

# Ned Kelly tattoos linked to higher violent deaths and suicides

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Edward (Ned) Kelly (1855 - 1880)

(Medical Xpress) -- In a paper soon to be published in the *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, Professor Roger Byard from Adelaide University showed that sporting a tattoo of Ned Kelly or in reference to him was linked to a higher rate of violent deaths by homicide or suicide.

[Ned Kelly](#), who died in 1880 when he was hanged for murdering three police officers, was an Irish-Australian who became a symbol of the Irish resistance against the British. He was known for creating armor out

of agricultural machinery and this can be seen in many of the different tattoo images supporting him.

Byard first became interested in the possible connection between Kelly [tattoos](#) and [violent death](#) when he noticed a high number of bodies coming into the mortuary with Kelly tattoos. He then looked at 20 men with the tattoos and found that only three had died from natural causes.

When comparing the findings to around 1000 other deaths in South Australia, he found that those with a Kelly tattoo had a suicide rate 2.7 times that of those without and a [homicide rate](#) of 7.7 of those who did not have a tattoo. The three that had died of natural causes can be compared to a national rate of 50 percent of the population.

Byard also noted that 11 out of the 20 men studied also showed signs of drug and [alcohol abuse](#).

While this is not the first study to link violent deaths to anti-social tattoos, it is the first study to link these types of violent deaths with a specific tattoo and person.

**More information:** Ned Kelly tattoos – Origins and forensic implications, *Journal of Forensic and Legal Medicine*, [doi:10.1016/j.jflm.2011.05.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jflm.2011.05.006)

### **Abstract**

Tattoos depicting Ned Kelly, a 19th-century Australian bushranger (outlaw) are occasionally encountered in the contemporary Australian population at forensic autopsy. To determine the characteristics of decedents with such tattoos, twenty cases were identified in the autopsy files at Forensic Science SA. All of the decedents were white males (100%) with an age range of 20–67yrs (average 37yrs). Seventeen of the deaths (85%) were unnatural, due to suicide in eight cases (40%),

accidents in seven cases (35%) and homicide in two cases (10%). Compared to the general autopsy population suicides and homicides were 2.7 and 7.7 times higher, respectively, than would be expected, with a striking male predominance. A Ned Kelly tattoo identified at autopsy in another country or in a disaster victim identification situation may suggest that the decedent was Australian or had a connection with that country. Although the population studied is highly selected, individuals with these tattoos had an above average incidence of traumatic deaths.

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