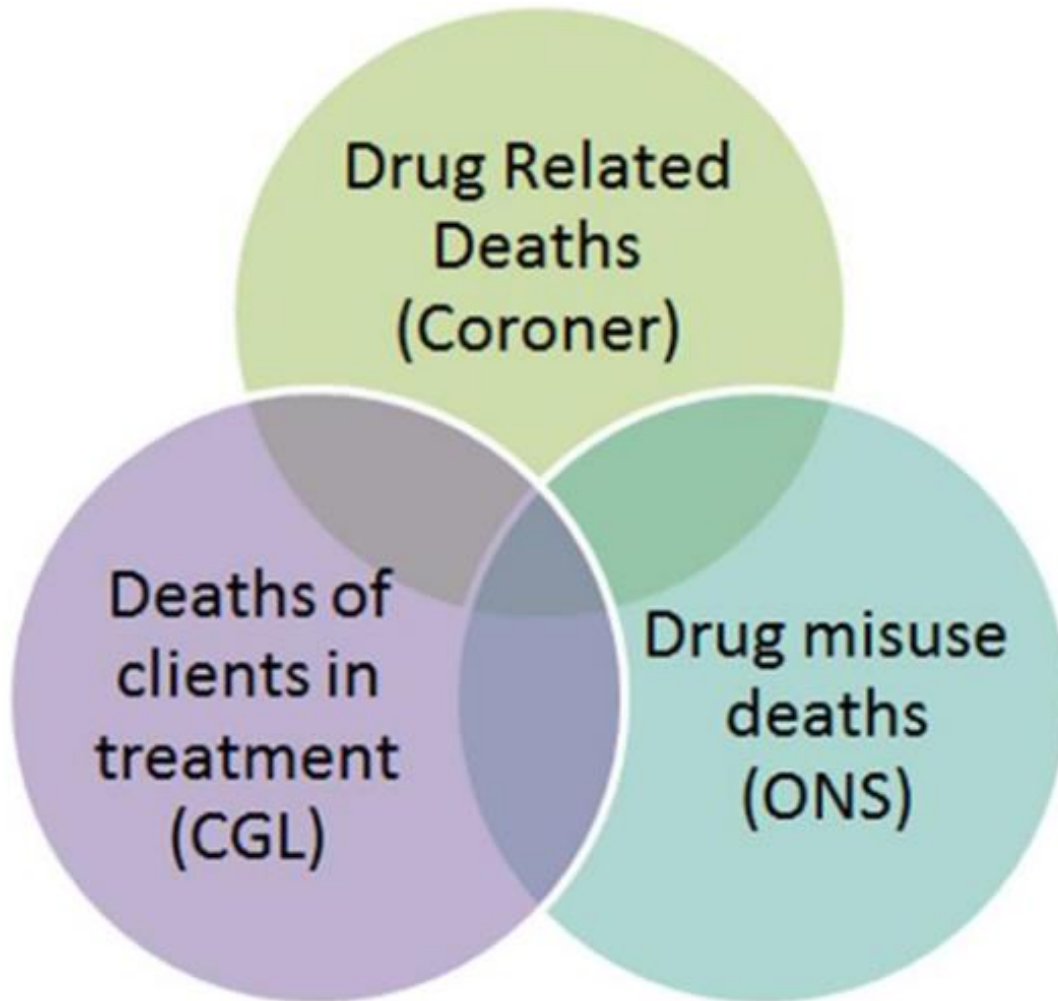


Drug Related Deaths (2018-20)

February 2023

Wirral Public Health Intelligence Team

Classification of deaths due to, or related to, drug use



Drug Related Death

- Based on Wirral resident population.
- Drug related death is defined as a death with any mention of drug use on the death certificate.

