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Ph.D., NCC, LCPC



Suicide Prevention in Montana: Analyzing Preliminary Data to Inform Targeted Efforts



AND Elise Meldahl

2025



SUICIDE PREVENTION IN MONTANA:

ANALYZING PRELIMINARY DATA TO INFORM TARGETED EFFORTS

**2025 Montana Conference
on Suicide Prevention**

Jessica Gerthe, Ph.D., NCC, LCPC
Elise Meldahl, BS, Graduate Research Assistant

Presenters

Dr. Jessica Gerthe

- Assistant professor of counseling at MSU-Bozeman
- LCPC specializing in adolescent suicidality
- Earned Ph.D. in Counselor Education at Penn State
- Research focus on suicide prevention, intervention, and postvention
- Jessica.Gerthe@montana.edu

Elise Meldahl

- Master's student in Marriage, Couple, and Family Counseling at MSU
- Graduate research assistant
- B.A. in Elementary Education
- Clinical focus on suicidality among children and teens





Agenda

- Overview of study goals
- Review of preliminary data
 - Veteran Status and Industry
 - Veteran Status and Age
 - Age and Marital Status
- Recommendations for targeted intervention
- Plan for continued data analysis
- References



INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY:

MONTANA SUICIDE DEATHS 2013-2024



What Data?

De-identified details on every suicide death in Montana 2013-2024, accounting for over 3,500 individuals

Goals

Analyze the data to identify key indicators of increased risk, including vet status, industry, county of residence, etc.

Outcome

Use data analysis results to inform targeted, strategic suicide prevention and intervention efforts across Montana.

