



**water safety**  
Scotland

# Accidental Drowning Fatalities in Scotland: Under 25s

**An Analysis of the 2017 – 2021 WAID Data (Scotland)**



accidents don't have to happen

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**Author(s):** C McAvoy, J Foley

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# Introduction and limitations

Water Safety Scotland (WSS) released an updated [analysis on drowning fatalities \(2017 – 2021\)](#) for males over the age of 40 as the [Interim Review of Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy](#) showed this is the predominant demographic of those drowning accidentally in Scotland.

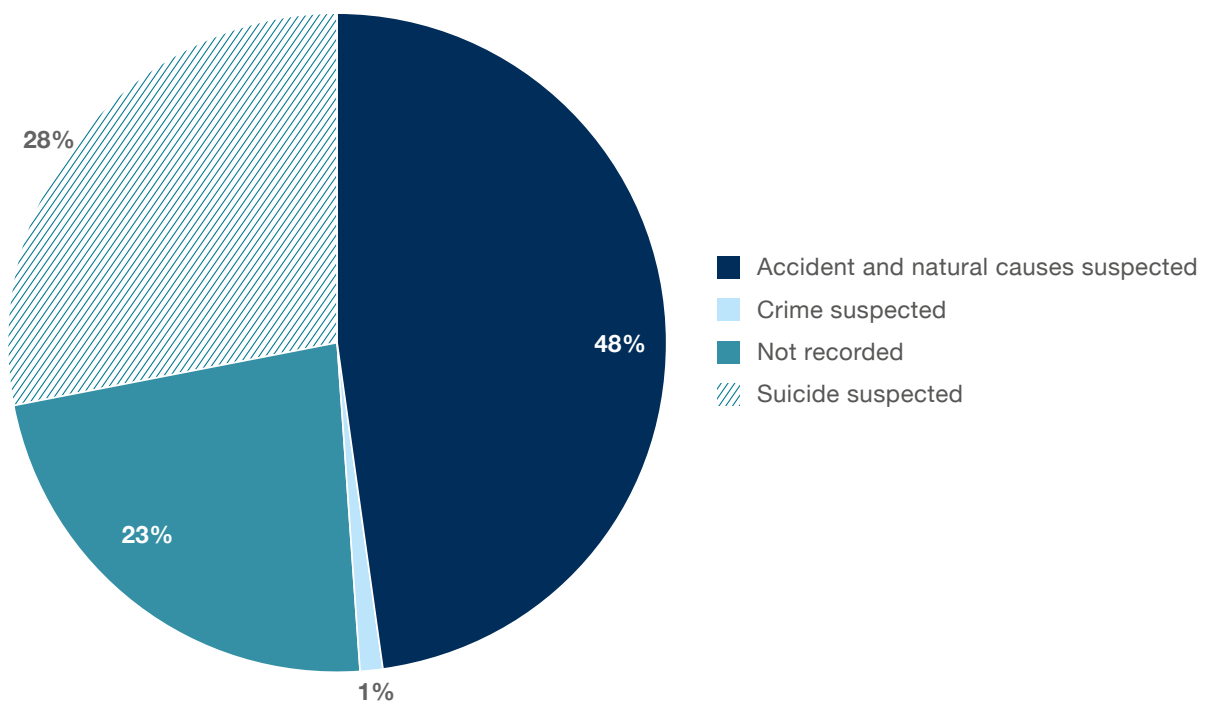
WSS was subsequently tasked, via a local PAWS (Partnership Approach to Water Safety) group, with conducting a similar analysis but concentrating on all accidental drowning fatalities occurring among those under the age of 25. This report therefore focusses on this group, using data from the Water Incident Database (WAID) over the period 2017 – 2021.

It should be noted that as the core data providers develop and improve data verification and completeness of records, the data (particularly 'crime suspected' and 'suicide suspected') is subject to change. Throughout the report, the term 'accidental' refers to both accidental and natural cause of death. Where possible, all data is reported; if this is not possible we indicate the number of records counted in the analysis, i.e n=33

# Analysis and findings

## Overview

Over the five-year period, there were 473 water-related fatalities in Scotland. Of these, 48% were identified as 'accidental' (n = 226). See Figure 1.



