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Firearm Homicides in King County: Key Findings from Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS)

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Public Health
Seattle & King County



Outline

- Background:
 - Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS)
 - Primary uses
 - Types of crimes reported

- Key Findings

- Information Gaps
 - Limited geographic information
 - Missing suspect criminal history
 - Narrative of incident not provided
 - Suicides not systematically included



Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS)

- Used by law enforcement to identify serial killers, solve violent crimes and speed apprehension/prosecution of violent criminals
- Excludes officer-involved incidents
- Source: Washington State Attorney General's Office
- Police and sheriff's departments in Washington and Oregon voluntarily contribute crime-related information



Analysis Approach

- King County firearm-related homicides only, 2001-2012.
 - Victim and suspect demographics
 - Motives/crime classifications
 - Victim-suspect relationships
 - Weapon type

- No individually identifiable information was provided



Key Findings from HITS analysis

- On average 34 victims a year from 2001-2012.
- Mass shootings are rare, a single victim is the norm.
- 9 out of 10 firearm homicides involve handguns.
- About half of firearm homicide victims and suspects were 18-29 years old.
- Younger victims (18-29 years) disproportionately African American or American Indian/Alaska Native.
- “Heat of anger” was the primary motivation in incidents for victims for all ages.
- Domestic violence more common motivation in incidents involving older (≥ 30 years) than younger victims.
- Older victims (≥ 30 years) had closer relationship(s) with shooter.



Firearm Homicide Summary — King County, WA, 2001-2012

Firearm Homicide Summary	Total (2001-2012)	Average/Year
Number of incidents	367	31
Number of victims	402	34
Number of suspects	458*	38

*457 unique suspects, 1 suspect counted twice due to involvement in 2 different incidents and being different ages at each incident



Suspect Status in Firearm Homicide Incidents — King County, WA, 2001-2012

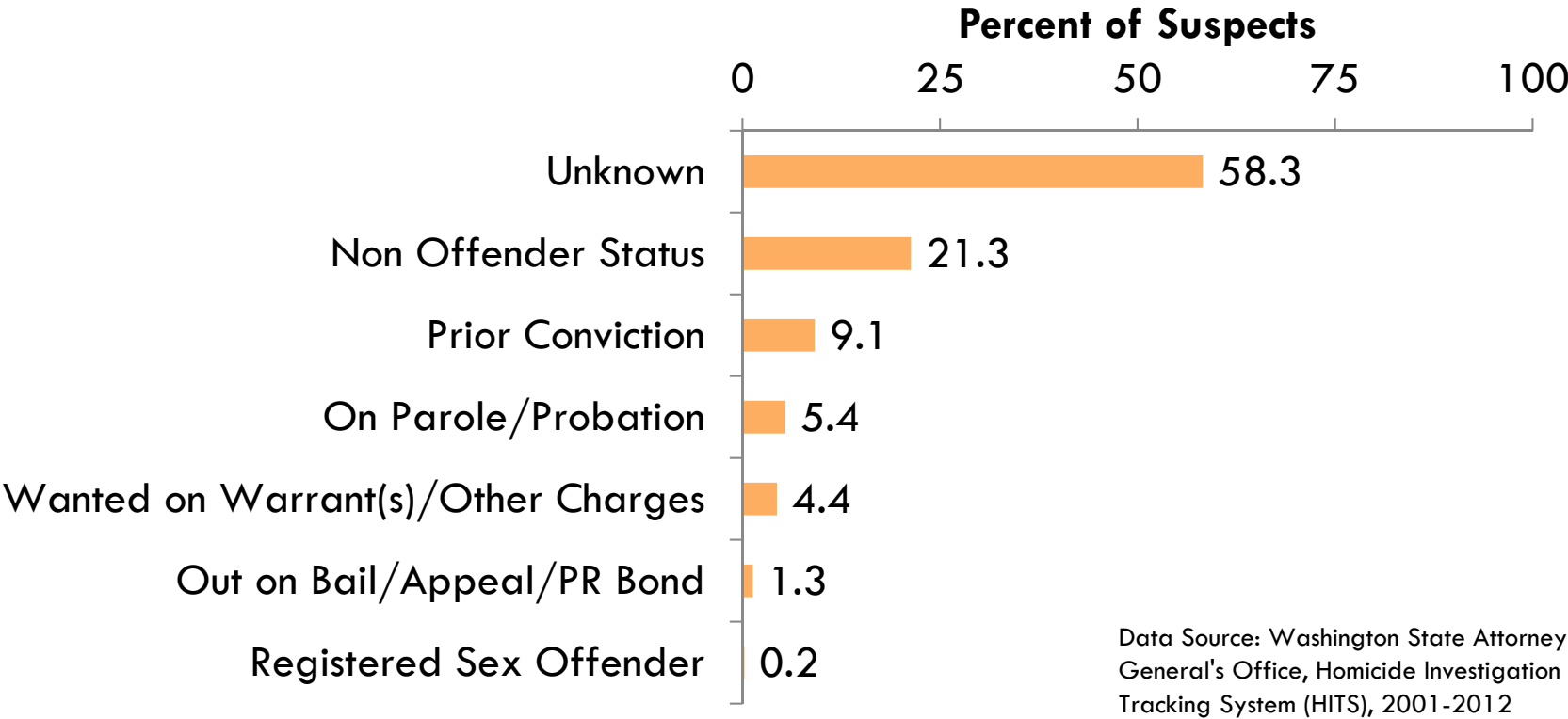
Suspect Status* (2001-2012)	Count	Percent
Deceased	37	8.1
Was arrested and/or charged as a suspect in this case	276	60.4
Identified (named) – Not arrested or charged in this case	48	10.5
Unknown – Seen	51	11.2
Unknown – Not seen	45	9.9

