

# 15 Homicide

## Characteristics

Homicides are fatal outcomes from intentional injuries inflicted by another person. Homicide rates provide an indicator of the nature and extent of interpersonal violence in the population. They are not distributed evenly throughout the population, taking a greater toll on males, the young, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in rural and remote areas.

An examination of a decade of homicide in Australia by the Australian Institute of Criminology found for the period 1989–1999 (Mouzos 2000):

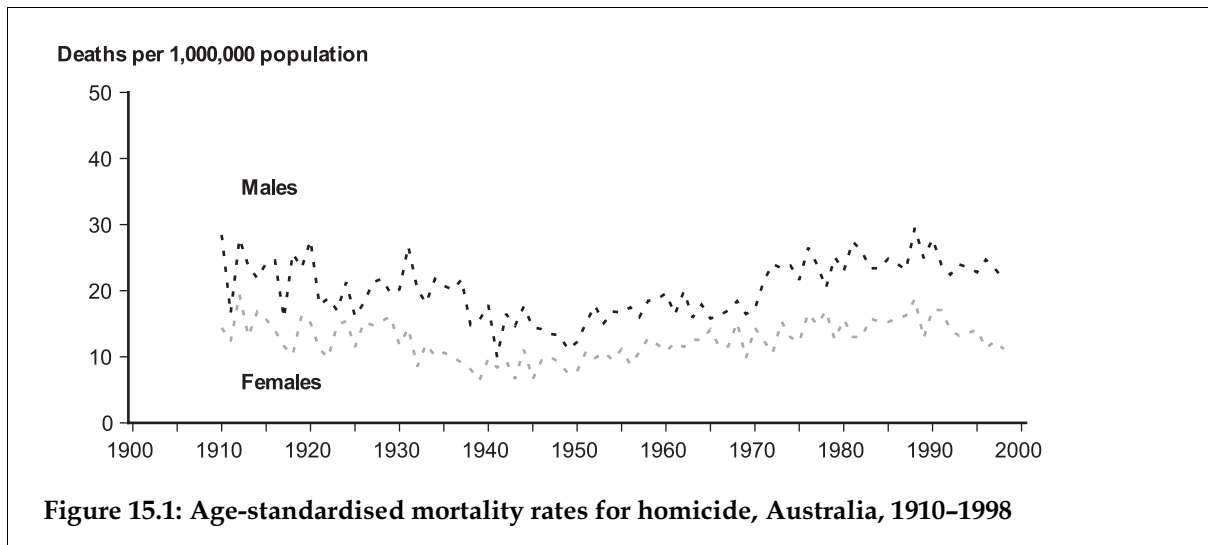
### Offenders

- Of the 3,481 offenders of homicide, 87.2% were male and 12.8% were female.
- Male offenders were more likely to be single, whereas female offenders were more likely to be married or living in a de facto relationship at the time of the incident.
- Just over seven out of ten male offenders and just under nine out of ten female offenders were not employed at the time of the incident.
- Approximately 6% of homicide offenders in Australia committed suicide during or following the homicide incident.
- When women kill a male intimate partner, they typically kill someone with whom they have experienced a long history of violent conflict.
- Biological parents, usually the mother, were responsible for a majority of child killings in Australia. Very rarely were children killed by a stranger.

### Victims

- Eight out of ten homicides occurred between people who were known to one another.
- Females were likely to be killed by an intimate partner, whereas males were more likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance.
- Females were more likely to be killed as a result of a domestic altercation, although this proportion has declined in recent years.
- Males were more likely to be killed following an alcohol-related argument.
- About 10% of homicide incidents occurred in the course of a robbery and almost 4% occurred in the course of sexual assault.
- Approximately 9% of all homicide victims were aged under 15.
- The homicide of an elderly person is a relatively rare occurrence, with elderly victims accounting for approximately 7% of all homicide victims during 1989–1999.

## Historic view



The collection of homicide statistics began in 1910. No clear trend in homicide rates emerges. Rates for males and females in 1910 were around 30 and 20 deaths per million population. These rates declined to 10 and 6 deaths per million population males and females respectively in 1939. The rates climbed again to 29 and 19 deaths per million population in 1988 after which they fell to 21 and 11 deaths by 1998 (Figure 15.1). It is estimated that there are about 8,000 PYLL before age 75 for males and about 4,000 PYLL for females.

