
FAMILY, ACQUAINTANCE AND STRANGER HOMICIDE IN NEW SOUTH WALES

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PREFACE

Since the publication of Alison Wallace's (1986) seminal report on homicide in New South Wales, the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has received a large number of enquiries annually from members of the public, academics and Government officers about various aspects of homicide. Many of these enquiries have centred upon the distinctive characteristics of different types of homicide, especially those which distinguish between homicides which occur within the family, those which involve acquaintances and those which involve strangers.

The present report presents the result of a statistical analysis of 1,667 cases of homicide which occurred in New South Wales between 1968 and 1986. The analysis identifies similarities and differences across victim, offender and incident characteristics involving family, acquaintance and stranger homicide. No detailed attempt is made to explain the similarities and differences. Such explanation would require detailed case studies of the kind recently undertaken by Dr Ken Polk in the Department of Criminology at the University of Melbourne.

The findings should certainly stimulate further research. Some of them may be unsurprising (e.g. 62.6% of all homicide victims are male but 58.4% of the family homicide victims are female) but others will provoke new questions about the dynamics of family homicide. Children are nearly six times more at risk of homicide from members of their own family than they are from strangers. Slightly more than half the offenders in cases of child homicide, however, are female. This finding runs counter to the widespread view that men outnumber women in all categories of homicide offender.

It is hoped that this report will promote public understanding of the multifarious character of homicide. Homicide rates are often regarded as a barometer for the general level of violence in a community. New South Wales is in the fortunate position of having had a moderate and relatively stable homicide rate for many years. That fact, however, should not be allowed to encourage undue complacency about violent crime in this State. A better understanding of homicide may well turn out crucial in the longer term in maintaining if not improving current levels of community safety.

Dr Don Weatherburn
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1. INTRODUCTION

The public understanding of murder is influenced by crime writers and television producers who often portray murderers as insane men who prey upon innocent and unsuspecting victims. According to this popular conception of murder, the act is premeditated and concealed by the offender, who is viewed as acting out of motives of greed, lust or revenge. The truth about homicide, however, as documented in studies both from overseas and from Australia (Wolfgang 1958, Voss and Hepburn 1968, Wallace 1986, Bonney 1987, Kapardis 1990) is that homicide is rarely an offence carried out by deviant individuals operating in a social vacuum. On the contrary, in the majority of cases the homicide offender and victim know each other, and the homicide often comes about in the context of some kind of argument or dispute. Indeed, in NSW, over the nineteen year period spanning 1968 to 1986, 80 per cent of homicides occurred within the family or among friends and acquaintances (Bonney 1987). Earlier research conducted by the Bureau has gone some way towards providing a basis for our understanding of homicide in NSW (Wallace 1986, Bonney 1987). That research continues to stimulate many requests for information about particular forms of homicide and their situational factors. This report seeks to address these enquiries by examining separately three types of homicide: homicides where the victim and the offender are members of the same family, homicides where the victim and the offender are friends or are acquainted in some way, and homicides where the victim and the offender are strangers.

1.1 OPPORTUNITY AND THE VICTIM-OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP

There is a large body of research addressing the question of patterns in homicide victimisation. A convenient review of the overseas research and a discussion of the characteristics of homicide victims and offenders in NSW can be found in the earlier Bureau report on homicide by Wallace (1986). We know, for example, that the majority of victims and offenders are male, but that there is a higher proportion of female victims than female offenders (Wallace 1986). In common with other offences, most homicide offenders come from the younger age groups. In NSW between 1968 and 1986 some 55 per cent of homicide offenders were aged less than 30 years (Bonney 1987). Although victims are more evenly spread across age groups than offenders, Bonney (1987) found that victims were disproportionately drawn from the 20-30 year age group.

Since homicide involves violent interaction between two or more people, it is likely that the relationship between the victim and the offender plays a key role in determining the nature of the offence. Silverman and Mukherjee (1987, p. 37) argue that homicide is an event which involves at least two people in a ...social relationship that plays a dynamic role in the way that the homicide unfolds. As Wolfgang (1958, p. 203) puts it in his classic study:

...homicide is a dynamic relationship between two or more persons caught up in a life drama where they operate in a direct, interactional relationship. More so than in any other violation of conduct norms, the relationship the victim bears to the offender plays a role in explaining the reasons for such flagrant violation.

It is obvious that the relationship between the victim and offender is important in terms of the opportunity for the commission of homicide. As Conklin (1981, p. 306) has suggested:

Murder and aggravated assault generally occur between people of similar social backgrounds, because people of similar backgrounds interact with each other more often than they do with people of different backgrounds. Murder and aggravated assault commonly arise from interpersonal conflicts that involve intense emotions, and conflicts of this sort are most likely to develop among people who are close to each other. Spouses, lovers, and close friends are more likely to get into heated arguments that lead to violence than are strangers who rarely interact with each other.

Wolfgang (1958) studied 550 homicide cases in Philadelphia between 1948 and 1952. He used police statistics on homicide to analyse the race, sex and age of the offenders and victims, the weapons and methods used to effect death, the presence of alcohol, previous criminal records of victims and offenders, and the motives of the offenders.

Wolfgang (1958) also examined the interpersonal relationships between offenders and their victims. He classified homicides into 11 separate categories according to the relationship between victim and offender. In 63.3 per cent of cases the victim and the offender were members of the same family, lovers, homosexual partners, or close friends. Close family relationships, most commonly that of husband and wife, accounted for 24.7 per cent of homicides. Only 12.0 per cent of homicides involved strangers.

These results were mirrored in Wallace's (1986) study of homicide in NSW. Indeed, the similarity of the proportions of homicides in each category of victim-offender relationship in the studies is remarkable. Wallace found that primary social relationships were implicated in the majority of homicides in NSW, with homicides involving family or friend/acquaintance relationships accounting for 62.5 per cent of the total. Included in this group were spousal homicides which accounted for some 23.2 per cent of all homicides. Only 18.0 per cent of homicides in NSW involved strangers.

These observations lend support to Conklin's (1981) suggestion that the close relationships of family and friendship affect the risk of homicide by increasing both the frequency of interaction and the intensity of conflict between potential victims and offenders.

Wolfgang (1958) did not attempt to analyse the quantitative differences between the various categories of homicide. Similarly, while Wallace's (1986) study differentiated between different victim-offender relationship categories and discussed some in detail, there was no systematic attempt to describe the statistical features which differentiate one category of homicide from another.

Important aspects of the homicide act may be hidden when it is treated as a homogeneous crime. This point has been made strongly with respect to stranger homicide by Silverman and Kennedy (1987) and has been reiterated by Kapardis (1990). The correlates of different forms of homicides may not be identical. To see if they are, it is necessary to examine the profile of different forms of homicide. The next section of the report explains how this is done.

2. METHODOLOGY

The NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research has compiled a data set which contains information on all recorded homicides in NSW between 1968 and 1986 inclusive. Over the nineteen year period there were 1,875 distinct persons charged with one or more homicide offences relating to the deaths of 1,894 distinct persons. These data were the subject of two earlier reports by the Bureau (Wallace 1986, Bonney 1987).

As the present report focuses on the relationship between homicide victims and offenders, the data considered here are comprised of only those cases where there was a known offender and where the relationship between the victim and the offender was known. In the case of multiple offenders and/or victims only the principal offender and/or victim was counted. In all, the sample comprised 1,667 cases.¹

The selected cases were classified into three types according to the relationship between the victim and the offender: family, acquaintance, and stranger. Family homicides include those cases where the victim was killed by his or her spouse (including de facto spouse), parent, or other relation. Acquaintance homicides consist of those cases where the offender was known to the victim as a friend, acquaintance or sexual partner. Stranger homicides are those homicides committed by persons who share no known relationship with the victim. It should be emphasised that these homicides may include incidents where the victim and the offender became acquainted with each other immediately prior to the homicide.

