

Unsolved serial homicides in Australia, 1965–2022

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Research Article

ABSTRACT

Serial homicides attract much attention from the media, the entertainment industry, and the criminal justice field, but there appears to be no research undertaken in Australia regarding unsolved serial homicides. This exploratory study provides an overview of Australian unsolved serial homicides, reporting on characteristics related to the victims, the police investigations, and the specific details of the crimes that were both serial and unsolved. Even though small, the total number of unsolved serial homicide series on the public record is four, with 16 victims, committed by an unknown number of perpetrators. By examining coroners' reports, textbooks, and media reports, the authors were able to tabulate victim variables that may have influenced the perpetrator's decision to murder the chosen victim. The incident characteristics of the cases were also examined. A qualitative method was used by analysing case studies of serial homicides within the context of unsolved matters. Various publicly accessible data sources were used to provide the accounts critical to explaining victim vulnerability. The results identified factors that created victim vulnerability and successful perpetrator detection avoidance strategies.

Keywords: *Australia, unsolved serial homicide, serial killers, victimology, vulnerable victims, unsolved homicides.*

INTRODUCTION

Australian serial homicides are rare, and there is minimal and dated research regarding unsolved serial murders. Although serial murder has been the subject of academic research for several decades, the Australian studies that exist are over 15-years-old and have limitations. Much Australian serial homicide research focuses on the offenders to understand the basis and reasoning for committing this

crime type. International studies have attempted to explain serial murder by proposing psychological, social, and biological models for understanding offenders' behaviour (Douglas & Olshaker, 1997; Leyton, 1986; Pinto & Wilson, 1990; Stone, 2001). This has minimal impact on the ability of police to investigate these crimes.

This exploratory study was designed to provide a comprehensive picture of all recorded Australian unsolved serial homicides, starting with the first recorded unsolved serial homicide in 1965, to 2022. It will investigate victim characteristics, modus operandi, possible motivation, signature behaviours, details of the victim's cause of death, and victim vulnerabilities. It aims to provide an up-to-date overview of the topic and extend upon previous studies (Mouzos & West, 2007; Pinto & Wilson, 1990) by discussing trends and issues related to unsolved serial homicides.

The ability to solve serial homicides is significant in many ways. Firstly, it reinforces social cohesion between the police and society, as the public believes that when homicides occur, the perpetrator will be brought to justice. Secondly, it provides an opportunity for closure for people involved in the crime, including the victims' families, friends, and police officers. Thirdly, it offers a potential research resource to improve our understanding of how serial homicides occur, how they are understood, and how best to deal with them effectively and efficiently.

Defining Serial Homicide

For this article, serial homicide is defined as involving "...the killing of two or more victims by the same offender(s), where the offences have been reliably linked and where there is a non-offending period between offences. The motive for these offences is personal, rather than corporate, organisational, or institutional in nature" (Petherick et al., 2022, p. 24).

The Characteristics of Unsolved Serial Homicides

Victim characteristics – Australian research

Mouzos and West (2007) mentioned the "Claremont murders" as the only unsolved serial homicide in their dataset. This supports the findings by Pinto and Wilson (1990), that in Australia, between July 1900 and June 1990, most unsolved serial homicide victims were female. They accounted for 63% of the victims, and many of the victims (irrespective of gender) were adult Caucasians. Pinto and Wilson (1990) highlighted that evidence has continued to suggest that a significant characteristic of serial homicides is the relationship between the victim and perpetrator. While media reports may indicate that there is a prominence of serial killings where there is no link between the perpetrator and victim (stranger killings), it is more common for serial murderers to know their victims. The victims are most

commonly a family member, friend, or acquaintance (Curtis, 1974; Deardon & Jones, 2008; Pinto & Wilson, 1990).

Identifying the relationship between a perpetrator and their victims and how they have come to be together are necessary elements in solving serial murders. This information can bring details to the surface; not just in terms of the perpetrators, but also the victims, and why those victims were important in the conduct of a murder. This falls directly into the criminological field, especially in relation to routine activity theory (Beauregard & Martineau, 2015). Routine activity theory is the understanding that “people make choices, but they cannot choose the choices available to them. Nor can they be sure what chain of events will follow from their choices, including choices made by others” (Felson, 1986, p. 119). It is also the understanding that for a crime to occur, there must be three elements:

- 1) A motivated perpetrator
- 2) An available victim, and
- 3) A lack of a capable guardian (Felson & Cohen, 1980).

Deslauriers-Varin and Beauregard (2010) identified that target selection is significantly influenced by the victim’s routine and the environment in which the crime ultimately takes place. This highlights that location is a significant influence when it comes to the strategies that a perpetrator may use to commit a crime. It recognises that crimes are generally committed within 20 kilometres of the perpetrator’s base because they know the area. As a result, it provides a link in determining where the victim is and what the victim may be doing, which will then influence the tactics, attitudes, and, ultimately, how the crime is committed. The importance of understanding the victim or using victimology is that it can provide information about the crime and the perpetrator, where there may be no evidence or a lack of evidence at the crime scene (Zedner, 2002).

