

Johnson County Medical Examiner Department

Annual Report 2024



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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 in 2020, 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. 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 2024, there were 930 deaths reported to JCME. Of these, 511 were accepted as medical examiner jurisdiction deaths. Each of these deaths were investigated and certified by JCME. After review of each of the remaining 419 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 45% of the 2052 deaths that occurred in Johnson County in 2024.

Of the 511 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 252 decedents were Johnson County residents and 216 were residents of other counties in Iowa. Additionally, there were 33 decedents who were out-of-state residents and 10 decedents who were under the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections. As a result, 49% of deaths accepted and investigated by JCME consisted of Johnson County residents.

Of the 511 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the incident location for 266 decedents was Johnson County. Two-hundred and six incidents occurred in other Iowa counties followed by 23 in which the incident location was out-of-state. Additionally, for 10 decedents, the incident occurred while under the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections followed by 6 decedents in which the incident location was unknown.

Of the 511 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, all decedents were identified and 3 were unclaimed by family or friends with JCME arranging final disposition.

In 2024, 1 unidentified decedent was disinterred, and a second autopsy was performed. This decedent remains unidentified and unclaimed.

In 2024, 146 autopsies were conducted by JCME. Of those 146 autopsies, 127 were performed at the Iowa Health Care Main Campus (IHCMC) and 19 were performed at the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner (IOSME). All but 1 of the 127 autopsies performed at IHCMC were complete autopsies (external examination and internal examination of the head, neck, chest, and abdomen).

Of the 511 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the manner of death was classified as accident for 262, natural for 200, suicide for 33, undetermined for 10 and homicide for 6. JCME did not accept jurisdiction of any fetal deaths in 2024. One of the deaths that was classified as natural was a decedent who died from Lassa Fever.

In 2024, there were 48 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 22 involved illicit drugs only, 22 involved a mixture of drugs, and 4 involved over-the-counter (OTC) drugs only. Of the 22 illicit drug-related deaths, 13 involved methamphetamine, 6 fentanyl, 2 cocaine, and 1 heroin. Of the 22 mixed drug-related deaths, toxicology results demonstrated that 5 decedents tested positive for more than one drug. Of these, 14 involved illicitly obtained drugs, 13 involved prescription (Rx) drugs and 9 involved over-the-counter drugs. Of the 22 mixed drug-related deaths, the most common drug used was methamphetamine (18 decedents), followed by fentanyl (11 decedents) and cocaine (8 decedents). Of the 48 drug-related deaths, 17 involved opioids. Of these 17 deaths, toxicology results demonstrated that 5 decedents tested positive for more than 1 opioid drug. Of these, 16 were classified as accident and 1 as suicide. The most common opioid drug was fentanyl (12 decedents) followed by heroin (2 decedents) and oxycodone (2 decedents).

There were 336 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 112 in which the death was the result of an accidental fall. Of these fall-related deaths, 82 occurred from a standing height and 61 occurred inside the decedent's home. The most common anatomical location of injury from a fall was the head and/or neck, which occurred in 64 of the falls. One of the 112 older adult accidental fall-related deaths, one was a decedent who died from a remote injury after falling off an animal. This death was categorized as "other" which differs from the other 111 older adult accidental fall-related deaths.

In 2024, there were 11 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age or younger. Of these 11 deaths, 6 were classified as accident followed by 2 as natural, 1 as undetermined, 1 as suicide, and 1 as homicide. For 3 of these deaths, the incident location was Johnson County, 7 occurred in other Iowa Counties, and 1 was out-of-state. Of these 11 deaths accepted by JCME, there were 2 deaths of infants one year of age or less, of which 1 was classified as natural and 1 as undetermined. An autopsy was performed on both infant deaths. In 2024, there was 1 sleep-related infant death, which was classified as undetermined. For this deaths, the incident location was in another Iowa County.

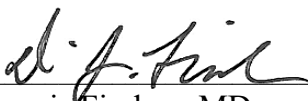
A data point on every death certificate is an indication of whether tobacco use contributed to death. This determination is made by the forensic pathologist responsible for certifying the death. Of the 511 deaths certified by JCME in 2024, it was determined that 93 were tobacco-related and 45 were probably 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 1414 cremation permits to funeral service providers in 2024. There were 507 cremation permits issued to funeral service providers in Johnson County, 796 to funeral service providers located in other Iowa counties, and 111 to funeral service providers located out-of-state. Cremation permits were issued to a total of 144 funeral service providers. Of the 1414 cremation permits issued, 10 permits prompted the recognition of missed cases, or less than 1% of all cremation permits issued.

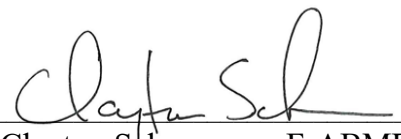
The Johnson County Child Death Review Team is facilitated by JCME. The purpose of this team is to gain a greater understanding of issues associated with deaths of children under the age of 18. The information gained from the review of these cases is used to identify trends and risk factors, as well as 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 2024, 15 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 15 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 22 kidneys, 6 livers, 3 hearts, 12 lungs, and 1 pancreas. Twenty-seven 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 2024, JCME had four Board Certified Death Investigators (Advanced): Clayton Schuneman, Kate Bengtson, Kristen Long, and Amanda Gellhaus and four Registry Certified Death Investigators (Basic): Kora LaVoy, Anna Posthumus, Zeel Naik, and Mary Roberts. Additionally, the three forensic pathologist medical examiners, Dennis Firchau, MD, Melissa Blessing, DO, and Marcus Nashelsky, MD, are certified in Anatomic, Clinical, and Forensic Pathology by the American Board of Pathology.

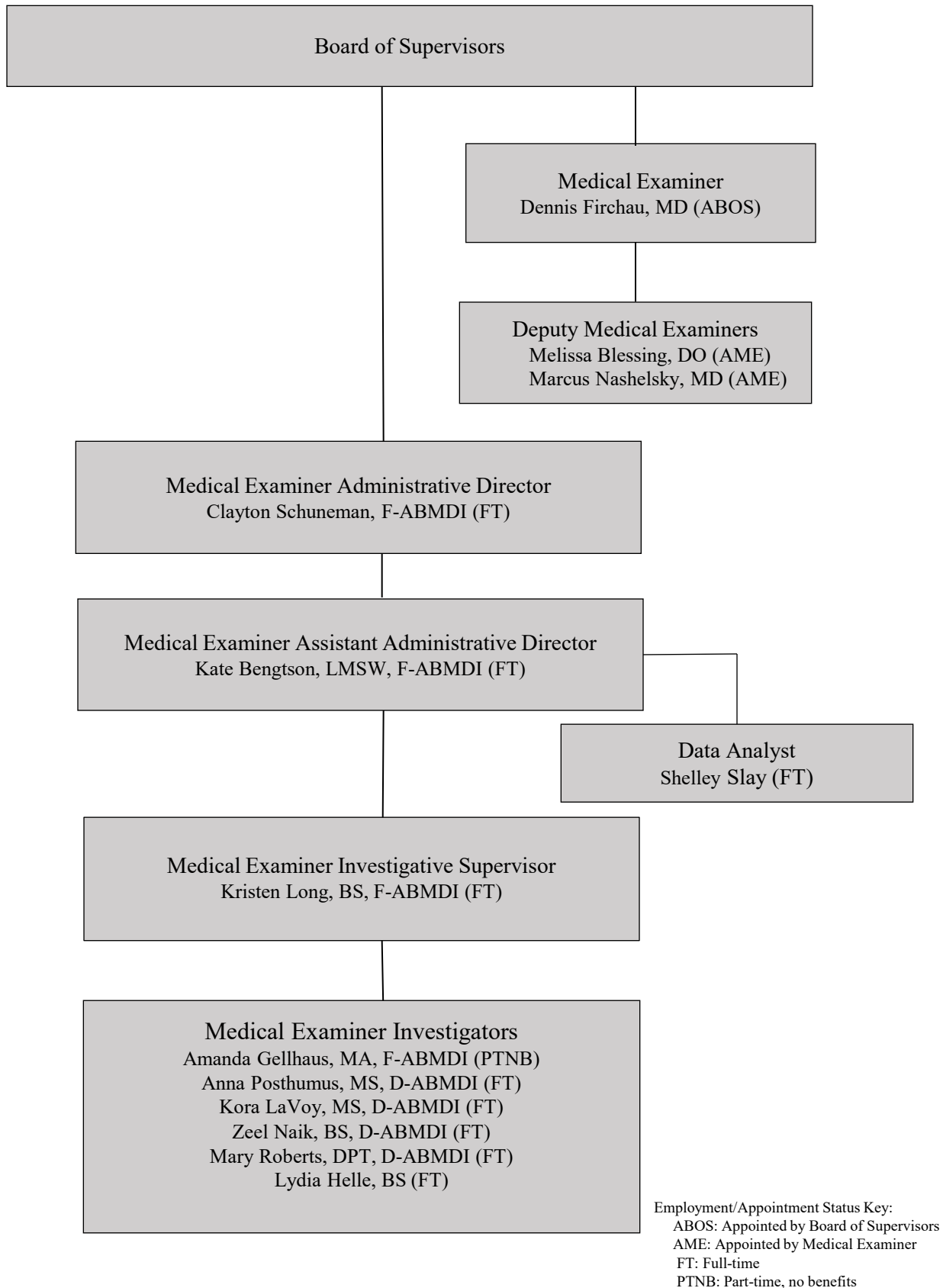


Dennis Firchau, MD
Medical Examiner



Clayton Schuneman, F-ABMDI
Administrative Director

Figure 1.1. Organizational Chart (2024)



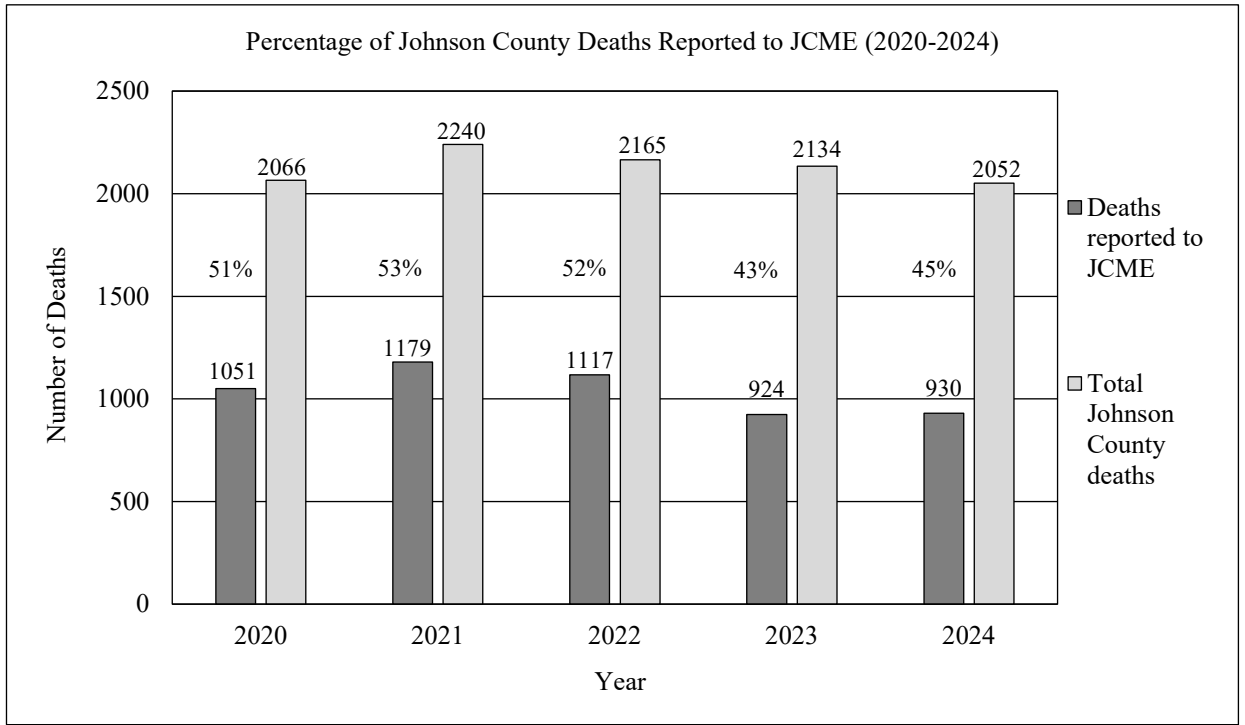


Figure 1.2.

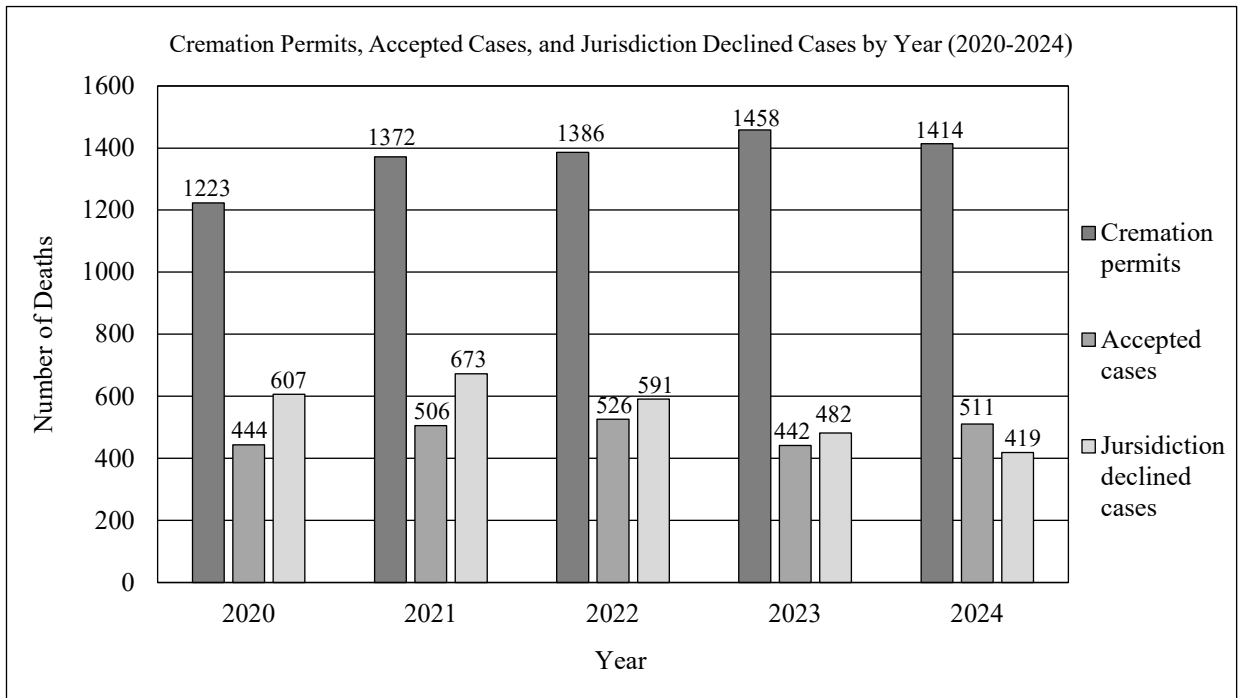


Figure 1.3.

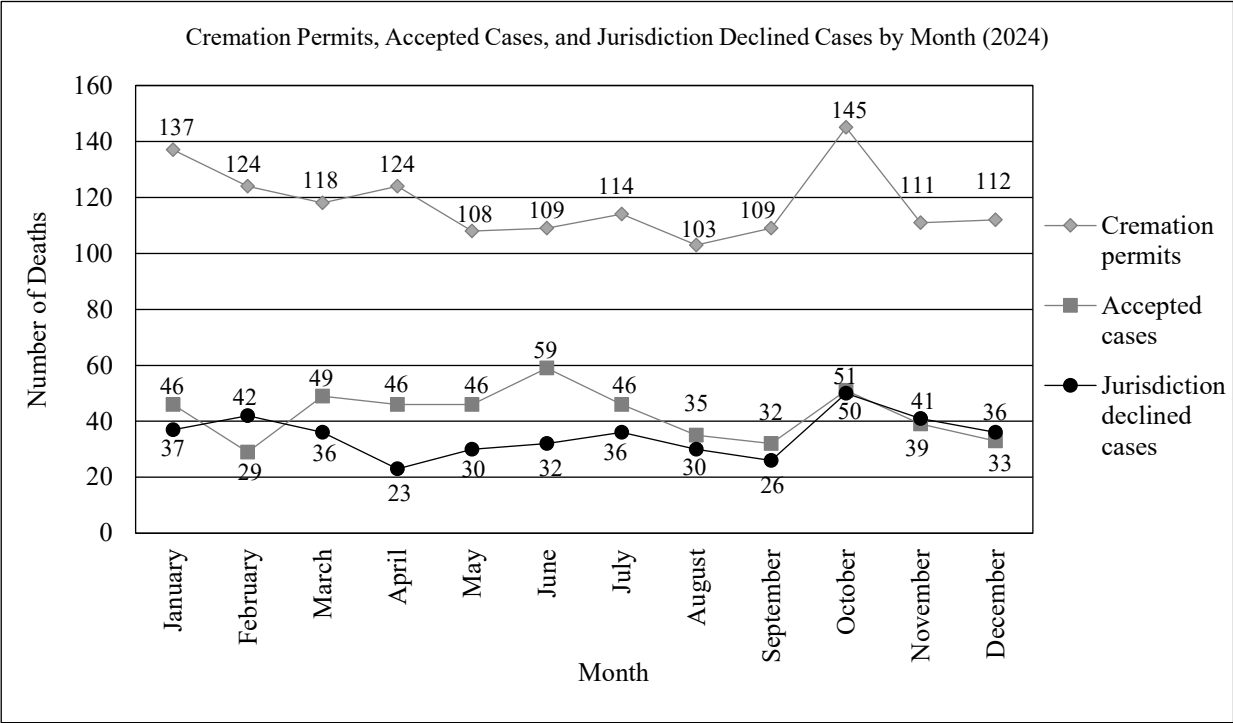


Figure 1.4.

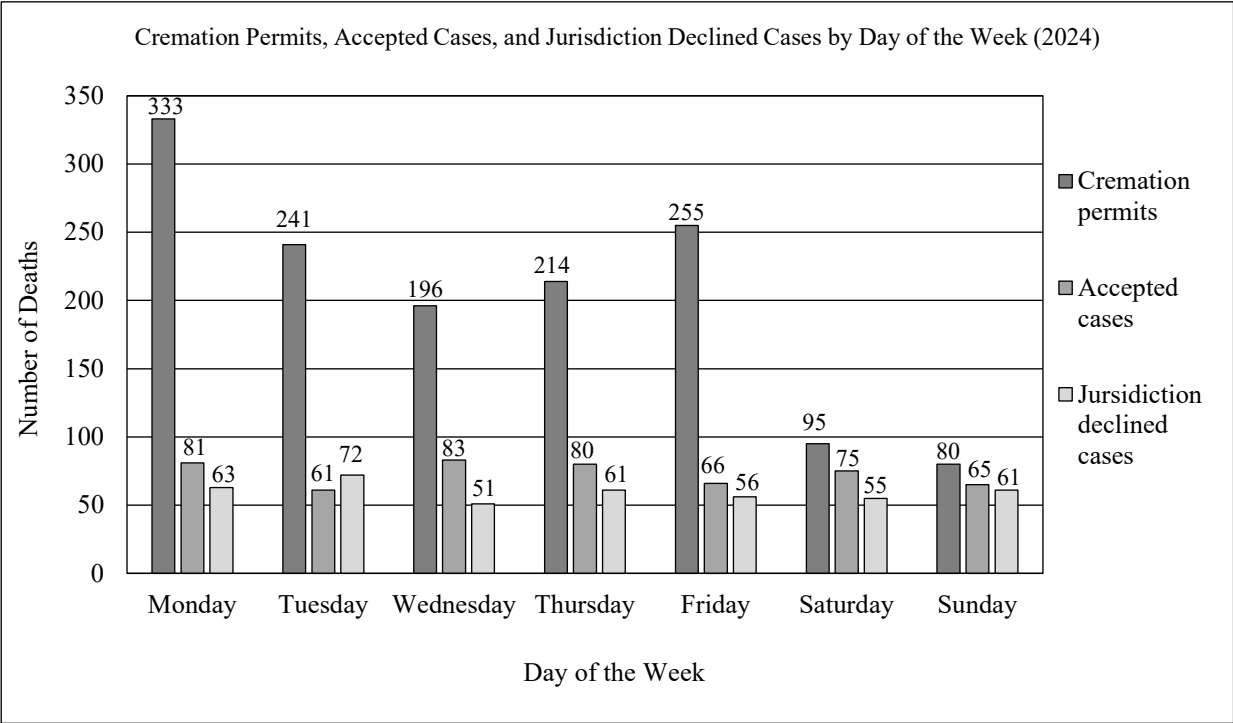


Figure 1.5.

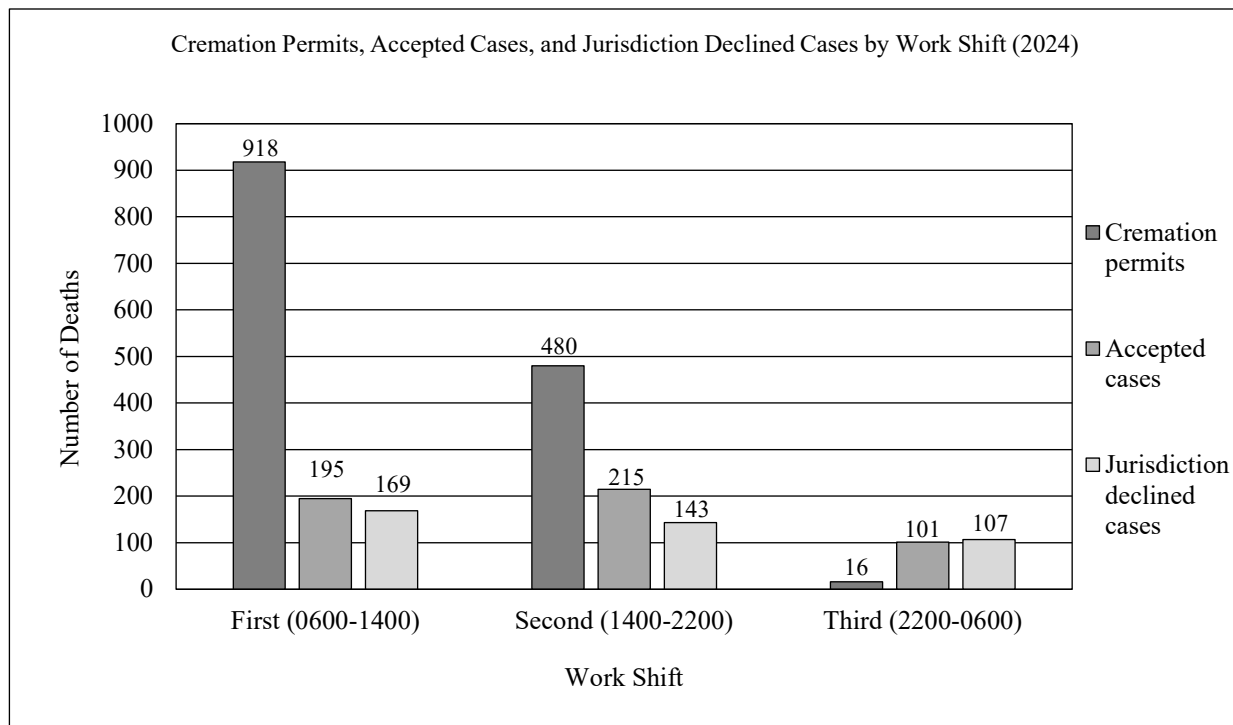


Figure 1.6.

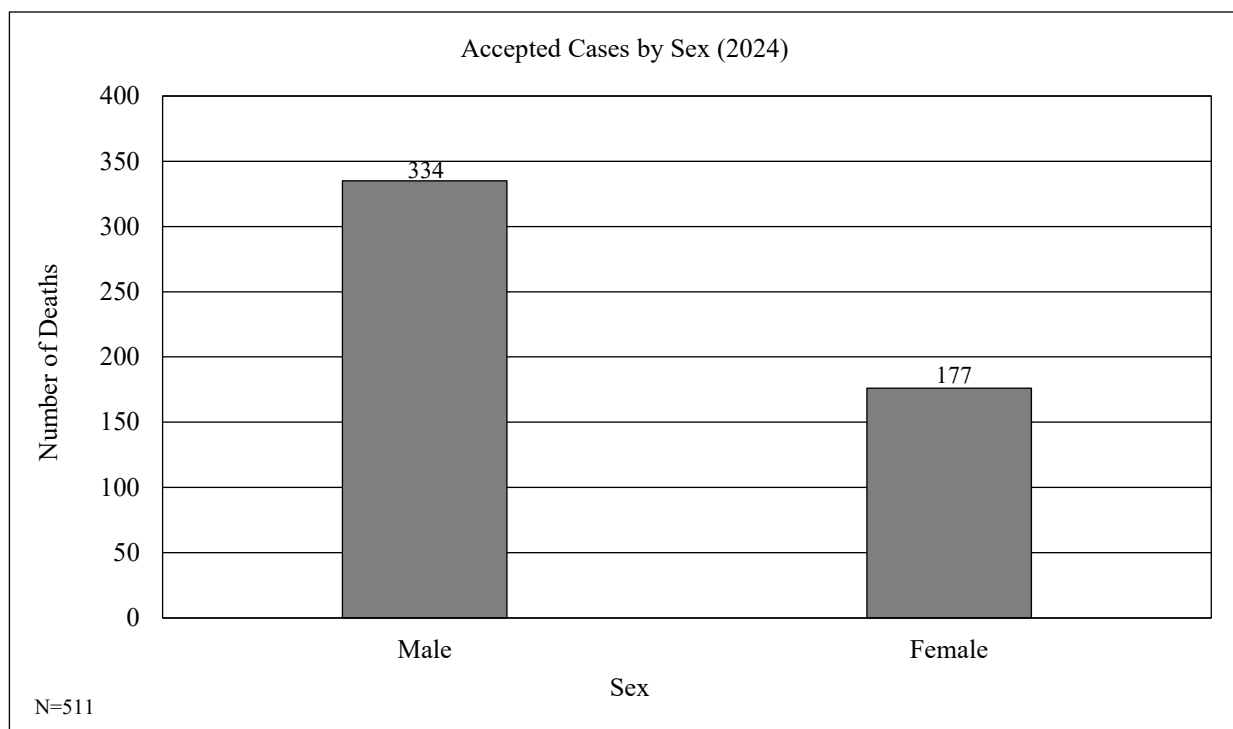


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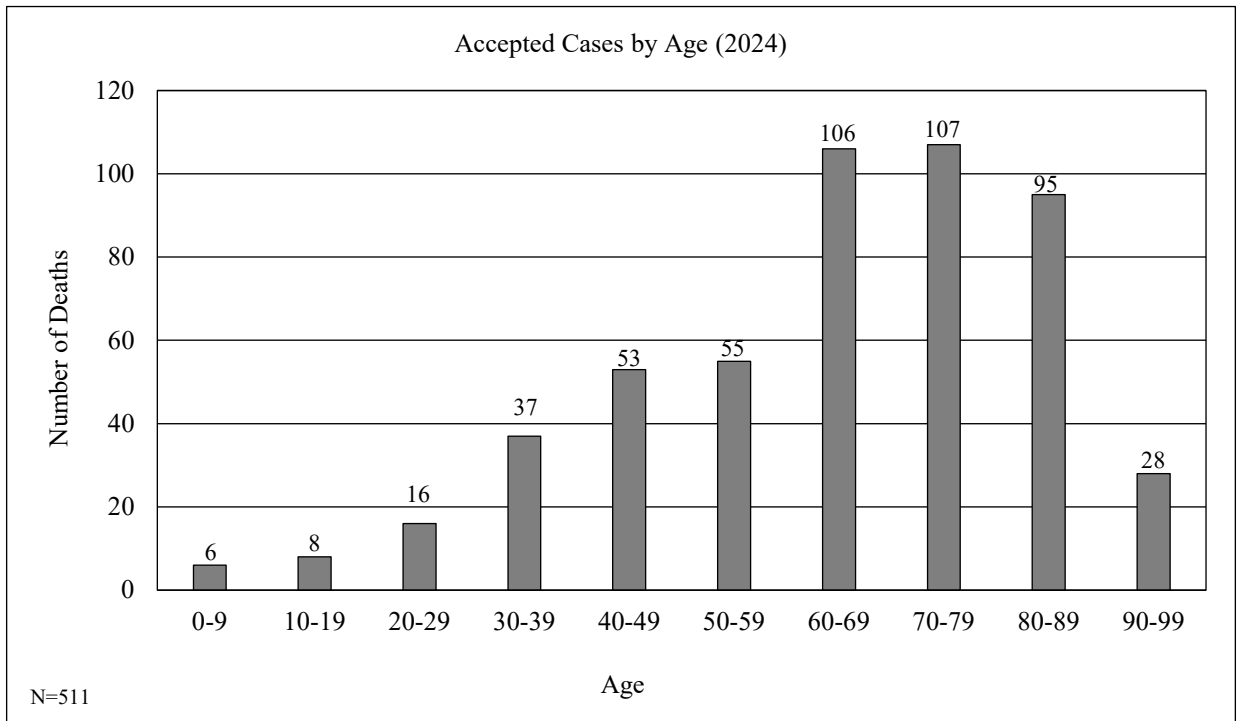


Figure 1.8.

