

Johnson County Medical Examiner Department

Annual Report 2025



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Table of Contents

Overview

Introduction	5-7
Figure 1.1. Organizational Chart (2025)	8
Figure 1.2. Percentage of Johnson County Deaths Reported to JCME (2021-2025)	9
Figure 1.3. Cremation Permits, Accepted Cases, and Jurisdiction Declined Cases by Year (2021-2025)	9
Figure 1.4. Cremation Permits, Accepted Cases, and Jurisdiction Declined Cases by Month (2025)	10
Figure 1.5. Cremation Permits, Accepted Cases, and Jurisdiction Declined Cases by Day of the Week (2025)	10
Figure 1.6. Cremation Permits, Accepted Cases, and Jurisdiction Declined Cases by Work Shift (2025)	11
Figure 1.7. Accepted Cases by Sex (2025)	11
Figure 1.8. Accepted Cases by Age (2025)	12
Figure 1.9. Accepted Cases by Manner of Death (2025)	12
Figure 1.10. Accepted Cases by Location of Incident (2025)	13
Table 1.1. Other Iowa Counties Location of Incident (2025)	14
Table 1.2. Out-of-State Location of Incident (2025)	15
Figure 1.11. Accepted Cases by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	15
Table 1.3. Other Iowa Counties Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	16
Table 1.4. Out-of-State Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	17
Figure 1.12. Accepted Cases and Jurisdiction Declined Cases Triggered by Cremation Permit Request (2025)	18
Figure 1.13. Johnson County Scene Visits (2025)	18
Figure 1.14. Incident Scene Visits (2025)	19
Figure 1.15. Incident Scene Visits by Manner of Death (2025)	19
Autopsies	21
Figure 2.1. Accepted Cases by Postmortem Examination (2025)	22
Figure 2.2. ME Consent Autopsy by Manner of Death (2025)	22
Figure 2.3. Performance of Toxicology (2025)	23
Figure 2.4. ME Consent Autopsy by Location of Autopsy (2025)	23
Cause of Death for Each Manner of Death	25
Figure 3.1. Cause of Death by Manner of Death: Natural (2025)	26
Figure 3.2. Cause of Death by Manner of Death: Accident (2025)	27
Figure 3.3. Cause of Death by Manner of Death: Suicide (2025)	28
Figure 3.4. Cause of Death by Manner of Death: Homicide (2025)	29
Figure 3.5. Cause of Death by Manner of Death: Undetermined (2025)	29
Accidents	31
Figure 4.1. Accidents by Year (2016-2025)	32
Figure 4.2. Accidents by Sex (2025)	32
Figure 4.3. Accidents by Age (2025)	33
Figure 4.4. Accidents by Location of Incident (2025)	33
Figure 4.5. Accidents by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	34

Suicides	35
Figure 5.1. Suicides by Year (2016-2025)	36
Figure 5.2. Suicides by Sex (2025)	36
Figure 5.3. Suicides by Age (2025)	37
Figure 5.4. Suicides by Location of Incident (2025)	37
Figure 5.5. Suicides by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	38
Homicides	39
Figure 6.1. Homicides by Year (2016-2025)	40
Figure 6.2. Homicides by Sex (2025)	40
Figure 6.3. Homicides by Age (2025)	41
Figure 6.4. Homicides by Location of Incident (2025)	41
Figure 6.5. Homicides by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	42
Drug-Related Deaths	43
Figure 7.1. Drug-Related Deaths by Year (2016-2025)	44
Figure 7.2. Drug-Related Deaths by Sex (2025)	44
Figure 7.3. Drug-Related Deaths by Age (2025)	45
Figure 7.4. Drug-Related Deaths by Manner of Death (2025)	45
Figure 7.5. Drug-Related Deaths by Location of Incident (2025)	46
Figure 7.6. Drug-Related Deaths by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	46
Figure 7.7. Drug-Related Deaths by Substance Type (2025)	47
Figure 7.8. Drug-Related Deaths by Mixed Substance Type (2025)	47
Figure 7.9. Drug-Related Deaths by Illicit Drug Type (2025)	48
Table 7.1. Drug-Related Deaths by Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs (2025)	49
Figure 7.10. Opioid Drug-Related Deaths by Year (2021-2025)	50
Figure 7.11. Opioid Drug-Related Deaths by Sex (2025)	50
Figure 7.12. Opioid Drug-Related Deaths by Age (2025)	51
Figure 7.13. Opioid Drug-Related Deaths by Manner of Death (2025)	51
Figure 7.14. Opioid Drug-Related Deaths by Location of Incident (2025)	52
Figure 7.15. Opioid Drug-Related Deaths by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	52
Figure 7.16. Opioid Drug-Related Deaths by Drug Type (2025)	53
Older Adult Deaths	55
Figure 8.1. Older Adult Deaths by Year (2016-2025)	56
Figure 8.2. Older Adult Deaths by Sex (2025)	56
Figure 8.3. Older Adult Deaths by Age (2025)	57
Figure 8.4. Older Adult Deaths by Manner of Death (2025)	57
Figure 8.5. Older Adult Deaths by Location of Incident (2025)	58
Figure 8.6. Older Adult Deaths by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	58
Figure 8.7. Older Adult Deaths by Postmortem Examinations (2025)	59

Older Adult Fall-Related Deaths	61
Figure 9.1. Older Adult Falls by Year (2016-2025)	62
Figure 9.2. Older Adult Fall by Sex (2025)	62
Figure 9.3. Older Adult Falls by Age (2025)	63
Figure 9.4. Older Adult Falls by Location of Incident (2025)	63
Figure 9.5. Older Adult Falls by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	64
Figure 9.6. Older Adult Falls by Type of Fall (2025)	64
Figure 9.7. Older Adult Falls by Area of Injury (2025)	65
Figure 9.8. Older Adult Falls by Location of Event (2025)	65
Child Deaths	67
Figure 10.1. Child Deaths by Year (2016-2025)	68
Figure 10.2. Child Deaths by Sex (2025)	68
Figure 10.3. Child Deaths by Age (2025)	69
Figure 10.4. Child Deaths by Manner of Death (2025)	69
Figure 10.5. Child Deaths by Location of Incident (2025)	70
Figure 10.6. Child Deaths by Location of Decedent Residence (2025)	70
Table 10.1. Infant Sleep-Related Deaths (2025)	71
Budget	73
Figure 11.1. Budget vs Actual FY2025	74
Figure 11.2. Budget vs Actual FY2026	74
Figure 11.3. Budget FY2027	75
Organ and Tissue Donation	77
Table 12.1. Organs Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2025)	78
Table 12.2. Tissues Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2025)	78

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, 2024, and 2025. 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 2025, there were 909 deaths reported to JCME. Of these, 463 were accepted as medical examiner jurisdiction deaths. Each of these deaths were investigated and certified by JCME. After review of each of the remaining 446 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 44% of the 2063 deaths that occurred in Johnson County in 2025.

Of the 463 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 197 decedents were Johnson County residents and 206 were residents of other counties in Iowa. Additionally, there were 34 decedents who were out-of-state residents, 25 decedents who were under the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections, and 1 decedent was in custody with the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP). As a result, 43% of deaths accepted and investigated by JCME consisted of Johnson County residents.

Of the 463 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the incident location for 205 decedents was Johnson County. One-hundred and ninety-nine incidents occurred in other Iowa counties followed by 28 decedent in which the incident location was out-of-state. Additionally, for 25 decedents, the incident occurred while under the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections followed by 4 decedents in which the incident location was not known, 1 decedent in the custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons (FBOP), and 1 decedent in which the incident occurred in another country.

Of the 463 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, all decedents were identified with JCME arranging final disposition for 6 decedents.

In 2025, 125 autopsies were ordered by JCME. Of those 125 autopsies, 124 were performed at the University of Iowa Health Care Main Campus (UIHCMC) and 1 was performed at the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner (IOSME).

Of the 463 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, the manner of death was classified as accident for 206, natural for 202, suicide for 37, undetermined for 9 and homicide for 9. JCME did not accept jurisdiction of any fetal deaths in 2025.

In 2025, there were 40 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 18 involved illicit drugs only, 17 involved a mixture of drug types, 4 involved over-the-counter drugs only, and 1 involved prescription drugs only. Of the 40 drug-related deaths, 29 were classified as accidents, 9 as suicides, 1 as homicide and 1 as undetermined. Of the 18 illicit only drug-related deaths, 15 involved methamphetamine, 2 cocaine, and 1 fentanyl. Of the 17 mixed drug-related deaths, the most common illicit drug used was methamphetamine (7 decedents), followed by cocaine (3 decedents) fentanyl (3 decedents), amphetamine, heroin, and Para-Flourofentanyl (1 decedent each). Of the 40 drug-related deaths, 5 involved opioids. Of these 5 deaths, 4 were classified as accident and 1 as suicide. The most common opioid drug was fentanyl (4 decedents) followed by carfentanil, heroin, hydrocodone, oxycodone, Para-Flourofentanyl, and tramadol (1 decedent each) with 3 decedents testing positive for more than one opioid.

There were 323 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 103 in which the death was the result of an accidental fall. Of these fall-related deaths, 71 occurred from a standing height and 69 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 55 of the falls.

In 2025, there were 19 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 19 deaths, 6 were classified as accident followed by 4 as undetermined, 3 as natural, 3 as suicide, and 3 as homicide. For 16 of these deaths, the incident location occurred in another Iowa county followed by 3 that occurred out-of-state. Of these 19 deaths accepted by JCME, there were 6 deaths of an infant one year of age or less. Of these 6 deaths, 3 were classified undetermined, 2 were classified as homicide, and 1 as accident. Autopsies were performed on all 6 infant deaths. In 2025, there were 4 sleep-related infant deaths. For all four deaths the incident location occurred in another Iowa Couty.

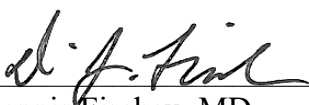
A data point on every death certificate is an indication of whether tobacco use contributed to death. This determination is made by the forensic pathologist responsible for certifying the death. Of the 463 deaths certified by JCME in 2025, it was determined that 122 were tobacco-related and 26 were probably 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 1432 cremation permits to funeral service providers in 2025. There were 498 cremation permits issued to funeral service providers in Johnson County, 812 to funeral service providers located in other Iowa counties, and 122 to funeral service providers located out-of-state. Cremation permits were issued to a total of 157 funeral service providers. Of the 1432 cremation permits issued, 8 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 the Team is to gain a greater understanding of issues associated with death 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 2025, 14 accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 14 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 20 kidneys, 6 livers, 8 hearts, 5 lungs, 1 pancreases, and 1 small intestine. Twenty-four 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 2025, JCME had five Board Certified Death Investigators (Advanced): Clayton Schuneman, Kate Bengtson, Kristen Long, Kora LaVoy, and Anna Posthumus and three Registry Certified Death Investigators (Basic): Zeel Naik, Mary Roberts, and Lydia Helle. Additionally, the two forensic pathologist medical examiners, Dennis Firchau, MD, Melissa Blessing, DO are certified in Anatomic, Clinical, and Forensic Pathology by the American Board of Pathology.


Dennis Firchau, MD
Medical Examiner

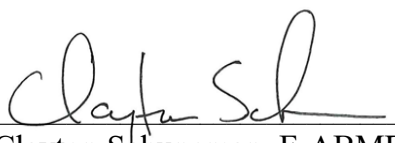
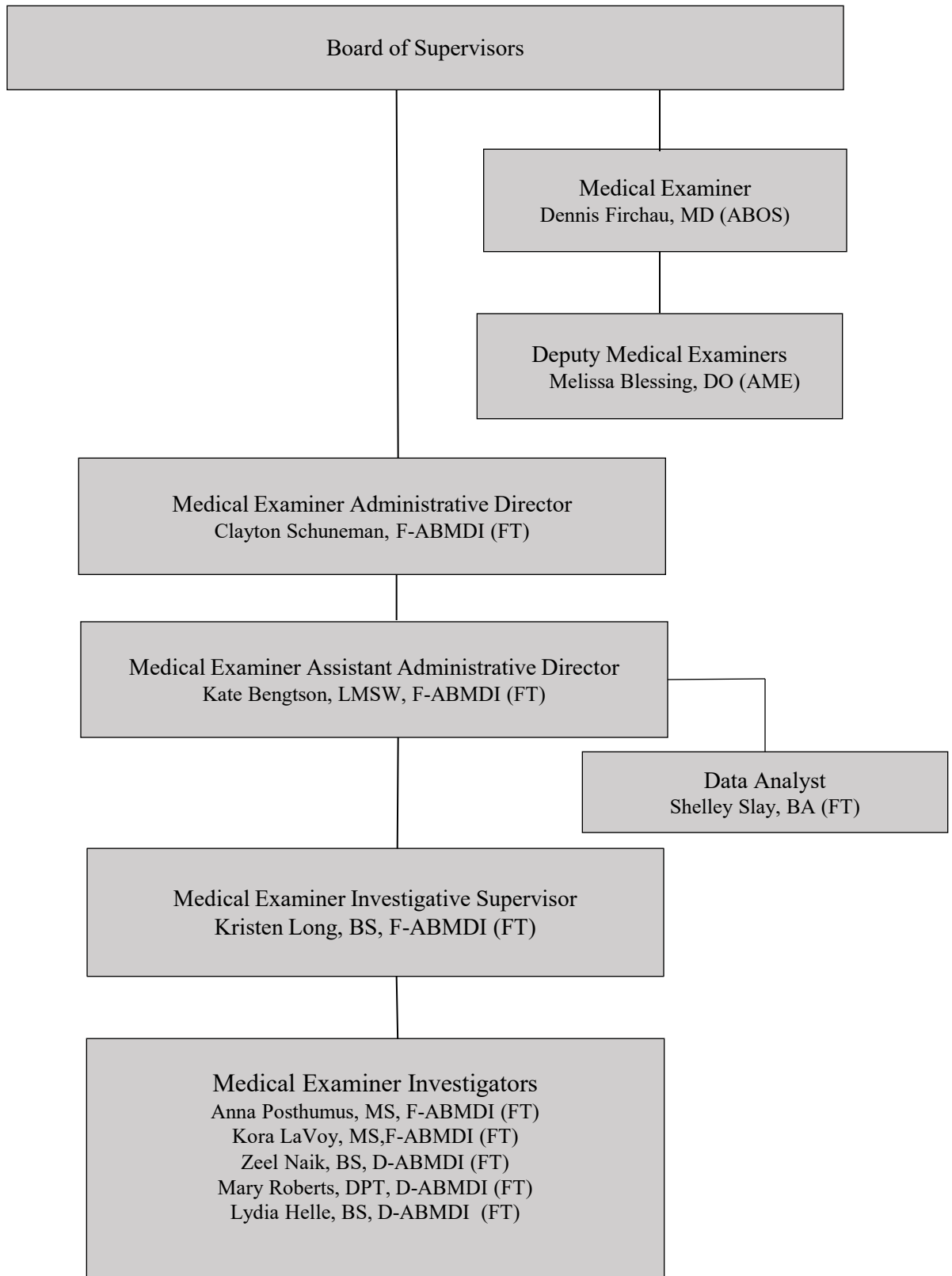

Clayton Schuneman, F-ABMDI
Administrative Director

Figure 1.1. Organizational Chart (2025)



Employment/Appointment Status Key:

- ABOS: Appointed by Board of Supervisors
- AME: Appointed by Medical Examiner
- FT: Full-time

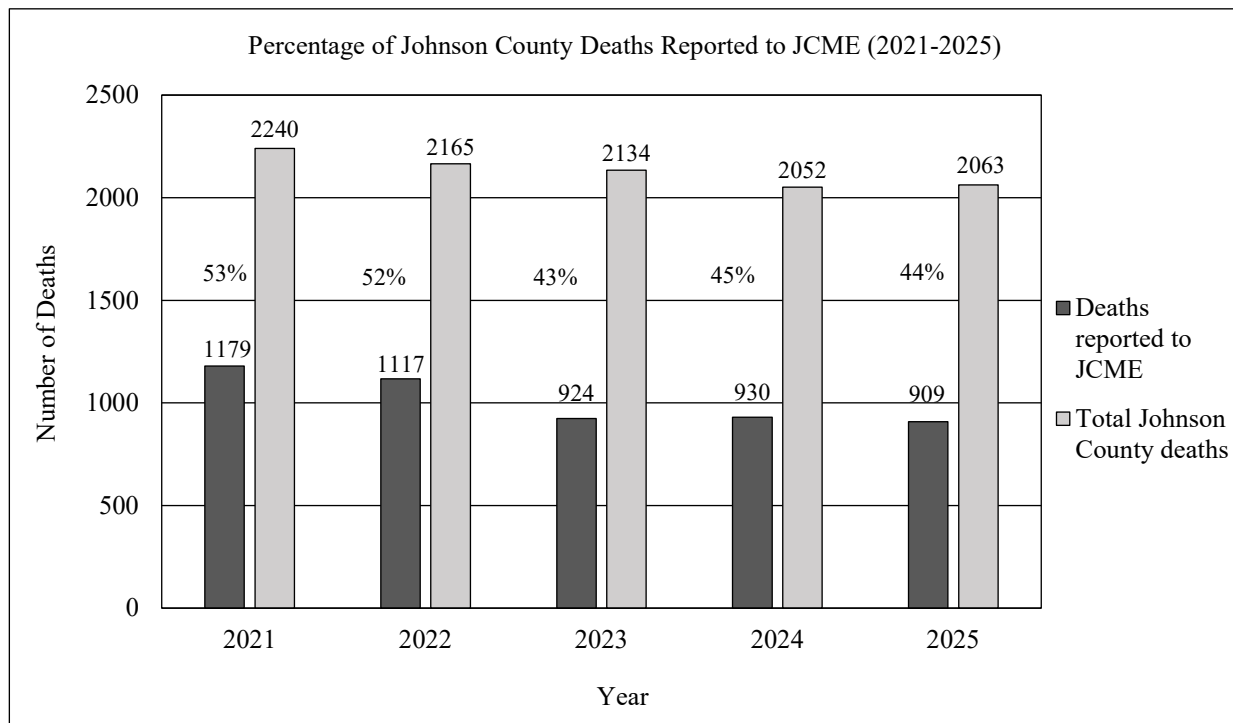


Figure 1.2.

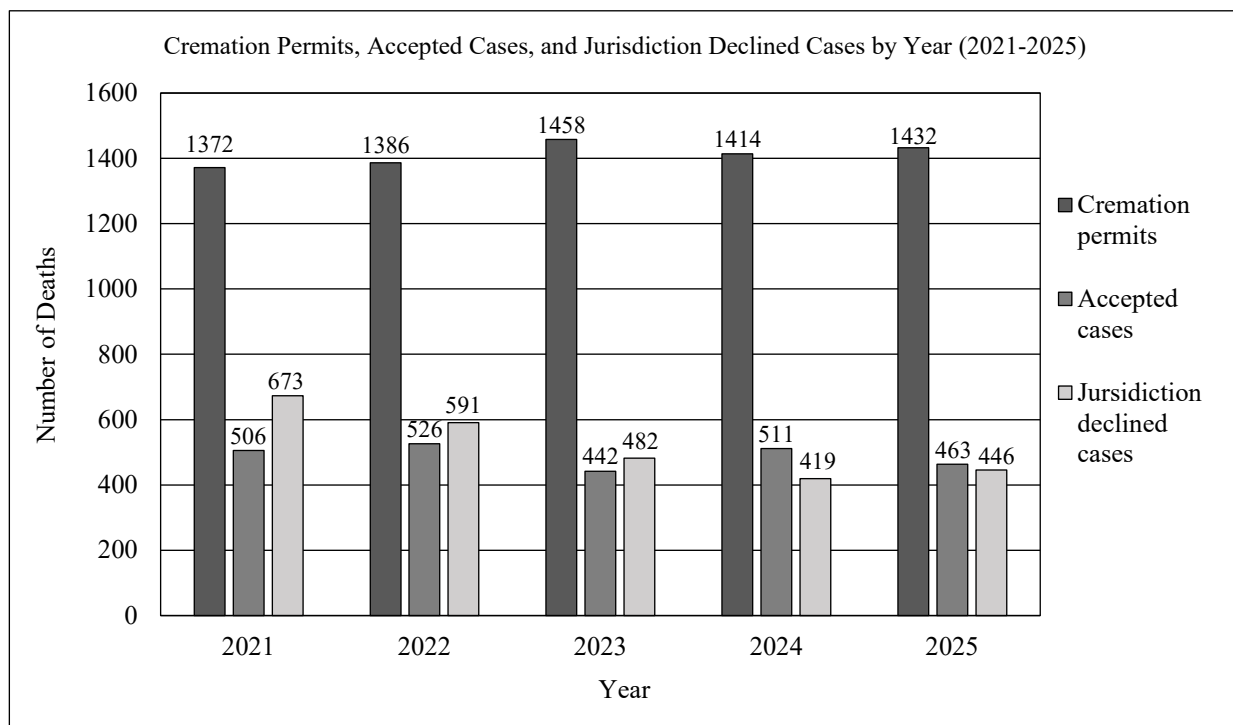


Figure 1.3.

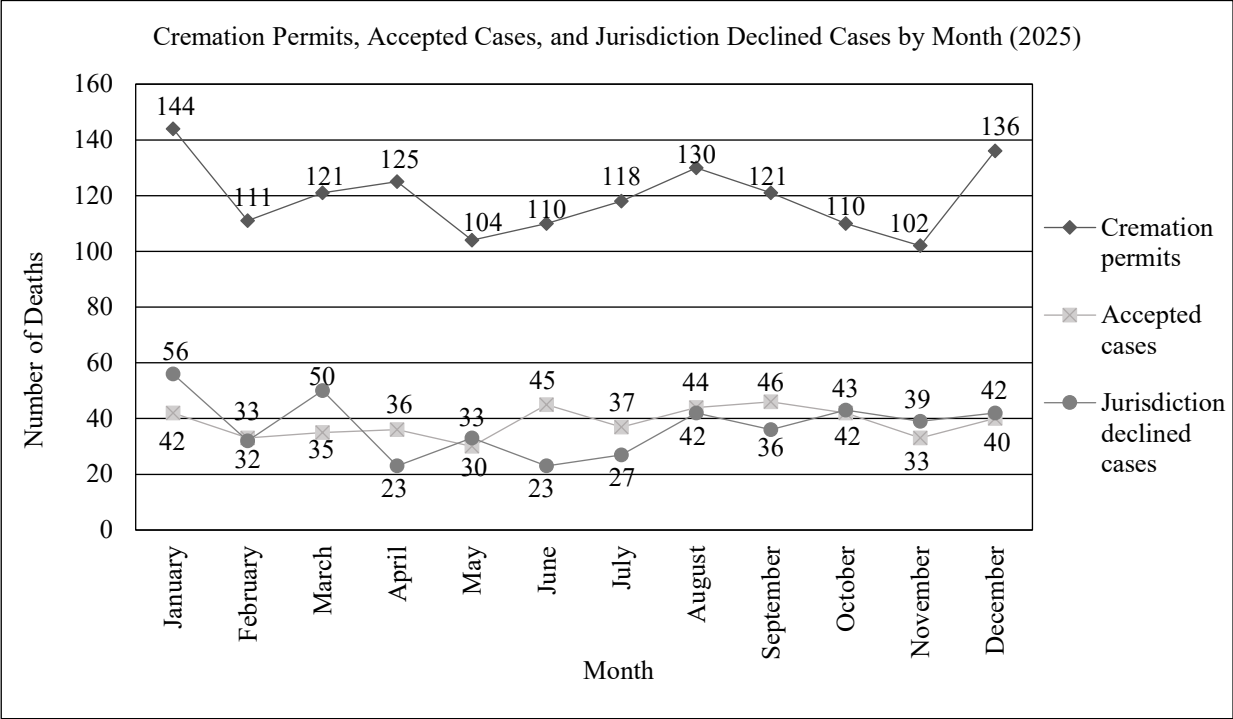


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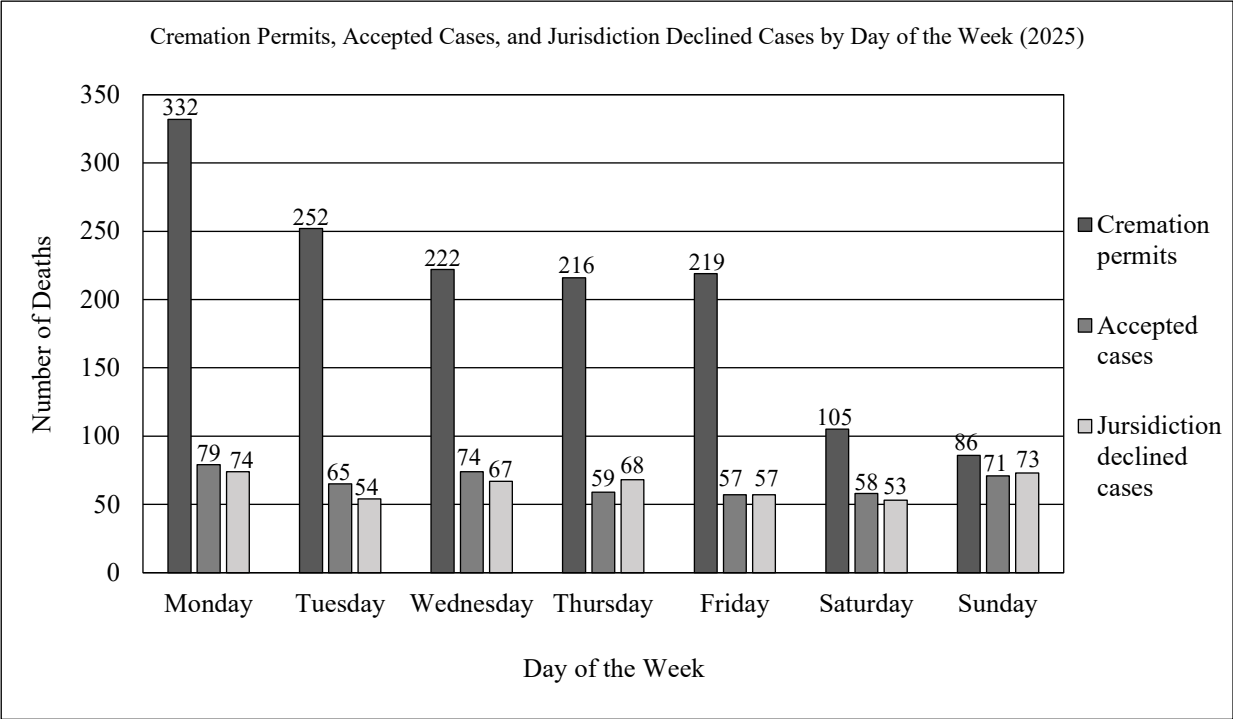


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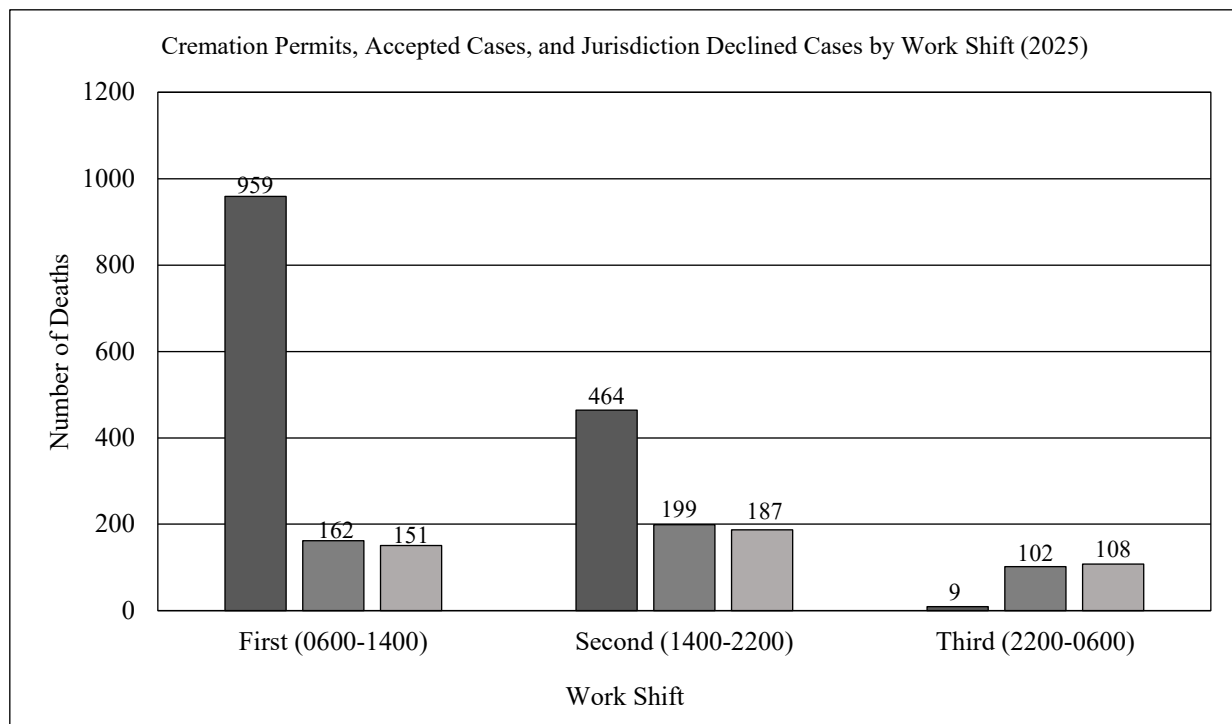


Figure 1.6.



Figure 1.7.

