

Sexuality Across the Life Course

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THE NATIONAL
SOCIAL LIFE
HEALTH &
AGING PROJECT

Aging, Sexuality, and Health



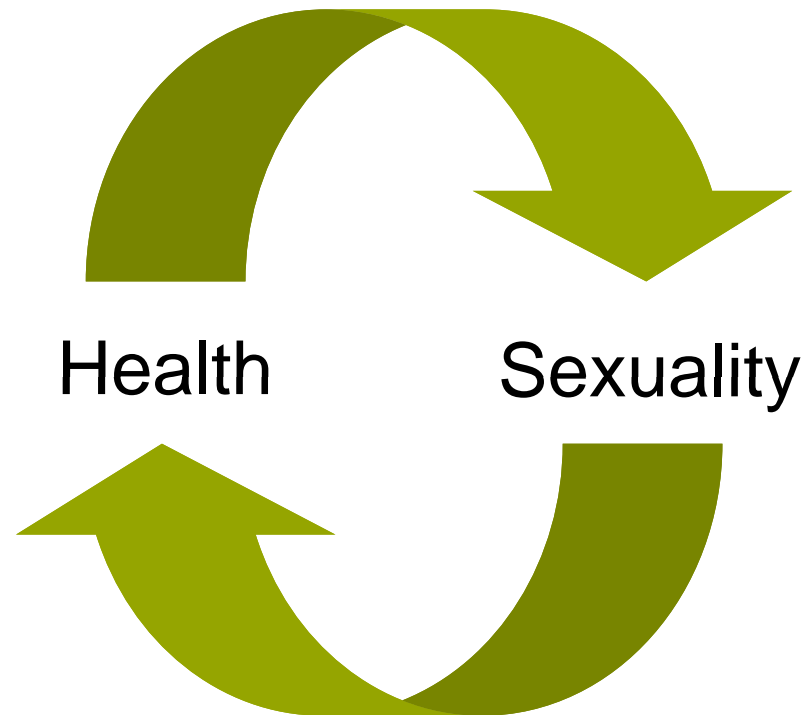
- U.S. population is aging
- Older adults are healthier
- Little is known about older adult sexuality
- Sexual interest, behavior, and function important for and associated with mental and physical health—both cause and effect
- Different dimensions of health affect different aspects of sexuality
- Men and women have different experiences

NSHAP Specific Aims



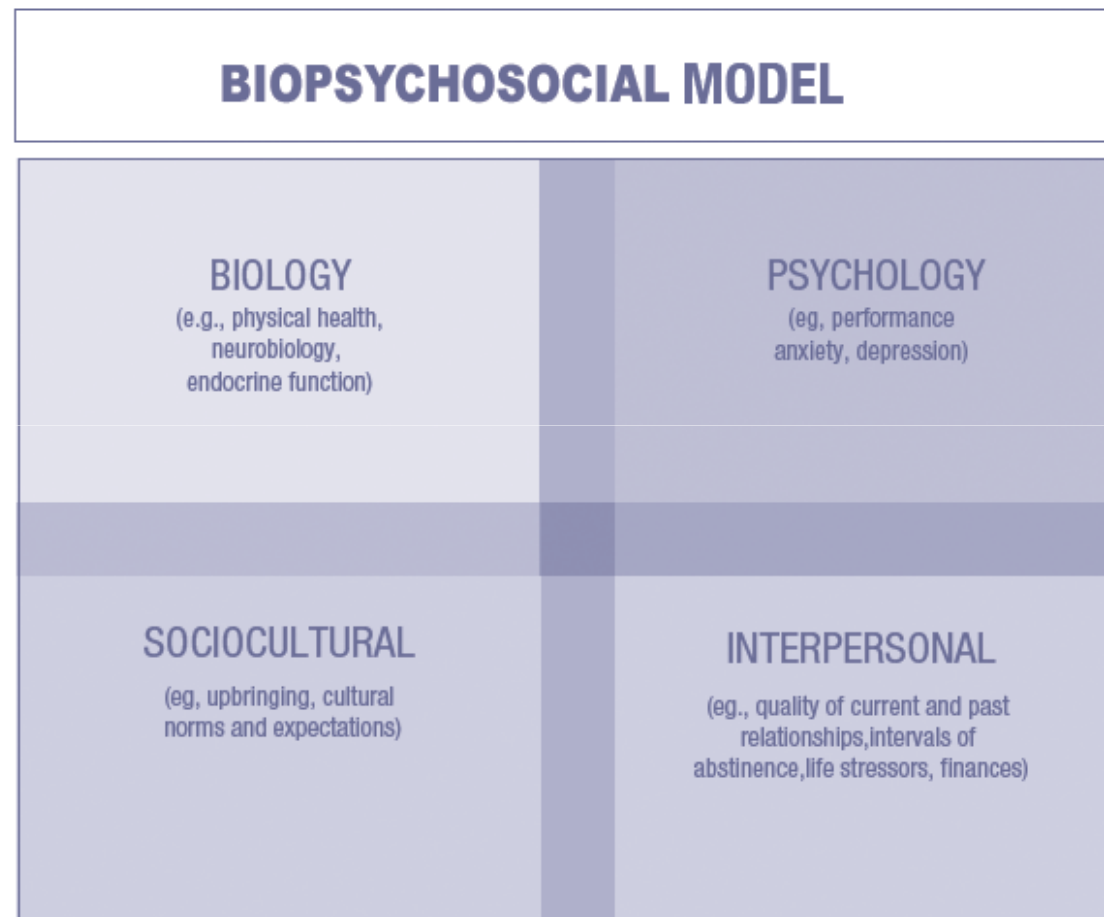
1. Describe the health of older adults
2. Evaluate the pathways through which older adult interpersonal and intimate connections affect health
3. Examine the importance of gender, culture, and economic context for older adult health and social connectedness
4. Identify the biological pathways through which social connectedness affects various aspects of health
5. Describe health behaviors and health care utilization among older adults, including their perceptions of patient-physician communication

Bi-directional Relationship between Health and Sexuality



While health alters attitude, opportunity and physical capacity for intimate activities, sexual expression is a key component of healthy aging.

Biopsychosocial Model of Health and Sexuality



Source: Kinsberg SA, Iglesia CB, Kellogg S, Krychman ML. (2011) Handbook On Female Sexual Health And Wellness. Washington, DC: Association of Reproductive Health Professionals.

NSHAP Study Design



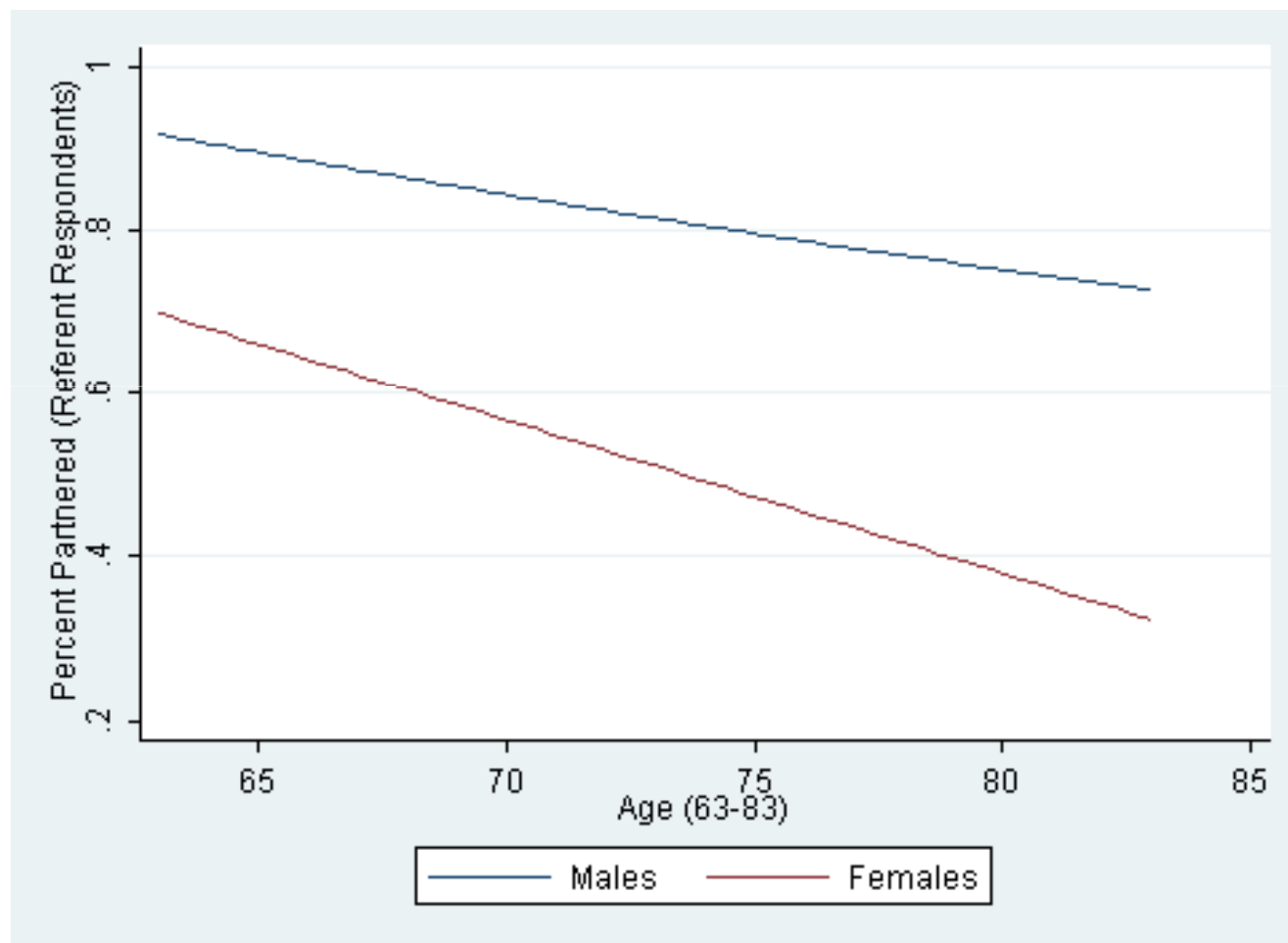
- Population-based, community-resident sample with minority oversampling
 - Wave 1 (2005): 3,005 older adults ages 57-85
 - Wave 2 (2010): 3,377 adults, including 2,322 Wave 1 respondents ages 62-90 and a subsample of their co-resident romantic partners, 955 adults ages 36-99
- Multi-mode data collection
 - 120-minute in-home interview, including the in-person questionnaire and biomeasure data collection
 - Leave-behind pencil-and-paper questionnaire
 - 7-day actigraphy sub-study (Wave 2 only)

Definition of Sex



- “Now, we would like to ask you some questions about your sexual relationship. By sex or sexual activity we mean any mutually voluntary activity with another person that involves sexual contact, whether or not intercourse or orgasm occurs.”

Probability of Having a Partner



Item Sample and Response



Everyone (Referent Respondents and Partners)
(N=3,113)

Partnered
(N=2,252)

Not Partnered
(N=861)

Partnered, Sexually
Active
(N=1,340)

Partnered, Not
Sexually Active
(N=912)

Not Partnered,
Sexually Active
(N=172)

Not Partnered, Not
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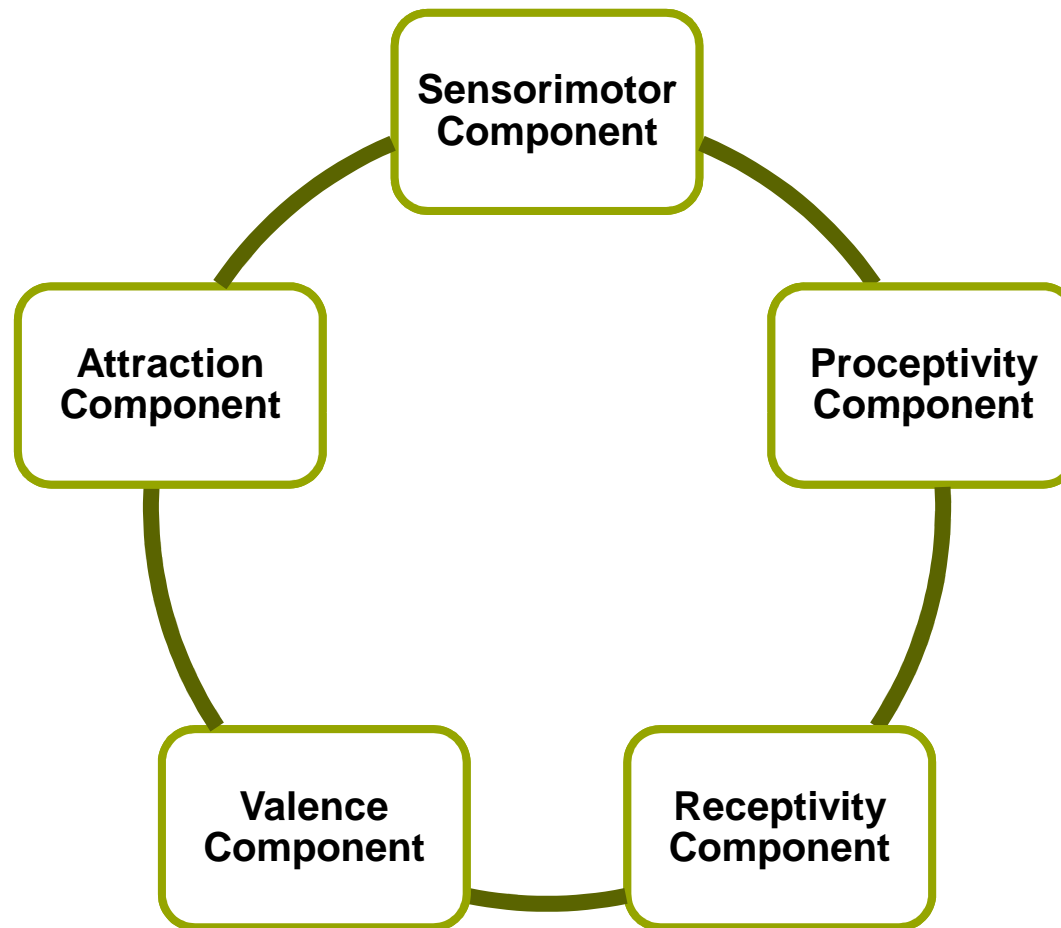
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Neurobiological Perspective on Sexual Interest and Motivation