*457 unique suspects, 1 suspect counted twice due to involvement in 2 different incidents and being different ages at each incident

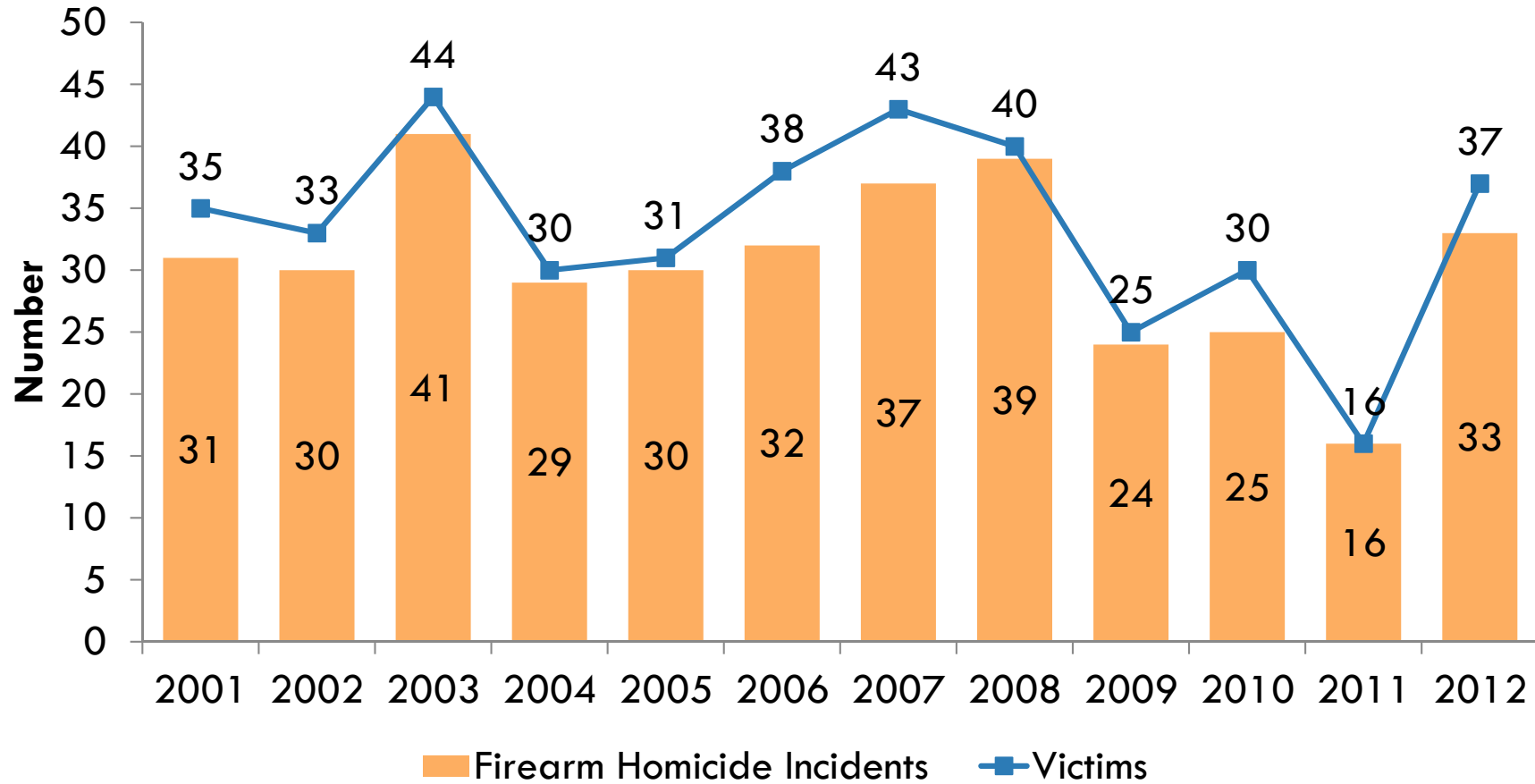


Criminal history unknown for about 3 out of 5 suspects

Firearm Homicide Suspect Criminal History — King County, WA, 2001-2012



