

Johnson County Medical Examiner Department

Annual Report 2019



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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 February 28, 2020. 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 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 2019, there were 814 deaths reported to JCME. Of these, 418 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 396 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 43% of the 1,897 deaths that occurred in Johnson County in 2019.

Of the 418 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 189 decedents were Johnson County residents and 176 were residents of other counties in Iowa. Additionally, there were 9 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, 45% of deaths accepted and investigated by JCME consisted of Johnson County residents.

Of the 418 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the incident location for 201 decedents was Johnson County. One-hundred and seventy three incidents occurred in other Iowa counties and 9 incidents occurred while in the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections. Additionally, for 26 decedents, the incident location was out-of-state, with one incident location in the Dominican Republic. Nine decedents had an incident location that was unknown.

Of the 418 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the manner of death was classified as accident for 201, natural for 177, suicide for 26, homicide for 7, and undetermined for 5. There were 2 fetal deaths in which a manner of death was not assigned.

In 2019, 121 autopsies were conducted by JCME. All JCME autopsies were performed at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) in which 120 were complete autopsies (external examination and internal examination the head, neck, chest, and abdomen). One partial autopsy was performed in 2019.

Of the 418 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, all decedents were identified. Two decedents were unclaimed by family or friends and final disposition was arranged by JCME. There were no exhumations.

In 2019, there were 20 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 20 deaths, 11 were classified as accident followed by 7 as natural, and 2 as suicide. For 10 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County, 6 incident locations occurred in another Iowa County, 3 incident locations occurred out-of-state, and 1 incident location was unknown. There were 5 sleep-related infant deaths in 2019 all of which were classified as accident. For 3 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County and 2 incident locations occurred in another Iowa county. There were 2 fetal deaths in which jurisdiction was accepted. Fetal deaths are not assigned a manner of death.

There were 261 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 years and older. Of these, there were 94 in which the death was the result of a fall. The majority of these fall-related deaths, 65, occurred from a standing height and 42 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 53 of the falls.

In 2019, there were 21 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 11 involved illicit drugs only, 2 involved prescription drugs only, 2 involved over-the-counter medications only, and 6 involved a mixture of drug types. Of the 6 mixed drug-related deaths, 3 involved prescription drugs only, 1 involved multiple illicit drugs (methamphetamine and morphine), 1 involved a mixture of illicitly obtained substances (methadone, etizolam, and morphine) and prescription drugs, and 1 was a mixture of prescription and over-the-counter medication. Of the remaining 11 illicit drug-related deaths, 10 involved methamphetamine and 1 involved cocaine. Of the 21 drug-related deaths, 13 were classified as accident, 6 as suicide, and 2 as undetermined.

Of the 418 deaths investigated by JCME, 26 were classified as suicide. Eight of these deaths were due to hanging and 9 were the result of a firearm. The sex distribution was 19 males and 7 females. The most common age range was 50 to 59 years (6 decedents) followed by 20 to 29 years (4 decedents) and 40 to 49 years (4 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

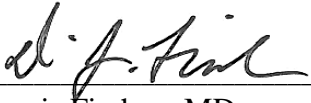
death. Of the 418 deaths certified by JCME in 2019, it was determined that 77 were tobacco-related and 28 were probably tobacco-related.

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 1084 cremation permits to funeral service providers in 2019. There were 442 cremation permits issued to funeral service providers in Johnson County, 579 to funeral service providers located in other Iowa counties, and 63 to funeral service providers located out-of-state. Cremation permits were issued to a total of 142 funeral service providers. Of the 1084 cremation permits issued, 5 permits triggered 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 2019, 14 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 14 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 28 kidneys, 11 livers, 6 hearts, 2 lungs, and 2 pancreases 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 2019 JCME had two Board Certified Death Investigators (Advanced): Clayton Schuneman and Kate Bengtson, and three Registry Certified Death Investigators (Basic): Heather Sanderson, Amanda Fink, and James McDonald. 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. As of January 1, 2020 Dennis Firchau, MD, was appointed as Medical Examiner by the Johnson County Board of Supervisors. Marcus Nashelsky, MD, was appointed as Deputy Medical Examiner.


Dennis Firchau, MD
Medical Examiner

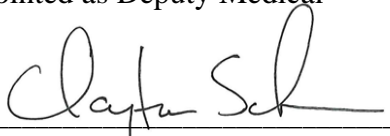
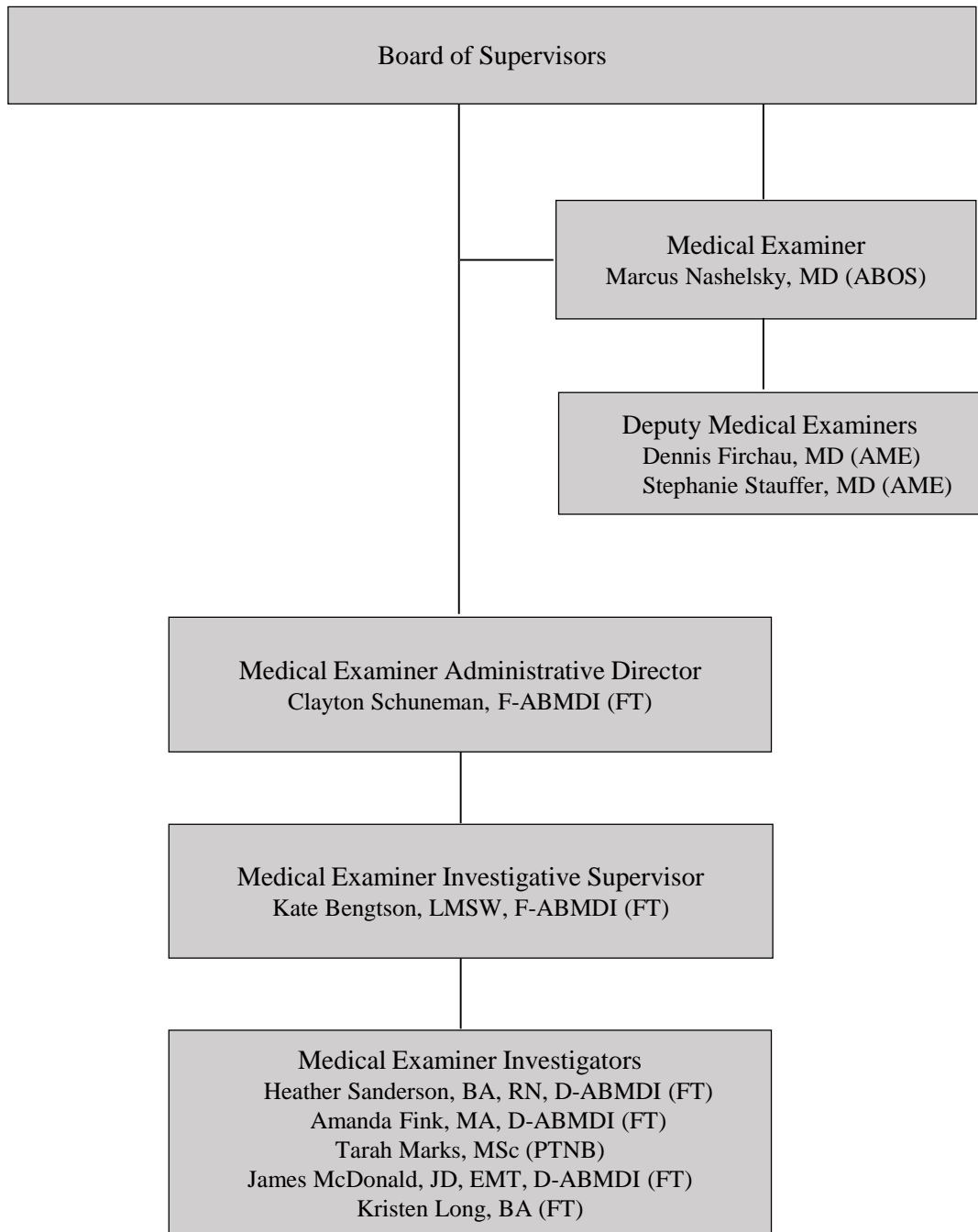

Clayton Schuneman, F-ABMDI
Administrative Director

Figure 1.1. Organizational Chart (2019)



Employment/Appointment Status Key:

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

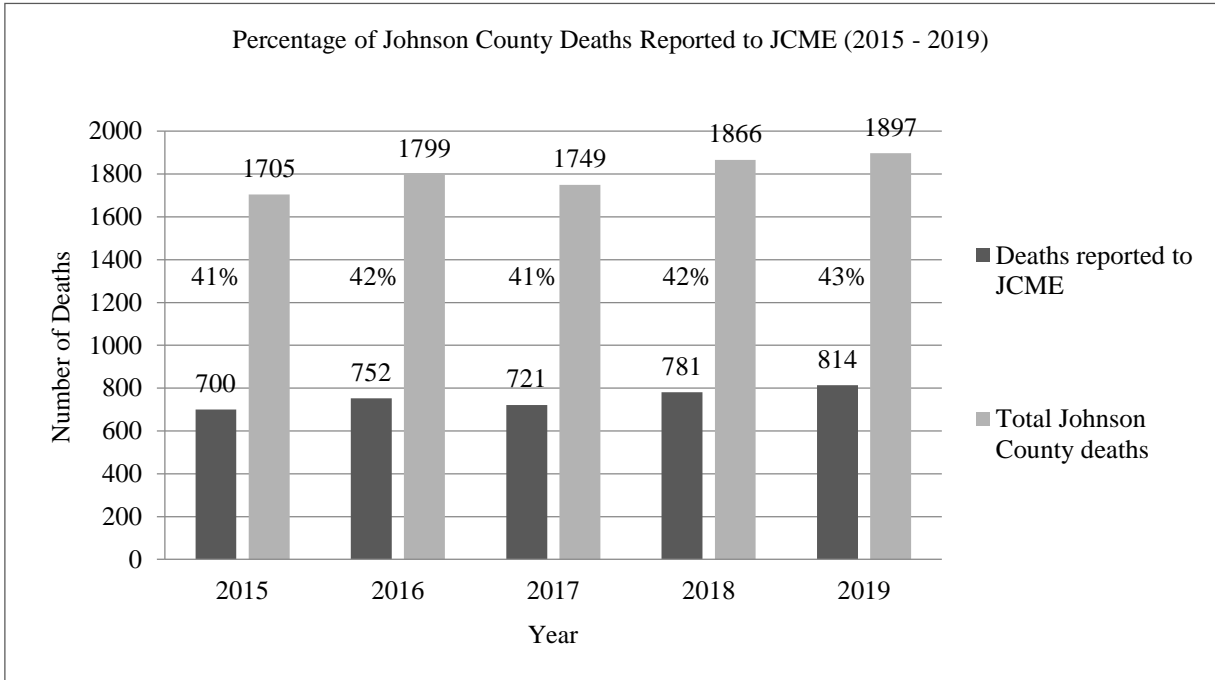


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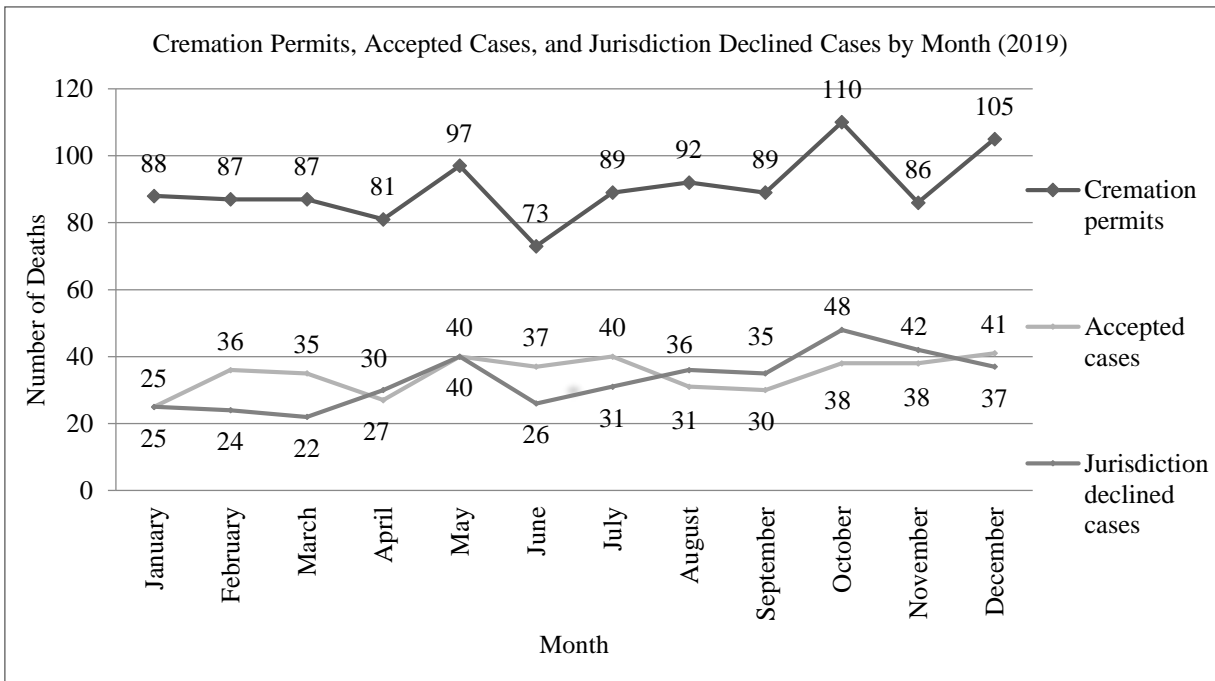


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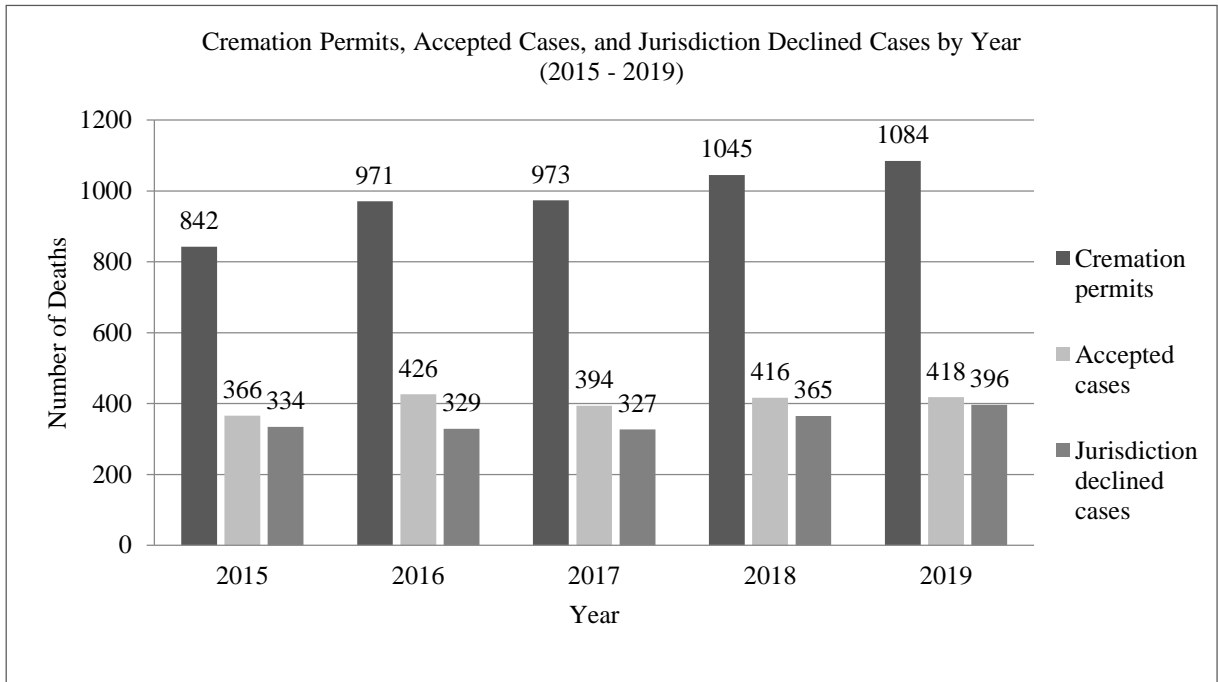


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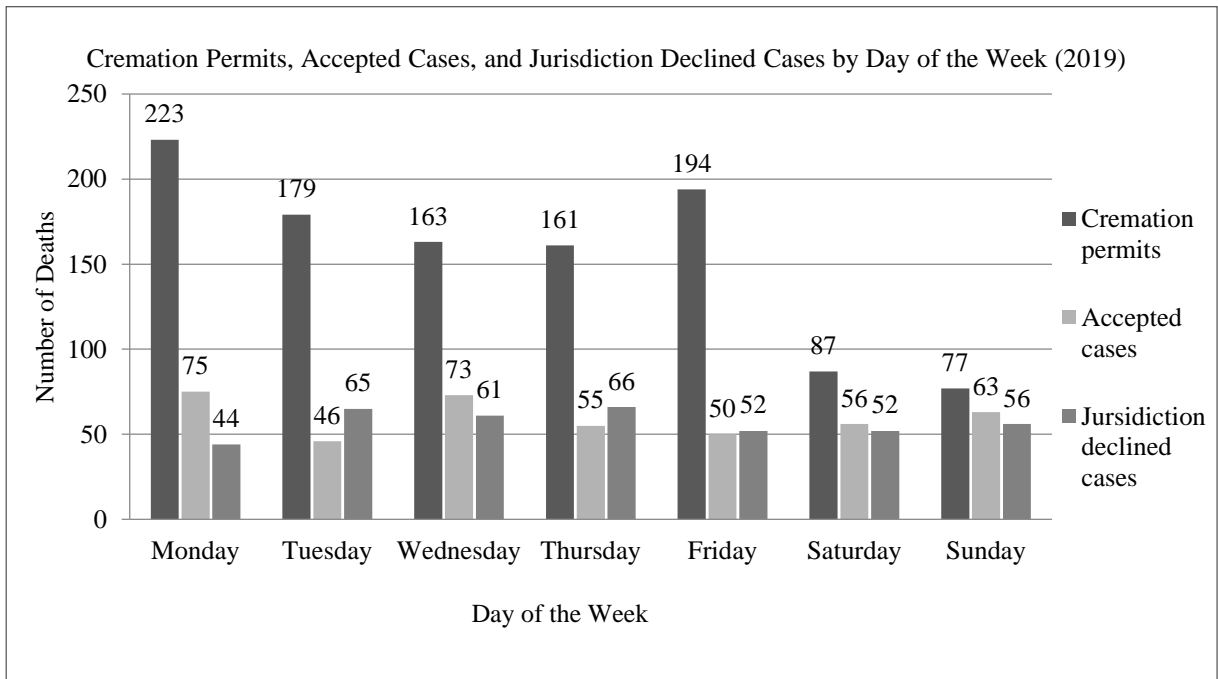


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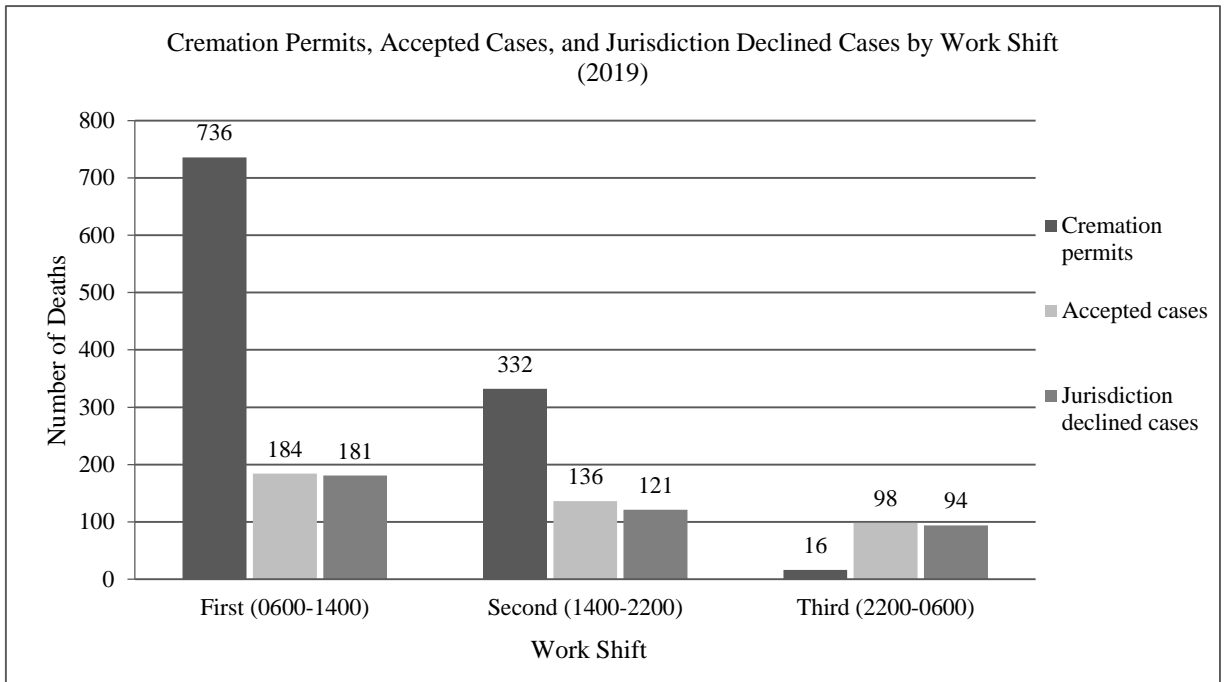


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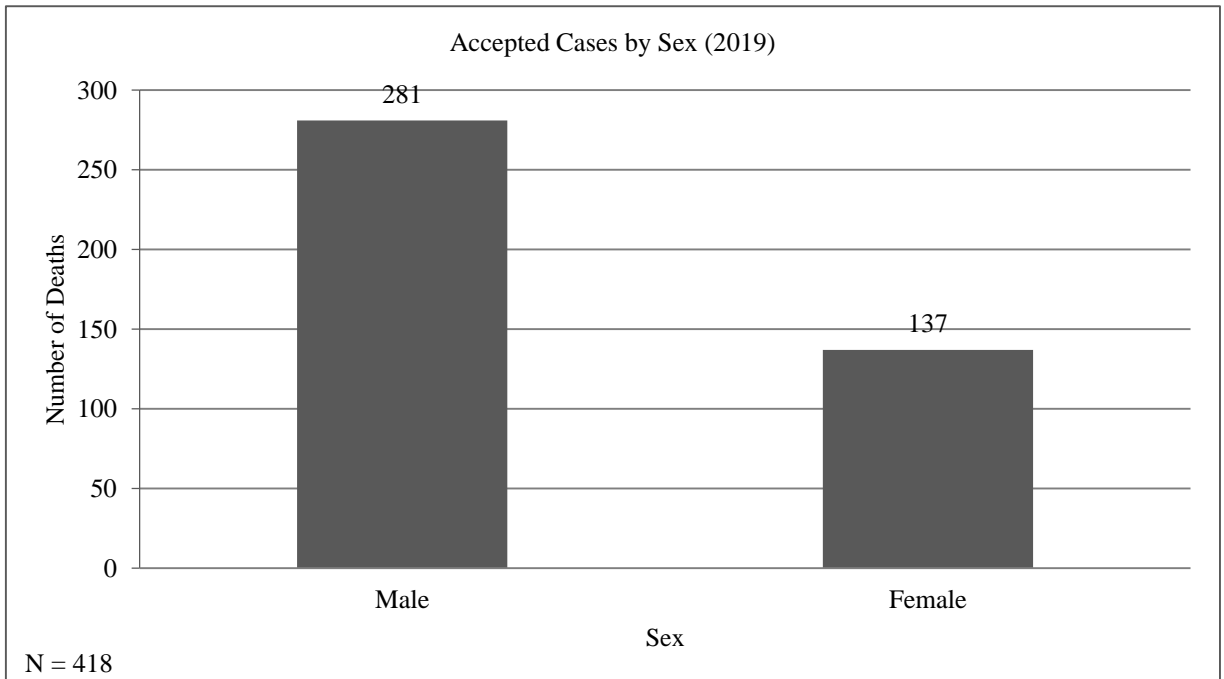


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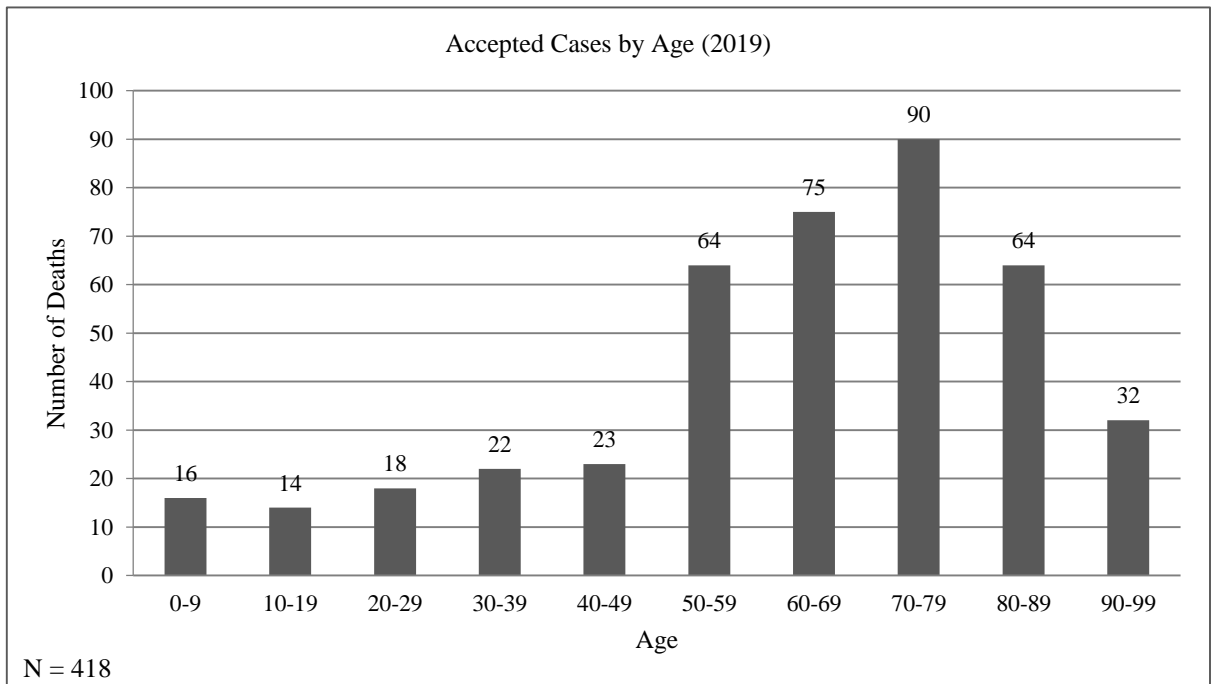


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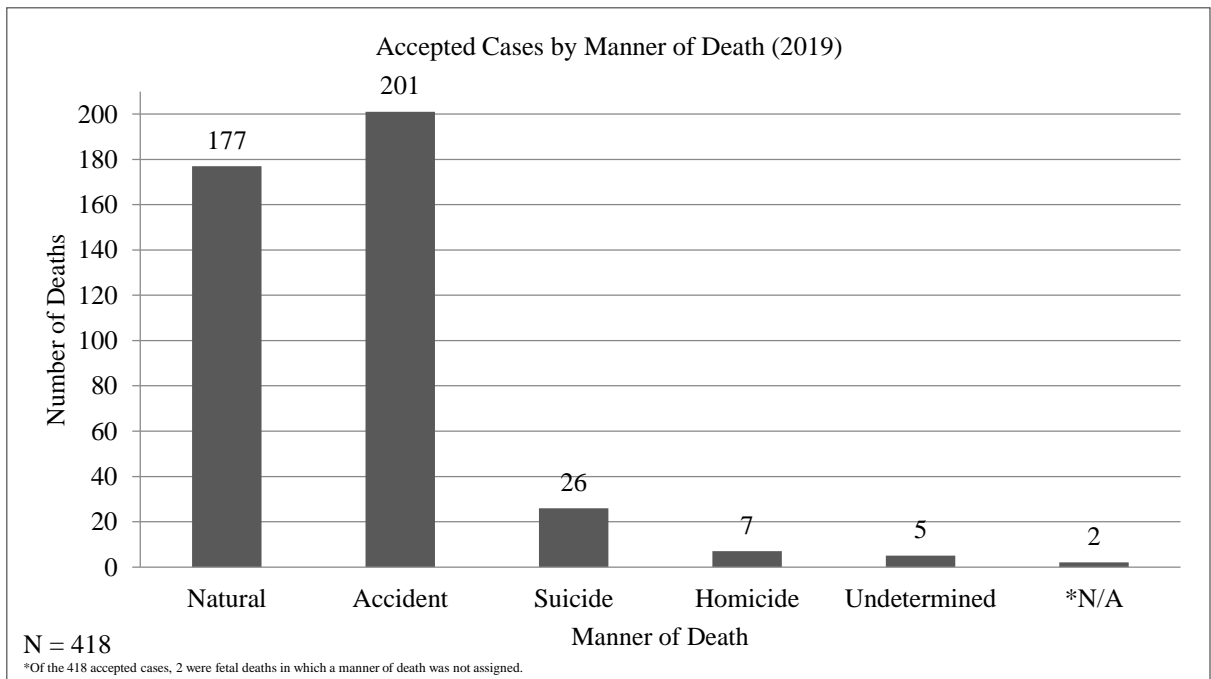


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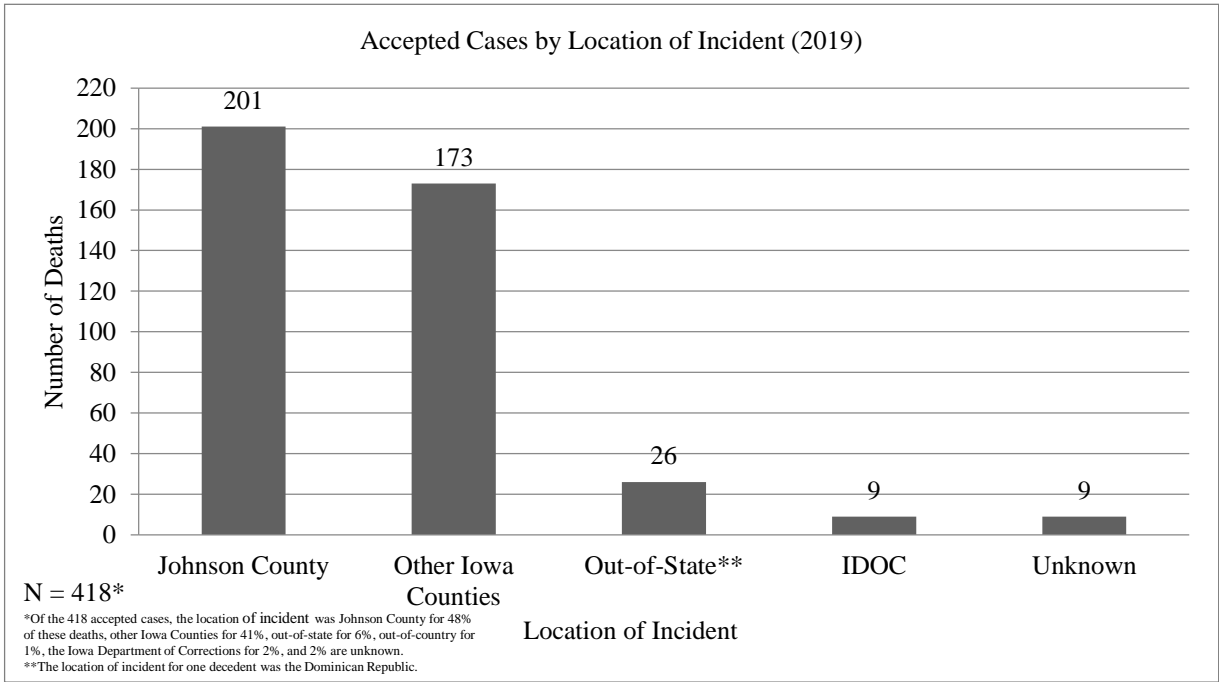


Figure 1.10.

