

The Impact of Parental Emotional Communication on Capacity for Openness in Relationships

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Introduction

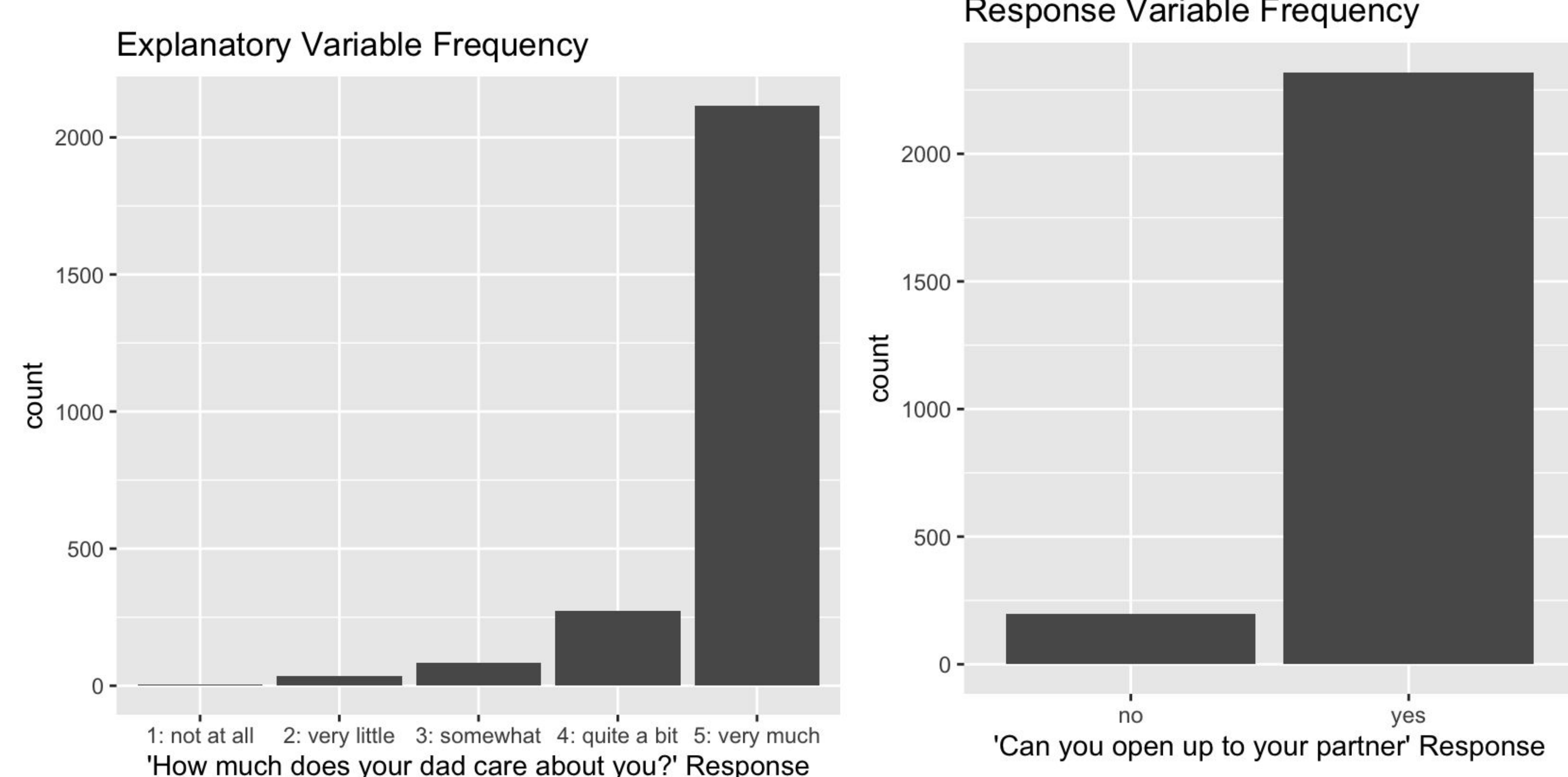
Much research has suggested that relationships with parents directly influence issues with mental health later in life. Statistics have shown some correlation between parental socialization and substance use, self-esteem, and emotion regulation. However, it doesn't appear that there has been as much research on subtler aspects of people's social growth.

Lack of emotional vulnerability has been shown to be detrimental to mental health. Both the availability of a support system and the willingness to ask for help when one needs it contribute to a healthier emotional disposition. People unable to open up emotionally in interpersonal relationships for whatever reason may not receive the assistance they would benefit from.

Hopefully, a direct examination of any possible connection between relationships with parents and ability to open up in relationships later in life will shed light on how people's earlier experiences continue to affect their health.

Methods

The National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health, or Add Health, followed U.S. adolescents from 1994 to 2018. The data being analyzed is from Wave 1 (participants were aged 12-17) and Wave 5 (participants were aged 36-41). Of the 6504 participants initially surveyed in 1994, 4196 were available in 2018.



