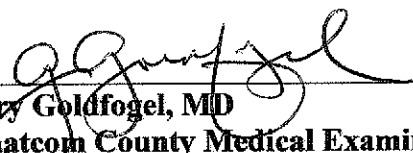


**WHATCOM COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER
1500 NORTH STATE STREET
BELLINGHAM, WA 98225**

2016 ANNUAL REPORT

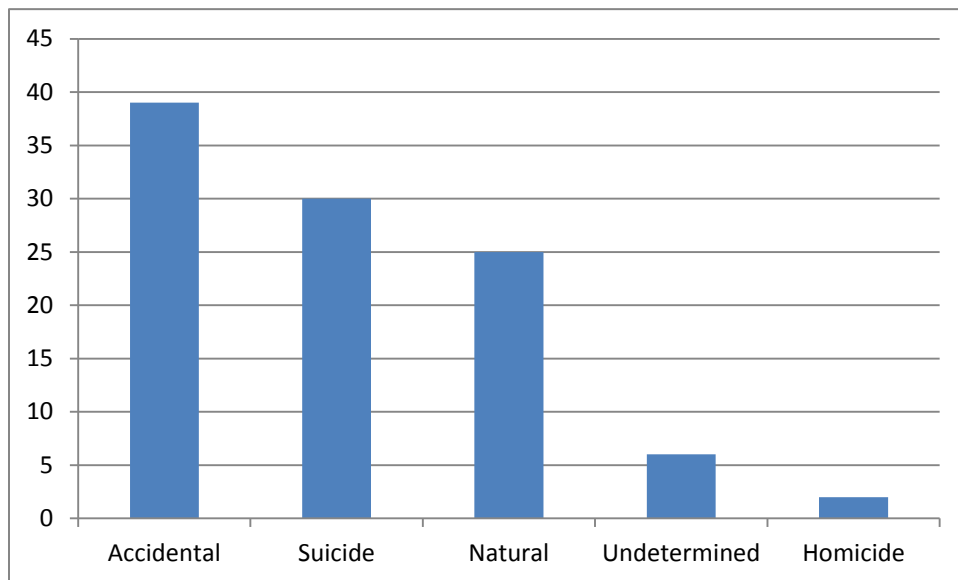
During 2016 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's office assumed jurisdiction in 104 death investigations that involved forensic autopsies, toxicological examinations, viewing and summary reporting. In addition, 255 other additional cases were reported to the office, investigated and no jurisdiction 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 Bellingham High Schools.


Gary Goldfogel, MD
Whatcom County Medical Examiner

During 2016 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner’s Office conducted 104 forensic death investigations of which 102 have been completed. The manner of death was certified as 39 Accident, 30 Suicide, 25 Natural, 2 Homicide and 6 as Undetermined. A fetal autopsy was performed but a manner of death was not assigned and a recovered skeleton was investigated and sent to the State Forensic Anthropologist Dr. Kathy Taylor for further investigation. 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.

