



From Maternal Childhood Victimization to Child Emotional and Behavioral Problems: Gender Moderated Pathways



Jacqueline B. Duong¹, Meghan Evans¹, Nicholas M. Morelli², Miguel Villodas^{1,2}

¹Department of Psychology, San Diego State University ; ²San Diego State University/University of California, San Diego Joint Doctoral Program in Clinical Psychology

Introduction:

- Maternal history of childhood sexual/physical abuse may have cascading effects, increasing risk for depressive symptoms and dysfunctional parent-child relationships.
- Maternal depressive symptoms interfere with effective and nurturing parenting and increase risk for aggressive mother-child interactions, which is a salient predictor of children's behavior problems and socioemotional development.
- Gender- differences in behavioral problems indicate girls are more likely to develop internalizing problems (i.e. depression, anxiety) while boys are likely to develop externalizing problems (i.e., aggression, delinquency).
- **Present study examined the mediational pathways from maternal victimization (T1) to child internalizing and externalizing problems (T4) through maternal depressive symptoms (T2) and mother-child aggression (T3).**
- **Hypotheses:** Maternal depressive symptoms would be a more salient mediator for girls, while mother-child aggression would be a more salient mediator for boys.

Methods:

- Mother-child dyads ($N = 768$), identified as at-risk for family violence before child age 4 years in the Longitudinal Studies of Child Abuse and Neglect, were interviewed biannually.
- **Maternal history of childhood physical and sexual victimization:** Caregiver's History of Loss and Victimization (child age 4; T1)
- **Maternal depressive symptoms:** Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (child age 4/6; T1 & T2)
- **Maternal use of psychological and physical aggression:** Parent-Child Conflict Tactics Scales (child age 6/8; T2 & T3)
- **Mother-reported child behavior problems:** Child Behavior Checklist (child age 6/8; T2 & T3)

Analyses:

- Multi-group SEM with bias-corrected confidence intervals based on 1000 boot-strapped samples was used to examine the effect of gender on mediation paths

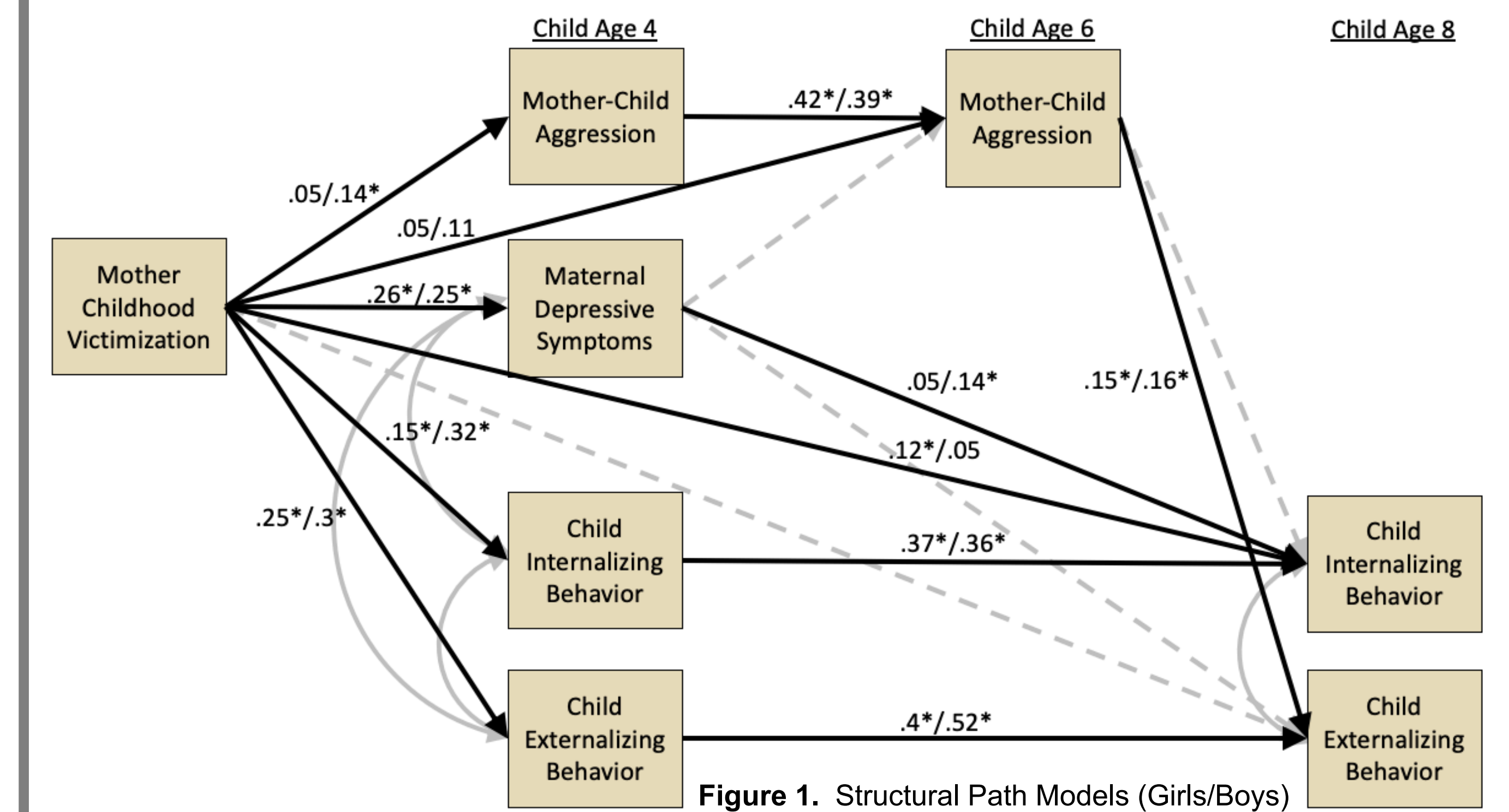
Two independent mediation paths separately explained the association between maternal victimization and child internalizing and externalizing problems