## Age–sex distribution

In 1998, 0.25% of all deaths was due to homicides. Of these 298 deaths, 197 were of males and 101 were of females. The age distribution for mortality rates was relatively consistent over the 12-year period.

In 1998:

- The mortality rate for males was 21 deaths per million population compared with 11 for females.
- While children aged between 5 and 14 had relatively low age-specific rates, children aged 0–4 years had age-specific rates comparable with those of adult age groups.
- Forty-nine per cent of homicides of males occurred between ages 20–39, while for females 40% occurred in this age group.
- Eighty-four per cent of all homicides occurred before the age of 55.
- While homicide was more likely in younger age groups, a higher proportion of female homicides compared to male homicides occurred after the age of 60 (Table 15.1).

## Twelve-year trends 1987–1998

Over the period 1987–1998, the homicide rate declined significantly by 1.5% per annum for males. For females the decrease was not statistically significant. While the age-specific rates showed no significant decreases for males over the period 1987–1998, there were significant decreases in female age-specific rates for ages 25–34 and 45–49 (Table 15.1; Figure 15.2).

## **Geographic differences in mortality**

As discussed in Chapter 4, geographic differences are a complex interplay of many factors including socioeconomic status, occupational and environmental risk, migrant population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and the proportion of the population living in rural and remote areas. Areas with a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will have higher mortality rates because of the higher mortality rates experienced by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. Some of these factors are discussed separately below.

### **State and Territory comparison**

The homicide rates showed some variation among the States and Territories (Table 15.2). During the 1987–1991 period, compared with the national homicide rate:

- The homicide rate for males in the Northern Territory was significantly higher.
- Homicide rates for males in South Australia, Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory were significantly lower.
- The homicide rate for females in the Northern Territory was significantly higher.
- The homicide rate for females in South Australia was significantly lower.

During the 1994–1998 period:

- The homicide rate for males in the Northern Territory was significantly higher.
- Homicide rates for males in Victoria, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory were significantly lower.
- Homicide rates for females in the Northern Territory and Western Australia were significantly higher.
- The homicide rate for females in Victoria was significantly lower.

### **Geographic category (by metropolitan, rural and remote area)**

During 1995–1997, homicide rates were significantly higher for males and females living in remote areas (Table 15.3).

The rate for males living in remote areas (71 deaths per million population) was more than three times the rates for males living in metropolitan areas and rural areas (22 and 20 respectively).

Females living in remote areas (44 deaths per million population) had a rate about 3.5 times the rate for females living in metropolitan areas (12). The rate for remote areas was about 4.5 times the rate for females living in rural areas (10 deaths per million population).

## **Country of birth**

For the period 1992–1994, the world-standardised mortality rates for homicide for Australian males and females born in Australia were 22 deaths per million population for males and 13 deaths per million population for females (Table 15.5).

- Australian males born in the Netherlands, Greece, Hungary and Italy had significantly lower homicide rates than Australian males born in Australia.

- Australian females born in Poland, Italy, the Netherlands, and Greece had significantly lower homicide rates than Australian females born in Australia.

### **Socioeconomic status**

For the period 1995–1997, the homicide rate for males in the lowest of the five socioeconomic groups (37 deaths per million population) was significantly higher than for all other groups, and three times the mortality rate for males in the highest SEIFA group (11).

The homicide rate for females was significantly greater for the lowest SEIFA group (18 deaths per million population) than for the highest SEIFA group (8) (Table 15.4; Figure 15.3) (see Appendix D).

