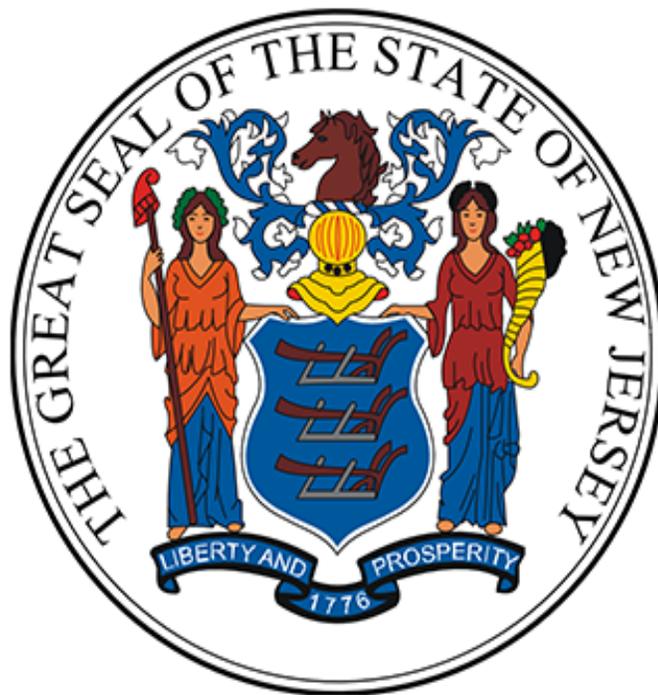


New Jersey

Office of the Chief State

Medical Examiner



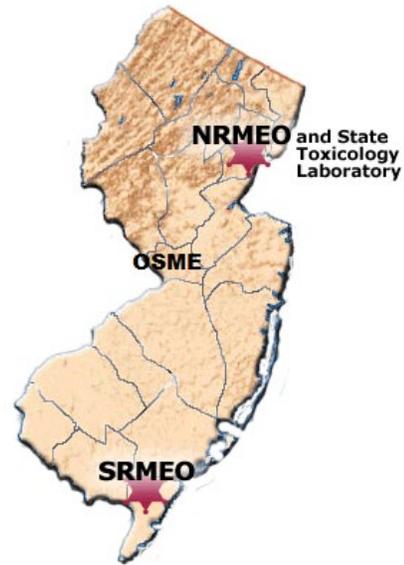
Annual Report

2016

**Office of the
State Medical Examiner
P O Box 085
Trenton, NJ 08625
Phone: 609-984-4883
FAX: 609-984-4466**

**Northern Regional Medical Examiner Office
(Essex, Hudson, Passaic, & Somerset
Counties)**

325 Norfolk Street
Phone: 973-648-7259
FAX: 973-648-3692
24-hour: 973-648-4500



**Southern Regional Medical Examiner Office
(Atlantic, Cape May, & Cumberland
Counties)**

Woodbine Developmental Center
1175 DeHirsch Avenue
Woodbine, NJ 08270
Phone: 609-861-3355
FAX: 609-861-5814
Atlantic 24-hour: 609-909-7200
Cape May 24-hour: 609-465-3011
Cumberland 24-hour: 856-455-6886

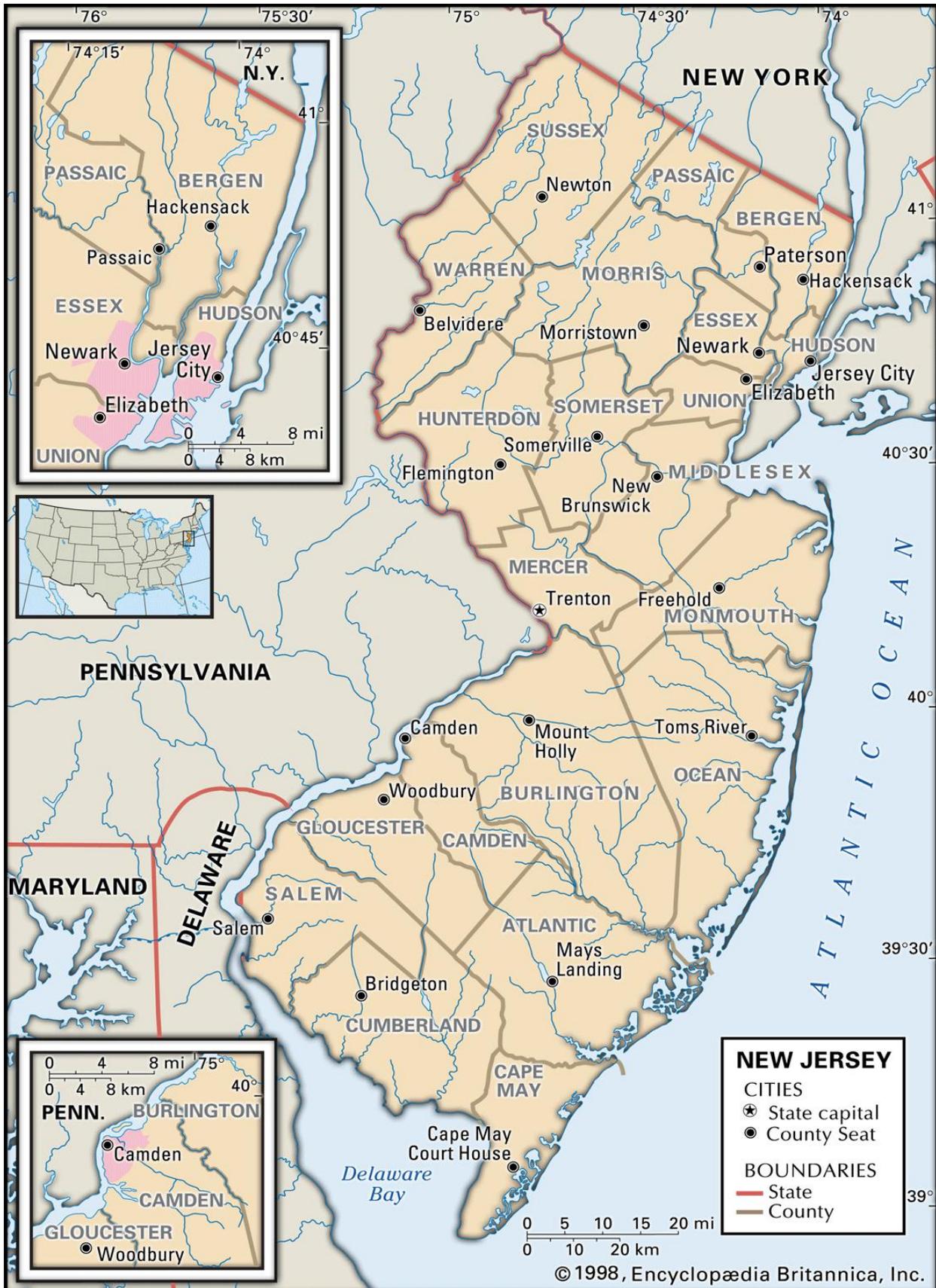


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Foreword

The staff of the Office of the State Medical Examiner (OSME) has prepared this annual report to provide medical examiner case data to local, county, state, and federal officials and to the citizenry at large. This report has been compiled based on case-specific information provided by the 21 New Jersey counties for the year 2016.

With a population of 8,944,469 reported in 2016, New Jersey is the fourth smallest in size but is the most densely populated of the 50 states. In 2016, a total of 20,862 deaths were reported to New Jersey Medical Examiner Offices. Over one-third were accepted for investigation by a medical examiner.

We would like to thank New Jersey's regional and county medical examiner offices for their cooperation in verifying the accuracy of the data reported in the 2016 cases and for their persistent efforts in guiding grieving families through the misfortune of their loved one's death.

The New Jersey Office of the State Medical Examiner
PO Box 085
Trenton, NJ 08625
Telephone: 609-984-4883
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Overview

The current New Jersey medicolegal death investigation system was established in 1967 by The State Medical Examiner Act of 1967 (N.J.S.A. 52:17b-78 et. seq.), which created the Office of the State Medical Examiner (OSME). With this legislation, “county physicians” were replaced by “county medical examiners” (Essex County was the only county that had a County Medical Examiner prior to this time).

The main role of the OSME is to provide administrative oversight of all medical examiner offices in the State of New Jersey. In 2016 there were 11 Medical Examiner Offices that conducted medicolegal death investigations in New Jersey. The State operates the Northern Regional Medical Examiner Office (NRMEO) located in Newark, which provides death investigation services to four counties (Essex, Hudson, Passaic, and Somerset), and the Southern Regional Medical Examiner Office (SRMEO) in Woodbine which covers three counties (Atlantic, Cape May, and Cumberland). Death investigations for the counties of Camden, Gloucester, and Salem are conducted out of a single office in Clarksboro. Likewise, Monmouth, Mercer, and Middlesex county death investigations are executed out of New Brunswick, while the counties of Morris, Sussex, and Warren operate out of a single office in Morristown. Bergen, Burlington, Hunterdon, Ocean, and Union counties are all responsible for their own county jurisdiction.

Cases that are required to be reported to the Medical Examiner’s office include:

- Unattended deaths at a residence or scene
- Unnatural or violent deaths including suspicious or unusual circumstances
- Deaths not caused by readily recognizable disease or disability
- Deaths within 24 hours of admission to a hospital or institution
- Deaths of inmates of prisons or institutions maintained in whole or part of at the expense of the State or county
- Deaths related to disease resulting from employment or accident while employed
- Sudden or unexpected deaths of infants and children under 3 years of age

When a case is reported to the Medical Examiner’s Office, a medicolegal death investigator will gather information regarding the circumstances surrounding a death in order to determine whether a case falls under the jurisdiction of the Medical Examiner’s Office. Depending on the information received, a case can be accepted, transferred to another jurisdiction, or released.

If a case is accepted, the decedent will be transported to the Medical Examiner’s facility. In certain cases, a medicolegal death investigator or a Medical Examiner may attend the death scene. Depending on the nature of the case, an external examination or autopsy will be performed on accepted cases.

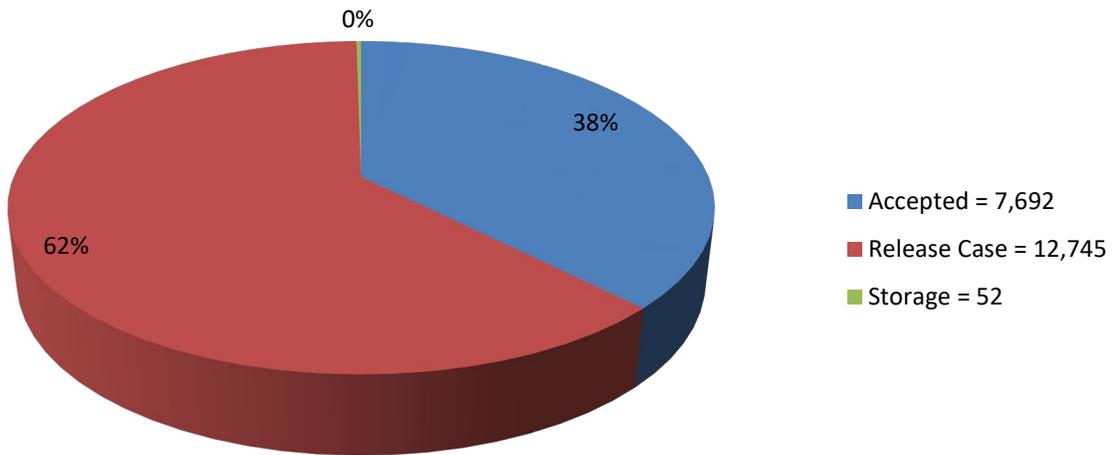
The identity of the deceased is formally established prior to completion of the death certificate. Medical Examiners will document their opinion as to the Cause of Death (COD) and Manner of Death (MOD) on the death certificate after an autopsy or external examination is complete. The COD is the underlying disease or injury that resulted in the death, while the MOD is used as a way to categorize the death. The manner of death classifications include Natural, Accident, Suicide, Homicide, or Undetermined. In cases where the manner of death cannot be determined immediately following an examination of the body, the manner of death will be classified as “Pending,” and will be amended accordingly once further information becomes available. Only a medical examiner can certify a death with a manner other than Natural.

The determination of Homicide or Accident by a medical examiner is a medical classification, and not a determination of criminal responsibility. While prosecutors and courts will usually make similar conclusions, they may conclude that a given case is or is not a homicide or accident regardless of a medical examiner’s determination.

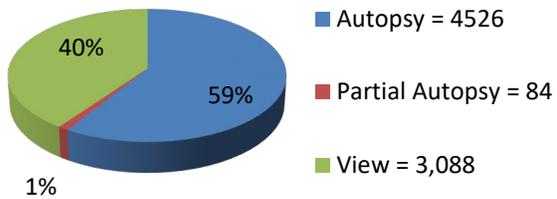
At the conclusion of the medicolegal death investigation, the medical portion of the death certificate is completed. The personal section of the death certificate is then completed by a licensed funeral director, who will then file the document with the New Jersey Department of Health, Office of Vital Statistics and Registry. Once all ancillary testing is completed, an autopsy report or external examination report is generated. Copies of these reports will be made available under the Open Public Records Act (OPRA).

Statewide Data

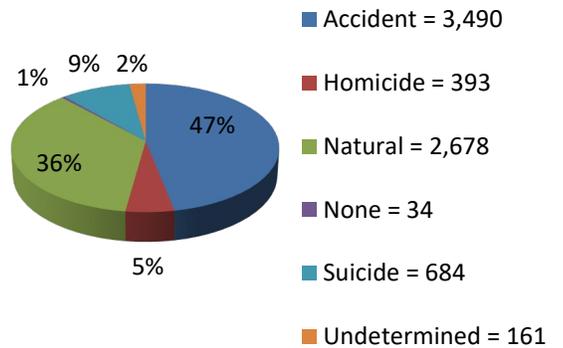
Total Deaths Reported Statewide (20,862)



Total Exams Statewide (7,598)



Manner of Death Statewide (Accepted Cases)



