

# Primer for Psychologists on Military Suicide Rates and Current Reduction Efforts



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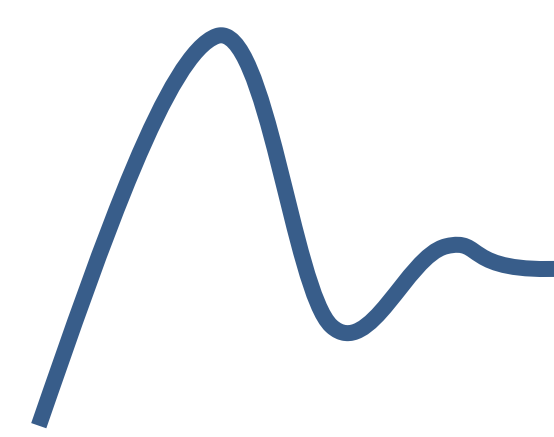
## Introduction

- ❖ Every suicide is a tragic event
- ❖ Suicide is a statistically rare event
- ❖ Due to its rarity, knowledge of basic epidemiological and statistical considerations is necessary to properly understand and interpret suicide data, including military suicide mortality rates
- ❖ This presentation will
  - ❖ Introduce epidemiological and statistical considerations that are essential to properly understanding, working with, and citing suicide data
  - ❖ Present suicide mortality rates from the Department of Defense (DoD) Suicide Event Report, commonly referred to as the DoDSER
  - ❖ Highlight some of the Department's current public health and clinical suicide prevention efforts

## Epidemiological & Statistical Considerations

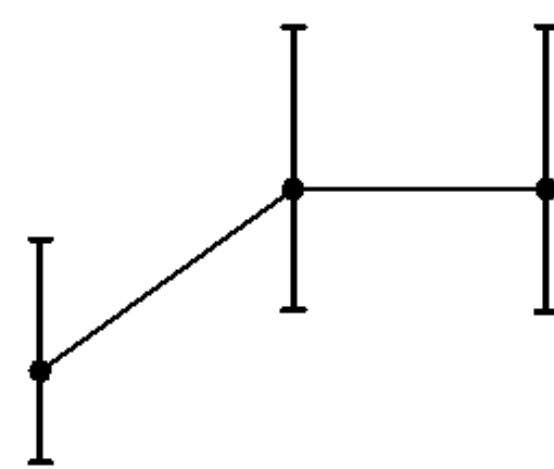
### ❖ Volatility

- ❖ Estimates of a rate will move up and down over time, even if there is no change in the true rate
- ❖ The magnitude of fluctuation over time is strong for rare events like suicide
- ❖ Using average rates helps lessen volatility



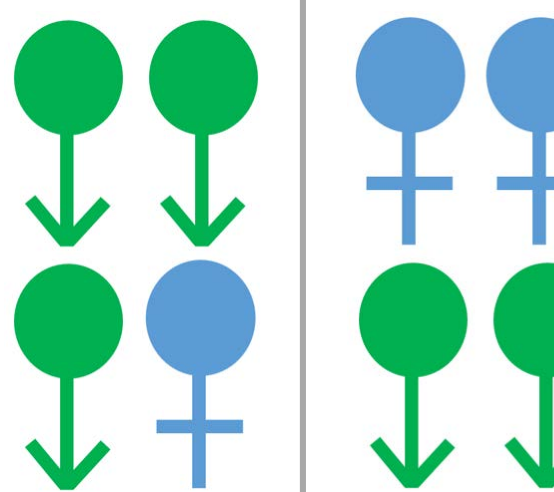
### ❖ Uncertainty

- ❖ Each estimate of a rate is influenced by random error (i.e., uncertainty)
- ❖ As such, rates cannot be measured with perfect accuracy
- ❖ Confidence intervals help to quantify the amount of uncertainty in the estimate



