made by SvC and the descriptive quantitative data from the local sheriff and SvC, with the exception that tougher laws are needed, which was mentioned by SvC as a possible protective factor, and the residents who blamed themselves rather than the offenders.

Grounded in a life course framework and based on a synthesis of the prior research, theory, and the findings in this study, the following hypotheses for future research have emerged. Subsequent research on the financial exploitation of the elderly should begin to explore and test these foundational hypotheses to determine if they are supported and to identify possible conditional or mediating factors. In addition, the hypotheses below may be applicable to a more general study of the victimization patterns of elderly citizens.

1. There are age-graded sociogenic changes experienced by elders that increase their likelihood of financial exploitation.
2. There are age-graded physical and cognitive changes experienced by elders that increase their likelihood of financial exploitation.
3. Elders experience a weakening of social bonds as a result of age-graded transitions, which increases their likelihood of financial exploitation.
4. Areas with a large number of elders and a limited amount of protective regulations will have an increased rate of financial exploitation targeting or attempts. And, the closer an elder is in proximity to areas with high rates of targeting, the greater their likelihood of experiencing financial exploitation.
5. Elders perceive that there are generational differences in trust and obligation between themselves and younger age cohorts that may lead to financial exploitation.

Rutter (1996) identified two features of turning points, first, they cause marked changes in an individual’s context or circumstance, and second, they create or close off opportunities for
success or achievement, social networks and relationships, and/or an individual’s self-concept. These features were identified in many of the turning points that led to financial exploitation among the study participants. In sum, life course turning points do matter and the role of the retirement community may play a major role in changing the lives of elders. Studying elder financial exploitation from a life course perspective can help to address some of the limitations and unanswered questions from prior research and theoretical explorations. The aforementioned foundational hypotheses can provide a theoretically informed starting point for future research on financial exploitation of the elderly and, possibly, elder victimization in general.
Table 6: Arrests Made by Local Sheriff Office, 2010-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft 300 to 5K dollars</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>25.81%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theft by Abandonment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10.75%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Grand Theft</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.68%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Theft Petit</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>9.68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal use of Personal ID information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft 10K to 20K dollars</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Mischief &lt; $1000</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraudulent use of Credit Card</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft 20K to 100K dollars</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft 5K to 10K dollars</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3.23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Mischief &gt; $1000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation of the Elderly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgery- Uttering a Forged Instrument</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft of Victim 65 or Older</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttering a Forged Instrument</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.15%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Computer Fraud ID</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracting No License</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud- Credit Card</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud- False Pretenses &gt; 300 dollars</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Theft &gt; 100K dollars</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Fraud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>93</strong></td>
<td><strong>100%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 7: Arrests Made by Local Sheriff Office-Exploitation Only, 2010-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Offense Description</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Theft by Abandonment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>31.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal use of Personal ID information</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraudulent use of Credit Card</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>9.38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploitation of the Elderly</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgery- Uttering a Forged Instrument</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uttering a Forged Instrument</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer Fraud ID</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contracting No License</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Forgery</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud- Credit Card</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud- False Pretenses &gt; 300 dollars</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organized Fraud</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3.13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>32</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Table 8: Complaints Made to Seniors vs Crime, 2010-2015

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaint Type</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Incomplete Work</td>
<td>629</td>
<td>16.85%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfactory Performance</td>
<td>503</td>
<td>13.47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contract Dispute</td>
<td>339</td>
<td>9.08%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assist</td>
<td>256</td>
<td>6.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warranty Issues</td>
<td>237</td>
<td>6.35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Billing Dispute</td>
<td>217</td>
<td>5.81%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faulty Products</td>
<td>196</td>
<td>5.25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Dispute</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>4.58%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unable To Classify</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>3.99%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Landscaping</td>
<td>144</td>
<td>3.86%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Breach of Contract</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>3.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scam</td>
<td>127</td>
<td>3.40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deception</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>2.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>1.77%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Payment</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real Estate Dispute</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>1.45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Dispute</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>1.42%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Insurance Dispute</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>1.12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Theft</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>1.07%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Price Gouging</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>1.02%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elder Abuse</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>0.83%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Failure to Disclose</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pressure Sales</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theft by Deception</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing Dispute</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>0.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal Intent</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>0.54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negligence</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>0.46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicare Dispute</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0.21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Estate Dispute</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeshares</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Domestic Dispute</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lemon Law</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.05%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>3,734</strong></td>
<td><strong>100.00%</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9: Frequency that Physical and Cognitive Health Factors were Mentioned by Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Cognitive Changes</th>
<th>Health Diagnoses</th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>Physical Limitations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>55-64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-74</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>75-84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>85 and above</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n= 12 interviewed respondents*
Table 10: Frequency that Physical and Cognitive Health Factors were Mentioned by Exploitation Type

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Exploitation Type</th>
<th>Cognitive Changes</th>
<th>Health Diagnoses</th>
<th>Mental Health</th>
<th>Physical Limitations</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Auto Sales</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Credit Card</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Repair/Maintenance</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Investment</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medical</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Romantic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n= 12 interviewed respondents
Table 11: Sociogenic Turning Points and Changes to Social Network

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Experienced Change to Social Network</th>
<th>Change to Marital Dynamic or Structure</th>
<th>Recently Moved</th>
<th>Retirement</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less family</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More close friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less close friends</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=18 interviewed respondents
Table 12: Influence of Regional Differences by Victimization Status and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victimization Status and Gender</th>
<th>Florida Laws</th>
<th>Local Offenders</th>
<th>Total Regional Differences</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: Female</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: Male</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: Female</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n=32 interviewed respondents
Table 13: Influence of Retirement Community by Victimization Status and Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victimization Status and Gender</th>
<th>Community is Protective</th>
<th>Concentration of Elders</th>
<th>False Sense of Security</th>
<th>Feel Targeted</th>
<th>More Trusting</th>
<th>Required or Desired Home Maintenance</th>
<th>Residents Perceived as Wealthy</th>
<th>Total Retirement Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: Male</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: Female</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: Male</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: Female</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n= 32 interviewed respondents*
### Table 14: Geographic Influence by Social Network Changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victimization Status and Social Network Changes</th>
<th>Florida Laws</th>
<th>Local Offenders</th>
<th>Community is Protective</th>
<th>Concentration of Elders</th>
<th>False Sense of Security</th>
<th>Feel Targeted</th>
<th>More Trusting</th>
<th>Required or Desired Home Maintenance</th>
<th>Residents Perceived as Wealthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: Less family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: More family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: More close friends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: Less close friends</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: More family</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: Less family</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: More close friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: Less close friends</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n = 32 interviewed respondents*
### Table 15: Geographic Influence by Victimization Status and Age

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victimization status and age</th>
<th>Florida Laws</th>
<th>Local Offenders</th>
<th>Community is Protective</th>
<th>Concentration of Elders</th>
<th>False Sense of Security</th>
<th>Feel Targeted</th>
<th>More Trusting</th>
<th>Required or Desired Home Maintenance</th>
<th>Residents Perceived as Wealthy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non victims aged 55-64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non victims aged 65-74</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non victims aged 75-84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims aged 55-64</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims aged 65-74</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims aged 75-84</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>4</strong></td>
<td><strong>21</strong></td>
<td><strong>18</strong></td>
<td><strong>27</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>41</strong></td>
<td><strong>11</strong></td>
<td><strong>6</strong></td>
<td><strong>13</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: n= 32 interviewed respondents*
Table 16: Geographic Influence by Victimization Status and Years Lived in the Retirement Community

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Victimization Status and Years Lived in Retirement Community</th>
<th>Regional Differences</th>
<th>Retirement Community</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: 0-4 years</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: 5-9 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-Victim: 10 or more years</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: 0-4 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: 5-9 years</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victim: 10 or more years</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>127</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: n= 32 interviewed respondents
CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

A limited amount of empirical and theoretical attention has been given to the growing problem of elder financial exploitation. Adequate and reliable descriptions and explanations of the prevalence, risk factors, protective factors, and circumstances are not available. Although there have been several empirical studies on the risk and protective factors of elder financial exploitation, there is not a consensus about the fraud types for which elders are most at risk and what they and their social networks can do to protect against instances of exploitation. In addition, many of the studies have been conducted with a narrow focus on incidence, with little to no attention given to the specific factors that may influence elders’ risk differently than that of younger generations.

