

# Dauphin County Coroner's Office & Forensic Center



2017

Annual Report

To the Citizens of Dauphin County:

Here is the 2017 annual report. It is important to look at the trends each year so we can determine patterns of death within our community. In the process of medical/legal investigation it is our job to determine the Cause and Manner of each death that meets the criteria of a coroner's case.

The cause of death is the actual physical condition that causes the irreversible failure of the body to function and sustain life. The Manner is how that physical failure occurred. The following are the Manners listed on a death certificate:

- Homicide
- Suicide
- Accidental
- Natural
- Undetermined

Once these patterns are observed, we begin to see how we die and that tells us much about how we live. As you will see in the charts and statistics below, one of the most significant issues is the increase in drug deaths. I am often asked what we should do about the opioid crisis. It is a good question given the increase in deaths and the fact that opioid toxicity is now the leading cause of death in those under fifty years of age.

It is interesting to note that deaths from prescription opioids have decreased because of better monitoring of manufacturing and distribution practices (plus, prescribing protocols have improved), while opioid deaths from various forms of illicit Fentanyl have dramatically increased the number of fatalities associated with illicit opioid use.

It is important to understand that opioid use is a tool of addiction, however addictive behavior is the real issue. The best definition of addiction is: A person doing a behavior over and over again, even though it consistently gets negative results. As a society we seem to have many addictions. We are addicted to consumption, greed, sexual behaviors, and yes, drugs. Each one of these addictions has their hold on us because of injuries from the past, fears for the future, or simply an emotional and spiritual emptiness. This is the real issue at hand, and we may ask ourselves: Why are the richest, freest people in the history of man killing themselves?

This means that we must have an in-depth look at our value systems. We must look at the drug issues as an addiction issue and embrace a much wider and holistic approach to drug and other addictions. Recovery must be a multifaceted approach, with temporary drug treatments and then comprehensive therapy for addicts so that they can understand their addictive triggers.

We speak for the dead and they speak to us, and they are also telling us that we have to have personal responsibility for our bodies. We must control our diets, exercise more, and live life more meditatively to combat the effects of stress. We must return to more interpersonal interaction in the age of a digital world, which can cause social isolation. The human body is affected far more from its environment than from our genetics.

The other interesting statistics are those concerning homicides. I have looked over the last six years and it does seem that the homicide rate has been increasing. It should be noted that 2017's homicide number is the largest annual percentage increase over the last ten years.

Respectfully,

Graham S. Hetrick, MS FD, B.C.F.E.  
Dauphin County Coroner

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### MISSION

The mission of the Dauphin County Coroner's Office & Forensic Center is to serve not only the decedents, but also the families of those who have passed. The Dauphin County Coroner's Office & Forensic Center conducts independent and thorough investigations. Our Office often works in conjunction with physicians, nurses, law enforcement agencies, and emergency service responders to assure the facts and circumstances surrounding a death are accurate and true. The staff of Dauphin County Coroner's Office & Forensic Center recognizes the responsibility to treat all deceased persons with dignity and the respect they deserve. We consider it an honor to speak for those who cannot.

The Dauphin County Coroner's Office & Forensic Center is responsible to investigate all deaths that occur within the geographical boundaries of the County of Dauphin. Deaths that occur under violent and suspicious manners are those that are seen in the headlines, however, most deaths occur away from the public eye. The staff of this Office recognizes the responsibility to all citizens regardless of the circumstances surrounding the death. Investigations performed by our staff often assist surviving loved ones with valuable medical information, specifically related to inherited diseases and conditions. This type of information provides families with comfort and peace of mind, serving as a tool to early detection and treatment of potential life threatening illnesses. In addition, information obtained by our staff is often requested to assist in legal proceedings and insurance settlements.

It should be noted that Dauphin County Coroner's Office & Forensic Center Annual Report only discusses deaths that fall under Coroner jurisdiction. Not every death that occurs in Dauphin County becomes a Coroner case. We assume jurisdiction of deaths occurring in Dauphin County that are reportable under Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Title 16.

### PURPOSE OF THE CORONER'S OFFICE & FORENSIC CENTER

The Dauphin County Coroner's Office is an independent, investigative agency of Dauphin County.

Under the direction of Coroner Graham Hetrick, our office provides Medicolegal Death Investigations, performs Forensic Autopsies, and provides Administrative Support.

The six basic functions of the Coroner's Office are:

- Determine the Cause and Manner of Death for individuals in a timely manner.
- Identify the deceased with the highest degree of certainty possible.
- Proper and timely notification to the legal next of kin.
- Account for and secure personal property of the decedent.
- Account for and secure evidence.
- Provide assistance to families involved in our investigations, as applicable.

The Coroner's Office is charged with determining the Cause and Manner of Death. We receive this Statutory Mandate from the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Title 16 § 1237:

1. The Coroner having a view of the body shall investigate the facts and circumstances concerning deaths which appear to have happened within the county, regardless where the cause thereof may have occurred, for the purposes of determining whether or not an autopsy should be conducted or and inquest thereof should be had in the following cases:
  - a. Sudden deaths not cause by readily recognizable disease, or wherein the cause of death cannot be properly certified by a physician on the basis of prior medical attendance.
  - b. Deaths occurring under suspicious circumstances, including those where alcohol, drugs or other toxic substances may have had direct bearing on the outcome.
  - c. Deaths occurring as a result of violence or trauma, whether apparently homicidal, suicidal, or accidental.
  - d. Any death in which trauma, chemical injury, drug overdose or reaction to drugs or medication or medical treatment was a primary or secondary, direct or indirect, contributory, aggravating or precipitating cause of death.
  - e. Operative and/or peri-operative deaths in which the death is not readily explainable on the basis of prior disease.
  - f. Any death wherein the body is unidentified or unclaimed.

- g. Deaths known or suspected as due to contagious disease and constituting a public health hazard.
  - h. Deaths occurring in prison or penal institution or while in the custody of police.
  - i. Deaths of persons whose bodies are to be cremated, buried at sea or otherwise disposed of so as to be thereafter unavailable for examination.
  - j. Sudden infant death syndrome.
  - k. Stillbirths.
2. The purpose of the investigation shall be to determine the cause of any such death and to determine whether or not there is sufficient reason for the coroner to believe that any such death may have resulted from criminal acts or criminal neglect of persons other than the deceased.
3. As part of this investigation, the coroner shall determine the identity of the deceased and notify the next of kin of the deceased.

DAUPHIN COUNTY CORONER AND STAFF MEMBERS**Coroner Graham Hetrick**

Graham Hetrick has been Coroner since January 1990. Graham is a graduate of Susquehanna Township High School, and has a Bachelor of Arts Degree from York College of PA (dual majored in European history and biology), a Mortuary Science Degree from Pittsburgh Institute of Mortuary Science, and a Master of Science Degree in research psychology from Capella University. Graham is a member of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, the American College of Forensic Examiners, the International Association of Bloodstain Pattern Analysis, the National Coroner/ME Advisory Board for the Musculoskeletal Transplantation Board, the PA Coroner's Association, and the Institute for Behavioral Profiling. He is nationally certified as a medicolegal death investigator by the American College of Forensic Examiners Institute. He has advanced training in blood pattern analysis, crime scene management, forensic sculpting, and shallow grave recovery. Over the years he has been part of hundreds of homicide investigations.

Graham grew up above a funeral home, with his father being the founder and owner of the Hetrick Funeral home in Harrisburg. During the 1960's Graham served in the United States Army. He was assigned to the Military Police, and then was attached to the 52nd Criminal Investigation Division. He was Provost Marshall for the Southern half of Germany where he investigated a wide variety of cases. Upon returning from the service, he completed his education and was a funeral director for many years before becoming Coroner.

**FULL TIME STAFF**

- Chief Deputy Lisa Potteiger, B.S., AAFS
- Deputy Lynn Choborda, D-ABMDI
- Deputy Thomas Reinhard, D-ABMDI
- Deputy Zachary Smeltz, D-ABMDI
- Deputy Gregory Bowser
- Administrative Assistant Jill Payne

**PART TIME STAFF**

- Deputy Richard Wilson
- Deputy Madyson VanHyll, B.S.
- Deputy Alisha Simpson, B.S., M.S.
- Deputy Jeff Tracey

AMERICAN BOARD OF MEDICOLEGAL DEATH INVESTIGATORS CERTIFICATION (ABMDI)

The American Board of Medicolegal Death Investigators is a voluntary, national, independent, and professional certification board that has been established to promote the highest standards of practice for medicolegal death investigators. ABMDI certifies individuals who have the proven knowledge and skills necessary to perform medicolegal death investigations as set forth by the National Institutes of Justice. The benefit of having deputies certified by the ABMDI is that they have proven to be able to perform 29 tasks that have been identified as crucial tasks in conducting a medicolegal death investigation. The certification also proves that deputies have acquired specialized knowledge and have demonstrated proficiency in the standards of practice necessary to properly conduct an investigation. Currently 3 of our deputies hold the ABMDI certification, and four additional deputies will be taking the certification exam in the year 2018.



