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Assessing Mental Health and Suicide Risk in Emergency Managers

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Non-Competitive Division

Introduction

- Emergency managers are often **grouped with first responders**, but their unique stressors and mental health risks are under-researched.
- Emergency managers often operate in high-risk regions, where repeated exposure to disasters may compound occupational stress.
- Preliminary evidence suggests suicidal ideation rates may be much higher in this profession than in the general U.S. adult population.
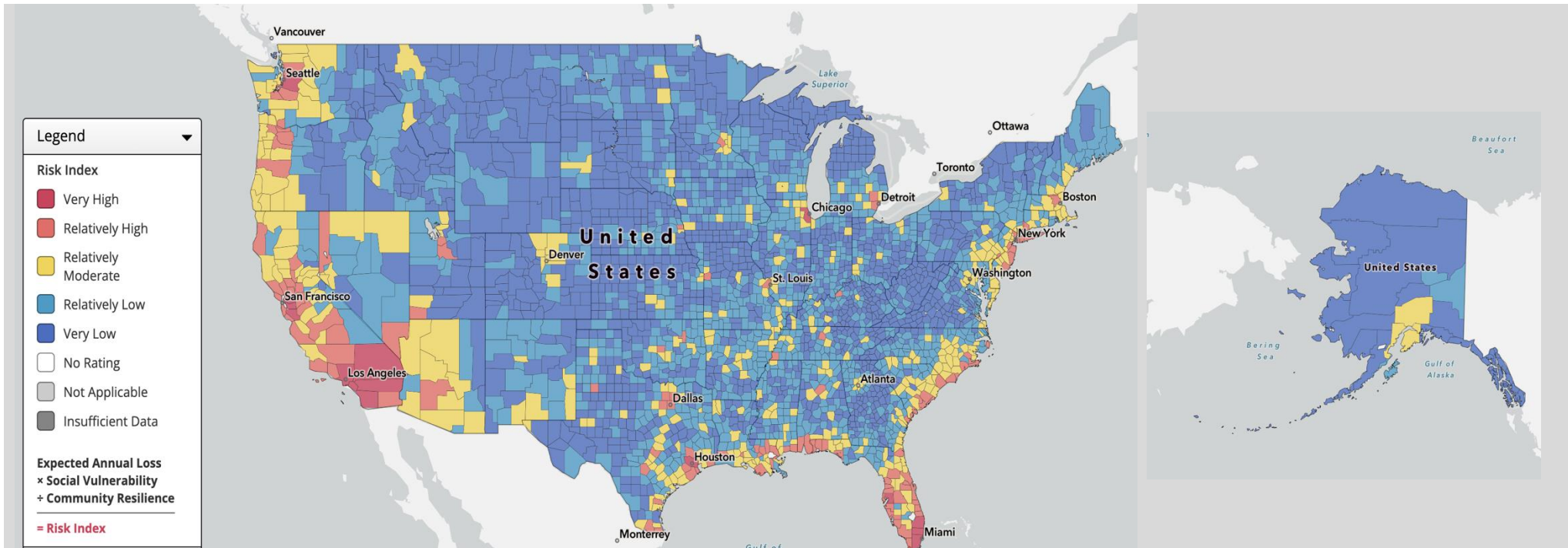

Figure 1. FEMA risk index distribution across the United States.

Goals

This study assesses suicidal ideation, family suicide history, occupational differences, and resource access among U.S. emergency managers.

Methods

Cross-sectional, anonymous Qualtrics survey. Among U.S. emergency managers, ≥18 years (n=153).
Recruitment: Professional outreach, IAEM newsletter, LinkedIn, email.
Measures: Suicidal ideation, family suicide history, access to mental health resources, demographics.
Analysis: Descriptive statistics and bivariate associations (chi-square/Fisher's exact) conducted in R; compared suicidal ideation rates against U.S. adults from 2023 NSDUH data.

