

**WHATCOM COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER  
1500 NORTH STATE STREET  
BELLINGHAM, WA 98225**

**RECEIVED**

FEB 29 2016

**JACK LOUWS  
COUNTY EXECUTIVE**

**2015 ANNUAL REPORT**

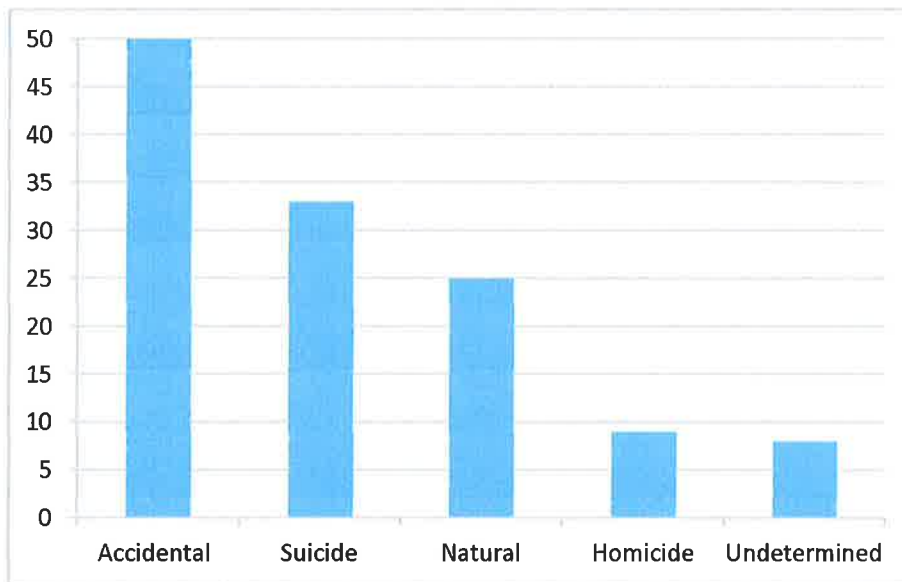
During 2015 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's office assumed jurisdiction in 125 death investigations that involved forensic autopsies, toxicological examinations, viewing and summary reporting. In addition, 211 other additional cases were reported to the office, investigated and no jurisdiction was assumed (NJA).

Teaching and public relations are also an important part of the Medical Examiner's office. Consulting was ongoing with the fire and police departments of the county and St. Joseph's Hospital. In addition, college and high school classes toured the morgue facility. The Medical Examiner also represented the office on numerous occasions to various civic organizations and gave multiple lectures at Western Washington University, University of Washington, Whatcom Community College, Bellingham Technical College and all three Bellingham High Schools.

  
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Gary Goldfogel, MD  
Whatcom County Medical Examiner

During 2015 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office conducted 125 forensic death investigations. The manner of death was certified as 50 Accidents, 33 Suicides, 25 Naturals, 9 Homicides and 8 as Undetermined. The statistics and graphs on the following pages show the breakdown of the various manners of the deaths and the age and sex of those who died.

## Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office Death Investigations 2015

