ARE VERMONT YOUNG ADULTS AWARE OF CURRENT STATE MARIJUANA POLICY?

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BACKGROUND & AIMS

- Current evaluations of changes to state-level marijuana legal status **assume equal policy awareness**.

- In 2018, Vermont became the first state to **legalize possession of cannabis for adults aged 21+** through the legislative process

- Policy changes may affect sub-groups differently (e.g., users vs. non-users).

- **The goal of this study** was to identify a nuanced measurement of policy exposure (e.g., policy knowledge) and associations with sociodemographics and marijuana beliefs and use.

METHODS

Policy and Communication Evaluation (PACE) Vermont Study
- A state-wide survey of substance use in Vermont young adults (N=1,037; ages 18-25).
- Data were collected through online surveys in Spring 2019.
- Approximately half of participants (47.8%) live in Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA)-designated rural counties.

Analysis
- Bivariate and multivariable analyses estimated prevalence ratios (PR) for correlations between knowledge of Vermont's marijuana policy, sociodemographics (Table 1), marijuana use, and harm perceptions (Table 2).

Correct Policy Knowledge:
1. Legal for people 21+ to use
2. May own up to two plants
3. Allowed for medical use *(also correct if not selected)*

FUNDING & DISCLOSURES

RESULTS

Figure 1. Current and ever marijuana use by knowledge of state marijuana policy
- *Young adults who reported ever (vs. never use) and past 30-day marijuana use (vs. no current use) had higher prevalence correct marijuana policy knowledge*
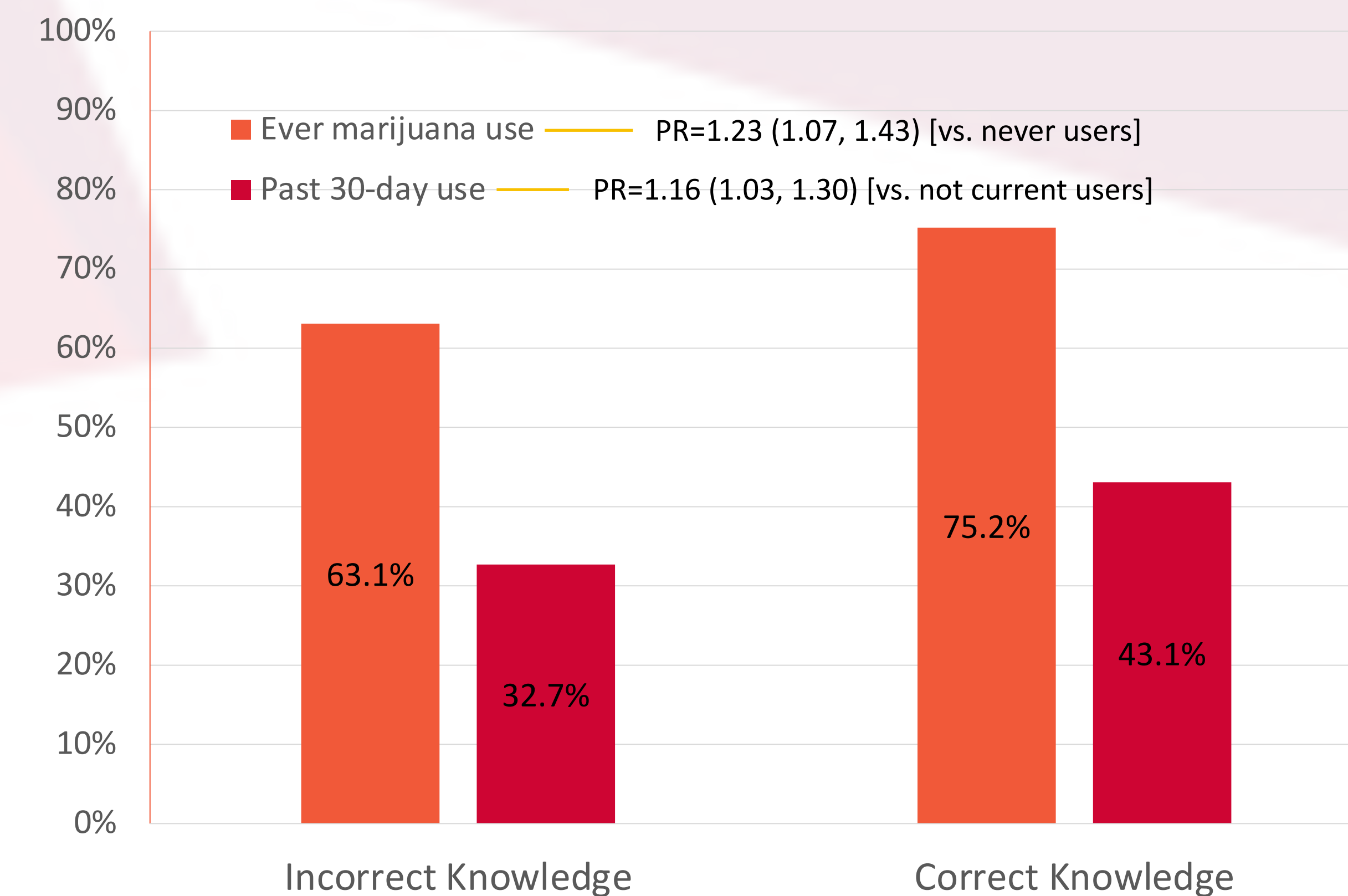

