

**WHATCOM COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER
1500 NORTH STATE STREET
BELLINGHAM, WA 98225**

2017 ANNUAL REPORT

During 2017 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's office assumed jurisdiction in 136 death investigations that involved forensic autopsies, toxicological examinations, viewing and summary reporting. In addition, 261 other additional cases were reported to the office, investigated and reviewed and no jurisdiction was assumed (NJA).

Teaching and public relations are also an important part of the Medical Examiner's Office. Consulting was ongoing with the fire and police departments of the county and St. Joseph's Hospital. In addition, service clubs, students and other interested parties received lectures and opportunities to tour the morgue facility. The Medical Examiner also represented the office on numerous occasions to various civic organizations and gave multiple lectures at Western Washington University, University of Washington, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College and all three Bellingham High Schools.



Gary Goldfogel, MD
Whatcom County Medical Examiner

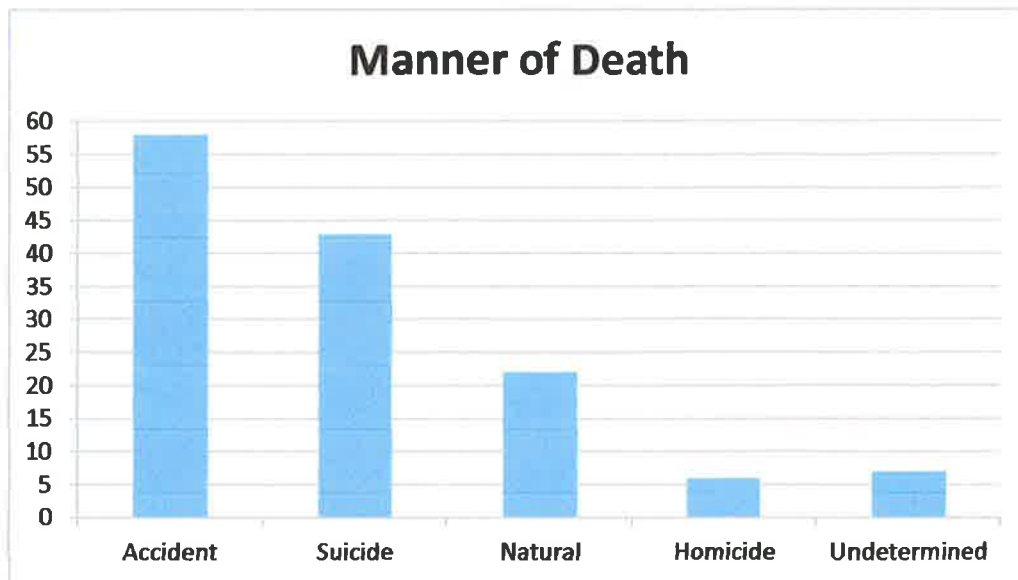
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**JACK LOUWS
COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

During 2017 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office conducted 136 forensic death investigations. The manner of death was certified as 58 Accident, 43 Suicide, 22 Natural, 6 Homicide and 7 as Undetermined. The statistics and graphs on the following pages show the breakdown of the various manners of the deaths and the age and sex of those who died.

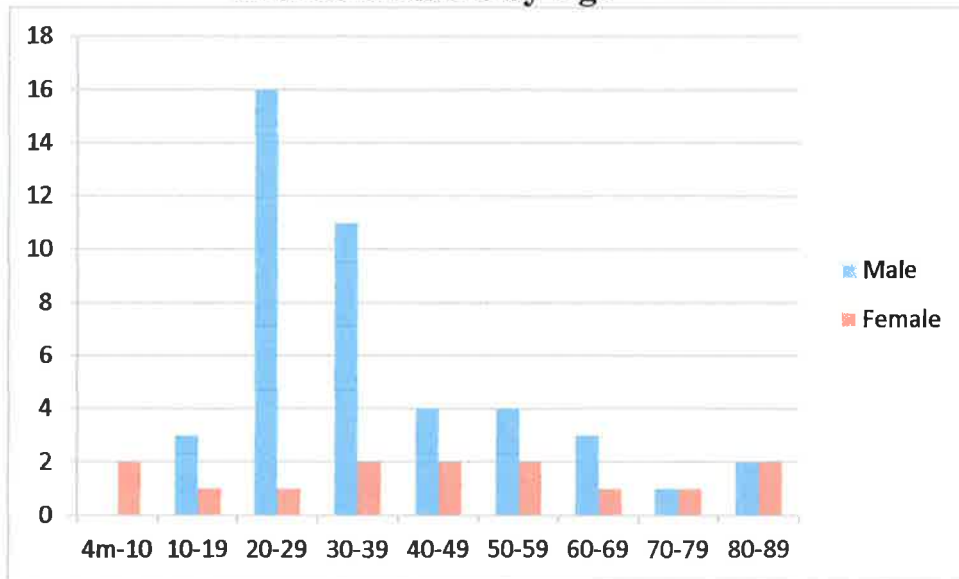
Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office Death Investigations 2017



