

Identifying deaths while homeless- the journey so far



Tony Wilkins on behalf of the Health Analysis and Life Events team.

Office for National Statistics

30th January 2020

Mortality@ons.gov.uk

Background

- On the 3 April 2018, the [Homeless Reduction Act 2017](#) came into force in England. It adds 2 new duties to the original statutory rehousing duty:
 - Duty to prevent homelessness,
 - Duty to relieve homelessness.
- Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government (MHCLG) set out ambitious plan to [halve rough sleeping by 2022](#) and eliminate it by 2027.
- Welsh Government's [Rough Sleeping Action Plan](#), 2018-2020, states:
 - Measuring rough sleeping is difficult, but we need to measure as best we can the extent and nature of rough sleeping in order to plan to end it

Deaths of homeless people- experimental statistics

ONS holds all death records registered in England and Wales. Although recording of homelessness is not consistent on the death certificate, innovative methods were used to produce first ever official statistics on deaths of homeless people.

This experimental statistics is aimed at providing evidence to show the progress against the reduction of homelessness.

Definition of Homelessness used

The meaning of homelessness in this release is not based on a pre-existing definition but follows from the scope for identification of affected individuals in the death registration data.

The records identified are mainly people sleeping rough, or using emergency accommodation such as homeless shelters and direct access hostels, at or around the time of death.



- Hostels defined as resident by license not assured short hold tenancy as these are the emergency shelters.
- **B&B's excluded** as it's not possible for us at this time to ascertain if the residents are exclusively homeless.

Data sources used in this work

- ONS mortality database
- ONS drug poisoning data base- a sub set of mortality database
- Homeless link website- web scrapped an extensive list of homeless hostel and shelter addresses, 1197 address were downloaded for England only.
- For Wales, 22 local authorities websites were searched for hostel address.

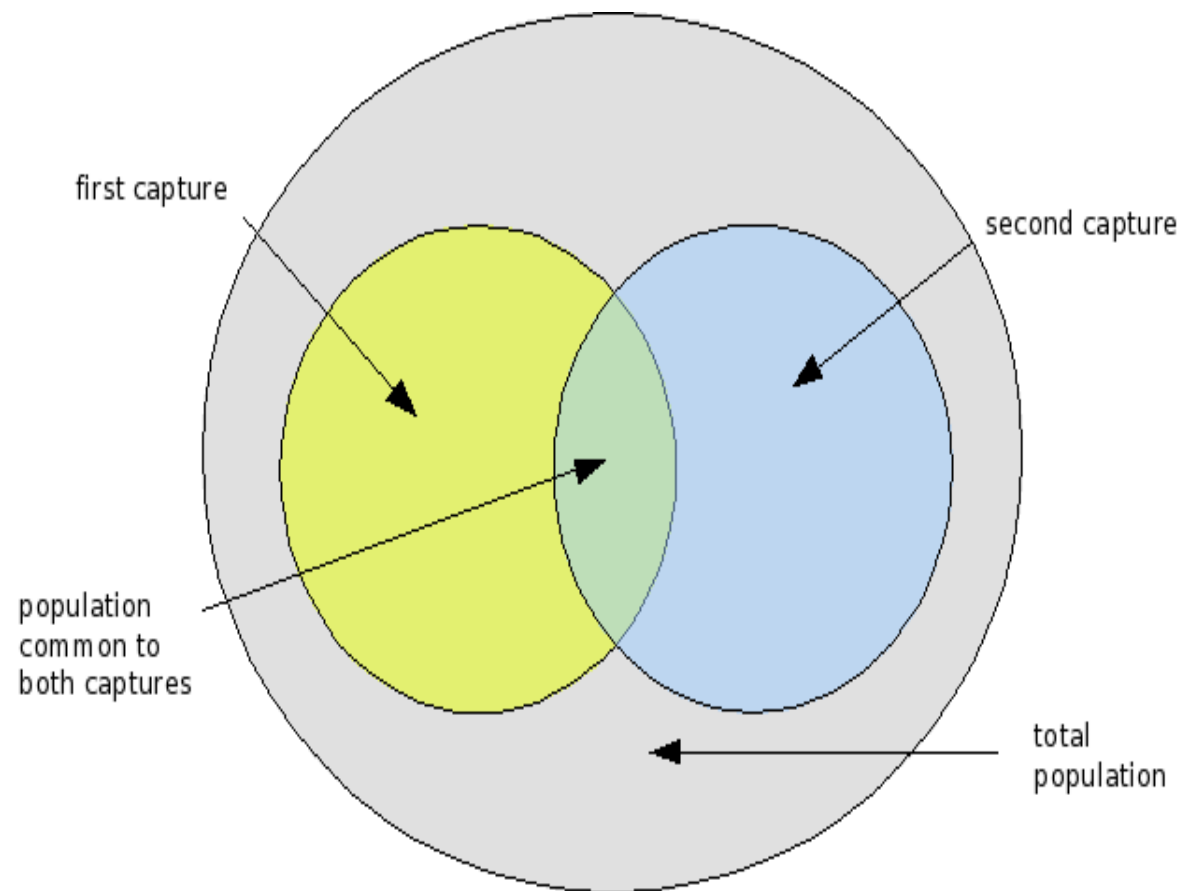
Methods- identifying homeless death records

