

# Johnson County Medical Examiner Department

Annual Report 2018



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## Introduction

The purpose of this annual report is to share information and annual statistics of the Johnson County Medical Examiner Department (JCME).

JCME achieved full accreditation by the National Association of Medical Examiners (NAME) on February 25, 2019. This significant accomplishment demonstrates that JCME is performing to the highest standards of medicolegal death investigation as set forth by NAME.

The primary statutory function of JCME is to determine a scientifically based cause and manner of death for every death within the medical examiner jurisdiction. Cause of death is defined as the disease or injury process that initiated the sequence of events that resulted in death (e.g., “atherosclerotic heart disease” or “gunshot wound of the head”). Manner of death is a public health statistic that classifies the circumstances under which death occurred (natural, accident, suicide, homicide, or undetermined). The manner of death stated on a death certificate is not a legal determination. The cause of death and the manner of death are the core medical components of the content of each death certificate.

Medical examiner jurisdiction is described by Iowa Code § 331.802 as those deaths which affect the “public interest.” Common examples are deaths that occur unexpectedly or from an unexplained cause; trauma deaths in the context of an accident, suicide, or homicide; deaths unattended by a physician; and deaths of children under the age of two.

In 2018, there were 781 deaths reported to JCME. Of these, 416 were accepted as medical examiner jurisdiction deaths. Each of these deaths was investigated and certified by JCME (i.e., generation of a death certificate). After review of each of the remaining 365 reported deaths, jurisdiction was declined because each death was determined to not be in the “public interest” as defined above. Each of these deaths was certified by the decedent’s physician. The total number of deaths investigated (jurisdiction accepted) or reviewed (jurisdiction declined) by JCME comprised 42% of the 1,866 deaths that occurred in Johnson County in 2018.

Of the 416 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 177 decedents were Johnson County residents and 200 were residents of other counties in Iowa. Additionally, there were 14 decedents who were in the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections at the time of death and 19 decedents were out-of-state residents. As a result, only 43% of deaths accepted and investigated by JCME consisted of Johnson County residents.

Of the 416 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the incident location for 188 decedents was Johnson County. 193 incidents occurred in other Iowa counties and 14 incidents occurred while in the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections. Additionally, for 19 decedents, the incident location was out-of-state. Two decedents had an incident location that was unknown.

Of the 416 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the manner of death was classified as accident for 196, natural for 178, suicide for 22, homicide for 4, and undetermined for 16.

In 2018, 114 autopsies were conducted by JCME. All JCME autopsies were performed at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) and were complete autopsies (external examination and internal examination the head, neck, chest, and abdomen). No partial autopsies were performed in 2018.

Of the 416 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, all decedents were identified. Thirteen decedents were unclaimed by family or friends and final disposition was arranged by JCME. There were no exhumations.

In 2018, there were 14 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 14 deaths, 5 were classified as undetermined followed by 4 as accident, 3 as homicide, and 2 as natural. For 3 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County, 10 incident locations occurred in another Iowa County, and 1 incident location occurred out-of-state. There were 4 sleep-related infant deaths in 2018. Of these 4 deaths, 3 were classified as undetermined and 1 was classified as accident. For 2 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County, 1 incident location was another Iowa county, and 1 incident location occurred out-of-state.

There were 274 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 103 in which the death was the result of a fall. The majority of these fall-related deaths, 69, occurred from a standing height and 37 of the falls occurred inside of the decedent's home. The most common anatomical location of injury from a fall was the head and/or neck, which occurred in 56 of the falls.

In 2018, there were 13 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 5 involved illicit drugs only, 3 involved over-the-counter medications only, and 5 involved a mixture of drug types. Of the 5 mixed drug-related deaths, 2 involved prescription and over-the-counter medications, 1 involved multiple illicitly obtained substances (acrylfentanyl and morphine), 1 involved an illicit drug (fentanyl) and prescription drug, and 1 was a mixture of an illicit drug (fentanyl), prescription drug, and over-the-counter medication. Of the remaining 5 illicit drug-related deaths, 3 involved methamphetamine, 1 involved propoxyphene, and 1 involved 5F-ADB. Of the 13 drug-related deaths, 11 were classified as accident and 2 as suicide.

Of the 416 deaths investigated by JCME, 22 were classified as suicide. Eight of these deaths were due to hanging and 7 were the result of a firearm. The sex distribution was 19 males and 3 females. The most common age range was 40 to 49 years (8 decedents) followed by 20 to 29 years (5 decedents) and 60 to 69 years (5 decedents).

A data point on every death certificate is an indication of whether tobacco use contributed to death. This determination is made by the forensic pathologist responsible for certifying the death. Of the 416 deaths certified by JCME in 2018, it was determined that 91 were tobacco-related and 34 were probably tobacco-related.

Iowa law requires that a medical examiner issue a cremation permit prior to cremation. This practice is to ensure that deaths are properly certified and that deaths within the jurisdiction of

the medical examiner are not unreported (“missed”). JCME issued 1045 cremation permits to funeral service providers in 2018. There were 439 cremation permits issued to funeral service providers in Johnson County, 549 to funeral service providers located in other Iowa counties, and 57 to funeral service providers located out-of-state. Cremation permits were issued to a total of 129 funeral service providers. Of the 1045 cremation permits issued, 9 permits triggered the recognition of new medical examiner cases, or less than 1% of all cremation permits issued.

The Johnson County Older Adult Death Review Team and the Johnson County Child Death Review Team are facilitated by JCME. The purpose of the Teams is to gain greater understanding of issues associated with the deaths of adults aged 60 and older and children under the age of 18. Information gained from the review of these cases is used to identify trends and risk factors, as well as to educate and mobilize community forces to prevent similar deaths in the future.

JCME has an essential role in the coordination of organ and tissue donation. In 2018, 16 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 16 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 27 kidneys, 13 livers, 9 lungs, 10 hearts, 3 pancreases, and 1 small intestine for transplant. Five accepted JCME cases became tissue donors with the recovery of bone, skin, heart valves, saphenous veins, femoral veins, adipose tissue, and/or joints. One tissue donor can enhance the lives of more than 300 people. JCME fully supports organ and tissue donation and, by policy, JCME refers all out-of-hospital deaths that fall under our jurisdiction to the Iowa Donor Network.

JCME requires its investigative employees to be certified by the American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators (ABMDI) within two years of starting employment. ABMDI is a voluntary, national, not-for-profit, independent professional certification organization that was established to promote the highest standards of practice for medicolegal death investigators. In 2018 JCME had two Board Certified Death Investigators (Advanced): Clayton Schuneman and Kate Bengtson, and two Registry Certified Death Investigators (Basic): Heather Sanderson and Amanda Fink. Additionally, the three forensic pathologist medical examiners, Marcus Nashelsky, MD, Dennis Firchau, MD, and Stephanie Stauffer, MD, are certified in Anatomic, Clinical, and Forensic Pathology by the American Board of Pathology.

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Marcus Nashelsky, MD  
Medical Examiner

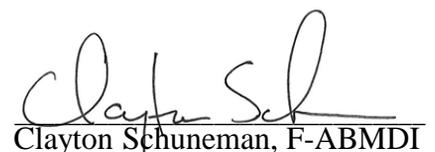
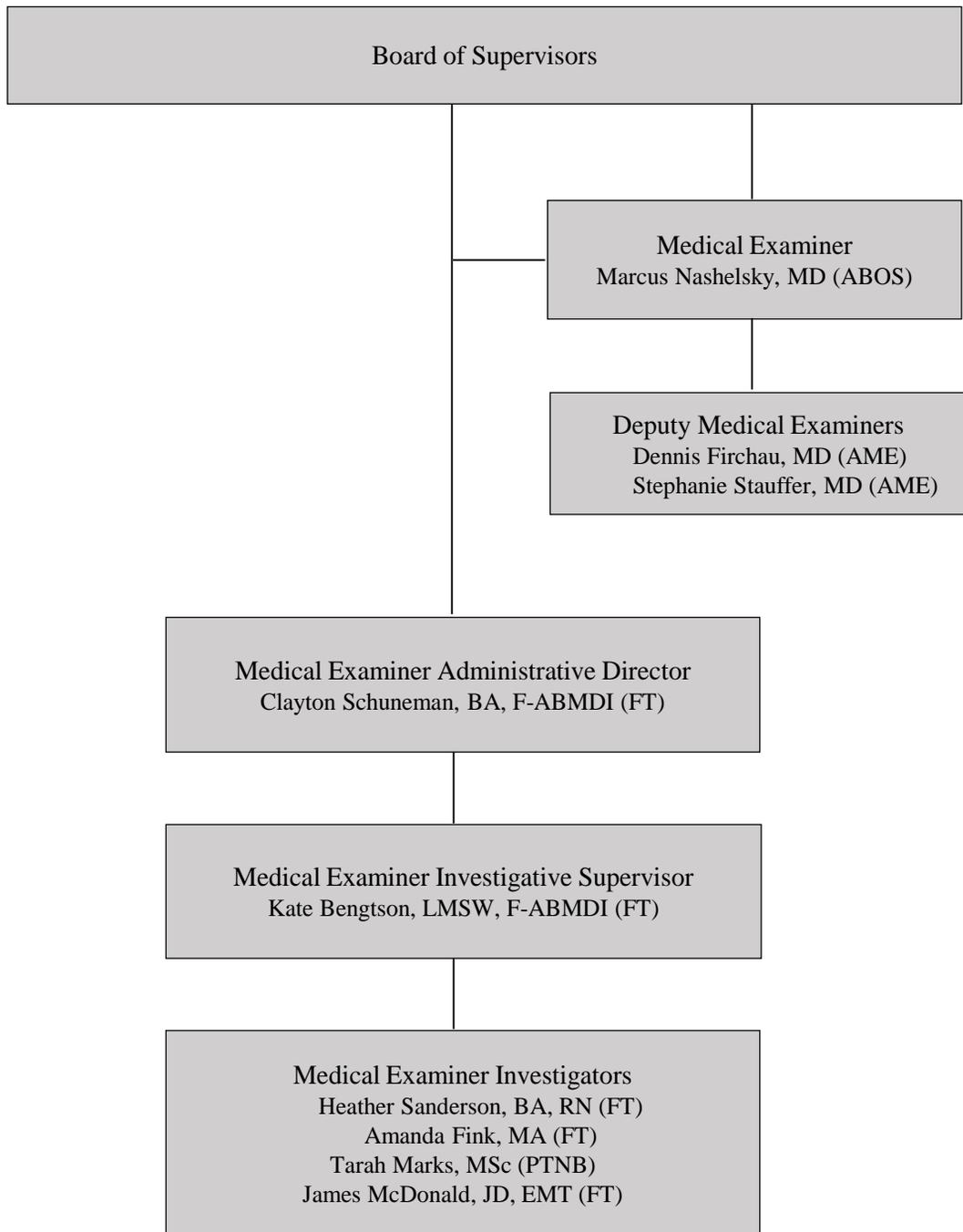
  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Clayton Schuneman, F-ABMDI  
Administrative Director

Figure 1.1. Organizational Chart (2018)



Employment/Appointment Status Key:

- ABOS: Appointed by Board of Supervisors
- AME: Appointed by Medical Examiner
- FT: Full-time
- PTNB: Part-time without benefits

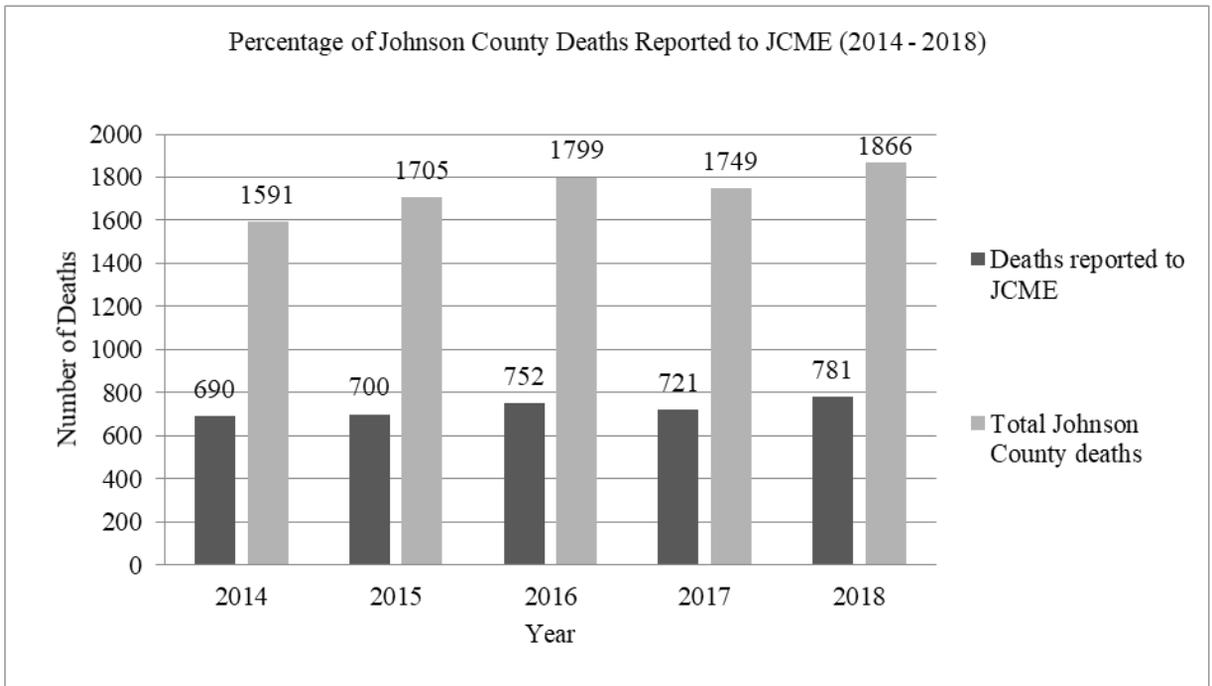


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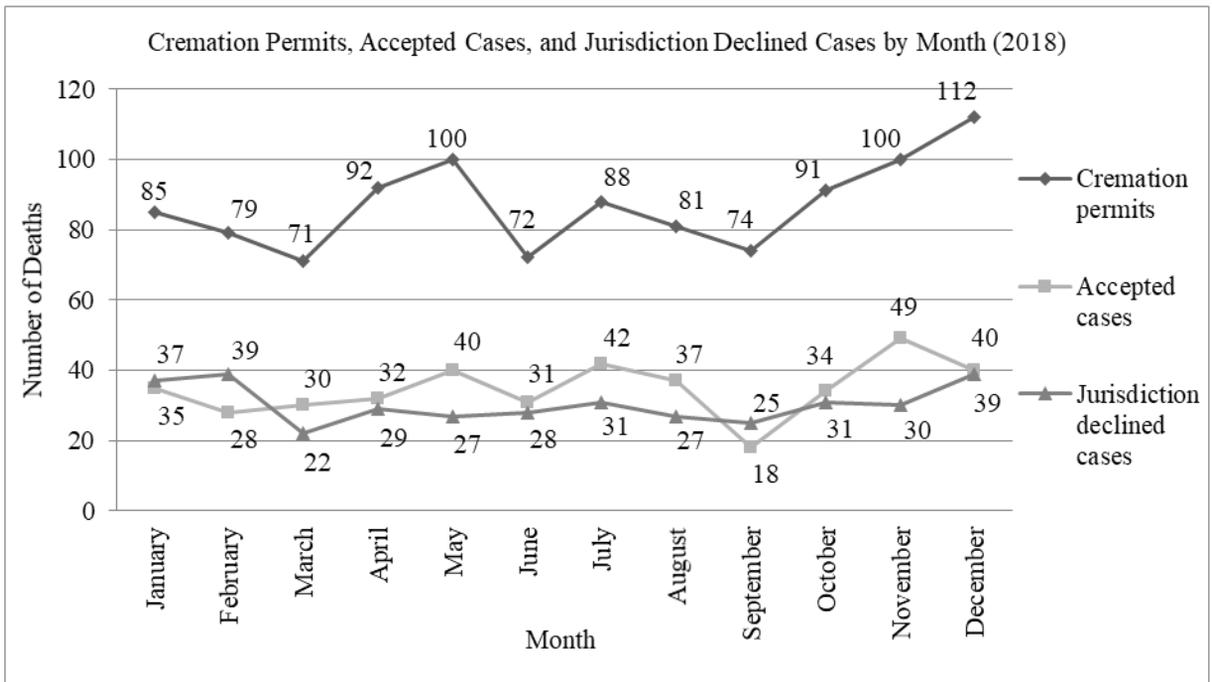


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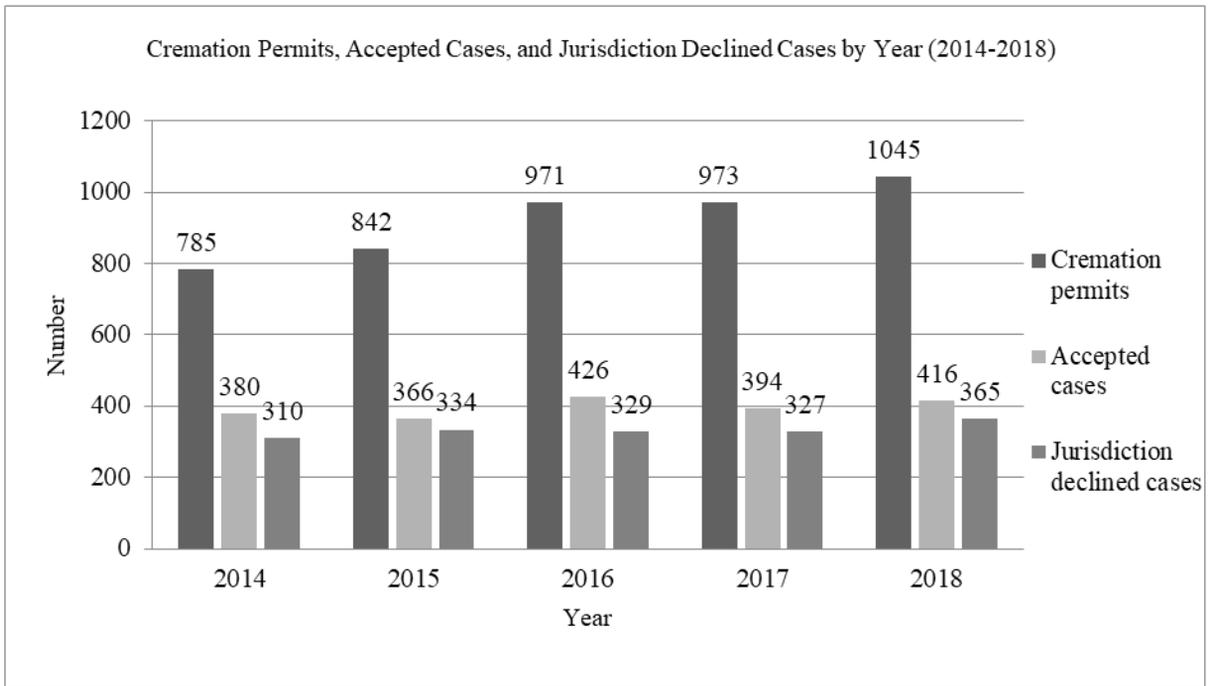


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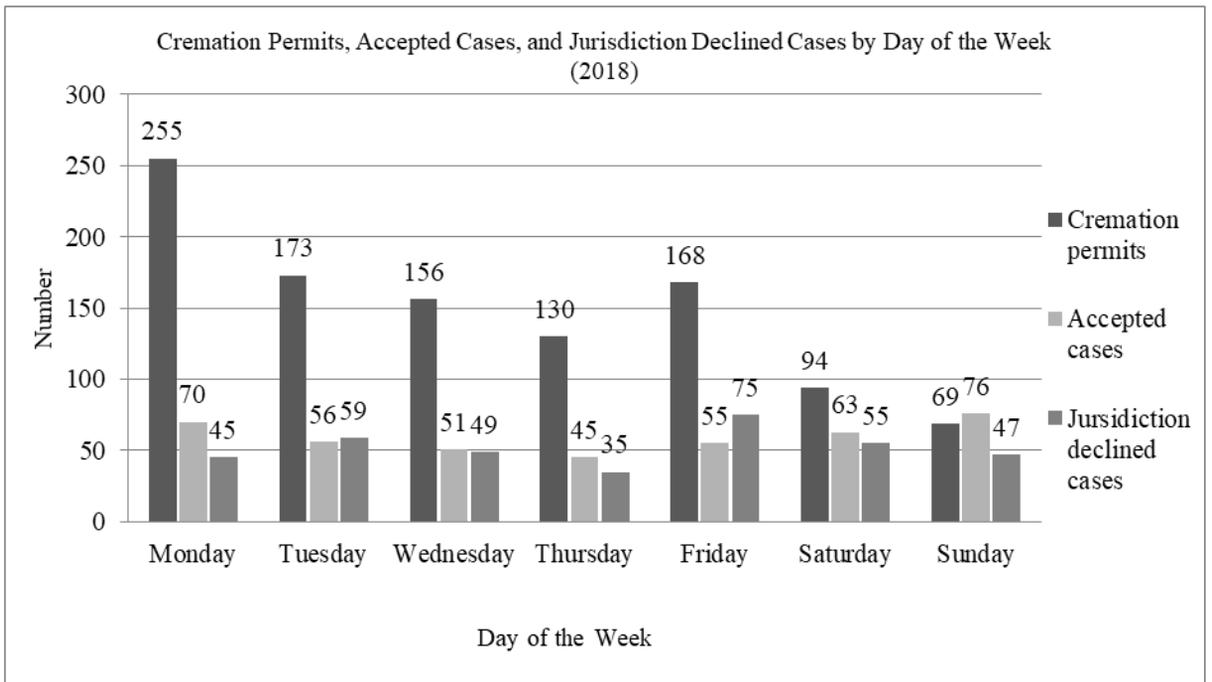


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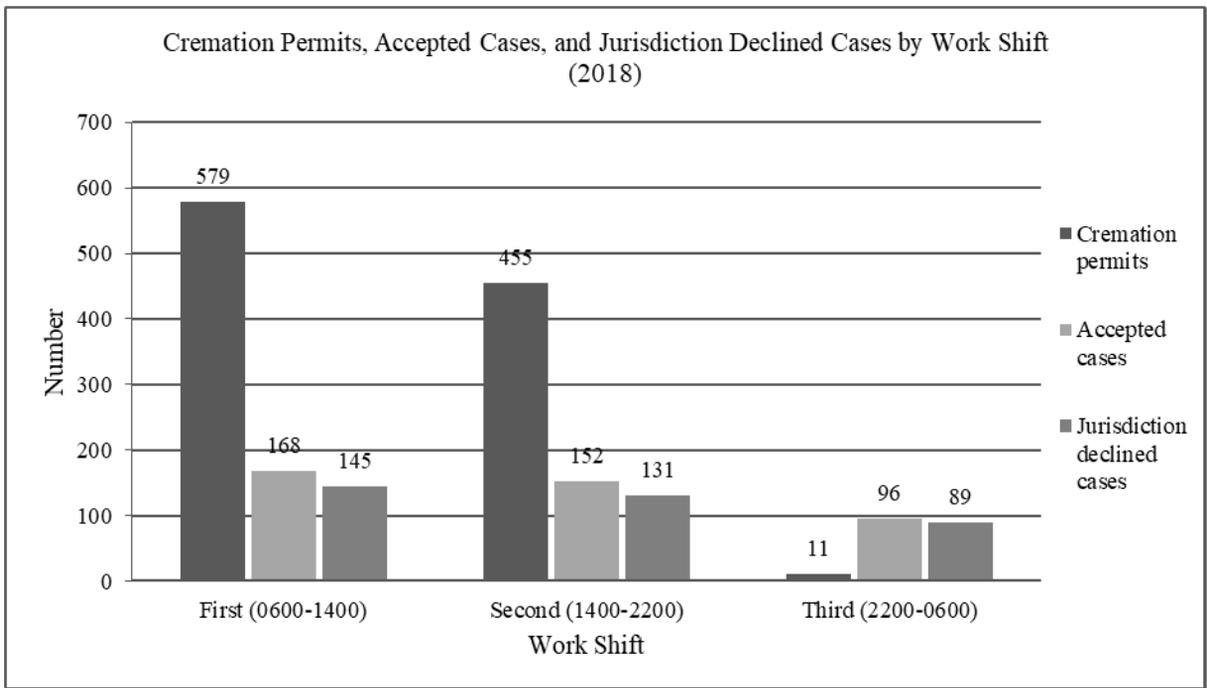


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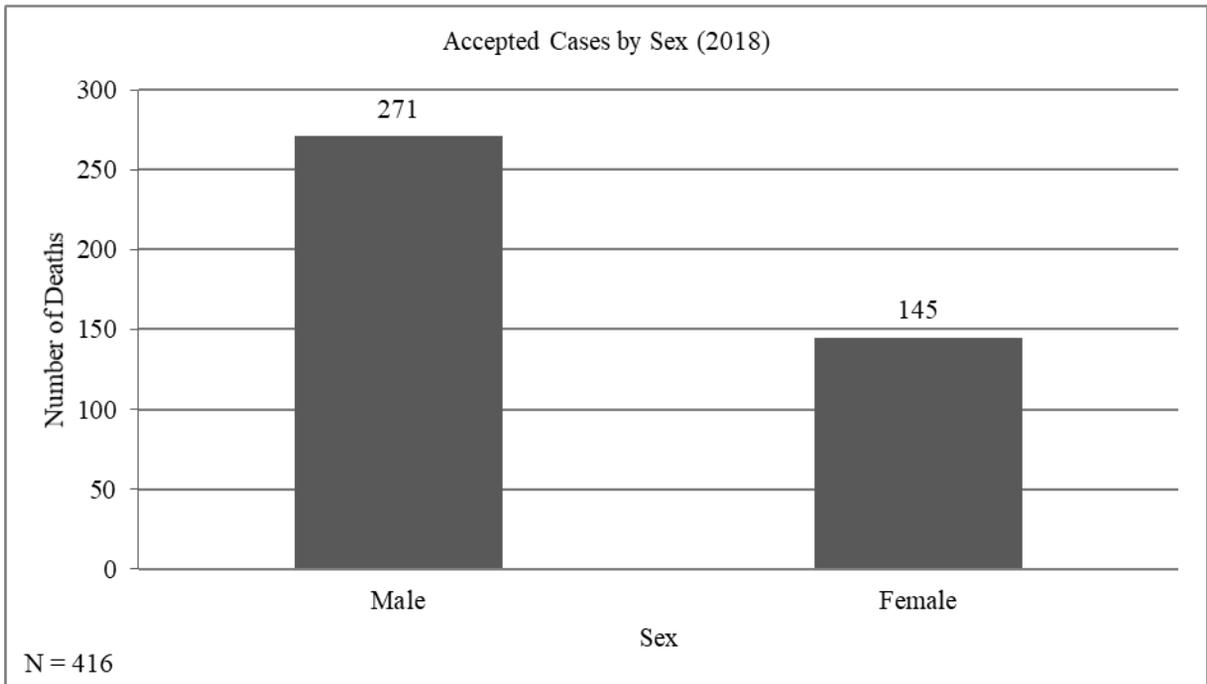


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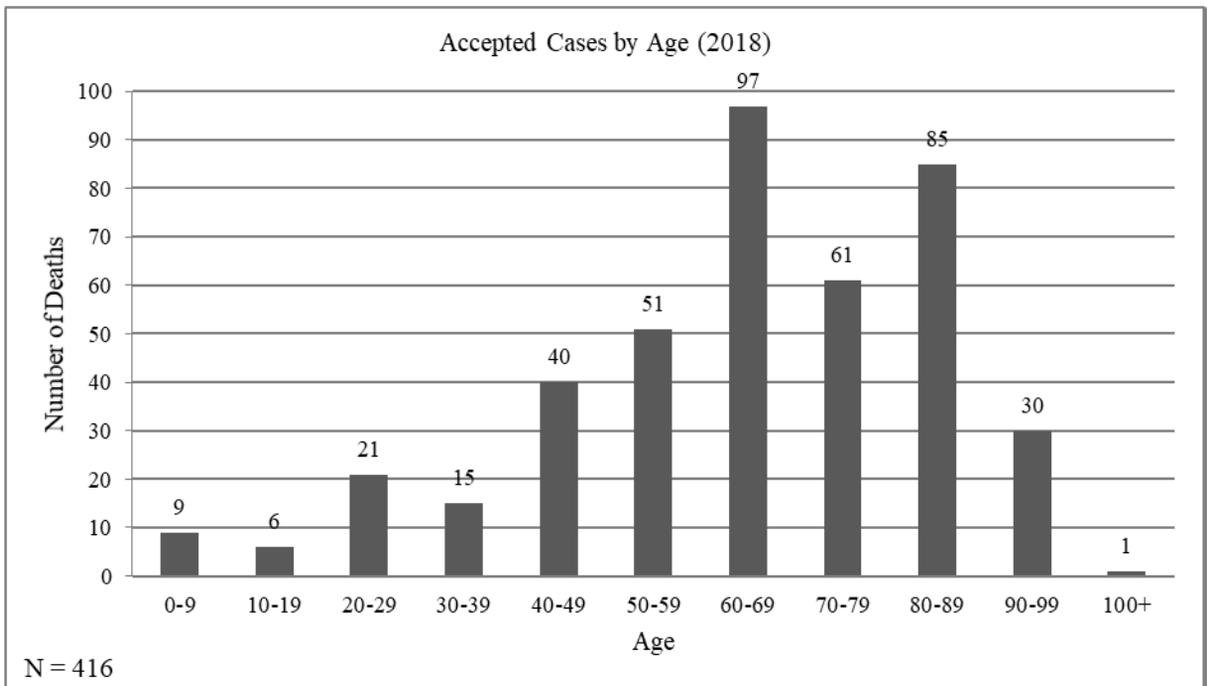


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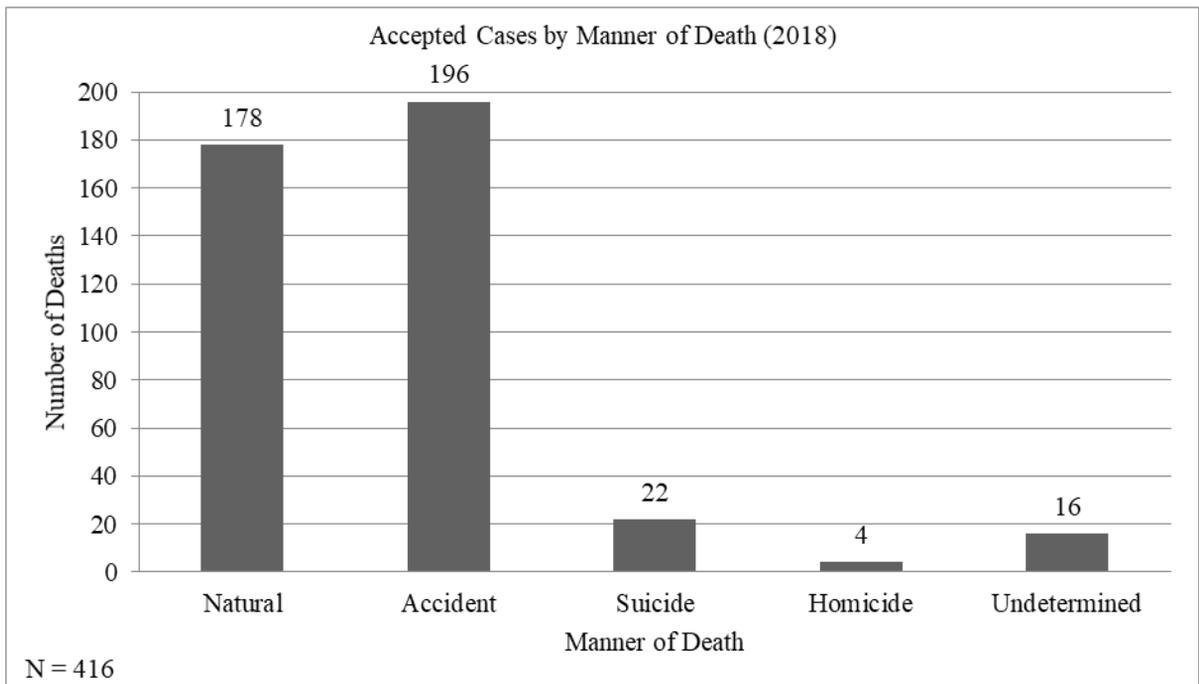


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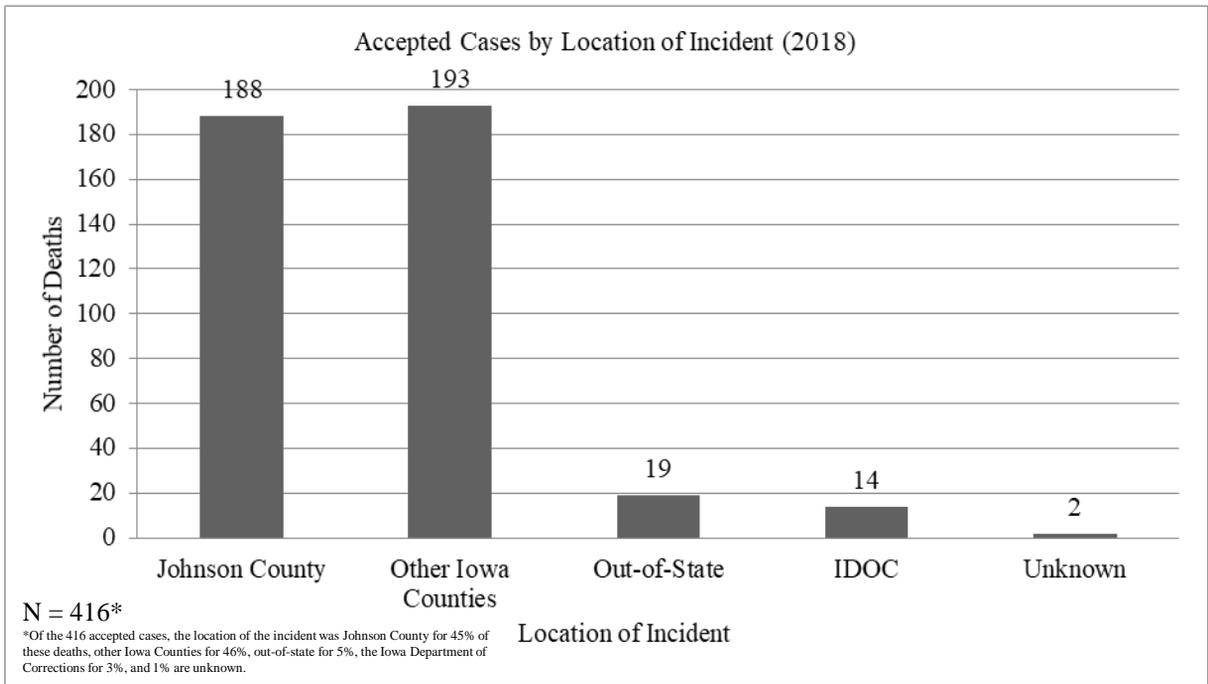


Figure 1.10.