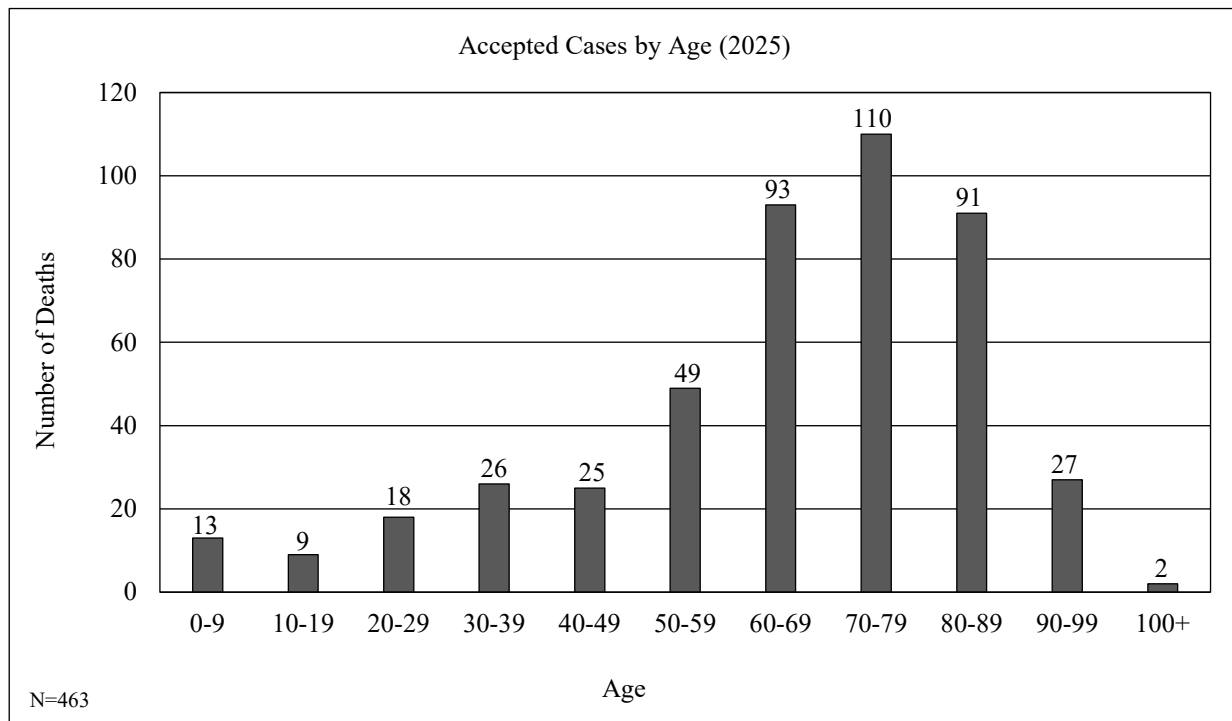


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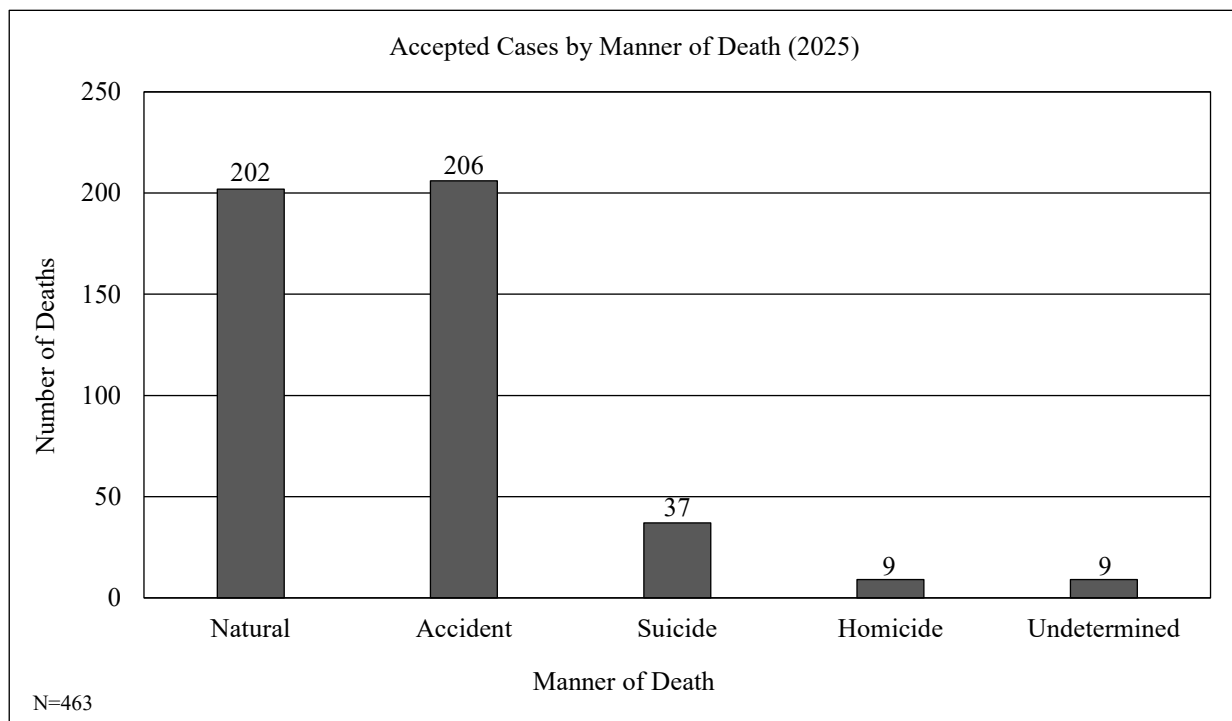


Figure 1.9.

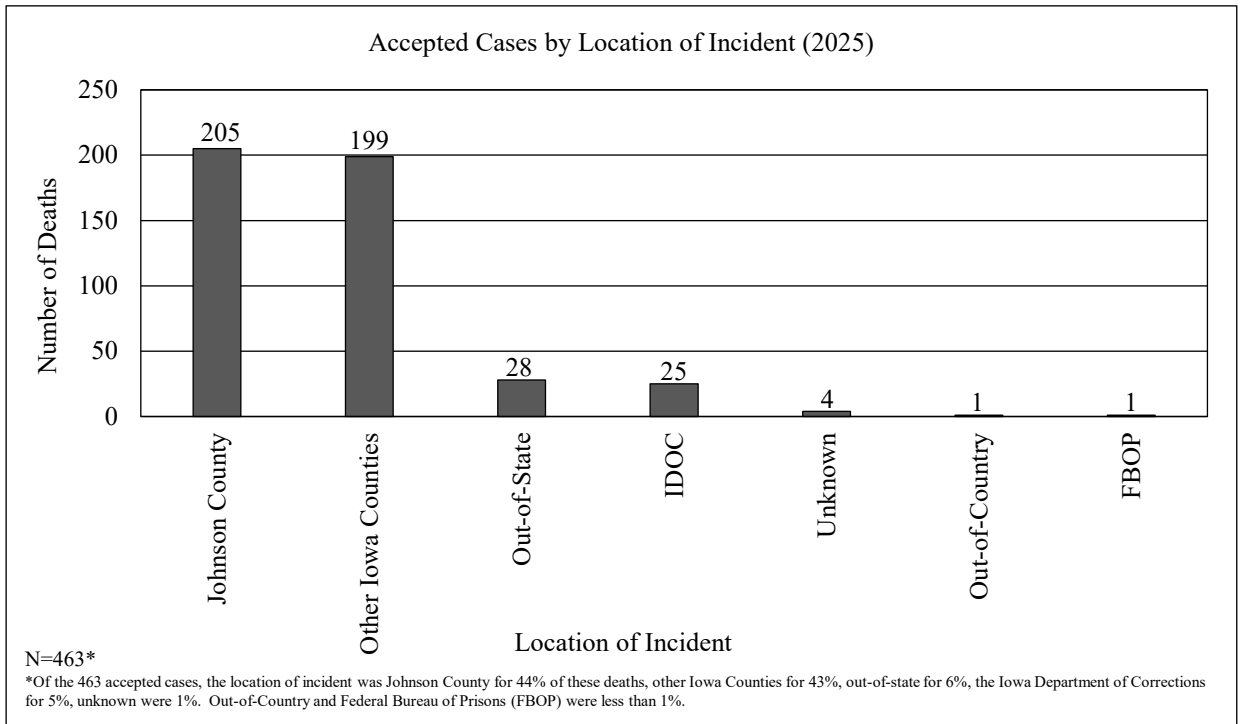


Figure 1.10.

Table 1.1. Other Iowa Counties Location of Incident (2025)

County	Number of Decedents
Scott	24
Linn	18
Muscatine	16
Black Hawk	15
Clinton	12
Polk	9
Washington	9
Dubuque	7
Lee	7
Iowa	6
Cedar	5
Delaware	5
Des Moines	5
Wapello	5
Benton	4
Buchanan	4
Henry	4
Jones	4
Keokuk	4
Marshall	4
Hamilton	3
Louisa	3
Mahaska	3
Clarke	2
Davis	2
Jackson	2
Poweshiek	2
Boone	1
Bremer	1
Carroll	1
Chickasaw	1
Dallas	1
Fayette	1
Floyd	1
Franklin	1
Jefferson	1
Kossuth	1
Marion	1
Van Buren	1
Warren	1
Winneshiek	1
Wright	1

N=199

Table 1.2. Out-of-State Location of Incident (2025)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	13
Mercer, IL	5
Whiteside, IL	2
Carroll, IL	1
Cherokee, KS	1
Grand Forks, ND	1
Jo Daviess, IL	1
Johnson, KS	1
New Castle, DE	1
Rock, WI	1
Seward, NE	1

N=28

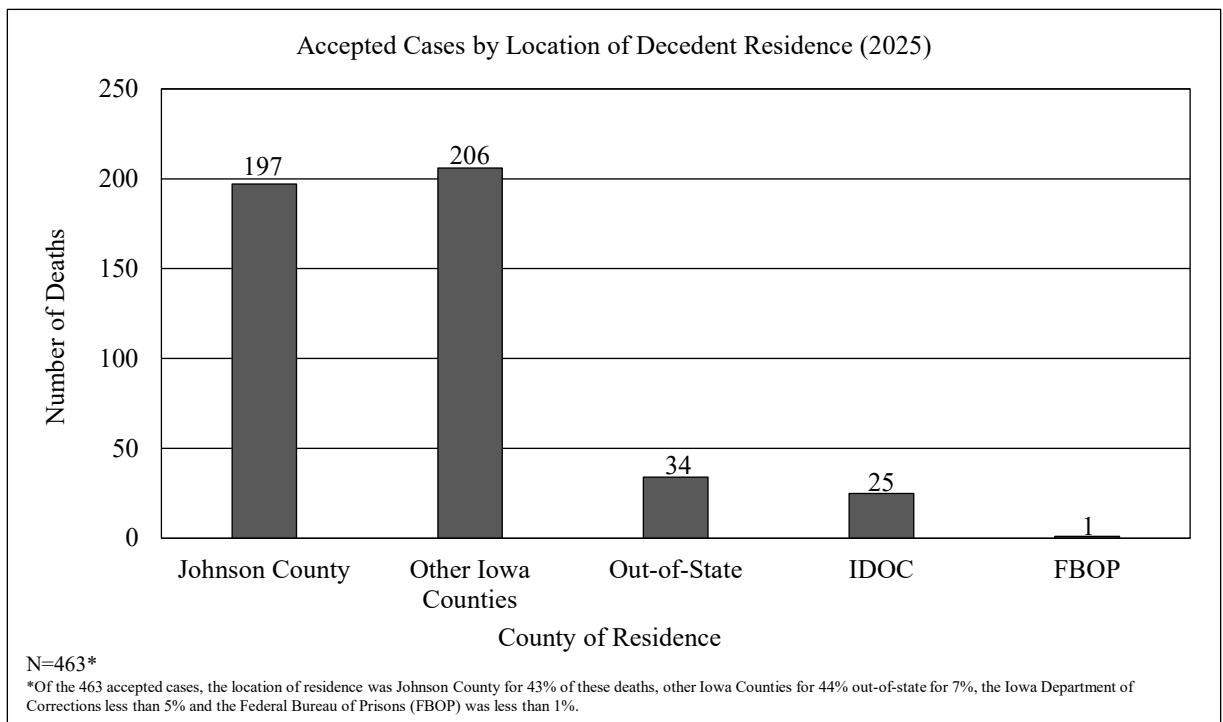


Figure 1.11.

Table 1.3. Other Iowa Counties Location of Decedent Residence (2025)

County	Number of Decedents
Scott	21
Linn	20
Black Hawk	15
Muscatine	15
Polk	14
Clinton	13
Washington	11
Dubuque	8
Lee	7
Benton	6
Cedar	6
Iowa	6
Wapello	6
Jones	5
Marshall	5
Buchanan	4
Delaware	4
Keokuk	4
Des Moines	3
Hamilton	3
Henry	3
Jackson	3
Louisa	3
Clarke	2
Davis	2
Jefferson	2
Mahaska	2
Boone	1
Bremer	1
Carroll	1
Chickasaw	1
Dallas	1
Fayette	1
Floyd	1
Franklin	1
Kossuth	1
Poweshiek	1
Warren	1
Winneshiek	1
Wright	1

N=206

Table 1.4. Out-of-State Location of Decedent Residence (2025)

County and State	Number of Decedents
Rock Island, IL	14
Mercer, IL	6
Whiteside, IL	2
Brown, WI	1
Carroll, IL	1
Cheboygan, WI	1
Cook, IL	1
DuPage, IL	1
Jo Daviess, IL	1
New Castle, DE	1
Rock, WI	1
Seward, NE	1
Tarrant, TX	1
Webster, MS	1

N=34

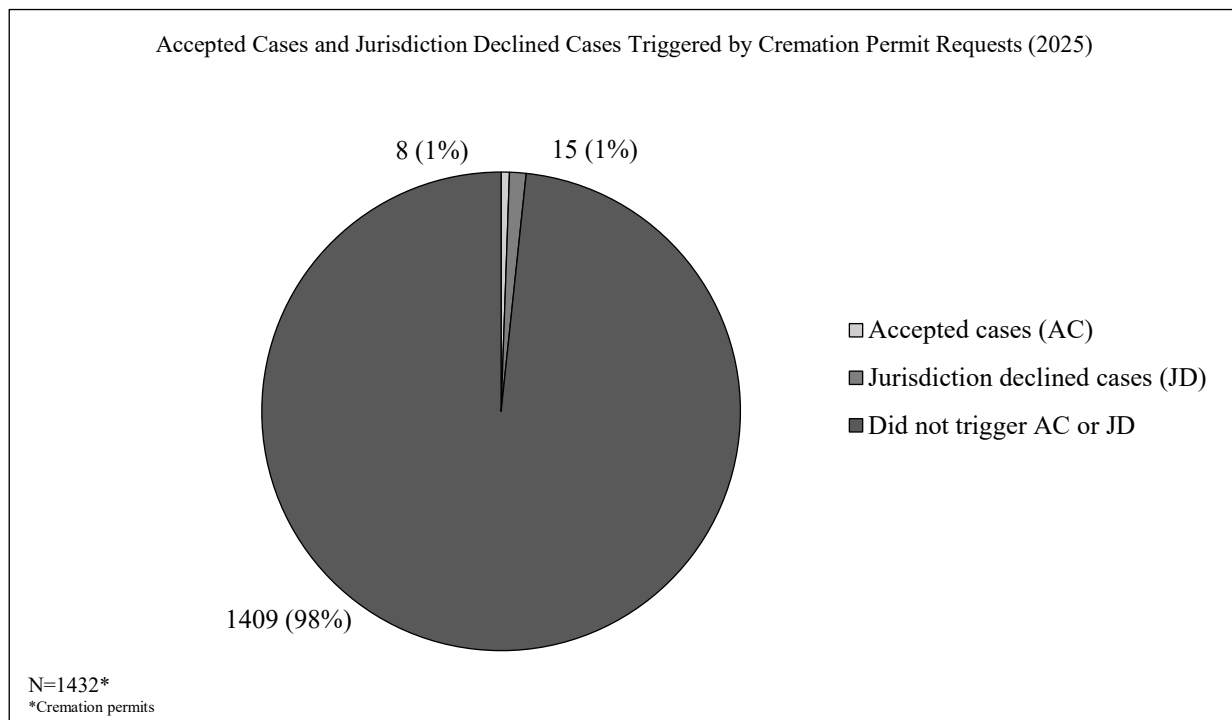


Figure 1.12.

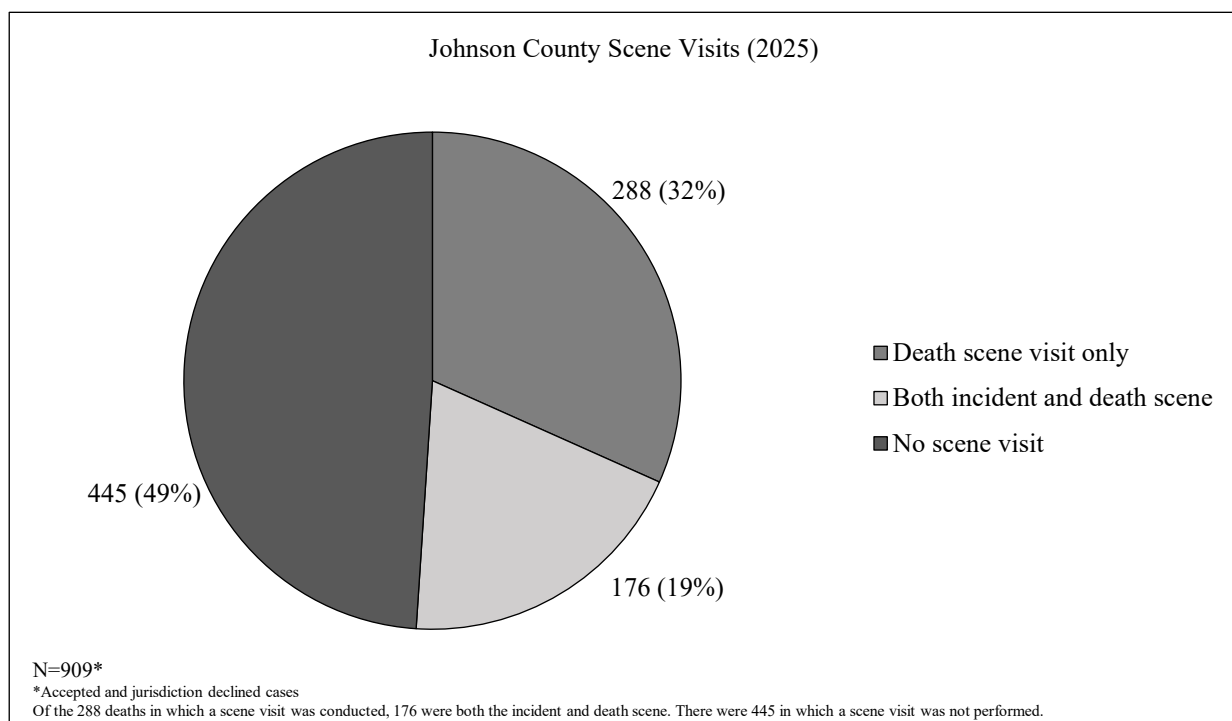


Figure 1.13.

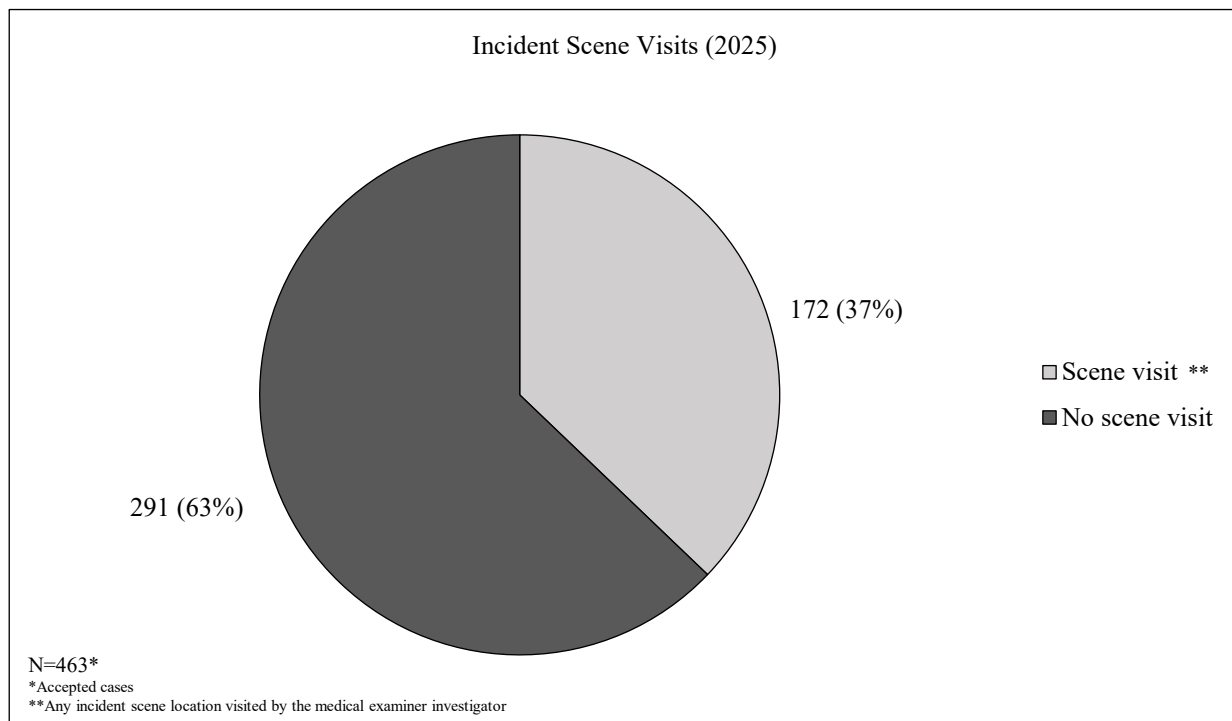


Figure 1.14.

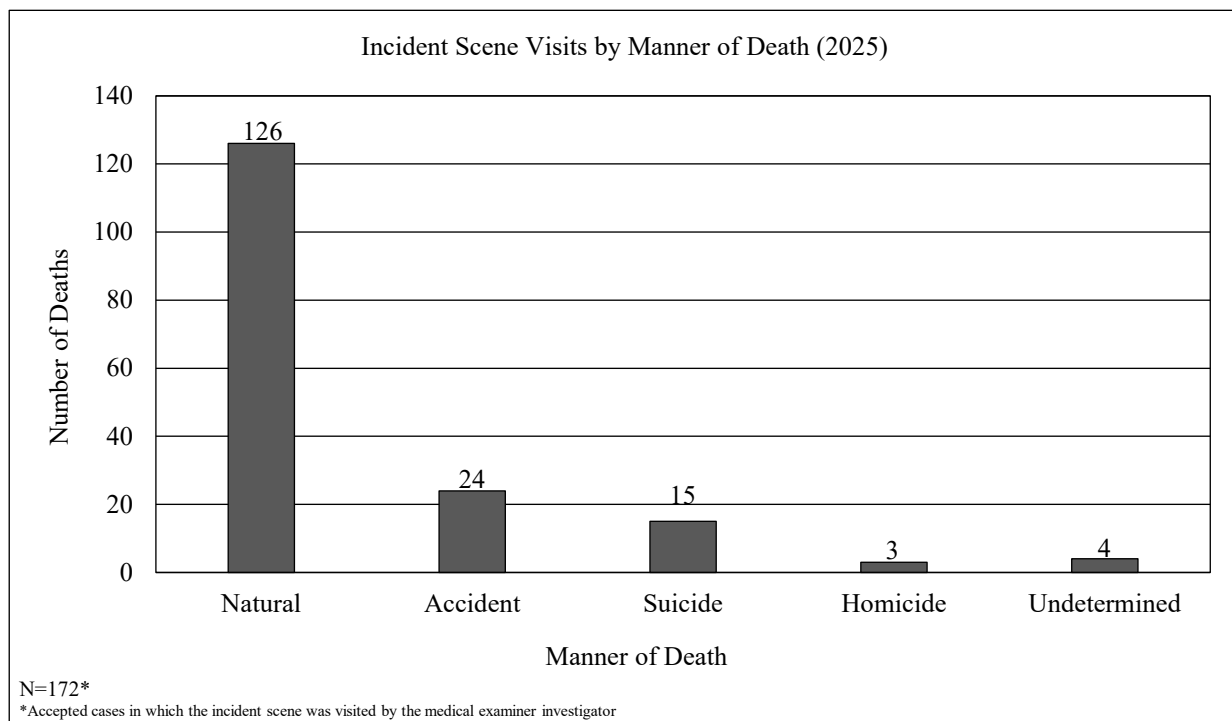


Figure 1.15.

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Autopsies

In 2025, 125 autopsies were ordered by JCME. Of those 125 autopsies, 124 were performed at the University of Iowa Health Care Main Campus (UIHCMC) and 1 was performed at the Iowa Office of the State Medical Examiner (IOSME). All 124 autopsies performed at UIHCMC were complete autopsies (external examination and internal examination of the head, neck, chest, and abdomen).

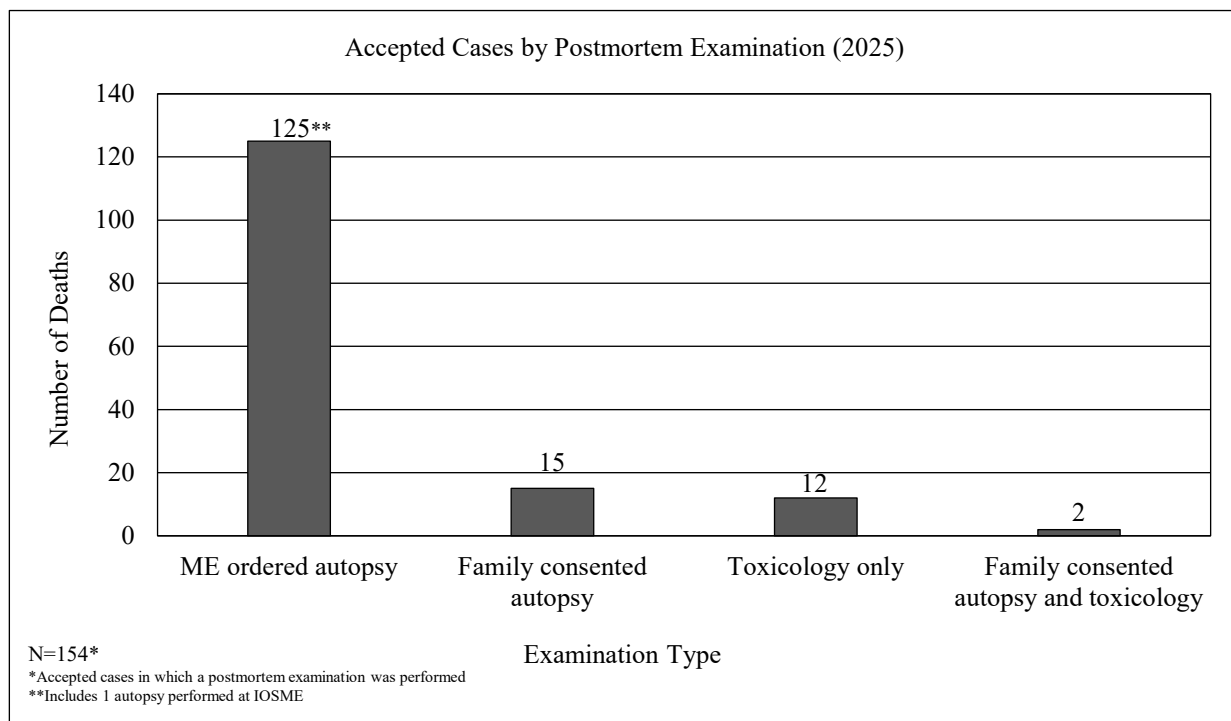


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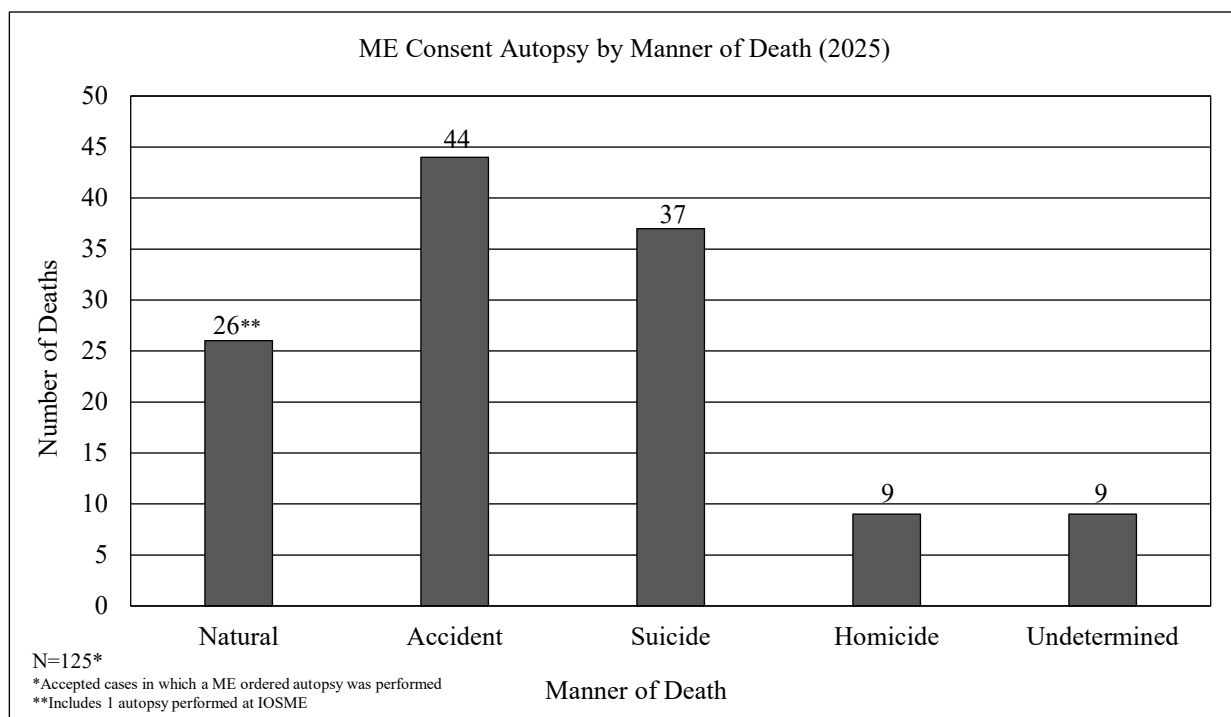


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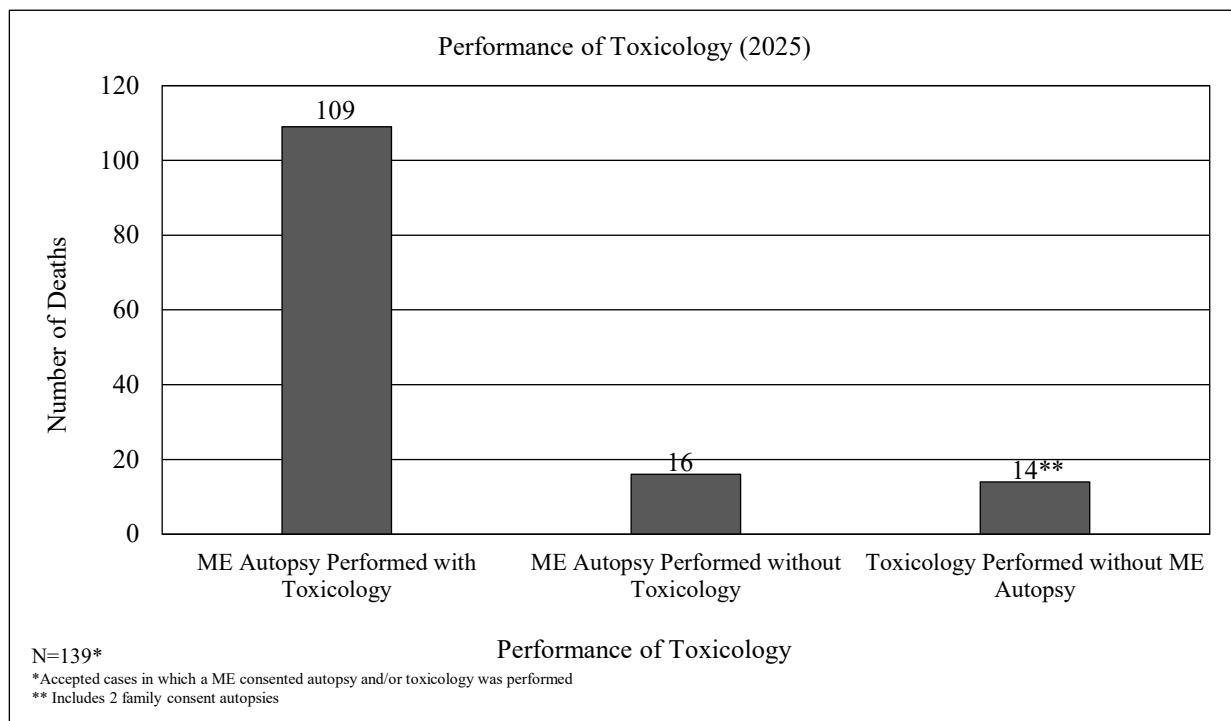


Figure 2.3.