Given the limited and largely descriptive prior literature, the goal of this dissertation was not to validate hypotheses or establish causality but rather to explore the utility of applying a life course turning points framework to our current understanding of elder financial exploitation in the United States. The foundation of solid empirical research should begin with exploratory studies aimed at describing a specific phenomenon. Because of the uncertainty and lack of theoretical explanation, this research sought to provide such a foundation in which future research can be built. Thus, the qualitative data analysis of focus group and interview transcripts was chosen as the most appropriate analytic method to answer the questions posed in this study. Clark (1980: 167) indicated that the goal of all research rests not in immediate tests of significance, but rather in the extent to which the findings contribute to a broader theoretical structure (Clark, 1980). The information obtained from this study can be used to develop a framework for future theory and research on age, the process of aging, and age-related factors that may lead to crime and financial exploitation vulnerability among the elderly population.

This final chapter has four objectives. The first objective is to provide a brief summary of the findings that emerged from this study and to situate the findings within the available empirical and theoretical literature. The second objective is to discuss the potential policy implications that can be advanced as a result of the current study. The third and fourth objectives are to acknowledge some of the limitations of this research and discuss specific directions for future research and theory.
Summary of Findings

This study sought to answer six research questions that addressed age-graded life changes or turning points experienced by a group of elder citizens who live in the largest active-living retirement community in the United States. The final research question sought to explore, from the perspective of the study participants, protective factors that could reduce the risk and incidences of financial exploitation among the elderly, especially those living in the retirement community. Table 17 provides an overview of the life course components that were explored in each of the research questions along with the themes and patterns that emerged from the focus group and interview data.

Research questions one and two asked whether there were age-graded turning points related to physical and/or cognitive health or sociogenic factors that influenced elders’ risk of experiencing financial exploitation. Based on the qualitative data analysis from the focus groups and individual interviews, several age-graded turning points did emerge as important factors that led to some of the study participants experiencing financial exploitation. Physical health issues and limitations were mentioned more frequently as leading to financial exploitation than were cognitive changes. However, this was not entirely unexpected as individuals who are experiencing cognitive changes were not likely to participate in the focus groups or individual interviews. The health problems that led to financial exploitation were either experienced by the individual themselves or their spouse, which resulted in the study participant becoming the primary caregiver for their ailing partner. Physical health issues could lead directly to exploitation, by making it necessary that the individual obtain services from someone who ultimately defrauded them, or indirectly by making them so desperate for relief that they would try anything, and therefore experienced issues of medical-related exploitation. Lastly, most commonly, individuals mentioned that they were so consumed with their own health issues or those of their spouses that they were not able to efficiently read or examine paperwork prior to signing contracts for services or thoroughly vetting service providers. The prior literature has indicated that health issues can be risk factors for financial exploitation but did not address why or for which types of financial exploitation they were more common. This study was able to begin to address why age-related physical and/or cognitive factors can be risk factors for financial exploitation among the elderly, as well as highlighting some of the more common types of exploitation that emerged.
The second research question addressed the influence that age-graded sociogenic factors may have on influencing an elders’ risk of financial exploitation. Three factors emerged as important components that played a role in the likelihood of experiencing financial exploitation, retirement, relocation to the retirement community, and a change to the marital dynamic. Only one interviewed participant indicated that retirement in and of itself created a series of difficulties in their lives, which may have contributed to their financial exploitation. More commonly, the study participants said that retirement led to drastic and significant changes to their financial security and social networks. Consistent with prior research, many of the study participants indicated that they were concerned that they would not have enough money to sustain their life after retirement. Relocating to the retirement community also played a significant role in the lives of many of the residents. Most mentioned that the move was extremely stressful and they began feeling targeted for financial exploitation scams almost immediately after moving in to their new homes, mainly from landscapers and contractors who were knocking on their doors offering over-priced services and requiring full or a majority of the payment upfront. The final sociogenic factor was that of the death of a spouse. Participants mentioned this factor as leading to financial exploitation in several ways, first, in some instances, the spouse who passed away was the one who handled all or a majority of the important household financial decisions, therefore, when they passed away the surviving spouse was left to learn how to manage the financials. Second, the death of a spouse created lasting feelings of sadness and loneliness, which left openings for individuals to befriend and financially exploit the widow. Several residents indicated that local funeral homes advise widowed women not to publish obituaries in the local newspaper because offenders who live in the immediate area take that information and use it to become part of the widow’s social network, and eventually financially exploit them. Research on sociogenic changes has been limited and the results are not systematic. The findings from this study extend beyond the rather narrow attention given to sociogenic factors in the literature in explaining which factors emerged as most prominent and the ways in which they were responsible for leading to the instance(s) of financial exploitation. Experienced changes to marital dynamics (i.e., getting married, getting divorced, a change in expected roles, the death or incapacitation of a spouse) have been included in the life course literature as sociogenic changes, which is how they were analyzed in this study. However, these changes may also represent changes to social bonds or the life course component of linked lives.
The study of social bonds has been primarily focused on relationships between friends and neighbors.

The third research question addressed whether or not there may be differences between generations that could lead to financial exploitation. This research question emerged solely from the life course perspective, prior research has not addressed this issue and the codes for this theme emerged entirely out of the data themselves. However, based on the study’s findings, there do appear to be generational differences, either real or perceived remains an empirical question, between the elderly and younger generations that could play a role in making elders suitable targets for financial exploitation. The residents who participated in the focus groups and interviews indicated that the elderly are more trusting than younger generations and this trust is oftentimes exploited. In addition, as a means to protect against financial exploitation, the residents said that elders should be more skeptical and less trusting of others. The SvC volunteers, however, had another perspective on generational differences. While acknowledging that elders do tend to be overly trusting, they placed the blame solely on the younger generation who are out to scam people. They believed that there is a scamming culture among the younger generations that live and work in and around the retirement community.

The fourth research question can be broken down into two parts, first, do elders experience changes to their social networks that are different from when they were younger and two, if so, how do these changes influence their risk of financial exploitation? First, the study participants did note that their social networks have changed since retirement, many of whom characterized the change in negative terms. Retirement has separated many people from good friends that they used to rely on for advice, as they continue to age residents indicated that members of their social networks are passing away more frequently, and relocating to the retirement community further created a significant changes to their long-standing social networks. Most of the study participants indicated that they had smaller family and friendship networks and the new bonds they developed in the retirement community were not as strong as those they had before moving. In general, prior research has found strong quality social bonds to be protective against financial exploitation among the elderly. However, depending on the intentions of the individuals in the social network, some social bonds can also be the cause of financial exploitation. The study participants did not readily perceive changes to their social
networks to be risk or protective factors for financial exploitation, they mainly noted the changes as being a part of life, but not in ways that influenced their risk.

The fifth research question also emerged solely from the life course perspective in that geography can play a significant role in the lives of individuals. Prior research or theory has not addressed the role that retirement communities may have in influencing the risk or perception of financial exploitation. Thus, the codes for this theme also emerged entirely from the data. The study participants mentioned this theme overwhelming more times than any of the others. For a small group, the retirement community created some elements of perceived protection. However, for a majority of the participants, the retirement community was believed to be a huge risk factor for financial exploitation. The participants felt as though they were targeted much more frequently for financial scams over the telephone, television, postal mail, and knocks on their door than they ever were prior to moving to the retirement community. In addition, residents felt targeted anytime they had to seek services for medical purposes, their homes, or cars. As members of the SvC focus group indicated, the retirement community has created a “golden dome” of criminal opportunity by placing so many elder citizens together surrounded by an area that is economically depressed and home to potential offenders and not offering any meaningful protections for its residents. In addition, the retirement community has also created a “dome effect” over the residents by creating false senses of security, which has led them to let their guards down. While the available research has not addressed this issue, the themes and patterns that emerged from each of the focus groups and individual interviews affirms the observations made by the SvC volunteers. These findings in particular are consistent with the criminological literature on routine activities theory and criminal hotspots.

