

# Summary Information on Victims and Perpetrators

*This summary is based on all the research carried out and identified by The Hub and is intended as a guide only. For in-depth information go to the publications list and refer to each article.*

## Victims

Australian research provides consistent information about victims as follows.

- One child under 18 is killed by a parent or parent equivalent in Australia every fortnight
- Victims most at risk are very young children; those under 12 months are most at risk followed by those under 4
- As children grow older, the risk diminishes but while aging is a protective factor all children remain at risk, even adult children
- Boys are more commonly victims than girls; that varies from one location to another with boys in Victoria being the boys most at risk. The reasons for this are not known currently
- Victims are more likely to have a chronic illness or disability; in some overseas countries all children with disabilities are killed by their parents with community support
- Victims who are indigenous are more at risk
- Only 1/3 of victims are known to Child Protection

## Perpetrators

The Australian research has divided perpetrators into 5 parental groups

- (1) Mothers
- (2) Fathers
- (3) Mothers and fathers acting together
- (4) Step-fathers, and
- (5) Mothers acting together with step-fathers.

One grand- father and one aunt have been identified since the national study. Step-mothers have not emerged as perpetrators in Australia, but they have overseas.

The parental group to which the perpetrator belongs affects who they kill, how they kill and why they kill.

## Mothers

- Killed 47% of the children
- Kill the youngest of the children, 0-12 months
- Means of death seems less violent, in that they do not usually shoot, bash or beat to kill but instead drug, suffocate, burn the house, drown, neglect
- While they do commit suicide following the child or children's deaths, they do not usually kill another family member
- Mothers are the only perpetrators of neonaticide; serial neonaticide not known in Australia
- Mothers seek help and approach mental health services, GPs, counselling, family law services

Risk factors are a constellation of factors as follows:

- (1) Diagnosed with a mental illness (52%), most likely depression; only 10% were suffering a psychotic breakdown
- (2) Being separated from the father of their children (45%)
- (3) Criminal history, (often with violence, 30%)
- (4) Being a victim of domestic violence (23%)
- (5) Abusing drugs or alcohol (22%)
- (6) History of abuse as a child

Early childhood abuse or trauma is currently seen as the beginning of a spiral attracting other risk factors and which descends over time

## Fathers

- Killed 38% of the children
- Kill young, 1-4, but not youngest of children (0-1) and older children at primary school
- Only perpetrator of adult child deaths
- Means of deaths appear more violent, shoot, bash, beat, stab
- Commit suicide and, with or without committing suicide, kill other family members after killing children
- Acts as above sometimes interpreted as revenge, but Johnson argues they are a representation of their view that their life has come to an end after being abandoned by other family members, especially in context of partnership breakdown
- Fathers seek help and approach GPs, mental health services and family law services
- Are approached by child protection

Risk factors are a constellation of factors as follows:

- (1) Having a criminal history (54%), often involving violence
- (2) Being a perpetrator of domestic violence (43%)
- (3) Having separated from partner (25%)
- (4) Abusing drugs or alcohol (32%)

(5) Diagnosed with a mental illness (12%)

(6) History of abuse as a child

## Step-fathers

Step-fathers are disproportionately represented as perpetrators. They are parenting 4% of children in Australia but kill 14% of victims. Their numbers appear to be growing. Current research does not distinguish between types of step-fathers, in terms of age or legal status or parenting responsibilities

- Killed 14% of victims
- Kill more boys than any other perpetrator
- Kill only one child
- Kill children under 12 months
- Means of death is violent with explosive outbursts of rage
- Do not seek help
- Are approached by Child Protection, Criminal Justice services

Risk factors are a constellation of factors as follows:

(1) Having a criminal history (74%)

(2) Abusing drugs and or alcohol ((55%), more commonly drugs (55%)

(3) Being a perpetrator of domestic violence (46%)

(4) Few with a diagnosed mental illness (3%)

## Joint Perpetrators

Little is known of joint perpetrators. One group of Joint perpetrators is mothers and fathers:

- Kill 3% of victims

The other is mothers and step-fathers:

- Kill 3% of victims