



ISRAEL ANTI-DRUG AUTHORITY



Bar-Ilan University

***A dramatic increase in cannabis use
among young and adult populations in Israel:
The "normalization" effect of the intense public debates
regarding cannabis legalization and medicalization***

***Findings from the youth HBSC survey,
and the adult National Epidemiological Survey of Drugs and Alcohol***

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Cannabis related developments in Israel during the past 4-5 years

- *Medicalization,*
- *Legalization,*
- *De-criminalization*



Cannabis related developments in Israel



Medicalization

- Legal use of marijuana for **medical treatment**
 - Intense development of **MM** policy and regulations
 - Intense **emotional public pressure** on government
 - Increase in MM patients from **6,000** to over **35,000** in 3 years.
 - **Illegal MM use** by many who experiment for medical purposes.
- ⇒ Israel becomes one of the leading countries in the world in implementing a legal medical marijuana policy.



Cannabis related developments in Israel



Legalization

- Aggressive **cannabis legalization** lobby
 - Vocal public opinion leaders:
 - **Parliament members** (Knesset Members)
 - **TV celebrities** on prime time
 - **Popular performers**
 - ⇒ **Intense public exposure to pro-cannabis messages**
(Cannabis is like coffee or sugar, everybody uses it, etc.)



Cannabis related developments in Israel



De-criminalization

Following:

- **Intense public pressure** to stop criminalizing occasional cannabis users,
- **Learning from success** of alternative policy models in Portugal and other European countries,
- **Recommendation** of a cross-agency professional committee

The **Israeli government decided** to Join the global move to recognize drug users as a social or public health problem rather than a criminal one.

In **April 2017**, the Minister of Internal Security declares the launch of a new cannabis policy named:

“Responsible De-Criminalization”



Cannabis related developments in Israel

“Responsible De-Criminalization” policy

Policy goals:

- Cannabis **remains illegal**
- **Reduce** use, **prevent** addiction and **prevent** a gateway effect.
- prevent addiction and prevent move to stronger drugs
- Provide 3-4 warnings to occasional users, including referral to prevention or treatment before applying criminalization.



Cannabis related developments in Israel

“Responsible De-Criminalization” policy

Policy practice:

(Details are still being debated and developed....):

- Main enforcement efforts aimed at cannabis use in **public places**
- 1st time, up to 15 grams € 250
- 2nd time, up to 15 grams : € 500
- 3rd time, up to 15 grams : €750 + conditional criminal record
- 4th time, up to 15 grams : criminal record and process
- **Regarding minors** – focus on conditional prevention treatment



Cannabis related developments in Israel



“Responsible De-Criminalization”

- Declaration made with **no public preparation!**
- Consequently, policy change perceived by public as a **1st first step towards legalization.**
- This has happened before new policy is implemented.
- New policy is planed **to be implemented in July 2017**
- Including an **evaluation research system.**



*The unintended consequences of
these developments where:*

***Decline in the
perception of risk***

followed by

***an increase in the
rates of Cannabis use***

Survey data

The WHO-HBSC survey

- National representative sample of school children
- 6th-12th grade students (drugs 10th-12th) ages 15-17
- Secular, religious and Arab public schools
- Self administered class-room questionnaire
- International mandatory protocol
- Last survey – May-June 2014
- N > 16,000 all ages

The National Epidemiological Survey of Drugs and Alcohol

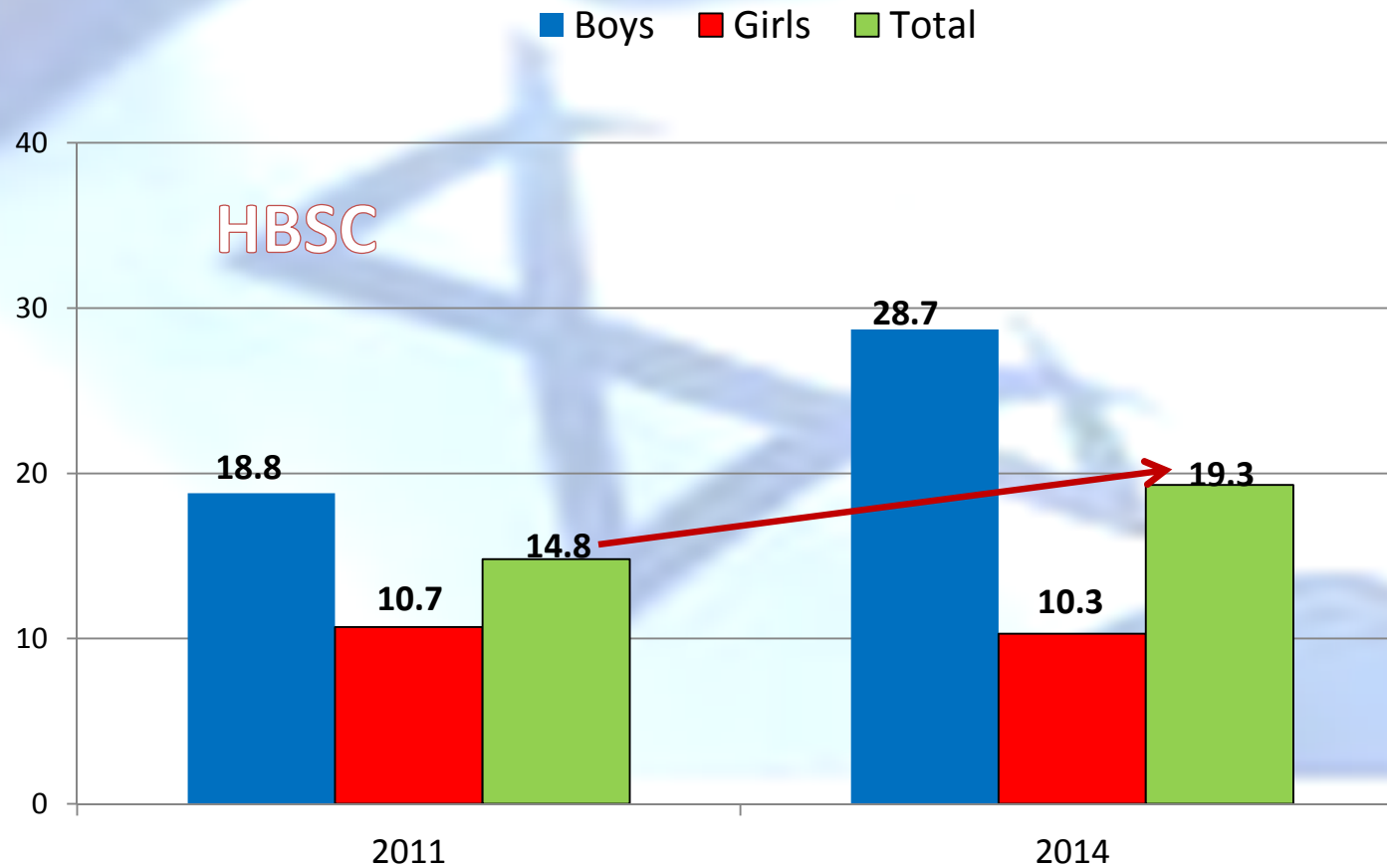
- House hold survey with national representative sample
- Ages 18-65 – all sub-populations
- Self administered questionnaire
- Data Collection: September – December 2016
- N > 5,500