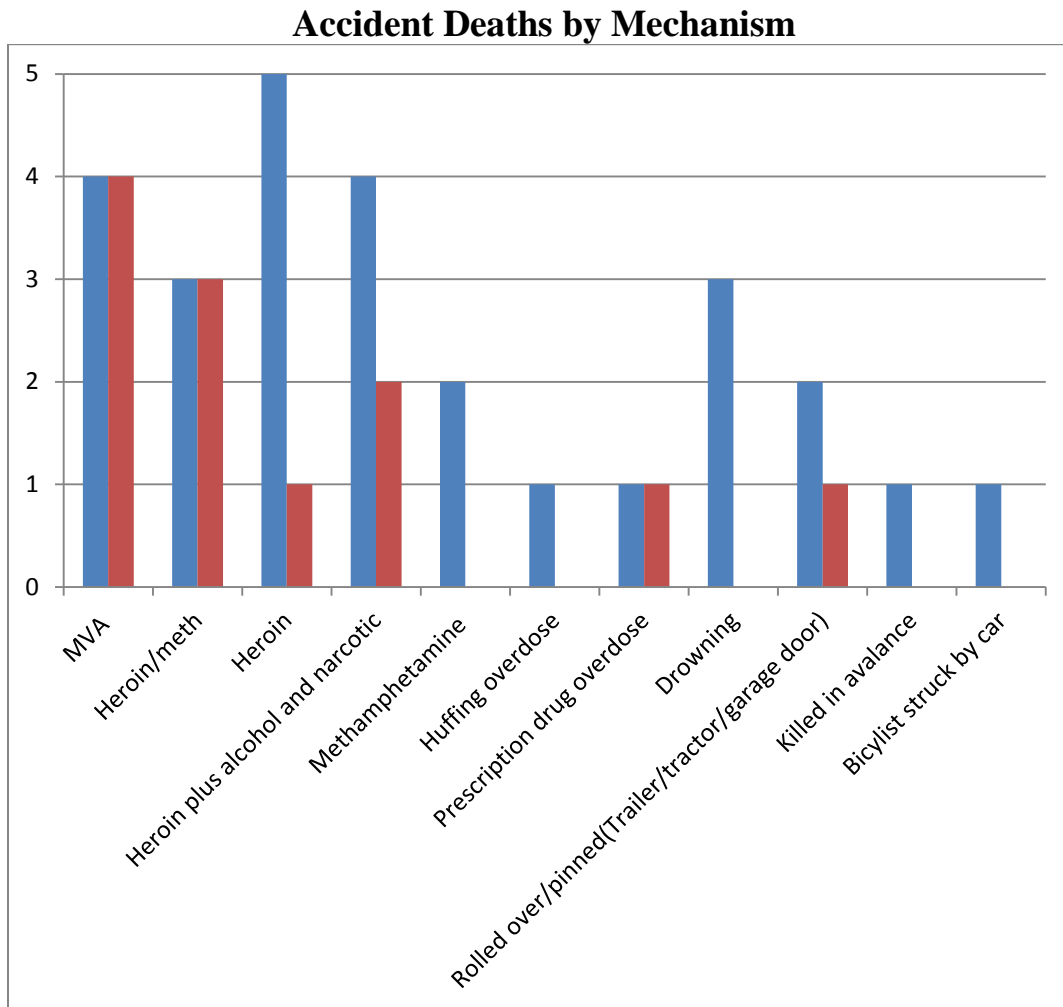
Whatcom County Medical Examiner’s Office Death Investigations 2016



ACCIDENT:

There were 39 total investigated accident deaths in which 27 of the victims were male and 12 were female. The circumstances of death were as follows: 8 motor vehicle accidents, 6 heroin and methamphetamine overdoses, 6 heroin overdoses, 6 heroin plus alcohol and another narcotic, 2 methamphetamine overdoses, 1 huffing overdose, 2 prescription drug overdoses, 3 drownings, 3 decedents pinned or rolled over by an object, 1 decedent killed in an avalanche and 1 bicyclist struck by a car.

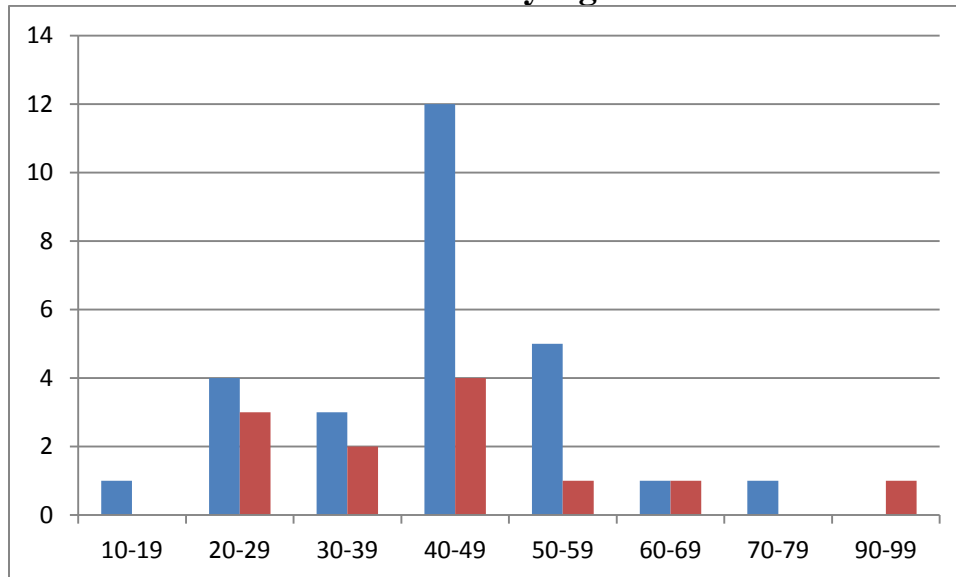
Seatbelts were worn in 2 of the 8 motor vehicle accident deaths.



