

# Mass and Serial Murders in Australia

This chapter will examine the statistically rare events of mass and serial murder in Australia. This chapter will also include a discussion of the specific characteristics (typologies) of mass and serial murders that are recorded in the NHMP as having occurred between 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1999.

## *Mass Murders*

The vast majority of homicide incidents in Australia involve only 1 fatality. Approximately 5 per cent involve more than 1 victim. Depending upon the magnitude and context, some homicide incidents become enshrined as landmark historical events and others give rise to substantial changes in public policy.<sup>35</sup> The following discussion will focus specifically on homicide incidents documented in the NHMP as involving 4 or more victims.<sup>36</sup>

Although, there is a great deal of inconsistency in the literature concerning the conceptualisation and definition of multiple homicide, according to Fox and Levin (1998) an incident claiming 4 or more victims at once is referred to as a mass murder. As will be discussed later on in this chapter, including an element of time in the definition of mass murder creates some difficulties when one is presented with a multiple homicide that does not fit neatly into the definition. Other researchers have also encountered the same problem (Fox and Levin 1998). Therefore, in this chapter we will attempt to minimise the distinctions between mass murder and serial murder based on time differences, but to focus more specifically on the differing characteristics of each.

Research conducted on mass murder is still in its infancy. However, a number of researchers have put forth various typologies in order to

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<sup>35</sup> As a result of the Port Arthur incident in which 35 people lost their lives on 28 April 1996, the Federal Government introduced the uniform national firearms licensing and registration framework (Nationwide Agreement on Firearms), and the compulsory surrender (with compensation) of semi-automatic firearms.

<sup>36</sup> It is acknowledged that by setting a limit of four or more victims, this inherently excludes family-related incidents where two or three family members are killed in one incident.

categorise those who commit mass murder to gain an insight into the behavioural “make-up” of the offender. These social constructs are most commonly based on behavioural dynamics, motivation, victim characteristics and selection methodologies, loci of motivations, and anticipated rewards (Holmes and Holmes 1992).

However, by examining the background of a multiple murderer, it is often not possible to discriminate those life history variables that exerted a causal influence on committing mass murder from those that did not exert such influence (Busch and Cavanaugh 1986). In other words, it may be difficult to isolate factors that may have contributed to the occurrence of mass murder. We can ask questions, but beyond these general questions lies the enigma of “why”.

A number of researchers have attempted to organise mass murderers into meaningful categories. Dietz (1986), for example, classified offenders of multiple homicide according to three categories: family annihilators, pseudo-commandoes, and set-and-run killers. These categories were further expanded by Holmes and Holmes (1994) who included disciples and disgruntled employees. A brief description of these five typologies follows:

1. The *family annihilator* characterises the offender as one who murders the entire family at one time, often including the family pet. They are usually the senior male member of the family, depressed, and have often with a history of alcoholism. Similarly, these incidents almost exclusively occur in a residential setting.
2. The *pseudo-commando* is usually preoccupied with weaponry, and may have an extensive supply of firearms.
3. The *set-and-run* killer will employ techniques such as bombing or poisoning, to allow his own escape before the act itself occurs.
4. The offender of multiple homicide who is classified as a *disciple* has committed the act out of a need for acceptance by the leader who they have come under their influence. A classic example is Charles Manson’s associates, and Tate/La Bianca Murders.
5. The *disgruntled employee* will commit multiple homicide, retaliating after having been discharged from their current place of employment or for perceived ill treatment by their employers.

Fox and Levin (1998) incorporated some of the underlying characteristics of the above five categories and suggested five other types of mass murder based on the motivation of the offender. Although there is a degree of overlap, motivations for mass murder fall into the following categories: power (psuedo-commando), revenge (family annihilator, disgruntled employee), loyalty (family annihilator), profit, and terror (psuedo-commando, set-and-run killer).

