

# Caregiver Distress and Child Behavior Problems as Predictors of Family Cohesion for Families Presenting to Treatment Following Child Sexual Abuse

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## INTRODUCTION

- Research on the influence of the familial environment on child sexual abuse (CSA) victims shows a direct link between family factors and long term victim functioning (Cohen & Mannarino, 2000; Zajac et al., 2015).
- Familial support and stress may act to maintain or increase a child's symptomology following CSA (Shonkoff et al., 2012).
- This study aimed to identify what factors influence **family cohesion** prior to engaging in a CSA intervention.
- Tested by a moderation model, it was hypothesized that the negative association between **caregiver distress** and **family cohesion** will be significantly enhanced when **child externalizing behavior** is high.

## METHODS

- Participants were 277 non-offending caregivers of sexually abused youth presenting to **Project SAFE (Sexual Abuse Family Education)**, a 12-week parallel group cognitive-behavioral treatment program held at a **Child Advocacy Center**.
- Caregivers were primarily biological parents, 23 to 72 years old ( $M = 37.41$ ,  $SD = 7.48$ ), 79.8% female, and 85.6% identified as European American.
- Youth were 4 to 19 years old ( $M = 11.26$ ,  $SD = 3.30$ ), 79.4% female, and 74.0% identified as European American.
- Caregivers completed the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL), the Symptoms Checklist-90-Revised (SCL-90-R), and the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES-III).

## RESULTS

- There was a significant interaction between **caregiver distress** and **child externalizing behavior** as predictors of **family cohesion** (unstandardized coefficient = -0.009,  $SE = 0.004$ ,  $p = .014$ ).
- The relationship between **caregiver distress** and **family cohesion** became significant at high and moderate levels of **child externalizing behavior**.
- The final model explained 11.4% of the variance in **family cohesion**.



When both caregiver and child are experiencing distress, the family is likely to have decreased cohesion following child sexual abuse.

## DISCUSSION

- Given the importance of family cohesion to victim recovery, examining this relationship and potential moderators has meaningful research and clinical implications.
- Results aid in informing clinicians on how families present to treatment as well as providing areas to address in intervention practices.
- This study provides support for interventions that deliver concurrent services to victims as well as their underserved caregivers, particularly those experiencing distress.

