



INTRODUCTION

Parental Depression and Problematic Behavior

- Parental depression is consistently associated with offspring internalizing and externalizing problems (Goodman et al., 2011).
- Indeed, treatment studies show that significant declines in emotional and behavioral problems, among diverse youth samples, have been cited as the result of improvements in parental depression. Conversely, asymptomatic youth have been shown to develop behavioral issues if parental depression is left untreated (Gunlicks & Weissman, 2008).

Attachment and Problematic Behavior

- Secure attachment to parent = lower incidence of problematic behaviors among adolescents (Dekovic, 1999).
- Insecure attachment to parent = higher incidence of problematic behavior (Laible et al., 2000).
- A bi-directional relationship was found between adolescent-parent attachment and both internalizing and externalizing behaviors among youth (Buist et al., 2004).

Parental Depression, Attachment and Problematic Behavior

- One proposed mechanism of the intergenerational transmission of risk of parental depression to child psychopathology is through parent-child attachment (Goodman and Gotlib, 1999).
- Attachment is hypothesized to be a key mediator as parental depression is not only associated with attachment security in children (Hopkins, Gouze & Lavigne, 2013) but adolescent behavior problems and internalizing symptoms (Obsuth, 2009).

Connect@

- Targets building blocks of attachment security
- Reported reductions in attachment avoidance coincided with decreases in the expression of externalizing behaviors. Similarly, reported reductions in attachment anxiety coincided with decreases in the expression of internalizing behaviors (Moretti, Obsuth, Craig & Bartolo, in press).



OBJECTIVES

This study aimed to address several gaps in the literature:

- 1) Examine the relationship between parental depressive symptoms and internalizing and externalizing problematic behaviors among adolescents.
- 2) Examine a possible mediating effect of attachment on the relationship between parental depressive symptoms and adolescent problematic behaviors.
- 3) Examine whether the mediating effect of attachment held for both mothers and fathers.

PARTICIPANTS

Caregivers attended at least 70% of the 10-week program, focusing on attachment principles and their relationships with their adolescent children.

	N	% Female	Mean Age (SD)	Sample Characteristics
Parental Sample	540	83%	M= 44.01 (SD = 8.29)	Biological Mothers : 76% Step fathers: 11.8% Other 11.8%
Adolescent Sample	540	48%	Girls: M= 14.05 (SD = 2.33) Boys: M = 13.87 (SD= 2.82)	Youth with clinical levels of behavior problems

MEASURES

Data from the pre-inclusion parent report questionnaire was utilized

Brief Child and Family Phone Interview (BCFPI)

- Derived from the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL). Externalizing problems includes items for ADHD, ODD and conduct disorder. Internalizing problems included items for SAD; anxiety; and major depression.
- Checklist also yields subscale corresponding to caregiver (participant) symptoms of depression.

Comprehensive Adolescent-Parent Attachment Inventory (CAPAI-P)

- Seven-point likert scale questionnaire that yields two dimensions: attachment anxiety and attachment avoidance.
- Completed from the parent's perspective of their relationship with their adolescent child.

RESULTS

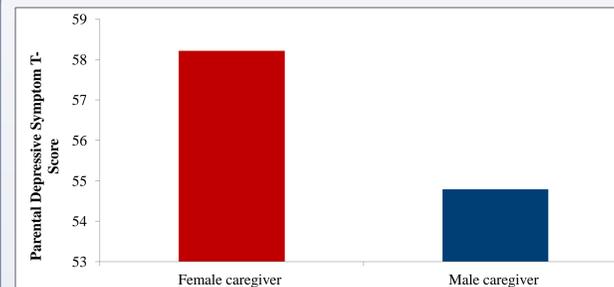


Figure 1. Mean levels of parental depressive symptoms T-scores for males and females. Females had significantly higher levels of depressive symptoms ($t(540) = 2.04, p < .05$)

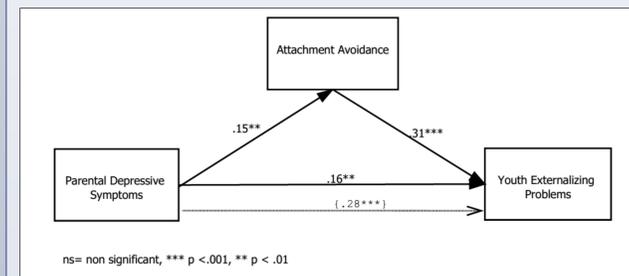


Figure 2. Regression β scores for adolescent externalizing symptoms mediated through attachment avoidance.

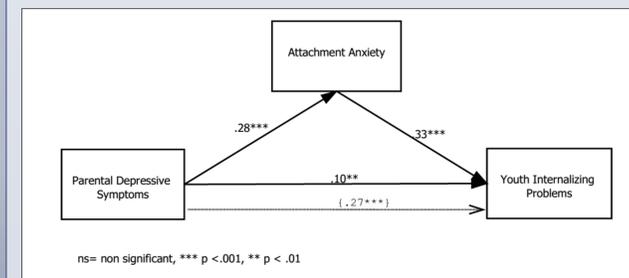


Figure 3. Regression β scores for adolescent internalizing symptoms mediated through attachment anxiety.

- Utilizing mediated regression with bootstrapping, while accounting for attachment anxiety, higher levels of parental depressive symptoms had a direct effect on externalizing problems and a significant indirect relationship through attachment avoidance (CI95 = .02, .08; see Figure 1).
- Parental depressive symptoms also had a direct effect on internalizing problems and an indirect relationship on internalizing problems through attachment anxiety (CI95 = .06, .13; see Figure 2).
- When parental gender differences were explored, these relationships held for female caregivers, but not male.

DISCUSSION

- The impact of parental depressive symptoms was partially mediated through attachment avoidance and anxiety to youth externalizing and internalizing problems respectively.
- Consistent with past research, female caregivers had significantly higher rates of depressive symptoms than male caregivers (Evenson & Simon, 2005).
- Consistent with the existing child attachment literature (Hopkins et al., 2013) results from the current study suggest that deficits in the parent-child attachment relationship, may help the relationship between parental depression and adolescent externalizing and internalizing problems.
- The findings from this study highlight the possible differing roles of mother and father relationships adolescent outcomes. This information may be useful in tailoring attachment-based interventions for adolescents.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

- Targeting female caregiver-adolescent attachment relationships may be beneficial for improving both symptoms of caregiver depression and adolescent problematic behavior, while further research is needed to understand how to promote similar improvements in male caregivers and their adolescent children.
- Continued research into the effectiveness of attachment based treatment programs may help researchers and clinicians gain a better understanding of how attachment relationships mediate the improvement of both parental symptoms of depression and adolescent problematic behavior.
- Further research may lead to a better understanding of the role male caregivers play in adolescent expression of problematic behaviors.



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For further information visit <http://adolescenthealth.ca/> or contact moretti@sfu.ca.

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