Maternal history of victimization is associated with child *internalizing behavior problems* via maternal depressive symptoms

Maternal history of victimization is associated with child *externalizing behavior problems* via mother-child aggression

These associations were found in boys but not for girls

Sample Demographics	Proportion or M(SD)
Child gender (% female)	386 (50.3%)
Race/Ethnicity	
White	203 (26.4%)
African American	443 (57.7%)
Latino or Hispanic	35 (4.6%)
Other	87 (11.3%)
Maternal Education (years)	11.39 (1.82)
Family income < \$14,999	482 (62.8%)
Mat History of Childhood Sexual Victimization	284 (38.4%)
Mat History of Childhood Physical Victimization	259 (35%)
Child internalizing T-scores (girls/boys at age 8)	51.74(11.28)/51.06(9.99)
Child externalizing T-scores (girls/boys at age 8)	53.25(10.84)/ 53.65(11.6)



Mediation Path	Indirect Effect [95% CI]	
	Girls	Boys
Mat Vic→Mat Dep→Ext	-.004 [-.043, .022]	.016 [-.004, .048]
Mat Vic→M-C Aggr→Ext	.007 [-.009, .036]	.017* [.001, .047]
Mat Vic→Mat Dep→Int	.013 [-.020, .052]	.034* [.009, .084]
Mat Vic→M-C Aggr→Int	.002 [-.004, .02]	.005 [-.007, .028]
Mat Vic→Mat Dep→M-C Aggr→Ext	-.001 [-.008, .003]	-.004 [-.013, 0]
Mat Vic→Mat Dep→M-C Aggr→Int	0 [-.004, .001]	-.001 [-.007, .001]

Discussion:

- Maternal depression and mother-child conflict may be important targets for the prevention of internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, among boys of mothers who have history of childhood victimization.
- Interventions, such as home-visiting programs that target at-risk mothers and mothers with histories of maltreatment should integrate cognitive-behavioral and parent-child interaction strategies, particularly for mothers of boys
- For girls, although no significant mediation effects were observed other potential mechanisms (i.e., maternal warmth) should be explored