Ever marijuana use — PR=1.23 (1.07, 1.43) [vs. never users]
Past 30-day use — PR=1.16 (1.03, 1.30) [vs. not current users]

Incorrect Knowledge: 63.1%, 32.7%
Correct Knowledge: 75.2%, 43.1%

Table 1. Sociodemographic correlates of state marijuana policy knowledge
- *Those aged 18-20 (vs. 21-25), non-white (vs. white), male (vs. female), who have high school/GED or BA or more (vs. some college/associates) had a lower prevalence of correct knowledge*
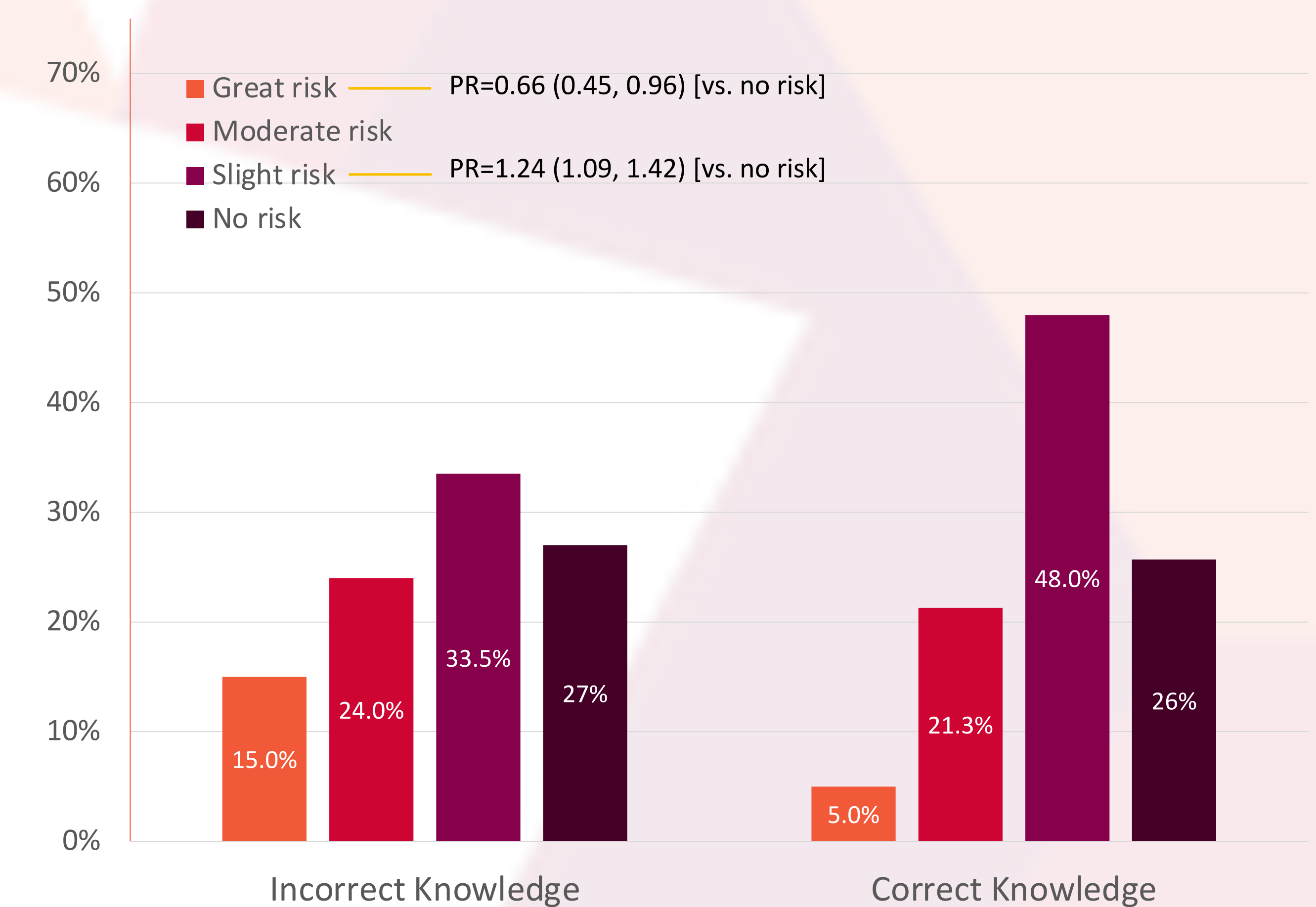
	Incorrect Knowledge (n = 314)	Correct Knowledge (n = 723)	PR	(95%CI)	
	%	%			
Age group					
18-20	48.7 (153)	37.6 (272)	0.81	(0.71, 0.92)	**
21-25	51.3 (161)	62.4 (451)	Ref.		
Sex assigned at birth					
Female	69.0 (216)	78.1 (565)	Ref.		
Male	31.0 (97)	21.9 (158)	0.85	(0.75, 0.96)	*
Race/ethnicity					
White	78.3 (246)	89.3 (646)	Ref.		
Asian, black, other/multiple	11.5 (36)	7.5 (54)	0.71	(0.54, 0.95)	*
Hispanic	10.2 (32)	3.2 (23)	0.49	(0.33, 0.73)	**
Education completed					
Less than high school	9.6 (30)	7.7 (56)	0.91	(0.72, 1.14)	
High school/GED	25.8 (81)	15.9 (115)	0.76	(0.63, 0.93)	*
Some college/AA	44.6 (140)	44.1 (319)	Ref.	(0.00, 0.00)	
BA or more	20.1 (63)	32.2 (233)	1.21	(1.09, 1.35)	**
Subjective financial status					
Don't meet basic expenses	6.1 (19)	4.4 (32)	0.88	(0.65, 1.19)	
Just meet basic expenses	24.7 (77)	24.8 (179)	1.00	(0.88, 1.15)	
Meet basic expenses with a little left	37.2 (116)	42.0 (304)	Ref.		
Live comfortably	32.1 (100)	28.8 (208)	0.91	(0.79, 1.05)	