The sixth and final research question asked what, if any, protective factors there are for elder financial exploitation. All study participants said they were targeted at least once since moving to the retirement community, and all engaged in recommended protective factors of shredding documents, routinely checking credit reports, and updating computer virus protection. Therefore, it was important to determine what, from the residents’ perceptions, could protect against financial exploitation victimization. The three factors that emerged by the residents were that of education, research, and skepticism. Each of these factors are individual-level actions that the elders believed should be taken by everyone to ensure they are not financially exploited. However, these factors do not take into consideration what may happen as elders continue to age.
and whether they will continue being able, physically or cognitively, to educate themselves, research companies and common fraud types, or to remain skeptical. The SvC participants did note that education is an important component in protecting against financial exploitation. However, they also pointed to the ability and responsibility of the government and criminal justice system in protecting elders. The SvC volunteers indicated that there should be tougher laws and law enforcement should be given more tools to pursue, investigate, and make arrests for financial exploitation crimes against the elderly. There is no consensus in the available research on protective factors as many studies and government reports have cited contradictory measures. It appears that in the literature protective factors may vary significantly by the type of exploitation. The findings from this study are more comprehensive and appear to be able to protect against a wider range of exploitation types. Another unique aspect to the protective factors that emerged is that they came directly from elders who report being targeted nearly everyday. Thus, the factors may be more practical or attainable because they are coming from people who regularly use the techniques.

In sum, based on the findings from this case study, age-graded turning points do appear to influence the risk of and protection from financial exploitation among the studied sample of elderly retirement community residents. Addressing elder financial exploitation using a life course perspective is likely a useful strategy for developing a more complete and compelling description and explanation. The life course turning points identified through this study, as well as changes to social networks and social bonds and generational differences may provide answers as to why some elders are suitable targets for financial exploitation, as assumed by routine activities theory. In addition, the retirement community, based on the findings from this study, appears to be a hotspot for financial exploitation targeting. A majority of the study participants had experienced an incident of financial exploitation, and all indicated that they had been targeted at least once since moving to the retirement community, with most indicating that they felt targeted on a daily basis.

Grounding this study in a life course perspective has uncovered and confirmed many nuances related to elder financial exploitation and has provided a series of future directions for research and policy. Figure 6 provides an age-graded life course theoretical model that emerged from this study. The figure shows the relationships between the life course components of sociogenic turning points, physical/cognitive health turning points, historical influence, linked
lives, geographical influence, and human agency that the study participants indicated as being important risk or protective factors to their experiences of financial exploitation while living in the retirement community. It is also important to note that the life course components themselves may interact with one another to produce changes in an individual’s life trajectory or more specifically, influence their risk of or protection from financial exploitation.

**Implications**

One fundamental step in the research process should involve identifying the implications of the findings on future research, policy, and practice. This section is devoted to addressing some of the policy and practice implications that can be responsibly advanced using the findings that emerged from this case study. First, the community managers and developers should address the seemingly routine and regular frequency of financial exploitation targeting attempts occurring in the retirement community. While it is understood and expected that the retirement community may not want to publically acknowledge how frequently the attempts are occurring as it may result in a loss of money and people moving out of the community, they should try to step out in front of the issue and show that they are actively working to protect their residents. Relatively simple steps can be taken such as publicizing some of the most common attempts in the local newspaper, establishing a vetting process for individuals who wish to rent out private rooms owned by the retirement community, and providing organized support services for individuals who have been victimized or targeted. This final recommendation may be best accomplished by working with the already-established and well-known Seniors vs. Crime organization.

Second, changes in physical health, cognitive declines, and weakening social networks emerged as likely risk factors for financial exploitation among some elderly citizens. Therefore, there should be a sense of heightened awareness from family, friends, and financial institutions, among others as they interact with elderly members of their social or client networks. These social institutions should be aware of the normal, age-related turning points that most elders experience and should be cognizant of any changes their clients or family members experience that may place them at an increased risk. As indicated by many of the study participants, the elder generation may be unlikely to ask for help when needed, therefore, it is imperative that
individuals are aware of any significant life changing events that may be occurring and how they can help protect their loved one.

Third, the prevalence of financial exploitation in the retirement community may require a different style of policing to adequately address the issue. The retirement community appears to be a hotspot in that there is a large number of financial exploitation victimization experiences and attempts occurring. However, routine patrol by law enforcement likely will not be an effective deterrent because of tactics used by perpetrators. Community policing tactics and hotspots policing, in general, focus on the unique issues of geographic areas and tailor their policing and patrolling styles accordingly. Law enforcement agencies whose jurisdiction covers the retirement community should be trained in how to handle the unique needs of elderly crime and financial exploitation victims and should have protocol in place for identifying and monitoring known repeat offenders in an effort to keep them from continually reentering the retirement community. Changes in policing style would be most effective if the officers believed that the local and state prosecutors would support them and that charges would be filed for arrests made. Currently, the local county sheriff does not believe that charges would be filed for arrests because many of the prosecutors have indicated that financial exploitation events are more often than not, civil, not criminal matters. In order for policing to be effective, there also should be support from prosecutors giving the police assurance that if arrests are made, cases will be pursued to the prosecutor’s best ability.

Limitations

Most empirical research in the social sciences has limitations that should be presented in all transparency. However, importantly, the limitations of any research project should be balanced with the overall contributions of the study. Specifically, the limitations should be weighed against the answers to the following questions: Does the study provide a meaningful contribution to the literature? And, does the study offer useful information for researchers, the public, policymakers, and practitioners? The limitations presented in the following paragraphs are issues commonly experienced by qualitative researchers who rely on interview data and in many instances, present various issues that can be addressed in future research on life course turning points among the elderly and elder financial exploitation.
A fundamental limitation of this study is that it was conducted in one retirement community. Therefore, the findings may not be generalizable to other retirement communities or to the elderly population in general. This represents an imperative next step for future research. The findings must be validated in other retirement and non-retirement community areas to determine their generalizability. In addition, the homogeneity of the sample also requires further research. All of the participants in the study sample identified as being Caucasian. Some of the prior research on the risk factors of elder financial exploitation has indicated that elder minorities are more likely than are whites to experience financial exploitation. Thus, the extent to which the findings apply to elders of other ethnicities remains an important empirical question.

In addition, the study participants are not representative of people who have been identified as most at risk for criminal victimization (poor, urban dwellers, minority). However, the retirement community itself appears to play a role in elder financial exploitation and attempts. Therefore, residents may be at an increased risk for financial exploitation due to geographical factors and influences, which may be different than what has been identified for victims of other types of crime. The individuals who live in the retirement community are likely to be different than individuals who do not live in a large active-living retirement communities. The residents are likely to be more wealthy, healthy, and social than elders who have chosen to age in place and not relocate to a retirement community.

It is important to note that while every effort was made to probe respondents and triangulate the themes and patterns that emerged, biases may be present in their answers. For example, the respondents were aware that the study was regarding financial exploitation and they may have said what they think the interviewer wanted to hear. And, the residents may have been upset with the retirement community and being exploited or targeted, and this frustration may have impacted or dramatized their responses.

A final limitation that is worth mention is that the data used in this study are not able to provide a test of a longitudinal, developmental life course theory. This is consistent with most life course research (Elder, 1998). Most life course research does not address long-term life trajectories but rather more short-term turning points and their immediate effects. However, the data used in this dissertation are able to address life course-related components that may influence financial exploitation in late-life. A more extensive and expansive research project would be to track the victimization rates of individuals overtime to determine, with more
precision, how turning points may influence or change life trajectories and victimization or financial exploitation.

**Future Directions for Theory and Research**

Several important directions for theory and research have emerged during the course of this study. Some experts believe that the prevalence of elder financial exploitation will continue to increase in the coming years. Therefore, it is important for researchers to address and provide explanations for why elders are targeted for financial exploitation, what the risk factors are, and what can be done to protect American senior citizens.

Criminal victimization has been identified as an event that can have significant and lasting consequences in the lives of victims and can impact a number of outcomes across the life course. In general, victimization can have implications for self-concept, feelings of safety, and trust in others (Hagan, 1989). Further, research on repeat victimization has consistently shown that a victimization event is associated with an increased risk for future victimization (Farrell, 1995). However, very little is known about victimization from a longitudinal or life course perspective. Research is also unclear about the lasting effects of financial exploitation, especially in the lives of elders. Research has alluded, but not confirmed, that elders may be less likely than younger generations to recover from instances of financial exploitation and violent criminal victimization. Elders may be likely less able to recover financial losses by reentering the workforce and recovering from physical violent victimization because they are more frail and may take longer to heal. Thus, additional research should address the lasting effects and consequences of elder financial exploitation. In addition, longitudinal research should determine if there are possible age differentiations among the elderly population in their risk of financial exploitation and in the associated consequences.