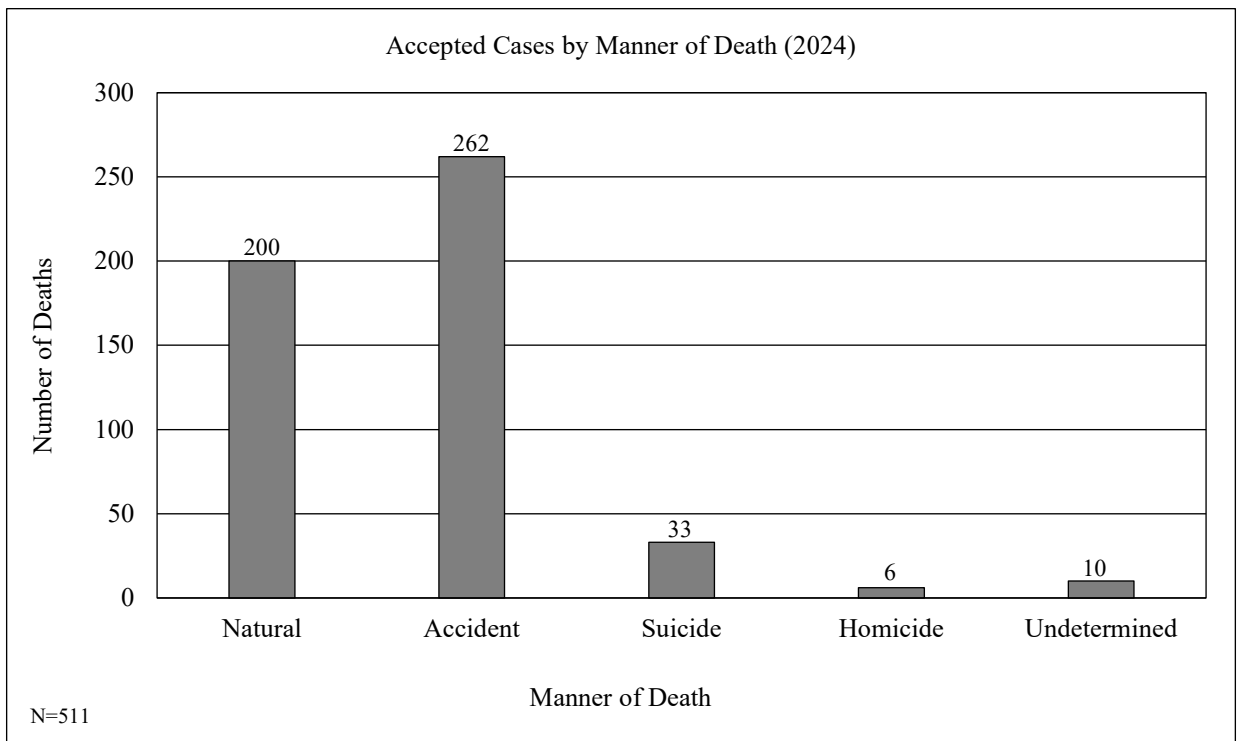


Figure 1.9.

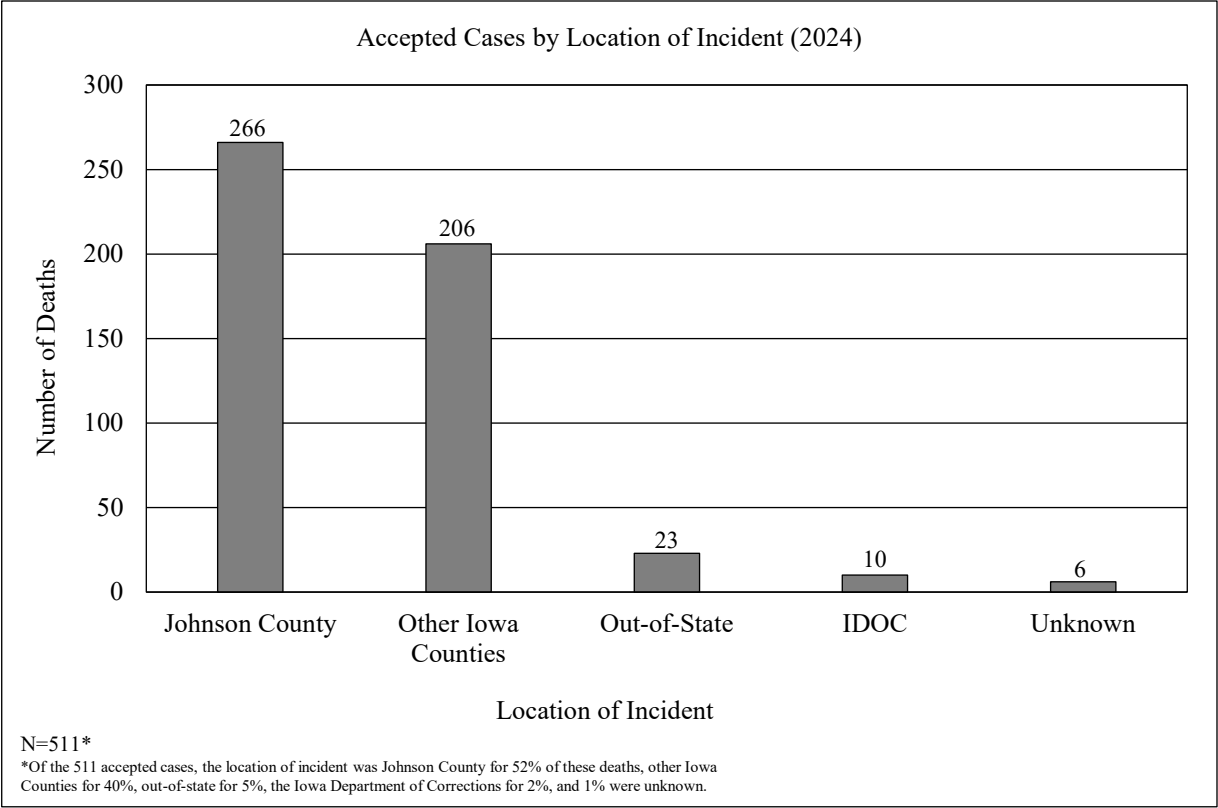


Figure 1.10.

Table 1.1. Other Iowa Counties Location of Incident (2024)

County	Number of Decedents
Scott	33
Linn	29
Dubuque	16
Muscatine	13
Clinton	10
Black Hawk	8
Des Moines	7
Cedar	6
Jefferson	6
Buchanan	5
Clayton	5
Jones	5
Keokuk	5
Washington	5
Henry	4
Lee	4
Louisa	4
Polk	4
Butler	3
Iowa	3
Jackson	3
Marshall	3
Poweshiek	3
Wapello	3
Benton	2
Fayette	2
Mahaska	2
Allamakee	1
Appanoose	1
Boone	1
Carroll	1
Chickasaw	1
Hamilton	1
Hardin	1
Madison	1
Monroe	1
Van Buren	1
Webster	1
Winnebago	1
Woodbury	1

N=206*

*Accepted cases

Table 1.2. Out-of-State Location of Incident (2024)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	9
Adair, MO	2
Carroll, IL	2
Hancock, IL	2
Warren, IL	2
Ada, ID	1
Freeborn, MN	1
Henderson, IL	1
Henry, IL	1
JoDaviess, IL	1
Whiteside, IL	1

N=23*

*Accepted cases

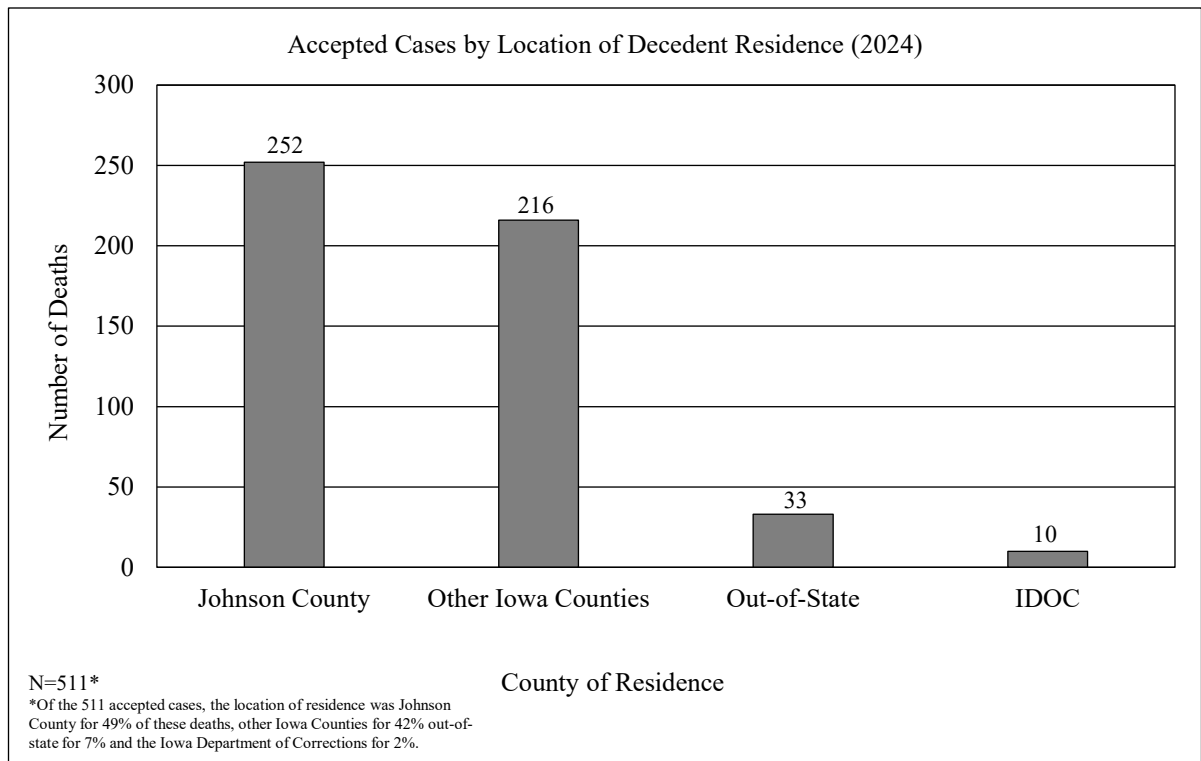


Figure 1.11.

Table 1.3. Other Iowa Counties Location of Decedent Residence (2024)

County	Number of Decedents
Scott	35
Linn	31
Dubuque	15
Muscatine	12
Clinton	10
Black Hawk	9
Des Moines	8
Washington	7
Cedar	6
Jefferson	6
Keokuk	6
Buchanan	5
Jones	5
Henry	4
Jackson	4
Lee	4
Louisa	4
Polk	4
Wapello	4
Clayton	3
Iowa	3
Marshall	3
Poweshiek	3
Benton	2
Butler	2
Fayette	2
Tama	2
Allamakee	1
Appanoose	1
Boone	1
Carroll	1
Chickasaw	1
Delaware	1
Hamilton	1
Hardin	1
Humbolt	1
Jasper	1
Madison	1
Mahaska	1
Van Buren	1
Warren	1
Webster	1
Winnebago	1
Woodbury	1

N=216*

*Accepted cases

Table 1.4. Out-of-State Location of Decedent Residence (2024)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	8
Adair, MO	2
Henderson, IL	2
Henry, IL	2
Jo Daviess, IL	2
McDonough, IL	2
Whiteside, IL	2
Ada, ID	1
Burlington, NJ	1
Carroll, IL	1
Clark, NV	1
Davidson, TN	1
Freeborn, MN	1
Grant, WI	1
Marion, MO	1
Mercer, IL	1
Ouachita, LA	1
Saginaw, MI	1
Stephenson, IL	1
Warren, IL	1

N=33*

*Accepted cases

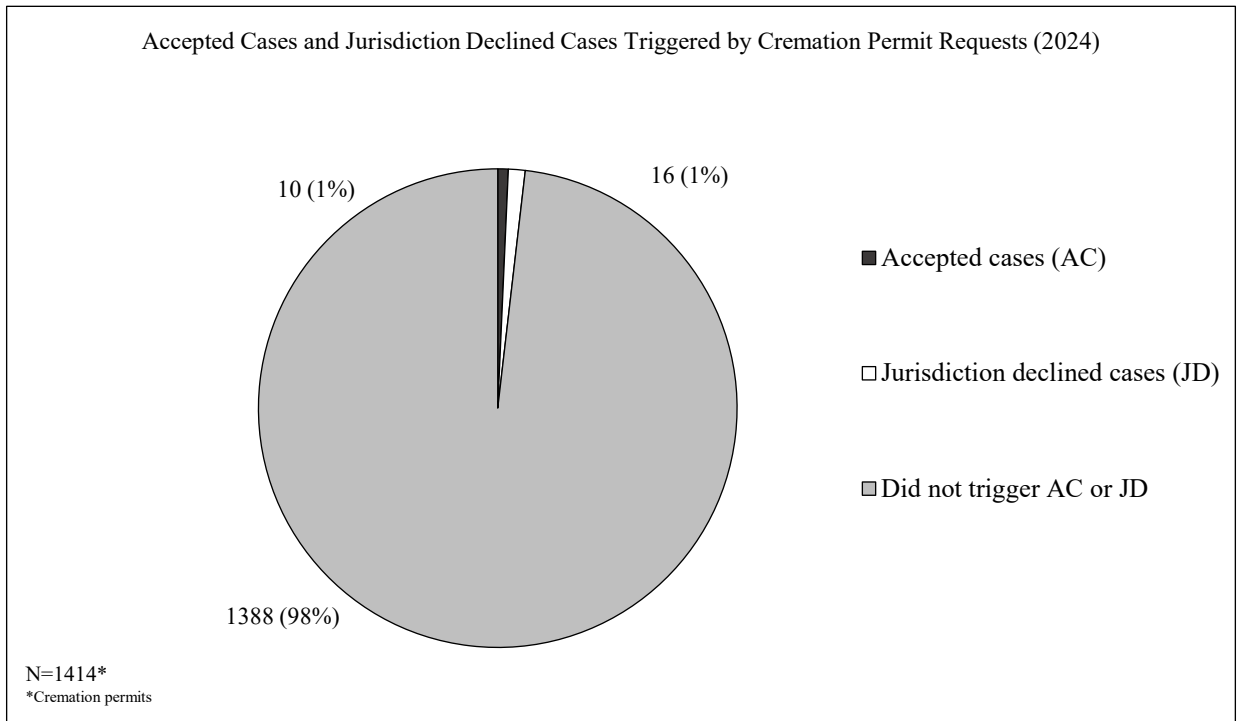


Figure 1.12.

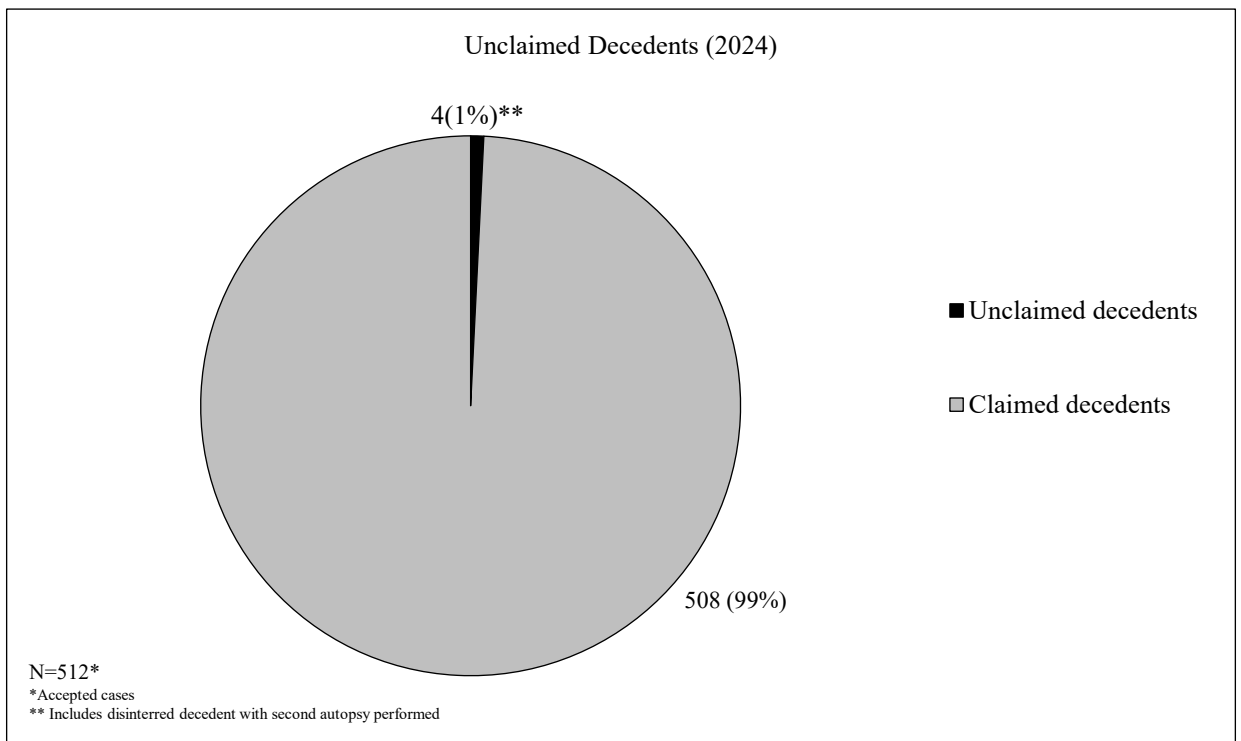


Figure 1.13.

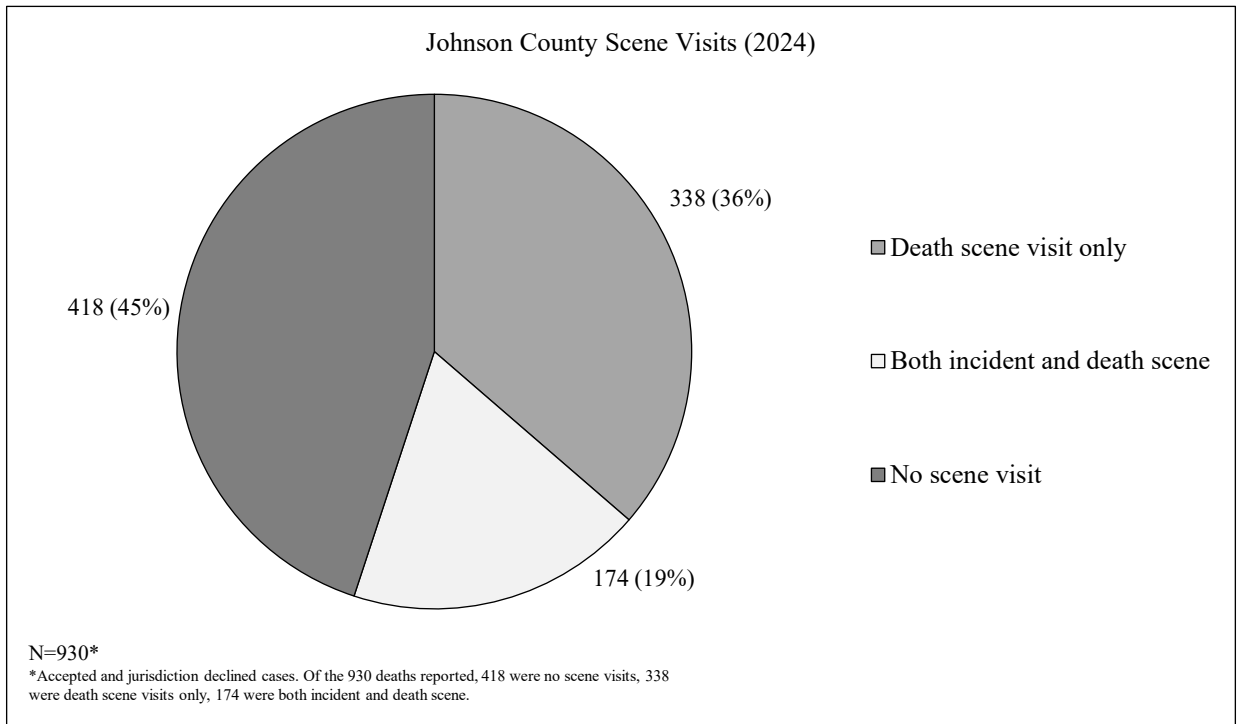


Figure 1.14.

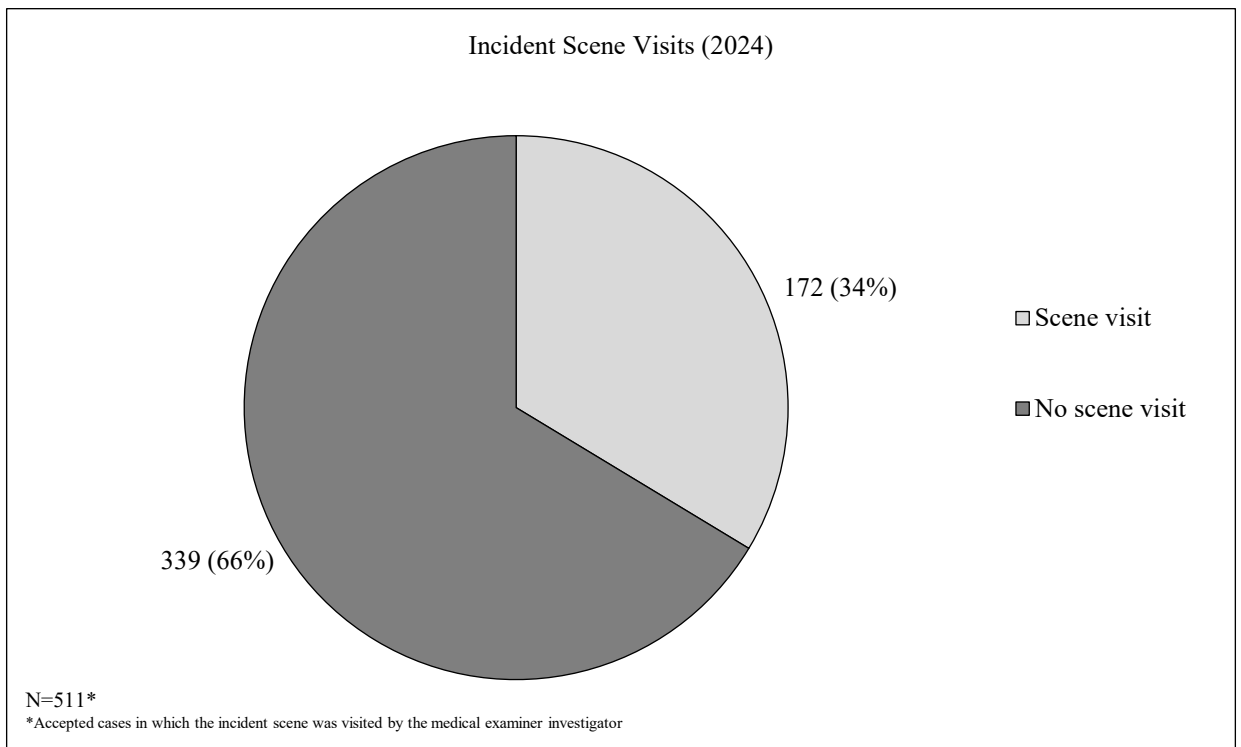


Figure 1.15.

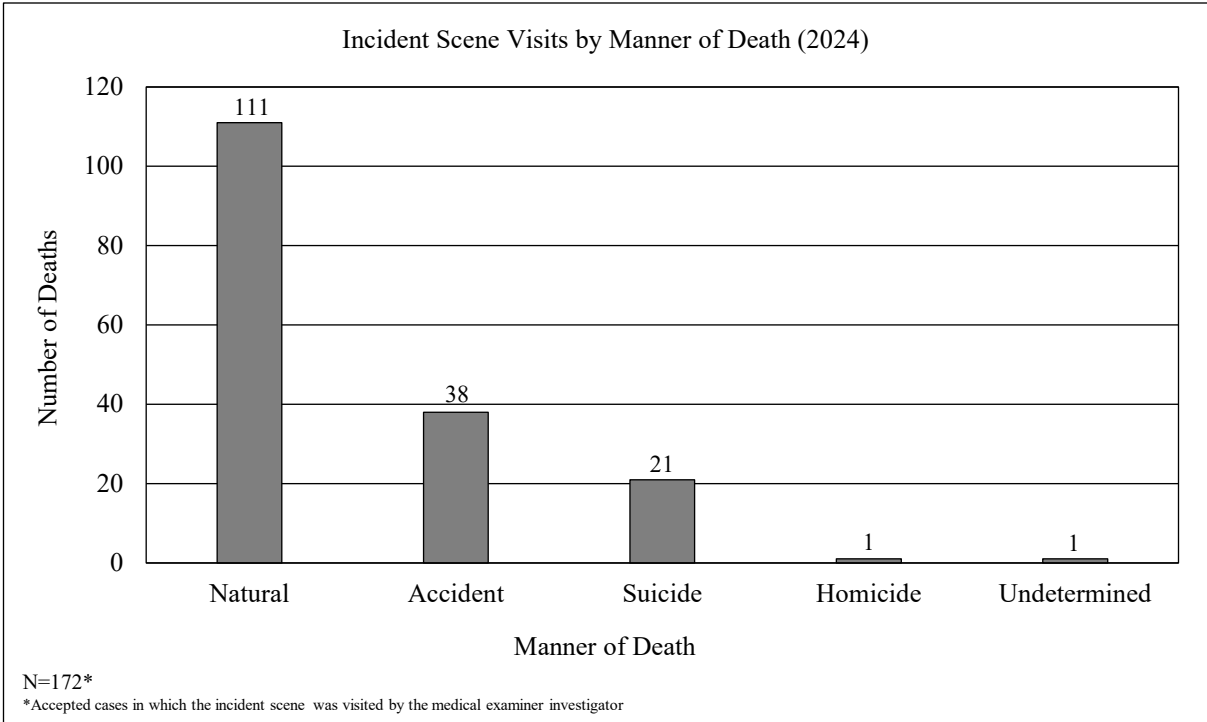


Figure 1.16.

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Autopsies

In 2024, 146 autopsies were conducted by JCME. Of those 146 autopsies, 127 were performed at the Iowa Health Care Main Campus (IHCMC) and 19 were performed at the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner (IOSME). One of the 127 autopsies performed at IHCMC was of a disinterred decedent that underwent a second autopsy. All but 1 of the 127 autopsies performed at IHCMC were complete autopsies (external examination and internal examination of the head, neck, chest, and abdomen).

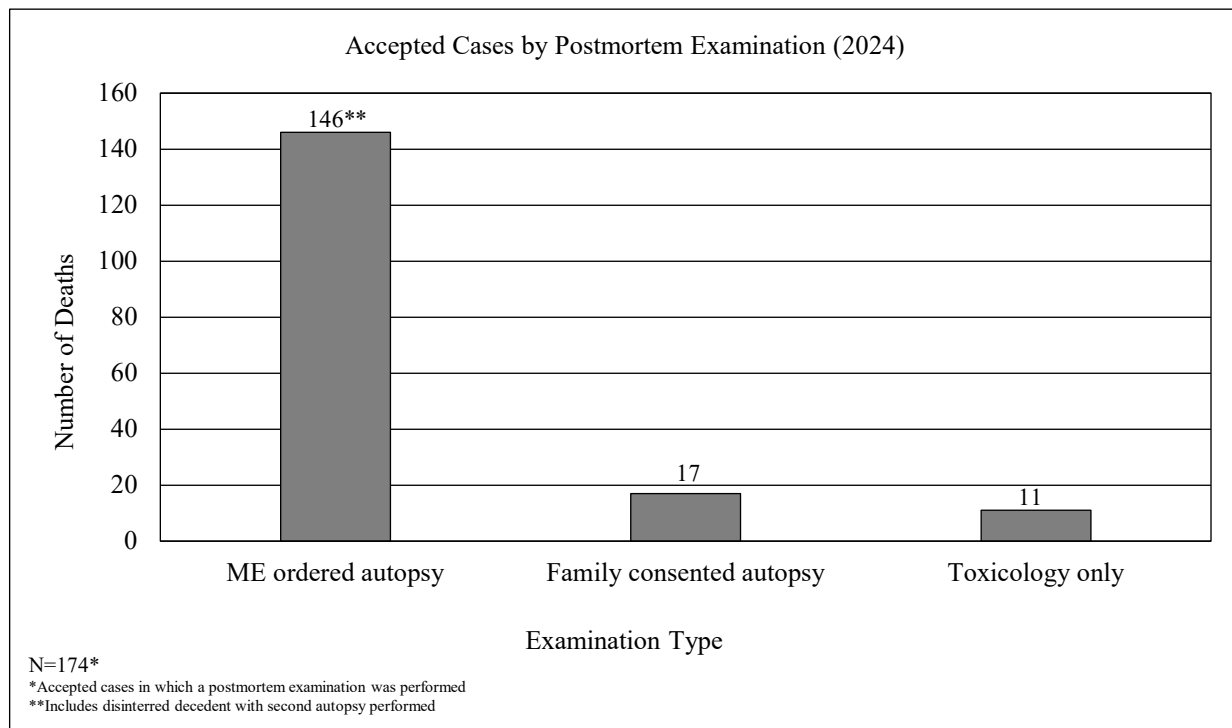


Figure 2.1.