When mass murderers are motivated by revenge, as is the case in some family annihilators and those characterised as disgruntled employees, the murderer seeks to get even with people he knows—with his estranged wife and all her children, or the boss and all his employees. The concept “murder by proxy” refers to how some victims are chosen because they are identified with the primary target against whom revenge is sought (Franzier 1975). For example, the family annihilator may kill all his children because he sees them as an extension of his wife, killing them to avenge her.

Similarly, the disgruntled employee after being reprimanded and/or dismissed, may kill some of his fellow employees and then his boss. Sometimes, the primary target of revenge is not a specific individual, it may be directed at society at large. The paranoid mass murderer believes that there is a conspiracy against him in which large number of people, including family, friends, and strangers are all against him and are conspiring to do him harm (Fox and Levin 1998).

Although the development of most of these typologies were based primarily on American homicide cases, mostly derived from using the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI)’s Supplementary Homicide Reports, it will be interesting to examine whether these typologies could also be applied to Australian homicide cases where 4 or more victims were killed. In other words, can Australian mass murders be categorised according to the five categories discussed above?

As previously stated, approximately 5 per cent of all homicide incidents involve multiple victims in Australia. Even less frequent are homicide incidents involving 4 or more victims. From 1 July 1989 to 30 June 1999, the NHMP recorded 13 mass-murder incidents committed by 13 individual male offenders.<sup>37</sup> In total, these 13 mass murders resulted in the death of

<sup>37</sup> In Canada, female offenders were responsible for 10 per cent of mass-murder incidents (Silverman and Kennedy 1993), and in the United States they were responsible for 5.6 per cent of mass-murder incidents (Fox 1997, cited in Fox and Levin 1998).

94 victims (Table 6). In 1995/96, there were 3 mass murders and a total of 45 victims. This, of course, includes the Port Arthur incident where on Sunday 28 April 1996, 35 victims were killed by a single offender. In the two most recent years—1997/98 and 1998/99, Australia recorded **no** mass-murder incidents.

On average, Australia records approximately 1 mass-murder incident per year. In comparison, Canada records approximately 2.4 per year (Silverman and Kennedy 1993), and the United States records approximately 26 per year (Fox 1997, cited in Fox and Levin 1998).

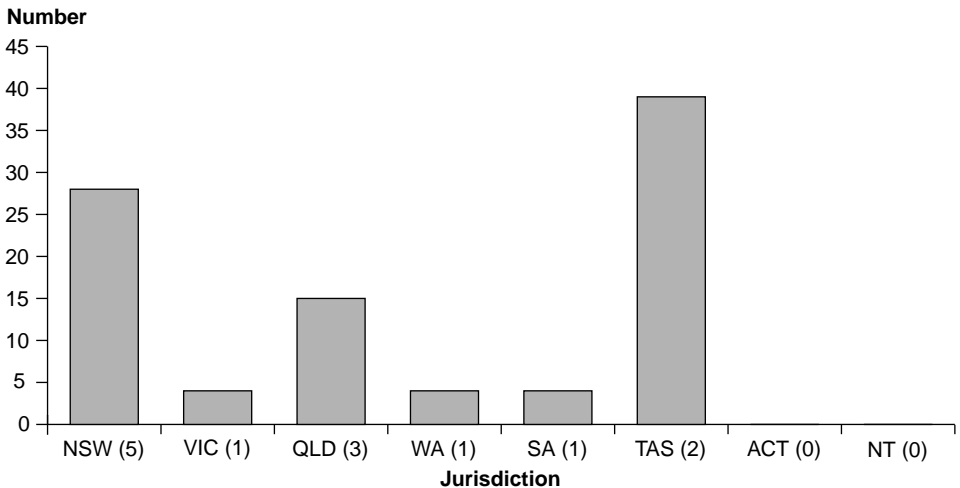
A jurisdictional comparison indicates that over the 10-year period, New South Wales recorded the highest number of mass-murder incidents (n = 5). However, as a result of the Port Arthur incident, Tasmania recorded the

**Table 6: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989–30 June 1999: Number of Mass-Murder Incidents with Four or More Victims per Year**

Year	1989/ 90	1990/ 91	1991/ 92	1992/ 93	1993/ 94	1994/ 95	1995/ 96	1996/ 97	1997/ 98	1998/ 99	Total
Incidents	1	2	1	3	1	1	3	1	0	0	13
Victims	6	9	7	15	4	4	45	4	0	0	94

Source: NHMP, AIC.