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1. **Sensorimotor Component:** Sexual function and performance, which develops through interactions between the nervous and hormonal systems, culminating in gonadal and behavioral maturity.
2. **Proceptivity Component:** Solicitation, the urge to seek out sexual partners and initiate sexual activity. Defined by proceptive (i.e., flirting) behaviors to initiate and maintain a sexual interaction.
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Neurobiological Perspective on Sexual Interest and Motivation



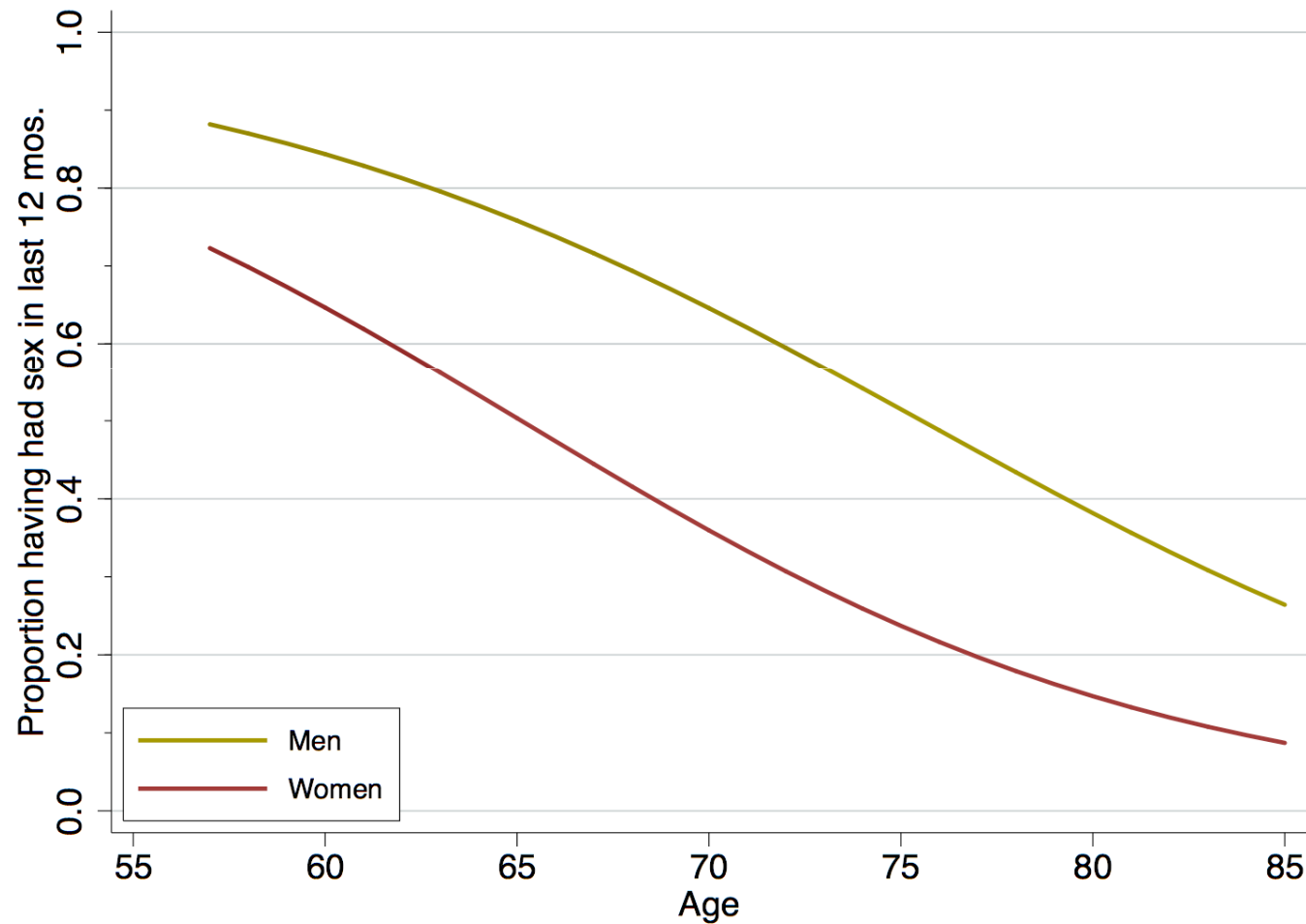
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Sensorimotor Component: Sexual Behaviors and Performance

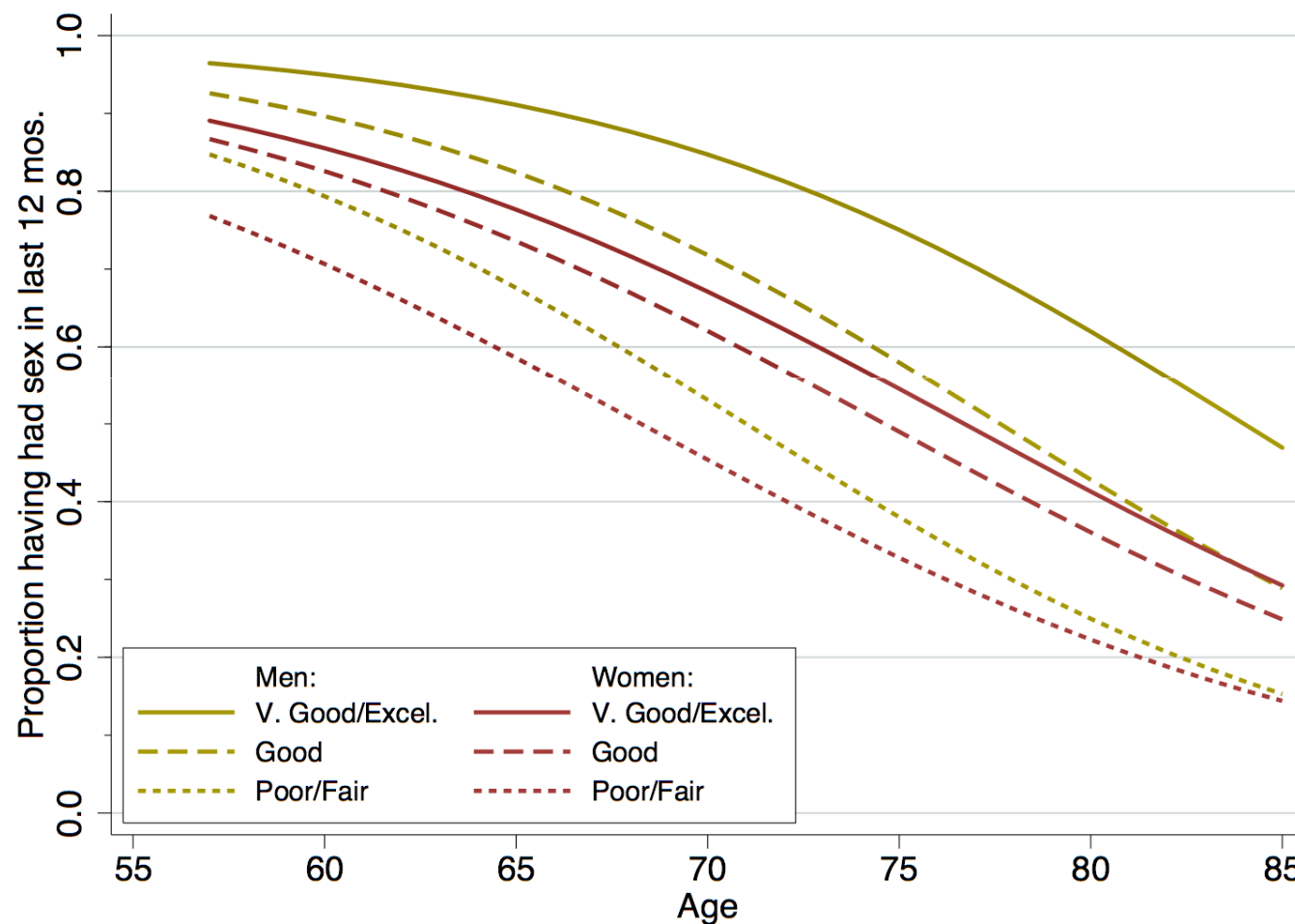


- In the last 12 months, about how often did you have sex with your current partner? Was it once or twice, about once a month, two or three times a month, about once a week, two or three times a week, four or more times a week, or not at all?
- In your entire life so far, about how many men have you had sex with, even if only one time?
- In your entire life so far, about how many women have you had sex with, even if only one time?
- On average in the last 12 months, how often did you masturbate?
- When masturbating in the last 12 months, how often did you have an orgasm, that is, come or come to climax?

Prevalence of Sexual Activity (%)

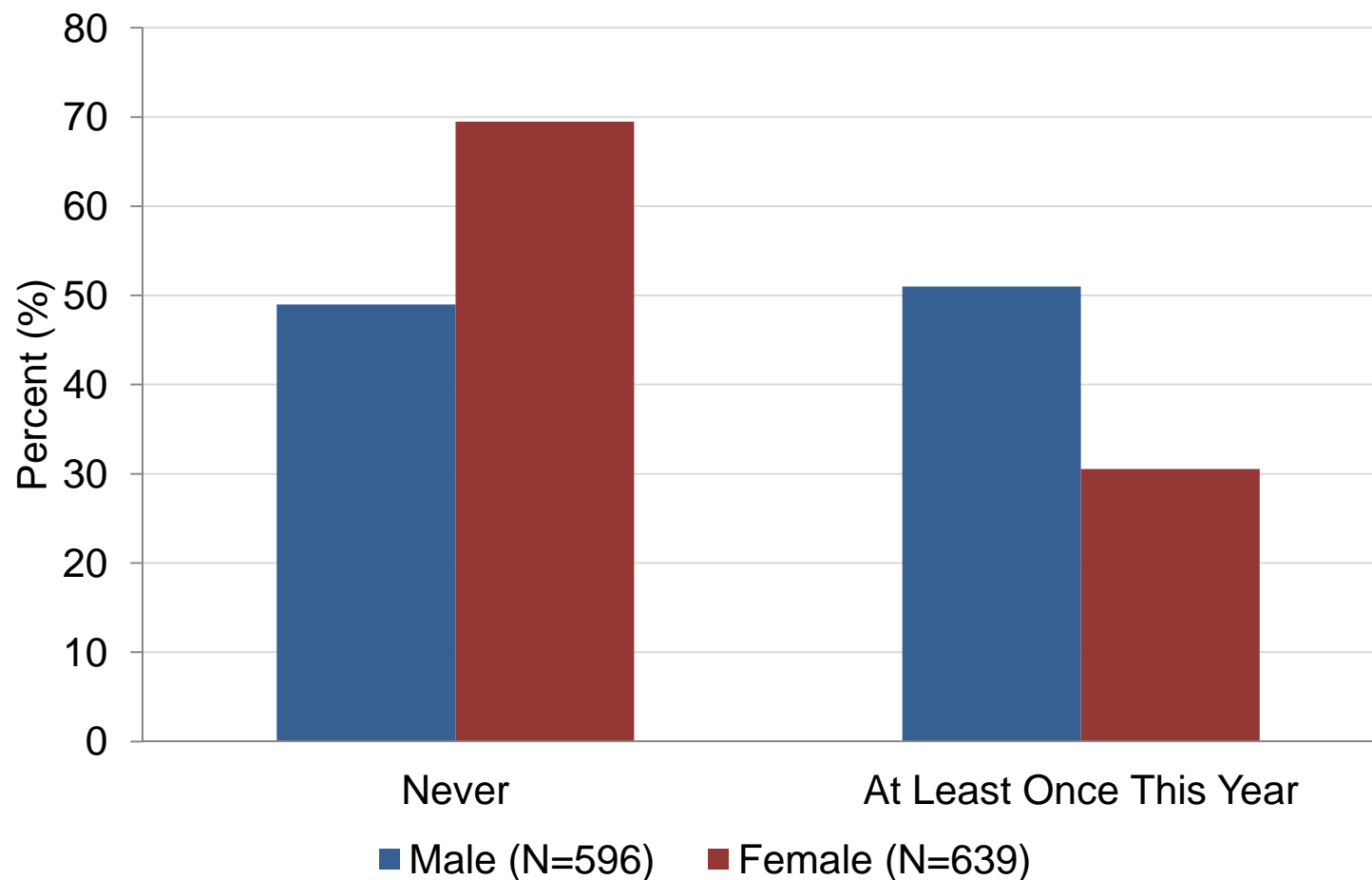


Probability of Sex in Last 12 Months* (Wave 1)



* among those with a spouse or other romantic relationship

“On average in the last 12 months, how often did you masturbate?”



