

# A SITUATIONAL ANALYSIS OF HOMICIDE IN AUSTRALIA

Richard Wortley

Paul Mazerolle

Li Eriksson

Holly Johnson

# The Australian Homicide Project

- Australian Research Council Discovery Project
- Griffith University (KCELJAG)
- Structured face-to-face interviews conducted at correctional facilities and probation and parole offices across Australia
- Interviews conducted with 302 homicide offenders
- Comprehensive data collection effort in scale, scope and sophistication
- Allows for comparisons across homicide categories

# What was covered in the interviews?

## 1. Background (structured interview)

- Demographics, background factors, criminal history, attitudes, beliefs and experiences of offenders

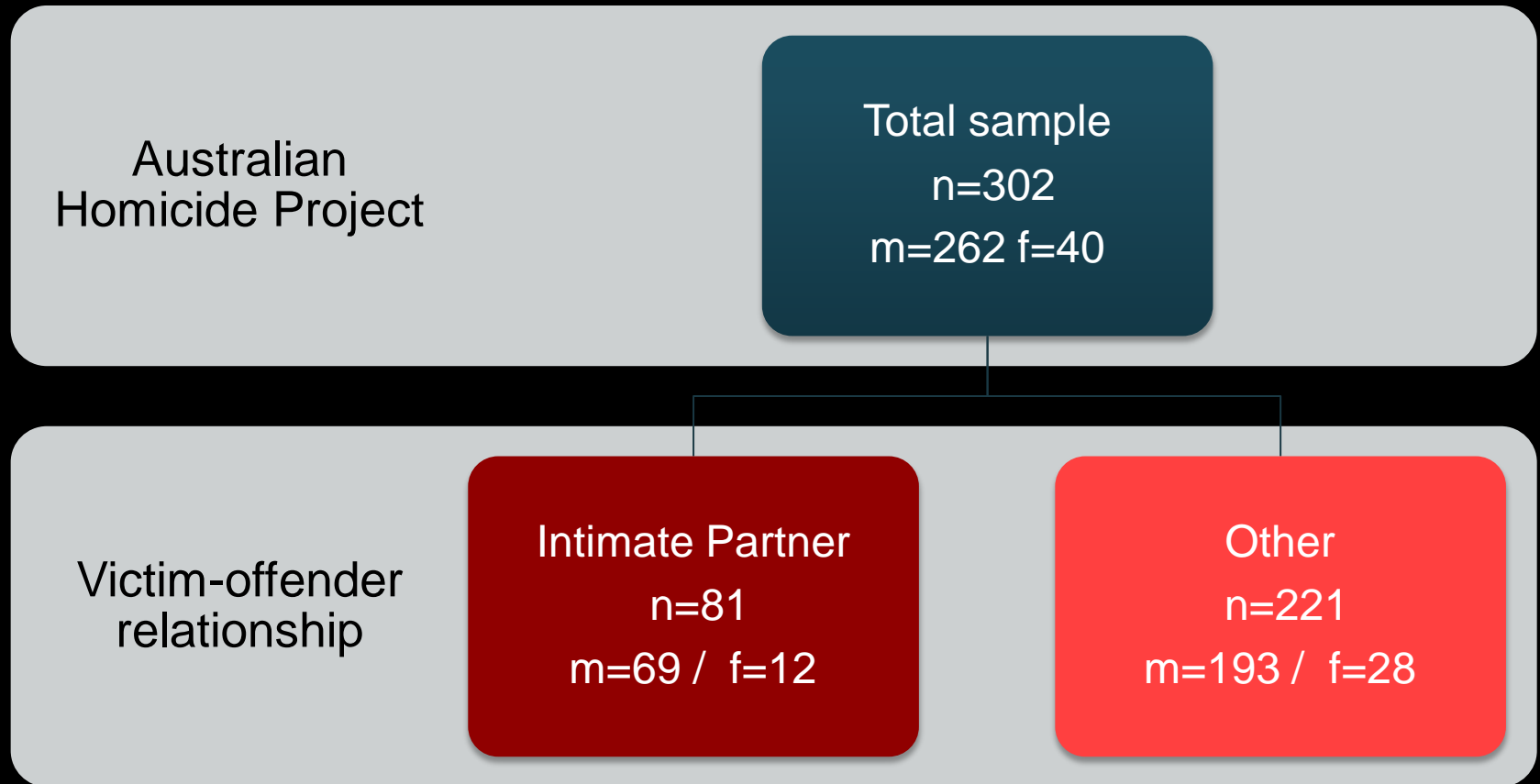
## 2. Calendar (semi-structured interview)

- Crime and life event calendar
- Temporal sequence of events occurring within the 12 months leading up to the homicide (e.g., housing, intimate relationships, substance use, physical and mental health issues and contact with formal agencies)

## 3. Situational (semi-structured interview)

- Situational factors
- Events/emotions/thoughts preceding homicide
- During homicide
- Post-homicide