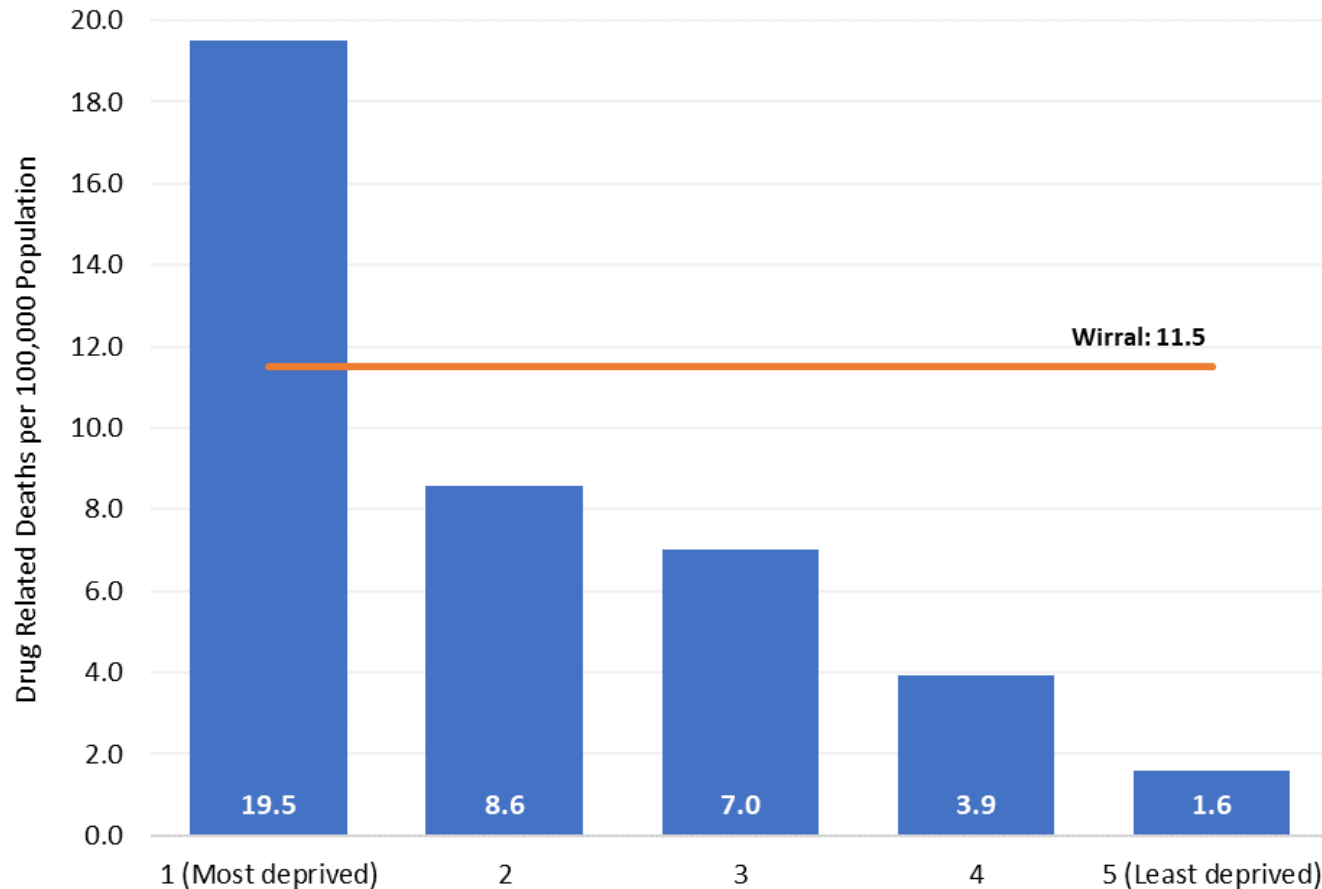
Deaths of clients in treatment

- Based on CGL client population.
- Deaths are counted for any CGL client that has died of any cause whilst in service.

