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Abstract | This study uses 34 years of data from the National Homicide Monitoring Program to describe the prevalence and characteristics of homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

Between 1 July 1989 and 30 June 2023, 476 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were the victim of a homicide. Indigenous women experienced a homicide victimisation rate up to seven times the national average. Ninety-six percent ($n=455$) of the 473 homicide incidents involving an Indigenous woman were cleared by police. Almost all victims from cleared incidents were killed by someone they knew (97%, $n=446$), most by an Indigenous male intimate partner (66%, $n=301$).

Findings highlight the over-representation of Indigenous women as victims of homicide in Australia and provide baseline data to measure Closing the Gap targets to reduce homicide and other violent victimisation among these women.

Homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women

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Target 13 of the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) aims to at least halve by 2031 rates of all forms of family violence and abuse against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children, as progress towards zero. Supporting this target is a reduction in rates of homicide victimisation, specifically intimate partner homicide. The disproportionate levels of lethal and non-lethal family violence against Indigenous women, and the unique context in which this violence is enacted, experienced and responded to, motivated the development of a standalone action plan under the National Plan to End Violence Against Women and Children 2022–2032 (Commonwealth of Australia 2022) to support Target 13. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan 2023–25 highlights the over-representation of Indigenous women as victims of violence and the actions required to ‘address the current safety needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children and families, as well as lay a strong foundation for longer-term structural change’ (Commonwealth of Australia 2023: 10).

The homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women has received recent attention from the Senate inquiry into missing and murdered First Nations women and children, state-based inquiries such as the 2023 coronial inquest into the intimate partner homicide of Aboriginal women in the Northern Territory and the publication of domestic and family violence death reviews (see, for example, ADFVDRN & ANROWS 2022). Studies by Boxall et al. (2022), Buxton-Namisnyk (2022) and Cripps (2023) present timely analysis of victimisation patterns and the context of intimate partner homicides of Indigenous women. Yet these and other recent studies (eg Bevan, Lloyd & McGlade 2024) note the paucity and limitations of research on Indigenous women as victims of homicide, and few have examined the broader nature of homicide victimisation or the characteristics of the homicide offenders.

Since the early 1990s the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) has published data on Indigenous homicide (see Miles & Bricknell 2024 for the most recent data). In this paper we use 34 years of homicide data to describe the prevalence and characteristics of homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Our findings add to the AIC's submission to the aforementioned Senate inquiry into missing and murdered First Nations women and children by examining victimisation rates and the type, location and circumstances of these homicides (AIC 2024, 2022). This paper also looks at the demographics of the offenders, their relationship with the victim and their history of family and domestic violence.

Method

This study uses data from the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP). The NHMP was established at the AIC in 1990 following a recommendation of the National Committee on Violence for a national monitoring program on homicide. The NHMP is Australia's only national data collection on homicide incidents, victims and offenders.

The NHMP draws on two key sources of data:

- offence records obtained from each Australian state and territory police service; and
- state and territory coronial records from the National Coronial Information System (NCIS).

Data from offence records are cross-referenced with coronial records from the NCIS. The AIC has access to open cases (those for which the coronial investigation has not been finalised) and closed cases (those for which the coronial investigation has been completed and a finding has been made available) from all states and territories. NHMP data are supplemented with material from court documents where available.

Definition of homicide

Homicide refers to the unlawful killing of a person. A homicide for the purposes of the NHMP includes:

- all cases where a person is charged with murder or manslaughter;
- all murder–suicides classified as murder by police;
- all driving causing death offences where the offender was charged with murder, manslaughter or equivalent offences; and
- all other deaths classed by police as homicides, whether or not an offender was apprehended.

Cleared homicides

A cleared homicide for the purposes of the NHMP is defined as any incident where at least one offender is charged with a homicide offence, an offender died prior to arrest (eg by alleged suicide) but would have been charged with a homicide offence, and incidents cleared otherwise (eg legal intervention). Information on offenders is collected for cleared homicides only.

