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Intergenerational Pathways to Emotional Regulation: Implications for Parenting Stress and Preschoolers' Challenging Behaviors

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Background

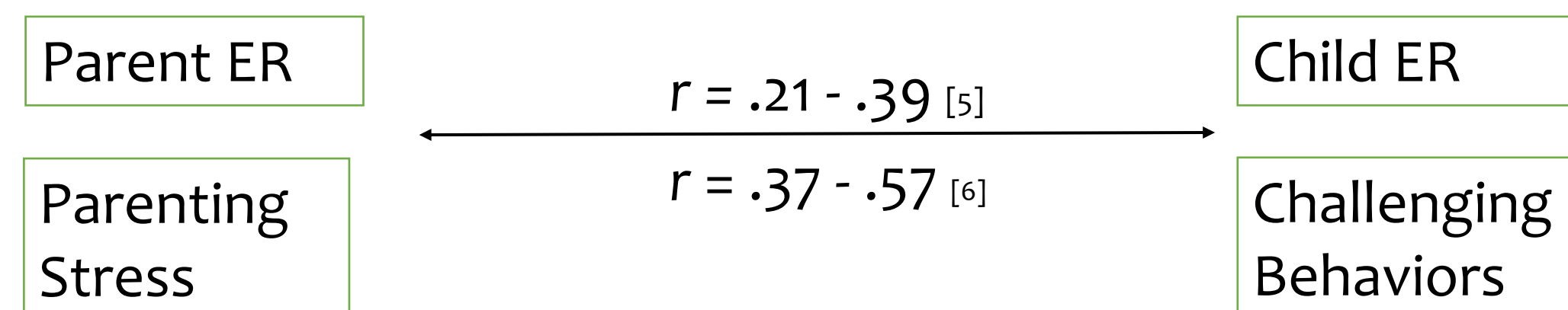
Emotion Regulation: Responses to emotions that help accomplish goals [1]

Emotion dysregulation: Responses to emotions that are maladaptive given one's goals or context [2]

Preschool: Critical period for ER development
Co-regulation w/ parents → Co-regulation w/ other social agents + self regulation [3]

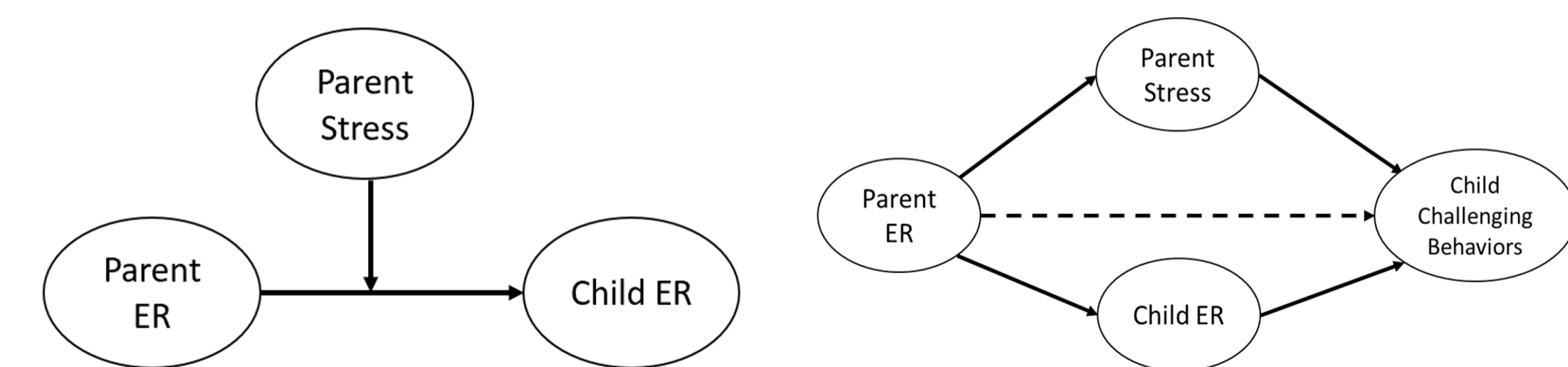
Autistic children show differences in ER development – prolonged influence of parents[4]

Research shows two well established patterns on how parent's emotions translate to children's overall emotional adjustment and development:



