

The Intergenerational Transmission of Emotion Regulation Difficulties: Understanding the Influence of Emotion Regulation Skills and Child Maltreatment Subtypes

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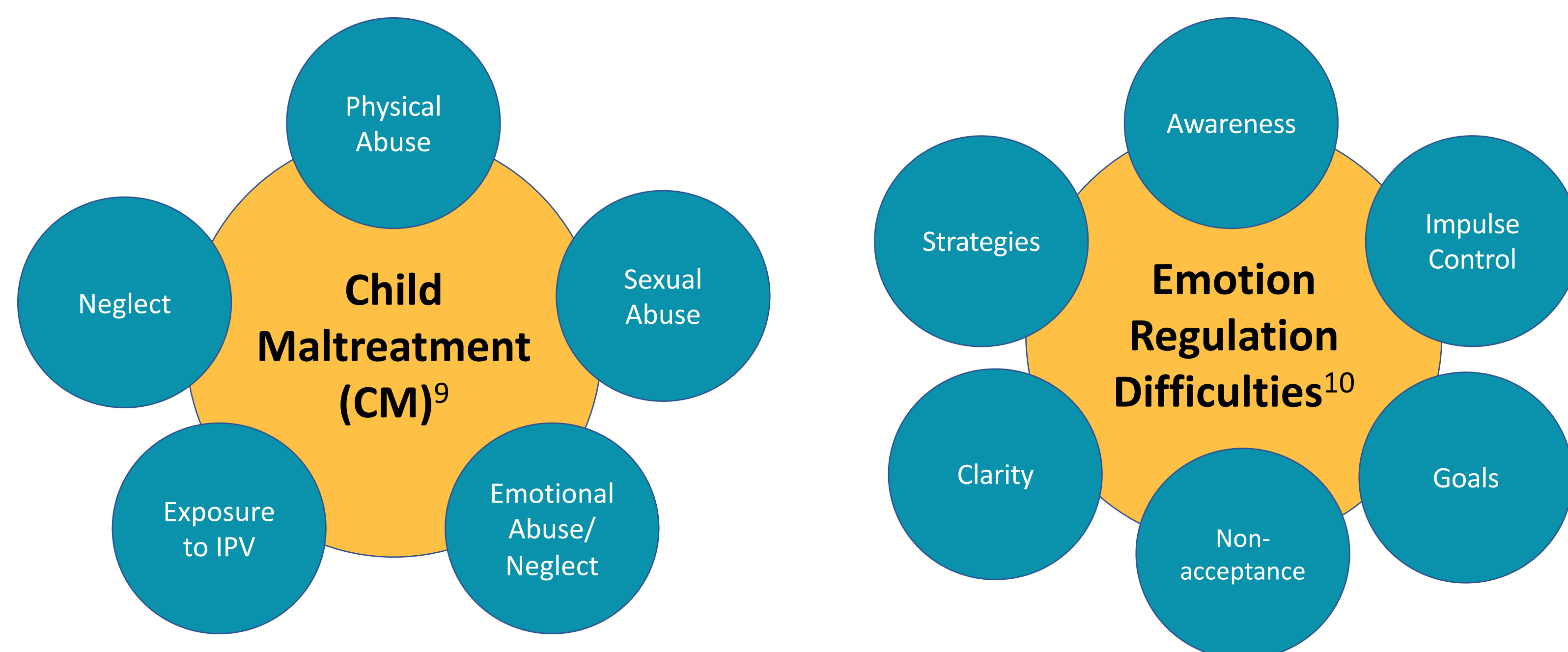


BACKGROUND

The Impact of Child Maltreatment on Parental Emotion Socialization

- A history of child maltreatment (CM) is associated with emotion regulation difficulties¹ and maladaptive parenting behaviours², but research on parents' emotion-related socialization behaviours is sparse.
- Parents' emotion-related socialization behaviours describe ways in which parents discuss and react to their children's emotions, including their contingent responses to children's emotional displays.³
- Unsupportive contingencies (UCs), defined as distressed, punitive, or minimizing responses, have been associated with negative emotionality⁴ and psychopathology⁵ in children and adolescents.
- Survivors of CM, and particularly those who have been victims of cumulative CM, may be more likely to use UCs which in turn, can contribute to emotional difficulties in the next generation.⁶
- The effects of CM subtypes on maternal emotion socialization is unknown, however one study suggests that sexual abuse might have an influence.⁷
- Similarly, only one study⁸ has examined how specific emotion regulation difficulties influence the intergenerational transmission of self-regulation among maltreated parents, but it did not examine UCs.
- No studies have examined whether recollections of UCs in adolescence impact ER in young adults.

Types of Child Maltreatment and Emotion Regulation Difficulties



RESEARCH GOALS AND HYPOTHESES

- The present study explored the interactions between a maternal history of CM and maternal emotion regulation difficulties with the goal of elucidating the mechanisms involved in the intergenerational transmission of emotional dysregulation through young adult's recollections of their mother's UCs.

Hypothesis 1: Maternal emotion regulation difficulties will moderate the association between a maternal history of cumulative CM and UCs such that the effect of CM on maternal unsupportiveness will be greater for mothers with higher levels of emotion regulation difficulties.

