

# Gender Differences in the Association between Perceived Risk of Pregnancy and Adolescents' Willingness to use Birth Control



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## Introduction

- Adolescents generally have a negative perception of immediate pregnancy (pregnancy at the current time in their life), but a surprising number (>22%) are ambivalent regarding the use of contraception and are unconcerned about the responsibilities and risks of pregnancy (Dixon et al., 2018).
- Young males take less responsibility for using birth control than their female partners. This discrepancy is strengthened when the female partner is on a form of hormonal or non-hormonal birth control. This is associated with a decrease in condom usage for adolescent boys (Smith et al., 2010).
- Adolescent attendance in sex education has declined from a recorded high of 15% in 2003 to just 7% in 2016. This corresponds with a 53% proportional decrease and is statistically significant even after controlling for age, race, income, gender, and urban vs rural areas (Salas-Wright et al., 2019).
- Men who adhere to a "traditional masculine sexual script" are less likely to discuss birth control with their female partners. There was no association between men who affirm a "gender-equitable, 'sex-positive woman' script" and their likelihood to discuss birth control with their partners (Masters et al., 2017).

## Methods

### Sample

- Young adults (grades 7-12) who reported previous sexual activity (n=2565) were drawn from the first wave of the US National Longitudinal Survey of Adolescent Health (ADDHEALTH).
  - Definition of sexual activity in this context: Answering 'Yes' to "Have you ever had sexual intercourse? When we say sexual intercourse, we mean when a male inserts his penis into a female's vagina."
- ADDHEALTH is a nationally representative sample of adolescents in grades 7 through 12 in the U.S.

### Measures

- Perception of pregnancy was evaluated through self-reporting ("Getting (someone) pregnant at this time in your life is one of the worst things that could happen to you") with responses of 'Yes' or 'No'.
- Willingness to use birth control was evaluated through self-reporting ("If you wanted to use birth control, how sure are you that you could stop yourself and use birth control once you were highly aroused or turned on?") with responses ranging from 'Strongly Agree' to 'Strongly Disagree' and 'I never want to use birth control'.

## Research Questions

- Is there a relationship between participants' perception of unplanned pregnancy and their actual use of contraception, including circumstances where it is not easy?
- Does the relationship between the perception of unplanned pregnancy and the application of contraception differ between biological sexes?

## Results

### Univariate

- 77.82% of adolescents reported that pregnancy would be one of the worst things that could happen to them.
- 73.87% of adolescents said that they are sure they could stop themselves (when highly aroused) to use birth control. 2.55% said they never want to use birth control.

### Bivariate

- Chi-Square analysis showed that **adolescents with a negative view of immediate pregnancy (77.82%) have a higher probability of being able to stop themselves to use birth control (76.61%)** than those without a negative opinion of immediate pregnancy (64.11%),  $X^2=36.2$ ,  $p<.0001$ .
- All interactions between levels of **apprehension surrounding pregnancy and ability to stop to use contraception**, even when highly aroused, were statistically significant ( $p\leq .01$ )

### Multivariate

- After controlling for biological sex, the only statistically significant relationships were between those who answered 'Agree' or 'Neither Agree nor Disagree' when asked if they could stop themselves to use birth control.
- Biological sex was not statistically significant for those who 'Disagree' that they could stop themselves and for those who 'Never want to use birth control'.
- The probability that those who answered 'Agree' (that pregnancy would be one of the worst things that could happen to them right now) would also answer 'Agree' to the self-reported ability to stop themselves to use birth control increased when compared to those who disagreed (Figure 1) even after controlling for biological sex.

