

Femicide: The Killing of Women in Australia 1989–1998

Jenny Mouzos



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Foreword

The Australian Institute of Criminology, through its National Homicide Monitoring Program, has collected data on every homicide in Australia since 1989, including incident, victim, offender and victim-offender characteristics. This unique data set makes it possible for the Institute to conduct in-depth analyses of various aspects of homicide in Australia.

This report focuses specifically on the intentional killing of women. In general, women are at a relatively low risk of homicide victimisation, but when they are killed, it is most likely that they will be killed by an intimate partner. The report sheds light on the more unpleasant aspects of gender relations and, in particular, intimate relations.

One aim of the Institute's ongoing research program is to identify characteristics associated with the occurrence of homicide and that are amenable to modification. It is envisaged that the analysis detailed in this report will be expanded by further work comparing Australian patterns of femicide with British data collected within the ESRC Violence Research Program at Brunel University.

Before the end of this year, the Australian Institute of Criminology will publish an extensive report on a decade of homicide in Australia.

Adam Graycar
Director, Australian Institute of Criminology
August 1999

Acknowledgments

The Australian Institute of Criminology gratefully acknowledges the cooperation and continuing support for the data collection process offered by the Australasian Police Ministers' Council and police and coronial services in all jurisdictions. The viability of the National Homicide Monitoring Program has been ensured through the continued assistance of all police and coronial services, and especially the individual officers and coronial staff who have assisted in compiling this data.

The author would also like to acknowledge the valuable input of Dr Peter Grabosky, Director of Research at the Australian Institute of Criminology, and the anonymous referee for their insightful and valuable comments on earlier drafts. A special thanks to Carlos Carcach, Senior Research Analyst at the Institute, for his continued technical assistance, and to Sharon Nevile, Editor at the Australian Institute of Criminology, for her work in the production of this publication.

Caveat

The Australian Institute of Criminology, like other Commonwealth agencies, is bound by the provisions of the *Privacy Act 1988*, which places restrictions on the disclosure of personal information from the data set that could result in the identification of individuals.

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Executive Summary

During the period 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998, the killing of females in Australia was characterised by the following features:

- Females of all ages are killed at an average annual rate of 1.4 per 100,000 population and men at an average annual rate of 2.4 per 100,000 population. This pattern has remained relatively stable during the nine-year period.
- The greatest risk of homicide victimisation for females of all ages is between the ages of 21 and 23 years, where homicide victimisation occurs at a rate of 2.8 per 100 000 population (greatest risk for men is between the ages of 24 and 26 years).
- Nearly three in five of all femicides (women aged 15 years and over) occur between intimate partners, and nearly all of these are as a result of a domestic altercation. In comparison, half of all homicides involving male victims occur between friends and/or acquaintances. One in nine male homicide victims is killed by an intimate partner.
- Femicide is most likely to occur in residential premises, rather than in other locations; males are also most likely to be killed in a private residence.
- Similar to homicide involving male victims, femicide is most likely to be committed using a knife or some other sharp instrument, followed by bodily force (hands and/or feet).
- Femicide in Australia is overwhelmingly a male-dominated act, with approximately 94 per cent of offenders being male.
- The offender's age varies according to the victim-offender relationship; as the offender's mean age decreases, so does the level of familiarity between the victim and the offender.
- Similar to homicide in general, femicide in Australia is generally of an intra-racial nature.
- Aboriginal/TSI women are over-represented as victims of femicide, just as Aboriginal/TSI men are over-represented as victims of homicide.

- Similar to Aboriginal/TSI men, Aboriginal/TSI women are most likely to be killed in a location other than a private residence, and the incident is most likely to involve alcohol.
- Very rarely do women die at the hands of a male stranger.

Introduction

In Australia, approximately 125 females of all ages are murdered every year, making homicide the fourth leading external cause of death for females (see Figure 1). Yet in comparison to all other causes of death for females (both internal and external), homicide accounts for only 0.2 per cent of all female deaths (ABS 1997a). It is for this reason that, in most studies of homicide, the attention has been on men and their role as victims or offenders.

Although men account for approximately 63 per cent and women for approximately 37 per cent of all homicide victims, very few studies have examined the circumstances and dynamics relating to women as victims of homicide. Of the limited research that is available, the findings suggest that there are distinctive characteristics associated with the killing of women (Polk & Ranson 1991; Kellermann & Mercy 1992; Browne 1997).

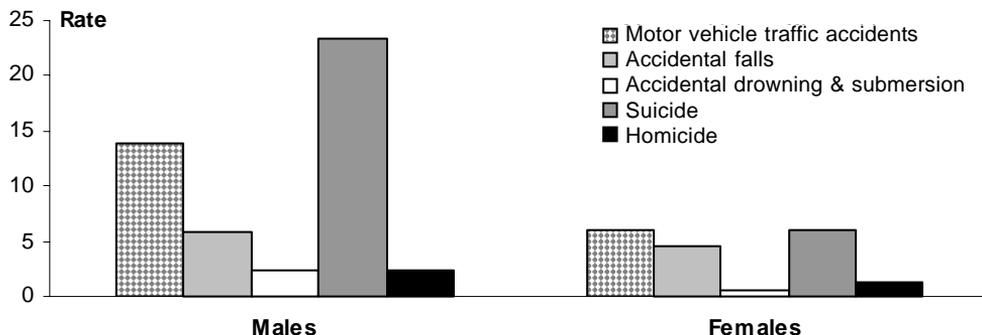
Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is threefold:

- to identify patterns and trends in femicide¹—the murder of women;
- to examine the differences and similarities between the murder of women and the murder of men; and
- to determine the circumstances that may contribute to the likelihood of a woman being murdered in Australia.

Previous research has indicated that, in homicide, the victim and offender are likely to be linked in a close relationship (Polk & Ranson 1991), with most homicide incidents being characterised as a social event: “one in which there are at least two actors and there is a social relationship that plays a dynamic role in the way that the homicide

Figure 1: AUSTRALIA: External Causes of Death, Standardised Death Rate per 100,000 Population



Source: ABS *Causes of Death Australia, 1997*

unfolds” (Silverman & Mukherjee 1987, p. 37). It is therefore important that research on lethal violence links information relating to the incident, the victim and the offender so as to achieve a fuller understanding of the process (Block 1994).

This study will explore the relationship between the victims of femicide and their offenders, in terms referred to as “relational distance”.² An understanding of the nature and breadth of the victim-offender relationship, and the identification of potentially modifiable risk factors, will provide a more accurate portrayal of women’s experiences as victims of homicide.

Definition of Femicide

Femicide has been defined as the “misogynist killing of women by men” (Radford & Russell 1992, p. xi). However, this definition fails to take into account that some women are killed as a result of opportunistic crime, such as armed robbery and mass shootings, where the women are simply “in the wrong place at the wrong time”. In addition, a small minority of women is also killed by other women. Therefore, this study goes further than Radford and Russell’s definition to examine the killing of all women, regardless of the gender of the offender and the motive behind the incident.

The Data Set

The present study analyses data held as part of the National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) at the Australian Institute of

Criminology. The NHMP was established in 1989, and routinely collects data on all homicides coming to the attention of police services throughout Australia. Data collected include 77 variables relating to the victim, the offender (where one has been identified) and the setting or context within which the incident occurred (including location, alleged motive of the incident and weapon employed). Information is also collected that allows the relationship between the victim and offender to be documented. Data are derived exclusively from police records, supplemented as necessary with information provided directly by investigating police officers. As of 1 July 1996, additional information relating to whether the victim had consumed alcohol, or had taken illicit/prescription drugs at the time of the incident, was also collected from State and Territory coronial files, specifically from toxicology reports.

Between 1 July 1989 and 30 June 1998—the period of this study—a total of 2821 homicide incidents occurred, perpetrated by 3314 identified offenders and resulting in the death of 3045 victims. It should be noted that some homicide incidents involve more than one victim and/or offender.

In accord with previous findings, homicidal violence is a distinctively masculine matter (see Wallace 1986; Daly & Wilson 1988; Polk 1994). Of the 3045 homicide victims whose gender was known, 1125 (37%) were female and 1913 (63%) were male. This gender distribution has been consistent over time. According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data, between 1982 and 1988, of a total of 2225 homicide victims, 1367 (61.4%) were male and 858 (38.6%) were female (ABS Causes of Death, microfiche UR2, Tables 1982–88). These data indicate that the killing of women is by no means the predominant pattern of homicide in Australia.

The differentiation of homicidal violence between the sexes is further apparent when the gender of homicide *offenders* is examined. According to the figures in Table 1, over half of the homicides that occurred during the nine-year period under review (1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998) involved the killing of men by other men. Similarly, when a female kills, she is more likely to kill a male than another female. In this period, where gender was known, males accounted for 88.6 per cent and females for only 11.4 per cent of all homicide offenders. This supports the notion that homicide is a male-dominated act.

