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**Female perpetrated intimate
partner homicide: Indigenous and
non-Indigenous offenders**

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Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AIC	Australian Institute of Criminology
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
IPH	intimate partner homicide
IPHSD	intimate partner homicide supplementary dataset
IPV	intimate partner violence
NHMP	National Homicide Monitoring Program
SEIFA	socio-economic index for areas

Abstract

The current study was commissioned by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to examine the role of offender characteristics, historical circumstances and situational factors in female perpetrated intimate partner homicide, and how these factors may differ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders. The sample is based on 115 female intimate partner homicide offenders recorded in the National Homicide Monitoring Program between 2004 and 2014, with additional supplementary data from police, coronial and court records. The findings highlight that, while the immediate circumstances within which female perpetrated intimate partner homicides occur are varied, offenders are often involved in violent relationships, and have backgrounds of criminal activity, unemployment and substance misuse.

Executive summary

The majority of homicides perpetrated by women are against a male intimate partner. Despite this, little Australian research has examined the offender characteristics, historical circumstances and situational factors of female perpetrated intimate partner homicides, and whether these conditions are different for Indigenous and non-Indigenous women. To examine this knowledge gap, the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet commissioned the Australian Institute of Criminology (AIC) to undertake research into female perpetrated domestic violence and homicide. The current study used a descriptive and exploratory approach to analyse these factors in homicides committed by Indigenous and non-Indigenous women against their male partners.

The study population comprised women aged 18 years and over charged with the murder of a male intimate partner in Australia between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2014. The AIC's National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) was the primary data source for the study. The NHMP collates data on all homicide incidents, victims and offenders recorded by state and territory police. Data from the NHMP were supplemented with information drawn from police records and coronial findings stored on the National Coronial Information System, and publicly available case law documents, which were used to examine variables outside the scope of the NHMP. The latter data were available for a subset of offenders ($n=33$) identified in the NHMP and collated in the Intimate Partner Homicide Supplementary Dataset (IPHSD). Intimate partner homicide is the most common type of female perpetrated homicide, particularly among Indigenous women.

Between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2014, 302 incidents of female perpetrated homicide were recorded, involving 317 adult female offenders. These included 115 intimate partner homicide offenders (34%), 96 family homicide offenders (28%), 86 non-family homicide offenders (26%), and 20 homicide offenders in which the relationship with the victim was not stated or unknown (6%). Compared with non-Indigenous offenders, Indigenous female homicide offenders were significantly more likely to have killed an intimate partner ($n=44$, 60% vs $n=66$, 33%) than another family member ($n=15$, 21% vs $n=68$, 32%) or non-family victim ($n=13$, 18% vs $n=69$, 33%).

Most offenders were in established relationships with the victim, around half of which were characterised by domestic violence.

Female IPH offenders were typically in relationships at the time of the homicide ($n=103$, 90%). The majority of relationships were characterised by a history of domestic violence ($n=58$, 60%) committed by the offender, victim or both. Among the 15 incidents where the direction of the violence was stated, women were either the primary victims of male perpetrated abuse ($n=8$, 53%) or the simultaneous perpetrators and victims of reciprocal violence ($n=7$, 47%). In no relationship was the violence described as perpetrated only by the female against their male partner. Women frequently killed their intimate partners in a single spontaneous episode of violence following some type of conflict with the victim ($n=14$, 52%). In many incidents, the male partner physically or sexually assaulted the woman immediately prior to her killing him ($n=24$, 28%).

Female homicide offenders often had backgrounds of criminal activity, unemployment, substance misuse and mental health problems.

Half of women who killed their intimate partners were unemployed at the time of the homicide incident ($n=43$, 49%) and 40 percent had a criminal history recorded by police ($n=48$, 42%), primarily for assault ($n=21$, 44%). Many had a history of mental illness. Forty-two percent of the 33 offenders ($n=14$) from the IPHSD sample had a diagnosed mental health condition at the time of the homicide and 15 percent ($n=5$) had previous experience of mental illness.

Substance use and misuse preceded most homicides. The majority of offenders consumed alcohol ($n=57$, 68%) in the 24-hour period leading up to the homicide and a fifth had used illicit drugs ($n=13$, 19%). Forty percent of women at sentencing were identified as having alcohol misuse issues ($n=13$, 39%) or illicit drug use issues ($n=12$, 39%). A third were in a relationship with a partner who misused alcohol ($n=11$, 33%).

The adversities faced by female homicide offenders were amplified for Indigenous women.

The lives of Indigenous female IPH offenders were shown to be complex and characterised by adversity. Indigenous women were more likely than non-Indigenous women to be unemployed ($n=22$, 67% vs $n=21$, 38%), to have a criminal history ($n=26$, 77% vs $n=22$, 39%) and to have been in a relationship with a partner with a criminal history ($n=28$, 82% vs $n=32$, 58%). Most of the Indigenous women who killed their intimate partners were in abusive relationships ($n=24$, 67%) and 61 percent had partners with violent criminal histories ($n=17$). Substance misuse was also prevalent.

Approximately half of female perpetrated intimate partner homicides were premeditated.

There was a similar number of premeditated ($n=13$, 48%) and spontaneous ($n=14$, 52%) female perpetrated IPH incidents. In instances of premeditation, women engaged in behaviours that indicated a degree of planning (such as killing a sleeping victim or recruiting co-offenders), while spontaneous homicides exclusively included incidents that were preceded by a physical or verbal argument between the victim and offender with no evidence of premeditation. Indigenous offenders were more likely than non-Indigenous counterparts to have conflicts related to infidelity and jealousy ($n=16$, 40% vs $n=5$, 9%). Financial motives were more common among non-Indigenous offenders ($n=12$, 21% vs $n=1$, 3%).

Introduction

While the majority of intimate partner homicides (IPH) involve female victims and male perpetrators (Bryant & Cussen 2015; Mouzos & Rushforth 2003), women who commit homicide are most likely to do so against their male intimate partners (Dearden & Jones 2008). Female IPH has often been understood with reference to the perpetrators' histories of domestic violence victimisation. Research shows that the majority of women who kill their partners have been subjected to an extended period of physical and psychological abuse by their male victims (Daly & Wilson 1988; Del Tosto 1981; Ewing 1997; Kim, Gerber & Kim 2007; Schneider 2000). In these circumstances, female IPH has been framed defensively, as a measure to protect against immediate or longer term harm from their abusive partners (Dugan, Nagin & Rosenfeld 1999; Hines & Malley-Morrison 2001; Moen, Nygren & Edin 2016).

Women who are in well-established long-term relationships may have particular difficulty ending abusive relationships due to the damaging cumulative effect of domestic violence (Wolf et al. 2003), as well as entrenched dependence and investment in the relationship (Lee, Park & Lightfoot 2010). In support of this, research has found that women who kill their intimate partners are, on average, older (Block & Christakos 1995) and more likely to be married, have children and be cohabiting with the victim (Jordan et al. 2012; Kim, Gerber & Kim 2007) than other female homicide offenders. Despite this, not all women who kill their male partners have experienced domestic violence, and very few women who have experienced domestic violence go on to kill their partners. Efforts to understand the risk factors for female IPH must therefore look beyond the previous victimisation experiences of its perpetrators.

There is little evidence for the role of mental health issues in female IPH perpetration. Indeed, even research examining the role of mental illness in female intimate partner violence (IPV) has generated mixed findings (Caman et al. 2016; Mackay et al. 2018), although violent female offenders broadly are more likely than their male counterparts to have a history of mental illness (Jordan et al. 2012). At the extreme end of mental illness is suicidal ideation. Research indicates that when a man is at risk of suicide, his partner and children are at risk of being murdered (Block & Christakos 1995; Daly & Wilson 1988). However, it is unclear whether this applies to female IPH perpetrators. A recent review of approximately 20 years worth of coronial files in Quebec found that only 14 percent of female IPH perpetrators attempted suicide immediately following the homicide compared with 43 percent of male perpetrators (Bourget & Gagné 2012). Research suggests that substance abuse is a prominent feature of female IPH (Caman et al. 2016; Moen, Nygren & Edin 2016). In a recent study, more than half the sample

of female IPH perpetrators had previously been diagnosed with a substance misuse disorder and the majority were intoxicated during the homicide offence (Caman et al. 2016). Compared with men, female perpetrators were also more likely to have been hospitalised for substance misuse at some point in their lives (Caman et al. 2016).

It is important to examine female IPH perpetrators' history of contact with agencies such as social services, domestic violence support services, child protection services, and mental health and substance abuse services, which represent an important potential intervention point for supporting at-risk women before their situations escalate to homicide. It is concerning, then, that Yourstone, Lindholm and Kristiansson (2008) found that female homicide offenders were more likely than male homicide offenders to have sought help from formal supports (such as medical care, police and social services) in the six months leading up to the homicide.

Economic disadvantage is an important factor in criminal offending among women (Heimer, Wittrock & Unal 2005), but research on the role of socio-economic status in female IPH is mixed. Some studies have found that female IPH offenders are significantly more likely than male IPH offenders to be unemployed (Caman et al. 2016; Weizmann-Henelius et al. 2012), while others report that female homicide offenders are less likely to be homeless than male homicide offenders (Yourstone, Lindholm & Kristiansson 2008), and that female IPH offenders are more highly educated than other female homicide offenders (Jordan et al. 2012).