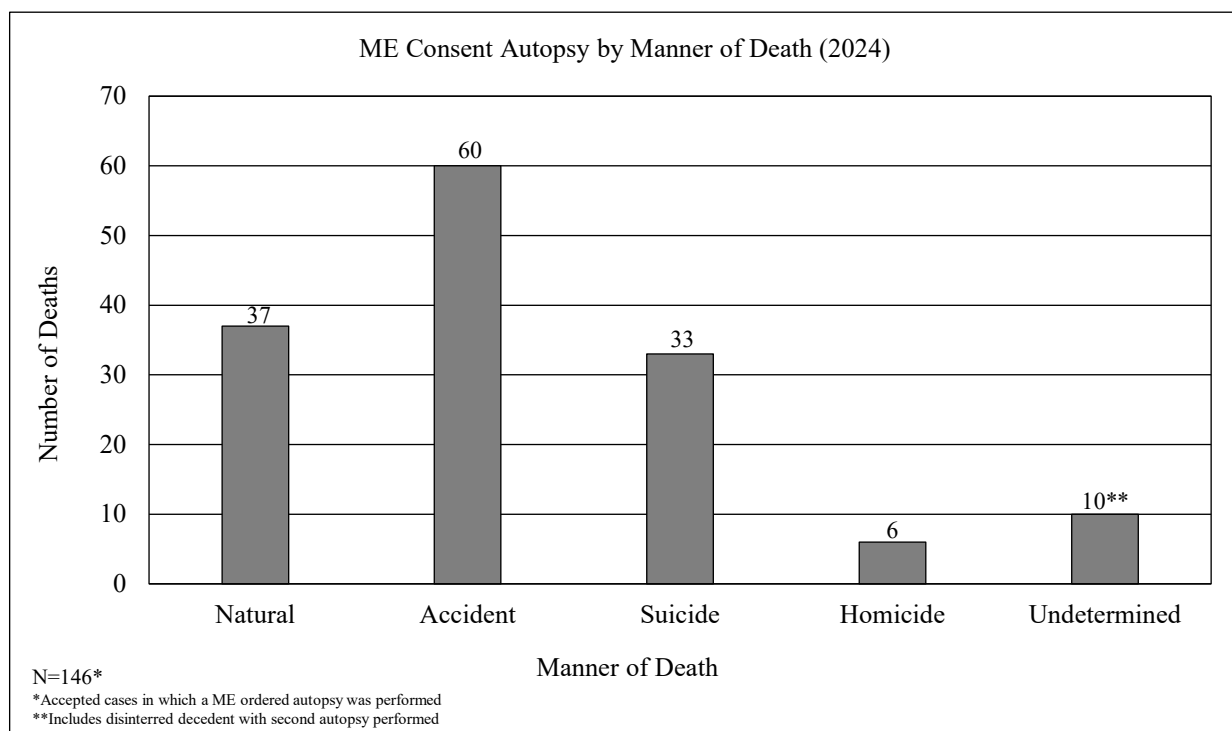


Figure 2.2.

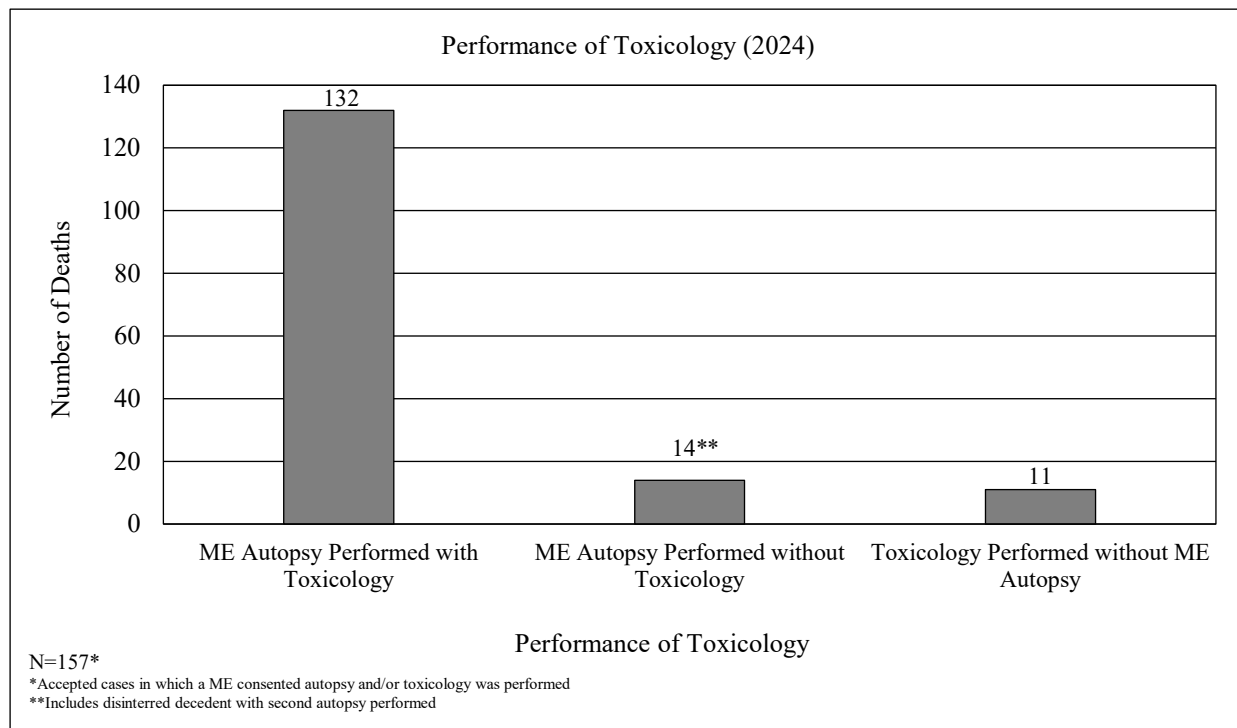


Figure 2.3.

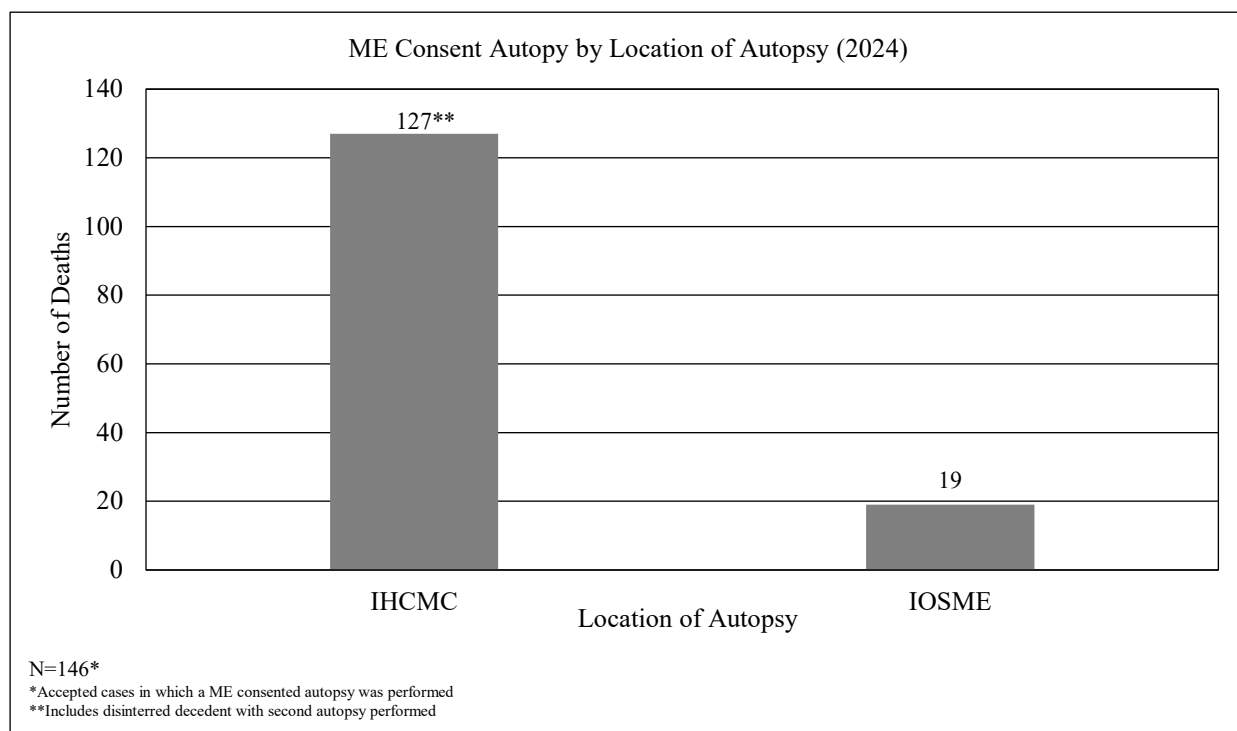


Figure 2.4.

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Causes 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.

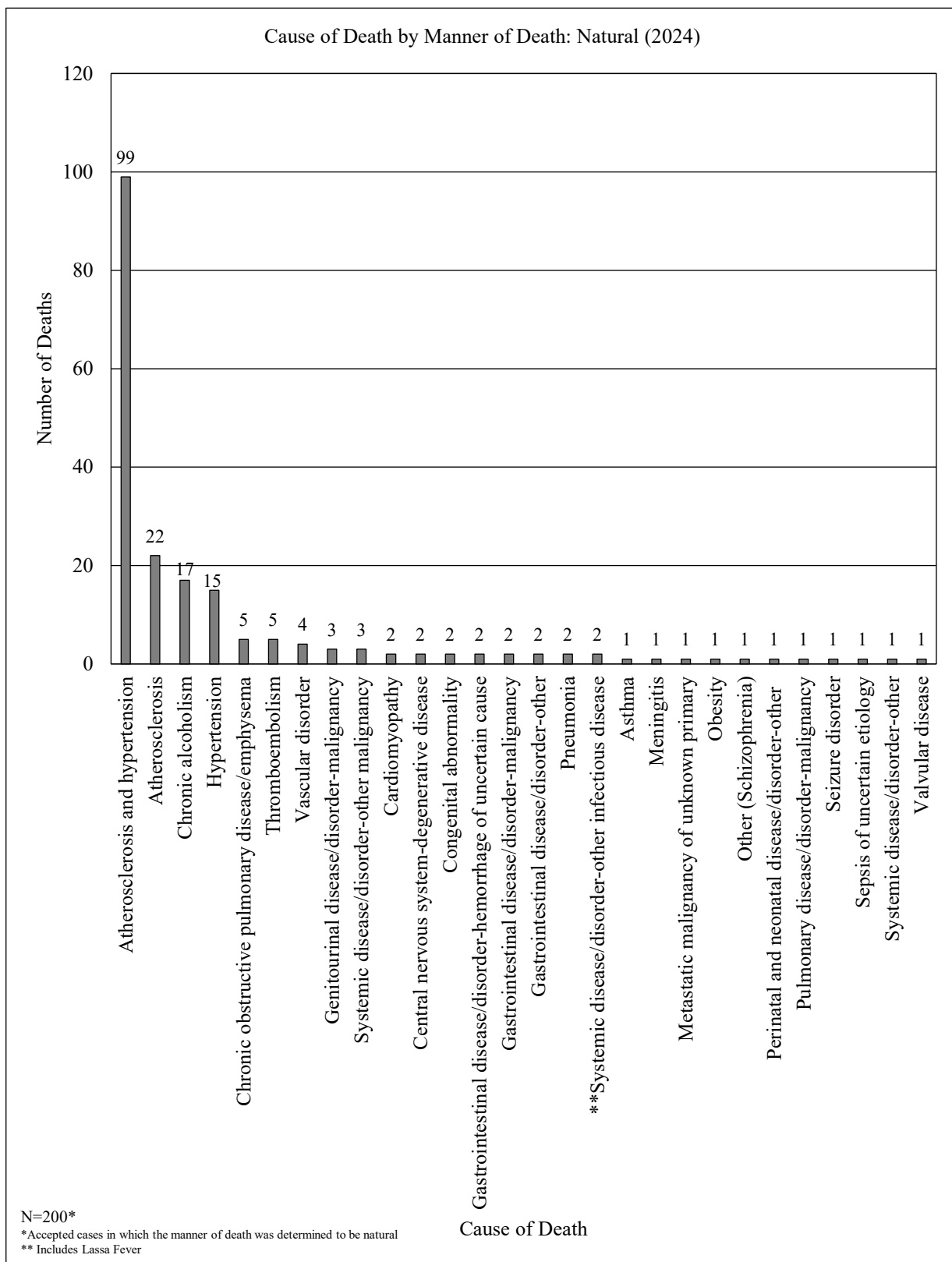
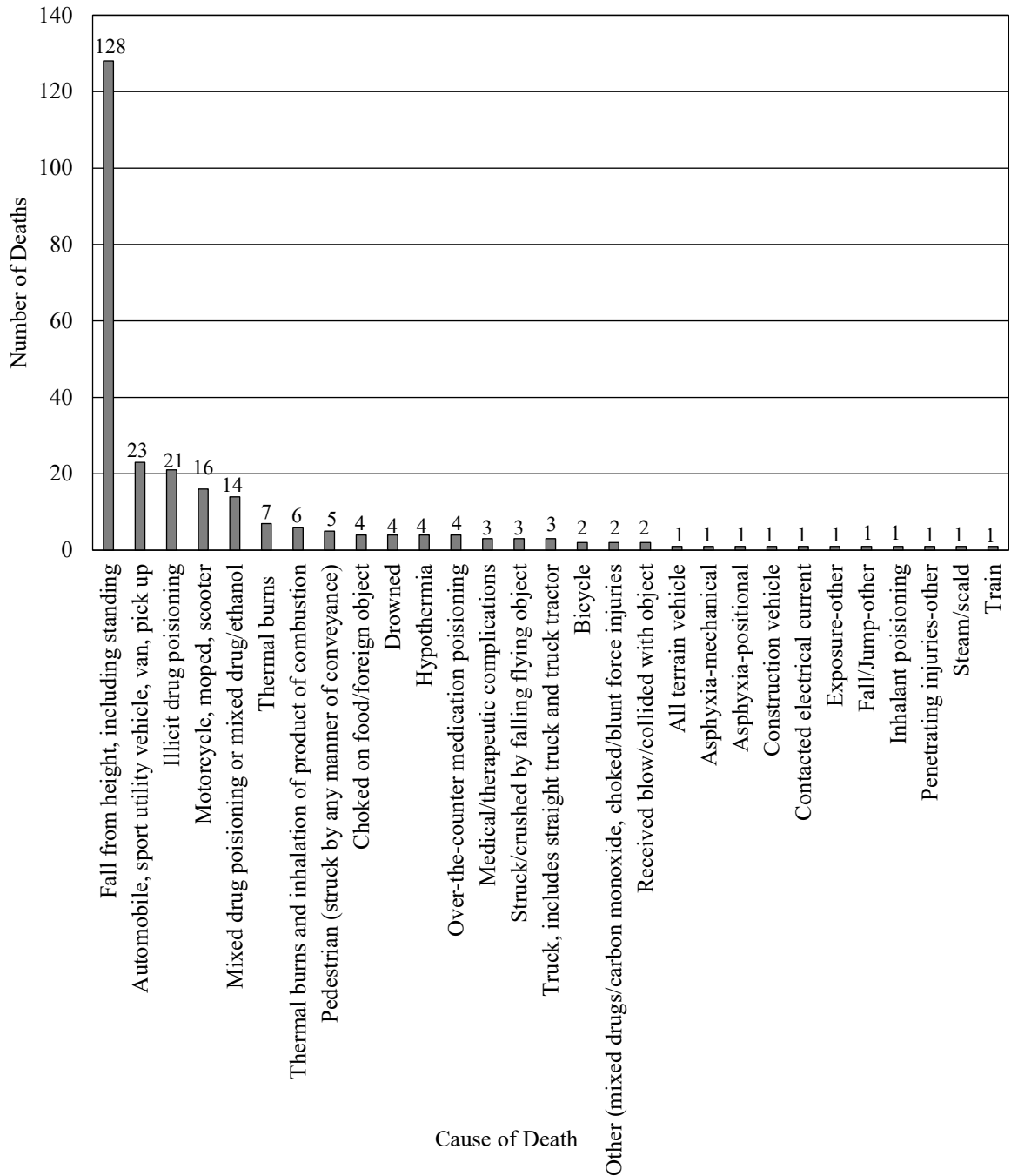


Figure 3.1.

Cause of Death by Manner of Death: Accident (2024)



N=262*

*Accepted cases in which the manner of death was determined to be an accident

Figure 3.2.

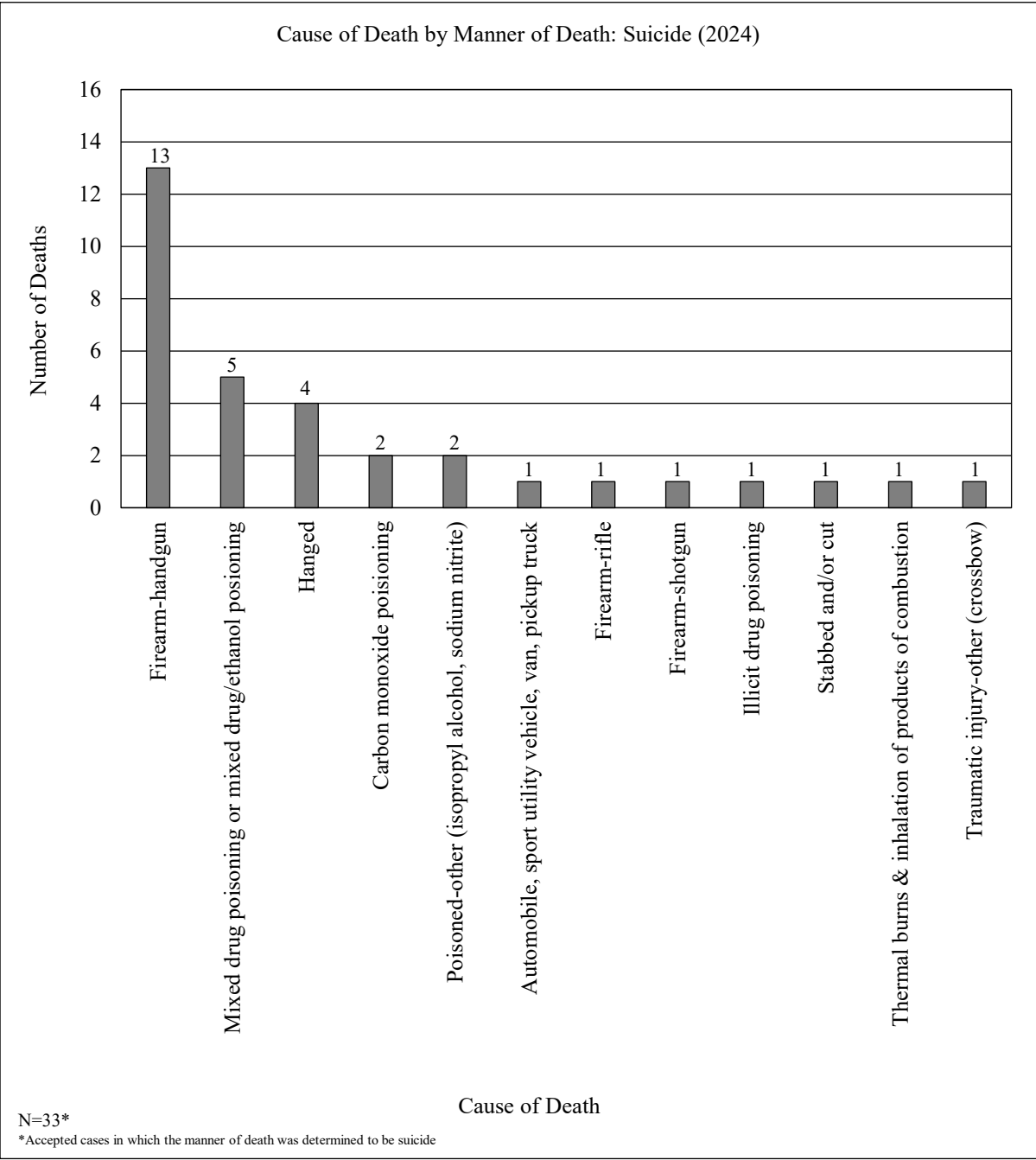


Figure 3.3.

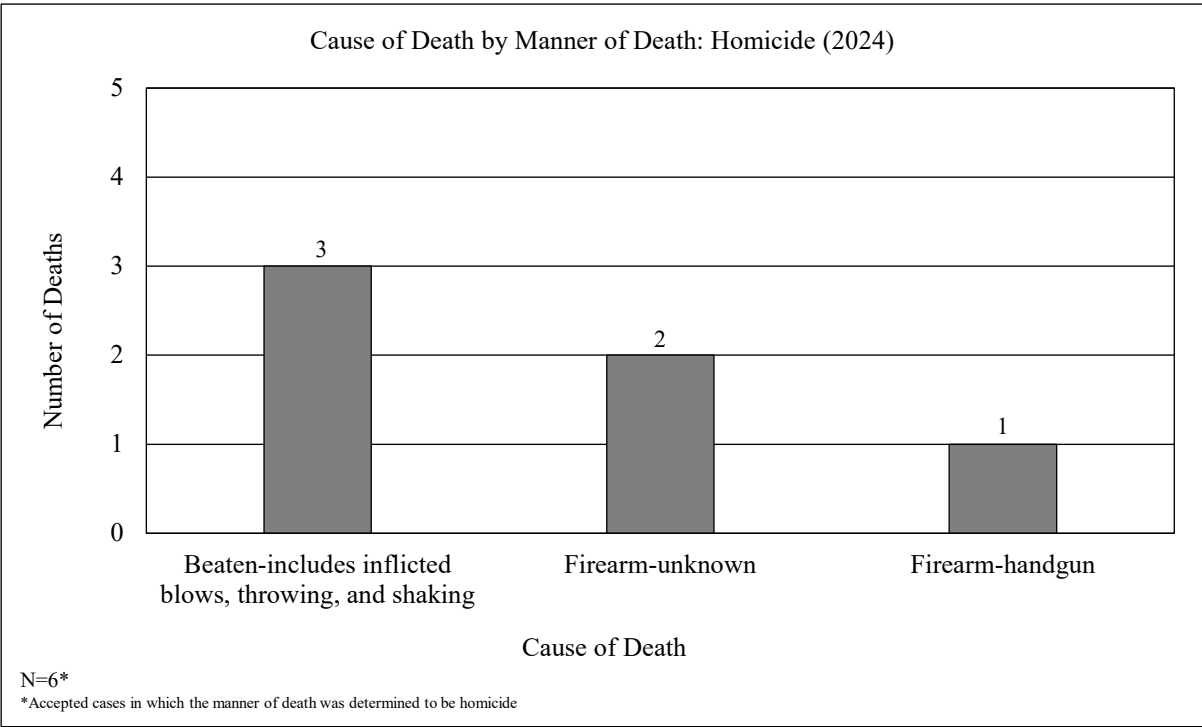


Figure 3.4.

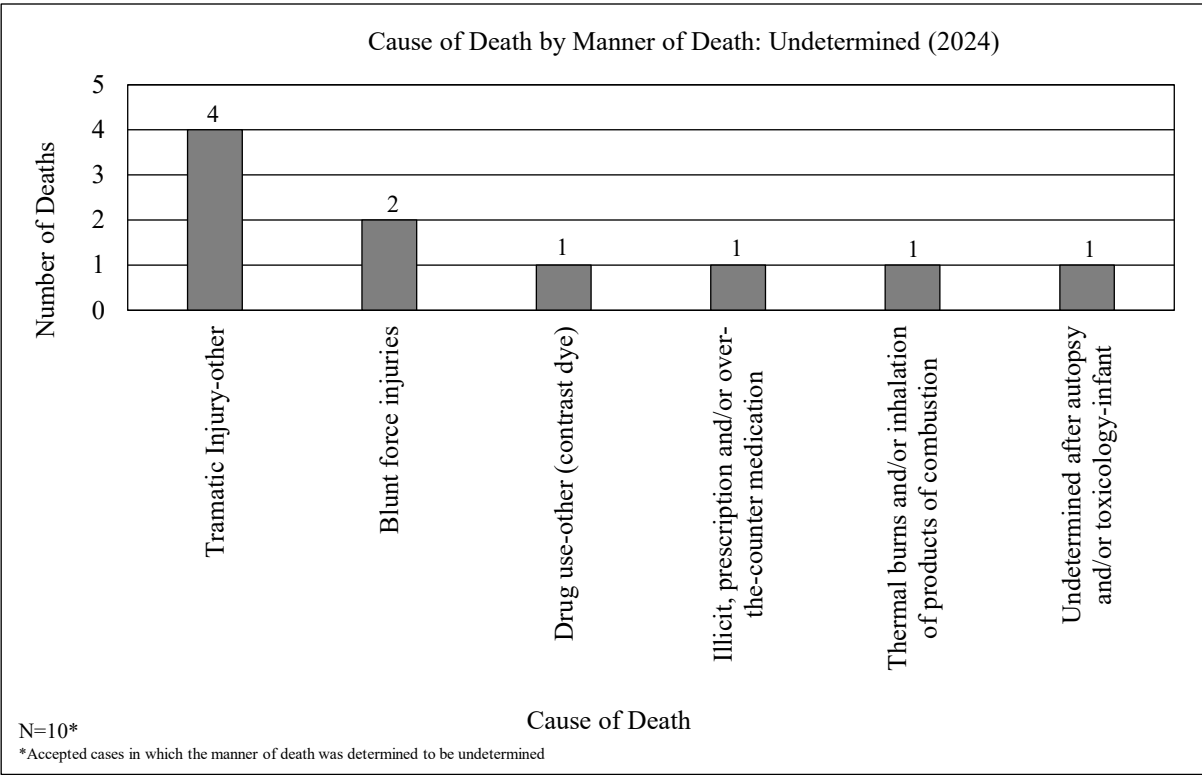


Figure 3.5.

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Accidents

Of the 511 deaths accepted by JCME, 262 were classified as accident. The sex distribution was 168 males to 94 females. One hundred and twenty-nine were the result of a fall, 21 were the result of illicit drug poisoning, and 51 were due to a motor vehicle crash. The most common age ranges were 80-89 years (56 decedents) followed closely by 70-79 years (54 decedents).

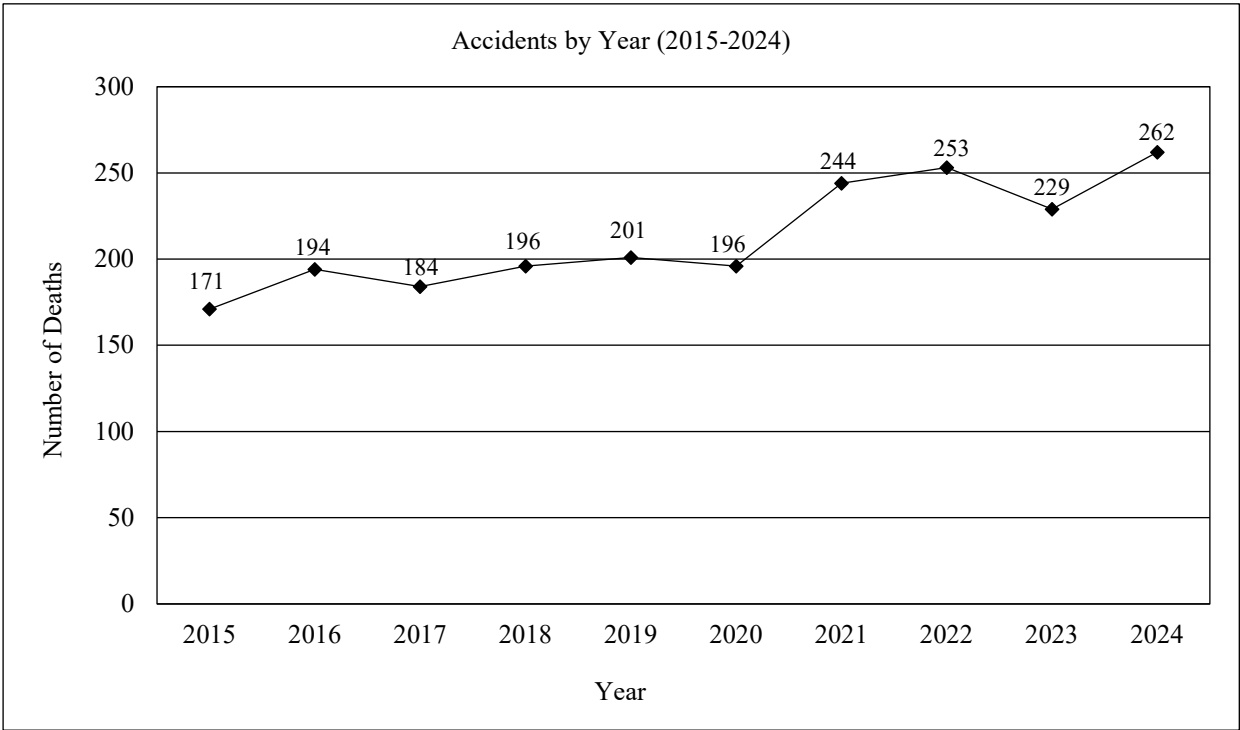


Figure 4.1.

