
HOMICIDES IN AUSTRALIA 1991-92

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Homicides in Australia 1989-90
Heather Strang

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The National Homicide Monitoring Program, which produces the Homicides in Australia series, was established following a recommendation by the National Committee on Violence (NCV) in its final report, *Violence: Directions for Australia* (1990, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra). The NCV was in existence from October 1988 to December 1989, and earlier monographs produced were:

Violence in Australia

Victims of Violence
P.N. Grabosky

Society's Reponse to the Violent Offender
P.N. Grabosky & W.E. Lucas

HOMICIDES IN AUSTRALIA 1991–92

Heather Strang



Australian Institute of Criminology

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Heather Strang
September 1993

The 1991-92 Data in Brief

Homicide in Australia in 1991-92 was characterised by the following salient features

- The homicide rate declined slightly to 1.9 per 100,000 population: the number of victims fell from 351 in 1990-91 to 330 in 1991-92.
- The proportion of male victims to female victims remained at about 3:2. The proportion of male offenders to female offenders remained at about 9:1.
- Aboriginal people continued to be vastly over-represented both as victims and offenders. For victims the rate was nine times and for offenders 13 times that for Australia as a whole.
- Firearms, sharp instruments and assaults again accounted for almost 90 per cent of all homicides. Twenty-two per cent of victims were killed by firearms, a slight decline on last year; there was also a slight decline in the proportion of victims killed by sharp instruments; these declines were matched by a slight increase in the proportion of victims killed in assaults.
- For about a third of homicides *where the relationship was recorded*, the relationship was spousal or between other family members: nearly two-thirds of these family homicides were between spouses.
- A further one-third of homicides, *where the relationship was recorded*, occurred between friends and long-term acquaintances, and most of these were young males and many of the incidents resulted from apparently trivial and/or drunken altercations.

Introduction

This report is the third in the annual series of the Australian Institute of Criminology's National Homicide Monitoring Program. It describes and analyses the characteristics of all Australian homicide incidents which occurred between July 1991 and June 1992, and the victims and offenders involved in them. Its aim is to provide reliable data on the nature of homicide and to detect patterns and trends in its character over time.

It is important to emphasise, as the earlier reports in this series have done, that homicide in Australia remains a relatively rare phenomenon, both by international standards and by Australia's own historical standards: the homicide rate has not changed significantly over the past twenty years (see Figure 1), and 1991-92 showed a slight decline on the previous year. It certainly remains rare relative to other forms of violent death, such as suicide and motor vehicle accidents (see Figure 2). Its rarity means that the data are subject to the random fluctuations associated with infrequent events: this is especially the case when we attempt to draw conclusions concerning the character of homicide in Australian jurisdictions with small populations.

Figure 1: Number of Homicides per 100,000 Population, Australia 1966-1991

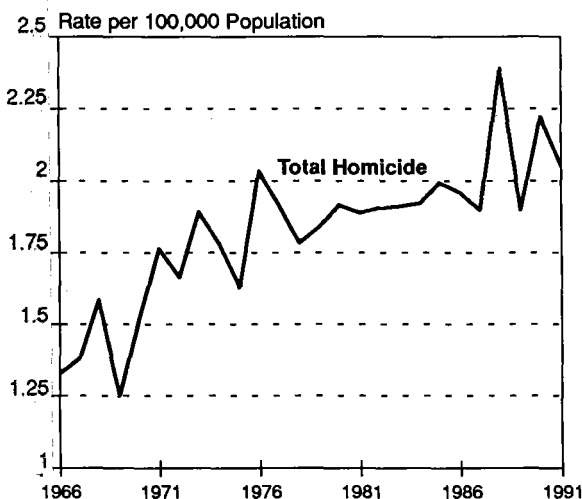
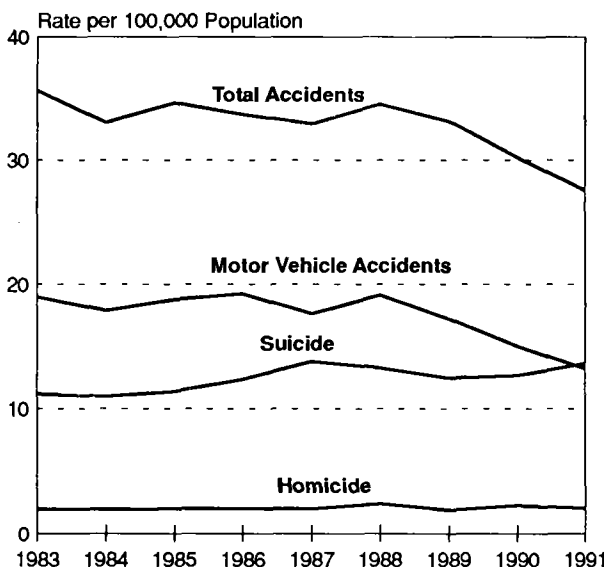


Figure 2: Death Statistics, Rate per 100,000 Population, Australia 1983-1991



Source for Figures 1 and 2: *Source Book of Australian Criminal & Social Statistics 1804-1988*, Mukherjee, S.K. et al. 1989, updates Dagger, D. 1992, Australian Institute of Criminology, Canberra.

In spite of these caveats, because this is the third year of data collection we are now able to begin to assert more confidently some statements about the nature of Australian homicide in matters such as weapon use, time and place of incidents and the most frequent precipitating factors. We are also able to identify more reliably the socio-demographic features of those most at risk both of victimisation and offending and to draw some conclusions about the relationships that exist between victims and offenders.

With the increasing reliability of the data over time, the value of the National Homicide Monitoring Program increases as an instrument to assist in the formulation of public policy in areas relating to fatal violence. By understanding more precisely who are at risk of this extreme form of violence and under what circumstances it is most likely to occur, appropriate intervention strategies become more feasible to frame in the realm of homicide prevention and control.

Defining Homicide

As in previous years, the definition of homicide for the purposes of this report relates to the operational definition used by police throughout Australia. Included here are the following kinds of incidents:

- all cases, excluding driving-related offences, resulting in a person or persons being charged with murder or manslaughter (including the charge of 'dangerous act causing death' which applies in the Northern Territory);
- all murder-suicides classed as murder by the police;
- all other deaths classed by the police as homicides, even though no suspect has been apprehended.

It is important to note the kinds of incidents which are not included: attempted murder is excluded, as are violent deaths such as industrial accidents involving criminal negligence (unless a charge of manslaughter is laid). Lawful homicide, including incidents involving police in the course of their duties, is also excluded.

The Data

Source. The basic data source for this report is police records, supplemented by information supplied by individual investigating police officers. Once again we owe a debt of thanks to police in each jurisdiction throughout Australia who have assisted in every way with the often difficult process of compiling as much information as possible about each incident.

Information has been collected on each homicide reported to police or coming to police attention in the period July 1991 to June 1992, and each victim and offender (where known) involved in these incidents. The intention is to identify as precisely as possible the characteristics of individuals which place them at particular risk of homicide victimisation and of offending, and the circumstances which enhance the likelihood of a homicide occurring.