Geographic location has been afforded very limited attention in the theoretical explanation and empirical research on elder financial exploitation. Current research does not adequately link micro and macro factors about the origin and consequences of financial exploitation. The retirement community itself emerged as the significant factor influencing the likelihood of financial exploitation according to the study residents. As indicated in the preceding section, this finding must be verified with other retirement communities and among elders who do not live in retirement communities to determine the true role of geography in elder
financial exploitation. As it appears, the retirement community may have created a hotspot for financial exploitation. Age-graded turning points leading up to an individual's decision to move to a retirement community must also be explored in future research to determine if and how residents of active-living retirement communities are different from other elderly citizens.

Another direction for future research involves exploring the reasons why an individual decided to use the perpetrator for services. While beyond the scope of this study, there was an emergent theme that individuals felt that the perpetrator was charismatic and seemed professional. A limited amount of research has addressed the characteristics of the perpetrators. In the studies that have, they have not addressed the victims’ perceptions of the perpetrator. In many cases of financial exploitation, there is some degree of communication between the victim and perpetrator and oftentimes the victim willingly gives the perpetrator money for a service. Therefore, understanding the factors that encouraged the victim to engage with the perpetrator are also important avenues for future research and policy.

In sum, directions for future research include first validating the findings from this study in another retirement community and then comparing the similarities and differences in risk factors, protective factors, and perceptions with elders who do not live in retirement communities. In addition, determining how the findings can be applied to residents of different racial groups and if and how the risk factors change over time. The Analytic Memo in Appendix A contains a list of additional ideas for future research that emerged from the themes of this study. The list of topics was beyond the scope of the present study, but came directly from the data.

**Concluding Discussion**

The elderly population in the United States is growing with unprecedented speed and is expected to continue growing for the foreseeable future. Consistent with prior life course research, many of the turning points identified in this study are not exclusively reserved for elders, however, they did emerge as contributing factors the elderly’s position in the age-strata may make their frequency and salience more significant risk factors for financial exploitation.

An increasing number of elderly Americans are choosing to relocate to designated age-restricted communities. And, while the research is limited, the prevalence of elder financial exploitation is also expected to grow. The findings from this dissertation have indicated that
elders who live in retirement communities may be living in a hotspot for financial exploitation because of the large concentration of elders who are perceived to be suitable targets. The residents in the retirement community where the study was conducted felt targeted and indicated that they were targeted much more frequently for financial exploitation scams than they were prior to moving. In addition, the social networks of the residents were not as strong as they were prior to moving. As elders continue to age, they may require more assistance from their social networks. Thus, understanding the complete role of retirement communities presents an important factor for future research and focus from policy makers, practitioners, and law enforcement.

As discussed in previous chapters, the United States is facing a critical shortage of affordable housing for its growing elderly population. And, many of the traditional retirement communities were not built with the future aging resident in mind. They are mostly designed for younger, healthy, and active elders, as is the retirement community that was studied in this dissertation. As residents continue to age, they may become unsafe in their homes and many have to move again, to a nursing home, assisted-living facility, memory care unit, or closer to family members, each time they are pulled from their community creates stress and the need to reestablish routines, meet people, and become familiar with medical professionals and/or service providers.

Some elders have expressed desires to remain near their families or live in areas that are more age-heterogeneous, which has prompted developers, builders, and architects to rethink homes and spaces for elder Americans (Davis, 2016). Increasingly, intergenerational housing communities are being built with homes that have open floor plans, carriage houses for multi-generational families, parks, and nearby public transportation. These social and age integrated communities are believed to be able to accommodate residents for decades, keep them close to their social support networks and will benefit seniors more than the more traditional age-restricted communities (Davis, 2016). These unique communities may represent changes to the existing patterns of elder financial exploitation and may also be helpful protective factors by reducing the unintended likelihood of an age-homogenous community turning into a hotspot for financial exploitation.

In an interview with Robert Love (2016) for AARP’s Bulletin magazine, the CEO of AARP, Jo Ann Jenkins, discussed changing views on aging in the United States. Jenkins believes
that, traditionally, there have been four main stages of stages of life: childhood, adolescence, work, and retirement. Now, for many, there is a new and extended middle age, where there are an additional 20-plus years for healthy and active living that previous generations did not have and many in the current generation are not adequately financially prepared for. Prior generations of elderly Americans did not readily consider the possibility of having an active retirement however, many are living unprecedented longer lives and are facing new challenges. As Jenkins indicated in her interview, if we assume that people are going to live to be 100, there could be six generations alive at the same time, but none of whom are prepared for the unique challenges facing the elderly population. Because people are living longer and may not be financially prepared for an active lifestyle that lasts several decades, understanding their unique characteristics and challenges becomes increasingly important.

As the nature and characteristics of the elderly population change, the mechanisms and consequences of financial exploitation likely will change as well. For example, elder Americans today are more technologically savvy than prior generations, and through this study, many participants mentioned that they were becoming increasingly targeted through the Internet. In addition, as people age, the consequences of financial exploitation may become more significant. Empirical research that is guided by a life course and turning points perspective provides a framework for understanding, describing, and explaining how age-graded changing life events and circumstances of the elderly combine with generational differences, weakening social bonds, and the potential for geographic location to influence their risk of financial exploitation.
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<tr>
<th>Life Course Component</th>
<th>Thematic Findings</th>
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<td>Chronic pain</td>
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<td>Physical injury and limitations</td>
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<td>Serious diagnoses</td>
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<td>Sociogenic Changes*</td>
<td>Death of a spouse</td>
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<td>Relocation to the retirement community</td>
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<td>Retirement</td>
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<td>Social Bonds**</td>
<td>Less family and friends nearby</td>
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<td>Social network passing away</td>
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<td>Social bonds weaker in retirement</td>
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<td>Historical Influence***</td>
<td>Generational differences</td>
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<td>Elderly more trusting</td>
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<td>Geographical Influence***</td>
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<td>Skeptical personality</td>
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*Represents the life course component of timing of lives (turning points)

**Represents the life course component of linked lives

***Represents the life course component of sociohistorical/geographic influence
Notes:
- signs denote negative observed relationships to financial exploitation.
Dashed lines show relationships that have been found in the literature but did not clearly emerge through the data analysis in this study.

Figure 6: An Age-Graded Life Course Theoretical Model Explaining Elder Financial Exploitation
APPENDIX A

ANALYTIC MEMO

The six research questions addressed in this study have provided a foundation for future research on the risk and protective factors of elder financial exploitation using a life course and turning points framework. However, many additional avenues for future research emerged while completing this dissertation. The ideas listed below were beyond the scope of the present study and therefore were not fully explored. They are each listed below with a brief description. This appendix provides a general list of ideas for future research and describes factors that emerged from the data used in this study.

1. Reporting behavior

   Researchers, policymakers, and practitioners have consistently noted that elder financial exploitation is underreported for a variety of reasons that appear to vary based on the type of exploitation, how much money was lost, and the victim’s relationship with the perpetrator. The focus group discussion topics and interview questions used in this study asked participants if they reported their experiences and why or why not. Most of the residents said that they did not report the exploitation to law enforcement because they felt that it would have been more trouble that it was worth. Many did say they reported to Seniors vs. Crime but that they were unsuccessful at helping them recover their money. One factor that emerged from the responses was the role of intimidation, which was especially felt by single or widowed women. The women said that they were afraid that if they reported their experience, the perpetrator would come back to their homes to physically harm them and they did not believe that the risk was worth reporting.

2. Relative costs of elder victimization

   The amount of money lost by the study participants varied significantly. The degree to which elders were impacted by the losses also varied. Some of the participants indicated that they lost tens of thousands of dollars to phony business investments or annuities, and while they were angry and upset for losing the.
money, it did not represent a significant financial loss. On the other hand, one participant lost $75 in a house cleaning scam where they paid upfront and services were never rendered. All aspects of this participant’s life were consumed with getting their money back. As a result, they began experiencing physical health problems because of the associated stress. Therefore, the relative costs of victimization appear to differ based on a variety of factors.

