

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

**2001 ANNUAL REPORT**

During 2001 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's office assumed jurisdiction on 114 death investigations that involved forensic autopsies, toxicological examinations, viewing and summary reporting. In addition, 154 additional cases were reported and investigated and no jurisdiction was assumed (NJA). The medical evidence collected on 49 reported sexual assault cases in Whatcom County was processed by the Medical Examiner's office and summary reports were provided to the involved agencies.

The Medical Examiner also participated in the multi-disciplinary Child Death Review Committee for children under the age of 18. From time to time local agencies also brought miscellaneous bones to the Medical Examiner to determine if they were of human origin.

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 classes toured the morgue facility. Several staff members from the Bellingham Police and Fire Departments and other county agencies were trained on and off site about how the medical examiner's office functions. The Medical Examiner also represented the office on numerous occasions to various civic organizations.

It would appear the autopsy case load is increasing at a significant pace. From 1991 through 1997 the average number of autopsies per year was 83 but from 1998 through 2001 the case load increased to an average of 102 autopsies per year, an increase of nearly 23%. There has also been a 44% increase in the number of sexual assault cases reported in 2001 over the previous 10 year average.

The tables below show the trend data for both the number of autopsies performed and the number of sexual assault cases processed by the MEO

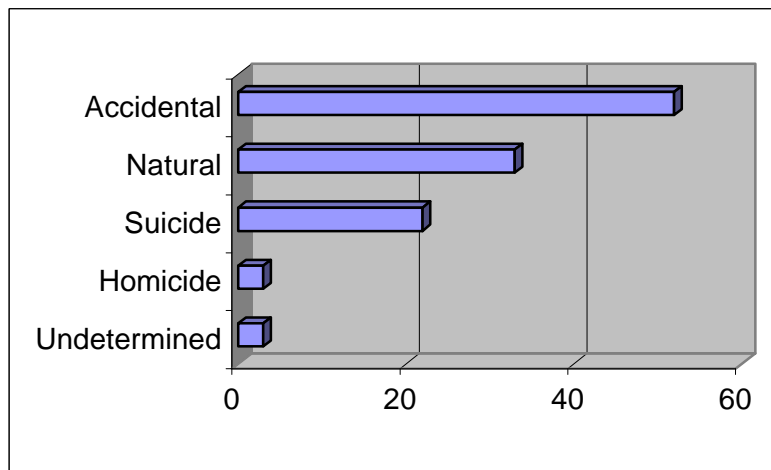
Autopsies		Sexual Assault Cases	
2001	114	2001	49
2000	107	2000	34
1999	98	1999	34
1998	88	1998	23
1997	83	1997	30
1996	84	1996	30
1995	90	1995	39
1994	85	1994	35
1993	84	1993	24
1992	85	1992	49
1991	80	1991	46

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**Gary Goldfogel, M.D.**  
**Whatcom County Medical Examiner**

During 2001 the Whatcom County Medical Examiner's Office conducted 114 forensic death investigations as stated on the previous page. The following statistics and graphs show the breakdown of the various causes of the deaths and the ages and sex of those who died.

### **Whatcom County MEO Death Investigations 2001**



The causes of death shown on the above table are further broken down and displayed in the following pages.