Search criteria used:

1. The recorded place of residence contained any of a list of text expressions such as “no fixed abode”, “homeless” and “night shelter” or the name or address of a known homeless hostel or project.
2. Similarly, the recorded place of death containing any of a list of text expressions mentioned above.
3. The death had been investigated by a coroner, and the details received by ONS after the inquest included any of the text expressions or addresses outlined previously.
4. The record contained a “communal establishment code”, which specified a homeless hostel or shelter.
5. The death occurred in hospital or in a hostel or similar location, and the recorded postcode of the place of residence was identical to the postcode of the place of death.

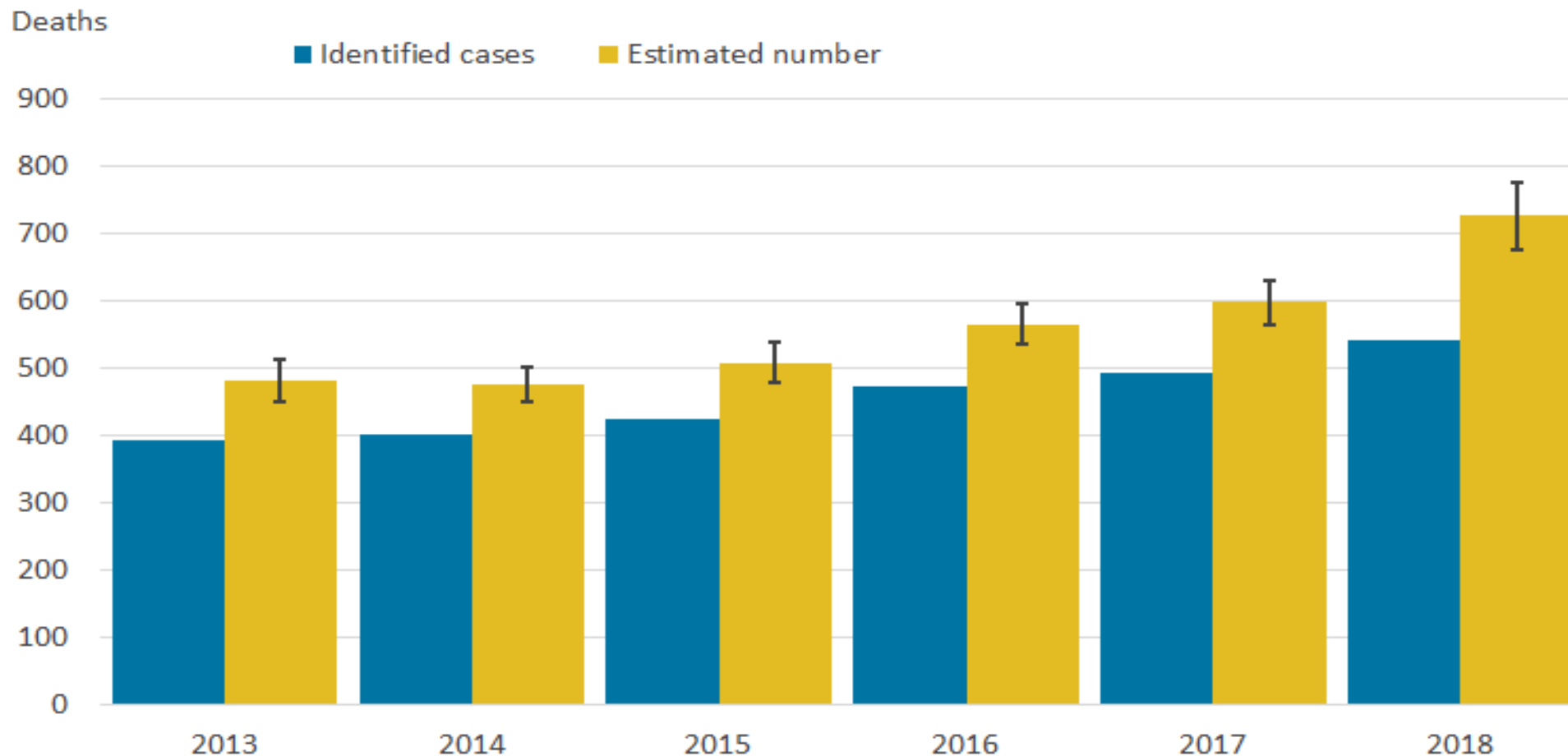
Methods – estimating homeless deaths

- A statistical method called **capture-recapture modelling** was applied to estimate the most likely number of additional registrations not identified as homeless people, based on multiple captures (searches), using Poisson loglinear regression.
- The Chao model was selected out of several alternatives. This is a robust but conservative (lower-bound) model, so that the figures produced should be taken as the lowest probable estimates.