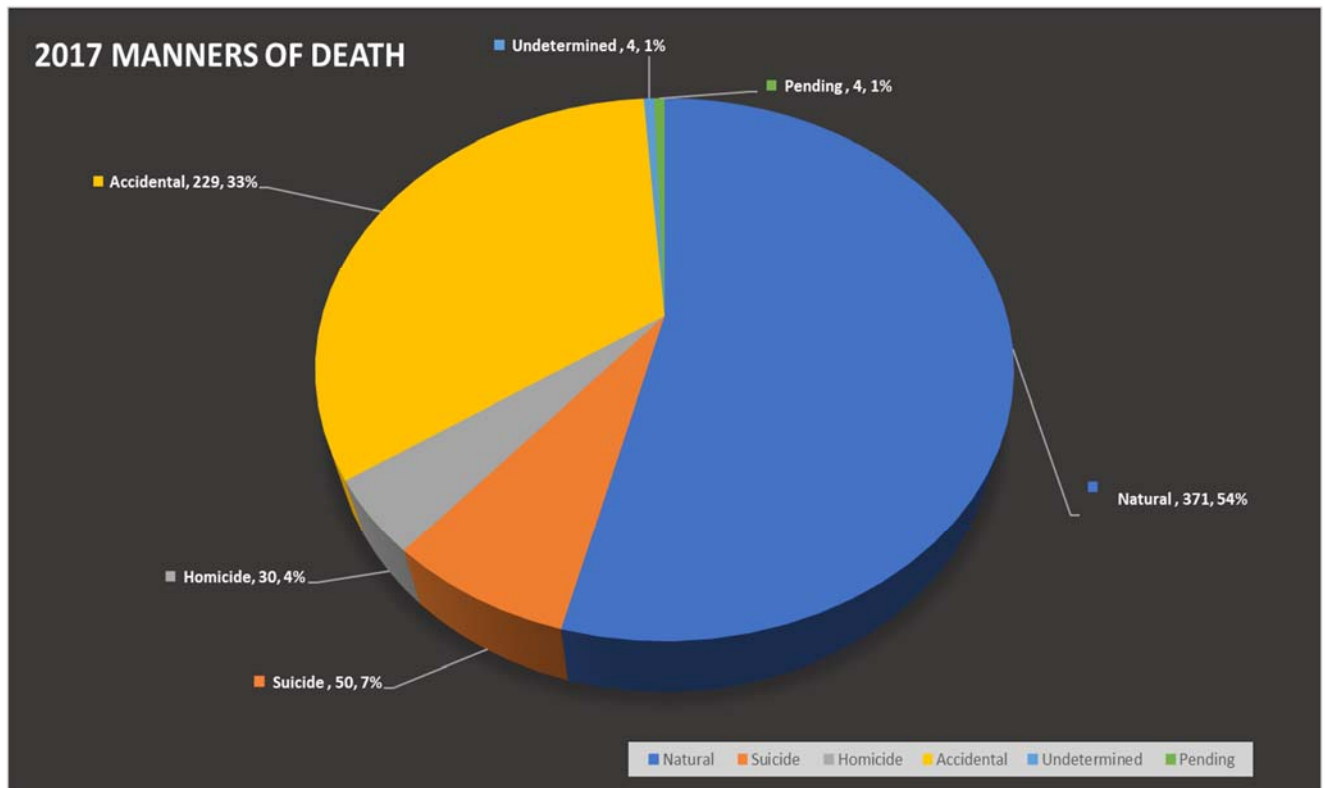
CAUSE AND MANNER OF DEATH

The mission of the Dauphin County Coroner’s Office & Forensic Center is to investigate and determine the Cause of Death and the Manner of Death of individuals who have died within the boundaries of the County, as a result of sudden, unattended, violent or suspicious circumstances.

**CAUSE OF DEATH:** The official determination of the disease or injury and the sequence of events responsible for the occurrence which leads to an individual’s demise.

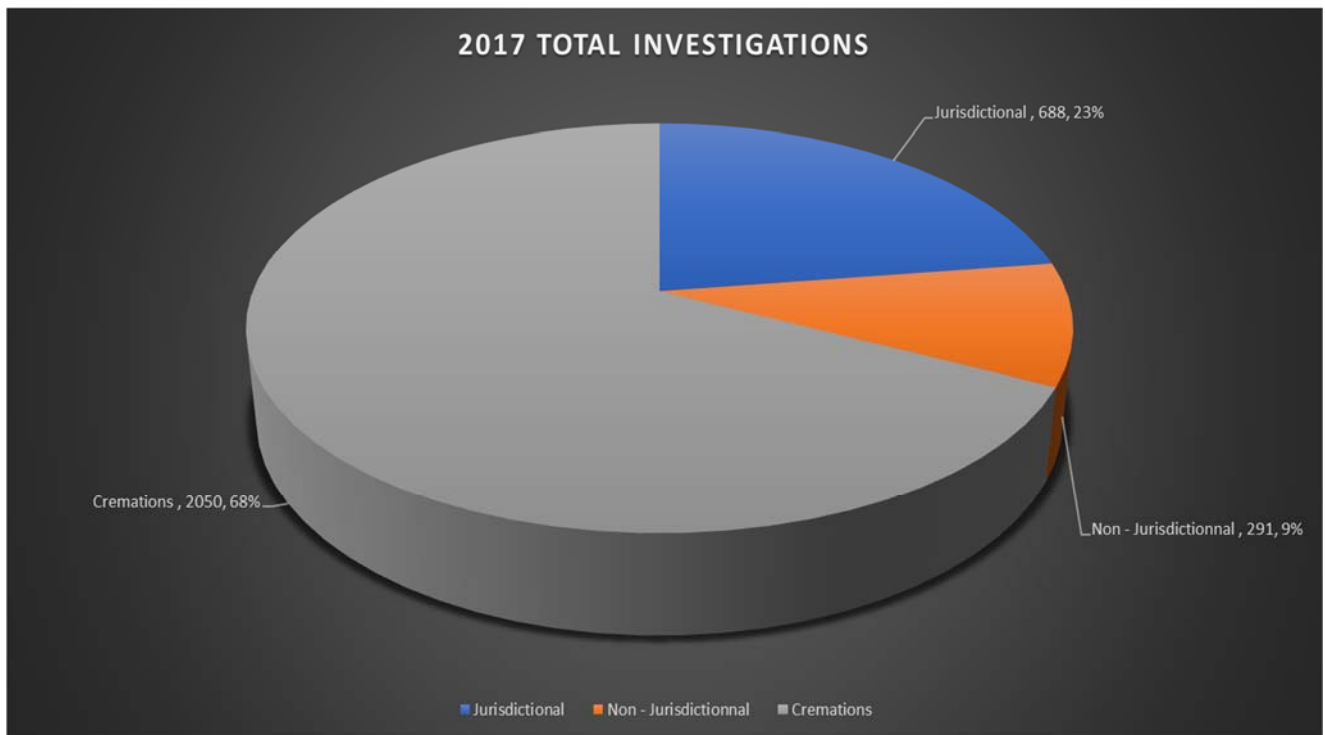
**MANNER OF DEATH:** The classification of the way in which the cause of death came about. There are 5 manners of death.

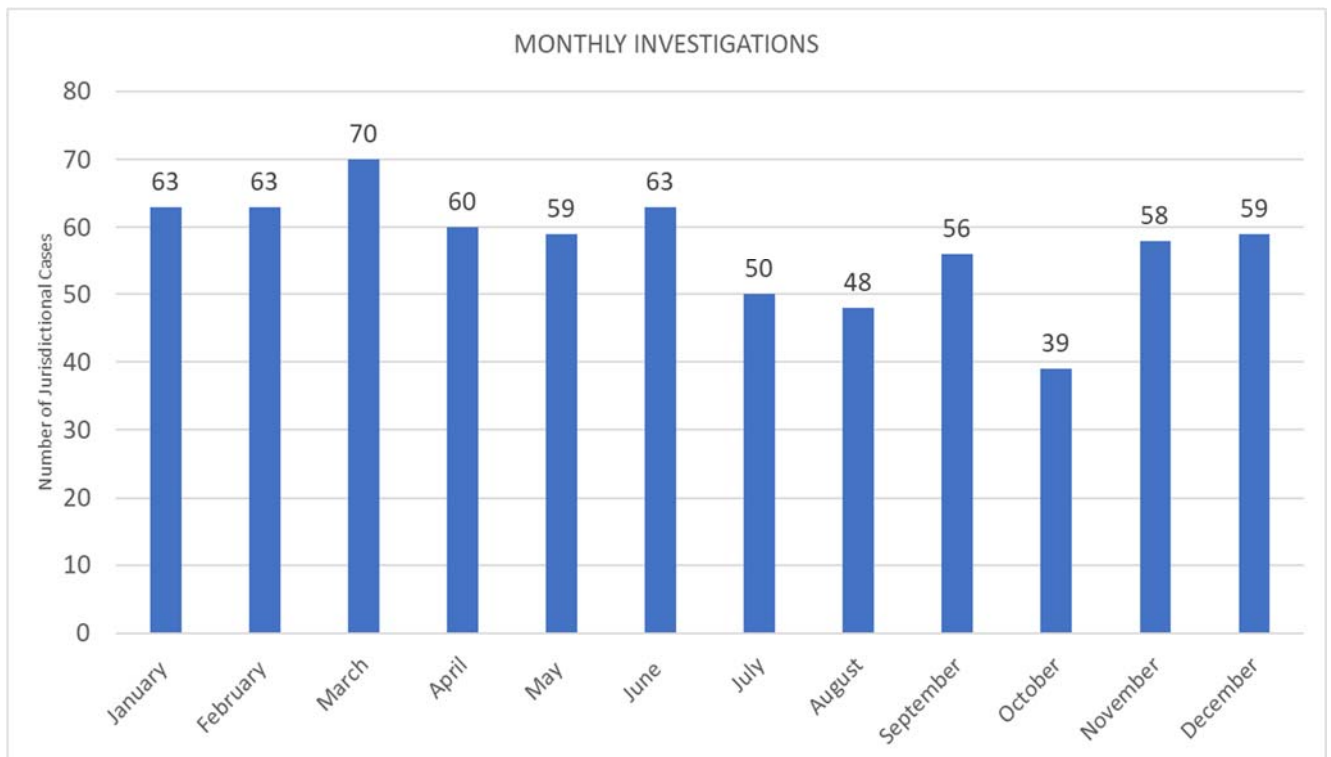
- **NATURAL:** Death caused solely or nearly totally by disease and/or the aging process.
- **ACCIDENTAL:** Death caused by an injury or poisoning where there is no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death.
- **SUICIDE:** Death caused by injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self – inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of one’s self.
- **HOMICIDE:** Death caused by a volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death.
- **UNDETERMINED:** Manner assigned when there is insufficient evidence or conflicting/equivocal information (especially about intent), to assign a specific manner.
- **PENDING:** Manner assigned when the investigation is ongoing.