Table 1.1. Other Iowa Counties Location of Incident (2018)

County	Number of Decedents
Linn	23
Scott	22
Black Hawk	16
Muscatine	15
Washington	14
Henry	11
Dubuque	10
Wapello	9
Clinton	7
Fayette	6
Jefferson	5
Cedar	4
Clayton	4
Keokuk	4
Bremer	3
Des Moines	3
Lee	3
Polk	3
Poweshiek	3
Tama	3
Benton	2
Chickasaw	2
Floyd	2
Jackson	2
Jones	2
Van Buren	2
Adair	1
Allamakee	1
Butler	1
Dallas	1
Davis	1
Delaware	1
Hamilton	1
Iowa	1
Marshall	1
Story	1
Warren	1
Webster	1
Wright	1

Table 1.2. Out-of-State Location of Incident (2018)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Henderson, IL	5
Rock Island, IL	5
Whiteside, IL	3
Carroll, IL	2
Cook, IL	1
Hancock, IL	1
Manatee, FL	1
Shelby, TN	1

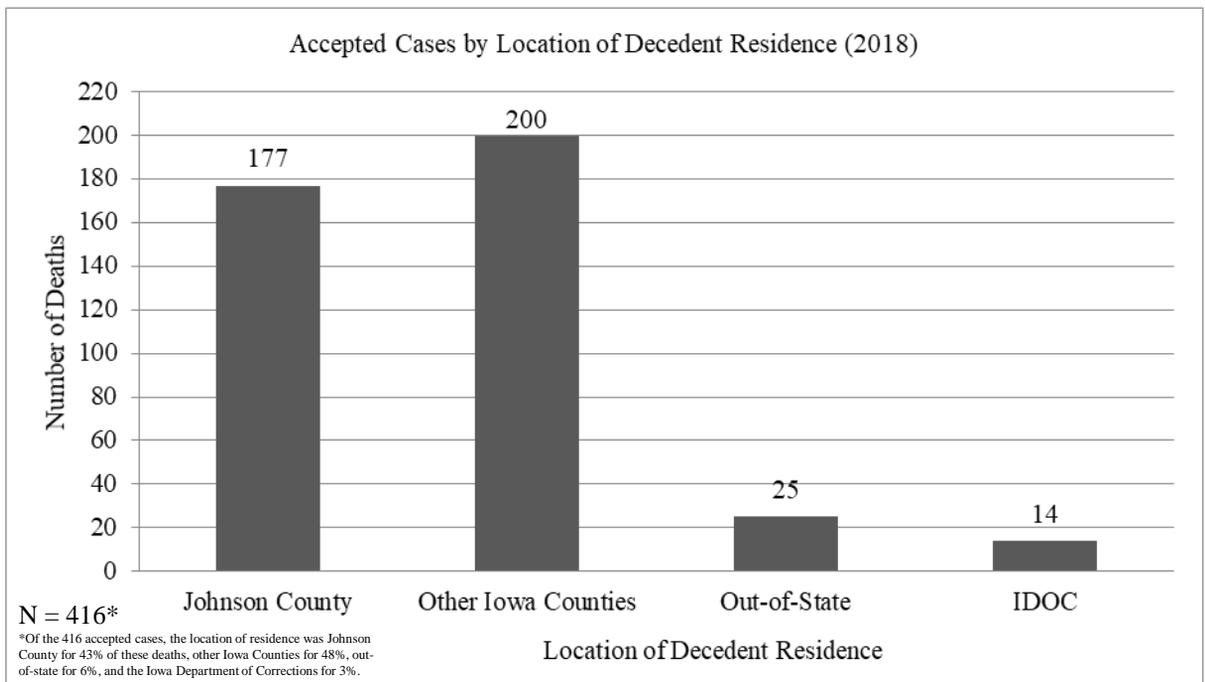


Figure 1.11.

Table 1.3. Other Iowa Counties Location of Decedent Residence (2018)

County	Number of Decedents
Linn	23
Scott	22
Black Hawk	16
Muscatine	15
Washington	12
Dubuque	10
Henry	10
Jefferson	8
Wapello	7
Clinton	6
Des Moines	6
Fayette	6
Iowa	5
Keokuk	5
Cedar	4
Polk	4
Benton	3
Bremer	3
Lee	3
Clayton	2
Delaware	2
Floyd	2
Jackson	2
Jones	2
Poweshiek	2
Tama	2
Van Buren	2
Wright	2
Adair	1
Allamakee	1
Buchanan	1
Butler	1
Cerro Gordo	1
Chickasaw	1
Dallas	1
Davis	1
Hamilton	1
Louisa	1
Marshall	1
Story	1
Warren	1
Webster	1

Table 1.4. Out-of-State Location of Decedent Residence (2018)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	6
Henderson, IL	5
Whiteside, IL	3
Carroll, IL	2
Cook, IL	1
Fulton, GA	1
Hancock, IL	1
LaSalle, IL	1
Manatee, FL	1
Miller, MO	1
San Diego, CA	1
Sarpy, CA	1
Westmoreland, PA	1

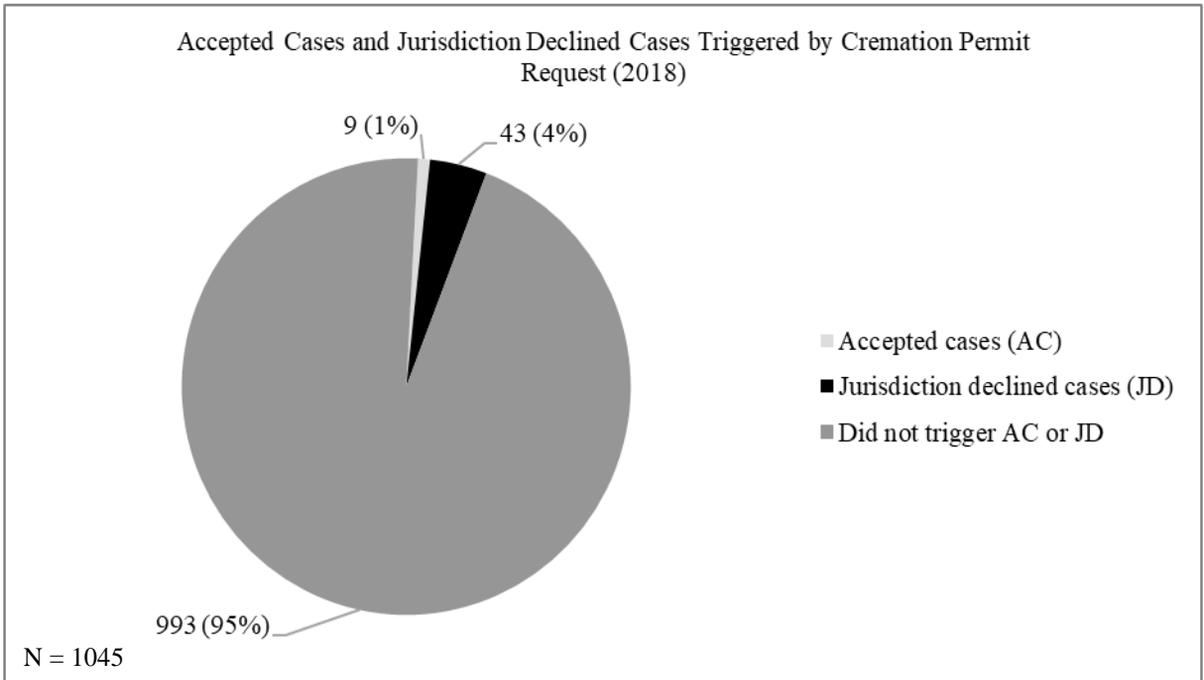


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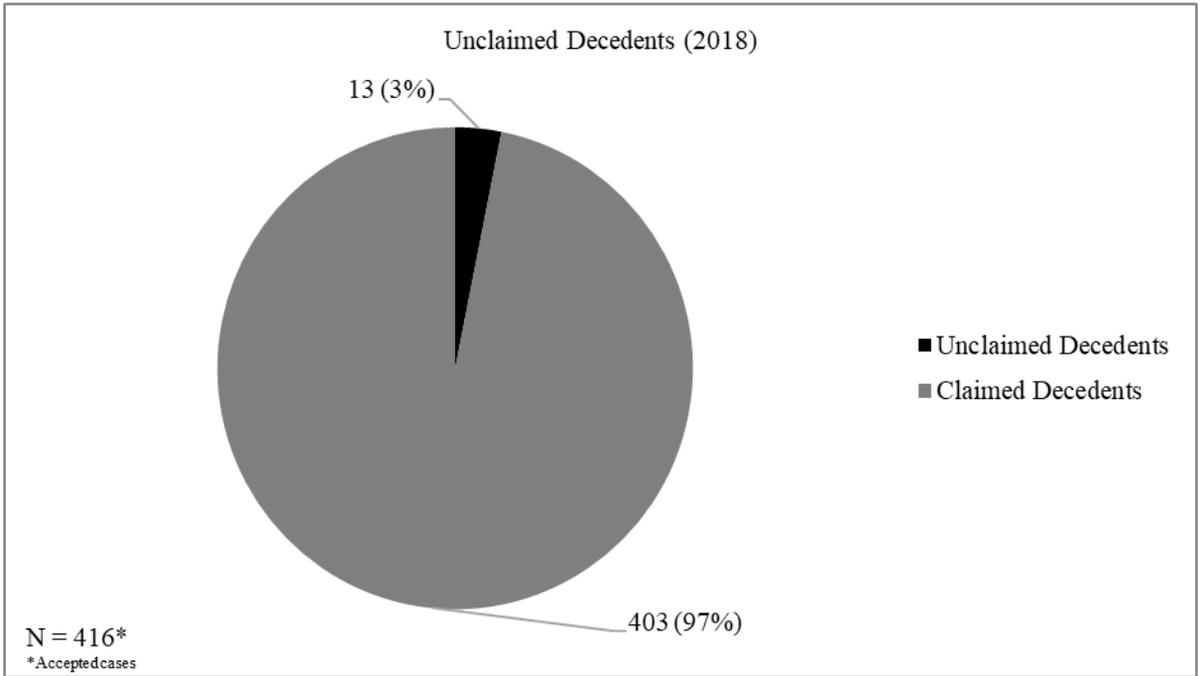


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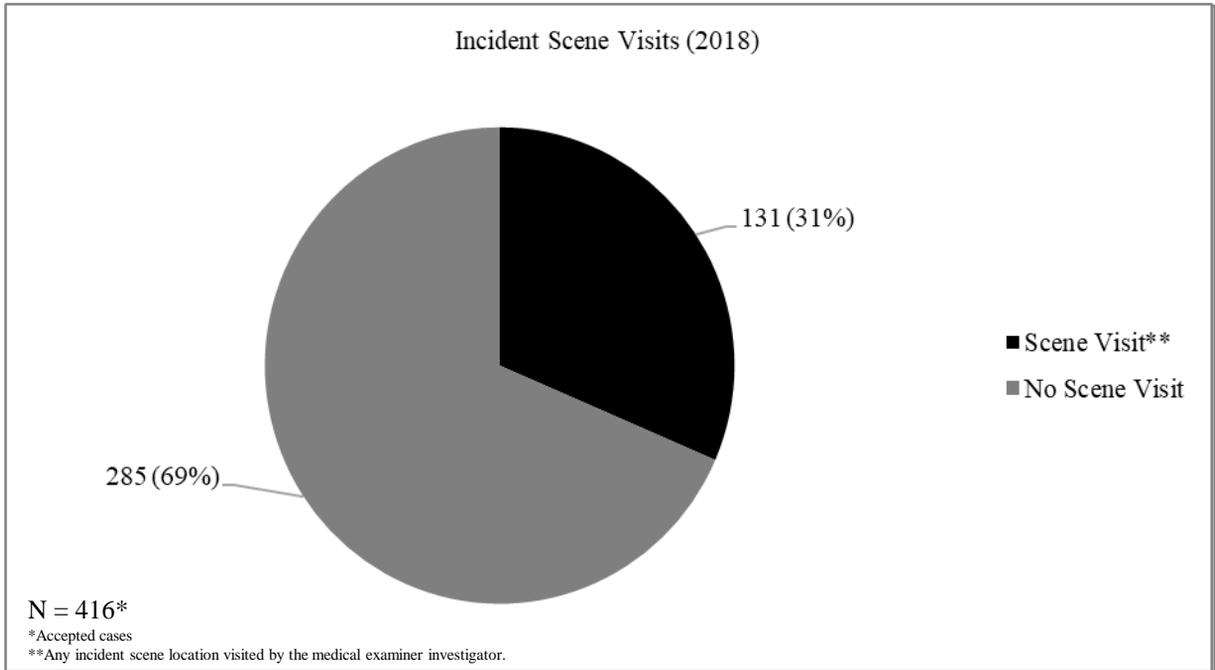


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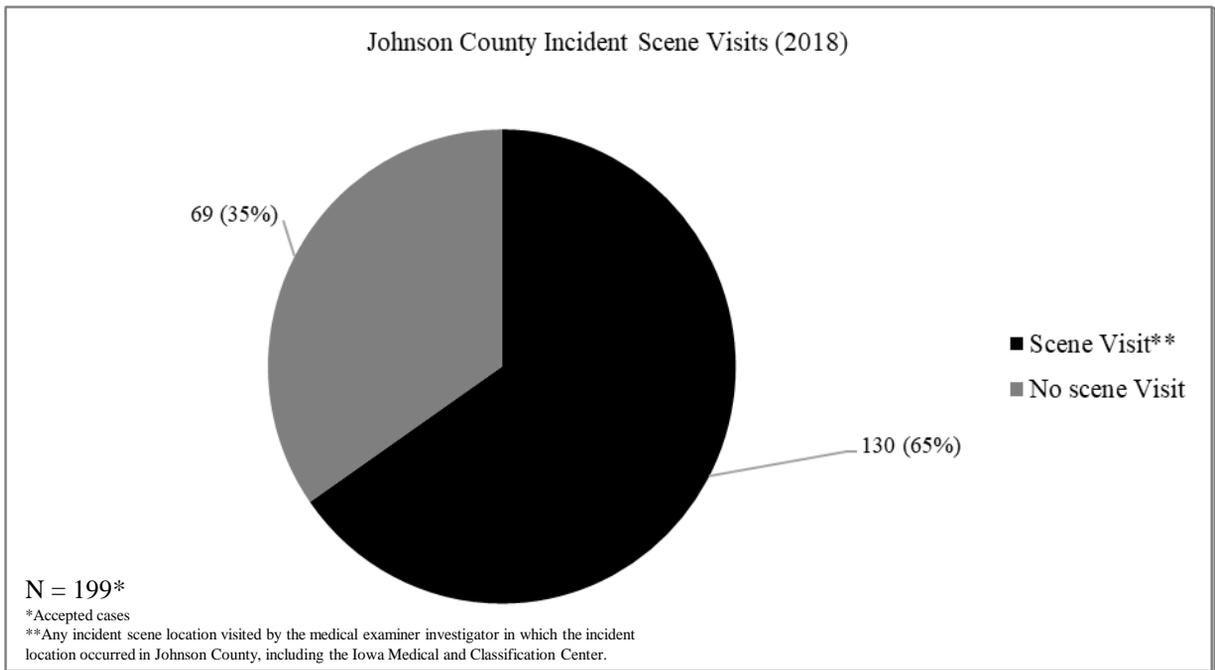


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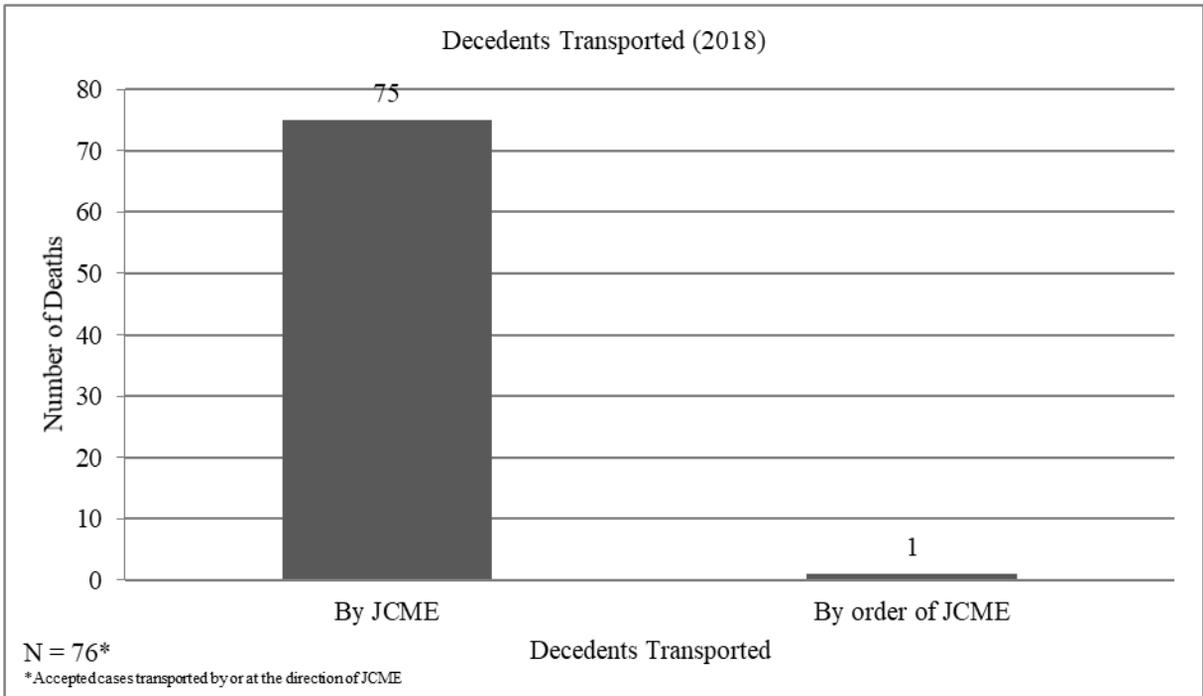


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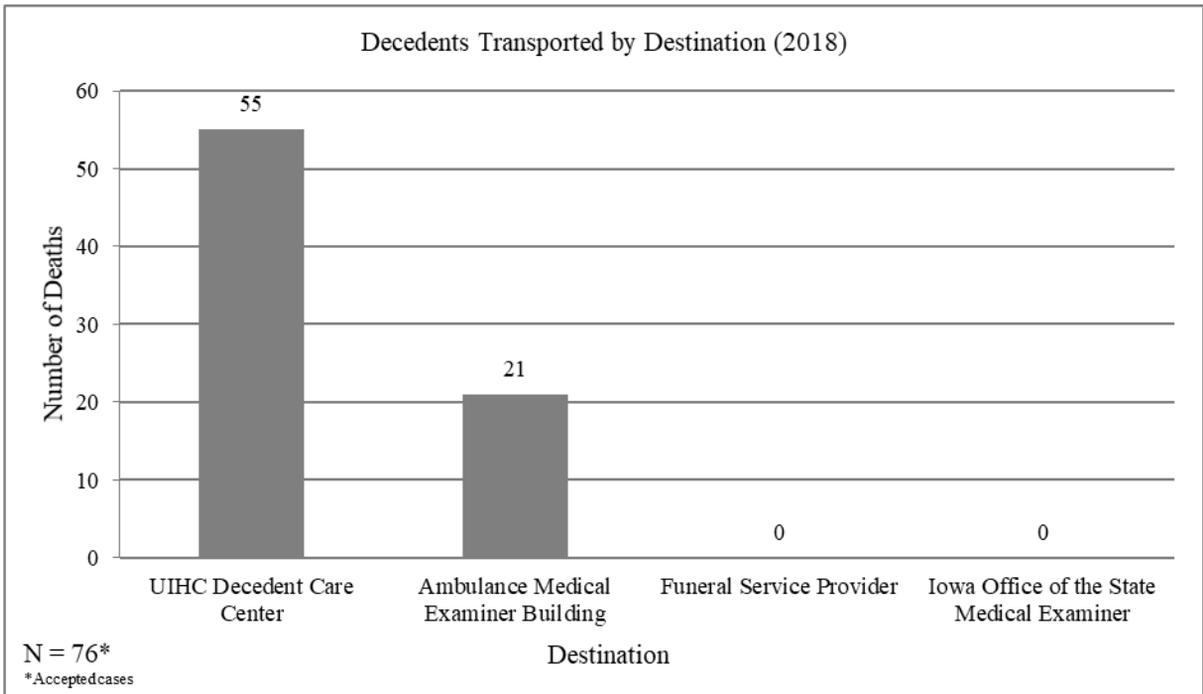


Figure 1.18.

## Autopsies

In 2018, 114 autopsies were conducted by JCME. All JCME autopsies were performed at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) and were complete autopsies (external examination and internal examination the head, neck, chest, and abdomen). No partial autopsies were performed in 2018.

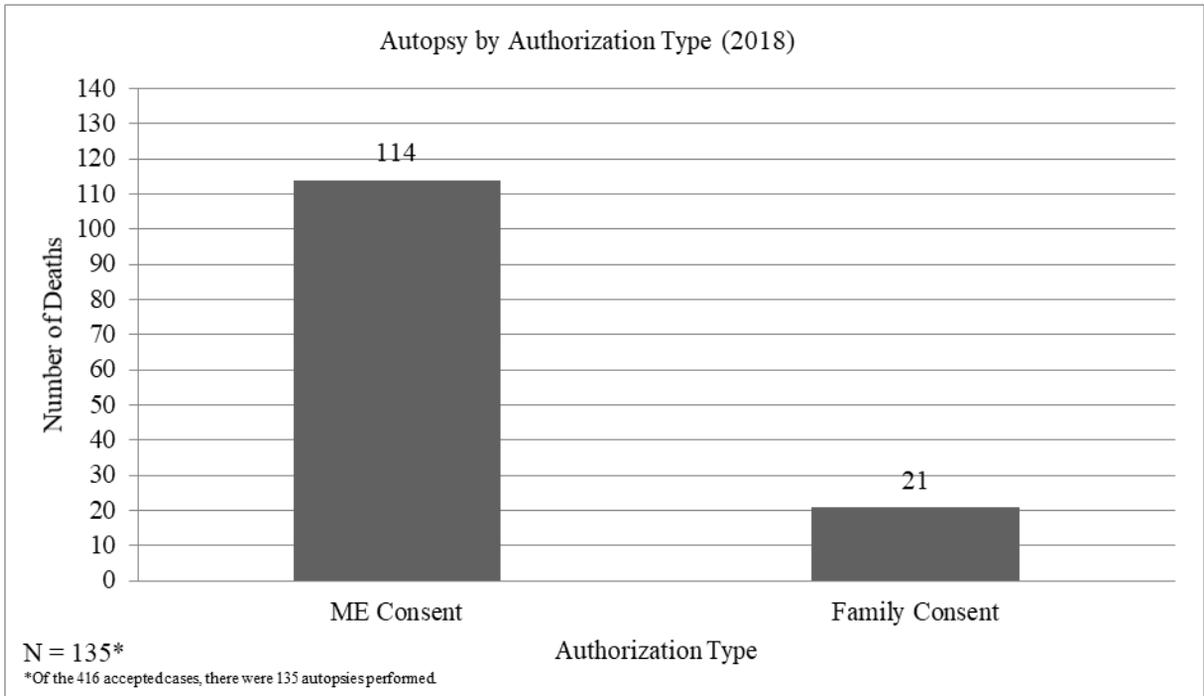


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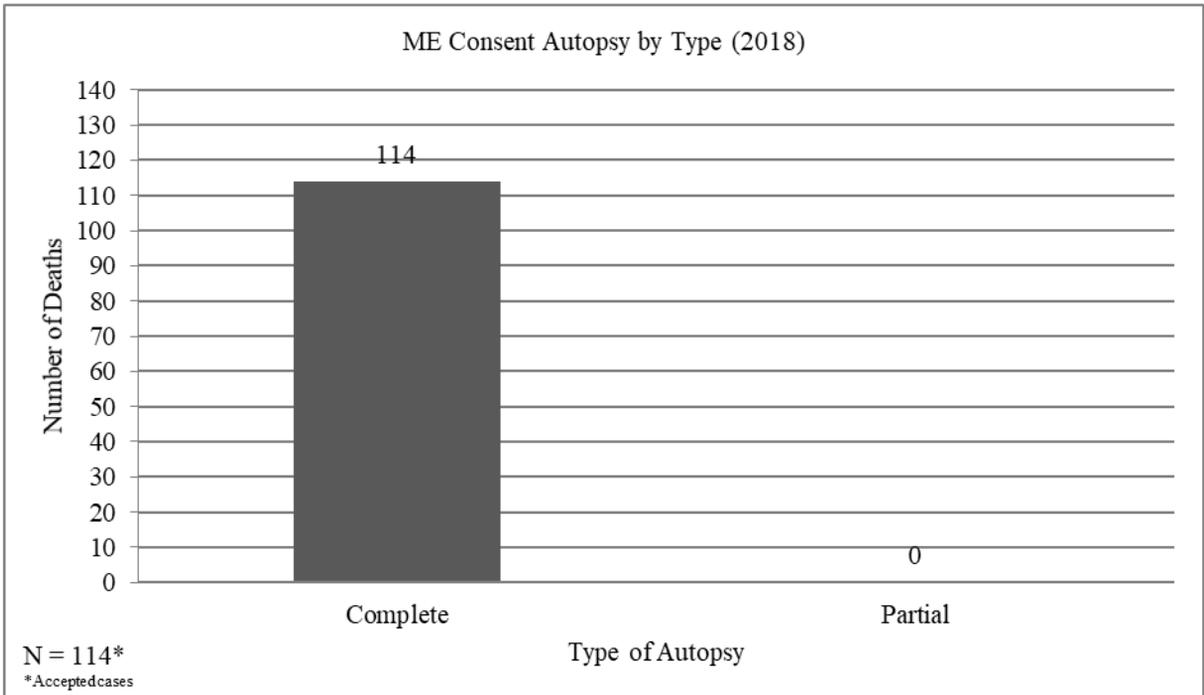


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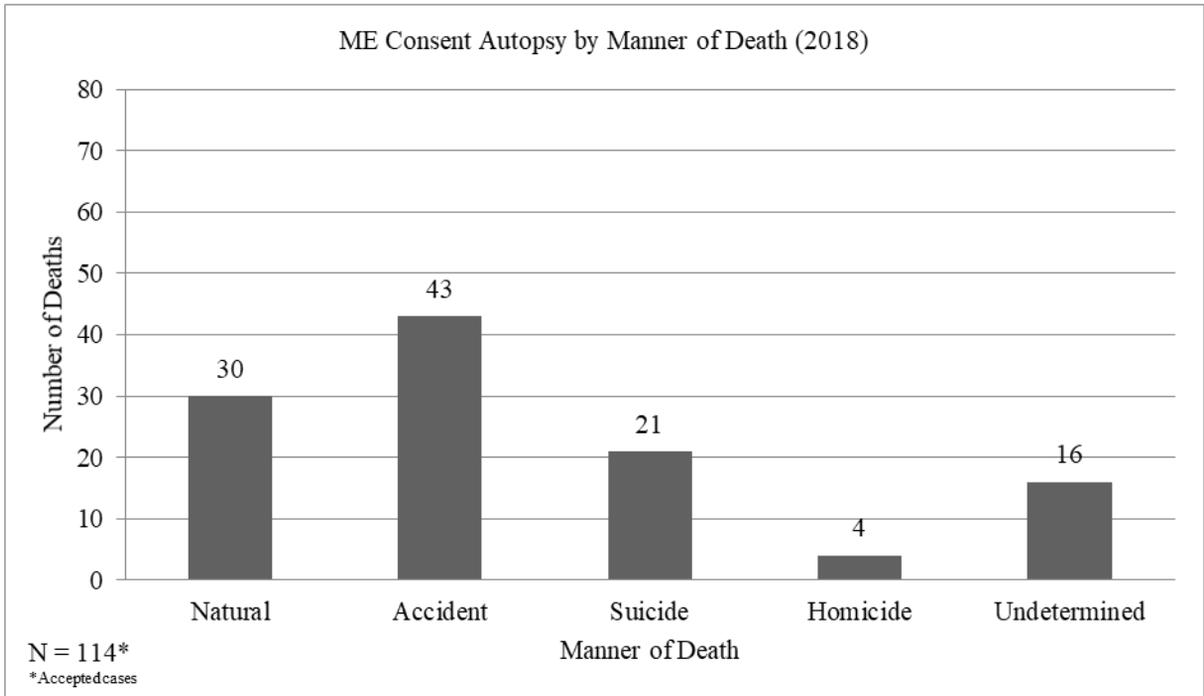