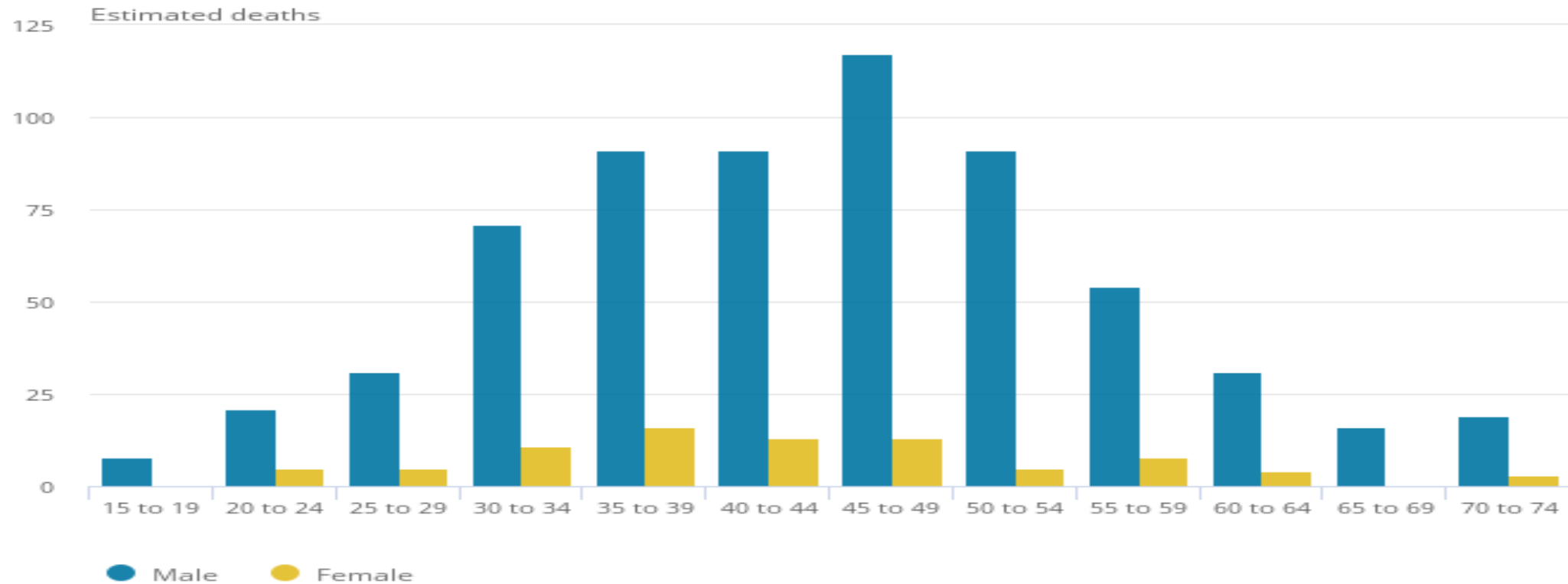


Results

Deaths of homeless people have increased significantly since 2017