Sexual Activity and Age



Attribution: Bob Englehart, The Hartford Courant

Sensorimotor Component: Sexual Dysfunction

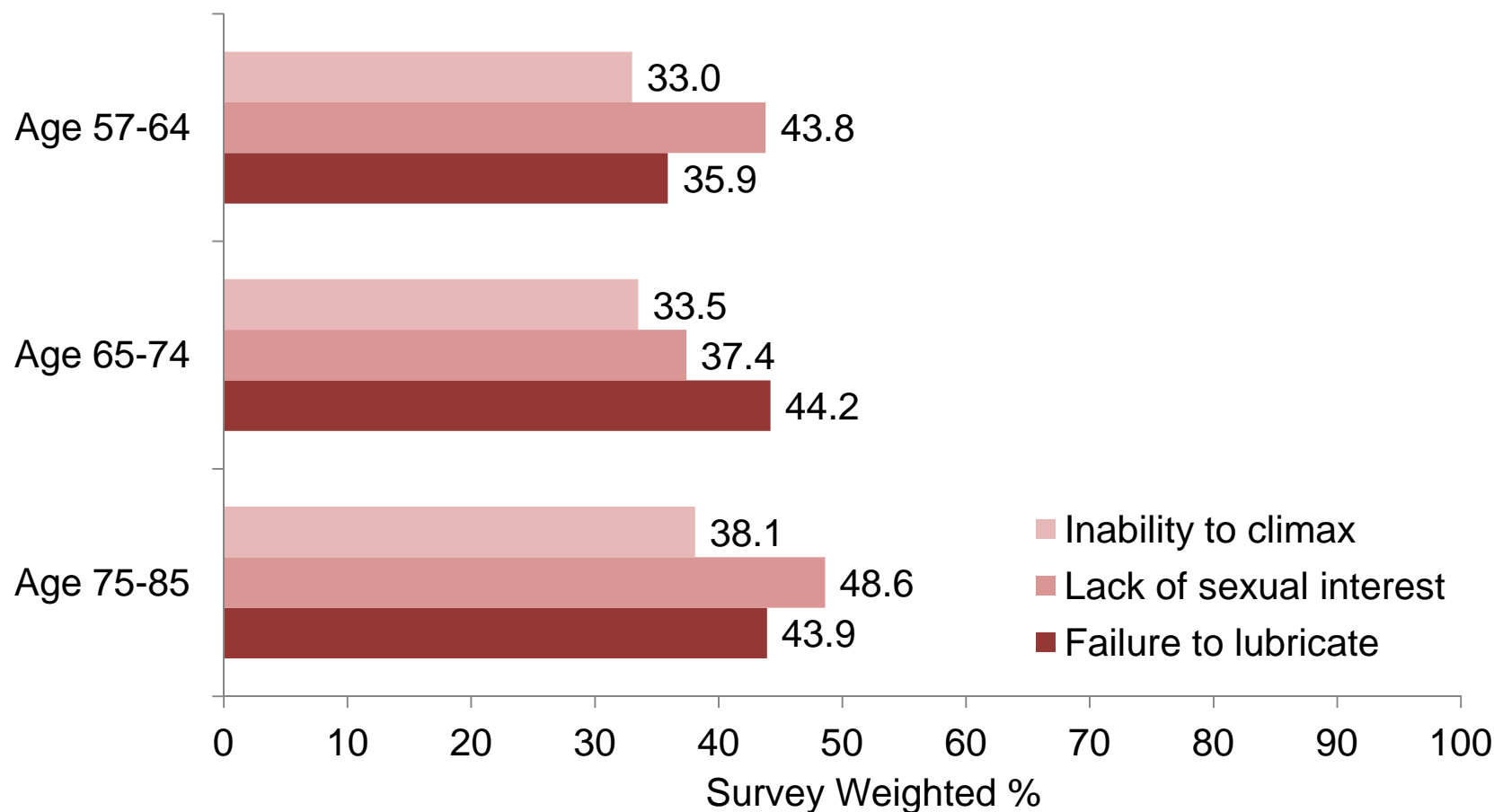


- “...in the last 12 months there has ever been a period of several months or more when you...
 - ...lacked interest in having sex?
 - ...were unable to climax (experience an orgasm)?
 - ...came to a climax (experienced orgasm) too quickly?
 - ...experienced physical pain during intercourse?
 - ...did not find sex pleasurable (even if it was not painful)?
 - ...felt anxious just before having sex about your ability to perform sexually?
 - [MEN ONLY]...had trouble getting or maintaining an erection?
 - [WOMEN ONLY]...had trouble lubricating?
- “Did [PROBLEM] bother you?”

Sexual Problems (Women; Wave 1)



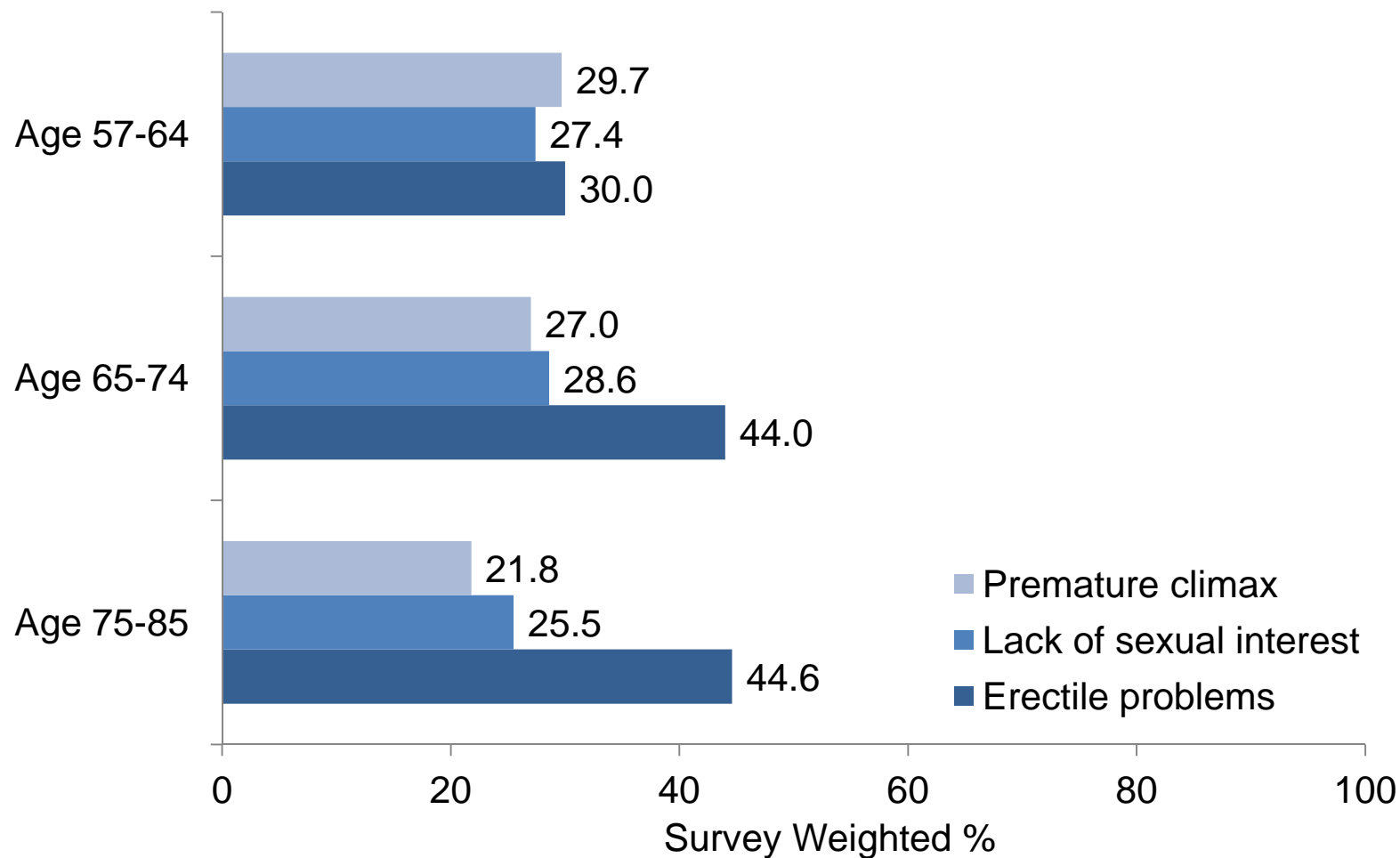
Select Sexual Problems Past Year Among Partnered Women Aged 57-85



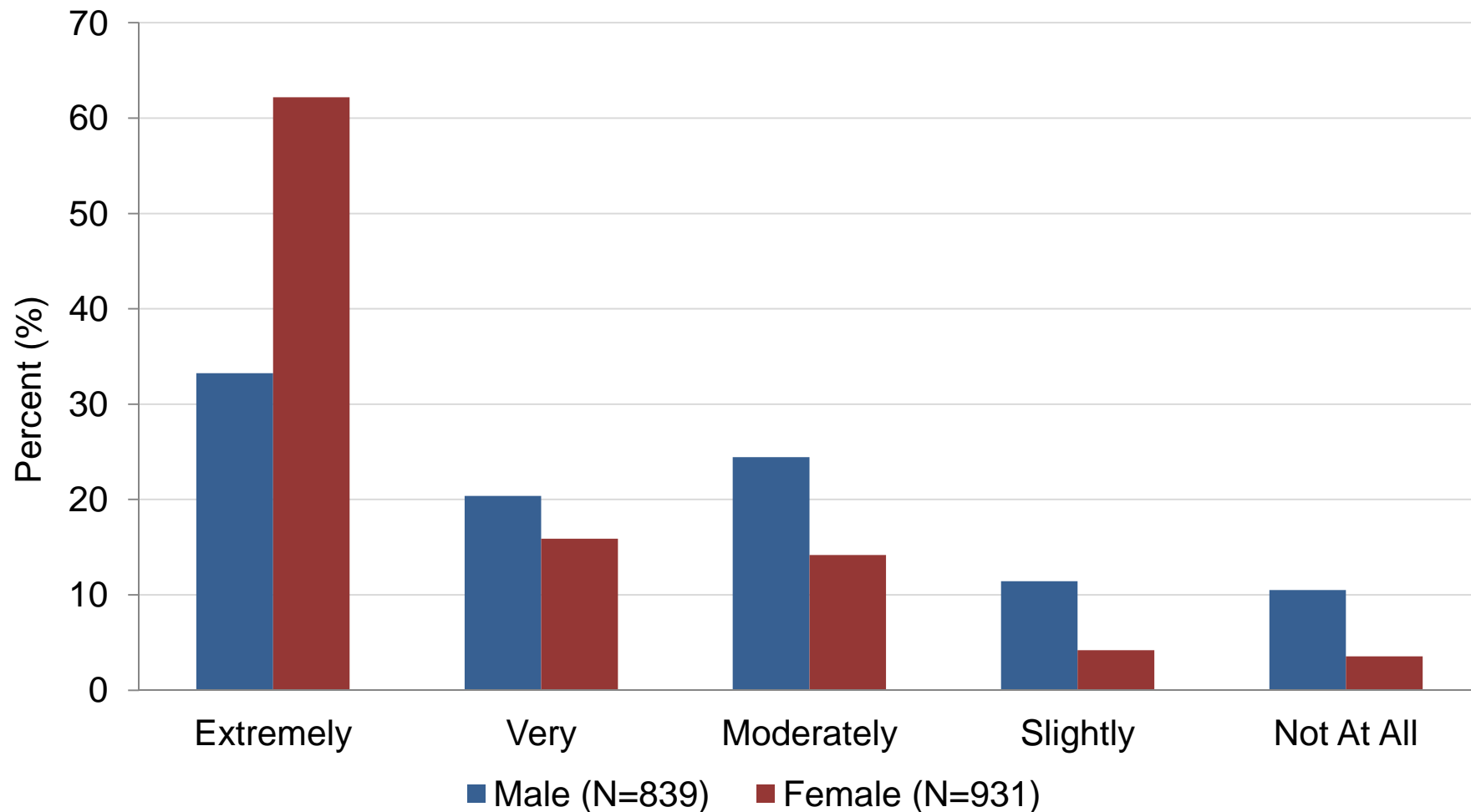
Sexual Problems (Men; Wave 1)



Select Sexual Problems Past Year Among Partnered Men Aged 57-85



“In the last 12 months, how much did this/these problems bother you?”