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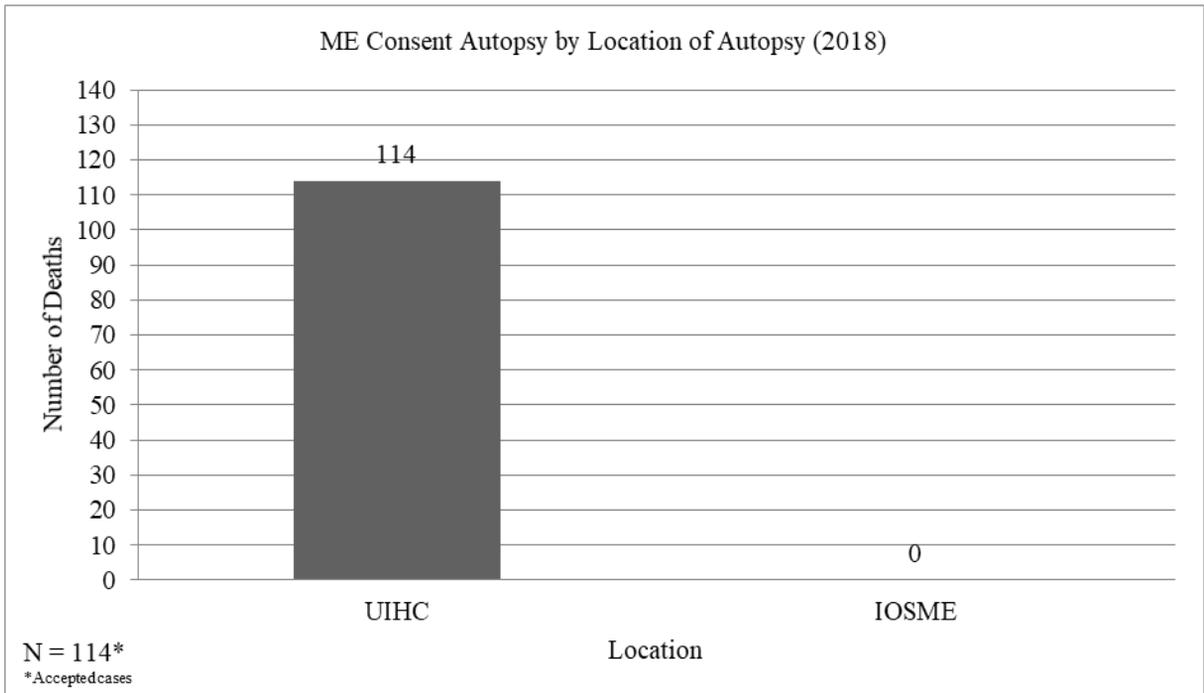


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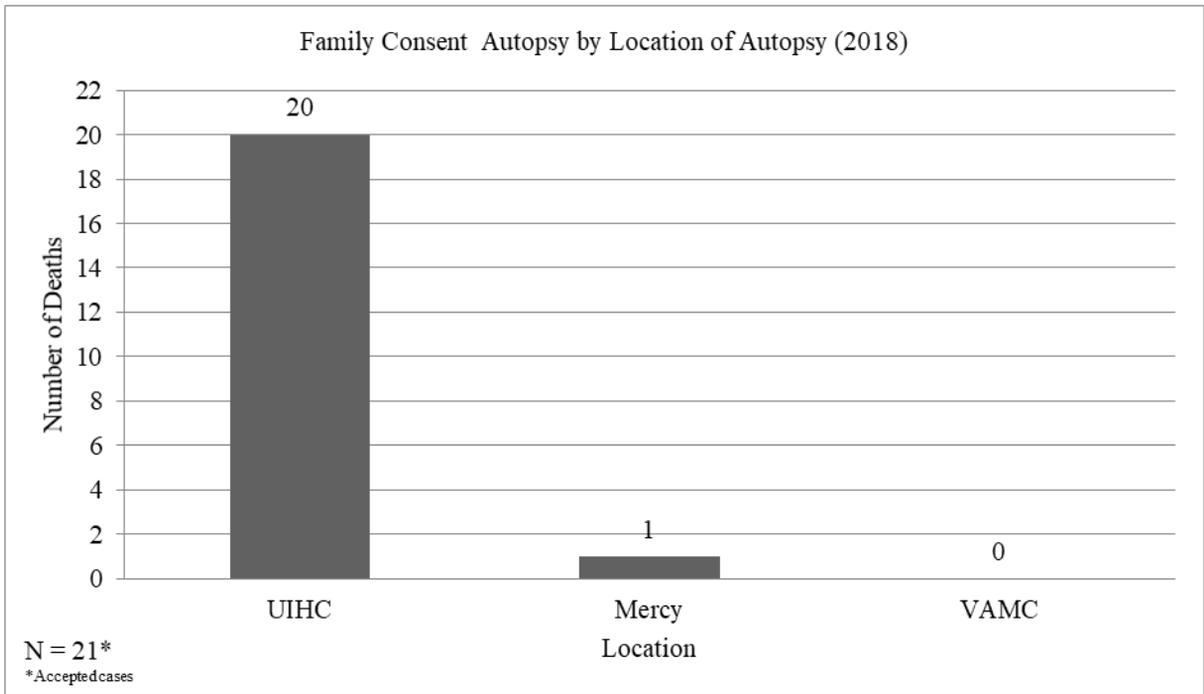


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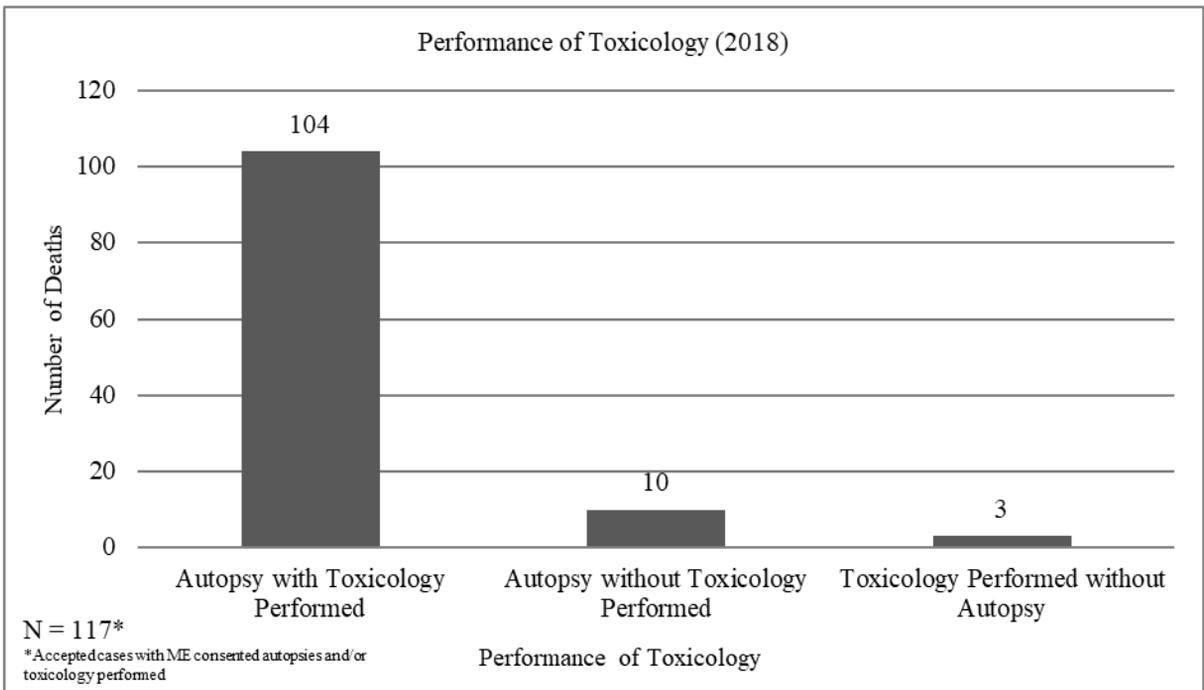


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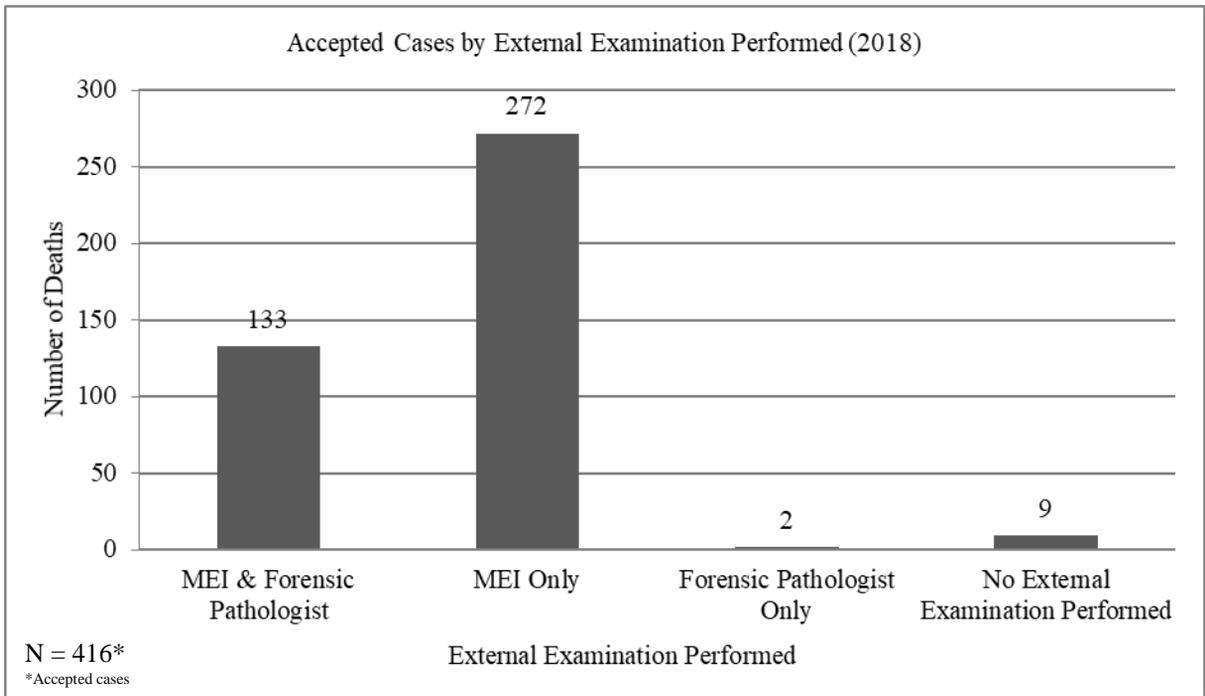


Figure 2.7.

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## Cause of Death for Each Manner of Death

The cause of death for each manner of death is a cross index of categories used for statistical information retrieval.

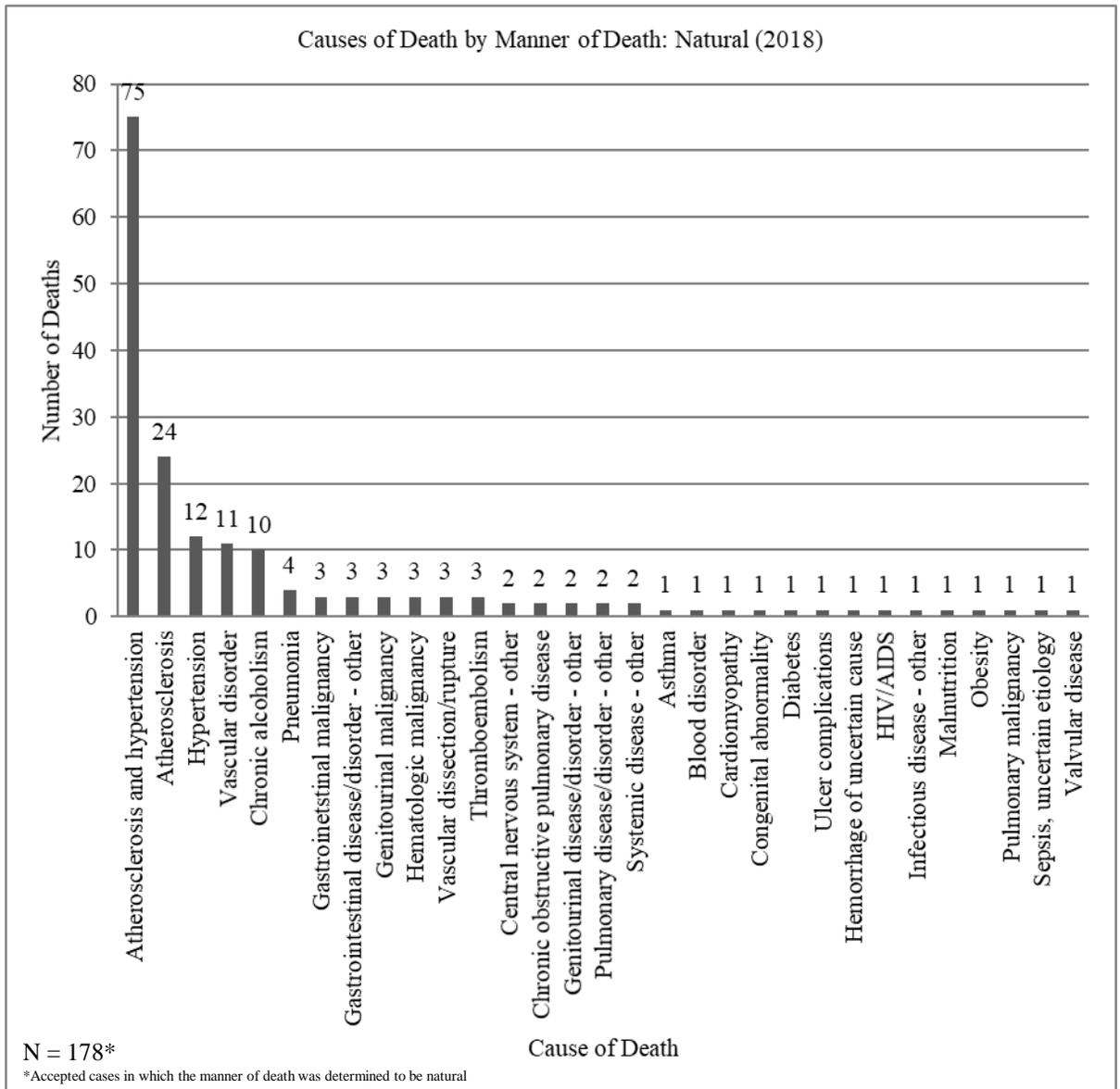


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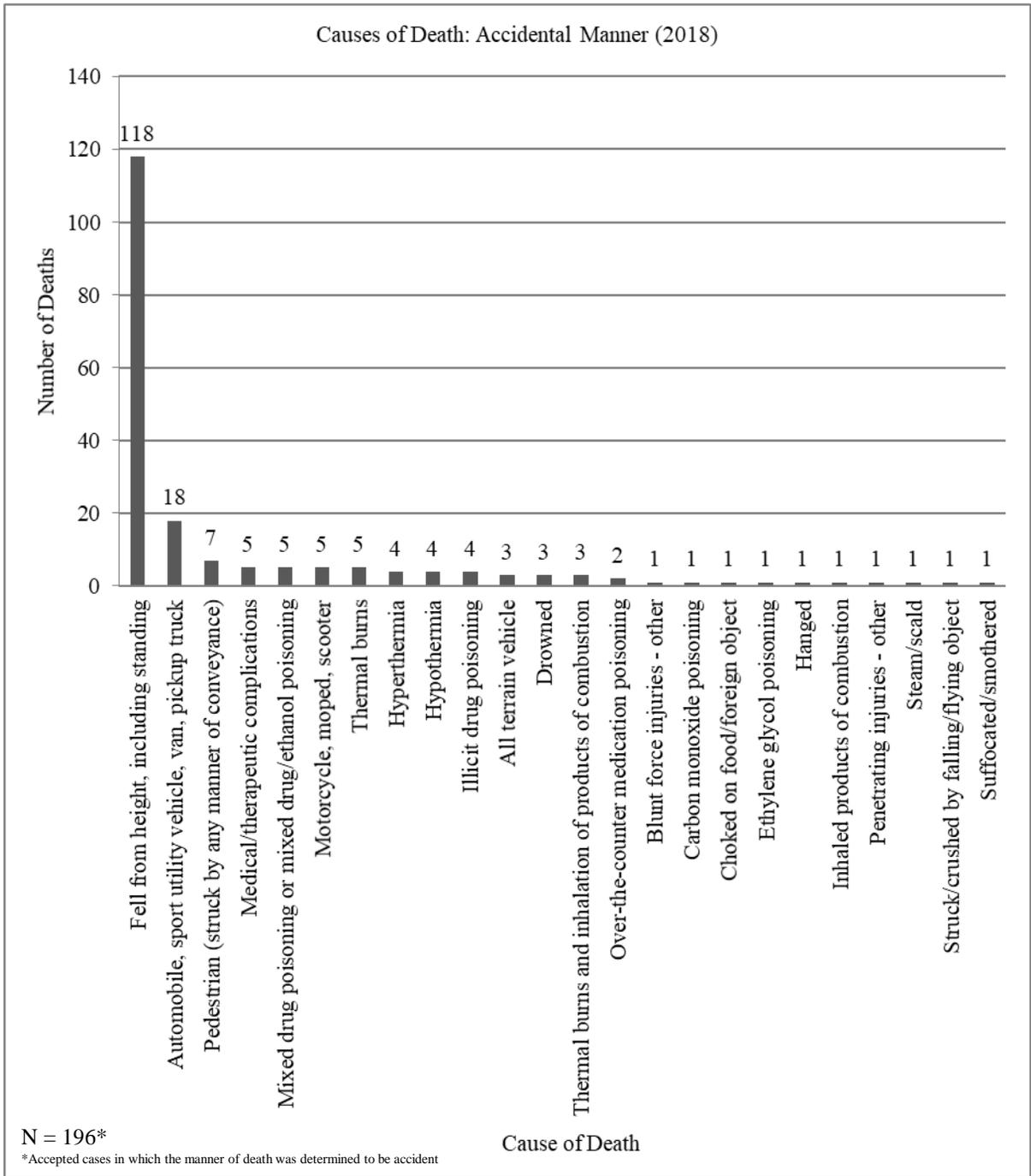


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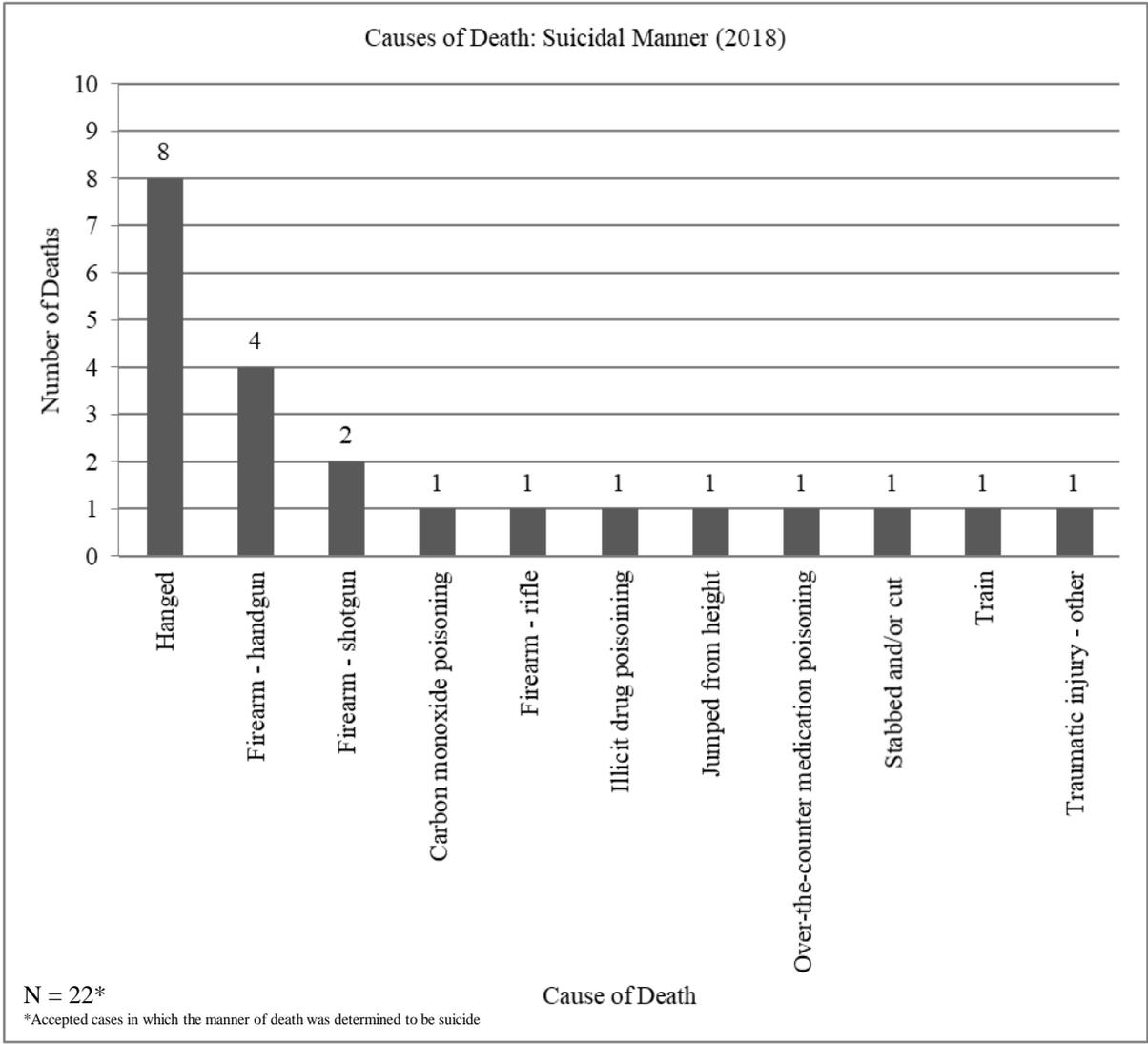


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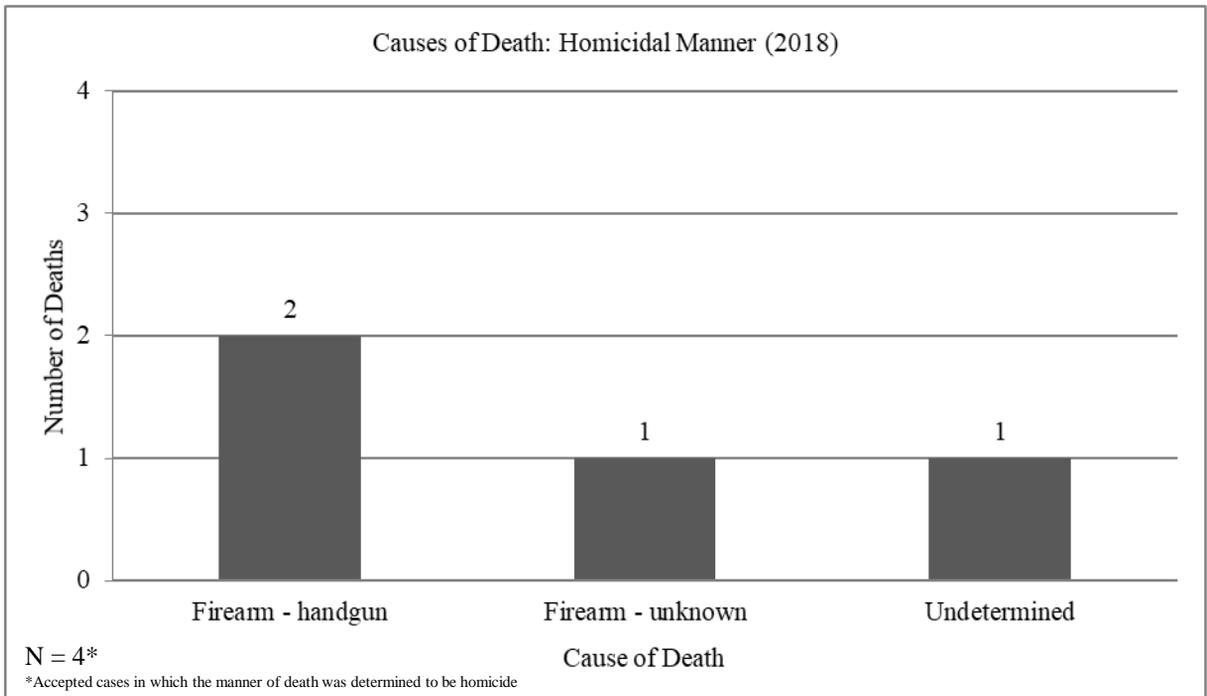


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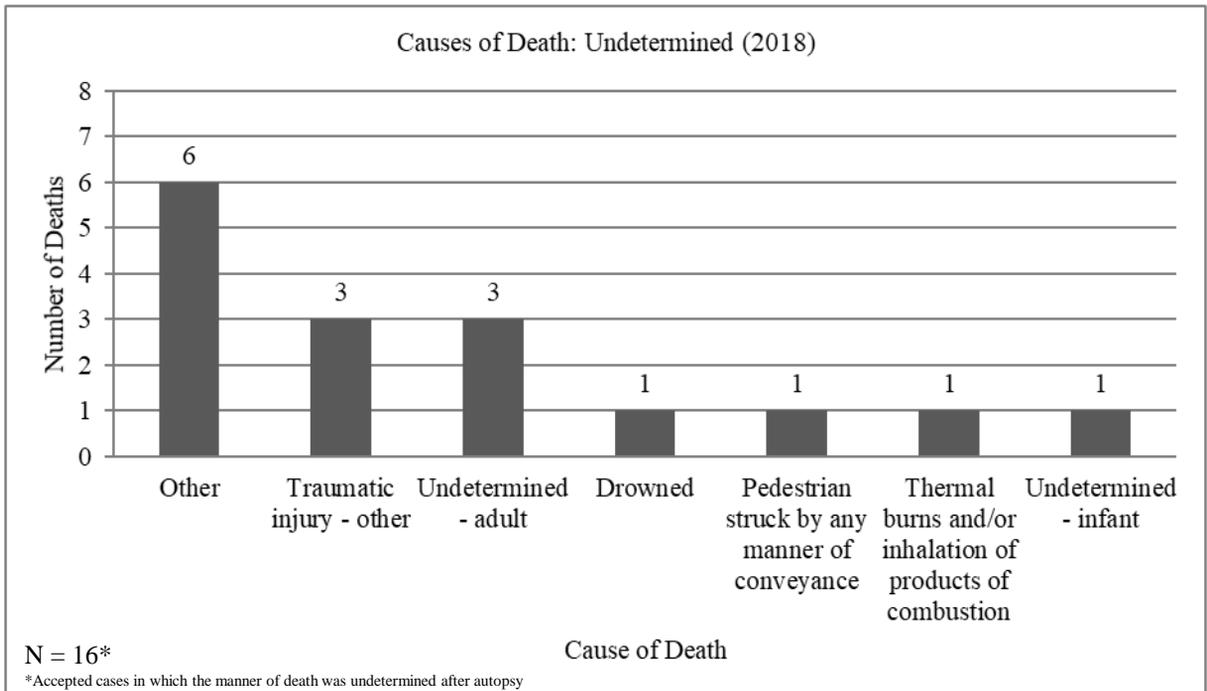


Figure 3.5.

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## Accidents

Of the 416 deaths accepted by JCME, 196 were classified as accident. The sex distribution was 128 males to 68 females. One hundred and eighteen of these deaths were the result of a fall, 7 were due to a motor vehicle crash, and 18 were the result of a pedestrian struck by any manner of conveyance. The most common age range was 80-89 (46 decedents), followed by 70-79 (33 decedents).

