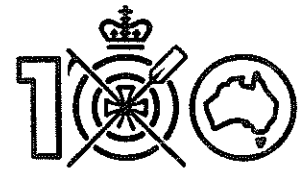


The Royal Life Saving Society Australia



1894-1994

DROWNING IN AUSTRALIA 1995

This is the first Drowning in Australia report compiled by The Royal Life Saving Society Australia. Drowning statistics for this report have been collected by Branches of the Society or made available by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

This report includes all accidental deaths, the primary cause of which is drowning. It thus excludes deaths by suicide, homicide and cases where drowning is the secondary cause of death, where identifiable.

- Drowning rates in infants and toddlers remains high but has begun to decline.
- 40% of drownings of infants and toddlers aged 0-4 occurred in a home swimming pool.

Key Indicators

| Cases | Males | Females | Total | Rate/100,000 pop |
|-----------|-------|---------|-------|------------------|
| Australia | 263 | 50 | 313 | 1.69 |
| NSW | 80 | 14 | 94 | 1.35 |
| Qld | 52 | 12 | 64 | 1.96 |
| Vic | 42 | 9 | 51 | 1.13 |
| WA | 37 | 8 | 45 | 2.61 |
| SA | 30 | 5 | 35 | 2.38 |
| NT | 14 | 1 | 15 | 8.65 |
| Tas | 5 | 0 | 5 | 0.95 |
| ACT | 3 | 1 | 4 | 1.31 |

Sex

84% of drowning victims were male which is consistent with trends over the last 75 years.

Males in the 15-44 year age range are inclined to take a great deal more risks when participating in aquatic based activity and are subsequently susceptible to accidents, as reflected by the number of deaths. 127 males drowned in this age range as compared with 14 females.

Age

There are two main age groups where drownings are high. The 25-34 age group which are known as the 'risk takers' recorded 57 deaths. The 0-4 year age group shows 52 deaths which is a more significant figure when consideration is given to the fact this group covers a five year period while the 25-34 group covers ten years.

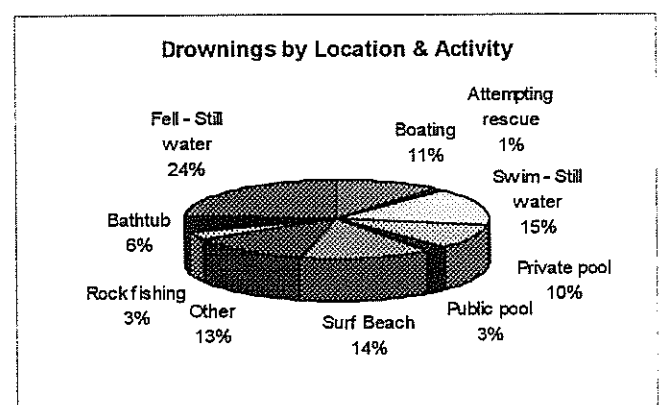
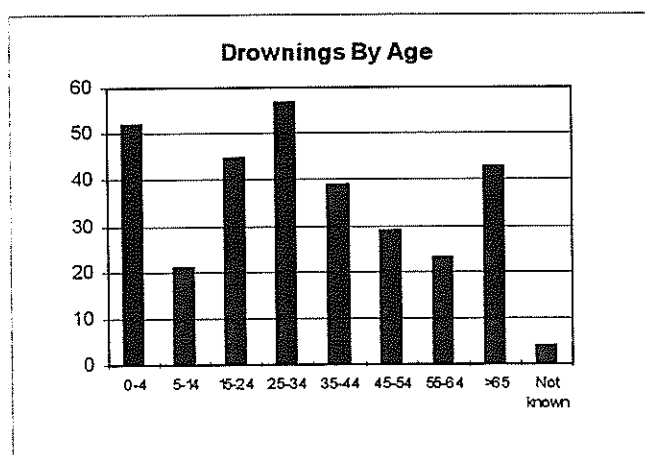
Although some impact has been made in reducing 0-4 drownings from previous years, the rate, now at 4.12 per 100,000 population, is still approximately 2.5 times the rate for all ages. This group is particularly vulnerable as these children are attracted to water for which they show little fear.

Location and Activity

Still water was the location for 58% of all drownings. This includes deaths while swimming or bathing and due to accidental immersion through falling into water.