Note on 'racial appearance'. Again this year a note is necessary regarding information on the 'racial appearance' of victims and offenders. This term is an inadequate one in many ways and also has the capacity for giving offence to some. It is frequently no more than a subjective assessment by police, and errors and inconsistencies in this sensitive area are likely to occur. Also, we are aware that there are special considerations surrounding Aboriginality which make the concept of 'racial appearance' inappropriate. Nevertheless, we believe that important information is captured here which adds substantively to the picture of Australian homicide.

In addition, it should be noted that wherever reference is made to Aboriginal people, Torres Strait Islanders are also included: police records do not distinguish between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders reliably enough for separate categories to be employed.

Confidentiality considerations. The Australian Institute of Criminology, like all Commonwealth instrumentalities, is bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988*, which places restrictions on the disclosure of personal information which could result in the identification of individuals. In this context, it should be noted that in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) two incidents occurred in 1991-92, involving two victims and two offenders. Because of the possibility of identifying aspects of these individuals if ACT data were shown separately, in

tables with jurisdictional breakdowns these cases have been included in New South Wales data (but comments in the text concerning New South Wales data relate to New South Wales alone).

The data set. In this data set there are 312 incidents, involving 330 victims and 309 offenders (as in previous years, the term 'offender' is used to include not only those convicted but also those suspected of or charged with the offence). For 42 incidents no suspects had been identified at the time of data collection, although some may well have been identified subsequently. Again this year 90 per cent of homicides became known to the police within 24 hours of the incident.

However, it must be recognised that this data set is inevitably incomplete, as homicides undoubtedly take place from time to time which are not discovered. There may be incidents in which the actual cause of death escapes detection; in addition, an unknown number of persons reported missing each year may have been the victims of foul play.

In general terms, however, it is gratifying to note that the overall quality of the data for this year continues to improve: the number of 'unknowns' recorded for each variable continues to drop, and as police have developed an understanding of what data are being sought, they have assisted enormously in resolving various data collection problems.

Caveats on the data. Because the National Homicide Monitoring Program relies exclusively upon police records and other police information in compiling these annual reports, there are some shortcomings in the data. These problems arise because of the unavoidable difficulties in adapting to this Program records designed for the requirements of the criminal justice process. Understandably, the emphasis in police records is upon aspects of the incident of greater relevance to the prosecution process than to a sociological examination of events. Thus records may note numerous physical characteristics of those involved in the incident, but not record the nature of the relationship between victim and offender—or even whether they knew one another at all. However, as an understanding of what happened in any given incident depends so much on identifying what the relationship was between participants, we have placed great emphasis on following up this information with investigating police officers, who frequently know a great deal about the circumstances of

the participants but who do not necessarily have an opportunity or a need to record such information.

In this context it should also be acknowledged that there are inevitable limitations resulting from the use of police data as the only source of information, as they represent only one perspective on events. A clearer picture of what transpired in the incident emerges after the exhaustion of all avenues of the criminal justice process, including the coronial enquiry, the committal, the trial itself and any subsequent appeals. This process may take two years or more to be completed, however, and concerns about timeliness of information have had to be weighed against completeness in reaching a decision to limit sources to police data only.

There are, in addition, special problems relating to information about offenders. As noted above, the term 'offender' in this report refers both to convicted persons and to those only suspected or charged with the offence. Even if the prosecution process proceeds, the suspect may be no-billed, discharged at committal, found not guilty or convicted of a lesser charge. However, for the purposes of our analysis it is not guilt before the law which is of primary interest: an assumption is made that those identified by the police as the offender were, in the great majority of cases, actually involved in the incident (and a cursory review of trial outcomes has supported this assumption), and we believe a useful distinction can be made between legal guilt and the 'social reality' of homicide offending.

Finally, the Australian Institute of Criminology would like to acknowledge the generous degree of cooperation offered by police in all jurisdictions in the data collection process. Although every effort is made to minimise the impact of the process on police, the National Homicide Monitoring Program could not continue without the continuing assistance of all police services, and especially the individual officers who have helped in the pursuit of elusive data.

The Incident

Because we know that homicides do not occur randomly, there are a number of aspects of each incident which require examination in order to ascertain whether certain places, times and circumstances are associated with a greater likelihood of fatal incidents occurring.

Jurisdiction. There were 312 homicide incidents in total this year. The rate of victimisation across Australia declined slightly to 1.9 per 100,000 of the population. The total number of victims was 330, the same number as in the year 1989-90 (see Table 1). There was a decline of 21 (6 per cent) against 1990-91: most of this decline occurred in New South Wales (16 fewer victims) and Victoria (18 fewer victims).

The Northern Territory remains the jurisdiction with by far the highest rate of homicide, in spite of a steep decline in the numbers of victims against 1990-91 (from 27 to 17). This represents a rate of 10.9 per 100,000 against last year's 17.3: most of this decline was for female victims, the number of whom halved from 12 victims last year to six this year.

Increases in numbers of victims occurred in Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and Tasmania but it is not yet possible to say whether these increases represent a significant trend.

The rate of offending remained similar to last year, with a decline commensurate with the decline in the number of victims. There were 42 incidents for which no offender had been identified at the time of data collection: almost half of these were in New South Wales. Nearly 90 per cent of identified offenders were male, and this proportion was stable across nearly all jurisdictions (see Table 2).

Again, the vast majority of incidents (96 per cent) involved only one victim. In ten incidents there were 2 victims, in one there were 3 and in one there were 7. Most of these multiple incidents occurred in New South Wales and Victoria. Likewise, most incidents (87 per cent) were known to have involved only one offender. However, in 29 incidents there were 2 offenders, in five there were 3 and in one there were 4 offenders.

Table 1: Homicide: Sex of Victim by Jurisdiction - Number and Rate per 100,000 Population, Australia 1991-92

Sex of Victim	Jurisdiction									
	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST	%
	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate
Male	72 (2.5)	33 (1.6)	48 (3.5)	13 (1.7)	15 (2.1)	7 (3.2)	11(13.4)	2 (1.5)	201 (2.4)	61%
Female	43 (1.5)	26 (1.1)	22 (1.5)	17 (2.1)	13 (1.8)	2 (0.9)	6 (8.1)	0 (0.0)	129 (1.5)	39%
Total Victims	115 (2.0) 35%	59 (1.3) 18%	70 (2.4) 21%	30 (1.8) 9%	28 (2.0) 8%	9 (2.0) 3%	17(10.9) 5%	2 (0.7) 1%	330 (1.9) 100%	100%

Table 2: Homicide: Sex of Offender by Jurisdiction - Number and Rate per 100,000 Population, Australia 1991-92

Sex of Offender	Jurisdiction									
	NSW	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	NT	ACT	AUST*	%
	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate	No. Rate
Male	92 (3.2)	45 (2.1)	67 (4.7)	23 (2.9)	19 (2.7)	12 (5.3)	15(18.3)	2 (1.4)	275 (3.3)	89%
Female	10 (0.4)	4 (0.2)	6 (0.4)	6 (0.9)	6 (0.8)	0 (0.0)	2 (2.7)	0 (0.0)	34 (0.4)	11%
Total Offenders	102 (1.8) 33%	49 (1.1) 16%	73 (2.6) 24%	29 (1.8) 9%	25 (1.7) 8%	12 (2.6) 4%	17(10.8) 5%	2 (0.8) 1%	309 (1.8) 100%	100%

* There were 42 incidents in which no offender was identified.