STATEWIDE STATISTICAL SUMMARY REPORT FOR 2016

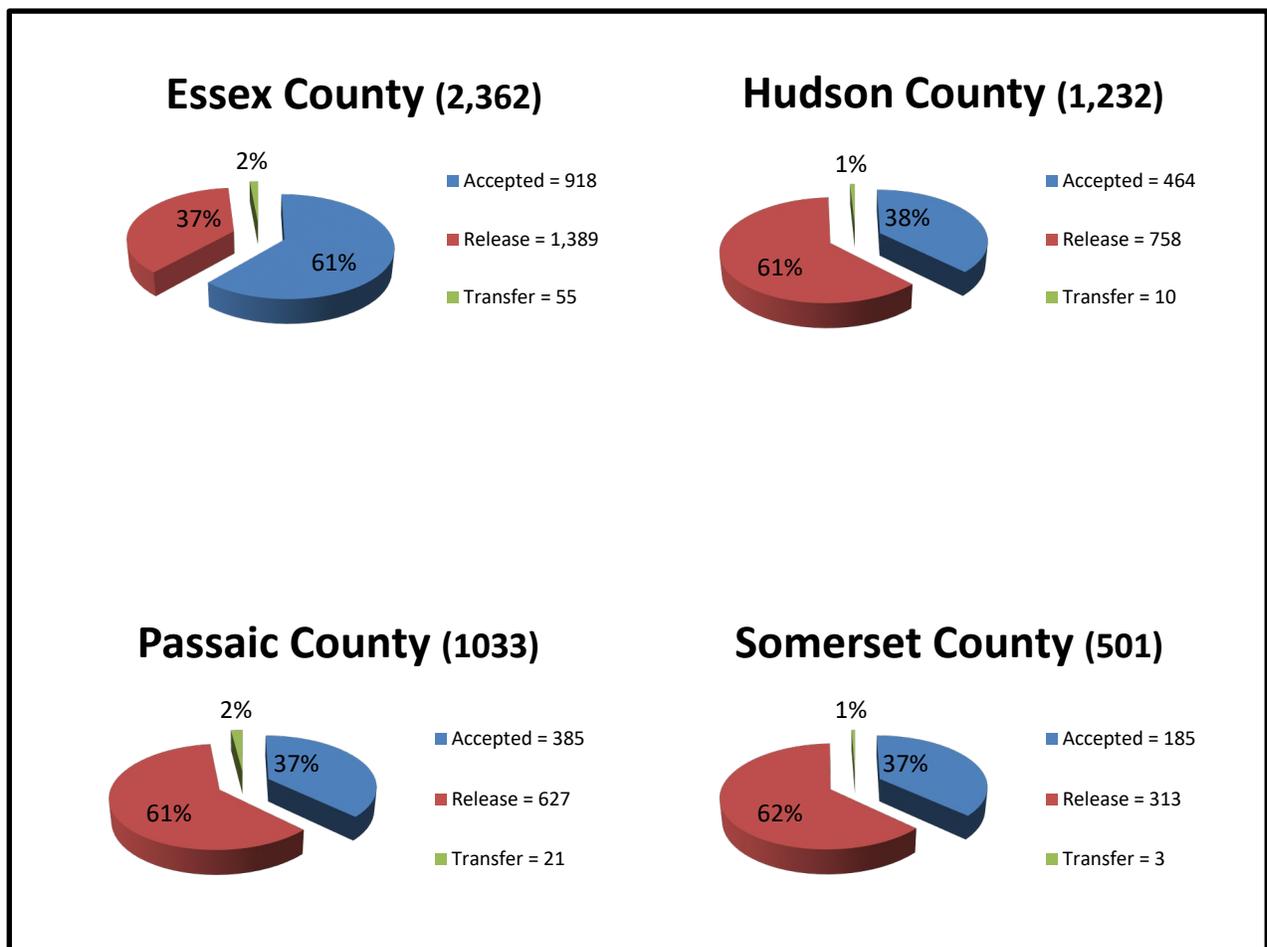
COUNTY NAME	Reported	Accepted	Autopsy	% Autopsied	View	% Viewed
Atlantic	1,005	487	334	69%	153	31%
Bergen	1,996	539	321	60%	218	40%
Burlington	976	365	112	31%	253	69%
Camden	1,344	504	233	46%	271	54%
Cape May	309	131	76	58%	55	42%
Cumberland	568	246	141	57%	105	43%
Essex	2,362	918	652	71%	266	29%
Gloucester	619	232	43	19%	189	81%
Hudson	1,232	464	311	67%	153	33%
Hunterdon	232	121	64	53%	57	47%
Mercer	749	277	106	38%	171	62%
Middlesex	1,811	681	446	65%	235	35%
Monmouth	1,482	570	365	64%	205	36%
Morris	1,025	289	116	40%	173	60%
Ocean	1,717	652	516	79%	136	21%
Passaic	1,033	385	259	67%	126	33%
Salem	172	80	23	29%	57	71%
Somerset	501	185	129	70%	56	30%
Sussex	286	117	50	43%	67	57%
Union	1,166	336	267	79%	69	21%
Warren	248	109	48	44%	61	56%
State	4	4	4	100%	0	0%
TOTAL Transfers	20,837 351					
TOTAL	21,188	7,692	4,616		3,076	

Northern Regional Medical Examiner

The Northern Regional Medical Examiner’s Office (NRMEO) serves four counties: Essex, Hudson, Passaic, and Somerset. The counties have entered into a contract with the Department of Law and Public Safety, whereby the Division of Criminal Justice provides death investigations, medical examiner services, and toxicology analysis on a fee-for-service basis and the counties reimburse the state for the cost to operate the office.

The Edwin H. Albano Institute of Forensic Sciences is a free-standing facility located in Newark in Essex County. The daily work of this office is under direct supervision of the State Medical Examiner. The office is used for various training programs, Mass Fatality Planning, and houses the New Jersey State Toxicology Laboratory that conducts post-mortem toxicology and law enforcement drug testing.

In 2016, a total of 4,609 cases were reported to the Northern Regional Medical Examiner office.

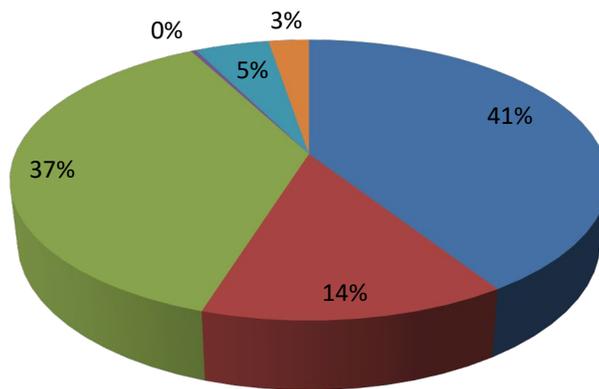


Deaths Reported 2,362

Accepted	918
Transferred	55
Released	1,389

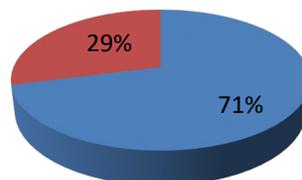
Manner of Death (Accepted)

■ Accident = 375	■ Homicide = 128	■ Natural = 343
■ None = 3	■ Suicide = 44	■ Undetermined = 25



Exam Type

■ Autopsy	■ View
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Essex County Violent Death Analysis of Accepted

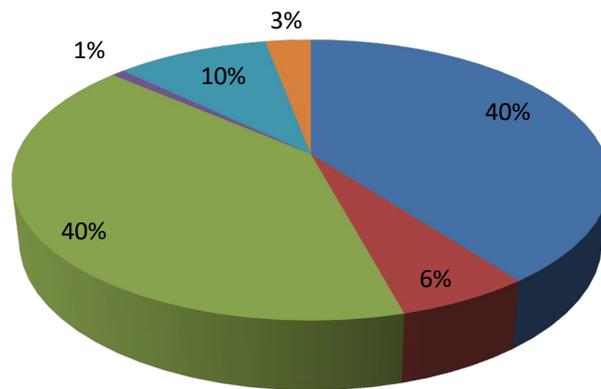
	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	<i>Total</i>
Firearm	1	13	108		122
Blunt Trauma	2		6	4	12
Transportation	48	2			50
Falls / Falls from Height	27	4			31
Sharp Force	1	2	5		8
Drug / Alcohol	274	4		3	281
Chemical	1				1
Asphyxia	5	2	9		16
Hanging		17			17
Drowning	2			1	3
Fire	8				8
Miscellaneous	5			16	21
<i>Total</i>	374	44	128	24	570

Deaths Reported 1,232

Accepted	464
Transferred	10
Released	758

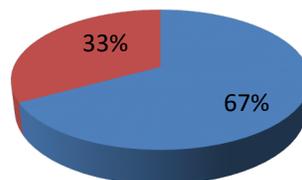
Manner of Death (Accepted)

■ Accident = 189	■ Homicide = 29	■ Natural = 193
■ None = 4	■ Suicide = 47	■ Undetermined = 14



Exam Type

■ Autopsy	■ View
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Hudson County Violent Death Analysis of Accepted

	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	<i>Total</i>
Firearm		9	19		28
Blunt Trauma	1		2	3	6
Transportation	34				34
Falls / Falls from Height	21	5			26
Sharp Force			6		6
Drug / Alcohol	123	7		3	133
Asphyxia	3		2		5
Hanging		14			14
Drowning	5	3		1	9
Fire	2				2
Miscellaneous				7	7
<i>Total</i>	189	38	29	14	270

Passaic County

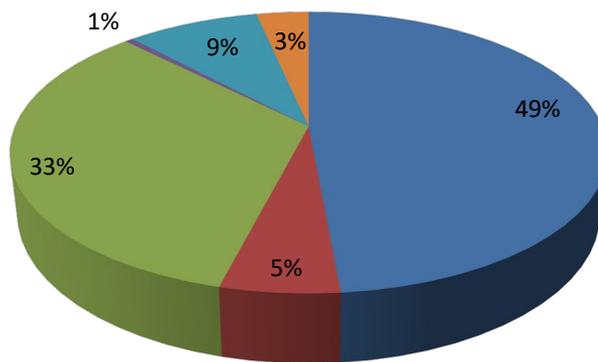
2016 Population = 507,945

Deaths Reported 1,033

Accepted	385
Transferred	21
Released	627

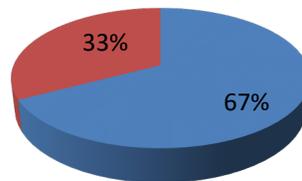
Manner of Death (Accepted)

■ Accident = 187	■ Homicide = 21	■ Natural = 129
■ None = 2	■ Suicide = 33	■ Undetermined = 13



Exam Type

■ Autopsy	■ View
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Passaic County Violent Death Analysis of Accepted

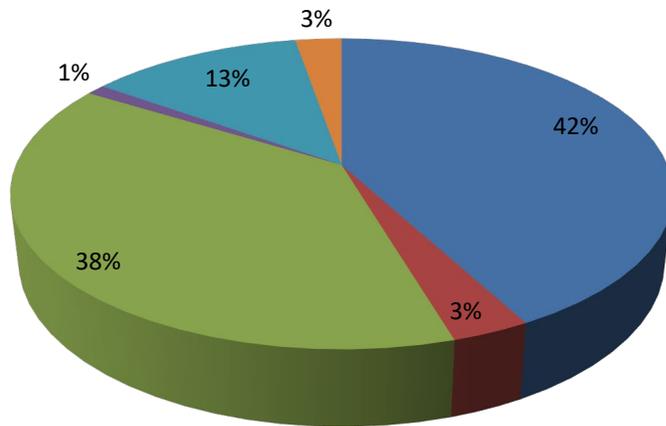
	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	<i>Total</i>
Firearm		9	19		28
Blunt Trauma	1	1	1		3
Transportation	26			1	27
Falls / Falls from Height	37	4			41
Sharp Force			1	1	2
Drug / Alcohol	108	4		3	115
Chemical	4				4
Asphyxia	4	1		1	6
Hanging		14			14
Drowning	3				3
Fire	2				2
Miscellaneous	2			7	9
<i>Total</i>	187	33	21	13	254

Deaths Reported 501

Accepted	185
Transferred	3
Released	313

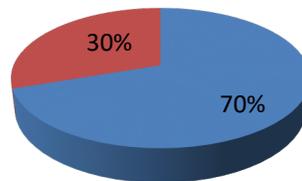
Manner of Death (Accepted)

■ Accident = 78 ■ Homicide = 6 ■ Natural = 71 ■ None = 2 ■ Suicide = 23 ■ Undetermined = 5



Exam Type

■ Autopsy ■ View



Somerset County Violent Death Analysis of Accepted

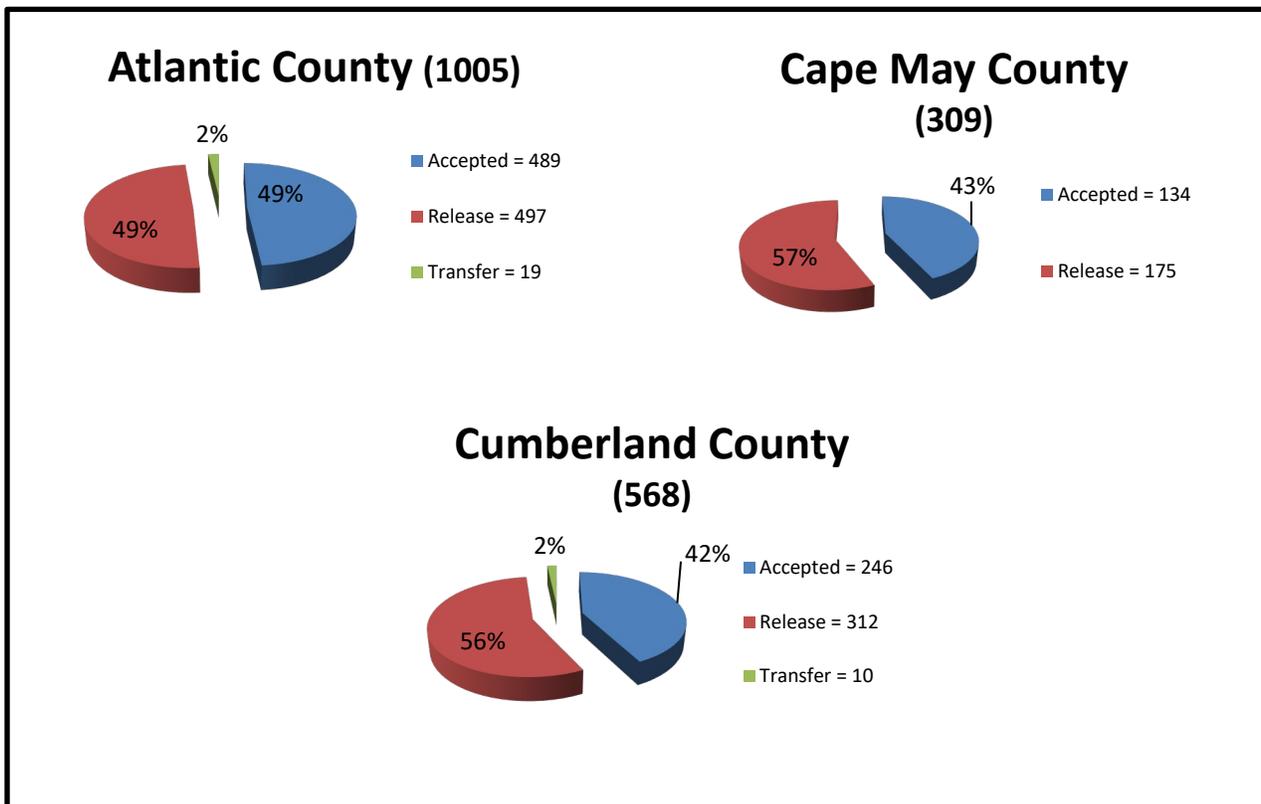
	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	<i>Total</i>
Firearm		7			7
Blunt Trauma	1		3	1	5
Transportation	21	1			22
Falls / Falls from Height	6				6
Drug / Alcohol	43	2			45
Chemical		1	1		2
Asphyxia	3	2			5
Hanging		8			8
Sharpe Force		1	1		2
Hypothermia					0
Fire	3	1	1		5
Miscellaneous	1			4	5
<i>Total</i>	78	23	6	5	112

Southern Regional Medical Examiner

The Southern Regional Medical Examiner Office (SRMEO) serves three counties: Atlantic, Cape May, and Cumberland. Similar to the Northern Regional Office, the counties have entered into a contract with the Department of Law and Public Safety, whereby the Division of Criminal Justice provides death investigations, medical examiner services, and toxicology analysis on a fee-for-service basis, and the counties reimburse the state for the cost to operate the office. The office is charged with conducting death investigations for all violent, sudden, unexpected and suspicious deaths that occur within its jurisdiction. Other cases involve a threat to public health, occupation related deaths, industrial equipment accidents, environmental hazards, vehicular deaths, drownings, and even farming accidents.

This office is administered from a site co-located with the Woodbine Developmental Center (WDC), in Woodbine, NJ while post-mortem examinations are performed at Shore Memorial Hospital in Somers Point, NJ. The daily work of the office is under the direct supervision of an Assistant State Medical Examiner. The office is also used as a base of operations for Mass Disaster Planning, training, and other medical examiner functions. The WDC site can also serve as the staging area for catastrophes that involve the health and safety of the citizens of this state.

