

The Relationship between Child Behavior Problems, Parenting Stress and Parental Perceptions in Families with Children with Autism Spectrum Disorder



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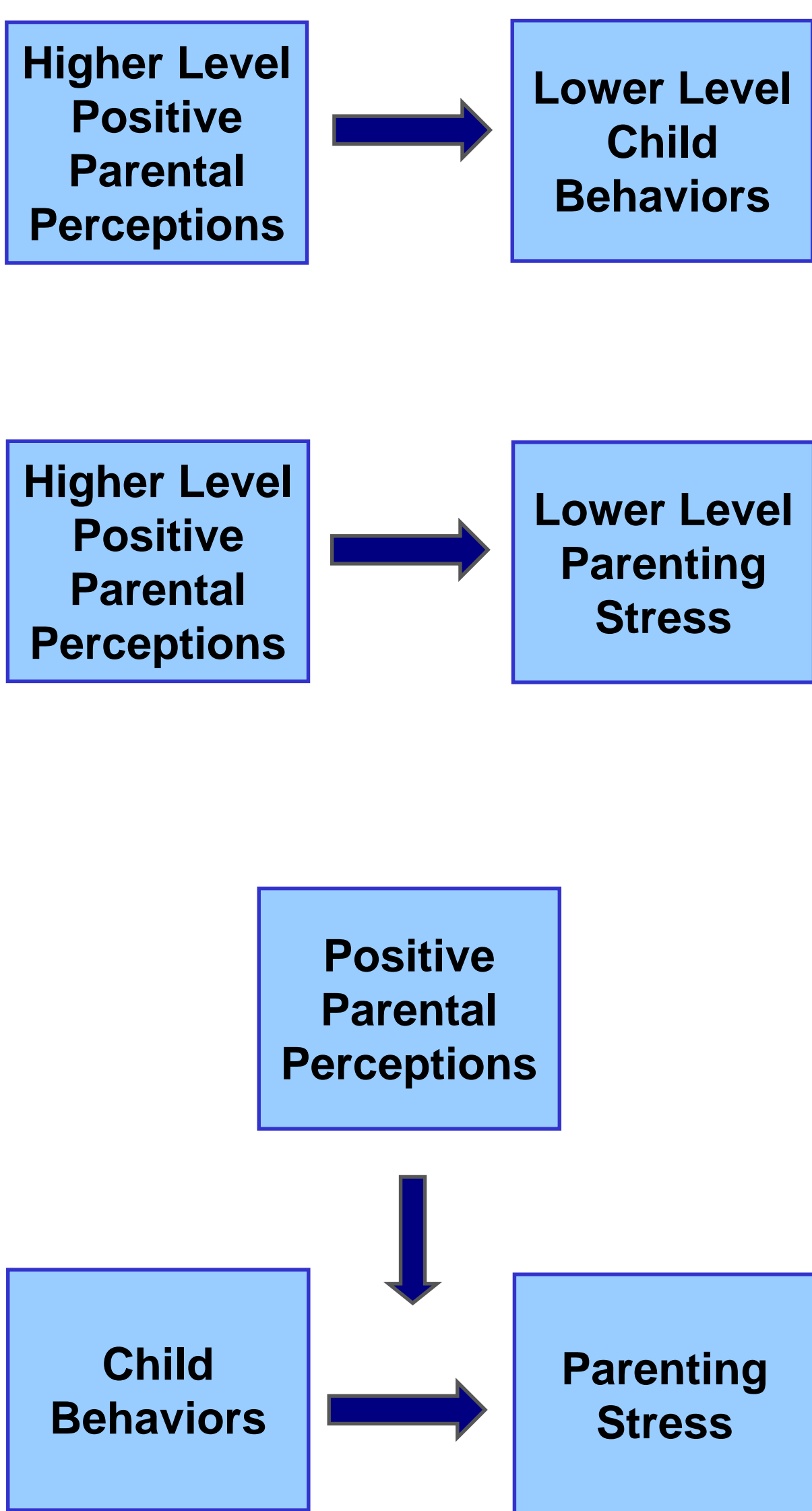
Introduction