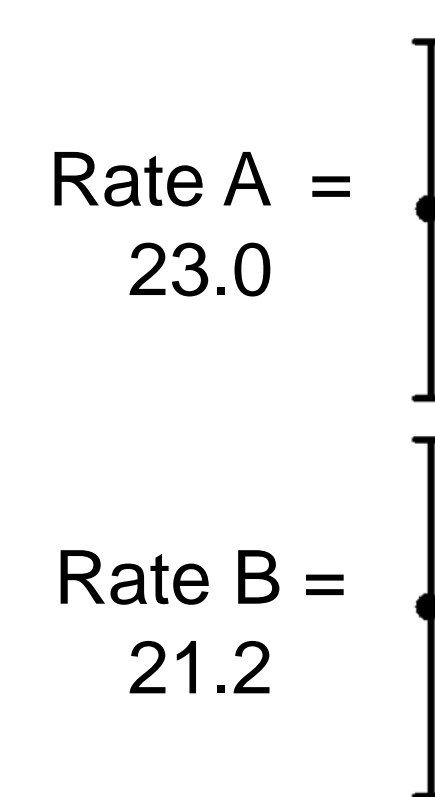
### ❖ Comparability

- ❖ The extent to which suicide rates from different populations or time periods can be compared
- ❖ Suicide rates vary significantly by age, sex, race/ethnicity, Veteran status, and other variables
- ❖ To ensure comparability, standardize the populations to be compared on all significant variables using adjustments



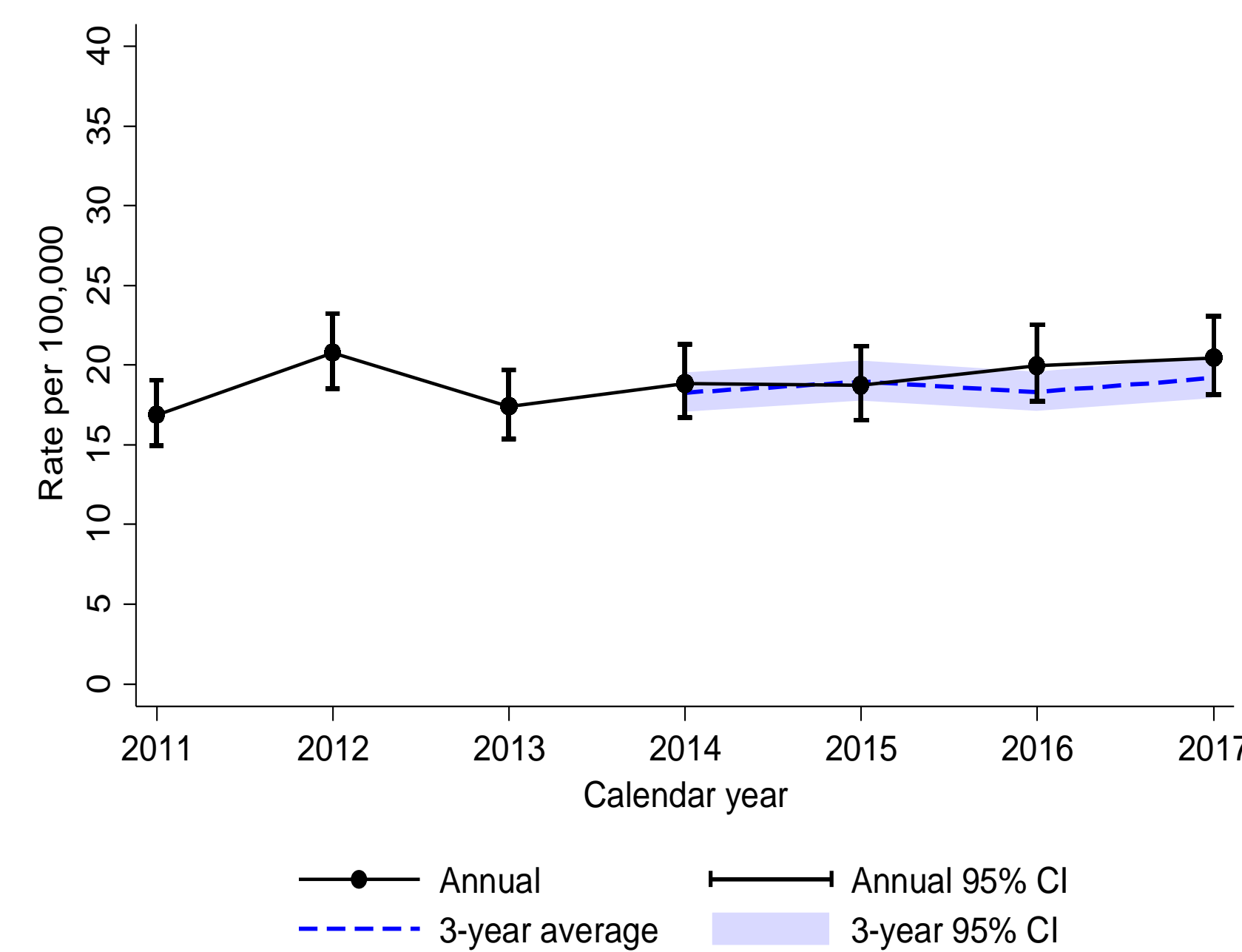
### ❖ Statistical Differences between Rates