Demographics		N (Total=153)	Percent
Age group	≤34	29	19
	35–54	83	54.2
	55	41	26.8
Sex at birth	Female	62	41.9
	Male	86	58.1

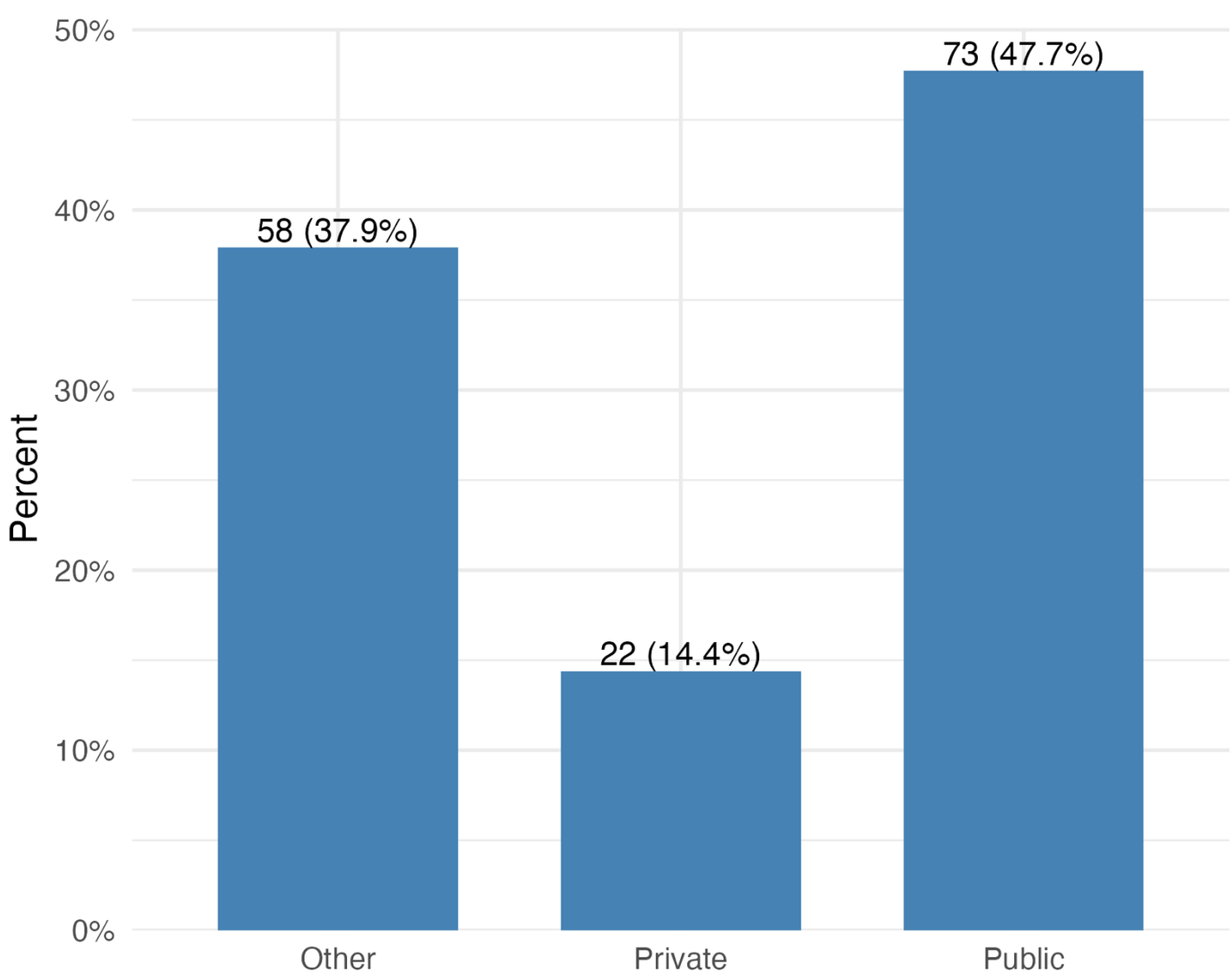## Public Sector Comprised the Largest Group

Figure 2. Sector breakdown of participants. Other (n=58), Private (n=22), and Public (n=73).