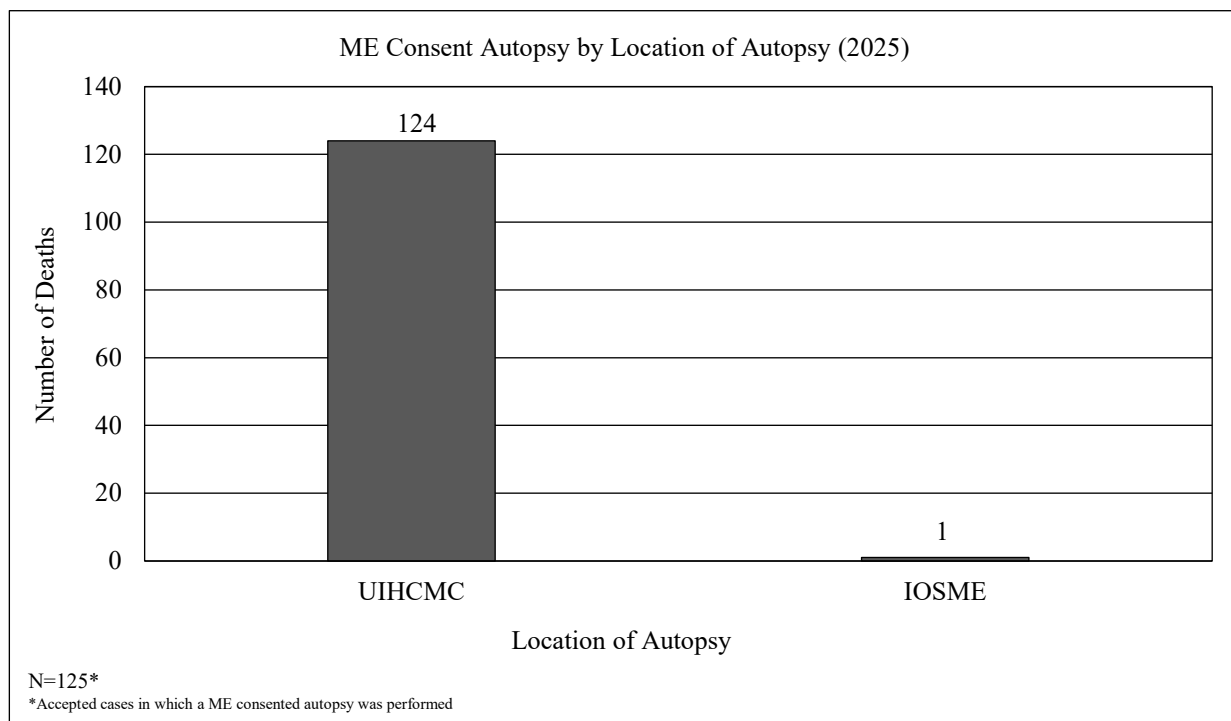


Figure 2.4.

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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.

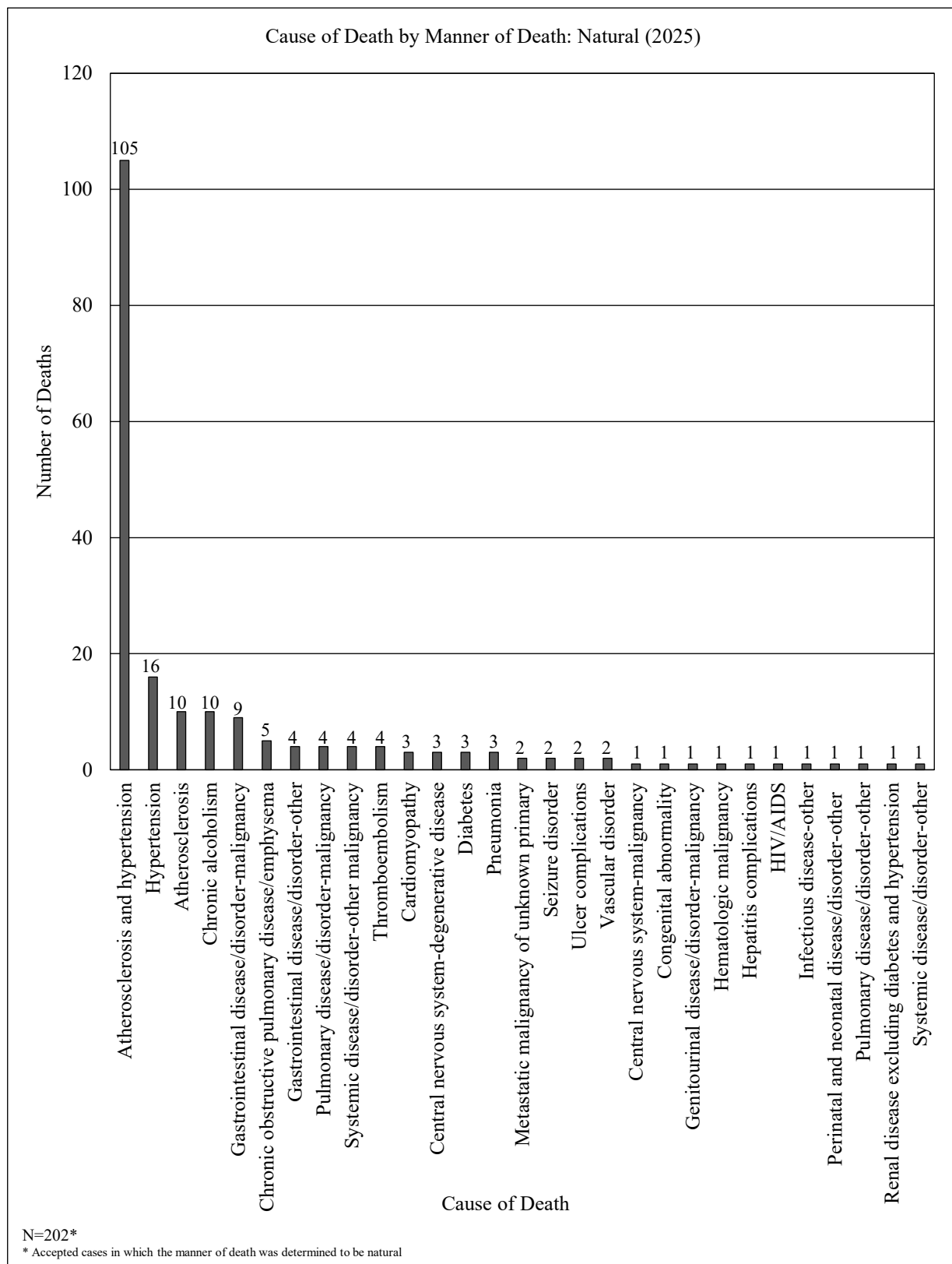


Figure 3.1.

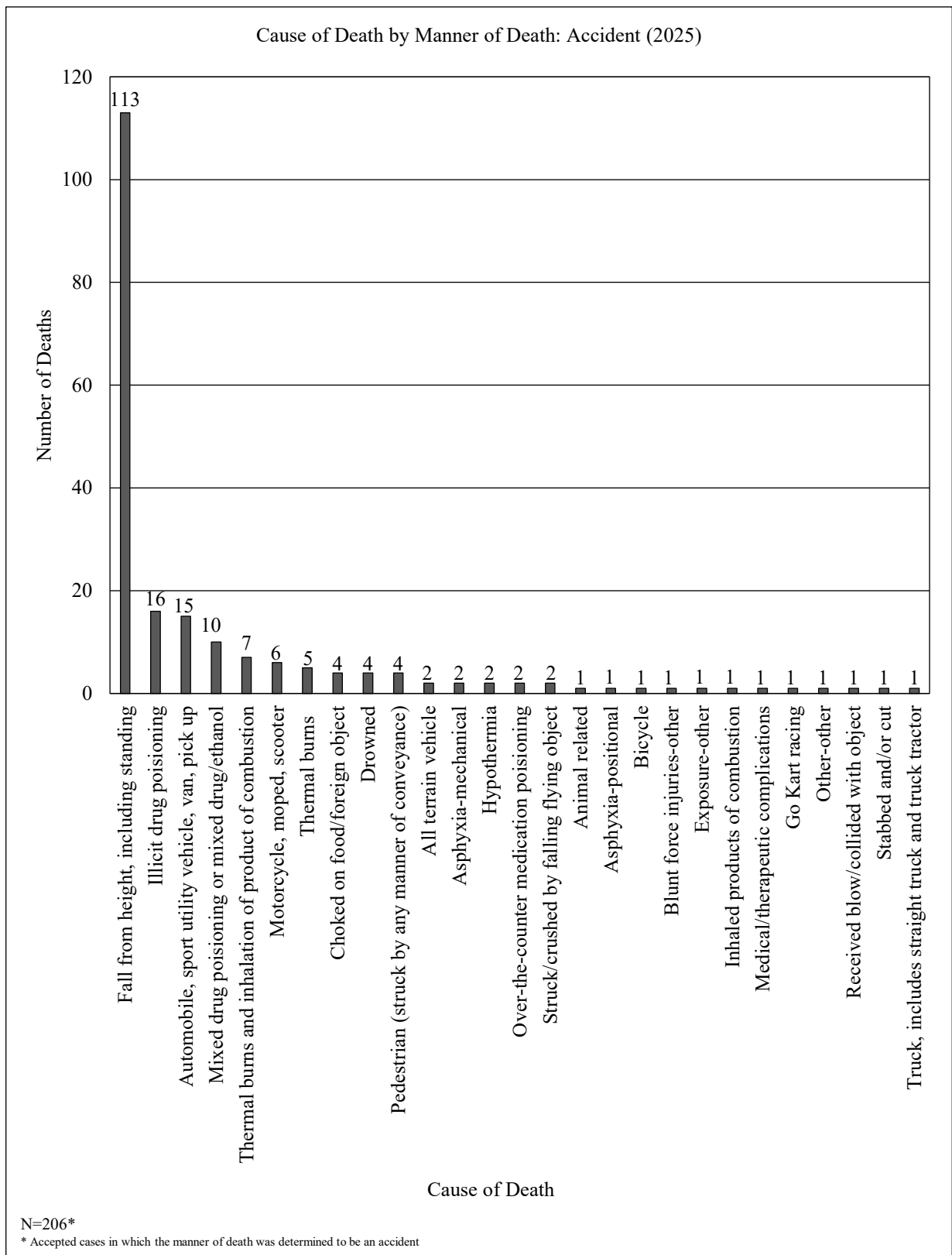


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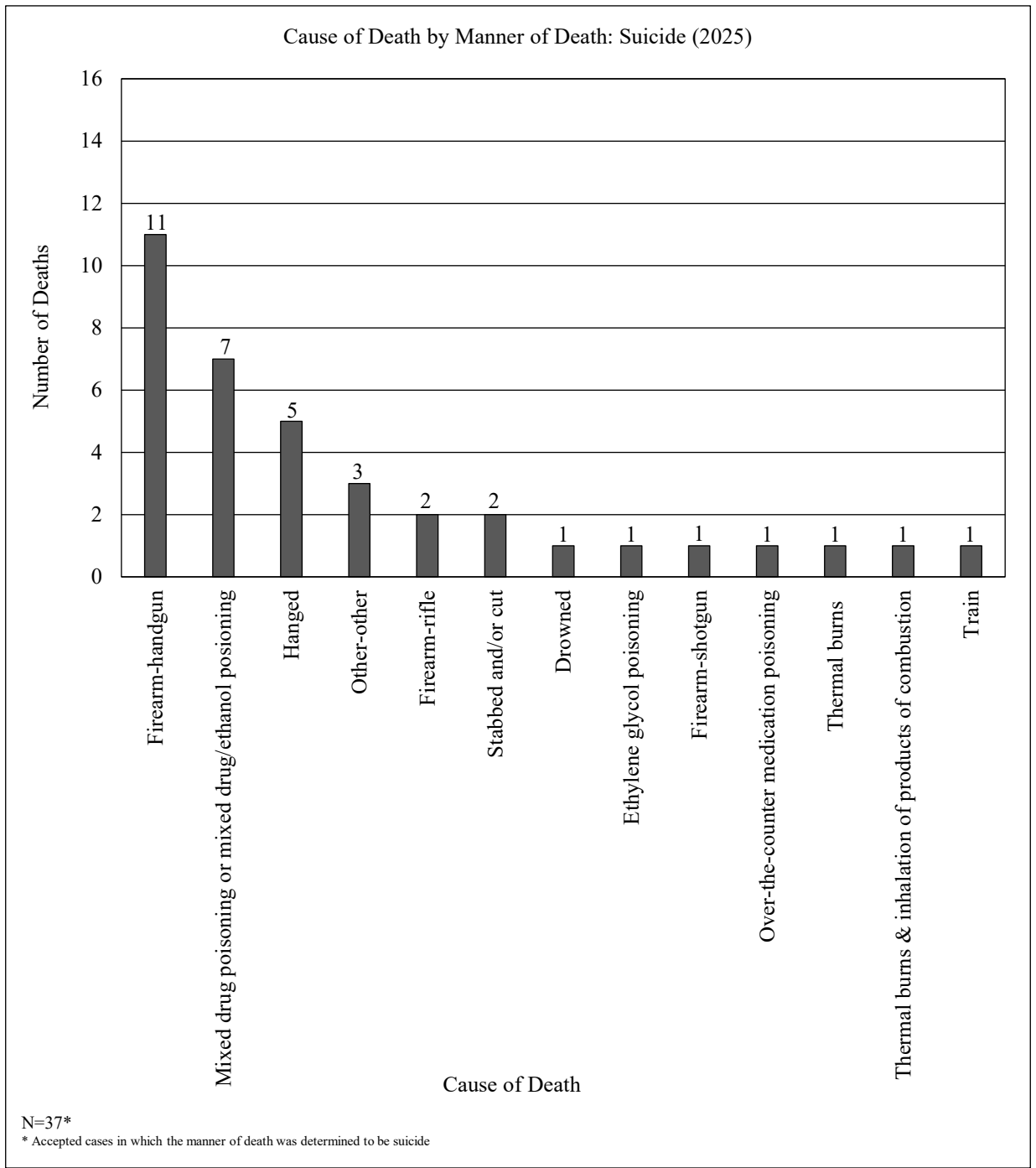


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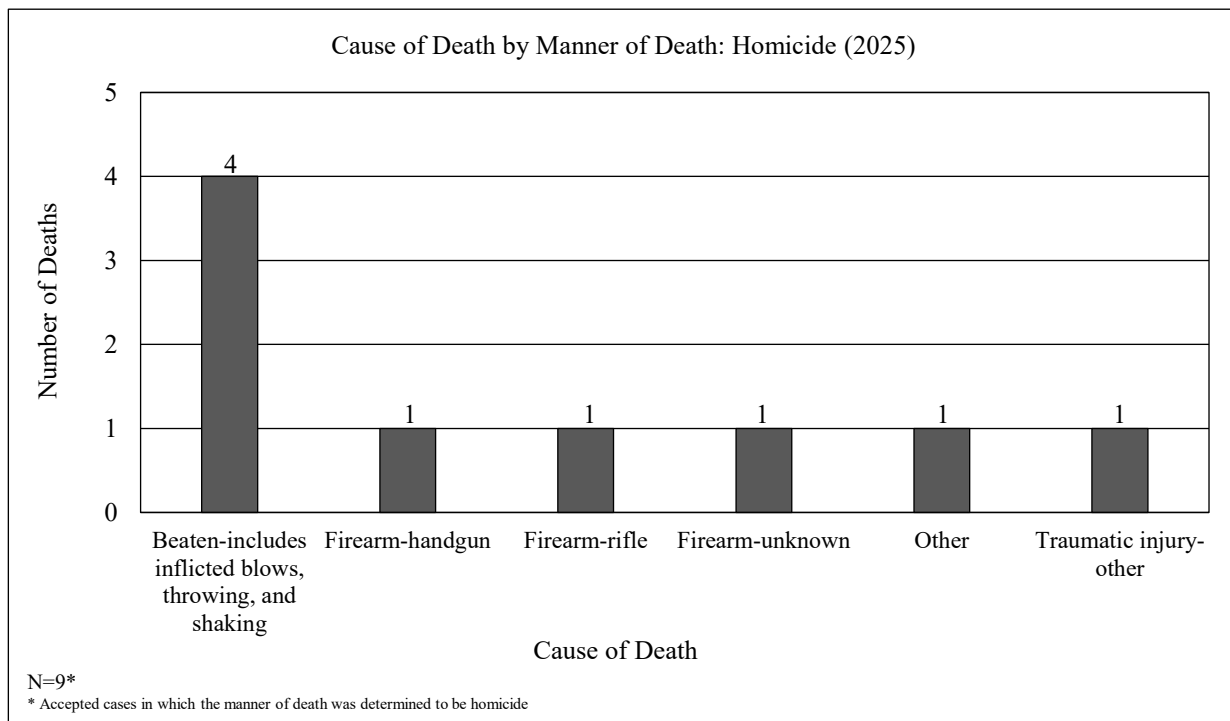


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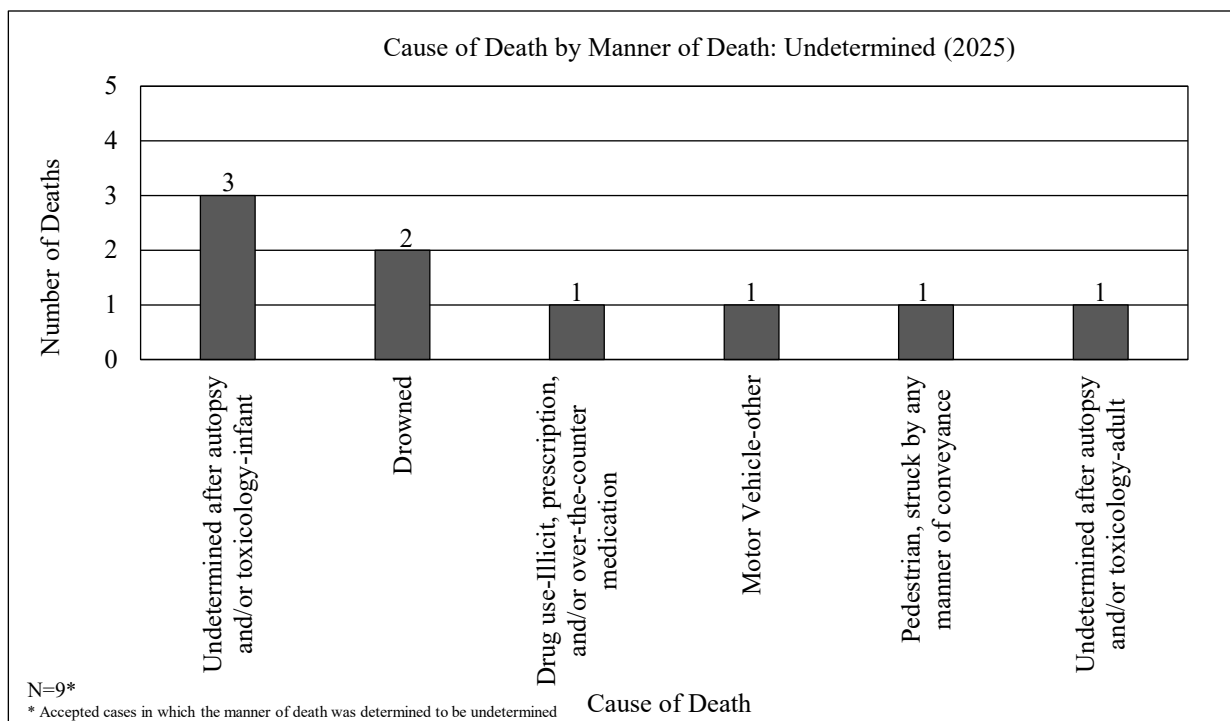


Figure 3.5.

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Accidents

Of the 463 deaths accepted by JCME, 206 were classified as accident. The sex distribution was 140 males to 66 females. One hundred and thirteen were the result of a fall, 40 were drug-related, and 27 were due to a motor vehicle crash. The most common age ranges were 70-79 years, and 80-89 years (52 decedents).

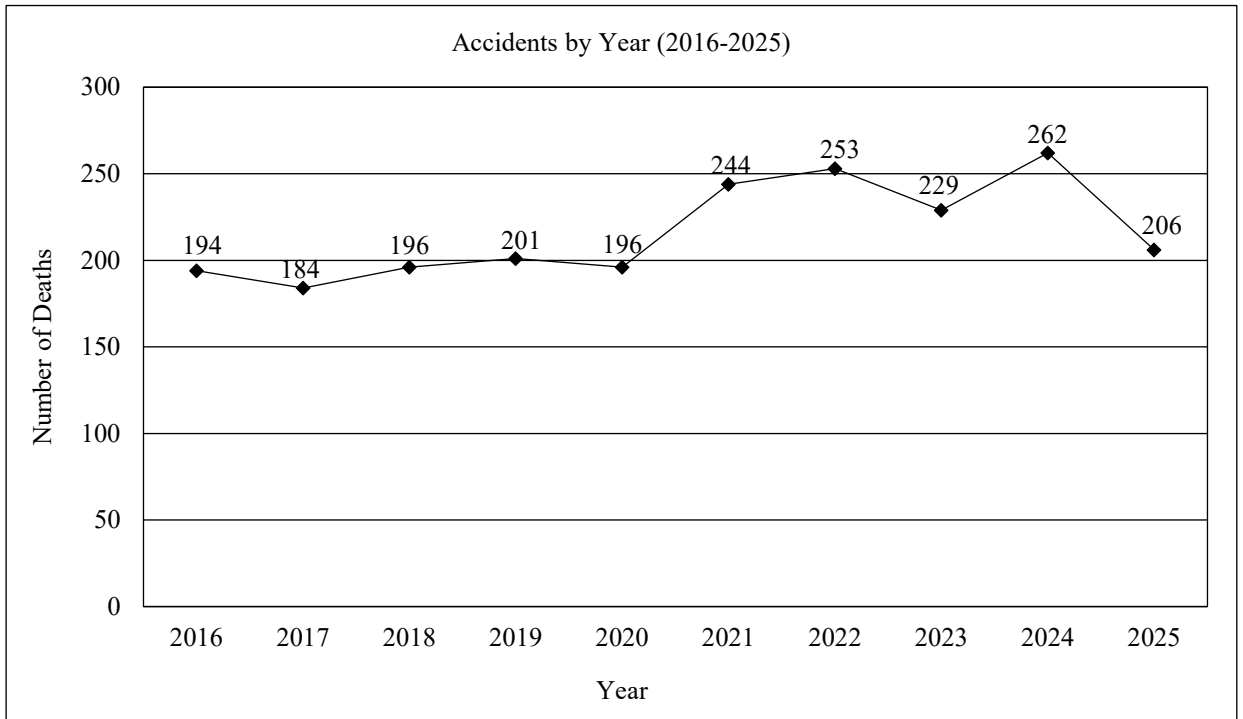


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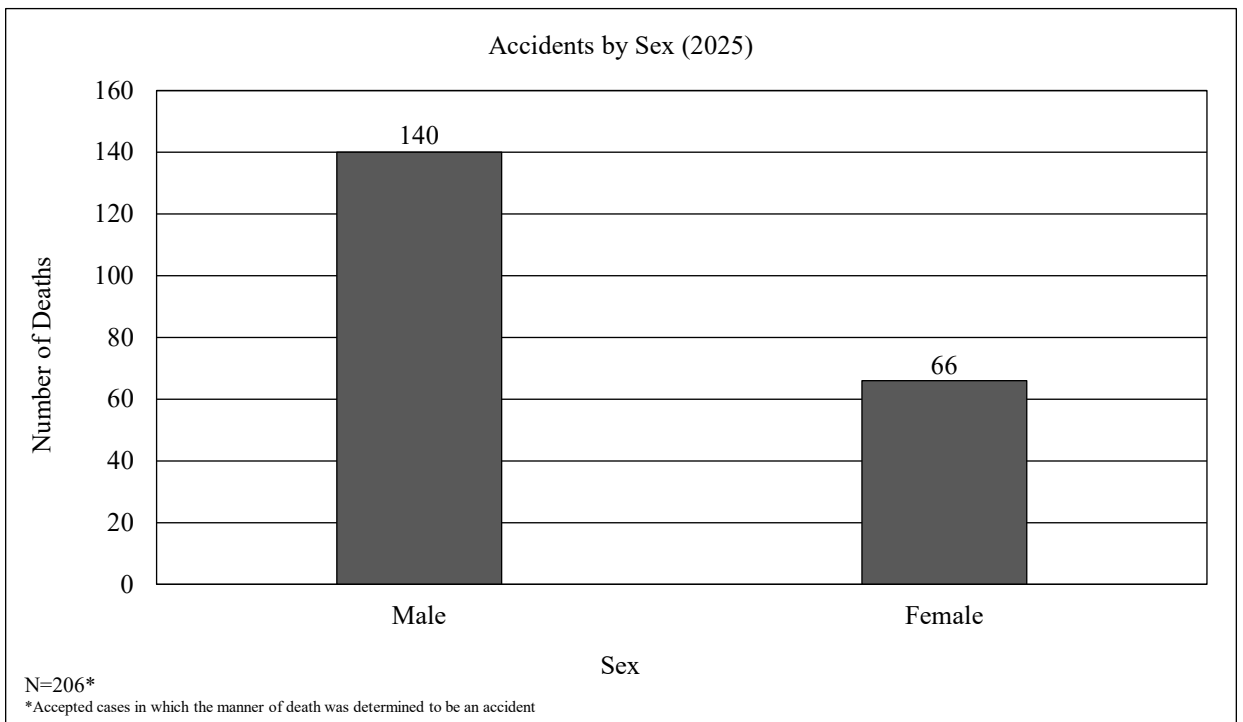


Figure 4.2.

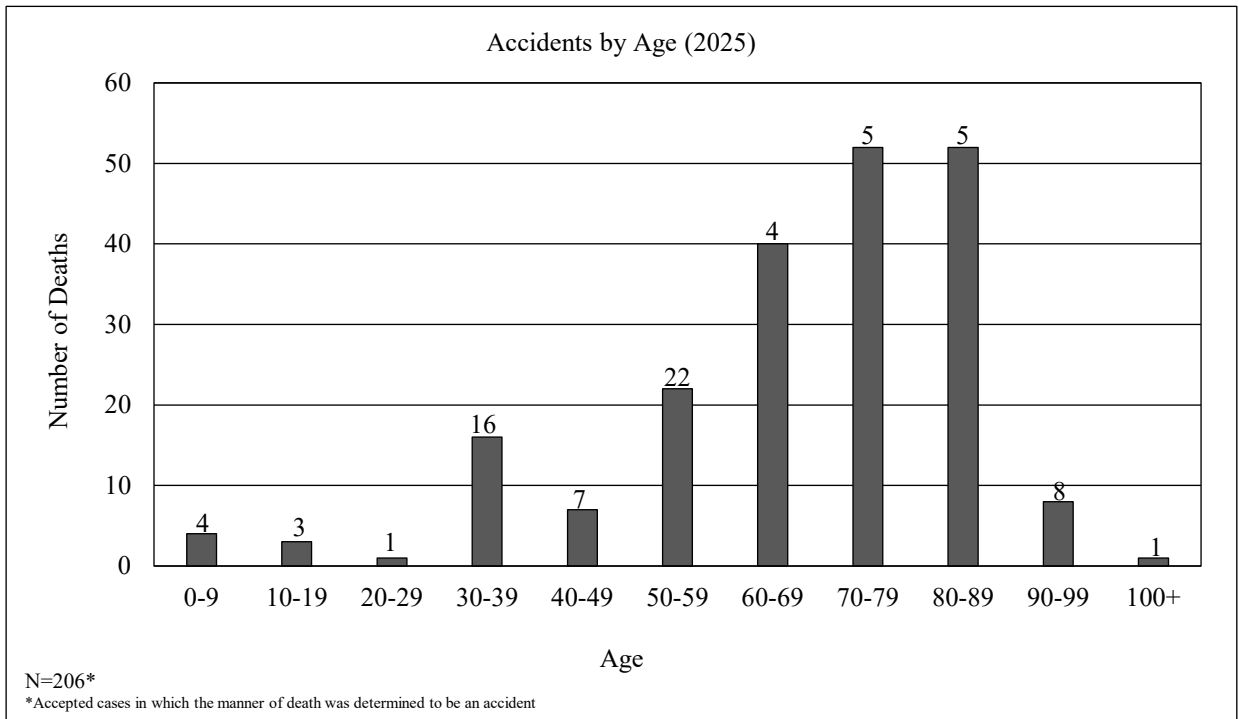


Figure 4.3.