# Current sample



# Current Analysis

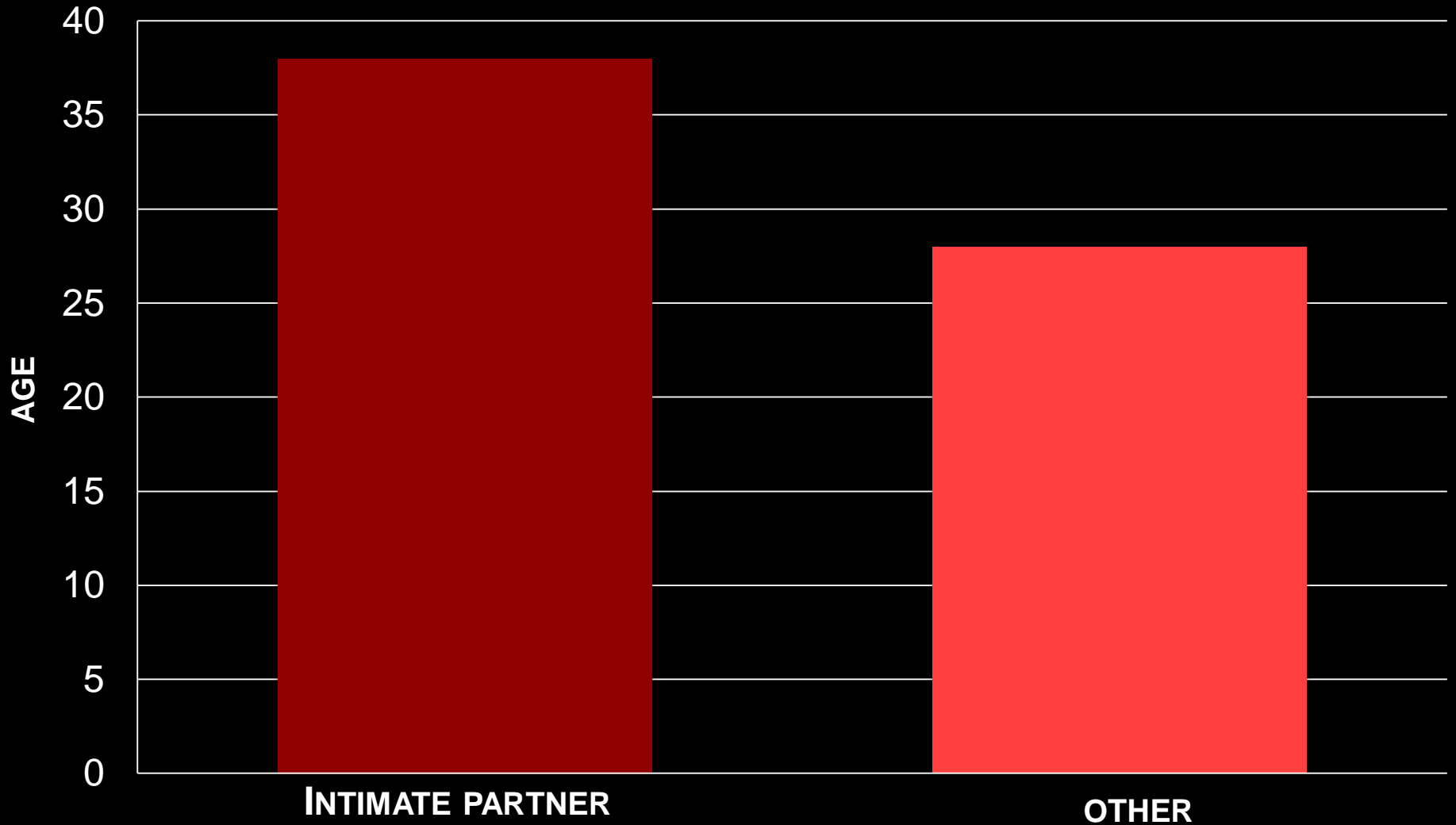
- Male perpetrators only (n=262)
- IPH v other (69 v 193)
- Personal variables
  - Offender age at time of offence
  - Previous contact with the law
  - Self control scores
  - Emotional state a week before
- Situational variables
  - Victim gender
  - How long known victim
  - Planning and forethought
  - How long intention
  - Feelings just before
  - Drugs/alcohol involvement
  - Time of offence
  - Location of offence
  - Weapon used
  - Source of weapon
  - Why didn't stop

# Personal Variables

## Contact with Law X Offender Type

Contact with Law	Proportion		Onset Age	
	Intimate Partner	Other	Intimate Partner	Other
Formally Cautioned	48%	69%	21.9 years	14.8 years
Arrested as a Juvenile	32%	53%	13.5 years	13.5 years
Detained in Juvenile Centre	14%	25%	13.5 years	14 years
Community Service Order	25%	49%	23 years	18 years