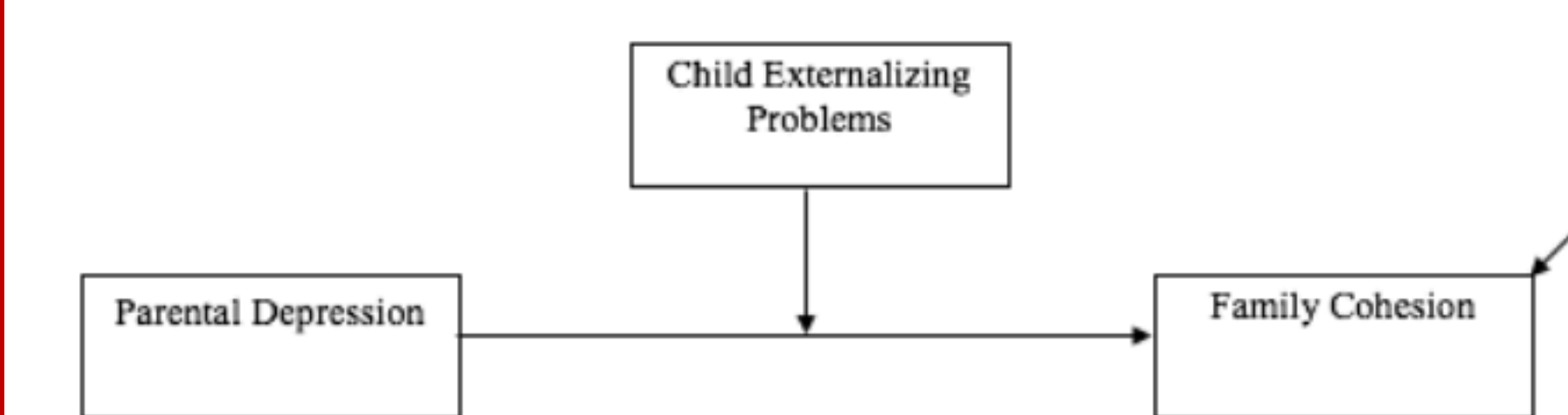
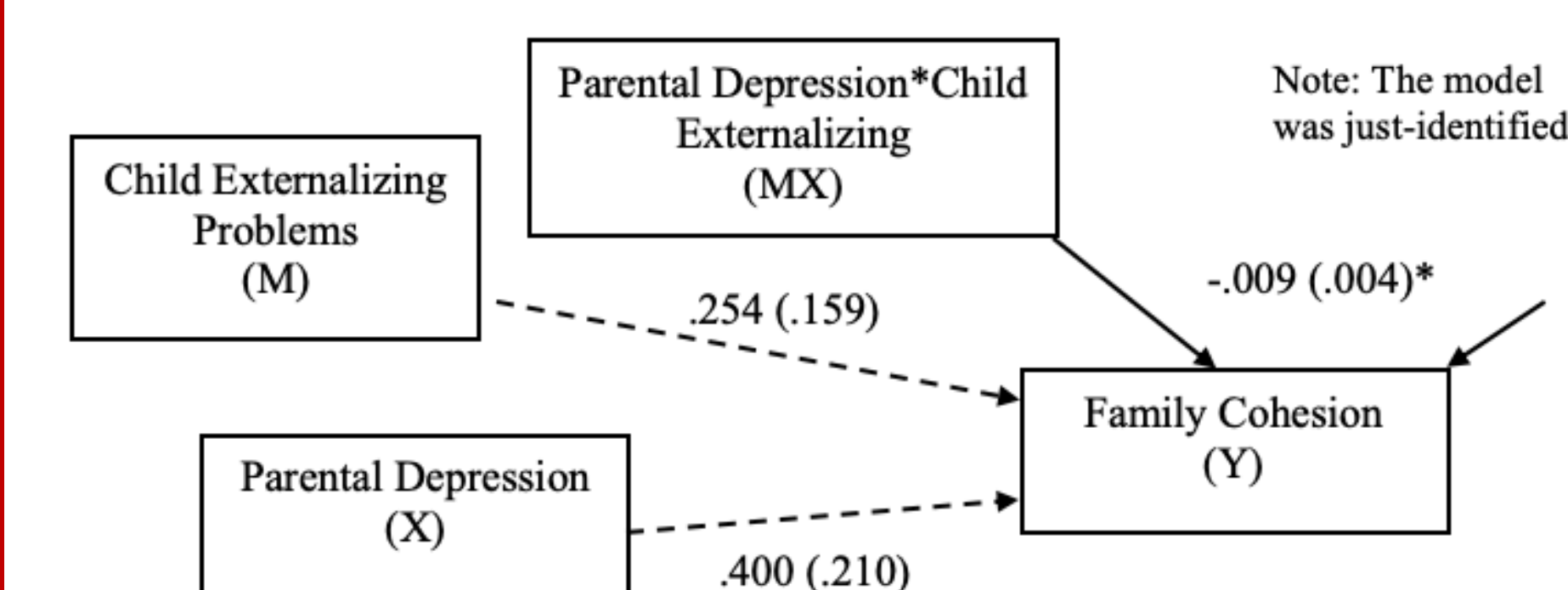


Figure 1. Conceptual Model. Child externalizing behaviors moderate the relationship between parent depression and family cohesion.

Table 1. Observed Study Variables: Descriptive Statistics and Correlations

	Parent Depression	Child Externalizing	Family Cohesion
Parent Depression	-		
Child Externalizing	.187***	-	
Family Cohesion	-.214*	.266***	-
<i>M</i>	44.49	59.42	36.87
<i>SD</i>	9.67	11.53	6.44
<i>N</i>	268	269	277

\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$   
 Note. Correlations were calculated in SPSS using pair-wise deletion.



\*  $p < .05$  \*\*  $p < .01$  \*\*\*  $p < .001$