**Table 1: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998:
Distribution of Homicide Victims According to
Gender of Offenders (n=2704)***

| Gender of Victim | Male Offender | | Female Offender | | Total Offenders | |
|------------------|---------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| Male | 1464 | 54.2 | 237 | 8.8 | 1701 | 62.9 |
| Female | 931 | 34.4 | 72 | 2.6 | 1003 | 37.1 |
| Total | 2395 | 88.6 | 309 | 11.4 | 2704 | 100.0 |

*Excludes 222 cases where gender of either victim or offender was unknown/not stated and 125 unidentified offenders.

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

Notes

¹ The term “femicide” has recently come into use by such scholars as Radford and Russell (1992) and Stout (1989).

² Described by Polk (1994, p. 20) as “an underlying continuum which ranges from the most intimate relationships at one extreme, to the most distant (strangers) at the other”. See also Black (1998) and Cooney (1994).

Trends in the Homicide of Females

In general, females are at a consistently lower risk of homicide victimisation than males (Mouzos 1999). During the nine-year period under review, females in Australia were killed at an average annual rate of 1.4 per 100,000 population, although in the two most recent years analysed (1996–97 and 1997–98), the rate has declined to 1.2 per 100,000 population. Males, on the other hand, were killed at an average annual rate of 2.4 per 100,000 population.

Across the period, there has been a slight declining trend in the number of female homicide victims per year (Figure 2). The annual number of female homicide victims between 1989–90 and 1997–98 ranged from 147 in 1990–91 to 111 in 1996–97. On average, 125 females are murdered each year in Australia.

Similarly, there has been a relatively stable pattern of gender differentiation over the years—around 65 per cent of victims are males, and around 35 per cent are females (Figure 3).

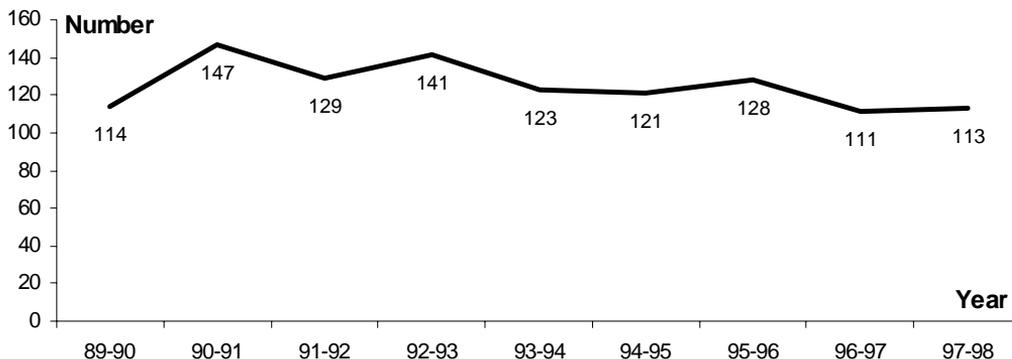
Female Homicide in the Jurisdictions

When the number of female homicide victims in each Australian State and Territory (expressed as a percentage of the total number of homicide victims in each) is examined, there appear to be slight variations across each jurisdiction (Figure 4). Although Tasmania and the ACT seem to have recorded the highest percentage of female homicide victims across the nine-year period, this is due mostly to their overall low incidence of homicide.

Age

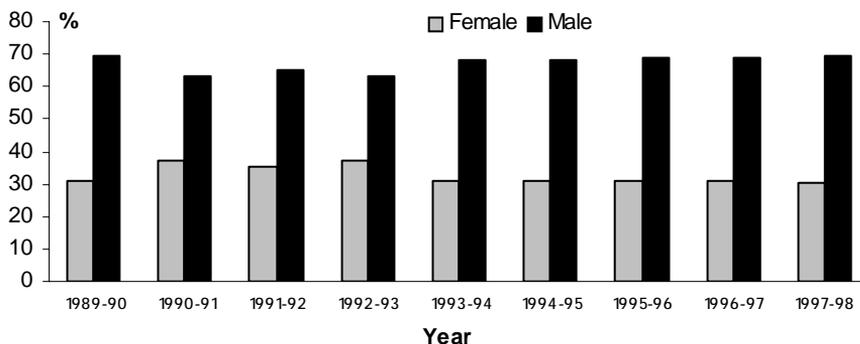
Homicide victimisation varies significantly according to age because of different levels of exposure to violence during one's life cycle

Figure 2: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Distribution of Female Victims of Homicide (n=1125)



Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

Figure 3: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Distribution of Homicide Victims per Year, According to Gender (n=3045)

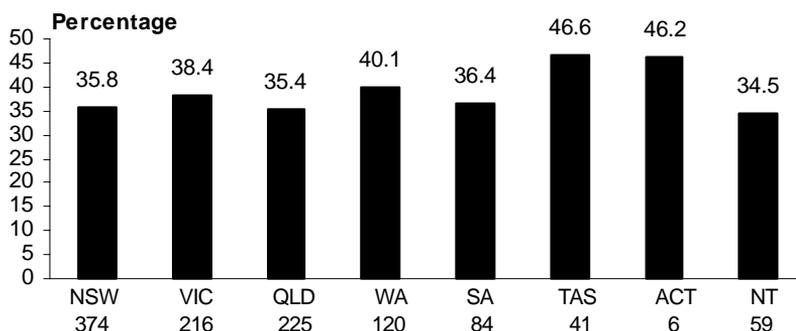


Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

(James & Carcach 1998). The rate of female homicide victimisation per 100,000 population for each specific age is depicted in Figure 5.

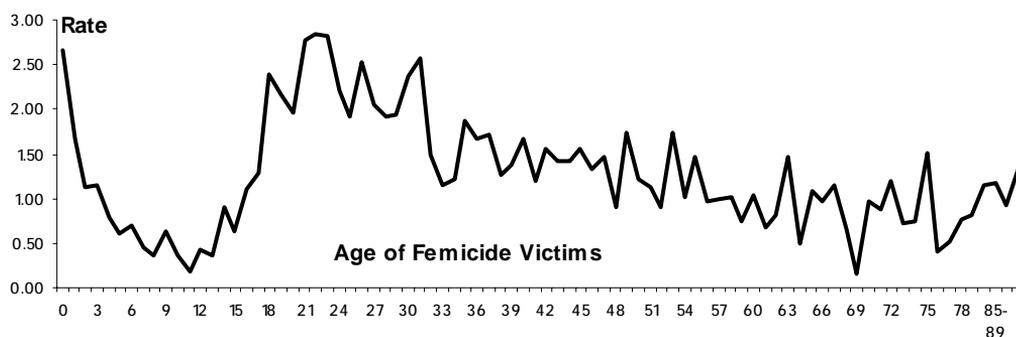
Females are at a relatively high risk of homicide victimisation during early infancy, that is less than one year old (rate of 2.7 per 100,000 population), and from late teens (rate of 2.3) to early thirties (average rate of 2.1, 18–31 years) (Figure 5). The highest risk of homicide victimisation for females is between the ages of 21 and 23 years, where

Figure 4: AUSTRALIA, STATES & TERRITORIES: Female Homicide Victims as a Percentage of All Homicide Victims, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998 (n=1125)



Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

Figure 5: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Female Homicide Victimization Rate per 100,000 Age-specific Population



Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

homicide victimisation occurs at a rate of 2.8 per 100,000 population. Age-specific vulnerability for males differs slightly from females. For example, the highest risk of homicide victimisation for males is between the ages of 24 and 26 years (Mouzos 1999).

It is important to note that the circumstances surrounding the death of children under the age of one appear to be qualitatively different from other types of homicides (Fiala & LaFree 1988; Gartner 1991; Strang 1996; Wilczynski 1997) and a thorough examination of children as

victims of homicide warrants a discussion that is beyond the scope of the present study.¹

Previous research suggests that the homicide of females occurs more often than not in the context of heterosexual relations (Smith & Stanko unpub.), with adult women most likely to be the victims (Levinson 1989). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, a total of 137 female homicide victims aged 0-14 years have been excluded from the following analyses.

Notes

¹ For a discussion of child homicide in Australia, see Strang (1996).

The Context of Femicide

The relationship between the victim and offender is critical to understanding the context and dynamics of femicide—defined in this study as the killing of women aged 15 years and over. It is therefore essential to examine the contexts in which a woman is killed based on the relational distance between the victim and offender.

Relational Contexts

The NHMP data set includes information on 26 different types of victim–offender relationships. The present study combined these variables into just four categories: Intimates, Family, Friends and Strangers. Based on these categories, maps of “relational space”, wherein offenders and victims interact, will be constructed (Smith & Stanko unpub.).

The relational category of *Intimates* primarily includes spouses, ex-spouses, persons in current or former de facto relationships, current or former boy/girlfriends, extra-marital lovers or partners of same-sex relationships. Those victim–offender relationships categorised as *Family* include sons, daughters (including stepchild), parent (including stepparent, custodial and non-custodial), grandparent, sibling (including stepsibling) and other family relationships. The third relational category of *Friends* includes close friends and acquaintances (including a neighbour). The final relational category of *Strangers* includes those victim–offender relationships in which the victim is unknown to the offender at the time of the incident. Smith and Stanko (unpub.) suggest that many victims of stranger killings may actually have some prior knowledge of the offender—from a brief nod in the street or some short association, such as meeting someone in a bar. It was decided, therefore, to include acquaintances of less than 24 hours in the relational category of strangers.