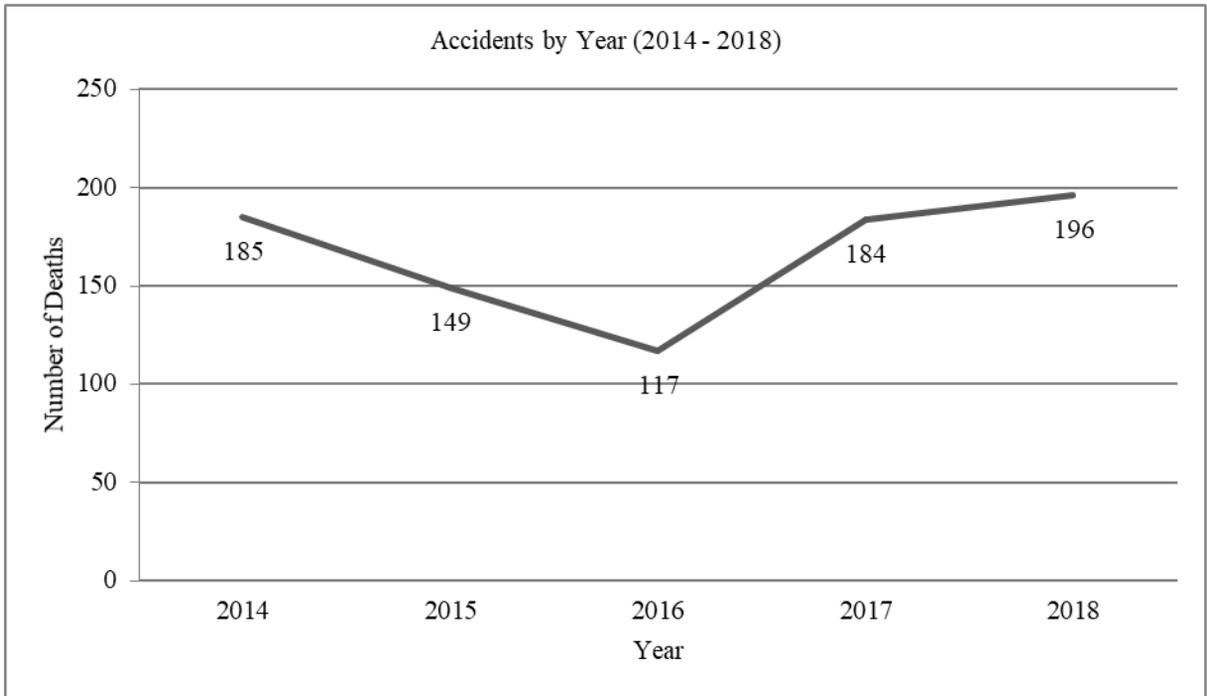


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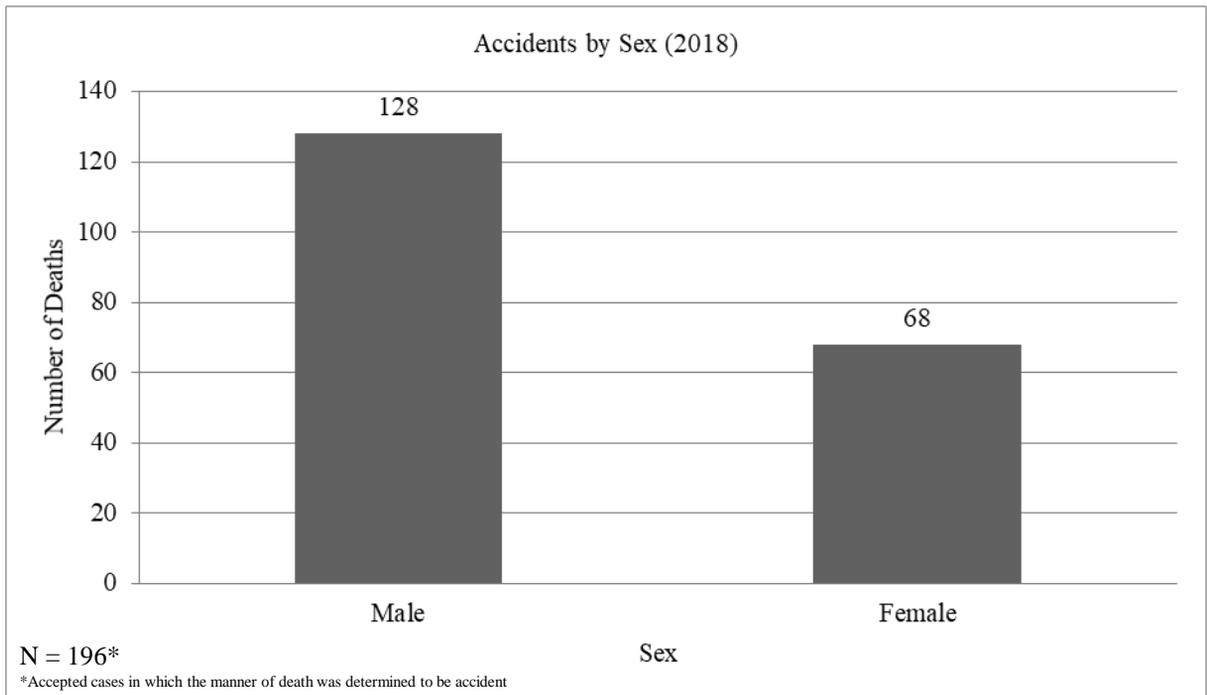


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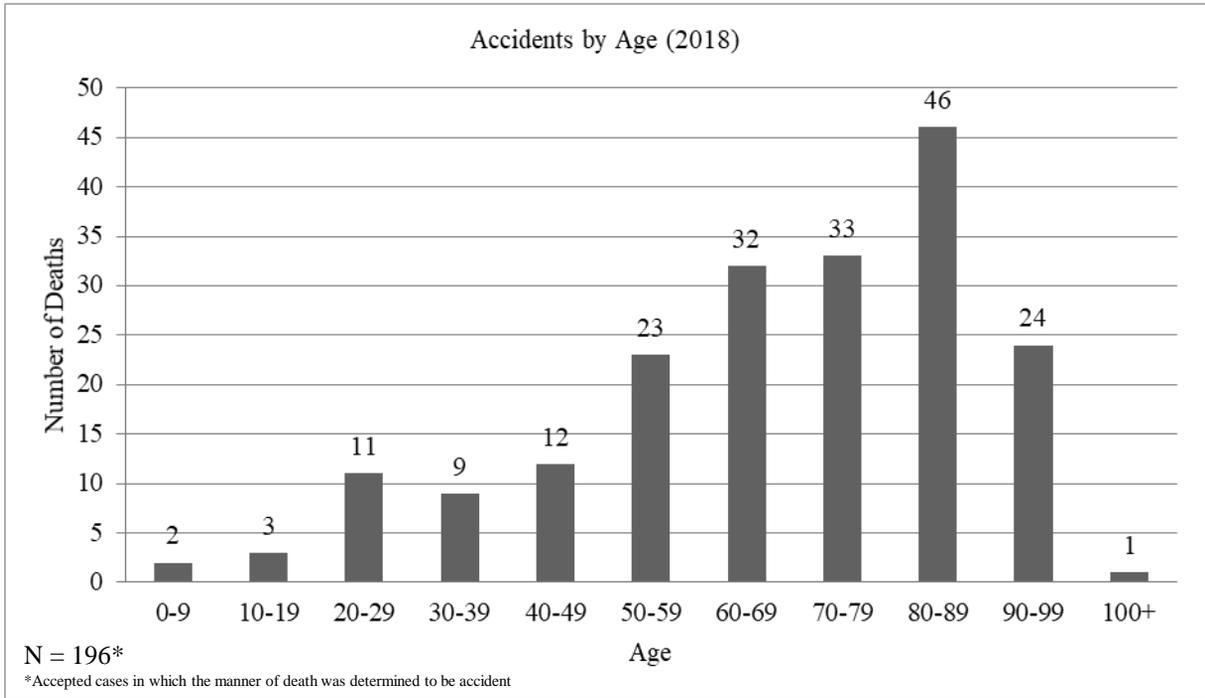


Figure 4.3.

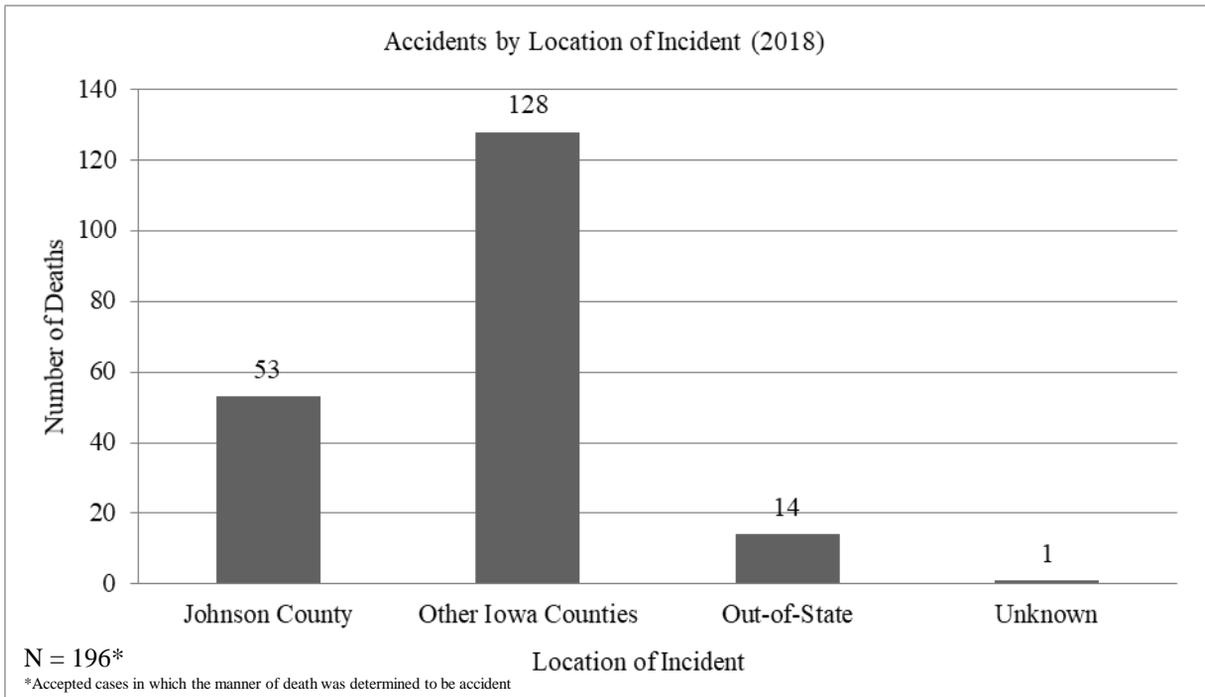


Figure 4.4.

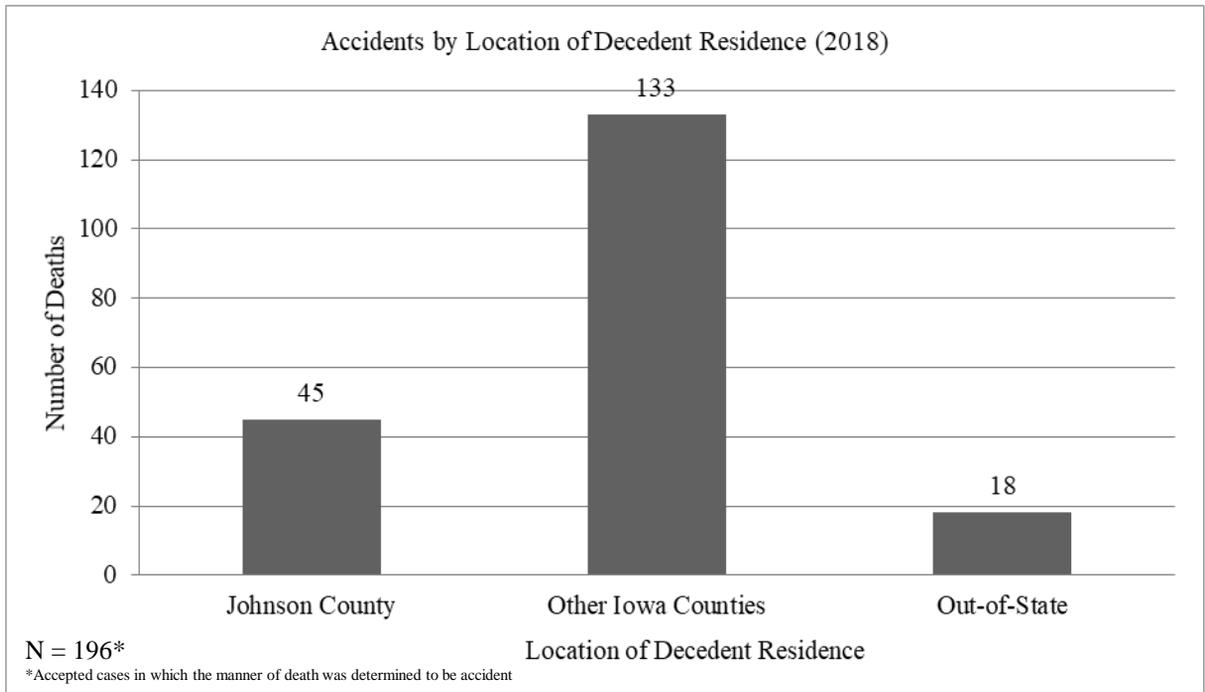


Figure 4.5.

## Suicides

Of the 416 deaths investigated by JCME, 22 were classified as suicide. Eight of these deaths were due to hanging and 7 were the result of a firearm. The sex distribution was 19 males and 3 females. The most common age range was 40 to 49 years (8 decedents) followed by 20 to 29 years (5 decedents) and 60 to 69 years (5 decedents).

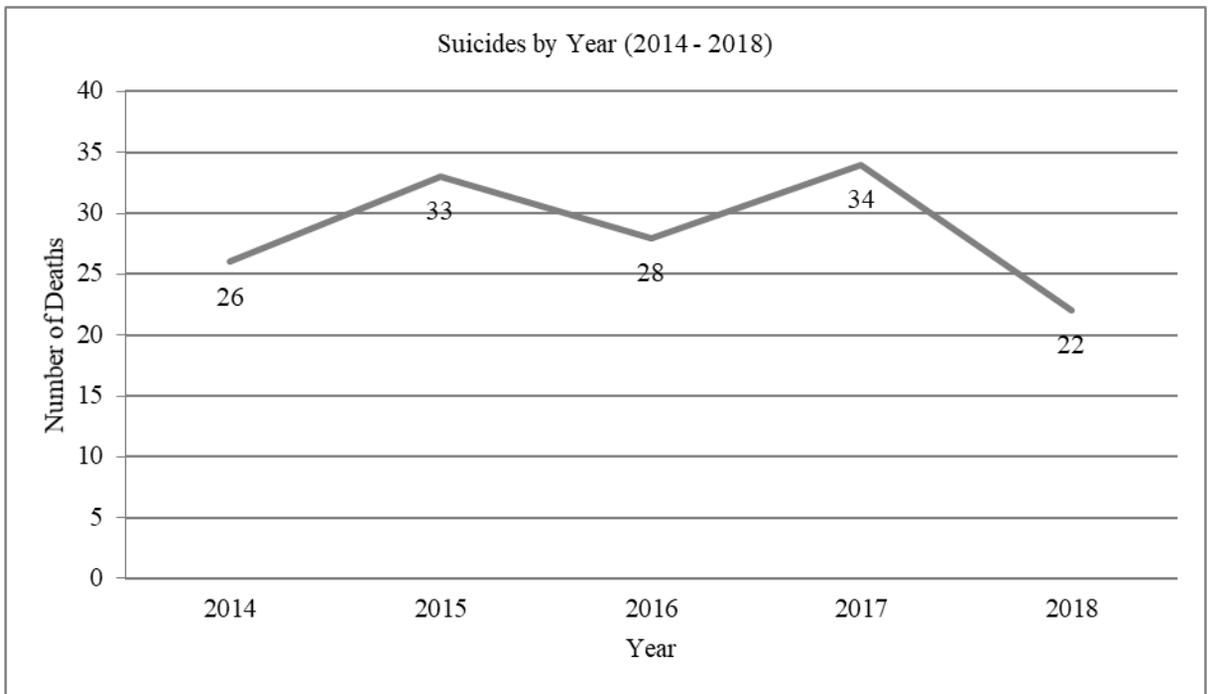


Figure 5.1.

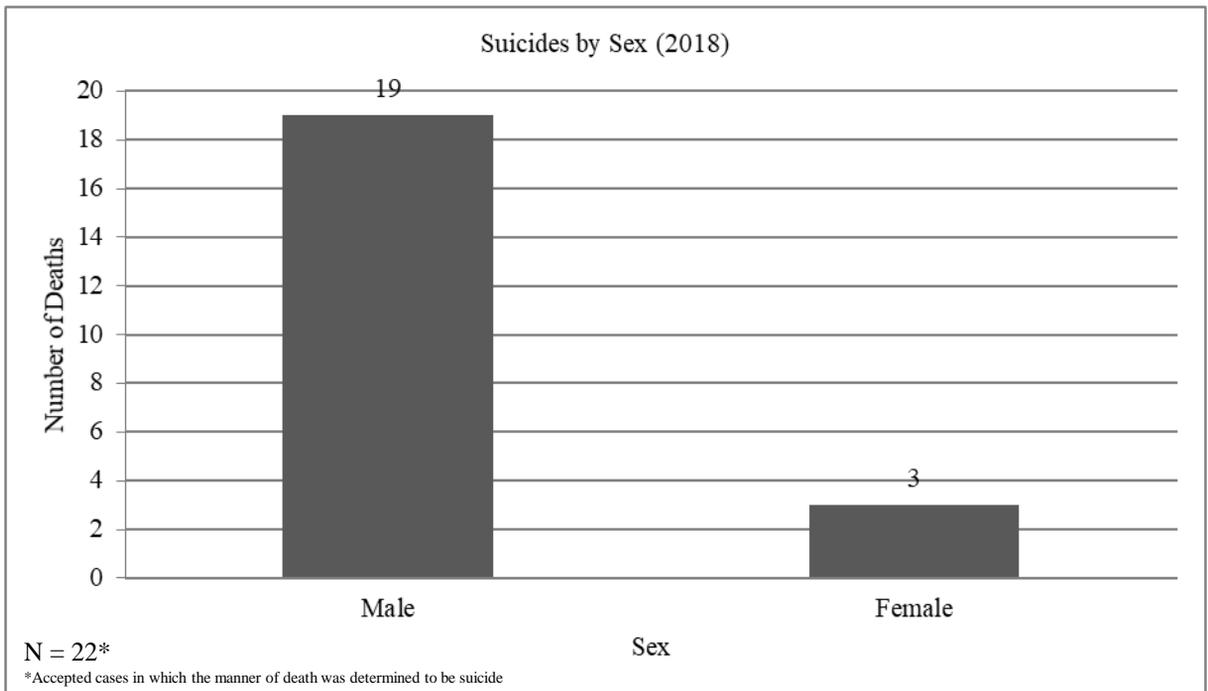


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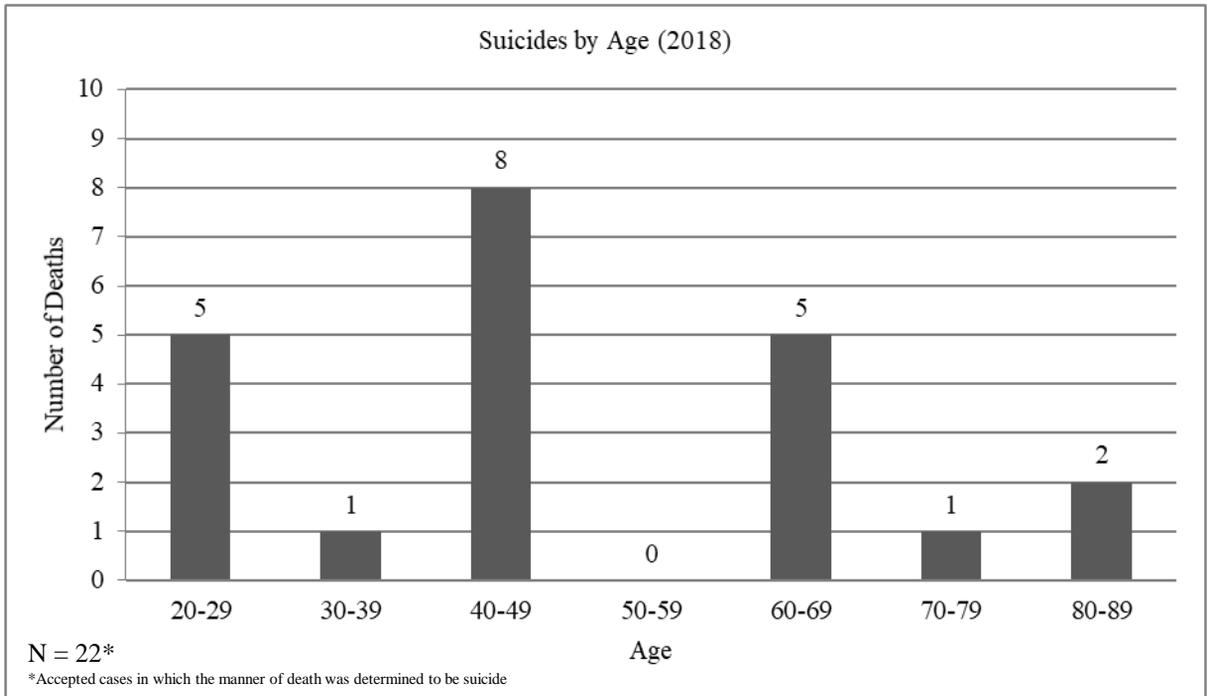


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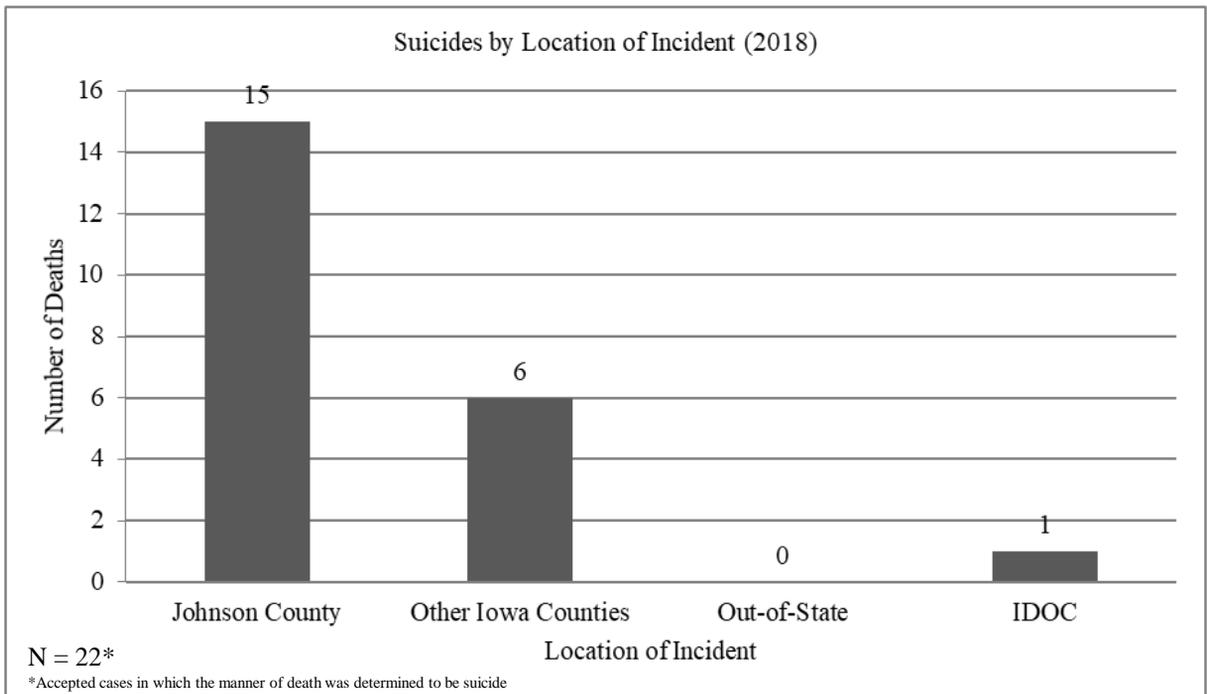


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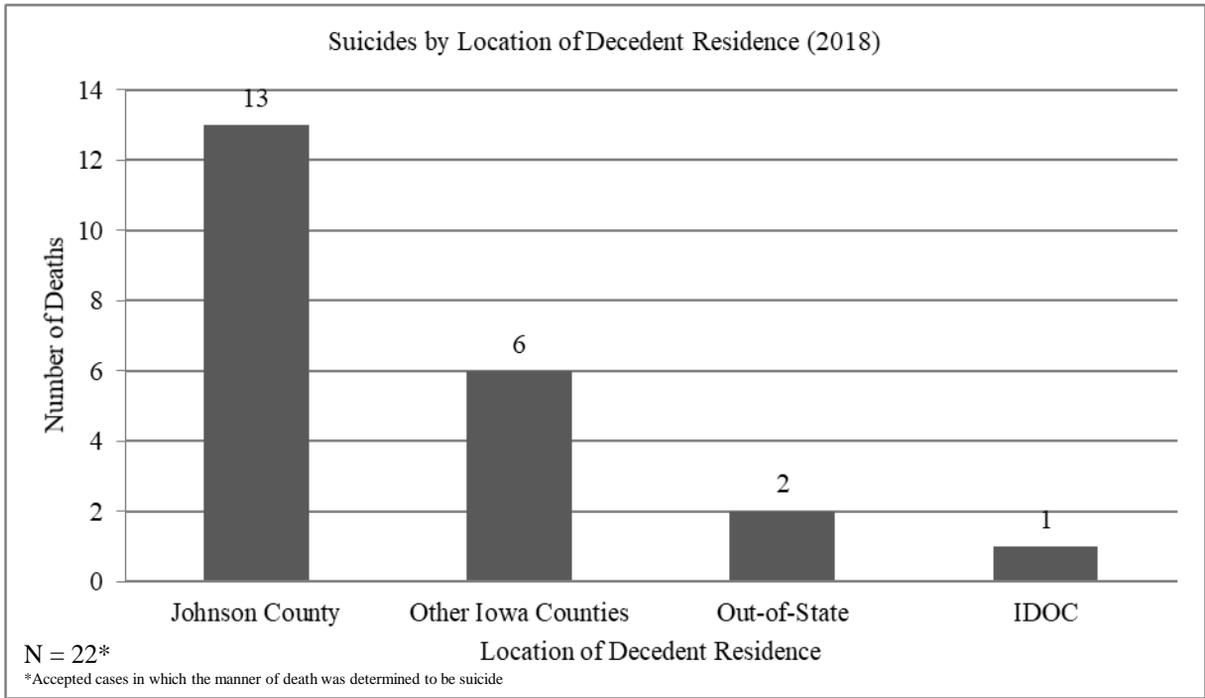


Figure 5.5.

## Homicides

Of the 416 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 4 were classified as homicide. All four decedents were male. The most common age range was 10 to 19 years (2 decedents), followed by 0 to 19 years (1 decedent) and 30 to 39 years (1 decedent). The incident location for 3 of the 4 deaths certified as homicide occurred in other Iowa counties while the remaining 1 occurred out-of-state.

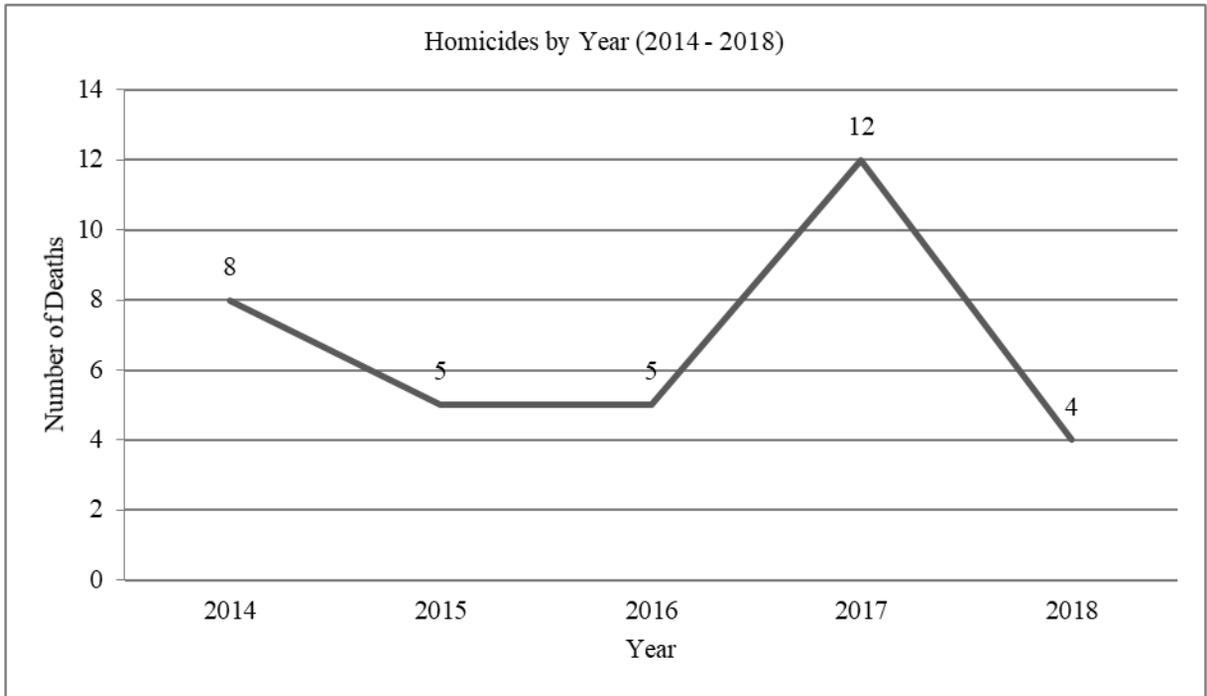


Figure 6.1.

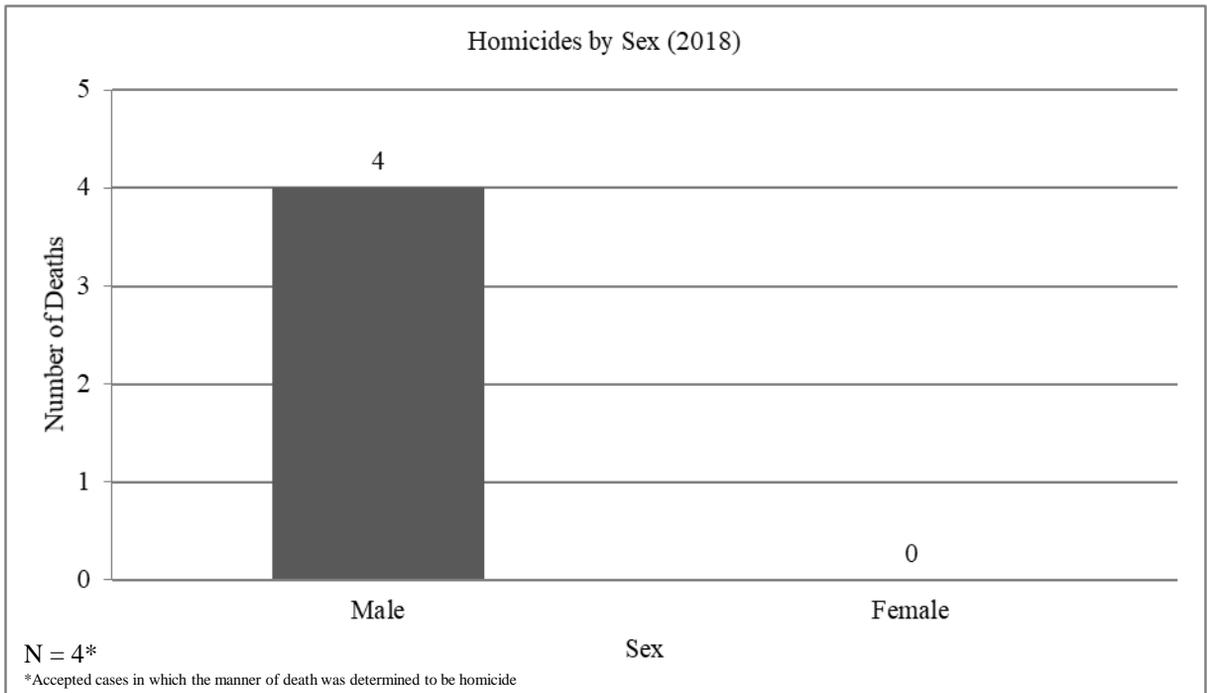


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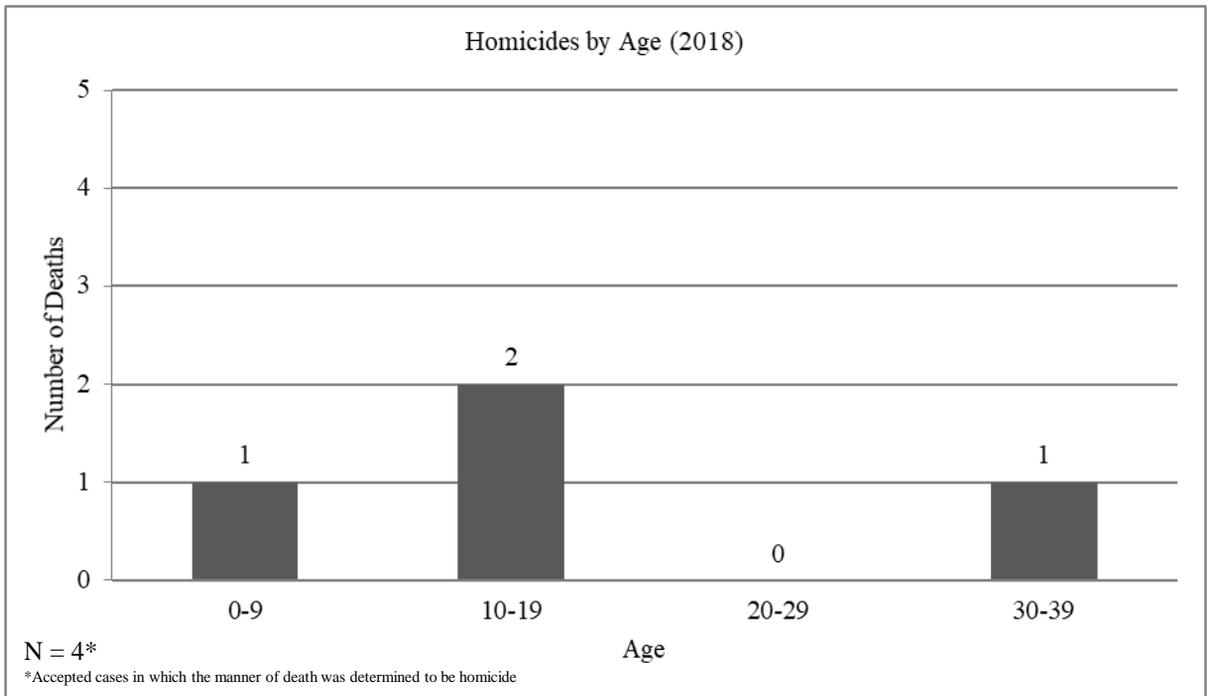