Based on the present sample, almost half (44.5%) of the homicide cases in NSW for which an offender was known involved family members. Acquaintances accounted for 38.3 per cent of the selected homicide cases and only 17.2 per cent involved strangers. It must be noted here that it is possible that a disproportionate number of unsolved homicides were stranger killings, and that by excluding these from our sample the stranger homicide figure may be artificially low. However, even if all unsolved homicides were included and classified as stranger homicides, the vast majority of the homicides would still have occurred between people in some way acquainted with one another.

In order to determine factors discriminating between the three types of homicide, a number of victim characteristics, offender characteristics and incident characteristics were examined. In particular, the victim and offender characteristics are:

- (1) Gender
- (2) Age
- (3) Marital status

The incident characteristics are:

- (1) Location
- (2) Time of day
- (3) Day of week
- (4) Week of year
- (5) Month of year

Two-way chi-squared analyses were employed to assess the relationship between type of homicide and the victim, offender and incident characteristics.

3. RESULTS

The results are presented in three sections. The first section presents the association between each victim characteristic and homicide type. The second section outlines the association between each offender characteristic and homicide type. The third section discusses the association between each incident characteristic and homicide type.

3.1 VICTIM CHARACTERISTICS

This section examines the characteristics of victims of family, acquaintance and stranger homicides which occurred in NSW over the period from 1968 to 1986. In particular, the variables of gender, age, and marital status are examined in an attempt to differentiate between victims of different types of homicide.

3.1.1 Gender of victims

As has been commonly observed in the homicide literature, male victims outnumber female victims. In the present study, when all types of homicide were considered together, some 62.6 per cent of victims were male. As shown in Table 1, the predominance of male victims was evident for both acquaintance and stranger homicides. For acquaintance homicides 78.9 per cent of victims were male and for stranger homicides 80.1 per cent of victims were male. In contrast, less than half of the victims of family homicides were male (41.6%). Insofar as homicide is concerned, women are clearly at greatest risk from members of their own families. Over 50 per cent of the victims of family homicide were women.

Table 1: Gender of victim by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Gender of victim</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	306	41.6	504	78.9	230	80.1
Female	429	58.4	135	21.1	57	19.9
Total	735	100.0	639	100.0	287	100.0

Note: For six victims of family homicides gender was not known so these cases were excluded from the analysis.
 $N = 1661, X^2 = 248.0, df = 2, p < 0.05.$

The lower victimisation rate among women in acquaintance and stranger homicides probably reflects the operation of a number of different factors. Men may interact more frequently with strangers or acquaintances in circumstances where violent interactions are likely to occur (e.g. in hotels). It is also possible that men are more likely to use violence to assert control in personal or intimate relationships than in relationships with women they do not know well.

3.1.2 Age of victims

The average age of all homicide victims considered here was 37 years. When the different types of homicide are considered, however, the average age of victims varied with victim-offender relationship. The average age of victims was lower for family homicides (33.4 years) than for acquaintance homicides (40.7 years) or stranger homicides (38.3 years).

While the average age of victims for each type of homicide was over 30 years, overall the largest proportion of victims fell in the 20-29 years age group (see Table 2). In all, nearly one in four victims of homicide in NSW (22.9%) were aged between 20 and 29 years. This proportion is higher than the proportion of persons in that age group in the NSW general population (16.3%).² In other words, those in the 20-29 years age group were over-represented as homicide victims.

Table 2: Age of victim by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Age of victim</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
0-9 years	156	21.1	20	3.1	8	2.8
10-19 years	49	6.6	70	11.0	40	13.9
20-29 years	139	18.8	160	25.0	82	28.6
30-39 years	120	16.2	118	18.5	42	14.6
40-49 years	116	15.7	96	15.0	39	13.6
50-59 years	67	9.0	60	9.4	32	11.2
60 years and over	56	7.6	74	11.6	33	11.5
Unknown	38	5.1	41	6.4	11	3.8
Total	741	100.0	639	100.0	287	100.0

Note: N = 1667, $\chi^2 = 158.9$, df = 14, p < 0.05.

When only those victims aged 10 years and over are considered for each type of homicide, the age distributions for each of acquaintance and stranger homicides were quite similar and differed from the distribution for family homicide (see Table 2). In particular, the proportion of 10 to 19 year old victims of acquaintance homicide (11.0%) and stranger homicide (13.9%) was considerably larger than the proportion of family homicide victims in the 10-19 years age group (6.6%). Similarly, the proportions of victims aged 60 years and over of acquaintance homicide (11.6%) and stranger homicide (11.5%) were higher than the proportion of family homicide victims of this age (7.6%).

The most striking difference between the homicide types concerned victims aged less than 10 years. The lower average age of victims of family homicide was largely due to the fact that children aged less than 10 years were much more commonly killed by relatives than by acquaintances or strangers. For family homicides, 21.1 per cent of victims were aged less than 10 years. This contrasts with both acquaintance and stranger homicides where fewer than five per cent of victims were under 10 years old. Indeed, for this age group, an overwhelming majority of homicides (84.8%) were committed by members of the child's own family rather than by an acquaintance or stranger. Interestingly, in these cases of child homicide, slightly more than half of the offenders were female family members (53.2%). This is the only category of homicide where women outnumber men as offenders.

There are other interesting differences when both age and gender of victims are considered for each type of homicide. In family homicides, females were not only more at risk of homicide than males but female victims tended to be older than male victims. The average age of female victims was 36.3 years whereas the average age of male victims was 30.1 years. In contrast, male victims in both acquaintance and stranger homicides tended to be older than female victims, although the age difference between males and females in acquaintance and stranger homicides was not as great as that seen in family homicide. In acquaintance homicides the average age of male victims was 41.5 years whereas for females it was 37.6 years. For stranger homicides the average age of male victims was 38.6 years while for female victims it was 37.3 years.

The finding that female victims in family homicide tend to be older than male victims is a curious one. It arises at least in part because male victims of family homicide are more likely to be children than female victims of family homicide. Why this should be so is a matter which cannot be resolved with the available data.

For acquaintance and stranger homicides, male victims far outnumbered female victims in all age categories except for the 0-9 years age group where female victims marginally outnumbered male victims. In other words, males were much more likely than females to be the victims of acquaintance and stranger homicide, except for those aged between 0 and 9 years where the risk was effectively the same for males and females.

3.1.3 Marital status of victims

When discussing the relationship between marital status and homicide type, it is inappropriate to include children for whom marriage is not possible. Their inclusion would artificially inflate the numbers of single victims. For the following analysis of marital status, therefore, all child victims aged less than 15 years were excluded thereby reducing the data set by 234 cases or 14 per cent of all homicide victims.

The proportions of victims of each marital status tended to differ from the proportions of people of each marital status in the general population. The frequency distribution of homicides according to marital status in Table 3 shows that 25.4 per cent of family homicide victims were in de facto relationships. This contrasts with the much lower proportion of de facto couples in the general population. According to the 1986 Census, 67,678 families in NSW were de facto couples. This represents about 135,000 persons or only three per cent of the NSW population aged 15 years and over.³ In the same way, the proportion of family homicide victims who were separated was very high (16.8%) given that persons with separated marital status on average comprised less than three per cent of the general population of NSW aged 15 years and over.

