

# The health risks of procrastination in older adult populations

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## Introduction

- Older adults are more likely to encounter situations that require them to make important decisions about their health.
- However, these behaviours often require effort and discipline to adopt and may be prone to procrastination.
- This study uses Health and Retirement Study (HRS) data to investigate whether procrastination affected engagement in health preventive behaviours among older adults.

## Health Preventive Behaviours

- Prostate Exams
- Mammograms
- Pap Smears
- Cholesterol Screenings
- Flu Shots
- Dental Visits

## Methods

### Participants

- N = 1,338 older American adults from the 2020 wave of the HRS.

### Measures

- Health preventive behaviours gathered from the health services section of the HRS.
- Procrastination measured using the Pure Procrastination Scale.

*“Even after I make a decision, I delay acting upon it”*

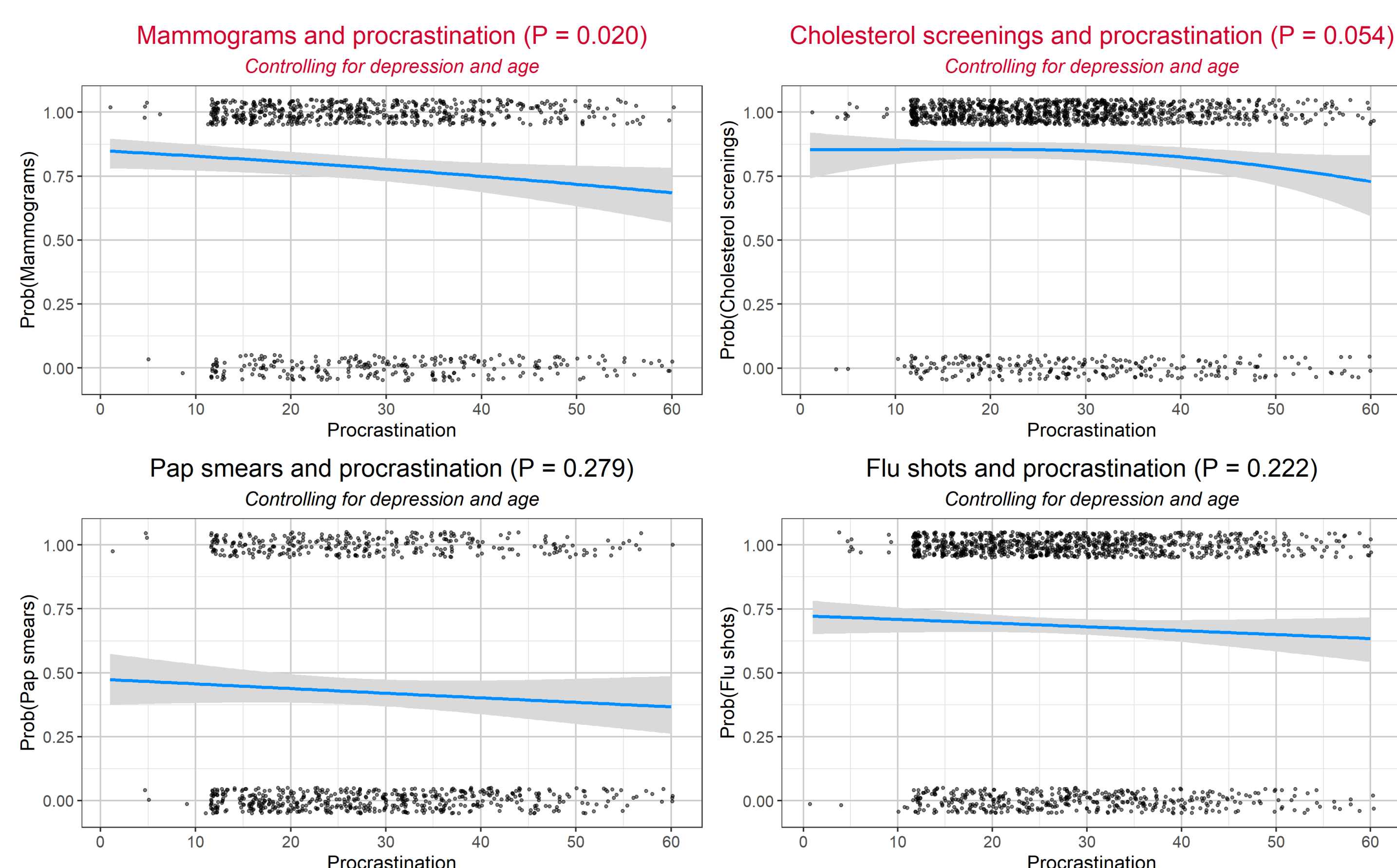
### Data Analysis

- Generalized additive models were used to evaluate the associations between procrastination and each preventive behaviour.

