

Johnson County Medical Examiner Department

Annual Report 2021



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Overview

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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 and was re-accredited on March 8, 2021 and March 31, 2022. This significant accomplishment demonstrates that JCME adheres 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 death certificate.

Medical examiner jurisdiction is described by Iowa Code § 331.802 as 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 2021, there were 1179 deaths reported to JCME. Of these, 506 were accepted as medical examiner jurisdiction deaths. Each of these deaths were investigated and certified by JCME. After review of each of the remaining 673 reported deaths, jurisdiction was declined because each death was determined to not be in the “public interest” as defined above. Each of these deaths were certified by the decedent’s physician. The total number of deaths investigated (jurisdiction accepted) or reviewed (jurisdiction declined) by JCME comprised 53% of the 2240 deaths that occurred in Johnson County in 2021.

Of the 506 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 221 decedents were Johnson County residents and 222 were residents of other counties in Iowa. Additionally, there were 19 decedents who were in the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections at the time of death and 44 decedents were out-of-state residents. As a result, 44% of deaths accepted and investigated by JCME consisted of Johnson County residents.

Of the 506 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the incident location for 230 decedents was Johnson County. Two-hundred and ten incidents occurred in other Iowa counties and 19 incidents occurred while in the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections. Additionally, for 39 decedents, the incident location was out-of-state and 8 decedents had an incident location that was unknown.

Of the 506 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, all decedents were identified. Six decedents were unclaimed by family or friends and final disposition was arranged by JCME. There was one exhumation in which a third autopsy was performed.

In 2021, 137 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 of the head, neck, chest, and abdomen).

Of the 506 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the manner of death was classified as accident for 244, natural for 213, suicide for 31, undetermined for 11, and homicide for 6. JCME accepted jurisdiction of 1 fetal death in 2021. Fetal deaths are not assigned a manner of death.

In 2021, there were 49 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 31 involved illicit drugs only, 5 involved over-the-counter drugs only, 1 involved prescription drugs only, 11 involved a mixture of drug types, and 1 was unknown. Of the 11 mixed drug-related deaths, 5 involved multiple illicit drugs (fentanyl, morphine, methamphetamine, acetyl fentanyl, and amphetamine), 2 involved illicit (methamphetamine, fentanyl, and cocaine) and over-the-counter drugs, 2 involved a mixture of prescription and over-the-counter drugs, 1 involved a mixture of illicit drugs (methamphetamine) and prescription drugs, and 1 involved a mixture of prescription drugs only. Of the remaining 31 illicit drug-related deaths, 23 involved methamphetamine, 5 involved cocaine, 2 involved fentanyl, and 1 involved heroin. Of the 49 drug-related deaths, 44 were classified as accident, 3 as suicide, and 2 as undetermined.

Of the 1179 deaths reported to JCME in 2021, 274 decedents were determined to have died from COVID-19. Of these 274 decedents, the sex distribution was 166 males to 108 females with the most common age range of 70-79 years (79 decedents) followed by 60-69 years (58 decedents). Fifty-four decedents were Johnson County residents and 170 were residents of other counties in Iowa. Additionally, there were 8 decedents who were in the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections at the time of death and 42 decedents who were out-of-state residents.

There were 332 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 96 in which the death was the result of a fall. The majority of these fall-related deaths, 58, occurred from a standing height and 45 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 54 of the falls.

In 2021, there were 12 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 12 deaths, 6 were classified as accident followed by 3 as undetermined, 2 as suicide, and 1 as natural. For 6 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County with the remaining 6 occurring in another Iowa County. Of these 12 deaths accepted by JCME, there were 4 deaths of infants one year of age or less of which 2 were classified as accident and 2 as undetermined. An autopsy was performed on all 4 infant deaths. In 2021, there were 2 sleep-related infant deaths, 1 of which was classified as accident and 1 as undetermined. The incident location occurred in another Iowa County for both of these deaths. JCME accepted jurisdiction of 1 fetal death in 2021.

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 506 deaths certified by JCME in 2021, it was determined that 116 were tobacco-related and 33 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 cases”). JCME issued 1372 cremation permits to funeral service providers in 2021. There were 525 cremation permits issued to funeral service providers in Johnson County, 744 to funeral service providers located in other Iowa counties, and 103 to funeral service providers located out-of-state. Cremation permits were issued to a total of 154 funeral service providers. Of the 1372 cremation permits issued, 6 permits prompted the recognition of missed 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.

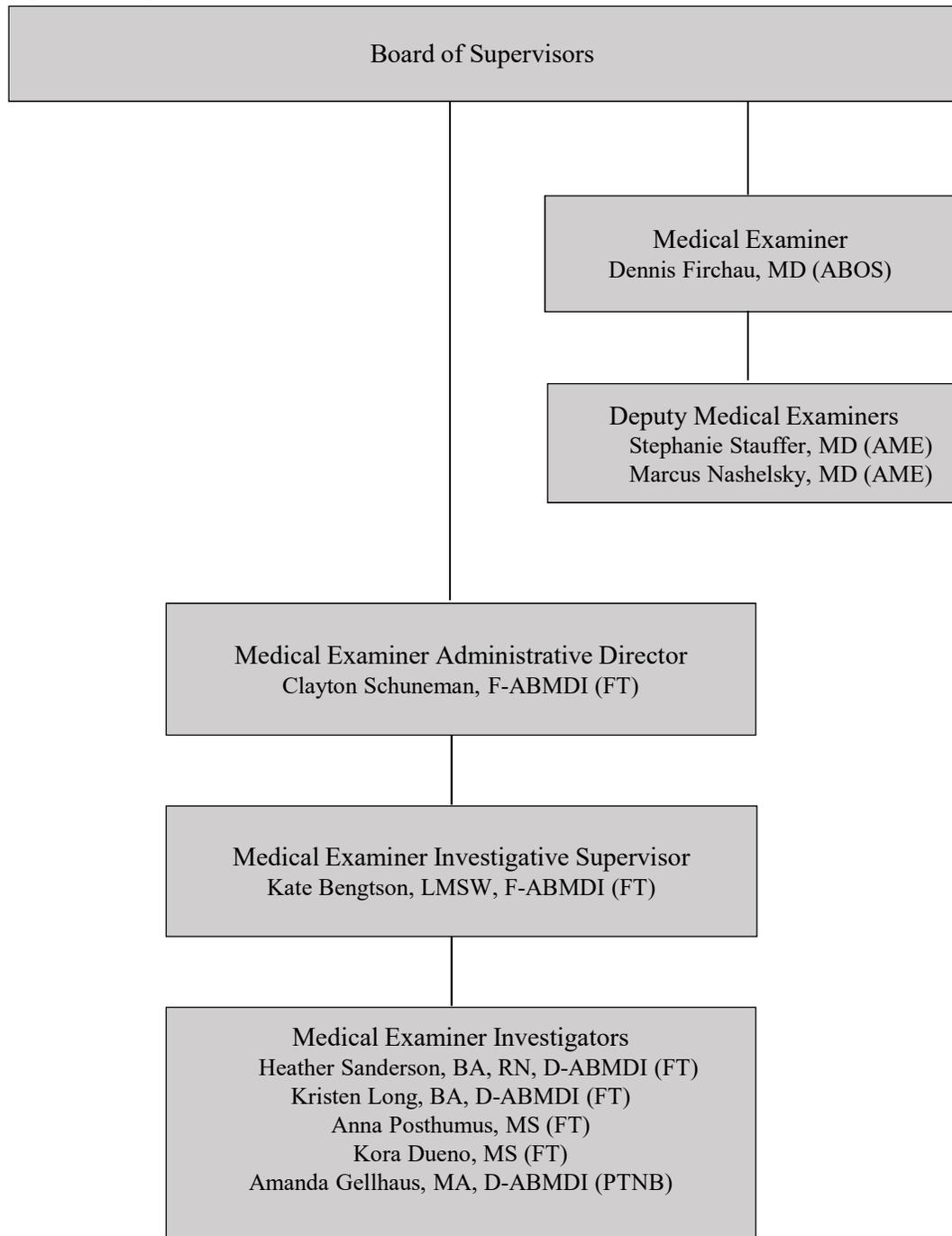
JCME has an essential role in the coordination of organ and tissue donation. In 2021, 17 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 17 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 24 kidneys, 7 livers, 8 hearts, 2 lungs, and 3 pancreases for transplant. Twenty-one accepted 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 2021, JCME had two Board Certified Death Investigators (Advanced): Clayton Schuneman and Kate Bengtson, and four Registry Certified Death Investigators (Basic): Heather Sanderson, Amanda Gellhaus, and Kristen Long. Additionally, the three forensic pathologist medical examiners, Dennis Firchau, MD, Stephanie Stauffer, MD, and Marcus Nashelsky, MD, are certified in Anatomic, Clinical, and Forensic Pathology by the American Board of Pathology.


Dennis Firchau, MD
Medical Examiner


Clayton Schuneman, F-ABMDI
Administrative Director

Figure 1.1. Organizational Chart (2021)



Employment/Appointment Status Key:

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

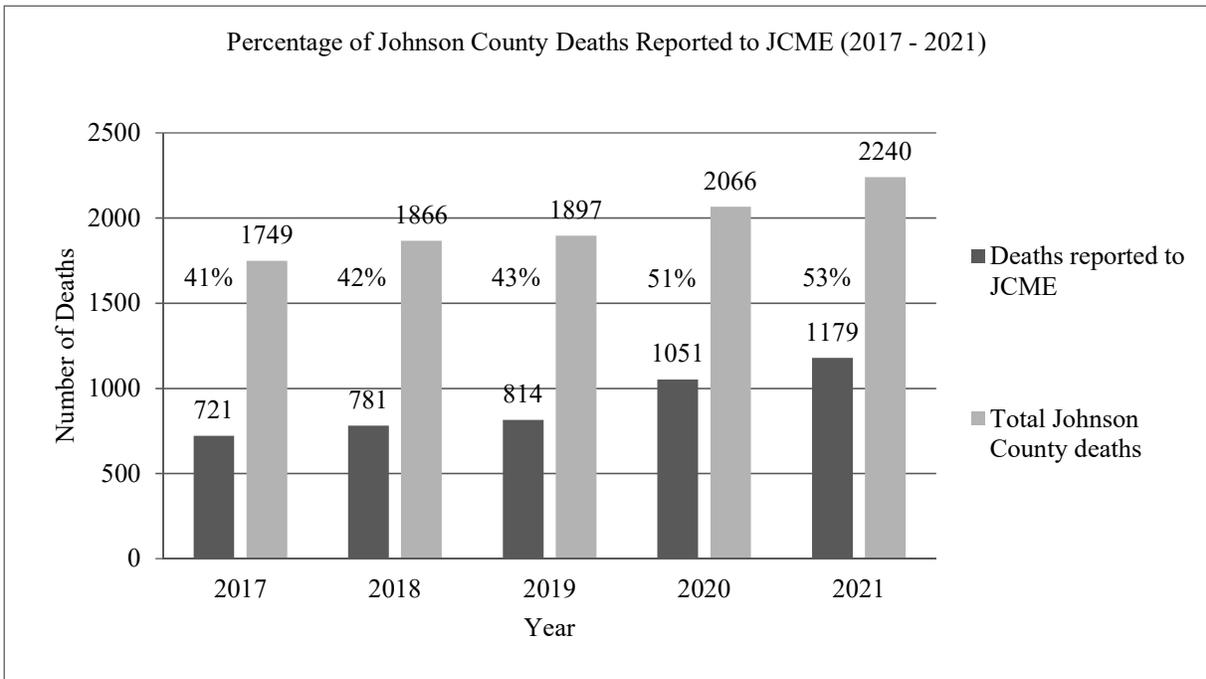


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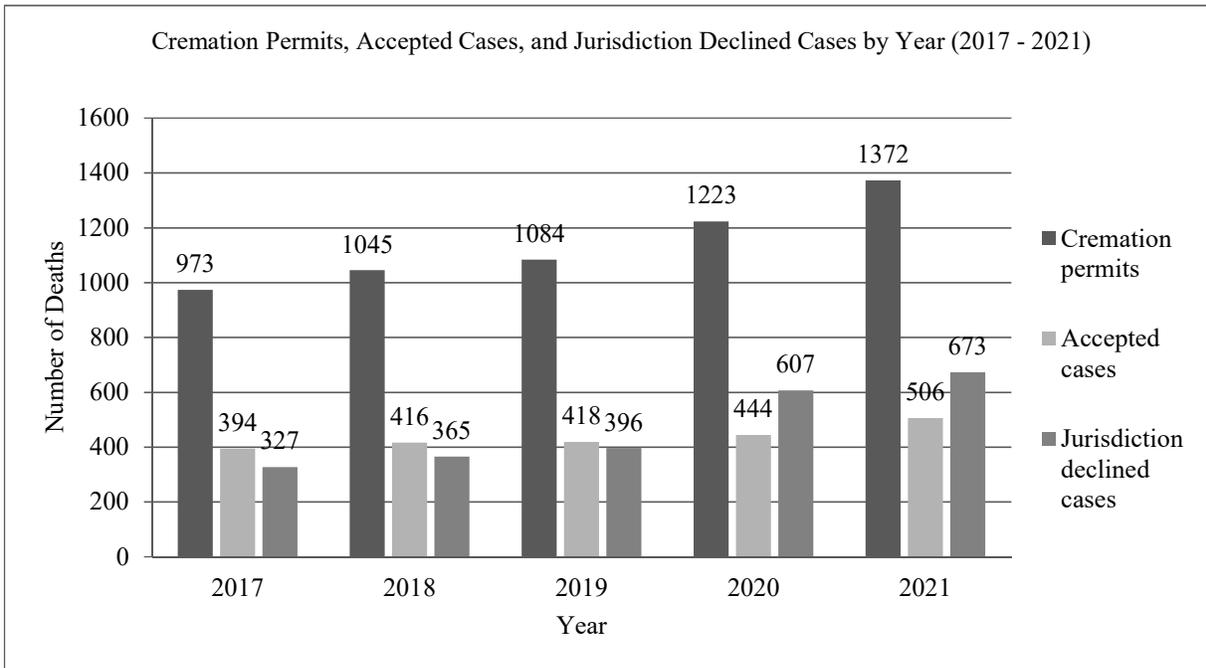


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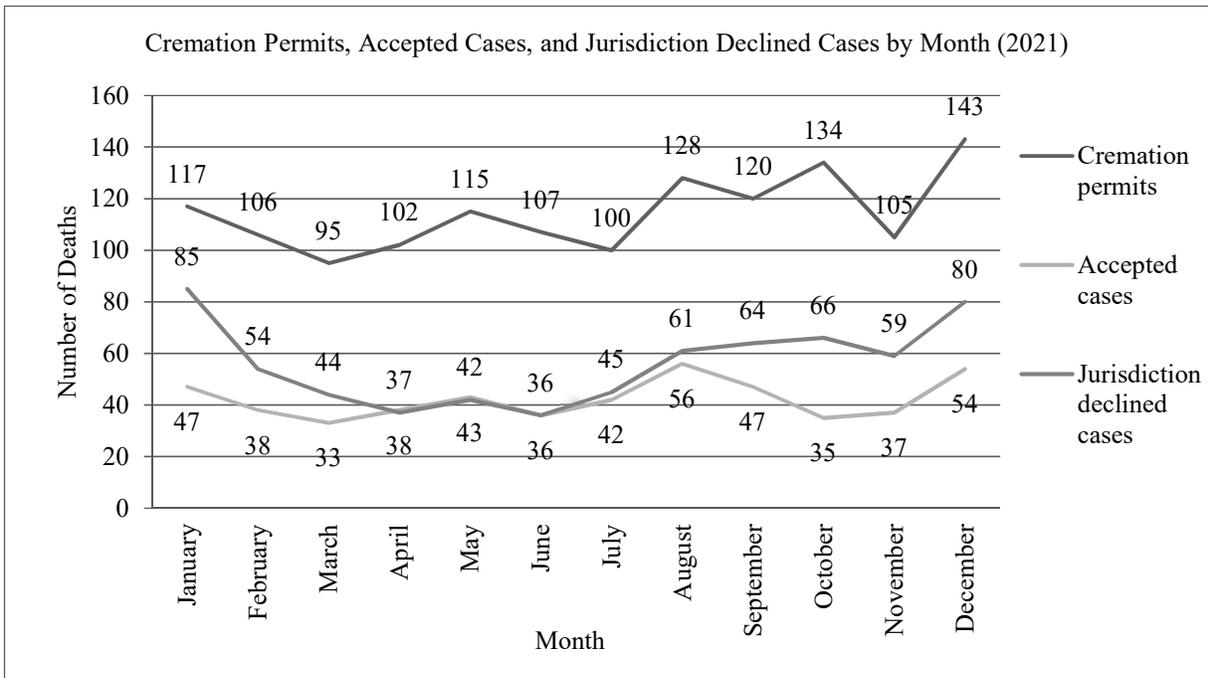


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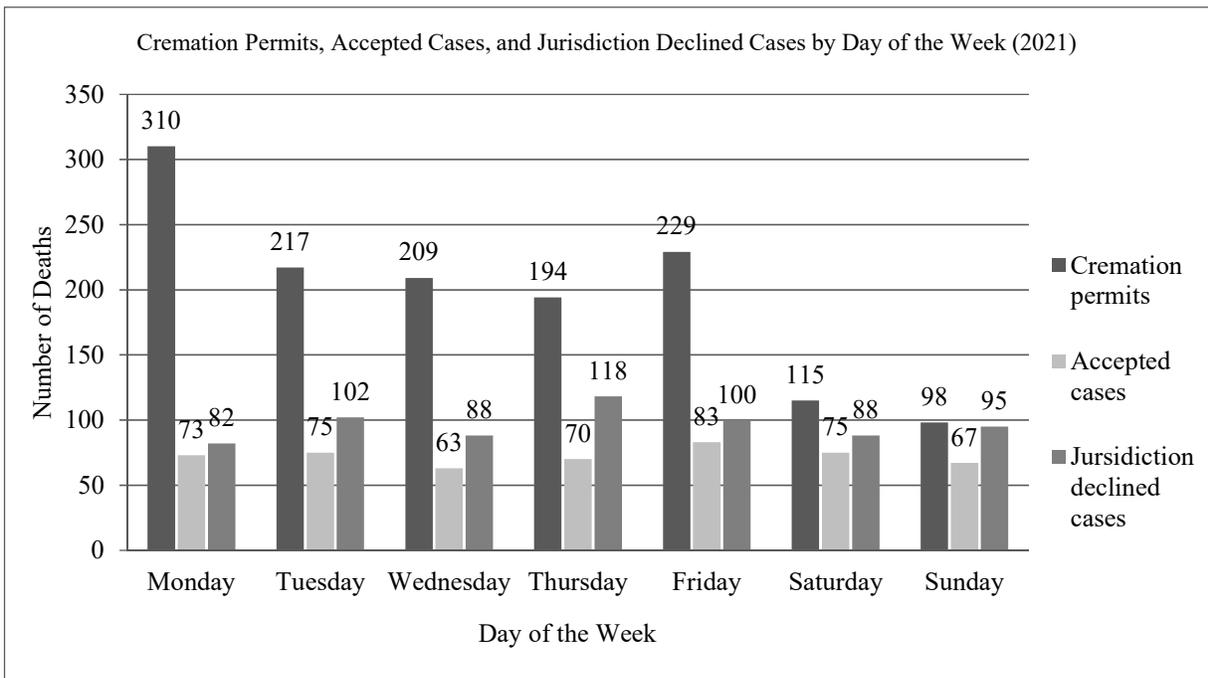


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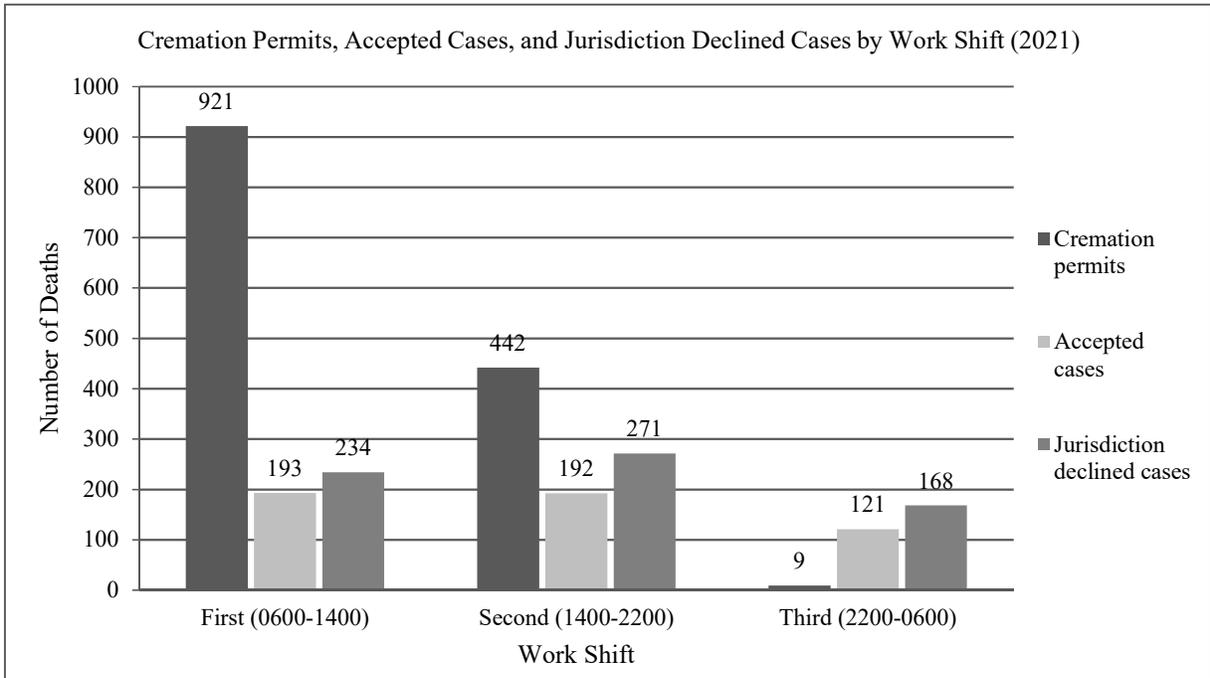


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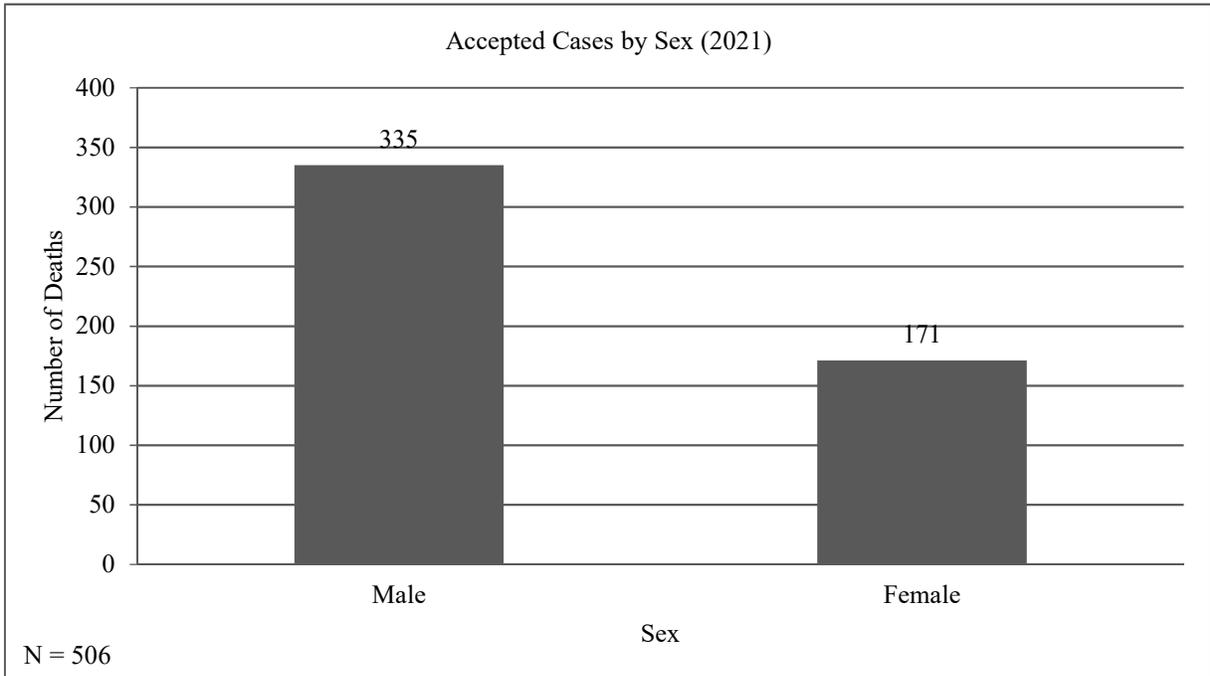


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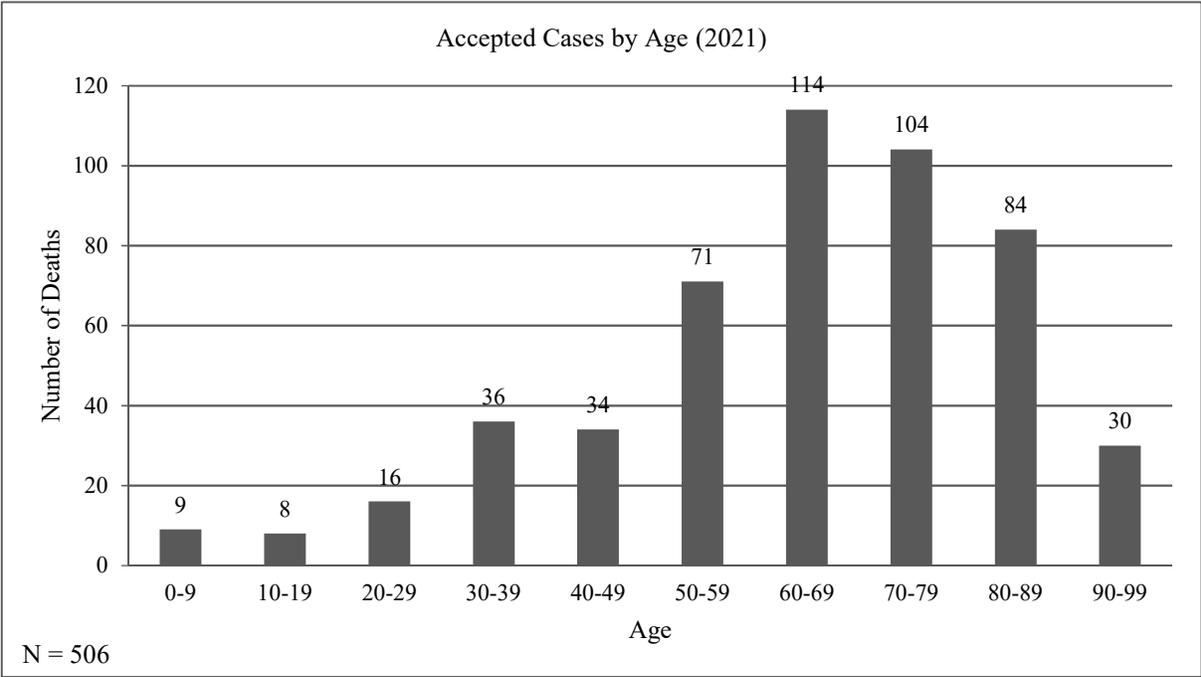


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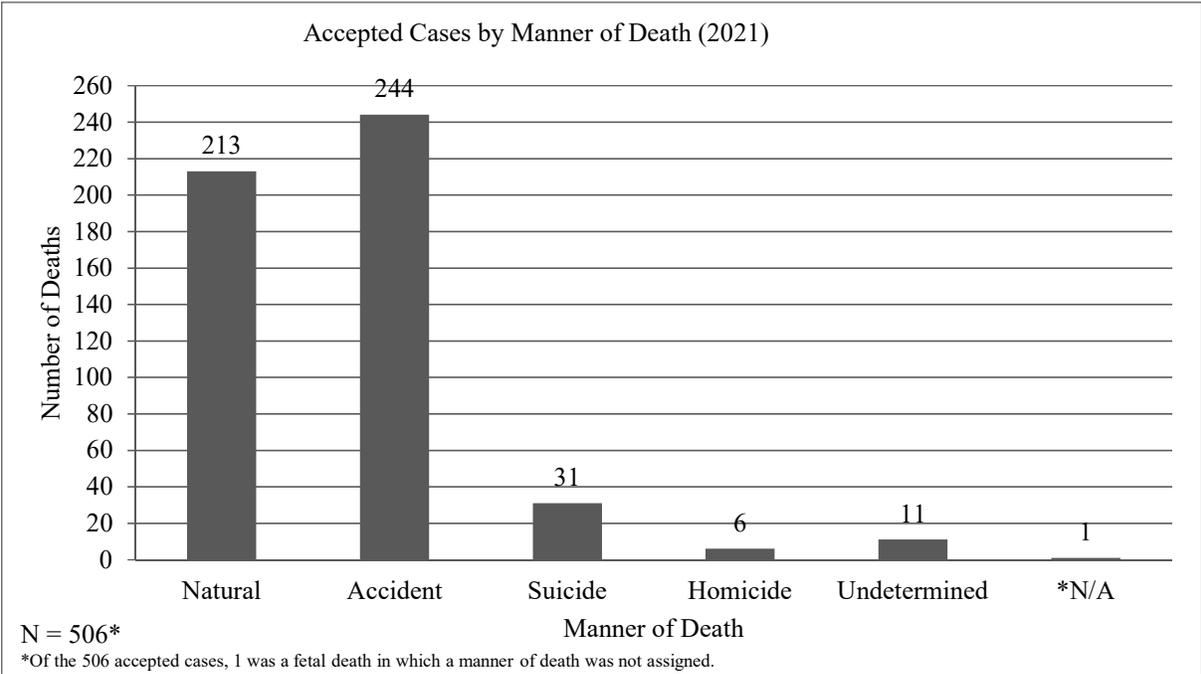


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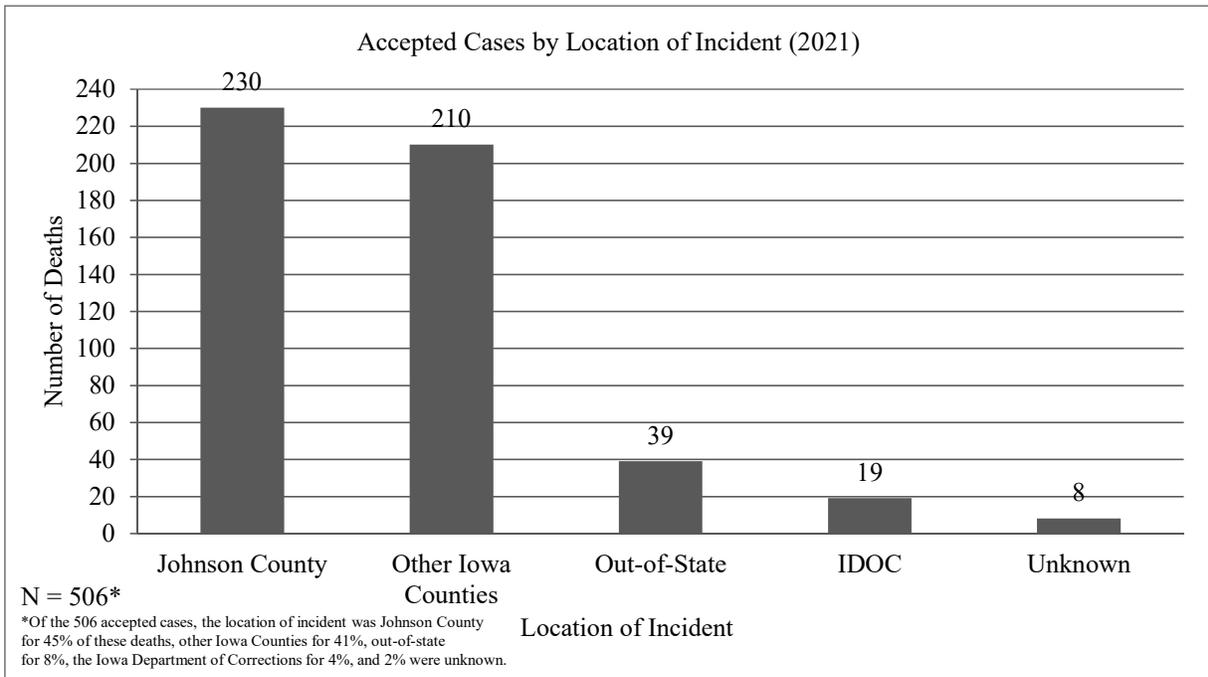


Figure 1.10.