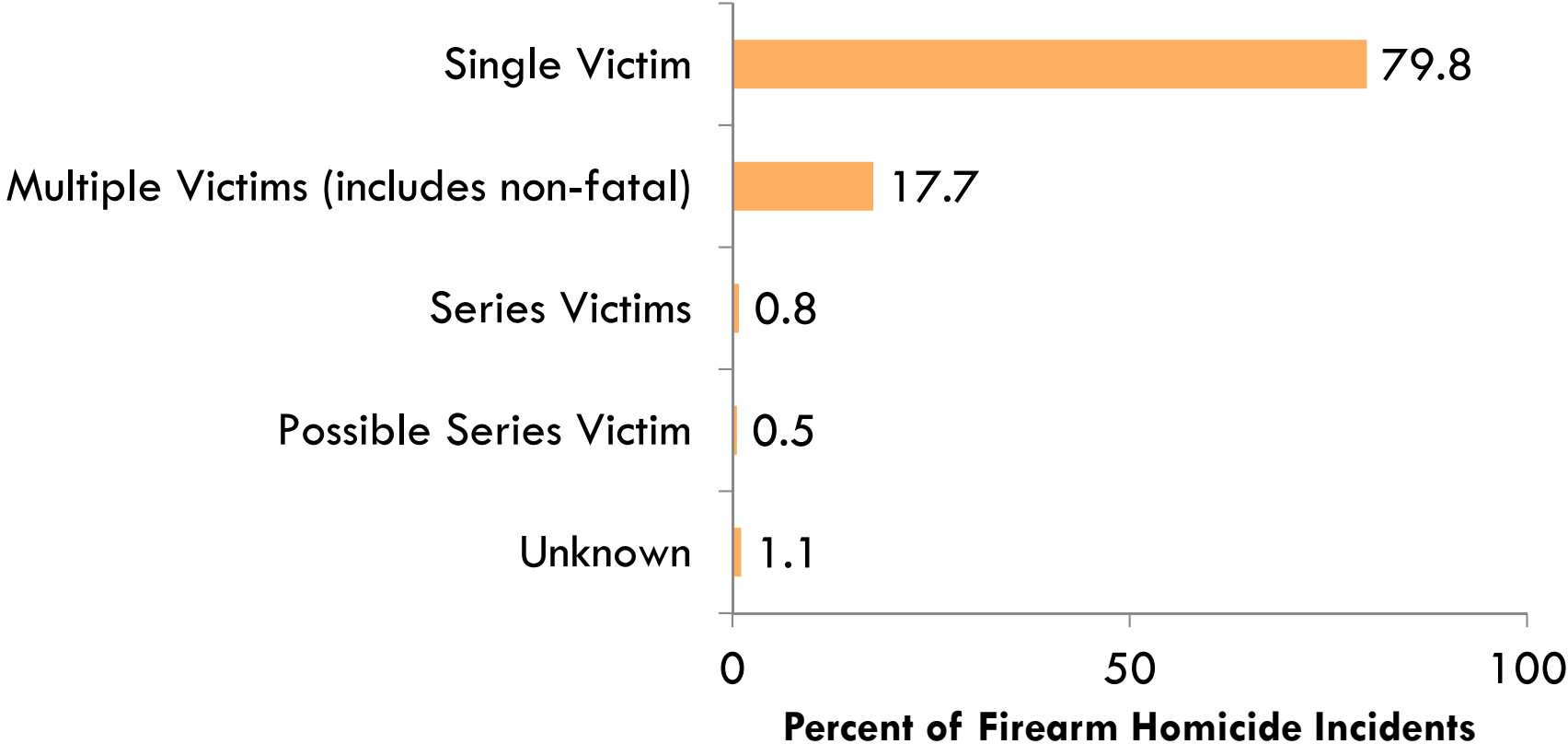
No clear trend in number of victims per incident



Firearm Homicide Incidents and Victims by Year — King County, WA, 2001-2012



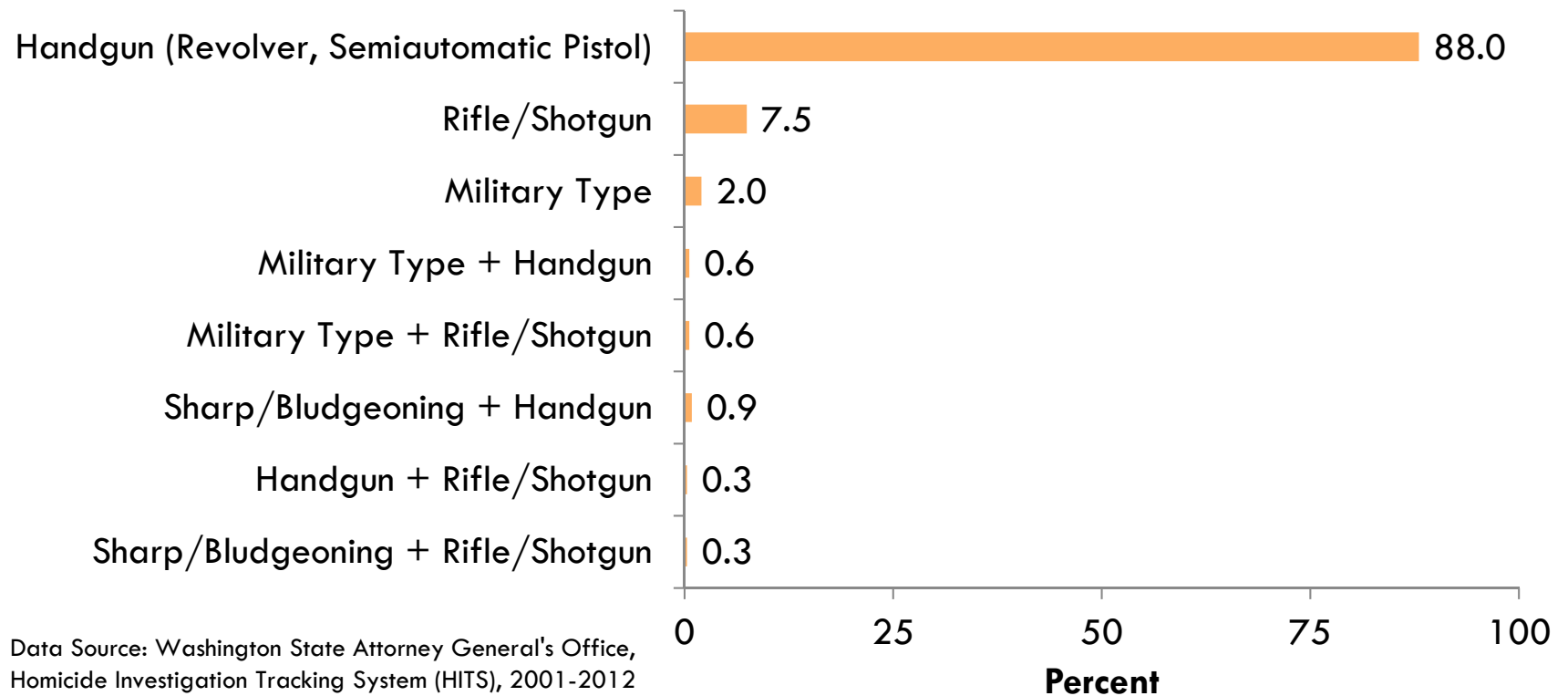
8 of 10 firearm homicide incidents involve a single victim