Table 1.1. Other Iowa Counties Location of Incident (2019)

County	Number of Decedents
Scott	21
Linn	17
Dubuque	13
Washington	11
Clinton	9
Henry	9
Wapello	9
Iowa	8
Des Moines	7
Lee	7
Muscatine	7
Black Hawk	6
Cedar	5
Polk	5
Cerro Gordo	3
Louisa	3
Bremer	2
Clayton	2
Delaware	2
Fayette	2
Jackson	2
Jefferson	2
Keokuk	2
Mahaska	2
Marion	2
Marshall	2
Poweshiek	2
Warren	2
Boone	1
Buchanan	1
Clarke	1
Floyd	1
Gundy	1
Hancock	1
Jasper	1
Jones	1
Webster	1

Table 1.2. Out-of-State Location of Incident (2019)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	9
Jo Daviess, IL	3
Clarke, MO	2
Henderson, IL	2
Adams, IL	1
Cleveland, OK	1
Cobb, GA	1
Henry, IL	1
Mendota Heights, MN	1
Pike, IL	1
Santa Clara, CA	1
St. Louis, MN	1
Warren, IL	1
Punta Cana, Dominican Republic	1

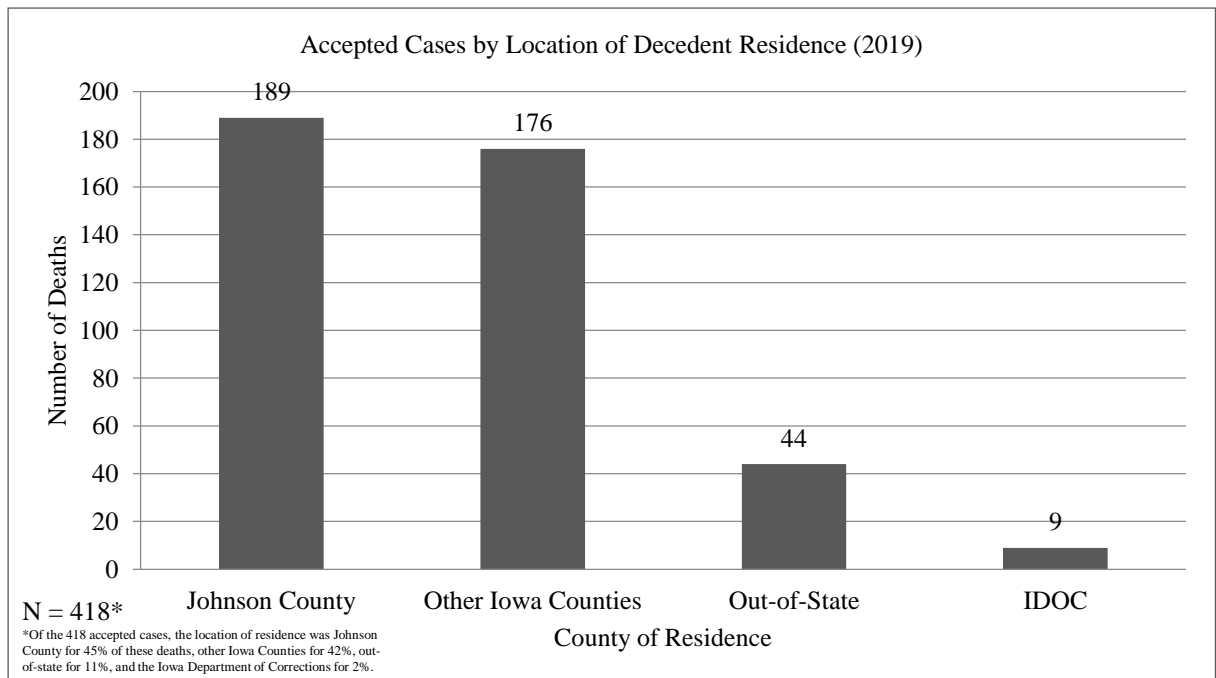


Figure 1.11.

Table 1.3. Other Iowa Counties Location of Decedent Residence (2019)

County	Number of Decedents
Linn	21
Scott	15
Washington	11
Dubuque	10
Wapello	9
Clinton	8
Iowa	8
Lee	8
Muscatine	8
Polk	8
Des Moines	6
Henry	6
Louisa	6
Black Hawk	5
Jackson	5
Cedar	4
Cerro Gordo	4
Bremer	3
Clayton	3
Jones	3
Clarke	2
Fayette	2
Jefferson	2
Mahaska	2
Marion	2
Marshall	2
Poweshiek	2
Warren	2
Benton	1
Boone	1
Butler	1
Delaware	1
Floyd	1
Hancock	1
Keokuk	1
Van Buren	1
Webster	1

Table 1.4. Out-of-State Location of Decedent Residence (2019)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	12
Jo Daviess, IL	3
Clark, MO	2
Henderson, IL	2
Warren, IL	2
Adams, IL	1
Clarke, GA	1
Cleveland, OK	1
Cook, IL	1
Denton, TX	1
Grant, WI	1
Henry, IL	1
Hidalgo, TX	1
Lackawanna, PA	1
Los Angeles, CA	1
Mendota Heights, MN	1
Olmsted, MN	1
Ozaukee, WI	1
Peoria, IL	1
Pike, IL	1
Portage, WI	1
Rankin, MS	1
Salt Lake, UT	1
Sarpy, NE	1
St. Louis, MN	1
Stark, IL	1
Washington, UT	1
Whiteside, IL	1

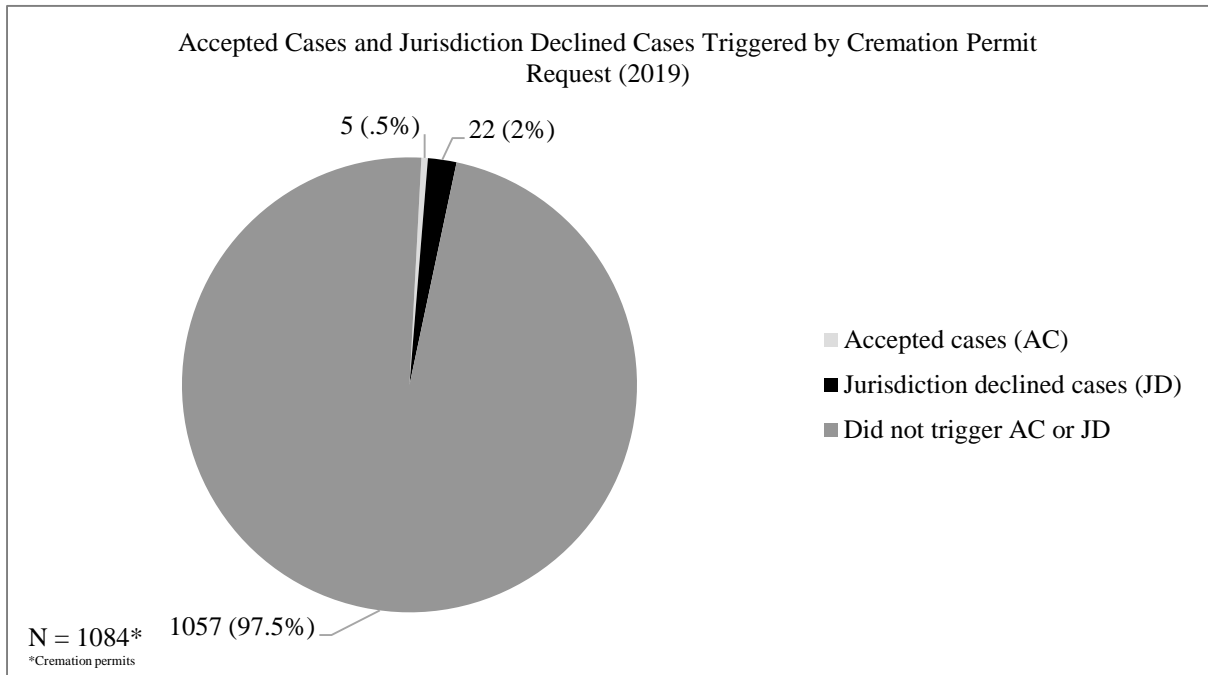


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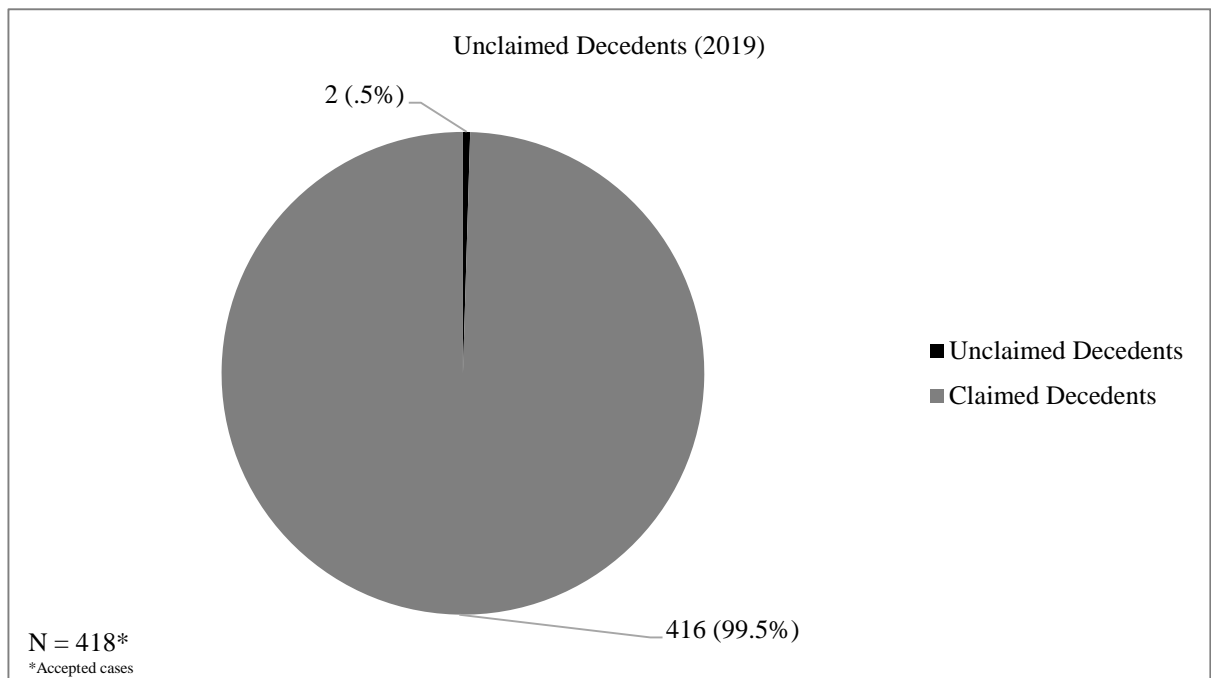


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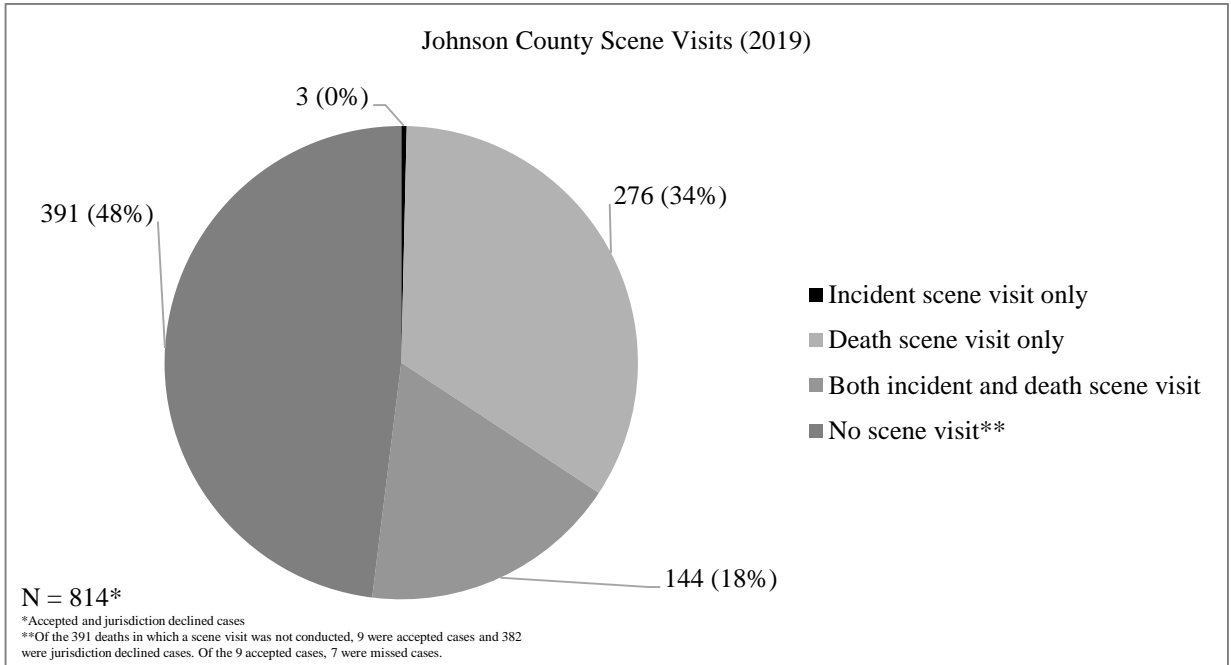


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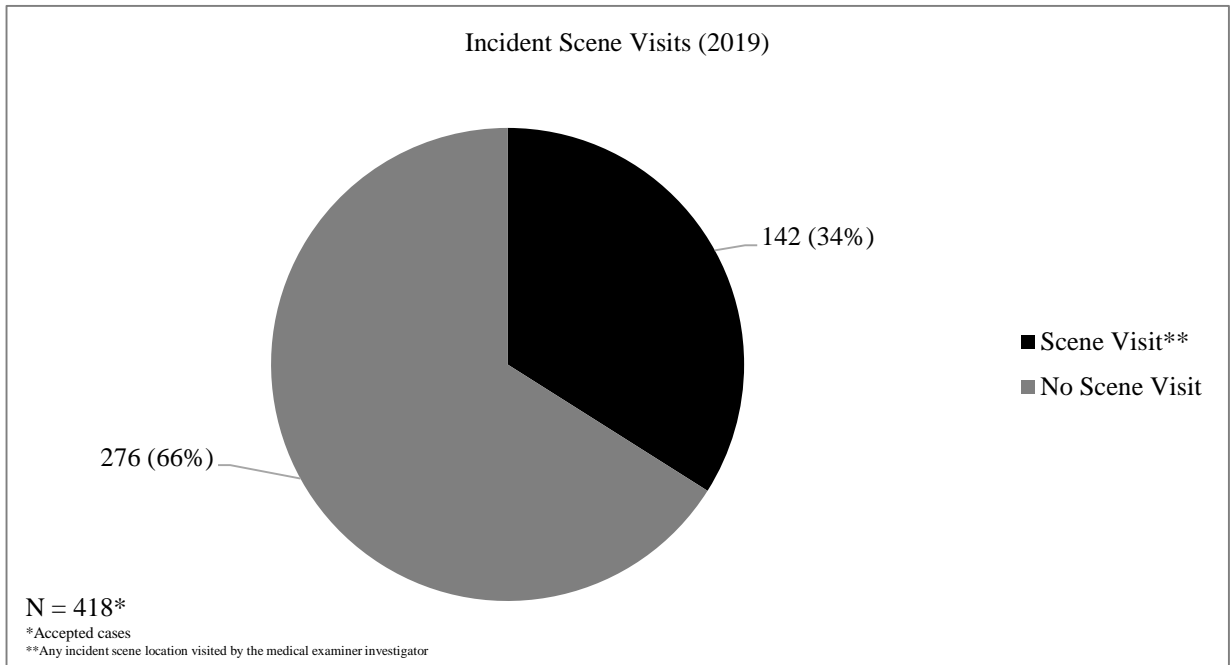


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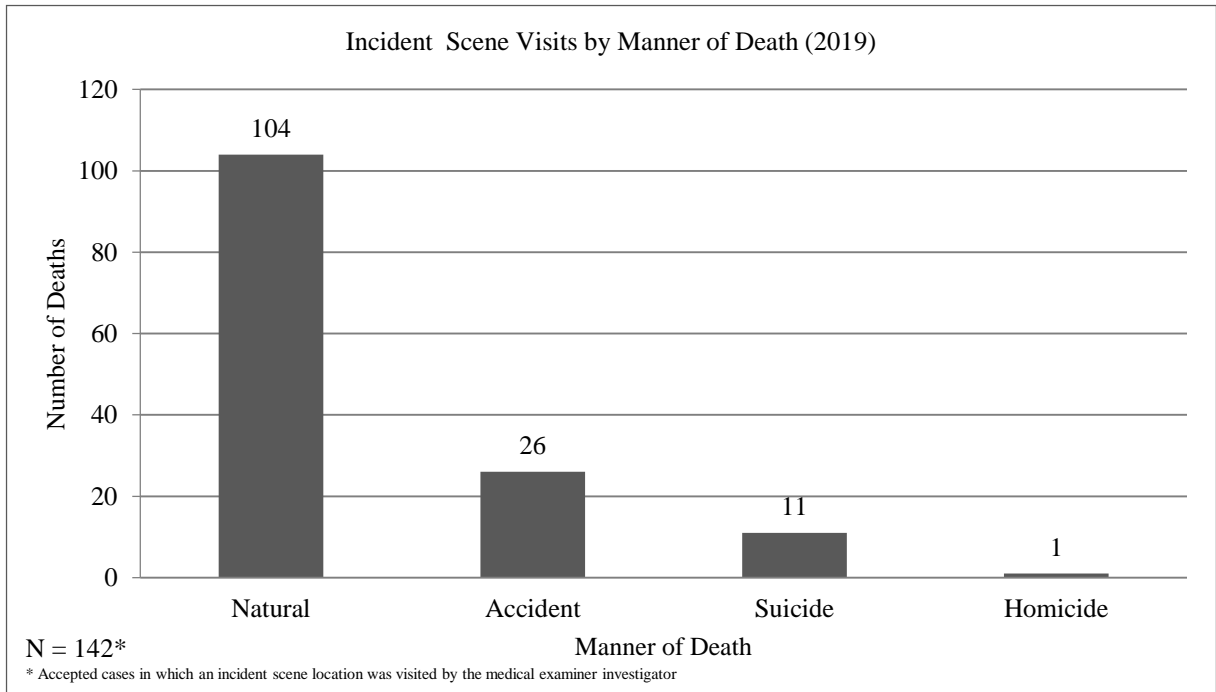


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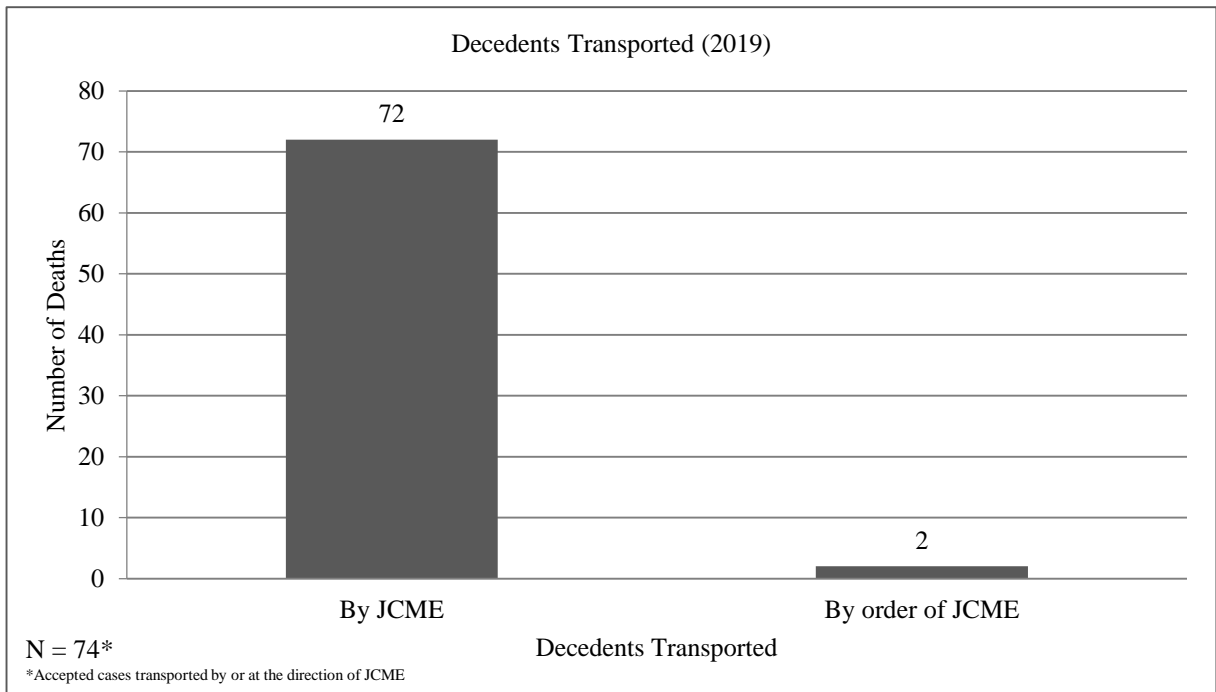


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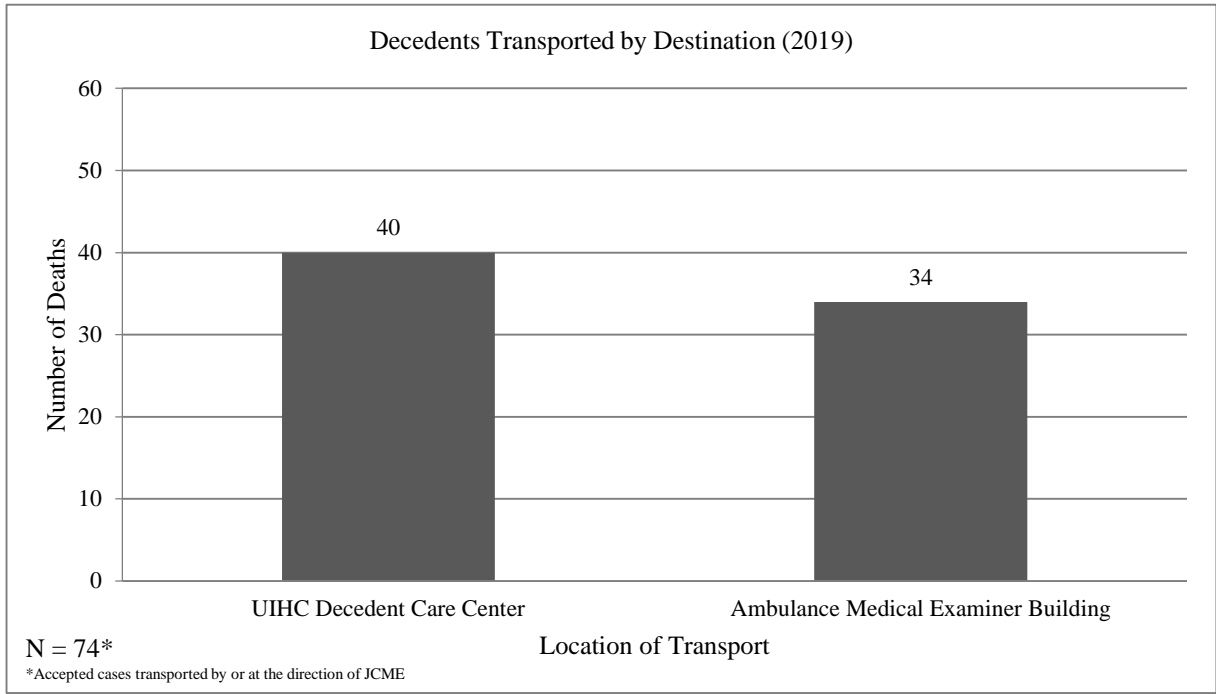


Figure 1.18.

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Autopsies

In 2019, 121 autopsies were conducted by JCME. All JCME autopsies were performed at the University of Iowa Hospitals and Clinics (UIHC) in which 120 were complete autopsies (external examination and internal examination the head, neck, chest, and abdomen). One partial autopsy was performed in 2019.

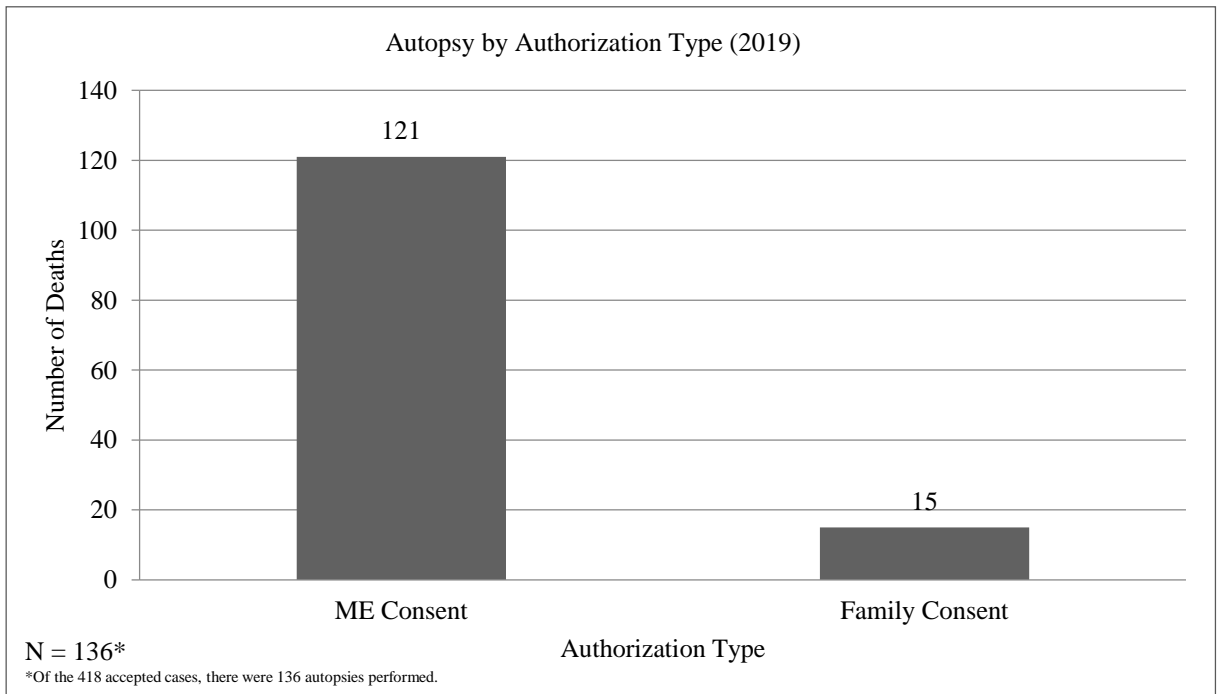


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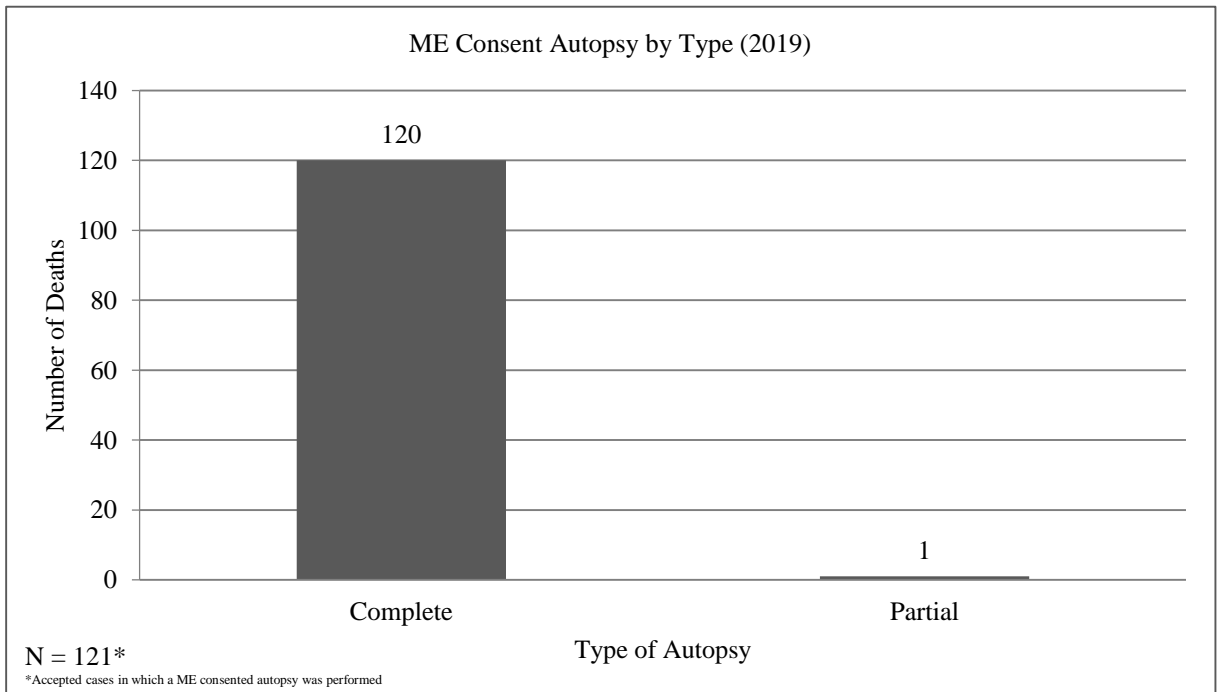


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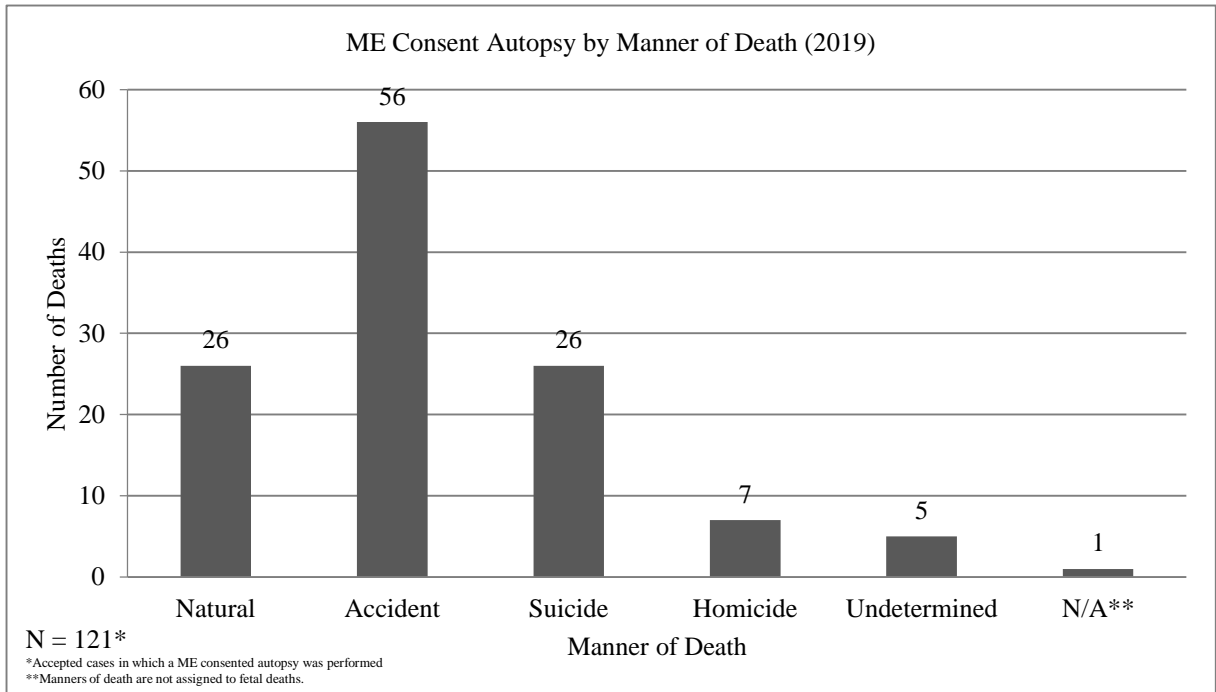


Figure 2.3.