Table 1.1. Other Iowa Counties Location of Incident (2021)

County	Number of Decedents
Linn	29
Scott	24
Dubuque	15
Washington	13
Cedar	10
Muscatine	10
Clinton	9
Lee	9
Black Hawk	7
Wapello	7
Des Moines	6
Polk	6
Benton	5
Henry	5
Iowa	5
Jefferson	5
Jones	5
Bremer	4
Jackson	4
Louisa	4
Grundy	3
Webster	3
Clayton	2
Delaware	2
Fayette	2
Floyd	2
Jasper	2
Tama	2
Carroll	1
Chickasaw	1
Franklin	1
Hamilton	1
Keokuk	1
Lucas	1
Madison	1
Mahaska	1
Monroe	1
Warren	1

Table 1.2. Out-of-State Location of Incident (2021)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	10
Whiteside, IL	4
Clarke, MO	2
Henderson, IL	2
Henry, IL	2
Jo Daviess, IL	2
Knox, IL	2
McDonough, IL	2
Mercer, IL	2
Adams, IL	1
Carroll, IL	1
Chelan, WA	1
Cook, IL	1
Hancock, IL	1
Lake, MN	1
LaSalle, IL	1
Mercer, MO	1
Peoria, IL	1
St. Clair, IL	1
Warren, IL	1

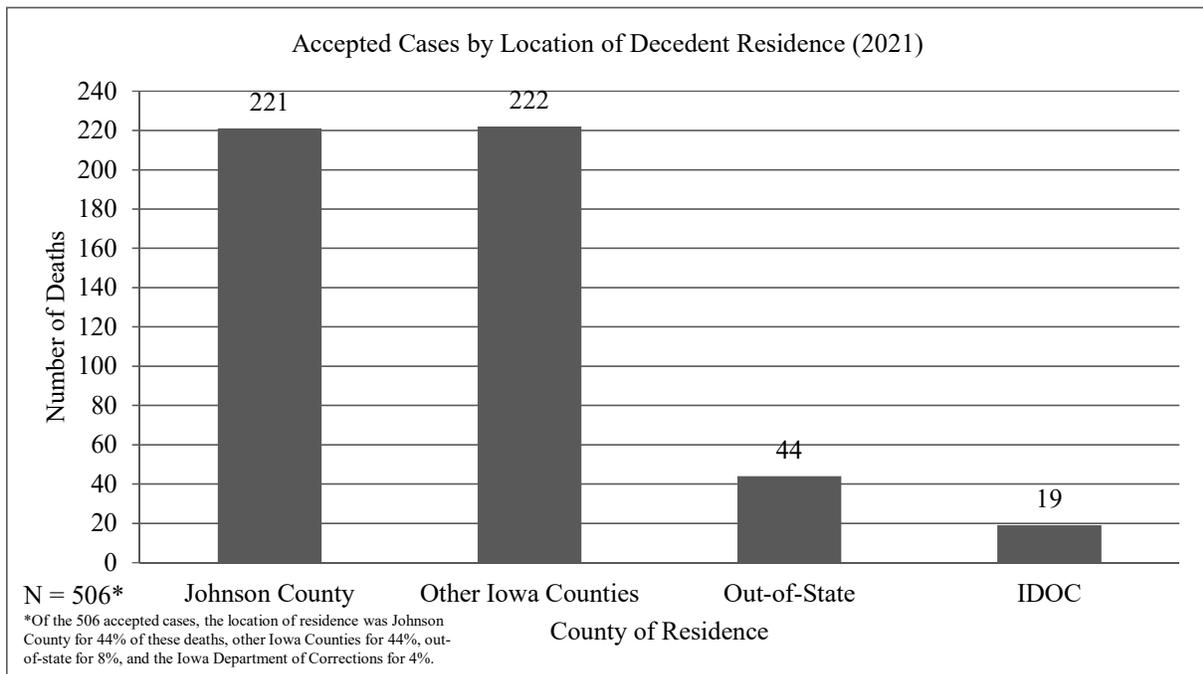


Figure 1.11.

Table 1.3. Other Iowa Counties Location of Decedent Residence (2021)

County	Number of Decedents
Linn	28
Scott	25
Dubuque	17
Washington	15
Muscatine	13
Lee	11
Cedar	10
Clinton	9
Black Hawk	7
Iowa	7
Des Moines	6
Henry	6
Jefferson	6
Polk	6
Jackson	5
Benton	4
Floyd	4
Jones	4
Louisa	4
Fayette	3
Hardin	3
Wapello	3
Webster	3
Bremer	2
Grundy	2
Jasper	2
Marshall	2
Butler	1
Carroll	1
Chickasaw	1
Davis	1
Franklin	1
Hamilton	1
Keokuk	1
Lucas	1
Madison	1
Mahaska	1
Mitchell	1
Monroe	1
O'Brien	1
Tama	1
Warren	1

Table 1.4. Out-of-State Location of Decedent Residence (2021)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	10
Henry, IL	3
Whiteside, IL	3
Clarke, MO	2
Jo Daviess, IL	2
McDonough, IL	2
Mercer, IL	2
Adams, IL	1
Broward, FL	1
Buffalo, NE	1
Carroll, IL	1
Chelan, WA	1
Cook, IL	1
Grant, WI	1
Hancock, IL	1
Henderson, IL	1
Knox, IL	1
Lake, MN	1
Lancaster, NE	1
LaSalle, IL	1
Mercer, MO	1
Peoria, IL	1
Scotland, MO	1
Stuben, IN	1
Warren, IL	1
Waukesha, WI	1
Will, IL	1

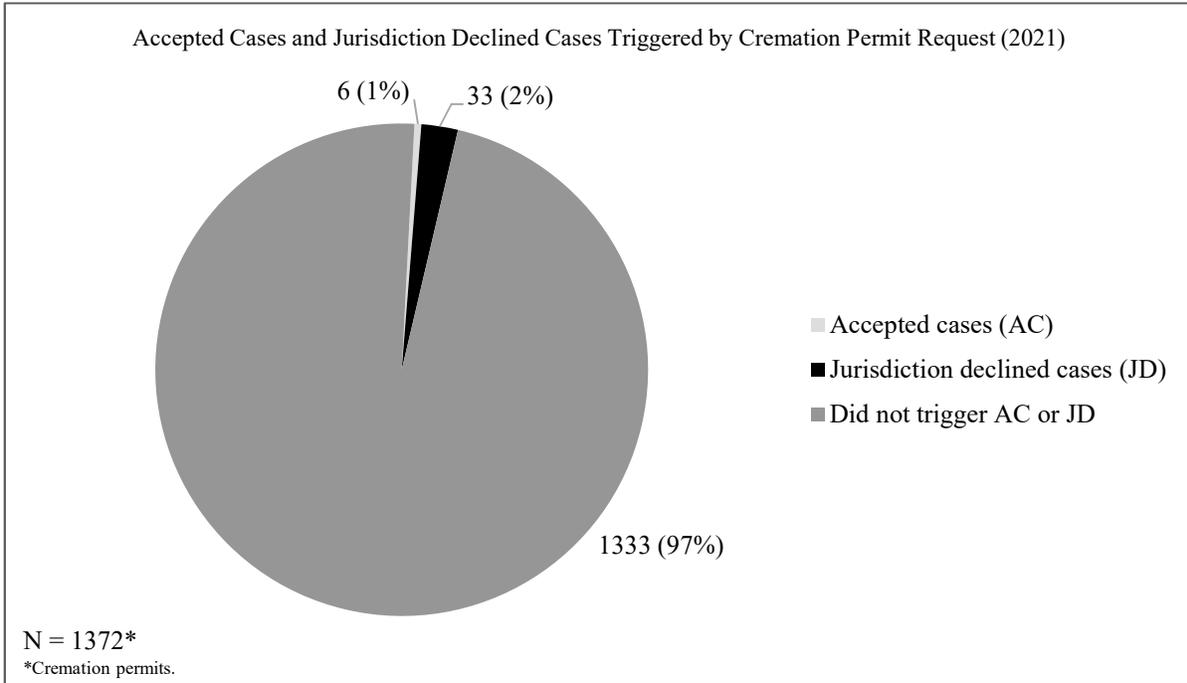


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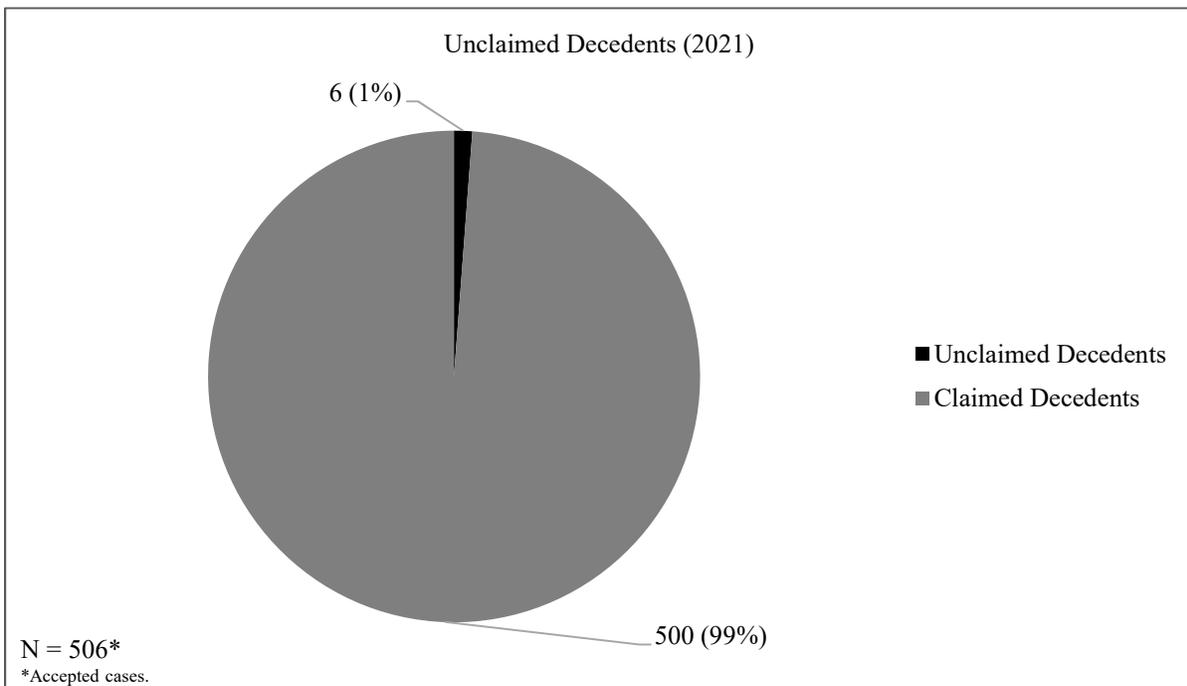


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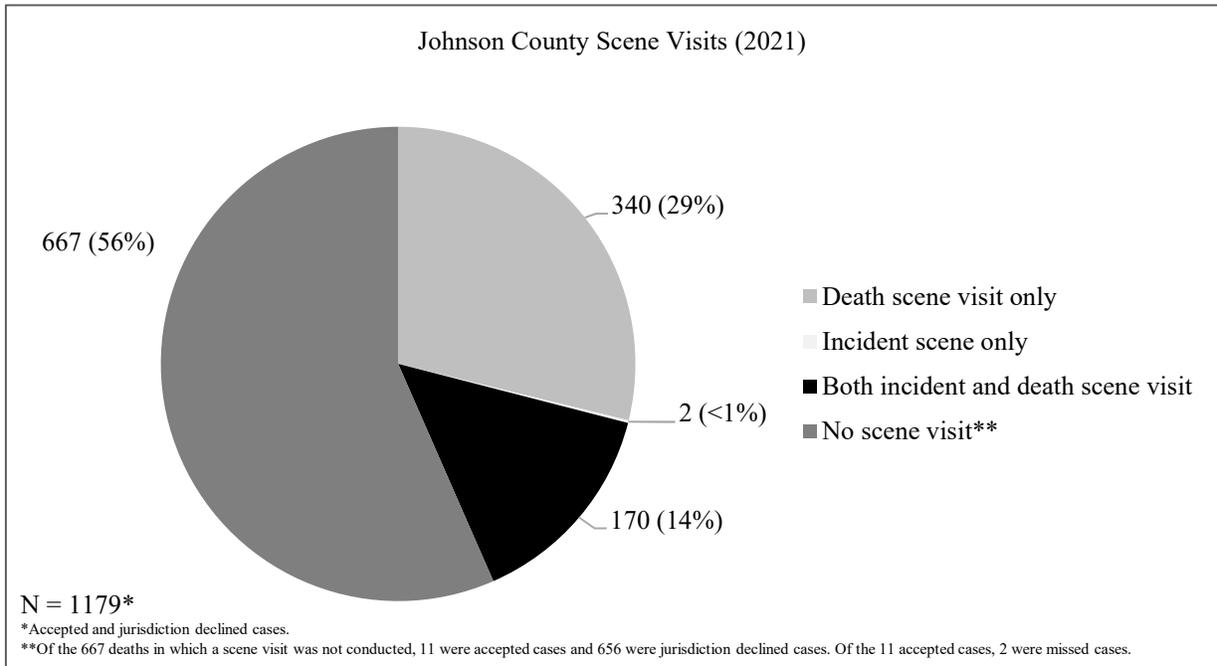


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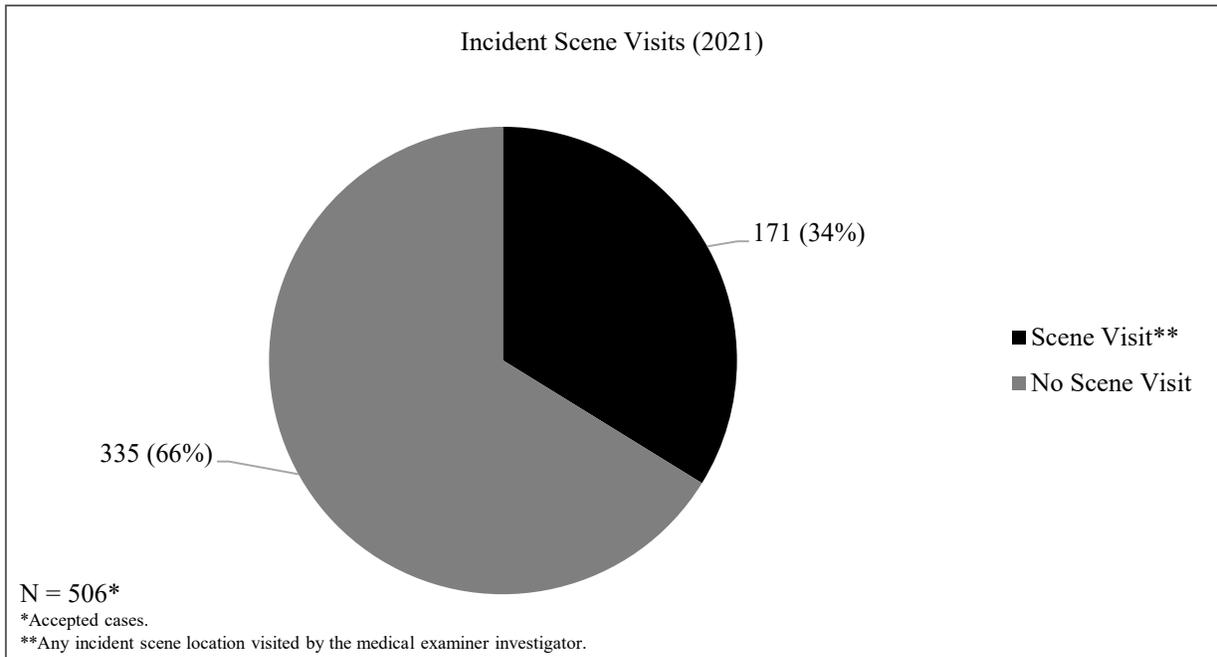


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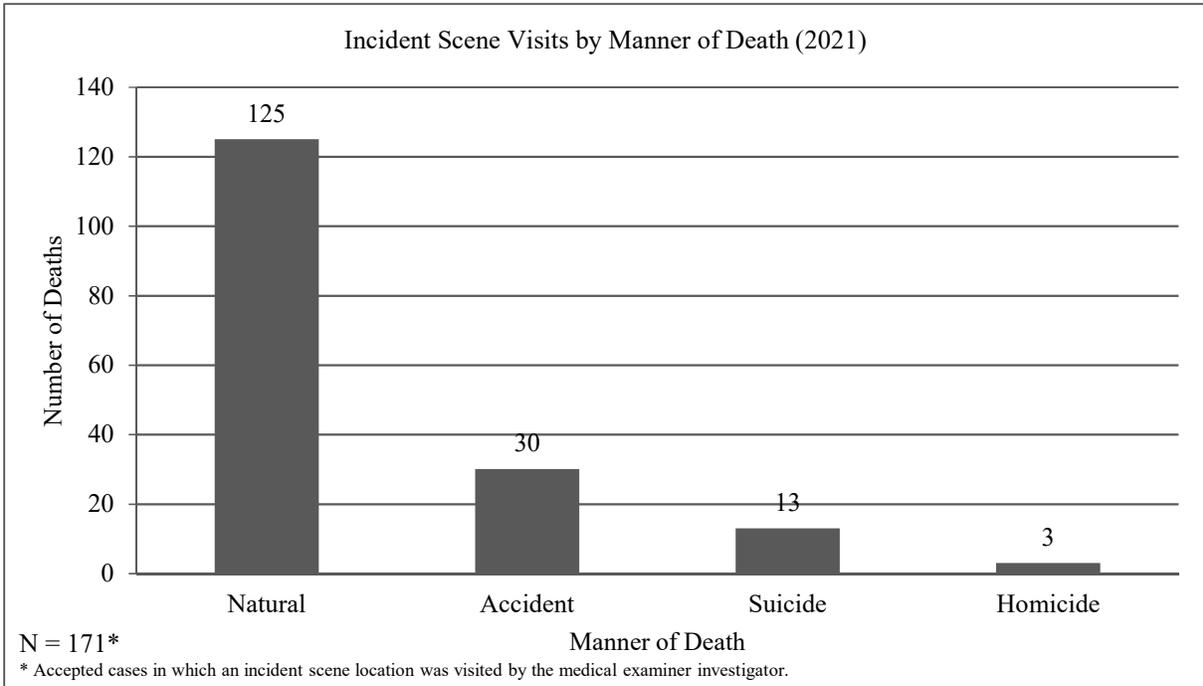


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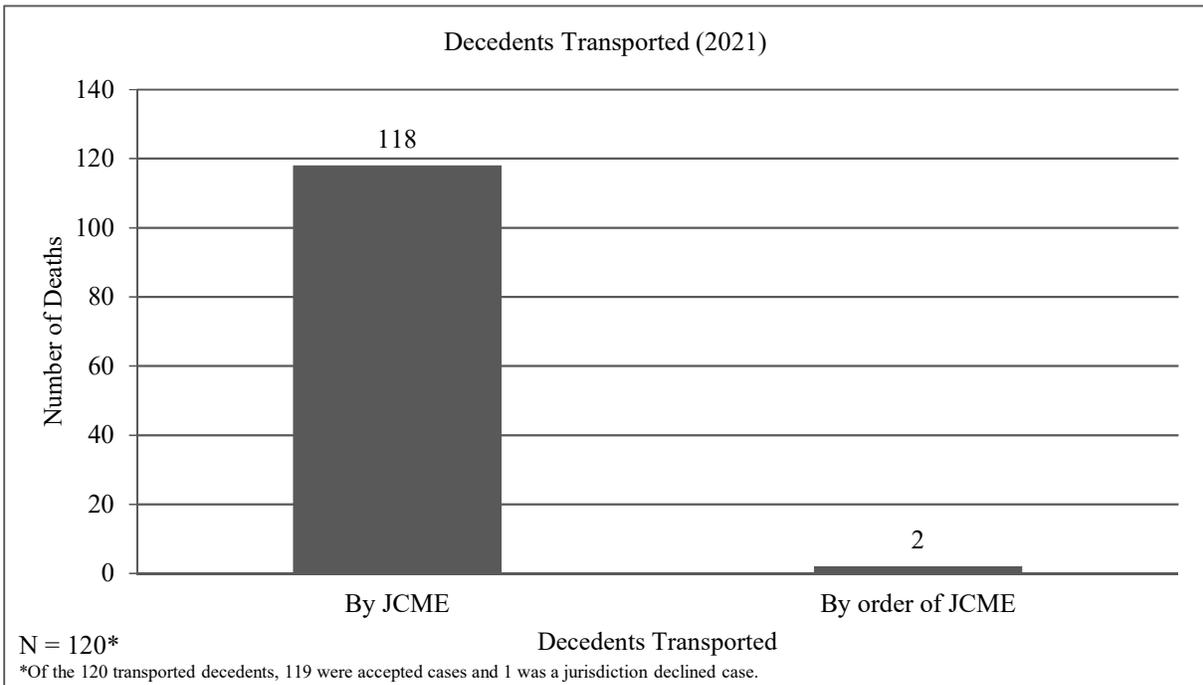


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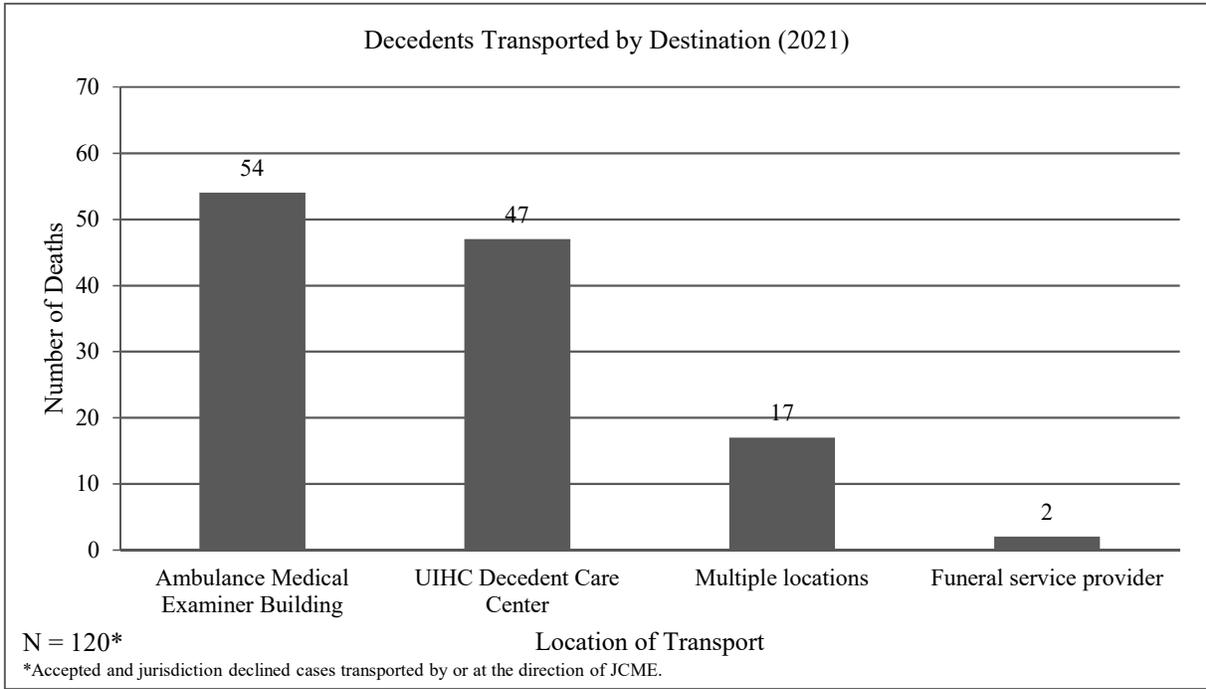


Figure 1.18.

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Autopsies

In 2021, 137 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 of the head, neck, chest, and abdomen). One decedent was disinterred and underwent a third autopsy in 2021.

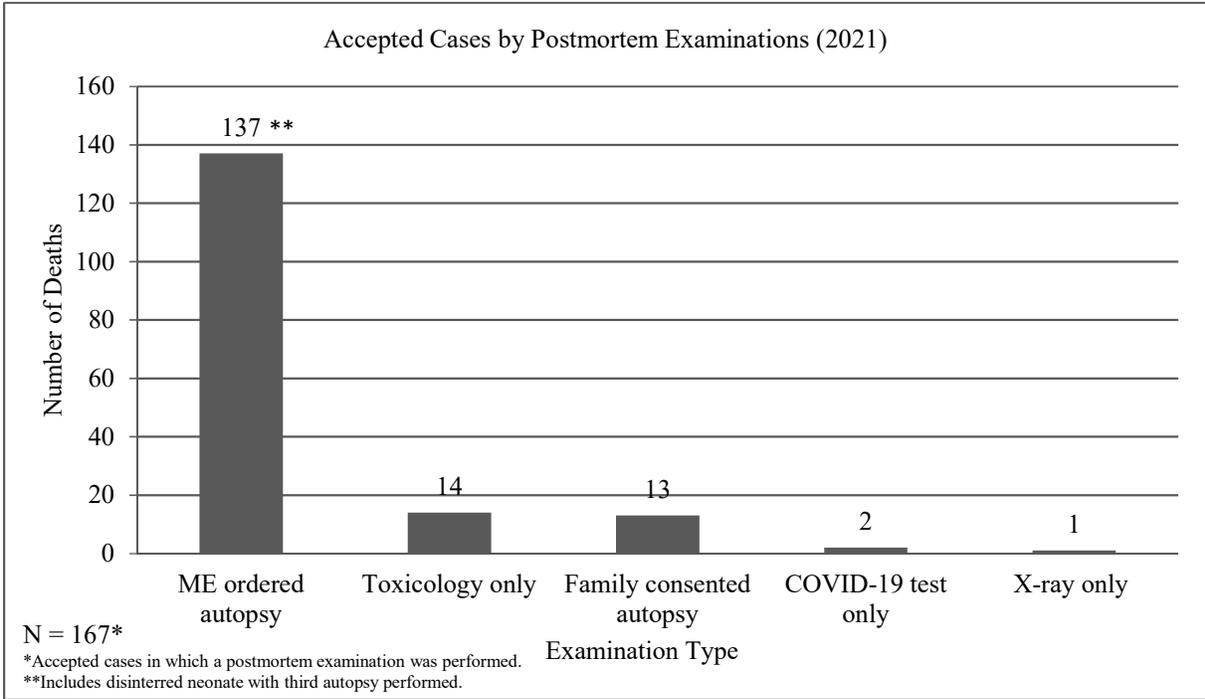


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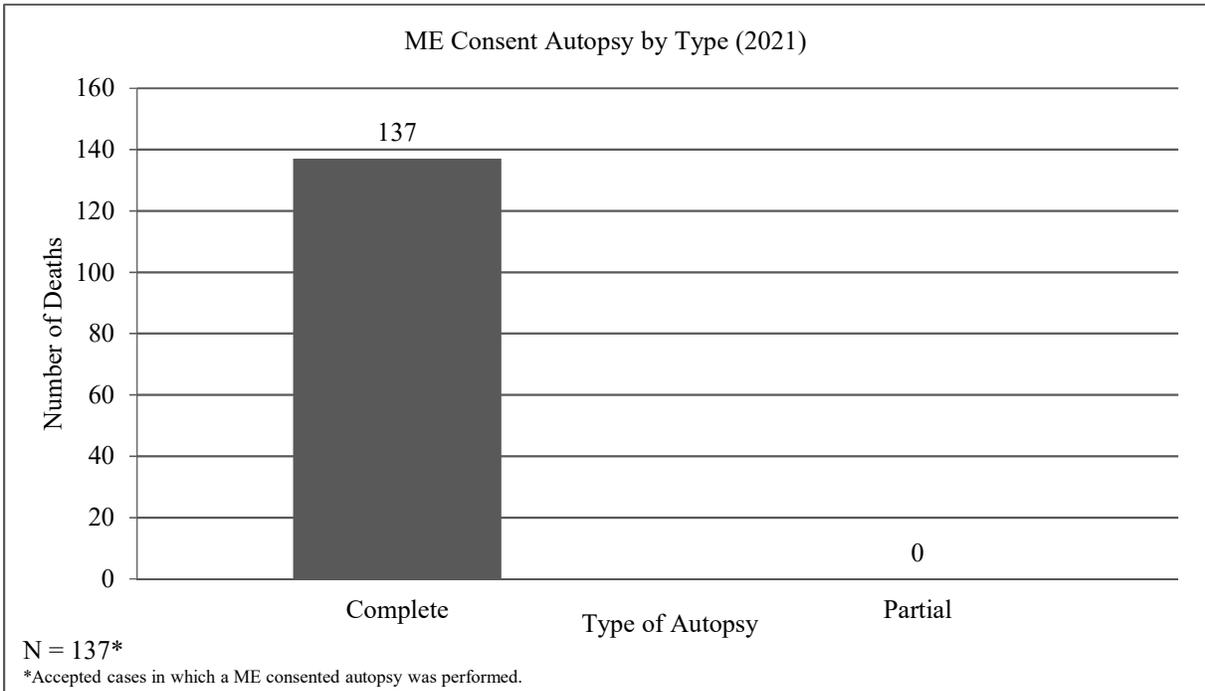


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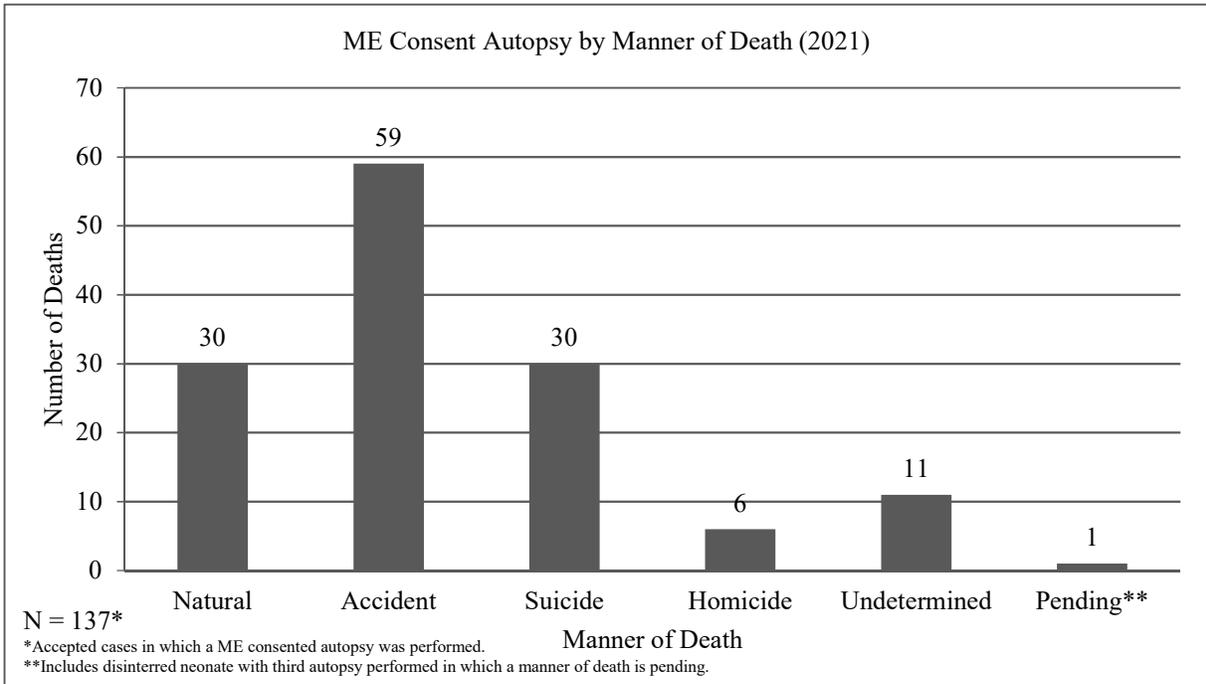


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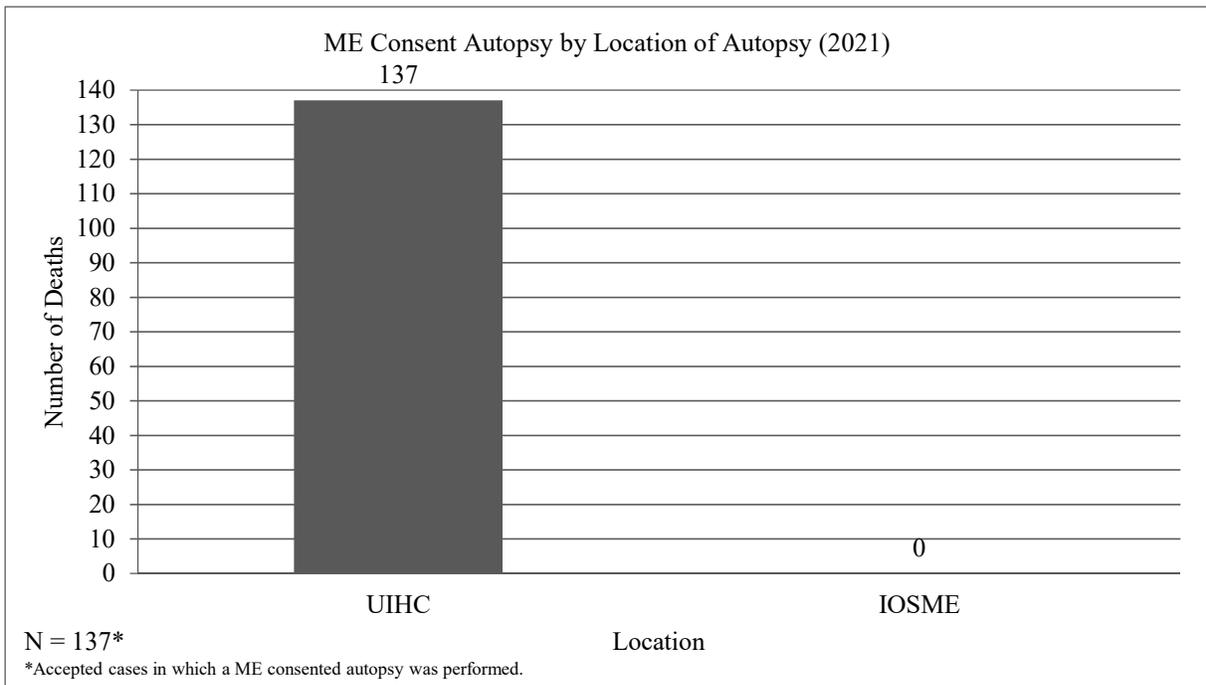