Victimology research has brought to light significant victim characteristics that are relevant when understanding serial murders (McKinley & Petherick, 2021). Victim characteristics in relation to serial murder indicate that serial perpetrators usually select a specific type of victim (Bricknell & Doherty, 2021). It has been found that, overall, serial murder victims share similarities, which include age, occupation, lifestyle, race, and hairstyle. Kraemer et al. (2004) highlighted that it was significantly common for victims to be young, vulnerable Caucasian women and that the environment and access to the victim were significant precursors for victim selection. While young, vulnerable Caucasian women are common targets, serial murderers also tend to target children, the elderly, the homeless, the mentally ill, and prostitutes due to their lifestyle factors and ease of access (McKinley & Petherick, 2021).

Serial murders have gained significant publicity in the United States (U.S.), which has been referred to as the natural habitat for serial murderers (McLaughlin & Muncie, 2001). At the end of 1992, it was estimated that there were 447 serial killers in the U.S. Eighty-two had been active between 1900 and 1970 and the remaining 365 were active from 1970 to 1992 (Jenkins, 1994). However, in 1965, approximately 80% of homicides in the U.S. had been cleared (Martin et al., 2020). In stark contrast, in 2017, only about 60% of unsolved serial homicides had been cleared, which is approximately 250,000 cases, with 100,000 cases being accumulated in the past 20 years (Martin et al., 2020). This illustrates the need to understand the potential patterns of behaviour and psychological mechanisms of a perpetrator, victimology, and ultimately the relationship between the perpetrator and victim.

An evolved understanding of patterns and relationships between the perpetrator and victim can assist in identifying or reducing the possible suspects of a crime (MacDonald et al., 2014). MacDonald et al. (2014) determined that serial homicide perpetrators start committing crimes much earlier than one would believe. It has also been identified that perpetrators who engage in serial homicide have diverse criminal careers. Specifically, armed robbery has been linked to serial homicide later in life due to ongoing increases in violent crime. If a perpetrator engages in sexual offences, the transition to serial homicide is likely to occur faster (DeLisi et al., 2017).

While not every perpetrator will follow this pattern of behaviour, it has featured in numerous cases; for instance, the Boston Strangler, the Golden State Killer, and the Killer Clown (DeLisi et al., 2017). However, while having background knowledge of serial homicides in relation to the perpetrator is important, it is imperative to be aware of strategies that may have been used during the crime to avoid detection. Detection avoidance highlights elements within a crime, such as moving objects, moving the body, cleaning the crime scene, and target selection (Beaver, 2010). This is important because it can provide investigators with information on the level of knowledge and awareness a perpetrator may have of forensic matters (Beaver, 2010).

For example, using a weapon can provide fingerprints and ballistic evidence. Using restraints provides the potential to recover fingerprints and fibres, and a sex offender who has penetrated the victim can leave behind DNA (Beaver, 2010). However, even with many opportunities for evidence of the perpetrator to be left behind, many crime scenes do not have any available evidence (Cole, 2010). This suggests that many perpetrators have incorporated detection avoidance strategies into their modus operandi by educating themselves and learning from previous mistakes (Cole, 2010; Horvath & Meesig, 1996). Ultimately, research illustrates that physical evidence is collected in approximately 10% of cases (Horvath & Meesig, 1996).

Evidence suggests that the uniqueness of unsolved serial homicides can be attributed to detection avoidance and the victims. Mott (1999) analysed 75 unsolved serial murders and compared them with 399 solved serial murders, focusing on offender characteristics, victim characteristics, and methods. The solved case group perpetrators tended to kill at a higher rate than the unsolved group, and the unsolved group perpetrators chose targets that would be considered vulnerable people within the community. In the unsolved cases, the victim's body was more likely to be found in an outdoor area open to the public. In contrast, in the solved cases, body disposal sites were hidden or not used by the public (i.e., abandoned buildings). A significant element of solved and unsolved cases is that if a body is left outside, the impact of the elements, such as the weather, can destroy forensic evidence (Mott, 1999). Having this understanding illustrates the importance of incorporating knowledge in terms of both the perpetrator and the victim because it highlights how one treats a victim and how the body is left; preparation vs. opportunity can reveal information about incident characteristics and how they can assist in an investigation (Mott, 1999).