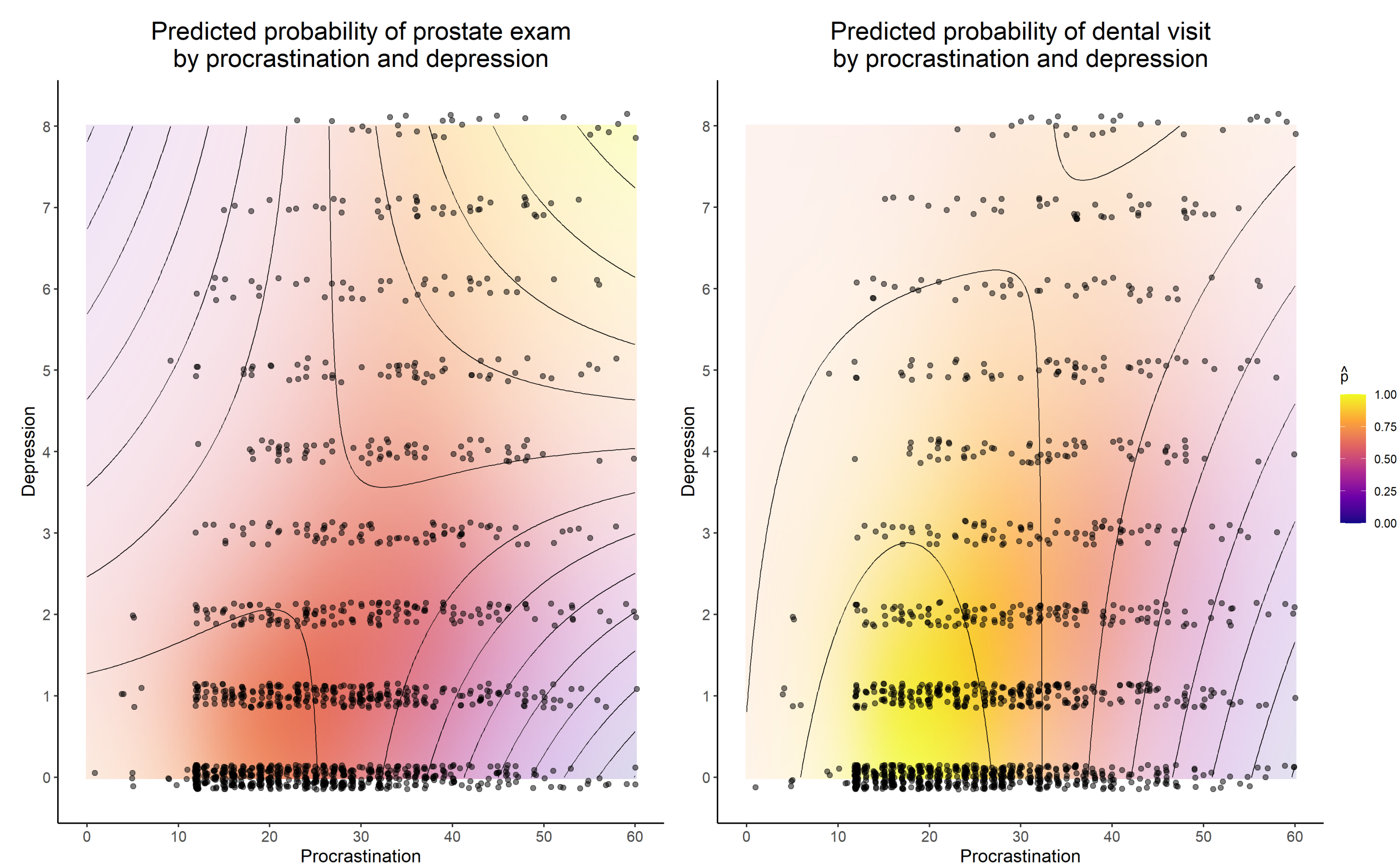
$$g(u_i) = \alpha + f_1(x_{1i}) + f_2(x_{2i}) + \dots + f_p(x_{pi})$$

where  $g(u_i)$  is a link function chosen based on the distribution of the response variable,  $\alpha$  is an intercept term, and  $f_1, \dots, f_p$  are smooth functions applied to the predictor variables  $x$ .