Indigenous status

The Indigenous status of homicide victims and offenders is collected using the Indigenous status standard (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014). Information on the Indigenous status of homicide victims is provided by state and territory police and cross-referenced with Indigenous status and Indigenous origin information recorded on the NCIS. Indigenous status of homicide offenders is provided by state and territory police and based on whether the individual identified as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or neither. Indigenous status is recorded in the NHMP as not stated where this information is not known or where there is inconsistent information recorded across the data sources.

Victim and offender sex

Data presented refer to an individual's sex (ie sex characteristics) rather than gender (ie 'social and cultural identity, expression and experience'; ABS 2021b). This reflects the definitions in the data provided by the source organisations and recorded by the NCIS. Data on the sex of the victim and offender are collected using the ABS standard for sex (ABS 2021b).

For the current study, women are defined as females aged 18 years or over.

Counting rules

This paper describes homicide incidents, victims and offenders. For the purposes of the study:

- A homicide incident is a unique homicide event where one or more of the victims was an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman.
- A homicide victim is an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman unlawfully killed by another person as defined above. It excludes persons who were injured during a homicide event and victims of attempted murder or conspiracy to murder.
- A homicide offender is an individual charged or otherwise determined by police to have committed the murder or manslaughter of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman.

Methodological considerations

The findings in this paper should be interpreted based on the following considerations.

Homicide classification

Homicide classification in the NHMP is based on victim–offender relationship. Most homicide incidents in Australia involve a single victim and a single offender, in which case classification is simple. Where a homicide incident involves multiple victims and/or offenders, the classification is based on the closest relationship between the victim and the primary offender. For example, if an offender kills an intimate partner and a cousin, the incident is classified as an intimate partner homicide.

Remoteness classification

This study uses the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure (ABS 2023a) to estimate the proportion of homicide incidents in each remoteness category. The remoteness structure defines remoteness across five classes—major cities, inner regional, outer regional, remote and very remote—and is based on the measure of relative access to services (ABS 2023a). Remoteness allocation in this study was undertaken using the ASGS Edition 3 Correspondences generator to assign a remoteness classification to the postcode of each homicide incident (ABS 2021a). For further information about the remoteness area design criteria and coding structure, see ABS (2023a).

Rate calculations

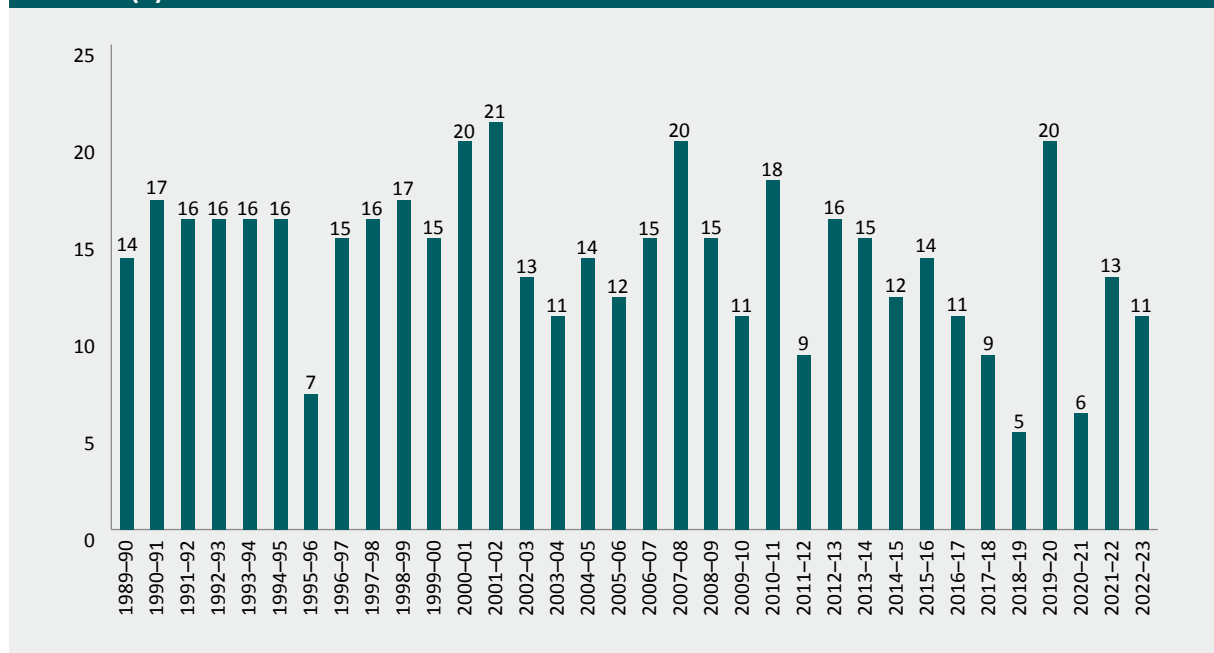
Updated population data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are only available from 2010 (ABS 2024). Hence this paper presents homicide victimisation rates for the period 2010–11 to 2022–23 only.