3. Contact with perpetrator

The interview questions asked how the victim came into contact with the individual who exploited them and, when applicable, why they chose to have services provided by the individual. Numerous individuals indicated that the service providers (medical centers, landscapers, contractors, financial planners) seemed professional and/or trustworthy. Others said they had seen many advertisements either in the local newspaper or on television from the individual and because of that, they assumed they could be trusted. The ways in which individuals come into contact with perpetrators has not been readily explored in the literature.

4. No children

Ten of the 35 interviewed residents indicated that they did not have any children and two said that they were estranged from one or more of their children. Research on gerontology and social network changes among the elderly has indicated that the current generation of senior citizens has fewer children, on average, than prior generations. It is unclear how, or if, having no children may influence an elders’ risk of victimization or financial exploitation.

5. Role of multiple turning points

Life course researchers have assumed that the presence of multiple turning points occurring in a short period of time may be more likely to produce changes in an individual’s life trajectory or result in either positive or negative life outcomes than one singularly occurring turning point. Several of the study participants said
that they had multiple things occurring in their lives at the same time that distracted them from focusing on certain financial matters and ultimately led to their financial exploitation.

6. **Trusting nature**

Trust emerged as a factor influencing many of the study participants’ risk of financial exploitation and overall belief of why elders may be perceived to be suitable targets by offenders. Conversely, a skeptical personality was mentioned as one of the three factors that can protect elders against financial exploitation. It is unclear if a majority of elders would categorize themselves as being trusting, if other age groups may have experienced financial exploitation because they are trusting, and why elders are believed to be more trusting than their younger counterparts. In addition, subsequent research is needed to uncover if the elderly perceive themselves to be trusting because of generational differences in the way they were raised or possibly because factors related to the retirement community have led to them becoming more trusting of outsiders.

7. **Routine activities**

Prior research has indicated that the routine or daily activates of elders can function as risk or protective factors. While not specifically studied in this dissertation, the routine activities of some respondents, including participating in recreational activities outside of the home did not appear to be either a risk or protective factor. No overwhelming trend emerged with cursory explorations of this theme. Most respondents indicated that they were busy participating in activities outside of their home most days of the week, more than they were before retirement. Some mentioned that their social networks and having the opportunity to socialize with others has protected them by raising their awareness of scams, whereas an equal number said that they had no influence on financial exploitation.
8. **Consequences**

Victims of financial exploitation interviewed in this study indicated that they suffered consequences far greater than just losing money. Many of them experienced lasting physical and emotional consequences as a result; namely, stress, anxiety, chest pains, depression, and feelings of embarrassment and inadequacy. While fully exploring the consequences was beyond the scope of this study, they were mentioned frequently by the participants and did emerge as a major theme.

9. **Differences among retirement community residents and other elders**

An important next step is to validate the findings from this dissertation with other retirement communities and among elders who do not live in retirement communities. It is likely that there are fundamental differences among elders who chose to relocate after retirement, especially to an active-living retirement community like the one that was the focus of this dissertation, and those who choose to age in place. Elders who relocate to active-living retirement communities likely have more money, better health, and a desire to socialize with others and participate in recreational activities. Another important group of elders who may have distinct characteristics influencing their risk of financial exploitation are those who lived in a retirement community and then chose to move elsewhere. These individuals may be older and not as wealthy or healthy as they were when they chose to move. These factors may influence the risk or likelihood of financial exploitation in ways that were different from the ones identified in this dissertation because the individuals may have experienced other age-graded turning points in the process.

10. **Fear of crime and/or financial exploitation in retirement communities vs. nonretirement communities**

Geographic influences, especially those related to the retirement community, raised a very important issue that was beyond the scope of this study. Residents said that they felt targeted for financial exploitation and that the retirement
community created a false sense of security. The retirement community is advertised as being a safe place and has guard gates located at every entrance. The residents did not indicate that they were fearful of crime or financial exploitation. It is unclear if these feelings are different from people who do not living in retirement communities. An interesting research study may involve exploring whether or not residents are more or less fearful of crime or victimization based upon where they live.

11. Comparison of rates of financial exploitation with other crimes against the elderly

As mentioned repeatedly in this study, there are no good prevalence estimates of financial exploitation. Many experts believe that the rates have been increasing and will continue to increase in the coming years as the number of people over 65 grows exponentially. After a more reliable estimate has been established, it is important to note how financial exploitation rates compare with other crime types against the elderly to determine if they are more or less likely to fall victim to certain types of crime.

12. Influence of low self-control

Low self-control has been identified as a correlate of victimization, in general, and elder financial exploitation, in particular. However, many questions remain regarding how and why low self-control may lead to elder financial exploitation. In addition, it remains unclear if and how the factors of low self-control are different among the elderly and younger generations. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) argued that levels of self-control are established early in life and remain stable over the life course. Therefore, if low-self control were a correlate of victimization, it would be expected that victimization rates would remain stable over the life course as well. Unfortunately, the data used in this study were unable to address issues of low self-control and whether or not it is related to financial exploitation. Two questions that could potentially serve as proxies for behaviors associated with low self-control (frequency of gambling at casinos and playing the lottery) were asked in the focus groups and interviews, however nearly all
respondents indicated that they never or very rarely engaged in the behaviors. Future research should address issues of self-control among the elderly more comprehensively and from a longitudinal perspective to determine if and how victimizations related to low self-control may change over time.
APPENDIX B

IRB APPROVALS

The Florida State University
Office of the Vice President For Research
Human Subjects Committee
Tallahassee, Florida 32306-2742
(850) 644-8673 · FAX (850) 644-4392

APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 1/6/2017

To: Julie Brancale

Address: 1127
Dept.: CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and one member of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per per 45 CFR § 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 1/5/2018 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by
the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The Assurance Number is FWA00000168/IRB number IRB00000446.

Cc: Thomas Blomberg, Advisor
HSC No. 2016.19927
APPROVAL MEMORANDUM

Date: 2/2/2015

To: Thomas Blomberg [tblomberg@fsu.edu]

Address: 204 A Eppes Hall
Dept.: CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

From: Thomas L. Jacobson, Chair

Re: Use of Human Subjects in Research

Exploratory Study of Elder Financial Exploitation
The application that you submitted to this office in regard to the use of human subjects in the proposal referenced above have been reviewed by the Secretary, the Chair, and one member of the Human Subjects Committee. Your project is determined to be Expedited per 45 CFR Â§ 46.110(7) and has been approved by an expedited review process.

The Human Subjects Committee has not evaluated your proposal for scientific merit, except to weigh the risk to the human participants and the aspects of the proposal related to potential risk and benefit. This approval does not replace any departmental or other approvals, which may be required.

If you submitted a proposed consent form with your application, the approved stamped consent form is attached to this approval notice. Only the stamped version of the consent form may be used in recruiting research subjects.

If the project has not been completed by 2/1/2016 you must request a renewal of approval for continuation of the project. As a courtesy, a renewal notice will be sent to you prior to your expiration date; however, it is your responsibility as the Principal Investigator to timely request renewal of your approval from the Committee.

You are advised that any change in protocol for this project must be reviewed and approved by the Committee prior to implementation of the proposed change in the protocol. A protocol change/amendment form is required to be submitted for approval by the Committee. In addition, federal regulations require that the Principal Investigator promptly report, in writing any unanticipated problems or adverse events involving risks to research subjects or others.

By copy of this memorandum, the Chair of your department and/or your major professor is reminded that he/she is responsible for being informed concerning research projects involving
human subjects in the department, and should review protocols as often as needed to insure that
the project is being conducted in compliance with our institution and with DHHS regulations.