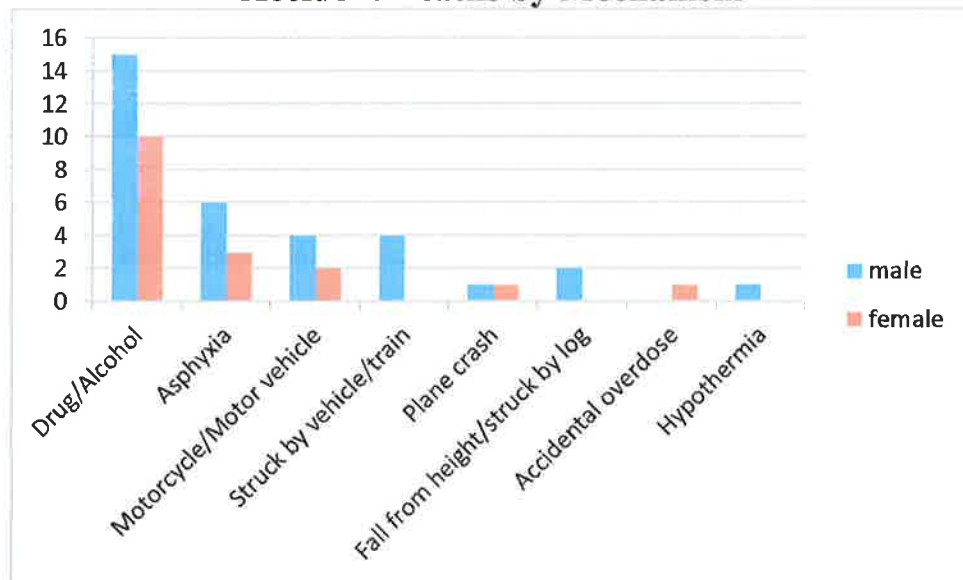


## ACCIDENT:

There were 50 total investigated accident deaths in which 33 of the victims were male and 17 were female. The circumstances of death were as follows: 25 Drug/alcohol, 9 Asphyxia (positional, drowning, inhalation), 6 Motorcycle/motor vehicle, 4 Pedestrian/bicyclist struck by vehicle/train, 2 Plane crash, 2 Fall from height/struck by log, 1 Iatrogenic overdose, and 1 Hypothermia.

Seatbelts were worn in all of the motor vehicle accidents. Motorcyclists, kayakers and all but one bicyclist wore a helmet. Personal floatation devices (PFDs) were also used or at least brought along on kayaking accidents.

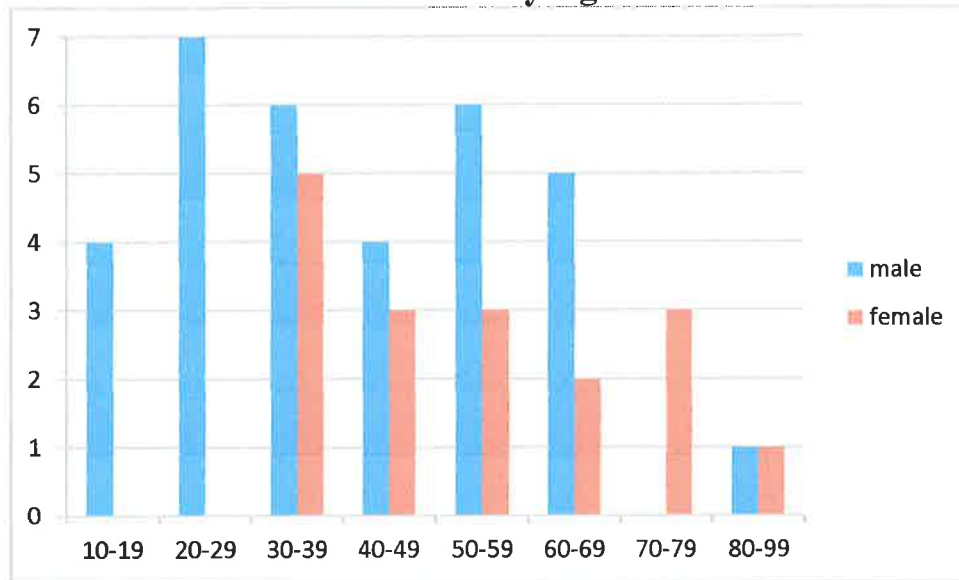
**Accident Deaths by Mechanism**



\* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized by age, 4 of the 50 accidental deaths were between 10-19 years of age, 7 between 20-29, 11 between 30-39, 7 between 40-49, 9 between 50-59, 7 between 60-69, 3 between 70-79, and 2 between 80-89 years of age.