Firearm Homicide Incident by Type — King County, WA, 2001-2012



Almost 9 of 10 firearm homicides involve handguns

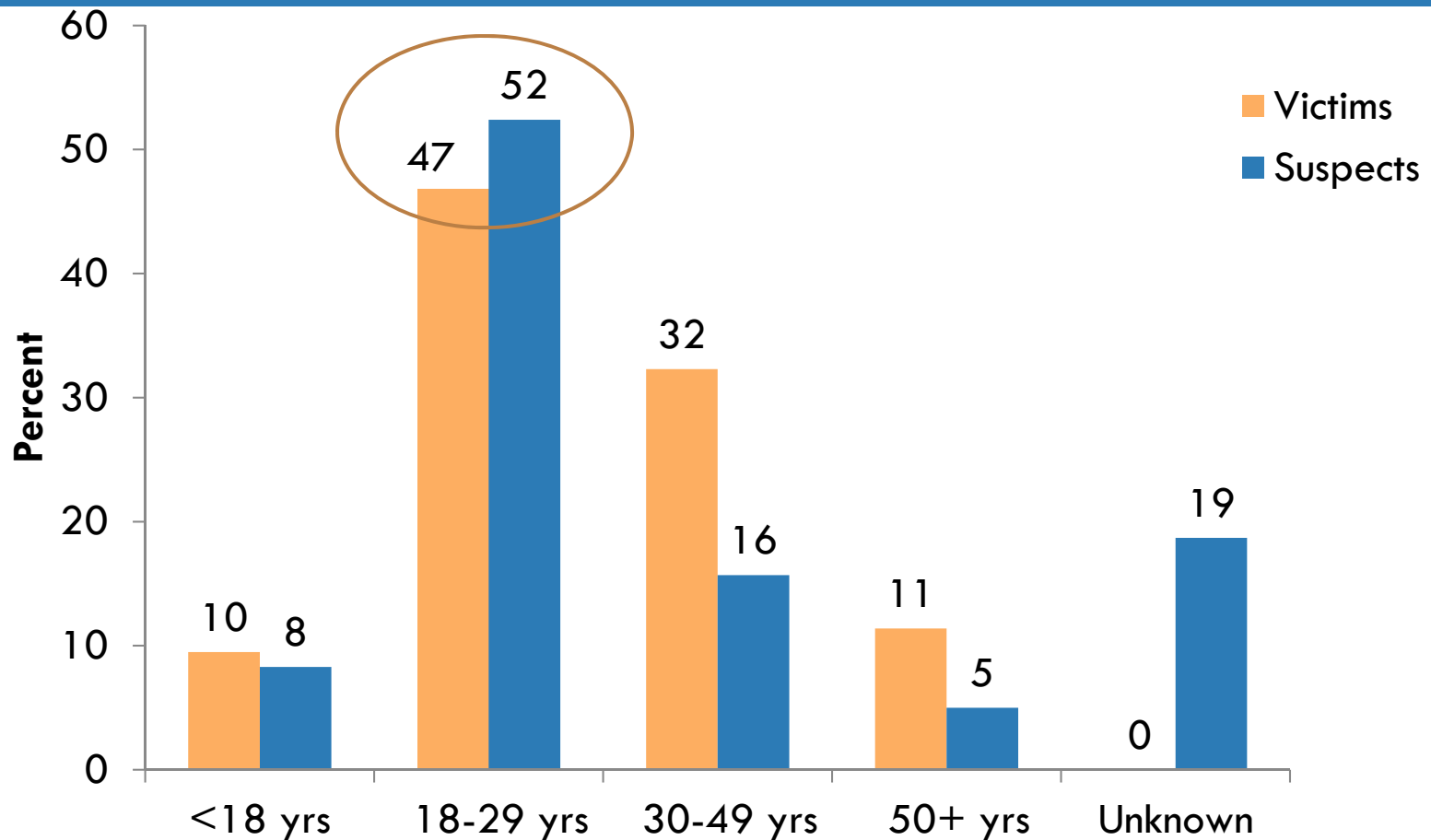


Weapon Type in Firearm Homicides* — King County, WA, 2001-2012

*Excludes unknown weapon types (n=17 incidents, 4.6% of 367 total incidents)