**Figure 1:** Overall water-related fatalities, n=473 by outcome percentage (Scotland, 2017-2021)

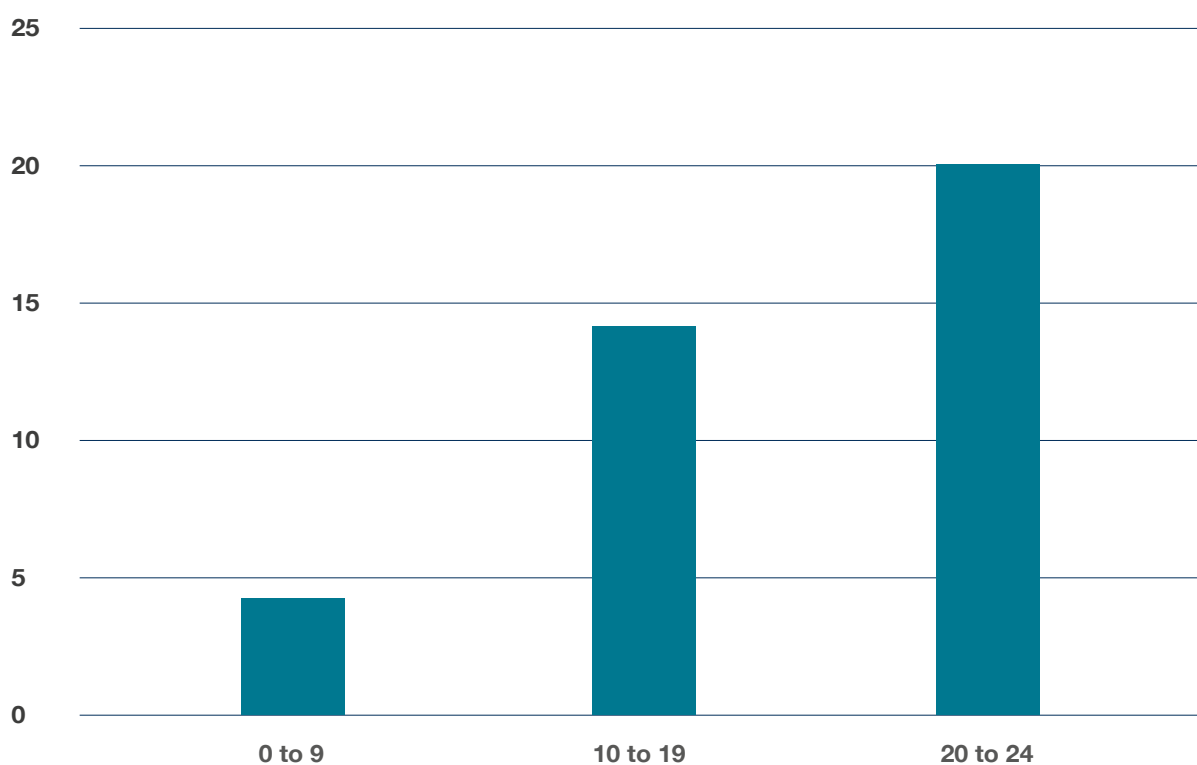
Of the 226 accidental fatalities over the five year period, 46 involved those under the age of 25 (20 %).

Please note that the following analysis and subsequent pages relate only to the 46 accidental fatalities that occurred to those under the age of 25.

## Age and sex

The most common age range for accidental drowning was 20 to 24 years.

The average age of an accidental drowning fatality within the under-25s age group was 18 years.