Homicide victimisation

Between 1989–90 and 2022–23, there were 473 incidents of homicide in Australia where at least one victim was an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander woman. These incidents comprise five percent of all homicide incidents. A total of 476 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were victims of homicide during this 34-year period. The annual number of Indigenous women victims ranged from five to 21, with an average of 14 victims each year (see Figure 1).

Indigenous women represent about three percent of the adult female population of Australia (ABS 2024, 2023b). However, they comprised an average of 16 percent of adult female homicide victims each year since 1989–90 (range: 7–25%). Overall, five percent of all homicide victims (both male and female) between 1989–90 and 2022–23 were Indigenous women.

Figure 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women victims of homicide, 1989–90 to 2022–23 (n)



Source: AIC NHMP 1989–90 to 2022–23 [computer file]

The homicide victimisation rate for Indigenous women from 2010–11 to 2022–23 was highly variable, ranging from 1.73 per 100,000 Indigenous female population aged 18 years and over in 2018–19 to 7.64 per 100,000 in 2010–11 (see Figure 2). Rates of Indigenous homicide victimisation are generally highly variable due to small population effects. Since 2010–11 Indigenous women have experienced a homicide victimisation rate between two and seven times greater than the national homicide rate and between three and nine times greater than the adult female homicide rate.

Figure 2: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women victims of homicide, 2010–11 to 2022–23 (rate per 100,000 relevant population)



Note: Rates are presented for 2010–11 to 2022–23 only due to data availability. Rates were calculated using *Estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* (ABS 2024)

Source: AIC NHMP 2010–11 to 2022–23 [computer file]

One-third of the victims between 1989–90 and 2022–23 were aged 25–34 years (34%, $n=162$). Twenty-nine percent ($n=136$) were aged 35–44 years and 22 percent ($n=105$) were aged 18–24 years. Indigenous women victims of homicide were generally younger than non-Indigenous women victims over this 34-year period. Over half (56%, $n=267$) were aged less than 35 years of age, compared with 38 percent ($n=927$) of non-Indigenous victims.

The homicide incident

Nine in 10 of the women were victims of murder (87%, $n=414$). Thirteen percent were victims of manslaughter ($n=60$), while the most serious charge was not stated or unknown for two victims (<1%).

Clearance status

Between 1989–90 and 2022–23, 96 percent ($n=455$) of the 473 homicide incidents involving an Indigenous woman were cleared by police. This is slightly higher than the proportion of all homicide incidents in Australia cleared during the same period (91%, $n=8,460$). An offender was charged in 94 percent of cleared homicides of an Indigenous woman ($n=444$ incidents involving 446 victims), while the offender died prior to arrest in two percent of incidents ($n=11$ incidents and victims).

Four percent ($n=18$) of homicides of Indigenous women victims between 1989–90 and 2022–23 have not been cleared. This is a lower proportion than the nine percent of all homicide incidents ($n=821$) which occurred during this period that remain uncleared.

Geographic location

The homicide of 81 percent ($n=384$) of victims occurred in three jurisdictions. Just under a third of all Indigenous women homicide victims were killed in the Northern Territory (31%, $n=146$) and a quarter each in Western Australia (26%, $n=123$) and Queensland (24%, $n=115$; see Table 1). Smaller proportions of victims were killed in homicide incidents recorded in New South Wales (12%, $n=59$), South Australia (6%, $n=26$) and Victoria (2%, $n=7$). There were no Indigenous women victims of homicide in either Tasmania or the Australian Capital Territory between 1989–90 and 2022–23.

