# PERCEIVED RISKS OF CANNABIS AND OTHER DRUGS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

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## BACKGROUND

The Cannabis Act was recently passed in Canada to regulate the use of cannabis nation-wide.[1]

**Decreased Perceived Risk of Substance Use**
1. Earlier initiation of substance use[2]
2. Correlated to negative outcomes[3]:
   - Acquiring a drug dependence
   - Decreased cognitive performance
   - Future onset of mental health disorders

Current literature on adolescent substance use from industrialized countries suggests that perceived risk decreased post-legalization for secondary school students.

**KNOWLEDGE GAP**
Perceived risks of cannabis and other drugs amongst adolescents and young adults in university educational settings are rarely studied. This is possibly due to the focus of prevention before "legally" using some substances.

## OBJECTIVE

TO INVESTIGATE THE FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE PERCEIVED RISKS OF CANNABIS AND OTHER DRUGS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS.

## METHODOLOGY

Students in 1st-5th year at the University of British Columbia, Okanagan Campus were asked the following question through an online survey:

**HOW RISKY IS IT TO USE THE FOLLOWING DRUGS?**
Nicotine    Alcohol    Cannabis    Illicit Drugs

**Likert Scale of Perceived Risk**

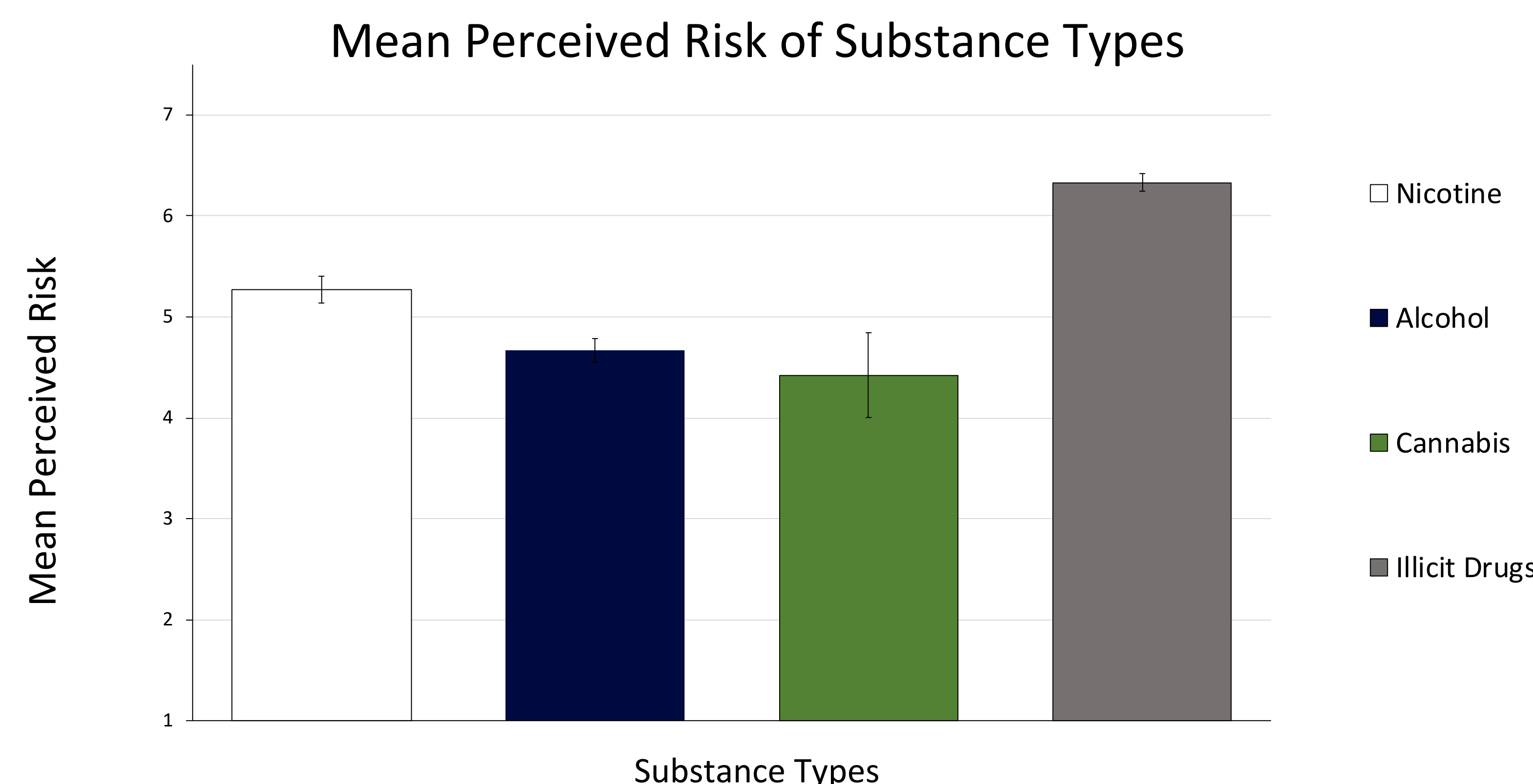| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Extremely Safe | Very Safe | Somewhat Safe | Neither Safe Nor Risky | Somewhat Risky | Very Risky | Extremely Risky |