Drug misuse death

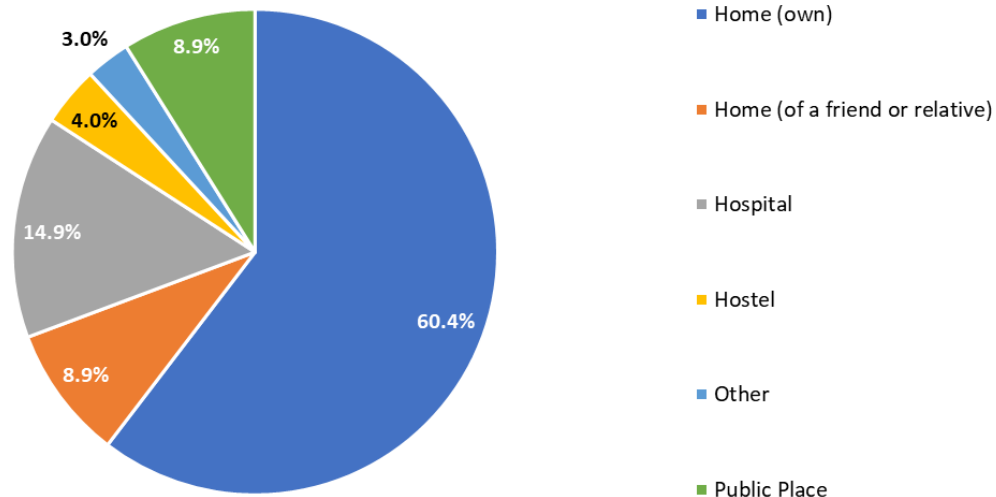
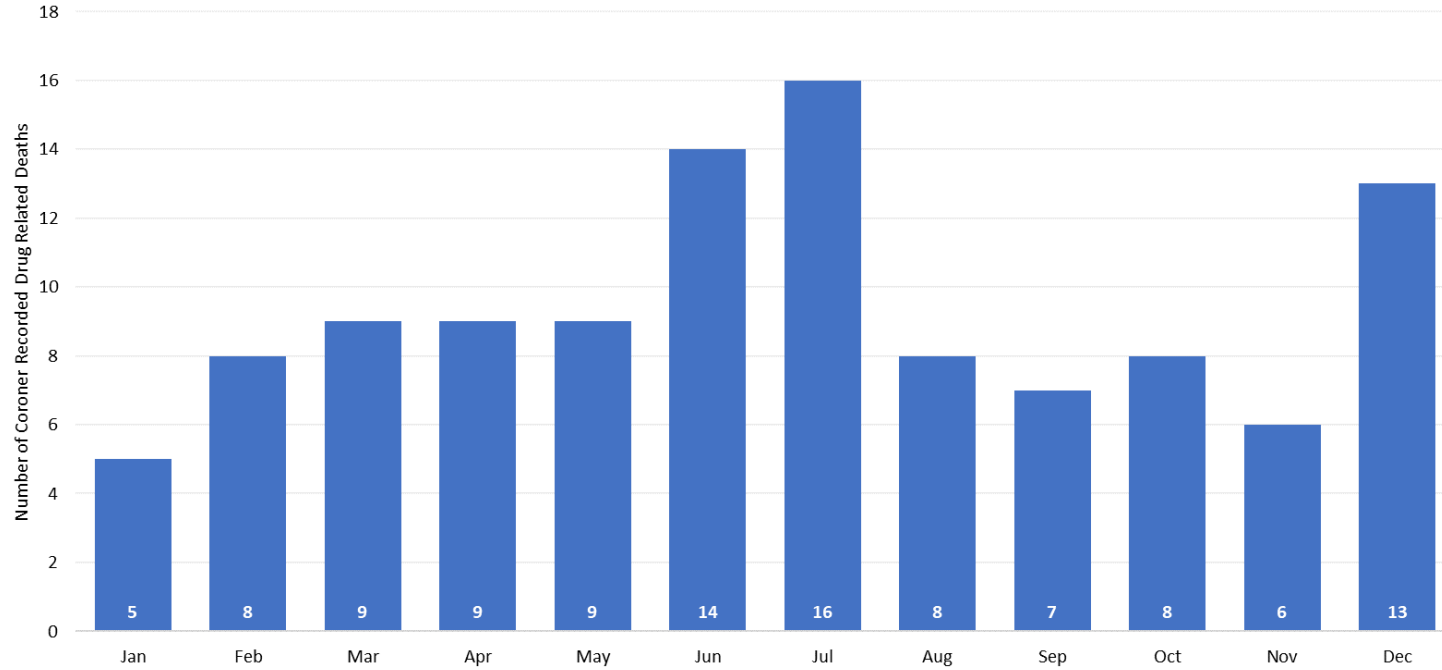
- Based on Wirral resident population.
- Drug misuse death is defined as a death where the underlying cause of death matches any of the ONS defined drug misuse causes of death.