Incident Characteristics

Australian Research

During the 1980s and the 1990s, serial murders became more common compared to earlier decades – this is reflected in works by Pinto and Wilson (1990), Kidd (2000), McGarry (2005), and McKinley and Petherick (2021). While serial murder in Australia may be lower than in other parts of the world, it does require attention as this crime inherently has higher victimisation rates, often having two or more victims per perpetrator (McKinley & Petherick, 2021). As a result, this heightens community outrage and fear, especially when the victims are children or young adults, due to their innocence and ideal victim status (Morton et al., 2014). The use of detection avoidance in understanding unsolved serial murders is a pivotal aspect, as it highlights defining characteristics of the perpetrator. Detection avoidance is “...behaviour an offender employs to hide, destroy or manipulate evidence in order to avoid detection or apprehension by police” (Ferguson & McKinley, 2020, p. 114). The significance of this is that it illustrates specific behavioural patterns, target choices, and the possible psychological mindset of the perpetrator.

Australian research illustrates that victims of serial homicide are marginalised within the community. In 2005, the Australian Institute of Criminology published a report highlighting people at higher risk of being victimised (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2016). They include, for example, the unemployed, unmarried, homeless, those from culturally diverse backgrounds, people with a mental illness, those with disabilities, children, and young people (Victorian Law Reform Commission, 2016). Furthermore, research suggests that in terms of the

perpetrator's relationship with the victim, it was most common that they had a domestic relationship, followed by an acquaintance. As a result, it is significantly rare for the perpetrator and victim to be strangers (Bricknell, 2020). Because of the likely connection between victims and perpetrators before the crime, perpetrators can implement specific detection avoidance strategies (Sutton & Keatley, 2021). It also illustrates that when the perpetrator and victim are known to each other, this provides possible areas of access and knowledge that the perpetrator may have had in relation to the victim (Sutton & Keatley, 2021).

International Research

Research by Beauregard and Martineau (2014) suggests that "offenders make rational choices which enhance their ability to avoid police detection" (p. 5). Perpetrators know that making a rational choice is beneficial in avoiding detection and can be implemented into their modus operandi (Beauregard & Martineau, 2014). McKinley and Ferguson (2021) included in their research the following.

...examined 350 Canadian solved sexual homicides. The result of this research was that 47% of murderers used a form of detection avoidance, whereby 30.6% destroyed evidence, 11.1% disposed of the victim's body, 4.3% protected their identity, 11.4% acted on the victim or environment, 0.9% staged the crime scene, and 12% used other precautions, such as securing an alibi or using a look-out. (McKinley & Ferguson, 2021, p. 57)

Beauregard and Martineau's (2014) research illustrates that the characteristics of the victim are possible indicators of how the crime was committed, if the body was moved, and the time taken to recover the victim's body. It also highlights if the perpetrator was specifically targeting the victim or if the victim was an opportunity within the perpetrator's designated hunting area, which as discussed, can be referred to as routine activity theory (Morton et al., 2014). Characteristics such as displaying the body, concealing the body, and staging can provide critical information about the relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, how the perpetrator feels about a victim, if it is psychosexual, and many other characteristics that ultimately aid in unravelling the homicide (Morton et al., 2014). Rational choice theory, used with detection avoidance, can help identify the geographical bounds a perpetrator selects to commit their crime and dispose of the body (Lundrigan & Canter, 2001). The geographical locations are not arbitrary but can relate specifically to the experiences of the perpetrator and imply a sequence of logical reasoning and selection, which may incorporate bias selection even if the perpetrator is unaware of it themselves (Lundrigan & Canter, 2001).

This understanding provides that the target selection can come from the perpetrator's 20-kilometre hunting ground, which starts from the perpetrator's residence (Lundrigan & Canter, 2001). This is because perpetrators hunt in an area,

they are comfortable in, know, and can covet what they want daily, ultimately making it easier to watch and learn about a victim's movements and routines (Lundrigan & Canter, 2001).

Victim Vulnerability

The extant literature states that perpetrators who commit multiple murders over time evade capture by targeting individuals who live on the fringes of society, who are often itinerant, mobile, and have had no prior contact with the killer (Ressler et al., 1986; Santtila et al., 2008). These perpetrators are also opportunistic and seek scenarios that give them the upper hand, allowing them to offend without apprehension (Bartol & Bartol, 1999; Fox & Levin, 2015). Dietz (1986) proposed that most unsolved serial killers had a mental disorder and were 'psychopathic sexual sadists', although few were psychotic (p. 483).

Fox and Levin (2015) raise the interesting point that many victims of unsolved serial killings are chosen from the fringes of society, such as drug users, prostitutes, runaways, migrants, or the homeless. Not only are the victims blamed for their own victimisation and deaths, but the fact that these persons are marginalised stops their communities spiralling into a 'collective hysteria' (p. 11) over the crimes as they are occurring and being discovered. It appears easier for society, as a collective, to accept that the victim somehow participated in the crime that ultimately cost them their lives or brought it on themselves due to their lifestyle risk. Furthermore, the victim's marginalised role in society means it often takes more time for law enforcement agencies to become aware that an unsolved serial killer is operating, and the pressure to solve the crime is perceived to be less when the victims are prostitutes, drug addicts or homosexuals than if they are considered to be a more valued societal asset, such as children or 'ideal victims' (Christie, 1986; Fox & Levin, 2015).

