CHILDREN AND FAMILY
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SCHOOL OF SOCIAL WORK

DNA, Biological Evidence, Injuries and Arrests for Child and Adolescent Sexual Assault Victims with Acute Medical Examinations

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Importance of forensic medical examinations following sexual abuse

- Assures children and adolescents that their body is healthy
- Addresses any medical needs children have as a result of the abuse
- Can supply important evidence if done acutely
  - Biological evidence can counter perp denial
  - DNA can help identify suspects
  - Documentation of injuries counters consent defense

Gaps in knowledge

- Limited research on results from medical examinations
- No study presents results for adolescents
  - Are adolescent cases more like children or adults?
- No study considers age of consent
  - Below age of consent, sexual assault cases may involve less force and injury
- Limited research on criminal justice actions following medical examinations

Current study

- Compares child, adolescent and adult sexual assault victims with forensic medical exams
  - Case characteristics
  - Non-genital and genital injuries
  - Evidence of biological products (sperm, blood)
  - DNA evidence and matches
  - Unfounding (police deciding no grounds to pursue investigation)
  - Arrests

Sample

- Massachusetts statewide sample of emergency department exams in sexual assault cases
- Years: 2008-2010
- N=563
- Victims age 1 to adult
- Relevant age cutoffs:
  - Pediatric kit: Age 11 and younger
  - Age of consent: 16

Types of Data Collected

State Medical Exam Database

- Victim age, sex, race/ethnicity
- Location of assault (city and surroundings)
- Location/date/time of exam
- Exam provider (SANE/non SANE)
- Number of assailants
- Assailant-victim relationship
- Weapon type
- Description of assault
- Reported to police
- Completion of evidence kit/toxicology

Crime Laboratory Data

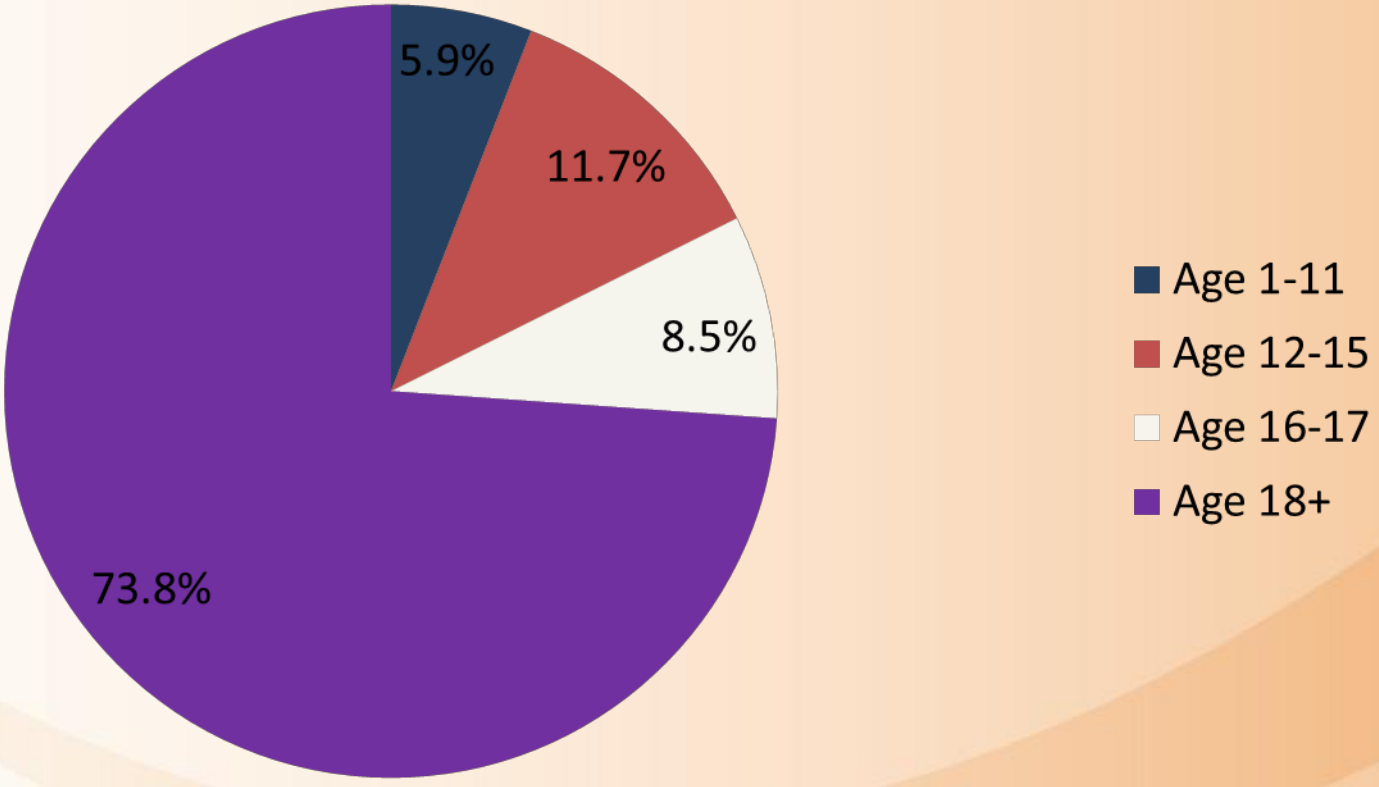
- Injury type, frequency, location
- Type of examinations completed
- Type of evidence collected (physical, forensic)
- Date/time of evidence kit collected
- Date/time kit arrival to lab
- Date/time of report of lab results
- Laboratory results

Police Outcome Data

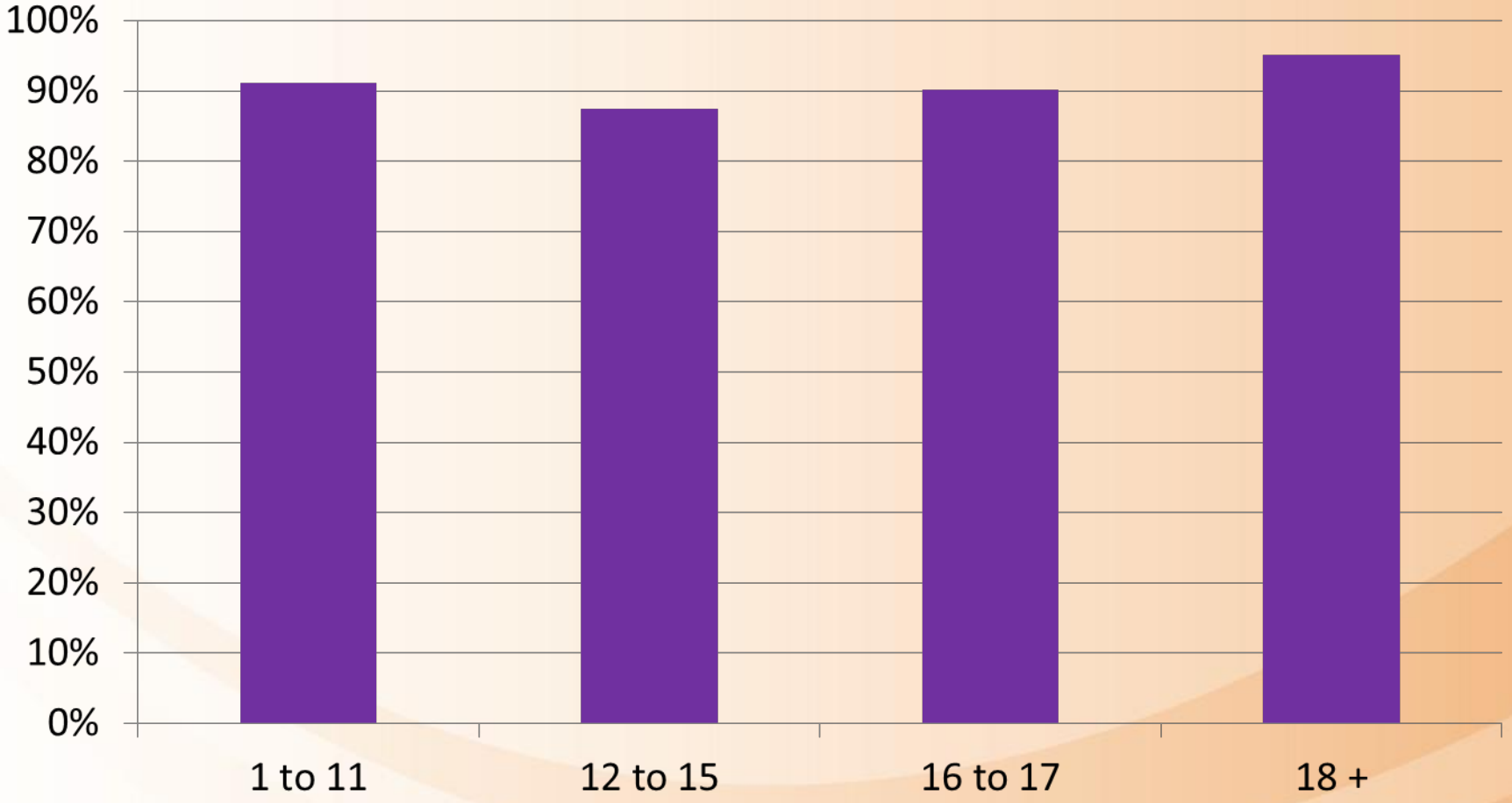
- Unfounded
- Arrest made/arrest date
- Charged/charge date

