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**Abstract** | Filicide is the killing of a child by a parent or parent equivalent. Between 2000–01 and 2011–12, there were 238 incidents of filicide in Australia involving the death of 284 children. This paper examines the characteristics of custodial parents, non-custodial parents and step-parents charged with the murder or manslaughter of their children.

Offender circumstances and characteristics differed according to the offender's gender and custodial relationship with the victim. As filicide is difficult to predict, intervention strategies should focus on families with multiple risk factors and address the needs of parents as well as those of children at risk.

## Filicide offenders

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Around 10 percent of homicide victims in Australia are children aged 0–17 years (Bryant & Bricknell 2017). The majority of these children are victims of filicide (Kirkwood 2012)—the murder or manslaughter of a child by a parent or parent equivalent. International and Australian research indicates that children aged under five years make up the largest proportion of filicide victims (Bourget & Gagné 2005; Brown, Tyson & Fernandez Arias 2014; Dixon, Krienert & Walsh 2014; Kunz & Bahr 1996; Mariano, Chan & Myers 2014; Mouzos & Rushforth 2003; West, Friedman & Resnick 2009). Infants are at particular risk—between one-quarter and one-third of all filicide victims are under one year of age (Bourget & Gagné 2005; Dixon, Krienert & Walsh 2014; Kunz & Bahr 1996; Mariano, Chan & Myers 2014). Filicide, however, involves not only child victims. While the incidence of adult filicide victimisation is less well documented, one study from the US estimated 18 percent of filicide victims over a 32-year period were aged 18 years or over (Mariano, Chan & Myers 2014).



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Early research on filicide, pioneered by Resnick (1970, 1969), was dominated by an examination of the motives of filicide offenders. Motive continues to be a common theme in filicide research, yet some scholars argue that categorising offenders according to motive is simplistic and misleading (Sidebotham 2013; Stroud 2013). Motives are rarely expressed, or expressed clearly, by filicidal parents (Brown, Tyson & Fernandez Arias 2014; Mouzos & Rushforth 2003) and its emphasis disregards the personal, familial and social circumstances that may lead to or characterise a filicide. More recent filicide research has therefore examined the effects of some of these circumstances, such as parental separation (Brown, Tyson & Fernandez Arias 2014; Johnson 2008; Liem & Koenraadt 2008; Kirkwood 2012; Putkonen et al. 2010), experience of domestic violence (Bourget, Grace & Whitehurst 2007; Butler & Buxton 2013; Stroud & Pritchard 2001), the mental health status of the offender (Bourget & Gagné 2005; Friedman et al. 2005; Pritchard & Bagley 2001; Putkonen et al. 2010; Somander & Rammer 1991; Stroud & Pritchard 2001), parental perpetration or childhood experience of abuse and neglect (Eriksson et al. 2014), use of alcohol and other drugs, and whether the parent and child were genetically related (Daly & Wilson 1994; Harris et al. 2007; Weekes-Shackelford & Shackelford 2004). A study of filicide in Victoria (see *Monash Filicide Research Project* below) suggested that offender characteristics and custodial relationship markedly influenced the circumstances and reasons for filicide deaths (Brown & Tyson 2012; Brown, Tyson & Fernandez Arias 2014).

This paper describes offenders charged with the murder or manslaughter of their child(ren) in Australia between 2000–01 and 2011–12 to examine the prevalence of risk factors documented in the literature among custodial parents, non-custodial parents and step-parents. The findings are drawn from a larger national study of the incidence and characteristics of filicide incidents, victims and offenders in Australia, undertaken by researchers from Monash University, Deakin University and the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC), funded by a Criminology Research Grant (Brown et al. 2019).

### Monash Filicide Research Project

The Monash Filicide Research Project investigated filicide deaths that occurred in Victoria between 2000 and 2009 (Brown, Tyson & Fernandez Arias 2014). Fifty-two children were identified as being killed in the state over the 10-year period. Information on 42 of the 52 children was available from closed case files held by the Victorian Coroner's Office, including witness statements, police records, court transcripts and criminal records for the offender.