Research indicates that several susceptible populations are vulnerable to serial murderers (Bartol & Bartol, 1999; Santtila et al., 2008). They are children (Fox & Levin, 2015); adolescents, elderly, females, prostitutes, homosexuals (Bartol & Bartol, 1999; Jenkins, 1988; Kraemer et al., 2004); runaways (Fox & Levin, 2015); mentally ill, minorities, foreigners, refugees, immigrants (Fox & Levin, 2015); and hitchhikers (Ressler et al., 1986). Within these populations, variables such as the victim's actions during the offence, their age, attractiveness, complexion, height, marital status, physique, race, residence, sex, socio-economic status, and weight are important factors in terms of why perpetrators target them (Ressler et al., 1986, p. 292). Esmail (2005) determined that elderly women who lived alone and suffered due to age or terminal illness were more susceptible to being targeted by serial killers. Perpetrators specifically select victims such as these to avoid discovery as they are often left alone, fragile, unwell, and isolated. In some cases, it was later identified that doctors or medical professionals were the killers and were able to

get away with multiple killings over long periods by manipulating records, the victim's family, and their patient's (victim's) naivety, lack of knowledge, and power (LaBrode, 2007; Mott, 1999). Among other things, Ressler et al. (1986) and Santtila et al. (2008) found that 63% of victims were alone when attacked.

Interestingly, most Australian victims of unsolved serial homicide are more often stabbed or strangled than shot. Dietz (1986) describes these methods as the killer's choice as hand-held weapons bring the perpetrator and victim into close proximity, unlike a long-distance kill with a firearm. For example, the perpetrator and victim are intimately close at the time of the individual's death, which for many killers would be highly stimulating (Dietz, 1986). The Australian Institute of Criminology stated that "serial killers are more likely to use strangulation, stabbing, ligature weapons, hands or feet (beating), cause injury to the victim's head and genitalia (anus), bind victims and sexually assault victims" (Mouzos & West, 2007, p. 2). The significance can be a sense of mastery or control, whereby the killer wants to see the victim suffer, which is difficult to achieve from a distance. Much of the previous research indicates that the motivation behind unsolved serial killings is predominantly sexual (Bartol & Bartol, 1999; Keppel & Walter, 1999; Kraemer et al., 2004; Salfati & Bateman, 2005). The reasons why these killers target specific individuals have also been the subject of intriguing studies. Judging victim vulnerability, the offender could watch the victim's body language, specifically their gait, and determine whether they could exploit the victim's vulnerability and behaviour (Book et al., 2013; Grayson & Stein, 1981; Wheeler et al., 2009). Alternatively, the victim dies in a case of 'murder by proxy', a term which refers to how a particular victim was chosen because the offender's ultimate target plays the same role, looks similar, or is employed in the same job (Cullen, 2013).

Further support for this research is illustrated by Camilleri et al. (2010), who studied the success of specific psychopathic traits connected with increased memory and acuity when assessing another person's confidence (Book et al., 1988), vulnerability to victimisation (Grayson & Stein, 1981; Montepare & Zebrowitz-McArthur, 1998; Wheeler et al., 2009), or a killer's ability to determine the susceptibility of a victim based on the crime typology (Sakaguchi & Hasegawa, 2007). Snook et al. (2005) posited that the perpetrators of unsolved serial killings identified possible victims while occupied in their everyday activities and, in the same way, could find suitable locations for body disposal. Their findings indicated that perpetrators choose their victims close to their homes. Godwin (1998) argued that investigators should give more consideration to how perpetrators of unsolved serial killings focus on where victims are initially targeted. Godwin (1998) made judgements and deductions about how the perpetrator made decisions relating to the selection of the victim, where the crime would occur, and where it was in respect to the geographical location of the offender's home. Holmes (1997) and Godwin (1998) found that the areas of highest risk for victimisation from perpetrators of unsolved serial killings (p. 80) were:

- Areas with a high concentration of elderly and poor individuals.
- Isolated landscapes (parking lots, jogging paths, and rest areas).
- Skid row (derelict areas of a city).
- University campuses.
- Urban subcultures (heterosexual and homosexual bars, nightclubs, and red-light areas).

METHODOLOGY

Aim

This study aimed to:

- a) Identify the unsolved serial homicides in Australia between 1 January 1965 and 31 July 2022,
- b) Identify victim vulnerabilities or risk factors, and
- c) Identify common characteristics of Australian unsolved serial homicide victims and incidents

Research Question

- a) For each unsolved serial homicide case, when did it occur, how many victims were there, what were their demographic characteristics (gender, race, and age), how did the victim die, was a sexual element involved, and what made the victims vulnerable to attack?
- b) What are the victim risk factors?