Several studies have shown that women who kill their partners are less likely to have criminal records than either men who kill their partners (Block & Christakos 1995) or women convicted of other offences (Kim, Gerber & Kim 2007; Moen, Nygren & Edin 2016). In contrast, Caman and colleagues (2016) found that a higher proportion of female IPH perpetrators compared with their male counterparts had a history of violent and non-violent offences. This variation could indicate that there is a subset of female IPH offenders with extensive histories of violence, who initiate and escalate violence outside of self-defence situations (Babcock, Miller & Siard 2003). In a study of 60 women attending a domestic violence intervention program, Babcock and colleagues (2003) differentiated between women who were violent only in the context of their intimate relationships and women who used violence in a variety of situations, not just in conflict with their partners.

Female perpetrated IPH incidents can also be distinguished on the basis of offence behaviours, and the immediate circumstances within which they occur. The literature has generally differentiated between spontaneous and premeditated homicides (Meithe & Drass 1999), a distinction which closely parallels that of expressive ('heat of passion') and instrumental (goal-orientated) crimes (Decker 1996; Maxfield 1989). Premeditated crimes are those that are planned or preconceived in some way, often conducted in pursuit of explicit goals such as acquiring money or improving one's social position, and often occurring among strangers or in the course of another crime (Meithe & Drass 1999). Spontaneous crimes are less rational—unplanned acts of anger, rage or frustration, often emerging from arguments, brawls, romantic triangles and other interpersonal conflicts (Decker 1996; Meithe & Drass 1999). Meithe and Drass' (1999) research examined a range of victim-offender relationships and both male and female offenders, and found that women tended to perpetrate spontaneous (expressive)

homicides. Supporting this notion, female perpetrated IPV has been linked with the expression of anger (Hamberger et al. 1997), poor anger management skills and perceived lack of alternatives to violence (Robertson & Murachver 2007).

However, this depiction of female homicide as unplanned expressions of uncontrolled emotion does not account for the variations found in how female homicide occurs. Indeed, instrumental motivations may be more common in incidents of female IPH than generally accepted in the literature. A recent study of female perpetrated homicide incidents in South Korea found that approximately 60 percent were premeditated and about 30 percent involved an accomplice (Kim et al. 2018). Similarly, a systematic review of female perpetrated IPV (Mackay et al. 2018) revealed that common motivations include retaliation, control or instrumental gain, and problems managing negative emotions. There is empirical evidence that women report using violence in retaliation for previous violence (Hamberger et al. 1997) or to 'get back at' or punish their partner (Kernsmith 2005), and both female and male perpetrators report using violence to control (Hamberger et al. 1997; Kernsmith 2005), dominate (Robertson & Murachver 2007) and humiliate their partners (Rode, Rode & Januszek 2015). Even spontaneous female IPH incidents perpetrated in reaction to some perceived wrongdoing may still be instrumental (Felson 1993) in that they are motivated by a particular goal, whether revenge, control, self-defence or financial gain.

Unfortunately, outside of the motivations and level of premeditation for female IPH, there is little research on the immediate situational contexts of these incidents. As domestic violence incidents typically occur in the victim and offenders' shared residence (Boxall et al. 2018) it follows that female IPH is significantly more likely than other female perpetrated homicides to occur in the family home shared with the victim (Moen, Nygren & Edin 2016). Additionally, while the private settings of most IPV incidents have likely limited the examination of bystander interventions, research has more recently started to do so (eg Boxall et al. 2018), highlighting another important avenue for further research into the situational contexts of female IPH. For example, recent research suggests that around a third of domestic violence incidents occur in public or semi-public locations and in the presence of children and other adults (Boxall et al. 2018).

When considering the factors related to female perpetrated IPH, a major gap exists in the understanding of ethnic and cultural differences between women who use violence (Dasgupta 2002; Miller & Meloy 2006; Stuart et al. 2006). This gap is particularly notable in Australia, where Indigenous Australians are over-represented among homicide offenders, with the rate of Indigenous offending being five times the non-Indigenous rate in 2013–14 (Cussen & Bryant 2015). In particular, nearly 90 percent of homicides perpetrated by Indigenous female offenders in 2013–14 were of intimate partners or family members (Cussen & Bryant 2015). There is an over-representation of Indigenous men and women in official crime statistics as both victims and perpetrators (Australian Human Rights Commission 2008; Cheers et al. 2006; State of Victoria 2016). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities also face significant adversities. They have higher rates of IPV (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW)

2018; Willis 2011), and greater prevalence of a number of risk factors for it, such as substance use (AIHW 2011), mental health issues (Jorm et al. 2012; Pink & Allbon 2008), socio-economic disadvantage (AIHW 2017), and unemployment (ABS 2013). Indigenous communities in rural and remote areas may also face particular difficulties accessing formal support services that could intervene before violence escalates to lethal levels. It is therefore important to understand how such factors may influence the perpetration of IPH among Indigenous women.

Research aims and questions

The Australian Institute of Criminology was commissioned by the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to undertake the current project examining the circumstances in which women perpetrate homicide against their male intimate partners. This study uses a descriptive and explorative approach that aims to analyse the role of situational triggers and broader contextual factors in female-to-male intimate partner homicide. More specifically, the project aims to answer the following research questions:

- What personal, contextual and situational factors are associated with women's perpetration of homicide against their male partners?
- Do these factors differ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous IPH offenders?

Method

Sample

The sample comprised female offenders aged 18 years and older charged with the murder of a male intimate partner in Australia between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2014. Intimate partners include current or former husbands, de facto partners, boyfriends or extra-marital lovers. Women charged with manslaughter were excluded from the study as the focus was offenders charged with intentionally killing their partners. Also excluded from the study were female intimate partner homicide offenders aged under 18 years at the time the charge was laid and offenders whose victim was a same-sex or temporary sexual partner.

Data sources

The study used two sources of data—the AIC’s National Homicide Monitoring Program (NHMP) and a supplementary dataset based on incidents identified from the NHMP and compiled for the purposes of the research. Additional socio-economic data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics were also sourced.

National Homicide Monitoring Program

The NHMP captures data on homicide incidents, victims and offenders recorded in Australia since 1989–90. Homicide is defined in the NHMP as the unlawful killing of a person and a homicide incident as an event in which one or more persons are killed at the same place and time. The NHMP collects data on all incidents resulting in a person being charged with murder or manslaughter, all murder–suicides classed as murder by police, and all other deaths classed as homicides by police (including infanticide) whether or not an offender was apprehended. The NHMP draws on offence records obtained from Australian state and territory police and state and territory coronial records from the National Coronial Information System. Court transcripts and media reports are used where suitable as supplementary sources of information. The accuracy of NHMP data is ensured through a quality control process that involves cross-checking the information contained in police offence records with these other data sources. The NHMP variables included in the current analyses are presented in the *Appendix*. Data are presented as offender counts, rather than incident counts, unless specified otherwise.

The NHMP was used to identify homicide, family homicide and intimate partner homicide incidents in which a woman aged 18 years or over was charged with murder (see Table 1).

Table 1: Female perpetrated homicide incidents, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014 (n)

	Incidents	Offenders
Intimate partner	113	115
Family homicide	94	96
Non-family homicide	76	86
Not stated or unknown	19	20
All homicide	302	317

Note: Homicide includes incidents in which a female offender was charged with murder

Source: AIC NHMP 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014 [computer file]

While data were collected from 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014, the homicide rates per 100,000 female residents presented in the results exclude the first six months of data. They are calculated from 1 July 2004 to 30 June 2014 because rates can only be calculated for 12-month periods.

Intimate partner homicide supplementary dataset

A supplementary dataset was compiled to examine IPH incident and offender variables outside the scope of the NHMP. Victim and offender personal information recorded in the NHMP was used to match incidents with National Coronial Information System records and case law documents respectively to collect additional information about each incident and offender. Sentencing remarks and judgement summaries were accessed from the Australasian Legal Information Institute and online databases of state supreme courts. Each jurisdiction has different rules regarding the availability of court documents, meaning that the available case law documents largely concerned matters in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland, with limited availability in Western Australia, South Australia, Tasmania and the Northern Territory.

Of the 113 incidents of female perpetrated IPH identified in the NHMP, 103 had police reports available, 79 had coronial findings available and 30 had case law documents available (which included 15 sentencing remarks, five judgements, six appeals, three procedural rulings and one bail application). The majority of documents contained limited detail on the variables of interest, resulting in 80 incidents of female IPH being excluded from the IPHSD due to lack of data. The final sample of 33 female perpetrated IPH incidents contained data from 25 case law documents, 26 police reports and 15 coronial files. For seven incidents data came from one source, for 19 incidents data came from two sources, and for another seven incidents data were available from all three sources. There were no instances in these 33 incidents in which different sources gave conflicting information. Rather, the extra information acquired through case law documents and coronial files was consistent with the information in the police reports, even though they did not specifically mention the police reports. The IPHSD variables included in the current analyses are presented in the *Appendix*.

The IPHSD largely comprised incidents perpetrated by non-Indigenous females ($n=26$, 79%). Information was available for only five Indigenous offenders. Indigenous status was unknown for two women (6%). Reflecting the availability of court documents, the largest proportion of the IPHSD sample came from Victoria ($n=13$, 39%), followed by New South Wales ($n=9$, 27%), Queensland ($n=5$, 15%), the Northern Territory ($n=3$, 9%), South Australia ($n=2$, 6%) and Western Australia ($n=1$, 3%).