Some data not collected for victims age 11 and younger

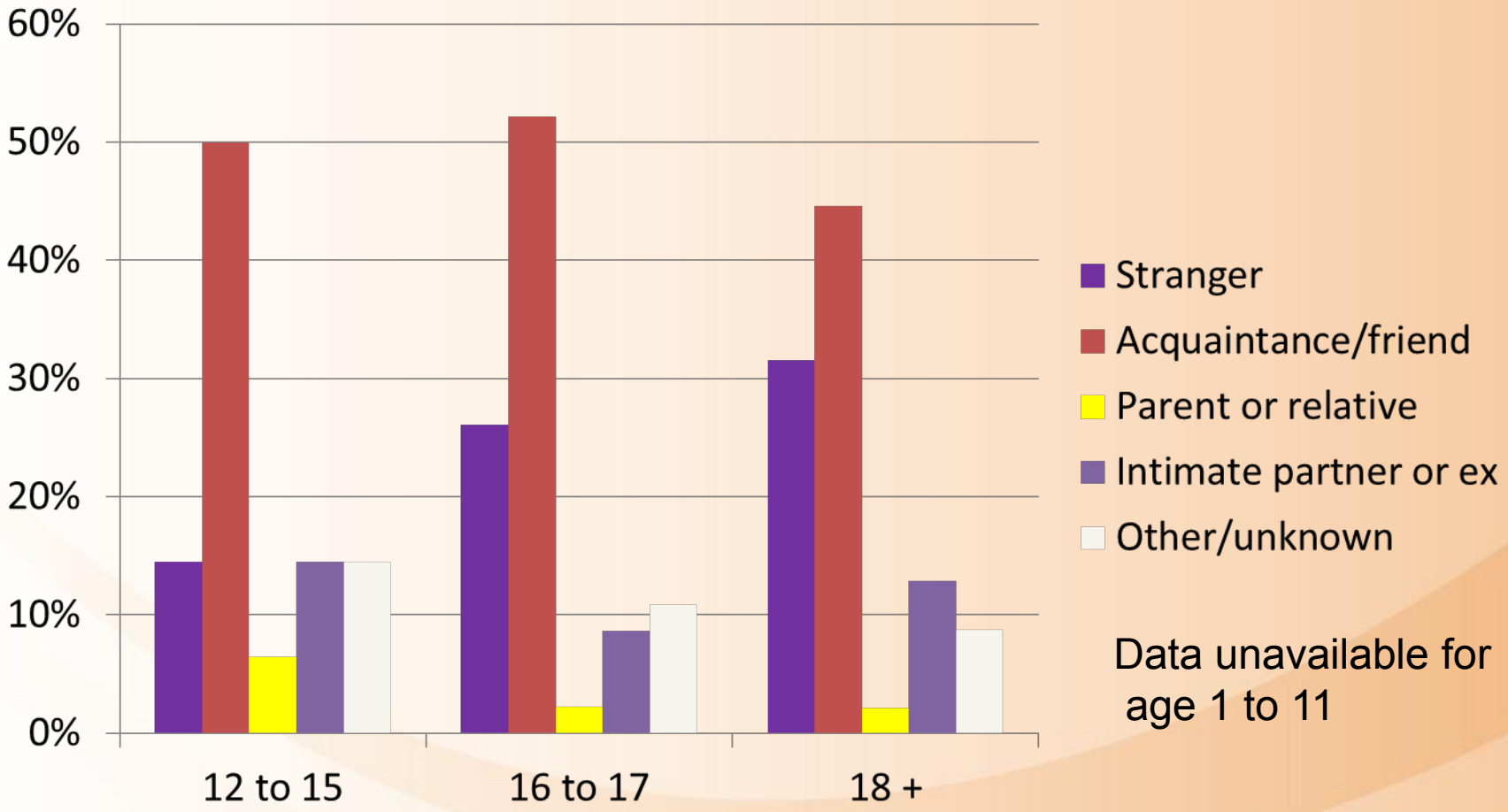
Age distribution of sample



Exam conducted within 72 hours of assault by victim age



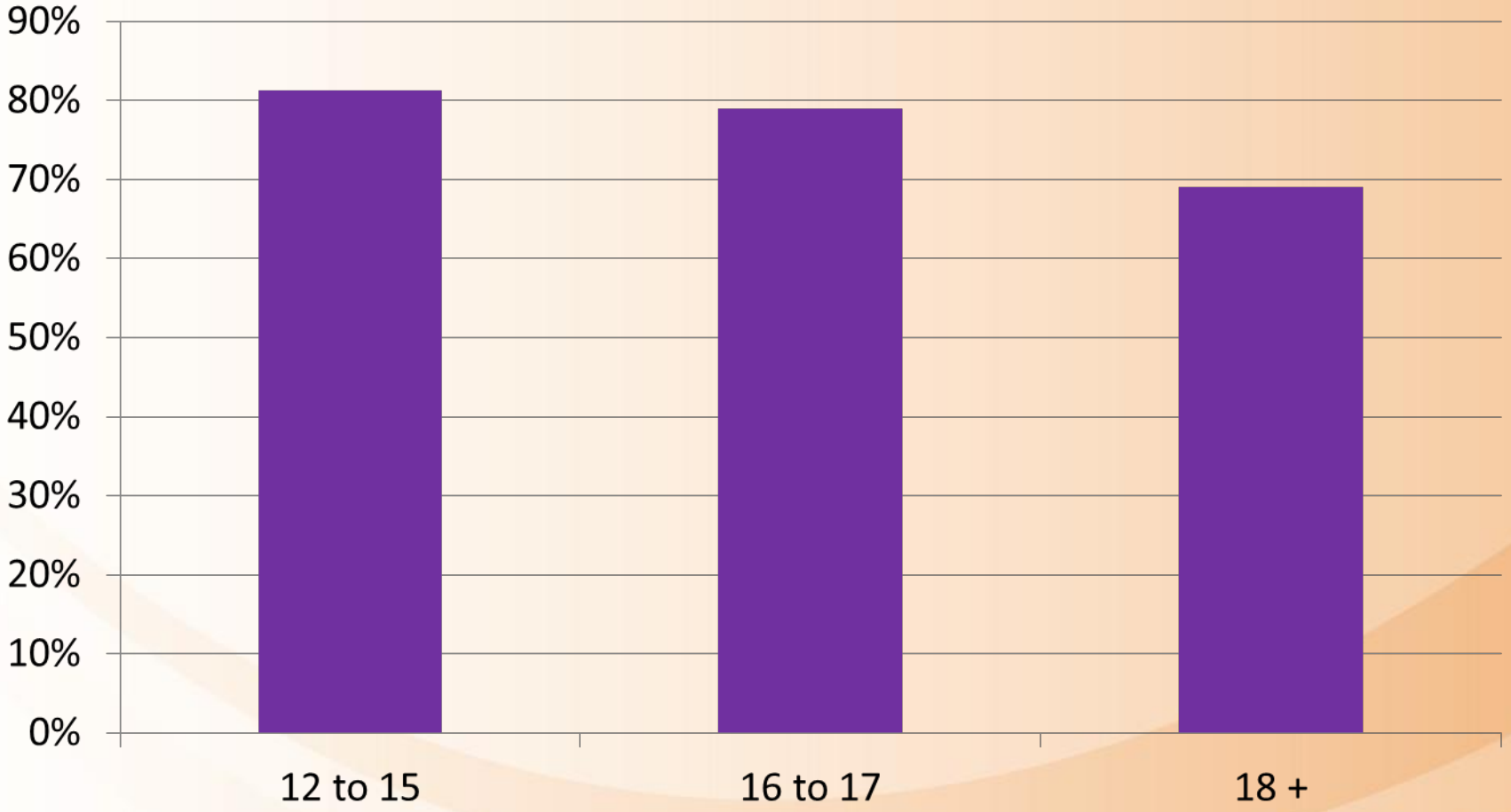
Perpetrator type by age



Data unavailable for age 1 to 11

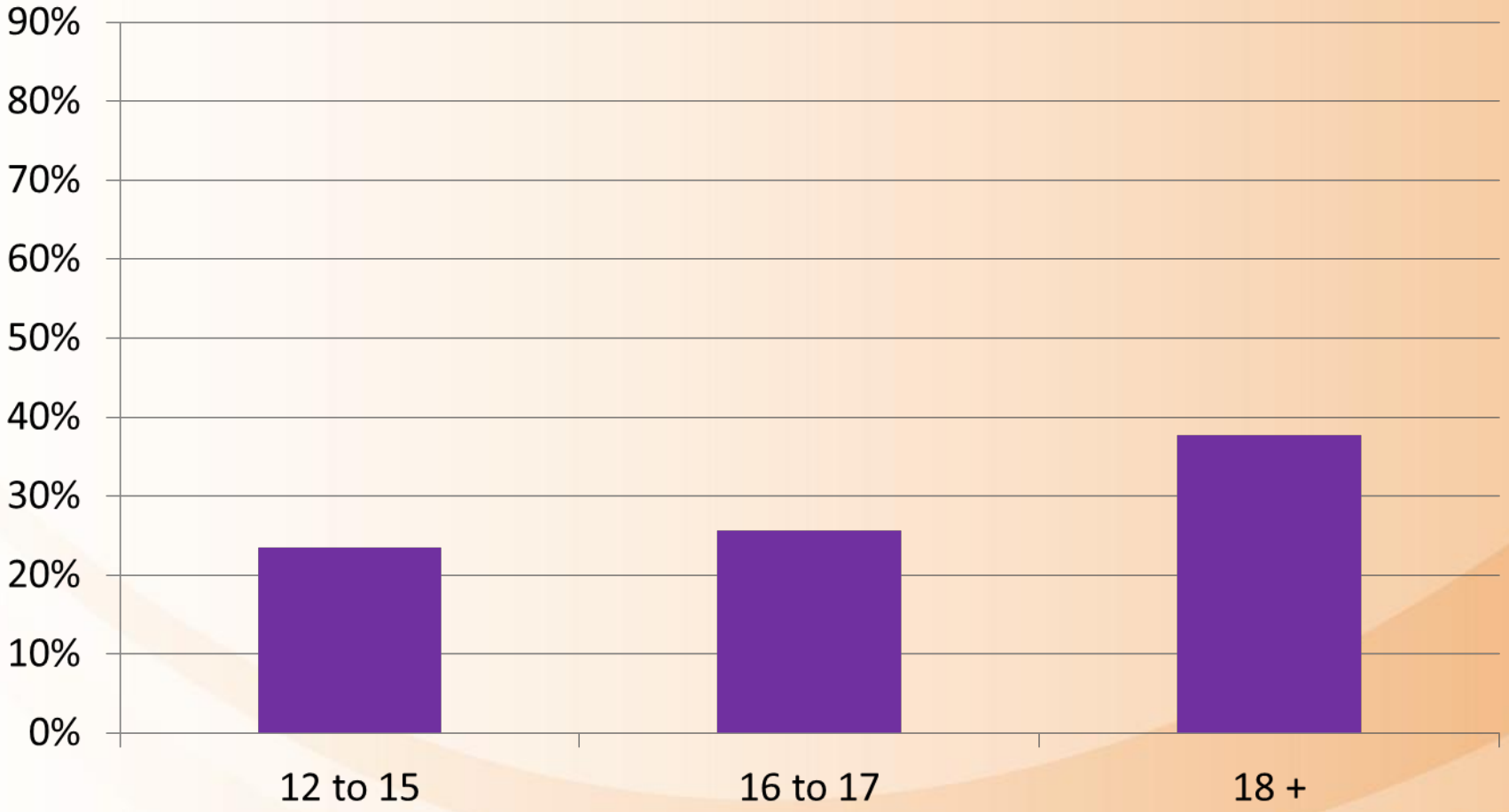
Adolescents not much different from adults!