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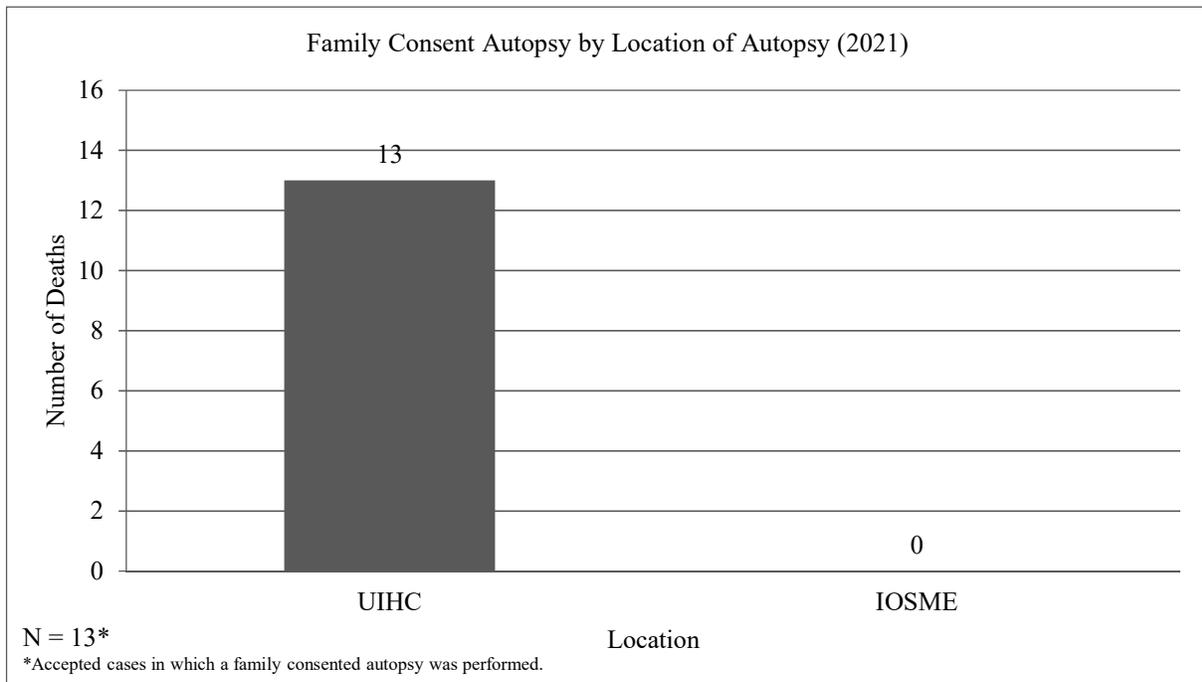


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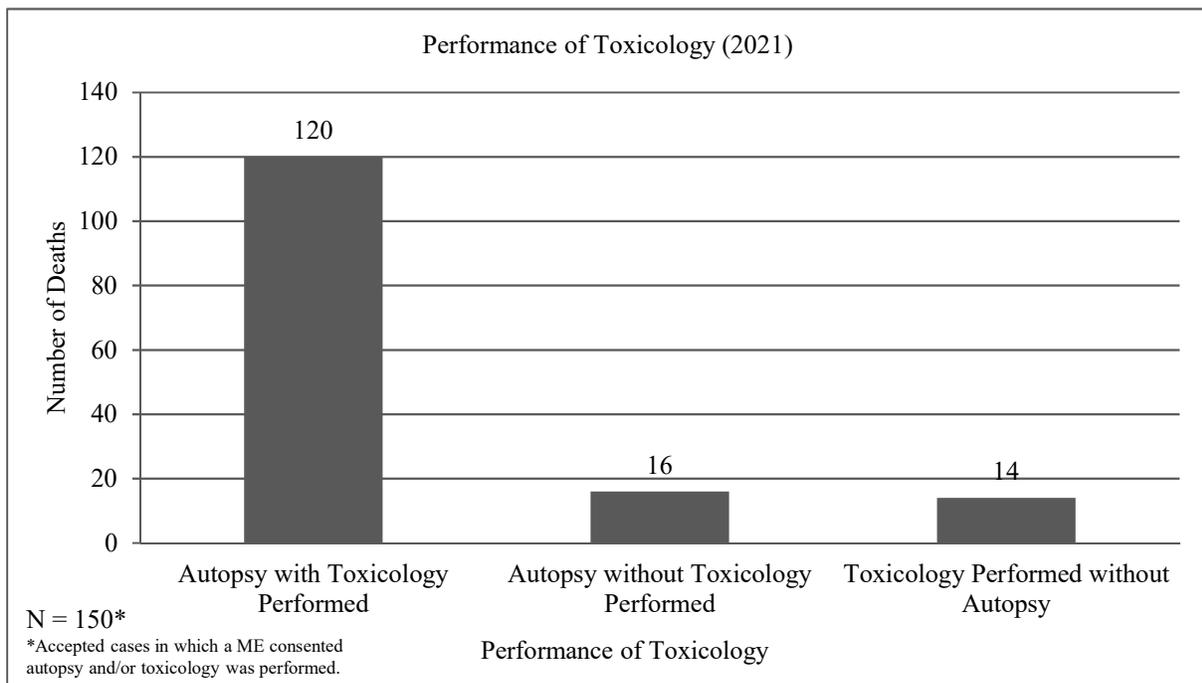


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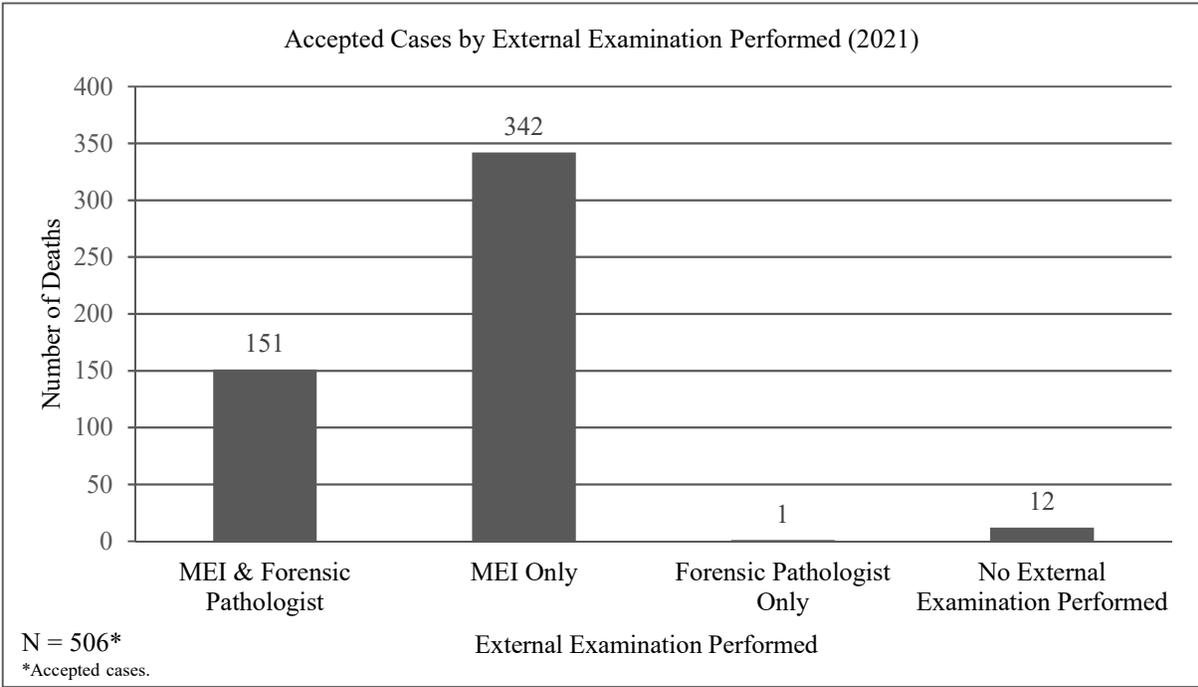


Figure 2.7.

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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.

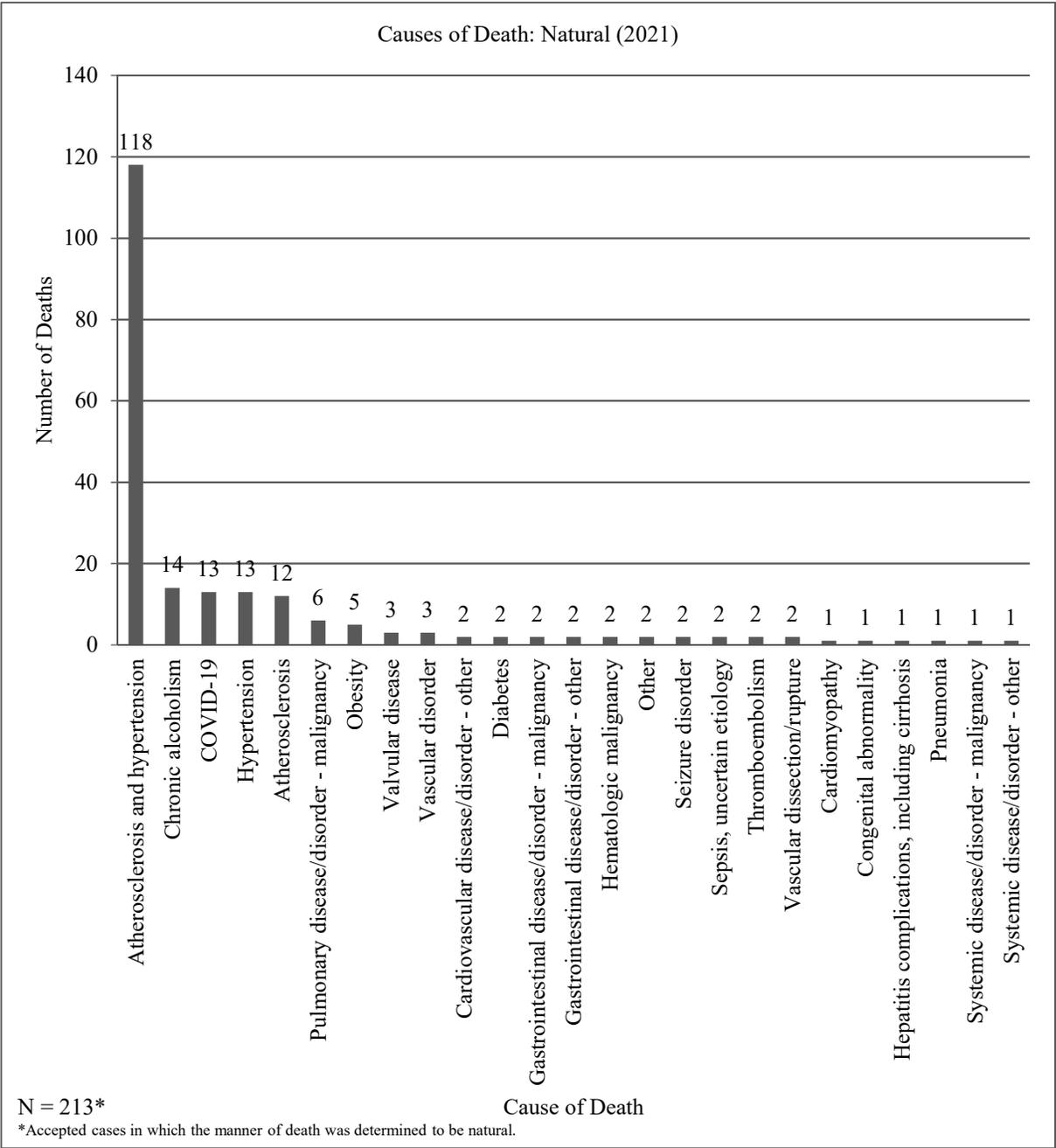


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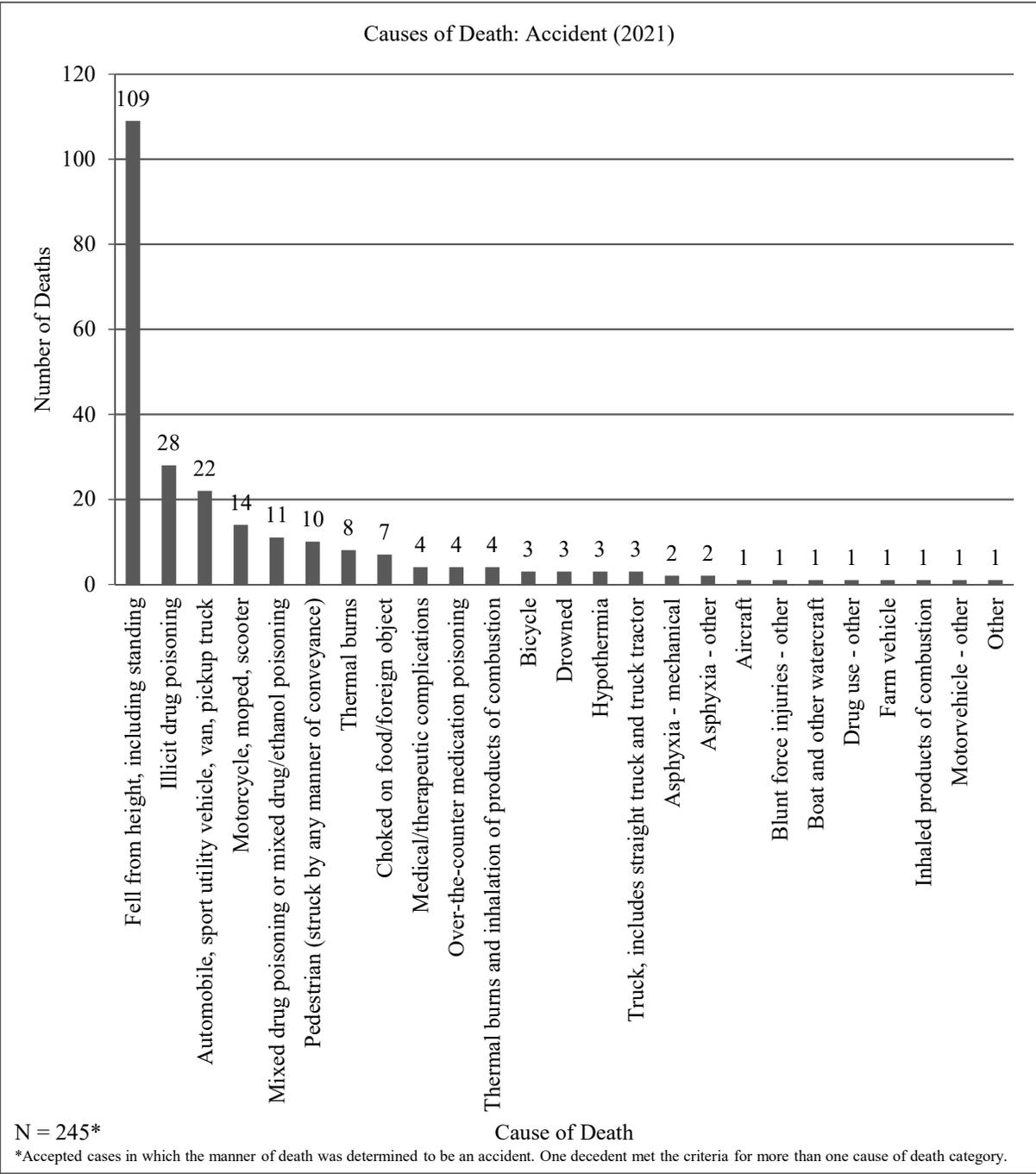


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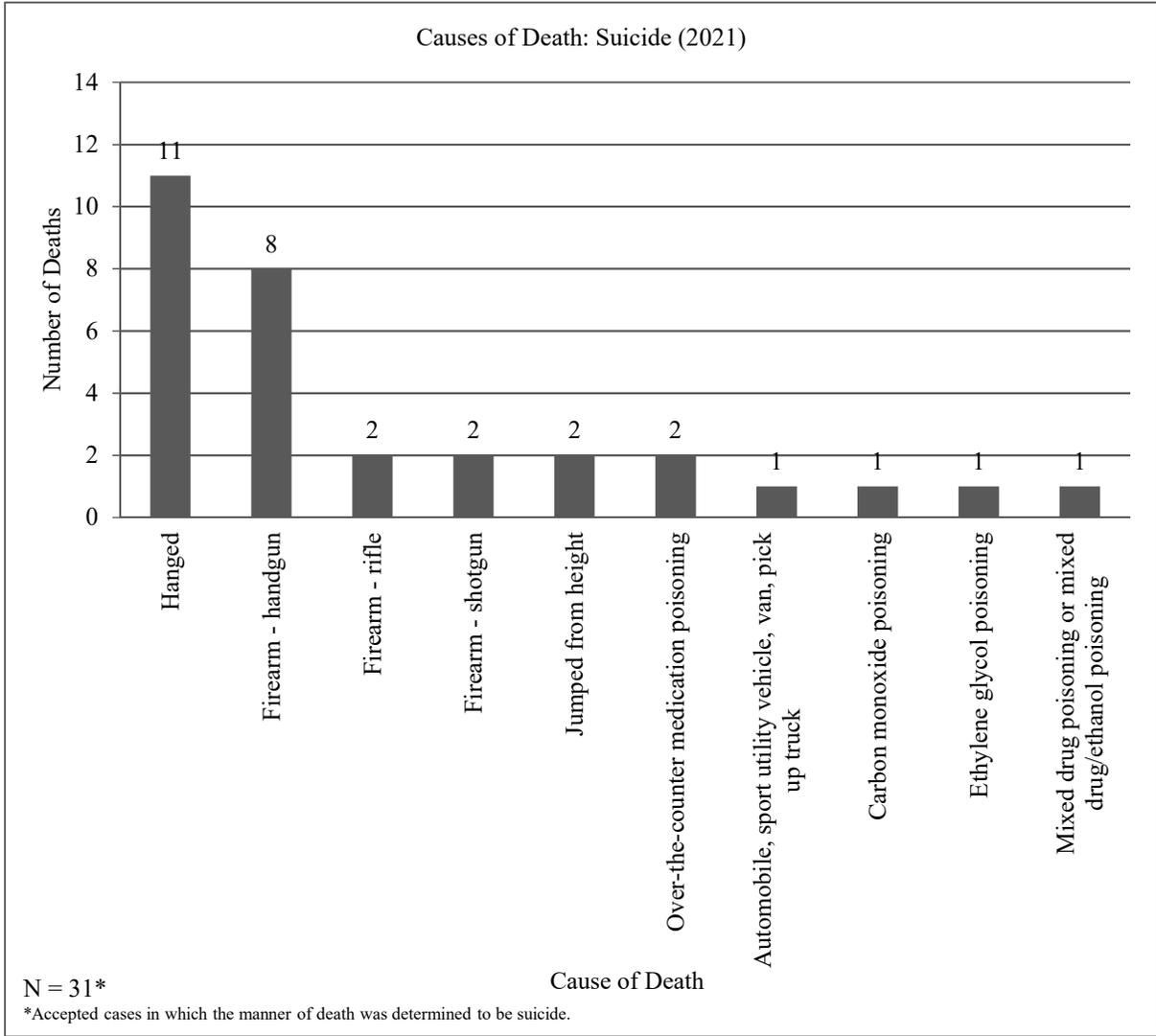


Figure 3.3.

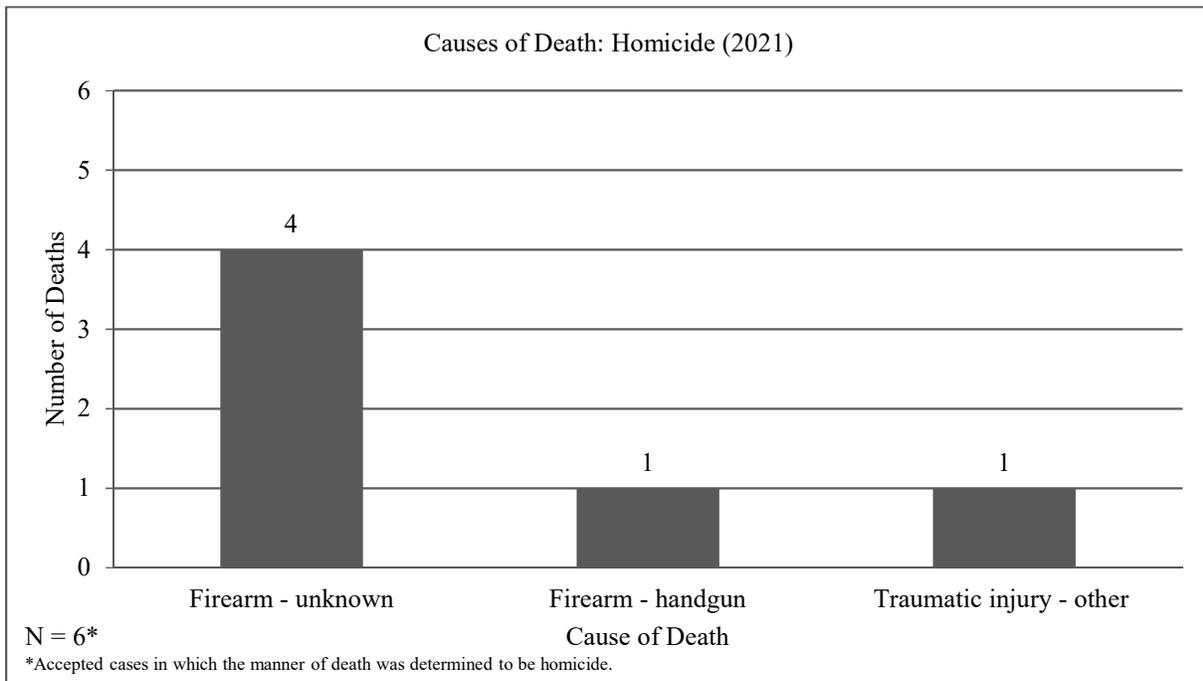


Figure 3.4.

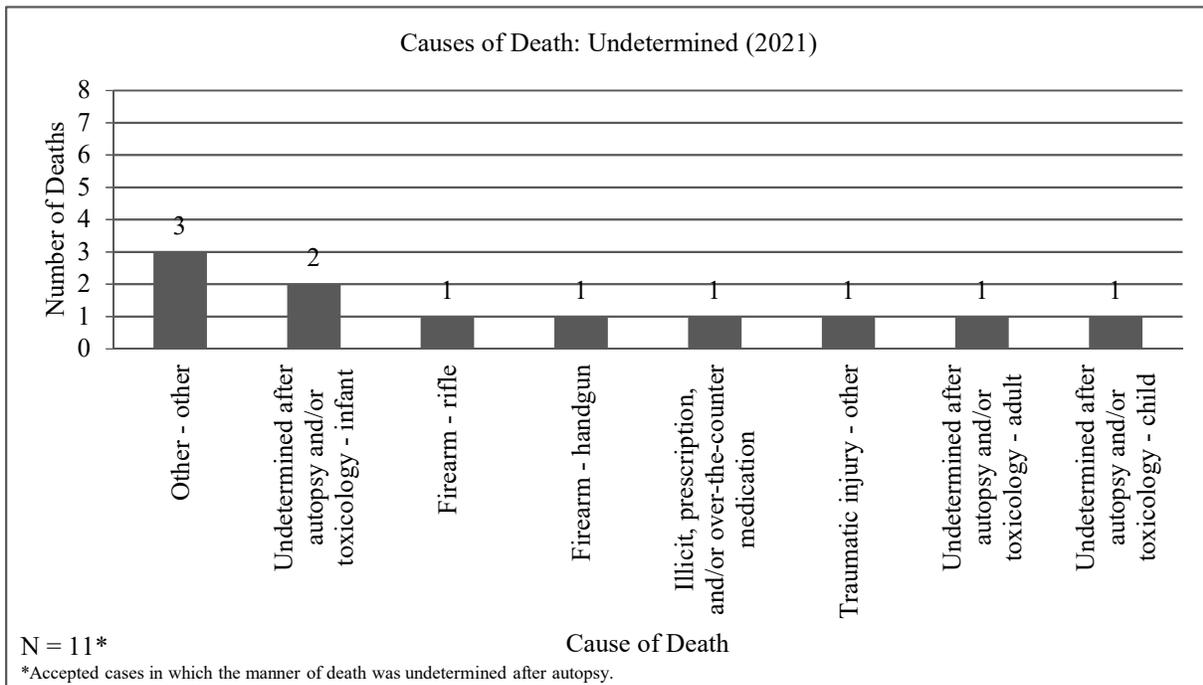


Figure 3.5.

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Accidents

Of the 506 deaths accepted by JCME, 244 were classified as accident. The sex distribution was 148 males to 96 females. One hundred and nine of these deaths were the result of a fall, 28 were the result of illicit drug poisoning, and 22 were due to a motor vehicle crash. One death met the criteria for more than one cause of death category. The most common age ranges were 80-89 years (47 decedents) and 70-79 years (45 decedents).

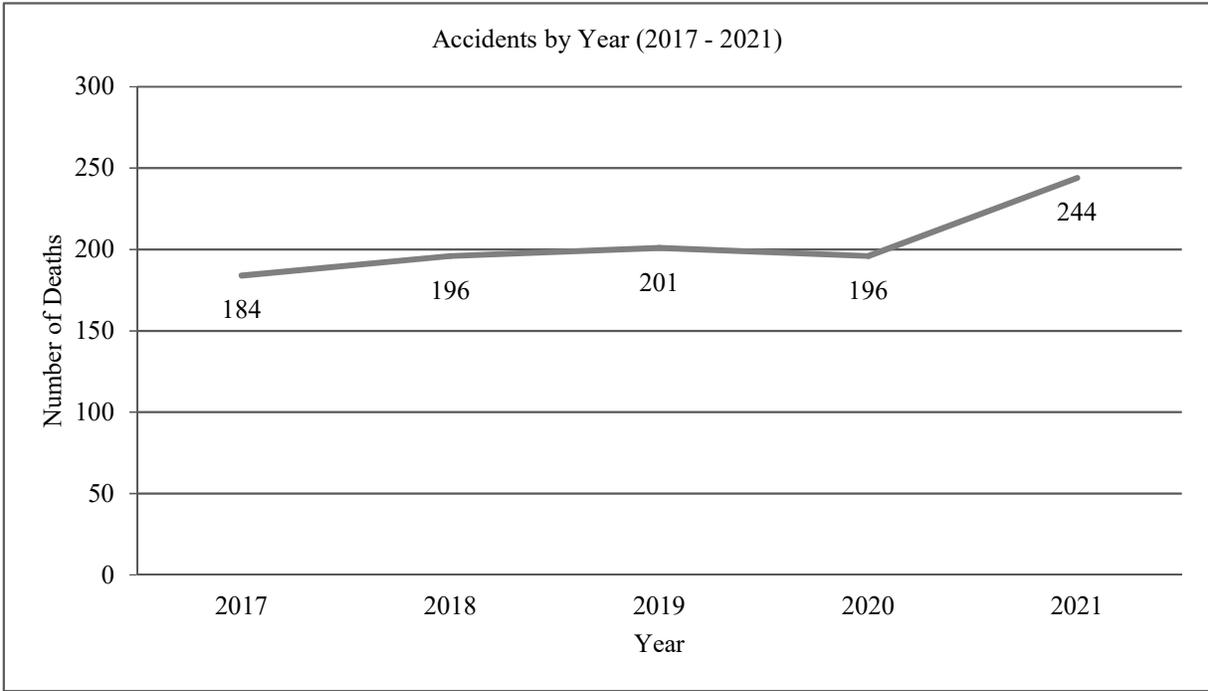


Figure 4.1.