- ❖ Evidence that two observed rates reflect different true rates
- ❖ Little, or no, overlap of confidence intervals suggests that the observed rates come from groups with different true rates
- ❖ Substantial overlap of confidence intervals indicates that the observed difference in rates is very likely the result of random error or volatility

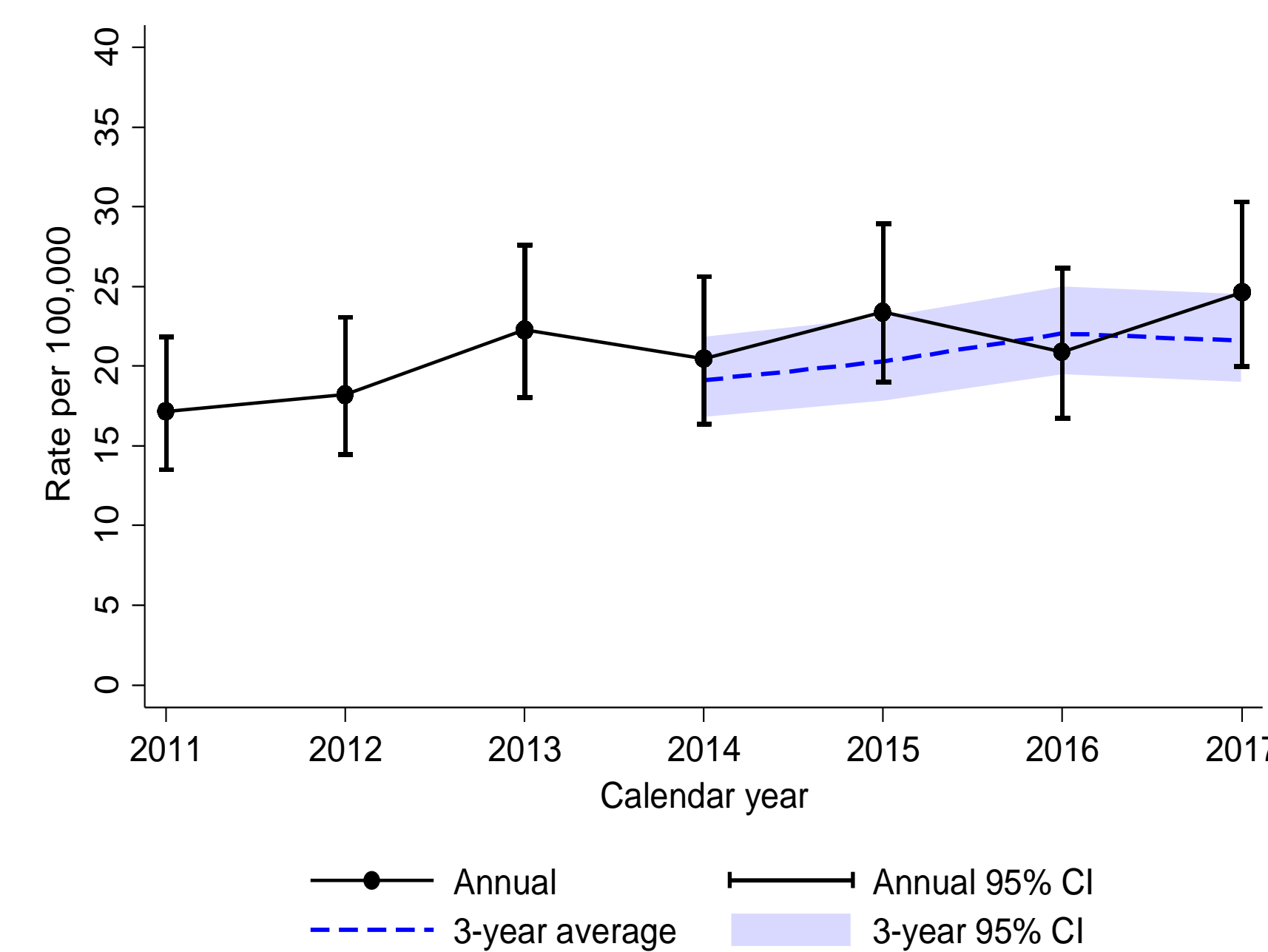


## 2017 DoDSER Data: Military Suicide Mortality Rates and Comparisons

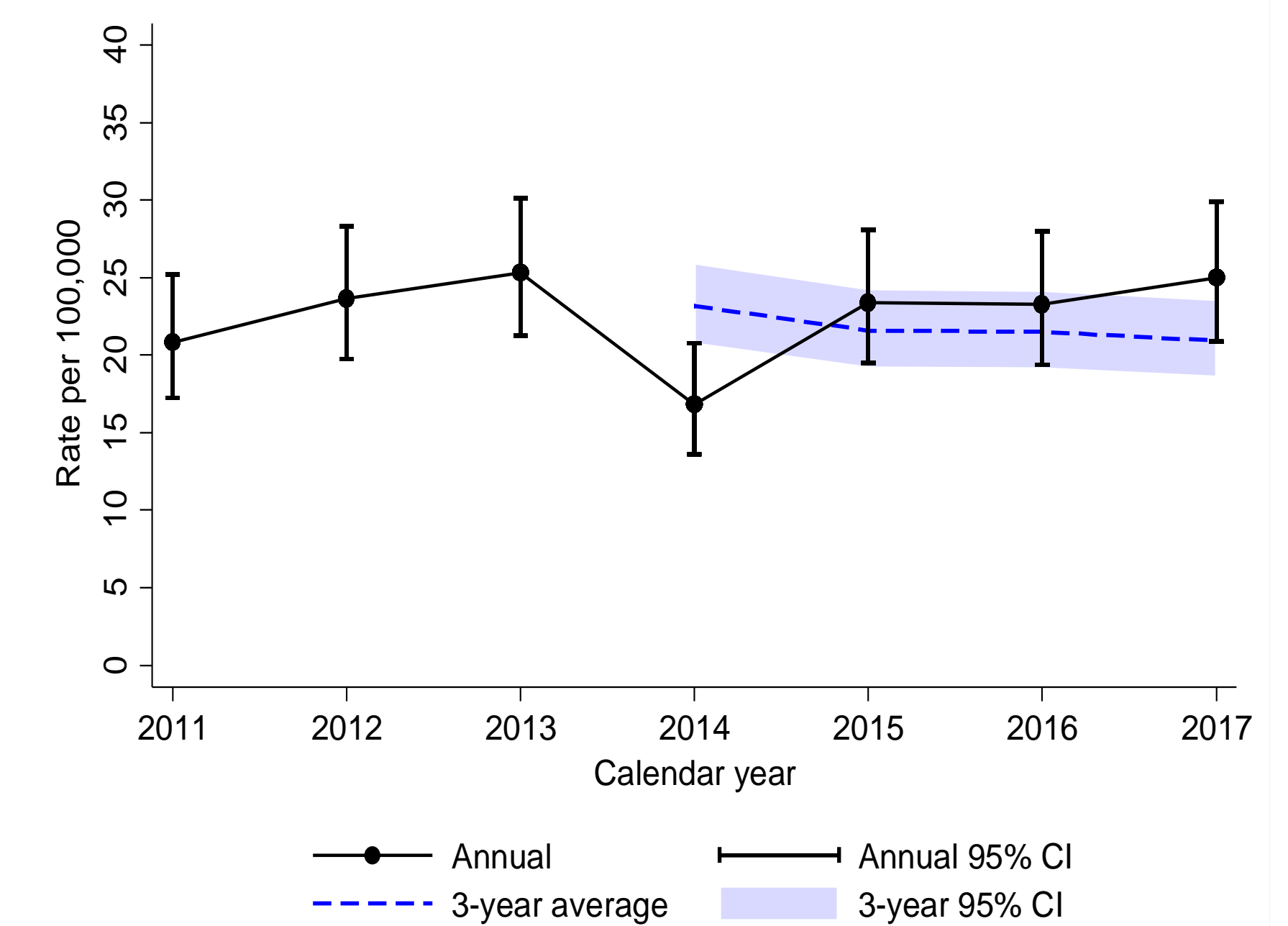
Adjusted Annual Suicide-Mortality Rates, Active Component, All Services, 2011 - 2017