Penetration by age of victim



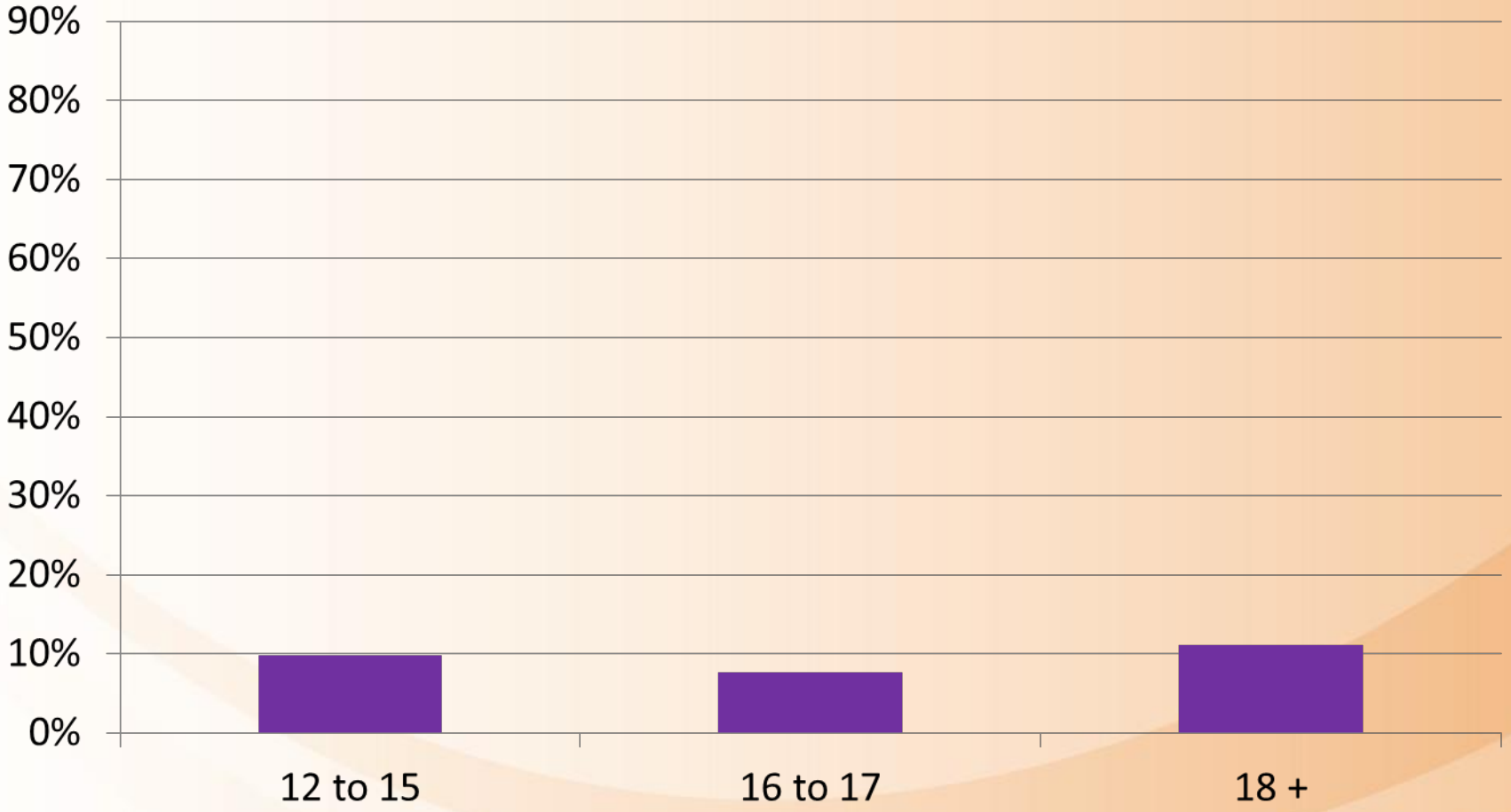
Data not available for Age 1 to 11

Use of force by age of victim



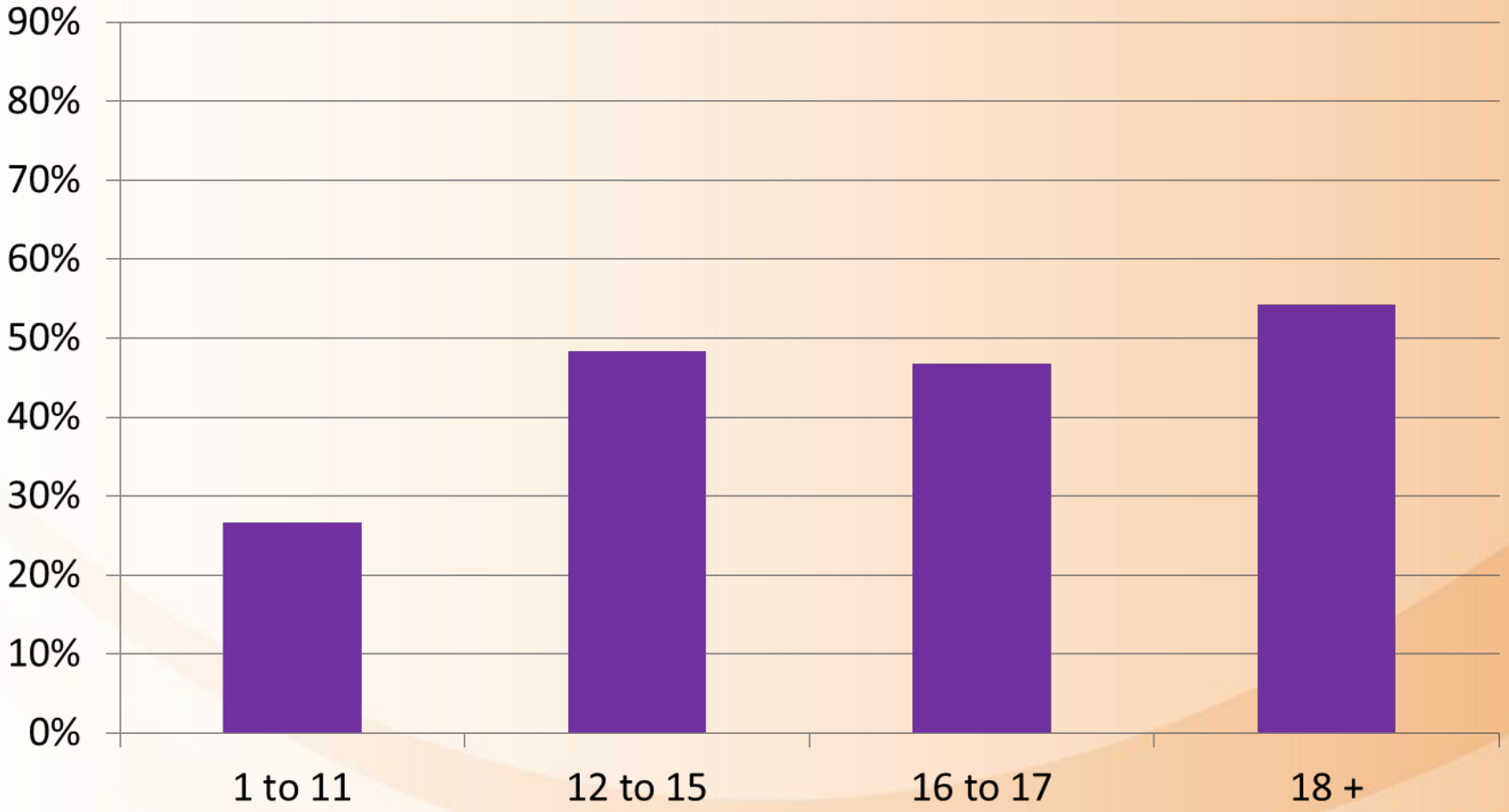
