



The relationship between anxiety and treatment-seeking behavior among those with drug abuse problems

Amit Piryatinsky, Applied Data Analysis, Wesleyan University



Introduction

- As some drug use becomes more normalized, more and more people gain access to marijuana, alcohol and other addictive substances, with over 10% of youth aged 12-17 and over 18% of adults reporting using marijuana (NCDAS 2020).
- It has been shown that there is a strong association between substance use disorders and anxiety disorders, with over 20% of individuals with social anxiety also suffering from a substance use disorder. (Brady et al. 2013)
- Additionally, Gender has been shown to be associated with one's likelihood of seeking substance abuse treatment services (C. A. Green 2006)

Research Questions

- Are people who have drug abuse or dependency issue more or less likely to seek treatment if they have anxiety?
- Does this relationship differ between genders?
- Does this relationship differ for those with without anxiety?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=15238) were drawn from the U.S. National Epidemiological Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions, a nationally representative sample of non-institutionalized adults in the U.S.

Measures

- A lifetime incidence of substance abuse or was put together through NESARC's diagnosis of abuse or dependence during the last 12 months and prior to the last 12 months using the DSM-IV for all possible types of drugs. The question asked was some form of "(Drug) Abuse/Dependence in/prior to the last 12 months?"
- A lifetime incidence of anxiety was measured with through NESARCS' own DSM-IV diagnosis of general anxiety, again putting together all indications of anxiety to get the largest possible sample.

- Seeking help was measured with the question "Ever sought help because of medicine or drug use?"

Results

Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that Anxiety was significantly associated with treatment seeking ($p = 4.941e-12$).
- There was a much greater variation in treatment seeking rates among those with anxiety than those without
- Those with anxiety are two times more likely to seek treatment than those without ($OR = 2.116$ $p=8.06e-12$) (Fig. 1.)

Multivariate

- Logistic regression analyses showed that males were not significantly more likely than females to seek treatment whether they had anxiety or not ($OR = 1.106$, $p = 0.236$).
- Gender also doesn't significantly moderate the relationship between anxiety and treatment seeking ($OR = 1.24$, $p=0.332$) (Fig. 2).