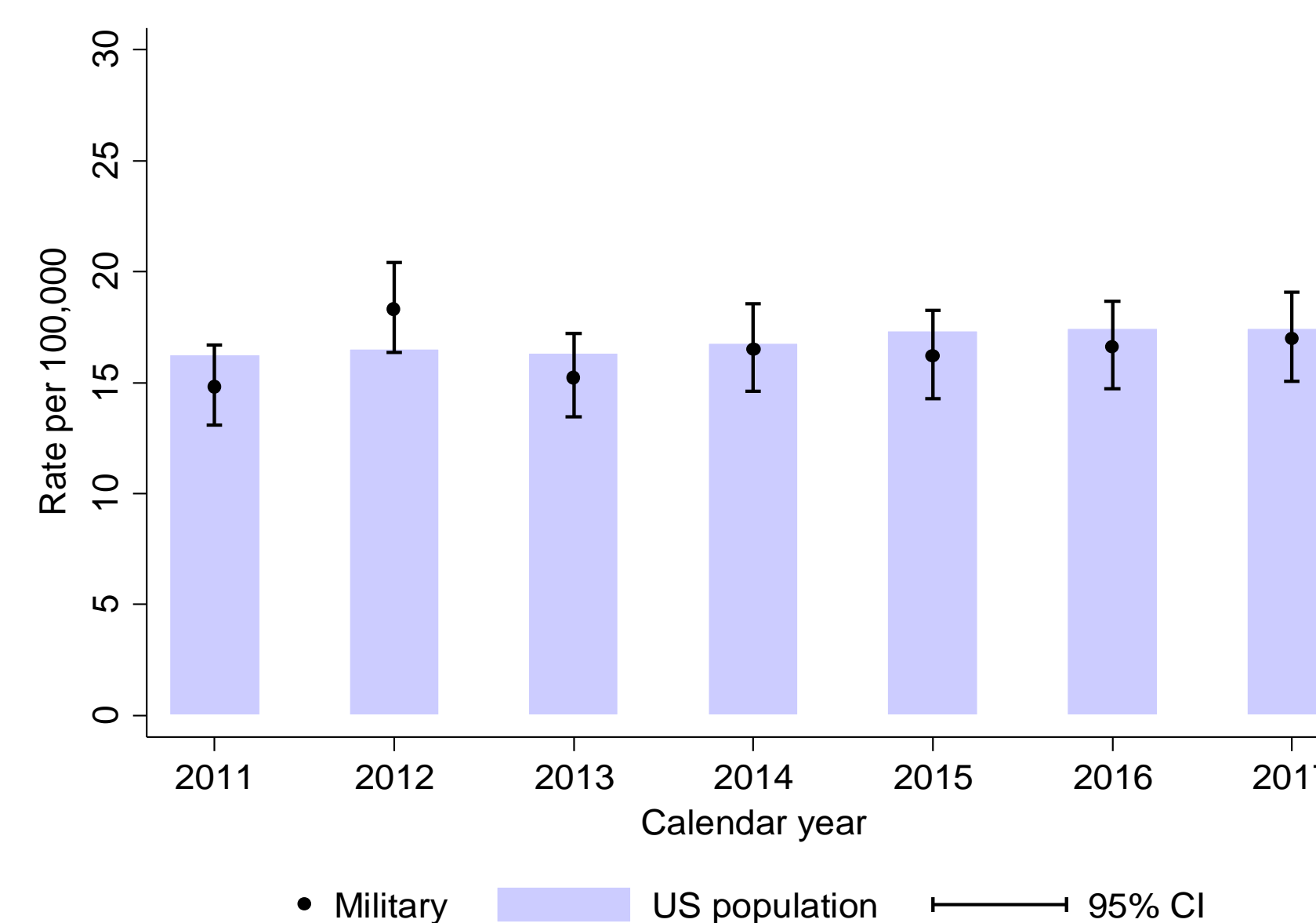
Adjusted Annual Suicide-Mortality Rates, Reserve Component, All Services, 2011 - 2017