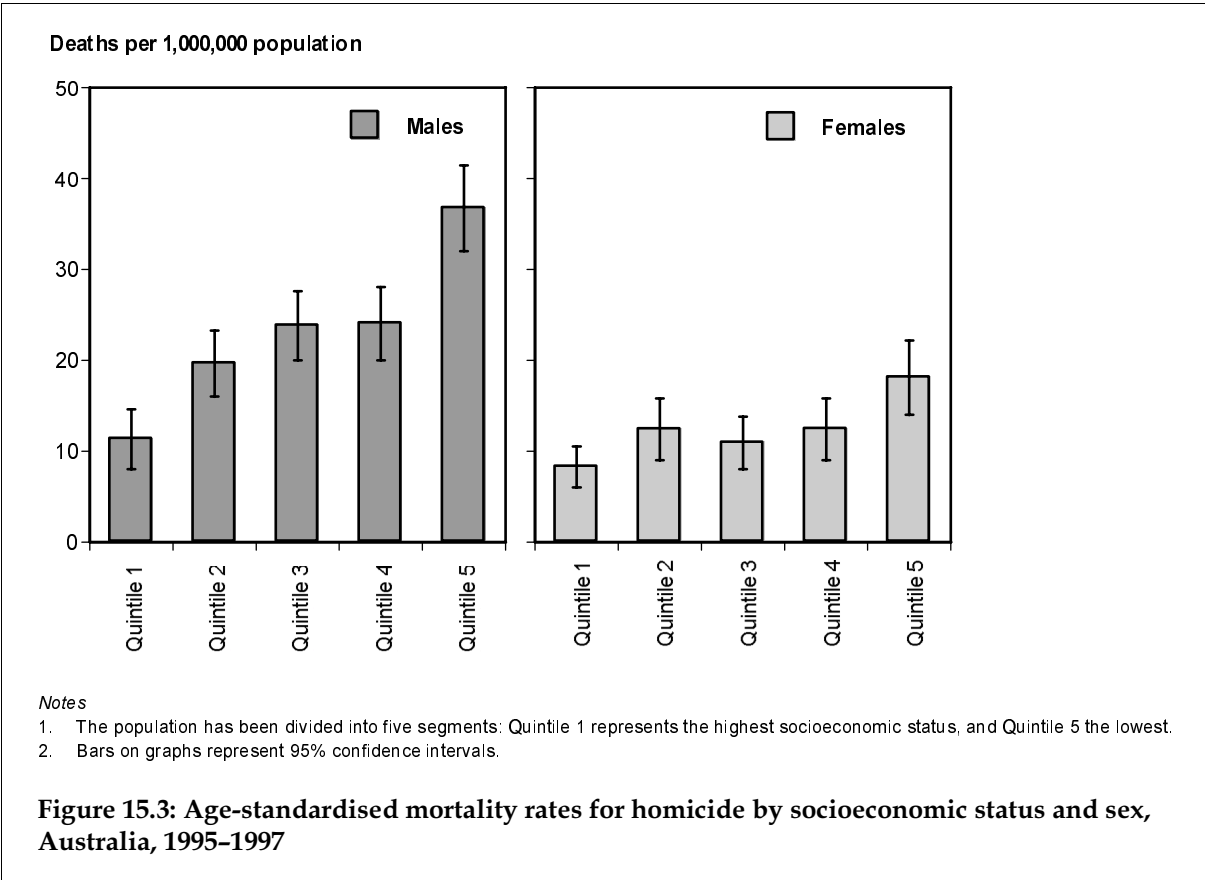
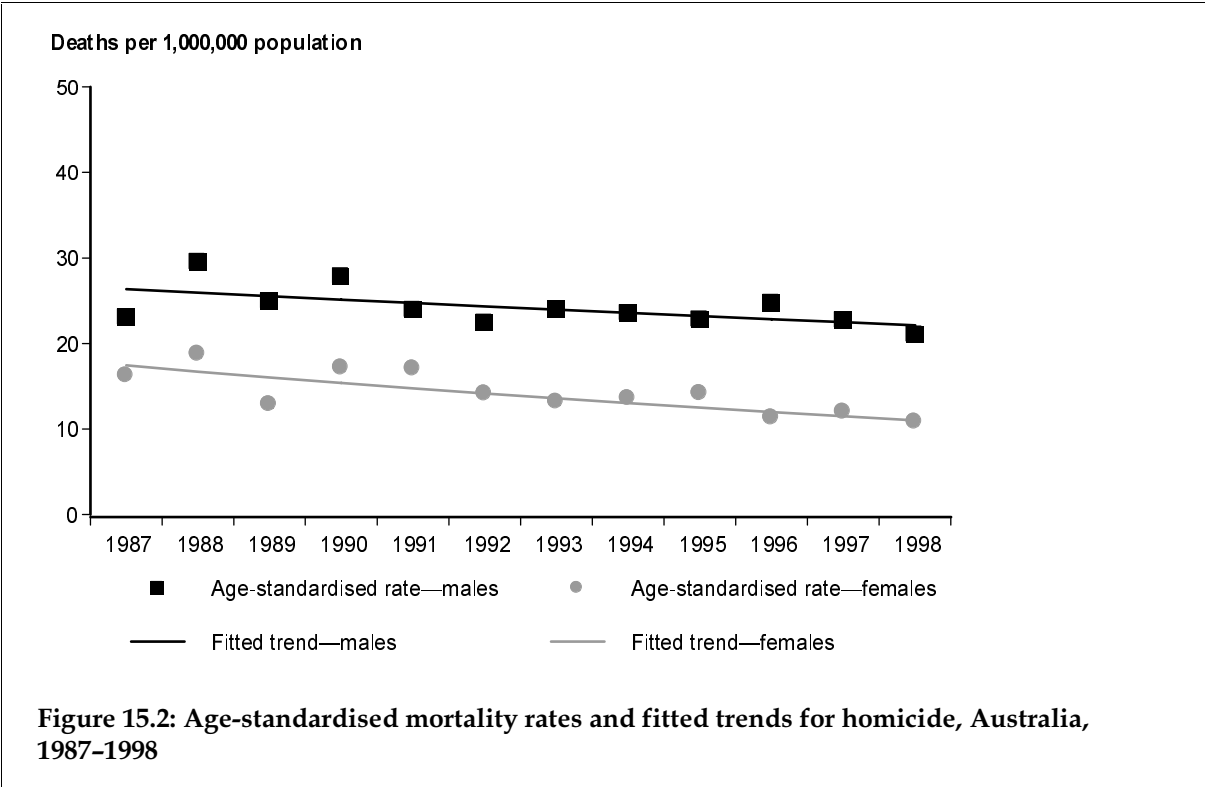