The proportion of all homicide victims who were Indigenous women varied greatly between 1989–90 and 2022–23. Thirty percent ($n=146$) of all victims of homicide in the Northern Territory during this 34-year period were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, followed by 11 percent ($n=123$) in Western Australia and six percent ($n=115$) in Queensland (see Table 1).

Table 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women victims of homicide, by jurisdiction, 1989–90 to 2022–23

	<i>n</i>	% of Indigenous women victims	% of all victims ^a
NSW	59	12.4	1.9
Vic	7	1.5	0.3
Qld	115	24.2	5.8
WA	123	25.8	10.9
SA	26	5.5	3.5
Tas	0	0.0	0.0
ACT	0	0.0	0.0
NT	146	30.7	29.7
Total	476	100.0	4.8

a: Percentage of all homicide victims in each state and territory

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 1989–90 to 2022–23 [computer file]

Ninety-five percent ($n=449$) of homicides of Indigenous women occurred in the victim's residential state or territory. The victim's state or territory of residence was not stated or unknown for the remaining five percent ($n=24$) of incidents. The homicide of most Indigenous women (78%, $n=367$) occurred in the victim's residential postcode.

Remoteness was associated with a higher rate of homicide victimisation among Indigenous women. Half (49%) of homicide incidents where one or more victims was an Indigenous woman occurred in a remote area (22%) or very remote area (27%). Three-quarters (74%) of incidents in the Northern Territory and 60 percent of incidents in Western Australia occurred in a remote or very remote location.

Incidents in regional areas comprised 37 percent of homicides of Indigenous women, most frequently in an outer regional area (31% of all incidents). Over half of homicides of Indigenous women in Queensland took place in an outer regional area, and a quarter each in South Australia and the Northern Territory. Homicides in major cities were less common, making up 14 percent of homicides of Indigenous women.

Homicide classification

Indigenous women were overwhelmingly the victims of intimate partner homicide. Sixty-nine percent ($n=328$) of the 473 homicide incidents involving an Indigenous woman between 1989–90 and 2022–23 were intimate partner homicides (see Table 2). This ranged from 73 percent of incidents in Queensland ($n=84$) to 59 percent in New South Wales ($n=34$). The victimisation rate from intimate partner homicide ranged from 1.32 to 4.82 per 100,000 population over the 13-year period 2010–11 to 2022–23 (see Figure 3), with an average victimisation rate each year of 2.92 per 100,000.

Another 12 percent ($n=58$) of incidents between 1989–90 to 2022–23 were other domestic homicides. Acquaintance homicides also comprised 12 percent ($n=57$) of homicide incidents. Stranger homicides were very rare, at two percent of incidents involving an Indigenous woman victim ($n=8$).

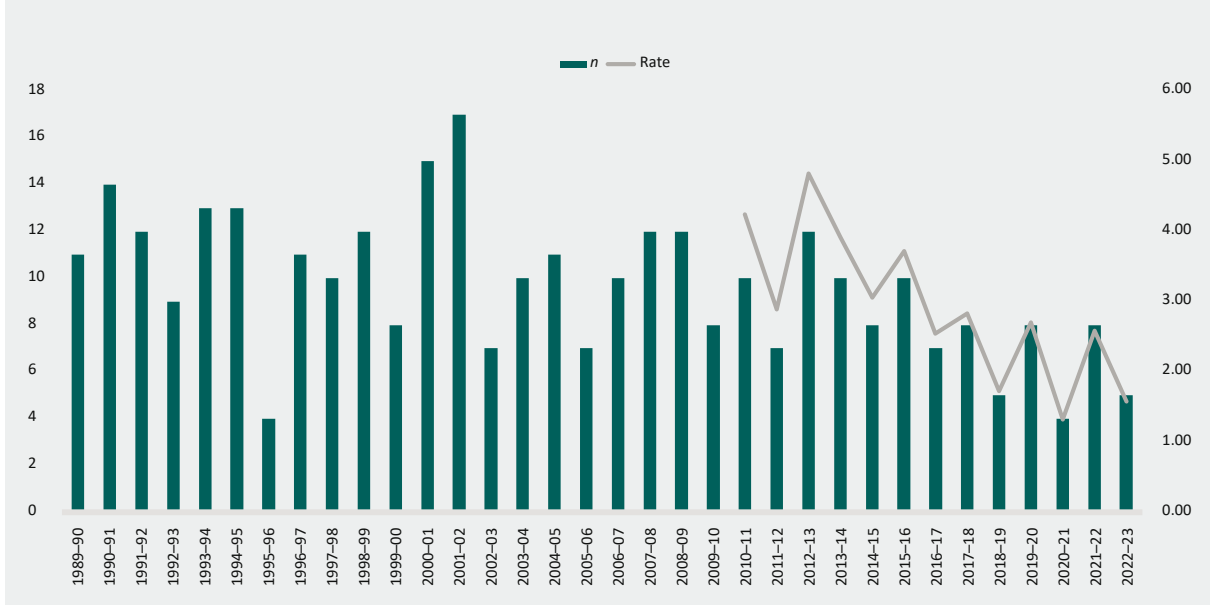
Table 2: Incidents of homicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, by homicide classification and jurisdiction, 1989–90 to 2022–23 (n)