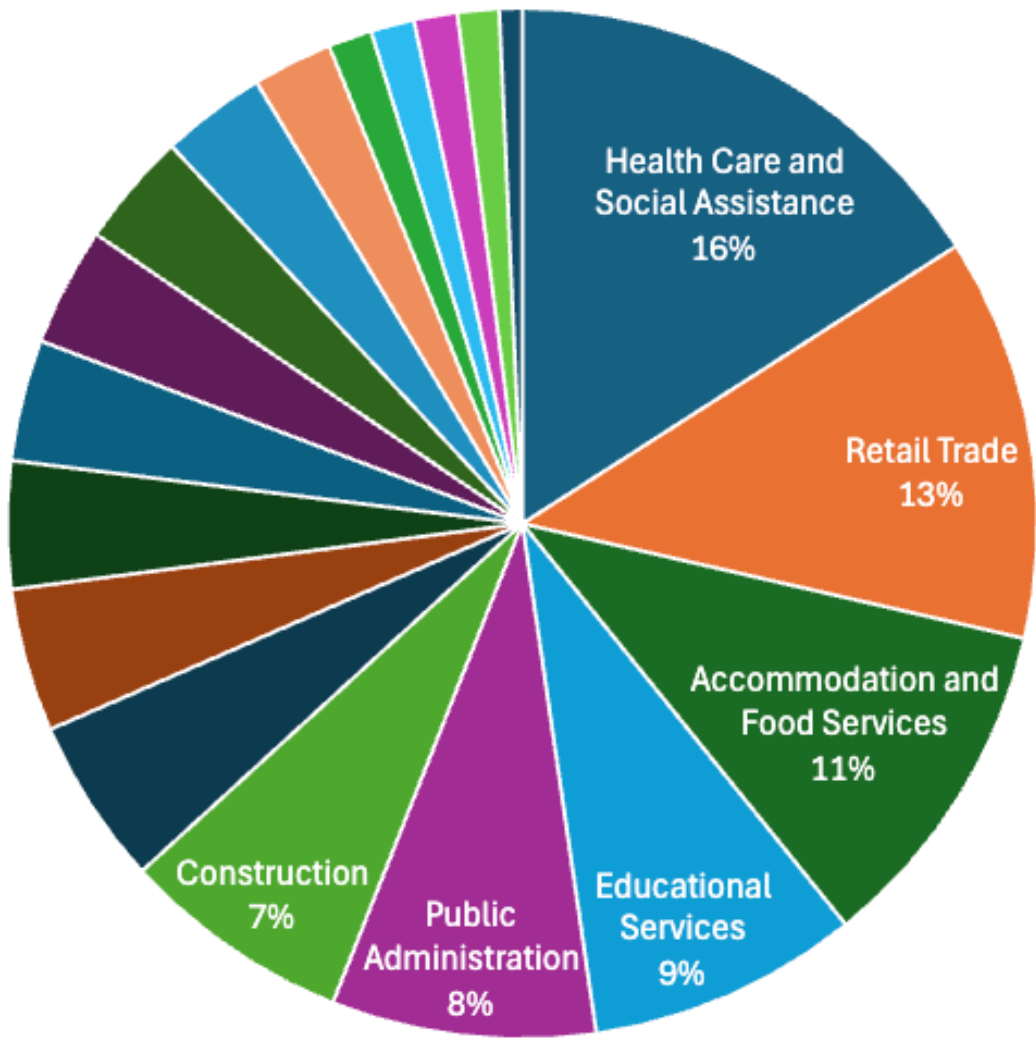


VET STATUS, INDUSTRY, & COUNTY

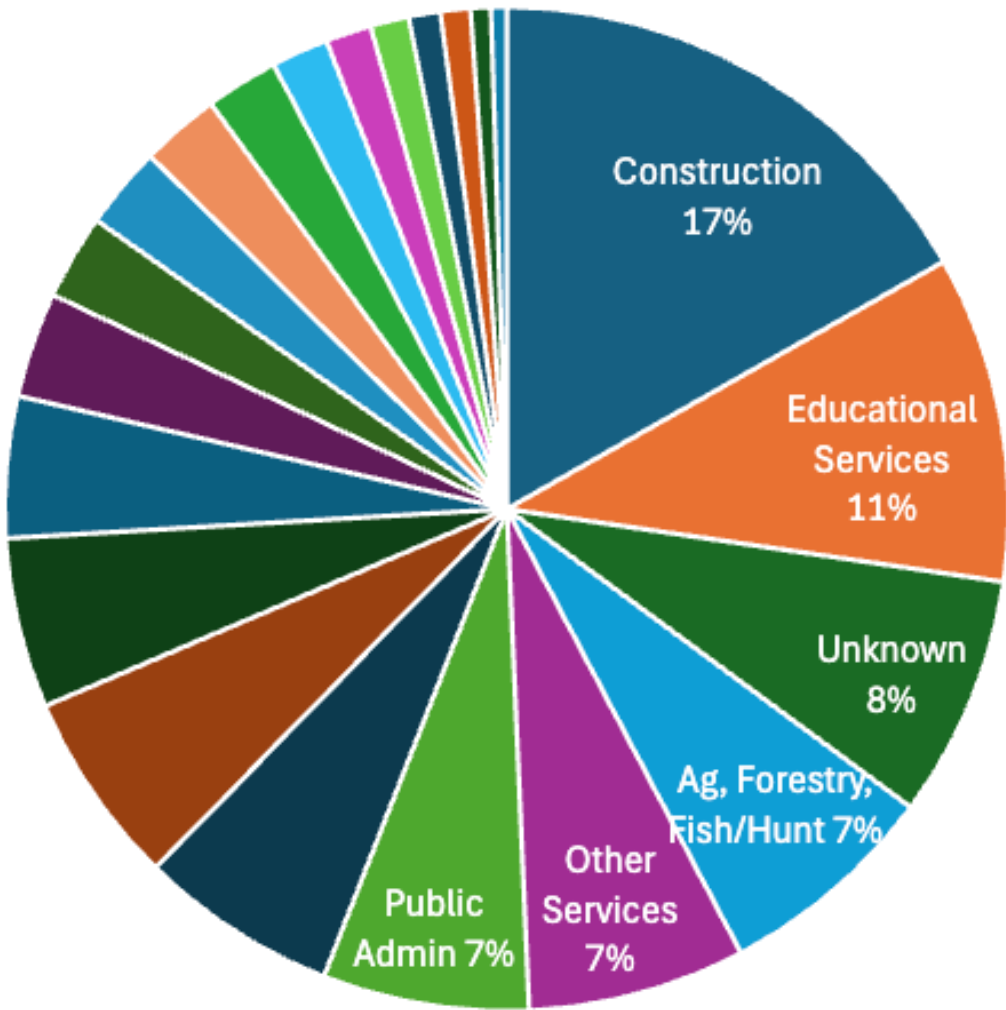


Disproportionate Risk: Suicide in Montana's Construction Workforce

Montana Workforce Average by Industry 2020- 2024

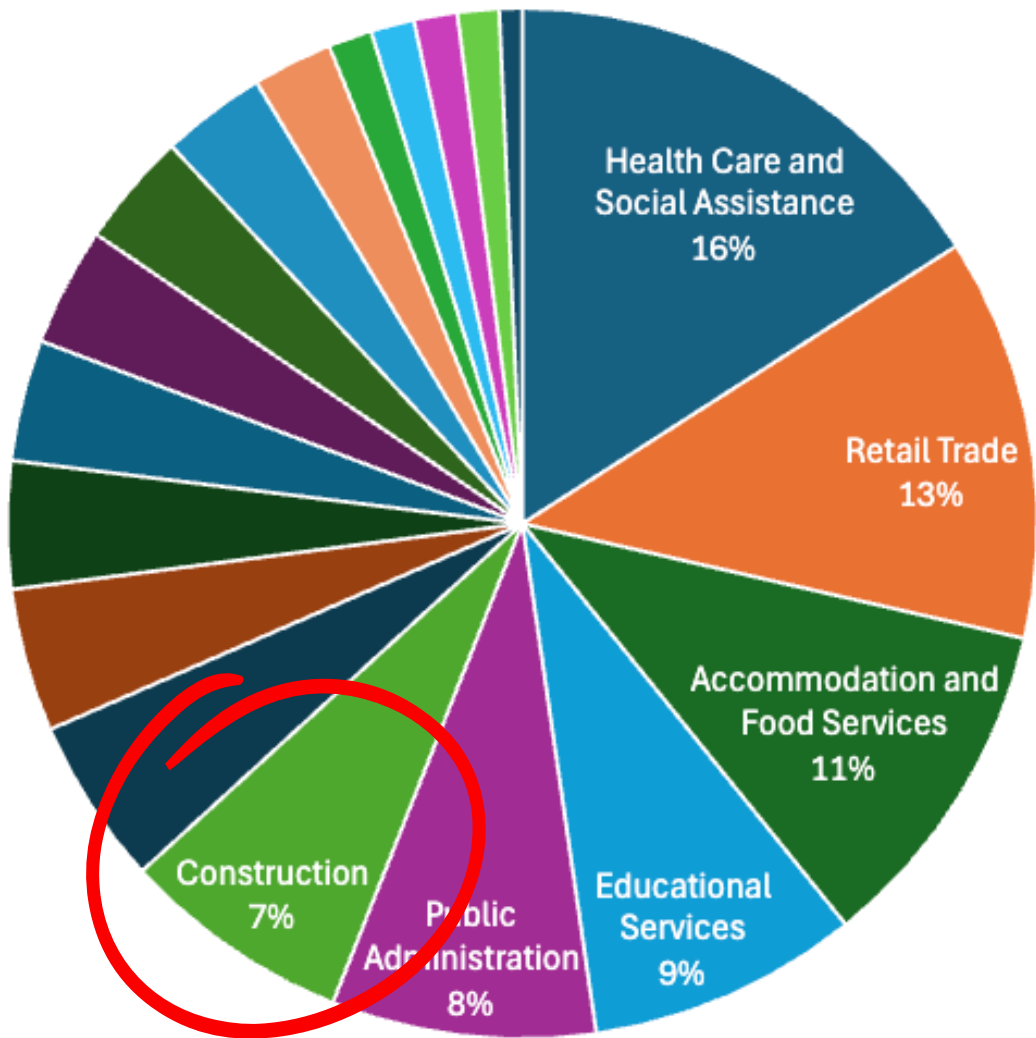


Total Suicide Deaths by Industry 2013 - 2024

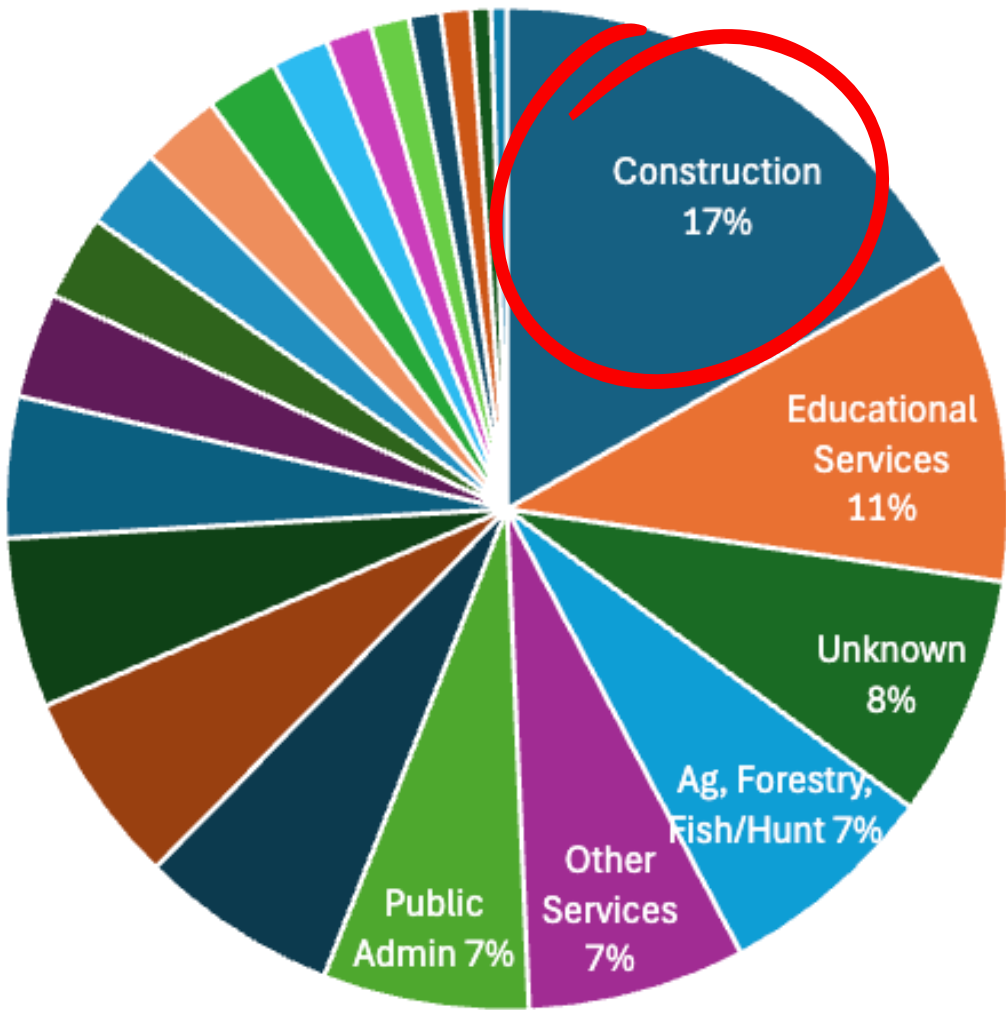


Disproportionate Risk: Suicide in Montana's Construction Workforce

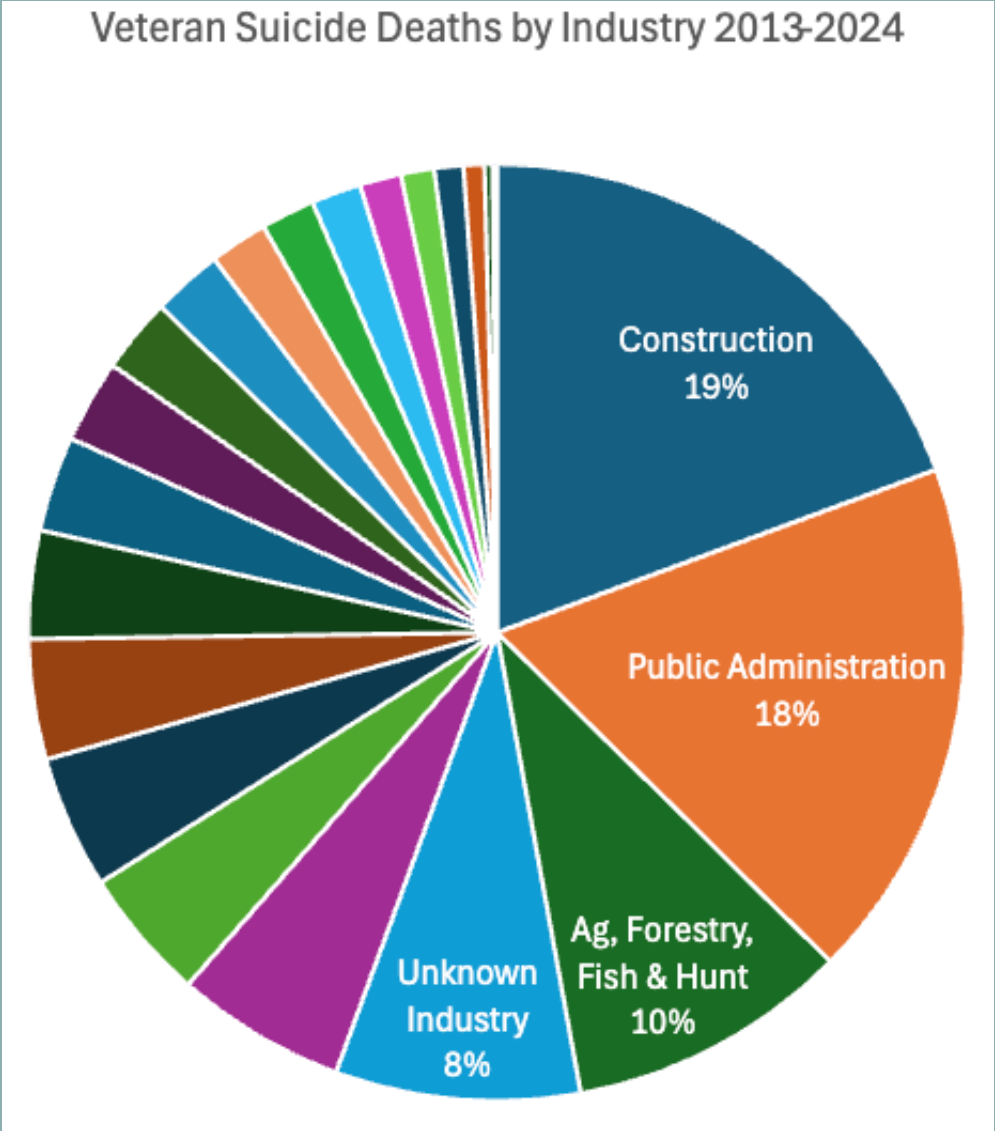
Montana Workforce Average by Industry 2020- 2024