Australian Bureau of Statistics data

ABS data were used to estimate the socio-economic status of the areas in which female offenders lived. Offenders' residential postcodes were matched with the socio-economic index for areas (SEIFA) Index of Relative Socio-economic Disadvantage (ABS 2011). This index ranks each area of Australia according to weighted indicators of the average income, education, occupation and assets of its inhabitants. Scores were then standardised to a distribution and the resulting standardised scores were used to divide areas into percentile groups. The SEIFA distribution was coded into deciles ranging from decile 1 (most disadvantaged) to decile 10 (least disadvantaged), and then recoded into quintiles ranging from quintile 1 (most disadvantaged) to quintile 5 (least disadvantaged).

Presentation of findings

Data presented in tables exclude not stated or unknown counts unless specified otherwise. The base may vary between tables due to exclusion of missing data.

Results

Incidents of female perpetrated intimate partner homicide

Female perpetrated homicide incidents identified in the NHMP were most commonly recorded in New South Wales ($n=86$, 28%), Queensland ($n=66$, 22%), Victoria ($n=59$, 20%) and Western Australia ($n=35$, 12%), reflecting the larger populations in these jurisdictions. No more than 10 percent of incidents were recorded in South Australia ($n=30$, 10%), the Northern Territory ($n=22$, 7%), Tasmania ($n=4$, 1%) and the Australian Capital Territory ($n=1$, <1%). Of the 303 incidents, 283 involved one female offender, eight involved two female offenders and one involved four female offenders. The rate of female perpetrated homicide incidents declined overall across the 10-year period from 0.43 incidents per 100,000 female residents in 2004–05 to 0.22 incidents per 100,000 female residents in 2013–14. As rates can only be calculated for 12-month periods, these rates exclude incidents occurring in the first six months of the study period (1 January to 30 June 2004) and only include incidents occurring between 1 July 2004 and 30 June 2014.

Similarly, the largest number of female perpetrated IPH incidents occurred in Queensland ($n=28$, 25%), New South Wales ($n=26$, 23%), Victoria ($n=20$, 18%) and Western Australia ($n=18$, 16%), followed by the Northern Territory ($n=11$, 10%), South Australia ($n=8$, 7%) and Tasmania ($n=2$, 2%; see Table 2). No female IPH incidents were recorded in the Australian Capital Territory between 1 July 2004 and 30 June 2014. The rate of female IPH incidents declined overall across the 10-year period, from 0.15 incidents per 100,000 female residents in 2013–14 to 0.10 IPH incidents per 100,000 female residents in 2014–15.

Table 2: Female perpetrated intimate partner homicide incidents, by jurisdiction and Indigenous status of offender, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total ^a	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
NSW	5	11.4	17	26.6	26	23.0
Vic	2	4.6	18	28.1	20	17.7
Qld	11	25.0	17	26.6	28	24.8
WA	15	34.1	2	3.1	18	15.9
SA	1	2.3	7	10.9	8	7.1
Tas	0	0.0	2	3.1	2	1.8
NT	10	22.7	1	1.6	11	9.7
Total	44		64		113	

a: Includes 5 incidents in which the Indigenous status of the offender was not stated or unknown

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Offender characteristics and histories

The largest proportion of female homicide offenders committed IPH ($n=115$, 36%; see Table 3), followed by other family homicides ($n=96$, 30%), and non-family homicides ($n=87$, 27%).

Table 3: Homicide offenders, by homicide type and Indigenous status, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Unknown		Total	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Intimate partner	44	60.3	66	31.1	5	15.2	115	36.3
Other family^a	15	20.5	68	32.1	13	39.4	96	30.3
Non-family/ domestic	13	17.8	68	32.5	5	15.2	86	27.1
Not stated/ unknown	1	1.4	9	4.2	10	30.3	20	6.3
Total	73		211		33		317	

a: Includes filicide, parricide, sibicide and other homicide involving family members

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Indigenous status

Twenty-three percent ($n=73$) of female homicide offenders were Indigenous and 67 percent ($n=211$) non-Indigenous (the Indigenous status of 33 offenders (10%) was not stated or unknown; see Table 3). The largest proportions of Indigenous IPH incidents occurred in Western Australia ($n=15$, 34%), Queensland ($n=11$, 25%) and the Northern Territory ($n=10$, 23%; see Table 2). Indigenous female homicide offenders, compared with non-Indigenous offenders, were significantly more likely to have killed an intimate partner ($n=44$, 60% vs $n=66$, 31%) than another family member ($n=15$, 21% vs $n=68$, 32%) or a non-family victim ($n=13$, 18% vs $n=68$, 33%), $\chi^2(2, n=275)=18.22, p<0.01$.

Age

The average age of all female homicide offenders was 35 years, ranging from 19 to 92 years. IPH offenders (mean age 38 years) were slightly older than other family homicide offenders (mean age 34 years) and non-family homicide offenders (mean age 35 years), although this difference was not statistically significant. The largest proportion of IPH offenders ($n=52$, 45%) were aged between 35 and 49 at the time of the murder. There was no significant age difference between Indigenous (mean age 36 years) and non-Indigenous IPH offenders (mean age 39 years).

Employment status

Half of all female homicide offenders were unemployed at the time of the homicide incident ($n=113$, 49%), 22 percent ($n=51$) were employed, 17 percent ($n=39$) were engaged in full-time domestic duties and 11 percent ($n=26$) were retired or on a pension (see Table 4). Analysis of IPH offender employment status by Indigenous status ($\chi^2(3, n=88)=8.787$, Fisher's exact $p<0.04$) indicated that Indigenous IPH offenders were significantly more likely to be unemployed ($n=22$, 69% vs $n=20$, 37%), while non-Indigenous IPH offenders were significantly more likely to be employed ($n=18$, 33% vs $n=2$, 6%). This likely reflects variation in employment status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women generally. There was no statistically significant difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous IPH offenders in the likelihood of being retired, on a pension or on domestic duties.

Table 4: Female homicide offenders by employment status, homicide type and IPH offender Indigenous status, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Intimate partner homicide						Other family homicide	Non-family homicide	Total female homicide offenders ^b			
	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total ^a							
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Employed	2	6.3	18	33.3	20	22.4	15	22.4	12	17.7	51	22.3
Unemployed	22	68.8	20	37.0	43	49.4	27	40.3	41	60.3	113	49.3
Domestic duties	6	18.8	10	18.5	16	18.4	18	26.9	4	5.9	39	17.0
Retired or pensioner	2	6.3	6	11.1	8	9.2	7	10.5	11	16.2	26	11.4
Total^c	32		54		87		67		68		229	

a: Total includes one IPH offender with unknown Indigenous status who was removed from significance testing

b: Includes 7 female homicide offenders for whom victim–offender relationship was not stated or unknown

c: Excludes 28 intimate partner homicide incidents (12 Indigenous offenders, 12 non-Indigenous offenders and 4 offenders of unstated or unknown Indigenous status), 29 other family homicides and 18 non-family homicides and 13 not stated/unknown-relationship incidents for which offender employment status was not available

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

As shown in Table 5, a large proportion of IPH incidents involved victims and offenders who were both unemployed ($n=25$, 44%). In fewer incidents, both the victim and offender were employed ($n=13$, 23%), or the victim but not the offender was employed ($n=15$, 26%). In only four incidents was the offender employed but not the victim (7%). Incidents with Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely to involve victims and offenders who were both unemployed ($n=14$, 74% vs $n=11$, 29%), while incidents with non-Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely to involve victims and offenders who were both employed ($n=12$, 32% vs $n=1$, 5%), $\chi^2(3, n=57)=10.951$, Fisher’s exact $p<0.01$.

Table 5: Employment status of IPH offenders and victims^{ab}, by Indigenous status of offender, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Indigenous		Non-Indigenous		Total ^b	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Offender and victim both employed	1	5.3	12	31.6	13	22.8
Offender and victim both unemployed	14	73.7	11	29.0	25	43.9
Only victim employed^c	3	15.8	12	31.6	15	26.3
Only offender employed^d	1	5.3	3	7.9	4	7.0
Total	19		38		57	

a: Excludes 33 intimate partner homicide incidents (involving 14 Indigenous offenders, 15 non-Indigenous offenders and 4 offenders of unknown Indigenous status) where either offender and/or victim employment status was not stated or unknown

b: Excludes 23 incidents (involving 11 Indigenous offenders, 11 non-Indigenous offenders and 1 offender of unknown Indigenous status) in which both the offender and victim were engaged in domestic duties and/or were retirees/pensioners

c: Incidents in which the victim was employed while the offender was unemployed, engaged in domestic duties or a retiree/pensioner

d: Incidents in which the offender was employed while the victim was unemployed, engaged in domestic duties or a retiree/pensioner

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Housing stability and socio-economic status

Information on housing stability was available for only 27 incidents. For 23 of these 27 incidents, the IPH offender had access to stable accommodation. Four offenders were in unstable accommodation.