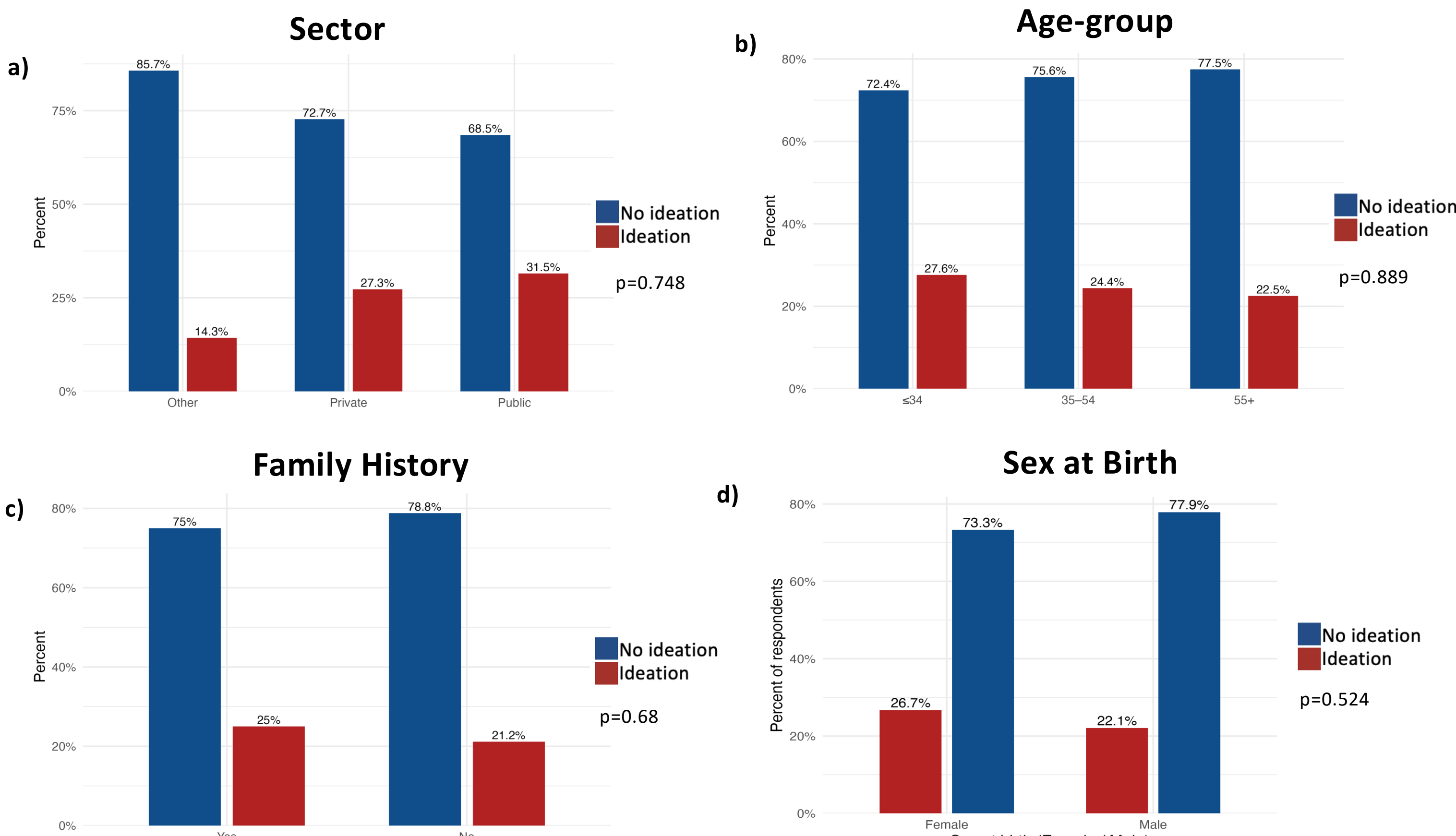## Demographics Suicidal Ideation by Stratifications

Figure 3. Suicidal ideation by demographic stratifications. No statistically significant differences in suicidal ideation were observed across age groups or gender. Chi-square was performed on each.

