

Is it truly as painful as you say it is?

Husbands' assessment of their wives' labor pains

Avner Caspi¹ Eran Chajut¹, & Dan Ariely²

¹ Department of Education and Psychology, Open University of Israel; ² Department of Marketing, Fuqua School of Business, Duke University

Background

Recent studies examined recollections of labor pains among parturient and their husbands after two days and after two months (Chajut et al., 2014; 2015). The authors' main finding is that the recollections of pain experience are consistently biased toward the average of the peak pain and the end pain, whereas the duration of the delivery is neglected. Although individual differences in experiencing labor pain were also reported (Berentson-Shaw et al., 2009), individual differences regarding the memory of the event have not been studied. In our study no individual differences in recollection were found among the woman giving birth, probably a result of the severe pain. However, in the current study we report changes in memory of labor pain among women that their spouses estimated their actual pain during labor either as severe or as lesser than their reports. We speculate that level of couple partnership and interdependence affects the solidity of the memory.

Method

Two hundreds and eighteen couples participated in the study. Couples were recruited to the study while waiting to enter the delivery room. In that time, the research assistant collected the couples personal details and the couples filled personality questionnaires. Immediately after a couple entered the delivery room the woman was asked to reported her level of labor pain (every 20 minuets) until the birth itself. Simultaneously, the husband was asked to give estimations of how much pain his wife *truly* endures.

Results

Comparison of the husband reports to the wives' reports of pain revealed three noticeable and defined groups: The majority (62.8%) in which husbands' estimations were almost identical to those of their wives (**adjusted**), about a quarter (24.8%) of husbands gave higher estimations compare to their wives reports (**over-estimation**), and a small group (12.4%) that includes husbands that gave lower estimations compare to their actual wives reports (**under-estimation**). We further examined the difference between husbands' recalled estimation and wives' recalled pain two days and two months later (see Figure 1). A significant interaction between groups and time of measurement was found, $F(4,356) = 3.48, p < .01$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. Trend analysis revealed a significant linear trend for husbands that were highly coordinated with their wives' pain reports (adjusted), $F(1,118) = 4.41, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$. For this group, the differences between the couples recollection become slightly less adjusted: over time, wives recalled their pains as less severe than their husbands' recollections. Unlike the former group, in the under-estimation group the difference between wives' and husbands' recollection declined and the couples became more adjust. This linear trend was significant, $F(1,21) = 6.17, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .23$. Finally, over-estimators husbands were relatively persistent with their pattern of overestimation in their recollections after time.