In this study 16 children were killed by their mother, 15 by their father, nine by a step-father and one by both parents. Of the 36 filicides in which risk factor information was available, the majority followed parental separation (72%; n=26) and involved an offender with a mental illness (66%; n=24). A history of domestic violence or child abuse characterised a quarter (25%; n=9) and a fifth (22%; n=8) of filicides respectively.

The Monash study suggested that filicide occurs when different factors, such as mental illness, domestic violence and family dissolution, interact and there is an absence of appropriate interventions (Brown, Tyson & Fernandez Arias 2014). Larger proportions of filicidal mothers had mental health issues (86%; n=12) and/or were previously separated (64%; n=9) compared with fathers and step-fathers. Most step-fathers had a history of domestic violence (67%; n=6) or child abuse (56%; n=5) and were known to use illicit drugs (78%; n=7). The Monash study also noted that step-fathers ‘behaved differently’ to fathers and mothers—they were less likely to give prior warning about possible harm to children or to attempt or commit suicide. Further, step-fathers almost exclusively killed children aged one to four years. The research showed that a relationship existed between the child’s age and gender, the type of custodial relationship and the method used to kill the child. For example, both fathers and mothers killed more boys than girls. However, fathers primarily killed boys under one year of age, whereas mothers killed equal numbers of infants and children aged one to four years (Brown, Tyson & Fernandez Arias 2014).

## Method

This study drew on the Monash Filicide Research Project to produce a picture of filicide across Australia. The data used for analysis came from the Australian Institute of Criminology’s National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP). The NHMP collects data on homicide incidents, victims and offenders recorded in Australia since 1989–90.

*Homicide* is defined in the NHMP as ‘the unlawful killing of a person’ and a *homicide incident* as ‘an event in which one or more persons are killed at the same place and time’. The NHMP collects data on all cases resulting in a person being charged with murder or manslaughter; all murder–suicides classed as murder by police; and all other deaths classed as homicide or infanticide by police, whether or not an offender was apprehended.

NHMP data are derived from (a) offence records created by Australian state and territory police and (b) state coronial records (including toxicology and post-mortem reports). State and territory police provide homicide incident, victim and offender data to the NHMP using a data collection form developed by the AIC in consultation with police agencies. Coronial data are accessed from the National Coronial Information System using victim name, jurisdiction and incident year identifiers drawn from police data. Autopsy, toxicology and coronial findings reports are used to verify incident and victim data provided by police, such as cause of death.

Court transcripts and media reports are used where suitable to supplement offence records and coronial data sources. NHMP data are linked to these sources using victim and offender name(s) provided in offence records.

Homicide incidents are classified according to the principal relationship between victim and offender. A domestic homicide in the NHMP refers to an incident involving the death of a family member or other person from a domestic relationship. A filicide refers to a homicide in which a person is killed by one or both parents or parent equivalent(s). Parents are categorised based on their custodial relationship with the child (ie custodial parent, non-custodial parent or step-parent). These terms were applied at the commencement of the NHMP and retained to ensure data consistency.

The analytical framework for the study was guided by the findings from the Monash Filicide Research Project (described above) and constructed based on the range of descriptive variables captured in the NHMP.

Data were analysed as incident, victim and offender characteristics, and victim relationship with the primary offender.