SEIFA scores were calculated for 287 female homicide offenders, and indicated that the areas in which offenders lived were fairly representative of the general Australian population in terms of socio-economic status. SEIFA quintile 3 represents the middle 20 percent of the population in terms of socio-economic disadvantage, and the largest proportion of offenders lived in quintile 3 suburbs (*n*=75, 27%), followed by quintile 2 (*n*=62, 23%). The mean SEIFA decile score for all female offenders was 4.8, slightly under the population midpoint of 5. There were no statistically significant differences between homicide types in mean SEIFA decile scores, with 4.8 for non-family homicide offenders, 4.9 for other family homicide offenders and 4.7 for IPH offenders. Among IPH offenders (*n*=106), Indigenous offenders scored slightly lower than non-Indigenous offenders in residential socio-economic status (mean decile 4.1 vs 5.2), a difference that was not statistically significant.

Criminal history

Over half of female homicide offenders (*n*=123, 53%) had a criminal history recorded by police (see Table 6). Of the 123 female offenders with a criminal history, 50 percent (*n*=60) had been charged with a violent offence, primarily assault, 18 percent (*n*=22) with a property offence and 16 percent (*n*=19) with drug offences.

Table 6: Criminal history of homicide offenders and victims, by homicide type and Indigenous status of IPH offenders, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Intimate partner homicide						Other family homicide (n=96)	Non-family homicide (n=86)	Total female homicide offenders (n=317) ^a			
	Indigenous (n=44)		Non-Indigenous (n=66)		Total (n=115) ^a							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Offender criminal history												
Criminal history^b	26	76.5	22	39.3	48	53.3	29	40.3	43	67.2	123	53.0
Violent crime history^c	11	25.0	10	15.2	21	18.3	10	10.4	28	32.6	60	18.6
Offender prior offences^{cd}												
Assault	11	45.5	10	42.3	21	43.8	9	31.0	28	66.7	58	47.5
Robbery	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	3.5	–	–	1	0.8
Property offences	6	23.1	3	13.6	9	18.8	8	27.6	5	11.9	22	18.0
Drug offences	3	11.5	6	27.3	9	18.8	4	13.8	4	9.5	19	15.5
Other	6	23.1	3	13.6	9	18.8	7	24.1	5	11.9	22	18.0
Victim criminal history												
Criminal history	28	82.4	32	58.2	61	67.8	14	16.1	31	49.2	109	43.9
Violent crime history^c	17	50.0	10	18.2	28	24.4	8	8.3	17	19.8	54	17.0

a: Includes 3 female homicide offenders for whom victim–offender relationship was not stated or unknown

b: Excludes 25 intimate partner homicides (10 Indigenous offenders, 10 non-Indigenous offenders and 5 offenders whose Indigenous status was not stated or unknown), 24 other family homicides, 22 non-family homicides and 14 incidents for which victim–offender relationship was not stated or unknown for which offender criminal history was not available

c: Excludes offenders/victims for whom it was unknown whether they had a criminal history

d: Proportions are of female offenders with a criminal history. Excludes homicide, abduction/kidnapping and sexual assault, of which no female offenders had a criminal history

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Indigenous IPH offenders were significantly more likely to have a criminal history compared with non-Indigenous IPH offenders ($n=26$, 77% vs $n=22$, 39%; $\chi^2(1, n=90)=11.753, p<0.01$), which may be driven by the larger proportions of Indigenous women with criminal histories compared with non-Indigenous women. A larger proportion of Indigenous IPH offenders, compared with non-Indigenous offenders, also had a history of violent offending ($n=11$, 25% vs $n=10$, 15%) but these differences were not statistically significant. Forty-four percent of all homicide offenders murdered victims who had criminal histories ($n=109$), with 17 percent ($n=54$) involving victims charged with past violent offences. Assault was the most common prior victim offence type overall ($n=47$, 43%), followed by drug offences ($n=23$, 21%) and other unspecified offence types ($n=20$, 18%).

There were statistically significant differences between victims of Indigenous and non-Indigenous IPH offenders for both criminal history, $\chi^2(1, n=89)=5.588, p<0.02$, and violent offence history, $\chi^2(1, n=89)=10.066, p<0.01$. Eighty-two percent of Indigenous IPH offenders ($n=28$) and 58 percent of non-Indigenous IPH offenders ($n=32$) murdered victims with a recorded criminal history. A history of violent offences was recorded for half of IPH victims involving Indigenous offenders ($n=17, 50\%$) and 18 percent of victims of non-Indigenous offenders ($n=10$).

Substance misuse

Among the 33 offenders in the IPHSD sample, nearly 40 percent were identified as having alcohol misuse issues ($n=13, 39\%$) and illicit drug use issues ($n=12, 39\%$). A third of IPH offenders were in a relationship with a partner who misused alcohol ($n=11, 33\%$), and just under a fifth ($n=6, 18\%$) were in a relationship with a partner who had other illicit drug use issues. Indigenous IPH offenders were significantly more likely than non-Indigenous offenders to have alcohol misuse issues ($n=5, 100\%$ vs $n=6, 23\%$; $\chi^2(1, n=31)=10.839$, Fisher's exact $p<0.01$), and to be in a relationship with a partner with alcohol misuse issues ($n=4, 80\%$ vs $n=6, 23\%$; $\chi^2(1, n=31)=6.218$, Fisher's exact $p<0.05$). However, these numbers are small and should be treated with caution.

Mental illness

There was evidence that 14 of the 33 IPH offenders had a current mental health condition at the time of the homicide and five had a historical mental health issue not evident at the time of the homicide. Five offenders had a history of threatening ($n=2$) or attempting suicide ($n=3$).

Relationship characteristics

Relationship status

Sixty percent ($n=69$) of female IPH offenders were the current or former de facto partner of the male victim and 28 percent ($n=32$) were the current or former spouse (ie in a registered marriage with the victim; see Table 7). Chi-square analysis indicated that Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely than non-Indigenous offenders to be in de facto relationships with the victim ($n=32, 73\%$ vs $n=27, 41\%$), while non-Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely than Indigenous offenders to be currently married to the victim ($n=20, 30\%$ vs $n=8, 18\%$; $\chi^2(2, n=110)=11.41, p<0.01$).

The majority of IPH offenders were in a relationship with the victim at the time of the homicide incident ($n=103, 90\%$). Of the IPH offenders for whom information was available, most were living with the victim at the time of the incident ($n=32, 59\%$). Sixteen offenders (35%) were in a current relationship with the victim but not living together. Cohabiting status and whether the relationship was current or former did not differ significantly by Indigenous status.

Table 7: Relationship of IPH offender with victim, by Indigenous status of the offender, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Indigenous (<i>n</i> =44)		Non-Indigenous (<i>n</i> =66)		Total (<i>n</i> =115) ^a	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Relationship type						
Spouse	8	18.2	20	30.3	28	24.4
Divorced or separated spouse	–	–	4	6.1	4	3.5
De facto	32	72.7	27	40.9	63	54.8
Former de facto	1	2.3	5	7.6	6	5.2
Extra-marital lover	–	–	4	6.1	4	3.5
Girlfriend	2	4.6	5	7.6	8	7
Former girlfriend	1	2.3	1	1.5	2	1.7
Current relationship ^{ab}	42	95.4	56	84.9	103	89.6
Offender living with victim^c						
Offender and victim cohabiting	15	71.4	17	51.5	32	59.3
Offender and victim not cohabiting	6	28.6	16	48.5	22	40.7

a: Total includes 5 IPH offenders of unstated or unknown Indigenous status who were removed from significance testing

b: Includes current spouses, de facto partners, girlfriends and extra-marital lovers

c: Excludes 23 Indigenous offenders, 33 non-Indigenous offenders and 5 offenders of unstated or unknown Indigenous status for whom it was not known whether they were living with the victim at the time of the homicide

Note: Five offenders of unknown Indigenous status were removed from significance testing. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Children

Among the 33 offenders included in the IPHSD sample, the majority did not have any custodial children (*n*=18, 55%) or any children living in the family home at the time of the incident (*n*=19, 58%). The presence of children in the family home was not indicated for three offenders. There were only three offenders with custodial children for whom child custody disputes were identified in the IPH dataset, and no offenders had formal family law orders relating to children.

Domestic violence

Domestic violence is recorded in the NHMP if there was a known history of domestic violence involving the offender and the victim or if either party had been subject to a protection order or a participant in a behaviour change program or equivalent. A record of domestic violence refers to violence committed by the offender, the victim or both. Data on a history of domestic violence was recorded for 96 IPH offenders, with the majority ($n=58$, 60%) in relationships characterised by domestic violence (see Table 8). While Indigenous IPH offenders had slightly higher rates of recorded domestic violence ($n=24$, 67%) than their non-Indigenous counterparts ($n=34$, 58%), the difference was not statistically significant.

Table 8: History of domestic violence in the relationship, by Indigenous status of IPH offender, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Indigenous ($n=36$)		Non-Indigenous ($n=59$)		Total ($n=96$) ^{ab}	
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%
Domestic violence identified	24	66.7	34	57.6	58	60.4
No domestic violence identified	12	33.3	25	42.4	38	39.6

a: Total includes one IPH offender with unknown Indigenous status who was removed from significance testing

b: Excludes 19 offenders for whom data on any history of domestic violence was not recorded

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Domestic violence was evident in nearly half of the 33 relationships described in the IPHSD sample ($n=15$, 45%). In abusive relationships, violence was either perpetrated against the woman by their male partner ($n=8$, 53%) or reciprocal ($n=7$, 47%). In no relationship was the violence described as perpetrated only by the woman against their male partner. Physical violence was the most common type of abuse described ($n=12$, 80%), and in two incidents sexual violence was perpetrated by the male partner against the female. In another two incidents, the most serious form of abuse was psychological and emotional in nature, while in one case there was evidence of abuse but the type of abuse was not specified. There were no statistically significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous women in the direction and type of violence.