ACCIDENT:

There were 58 total investigated accident deaths in which 44 of the victims were male and 14 were female. The following accidental deaths accounted for 32 of the 58 accidental deaths. The circumstances of death were as follows: 13 died from motor vehicle accidents, 4 died from motorcycle accidents, 4 died from falling from an exceptional height or down stairs, 3 pedestrians died from being struck by a motor vehicle, 3 died from drowning, 2 died from asphyxiation (1 due to a residential fire and 1 from being pinned by their vehicle), 1 bicyclist died from being struck by a motor vehicle, 1 died from a falling branch and 1 died from hypothermia.

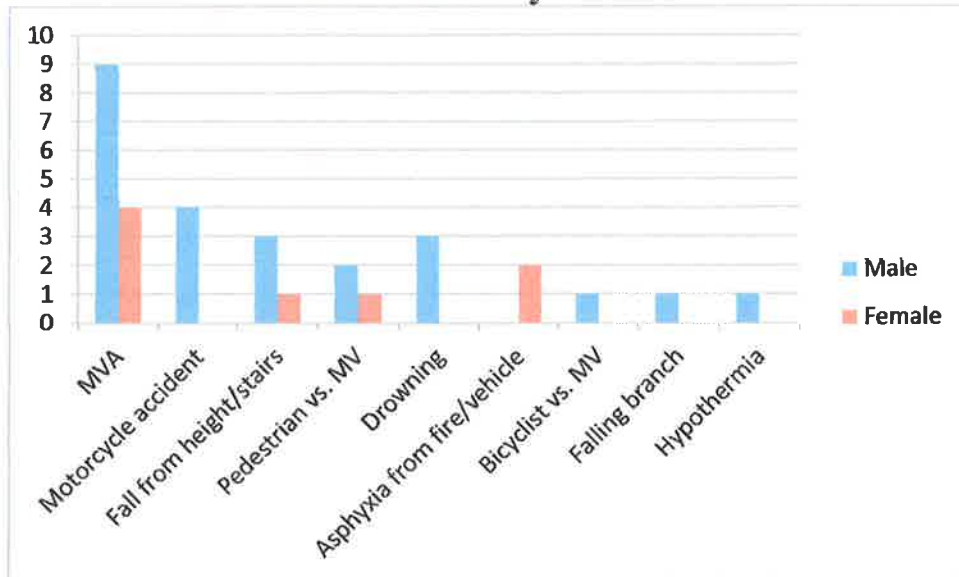
Accident Deaths by Age and Sex



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized by age, 2 of the 58 accidental deaths was between 4 months and 10 years of age, 4 were between 10-19, 17 were between 20-29, 13 were between 30-39, 6 were between 40-49, 6 were between 50-59, 4 were between 60-69, 2 were between 70-79, and 4 were between 80-89 years of age.