**Figure 59: AUSTRALIA, STATES and TERRITORIES, 1 July 1989–30 June 1999: Number of Mass-Murder Victims by Jurisdiction (n = 94)**



Number of incidents are indicated in brackets.

Source: NHMP, AIC.

highest number of mass-murder victims ( $n = 45$ ) (Figure 59). Queensland recorded 3 mass-murder incidents which resulted in the deaths of 15 victims. Neither the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory recorded any mass-murder incidents during the period under review.

### *A Typology of Mass Murder in Australia*

An examination of each of the 13 mass murders recorded in the NHMP database reveals that Australian mass murders are best grouped according to typologies based on the motivation of the offender. Often, typologies that revolve around the motive for the murder are probably the most fruitful way of classifying the murders (Silverman and Kennedy 1993). However, it should be noted that the motive behind mass murders, as in other homicides, is very complex in nature and may involve a number of different factors. There may be some degree of overlap between two typologies that could adequately describe the motive behind the mass murder, making it difficult to place the incident into one single category. In such cases, the mass murder needs to be classified according to what the main motive was perceived to be.

Table 7 lists the type of mass murders that occurred in Australia over a 10-year period. A majority of mass murders in Australia occurred primarily as a result of the offender's need for revenge (85%). In 7 mass-murder incidents, the revenge was primarily directed at an intimate partner or former intimate partner. In such cases, the offender killed all his children because he saw them as an extension of his (former) partner; he sought to get even with her.<sup>38</sup> Three other revenge-motivated mass murders stemmed from the offender's paranoid view of society at large. Two prominent examples are the Strathfield massacre and the Port Arthur massacre.

The Strathfield massacre took place on Saturday 17 August 1991, when 33-year-old Wade Frankum made his way to the Strathfield Plaza shopping Centre in New South Wales and murdered 7 people before turning the gun on himself. Apparently after he purchased his rifle, he was quoted as saying that he was going to use the firearm to "wipe people out" and to "protect myself" (Sharpe 1997, p. 380).

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<sup>38</sup> Also referred to as familicide.

Psychiatrist Dr Rod Milton postulated that the motivating forces behind Frankum committing mass murder were:

*ANGER*, because he was a failure, chronically unassertive and could not tolerate intimacy; *GUILT*, over his mother's suicide; *CONFLICT*, over his grandmother's estate and certain trivial disputes with the neighbours, and finally; *IMPECUNIOSITY*, his money had run out, depriving him of the outlet for his loneliness and sexual needs with prostitutes (Waller 1994, p. 118).

Dr Milton further noted that Frankum's family background, his life history, and his personality were insufficient in themselves to explain the murders. He suggests that societal factors promoting violence exist now which did not exist previously, and that it was these which may have tipped the balance (Milton 1994).

Another revenge-motivated mass murder was the Port Arthur massacre that occurred on Sunday 28 April 1996, where Martin Bryant went on a "shooting spree" and murdered 35 men, women and children at Port Arthur Tasmania.<sup>39</sup> The youngest victim was 3, and the oldest 72. A great deal has been written about Bryant's various motives. Some writers postulate that similarly to Frankum, Bryant was motivated by "anger" but he is also said to have harboured grudges (Scott 1997).

For years he had desperately sought contact with people, yet he either frightened or annoyed them with his ability to say and do the most inappropriate things. "I was knocked around all the time", he would recall. "No one wanted to be my friend" (Linnell 1999, p. 49 and Bryant quoted in Linnell 1999, p. 49).

Both of these mass murders occurred because the offenders wanted to be noticed, they wanted to seek revenge from a society which had apparently mistreated them in some way and was responsible for their difficulties in life (Fox and Levin 1998).