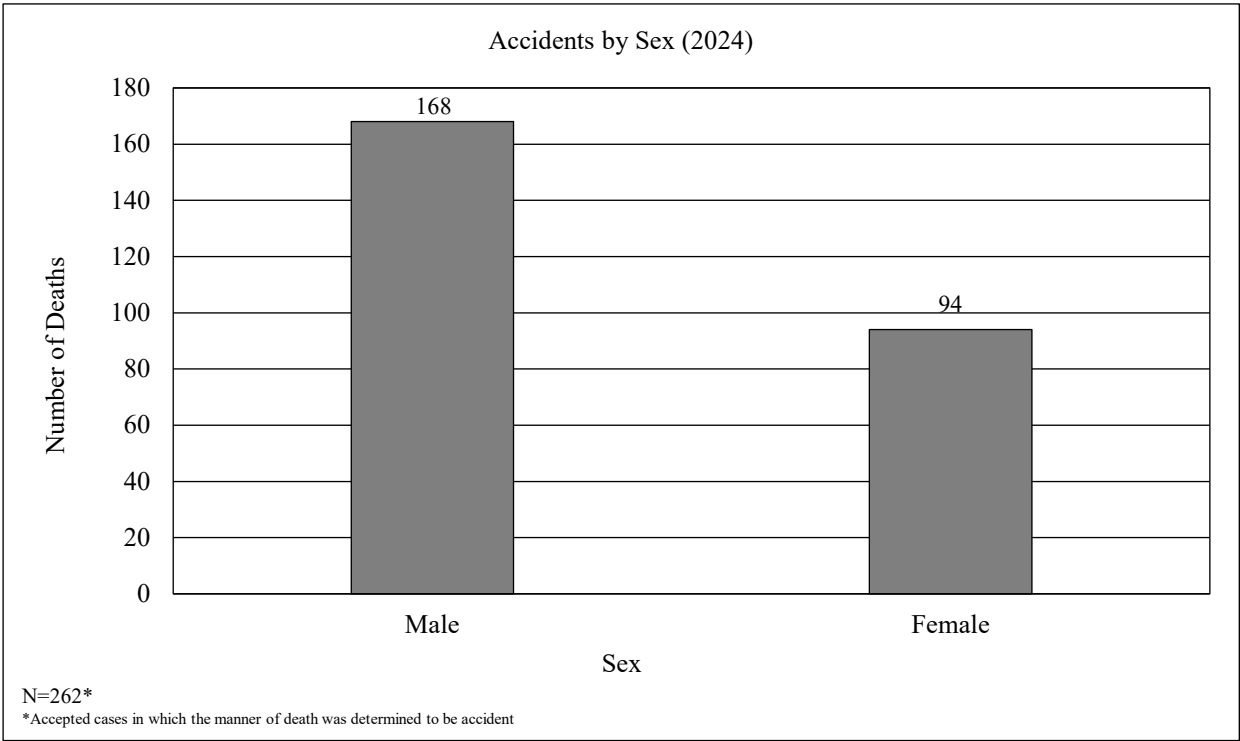


Figure 4.2.

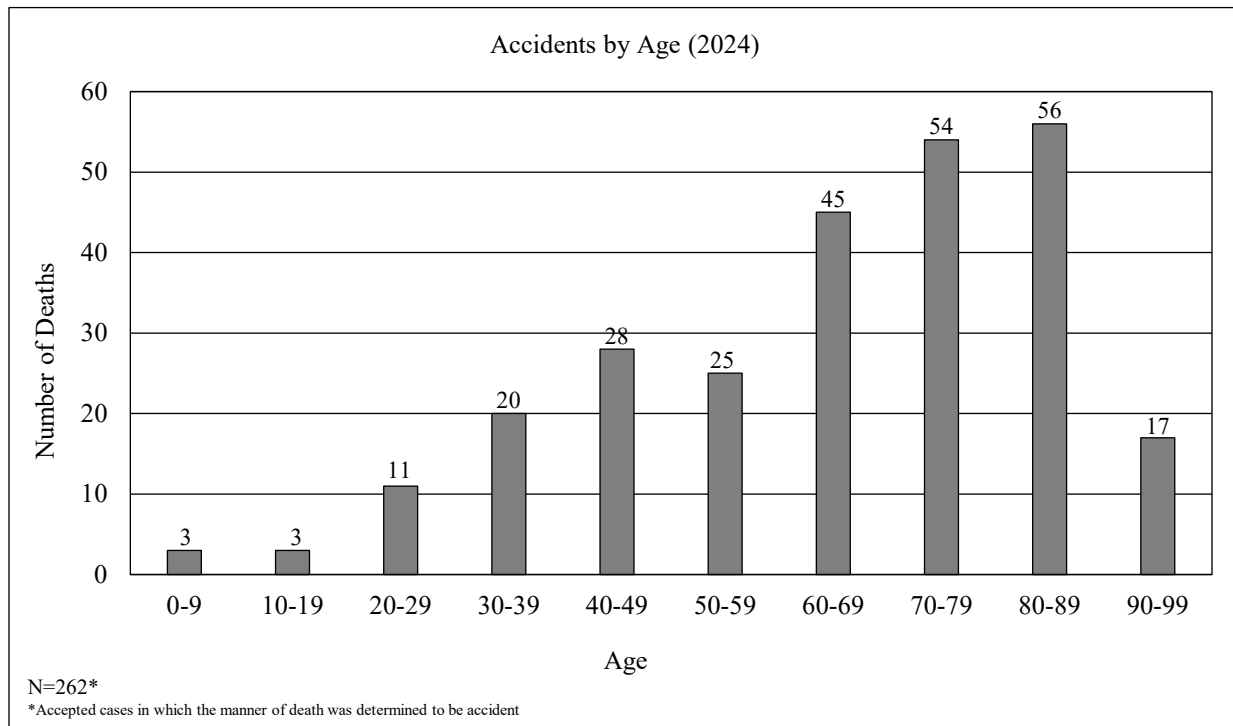


Figure 4.3.

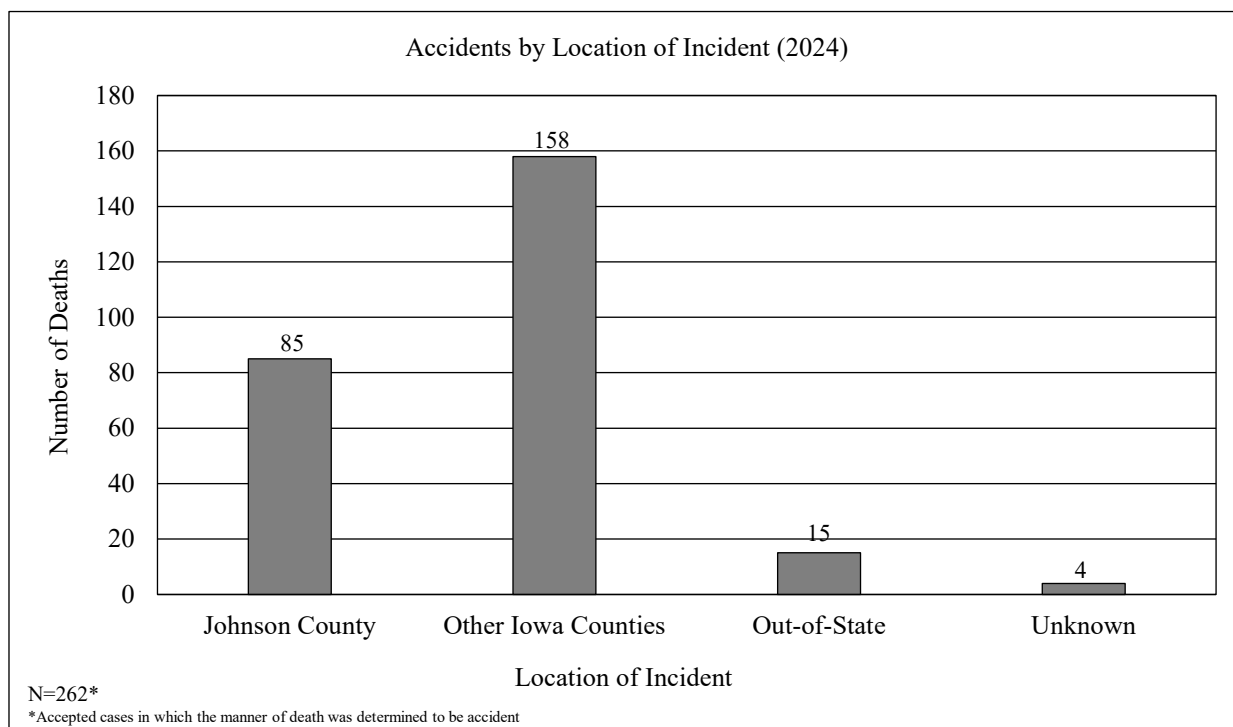


Figure 4.4.

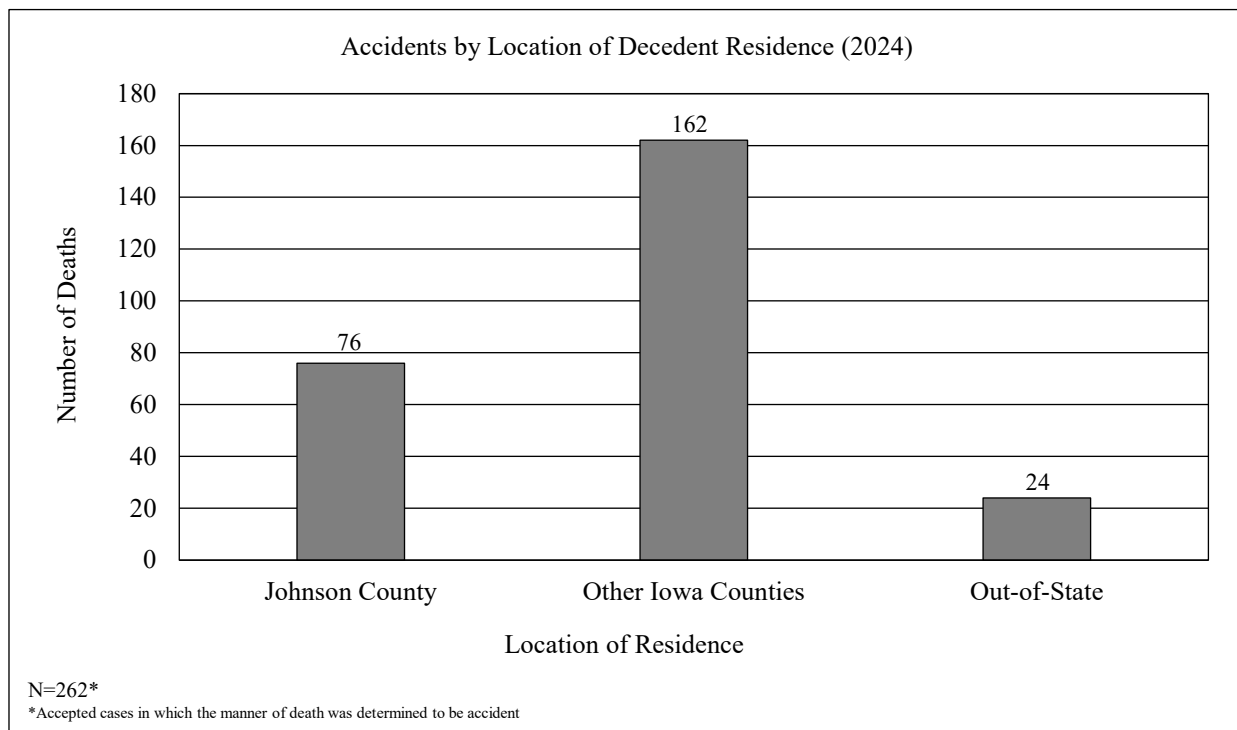


Figure 4.5.

Suicides

Of the 511 deaths investigated by JCME, 33 were classified as suicide. Fifteen of these deaths were the result of a firearm and 4 were due to hanging. The sex distribution was 26 males to 7 females. The most common age range was 50-59 years (8 decedents) followed closely by 30-39 years (7 decedents).

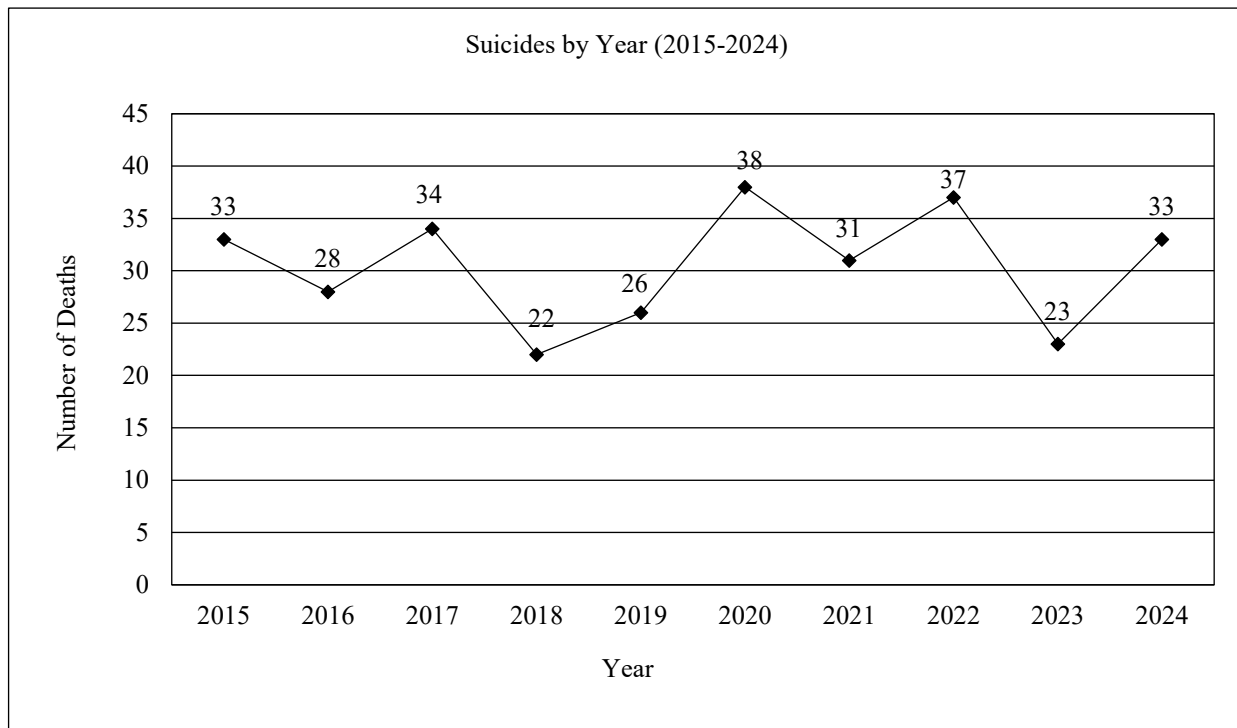


Figure 5.1.

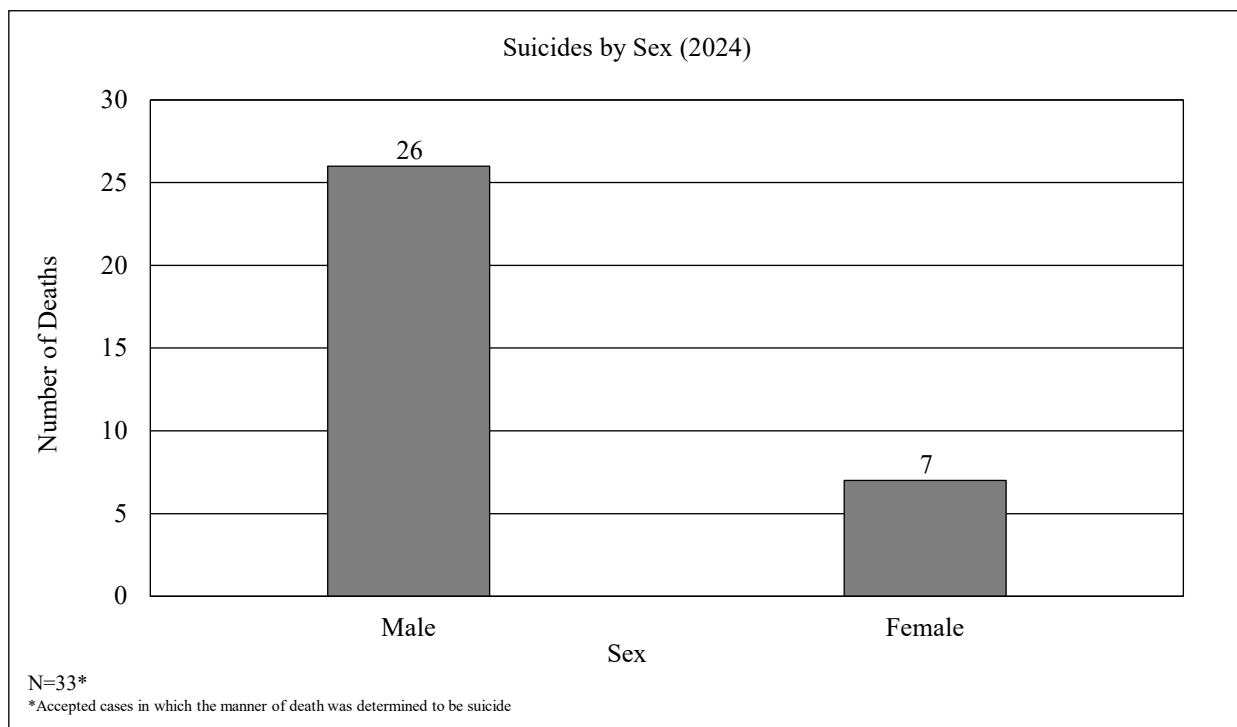


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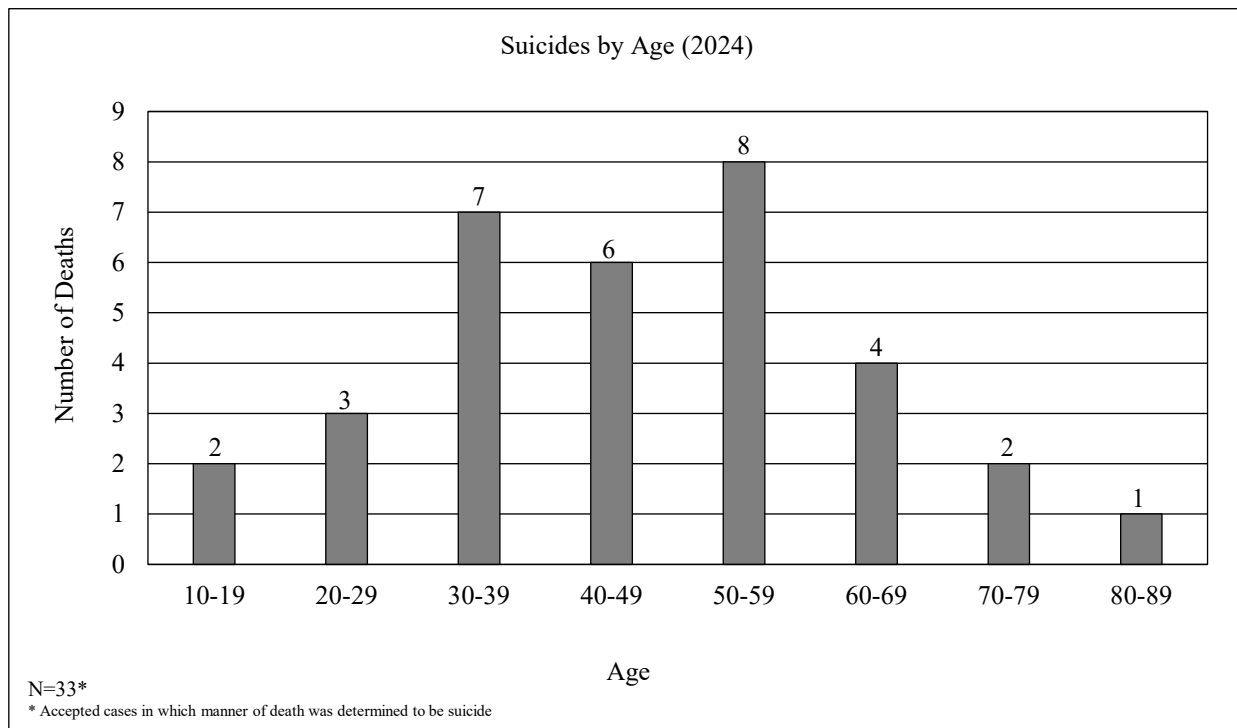


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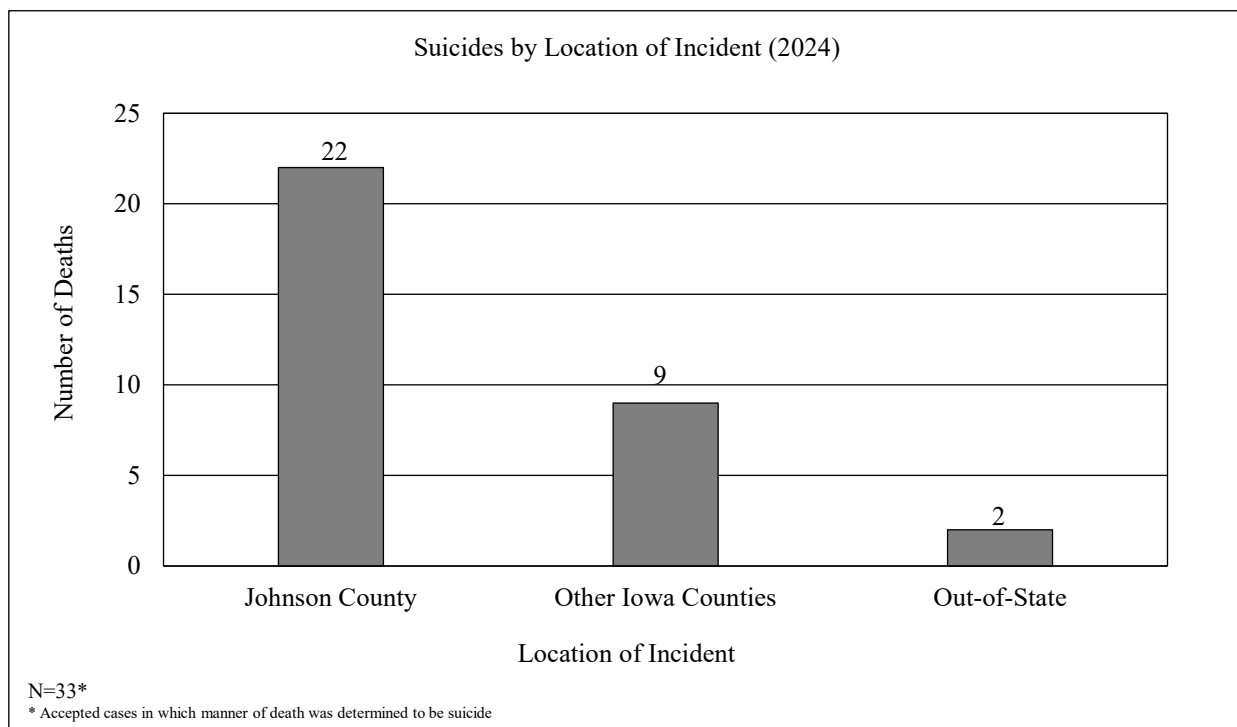


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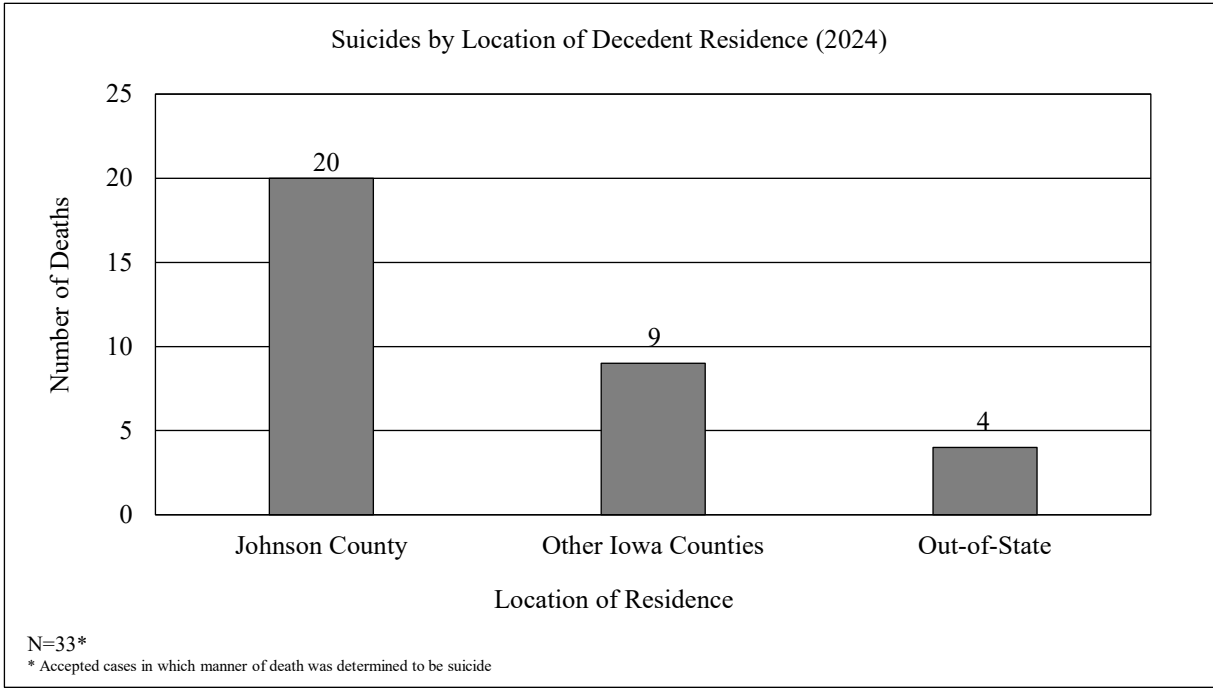


Figure 5.5.

Homicides

Of the 511 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 6 were classified as homicide. The sex distribution was 4 males to 2 female. The most common age range was 30-39 (3 decedents). Of the 6 deaths certified as homicide, 3 occurred in other Iowa counties, 1 occurred out-of-state, 1 occurred under the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections, and 1 occurred in Johnson County.

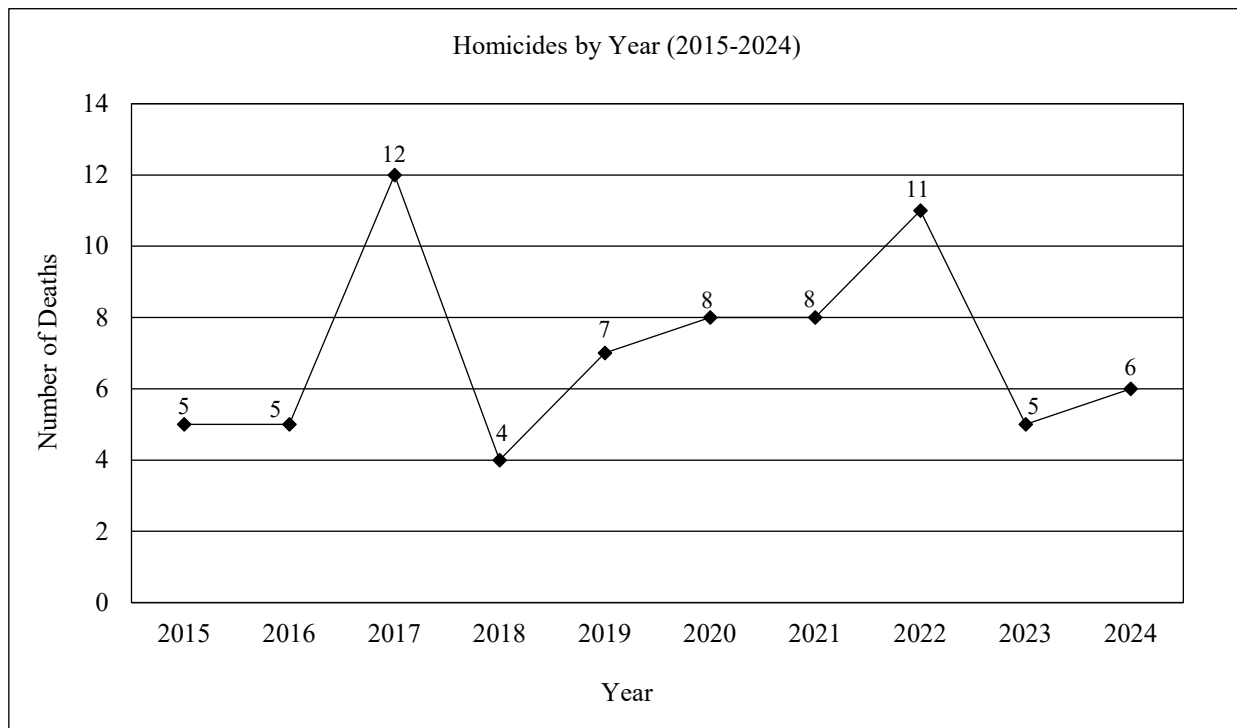


Figure 6.1.