In 2016, a total of 1,882 cases were reported to the Southern Regional Medical Examiner office.

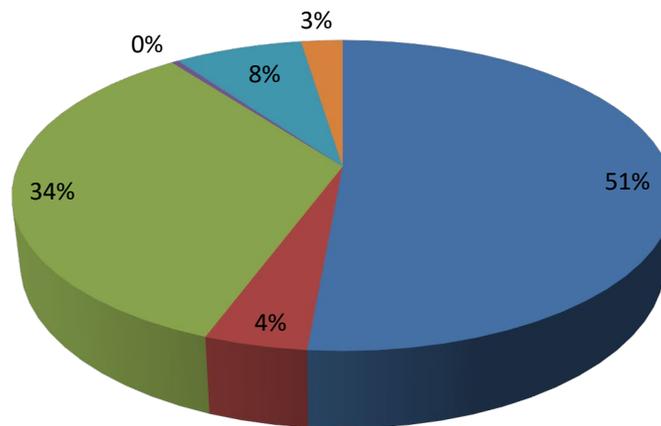


Deaths Reported 1005

Accepted	489
Transferred	19
Released	497

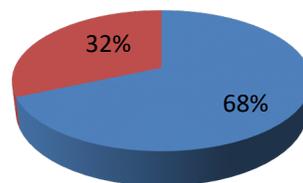
Manner of Death (Accepted)

■ Accident = 254 ■ Homicide = 21 ■ Natural = 168 ■ None = 2 ■ Suicide = 37 ■ Undetermined = 7



Exam Type

■ Autopsy ■ View



Atlantic County Violent Death Analysis of Accepted

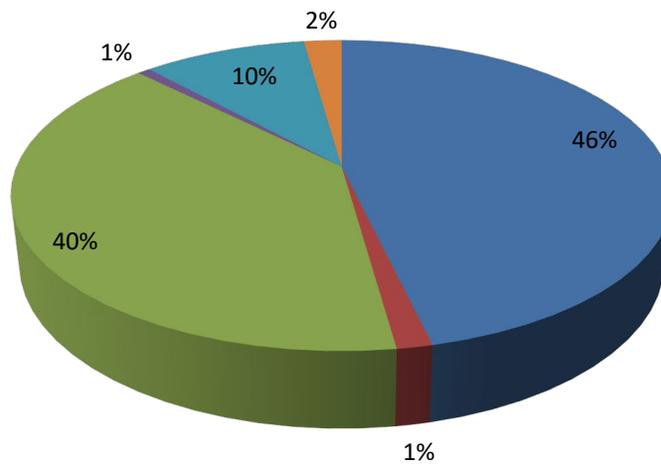
	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	<i>Total</i>
Firearm		11	17		28
Blunt Trauma	2		3	2	7
Transportation	45				45
Falls / Falls from Height	26	3		1	30
Sharp Force			1		1
Drug / Alcohol	169	6		1	176
Chemical	1	4			5
Asphyxia	5	1			6
Hanging		12			12
Drowning	3				3
Miscellaneous	2			3	5
<i>Total</i>	253	37	21	7	318

Deaths Reported 309

Accepted	134
Released	175

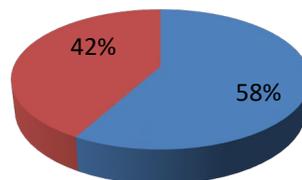
Manner of Death (Accepted)

■ Accident = 63 ■ Homicide = 2 ■ Natural = 54 ■ None = 1 ■ Suicide = 13 ■ Undetermined = 3



Exam Type

■ Autopsy ■ View



Cape May County Violent Death Analysis of Accepted

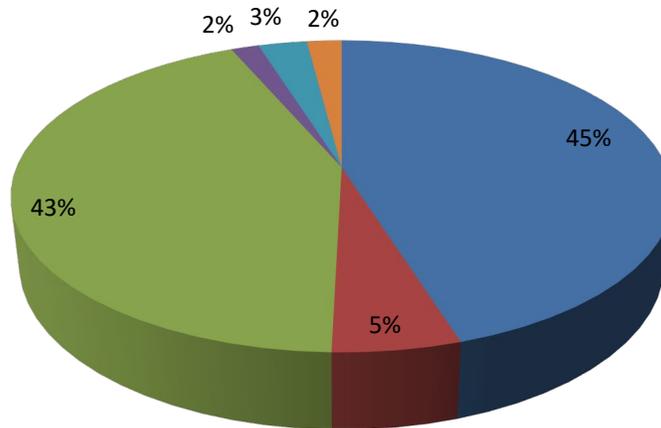
	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	<i>Total</i>
Firearm		6			6
Transportation	12				12
Blunt Trauma	1				1
Falls / Falls from Height	16	1			17
Sharp Force					
Drug / Alcohol	32	2		2	36
Hanging		3			3
Drowning	1				1
Fire	1			1	2
Miscellaneous		1			1
<i>Total</i>	63	13	0	3	79

Deaths Reported 568

Accepted	246
Transferred	10
Released	312

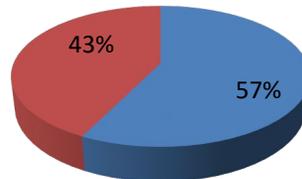
Manner of Death (Accepted)

■ Accident = 111 ■ Homicide = 13 ■ Natural = 106 ■ None = 4 ■ Suicide = 7 ■ Undetermined = 4



Exam Type

■ Autopsy ■ View



Cumberland County Violent Death Analysis of Accepted

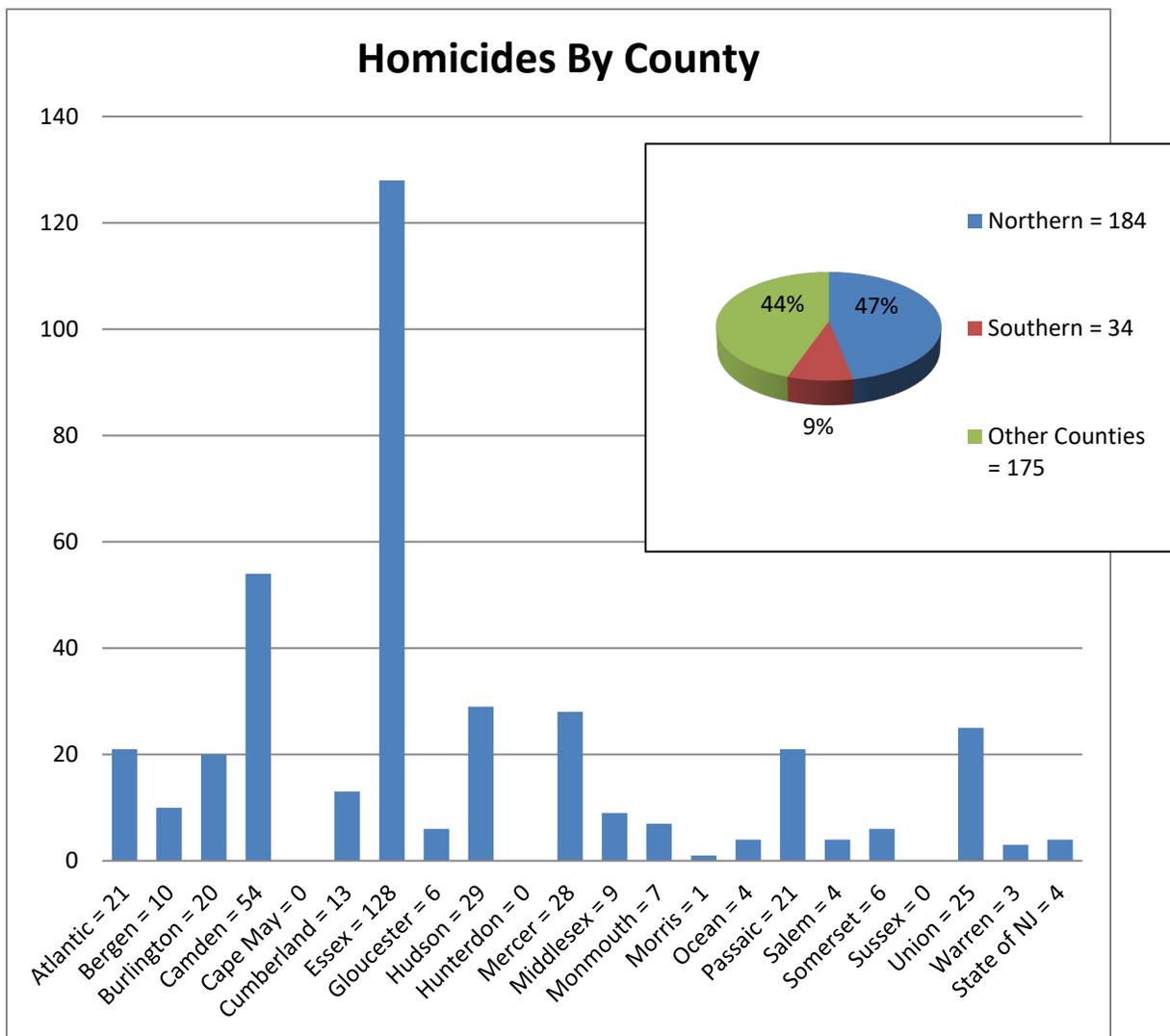
	Accident	Suicide	Homicide	Undetermined	<i>Total</i>
Firearm		2	8		10
Blunt Trauma			2		2
Transportation	32				32
Falls / Falls from Height	18				18
Sharp Force			3		3
Drug / Alcohol	56			2	58
Chemical		1		1	2
Fire		1			1
Hanging		3			3
Hypothermia	2				2
Drowning	3				3
Miscellaneous				2	2
<i>Total</i>	111	7	13	5	136

Statewide Homicides

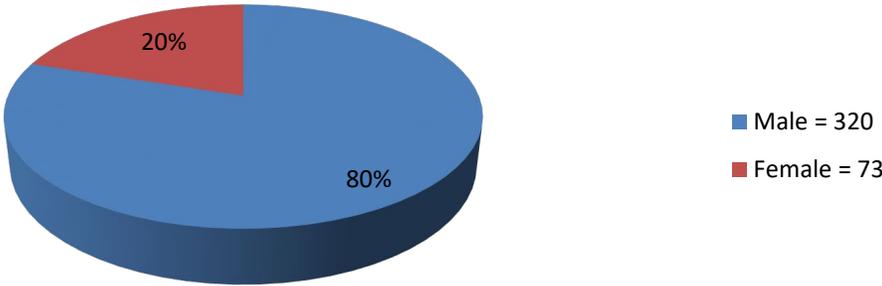
A homicide is defined as the deliberate and unlawful killing of one person by another; murder. All cases of apparent homicidal deaths are classified as a mandatory autopsy (N.J.A.C. 13:49-1.1).

New Jersey State and County Medical Examiners certified 393 deaths as homicides in 2016. The victims of these homicides were predominantly male (81%), Black (69%), and in their 20's (38%).

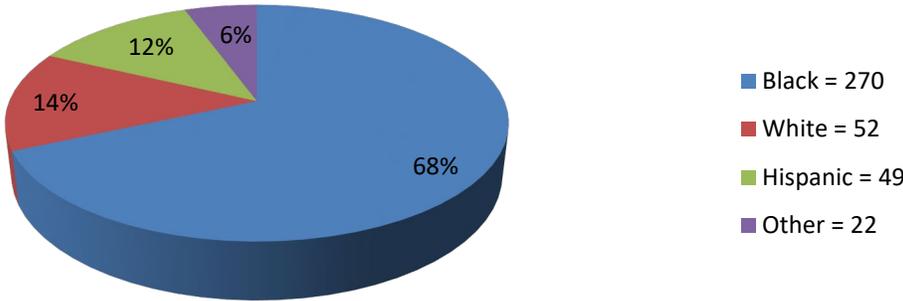
The Northern Regional Medical Examiner Office accounted for approximately half of the state's homicides (47%) and Essex County alone accounted for a third of the state's homicides (33%). There were no homicides reported in Cape May, Hunterdon, and Sussex counties.



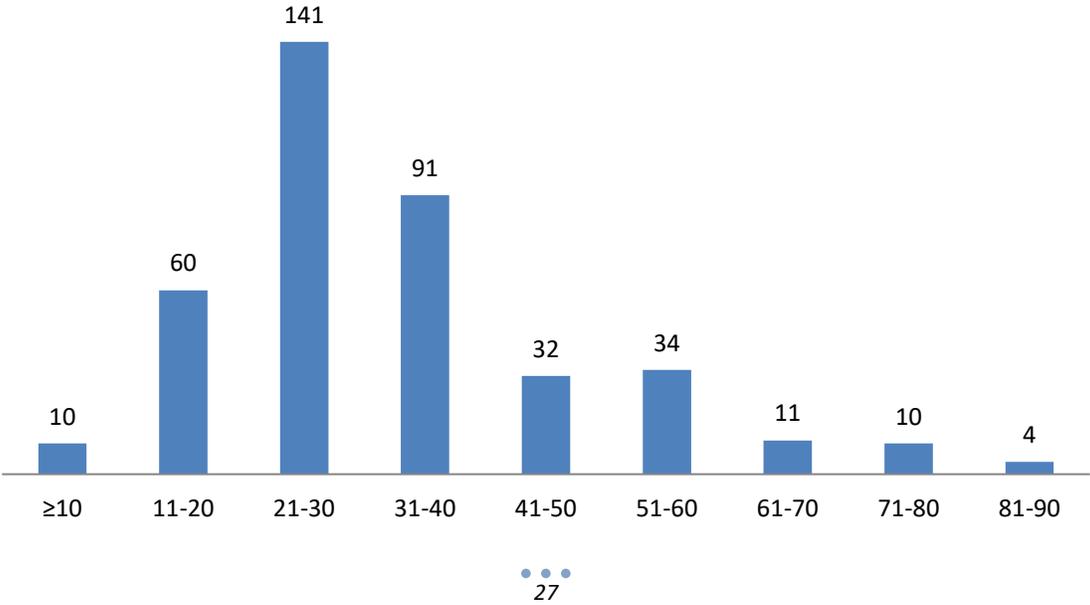
Homicides by Gender Statewide



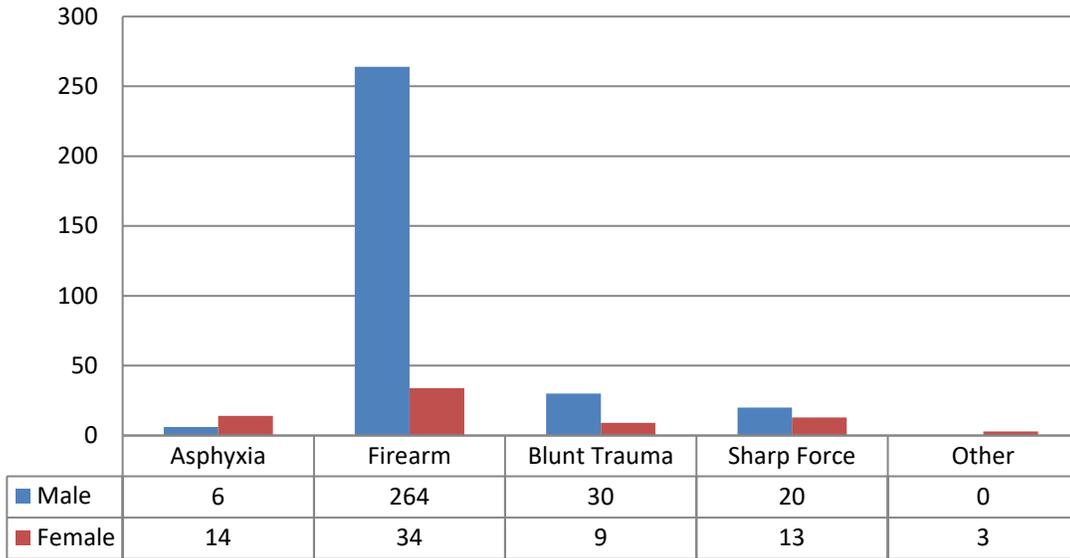
Homicides by Race Statewide



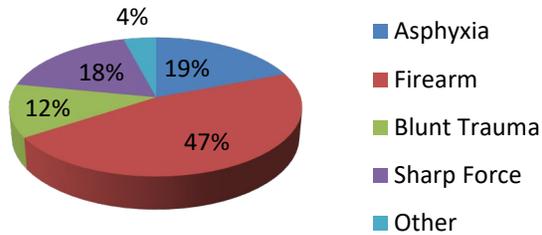
Homicides by Age Statewide



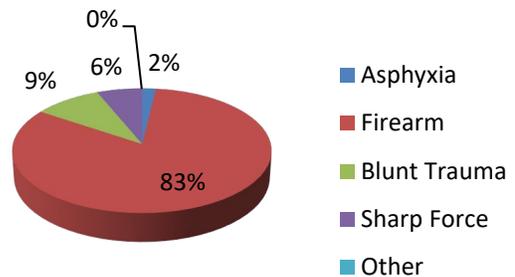
Number of Homicide Deaths by Gender and Method



