



The Association Between Sexual Assault and Happiness in Romantic Relationships



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Introduction

- The majority of research on the impact of sexual assault on relationships focuses on sexual functioning (Lipinski & Beck, 2022; Haring & Szymanski, 2025).
- The disclosure of the sexual assault by the survivor to their romantic partner presented additional challenges for the relationship (Connop & Petrak, 2004; Unruh & Bute, 2024).
- Less is known about the impact of sexual assault on general relationship happiness, as studies have not compared relationships with survivors of sexual assault and those without
- Research on sexual assault primarily investigates female survivors (DiMauro & Renshaw, 2019; Lipinski & Beck, 2022; Haring & Szymanski, 2025).

Research Questions

- To what extent is sexual assault associated with happiness in romantic relationships?
- Is sexual assault significantly associated with happiness in romantic relationships after controlling for sex?

Methods

Sample

- Respondents (n=4,196) were drawn from Wave V of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent to Adult Health (Add Health), a nationally representative sample of adults aged 30 to 40 years
- Present analyses included 3,446 adults, omitting respondents who were not in romantic relationships

Measures

- Sexual assault: Defined by whether or not individuals had ever been sexually assaulted either physically or non-physically, with responses coded dichotomously.
- Happiness in romantic relationships: Based on the question ("In general, how happy are you in your relationship?"). Possible responses ranged from 1 (not too happy) to 3 (very happy). This response variable was coded dichotomously for the logistic regression in terms of the presence of happiness.

Results

Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that adults who had been sexually assaulted were **significantly less likely to experience a high level of happiness in their relationship** (52.5%) compared to adults who had never been sexually assaulted (59.6%), $X^2=17.743$, $p=0.0001$.
- Adults who had been sexually assaulted were **significantly more likely to be unhappy in their relationship** (10.6%) compared to adults who had never been sexually assaulted (6.3%).