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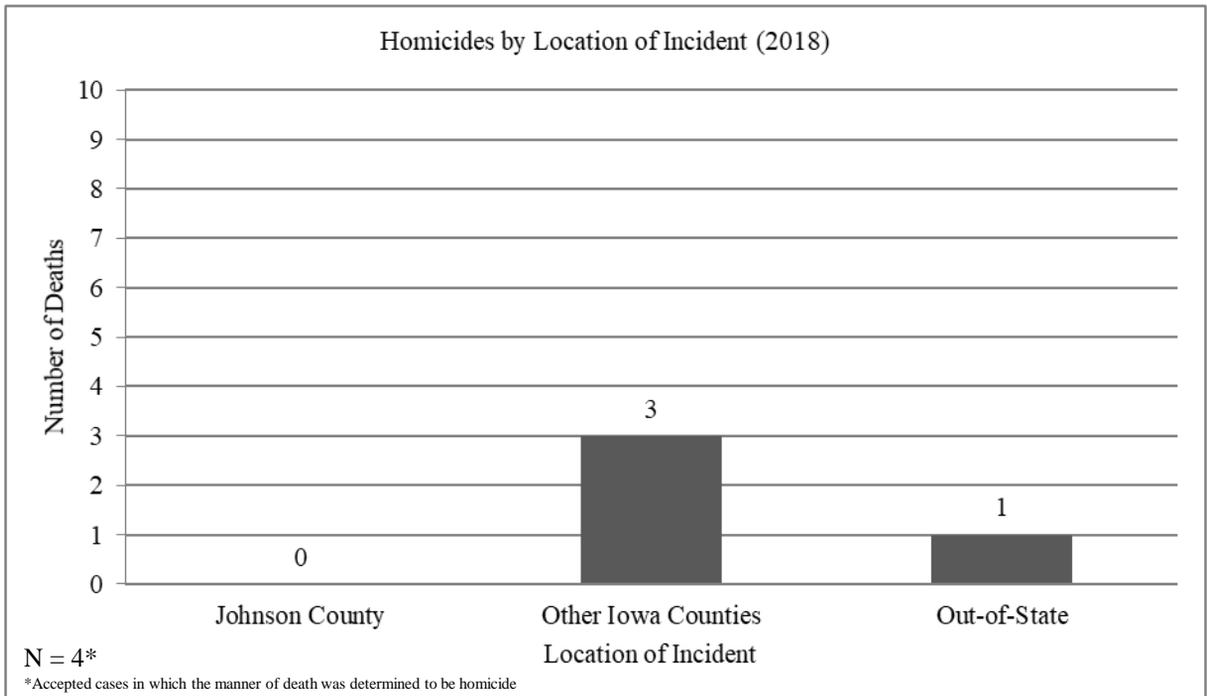


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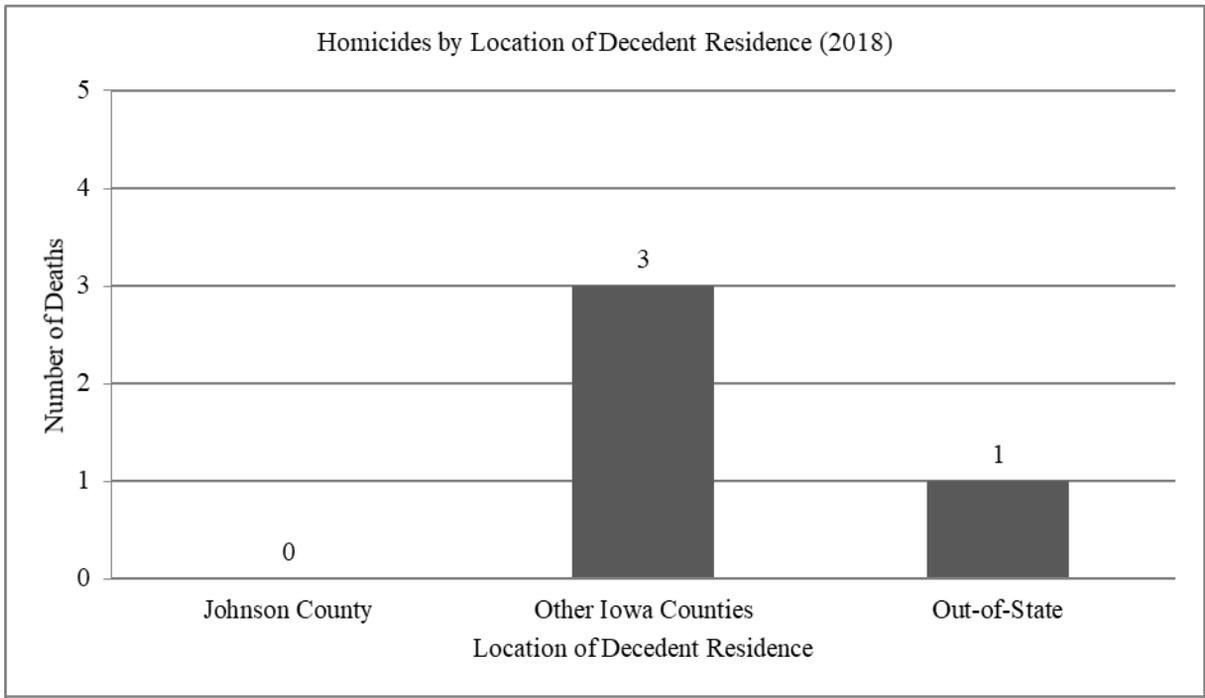


Figure 6.5.

## Drug-Related Deaths

In 2018, there were 13 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 5 involved illicit drugs only, 3 involved over-the-counter medications only, and 5 involved a mixture of drug types. Of the 5 mixed drug-related deaths, 2 involved prescription and over-the-counter medications, 1 involved multiple illicitly obtained substances (acrylfentanyl and morphine), 1 involved an illicit drug (fentanyl) and prescription drug, and one was a mixture of an illicit drug (fentanyl), prescription drug, and over-the-counter medication. Of the remaining 5 illicit drug-related deaths, 3 involved methamphetamine, 1 involved propoxyphene, and 1 involved 5F-ADB.

Of the 13 drug-related deaths, 11 were classified as accident and 2 as suicide. Of the 13 drug-related deaths, 6 involved prescription and/or illicit opioids. The overall sex distribution was 9 males to 4 females, with the most common age range of 20 to 29 years (5 decedents), followed by 60 to 69 years (4 decedents).

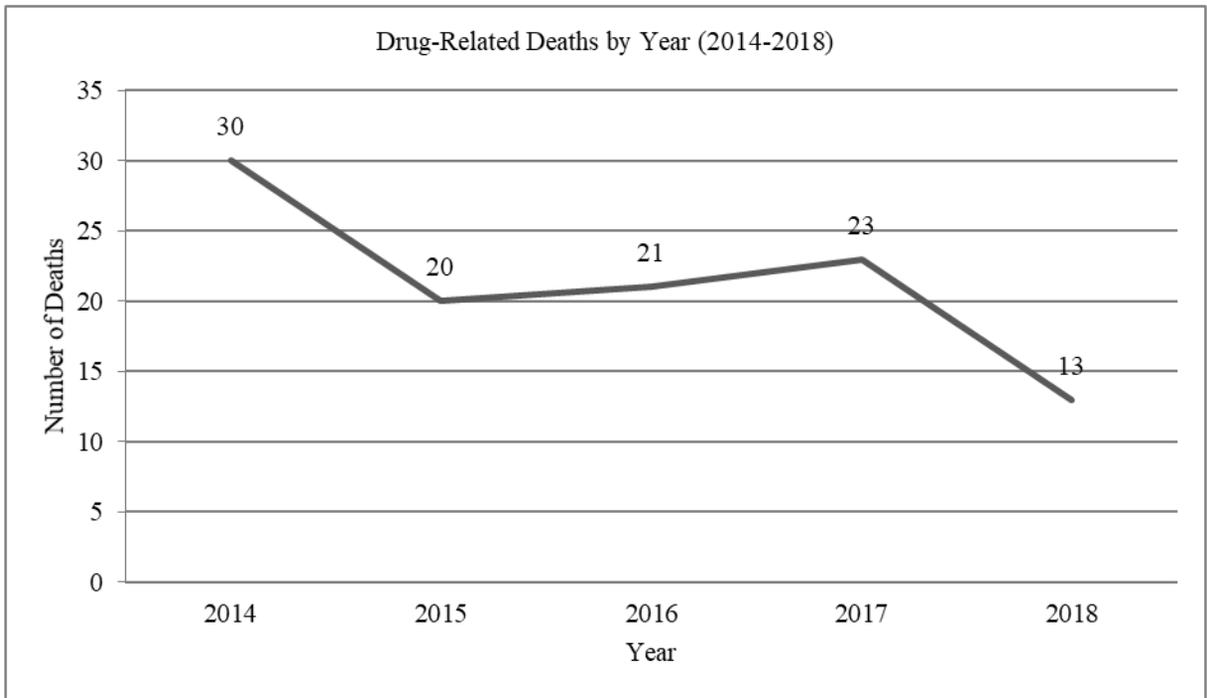


Figure 7.1.

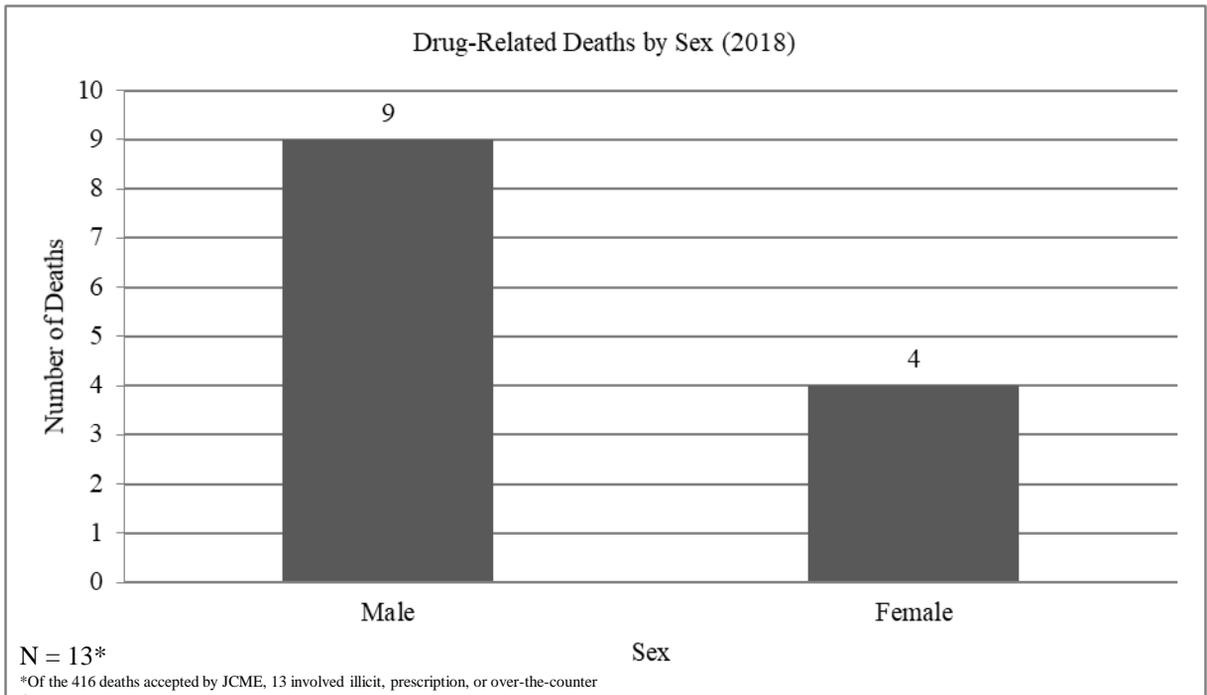


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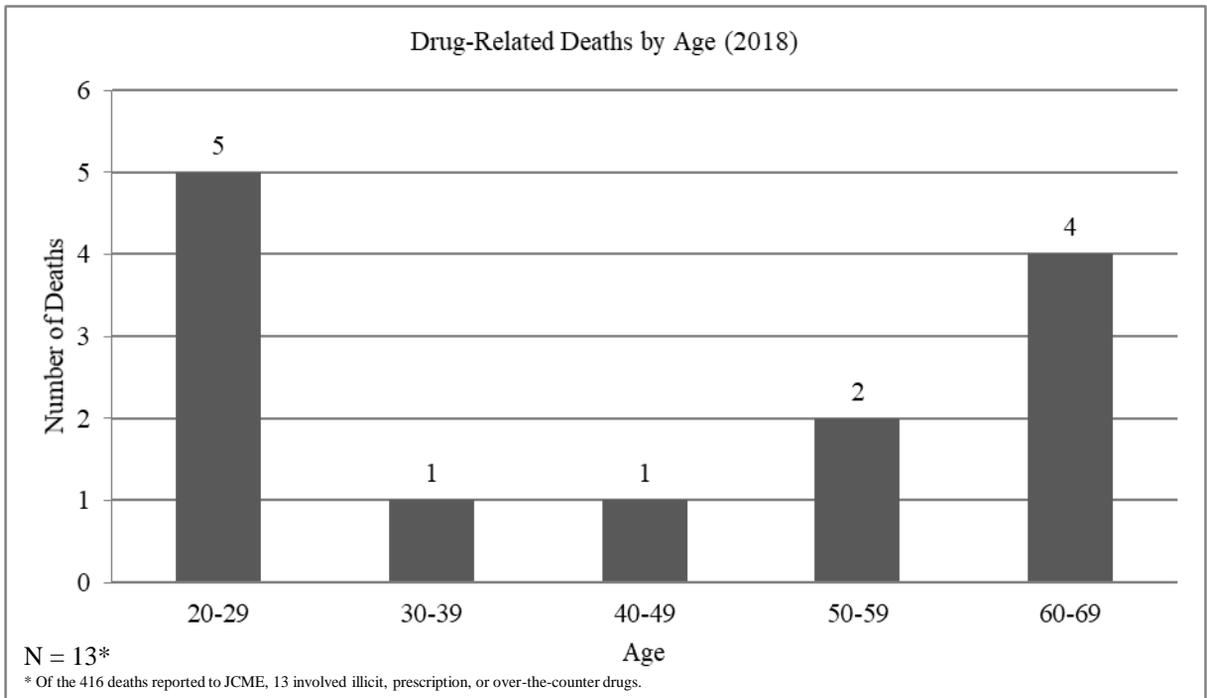


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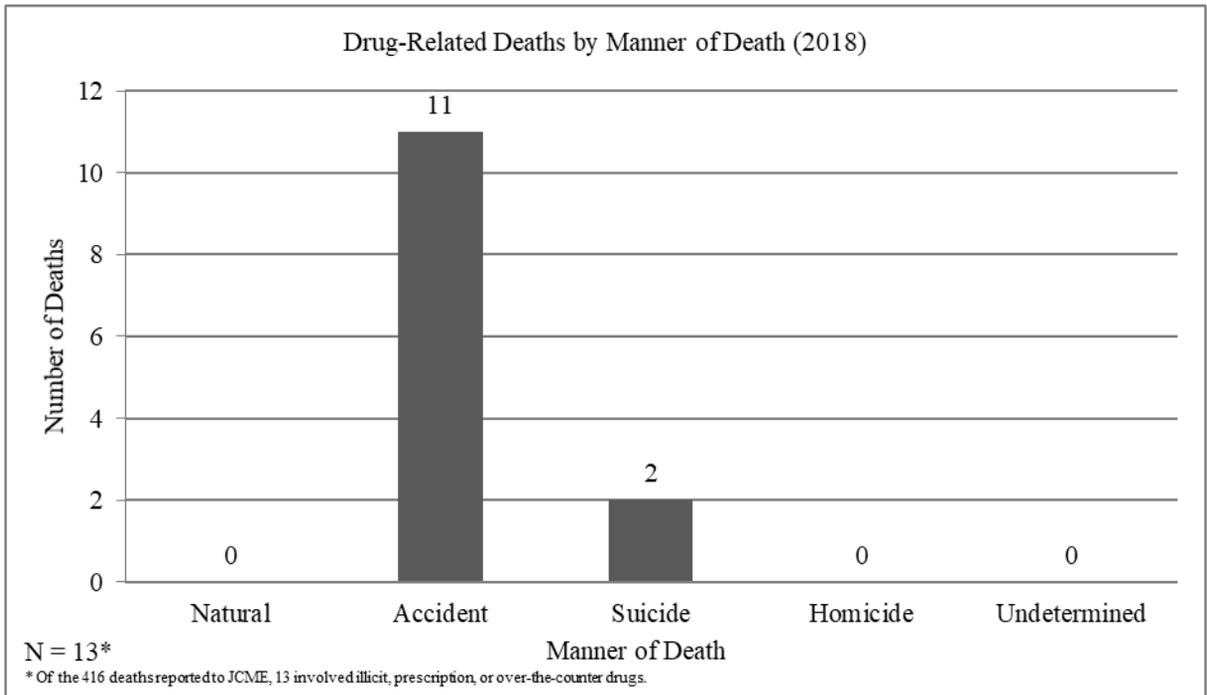


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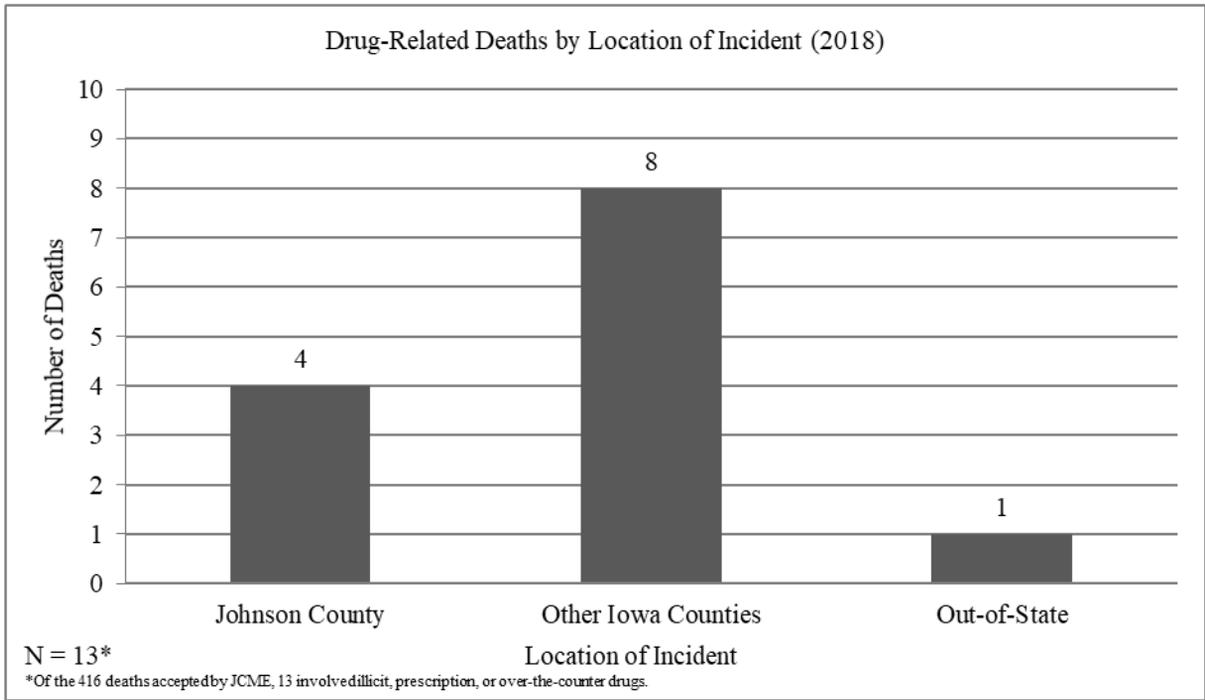


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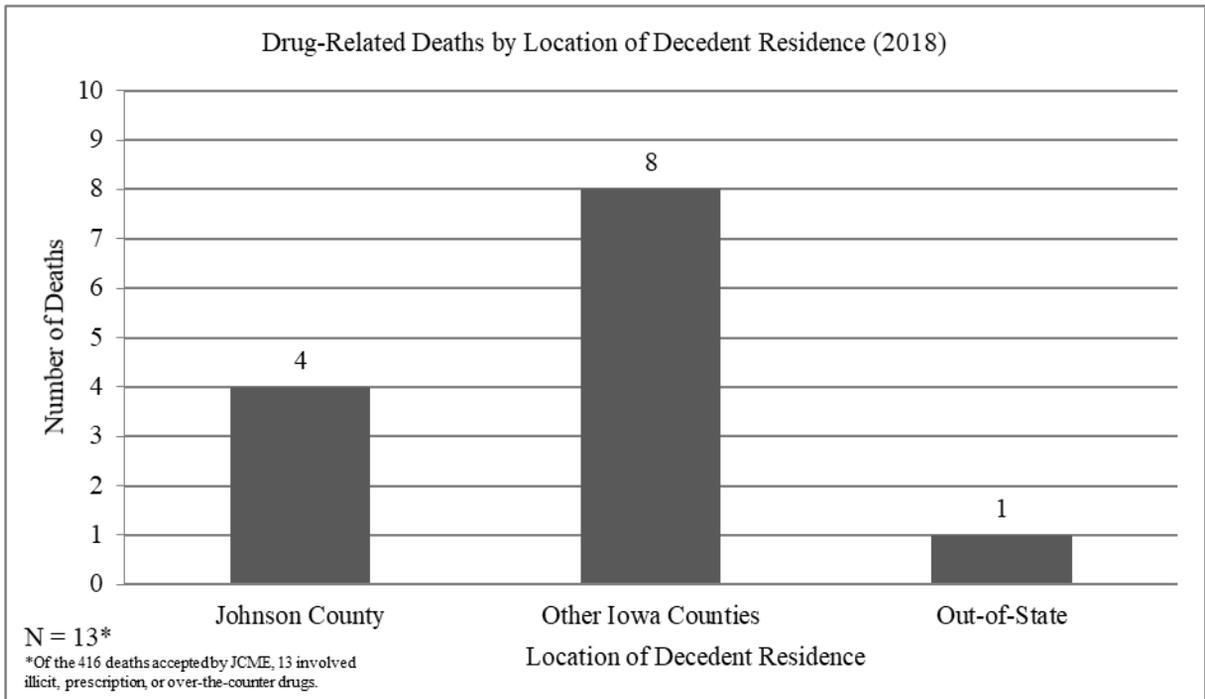


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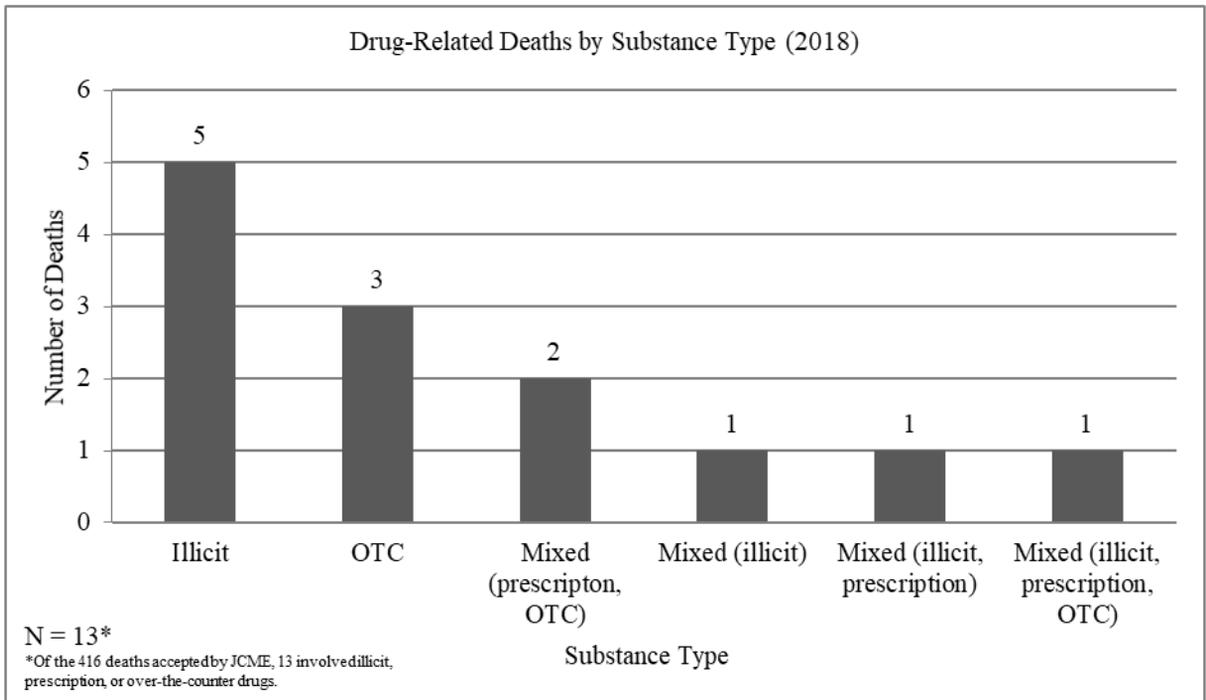


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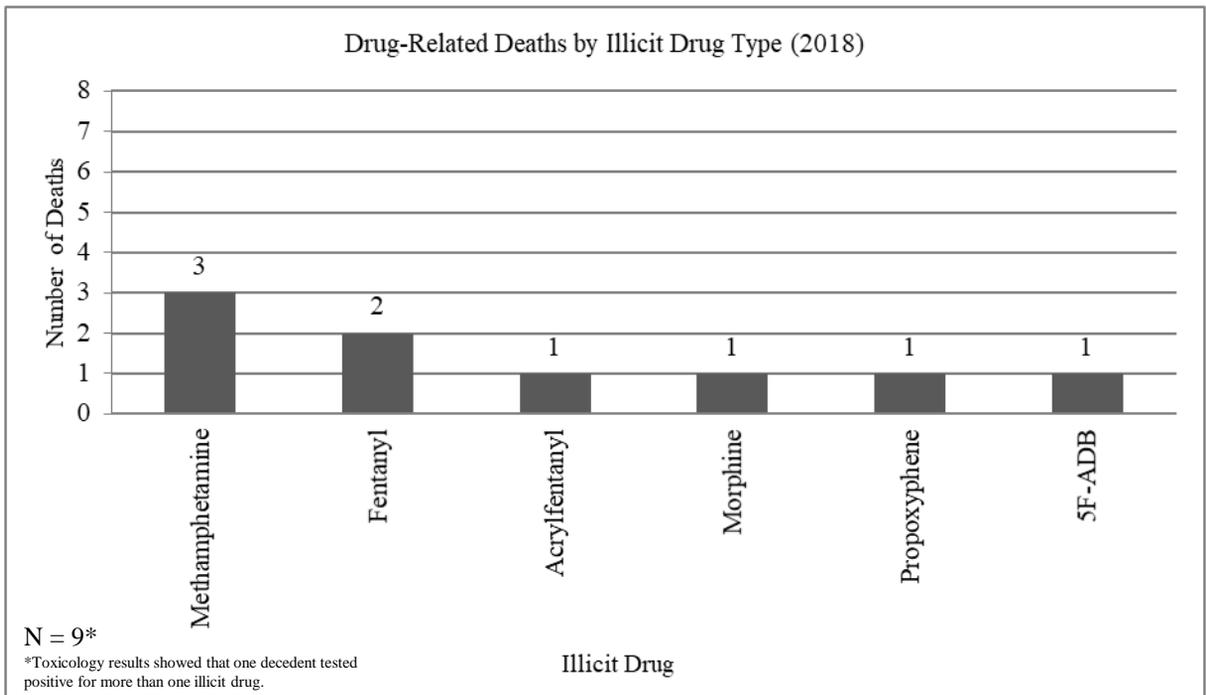


Figure 7.8.

Table 7.1. Drug-Related Deaths by Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs (2018)

Type of Drugs	Number of Decedents*
Acetaminophen	3
Diphenhydramine	2
Amitriptyline	1
Clonazepam	1
Hydrocodone	1
Loperamide	1
Morphine	1
Oxycodone	1
Salicylate	1

\*Toxicology results showed that several decedents were positive for multiple prescription and over-the-counter drugs at the time of their death

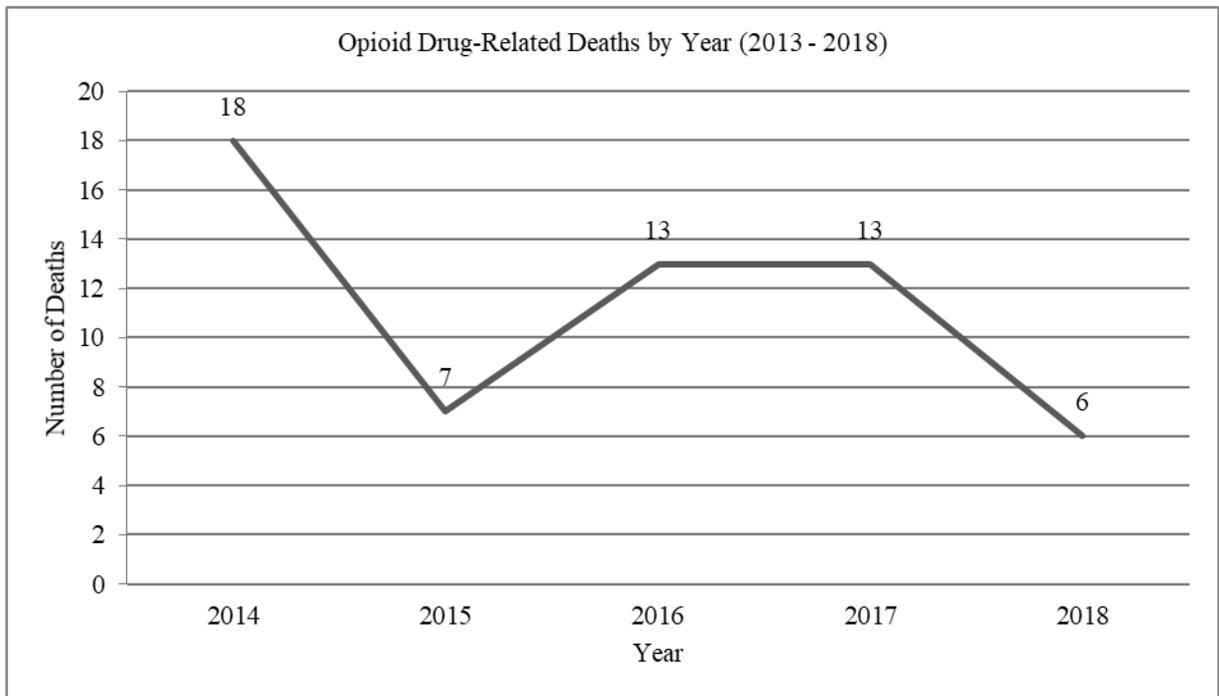


Figure 7.9.