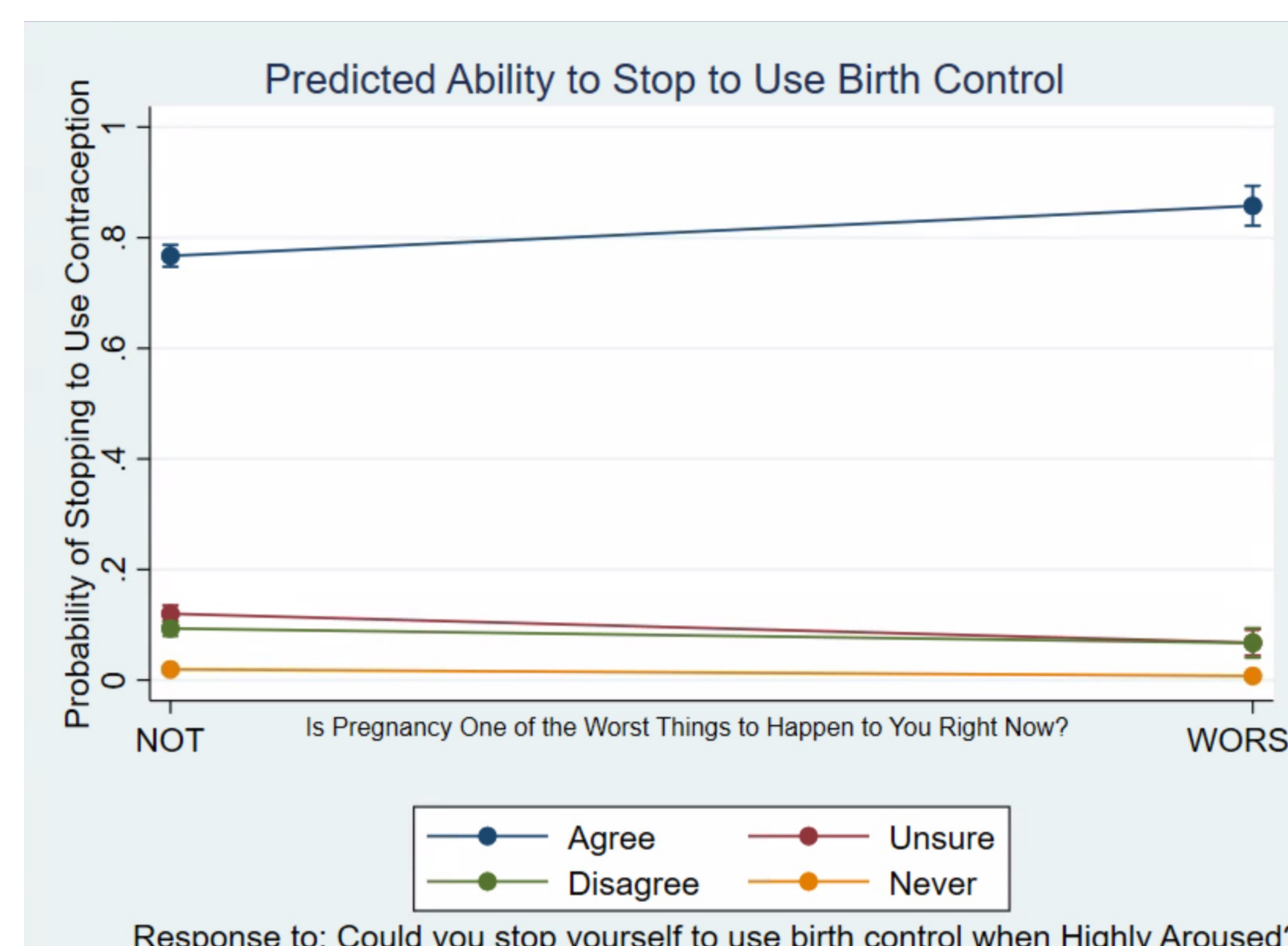


Figure 1. Predicted Ability to Stop to Use Contraception, Comparing Adolescents who 'Agree' that Pregnancy is One of the Worst Things that Could Happen Right Now and those who 'do Not Agree'.

### Multivariate (cont.)

- There was not a large difference in self-reported ability to stop to use contraception when highly aroused for those who said they 'never want to use birth control' when comparing biological sexes (Figures 1 and 2).