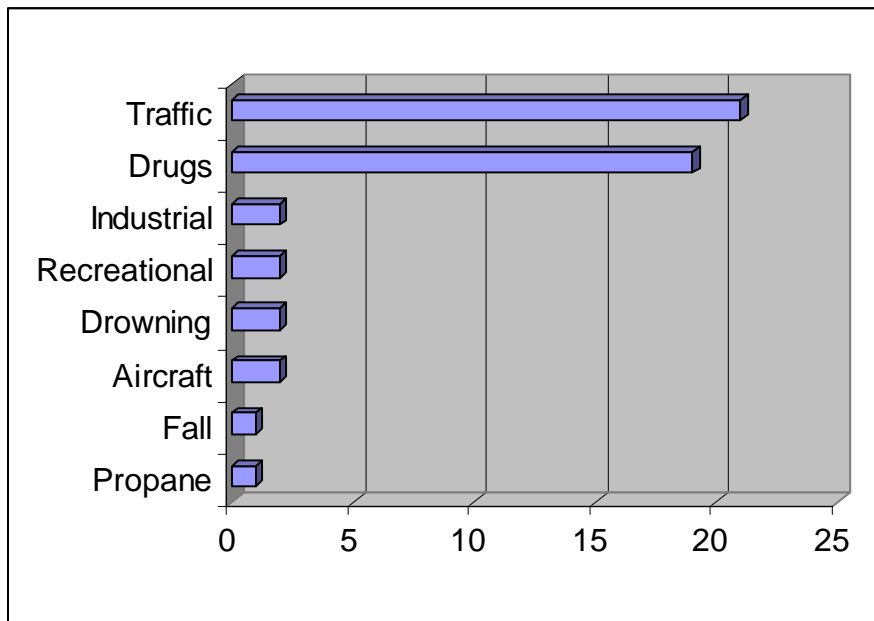
#### **ACCIDENTAL:**

There were 52 total accidental deaths of which 36 were male and 16 female. The cause of death was as follows: Traffic (21), Drug overdose (19), Recreational (2), Drowning (2), Aircraft (2), Industrial (1), Falls (1) and Propane poisoning (1).

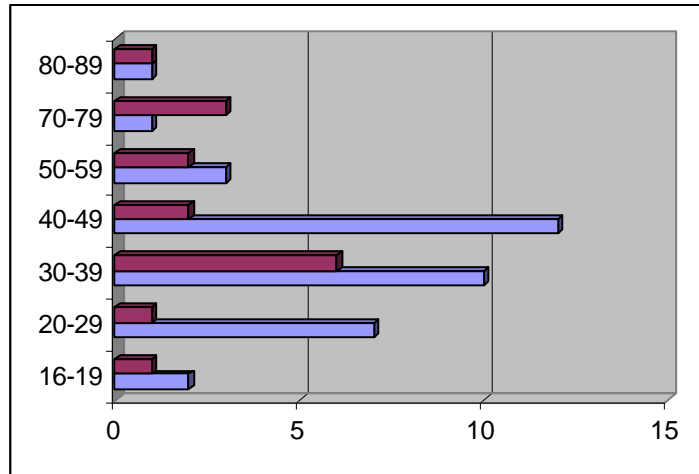
By age approximately 4% of all accidental deaths were between 16-19, 15% between 20-29, 30% between 30-39, 26% between 40-49, 8% between 50-59, 8% between 70-79 and 4% between 80-89.

Alcohol was a factor in 35% of all the accidental cases and especially in the drowning cases with alcohol found in all three victims with an average blood alcohol of 0.20 gm% Overall marijuana was found in 15% of the accident cases. Of the drug related cases, the following drugs were found: opiates (58%), cocaine (53%), methadone (16%) and amphetamine/methamphetamine (10%). In the traffic related cases, 38% of the deceased had alcohol present with an average reading of 0.18 gm%. These traffic numbers only include those who died whether at fault or an innocent victim.