2017 INVESTIGATIONS

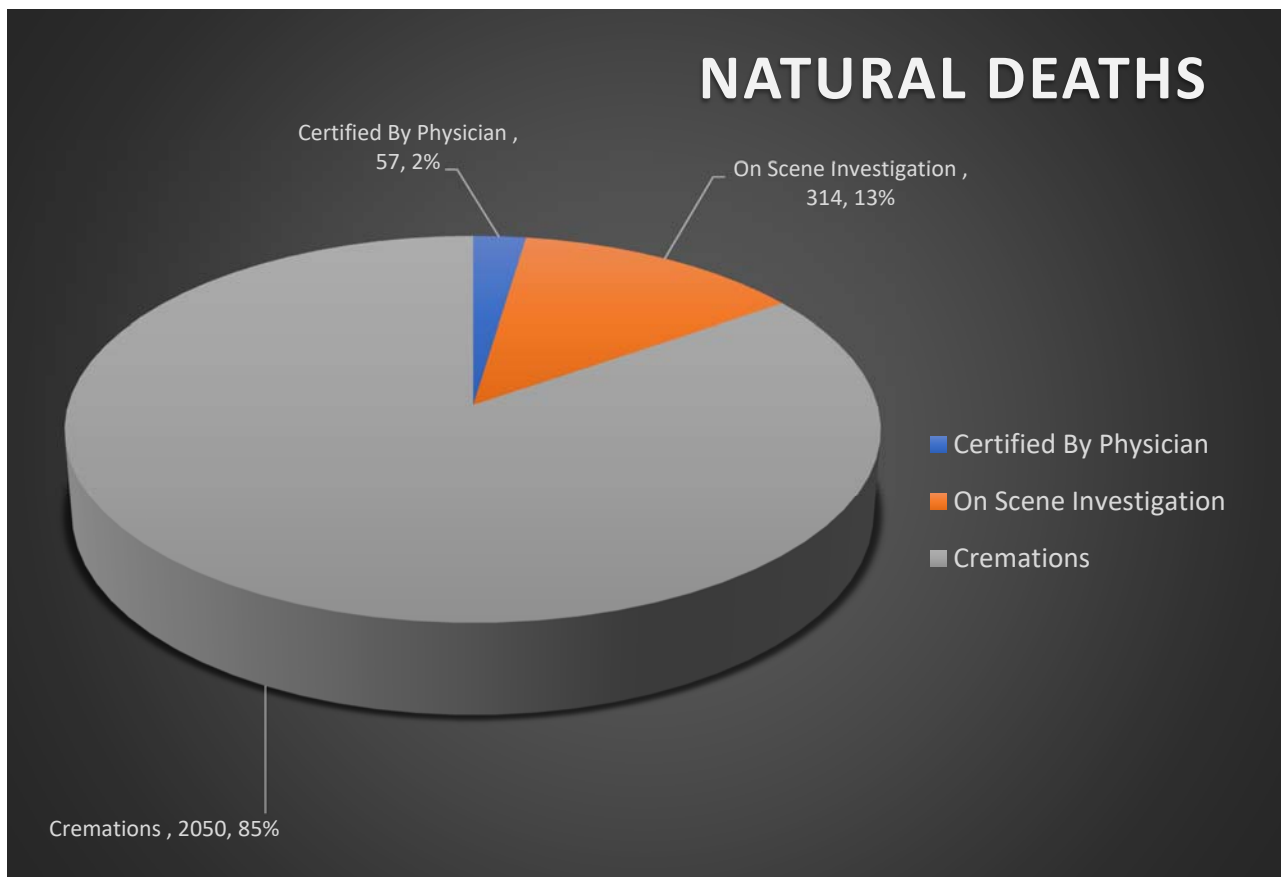
In 2017, there were a total of 3029 investigations reported to our office. Of these investigations: 291 deaths did not require scene investigations or external examinations. 2050 authorizations for cremation. 688 of the death investigations required the Office of the Coroner to provide scene investigations, as well as external examinations. Autopsies were not performed where scene investigation, circumstances, medical history, and external examination provided enough detail for death certification.