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Proceptivity Component

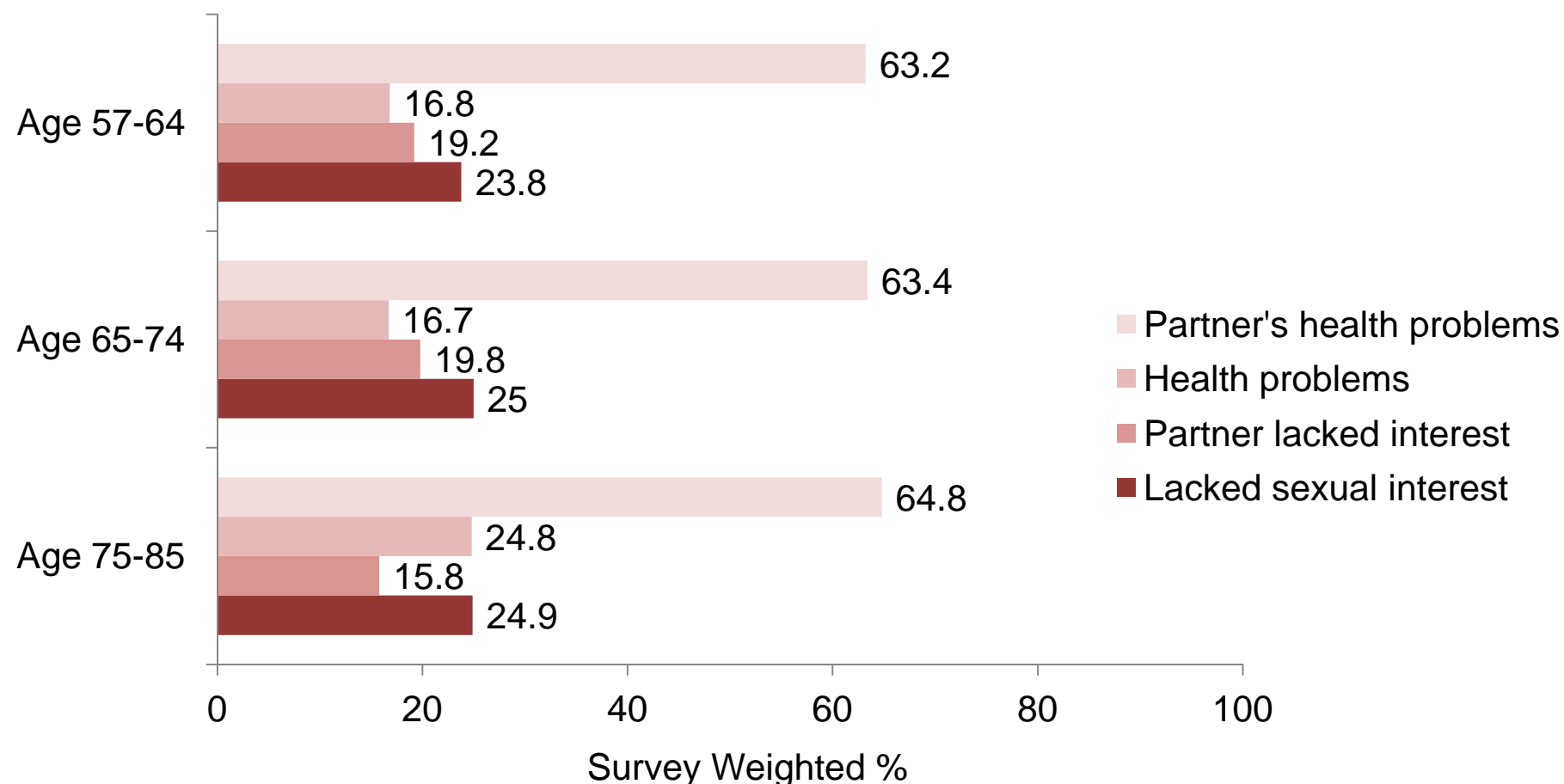


- You mentioned before that you last had sex in (month/year). What are the reasons you haven't had sexual activity since then? Choose all that apply: you are not interested; your partner is not interested; physical health problems or physical limitations you have; physical health problems or physical limitations your partner has.
- During the past 12 months, would you say that you had sex: much more often than you would like, somewhat more often than you would like, about as often than you would like, less often than you would like, much less often than you would like?
- For some people sex is a very important part of their lives and for others it is not very important at all. How important a part of your life would you say that sex is?

Reasons for No Sex (Partnered Women; Wave 1)



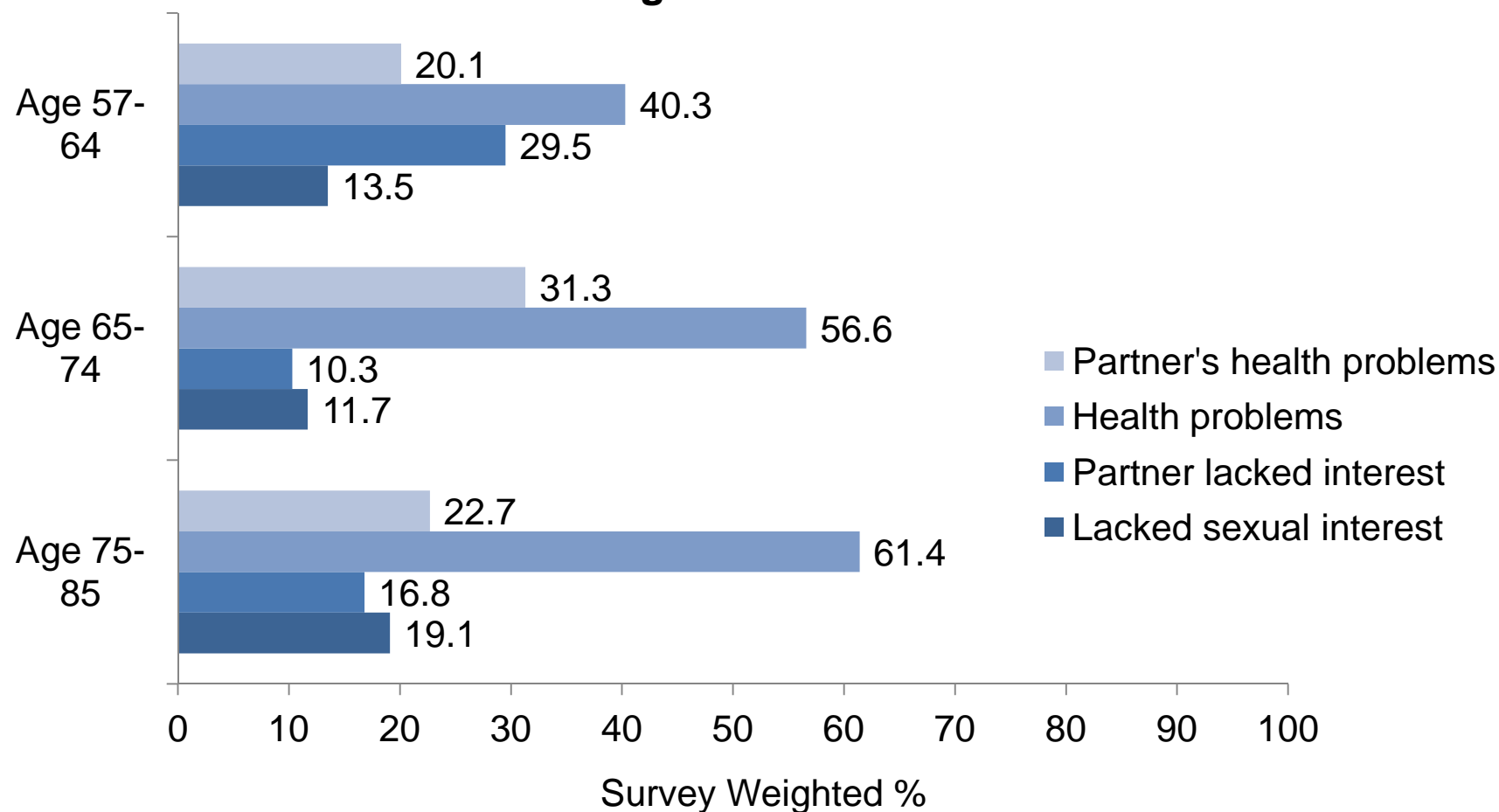
Major Reasons for Sexual Inactivity (Past 3 Months) Among Partnered Women



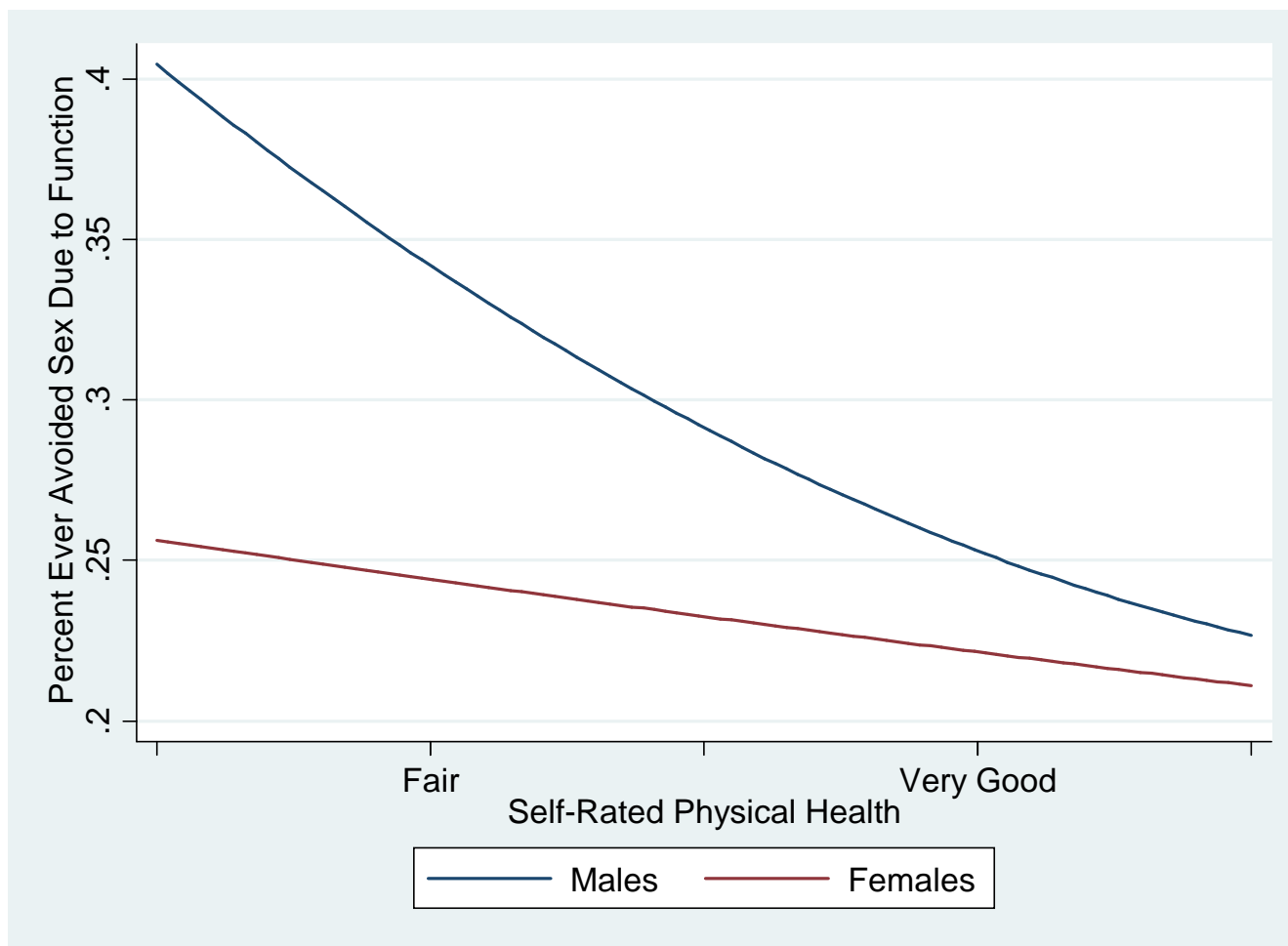
Reasons for No Sex (Partnered Men; Wave 1)



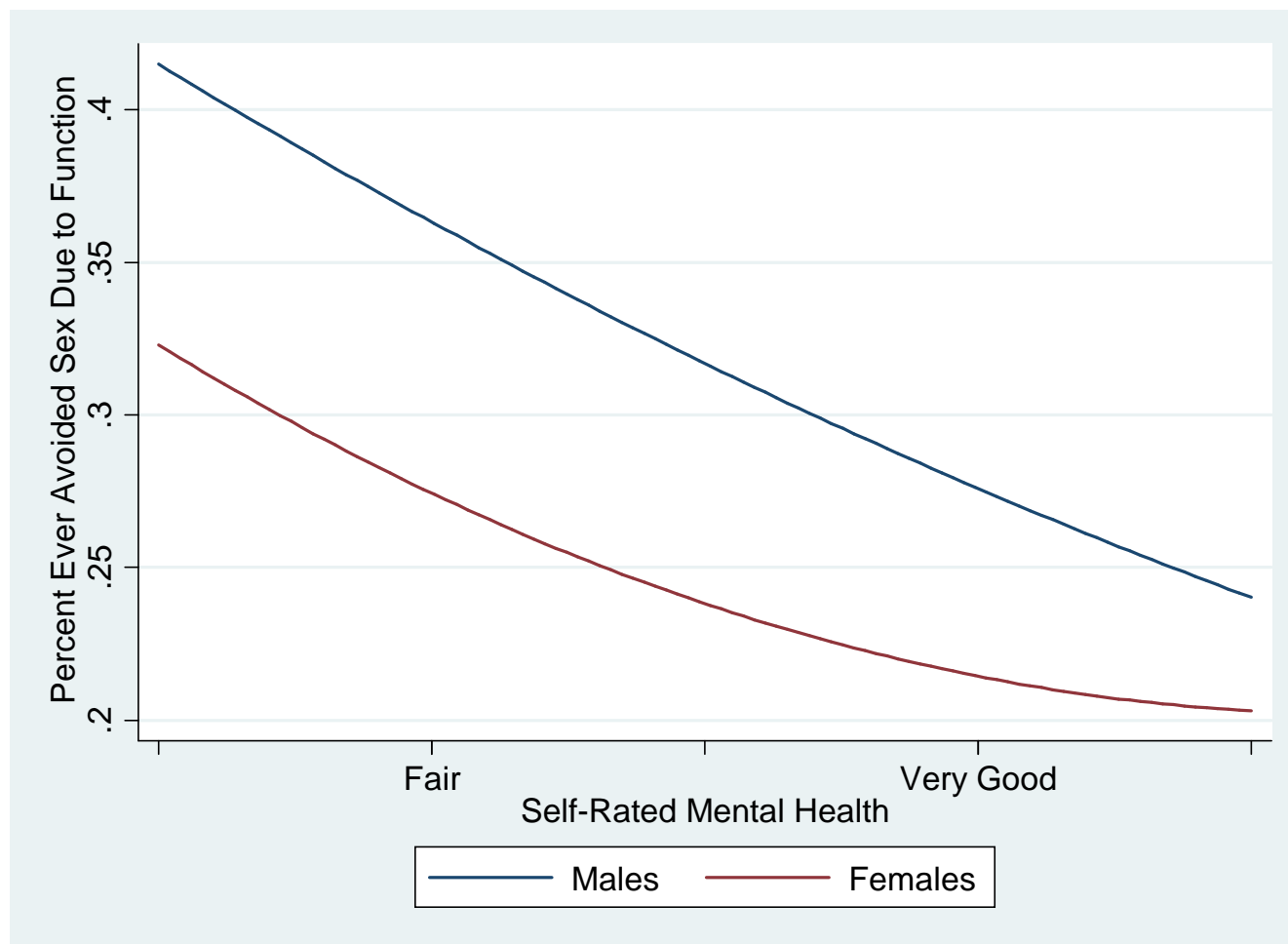
**Major Reasons for Sexual Inactivity (Past 3 Months)
Among Partnered Men**