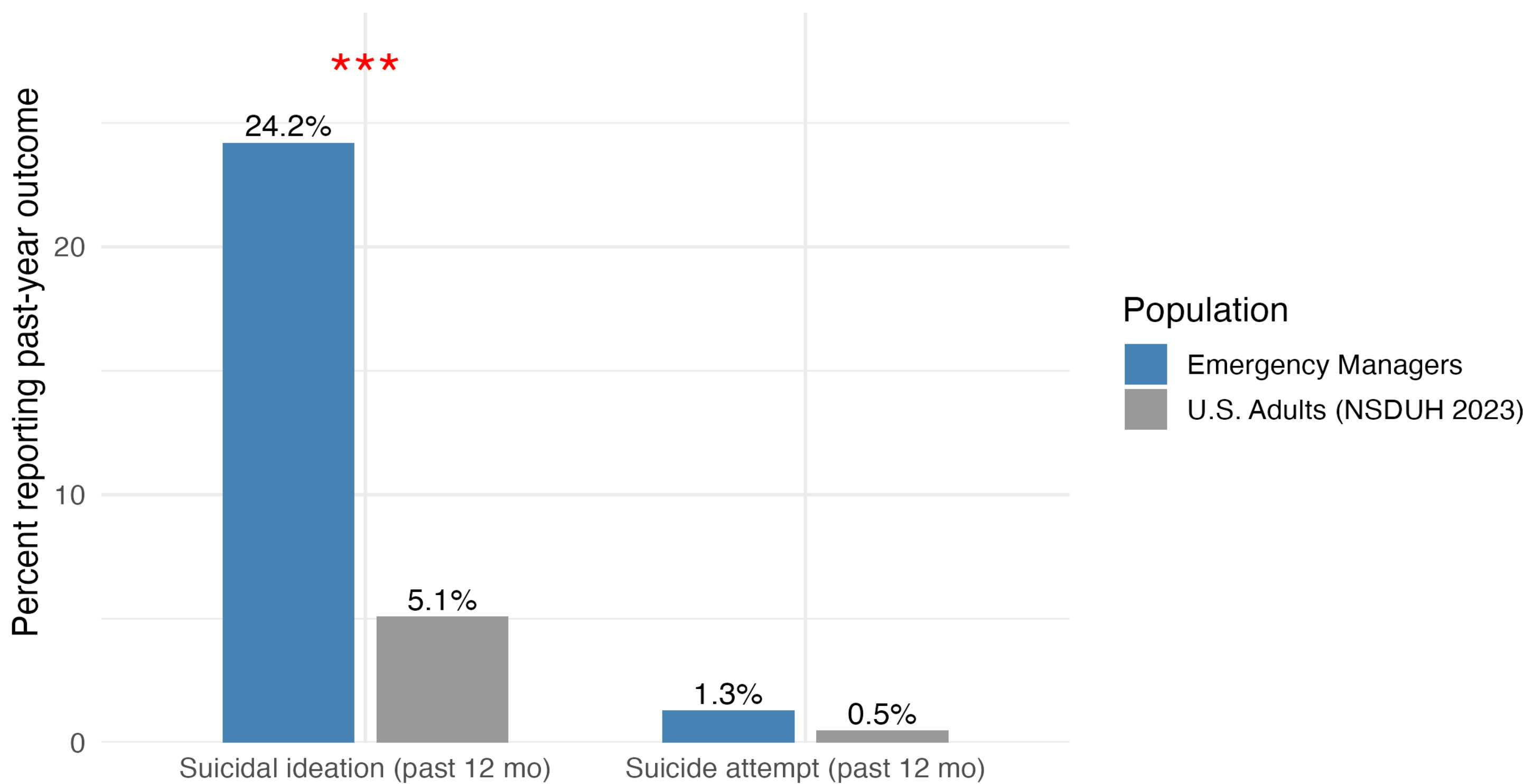**Emergency managers are ~5 times more likely to have suicidal ideations compared to U.S adults**

Figure 4. Suicidality among emergency managers compared with U.S. adults (NSDUH 2023). Emergency managers reported significantly higher suicidal ideation vs. among U.S. adults *(p< 0.001).*