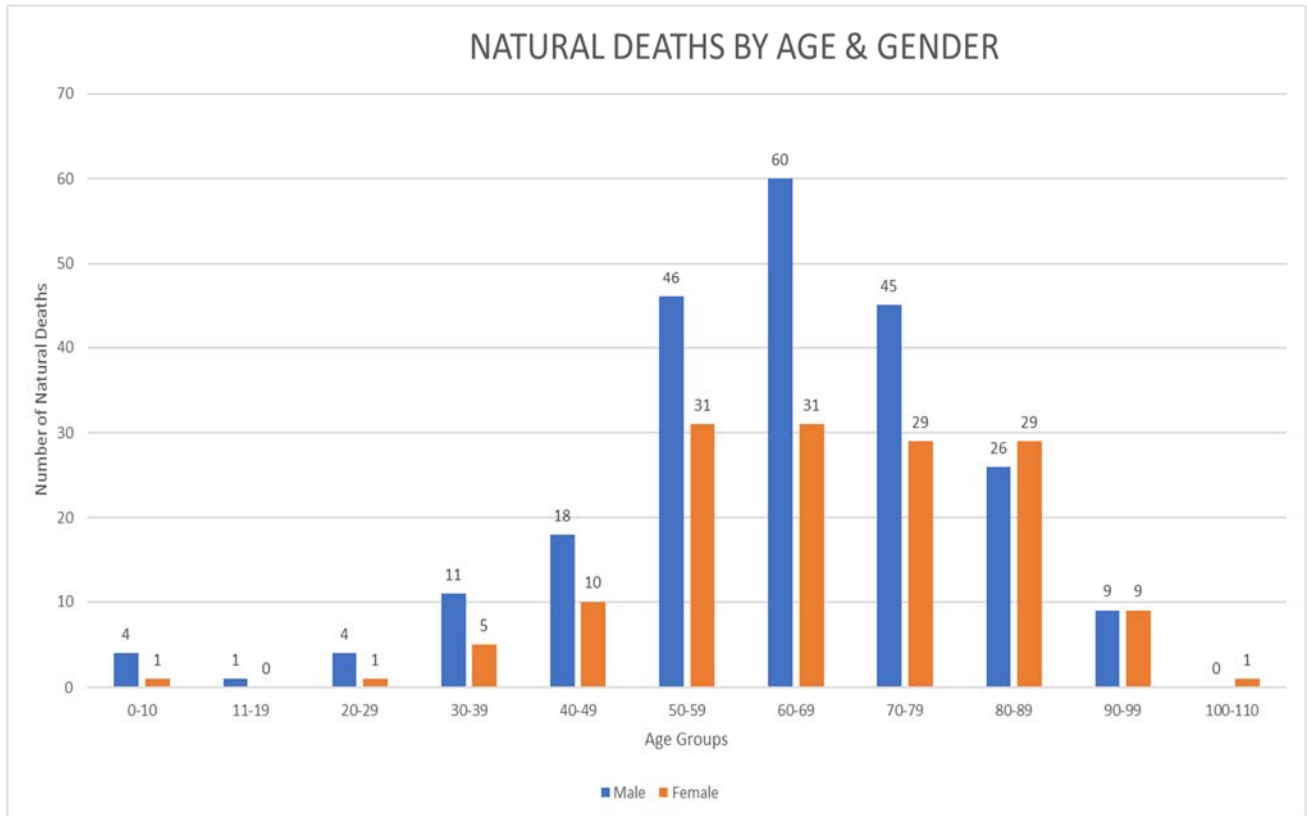




2017 NATURAL DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

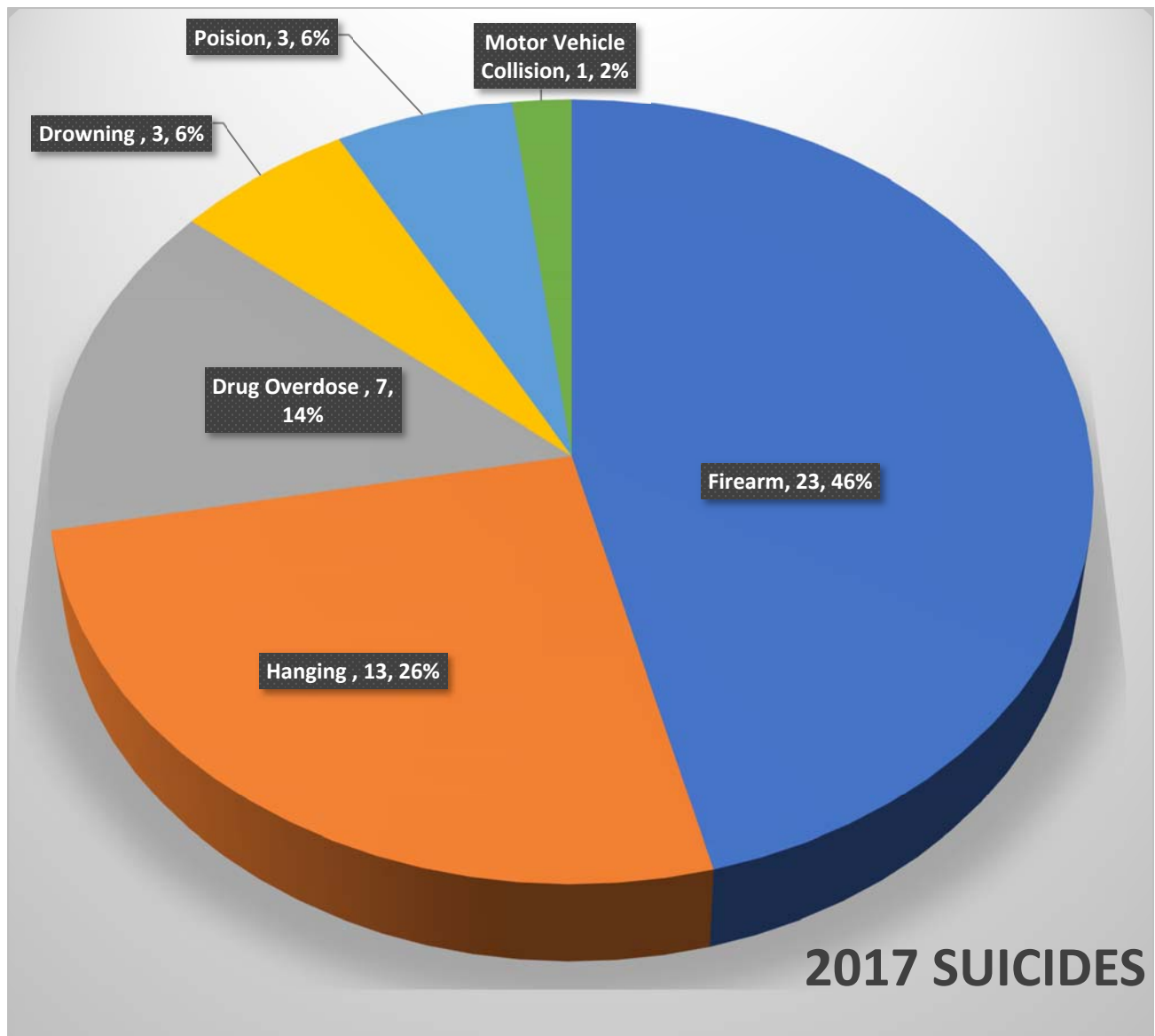
A vast majority of the deaths investigated by the Coroner's Office are determined to be natural deaths. In 2017, there were 371 deaths that were reported to our office and ruled natural. 314 of these deaths were unattended and required our office to take Jurisdiction in the death, which consisted of an investigation and external examination of the decedents. There were 2050 attended deaths that were reported as cremation authorizations and were certified by the decedents' attending physicians. In the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, physicians are only able to certify natural deaths. Our office affords the opportunity to the attending physician to certify the death following our investigation if he/she chooses. In 57 cases the attending physicians signed the death certificate after our Office's investigation.

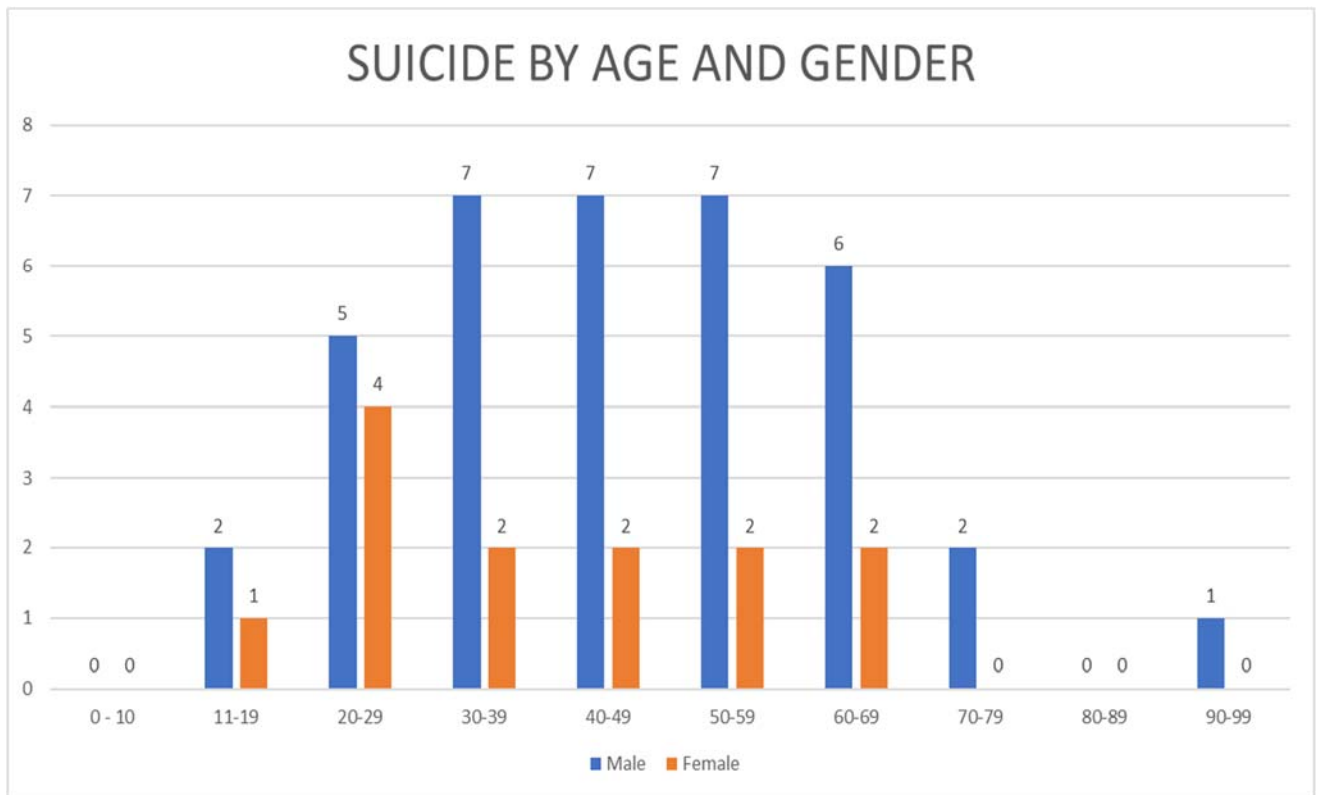
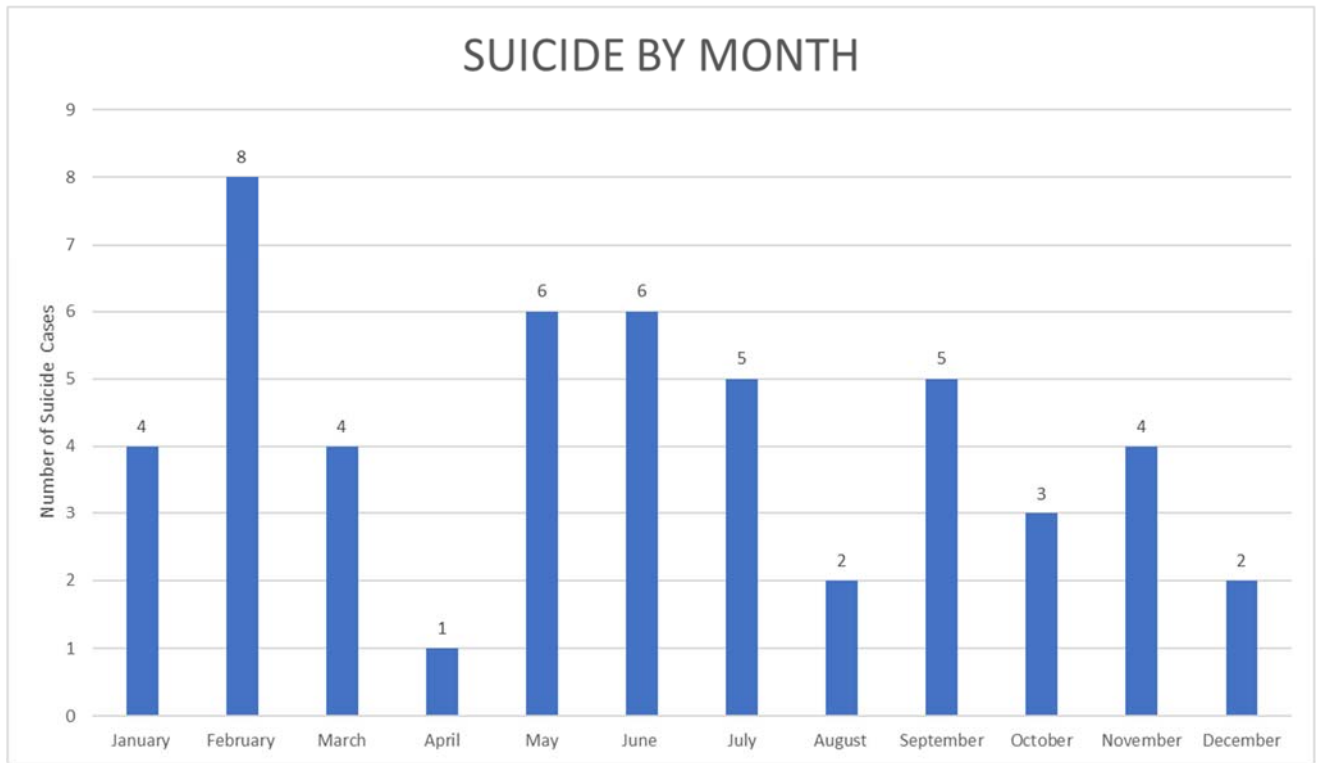




