



# The Moderating Effect of Parent Expectations on Child Internalizing Symptoms Following Child Sexual Abuse During a CBT Intervention: A Multilevel Modeling Approach

Presenters: Emily Sonnen, M.A., & T. Zachary Huit, M.A.



Authors: Emily Sonnen, T. Zachary Huit, Brittany Biles, Katie Meidlinger, Kate Theimer, Kelsey McCoy, Akemi Mii, Hannah Coffey, Gina May, Mary Fran Flood, PhD, & David J. Hansen, PhD

## INTRODUCTION

- Following **child sexual abuse (CSA)**, non-offending parents play an important role in supporting children's recovery.
- **Parent perceptions** about the **child's future** can be affected by the emotionally-charged **labels** such as "the sexually abused child," or "damaged goods."
- Believing such labels may cause an overestimation of **negative expectancies** and **perceiver bias**.
- Through the process of **negative attributions** and **self-fulfilling prophecies**, parents' expectations about their child's future functioning can **worsen a child's symptoms**.
- The study explored relationships between **changes in parent expectations and changes in their child's internalizing problems** (e.g., depression and anxiety) over the course of a 12-week CBT intervention.

## METHOD

- **Participants:** 297 non-offending parents and their 297 children presenting to Project SAFE (Sexual Abuse Family Education), a 12-week cognitive behavioral group intervention at a Child Advocacy Center.
- **Parents:** Ages 23-72 (M = 38), 76% female, 73% European American.
- **Victims:** Ages 7-17 (M = 12), 73% female, 64% European American.
- **Parent Expectations** were measured before treatment (baseline) and at posttest (12 weeks) using the Post Sexual Abuse Expectations Scale (PSAES).
- **Child Internalizing Symptoms** were measured before treatment (baseline) and at posttest (12 weeks) using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL).
- **Growth curve modeling** was implemented to examine whether changes in child internalizing problems were moderated by parents' expectations over the course of treatment.

## ADDITIONAL INFO

Scan QR Code to access more detailed methods, results, implications, and references.

During treatment for child sexual abuse, as parent expectations about their child's future improve, children's internalizing symptoms also improve.

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## RESULTS

- As hypothesized, results showed that **improvements in parent expectations were positively associated with improvements in child internalizing symptoms**, and this relationship extended above and beyond the effects of time,  $t(227) = 5.35, p < .001$ .
- Or, alternatively interpreted, **as parents' negative expectations decreased, children's internalizing symptoms also decreased** beyond the expected change in symptoms as a function of time.
- After controlling for the effects of time, **for every 1 unit decrease in negative parent expectations, child internalizing symptoms decreased** at a rate of -1.35 units at each assessment point,  $t(227) = -3.72, p < .001$ .
- For parents whose **expectations improved more over the course of treatment, their children showed a greater rate of reduction in internalizing symptoms**.

Fixed Effect	Coefficient	Standard error	t-ratio	Approx. df.	p-value
For INTRCPT1, $\pi_0$					
INTRCPT2, $\beta_{00}$	60.316926	0.734978	82.066	215	<.001
For TIME slope, $\pi_1$					
INTRCPT2, $\beta_{10}$	-1.351572	0.363521	-3.718	227	<.001
For EXP slope, $\pi_2$					
INTRCPT2, $\beta_{20}$	0.417544	0.078072	5.348	227	<.001

## DISCUSSION

- Improvements in parent expectations predicted greater ratings of improvements in child internalizing symptoms.
- Children's emotions may be influenced by perceptions of their parent's expectations.
- Thus, it is important to address parent expectations as a treatment target for CSA interventions.
- CSA interventions should strive to reach and include underserved parent populations, as well as educate parents about the potential impact of their expectations on their child's wellbeing.