Table 2: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Femicide Victim’s Relationship to Offender (n=875)

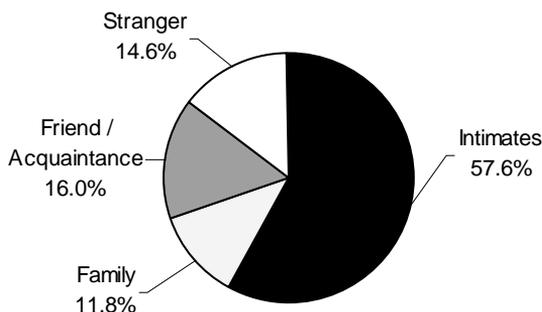
| Relation of Female Victim to Offender | Male Offender | | Female Offender | | Total Offenders | |
|---------------------------------------|---------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|-----------------|--------------|
| | Frequency | % | Frequency | % | Frequency | % |
| Intimates | 499 | 60.7 | 5 | 9.4 | 504 | 57.6 |
| Family | 89 | 10.8 | 14 | 26.4 | 103 | 11.8 |
| Friend | 112 | 13.6 | 28 | 52.8 | 140 | 16.0 |
| Stranger | 122 | 14.8 | 6 | 11.3 | 128 | 14.6 |
| Total | 822 | 100.0 | 53 | 100.0 | 875 | 100.0 |

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

Of the 1125 femicide victims identified over the period, a further 113 victims were excluded from the study¹—those associated with offenders who were unknown/not stated (16), or whose relationship to the offender was unidentified (59) or other than the four specified (38). The remainder—a total of 875 femicide victims—provides the focus of the following analyses.

Figures in Table 2 reveal that male offenders were responsible for killing approximately 94 per cent of adult female victims, and the vast majority (61%) of these killings occurred in an intimate relational context. In contrast, when women kill women, the relationship is more likely to be friends (or acquaintances), or within the family. Only 14.6 per cent (128) of all femicide victims were killed in a stranger relational context (Figure 6).

Figure 6: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Adult Female Homicide Victims, Relationship to Offenders (n=875)



Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

There appear to be distinct differences between male and female homicide victimisation with regard to the victim–offender relationship. For example, almost 60 per cent of women were killed by an intimate partner (Figure 6). However, when men are killed, they are more likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance (45%) or by a stranger (32%), and in approximately 95 per cent of these non-intimate homicides the offender is also male. In comparison to women, only 11 per cent of men were killed by an intimate partner, with the majority of these offenders (84%) being female.

The data in Table 2 indicate that the killing of women in Australia is overwhelmingly a male-dominated act, where more often than not there is some familiarity between the victim and offender.

Furthermore, consistent with international research, a woman is more likely to be killed by an intimate partner than by all other categories of known offenders combined (Browne & Williams 1993; Kellermann & Mercy 1992; Maguire & Pastore 1996).

Spatial Context and Motives of Femicide

In homicide, and more specifically in femicide, perhaps more than any other crime, the victim–offender relationship plays a significant role in determining the reasons for the crime (Wolfgang 1958). Finding an association between the distribution of victim–offender relationships, the location of the killing and the offender’s motive allows a better understanding of the complex dynamics of femicide. It is only after examining these factors that we can answer the “where”, “how” and “why” associated with the occurrence of femicide.

Approximately 90 per cent of adult women victims of lethal violence who were killed within an intimate context were killed as a result of “altercations of a domestic nature”—referring to general domestic arguments, desertion or termination of an intimate relationship, and jealousy and/or rivalry (Figure 7). Many researchers have reported that women who attempt to terminate relationships with men are at a greater risk of becoming homicide victims (Wallace 1986; Wilson & Daly 1993).

Barnard et al. (1982) conducted interviews with men who had killed their wives and have found that either threats of separation, or actual separation, are most cited as the precipitating event to the homicide incident and are taken to represent “intolerable desertion, rejection,

and abandonment” by the males (p. 278). The explanations offered by the killers, and the circumstances surrounding these events, suggest that the killer was typically impassioned by sexual jealousy and/or by his concern about losing his wife (Barnard et al. 1982; Polk & Ranson 1991; Wallace 1986; Wilson & Daly 1993).

Termination of a relationship often fails to guarantee the termination of violence against the female partner. On the contrary, relationships that were not violent before sometimes become violent at the onset of separation. Canadian national homicide data analysed by Wilson and Daly (1994) show that, compared to cohabiting couples, separation entails a sixfold increase in the risk of violence to wives. The most thorough published analysis of excess homicide risk incurred by wives upon separation was the work by Wallace. Wallace (1986) reported that 45 per cent of the 217 women murdered by their husbands in New South Wales between 1968 and 1981, had left their killers or were in the process of leaving. Similarly, in the present study, domestic altercations involving desertion or termination of a relationship and jealousy were found to provide the motive associated with the deaths of approximately 40 per cent of the femicide victims that occurred within an intimate relational context.

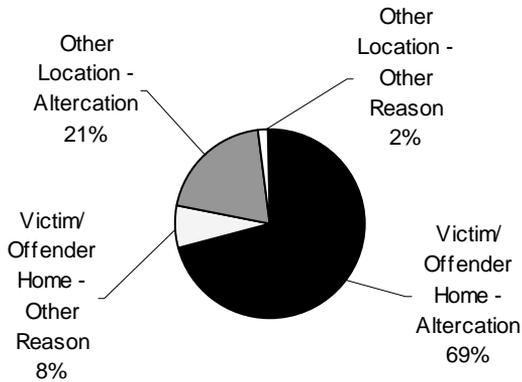
When adult women are killed as a result of a domestic altercation, most victims (77%) are killed either at their home or at the offender’s home. Less than a quarter (22.6%) are killed at some other location.²

As stated, in the period under review, 77 per cent of the victims of femicide in an intimate context were killed in some private residence. All but three of these cases involved a male offender. These findings are consistent with previous research that suggests that between 42 and 77 per cent of homicides occur at some private residence (Goetting 1991, p. 164). Carcach and James (1998) also found that intimate homicide incidents occur more frequently in the absence of third parties, or where privacy is maximal.

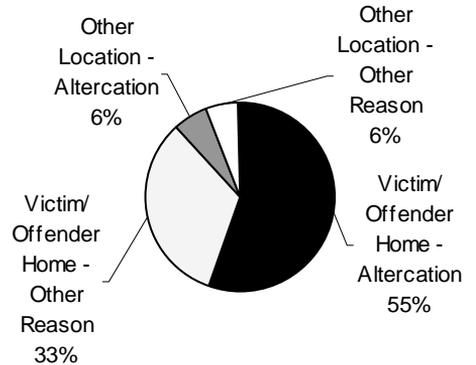
The differences between femicides occurring within a family context and a friend/acquaintance context are evident in Figure 7. In both these relational contexts, the incident is more likely to occur in some private residence. However, within a family context, the femicide is most likely to be the result of a domestic altercation, whereas within the context of friends, the incident is most likely to be for some other reason such as money, drugs or alcohol.

**Figure 7: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998:
Percentage of Femicides According to Relational Context, Place of Occurrence and Alleged Motive**

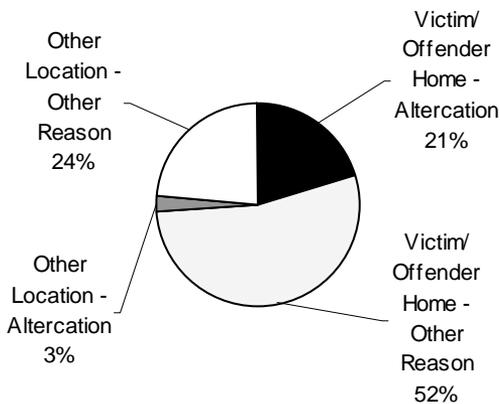
Intimate Relationship (n=504)



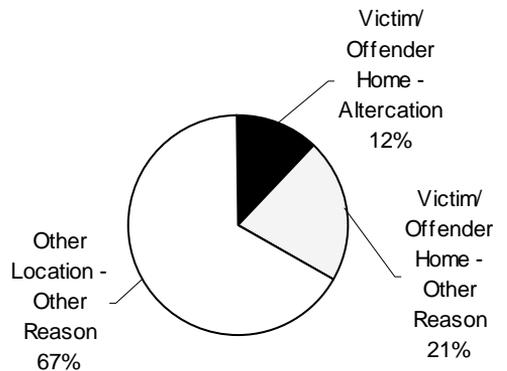
Family Relationship (n=103)



Friend Relationship (n=140)



Stranger Relationship (n=128)



Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

In contrast, when men kill women in the relational context of strangers, nearly three-quarters of the victims were killed at some location other than a private residence (Figure 7). It has been suggested that, contrary to popular beliefs, homicides that occur between strangers may also involve an element of social interaction

and such an incident, as with other types of homicides, does not occur in a vacuum (Silverman & Kennedy 1993; Polk 1994). In the present study, more than half (57%) of the femicide victims killed in a stranger relational context died in the course of other crime, including robberies, sexual assault, abduction and break-ins. This is consistent with the findings of Moracco et al. (1998, p. 436) that 53.2 per cent of non-partner femicides in North Carolina were associated with other criminal activity.