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized by age, 1 of the 39 accidental deaths was between 10-19 years of age, 7 were between 20-29, 5 were between 30-39, 16 were between 40-49, 6 were between 50-59, 2 were between 60-69, 1 was between 70-79, and 1 was between 90-99 years of age.

Accident Deaths by Age and Sex



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Of the 39 accidental deaths, 23 were specifically drug related and included solely heroin but also a combination of heroin and methamphetamine, heroin and alcohol, and heroin and other drugs. Suboxone was being utilized in two of the heroin/methamphetamine deaths. There were also solely methamphetamine and prescription drug overdoses. Fentanyl was found in only one of our 23 drug specific cases.

Drugs were present in 3 of the 8 motor vehicle accidents.

Non-narcotic drugs, antidepressants and antipsychotics were also found in various accidental deaths.

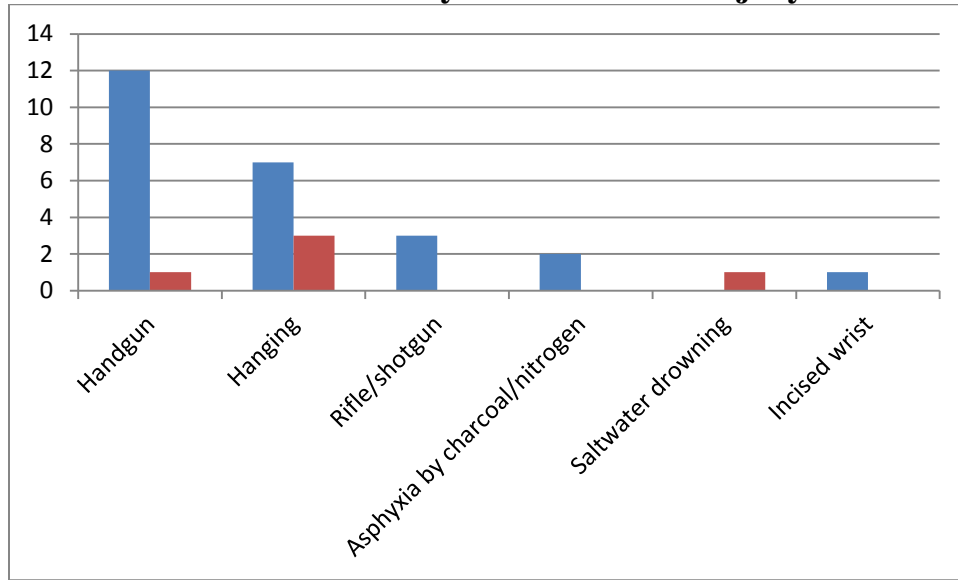
Marijuana was present in 14 of the 39 accidental deaths.

Alcohol was present in 17 of the 39 accidental death cases with a blood alcohol level above 0.08 with a maximum blood alcohol of 0.34 gm%.

SUICIDE:

There were 30 total investigated suicide deaths of which 25 were male and 5 were female. The causes of death were as follows: 13 Handgun, 10 Hanging, 3 Rifle/Shotgun, 2 Asphyxia (inhalation of charcoal/nitrogen), 1 Saltwater drowning, 1 Incised wrist.