Case Identification

Unsolved serial homicide cases were identified by:

- a) Aamodt (2022) Radford/FGCU serial killer database (held by the first author)
- b) Reviewing existing Australian peer-reviewed journal articles on unsolved serial homicides (Mouzos & West, 2007; Pinto & Wilson, 1990)
- c) Reviewing the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) Annual Reports 1989–2020
- d) State and Territory coroners' reports; and
- e) Searching multiple online engines/databases, Google and Trove (the Australian National Library's database aggregator), using relevant keywords (e.g., Australia, unsolved serial killer, unsolved serial homicide).

Inclusion Criteria

Unsolved serial homicide cases were considered eligible for inclusion in the study if they met the following criteria:

- a) The first murder in the series occurred after 1 January 1965
- b) The last murder in the series occurred before 31 July 2022
- c) The perpetrator(s) killed at least two victims
- d) At least two reliable references mentioning the case could be located (e.g., court documents, peer-reviewed journal articles, coroners' reports and NHMP annual reports)
- e) An extensive online search for newspaper articles/books, etc., published after the date of the most recent reliable reference indicated that the case had still not been solved and was considered a likely unsolved serial homicide case.

Case Details

Once the cases had been identified, the following information was compiled and recorded for each unsolved serial homicide case: total number of victims, gender of victims, age of victims at the time of death, race of victims, method(s) of killing used, whether a sexual element was present, and victim vulnerabilities. Previous international research has primarily examined solved homicides in isolation, while previous Australian studies have only included one to five unsolved serial homicide cases in their sample (Mouzos & West, 2007; Pinto & Wilson, 1990). Vignettes were considered the best way to provide current information about these unsolved matters. Since there was only a small sample of unsolved serial homicides, it was appropriate to use vignettes to provide a more detailed account of the serial homicides that have occurred in Australia.

RESULTS

Solved cases – Victim vulnerabilities

Common vulnerabilities of solved and unsolved serial homicide victims that may have contributed to the perpetrator's decision to target them include:

- Their age (particularly being an infant/child or elderly) (Kraemer et al., 2004)
- Their gender (particularly being female) (Holmes, 1997)
- Their relationship with the perpetrator (Sutton & Keatley, 2021)
- Located in a 'deviant place': a remote area or alone in a public place (day/night) (Stark, 1987)
- Being hitchhikers, backpackers, travellers, nomads, or itinerant workers (Mott, 1999)
- Their high-risk employment, such as being a sex worker (Beauregard & Martineau, 2012; Quinet, 2011)
- Their body language (gait, pace, movements) (Book et al., 2013)

- Their sexual choices (i.e., being homosexual or a paedophile) (DeLisi et al., 2017).

Unsolved cases – Victim vulnerabilities

The extant literature identified that significantly common vulnerabilities for victims of unsolved serial homicides that may have identified them as a favourable target include:

- Their age (particularly being a child/teenager)
- Their gender (particularly being female)
- Their race (being Indigenous)
- Being alone in a public place (see Table 1).

Unsolved serial homicide series

Incident years	Case name	Signature/MO	Victims	Age of victims	Race of victims	Method of killing	Presence of sexual element*	Victim vulnerabilities
1965–1966 ¹	Wanda Beach Murders	Vicious multiple stab wounds, rape, blunt force trauma, and concealed bodies	2 females: Christine Sharrock & Marianne Schmidt	15, 15	Caucasian (2)	Bashing and stabbing (2), strangulation (1), and stabbing (1)	Yes	All females (two teenagers) alone on the beach
1979–1983 ²	The Family Murders	Drugged, dissection, mutilation, decapitation, severe blood loss, insertion of a blunt object which caused anal injury	5 males: Alan Barnes, Neil Muir, Peter Stogneff, Mark Langley & Richard Kelvin	17, 25, 14, 18, 15	Caucasian	Sexual mutilation (e.g., insertion of a large object up the anus) (5)	Yes	All young males. One walking home from a bus stop alone. One hitchhiking alone
1984–1990 ³	Tynong North Murders	Most victims had been stripped of clothing and dumped in secluded areas	6 females: Allison Rooke, Joy Summers, Bertha Miller, Catherine Headland, Ann-Marie Sargent & Narumol Stephenson	59, 55, 75, 14, 18, 34	Caucasian (5) and Asian (1)	Unknown	Yes	All females. All walking or waiting for public transport. Two older adults, one a child
1990–1991 ⁴	Bowraville	Victims disappeared from local parties; they or the people close to them were intoxicated at the time	3 victims (2 female, 1 male) Evelyn Greenup, Clinton Speedy Duroux & Colleen Walker-Craig	16, 4, 16	Indigenous	Hitting with blunt/sharp object (2) and unknown (1)	Unknown	All Indigenous, all children, two females. All from Bowraville (a very small town)

¹ Both in January in Cronulla, New South Wales.

² Adelaide, South Australia.