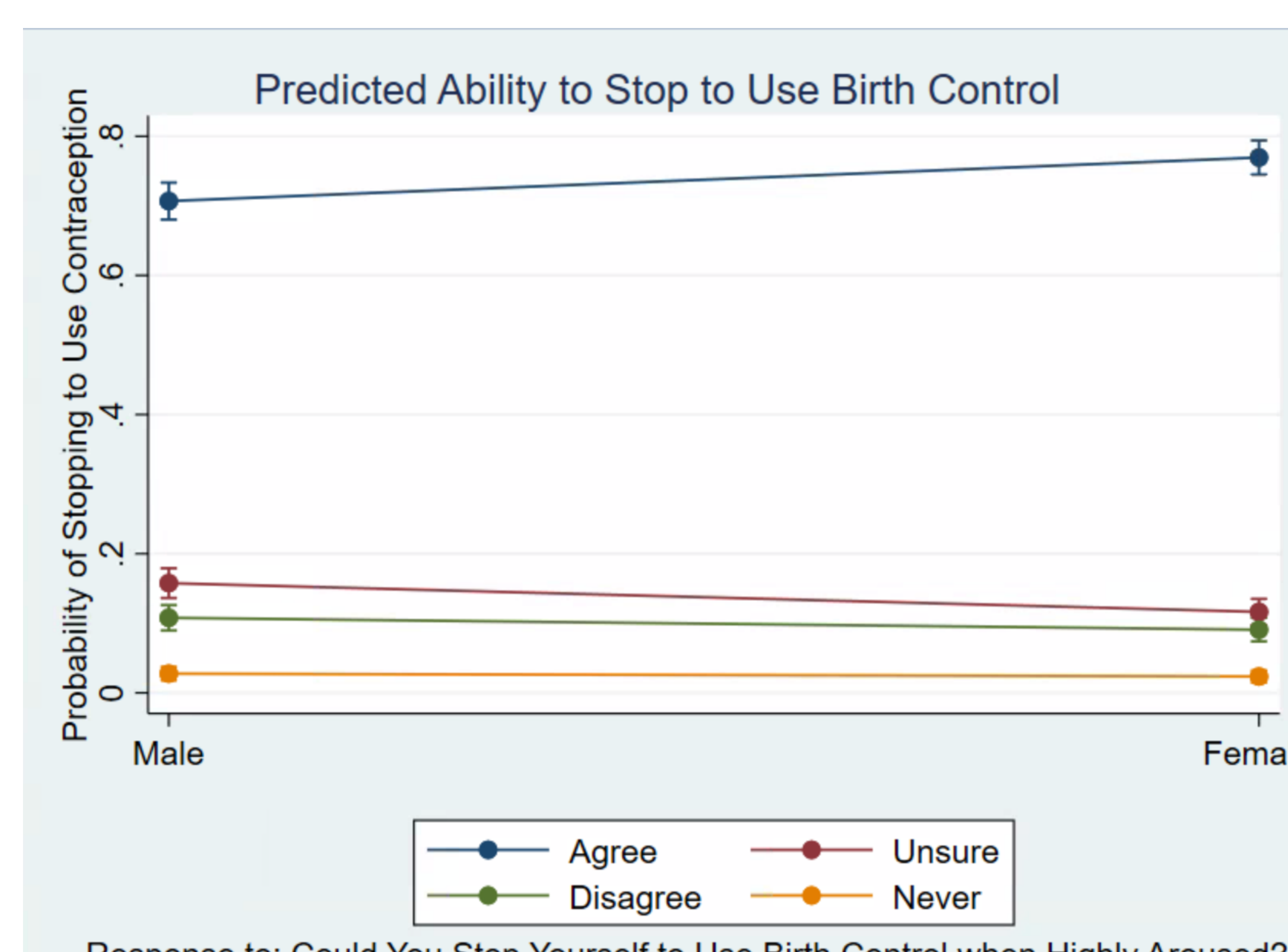


Figure 2. Predicted Ability to Stop to Use Contraception, Comparing Responses from Biological Men and Women.

## Discussion

- Individuals with a negative perception of immediate pregnancy are more likely to report that they would be able to stop themselves to use birth control when highly aroused when compared to those who do not have a negative view of immediate pregnancy.
- There is a statistically significant difference in the above relationship between the male and female biological sexes. Women are more likely to stop themselves to use birth control than men. This corroborates the study by Smith et al. mentioned in the introduction section.
- Participants who reported that they never want to use birth control are less likely to view pregnancy as one of the worst things that could happen to them at that point in time.
- Notably, this analysis is based on observational data, not experimental. Further research is needed to determine if this is just an association or if it is causal. It is also necessary to collect more data surrounding the ability to stop to use birth control, as this study was all self-reported and self-assessed.

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