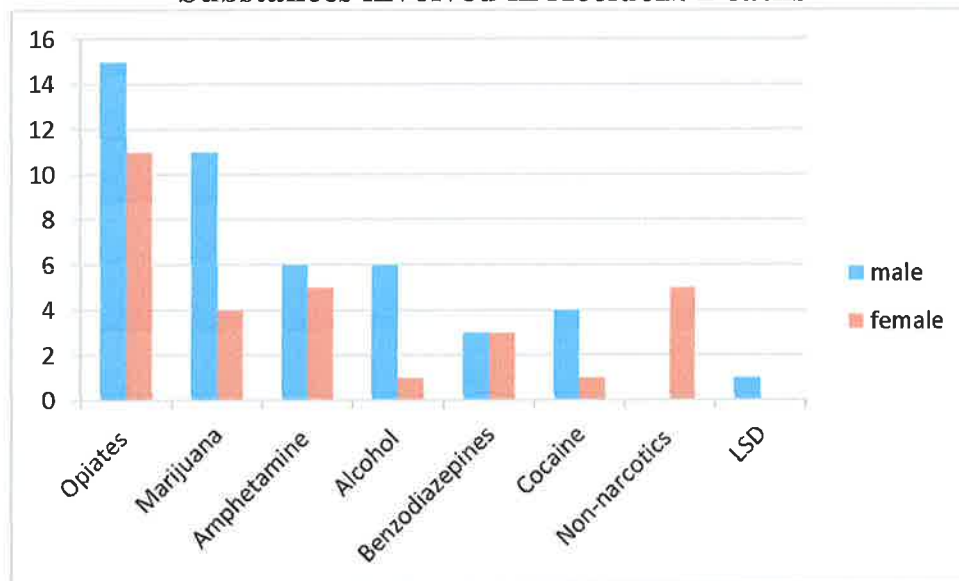
### Accident Deaths by Age and Sex



\* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Of the 50 accidental deaths, opiates (predominately heroin) were involved in 26, marijuana was involved in 15, amphetamines were involved in 11, benzodiazepines were involved in 6, cocaine was involved in 5, non-narcotics (pain relievers and antidepressants) were involved in 5 and LSD in one. Alcohol was involved in 7 of the 50 accidental death cases with a blood alcohol level above 0.08 with a maximum blood alcohol of 0.25.

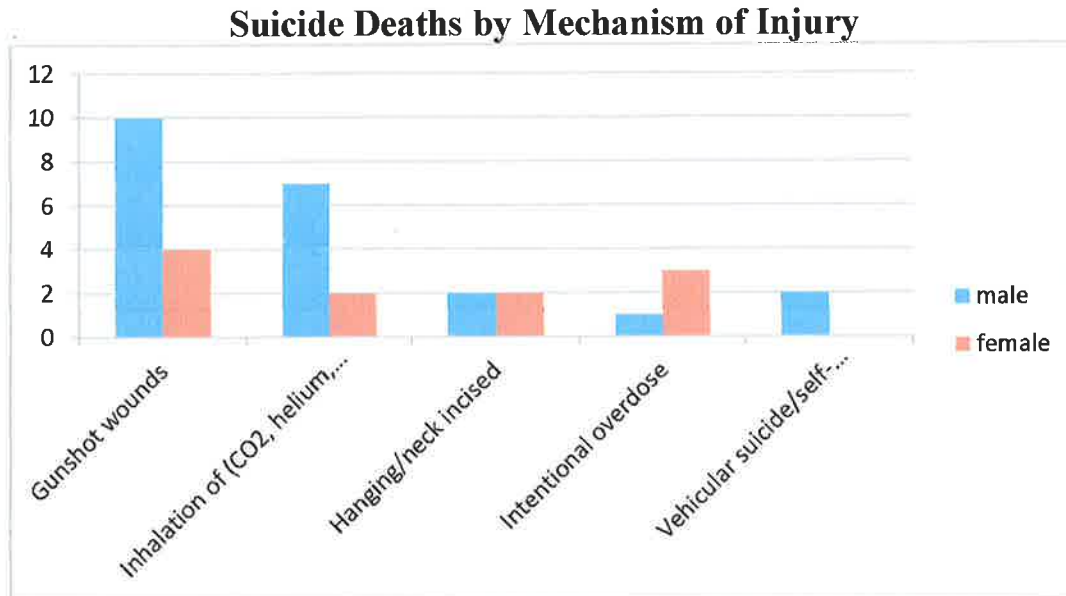
### Substances involved in Accident Deaths



\* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

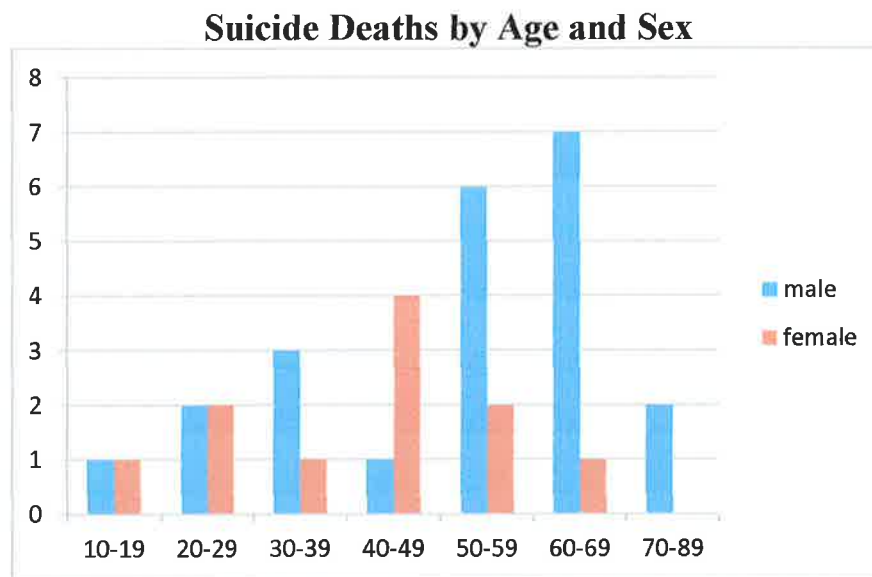
## SUICIDE:

There were 33 total investigated suicide deaths of which 22 were male and 11 were female. The causes of death were as follows: 14 Gunshot wounds, 9 Asphyxia (inhalation of CO2, helium, nitrogen or by drowning), 4 Hanging/neck incised, 4 Intentional overdose, 2 Vehicular suicide/self-immolation.



\* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

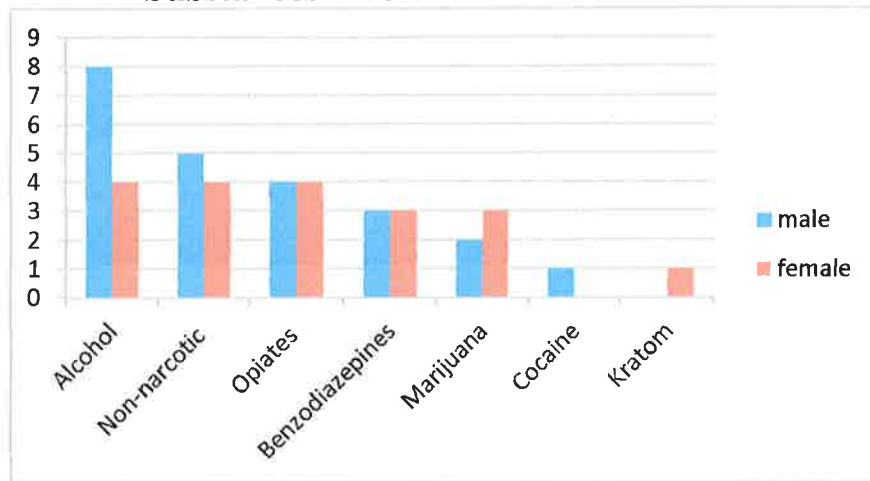
Categorized by age, 2 of the 33 suicide deaths were between 10-19 years of age, 4 between 20-29, 4 between 30-39, 5 between 40-49, 8 between 50-59, 8 between 60-69, and 2 between 70-79 years of age.



\*Blue bars are male and red bars female.

Alcohol was involved in 12 of the 33 suicide deaths but only 9 had a blood alcohol above 0.08 with a maximum blood alcohol of 0.31. Non-narcotic drugs such as anti-depressants, pain relievers and benadryl were involved in 9 of the 33 suicide deaths, cough syrup (dextromethorphan) in 1, and Kratom in 1. Narcotic drugs such as opiates were involved in 8 of the 33 suicide deaths, benzodiazepines in 6, marijuana in 5, and cocaine in 1. A combination of either a non-narcotic, narcotic, and alcohol was usually involved in the suicide deaths.

### Substances involved in Suicide Deaths

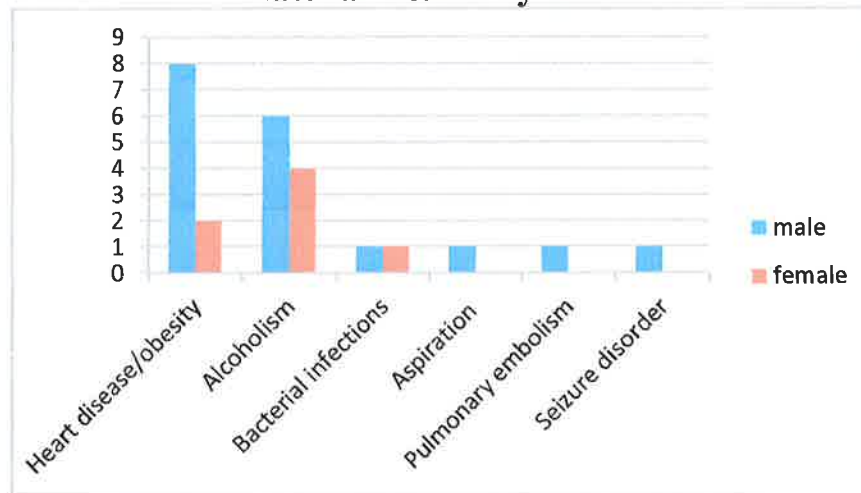


\* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

## NATURAL:

There were 25 total investigated and autopsied natural unexpected/unexplained deaths of which 18 were male and 7 were female. The causes of death were as follows: 10 Heart disease/obesity, 10 Alcoholism, 2 Bacterial infections, 1 Aspiration, 1 Pulmonary embolism, and 1 Seizure disorder. In addition, 8 of the 25 natural deaths were obese.