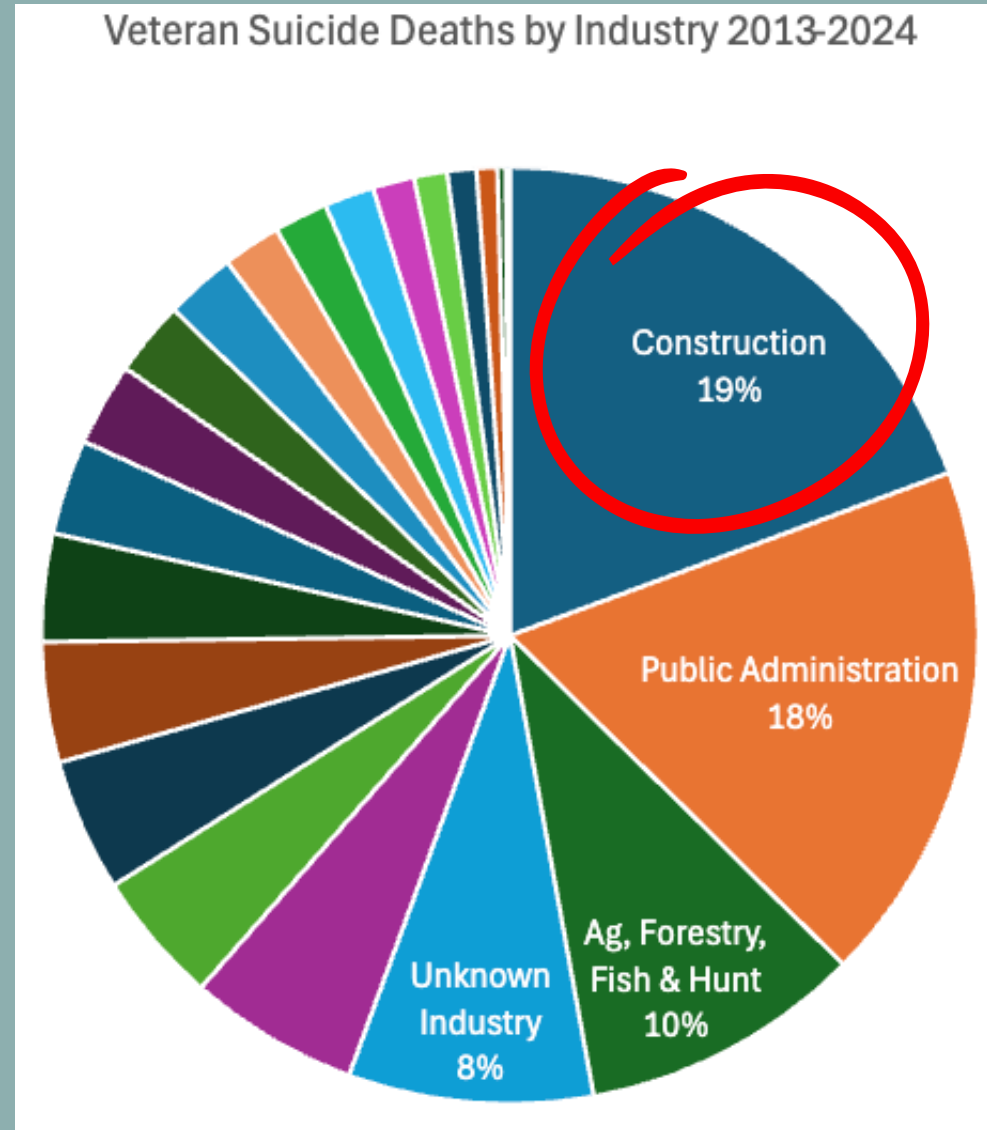
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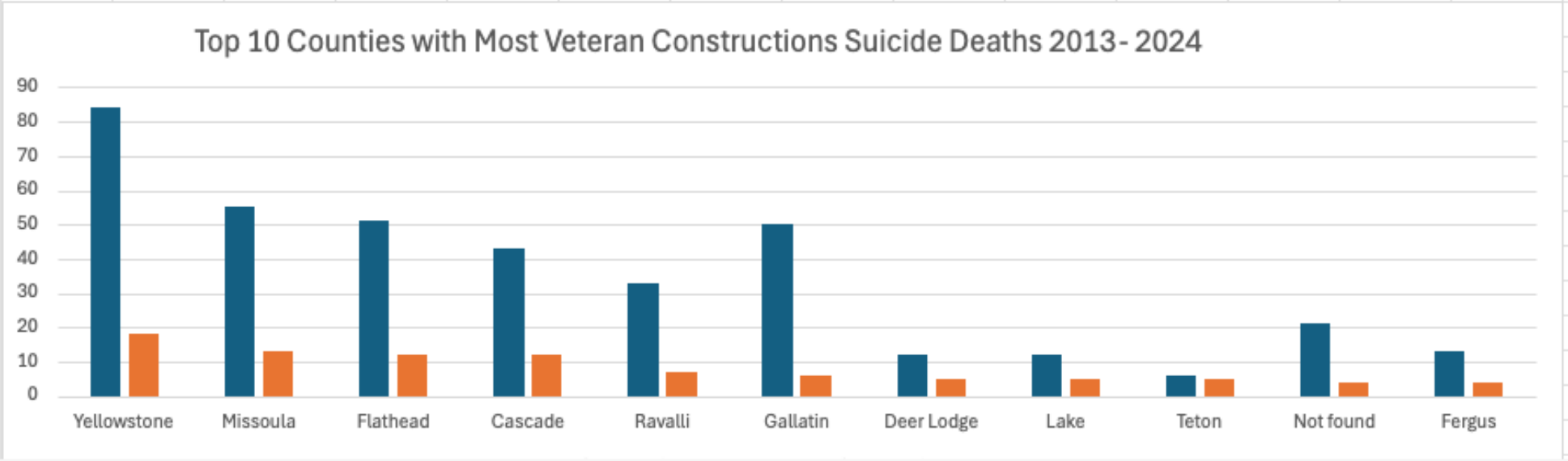
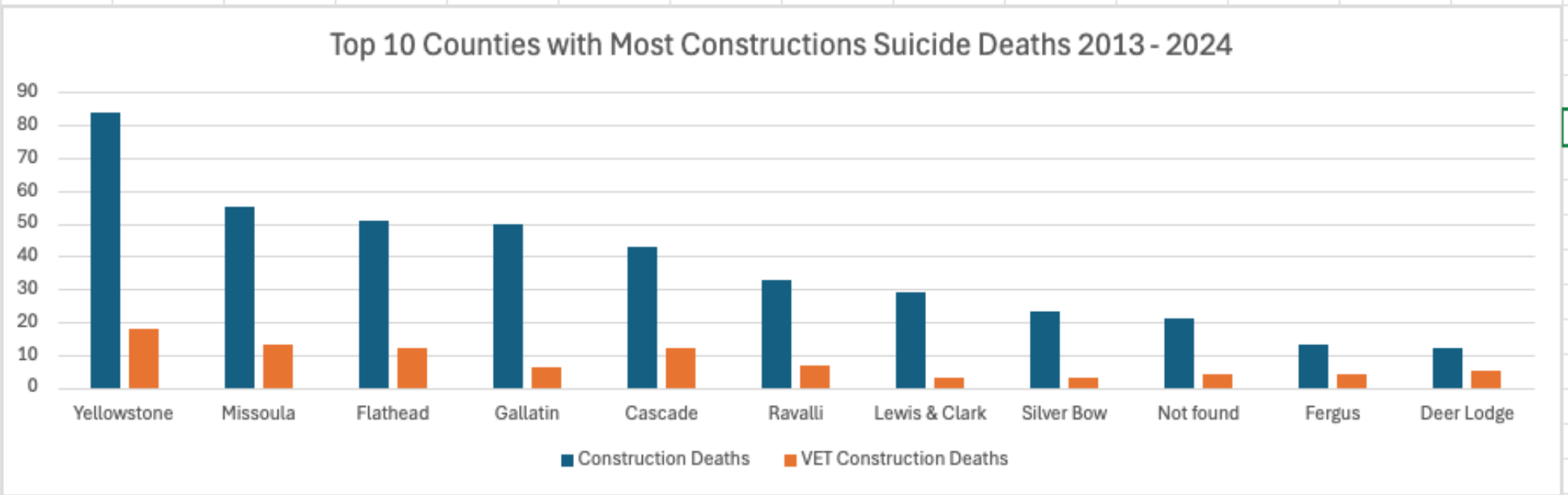
Disproportionate Risk: Suicide in Montana's Construction Workforce



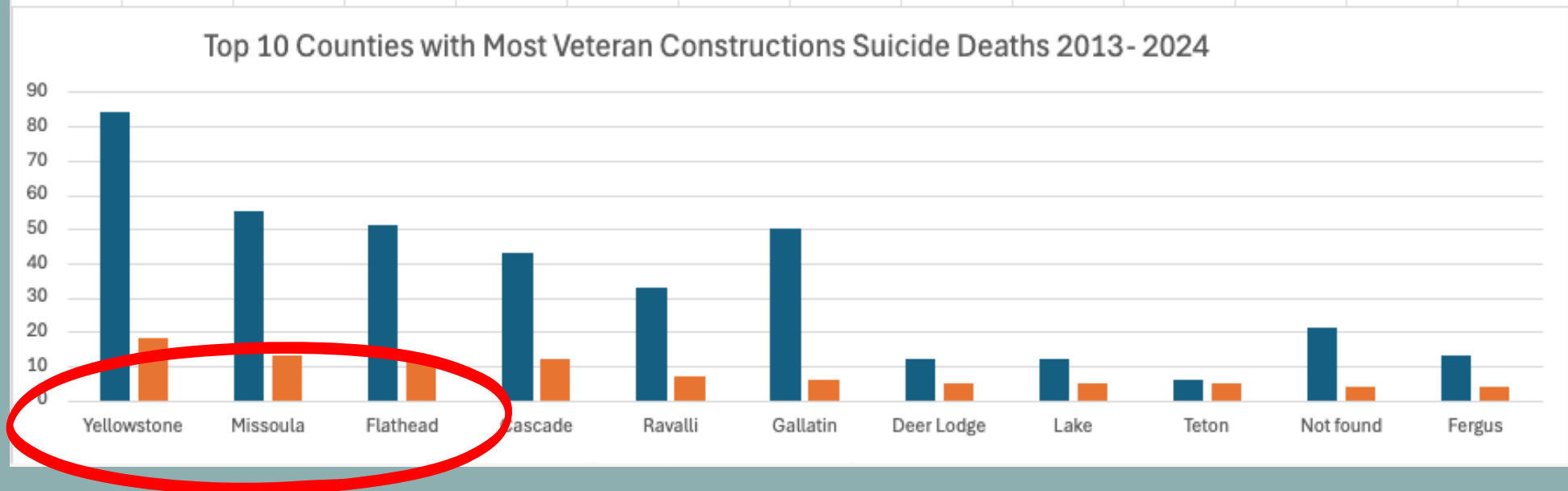
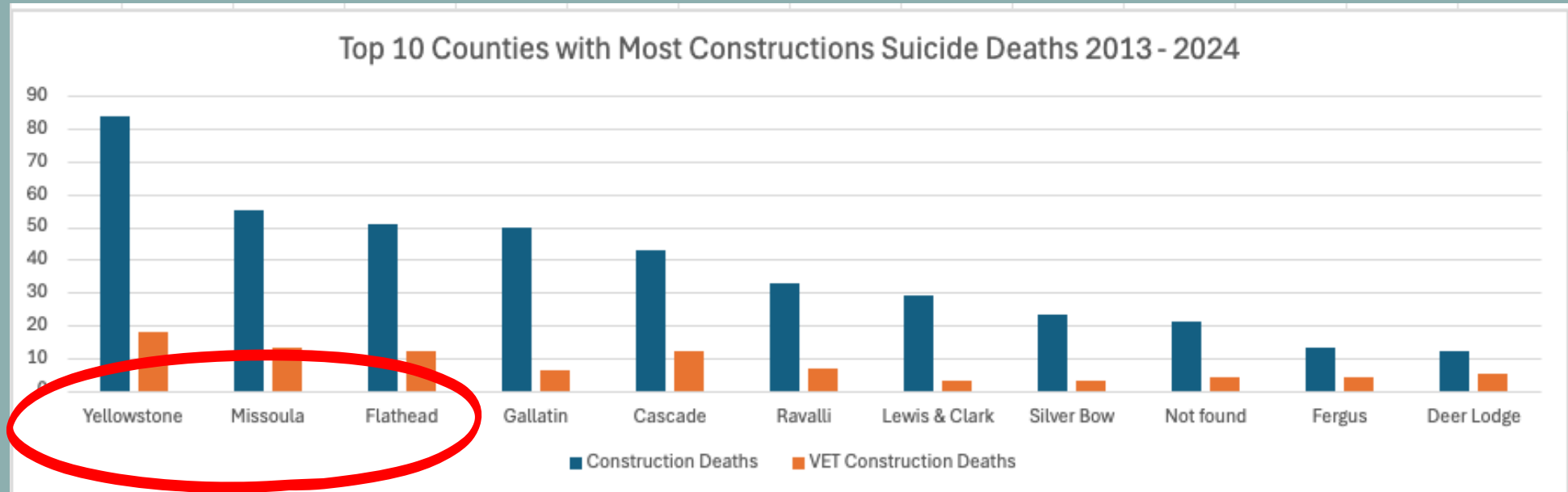
Disproportionate Risk: Suicide in Montana's Construction Workforce