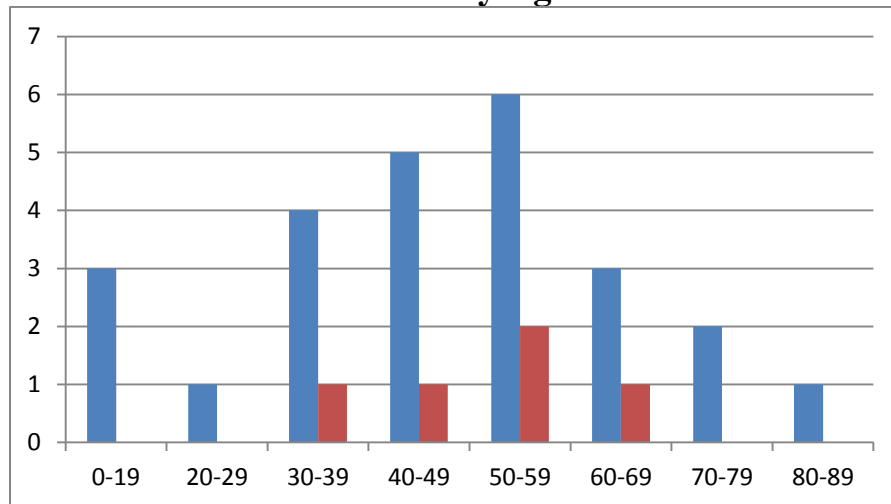
Suicide Deaths by Mechanism of Injury



* Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

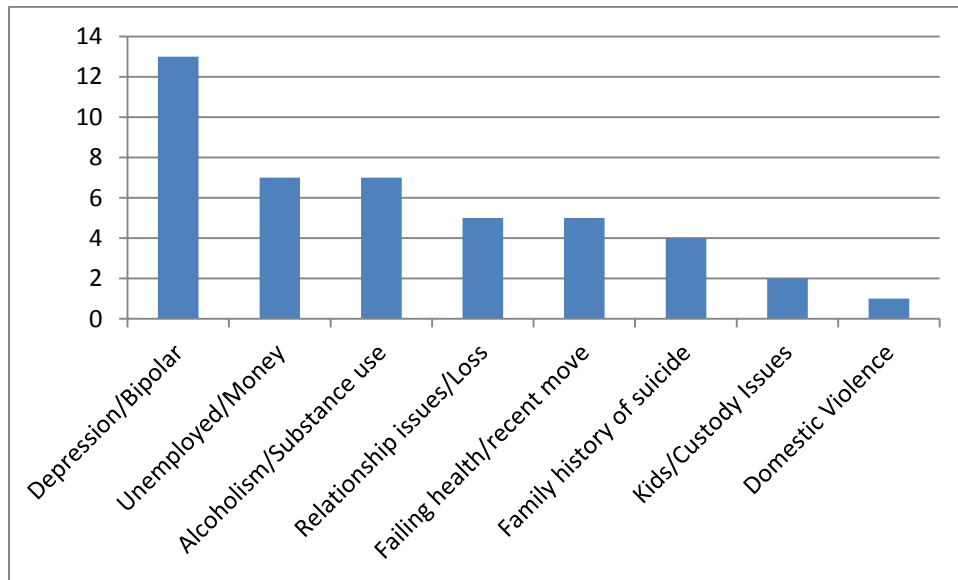
Categorized by age, 3 of the 30 suicide deaths were between 10-19 years of age, 1 was between 20-29, 5 were between 30-39, 6 were between 40-49, 8 were between 50-59, 4 were between 60-69, 2 were between 70-79 and 1 was between 80-89 years of age.

Suicide Deaths by Age and Sex



*Blue bars are male and red bars female.