Perception of Risk *by adolescents*

HBSC 10th-12th grade students
(15-17 years of age)

Low perception of risk

Percent of 10th–12th grade students who think there is low or no danger in using cannabis, by gender and year of survey

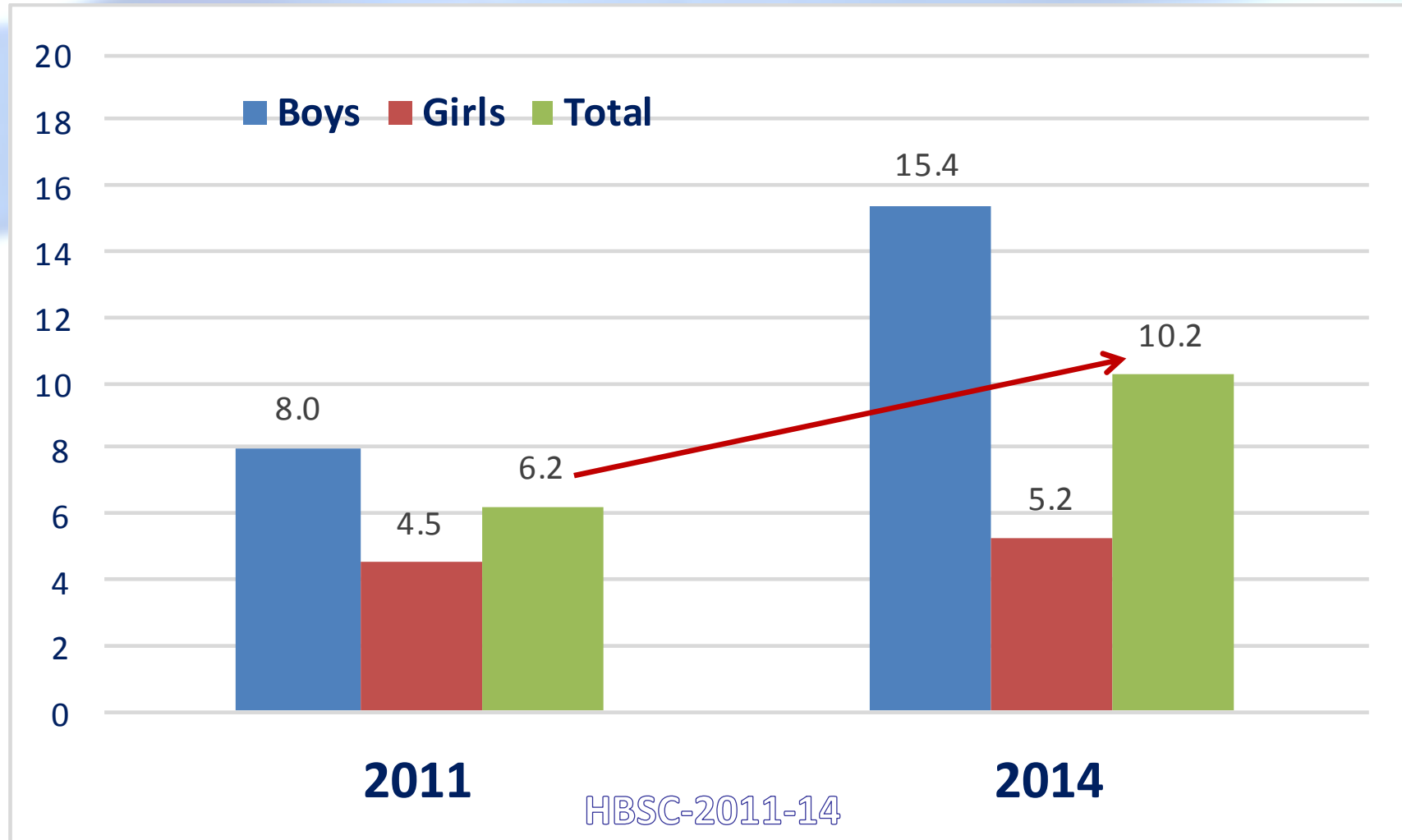


Use of Cannabis by adolescents

*HBSC 10th-12th grade students
(15-17 years of age)*



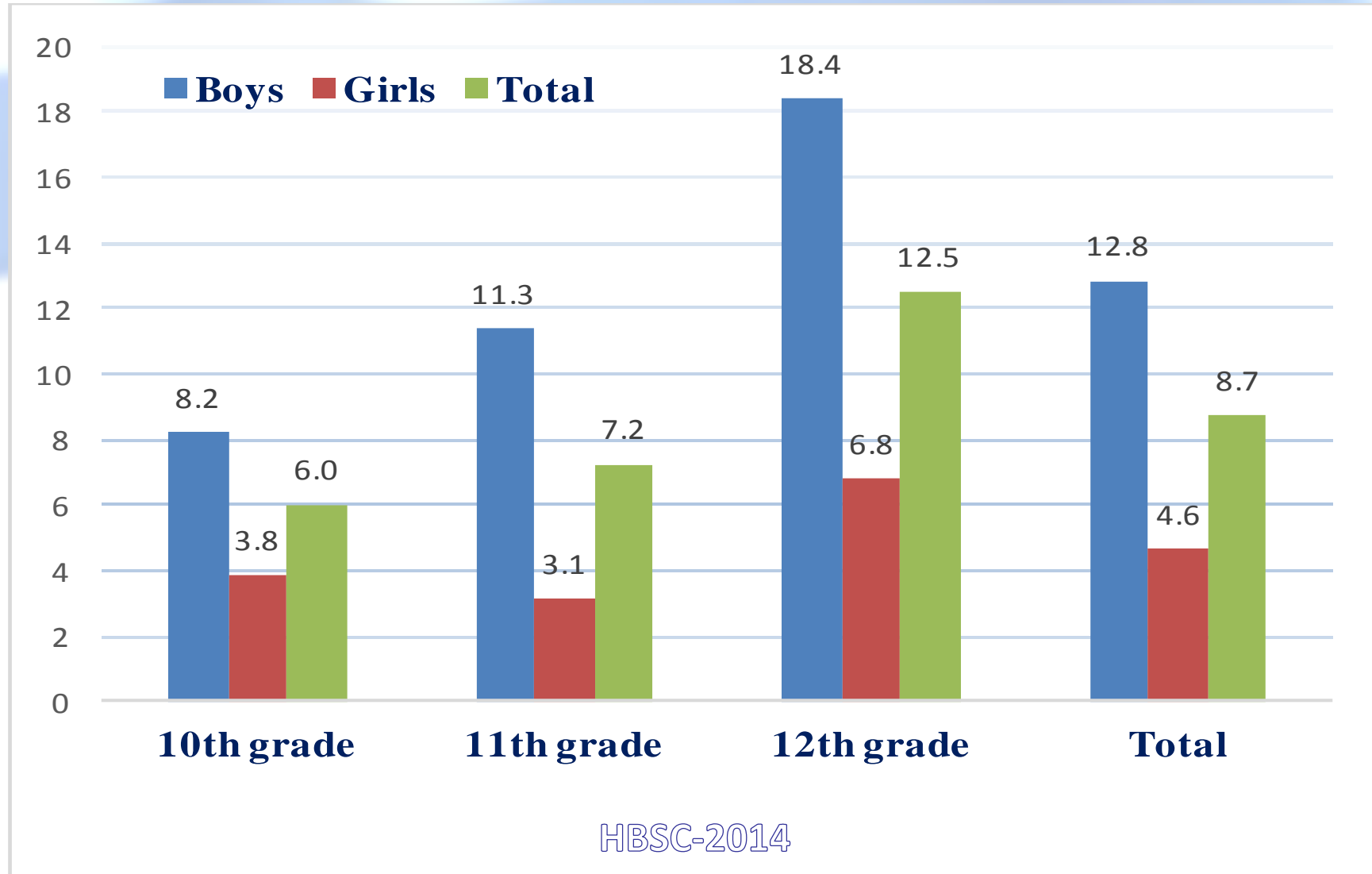