Another perpetrator of mass murder was classified as being motivated by "loyalty". In this mass-murder incident, the offender killed his 4 daughters prior to committing suicide. A few mass murderers are inspired to kill by a "warped sense of love and loyalty—a desire to save their loved ones from

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<sup>39</sup> This can also be referred to as a spree-murder—defined as the killing of three or more victims in different locations but within the context of the one event (Douglas and Munn 1992).

misery and hardship” (Fox and Levin 1998, p. 446). This type of mass murder is also referred to as “suicide by proxy” (Frazier 1975).

As in the example described herein, suicide by proxy typically involves a father who is despondent over the fate of the family unit and takes his own life and the life of those of his children and sometimes his wife, in order to protect them from the pain and suffering in their lives (Fox and Levin 1998). Although, in some cases this may be seen as a “convenient excuse” for their actions.

Finally, in another mass-murder incident the motive was not entirely clear. After careful examination of the material at hand, the motive appeared to involve at least some degree of ambivalence between power and terror. This mass murder resulted in the death of 6 people who were living at a backpackers’ hostel in Kings Cross, New South Wales. The offender had allegedly gone on an arson spree over a 2-year period, resulting in 146 charges of arson. These arson attacks appeared to be entirely indiscriminate or random with no specific target.

The offender was not exacting revenge upon society, nor was he burning down these buildings in the hope of collecting insurance money. He may have been trying to instill fear in the general public or “send a message” through his actions. Alternatively, he may have been motivated by a need for power and control, also known as a “thrill kill”. However, given the ambiguity of the motivation of the offence, this mass-murder incident could not be adequately classified according to one of the five typologies.

Given that there are different motivations of offenders of mass murder, we would expect that their relationship to the victims would also differ. Contrary to popular belief, mass murderers infrequently attack strangers.

**Table 7: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989–30 June 1999: Number of Mass Murders According to Motivation of Offender (n = 13)**

Motivations for Mass Murder	Australian Mass Murders	
	Number	Percentage
Power	0	0
Revenge	11	84.6
Loyalty	1	7.7
Profit	0	0
Terror	0	0
Unclassifiable	1	7.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NHMP, AIC.

In the present study, just over half of the mass-murder victims were not known to the offender<sup>40</sup> (Table 8). Where the offender knew his victims, they were most likely to be his children, some other family members, a friend, or an acquaintance. Just under half of the mass murderers killed their intimate partners.

This is consistent with the findings of both Fox (1997 cited in Fox and Levin 1998) and Silverman and Kennedy (1993) who found that mass murderers were more likely to kill family members than strangers.

When one examines the instruments of mass murders, we would automatically assume that given the relative lethality of firearms, a firearm would be the most common weapon used to commit mass murder. Indeed, in the present study a firearm was the most common single weapon used to commit mass murder, accounting for less than half of the mass-murder incidents (Figure 60). A firearm was also used to claim the highest number of victims in a single mass-murder incident in Australia—the Port Arthur incident where 35 victims were killed.

However, there are other instruments of homicide that may be considered more lethal in terms of inherent capacity (Grabosky and Mouzos 1999). For example, explosive devices—the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing in the United States, and more recently, the use of airplanes—such as the apparent intentional crashing of an *Egypt Air* aircraft where over 200 persons were killed. Therefore, if relative lethality is measured by the number of victims killed, a firearm is not the most lethal instrument of homicide.

**Table 8: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989–30 June 1999: Mass-Murder Victims by Victim–Offender Relationship**

Victim–Offender Relationship	Number	Percentage
Partner/Former Partner	6	6.4
Other Family	25	26.6
Friend/Acquaintance	15	16.0
Stranger	48	51.1
Other	0	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Source: NHMP, AIC.

<sup>40</sup> Thirty-three of these victims were killed in the Port Arthur incident and were not known to the offender.



**Figure 60: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989–30 June 1999: Type of Weapon Used by Mass Murderers (n = 13)**



Source: NHMP, AIC.