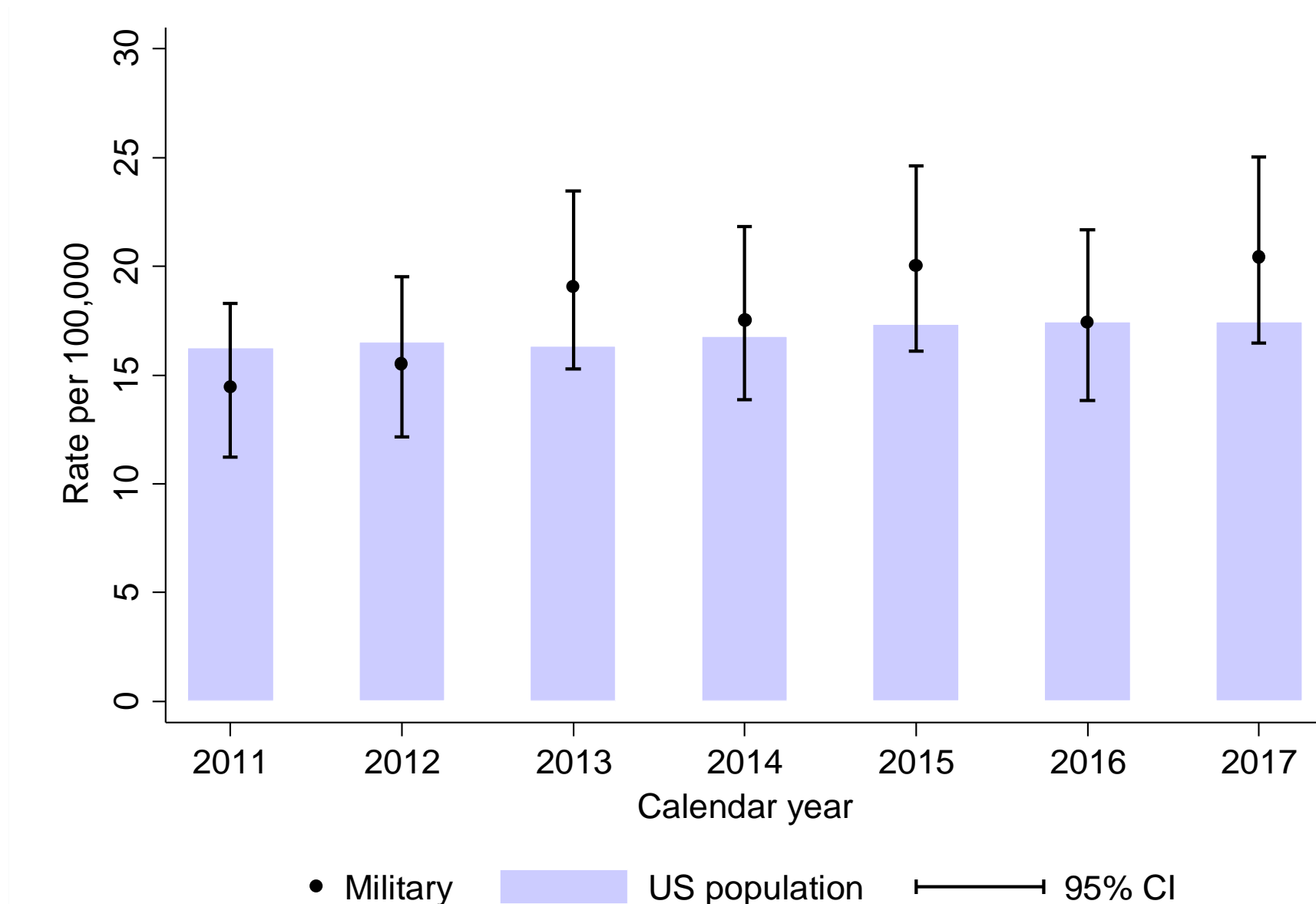
Adjusted Annual Suicide-Mortality Rates, National Guard, Air Force & Army, 2011 - 2017