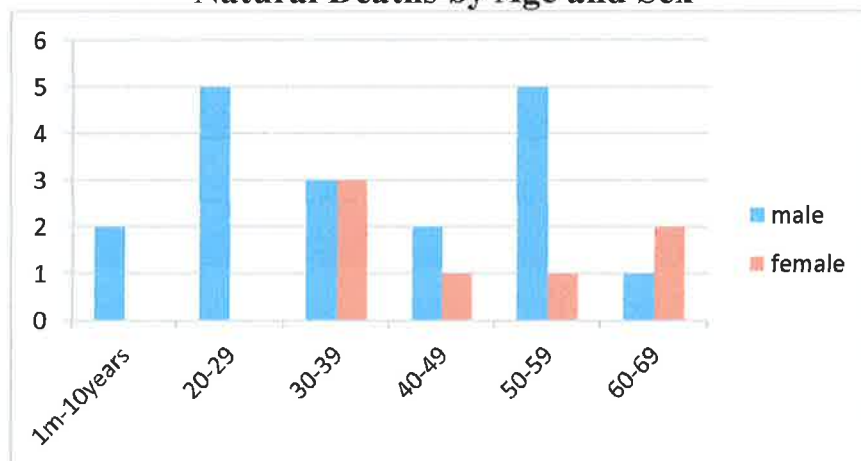
**Natural Deaths by Cause**



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized age, 2 of the 25 natural deaths were between 1 month-10 years of age, 5 were between 20-29, 6 between 30-39, 3 between 40-49, 6 between 50-59, and 3 between 60-69 years of age.

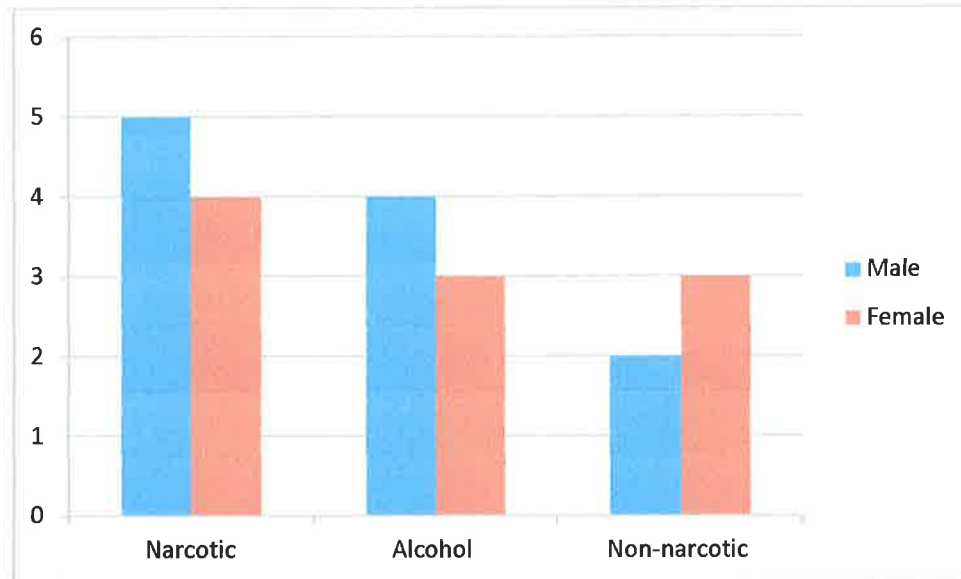
**Natural Deaths by Age and Sex**



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Alcohol was present in 7 of the 25 natural deaths but a blood alcohol above 0.08 was only involved in 4 of the 25 natural deaths with a maximum blood alcohol of 0.24. Narcotic drugs were present in 9 of the 25 natural death cases and included one or a combination of the following: Marijuana, opiates, methadone, amphetamines, and benzodiazepines. Non-narcotic drugs were present in 5 of the cases and included one or a combination of the following: Antidepressants, Tylenol, Benadryl and Flexeril.