Table 15.1: Age-specific and age-standardised mortality rates for homicide per million population, Australia, 1987-1998

Year	Age																	ASMR Aust 1991		
	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	30-34	35-39	40-44	45-49	50-54	55-59	60-64	65-69	70-74	75-79	80-84		85+	Crude rate
	<b>Males</b>																			
1987	18	2	5	18	31	40	32	35	34	29	16	26	14	18	14	22	28	0	23	23
1988	13	5	6	19	53	52	36	44	39	30	33	29	22	24	14	21	41	53	29	29
1989	5	5	3	26	43	43	41	34	27	35	39	16	14	16	9	13	13	25	25	25
1990	20	5	5	26	44	41	36	44	34	36	24	35	35	19	23	6	0	0	28	28
1991	8	6	3	17	38	46	50	27	32	25	32	5	22	16	4	19	24	23	24	24
1992	3	2	0	16	30	39	28	34	41	32	31	35	25	6	13	6	23	21	22	22
1993	27	8	5	15	34	41	36	28	18	27	29	23	31	15	4	31	11	60	24	24
1994	14	6	3	15	44	40	34	39	35	37	19	18	8	12	8	12	20	0	24	24
1995	15	3	8	25	36	30	29	37	35	16	34	12	23	24	4	12	10	35	23	23
1996	14	3	1	23	32	51	46	36	24	17	25	24	20	39	11	11	19	17	24	25
1997	13	9	4	23	29	48	30	28	24	27	28	16	11	20	7	36	9	30	23	23
1998	15	7	4	16	27	36	32	40	22	24	23	24	16	17	14	0	9	0	21	21
	<b>Females</b>																			
1987	12	5	6	22	35	28	17	11	21	17	16	14	8	16	4	5	24	0	16	16
1988	23	3	10	25	34	30	24	25	21	21	19	3	8	6	4	5	15	20	19	19
1989	23	7	7	7	11	27	21	8	17	11	8	8	3	3	19	9	30	29	13	13
1990	13	11	5	12	28	24	23	32	19	27	7	6	8	6	18	18	7	19	17	17
1991	19	3	7	21	30	27	25	12	27	12	15	11	8	14	11	4	21	9	17	17
1992	11	6	3	14	27	29	26	13	6	17	9	8	14	14	0	4	20	0	14	14
1993	16	6	5	21	25	19	11	10	6	17	14	16	11	6	10	4	13	16	13	13
1994	22	5	2	11	18	15	20	21	21	15	13	5	11	8	0	4	12	16	13	14
1995	9	8	8	6	20	25	26	13	15	21	8	8	11	8	19	13	17	7	14	14
1996	11	6	3	11	13	23	10	11	15	16	12	5	14	14	3	8	6	7	11	11
1997	8	3	6	18	16	16	11	21	13	12	20	14	8	3	12	8	0	0	12	12
1998	16	0	2	14	13	16	22	6	11	7	14	7	8	8	18	4	22	6	11	11

Note: ASMR = age-standardised mortality rate.

