

## Background

- ❖ Early childhood abuse is associated with increased risk for depression across the lifespan (e.g., Kim & Cicchetti, 2010; Hankin, 2005).
- ❖ Disturbance of the development of affect regulation including associated self-regulating strategies such as self-compassion has been implicated in the relationship between abuse and depression (Vettese et al., 2011).
- ❖ At high levels, adaptive affect regulation can be protective in the context of adversity; however, low adaptive affect regulation, or affect dysregulation, is associated with a myriad of mental health problems (Romens & Pollack, 2012; Soenke et al., 2010).
- ❖ From a developmental perspective, it is clear that all forms of abuse place the child in an untenable and extremely vulnerable position: when the person whom they rely on to support them to cope with overwhelming distress is the perpetrator of abuse, the child is abandoned and left to cope with extreme distress.
- ❖ The primacy of maternal versus paternal maltreatment is due to the primary role of mothers as caregivers (Hendy et al., 2003).
- ❖ As primary attachment figures, mothers shape the development of their children's capacity for self-regulation, especially regulation of negative affect.

## Purpose

The purpose of this study was to:

1. To determine if affect dysregulation partially or fully mediated the relationship between experiencing maternal and paternal abuse and depressive symptoms.
2. Gender-specific risk transmission was also tested by evaluating whether daughters were more influenced than sons by maternal than paternal abuse, and also whether sons were more influenced than daughters by paternal abuse.

## Measures

### Maternal and Paternal Abuse

The Conflict Tactics Scale (CTS; Straus, 1979) is a questionnaire that assesses violence and aggression within relationships. Abuse was assessed by 7 items: one that assessed emotional abuse and six items that assessed physical abuse.

### Affect Dysregulation

The Affect Regulation Checklist is a 12-item measure adapted for adolescents from published scales of emotion regulation (e.g., Gross & John, 1998). In the current study, we focused on the affect dysregulation subscale.

### Depression

The Ontario Child Health Study Scales (Boyle et al., 1993) was used to assess depressive symptoms at the first and second waves of the study when participants were adolescents.

The Adult Self Report is the adult version of the Achenbach Youth Self Report (Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001) and was used to assess depressive symptoms during the third wave.

## Participants

Participants ( $N = 179$ ; 46% female) were part of a larger longitudinal project examining gender and psychopathology among high-risk youth. Half (55%) of the participants were drawn from juvenile justice centre and the remainder were from an assessment centre which receives referrals for youth with serious behavior problems and associated comorbid conditions.

## Maternal Abuse Model for Boys and Girls

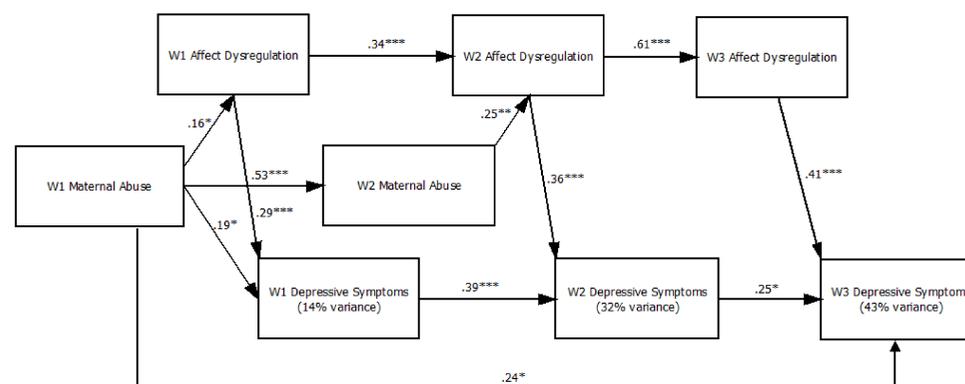


Figure 1 Path analysis model for maternal longitudinal mediation model across all three time points with standard estimates for the overall sample ( $\beta$ ). \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; ( $\chi^2(21) = 27.62, p = .15, RMSEA = .04, CFI = .96$ )