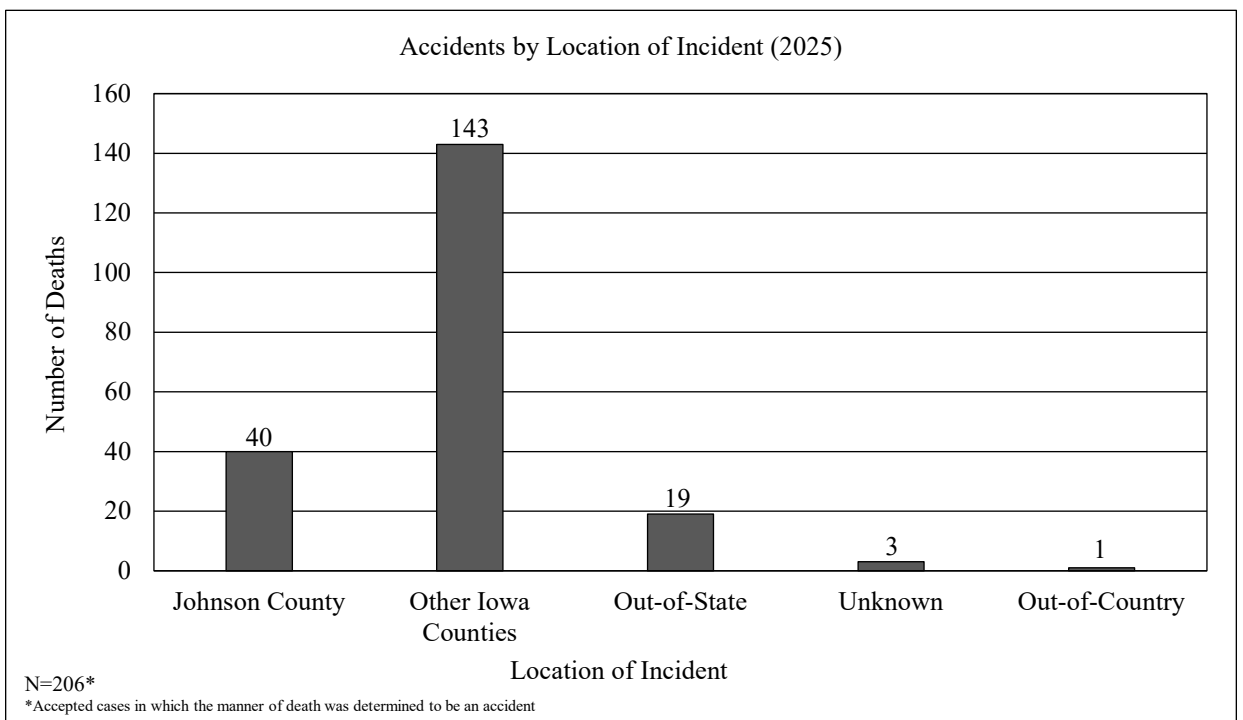


Figure 4.4.

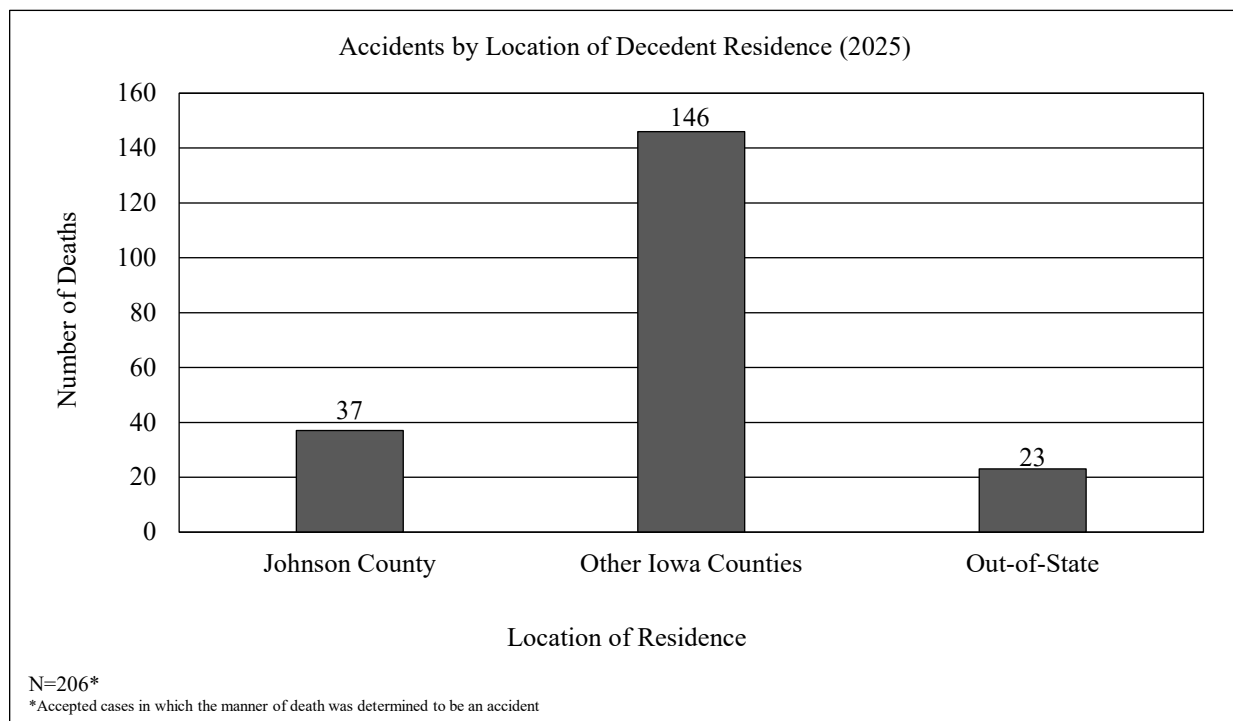


Figure 4.5.

Suicides

Of the 463 deaths investigated by JCME, 37 were classified as suicide. Fourteen of these deaths were the result of a firearm and 5 were due to hanging. The sex distribution was 26 males to 11 females. The most common age range was 20-29years (13 decedents) followed by 10-19 years and 50-59years (5 decedents).

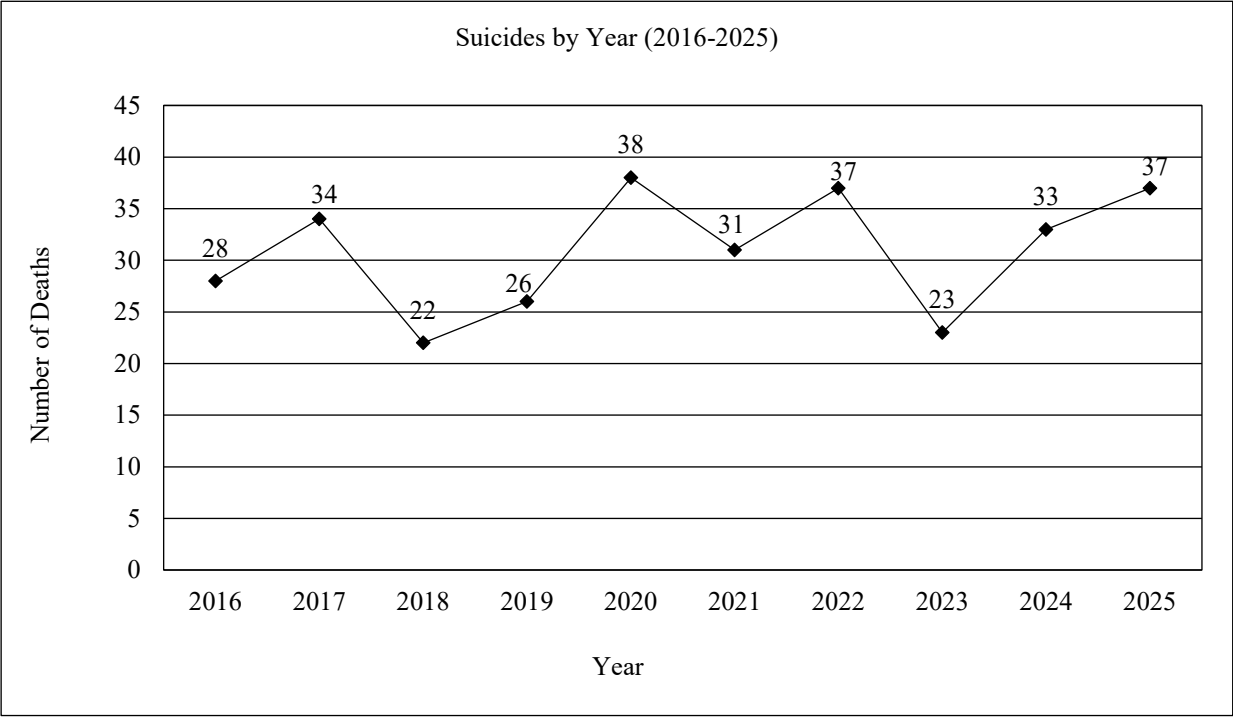


Figure 5.1.

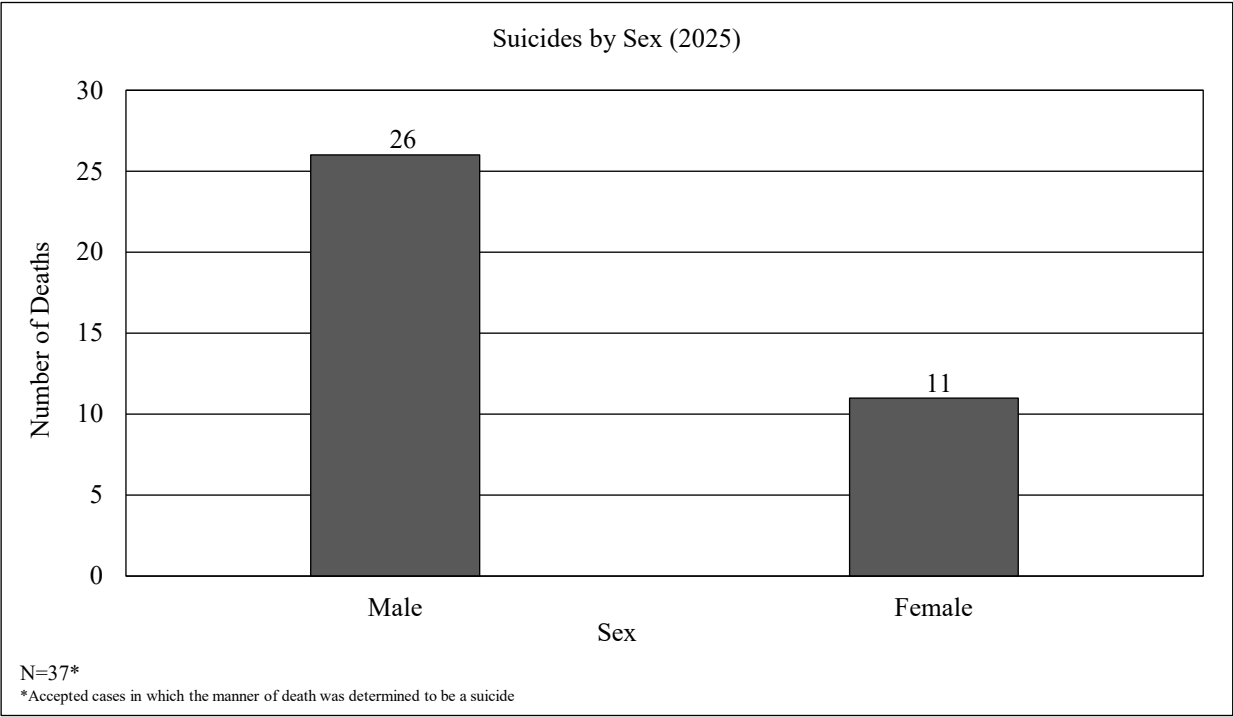


Figure 5.2.

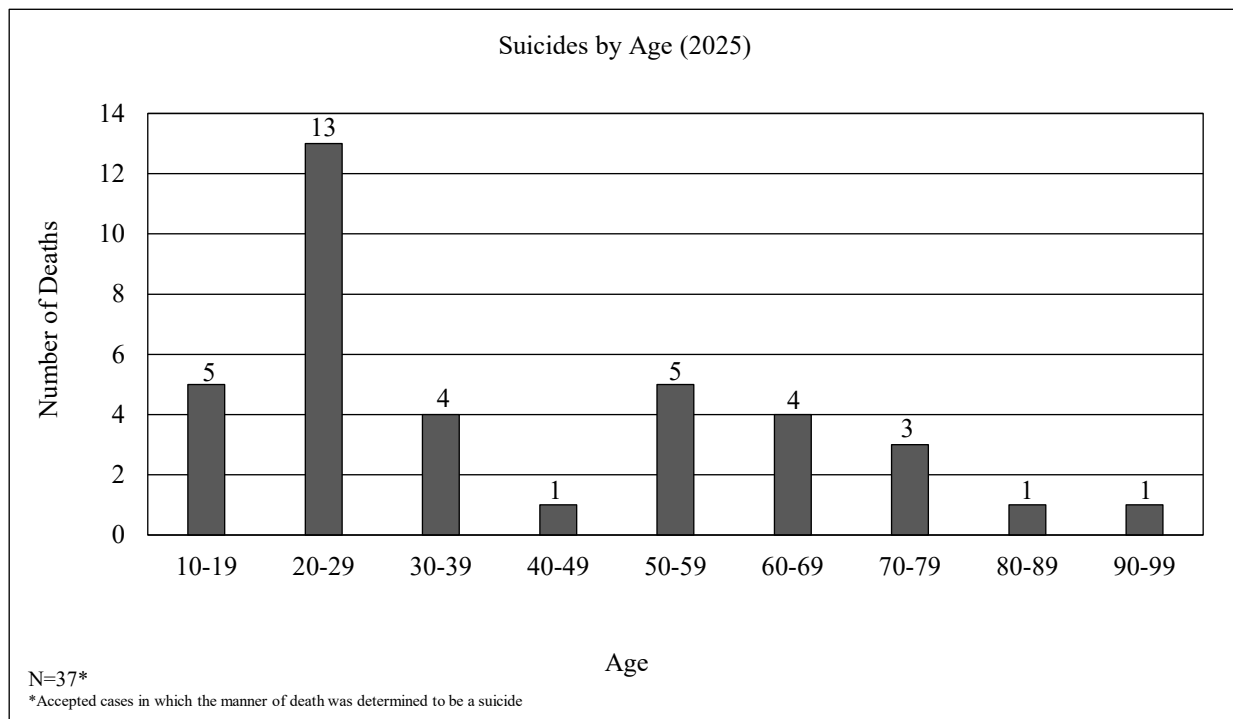


Figure 5.3.

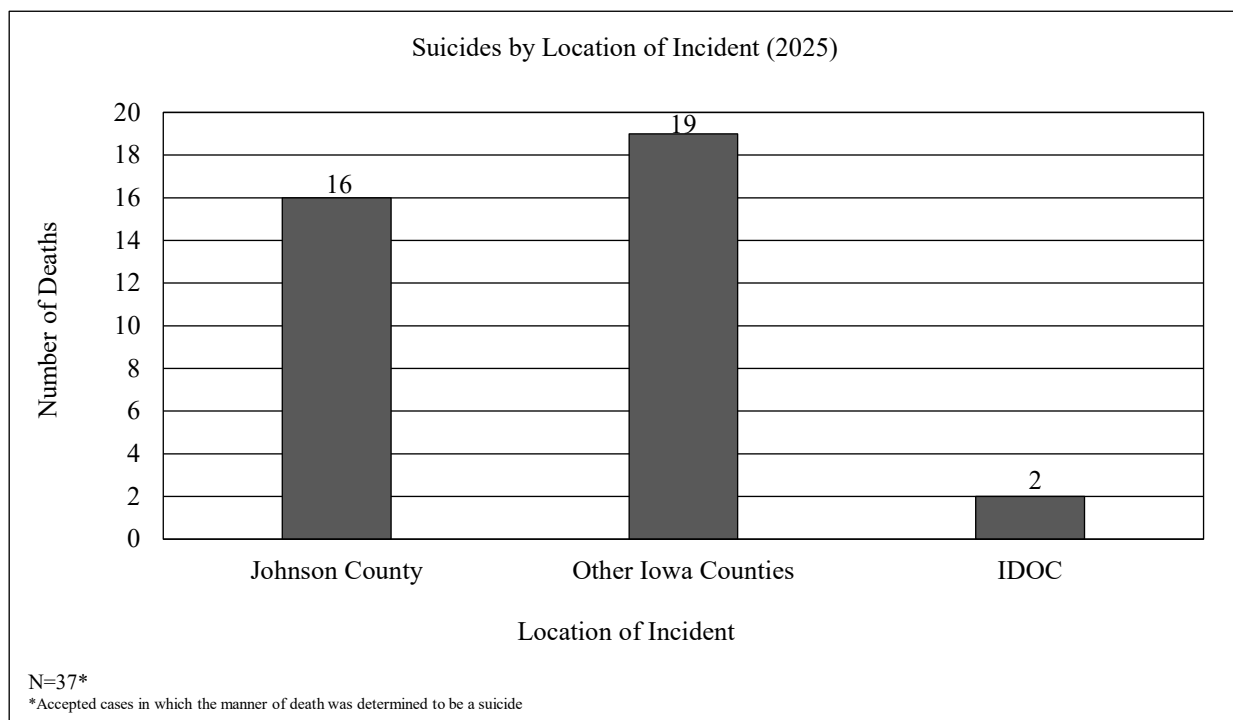


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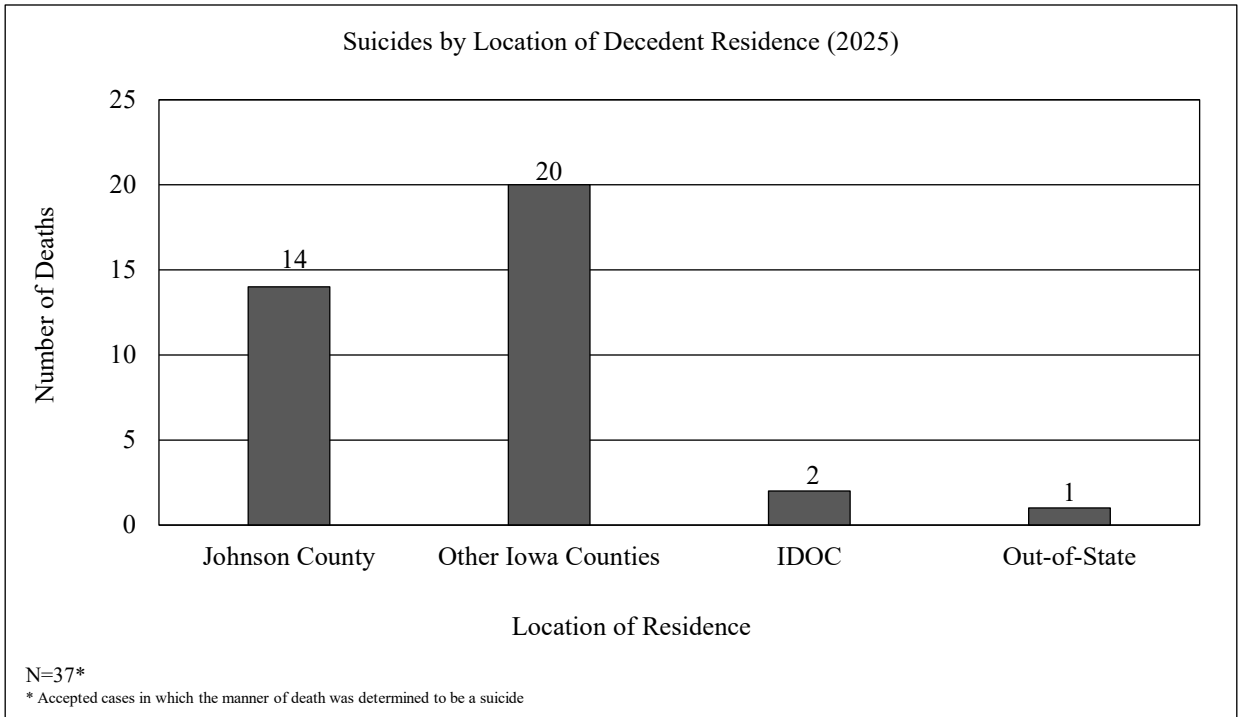


Figure 5.5.

Homicides

Of the 463 deaths accepted and investigated by JCME, 9 were classified as homicide. The sex distribution was 6 males to 3 female. The most common age ranges were 20-29, 30-39, 40-49 (2 decedents each). Of the 9 deaths certified as homicide, 5 occurred in other Iowa counties, 3 occurred in Johnson county and 1 occurred out-of-state.

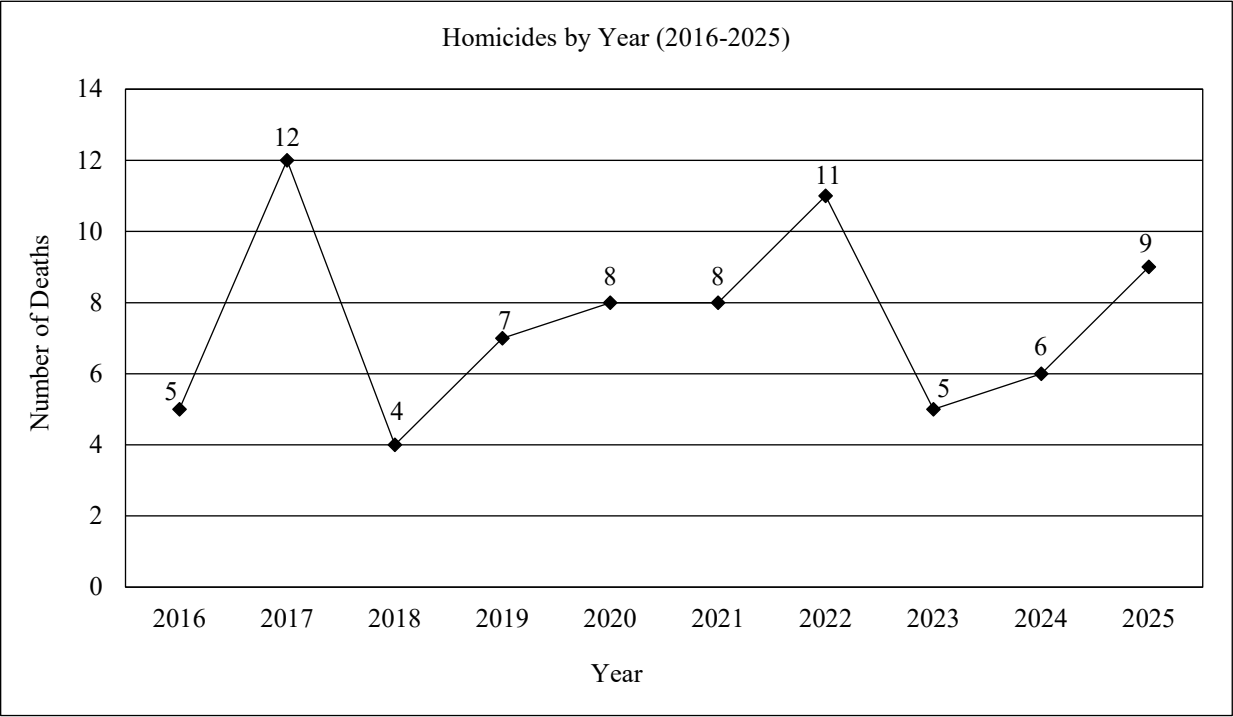


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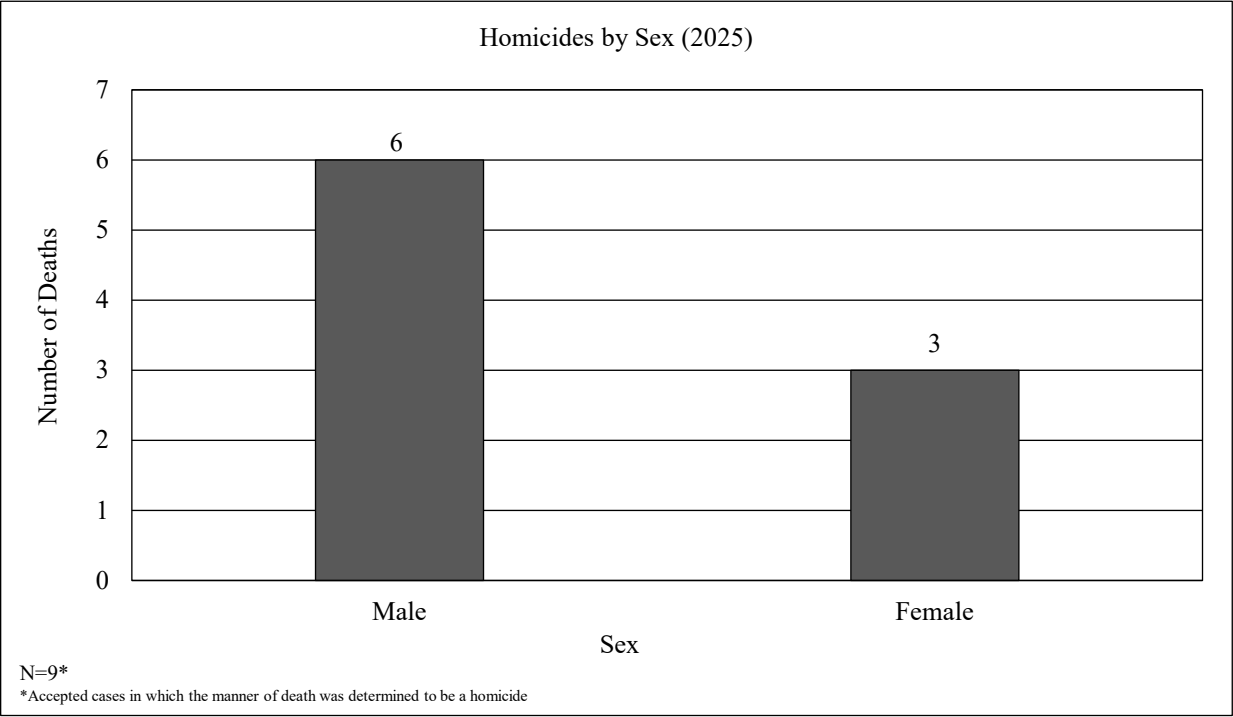


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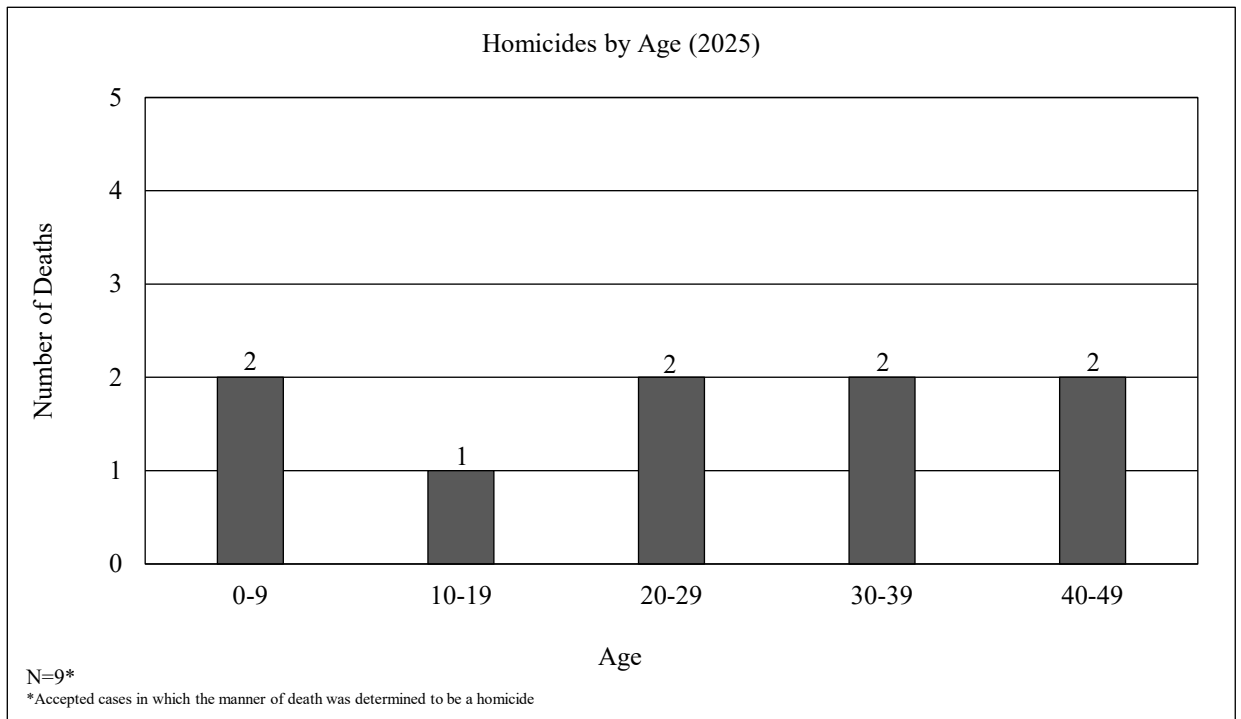