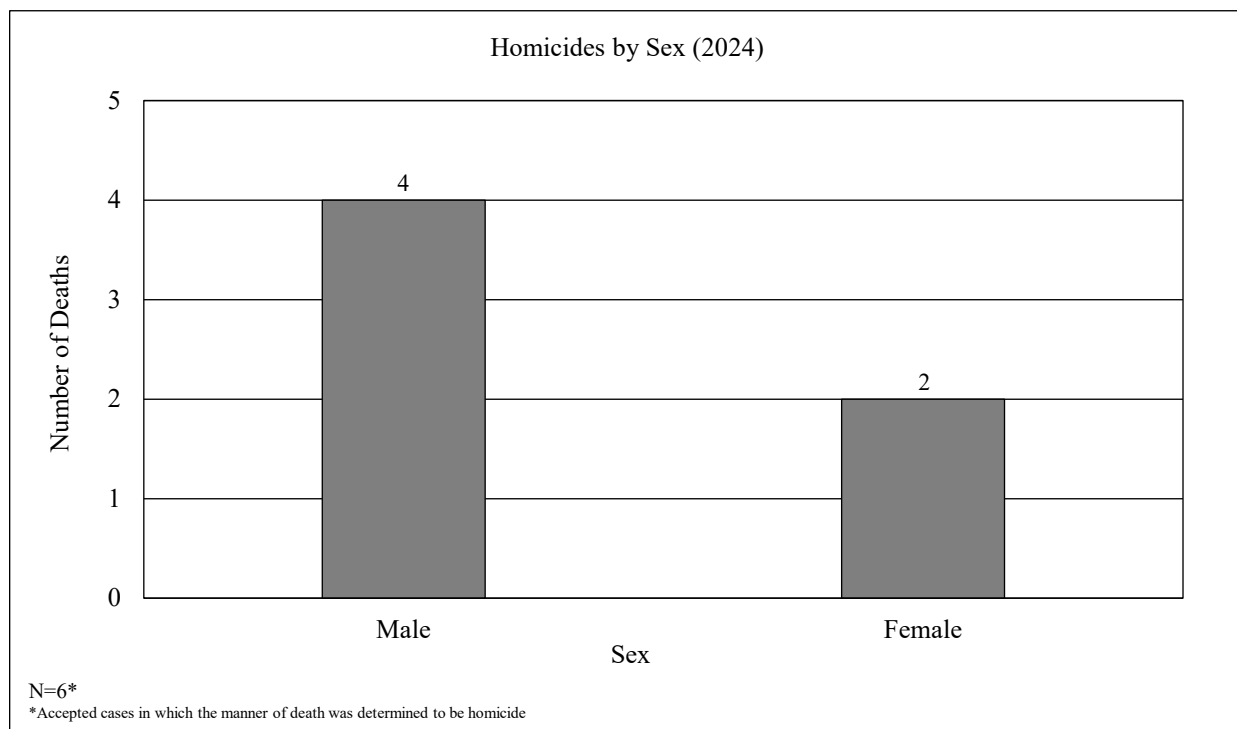


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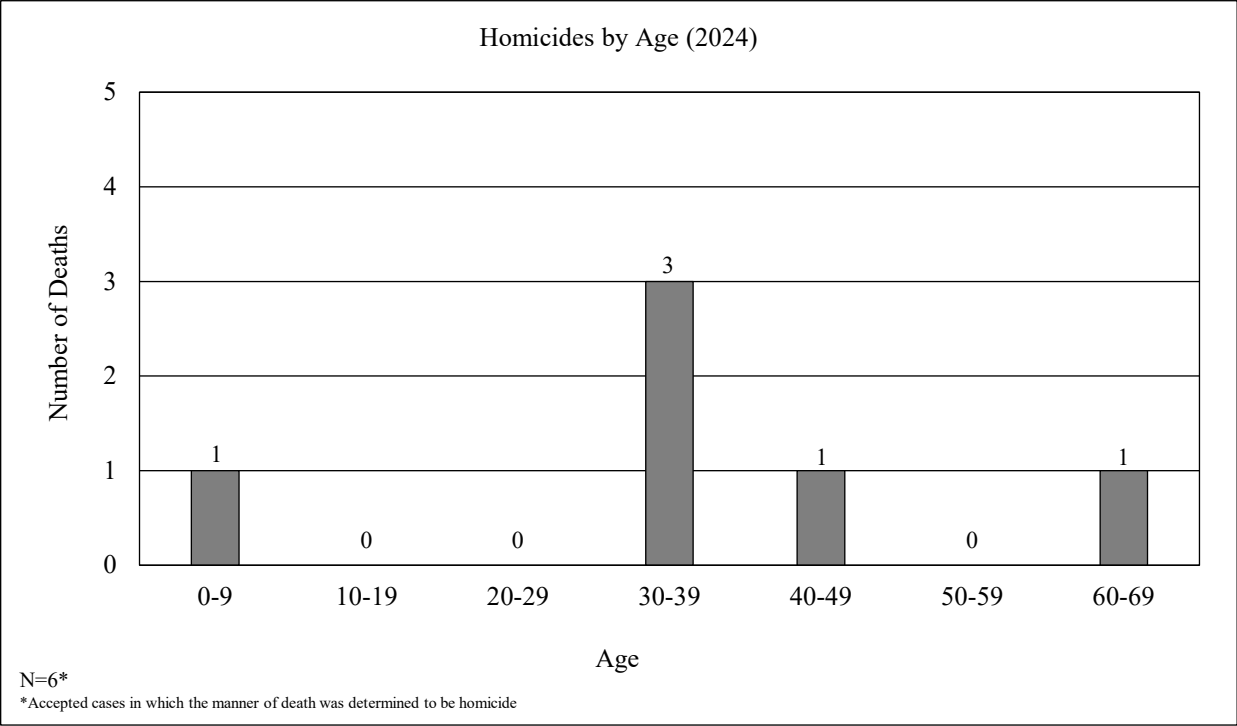


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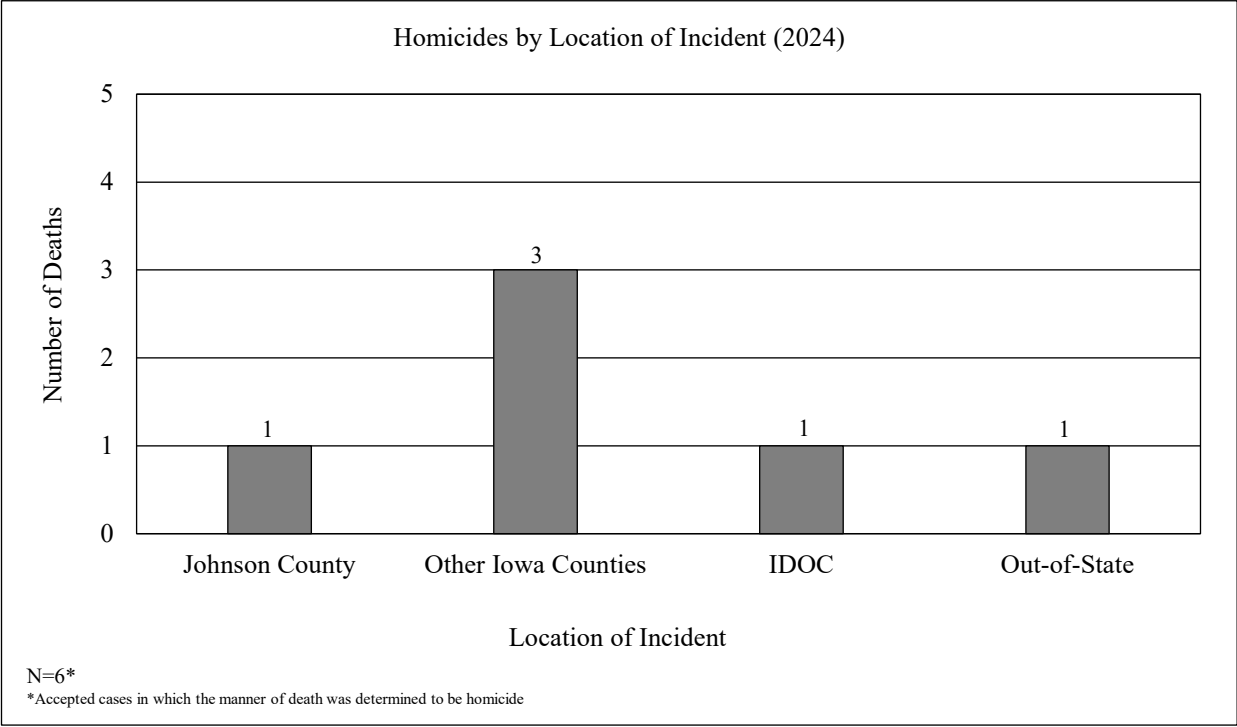


Figure 6.4.

Homicides by Location of Decedent Residence (2024)



N=6*

*Accepted cases in which the manner of death was determined to be homicide

Figure 6.5.

Drug-Related Deaths

In 2024, there were 48 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 22 involved illicit drugs only, 22 involved a mixture of drugs, and 4 involved over-the-counter (OTC) drugs only.

Of the 22 illicit drug-related deaths, 13 involved methamphetamine, 6 fentanyl, 2 cocaine, and 1 heroin.

Of the 22 mixed drug-related deaths, toxicology results demonstrated that 5 decedents tested positive for more than one drug. Of these, 14 involved illicitly obtained drugs, 13 involved prescription (Rx) drugs and 9 involved over-the-counter drugs. Of the 22 mixed drug-related deaths, the most common drug used was methamphetamine (18 decedents), followed by fentanyl (11 decedents) and cocaine (8 decedents).

Of the 48 drug-related deaths, 17 involved opioids. Of these 17 deaths, toxicology results demonstrated that 5 decedents tested positive for more than 1 opioid drug. Of these, 16 were classified as accident and 1 as suicide. The most common opioid drug was fentanyl (12 decedents) followed by heroin (2 decedents) and oxycodone (2 decedents).

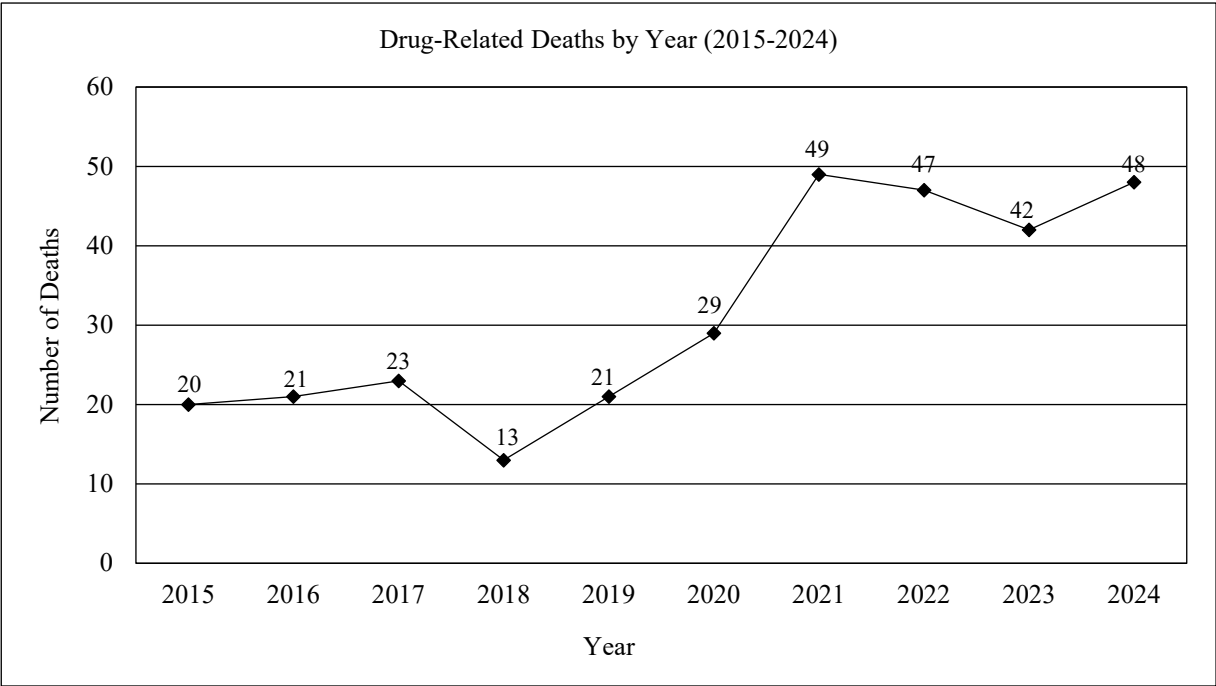


Figure 7.1.

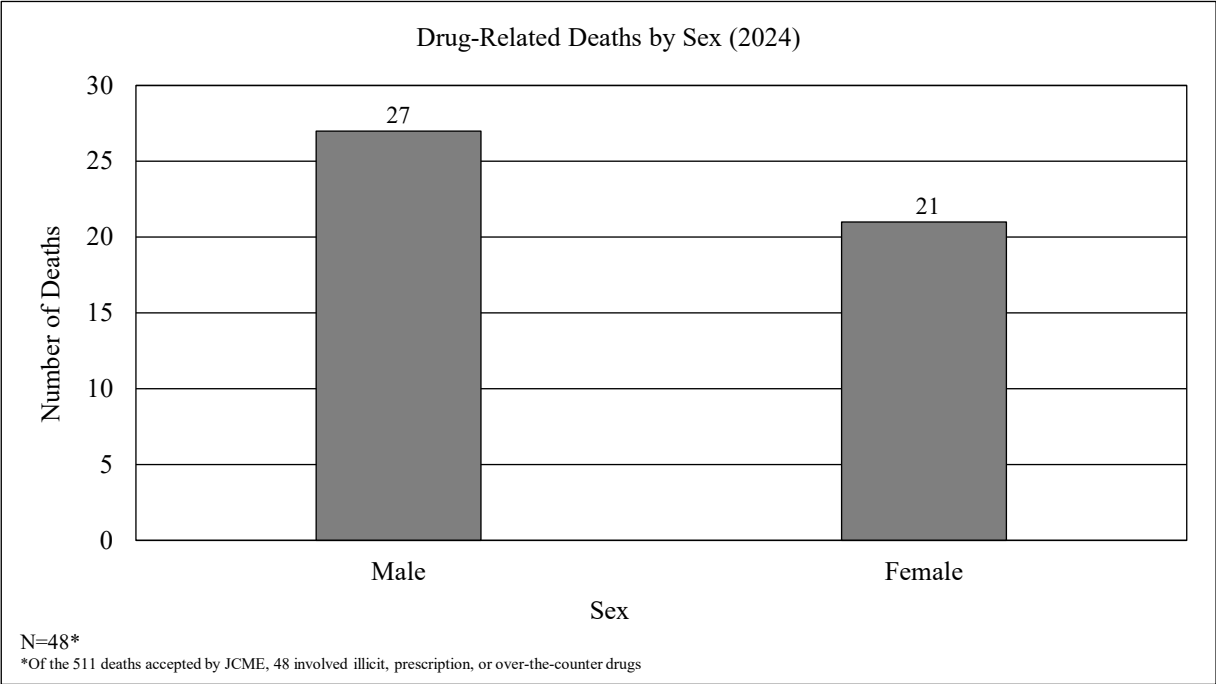


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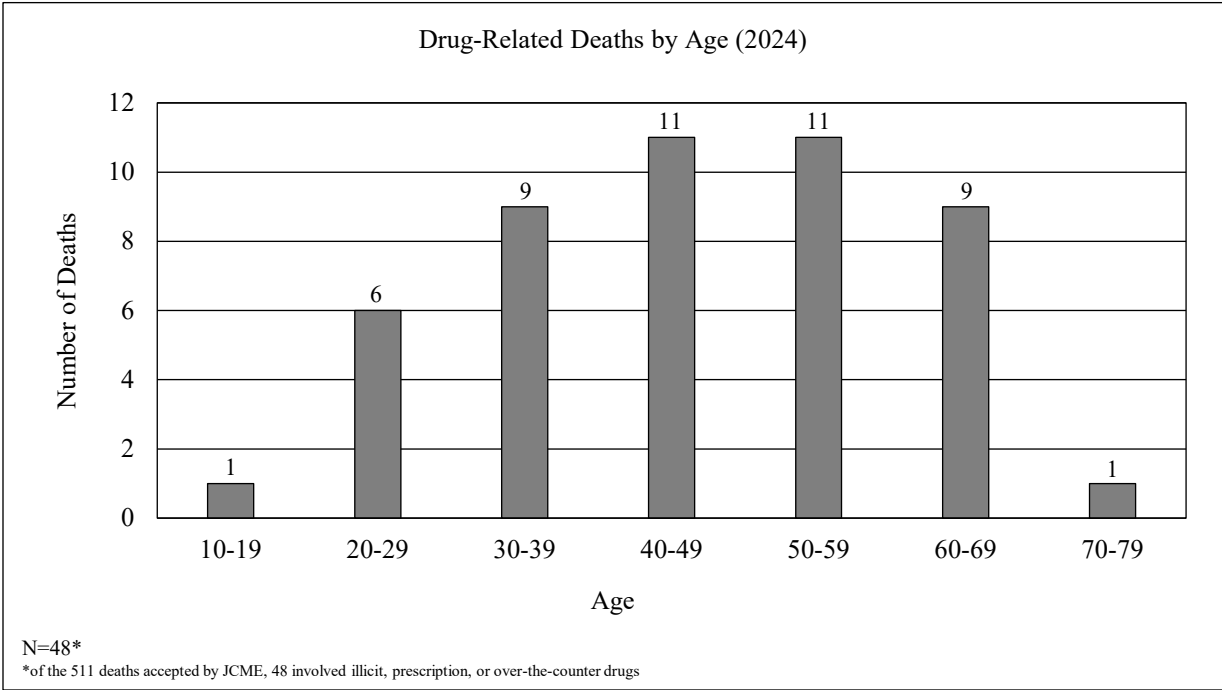


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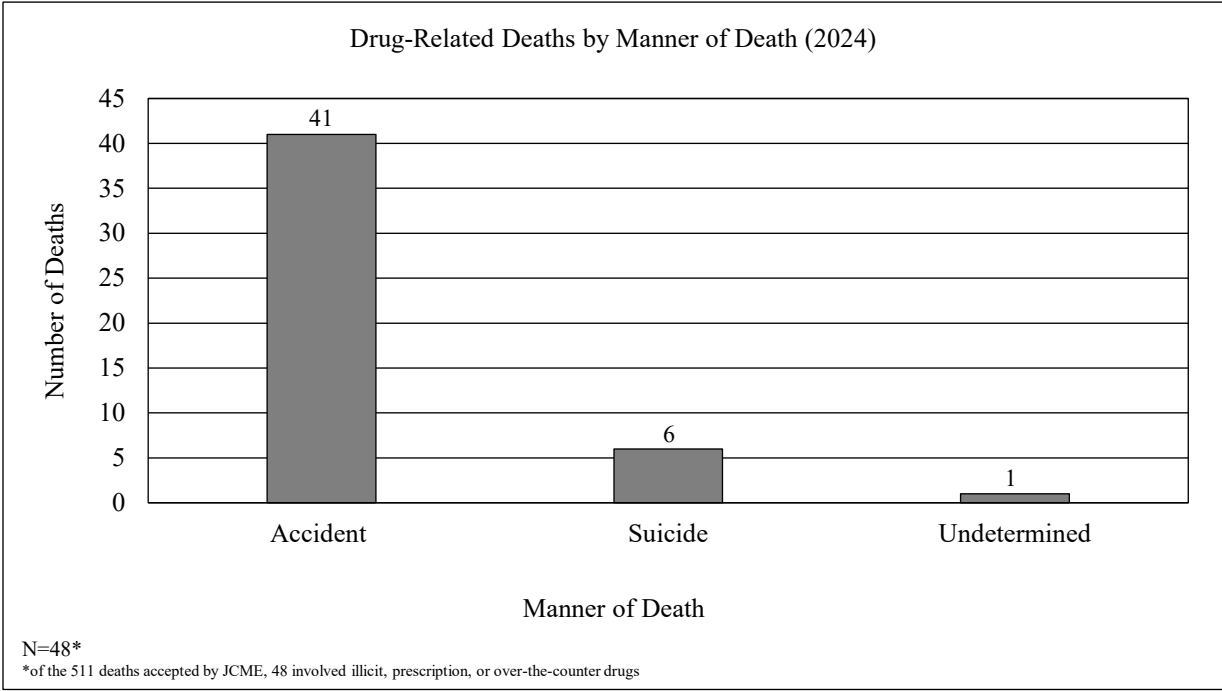


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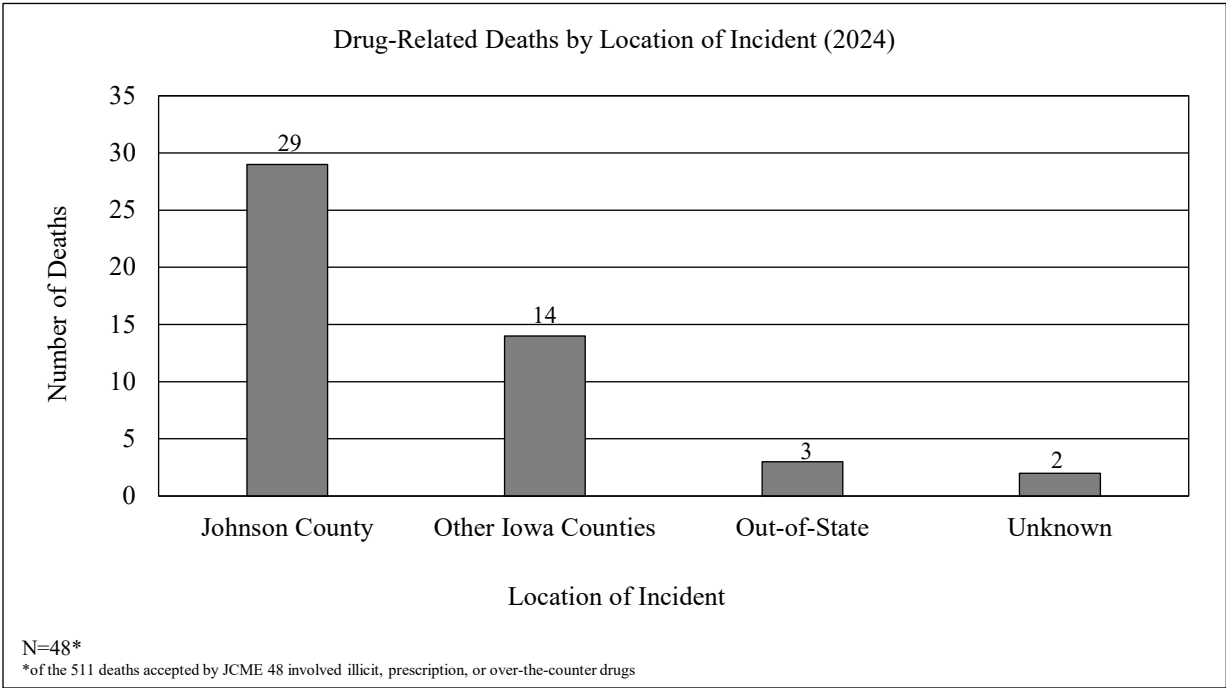


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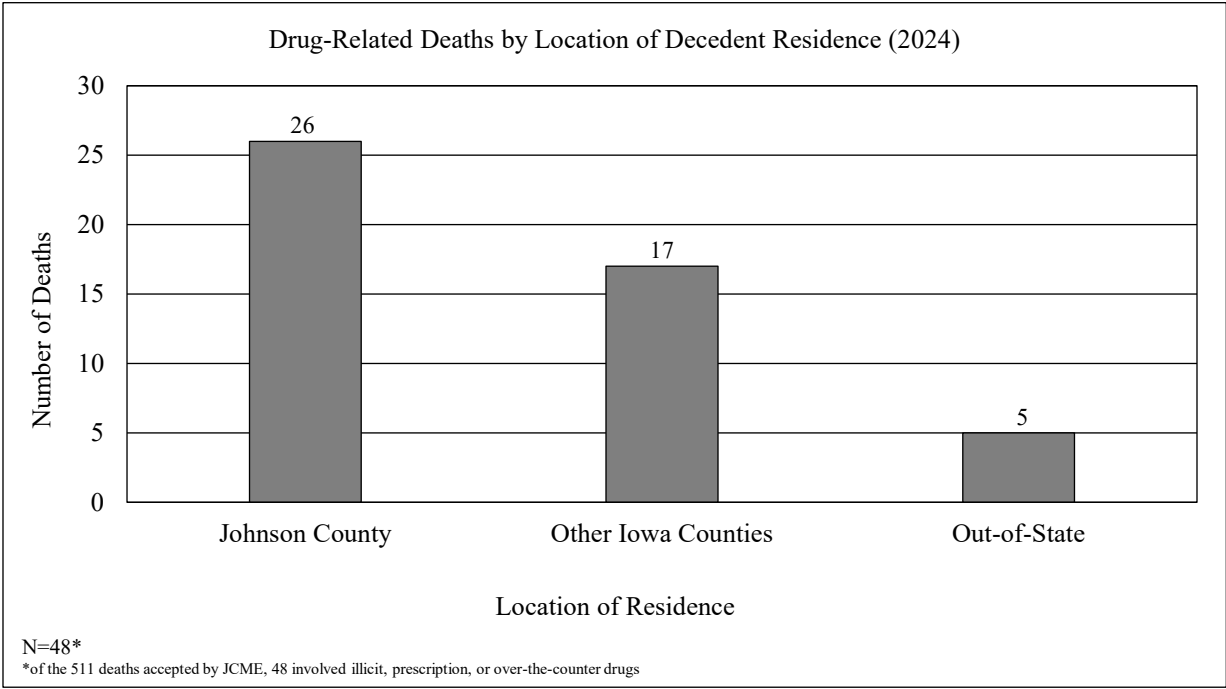


Figure 7.6.

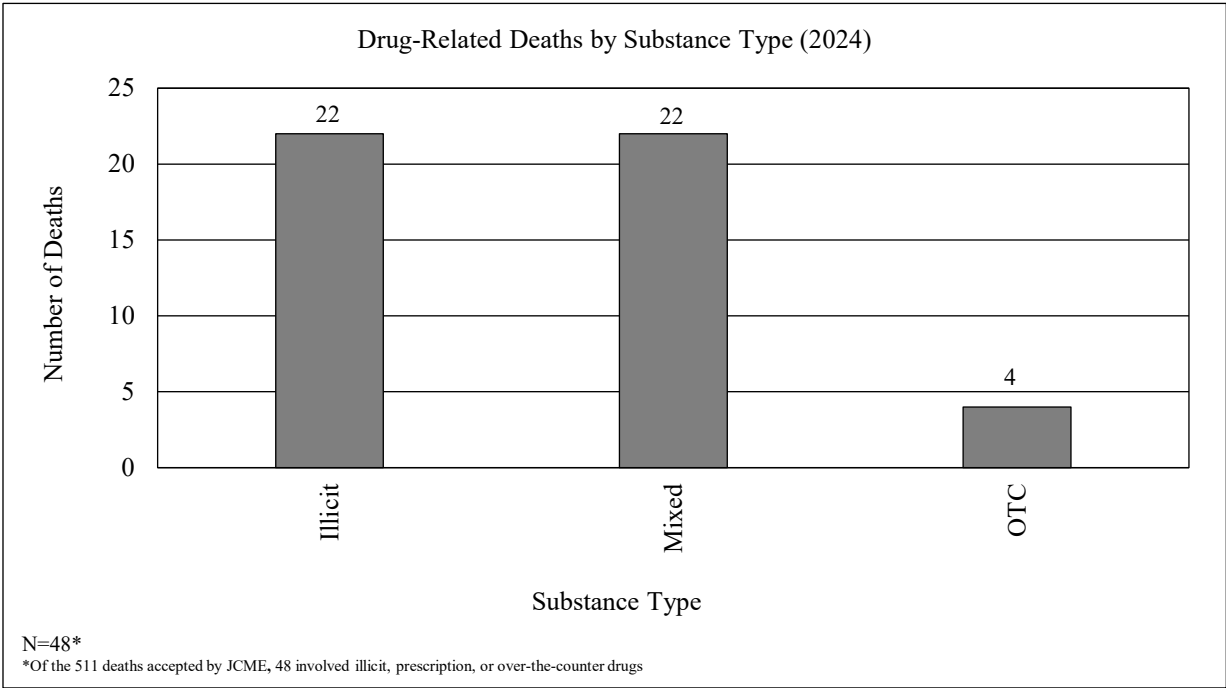


Figure 7.7.

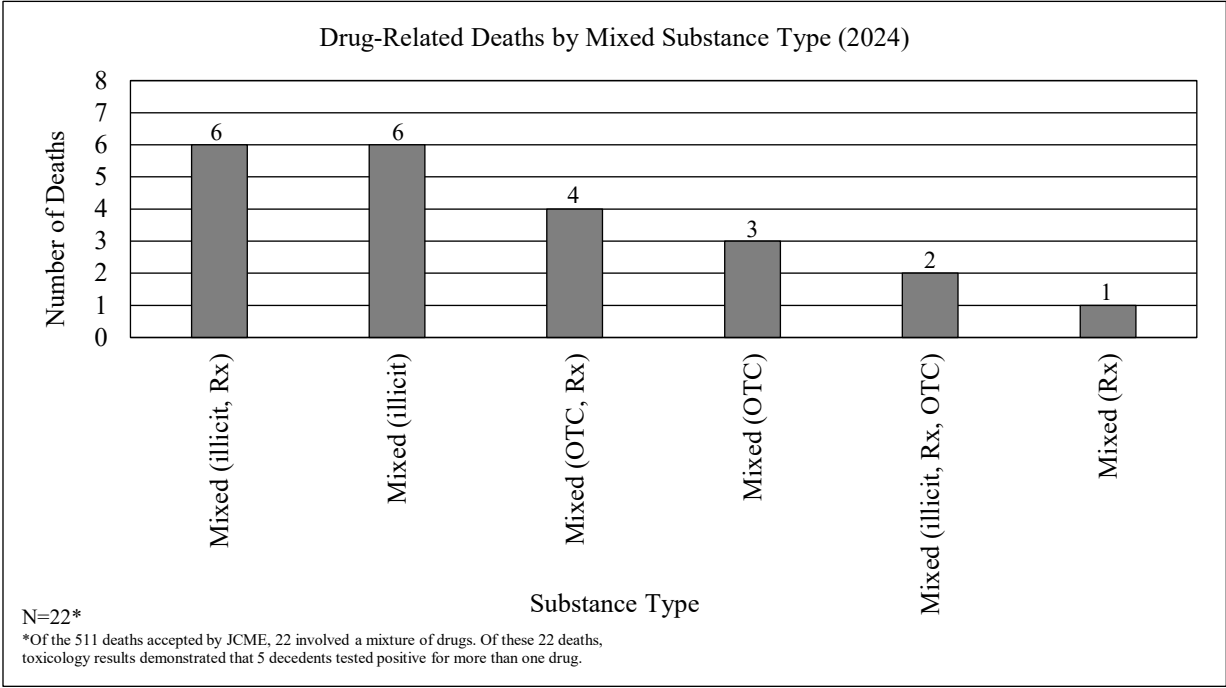


Figure 7.8.

