

The Role of Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder Symptoms in Aggression and Offending

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BACKGROUND

Common symptoms of ADHD such as impulsivity and ineffective emotion regulation could contribute to an increased risk for antisocial behaviors. Challenges seen in youth with ADHD, such as persistent negative feedback from parents, teachers, and peers, and poor academic performance may also cause a sense of detachment from traditional institutions like school. These indirect contributions of ADHD coupled with the natural obstacles generated from this disorder may increase risk for aggression and offending while youth seek alternative sources of praise and belonging

I hypothesized that attention problems at age 12 would predict aggression and delinquency at age 17, over and above the amount predicted by aggression/delinquency at age 12 (Hypothesis 1).

I hypothesized that negative attitudes about school would explain some of the variance in the relationship between attention problems at age 12 and aggression/delinquency at age 17.

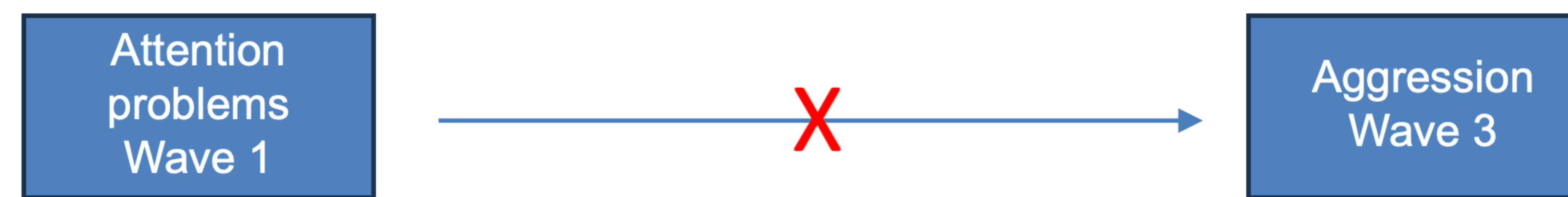
METHODS

- 812 students aged 12 in the Chicago area participated in the longitudinal study
- Parents rated children's attention problems, aggression, and delinquency at each time point
- Students rated their attitudes toward school
- Participants were followed up approximately every 2-3 years (Wave 1, Wave 2, Wave 3)
- Regression analyses were used to examine whether attention problems predicted later aggression/delinquency when controlling for earlier aggression/delinquency
- Mediation analyses examined whether school attitudes accounted for variance in the relationship between attention problems and aggression/delinquency

RESULTS

In a regression predicting Wave 3 aggression, attention problems were not a significant predictor when controlling for Wave 1 aggression.

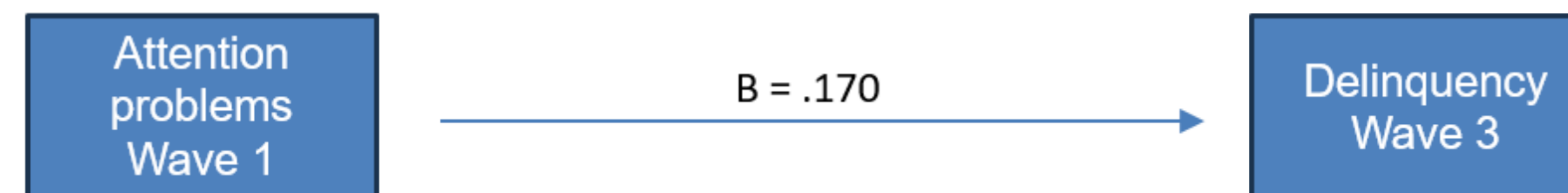
Figure #1



* Controlling for wave 1 aggression

In a regression predicting Wave 3 delinquency, attention problems were a significant positive predictor when controlling for Wave 1 delinquency

