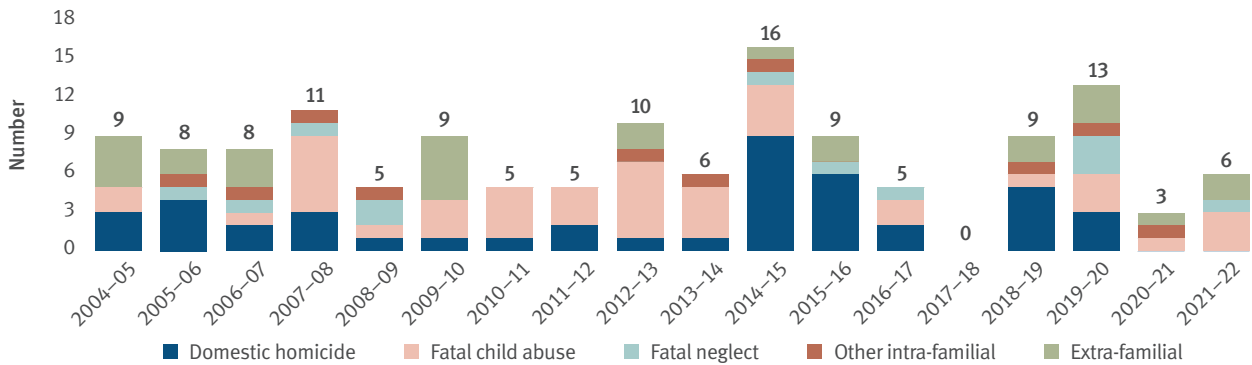
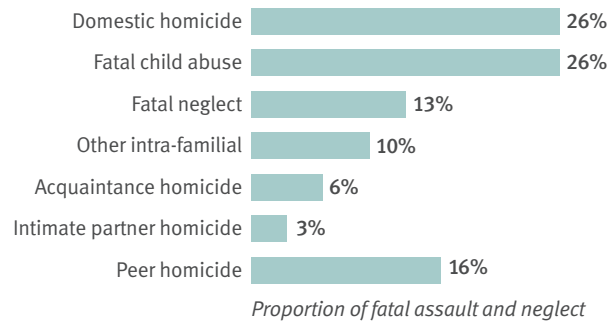


# 7 Fatal assault and neglect

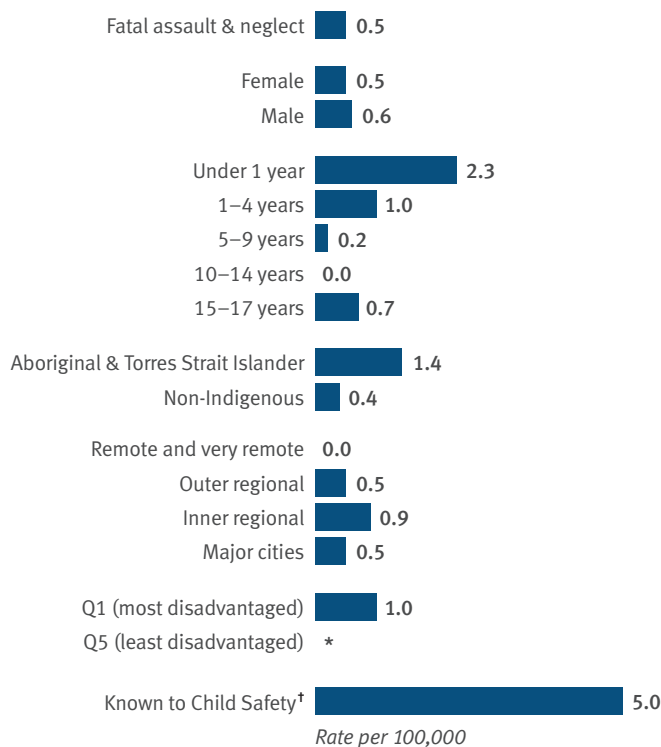
## 2004 to 2022



## 5-year summary (2017-22) | Incident type



## Demographics



## Intra-familial fatal assault and neglect risk factors

**61%** household domestic and family violence

**61%** child experienced previous abuse

**65%** alleged perpetrator had suspected or diagnosed mental health issues

**53%** alleged perpetrator had history of offending

**47%** alleged perpetrator had alcohol and/or substance misuse

Notes: Counting is by date of death registration. Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

\* rate not calculated for numbers between 1-3.

† in the 12 months prior to death.

## Key findings

Based on information available to the QFCC at the time of reporting, 6 deaths were identified as being the result of fatal assault and neglect in Queensland during 2021–22. Definitions for the types of fatal assault and neglect can be found in [Appendix C](#) and a description of the screening criteria can be found in [Appendix G](#).<sup>61</sup>

Over the last 5 years, 31 children died in 25 fatal assault and neglect incidents. Twenty-three deaths were categorised as intra-familial, meaning that the alleged perpetrator was a parent, family member or person acting in a parental role. Eight children died in domestic homicides, including murder-suicide incidents where the alleged perpetrator also took their own life. Eight children were found to have died as a result of child abuse, 4 died from neglect and 3 were other intra-familial incidents.