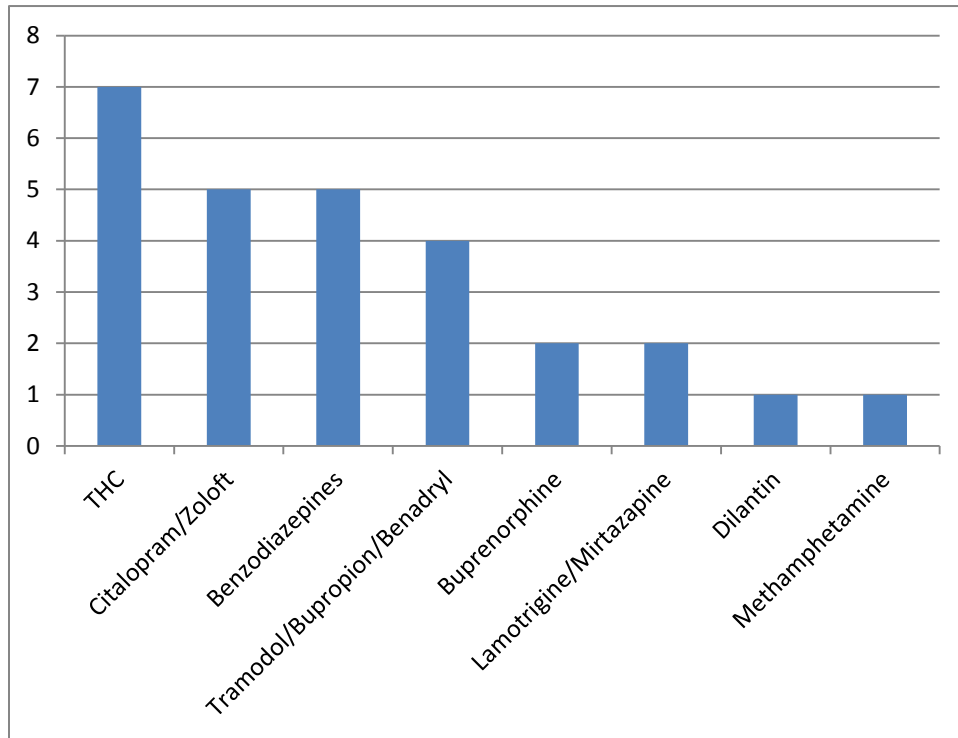
Stressors involved in Suicide Deaths



The deceased sometimes left reasons as to why they were committing suicide. For some it was one specific stressor but for others it was a combination of stressors. Mental illness was identified as a reason for 13 of the 30 suicides, 7 were due to finances, 7 were due to issues of addiction, 5 involved relationship issues, while 5 involved failing health. 18 of the 30 suicides spoke of wanting to commit suicide prior to committing suicide and 8 of 30 left a suicide note. 6 of the 30 suicides had tried to commit suicide before in the past.

Alcohol was present in 9 of the 30 suicides and blood alcohol values ranged from 0.03 to 0.28 gram%. 11 of 30 suicide victims didn't have any drugs in the toxicology results. The graph below shows the substances found in suicide deaths. One or a combination of the following was found in the suicide deaths.