The current study sought to understand how these processes influence each other, specifically –

- A) Does parenting stress moderate the relationship between parent and child ER?
- B) Does parenting stress and/or child ER explain the pathway from parent ER to children's
 - A) challenging behaviors? B



Methods

Study Sample

- N = 265 parent-child dyads; preschoolers ages 3-5 years old (M= 4.19)
- Baseline data from multi-site comparative efficacy trial (MBSR + BPT vs Attn + BPT) in OR and CA (87%)
- 48% primary diagnosis = ASD; 52% developmental delay
- 66% of families Hispanic/Latinx; 55% of children multilingual

Measures

- Parent ER = DERS or PCI observation
- Child ER = ERC or PCI observation
- Parenting stress = Parenting Daily Hassles and Parenting stress index
- Challenging behaviors = CBCL

Parent-Child Interaction Observational Data:

- 15-minute play task (free-play, clean-up, puzzle) – rated on 1-9 Likert scale for each item
- CFA model yielded 2-factor model for emotion dysregulation: overwhelmed vs dysphoric. Overwhelmed factor used in current study for parent ER.
- Parent ER (overwhelmed) examples = parent overwhelmed; stressed; emotionally reactive to situation
- Child ER examples = dysregulated and difficult to manage; overly upset with tasks or changes in routine

References 1) Thompson, 1994 2) Cole et al. 2019 3) Skinner & Zimmer-Gembeck, 2007 4) Nuske et al., 2017 5) Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021 6) Barosso et al., 2018

Parenting stress affects the degree to which there is shared parent-child emotion dysregulation during a play-based interaction



Parenting stress and child emotion dysregulation are both strong predictors of preschoolers' challenging behaviors