The private swimming pool and bathtub are locations of concern around the home. 16% of all drownings occurred in the home with 54% of those being in the 0-4 year age group.

The large figure for 'Other' locations comes from Western Australian data and is due to variations in the information recorded. Future data collection criteria will result in standardisation and allow better comparisons to be made.



DROWNING IN AUSTRALIA IN THE 0-4 YEAR AGE GROUP 1995

Drownings in this age group are of particular concern to The Royal Life Saving Society Australia. An analysis of circumstances surrounding these deaths from Coronial reports suggests that these drownings are preventable as they are commonly due to absence of supervision.

Key Indicators

| Cases | Males | Females | Total | Rate/100,000 pop |
|-----------|-------|---------|-------|------------------|
| Australia | 38 | 14 | 52 | 4.12 |
| Vic | 7 | 3 | 10 | 3.16 |
| Qld | 5 | 4 | 9 | 4.06 |
| SA | 6 | 1 | 7 | 7.14 |
| WA | 5 | 2 | 7 | 5.61 |
| NT | 6 | 1 | 7 | 42.29 |
| NSW | 5 | 2 | 7 | 1.64 |
| ACT | 2 | 1 | 3 | 13.55 |
| Tas | 2 | 0 | 2 | 5.60 |

Sex

Almost three times as many males drown in this age group than females. This is consistent with the overall trend. This is thought to be due to young male toddlers being encouraged to play outdoors and be more adventuresome. Consequently, young males are exposed to more dangers.

State Comparison

The larger and warmer States/Territories have recorded more drownings.

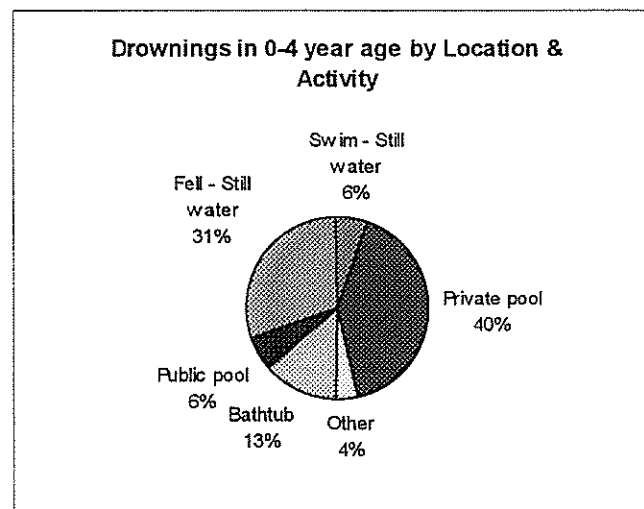
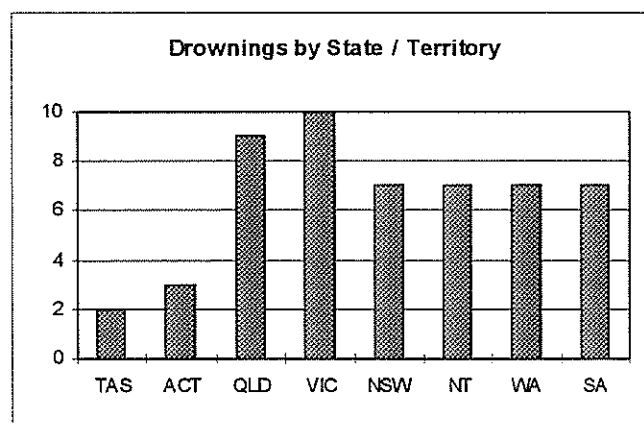
However, the only valid method of comparing the drownings in this age group is to use population corrected figures or "drownings per 100,000 population" of the age group.

From this analysis it becomes clear that the most significant problem exists in the Northern Territory where the rate of drownings is more than 10 times the National rate.

Location and Activity

The home environment represents the greatest location of danger for young children. 40% of drownings were in private swimming pools and a further 13% in the bathtub.

Drownings in both these locations are preventable through constant and vigilant supervision. In States where legislation requires private swimming pools to be fenced (NSW, Qld, Vic) the drowning rates are less than the National rate for the age range. Fencing is making some impact on preventing drownings but it does not replace parental supervision.



Acknowledgment

The Society acknowledges the support of Coronial Services, State Police, Australian Bureau of Statistics and RLSSA Branch Staff in the provision of data for this report.