Demographics



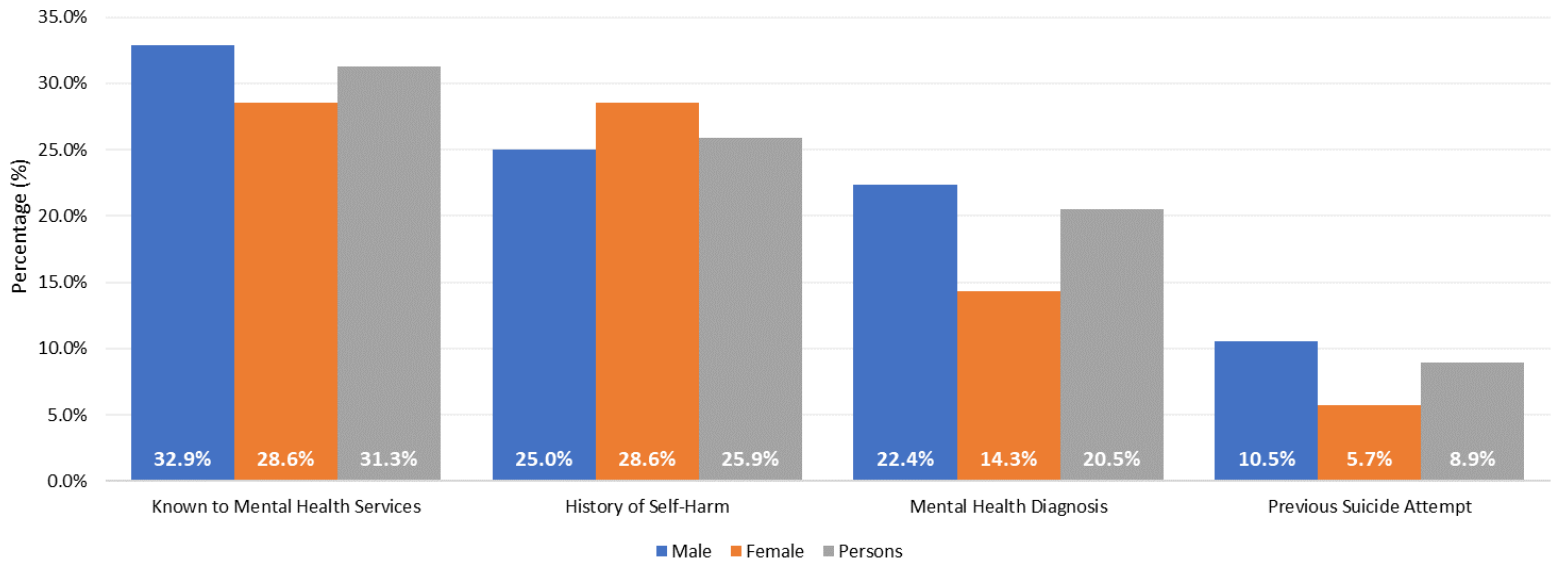
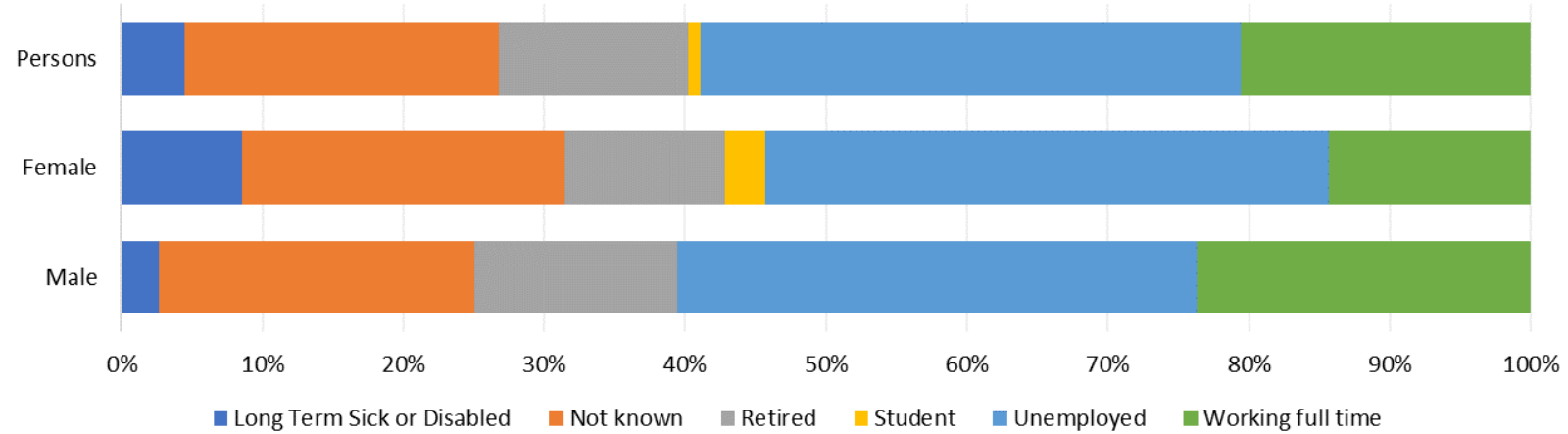
- There were a total of 112 drug related deaths examined by the Coroner in Wirral during 2018-20 included in this summary
- 2 in 3 (68%) drug related deaths were males; 31% (n=35) were female; this is very similar to the national picture (ONS drug misuse death indicator showed the % of males was 69% for the same time period)
- The largest % of deaths were in the 40-49 age band (36%), followed by those aged 50-59 (29%)
- The average age of drug related deaths in males was 46.1 years; for females it was 52.0 years; this is significantly lower than the average age of death for the overall population of Wirral (from any cause) for both males (75.7 years) and females (80.2 years) in 2018-20
- The highest rate (per 100,000) of deaths were in Quintile 1 (the most deprived 20% of the population); this rate was more than 12 times higher than that of Quintile 5 (the least deprived 20% of the population), where the rate was 1.6 per 100,000
- Over three quarters (78%) were either single, separated or divorced
- Wirral is estimated to have a Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) population of 5.0%; 4.5% of drug related deaths were in BAME groups in 2018-20, so slightly lower than the Wirral population (note small numbers however)
- Over two in three (68%) cases had Wirral as their place of birth; a further 7% of cases had another local authority within Cheshire or Merseyside (excluding Wirral) as their place of birth whereas exactly 1 in 4 (25%) (where a place of birth was recorded), were living some distance from where they were born

