

0294 THE RESCUER WHO DROWNS

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There is no greater sacrifice than that made by a rescuer who throws it all on the line to rescue a drowning victim. However, in some instances the rescuer tragically drowns in the rescue attempt. This paper examines the circumstances surrounding the drowning deaths of rescuers.

Methods All drowning deaths using data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Deaths Registrar for the period 1 July 1992 to 30 June 2002 and the National [Australian] Coroners Information System for the period 1 July 2002 to 30 June 2009 were examined to identify an unselected complete subset of drowning incidents where a rescuer drowned in attempting to effect a save.

Results There were 98 victims who drowned while attempting a rescue. Of these 69% were male. The majority (61%) were aged between 25 and 49 years. Where data concerning the location of the aquatic incident was available (n=37) beaches (35%); rivers (21%); ocean (16%) were common. The summer (42%) was the season of most rescuer fatalities.

Discussion The urge to leap into action to help someone in trouble is an altruistic impulse and often a source of pride in Australia. Sadly, a percentage (unknown) who attempt such a rescue do not return home. The drills and skills taught by lifesaving and water safety agencies provide a skill set which enables a potential rescuer to ensure both that they place themselves only at minimum risk commensurate with the circumstance; and have appropriate experience to undertake an effective rescue.