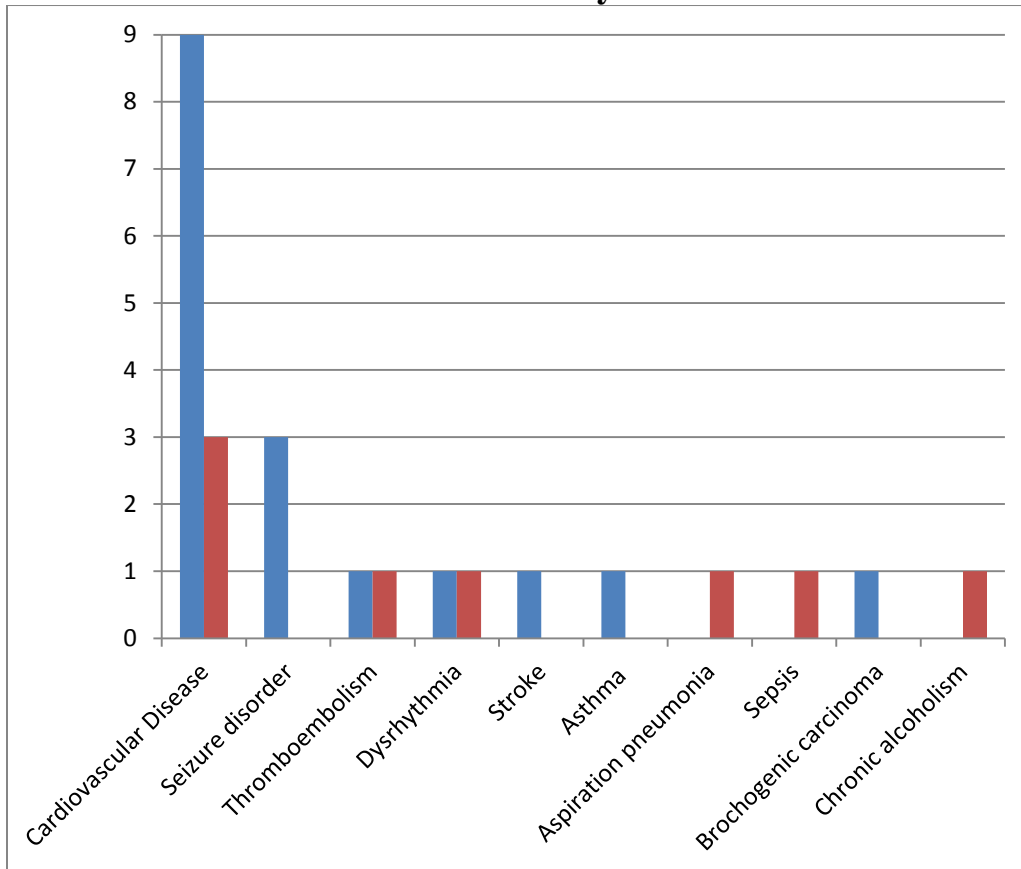
Substances found in Suicide Deaths



NATURAL:

There were 25 total investigated and autopsied natural unexpected or unexplained deaths of which 17 were male and 8 were female. The causes of death were as follows: 12 Cardiovascular disease, 3 Seizure disorder, 2 Thromboembolism, 2 Dysrhythmia, 1 Stroke, 1 Asthma, 1 Aspiration pneumonia, 1 Sepsis, 1 Bronchogenic carcinoma and 1 from Chronic alcoholism.

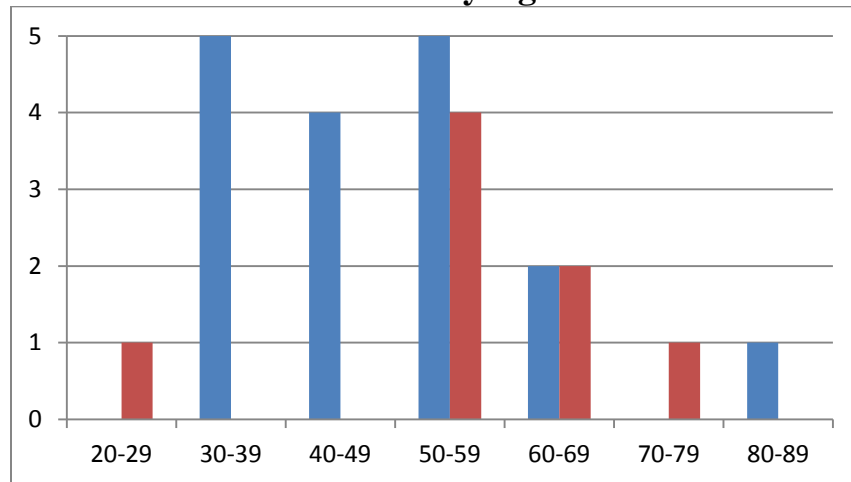
Natural Deaths by Cause



*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Categorized by age, 1 of the 25 natural deaths was between 20-29, 5 were between 30-39, 4 were between 40-49, 9 were between 50-59, 4 were between 60-69, 1 was between 70-79 and 1 was between 80-89 years of age.