Young adults, ages 18-29, comprise about half of both firearm homicide victims and suspects

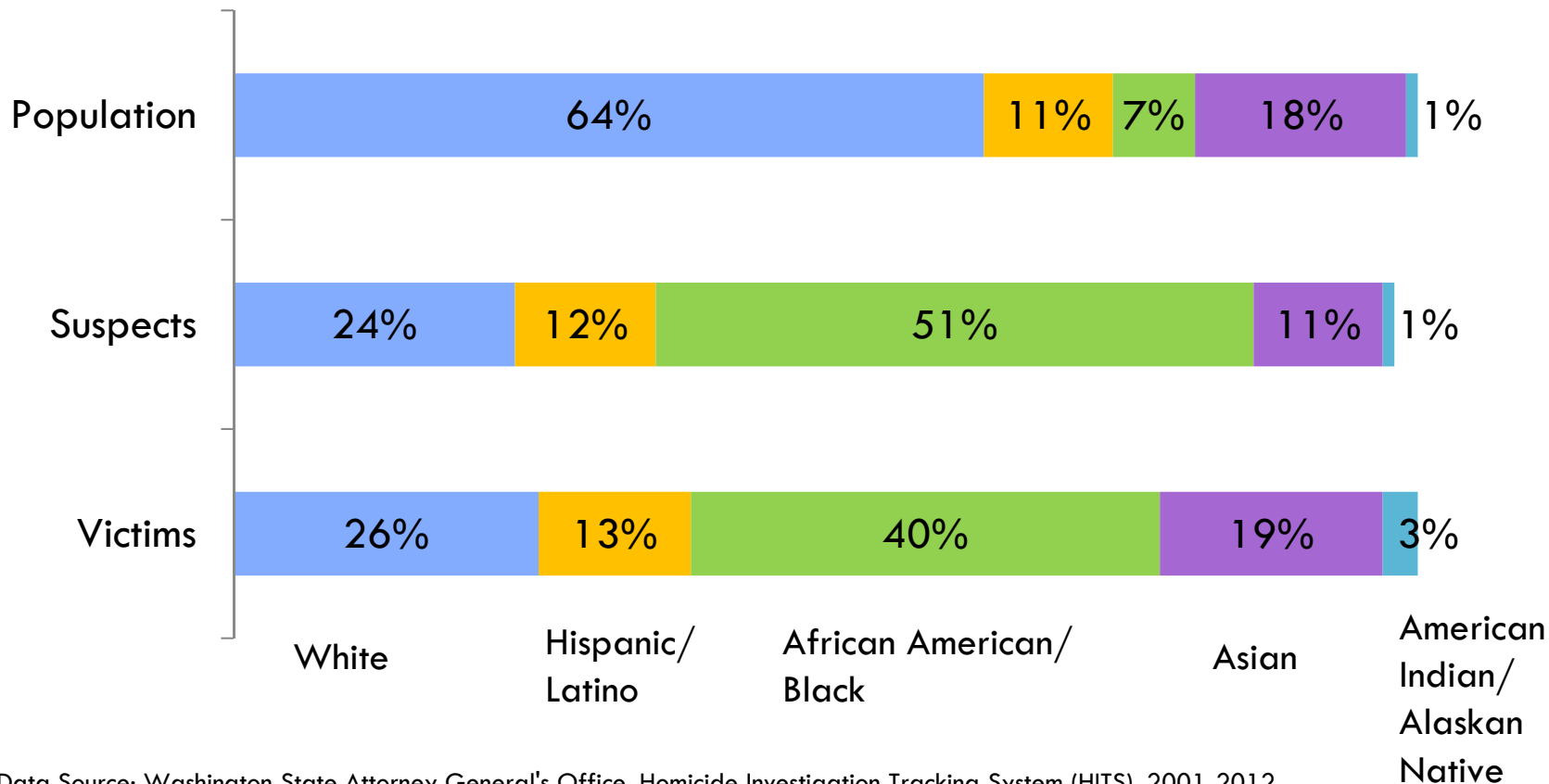


Data Source: Washington State Attorney General's Office, Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS), 2001-2012

Firearm Homicide Victims and Suspects by Age Group – King County, WA, 2001-2012



Firearm homicides of 18-29 year olds disproportionately affect African American/Black and American Indian/Alaska Native young adults