### *Serial Murders*

Serial murder is very different from mass murder. It is a not necessarily a new form of homicide,<sup>41</sup> but it is impersonal and stranger perpetrated and is growing in frequency and notoriety, at least in the United States (Holmes and DeBurger 1985, Rule 1986 cited in Holmes et al. 1998). It has been estimated that approximately 5,000 people each year in the United States are victims of serial killers (Holmes and DeBurger 1985). The FBI estimates that there are 30 serial killers roaming throughout the United States. One commentator based on a personal interview with Ted Bundy who was on death row in Florida, suggested that the number is much higher (Rule 1984, Bundy 1985 cited in Holmes et al. 1998).

Since 1960, Australia has recorded 9 known serial killers (Kidd 1999). There may be other serial killers operating throughout Australia who have yet to be apprehended by police. For example, Western Australia Police suspect a serial killer is responsible for the abduction and murder of 3 women in Claremont, Western Australia. Moreover, it is also important to consider that there may have been some murderers who, were not for their having been apprehended early in their killing career, may have gone on to claim more victims. For example, Barrie Watts and Valmae Beck only committed

<sup>41</sup> Although the term “serial murder” was coined by Robert Ressler of the FBI Behavioural Sciences Unit in Quantico, United States, in the early 1980s, the act of serial murder in modern times can be traced back to as early as 1888 with the murders committed by “Jack the Ripper”.

1 murder before being apprehended.<sup>42</sup> However, their “Modus Operandi” (MO)<sup>43</sup> can be considered characteristic of the sexual serial murderer, with Watts openly admitting that he had intentions to commit further murders (Kocsis and Irwin 1998).

Similar to mass murder, there is some disagreement regarding the definition of serial murder. Disagreement is generally centred around the number of victims that a multiple murderer needs to have killed before being classified as a serial killer. Hickey (1991), Holmes and Holmes (1998) and Egger (1998) all define serial murder as the killing of 3 or more people over a period of time. In their definition of serial murder, Fox and Levin (1998) indicate that there needs to be a string of 4 or more homicides committed by one or a few perpetrators. Egger (1998) and Rappaport (1988) both propose a broader definition without any constraints as to the number of victims killed. Specifically, Egger (1998, p. 5) identified the following characteristics which may typify serial murderers and which may be used as flags to alert authorities to the possibility that a serial murder is operating:

- (1) 1 or more individuals (in many cases, males) commit(s) a second murder and/or subsequent murder.
- (2) There is generally no prior relationship between victim and attacker (if there is a relationship, such a relationship will place the victim in a subjugated role to the killer).
- (3) Subsequent murders are at different times and have no apparent connection to the initial murder.
- (4) Are usually committed in a different geographical location.
- (5) The motive is not for material gain and is for the murderer’s desire to have power or dominance over his victims.
- (6) Victims may have symbolic value for the murderer and/or perceived to be of low status and in most instances unable to defend themselves or alert others to their.

In Australia, law enforcement personnel accept the FBI definition of serial murder. This definition was developed by the Critical Incident Response

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<sup>42</sup> They were apparently apprehended whilst searching for their next victim (McGregor 1990).

<sup>43</sup> MO refers to the actions taken by the offender to perpetrate the offence successfully. It is a learned behaviour that evolves as the offender becomes more sophisticated and confident (Douglas et al. 1992, p. 353).

Group (CIRG) of the FBI, after in-depth, long term studies of serial murderers and their crimes. Accordingly, in the classic type of serial murder:

there are 2 or more separate homicide events which occur over a period of time (hours, days, weeks, or even years). There is a cooling-off period between episodes. These crimes are predatory. The offender frequently stalks his victims. The motive is clearly psychological. The offender's behaviour and the crime scene evidence typically indicate sexual and sadistic features, and may involve torture and mutilation of the victim (Cook and Hinman 1999, p. 364).