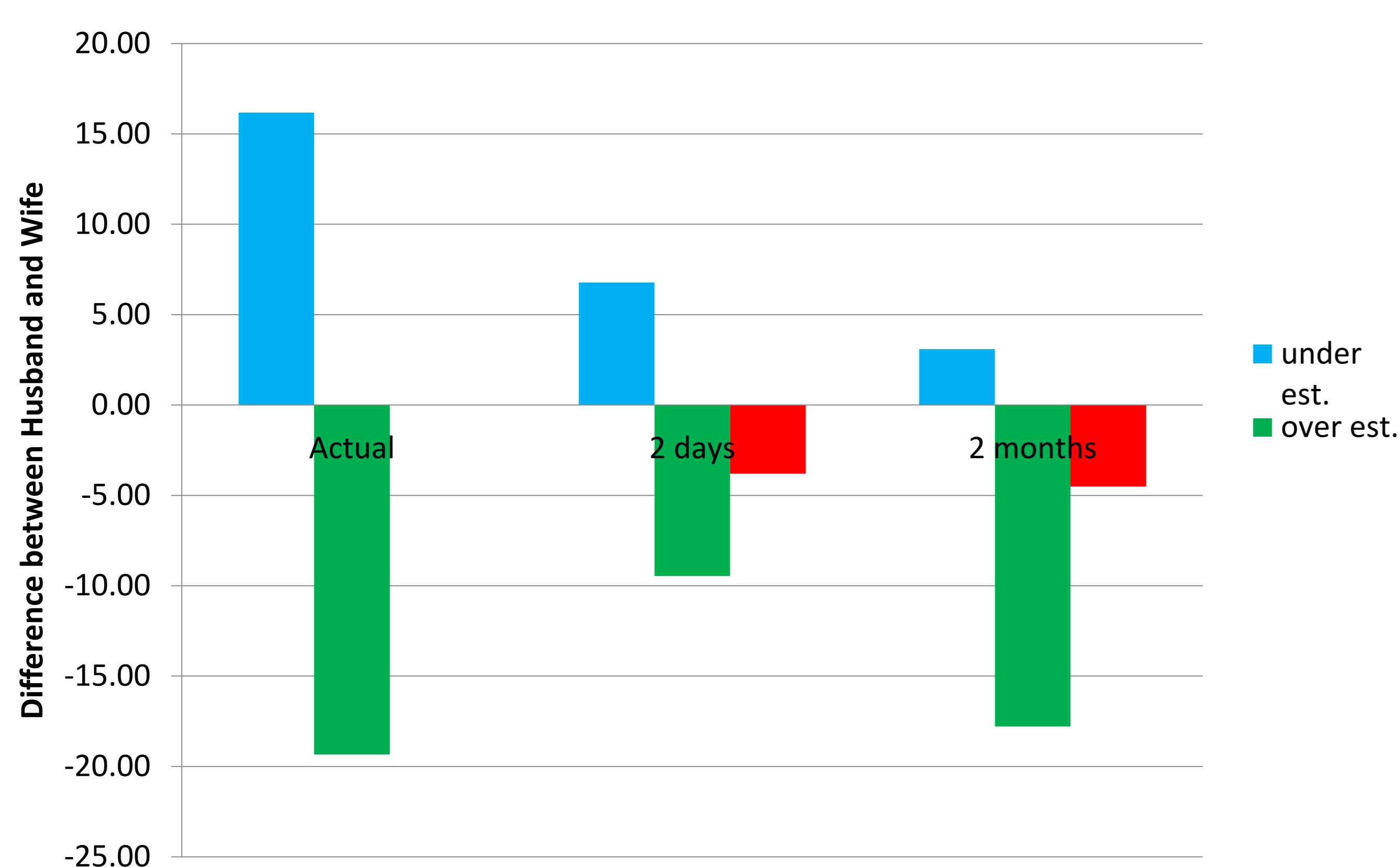


Figure 1.