2017 SUICIDE INVESTIGATIONS

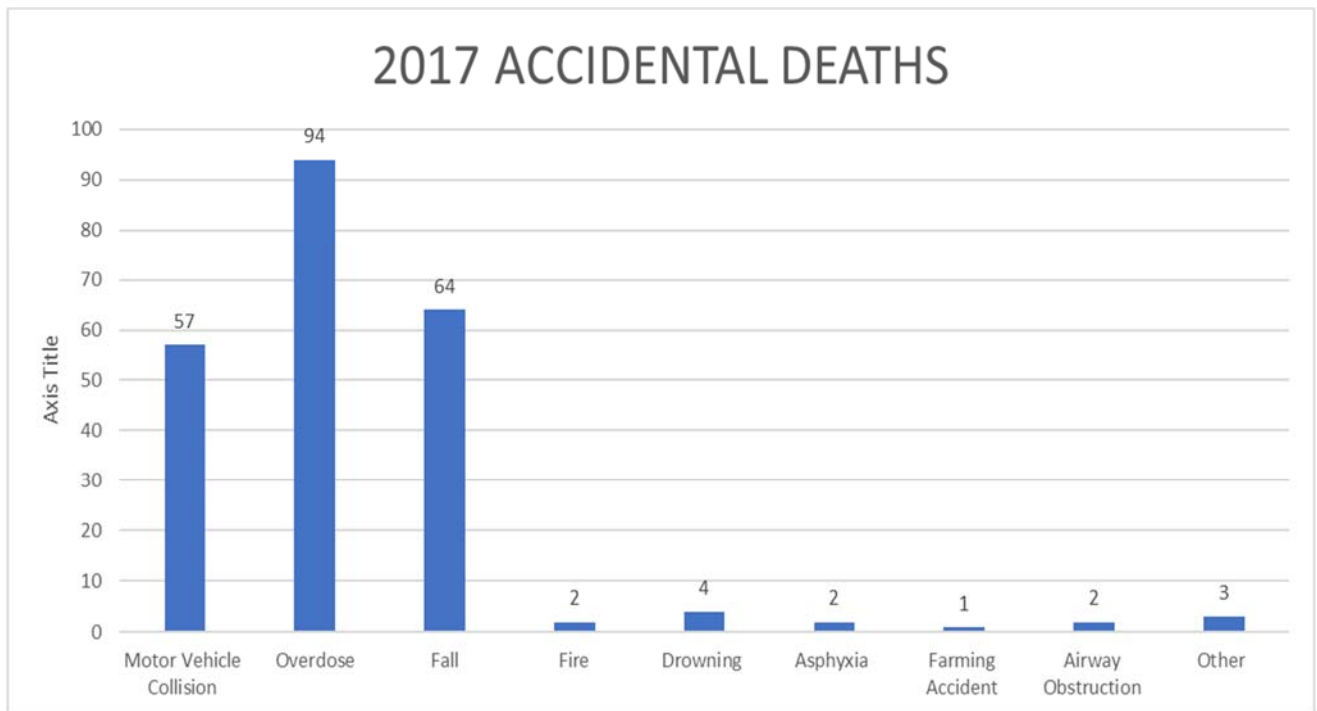
Suicide is a death caused by injury or poisoning as a result of an intentional, self-inflicted act committed to do self-harm or cause the death of one's self. Suicide deaths can range from gun related incidents to drug ingestions. During the 2017 year, there were 50 deaths by suicide. 23 were deaths by firearms, 13 were hangings, 7 were drug overdoses, 3 were drownings, 3 were poisonings, and 1 was by motor vehicle collision.



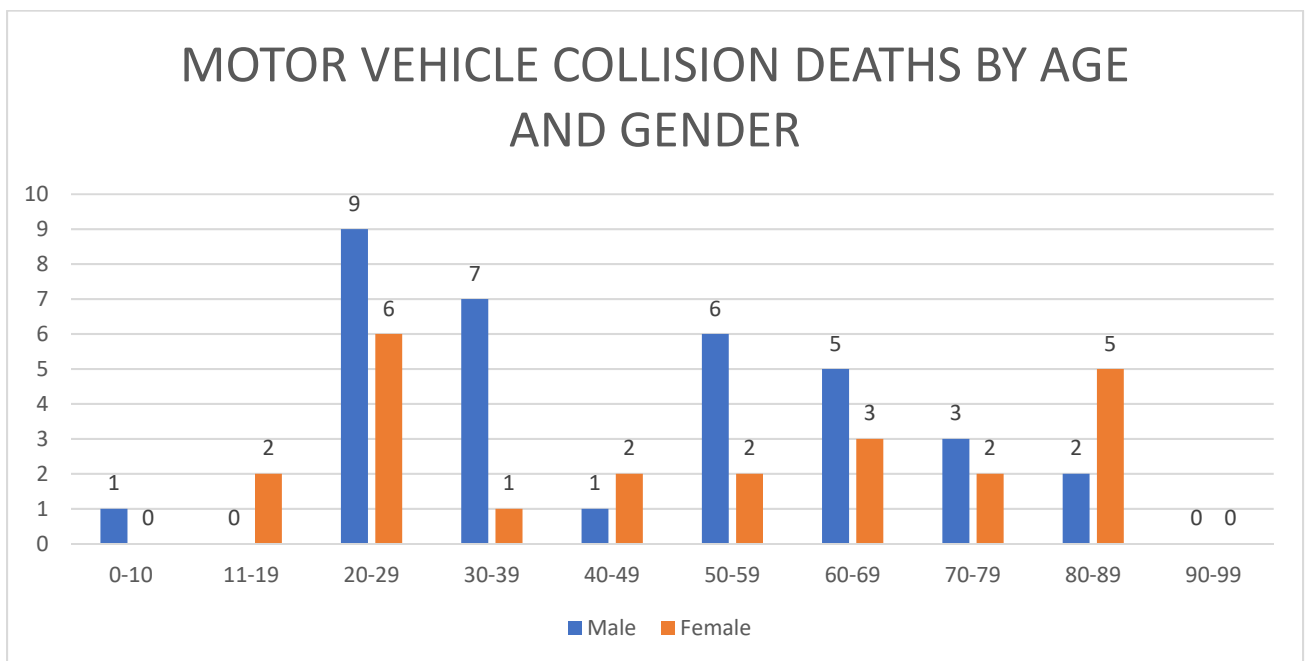
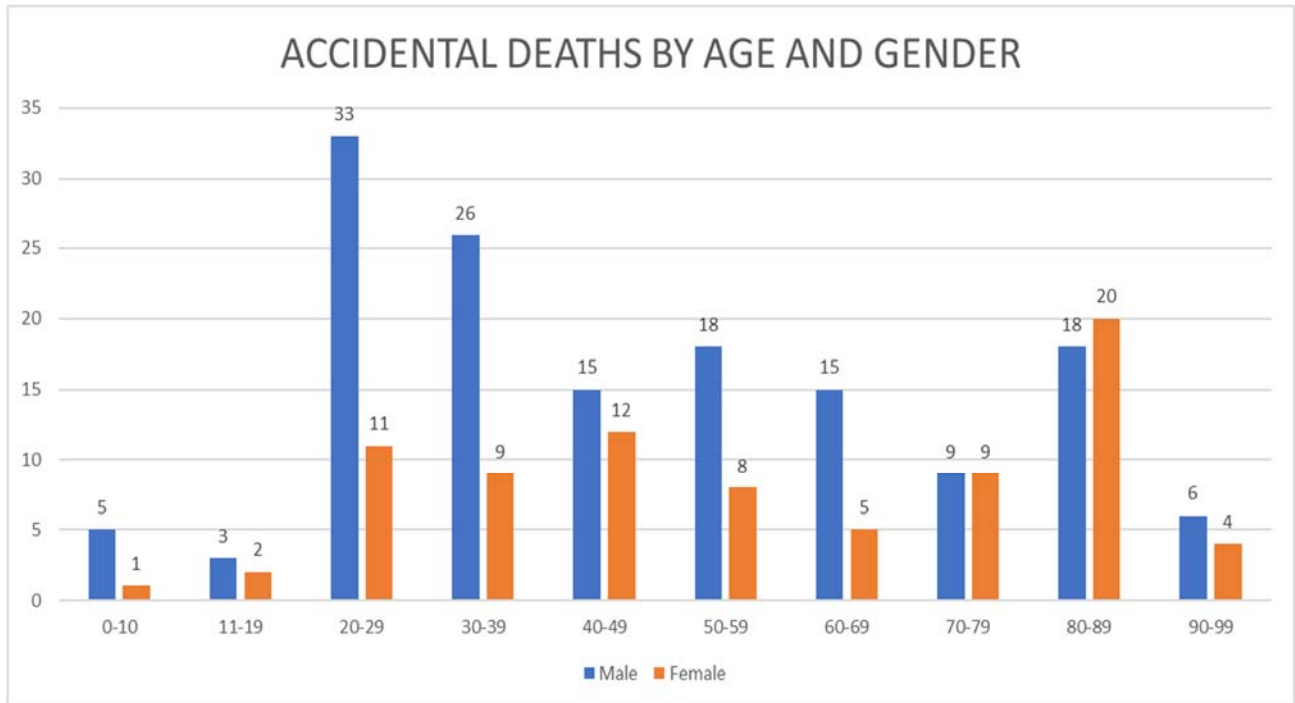


