

Part IV: Intentional injury-related deaths, 2013–14

Chapter 7 - Fatal assault and neglect

This section provides details of child deaths from fatal assault and neglect.

Key findings

- Four children died as a result of fatal assault and neglect in Queensland in 2013–14. There have been between four and 11 child deaths from assault and neglect each year since reporting commenced in 2004.
- In three of the four deaths the child was under the age of 1 year. One child was in the 10–14 years age group.
- Three children who were fatally assaulted in 2013–14 were alleged to have been killed by a family member.
- Three children were victims of fatal child abuse. The remaining death was due to domestic homicide.
- Three of the children were known to the children protection system prior to their death.
- Over one-third of child deaths from assault and neglect since 2004 have been of children aged under 1 year (27 of 76 deaths).
- More than half of the child deaths from fatal assault and neglect since 2004 have been of children aged under 5 years (47 of the 76 deaths).

Child death and injury prevention activities

External advice and information sharing

In 2013–14, CCYPCG provided advice to other Queensland government agencies developing new strategic plans and operational services for vulnerable children and young people. The CCYPCG also helped to inform research priorities for the academic sector and identify emerging trends.

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Fatal assault and neglect, 2013–14

A copy of Table 7.1 containing data since 2004 is available online at www.qfcc.qld.gov.au

Table 7.1: Summary of deaths from assault and neglect of children and young people in Queensland, 2009–2014

	2009–10		2010–11		2011–12		2012–13		2013–14		Yearly average
	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Total <i>n</i>	Rate per 100,000	Rate per 100,000
All fatal assault and neglect deaths											
Fatal assault and neglect	9	0.9	4	0.4	5	0.5	11	1.0	4	0.4	0.6
Sex											
Female	6	1.2	0	0.0	3	*	3	*	3	*	*
Male	3	*	4	0.7	2	*	8	1.4	1	*	*
Age category											
Under 1 year	2	*	3	*	1	*	6	9.8	3	*	*
1–4 years	1	*	1	*	2	*	3	*	0	0.0	*
5–9 years	1	*	0	0.0	1	*	0	0.0	0	0.0	*
10–14 years	2	*	0	0.0	1	*	1	*	1	*	*
15–17 years	3	*	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	*	0	0.0	*
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status											
Indigenous	1	*	1	*	0	0.0	2	*	3	*	*
Non-Indigenous	8	0.8	3	*	5	0.5	9	0.9	1	*	0.5
Geographical area of usual residence (ARIA+)											
Remote	1	*	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	*	1	*	*
Regional	5	1.3	4	1.0	1	*	6	1.5	2	*	*
Metropolitan	3	*	0	0.0	4	0.6	4	0.6	1	*	*
Socio-economic status of usual residence (SEIFA)											
Low to very low	7	1.7	3	*	3	*	6	1.4	4	0.9	1.1
Moderate	1	*	1	*	0	0.0	2	*	0	0.0	*
High to very high	1	*	0	0.0	2	*	3	*	0	0.0	*
Known to the child protection system											
Known to the child protection system	4	3.1	2	*	2	*	5	3.0	3	*	*
Category of fatal assault or neglect											
Neonaticide	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	*	0	0.0	*
Fatal child abuse	2	*	3	*	3	*	6	0.6	3	*	*
Domestic homicide	1	*	1	*	2	*	1	*	1	*	*
Fatal neglect	1	*	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	*	0	0.0	*
Intimate partner homicide	2	*	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	*
Peer homicide	2	*	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	*	0	0.0	*
Acquaintance homicide	1	*	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	*
Stranger homicide	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1	*	0	0.0	*

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2009–2014)

* Rates have not been calculated for numbers less than 4.

- Notes:
1. Data presented here are current in the Queensland Child Death Register as at June 2014 and thus may differ from those presented in previously published reports.
 2. Rates are based on the most up-to-date denominator data available and are calculated per 100,000 children (in the age/sex/Indigenous status/ARIA region/SEIFA region) in each year.
 3. The number of children known to the child protection system represents the number of children whose deaths were registered in the reporting period who were known to the Department of Communities in the 3 years prior to their death.
 4. ARIA and SEIFA were not able to be calculated for children whose usual place of residence was not Queensland.
 5. Average annual rates have been calculated using the estimated resident population data at June 2011 (the mid-point for the period).
 6. Definitions of each category are listed under the Abbreviations and Definitions table presented in Appendix 1.2.

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Defining fatal assault and neglect

Fatal assault is defined in this report as a death where a child dies at the hands of another person who has inflicted harm to them through some means of force or physical aggression.⁴⁶ *Fatal neglect* is defined as a death where a child that is dependent on a caregiver for the basic necessities of life dies owing to the failure of the caregiver to meet the child's ongoing basic needs.