## Characteristics of filicide offenders

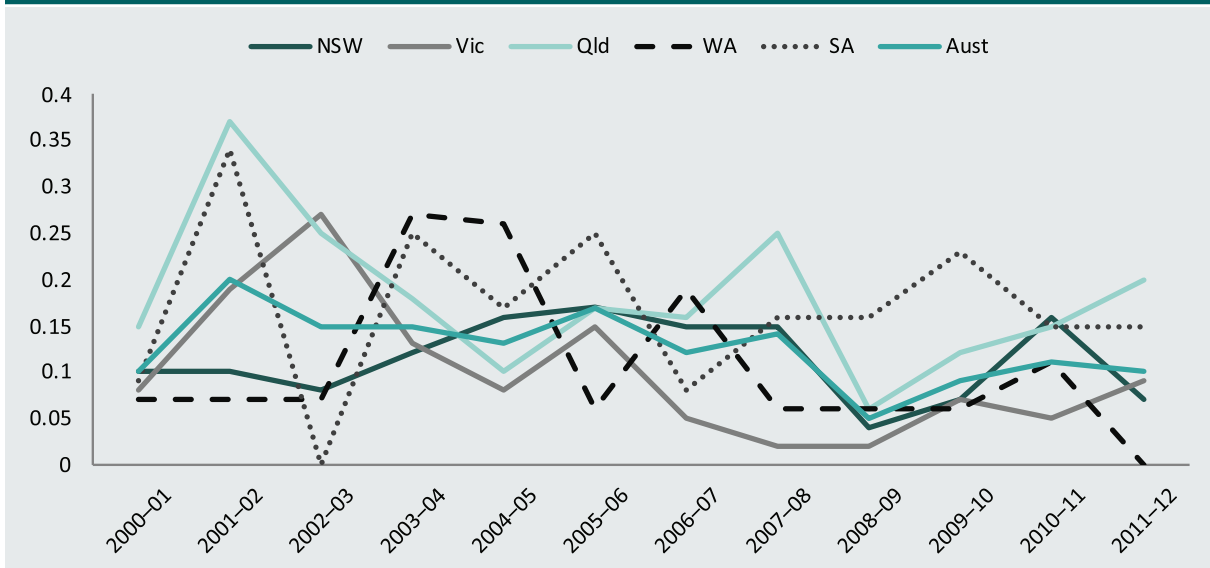
Between 2000–01 and 2011–12, Australian state and territory police recorded 238 incidents of filicide, in which 284 victims were killed by their parent(s). Ninety-six percent of filicide victims (n=274) were aged 0–17 years. Of the 10 adult victims, the youngest was 18 years and the oldest 33 years.

The 238 filicide incidents were committed by 260 offenders. This group of homicide offenders accounted for 16 percent of all domestic homicide offenders (n=1,484) and six percent of all identified homicide offenders (n=3,771) over the 12-year period. Eighty-three percent of filicide offenders (n=216) committed the homicide on their own. The remaining offenders committed the filicide with another person—that is, 22 homicide incidents involved two co-offenders.

The *primary offender* is defined in the NHMP as the offender with the closest relationship with the victim (or 238 of the 260 recorded filicide offenders). The following analysis describes the characteristics of primary filicide offenders.

The primary offender rate fluctuated during the period, with the highest rate—0.2 offenders per 100,000—recorded in 2001–02 (see Figure 1). Offender rates were similarly variable across selected states (see Figure 1), largely affected by the small number of filicide offenders recorded in each jurisdiction each year.

**Figure 1: Filicide offenders by selected states, 2000–01 to 2011–12 (rate per 100,000)**



Note: Excludes Tas, NT and the ACT due to very small numbers. Offender rates for all jurisdictions are shown in Table A1  
Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]; Table A1

## Gender

Males and females comprised around half of primary filicide offenders each (52% (n=124) vs 48% (n=114); see Table 1). However, male offender rates were higher than female offender rates for all but four of the years from 2000–01 and 2011–12 (see Figure 2). Some variation in the proportion of male and female filicide offenders was observed across the jurisdictions. Higher proportions of male filicide offenders were recorded in Victoria (62%; n=29) and Western Australia (60%; n=12), as well as in Tasmania and the Northern Territory, although based on very small offender numbers. In contrast, three-quarters of filicide offenders in South Australia were female (76%; n=19). The reason(s) for the predominance of female filicide offenders in South Australia is unclear.

**Figure 2: Filicide offenders by gender, 2000–01 to 2011–12 (rate per 100,000)**



Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]; Table A2

**Table 1: Filicide offenders by gender and state/territory, 2000–01 to 2011–12**

	Male		Female		Total
	n	%	n	%	n
NSW	36	50	36	50	72
Vic	29	62	18	39	47
Qld	34	52	31	48	65
WA	12	60	8	40	20
SA	6	24	19	76	25
Tas	2	100	0	0	2
ACT	1	50	1	50	2
NT	4	75	1	25	5
National	124	52	114	48	238

Note: Table refers to primary filicide offenders only. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding  
Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]

## Age

The median age of filicide offenders was 32 years; the youngest offender was 17 years of age and the oldest 75 years. The largest proportion of female filicide offenders were aged 25–34 years (42%; n=47). Another third were aged 35–49 years (34%; n=38). Similar proportions of male offenders were aged 25–34 (37%; n=45) and 35–49 years (32%; n=39). There was no statistically significant difference in the age of male and female filicide offenders.