It should be noted that, in a significant proportion (81.2%) of these stranger killings involving women, the motive was not always apparent or was recorded as “unknown” or “not stated”, making it difficult to determine exactly what the motivation may have been for a man killing a woman who is not known to him. Caution should therefore be exercised when interpreting these results

Weapons of Femicide

The type of weapon used to kill the victim will vary with the relational distance between the victim and offender (Gillis 1986). This is apparent in Tables 3 and 4. In an intimate relational context, a male offender is more likely to use a knife or some other sharp instrument to commit femicide. On the other hand, when male strangers commit femicide they are more likely to use bodily force (assault with hands or feet).

Table 3: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Femicide: Type of Weapon Used by Male Offenders According to Relational Context (n=752)*

| Type of Weapon | Relational Context | | | |
|------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------|---------------------|------------------|
| | Intimates (n=487) | Family & Friends (n=180) | Strangers (n=85) | Total (n=752) |
| Firearm | 25.9% | 17.8% | 20.0% | 23.3% |
| Knife** | 34.5% | 30.6% | 25.9% | 32.6% |
| Blunt Instrument | 10.7% | 17.8% | 10.6% | 12.4% |
| Hands, Feet | 26.1% | 27.2% | 35.3% | 27.4% |
| Other*** | 2.9% | 6.7% | 8.2% | 4.4% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

*Excludes those cases where type of weapon was unknown or not stated

**Includes other sharp instrument

***Other includes poison, fire, drugs and other undermined methods

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

Table 4: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Femicide: Type of Weapon Used by Female Offenders According to Relational Context (n=48)*

| Type of Weapon | Relational Context | | | |
|------------------|--------------------|----------------------------|--------------------|-----------------|
| | Intimates (n=5) | Family & Friends (n=38) | Strangers (n=5) | Total (n=48) |
| Firearm | 40.0% | 10.5% | 20.0% | 14.6% |
| Knife** | 40.0% | 44.7% | 20.0% | 41.2% |
| Blunt Instrument | 0.0% | 2.6% | 0.0% | 2.1% |
| Hands, Feet | 20.0% | 39.5% | 0.0% | 33.3% |
| Other*** | 0.0% | 2.6% | 60.0% | 8.3% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

*Excludes those cases where type of weapon was unknown or not stated

**Includes other sharp instrument

***Other includes poison, fire, drugs and other undermined methods

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

A knife or other sharp instrument is most likely to be used by both male and female offenders when the relational context involves family or friends.

When a woman is killed, regardless of the gender of the offender, she is most likely to be killed with a knife or some other sharp instrument. This leads us to question whether this is also the case for men. Table 5 offers a comparison of the various types of weapons most commonly used to kill men and women. The figures reveal that both men and women are most likely to be killed with a knife or some other sharp instrument. Bodily force (hands and/or feet) is the weapon next most

Table 5: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Homicide: Type of Weapon Used According to Gender of Homicide Victims (n=2838)*

| Type of Weapon | Female Victims | Male Victims |
|------------------|----------------|---------------|
| Knife** | 33.1% | 38.2% |
| Hands, Feet | 27.8% | 24.7% |
| Firearm | 22.8% | 22.9% |
| Blunt Instrument | 11.8% | 11.4% |
| Other*** | 4.3% | 2.9% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% |

*Excludes 207 where either gender or type of weapon was unknown or not stated

**Includes other sharp instrument

***Other includes poison, fire, drugs and other undermined methods

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

likely to be used to kill both, and this is followed by a firearm and blunt instrument. That is, there is no discernible difference in the order of weapon types most commonly used to kill either a woman or a man. In other words, it would not be possible to predict the gender of a victim based on the type of weapon used to commit the homicide.

Given that the most common weapon used to kill both men and women is a knife or some other sharp instrument, it would be interesting to determine whether this was also the most common weapon used in femicides overseas. A review of international literature reveals that, similar to the situation in Australia, femicide victims in England and Wales (Smith & Stanko unpub.), Chicago (Block & Christakos 1995) and three western Canadian cities (Silverman & Mukherjee 1987) were most likely to be killed with a knife or some other sharp instrument. However, in North Carolina (Moracco et al. 1998) and in Detroit (Goetting 1991) a firearm was the most common weapon used to commit femicide—a similar finding to that of Wallace (1986), whose earlier research on homicide revealed that a firearm (34.7%) was the weapon most commonly used in New South Wales.

In summary, these findings indicate that a woman is most likely to be killed:

- by an intimate partner;
- as a result of a domestic altercation;
- in some private residence; and
- with a knife or some other sharp instrument.

Notes

¹ It is most likely that, if these offenders are identified, they may fit into the stranger category. However, it should be noted that there are some cases where the offender has been identified but not charged, because of lack of sufficient evidence.

² “Other location” refers to corrective institution, hospital/health care facility, shop/shopping mall, bank/credit union, car park, recreation food venue, public transport and connected facilities, taxi or similar, workplace/school, private motor vehicle, street, road, highway, sporting oval, open area/waterway.

Factors Associated with the Occurrence of Femicide

As we have shown, women in general are at a relatively low risk of homicide victimisation. In those rare instances where femicide does occur, there are a number of factors that are associated with an elevated risk. These include the location of the killing, the motive and the relational context. The likelihood of femicide will also vary in accordance with the degree to which these factors are related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the femicide victims and their offenders.

The following section will examine the socio-demographic characteristics of victims and offenders of femicide, based on the victim–offender relationship and the location of the incident, and will attempt to identify the socio-demographic characteristics associated with an increased likelihood of female homicide victimisation.

Age

As previously discussed, age is associated with mortality risk, just as the gender of victim and offender shapes the context within which a killing occurs. The mean ages of victims and offenders based on the victim–offender relationship are outlined in Table 6. The most striking finding is that the offender’s age varies according to the relational distance between the victim and offender—as the offender’s mean age decreases, so does the level of familiarity between the victim and offender. Offenders tend to be older than their victims in those incidents where the bond between the victim and offender is strongest, namely those relationships between intimates and family. However, when the bond between the victim and offender may be weaker, femicide offenders tend to be younger (Smith & Stanko unpub.).

Table 6: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Mean Age of Femicide Victims and Offenders According to Relational Context

| Relational Context | Mean Age of Victims | Mean Age of Offenders |
|------------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|
| Intimates | 36 years old | 39 years old |
| Family | 50 years old | 32 years old |
| Friends /Acquaintances | 36 years old | 31 years old |
| Strangers | 41 years old | 28 years old |

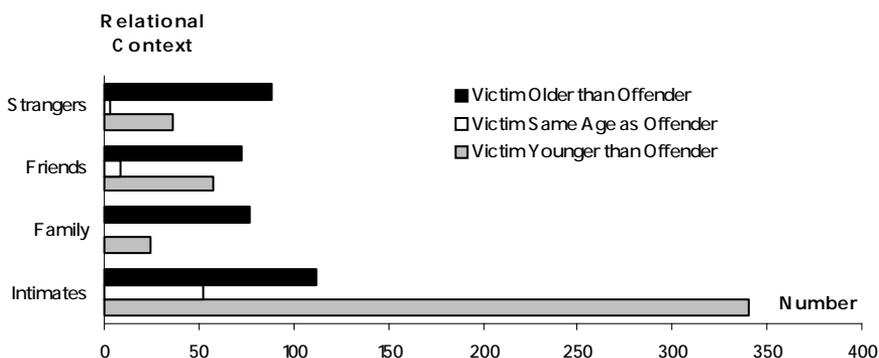
Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

Furthermore, there are distinct differences between *each* relational context in terms of the relative ages of the victim and offender (Figure 8). In an intimate relational context, the femicide victim is more likely to be younger than the offender. In the relational context of friends, the victim is likely to be younger or older than the offender but not the same age. However, when the femicide occurs amongst strangers, the victim tends to be older than the offender. These findings indicate that the risk of victimisation will vary according to both the victim-offender age differential and the relational context of the femicide.

Racial Appearance

This section examines the likelihood of victimisation according to the racial appearance of both victim and offender, and also whether the racial appearance of a woman is associated with an increased

Figure 8: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Age of Femicide Victim Compared to Age of Offender According to Relational Context (n=875)



Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

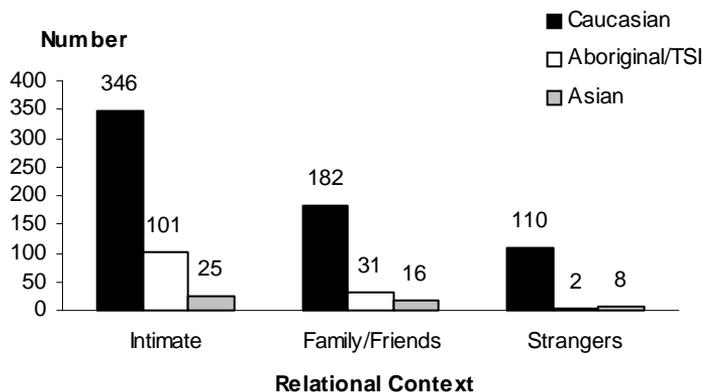
likelihood of victimisation, independent of the racial appearance of the offender.