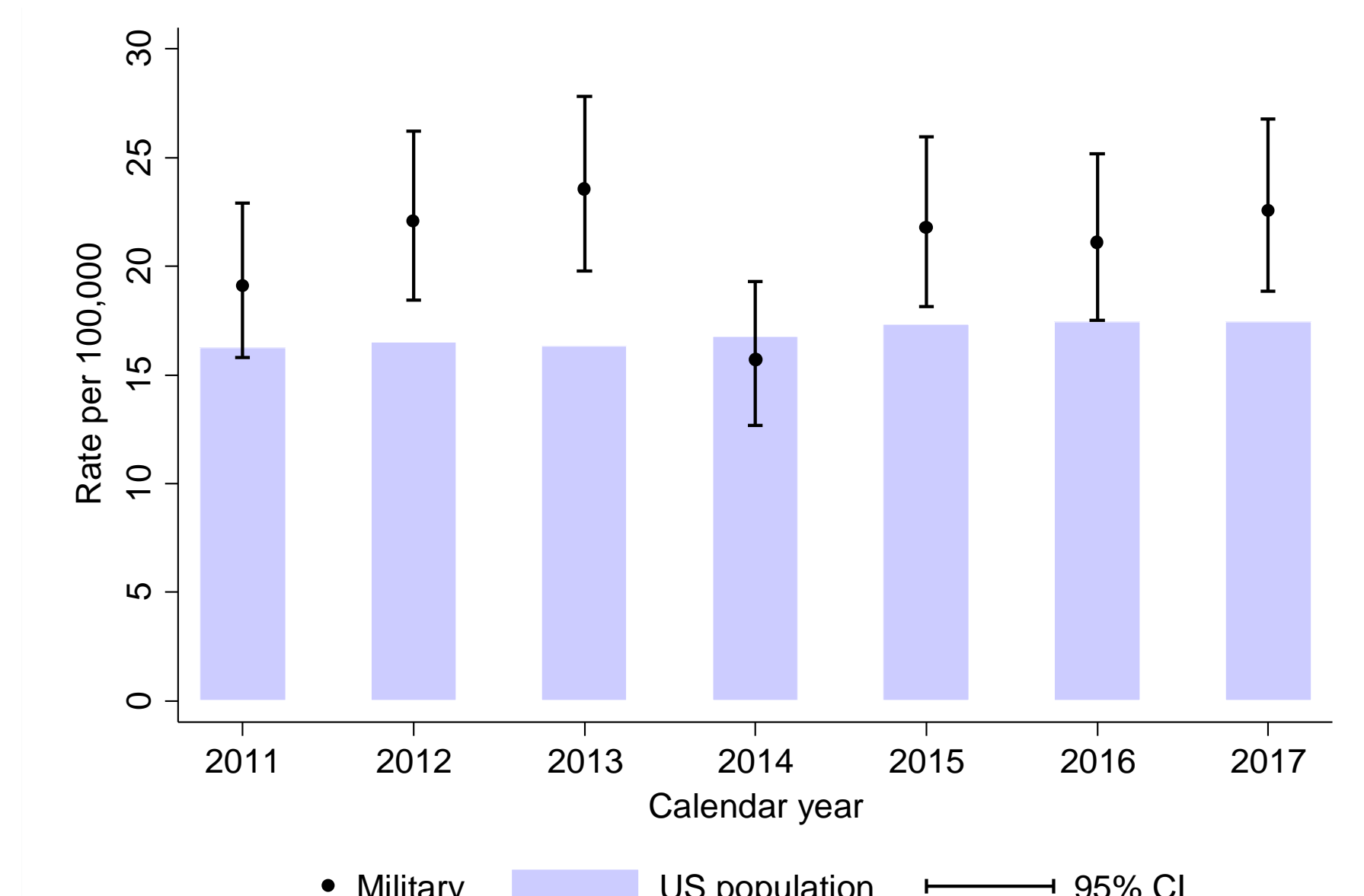
Adjusted Annual Suicide-Mortality Rates, Active Component vs. U.S. General Population, 2011 - 2017