There was evidence of relationship instability in 45 percent of IPH victim–offender relationships ($n=15$). These relationships were most commonly described as being on-again-off-again relationships marked by fluctuating periods of separation and reunion ($n=9$), volatile relationships characterised by verbal arguments ($n=5$) and relationships with actual infidelity or accusations of infidelity ($n=3$). Many incidents were complex, with multiple factors contributing to instability in the relationship. In particular, all 15 victim–offender relationships where relationship instability was evident were also identified as violent relationships.

Incident characteristics

Premeditation

Among offenders in the IPHSD sample, there was a relatively even number of premeditated or planned incidents ($n=13$, 48%) and spontaneous incidents ($n=14$, 52%). In five incidents, there was insufficient evidence to make a determination about whether the homicide was spontaneous or premeditated.

Spontaneous homicides ($n=14$) included only those incidents in which there was a physical or verbal argument between the victim and offender prior to the homicide. This often involved the man physically or sexually assaulting the woman ($n=7$), which occurred in 21 percent of all incidents. The remaining incidents involved 'jealous rages' and romantic triangles ($n=4$) and verbal arguments not precipitated by physical violence ($n=4$).

In incidents coded as premeditated ($n=13$), offenders recruited co-offenders prior to the incident ($n=7$), attacked a sleeping victim ($n=3$), brought murder weapons and cleaning products to the scene prior to the incident ($n=3$), researched methods of committing homicide and/or associated penalties prior to the incident ($n=2$) or lured the victim to the scene under false pretences ($n=2$). In four of these incidents where court documents addressed offender motivation, offenders were said to have used the victim's death for some form of financial gain, such as life insurance money, shared properties or businesses, or to regain items believed to have been stolen by the victim.

Self-defence

The use of violence by a victim immediately prior to the IPH was recorded for 86 of the 115 IPH incidents. Victims used violence against the offender in over a quarter of these incidents ($n=24$, 28%; see Table 9). In 10 incidents (59%) the male victim initiated the violence and in seven incidents (41%) the female offender initiated the violence. The initiator of violence in the remaining seven incidents was not known.

There were no statistically significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous IPH offenders in whether victims used violence or in who initiated that violence.

Table 9: Victim use of violence against offender during or prior to intimate partner homicide, by offender Indigenous status, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Indigenous (n=37)		Non-Indigenous (n=47)		Total (n=86) ^a	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Victim used violence^b	11	29.7	11	23.4	24	27.9
Victim initiated	4	44.4	5	71.4	10	58.8
Offender initiated	5	55.6	2	28.6	7	41.2

a: Data are presented as incident counts rather than offender counts. Total includes two IPH offenders of unstated or unknown Indigenous status who were removed from significance testing

b: Excludes 7 incidents with Indigenous IPH offenders, 15 incidents with non-Indigenous IPH offenders and 3 incidents with IPH offenders of unknown Indigenous status for which victim use of violence against offender was not stated or unknown

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Motive

The most common motive for female perpetrated IPH was an argument of a domestic nature (n=65, 57%; see Table 10). Of these, the leading causes of the arguments were infidelity (n=14, 30%) and other unspecified reasons (n=14, 30%), followed by the consumption of alcohol (n=8, 17%). Less common motives were revenge (n=9, 8%), jealousy (n=7, 6%) and money (n=7, 6%). Just two IPH offenders were motivated by desertion or termination of the relationship by their intimate partner (2%).

There were statistically significant differences in the motives of Indigenous and non-Indigenous offenders within the IPH offender sample. When combining IPH incidents in which jealousy was a primary motive or infidelity was the cause of a domestic argument, 18 percent of all IPH incidents (n=21) had jealousy or infidelity as a motivating factor in the homicide. The NHMP defines jealousy as ‘jealousy of the intimate partner due to suspicion they are or have been in an intimate relationship with another person, whether or not this includes suspected or actual infidelity’. Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely than non-Indigenous offenders to have jealousy or infidelity as a motivating factor (n=16, 40% vs n=5, 8.69%; $\chi^2(1, n=98)=13.844, p<0.01$).

In 13 percent (n=13) of all IPH incidents, money was a primary motive or the cause of the domestic argument preceding the homicide. Non-Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely than non-Indigenous offenders to have money as a motivating factor (n=12, 21% vs n=1, 3%; $\chi^2(1, n=98)=6.808, p<0.01$).

Table 10: Motivation for homicide incident, by homicide type and IPH offender Indigenous status, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Intimate partner homicide						Other family homicide (n=96)	Non-family homicide (n=86)	Total female homicide offenders (n=317)			
	Indigenous offender (n=44)		Non-Indigenous offender (n=66)		Total (n=115) ^a							
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%		
Revenge	2	4.6	7	10.6	9	7.8	3	3.2	11	12.8	23	7.3
Jealousy	6	13.6	1	1.5	7	6.1	2	2.1	1	1.2	10	3.2
Desertion or termination	1	2.3	–	–	2	1.7	2	2.1	3	3.5	7	2.2
Argument of domestic nature	28	63.6	37	56.1	65	56.5	14	14.9	0	–	83	26
Money	–	–	7	10.6	7	6.1	1	1.1	18	20.9	29	9.2
Drugs	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	8	9.3	9	2.9
Alcohol-related argument	2	4.6	1	1.5	3	2.6	5	5.3	5	4.7	13	3.8
Sexual vilification	1	2.3	1	1.5	2	1.7	6	6.4	14	16.3	23	7.3
No apparent motive	–	–	4	6.1	4	3.5	37	39.4	13	15.1	54	17.1
Apparently delusional^b	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2.1	1	1.2	3	4.8
Not stated/unknown	4	9.1	8	12.1	16	13.9	24	25.5	12	13.9	63	20
Homicide motive if argument of domestic nature (n=67)^c												
Infidelity	10	50	4	14.8	14	29.8	–	–	–	–	14	22.6
Money	1	5	5	18.5	6	12.8	–	–	–	–	6	9.7
Custody of children	–	–	1	3.7	1	2.1	2	18.2	–	–	3	4.8
Upbringing of children	–	–	3	11.1	3	6.4	3	27.3	–	–	6	9.7
Relatives	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	9.1	–	–	1	1.6
Drinking	5	25	3	11.1	8	17	1	9.1	1	50	10	16.1
Drugs	–	–	1	3.7	1	2.1	–	–	–	–	3	4.8
Other	4	20	10	37	14	29.8	4	36.4	1	50	19	30.7

a: Total includes five IPH offenders of unknown Indigenous status who were removed from significance testing

b: Delusional state as identified and recorded by police

c: Excludes 18 intimate partner homicide incidents (8 Indigenous and 10 non-Indigenous), 3 other family homicide incidents and 2 relationship unknown homicide incidents where the motive was identified as a domestic argument the nature of that argument was not stated or unknown

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Location and circumstances

Most victims of female perpetrated homicide died in a private residence ($n=224$, 80%), the majority in their own home ($n=167$, 60%; see Table 11). Chi-square analysis indicated that the locations of IPH incidents were not significantly different to those of other family homicide incidents or non-family homicides.

When comparing incidents that occurred in residential settings (ie the home of the victim, offender or another person) vs non-residential settings (all other locations), there was a statistically significant difference by offender Indigenous status. Incidents involving Indigenous offenders were more likely to occur in non-residential settings ($n=12$, 29%) compared with incidents involving non-Indigenous offenders ($n=4$, 6%; $\chi^2(1, n=104)=9.411$, Fisher's exact $p<0.01$). Specifically, incidents involving Indigenous IPH offenders were significantly less likely to occur in the victim's home ($n=19$, 45%) or offender's home ($n=2$, 5%), and more likely to occur in another person's home ($n=9$, 21%) or on a street, road or highway ($n=7$, 17%; $\chi^2(7, n=104)=29.033$, Fisher's exact $p<0.01$).