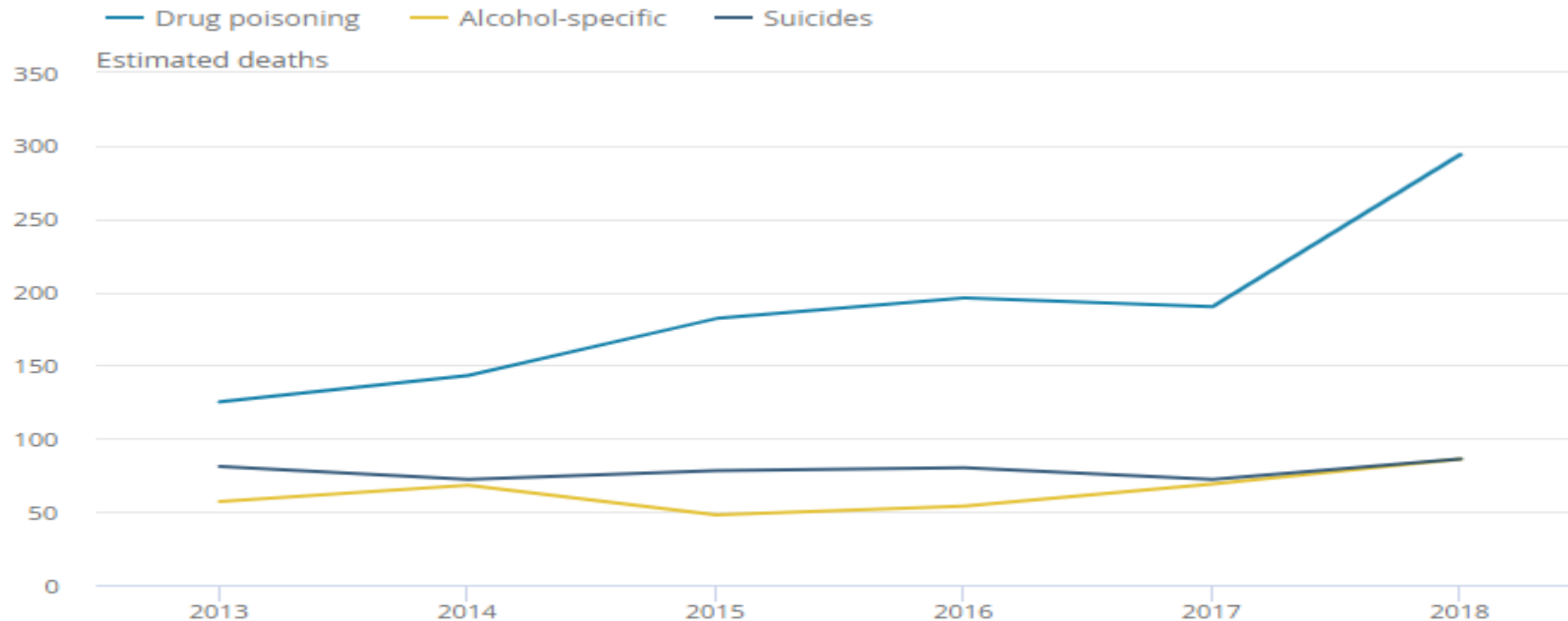


There were more than seven times as many male deaths compared with females in 2018