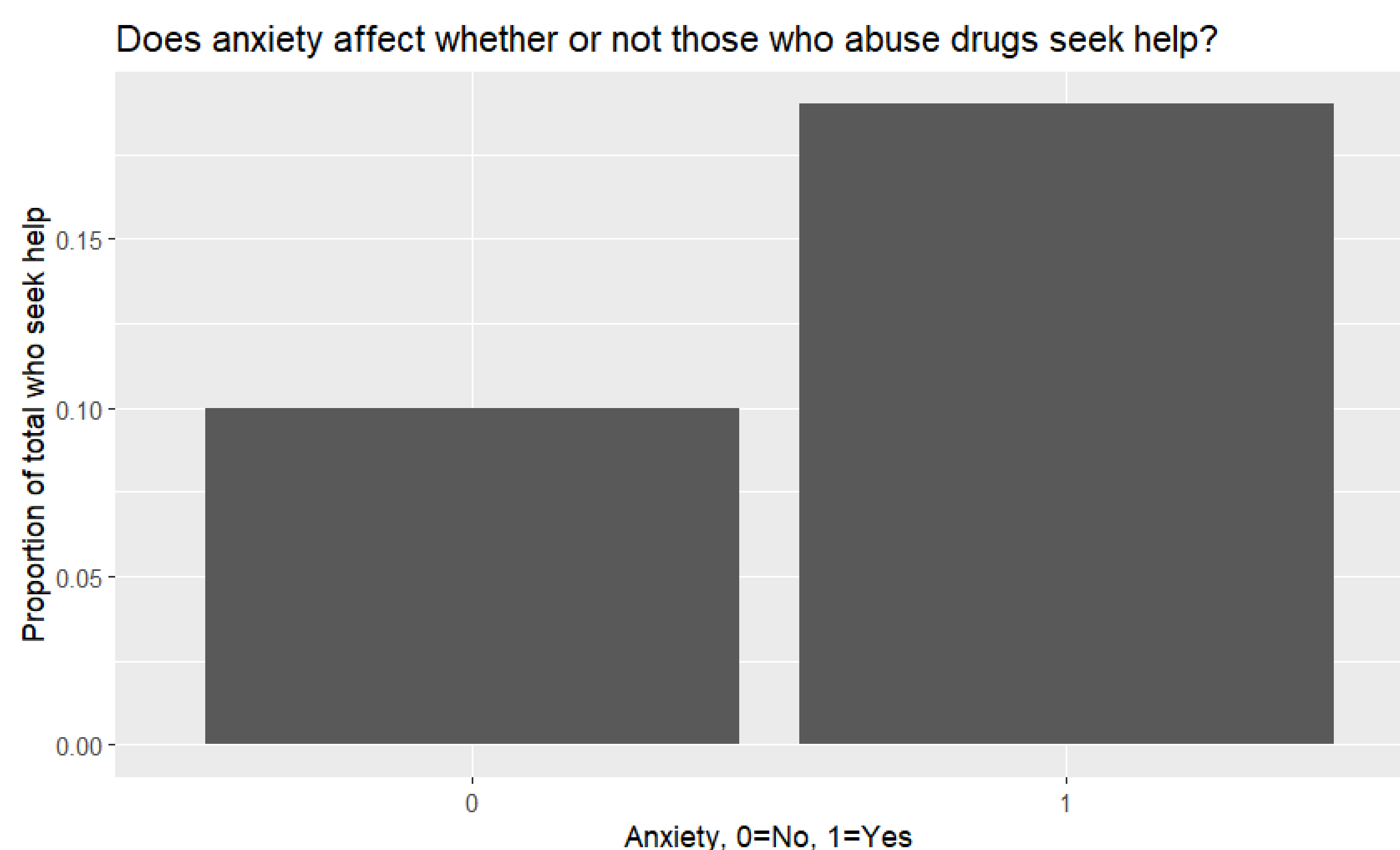


Figure 1: The Proportion of those who seek treatment among those with and without anxiety.