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	NT	Total
Intimate partner	34	5	84	83	17	105	328
Other domestic	11	1	12	13	4	17	58
<i>Domestic</i>	<i>45</i>	<i>6</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>96</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>122</i>	<i>386</i>
Acquaintance	6	0	18	12	1	20	57
Stranger	2	0	0	2	2	2	8
Relationship not stated	0	0	0	4	0	0	4
Incident not cleared	5	1	1	8	1	2	18
Total	58	7	115	122	25	146	473

Note: Excludes Tasmania and ACT as there were no homicides of Indigenous women in these jurisdictions during the reference period. One incident involved the homicide of a non-Indigenous intimate partner and an Indigenous woman who did not know the offender. This incident has been classified as a stranger homicide for the purposes of this paper

Source: AIC NHMP 1989–90 to 2022–23 [computer file]

Figure 3: Incidents of intimate partner homicide of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander woman, 1989–90 to 2022–23



Note: Rates are presented for 2010–11 to 2022–23 only due to data availability. Rates were calculated using *Estimates and projections, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians* (ABS 2024)

Source: AIC NHMP 1989–90 to 2022–23 [computer file]

Incident location

Most homicide incidents in Australia occur in a residential setting, often the victim’s home. This is also the case for the homicide of Indigenous women. Of the 473 incidents where at least one victim was an Indigenous woman, 56 percent ($n=265$) occurred in a residential setting, predominantly the victim’s home (43% of incidents, $n=204$; see Table 3). Five percent of incidents ($n=24$) took place in the offender’s home and eight percent ($n=37$) in another person’s residence.

Thirty-nine percent ($n=183$) of incidents occurred in a community setting, mainly in an open area (21% of all incidents, $n=97$) or a street, footpath or similar (15%, $n=71$). These settings were much more common for the homicides of Indigenous women compared with the homicides of other females in Australia.

Table 3: Incidents of homicide of Indigenous women by location, 1989–90 to 2022–23

	<i>n</i>	%
Victim's home	204	43.1
Offender's home	24	5.1
Other home	37	7.8
<i>Residential</i>	265	56.0
Street/footpath	71	15.0
Open area/waterway	97	20.5
Sporting oval/facility	6	1.3
Public transport/facility	0	0.0
Public carpark	9	1.9
<i>Community</i>	183	38.7
Other	18	3.8
Not stated or unknown	7	1.5
Total	473	100.0

Source: AIC NHMP 1989–90 to 2022–23 [computer file]

Circumstances preceding the event

Altercations directly precede the great majority of homicides in Australia, and are reported by the NHMP when the homicide incident has been cleared ($n=455$). Arguments or enmity related to the domestic relationship preceded around half of homicides of Indigenous women that had been cleared (52%, $n=236$). Jealousy was cited as a motive for 10 percent ($n=45$) of homicides and desertion/termination for two percent ($n=10$).