Accident Deaths by Mechanism

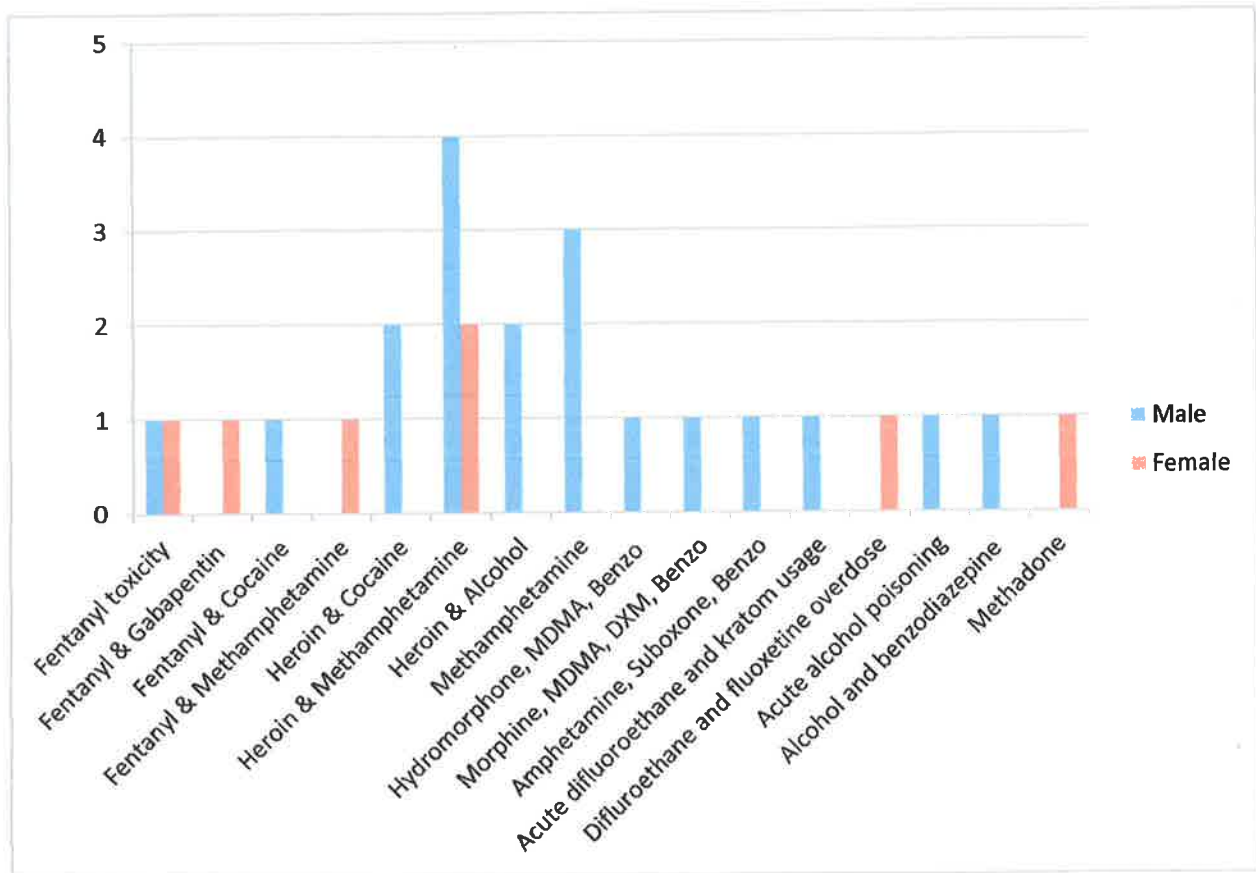


* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Alcohol was involved in 5 of the 13 motor vehicle accidents with the blood alcohol range from .15 to .28 gram% with the mean at .22 gram%.

Marijuana was involved in the motorcycle accident as well as 3 of the motor vehicle accidents. Codeine, venlafaxine and a benzodiazepine were also found in 3 of the motor vehicle accidents.

26 of the 58 accidental deaths had to do with drugs or alcohol, predominately drugs. Drugs such as fentanyl, heroin, cocaine, and methamphetamine were used either alone but more often in combination with other drugs as seen below. 19 males and 7 females died of drug overdoses.

