Child Maltreatment and Adolescent Suicidal Thoughts and Behaviors:
A Developmental Model and Empirical Findings

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Study Aims
- We tested the role of stressful life events (a developmentally salient risk factor) in the association between CM and STBs among depressed adolescent girls.
- The stress sensitivity hypothesis suggests that exposure to CM increases ones’ vulnerability to the harmful effects of stress experienced later in life.
- We hypothesized that stressful life events would exacerbate the association between CM and STBs, supporting the stress sensitivity hypothesis.

Method
- We utilized a baseline sample of low-SES depressed adolescent girls (N = 175) who participated in an RCT.
- We measured STBs via the Kiddie Schedule for Affective Disorders and Schizophrenia, and via participant self-report.
- Youth answered questions about stressful life events in the past year and about CM anytime growing up using well-validated measures.
- We used structural equation modeling to test study hypotheses.

Results
- The moderation model exhibited an excellent model fit, \( \chi^2 = .93 (5), p = .97, CFI = 1.00, SRMR = .01 \).
- CM was significantly associated with adolescent STBs, \( \beta = .40, p < .001, 95\% CI [.24, .57] \).
- The interaction term (CM X stressful life events) was significantly associated with STBs, \( \beta = .18, p < .05, 95\% CI [.001, .36] \), indicating a moderation effect (See Figure 2).

Discussion
- Results supported the stress sensitivity hypothesis: stressors in the past year exacerbated the association between CM and adolescent’s STBs.

Key Principles of the Model:
1. CM leads to adolescent STBs by way of three transacting (i.e., interacting with one another), multi-level (i.e., biological, behavioral, and interpersonal) mechanisms (see Figure 1 in blue).
2. CM is a context and not a one-time event. CM can be acute or chronic, and can interact with mechanisms at different points in development (see Figure 1 in yellow).
3. Protective factors can be youth traits (i.e., emotion regulation) or contextual factors (i.e., supportive adults) that buffer the pathway to adolescent STBs (see Figure 1 in green).
4. During adolescence, there are developmentally-salient risk factors for STBs. These are risk factors that are especially important to consider when studying adolescent suicide prevention.
5. STBs emerge from a combination of mechanisms and risk factors that develop over time.

Figure 1. A Developmental model of child maltreatment and adolescent suicidal thoughts and behaviors.

Figure 2. The shaded area represents the values of the moderator in which the effect of stressful life events on STBs is significant.

References