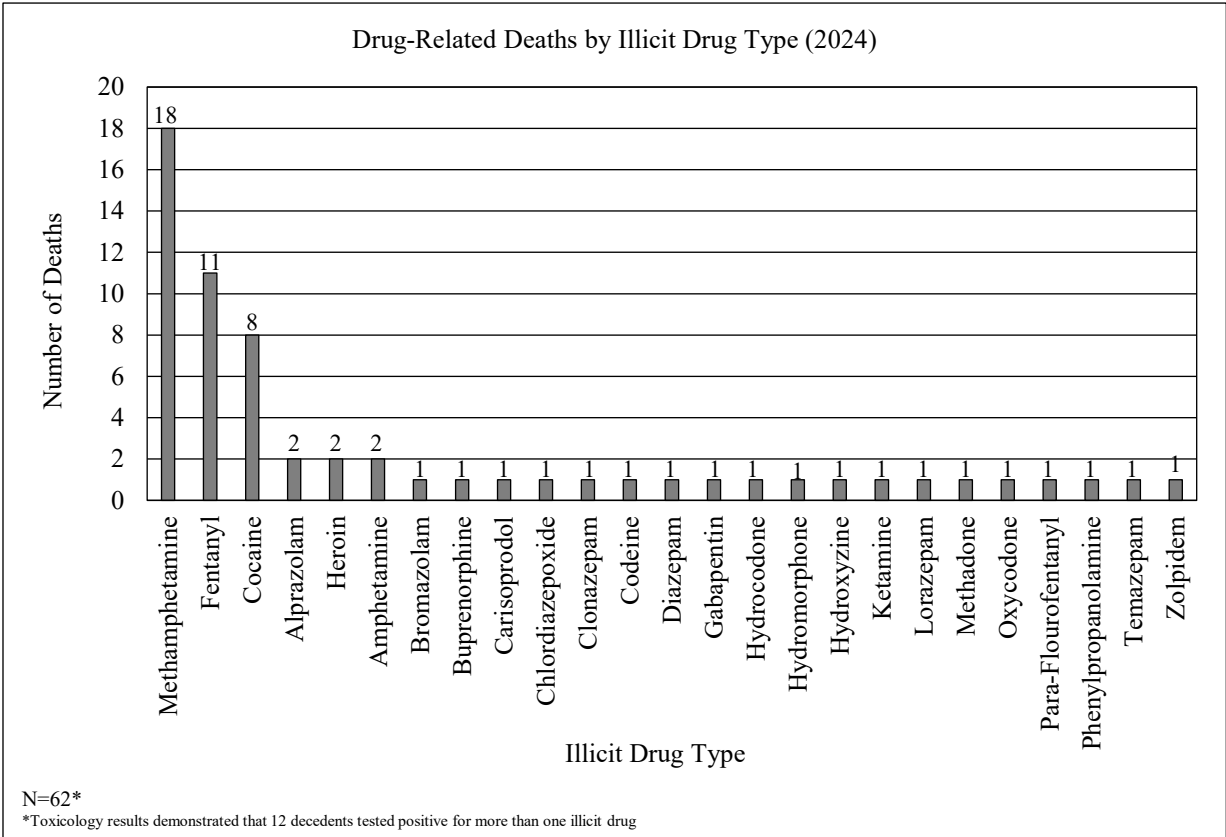


Figure 7.9.

Table 7.1. Drug-Related Deaths by Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs (2024)

Type of Drug	Number of Decedents
Acetaminophen	6
Bupropion	5
Diphenhydramine	4
Mitragynine	3
Dextromethorphan	2
Diazepam	2
Gabapentin	2
Ibuprofen	2
Trazadone	2
Alprazolam	1
Chlorpheniramine	1
Citalopram	1
Clonazepam	1
Doxylamine	1
Escitalopram	1
Fentanyl	1
Fluoxetine	1
Hydroxyzine	1
Lithium	1
Lorazepam	1
Meloxicam	1
Mirtazapine	1
Morphine	1
Nortriptyline	1
Olanzapine	1
Oxcarbazepine	1
Oxycodone	1
Paroxetine	1
Promethazine	1
Propanlol	1
Pseudoephedrine	1
Quetiapine	1
Risperidone	1
Salicylate	1
Sertraline	1

N=54*

*Toxicology results demonstrated that 15 decedents tested positive for more than one prescription or over-the counter drug

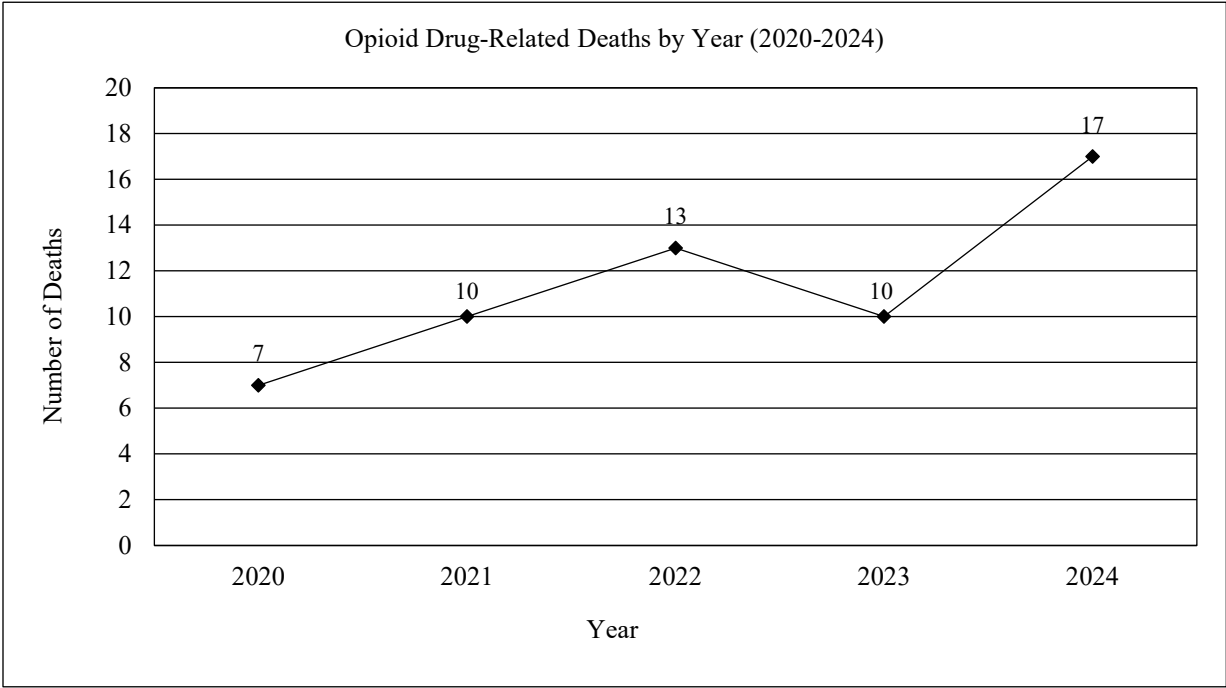


Figure 7.10.

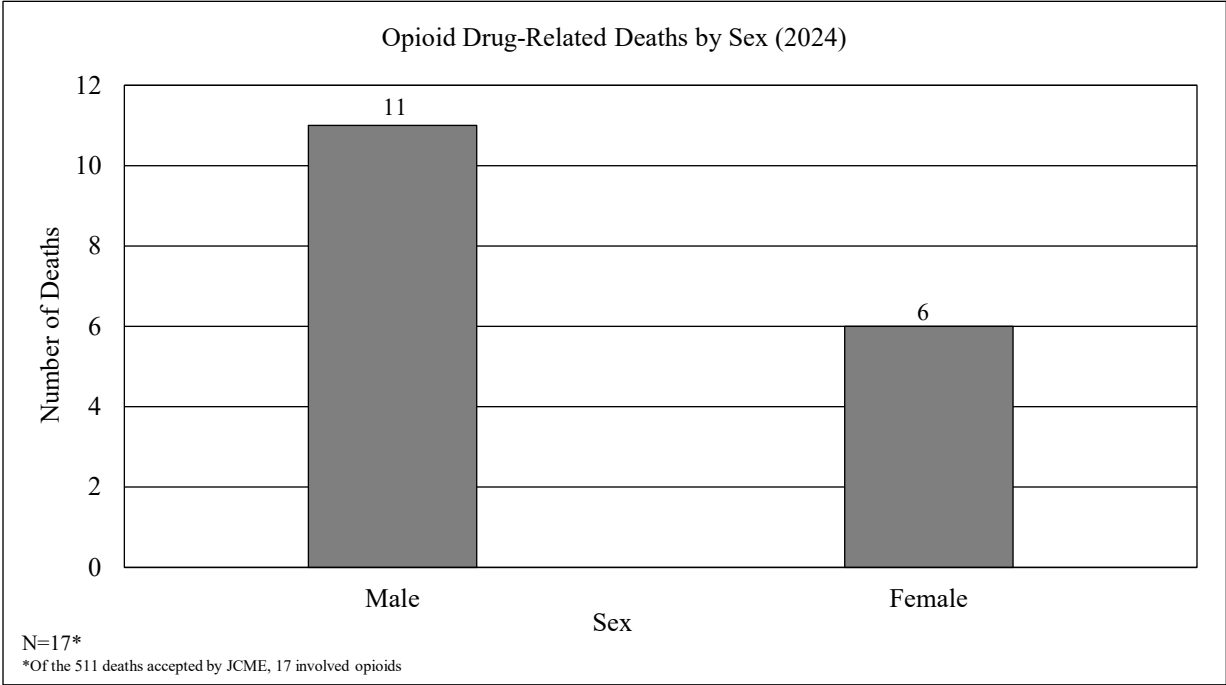


Figure 7.11.

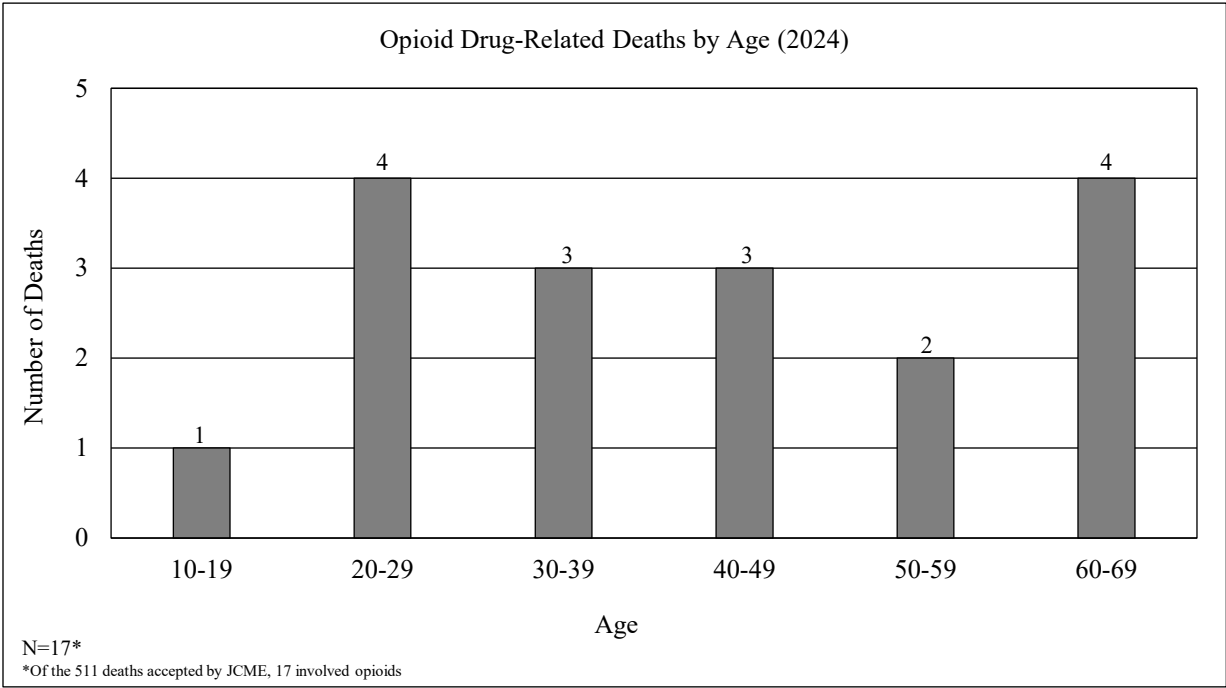


Figure 7.12.

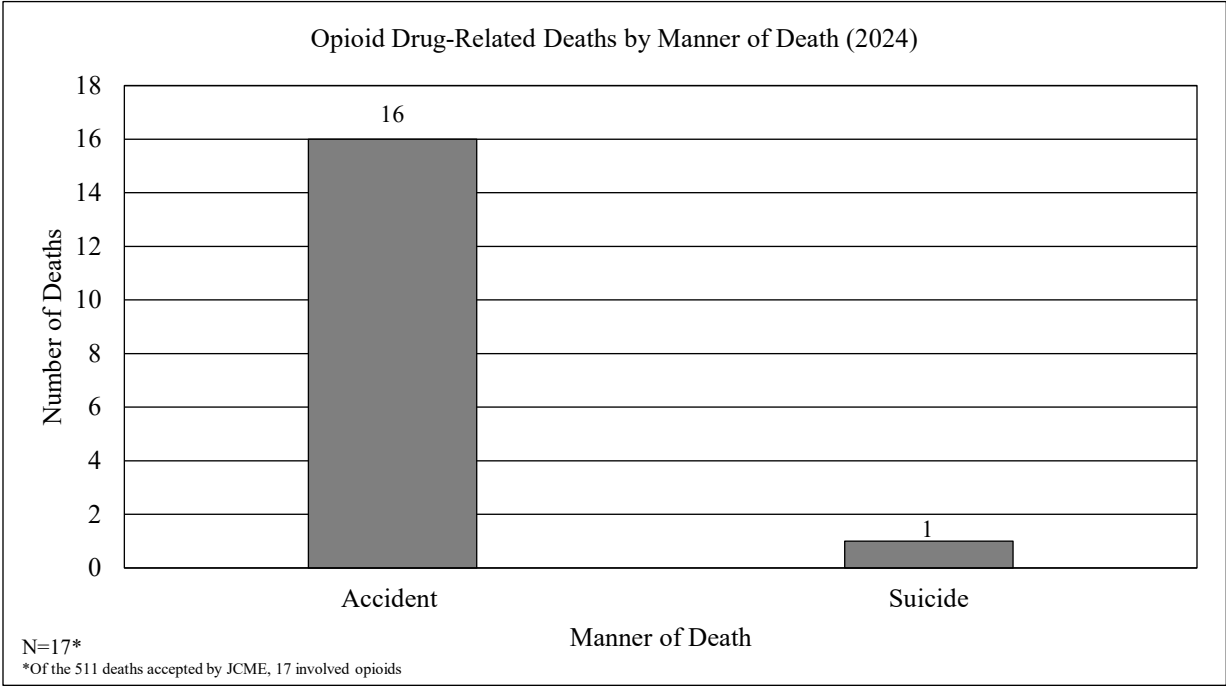


Figure 7.13.

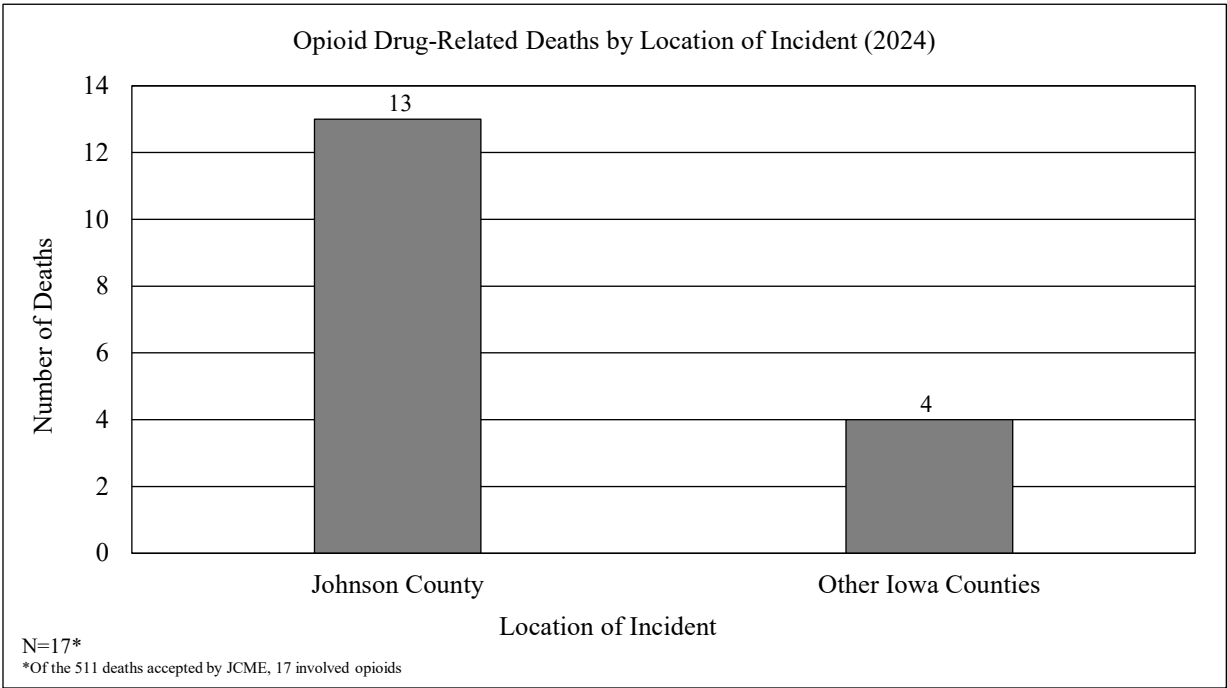


Figure 7.14.

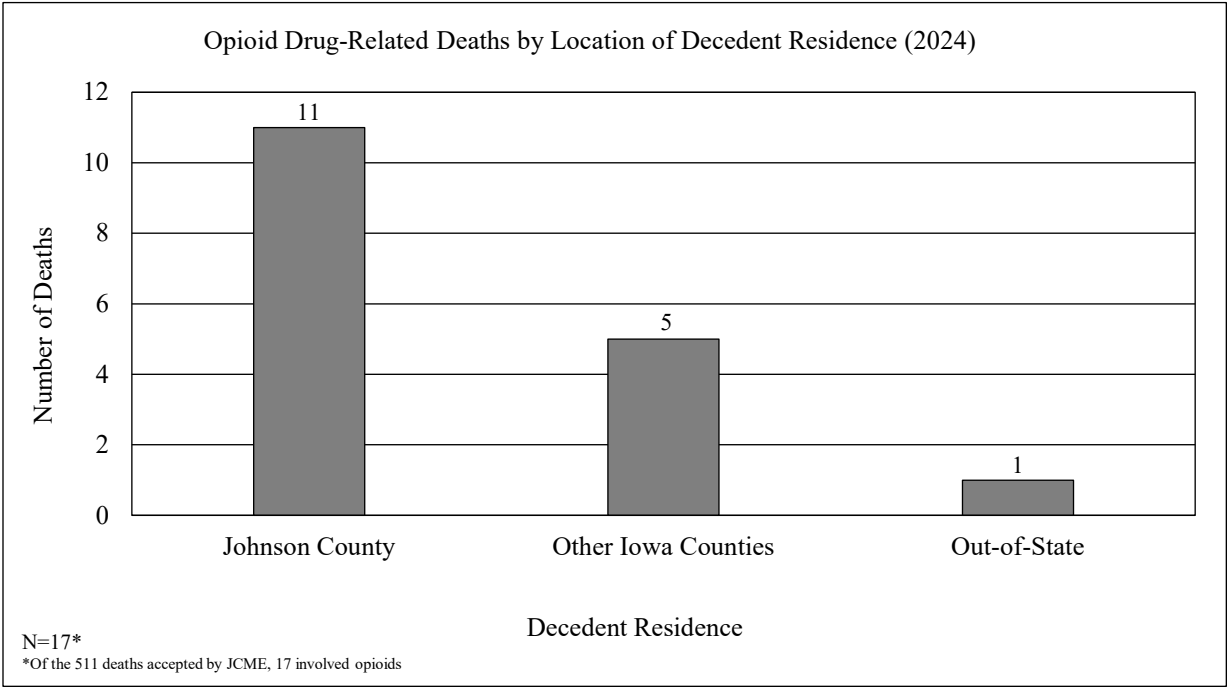


Figure 7.15.

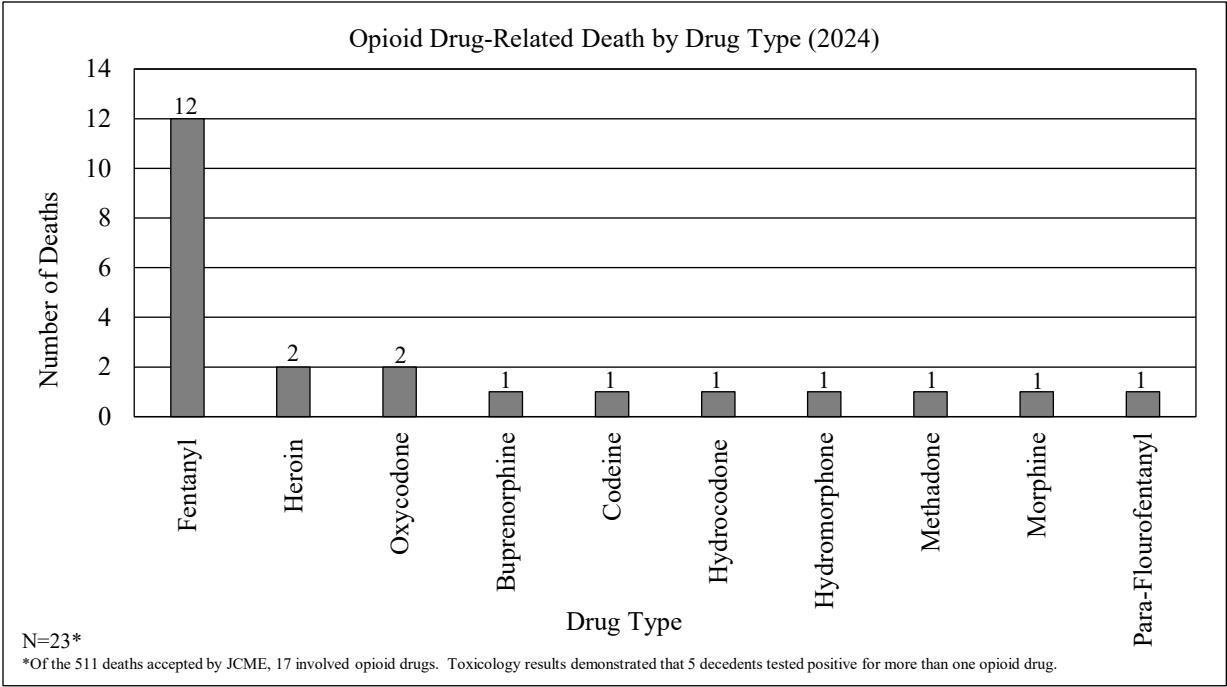


Figure 7.16.

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Older Adult Deaths

In 2024, JCME accepted jurisdiction of 336 deaths that involved adults aged 60 years and older. Of these, 165 were residents of Johnson County, 145 were residents of other Iowa counties, 18 were out-of-state residents, 8 were under the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections. One hundred and seventy-two of these deaths were certified as accident, 152 as natural, 7 as suicide, 4 as undetermined, and 1 as homicide.

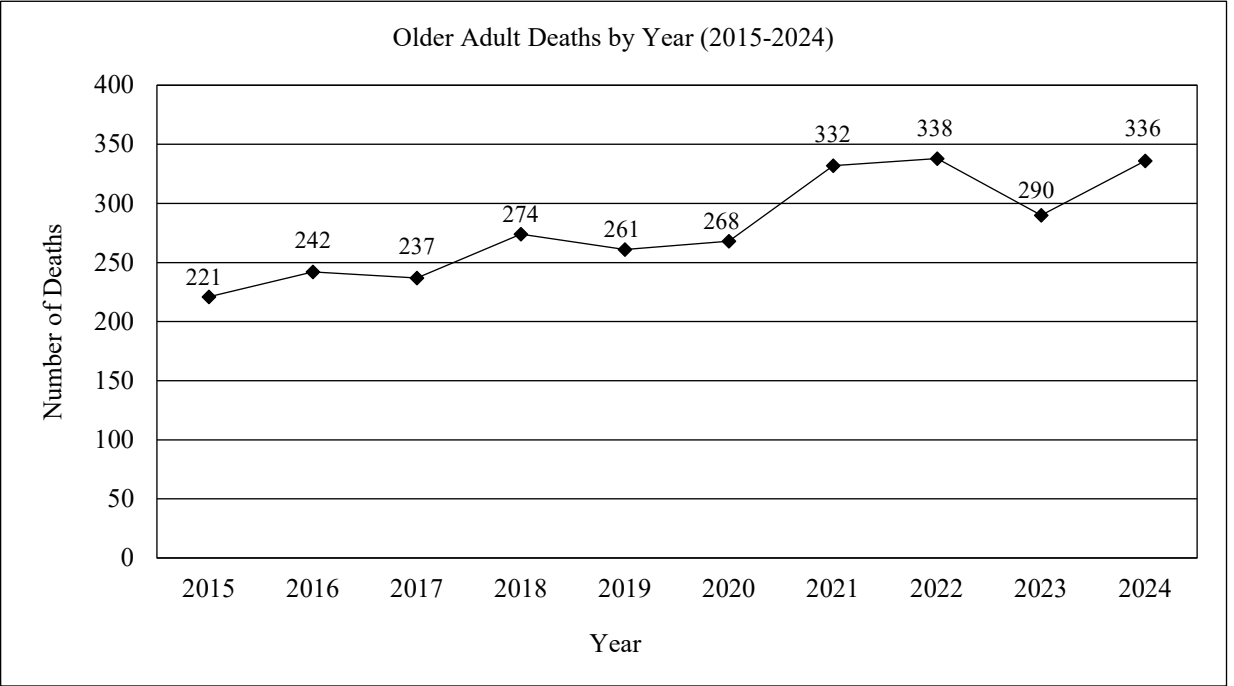


Figure 8.1.

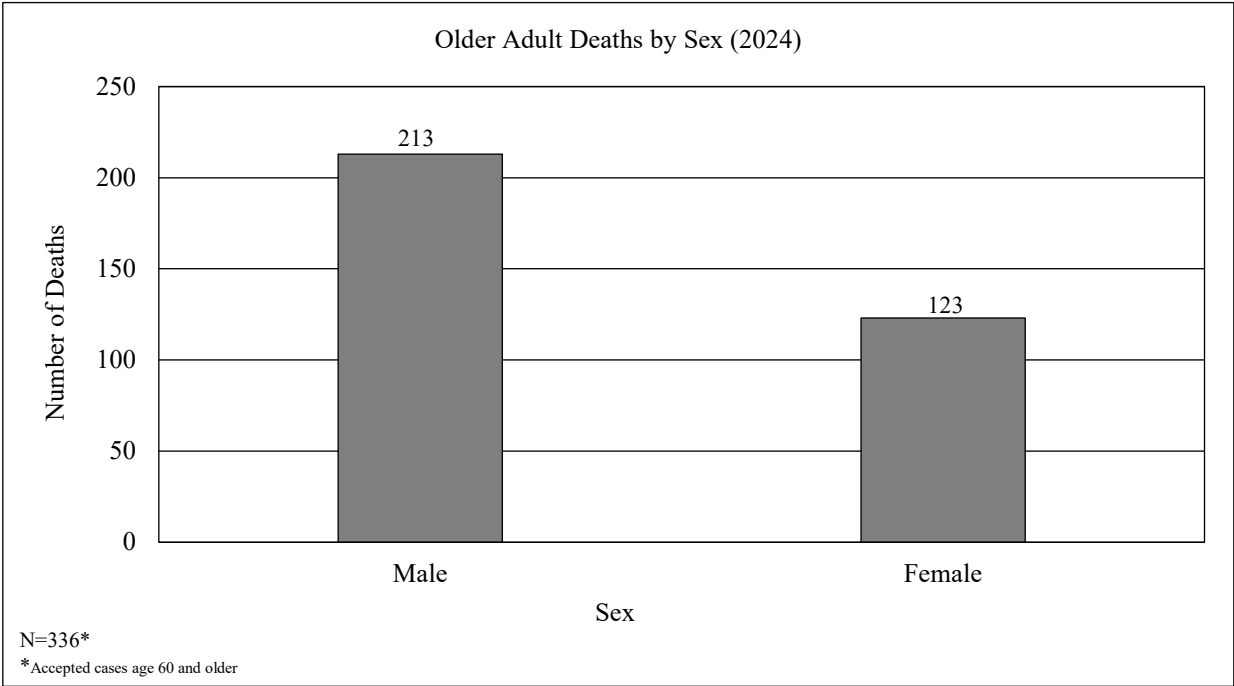


Figure 8.2.

