

Exposure to the Beating of Rodney King, Acquittal of Offending Officers, and Substance Use among Black Americans

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INTRODUCTION

- Recent police killings of Black Americans and media documentation has brought newfound attention to police violence and its associated health effects
- Approximately 1,200 people die annually in the United States due to police officers' actions (Banks et al. 2016; Buehler 2016; Edwards, Esposito, and Lee 2018)
- Black Americans are nearly three times more likely than white Americans to be killed by police and account for more than 40 percent of victims of all police killings nationally (Bor et al. 2018; Buehler 2017; Sinyangwe 2016)
- Approximately 100 in every 100,000 Black men and 4 in every 100,000 Black women are killed by police (Edwards, Lee, and Esposito 2019; GBD Collaborators 2021)
- Despite these patterns, few studies interrogate the consequences of historical instances of police violence
- The present study investigates how exposure to the beating of Rodney King and the acquittal of officers factors into Black Americans' substance use patterns

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Stress Process Model (Pearlin et al. 1981; Pearlin 1989)
 - Composed of stressors, resources, and outcomes
 - Stressors are events, circumstances, or conditions appraised as negative that can adversely affect people's ability to cope with adversity
 - For this study, we expect that exposure to traumatic events is a stressor that will tend to worsen mental health and increase substance use
- Based on tenets of the stress process model, we anticipate that alcohol consumption will increase in the aftermath of the two events under consideration
 - (a) exposure to the police beating Rodney King on March 3, 1991, and
 - (b) acquittal of offending officers on April 23, 1992.

