

# The Association between Parent-Child Closeness and Birth Control Use during Adolescents' Most Recent Experience of Sexual Intercourse



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## Introduction

- School-based sexual education remains one of the most important aspects of sexual health and well-being for adolescents (Goldfarb & Lieberman, 2021). However, parents also play a vital role in their children's sexual education (Morawska et al., 2015).
- While the association between parental influence on adolescent sexual health decision making has been well established in the literature, less is known about the ways in which *parent-child closeness* may play a role in the use of birth control for adolescents.
- Most research has focused on the association between direct parent communication and instruction about sexual behavior and adolescents' engagement in sexual risk behavior, or between parental concern/confidence and direct parent communication about these topics with their child, or between direct parent communication and child sexual health knowledge, not behavior (Aspy et al., 2006; Raffaelli et al., 1998).
- Alternately, however, parental closeness, not just direct communication, may signal a greater likelihood of adolescent birth control use (i.e. adolescents who report a higher parent-child closeness may use birth control more than those who feel less close to their parents).

## Methods

### Sample

- Adolescents (grades 7 to 12) who reported having both a mother and father and who have had sexual intercourse recently (n=2533) were drawn from the first wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Add Health).

### Measures

- Parent-child closeness was reported by adolescents and measured on a scale from 1-5 as a composite variable of the mean of a series of four variables related to mother-child closeness/care and father-child closeness/care.
- Adolescent birth control use was reported as "yes" or "no" with the question, "Did you or your partner use any method of birth control when you had sexual intercourse most recently?".
- Parental approval of their child having sexual intercourse was measured on a scale from 1-5 in response to the prompt to rate their agreement with the statement: "You disapprove of {NAME}'s having sexual intercourse at this time in (his/her) life."
- Sex assigned at birth was measured as "Female" or "Male."

## Research Questions

- What is the relationship between parent-child closeness and adolescent birth control use?
- Does the association between parent-child closeness and adolescent birth control use differ by sex assigned at birth?
- How does the relationship between parent-child closeness and adolescent birth control use differ when accounting for parent approval of sexual intercourse?

## Results

### Univariate

- 6,504 adolescents reported having both a mother and father and rated their closeness to them on a scale from 1-5, with 5 being the closest.
- Of this group, 39% of adolescents reported having sexual intercourse recently (n=2533).

### Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that those with higher reported parent-child closeness scores used birth control more than those with lower parent-child closeness scores,  $\chi^2=32.781$ , 15 df,  $p=0.005$ .
- Based on logistic regression, with every increase of 1 point on the parent-child closeness score, adolescents were more likely to use birth control by a factor of 1.16 during their most recent sexual intercourse (Figure 1).

