Population exposure to marijuana and illicit drugs is increasing while exposure to prescription pain relievers is decreasing in the United States

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Introduction

- The number of individuals using drugs and the number of days using both contribute to the overall exposure of the national population to drug use risks.

- Combining both metrics into person-days of exposure provides a more meaingful metric of exposure to drug use risks.

- This study quantifies the change in person-days of exposure by examining the National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH).
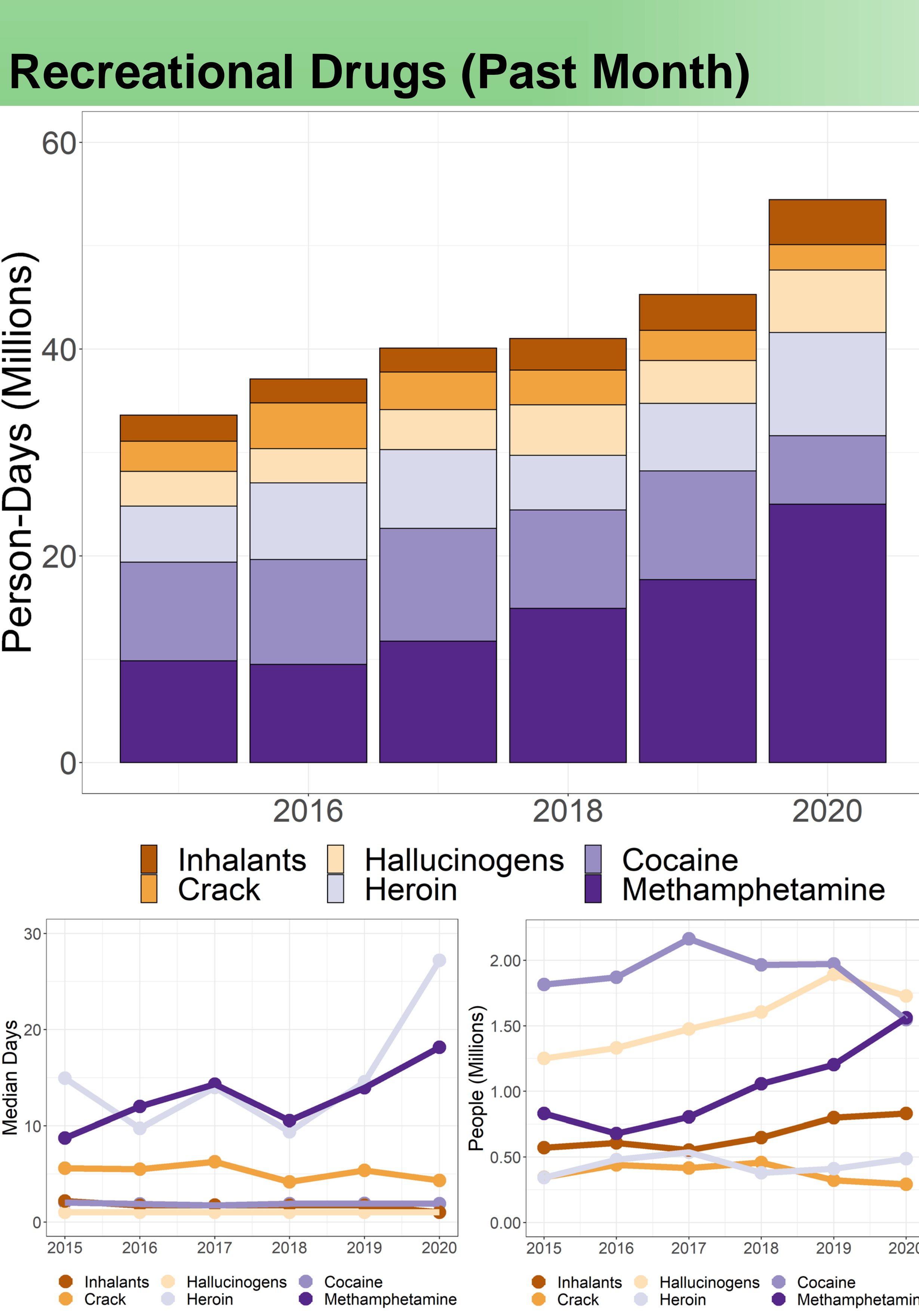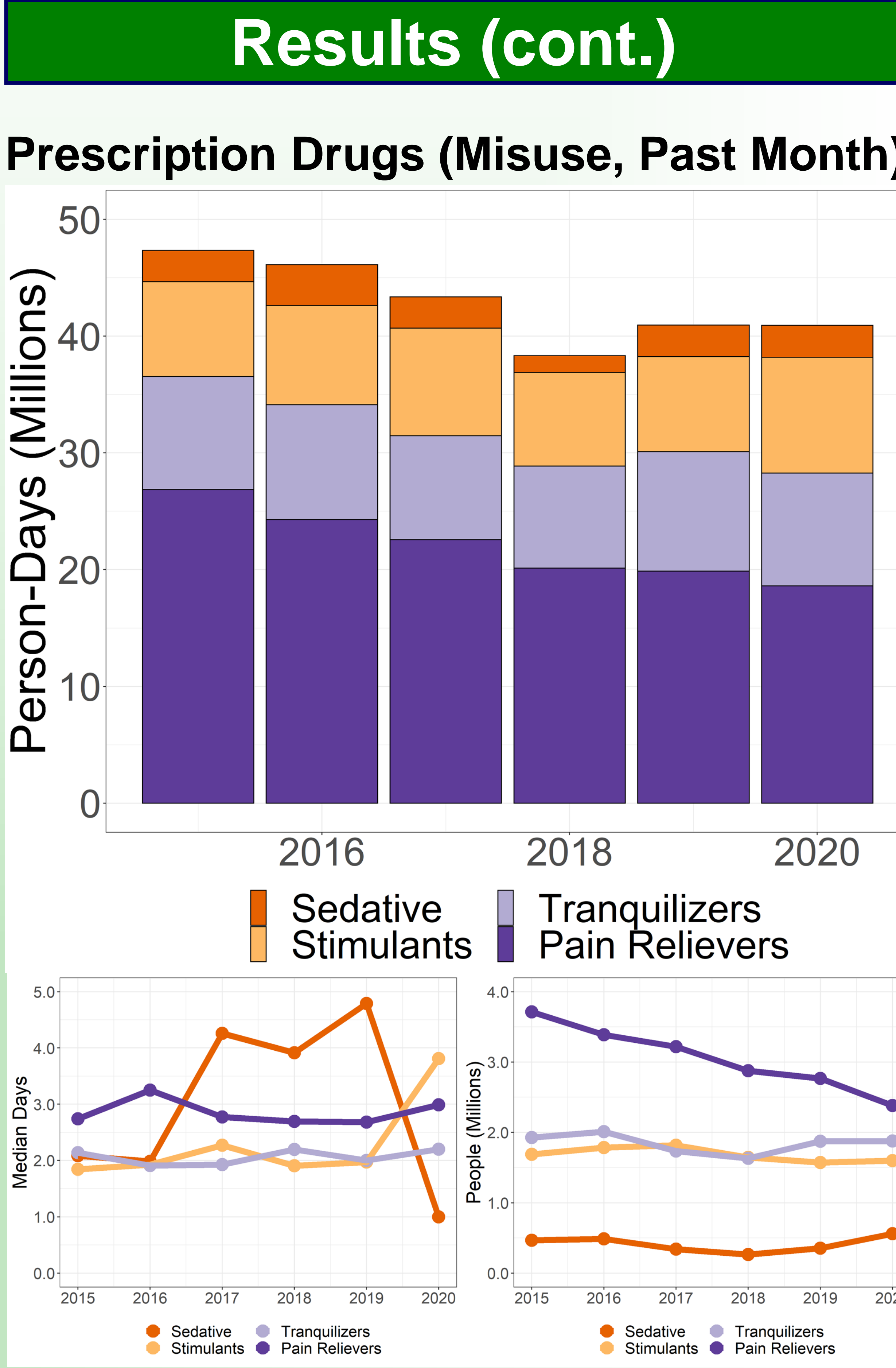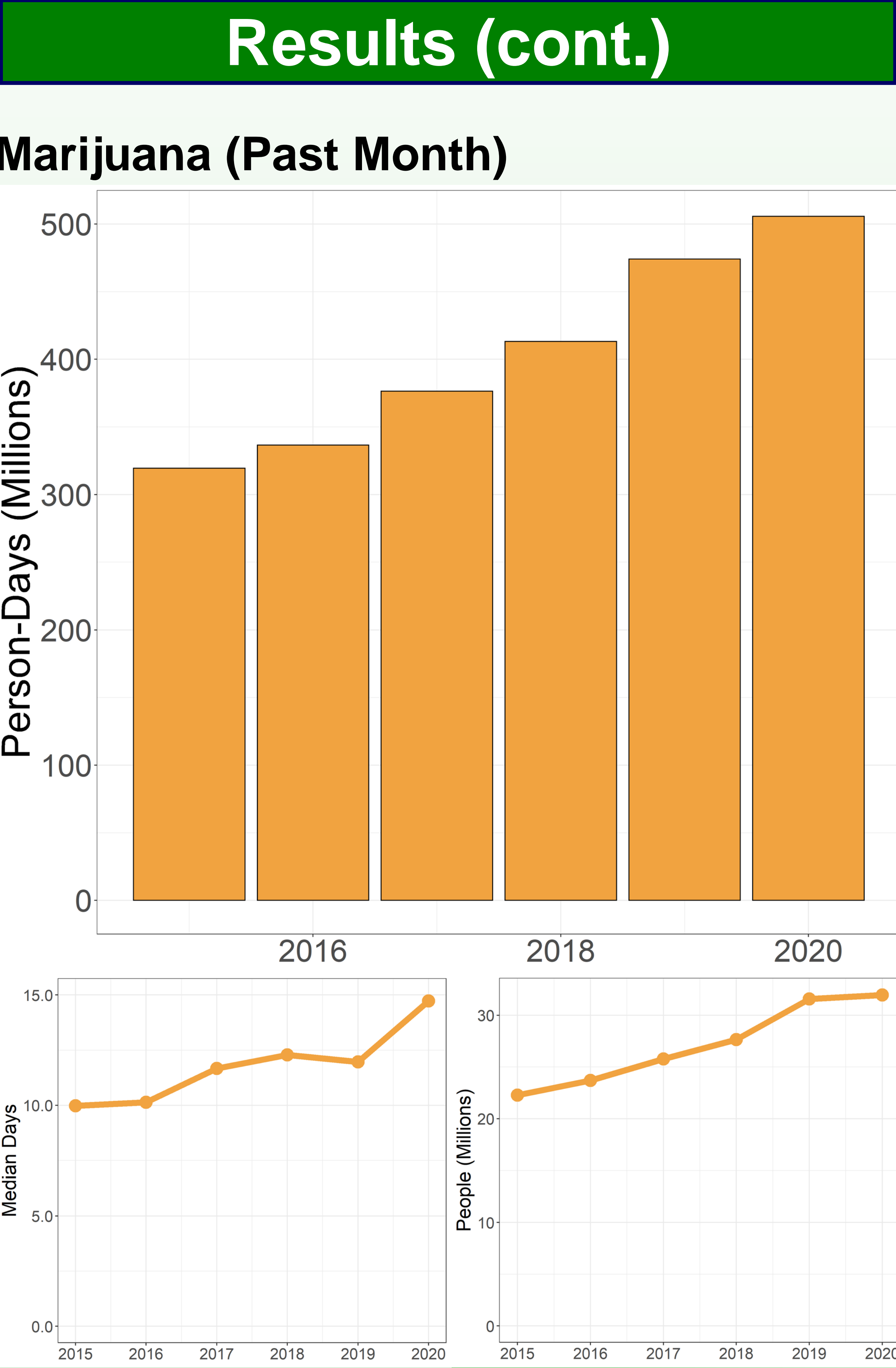
Methods