- Behavior problems are a significant source of stress for parents of children with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD)^{2,4,6}, and are related to caregiver depression^{5,6} and a lower parental quality of life⁶.
- Positive maternal perceptions of children with ASD have been shown to predict child adaptation and behavioral functioning⁷.
- There is an association between parent behaviors/perceptions and child behaviors in children with disabilities³.
- However, more negative maternal perceptions of one's child predict higher levels of child behavior problems in children with ASD¹.
- There is little research examining whether parental perceptions of a child with ASD affect one's level of parenting stress, or if these perceptions could moderate the relationship between child behavior problems and parenting stress.

Study Questions

1. Is there a relation between level of positive parental perception about the child with ASD and the severity of the child's behavior problems?
2. Is there a relation between level of positive parental perception about the child with ASD and level of parenting stress?
3. Does level of positive parental perception about the child with ASD moderate the association between severity of the child's behavior problems and level of parenting stress?

Hypotheses



Participants

Sample Characteristics: M (SD)			
Parents		Children	
Number of Couples	60	Age	9.5 (3.1)
		Age Range	6-17
Age	39.3 (6.1)	Severity of Autism Symptoms (Measured by Social Responsiveness Scale)	77.1 (10.3)
Household Income	\$70,000- \$79,999 (\$30,000)	Child Behavior Problems (Measured by Child Behavior Checklist total t-score)	63.1 (10.6)

Measures

- Child behavior problems: Child Behavior Checklist⁸. Total t-score used, higher scores indicating more severe behavior problems.
- Parental perceptions of child with ASD: Five Minute Speech Sample⁹. Warmth used: 0-5 scale, 5 being the largest amount of warmth expressed.
- Parenting stress: Burden Interview¹⁰. 29 items rated on a 0-2 scale, score of 58 being greater stress.

Results

Study Question 1:

Level of positive parental perception was significantly negatively associated with severity of the child's behavior problems in mothers ($r = .36, p = .004$)

Level of positive parental perception was significantly negatively associated with the severity of the child's behavior problems in fathers ($r = .27, p = .03$)

Study Question 2:

Level of positive parental perception was significantly negatively associated with level of parenting stress in mothers ($r = -.46, p < .001$)

Level of positive parental perception was not significantly associated with level of parenting stress in fathers ($r = -.18, p = .16$)