Use of Cannabis: Percent of students grades 10th-12th who **ever used Cannabis** : by gender and year of survey



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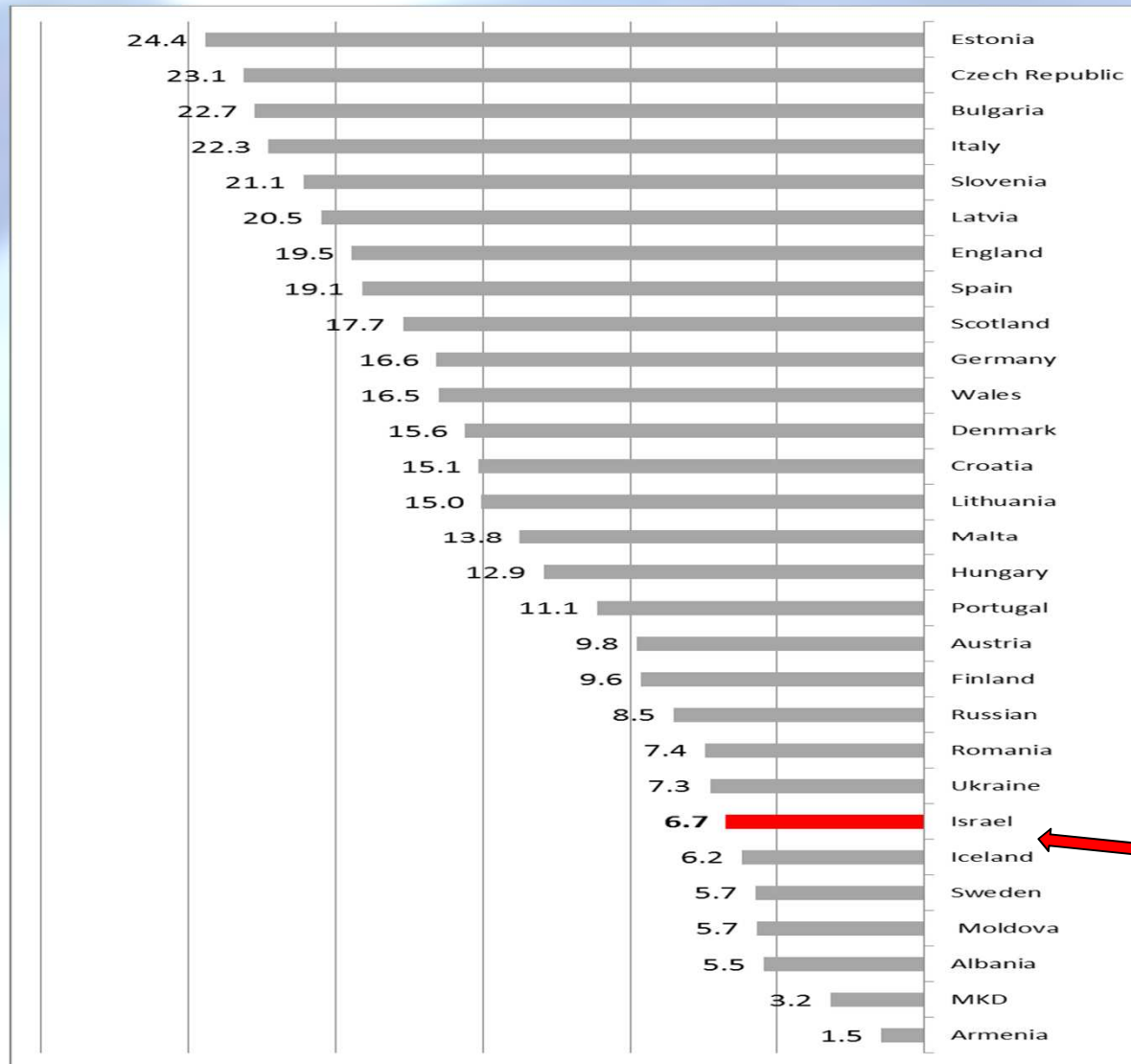


Percent of 10th–12th grade students who used cannabis at least once during the past 12 months: by gender by grade-level



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**Percent of 10th grade students (age 15) who used cannabis
at least once during the past 12 months:
by country - HBSC 2014**