### Substances involved in Natural Deaths



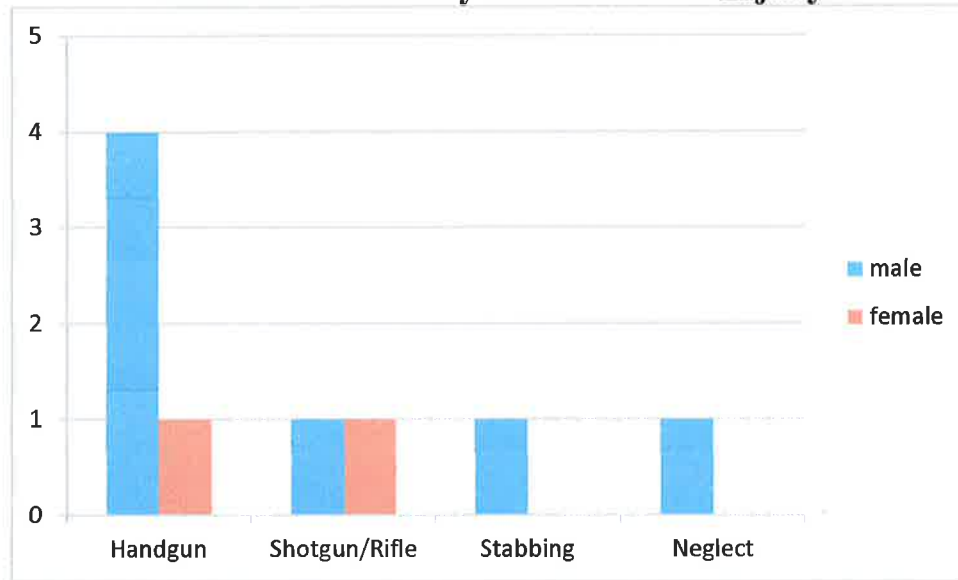
\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.



## HOMICIDE:

There were 9 homicide death cases, 7 of which were male and 2 female. The mechanism of injury for the homicide deaths was: 5 Handgun, 2 Shotgun/rifle, 1 Stabbing and 1 Neglect.

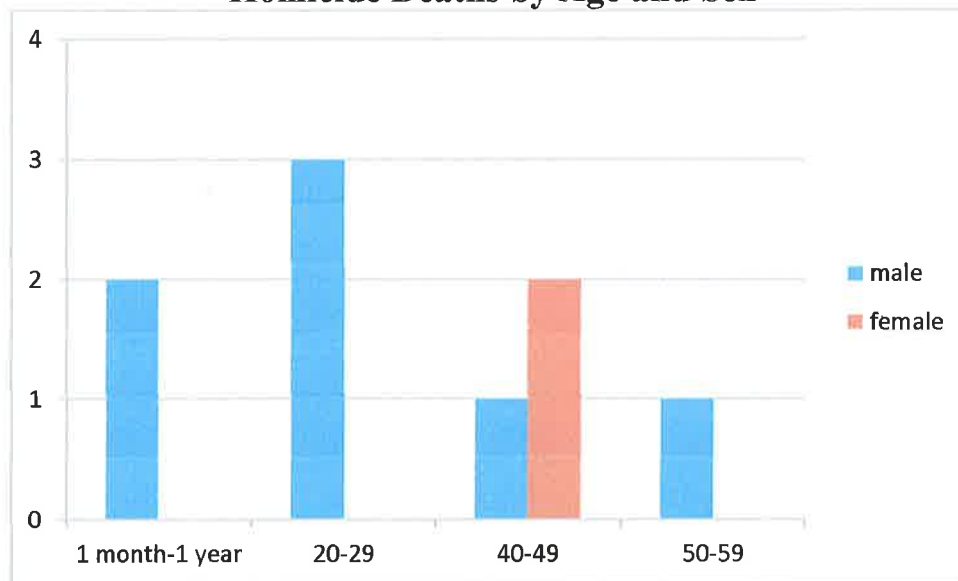
**Homicide Deaths by Mechanism of Injury**



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized by age, 2 of homicide deaths were between 1 month and 1 year of age, 3 were between 20-29, 3 between 40-49, and 1 between 50-59 years of age.