Other disputes preceded 15 percent ($n=68$) of these homicides, most of which were alcohol-related (12% of all incidents, $n=55$). Less than one percent of homicides of Indigenous women were motivated by other reasons ($n=4$) or perpetrated by an offender experiencing a suspected mental health event at the time of the homicide ($n=3$).

A motive could not be determined for five percent ($n=24$) of homicide incidents and information about the possible motive was not available for 13 percent ($n=57$).

Weapon used

A weapon was used in the homicide of 93 percent ($n=441$) of Indigenous women victims between 1989–90 and 2022–23. Knives or other sharp instruments were the most common weapon type, used against 40 percent ($n=191$) of victims. Hands and/or feet were used against 27 percent of victims ($n=127$) and a blunt instrument against 17 percent of victims ($n=82$). Firearms were seldom used in the homicide of an Indigenous woman (3%, $n=15$).

The pattern of weapon use against Indigenous women victims of homicide contrasted with that of non-Indigenous women. Larger proportions of Indigenous women had a knife or sharp instrument (40%, $n=191$ vs 31%, $n=757$), blunt instrument (17%, $n=82$ vs 10%, $n=244$) or hands and feet (27%, $n=127$ vs 20%, $n=481$) used against them. Indigenous women, however, were much less likely to have had a firearm (3%, $n=15$ vs 18%, $n=429$) or other weapon (eg fire, drugs, ligatures) used against them (4%, $n=21$ vs 11%, $n=265$).

Cause of death

Cause of death is determined by the coroner and NHMP data are drawn from autopsy reports and coronial findings from the NCIS. Over 80 percent ($n=396$) of Indigenous women victims of homicide died from just two causes of death—blunt force injuries or a stab wound. However, unlike the general cause of death pattern for homicide victims in Australia, Indigenous women were equally likely to have died from injuries sustained from a beating or other blunt force trauma (43%, $n=203$) or from a stab wound (41%, $n=193$; see Table 4). Few victims died from other causes. Three percent ($n=15$) died from a gunshot wound, two percent ($n=11$) from strangulation or suffocation and two percent ($n=11$) from injuries sustained from a collision with a vehicle. The cause of death for five percent of victims ($n=23$) was not available.

Table 4: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women victims of homicide by cause of death, 1989–90 to 2022–23

	<i>n</i>	%
Gunshot wound	15	3.1
Stab wound	193	40.5
Beating/blunt force trauma	203	42.6
Strangulation/suffocation	11	2.3
Injuries sustained from a vehicle	11	2.3
Other	20	4.2
Cause of death not available	23	4.8
Total	476	100.0

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 1989–90 to 2022–23 [computer file]

The offender

Most women victims of homicide in Australia are killed by a male (Miles & Bricknell 2024). Eighty-nine percent ($n=406$) of Indigenous women victims where the incident was cleared ($n=458$ victims from 455 incidents) were killed by a male offender. Eleven percent ($n=52$) were killed by a female offender.

Indigenous status and sex of the offender

Most Indigenous women victims of homicide were killed by an Indigenous male. Between 1989–90 and 2022–23, 78 percent ($n=359$) of Indigenous women homicide victims were killed by an Indigenous male (see Table 5). Similar proportions of Indigenous women were killed by another Indigenous female (11%, $n=49$) or a non-Indigenous male (10%, $n=47$). Very few Indigenous women were killed by a non-Indigenous female (1%, $n=3$). Previous research on Indigenous and non-Indigenous homicide similarly found that most Indigenous homicides are perpetrated by an Indigenous offender (Cussen & Bryant 2015; Miles & Bricknell 2024; Mouzos 2001).

Table 5: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women victims of homicide by relationship with, Indigenous status of and sex of primary offender, 1989–90 to 2022–23 (n)

	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander offender		Non-Indigenous offender		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Intimate partner	301	0	27	0	328
Child	0	2	0	0	2
Parent	6	7	2	0	15
Sibling	7	6	2	0	15
Other relative	16	10	0	0	26
Friend	3	4	0	1	8
Acquaintance	18	9	5	1	33
Other known person	5	8	6	0	19
<i>Knew primary offender</i>	<i>356</i>	<i>46</i>	<i>42</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>446</i>
Stranger	3	0	5	0	8
Relationship not stated	0	3	0	1	4
Total	359	49	47	3	458