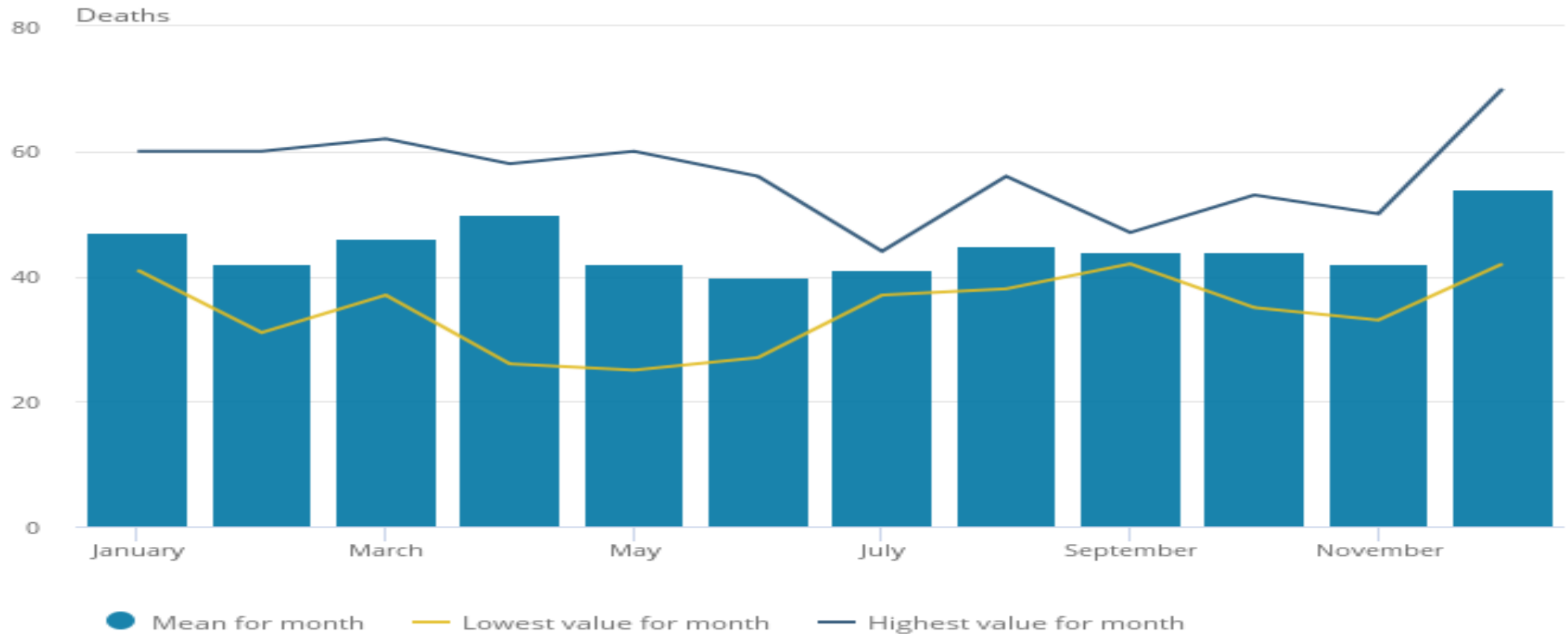
Source: Office for National Statistics – Death registrations