In contrast, victims of family homicide who were married were under-represented based on population figures. Table 3 indicates that 41.0 per cent of family homicide victims were married while population figures indicate that married persons represented some 61 per cent of the NSW population aged 15 years and over.⁴ The low relative incidence of marriage among family homicide victims is reflected in other types of crime. It should not be construed as indicating that marriage per se reduces the risk of family homicide. In all likelihood, the finding on marital status reflects the operation of a variety of other more important factors, for example socio-economic status, which are characteristically different among the marital status groups (Wallace 1986).

Table 3: Marital status of victim by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Marital status of victim</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Single	45	8.1	142	23.4	57	21.3
Separated	94	16.8	43	7.1	7	2.6
Divorced	5	1.1	9	1.5	5	1.9
Widowed	8	1.4	10	1.6	8	3.4
Married	229	41.0	81	13.3	54	20.2
De facto	142	25.4	42	6.9	16	6.0
Unknown	34	6.1	281	46.2	119	44.6
Total	558	100.0	608	100.0	267	100.0

Note: All children aged less than 15 years were excluded from this analysis. N = 1433, X² = 448.8, df = 12, p < 0.05.

Since information on marital status was not recorded in more than 40 per cent of the cases of homicides by acquaintances and strangers, it is not possible to come to any firm conclusions about the relative frequency of marital status groups for the victims of these types of homicide.

3.2 OFFENDER CHARACTERISTICS

This section examines the characteristics of offenders of family, acquaintance and stranger homicides that occurred in NSW over the period 1968 to 1986. In particular, the variables of gender, age, and marital status are examined in an attempt to differentiate between offenders of different types of homicides. Finally the numbers of murder-suicides in each type of homicide are considered.

3.2.1 Gender of offenders

Overall, 85.3 per cent of homicide offenders in NSW were male. From Table 4 it can be seen that male offenders were responsible for 96.9 per cent of stranger homicides, 94.5 per cent of acquaintance homicides and 72.9 per cent of family homicides. Even though only 14.7 per cent of all homicide offenders were female, 27.1 per cent of the offenders in family homicides were female. Some of these homicides occur in response to long periods of abuse inflicted on women by their male spouses. Over seas evidence suggests, however, that many relationships involve a pattern of mutual physical abuse in which men and women assault each other equally often, but the woman is more frequently injured than the man and therefore is more likely to fall victim to a fatal assault (Frieze and Browne 1989).

Table 4: Gender of offenders by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Gender of offender</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Male	540	72.9	604	94.5	278	96.9
Female	201	27.1	35	5.5	9	3.1
Total	741	100.0	639	100.0	287	100.0

Note: N = 1667, $X^2 = 165.2$, df = 2, $p < 0.05$.

3.2.2 Age of offenders

Of all homicide offenders, the largest proportion was aged between 20 and 29 years, accounting for 35.8 per cent of all homicide offenders. This was quite high given that persons aged 20 to 29 years comprised about 20 per cent of the NSW population aged 10 years and over.⁵ Offenders in the age group 20 to 29 years were responsible for almost half of the stranger killings (44.9%), 38.8 per cent of acquaintance killings and 29.7 per cent of family killings. Offenders aged 30 to 39 years were the next most common group to be charged with homicide and accounted for 24.1 per cent of all homicide offenders. This age group represented only 17 per cent of the NSW population aged 10 years and over.

Table 5: Age of offender by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Age of offender</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
10-19 years	64	8.6	87	13.6	70	24.4
20-29 years	220	29.7	248	38.8	129	44.9
30-39 years	205	27.7	142	22.2	55	19.2
40-49 years	142	19.2	93	14.6	23	8.0
50-59 years	61	8.2	25	3.9	7	2.4
60 years and over	47	6.3	41	6.4	2	0.7
Unknown	2	0.3	3	0.5	1	0.3
Total	741	100.0	639	100.0	287	100.0

Note: N = 1667, $\chi^2 = 112.0$, df = 12, p < 0.05.

Overall, the age distributions of offenders for each type of homicide were quite similar with the majority of offenders aged between 20 and 39 years (see Table 5). Stranger homicide, however, differed slightly from both family and acquaintance homicide in that a higher proportion of offenders were aged between 10 and 19 years. For stranger homicide 24.4 per cent of offenders were in this age category compared with 8.6 per cent and 13.6 per cent for family and acquaintance homicides respectively. Given that 10 to 19 year olds comprised some 21 per cent of the NSW population aged 10 years and over, these young offenders were slightly over-represented in stranger homicides and somewhat under-represented in family and acquaintance homicides. From the age of 30 years onwards, the proportion of offenders involved in family or acquaintance homicides was greater than the proportion involved in stranger homicides.

A comparison of offenders aged 40 years and over with the proportion of people in this age group in the general population shows that they were under-represented in all homicides, especially stranger homicides. They accounted for 33.7 per cent of family homicides, 24.9 per cent of acquaintance homicides and only 11.1 per cent of stranger homicides. In contrast, they represented some 43 per cent of the NSW population aged 10 years and over.

3.2.3 Marital status of offenders

As explained earlier, it was necessary to exclude children aged under 15 years from the analysis of marital status. It should be noted that there were only 13 cases where the offender was aged under 15 years (0.8 per cent of all homicide offenders in the sample).

From Table 6 it can be seen that more than one in three family homicide offenders were married (37.1%). This is to be expected given the earlier finding in relation to victims on this issue. The proportion of married offenders in family homicide was quite low compared with population figures (married persons comprised about 61% of the NSW population aged 15 years and over). On the other hand, offenders who were separated (19.5%) and those who lived in de facto relationships (23.5%) were both considerably over-represented in family homicides (separated persons and persons in de facto relationships each comprised about three per cent of the NSW population aged 15 years and over).⁶

An examination of the length of the relationship reveals that when the victim and offender were married, the homicide tended to occur later rather than earlier in the relationship. Almost one in three (31.3%) marital homicides occurred when the couple had spent at least 10 years together. This proportion is much higher than the proportion of de facto homicides which occurred after ten years (8.1%). When the victim and offender were in a de facto relationship, the first year of the relationship was when the homicide was most likely to occur (26% of all de facto homicides). In comparison, only 16.9 per cent of marital homicides occurred within the first year of the relationship.⁷ This finding may indicate that family homicides are more likely to occur either early or late in a relationship and that the likelihood of a couple being married increases with the duration of the relationship.

Table 6: Marital status of offender by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Marital status of offender</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Single	93	12.7	224	35.4	132	46.2
Separated	143	19.5	53	8.4	8	2.8
Divorced	10	1.4	6	0.9	1	0.3
Widowed	3	0.4	7	1.1	0	0.0
Married	273	37.1	75	11.8	29	10.1
De facto	173	23.5	59	9.3	20	7.0
Unknown	40	5.4	209	33.0	96	33.6
Total	735	100.0	633	100.0	286	100.0

Note: All children aged less than 15 years were excluded from this analysis. N = 1654, $\chi^2 = 508.1$, df = 12, p < 0.05.

Since information on marital status was missing in over 30 per cent of cases of acquaintance and stranger homicides it is not possible to come to any firm conclusions about the relative frequency of marital status groups for the offenders for these homicide categories. However, the existing information indicates that offenders in stranger and acquaintance homicides were more likely to be single than either married or in a de facto relationship.

3.2.4 Murder - suicide

Overall, 12.8 per cent of offenders committed suicide and a further 3.3 per cent attempted suicide following the homicide. Suicide after the commission of the homicide was more frequent in family homicides than in the other types of homicide, accounting for almost three-quarters of all murder-suicides (see Table 7). A total of 27.7 per cent of family homicide offenders committed or attempted suicide. Only 9.1 per cent of acquaintance homicide offenders and 2.1 per cent of stranger homicide offenders attempted or committed suicide.