Time of day/day of week. Nearly half of all incidents occurred on Friday, Saturday or Sunday, most of Sunday's occurring in the early hours of the morning: this pattern was stable across all jurisdictions. The approximate time of the incidents was known for 85 per cent of cases: Australia-wide, where the time was recorded, 40 per cent occurred between six in the evening and midnight, and a further 30 per cent between midnight and six in the morning. This pattern is consistent with the two previous years.

Geographic area. As would be expected, the geographic distribution of homicides coincides with the population distribution. A little under 60 per cent of Australians live in or near the State and Territory capitals, together with the cities of Newcastle, Wollongong and Geelong: 57 per cent of homicides this year occurred either in their inner areas (4 per cent) or their suburbs (53 per cent). Major regional centres such as Shepparton and Rockhampton, together with country towns account for a further 28 per cent of incidents, whilst six per cent occurred within Aboriginal communities and fringe camps. All these figures are almost identical to those for 1990-91 and very similar to the year 1989-90.

Jurisdictional differences were small, although a higher than expected proportion of incidents occurred in the suburbs of Sydney and Melbourne and a commensurately smaller proportion in Victorian and New South Wales country towns. In Queensland, fewer than expected occurred in Brisbane's suburbs, with higher proportions occurring in regional centres and country towns: these findings reflect the greater population decentralisation of Queensland.

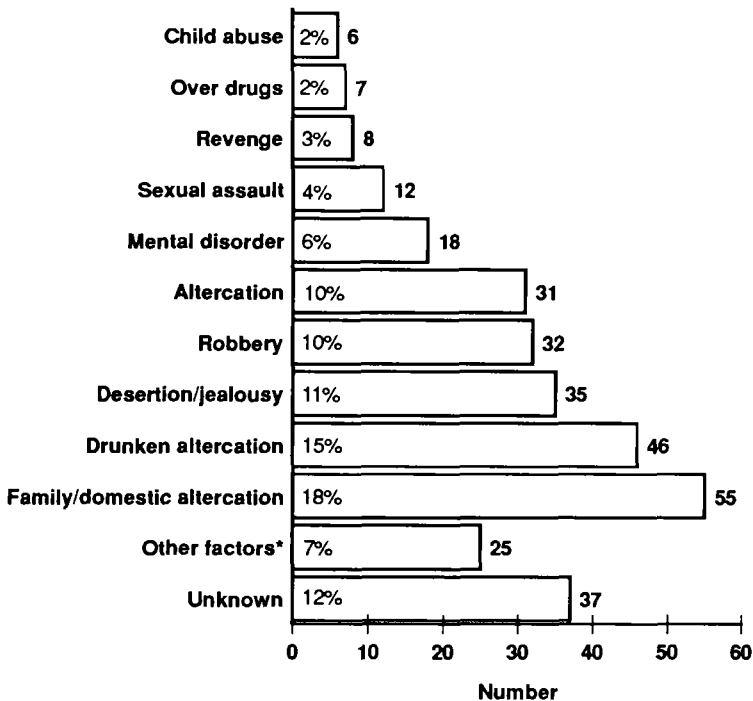
Location. Over 60 per cent of homicides occurred within residential premises this year: more than three-quarters of these were the victim's home, which in many cases was also the offender's home. A higher proportion of women than men were killed in their own homes: 60 per cent of females compared with 42 per cent of males. A higher proportion of males than females were killed in the home of the offender or other residential premises, in the street, in and around pubs and clubs and other public places. This picture is very similar to that for 1990-91. Only 12 per cent of victims were killed in the street (although, like last year, a higher proportion of homicides within Aboriginal communities occurred in the street rather than in residential premises). All these figures are almost

identical to those for the two preceding years and the differences between jurisdictions are very slight.

Again this year it is interesting to note those locations where homicides rarely occurred: shops, shopping malls, sporting venues, beaches, public transport, taxis and other vehicles, parks, railways and bus stations together accounted for 7 per cent of all homicide locations. This figure also is very similar to the two preceding years.

Precipitating factors. Figure 3 indicates the most common factors precipitating homicide incidents in 1991-92.

Figure 3: Primary Precipitating Factors in Homicide (number of incidents), Australia 1991-92



*Other factors: over money - 4; carelessness - 4; contract killing - 3; racial 'hate' - 1; arson - 1; intellectual disability - 1; other factors not involving an altercation - 11

Special care is needed in interpreting these figures: it is important to realise that they represent in most cases a considerable oversimplification of the circumstances prevailing at the time of the incident. Homicide almost always involves a dynamic interaction between victim and offender, who usually know one another well, together with a host of contributing factors relating both to the participants' life experiences and the immediate circumstances of the incident. Police records, which are the sole source for these data, are often sketchy in describing these factors and hence less than ideal for describing the complexities of the situation and the relationship between the participants.

It should also be noted that whilst trivial altercations occur between people standing in all kinds of relationships to each other, for the present purpose only 'friends' and other persons known to each other have been assigned to this category: where such apparently petty and inconsequential arguments occurred in a family setting they were described as 'general domestic altercations'. Generally, the relationship between victim and offender is a more useful variable than the nature of the precipitating factor for the purposes of interpreting the nature of the event.

Bearing in mind all these caveats, the following observations are made

- The largest category of precipitating factors (see Figure 3—domestic altercations, jealousy, desertion, child abuse) related to the breakdown of spousal or other family relationships. These together accounted for 31 per cent of all homicide incidents—a similar figure to both last year and 1989-90. It was not possible in most cases to determine from available police data whether these fatal incidents had been preceded by previous ongoing violent altercations or whether they were precipitated by factors similar to those found in disputes between people in non-intimate relationships. It is vital, therefore, that any assessment of the significance of these data be made in conjunction with the data on relationship between victim and offender.
- The next largest category related to altercations outside the family setting (25 per cent). More than half of these (15 per cent of the total) involved drunken disagreements over apparently trivial matters, almost always between young male peers. However, it is important not to denigrate the seriousness of these kind of events, which usually involve

matters of honour or 'face' and which are clearly seen by the participants as enough to kill or die for.

- The number of fatal armed robberies (n=32, 10 per cent of the total) was remarkably similar to last year's figure (n=31, 10 per cent of the total). Again, over half of these incidents occurred in New South Wales. More than two-thirds of them (n=22) occurred in the suburbs of capital cities.
- The number of fatal sexual assaults (n=12, 4 per cent of the total) was also very close to last year's figure (n=11, 3 per cent of the total). The distribution of these incidents was spread evenly between suburbs, regional centres and country towns according to the population distribution of those geographic areas.

