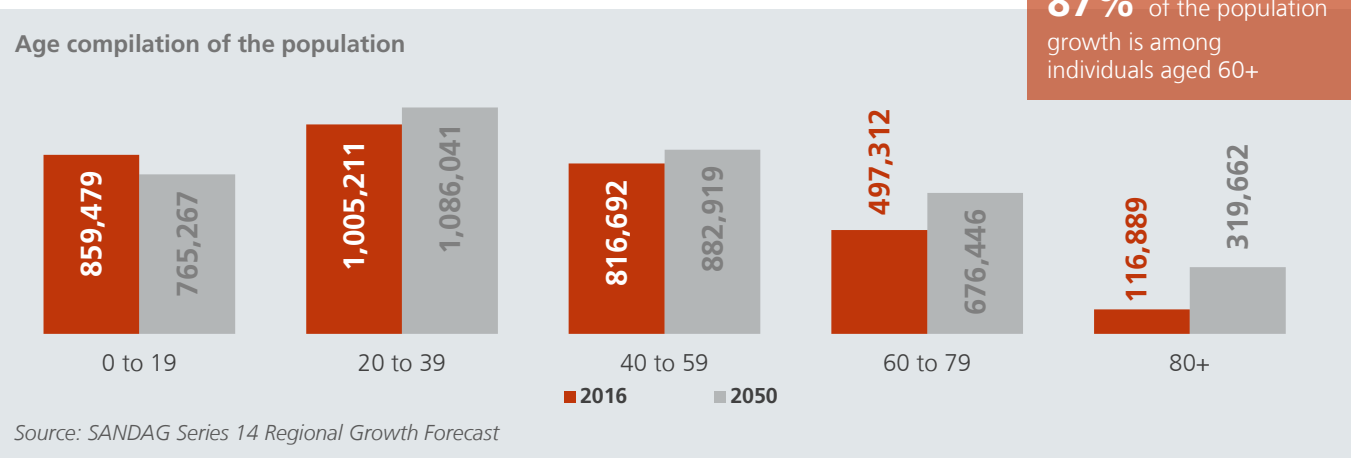




Crimes Against Elders: Raising Awareness of those Most Vulnerable in Time of COVID

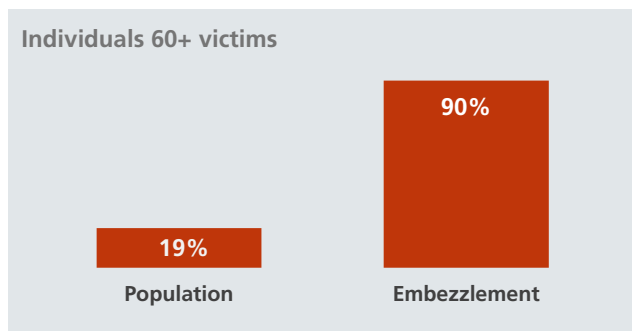
With individuals 60 years and older comprising the fastest growing segment of the population, it is imperative to be aware of the implications associated with this unprecedented growth. While the San Diego region's population under 60 years old is expected to grow 4% between 2016 and 2050, the population of those 60 and over is expected to grow 67%. Furthermore, 87% of the population growth in the region between 2016 and 2015 is estimated to be among those individuals age 60 and over. With National Crime Victims' Right Week recently recognized locally and nationally, it is worth pausing to examine how this dramatic increase of elders in the population is impacted by crime.

Highlight 1



Highlight 2

While this generation is generally living longer and healthier lives, age-related correlates such as decreased cognitive abilities that impair decision making, isolation and/or dependency on others, a lucrative 'nest egg', inexperience with technologically, and a generation raised to be polite and trusting make them easily misled and victimized.^{1 2 3} Analyses of San Diego County regional property crime incidents show that while individuals 60 years and over represented 19% of the population, they comprised 90% of embezzlement victims in 2019. These figures are more disturbing knowing that only 34% of property crimes are even reported to police,⁴ a proportion estimated to be smaller for victims over 60 for a variety of reasons, including shame or fear of retaliation when the perpetrator is a family member, unaware of being a victim of financial theft, fear of being seen as unable to live independently, and lack of knowledge of how to report it:⁵



Common reasons elders do not report being a victim



¹ Elder Justice Policy Brief. (May 2015). Retrieved from <https://archive.whitehouseconferenceonaging.gov/home/blog/policy/post/elder-justice-policy-brief.html>

² Bobitt, J., Carter, J., & Kuhne, J. (2018). Advancing National Policy on Elder Abuse, *Public Policy & Aging Report*, Volume 28, Issue 3, 2018, Pages 85–89, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ppar/pry023>

³ Center for Law Brain and Behavior. (April 2020). *Protecting Older Adults from Financial Scams during COVID-19*. Retrieved at <http://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/author/jpatrick/>

⁴ Morgan, R. & Oudekerk, B. (2018). *Criminal Victimization, 2018*. Bureau of Justice Statistics. Retrieved at bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/cv18.pdf

⁵ Federal Bureau of Investigation. *Scam and Safety*. Retrieved on April 30, 2010, at [fbi.gov/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/seniors](https://www.fbi.gov/scams-and-safety/common-scams-and-crimes/seniors)



Highlight 3

Unfortunately, these age-related vulnerabilities have contributed to elders becoming an easy target for predators preying on the fears and unknowns of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁶ As noted by the FBI in their recent public service announcements, recent examples include a false website soliciting donations for the Red Cross, scammers claiming to sell COVID test supplies, or posing as medical experts demanding money to treat a family or friend with COVID.⁷

COVID-19 scams against elders



False investment opportunities to capitalize on potential financial windfalls (e.g., the next cure or vaccine)



Fake charities that use the tragedy to draw on the desire to help



Fake claims of a cure, vaccination, or medicine



Fraudulent calls or websites posing as government agencies to gather personal information to receive government supplements

Highlight 4

Awareness of the growth in this subpopulation and their raised risk of victimization has been on the radar of local public health and safety leaders. In San Diego County, the District Attorney and the Health and Human Services Agency have partnered on their **Don't Get Hooked** campaign to raise the awareness of common scams and provide resources to protect this vulnerable population. To learn more of the available resources for elders who may have been a victim of a crime or to protect yourself or a loved one visit: San Diego County District Attorney Office **Don't Get Hooked** website and/or call Adult Protective Services 1-800 510-2020.



⁶ Center for Law Brain and Behavior. (April 2020). *Protecting Older Adults from Financial Scams during COVID-19*. Retrieved at <http://clbb.mgh.harvard.edu/author/jpatrick/>

⁷ Federal Bureau of Investigation. *FBI Urges Vigilance During COVID-19 Pandemic*. Retrieved at [fbi.gov/coronavirus](https://www.fbi.gov/coronavirus)