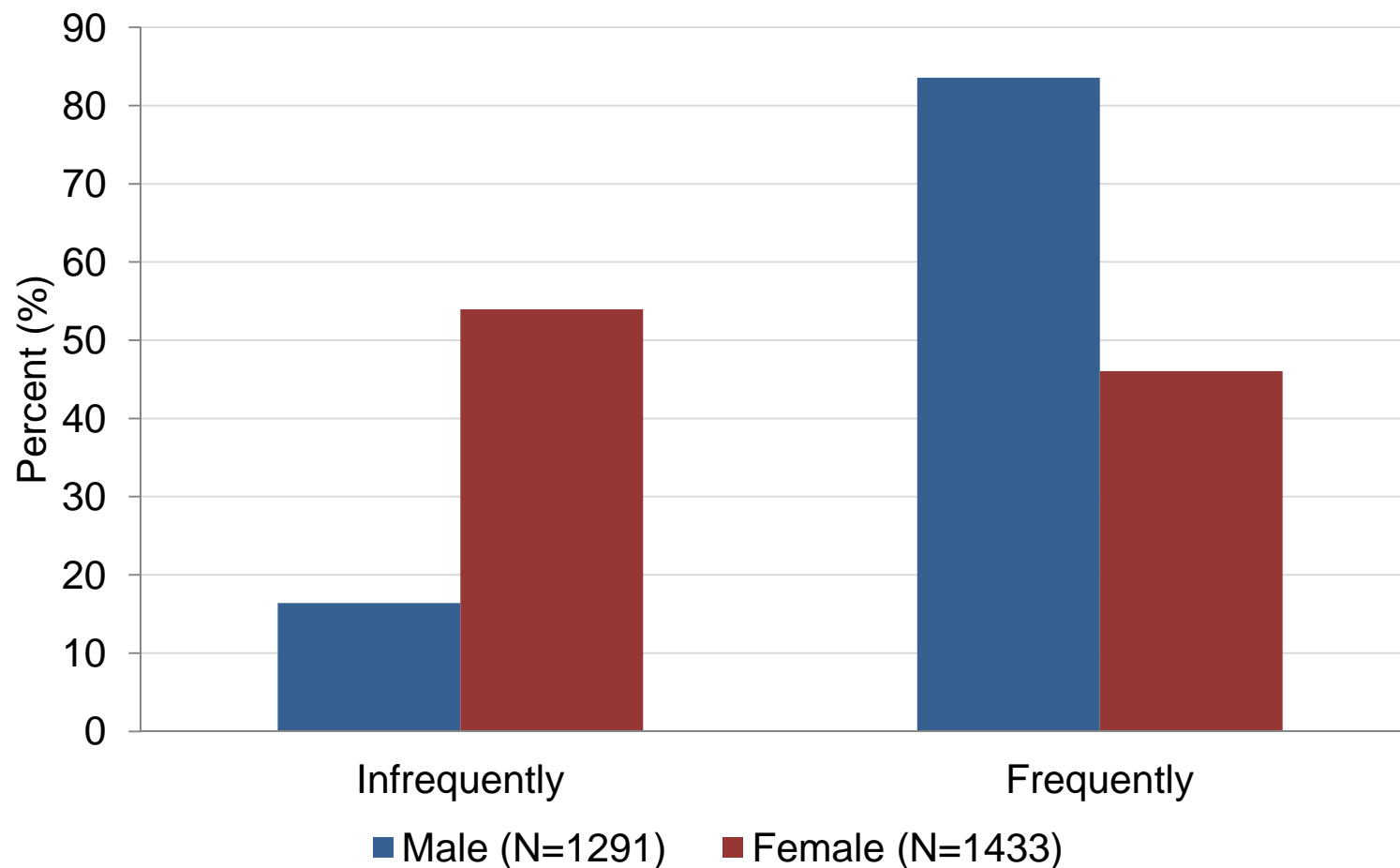
“In the last 12 months, have you ever avoided sex because of the problem(s) you mentioned?”



“During the past 12 months, have you ever avoided sex because of the problem(s) you mentioned?”



“How often do you think about sex?”



Neurobiological Perspective on Sexual Interest and Motivation



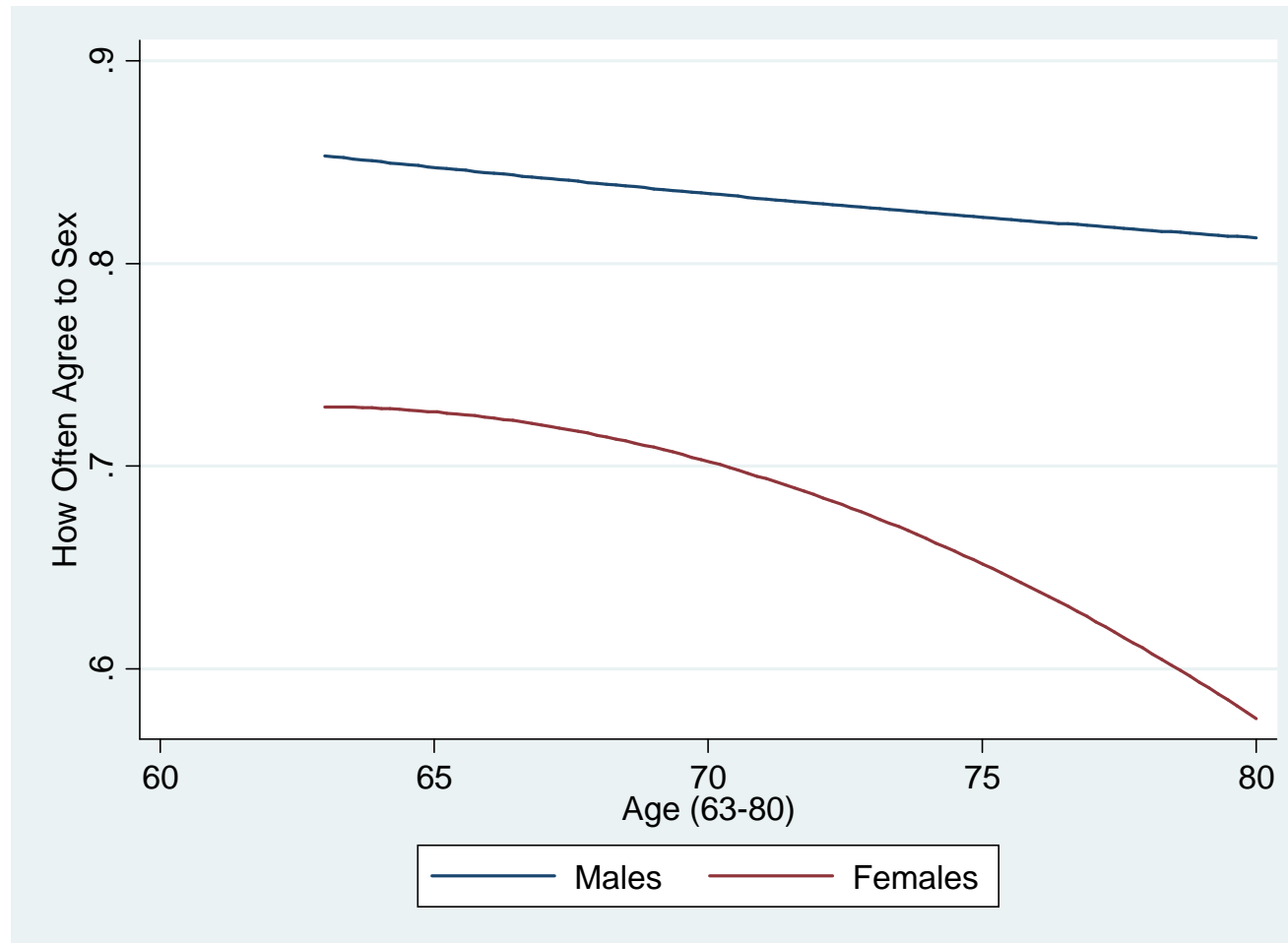
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Receptivity Component

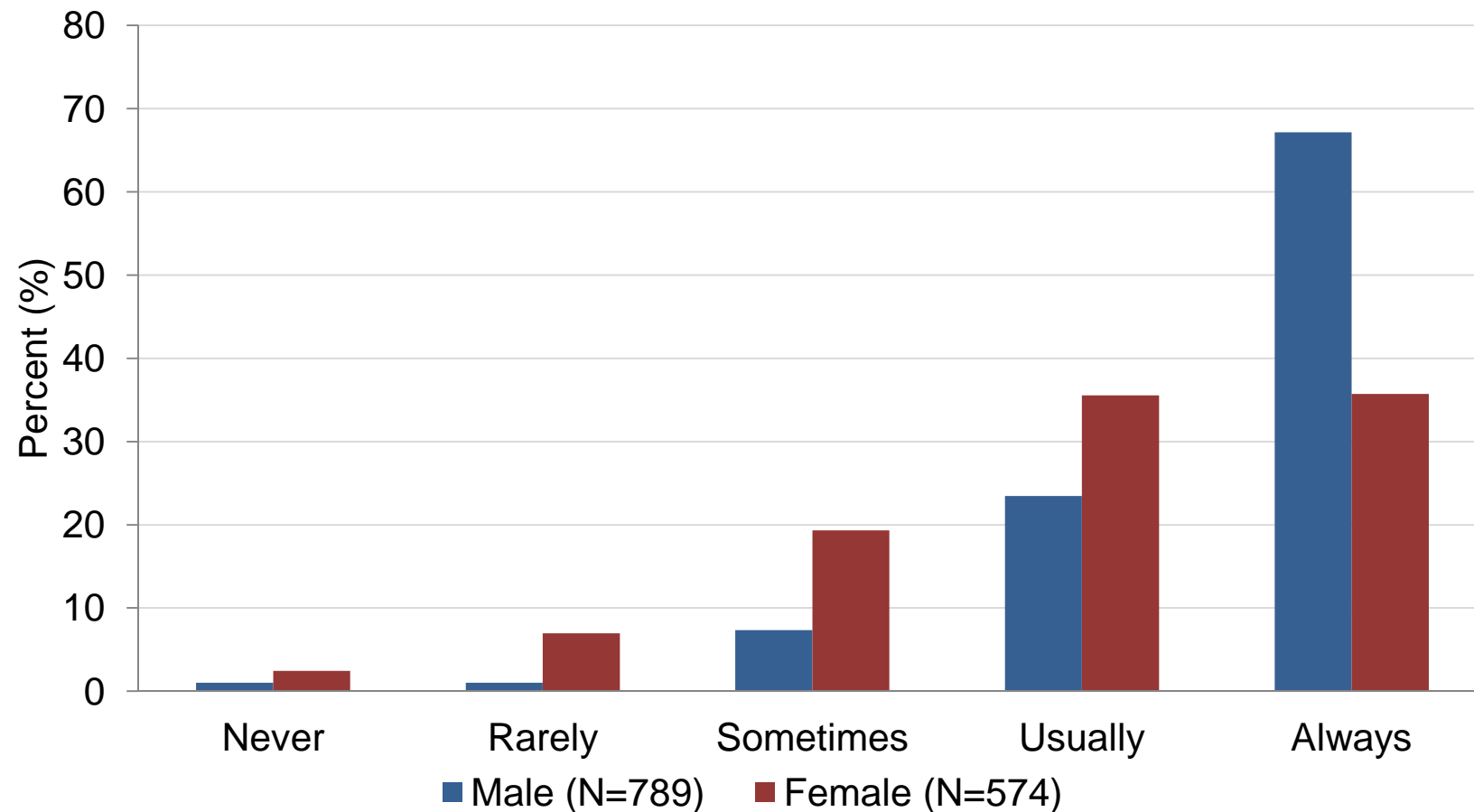


- In the past 12 months, how often did you have sex primarily because you felt obligated or that it was your duty?
- When your partner wants to have sex with you, how often do you agree? Always, usually, sometimes, rarely, or never?
- In the last 12 months, how often did you feel sexually aroused, that is “turned on,” during sexual activity with your current partner?