Female Homicides by Method



Male Homicides by Method



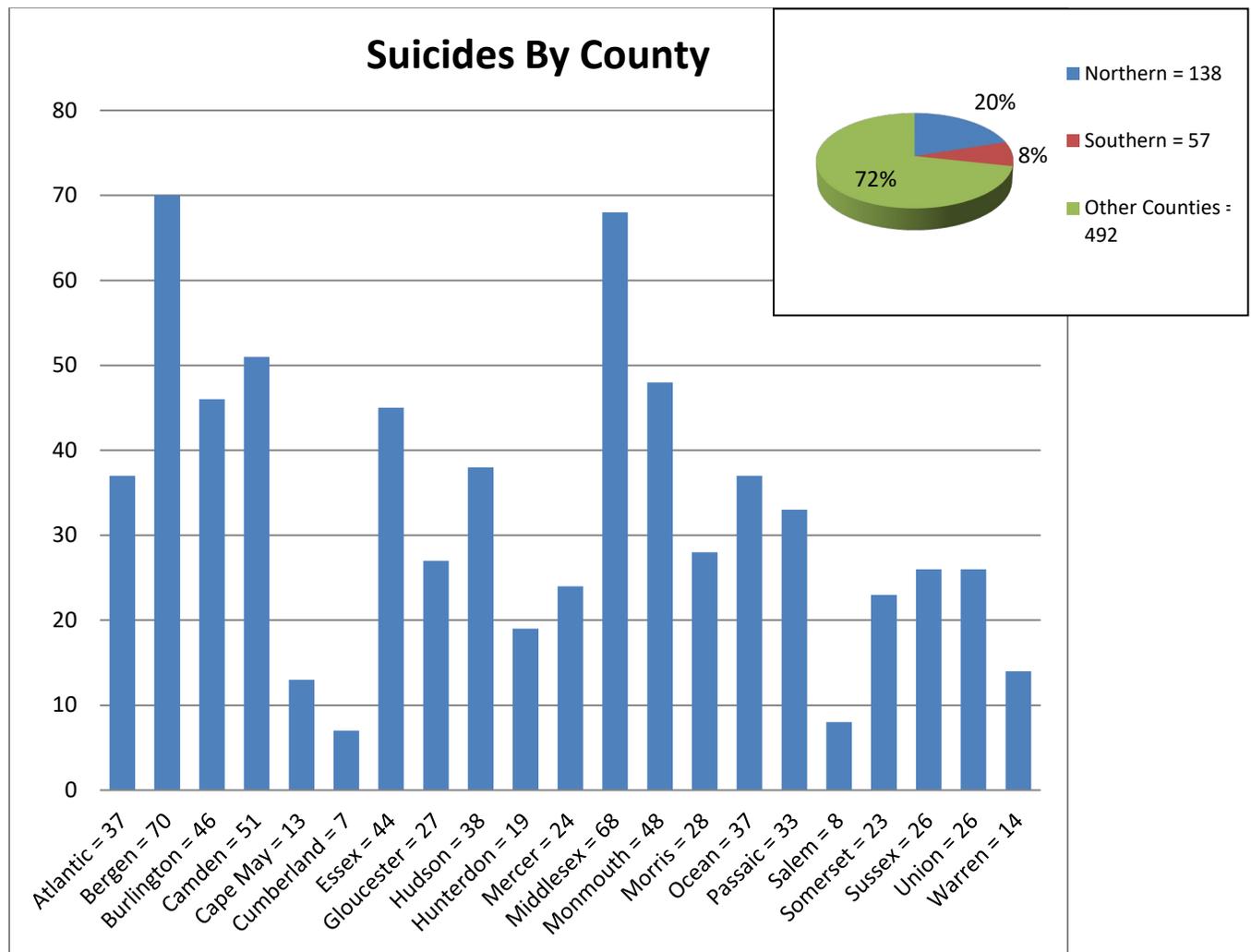
Statewide Suicides

A suicide is defined as the act or an instance of taking one’s own life voluntarily and intentionally.

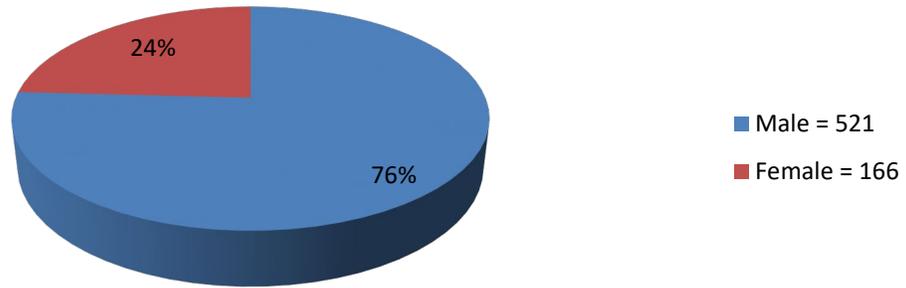
New Jersey State and County Medical Examiners certified 687 deaths as suicides in 2016. The victims of these suicides were predominantly male (76%), white (77%), and between the ages of 51 and 60 (24%).

Bergen and Middlesex Counties were the first and second counties respectively with the highest amount of suicides.

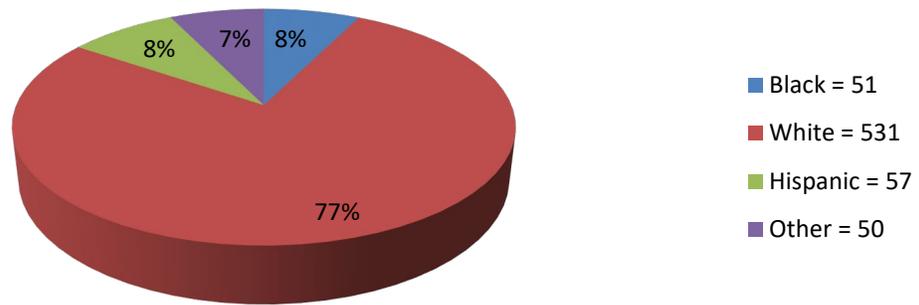
Hangings, firearms, and drugs/alcohol were the three most commonly used methods in suicides. The top two methods for males are hanging and firearms whereas the top two methods for females were hanging and drugs/alcohol.