For the purposes of the National Homicide Monitoring Program, the categories used for racial appearance are Caucasian, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (TSI), Asian and Other. It should be noted that these categories are not a perfect measure of ethnicity, or even of race, as they are based on subjective assessments made by police and are not immune from errors or inconsistencies.

When the distribution of femicide victims according to racial appearance and victim-offender relationship is examined, findings indicate that the majority of femicide victims (58%) were killed in an intimate relational context (Figure 9). However, the proportion of Aboriginal/TSI femicide victims who were killed by an intimate partner (75.4%) is higher than the proportion of both Caucasian (54.2%) and Asian (51%) femicide victims killed by an intimate partner. In the period under review, 58 per cent of femicide victims were killed in an intimate relational context.

Only 1.5 per cent of Aboriginal/TSI victims were killed by a stranger, whereas 17.2 per cent of Caucasian victims and 16.3 per cent of Asian victims were killed by a stranger. This difference may be explained in terms of the structure of Aboriginal/TSI communities, where more

Figure 9: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Distribution of Femicide Victims According to Racial Appearance and Relational Context (n=821)*



*In remainder of cohort, racial appearance was unknown or not stated, or was other than these categories

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

often than not Aboriginal/TSI people live amongst immediate family and relatives in a close-knit community where there is a high degree of familiarity. A stranger (most likely a displaced Aboriginal from some other area) who enters such a community is more likely to be noticed than in any other setting and therefore may have fewer opportunities to commit homicide.

Do these differences also apply to male homicide victims? Data from the NHMP data set, selecting only male victims aged 15 and over, indicate that, when Aboriginal/TSI men and Caucasian men are killed, they are most likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance. However, Aboriginal/TSI men are twice as likely (21.7%) as Caucasian men (10.2%) to be killed by an intimate partner. Overall, these findings indicate that a higher proportion of Aboriginal/TSI men and women than Caucasian men and women are killed by an intimate partner.

The proportion of femicide victims according to the racial appearance of the victim and offender, relational context and place of occurrence is displayed in Table 7. When femicide occurs, the victim and offender are most likely to be of the same racial appearance, usually of Caucasian appearance. In other words, femicides in Australia are

Table 7: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Proportion of Femicide Victims According to Racial Appearance of Victim and Offender, Relational Context and Place of Occurrence (n=821)*

| Racial Appearance of Victim and Offender | Intimate Home (n=367) | Intimate Other Location (n=105) | Family/Friends Home (n=173) | Family/Friends Other Location (n=56) | Stranger Home (n=34) | Stranger Other Location (n=86) | Total (n=821) |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|---------------|
| Victim Caucasian – Offender Caucasian | 77.4% | 56.2% | 78.0% | 75.0% | 73.5% | 84.9% | 75.3% |
| Victim Aboriginal/TSI- Offender Aboriginal/TSI | 16.6% | 34.3% | 11.0% | 16.1% | 2.9% | 1.2% | 15.5% |
| Victim Asian –Offender Asian | 3.5% | 2.9% | 7.5% | 1.8% | 5.9% | 2.3% | 4.1% |
| Inter-racial** | 2.5% | 6.7% | 3.6% | 5.4% | 17.6% | 11.7% | 5.1% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

*Excluding those offenders whose racial appearance was unknown

**Victim and offender were not of the same racial appearance

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

generally of an intra-racial nature—only 5 per cent of femicides occur between victims and offenders who are not of the same racial appearance. In addition, these inter-racial femicides are most likely to occur between strangers.

In contrast, approximately 10 per cent of homicides involving male victims were of an inter-racial nature and, similar to femicides, these were most likely to occur between strangers.

The place of occurrence also appears to vary with the racial appearance of both the victim and the offender. When Caucasian and Asian women are killed, they are most likely to be killed at some private residence. In contrast, when Aboriginal/TSI women are killed, they are most likely to be killed in a location other than a private residence.

Although similar in some ways to homicide between Caucasian people, homicide between Aboriginal/TSI people exhibits these unique characteristics:

- A higher proportion of both men and women are killed by an intimate partner.
- Women are highly unlikely to be killed by a stranger.
- Women are more likely to be killed in a location other than a private residence.

In addition to these, one of the most significant differences is the over-representation of Aboriginal/TSI people as both victims and offenders of femicide. In 16 per cent of femicide cases, both the victim and offender were of Aboriginal/TSI appearance (Table 7). Overall, Aboriginal/TSI women accounted for approximately 15 per cent of femicide victims, although comprising only about 2 per cent of the total female Australian population (ABS 1996). On the other hand, Aboriginal/TSI men (aged 15 and over) accounted for approximately 12.3 per cent of all male homicide victims.

Various researchers have put forward explanations as to why Aboriginal/TSI people have an elevated risk of both homicide victimisation and offending. Wilson (1982, 1985) examined the rates of homicide in Queensland's Aboriginal reserves and communities and found that they were ten times greater than for the State as a whole,

and rates of serious assault were at least five times greater. Wilson further noted that “high-violence” reserves differed significantly from “low-violence” reserves in a number of characteristics. For example, high-violence reserves had legally available alcohol; only low to medium levels of traditional culture; and relatively high populations. Most importantly, they were reserves that had received displaced Aborigines from other areas (1982, p. 18).

Reserves with low violence were characterised as having the opposite pattern. They were communities in which alcohol was not legally available; where relatively high levels of traditional culture survived; they had low populations; they were generally isolated from non-Aboriginal influence; and they were not receivers of people forced from their traditional areas.

Wilson (1982, p. 18) commented that:

These trends in violence and destruction on Aboriginal reserves point to explanations, which are familiar to observers of other societies. Whenever there is a lack of community cohesion, considerable mobility from one area to another and tribal disharmony, crime and violence rates escalate.

Furthermore, Martin (1993, p. 170) suggests that the intra-racial and intimate nature of Aboriginal femicide are indicative of the discrete and separate social worlds within which many Aboriginal people move. Violence and anger thus tends to be turned inwards rather than being directed at the wider society.

Marital and Employment Status

A number of researchers have discussed the relationship of homicide and marital status. Some argue that, for men, marriage is a form of social control that keeps them from engaging in the risky behaviour that attends homicide victimisation—frequenting the bar scene, heavy drinking, staying out late, fighting, etc. (Breault & Kposowa 1997). On the other hand, it has been found that, for women, marriage is more of a homicide risk than non-marriage (Gartner & McCarthy 1991). These studies suggest that any advantage marriage might otherwise have for women is offset by the homicide risk they face from their spouses. For example, Kposowa and Singh (1994) found that, in the United States, married women were twice as likely to be victims of homicide as were married men.

The routine activities theory states that socio-demographic characteristics associated with individuals spending more time at home should also be associated with disproportionately high levels of homicide at or near the home, in comparison with other locations (Messner & Tardiff 1985). This theory further suggests that socio-demographic characteristics such as gender (female), employment status (not working) and marital status (married) are associated with higher risks of homicide victimisation at or in the home (see Messner & Tardiff 1985; Carcach & James 1998).

Our analysis shows that an increased likelihood of femicide victimisation is associated with four significant factors:

- (1) female victim not working;
- (2) male offender not working;
- (3) victim and offender are involved in an intimate relationship; and
- (4) victim spends most of her time in a private residence.

The proportion of femicide victims according to employment status of the victim and offender, relational context and place of occurrence is presented in Table 8. Approximately 63 per cent of femicides occur between intimates, at some private residence, with both the femicide victim and offender not working and hence spending more time in or

Table 8: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Proportion of Femicide Victims According to Employment Status of Victim and Offender, Relational Context and Place of Occurrence (n=875)

| Whether Victim and/or Offender are Working | Intimate Home (n=392) | Intimate Other Location (n=112) | Family/Friends Home (n=183) | Family/Friends Other Location (n=60) | Stranger Home (n=36) | Stranger Other Location (n=92) |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Victim Working–Offender Working | 12.5% | 17.9% | 7.7% | 10.0% | 0.0% | 6.5% |
| Victim Working–Offender Not Working | 7.7% | 5.4% | 9.3% | 11.7% | 8.3% | 29.3% |
| Victim Not Working–Offender Working | 17.3% | 19.6% | 16.9% | 10.0% | 11.1% | 14.1% |
| Victim Not Working–Offender Not Working | 62.5% | 57.1% | 66.1% | 68.3% | 80.6% | 50.0% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

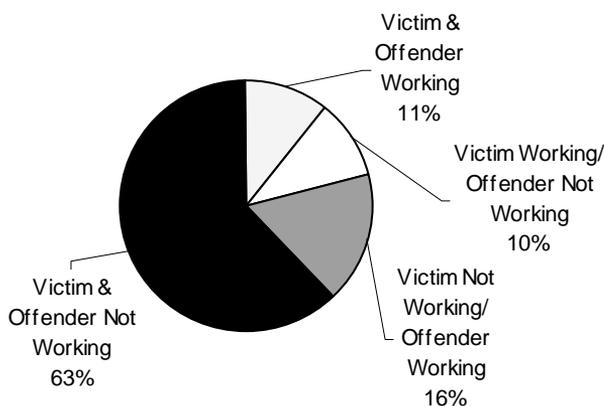
at the home. In addition, regardless of the victim–offender relationship and location of the incident, femicide is most likely to occur amongst those who are not working (see Figure 10).