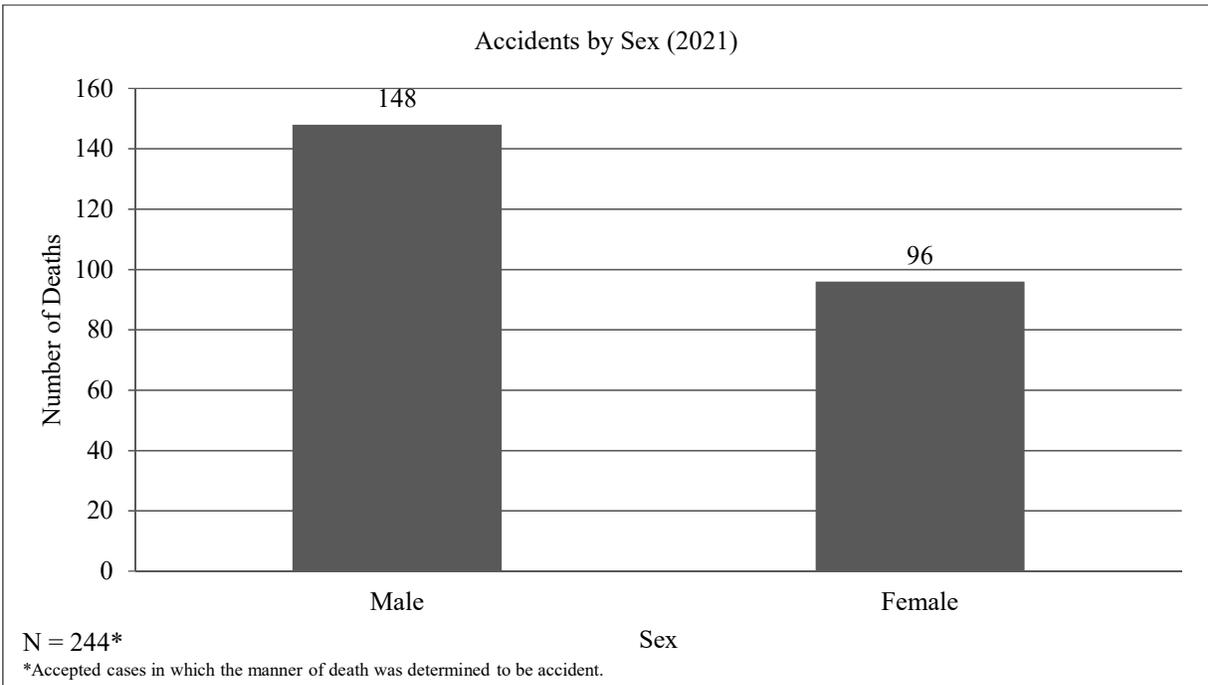


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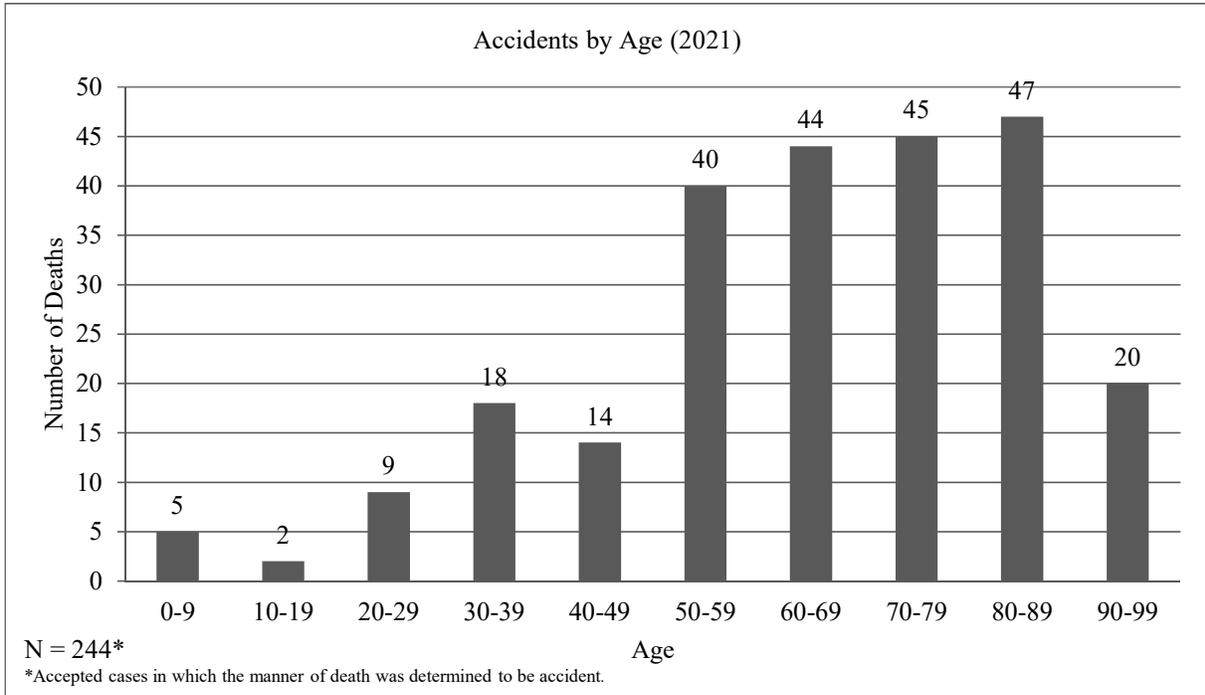


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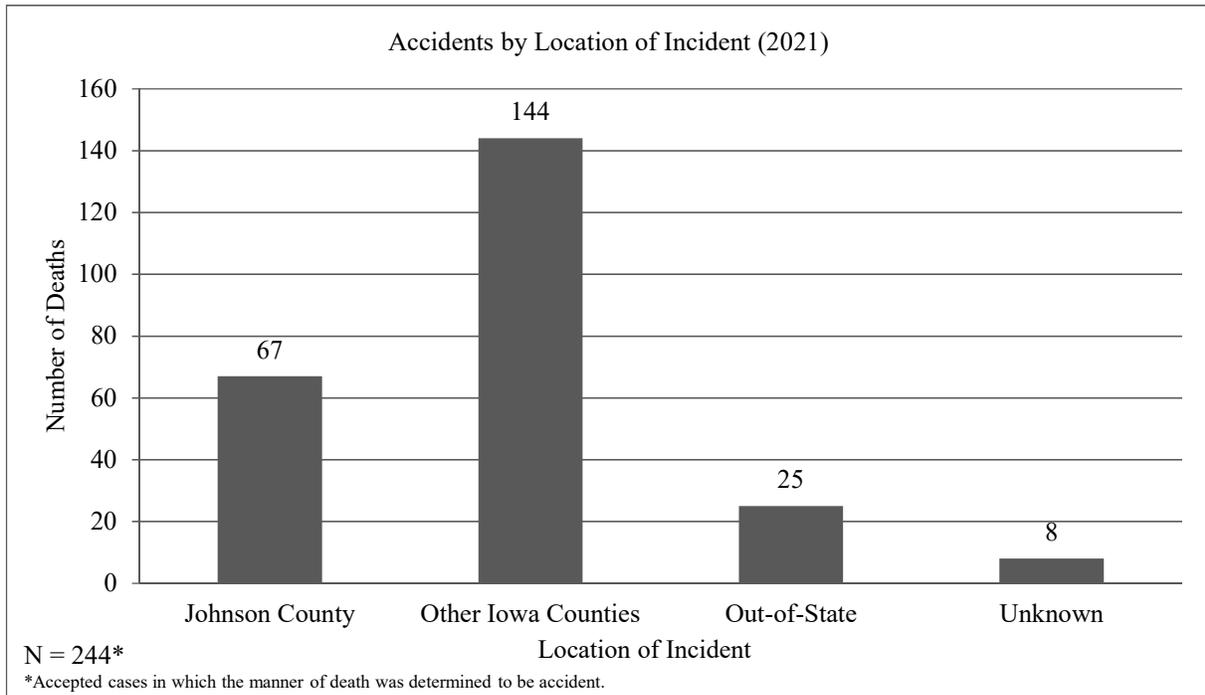


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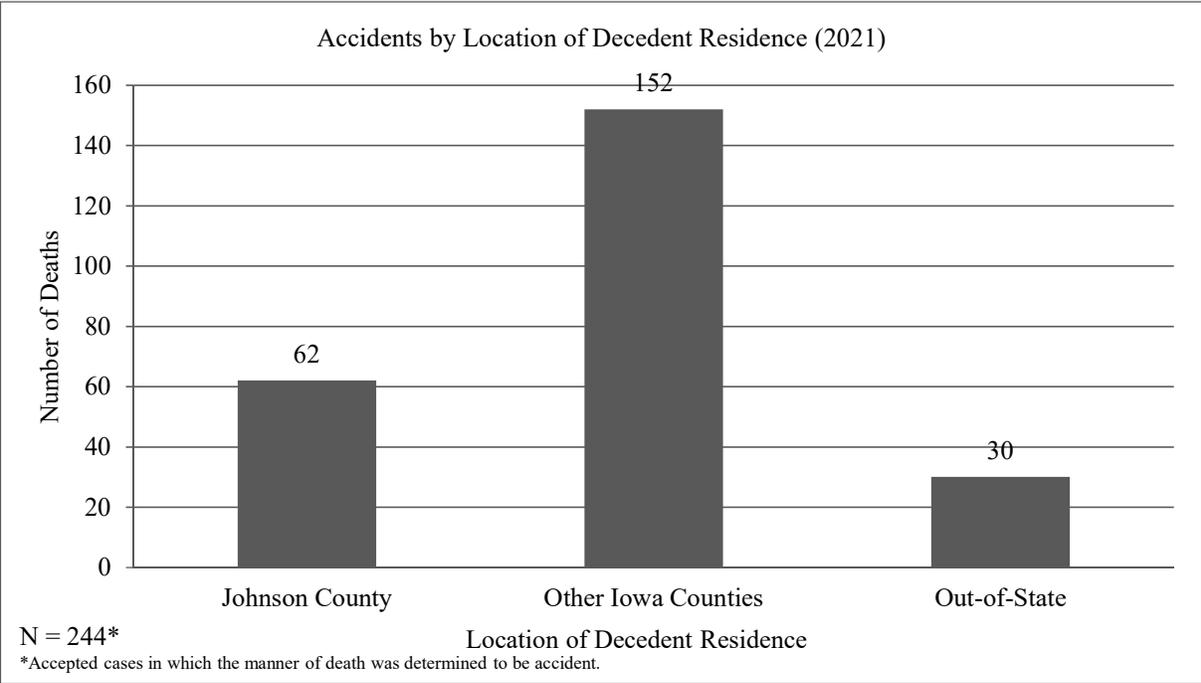


Figure 4.5.

Suicides

Of the 506 deaths investigated by JCME, 31 were classified as suicide. Twelve of these deaths were the result of a firearm and 11 were due to hanging. The sex distribution was 27 males and 4 females. The most common age range was 30-39 years (9 decedents).

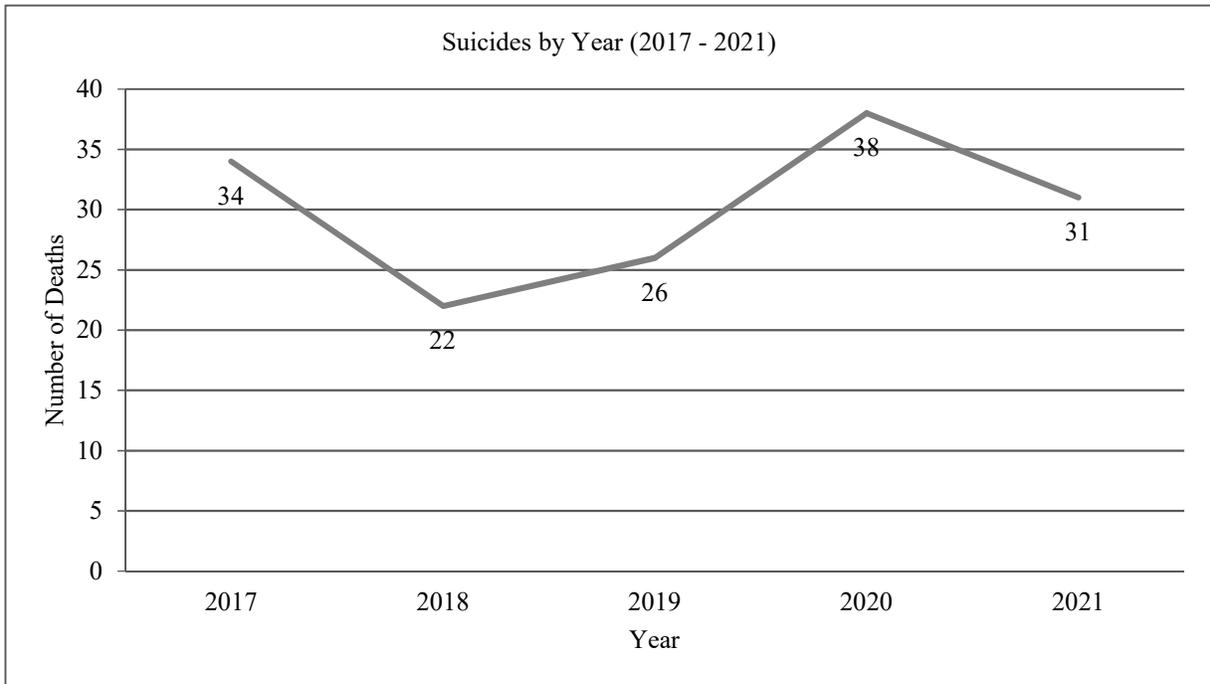


Figure 5.1.

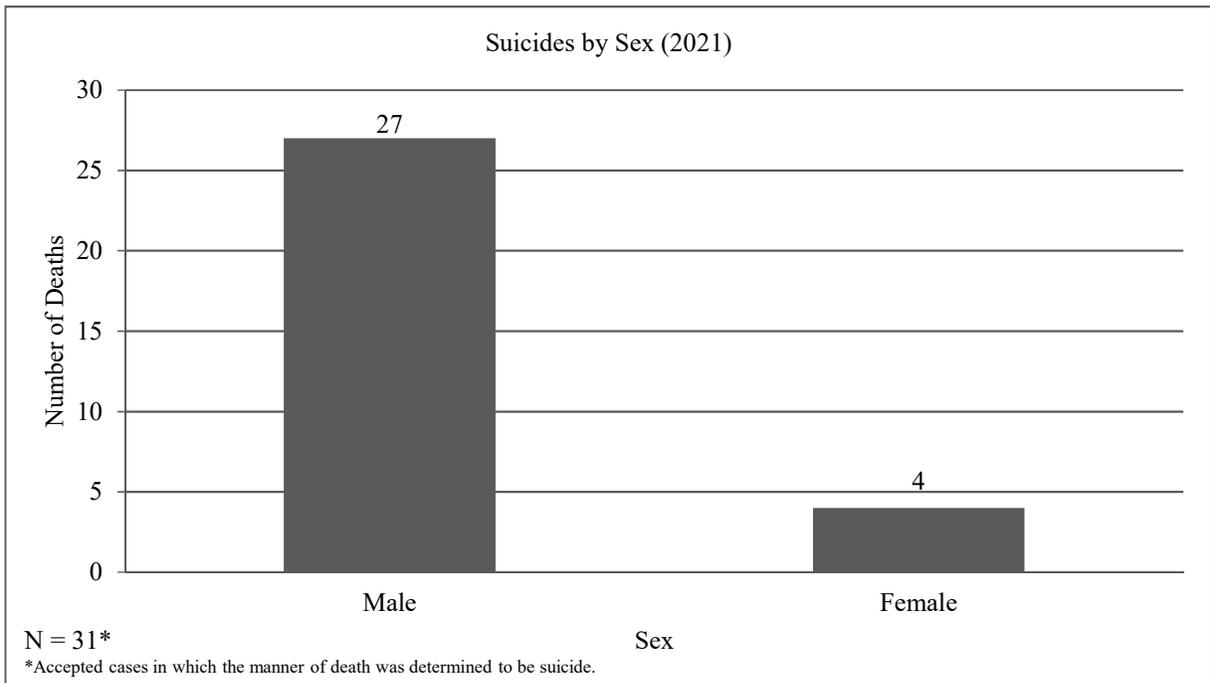


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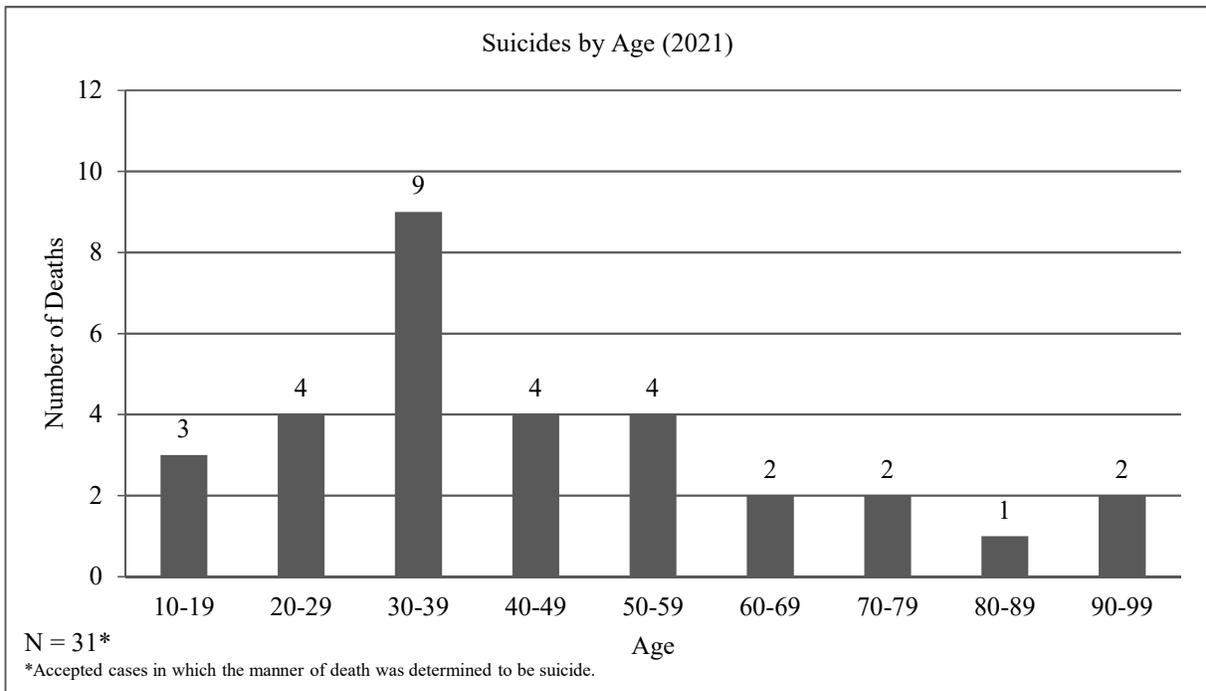


Figure 5.3.

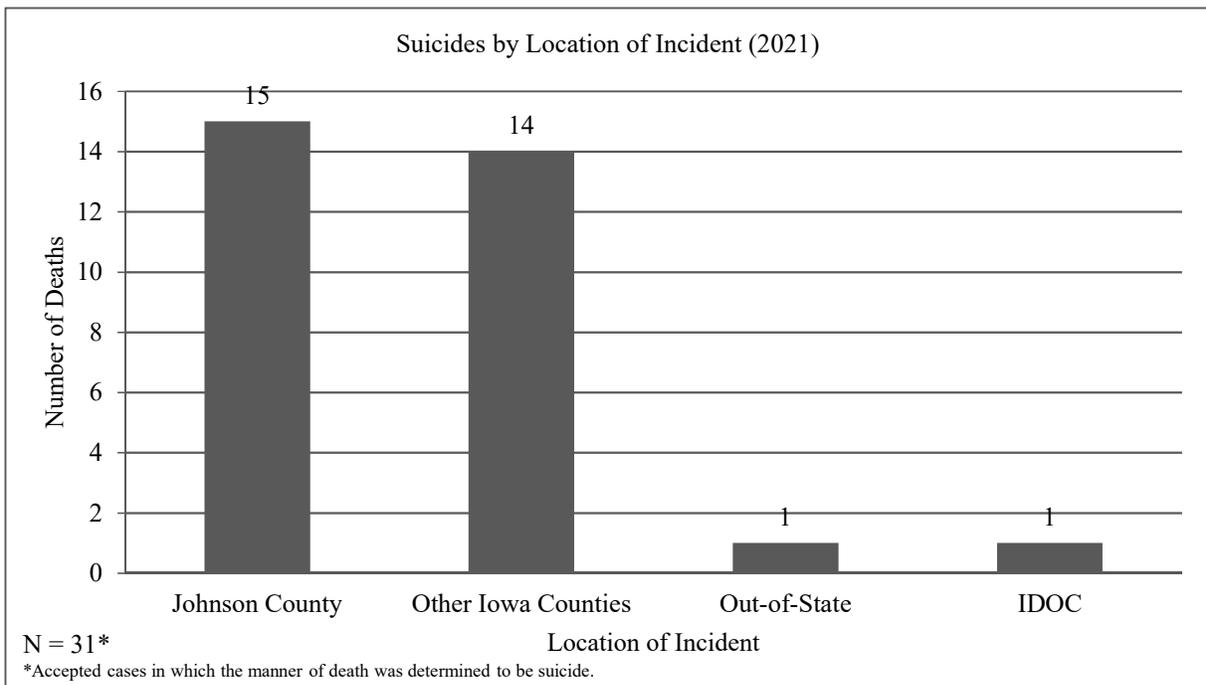


Figure 5.4.

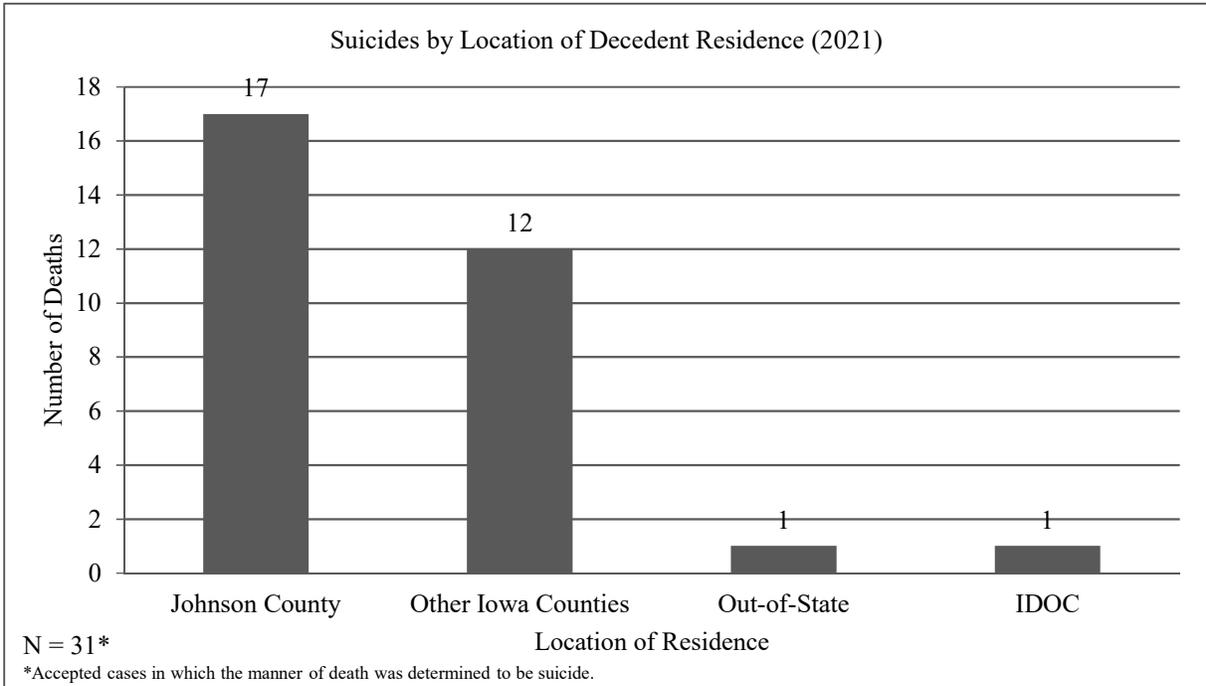


Figure 5.5.

Homicides

Of the 506 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 6 were classified as homicide. The sex distribution was 5 males and 1 female. The most common age range was 40-49 years (2 decedents) . The incident location for 3 of the 6 deaths certified as homicide occurred in Johnson County followed by 2 that occurred in another Iowa county and 1 that occurred out-of-state.

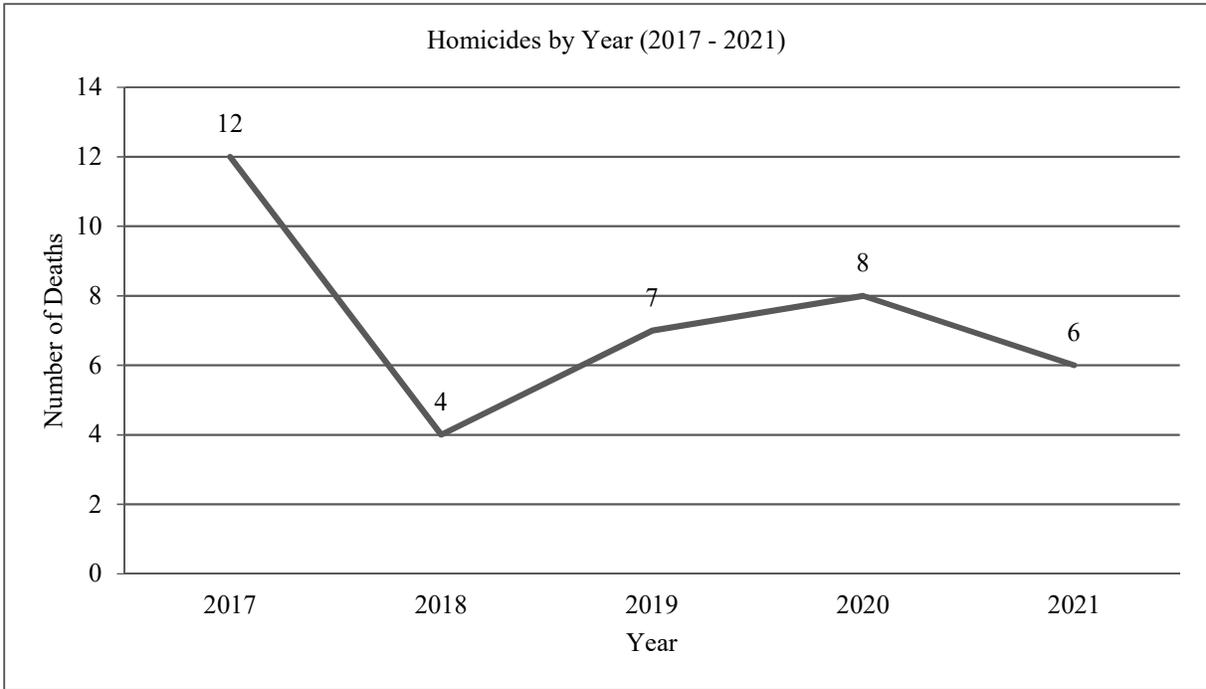


Figure 6.1.

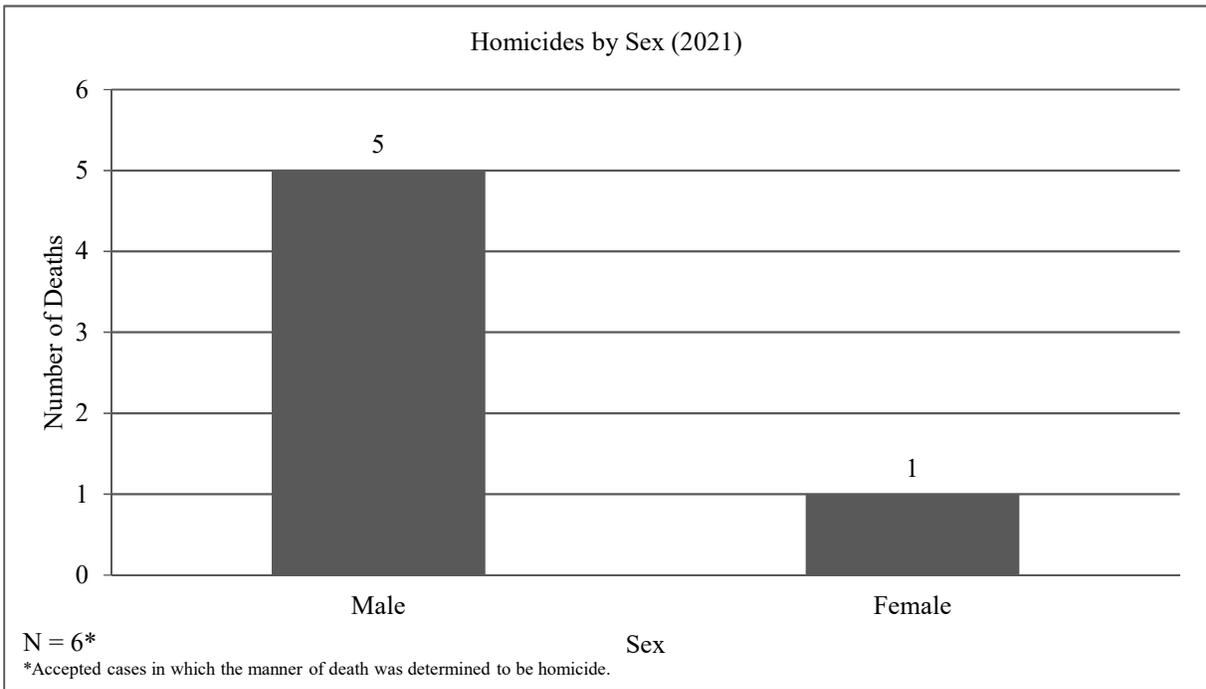


Figure 6.2.

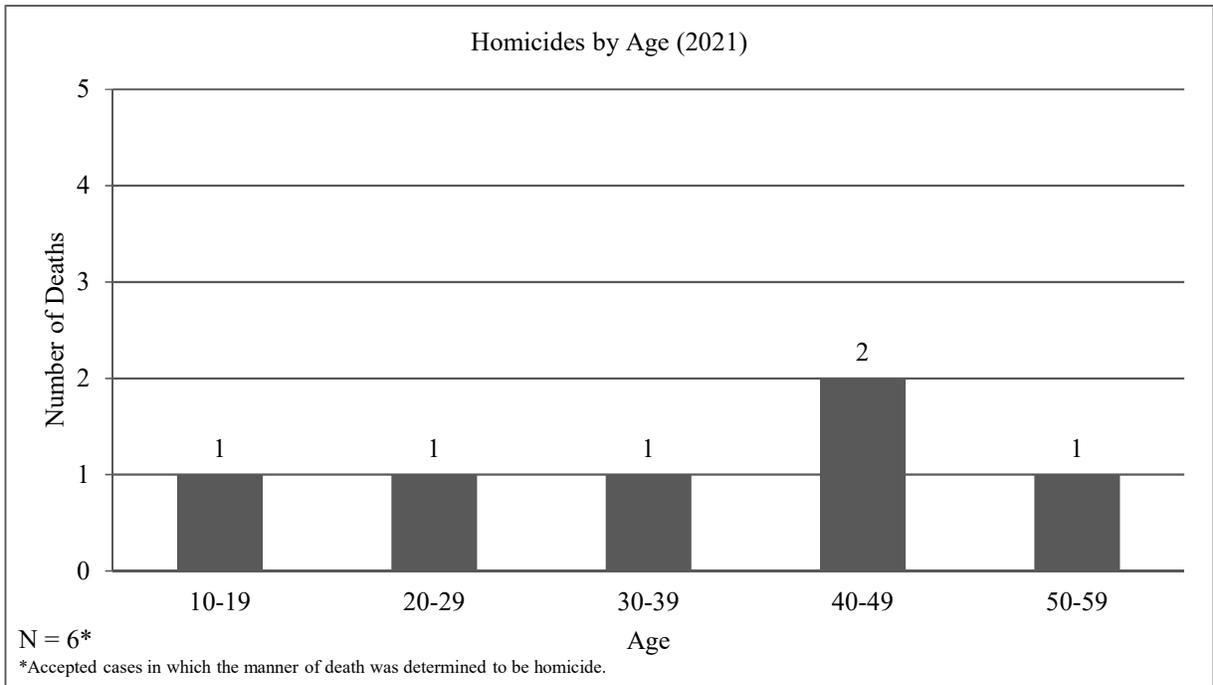


Figure 6.3.

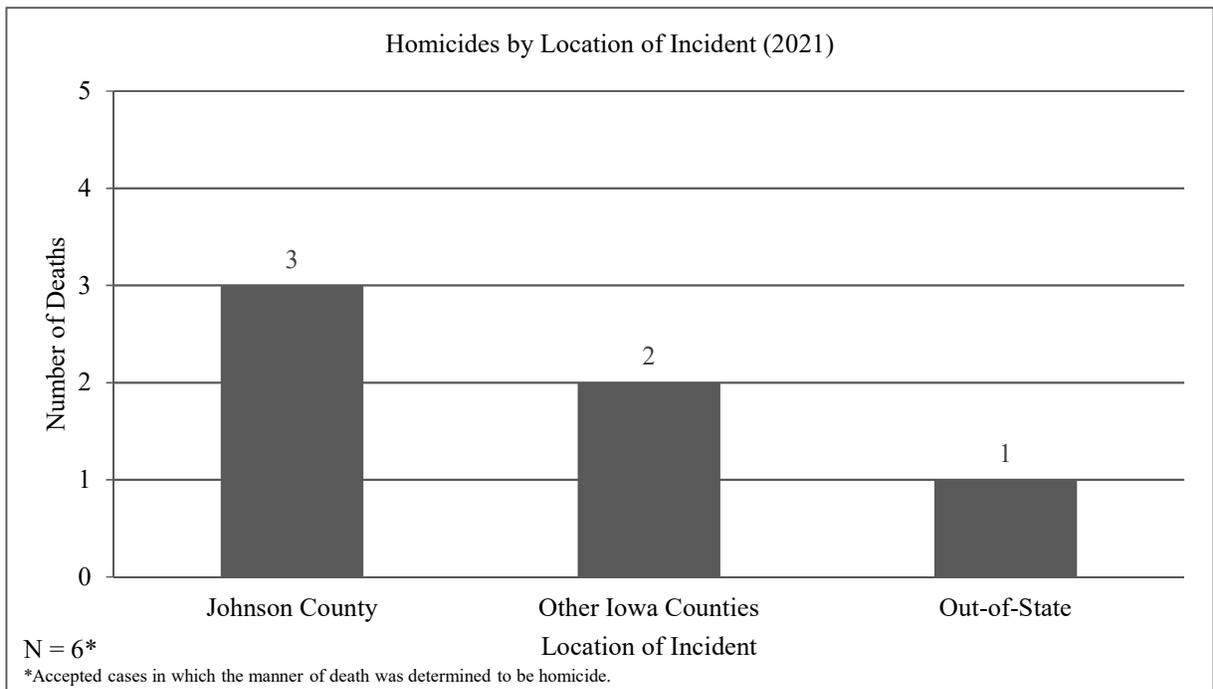


Figure 6.4.

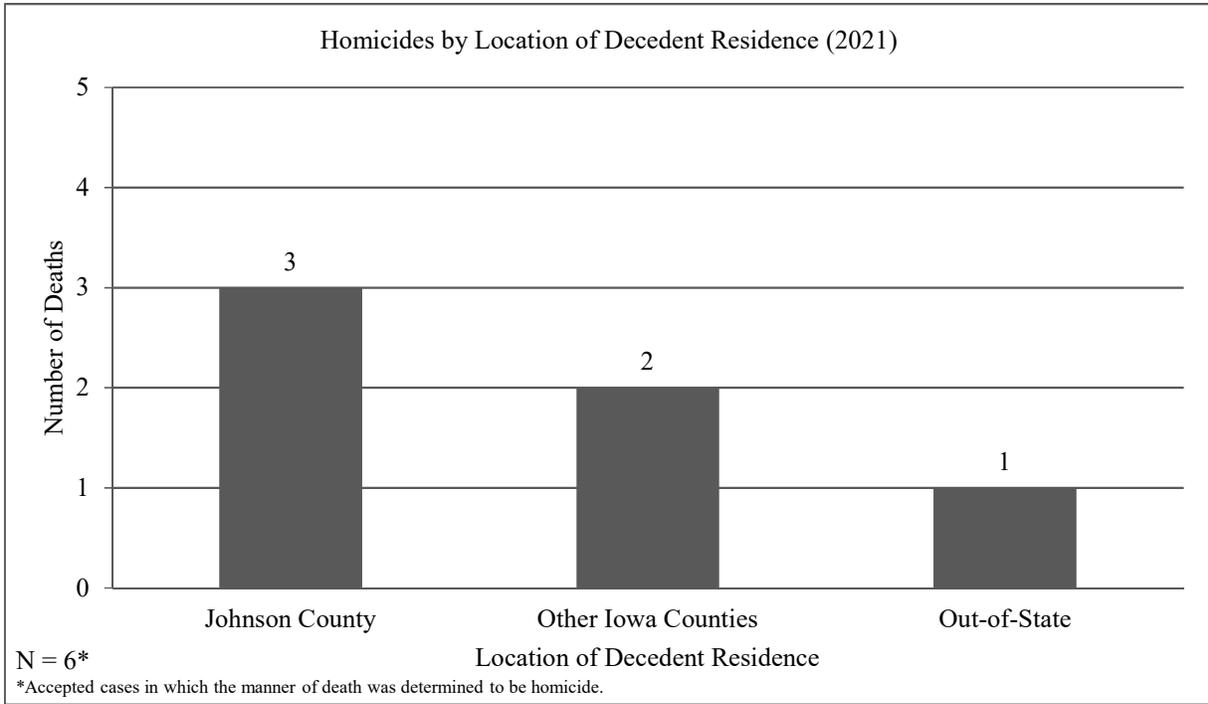


Figure 6.5.