Weapon/method. Again this year, firearms, sharp implements and assault accounted for almost 90 per cent of all homicides. Figure 4 displays their distribution. Because the category of 'Assault' has grown this year to 40 per cent of the total, the figure displays the constituent parts of this category (assault — feet and fists, blunt instrument and strangulation) which have been aggregated in previous years. Twelve per cent of all homicides (n=38) involved attacks with a blunt instrument: 6 per cent were caused by strangulation (both these figures were very similar to 1990-91 figures).

Figure 4: Homicide: Primary Method/Weapon, Australia 1991-92

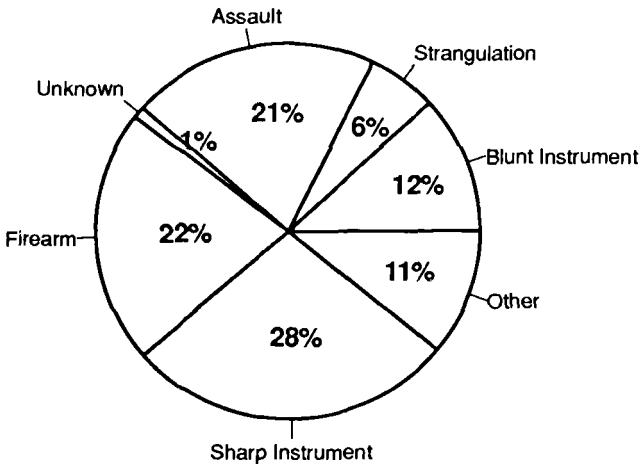
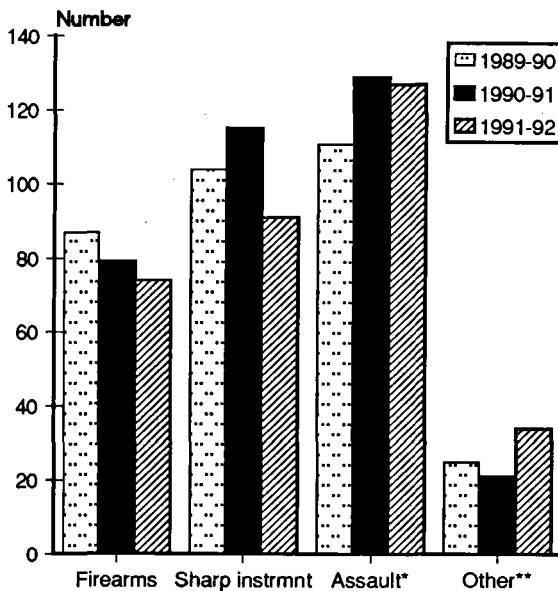


Figure 5: Homicide: Number of Victims by Choice of Weapon, 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92



* Includes blunt instrument and strangulation

** Includes poison, fire, drowning, neglect and all other unclassified causes of death

There was a further slight decline in the number of victims of firearms-related incidents (see Figure 5). However, there was a slight increase in the proportion of incidents which involved hand guns: 21 per cent of firearms-related incidents involved hand guns this year (n=13), compared with 12 per cent last year (n=10). As in previous years, the most commonly used firearm in homicide was a .22 calibre rifle (37 per cent of firearms-related homicides, n=23).

When we examine the relationship between the primary precipitating factor and choice of weapon the following observations can be made

- knives again predominated in family/domestic incidents (47 per cent), where use of firearms is less common (16 per cent). The number of victims of firearms incidents was lowest and of knife incidents highest in those jurisdictions where the proportion of family/domestic incidents was highest, namely Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory.

-
- where the precipitating factor related to desertion from an intimate relationship, firearms were more often the weapon of choice (44 per cent), perhaps indicating a degree of premeditation in these incidents.
 - assault was the cause of death in almost half the incidents involving drunken altercations outside the family setting.

Overall, the pattern of weapon use Australia-wide was very similar to last year. Table 3 shows that there were some intra-jurisdictional differences, however: in Victoria, whereas last year 48 per cent of victims were knife victims, this year only 20 per cent of incidents involved knives (this coincides with a steep decline in the number of family/domestic incidents this year); in Western Australia and South Australia, a decline in the number of firearms deaths and deaths from assault was matched by an increased proportion of incidents involving knives (from 22 per cent to 34 per cent in the case of Western Australia and from 24 per cent to 41 per cent for South Australia).

The geographical location of the incident did not appear to affect choice of weapon this year: in particular, the proportion of firearms-related incidents followed population distribution, except for the especially low proportion of these in Aboriginal communities and the higher proportion occurring in rural locations outside centres of population. These findings are similar to last year.

There were no significant differences between males and females in terms of cause of death, with remarkably similar proportions of each in each category of weapon except for strangulation, where female victims predominated. This is consistent with data for 1990-91.

When we look at choice of weapon by the sex of the offender, we find that overwhelmingly those homicides involving firearms were committed by men: of the 57 incidents involving guns for which an offender had been identified, only two were committed by women. Likewise, few women were involved in fatal assaults: knives were the most common choice of weapon used by women and they were used in half of all incidents involving women offenders.

Firearms were the weapon of choice in only four incidents where the offender was Aboriginal; most of these incidents involved knives (n=25) or assault (n=15).

Illicit drug involvement. The question of the extent of illicit drug involvement in homicide is problematic. Police records

Table 3: Homicide: Jurisdiction of Incident by Primary Weapon/Method, Australia 1991-92

Primary Weapon/ Method	Jurisdiction of Incident															
	NSW & ACT		VIC		QLD		WA		SA		TAS		NT		AUST	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Firearm	22	21	11	20	15	22	4	14	5	19	3	33	3	18	63	20
Sharp																
Instrument	32	30	11	20	13	19	10	34	11	41	3	33	8	47	88	28
Blunt Instrument	9	8	5	9	14	21	4	14	3	11	2	22	1	6	38	12
Assault	24	22	15	27	16	24	5	17	2	7	1	11	5	29	68	22
Strangulation	7	7	6	11	3	4	1	3	3	11	0	0	0	0	20	6
Other	11	10	6	11	6	9	5	18	3	11	0	0	0	0	31	10
Unknown	2	2	1	2	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	1
Total																
Victims	107	100	55	100	68	100	29	100	27	100	9	100	17	100	312	100

indicate that direct involvement—dealing, arguing over possession, robberies for drug money—is not a significant factor in Australian homicide. In only 7 per cent of incidents (n=24) were illicit drugs known to be involved and two-thirds of these occurred in the Sydney and Melbourne metropolitan areas: this figure is similar to those of the past two years. However, it is possible that data are incomplete: there is anecdotal evidence amongst police that illicit drugs are connected with many more homicides than these, especially those resulting from robberies, but no firm information is available.

The Victim

In previous years we have observed that, despite the complexity of homicide as a sociological event, there are characteristics associated with victims which enhance their risk of being involved in homicide incidents: some of these are demographic or societal factors whilst others relate to the behaviour, choices and circumstances of individuals. Such factors are associated with offenders as well: indeed, there are several risk factors which both parties share.