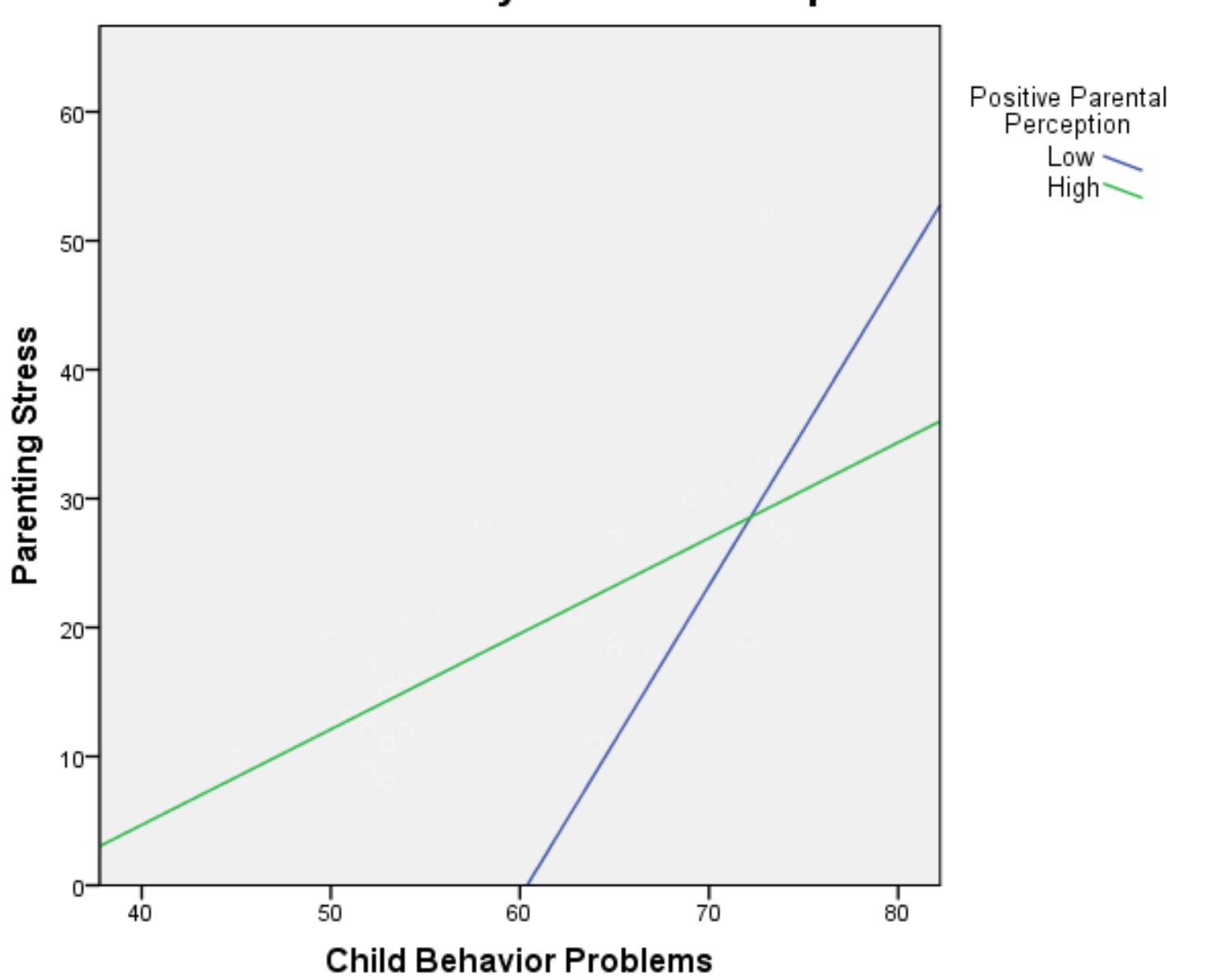
Study Question 3:

At a trend level, level of positive parental perception acted as a moderator of the association between severity of the child's behavior problems and level of parenting stress for mothers.