Drug-Related Deaths

In 2021, there were 49 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 31 involved illicit drugs only, 5 involved over-the-counter drugs only, 1 involved prescription drugs only, 11 involved a mixture of drug types, and 1 was unknown. Of the 11 mixed drug-related deaths, 5 involved multiple illicit drugs (fentanyl, morphine, methamphetamine, acetyl fentanyl, and amphetamine), 2 involved illicit (methamphetamine, fentanyl, and cocaine) and over-the-counter drugs, 2 involved a mixture of prescription and over-the-counter drugs, 1 involved a mixture of illicit drugs (methamphetamine) and prescription drugs, and 1 involved a mixture of prescription drugs only. Of the remaining 31 illicit drug-related deaths, 23 involved methamphetamine, 5 involved cocaine, 2 involved fentanyl, and 1 involved heroin.

Of the 49 drug-related deaths, 44 were classified as accident, 3 as suicide, and 2 as undetermined. The overall sex distribution was 31 males to 18 females, with the most common age range 50-59 years (15 decedents).

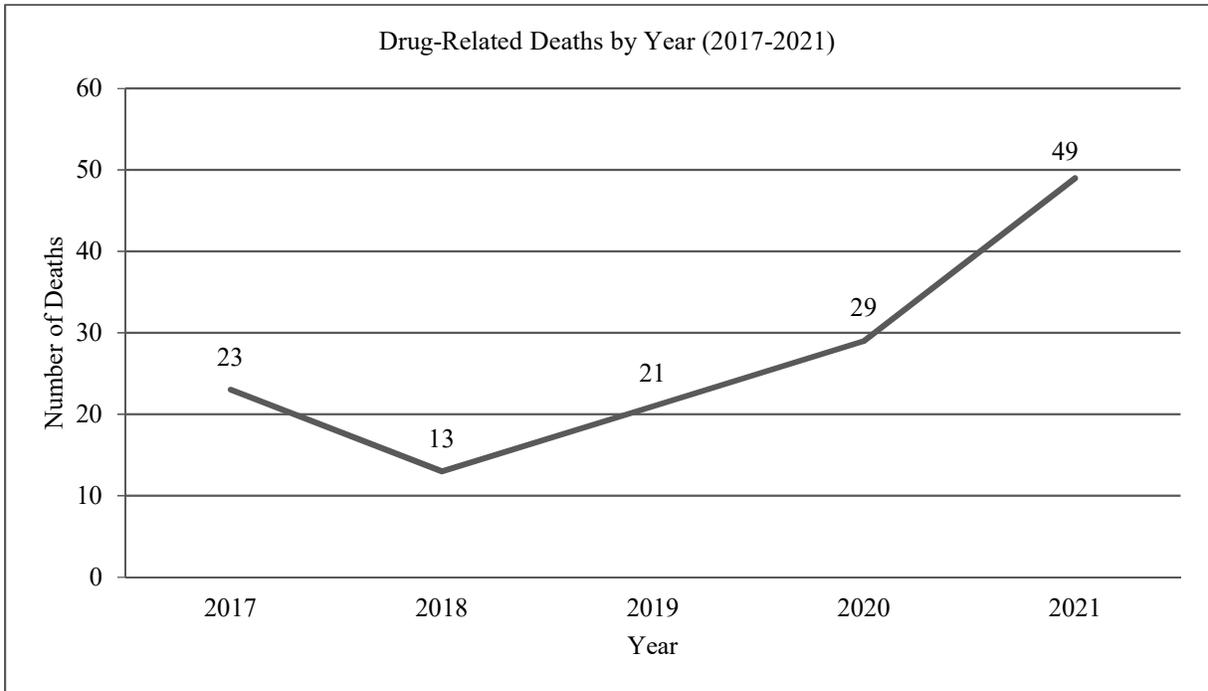


Figure 7.1.

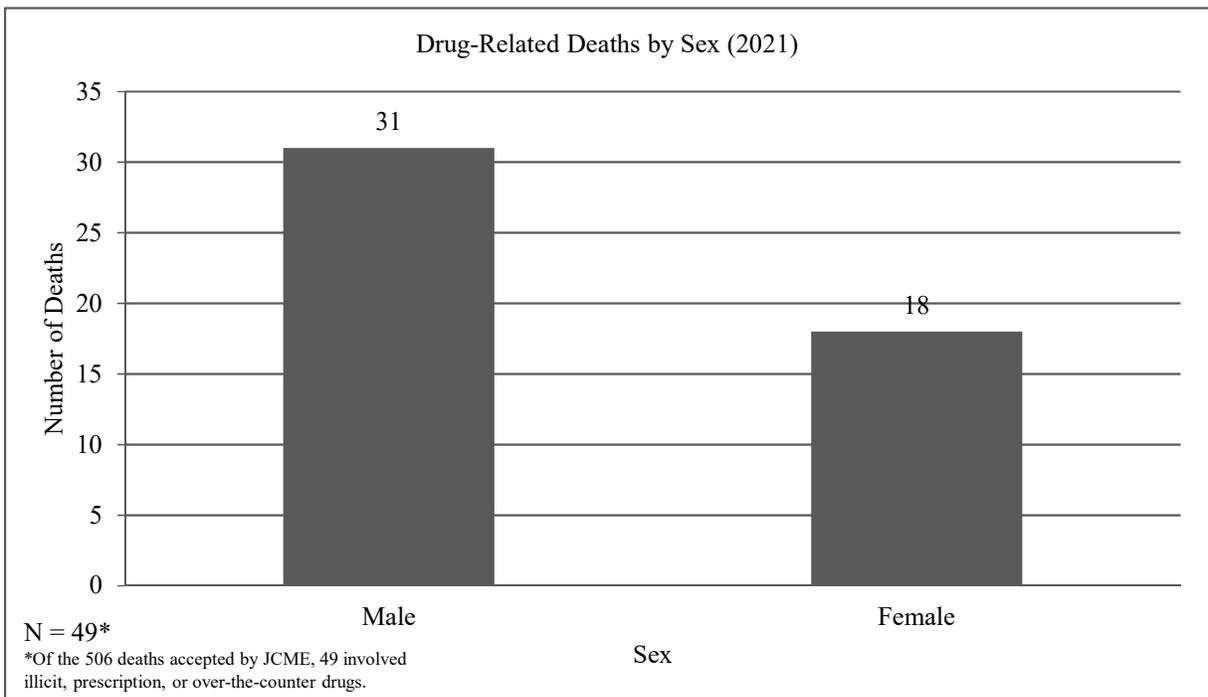


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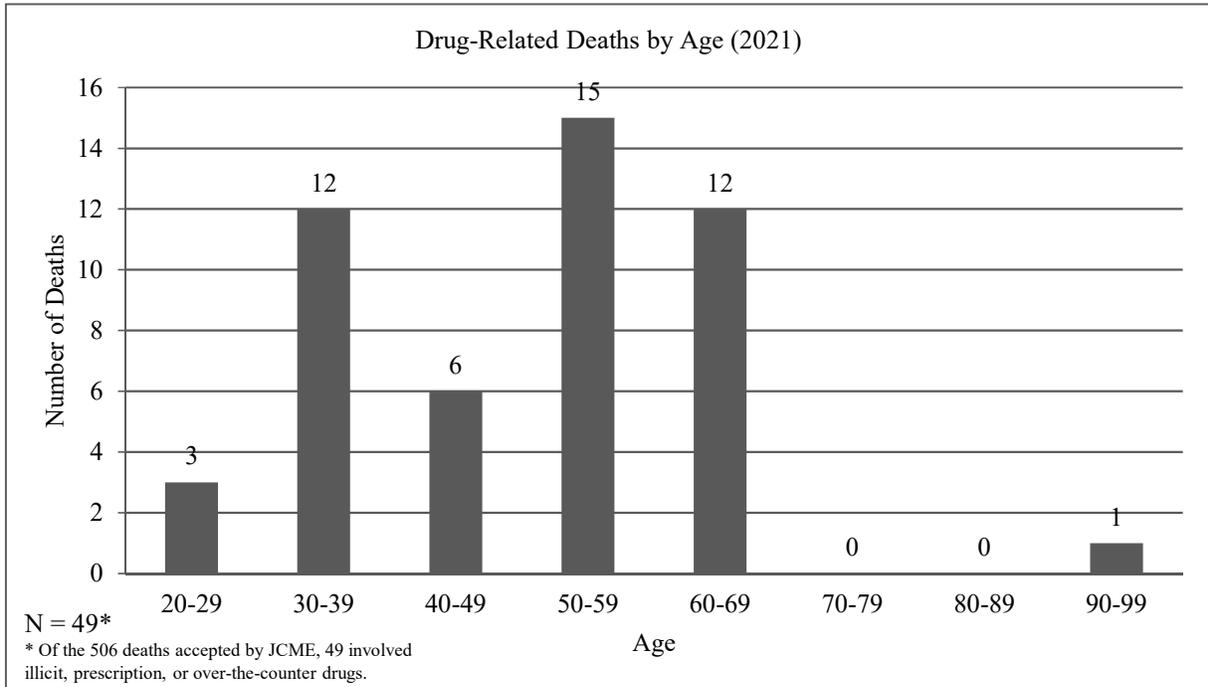


Figure 7.3.

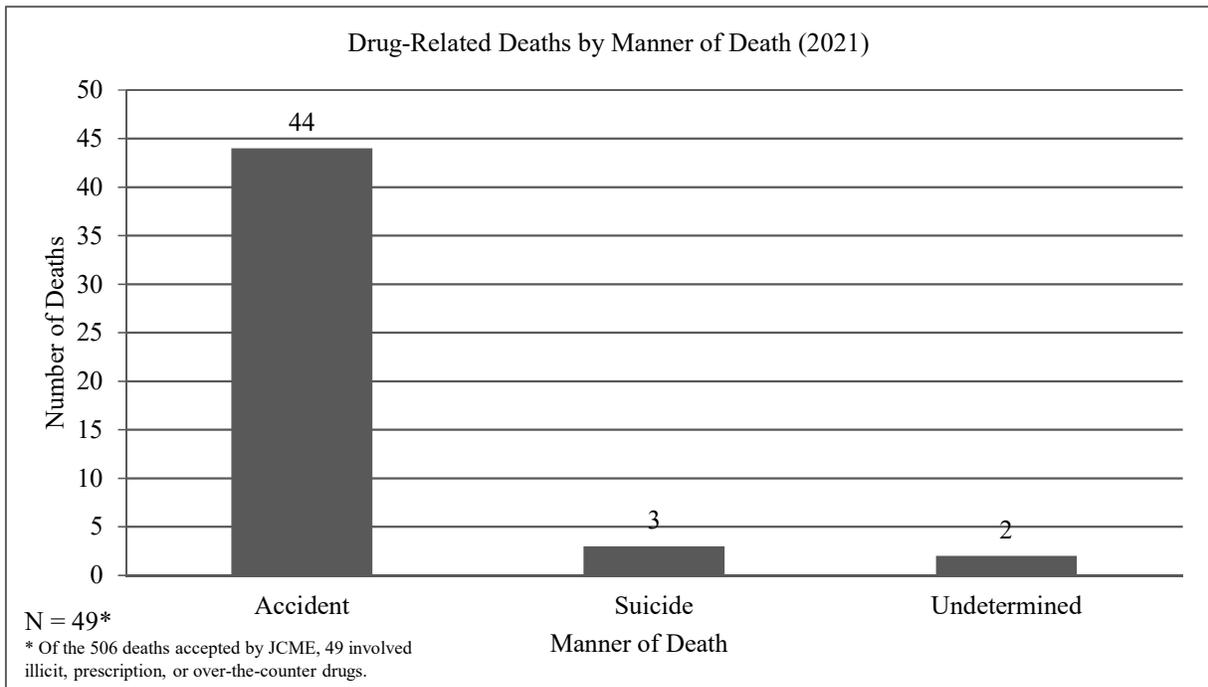


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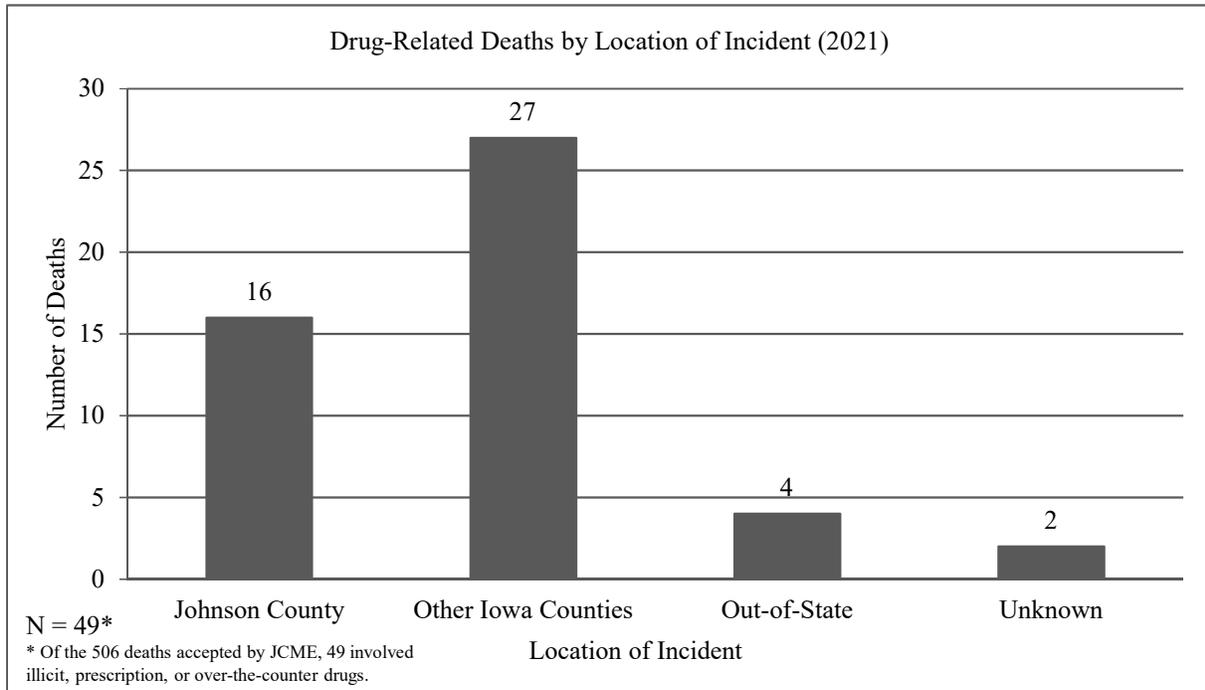


Figure 7.5.

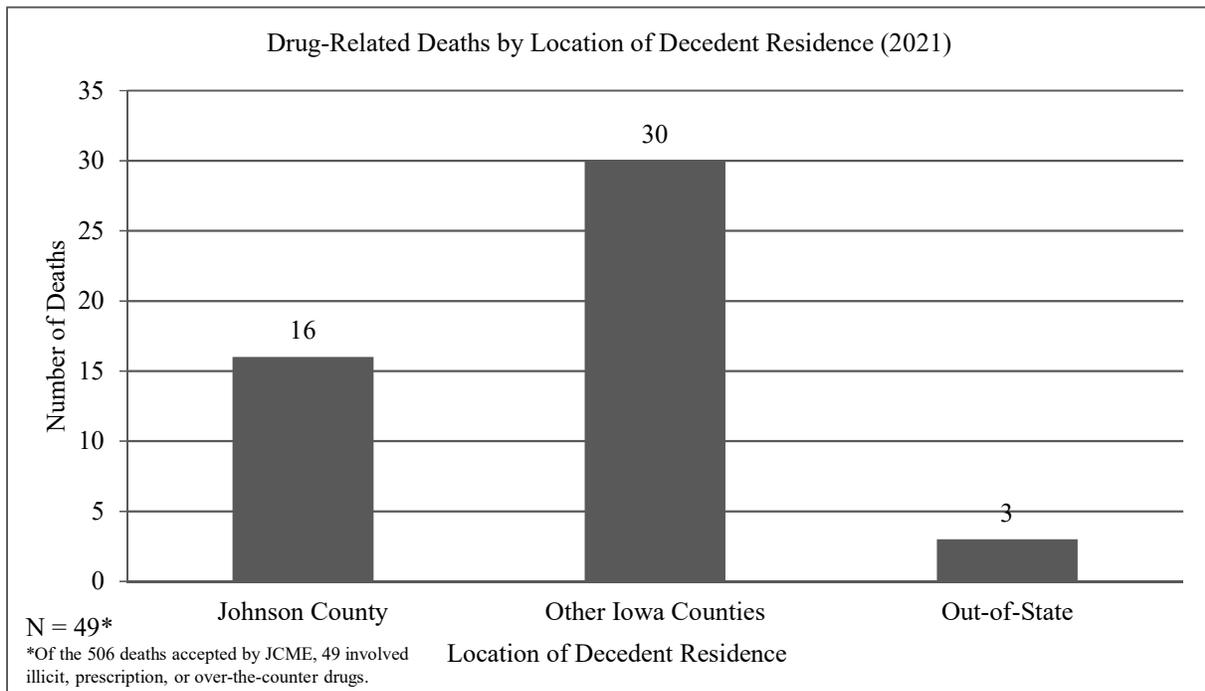


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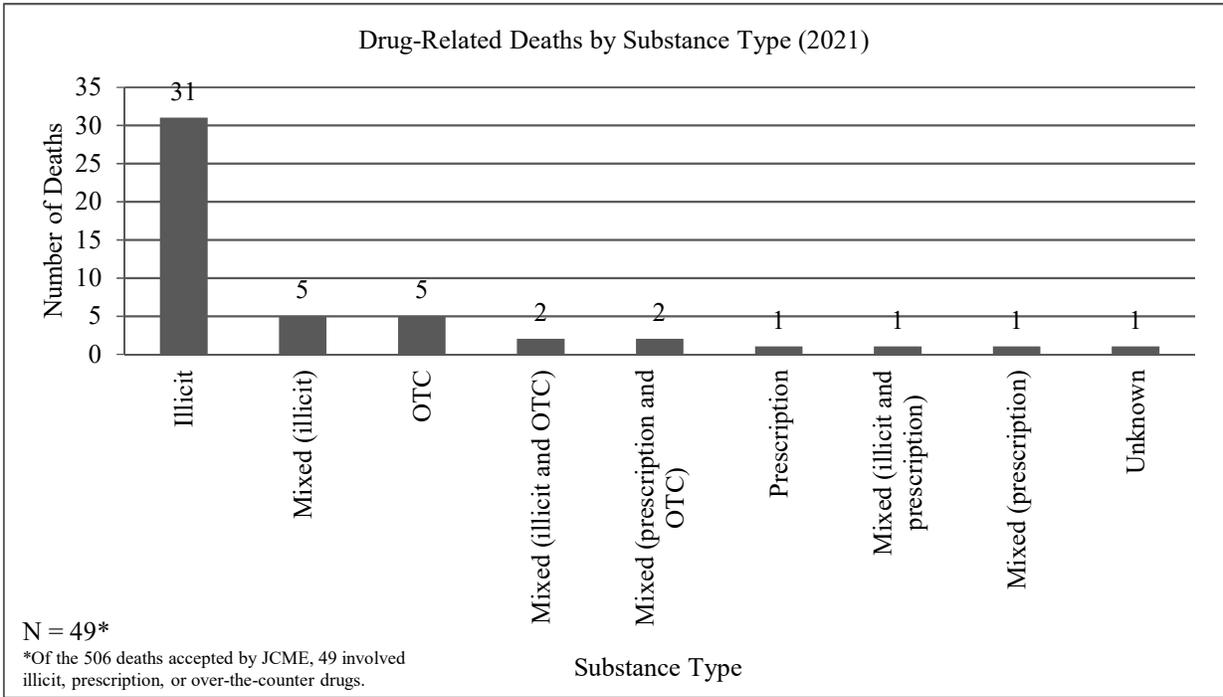


Figure 7.7.

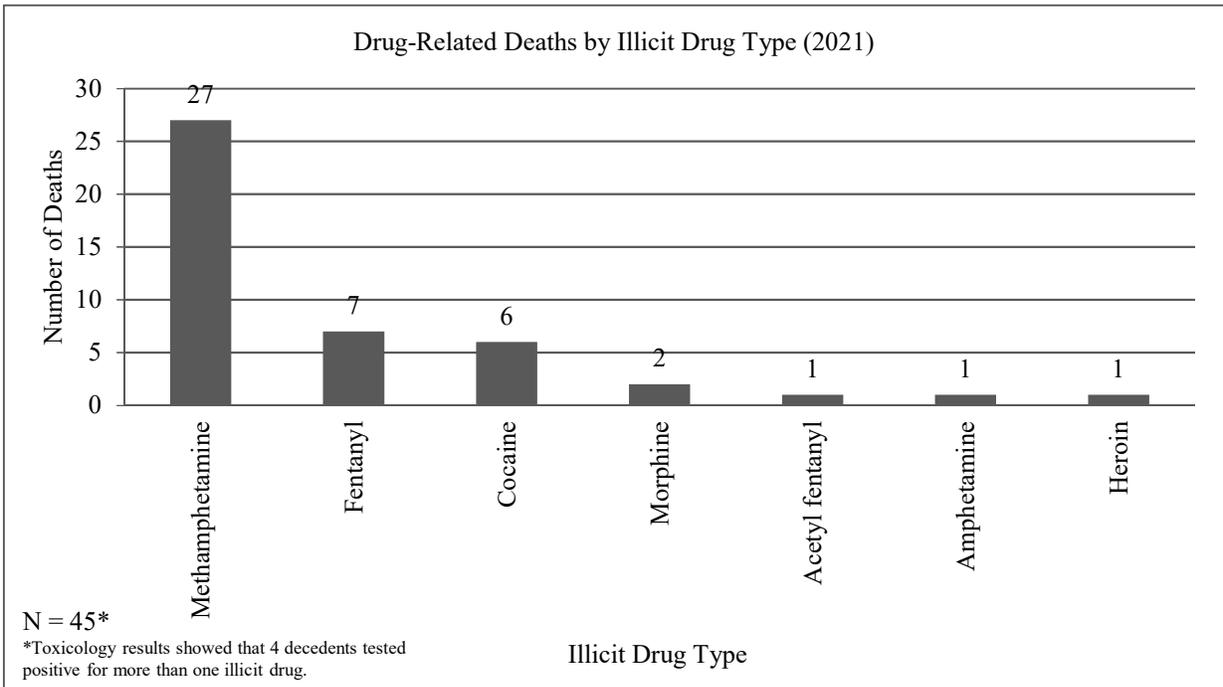


Figure 7.8.

Table 7.1. Drug-Related Deaths by Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs (2021)

Type of Drugs	Number of Decedents*
Mitragynine	5
Acetaminophen	3
Buprenorphine	2
Clonazepam	2
Diphenhydramine	2
Gabapentin	2
Hydroxyzine	2
Lamotrigine	2
Risperidone	2
Topiramate	2
Baclofen	1
Cholchicine	1
Oxycodone	1

*Toxicology results showed that 4 decedents were positive for multiple prescription and over-the-counter drugs at the time of their death.

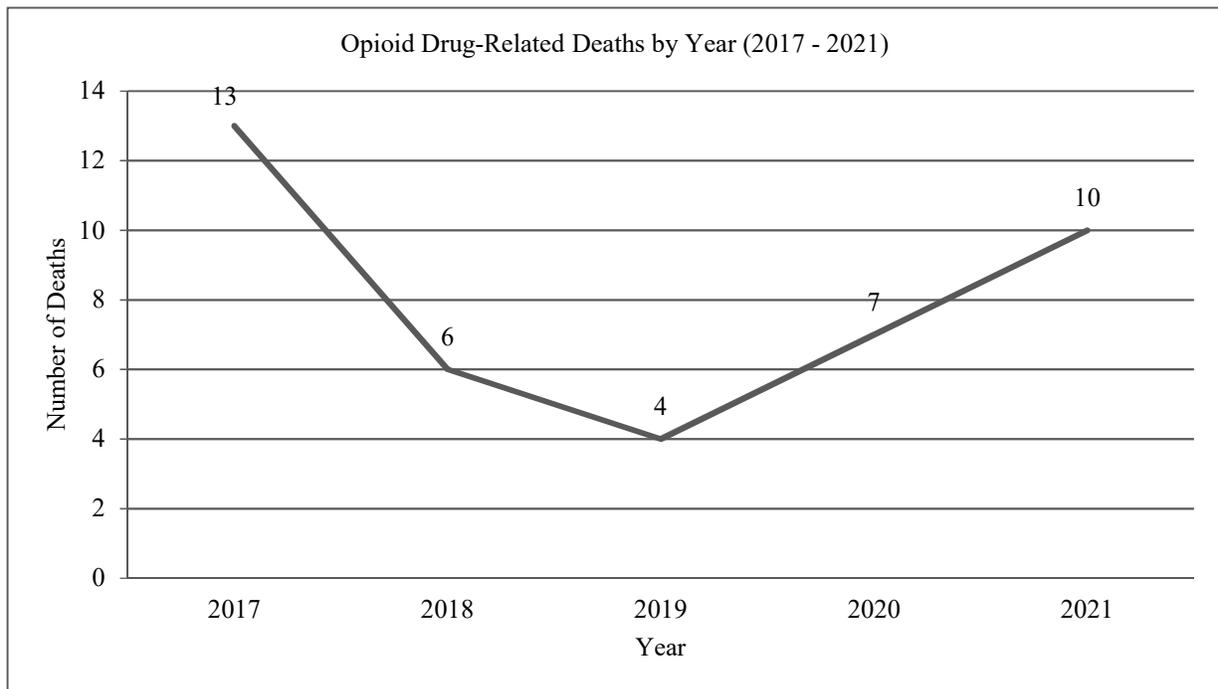


Figure 7.9.

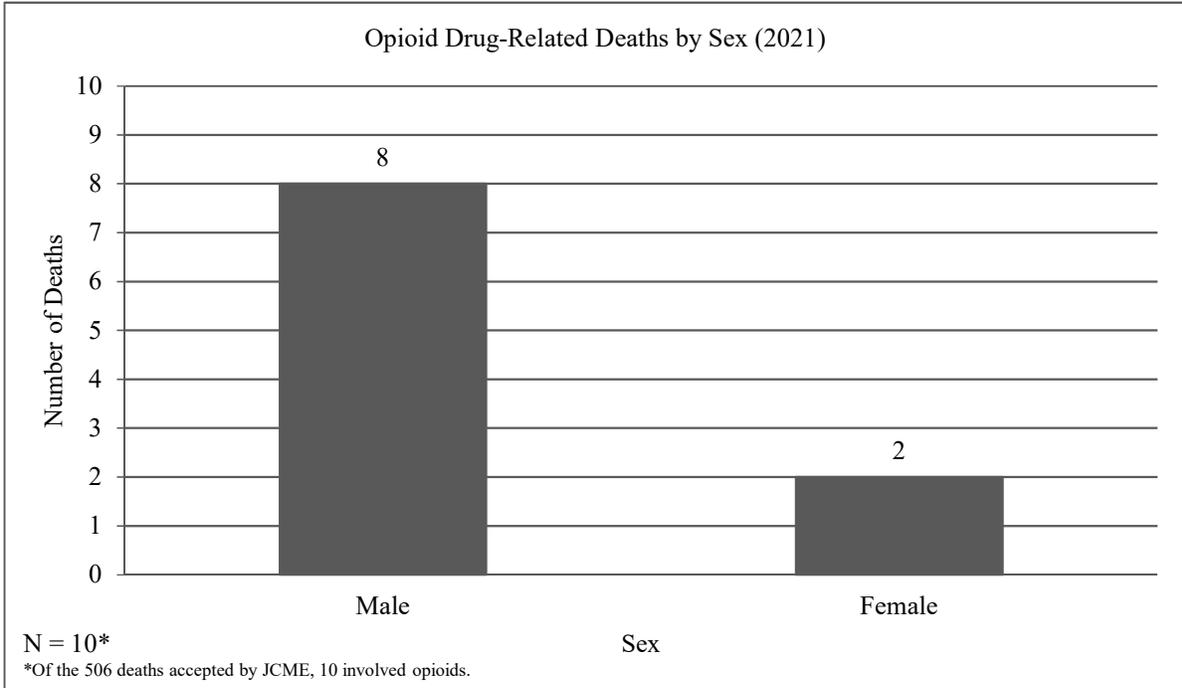


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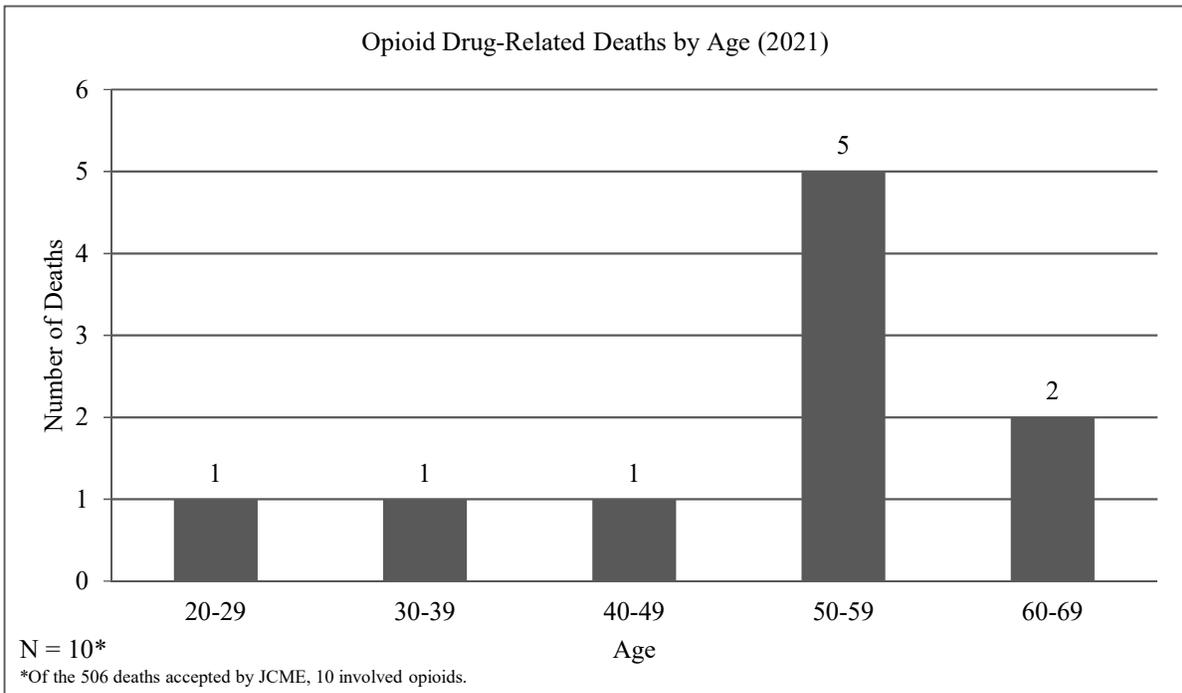


Figure 7.11.