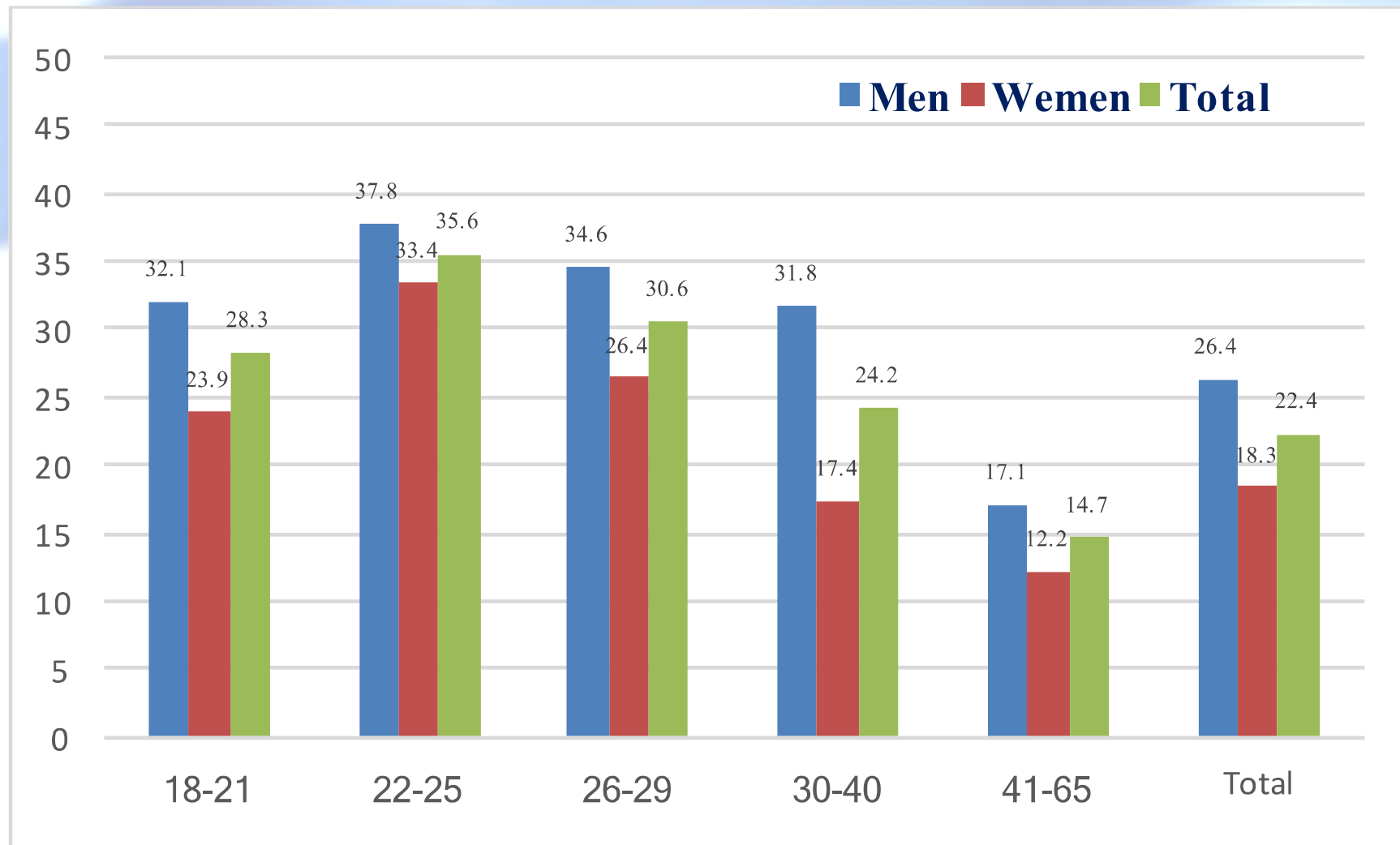


Perception of Risk *by adults*

NESDA – Adults 18-65 years of age
December 2016



Low perception of risk Percent of adults who perceive use of cannabis as having no or low risk: by gender and age group