Table 11: Location of female perpetrated homicide incidents^a, by homicide type and IPH offender Indigenous status^b, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Intimate partner homicide						Other family homicide incidents	Non-family homicide incidents	Total incidents with female homicide offenders			
	Indigenous offender		Non-Indigenous offender		Total ^c				n	%		
	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%	<i>n</i>	%		
Victim's home^d	19	45.2	45	72.6	66	61.1	70	76.9	26	38.2	167	59.6
Offender's home^d	2	4.8	12	19.4	16	14.8	3	3.3	14	20.6	36	12.9
Other person's home	9	21.4	1	1.6	10	9.3	4	4.4	6	8.8	21	7.5
Hospital	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2.2	1	1.5	3	1.1
Nursing home	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1.5	1	0.4
Shops	1	2.4	–	–	1	0.9	–	–	3	4.4	4	1.4
Car park	–	–	1	1.6	1	0.9	–	–	1	1.5	2	0.7
Recreation or food venue	1	2.4	–	–	1	0.9	1	1.1	1	1.5	3	1.1
Workplace or school	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1.1	–	–	1	0.4
Private motor vehicle	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1.1	–	–	1	0.4
Street, road, highway	7	16.7	1	1.6	8	7.4	2	2.2	9	13.2	22	7.9
Sporting oval or facility	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	1.5	1	0.4
Open area or waterway	3	7.1	2	3.2	5	4.6	5	5.5	3	4.4	13	4.6
Other	–	–	–	–	–	–	2	2.2	2	2.9	5	1.8
Total	42		62		108		91		68		279^e	

a: Excludes 23 homicide incidents in which incident location was not stated or unknown

b: Data are presented as incident counts rather than offender counts

c: Total includes four IPH offenders of not stated or unknown Indigenous status who were removed from significance testing

d: Where the victim and offender shared a residence, the incident location is coded as the victim's home

e: Includes 12 incidents in which victim–offender relationship was not stated or unknown

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Information on pre-homicide contact between the victim and offender was available for 27 IPH incidents in the IPHSD. In a quarter of these incidents ($n=7$, 26%), the victims and offenders moved between multiple locations together in the hours leading up to the homicide. This could involve the victim and offender consuming alcohol and socialising with others for several hours, while visiting public places and the homes of various friends and family members ($n=4$), but also included incidents where the victim and offender drove between various locations ($n=2$) or went to houses to obtain illicit drugs ($n=1$). Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely to move between multiple locations compared with non-Indigenous offenders ($n=4$, 80% vs $n=3$, 15%; $\chi^2(1, n=25)=8.383$, Fisher's exact $p<0.01$).

In over a third of IPH incidents ($n=10$, 35%), adults other than the victim and offender were present during or leading up to the incident, while in a fifth of incidents ($n=5$, 19%) children under the age of 18 years were present. Other adults present included co-offenders ($n=5$), friends and family of the victim and/or offender ($n=4$) or members of the public ($n=1$). A higher proportion of Indigenous offenders committed homicides with other adults present compared with non-Indigenous offenders ($n=3$, 60% vs $n=5$, 23%), while a higher proportion of non-Indigenous offenders committed homicides with children present compared with Indigenous offenders ($n=4$, 20% vs nil). Chi-square analyses of offender Indigenous status showed no statistically significant differences in the likelihood of adults or children being present at the time of the homicide.

Substance use during homicide

For those incidents in which offender alcohol and drug use was recorded by police, half of all female homicide offenders had consumed alcohol ($n=96$, 50%) at the time of the homicide incident, and one-fifth had used other drugs ($n=35$, 19%; see Table 12). Chi-square analysis of offender alcohol use by homicide type ($\chi^2(1, n=189)=19.861$, $p<0.01$) indicated that IPH offenders were significantly more likely than other homicide offenders to have consumed alcohol before the homicide ($n=57$, 68% vs $n=37$, 35%). There was no statistically significant difference between IPH and non-IPH offenders in whether they had used drugs.

The vast majority of Indigenous IPH offenders ($n=38$, 91%) had consumed alcohol preceding the homicide incident, a significantly larger proportion than non-Indigenous IPH offenders ($n=18$, 44%; $\chi^2(1, n=83)=20.504$, $p<0.01$). There were no statistically significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous IPH offenders in whether they had used drugs or the type of drugs used. Just under a fifth of Indigenous ($n=6$, 19%) and non-Indigenous offenders ($n=7$, 18%) had used illicit drugs during the homicide incident.

In the majority of IPH incidents, both the offender and victim had consumed alcohol at the time of the homicide ($n=52$, 66%). Less commonly, neither the victim nor offender had been drinking ($n=17$, 22%) or only the offender ($n=4$, 5%) or victim ($n=6$, 8%) had been drinking. Compared with incidents perpetrated by non-Indigenous offenders, those with Indigenous offenders were significantly more likely to involve both the offender and victim consuming alcohol ($n=37$, 93% vs $n=14$, 37%) and less likely to involve only the offender drinking (nil vs $n=4$, 11%) or neither party drinking ($n=1$, 3% vs $n=16$, 42%; $\chi^2(3, n=78)=28.24$, Fisher's exact $p<0.01$; see Figure 1).

In contrast to alcohol consumption, incidents in which the offender ($n=1$, 2%), victim ($n=6$, 10%) or both ($n=10$, 16%) had consumed illicit drugs at the time of the homicide were less common. In most incidents, neither the offender nor victim had consumed illicit drugs before the homicide ($n=44$, 72%). There were no statistically significant differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous IPH offenders in victim and offender drug use.

Table 12: Female homicide offender substance use during incident, by homicide type and IPH offender Indigenous status, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014

	Intimate partner homicide						Other family homicide		Non-family homicide		Total female homicide offenders	
	Indigenous offender		Non-Indigenous offender		Total		n	%	n	%	n	%
	n	%	n	%	n	%						
Alcohol use^a												
Alcohol	38	90.5	18	43.9	57 ^b	67.9	10	18.2	27	54	96	49.5
No alcohol	4	9.5	23	56.1	27	32.1	45	81.8	23	46	95	50.4
Total	42	100	41	100	84 ^b	100	55	100	50	100	189	100
Drug use^c												
No drugs	25	80.7	31	81.6	56	81.2	51	86.4	35	71.4	145	80.6
Drugs identified	6	19.4	7	18.4	13	18.8	8	13.6	14	28.6	35	19.4
Marijuana^d	3	60	1	14.3	4	33.3	2	28.6	6	46.2	12	37.5
Meth/amphetamines^d	3	60	2	28.6	5	41.7	–	–	4	30.8	9	28.1
Prescription drugs^d	1	20	–	–	1	8.3	5	71.4	4	30.8	10	31.3
Heroin^d	–	–	–	–	–	–	1	14.3	3	23.1	4	12.5
Other drug^d	–	–	3	42.9	3	25	–	–	4	30.8	7	21.9
Total	31		38		69		59		49		180	

a: Excludes 31 intimate partner homicide incidents, 41 other family homicides and 37 non-family homicides and 15 relationship-unknown homicide incidents for which offender alcohol use was not stated or unknown. Total includes 5 female homicide offenders for whom victim-offender relationship is unknown

b: Includes 1 IPH offender of unstated or unknown Indigenous status

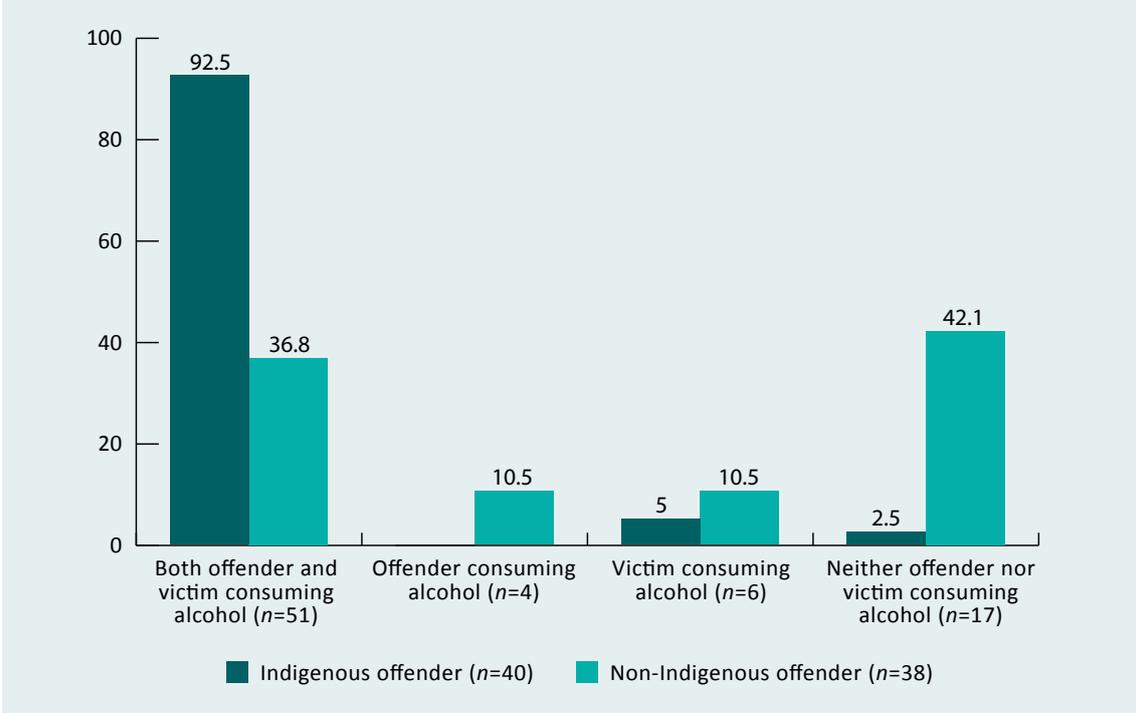
c: Excludes 46 intimate partner homicide incidents, 37 other family homicides, 38 non-family homicides and 17 victim-offender relationship-unknown incidents for which offender drug use was not stated unknown. Total includes 3 female homicide offenders for whom victim-offender relationship was not stated or unknown

d: Categories are not mutually exclusive as offenders could have consumed more than one substance. Percentages are of the number of offenders using an illicit substance (12 IPH, 7 other family homicides, 13 non-family homicides and 32 total female perpetrated homicides). Excludes 3 offenders (1 non-Indigenous intimate partner homicide, 1 other family homicide and 1 non-family homicide) where drug type was not stated or unknown

Note: Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Figure 1: Offender and victim alcohol consumption during IPH incidents, by offender Indigenous status, 1 January 2004 to 30 June 2014 (%)



Note: Data are presented as incident counts rather than offender counts. Excludes 5 incidents in which offender Indigenous status was unknown. Excludes 26 incidents with non-Indigenous offenders and 4 incidents with Indigenous offenders where victim and/or offender alcohol consumption were unknown. Percentages may not total 100 due to rounding

Source: AIC NHMP 2004–2014 [computer file]

Offender suicide or self-harm

A small proportion of female offenders (n=24, 8%) self-harmed during or immediately after the homicide incident, with 16 committing suicide (6%), five attempting suicide (2%) and three self-inflicting injuries short of a suicide attempt (1%). There was no statically significant difference between IPH offenders and other homicide offenders in the likelihood of self-harm or suicide (n=5, 5% vs n=19, 11%) or between Indigenous and non-Indigenous IPH offenders (nil vs n=5, 8%).