Confidence in Accessing Mental Health Support Reduces Suicidal Ideation Risk
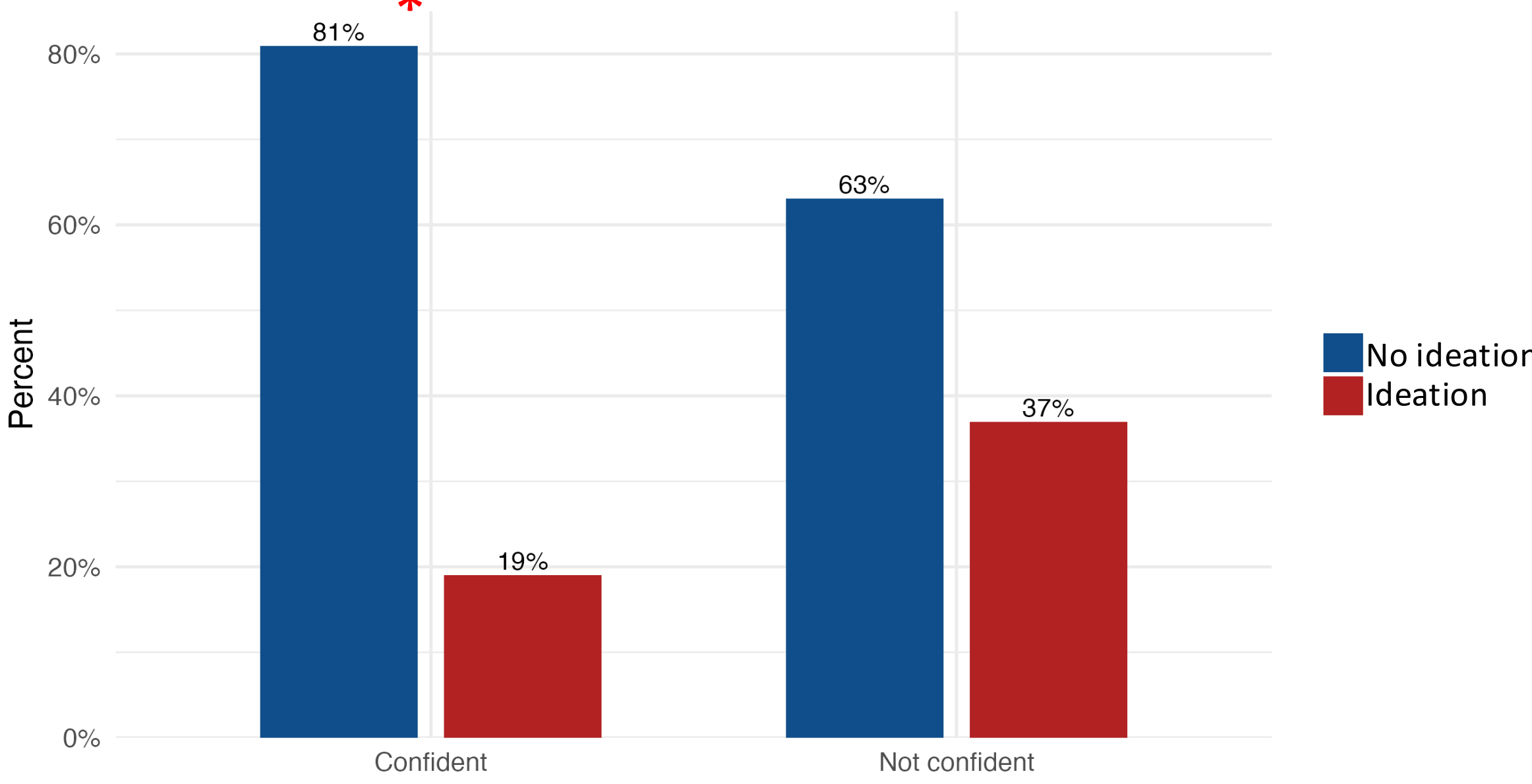

Figure 5. Suicidal ideation by confidence accessing support. Emergency managers confident in accessing support reported much lower rates of suicidal ideation (19%) compared to those not confident (37%) (*p*=0.0185).

Higher rates of suicidal ideation among emergency managers underscore the urgent need for tailored mental health support in this profession.

Conclusions

- Traditional demographics (age, sex, sector workforce) were not significantly associated with suicidal ideation.
- Confidence in **accessing support** was **protective**, with lower confidence linked to nearly double the rate of suicidal ideation.
- Organizational support appears to play a critical role and may represent a modifiable risk factor.

Future Directions

- Utilize broader recruitment strategies to reach more emergency managers and strengthen statistical power.
- Mobilize public health efforts to better support the mental health of this critical and essential workforce.

References
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