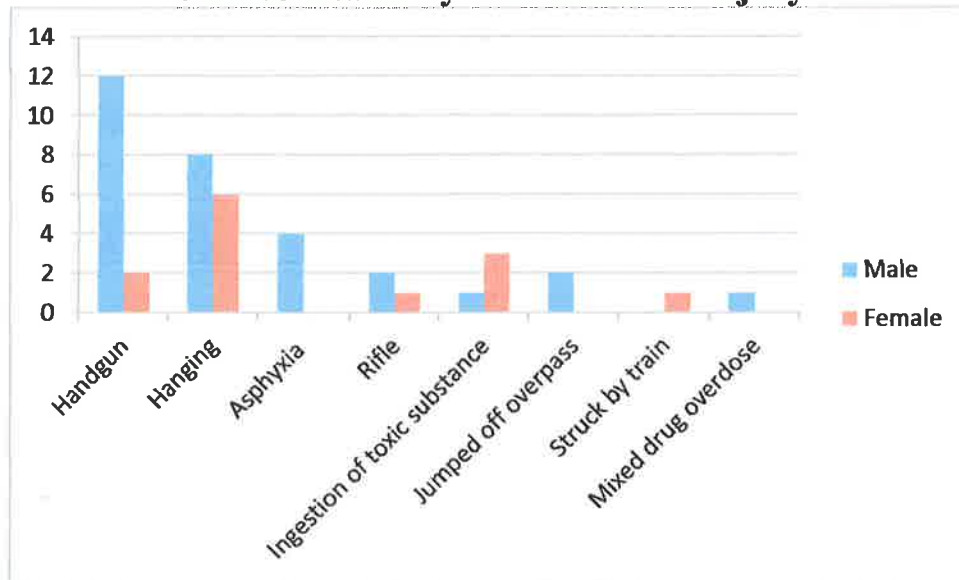


The above are the main causes of drug overdose deaths. However, additional substances such as diphenhydramine, sertraline, fluoxetine, cyclobenzaprine, risperidone, gabapentin, buprenorphine, naloxone, cannabinoids, and MDA were found in some of the drug overdose death additional toxicology results (for example: The deceased died from heroin and cocaine but also had fluoxetine in his system.)

SUICIDE:

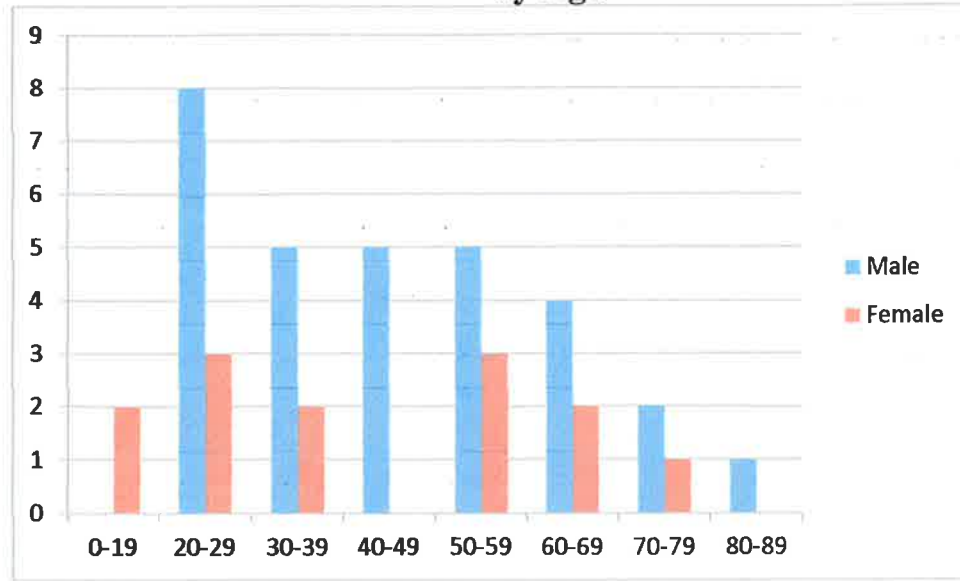
There were 43 total investigated suicide deaths of which 30 were male and 13 were female. The causes of death were as follows: 17 gunshot fatalities (14 handgun, 3 rifle), 14 Hanging, 4 Asphyxia (1 by exclusion of air, 1 by inhalation of nitrogen, 1 by inhalation of car exhaust and 1 residential fire), 4 ingestion of toxic substance (overdose of diphenhydramine, valproic acid, lidocaine or propofol), 2 jumped off an overpass, 1 was struck by a train and 1 mixed drug intentional suicide overdose.

Suicide Deaths by Mechanism of Injury



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Suicide Deaths by Age and Sex



*Blue bars are male and red bars female.

Categorized by age, 2 of the 43 suicide deaths were between 0-19 years of age, 11 was between 20-29, 7 were between 30-39, 5 were between 40-49, 8 were between 50-59, 6 were between 60-69, 3 were between 70-79 and 1 was between 80-89 years of age.