Discussion

The current study explored female perpetrated IPH using data from both the National Homicide Monitoring Program and the intimate partner homicide supplementary dataset. Between 1 January 2004 and 30 June 2014, there were 303 incidents of female perpetrated homicide recorded in the NHMP, involving 318 offenders. Of these female perpetrated homicides, 113 were IPH incidents, involving 115 offenders.

In line with previous research, female IPH offenders were typically aged 35 to 49 and in long-term relationships (married or de facto) where they lived with their partner (Block & Christakos 1995; Jordan et al. 2012; Kim, Gerber & Kim 2007). Around half of the women who killed their intimate partners were in relationships characterised by domestic violence, most often as the primary victims of male perpetrated abuse, but also as the simultaneous perpetrators and victims of reciprocal violence. A notable proportion of women killed their intimate partners in a single spontaneous episode of violence following some type of conflict with the victim. The IPHSD showed that 52 percent of women killed their partner spontaneously following a conflict, and in over a fifth of incidents the male partner physically or sexually assaulted the female partner immediately prior to her killing him. Similarly, the NHMP data indicated that domestic arguments were the primary motive in 57 percent of incidents, and in nearly a quarter of incidents the victim engaged in violence immediately prior to the homicide. Taken together, these findings add support to the body of evidence suggesting that female IPH perpetrators often experience physical and psychological abuse at the hands of the male partners they kill. The finding that there was no evidence of domestic violence victimisation for half of the women who killed their intimate partners speaks to the diversity of female IPH offending and highlights the importance of considering other offender characteristics, historical circumstances and situational factors.

In line with previous research (Caman et al. 2016; Moen, Nygren & Edin 2016; Weizmann-Henelius et al. 2012), both female IPH perpetrators and their male victims tended to be unemployed and have substance misuse issues. The finding that 42 percent of offenders had a mental health issue at the time of the homicide somewhat contradicts several studies' findings that having a history of mental health issues is not correlated with female IPV perpetration (Caman et al. 2016). This may be because the IPHSD is based on a non-representative sample and captures data on whether there was evidence that the offender had any current or historical mental health issues, regardless of whether this contributed to the offence.

Alternatively, it is possible that female perpetrated IPV is related more to certain personality disorders than to mental illness (Caman et al. 2016; Mackay et al. 2018). For example, characteristics of borderline personality disorder include impulsive behaviours, extreme emotional swings, explosive anger and unstable relationships (Smith & Segal 2019). Supporting this theory, Caman and colleagues (2016) found that neither female nor male perpetrators of IPH seemed to be particularly characterised by mental health issues, but female perpetrators were more likely to have been diagnosed with a personality disorder compared to their male counterparts.

The lives of Indigenous female IPH offenders were shown to be complex and often characterised by adversities such as unemployment, unstable accommodation and substance misuse. Indigenous women who killed their partners were significantly more likely than non-Indigenous women to be both the perpetrators and victims of violent crime. Over two-thirds of the Indigenous IPH offenders in the NHMP sample were involved in abusive relationships, and over three-quarters were recorded by police as having committed crimes in the past. Assault was by far the most common offence recorded for both Indigenous women and the partners they killed. It is unknown whether these assaults occurred during a domestic violence incident and, if so, whether the women were arrested as primary aggressors or as part of dual arrest practices when they retaliated, fought back, or acted in self-defence. These findings suggest that Indigenous women who kill their intimate partners exist in hostile social environments, in which violence may be seen as necessary for survival or an acceptable way to resolve conflict.

There is a relatively even split between premeditated and spontaneous female perpetrated IPH incidents in the IPHSD data, further refuting the portrayal of female perpetrated IPH as invariably spontaneous and uncontrolled, and drawing attention to the various reasons that women kill their partners. In many instances, the IPH appeared to be instrumental, motivated by a range of goals. In approximately a quarter of incidents, Indigenous offenders and victims made initial contact in a public place, and engaged in social situations involving the consumption of alcohol. This would often entail the victim and offender socialising and drinking with various friends and family for long periods, usually while moving between different locations together. Alcohol consumption is linked to increased aggression and reduced inhibition in both men and women (Giancola et al. 2009). In many incidents, the victim initially used violence against the offender, who then retaliated with deadly force.

Non-Indigenous offenders were more likely than Indigenous women to be financially motivated. In most incidents, initial contact between the victim and offender occurred in their shared residence, without other adults present. Homicides perpetrated by non-Indigenous women were significantly less likely to involve alcohol consumption by either the offender or the victim, and would usually occur in the initial location where the offender and victim came into contact rather than involving movement across multiple locations.

An important question, raised but not answered in the present study due to limitations in the data, relates to offenders' access to formal and informal social support leading up to the homicide. The current study suggests that both female offenders and male victims may come into contact with service providers for assistance with issues such as substance misuse,

domestic violence and unemployment. They are also likely to have come into contact with law enforcement as either the victims or perpetrators of other crime. These points of contact are potential opportunities for female perpetrators and their male victims to be referred to formal support services before situations escalate to IPH. This study has highlighted gaps in knowledge in the field of female IPH perpetration which must be further explored in order to allow effective intervention. This is particularly relevant to Indigenous IPH offenders, who are more likely than non-Indigenous offenders to live in geographically remote areas where access to services is limited.

Strengths and limitations

The NHMP includes every female perpetrated homicide recorded by police nationally from 1989–90, and represents Australia’s only national system with the capacity to monitor homicide rates and facilitate detailed analysis of homicide types and trends. Similarly, a major strength of the IPHSD is that it is based on multiple sources of information collected at various points in time, which allowed researchers to cross-reference information and assess the accuracy of accounts during data collection.

A homicide incident is included in the NHMP where an offender is charged or where a death recorded by police indicates a homicide offence has been committed. The NHMP is not a measure of the conviction rate. Further, information on offender characteristics is largely drawn from police records supplied to the NHMP. This information may be based on subjective assessment, although data quality control measures are undertaken to ensure critical variables such as Indigenous status are confirmed across different sources.

A limitation of the IPHSD is the small sample size for certain variables due to difficulties obtaining sufficiently detailed police reports, coronial files and court documents. Case law documents represent a rich source of information on offenders, victims and the factors leading up to a homicide, but could be sourced for only 33 incidents. Most of the 79 coronial findings examined lacked sufficient detail about the offender’s characteristics and history to be included. While police reports were available for 103 incidents, police prioritise collecting and recording information that is most relevant to the investigative process, meaning that broader contextual information was much less detailed than the information about what had happened immediately before and during the homicide.

Findings related to the IPHSD variables, particularly where data are disaggregated into small cell sizes, should therefore be treated with caution. Further investigation with larger samples and more detailed data would reduce the amount of missing data and increase the number of variables that could be analysed, possibly using multivariate modelling. Because of these issues, the IPHSD data used in this study are limited to relatively basic offender, victim, and offence circumstance variables that are not routinely collected in the NHMP. This level of detail does not allow for a more in-depth investigation of other factors that may be related to IPH perpetration such as offenders’ education, occupation, pregnancy, prior police contact, historical child abuse, and domestic violence perpetration and/or victimisation outside the current relationship.

Conclusion

This initial exploration of female perpetrated intimate partner homicide is the most comprehensive of any such Australian study to date. The findings are consistent with those of prior research, suggesting that female perpetrated IPH often occurs in the context of violent relationships. Women may plan premeditated homicides for a range of reasons, or commit spontaneous homicides in reaction to negative emotions during domestic conflicts. Women who kill their partners often have backgrounds of criminal activity, unemployment and substance misuse. Many of these issues are amplified for Indigenous women, who are more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be unemployed, to have a criminal history involving violent offences, to misuse alcohol, and to be in a relationship with an unemployed man. Future studies should address offenders' access to and engagement with formal support services, as it is not known if the services currently provided to these women are reducing the likelihood that they will perpetrate violence towards intimate partners. Nevertheless, this explorative study has built a solid foundation for future analysis of female perpetrated intimate partner homicide in Australia.

