

RECOGNITION OF EMOTIONS BY PARENTS AND THEIR CHILD MODERATES THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CHILDHOOD MALTREATMENT AND SENSITIVE PARENTAL BEHAVIORS



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INTRODUCTION

As defined by Ainsworth et al. (1979), sensitivity is the ability of a parent to perceive, interpret, and respond adequately in response to a child's signals. Several studies indicate that a history of childhood maltreatment is related to their ability to recognize facial expressions of emotion (Bérubé et al., 2020; Cheng & Langevin, 2023). In turn, parental emotional abilities influence children's emotional abilities. Perceptual difficulties in parents and children could have serious consequences on their dyadic relationship.

METHOD

Emotion recognition by the parent: 3 blocks of 150 trials

- Computerized emotion recognition task
- Like the Facial Expression Megamix task by Young et al. (1997)
- 6 basic emotions: Anger, Disgust, Fear, Joy, Sadness and Surprise
- Total score of unbiased performance on all 6 emotions

Emotion recognition by the child: 2 blocks of 40 trials

- Is the mother happy or unhappy?
- Performance score calculated with the 4 negative emotions

OBJECTIVES

To examine how parents' and children's ability to recognize emotion interact with a history maltreatment to influence sensitive parenting behavior.

PARTICIPANTS

57 **parents** aged between 24 and 48 years ($M = 34.63$, $SD = 5.30$) and their **child** from two to six years old ($M = 4$ years 7 months, $SD = 0.99$ year).

METHOD

Childhood Trauma Questionnaire (CTQ)

- 28 items self-reported questionnaire measuring 5 forms of abuse and neglect
- Likert-type scale from 1 to 5
- Global score of severity formed by adding the score of each subscale

Sensitivity

- Coding Interactive Behavior (CIB) global rating scheme by Ruth Feldman (1998)
- Videotaped parent-child interaction: 8 min of free play and 7 min structured task
- Score of sensitive behaviors = Mean of *dyadic reciprocity*, *adaptation* and *regulation* and *fluency*