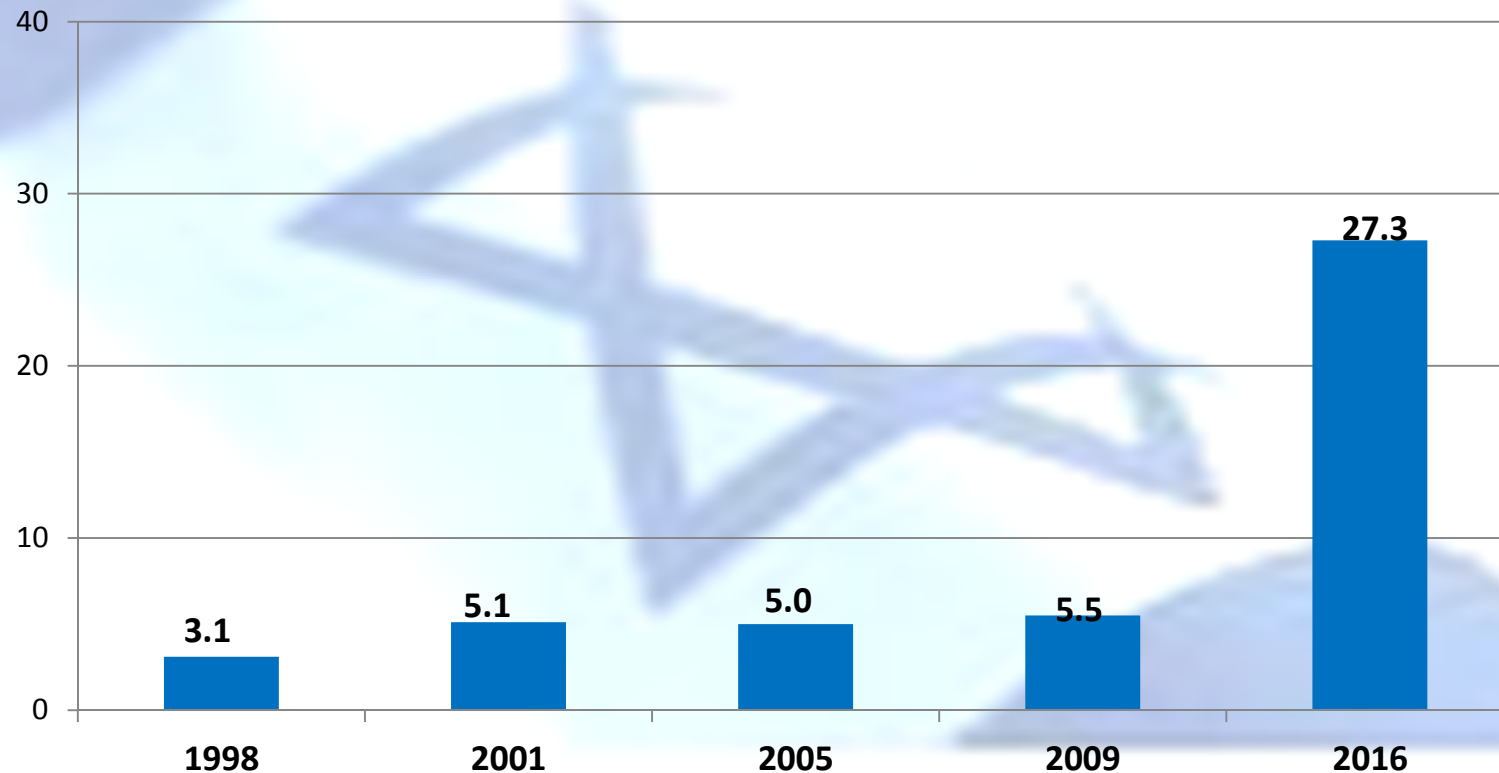


Use of Cannabis by adults

*NESDA – Adults 18-65 years of age
December 2016*

Dramatic increase in reported cannabis use

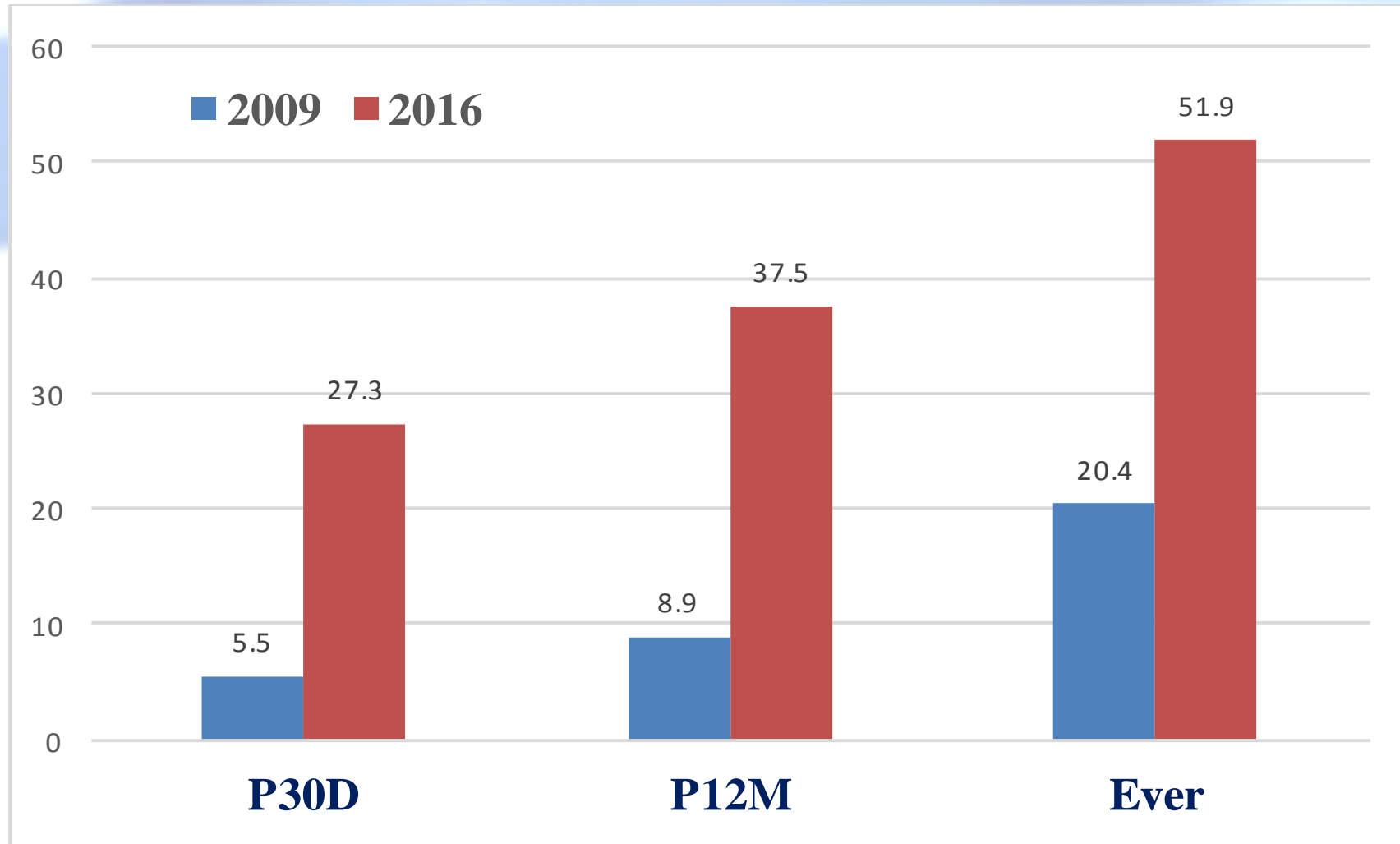
Percent of Israeli adults 18-40 who
used cannabis at least once during the past 30 days
Trends: 1998-2016



