



**VICTORIAN INSTITUTE
OF FORENSIC MEDICINE**



MONASH
University



STOP THE COWARD PUNCH CAMPAIGN 2021

Research Update

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RESEARCH UPDATE:

172ⁱ Australians killed by a coward punch since 2000

Methodology:

- Review of all cases on the National Coronial Information System database between 1st January 2012 and 31st December 2019 involving assault by a person (304 cases)
- All cases were manually reviewed by Jennifer Schumann to identify one punch assaults falling into *Type 1* or *Type 2*
 - *Type 1*: Individual was assaulted with a single punch to the head or face, sending them falling to a hard surface (usually the ground) and striking their head, not regaining consciousness.
 - *Type 2*: Individual was assaulted with a single punch to the head or face, sending them falling to a hard surface unconscious, followed by a small number of subsequent strikes shortly after the 'coward punch'.
- Cases requiring further investigation were also reviewed by a second researcher, Dr Reena Sarkar.

Overview of the findings:

- 63 *Type 1* cases and 19 *Type 2* cases
- Almost exclusively males (81 males, 2 females)
- Age ranging from 18-71 years with a median of 44 years
- Overall, the perpetrator relationship indicated roughly the same number of known individuals (48.8%) to strangers (47.6%), however there were more strangers in the *Type 2* category (63% compared with 32% known to victim)
- The highest proportion of cases overall were seen in NSW (28%), followed by Queensland (25.6%) and WA (19.5%). This was consistent across groups.
- More assaults occurred on a weekday (58.5%) than a weekend. This trend was even more evident among *Type 2* cases, with 68% occurring on a weekday. However, when broken down by day, Saturday incurred the highest proportion of assaults compared with any other day (25.6%).
- The majority of assaults occurred between 6pm and midnight (47.6%), followed by the period of midnight until 6am. The fewest number of cases occurred between 6am and 6pm.
- There was a decreasing trend in cases over the time period from 2012 (14 cases) to 2018 (6 cases) and no cases detected in 2019. However, it must be noted that due to a lag period in case closures by the coroner, it is likely that cases in the last 2 years are underrepresented.
- Alcohol was the most common drug, detected in 62.6% of cases overall, of 75 cases where toxicology was conducted. The median alcohol concentration detected in antemortem, and



postmortem samples was over three times the legal driving limit, 0.167% BAC, ranging from 0.005% to 0.327% BAC.

- THC was also detected in about a fifth of cases, with some amphetamines and cocaine detected in the sample (around 8%).
- The majority of cases (41.5%) occurred on a footpath or roadside. This was followed closely by homes or other accommodation (32.9%). Notably, deaths occurred at hotels or other licenced venues in only 8.5% of cases.
- When location of the assault was divided into those where alcohol was and was not involved (i.e. the person had or had not been drinking prior to death), the difference was more obvious, with 29.3% of cases involving alcohol consumption at a location prior to death and 70.7% not, according to all information available in the coroners findings.

Then and now: 2000-2012 vs 2012-2019 data.

- There was a decreasing trend in deaths, from 14 in 2012 down to 6 in 2018.
- The median age was 44 (range 18-71) years, demonstrating a drop in younger victims (previously 33 years).
- New South Wales and Queensland were again the jurisdictions reporting the highest proportion of cases (28% and 25.6%, respectively), however there was a decline in Victorian cases from 27% to 14.6%, and a rise in cases from Western Australia, from 7% to 19.5%.
- Alcohol is still the most commonly detected drug among one punch deaths in Australia.
 - Of the 75 cases where toxicology results were available, alcohol was detected in 47 cases (62.6%) (with an additional case where alcohol intoxication was reported but an appropriate sample for testing was not available).
 - While this is less than the previous study's finding of 73%, the median alcohol concentration was the same: 0.14 and 0.19 g/100mL in antemortem and postmortem samples, respectively (range 0.005-0.32g/100mL).
 - Only 5 deaths reported methylamphetamine, with THC more commonly detected at a rate of 20.7%.
- In our previous study, the majority of deaths occurred on a weekend (52.3%), however the new data indicated a shift towards weekday assaults, with 58.5% occurring between Monday and Friday.
 - Saturday still incurred the highest proportion of assaults compared with any other day, representing a quarter of all cases (25.6%).
 - Of the cases occurring on a Sunday (n=11), only 5 occurred in the early hours of the morning (i.e. "Saturday night"). Of the cases occurring on a Monday (n=13), only 4 occurred in the early hours of the morning (i.e. "Sunday night").
- The drop in deaths occurring in licenced venues was noteworthy; only 8.5% of deaths occurred in hotels, bars or other licenced venues, compared with 41% in our previous study. However, 34 deaths (41.5%) occurred on a footpath or roadside, of which 17 (20.7%) had been at a licenced venue immediately prior. Only 18% of deaths occurred in a home or other accommodation in the pre-2012 data; a figure which rose to 31.7% in the current dataset. Of these, none involved an intimate partner; most involved a friend/housemate (n=12) or non-partner family members (n=6).