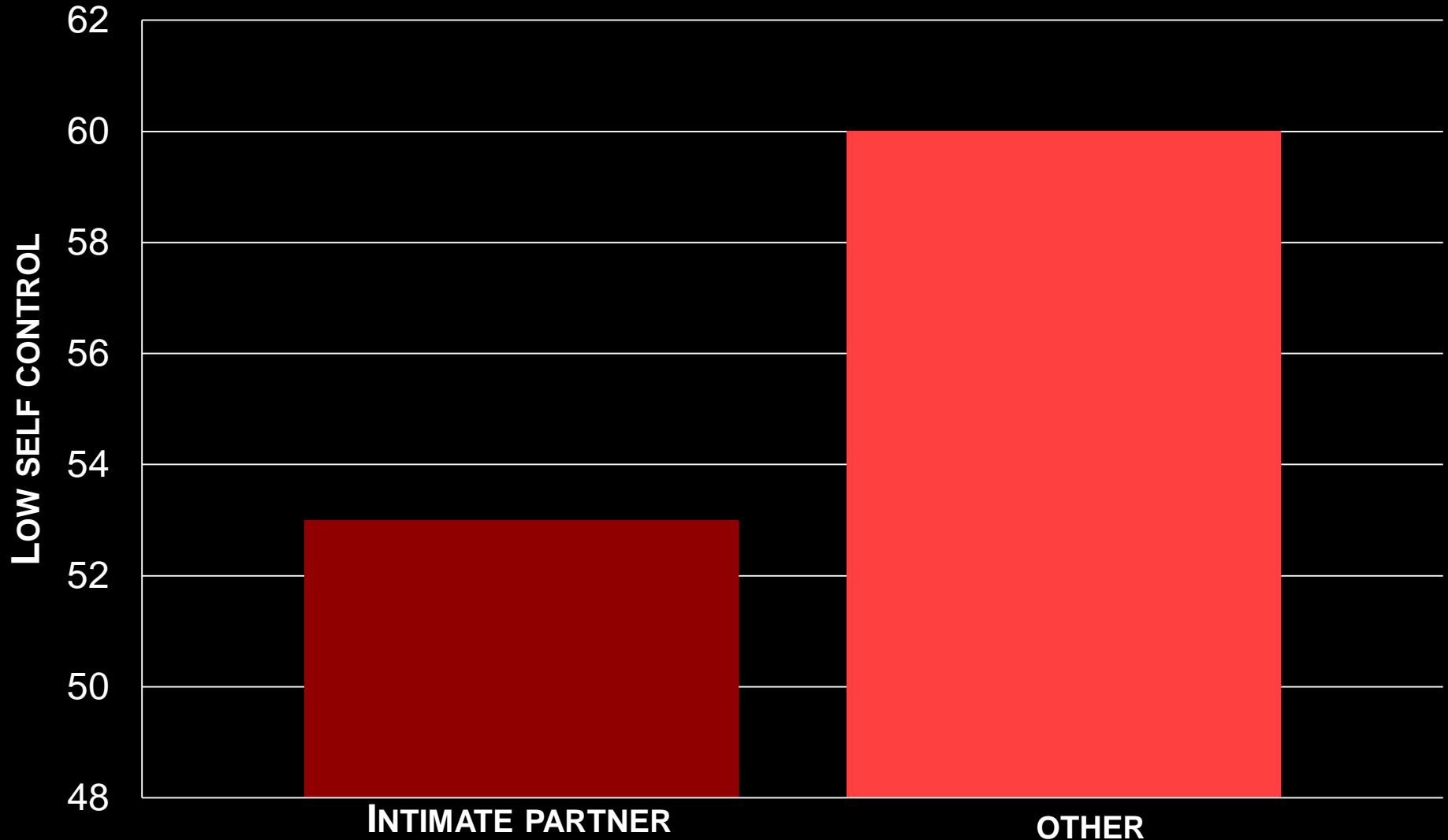
# Age at time of offence X Offender Type



$P < .001$



# Self control X offender type



P=.009

# Emotional State Leading up to Offence X

## Offender Type

Felt ...	Offender Type	
	Intimate Partner	Other
OK, normal, good, nothing unusual	38%	50%
Sad, depressed, despairing, lonely	34%	24%
Angry, alienated	8%	7%
Confused, stressed, tired, anxious, unstable, drugged	20%	17%

# Situational Variables

## ‘Tell us what Happened’ – IPH/Unplanned

We'd been having breakfast out, after dropping kids at school. Then we went shopping stuff for our business. We got home. Argument broke out. Can't remember over what. Not sure what about. It escalated. She wasn't violent, just a lot of shouting and screaming. Wanted her to stop shouting, stop screaming. I felt insulted, small, belittled because of what she was saying (can't remember what it was). I just lost it. Put my hand around her (throat). I said "stop" (to her). When I came to she wasn't breathing. I know that feeling (belittled, small, insulted). It's unlike me not being under control. Even now I can still feel the intensity of it. For that to happen it's like another person. I find it hard to believe myself that it's me. The only one time I lost control of my emotions. Usually I don't even get to that stage.