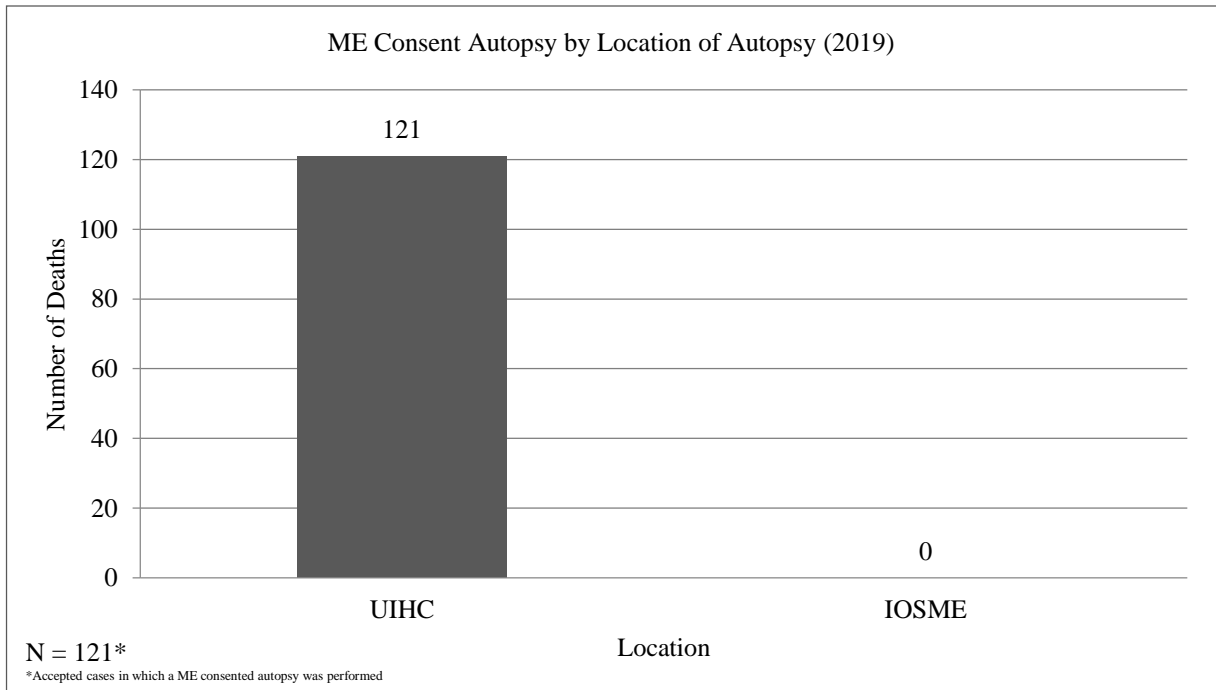


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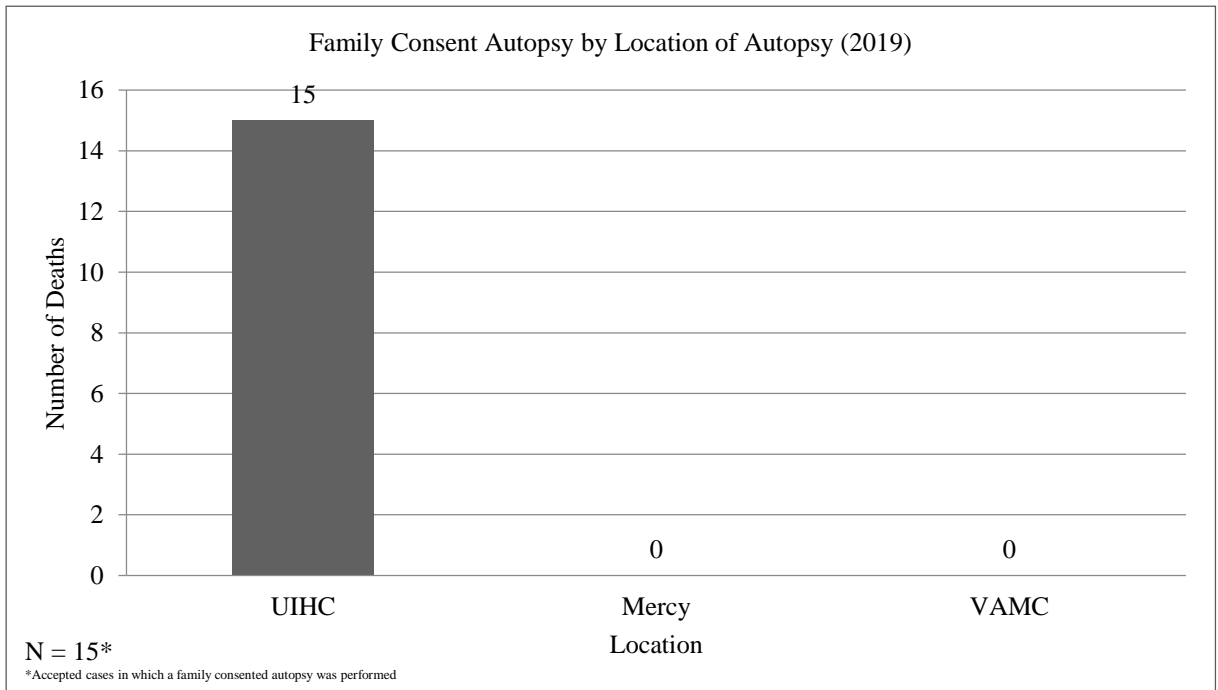


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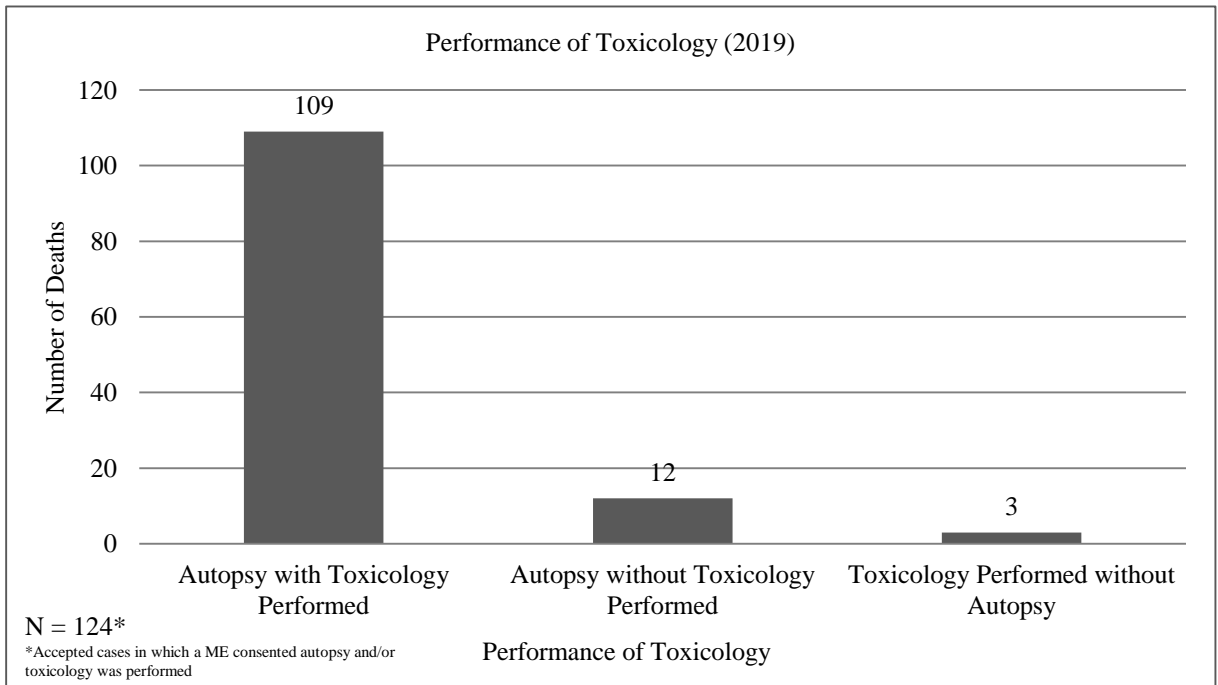


Figure 2.6.

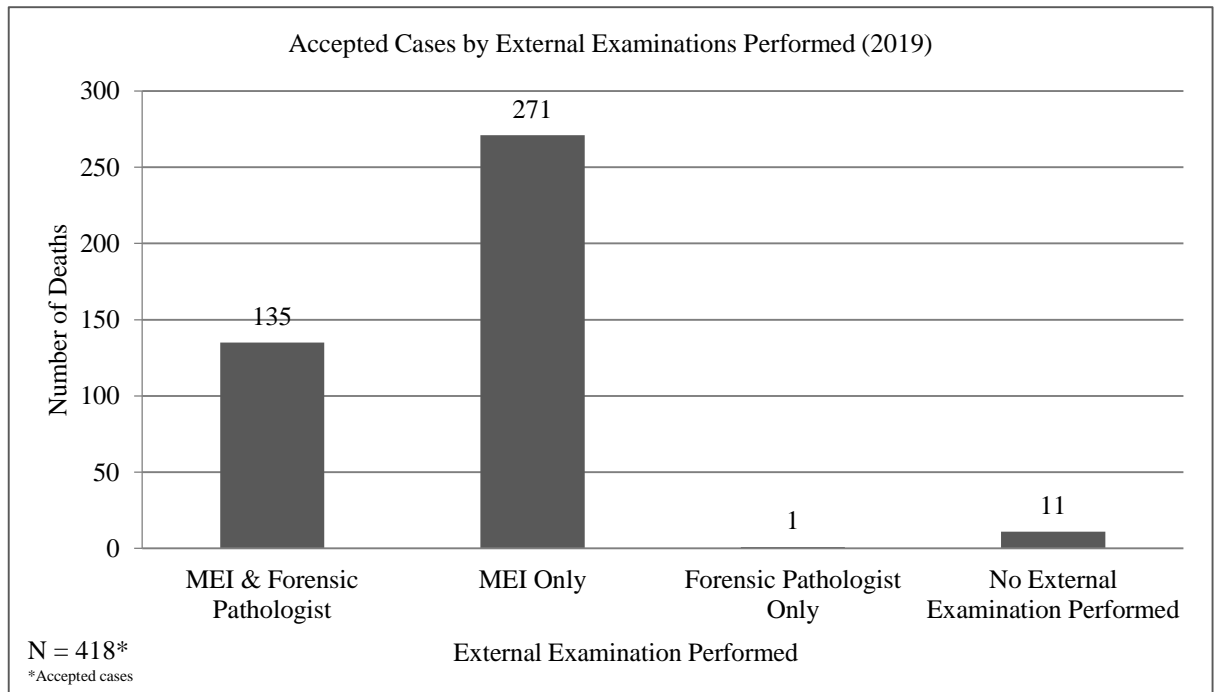


Figure 2.7.

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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.

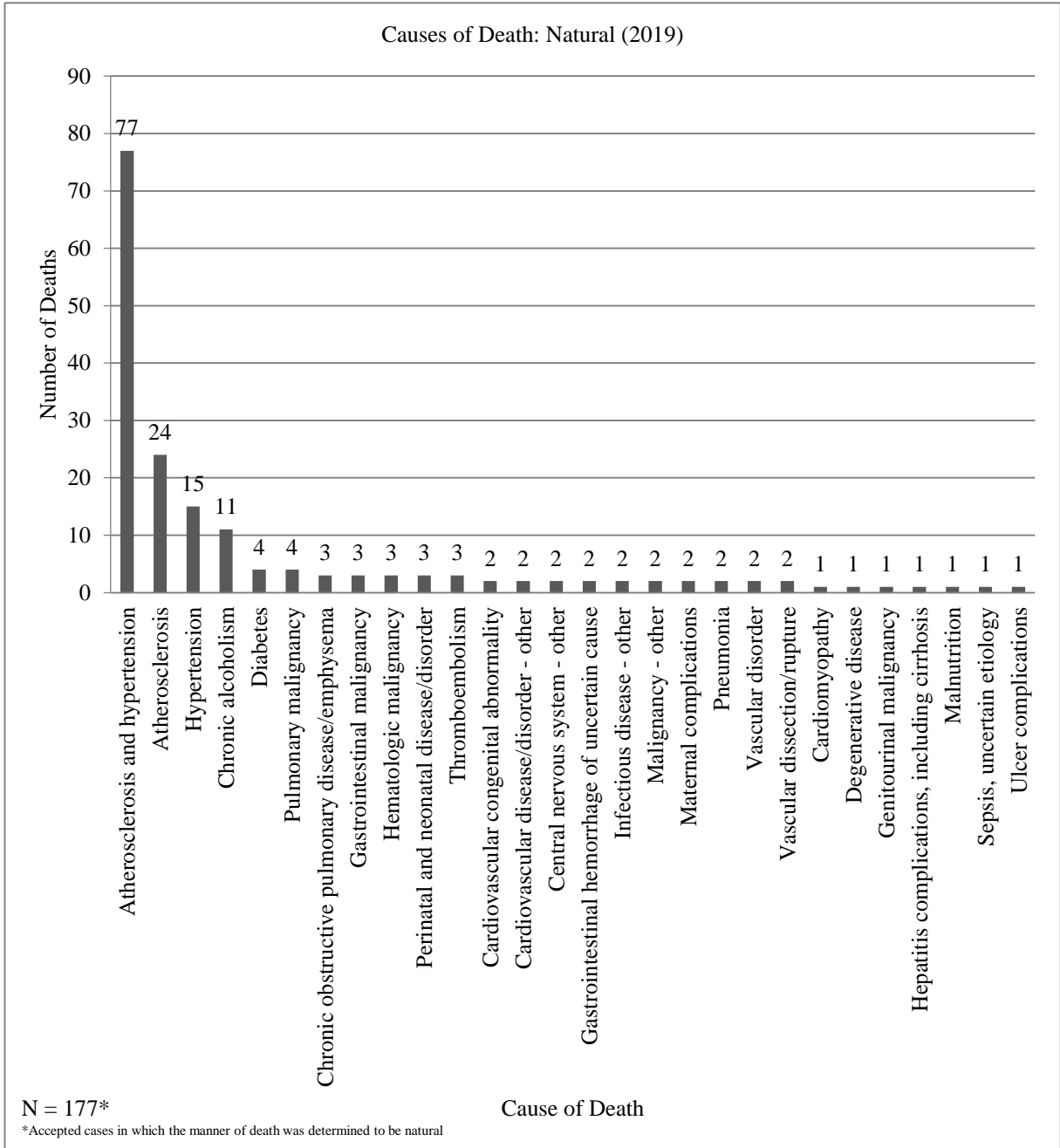


Figure 3.1.

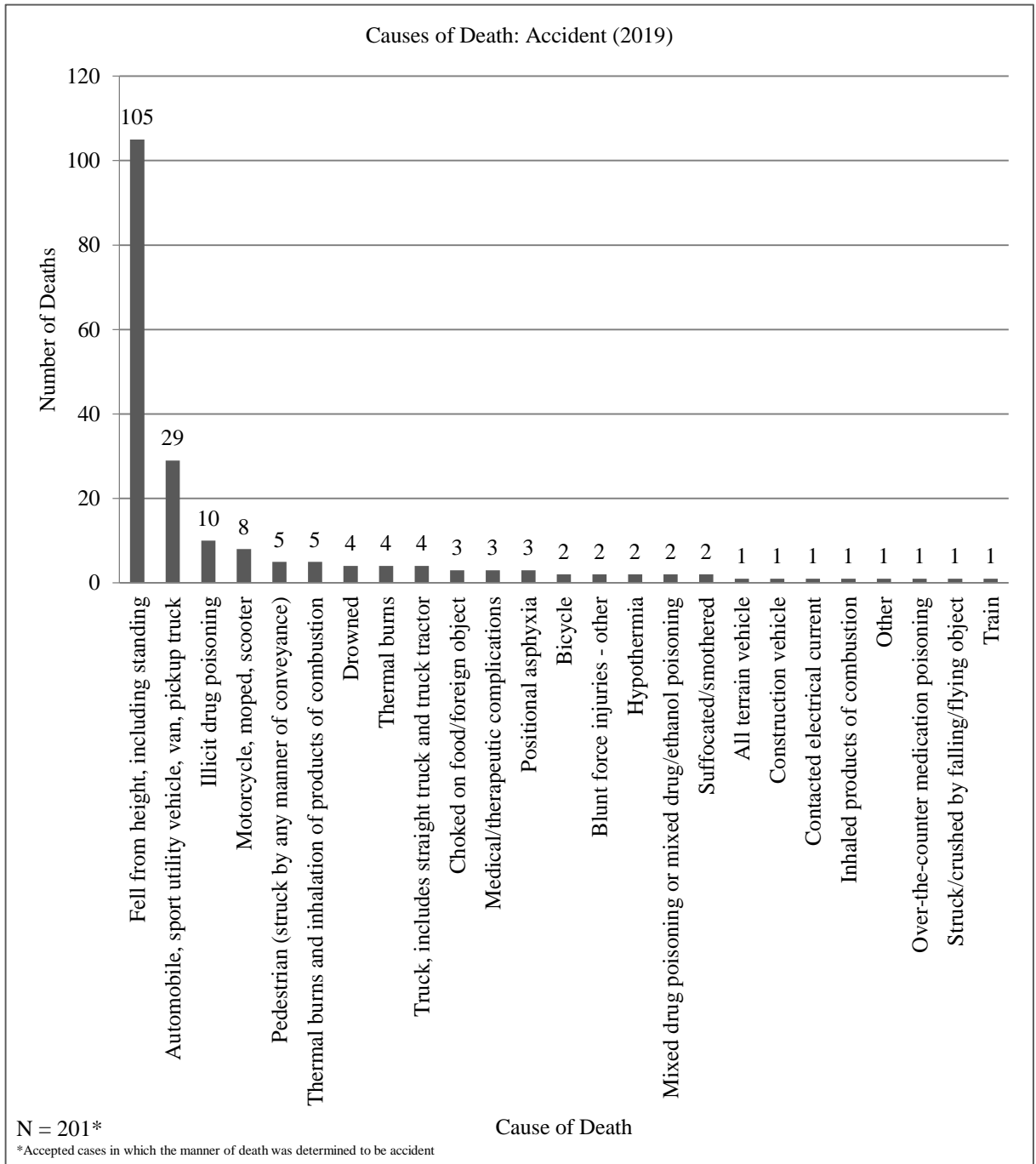


Figure 3.2.

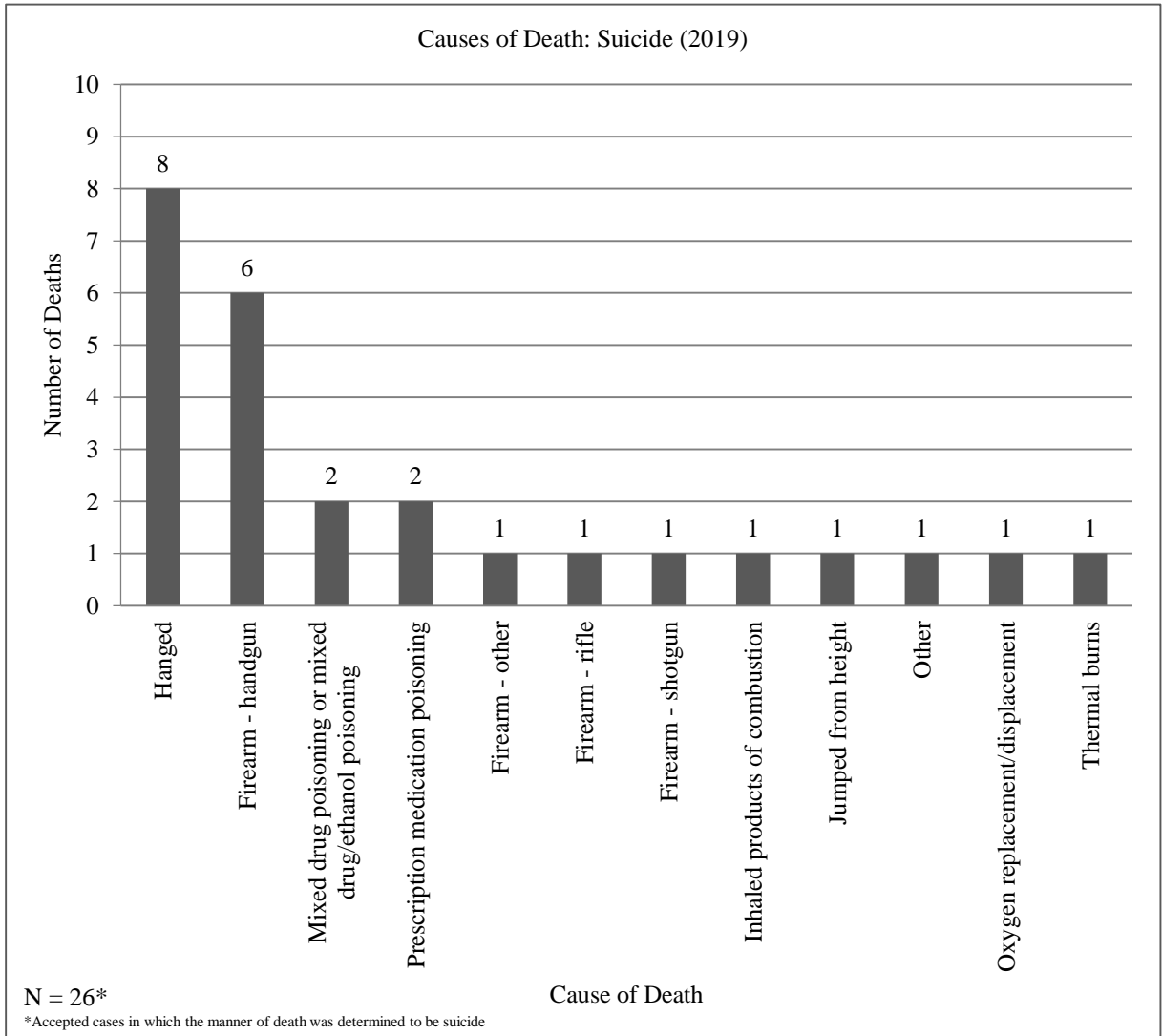


Figure 3.3.

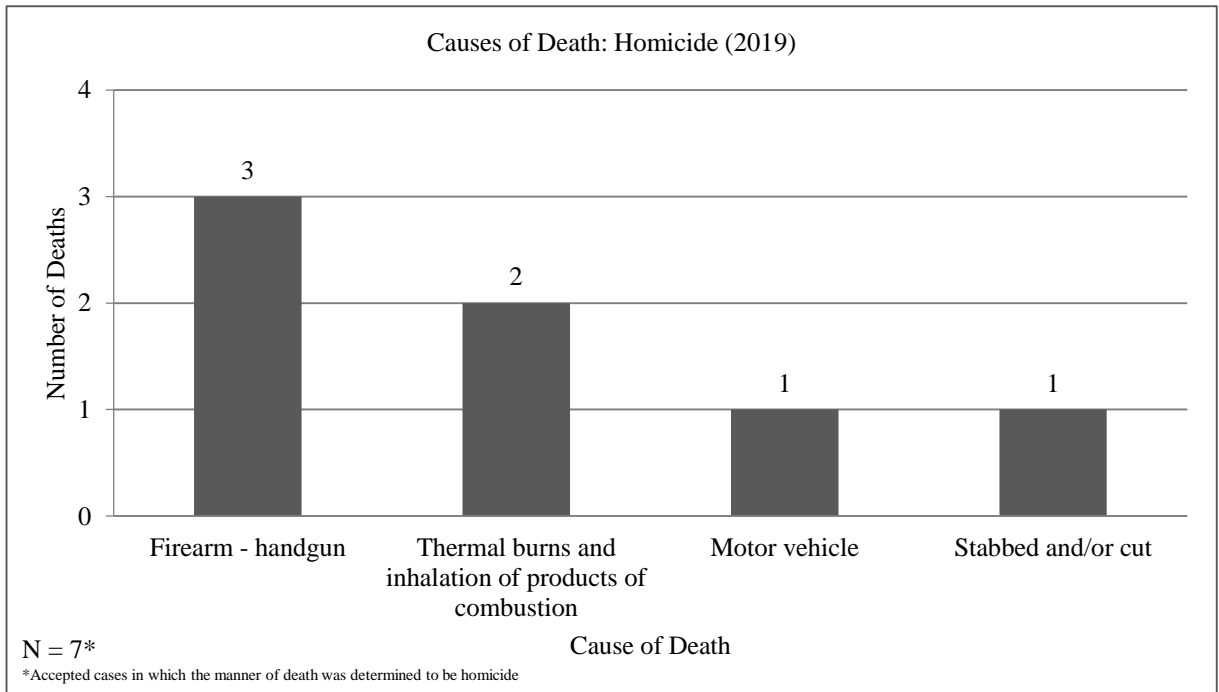


Figure 3.4.

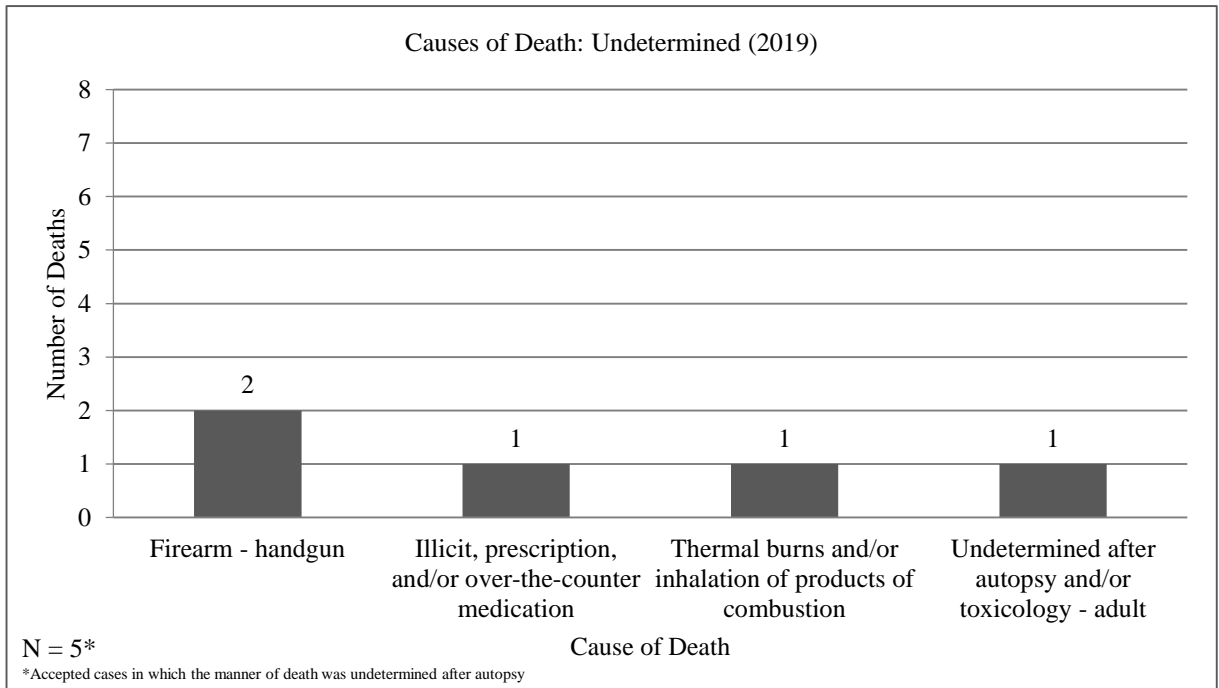


Figure 3.5.

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Accidents

Of the 418 deaths accepted by JCME, 201 were classified as accident. The sex distribution was 137 males to 64 females. One hundred and five of these deaths were the result of a fall, 29 were due to a motor vehicle crash, and 10 were the result of illicit drug poisoning. The most common age range was 70-79 (43 decedents), followed by 80-89 (33 decedents).

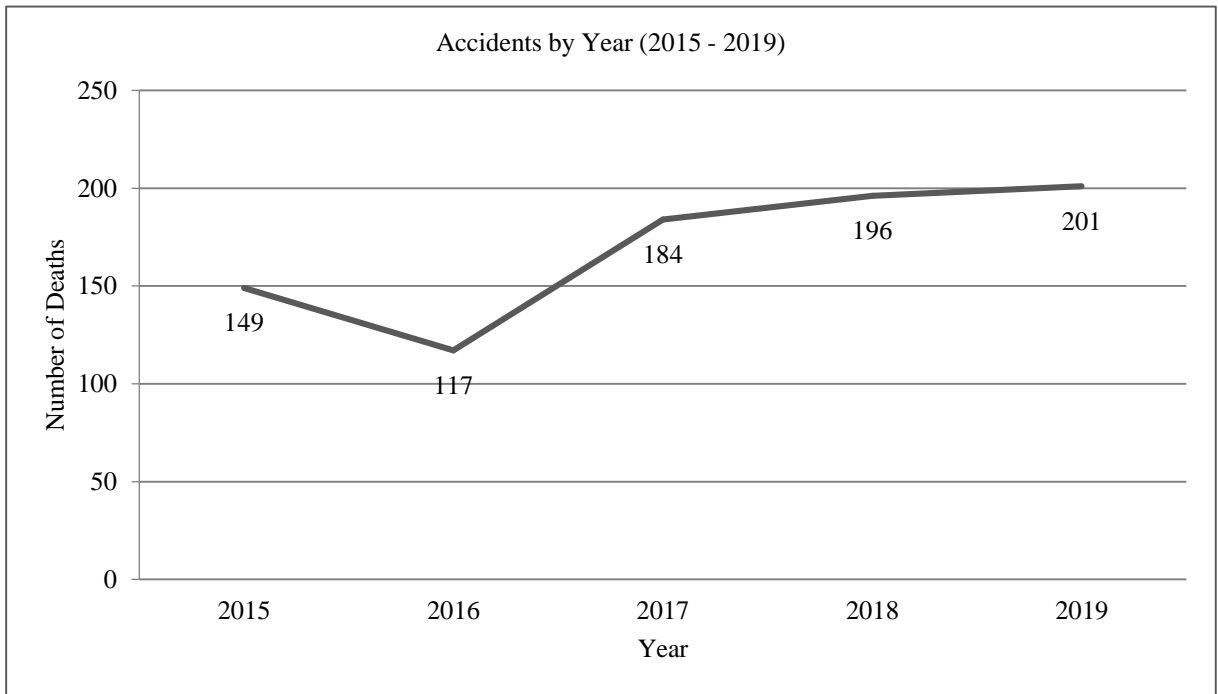


Figure 4.1.