**Investigated Factors**
- Past year use of cannabis
- Past year use of alcohol
- Age
- Sex
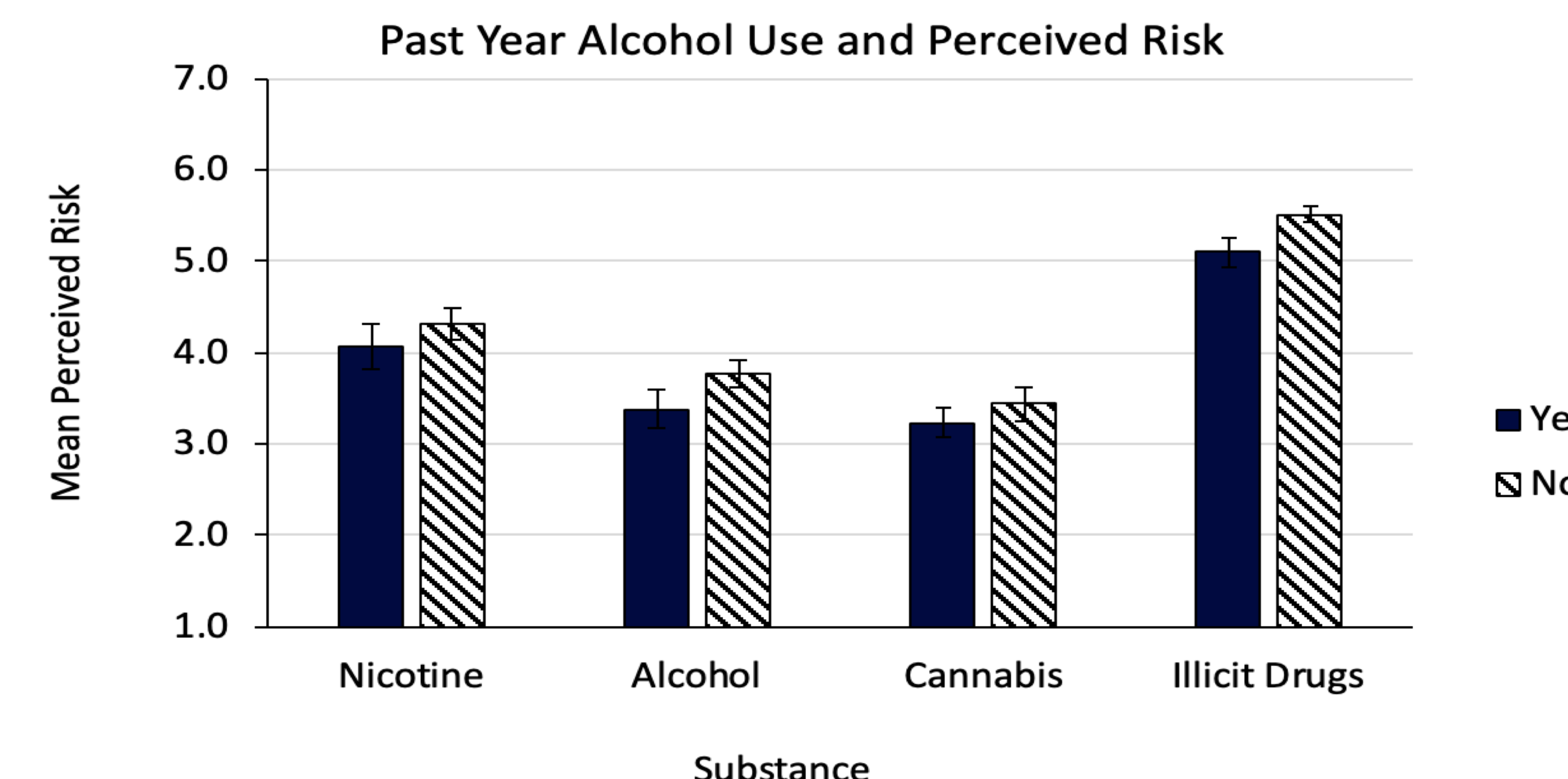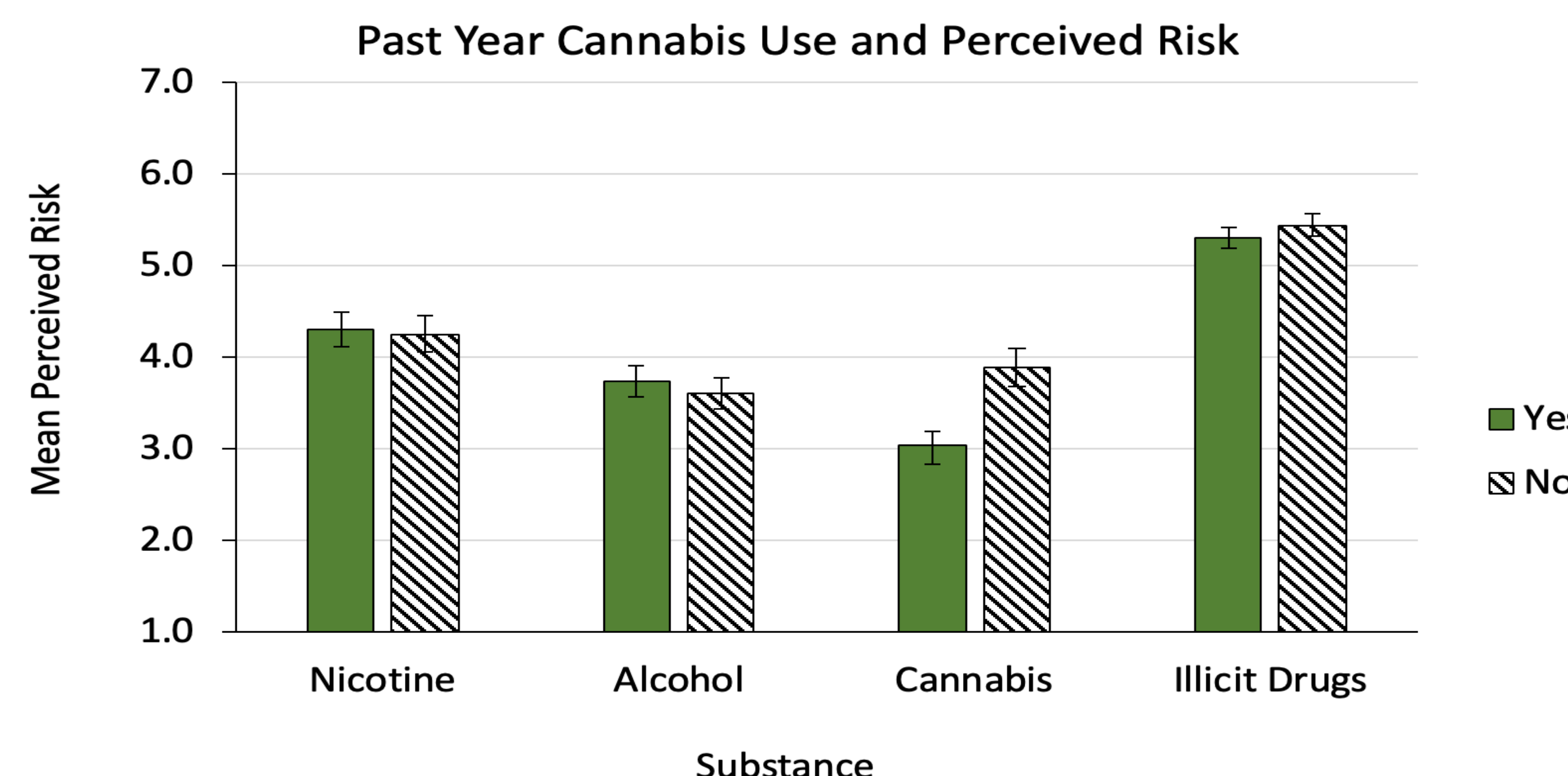- Year of university studies