## ‘Tell us what Happened’ – IPH/Semi-Planned

Found out from my mate’s wife that she’d been seeing her (the mate’s wife’s) husband behind my back. She came around and told me. Turned out my mates knew – they didn’t know how to tell me. Wife kicked me out. I went to live with two mates. They were both drunks. I started drinking more. That day I’d been drinking from 5:30am. Drank waiting for the pub to open then drank at home when they closed again at 1pm. Then went back when they opened again. It was evening. I went to my car. Saw a payphone. Rang my wife up. She said “nah, you can’t come over, you’re finished”. She slammed the phone down. Because I was full of piss I went and shot her. Went straight to the boot (car boot) to get the gun out. She lived a block away. Had she lived further away I would have probably gone home and fallen asleep. I was so furious with her. Slamming the phone down. Won’t let me come home. Knocked down back door. She was at front door. She didn’t say anything. Just shot her. Had the gun by my hip (note from interviewer: respondent demonstrating how he fired the shot from the hip rather than holding the weapon up in front of him). She got up and started running. Ran out front door. Ran to the house in front of us. Out through gate. She was just running. Not screaming. No words said. I shot her again in the back of her head. She was in the neighbour’s front yard. Neighbour said he heard me say “I love you X” but I don’t remember that. Walked up and fired two more shots.

## ‘Tell us what Happened’ – IPH/Planned

He was mentally abusive – He was intimidating – He was a hit man, not to be fucked with, threats to kill me if I left. I went to visit my ex in prison and he told me they both planned to kill me, but I’m lucky I’m with him now (Note from data entry person: Not sure who this is referring to). He would pull out his guns in front of me. He did not communicate feelings. He stalked me in the shops, outside my house. I was fearful he was watching me all the time and had a gun on me. The last straw was when he threatened to kill my children as well as me. I received threatening messages on my phone, I got scared, I can’t do this anymore and I had a panic attack. My housemate said what’s wrong? I showed him the messages. I stopped communicating with the ex and the text messages escalated. Told my flatmate I want him dead, I’m terrified. Always worried about my kids, slept with a gun under my pillow. We (respondent and flatmate) sat down and planned to kill him. Went out with ex for two hours, then came back to house, flatmate (co-accused) ambushed him. Flatmate asked my ex if he was planning to kill us all – He said “yes”. So flatmate started to repeatedly stab him and killed him. Got cold feet just before (respondent got cold feet). I didn’t see it happen. Saw the deceased fall off the chair. Not sure it had happened. Flatmate said “the job’s done”. Flatmate relayed what happened to me.

## ‘Tell us what Happened’ – Other/Unplanned

Had gone up to NT for my father’s funeral. Went to a nightclub with mates. He (victim) was there with his mate. They were chatting up this girl. She came over to me – asked me for a ride. They must have thought I was stealing their girl. They came up, grabbed me from behind. Started pushing me around. I told them to piss off, that I was just there to get drunk, didn’t want any trouble. I smiled at him – he came running back, continued to jump on me. I said the same thing again. Told them to fuck off and leave me alone. They went over to my friends, told them to meet outside to he could fight me. My friends told them to leave me alone, that I’d done nothing wrong. They kept jumping on me for an hour and a half. I told them to fuck off, to leave me alone, and then I pushed him over. At that stage, there was nothing left to do. I turned around and punched him. Was gonna punch his mate as well, but he was already knocked out. My nephew had apparently hit the other guy, knocked him out. When I punched (victim), he was knocked out cold. He fell and hit his head against the concrete (refurbishing – no carpet on the floor). I went passed him to leave. The manager must have thought I was going to attack him, so he pushed me. The bouncers came over, pushed me. I told them to stop, so that I could leave. I walked out. Before I’d got to the next building, I was arrested.