METHODOLOGY

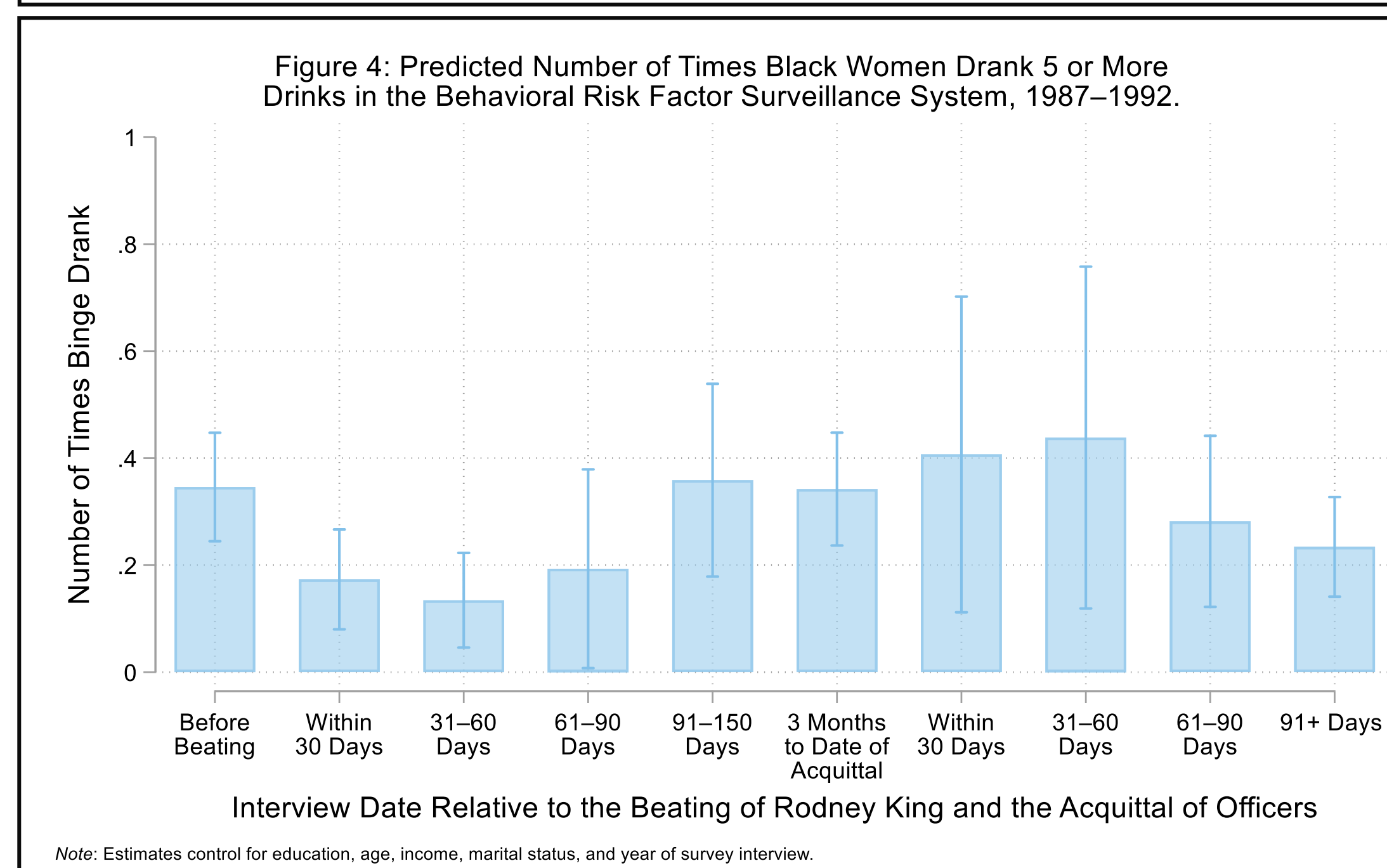
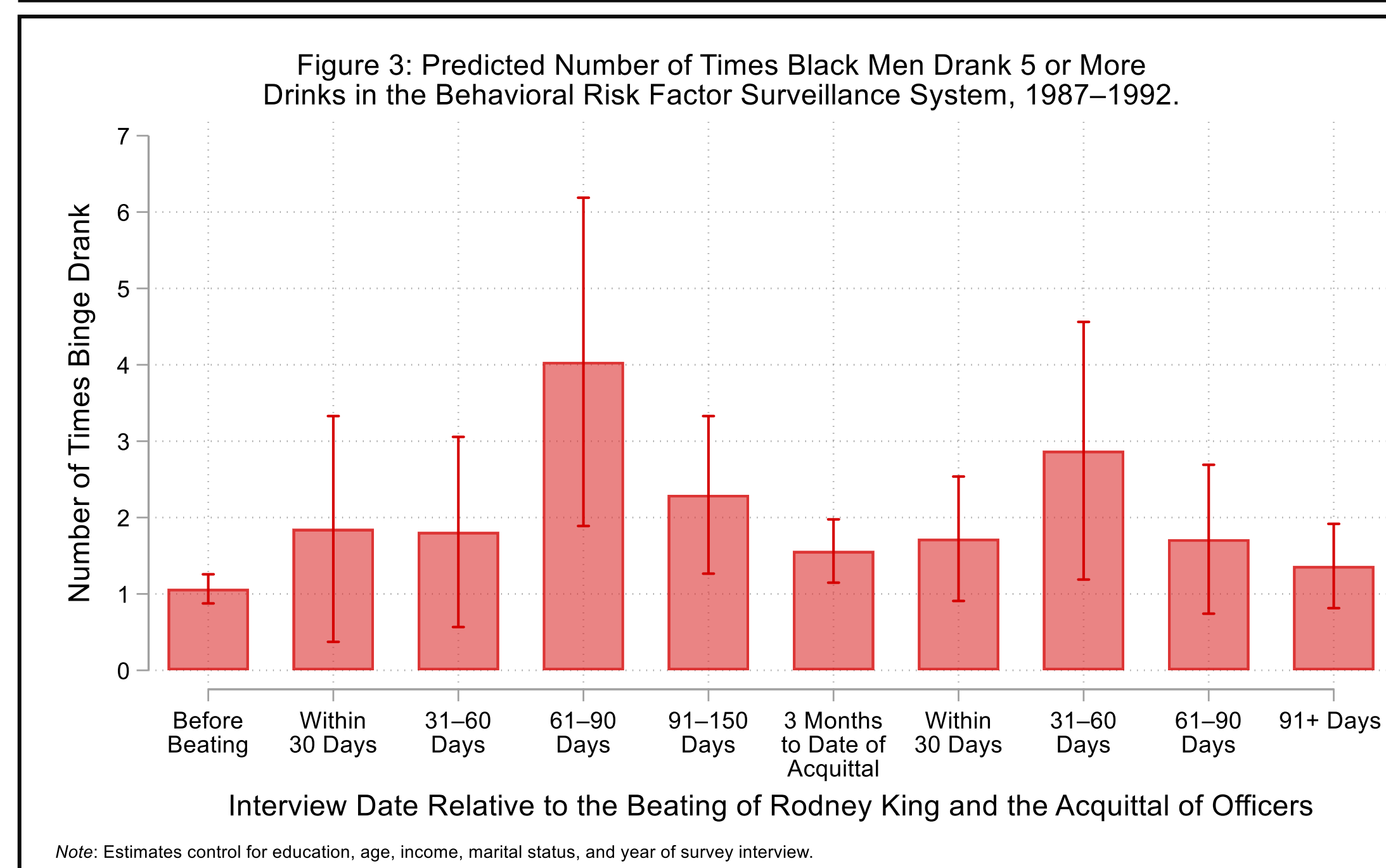
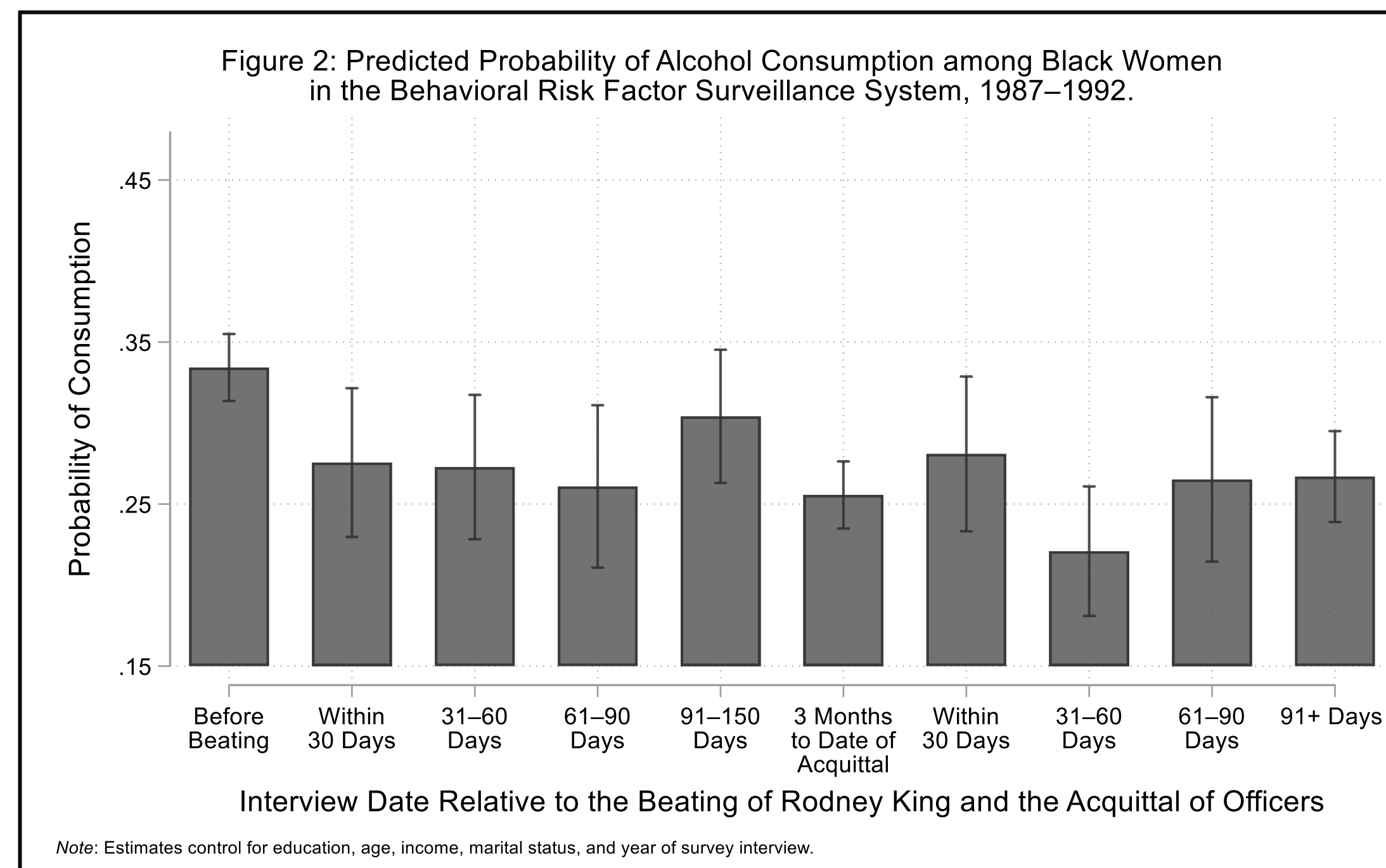
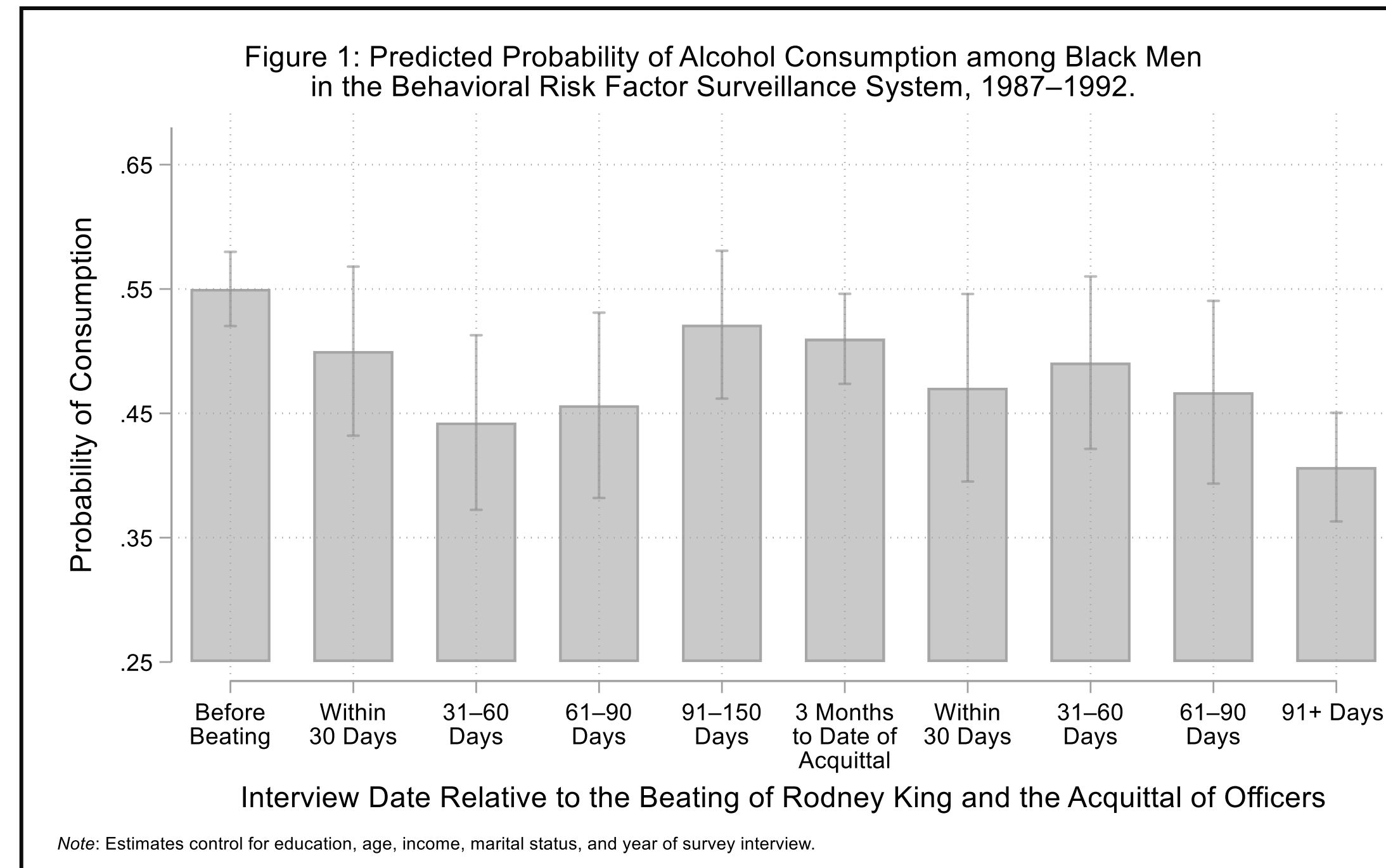
- Data are extracted from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System, 1987–1992 (Black respondents=46,668)
 - Nationally representative, telephone-based, random digit dial survey of non-institutionalized adults
 - The BRFSS is the world's largest on-going telephone health survey and tracks health conditions and risk behaviors among adults across the U.S.
 - Allows for meaningfully examining variation among Black men and women