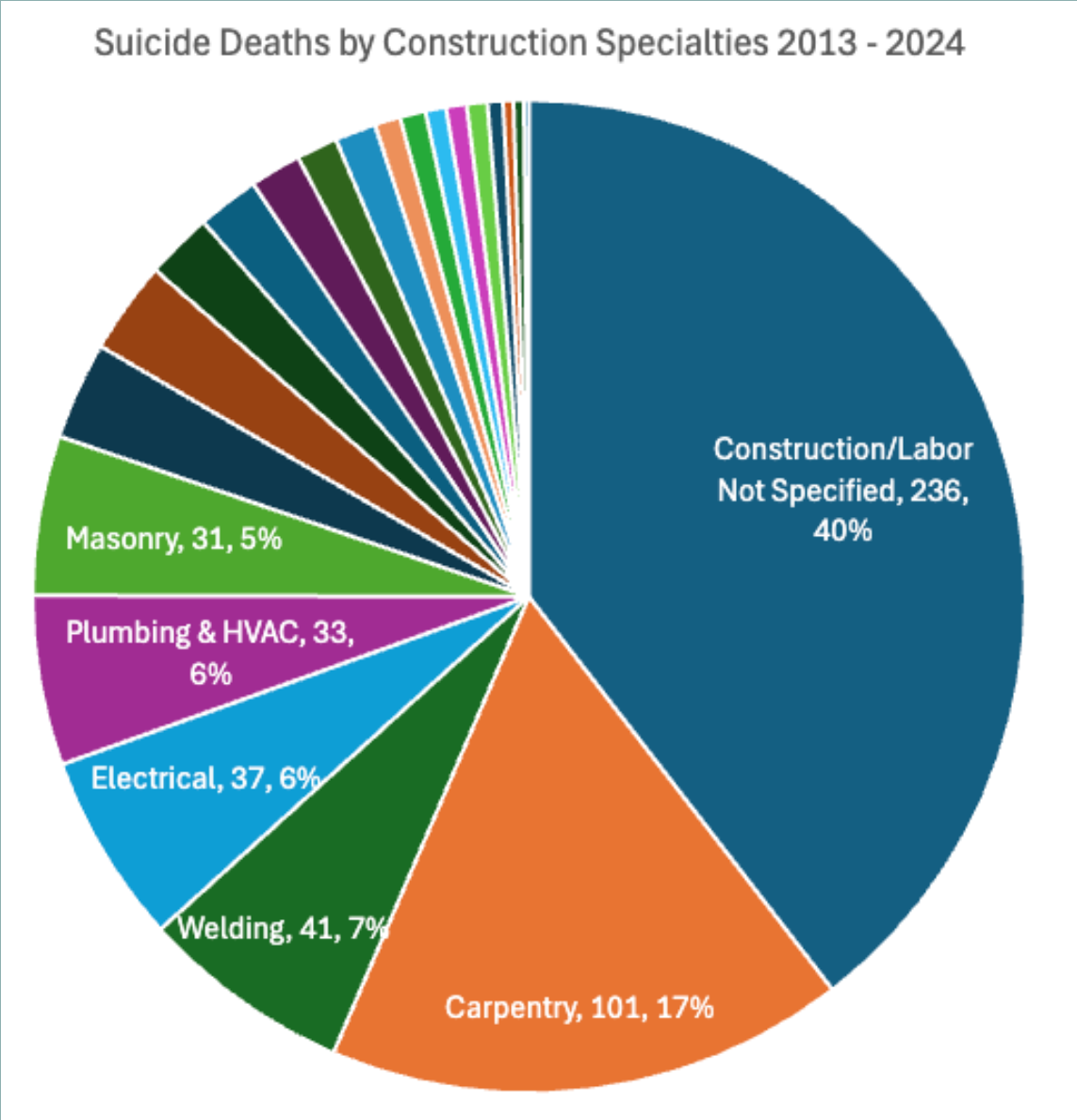
Drilling Deeper: Veteran Construction Worker Deaths by County



Drilling Deeper: Veteran Construction Worker Deaths by County

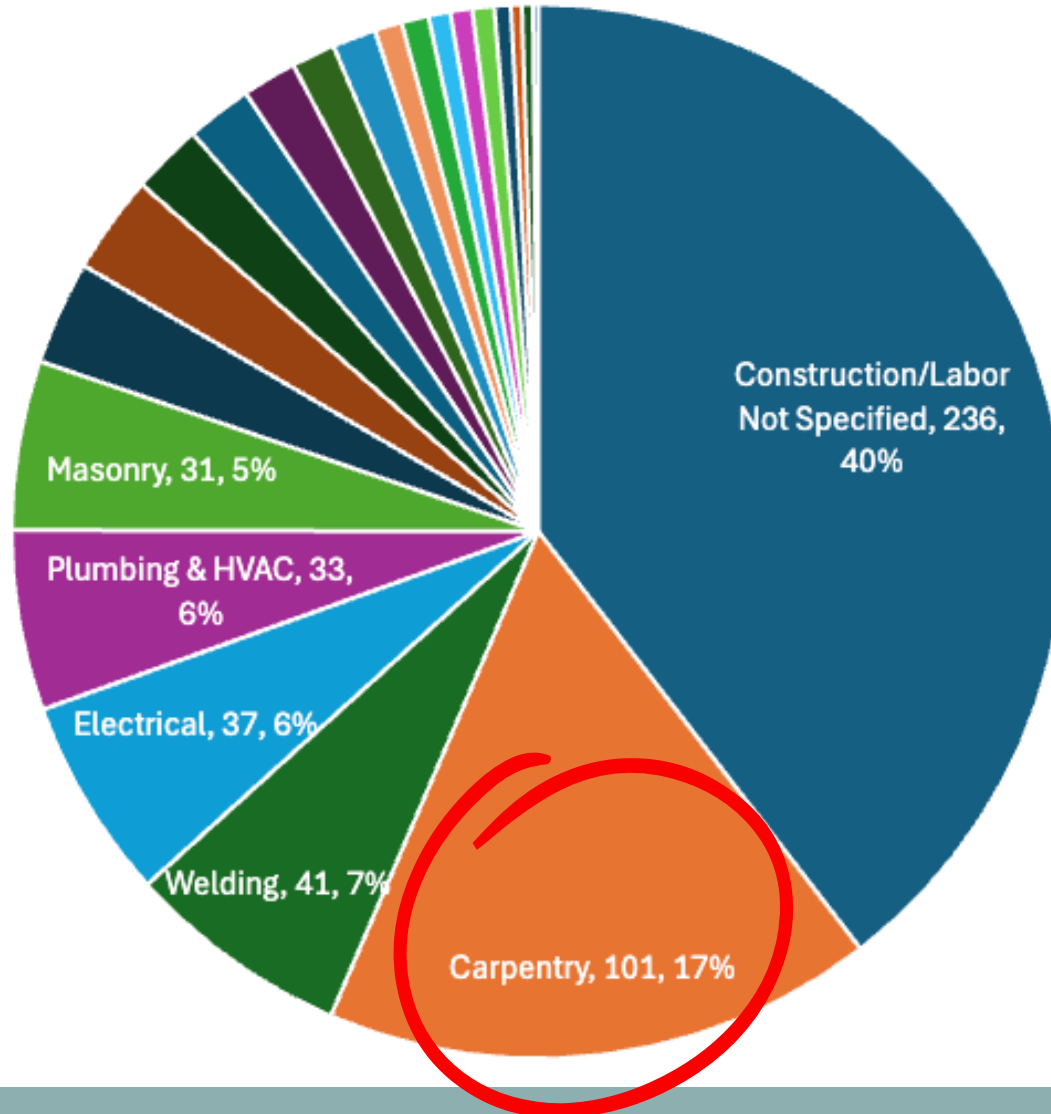


Carpentry Carries Heavy Risk



Carpentry Carries Heavy Risk

Suicide Deaths by Construction Specialties 2013 - 2024




Carpentry Carries Heavy Risk

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Next Steps

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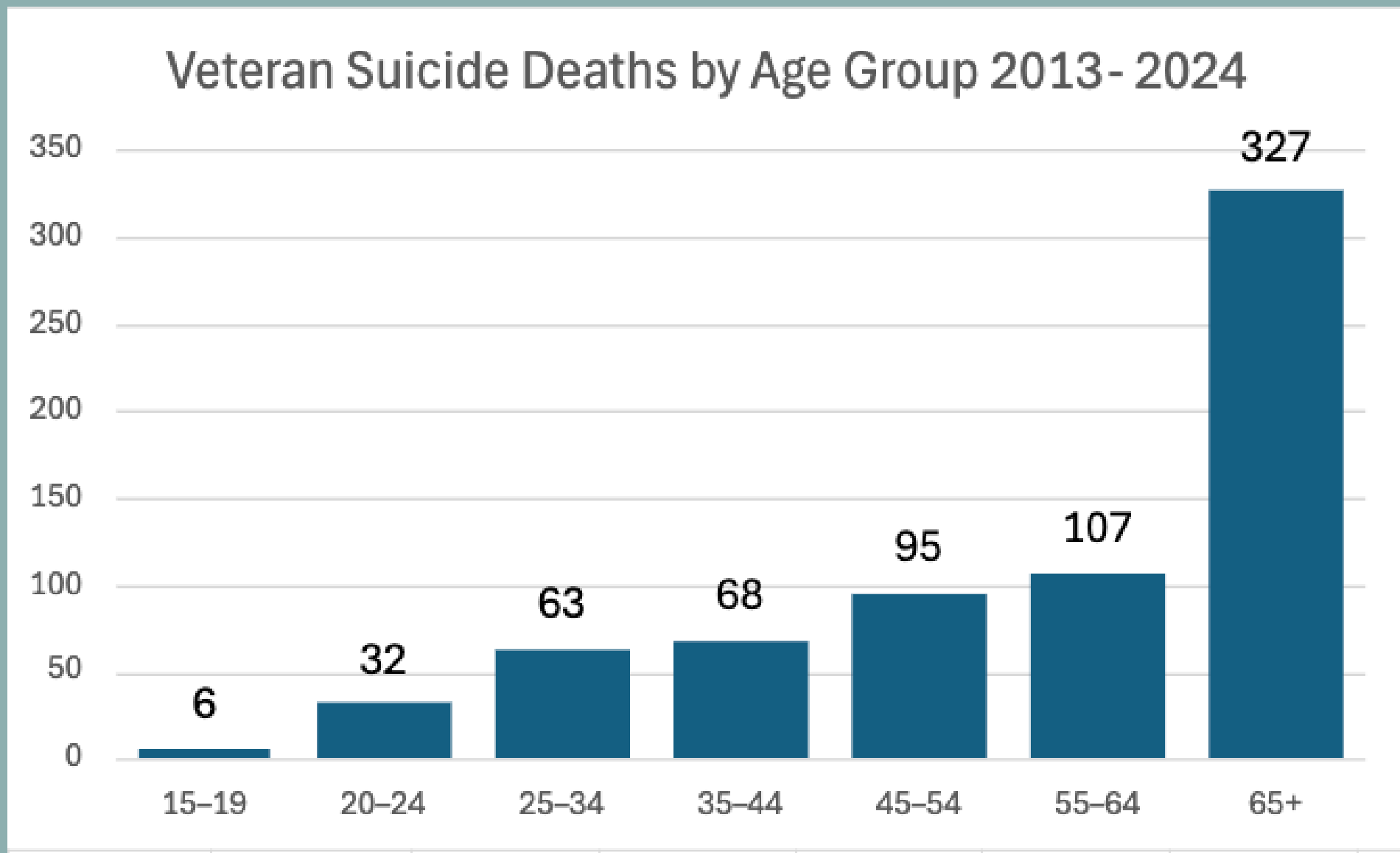
Just Plane Smart