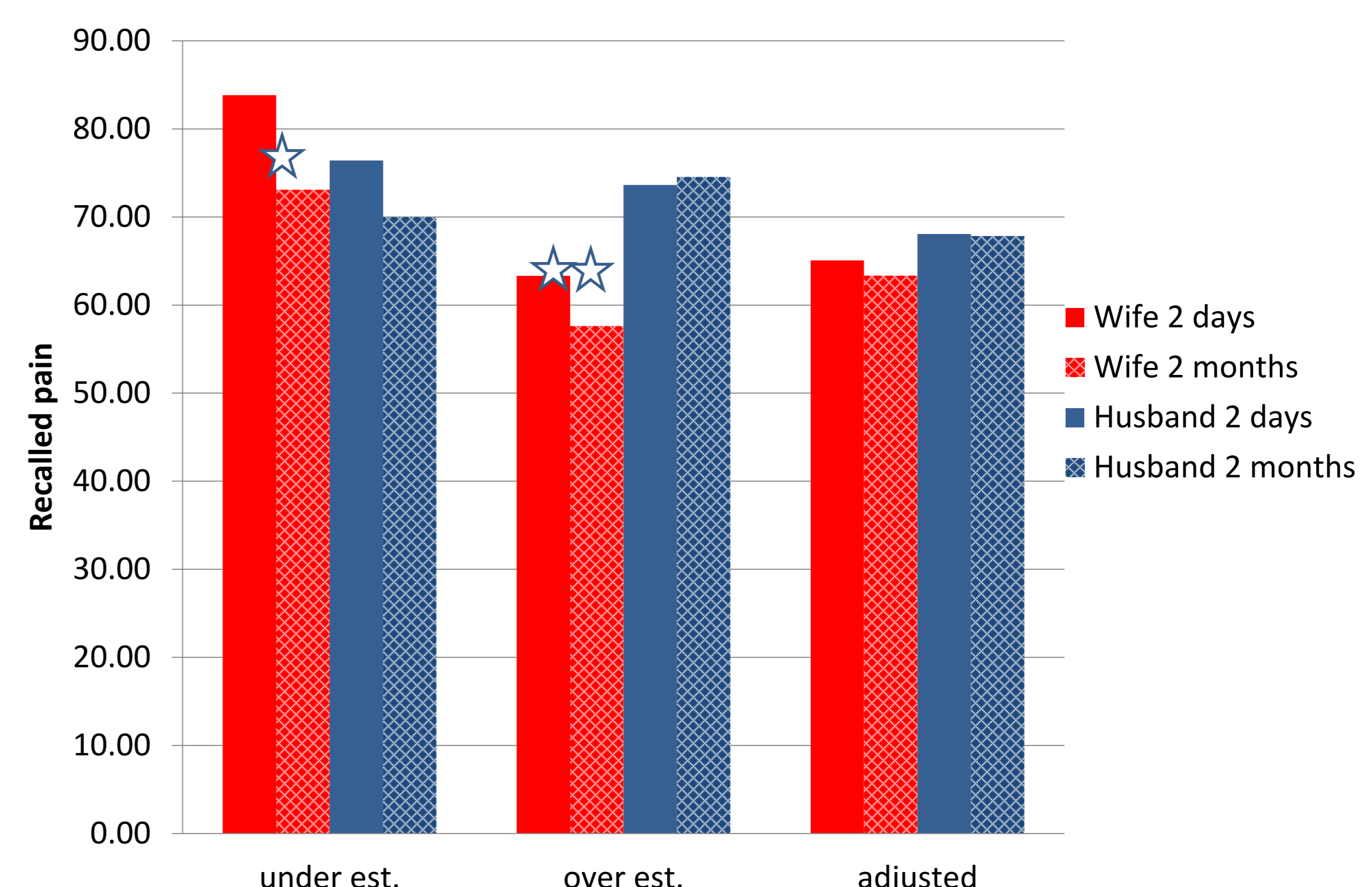


Figure 2.

* $t(22) = 2.73, p < .05$, Cohen's $d = 0.58$
 ** $t(40) = 2.17, p < .05$, Cohen's $d = 0.34$

To further uncover the memory process, we compared **wives'** and **husbands'** two days and two months recollections. We found significant difference between wives and husbands, $F(1,178) = 5.35, p < .05$, partial $\eta^2 = .03$, wives recalled the experience as less painful than husbands. A significant reporter (wives vs husbands) by groups (adjusted, over-estimated vs under-estimated) interaction shed light on the stability of recollection of pain experience, $F(2,178) = 7.86, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .08$. First, overall wives' recollections decreased significantly over time, $F(1,183) = 7.89, p < .001$, partial $\eta^2 = .04$, while husbands' recollections remained unchanged, $F(1,180) < 1$. In addition, the changes in wives' recollections were found only in the over- and under-estimators groups, but not in the adjusted group (see Figure 2).

Conclusions

The results suggest some memory differences between those who actually experienced pain (wives) and those who witnessed it (husbands). First, husbands do not change their recollection over times, whereas mothers do. Second, the above effect is moderated by the relations within couples: it is observed only among non-adjusted couples (where husbands either over- or under-estimated their wives' pain), but is not found in the adjusted couples. We speculate that the variables that govern the accordance between couples' recollections, especially when a new born is joining to the family accounted also for the process of memory changes over time.

References

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