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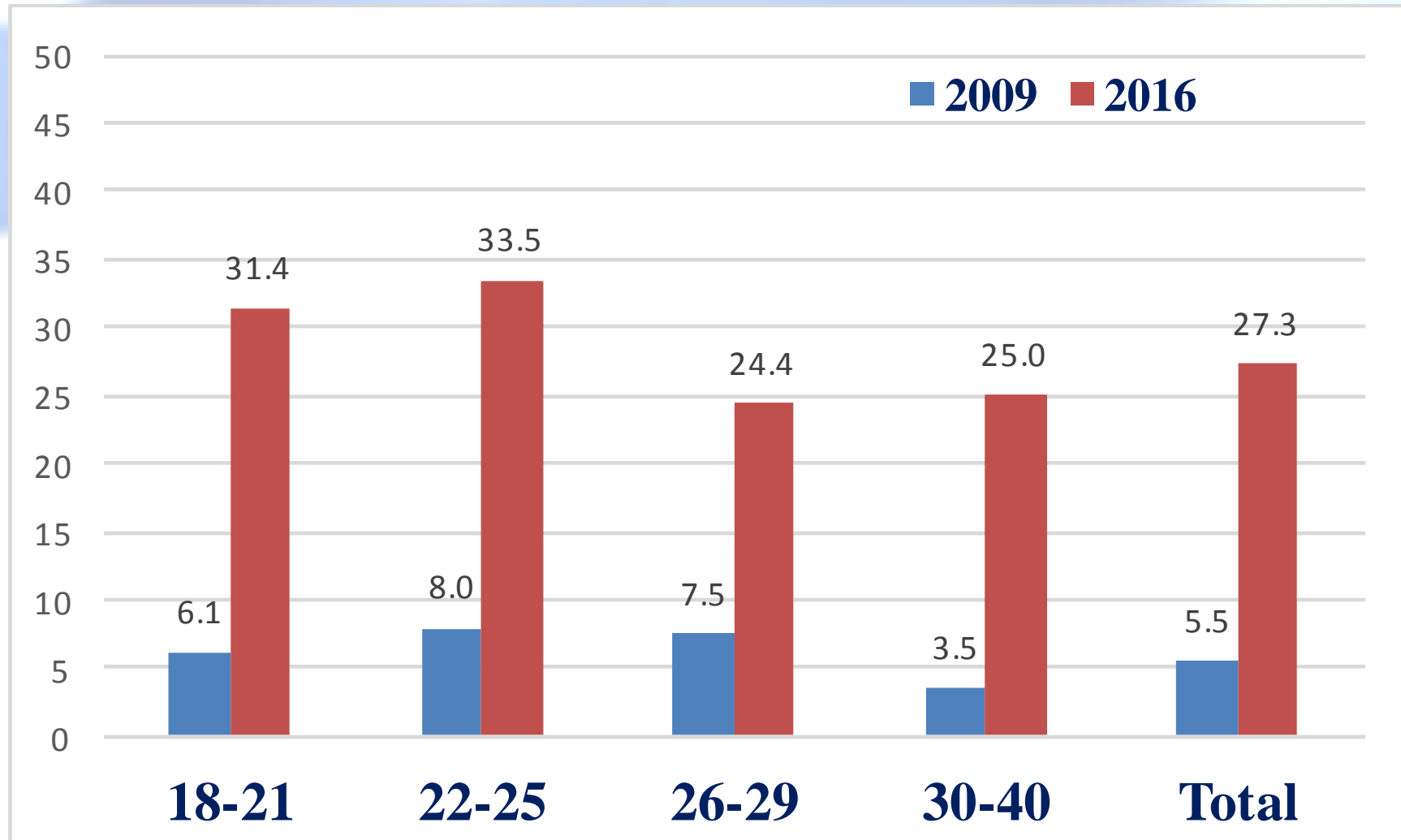
Dramatic increase in reported cannabis use Adults 18-40 years of age, Israel 2009 – 2016



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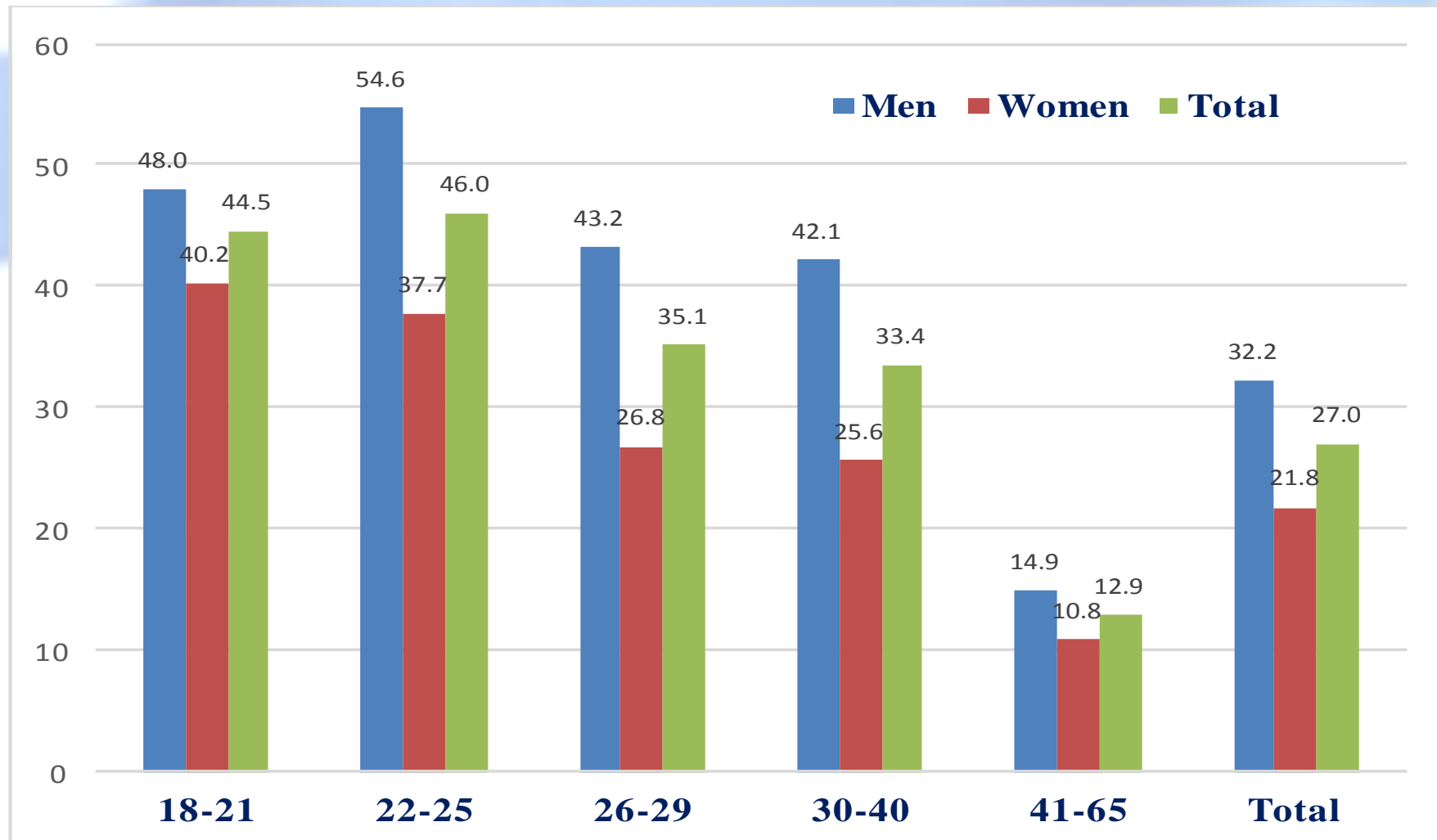


Dramatic increase in reported cannabis use - Israel 2009 – 2016
Percent of Israeli adults 18-40 who
used cannabis at least once during the past 30 days
by age group and year of survey