In addition to developing teamwork and interpersonal skills needed to succeed in today's workplace, this one-year certificate

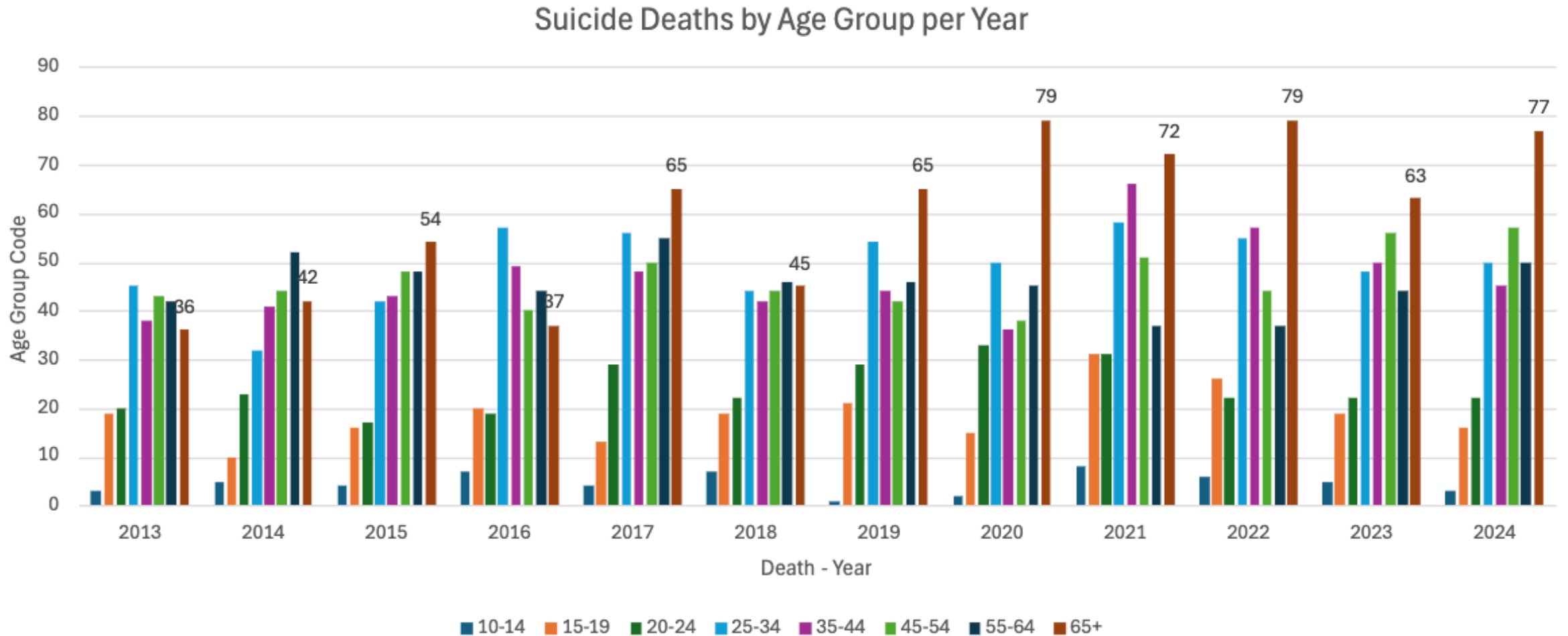
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VET STATUS, AGE, & TIME

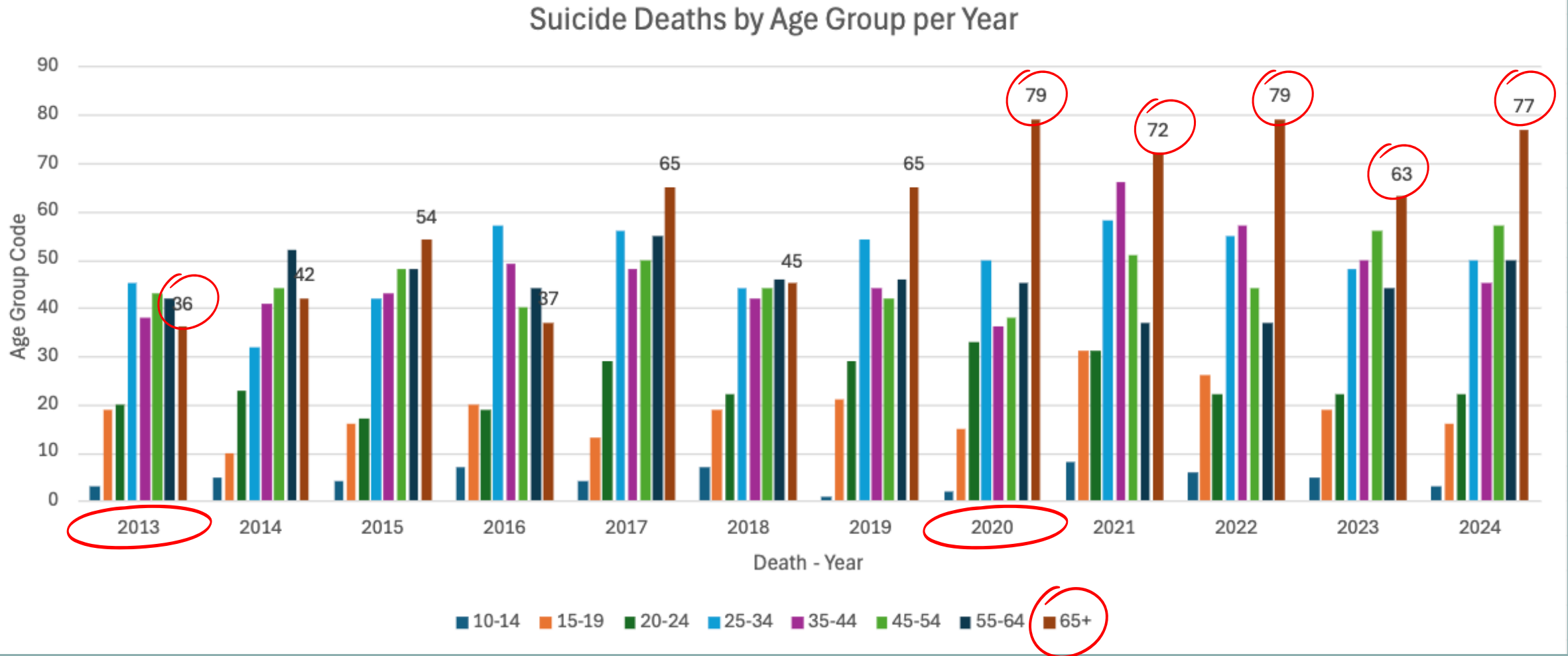
Veterans 65+: Silent Surge in Later Life