Adjusted Annual Suicide-Mortality Rates, Reserve Component vs. U.S. General Population, 2011 - 2017



Adjusted Annual Suicide-Mortality Rates, National Guard vs. U.S. General Population, 2011 - 2017



## DoD-Wide Suicide Reduction Efforts

- ❖ Recent Clinical Efforts from the Defense Health Agency (DHA)
  - ❖ Developing a DHA Procedural Instruction for suicide interventions to guide all suicide-related care in military medical treatment facilities
  - ❖ Identifying outgoing Service members with a history of suicidal behavior in order to connect them as expeditiously as possible to the Department of Veterans Affairs' (VA) care system
  - ❖ Reviewed and updated the VA/DoD Clinical Practice Guideline for Assessment and Management of Patients at Risk for Suicide
    - ❖ Publication expected in 2019
    - ❖ Clinical Support Tools will be developed to help clinicians implement the recommended practices
- ❖ Recent Public Health Efforts from the Defense Suicide Prevention Office
  - ❖ Testing programs for teaching Service members how to recognize suicidal warning signs on social media and how to deal with life stressors
  - ❖ Developing training for non-clinical military providers on how to discuss limiting access to lethal means with clients and approaches to increasing safe storage practices
  - ❖ Creating a public messaging campaign to educate Service members and their families about suicide and firearms

## Psychological Health Resources



- ❖ Real Warriors Campaign: Find psychological health resources and anti-stigma information at [www.realwarriors.net](http://www.realwarriors.net)
- ❖ inTransition Program: Receive coaching and assistance for accessing behavioral health care at 800-424-7877
- ❖ Military OneSource: Receive assistance and information for coping with life stressors at 800-342-9647

## Reference

Defense Health Agency. (2019) *Department of Defense Suicide Event Report - Calendar Year 2017*. Washington, DC: Psychological Health Center of Excellence