Seasonality & Location



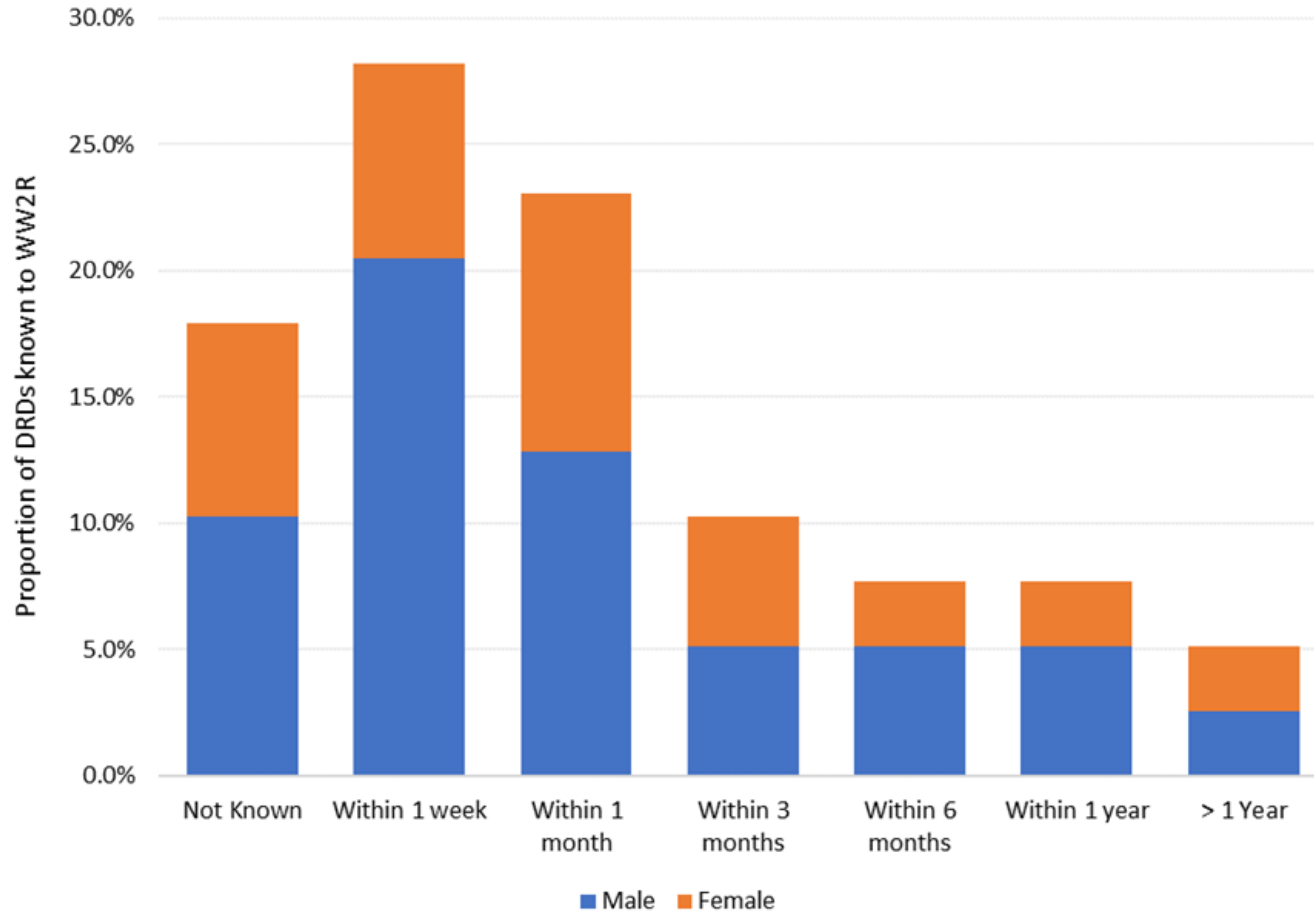
- Between 2018-20, July (n=16), June (n=14) and December (n=13) had the highest number of Coroner recorded drug related deaths
- January (n=5), November (n=6) and September (n=7) had the fewest number of deaths
- Reasons for this are unclear and cannot be compared to national figures, as the Office for National Statistics (ONS) drug misuse deaths are not presented by month nationally
- Over three quarters of all Coroner recorded drug related deaths occurred at either an individual's own home (60.4%) or in hospital (14.9%)
- Most of those who died in hospital include those who were found unresponsive upon the arrival of North West Ambulance Service (NWAS), but then later died in hospital
- Locations categorised as "Other" include hostels, care homes and drug rehabilitation centres