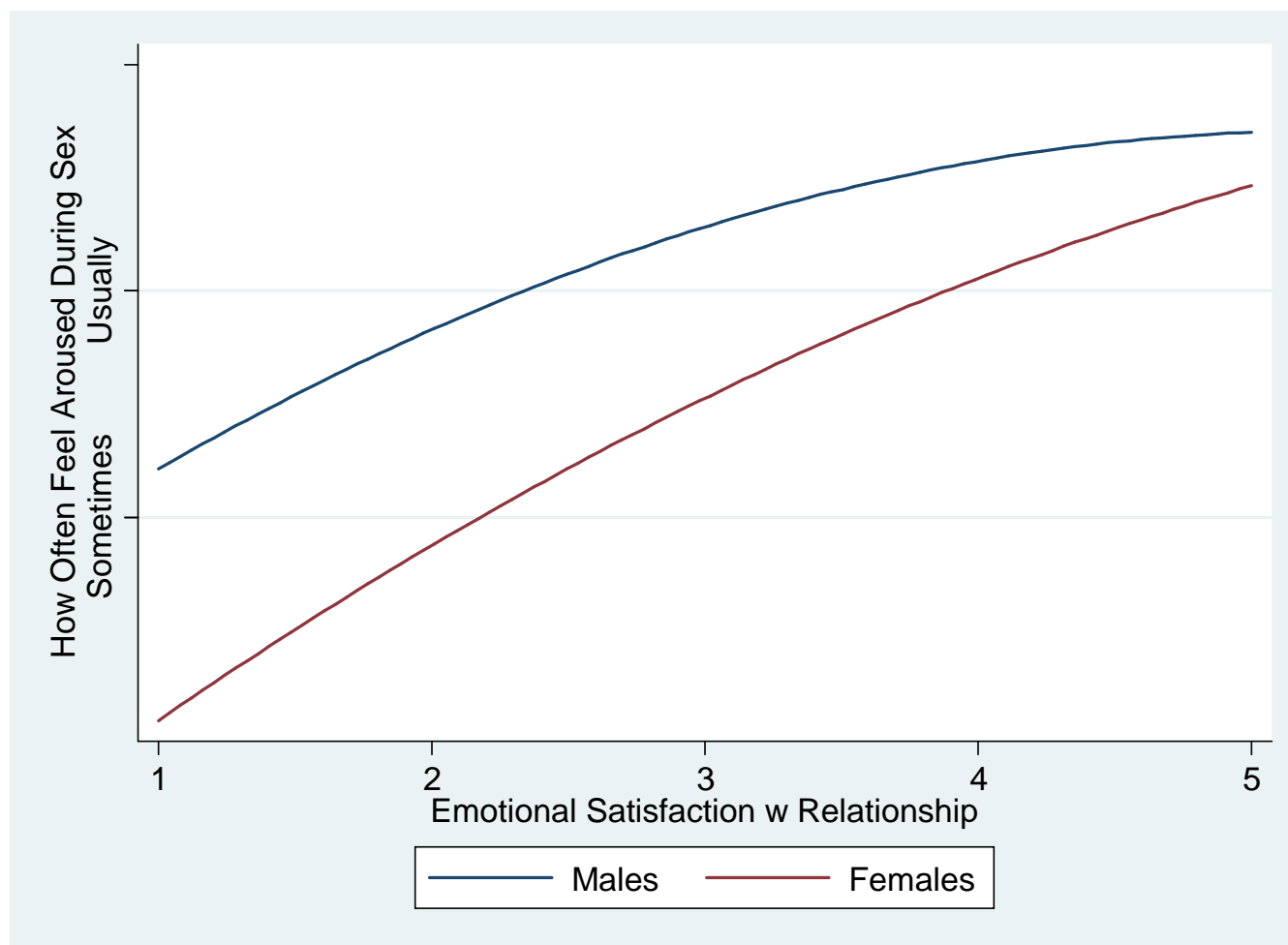
“When your partner wants to have sex with you, how often do you agree?”



“In the last 12 months, how often did you feel sexually aroused during sex?”



Emotional Satisfaction and Arousal



Neurobiological Perspective on Sexual Interest and Motivation



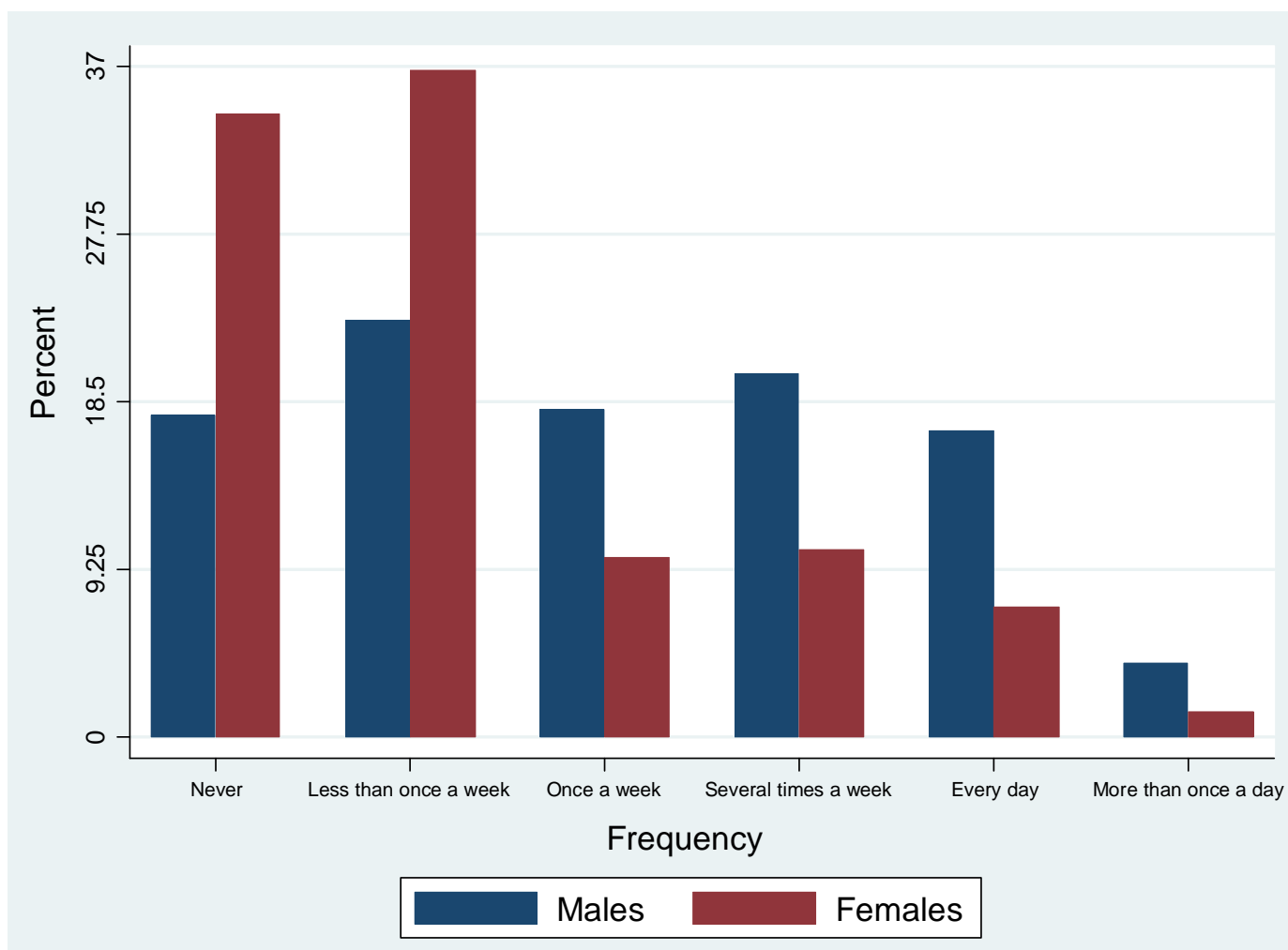
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Valence Component



- How often do you find someone you don't know such as people in movies, television, books, or strangers on the street physically attractive? More than once a day, every day, several times a week, once a week, less than once a week, or never?
- For some people, their sexual enjoyment is affected by non-sexual things that their partner does before having sex, such as helping out, compliments or sharing activities...For you, how important is such a behavior to your enjoyment of sex? Extremely important, very important, moderately important, somewhat important, or not at all important?

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Neurobiological Perspective on Sexual Interest and Motivation



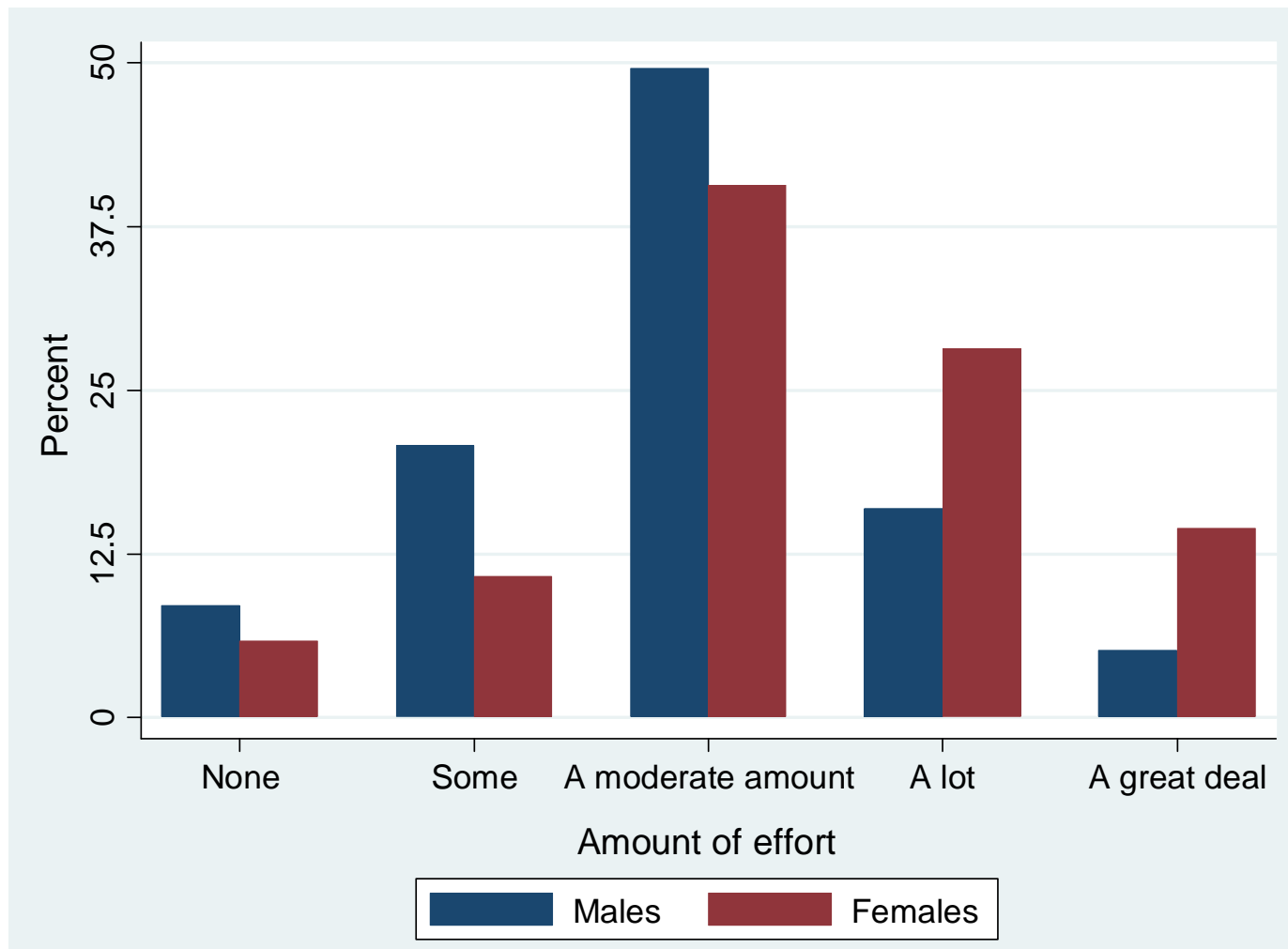
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Attraction Component

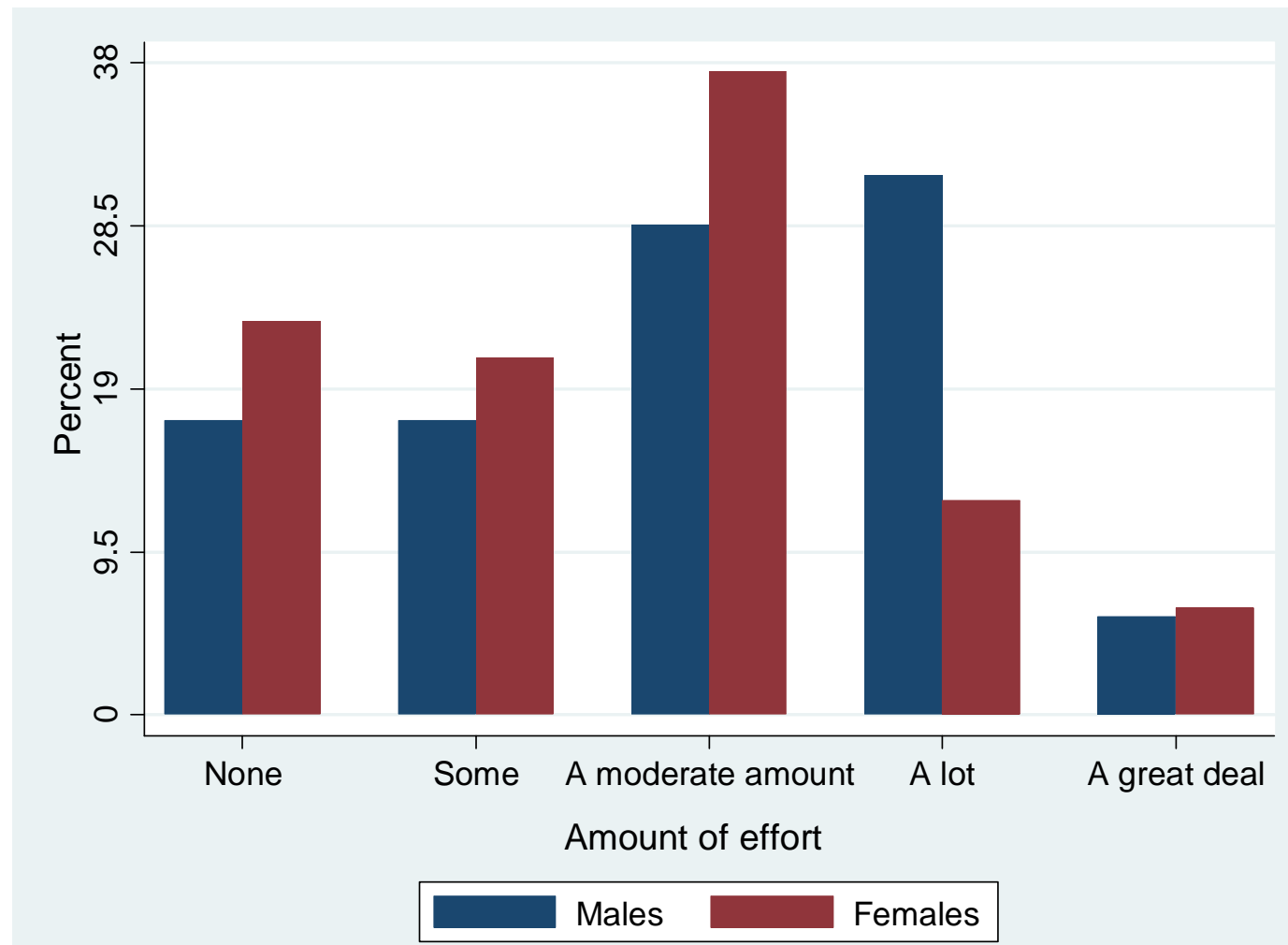


- In the past month, how much effort have you made to make yourself look attractive for your partner? A great deal of effort, a lot of effort, a moderate amount of effort, some effort, or no effort?
- In the past month, how much effort have you made to make yourself look attractive for someone you find attractive? A great deal of effort, a lot of effort, a moderate amount of effort, some effort, or no effort?