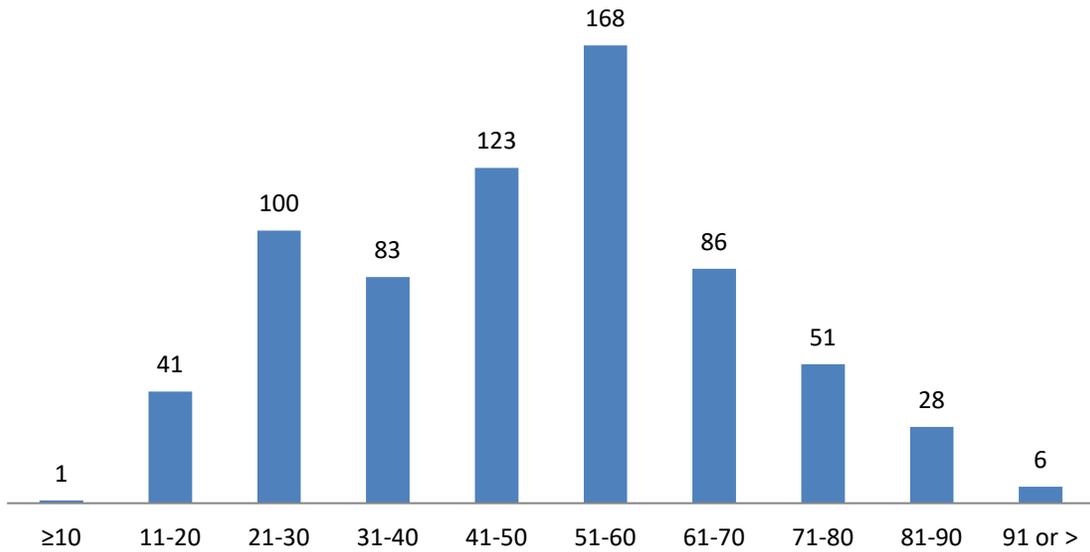
Suicides by Gender Statewide



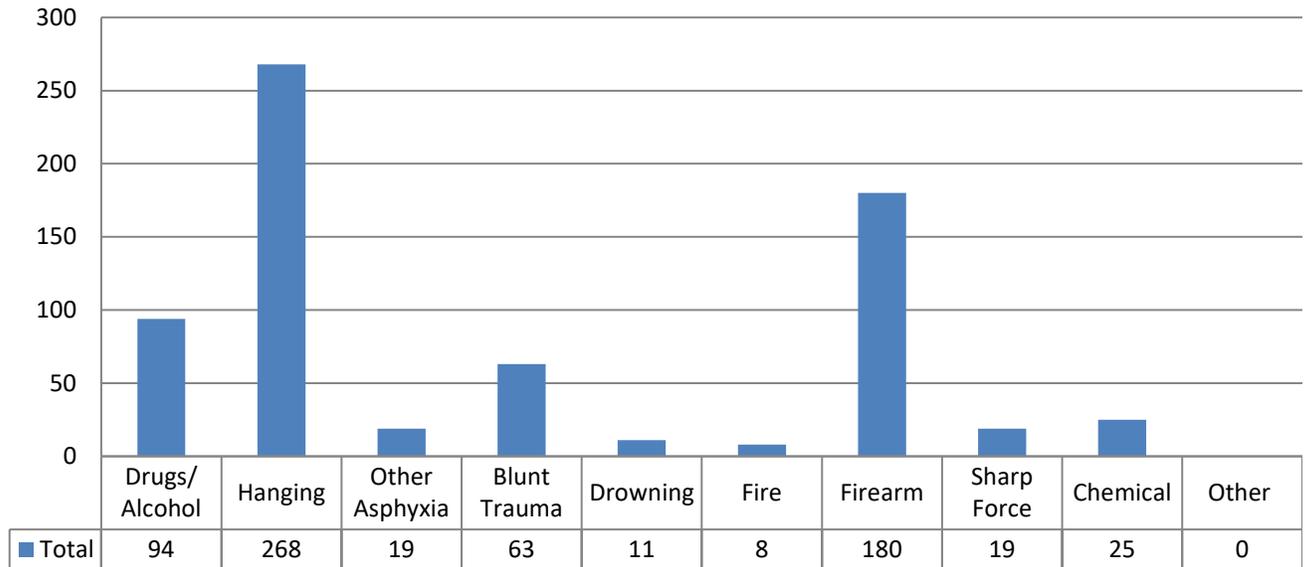
Suicides by Race Statewide



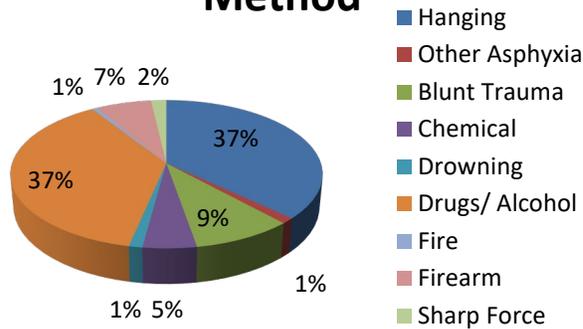
Suicides by Age Statewide



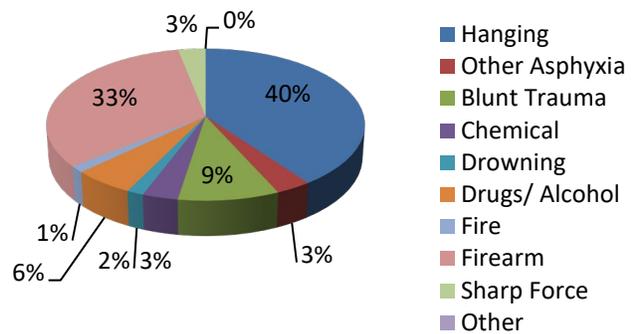
Number of Suicide Deaths by Method



Female Suicides by Method



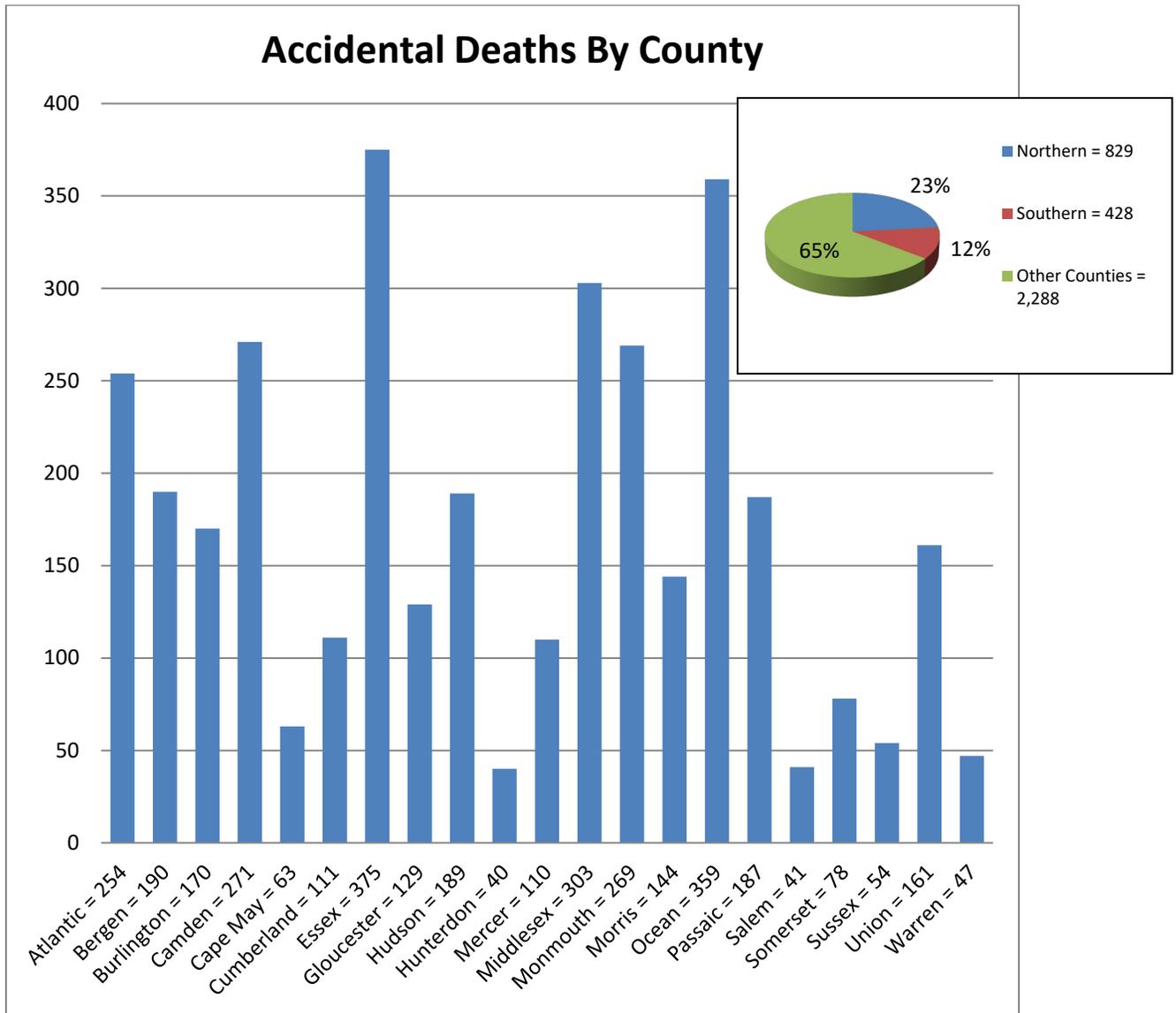
Male Suicides by Method



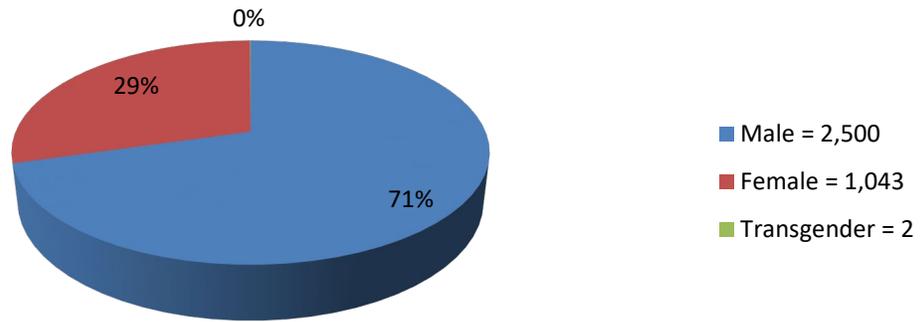
Statewide Accidents

New Jersey State and County Medical Examiners certified 3,545 deaths as accidents in 2016. The victims of these accidents were predominantly white (67%) males (71%) with the majority aged between 21 and 60.

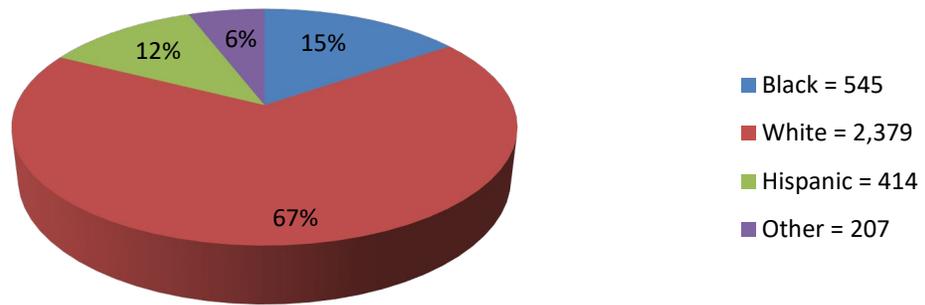
Drug and/or Alcohol related deaths made up more than half of these recorded accidents. Blunt trauma related deaths, including transportation deaths, falls as well as other miscellaneous cases made up 32% of these recorded accidents.



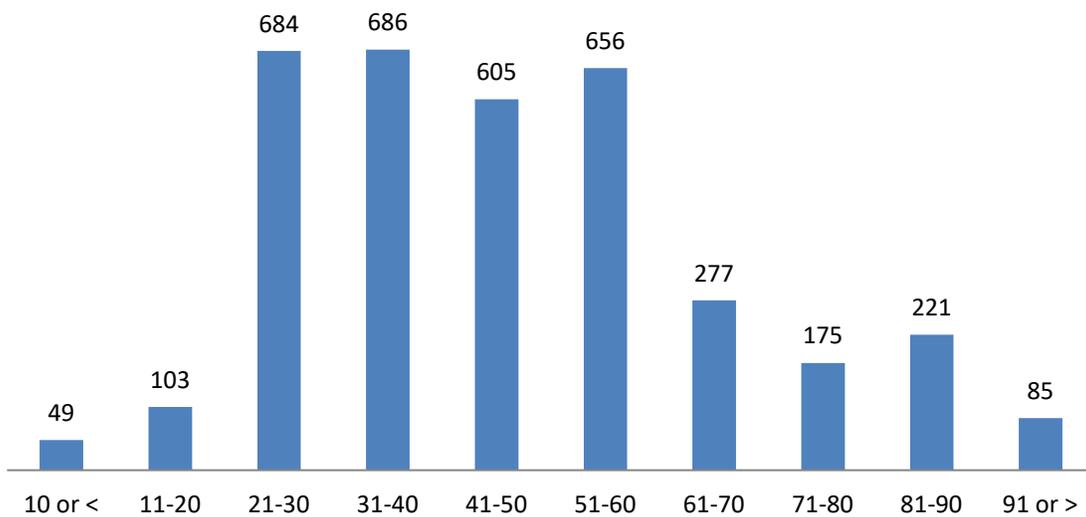
Accidental Deaths by Gender Statewide



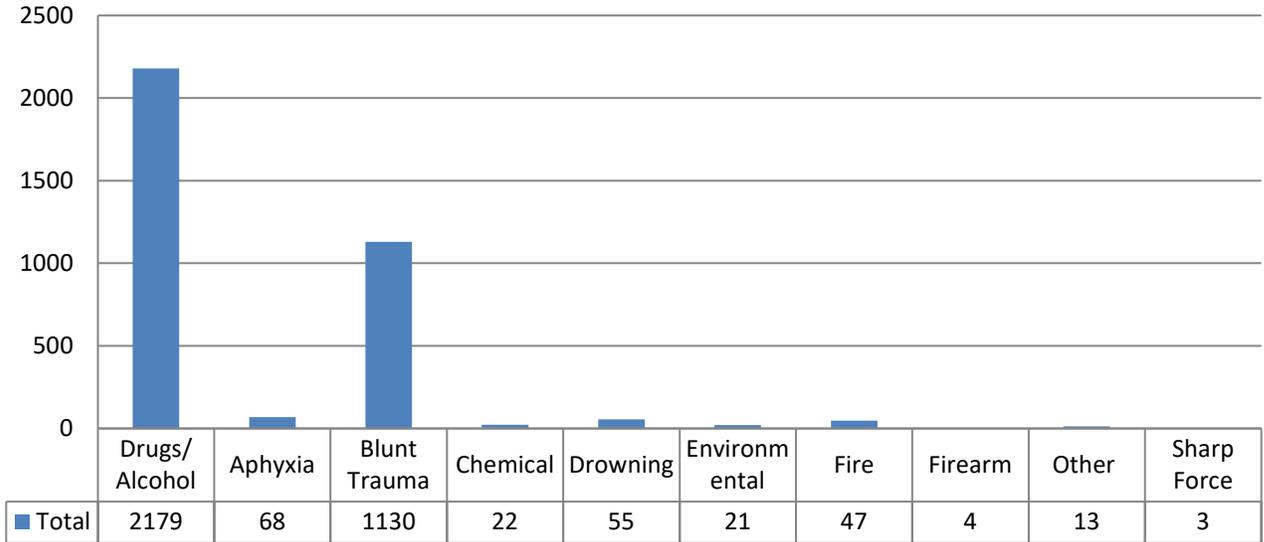
Accidental Deaths by Race Statewide



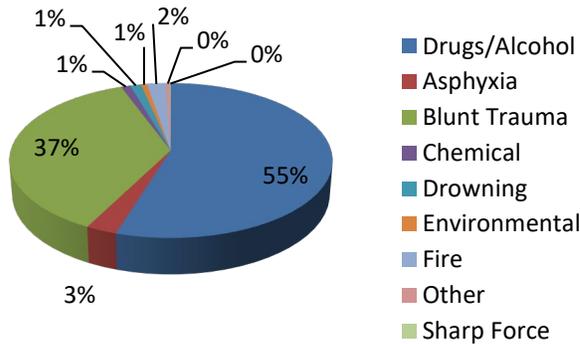
Accidental Deaths by Age Statewide



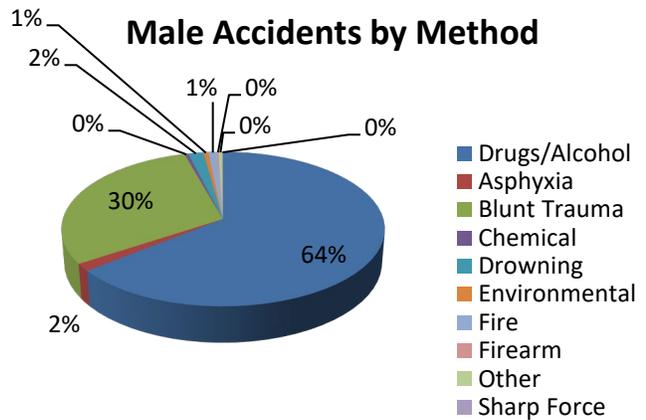
Number of Accidental Deaths by Method



Female Accidents by Method



Male Accidents by Method



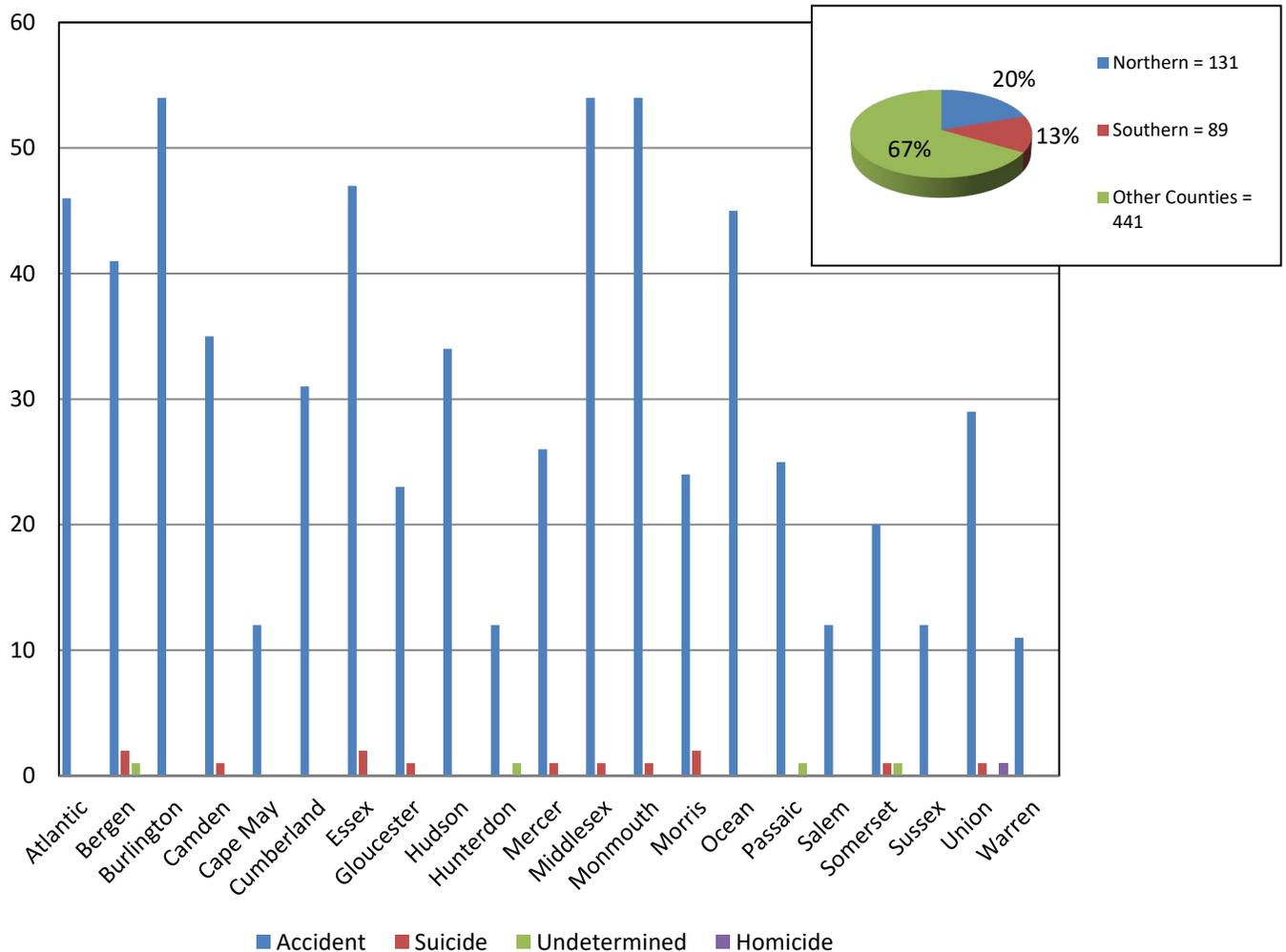
- Transgender deaths were due to drugs/alcohol and blunt trauma.

Statewide Motor Vehicle Deaths

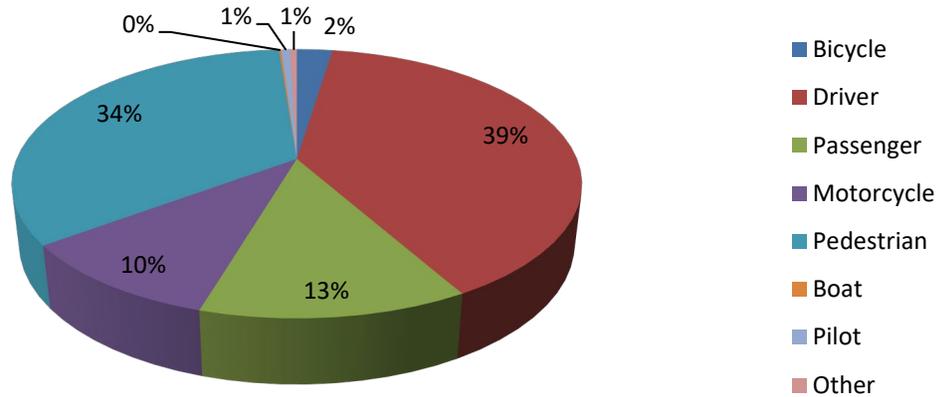
New Jersey State and County Medical Examiners certified 661 motor vehicle related deaths in 2016. These deaths were categorized into Accidents, Suicides, Homicides, and Undetermined deaths that involved individuals on bicycles, pedestrians, drivers or passengers in cars, trucks, or on motorcycles, pilots, and a person in a boat.