Employment Status & Physical and Mental Health Status



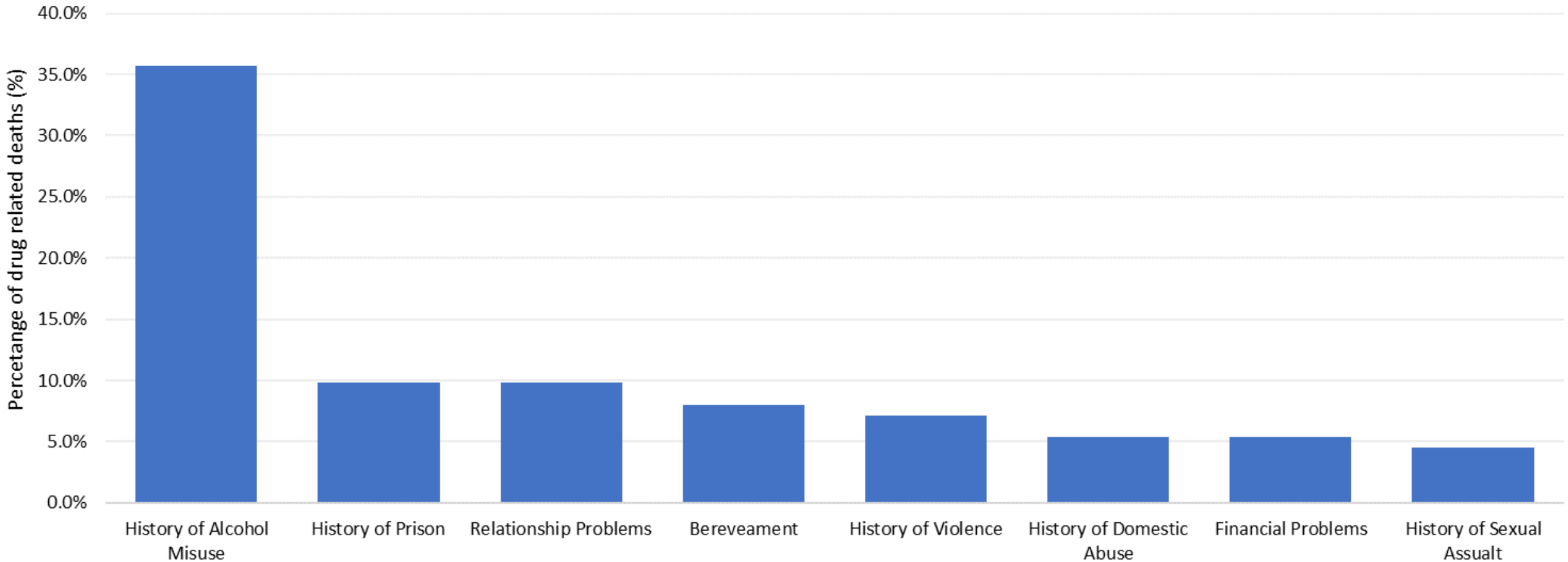
- Just over 1 in 5 (21%) of deaths were either in full-time employment or in full-time education
- A further 22% had an unknown employment status, whilst 13% were retired (although may not have necessarily been of retirement age); this means that 43% of all cases were not in work
- This compares to the working age population who are not in work in Wirral (for any reason, including being long-term sick or disabled) of 17% in 2022
- 70 people (63%) were suffering from at least 1 chronic (60%) or terminal illness (3%) at the time of their death; the most common physical or mental health issues affecting individuals was COPD (22%), followed by depression (20%) and hepatitis C (14%)
- Around half of individuals (46%) were recorded as having some form of mental health issue
- Almost one third of males (33%) were known to mental health services; in females it was slightly lower at 29%
- The only mental health issue where females outnumbered males was a history of self-harm (29% of females compared to 25% of males)
- Over one in five of people included in this audit had some form of mental health diagnoses (the most common being depression and anxiety), whilst almost one in ten had attempted suicide

Contact with Services – Wirral Ways to Recovery (WWtR/CGL)