The definitions are intended to be child-focused insofar as the perpetrator's intention is not relevant – the definition includes instances of violence or neglect leading to the child's death even though the perpetrator may not have intended such an outcome, as well as instances where the perpetrator intended to kill the child.⁴⁷

It is important to note that assault and neglect are not necessarily exclusive categories. For example, a child's death may be the culmination of a series of violent and neglectful acts perpetrated against them. Where more than one type of fatal assault and neglect was identified for the child at the time of death, a primary type of fatal assault or neglect in relation to the cause of death is identified for the child for reporting purposes.

Fatal assault and neglect: Findings, 2013–14

Four children died as a result of fatal assault and neglect in Queensland in 2013–14. Three children and young people were victims of fatal child abuse. The remaining death was due to domestic homicide.⁴⁸

Sex

Three of the children who died were female. The remaining death was a male child.

Age

Three of the four deaths due to fatal assault and neglect were infants under 1 year. One child was aged 10–14 years.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status

Of the four fatal assault and neglect deaths, three were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Geographic area of usual residence (ARIA+)

Two of the four fatal assault and neglect deaths were of children who resided in regional areas of Queensland. One death was of a children from a metropolitan area and one was from a remote area.

Socio-economic status of usual residence (SEIFA)

In 2013–14, all four children who died from assault and neglect were from low to very low socio-economic areas.

Children known to the child protection system

Of the four children who died as a result of assault and neglect, three were known to the child protection system in the three years preceding their deaths.

Coronial findings

At the time of reporting, there were no coronial findings for any of the four child deaths. Criminal proceedings were underway for three of the deaths.

46. Deaths where a person has been charged with driving offences resulting in the death of a child are currently excluded from the definition of fatal assault and neglect (with the exception of murder charges). These cases are counted in Chapter 3, Transport.

47. These definitions have been adapted from Lawrence, R. (2004). 'Understanding fatal assault of children: a typology and explanatory theory'. *Children & Youth Services Review*, 26, 837–852.

48. See Appendix 1.2 for definitions of the types of fatal abuse and neglect.

Level of confirmation

Screening criteria, developed by the CCYPCG, have been used to establish the level of confirmation of fatal assault and neglect that applies to relevant child deaths.⁴⁹ As indicated in Table 7.2, of the four fatal assault and neglect deaths, one was assessed as ‘confirmed’, two assessed as ‘probable’, and one assessed to be ‘possible’.⁵⁰

Table 7.2: Classification of death by level of confirmation, 2013–14

Classification of death	Level of confirmation			Total <i>n</i>
	Possible <i>n</i>	Probable <i>n</i>	Confirmed <i>n</i>	
Child deaths that demonstrated fatal assault	1	2	1	4
Fatal child abuse	1	2	0	3
Domestic homicide	0	0	1	1
Child deaths that demonstrated some type of fatal assault or neglect	1	2	1	4

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2013–14)

49. See Appendix 7.1 for further details regarding the screening criteria.

50. Level of confirmation is subject to ongoing police and coronial investigations and is dependent upon information available at the time of reporting.

Vulnerability characteristics

Vulnerability characteristics related to the deceased child, their family and the alleged perpetrator are presented in Table 7.3 below.

Table 7.3: Types of vulnerability characteristics, 2013–14

Vulnerability characteristics ⁵¹	Total <i>n</i>
Of the child	
Mental health issues of the child	0
Intellectual disability of the child	0
Physical disability of the child	0
A known serious medical condition of the child	0
Of the child's family⁵²	
The child's family had a child protection history ⁵³	4
The child was known to the Queensland child protection system within 3 years of their death	3
The child was in out-of-home care at the time of their death	0
The child's family had a domestic violence history	2
At least one of the child's parents had a criminal history	1
At least one of the child's parents had a history of drug or alcohol abuse	1
A sibling is known to have died in the same incident as the child	0
A sibling is known to have previously died from a similar category of death to the child	0
Of the alleged perpetrator/s	
Child deaths where one or more alleged perpetrators had a mental health issue ⁵⁴	1
Child deaths where one or more alleged perpetrators had an intellectual disability	0
Child deaths where one or more alleged perpetrators had a physical disability	0
Child deaths where one or more alleged perpetrators had used drugs and/or alcohol immediately prior to the incident	0
Child deaths where one or more alleged perpetrators had a criminal history	1

Data source: Queensland Child Death Register (2013–14)

51. Vulnerability characteristic findings are based on information available to the Commission at the point in time that analysis was conducted. The absence of evidence of vulnerability characteristics in the information relied upon does not mean that vulnerability characteristics were not present, but that the Commission did not have evidence to suggest it from all available sources.

52. A 'history' of a particular vulnerability characteristic refers to any known history of that characteristic and does not mean that the behaviours were active at the time of the death incident.

53. A child protection history refers to any history that the family had with the Department of Communities or an equivalent interstate agency in relation to child protection concerns. This history may or may not relate directly to the subject child but will involve some member of the child's family, for example, the child's siblings or parents.

54. The presence of a mental health issue does not indicate the perpetrator meets the threshold for any consideration of presence of state of mind in any criminal charges or court matters relating to the death incident.

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