This definition contains a sexual element. However, research suggests that the presence of this element and its meaning to the offender may vary (Ressler et al. 1988). The motive may not be sexual in the normal sense of the word, with the role of sexual gratification being less difficult to identify in certain types of serial murder, such as a hedonistic serial killer.<sup>44</sup> Ressler et al. (1988) have noted that some acts committed during a serial murder were later found to have a sexual meaning to the offender. In certain cases, the motivation for serial murder is often something more complicated and intrinsic than just sexual gratification. For the serial killer "the experience is one of great pleasure in exerting power and control over the victim including the power over life and death" (Geberth 1990, p. 73).

As pointed out in the previous section on mass murders, some incidents do not contain all the elements as prescribed in a given definition. Most definitions are based on common elements present in a specific behaviour. In the case of uncommon and apparently motiveless behaviour, such as serial murder, discrepancies and differences are bound to arise.

### *Typology of Serial Murder*

A number of researchers have examined the distinctive characteristics of serial murderers. Based on interviews with incarcerated serial killers in the United States, Holmes and DeBurger (1985) developed a typology of serial killers. They posit that there are four types of serial killers, although they do emphasise that these are ideal types and that "there is some obvious blending of perpetrators in the world of this serial violent personal offender" (p. 114).

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<sup>44</sup> The thrill killer and lust killer are two types of hedonistic (pleasure-seeking) serial killers. The hedonistic serial killer kills for various reasons, but sexuality is the common component in the fantasy shared by the lust killer and the thrill killer. Both have made a connection between sex and personal gratification (Holmes and Holmes 1998).

The first type is the *visionary type*—this serial killer responds to voices or visions that demand him to kill a defined and identified cohort. This serial offender may be suffering from some form of psychosis (although most serial killers are neither psychotic or mentally disordered).

The second type is the *mission type*—this serial killers main aim is to eliminate a certain sub-population. For example, a serial killer trying to rid the community of a minority group, such as: homosexuals, prostitutes, African-Americans, or Catholics. This killer does not hear voices, nor does he react to a vision.

The third type is the *hedonistic type*—this serial killer kills because it is pleasurable or because it enhances the murderer’s social and personal status (money, material gain). There are three subtypes: *lust*, *thrill*, and *comfort*. The first two subtypes are very similar in that they both have “an integral connection between personal violence and sexual gratification” (Holmes and Holmes 1998, p. 43). These serial killers murder because they derive pleasure from the act. The comfort killer kills for materialistic gains, such as money, business, or other financial considerations.

The fourth type is the *power/control type*—this serial killer kills in order to feel in complete control, the killer receives personal gratification from the total subjugation of the victim. “By dominating his victims completely, he experiences a “sexual” pleasure akin to the pleasure of the hedonistic serial killer of the lust or thrill subtype” (Holmes and Holmes 1996). Holmes et al. (1998) suggest that most serial killers can be categorised as being motivated by power and control.

### ***Serial Murder in Australia***

According to NHMP between 1 July 1989 and 30 June 1999, there have been three clusters of serial murders that can be linked to different serial offenders—the serial murders committed by Paul Denyer (the “Frankston Serial Killer”), Ivan Milat (the “Backpacker Serial Killer”), and the “Snowtown serial murders”<sup>45</sup> which were committed by 4 different offenders acting in concert.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Task force code-named “Operation Chart”.

<sup>46</sup> It is important to note that at the time of publication, investigations into the Snowtown murders were still continuing. As a result, information concerning specific details of the murders, and which offender is responsible for killing which victim are not yet available. Based only on available information, these murders may be classified as serial murders, although this may be subject to change depending on further developments during the police investigation process.

Other sources (Kidd 1999) that have also recorded the number of serial murderers in Australia suggest that the true figure for this time period is 3<sup>47</sup> (Rodney Francis Cameron, the “Lonely Hearts Killer”, Paul Charles Denyer, the Frankston Serial Killer and Ivan Milat, the Backpacker Killer).<sup>48</sup> However, as NHMP data are collected on a financial year basis from police records, until a serial murderer is apprehended and linked to these murders, these cases will remain unsolved and recorded in the NHMP as such. It would be only after updating unsolved homicides that incidents whereby the victims were killed by the same offender can be linked and identified as the work of a serial killer.