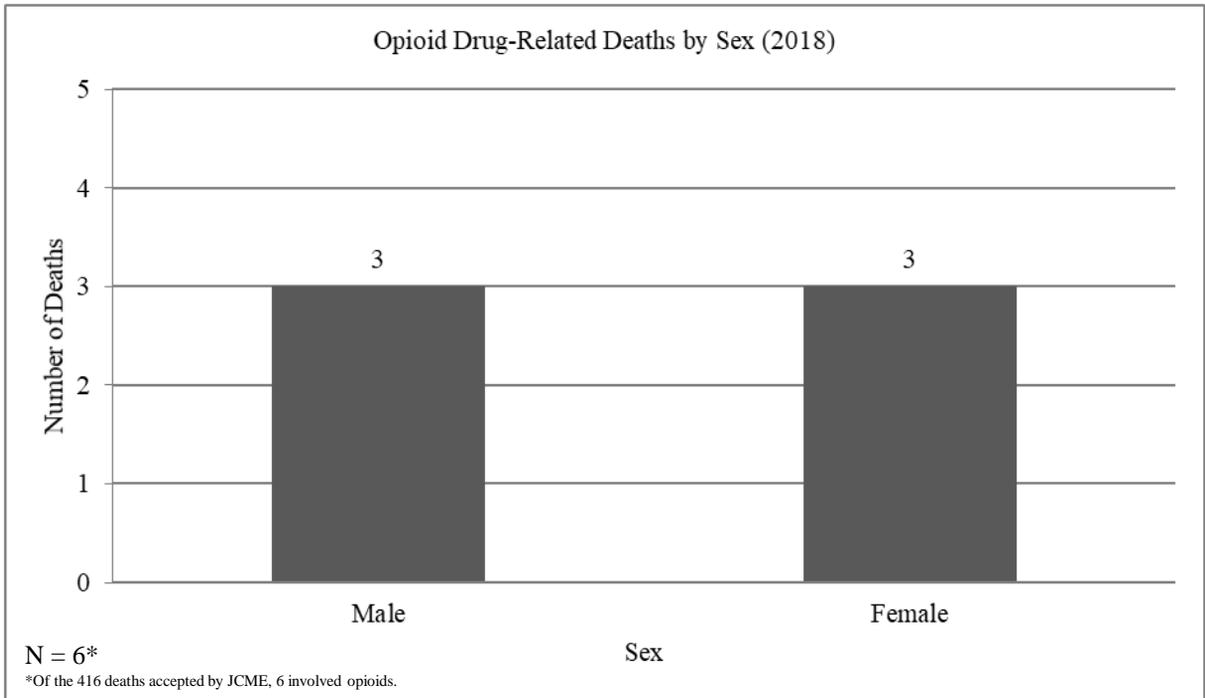


Figure 7.10.

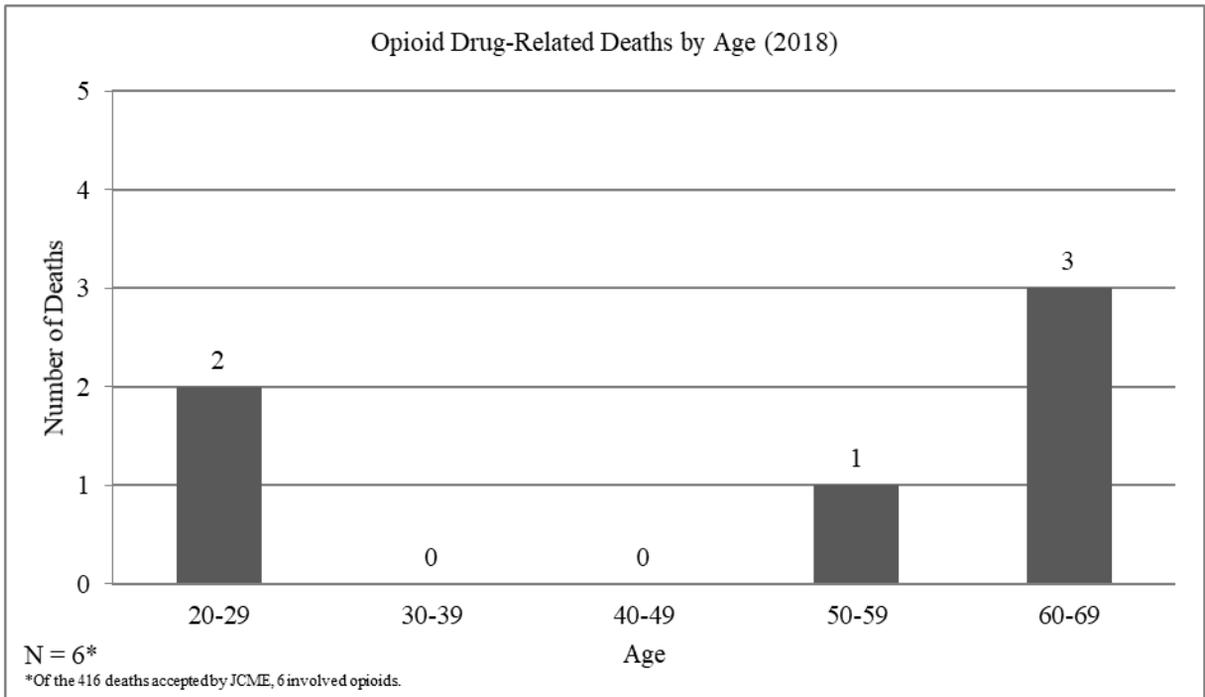


Figure 7.11.

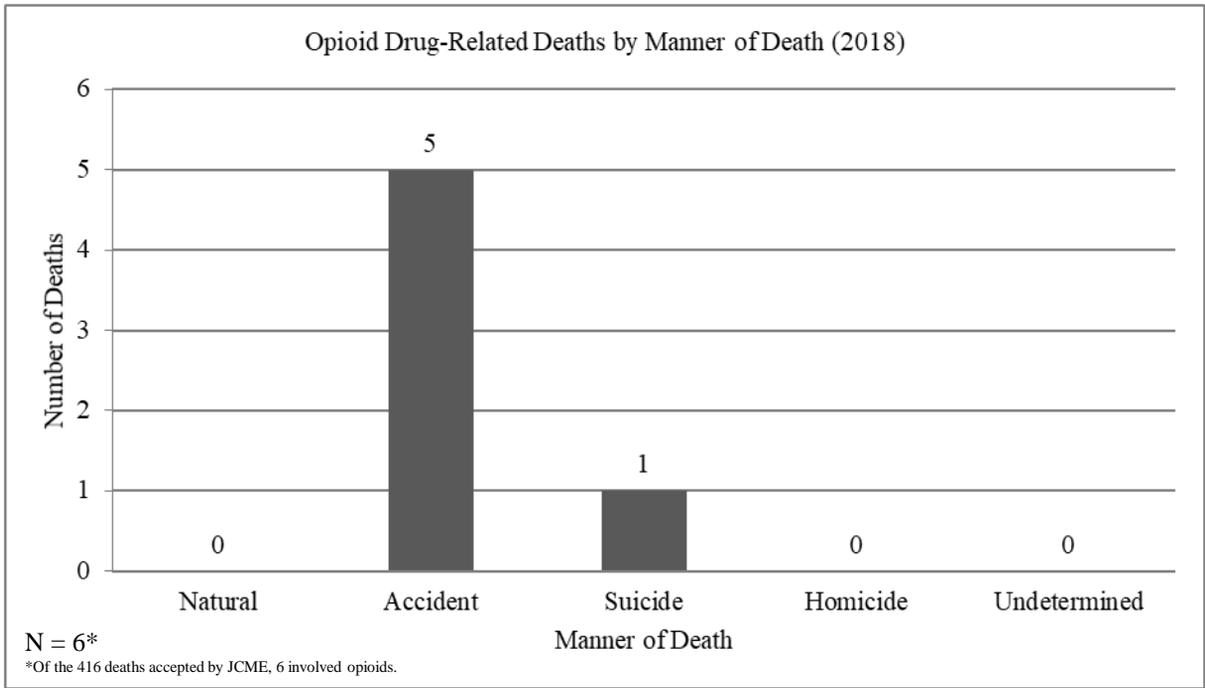


Figure 7.12.

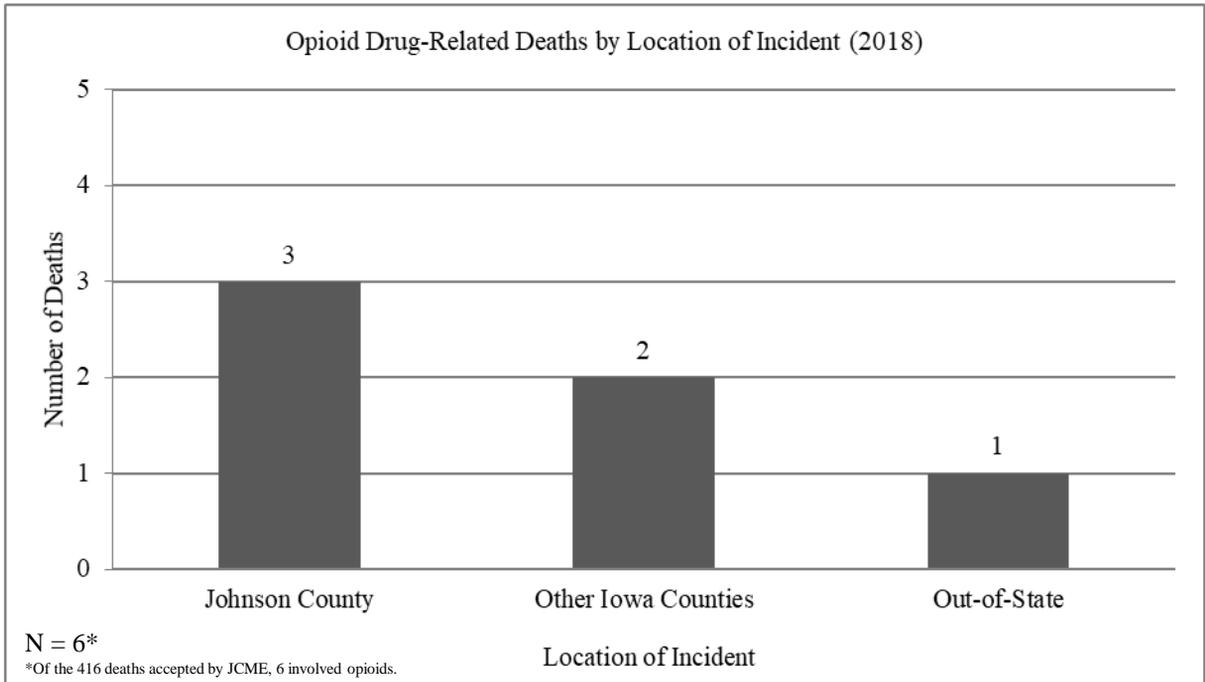


Figure 7.13.

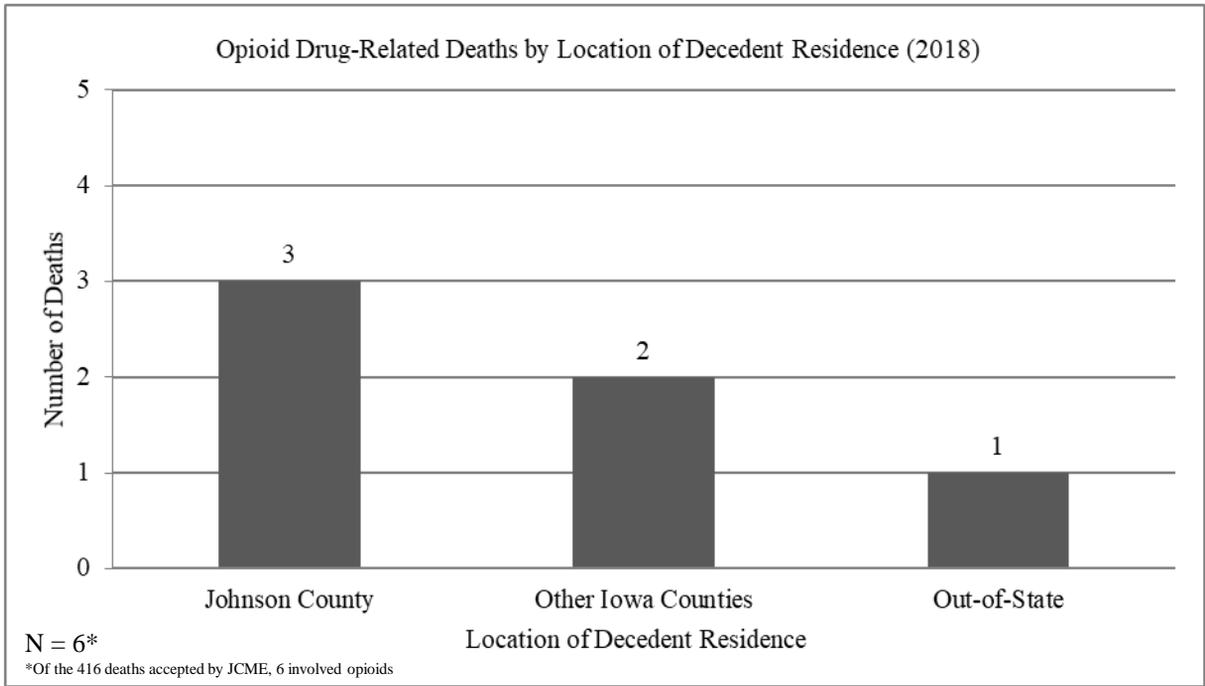


Figure 7.14.

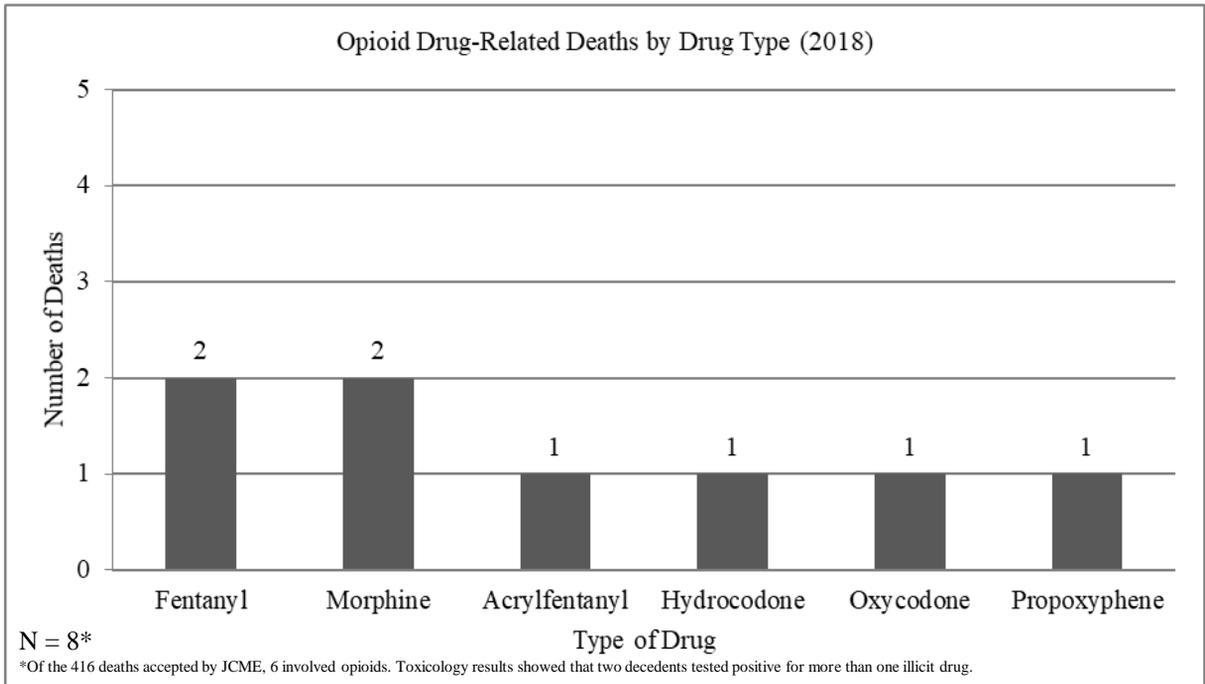


Figure 7.15.

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## Older Adult Deaths

In 2018, there were 274 deaths accepted by JCME that involved adults 60 and older. Of these, 123 were residents of Johnson County, 125 were residents of other counties in Iowa, 16 were out-of-state residents, and 10 were Iowa Department of Corrections offenders. 136 of these deaths were certified as accident, 128 as natural, 8 as suicide, and 2 as undetermined after a complete autopsy was performed.

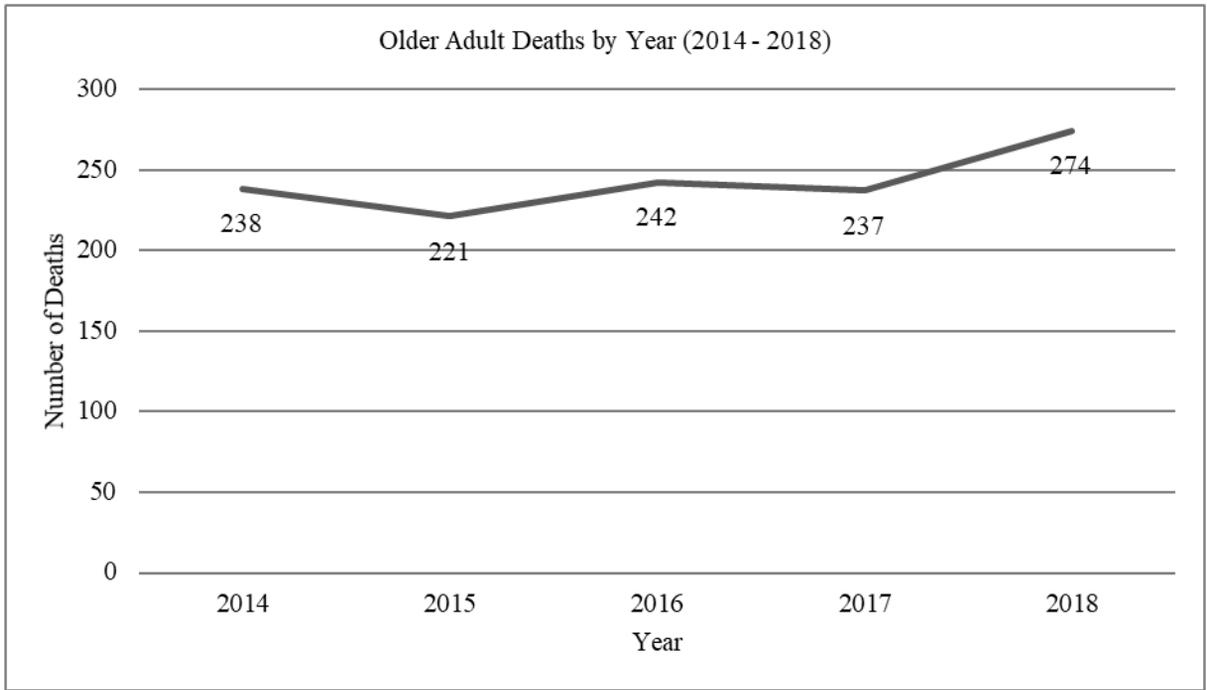


Figure 8.1.

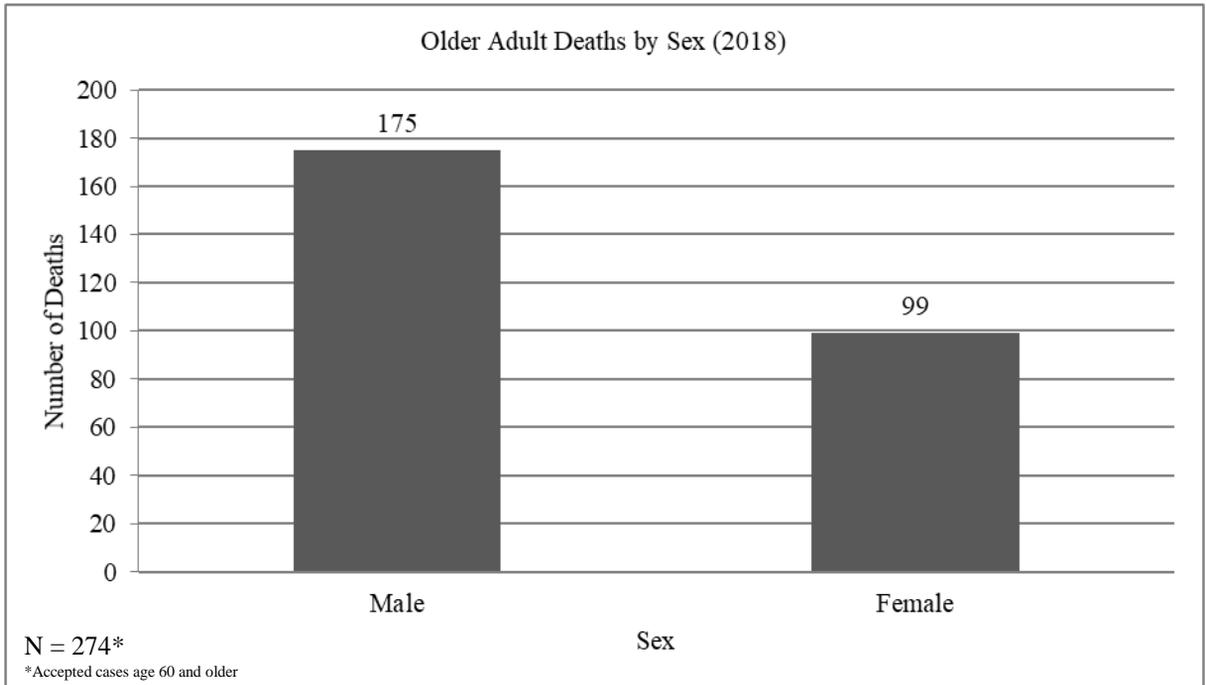


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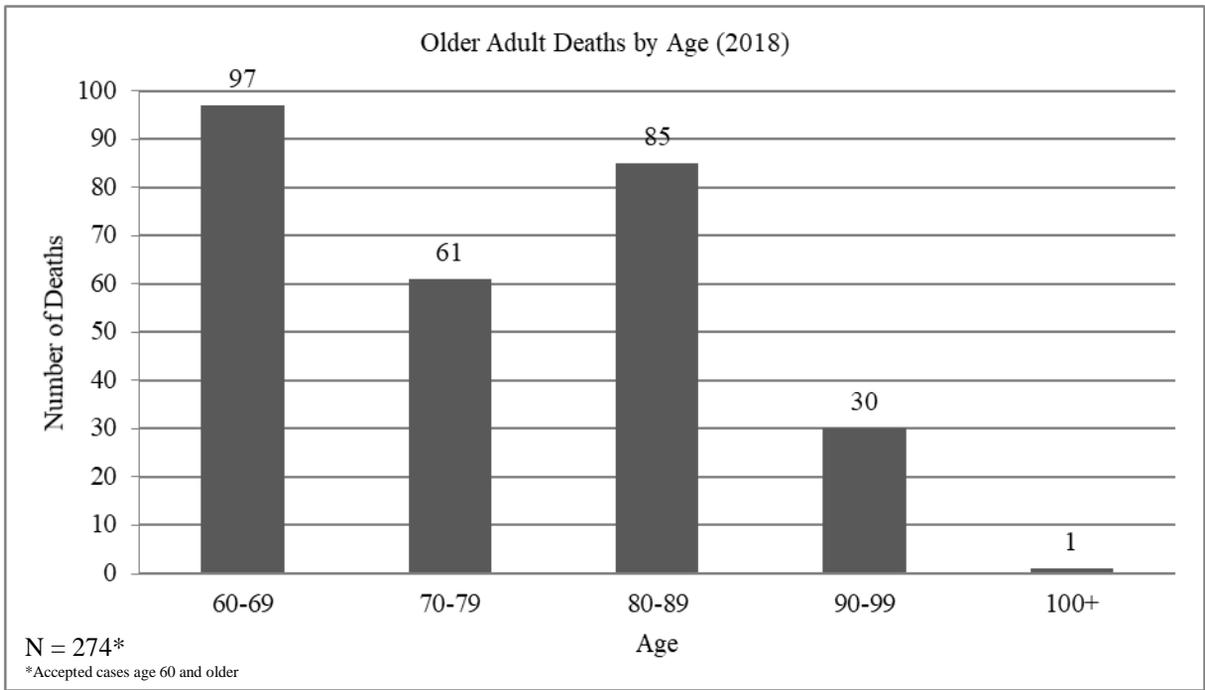


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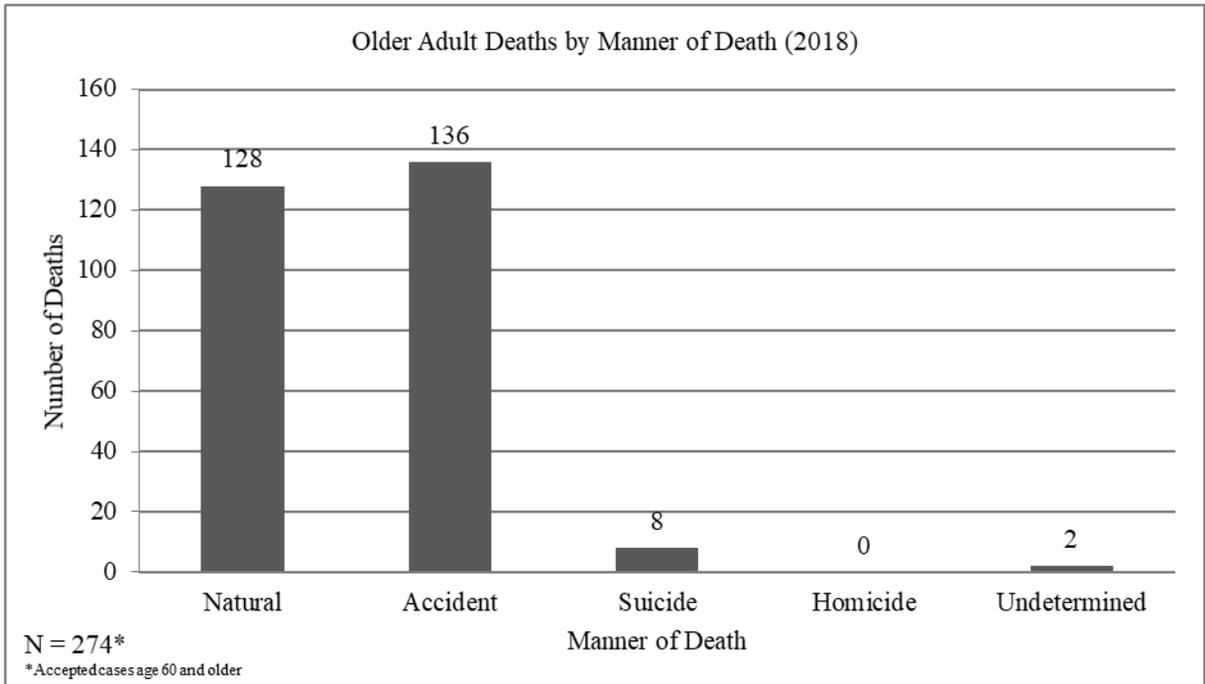


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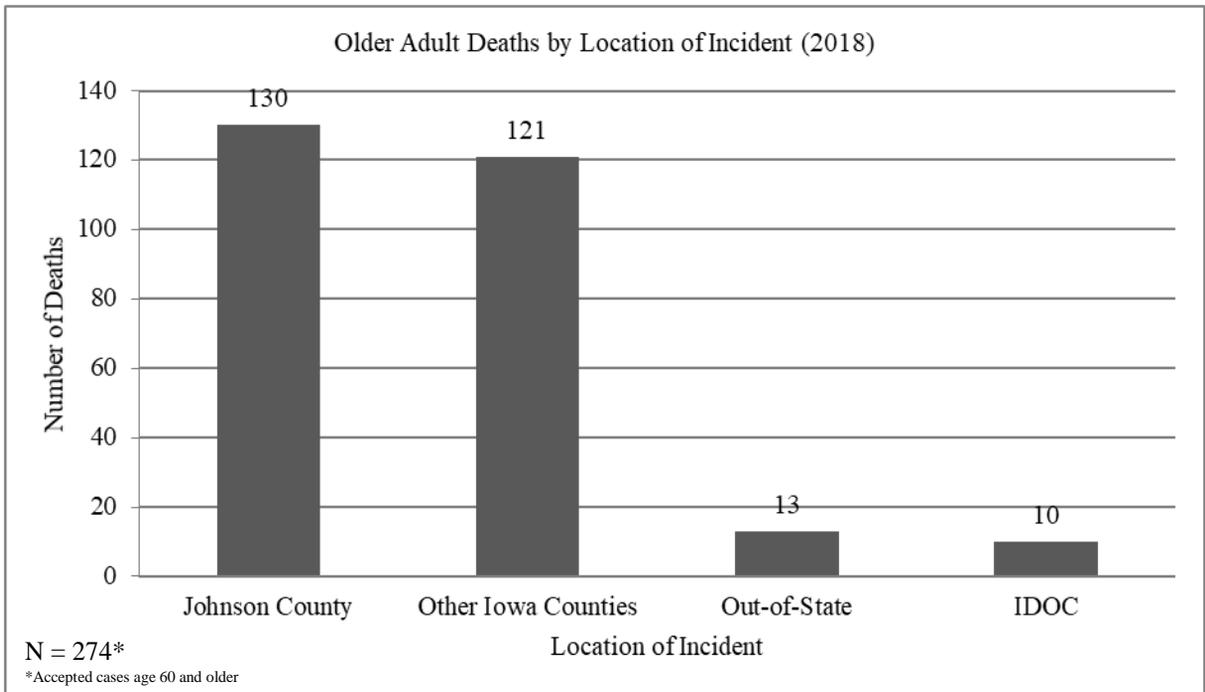


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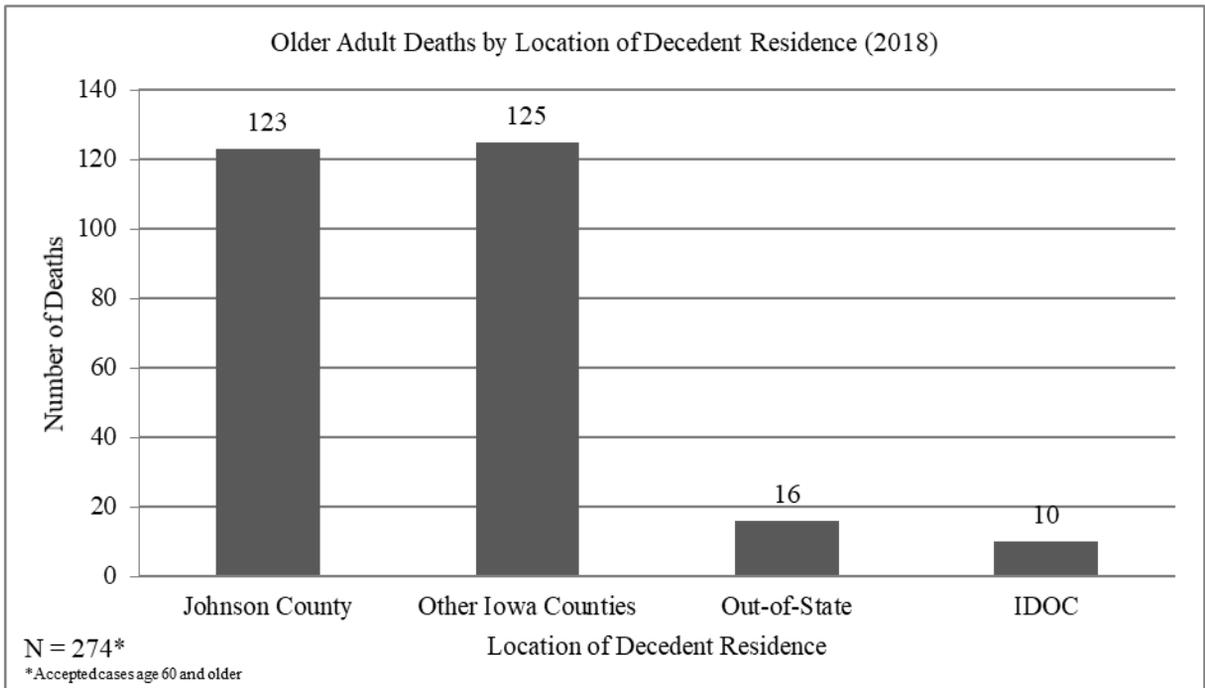