This institution has an Assurance on file with the Office for Human Research Protection. The
Assurance Number is
FWA0000168/IRB number IRB0000446.
Cc: Thomas Blomberg, Dean
HSC No. 2014.14460
**1. Project Title and Identification**

1.1 Project Title  
Exploratory Study of Elder Financial Exploitation  
Project is: Funded Research

1.2 Principal Investigator (PI)  
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Name (Last name, First name MI):</th>
<th>Blomberg, Thomas G</th>
<th>Highest Earned Degree:</th>
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<td>University Department:</td>
<td>CRIMINOLOGY AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE</td>
<td>Email:</td>
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<td>The training and education completed in the protection of human subjects or human subjects records:</td>
<td>NIH</td>
<td>Occupational Position:</td>
<td>Faculty</td>
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1.3 Co-Investigators/Research Staff  
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<tr>
<th>Name (Last name, First name MI):</th>
<th>Brancale, Julie N; Research Staff</th>
<th>Highest Earned Degree:</th>
<th>Master's Degree</th>
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<td>NIH</td>
<td>Occupational Position:</td>
<td>Student</td>
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</table>
APPENDIX C

FOCUS GROUP AND INTERVIEW INSTRUMENTS

Seniors vs. Crime Focus Group Topics

Introduction

- Please share your name and briefly discuss why you joined Seniors vs. Crime.

Topic 1: Cases

- Tell us about the type of cases you handle as a volunteer sleuth.
  - Prompts: typical, common, rare, most interesting, difficult, successful

Topic 2: Victim Risk Factors

- In your experience, what factors place seniors at-risk for financial fraud?
  - Prompts: gender, age, death of spouse, declining health, cognition, living situation, marital status, personality, health status, mental health, wealth

Topic 3: Victim Protective Factors

- In your experience, what factors protect seniors from financial fraud?
  - Prompts: support networks, social activities

Topic 4: Reporting Behavior

- In your experience, why do seniors report their financial fraud victimization, what do they hope will happen because of their reporting?
- In your opinion, why do some seniors not report their financial fraud victimization?

Topic 5: Perpetrators

- Who are the perpetrators of financial fraud in the retirement community and what are their characteristics?
  - Prompts: friend, family, door-to-door, contractors, internet, types of fraud

Topic 6: Policy

- In your opinion, what state or community policies could help the 1) reporting, 2) prevention, and 3) pursuit of elder fraud cases?
- Are there aspects of living in the retirement community that contribute to seniors being targeted for financial fraud?
- Are the aspects of living in the retirement community that helps to protect seniors from becoming victims of financial fraud?
Resident Focus Group Topics

Opening Statement:
- Thank you for participating
- In collaboration with Merrill Lynch and SvC we are conducting a study of elder financial fraud
- Elder fraud is a growing and underreported problem
- We have looked at national survey data on elder financial fraud and local incidents that have occurred in your retirement community. Now we are talking with you to gain your perspectives through focus groups and interviews
- We hope to better understand the types of financial fraud as well as the factors that may increase or decrease one’s risk of experiencing fraud
- We are interested in learning about your experiences and the experiences of others that you are aware of in the retirement community
- We hope this study will assist local organizations with preventing and pursuing financial fraud in the future in the retirement community

Consent forms
- By signing this form you are consenting to participate in this research study
- We are recording these sessions for transcription and research purposes
- Your names and contact information will be destroyed at the end of the project
- All of your answers here today will be anonymous
- You are free to leave the focus group and/or study at anytime
- Your participation will help local and national organizations better understand and combat elder financial fraud

Focus Group
- Please complete the “information cards” in front of you when you have time. Please do not put your name on them.
- We have seven topics that we would like to cover and have allotted 10-15 minutes per section
- Everyone state their first name, the length of time you have lived in The retirement community, and your prior city and state of residence

Topic 1: Financial Fraud Incidents
Opening statement: For the next 15 minutes, we would like to discuss financial fraud incidents that have occurred in the retirement community and/or in your prior place of residence.

- Based upon the experiences of yourself or someone you know, tell us about types of financial fraud that frequently occur in the retirement community.
  1. Prompts: contract disputes, financial investments, door-to-door sales, Internet scams, lottery scams, etc.
National surveys and SvC data indicate that home service scams are the most common type of fraud the elder experience. Why do you think home service frauds are most common?
   i. Prompts: mandatory home maintenance, snow birds

We are also interested in how incidents of financial fraud compare between the retirement community and your prior place of residence. Do you believe it is different? If so, how and why?
   i. Prompts: Differences in frequency, type, and/or severity, why the difference?

**Topic 2: Financial Fraud Methods and Perpetrators**

Opening statement: For the next 15 minutes we would like to discuss methods of how financial fraud is perpetrated and the characteristics of financial fraud offenders.

Thinking about incidents of financial fraud in the retirement community involving yourself or someone you know, how did you or they come into contact with the individual/business/institution that committed the fraud?
   - Prompts: Internet, door-to-door sales, home services, banking or investment institutions, telemarketers, etc.

Regarding incidents of financial fraud you are aware of, who are the primary perpetrators of fraud in the retirement community?
   - Prompts: characteristics, strangers, live nearby, relatives, etc.

In your experience or that of others, who are the primary perpetrators of fraud elsewhere?

**Topic 3: Life Course Theory (Risk and Protective Factors)**

Opening Statement: Despite growing incidents of elder financial fraud, the majority of seniors have not experienced financial fraud firsthand. For the next 15 minutes, we would like to discuss several topics that may influence one’s likelihood of experiencing financial fraud.

Based upon the experiences of yourself or someone you know, are there certain life circumstances, or changes that individuals experience during their later years, that may put one at greater risk for financial fraud?
   - Prompts: changes in living arrangements, moving, death or illness of spouse, retirement, etc.

Are there certain activities (daily routines) that people may engage in that increase their risk for experiencing financial fraud? Are there certain activities (daily routines) that people may engage in that decrease their risk for experiencing financial fraud?
   - Prompts: active social life (clubs, organizations), watching TV alone all day, browsing the Internet, loneliness, gambling, etc.

Are there certain aspects of aging such as physical, health, and/or cognitive process that you believe may increase one’s likelihood for financial fraud?
   - Prompts: How? Why? changing cognition, declining health, etc.
Topic 4: Role of financial advisors/planners
Opening statement: For the next 10 minutes, we would like to discuss the role of financial planners and/or advisors in incidents of financial fraud.

- What are your thoughts on the role that financial advisors/planners may play in preventing or perpetuating financial fraud? Are the helpful? How?

- How can financial advisors/planners have a larger and more effective role in the detection and prevention of financial fraud?

Topic 5: Reporting Behavior
Opening statement: The majority of financial fraud cases are not reported to the police. Because of this, we don’t understand how common financial fraud is among the elderly. For the next 10 minutes, we would like to discuss reporting behavior.

- In general, why do you believe some people choose to report and others not?

- To better help understand and combat underreporting, we believe it is important to explore the ways in which information about financial fraud is spread throughout the retirement community. How do you learn about the types of scams or fraud being perpetrated in the retirement community?
  - Prompts: newspaper, social media, neighbor, service provider, etc.

Topic 6: Policy
Opening statement: for the next 10 minutes, we would like to discuss laws, policies, and practices aimed at the detection and prevention of financial fraud against the elderly.

- In your opinion, are state, local, and federal governments doing enough to prevent elder financial fraud?

- What recommendations do you have for local, state, or federal policies that could help the 1) reporting, 2) prevention, and/or 3) pursuit of elder fraud cases?

Topic 7: Conclusion

- Do you have any other thoughts or concerns you would like to share with us about elder financial fraud?

Concluding Statement:

- Thank you for your participation.

- Our findings and policy recommendations will be shared with banking institutions, the local Villages government, and state and federal lawmakers.

- The next phase of our study will consist of more in-depth individual interviews

- We will contact you in the coming weeks about your interest in participating
• If there was anything you did not feel comfortable discussing in a focus group setting but would like to share with us, please do not hesitate to contact one of the researchers on the project.
Victim Interview Questions

1. Introduction
   a. Thank you
   b. Consent form
   c. Interested in only your personal experiences with financial fraud

1. First, I would like to know a little about you.

Retirement community information
   a. How long have you lived in the retirement community?
   b. Are you or have you ever been a seasonal, or part-time, resident in the retirement community?
      i. If yes:
         1. How many months do you spend in the retirement community?
      ii. If used to be:
         1. When did you become a permanent resident?
         2. When you were a seasonal resident, how many months did you spend in the retirement community?
   c. How many close family members do you have that live within two hours of your home in the retirement community?
   d. How often do you receive visits from your family?
   e. Prior to moving to the retirement community, where did you live and for how long?
      i. If less than 5 years:
         1. Where did you live before that and for how long?
   f. Prior to moving to the retirement community, how many close friends lived within two hours of your home?
   g. Prior to moving to the retirement community, how many family members lived within two hours of your home?