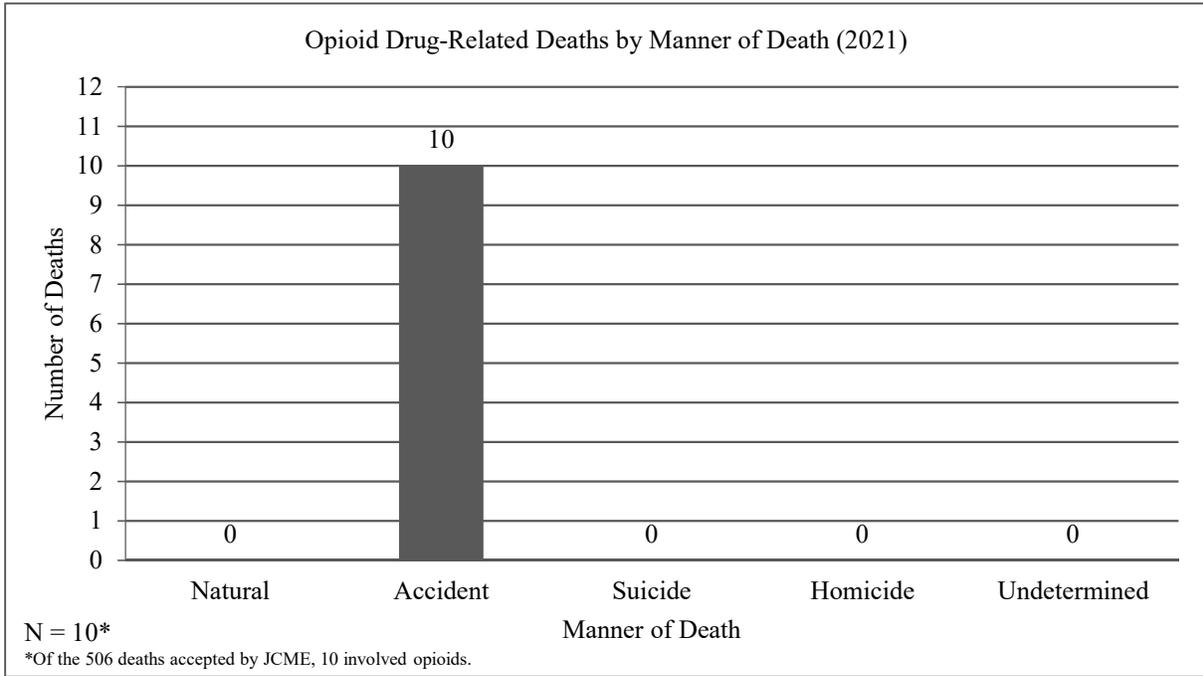


Figure 7.12.

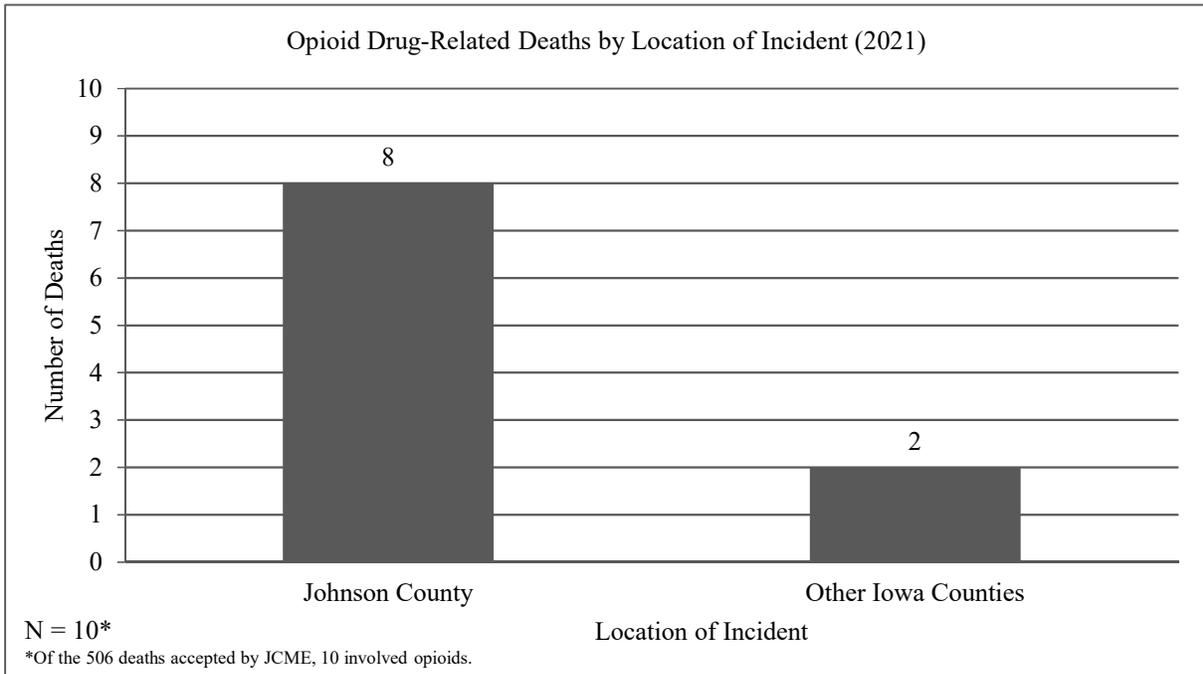


Figure 7.13.

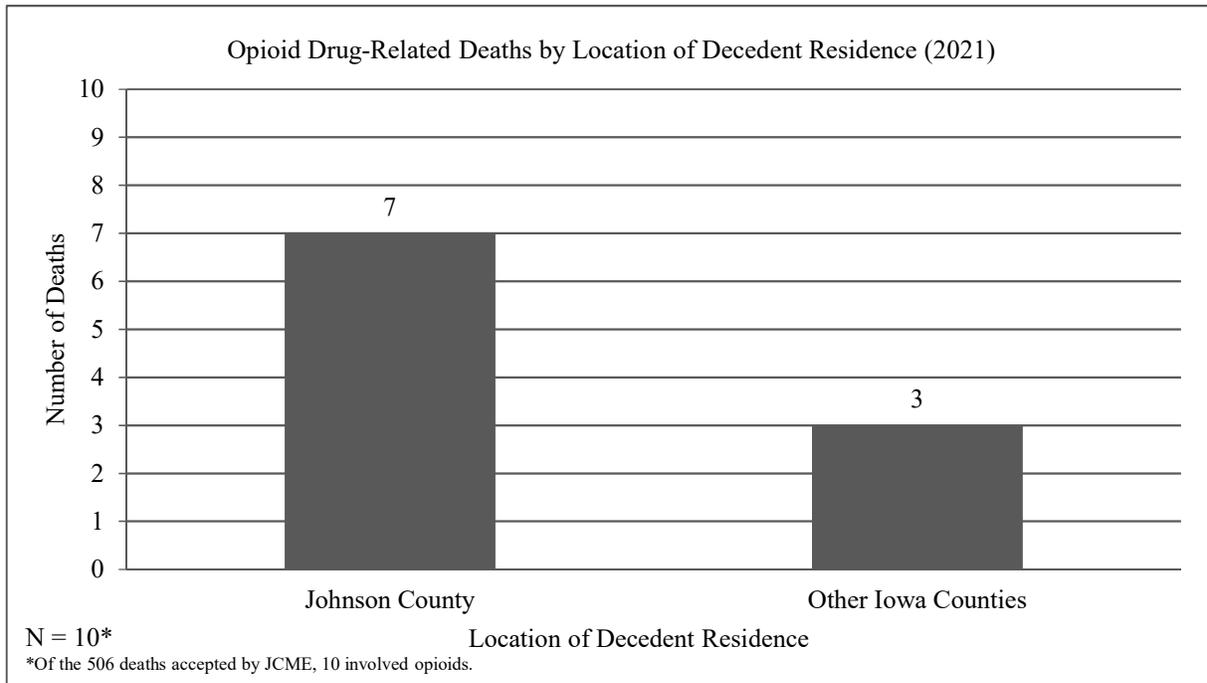


Figure 7.14.

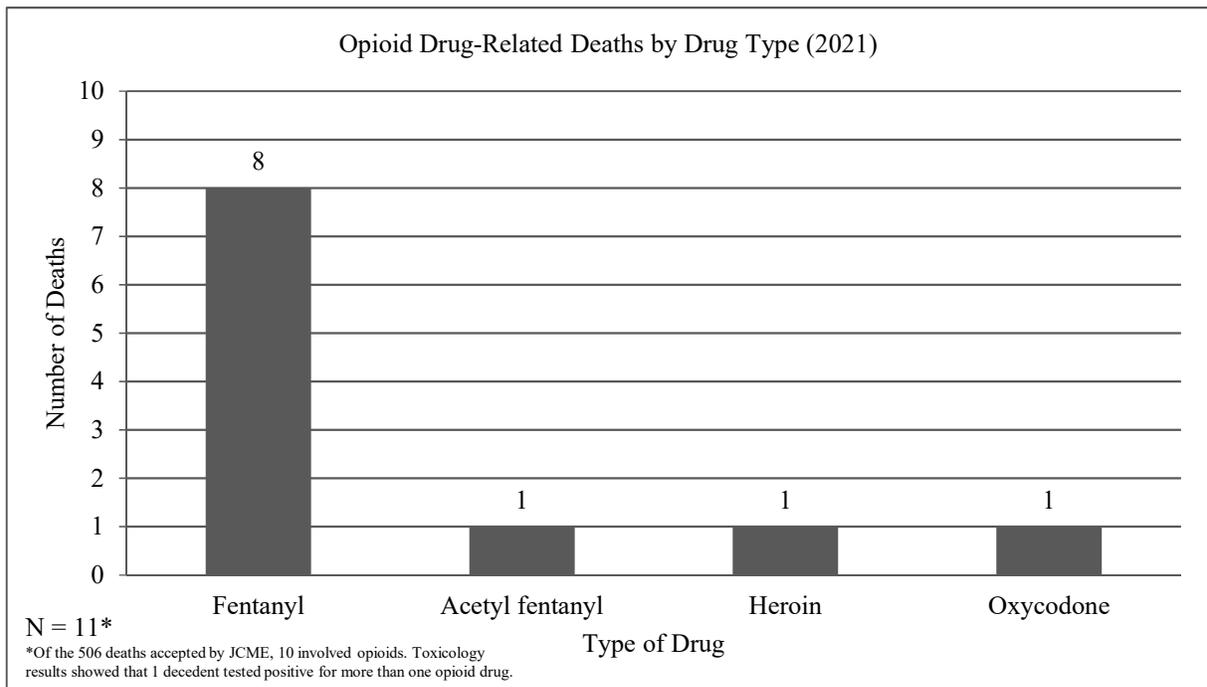


Figure 7.15.

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COVID-19 Deaths

Of the 1179 deaths reported to JCME in 2021, 274 decedents were determined to have died from COVID-19. Of these 274 decedents, the sex distribution was 166 males to 108 females with the most common age range of 70-79 years (79 decedents) followed by 60-69 years (58 decedents). Fifty-four decedents were Johnson County residents and 170 were residents of other counties in Iowa. Additionally, there were 8 decedents who were in the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections at the time of death and 42 decedents who were out-of-state residents. Twenty-two decedents were identified to have COVID-19 at the time of death, but COVID-19 was determined to not have caused or contributed to death. These 22 decedents were classified to have died with COVID-19, not from it.

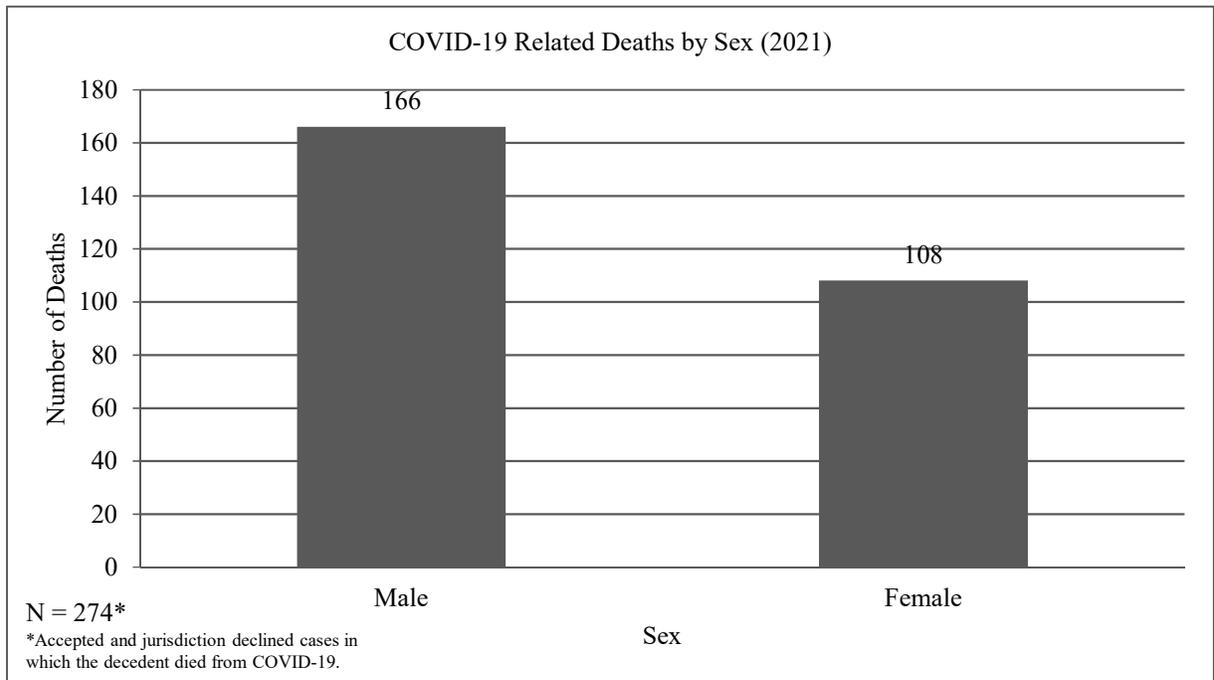


Figure 8.1.

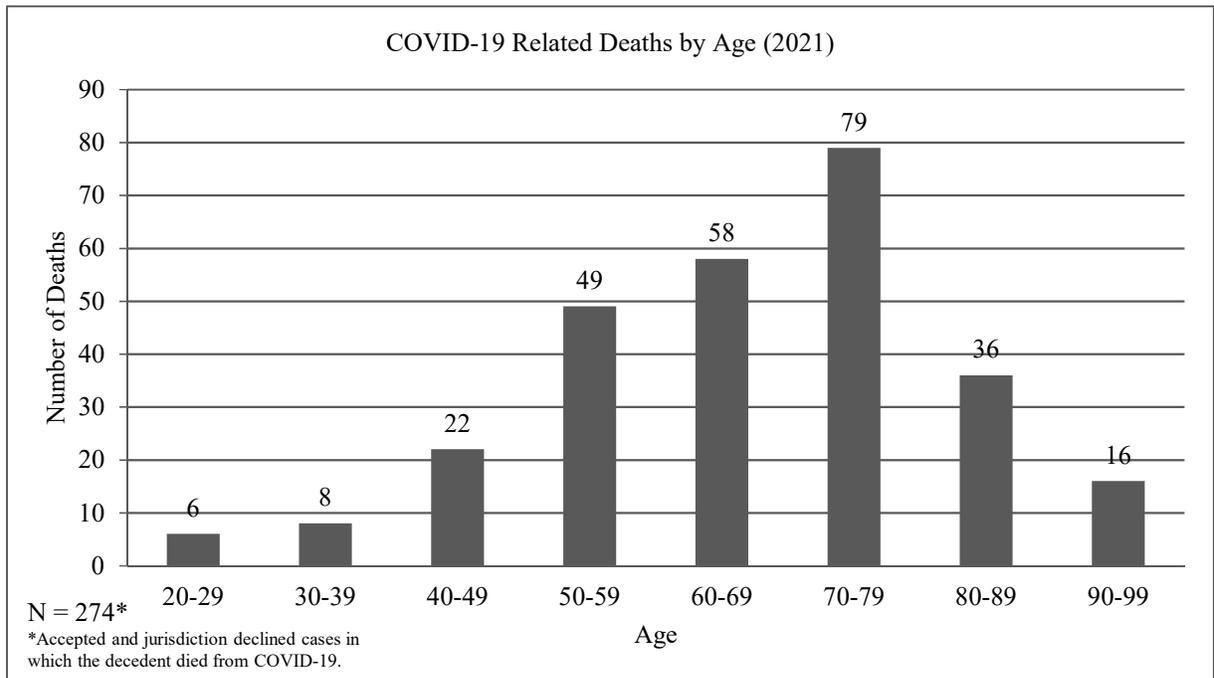


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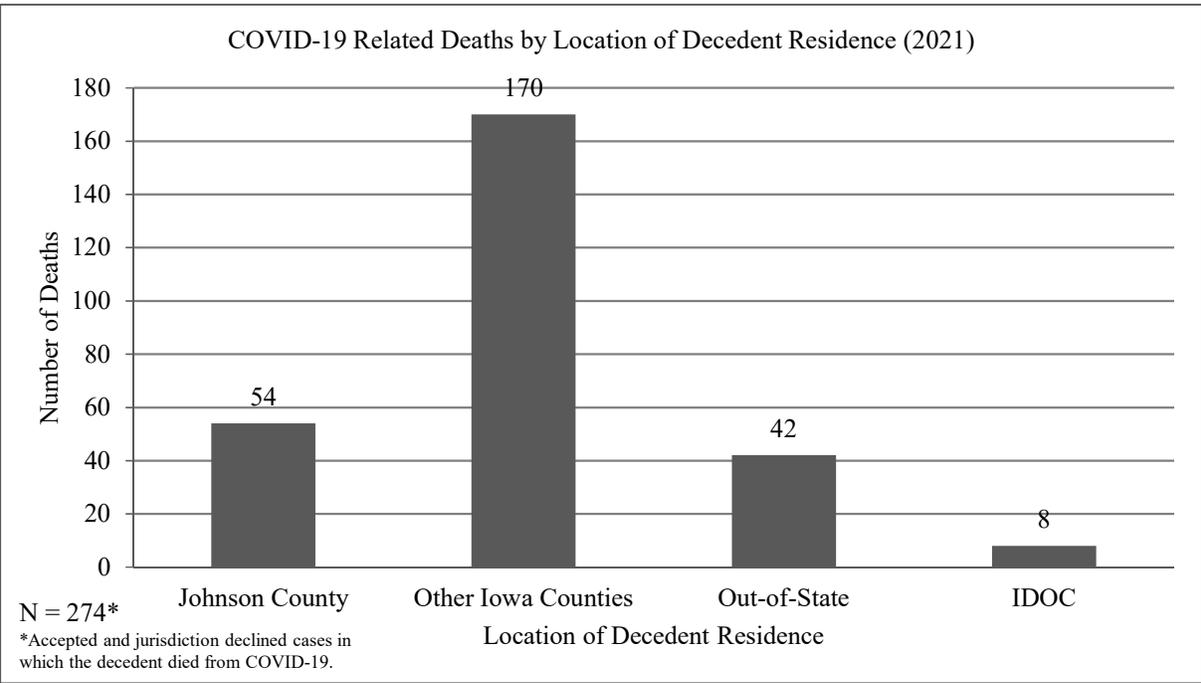


Figure 8.3.

Table 8.1. COVID-19 Related Deaths by Other Iowa Counties Location of Decedent Residence (2021)

County	Number of Decedents
Washington	19
Scott	16
Black Hawk	14
Henry	13
Muscatine	12
Lee	10
Des Moines	6
Louisa	6
Iowa	5
Linn	5
Wapello	5
Cedar	4
Clinton	4
Delaware	4
Jefferson	4
Cherokee	3
Dubuque	3
Jackson	3
Jasper	3
Marshall	3
Poweshiek	3
Bremer	2
Buchanan	2
Clayton	2
Keokuk	2
Kossuth	2
Story	2
Van Buren	2
Adair	1
Chickasaw	1
Clarke	1
Davis	1
Fayette	1
Greene	1
Hamilton	1
Humbolt	1
Ida	1
Mahaska	1
Monona	1

Table 8.2. COVID-19 Related Deaths by Out-of-State Location of Decedent Residence (2021)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	12
Whiteside, IL	8
Henderson, IL	2
Mercer, IL	2
Benton, TN	1
Brown, IL	1
Bureau, IL	1
Carroll, IL	1
Dallas, TX	1
Flagler, FL	1
Grant, WI	1
Hancock, IL	1
Henry, IL	1
Jackson, IL	1
La Crosse, WI	1
Lake, IL	1
Lincoln, OR	1
McDonough, IL	1
Randolph, IN	1
St. Croix, WI	1
Schuyler, MO	1
Tazewell, IL	1

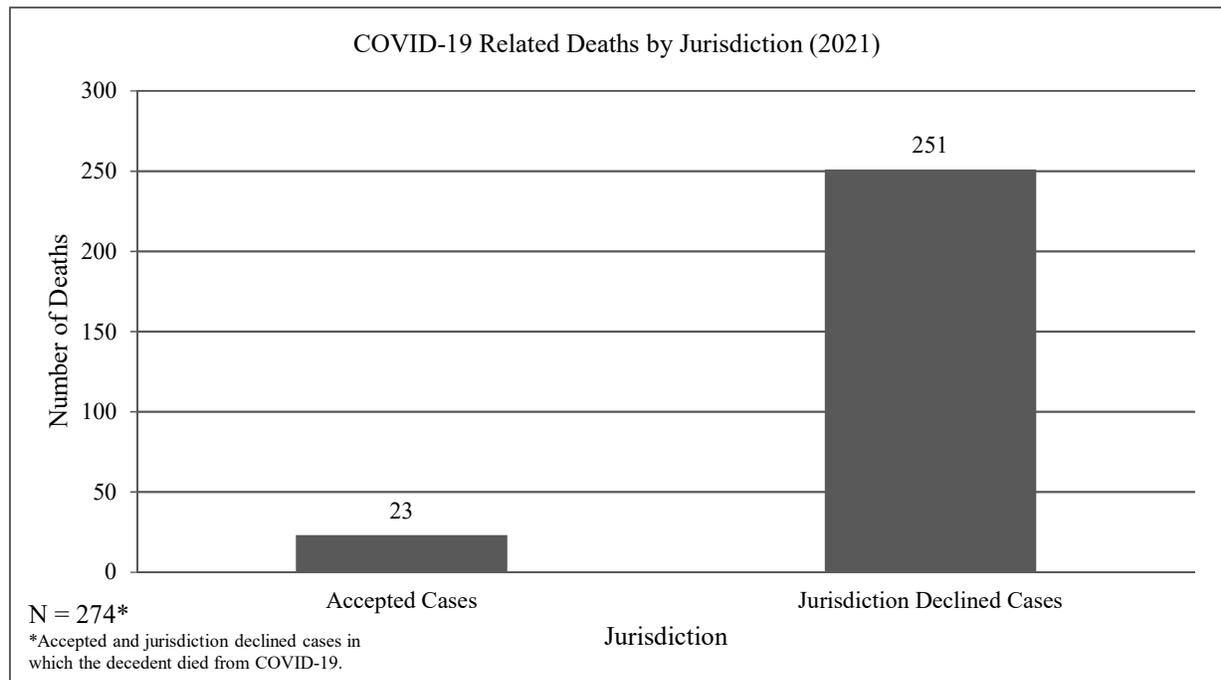


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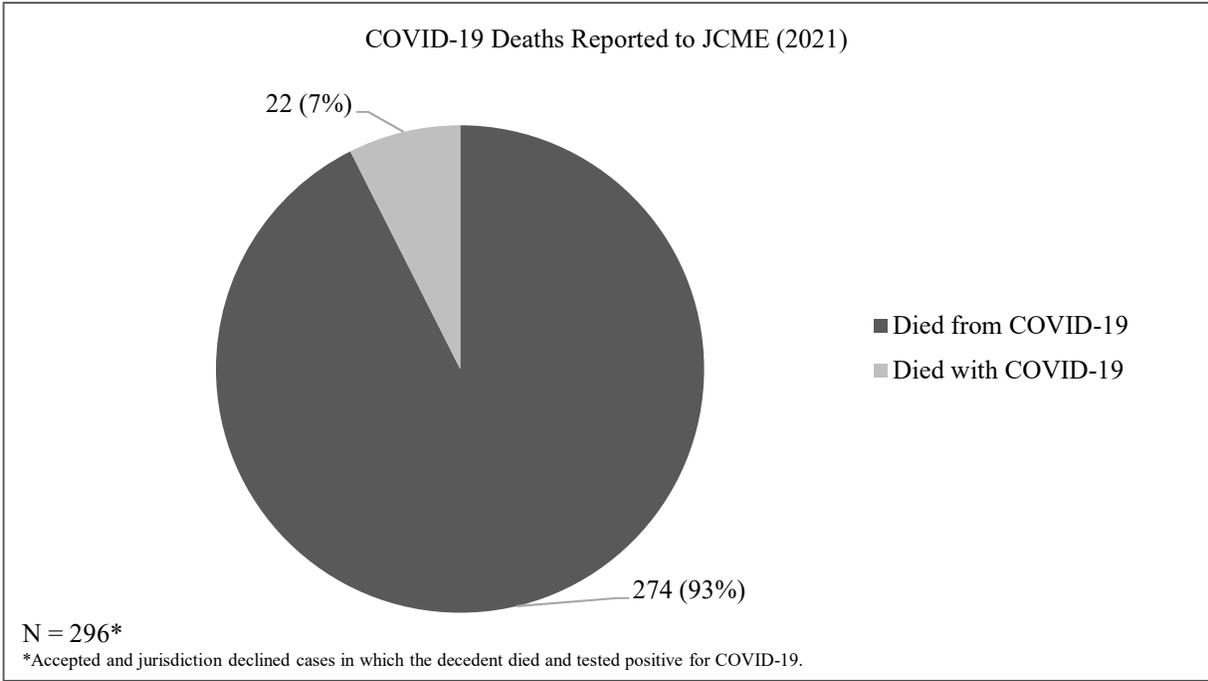


Figure 8.5.

Older Adult Deaths

In 2021, JCME accepted jurisdiction of 332 deaths that involved adults aged 60 years and older. Of these, 152 were residents of Johnson County, 136 were residents of other counties in Iowa, 30 were out-of-state residents, and 14 were Iowa Department of Corrections offenders. One hundred and sixty-seven of these deaths were certified as accident, 156 as natural, 7 as suicide, and 2 as undetermined.

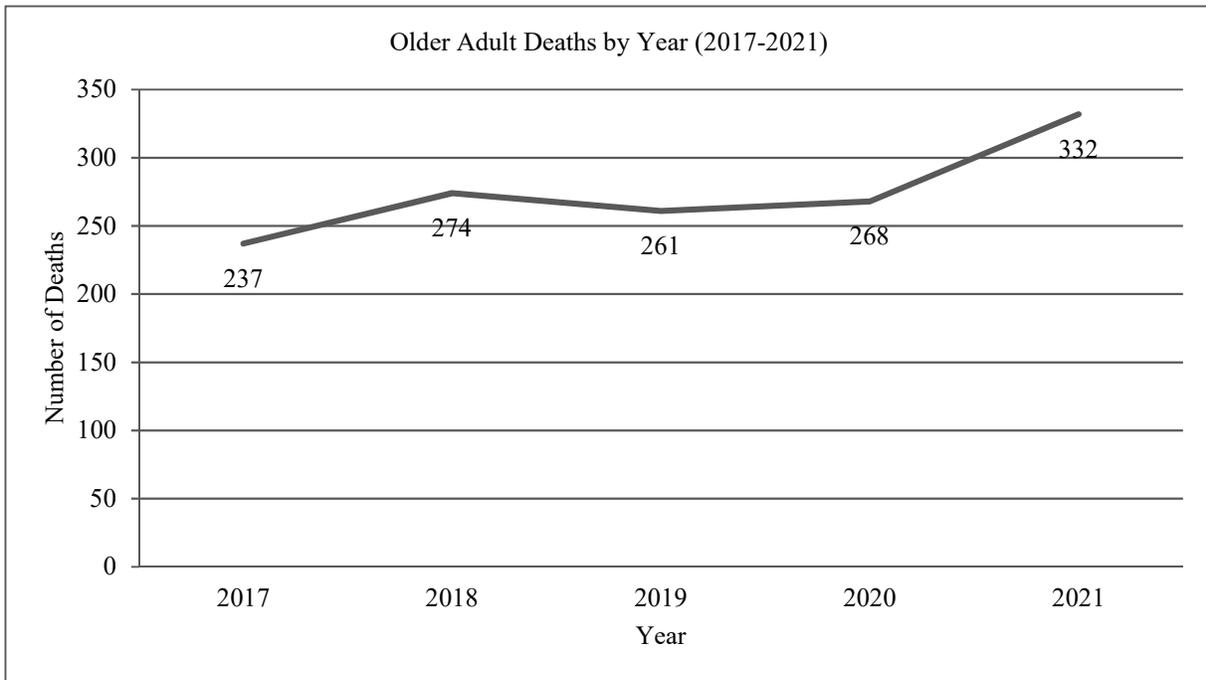


Figure 9.1.

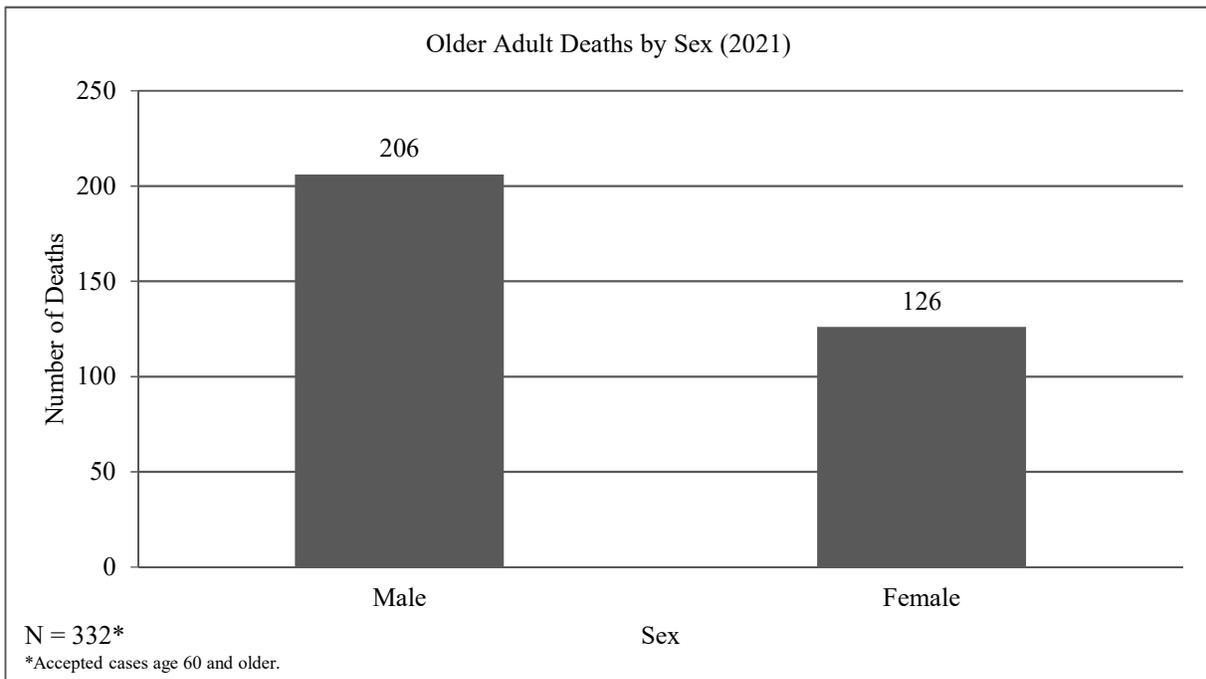


Figure 9.2.

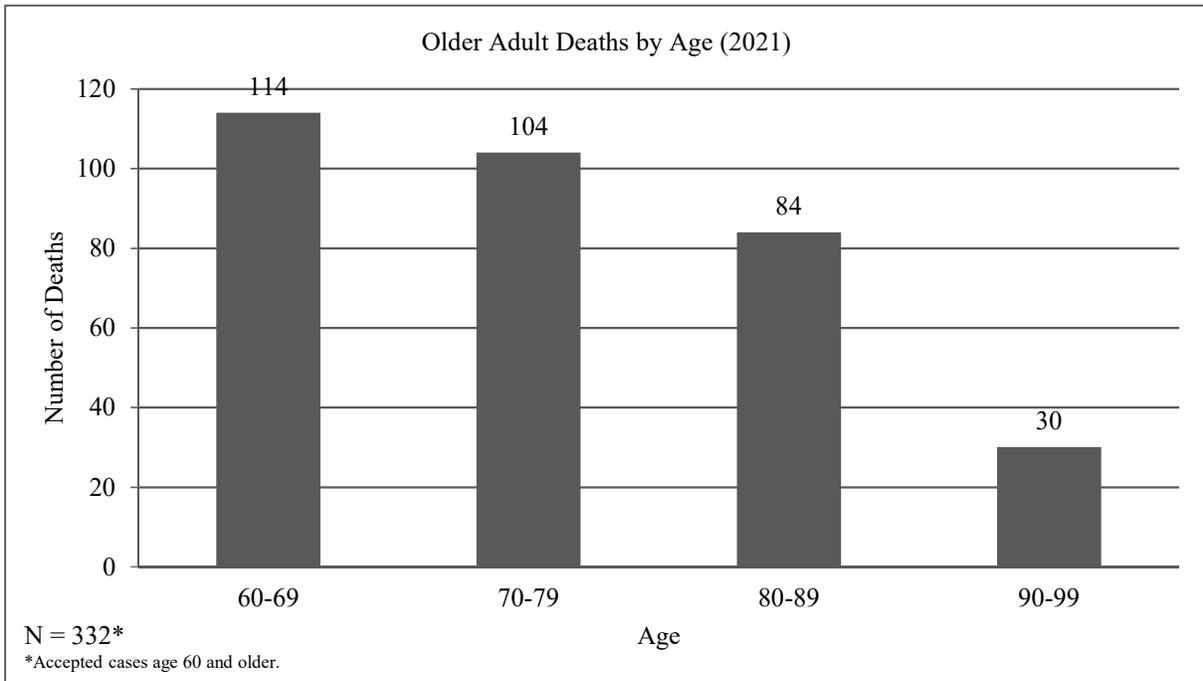


Figure 9.3.