Sex and age. The most obvious risk factors relate to sex and age of victims: male victims continue to significantly outnumber females in the ratio 3:2 (see Table 4): This was the case for every age group except those under nineteen years. Although the differential between the sexes varied, it was double or greater for nearly every remaining age group up to and including 50-59. Rates were highest for those aged 20-39, with almost half of all victims in this age range. Figure 6 shows the rates of homicide for males and females in each age range.

Figure 6: Homicide: Age of Victims by Sex, Australia 1991-92

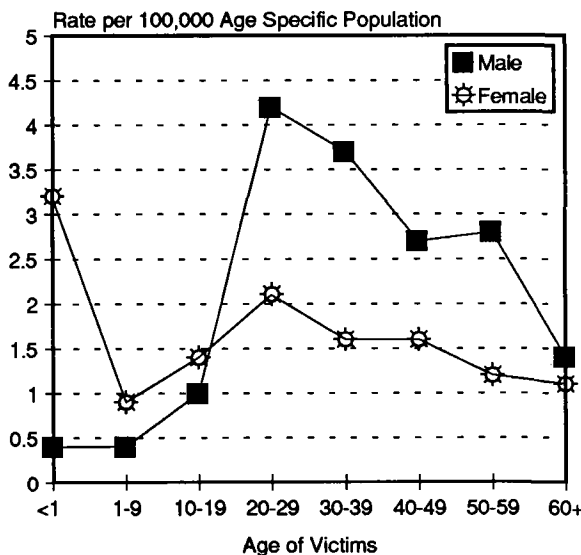
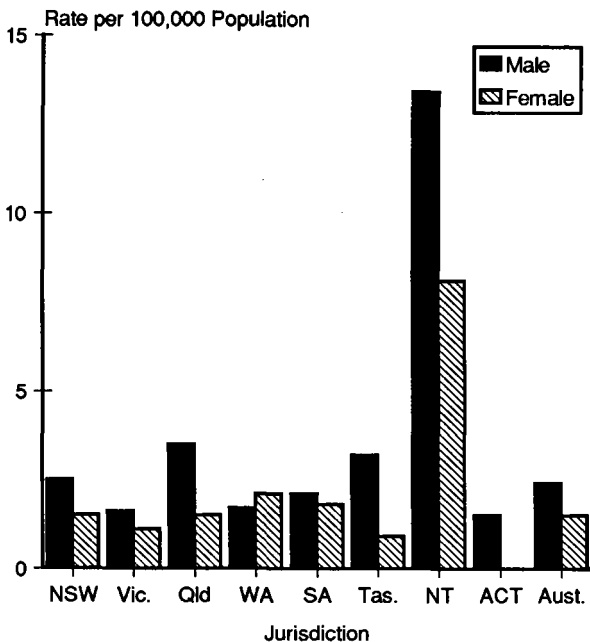


Table 4: Homicide: Age of Victim by Sex, Number and Rate per 100,000 Population, Australia 1991-92

Sex of Victim	Age of Victim											Total
	<1	1-9	10-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Unknown			
Male	1 (0.4)	4 (0.4)	14 (1.0)	59 (4.2)	49 (3.7)	30 (2.7)	22 (2.8)	16 (1.4)	6	201	61%	
Female	4 (3.2)	10 (0.9)	19 (1.4)	30 (2.1)	21 (1.6)	17 (1.6)	9 (1.2)	15 (1.1)	4	129	39%	
Total	5 (1.9)	14 (0.6)	33 (1.2)	89 (3.2)	70 (2.7)	47 (2.2)	31 (2.0)	31 (1.2)	10	330		
	2%	4%	10%	27%	21%	14%	9%	9%	3%	100%		

The number of victims under the age of ten years has declined since last year (from 29 to 19), but once more girls exceeded boys for this age group, this time by a factor of almost three (14 girls and five boys): of children under the age of twelve months there were four girls and one boy. It is difficult to know whether these figures indicated an enhanced vulnerability of girls over boys, or whether they are merely artefacts of the small numbers in the data set: however, it will be important to keep this finding under observation.

Figure 7: Homicide: Jurisdiction and Sex of Victims, Australia 1991-92

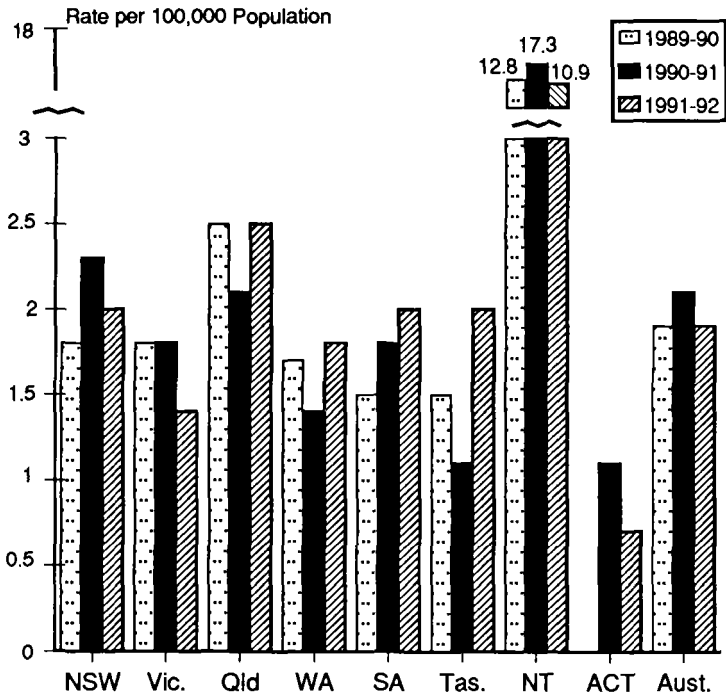


In the 20-29 age range in 1990-91, there had been almost exactly the same number of men and women: this year has reverted to the pattern in 1989-90, with almost twice as many men as women victims in this age group (this reflects the decline in the number of spousal homicides this year and an increase in the number of homicides resulting from altercations between young men). However, male victims were spread over a wider age range: whereas three-quarters of all women victims

were aged under 40 years, only about one half of males were in this age range.

Figure 7 shows the rate for both male and female victims in each jurisdiction. As noted above, the Northern Territory has an exceptionally high homicide rate compared with Australia as a whole (10.9 compared with 1.9), but the disparity is much less than last year's rate (17.3 compared with 2.1). Victims in the Northern Territory also tended to be younger (as would be expected given the demographic profile of its population), with over half of them aged 20-29, compared with the national figure of 27 per cent in this age range. Whereas in 1990-91 New South Wales had a disproportionate number of juveniles amongst the victims in that State (one-quarter of its total compared with 16 per cent nationally), in 1991-92 it was Western Australia which had the highest proportion of its victims aged under 20 years (37 per cent compared with 16 per cent nationally).

Figure 8: Homicide: Jurisdiction of Victims, Australia 1989-90, 1990-91, 1991-92



For comparative purposes, Figure 8 shows the homicide rates for each jurisdiction for each of the three years from 1989-90 to 1990-91.

Marital status. Marital status was recorded for 86 per cent of victims: of those, 60 per cent were single or no longer married. A slightly higher proportion of women than men were married or in a de facto relationship. This picture was very similar to that which emerged from the last two years' data.