³ Tynong North, Victoria.

⁴ Bowraville, New South Wales.

RESULTS

Vignettes

Wanda Beach Murders

On 11 January 1965, two 15-year-olds, Christine Sharrock and Marianne Schmidt, spent the day at Wanda Beach in Cronulla, New South Wales with Marianne's four younger siblings. After lunch, the two teenagers, who were best friends and neighbours from the suburb of West Ryde, told the other children they were going to get their bags from the southern end of the beach and were never seen alive again. It was approximately 1pm when the young children watched the two older girls walk off. The four youngsters stayed together until 5pm, when they gave up and caught the last train home. The girls were reported missing to the authorities as soon as the children returned home at 8pm.

Other than the children, the last official sighting of Christine and Marianne was at 12:45pm by Dennis Dostine, a local fireman, who was walking with his son in the area. Mr Dostine told police that they seemed to be in a hurry, and one of the girls often looked behind her as if they were being followed; however, he did not see anybody else. The girls' partially buried remains were discovered the following day in the sand dunes near the Wanda Surf Club.

Christine's skull had been fractured by a blow to the back of the head, and she had been stabbed 14 times. Marianne's throat had been deeply slashed, and she had been stabbed six times. Critically, semen was recovered during the autopsies; however, at the time, scientific techniques for DNA typing were not available. While admitting that technology in the mid-1960s could not provide more information, police were confident that future advances would provide more assistance. By April 1966, police had interviewed some 7,000 people, making it the largest investigation in Australian history (Nightingale, 2012).

In 1972, an alleged perpetrator is believed to have confessed to the murders to his girlfriend. However, it was not taken seriously and was not reported to the police (Zaczek, 2020). The Wanda Beach case was reopened in 2000, and again in February 2012, when the New South Wales Police Force's Unsolved Homicide Unit announced that a weak male DNA sample had been extracted from a pair of white shorts worn by Christine. However, in July 2014, police stated that a semen sample taken from Christine's body had been lost and could not be located, despite an extensive search (Brown, 2014). In 2020, it was believed that a person of interest in the Wanda Beach Murders may have already been in jail for a separate crime – this man was serving an eight-year sentence for the sexual abuse of his daughter (Zaczek, 2020); however, the murders remain unsolved.

The protective factors given the time in history were that the victims were in a public place, in broad daylight during school holidays. They had four other children present with them almost all day. Both girls were considered sensible, and it was an easy journey by public transport from their homes to the beach (Byrne, 2019). However, the victims were vulnerable because they were young, female, and alone at the time of the attack. Wanda Beach was a known haunt for nude bathing and courting couples, which allegedly made that section of the beach a space for adults (Byrne, 2019).

The Family Murders

The 'Family Murders' are the name attributed to the brutal murders of five young males who were kidnapped, drugged, sexually abused, and tortured (The Family Murders, 2020). The murders occurred in Adelaide, South Australia, in the 1970s and 1980s. It is believed that there were numerous prominent people in Adelaide associated with these murders (O'Brien, 2014). The first victim was Alan Barnes, a 16-year-old boy who was picked up in a Holden that had three or four people in the car (The Family Murders, 2020). Alan suffered torture pre-mortem, and his body was mutilated and dumped northeast of Adelaide. The autopsy revealed that Alan had the hypnotic drug Noctec in his system (The Family Murders, 2020). Noctec comes in tablet and liquid form and is used to make chemical changes within the brain to promote calm and is considered a drug of abuse (Milhorn, 1994).

Alan's cause of death was extensive blood loss from an anal injury caused by the insertion of a large blunt object (O'Brien, 2014). The second victim was Neil Muir, a 25-year-old man whose remains had been mutilated, dissected, and placed into garbage bags (O'Brien, 2014). Neil's remains were found at Port Adelaide. Tattoos and other identifying markings on Neil's body had been removed. The autopsy showed Neil's cause of death was extensive blood loss from an anal injury caused by the insertion of a large blunt object (O'Brien, 2014). It was also found that Noctec was present in Neil's system (The Family Murders, 2020). The third victim was Peter Stogneff, a 14-year-old boy, who was found at Middle Beach in Adelaide. Stogneff's body had been cut into pieces. However, due to his body being burned, no other information could be found on what had happened to him (O'Brien, 2014).

The fourth victim was Mark Langley, an 18-year-old man whose mutilated body was found in the foothills of Adelaide (O'Brien, 2014). A surgical wound was present, and a post-mortem examination showed that part of Mark's small bowel was missing (O'Brien, 2014). This indicated that the perpetrator had medical awareness, and it is speculated that upon inserting a large object into Mark's anus, it was caught up in his bowels and had to be removed (O'Brien, 2014). Mark's cause of death was extensive blood loss from the anal injury (O'Brien, 2014). It was also found that Mandrax was present in Mark's system (O'Brien, 2014). Mandrax is a

hypnotic drug that slows down the central nervous system, creating a sedative effect (Kelly, 1973). When Mandrax is combined with alcohol it can be fatal; however, it provides a 'high' if the user stays awake and has been reported to provide an aphrodisiac effect (Kelly, 1973).