## Results



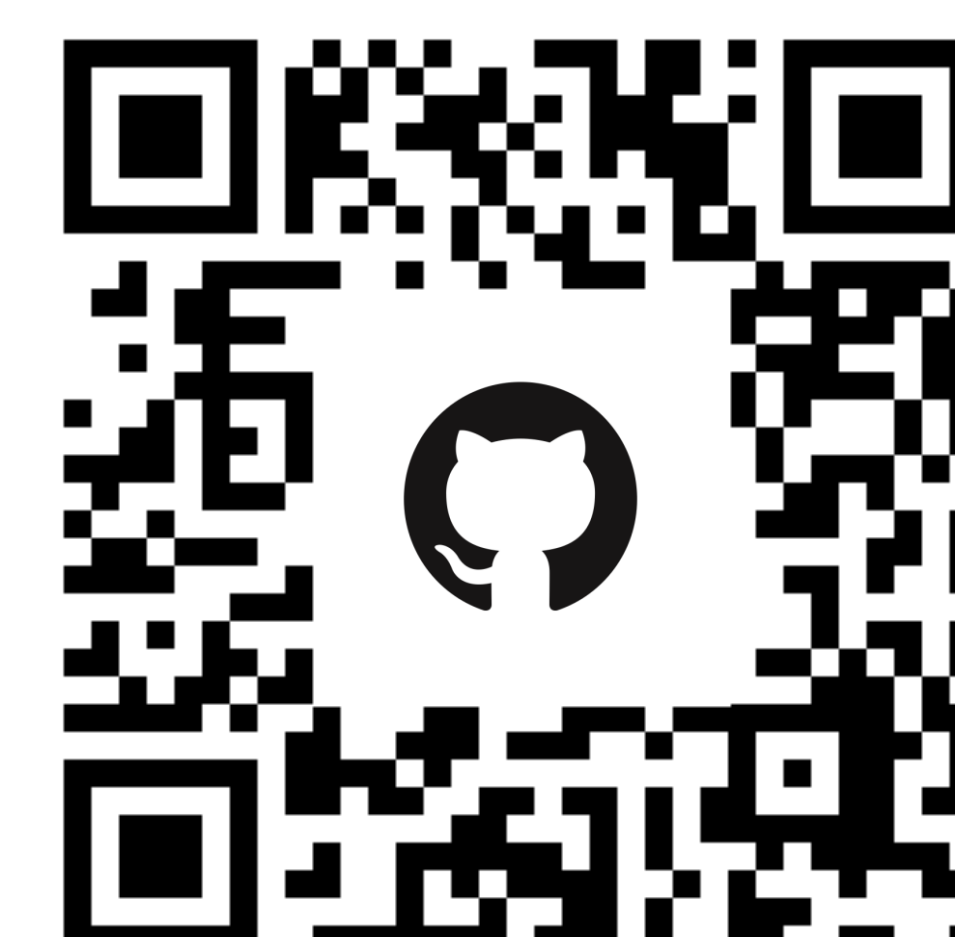
Note. Health preventive behaviours marked in red indicate significance at the 5% level.



Note. Transparency was added to each heat map based on the inverse standard error of each model. Hence, areas of higher transparency indicate greater uncertainty due to larger standard errors and fewer data points within that region

## Conclusion

- For older adults, procrastination emerges as a substantial risk factor that can undermine engagement in preventative health behaviours such as mammograms and cholesterol screenings.
- Additionally, procrastination can interact with depression to influence the likelihood of getting a prostate exam or visiting the dentist.
- Given that procrastination is a potentially modifiable behaviour, interventions targeting procrastination could improve engagement in critical health preventive behaviours.



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