Of the 158 offender suicides in family homicide cases, the majority were by males (84.8%). Men most commonly took their lives after killing a spouse (60.5% of male offender suicides) whereas women tended to suicide after killing their children (87.5% of female offender suicides).

Table 7: Murder-suicide by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Murder-suicide</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
Offender committed suicide	158	21.3	51	8.0	5	1.7
Offender attempted suicide	47	6.3	7	1.1	1	0.3
No attempt	527	71.1	577	90.3	281	97.9
Unknown	9	1.2	4	0.6	0	0.0
Total	741	100.0	639	100.0	287	100.0

Note: N = 1667, $\chi^2 = 147.2$, df = 6, $p < 0.05$.

3.3 INCIDENT CHARACTERISTICS

This section explores the variation in the location and the time of the homicide between the three categories of homicide being discussed.

3.3.1 Location of homicide

Maps 1, 2 and 3 show the homicide rate per 100,000 population for each Local Government Area (LGA) in the Sydney Statistical Division for family, acquaintance and stranger homicide respectively.⁸ The urban LGAs ranked in order of homicide rate for the three types of homicide are presented in Table 8. From the table it can be seen that the rankings for the three types of homicide were similar for some LGAs. The LGAs of Sydney, Marrickville, Burwood, Fairfield and Wollondilly had high rankings for each type of homicide. In contrast, both Baulkham Hills and Sutherland had low rankings for each type of homicide. For each of the middle order LGAs of Strathfield, Parramatta, Canterbury and Ryde, the ranks for the three types of homicide were almost identical.

With respect to the other LGAs, there were some similarities as well as differences in the ranks for the three types of homicide. For example, for each of the LGAs of Ashfield, the Blue Mountains and Gosford, the rates of acquaintance and stranger homicide had similar ranks, but these rates ranked somewhat lower than the family homicide rate. On the other hand, for Waverley, Manly, Liverpool and Woollahra, the ranks of the family and acquaintance homicide rates were similar. However, for the first three LGAs these rates ranked lower than the stranger homicide rate. In contrast, for Woollahra the family and acquaintance homicide rates ranked much higher than the stranger homicide rate.

Map 1: Rates of recorded family homicides per 100,000 population for each Local Government Area in the Sydney Statistical Division

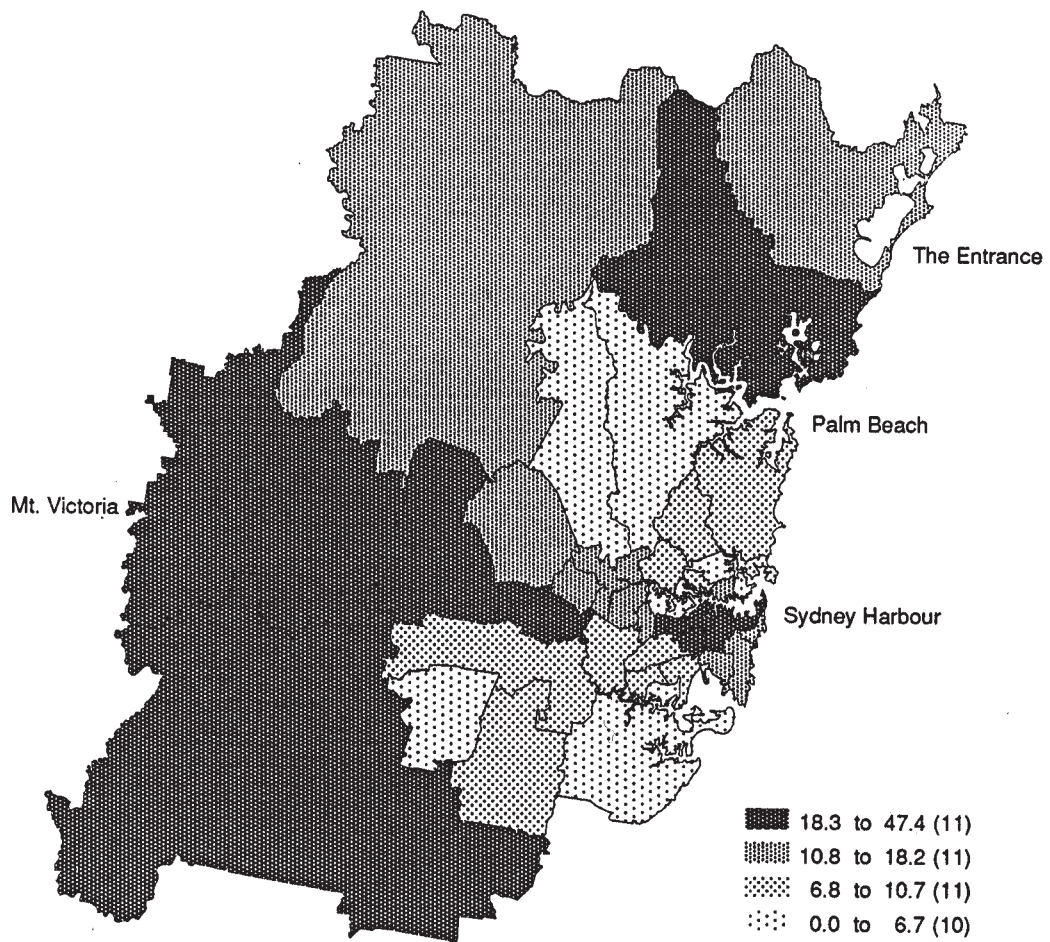
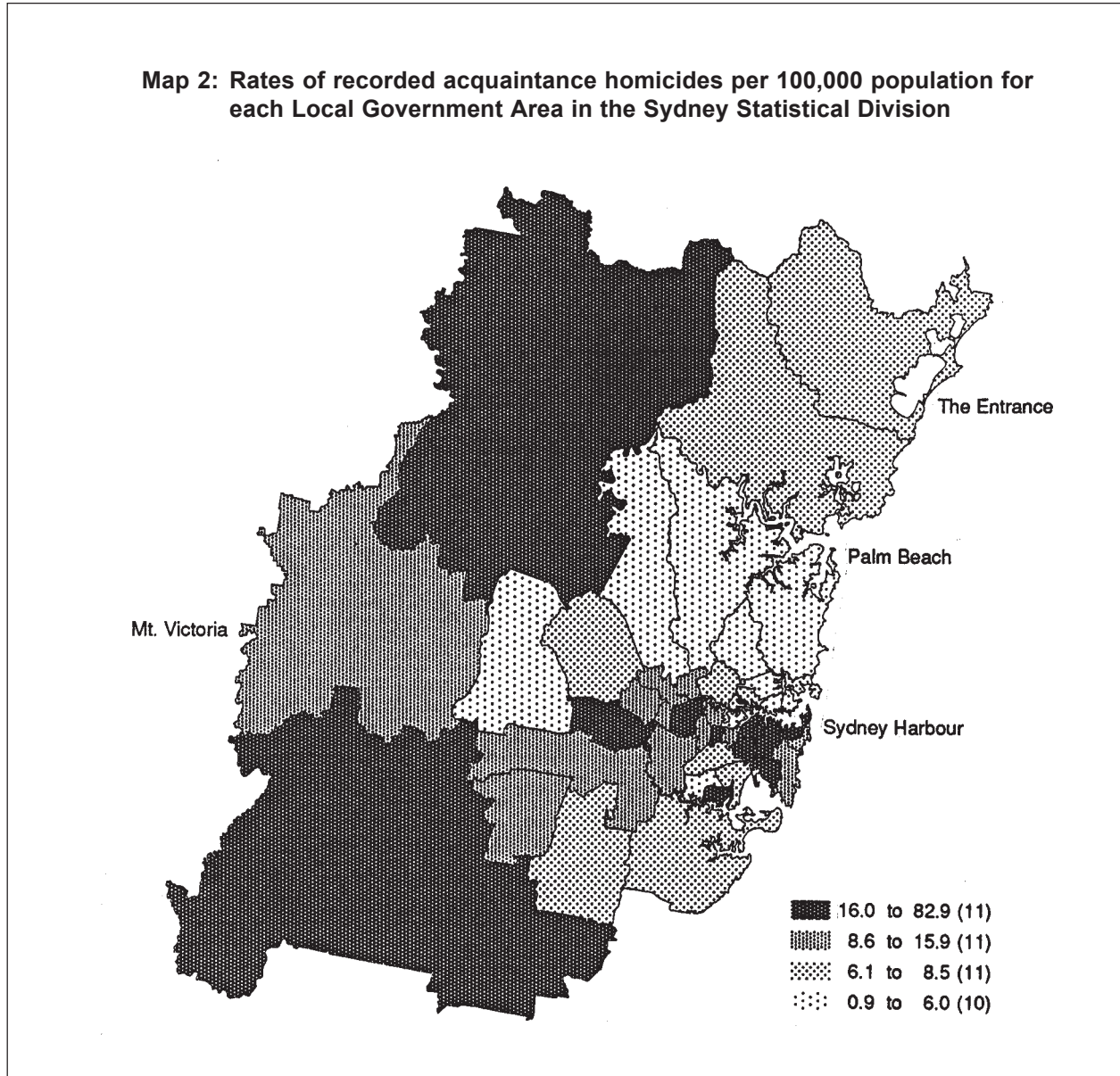