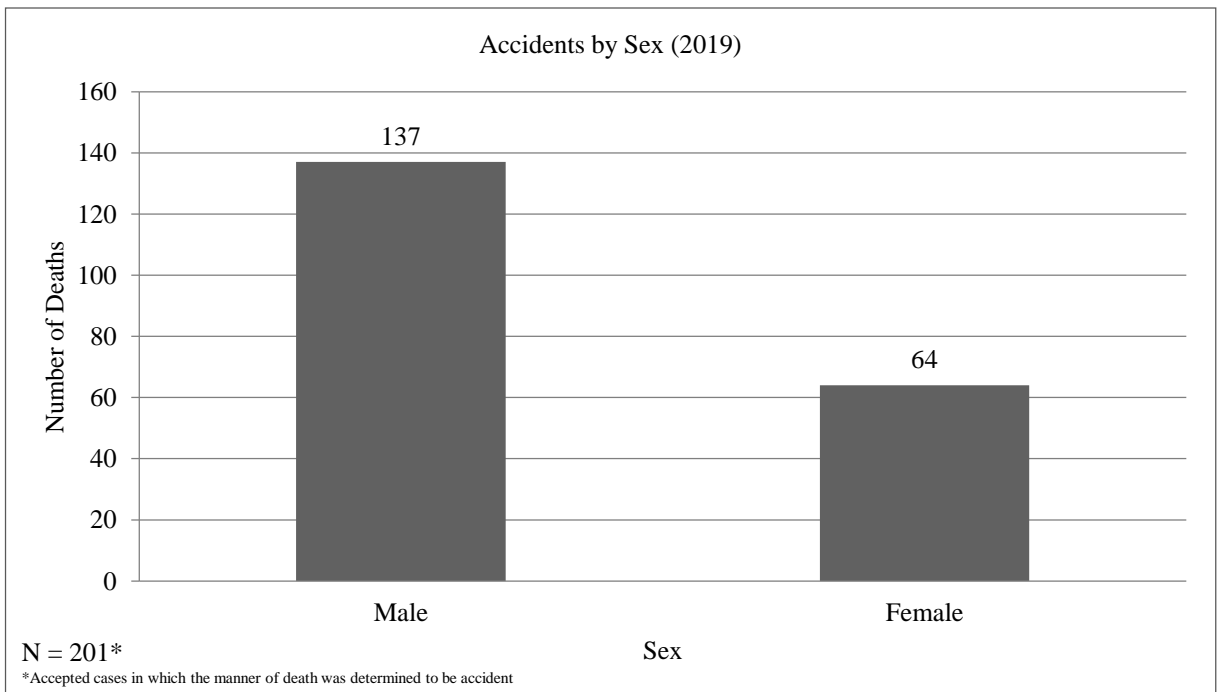


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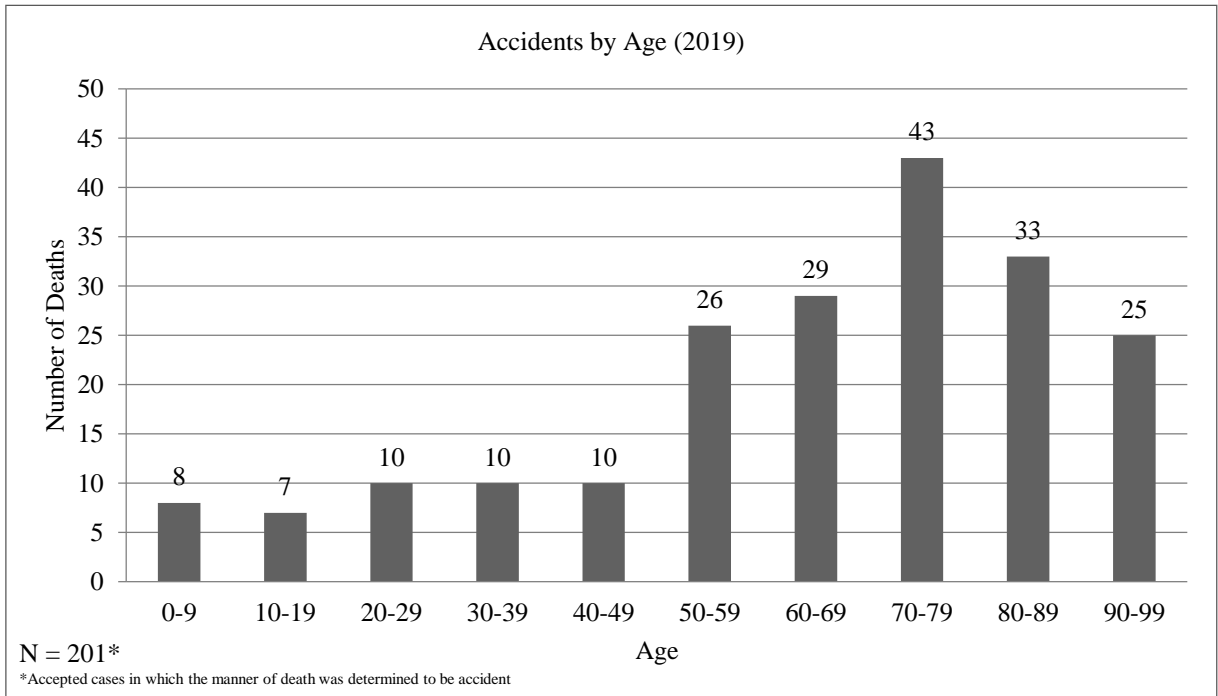


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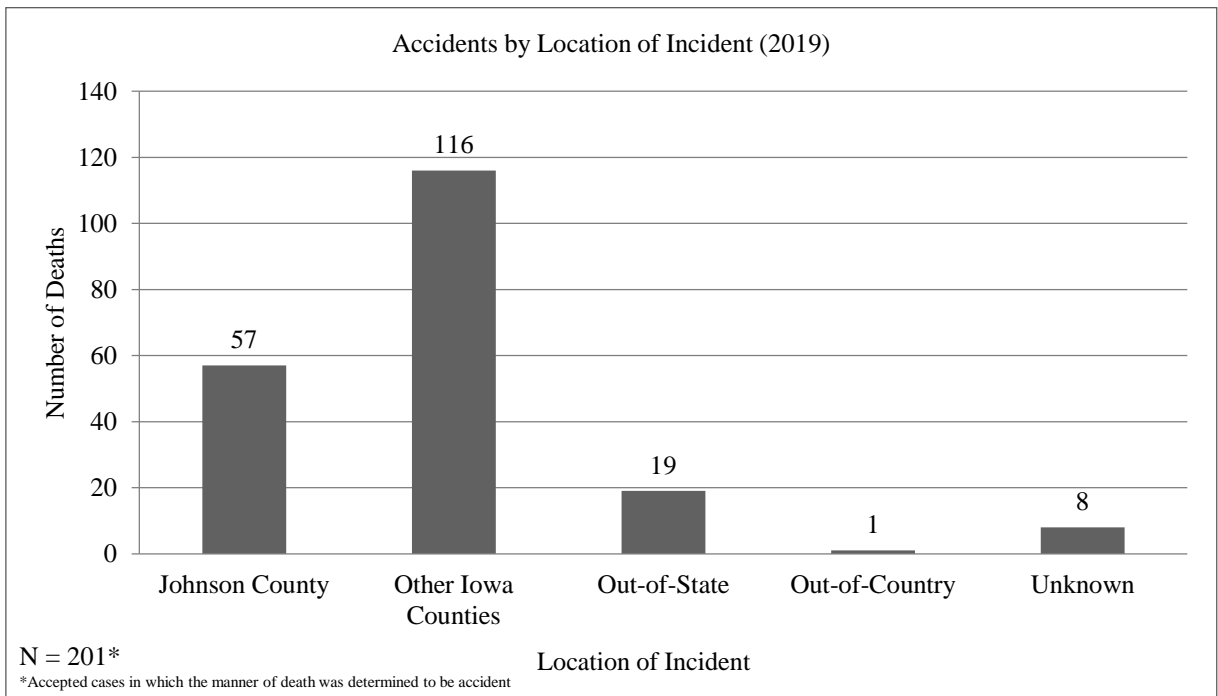


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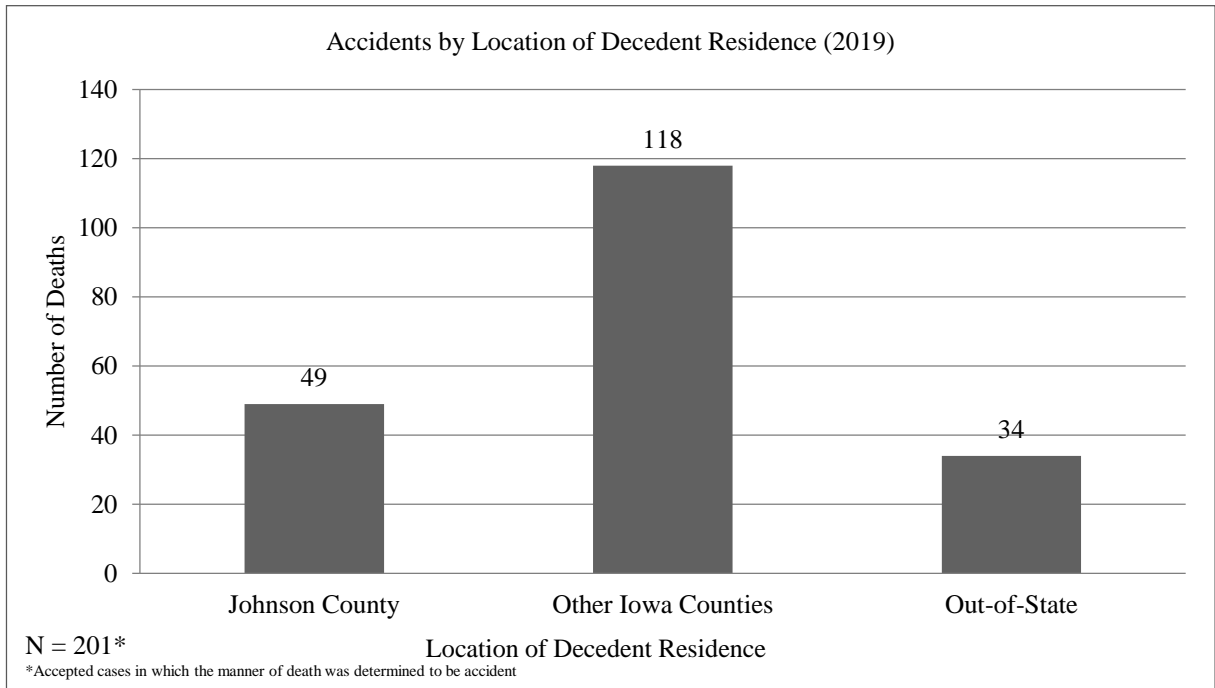


Figure 4.5.

Suicides

Of the 418 deaths investigated by JCME, 26 were classified as suicide. Eight of these deaths were due to hanging and 9 were the result of a firearm. The sex distribution was 19 males and 7 females. The most common age range was 50 to 59 years (6 decedents) followed by 20 to 29 years (4 decedents) and 40 to 49 years (4 decedents).

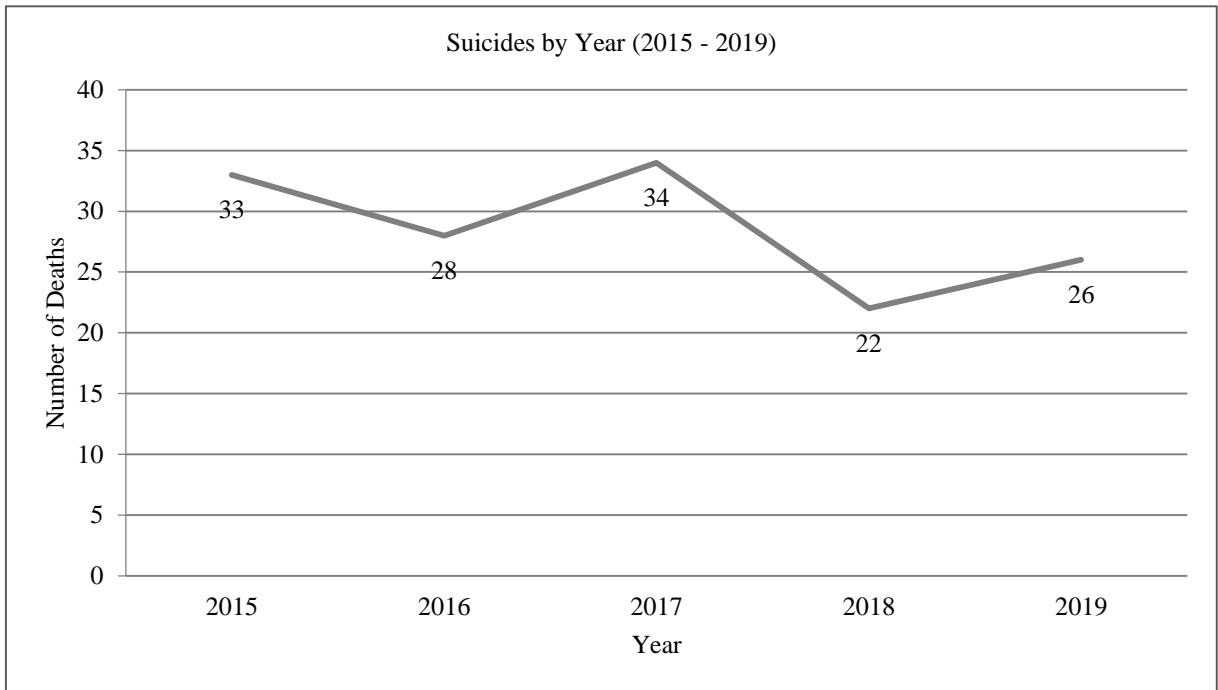


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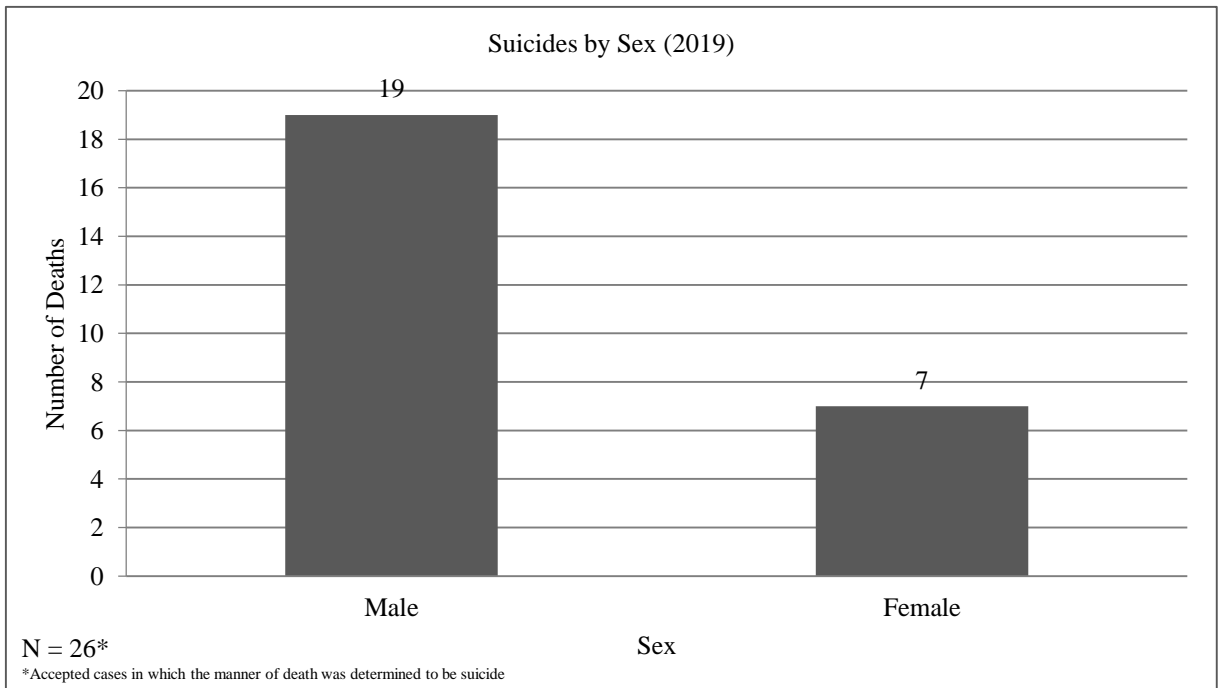


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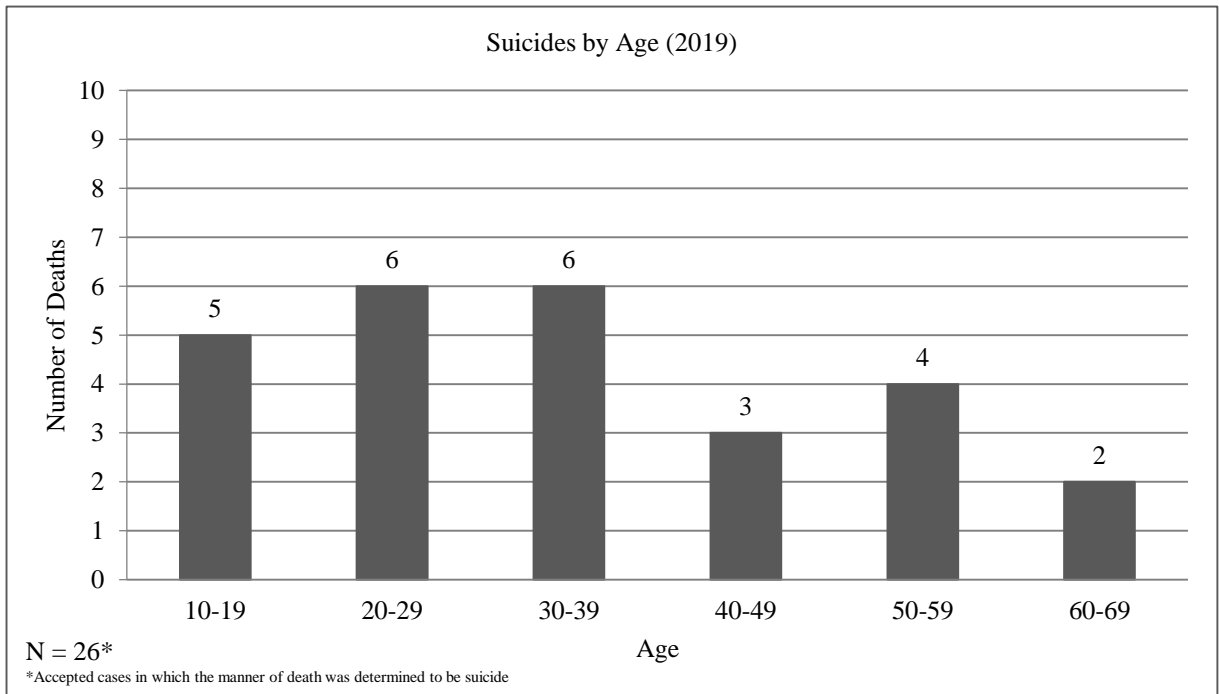


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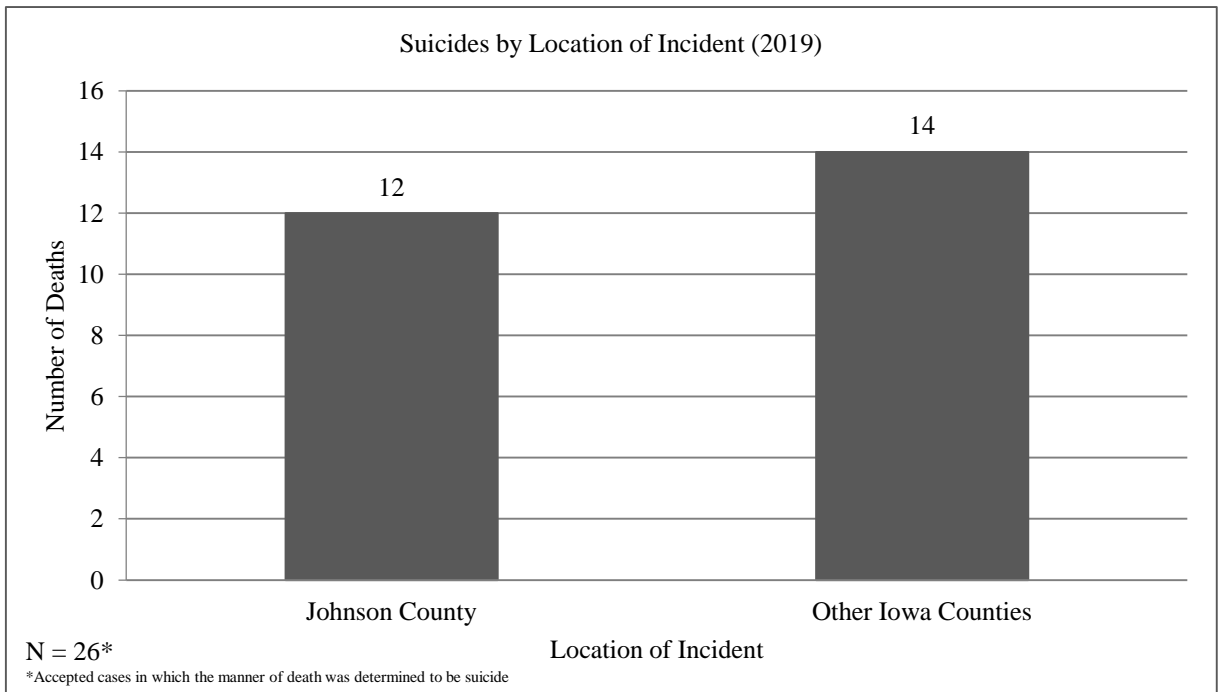


Figure 5.4.

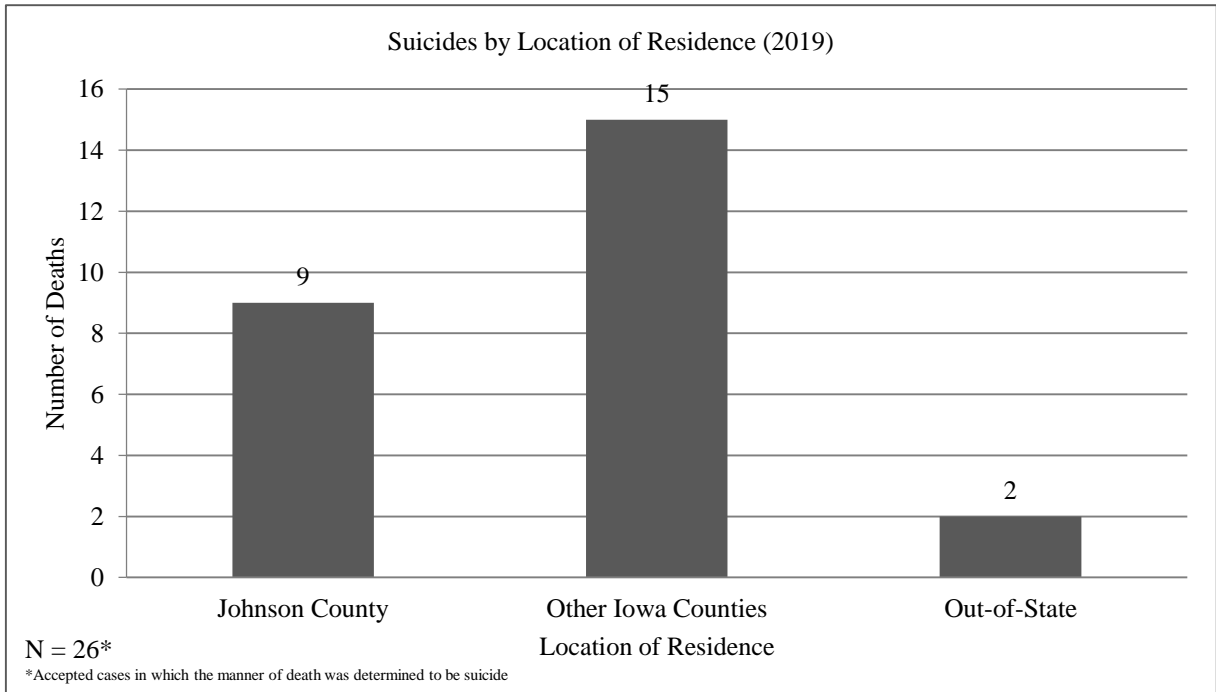


Figure 5.5.

Homicides

Of the 418 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 7 were classified as homicide. The sex distribution was 4 male and 3 female. The most common age range was 60 to 69 years (3 decedents). The incident location for 4 of the 7 deaths certified as homicide occurred in other Iowa counties while the remaining 3 occurred in Johnson County.

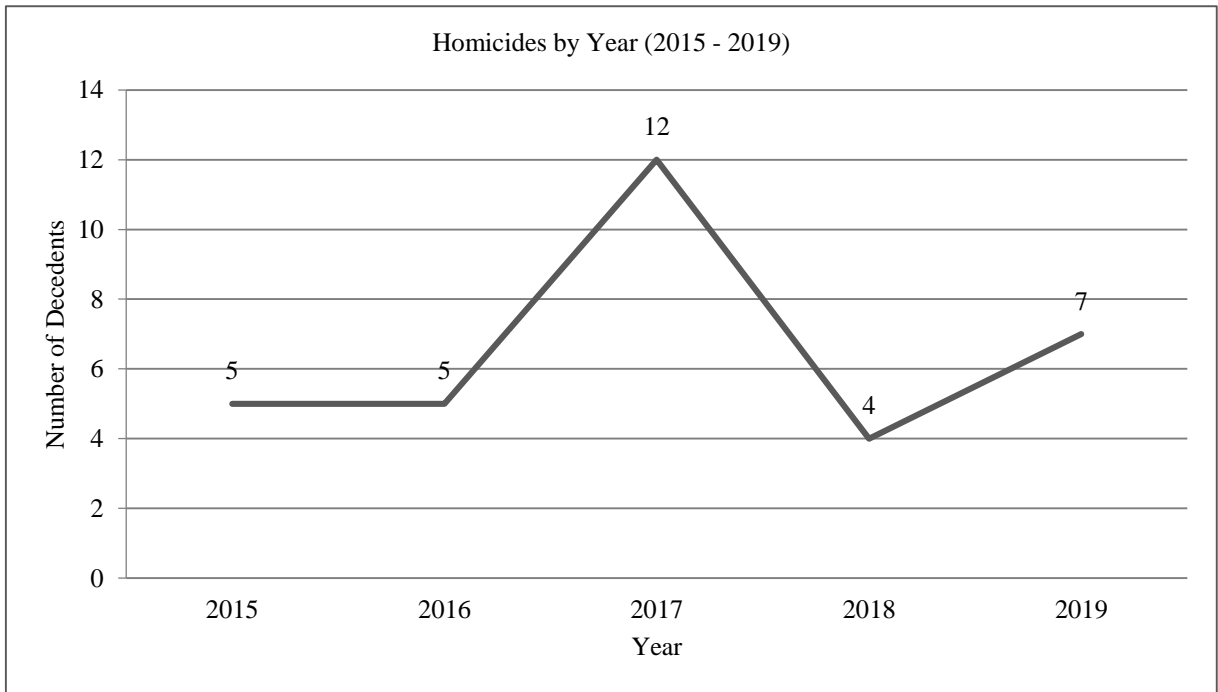


Figure 6.1.