- NSDUH is a probability based, national survey on drug use

- Approximately 70,000 individuals aged 12 and older are sampled via address-based sampling in the 50 US states and District of Columbia

- Complex survey design and non-response weighting used to create nationally representative estimates

- Analyzed marijuana use, recreational drug use, and prescription drug misuse, including specific drugs

- Calculated weighted estimates of:
  - Number of persons using in the past month
  - Median number of days using in a month
  - Past month person-days of exposure (persons x days)

Results

Demographics in 2020

%	Marijuana	Recreational	Prescription
Gender			
Male	54.9	61.0	47.4
Female	45.1	39.0	52.6
Age Category			
12-17	4.6	3.7	2.9
18-25	24.5	20.1	15.4
26-34	23.2	26.0	21.1
35+	47.8	50.3	60.5
Race & Ethnicity[†]			
NH White	65.5	68.4	72.7
NH Black	14.4	10.1	7.4
NH AI/AN	1.2	1.2	1.3
NH NH/PI	0.1	<0.1	0.1
NH Asian	2.2	1.0	2.7
NH Multiracial	3.3	5.0	1.3
Hispanic	13.4	14.3	14.5
Urbanicity			
Large Metro	54.0	58.0	52.2
Small Metro	32.3	32.4	37.1
Nonmetro	13.7	9.6	10.7

Results (cont.)

Marijuana (Past Month)

Recreational Drugs (Past Month)

†Race & ethnicity was defined using Office of Management and Budget Standards
NH: Non-Hispanic
AI/AN: American Indian or Alaskan Native
NH/PI: Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander

Results (cont.)

Prescription Drugs (Misuse, Past Month)

Conclusions

Exposure to marijuana and recreational drugs have risen substantially.

- Growth in marijuana exposure is from both more people and more days of use

- Exposure to recreational drugs has varying underlying factors

- Sharp increase in days of misuse of sedatives

- Steady decline in people misusing pain relievers

Factors driving exposure to drugs have shifted toward marijuana, recreational stimulants, and possibly Rx sedatives.

Limitations

- Data from 2020 interpreted cautiously, due to lack of 2Q & 3Q respondents
  - Abrupt change in 2020 Rx days of use likely indicates seasonality

- Health outcomes not analyzed