Drug-related deaths of homeless people have more than doubled over six years



Source: Office for National Statistics – Death registrations

There is little evidence of a seasonal pattern in deaths of homeless people



Findings for Wales

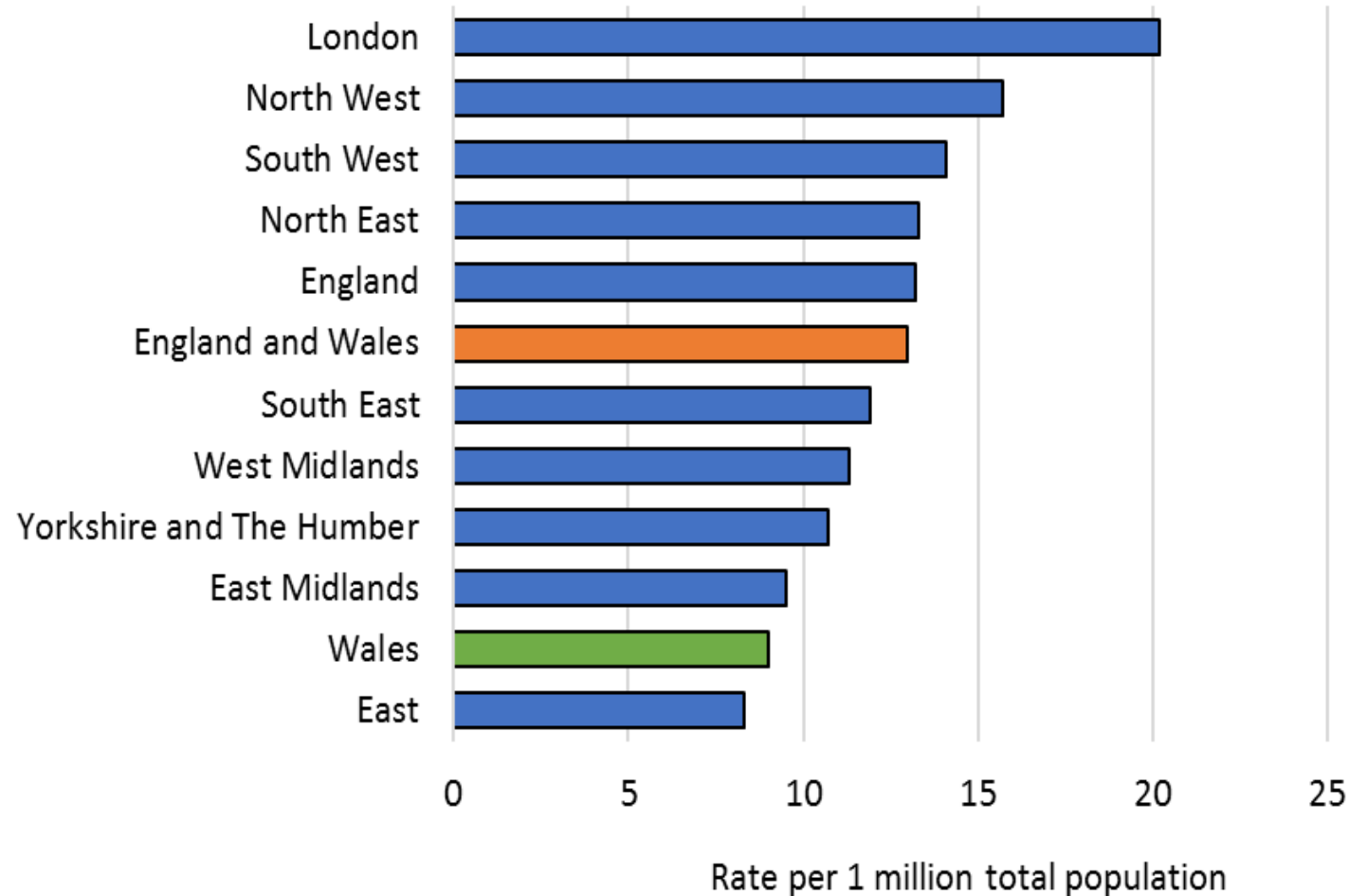


A total of 34 estimated deaths in Wales were registered in 2018.