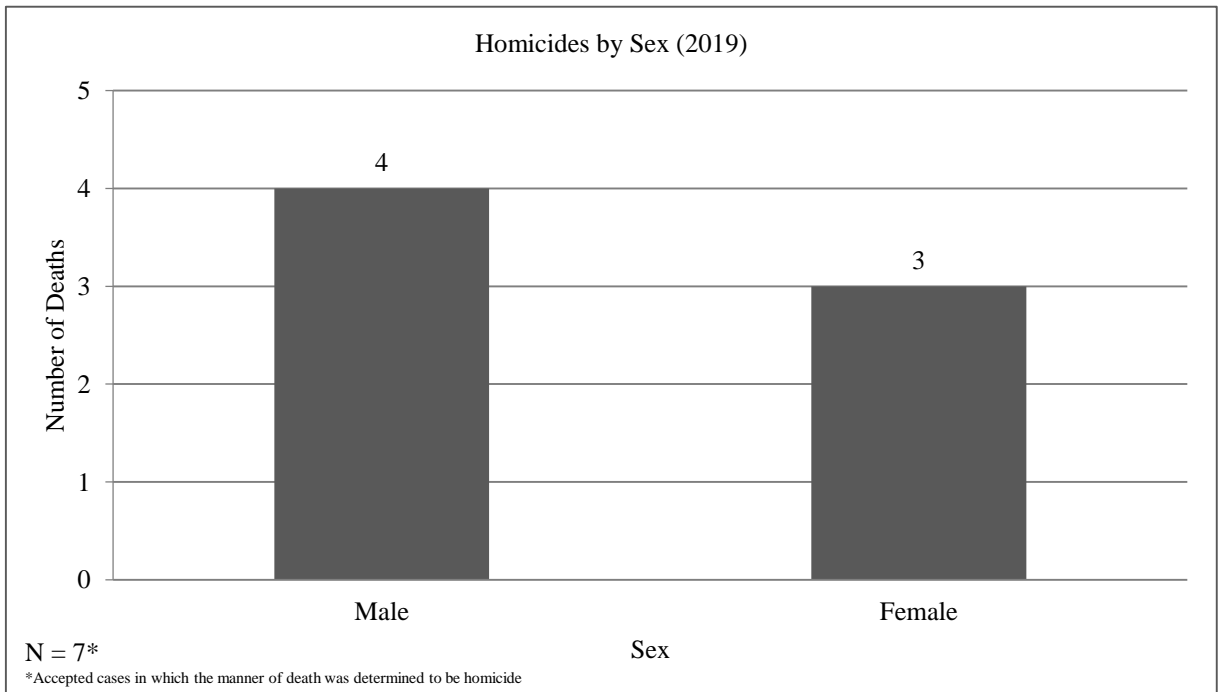


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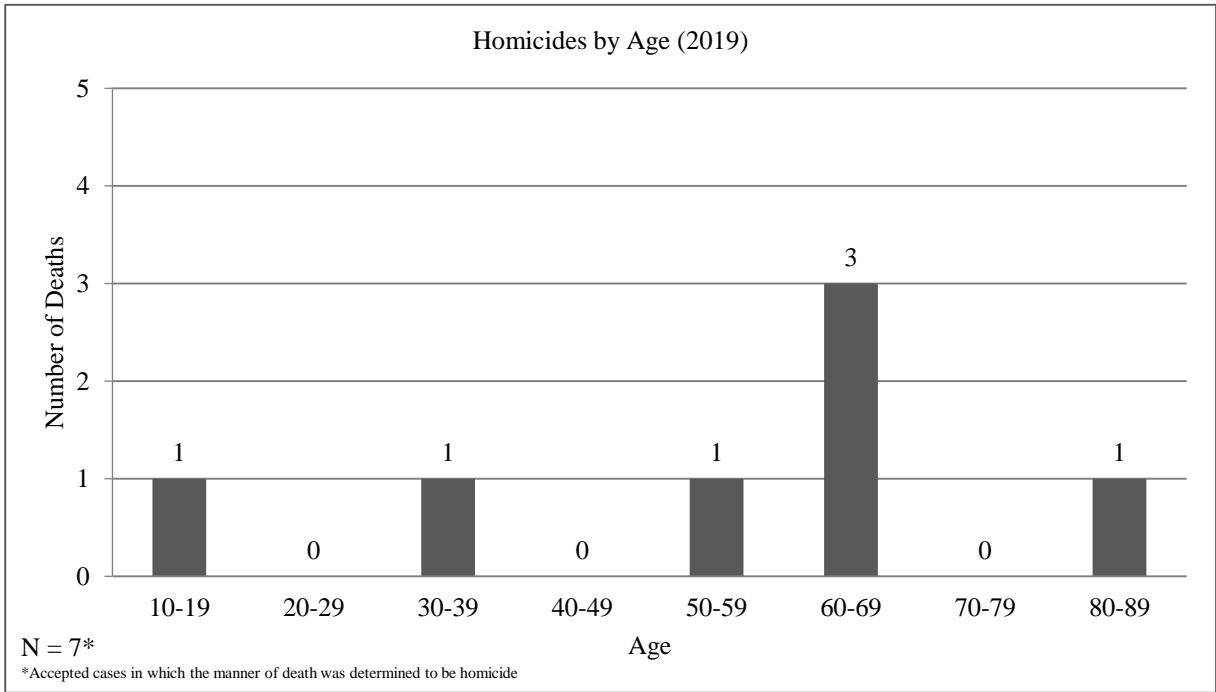


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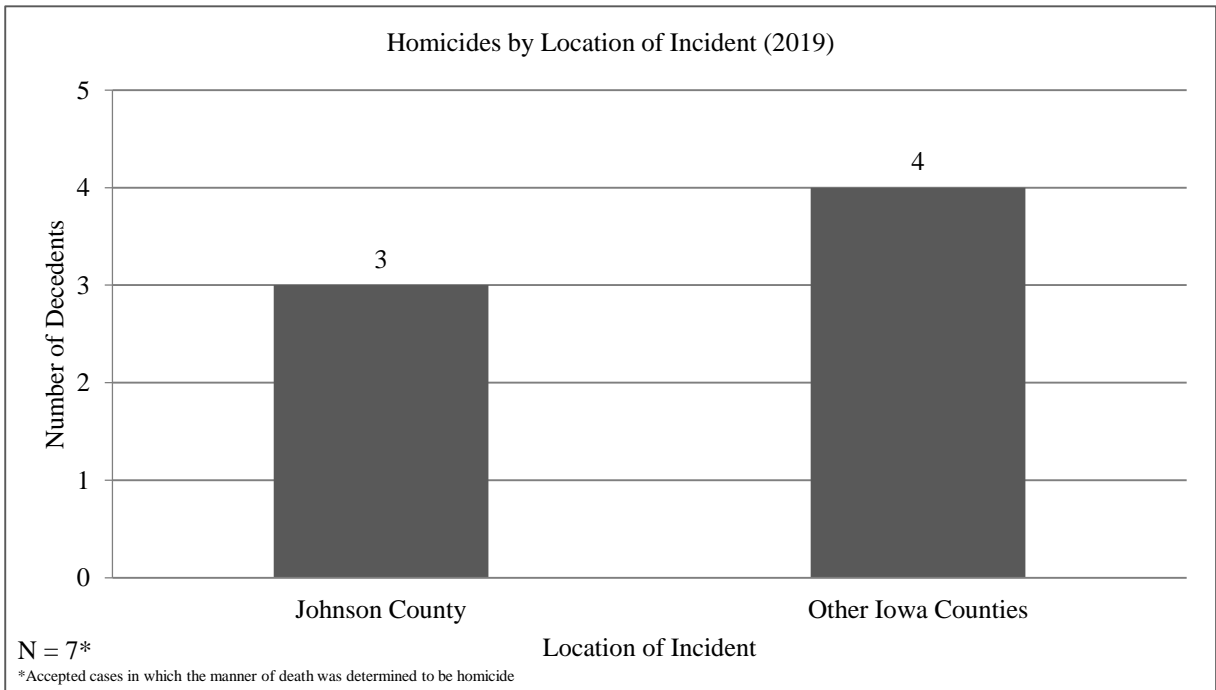


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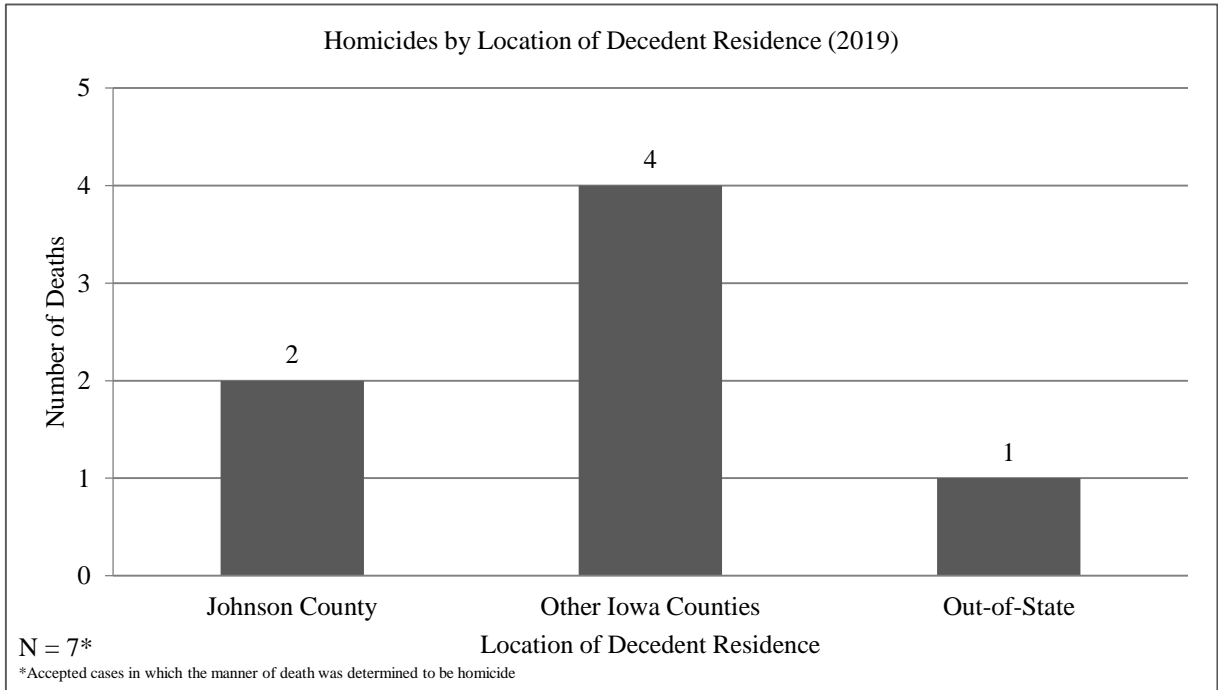


Figure 6.5.

Drug-Related Deaths

In 2019, there were 21 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 11 involved illicit drugs only, 2 involved prescription drugs only, 2 involved over-the-counter medications only, 6 involved a mixture of drug types. Of the 6 mixed drug-related deaths, 3 involved prescription drugs only, 1 involved multiple illicit drugs (methamphetamine and morphine), 1 involved a mixture of illicitly obtained substances (methadone, etizolam, and morphine) and prescription drugs, and 1 was a mixture of prescription and over-the-counter medication. Of the remaining 11 illicit drug-related deaths, 10 involved methamphetamine and 1 involved cocaine.

Of the 21 drug-related deaths, 13 were classified as accident, 6 as suicide, and 2 as undetermined. Of the 21 drug-related deaths, 4 involved prescription and/or illicit opioids. The overall sex distribution was 13 males to 8 females, with the most common age range of 50-59 (6 decedents).

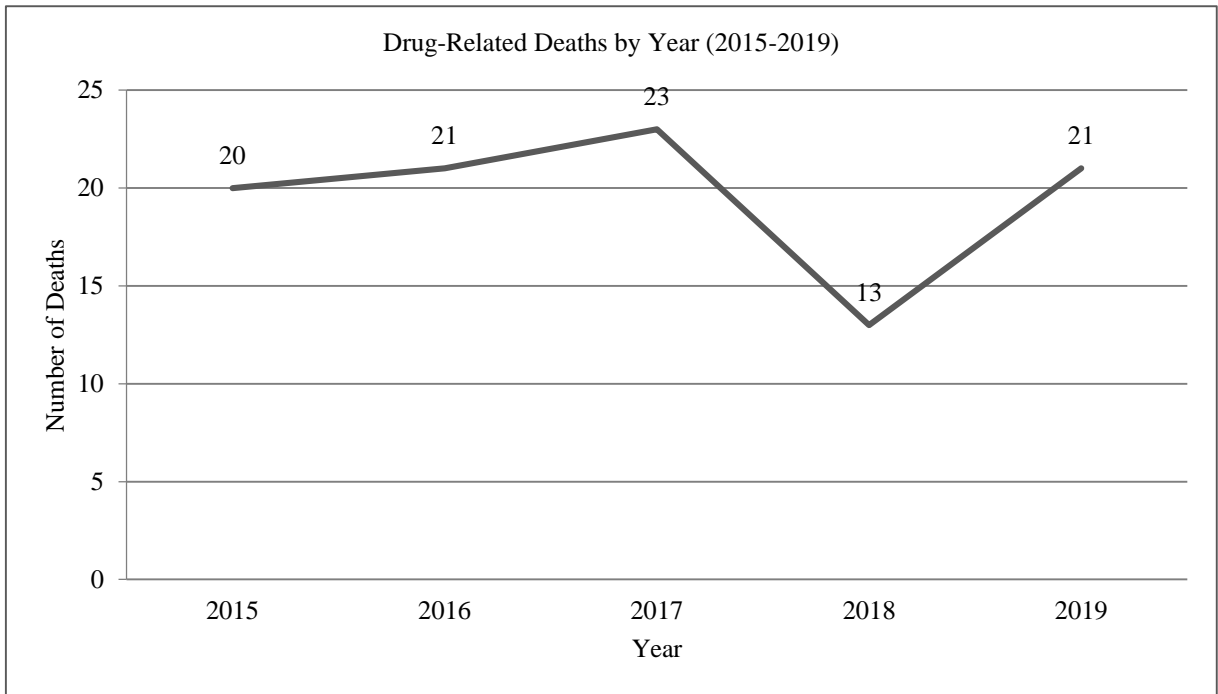


Figure 7.1.

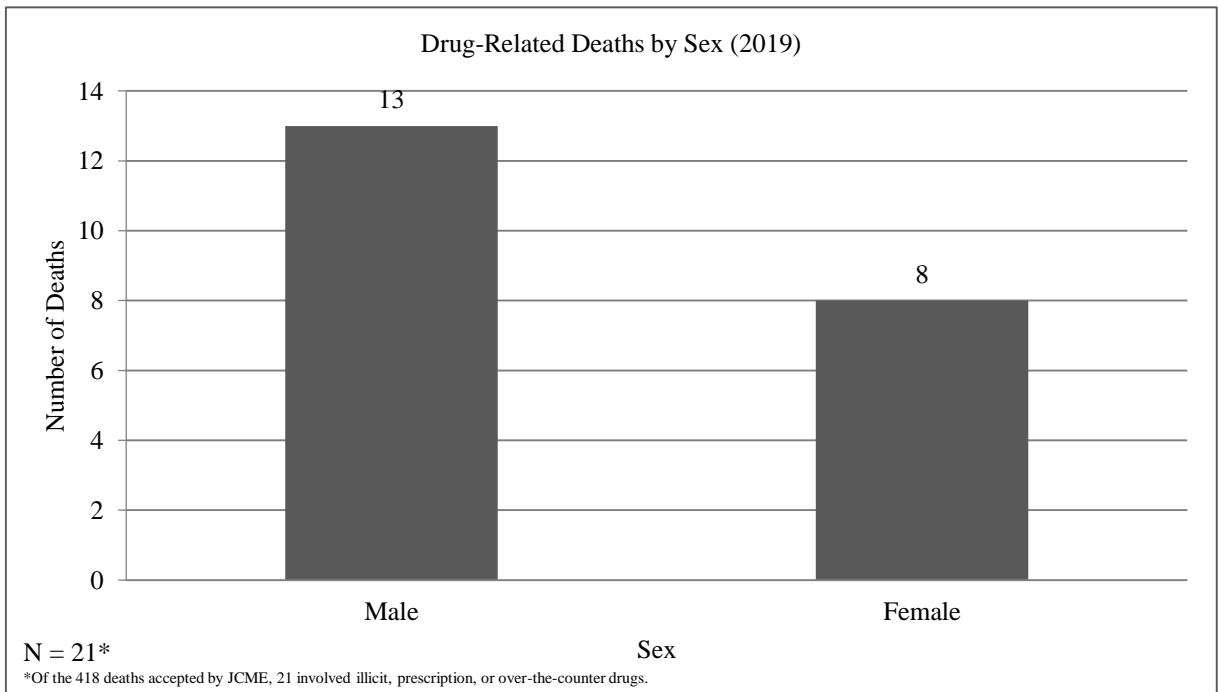


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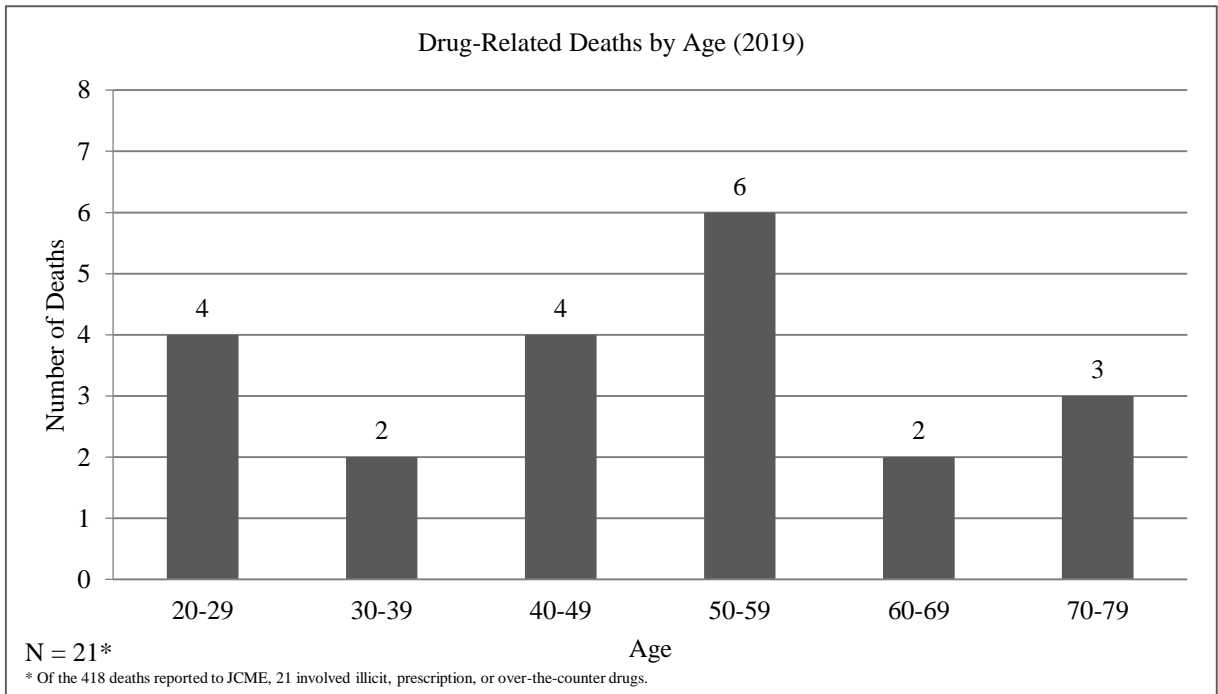


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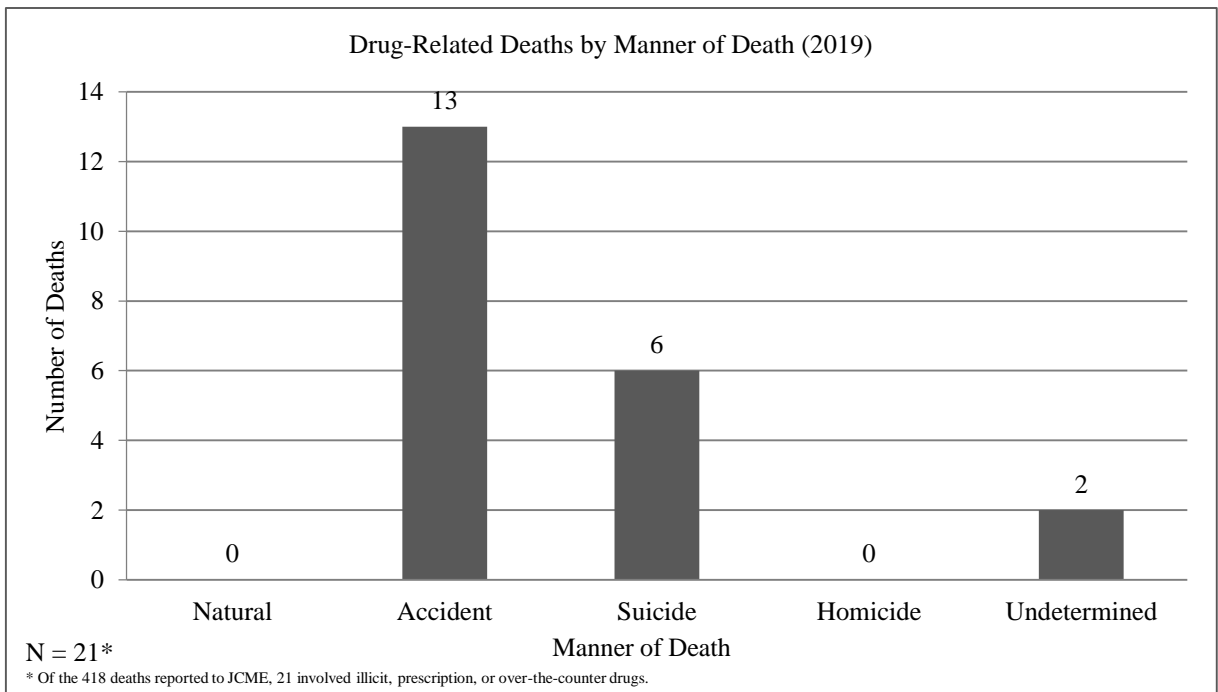


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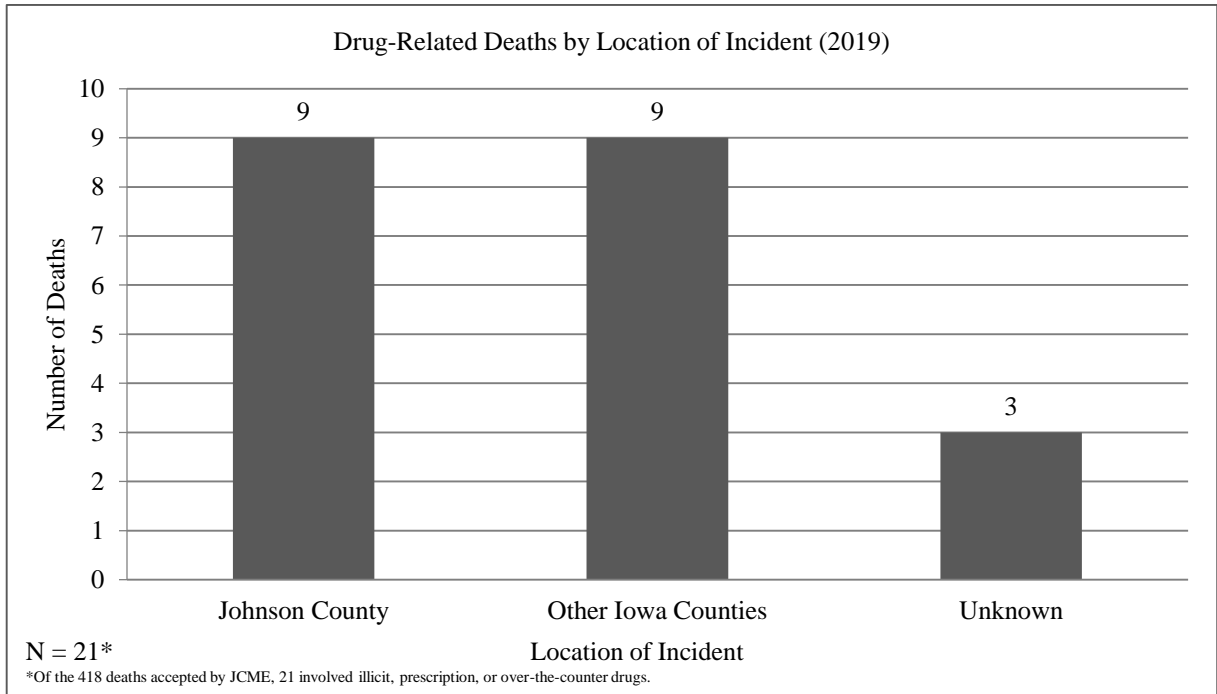


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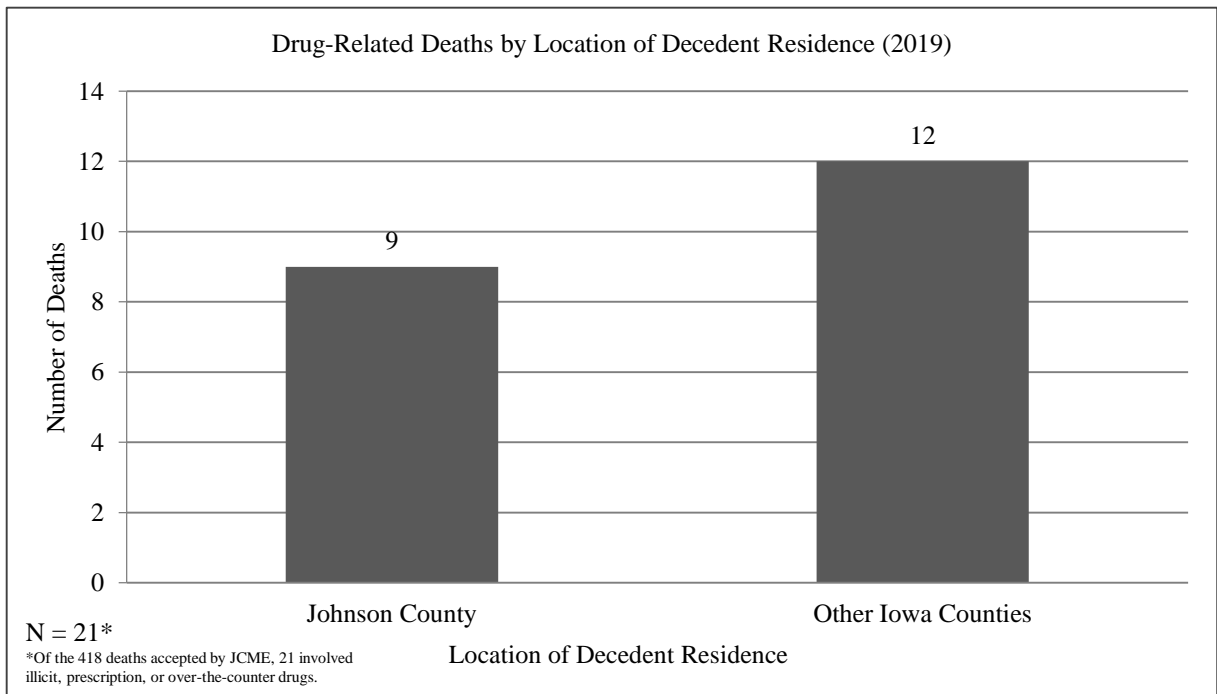


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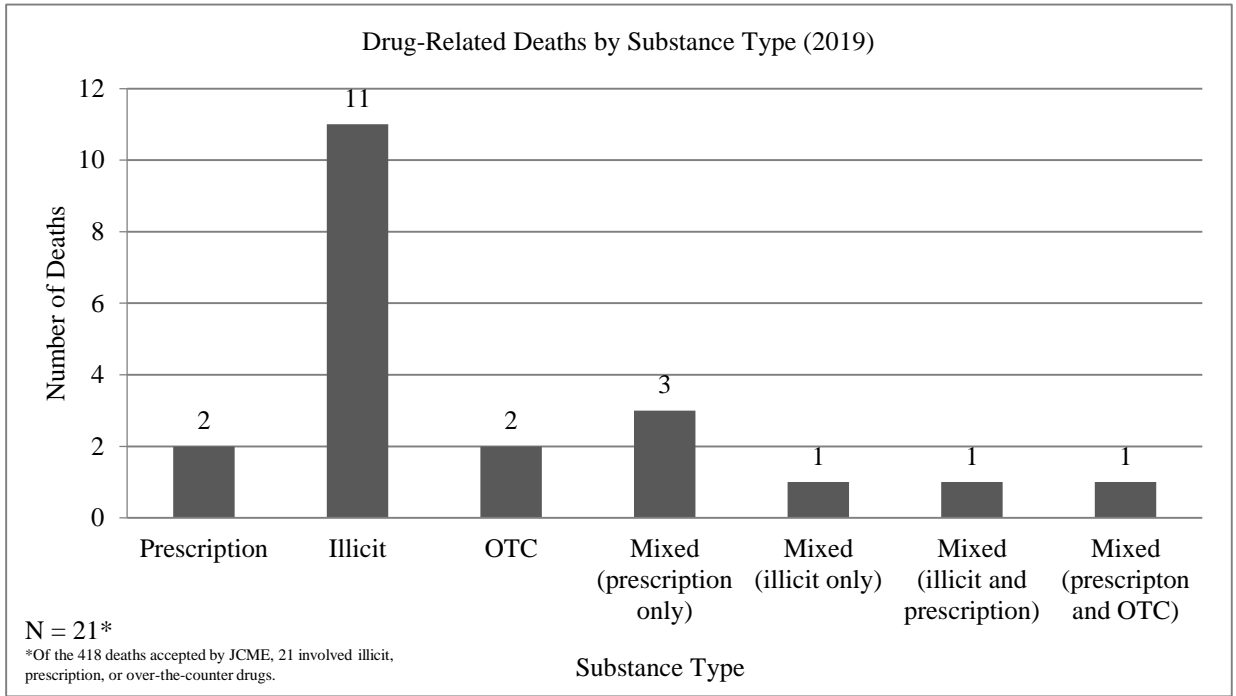


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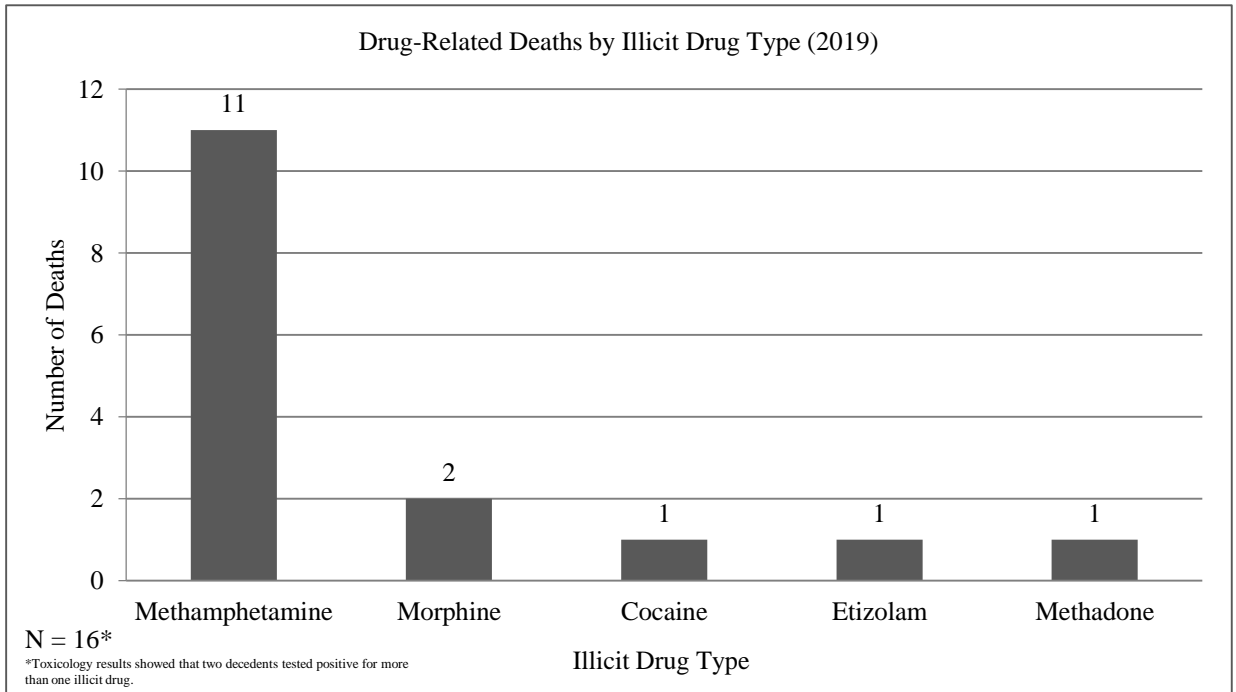


Figure 7.8.

Table 7.1. Drug-Related Deaths by Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs (2019)

Type of Drug	Number of Decedents*
Insulin	11
Mitragynine	1
Acetaminophen	1
Oxycodone	1
Quetiapine	1
Zolpidem	1
Fluoxetine	1
Diphenhydramine	1
Hydroxyzine	1
Doxepin	1
Hydrocodone	1

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

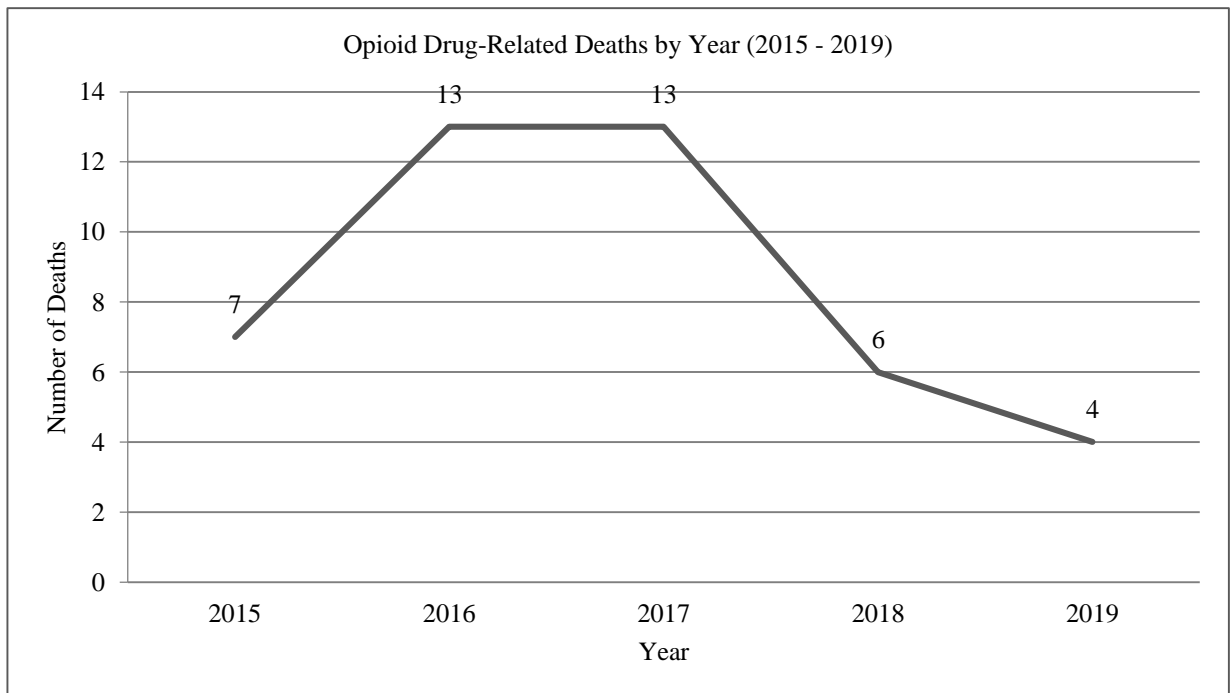


Figure 7.9.