## Indigenous status

Nine in 10 primary filicide offenders were non-Indigenous (89%; n=217). The non-Indigenous offending rate ranged from 0.04 to 0.19 per 100,000 between 2000–01 and 2011–12 (see Figure 3). The Indigenous offending rate was up to six times the non-Indigenous offending rate depending on the year considered but fluctuated markedly due to the small numbers of Indigenous filicide offenders recorded each year (range=0–3). Overall, 21 of the 238 primary filicide offenders in 2001–02 to 2011–12 were Indigenous. Approximately equal proportions of non-Indigenous offenders were male and female, whereas nearly two-thirds of Indigenous filicide offenders were male (62%; n=13).

**Figure 3: Filicide offenders by Indigenous status, 2000–01 to 2011 (rate per 100,000)**



Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]; Table A3

### Marital status

Marital status was known for 94 percent of primary offenders (n=223; see Table 2). Of these, two-thirds were in a relationship at the time the filicide was committed—36 percent in a de facto relationship (n=81) and 29 percent (n=65) married. One-fifth were separated (19%; n=43). Almost half of male filicide offenders were in a de facto relationship (47%; n=56), almost double the proportion of female offenders (24%; n=25). Female offenders were statistically more likely than male offenders to have never been married (22% (n=21) vs 5% (n=4)) and males were statistically more likely to be in a de facto relationship ( $\chi^2(5)=22.25, p<0.001$ ). There was little difference in the proportion of male and female offenders separated or divorced at the time of the filicide (20% (n=24) vs 22% (n=23)).

**Table 2: Filicide offender marital status by gender, 2000–01 to 2011–12**

	Male		Female		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Married <sup>a</sup>	32	27	33	32	65	29
De facto <sup>b</sup>	56 <sup>***</sup>	47	25 <sup>***</sup>	24	81	36
Separated <sup>c</sup>	22	18	21	20	43	19
Divorced	2	2	2	2	4	2
Widowed	1	1	2	2	3	1
Never married	5 <sup>***</sup>	4	22 <sup>***</sup>	21	27	12
Total	118	100	105	100	223	100

\*\*\*statistically significant at  $p<0.001$

a: Registered marriage

b: Includes same-sex relationships

c: Includes separations from registered and de facto marriages

Note: Excludes 15 offenders for whom marital status was unknown. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]

## Alcohol and drug use

In the NHMP, offender alcohol and drug use is indicated by police but not always confirmed with toxicology tests. Data on the alcohol and/or drug use by filicide offenders were recorded for three-quarters of primary offenders (n=175). Twenty-three percent of primary filicide offenders (n=40) were indicated by police to have used some type of drug at or near the time of the filicide and 15 percent of offenders (n=27) had consumed alcohol. Similar proportions of male and female filicide offenders were recorded as having used drugs (24% vs 22%). Male offenders were statistically more likely to be recorded as having consumed alcohol compared with female offenders (n=22 (23%) vs n=5 (6%);  $\chi^2(1)=9.90, p<0.05$ ).

## Previous offending

Criminal histories were available for 82 percent (n=194) of primary filicide offenders. Forty-three percent (n=83) of filicide offenders were known to have been convicted for a prior offence. More than half of male filicide offenders had received a previous conviction (54%; n=56), and of those for whom the type of offence was recorded, the largest proportion were convicted of a violent offence (41%; n=22). Fewer female filicide offenders had a criminal history (30%; n=27), compared with male filicide offenders ( $\chi^2(1)=12.03, p<0.001$ ) and female homicide offenders in general (40%; n=276). Among this small group, a third had a previous conviction for a drug offence (33%; n=9) and a fifth for a violent offence (22%; n=6). Step-parents were statistically more likely to have a criminal history (n=25; 74%) than custodial parents (n=55; 31%;  $\chi^2(2)=23.25, p<0.001$ ). However, these findings are correlated, as all step-parents were male and most custodial parents were female (n=133; 62%).