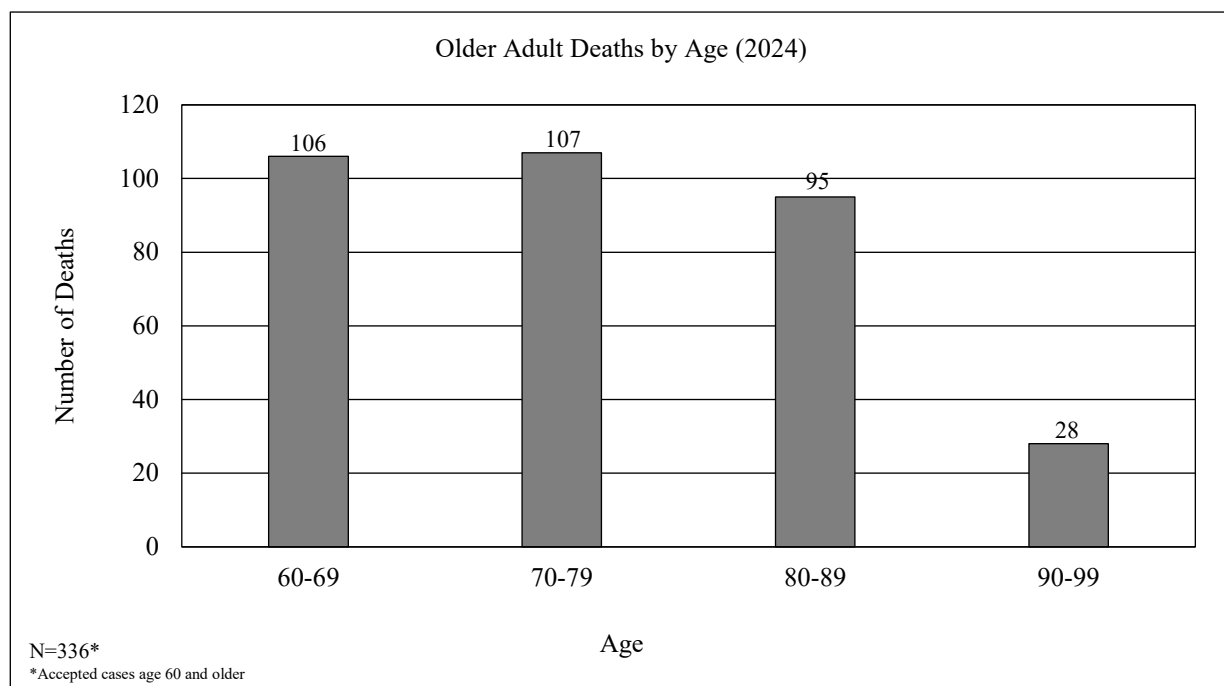


Figure 8.3.

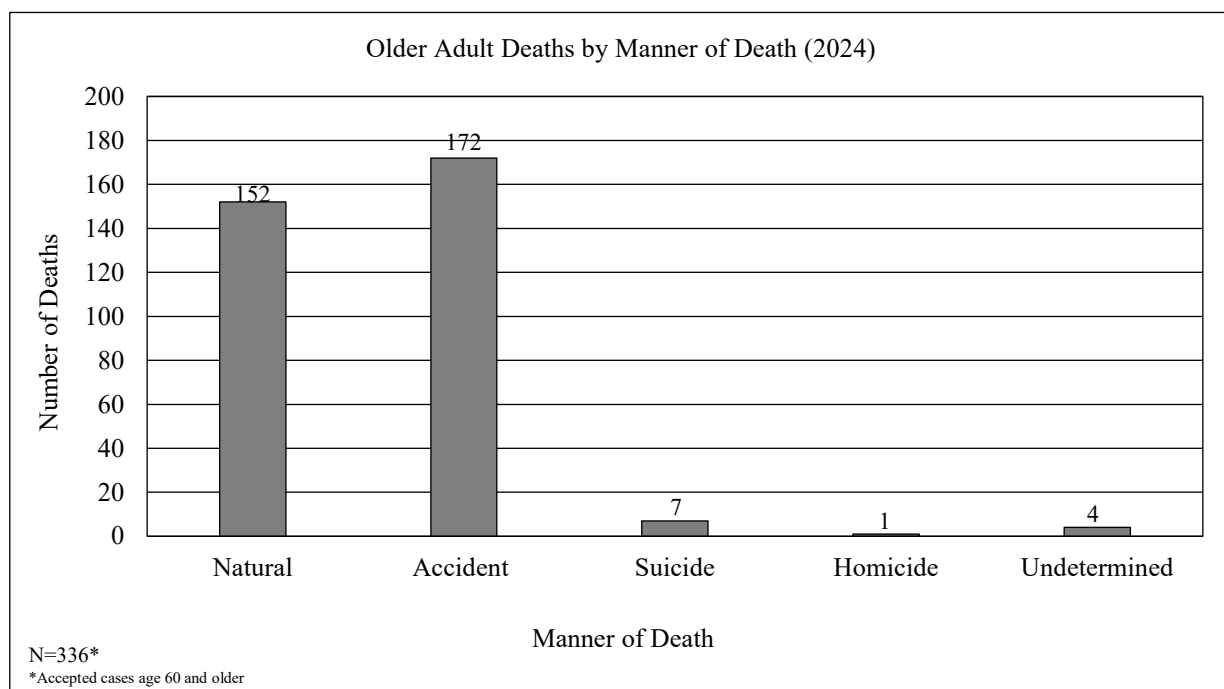


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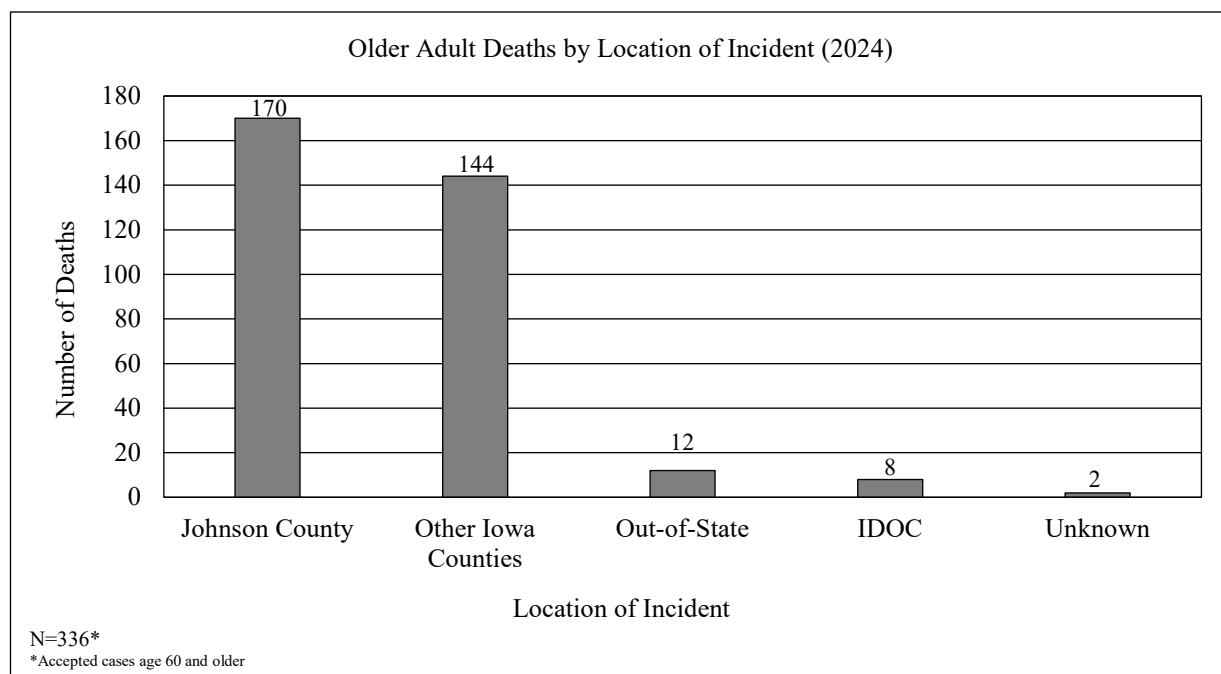


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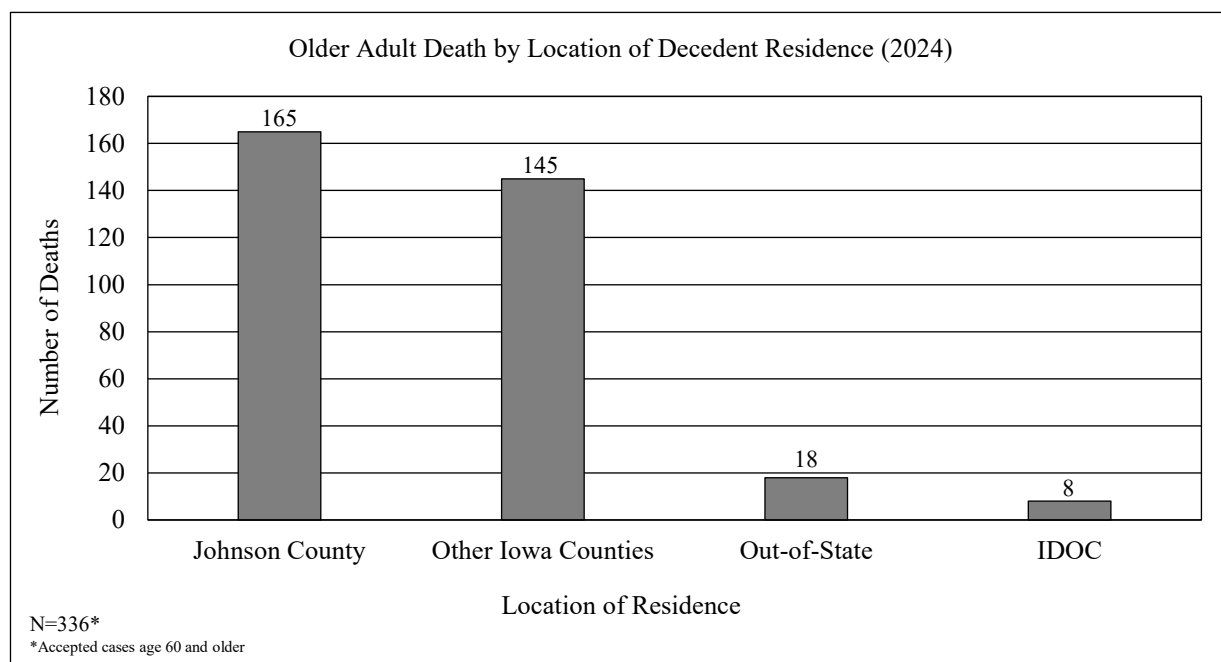


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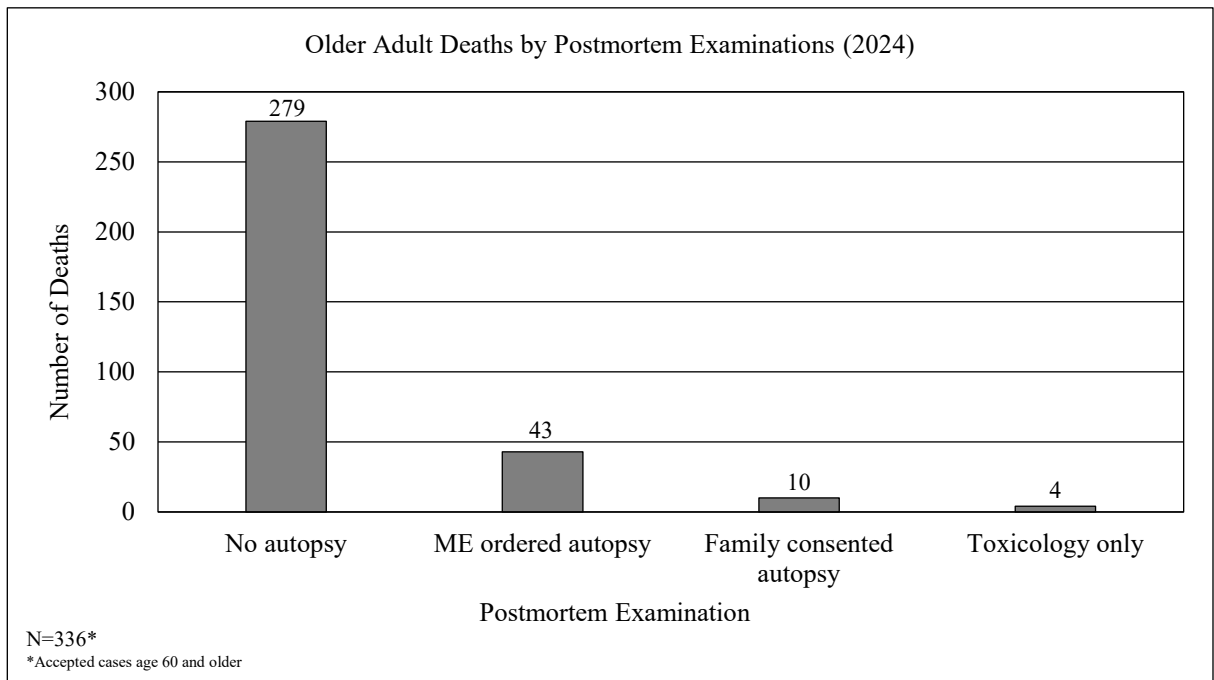


Figure 8.7.

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Older Adult Fall-Related Deaths

There were 336 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 112 in which the death was the result of an accidental fall. Of these fall-related deaths, 82 occurred from a standing height and 61 of the falls occurred inside the decedent's home. The most common anatomical location of injury from a fall was the head and/or neck, which occurred in 64 of the falls.

One of the 112 older adult accidental fall-related deaths was a decedent who died from a remote injury after falling off an animal. This death was categorized as "other" which differs from the other 111 older adult accidental fall-related deaths.

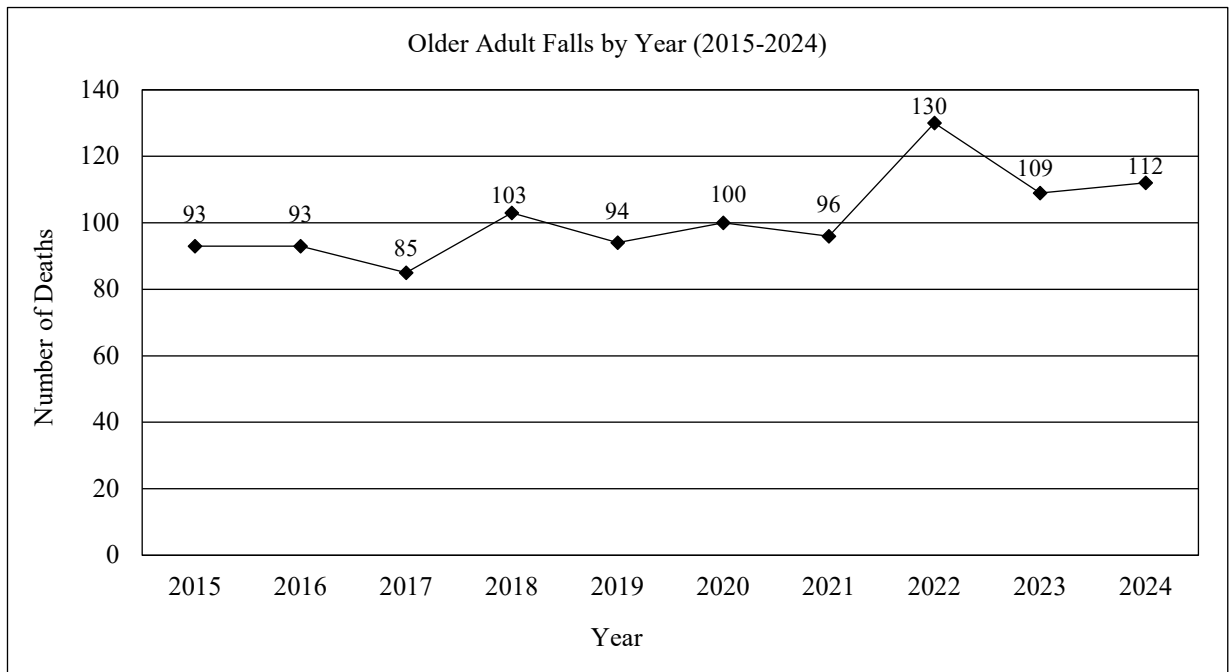


Figure 9.1.



Figure 9.2.

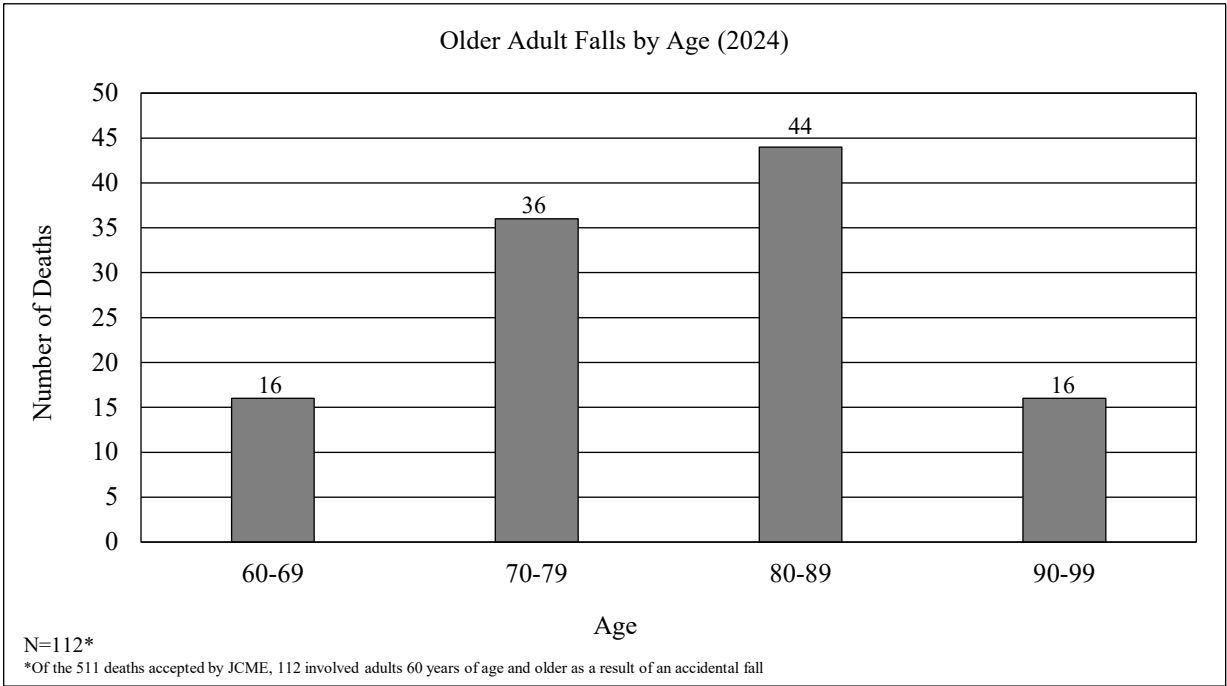


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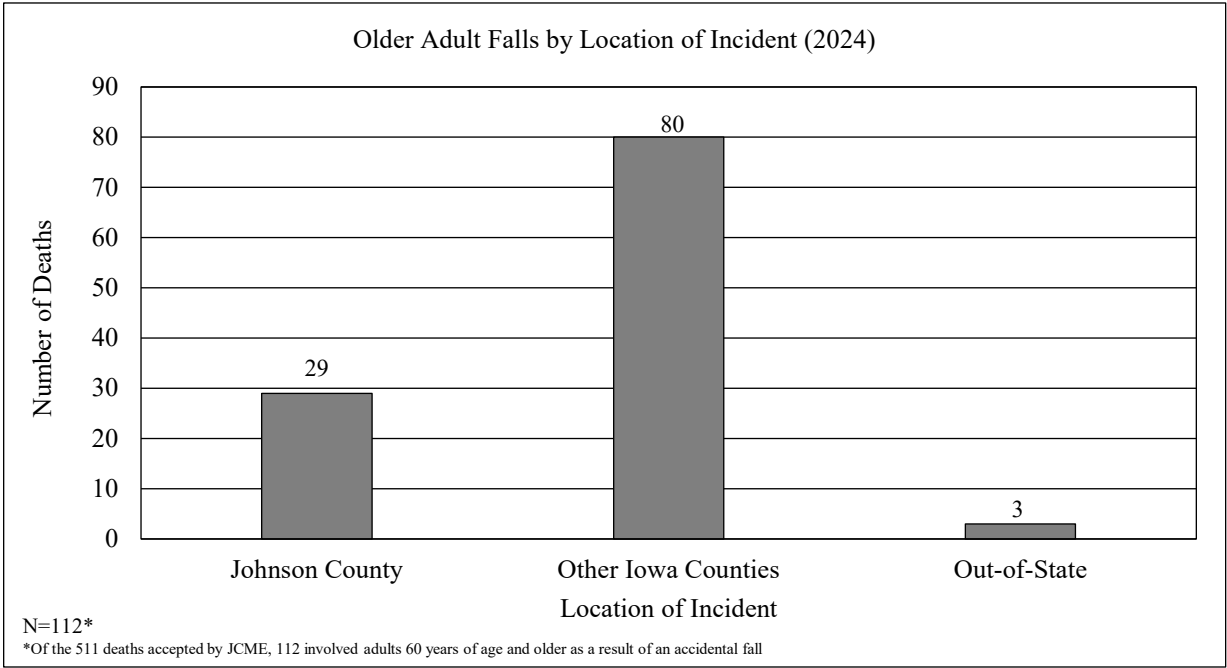


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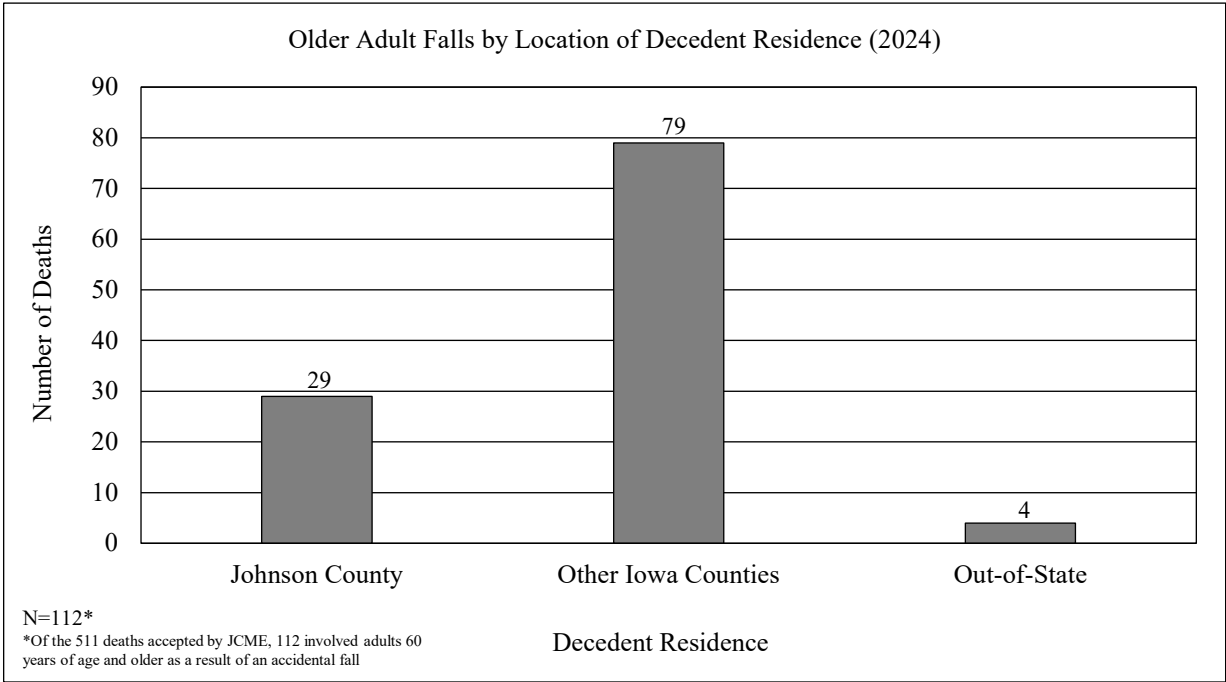


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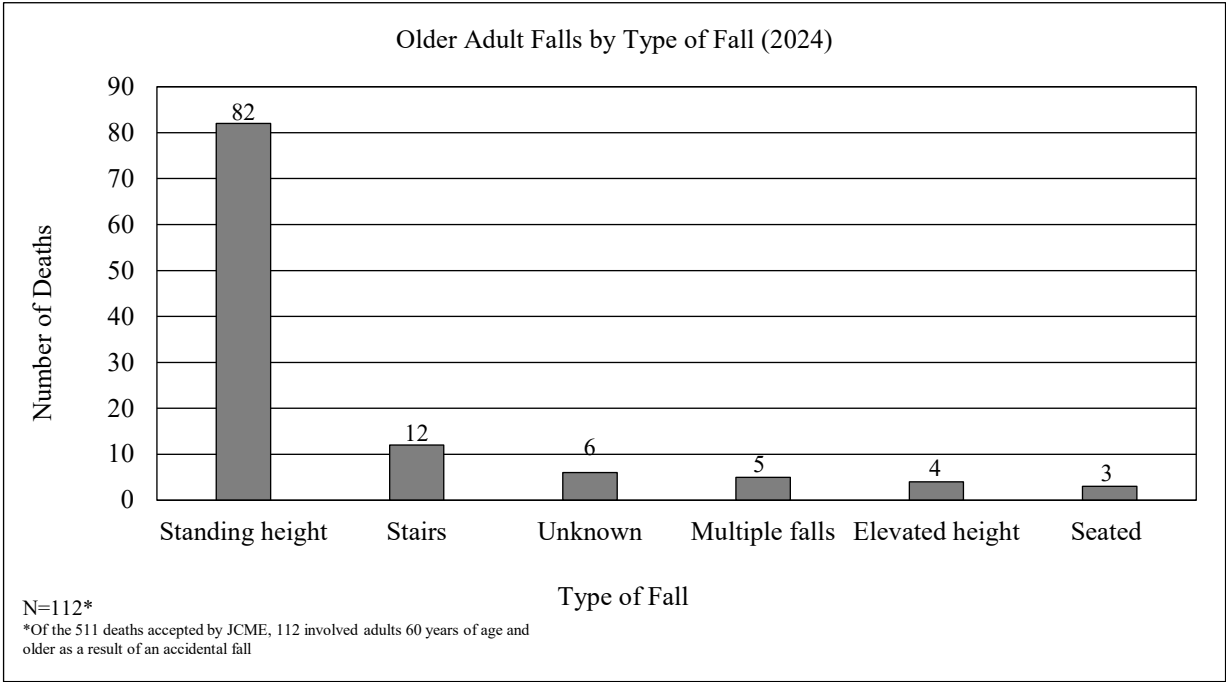


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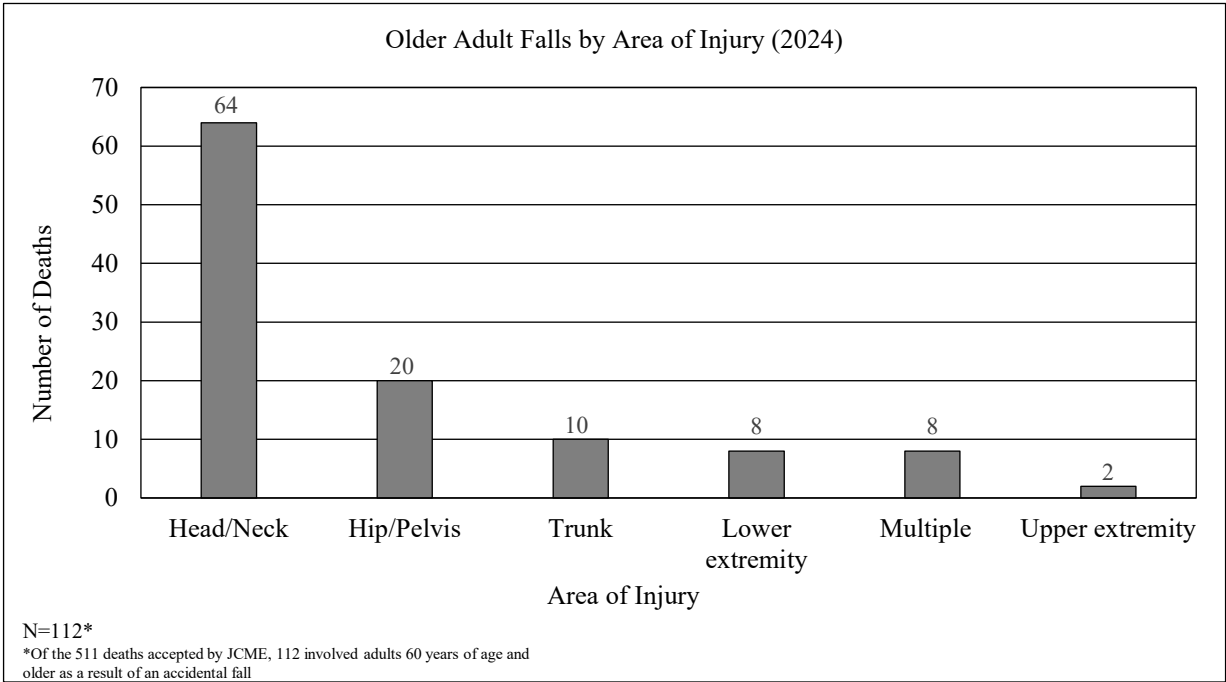


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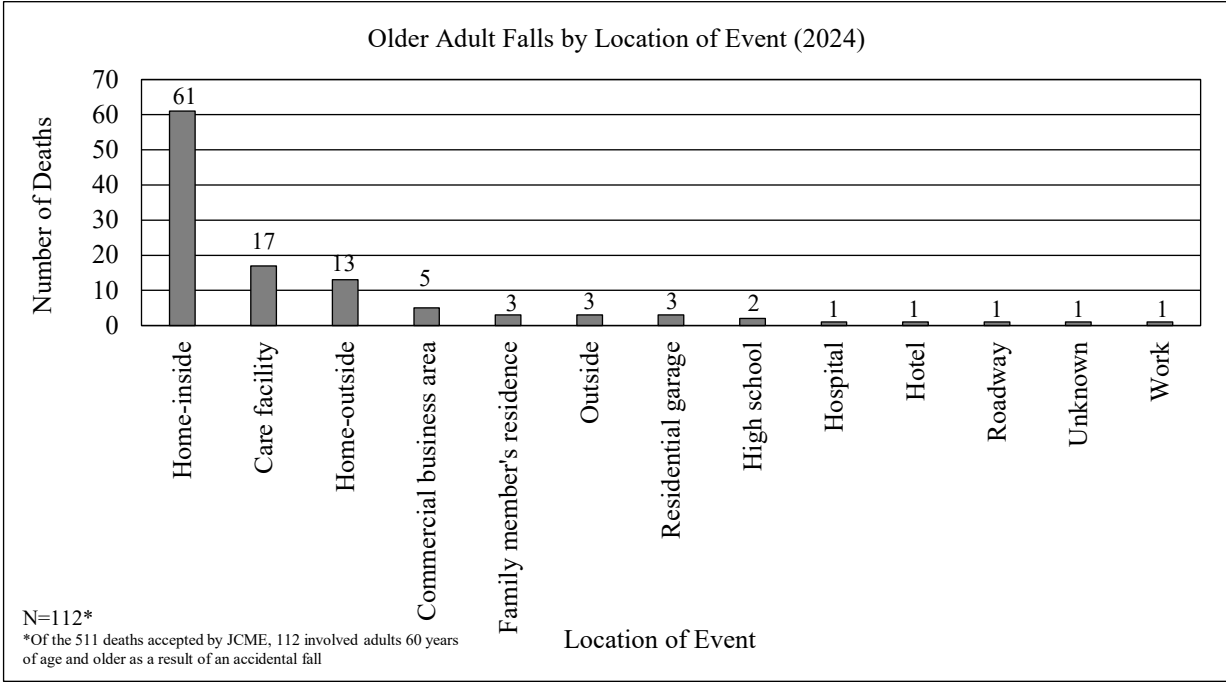


Figure 9.8.