Data not available for Age 1 to 11

Use of weapon by age of victim

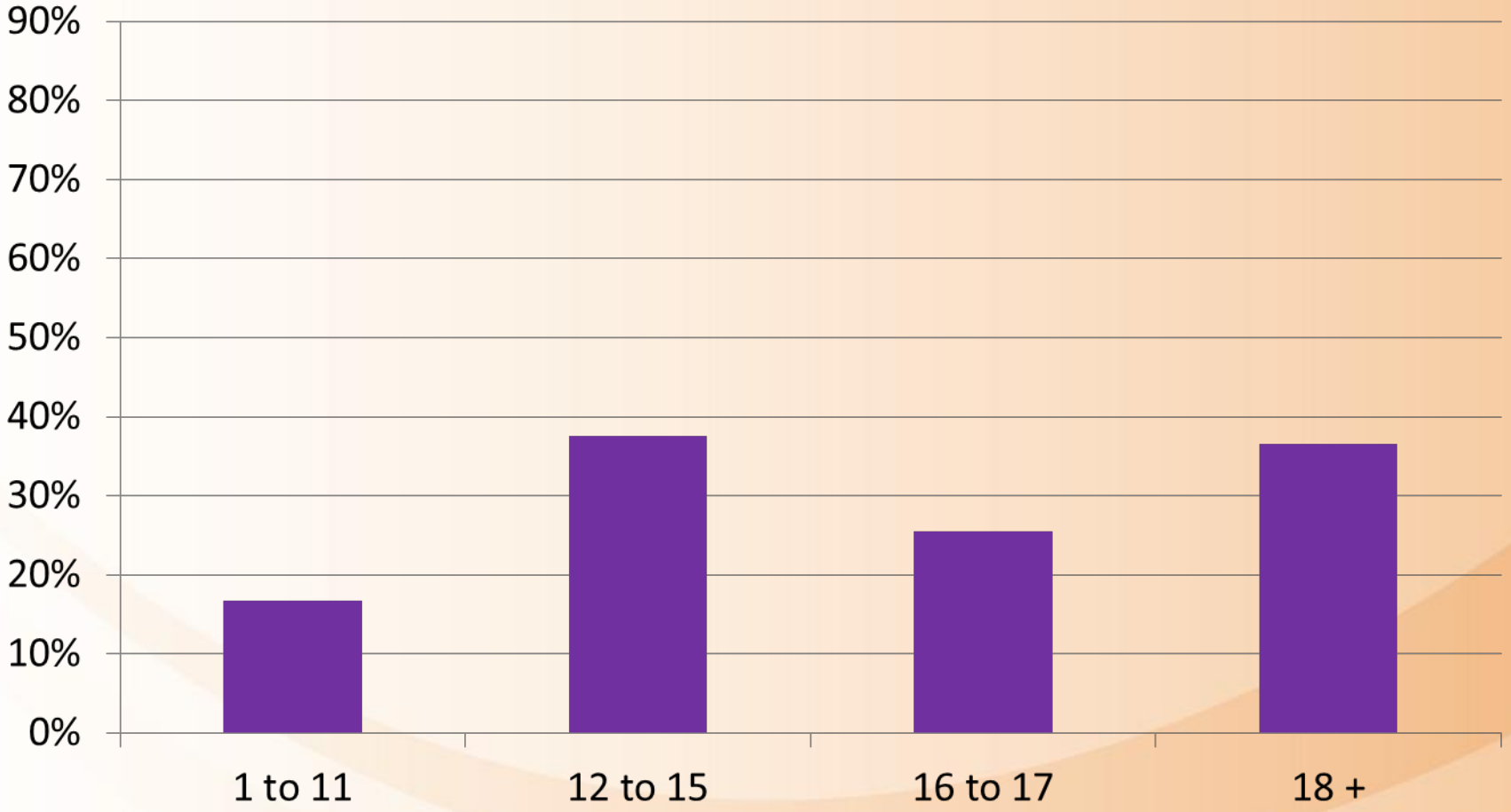


Data not available for Age 1 to 11

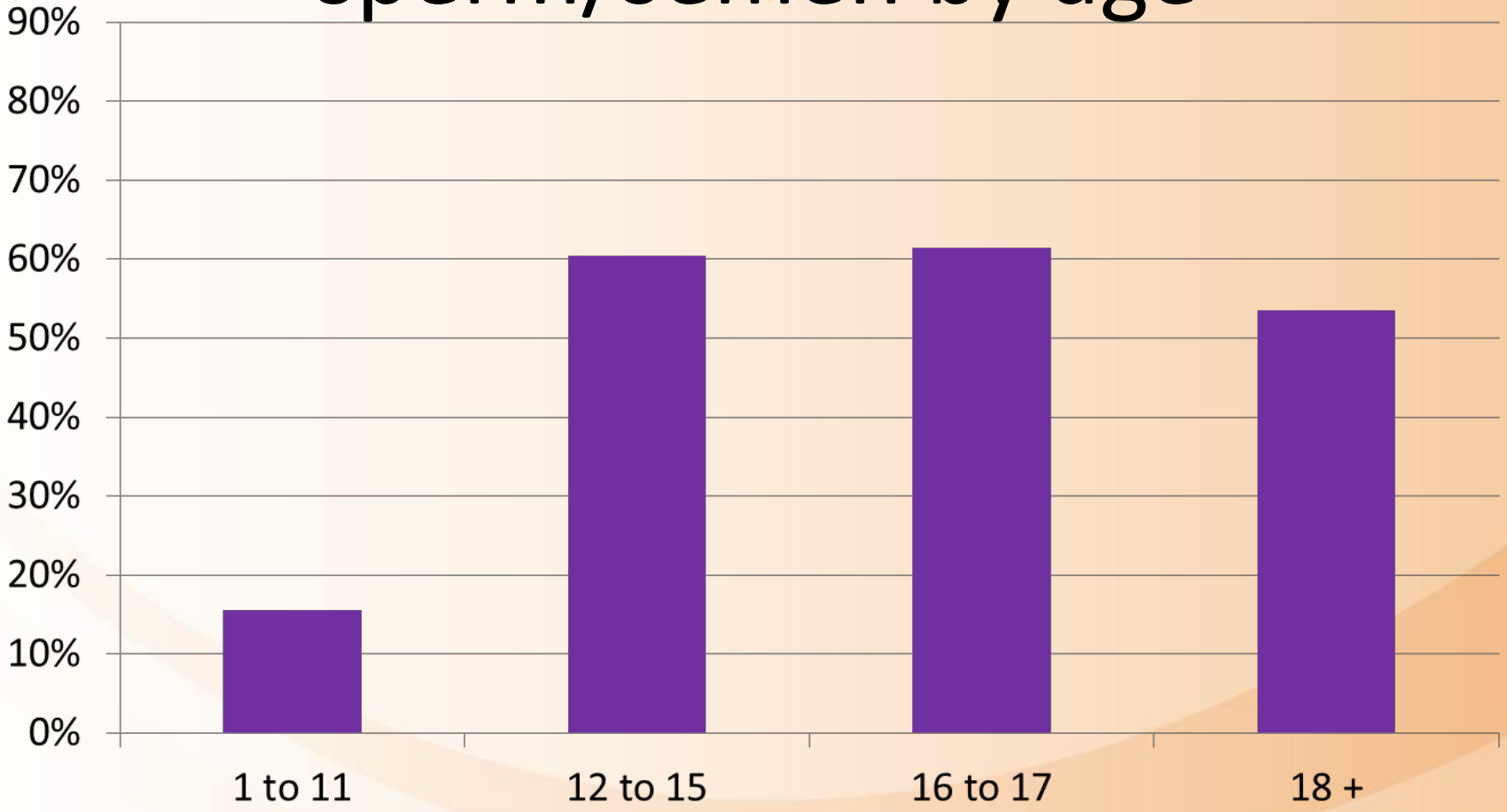