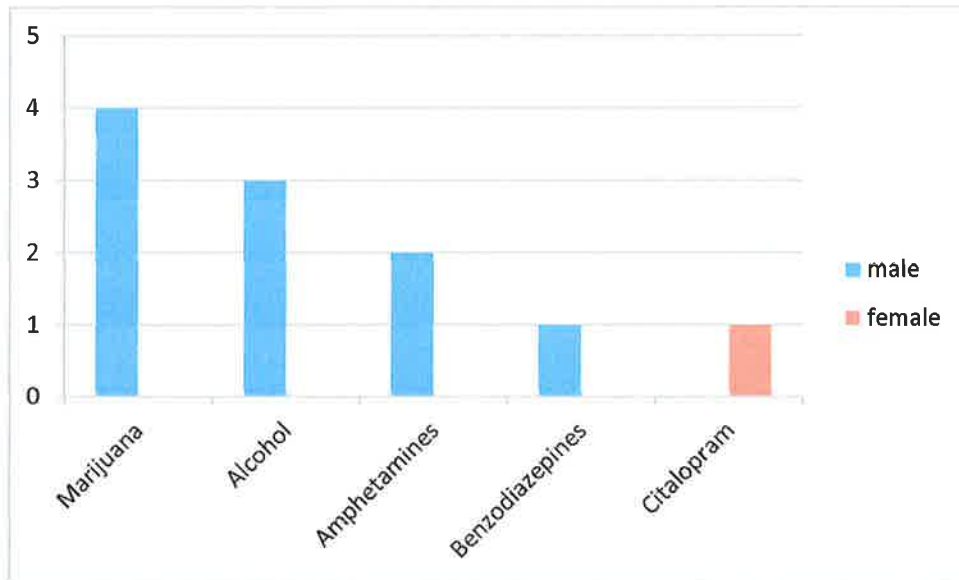
**Homicide Deaths by Age and Sex**



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

More than one of the following drugs were involved in the 9 homicide deaths. Marijuana was involved in 4 of the homicide deaths, blood alcohol above the level of 0.08 was involved in 3 of the homicide deaths with a maximum blood alcohol of 0.28. Amphetamines were involved in 2, benzodiazepines were involved in 1 and citalopram was involved in 1 homicide death.

### Substances involved in Homicide Deaths



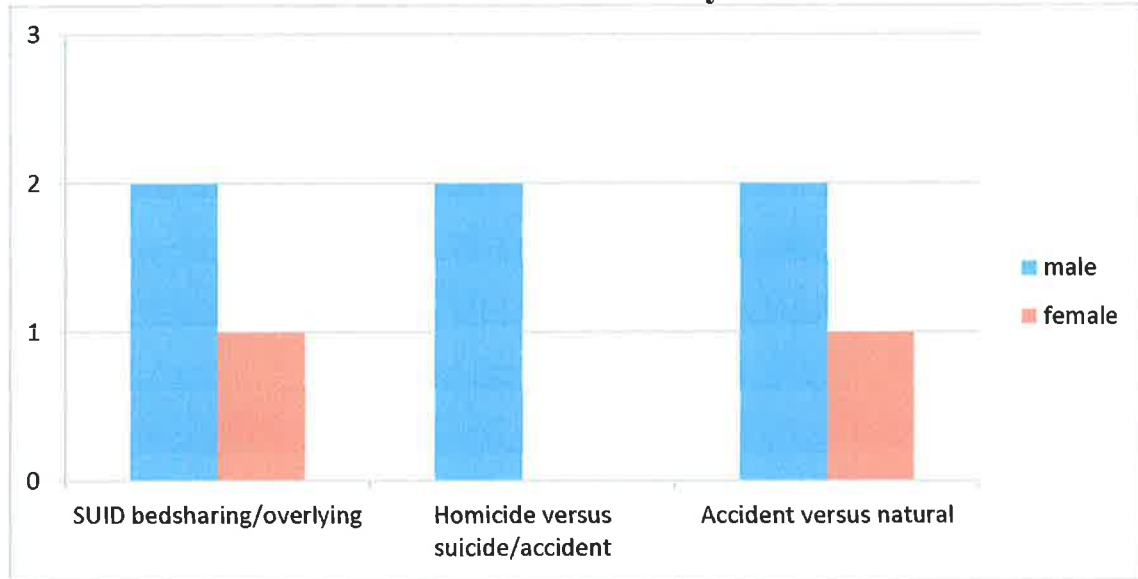
\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

## UNDETERMINED:

There were 8 investigated deaths whose manner of death after complete forensic autopsy and investigation were listed as undetermined of which 6 were male and 2 was female.

Undetermined category is utilized when the legal standard of “more probable than not” or 51% cannot be reached. Sudden Unexplained Infant Demise (SUID) due to bedsharing and overlying accounted for three of the undetermined deaths. Two were accident versus suicide/homicide related to drugs. Three were accident versus natural.