## Paternal Abuse Model for Boys

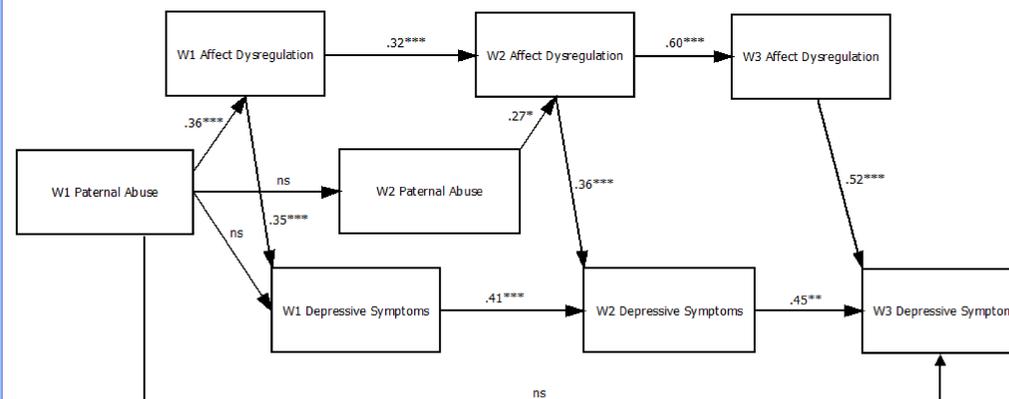


Figure 2 Path analysis model for paternal longitudinal mediation model for boys across all three time points with standard estimates for the overall sample ( $\beta$ ). \* $p < .05$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \*\*\* $p < .001$ ; ( $\chi^2(21) = 16.07, p = .77, RMSEA = .06, CFI = 1$ )

For the full study see: Moretti, M. M., & Craig, S. G. (2013). Maternal versus paternal physical and emotional abuse, affect regulation and risk for depression from adolescence to early adulthood. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 37(1), 4-13. doi:10.1016/j.chiabu.2012.09.015

## Results

### Maternal Longitudinal Model

- ❖ An indirect effect of maternal abuse on depressive symptoms through affect dysregulation ( $\beta = .05$ ;  $z_{sobel} = 1.78, p = .07$ ).
- ❖ An indirect effect of maternal abuse on depressive symptoms at Time 2 through affect dysregulation ( $\beta = .08$ ;  $z_{sobel} = 2.16, p < .05$ ).
- ❖ A modest indirect effect was found from maternal abuse at Time 1 on depressive symptoms at Time 3 through affect dysregulation at Times 1, 2 and 3 ( $\beta = .04$ ).
- ❖ A moderate indirect effect was also found from maternal abuse at Time 2 on depressive symptoms at Time 3 through affect dysregulation at Times 2 and 3 ( $\beta = .08$ ).

### Paternal Longitudinal Model

- ❖ The paternal model examining longitudinal associations between paternal abuse, affect dysregulation and depressive symptoms had a poor fit.

## Discussion

### Maternal Abuse

- ❖ Maternal abuse was partially mediated through affect dysregulation at the first time point of the study when participants were adolescents, and fully mediated at the second time point.
- ❖ Maternal abuse in adolescence also predicted depressive symptoms in early adulthood five years later after accounting for the partial mediating role of affect dysregulation at each of the three time points.
- ❖ Maternal abuse, which was fully or partially mediated through affect dysregulation, was equally related to daughters' and sons' levels of depressive symptoms.
- ❖ Results are consistent with other research showing that experiences of abuse increase vulnerability to depressive symptoms in early (Baldry & Winkl, 2004) and mid-adolescence (Seeds et al., 2010).

### Paternal Abuse

- ❖ Only sons exposed to paternal abuse reported more problems in regulating affect at Times 1 and 2 and this in turn predicted depressive symptoms at these time points.
- ❖ These results were not found for daughters
- ❖ Consistent with previous findings suggesting males may be impacted more by paternal abuse (Baldry & Winkel, 2004).

## Implications

- ❖ Mothers provide emotional soothing as well as important lessons in how to cope with difficult emotional experiences, strategies that can be internalized as adolescents move into adulthood.
- ❖ When emotional and physical abuse is part of the mother-adolescent relationship, opportunities for support and learning are compromised, limiting adolescents' ability to manage emotional distress.
- ❖ Parents may benefit from parenting programs that help them to regulate their own feelings of frustrations, and to recognize the importance in providing a secure base and safe haven within the parent-teen relationship as pivotal in their child's development of affect regulation (Moretti et al., 2012)
- ❖ Adolescents or young adults who have experienced abuse may also benefit from interventions designed to build affect regulation skills such as cognitive behaviour or dialectical behaviour therapy (McMain et al., 2001).