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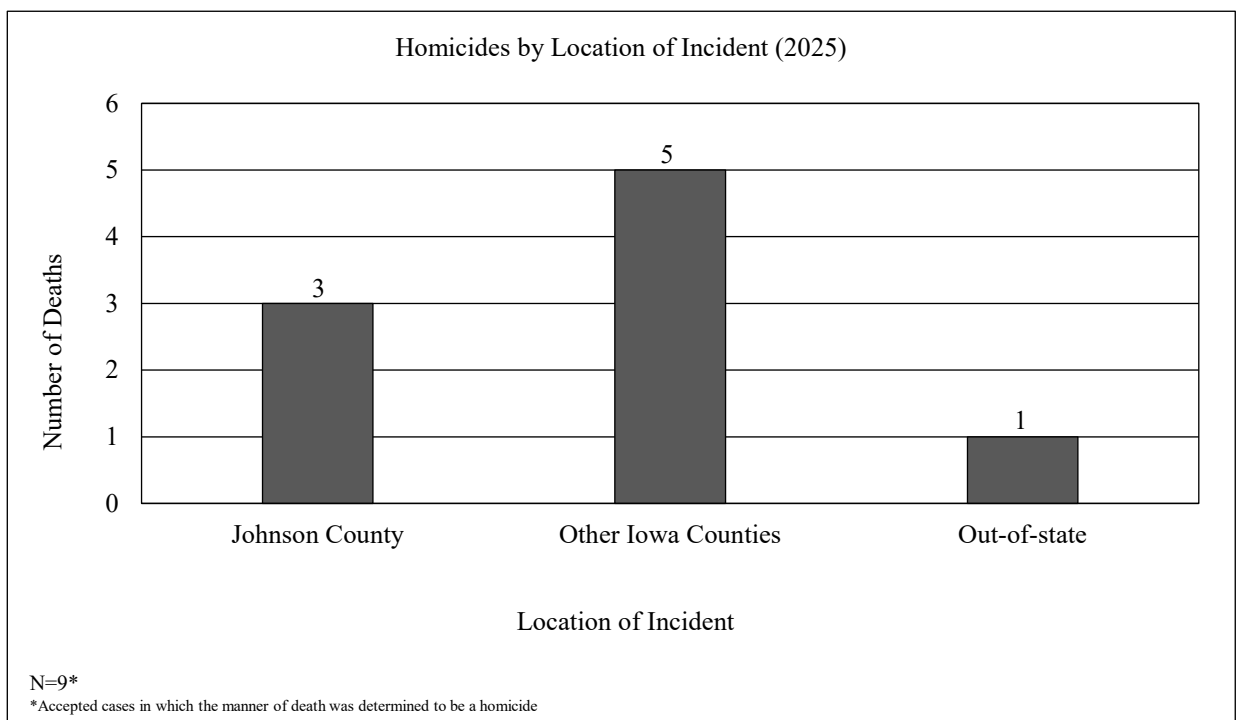


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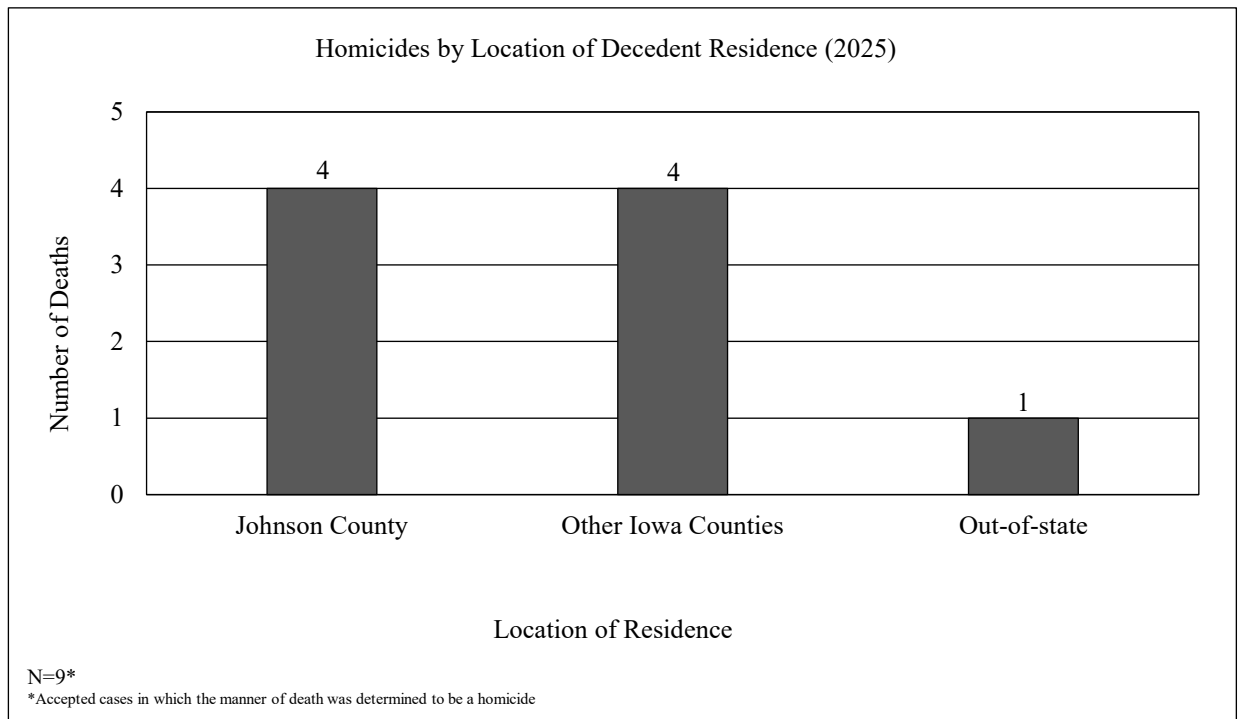


Figure 6.5.

Drug-Related Deaths

In 2025, there were 40 drug-related deaths investigated by JCME. Of this total, 18 involved illicit drugs only, 17 involved a mixture of drug types, 4 involved over-the-counter drugs only, and 1 involved prescription drugs only. Of the 40 drug-related deaths, 29 were classified as accidents, 9 as suicides, 1 as homicide and 1 as undetermined.

Of the 18 illicit only drug-related deaths, 15 involved methamphetamine, 2 cocaine, and 1 fentanyl. Of the 17 mixed drug-related deaths, the most common illicit drug used was methamphetamine (7 decedents), followed by cocaine (3 decedents) fentanyl (3 decedents), amphetamine, heroin, and Para-Flourofentanyl (1 decedent each).

Of the 40 drug-related deaths, 5 involved opioids. Of these 5 deaths, 4 were classified as accident and 1 as suicide. The most common opioid drug was fentanyl (4 decedents) followed by carfentanil, heroin, hydrocodone, oxycodone, Para-Flourofentanyl, and tramadol (1 decedent each) with 3 decedents testing positive for more than one opioid.

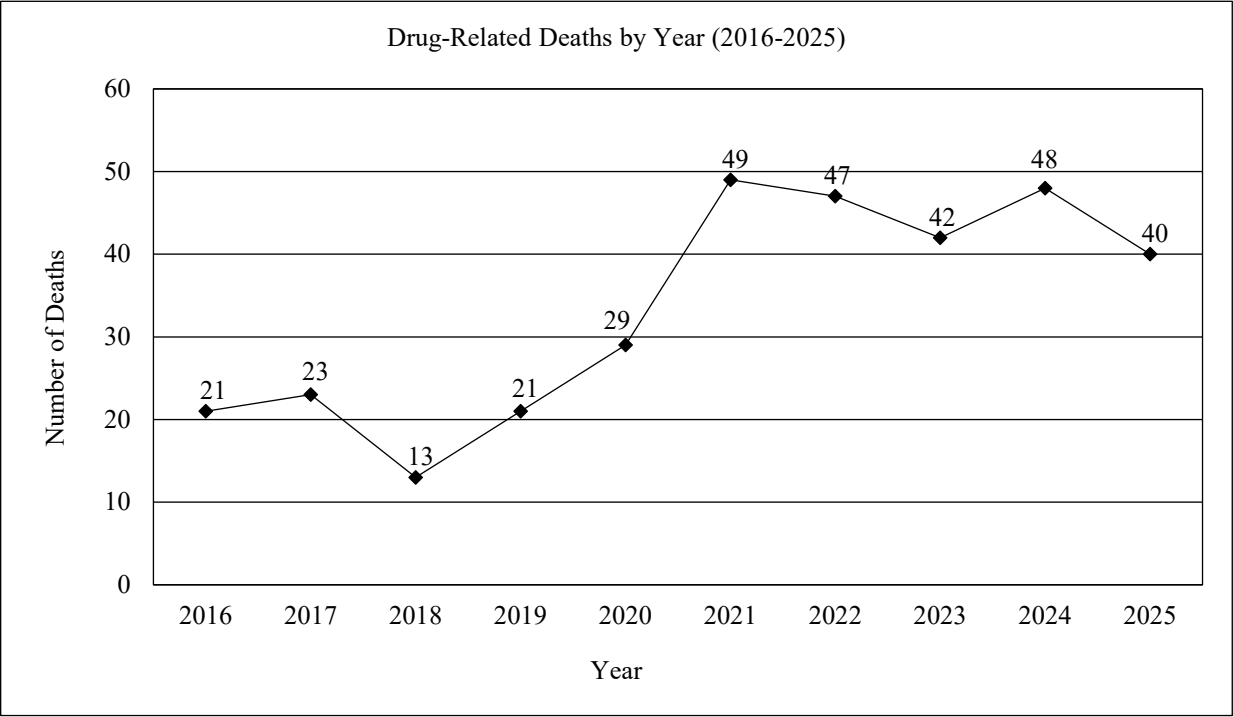


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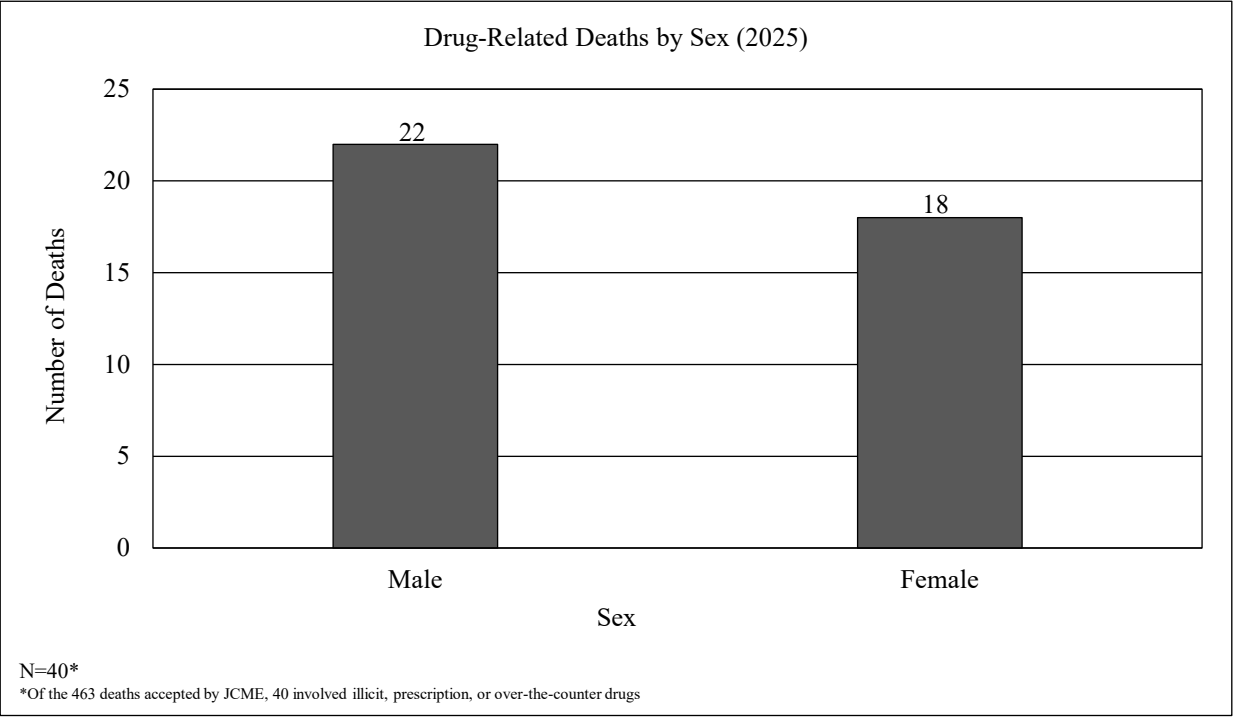


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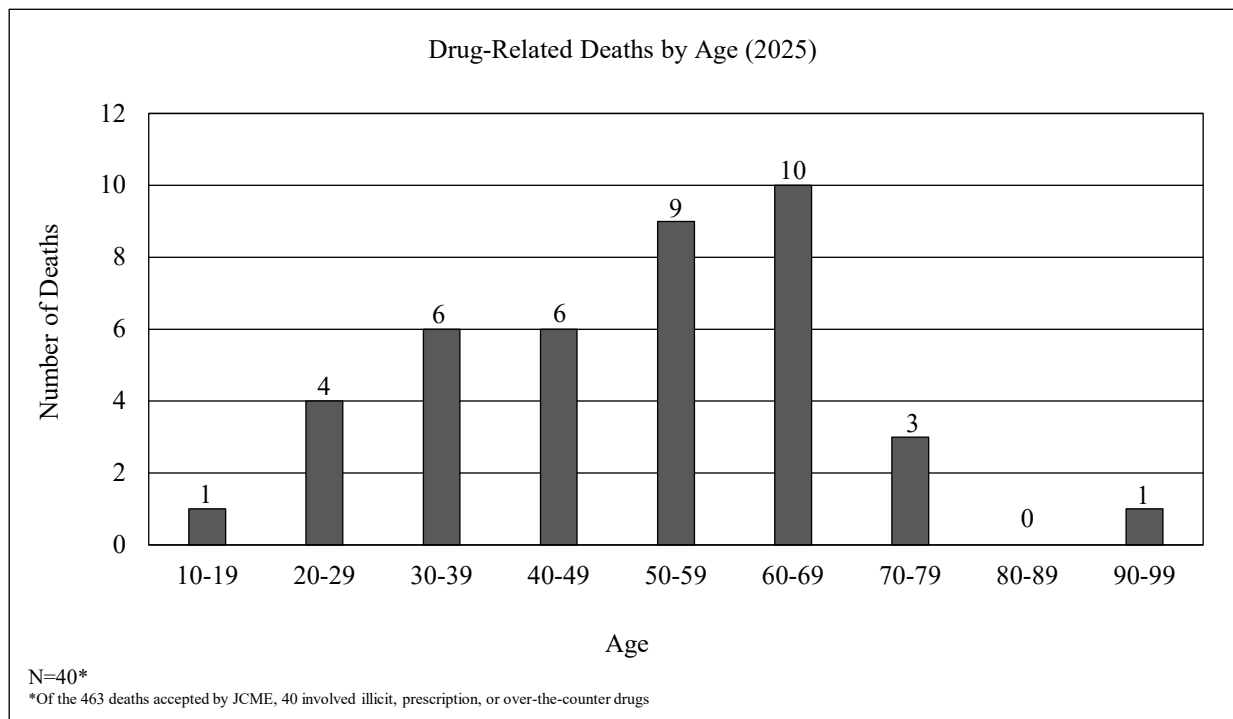


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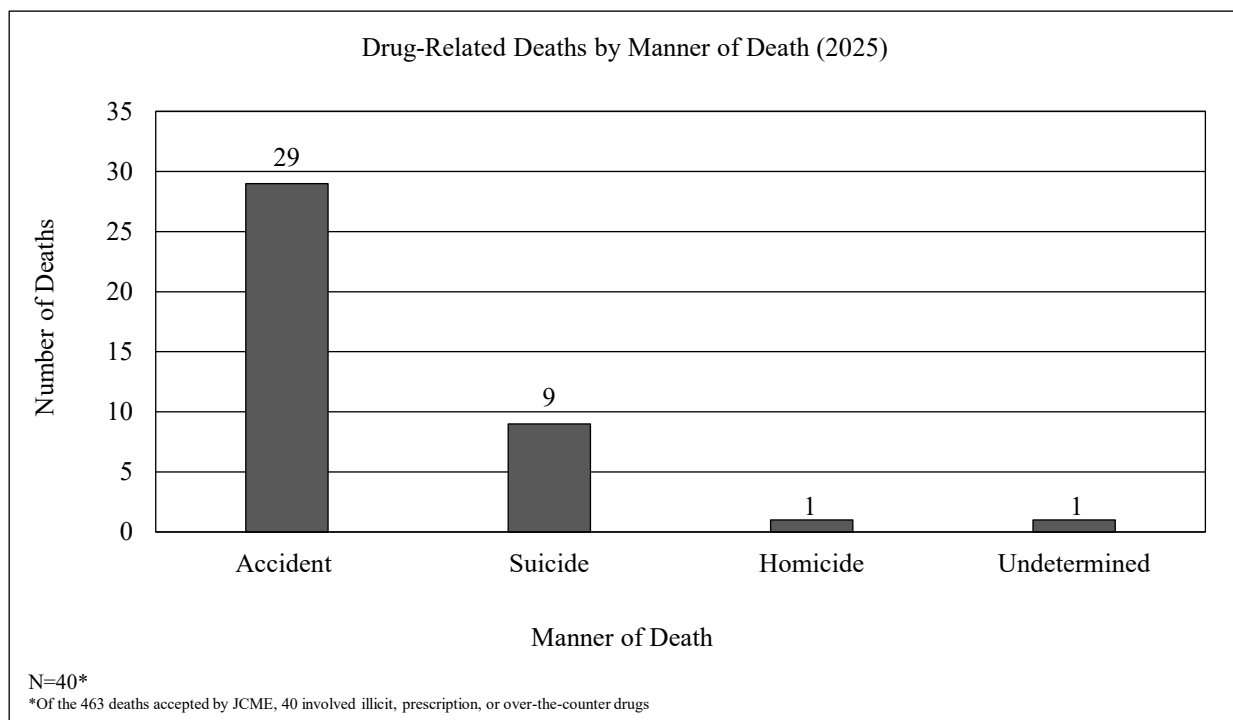


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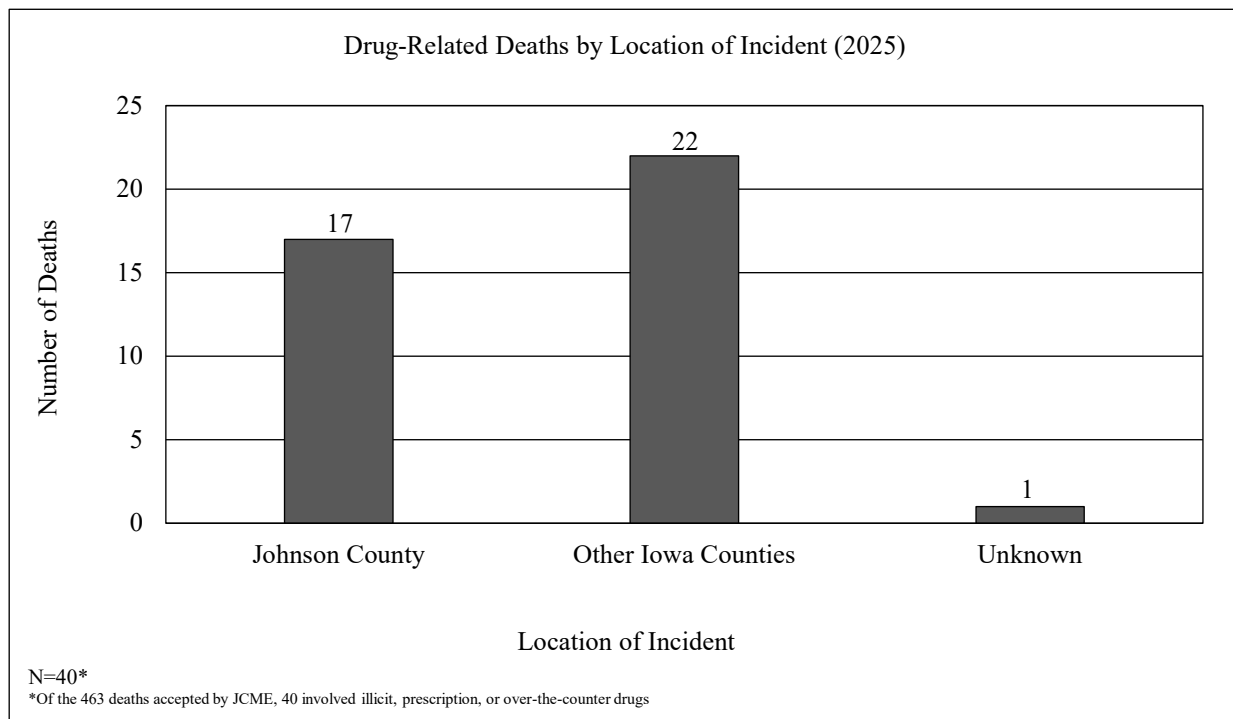


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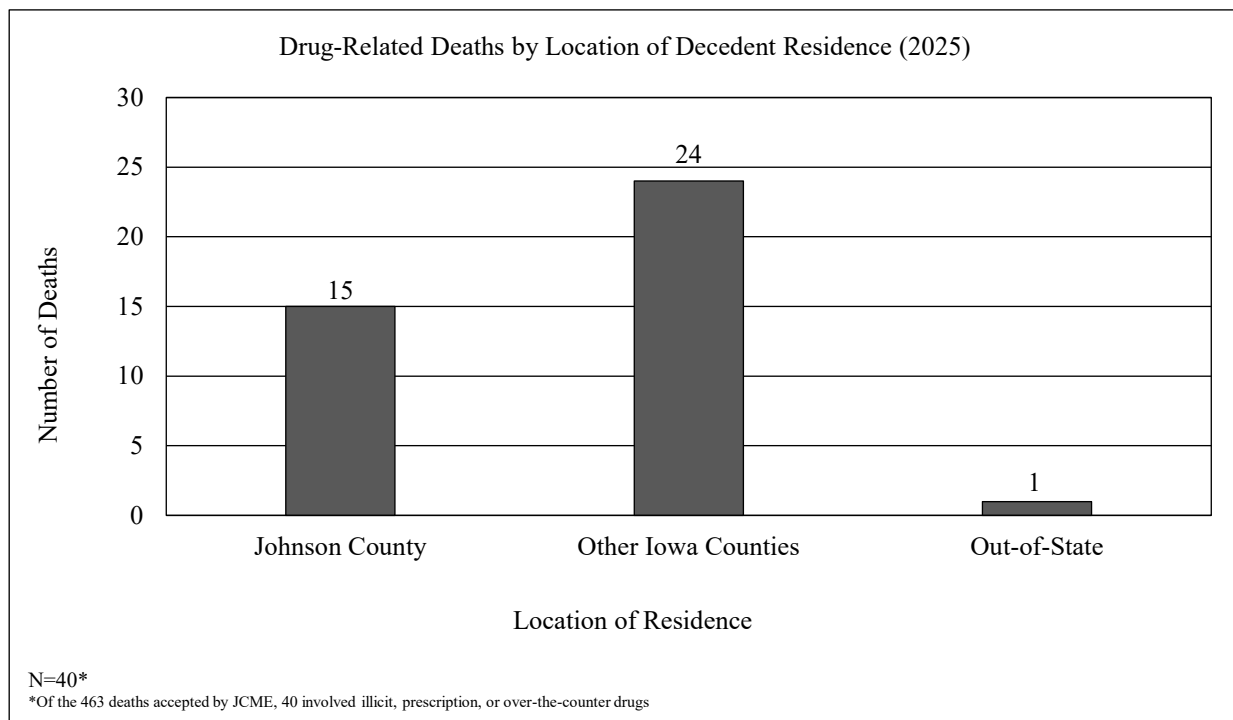


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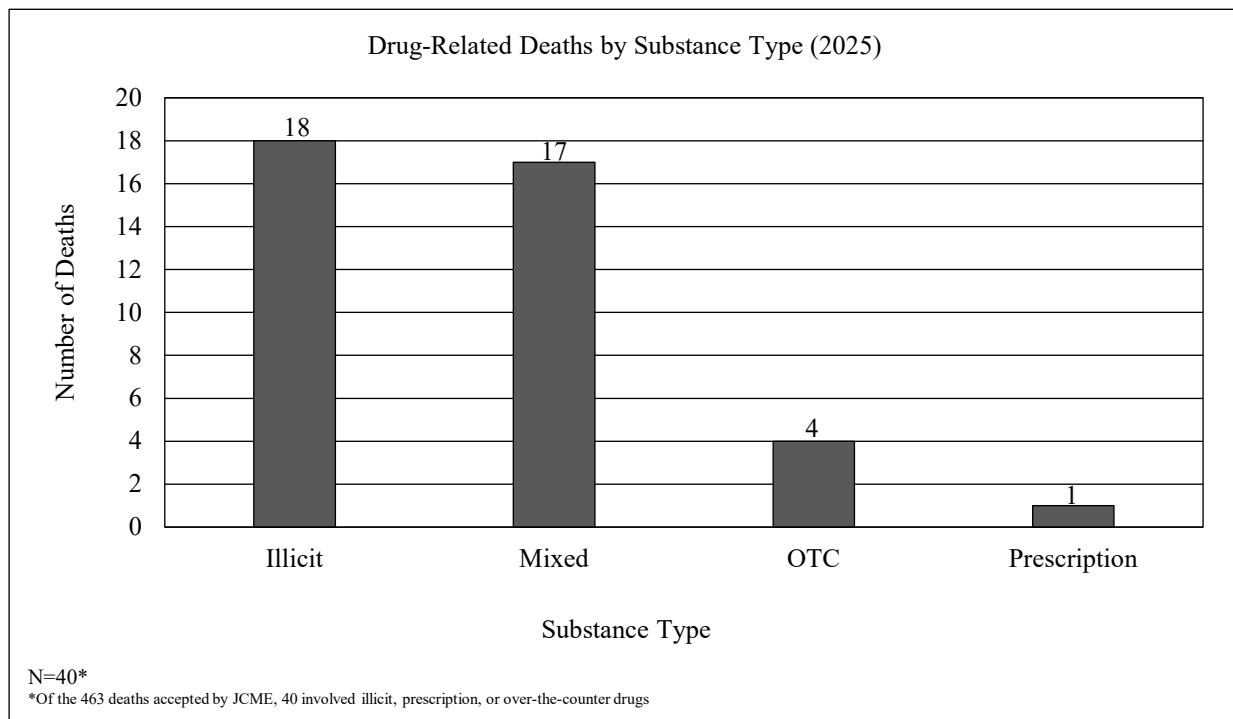


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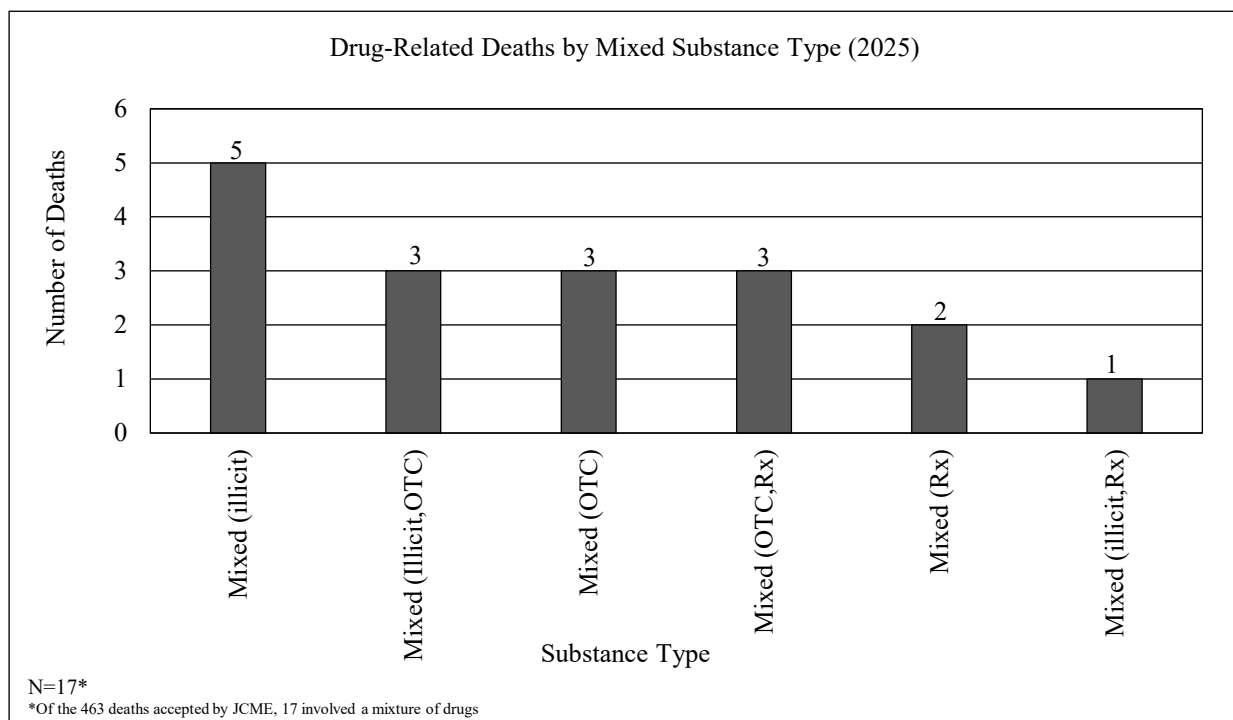


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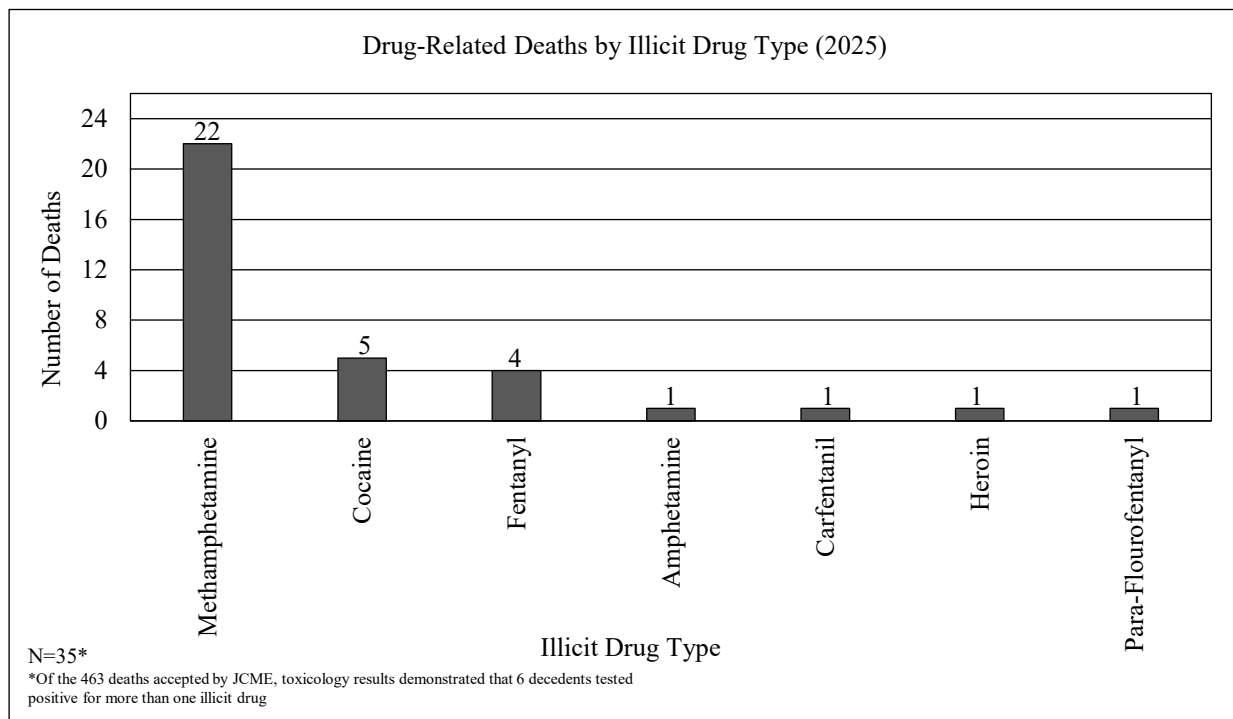


Figure 7.9.