“How much effort have you made to make yourself look attractive for your partner?”



“How much effort have you made to make yourself look attractive for others?”

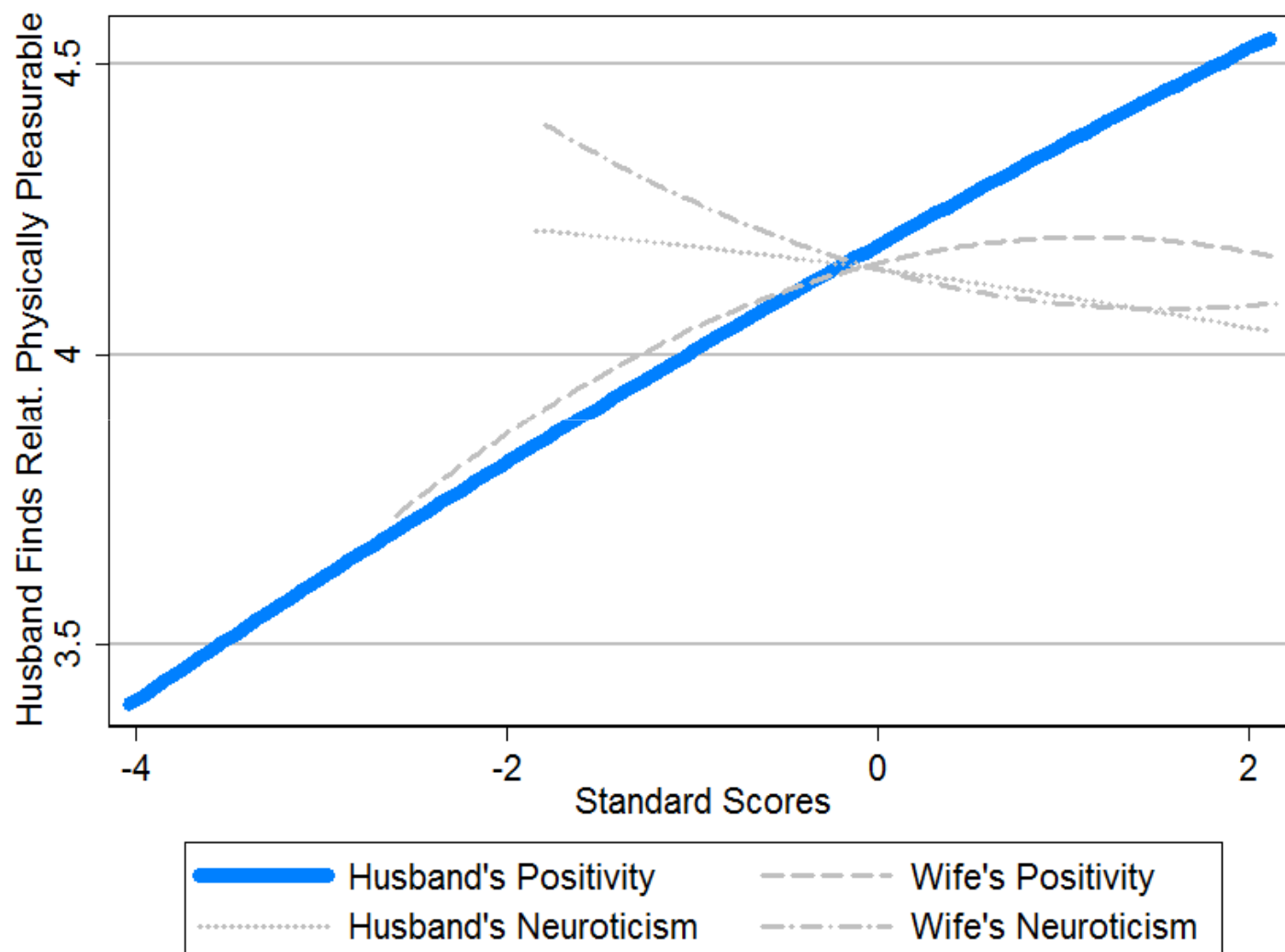


Studying Sexuality in Couples

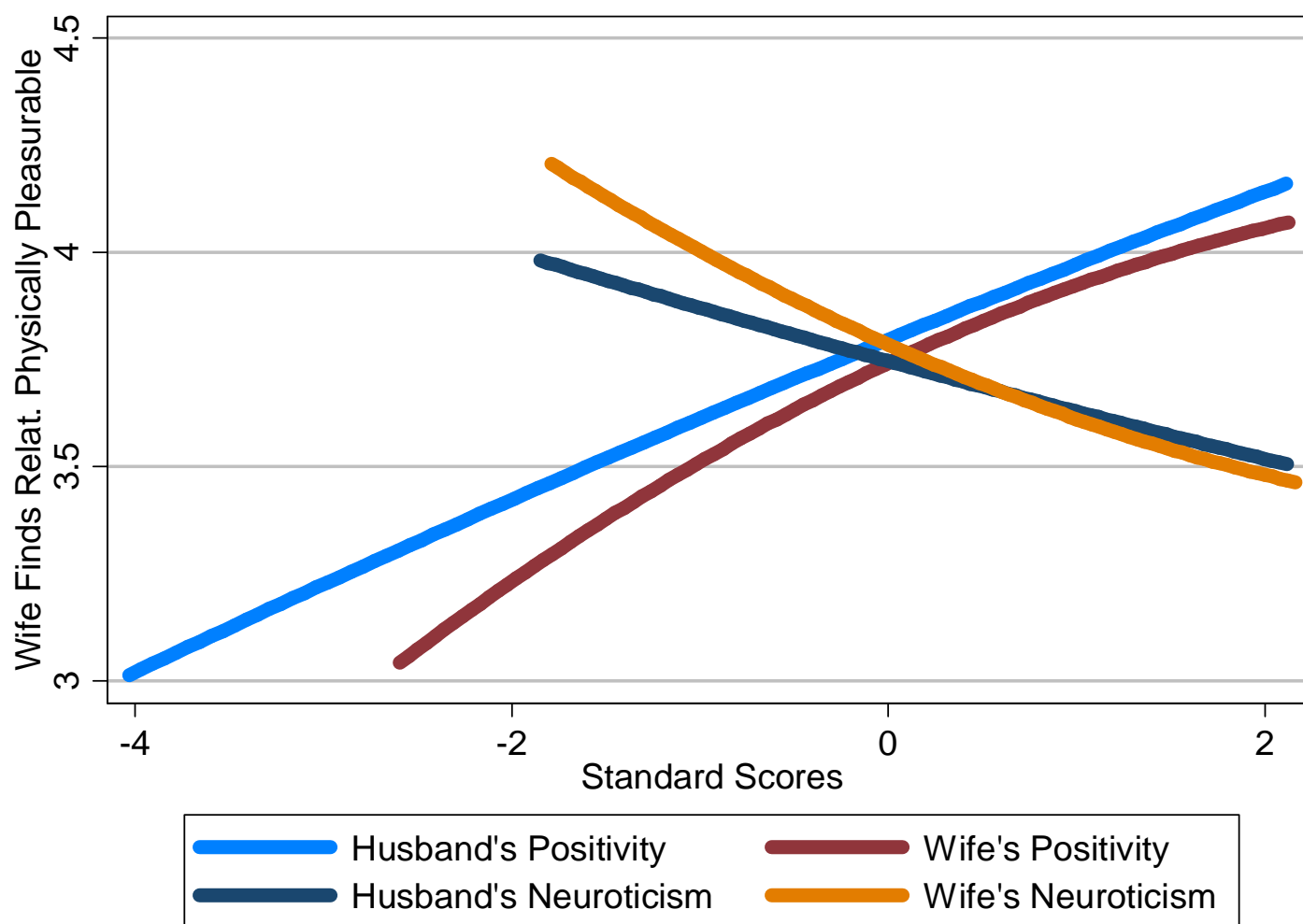


- **NSHAP Wave 2 interviewed husbands and their wives**
- **This provides a view from *each* partner**
- **Characteristics of individuals *from* them**
- **Characteristics of the partnership from each**