### **Accidental Death Causes**



### Accidental Deaths by Age and Sex



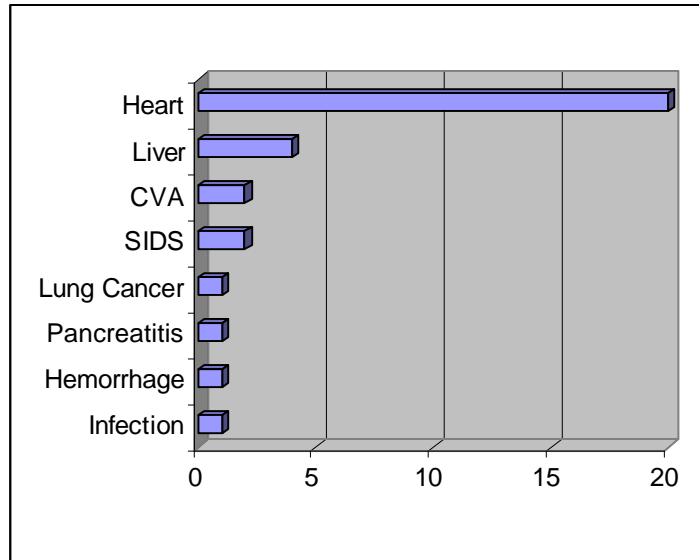
- Blue (light) bars are male and red (dark) bars female.

### NATURAL:

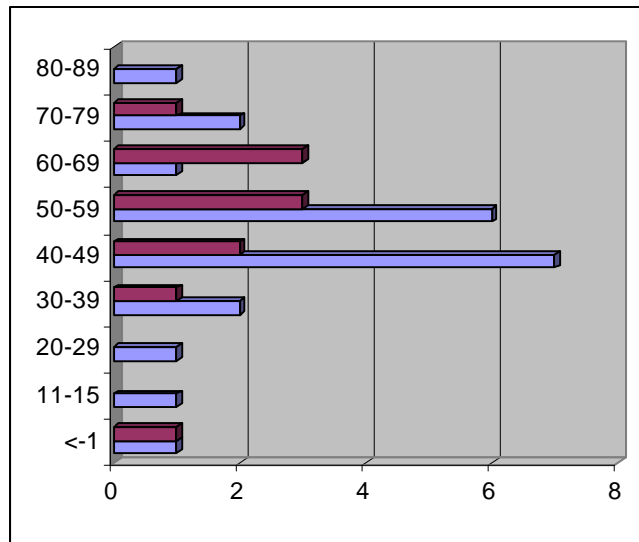
There were 33 total natural deaths of which 22 were male and 11 female. The cause of death was as follows: Heart related (20 ), Liver (4), Stroke (2), SIDS (2), Hemorrhage (1), Infection (1), Lung cancer (1), Pulmonary emboli (1) and Pancreatitis (1),

By age approximately, 6% of all natural deaths were less that 1 year old, 3% between 11-15, 3% between 20-29, 9% between 30-39, 29% between 40-49, 27% between 50-59, 9% between 60-69, 9% between 70-79 and 3% between 80-89.

### Natural Deaths by Cause



### Natural Deaths by Age and Sex



- Blue(light) bars are male and red (dark) bars female

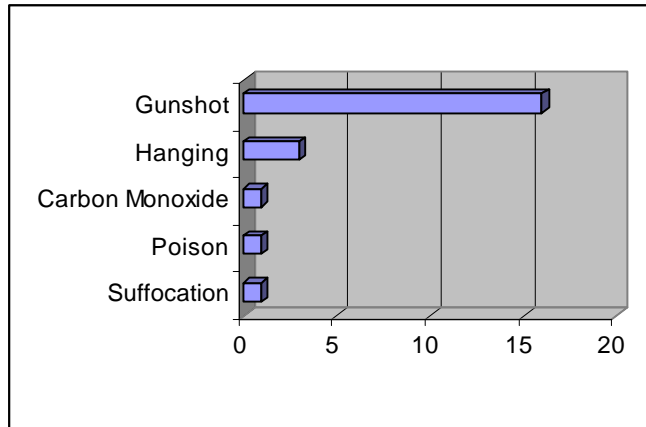
**SUICIDE:**

There were 22 total suicide deaths of which 13 were male and 9 female. The cause of death was as follows: Gunshot (16), Hanging (3), Carbon monoxide inhalation (1), Poison ingestion (1) and Suffocation (1)