Employment. Again this year employment status of victims was not recorded in a third of all cases. The figures were similar to previous years: for those victims for whom status was known, around equal numbers of males were employed and unemployed, whilst around three times as many women were unemployed as employed. Clearly a proportion of these unemployed women were voluntarily out of the paid workforce, but the very fact of their lacking economic independence may signal increased vulnerability.

Country of birth. Country of birth remains only patchily recorded, and nothing was known about the origins of one-third of victims. Of those for whom country of birth was known, about 80 per cent were born in Australia and the remainder originated in 23 different countries.

The only overseas-born group which appeared to be over-represented were the Vietnamese. With eight victims this year, they made up 2.4 per cent of the total, whereas they compose only .7 per cent of the population: this represents a rate per 100,000 of 6.5, compared with a rate of 1.9 for the population as a whole. These figures should be treated cautiously, as they are small: however they are consistent with figures over the preceding two years.

Racial appearance. The most notable aspect of Table 5 is once more the vast over-representation of Aboriginal people, who made up 14 per cent of all homicide victims when they compose only 1.5 per cent of the total population. There was the same number of Aboriginal victims as last year (n=46) and the rate per 100,000 remained at 17.8, compared with a rate of 1.9 per 100,000 for the Australian population as a whole.

Table 5: Homicide: Racial Appearance of Victim by Jurisdiction, Australia 1991-92

Racial Appearance	Jurisdiction								
	NSW (inc. ACT)	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	NT	AUST	%
White	92	50	52	20	21	9	3	247	75%
Aboriginal	1	0	15	9	7	0	14	46	14%
Other	17	7	2	1	0	0	0	27	8%
Unknown	7	2	1	0	0	0	0	10	3%
Total	117	59	70	30	28	9	17	330	100%
Victims	36%	18%	21%	9%	8%	3%	5%	100%	

This year the enhanced risk of both Aboriginal males and females was similar at around nine times that of the Australian population as a whole. However, there were slightly fewer Aboriginal women victims this year (n=19), in line with the slight decline in the number of female victims generally, compared with last year. The ratio of male to female victims amongst Aboriginal people was very similar to the total population at about 3:2 (last year there had been equal numbers of male and female Aboriginal victims).

When we look at jurisdictional differences we find that in the Northern Territory where Aboriginal people make up 22 per cent of the population, over 80 per cent of victims were Aboriginal persons. In Queensland, Aboriginal persons make up 2.4 per cent of the population and 21 per cent of the victims; in Western Australia they comprise 2.7 per cent of the population and 30 per cent of the victims. All these figures are in line with findings of the preceding two years.

Alcohol/drug use. Information concerning alcohol and other drug influence was available for around three-quarters of all victims this year (up from 60 per cent for the past two years). *Of those cases where the information was recorded*, 56 per cent of male victims and 25 per cent of females were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident (44 per cent of all victims). All these figures are remarkably close to last year's, and thus may have some reliability in spite of the incompleteness of the records.

When we look at alcohol influence and age, we find that the distribution was very similar for all ages between 15 and 49: thereafter the proportion of victims under the influence of alcohol was about half that for younger victims.

There was some variability between jurisdictions: in Queensland, *of those victims for whom the information was recorded*, over 60 per cent were alcohol-affected: this was associated with the higher proportion of male victims in that state. In the Northern Territory 88 per cent of all victims were alcohol-affected: this is associated with not only a disproportionate number of male victims, but also a very high proportion of Aboriginal victims. Across Australia 32 of the 46 Aboriginal victims were known to be under the influence of alcohol at the time of their deaths. It is important to note, however, that the relationship between alcohol and violence is complex and we should not assume a direct causal connection.

Once again, there was a very low incidence of other drug influence amongst victims (n=12, of whom eight were affected by prescription or other licit drugs).

Criminal history. Criminal histories were available for two-thirds of victims: of these, 31 per cent had criminal records, about half of them for violent offences. A higher proportion of male victims than females had criminal records: whilst 61 per cent of victims were male, 85 per cent of victims known to have criminal records were male. All these figures are very close to those of the past two years.

The Offender

There were 309 suspects/offenders identified by police in relation to the 312 incidents which occurred in 1991-92. Although they are referred to throughout this report as 'offenders', the data relate to suspects, charged persons and convicted persons. There were 42 incidents for which no suspect had been identified by police at the time of data collection. The characteristics of offenders associated with enhanced risk of involvement in homicide incidents are noted below.

Sex and age. The figures in Table 6 are remarkably similar to those of the preceding two years. Homicide offending remains an overwhelmingly male phenomenon: males outnumbered females by a factor of nine overall, and although there was variation in the ratio between age ranges, males predominated by a substantial margin in every jurisdiction (see Figure 9) and in every age range. Figure 10 shows the spread of ages of both males and females.

Offenders also remain predominantly young: 18 per cent were aged under 20 years (the same as last year) and a further 38 per cent were aged 20-29 (compared with 42 per cent last year). The proportions of males and females were again very similar for each age range, despite the much higher number of males at every age: a little over half of both men and women offenders were aged under 30, and a little more than three-quarters were under 40. This pattern was similar across all jurisdictions.

Marital status. Marital status was recorded for 85 per cent of offenders. There were greatly differing patterns in marital status between men and women which had been apparent in the preceding two years' data as well. *Of those where marital status was recorded, 60 per cent of men compared with 16 per cent of women were single; 74 per cent of women compared with 32 per cent of men were, or had been, in a married or de facto relationship.* These figures indicate the significance of being in a marital relationship in terms of the kinds of homicides most commonly committed by women, namely homicides where a family member is the victim.

Employment. As in previous years, employment status of offenders was available for only two-thirds of offenders. *Of*

Table 6: Homicide: Age of Offender by Sex, Number and Rate per 100,000 Population, Australia 1991-92

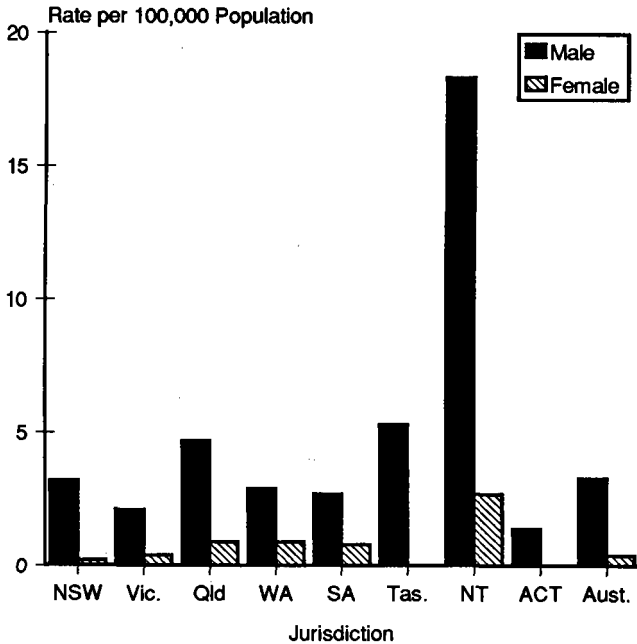
Sex of Offender	Age of Offender								Total	%
	<14	15-19	20-29	30-39	40-49	50-59	60+	Unknown		
Male	3 (0.2)	50 (7.0)	105 (7.5)	61 (4.6)	31 (2.8)	12 (1.5)	9 (0.8)	4	275	89%
Female	0	4 (0.6)	13 (1.0)	9 (0.7)	5 (0.5)	1 (0.2)	1 (0.1)	1	34	11%
Total	3	54	118	70	36	13	10	5	309	100%
	1%	17%	38%	23%	12%	4%	3%	2%	100%	