Table 7.1. Drug-Related Deaths by Prescription and Over-the-Counter Drugs (2025)

Type of Drug	Number of Decedents
Acetaminophen	8
Diphenhydramine	3
Dextromethorphan	2
Fluoxetine	2
Mitragynine	2
Allopurinol	1
Amlodipine	1
Baclofen	1
Diazepam	1
Doxylamine	1
Gabapentin	1
Hydrocodone	1
Ibuprofen	1
Lisinopril	1
Metoprolol	1
Mitragynine pseudoindoxyl/7-hydroxymitragynine	1
Oxycodone	1
Pseudoephedrine	1
Tramadol	1
Venlafaxine	1
Zolpidem	1

N=33*

*Toxicology results demonstrated that 8 decedents tested positive for more than one prescription or over-the-counter drug

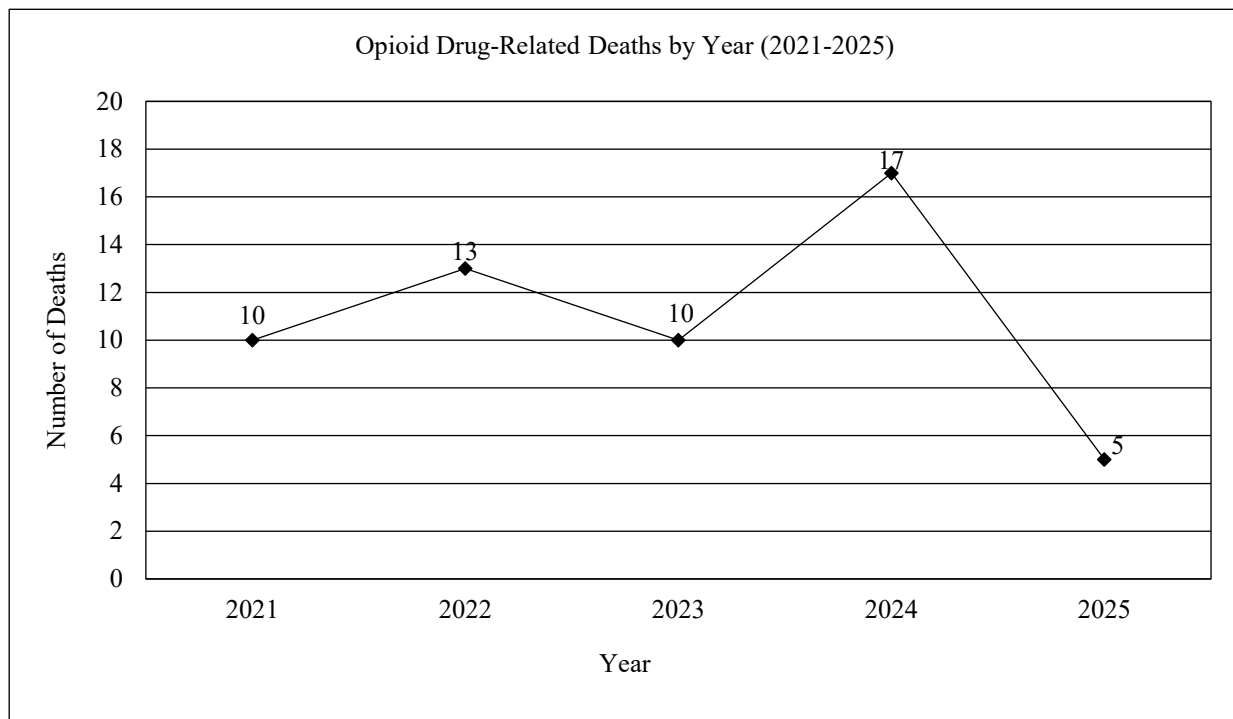


Figure 7.10.

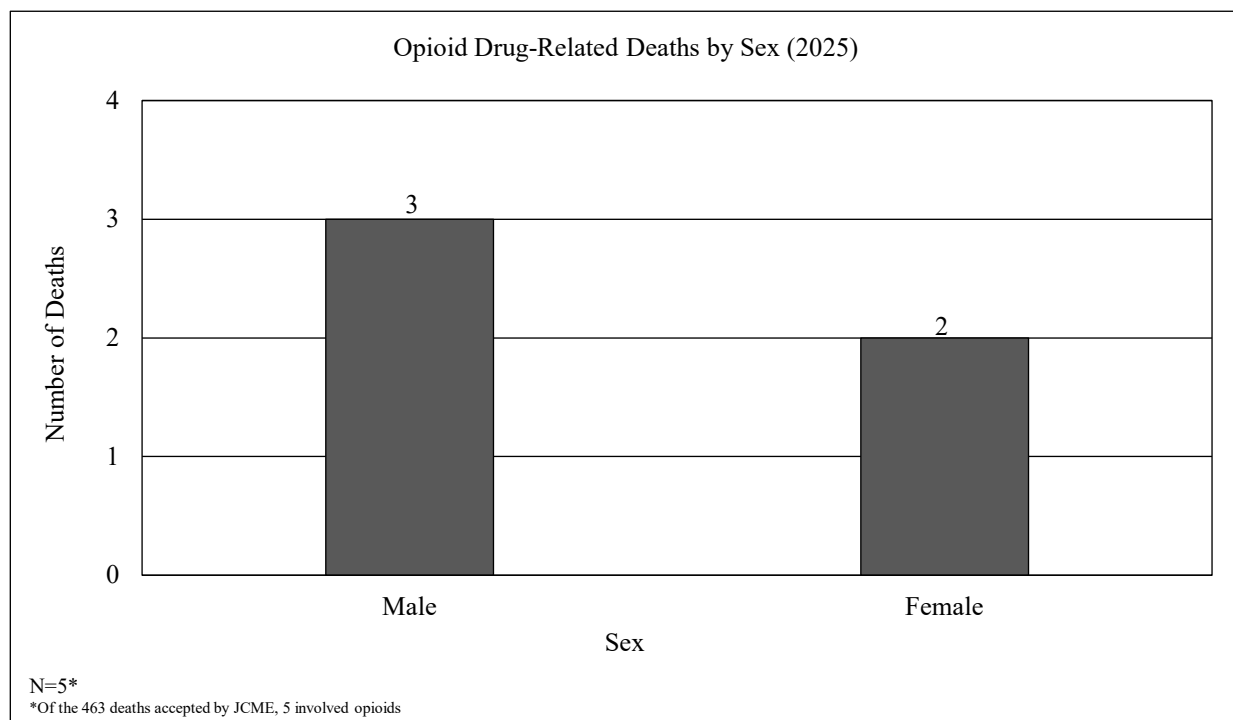


Figure 7.11.

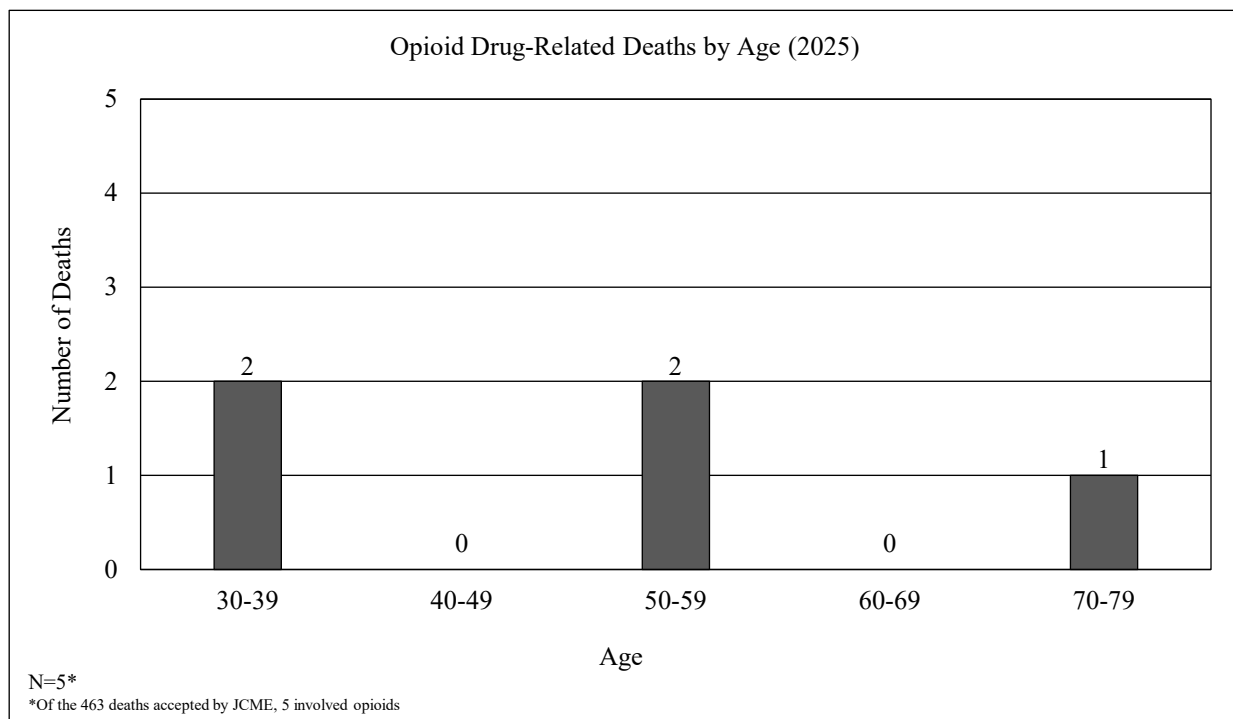


Figure 7.12.

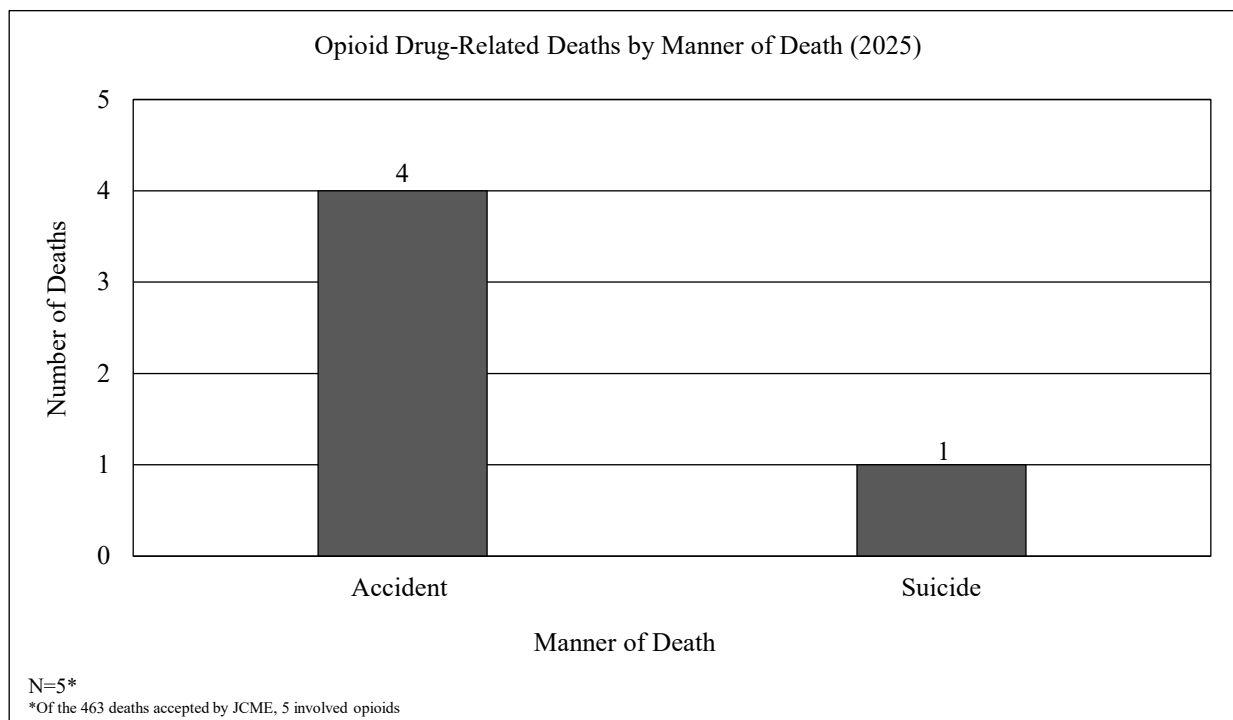


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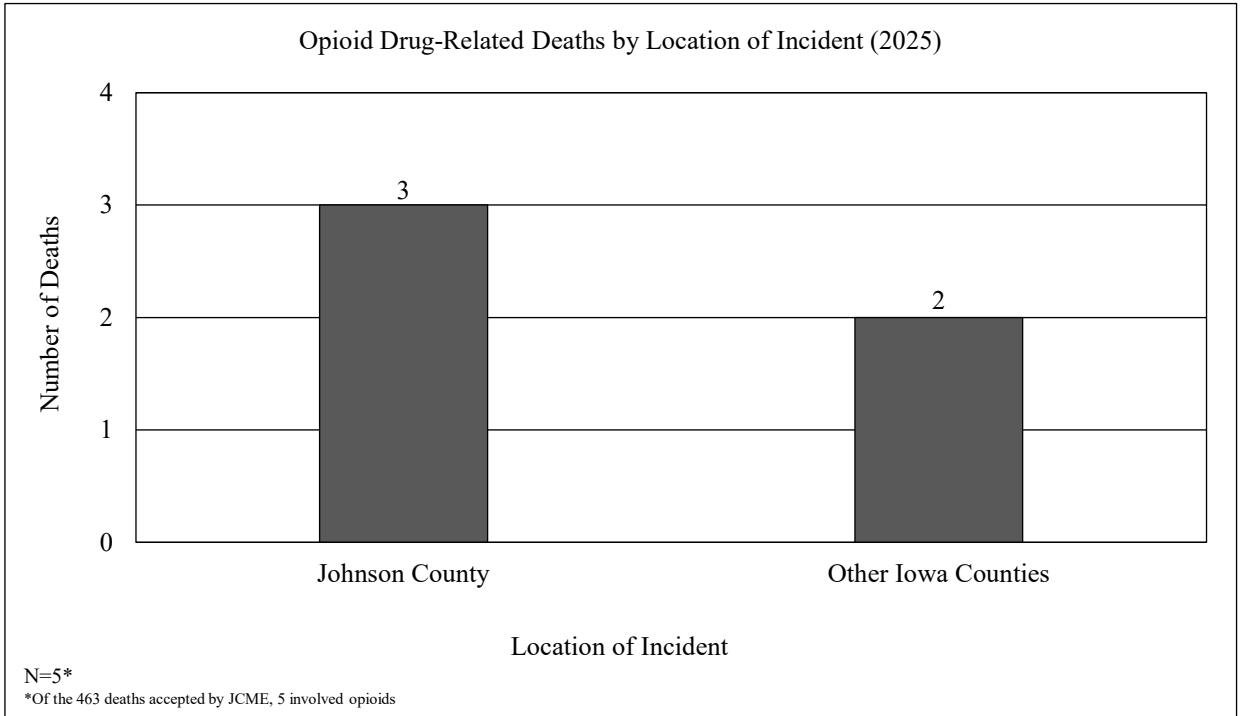


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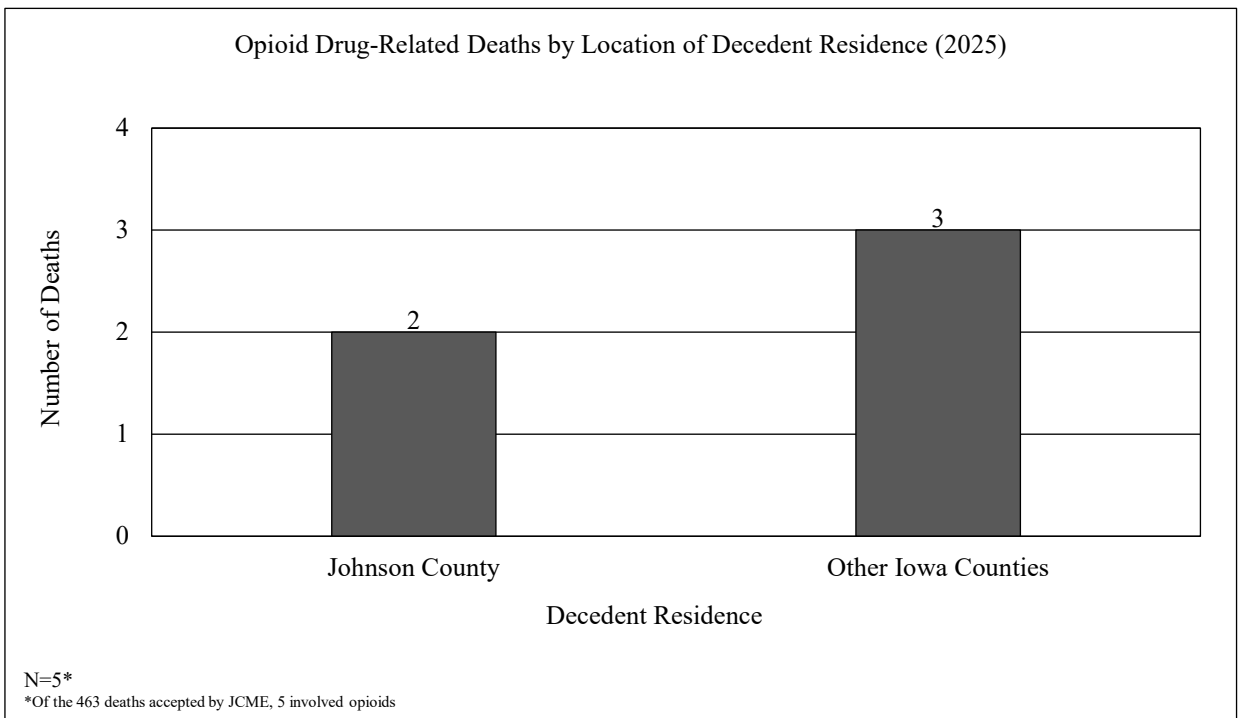


Figure 7.15.

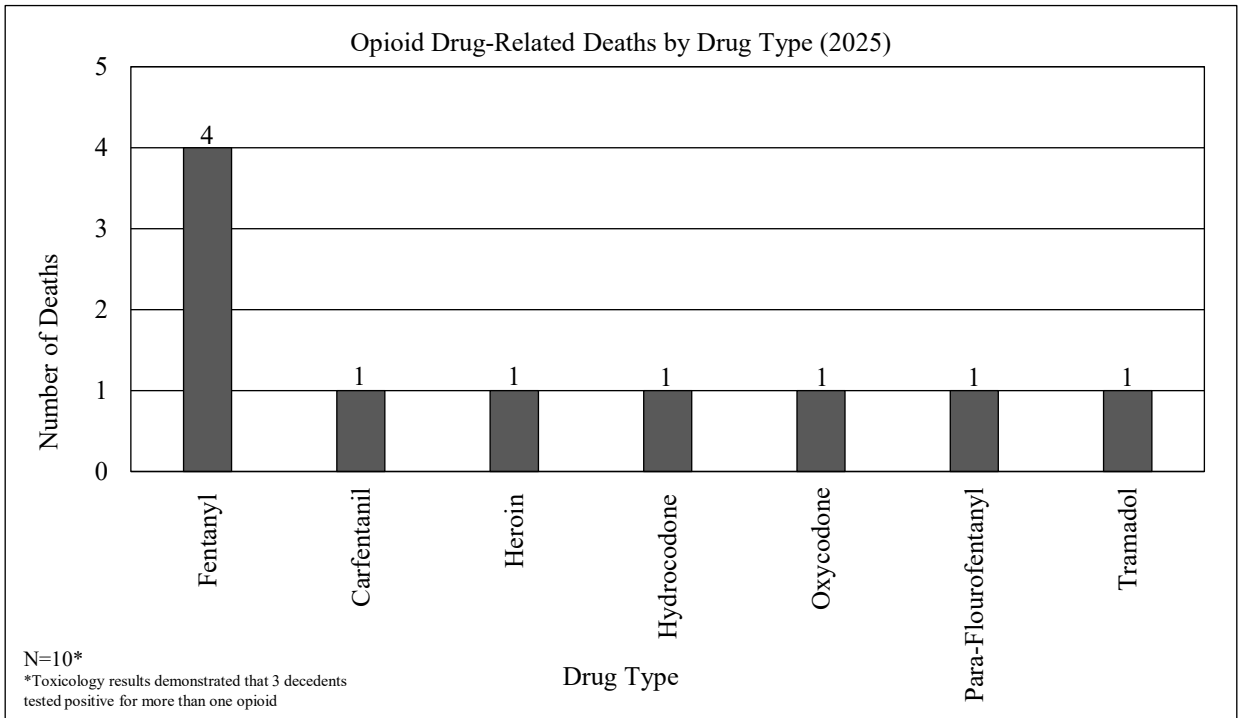


Figure 7.16.

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Older Adult Deaths

In 2025, JCME accepted jurisdiction of 323 deaths that involved adults aged 60 years and older. Of these, 152 were residents of Johnson County, 134 were residents of other Iowa counties, 20 were out-of-state residents, 16 were under the custody of the Iowa Department of Corrections, and 1 was under the custody of the Federal Bureau of Prisons. One hundred and fifty-three of these deaths were certified as accident, 160 as natural, 9 as suicide, and 1 as undetermined.

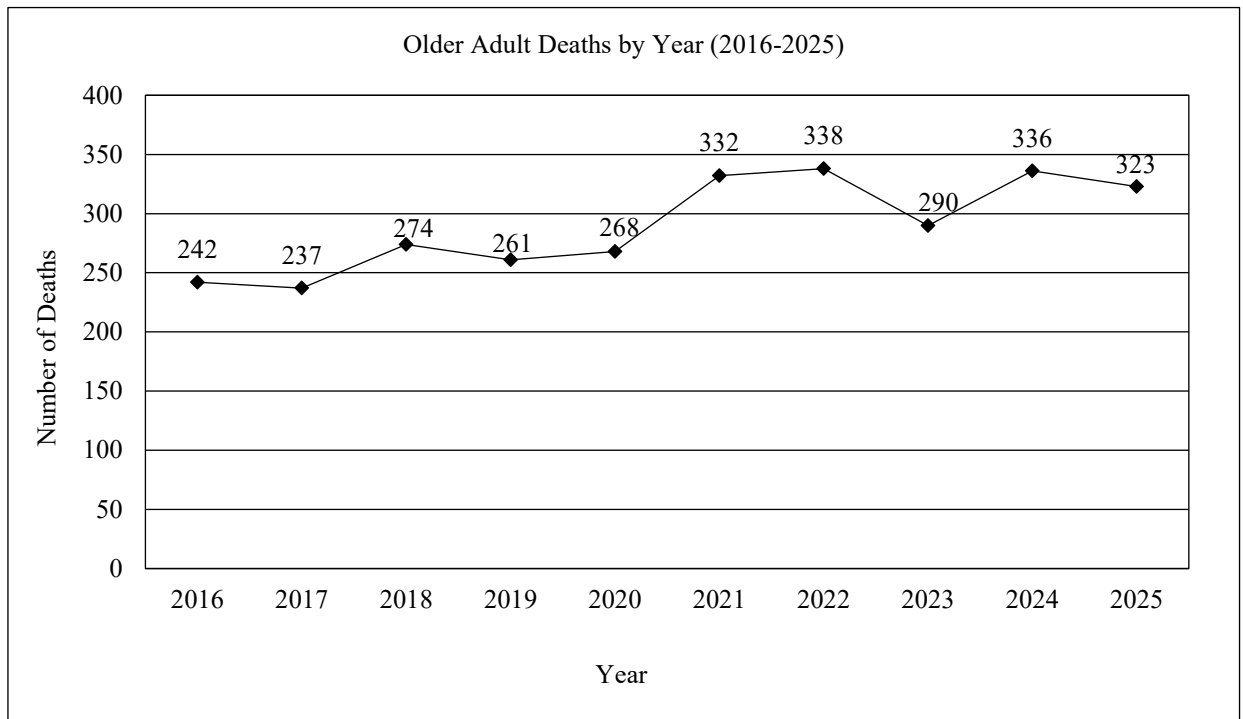


Figure 8.1.