Employment and attachment to work
   h. Are you currently working?
      i. If yes:
         1. Do you regularly socialize with some of your coworkers outside of work?
            a. If yes:
               i. How often?
         2. Would you consider some of your coworkers to be close friends?
         3. If needed, would you call your coworkers for advice outside of work?
      i. Have you retired from a career?
         i. If yes:
            1. How many years have you been retired?
            2. What career did you retire from?
            3. Throughout your career, did you regularly socialize with your coworkers outside of work?
4. Throughout your career, would you consider some of your coworkers to be close friends?

5. Throughout your career, if needed, would you call your coworkers for advice outside of work?

6. Since moving to the retirement community, do you keep in contact with any of your previous coworkers?
   a. If yes:
      i. How often?

Social bonds/social network and attachment information

j. Out of your friends and family, who do you go to for advice most frequently?
k. Who in your family do you communicate with most often?
   i. If says spouse:
      1. Who outside of your family do you communicate with most often?
l. How often do you communicate with other members of your extended family?
m. Excluding family, how many close friends do you have in the retirement community?
n. How often do you ask your friends in the retirement community for advice?
o. Do you participate in recreational groups or clubs in the retirement community?
   i. If yes:
      1. Which type?
      2. How frequently?
p. How frequently do you attend church, synagogue, temple, or mosque services?

Personal and routine activity risk and protective factors

q. How many hours do you spend on the Internet, either on your phone or computer each day?
r. What is the primary reason you use the Internet?
   i. Prompts: just use for email, frequently shop online, news, weather, use social media regularly
s. Do you gamble at casinos?
   i. If yes:
      1. How often?
t. How often do you play the lottery?
u. Do you have a financial planner or advisor?
   i. If yes:
      1. How often do you communicate with them?
      2. What do you consult them about?
   ii. If no:
      1. Why?
v. Do you hear about fraudulent attempts that occur in the retirement community?
   i. Where? From whom?
   ii. How often?
w. Do you routinely research companies prior to signing contracts for services such as asking neighbors, reading online customer reviews, looking at the BBB?
x. Do you routinely secure multiple bids or estimates for services before signing contracts?
y. Do you shred documents prior to throwing them away?
   i. If yes:
      1. What kind of documents?
z. Do you have virus protection on your computer?
   i. If yes:
      1. Do you perform virus scans?

aa. How often do you check your credit report?
bb. Do you have any locks, alerts, blocks, or holds on your credit?
cc. Who in your home handles the majority of the finances?

\textit{Fraud incident}

2. Now I would like to know a little bit about your experiences with financial fraud in the retirement community.
   a. Have you experienced financial fraud while living in the retirement community?
      i. If no:
         1. Go to non-victim questions on page 7 of non-victim interview
      ii. If yes:
         1. Will you please briefly tell me what happened?
            a. \textit{Can interject with: What type of fraud was it?}
         2. Overall, how many times have you been defrauded while living in the retirement community?
         3. We’d like to ask you some questions about the most difficult or important incident.
            a. Why would you characterize it as the most difficult or important?
            b. In what year did the incident occur?
            c. How much money did you lose?

3. Was the perpetrator a stranger you had never met, a stranger you met face-to-face, someone you knew previously, or a relative?

*  
\textit{If victim sought out services go to 4 (a)}
\textit{If perpetrator contacted victim first go to 4(b)}
\textit{If stranger go to 4(c)}

4. Did you initiate the contact with the perpetrator or did they contact you first?
   a. If victim contact first:
      i. Did you know the perpetrator to the incident?
         1. Was the perpetrator
      ii. How did you contact the perpetrator?
         1. \textit{Prompts: phone, mail, attended seminar, internet, email}
      iii. How did you learn of/discover the perpetrator?
         1. \textit{Prompts: Recommendation, seminar, ad}
iv. What about this interaction persuaded you to invest/pay for services?
   1. Prompt: What was it about the service that was appealing to you?

v. What was it about the person who defrauded that made you trust them?

vi. How did you detect the fraud?

vii. Approximately how long (years, months, weeks, days) after the incident did you detect the fraud?

b. If perpetrator contact first:
   i. How?
      1. Prompts: door-to-door, mail, internet, email
   ii. What about this interaction persuaded you to invest/pay for services/etc.?
      1. Prompt: What was it about the service that was appealing to you?
   iii. What was it about the person who defrauded that made you trust them?
   iv. How did you detect the fraud?
   v. Approximately how long (years, months, weeks, days) after the incident did you detect the fraud?

c. If no interaction with perpetrator:
   i. How do you believe the perpetrator got your information?
      1. Prompts: internet, doctor’s office, gas station
   ii. How did you detect the fraud?
   iii. Approximately how long (years, months, weeks, days) after the incident did you detect the fraud?

5. Who did you report the incident to?
   i. Prompts: Police, lawyer, SVC, Better Business Bureau, Financial planner?

b. If yes report:
   i. Why did you decide to report the incident?
   ii. On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being poor and 5 being excellent, how satisfied were you with the result?
   iii. What was the final outcome?
   iv. How long was it between when you realized that you were defrauded and when you reported the fraud?

c. If did not report:
   i. Why not?

6. Did you tell your family or friends about the incident?
   a. If yes:
      i. Did they encourage you to report the incident to the police or some other agency?
      ii. How did your family react to this incident?
         1. If favorably:
            a. Did their support help soften the impact of this incident?
            b. How has your relationship with family members changed since the incident?
         2. If unfavorably:
            a. Did their reaction make the incident more difficult?
b. How has your family relationship changed since the incident?

b. If no:
   i. Why?

Life prior to the incident
7. I would like to ask you some questions about your life before the incident.
   a. Before the time of the incident, how many years had you lived in the retirement community?
   b. On a scale from 1 to 5, with one being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate your overall physical health in the year prior to the incident?
   c. On a scale from 1 to 5, with one being low and 5 being high, how would you rate your overall level of stress and anxiety in the year prior to the incident?
   d. At the time of the incident, what was your marital status?
      i. If divorced, or widowed:
         1. How long prior to the incident?
         2. Did that person make the majority of financial decisions?
            a. What about home and automotive repairs?
      ii. If single:
          1. How long prior to the incident were you single?
      iii. If married:
          1. How long prior to the incident had you been married?
   e. Were you living alone?
      i. If yes:
         1. For how long had you been living alone?
      ii. If no:
         1. Who were you living with?
         2. How long had you been living with the person/people?
   f. Were you actively involved in the community/with friends?
      i. Prompts: Did you regularly engage in community activities?
   g. Prior to the incident, who did you discuss financial decisions with?
   h. Did you have a financial planner?
      i. If yes:
         1. Were they helpful, harmful, or irrelevant to your experience?
      i. Had you ever experienced an incident of financial fraud?
         i. If yes:
            1. Did it occur in The retirement community?
            2. What kind?
            3. Who was the perpetrator?

Life after the incident
8. I am also interested in your life since the incident.
   a. What was your emotional response immediately after learning you had been defrauded?
      i. Prompts: angry, scared, embarrassed
   b. What is your emotional response to the incident today?
c. Have you felt any emotional distress as a result of the incident?
d. On a scale from 1 to 5, with one being poor and 5 being excellent, how would you rate your overall physical health since the incident?
e. On a scale from 1 to 5, with one being low and 5 being high, how would you rate your overall level of stress and anxiety since the incident?
f. Has your level of trust with strangers, strangers you meet face-to-face, acquaintances, and family changed since the incident?
   i. *Make question specific to their response on question 3*
   ii. If yes:
       1. How?
       2. Are you less trusting of people?
g. Has the incident changed the way you socialize with strangers, family, acquaintances?
   i. *Make question specific to response on question 3 and mechanism of fraud*
   ii. If yes:
       1. How?
h. Has the incident changed how you handle your finances?
   i. If yes:
       1. How?
i. Have you taken any actions to ensure that you don’t get defrauded in the future?
   i. If yes:
       1. What actions?
          a. *Prompts: research companies, shred documents, hired a financial planner, virus protection on computer, credit locks*