**Figure 2:** Accidental fatalities by age under 25 n=46 (Scotland, 2017-2021)

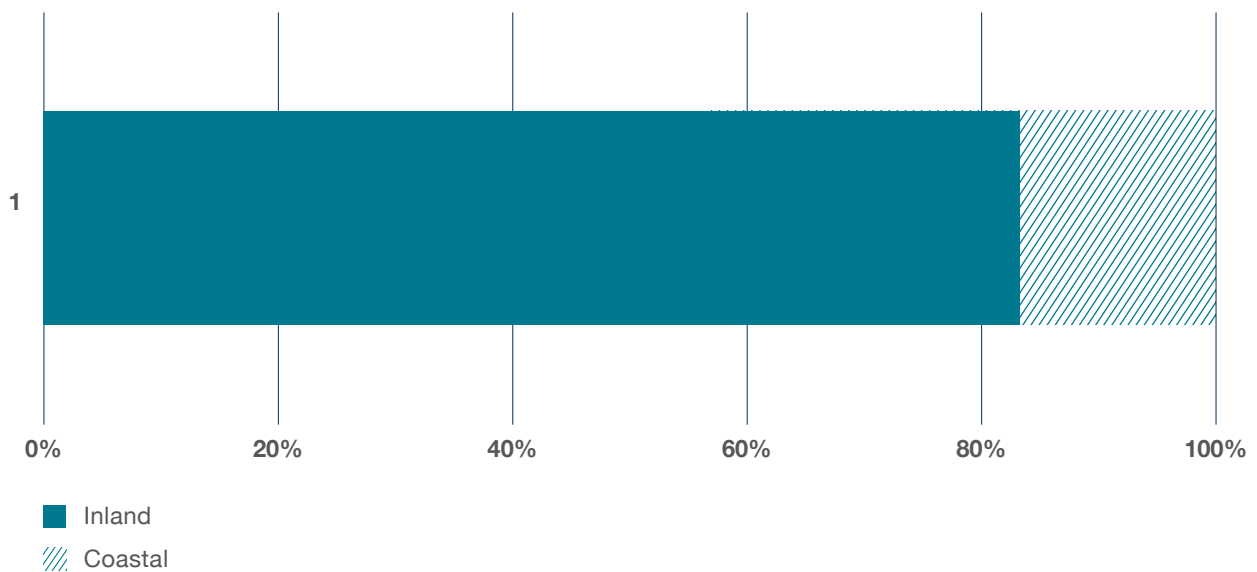
Sex has not been broken down by age due to the relatively small numbers, however 80% of the accidental fatalities in this age group were male. This is consistent with the data across all ages.

## Environment

In terms of the location of accidental fatalities over the five-year period, inland waterways accounted for 83% of accidental fatalities (see figure 3).

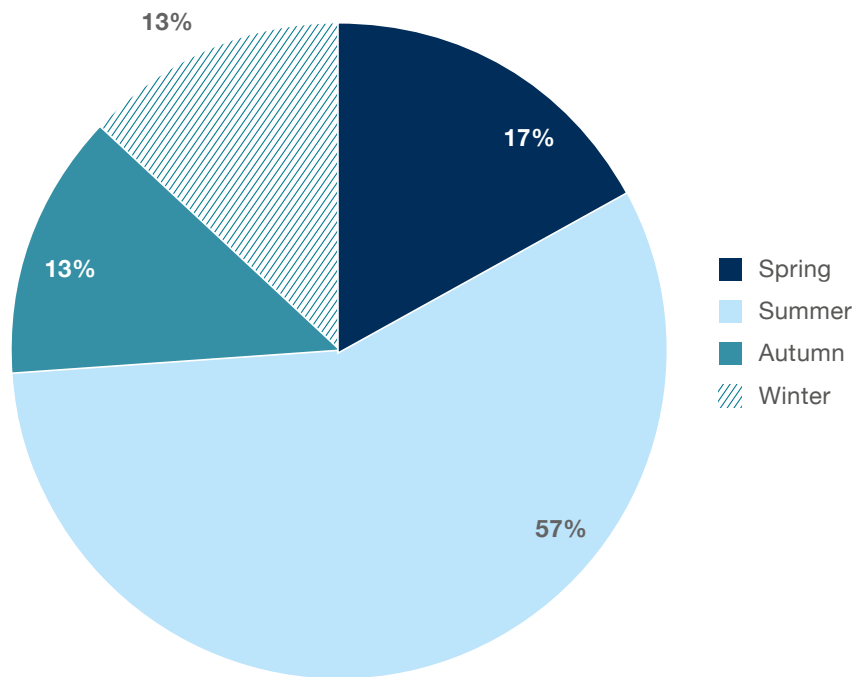
Fatalities due to drowning happen all year round. Summer<sup>1</sup> accounted for the majority of accidental fatalities (57%) with the month of July recording the highest number of accidental drowning fatalities over the year (n = 12). See figure 4.

Sunday was identified as the most common day for an accidental drowning fatality in this age group (n=10). See figure 5.