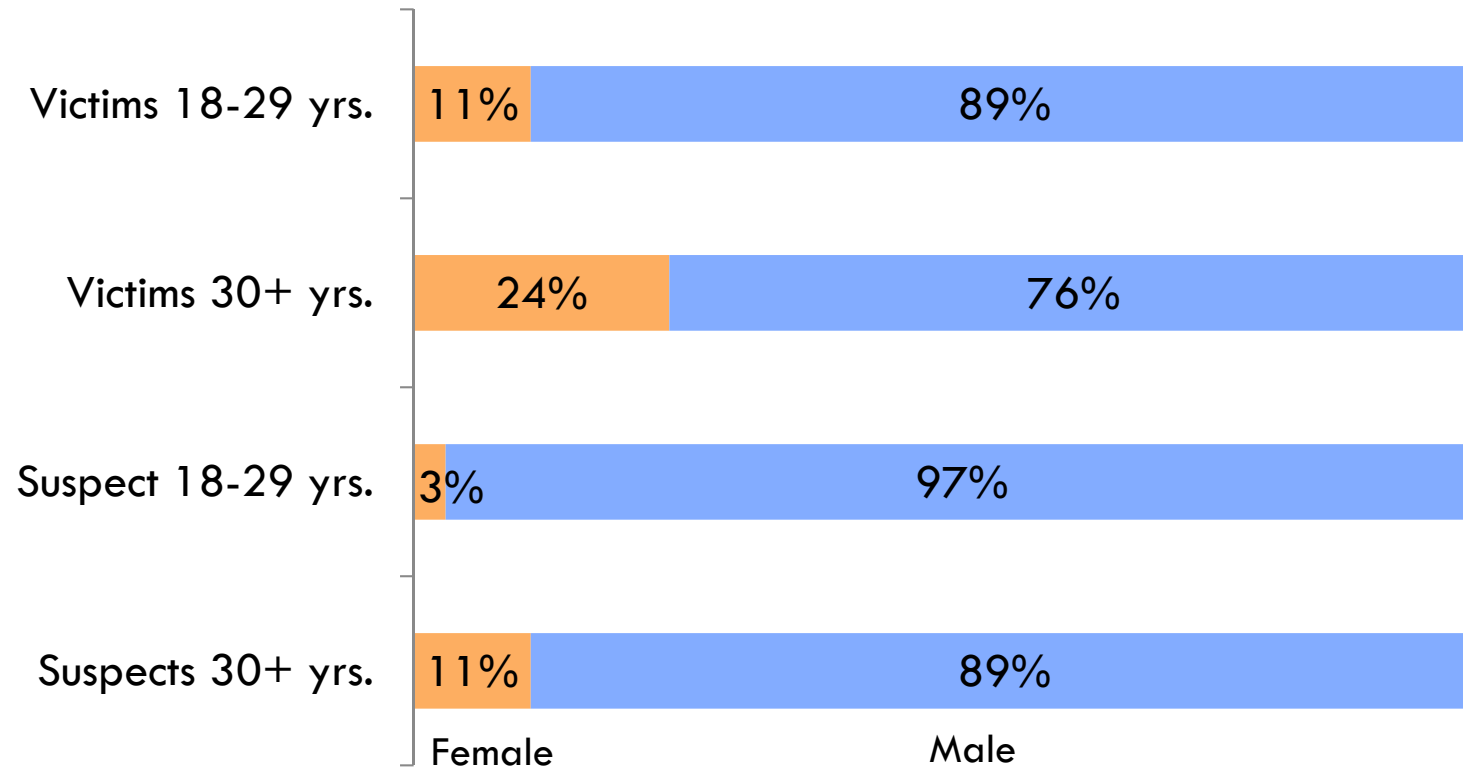


Data Source: Washington State Attorney General's Office, Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS), 2001-2012.
 Population Estimates: Looking Glass Analytics and the Washington State Office of Financial Management, 4/2014

Firearm Homicide Victim and Suspect 18-29 Yrs. by Race/Ethnicity — King County, WA, 2001-2012



Majority of firearm homicide victims and suspects are male



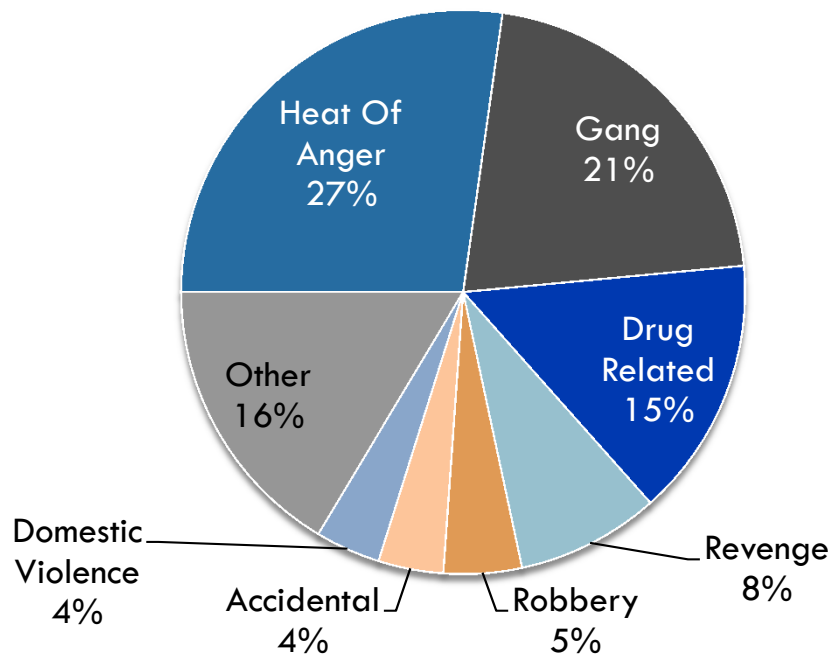
Data Source: Washington State Attorney General's Office, Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS), 2001-2012

Firearm Homicide Victim and Suspect by Age Group and Gender — King County, WA, 2001-2012