Note: Excludes 18 victims of homicides that have not been cleared

Source: AIC NHMP 1989–90 to 2022–2023 [computer file]

Relationship with the offender

Indigenous women victims of homicide are often killed by someone they know—97 percent ($n=446$) between 1989–90 and 2022–23 knew the primary offender (see Table 5). Almost three-quarters of these women were killed by their intimate partner (72%, $n=328$), of whom 92 percent ($n=301$) were their current partner. All intimate partner offenders were male and most were Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Of the 328 Indigenous women victims of intimate partner homicide, 92 percent ($n=301$) were killed by an Indigenous male intimate partner and eight percent ($n=27$) by a non-Indigenous male intimate partner (see Table 5). An Indigenous male intimate partner was the offender in the homicide of 66 percent ($n=301$) of Indigenous women between 1989–90 and 2022–23.

Other family members were involved in the homicide of 13 percent ($n=58$) of Indigenous women. Three percent ($n=15$) of victims each were the parent or sibling of the offender and six percent ($n=26$) were another family member (including kin). Less than one percent ($n=2$) were the adult daughter of the offender.

Another 13 percent ($n=60$) of Indigenous women victims were a friend of or acquainted with the offender, three-quarters (78%, $n=47$) of whom were also Indigenous (see Table 5). Indigenous male friends, acquaintances or other known persons were the offender in the homicide of six percent ($n=26$) of Indigenous women and Indigenous female friends, acquaintances or other known persons were the offender in five percent ($n=21$).

Homicide by a stranger is rare for Indigenous women. Only eight Indigenous women, or two percent of victims from cleared incidents between 1989–90 and 2022–23, were killed by a stranger. Five of these eight women were killed by a non-Indigenous male and three by an Indigenous male.

All but three of the Indigenous women killed by an Indigenous male knew the offender ($n=356$; see Table 5). Eighty-four percent ($n=301$) of the 359 women killed by an Indigenous male were the victim of a current or former intimate partner. Less than 10 percent were killed by an Indigenous male family member (8%, $n=29$).

Most of the 47 Indigenous women killed by a non-Indigenous male offender also knew the offender (89%, $n=42$). Fifty-seven percent ($n=27$) were killed by a non-Indigenous current or former intimate partner. A quarter (23%, $n=11$) were the victim of a non-Indigenous male acquaintance or other known person and 11 percent ($n=5$) of a non-Indigenous male stranger.

All Indigenous women victims of Indigenous female offenders knew the primary offender. Half (51%, $n=25$) were an Indigenous female family member—mostly a parent, sibling or other relative—and 43 percent ($n=21$) were a friend or acquaintance of or otherwise known to the Indigenous female offender.

Indigenous status of offender and cause of death

Variation also existed in the cause of death and the sex and Indigenous status of the offender. Among victims killed by a non-Indigenous male, close to half (45%, $n=21$) died from a stab wound, compared with a fifth (21%, $n=10$) from blunt force trauma. Deaths from strangulation and gunshot wounds were proportionally more common when the offender was a non-Indigenous male, although the numbers are small (<5).

Blunt force trauma was the most common cause of death where the offender was an Indigenous male. Half (50%, $n=179$) of Indigenous women killed by an Indigenous male died as a result of blunt force trauma or a beating. Thirty-seven percent ($n=134$) died from a stab wound.

Stab wounds were the primary cause of death where the offender was an Indigenous female. Seventy-one percent ($n=35$) of Indigenous women killed by an Indigenous female offender died as a result of stab wounds. Blunt force trauma caused the death of 14 percent ($n=7$) of victims.

Use of alcohol and drugs

Data on the use of alcohol and/or drugs by homicide offenders are not necessarily based on toxicology results and may underestimate the number of offenders who had used substances prior to the homicide. Sixty-nine percent ($n=314$) of primary homicide offenders who had killed an Indigenous woman had consumed alcohol prior to the homicide and 27 percent ($n=123$) had consumed illicit drugs and/or prescription drugs at non-therapeutic levels. A quarter (25%, $n=116$) had consumed both alcohol and drugs prior to the incident. The use of alcohol was not stated or unknown for 20 percent ($n=93$) of primary homicide offenders of Indigenous women. Drug use was unstated or unknown for 32 percent ($n=148$) of offenders.