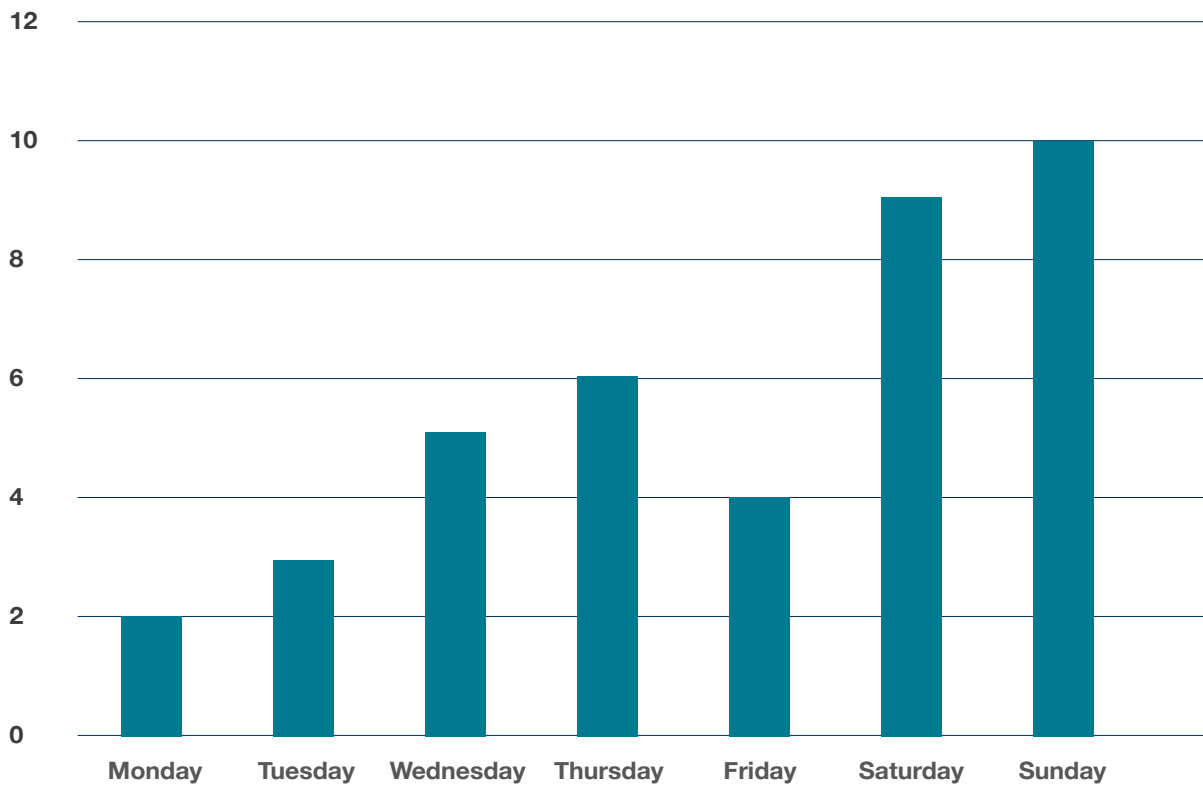


**Figure 3:** Accidental fatalities by location, ages under 25, n=46 (Scotland, 2017-2021)

<sup>1</sup> Seasons have been broken down as: Spring (March, April, May), Summer (June, July, August), Autumn (September, October, November) and Winter (December, January, February).



**Figure 4:** Accidental fatalities by season, ages under 25, n=46 (Scotland, 2017-2021)



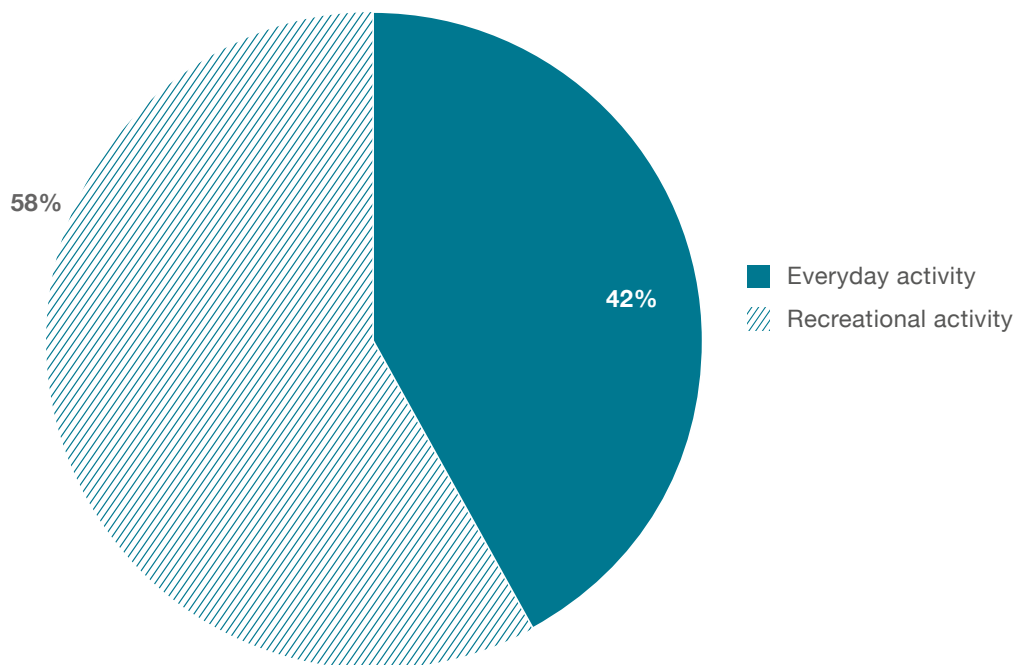
**Figure 5:** Accidental fatalities by weekday, ages under 25, n=39, 7 not recorded (Scotland, 2017-2021)