## ‘Tell us what Happened’ – Other/Semi-Planned

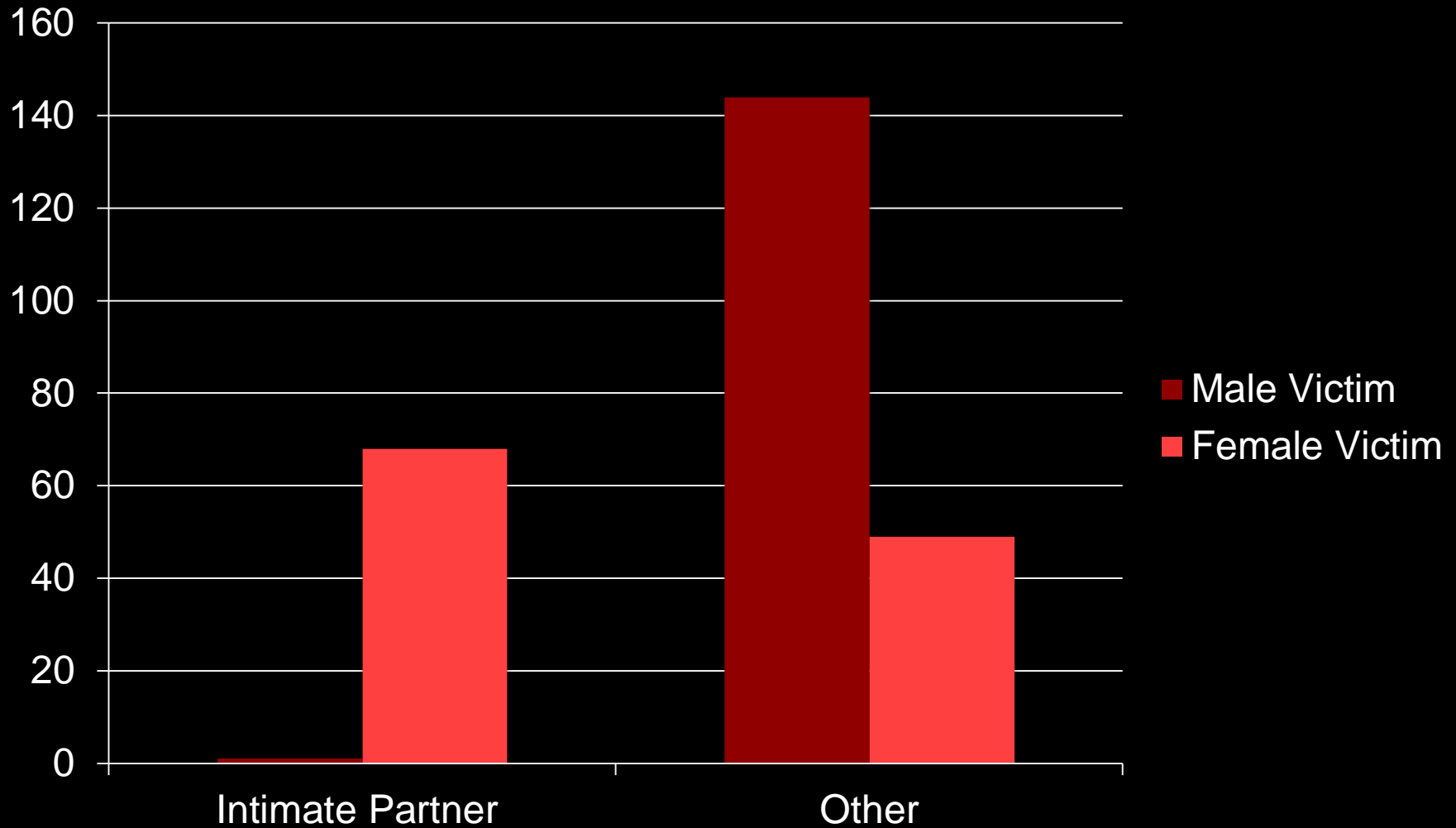
At a hotel. Was out with another gentleman at the time. The lady was at the hotel. Her ride was supposed to take her home. She ended up deciding to walk home – must have been an argument with him or something. I pulled into a service station to get fuel and she just happened to walk in – just as I was walking out. I recognised her from the hotel. I walked out. She smiled at me as I walked past. I left – was driving up the road. Just as I pulled out she was walking up the road. That’s when I decided to abduct her. I took her to a secluded place about 8-10 kms out of [name of place]. I then raped her. Then I realised that she could identify me. That’s when I decided that she had to die. I attempted strangulation. When that didn’t work I actually bludgeoned her to death with a rock. In my mind I didn’t see how it was wrong – because of the violent porn and my own ego – thought it was mine to take.



## ‘Tell us what Happened’ – Other/Planned

Co-offender and I picked him up (planned drug deal – victim was gonna buy drugs). Co-offender had asked me to shoot the bloke two days prior. He told me to do it if he gave me the signal. When co-offender introduced me by my real name (they normally used fake names) I knew by then it was gonna happen. I had the gun under my shirt. We drove for a while and co-offender stopped at a park. He told us to leave everything in the car and took the bloke out on the grass. They started arguing, I don't know what about – I wasn't paying attention. Then co-offender gave me the signal (said “I just have to go back to the car to get my wallet”). I walked up to him (victim). He was having a smoke and he offered me one. I had a quick smoke, I pulled the gun out and pointed it at him. He turned around – had a smirk on his face. But then I saw in his face he knew what was about to happen. I apologised to the guy – said “sorry mate”. Then I shot him. He fell down, made gurgling noises. The sound (from the gun) was hurting my ears – I had to walk back (a few meters). I knew it was gonna take a few minutes for him to die at that stage, I didn't want to leave him like that so I shot him again, twice. I didn't want to shoot him in the head. My dad was, his face was basically stapled together and my mum saw him. I didn't want his (victim's) family to go through that.