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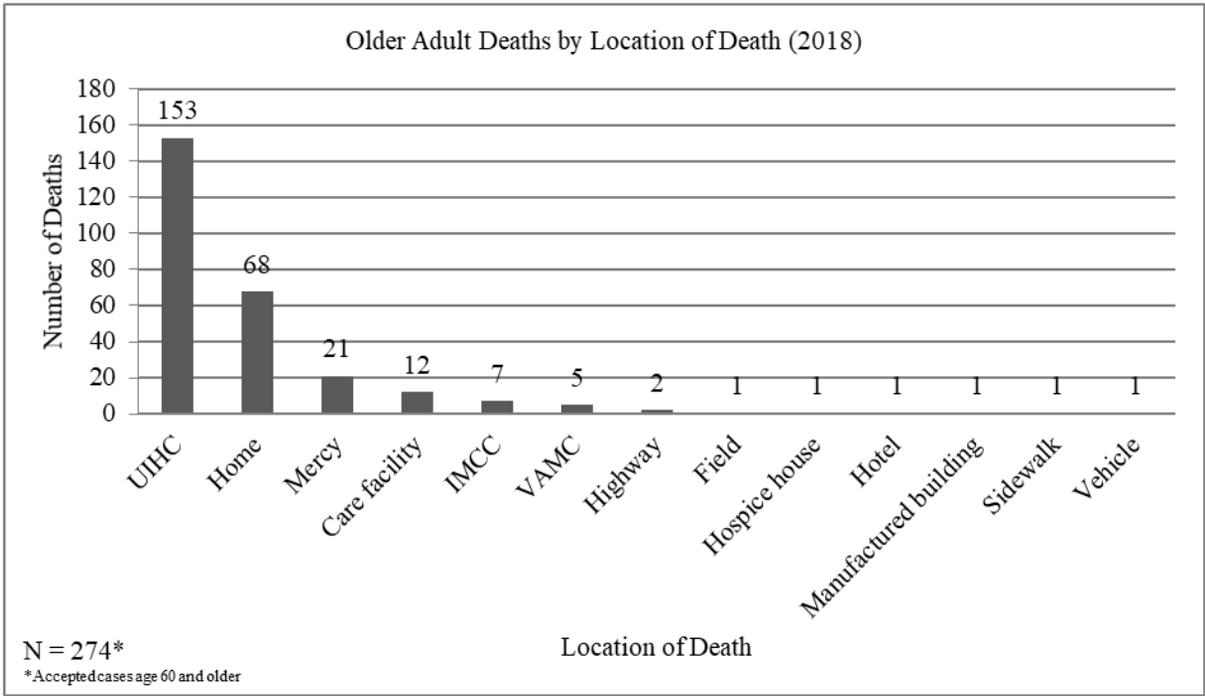


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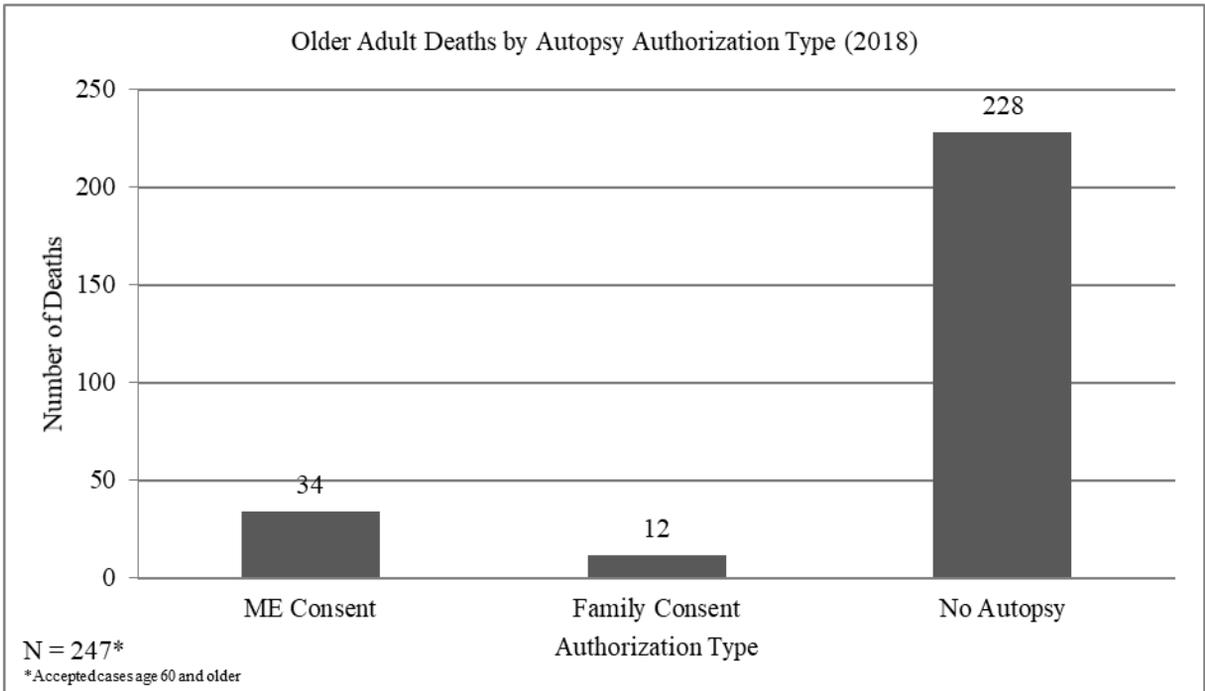


Figure 8.8.

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## Older Adult Fall-Related Deaths

There were 274 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 103 in which the death was the result of a fall. The majority of these fall-related deaths, 69, occurred from a standing height and 37 of the falls occurred inside of the decedent's home. The most common anatomical location of injury from a fall was the head and/or neck, which occurred in 56 of the falls.

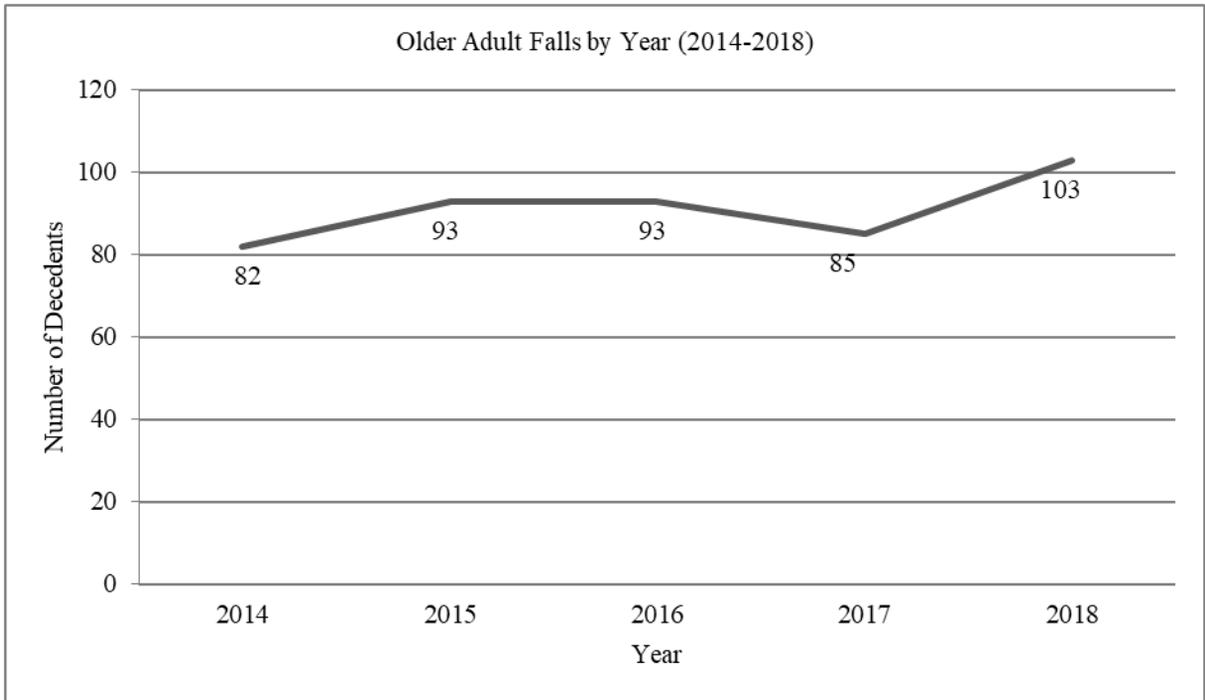


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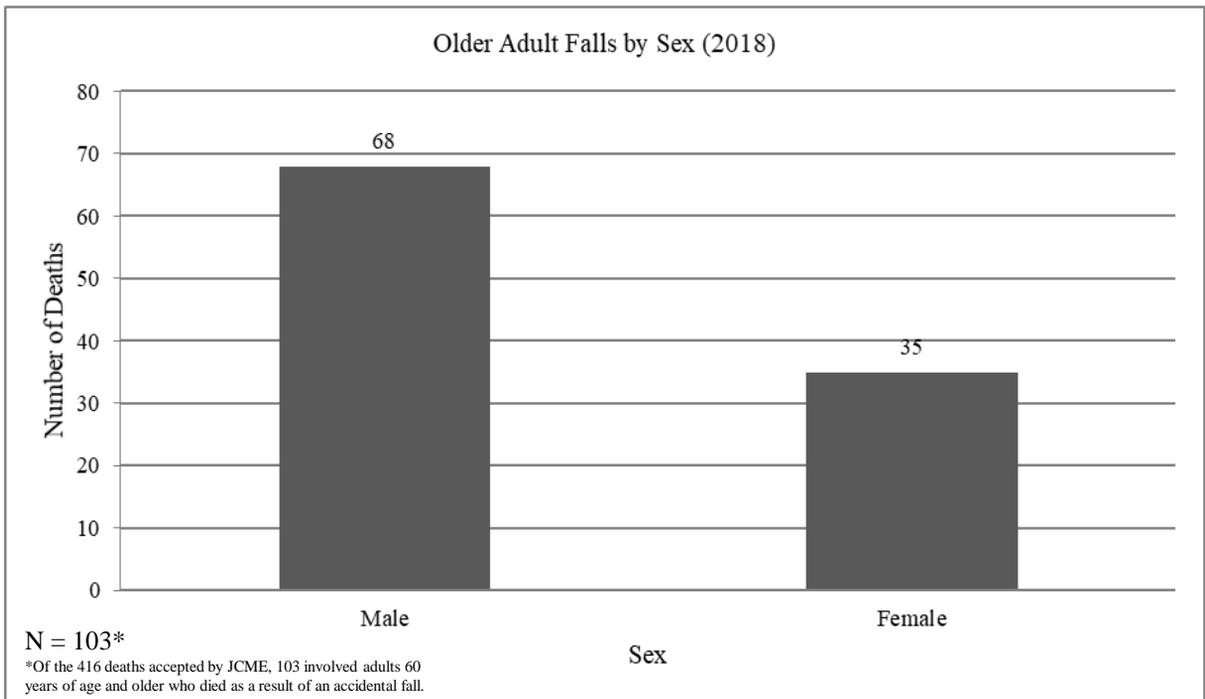


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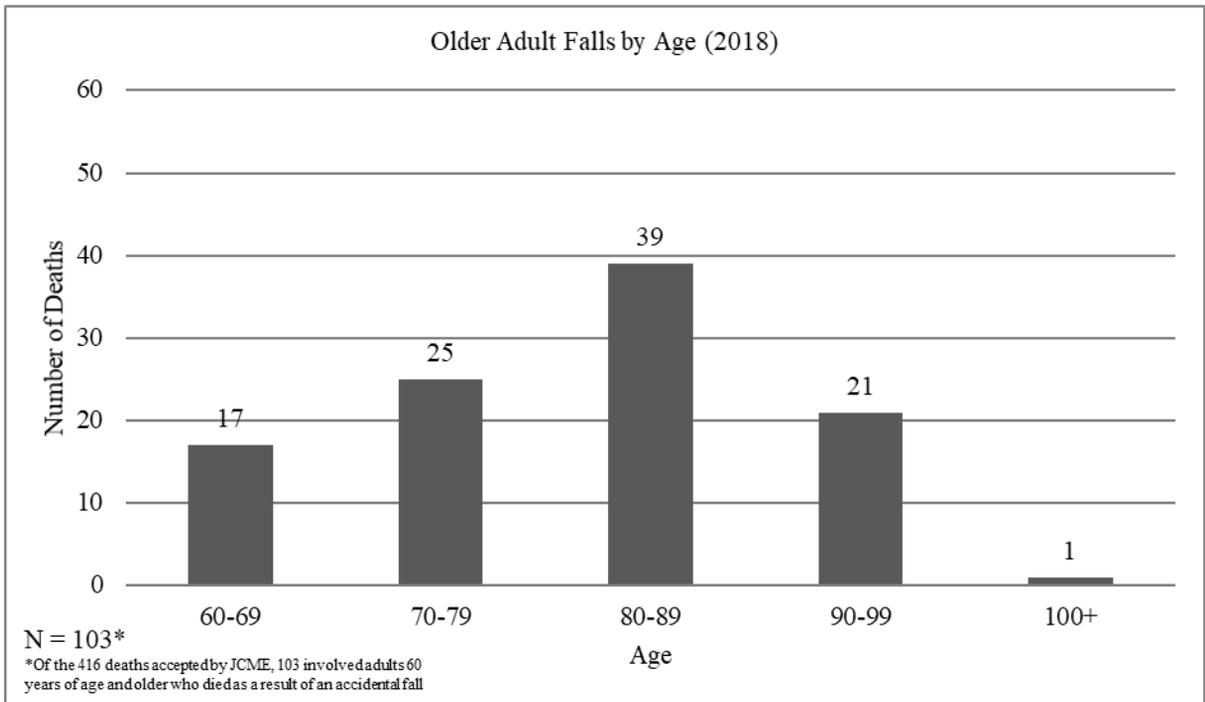


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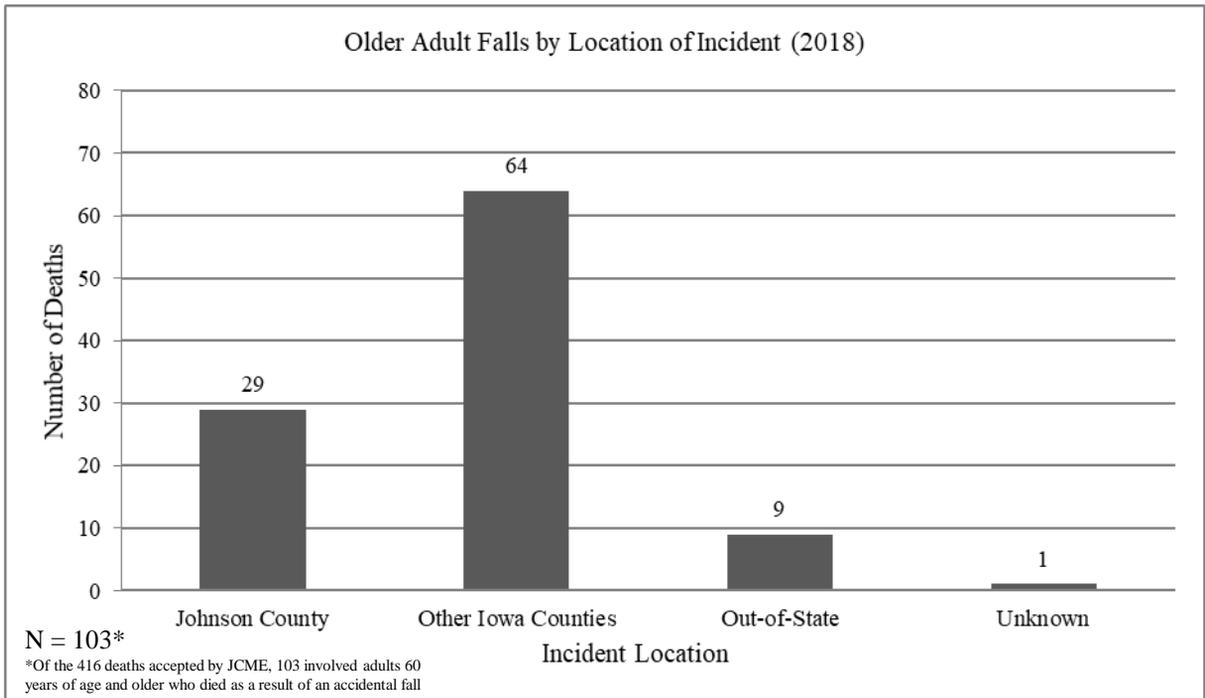


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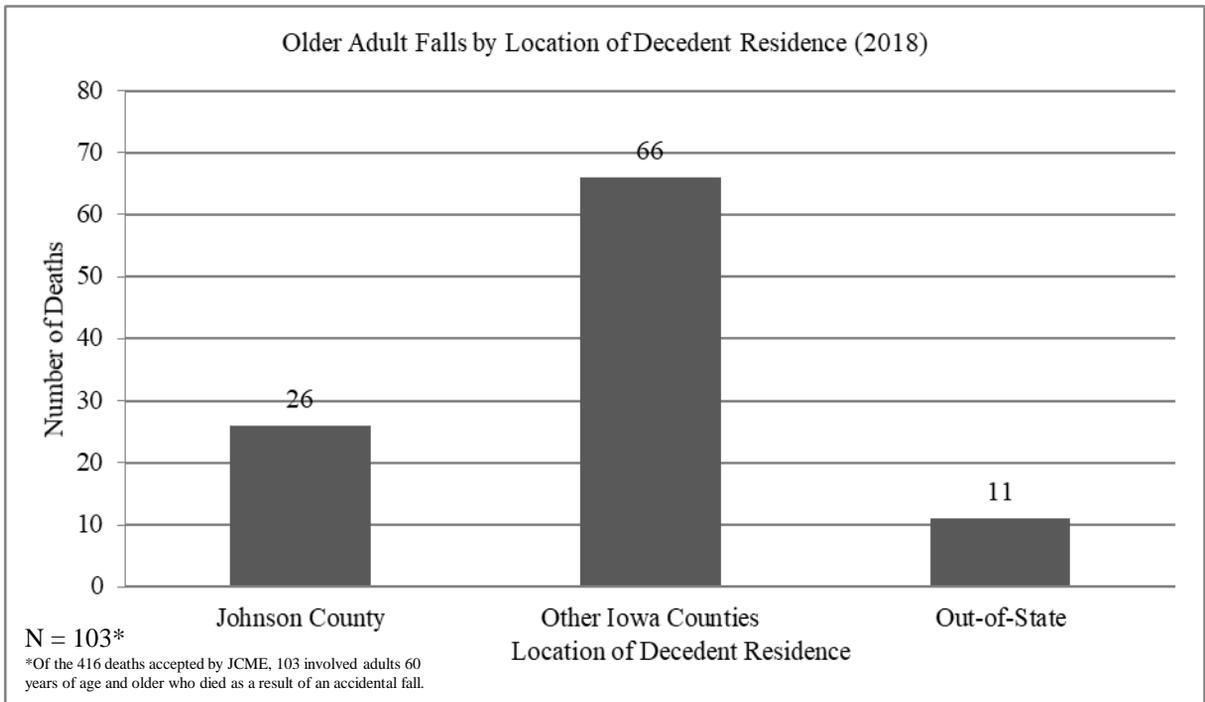


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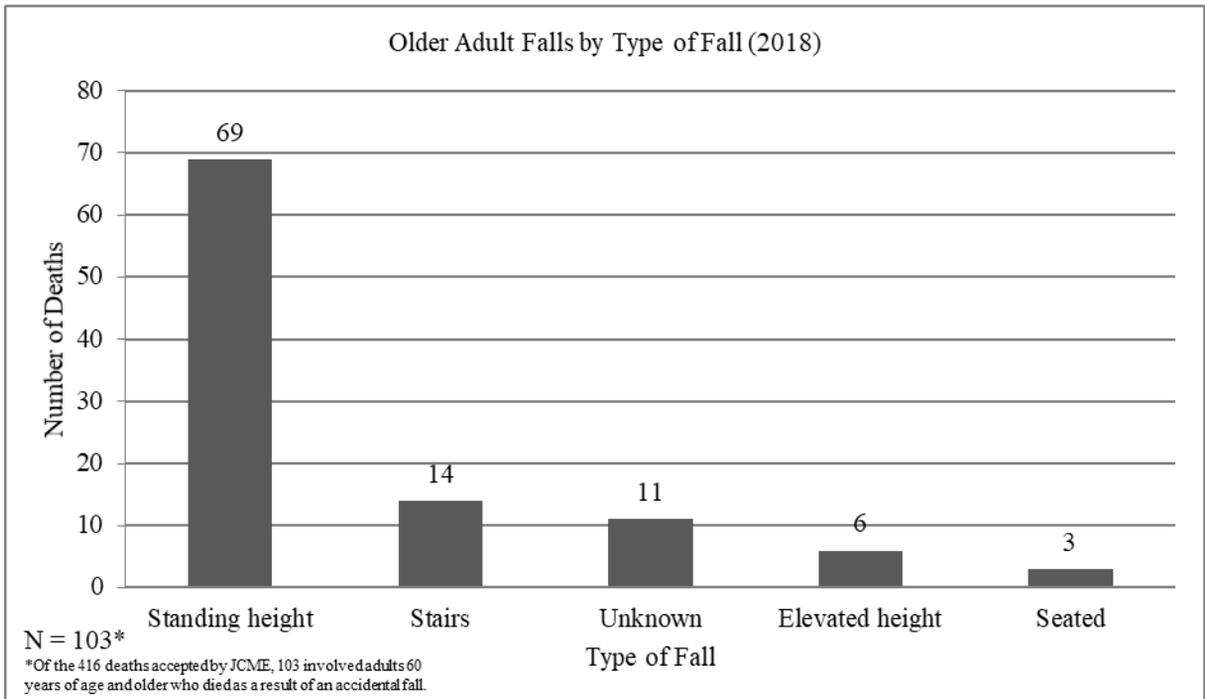


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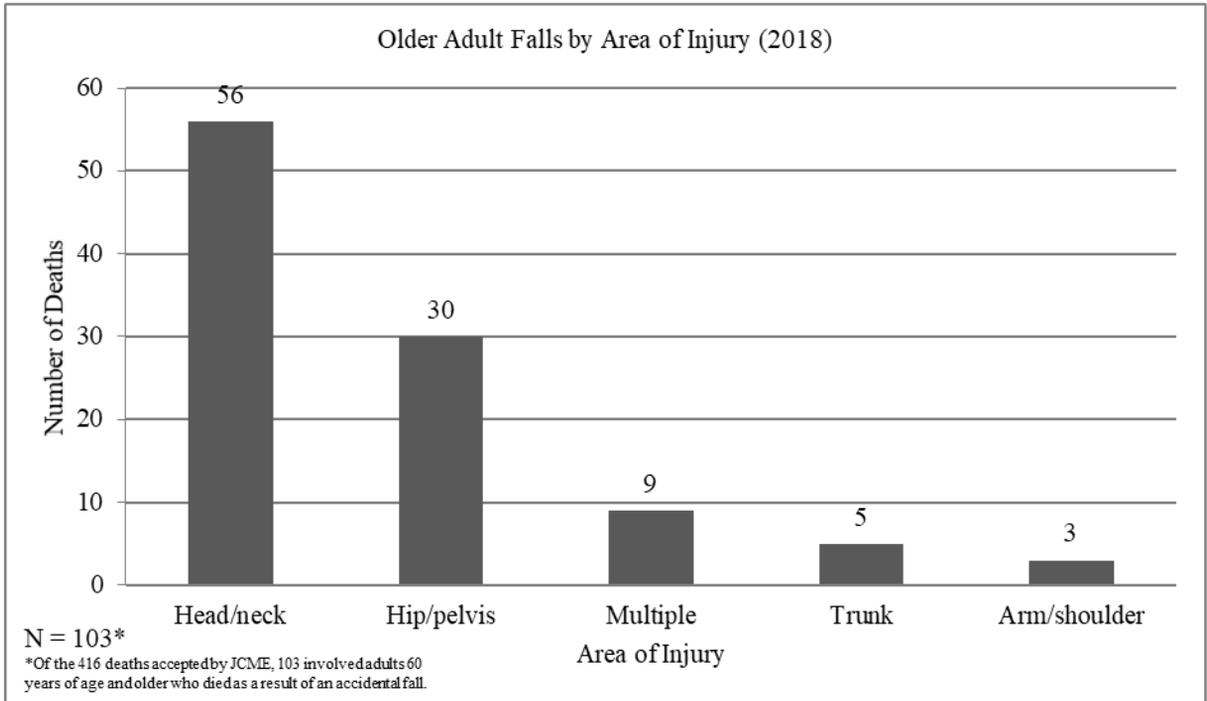


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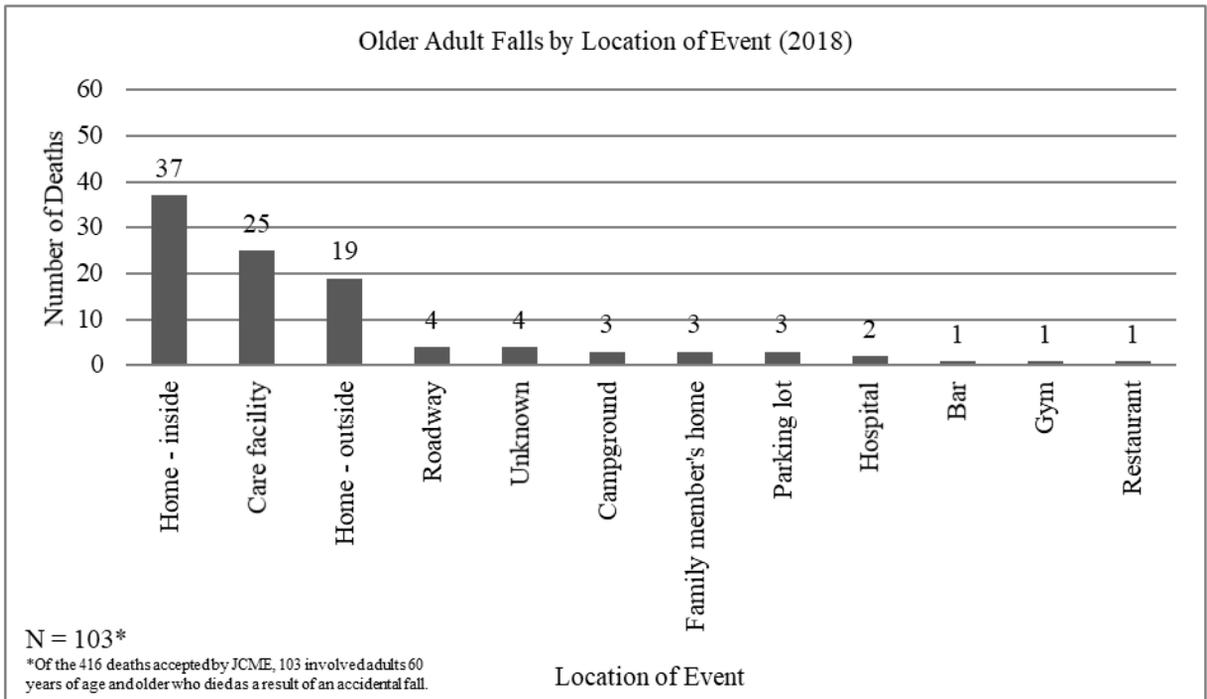


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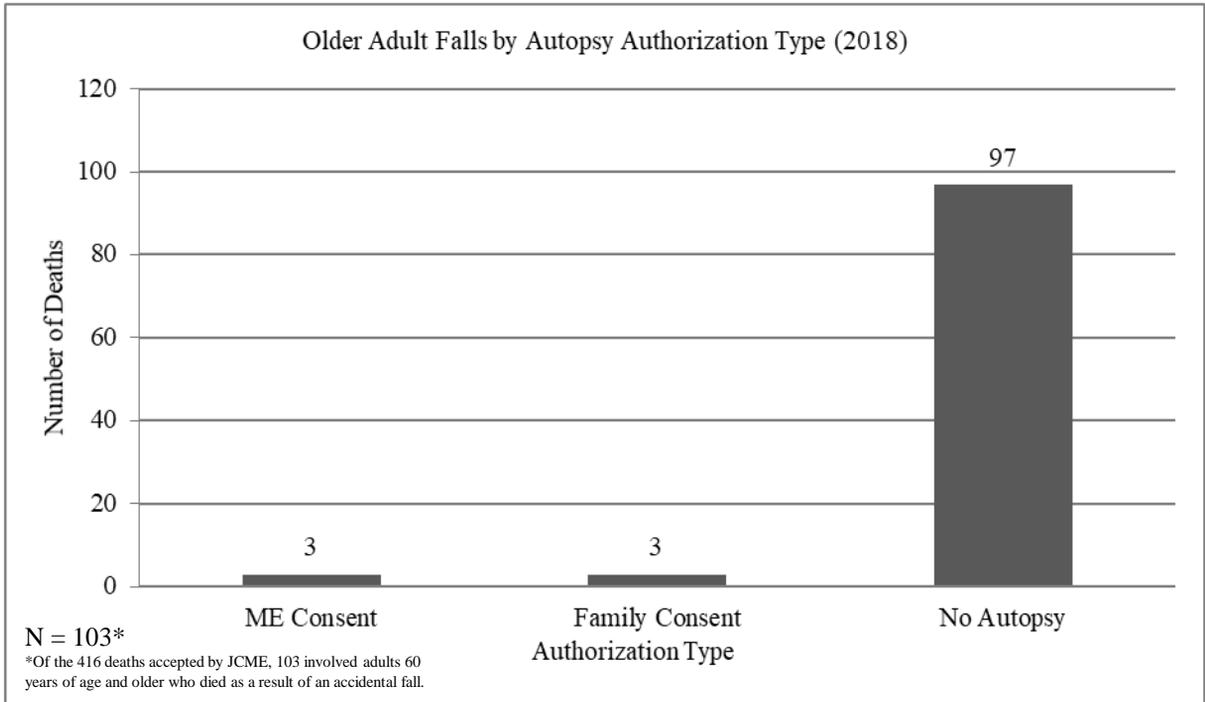


Figure 9.9.

## Child Deaths

In 2018, there were 14 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 14 deaths, 5 were classified as undetermined followed by 4 as accident, 3 as homicide, and 2 as natural. For 3 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County, 10 incident locations occurred in another Iowa County, and 1 incident location occurred out-of-state.

There were 4 sleep-related infant deaths in 2018. Of these 4 deaths, 3 were classified as undetermined and 1 was classified as accident. For 2 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County, 1 incident location was another Iowa county, and 1 incident location occurred out-of-state.