Stressors involved in Suicide Deaths

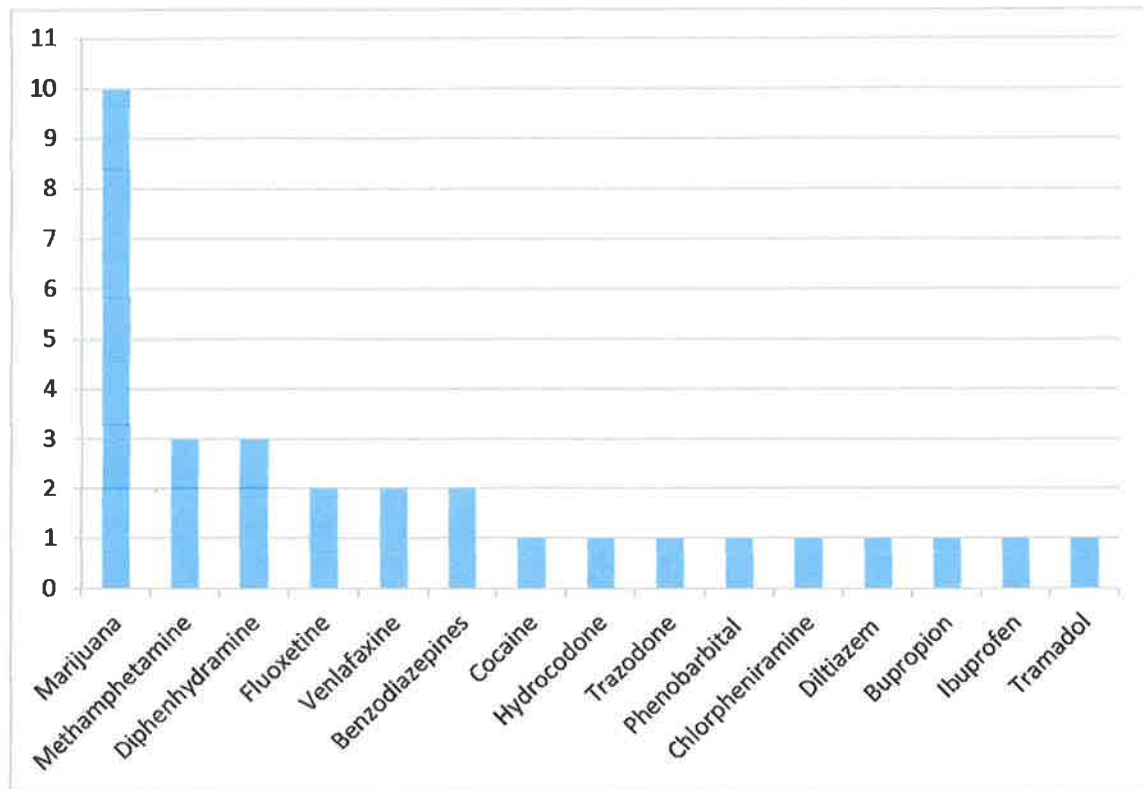
5 of the 43 suicides had tried to commit suicide before. 20 of the 43 suicides had spoken of wanting to end their life (suicidal ideation). 15 of the 43 suicides left a note.

The deceased sometimes left reasons as to why they were committing suicide. For some it was one specific stressor but for others it was a combination of stressors. Relationship issues such as divorce, separation, breakup or custody issues were identified as a reason for 12 of the 43 suicides, 11 were due to failing health or loss of independence, 11 were due to depression and schizophrenia, 6 were due to alcoholism and or substance abuse, 3 were due to lack of employment or stress at work and 2 were due to law enforcement issues.

Blood alcohol levels greater than 0.08 gram% were present in 9 of the 43 suicide cases. Of these, blood alcohol values ranged from 0.09 to 0.79 gram% with the mean of .25 gram% (over 3 times the per se intoxication value).

The graph below shows the substances found in suicide deaths. One or a combination of the following was found in the suicide deaths.

