



# The Association Between Parental Satisfaction in Childhood and Anxiety Diagnoses in Adulthood



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## Introduction

- Parental support can boost academic performance and is associated with higher college grade-point averages and higher self esteem (Cutrona et. al, 1994, Moneva and Malbas, 2020).
- These positive outcomes are associated with lower levels of anxiety later in life (Cutrona et. al, 1994, Lee et. al 2015).
- Overprotection and too much investment in academics can result in negative academic performance, increased mental health disorders, and reduced self-esteem (Cheng et. al 2009; Kullberg et. al 2020; Murayama et. al 2015).
- It is unclear how a child's perception of their relationship with their parents affects this association.

## Research Questions

- Are children who are satisfied with their relationships with their parents less likely to be diagnosed with anxiety in adulthood?
- Does this relationship differ between the gender of the parent?
- Does this relationship differ between the gender of the child?

## Methods

### Sample

- Respondents (n=2897) were drawn from the U.S. National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (AddHealth), a nationally representative sample of adolescents in the U.S.
- This survey followed them through adulthood, with the most recent one conducted in 2016-2018.

### Measures

- Anxiety Diagnoses were measured with the question "Has a doctor, nurse, or other healthcare provider ever told you that you have or had anxiety or panic disorder?" Possible responses were 0 (no) or 1 (yes).
- Measurement of satisfaction was taken from two questions: "Overall, you are satisfied with your relationship with your father," and "Overall, you are satisfied with your relationship with your mother." Responses ranged from 1 (strongly agree) to 5 (strongly disagree).
- Responses from 1 to 2 (strongly agree and agree) were classified as satisfied, the rest

classified as not satisfied. These were added to a new variable where participants could be satisfied with neither parent, only mom, only dad, or both.