There is a perception that homicide is commonly associated with people who are of low socioeconomic status (SES). James and Carcach (1998) suggest that almost 85 per cent of victims, and a little over 90 per cent of offenders, belong to what can be described as an under-class in Australian society. Similarly, in a study of homicides that occurred in New South Wales between 1968 and 1981, it was found that marital violence resulting in death only very rarely occurred in the professional, semi-professional and managerial classes (Wallace 1986). Moreover, large-scale survey data indicate that the poorer the woman, the more likely she is to experience violence at the hands of an intimate partner. According to the US Department of Justice’s National Crime Victimization Survey (Bachman & Saltzman 1995, p. 4), women with an annual family income under US\$10,000 were more likely to report having experienced violence at the hands of an intimate than those with a greater income.

However, as Wallace (1986, p. 103) states:

It is important to emphasise that in itself, socioeconomic status may not be as important as the myriad of factors associated with that status.

Figure 10: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Percentage of Femicide Victims and Offenders Who are Working/Not Working (n=875)



Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

It would appear that, largely as a result of their economic status, women who are not in paid employment have fewer resources available to them to enable them to leave a violent relationship. Furthermore, unemployment and the accompanying financial pressures may exacerbate any existing conflict, and may contribute to an escalation of violence in an intimate relationship. Research has consistently shown that domestic violence is likely to escalate in stressful situations and to contribute considerably to family conflict (Gelles 1980; O'Donnell & Saville 1982).

One of the limitations of the National Homicide Monitoring Program is that the current data do not provide adequate measures of socioeconomic status to enable an examination of the association between socioeconomic status and homicide victimisation and offending. Similarly, Census data only record income information based on the household, not for each individual, making it difficult to determine the socioeconomic status of the individual victims of femicide without assuming that the total household income is a reflection of their income. However, based on previous national and international research that indicates violence amongst intimates varies according to socioeconomic status (that is, women on the lower end of the economic scale are at a greater risk of victimisation than their counterparts at higher levels), we would assume that this is also the case in Australia. This inference is supported by the fact that only 11 per cent of the femicide victims and offenders were recorded as being employed at the time of the incident (Figure 10).

On the other hand, the lowest likelihood of femicide victimisation, at least amongst intimates or family, is associated with the victim being employed (see Table 8 and Figure 10). These findings suggest that access to employment opportunities and economic independence reduce the amount of time that these women would spend in or near the home, and also reduce exposure to violence from an intimate partner. A woman's improved economic status may further reduce her exposure to violence, as the financial barriers associated with exiting a violent relationship may be lessened (Dugan et al. 1997).

Levinson (1989) offers another possibility—he posits that a man's incentive to harm or kill his partner is lowered as her economic value increases. Alternatively, one would expect that improvements in women's economic status may lead to increased violence against

women by men who perceive gains in women's status as threats to their own power (Dugan et al. 1997). However, in the present study, the lowest likelihood of femicide victimisation in an intimate relational context was when the female victim was working and the offender was not working (see Table 8).

Furthermore, given that femicide victims who are killed in an intimate relational context are more likely to be not working, hence spending more time at or near the home, it is interesting to compare them to the general female population. Labour force statistics indicate that married females have a much lower unemployment rate (5.6%)¹ than females who are not married (13.6%) (ABS 1997b). Based on these population statistics, we would therefore expect that, in the present study of femicide victims, married victims would also be more likely to be employed than unmarried. Contrary to expectations, the femicide victims in this study who were married or living in a defacto relationship were also more likely not to be working.

In summary, these findings suggest that, in accord with the routine activities theory, femicide is most likely to occur between intimate partners who are both not working. The victim of femicide is most likely to be younger than the offender, and the femicide is most likely to occur in or near some private residence.

Alcohol Use

Available information indicates that alcohol consumption contributes to the risk of homicide victimisation and offending (Wolfgang 1958; MacDonald 1961; Goetting 1991; Block & Christakos 1995). As previously stated, additional information was collected from coronial files from 1 July 1996 onwards. This indicated the victims' alcohol and illicit or prescription drug use at the time of the incident. Information collected prior to 1996 was based on police offence reports, and was not always recorded. These data were excluded from analyses.

The distribution of femicide victims according to whether they and/or the offender consumed alcohol, the relational context and the place of occurrence is shown in Table 9. Alcohol was not a major factor associated with the occurrence of femicide. However, when both the victim and offender were under the influence of alcohol, the femicide incident was most likely to occur in some location other than a private residence.

Racial Appearance and Alcohol Use

According to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey 1994 (ABS 1995), 76 per cent of respondents aged 13 years and over perceived the use of alcohol to be a problem in their local area. Moreover, nearly half of the male respondents (48.3%) and nearly a third of the female respondents also reported that they had consumed alcohol within the week of being interviewed. Respondents who lived in a capital city were also more likely than respondents living in other urban or rural areas to report having consumed alcohol within the last week.

Research indicates that alcohol has had a serious impact on some sectors of the Aboriginal/TSI population. The proportion of indigenous people who drink alcohol is lower than the proportion of drinkers in the total Australian population, but those who do consume alcohol do so at high levels (Alexander 1990; Mukherjee et al. 1998). The consequences of this “problem drinking” are high mortality, increased illness, serious deterioration in social wellbeing, cultural degradation and a high incidence of crime and family dysfunction (Douglas 1993).

A separate analysis was conducted that included the racial appearance of the victim and offender and whether they had been under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident. The results

Table 9: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Proportion of Femicide Victims According to Whether Victim and/or Offender were Under the Influence of Alcohol, Relational Context and Place of Occurrence (n=875)

| Whether Victim and/or Offender were Under the Influence of Alcohol | Intimate Home (n=392) | Intimate Other Location (n=112) | Family/Friends Home (n=183) | Family/Friends Other Location (n=60) | Stranger Home (n=36) | Stranger Other Location (n=92) |
|--|-----------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------|----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Both Victim & Offender | 21.7% | 32.1% | 12.6% | 35.0% | 2.8% | 16.3% |
| Victim & Not Offender | 1.8% | 1.8% | 4.9% | 1.7% | 2.8% | 2.2% |
| Offender & Not Victim | 9.2% | 4.5% | 13.7% | 13.3% | 2.8% | 18.5% |
| Neither Victim nor Off. | 67.3% | 61.6% | 68.9% | 50.0% | 91.7% | 63.0% |
| Total | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% | 100.0% |

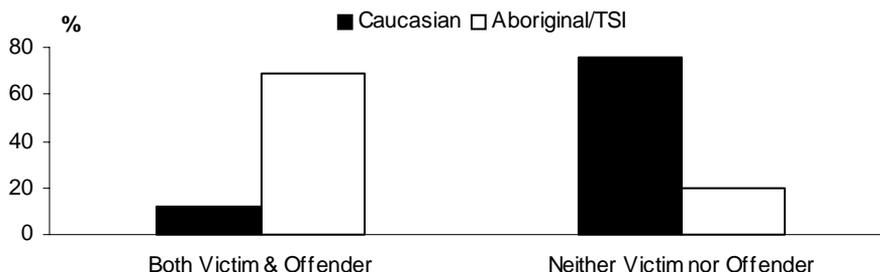
Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

of this analysis are shown in Figure 11. As expected, where information was available, in nearly three-quarters of the femicides that occurred between Aboriginal/TSI people, both the victim and offender were under the influence of alcohol. In contrast, only 12 per cent of victims and offenders who were of Caucasian appearance were both under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident (see Figure 11).

Or conversely, 75 per cent of victims and offenders who were of Caucasian appearance were not under the influence of alcohol, whereas only 19 per cent of victims and offenders of Aboriginal/TSI appearance were not under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident (see Figure 11).

These findings indicate that there is a relatively high level of alcohol involvement in femicides that occur between Aboriginal/TSI people. However, patterns of alcohol consumption cannot be considered in isolation. Irrespective of the motivations for its use, alcohol consumption takes on its own dynamic and meanings. According to the work of many researchers, Aboriginal drinking has been widely assimilated into basic cultural notions such as those of sharing and reciprocity (Brady & Palmer 1984). For example, Sansom (1980) and Collmann (1988) point to liquor being a valued item in Aboriginal

Figure 11: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998: Comparison of Caucasian and Aboriginal/TSI Victims and Offenders of Femicide, According to Whether they were Under the Influence of Alcohol or Not (n=703)*



*Excludes 172 cases where only the victim or the offender were under the influence of alcohol, and also excludes victims and offenders whose racial appearance was Asian or Other
 Source: National Homicide Monitoring Program, Australian Institute of Criminology

exchanges. Stotz (1989), working in the Tennant Creek area of the Northern Territory, states that alcohol is integrated into the economic system of reciprocity, for example the “shout”, where each drinker takes turns in buying alcohol for his mates. Alcohol has also been used as a commodity in gambling, reciprocal exchanges as already mentioned, and as a means of creating credit (Brady 1992).