Table 8: Number of homicides per 100,000 population, 1968-1986, Sydney Statistical Division (LGAs ranked in decreasing order of rate)

<i>LGA</i>	<i>Family homicide rate</i>	<i>LGA</i>	<i>Acquaintance homicide rate</i>	<i>LGA</i>	<i>Stranger homicide rate</i>
Sydney	47.37	Sydney	82.89	Sydney	67.50
Fairfield	33.64	Marrickville	27.22	Waverley	17.04
Penrith	28.08	Leichhardt	25.88	Burwood	13.29
Ashfield	27.18	Burwood	23.26	Wollondilly	12.99
Marrickville	23.95	Hawkesbury	20.30	Leichhardt	12.18
Blue Mountains	22.94	Woollahra	19.66	Marrickville	10.89
Burwood	19.93	Wollondilly	19.48	Holroyd	8.44
Woollahra	19.66	Fairfield	18.50	Fairfield	8.41
Wollondilly	19.48	Auburn	16.41	Manly	7.77
Gosford	18.35	Kogarah	16.34	Liverpool	7.51
Leichhardt	18.26	Botany	15.98	Campbelltown	7.41
Strathfield	18.21	Concord	15.90	Strathfield	7.29
Auburn	16.41	Strathfield	14.57	Ashfield	6.80
Blacktown	16.27	Holroyd	14.47	Camden	6.71
Randwick	15.21	Ashfield	13.59	Auburn	6.15
Parramatta	14.60	Camden	13.42	Wyong	6.12
Hawkesbury	13.54	Parramatta	12.41	North Sydney	5.94
Botany	13.32	Waverley	12.39	Parramatta	5.84
Holroyd	13.26	Randwick	12.01	Hornsby	5.57
Wyong	12.23	Bankstown	10.47	Bankstown	5.55
North Sydney	11.88	Blue Mountains	10.43	Penrith	4.88
Waverley	10.84	Liverpool	8.58	Rockdale	4.56
Liverpool	10.73	Blacktown	8.44	Warringah	4.50
Manly	10.36	Manly	7.77	Blacktown	4.22
Hurstville	10.02	Hunters Hill	7.55	Blue Mountains	4.17
Lane Cove	9.82	Campbelltown	7.41	Concord	3.98
Canterbury	9.66	Rockdale	6.83	Willoughby	3.72
Ku-ring-gai	9.55	Canterbury	6.69	Canterbury	3.71
Campbelltown	9.26	Gosford	6.55	Woollahra	3.57
Bankstown	8.63	Lane Cove	6.55	Mosman	3.55
Warringah	8.43	Ryde	6.49	Ryde	3.24
Ryde	7.57	Wyong	6.12	Randwick	3.20
Rockdale	6.83	Sutherland	6.11	Drummoyne	3.03
Sutherland	6.72	North Sydney	5.94	Botany	2.66
Camden	6.71	Warringah	5.62	Gosford	2.62
Hornsby	6.50	Willoughby	5.58	Kogarah	2.04
Baulkham Hills	6.38	Baulkham Hills	3.83	Sutherland	1.83
Kogarah	6.13	Mosman	3.55	Ku-ring-gai	0.95
Drummoyne	6.07	Drummoyne	3.03	Baulkham Hills	0.00
Willoughby	5.58	Hurstville	2.86	Hawkesbury	0.00
Concord	0.00	Hornsby	2.78	Hunters Hill	0.00
Hunters Hill	0.00	Penrith	2.44	Hurstville	0.00
Mosman	0.00	Ku-ring-gai	0.95	Lane Cove	0.00

Map 2: Rates of recorded acquaintance homicides per 100,000 population for each Local Government Area in the Sydney Statistical Division