## History of domestic violence

Just under a third of filicide incidents (30%; n=57) were characterised by previous domestic violence between the filicide offender and an intimate partner. Previous domestic violence includes violence perpetrated and/or experienced by the offender. Proportionally more male filicide offenders were recorded by police as having a history of domestic violence (43%; n=43) compared with female filicide offenders (16%; n=14;  $\chi^2(1)=17.35, p<0.001$ ). Family and domestic violence history in the NHMP includes convictions for domestic assault and the issuance of domestic violence orders.

## Mental illness

Offenders are recorded in the NHMP as having a mental illness only if supporting evidence was presented by medical professionals during court proceedings or agreed upon by the presiding court authority and where it was established the offender had a mental illness at the time of the offence. One-third of primary offenders (32%; n=75) in which mental health status was known had a history of mental illness. Offenders with a mental illness were more likely to be female than male (n=50 (51%) vs n=13 (13%);  $\chi^2(1)=32.02, p<0.001$ ).

## Suicide

Most filicide offenders did not attempt (93%; n=200) or commit suicide (81%; n=190) following the homicide incident. Among the 14 primary offenders who attempted suicide, 12 were female. Of those who committed suicide, 53 percent (n=24) were male and 47 percent (n=21) were female.



## Custodial relationship with victim

The NHMP records the victim's relationship with the offender and, in the case of filicides, whether the child victim was killed by a custodial parent, non-custodial parent or step-parent. While the NHMP cannot specify whether the victim and parental offender were genetically related, it may be assumed that a large proportion of custodial and non-custodial parents recorded in the NHMP were the biological parent(s) of the children they killed.

It should be noted that the terms 'custodial parents' and 'non-custodial parents' have not been used in family law parenting arrangements and orders since 1995. The terms 'custody' and 'access' were discarded in favour of the terms 'residence' and 'contact' in the *Family Law Reform Act 1995* (Cth) (Rhoades, Graycar & Harrison 2000). Subsequently, these were superseded by the terms 'shared parental responsibility' and 'shared time', as legislated by the *Family Law Amendment (Shared Parental Responsibility) Act 2006* (Cth) (Kaspiew et al. 2009). While the NHMP database may be out of step with the language of the 1995 and 2006 legislation, research has found (Rhoades, Graycar & Harrison 2000) that the terms used before the 1995 reforms remain in common usage.

Because the relationship recorded in the NHMP is the victim's relationship to the offender, the following data are presented as victim rather than offender counts. Therefore, in homicides where an offender killed two or more of their children, the offender will be counted multiple times. The number of single victim and multiple victim incidents by parental status is shown in Table 3. The majority (n=201; 84%) were single victim incidents.

	Custodial parent		Non-custodial parent		Step-parent		Total
	n	%	n	%	n	%	
One victim	156	85	10	59	35	92	201
Two victims	22	12	3	18	3	8	28
Three victims	5	3	4	24	0	0	9
Total	183		17		38		238

Note: percentages may not total 100 due to rounding  
Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]

Three-quarters (76%; n=215) of the 284 filicide victims between 2000–01 and 2011–12 were killed by a custodial parent—46 percent (n=133) by their custodial mother and 29 percent (n=81) by their custodial father (see Table 4). Smaller proportions of children were killed by a step-parent (14%; n=41) or non-custodial parent (10%; n=28). All but one of the victims of a non-custodial parent were killed by their father and all victims of step-parents were killed by a step-father.

More males than females were killed by their parent or parent equivalent—56 percent (n=158) vs 44 percent (n=125). Most children killed by their father, irrespective of the custodial arrangements, were male (see Table 4). Males comprised 54 percent (n=44) of children killed by a custodial father, 63 percent (n=17) of those killed by a non-custodial father and 66 percent (n=27) of those killed by a step-father. Just over half of children killed by a custodial mother were male (52%; n=69).