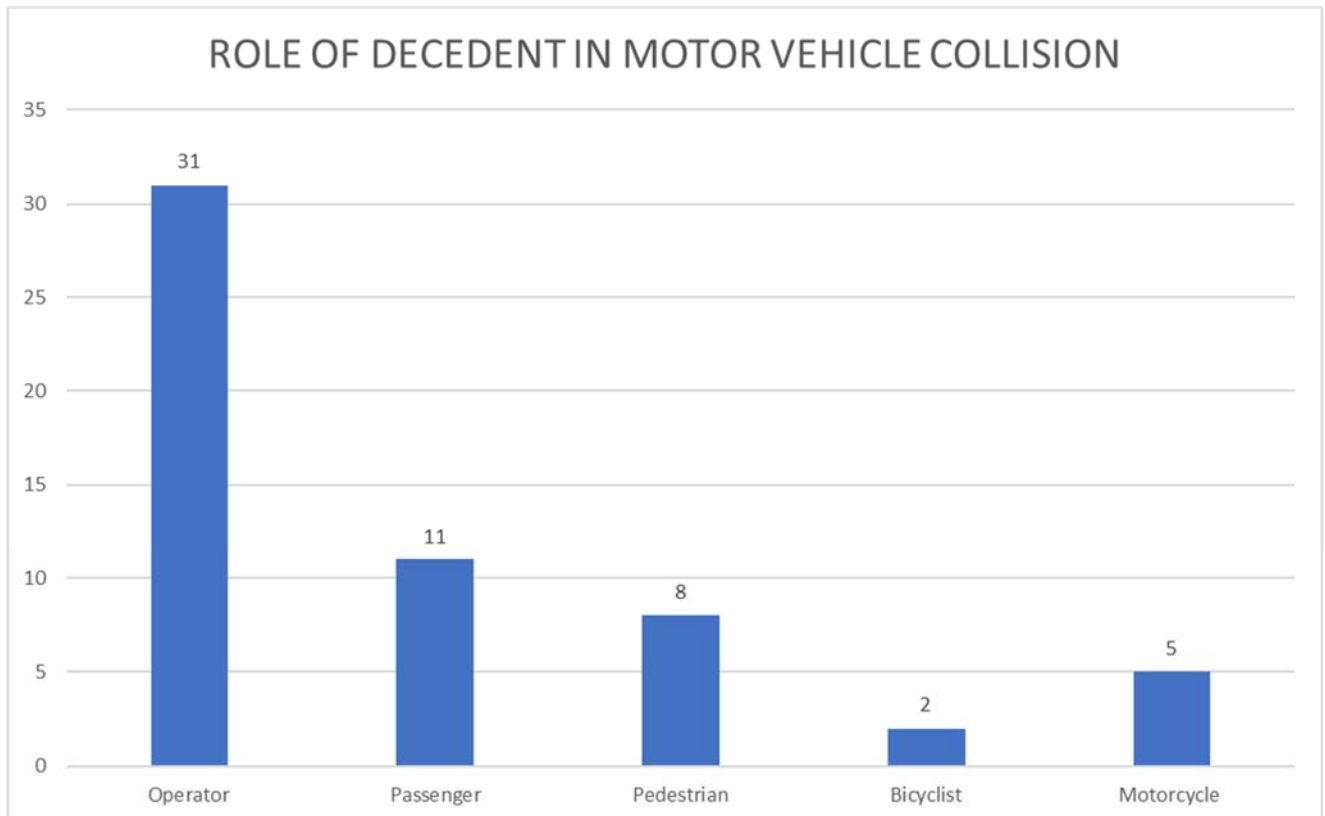
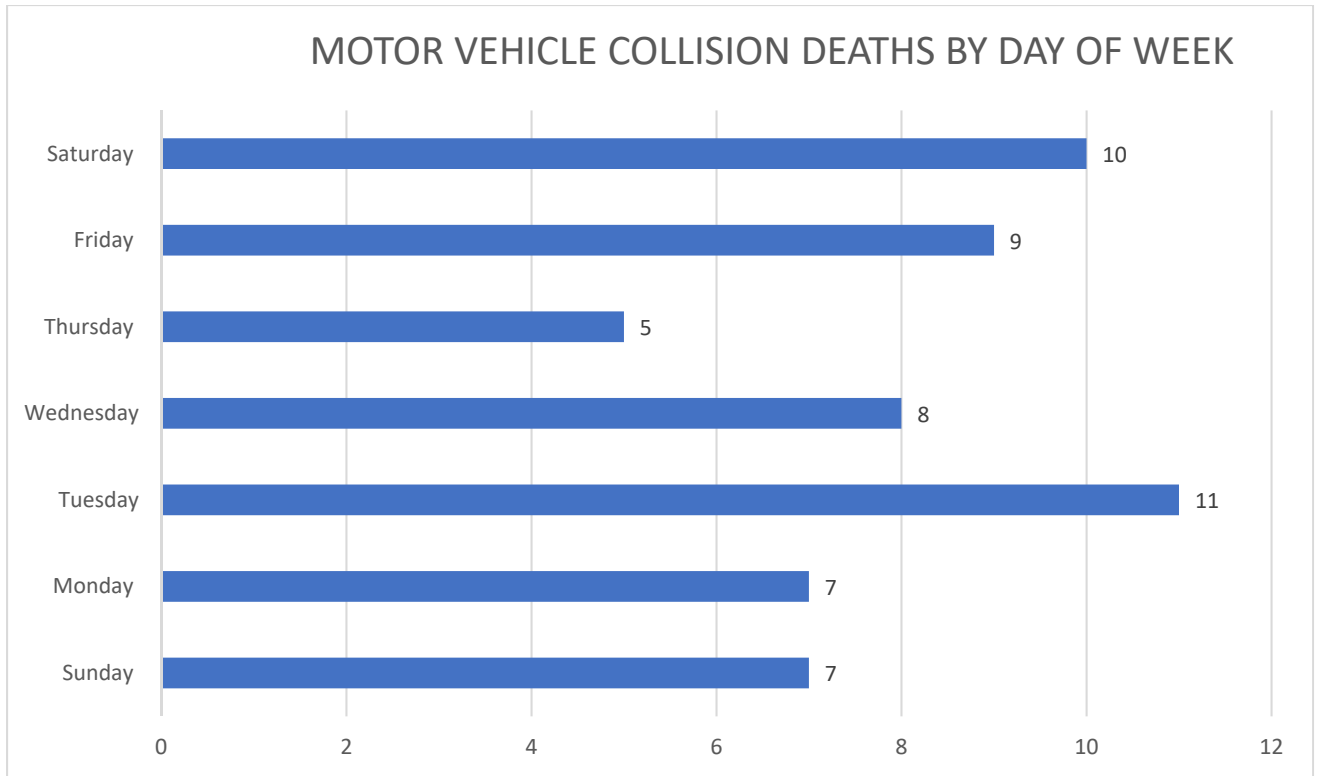
2017 ACCIDENTAL DEATH INVESTIGATIONS

An accidental death is a Death caused by an injury or poisoning where there is no evidence that the injury or poisoning occurred with intent to harm or cause death. These deaths can range from falls to drug overdoses. During the 2017 year there were 229 deaths ruled accidental.