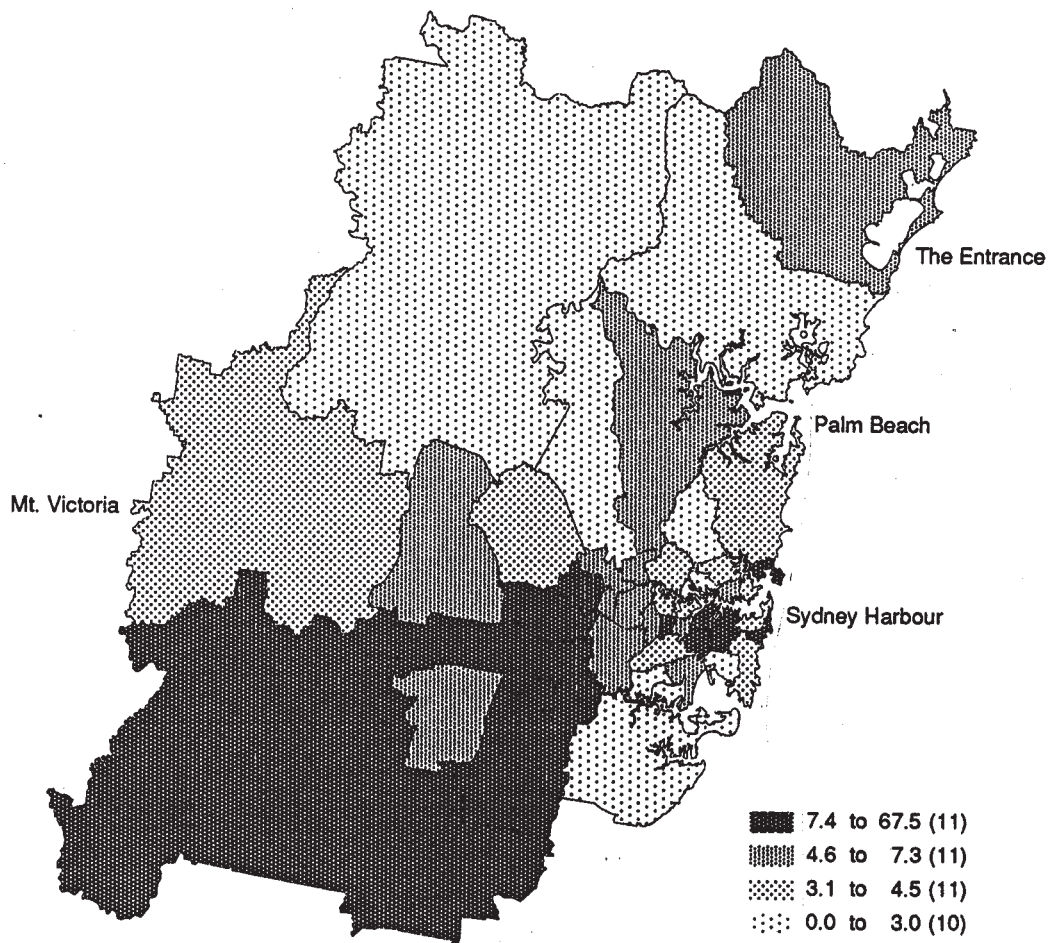


Of all the LGAs, Sydney was the only area for which the rates of both acquaintance homicide (83 homicides per 100,000 population) and stranger homicide (68 homicides per 100,000 population) were higher than the family homicide rate (47 homicides per 100,000 population).

Penrith and Hawkesbury LGAs are interesting cases in that the ranks of the three types of homicide rate were widely dispersed. For Penrith, the family homicide rate ranked third highest, the stranger homicide rate ranked in the middle, while the acquaintance homicide rate ranked second lowest. For Hawkesbury LGA, the family homicide rate ranked near the middle, the acquaintance homicide rate ranked fifth highest, while the stranger homicide rate ranked equal lowest. In spite of the locational differences described above, there was an overall concordance between the three types of homicide in location of homicide.⁹

Not surprisingly, the most common venue for family homicides was the home shared by the victim and offender (60.2% of family homicides). Similarly, acquaintance homicides most commonly occurred in the home of the victim (27.7% of acquaintance homicides). On the other hand, the street was the most common location for stranger homicides (27.5% of stranger homicides).

Map 3: Rates of recorded stranger homicides per 100,000 population for each Local Government Area in the Sydney Statistical Division



3.4 TIME OF HOMICIDE

3.4.1 Time of day of homicide

Overall, more than one in every four homicides (27.9%) occurred in the evening between 8pm and 12 midnight. As illustrated in Table 9, the proportion of acquaintance homicides (33.7%) and stranger homicides (30.7%) that occurred between 8pm and 12 midnight was higher than the proportion of family homicides (21.9%) that occurred at that time.

Table 9: Time of day of victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

<i>Time of day</i>	<i>Victim-offender relationship</i>					
	<i>Family</i>		<i>Acquaintance</i>		<i>Stranger</i>	
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>
12 midnight to 4am	105	14.2	102	16.0	79	27.5
4am to 8am	55	7.4	44	6.9	14	4.9
8am to 12 noon	88	11.9	42	6.6	17	5.9
12 noon to 4pm	93	12.6	67	10.5	27	9.4
4pm to 8pm	135	18.2	109	17.1	40	13.9
8pm to 12 midnight	162	21.9	215	33.6	88	30.7
Unknown	103	13.9	60	9.4	22	7.7
Total	741	100.0	639	100.0	287	100.0

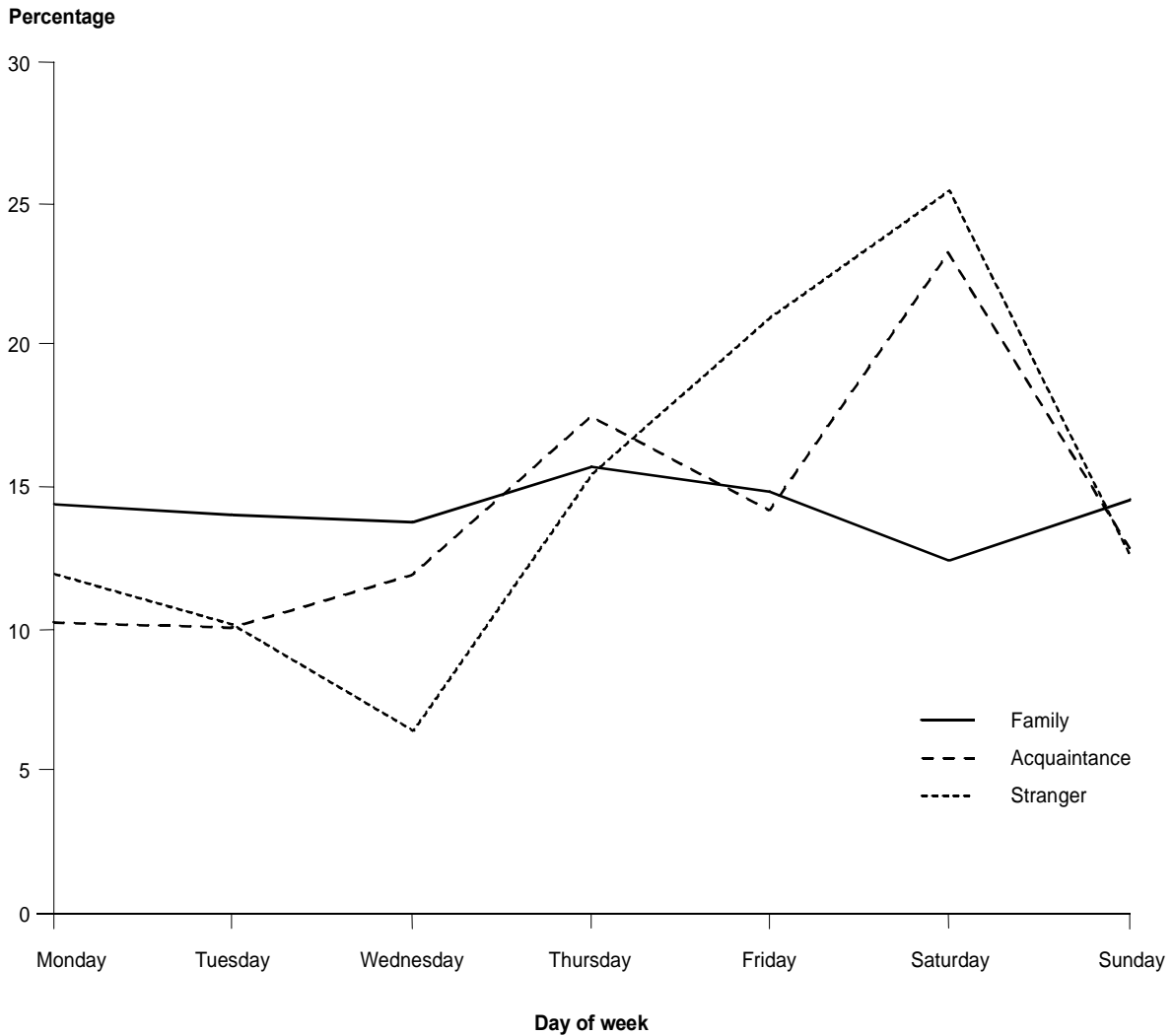
Note: N = 1667, $X^2 = 71.2$, df = 12, $p < 0.05$.