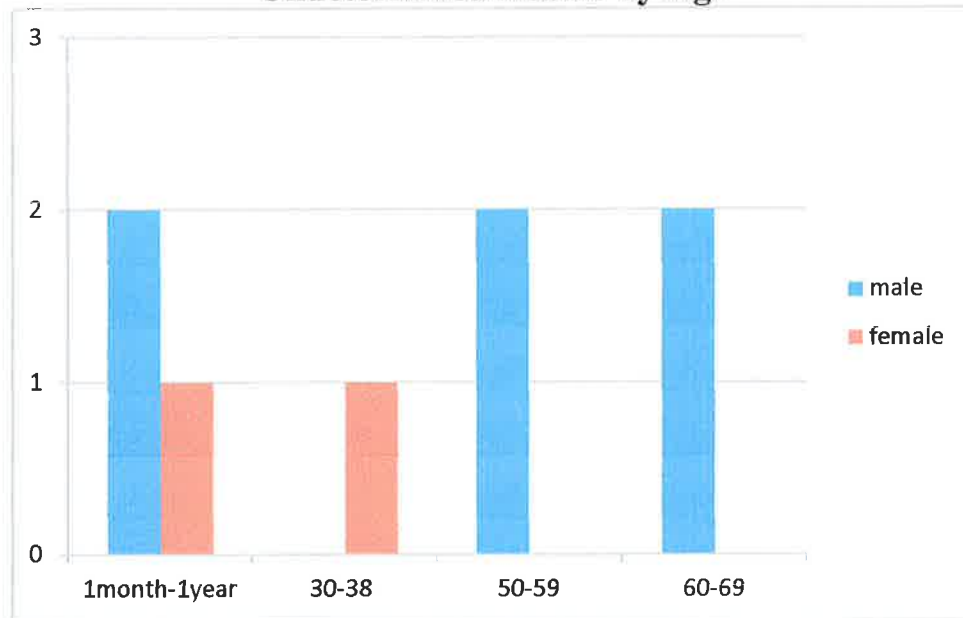
**Undetermined Deaths by Cause**



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized age, 3 of undetermined deaths were between 1 month to 1 year of age, 1 between 30-39, 2 between 50-59, and 2 between 60-69 years of age.

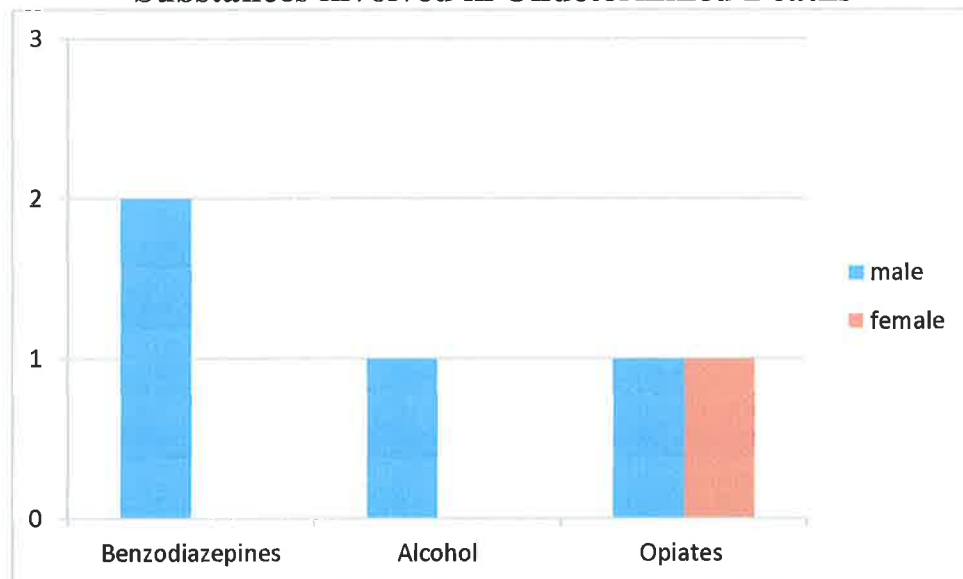
### Undetermined Deaths by Age



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

More than one of the following drugs was usually involved in the 8 undetermined deaths: Heroin, Dilaudid, Ambien and a tricyclic antidepressant. Benzodiazepines were involved in two of the undetermined deaths. Blood alcohol above the level of 0.32 was involved in one.

### Substances involved in Undetermined Deaths



\*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.