### *Common Threads*

Although there is no typical serial killer (Cook and Hinman 1999), accumulating evidence seems to suggest that there are common threads present in the behavioural make-up of serial killers:

- They grew up in a dysfunctional family (for instance, a rejecting parent, instability of residence, or lack of an appropriate role model).
- There was a history of abuse and neglect (for instance, physical, psychological, or sexual).
- Poverty, unemployment, societally blocked means to legitimate ends.
- A preoccupation with fantasy and murder.
- Learned associations between violence and pleasure (Sears 1991; Holmes et al. 1998).

They may also have exhibited the “classic warning signs such as the ‘homicidal triad’:

- persistent bed-wetting;
- starting fires; and
- cruelty to animals or other young children” (Douglas and Olshaker 1998, p. 463).

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<sup>47</sup> Excludes the Snowtown serial murders.

<sup>48</sup> The so-called Granny Serial Killer committed his first murder in early March 1989; before the inception of the NHMP.

However, it is important to note that not all persons who exhibit these behavioural characteristics will go on to inflict violence and especially lethal violence on those around them. According to Megargee (1993), a combination of these factors lead to some persons engaging in serial murder, these persons possess higher than normal *instigation to aggression* and deficient *inhibitions against aggression*.

Instigation to aggression is referred to as “the sum of all forces that motivate an individual to commit a violent or aggressive act” (Megargee 1993, p. 620). Both psychological (intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation) and biological sources are included as the instigation. On the other hand, there is a set of factors that operate against instigation to aggression. These are the main reasons behind why a person fails to perform an aggressive act against another person. These inhibitory factors include moral prohibitions against violence—the ability to distinguish between right and wrong behaviour and the ability to realistically consider the likelihood of apprehension and punishment (Cook and Hinman 1999). In the case of serial murder, it is quite obvious that these offenders lack the sufficient “inhibitions against aggression”, lethal violence, and have been described as lacking consciences and empathy for their victims (Cook and Hinman 1999).

So far, we have focussed on defining serial murder, typologies, incidence in Australia, and the commonalities of serial murderers. The next stage is to bring all this together with the use of real case examples.

The following paragraphs describe the 3 known serial killers identified as having been active during the 10-year period under review. This provides an illustrative example of the crimes that they committed and the behavioural characteristics of each offender. As previous research suggests, there are a number of behavioural similarities between the 3 Australian serial killers and the expected profile.

### **Case Study Nine—The Lonely Hearts Killer**

*Background: Rodney Cameron Francis was adopted at an early age, but he was committed to an institution because he was continually in trouble at school. At age 10, he tried to strangle a young girl and an elderly lady. By this stage, his adoptive parents had completely rejected him. He drank heavily and openly displayed hostility and extreme aggression towards those close to him (Kidd 1999).*

*In early 1974, at the age of 19, he raped and murdered a nurse whom he had befriended. After the murder, Francis inserted a towel down the victim’s throat.*

*This specific act became Francis' signature.<sup>49</sup> Approximately one week later, Francis picked up his second victim who was hitchhiking. This victim was beaten to death with a blunt instrument and was also strangled using a sock. At two separate trials, Francis was found guilty of the murders of a man and a woman. After serving 16 years, Francis was released from prison. Approximately 3 months after his release, Francis had gone on a radio match-making show. The third victim had called the show expressing an interest in Francis. This victim was found in a motel which Francis and the victim had rented. The victim had died of asphyxiation and had also been repeatedly beaten with a blunt instrument. Similar to the other victims, this victim was also found with a handkerchief in her mouth. After this murder, Francis presented himself to police. During his trial, the presiding judge sentenced Francis to life imprisonment. In 1997, Francis confessed to the killing of another woman back in 1974. Similarly, he has since made other confessions. If his confessions are substantiated, then Francis would have been responsible for the murder of 8 victims (Kidd 1999).*