Natural Deaths by Age and Sex



*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.

Alcohol was present in 4 of the 25 natural deaths but a blood alcohol above 0.08 was only involved in 1 of the 25 natural deaths with a blood alcohol of 0.34 gram%.

Narcotic drugs were present in 5 of the 25 natural death cases and included one or a combination of the following: Opiates, methamphetamine, benzodiazepine and marijuana.

Non-narcotic drugs were present in 5 of the cases and included one or a combination of the following: Benadryl, Clozapine, Lamotrigine, Trazodone and Gabapentin.

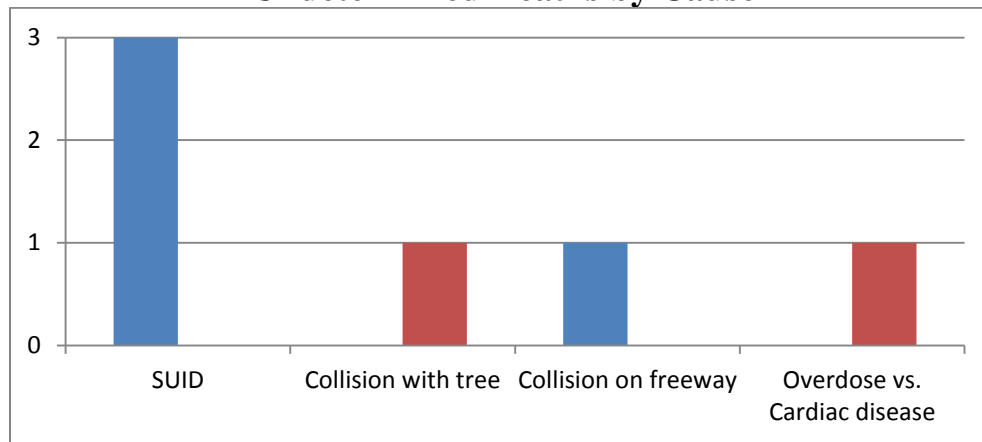
HOMICIDE:

There were 2 homicide death cases, both males in their twenties. One died from a single stab wound to the neck and one died from a single handgun gunshot wound to the head. Both contained illicit narcotic substances in their toxicology which included in one case methamphetamine and the other morphine, methamphetamine, amphetamine and benzodiazepine.

UNDETERMINED:

There were 6 investigated deaths whose manner of death after complete forensic autopsy and investigation were listed as undetermined of which 4 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 unsafe sleeping surface, cosleeping, tobacco and marijuana use and overlying accounted for three of the undetermined deaths of which all three were males and less than one year old. Of the remaining cases one involved suicide versus accident versus natural related to a motor vehicle accident. One case involved suicide versus accident related also to a motor vehicle accident and one was natural versus accidental overdose. Alcohol was not involved in any of the undetermined manner of deaths.

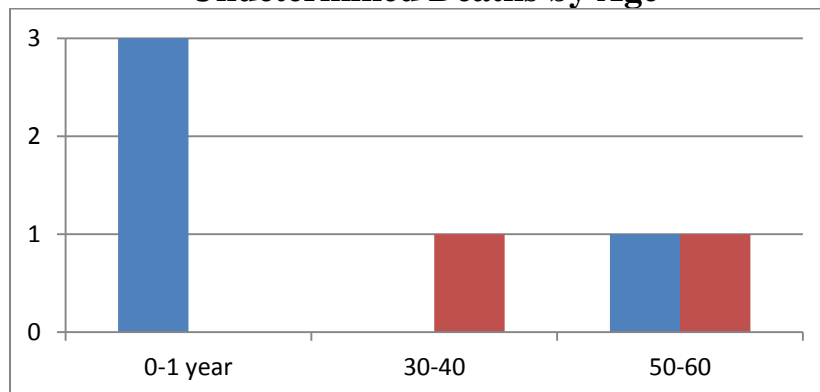
Undetermined Deaths by Cause



*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 and 2 between 50-59 years of age.

Undetermined Deaths by Age



*Blue bars are male and red bars are female.