- When categorised according to whether or not the location was related to attendance at a licenced venue, the differences are even more obvious: those that occurred at, around, or upon leaving a hotel/pub/licenced venue comprised 24 cases in total (29.3%). Whereas those that occurred in or around a home, shop, public transport stop or footpath/roadway not having recently attended a licenced venue comprised 58 cases overall (70.7%).
- 65% occurred in metropolitan locations, compared to 35% in regional areas.
- The data shows at least 172 Australians have lost their lives to a one punch assault since 2000.



	TYPE 1		TYPE 2		TOTAL	%
NUMBER OF CASES (2012-2020)	63		19		82	
MEDIAN AGE (RANGE)	44	18-71	45	39-69		
NUMBER and % MALES	61	97%	19	100%	80	97.6%
<u>OFFENDER RELATIONSHIP</u>						
OFFENDER: STRANGER	27	43%	12	63%	39	47.6%
OFFENDER KNOWN TO VICTIM	34	54%	6	32%	40	48.8%
<u>STATE</u>						
NSW	17	27%	6	32%	23	28.0%
VIC	9	14%	3	16%	12	14.6%
QLD	15	24%	6	32%	21	25.6%
SA	2	3%	1	5%	3	3.7%
NT	6	10%	1	5%	7	8.5%
WA	14	22%	2	11%	16	19.5%
<u>DAY</u>						
MON	8	13%	5	26%	13	15.9%
TUE	11	17%	1	5%	12	14.6%
WED	2	3%	2	11%	4	4.9%
THU	6	10%	2	11%	8	9.8%
FRI	8	13%	3	16%	11	13.4%
SAT	16	25%	5	26%	21	25.6%
SUN	10	16%	1	5%	11	13.4%
MON-FRI*	35	56%	13	68%	48	58.5%
SAT/SUN	26	41%	6	32%	32	39.0%
<u>TIME</u>						
6:00-18:00	14	22%	4	21%	18	22.0%
18:01-11:59	29	46%	10	53%	39	47.6%
00:00-05:59	20	32%	5	26%	25	30.5%
<u>YEARS</u>						
2012	11	17%	3	16%	14	17.1%
2013	11	17%	3	16%	14	17.1%
2014	10	16%	2	11%	12	14.6%
2015	9	14%	4	21%	13	15.9%
2016	12	19%	1	5%	13	15.9%
2017	6	10%	4	21%	10	12.2%
2018	4	6%	2	11%	6	7.3%
<u>DRUGS DETECTED</u>						
ALCOHOL	35	63.6%	13	68%	48	58.5%
MIN	0.005	-	0.027	-	0.005	-
MAX	0.327	-	0.32	-	0.327	-
MEDIAN	0.167	-	0.173	-	0.167	-
AMPHETAMINES	6	10.9%	0	0%	6	7.3%
COCAINE	0	0.0%	1	5%	1	1.2%
THC	11	20.0%	6	32%	17	20.7%
NOT CONDUCTED/UNAVAILABLE	8	14.5%	0	0%	8	9.8%