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URLs correct as at August 2019

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Appendix: Analytic framework of NHMP and IPHSD variables

National Homicide Monitoring Program variables

- *Female homicide incidents*: indicates the number of homicide incidents with female offenders as recorded by police;
- *Female homicide offenders*: the number of females charged with murder by police;
- *Victim–offender relationship*: indicates whether the victim–offender relationship was male–female intimate partner (spouse, separated spouse, divorced spouse, de facto partner, ex de facto partner, girlfriend, former girlfriend, extra-marital lover/former lover), other family member (custodial parent–child, non-custodial parent–child, step parent–child, grandparent–grandchild, sibling, step-sibling, other family—eg in laws, niece/nephew, uncle/aunt), non-family (close friend, acquaintance, neighbour, gang member, stranger, other relationship—eg employee/employer, landlord/tenant) or not stated/unknown;
- *Incident year*: indicates the year of the homicide incident, by financial year (1 July to 30 June);
- *Jurisdiction*: indicates the state or territory in which the homicide occurred;
- *Offender Indigenous status*: indicates whether an offender was recorded by police as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both
- *Victim Indigenous status*: indicates whether a victim was recorded by police and in the NCIS as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or both
- *Offender age*: indicates the age of offender in years;
- *Offender employment status*: indicates the employment status of an offender;
- *Offender criminal history*: indicates whether the offender had been previously convicted of an offence as recorded by police;
- *Offender offence type*: indicates the types of offences for which the offender had been previously convicted;
- *Victim offence type*: indicates the type of offences for which the victim had been previously convicted;

- *Offender violent crime history*: indicates whether the offender had been convicted of violent offences (homicide, sexual assault, other assault, kidnapping/abduction or robbery);
- *Victim violent crime history*: indicates whether the victim had been convicted of violent offences (homicide, sexual assault, other assault, kidnapping/abduction or robbery);
- *Offender mental health issue/s*: indicates whether the homicide was related to a mental health condition in the offender, as identified by police;
- *Offender relationship type*: indicates the offender's relationship with the victim at the time of the homicide;
- *Current relationship*: indicates whether the victim and offender were in an intimate relationship at the time of the homicide;
- *Offender living with the victim*: indicates whether the offender was sharing a residence with the victim at the time of the homicide;
- *History of domestic violence in relationship*: indicates whether there was any history of violence involving the offender as recorded by police. Includes offender's history of victimisation or perpetration of domestic violence;
- *Victim violence against offender*: indicates whether the victim used violence against the offender immediately prior to the homicide as recorded by police;
- *Victim initiated violence*: indicates whether the victim or offender initiated the violence in incidents where the victim used violence against the offender immediately prior to the homicide;
- *Offender motivation for homicide*: indicates the primary motivation of the offender for committing the homicide, as identified by police;
- *Homicide motive for domestic argument*: indicates the cause of the argument if the homicide was related to a domestic conflict, as identified by police;
- *Location of homicide*: indicates where the homicide incident took place;
- *Offender alcohol use*: indicates whether the offender was under the influence of any alcohol during the homicide incident;
- *Offender illicit drug use*: indicates whether the offender was under the influence of any illicit drugs during the homicide incident;
- *Offender illicit drug type*: indicates the type of illicit drug used by offenders during the homicide incident;
- *Victim alcohol use*: indicates whether the victim was under the influence of any alcohol during the homicide incident;
- *Victim illicit drug use*: indicates whether the victim was under the influence of any illicit drugs during the homicide incident;
- *Victim illicit drug type*: indicates the type of illicit drug used by victims during the homicide incident; and
- *Offender suicide or self-harm*: indicates whether the offender committed suicide, attempted suicide or self-harmed during or immediately after homicide.

Intimate partner homicide supplementary dataset variables

- *Offender housing stability*: indicates whether an offender had access to stable accommodation at the time of the homicide incident, as opposed to being homeless, couch-surfing or in temporary accommodation;
- *Offender historical alcohol abuse*: indicates whether the offender has a history of alcohol abuse, regardless of whether they were consuming alcohol at the time of the incident. Indicators of historical alcohol abuse include the offender being diagnosed with substance abuse disorder, entering treatment for alcohol abuse, having physical health problems attributed to excessive alcohol consumption, or being described in court records as abusing alcohol in the past or currently;
- *Offender historical illicit drug use*: indicates whether the offender has a history of using illicit drugs, regardless of whether they were under the influence of illicit drugs at the time of the incident. This was based on whether the offender was described in court records as using illicit drugs in the past or currently. Illicit drugs included marijuana, meth/amphetamines, heroin and cocaine;
- *Victim historical alcohol abuse*: indicates whether the victim has a history of alcohol abuse, regardless of whether they were consuming alcohol at the time of the incident. Indicators of historical alcohol abuse include the victim being diagnosed with substance abuse disorder, entering treatment for alcohol abuse, having physical health problems attributed to excessive alcohol consumption, or being described in court records as abusing alcohol in the past or currently;
- *Victim historical illicit drug use*: indicates whether the victim has a history of using illicit drugs, regardless of whether they were under the influence of illicit drugs at the time of the incident. This was based on whether the victim was described in court records as using illicit drugs in the past or currently. Illicit drugs included marijuana, meth/amphetamines, heroin and cocaine;
- *Offender mental health conditions*: indicates whether the offender has a current or past mental health condition as identified in court records, coronial files and/or police reports. Mental health conditions included diagnoses of depression, anxiety disorders, post-traumatic stress disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, unspecified delusions and hallucinations, and anorexia. Offenders were also coded as having mental health conditions when court records, coronial files and/or police reports state that mental illness, severe trauma, acquired brain injuries and/or cognitive impairment were likely a factor in the homicide. Offenders were coded as having historical mental health conditions when court records stated that the mental health condition/s were no longer an issue;
- *Offender history of suicide attempts and/or threats*: indicates whether the offender has a history of suicide attempts and/or threats, regardless of whether they attempted or committed suicide at the time of the incident, as identified in court records, coronial files and/or police reports. Offenders who both threatened and attempted suicide were coded as having attempted suicide;

- *Length of victim–offender relationship*: indicates the number of years the victim and offender had been in an intimate relationship, as provided in court records, coronial files and/or police reports;
- *Offender had custodial children*: indicates whether the offender had any custodial children under the age of 18 years;
- *Children in the family home*: indicates whether the offender had children living in the family home at the time of the incident, including adult children. This includes children shared by the victim and offender and children that were either the offender’s children or the victim’s children;
- *Primary perpetrator in abusive relationships*: indicates the directionality of the violence in abusive relationships as described in court records, coronial files and/or police reports. Violence could be either perpetrated predominately by the female against the male, by the male against the female, or by both parties perpetrating violence equally against one another. An individual was considered to be the primary perpetrator when they were specifically described as being the primary perpetrator of violence or when they were the subject of intervention orders taken out by their partner. Offenders were considered to be in relationships of reciprocal violence when it was specifically stated that there was a history of domestic violence between the two individuals which was perpetrated by both of them;
- *Type of domestic violence*: indicates the type of domestic violence in abusive intimate relationships as described in court records, coronial files and/or police reports, including sexual, physical, verbal, psychological, emotional abuse, and other forms such as financial and image-based abuse. Relationships characterised by both physical and psychological elements were coded as physical abuse;
- *Other relationship instability*: indicates whether there was evidence of relationship instability between the victim and offender, as described in court records, coronial files and/or police reports. These were coded in three main themes that were not mutually exclusive: fluctuating periods of separation and reunion, verbal or physical arguments, and actual or suspected infidelity;
- *Contact with external services*: a qualitative free-text variable indicating whether the offender had any contact (in person, over phone, email etc) with formal support/service agencies and organisations, including whether the person was referred by external parties. Services included domestic violence support services, mental health and substance abuse services, medical services and child protection services. This variable was not included in the final dataset due to data limitations;

- *Whether the homicide was spontaneous or premeditated:* indicates whether the homicide was premeditated by the offender or spontaneous, as described in court records, coronial files and/or police reports. The spontaneous/instrumental dichotomy is based on Miethe and Drass' (1999) research using supplementary homicide reports involving both female and male offenders in a range of victim–offender relationships. Spontaneous homicides were coded in three main themes that were not mutually exclusive: male physically or sexually assaulting the female, 'jealous rages' and romantic triangles, and verbal arguments not precipitated by physical violence. Premeditated homicides were coded in five main themes that were not mutually exclusive: offenders recruiting co-offenders prior to the incident, attacking a sleeping victim, bringing murder weapons and cleaning products to the scene prior to the incident, researching methods of committing homicide and/or associated penalties prior to the incident, and luring the victim to the scene under false pretences. A limitation of this approach is that the presence of domestic argument or absence of premeditative offender actions does not necessarily indicate that a homicide was spontaneous;
- *Victim and offender pre-homicide movements:* indicates whether the offender and victim travelled between at least two different locations together prior to the homicide, including residential and non-residential areas. This involves travelling by car, public transport and walking;
- *Presence of other adults during the homicide:* indicates whether adults other than the victim and offender were present during or leading up to the incident. Incidents were included when other adults were within sight of the victim and offender within minutes of the incident (eg other adult/s going into another room in a residence immediately prior to homicide); and
- *Presence of children during the homicide:* indicates whether any children of the victim and/or offender were present during or leading up to the incident, including adult children. Incidents were included when children were within sight of the victim and offender within minutes of the incident (eg children going into another room in a residence immediately prior to homicide).

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Statistical Report

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