

# Does Opening Up to Family Help You Remember? Family Openness and Autobiographical Memory in Midlife Adults

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## Introduction

- Autobiographical memory is the memory of oneself that includes both episodic content and semantic details; it can be guided by language and narratives when recalled.<sup>[1]</sup>
- Sharing autobiographical memories with family, such as life stories over the dinner table, not only influences individuals' closeness and trust with their family members but also shapes one's development of memory retrieval and expression.<sup>[3]</sup>
- Adults who experienced depression or suicidal thoughts tend to have a less specific autobiographical retrieval than those who did not.<sup>[4]</sup>
- Children who have mothers who are more detailed when reminiscing with them are more likely to develop better autobiographical memory skills with their own personal narratives in childhood and adolescence.<sup>[2]</sup>
- Women generally recall past events in a more detailed manner than men.<sup>[6][7]</sup>
- While conversation can help retain working memory and transfer it to long-term memory via repetition and elaboration, memory is susceptible to being distorted by constantly talking about past events in conversation.<sup>[5]</sup>

## Methods

### Sample

- Midlife adults (aged between 39 and 51,  $\mu = 44$ ) who finished the questionnaire (n=3937) were collected from the sixth wave of the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescents to Adult Health (AddHealth)

### Measures

- Perceived autobiographical memory retrieval is measured through the self-rated scale regarding the statement "I am good at remembering the order that the events occurred".
- The answer is chosen on an ordinal scale coded from 1 to 4 and is recoded into binary answers where 0 is categorized as disagree or strongly disagree, and 1 is categorized as agree or strongly agree.
- The ability to open up to family members is measured through a binary question about whether they're able to talk about their concerns with their family ("Whether or not you can open up to them if you need to talk about your worries: Other family members").

## Research Questions

- What is the association between the ability to open up to other family members and autobiographical memory ability among midlife adults?
- Does the association between the ability to open up to other family members and autobiographical memory ability differ by biological sex?
- Do other dimensions of family relationships (ability to rely on, criticism, and letting down) predict autobiographical memory ability beyond the ability to open up to family members?

## Results

### Bivariate

- The logistic analysis showed that the ability to open up to family members is a significant predictor of the ability of recalling order of past events ( $b = 0.51, p < .001$ ).
- Those who were able to open up to family members have 67% greater odds of being able to recall the order of past events compared to those who were not ( $OR = 1.67, CI [1.40, 1.98]$ ).

### Multivariate

- Logistic regression with biological sex as the interaction term found that the interaction with the ability of recalling order of past events is not significant, therefore sex is not a moderator ( $b = .244, p = .173$ ).
- Biological sex is also a significant predictor of the ability of recalling order of past events ( $b = .239, p < .001$ ).
- Controlling for other family relationship dimensions and birth sex, the ability to open up to family members has more influence on autobiographical memory ( $OR = 1.38, p = .004$ ) than being let down by family members ( $OR = 0.80, p = .034$ ).