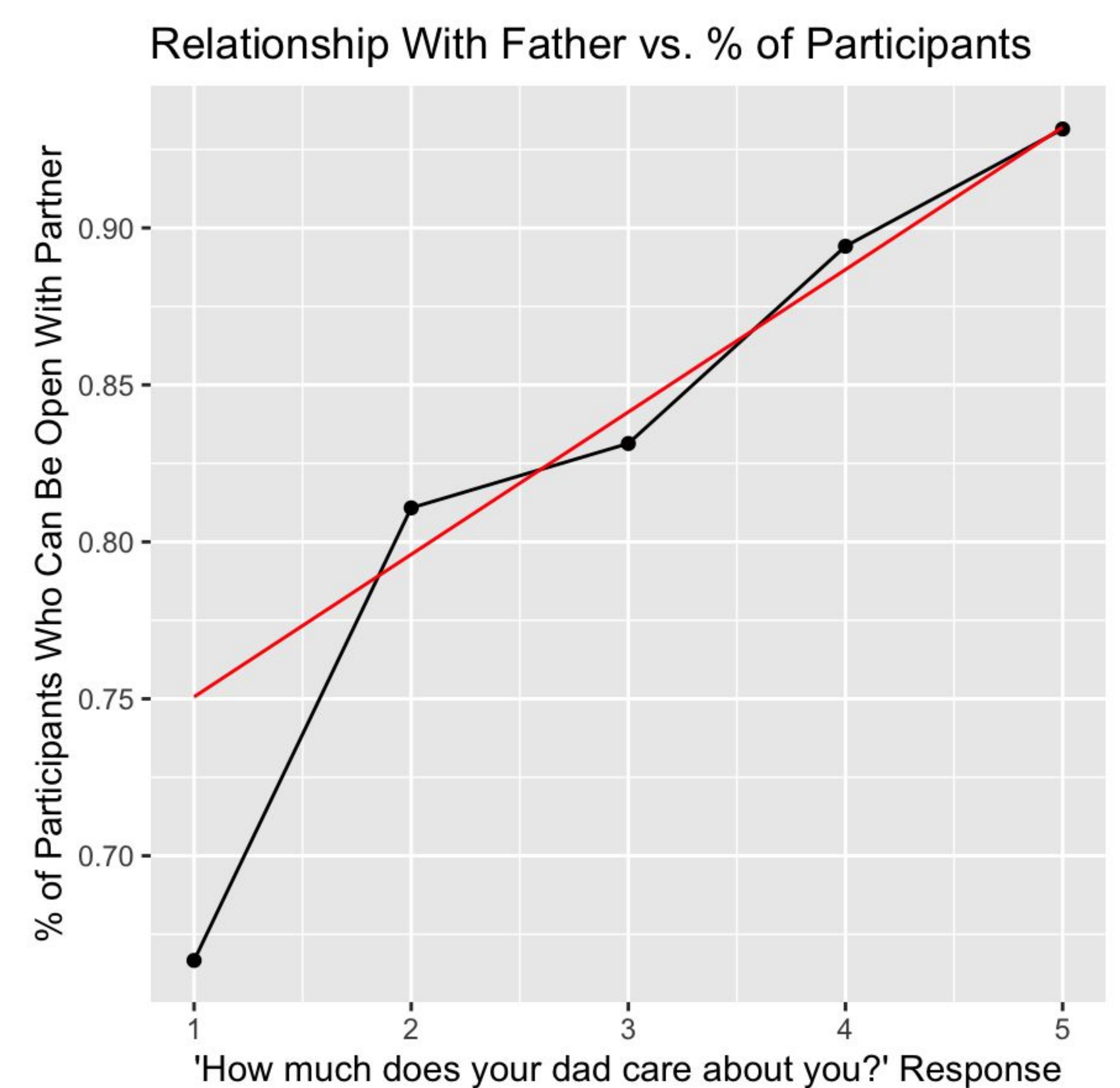
Results

A chi-square test of independence revealed that those who had answered "very little" to the Wave 1 question "How much does your dad care about you?" were more likely to answer "no" to the Wave 5 question "Can you open up to your partner?" (18.92%) than those answering that their father cared "very much" (6.85%), $X^2 = 26.816$, 4 df, $p = 2.166e-05$.

The average (mean) of the '0' and '1' answers to the Wave 5 question gives us the percentage of participants who answered 'yes'. Grouping these averages by responses to the Wave 1 question, we are able to represent the relationship visually.

There is a clear positive relationship between the variables. Running linear regression on the two variables yields coefficients for a linear equation: $y = 0.0454x + 0.705$ where x is the numerical response to the Wave 1 question and y is the expected response to the Wave 5 question.

The p -value of $3.62e-07$ means this relationship is significant, as is demonstrated by how accurately the red line matches the data.



Discussion

There seems to be a direct connection between people's childhood relationships with their fathers and how they relate interpersonally as adults for this surveyed group.

However, considering the amount of non-informative responses (due to missing data or situations for which the questions did not apply) and the specificity of the sample (all Americans), it's not clear that any conclusions are guaranteed.

Nevertheless, the evidence appears to emphasize the effect of paternal social involvement on the capacity for later emotional vulnerability.

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