- 643 Motor Vehicle Accidents
- 13 Motor Vehicles involved Suicides
- 1 Motor Vehicle Homicide
- 4 Motor Vehicle deaths categorized as Undetermined

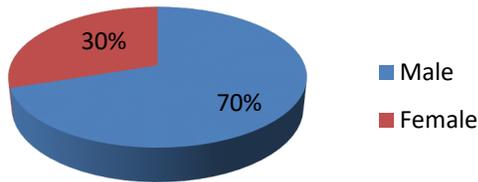
Motor Vehicle Deaths by County



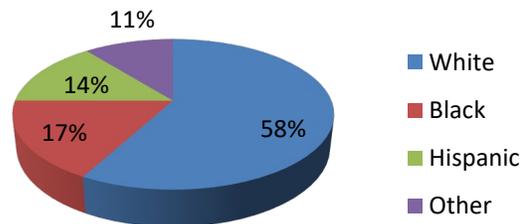
Motor Vehicle Accidents



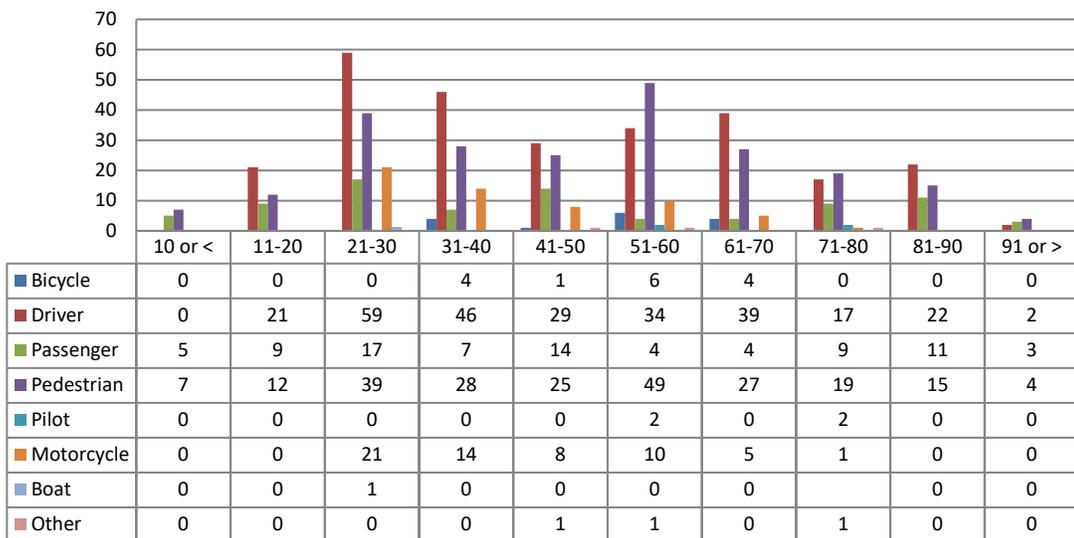
Motor Vehicle Accidents by Gender



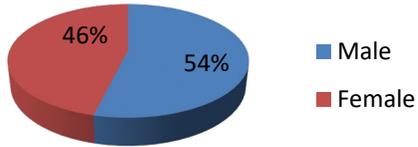
Motor Vehicle Accidents by Ethnicity



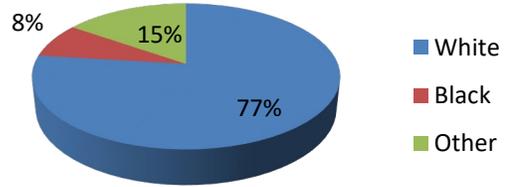
Motor Vehicle Accidents by Age



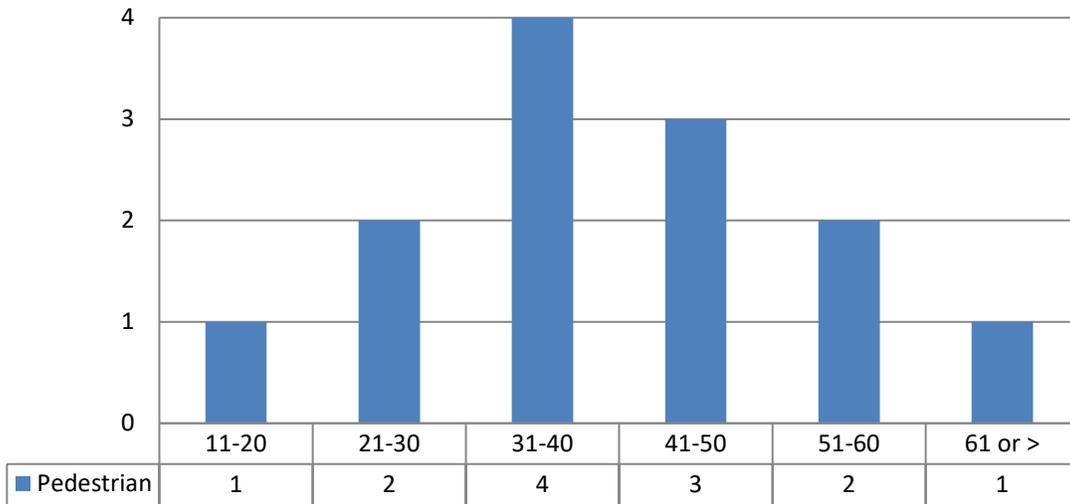
Motor Vehicle Suicides by Gender



Motor Vehicle Suicides by Ethnicity



Motor Vehicle Suicides by Age



Statewide Drug Related Deaths

(Illicit, Prescription, and Alcohol)

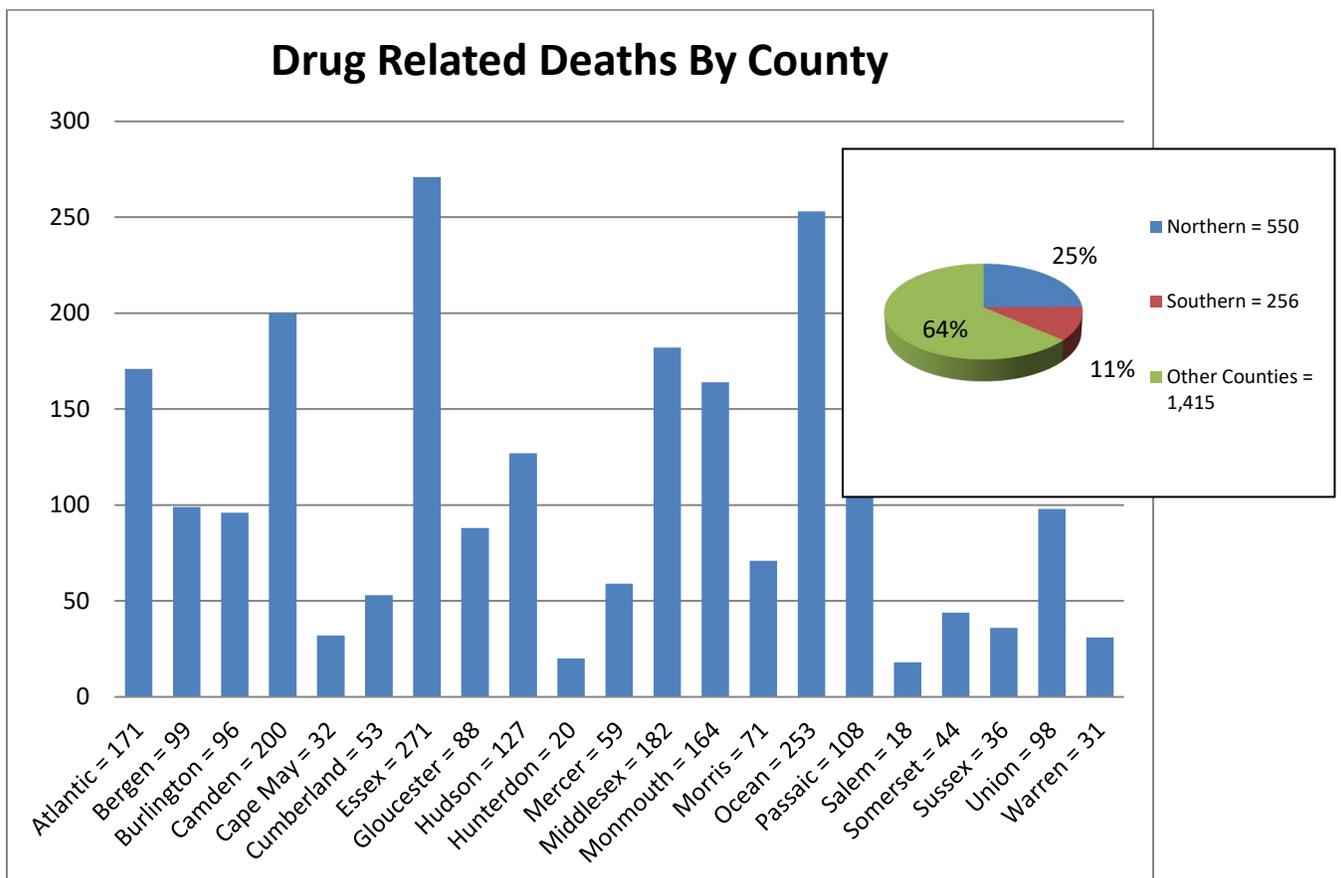
When a person dies of the toxic effects of a drug, the medical examiner must determine whether the death was intentional (suicide) or unintentional (accidental). Some cases lack sufficient evidence to make that determination and the death is classified as undetermined.

New Jersey State and County Medical Examiners certified 2,221 deaths as being drug and/or alcohol related in 2016.

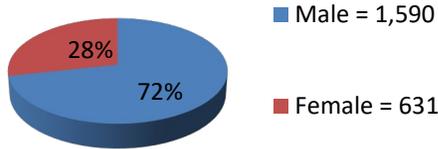
- 2,105 were Accidents (95%)
- 88 were Suicides (4%)
- 28 were Undetermined

This data consists of deaths caused by illicit and/or prescription drugs, alcohol, or a combination thereof.

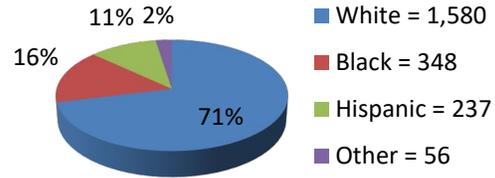
- Drug related deaths = 1,751 (79%)
- Alcohol & Drug related deaths = 470 (21%)



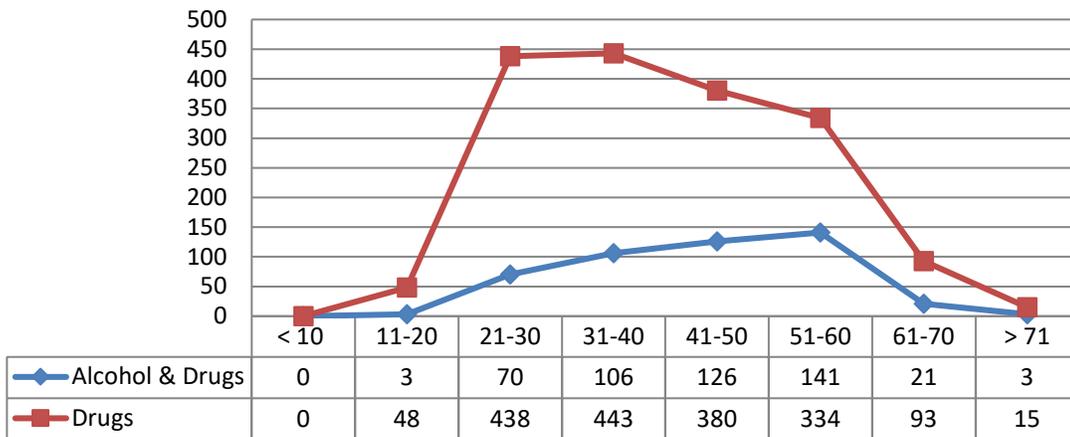
Drug Related Deaths by Gender



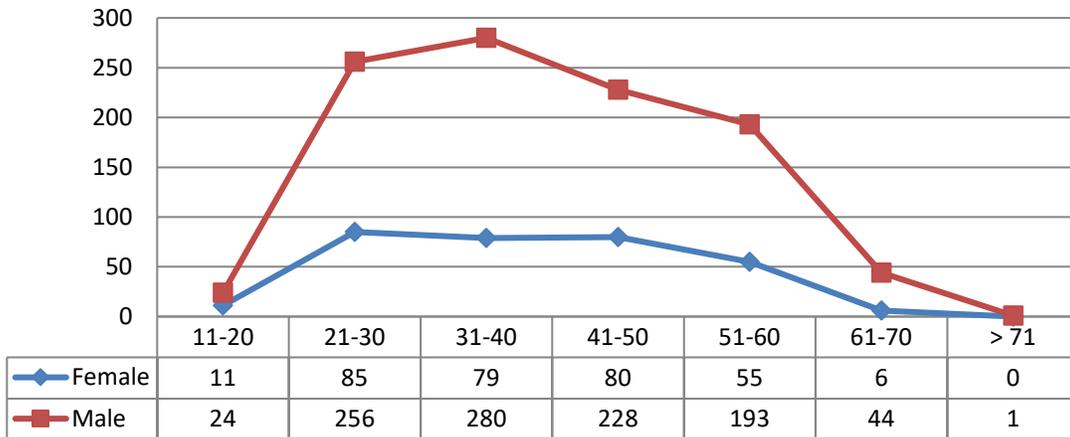
Drug Related Deaths by Ethnicity



Drug/Alcohol Related Deaths by Age



Heroin Related Deaths by Age and Gender



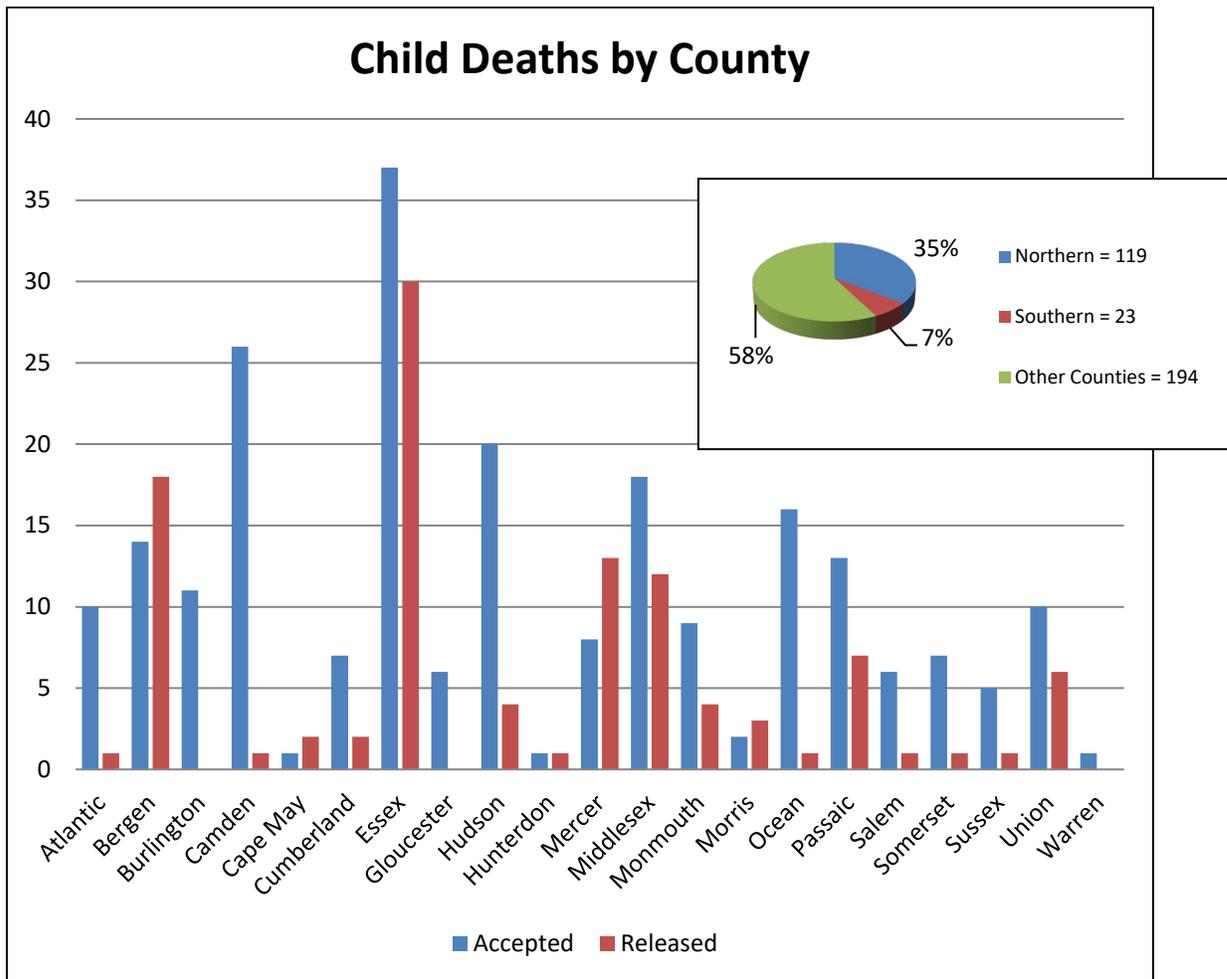
Statewide Child Deaths

Aged 17 years and younger

In 2016, 336 child deaths were reported to the State and County Medical Examiner’s Offices.