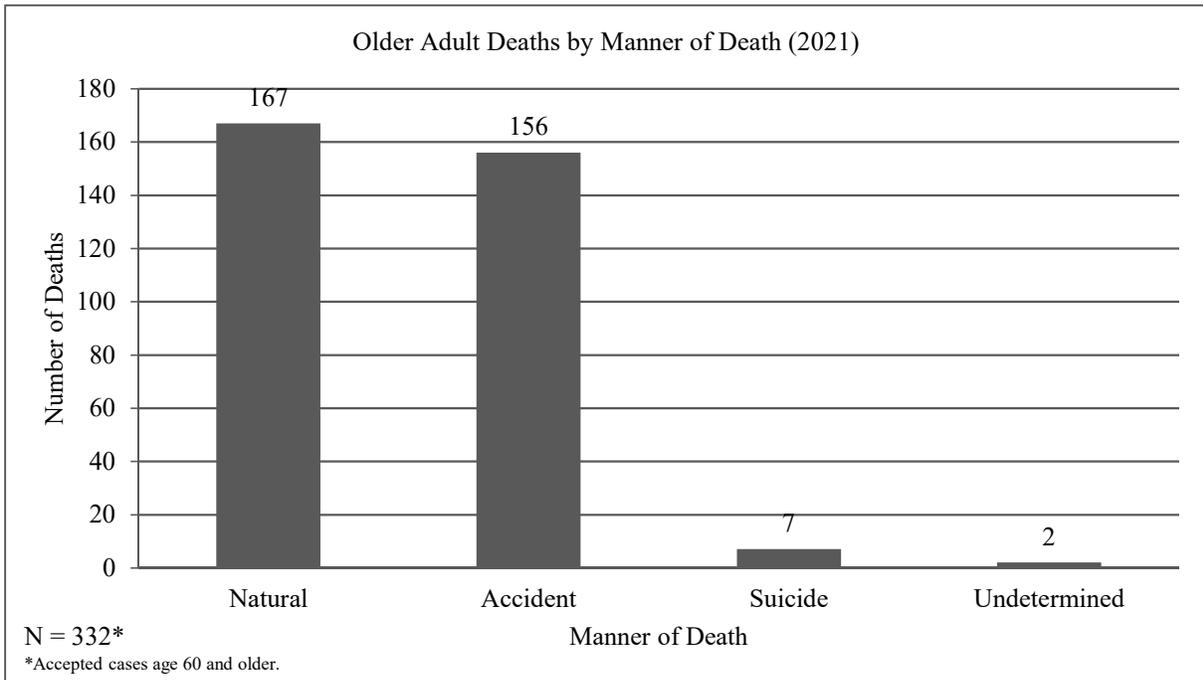


Figure 9.4.

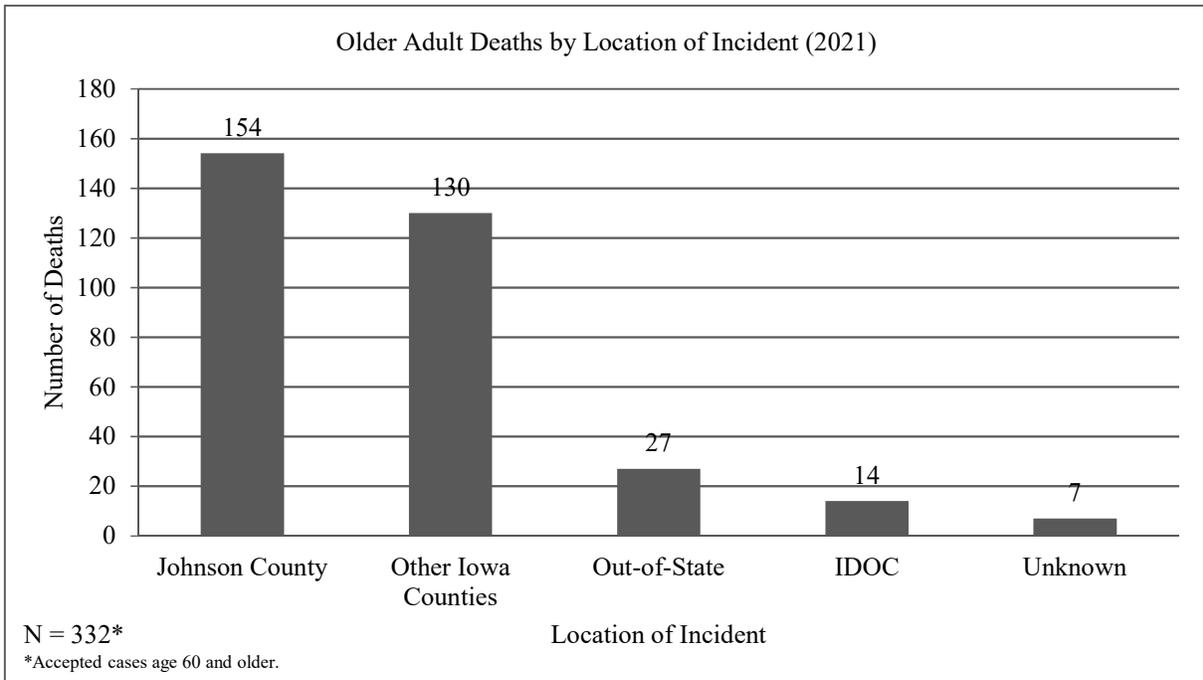


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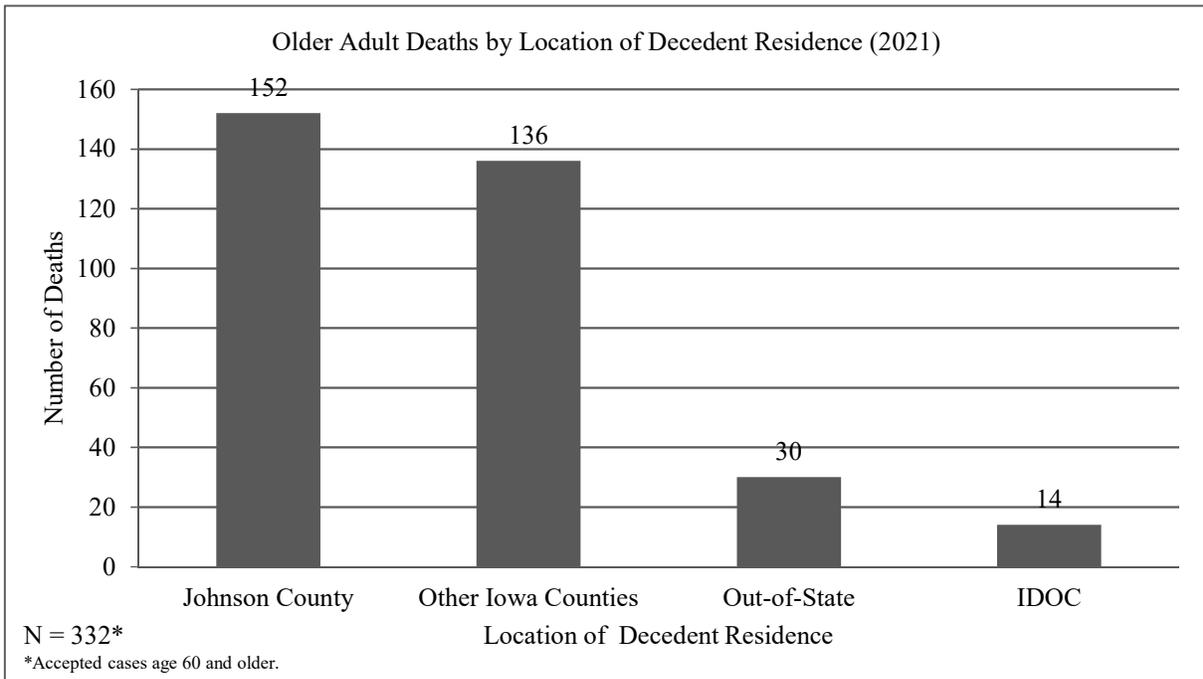


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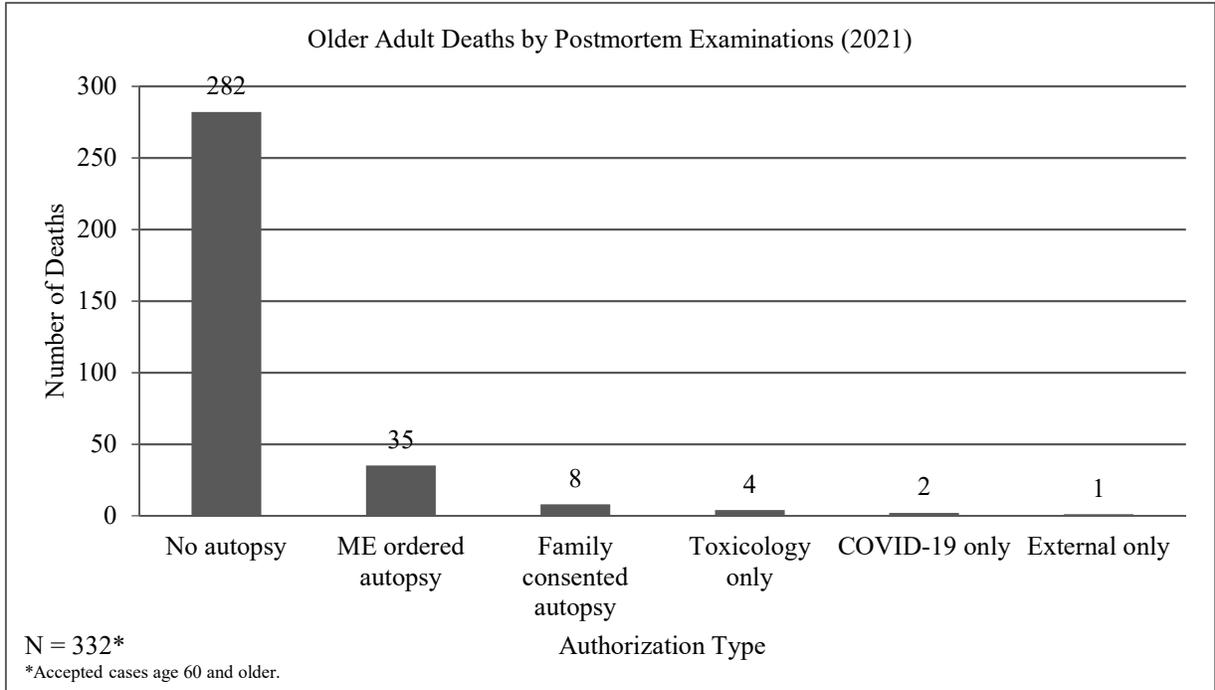


Figure 9.7.

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Older Adult Fall-Related Deaths

There were 332 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 96 in which the death was the result of a fall. The majority of these fall-related deaths, 58, occurred from a standing height and 45 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 54 of the falls.

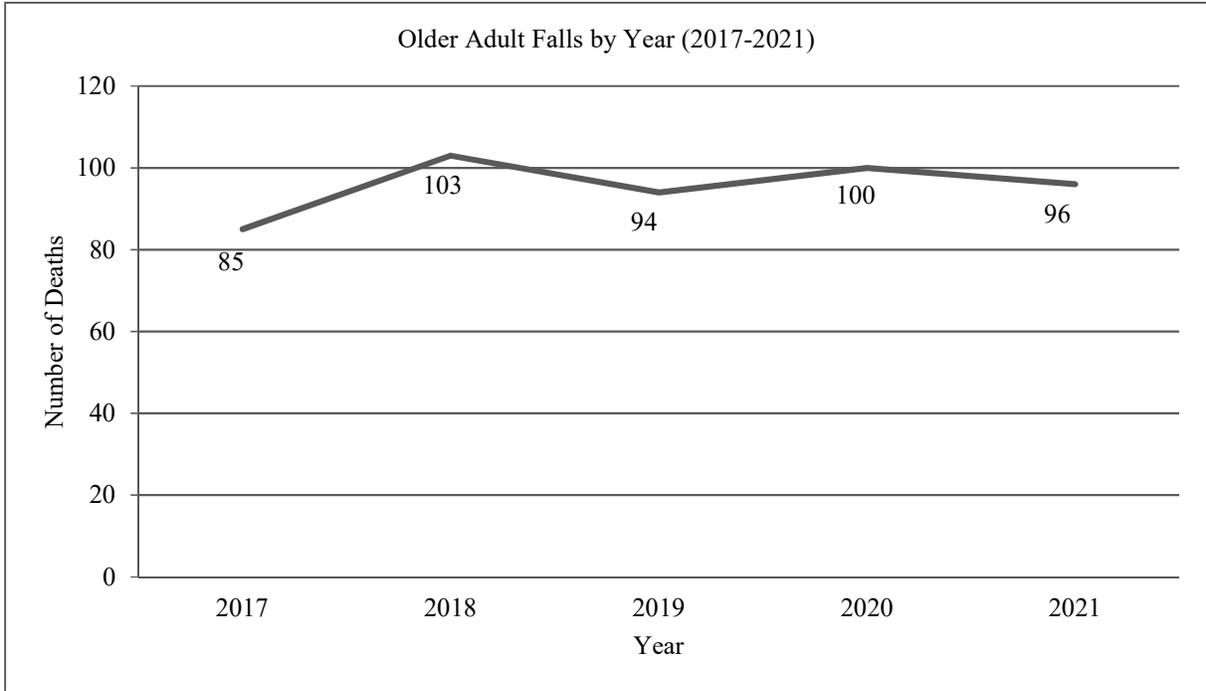


Figure 10.1.

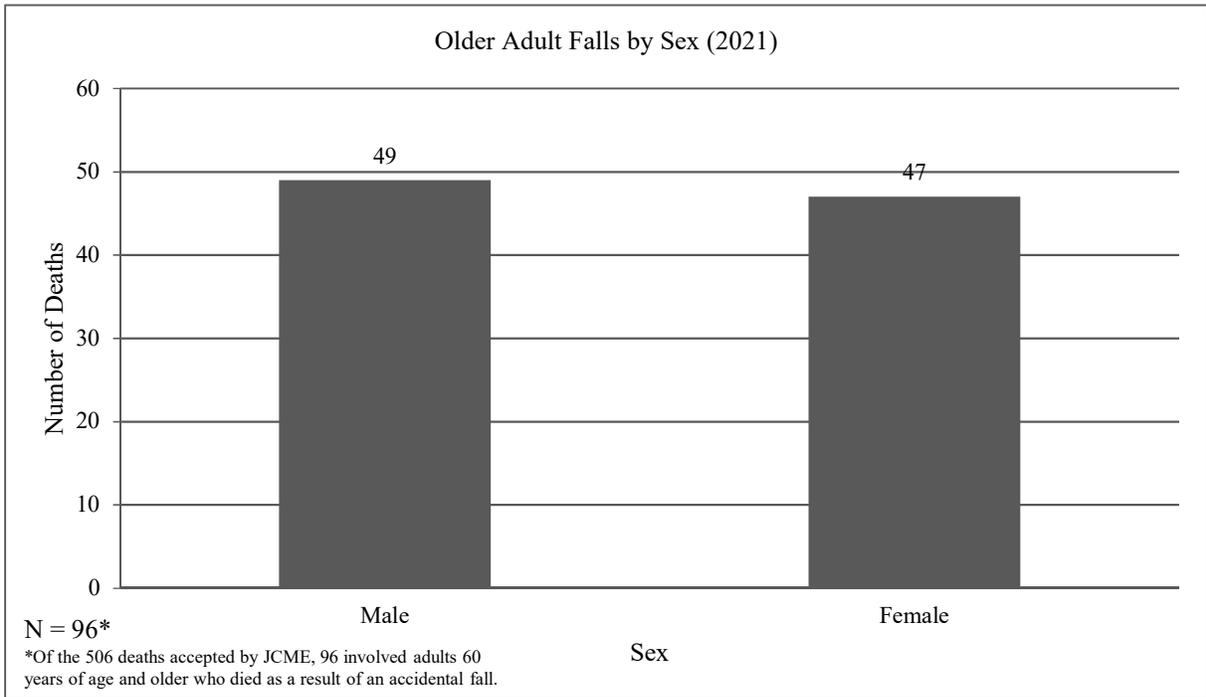


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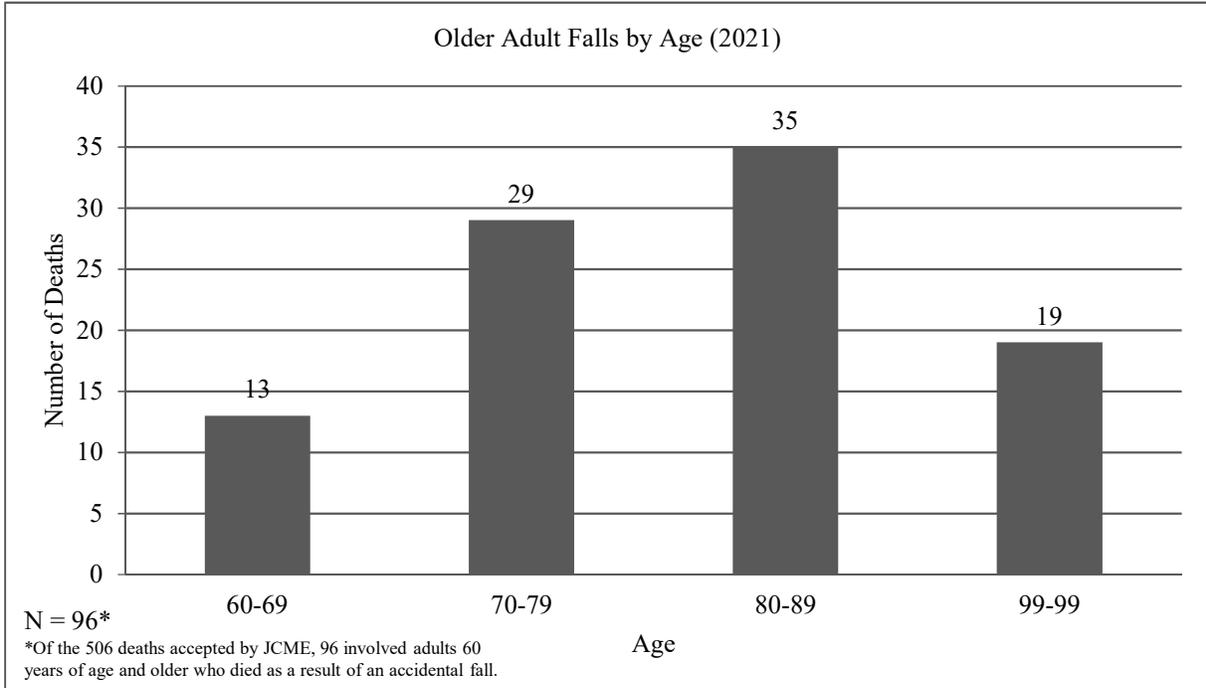


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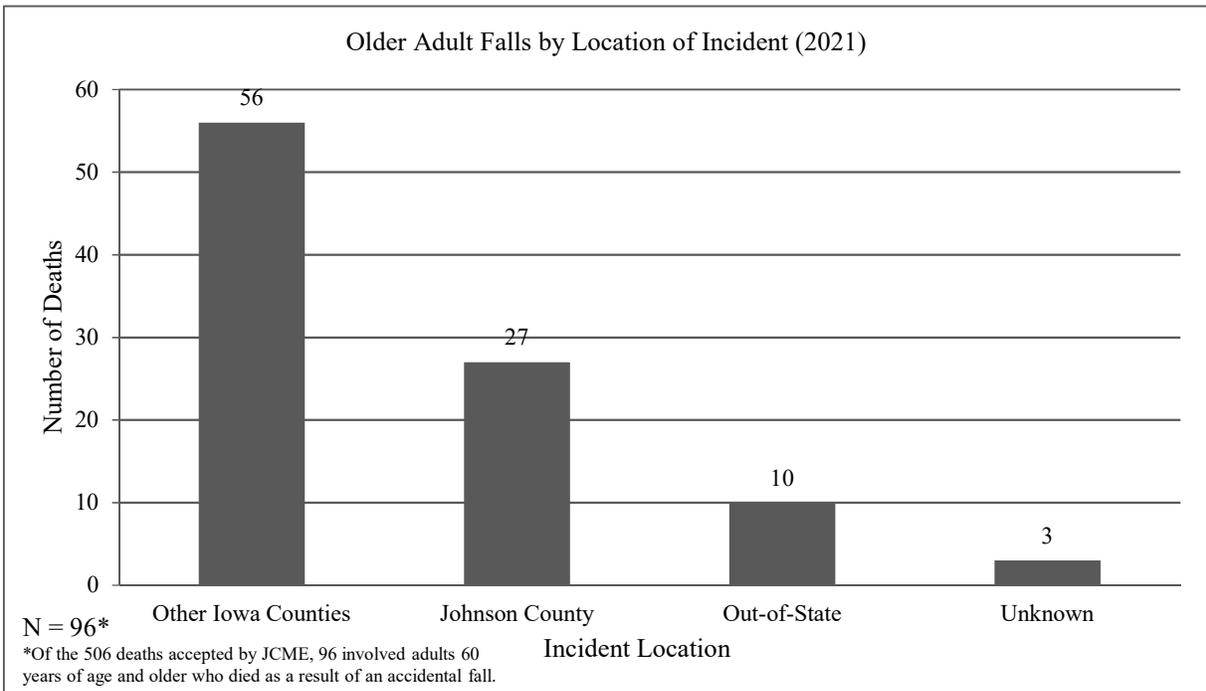


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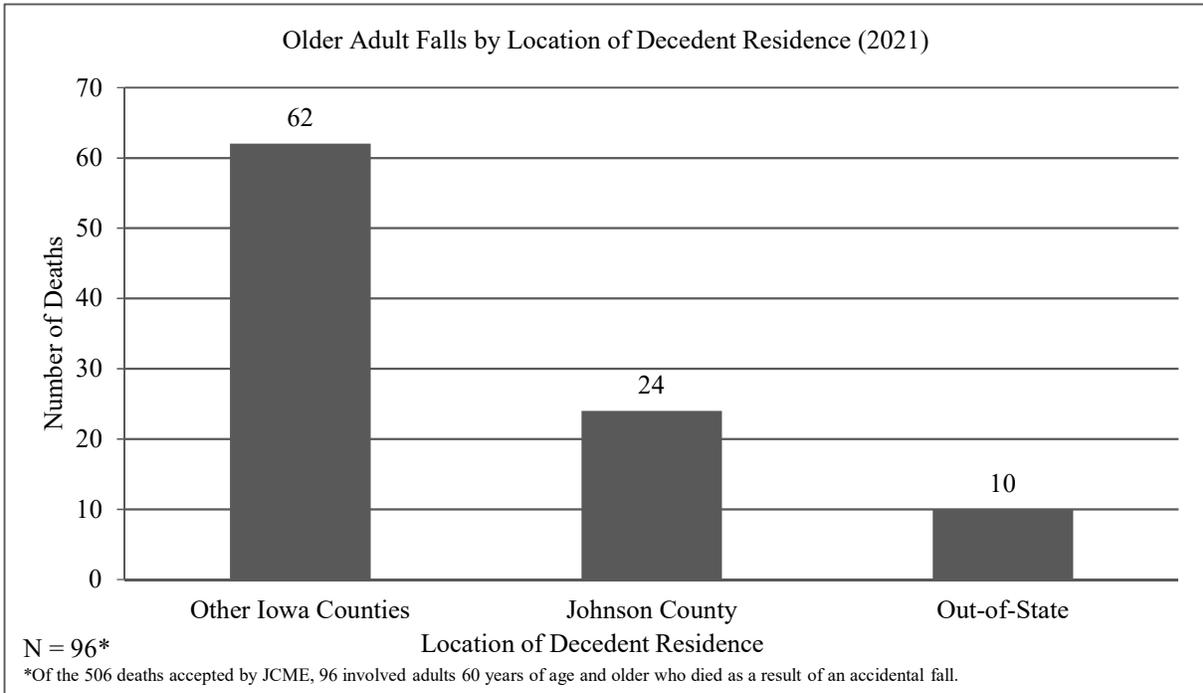


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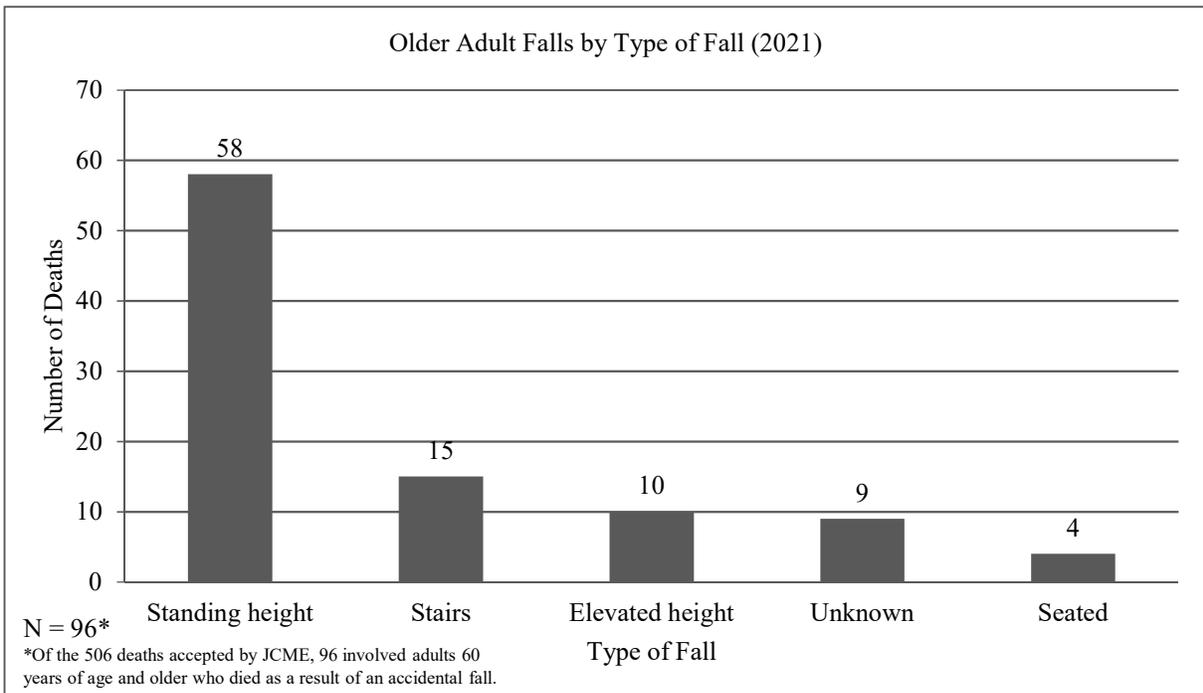


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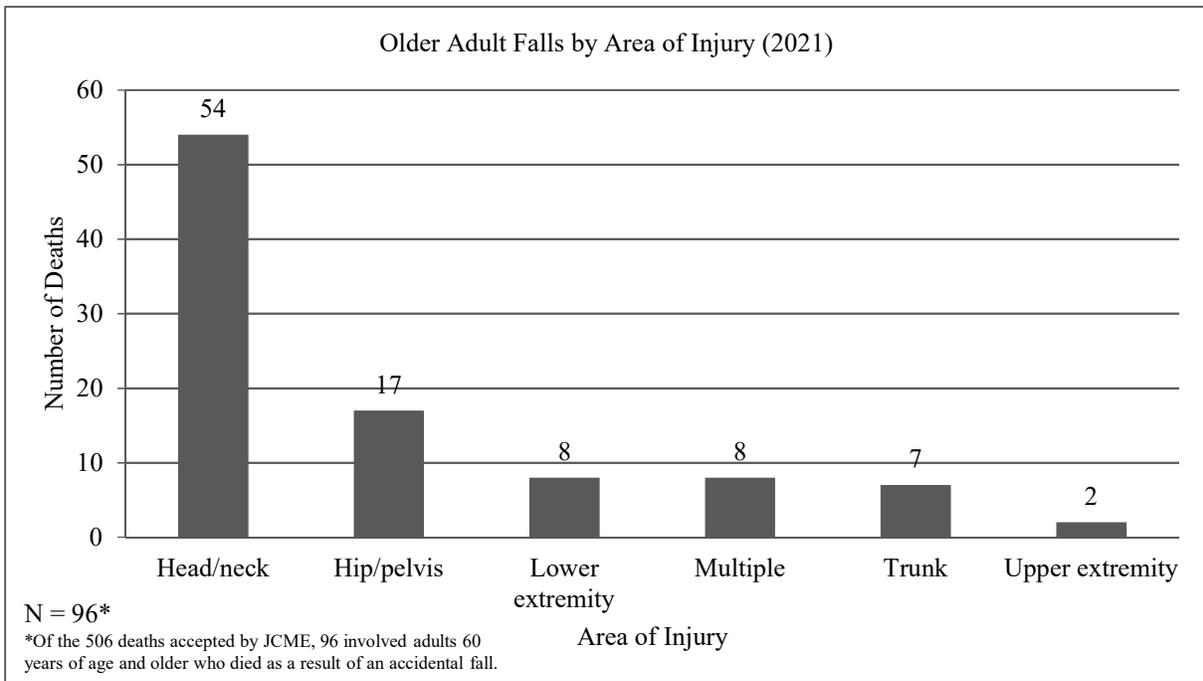


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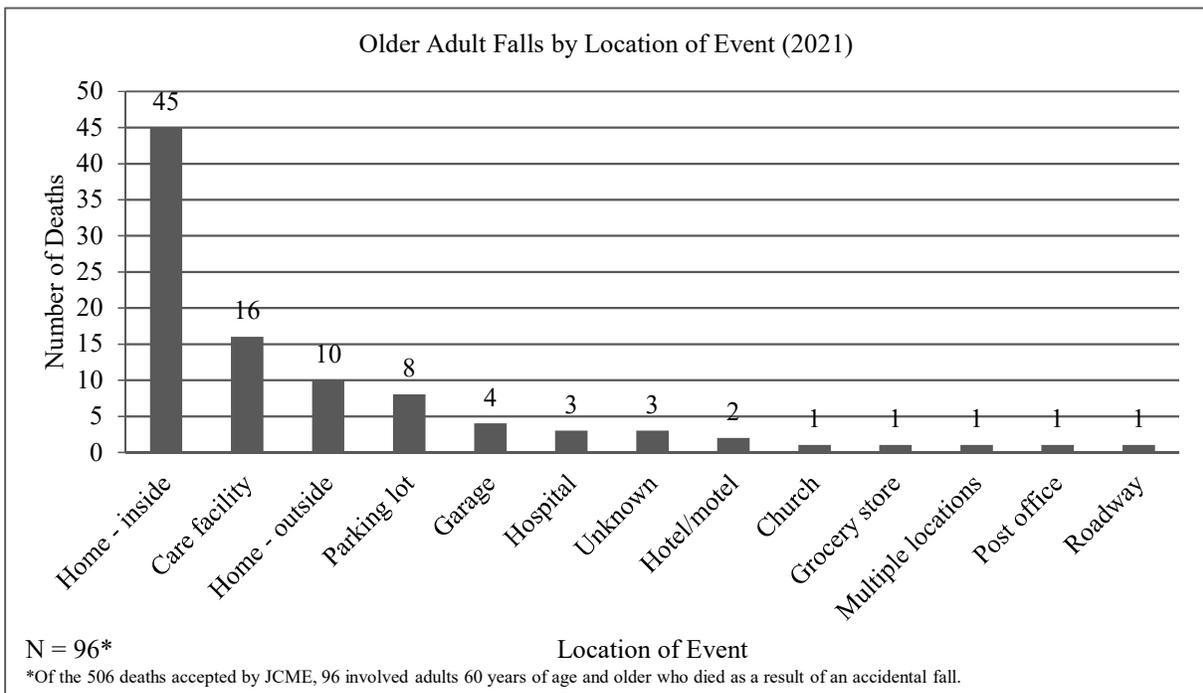


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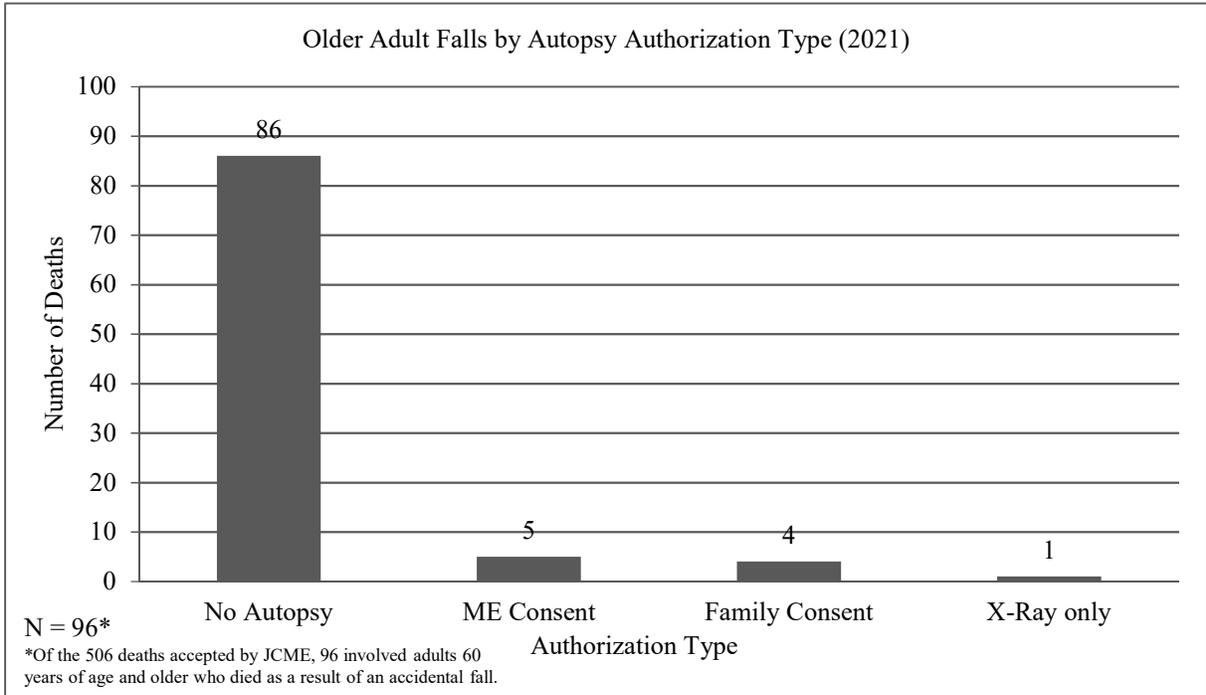


Figure 10.9.