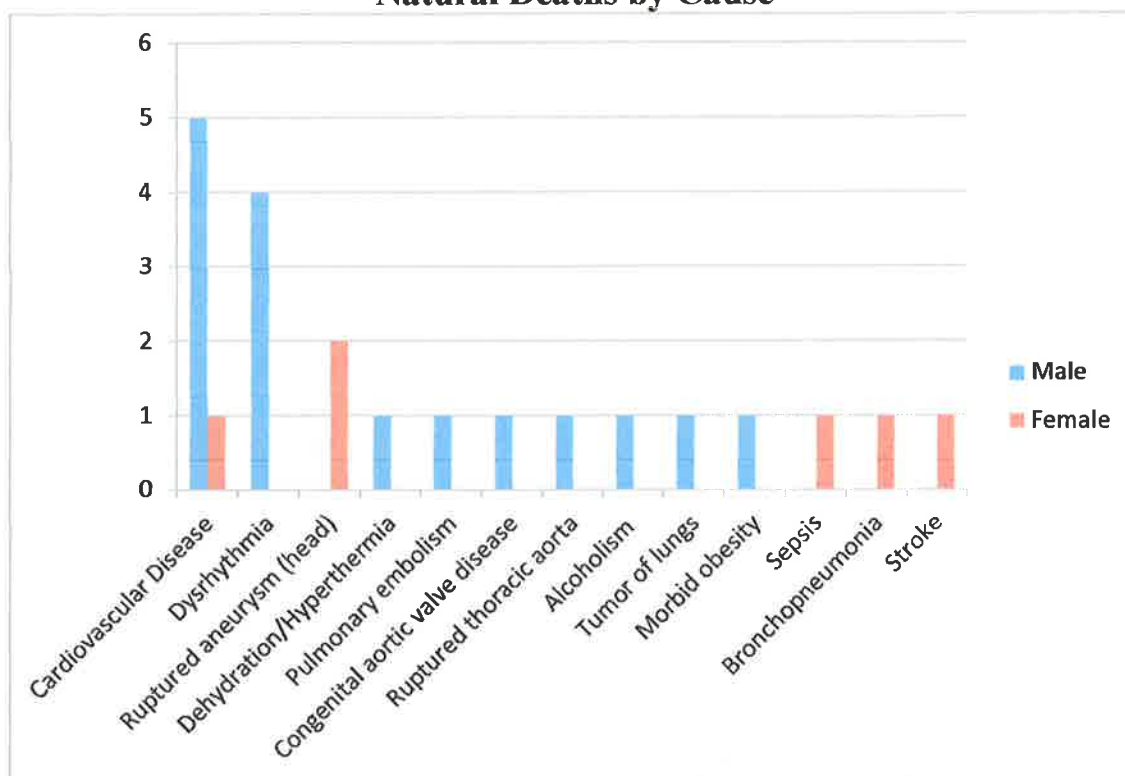
Substances found in Suicide Deaths



NATURAL:

There were 22 total investigated and autopsied natural unexpected or unexplained deaths of which 16 were male and 6 were female. The causes of death were as follows: 6 cardiovascular disease, 4 dysrhythmia, 2 ruptured brain aneurysms, 1 from a combination of dehydration/hypothermia, 1 from pulmonary embolism, 1 from congenital aortic valve disease, 1 from ruptured thoracic aorta, 1 from alcoholism, 1 from an occult tumor of the lungs, 1 from morbid obesity, 1 from sepsis, 1 from bronchopneumonia and 1 from stroke.

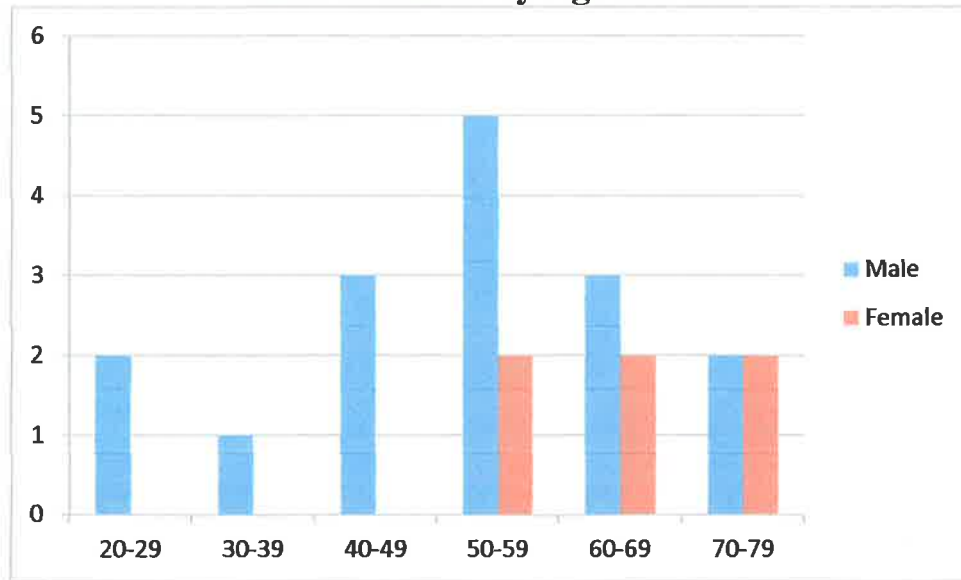
Natural Deaths by Cause



*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized by age, 2 of the 22 natural deaths were between 20-29, 1 was between 30-39, 3 were between 40-49, 7 were between 50-59, 5 were between 60-69 and 4 were between 70-79 years of age.