Non-genital injury rate by age



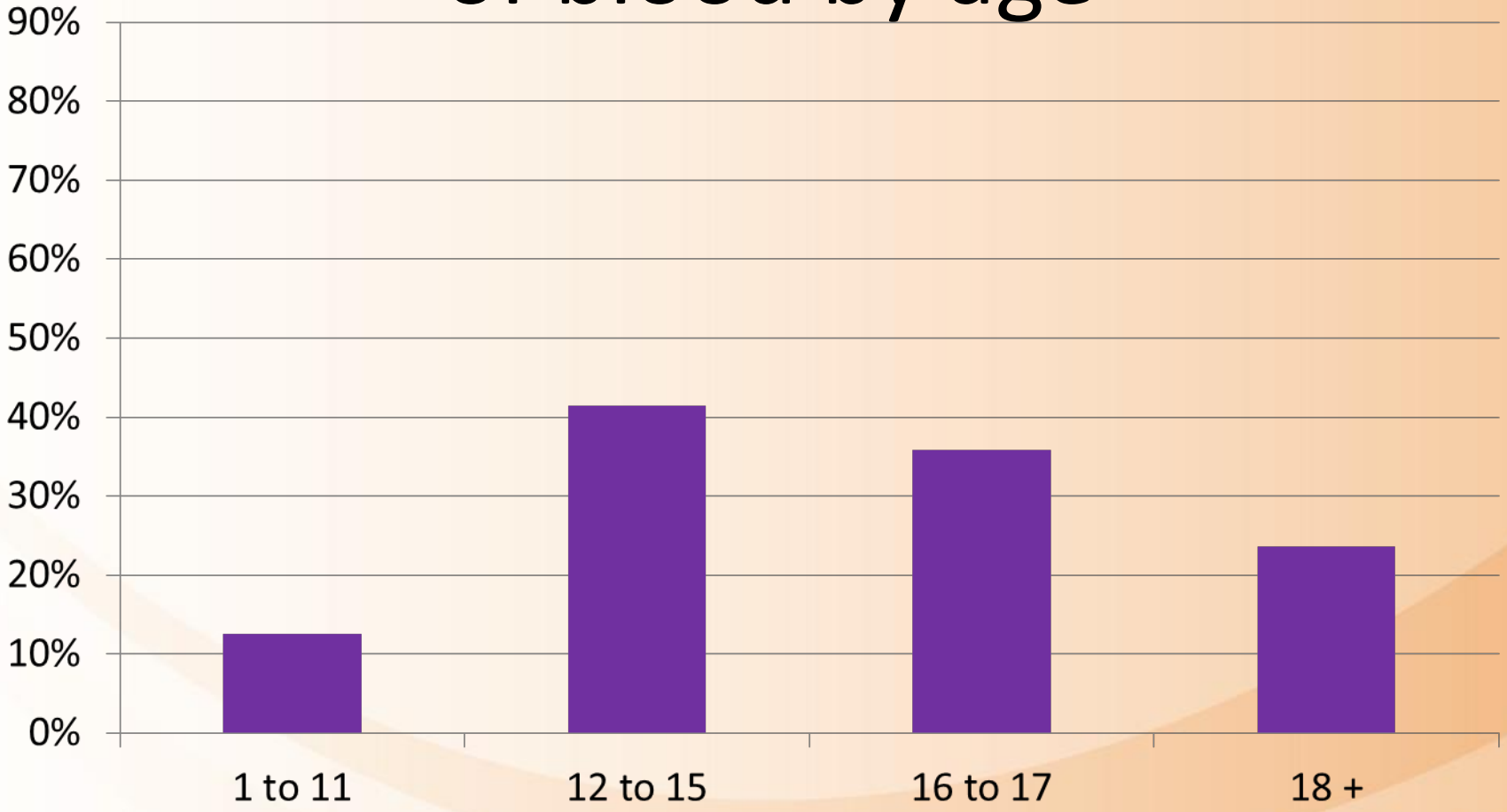
Genital injury rate by age



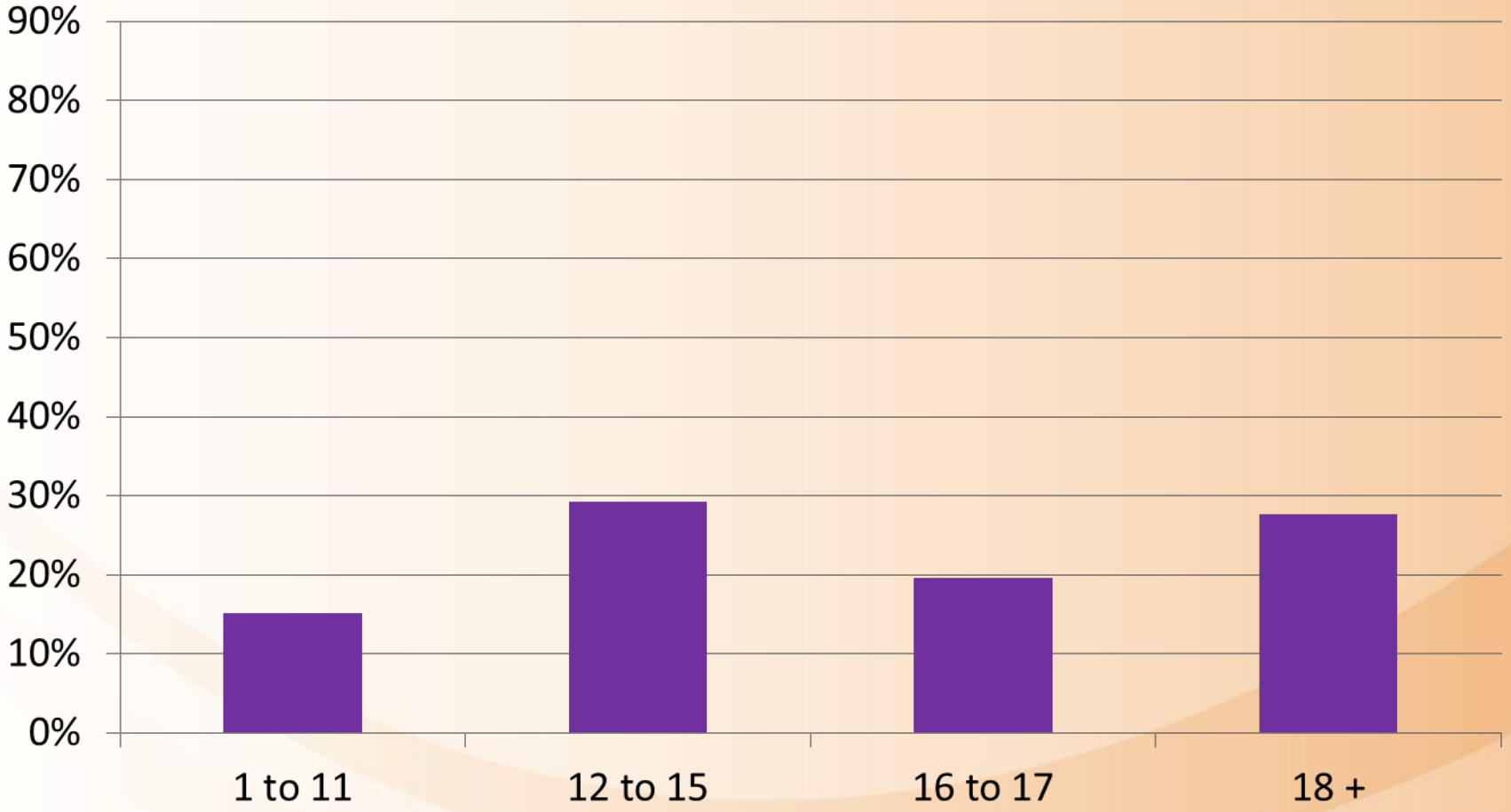
Crime lab evidence of sperm/semen by age