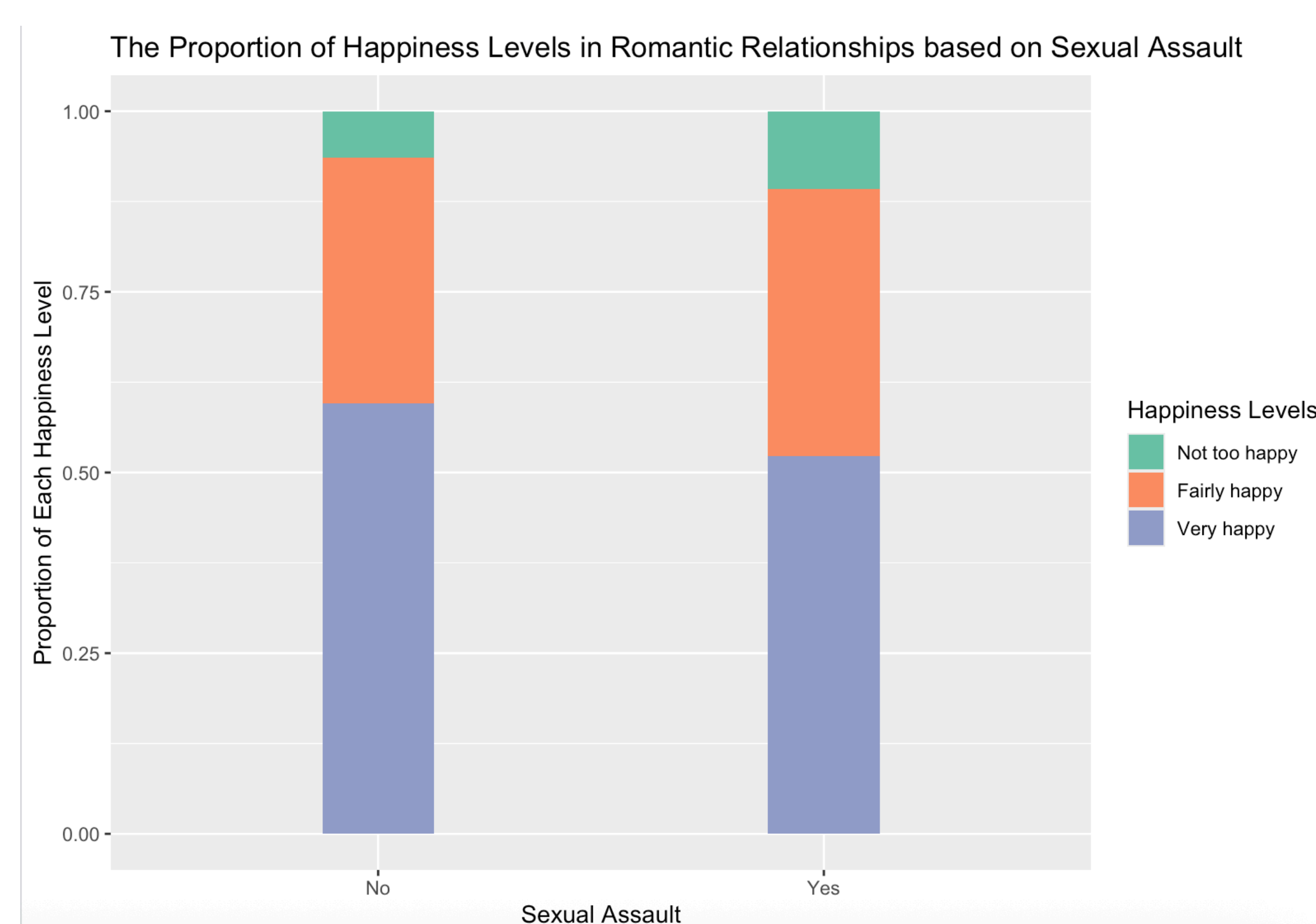


Figure 1: Sexual Assault and Relationship Happiness Levels

Multivariate

- Logistic regression analysis showed that sexual assault is significantly associated with the likelihood of being happy in a relationship **after controlling for sex** (O.R. 0.71, CI 0.59-0.86, $p=0.0003$).
- Sex is not significantly associated with the likelihood of being happy in a romantic relationship (O.R. 0.71, CI 0.59-0.86).

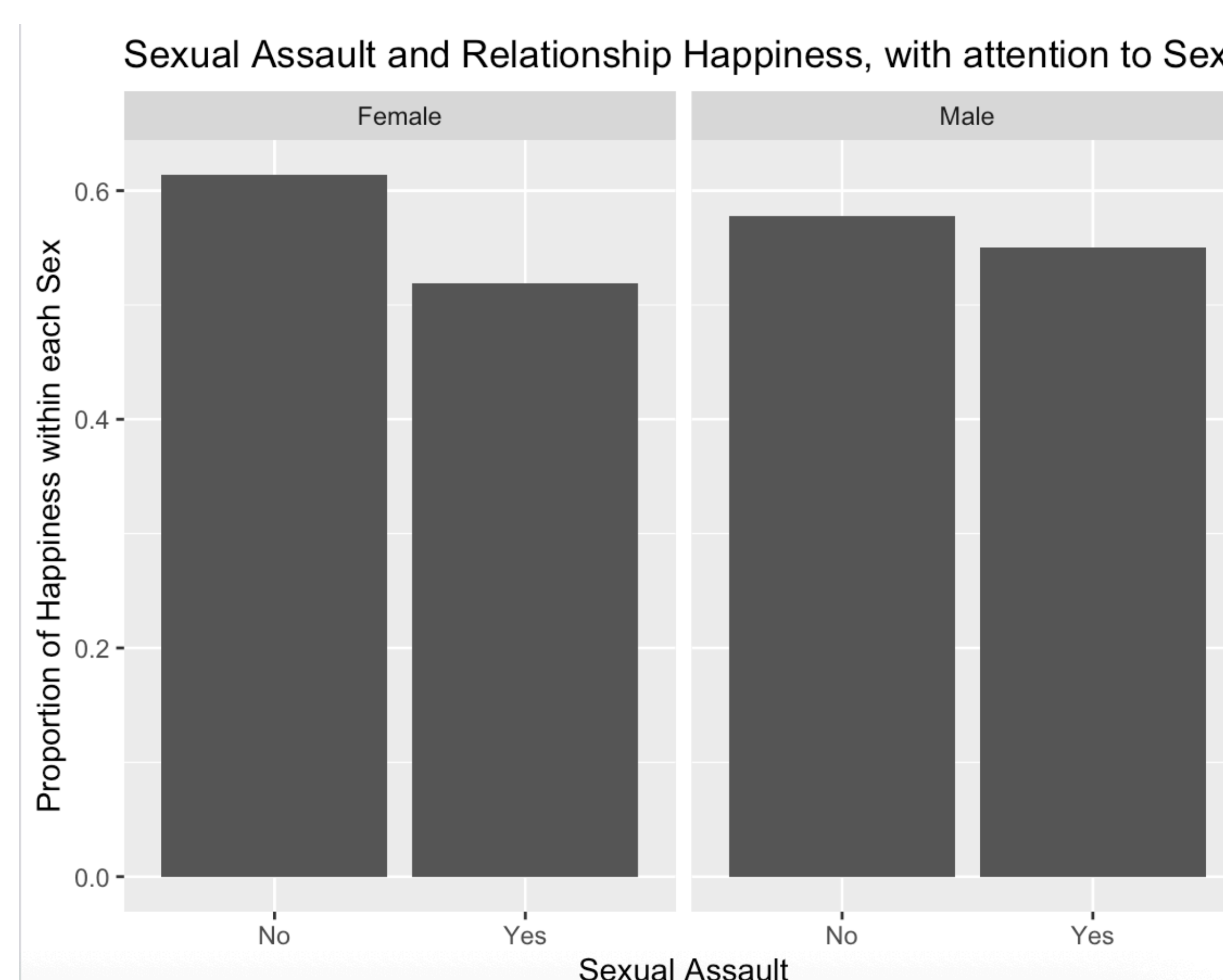


Figure 2: Sexual Assault and Relationship Happiness, with attention to Sex

Discussion

- Sexual assault that occurred outside the relationship can negatively influence survivors' happiness in relationships to an extent that is more significant than other relationships
- These findings support the need for interventions and studies that target emotional challenges informed by sexual assault trauma
- Further research is needed to examine the impact of sexual assault between genders

References

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