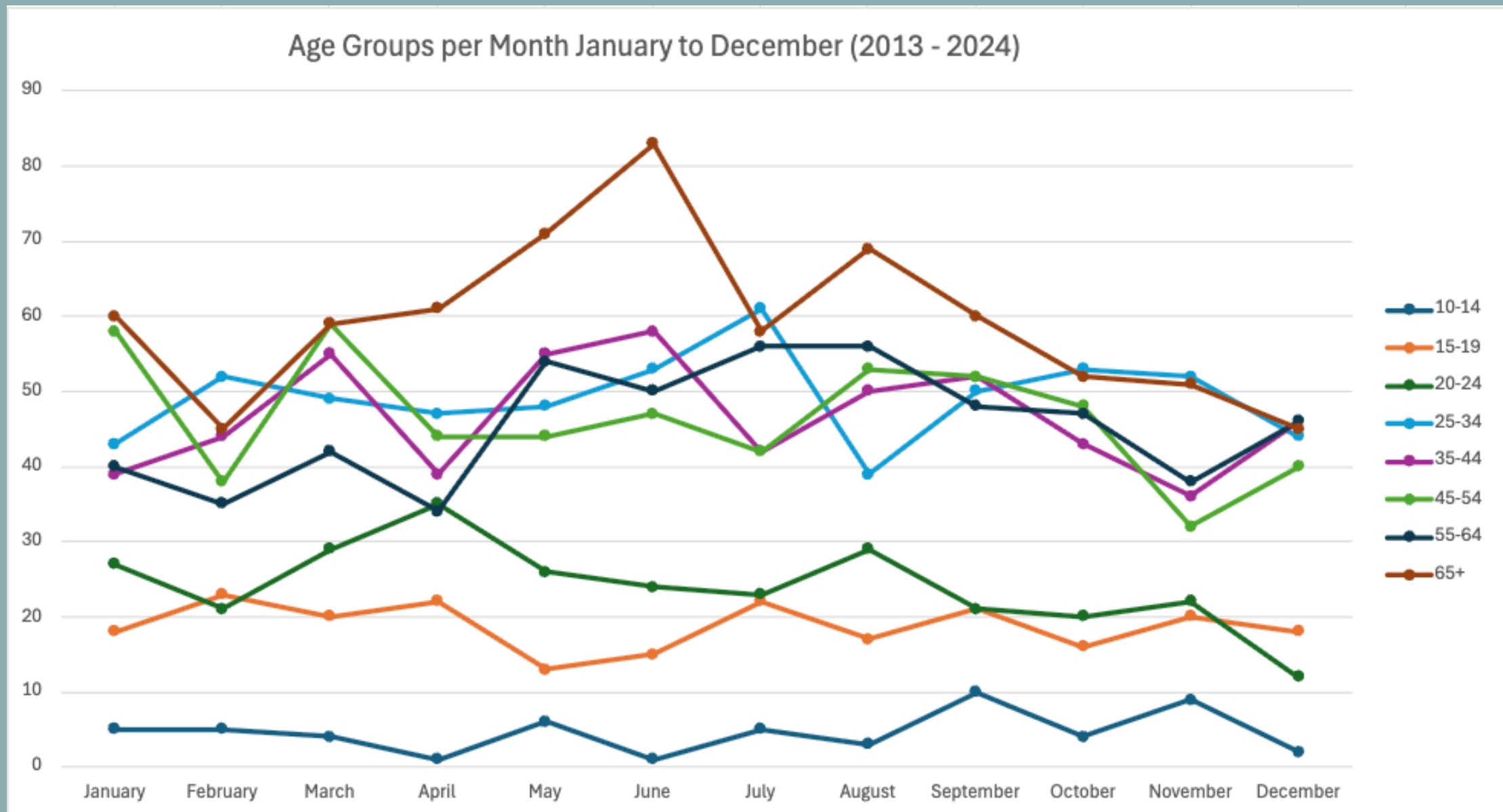
Annual Trends Show Increase Among 65+



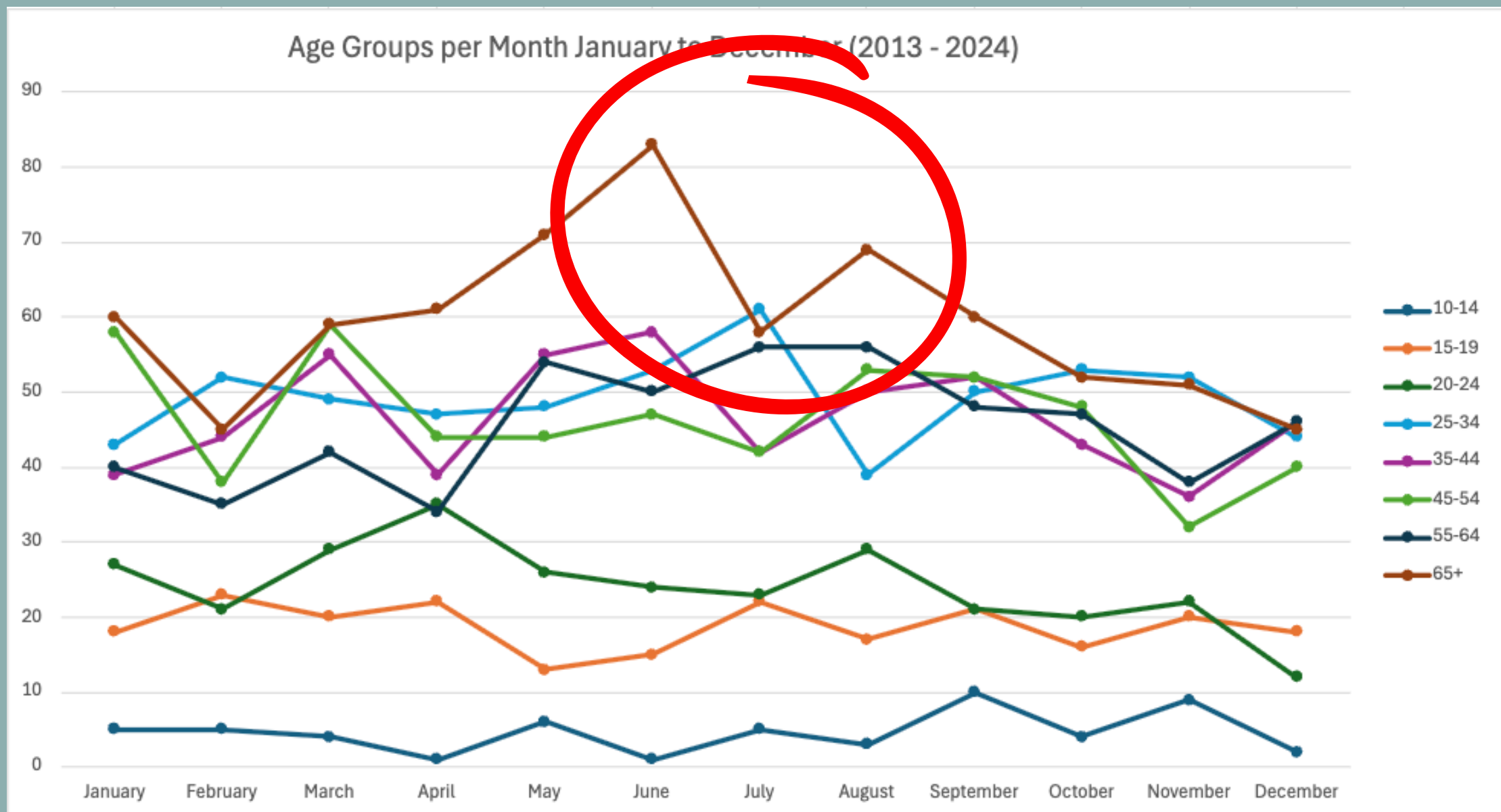
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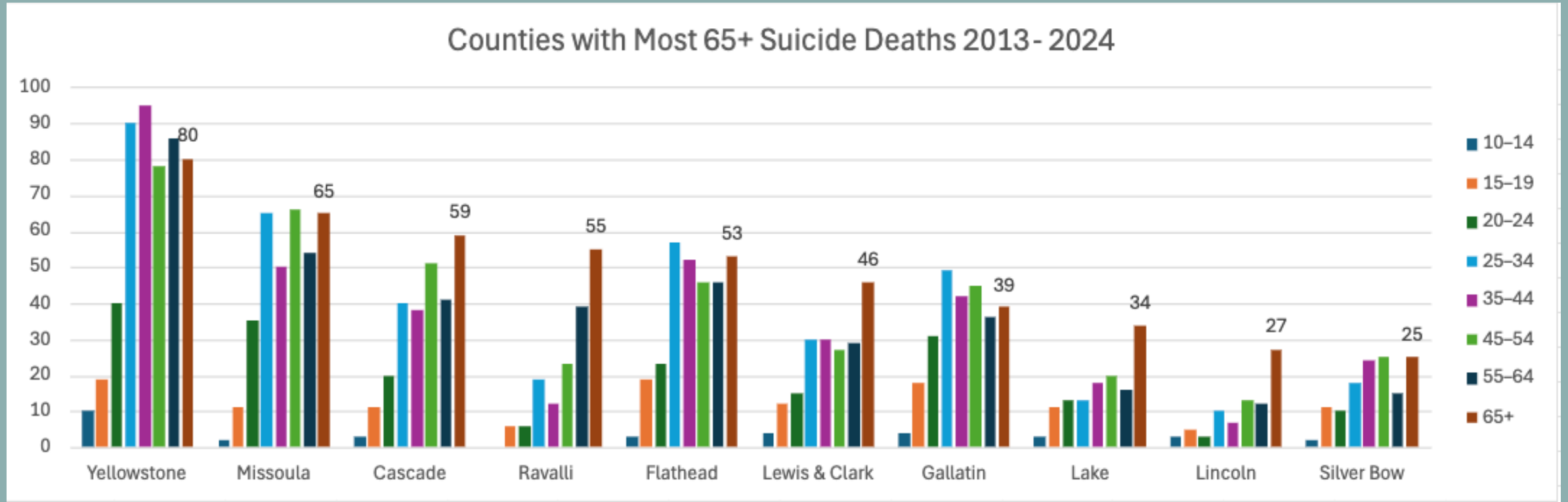
The Summer Spike: 65+ Deaths by Month



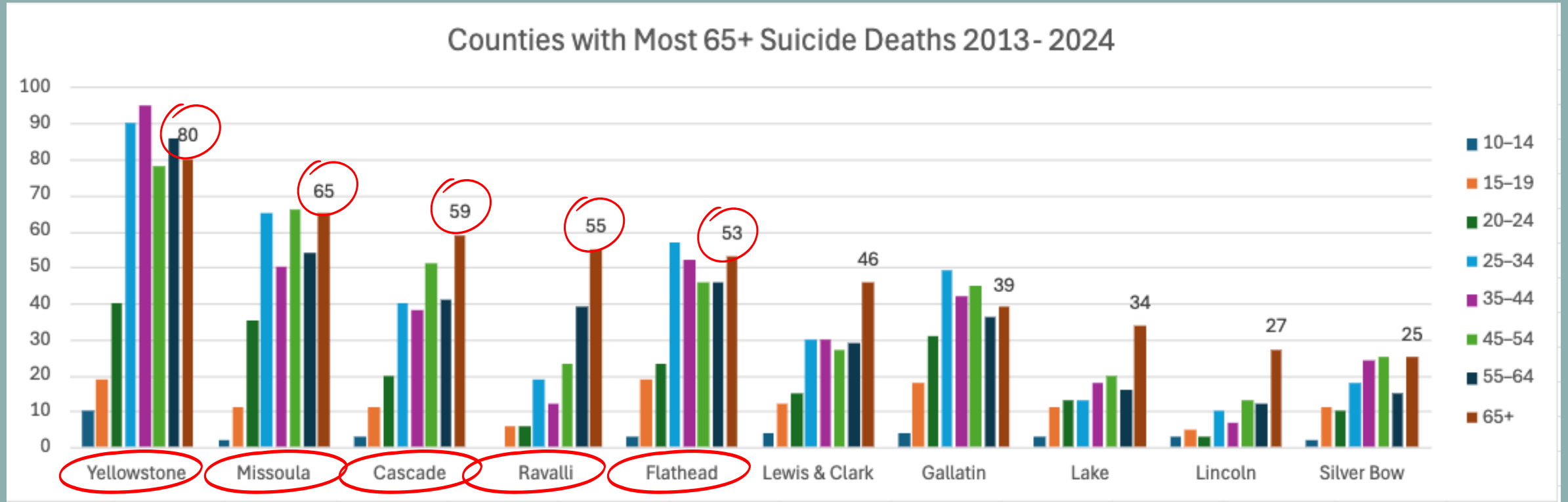
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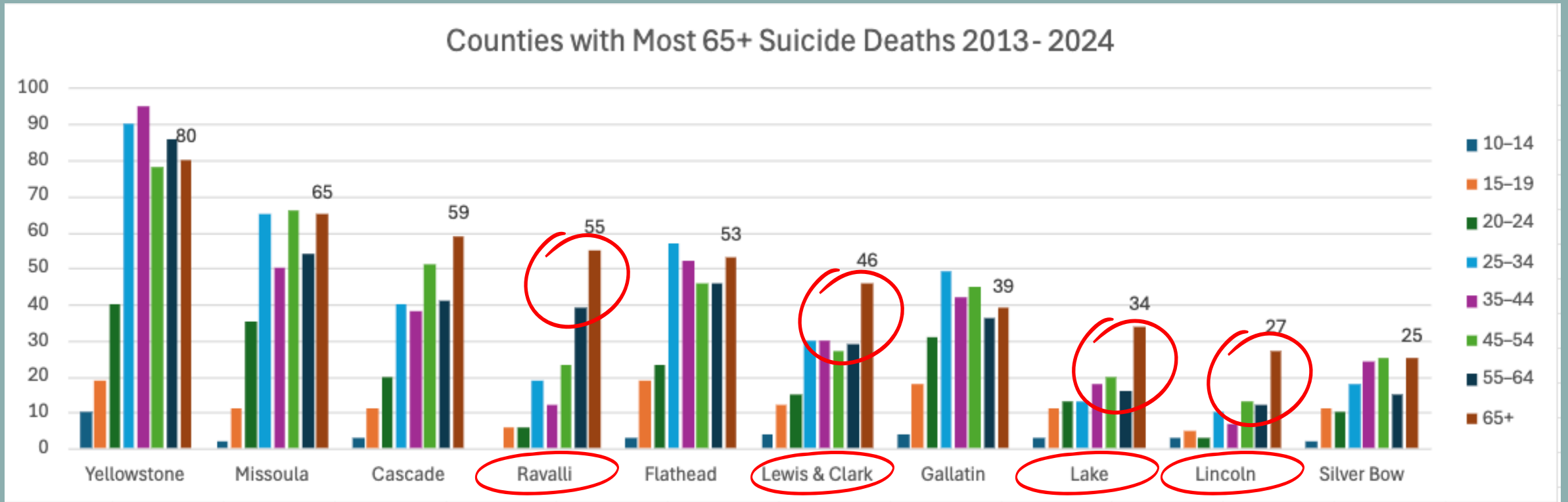
Drilling Deeper: 65+ Deaths by County



