

Maternal and Adolescent Temperament as Predictors of Maternal Emotional Behaviour During Mother-adolescent Interactions

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Background

Early adolescence is a period during which there is an increased risk of emotional regulatory disorders, such as depression. Emotion socialization is known to be an important influence on the development of emotion regulation skills, throughout childhood and even into adolescence. However less research has been conducted on emotion socialization during adolescence than during childhood. Parental emotional expression may serve as a model for early adolescents of the appropriateness and efficacy of interpersonal emotional behaviour. It is thought that both mothers and adolescents contribute somewhat to the patterns of maternal emotional behaviour. The pervasive impact of one's temperament on emotional profiles renders it a potential influence on family interaction behaviour. Therefore, we aimed to examine whether maternal and early adolescent temperament predict maternal emotional behaviour during mother-adolescent interactions. Specifically, we examined temperament dimensions of Negative Affectivity, Effortful Control, and Surgency/Extraversion, in both mothers and adolescents, as predictors of maternal aggressive, dysphoric, and positive interpersonal behaviour.

Methods:

The sample comprised 151 early adolescents (aged 11-13; 53% female) and their mothers (aged 29-57), recruited through schools across metropolitan Melbourne. Self-reports and mother-reports of the Early Adolescent Temperament Questionnaire were collected, as well as self-reports of maternal temperament, measured by the Adult Temperament Questionnaire. The mother-adolescent dyads were then observed participating in event-planning and problem-solving interactions, during which the frequency (rate per minute) of Aggressive, Dysphoric, and Positive Interpersonal maternal behaviour was recorded. These behaviours were coded using the Living in Family Environments (LIFE) event-based coding system, during which new codes are entered each time the affect or verbal content of the interactants changes. The Aggressive construct included all codes with contemptuous, angry, and argumentative affective or verbal behaviour; the Dysphoric construct comprised dismal, anxious, or complaining behaviour; and the Positive Interpersonal construct denoted happy, pleasant, caring or affirmative behaviour. Regression analyses were conducted to assess the relationships between temperament factors and maternal emotional behaviours.

Results:

Analyses indicated that adolescent temperament (particularly maternal ratings of adolescent temperament) was a significant predictor of aggressive and positive maternal behaviour (see Figure 1), and accounted for greater proportions of variance in aggressive and positive maternal behaviour than did maternal temperament. Specifically, the findings suggested that adolescents who are perceived by their mothers as higher in Negative Affectivity are generally exposed to more frequent aggressive and less frequent positive maternal behaviour. It was also found that mothers who perceive themselves as higher in Effortful Control displayed less frequent dysphoric behaviour towards their adolescent children (see Figure 2). Maternal and adolescent Surgency were unrelated to maternal emotional behaviours. Maternal and adolescent temperaments also did not predict maternal dysphoric behaviours.

Figure 1: Significant results from linear regressions predicting maternal emotional behaviour with early adolescent temperament - mother-report (N = 151)

