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The Effect of Maternal Big-Five Personality Traits on Parenting, Attachment, and Child Problem Behaviors

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Introduction

A few studies showed that the maternal personality traits (e.g., neuroticism, extraversion, openness, agreeableness, and conscientiousness) have been linked to parenting (Kochanska et al., 1997) and problem behaviors during preschool years (Moss et al., 1998). Among various parenting practices, growing body of research showed that maternal harsh parenting was highly associated with child problem behaviors (Deater-Deckard et al., 2012). In addition, attachment between mother and child also contributed child problem behaviors during preschool years. For example, children with insecure attachment during preschool carry forward negative expectations that may raise mistrust, anger, aggression, and lack of empathy in interpersonal relationships (DeMulder et al., 2000)

Although the link between harsh parenting, parent-child attachment and child problem behaviors has been widely studied, a few studies have examined the **unique and joint effects of maternal personality traits, harsh parenting, attachment, and child problem behaviors during preschool years.**

Methods

Participants (N= 60 children, ranging 4-5 years of age, 60 mothers) were drawn from a larger study, for whom written parental consent and children assent were received.

- Mothers' Big-5 personality traits and harsh parenting methods were reported during the laboratory visit.
- Mothers reported their children's problem behavior using the Child Behavior Checklist (CBCL) during the laboratory visit.
- Mothers completed 90 card sorting procedures regarding their child's behavior while interacting with them using the Attachment Q-set (AQS) to assess the child's attachment security.

Research Questions

The aim of this study is to answer the following questions:

- Is there any direct effects among mothers' big 5 personality traits and harsh parenting?
- Is there any direct effects among mothers' big 5 personality traits and mother-child attachment?
- Are harsh parenting and insecure attachment between mother and child associated with child problem behaviors during preschool years?
- Are there any indirect effects between mothers' big 5 personality traits and preschool child problem behaviors?
- Are there any indirect effects between attachment and preschool child problem behaviors?

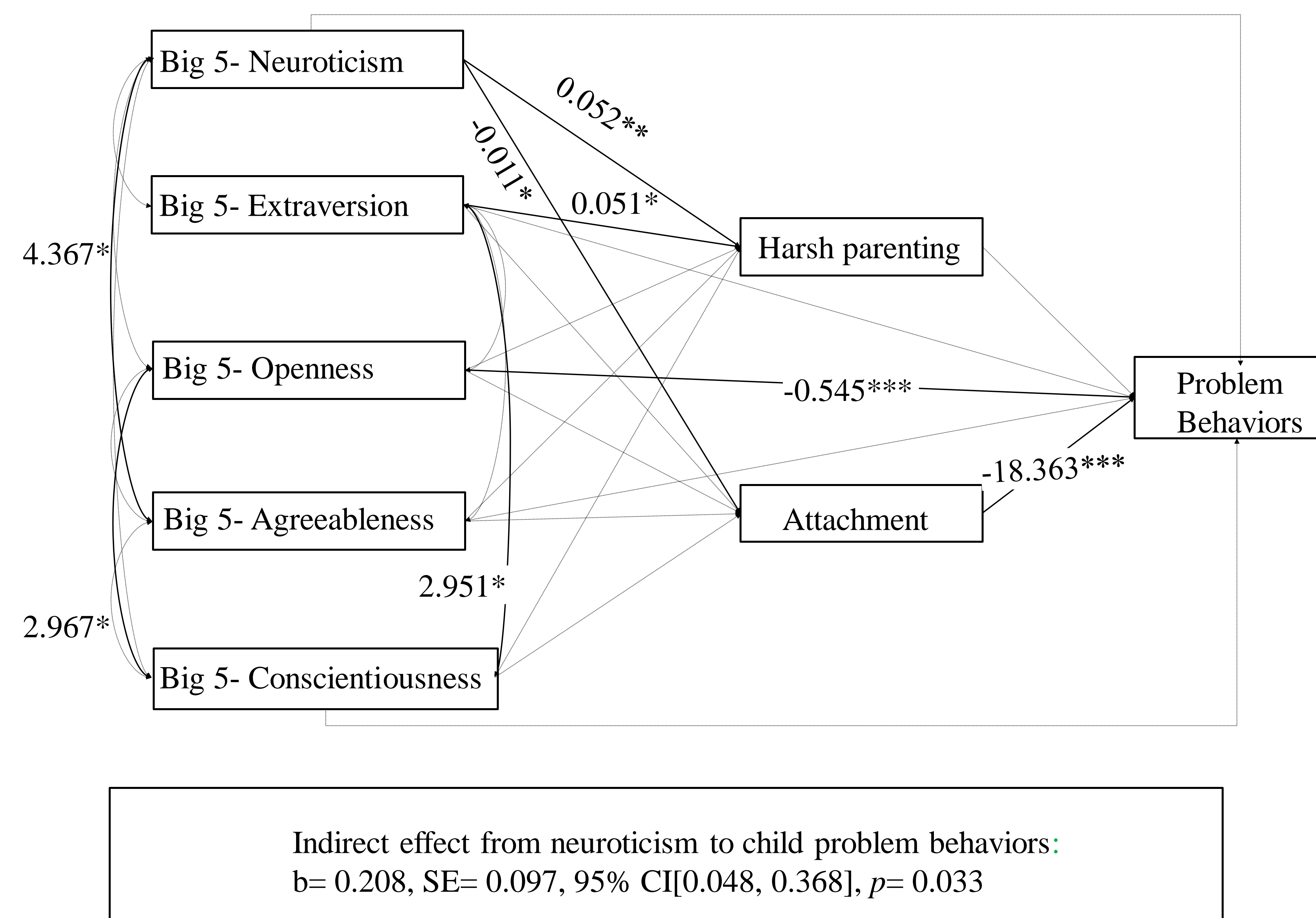


Figure 1.

Path model linking mother's big 5 personality traits, harsh parenting, attachment, and child problem behaviors during preschool years

Note. * $p < .05$, *** $p < .001$

Results

○ Model fit indices included a chi-square of 9.105 with 8 degrees of freedom, a Comparative Fix Index of 0.982, a Root Mean Square Error of Approximation of 0.048 (90% CI = 0.000, 0.162), and a Standardized Root Mean Square Residual of 0.051, which indicated a good fit to the data (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Significant direct effects

○ Between neuroticism and attachment ($b = -0.011$, $p < .05$); neuroticism and harsh parenting ($b = 0.052$, $p < 0.01$); extraversion and harsh parenting ($b = 0.051$, $p < 0.01$); openness and problem behaviors ($b = -0.545$, $p < .001$); and attachment and problem behaviors ($b = -18.363$, $p < 0.000$). I

Significant indirect effect

In addition, the model revealed that there was an indirect effect between neuroticism and problem behaviors through attachment ($b = 0.208$, SE = 0.097, 95% CI [0.048, 0.368], $p = 0.033$).

Conclusions

This study examined both direct and indirect effects among mothers' big 5 personality traits, parenting, parent-child attachment, and child problem behaviors during preschool years. The findings highlight the unique effect of harsh parenting and mothers' personality traits on preschool children's problem behaviors, as well as the effect of mother-child attachment bonds during preschool years. Future research regarding the effects of the parent-child attachment bond beyond mothers' personality traits and parenting on preschool children's adjustment/maladjustment is warranted.

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