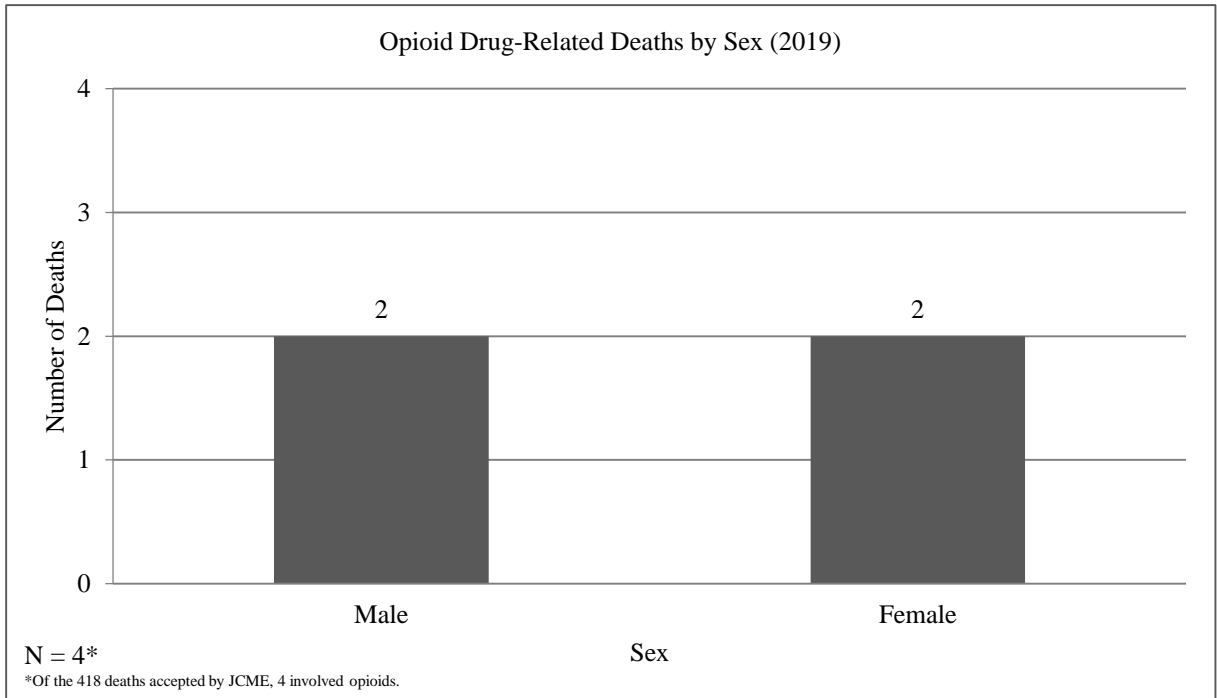


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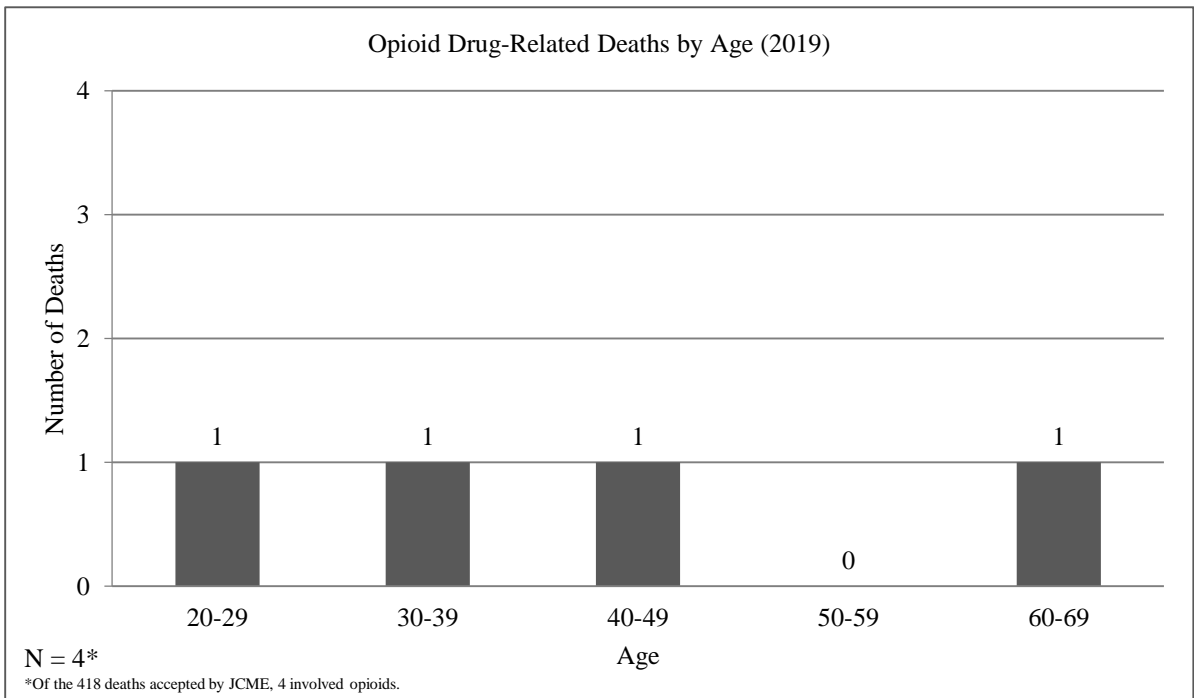


Figure 7.11.

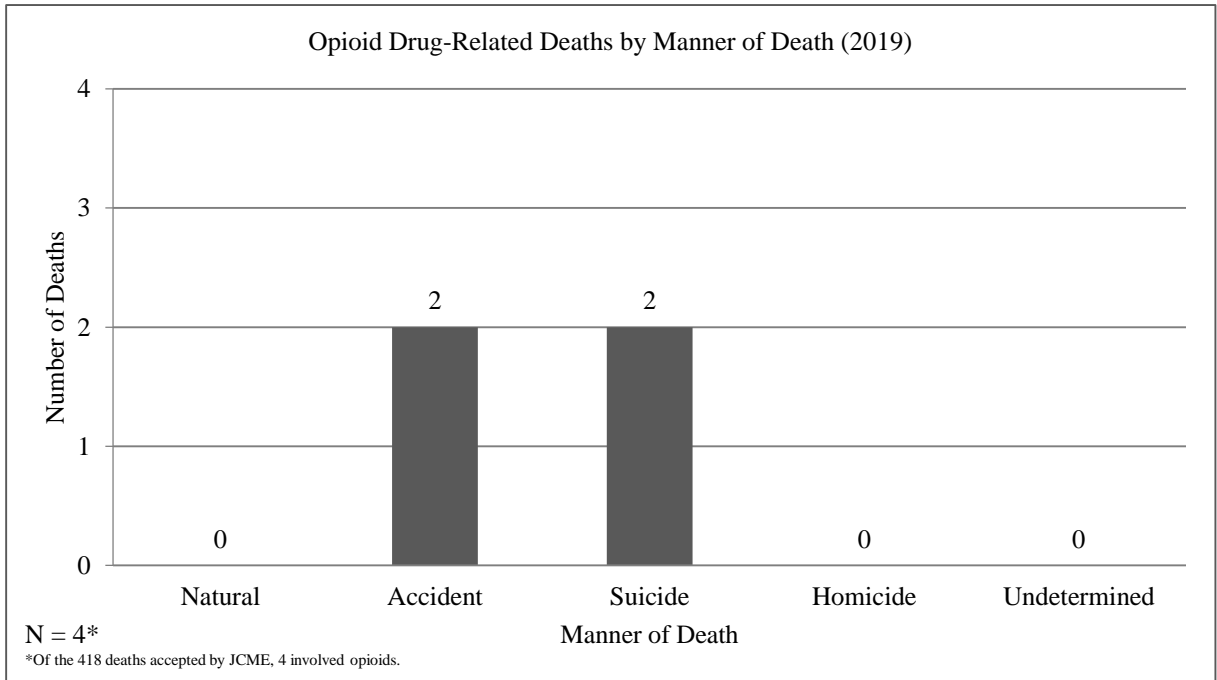


Figure 7.12.

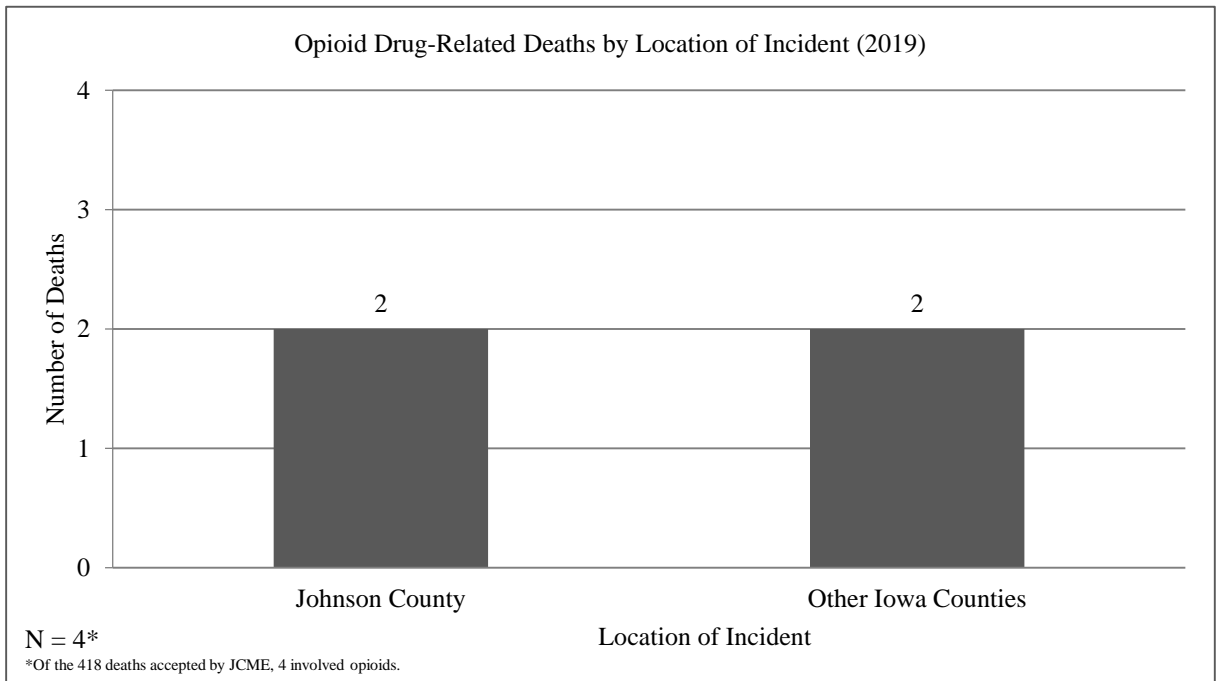


Figure 7.13.

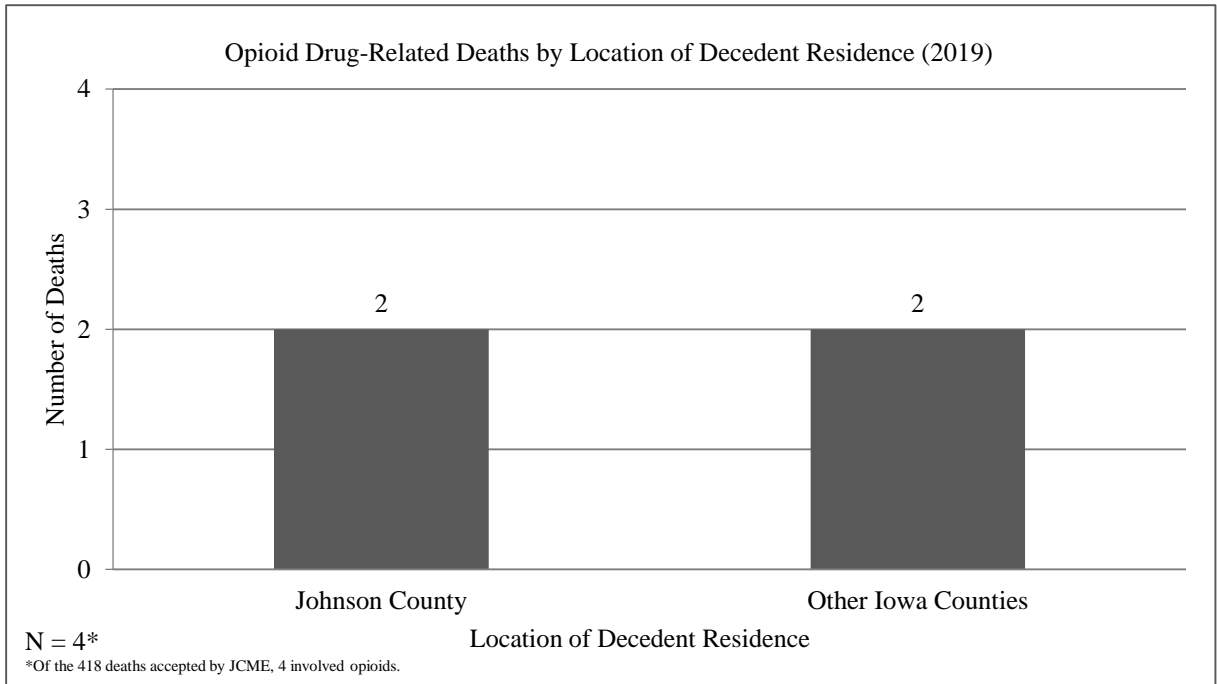


Figure 7.14.

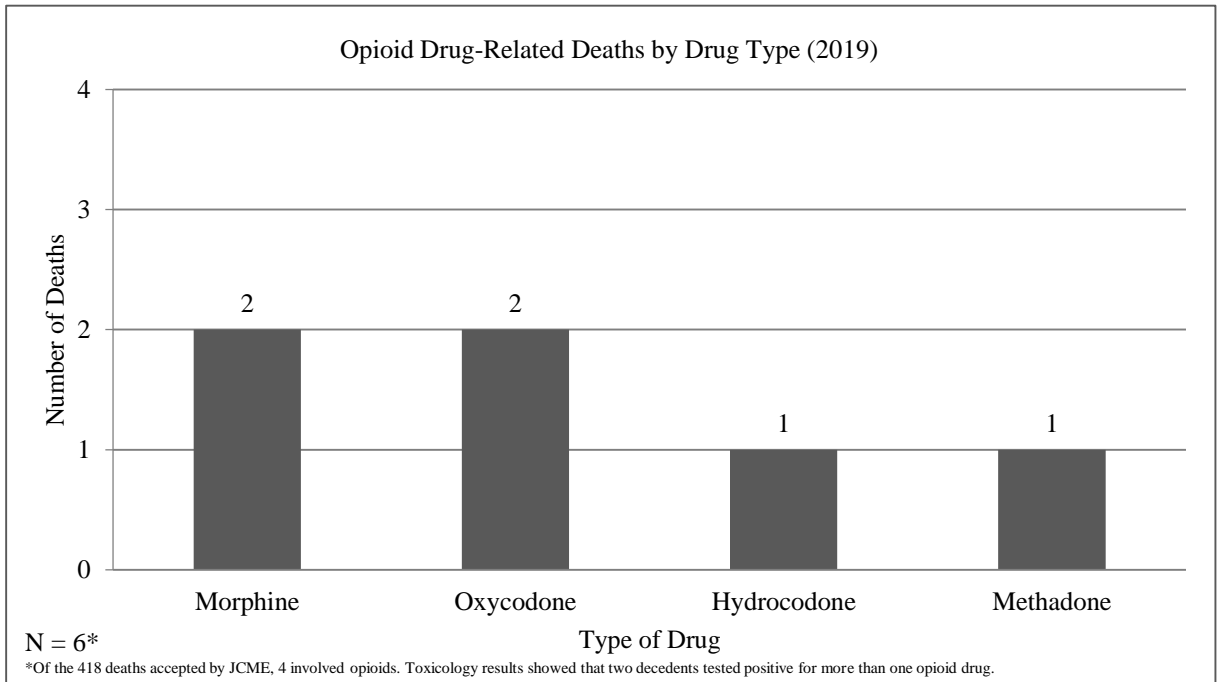


Figure 7.15.

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Older Adult Deaths

In 2019, JCME accepted jurisdiction of 261 deaths that involved adults aged 60 years and older. Of these, 122 were residents of Johnson County, 103 were residents of other counties in Iowa, 30 were out-of-state residents, and 6 were Iowa Department of Corrections offenders. 130 of these deaths were certified as accident, 124 as natural, 4 as homicide, 2 as suicide, and 1 as undetermined after a complete autopsy was performed.

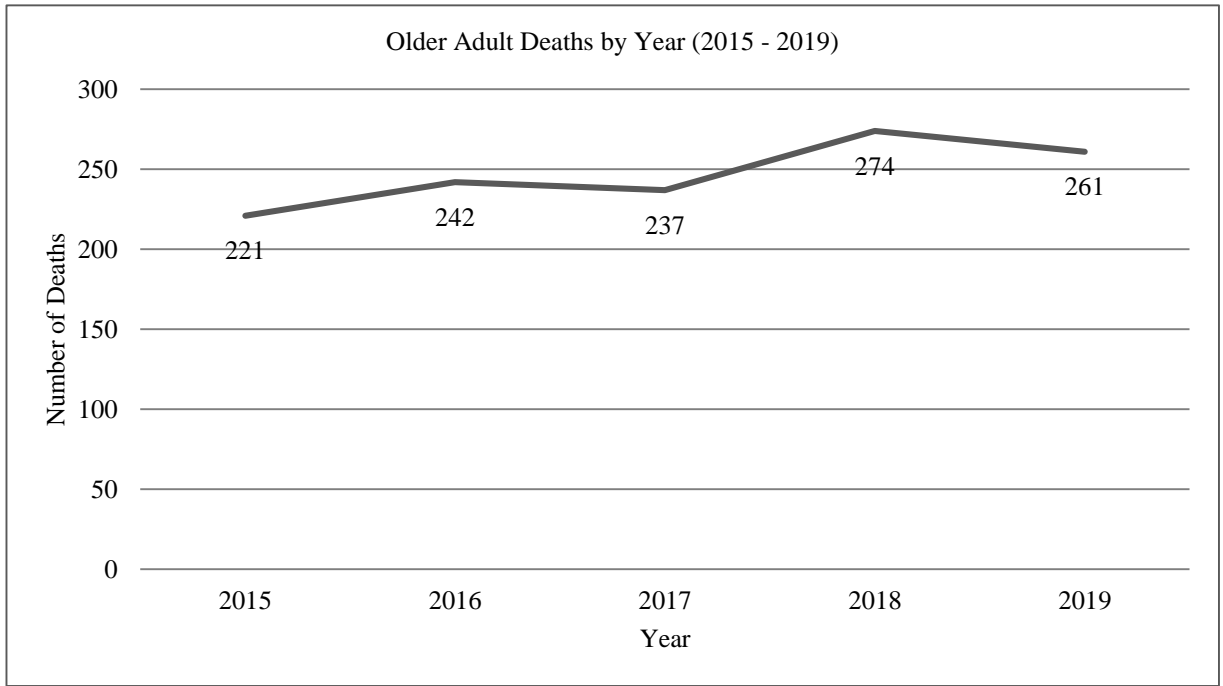


Figure 8.1.

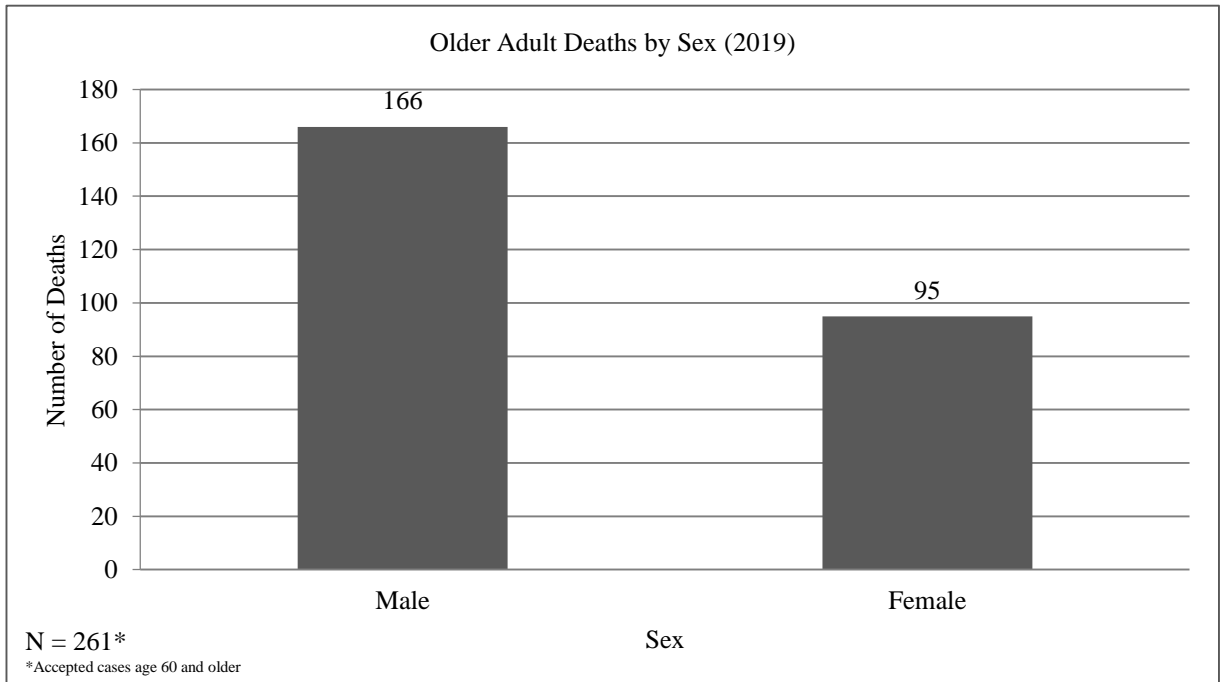


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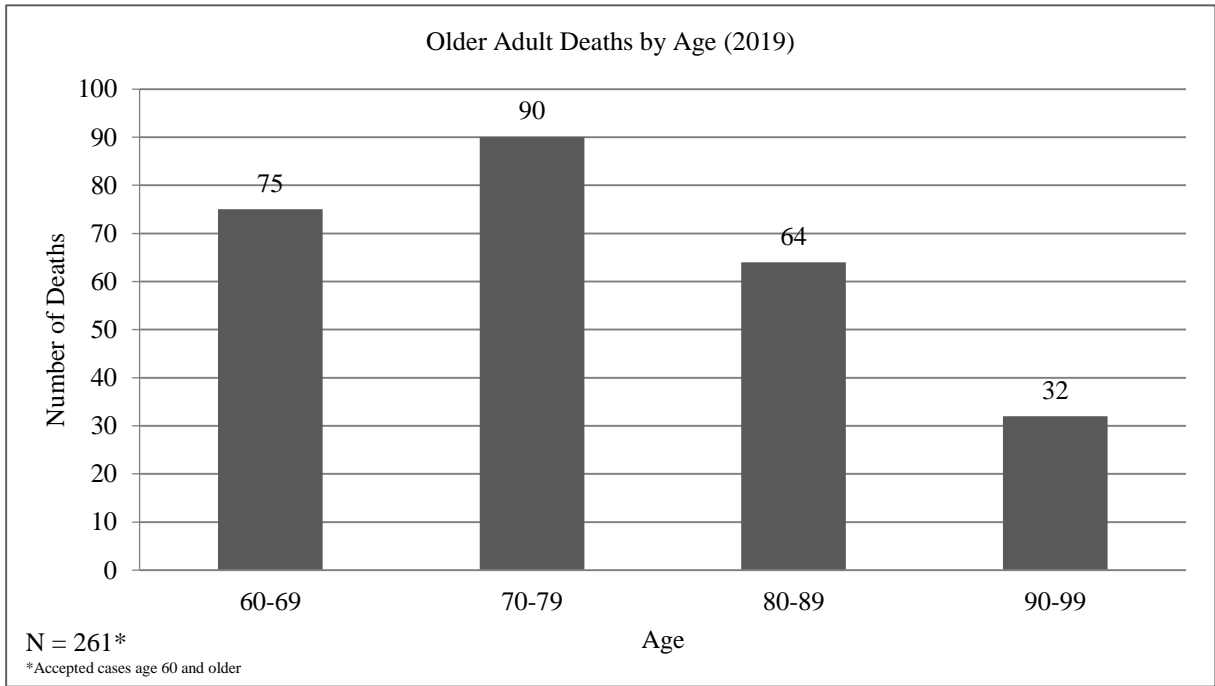


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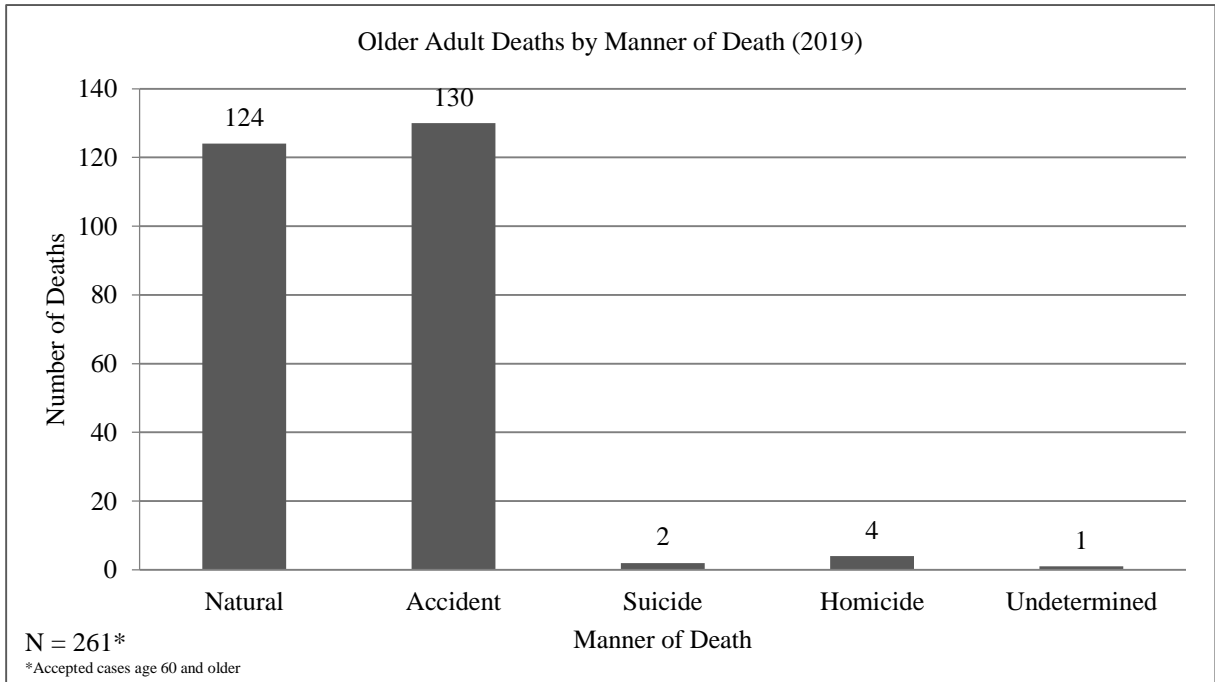


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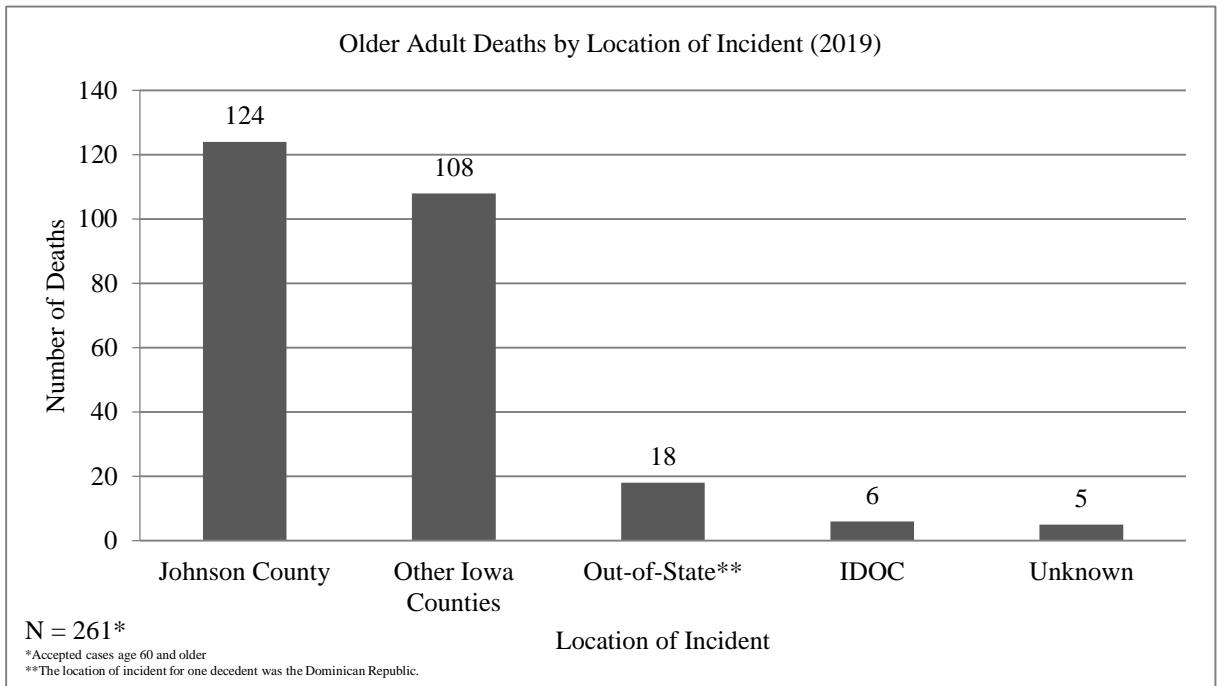


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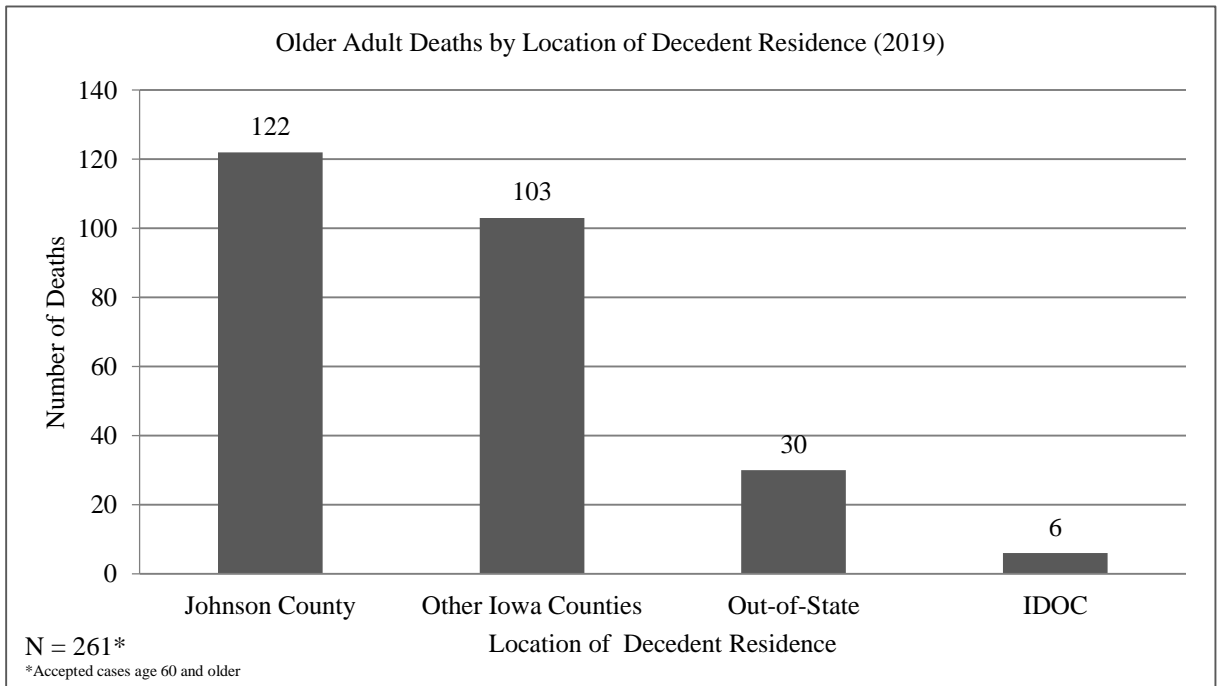