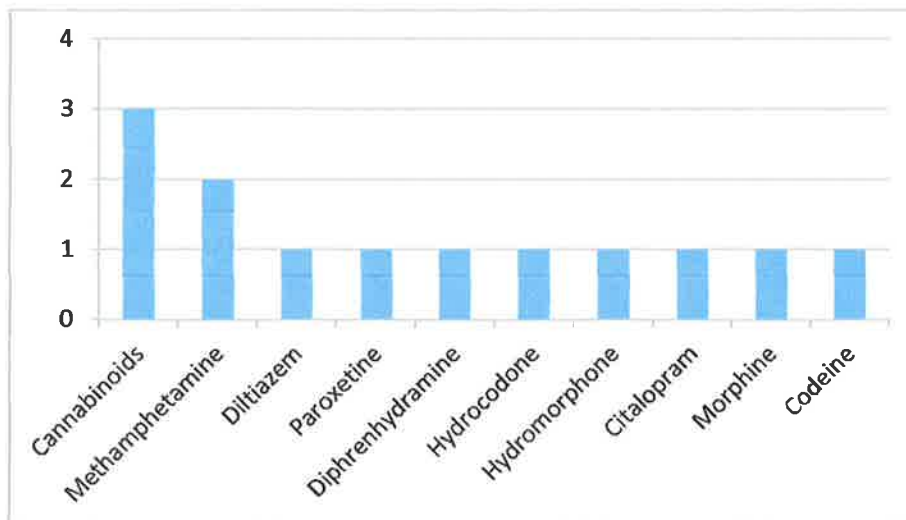
Natural Deaths by Age and Sex



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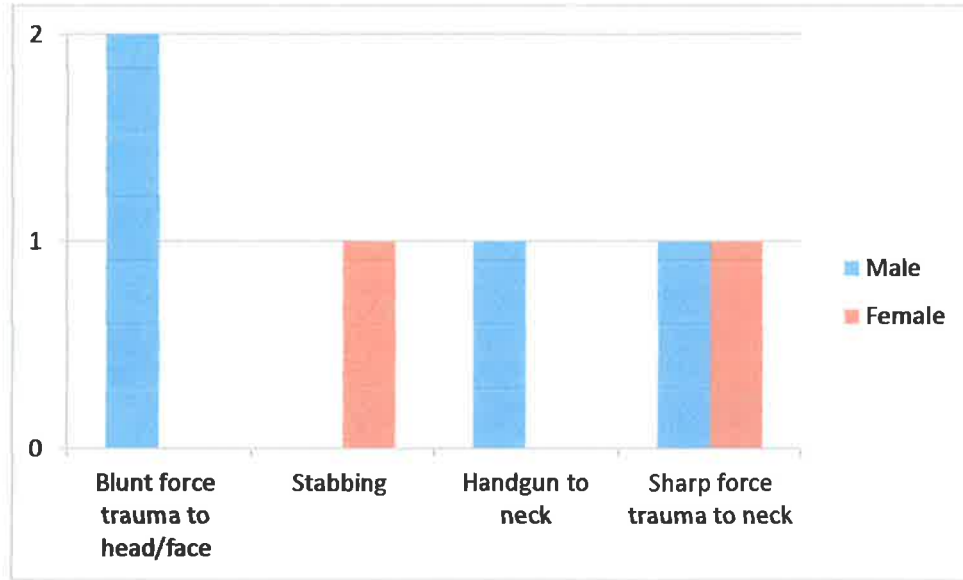
Surprisingly, alcohol was not present in the postmortem toxicology in any of the 22 natural deaths.

The deceased died of natural causes but there were instances where the following substances were found in their postmortem toxicology. For some it may have been just one substance and for others a combination of substances.

