



## Psychiatry & Behavioral Sciences Section – 2005

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### 17 Are Drug Related Deaths Avoidable? An Analysis From Vienna, Austria

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After attending this presentation, attendees will recognize the patterns of drug related deaths in Vienna, Austria and will understand the prevalence of avoidable death in this population.

This presentation will impact the forensic community by demonstrating the existence of avoidable factors in the overdose deaths of drug-addicted individuals in Austria.

**Introduction:** Drug abuse is a worldwide problem. It is estimated that in Vienna, the capital of Austria, with a total population of 1.6 million inhabitants, there are between 10,000 and 15,000 heroin users. Since the end of the 1980's the number of officially registered drug related deaths has increased in Vienna. The aim of this survey was to find out if at least part of the drug related deaths could have been avoided.

**Methods:** Police records of drug related deaths in Vienna in the year 2002 have been analysed regarding place, sex, age at death, and if witnesses were present.

**Results:** In 2002 a total of 95 drug related deaths were investigated at the Institute of Forensic Medicine in Vienna. Of the drug related deaths 75% happened in private flats. In 39% of these cases other people were present. Of the victims 76% were male. The proportion between sexes was 3:1. The average age was 33, ranging from 17 to 47 years. Female drug users were younger than males.

**Discussion:** Based on the results of this study – three quarters of drug related deaths have happened in flats, mostly in the presence of other persons – it may be assumed that at least some of these deaths would have been avoidable if first aid measures would have been applied in time.

#### Drug Abuse, Drug Related Deaths, Epidemiology