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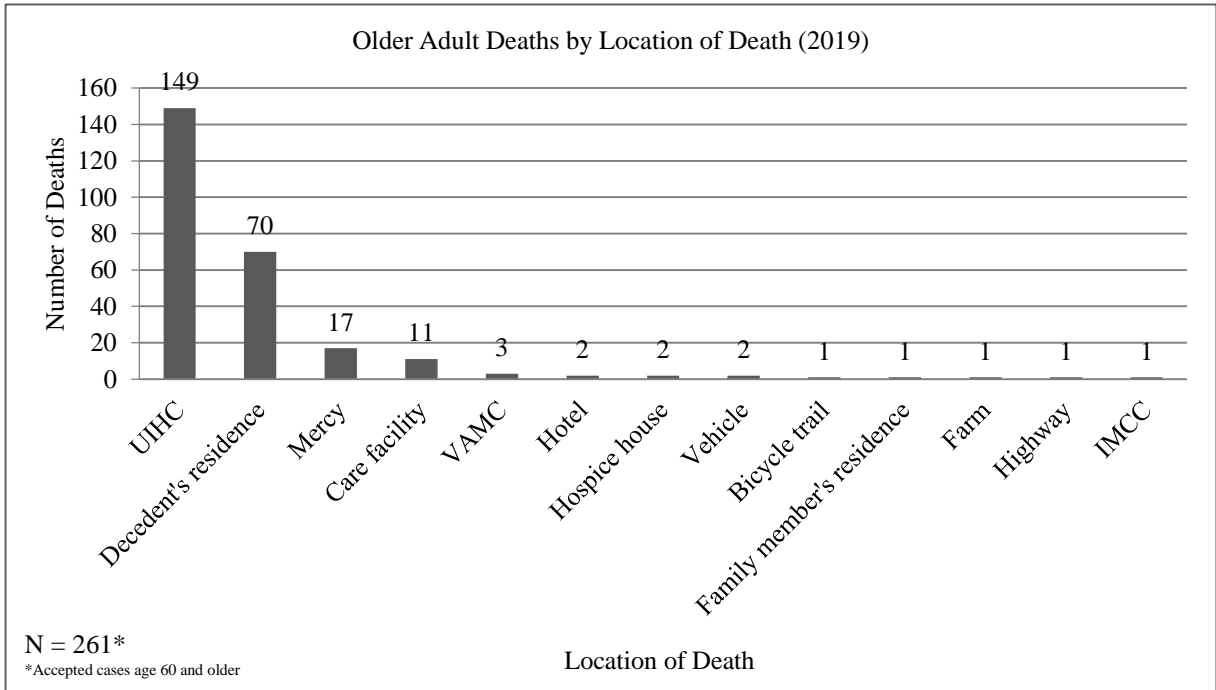


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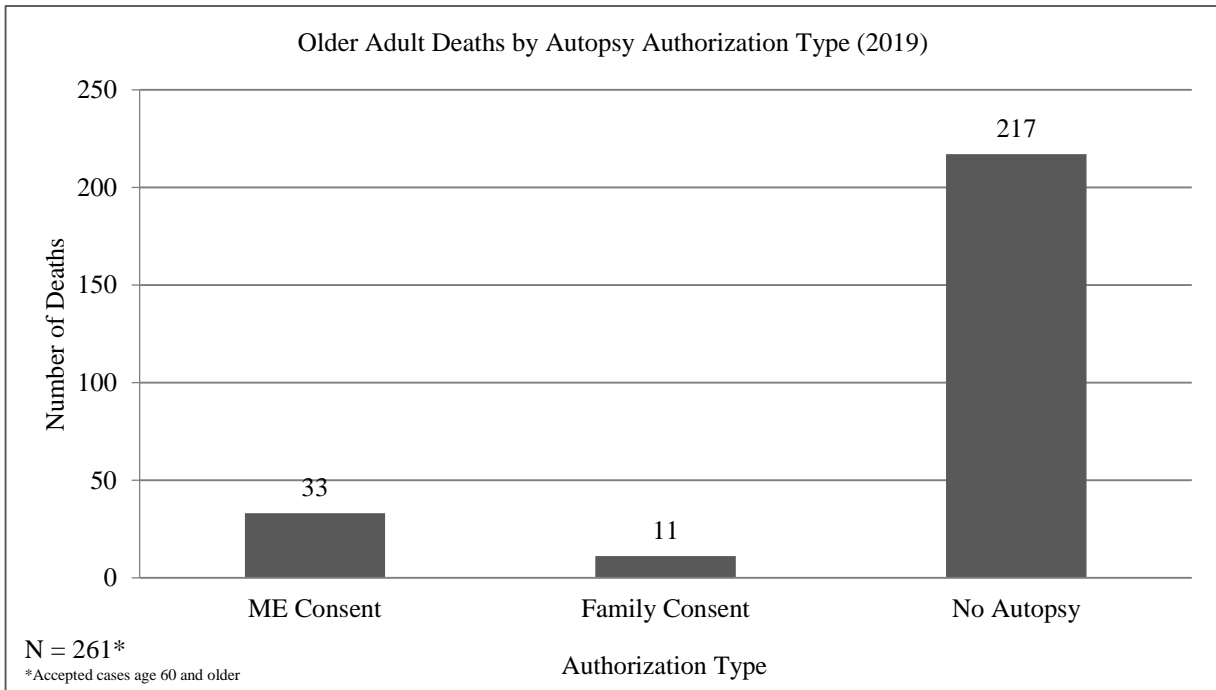


Figure 8.8.

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Older Adult Fall-Related Deaths

There were 261 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 94 in which the death was the result of a fall. The majority of these fall-related deaths, 65, occurred from a standing height and 42 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 53 of the falls.

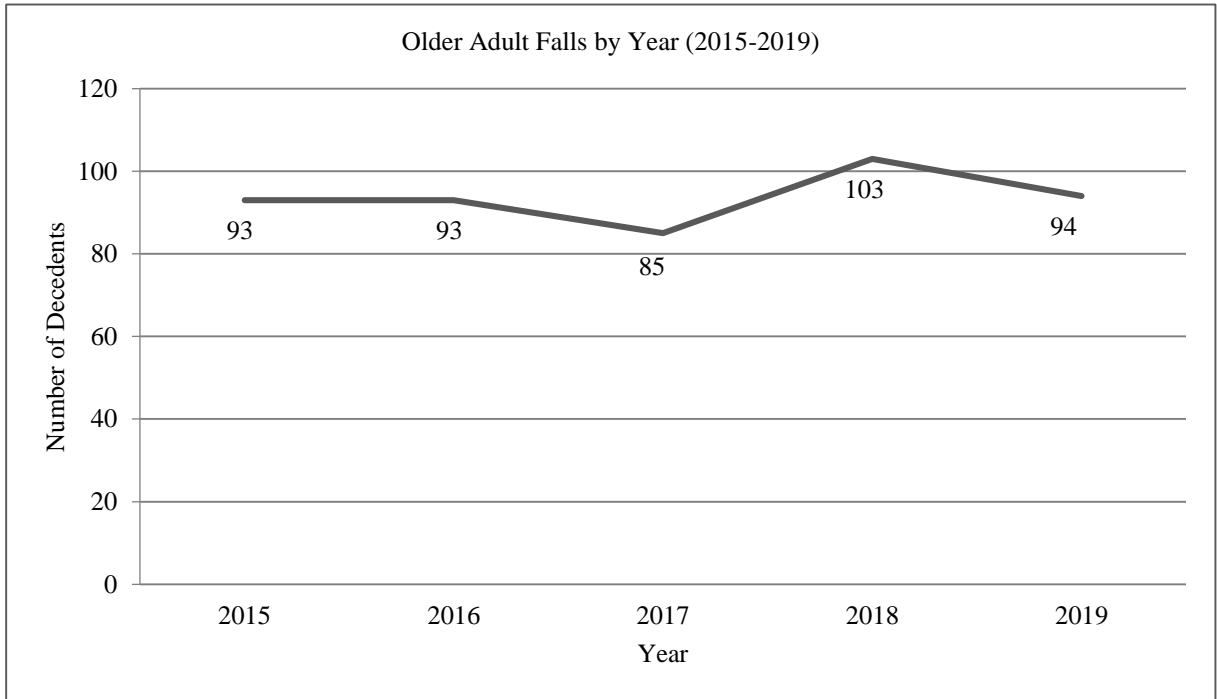


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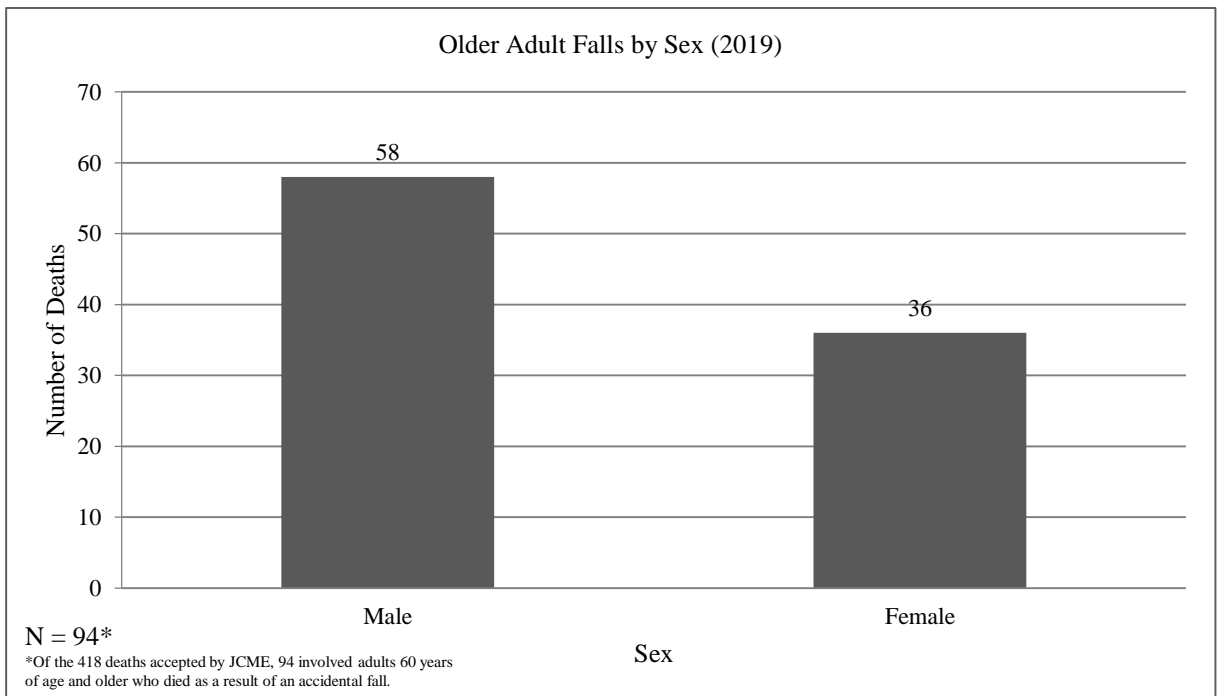


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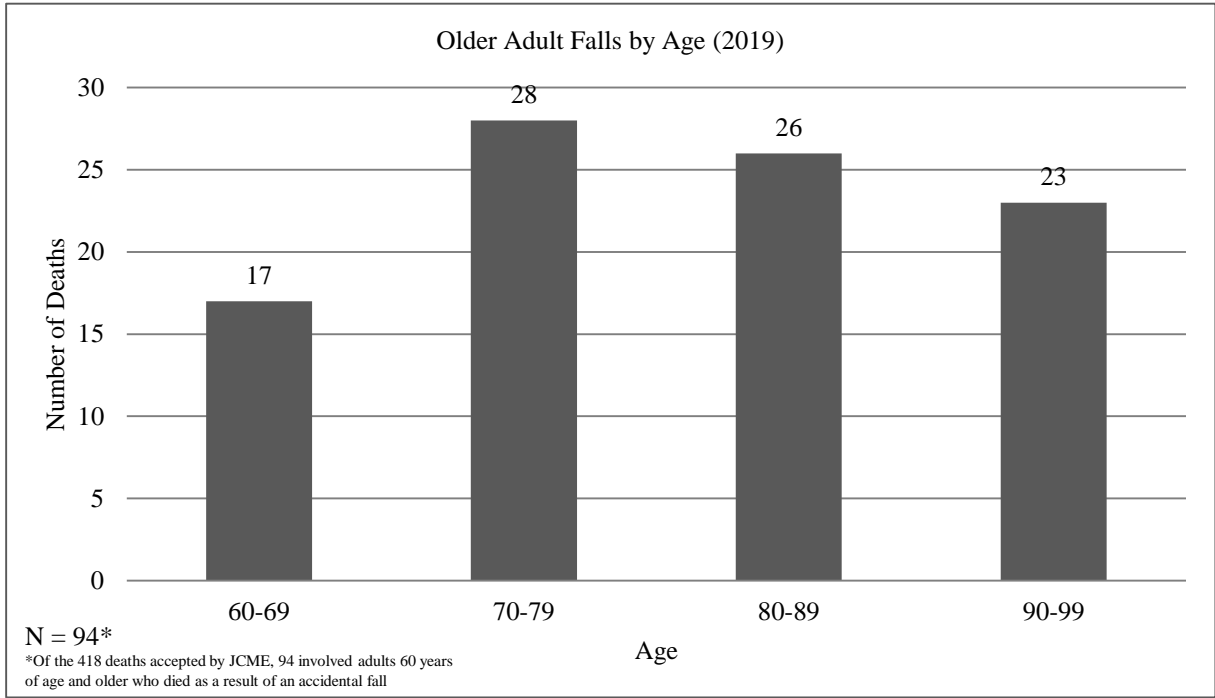


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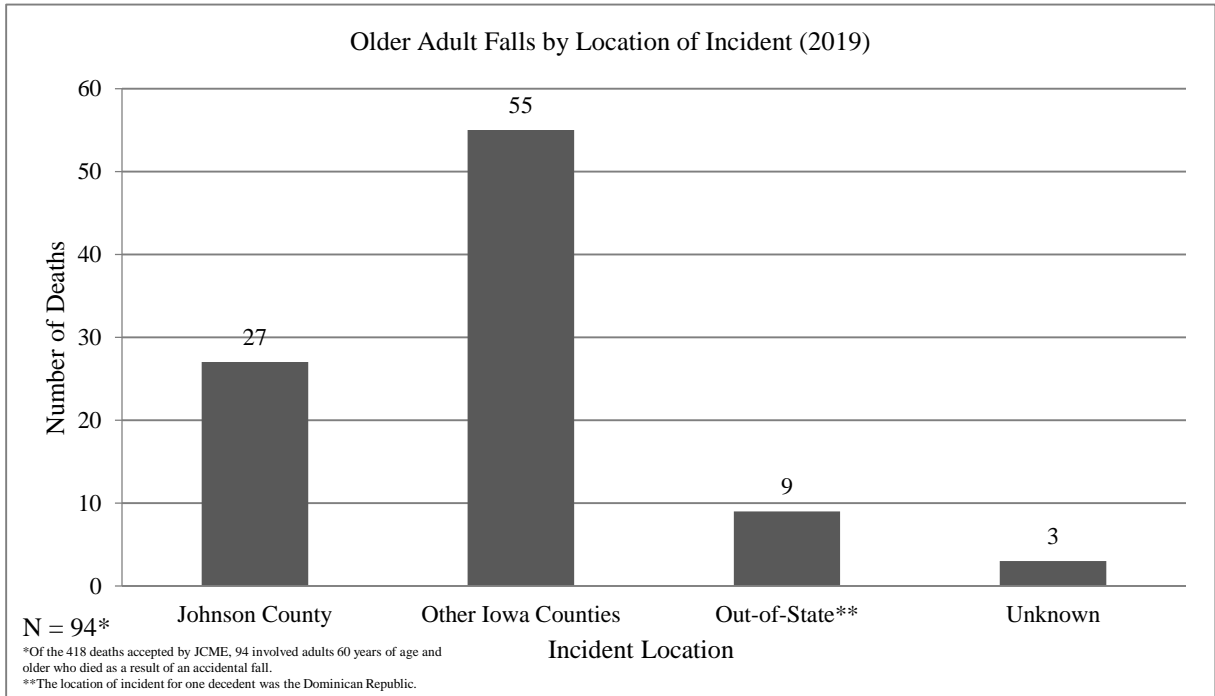


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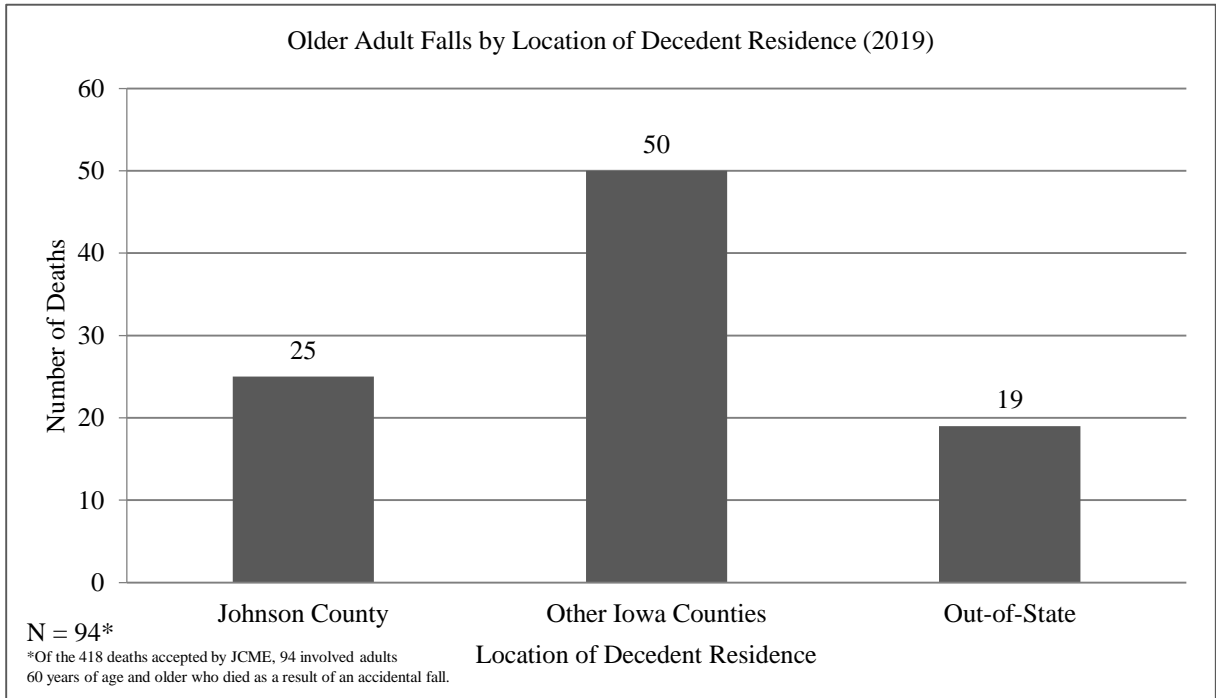


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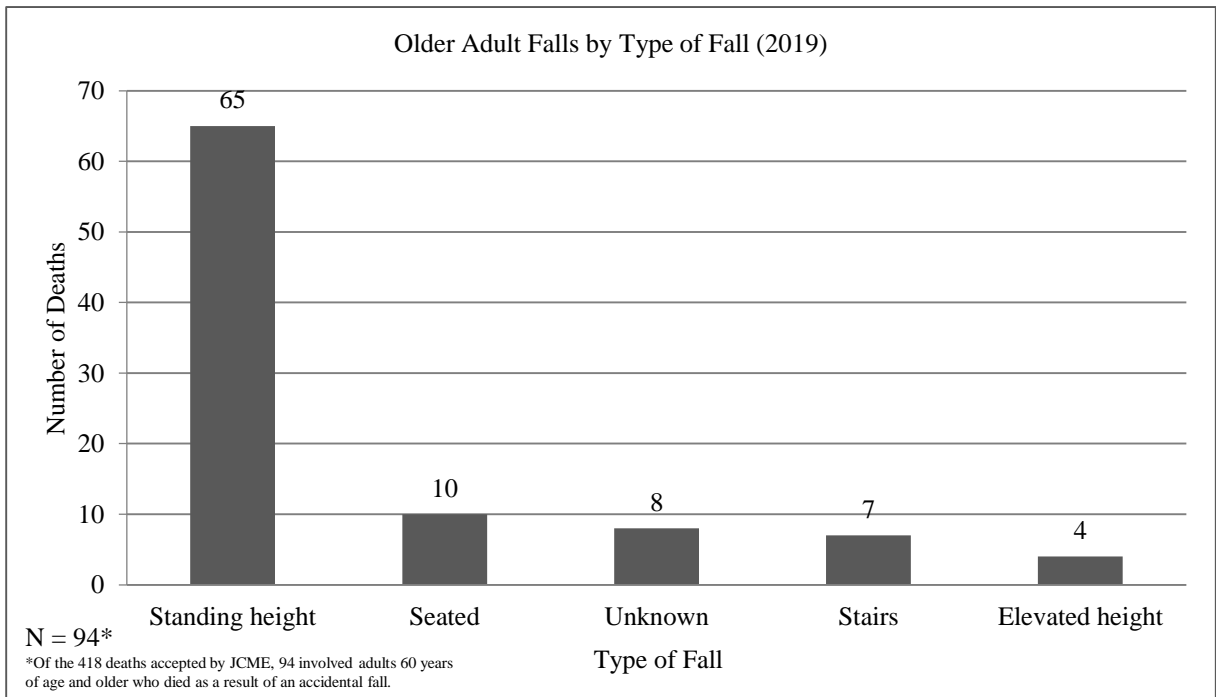


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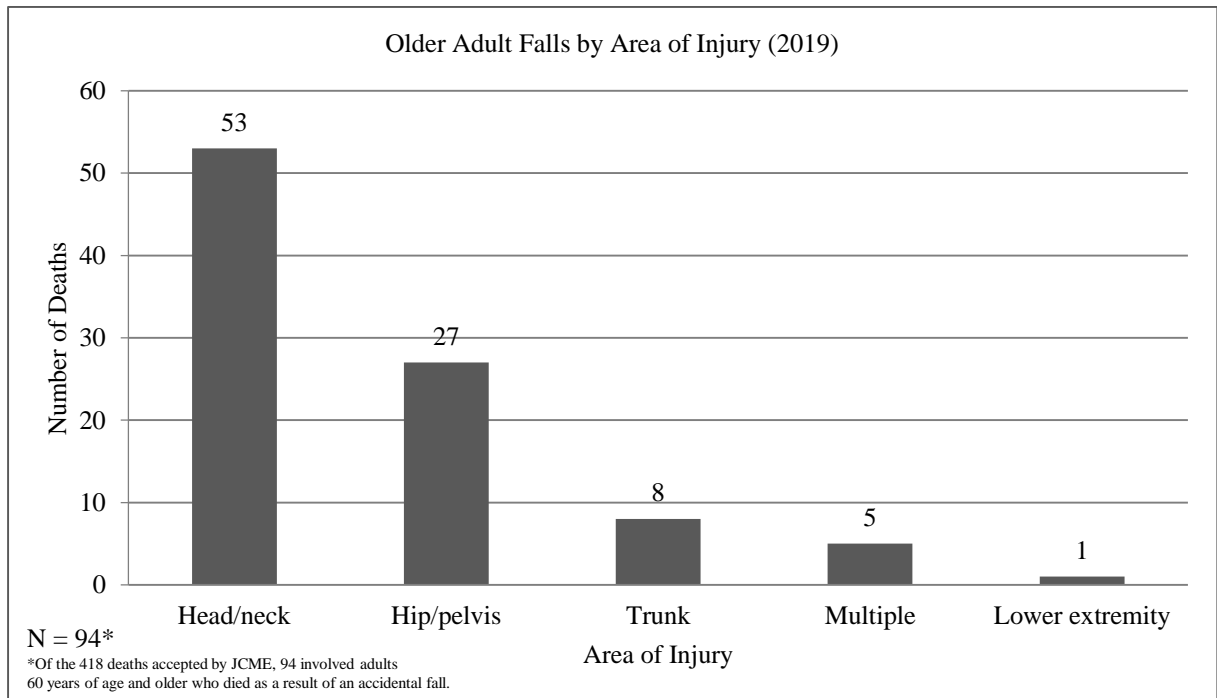


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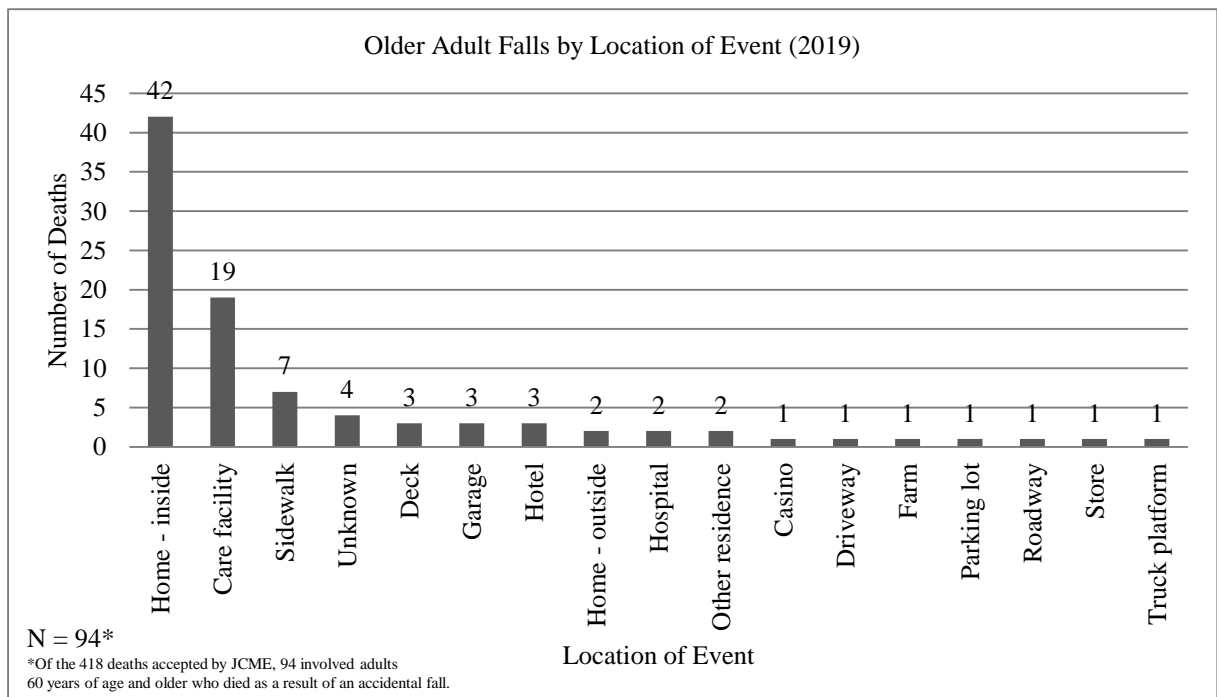


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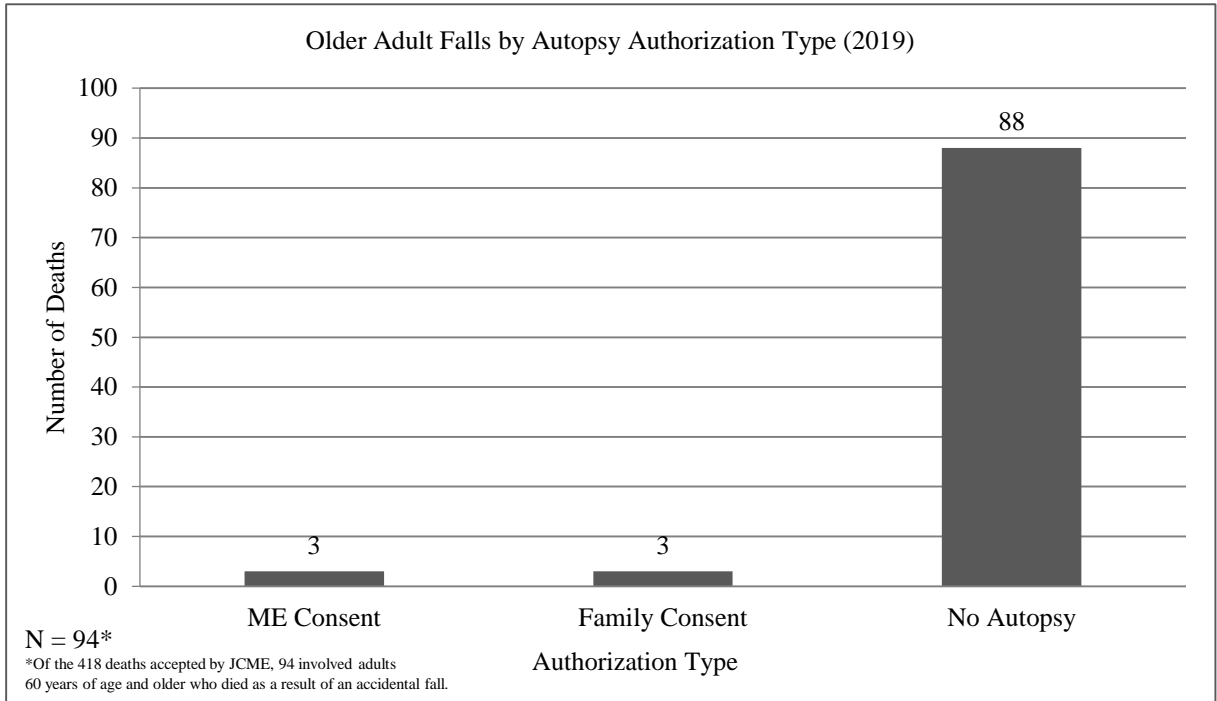


Figure 9.9.

Child Deaths

In 2019, there were 20 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 20 deaths, 11 were classified as accident followed by 7 as natural, and 2 as suicide. For 10 of these deaths the incident location was Johnson County, 6 incident locations occurred in another Iowa County, 3 incident locations occurred out-of-state, and 1 incident location was unknown.

There were 5 sleep-related infant deaths in 2019, all of which were classified as accident. For 3 of these deaths, the incident location was Johnson County and 2 incident locations occurred in another Iowa county.