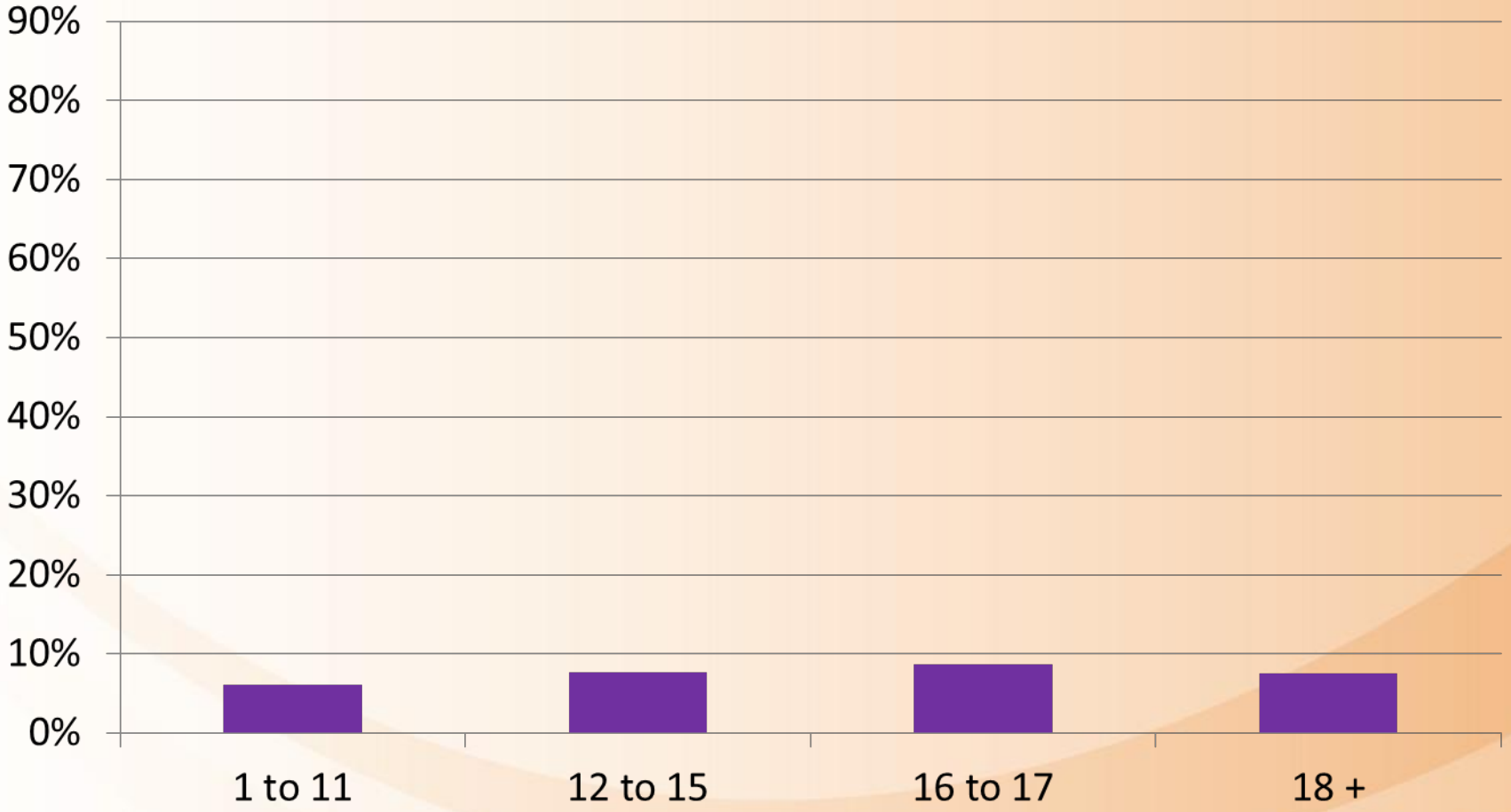
Crime lab evidence of blood by age



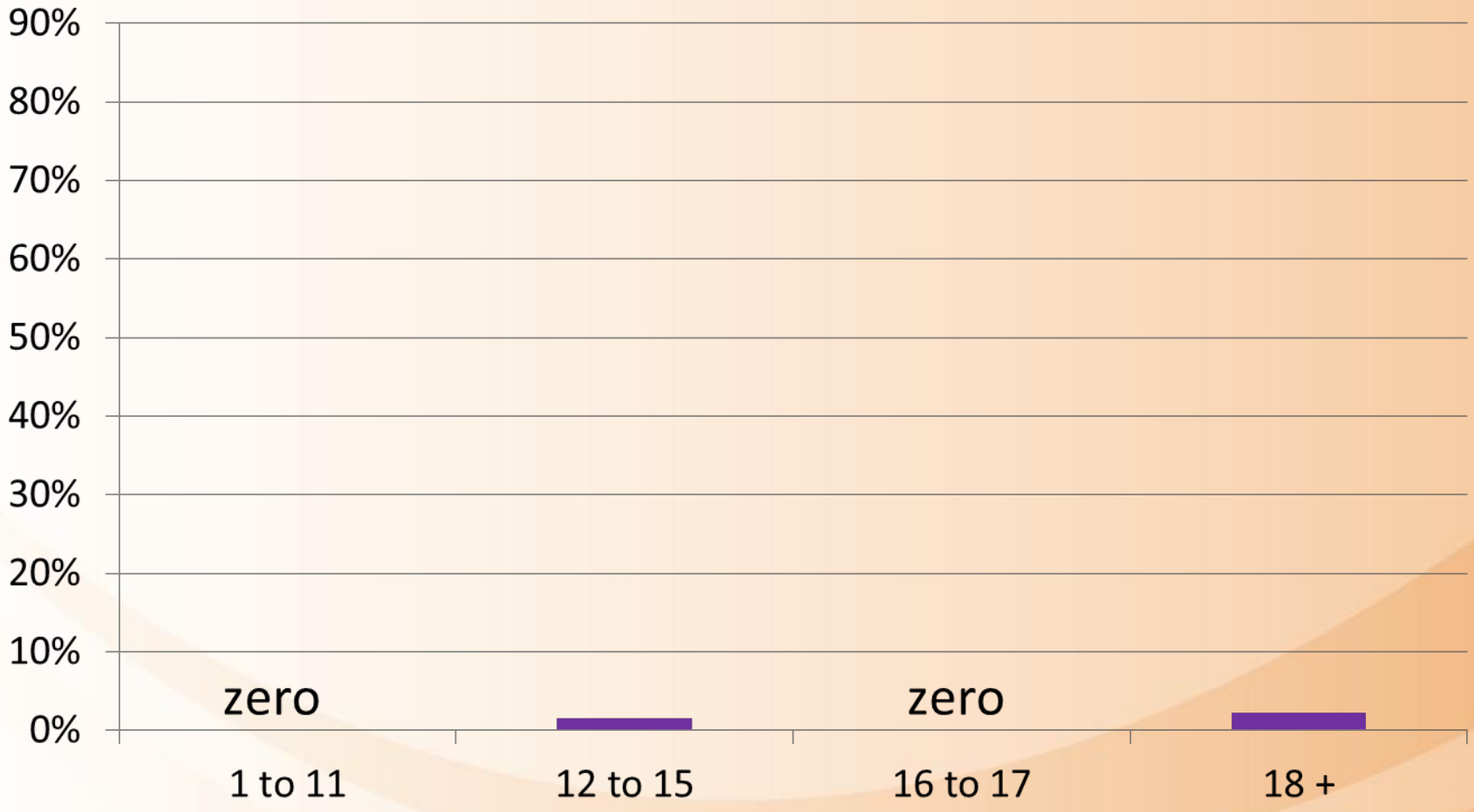
DNA profile generated by age



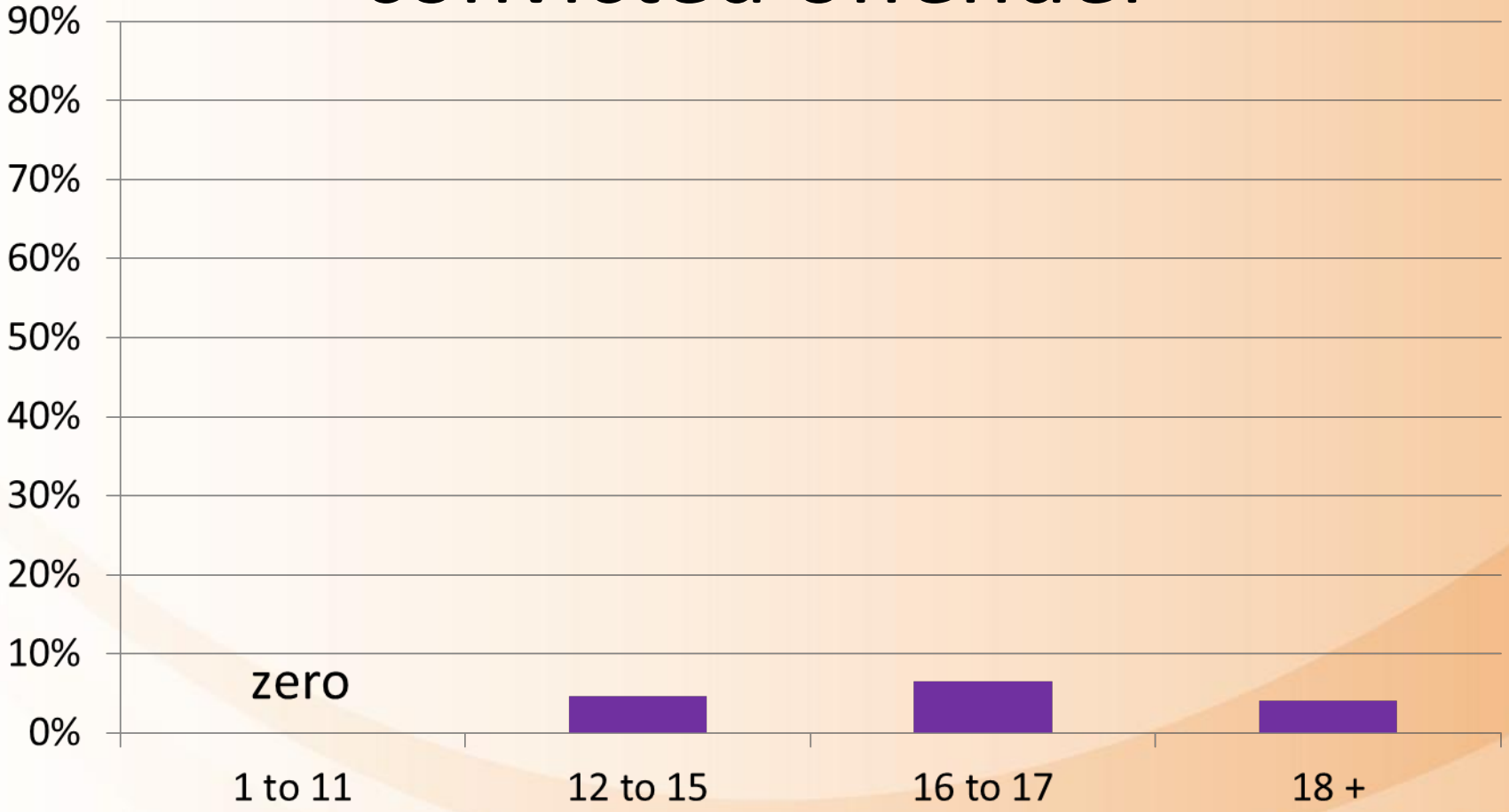
DNA match to suspect by age



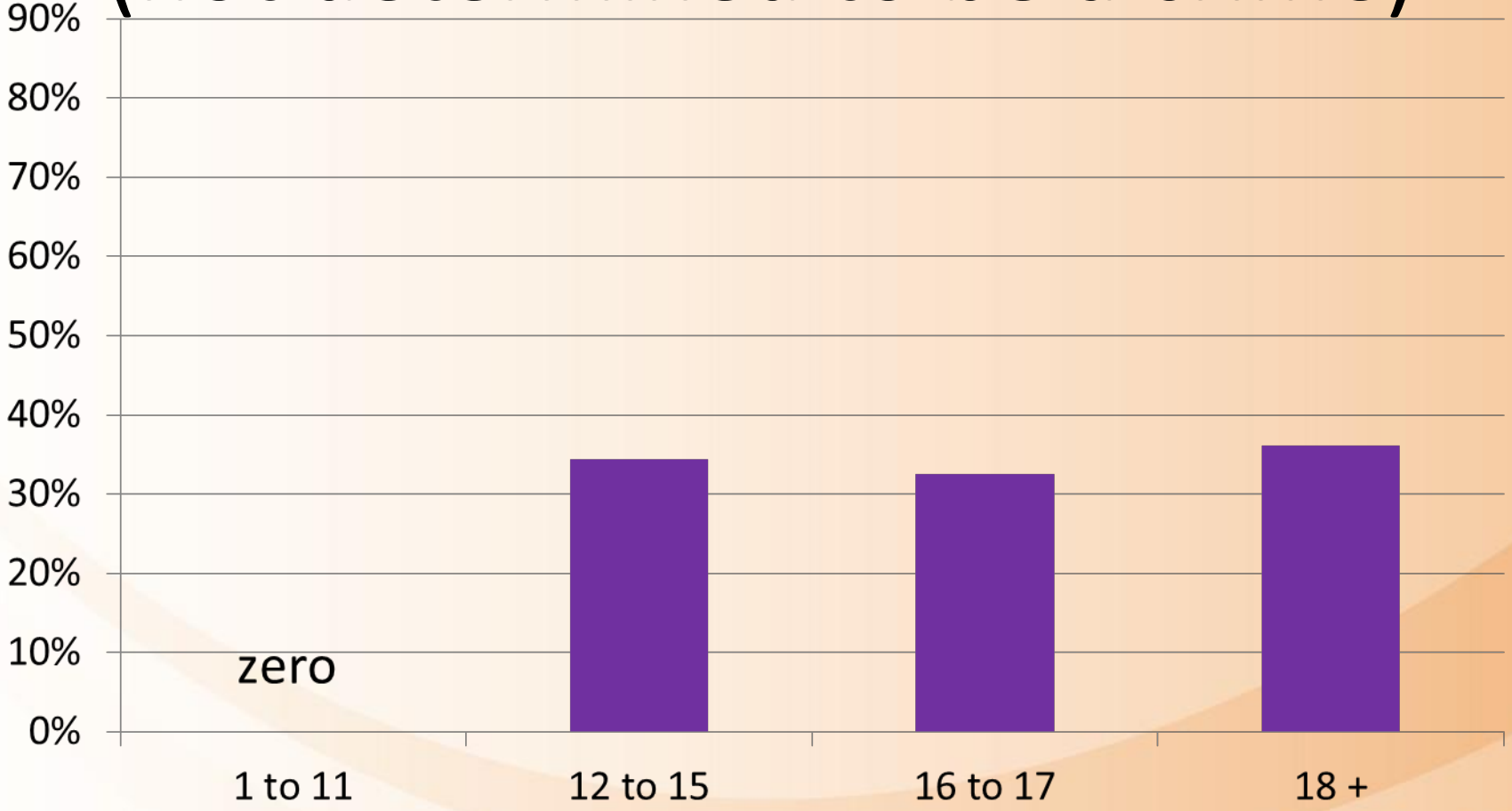
DNA match to suspect in another case



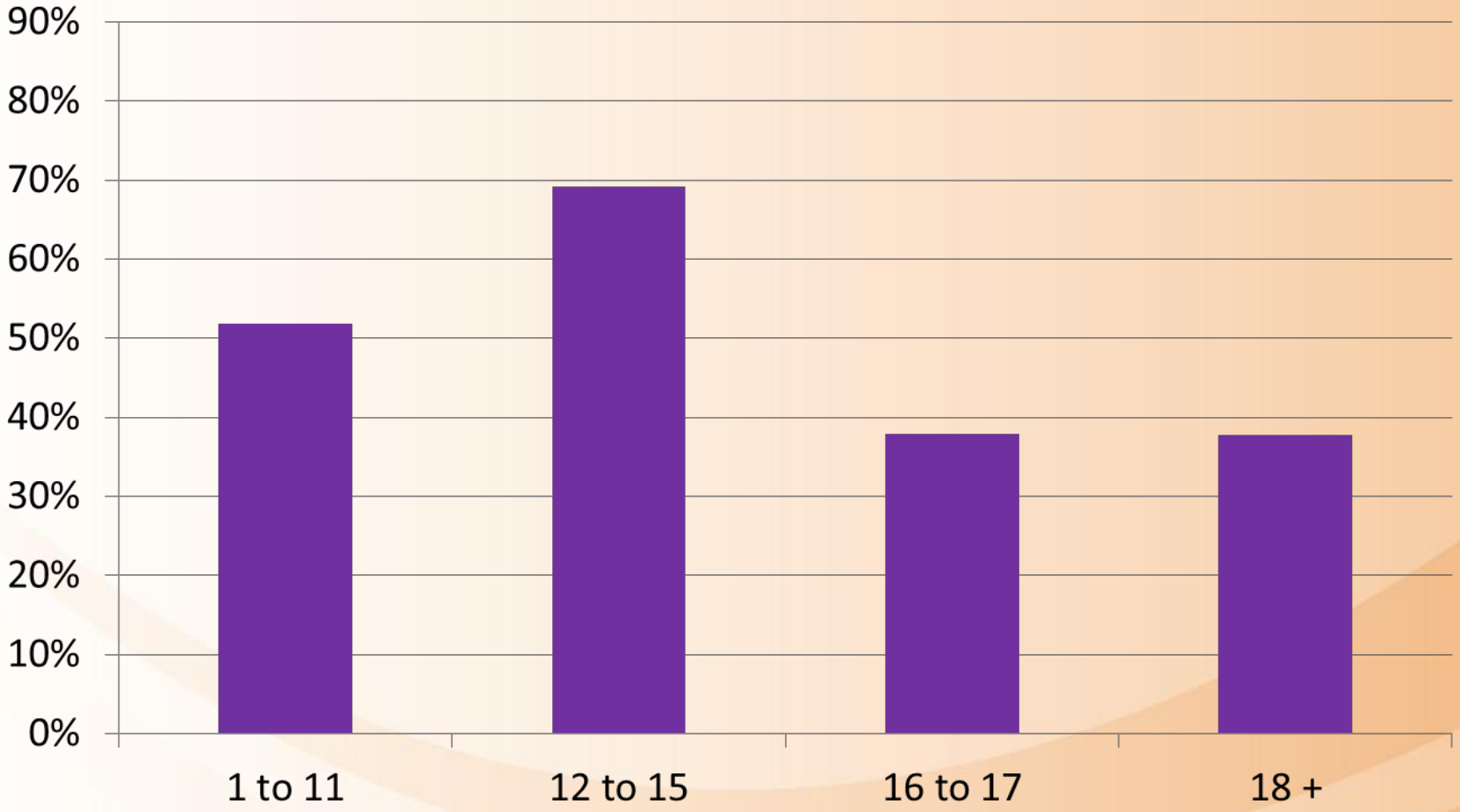
DNA match to a convicted offender



Cases unfounded by police (not determined to be a crime)



Arrests made in founded cases



Timing of crime lab analysis and arrests

- N=123 arrests
- 2/3 of arrests occurred within 2 days of assault
- Only 11 arrests took place near or after crime lab analysis
  - 5 adolescents (14 or 15 years old)
  - 6 adult
- DNA was significantly more likely when arrest took place near or after crime lab analysis – but only for adults in sample