## Victim Gender X Offence Type



# How Long Known Victim X Offender Type

## Offender Type

	Intimate Partner	Other
Less than an Hour	0	5%
Less than a Week	0	9%
Less than a Month	0	6%
Less than a Year	3%	23%
One to Ten Years	63%	36%
More than Ten Years	34%	21%

# Forethought and Planning X Offender Type

## Offender Type

	Intimate Partner	Other
Had been having violent thoughts about victim	18%	17%
Made decision to hurt victim	27%	42%
Made plans to kill the victim	14%	12%

## How Long Thoughts/Plans X Offender Type

Time	Violent Thoughts		Decision to Hurt		Plan to kill	
	IP N=11	Other N=30	IP N=17	Other N=77	IP N=9	Other N=25
ATM	9%	23%	47%	58%	33%	32%
<Day	18%	7%	41%	23%	11%	28%
<Week	0	20%	0	13%	11%	12%
<Month	9%	17%	12%	3%	33%	0
<Year	46%	20%	0	3%	0	4%
>Year	18%	13%	0	0	11%	24%

# Feelings Just Before X Offender Type

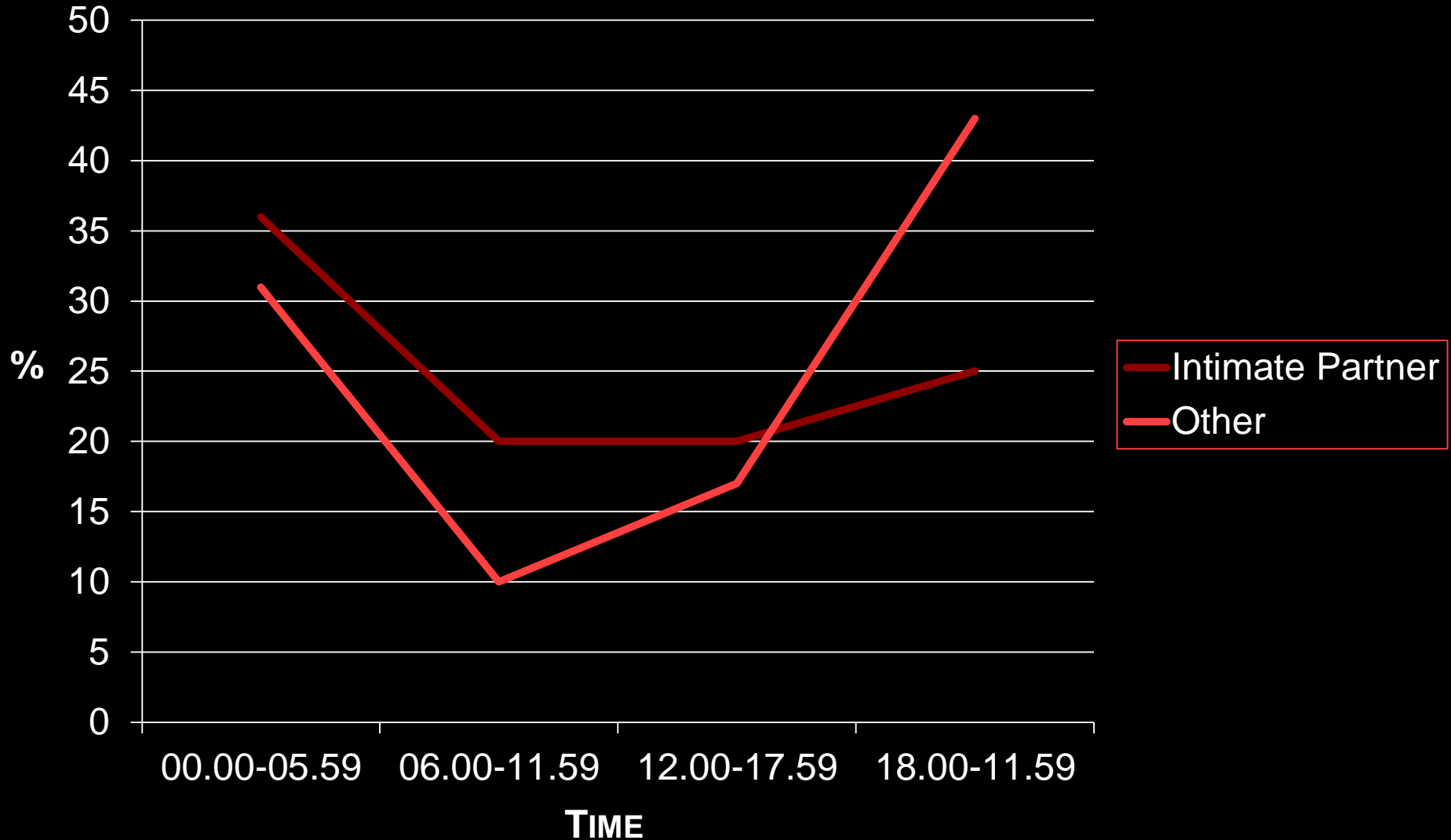
## Offender Type

Feeling ...	Intimate Partner	Other
OK, fine, normal	8%	14%
Depressed, worthless	5%	2%
Angry, frustrated	50%	34%
Stressed, upset, confused	12%	16%
Scared, desperate	8%	10%
Hurt, belittled, jealous	7%	4%
Nothing, numb, automatic	2%	9%
Drunk, spaced out	2%	5%
Excited, adrenaline rush	0	2%
Don't know, can't remember	7%	4%