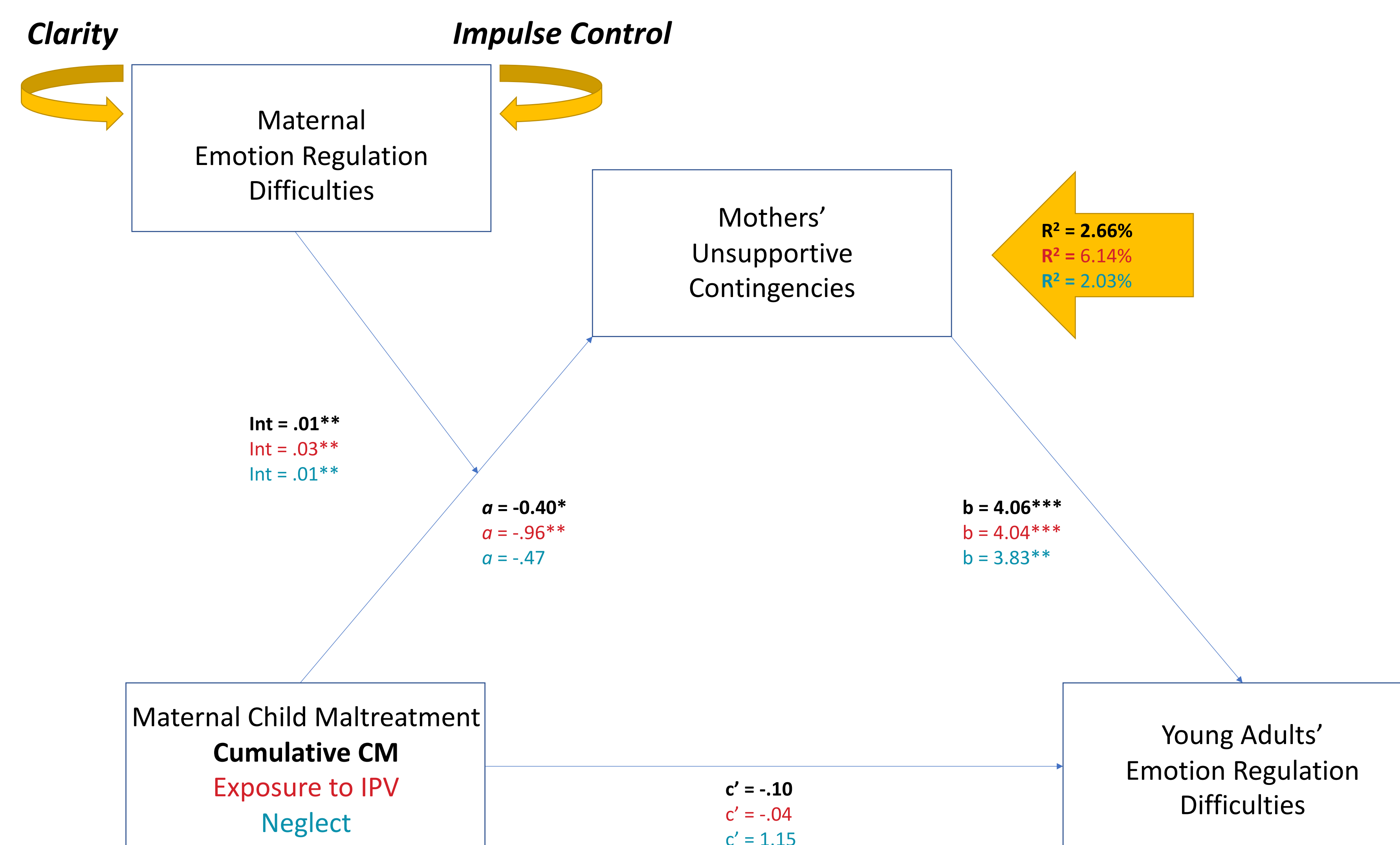
Hypothesis 2: Specific subtypes of maternal CM and ER difficulties will be differentially associated with UCs and the intergenerational transmission of emotional dysregulation.

METHOD & DEMOGRAPHICS

- Mothers ($M_{age} = 51.19$, $SD = 5.81$) and young adults ($M_{age} = 20.99$, $SD = 2.18$, 89.7% female) were recruited from across Canada to complete an online survey via Qualtrics ($N = 185$ dyads, ~70% white).
- Mothers reported on their CM histories and multi-level risk and protective factors; young adults provided retrospective reports of their mothers' UCs during adolescence.
 - 64.3% of mothers reported experiencing at least one type of CM
 - 47% reported two+ types (physical or sexual abuse, emotional maltreatment, neglect, exposure to IPV)

RESULTS

- Mother's **cumulative CM** was significantly associated with UCs, which in turn, were positively associated with young adults' emotion regulation difficulties.
- Maternal emotion regulation difficulties moderated the effect of CM on mothers' UCs.
- We also conducted exploratory analyses¹¹ to determine whether the model would vary depending on the type of CM entered as the focal variable OR the type of ER difficulty entered as the moderator.



- The hypothesized moderated mediation was significant for two types of CM: **Neglect** (index = .05, $SE = .02$, $CI = .01; .09$) and **Exposure to IPV** (index = .11, $SE = .03$, $CI = .05; .17$).
- The cumulative CM model was significant for two types of ER difficulties¹²: **Clarity** (index = 0.17, $SE = 0.08$, $CI = 0.02; 0.34$) and **Impulse Control** (index = 0.19, $SE = 0.08$, $CI = 0.03; 0.34$).

CONCLUSIONS & IMPLICATIONS

- Mothers who endorsed more types of CM were described as more likely to use UCs, but only in the context of high emotion regulation difficulties (with impulse control and emotional clarity in particular).
- Childhood neglect and exposure to IPV may have unique influences on maternal emotion socialization.
- Interventions targeting emotion regulation and socialization concurrently should be offered to parents with histories of CM, particularly when parents have experienced cumulative CM, IPV, or childhood neglect.
- These interventions should focus on helping mothers to identify, describe, and make sense of their emotions and reducing impulsive responding when children/adolescents are in distress.

Research supported by:



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