Child Deaths

In 2021, there were 12 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 12 deaths, 6 were classified as accident followed by 3 as undetermined, 2 as suicide, and 1 as natural. For 6 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County with the remaining 6 occurring in another Iowa County. Of these 12 deaths accepted by JCME, there were 4 deaths of infants one year of age or less of which 2 were classified as accident and 2 as undetermined. An autopsy was performed on all 4 infant deaths.

In 2021, there were 2 sleep-related infant deaths, 1 of which were classified as accident and 1 as undetermined. The incident location occurred in another Iowa County for both of these deaths.

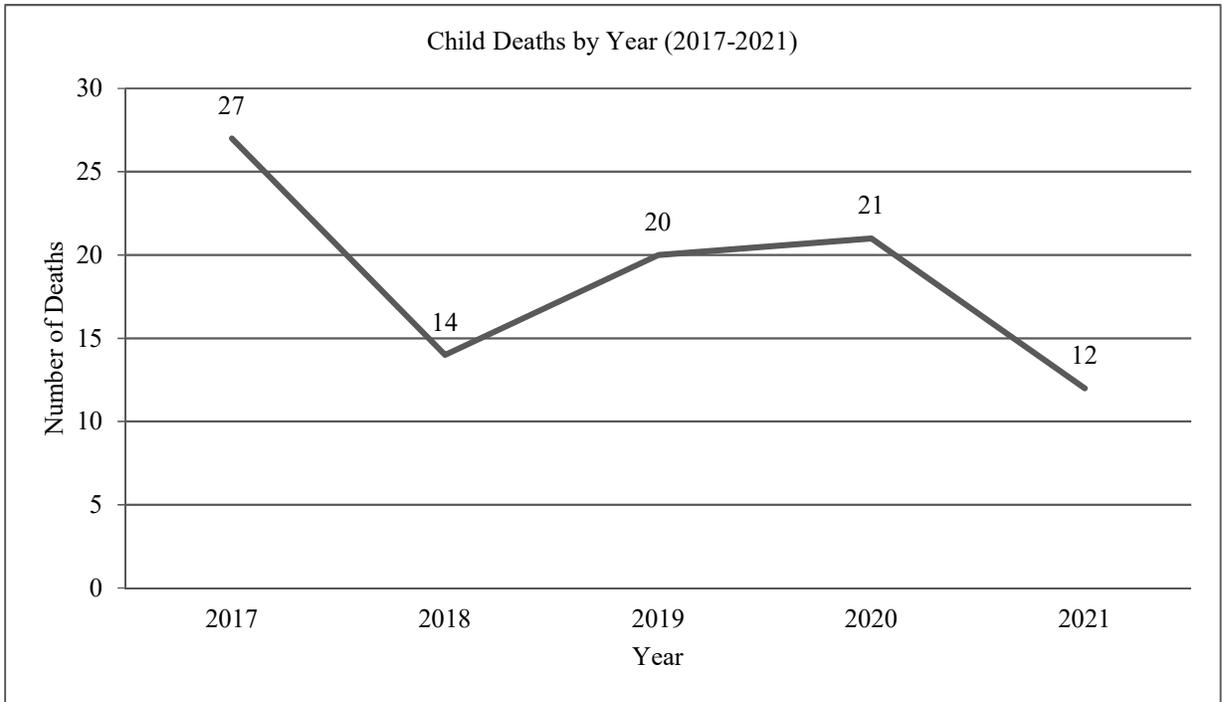


Figure 11.1.

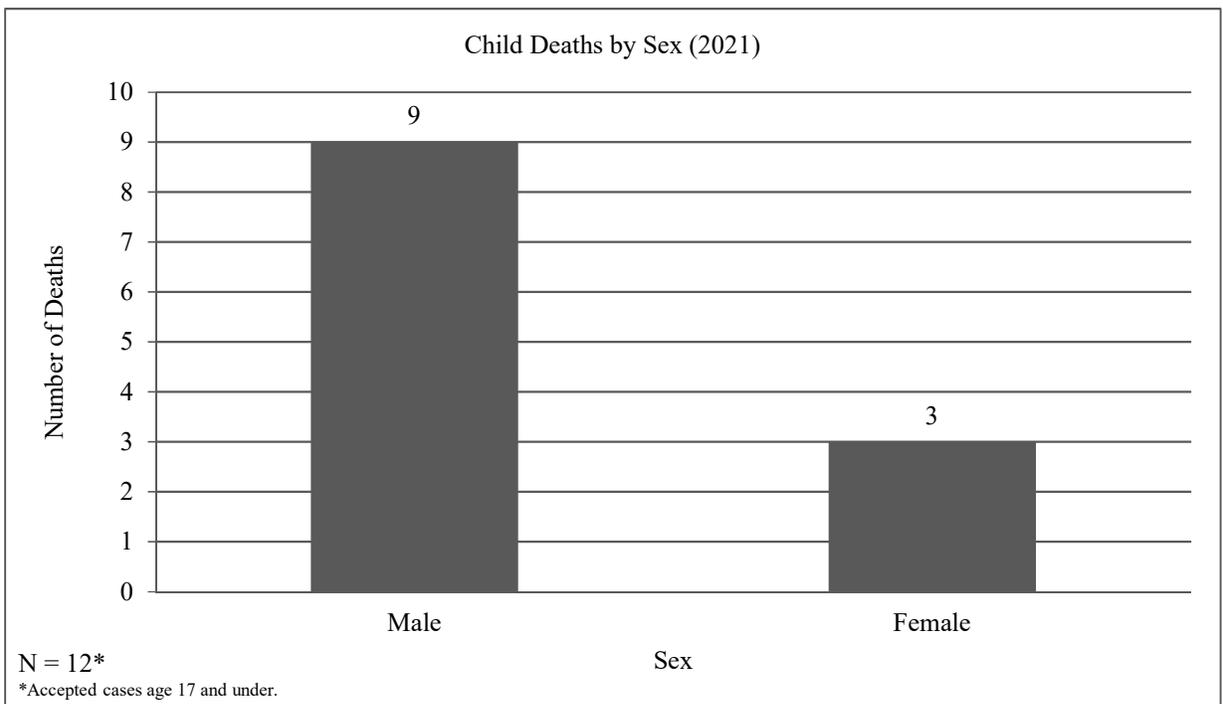


Figure 11.2.

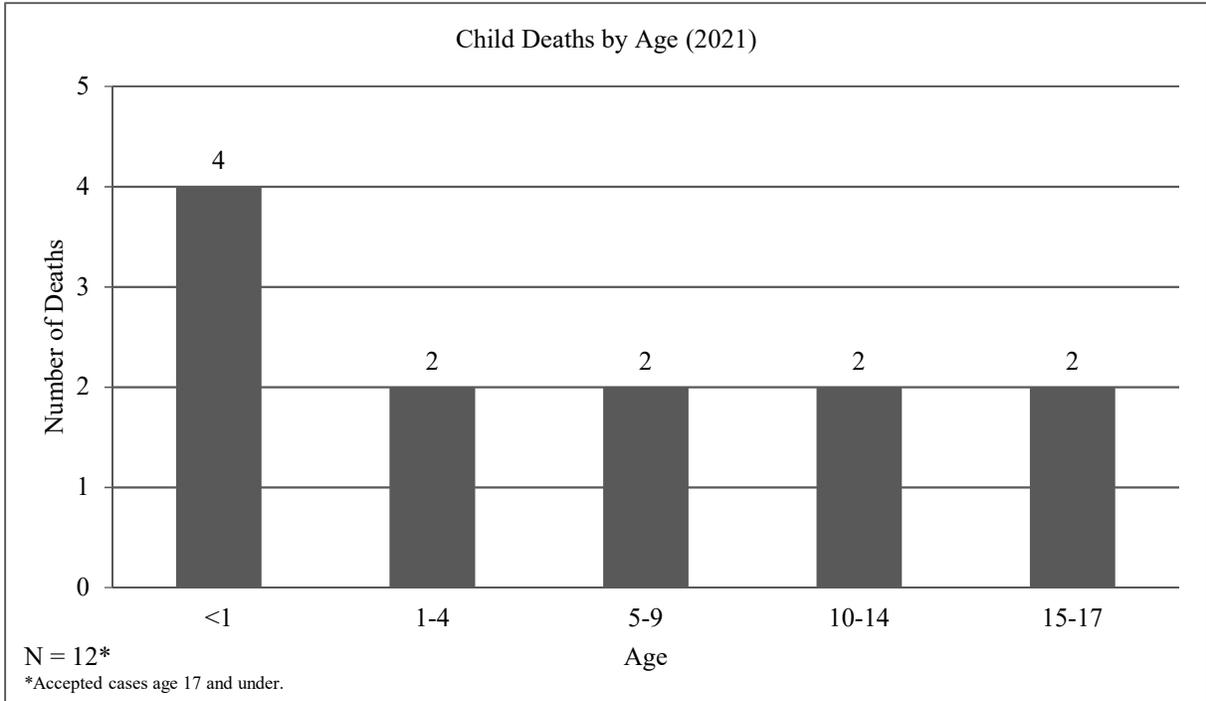


Figure 11.3.

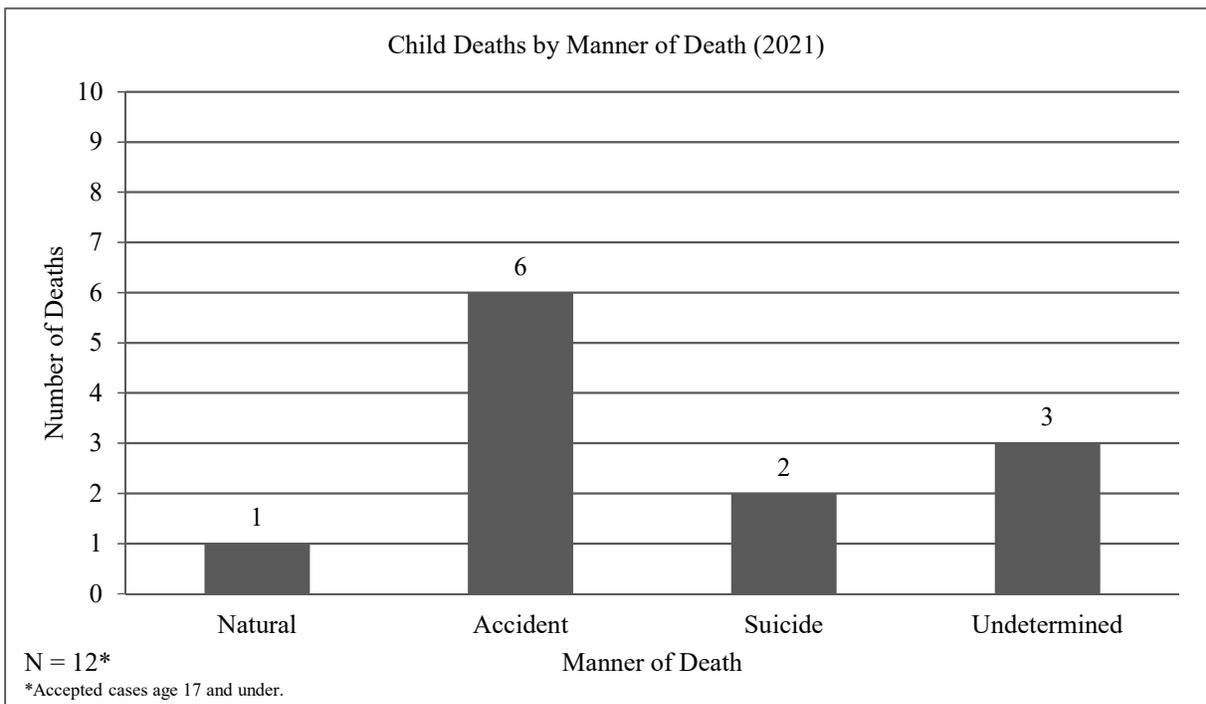


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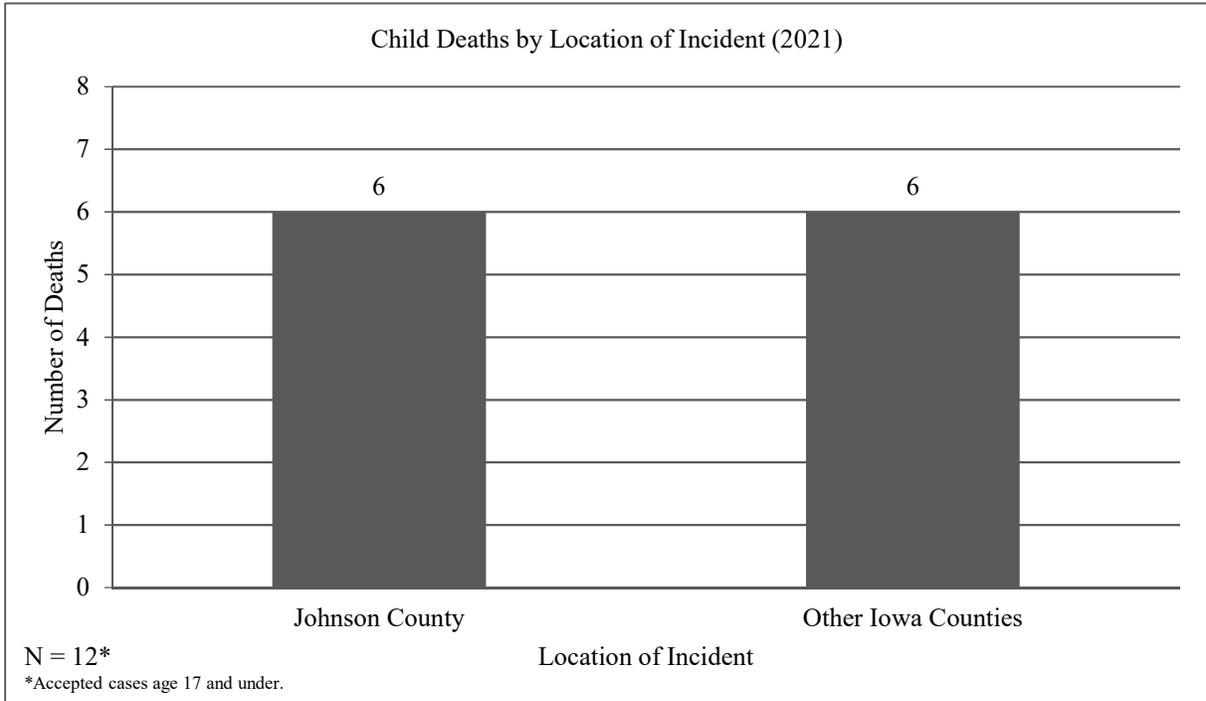


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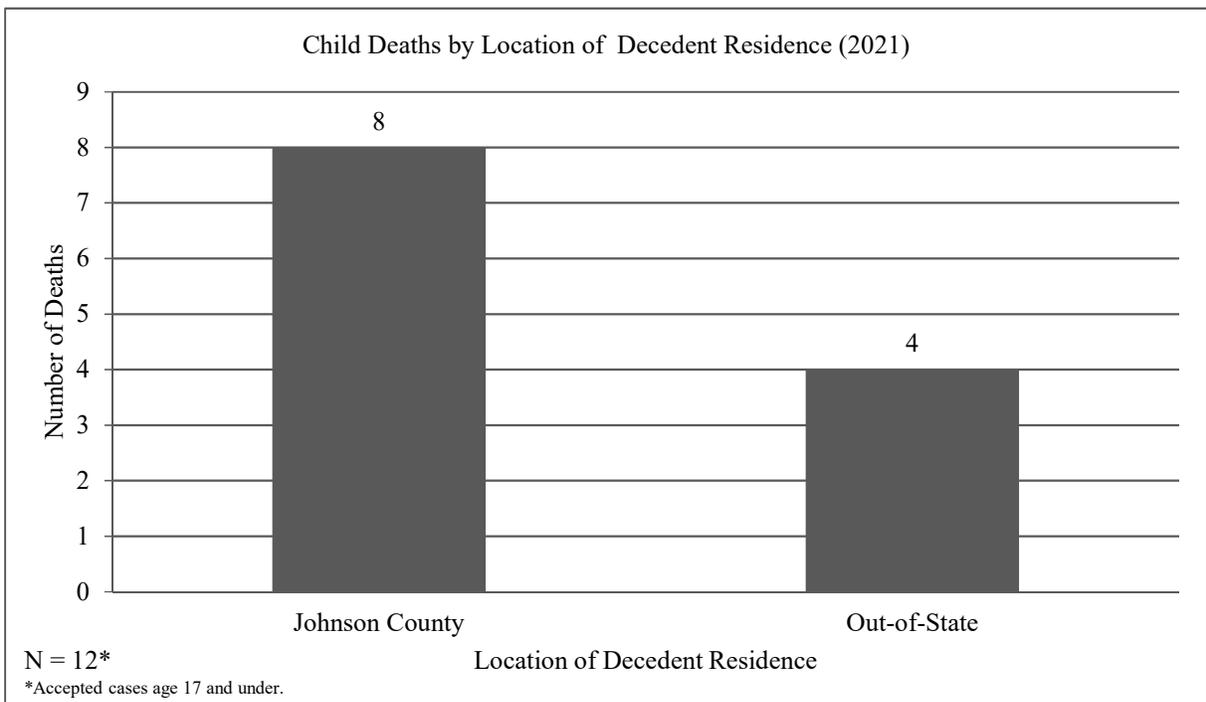


Figure 11.6.

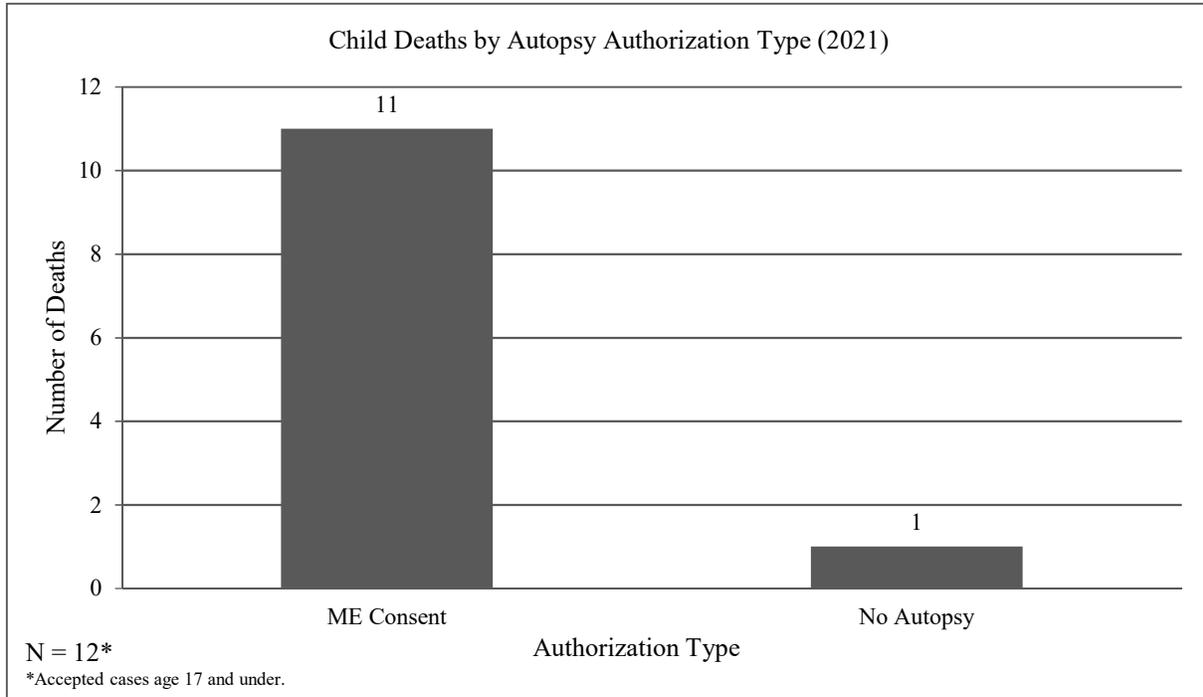


Figure 11.7.

Table 11.1. Infant Sleep-Related Deaths (2021)*

Age	Sex	Cause of Death	Manner of Death	Location of Incident
5 months	F	Complications of resuscitated cardiopulmonary arrest due to positional asphyxia and possible smothering	Accident	Other Iowa County
4 months	M	Complications of resuscitated cardiopulmonary arrest of unknown etiology	Undetermined	Other Iowa County

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

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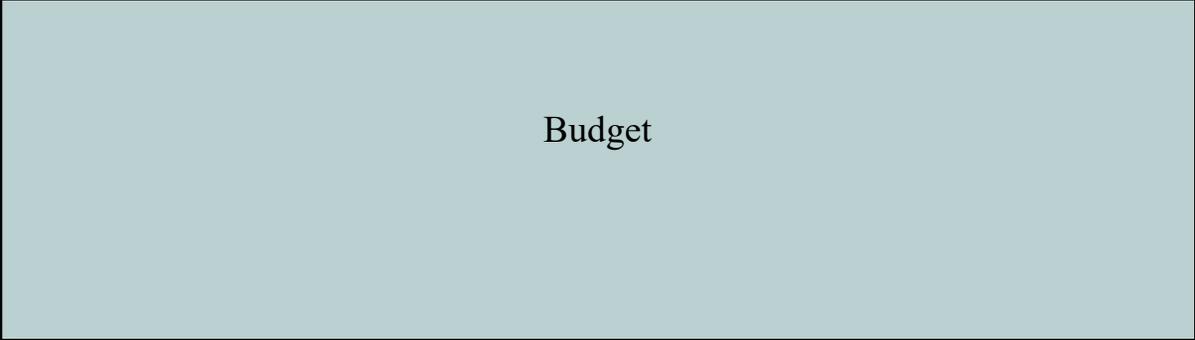
Fetal Deaths

In 2021, JCME accepted jurisdiction of 1 fetal death. Fetal deaths are not assigned a manner of death.

Table 12.1. Fetal Deaths (2021)*

Age	Sex	Cause of Death	County of Incident	County of Residence	Location of Death	Autopsy Authorization Type
36 weeks gestation	F	Intrauterine fetal demise	Muscatine County	Muscatine County	UIHC	Family consent autopsy

*Manners of death are not assigned to fetal deaths.



Budget

Johnson County's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. In fiscal year 2021, JCME was 14% under our budgeted expenditures and 12% below our budgeted revenues.

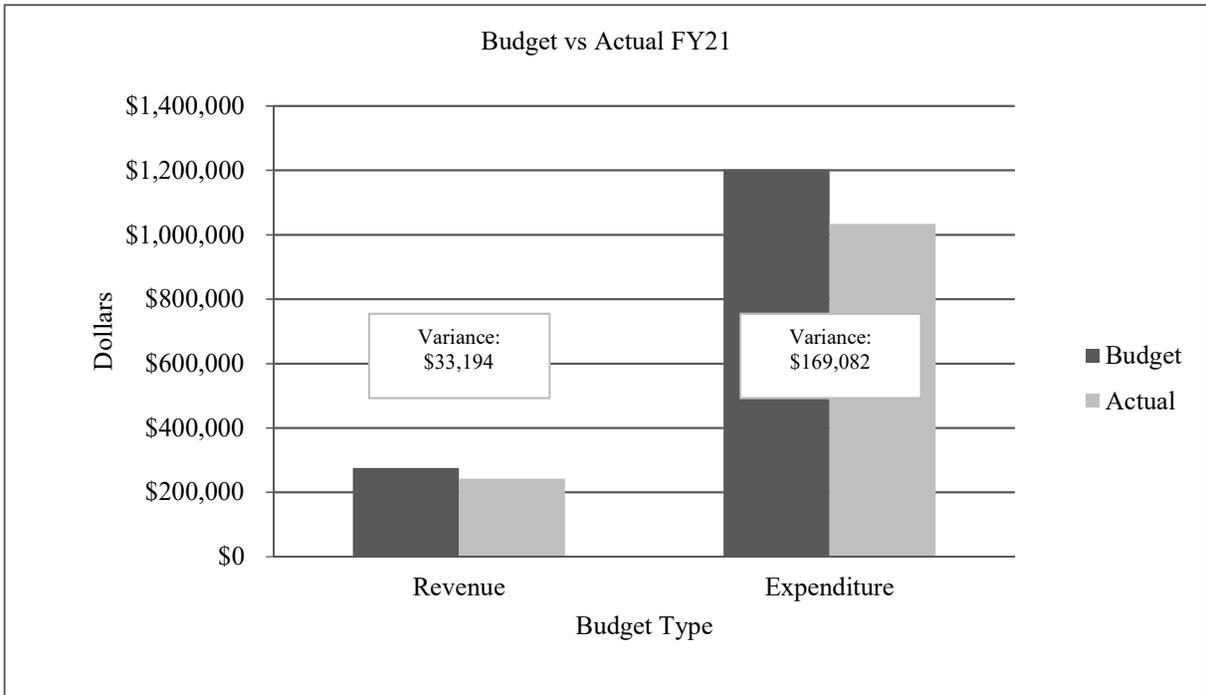
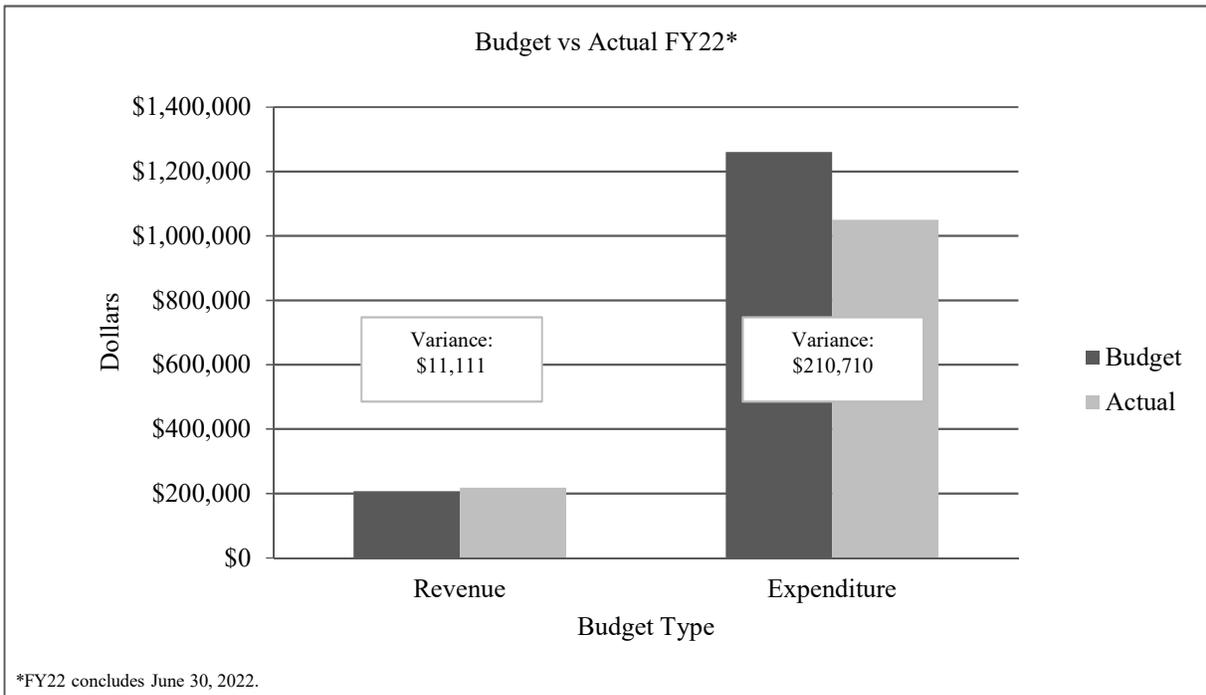


Figure 13.1.



*FY22 concludes June 30, 2022.

Figure 13.2.

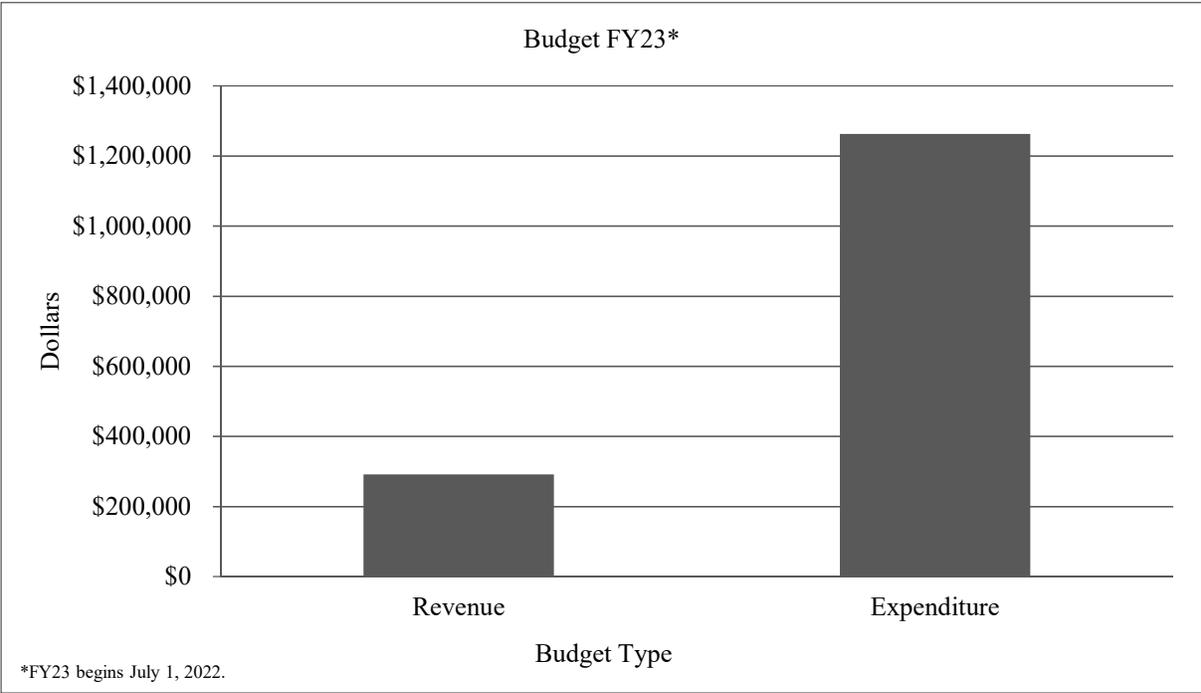


Figure 13.3.

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Organ and Tissue Donation

JCME has an essential role in the coordination of organ and tissue donation. In 2021, 17 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 17 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 24 kidneys, 7 livers, 8 hearts, 2 lungs, and 3 pancreases for transplant. Twenty-one 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 14.1. Organs Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2021)

Organs Transplanted*	
Hearts	8
Lungs (single lungs)	2
Livers	7
Kidneys (single kidneys)	24
Pancreases	3
Small Intestines	1
Total organ donors**	17

*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network
 **Total number of decedents who donated organs

Table 14.2. Tissues Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2021)

Tissues Transplanted*	
Bone Donors	6
Skin Donors	11
Heart Valve Donors	3
Saphenous Vein Donors	15
Femoral Vein Donors	15
Juvenile Cartilage Donors	1
Joint Restoration Donors	12
Total recovered tissue donors**	21

*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network
 **Accepted cases who died out-of-hospital and donated tissue