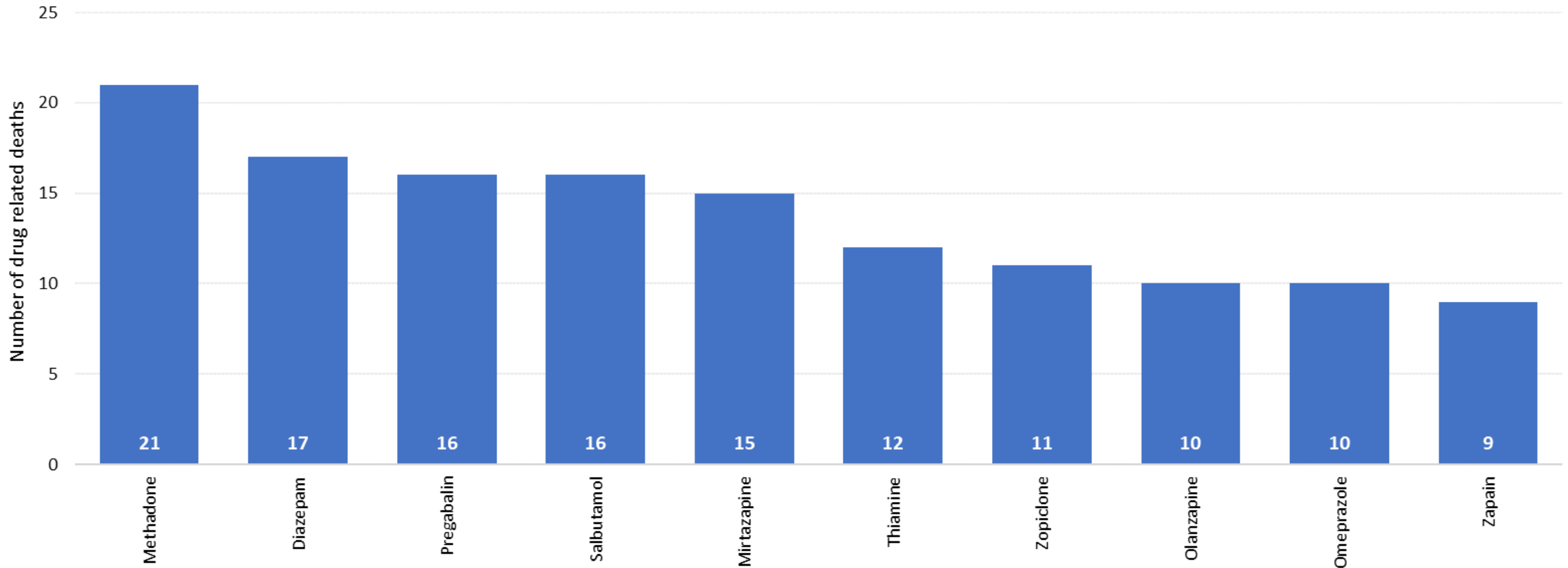
- Around 1 in 3 deaths were in those who were either a current client or previous client to Wirral Ways to Recovery (WWtR/CGL); of those who were known to WWtR/CGL, almost 1 in 3 (28%) had visited the service within 1 week of their death
- The age and gender profile of the clients who were known to Wirral Ways to Recovery (WWtR/CGL) varies from that of the overall drug related death population
- For example, there was a higher proportion of females who were clients of WWtR/CGL who were included in this audit (due to having been classed as dying from a drug related death), than the total drug related death population (37% compared to 31.3%)
- The age profile of clients attending WWtR/CGL was also slightly older in females, with the average age of death in females at 53.0 years (compared to 52.0 years in the general population)
- For males, on the other hand, the age demographic was slightly younger, with the average age of death in males at 45.0 years (compared to 46.1 years in the general population)
- Almost three quarters of all people included in this audit (72%) had a history of drug misuse, yet, despite this, fewer than half of the drug misuse cohort were known to WWtR/CGL - 38 people (34% of the total number of people included in this audit); this is a difference of 43 people