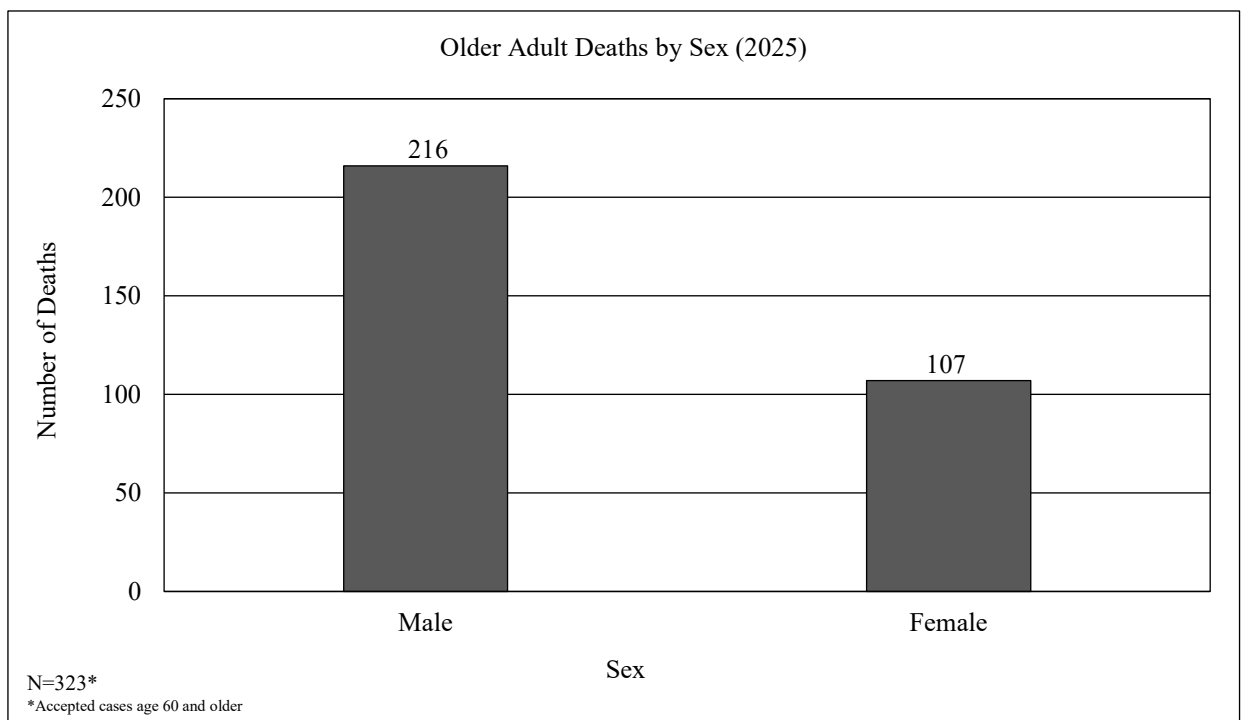


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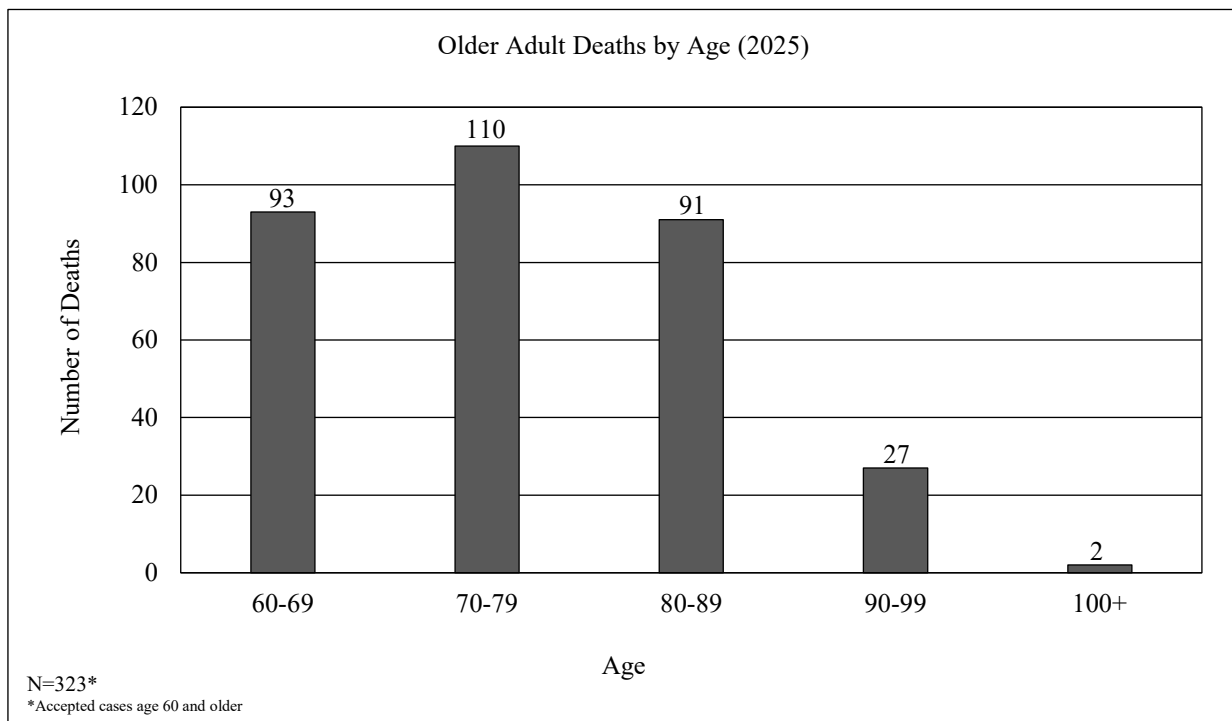


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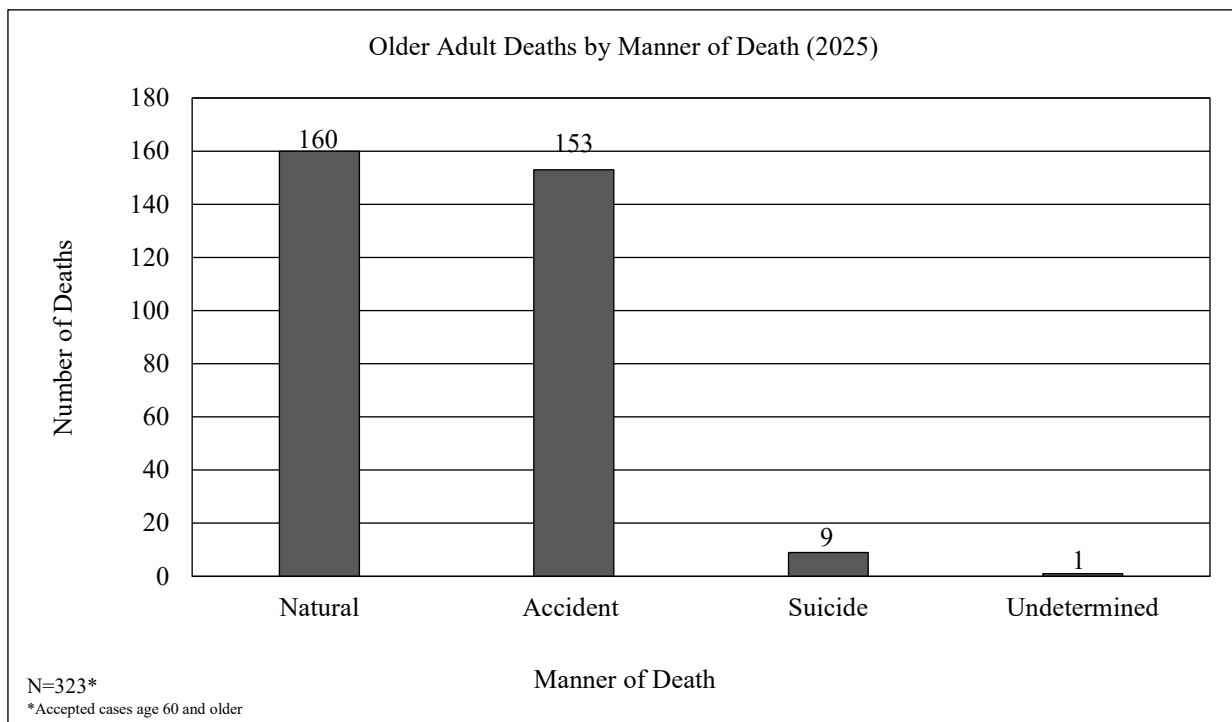


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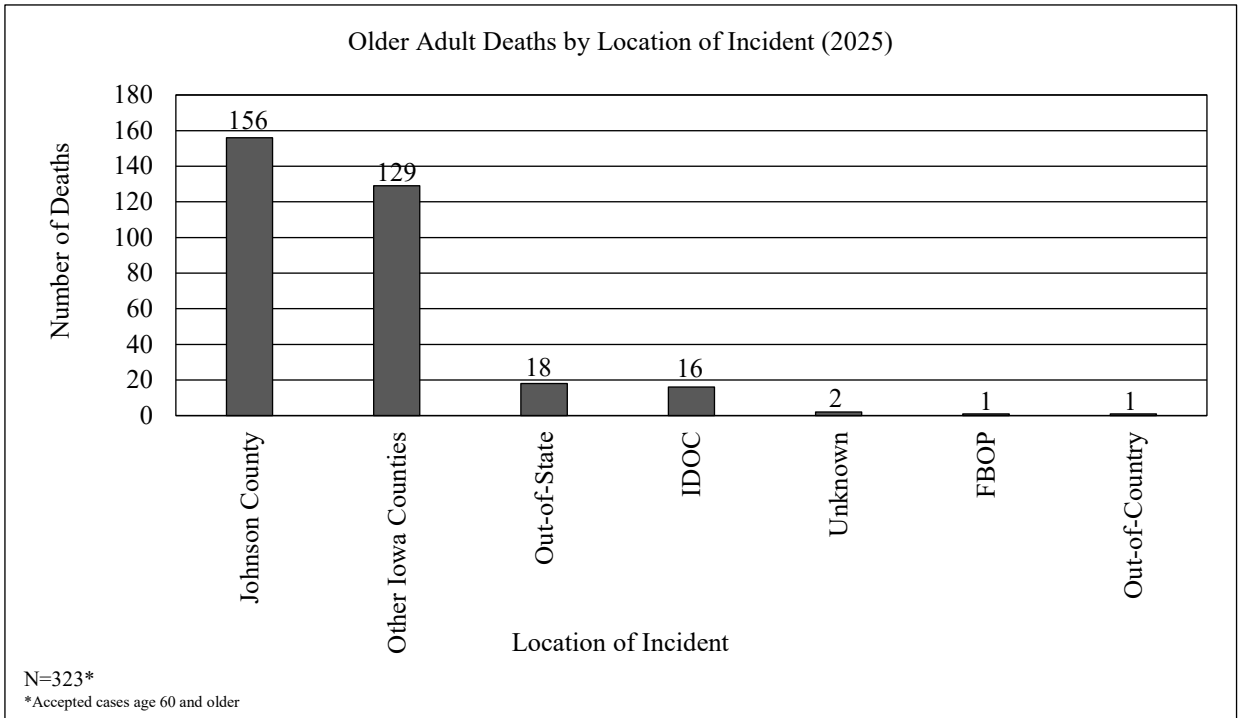


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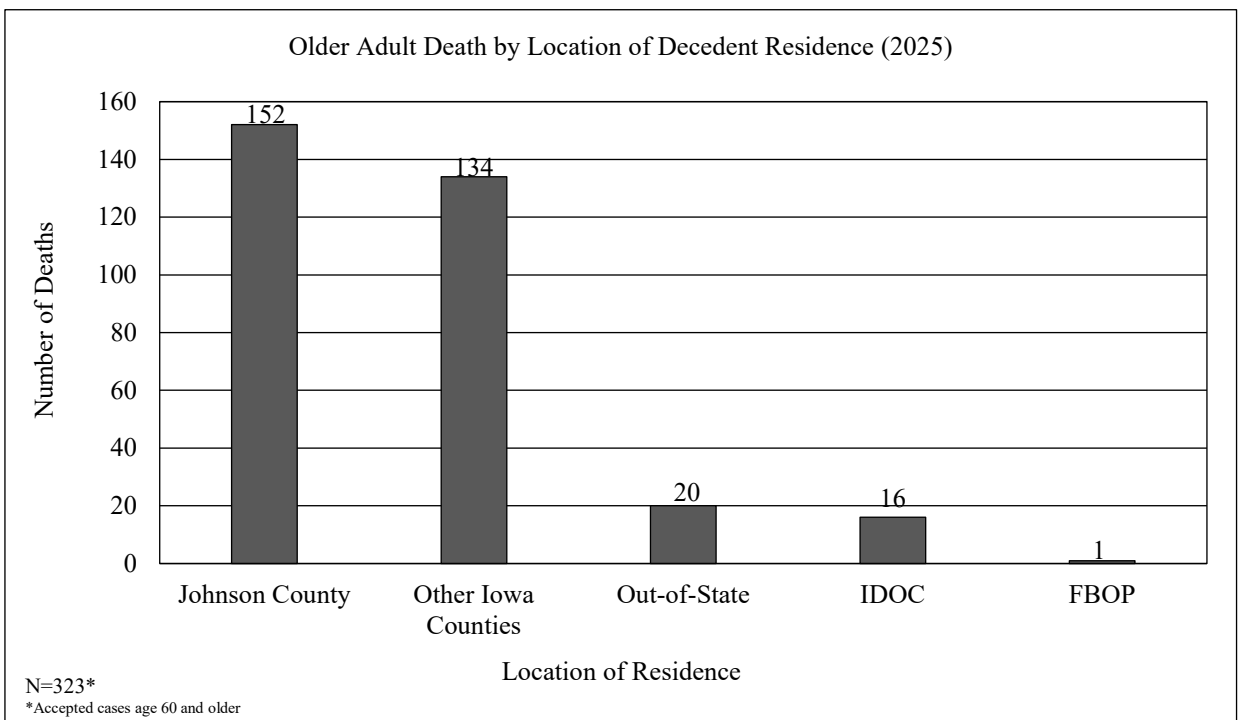


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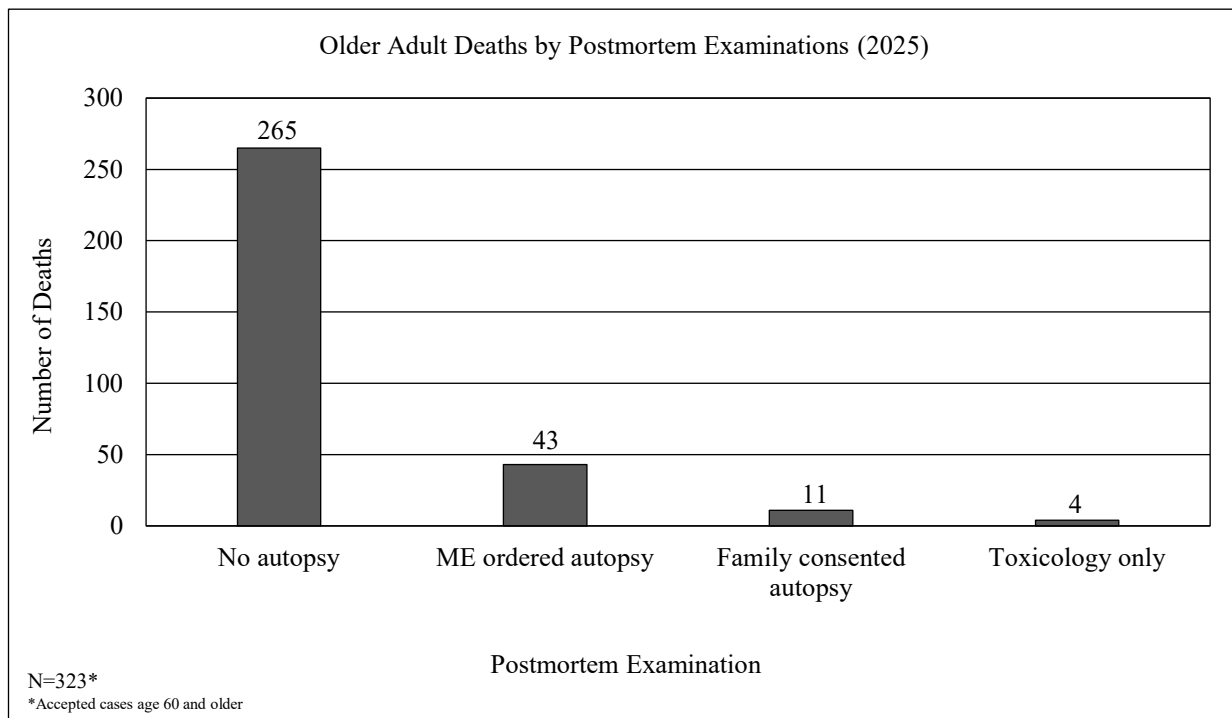


Figure 8.7.

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Older Adult Fall-Related Deaths

There were 323 deaths accepted by JCME of adults aged 60 and older. Of these, there were 103 in which the death was the result of an accidental fall. Of these fall-related deaths, 71 occurred from a standing height and 69 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 (55 decedents).

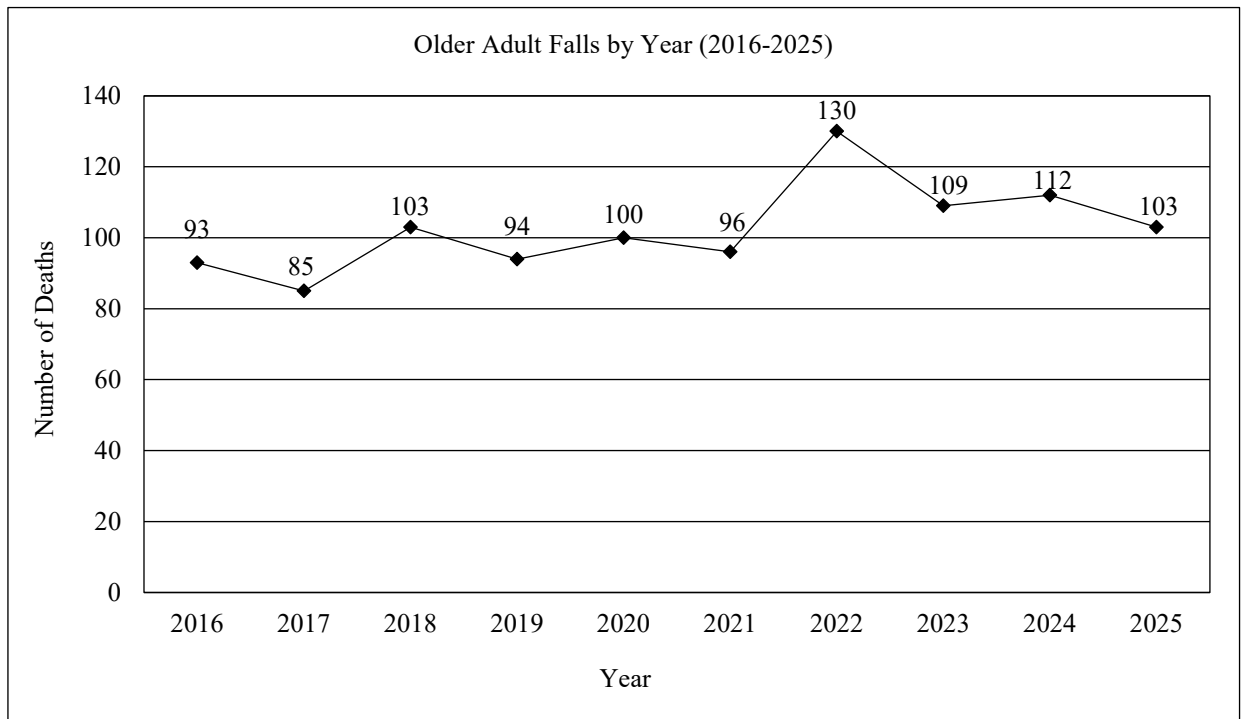


Figure 9.1.

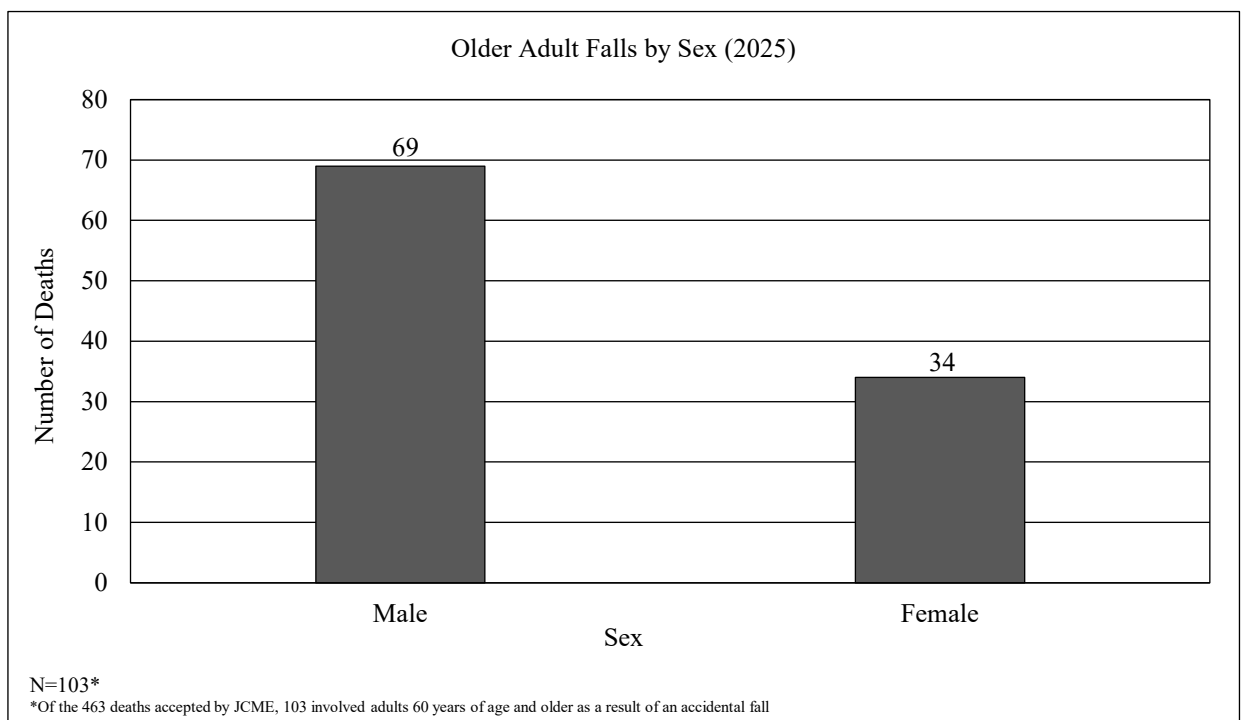


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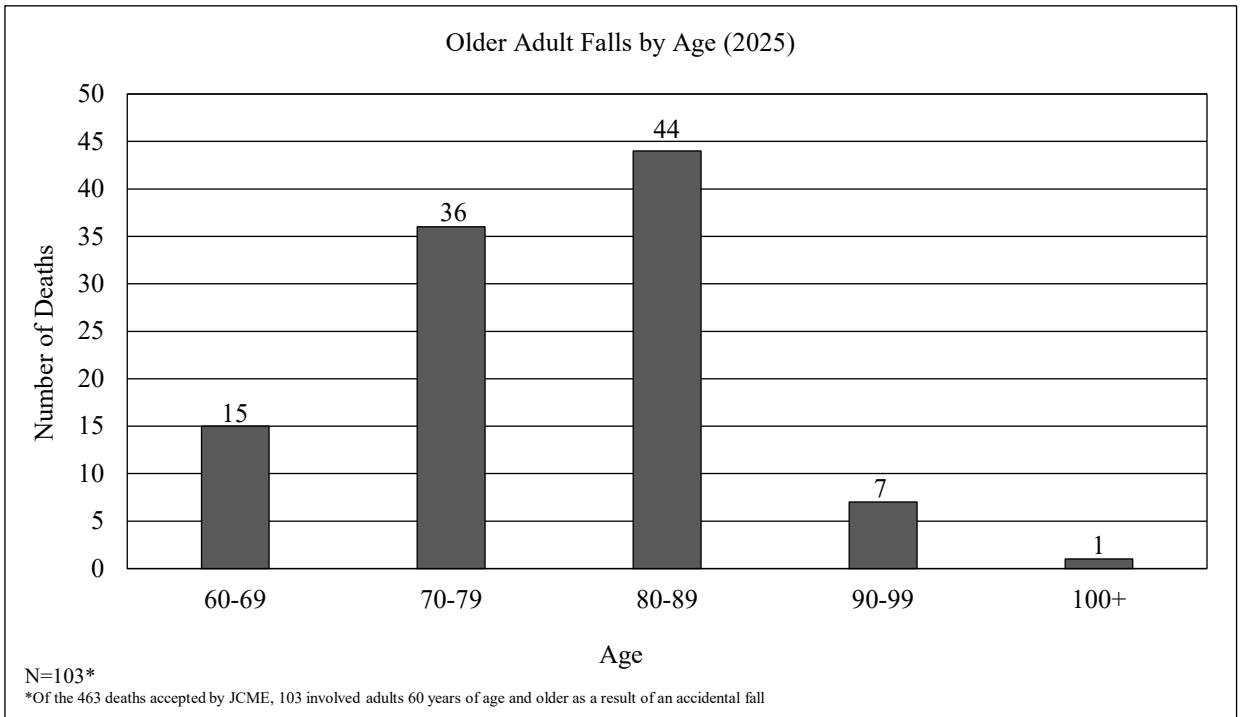


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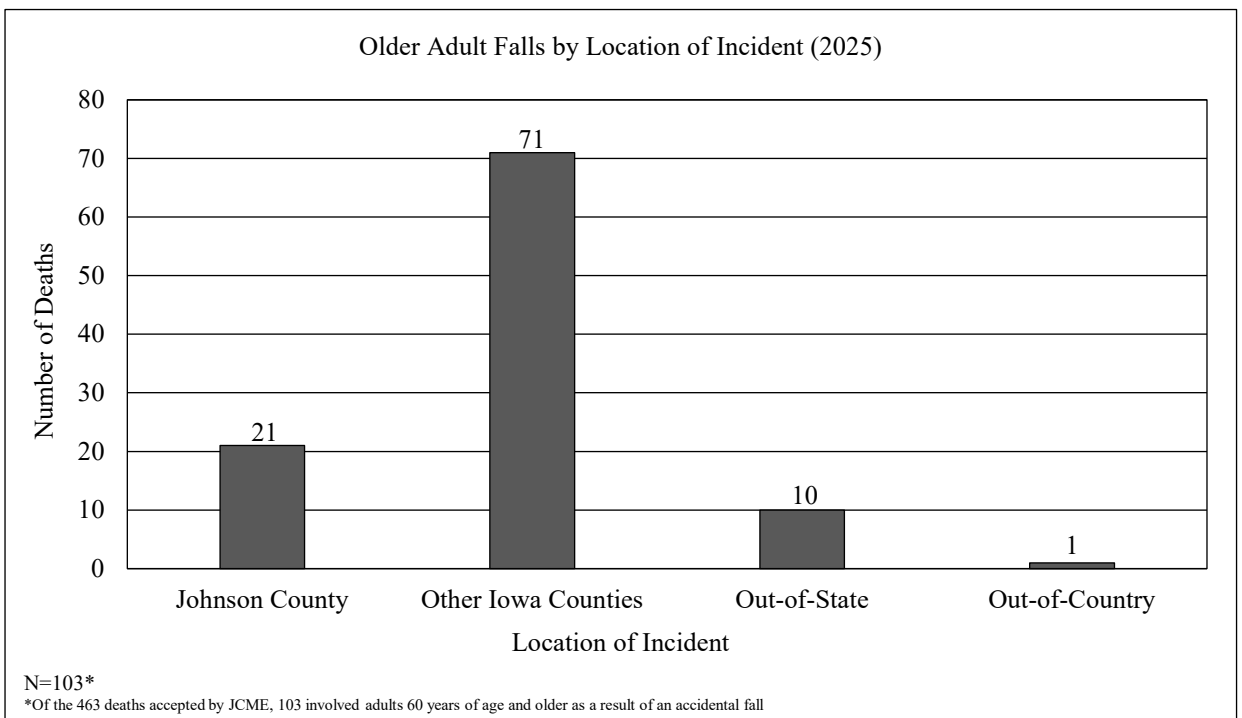


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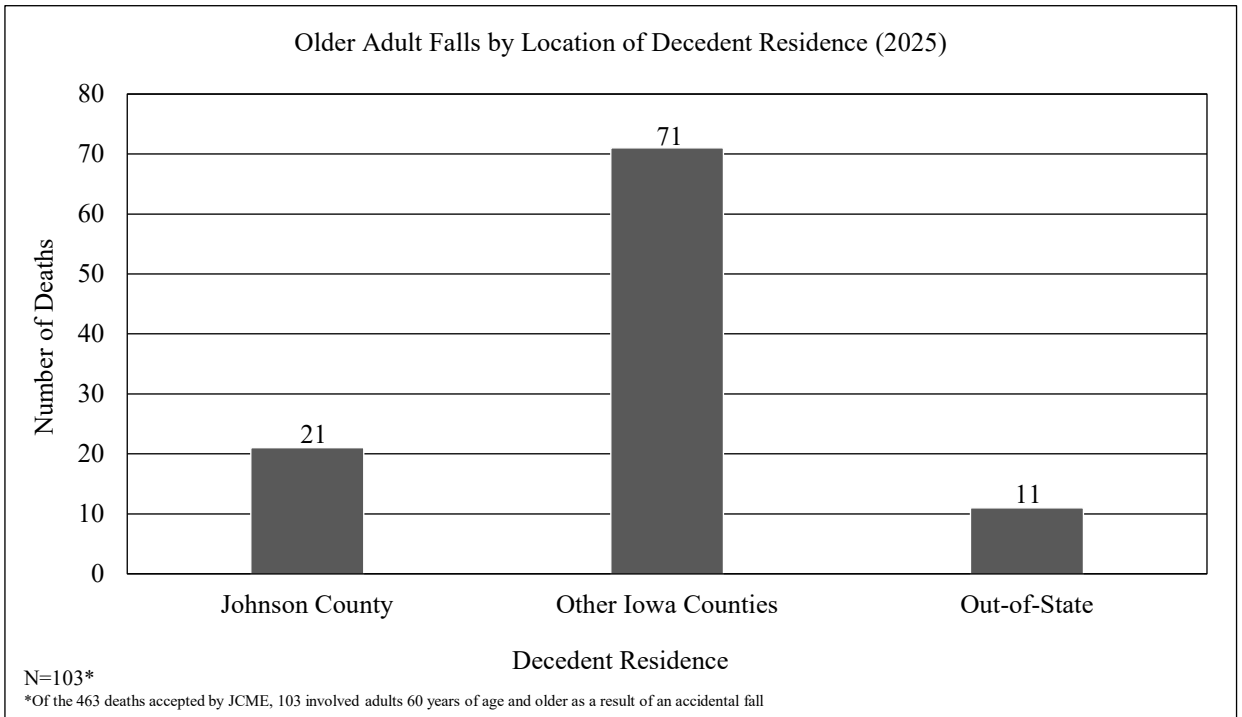


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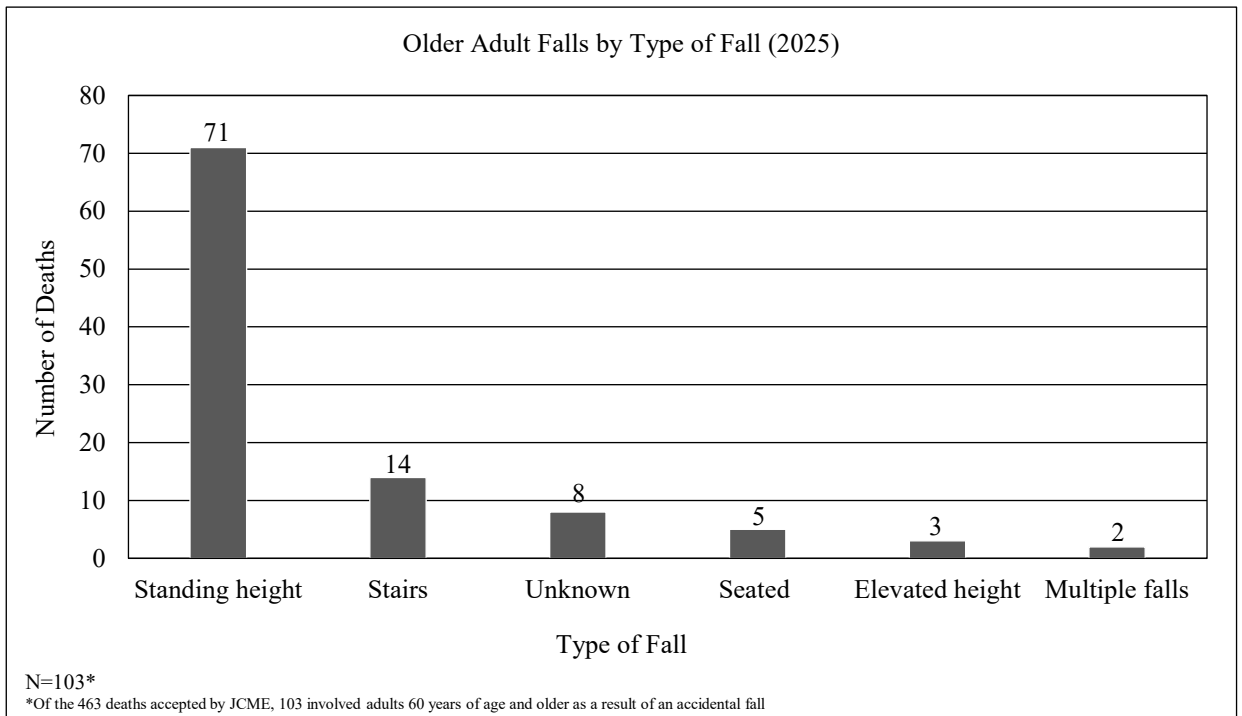


