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Criminals find senior citizens easy targets

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HOW FAR SAFE?: Providing dedicated helplines for senior citizens and raising awareness will go a long way in ensuring the safety of the elderly.

Last month, a 75-year-old woman was approached at her Abhirampuram residence by a “decent-looking man.” He invited her to bless a group of pilgrims bound for Tirupati and promised that she will receive a silk sari at the function. He also urged her to remove her jewellery to appear from a modest background. Under the pretext of buying fruits and flowers for the function, he escaped with her jewels.

“The old woman could not remember his features or his bike's registration number,” says a police official at the Abhirampuram station. To create awareness amongst residents and warn people of such incidents, the police printed 1,000 flyers for distribution in the neighbourhood.

Increasingly, the city's petty criminals are finding innovative ways to con the elderly. Some pose as nurses requesting women to remove their jewellery before they go in for a scan at a hospital. Others approach old women and enquire if they are aware of the old age pensioner's scheme where the aged or destitute receive money for support. When the innocent victims say they are ignorant, the fraudsters volunteer to help them apply for the scheme. They take them to a photo studio and convince them to remove their jewellery for taking photographs. Often the fraudsters disappear with the jewellery.

When Visalam Krishnamoorthy (68) left her house to buy groceries on the evening of July 13, she felt safe enough to venture out in her neighbourhood. After being coned by a chain snatcher in a dark alley near Ayodhya Mandapam, who claimed to protect her from another man, who turned out to be his accomplice, she says her “confidence has been completely shattered.”

Miscreants also form teams to deceive people. At 6.45 p.m. on July 13, a 69-year-old resident of West Mambalam was coned by two men - one warning her against the other who he claimed was a chain-snatcher. “I believe he tricked me off all my jewellery by spraying something on my face,” she says. “I was not in my sense because I would have never let this happen to me otherwise,” she adds.

Most victims do not identify the thief when the police ask them to. The fear that the chain snatchers regularly circuit the locality and can attack them in future, restrain them from giving too many details about their identity, say victims. Deputy Commissioner Adyar K.A.

Senthilvelan says, “Generally, women above the age of 45 are targeted by chain snatchers. Young women tend to retaliate.”

HelpAge India counsellor R.Muthukrishnan says that old people read about incidents in the newspapers and call in on the Senior Citizens Helpline ‘1253’ to ask if they can use this facility in case of emergencies. “We encourage them to use this helpline as we work closely with the police. We transfer calls immediately so the police can send out a patrol,” he says.

Commissioner of Police J.K.Tripathy says dialling 100 should be the first port of call for any kind of emergency. “Noting the vehicle number is very important,” he says.