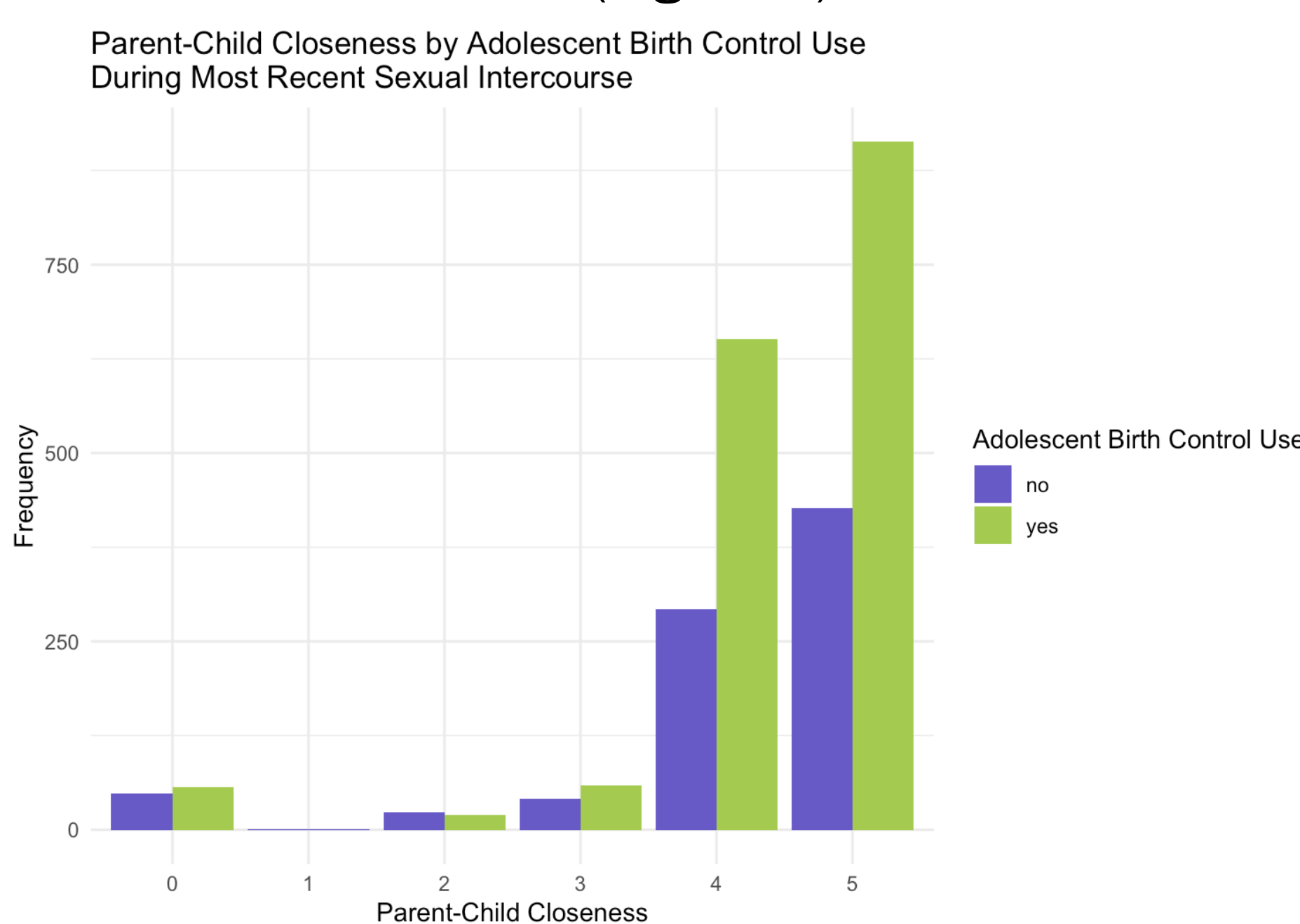


Figure 1. Parent-Child Closeness by Adolescent Birth Control Use During Most Recent Sexual Intercourse

### Multivariate

- Based on logistic regression, the interaction between sex assigned at birth and parent-child closeness was not found to be significantly associated with adolescent birth control use during their most recent sexual intercourse (Figure 2).