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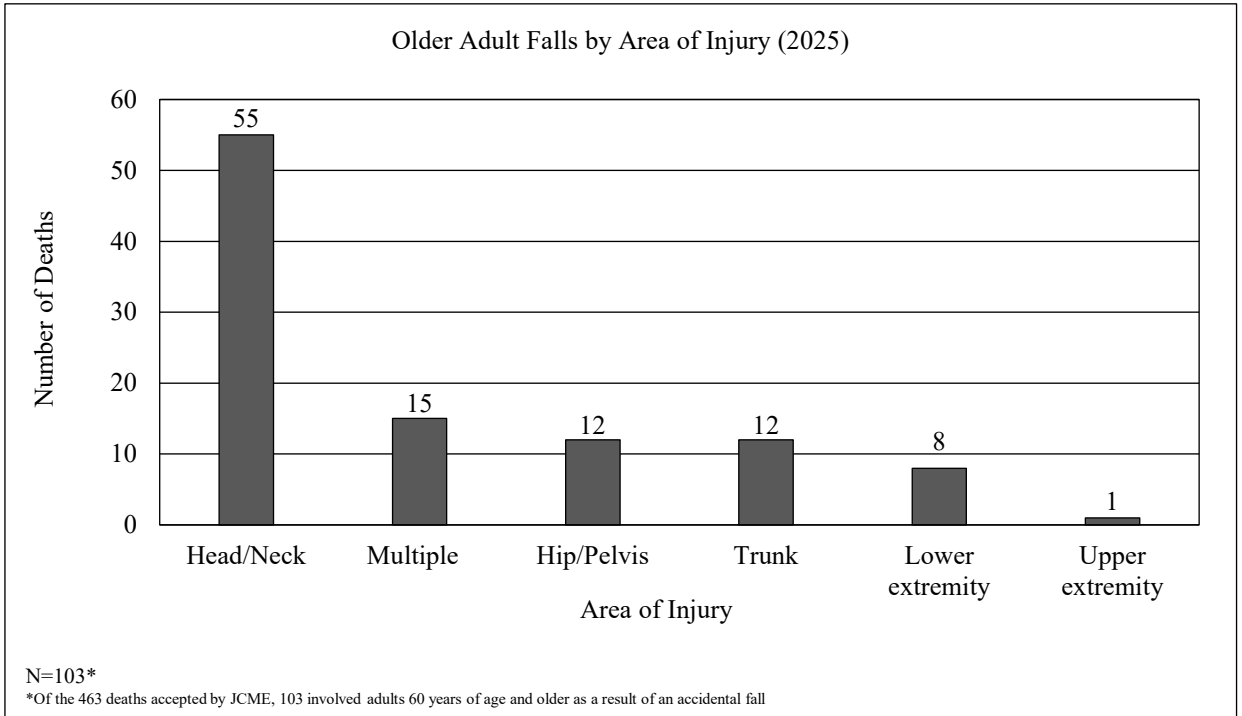


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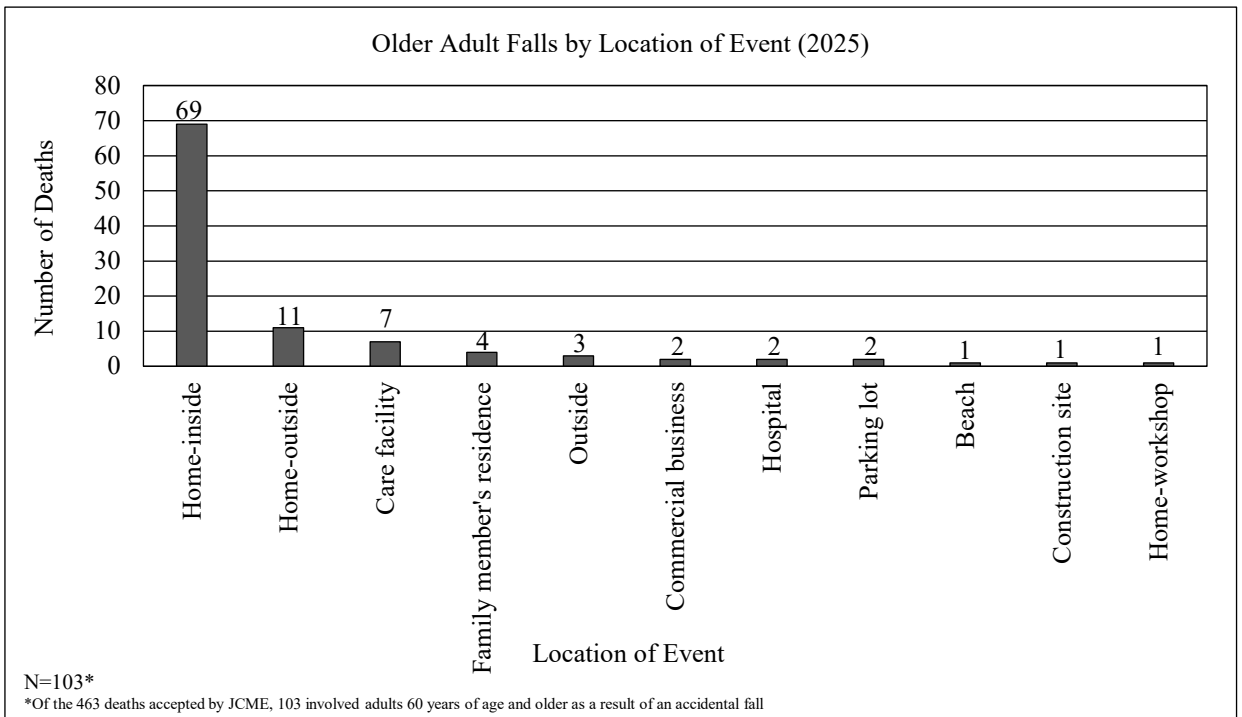


Figure 9.8.

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Child Deaths

In 2025, there were 19 deaths accepted by JCME of individuals 17 years of age and younger. Of these 19 deaths, 6 were classified as accident followed by 4 as undetermined, 3 as natural, 3 as suicide, and 3 as homicide. For 16 of these deaths, the incident location occurred in another Iowa county followed by 3 that occurred out-of-state. Of these 19 deaths accepted by JCME, there were 6 deaths of an infant one year of age or less. Of these 6 deaths, 3 were classified undetermined, 2 were classified as homicide, and 1 as accident. Autopsies were performed on all 6 infant deaths.

In 2025, there were 4 sleep-related infant deaths. For all four deaths the incident location occurred in another Iowa County.

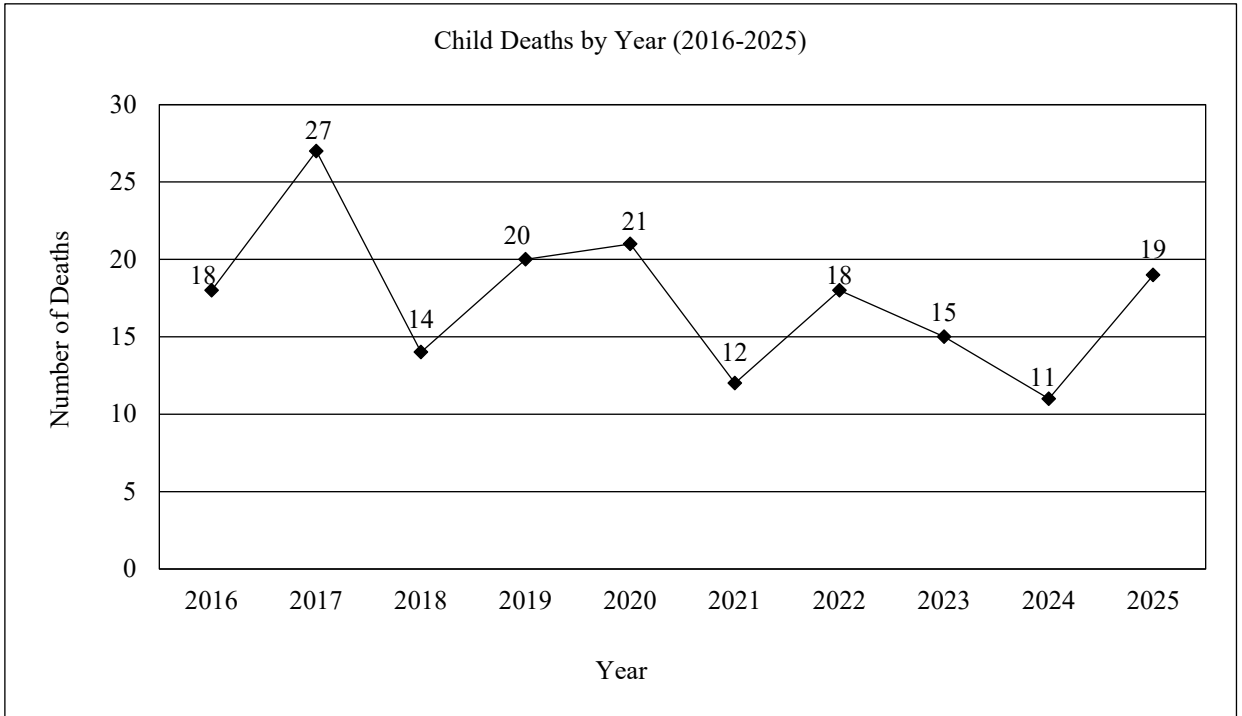


Figure 10.1.

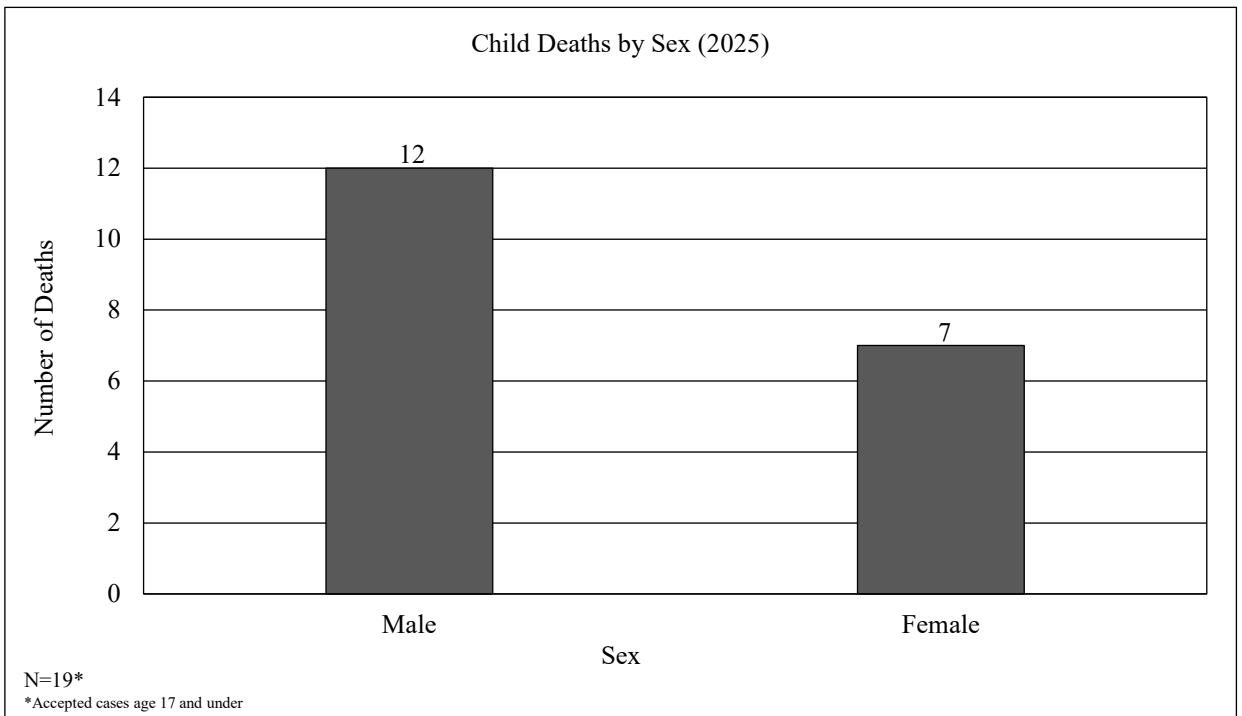


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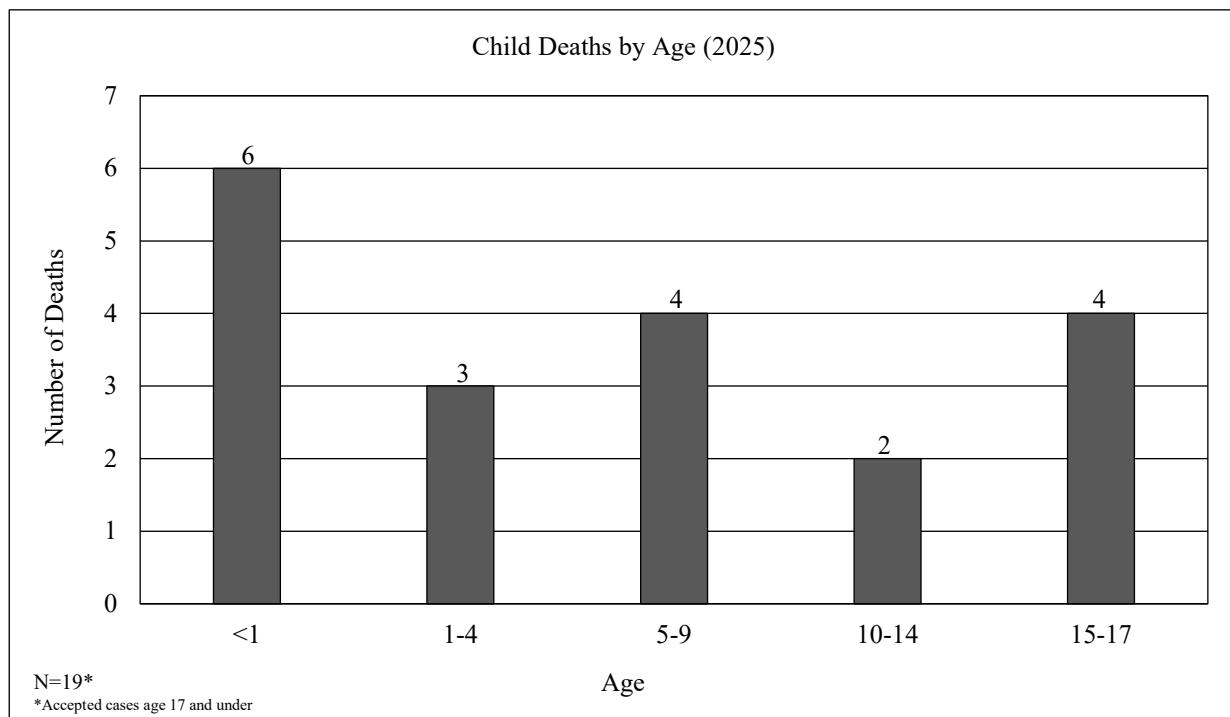


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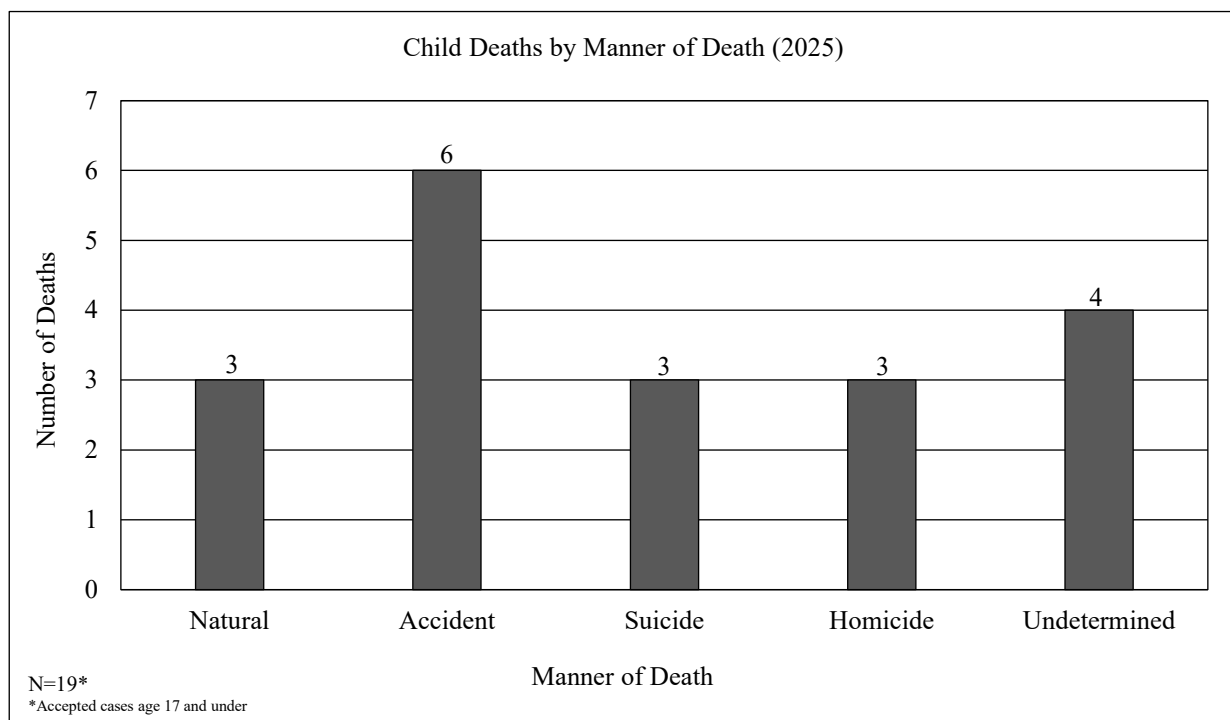


Figure 10.4.



Figure 10.5.

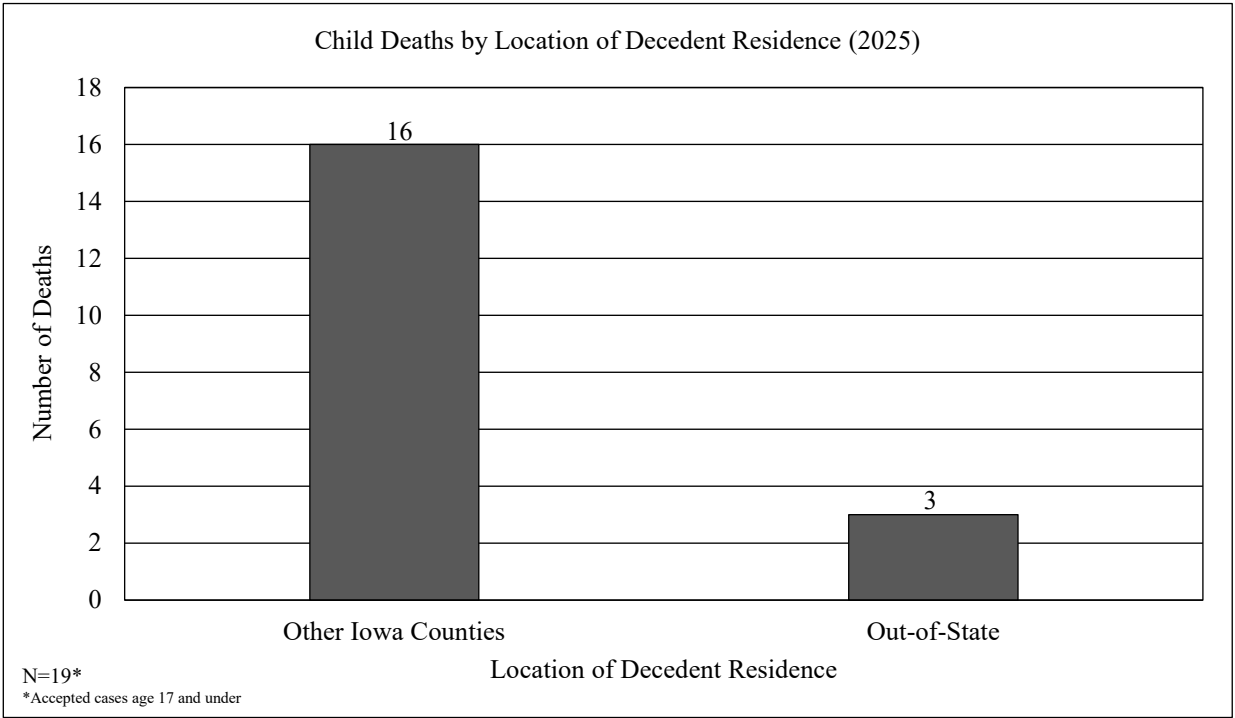


Figure 10.6.

Table 10.1. Infant Sleep-Related Deaths (2025)

Age	Sex	Manner of death	Cause of Death	Location of Incident
7 months	M	Accident	Asphyxia due to inversion into plastic lined container	Lee County
9 months	M	Undetermined	Unexplained infant death	Iowa County
10 months	M	Undetermined	Undetermined	Black Hawk County
2 months	F	Undetermined	Unexplained infant death	Black Hawk County

N=4*

*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 2025, JCME was 7% under our budgeted expenditures and 7% over our budgeted revenues.

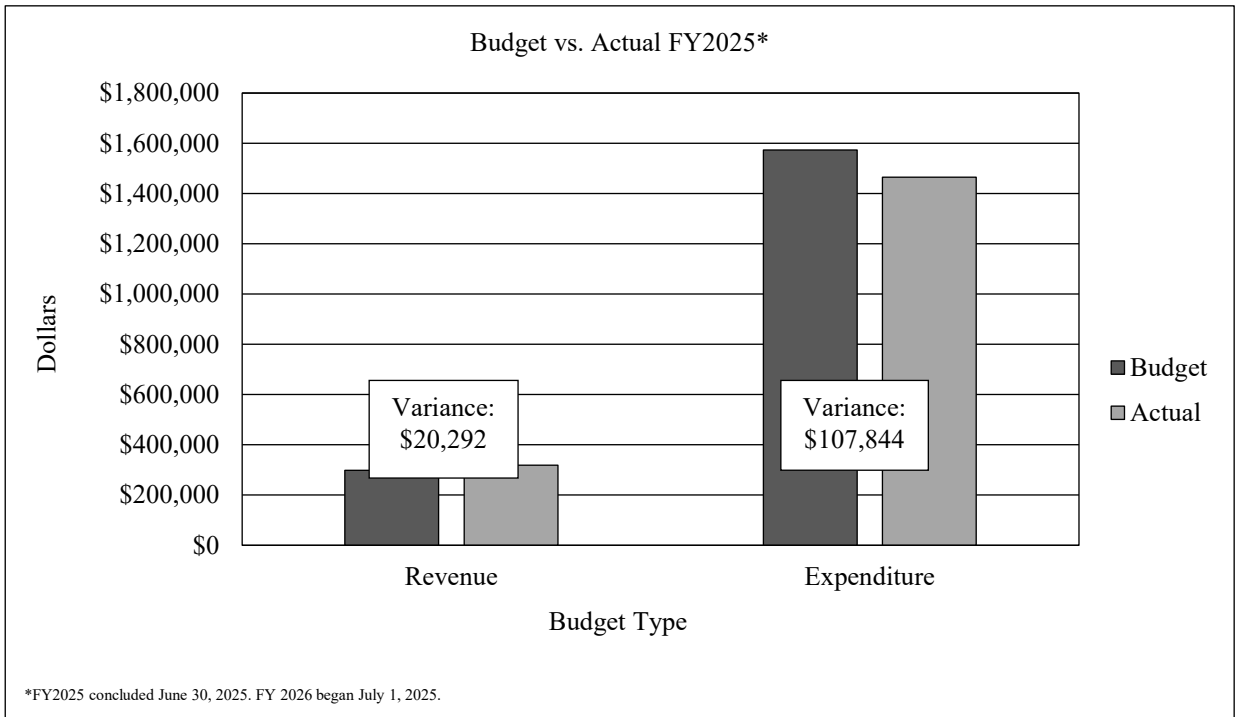


Figure 11.1.

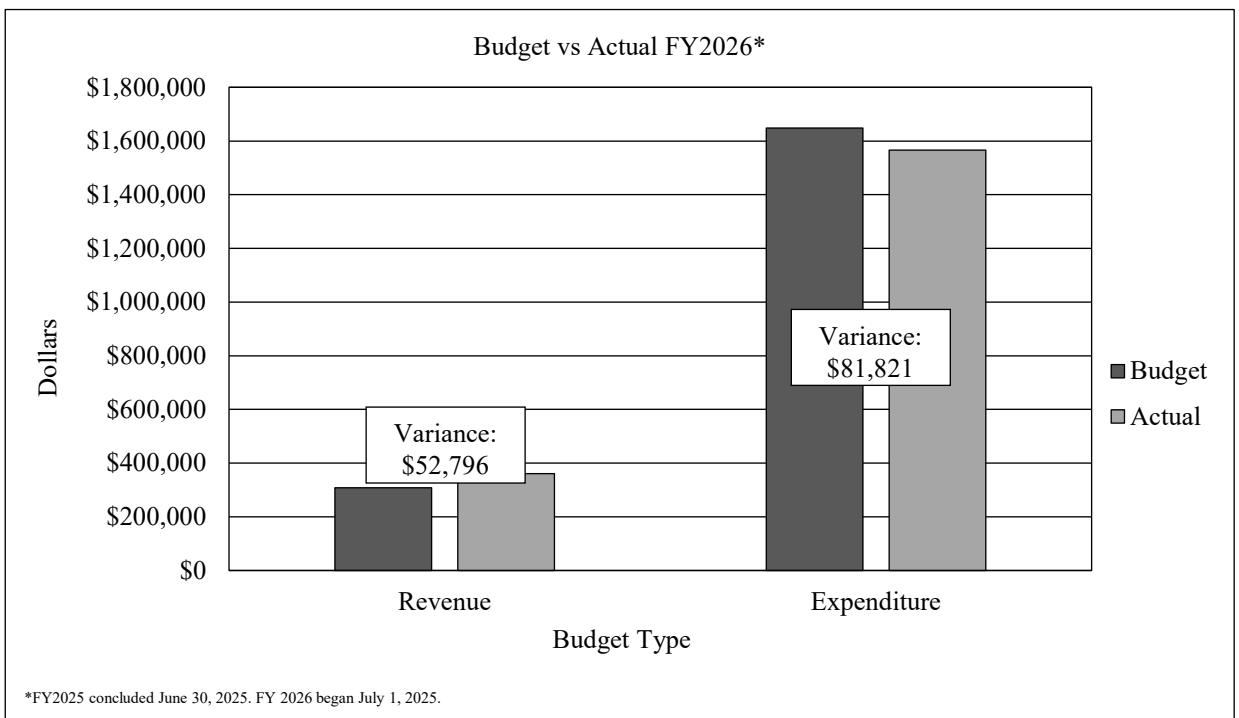


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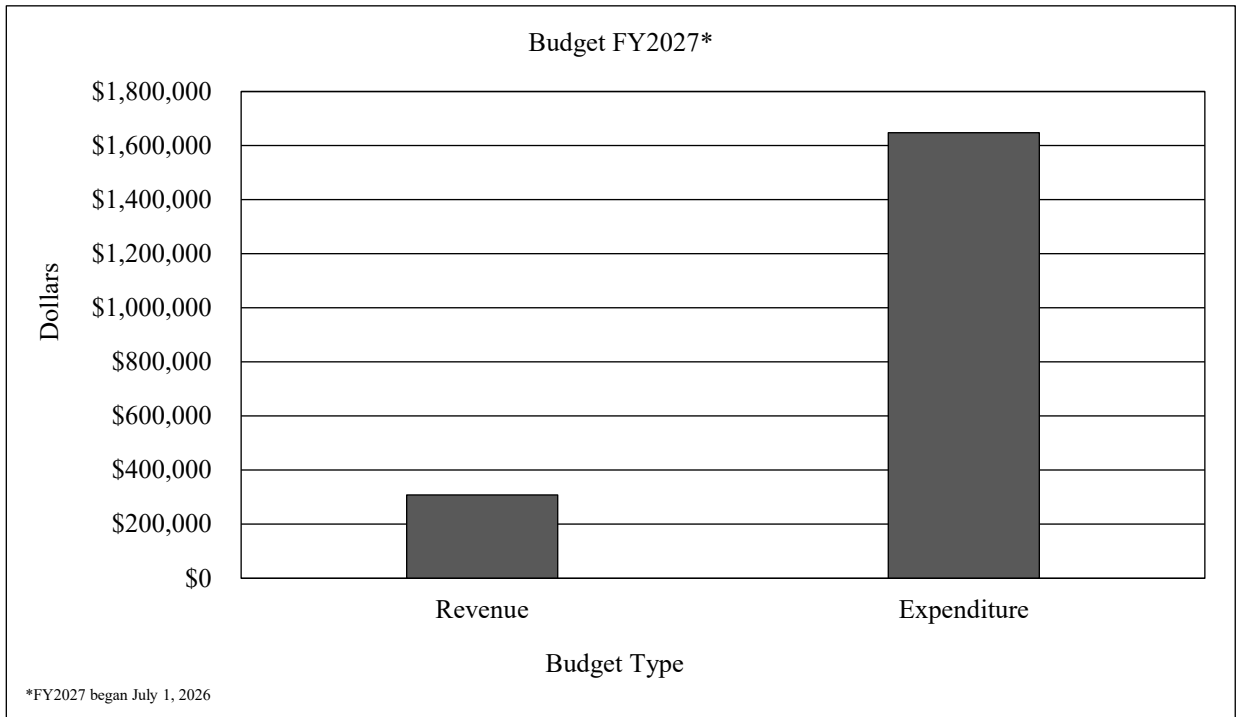


Figure 11.3.

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Organ and Tissue Donation

JCME has an essential role in the coordination of organ and tissue donation. In 2025, 14 decedents who were accepted accepted JCME cases became organ donors. From these 14 individuals, the Iowa Donor Network coordinated the recovery of 20 kidneys, 5 lungs (single), 6 livers, 8 hearts, 1 pancreas, and 1 small intestine for transplant. Twenty-four 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 (2025)

Organs Transplanted	
Hearts	8
Lungs (single lungs)	5
Livers	6
Kidneys (single kidneys)	20
Pancreases	1
Small Intestine	1
Total organ donors*	14 donors (41) organs transplanted**

*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network

**Total number of decedents who donated organs

Table 12.2. Tissues Transplanted from JCME Accepted Cases (2025)

Tissues Transplanted	
Bones	21
Skin	20
Heart valves	8
Saphenous veins	4
Femoral veins	4
Joint restoration	8
Corneas (single corneas)	34
Total recovered tissue donors*	24 donors**

*Information supplied by Iowa Donor Network

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