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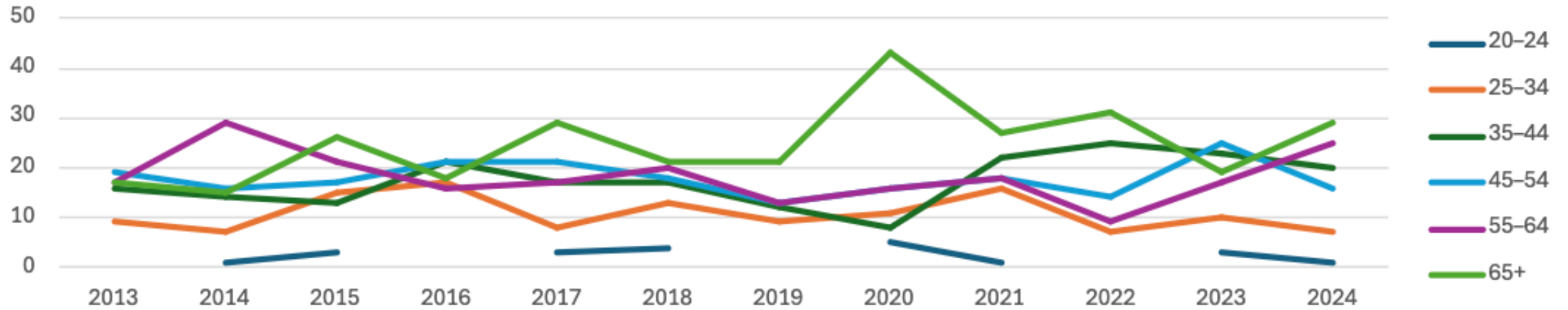


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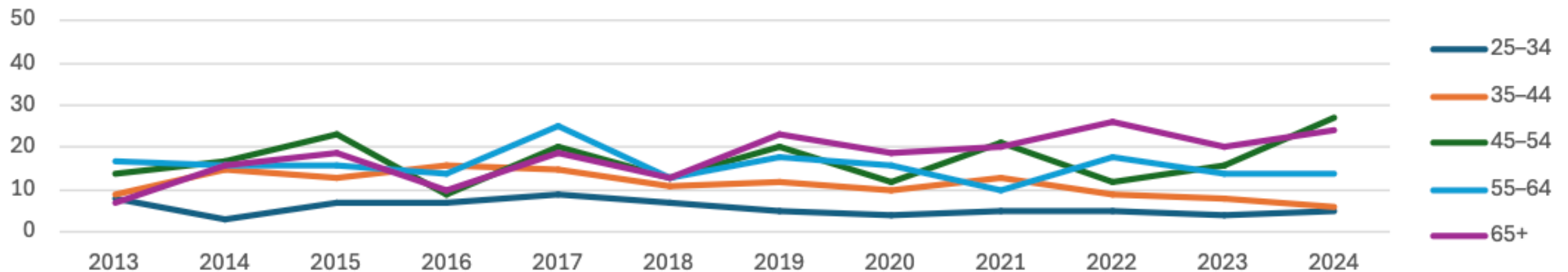
AGE & MARITAL STATUS

Suicide Deaths by Marital Status

MARRIED & SEPARATED Deaths by Age Group per Year (2013 - 2024)

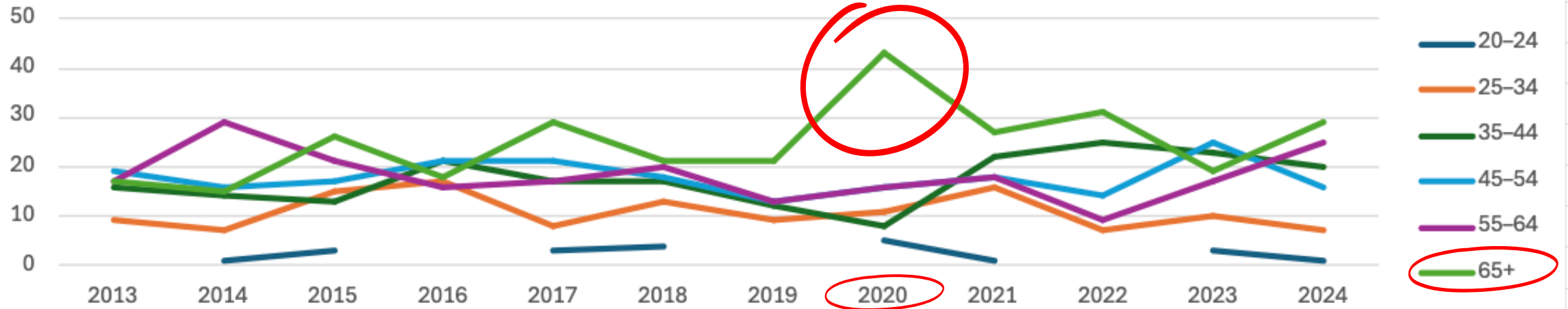


DIVORCED Deaths by Age Group per Year (2013 - 2024)

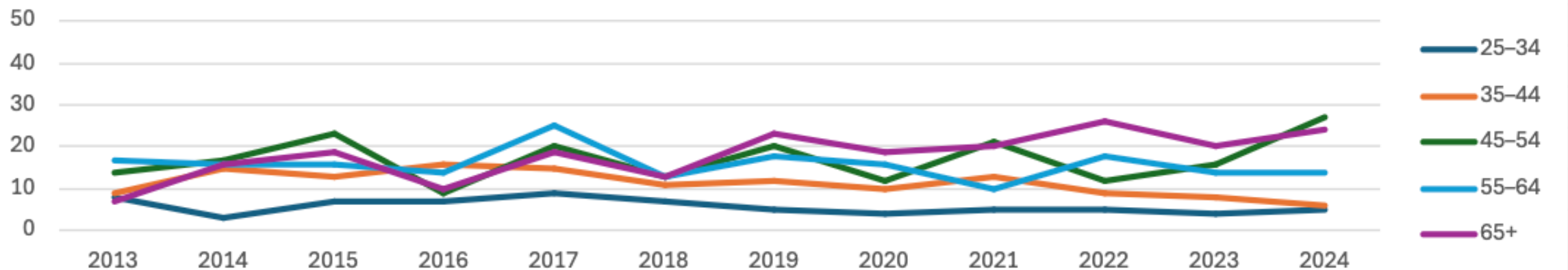


Suicide Deaths by Marital Status

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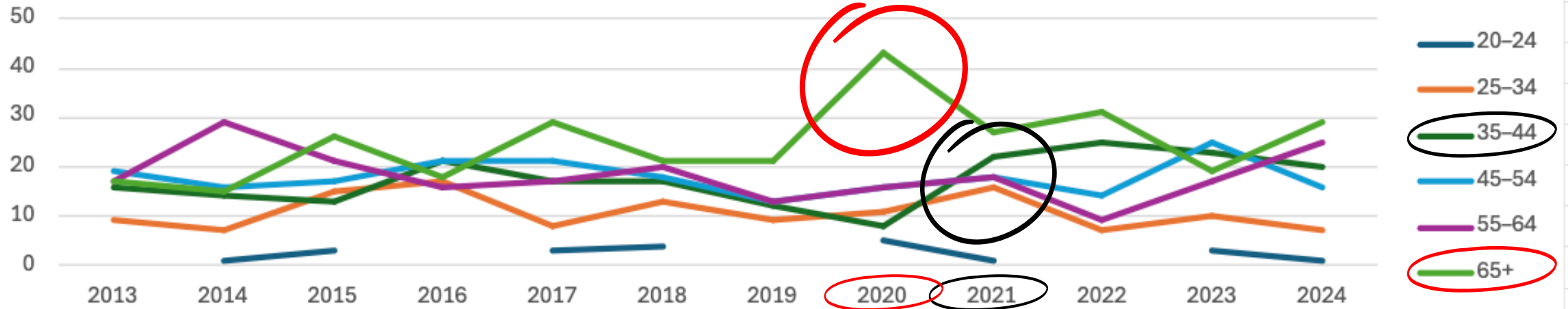


DIVORCED Deaths by Age Group per Year (2013 - 2024)