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Child Deaths

In 2024, there were 11 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 11 deaths, 6 were classified as accident followed by 2 as natural, 1 as undetermined, 1 as suicide, and 1 as homicide. For 3 of these deaths, the incident location was Johnson County, 7 occurred in other Iowa Counties, and 1 occurred out-of-state. Of these 11 deaths accepted by JCME, there were 2 deaths of infants one year of age or less, of which 1 was classified as natural and 1 as undetermined. An autopsy was performed on both infant deaths.

In 2024, there was 1 sleep-related infant death, which was classified as undetermined. For this death, the incident location was in another Iowa County.

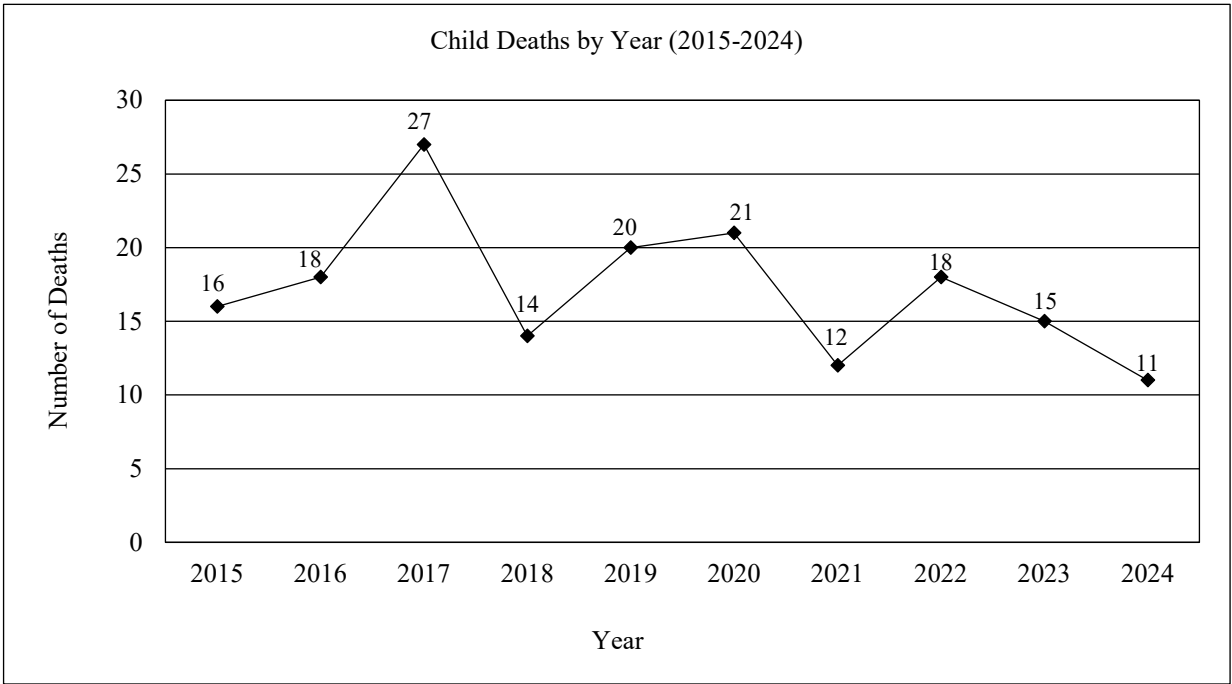


Figure 10.1.

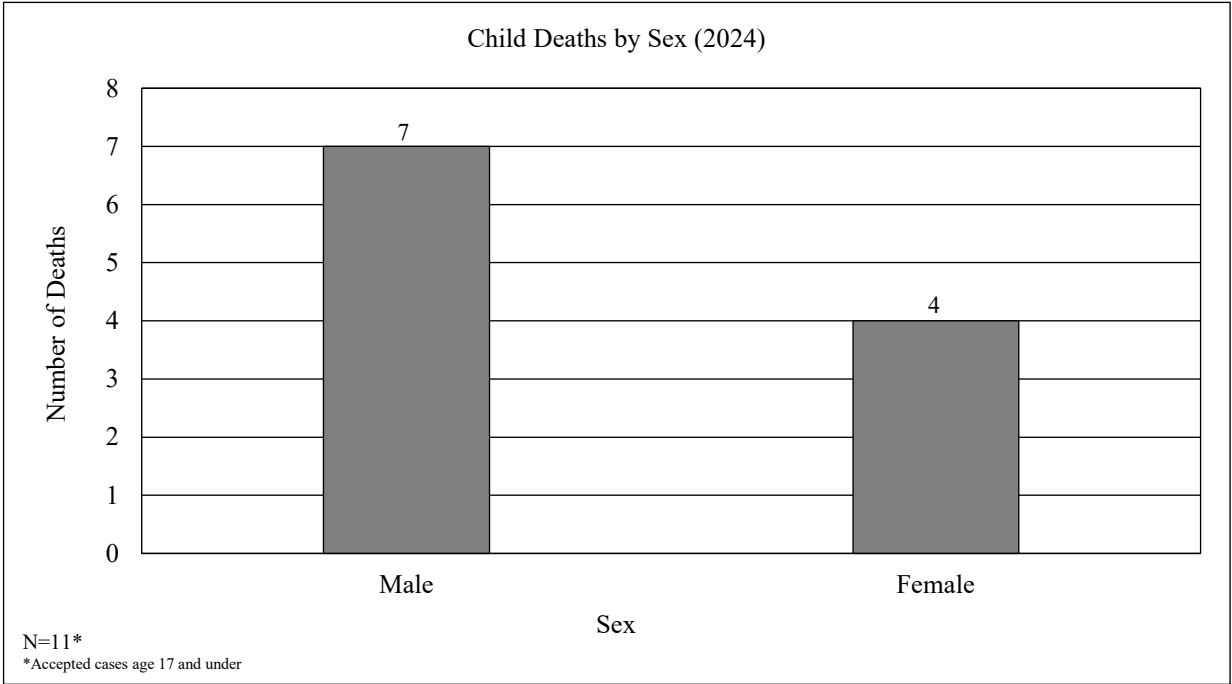


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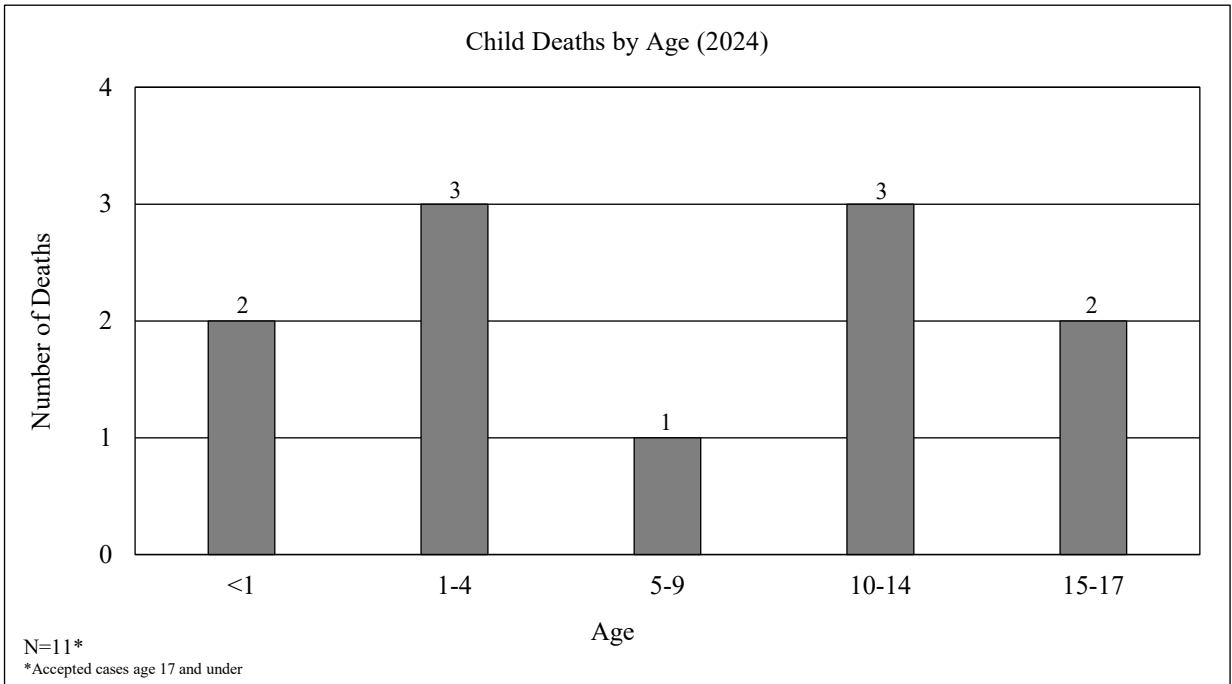


Figure 10.3.

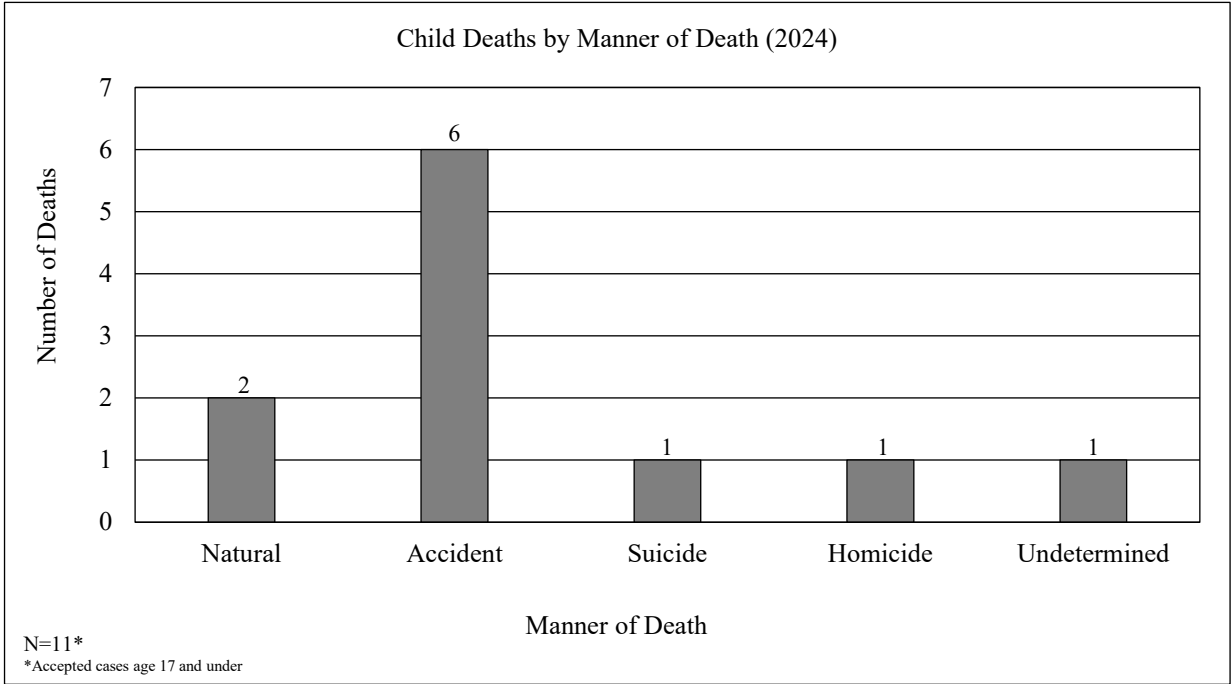


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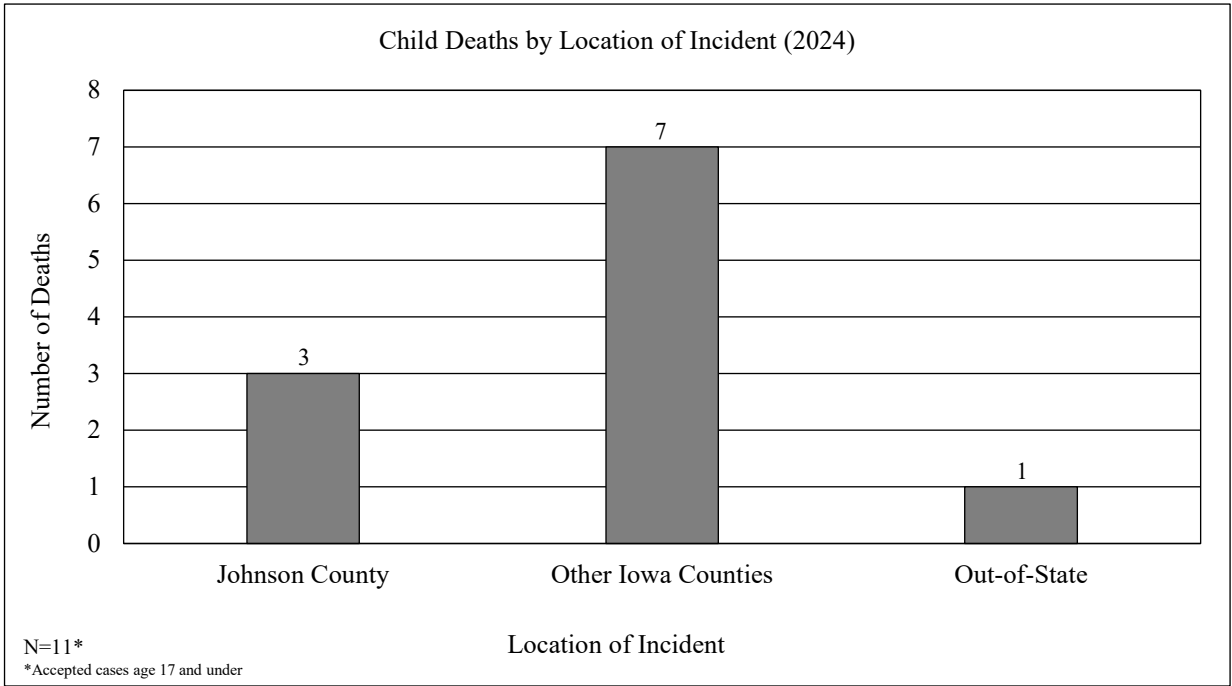


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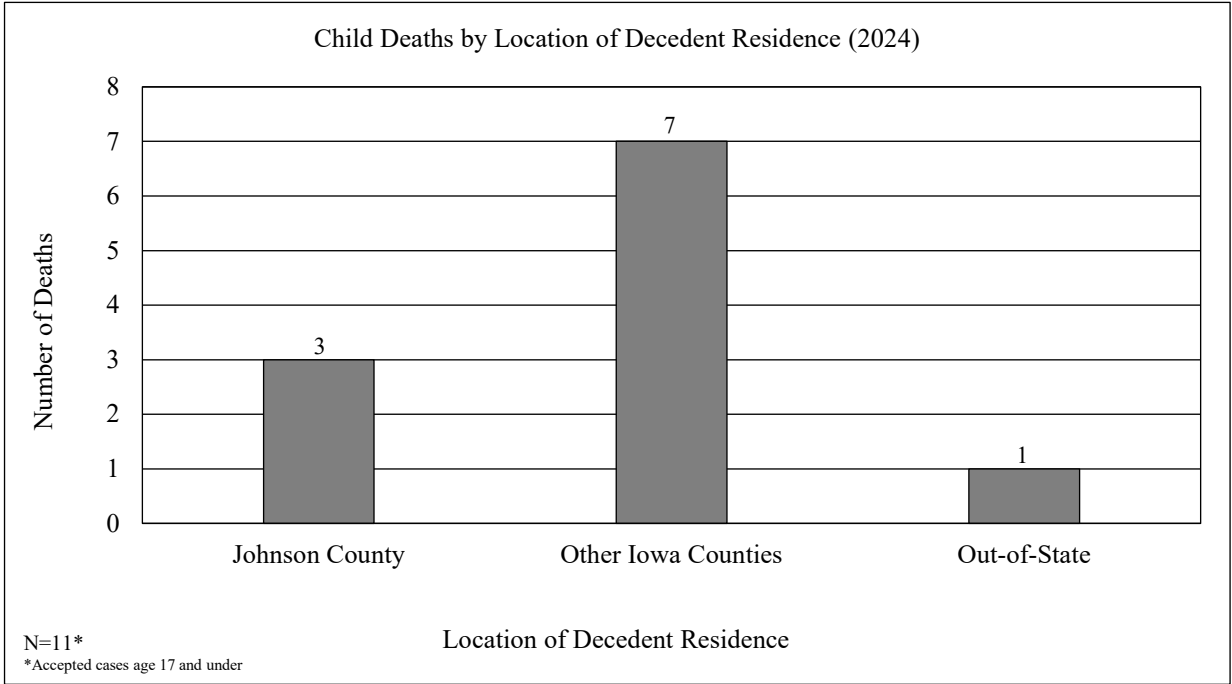


Figure 10.6.

Table 10.1. Infant Sleep-Related Deaths (2024)

Age	Sex	Cause of Death	Manner of Death	Location of Incident
9 months	M	Undetermined	Sudden unexpected infant death	Fayette

N=1*

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

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Budget

Johnson County's fiscal year runs from July 1 to June 30. In fiscal year 2024, JCME was 8% under our budgeted expenditures and 4% over our budgeted revenues.

In fiscal year 2025, JCME was 7% under our budgeted expenditures and 6% over our budgeted revenues.

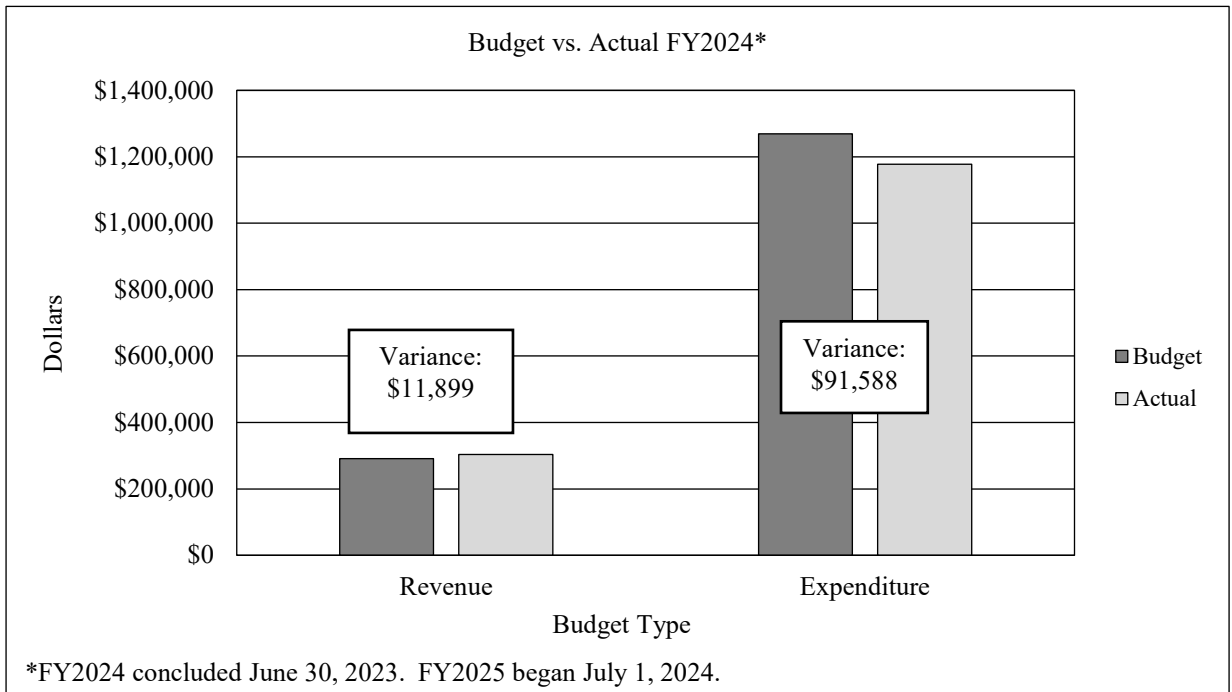


Figure 11.1.

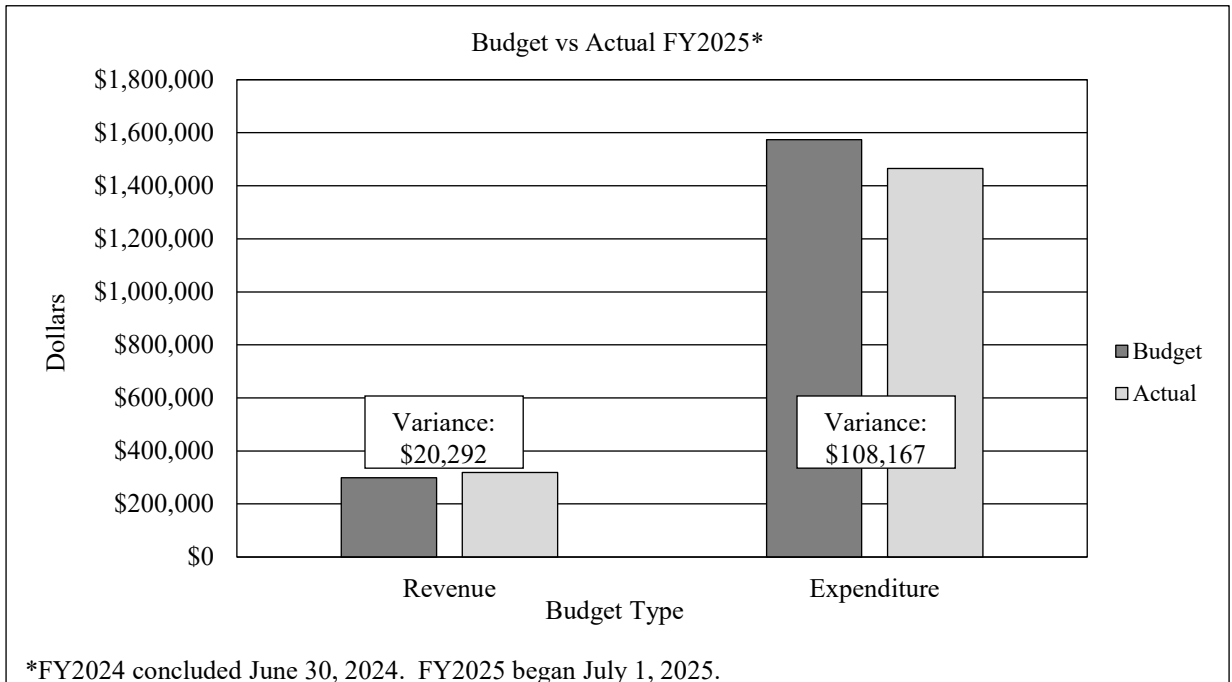


Figure 11.2.

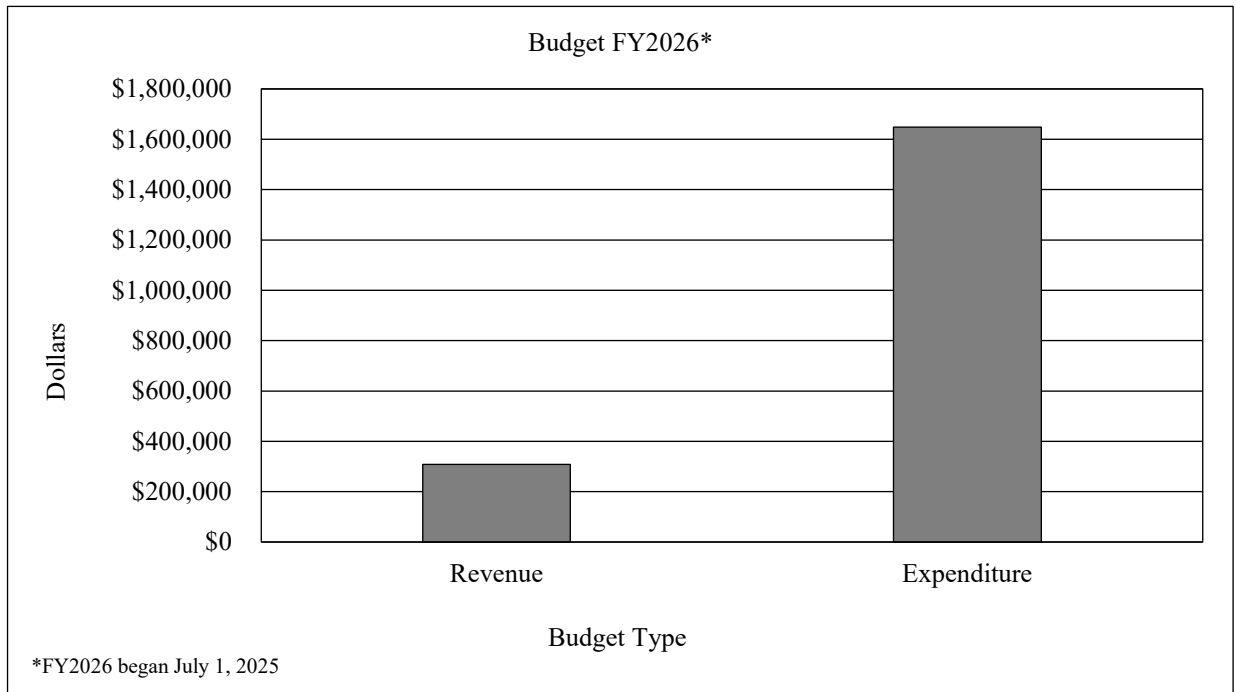


Figure 11.3.

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Organ and Tissue Donation

JCME has an essential role in the coordination of organ and tissue donation. In 2024, 15 decedents who were accepted accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 15 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 22 kidneys, 12 lungs (single), 6 livers, 3 hearts, and 1 pancreas for transplant. Twenty-seven decedents who were accepted JCME cases became tissue donors with the recovery of bone, skin, heart valves, saphenous veins, femoral veins, 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 (2024)

Organs Transplanted	
Hearts	3
Lungs (single lungs)	12
Livers	6
Kidneys (single kidneys)	22
Pancreases	1
Total organ donors*	15 donors (44) organs transplanted**

*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network

**Total number of decedents who donated organs

Table 12.2. Tissues Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2024)

Tissues Transplanted	
Bones	25
Skin	20
Heart valves	11
Saphenous veins	5
Femoral veins	5
Joint restoration	5
Corneas (single corneas)	38
Total recovered tissue donors*	27 donors**

*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network

**Total number of decedents who died out-of-hospital and donated tissue