### **Case Study Ten—The Frankston Serial Killer**

*Background: When Paul Charles Denyer was a baby, his mother recalls him rolling off a bench and knocking his head. Occasionally, his childhood misdeeds were flippantly attributed to the knock on his head. On one occasion, he had cut the family kitten's throat and left it hanging on the tree. On another occasion, which his primary school teacher recalls clearly, is the day that Denyer, in response to a derogatory remark, slapped a fellow class mate so hard that the that pen the boy was chewing on became deeply lodged in this throat. He had apparently wanted to kill since he was 14 and his days of free time had allowed him to stalk women and make reconnaissance memoirs to find locations to dump their bodies. He also had begun to collect things he could use to strangle women (Petratis 1995).*

*Twenty-six year old Denyer became known as the Frankston serial killer—he had killed 3 women during separate incidents in 1993. His first victim was a TAFE student who had disappeared. Her body was found mutilated with a distinctive criss-cross pattern carved into her chest. Less than a month after she was found, another victim was found. The second victim had gone out to buy some milk, but she never returned. She was found strangled and stabbed to death. The third victim, a young schoolgirl, was found on a bike track in Frankston. She had received fatal sharp instrument injuries. Denyer was apprehended shortly after killing the third victim. "Denyer's undoing was a deep cut on the thumb which he could not satisfactorily explain to detectives; the wound matched a piece of skin found in the victim's cut throat: he had injured himself while committing the murder" (Meadows 1995, p. 638).*

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<sup>49</sup> The signature of a serial murderer is the unique manner in which he or she commits murder. A signature may be the manner in which the person kills, certain words that he/she may say to or use the victim, a particular manner in which the killer leaves something at crime scenes, or some other indicator (Holmes and Holmes 1996).

### **Case Study Eleven—The Backpacker Serial Killer**

*Background: As Task force “Air” delved into Ivan Robert Marko Milat they discovered that he was brought up in what seemed to be a completely dysfunctional family. He was also fairly unsuccessful in having fulfilling, long-term relationships with women. He had an extensive criminal history, including an incident where he picked up 2 women and threatened them with knives, tied them up and raped one of them. There was also another unreported assault. Dr Rod Milton who advised the task force indicated that these attacks were not so much as a practice run “as a development of a mode of life, a mode of achieving pleasure and satisfaction” (Mercer 1997, p. 154).*

*Between 1989 and 1992, Milat murdered 7 young backpackers in the Belanglo State Forest south of Sydney. The total victim count could have been greater, but the last potential victim had escaped. Milat had murdered 2 British females, 2 German females and 1 German male, and 1 Australian female and 1 Australian male. The remains of all 7 victims were found in the same area. “They had been ritualistically murdered, and there were indications that they had been sexually assaulted” (Kidd 1999, p. 141). The English backpacker who escaped was flown back to New South Wales, and it was he who identified Milat from police photographs. In May 1994, Milat was charged with the 7 murders. As Milat pleaded not guilty, at trial it was revealed that the 7 victims had been “... sexually assaulted, stabbed, used as target practice, decapitated, tortured, hacked and bludgeoned to death” (Kidd 1999, p. 149). Milat was sentenced to life imprisonment on 7 counts of murder and to 6 years for the abduction of the backpacker who had escaped.*



## **Summary—Mass and Serial Murders in Australia**

In summary, the main findings of this section are that:

- In Australia, between 1 July 1989–30 June 1999, there were 13 mass murder incidents (where the number of victims was 4 or more) that resulted in the death of 94 persons.
- In the two most recent years—1997/98 and 1998/99, Australia recorded no mass-murder incidents.
- During the 10-year period under review, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory also did not record any mass murder incidents.
- Just over 8 out of 10 mass murderers were motivated by the “need for revenge”.
- Half of all victims of mass murder were not known to the offender and just under half of the mass murderers killed their partners or former partners.
- Just under 3 out of 5 mass murders were committed with a firearm.
- In Australia, since 1960 there have been 9 known serial killers, of which 3 were active between 1989/90 and 1998/99 and are recorded in the NHMP.
- Both mass killers and serial killers tend to come from disadvantaged backgrounds and dysfunctional families.
- Both mass murder and serial murder in Australia are statistically rare events.