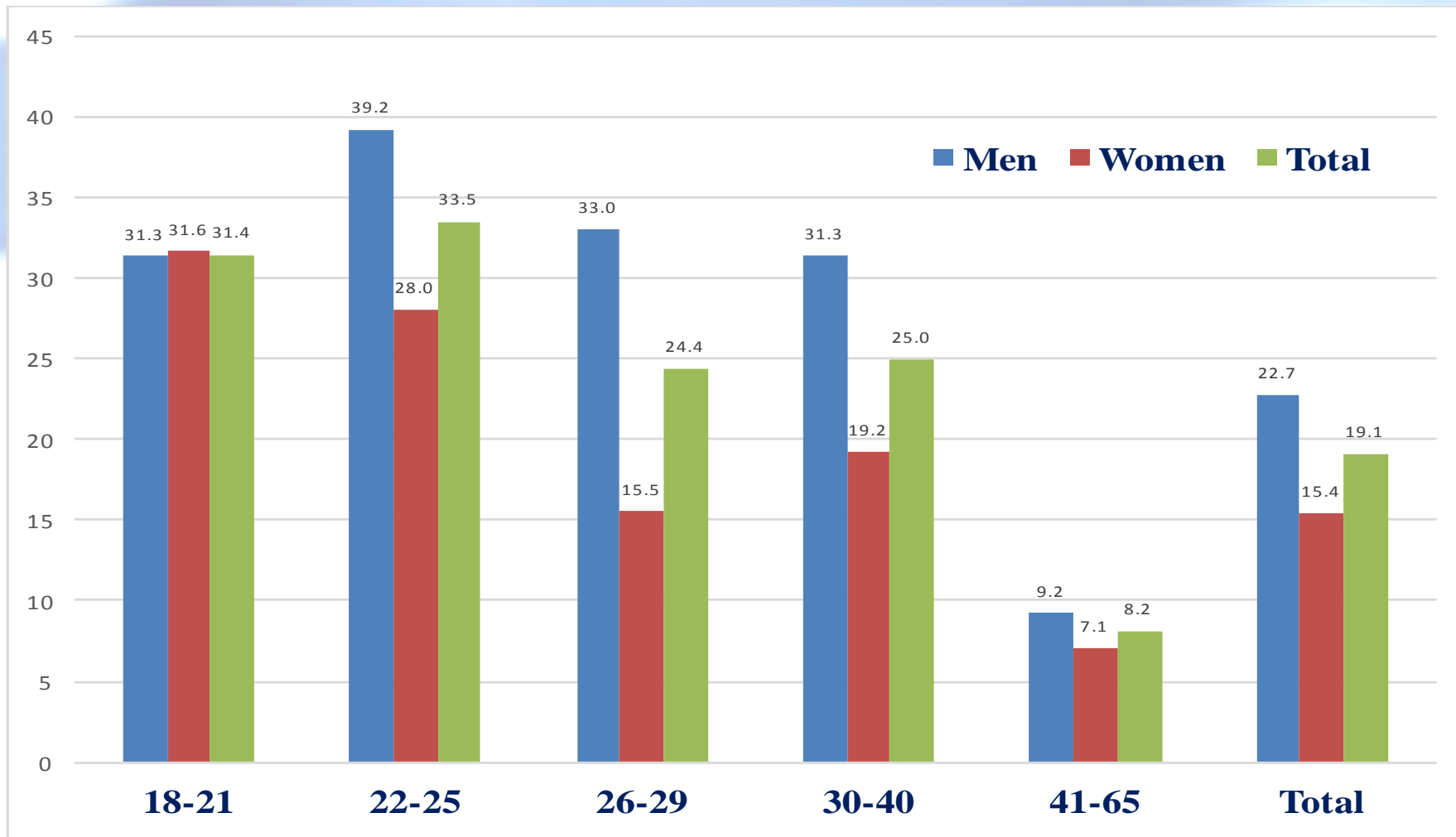
Percent of adults ages 18-65 who reported using cannabis at least once during the **past 12 months**: by gender and age-group



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Percent of adults ages 18-65 who reported using cannabis at least once during the **past 30 days**: by gender and age-group



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Can these new outstanding rates be explained by some methodological error?

Questionnaire

- Cannabis items (questions) are identical to the previous surveys
- Cannabis items (ever, P12M, P30D) appear in a table that includes all other drugs. Cannabis is the only drug that has an unusual rate.
- Questionnaire is formatted identically to previous surveys.

Sample

- Sampling method identical to previous surveys, no oversampling of high-rate sub-populations.

Variable transformation

- All drug items, including cannabis, were subjected to the same transformations which were identical to previous surveys and to each other. No deviations were found.

Statistical analyses

- Analyses of all drug items, including cannabis, were identical to previous surveys. No deviations were found.

Face validity

- Relationships between the cannabis items and a host of usual social-demographic variables were found to be logical and provide face validity to the cannabis

Conclusions: *No methodological explanation was found to account for the exceptional high rates of cannabis use.*

Namely, *the rates accurately represent the answers of the respondents.*

Over reporting or over estimates may also be due to:

- 1. MM use (with or without prescriptions)*
- 2. Over reporting due to social desirability (it's "cool" to use...) resulting from the legalization public debate*

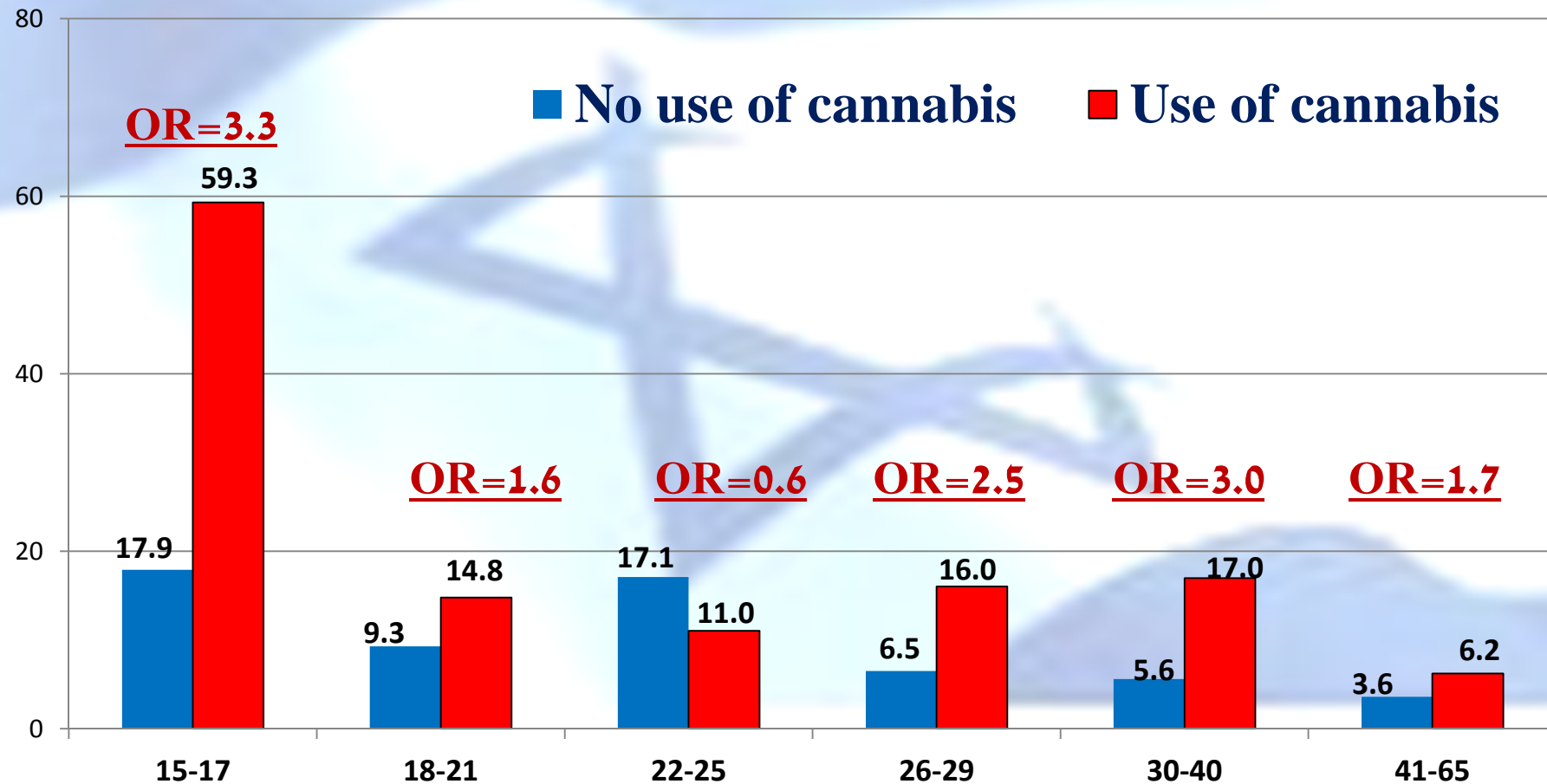
We will investigate these possible effects next survey in 2017-18