**Table 15.2: Number of deaths and age-standardised mortality rates for homicide per million population, States and Territories, 1987–1991 and 1994–1998**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	Australia
<b>Males</b>									
<b>Deaths</b>									
1987–1991	349	293	214	70	64	13	7	73	1,081
1994–1998	411	175	206	90	77	22	7	56	1,044
<b>Deaths per million population</b>									
1987–1991	24	28	31	20	16	12	9	186	26
1994–1998	27	16	25	25	17	19	8	116	23
<b>Confidence intervals (95%)</b>									
1987–1991	22–27	25–31	27–35	15–24	12–20	5–18	2–16	133–238	24–27
1994–1998	24–29	13–18	21–28	20–30	13–21	11–27	2–14	83–149	22–24
<b>Females</b>									
<b>Deaths</b>									
1987–1991	242	166	128	65	35	12	16	31	687
1994–1998	183	97	122	67	41	21	10	29	565
<b>Deaths per million population</b>									
1987–1991	17	16	18	18	9	11	26	80	16
1994–1998	12	8	15	19	9	18	13	69	12
<b>Confidence intervals (95%)</b>									
1987–1991	15–19	13–18	15–21	14–23	6–12	5–17	13–38	45–115	15–18
1994–1998	10–13	7–10	12–17	14–23	6–12	10–26	5–21	39–98	11–13

**Table 15.3: Age-standardised mortality rates for homicide per million population, by geographic area, 1995–1997**

Geographic area	Males		Females	
	ASMR	95% confidence interval	ASMR	95% confidence interval
Metropolitan	22	20–25	12	10–13
Rural	20	17–24	10	8–13
Remote	71	53–89	44	29–59

Note: ASMR = age-standardised mortality rate.

Source: AIHW Mortality Database, based on *Statistical Local Area* resident population estimates compiled by the ABS.

**Table 15.4: Age-standardised mortality rates for homicide per million population, by socioeconomic status, 1995–1997**

SEIFA quintile	Males		Females	
	ASMR	95% confidence interval	ASMR	95% confidence interval
1 High SES	11	8–14	8	6–11
2	20	16–23	12	9–15
3	24	20–28	11	8–14
4	24	20–28	12	9–15
5 Low SES	37	32–42	18	14–22

Notes

1. ASMR = age-standardised mortality rate; SES = socioeconomic status.

2. A description of the SEIFA Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage may be found in Appendix D.

Source: AIHW Mortality Database, based on *Statistical Local Area* resident population estimates compiled by the ABS.



**Table 15.5: Age-standardised mortality rates per million population for homicide, Australians by birthplace, 1992–1994**

Males			Females		
Country of birth	ASMR (world)	95% CI	Country of birth	ASMR (world)	95% CI
Japan	145	0–382	Hungary	137	0–391
Poland	48	0–111	Germany	61	0–131
USA	41	0–90	France	52	0–155
Finland	39	0–116	Finland	33	0–98
Germany	37	0–78	Japan	29	0–68
China	32	0–65	Hong Kong and Macau	21	0–47
New Zealand	26	12–40	Korea	19	0–58
<b>Australia</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>20–24</b>	New Zealand	14	4–24
Austria	21	0–51	<b>Australia</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>11–14</b>
United Kingdom and Ireland	16	10–23	Malta	12	0–28
Singapore	14	0–42	USA	9	0–26
Hong Kong and Macau	14	0–34	China	7	0–22
Italy	7	0–14	United Kingdom and Ireland	7	3–11
Hungary	6	0–17	Greece	5	0–10
Greece	4	0–10	Netherlands	3	0–10
Netherlands	2	0–7	Italy	3	0–6
Canada	—	—	Poland	2	0–5
Chile	—	—	Austria	—	—
France	—	—	Canada	—	—
Israel	—	—	Chile	—	—
Korea	—	—	Israel	—	—
Malta	—	—	Mauritius	—	—
Mauritius	—	—	Portugal	—	—
Portugal	—	—	Singapore	—	—
Switzerland	—	—	Switzerland	—	—

*Notes*

1. ASMR = age-standardised mortality rate; CI = confidence interval.
2. Age-standardised mortality rates have been standardised to the World Standard Population.