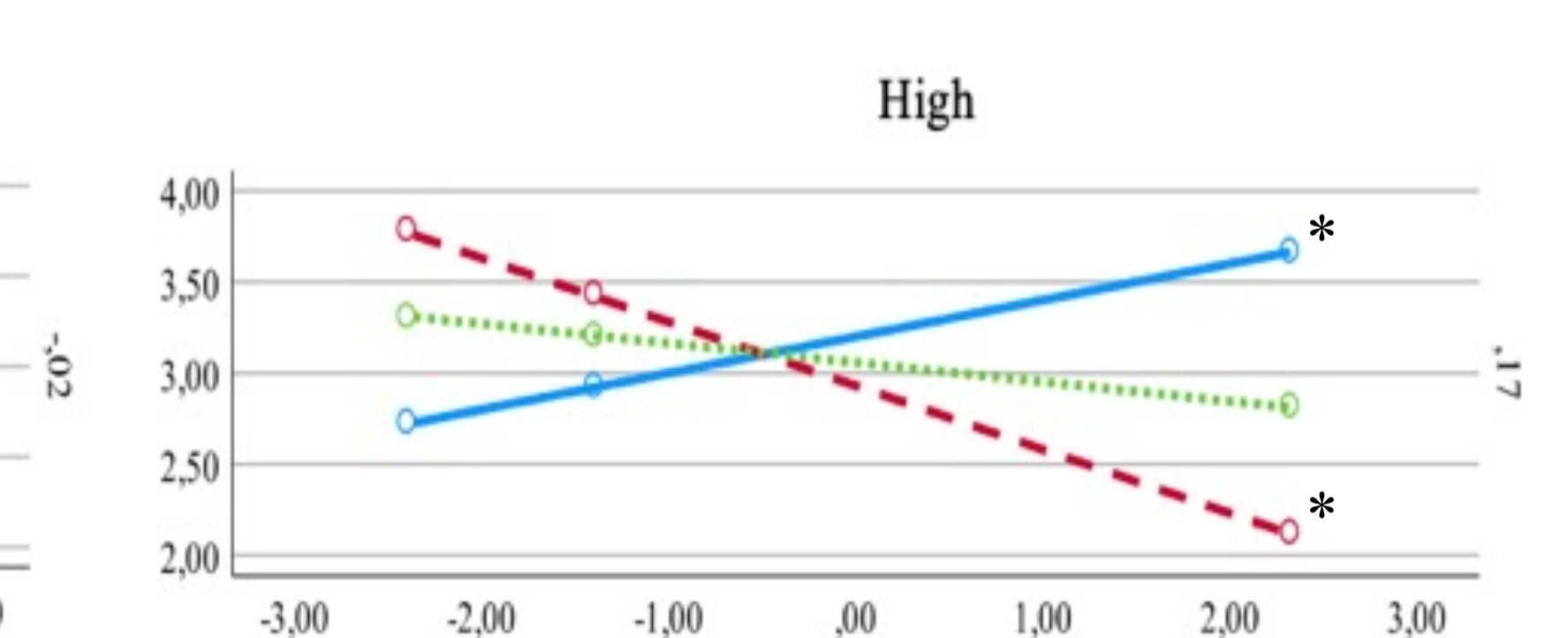
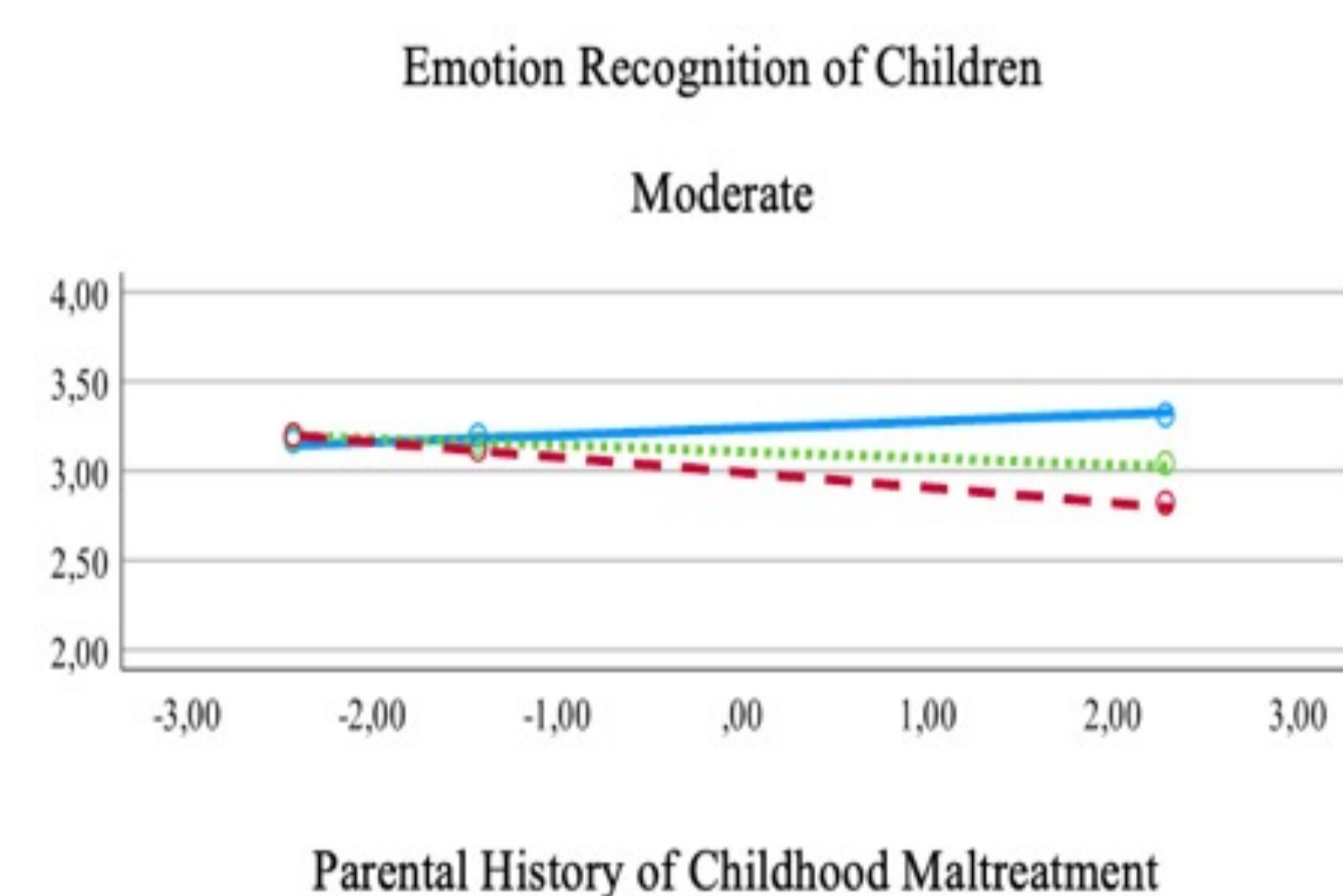
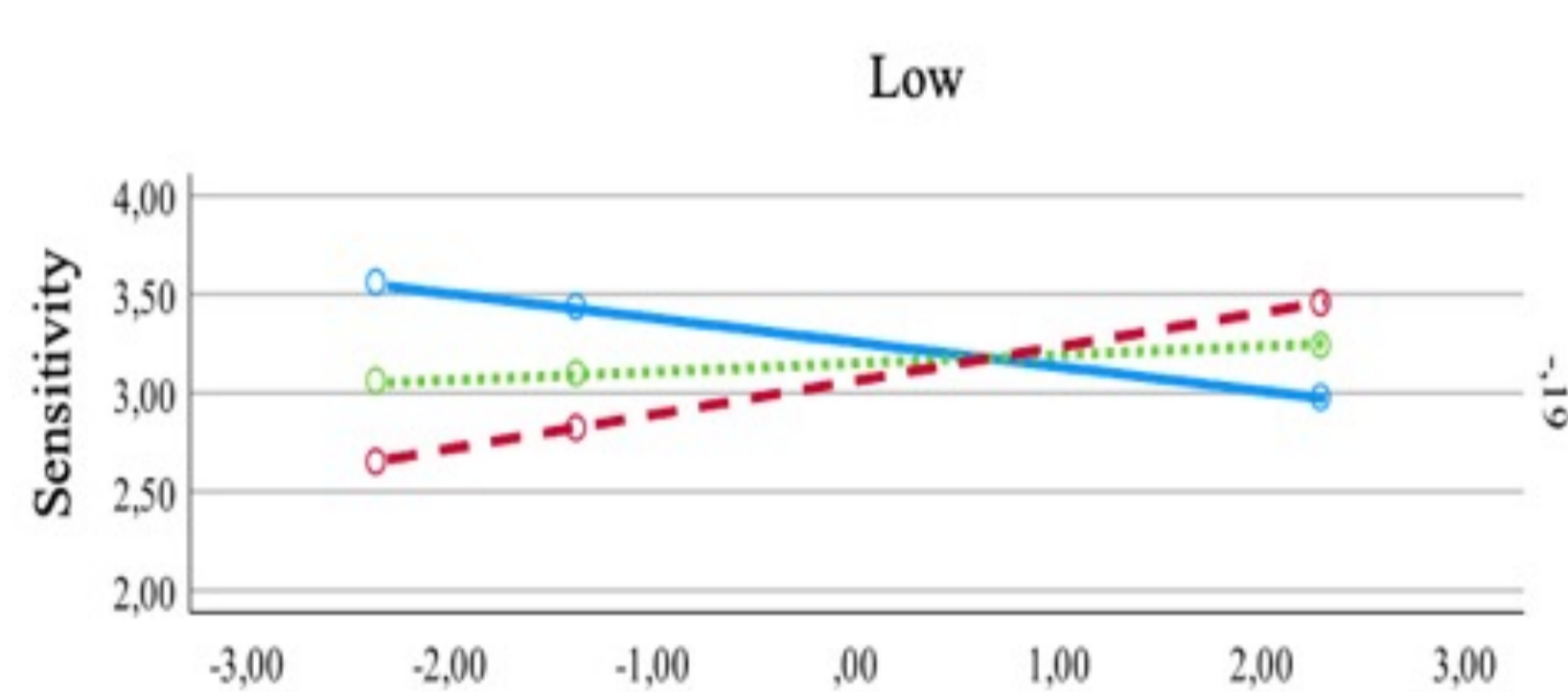


RESULTS

Emotion Recognition of Parents

Low
Moderate
High

* sig.



RESULTS

Model was significant $F(9, 47) = 4.39$, $p < .001$, accounting for 21.14% of the variance in parental sensitivity during the **structured task**. An interaction effect between parental and child's emotion recognition, along with childhood maltreatment, significantly influenced sensitive parental behaviors ($b = -14.32$; $t(47) = -3.80$, $p < .001$).

For parents with higher performance in emotion recognition, when their child's performance is also high, greater childhood maltreatment severity predicts lower dyadic sensitivity. However, when a parent's performance in emotion recognition is low but their child performs well, greater maltreatment severity is associated to higher dyadic sensitivity.

CONCLUSIONS

In certain instances, children could help break the cycle by contributing to more positive interactions. However, if interventions are made without considering parents' abilities, it could create additional stress in the relationship.

Our results suggest the importance of working with both parents and children, particularly when parents have a history of childhood maltreatment, to break the intergenerational cycle of maltreatment.

TAKEAWAY POINTS

1. A systemic approach should be used to intervene with both parties.
2. Children may benefit from emotion recognition training but their familial context as to be considered and supported when necessary.
3. Trauma-informed interventions would be recommended for families with maltreatment history.

REFERENCES



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