History of domestic and family violence

Information regarding whether the offender had a history of domestic and family violence—as the offender, victim or both—has been routinely recorded by the NHMP since 2016–17. A history of domestic or family violence refers to the offender being known to police in relation to a domestic and family violence incident, rather than having been charged with an associated offence. Of the 69 primary offenders between 2016–17 and 2022–23, two-thirds (67%, $n=46$) had a known history of domestic and family violence. Among these 69 offenders, 38 percent ($n=26$) were known as a perpetrator, four percent ($n=3$) as a victim and 25 percent ($n=17$) as a victim and a perpetrator. Ten percent ($n=7$) of primary offenders did not have a history of domestic and family violence and information was not available for 23 percent ($n=16$) of primary offenders. Two-thirds (65%, $n=35$) of Indigenous primary offenders and 47 percent ($n=7$) of non-Indigenous offenders had a known history of domestic and family violence.

Between 2016–17 and 2022–23 there were 45 incidents where an Indigenous woman was the victim of an intimate partner homicide. In 80 percent ($n=36$) of these incidents the primary offender was known to have had a history of domestic and family violence. A similarly high proportion of primary offenders of domestic homicide of an Indigenous woman were known to have a history of domestic and family violence as either the victim, offender or both (77%, $n=43$ of 56 offenders).

Discussion

This study examined homicide victimisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. In the 34 years between 1989–90 and 2022–23, 476 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were the victim of a homicide in Australia. Indigenous women experienced a homicide victimisation rate between two and seven times the victimisation rate for all Australians. They comprised an average of five percent of all homicide victims, and an average of 16 percent of all women victims, each year over the 34-year period. Most of these 476 women were victims of murder and 96 percent of the homicide incidents (murder and manslaughter) had been cleared by police.

The homicide of Indigenous women was commonly committed by someone they knew, mostly their male intimate partner. Seventy-two percent of Indigenous women were killed by a current or former male intimate partner, with smaller proportions killed by another family member or a friend or acquaintance (13% each). Ninety-two percent of the male intimate partner offenders were also Indigenous, similar to the proportions reported by ADFVDRN and ANROWS (2022) and Buxton-Namisnyk (2022). Overall, 78 percent of Indigenous women were killed by an Indigenous male, 11 percent by an Indigenous female and 10 percent by a non-Indigenous male.

The homicide of Indigenous women mostly occurred in a private residence, although over a third took place in a community setting, specifically an open area or streetscape. This pattern differs from homicide generally, which less commonly occur in public locations. Forty-three percent of the women died from injuries sustained from a beating or trauma from a blunt object and 41 percent from a stab wound. Beating deaths were more frequently perpetrated by Indigenous male offenders and stabbing deaths by non-Indigenous male offenders. Cripps (2023) noted the same variance in cause of death depending on the Indigenous status of the offender, with victims of non-Indigenous offenders more likely to die from gunshot wounds or strangulation.

Around half of the homicides were immediately preceded by some form of domestic conflict or enmity. While this study is quantitative in nature and did not use coronial findings to examine the nature of the relationship between victim and offender, studies by ADFVDRN and ANROWS (2022) and Boxall et al. (2022) show most intimate partner homicides, at least, occurred in the context of domestic and family violence. Eighty percent of intimate partner homicide offenders of Indigenous women in the seven years between 2016–17 and 2022–23 had a known history of family and domestic violence, as did 77 percent of domestic homicide offenders.

The over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as victims of homicide has long been stated, although data have not always been available or used to support this reality. The findings from this study, drawn from over 30 years of homicide data, show that Indigenous women are victims of homicide at much greater rates than other Australians. The findings also highlight these women are overwhelmingly killed by a male intimate partner, most offenders had histories of family and domestic violence and most offenders were Indigenous males. These data complement the findings from the currently small number of studies about the homicide of Indigenous women. Importantly, they also contribute long-term data with which to measure national targets to reduce rates of victimisation and eliminate the circumstances that initiate lethal violence.

References

URLs correct as at July 2024

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