## Activities

When looking at the activity prior to the accidental fatality, recreational water activities accounted for over half (58%, see figure 6).

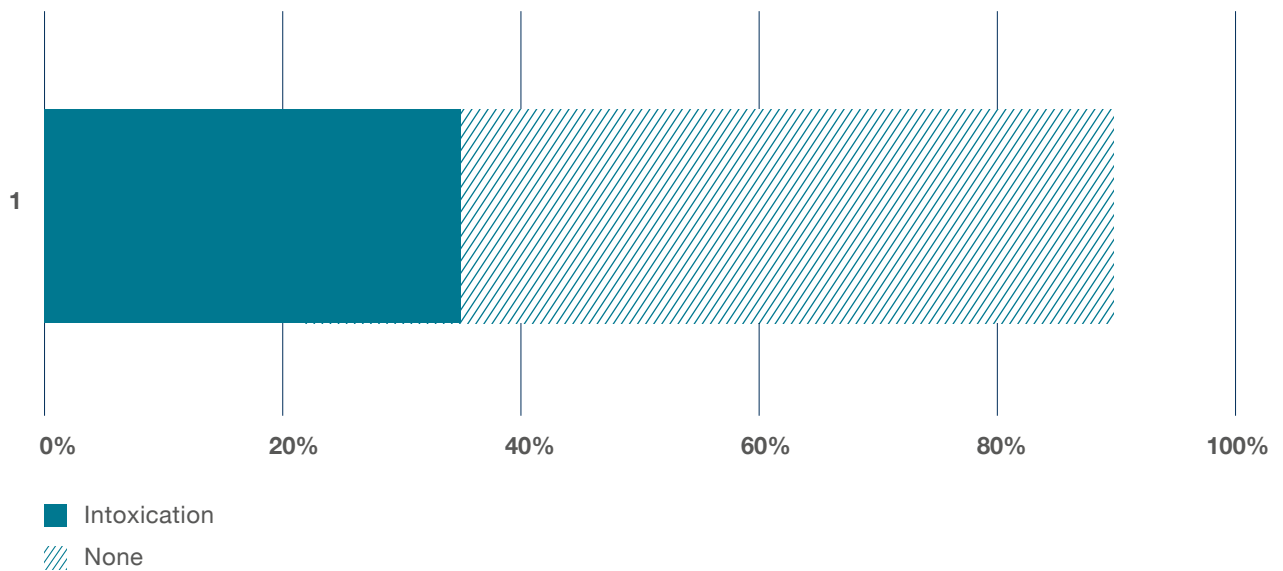
The majority of the recreational fatalities were the result of swimming or waterside play.



**Figure 6:** Accidental fatalities by activity, ages under 25, n=45, 1 not included (Scotland, 2017-2021)

## Intoxication

The analysis found that 35% of the fatalities had suspected intoxication at the time of death (see figure 7). This statistic should however be interpreted cautiously and noted as 'suspected'. This is a higher percentage than seen in overall age groups. This information could help to inform future approaches for preventative efforts.



**Figure 7:** Accidental fatalities by intoxication, ages under 25, n=46 (Scotland, 2017-2021)



# Conclusion

This report is the first to look specifically at the age group under 25. The report has revealed a number of key points that are different to general analysis trend reports published via RoSPA and WSS each year.

The research reveals the following information:

- **There were 46 accidental fatalities during the five-year period of people under the age of 25**
- **The average age of a fatality was 18**
- **The vast majority of the accidental fatalities happened at inland waterways**
- **Summer accounted for the most fatalities**
- **Sunday was the most common day for a fatality**
- **Just over half of accidental fatalities were the result of recreational water activities**
- **Intoxication was suspected in 35% of cases**

It is hoped that this information will be useful for campaign and awareness-raising and can be used to help Water Safety Scotland and its PAWS partners focus effort to help reduce fatalities.