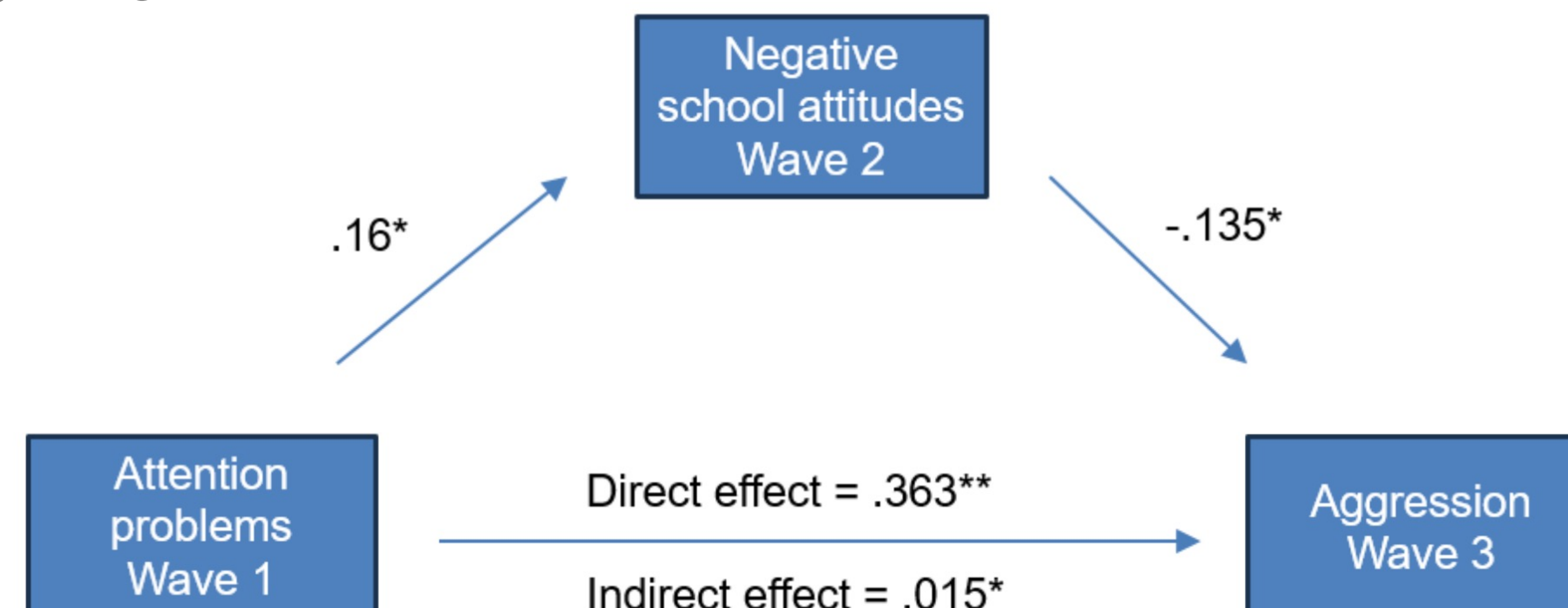
Figure #2



* Controlling for wave 1 delinquency

A Sobel test revealed that Wave 2 school interest was a significant mediator of the relationship between Wave 1 attention problems and Wave 3 self-reported non-violent offending (Sobel test statistic = 2.30, $p = .02$).

Figure #3



CONCLUSIONS

Attention problems predicted later delinquency but not aggression. It may be that attention problems increase the risk of being rejected by peers, which may lead youth to become involved with delinquent peers and increase their risk for delinquency.

Negative attitudes about school partially account for the relationship between attention problems and delinquency. It may be that youth with attention problems struggle in school and have poor relationships with teachers and therefore may engage with delinquent peers and delinquent behavior as a means of finding rewarding experiences.

ADHD treatment in adolescents can potentially prevent adverse behavior in later ages.

REFERENCES

Earls, F. J., Brooks-Gunn, J., Raudenbush, S. W., and Sampson, R. J. (1995). Project on human development in Chicago neighborhoods: Community survey, 1994-1995. Inter-university Consortium for Political and Social Research. <https://doi.org/10.3886/ICPSR02766.v4>