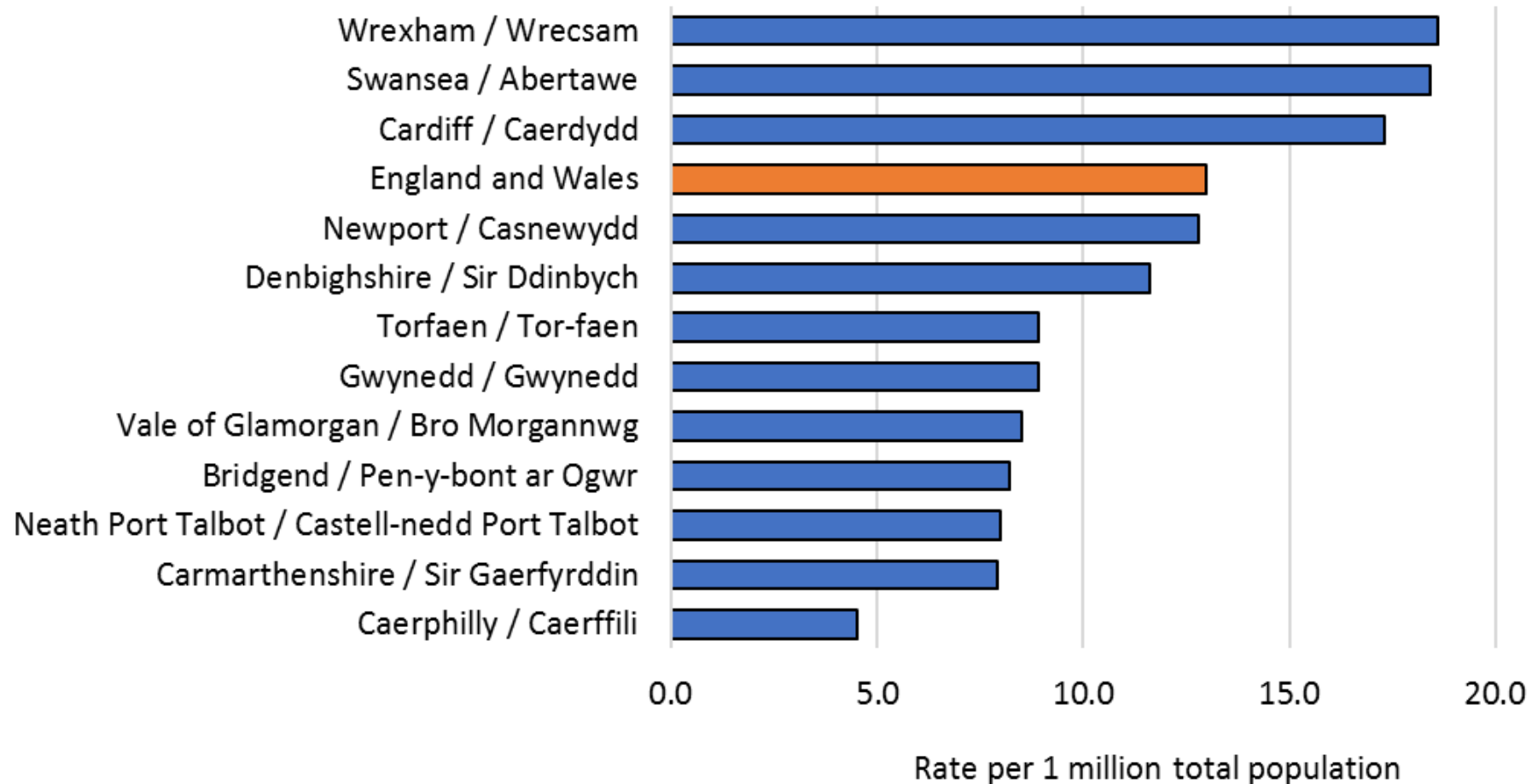
Rate of estimated homeless deaths in Welsh local authorities, registered between 2013 and 2018 combined

In Wales, there were 124 estimated homeless death between 2013 and 2018.

The rate was lower than all English regions, with the exception of the East of England.



Rate of estimated homeless deaths in Welsh local authorities, registered between 2013 and 2018 combined



Variation in rates when comparing different areas of Wales.

However, these rates have wide confidence intervals, so the differences **are not** statistically significant.

What's next

- ONS is working with University of Southampton to improve the reporting of homeless deaths at local area level.
- Working with the General Registrar Office (GRO) to improve the guidance on recording of deaths of homeless people on the death certificate.
- National Records of Scotland will be publishing similar statistics for Scotland on 5 February.