Of all homicides, about 17 per cent occurred in the early evening period from 4pm to 8pm and a further 17 per cent in the early morning from 12 midnight to 4am. Unlike family and acquaintance homicides, stranger homicides were much more likely to occur between 12 midnight and 4am (27.5%) than between 4pm and 8pm (13.9%).

3.4.2 Day of week of homicide

As illustrated in Figure 1, family homicides were equally likely to occur on any day of the week. On the other hand, acquaintance homicides most commonly occurred on Saturdays and Thursdays. Almost twice as many of these deaths occurred on Saturday than on any other day of the week, except for Thursday. Stranger homicides peaked on Fridays and Saturdays with one in five of these deaths occurring on Friday and one in four occurring on Saturday. Thus, homicides between strangers on weekends accounted for over one-third of all stranger killings (37.3%).

Figure 1: Day of week of homicide by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986

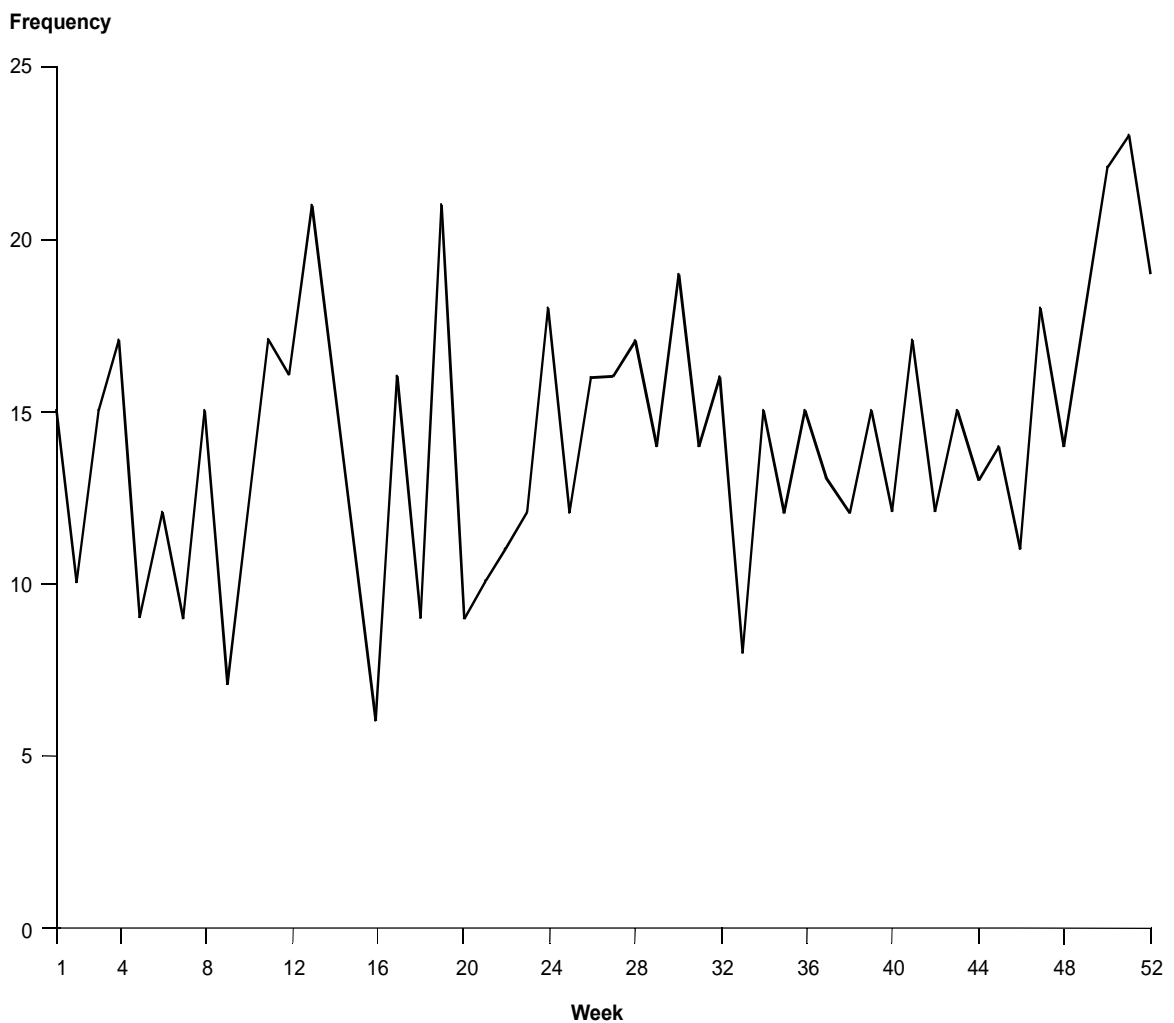


It is not possible to establish whether or not the increase in homicides on Friday and Saturday was related to alcohol consumption because alcohol consumption information was not recorded for 997 cases or 60 per cent of the sample. However, in an earlier Bureau study of homicide, Wallace (1986, p. 59) observed that alcohol consumption was found to be linked to the day of the week on which the homicide occurred and that over half ... of all the accused who killed on Saturday had been drinking prior to the homicide incident. Drinking by victims was also most likely at this time. Almost as many victims ... as offenders had consumed alcohol prior to their deaths on Saturday, almost double the number of victims who were killed on week days. Drinking by victims and offenders, then, was particularly high on Fridays and Saturdays (Wallace 1986).

3.4.3 Week of year of homicide

An examination of the total number of homicides that occurred in each week of the year over the period from 1968 to 1986 indicated a seasonal variation for family homicides (see Figure 2). These homicides appear to peak at the end of each month and also at Easter and at Christmas ($X^2=74.9$, $df= 56$, $p < 0.05$).¹⁰ In contrast, homicides committed by acquaintances and strangers occurred randomly over time ($X^2=68.0$, $df= 54$, $p > 0.05$ and $X^2=75.9$, $df=69$, $p > 0.05$ for acquaintance and stranger homicides respectively).