Abbreviations: PR, prevalence ratio
* p < 0.05, ** p<0.001
Number of observations missing data on the following variables: sex assigned at birth (n = 1); subjective financial status (n = 2).

RESULTS

Figure 2. Marijuana belief and harm perception correlates of marijuana policy knowledge
- *Young adults who reported slight risk of harm from weekly marijuana use had higher prevalence of correct knowledge of marijuana law (vs. no risk). Conversely, YAs who reported great risk of had lower prevalence of policy knowledge (vs. no risk)*
- *Young adults who correctly identified THC as the substance in marijuana that causes a person to feel high had a higher prevalence of correct marijuana law knowledge (vs. incorrect substance)*

Great risk — PR=0.66 (0.45, 0.96) [vs. no risk]
Moderate risk
Slight risk — PR=1.24 (1.09, 1.42) [vs. no risk]
No risk

Incorrect Knowledge: 15.0%, 24.0%, 33.5%, 27%
Correct Knowledge: 5.0%, 21.3%, 48.0%, 26%

CONCLUSIONS

- A **third** of Vermont young adults misunderstood state marijuana policy

- **Policy knowledge may be a more nuanced measure of policy exposure than policy implementation year,** as many young adults did not have accurate awareness of the policy changes

- Greater prevalence of policy knowledge among past-30-day marijuana users (vs. not current users) and those with low perceived risk of regular marijuana use (vs. no risk) may indicate **that changes in legal status impact sub-groups differently (e.g., users vs. non-users).**

- Findings signal novel opportunities for **state-level education on marijuana to ensure young people understand the potential harms of marijuana.**