It would be overly simplistic to attribute the excessive alcohol consumption found in the present study merely to differences in cultural background. Nonetheless, it should be acknowledged that any treatment or intervention measures proposed must take into consideration that the treatment needs for Aboriginal problem drinkers are different to those for non-Aborigines (Douglas 1993).

Notes

¹ This excludes women who are not in the labour force (home duties).

Explaining the Incidence of Femicide Between Intimates

The findings discussed in the previous chapter indicated that women are more likely to be killed by an intimate partner, and that this increased likelihood is also associated with a variety of factors including age, marital status, employment status, racial appearance and alcohol consumption. Many of these factors are interlinked, however, and it may be possible that the relationship of a particular variable to the risk of victimisation could be explained by a third variable. For example, the relationship between femicide victimisation by an intimate and the incident occurring at some private residence might be at least partly explained by differences in employment and marital status, which are both related to spending greater amounts of time in the home.

The analyses presented in earlier chapters only examined one or two factors, in relation to femicide victimisation, at a time. In effect, this may have resulted in the magnification or suppression of some interactions. A more complete analysis requires that account be taken of the independent effects upon victimisation of a number of factors. One way to do this is by using the statistical technique known as logistic regression.¹ This chapter examines the factors influencing the killing of a woman by her intimate partner and summarises the results of a logistic regression analysis of the probability of a femicide incident involving intimate partners.

Logistic Regression Model Construction

The first step in constructing the logistic regression model involved the selection of explanatory variables and the definition of the categories for inclusion in the model. This consisted of determining, for each explanatory variable, the distribution of its degree of association with the occurrence of a femicide incident between

intimate partners and whether this association varied across the categories of the potential predictor. The second step involved defining new dichotomous variables for those categories of the potential explanatory factors that were associated with the occurrence of intimate partner femicide relative to the other categories.

Given the prominent role that motive plays in the occurrence of any homicide, the relevant variables relating to the motive of the incident were included as part of the model. The next variable considered for inclusion in the model was the location of the incident—that is, whether the femicide occurred at some private residence or some other location. As this factor made a contribution to explanatory power, its interaction with motive was assessed. The process continued by assessing the contribution of the employment status of the victim and/or offender at the time of the incident. This was followed by the inclusion of variables such as racial appearance of the victim and offender, and also whether the victim and offender had been under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident. The explanatory power of each variable was assessed in terms of its theoretical relevance, whether its associated regression coefficient was significant, and its contribution to model fit.

Model Results

Table 10 presents the estimated logistic regression coefficients and odds ratios for the model of intimate partner femicide.

Table 10: Estimated Logistic Regression Coefficients and Odds Ratios for Model of Intimate Partner Femicide (n=972)

| Variable | Coefficient | Odds Ratio |
|--|-----------------|------------|
| Motive of Jealousy | **3.60 | 36.5 |
| Domestic Altercation | **4.93 | 138.2 |
| Incident Occurred at Home | **1.04 | 2.8 |
| As a Result of a Domestic Altercation that Occurred at Home | **−2.48 | 0.1 |
| Victim was Working | *−0.78 | 0.5 |
| Victim was Younger than the Offender | **1.23 | 3.4 |
| Both Victim and Offender were Under the Influence of Alcohol | **0.64 | 1.9 |
| Constant | **−2.88 | |
| Model Chi-Square | **567.26 | |

** $p < 0.01$

* $p < 0.05$

Findings indicate that femicide incidents due to domestic altercations are most likely to involve intimate partners (Table 10). However, this must be considered together with whether the incident occurred at home or not. Note the negative regression coefficient for the interaction between motive and location of the incident. This indicates that differences in the risk of intimate partner femicide due to the domestic nature of the argument are reduced as a result of the incident occurring at home. In other words, regardless of the motive of the offender, if a woman is killed at home she is most likely to be killed by an intimate partner. This finding is consistent with previous research which found that intimate homicide incidents occur more frequently at home, where the level of guardianship is minimal, and it serves to further highlight the significant role that the absence of social control plays in the incidence of femicide between intimate partners.

Findings of the logistic regression model (Table 10) also show that:

- The motive of jealousy appears as the second highest factor associated with the occurrence of intimate partner femicide. A femicide incident where the motive is jealousy is 36 times more likely to involve intimate partners than other femicide incidents, excluding those incidents where the motive was primarily a domestic altercation.
- Femicide incidents where the victim is younger than the offender are about three and a half times more likely to involve intimate partners than other femicide incidents.
- Incidents where both the victim and offender were under the influence of alcohol are almost twice as likely to occur between intimate partners as other femicide incidents;
- Finally, femicide incidents where the victim was working were only half as likely to involve intimate partners as incidents where the victim was not working or not in the labour force.

It is important to note that, in the process of model development, whether the victim and offender were of Aboriginal/TSI appearance or not was one of the initial variables chosen for inclusion in the model. However, including this variable did not add any explanatory power to the model. In other words, Aboriginality was not a significant factor associated with the occurrence of femicide between

intimate partners. However, given that a high proportion of Aboriginal/TSI victims and offenders had been under the influence of alcohol at the time of the femicide incident, it seems that alcohol consumption as a predictor of intimate partner femicide overshadows the explanatory power of Aboriginality.

It must be emphasised that caution should be exercised when interpreting the results of this regression analysis. These results should not be interpreted as referring to the risk of a woman being killed by a partner; rather they should be interpreted as factors that are significantly associated with the risk of a given femicide involving intimate partners.

Notes

¹ For a comprehensive theoretical treatment of logistic regression refer to Tabachnick and Fidell (1996) and Agresti (1990).

Comparing Men and Women as Victims of Homicide

Throughout this study, femicide victims have been compared to male homicide victims, highlighting differences and similarities between the two. However, the important question—how the killing of women differs from the killing of men—cannot be answered without being able to compare all the differences and similarities at the same time. This chapter presents the results of a comparison between male and female victims of homicide, and will attempt to identify the characteristics that are unique to the killing of women in Australia.

A comparison between male and female homicide victims on characteristics associated with the incident, victim and offender, and the relationship between the victim and offender, is shown in Table 11. It is quite obvious that there are differences between the killing of women and the killing of men and that these differences are prevalent in all facets of homicide, from the incident itself to victim and offender characteristics and the victim–offender relationship.

Given that the motivation for each homicide incident tends to be associated with the gender of the victim (Table 11), it is not surprising to find other differences distinguishing male and female victims of homicide.

In summary, the main differences between the killing of a woman and the killing of a man are:

- A woman is more likely than a man to be killed at home.
- A woman is more likely to be killed as a result of a domestic altercation, whereas a man is more likely to be killed as a result of an alcohol-related argument.
- A female victim is more likely to be younger than the offender, whereas a male victim is more likely to be older than the offender.

**Table 11: AUSTRALIA, 1 July 1989 – 30 June 1998:
Comparison of Relevant Characteristics Between
Male and Female Homicide Victims Aged 15 and
Over**

| Characteristics | Femicide Victims (n=875) | Male Victims (n=1574) |
|---|-----------------------------|--------------------------|
| <i>Incident Characteristics</i> | | |
| Incident Occurred at Private Residence | *69.8% | 54.7% |
| Incident Occurred at Other Location | *30.2% | 45.3% |
| Alleged Motive of Incident: | | |
| Jealousy/Desertion | *29.4% | 7.1% |
| Domestic Altercation | *43.7% | 13.7% |
| Money/Drugs | *7.3% | 15.2% |
| Revenge | *2.6% | 11.7% |
| Alcohol-related Argument | *5.0% | 24.1% |
| Other | *3.2% | 19.4% |
| No Apparent Motive | 8.8% | 8.8% |
| Most Common Weapon Used to Kill Victim: | | |
| Knife and Other Sharp Instrument | 33.1% | 38.2% |
| <i>Victim – Offender Characteristics</i> | | |
| Age: | | |
| Mean Age of Victim | 38 years | 37 years |
| Mean Age of Offender | 35 years | 29 years |
| Median Age of Victim | 35 years | 34 years |
| Median Age of Offender | 32 years | 27 years |
| Victim Younger than Offender | *52.5% | 31.0% |
| Victim Same Age as Offender | 7.4% | 5.8% |
| Victim Older than Offender | *40.1% | 63.2% |
| Gender of Offender: | | |
| Male Offender | *93.8% | 85.8% |
| Female Offender | *6.2% | 14.2% |
| Racial Appearance: | | |
| Victim & Offender Caucasian | 75.3% | 74.3% |
| Victim & Offender Aboriginal/TSI | *15.5% | 11.7% |
| Inter-racial Homicides | *5.1% | 9.6% |
| Employment Status: | | |
| Victim/Offender Working | 10.9% | 10.2% |
| Victim Working/Offender Not Working | *10.3% | 22.6% |
| Victim Not Working/Offender Working | *16.5% | 8.2% |
| Victim/Offender Not Working | 62.4% | 59.0% |
| Alcohol Consumption: | | |
| Both Victim & Offender Drinking | *20.7% | 39.1% |
| Victim Drinking But Not Offender | *2.5% | 6.0% |
| Offender Drinking But Not Victim | 10.5% | 8.3% |
| Neither Victim nor Offender Drinking | *66.3% | 46.4% |
| <i>Victim – Offender Relationship</i> | | |
| Intimates | *57.6% | 11.1% |
| Family | 11.8% | 12.3% |
| Friends/Acquaintances | *16.0% | 44.9% |
| Strangers | *14.6% | 31.8% |

* $p < 0.05$

- Female victims are less likely than male victims to be killed by females.
- Homicides involving female victims are less likely than homicides involving male victims to be of an inter-racial nature.
- Homicides involving female victims are less likely than homicides involving male victims to involve alcohol.
- A female is more likely to be killed by an intimate partner, whereas a male is more likely to be killed by a friend or acquaintance.