Potential Contributory Factors



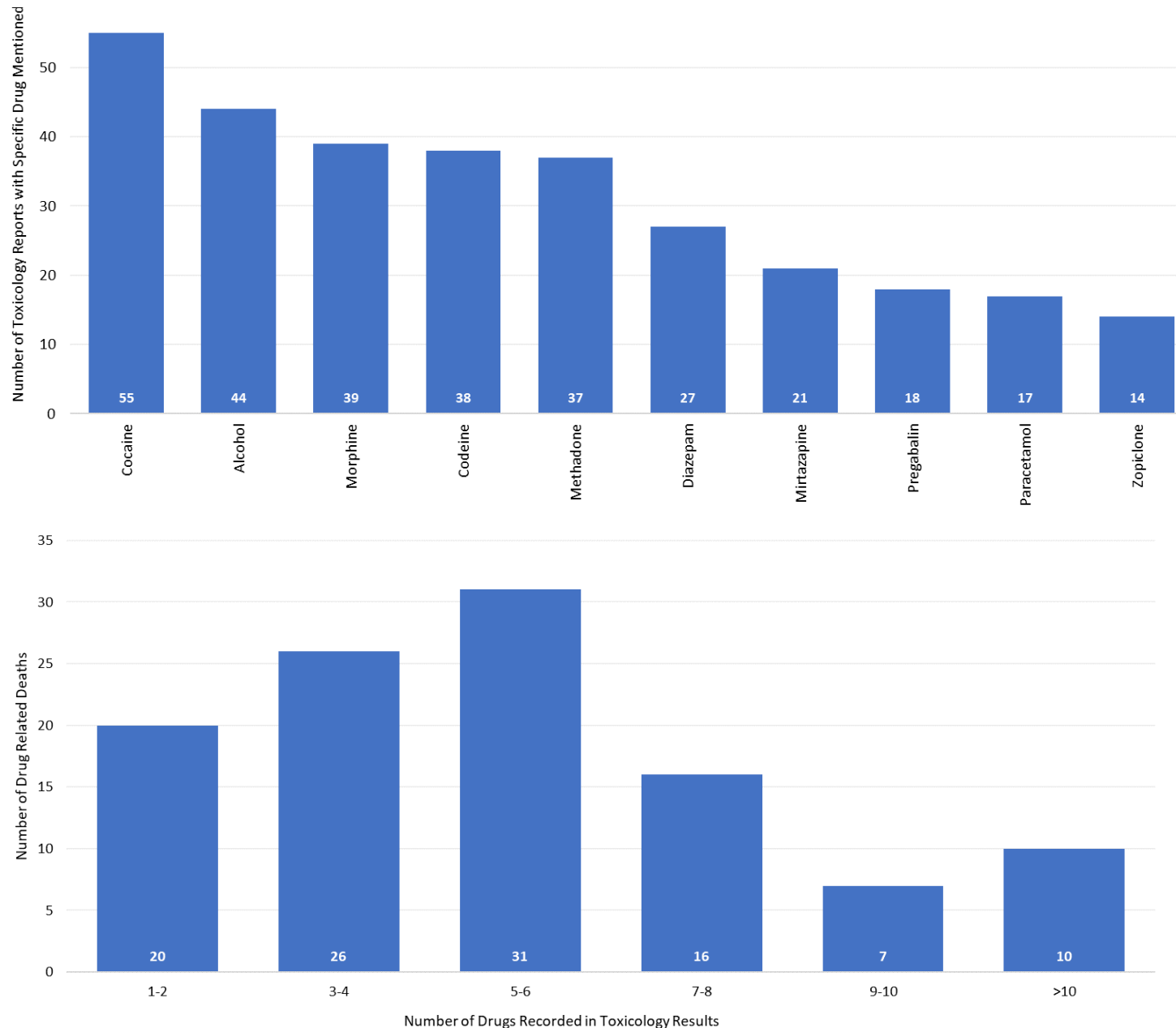
- The most common additional issue recorded was a history of alcohol misuse (36%), followed by a history of prison (10%), relationship problems (10%) and a recent bereavement (8%)
- Caution is noted with these figures as there are a lot of unknown recordings for each issue, if these issues are not recorded on an individual's death certificate it does not necessarily mean that the person did not experience them

Prescribed Medication



- In over half (58%) drug related deaths, there was an active prescription for medication recorded. Methadone was the most prescribed drug with almost 1 in 5 individuals (19%) prescribed the drug at the time of death
- Mirtazapine was the most common anti-depressant medication (13%) prescribed at the time of death
- Overall, there were 32 individuals who were prescribed anti-depressant medication (29%); this figure may be higher than might be expected, given that almost 1 in 4 (21%) were diagnosed with a mental health condition

Toxicology and Post-Mortem Results



- The most common drug found in the body at the time of death was cocaine, which was recorded in almost half of all deaths (49%); alcohol/ethanol was the second most commonly found drug, which was recorded in 39% of all deaths, followed by morphine which was recorded in just over third (35%) of all deaths
- Overall, opiates made up the largest class of drugs found in the toxicology reports, with almost three quarters (72%) of individuals having at least one opiate
- There were 8 individuals who died due to prescription drug use only
- Almost half of those who tested positive for morphine and/or heroin in their toxicology report (37%) were a known client to WWtR/CGL (45%)
- There were, however, only 19% individuals who were confirmed *not* to have been a client of WWtR/CGL, the remaining 36% were not known as there was no information recorded on their Coroner case file one way or the other
- The average number of drugs found at post mortem was 5.2, ranging from 1 to 15 drugs

Contact details

wirralintelligenceservice@wirral.gov.uk