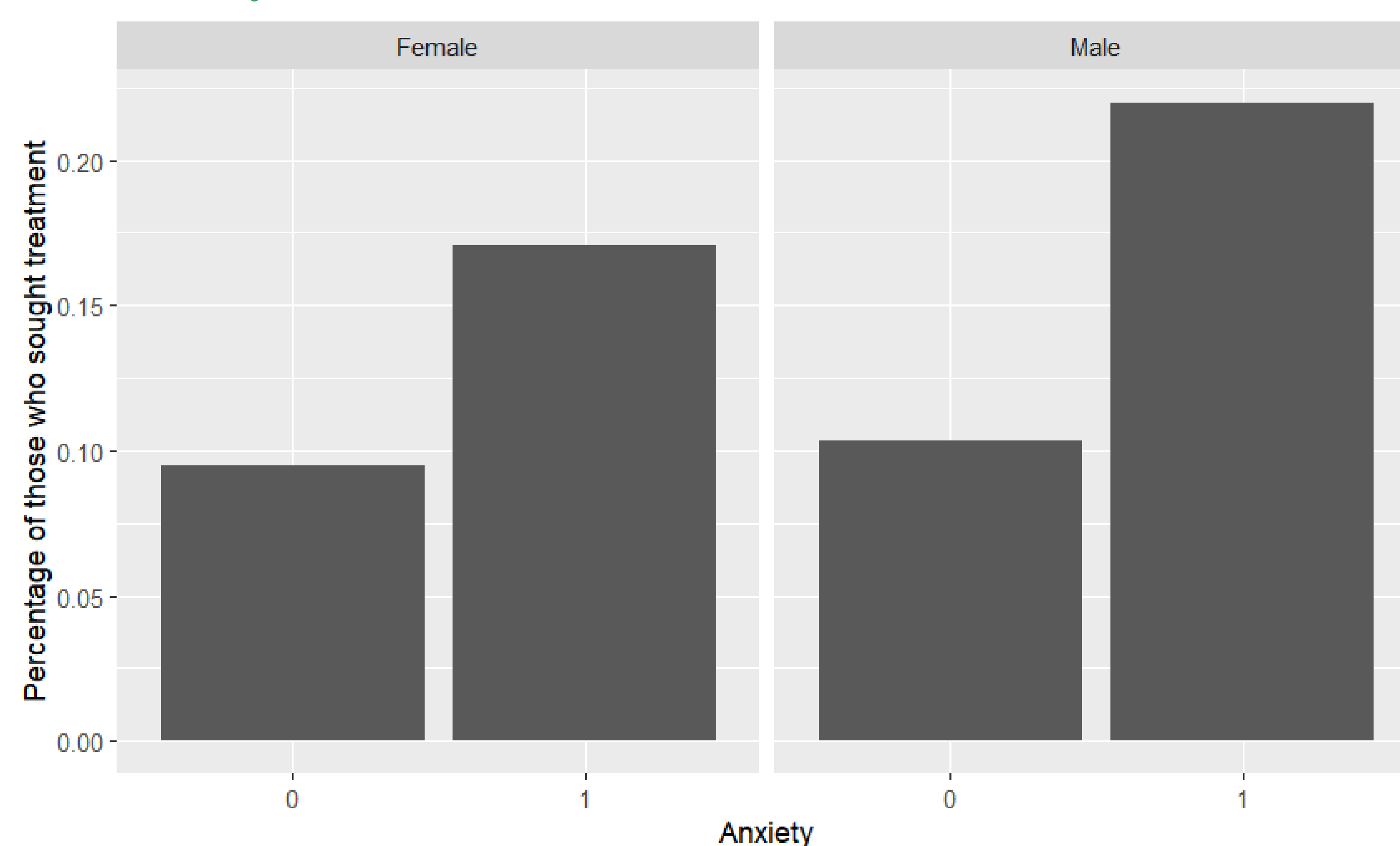


Figure 2: The proportion of those who seek treatment among those with and without anxiety, controlling for gender.

Discussion

- Those with anxiety seek treatment at greater rates than those without. This goes against my initial hypothesis.
- Men seeking treatment more than women, although not significant, does fall in line with what the literature suggests
- Future research is needed to determine whether anxiety and seeking treatment are correlated, as confounding factors could be affecting both. One idea could be that those with anxiety already have support systems in place.

References

- National Epidemiologic Survey on Alcohol and Related Conditions-III (NESARC-III). <https://www.niaaa.nih.gov/research/nesarc-iii>
- Drug Abuse Statistics. (2020). National Center for Drug Abuse Statistics. <https://drugabusestatistics.org/>
- Substance Use and Co-Occurring Mental Disorders. (2023). National Institute of Medical Health. <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/topics/substance-use-and-mental-health>
- Brady, K. T., Haynes, L. F., Hartwell, K. J., & Killeen, T. K. (2013). Substance use disorders and anxiety: a treatment challenge for social workers. *Soc Work Public Health*, 28(3-4), 407-423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19371918.2013.774675>
- Green, C. A. (2006). Gender and use of substance abuse treatment services. *Alcohol Res Health*, 29(1), 55-62.
- Muela, A. T., Martín-López, M., & Navarro, J. F. (2012). P.6.d.003 Ethological evaluation of the effects of MDEA, a recreational drug similar to MDMA, on anxiety in the elevated maze in mice. *European neuropsychopharmacology*, 22, S406-S407. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0924-977X\(12\)70635-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0924-977X(12)70635-1)