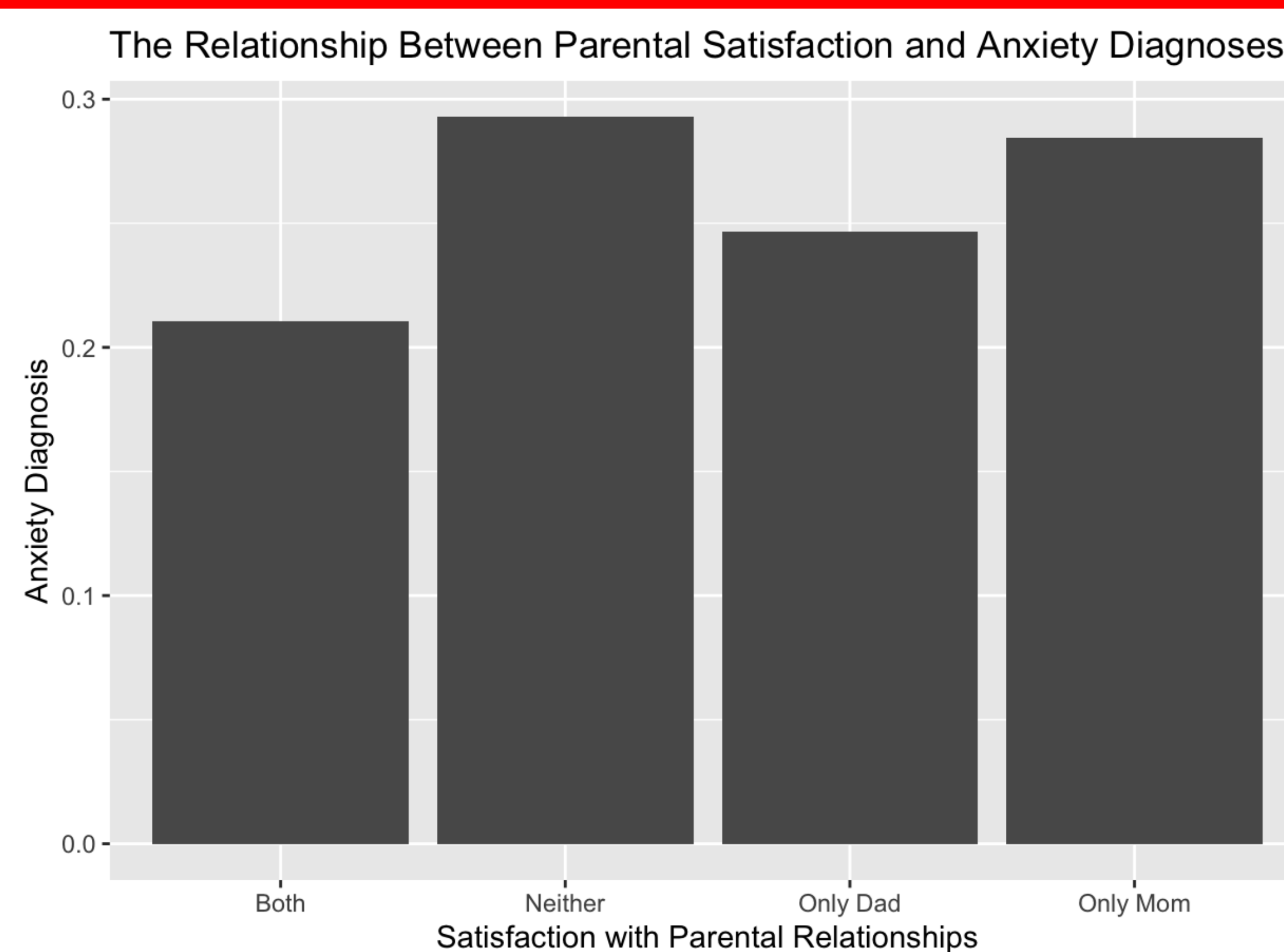
## Results

### Bivariate

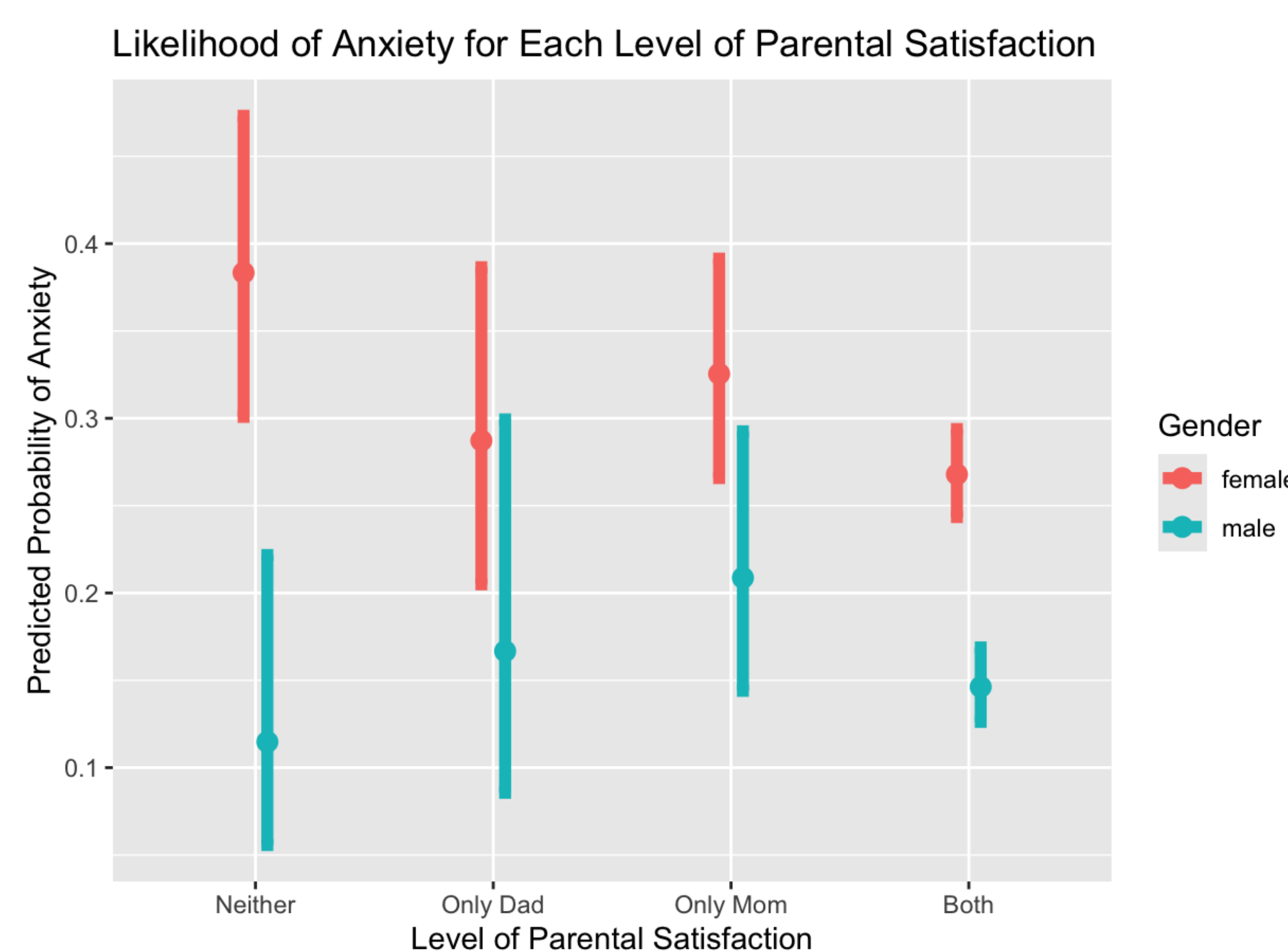
- Chi-Square analysis showed that anxiety diagnoses were significantly associated with satisfaction of parental relationships ( $p = 0.002373$ ) (Fig 1).
- Post-hoc tests revealed that the significant relationships lay in pairs with the "Both" group ( $p$  for both vs. neither = 0.0114,  $p$  for both vs. only mom = 0.0033).

### Multivariate

- Logistic regression analyses showed that the odds of having anxiety when feeling satisfied with both parents is 0.267, and this is significant ( $p < 2e-16$ ).
- For females, feeling satisfied by neither parent significantly increases the odds of having anxiety compared to both parents (OR: 1.699,  $p = 0.0077$ ) (Fig 2).
- When feeling satisfied by both parents, males have a significantly lower likelihood of having anxiety than females (OR: 0.468,  $p = 3.08e-16$ ) (Fig 2).



**Figure 1: The Proportion of Anxiety Diagnoses in Each Level of Parental Satisfaction**



**Figure 2: Likelihood of Having Anxiety by Parental Support Level Based On Gender**

## Discussion

- Feeling satisfied with both parents in childhood is associated with lower levels of anxiety in adulthood compared to feeling satisfied with neither parent or only feeling satisfied with maternal relationships.
- There is no evidence that gender affects this association; however, males are significantly less likely to have anxiety than females overall.
- Future research is needed to determine the specific role of mothers and fathers in influencing anxiety and how gender changes the strength of these relationships.

## References

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