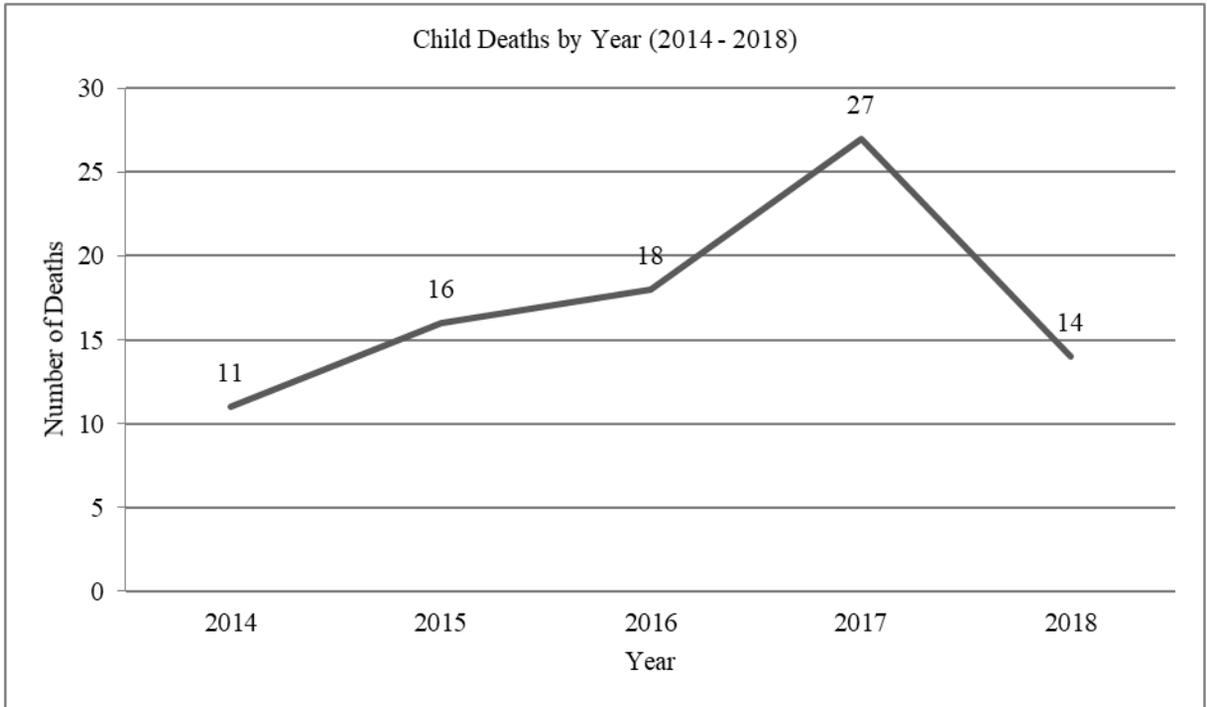


Figure 10.1.

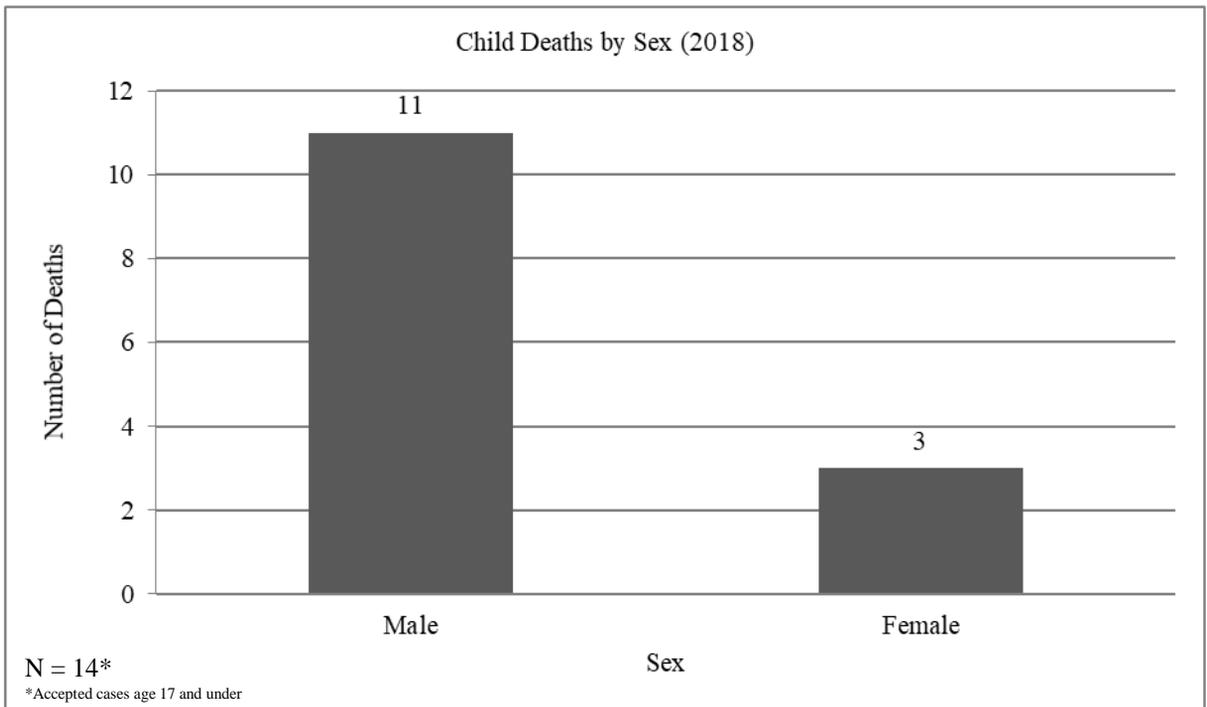


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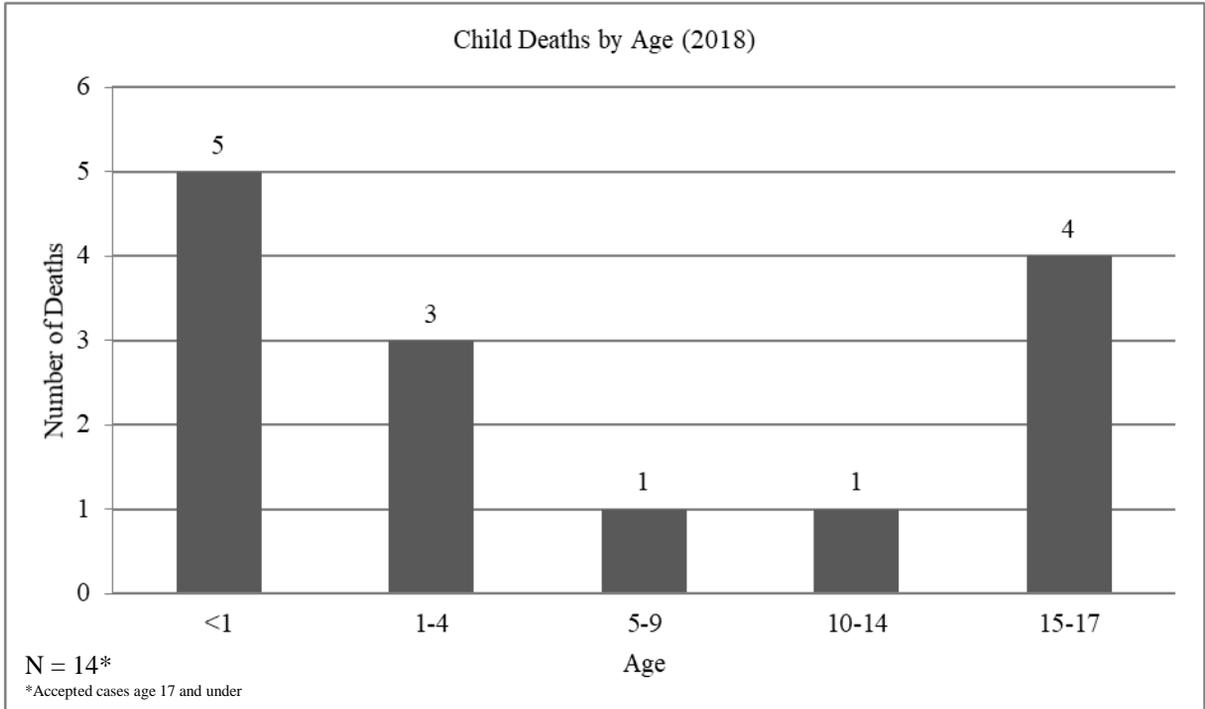


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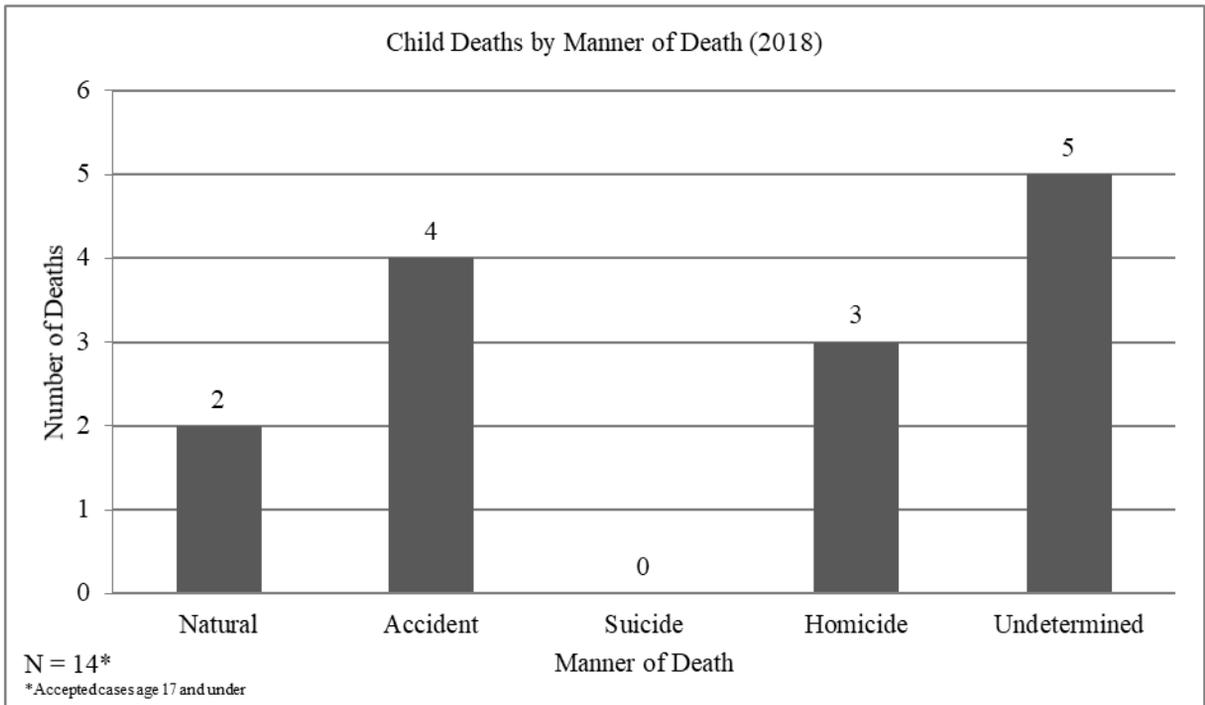


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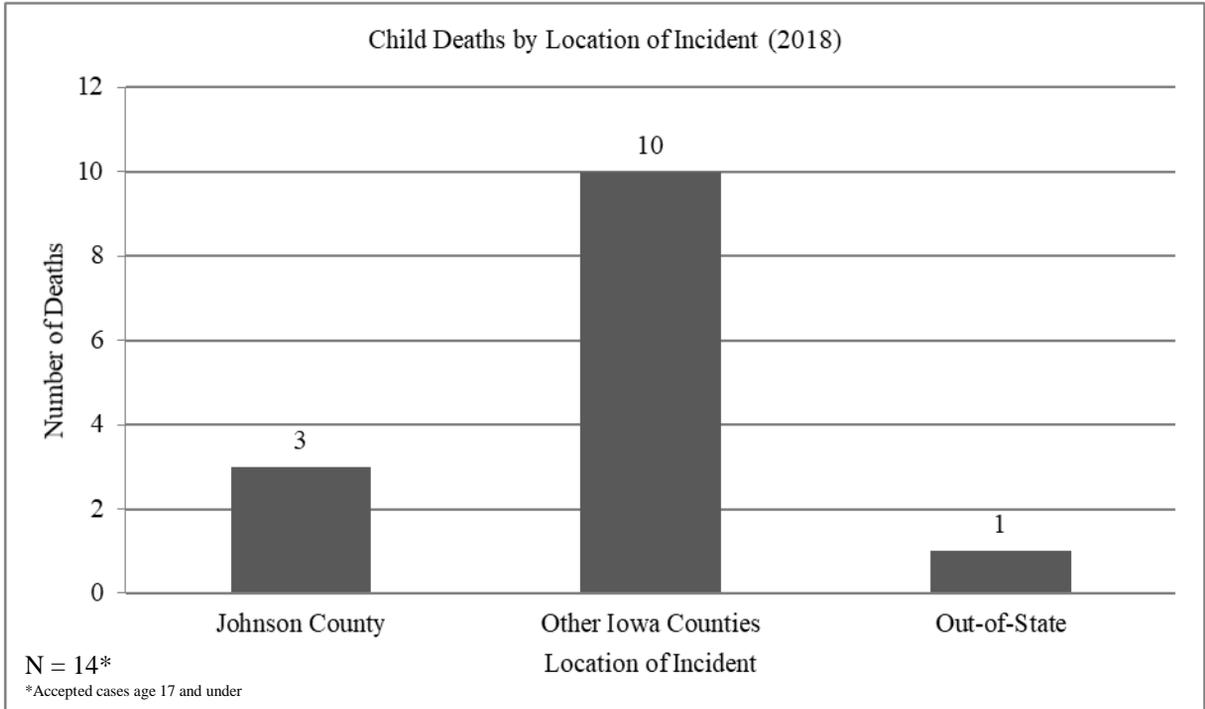


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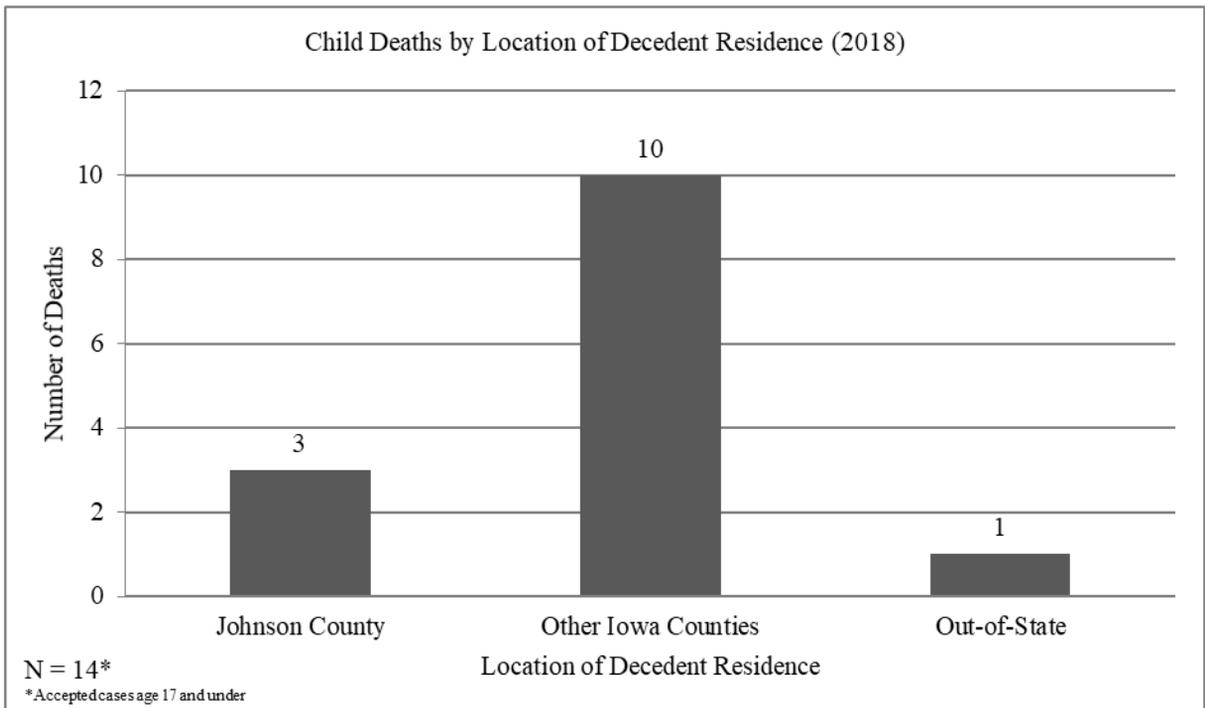


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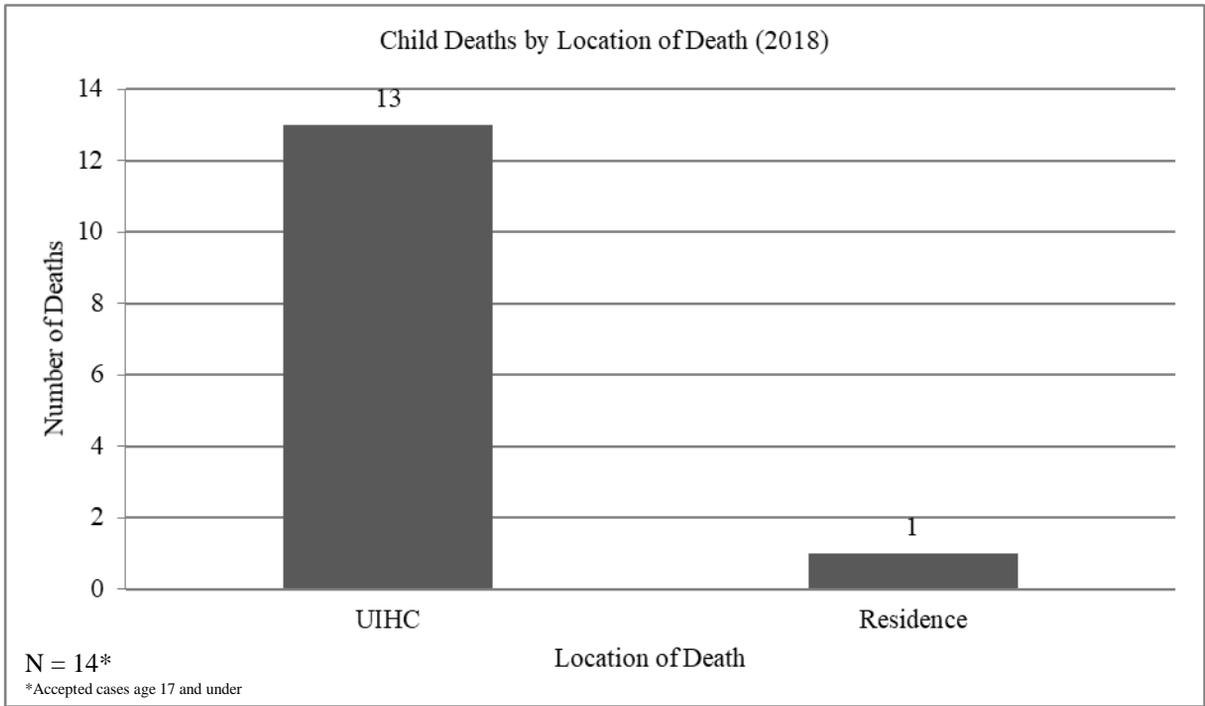


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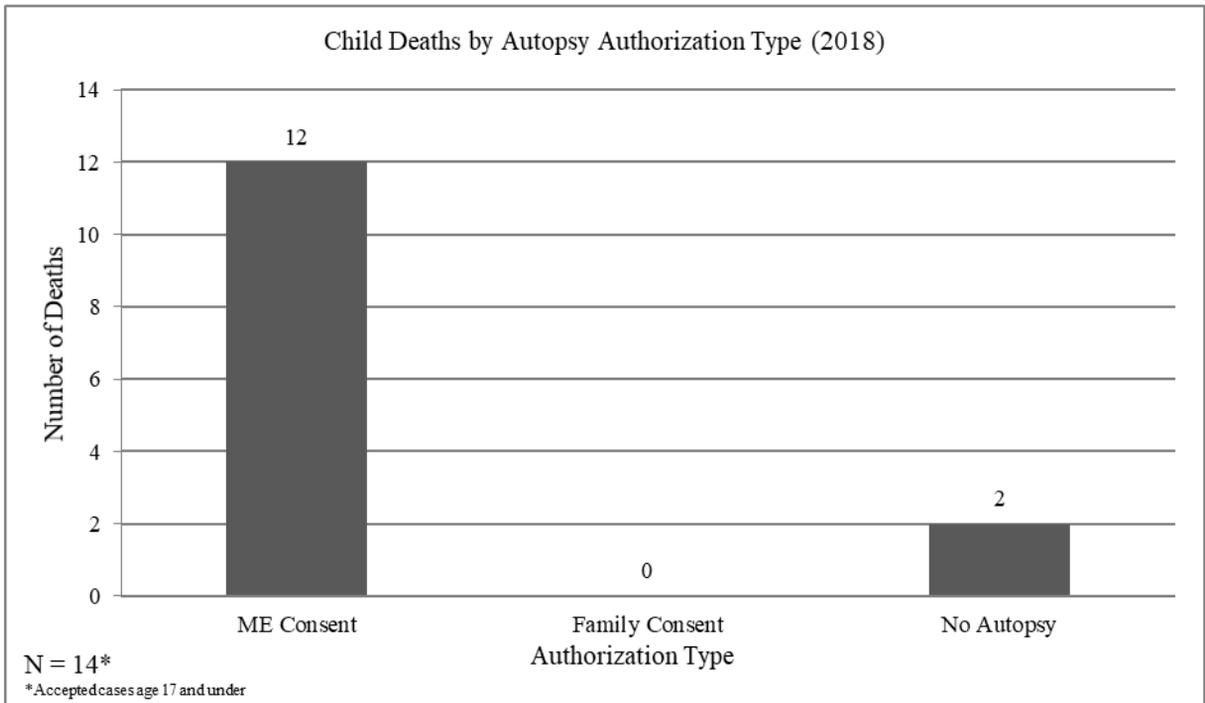


Figure 10.8.

Table 10.1. Infant Sleep-Related Deaths (2018)\*

Age	Sex	Cause of Death	Manner of Death	Location of Incident
4 months, 5 days	M	Asphyxia due to probable external airway obstruction and mechanical compression	Accident	Johnson County
2 months, 13 days	F	Undetermined	Undetermined	Johnson County
3 months, 13 days	M	Diffuse hypoxic-ischemic brain injury due to resuscitated cardiopulmonary arrest of unknown etiology	Undetermined	Out-of-State
4 months	M	Hypoxic-ischemic encephalopathy due to prolonged resuscitation due to cardiopulmonary arrest of undetermined etiology	Undetermined	Other Iowa County

\*Infant deaths in which an unsafe sleep environment/sleep surface may have had a contributory role

## Budget

Johnson County's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. In fiscal year 2018, JCME was 9% under our budgeted expenditures and 10% over our budgeted revenues.

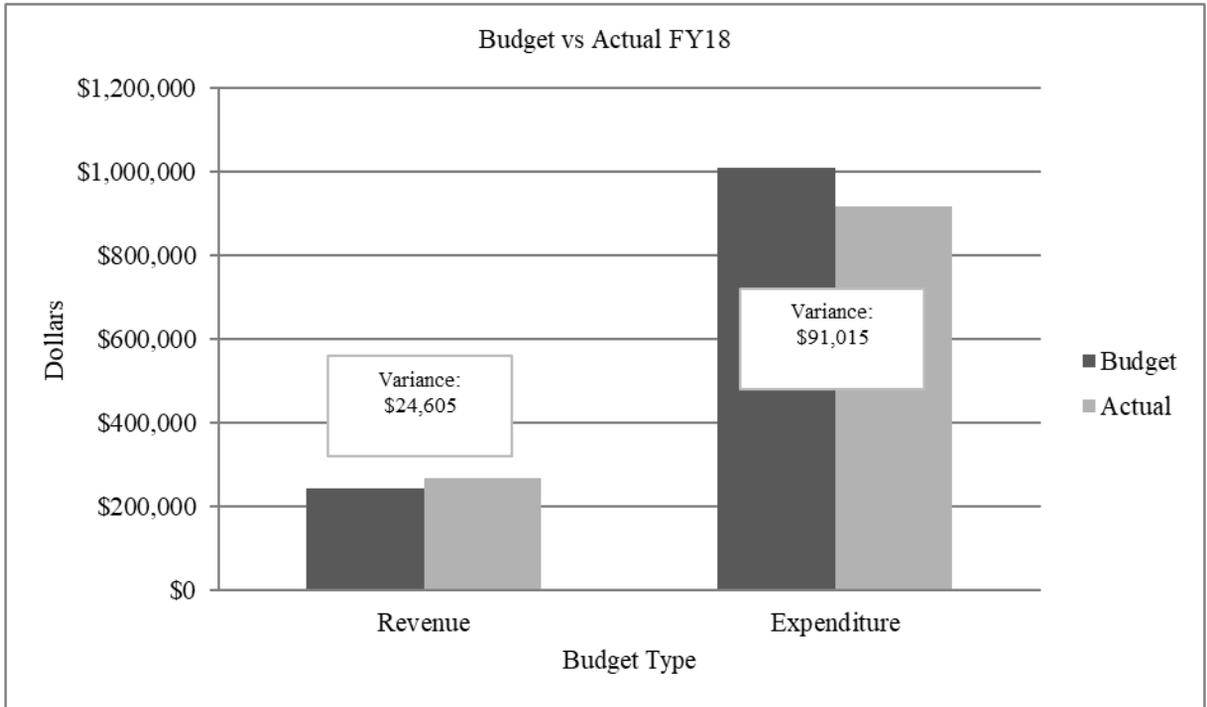


Figure 11.1.

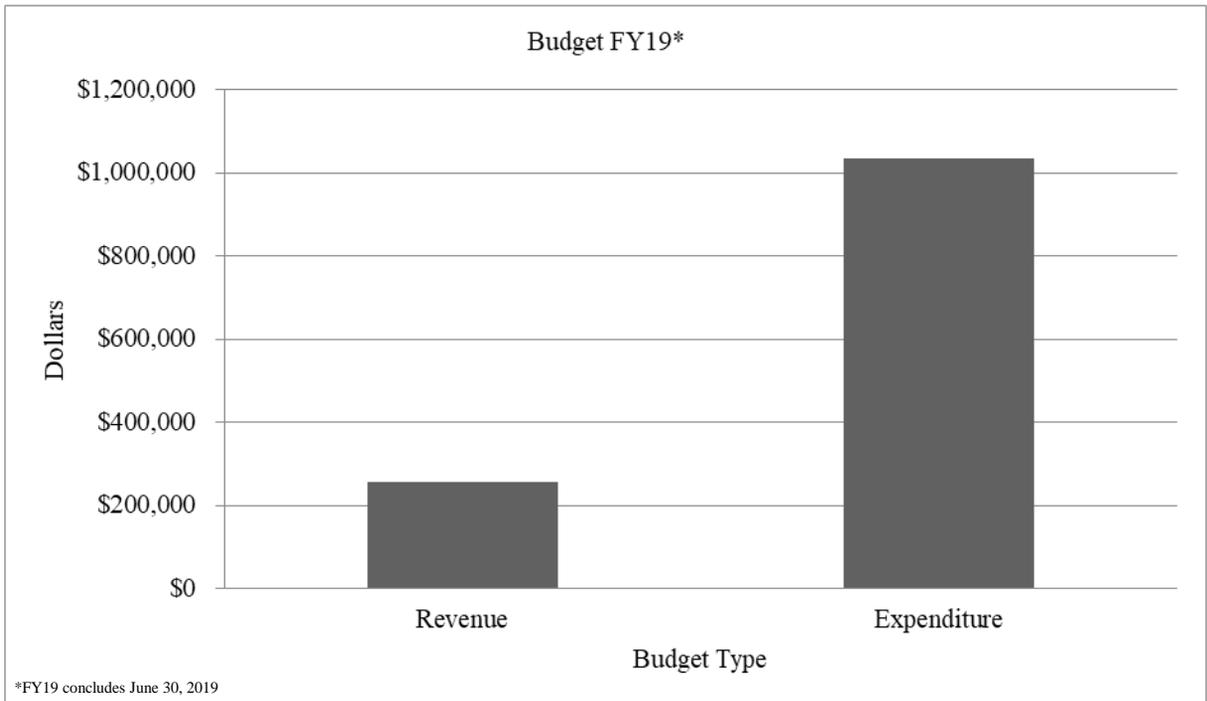


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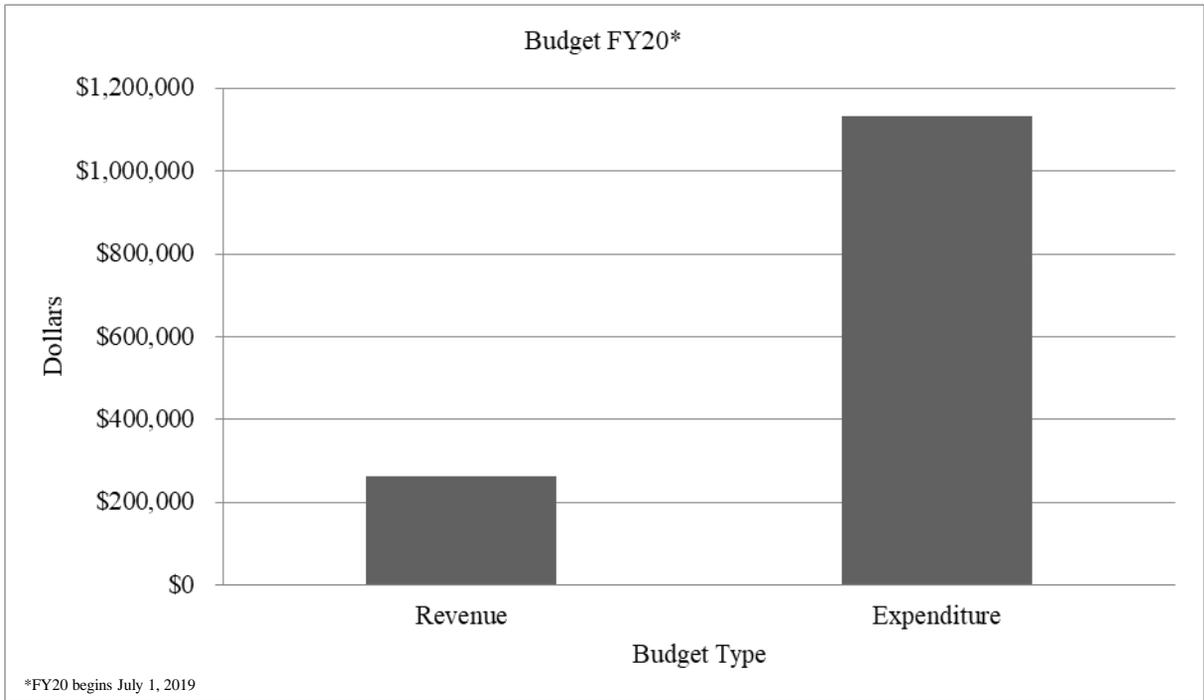


Figure 11.3.

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## Organ and Tissue Donation

JCME has an essential role in the coordination of organ and tissue donation. In 2018, 16 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 16 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 27 kidneys, 13 livers, 9 lungs, 10 hearts, 3 pancreases, and 1 small intestine for transplant. Five accepted JCME cases became tissue donors with the recovery of bone, skin, heart valves, saphenous veins, femoral veins, adipose tissue, and/or joints. One tissue donor can enhance the lives of more than 300 people. JCME fully supports organ and tissue donation and, by policy, JCME refers all out-of-hospital deaths that fall under our jurisdiction to the Iowa Donor Network.

Table 12.1. Organs Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2018)

Organs Transplanted*	
Hearts	10
Lungs (single lungs)	9
Livers	13
Kidneys	27
Pancreases	3
Small Intestines	1
Total organ donors**	16

\*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network

\*\*Total number of decedents who donated organs

Table 12.2. Tissues Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2018)

Tissues Transplanted*	
Bone Donors	5
Skin Donors	3
Heart Valve Donors	2
Saphenous Vein Donors	1
Femoral Vein Donors	1
Adipose Tissue Donors	0
Joint Restoration Donors	1
Total recovered tissue donors**	5

\*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network

\*\*Total number of decedents who donated tissue