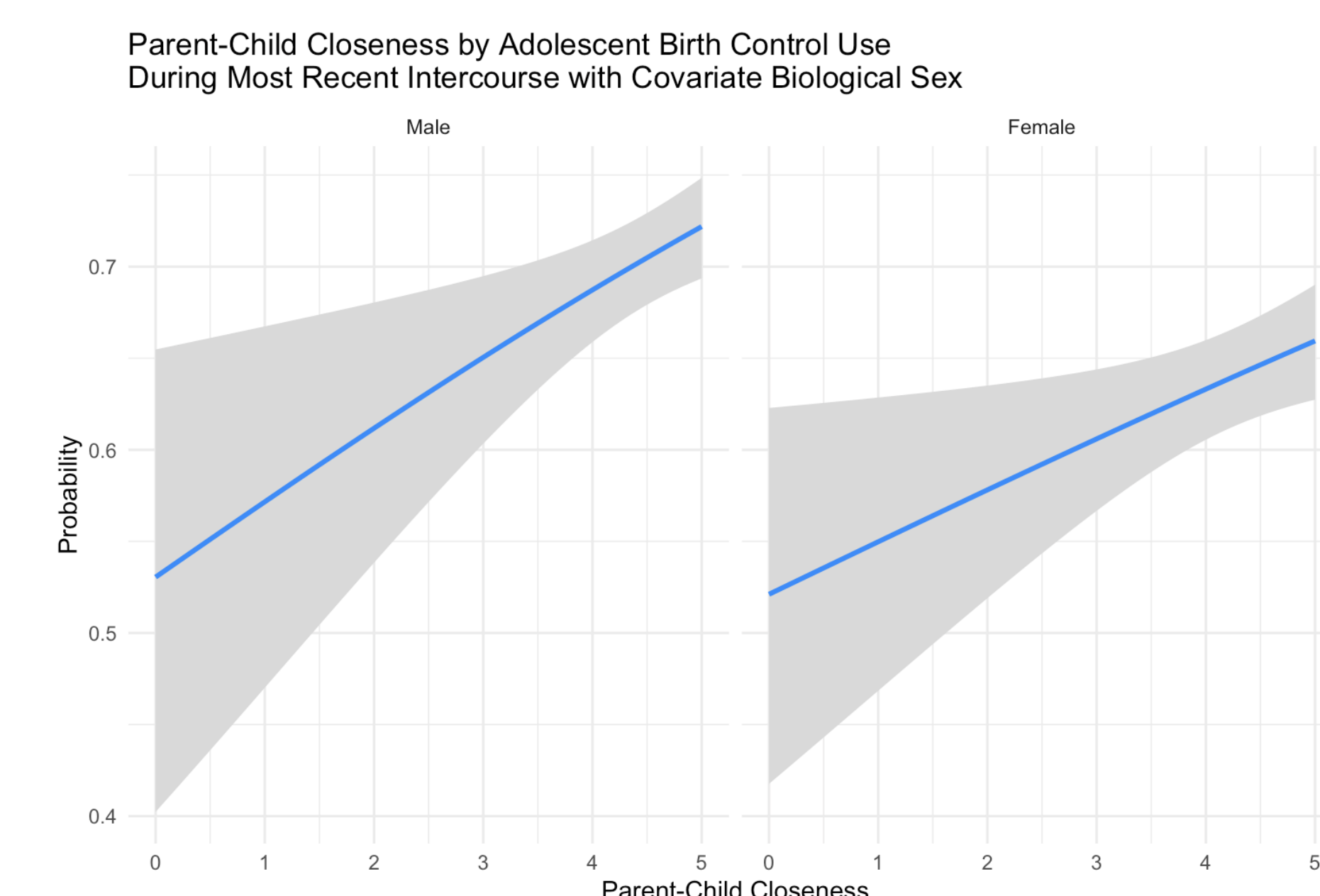


Figure 2: Parent-Child Closeness by Adolescent Birth Control Use During Most Recent Sexual Intercourse with Covariate Biological Sex

### Multivariate (cont.)

- The interaction between parental approval of sexual intercourse and parent-child closeness was found to be significantly associated with adolescent birth control use during their most recent sexual intercourse for levels 1-3 of parental approval.
- However, based on logistic regression, overall, the interaction between parental approval of sex and parent-child closeness was not found to be significantly associated with adolescent birth control use during their most recent sexual intercourse (Figure 3).