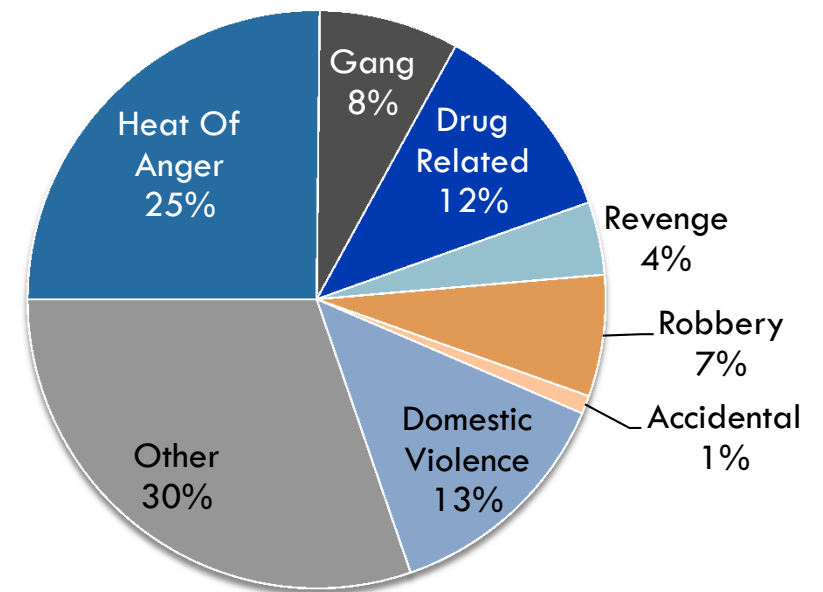


Total Motives/Crime Classifications of Firearm Homicide Victims by Age

Victims 18-29 Years



Victims 30+ Years



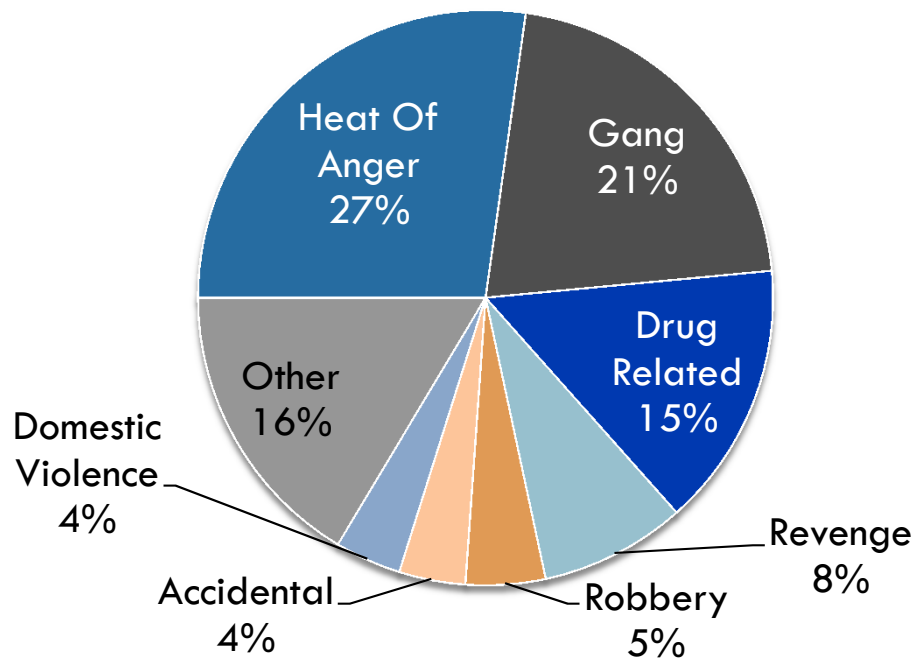
Data Source: Washington State Attorney General's Office, Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS), 2001-2012

May involve more than one motive; excludes victims where motive was unable to be determined: n = 20 among victims 18-29 yrs. and n = 14 among victims ≥30 yrs.



Total and Leading Firearm Homicide Motives/Crime Classifications: Victims 18-29 Years

Victims 18-29 Years



6 Leading Motives or Motive Combinations (% of Victims)

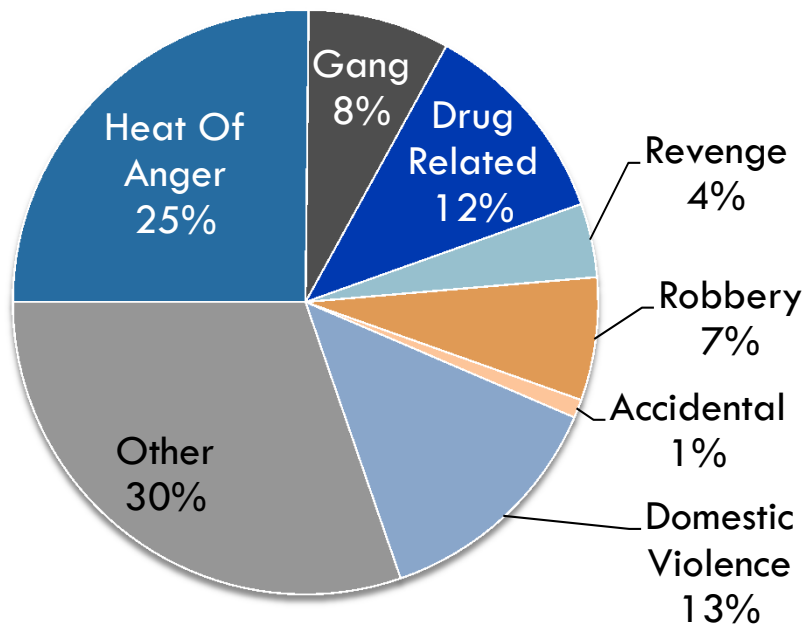
- Heat of Anger (16%)
- Gang (14%)
- Drug Related (9%)
- Heat of Anger, Gang (8%)
- Heat of Anger, Revenge (5%)
- Drug Related, Gang (4%)