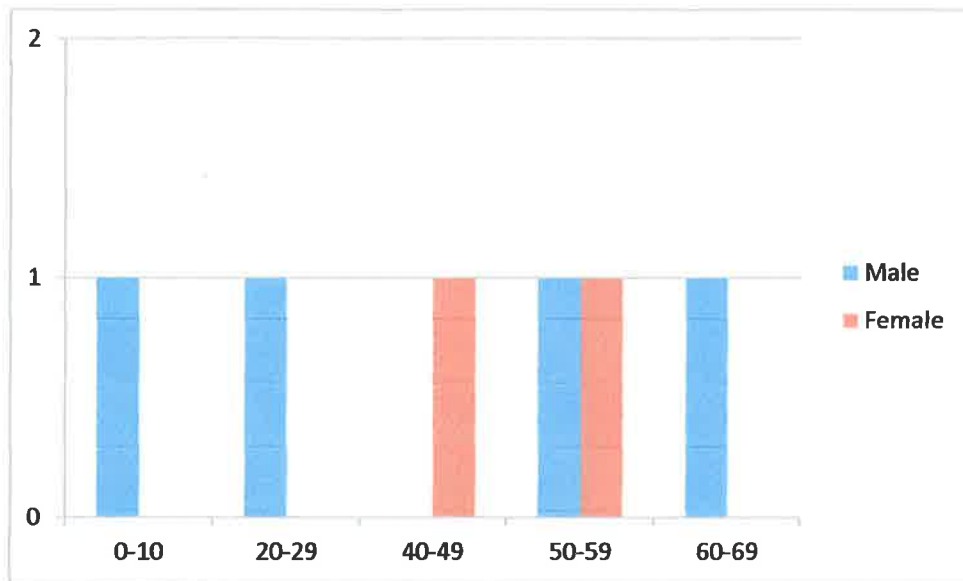


HOMICIDE:

There were 6 homicide death cases of which 4 were male and 2 were female. Alcohol was involved in one of the homicides. Marijuana was involved in 3 of the 6 homicides and methamphetamine was involved in 1 of the 6 homicides.



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UNDETERMINED:

There were 7 investigated deaths whose manner of death after complete forensic autopsy and investigation were listed as undetermined of which 5 were male and 2 were female. Undetermined category is utilized when the legal standard of “more probable than not” or 51% cannot be reached.

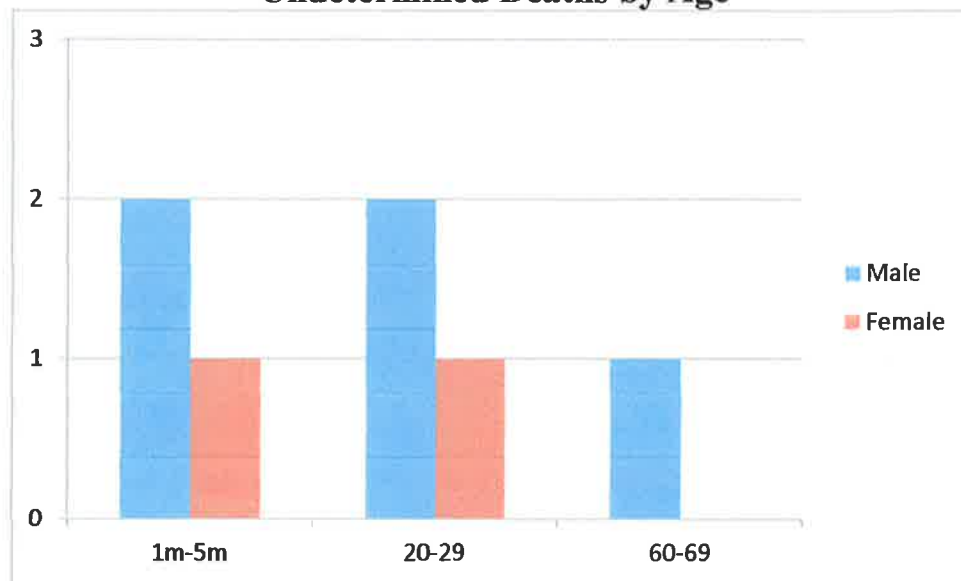
Sudden Unexplained Infant Demise (SUID) due to unsafe sleeping surface, soft bedding and cosleeping accounted for 3 of the 8 undetermined deaths of which 2 were males and 1 was female and all were less than six months old.

Of the remaining cases one involved mechanical asphyxia versus cardiac disease. One case involved suicide versus accidental overdose related to overdose of magnesium sulfate. Two cases were ruled undetermined due to failure of postmortem toxicology to certify suspected acute accidental overdose.

Marijuana was only involved in 1 of the 8 undetermined deaths.

Categorized by age, 3 of undetermined deaths were between 1 month to 5 months of age, 3 between 20-29 and 1 between 60-69 years of age.

Undetermined Deaths by Age



*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.