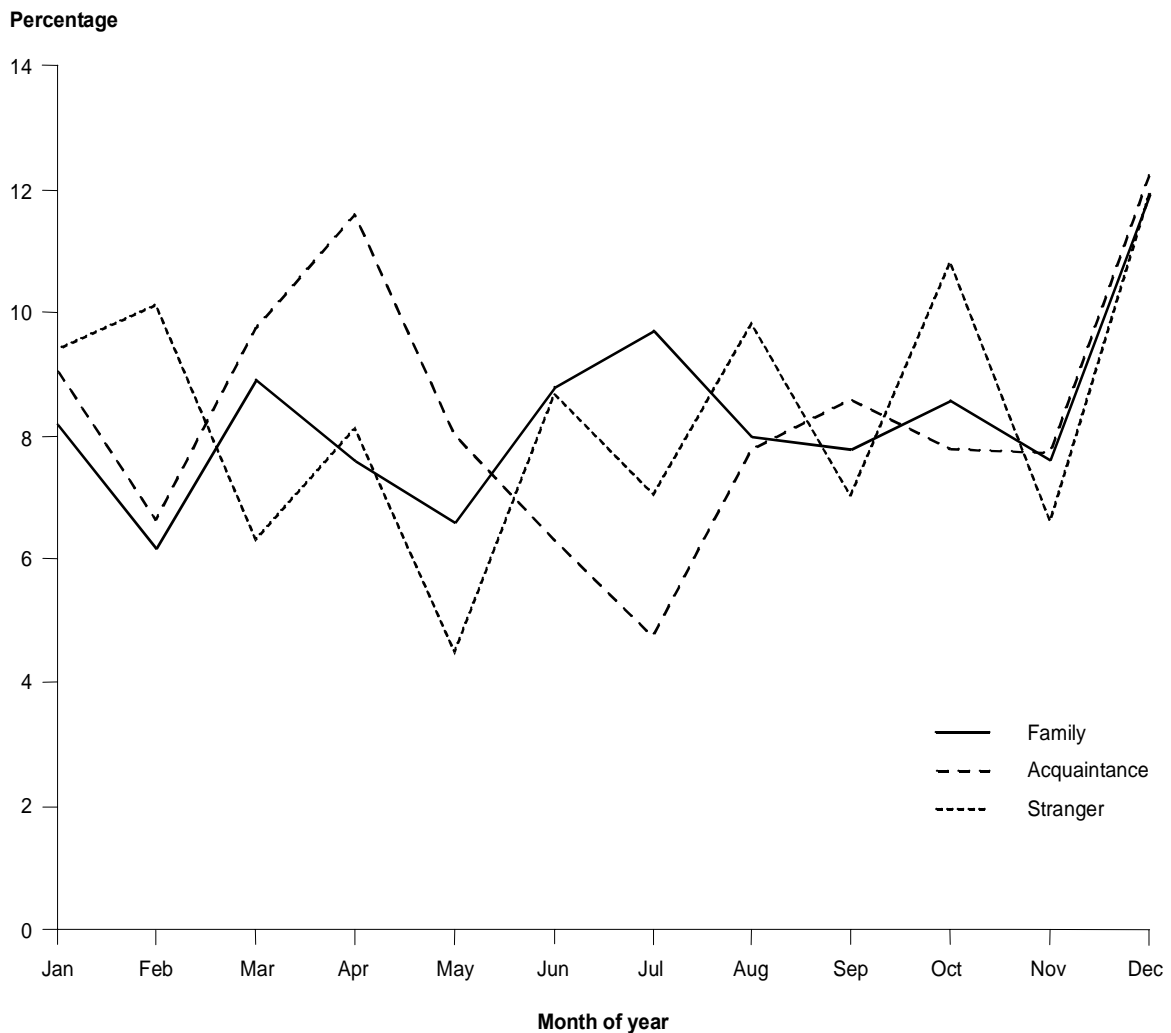
Figure 2: Total number of family homicides by week of year, 1968-1986



3.4.4 Month of year of homicide

Overall, the distribution of homicides over the months of the year was fairly even for each type of homicide (see Figure 3). There were, however, a few irregularities. In particular, family homicides were more likely to occur in December than in the other months of the year. It could be that there is an increase in family interaction during the holiday season and that this leads to higher levels of stress and family conflict. Acquaintance and stranger homicides also showed a tendency to peak at the end of the year, with acquaintance homicides showing another peak in April.

Figure 3: Month of homicide by victim-offender relationship, 1968-1986



4. SUMMARY

Over the period 1966 to 1986, most victims of acquaintance and stranger homicide were male. Females represented more than half of the family homicide victims. Overall, victims of homicide were most likely to be aged 20 to 29 years. This age group constituted the largest proportion of stranger and acquaintance homicide victims, while 0 to 9 year olds were the most likely family homicide victims. Relative to population figures, the proportion of family homicide victims who were married was low, while the proportion who were separated or in de facto relationships was very high.

Most homicide offenders were male. Only for family homicides was the proportion of female offenders as high as a quarter. Many offenders were aged 20 to 29 years. For stranger homicides, the proportion of offenders that were aged 10 to 19 years was higher than the proportion of offenders in family and acquaintance homicides of that age. Relative to population figures, the proportion of family homicide offenders who were separated or in de facto relationships was high. A small proportion of offenders committed or attempted suicide after the commission of homicide and they were mainly family homicide offenders.

Sydney LGA had the highest rate of each type of homicide. Relative to other LGAs in the metropolitan Sydney area, Marrickville and Burwood LGAs also had high rates for the three types of homicide, while in Baulkham Hills the rates were low.

The most likely time of day for any type of homicide to have occurred was between 8pm and 12 mid night. A high proportion of stranger homicides also occurred between 12 midnight and 4am

Family homicides were equally likely to occur on any day of the week, whereas acquaintance homicides were most likely to occur on Saturdays or Thursdays, and stranger homicides were most frequent on the weekend. Family homicides appeared to peak around the end of the month, at Easter and Christmas, while acquaintance and stranger homicides were randomly distributed throughout the year.

NOTES

- 1 The total sample of cases for which there was a known offender and the relationship between victim and offender was known as reported in Bonney (1987) was 1,671. The difference of four cases between Bonney's sample and the present sample arises because suspect details on four cases in Bonney's report were deleted as a result of subsequent information. The totals within each category of homicide also vary slightly between Bonney's report and the present report. Again, these differences represent the result of data edits following the completion of Bonney's report.
- 2 The population data used to calculate the proportion of persons in the age group 20-29 years in the NSW population were obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics publications *Census 86 - Summary Characteristics of Persons and Dwellings, New South Wales*, Catalogue No. 2479.0 and *Characteristics of the Population and Dwellings in Local Government Areas, New South Wales*, Catalogue No. 2427.0. The proportion was calculated by taking an average of the proportion of persons in the age group 20-29 years for the Census years 1971, 1976, 1981 and 1986, the period covered by the homicide data.
- 3 De facto couple data were obtained in electronic form from Census Applications Pty Ltd, a licensed secondary provider of census data. Population data used to calculate the proportion of persons in de facto relationships in the NSW population aged 15 years and over was obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics publications *Census 86 - Summary Characteristics of Persons and Dwellings, New South Wales*, Catalogue No. 2479.0.
- 4 The population data used to calculate the proportion of persons in each marital status category in the NSW population aged 15 years and over were obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics publications *Census 86 - Summary Characteristics of Persons and Dwellings, New South Wales*, Catalogue No. 2479.0 and *Characteristics of the Population and Dwellings in Local Government Areas, New South Wales*, Catalogue No. 2427.0. The proportions were calculated by taking an average of the proportion of persons in each marital status category for the Census years 1971, 1976, 1981 and 1986. The marital status population data included persons in de facto relationships. However, the percentage of de facto relationships in each marital status category was negligible.
- 5 The population data used to calculate the proportion of persons in each age group in the NSW population aged 10 years and over were obtained from the Australian Bureau of Statistics publications *Census 86 - Summary Characteristics of Persons and Dwellings, New South Wales*, Catalogue No. 2479.0 and *Characteristics of the Population and Dwellings in Local Government Areas, New South Wales*, Catalogue No. 2427.0. The proportions were calculated by taking an average of the proportion of persons in each age group for the Census years 1971, 1976, 1981 and 1986.
- 6 See Notes 3 and 4.
- 7 The length of the relationship between victims and offenders who were married or in a de facto relationship was not known for approximately three per cent of these homicide cases.
- 8 The homicide rates for these Local Government Areas were calculated using 1976 Census population data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics publication *Handbook of Local Statistics, New South Wales*, 1984, Catalogue No. 1304.1. Hence each rate represents a rate per 19 years.
- 9 In the correlational analysis of this location of homicide data, Spearman's correlation coefficient for ranked data was employed.
- 10 The statistical test used was a chi-square goodness-of-fit test, applied to the observed and expected frequencies resulting from fitting an exponential distribution to the times between successive homicides. (Note that, if at any point in time, the probability of a homicide occurring is *independent* of the length of time since the last homicide occurred, then the time between successive homicides should be distributed according to the exponential distribution. The goodness-of-fit test is therefore a test of whether the probability of a homicide occurring is independent of the time of year.)

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