**Dependent Factors**
Perceived Risks of:
- Nicotine
- Alcohol
- Cannabis
- Illicit Drugs

## RESULTS

### Mean Perceived Risk of Substance Types

Legend: Nicotine, Alcohol, Cannabis, Illicit Drugs

**n = 111, age = 18-32 years, 23% male & 77% female**

| Past-Year Cannabis Use | Past-Year Alcohol Use |
|---|---|
| Yes: 84% | Yes: 92% |
| No: 16% | No: 8% |

### Past Year Cannabis Use and Perceived Risk

Legend: Yes, No (substances: Nicotine, Alcohol, Cannabis, Illicit Drugs)

### Past Year Alcohol Use and Perceived Risk

Legend: Yes, No (substances: Nicotine, Alcohol, Cannabis, Illicit Drugs)

## DISCUSSION

**Mean Perceived Risk of Substance Types**
Friedman's Test: $\chi^2 = 163.15$, df = 3, $p < 0.001$
Therefore, the mean perceived risk of substance types are significant.

Wilcoxon Sign Rank Test: $p < 0.0083$
All perceived risks of substance use are significant, except the cannabis vs alcohol group.

Perceived risk of cannabis is the lowest compared to other substances; possibly due to recent legalization.[3,4]

**Past Year Use of Cannabis and Perceived Risk**
- Significance of lowered perceived risk of cannabis based on past year cannabis use vs non-use

**Past Year Use of Alcohol and Perceived Risk**
- Significance of lowered perceived risk of alcohol based on past year use vs non-use
- Significance of lowered perceived risk of illicit drugs based on past year alcohol use vs non-use

**No Difference in Perceived Risk Based On**
- Age, across all substance use groups
- Sex, across all substance use groups
- Year in university, across all substance use groups

**Limitations**
- No pre-legalization data
- Sample population from B.C.[5]
- Self-report data

## CONCLUSION

LOWER PERCEIVED RISK IN:
- PAST YEAR CANNABIS USERS VS NON-USERS
- PAST YEAR ALCOHOL USERS VS NON-USERS

## FUTURE STUDIES

- Comparison of perceived risks in secondary school students vs university students
- 1 year post-legalization survey follow-up

## REFERENCES

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