

How safe is Australia? The numbers show public attacks are rare and on the decline

Written by Terry Goldsworthy, Associate Professor in Criminology, Bond University

The [murder last week of International student Aii Maasarwe](#) has again drawn attention to the safety of women in Australia, and people in general. The focus is on safety at night in public spaces.

Maasarwe's murder has gained national and [international attention](#) and follows the [murder of Melbourne comedian Eurydice Dixon](#), who was also killed six months ago, in similar circumstances – by a stranger while walking home.

Both of these murders occurred in Victoria. As the [sister of Maasarwe said](#) :

She was living a dream in Melbourne, a dream that ended up being worse than a nightmare.

So, is Australia a dangerous place? And what are the statistics when it comes to lethal violence against women in public spaces?

À lire aussi : ['Stay safe': why women are enraged by advice to steer clear of violent men](#)

How dangerous is Australia?

The Australian Institute of Criminology's [latest report](#) on national homicide trends for the years 2012-13 and 2013-14 shows the incident rate is the lowest on record in the past 25 years. Homicides in this data set are cases where a person is charged with murder or manslaughter.

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The country's [homicide rate](#) has decreased from 1.8 homicides per 100,000 people in 1989-90, to 1 per 100,000 in 2013-14. The rate has been decreasing since 2005.

The overall number of homicide incidents continues to decline. In the period from 2012-13 to 2013-14 there were 487 homicide incidents, involving 512 victims and 549 offenders.

With regards to [comparable democracies](#) Australia's homicide rate is similar to that in the UK (which, in 2011, was 1 per 100,000 compared to 1.1 in Australia). The US was most dangerous at 4.7, compared to Sweden at 0.9.

But Australia's rate is much lower than the average global homicide rate of 6.2 per 100,000, as estimated by the [United Nations Global Study on Homicide](#) report. Countries with high homicide rates in 2012 included Colombia (30.8), Mexico (21.5), and South Africa (31).

International visitors and crime

The Australian Institute of Criminology completed [a study of homicides involving overseas visitors to Australia](#) in 2013. It looked at homicide offences in Australia between 1994–95 to 2009–10 and identified 58 incidents which involved 76 victims who were overseas visitors. The rate of homicide for overseas visitors was 0.55 per million visitors each year.

À lire aussi : [***Three charts on: Australia's declining homicide rates***](#)

In 2018 there were [9.2 million visitor arrivals in Australia](#) . In 1999 a [New South Wales study](#) found that of 2,480 tourists, 0.4% experienced an offence of assault or robbery.

Gender and homicide

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The Australian Institute of Criminology's latest report on homicide rates showed the rate for both male and female victims in Australia was low in 2013-14. And the rate of women who have died from a homicide remained steady at 0.8 per 100,000. This means less than 1 woman per 100,000 will be a victim of homicide in Australia.

The rate for males was the lowest since 1989-90. Victimisation rates for males decreased by 49% between 1989-90 (2.53 per 100,000) and 2013-14 (1.28 per 100,000), and for females by 41% (1.36 per 100,000 in 1989-90).

A 2018 [United Nations report on the gender-related killing of women and girls](#) estimated the total global rate of female homicide in 2017 was 2.3 per 100,000 of the female population.

Where does the danger lie?

Random murders of women are tragic and capture the attention of the media. They understandably lead to concern over women's safety. But they are rare.

Examination of homicide data for Australia shows that, in homicides where the relationship between the offender and victim is known, stranger homicides make up the smallest category for female victims, compared to acquaintance and domestic homicides.

From 2012-2014 stranger homicides accounted for just 3% of female murder victims (5 out of 184). In 2012-13, around 57% of stranger homicides [occurred in the street or an open area](#). In 2013-14 that figure dropped to 41%.

Does Victoria have a problem?

Both of the recent high profile homicides of women by strangers have occurred in Victoria. The high-profile [murder of Jill Meagher](#) in 2012 also occurred on a popular street in an inner suburb of Melbourne.

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À lire aussi : [FactCheck: does Victoria have Australia's highest rate of crime?](#)

Data provided by the Victorian Crime Statistics Agency shows 23% of female victims were murdered by non-family members from 2009-2013. This fell to 19% in 2014-2018. A [recent examination of crime rates in Victoria](#) for murder and other offences showed they are lower than most states, including NSW, QLD and the NT. The homicide rate in Victoria has remained relatively stable in the last five years.

Australia is safe

Murders of women in public spaces by strangers are not commonplace. But sometimes perceptions do not match reality. This is currently the case in Australia due to the extensive media coverage such crimes generate here and overseas.

It's good this is in the public eye and leading to more awareness. Society as a whole should work to bring down crimes against women, through measures ranging from better school education to more appropriate sentencing regimes.

But it's important to remember murder in Australia is not increasing, and Australia is a safe place to visit or live when compared to many other countries.

Terry Goldsworthy ne travaille pas, ne conseille pas, ne possède pas de parts, ne reçoit pas de fonds d'une organisation qui pourrait tirer profit de cet article, et n'a déclaré aucune autre affiliation que son poste universitaire.

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