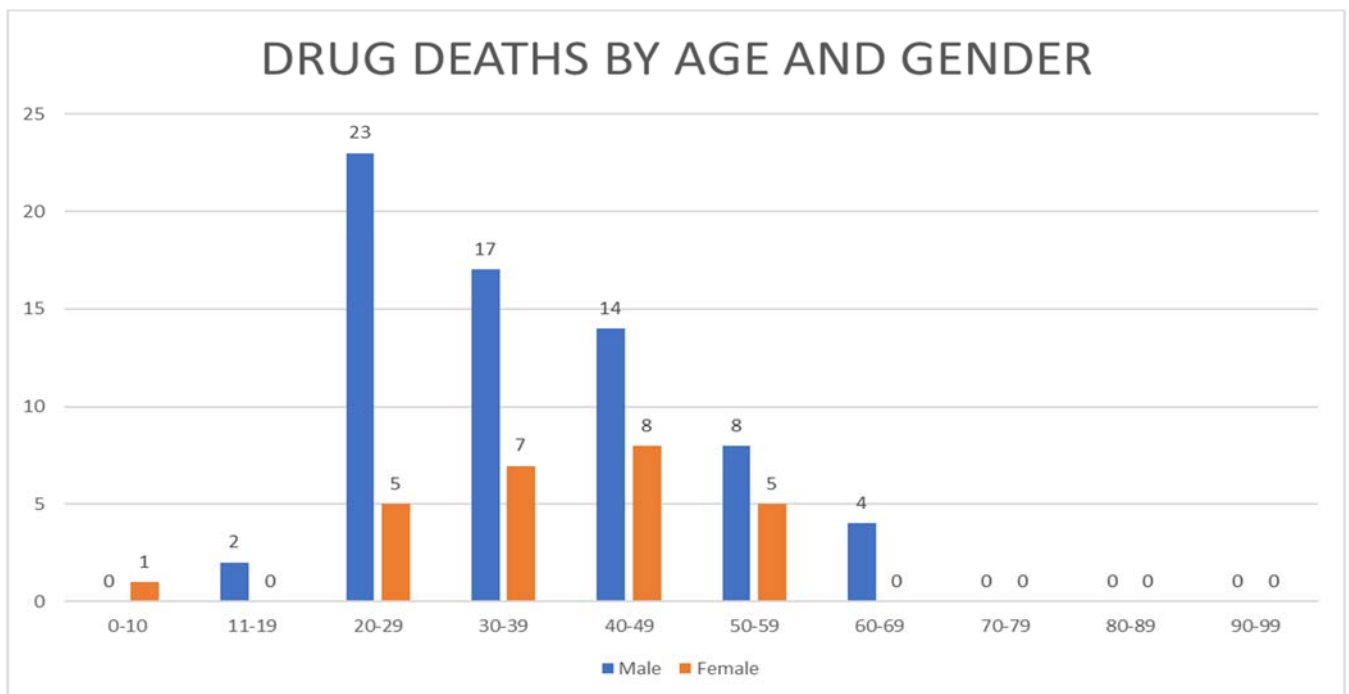
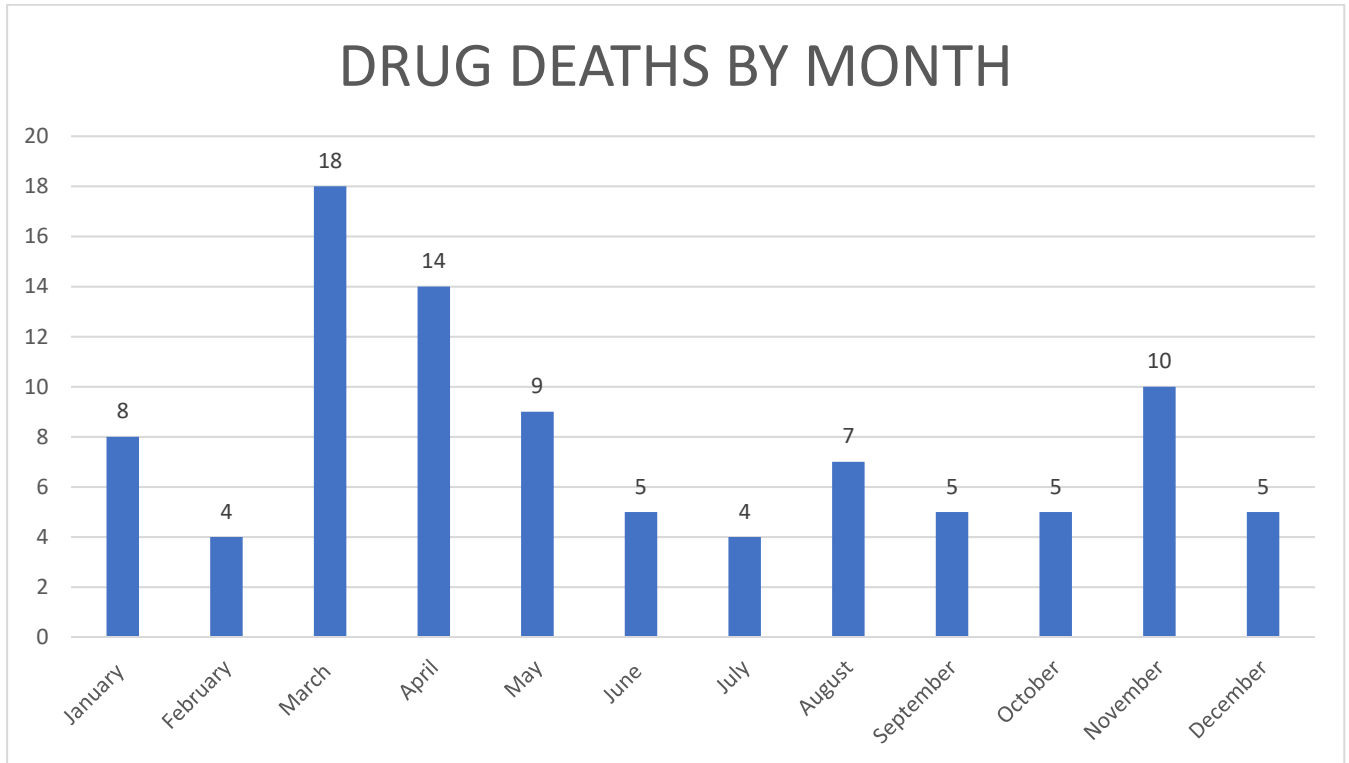