The fifth, and final known victim, was Richard Kelvin, a 15-year-old boy who was kidnapped from North Adelaide and whose body was found dumped near an airstrip at Kersbrook in Adelaide (O'Brien, 2014). Richard was held captive for five weeks, during which time he was tortured and sexually abused. The autopsy revealed that he died from extensive blood loss from an anal injury caused by the insertion of a large blunt object (O'Brien, 2014). Richard's body had both Mandrax and Noctec present, plus two other hypnotic drugs. Fibres from his body were used to show that Bevan Spencer von Eniem had murdered Richard; however, there was not enough evidence to tie the other four murders to Eniem (The Canberra Times, 1984). While numerous people are believed to be associated with the murders, no other convictions have been made due to the lack of evidence. Eniem was sentenced in 1984 to a minimum of 36 years' jail (The Canberra Times, 1984). The above cases were linked together by several factors. All victims had a form of substance in their system, whether it was Noctec or Mandrax, each died from extensive blood loss from an anal injury caused by the insertion of a large blunt object, the victims were held captive for an extended period, they had been tortured, their bodies had been severely mutilated, and their bodies had been dumped in semi-private locations. Currently, the murders of the other four victims remain unsolved. The protective factors were that the victims were in public in broad daylight with numerous people around. The victims were relatively close to their houses of residence and were well known in the areas where they lived (O'Brian, 2014). However, the factors that made the victims vulnerable were that they were young males who were alone when they were attacked. The perpetrators were unknown to the victims and were initially given alcohol that had been spiked to keep them compliant (O'Brian, 2014).

Tynong North and Frankston Murders

The Tynong North and Frankston murders are events associated with a serial perpetrator between 1980 and 1981 in Victoria (Pike, 2020; Victoria Police, 2021). Six women were abducted in the Tynong and Frankston areas and murdered. Their bodies were dumped in remote scrub areas (Victoria Police, 2021). The first victim was Allison Rooke, a 59-year-old woman, travelling via public transport along the Frankston and Dandenong Road. Five weeks later, Allison's body was located in a shallow grave; she had been stripped of her clothing (Pike, 2020; Victoria Police, 2021). Joy Summers was a 55-year-old woman who was travelling via public transport along the Frankston and Dandenong Road and went missing (Victoria Police, 2021). Six weeks later, her naked body was found in scrub land.

The remains of 73-year-old Bertha Miller, 14-year-old Catherine Headland, and 18-year-old Ann-Marie Sargent were located in a sand quarry in secluded bushland at Tynong North (Victoria Police, 2021). Bertha was fully clothed; however, both Catherine and Ann-Marie were stripped of their clothing (Pike, 2020; Victoria Police, 2021). Thirty-four-year-old Narumol Stephenson's naked and badly decomposed body was found in Tynong North (Victoria Police, 2021). All victims were planning to use public transport before their abduction and the cause of death for all the victims could not be identified (Pike, 2020; Victoria Police, 2021). It is suspected that there may be separate offenders; however, there are no suspects (Victoria Police, 2021) and the six murders remain unsolved.

The protective factors were that all the victims were using or about to use public transport in broad daylight. They were on their way to either work or church, and, as a result, people would have been around when the victims disappeared (Victoria Police, 2021). In these matters, the victims were vulnerable because they were females with a range of ages (young through to elderly). All victims were alone at the time of their attack. They were also in the vicinity of the 'hunting ground' of the Tynong North and Frankston serial killer (Victoria Police, 2021).

Bowraville

On 13 September 1990, 16-year-old Colleen Walker-Craig was last seen walking away from a party on Cemetery Road in Bowraville, New South Wales. Three weeks later, four-year-old Evelyn Greenup went missing from her grandmother's house in the same street after a party. On 31 January 1991, 16-year-old Clinton Speedy-Duroux disappeared after a party. All three were Indigenous children who were murdered between September 1990 and February 1991 in Bowraville (Townesley, 2015), in an area known as 'The Mission'. Autopsies of the two bodies that were found indicated that both suffered trauma to the head (Townesley, 2015).

Despite the families of the children believing something terrible had happened, the missing person's report of the children was not taken seriously by local police; no search parties were formed, and no formal action was taken (Townesley, 2015). The police failed in their initial investigations to consider the disappearances as a series; instead, they viewed them in isolation. In 1997, Task Force Ancud was formed to continue investigating the unsolved murders. The warning signs of a serial killer should have been spotted, but they weren't because the police assumed the children had gone 'walkabout'. Forensic psychologists were hired and found a motive for all three murders was sexual gratification.