Dependent Variables

- Any consumption of alcohol in the past month (yes=1)
- Number of times a person consumed 5+ drinks in a day in the past month (count)

Key Independent Variable

- Date of interview relative to the (a) police beating and the (b) acquittal of officers
 - Interviewed prior to the beating (51 percent of respondents)
 - Interviewed within 30 days of beating (1 percent)
 - Interviewed between 30 and 60 days of beating (1 percent)
 - Interviewed between 61 and 90 days of beating (1 percent)
 - Interviewed between 91 and 150 days of beating (3 percent)
 - Interviewed between 3 months and the acquittal of officers (13 percent)
 - Interviewed within 30 days of acquittal of officers (1 percent)
 - Interviewed between 30 and 60 days of acquittal of officers (1 percent)
 - Interviewed between 61 and 90 days of acquittal of officers (2 percent)
 - Interviewed between 91 days or more of acquittal of officers (26 percent)



RESULTS

Key takeaways

- On average, the probability of drinking any alcohol decreases in the aftermath of the King beating and acquittal of officers (Figures 1 and 2)
- However, rates of binge drinking increase precipitously for Black Americans following these same events (Figures 2 and 3)
- Generally, associations between exposure to the events and drinking are stronger for Black men than women
- Black men typically increase in binge drinking approximately 2 to 3 months after the release of the video of officers beating Rodney King

DISCUSSION

- Results showed support for our hypothesis the exposure to the two events would increase alcohol consumption among respondents
- Findings add to research that identifies gendered impacts of exposure to police violence (Bor et al. 2018; Johnson and Lecci 2020; Lee and Robinson 2019)
- The salience, perception, and impact of events likely differs by gender such that the beating of Rodney King had a disproportionate effect on Black men's probability of engaging in binge drinking
- Findings are likely due to the grief, anger, heightened vigilance, and trauma extending from observing the beating of a person with whom they shared identity characteristics and life experiences (Pearlin et al. 1981; Pearlin 1989)

CONCLUSIONS

- On average, over 1,000 people die annually due to police officers' use of deadly force (Boylstein 2018; Sinyangwe et al. 2016)
- Moreover, 1 in 1,000 Black men die from lethal police encounters (Naghavi et al. 2021), and Black men's and women's well-being is differently impacted by exposure to violent policing
- Findings call into question how any institution affects the health of racialized populations
- In this case, the criminal legal system is associated with people's consumption of alcohol
- Divesting from punitive criminal justice policy is imperative to ameliorate race-gender inequities in well-being