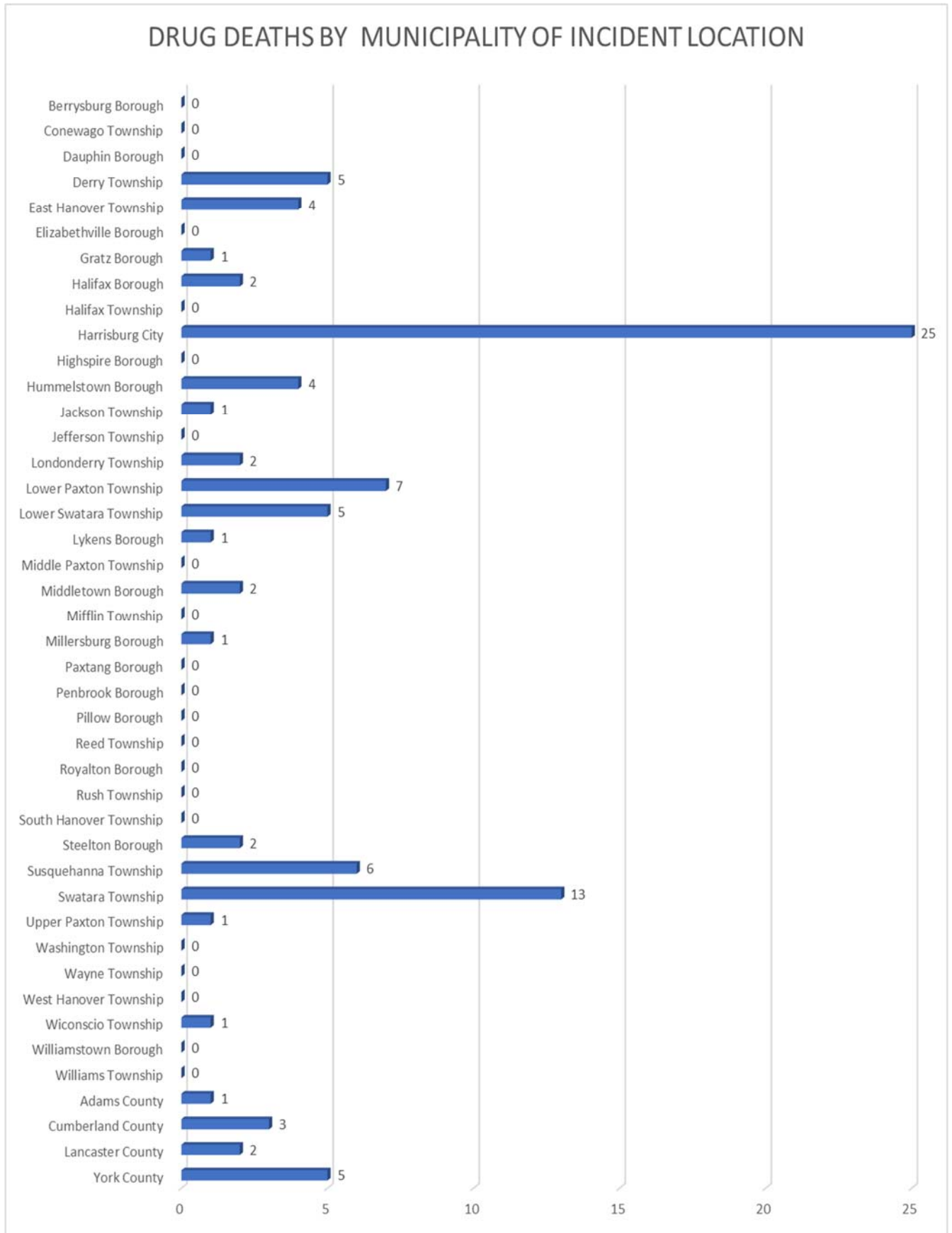






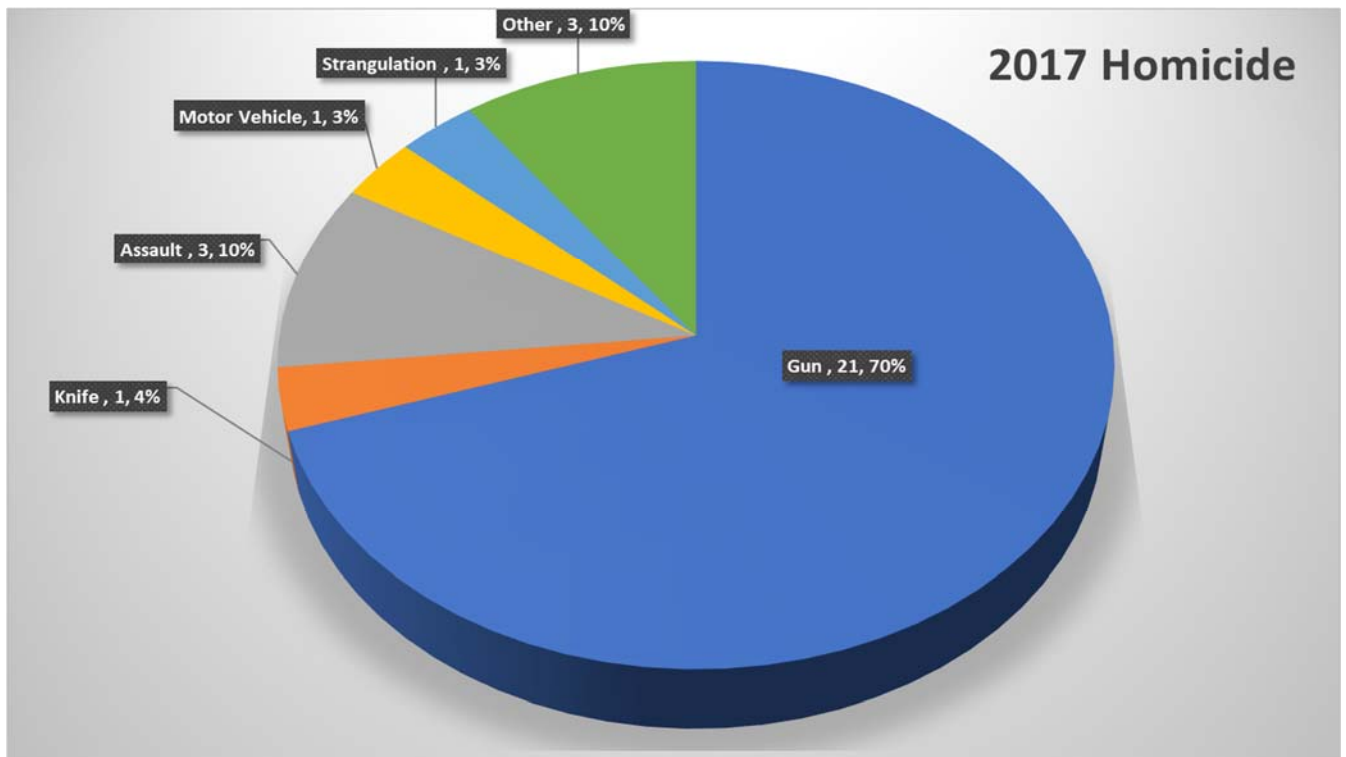
2017 DRUG DEATH – DEMOGRAPHIC STATISTICS

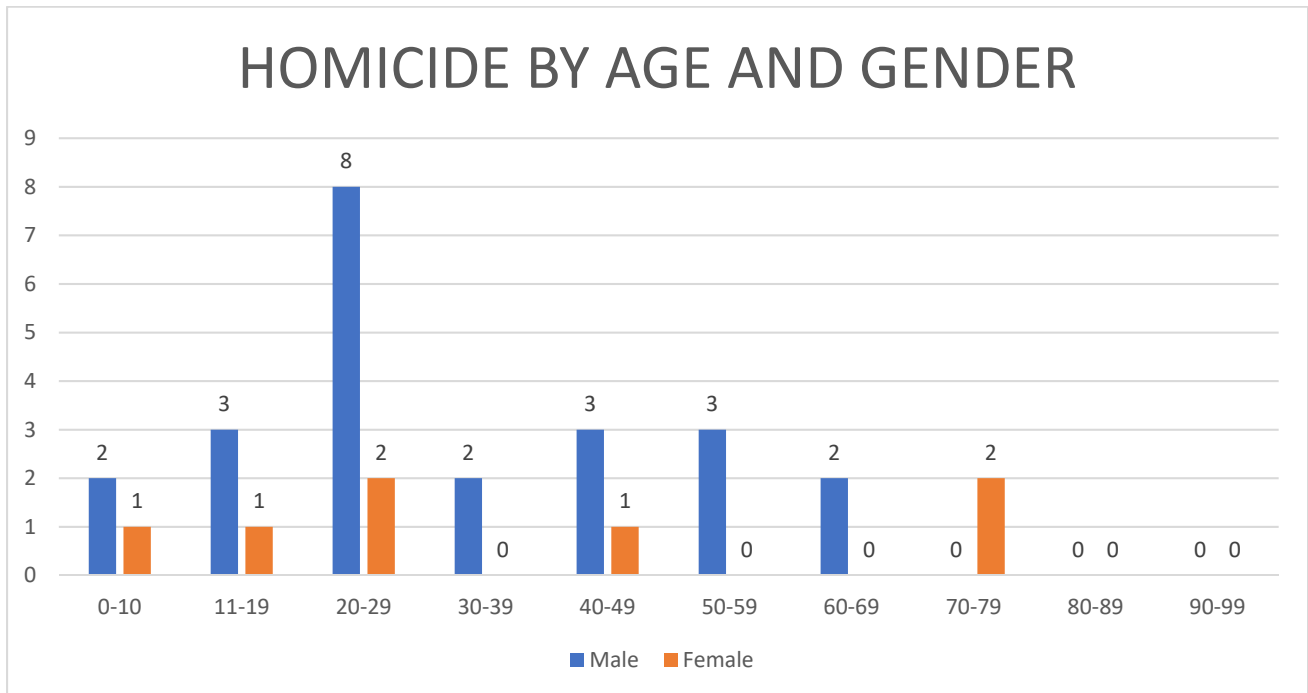
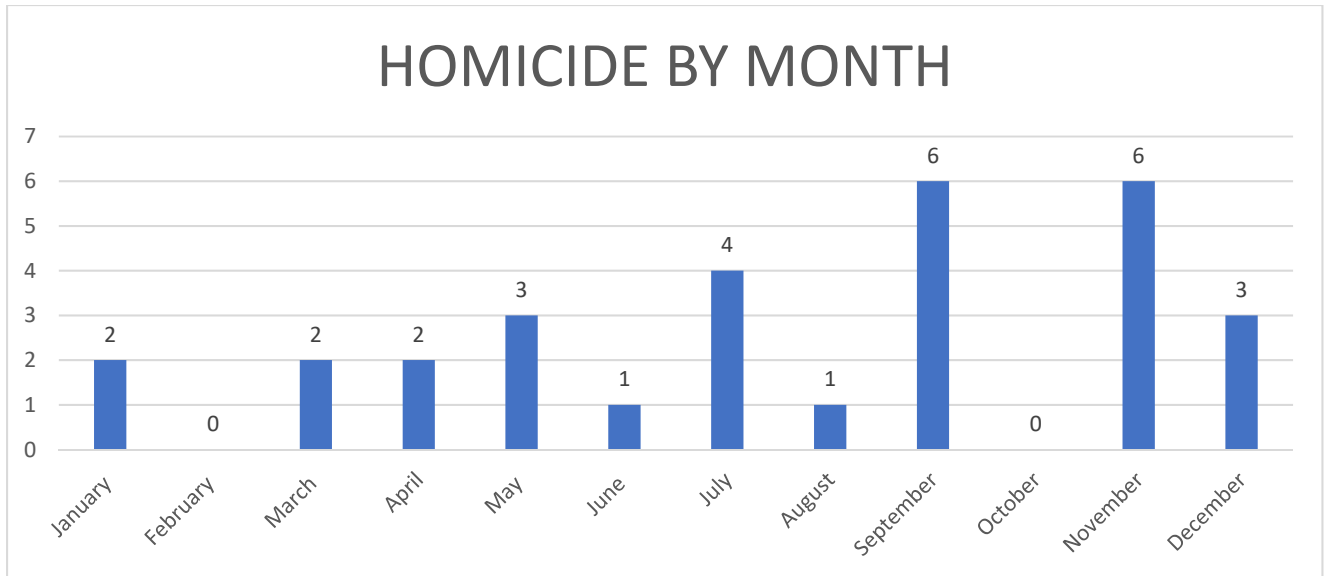




2017 HOMICIDE INVESTIGATIONS

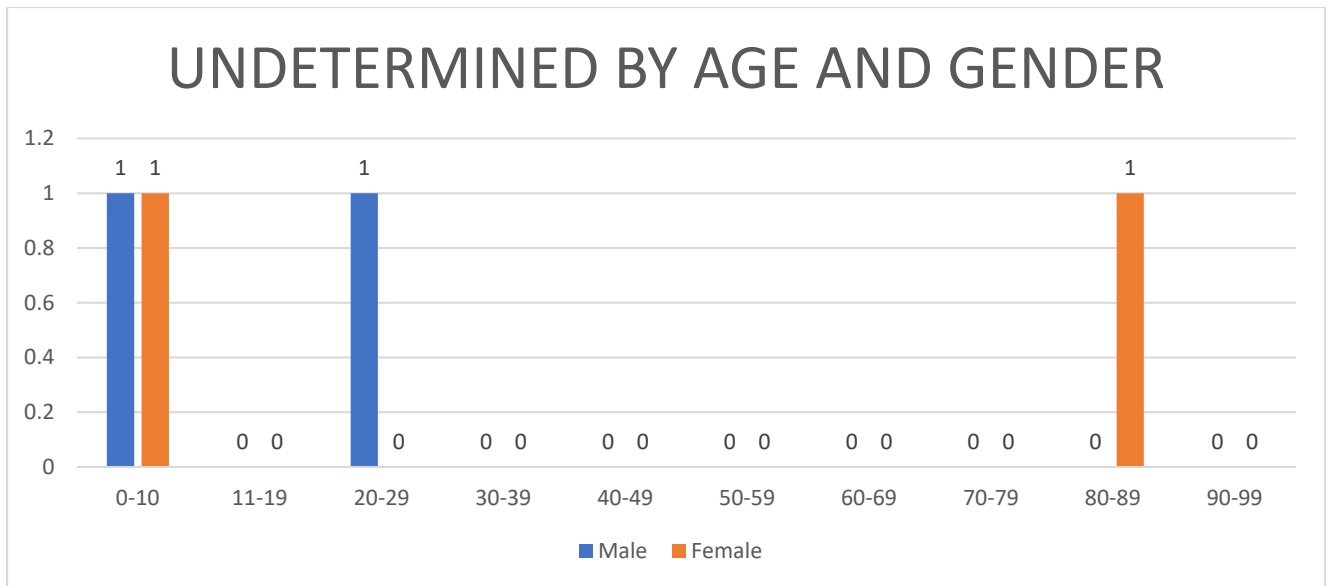
Homicide is a death caused by a volitional act committed by another person to cause fear, harm, or death. These cases are quite possibly the most sensationalized investigations and gain the most media attention. During the 2017 year, there were 30 homicides.





2017 UNDETERMINED INVESTIGATIONS

All possible efforts are made to determine both a Manner and Cause of death for all deaths investigated by the Coroner's Office. In a very small percentage of the total cases, the Manner of Death was unable to be classified even with a complete autopsy, scene investigation, and toxicology testing.



FORENSIC TESTING

There were 125 Forensic autopsies performed in 2017 year, some of which involved toxicology and other testing. 115 investigations only required toxicological testing, and no autopsy was performed.