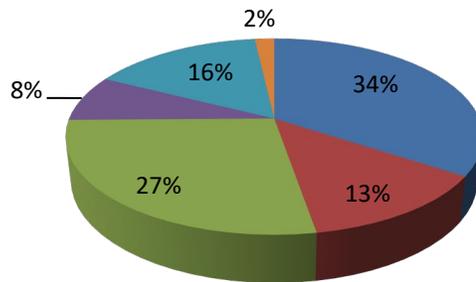
- 222 cases were Accepted
- 112 cases were Released
- 2 cases were Storage only

Sudden unexpected infant deaths are either classified as Natural or Undetermined. The majority of the Natural and Undetermined child deaths are sudden unexpected infant deaths.

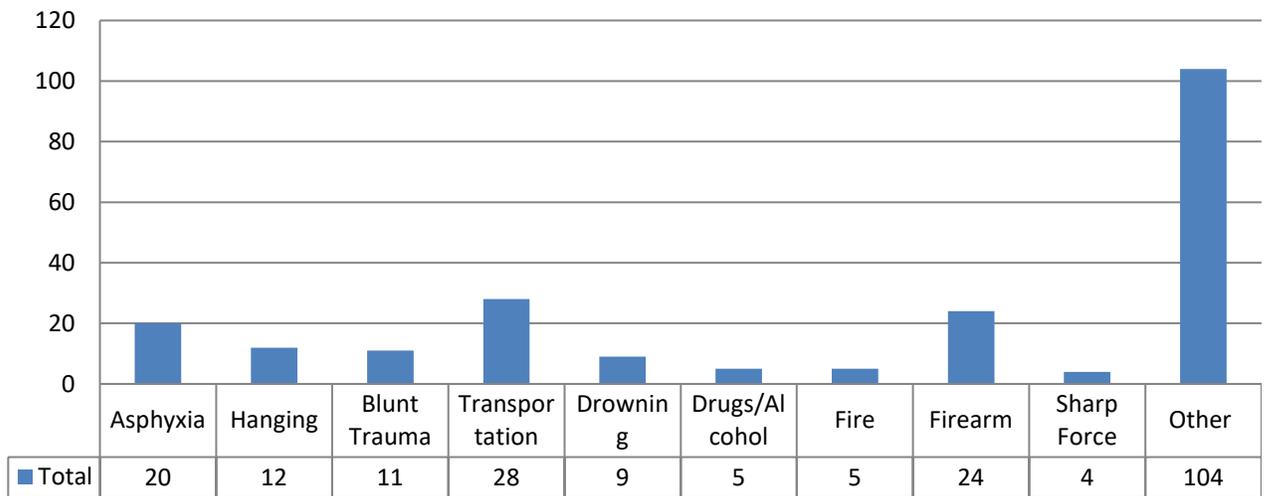


Manner of Death (Accepted)

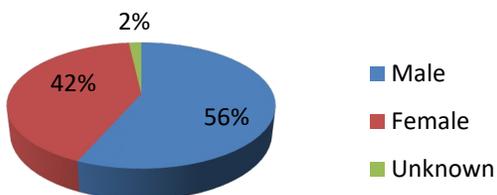
■ Accident = 76 ■ Homicide = 29 ■ Natural = 61
■ Suicide = 17 ■ Undetermined = 35 ■ None = 4



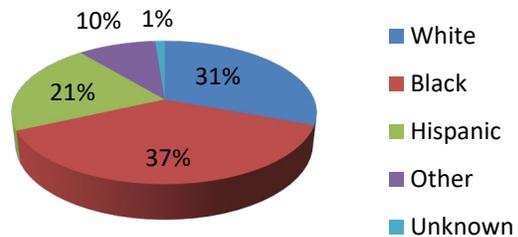
Number of Unnatural Child Deaths by Method



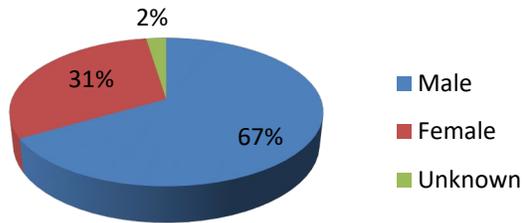
All Reported Child Deaths by Gender



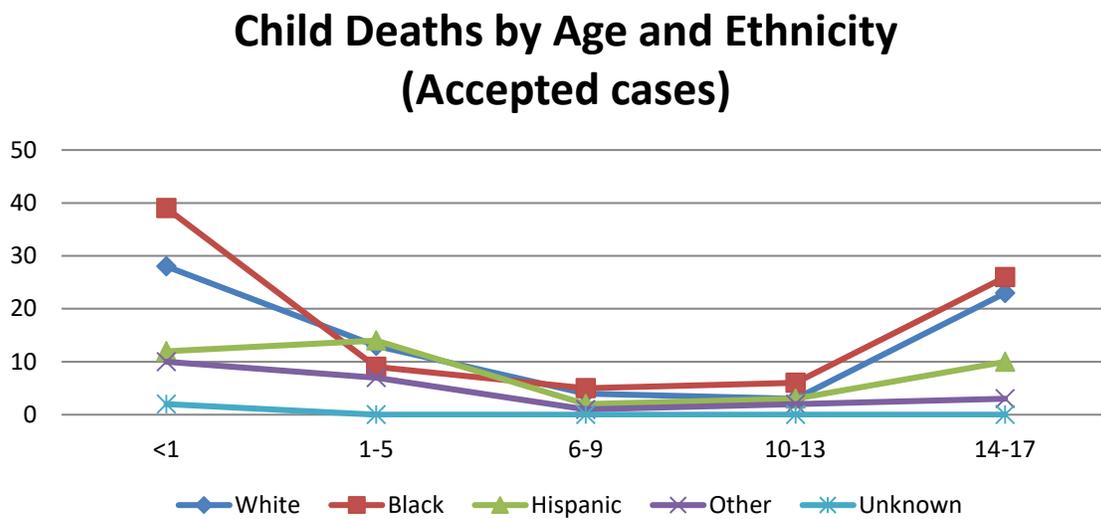
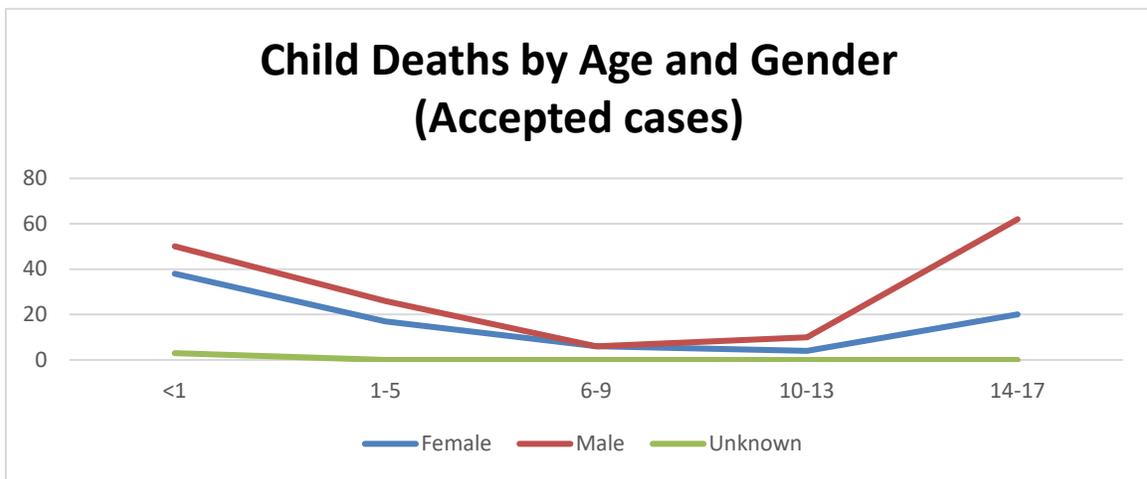
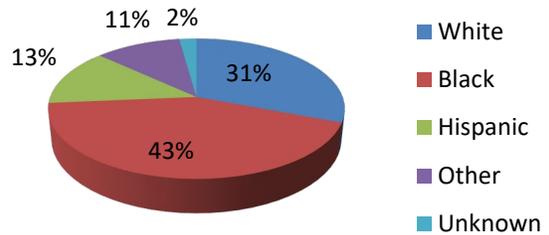
All Reported Child Deaths by Ethnicity



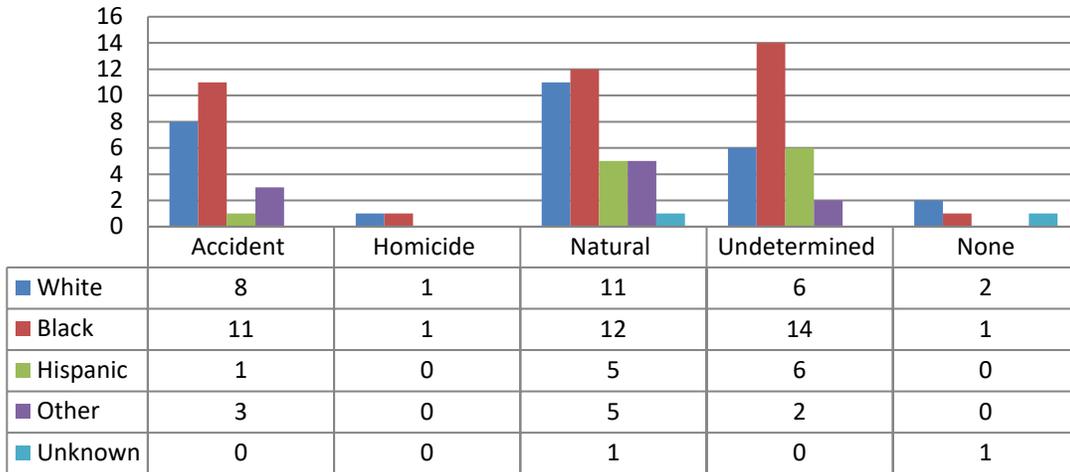
Accepted Child Deaths less than 1 year old by Gender



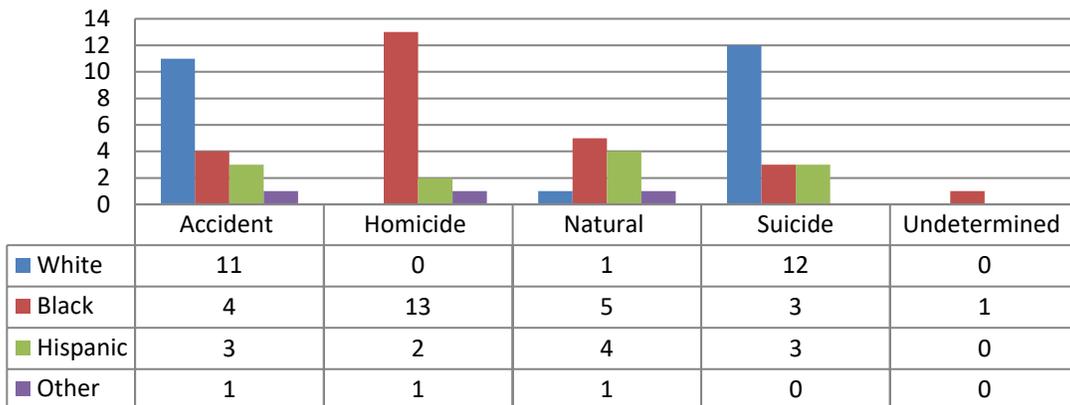
Accepted Child Deaths less than 1 year old by Ethnicity



Manner of Death of less than 1 year old (Accepted cases)



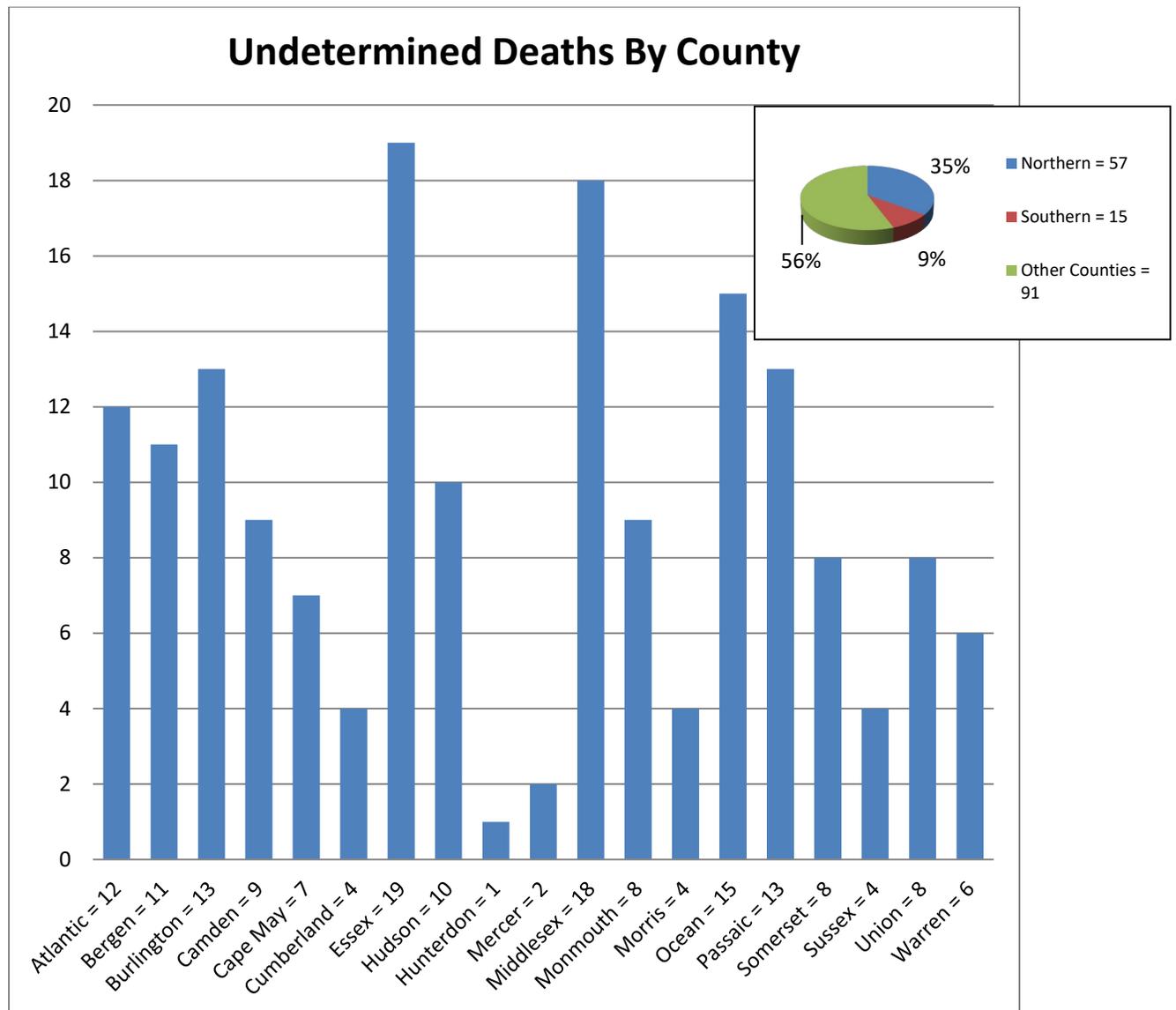
Manner of Death of Teenagers - 13-17 yr old (Accepted cases)



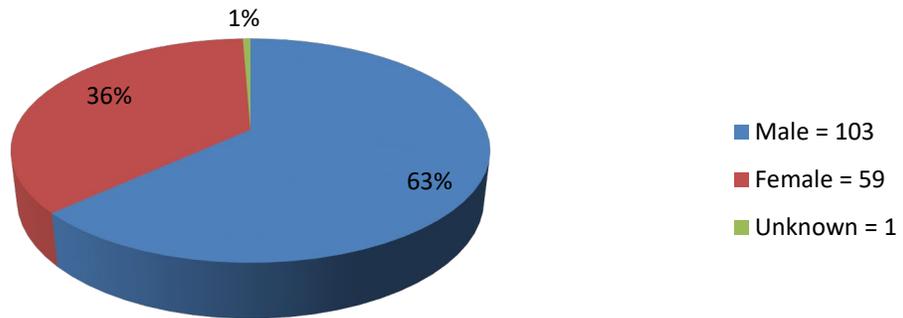
Statewide Undetermined Deaths

The manner of death of Undetermined is used when there is insufficient information or evidence to definitively classify the death in another category.