In essence, it is these differences combined that make the killing of a woman different to the killing of a man.

In addition, there are some similarities between the killing of a woman and the killing of a man:

- Men and women are both most likely to be killed with a knife or some other sharp instrument.
- A similar percentage of men and women victims are the same age as their offenders.
- The distribution of employment status (victim and offender) did not differ between male and female homicide victims.
- The distribution of alcohol involvement (victim not drinking/offender drinking) did not differ between male and female victims.
- A similar proportion of male and female homicide victims (approximately 12%) are killed by a family member.

This chapter has highlighted the fact that, unless we apply a gendered focus to homicide, we cannot begin to understand the distinct situations in which it occurs (Smith & Stanko unpub.). As we have also seen, no single characteristic explains the complex dynamics existing between the interaction of events and life circumstances that lead to homicide victimisation. However, what we are able to extract from these findings is the knowledge of how the killing of women differs from the killing of men. Essentially, the differing characteristics of homicide victimisation are directly connected to whether the victim is a male or a female. It is only after we are equipped with such knowledge that we can properly address policy issues in order to meet the separate needs of males and females.

Conclusion

It must be borne in mind that homicide is a rare occurrence in Australia, and the killing of women is even less common. This report has identified factors associated with an increased likelihood of such an occurrence, and characteristics unique to femicide victimisation. All available evidence points to the central role that an intimate relational context plays as an antecedent to femicide. To reiterate, just over half of the adult female homicide victims were killed by an intimate partner, mostly as a result of a domestic argument or the woman's termination of the relationship. Factors that are associated with a woman spending more time at home—that is, not working—are also associated with an increased likelihood of victimisation. Not surprisingly, when a woman is killed, she is most likely to be killed in the privacy of her own home.

Consistent with the findings of previous research, femicide is overwhelmingly a result of masculine violence. However, it should be noted that femicide, as a subset of homicide, takes on many forms. As the homicide drama unfolds, it is often difficult to capture all the factors leading one person to use lethal violence. While the present study has attempted to order femicide into meaningful categories, at times the types blur at the edges and, in a number of instances where information was recorded as missing, the true extent of some interactions may not be known. Nonetheless, the information available from the data set is still sufficient to differentiate between the killing of a man and the killing of a woman, based on the characteristics of the homicide.

In order to develop and implement effective policy interventions that address the particular needs of women, it is important to focus specifically on conflicts that arise from day-to-day interactions between people (Stark & Flitcraft 1996). The types of pressures faced by intimate partners who are not working need to be identified, as it is

the women in these relationships who have an increased likelihood of femicide victimisation. With the revision of the NHMP data collection form in July 1996, additional data on “arguments of a domestic nature” can now be collected. This will provide further insight into the exact nature of the domestic argument—whether it was over a custody dispute, the abuse of alcohol or drugs, or money problems.

In addition, more information is required on the length of the separation (if the couples were separated), because research suggests that actual or imminent separation is highly relevant to risk, with the period immediately after the estrangement associated with particularly high risk (Wilson & Daly 1993). It is also important to identify whether or not the victim had sought previous legal remedies, such as an Apprehended Violence Order. The availability of such information would facilitate the development of more structured policy interventions to enhance the safety of women.

Policy Implications

The majority of femicide victims were killed by an intimate partner in a private residence and it is difficult to develop policy interventions for lethal violence that occurs in the private domain, where the amount of external social control is very limited¹ (Carcach & James 1998). However, an important finding in the present study is that victims who were employed at the time of the incident had the lowest risk of victimisation by an intimate partner. This implies that women who are working may consequently experience less conflict associated with a lack of financial resources.

In addition, the most obvious reason associated with the decreased likelihood of femicide victimisation for women who were working may be that, by working, women are spending less time in or near the home, where the amount of social control is minimal. This sheds some light on how some of the factors associated with an increased likelihood of victimisation may be amenable to modification.

Considering that, in some cases, homicides by male partners are beatings that go too far (Browne 1997), one suggestion is that women who are not working need to have better access to resources and services that protect women and that would allow them to protect themselves. Greater social support for women is also required. By

providing women with information and networking with legal and other services, women may be in a better position to deal with conflict when it arises. Better access to resources and information means that women who are faced with violence in the home can develop a real option to leave the relationship. Lack of financial resources would not be a barrier to escaping the violence that can lead to death.

Although violence between intimates exists across the economic spectrum, homicide between intimate partners tends to be confined to those at the lower end of the spectrum. Intimate couples who are of low socioeconomic status would therefore require greater efforts to address the underlying issues of any conflict. We know that the greater proportion of femicide victims were killed by an intimate partner as a result of a domestic altercation, and that a high percentage of these couples were both not working at the time of the incident. The policy implications of these findings are that more assistance is required for couples experiencing pressures associated with economic hardship, to help them to resolve conflict effectively without resorting to violence. One suggestion is to offer subsidised counselling for these couples.²

Another important issue covered in the present study dealt with the over-representation of Aboriginal/TSI women as victims of homicide, and the vast majority of both victims and offenders who were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the incident. The results of the regression analysis did not reveal that Aboriginality was a significant factor associated with the occurrence of intimate partner femicide, but did reveal the significance of the involvement (or not) of alcohol in the incident. If this is the case, then there are fundamental issues that must be addressed concerning excessive alcohol use amongst Aboriginal/TSI people. These issues include empowerment; self-esteem and pride; meaningful occupation; and strengthening culturally-based social control mechanisms. “To say that alcohol is one of the factors that most destroys personal self-esteem and social life in Aboriginal communities is to state the obvious—but it is an obvious fact that requires reiteration” (Wilson 1982, p. 51). If these issues are not addressed, there may be no real chance of success in combating and correcting socially unacceptable behaviour in Aboriginal society (Palmer & Etter 1994).

Education programs can impart knowledge on the effects of alcohol abuse and can change attitudes, but they have little direct effect on alcohol consumption. More comprehensive programs that involve the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in managing and responding to the problem as a whole community are required to address the vicious cycle linking alcohol abuse and lethal intimate partner violence, and violence generally.³ Strategies need to be applied at both individual and community levels, giving due attention to some of the issues previously discussed in this study. Wilson (1982) notes that alcohol clinics run by Aborigines appear to have met with some success. Such clinics involve the Aboriginal community as a whole and focus specifically on Aboriginal ways of community life and counselling, including reference to traditional features of Aboriginal life.

The prevention of intimate, and often lethal, violence requires long-term changes in behaviour, but also cultural and social changes across the whole community so that violence is devalued as an appropriate way of resolving conflict in intimate relationships. This also applies to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Some offenders claim that violence directed at Aboriginal/TSI women is part of “traditional Aboriginal culture”, while others contend that this is rarely the case. Indigenous women do not endorse either view, rather they hold the belief that violence is not acceptable in any form (Langton et al. 1991, cited in Saggars & Gray 1998). However, prevention can never be imposed on a society or culture. If it is to be successful, prevention must involve people who are willing to listen and become involved (Brady 1998). It is therefore essential to provide resources for self-help, such as training for Aboriginal welfare workers, to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to help themselves.

By identifying factors associated with the increased likelihood of homicide victimisation for females, and by discussing the policy implications of these findings, we are able to contribute to the reduction of violence in Australia—not so much by reducing the absolute number of femicide victims, but by reducing the risk where risk is greatest.

Notes

¹ Alternatively, Black (1998) has argued that most intentional homicide in modern society can be construed as social control, specifically as self-help, intimates have numerous means by which to express grievances against one another, including direct criticism, ridicule, ostracism, deprivation, resort to third parties, desertion, self-destruction or violence. In the case of total strangers, the variety of social control is not so extensive, but its scale and severity may be enormous (1998, p. 3).

² For Aboriginal/TSI couples, the best form of counselling is referred to as "Narrative Therapy". Narrative Therapy offers a way for Aboriginal counsellors to develop practices that are culturally sensitive and appropriate. Many Aboriginal people have had to deal with negative stories about who they are. With Narrative Therapy, the counsellors are able to go through their journeys with them while they tell their stories, and acknowledge their strengths in a re-empowered way (Brady 1998).

³ For a comprehensive overview of ideas and strategies for managing alcohol in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, see Brady (1998).

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