**Table 4: Filicide victim–offender relationship, by victim gender and age, 2000–01 to 2011–12**

	Custodial parent				Non-custodial parent				Step-parent			
	Father		Mother		Father		Mother		Father		Mother	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Gender<sup>a</sup></b>												
Male	44	54	69	52	17	63	1	100	27	66	0	0
Female	37	46	64	48	10	37	0	0	14	34	0	0
<b>Age</b>												
Under 1 year	30	37	46	35	7	26	0	0	7	17	0	0
1–4 years	21	26	44	33	9	33	1	100	25	61	0	0
5–9 years	11	13	24	18	9	33	0	0	3	15	0	0
10–14 years	9	11	16	12	2	7	0	0	3	24	0	0
15–17 years	3	4	1	1	0	0	0	0	3	24	0	0
18 years and over	8	10	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total	82	29	133	46	27	10	1	<1	41	14	0	0

a: Excludes 1 case where victim gender was unknown  
Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding  
Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]

The median age of filicide victims was two years. Two-thirds of victims were under five years old when they were killed—31 percent (n=90) under 12 months and 35 percent (n=100) aged one to four years. Two-thirds of children (n=141) killed by a custodial parent were 0–4 years (see Table 4). Custodial mothers killed similar proportions of children under one year and children aged one to four years (35% (n=46) vs 33% (n=44)). Almost four in 10 children killed by their custodial father were less than one year (37%; n=30) and a quarter were aged one to four years (26%; n=21).

The majority of children killed by a step-father were one to four years (61%; n=25). Children killed by a non-custodial father tended to be older. A third were five to nine years (33%; n=9) and another third one to four years (33%; n=9).

Children killed by a parent who then attempted or committed suicide were most commonly killed by a custodial parent (n=13 (93%) for attempted suicide and n=37 (86%) for suicide). Offenders who did not suicide were most likely to have killed children aged under one year (n=78; 41%), whereas offenders who did suicide were most likely to have killed children aged one to four years (n=18; 40%).

## Method of killing

The method used by the primary offender to kill the child(ren) was recorded for 95 percent of victims (n=271). A quarter of all filicide victims (25%; n=66) died from a beating. Fourteen percent (n=39) died from being strangled or suffocated and 12 percent (n=32) from a stab wound. Cause of death was associated with victim age ( $\chi^2(48)=133.34, p<0.001$ ). Younger filicide victims were more likely to be beaten or shaken while older children to have died from a stab or gunshot wound (see Table 5).

Over half of children killed by a step-father were beaten (54%; n=21) and a quarter died from being shaken (18%; n=7; see Table 5). In contrast, a quarter of children killed by a non-custodial father were strangled or suffocated (26%; n=7) and a fifth were drowned (22%; n=6). The largest proportion of children killed by a custodial mother also died from strangulation or suffocation (20%; n=25). Beating was the most common method of killing used by custodial fathers (32%; n=26), followed by stab wounds (16%; n=13).

**Table 5: Filicide victim–offender relationship, by victim cause of death, 2000–01 to 2011–12**

	Custodial parent				Non-custodial parent				Step-parent			
	Father		Mother		Father		Mother		Father		Mother	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Beating	26	32	14	11	4	15	1	100	21	54	0	0
Stab wound	13	16	15	12	3	11	0	0	1	3	0	0
Gunshot wound	7	9	3	2	3	11	0	0	3	8	0	0
Drowning/ submersion	4	5	16	13	6	22	0	0	0	0	0	0
Strangulation/ suffocation	7	9	25	20	7	26	0	0	0	0	0	0
Shaken baby syndrome	8	10	7	6	0	0	0	0	7	18	0	0
Poisoning/ injection	7	9	11	9	2	7	0	0	2	5	0	0
Neglect	3	4	9	7	1	4	0	0	1	3	0	0
Other	6	7	24	19	1	4	0	0	4	10	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>		<b>124</b>		<b>27</b>		<b>1</b>		<b>39</b>		<b>0</b>	

Note: Excludes 12 cases where cause of death was unknown. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding  
Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]

## Discussion

An average of 20 filicide incidents was recorded each year in Australia between 2000–01 and 2011–12. The incidence remained steady over this period, unlike rates of domestic homicide and homicide overall, which declined by 13 percent and 20 percent respectively (Brown et al. 2019). Few studies have reported national filicide statistics, and data that are available are not comparable to Australian estimates. Homicide data collected in England and Wales, Canada and the United States provide a useful reference point for national incident and victimisation rates, but filicide rates are based on different victim age populations. Similar issues affect the only study comparing rates of child homicide across multiple countries (Pritchard, Davey & Williams 2013).