- Biological evidence leads to arrest in a small % of cases, but may have an important impact when arrest is not immediate

Conclusions

- Cases with adolescents (even young adolescents) resemble adult cases more than child cases
- Risk for adolescents = risk for adults
  - Injury
  - Penetration, force, weapon
- Adolescents comparable to adults in rates of biological evidence, including DNA

Conclusions (cont.)

- Police are less likely to found adolescent cases than child cases, i.e., determine a crime has been committed
  - Unfounding can mean police think action futile
  - Unfounding rates comparable in adult and adolescent cases, even under age of consent
- Arrests more likely under the age of consent
- Biological evidence is a factor in a small % of arrests and no arrests for children under age 12

National Institute of Justice final report on the project

Cross, T.P., Alderden, M.A., Wagner, A., Sampson, L., Peters, B., Spencer, M. & Lounsbury, K. (2014). *Forensic evidence and criminal justice outcomes in a statewide sample of sexual assault cases*. Final Report. Award number 2011-WG-BX-0005, National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.

Available from the National Criminal Justice Reference Service (www.ncjrs.gov) at https://www.ncjrs.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/248254.pdf

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See our Centers website on sexual abuse:

http://cfrc.illinois.edu/publications.php?dim=topic#SexualAbuseandAssault

I welcome any questions or requests for copies