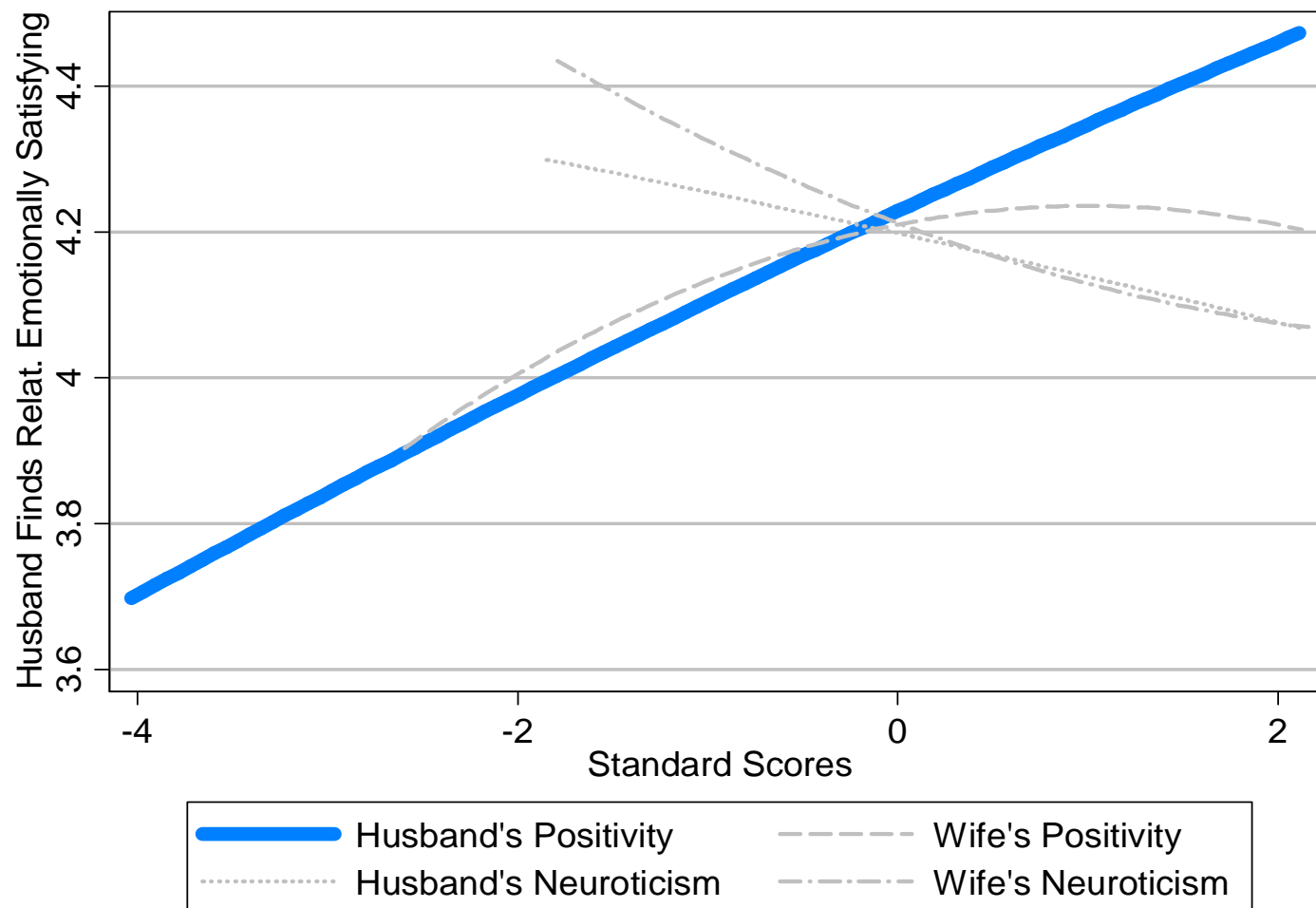
Husband's Report of Physical Pleasure



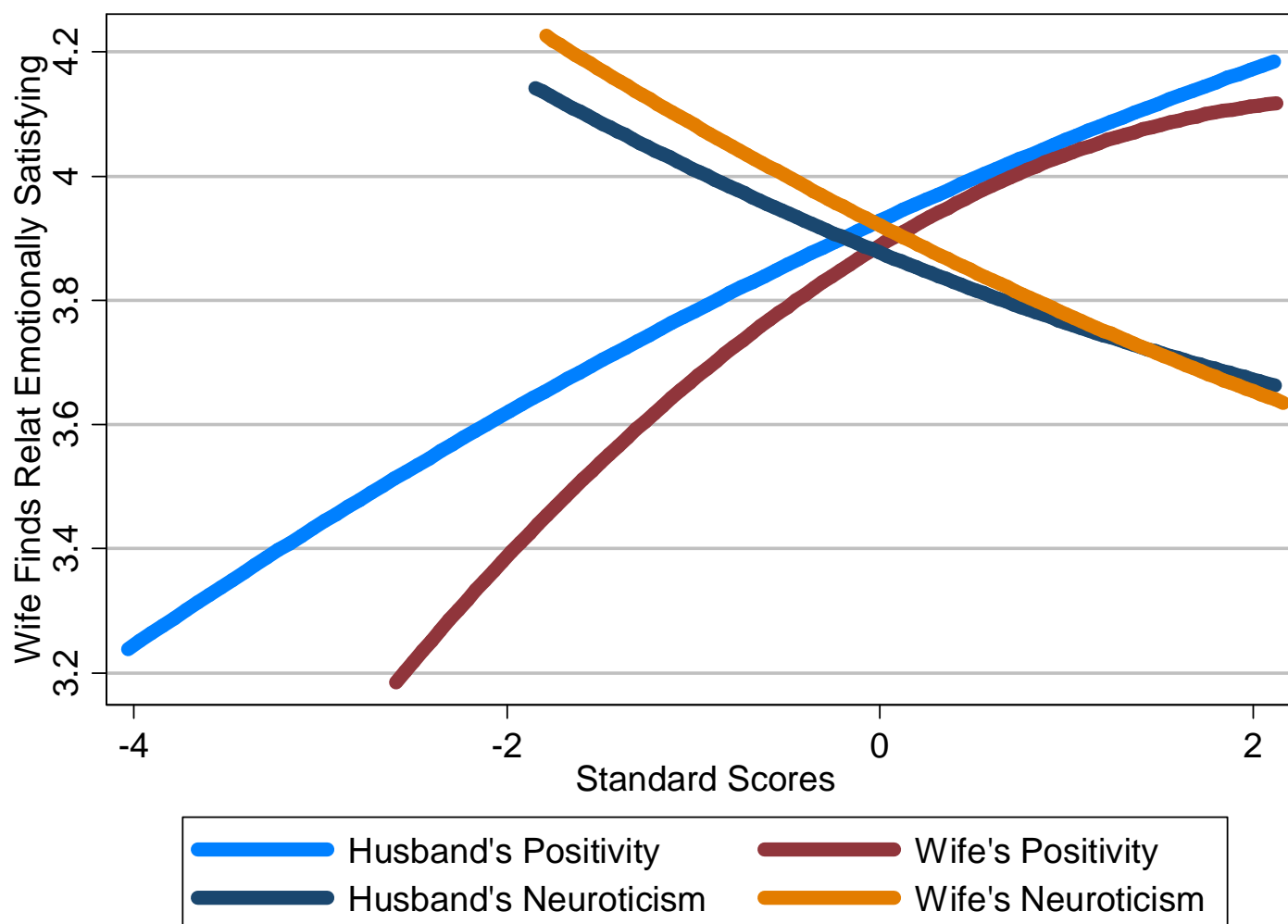
Wife's Report of Physical Pleasure



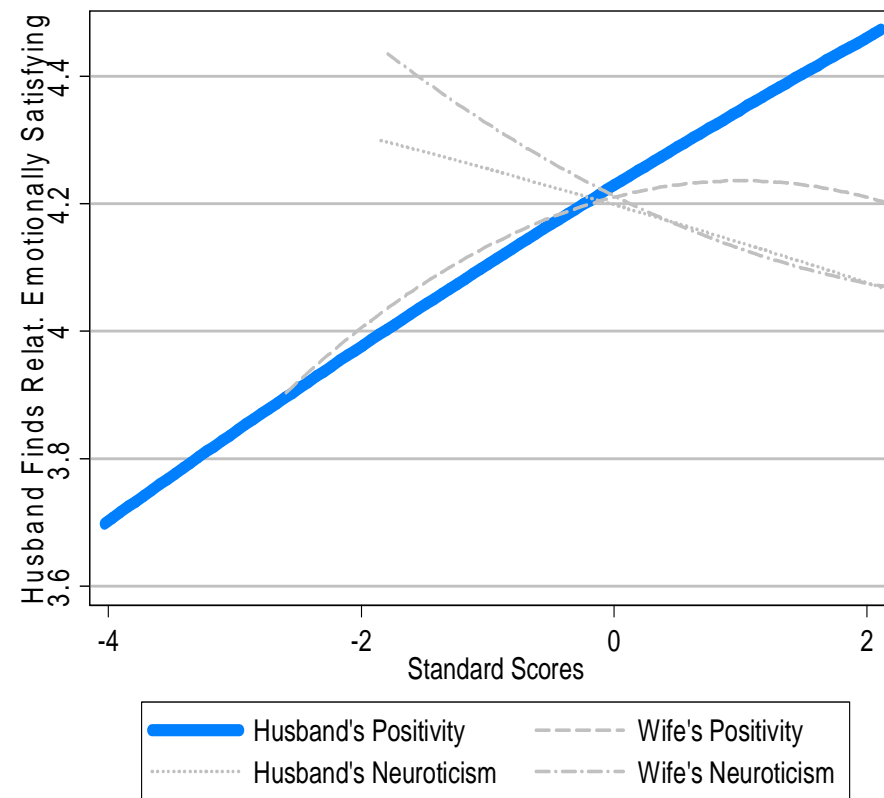
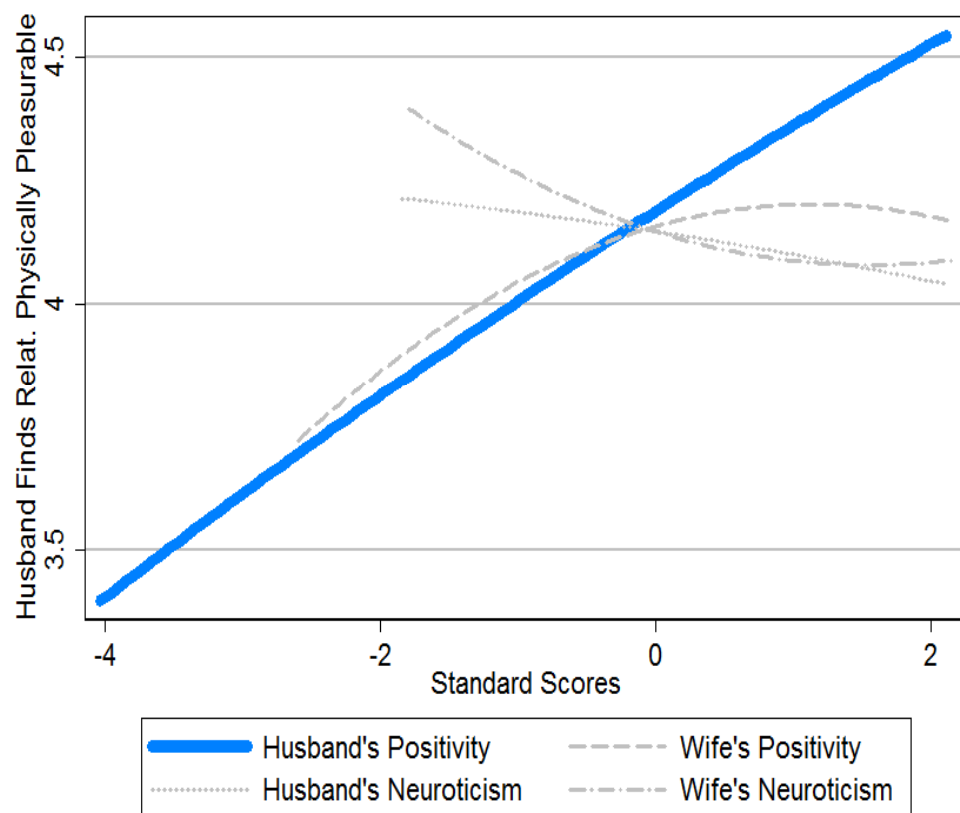
Husband's Emotional Satisfaction



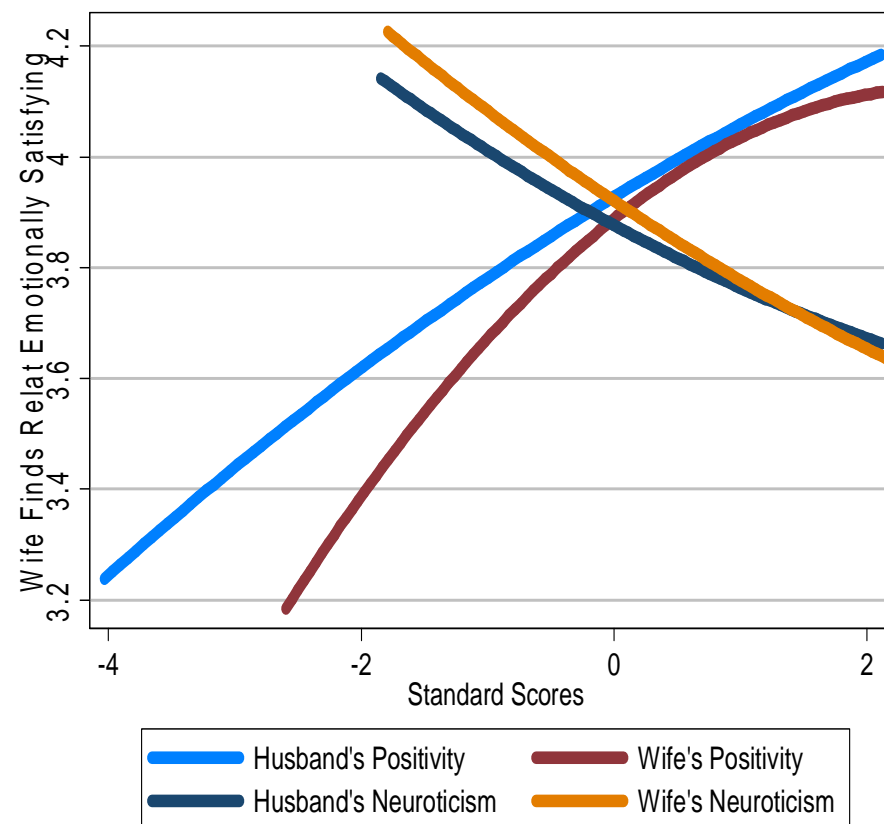
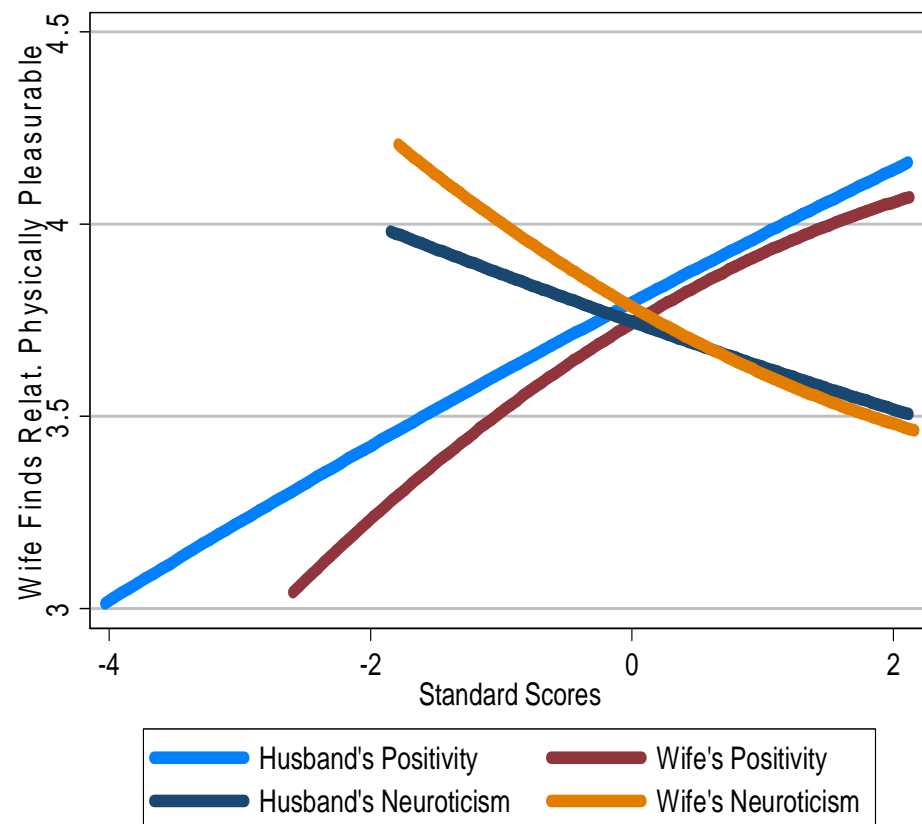
Wife's Emotional Satisfaction



Husband's Physical & Emotional



Wife's Physical & Emotional



Sexuality Over the Life Course



- **Story of decline**
 - Loss of partner
 - Loss of health
 - Loss of sexual activity
- **Different for men and women**
 - More men are partnered
 - More men are active
 - More men are interested
- **Most couples remain sexually active**
 - Health matters (physical & mental)
 - Relationship matters

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- NSHAP is directed by: Linda Waite (Principal Investigator), Kathleen Cagney, Benjamin Cornwell, William Dale, Elbert Huang, Edward Laumann, Martha McClintock, Colm O'Muircheartaigh, Phil Schumm.
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