## Drugs/Alcohol X Offender Type

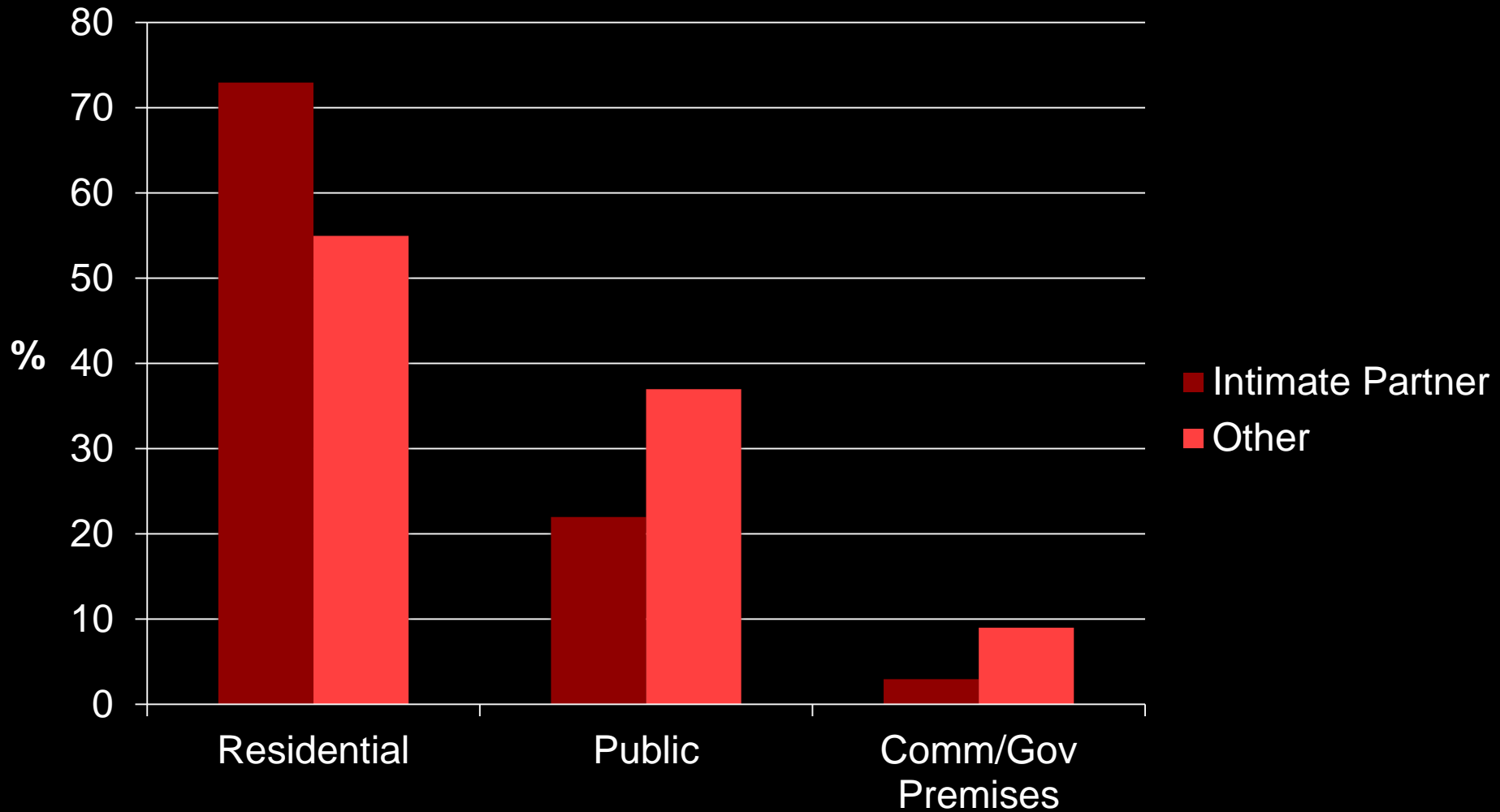
	Offender Type		P
	Intimate Partner	Other	
Offender drinking/taking drugs	57%	77%	.001
Victim drinking/taking drugs	43%	67%	.002