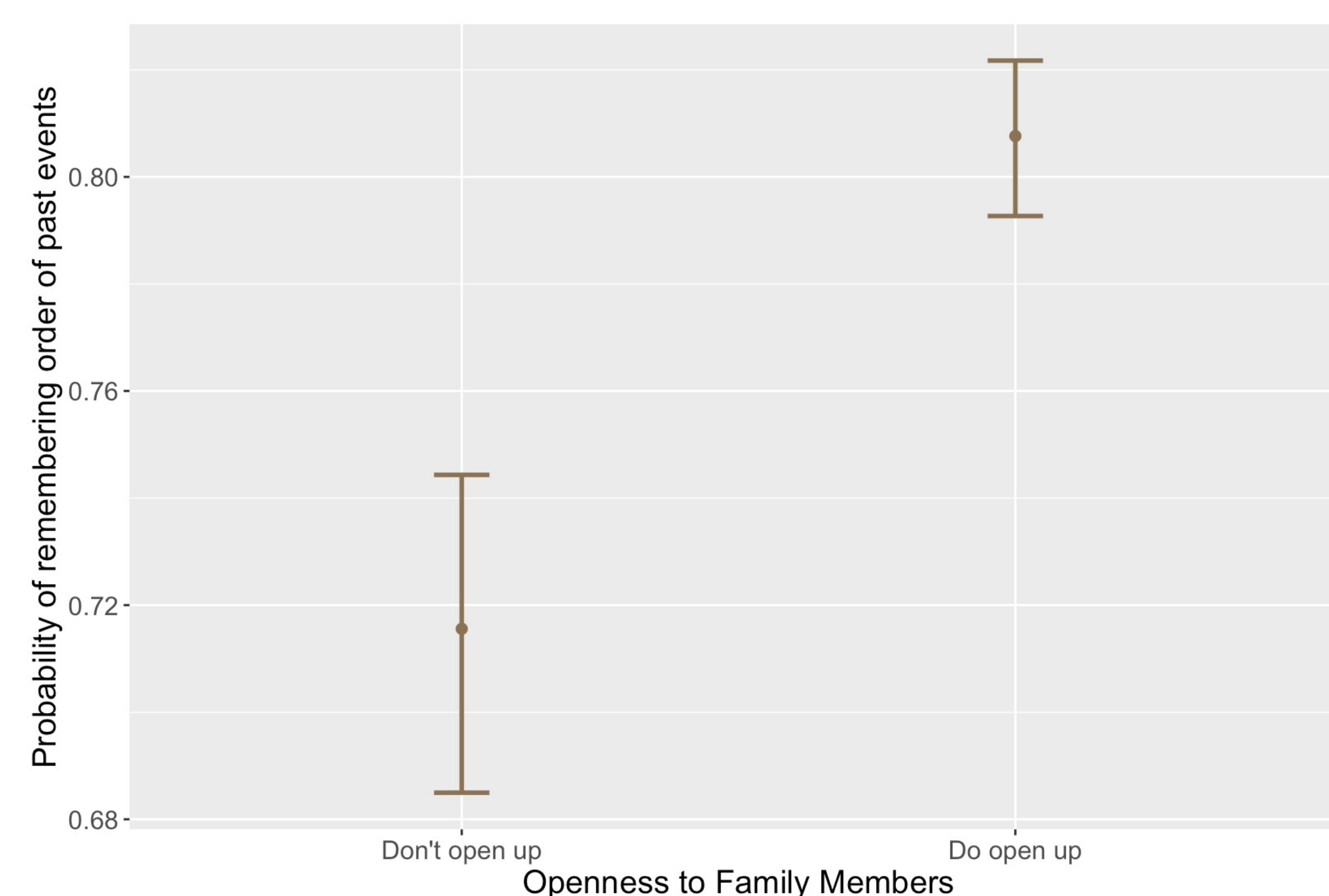


Figure 1. Predicted probability of recalling the order of past events by openness to family members

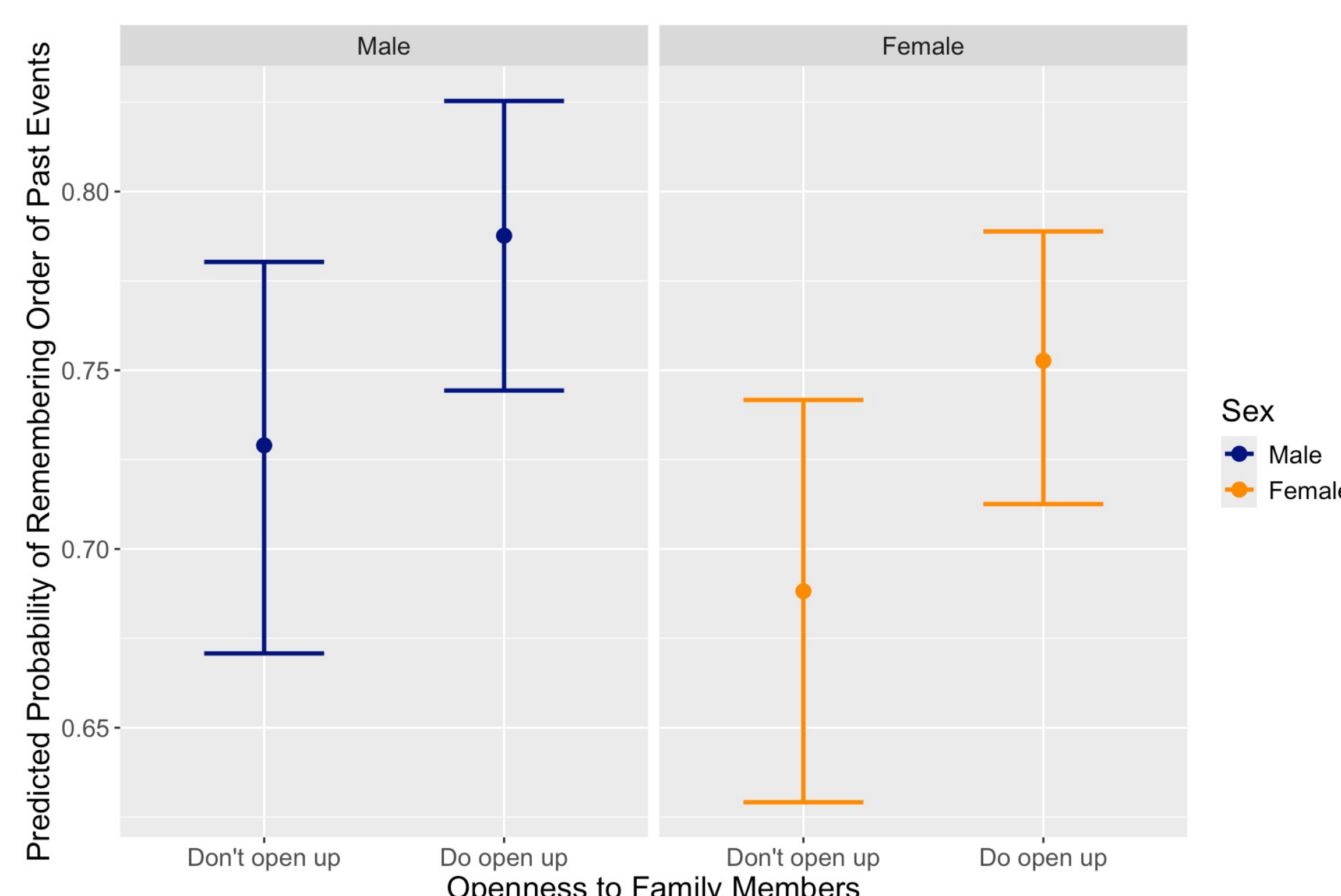


Figure 2. Predicted probability of recalling the order of past events by openness to family members across birth sex

## Discussion

- The quality of family relationships broadly matters for autobiographical memory.
- More connectedness within the family may contribute to better ability in recalling autobiographical memory overall.
- Being able to open up to family builds tighter bonds between family members and creates more shared moments.
- The significant positive relationship could potentially help promote communicative interaction within families.
- Direct tests of autobiographical memory and exploring the potential influence of negative familial interactions could provide more clarity.

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