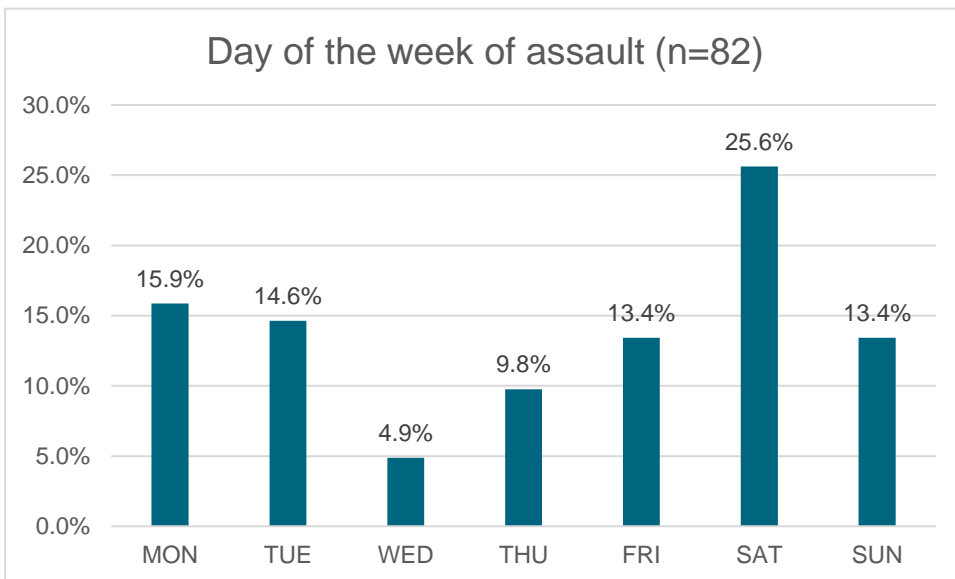
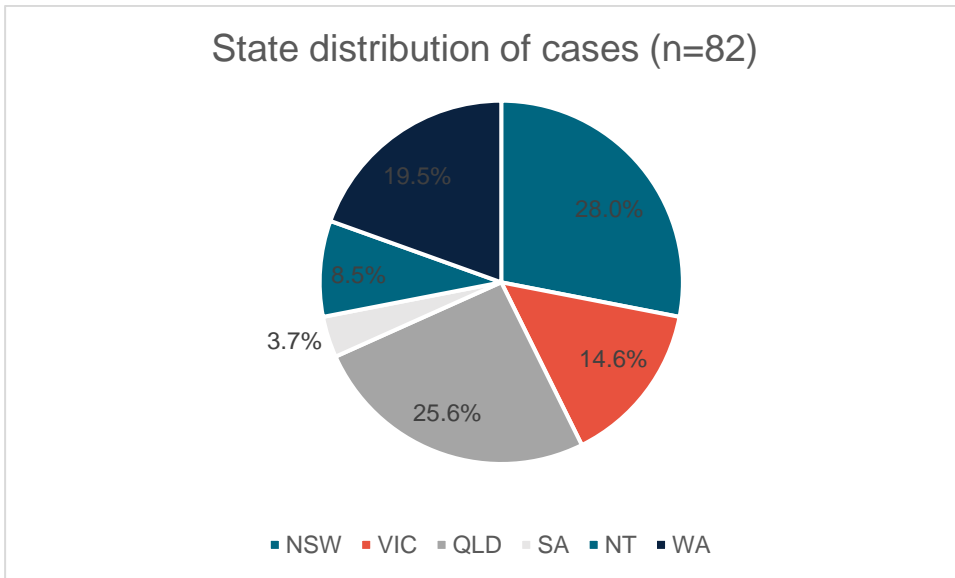


<u>LOCATION</u>						
Shop/store	5	7.9%	2	11%	7	8.5%
Home, accommodation or dwelling	20	31.7%	7	37%	27	32.9%
Roadway/footpath	28	44.4%	6	32%	34	41.5%
<i>Attended licenced venue prior</i>	13	20.6%	4	21%	17	20.7%
<i>No licenced venue visit</i>	15		2		-	
Motel/hotel/hospitality venue	4	6.3%	3	16%	7	8.5%
Public transport stop/rank	0	0.0%	1	5%	1	1.2%
Other	6	9.5%	0	0	6	7.3%
Metro	-		-		53	64.6%
Regional postcode	-		-		29	35.4%
Licenced venues and public areas (alcohol related)	17	27.0%	7	36.8%	24	29.3%
All other locations (not alcohol related)	46	73.0%	12	63.2%	58	70.7%

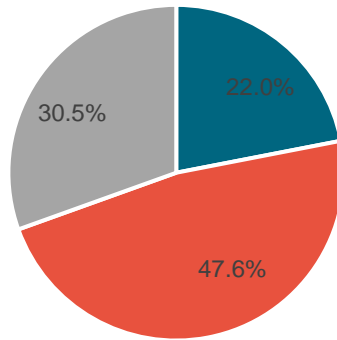
*ADDITIONAL MON-FRI; 3 ADDITIONAL SAT/SUN, ADDED WHERE SPECIFIC DAY WAS NOT PROVIDED, ONLY RANGE.

#DRUGS ADMINISTERED IN A CLINICAL SETTING WERE EXCLUDED FROM ANALYSIS.

The following graphs relate to the whole dataset of 82 cases, including both Type 1 and Type 2 cases:

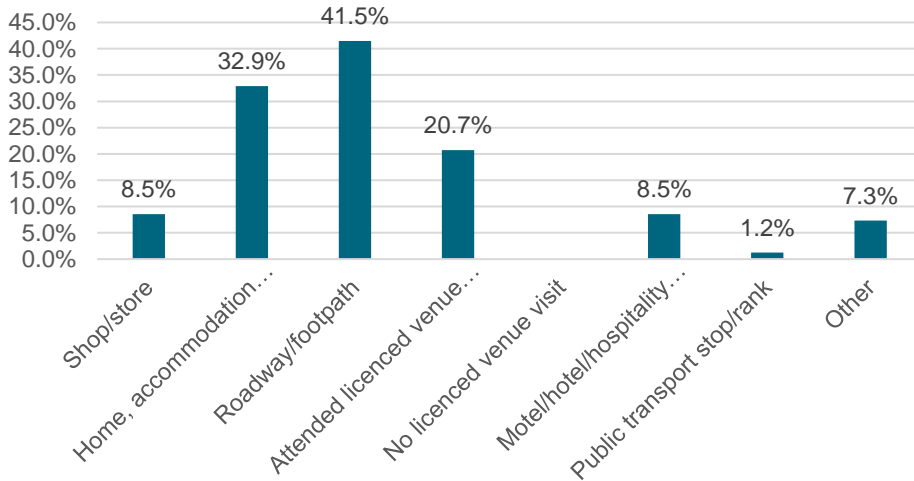


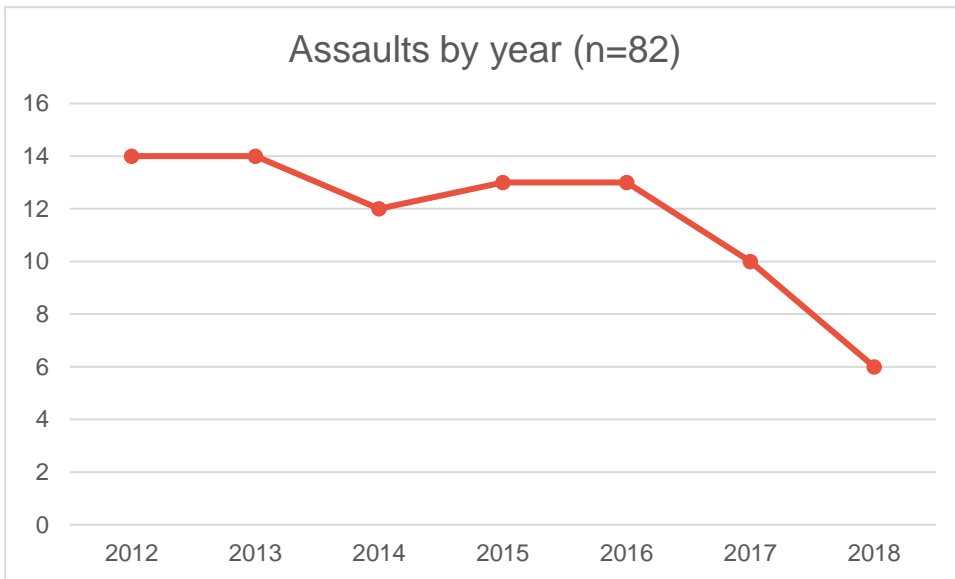
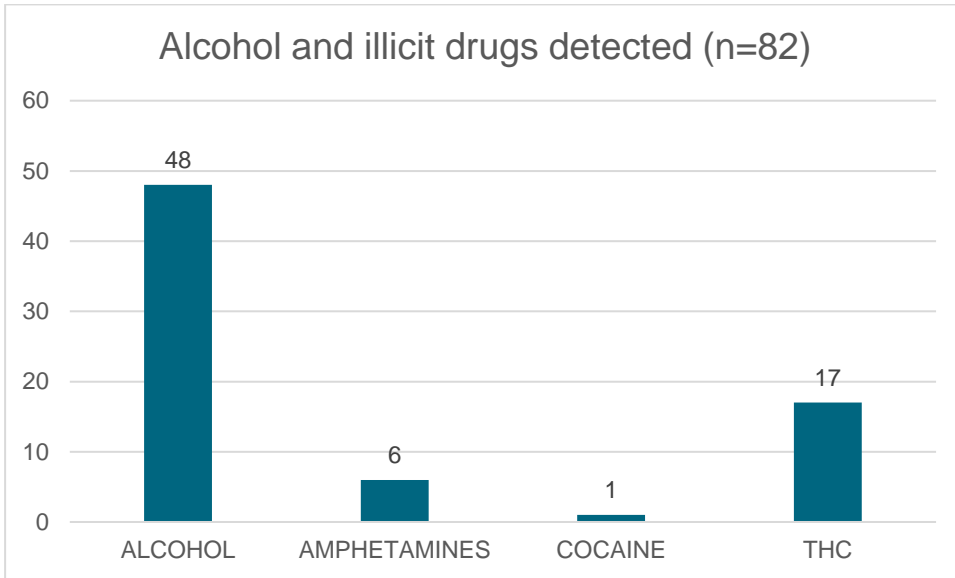
Time of day of incident (n=82)



■ 6:00-18:00 ■ 18:01-11:59 ■ 00:00-05:59

Lccation of incident (n=82)





The following graphs relate to Type 1 cases only (n=63):