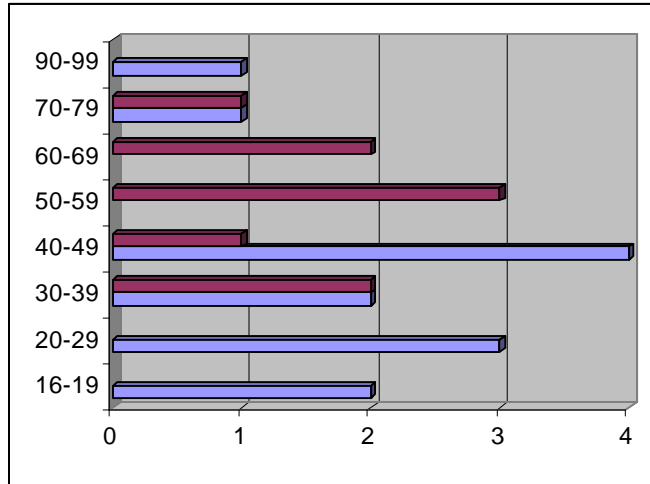
By age, 9% of all suicides were between 16-19, 13% between 20-29, 18% between 30-39, 23% between 40-49, 13% between 50-59, 9% between 60-69, 10% between 70-79 and 5% between 90-99.

Alcohol was a factor in 36% of all suicide deaths with an average reading of 0.16 gm%. Marijuana was present in two cases and amphetamine/methamphetamine once. Legal prescription drugs were present 32% of the time.

**Suicide Deaths by Cause**



### Suicide Deaths by Age and Sex

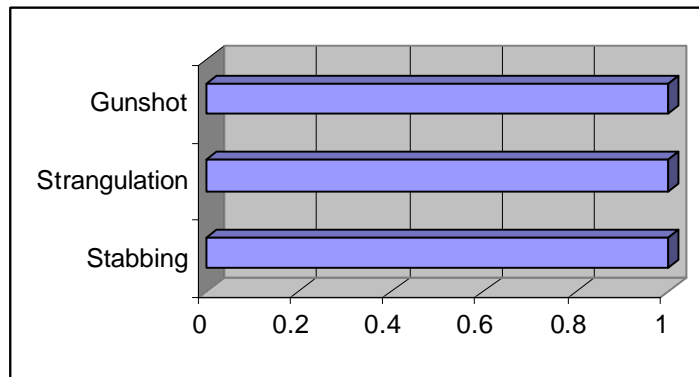


- Blue (light) bars are male and red (dark) bars are female

### HOMICIDE:

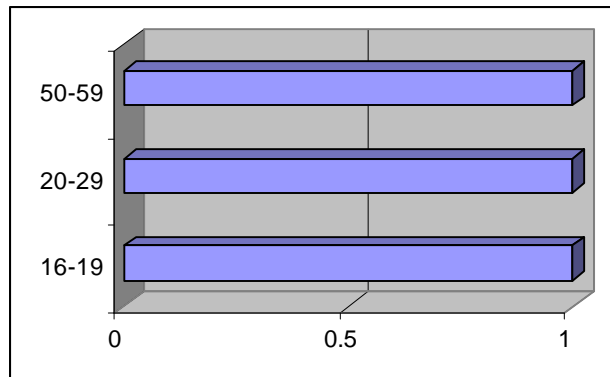
There were three total homicide deaths of which all were male. The cause of death was as follows: Stabbing (1), Strangulation (1) and GSW by police (1). By age, 33% of all homicides were between 16-19, 33% between 20-29, and 33% between 50-59. Alcohol was present in two of the three cases with an average reading of 0.22 gm%. Marijuana was also detected in two of the victims.

### Homicide Deaths by Cause





## Homicide Deaths by Age (all male)



### **UNDETERMINED:**

One intact Asian skull was extensively examined. One complete skeleton was discovered with positive identification made. One infant death was investigated with overlying as a possible mechanism of death and one possible decomposed fetus was examined.