Eight deaths in the last 5 years were extra-familial homicides, 5 of which were peer homicides.

Further summary information on deaths from fatal assault and neglect can be found in [Table A.9](#) in [Appendix A](#).<sup>62</sup>

## Age and sex

Infants under 1 year had the highest rate death from fatal assault and neglect over the last 5 years (2.3 per 100,000), followed by children 1–4 years and 15–17 years (1.0 and 0.7 per 100,000, respectively). All children who died in intra-familial assault or neglect were aged under 9 years, while 7 of the 8 extra-familial homicide deaths were young people aged 15–17 years.

There was little difference in male and female rates of deaths from assault and neglect (respectively 0.6 and 0.5 per 100,000 over 5 years). However, males made up 7 of the 8 extra-familial homicide deaths.

## Vulnerability characteristics

Of the 31 child deaths from assault and neglect during 2017–22, 23 (74%) children were known to the child protection system within the 12 months prior to death and one was known outside the statutory review period. It is noted that 2 of these children were only known to child protection because of the incident leading to their death.

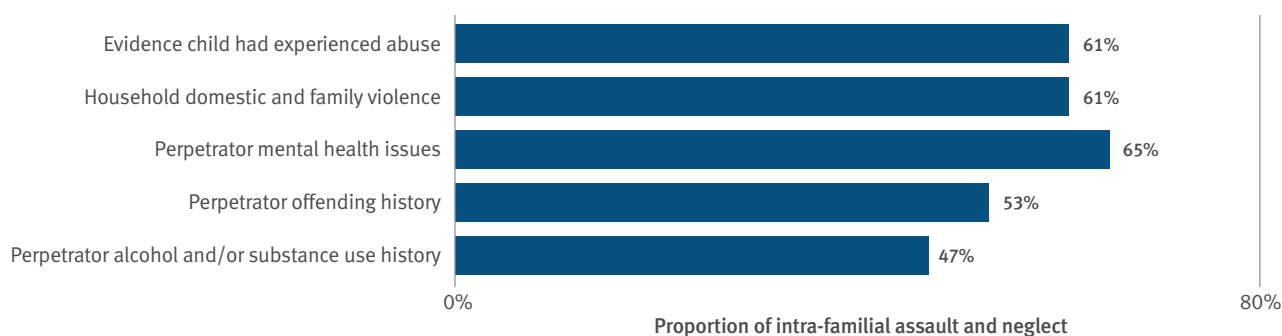
The following factors were present for the 23 children who died from intra-familial assault or neglect in 17 incidents over the last 5 years (see Figure 7.1):

- 61% had been exposed to domestic and family violence (12 of 23 children)
- 61% had experienced child abuse prior to the incident (12 of 23 children)
- 65% of the alleged perpetrators were identified as either having a diagnosed or suspected mental health issue (in 11 of the 17 incidents)
- 53% of the alleged perpetrators had a history of criminal offending (9 of the 17 incidents)
- 47% of the alleged perpetrators had a history of alcohol or substance use (8 of the 17 incidents).

Seven of the 23 children who died from intra-familial assault or neglect were exposed to all 4 of the vulnerability characteristics: household domestic and family violence; and exposure to a perpetrator with mental health; offending history; and alcohol/substance use.

<sup>61</sup> [www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/about-us/publications/child-death-reports-and-data](http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/about-us/publications/child-death-reports-and-data)

<sup>62</sup> Tables with data for 2004–22 are available online at [www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/about-us/publications/child-death-reports-and-data](http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/about-us/publications/child-death-reports-and-data)

**Figure 7.1: Vulnerability characteristics in intra-familial fatal assault and neglect (proportion), 2017–18 to 2021–22**

## Red flags for filicide

A QFCC system review completed following the death of a child prompted the QFCC to explore the concept of ‘red flags’ to identify children who are at risk of fatal assault or neglect by a parent—an act known as filicide. A red flag is an act or intention (such as injury, threats of harm or death) or accumulation of risk factors likely to adversely affect a child’s immediate safety. During 2020–21, the QFCC worked with researchers from the University of Queensland to develop an evidence base for red flags using data from the Queensland Child Death Register. This project identified several risk factors that, when occurring together, may indicate a child is at increased risk of filicide:

- a recorded threat to kill a child
- domestic and family violence
- repeated contact with the child protection authorities
- presence of a new male partner (or stepfather), especially for children aged 0–4 years
- illicit drug or alcohol misuse by parents or caregivers
- parent or caregiver with a severe mental health disorder
- recent separation (within the last 12 months)
- extended hospitalisation of the child.

A final report was released in May 2022 and based on the outcomes of this research, the QFCC considered a ‘Red Flags’ protocol for filicide was not warranted. The QFCC acknowledges that a threat to kill a child by a parent (found by this study to be a significant standalone risk factor for filicide) is already embedded in risk assessment frameworks that are currently used by child protection and police professionals.

The QFCC produced the paper *Taking Lives: A Queensland study on parents who kill their children* as a system-wide resource.<sup>63</sup> It summarises the main findings of the study and raises awareness on filicide risk factors across the broad range of professionals working with children and families.

63 [www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/node/274](http://www.qfcc.qld.gov.au/node/274)