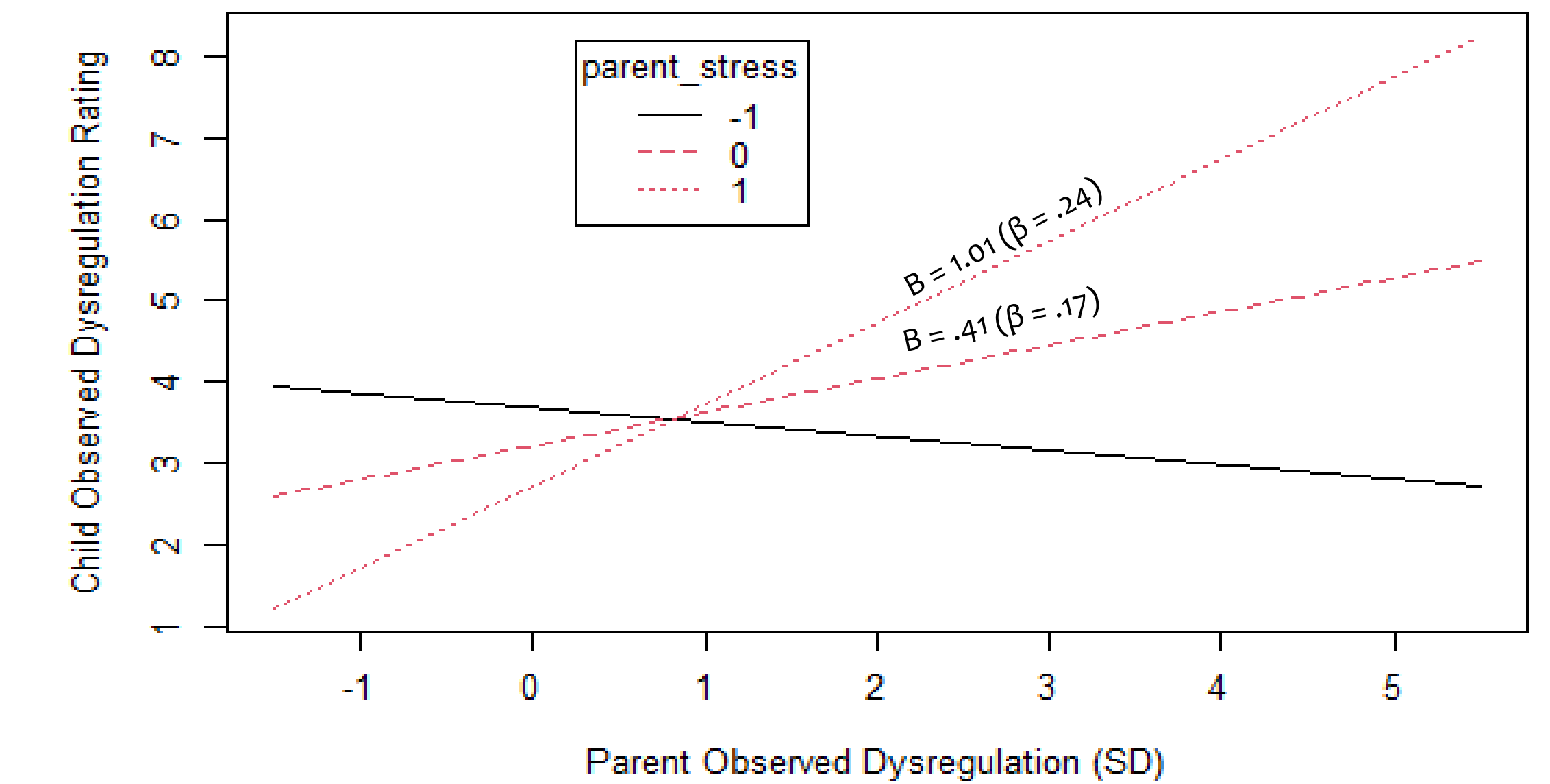


Child emotion dysregulation helps explain the pathway between parenting stress and children's challenging behaviors

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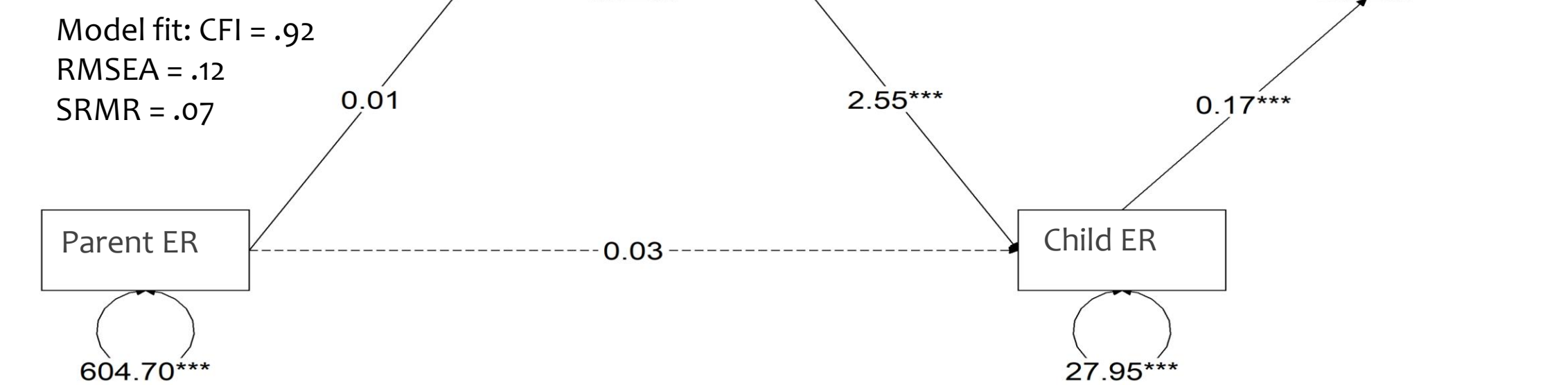
Results

RQ1: Does parenting stress moderate the effect of parent ER on child ER? Yes. For observational data.



RQ2/3: Does parent stress / child ER mediate the relationship between parent ER and children's challenging behaviors? No – though parent stress and child ER significantly predict child behaviors

Exploratory RQs: 1) Does parent ER affect child ER through parent stress? No, for both models. 2) Does parent stress affect child behaviors through child ER? Yes – for parent-report data



Conclusions

- ❖ Having low to average levels of parenting stress is a protective factor towards the impact of shared parent-child dysregulation
- ❖ Children's ER capacities, both parent-reported and observed were largely predictive of behavioral adjustment
- ❖ Sparsity of interventions focused on child ER and/or parenting stress
- ❖ More research is needed to clarify the relationship between parent ER and stress