The characteristics of Australian filicide offenders, however, can be compared with those of filicide offenders identified in other industrialised Western countries and are generally comparable. There was a predominance of male offenders (if parent and parent equivalents are counted together), and a relationship between offender gender and victim age. A history of domestic violence involving the offender was also prevalent. Parental separation, however, did not feature as a common factor among filicidal parents, and rates of mental illness among female filicide offenders, compared with male filicide offenders, were higher than those reported in the international literature.

Most offenders were custodial parents, with the largest number of children killed by a custodial mother. Mothers were slightly more likely to kill a male child while fathers (custodial, non-custodial or step-fathers) mostly killed male children. Further, gender and custodial relationship were associated with different methods of killing. Beating deaths were associated with custodial fathers and step-fathers, while strangulation and suffocation deaths were associated with custodial mothers.

One factor of increasing interest in international research (Pritchard, Davey & Williams 2013; Sidebotham et al. 2016) is the criminal history of offenders, which was examined in this study. Forty-three percent (n=83) of filicide offenders had a criminal history. Male offenders were twice as likely as female offenders to have a previous conviction, and step-fathers almost twice as likely to have a criminal history compared with custodial fathers. The criminal histories of female filicide offenders in Australia, which largely involved drug offending but with some violent offending, provide important context on previous offending among filicide offenders that has not been found in other studies (Pritchard, Davey & Williams 2013). Comparable national data on criminal histories of all male and female offenders are not publicly available. However, the ratio of male to female offenders for the years where national offender data are available (ie 2007–08 to 2011–12; ABS 2018) was approximately four to one.

## Limitations

The results in this report should be interpreted in light of the following limitations.

- As noted earlier, analyses examining the parent–child relationship are victim-based—that is, each individual victim’s relationship with the offender is counted separately. Therefore, in homicides where an offender was responsible for the death of two or more of their children, the offender was counted multiple times.
- Consistent with prior AIC homicide research, analysis of offender characteristics is based on the primary offender. For filicide incidents involving a single victim and offender, identifying the primary offender is straightforward. However, where there are multiple victims and/or offenders involved in a filicide incident, identifying the primary offender becomes more complicated. The primary offender is hence determined based on the closest known relationship between any victim–offender pairing (known as the principal/primary relationship). Identifying the closest relationship can be difficult, as different relationships may exist between different pairs of victims and offenders. Further, there may be some instances where, for example, a step-parent is more culpable than a custodial parent in the homicide incident; however, the custodial parent is classified as the primary offender because they had a closer relationship with the victim. This is because the NHMP dataset does not indicate offender culpability where multiple offenders were involved in the one incident.

- Offender history of domestic violence indicates whether there was a history of domestic violence between intimate partners and is not indicative of a victim dying in the context of a family or domestic violence incident.
- Alcohol and drug use can alter the circumstances of a homicide incident by affecting the judgement of the victim and/or offender or by incapacitating the victim in some way (intentionally or not). The NHMP dataset identifies the presence of alcohol and other drugs but not the impact of their use on the victim, offender or situation. For offenders, this information is based on police observations.