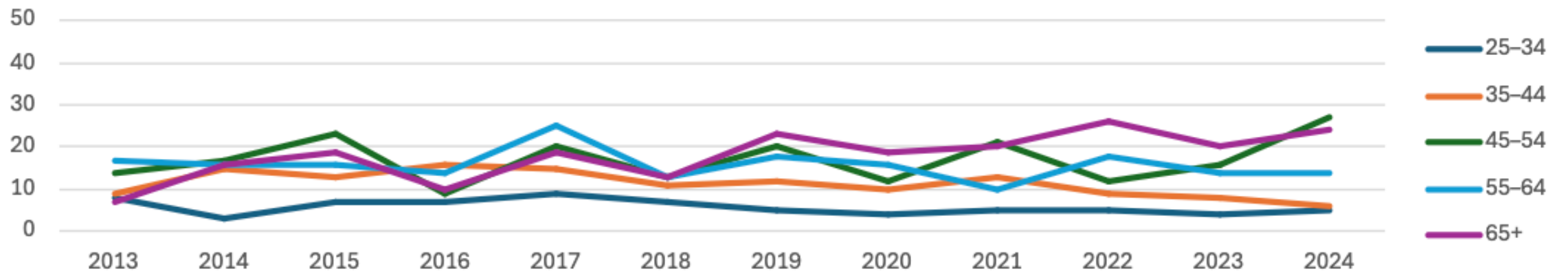


Suicide Deaths by Marital Status

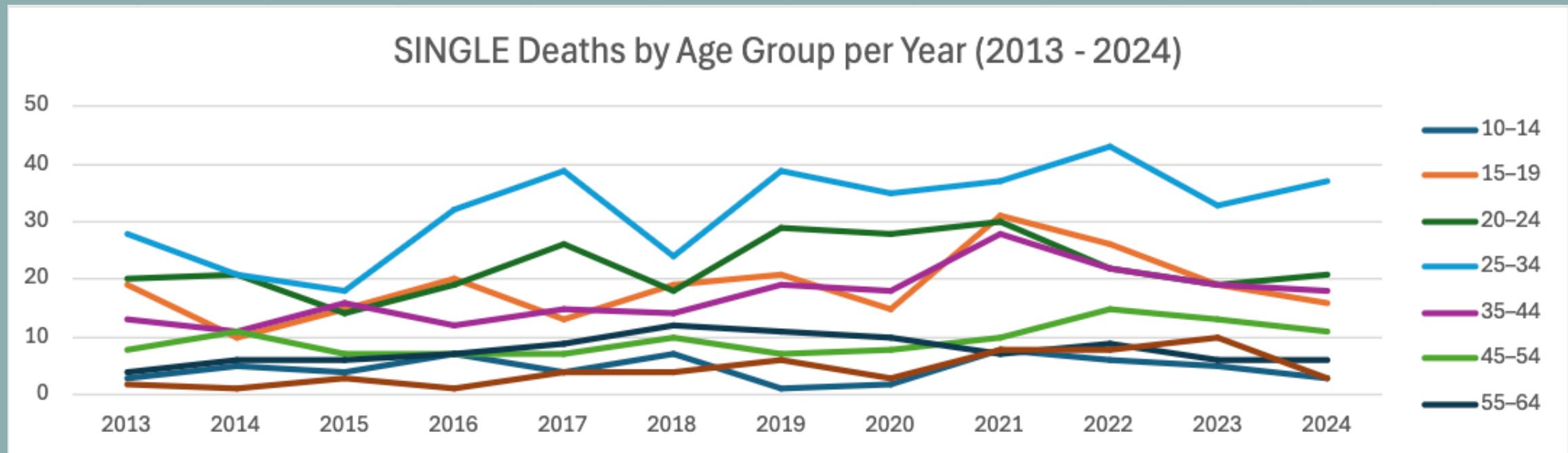
MARRIED & SEPARATED Deaths by Age Group per Year (2013 - 2024)



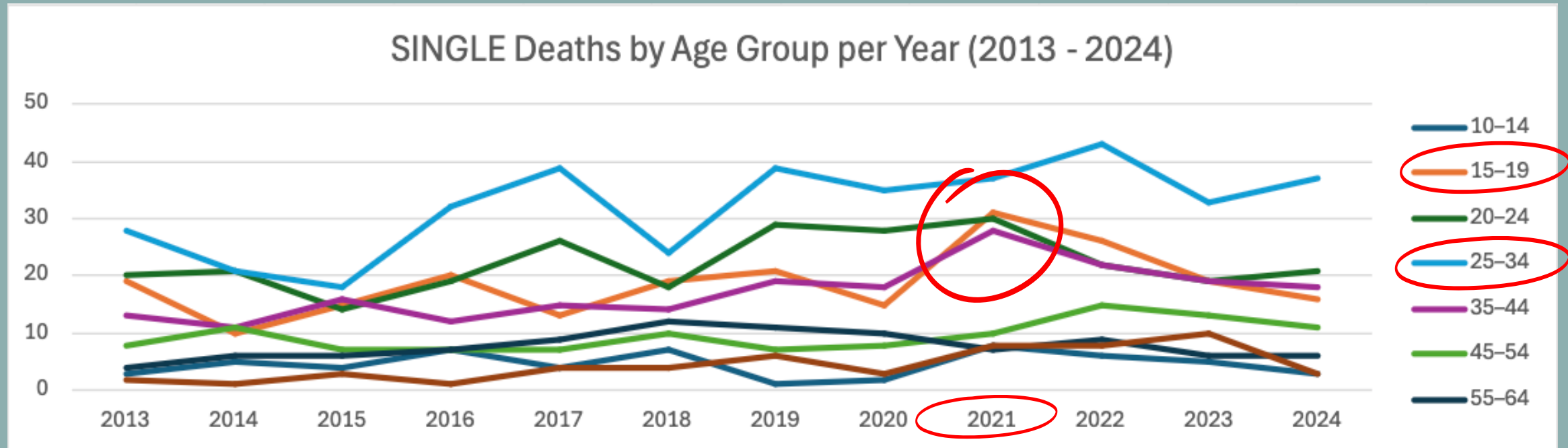
DIVORCED Deaths by Age Group per Year (2013 - 2024)



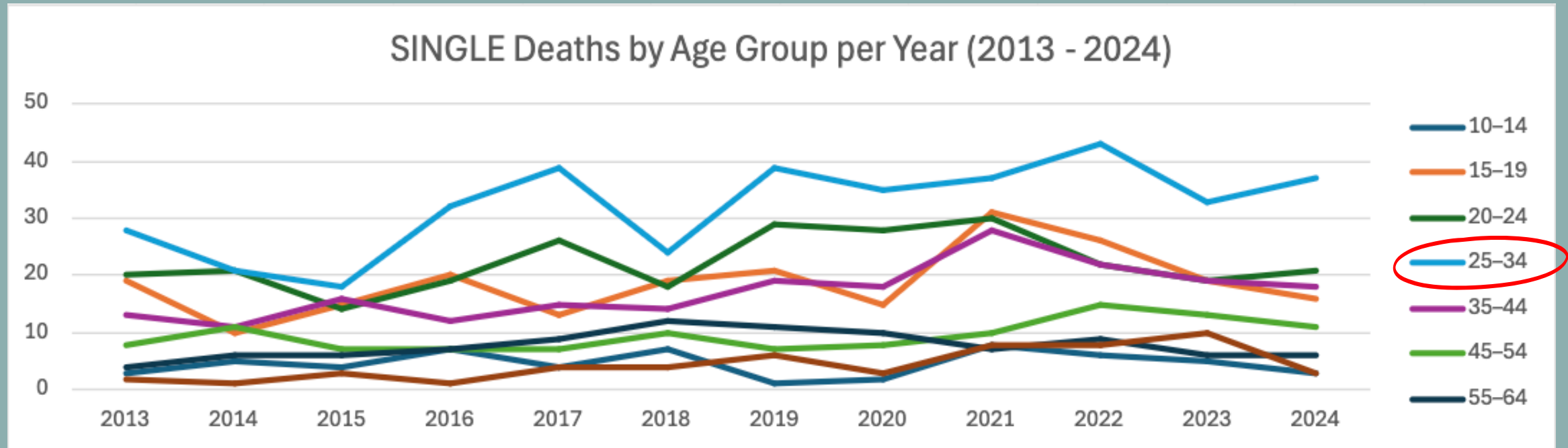
Suicide Deaths by Marital Status



Suicide Deaths by Marital Status



Suicide Deaths by Marital Status



The image features a light cream background with two purple geometric shapes. One shape is in the top-left corner, and the other is in the bottom-right corner. Both shapes are composed of several rectangular blocks of varying sizes, creating a stepped or staircase effect.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Construction workers

Summer efforts for 65+

Older veterans

Policy change

Focus groups

Advocate for data improvement



Construction workers

Summer efforts for 65+

Older veterans

Recommendations

- Provide training for construction education programs, especially carpentry.
- Advocate to incentivizing developers to provide onsite suicide prevention and intervention efforts
- Review existing services in Yellowstone, Missoula, Flathead, Galatin, and Cascade counties and identify gaps.

Construction workers

Summer efforts for 65+

Older veterans

Recommendations

- Conduct focus groups in key counties: Ravalli, Lewis & Clark, Lake, and Lincoln
- Ask about existing services, use/perceptions of said services, gaps in services and perceived needs and desires, trusted individuals in the community, etc.



Construction workers

Summer efforts for 65+

Older veterans

Recommendations

- For vets in construction, focus on key counties: Yellowstone, Missoula, Flathead, and Cascade
- Review existing services and identify gaps.
- Partnership between older and younger veterans?



Recommendations

- Advocate for suicide prevention training as requirement of construction licenses
- Advocate for suicide prevention training as requirement for permits
- Advocate for additional funding and services especially for 65+

Policy change

Focus groups

Catalog community resources



Recommendations

- This will be critical especially in more rural areas where needs are context specific and not necessarily plug play.
- be sure to ask about existing services, use/perception of services, gaps in need and want, and who the community trusts to seek support and help.

Policy change

Focus groups

Catalog community resources



Recommendations

- Coroner's reports to include SES markers, cohabitation, medical and mental health conditions, etc.
- Census, etc. differentiate between married and separated, and add domestic partner to "marital status" categories.

Policy change

Focus groups

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NEXT STEPS IN RESEARCH

Further Data Analysis

Cross reference with meteorological data

- Wind speed
- Temperature
- Precipitation
- Cloud coverage
- and more!

Build out county data

Chart trends over time for age, marital status, industry, etc. for each county.

Build out data on race/ethnicity

Chart trends over time for race/ethnicity, and sex/gender to other variables.

What else?

We would love to hear your input and ideas!

References

- American Foundation for Suicide Prevention. (2023). Lessons from Suicide Research [Brief]. <https://afsp.org/suicide-statistics>
- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. (2023). 2021 suicide data and statistics [Report]. <https://www.cdc.gov/suicide/suicide-data-statistics.html>
- Sussell A, Peterson C, Li J, Miniño A, Scott KA, Stone DM. Suicide Rates by Industry and Occupation — National Vital Statistics System, United States, 2021. MMWR Morb Mortal Wkly Rep 2023;72:1346–1350. DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.15585/mmwr.mm7250a2>
- Xu, J. Q., Kochanek, K. D., & Arias, E. (2022). Mortality in the United States, 2021 (NCHS Data Brief No. 456). National Center for Health Statistics. <https://doi.org/https://dx.d10.15620/cdc:122516>

Thank you!

Please feel free to contact me at
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