Table 7: Homicide: Racial Appearance of Offenders by Jurisdiction, Australia 1991-92

Offender Appearance	Jurisdiction								%
	NSW & ACT	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	NT	AUST	
White	75	38	51	18	16	12	3	213	69
Aboriginal/TSI	6	2	19	10	8	0	14	59	19
Other	9	4	3	1	0	0	0	17	6
Unknown	14	5	0	0	1	0	0	20	6
Total	104	49	73	29	25	12	17	309	100

those for whom it was recorded, fewer than one-third of offenders were in the paid work force. For women the proportion was less than 20 per cent. This pattern was very similar to that of the past two years.

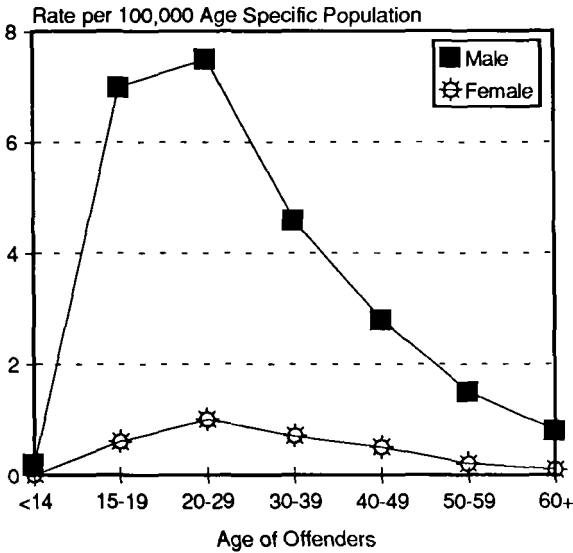
Figure 9: Homicide: Jurisdiction and Sex of Offenders, Australia 1991-92



Country of birth. Country of birth was available for only two-thirds of offenders. Of those for whom it was recorded, 80 per cent were Australian-born; the remainder originated in 23 different countries.

Racial appearance. Table 7 shows that Aboriginal persons continue to be greatly over-represented amongst offenders: whereas they make up 1.5 per cent of the total population, 19 per cent of offenders were Aboriginal. Their rate of offending was around thirteen times that of the population as a whole. These figures were consistent with the data of the preceding two years.

Figure 10: Homicide: Age of Offenders by Sex, Australia 1991-92



The over-representation was evident in the Northern Territory, where Aboriginal people make up 22 per cent of the population and where fourteen of the seventeen offenders were Aboriginal people (82 per cent). However, it was even more apparent in Western Australia, where Aboriginal people make up 2.7 per cent of the population and 32 per cent of offenders, and in Queensland, where they make up 2.4 per cent of the population and 25 per cent of offenders.

Both Aboriginal men and women were over-represented as offenders: whereas only about 10 per cent of all offenders were women, about 20 per cent of Aboriginal offenders were women. However, in the Northern Territory only one of the 14 Aboriginal offenders this year was a woman.

All these figures are very close to the findings of the preceding two years, and again there were low rates of offending by those of other racial backgrounds.

Alcohol/drug use. Information about alcohol and other drug influence was recorded for 60 per cent of offenders: of these, two-thirds were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident. This proportion varied somewhat between jurisdictions, with the Northern Territory the highest with 82 per cent (n=14), and Queensland following with 50 per cent

(n=38). Of those men and women offenders whose alcohol/drug status was known, similar proportions of each had been under the influence of alcohol.

For offenders aged between 15 and 49 whose alcohol/drug status was known, the proportion known to be alcohol-affected was fairly constant at a little more than two-thirds of the total; the proportion for those outside that age range was rather less at a little more than one-third. *Of those for whom the information was recorded, 60 per cent of white offenders and 90 per cent of Aboriginal offenders were alcohol affected.*

All these figures are similar to the past two years. Again, there was no significant involvement of any other drugs, licit or illicit, amongst offenders.

Criminal history. Criminal histories were available for two-thirds of offenders. Of these, 70 per cent had a previous criminal record and at least one-third of these (n=59) related to violent offences. Of the women for whom criminal history was known, one-third had a record and most of these were for assault.

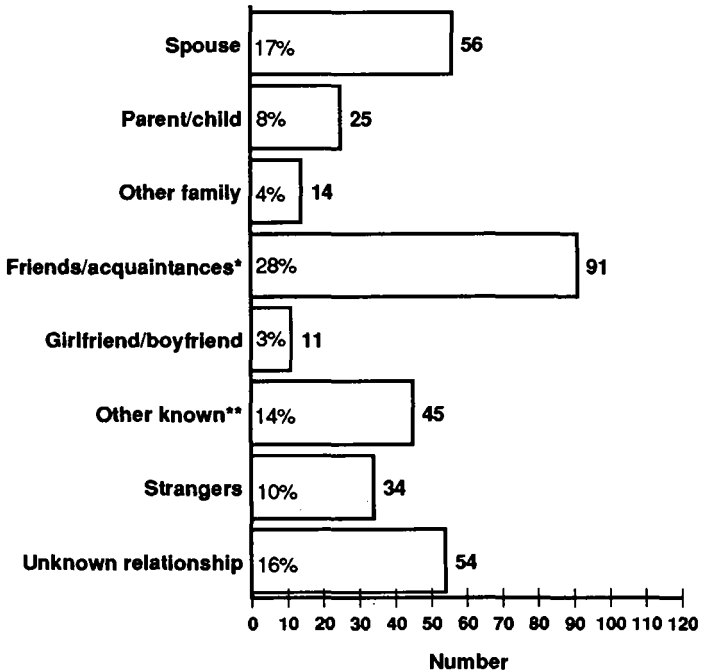
Of those for whom the information was available, two-thirds of white offenders and 90 per cent of Aboriginal offenders had criminal records; for both, most of these related to violent offences.

Murder-suicide. A total of 19 offenders committed suicide after the incident; all but one were men and none was Aboriginal. A further six offenders made a suicide attempt, or inflicted some form of injury on themselves. Together these made up 8 per cent of identified offenders, exactly the same proportion as in the two preceding years. In the great majority of these cases, the victim and offender had been in a spousal or other family relationship.

Relationship between Victim and Offender

Of all the factors surrounding a homicide, the relationship between the victim and offender is probably the single most significant in terms of understanding why the incident occurred. Figure 11 shows the frequencies of various relationship categories for those homicides which occurred in 1991-92, and Table 8 shows these relationships for each jurisdiction.