## Implications

The national study provides a platform for improved intervention, noting that the small number of filicides recorded each year means that most service providers are unlikely to be presented with such a case during their career. Filicide researchers (Frederico, Jackson & Dwyer 2014; Sidebotham et al. 2016) have recently advocated for a greater focus on enhanced case management and interagency communication around the broader constellation of factors that may increase the risk of filicide. Risk factors include acrimonious partnership breakdown and post-separation parenting disputes, domestic violence, and parents being affected by mental illness or substance abuse. Most significantly, families affected by multiple risk factors are at greatest risk. These factors are also common among families involved with statutory child protection services for cases of child abuse and neglect, the majority of which will not experience filicide. Determining robust indicators of filicide risk is a problematic exercise. However, by intervening early and effectively with such families, the risk of harm to a child can be reduced, parental and family wellbeing can be improved and the risk of child maltreatment and filicide can be reduced. Thus, preventing filicide through enhanced responses to families with significant risk factors, rather than predicting the small number of cases where filicide may be an outcome, is an important strategy.

At the same time, the study does assist professionals across a variety of services by identifying that offender circumstances and characteristics differ according to the offender's relationship with the victim. The problems associated with each of the offender types (custodial parents, non-custodial parents and step-parents) are likely to require different service responses. For example, step-fathers with a history of prior offending are likely to be engaged with criminal justice services. Therefore, a range of services that potential offenders may be involved with extends beyond the traditional child welfare services and, in particular, beyond the statutory child protection services. The services with which they are involved may not be focused on offering therapeutic intervention. Nevertheless, it is important that adult service providers remain alert to the potential dangers to children. Thus, mental health services, general health services, family law courts, criminal justice services, post-separation services and domestic violence services should continue to adopt interventions that consider the safety of their clients' children.

Complex service networks are not perfect mechanisms and, although many improvements have been made over decades to inter-professional communication and coordinated service delivery, areas identified for improvement and the need to trial a range of practice approaches remain. Although the study did not seek to develop intervention policies and programs, it provides information that will be used in future research to fashion more precise proposals for intervention.

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## Appendix

**Table A1: Filicide offenders by states and territories, 2000–01 to 2011–12 (rate per 100,000)**

	NSW	Vic	Qld	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT	National
2000–01	0.10	0.08	0.15	0.07	0.09	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.10
2001–02	0.10	0.19	0.37	0.07	0.34	0.28	0.00	0.70	0.20
2002–03	0.08	0.27	0.25	0.07	0.0	0.00	0.00	0.69	0.15
2003–04	0.12	0.13	0.18	0.27	0.25	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.15
2004–05	0.16	0.08	0.10	0.26	0.17	0.27	0.00	0.00	0.13
2005–06	0.17	0.15	0.17	0.06	0.25	0.00	0.08	0.00	0.17
2006–07	0.15	0.05	0.16	0.19	0.08	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.12
2007–08	0.15	0.02	0.25	0.06	0.16	0.00	0.00	1.28	0.14
2008–09	0.04	0.02	0.06	0.06	0.16	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05
2009–10	0.07	0.07	0.12	0.06	0.23	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.09
2010–11	0.16	0.05	0.15	0.11	0.15	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.11
2011–12	0.07	0.09	0.20	0.00	0.15	0.00	0.00	0.58	0.10

Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]

**Table A2: Filicide offenders by gender, 2000–01 to 2011–12 (rate per 100,000)**

	Males	Females	Total
2000–01	0.10	0.10	0.10
2001–02	0.21	0.19	0.20
2002–03	0.14	0.17	0.15
2003–04	0.13	0.17	0.15
2004–05	0.21	0.10	0.13
2005–06	0.20	0.15	0.17
2006–07	0.13	0.11	0.12
2007–08	0.18	0.10	0.14
2008–09	0.07	0.02	0.05
2009–10	0.08	0.09	0.09
2010–11	0.12	0.11	0.11
2011–12	0.09	0.11	0.10

Source: AIC NHMP 2000–01 to 2011–12 [computer file]



**Table A3: Filicide offenders by Indigenous status, 2000–01 to 2011 (rate per 100,000)**

	Indigenous	Non-Indigenous
2000–01	0.67	0.08
2001–02	0.65	0.19
2002–03	0.32	0.16
2003–04	0.31	0.15
2004–05	0.90	0.11
2005–06	0.87	0.16
2006–07	0.85	0.10
2007–08	0.58	0.13
2008–09	0.53	0.04
2009–10	0.00	0.09
2010–11	0.25	0.11
2011–12	0.24	0.10

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