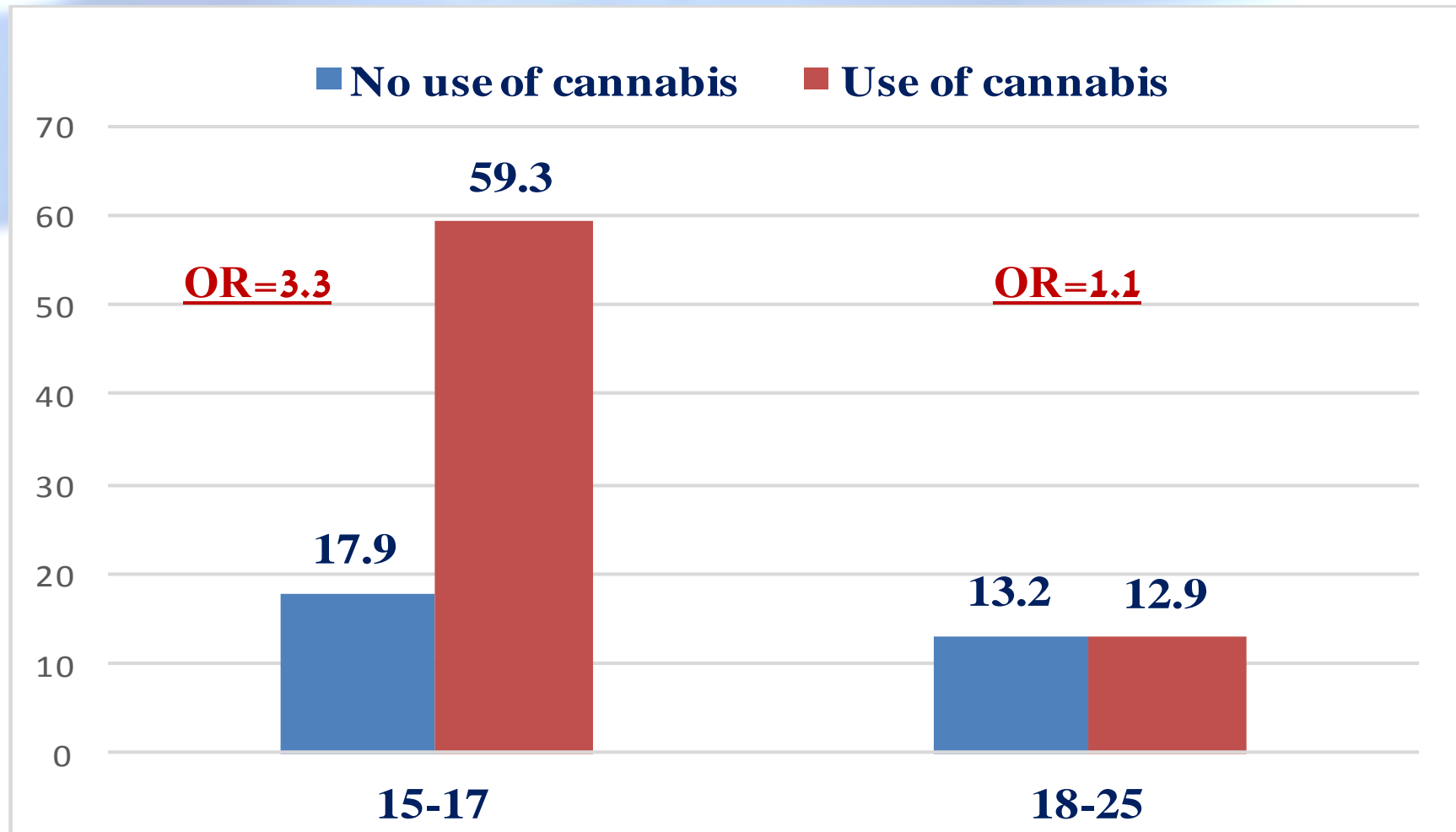
*The
normalization
effect*

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The probability of alcohol binge drinking By status of cannabis use (P30D) by age group



The probability of **alcohol binge drinking** By status of **cannabis use (P30D)** by age group





In sum

- The push for **MM use** and the public debate regarding **legalization** have resulted in a **dramatic increase in cannabis use** among the Israeli population.
- This happened even **before implementation of new policy**
- Israel has moved **from a low-rate to a high-rate country**.
- The new situation creates a **challenge to adapt new prevention, education and treatment strategies** accordingly.
- The Israeli Cabinet decided to **revisit the new policy in 2 years time to evaluate its effect**.
- An **evaluation research system**, is being developed, including the **implementation of the various GPS annually**.
- The **Israeli experience might be valuable** for other low-rate countries who are undergoing similar public debates regarding MM and legalization.



Thank you for your attention