

Crimes against older people up

Over-60s are the target of robberies, snatch thefts and various scams

■ By TEH JOO LIN

MADAM S. L. Yee, 64, had just picked up her five-year-old granddaughter from pre-school and was waiting for the lift at the foot of her block in Bukit Merah with the child.

A man wearing a cap and sunglasses came up and shoved her to the ground. Before she could get up, he snatched her \$1,000 gold necklace and bolted.

Just like that last month, she joined the ranks of elderly victims of crime.

The rising numbers of crimes with such victims has already stuck out in the January-to-June crime statistics the police released yesterday: Robberies and snatch thefts targeting those aged 60 and up jumped 25 per cent during that period to hit 145 cases. The figure for the first half of last year was 116.

Overall, however, crimes registered a marginal 1 per cent increase, although murders doubled in number to 12.

Crimes against older people, such as

hold-ups in lifts, typically happen as the elderly – mainly women – go about their daily routine in housing estates. Many robberies take place in broad daylight.

The aged also fall prey to various scams, with 70 cheated of their money, jewellery and mobile phones, eight more than in the first half of last year.

One ruse 11 elderly people fell for was that of crooks pretending to be electricians conducting flat-to-flat inspections. Once in the home, the imposter distracts his victim by asking him to hold on to wires. Out of sight, he then scoops up valuables from around the flat.

All those arrested for preying on the elderly were younger than their victims.

For some, the cost of an attack can far exceed the value of the possessions lost. Last month, a 71-year-old woman lost her life after a snatch theft. Pushed to the ground, she hit her head on a curb, lapsed into a coma and died three weeks later.

Her daughter, Madam Veronica Tay, 46, has called for more to be done to protect the elderly.

The police and National Crime Prevention Council have been running dialogues in the four main languages and Chinese dialects to tell senior citizens how to stay safe. Community Development Councils have also held crime-prevention workshops for the elderly.

Education is a good thing, said Dr Teo Ho Pin, who chairs the Government Parliamentary Committee on Law and Home Affairs, but he also called for better security features such as closed-circuit TVs to be installed in housing estates.

Some lawyers suggested stiffer punishment for those who target the elderly, but others felt the penalties for robbery and theft are already heavy.

Interviews with about 30 senior citizens indicated that many knew what precautions to take, but most did not imagine they might be pounced on by crooks.

A confident Mr Wong Fong Toy, 81, declared: "I know *taiji*, so they should be afraid of me instead!"

But since Madam Lee Teck Kim, 74, was held up in a lift in Toa Payoh, she always checks that no one follows her into a lift. She also heeds her family's advice to leave the lift if others rush in.

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