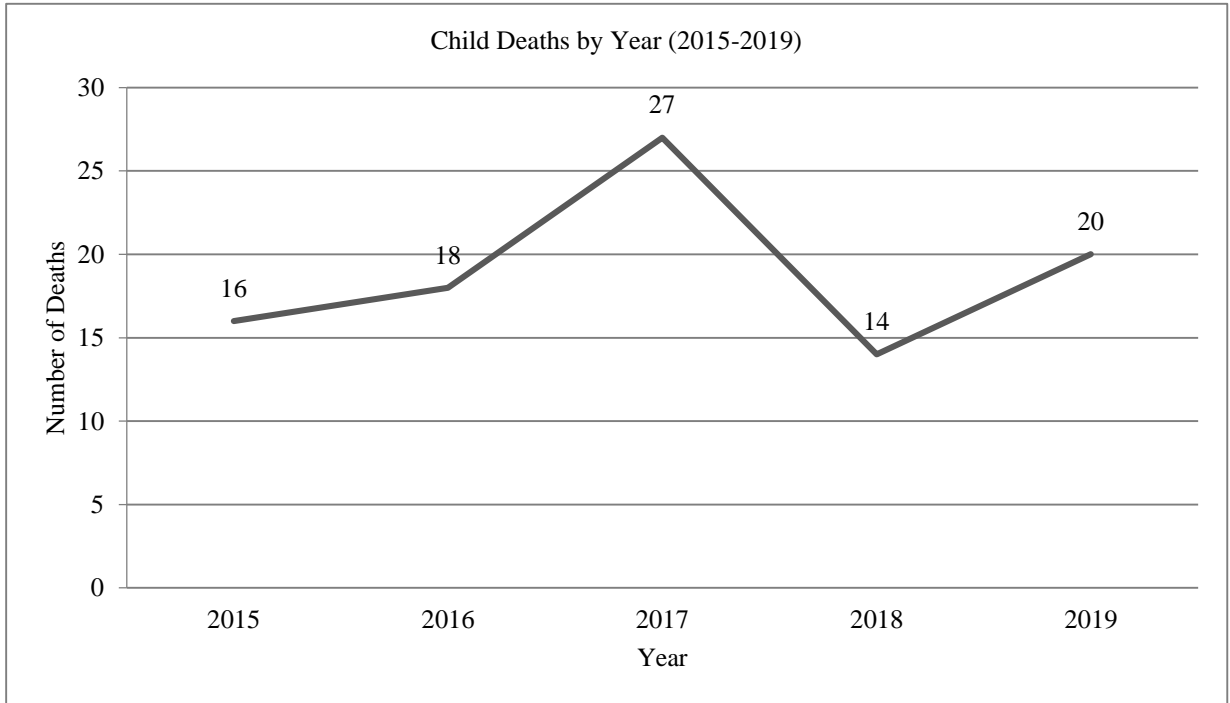


Figure 10.1.

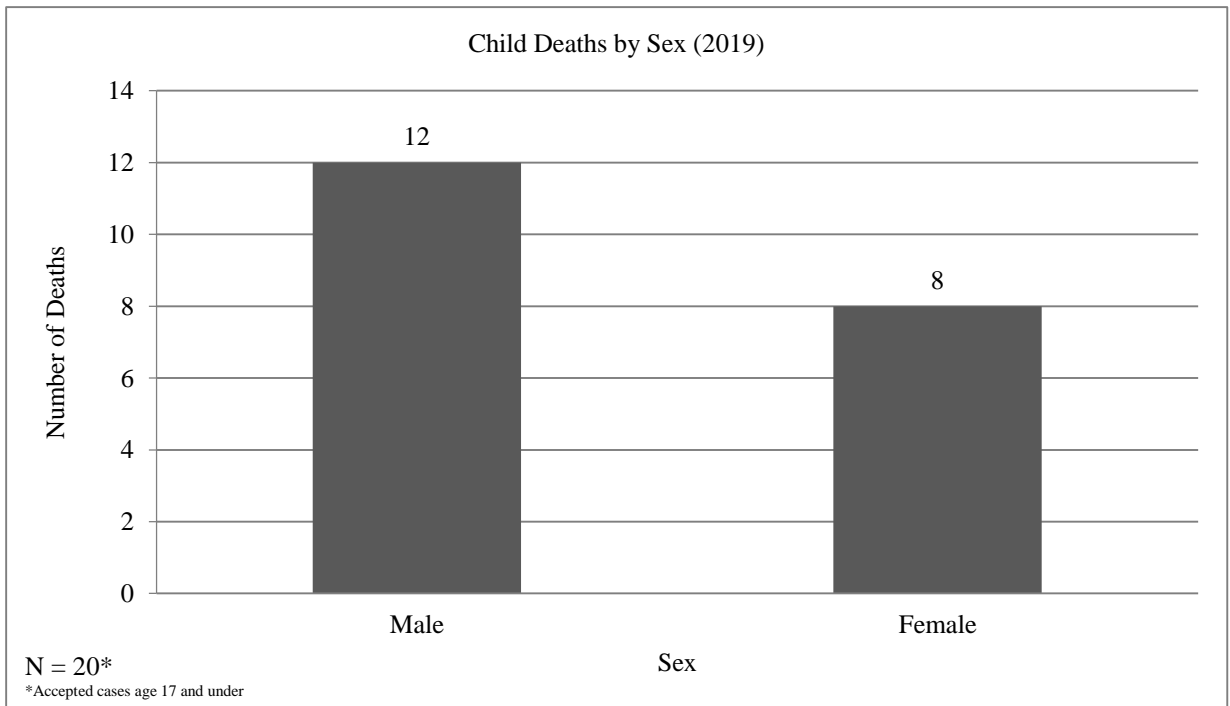


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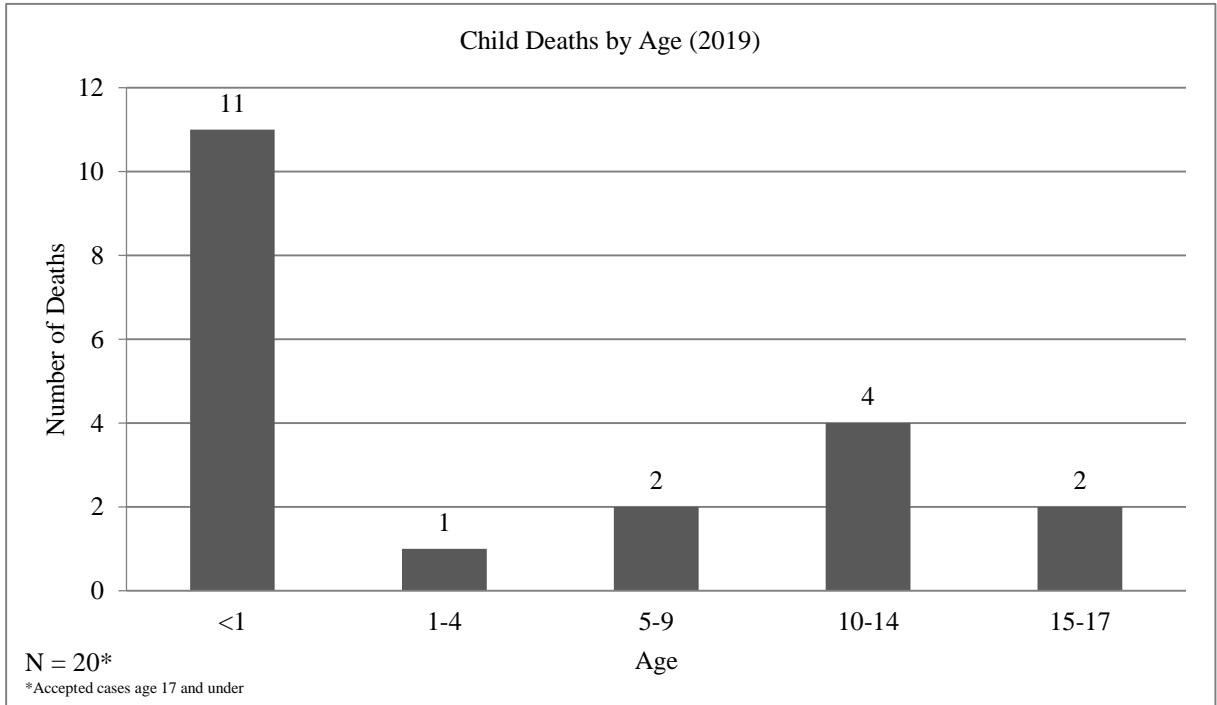


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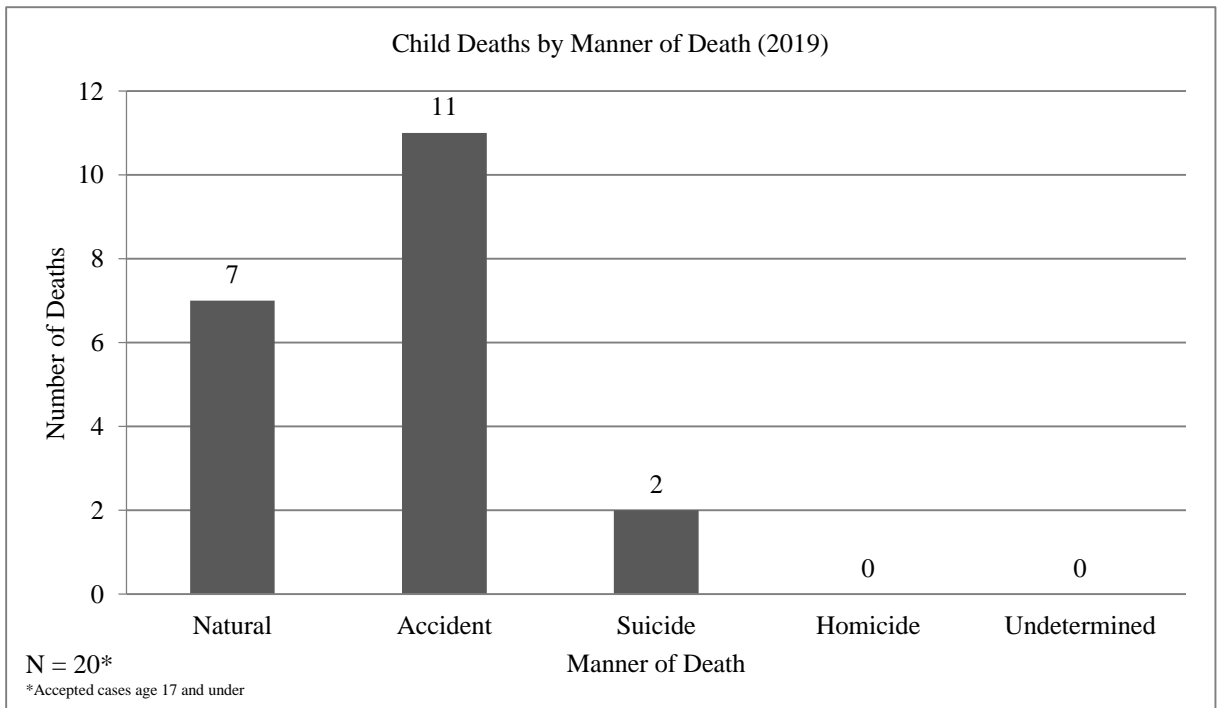


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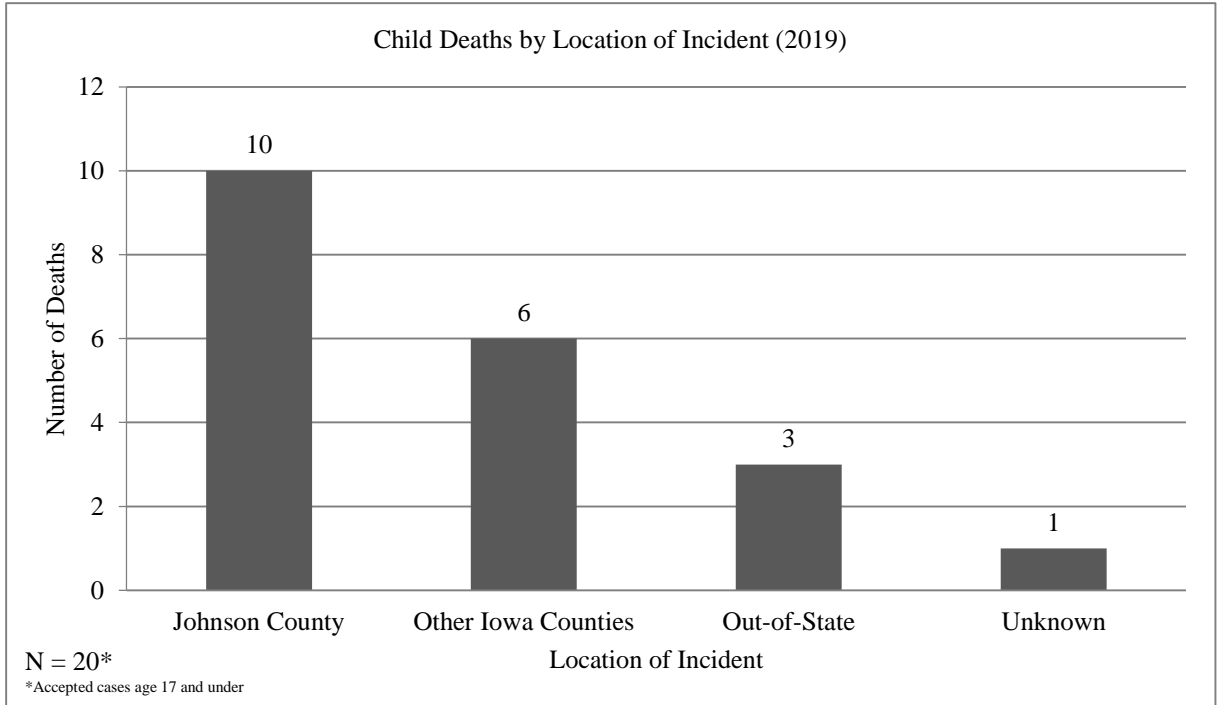


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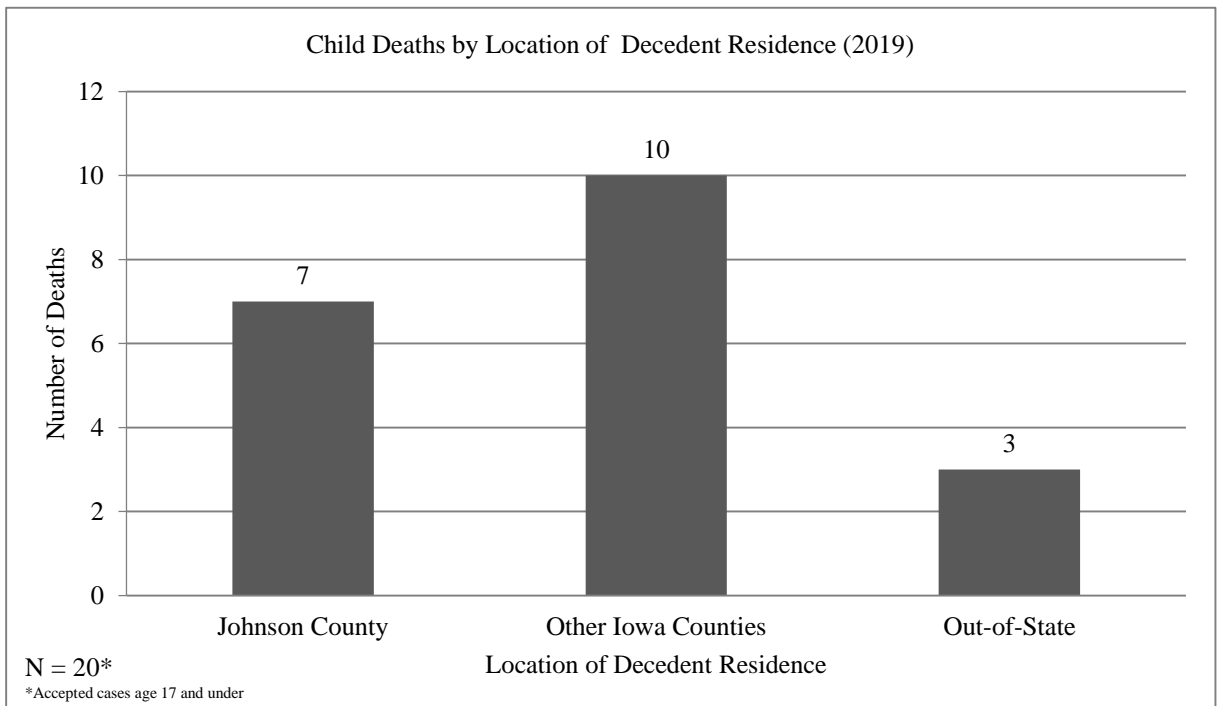


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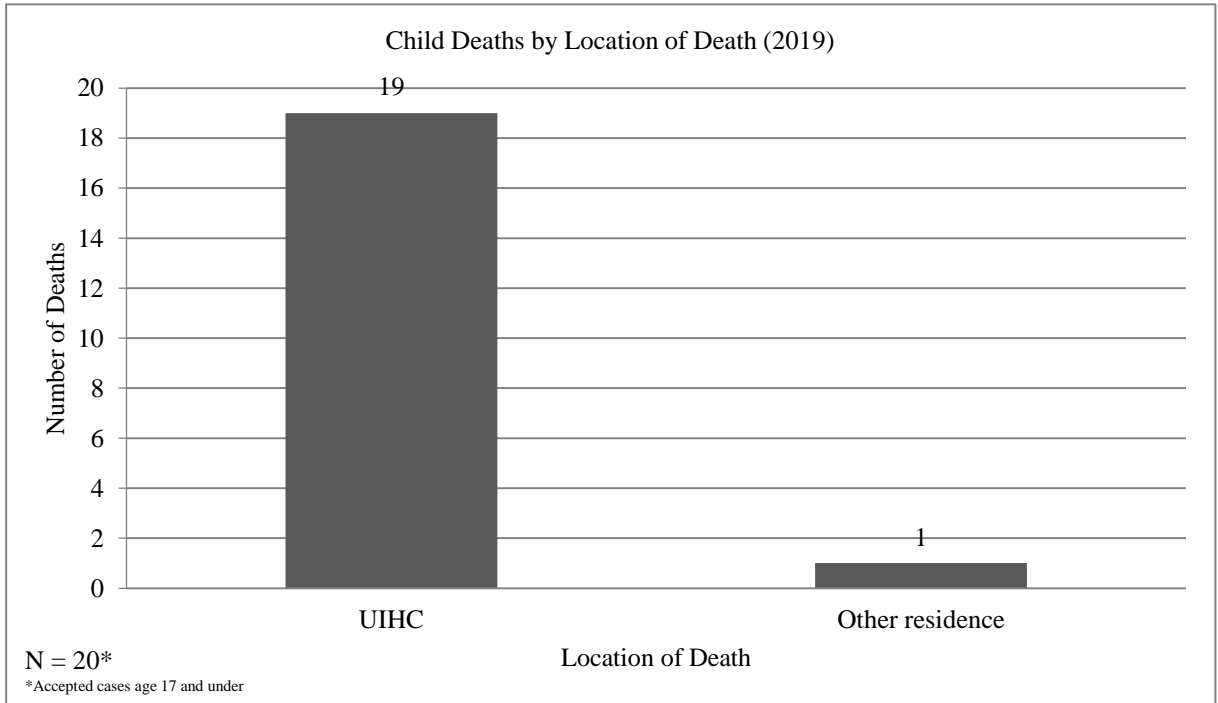


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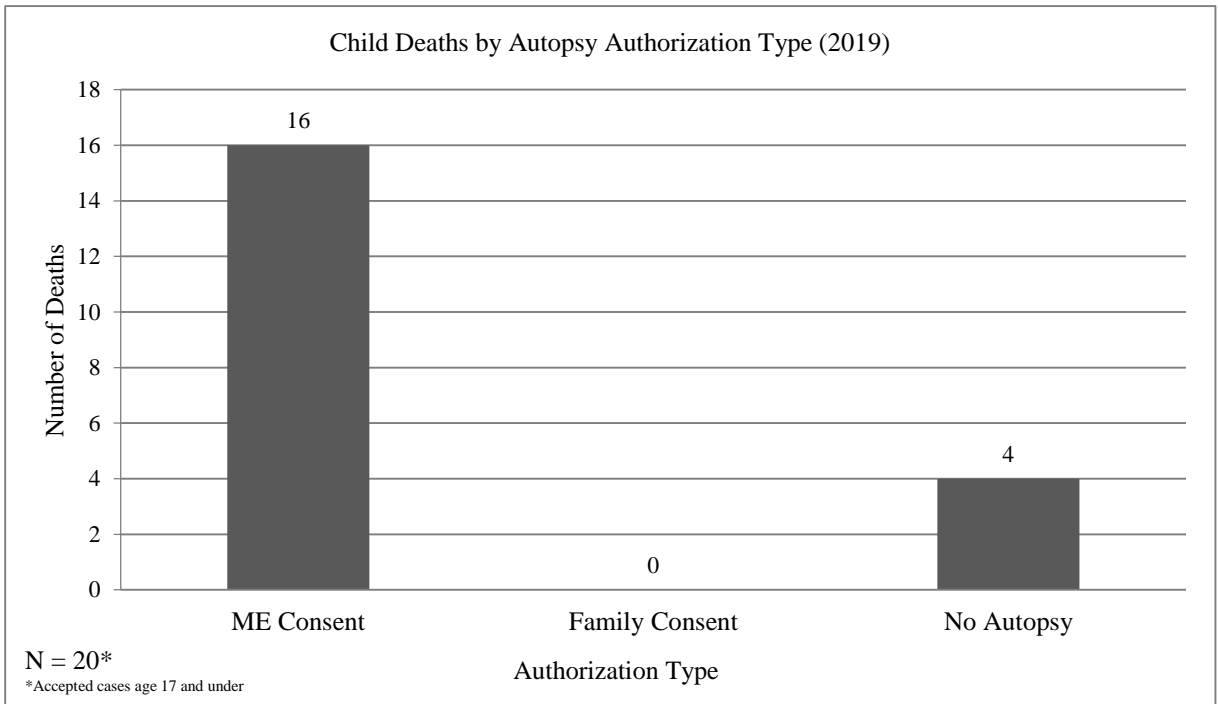


Figure 10.8.

Table 10.1. Infant Sleep-Related Deaths (2019)*

Age	Sex	Cause of Death	Manner of Death	Location of Incident
4 months	M	Asphyxiation due to external airway obstruction	Accident	Johnson County
3 months	F	Positional asphyxia	Accident	Johnson County
1 month, 17 days	M	Positional asphyxia	Accident	Johnson County
1 month, 2 days	M	Positional asphyxia	Accident	Other Iowa County
4 months	F	Positional asphyxia	Accident	Other Iowa County

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

Fetal Deaths

In 2019, JCME accepted jurisdiction of 2 fetal deaths. Fetal deaths are not assigned a manner of death.

Table 11.1. Fetal Deaths (2019)*

Age	Sex	Cause of Death	County of Incident	County of Residence	Location of Death	Autopsy Authorization Type
21 3/7 weeks gestation	M	Intrauterine fetal demise of uncertain cause	Johnson County	Johnson County	Decedent's Residence	No autopsy
22 3/7 weeks gestation	F	Intrauterine fetal demise due to placental abruption due to preeclampsia	Other Iowa County	Other Iowa County	UIHC	ME Consent

*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 2019, JCME was 23% under our budgeted expenditures and 3% over our budgeted revenues.

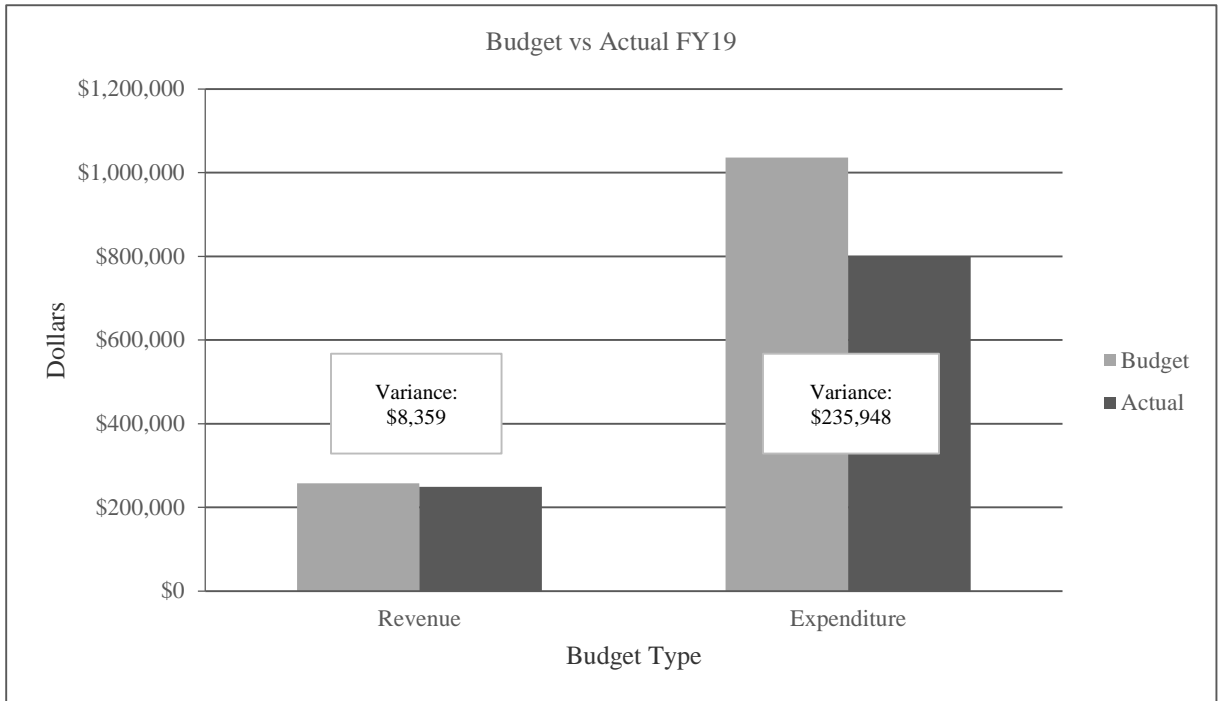


Figure 12.1.

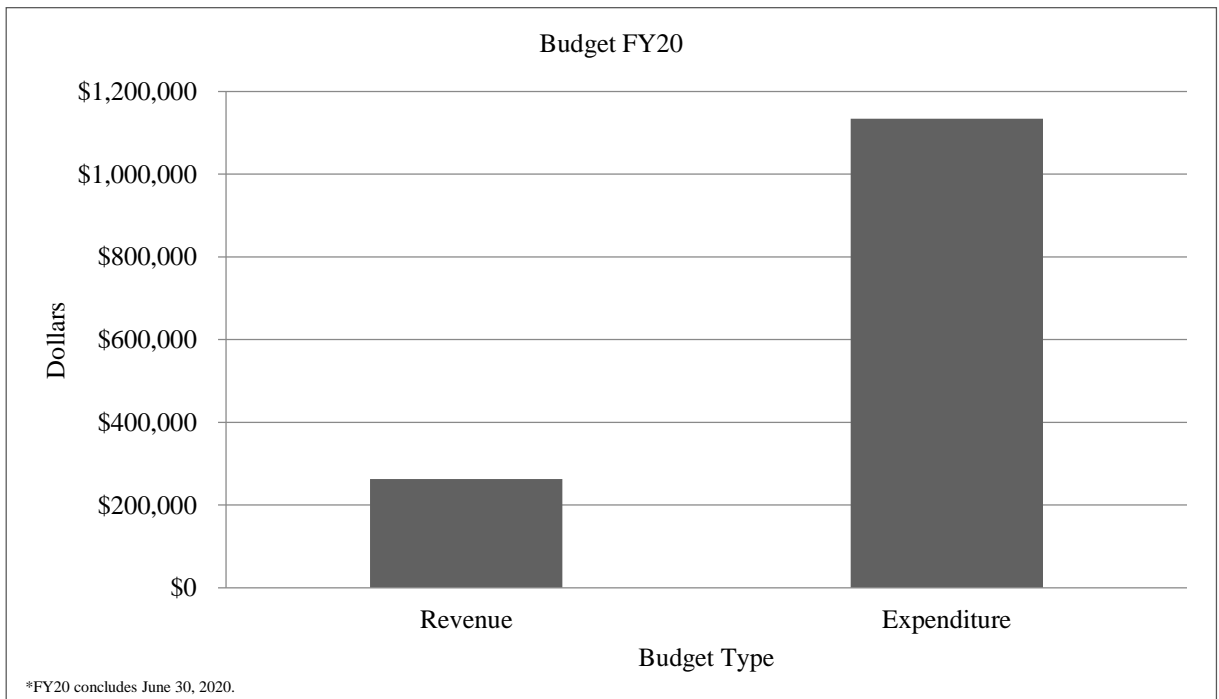


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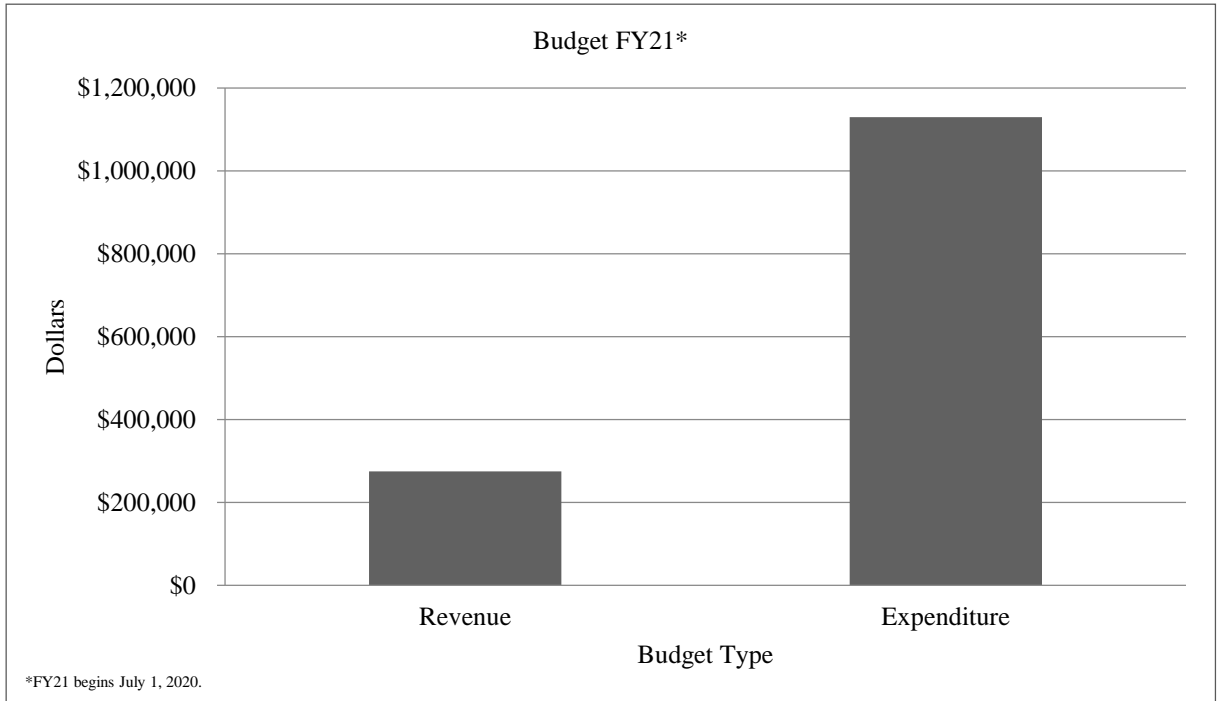


Figure 12.3.

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Organ and Tissue Donation

JCME has an essential role in the coordination of organ and tissue donation. In 2019, 14 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 14 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 28 kidneys, 11 livers, 6 hearts, 2 lungs, and 2 pancreases 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 13.1. Organs Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2019)

Organs Transplanted*	
Hearts	6
Lungs (single lungs)	2
Livers	11
Kidneys (single kidneys)	28
Pancreases	2
Small Intestines	0
Total organ donors**	14

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

Table 13.2. Tissues Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2019)

Tissues Transplanted*	
Skin Donors	4
Heart Valve Donors	1
Saphenous Vein Donors	1
Femoral Vein Donors	1
Total recovered tissue donors**	5

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