The prime suspect in this matter, a 25-year-old local labourer, Jay Hart, was charged with two of the murders in 1991 but acquitted in 1994 and 2006. In 2006, the NSW double jeopardy legislation opened the way for the retrial of any person acquitted of a life-sentence offence if "fresh and compelling evidence" was uncovered. On 9 February 2017, police laid a murder charge against the suspect,

and the NSW Attorney-General applied to the Court of Criminal Appeal for a retrial; the application was heard on 29 November 2017. On 13 September 2018, the court dismissed the application, concluding that none of the evidence was “fresh and compelling” and the accused could not be retried for the murders.

In March 2019, the NSW Attorney-General was refused an application to appeal the decision in the High Court of Australia. After the acquittal, prosecutors did not proceed with the trial against the accused for the murder of Greenup. The families refuse to give up. In the Bowraville matter, the protective factors were that all victims were part of strong social support networks and had stable, positive relationships with others. They were in their homes or those of friends and there were a lot of people in and around the areas they disappeared from. However, the victims were made vulnerable because they were young, in the company of those who were heavily intoxicated (absent guardians as in Felson & Cohen, 1980, and abducted late at night in unsafe housing. Additionally, Pascoe (2021) reported that “...the police and justice system have severely let (them) down...” (p. 2) and former NSW Police detective Gary Jubelin stated that “...it’s this racism and unconscious bias that the families have been battling for 30 years”.

DISCUSSION

This study aimed to:

- a) Identify the incidence of unsolved serial homicide in Australia between 1 January 1965 and 1 July 2022; and
- b) Identify victim vulnerabilities or risk factors; and
- c) Identify common characteristics of Australian unsolved serial homicide victims and incidents.

Unsolved serial homicide is a concerning issue that is prevalent within Australian society – it illustrates that significant crimes have occurred and could occur again. However, this study’s findings show that the community’s understanding of unsolved serial homicide is incorrect. The findings show that between 1 January 1965 and 1 July 2022 there were four cases of unsolved serial homicide, with a total of 16 victims.

A commonality is that the unsolved homicides demonstrated a significant level of rage towards the victims and a high presence of sexual mutilation towards teenagers and children. As discussed, research has suggested that high levels of rage in an unsolved serial homicide usually indicate that the perpetrator has had a long criminal career (Santtila et al., 2008). The perpetrator has had time to learn from mistakes and incorporate avoidance detection strategies within their modus operandi. Kraemer et al. (2004) found that victims had an element of vulnerability in terms of being young, Caucasian, and female, and these elements were significant precursors for crimes being committed against vulnerable groups of people.

The results of this research also highlight that all the victims had a form of vulnerability: children, young people, females, Caucasian, and from vulnerable communities. The victims were close to their primary place of residence, which highlights that the perpetrator likely coveted what they saw every day, making it easier to identify habits, movements, and routines. This may have enabled them to build a connection with the victims before the murder. This has been illustrated in the research by Sutton and Keatley (2021), who found stranger killings were rare, and in most cases, the perpetrator and victim had some form of a relationship before the murder – usually in the form of a domestic relationship, followed by an acquaintance. Following this, a significant number of victims were taken from a public area. This illustrates that the perpetrator was comfortable in their hunting ground and because the victims were close to their primary residence, they likely felt comfortable and safe in the area, which would ultimately reduce the victim's need to be cautious of their surroundings. This can be linked to Deslauriers-Varin and Beauregard's (2010) research, which highlighted the significance of routine activity theory and rational choice theory in terms of target selection in conjunction with the geographical location of the perpetrator's hunting ground. However, there were limitations to this study in relation to the amount of data that could be collected. While extensive research was conducted to gather as much information as possible, the authors know that not all information about the murders is public knowledge. As a result, some specific information that would have provided greater detail regarding victim vulnerabilities and perpetrator behaviour and movements may be missing.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For Australia to continue moving forward in understanding unsolved serial homicides, law enforcement officers must continue to be educated in this area to help remove bias. This is highlighted in the Bowraville case, where the police did not take a proactive stance over the seriousness of missing children. Given the continuous developments in science and understanding of behaviours in psychology, sociology, geography, and criminology, cases should continue to be revisited to bring closure to not only the friends and family of the victims, but to the police officers who handled such cases.

CONCLUSION

Although the number of unsolved serial homicide events in Australia has continuously decreased during the past few decades, the question of whether this could change in the future remains. Identifying the factors affecting the incidence of unsolved serial homicide is imperative to educating investigators and understanding what makes a person vulnerable to being targeted by a serial killer.

The ongoing advancements in solvability and forensic science techniques will assist in future research. Such advancements can highlight unseen links, patterns, and evidence that may have been missed in the past and new technical developments can shed fresh light on old evidence. These advancements can assist in gaining more evidence or possibly solving cold cases, while also developing links to previous serial cases. Future research will extend our understanding of serial homicides and victimology.

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