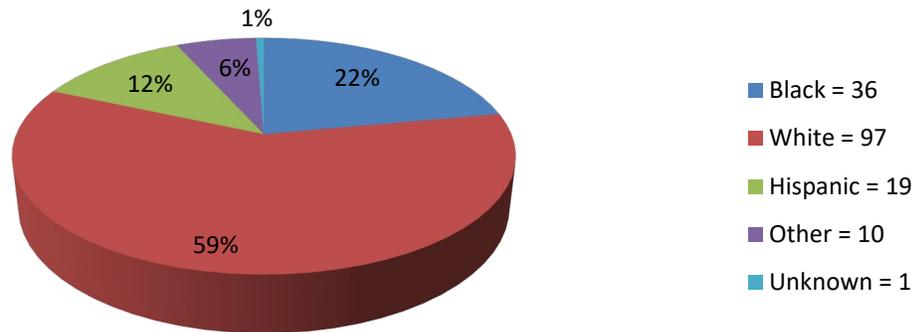
New Jersey State and County Medical Examiners certified 163 deaths as undetermined in 2016. Of these deaths, 64% were male, 60% were white, and 21% were between ages 51-60.



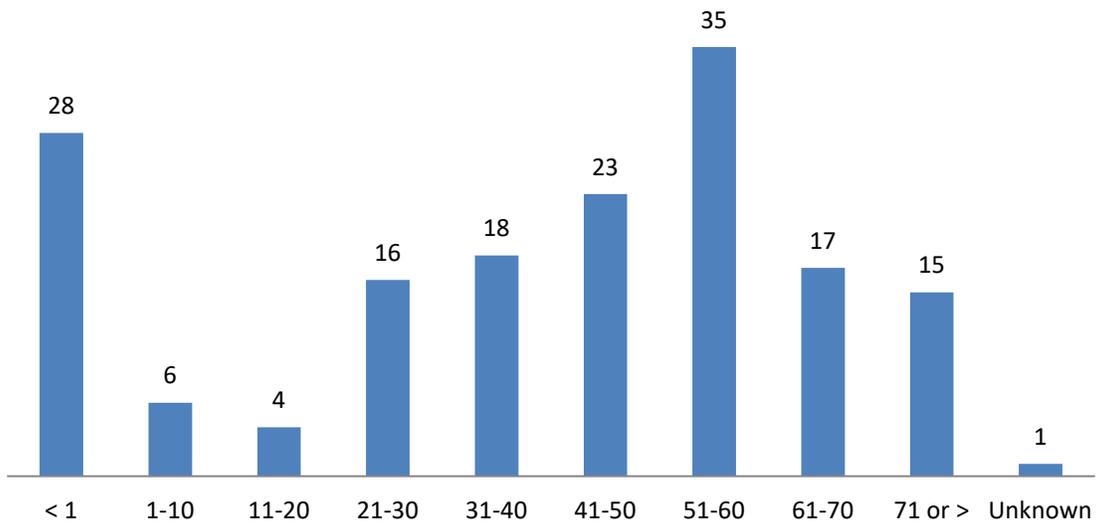
Undetermined Death by Gender Statewide



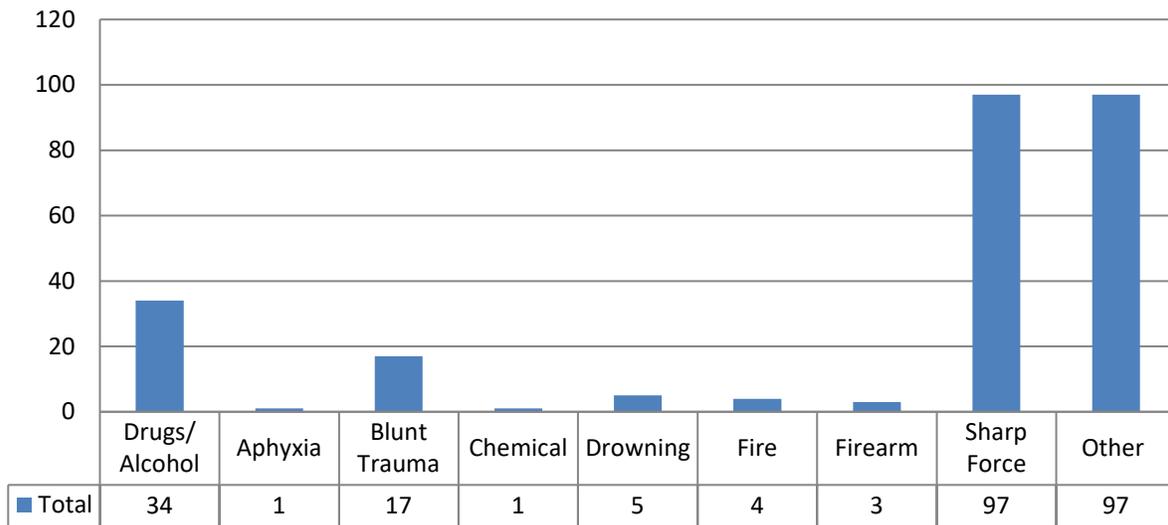
Undetermined Death by Race Statewide



Undetermined Deaths by Age Statewide



Number of Undetermined Deaths by Method



Most of the deaths classified as “Other” were that of children with sudden unexpected infant death.

Glossary

Accident: The manner of death used when there is an unintentional death by injury that may or may not involve negligence by a victim or any other individual or an unnatural, violent death resulting from an event occurring by chance or unintended cause. It is usually a sudden, unexpected, and unforeseen occurrence and it may refer to physical injuries, toxic effects, or environmental conditions.

Autopsy: A medical procedure which involves the external and internal examination (dissection) to include the head and cranial contents, the neck, thorax, abdomen, and any other focus on, or within, the body which will contribute to determining the cause and manner of death. The autopsy may or may not also involve toxicology and microscopic examination of the tissues.

Case: A human death that is reported and/or investigated by the Medical Examiner's Office.

Case file: An internal file containing all pertinent information including the autopsy report, investigatory reports, toxicology reports, body diagram(s), inventory of effects, body release form(s), and any other case specific information.

Cause of Death (COD): The underlying disease or injury that directly eventuates in death.

Ethnicity: A self-reported designation of racial or ethnic origin in the following categories: White, Black, Hispanic, or Other.

Homicide: The manner of death used when there is a violent death from an intentional act of another individual, whether or not the individual responsible is prosecuted.

Manner of Death (MOD): A classification of death based upon the cause of death and the circumstances surrounding the death. Categories include: Natural, Homicide, Suicide, Accident, Undetermined, and Pending.

Medical Examiner: A New Jersey licensed physician with specialized training in forensic pathology authorized by the State Medical Examiner to perform forensic examinations, autopsies, or views in the State of New Jersey and working under the auspices of a governmental medical examiner office.

Medicolegal Death Investigator (MLDI): Under the direction of a medical examiner, investigates deaths reported to the office, collects information, medical specimens, documentation, and other data relevant to the matter of the decedent's demise for the medical examiner to use in the determination of the cause and manner of death.

Medical Records: All charts, notes, files, or other data containing medical information obtained from physicians, clinics, hospitals, extended care facilities, or other sources who rendered care to the decedent (such records are confidential at all times).

Natural: The manner of death used when there is a nonviolent death resulting from disease.

Office of the State Medical Examiner: The office and facilities utilized by the State Medical Examiner in the performance of his/her duties.

Pending: A case where the death certificate has been issued with the cause and manner of death not specified and so indicated by the term “pending”.

Police Investigative Report: A report submitted by police to the medical examiner’s office that is in reference to a specific case giving pertinent background information to a determination of cause and manner of death.

Regional Medical Examiner: The chief medical examiner of a regional medical examiner facility who is responsible for medicolegal death investigation in multiple New Jersey counties.

Release Case (Non-Medical Examiner Case): A death reported to the medical examiner that after review is found not to come under the jurisdiction of the medical examiner. These cases are not further investigated nor are decedent’s remains brought to the medical examiner facility.

Report of Investigation by Medical Examiner (RIME): A form completed for the purpose of reporting medical examiner findings to the State Medical Examiner and to the County Prosecutor as required by statutes and regulations.

Scene: The location of a fatality or injury. A case may have more than one scene (i.e. place of injury and place of death).

State Medical Examiner: A medical examiner appointed by the Governor and confirmed by the Senate that heads the Office of the State Medical Examiner as designated by New Jersey law and has general oversight of medicolegal death investigation in the State.

Storage Case: A case that is reported to and released by the Medical Examiner’s office but at the time of the investigation, there is no family or family has not been able to be reached in order to claim the body.

Suicide: The manner of death used when a person takes their own life by any means, including chemical or physical, with the intent to cause self-harm or with reckless and wanton endangerment (i.e. Russian roulette).

Toxicology Report: The findings of toxicological or other chemical tests performed upon tissue or body fluid(s) from a decedent. Substances tested may include toxins, alcohol, drugs of abuse, prescription drugs, their metabolites, or clinical chemistries.

Undetermined: A case where there is insufficient information or evidence to express a cause and/or manner of death.

View: The external examination of the unclothed external surfaces of the decedent’s body with appropriate specimens acquired for toxicological screening and other ancillary testing as appropriate for the case that is performed by a medical examiner in accepted cases not requiring an autopsy.

Frequently Asked Questions

What do I do when a family member dies?

Call the local emergency number. The police and emergency personnel will respond. If the case warrants, it will be reported to the State or County Medical Examiner's Office.

Which Medical Examiner's Office should I contact?

In New Jersey, each County has a County Medical Examiner's Office however some offices have combined services and operate jointly out of one office. For information, please contact the Medical Examiner's Office in the county where the person was pronounced deceased.

What happens during an investigation?

The Medicolegal Death Investigator gathers information from family members, police, witnesses, and any others that may be associated with or have pertinent information about the deceased. The Investigator works with police in analyzing the death scene and also obtains medical records from attending physicians.

If there is a medical history for chronic disease/illness and there is nothing to suggest any other cause of death, the Investigator may release the case and refer it to the treating/attending physician to sign the death certificate. The treating/attending physician is obliged to pronounce death and to fill out the medical portion of the death certificate. At this time, the family should contact the funeral home of their choice. If the case falls under the Medical Examiner's jurisdiction, then the body will be taken to the Medical Examiner's facility. Upon conclusion of the Medical Examiner's investigation and examination, the body may be released to the funeral home of the family's choice. The family must arrange for the funeral home to contact the appropriate Medical Examiner's Office for release.

What is an autopsy?

An autopsy is an external and internal examination of a body. Licensed physicians, specifically forensic pathologists acting as medical examiners, will perform forensic autopsies to determine the cause and manner of death. Specimens of body fluids and tissues may be retained for diagnostic testing. When necessary, a specific organ, such as the brain or heart, may also be retained for further testing. If organs were retained for further testing and you desire the organs to be returned after testing, you should advise the office that performed the autopsy of this request.

Is an autopsy always necessary?

No. However, in some circumstances, an autopsy is mandated by law. The law requires an autopsy to be performed in deaths:

- * Involving a homicide
- * Occurring under suspicious or unusual circumstances
- * Might constitute a threat to public health
- * Inmates of jail/prison or those in police custody unless where the suspected cause of death is a known medical condition
- * All infants/children suspected of being abused or neglected or children suspected of having died of sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS)

How long does an exam take?

A standard forensic autopsy will take about 2 hours; however, the circumstances of the death may lengthen or shorten that timeframe.

Will an autopsy delay our funeral arrangements?

No. The family can make funeral arrangements at their convenience. Complicated autopsies may take longer than 2 hours but after the autopsy, the body can be released to the funeral home. Only in rare cases are bodies held for legal purposes. Upon request, the release of the remains may be expedited in order to honor the religious, cultural, or other beliefs of the family.

Will an autopsy interfere with our desire for a viewing or open casket?

No. In most cases, the funeral director can prepare the body for a viewing. The autopsy incisions which are closed are appropriately covered.

However, in some cases, it may not be possible to restore any post-mortem changes that occur naturally or if there were severe injuries that caused the death.

The family should speak with their funeral director to make those decisions.

What if the family does not want an autopsy?

The Medical Examiner autopsy, unlike a hospital autopsy, does not require permission from the Next-of-kin. It is performed under statutory authority. If the family has a religious objection to the autopsy, the family can sign an objection form and the Medical Examiner will make every effort to limit the procedure as much as possible.

Does the family pay for any of the Medical Examiner's services?

No. The family does not pay the Medical Examiner's office for their services.

The family should discuss any type of paid services with the funeral home.

Can a Medical Examiner case be an organ or tissue donor?

Yes. The Medical Examiner offices work closely with organ procurement agencies. If the family wishes to donate organs or tissues, they need to give permission to the procurement agency. The Medical Examiner will consider the family's wishes, the needs of the procurement agency, and the need to preserve vital evidence in criminal cases.

What happens to clothing and personal items?

Unless identified as evidence by the investigating law enforcement agency, all clothing and personal items that are brought in to the Medical Examiner's office on the body are released with the body to the funeral home. Items identified as evidence are retained by the investigating law enforcement agency and the family should contact the appropriate agency for the release.

Where can I obtain a medical examiner report and death certificate?

When a case is investigated by the Medical Examiner's office, a Report of Investigation by Medical Examiner (RIME) is created and if an exam was performed, an autopsy report or external examination report shall be generated. Reports are not automatically sent out as many families do not want to receive copies of the reports. If permitted by law in the individual case, reports can be obtained by writing to the County Medical Examiner office and requesting a copy of the report. A small fee for copies may be charged.

Death certificates are issued by the local Municipality, County or State Registrar. Certified copies of the death certificate can be obtained by the family through their funeral director or by directly contacting the registrar.

Do I make complaints to your office about a treating/attending physician I am having issues with?

No. That matter needs to be addressed to the State Board of Medical Examiners at (609) 826-7100.