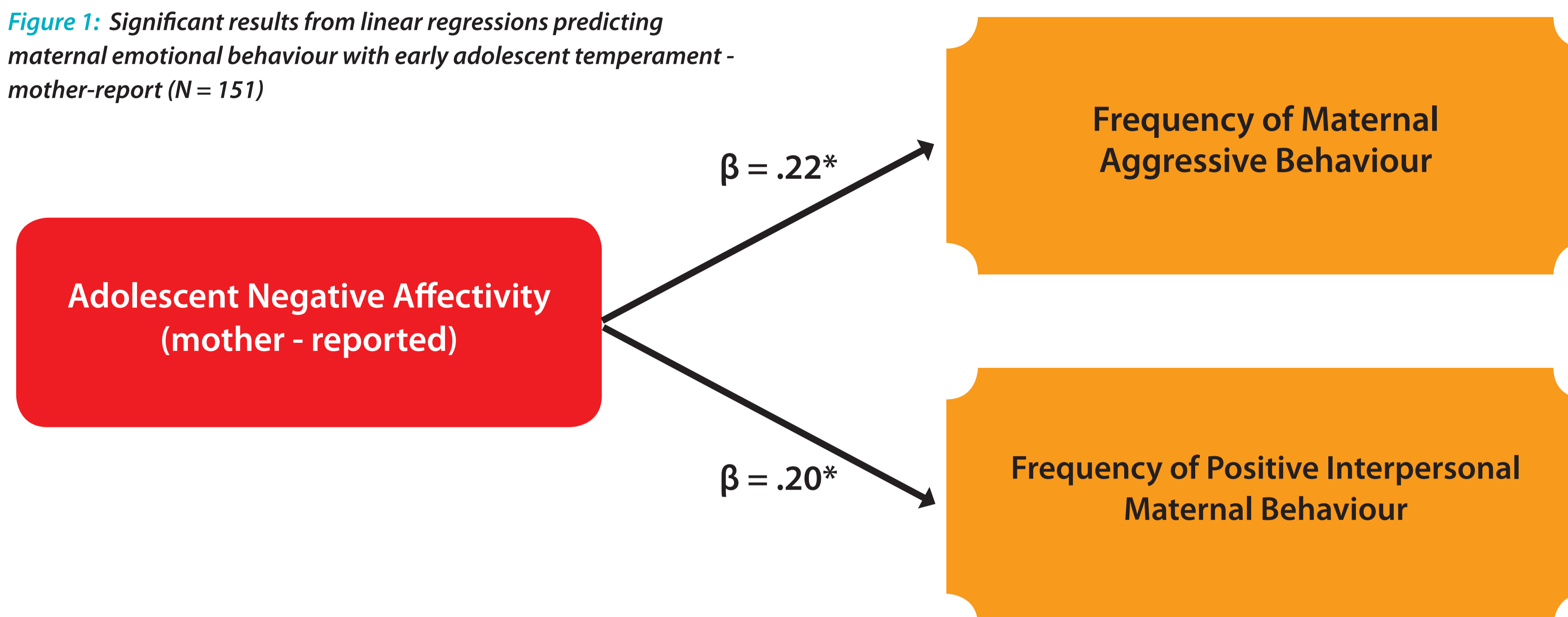
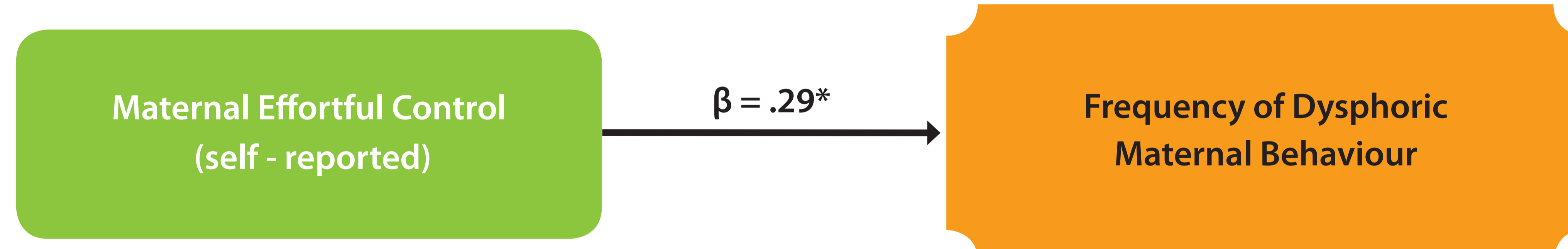


Figure 2: Significant results from linear regressions predicting maternal emotional behaviour with maternal temperament (N = 151)



Conclusions:

Overall, these results suggest that adolescent temperament, particularly as perceived by mothers, is significantly associated with particular maternal emotional behaviours, such as aggressive and positive interpersonal behaviour. Maternal temperament, however, appears to be less strongly related to maternal emotional behaviours. Emotionally expressive behaviour from mothers bears importance for adolescents' own emotional behaviour, thus these findings generally suggest that, through their relationship with maternal emotional behaviour, temperamental dispositions may have important implications for the development of emotion regulation skills and thus emotional well-being in adolescents.