Basic demographic information and concluding questions
9. Now we would like to ask you a few final questions about yourself.
   a. To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you most identify with?
   b. In what year were you born?
      a. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
      b. What is your current marital status?
         i. If married:
            1. How long have you been married?
            2. Had you been married before?
               a. If yes:
                  i. How long?
                  ii. When did that marriage end?
         ii. If divorced or widowed:
            1. When did that occur?
         iii. If single:
            1. Have you been married before?
            2. When did that marriage end?
            3. How did that marriage end?
   c. Do you have any children?
i. If yes:
   1. How many?
   2. Do they live within two hours of your home in the retirement community?

d. What do you recommend as a way to prevent and/or reduce financial fraud in The retirement community?

e. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your thoughts on financial fraud in the retirement community?
Non-Victim Interview Questions

1. Introduction
   a. Thank you
   b. Consent form
   c. Interested in only your personal experiences with financial fraud

2. First, I would like to know a little about you.

   The retirement community information
   a. How long have you lived in the retirement community?
   b. Are you or have you ever been a seasonal, or part-time, resident in the retirement community?
      i. If yes:
         1. How many months do you spend in the retirement community?
      ii. If used to be:
         1. When did you become a permanent resident?
         2. When you were a seasonal resident, how many months did you spend in the retirement community?
   c. How many close family members do you have that live within two hours of your home in the retirement community?
   d. How often do you receive visits from your family?
   e. Prior to moving to the retirement community, where did you live and for how long?
      i. If less than 5 years:
         1. Where did you live before that and for how long?
   f. Prior to moving to the retirement community, how many close friends lived within two hours of your home?
   g. Prior to moving to the retirement community, how many family members lived within two hours of your home?

   Employment and attachment to work
   h. Are you currently working?
      i. If yes:
         1. Do you regularly socialize with some of your coworkers outside of work?
            a. If yes:
               i. How often?
         2. Would you consider some of your coworkers to be close friends?
         3. If needed, would you call your coworkers for advice outside of work?
   i. Have you retired from a career?
      i. If yes:
         1. How many years have you been retired?
         2. What career did you retire from?
3. Throughout your career, did you regularly socialize with your coworkers outside of work?
4. Throughout your career, would you consider some of your coworkers to be close friends?
5. Throughout your career, if needed, would you call your coworkers for advice outside of work?
6. Since moving to the retirement community, do you keep in contact with any of your previous coworkers?
   a. If yes:
      i. How often?

Social bonds/social network and attachment information
j. Out of your friends and family, who do you go to for advice most frequently?
k. Who in your family do you communicate with most often?
   i. If says spouse:
      1. Who outside of your family do you communicate with most often?
l. How often do you communicate with other members of your extended family?
m. Excluding family, how many close friends do you have in the retirement community?

n. How often do you ask your friends in the retirement community for advice?
o. Do you participate in recreational groups or clubs in the retirement community?
   i. If yes:
      1. Which type?
      2. How frequently?
p. How frequently do you attend church, synagogue, temple, or mosque services?

Personal and routine activity risk and protective factors
q. How many hours do you spend on the Internet, either on your phone or computer each day?
r. What is the primary reason you use the Internet?
   i. Prompts: just use for email, frequently shop online, news, weather, use social media regularly
s. Do you gamble at casinos?
   i. If yes:
      1. How often?
t. How often do you play the lottery?
u. Do you have a financial planner or advisor?
   i. If yes:
      1. How often do you communicate with them?
      2. What do you consult them about?
   ii. If no:
      1. Why?
v. Do you hear about fraudulent attempts that occur in the retirement community?
   i. Where? From whom?
   ii. How often?
w. Do you routinely research companies prior to signing contracts for services such as asking neighbors, reading online customer reviews, looking at the BBB?
x. Do you routinely secure multiple bids or estimates for services before signing contracts?
y. Do you shred documents prior to throwing them away?
   i. If yes:
      1. What kind of documents?

z. Do you have virus protection on your computer?
   i. If yes:
      1. Do you perform virus scans?

aa. How often do you check your credit report?
bb. Do you have any locks, alerts, blocks, or holds on your credit?
c. Who in your home handles the majority of the finances?

Fraud incident
3. Now I would like to know a little bit about your experiences with financial fraud in the retirement community.
   a. Have you experienced financial fraud while living in the retirement community?
      i. If no:
         1. Continue to question 3
      ii. If yes:
         1. Go to Victim Interview Questions

4. Have you been targeted for financial fraud?
   a. If no:
      i. *Probe a bit about types of fraud just in case they may not realize we are looking for mail, internet, phone, etc.*
      ii. If still no after probe, go to question 4.
   b. If yes:
      i. In what ways have you been targeted for financial fraud since moving to the retirement community?
      ii. For each of the ways identified, how often have you been targeted? Daily, weekly, monthly, annually?
      iii. For each of the ways you have been targeted, why do you believe you have been withstand the attempts?
      iv. How soon after moving to the retirement community did the targets begin?
      v. Please describe the one target attempt that was most convincing or intriguing.
         1. What is your relationship with this person?
            a. *Prompts: Family member, friend, neighbor, caregiver, service provider, stranger*
         2. In your initial encounter, how did that person come into contact with you?
            a. If respondent contact first:
               i. How did you contact the perpetrator?
1. Prompts: phone, mail, attended seminar, internet, email
   ii. How did you learn of/discover the perpetrator?
      1. Prompts: Recommendation, seminar, ad
   iii. What about this interaction dissuaded from investing/paying for services?
   iv. Was there anything about the service that was tempting or appealing to you?
   v. How did you realize it was a fraud?

b. If perpetrator contact first:
   i. How?
      1. Prompts: door-to-door, mail, internet, email
   ii. What about this interaction dissuaded you from investing/paying for services/etc.?
   iii. Was there anything about the service that was tempting or appealing to you?
   iv. How did you realize it was a fraud?

c. If no interaction with perpetrator (stranger):
   i. How do you believe the perpetrator got your information?
      1. Prompts: internet, doctor’s office, gas station
   ii. What about this interaction dissuaded you from investing/paying for services/etc.?
   iii. Was there anything about the service that was tempting or appealing to you?
   iv. How did you realize it was a fraud?

d. Did you report the incident?
   i. If yes:
      1. To whom?
      2. How long was it after the attempt that you reported the fraud?
      3. What was your primary motivation in reporting the incident?
      4. If you reported the incident to your financial planner what was their reaction? Did they help you?
   ii. If no:
      1. Why not?

5. Now I would like to ask you some questions about why you think that you have not experienced financial fraud.
a. If you have a financial planner/advisor do you think that they help prevent you from being victimized?
b. Do you believe that your relationship with family, friends, and/or neighbors has protected you from experiencing financial fraud?
   a. If yes:
      i. Which relationship(s) have had the most impact?
      ii. Why? In what ways?
   b. In your opinion, what do you feel has most protected you from experiencing financial fraud?

Basic demographic information and concluding questions
6. Now we would like to ask you a few final questions about yourself.
   a. To which racial or ethnic group(s) do you most identify with?
   b. In what year were you born?
   a. What is the highest level of education you have completed?
   b. What is your current marital status?
      i. If married:
         1. How long have you been married?
         2. Had you been married before?
            a. If yes:
               i. How long?
               ii. When did that marriage end?
      ii. If divorced or widowed:
         1. When did that occur?
      iii. If single:
         1. Have you been married before?
         2. When did that marriage end?
         3. How did that marriage end?
   c. Do you have any children?
      i. If yes:
         1. How many?
         2. Do they live within two hours of your home in the retirement community?
   d. What do you recommend as a way to prevent and/or reduce financial fraud in the retirement community?
   e. Is there anything else you would like to share regarding your thoughts on financial fraud in the retirement community?
REFERENCES


BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Julie Brancale received her Bachelor of Science Degree in Criminology and Criminal Justice and her Master of Science Degree in Criminology from the Florida State University. In the summer of 2017, Julie received her PhD in Criminology, also from the Florida State University. While in graduate school, she served as Managing Editor for *Criminology & Public Policy*, worked as a research assistant on various funded projects, and taught undergraduate courses in Corrections and Criminal Justice. Julie’s research interests involve two interrelated paradigms, theoretical testing and advancement and the application of research evidence to public policy. She is particularly interested in exploring various age-graded events and circumstances that interact to influence an individual’s risk for criminal behavior and victimization.