Figure 11: Homicide: Relationship between Victims and Offenders, Australia 1991-92



* Refers to friends, long and short-term acquaintances, homosexual relationships and gang members.

** Refers to sex rivals, prostitute/client relationships, business relationships, citizen/police and others known to each other but where the nature of the relationship is unknown.

Table 8: Homicide: Victim Jurisdiction by Primary Relationship, Australia 1991-92

Relationship	Jurisdiction of Victim								%
	NSW (inc ACT)	VIC	QLD	WA	SA	TAS	NT	AUST	
Spouse	17	4	10	9	8	2	6	56	17
Parent/child	8	2	5	6	3	0	1	25	8
Other Family	6	3	0	0	0	1	4	14	4
Friends/ Acquaintances*	27	15	21	9	10	4	5	91	28
Girlfriend/ Boyfriend	6	3	1	1	0	0	0	11	3
Other known**	9	11	22	0	2	1	0	45	14
Strangers	16	6	7	2	1	1	1	34	10
Unknown	28	15	4	3	4	0	0	54	16
Total Relationships	117	59	70	30	28	9	17	330	100

* Refers to friends, long and short-term acquaintances, homosexual relationships and gang members.

** Refers to sex rivals, prostitute/client relationships, business relationships, citizen/police, and others known to each other but where the nature of the relationship is unknown.

Note: Like Table 11 in 1990-91, and Table 13 in 1989-90, Table 8 is based on only one relationship being recorded where there are multiple offenders.

In 1991-92, 34 per cent of all known relationships between victim and offender were family relationships: these included spouses (present and former, married and de facto), parent-child, siblings, grandparent-grandchild and other extended family relationships. This is a decline on the proportion for last year, which was 44 per cent.

Most of this decline is due to a reduction in the number of spousal homicides: this year 20 per cent of the total of known relationships were spousal, compared with 26 per cent last year (although 40 per cent of Aboriginal relationships were spousal). For all spousal cases three-quarters of the victims were women: 33 per cent of all female victims and 7 per cent of all males were killed by their spouses.

The high proportion of women offenders compared to men in spousal incidents was noteworthy: 42 per cent of all women offenders (n=14) killed their spouses compared with 15 per cent of men (n=42).

The largest single category of *known* relationship, however, was that of 'friends/long-term acquaintance', which made up 33 per cent of the total. Almost all of these victims and offenders were young men, and many of them were involved in drunken altercations. This represents an increase over last year, when 26 per cent of victims (*where the relationship was recorded*) were killed by friends/long-term acquaintances. In a further 16 per cent of recorded relationships this year the victim and offender were known to each other in some way.

Given that such a high proportion of victims and offenders knew one another well, it is not surprising that they shared a number of characteristics in common:

- where race was white or Aboriginal, almost 95 per cent of all victim-offender pairs were the same race;
- where sex was known, 60 per cent of all pairs were the same sex (nearly all male);
- where alcohol influence was known, nearly 60 per cent of all pairs were alcohol-affected (for only 23 per cent of pairs was neither party known to be alcohol-affected).

All these figures corresponded very closely to last year's data.

Of those victims for whom the relationship with the offender was recorded, 12 per cent were killed by strangers. This compares with last year's figure of 6 per cent of those victims where the relationship was recorded.

Summary

The homicide rate for Australia as a whole remains stable at 1.9 per 100,000 population. This rate represents a slight overall decline on last year: the decline occurred in New South Wales, Victoria and the Northern Territory, with slight increases in the remaining jurisdictions. It is too soon to say whether these figures indicate a trend in any State or Territory.

There continued to be clusters of elements associated both with the incidents themselves and with the participants involved in them which indicate enhanced risk.

Incident. In examining the time and place of incidents a number of factors emerged. Homicides tended to cluster on Friday and Saturday nights. They occurred most often in residential premises, usually the victim's own home; they occurred relatively infrequently in public places. The geographic distribution of homicides coincided with the overall population distribution, with most taking place in the suburbs of the State and Territory capital cities. The most common precipitating circumstances concerned the altercations relating to the breakdown of family relationships; the next largest category concerned altercations between friends and long-term acquaintances, usually young men and often whilst both parties were alcohol-affected. Homicides concerning arguments between people well-known to each other far exceeded in number 'instrumental' homicides such as those resulting from armed robbery and sexual assault. The vast majority of all homicides resulted from either firearms, sharp implements or assaults.

All these findings concerning the incidents were very similar to those for 1990-91, although there were a number of jurisdictional variations which need to be kept under observation.

Victims. Sex and age continue to be the most obvious correlates of risk of victimisation: homicide remains very much the province of young males. Males outnumbered females as victims in the ratio 3:2 overall, and for every age group above the age of nineteen years. Rates were highest for those aged 20-39, with almost half of all victims in this age range. Aboriginal people remain disproportionately represented as victims: their rate of victimisation was around nine times that

for the population as a whole. In the great majority of incidents, homicide was intra-racial. Other characteristics found disproportionately amongst victims included single marital status (particularly for males), unemployment, alcohol influence at the time of the incident and a criminal record.

All these findings relating to the characteristics of victims corresponded closely to those of preceding years.

Offenders. Offenders also shared a number of characteristics which were associated with enhanced risk. They continued to be overwhelmingly male and young: males again outnumbered females in the ratio 9:1 and more than half of both men and women offenders were aged under 30. There was once more a significant difference in marital status between men and women: there was a far higher number of single men than single women and a far higher proportion of women than men in married or de facto relationships.

Once more Aboriginal people were greatly over-represented as offenders: their rate of offending was about thirteen times that for the population as a whole. Again a disproportionate number of offenders were unemployed, alcohol-affected and had criminal records.

All these characteristics were consistent with the findings of preceding years.

Relationship. As in previous years, the vast majority of victims and offenders were known to each other, and most of them were either in a family relationship with each other or else friends or long-term acquaintances. There was, however, an increase in the proportion of stranger homicides compared with 1990-91.

This year there was a decline in the proportion of family homicides: *of those cases where relationship was recorded*, one-third were between family members, compared with nearly half last year. Most of this decline was due to a reduction in the proportion of spousal homicides. This trend needs to be kept under observation in order to ascertain whether this kind of homicide is truly on the decrease.

However, the largest single category of relationship, *amongst those cases where it was recorded*, was that of friends/long-term acquaintances: most of these were young men, many of them were alcohol-affected at the time of the incident and many of them were killed in fights. This category of relationship was larger this year than in previous years.

Conclusion. It is apparent that much of the information now available concerning homicide incidents and those involved in them is consistent enough for us to be confident that these characteristics do indeed indicate enhanced risk. However, for those elements of Australian homicide which appear to be at variance with previous years' data, it will be necessary to observe trends carefully over time to ascertain whether they do in fact represent changing patterns.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that despite similarities in these incidents, victims and offenders, each event and individual is unique. Each follows from the dynamic interaction of factors relating to both the personality and experience of the participants and to the circumstances prevailing at the time of the incident. It is only by understanding as completely as possible what these constituent factors are that we can begin to devise effective intervention strategies for the prevention and control of homicide.

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