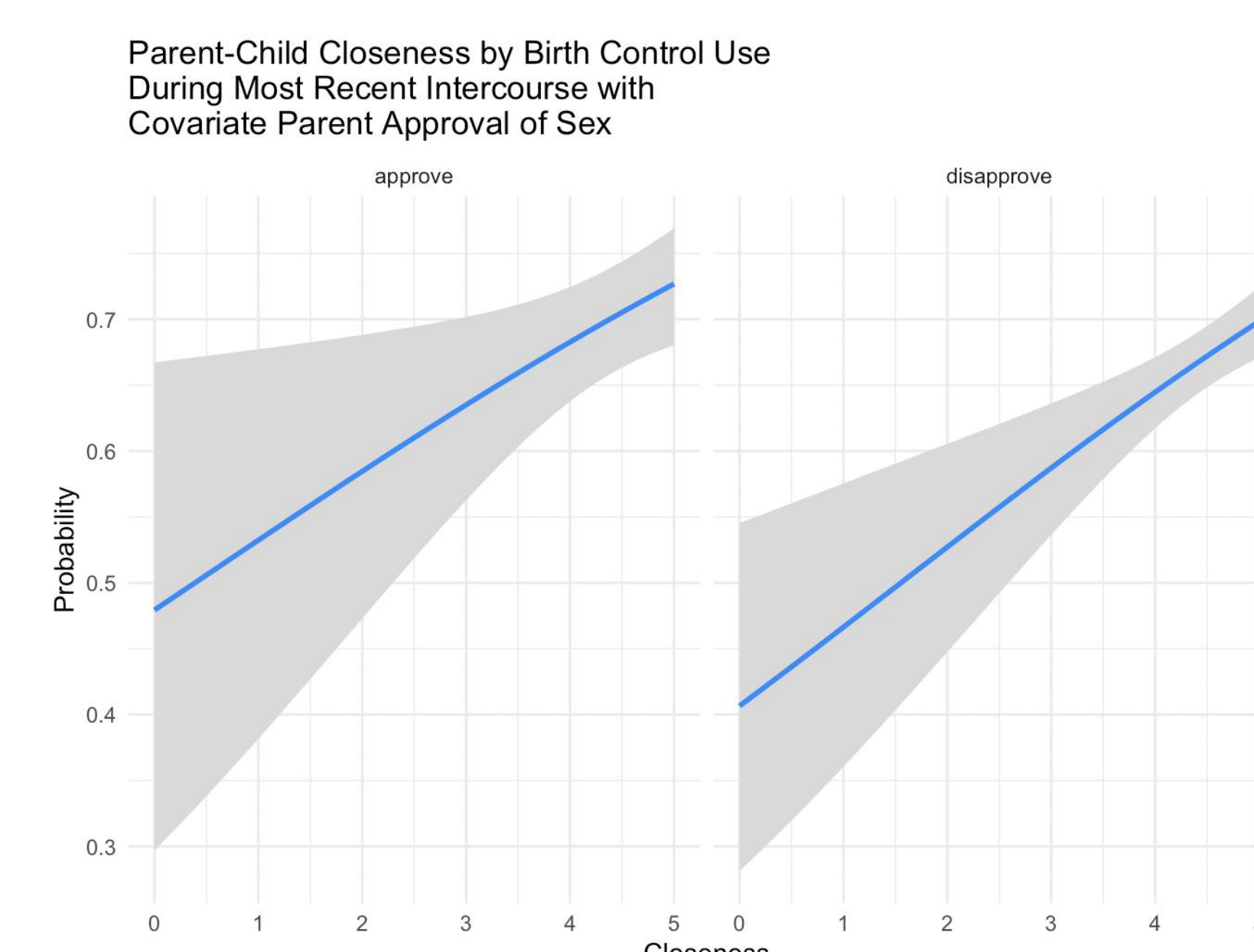


Figure 3: Parent-Child Closeness by Adolescent Birth Control Use During Most Recent Sexual Intercourse with Covariate Parental Approval of Sex

## Discussion

- Adolescents who are closer with their parents may use birth control more than their peers who are less close with their parents.
- There is not a significant difference between male and female adolescent birth control use and their closeness to their parents. The groups both use birth control more as they are closer to their parents.
- While both parent-child closeness and parental approval of sex impact how adolescents use birth control, the interaction between these two terms is insignificant.
- Further research is needed to determine significant covariates—either confounders or moderators—for the association between adolescent birth control use and parent-child closeness. Some possibilities may include race, income, and access to birth control methods, for example.

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