Data Source: Washington State Attorney General's Office, Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS), 2001-2012
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Total and Leading Firearm Homicide Motives/Crime Classifications: Victims 30+ Years

Victims 30+ Years



6 Leading Motives or Motive Combinations (% of Victims)

- Heat of Anger (12%)
- Domestic Violence (7%)
- Heat of Anger, Gang (7%)
- Heat of Anger, Domestic Violence (4%)
- Drug Related (4%)
- Heat of Anger, Drug Related (4%)

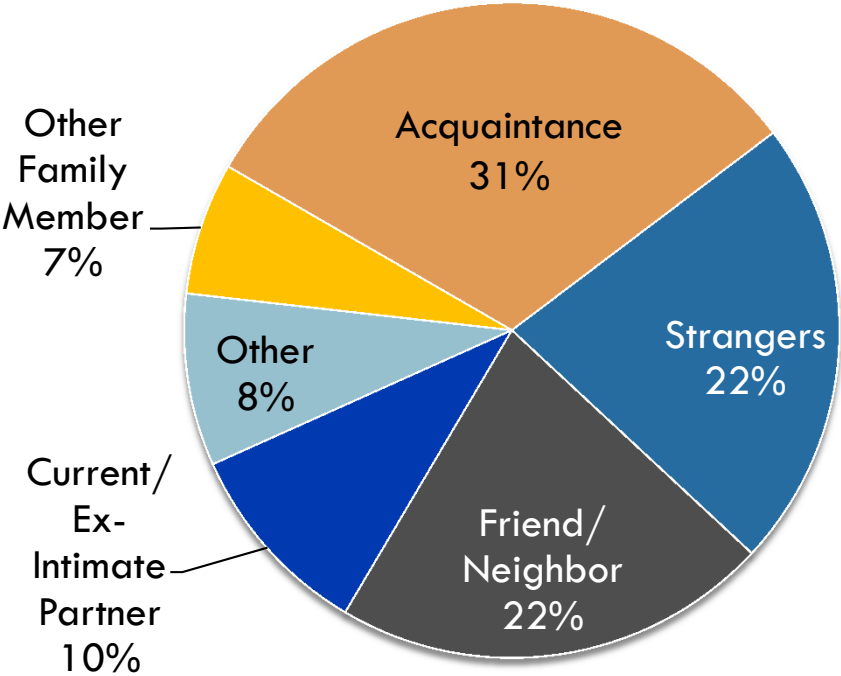
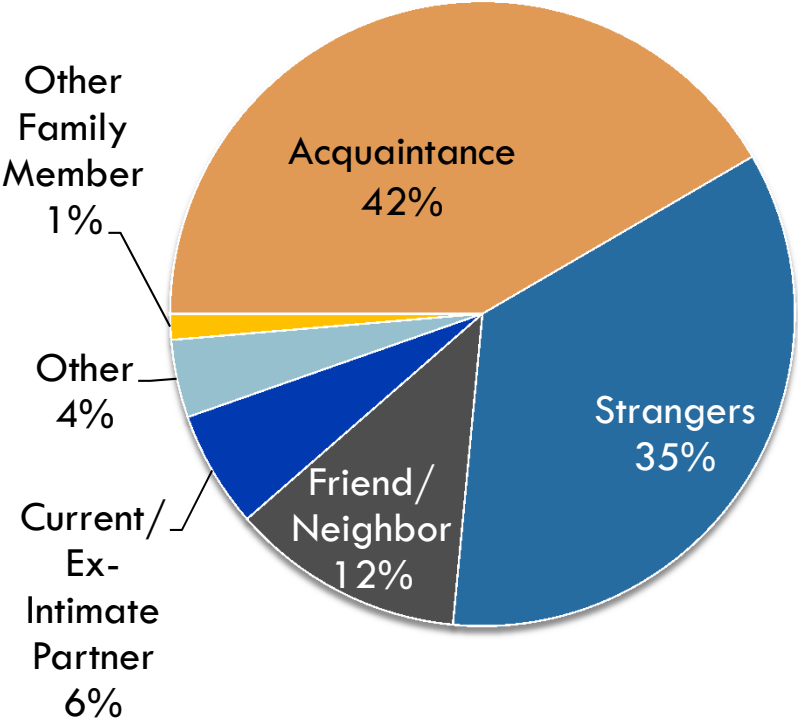
Data Source: Washington State Attorney General's Office, Homicide Investigation Tracking System (HITS), 2001-2012
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Firearm Homicide Victim-Suspect Relationships by Age: Closer relationships with suspects among older victims

Victims 18-29 Years

Victims 30+ Years



Data gaps

- Limited geographic information
- Limited suspect information to determine violence history
 - Criminal history missing for 58% of suspects
 - About 20% of suspects in firearm homicides were unidentified (not named)
- Need narrative to understand context of incident
 - No leading/primary motive identified; motives not ordered in hierarchy
- Suicide deaths not systematically collected
 - Only included if part of murder-suicide incidents
- Firearm ownership history (e.g. stolen, legally obtained) not collected



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Acknowledgements

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Homicide Investigation Tracking System Program Staff

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Injury and Violence Prevention Unit

