

Links between Depressive Symptoms and Responsive Parenting: Moderation by Neighborhood Environment

Maria Belinda Vasquez, M.S., Victoria Cooper, M.S., Priscilla Zambrano, M.S., Melissa A. Barnett, Ph.D

Background

- Economically disadvantaged parents often have to manage multiple stressors that may contribute to parental depressive symptoms, which can disrupt parental functioning, including parental responsiveness (Conger et al., 1997; Fagan et al., 2016; Farkas & Valdes, 2010).
- In addition, deteriorating neighborhood environments indicate a risk for proximal developmental processes such as parenting behaviors (Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006; Kohen et al, 2008).



- Nevertheless, high levels of neighborhood disorder can motivate parents to promote more parental responsiveness to protect their children, and low levels of neighborhood disorder can represent social support present in the environment (Joongbaeck & Ross, 2009).
- In line with The Resilience Risk Model (Masten, 1991), we examined whether low levels of neighborhood disorder in the presence of depressive symptoms would serve as a protective factor to promote parental responsiveness among low-income communities.

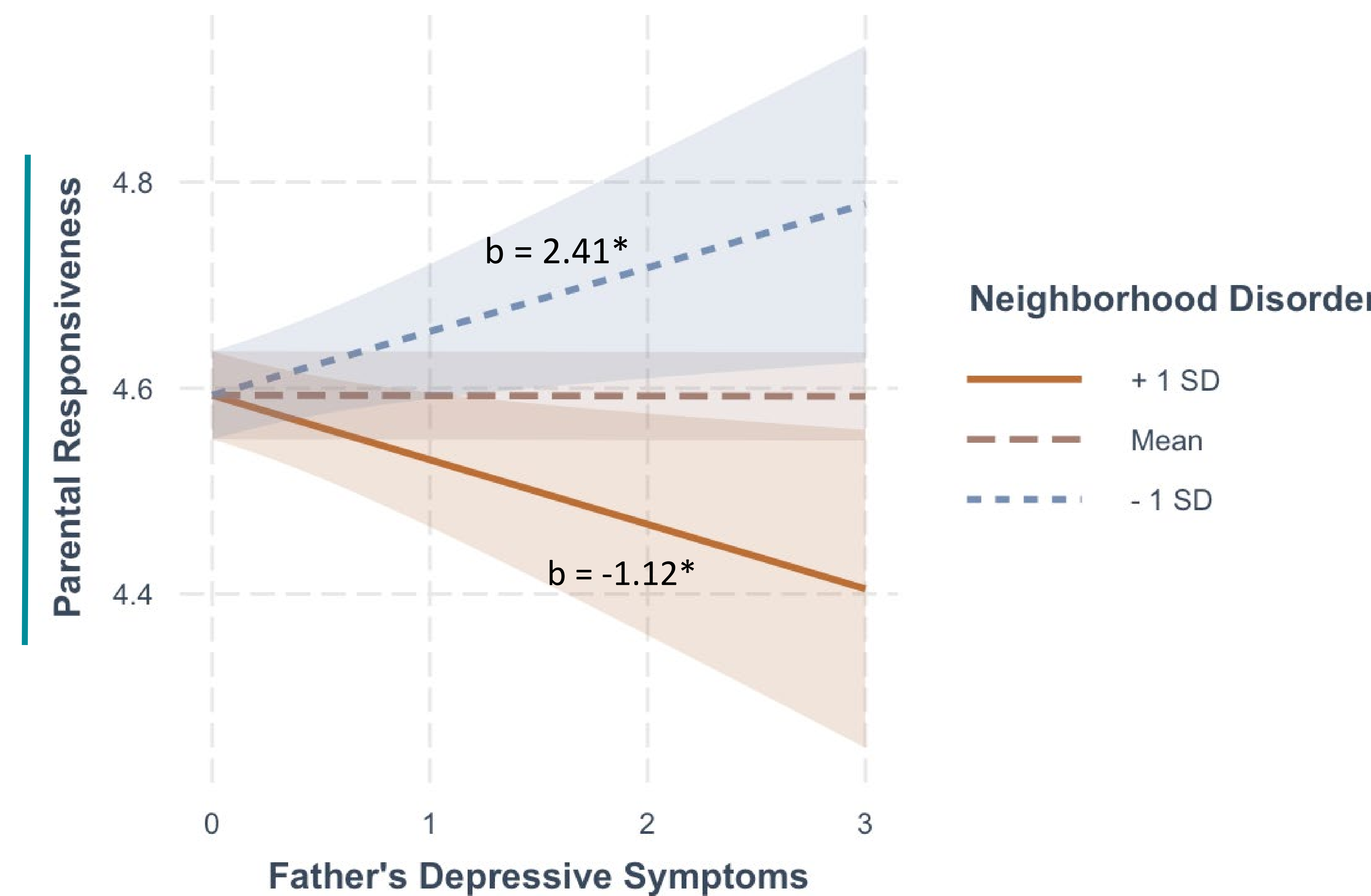
Results

H1: Depressive symptoms were directly associated with less parental responsiveness ONLY for mothers ($b=-0.17$, $p<0.001$).

- For mothers, fathers' responsiveness and depressive symptoms, Hispanic background, marital status and education predicted responsiveness.

H2: Neighborhood environment moderated the link between depressive symptoms and parental responsiveness ONLY for fathers at high and low levels ($b=-0.14$, $p<0.05$).

- For fathers, mothers' parental responsiveness was the only other predictor of responsiveness.



Methods

- Building Strong Families National Data**
 - (N=1,731 Couples after Multiple Imputation)
 - Low-income unmarried couples
 - 30% Hispanic, 70% African American
- Depressive Symptoms:** frequency of 12 items (CES-D; e.g., lonely, eating habits, M: $\alpha=.84$, F: $\alpha=.82$)
- Neighborhood Disorder:** 8 interviewer-rated items (e.g., bldg. conditions, $\alpha=.66$)
- Parental Responsiveness:** semi-structured dyadic observation with 36-month old child (e.g., sensitivity, positive regard, M: $\alpha=.80$, F: $\alpha=.60$)

Conclusions and Implications

- For mothers and fathers of color the impact of parental depression and environmental risks might be different.**

Further exploration of parental mental health and promotion of potential protective factors among low-income families of color is needed. Understanding the role of the neighborhood environment may inform efforts to better serve parents and children in underrepresented communities.