# Time of Offence X Offender Type





# Location of Offence X Offender Type

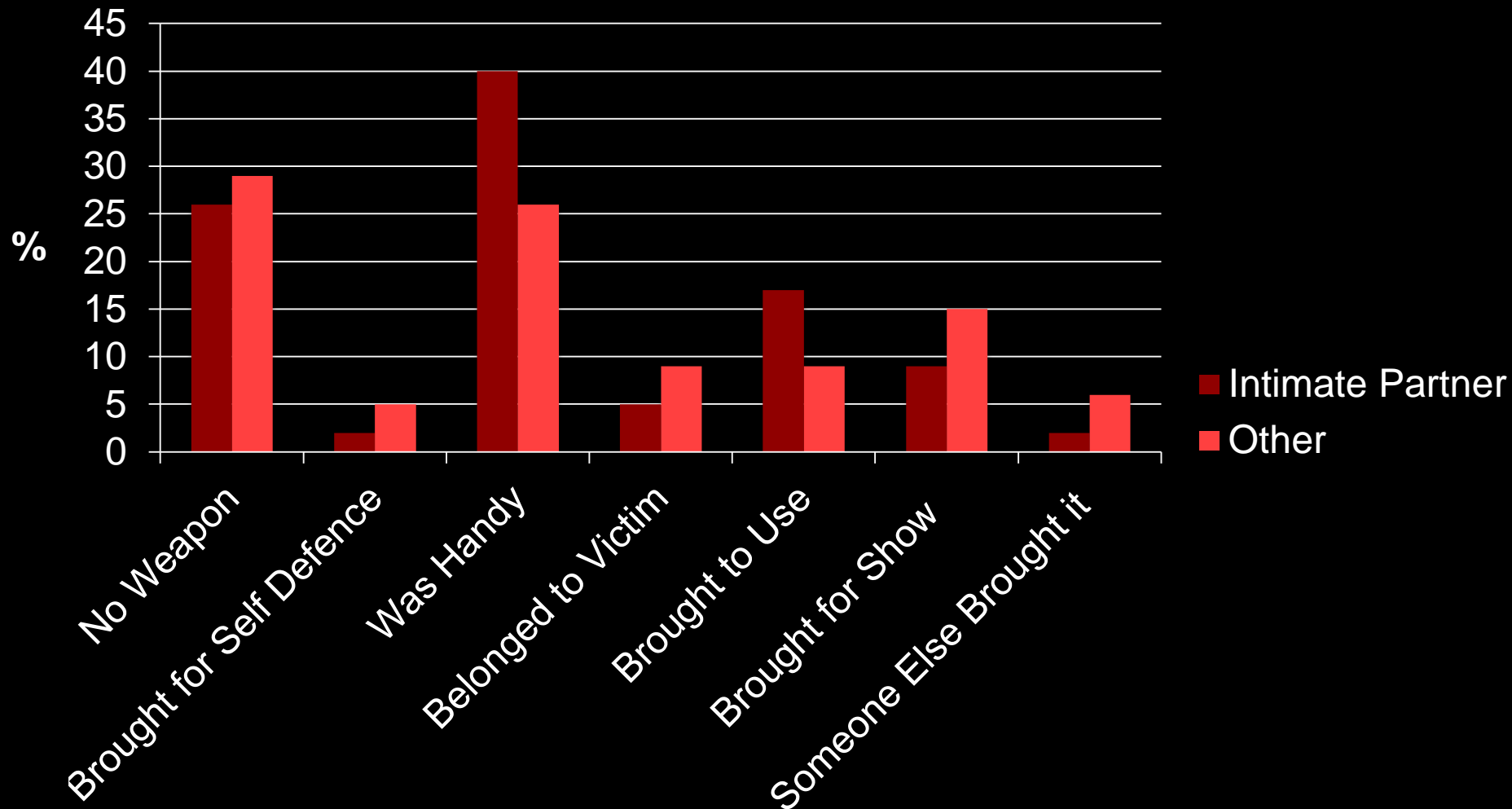


# Type of Weapon X Offender Type

## Offender Type

Weapon	Intimate Partner	Other
None – fists, kicking	3%	5%
Firearm	20%	17%
Knife	23%	29%
Household sharp object	9%	6%
Other sharp object	0	2%
Household blunt object	15%	9%
Other blunt object	2%	6%
Rope	3%	5%
Other (fuel, drug)	3%	3%

# Source of Weapon X Offender Type



# Why Didn't Stop X Offender Type

## Offender Type

Reason	Intimate Partner	Other
Lost control	44%	22%
Self preservation	6%	6%
Affected by drugs/alcohol	6%	9%
Protecting others	6%	15%
Pressure from others	0	2%
Mental health issues	7%	1%
Establishing control	18%	11%
Over too quick	7%	11%
Don't know/remember	6%	11%
Didn't mean to kill, did stop	0	6%
Wanted to finish the job	2%	7%

## Summary

- Lead up to homicide complex and varied
- IPH offenders generally less criminally involved, older and greater self control
- High levels of emotional disturbance prior to offence, esp IPH
- Most victims known to offender > month
- One third no planning
- Alcohol/drugs a factor in most cases, esp other
- Most offences in domestic settings
- <half a formal weapon; most improvised items that were handy

## So what?

- Prevalence of impulsive behaviour, improvised weapons – value of but also limitations of weapon restrictions
- Tensions and emotional disturbance leading up to offence, esp IPH - red flags for psych/soc intervention
- Significant role of alcohol/drugs, esp for ‘other’ homicides – general alcohol/drug programmes