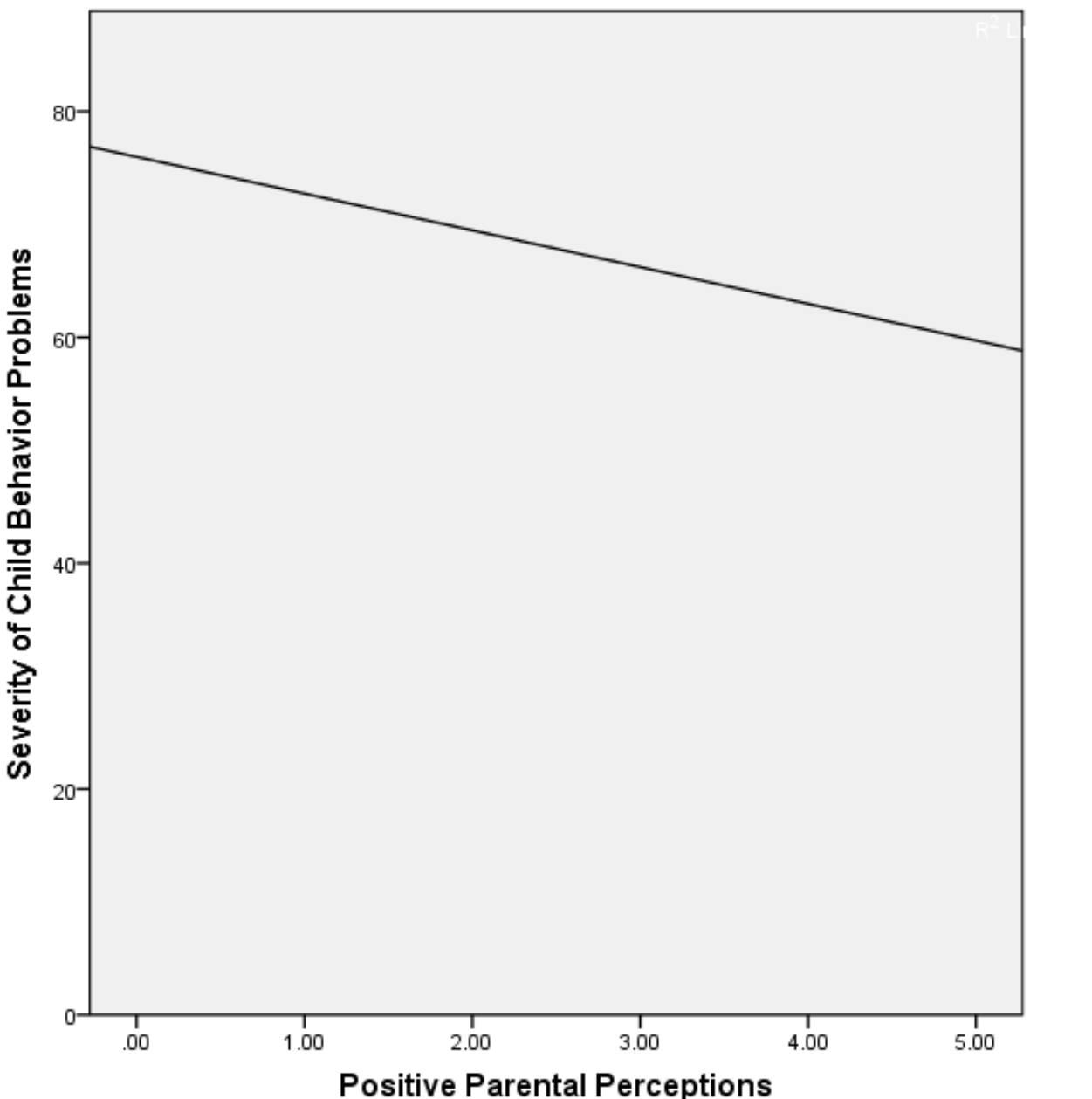
Level of positive parental perception did not moderate the association between severity of the child's behavior problems and level of parenting stress in fathers.

Results

Associations between Child Behavior Problems and Parenting Stress Moderated by Parental Perception in Mothers



Association Between Positive Parental Perceptions and Child Behavior Problems in Mothers of Children with ASD



Conclusions

Findings indicate that parents (both mothers and fathers) who had a child with ASD with less severe behavior problems had a more positive perception of their child. Moreover, positive parental perceptions about the child appear to play a role in the link between the child with ASD's behavior problems and level of parenting stress. Specifically, there was a positive association between severity of the child with ASD's behavior problems and level of parenting stress for mothers who did not have a positive perception of their child. In contrast, there was not an association between severity of the child with ASD's behavior problems and level of parenting stress for mothers who had a highly positive perception of their child. One interpretation of this finding is that if a mother has a positive perception of her child with ASD, she will be buffered from higher levels of parenting stress, no matter what her child's level of behavior problems. It is not clear why positive parental perceptions were not associated with parenting stress and did not serve as a moderator in fathers.

Future Directions

Future research should focus on understanding strategies for changing parental perceptions about their child with ASD in more positive ways. These findings show that this could have a positive effect on parenting stress for mothers. Future research should also focus on why differences exist between mothers and fathers of children with ASD, and the implications of this for child and family services.

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