

Relation of Maternal Support and Maternal Stress to Children's Behavior Problems in African American Families

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Statement of the Problem

- Chronic parenting stress have negative consequences on parents' physical and mental health (Cohen & Williamson, 1991; Crnic & Greenberg, 1990; Koeske & Koeske, 1990).
- Parenting stress also influences parental behavior in that mothers are more likely to use punitive parenting practices (Crnic & Greenberg, 1987; McLoyd et al., 1994), be less responsive, and more authoritarian (Deater-Deckard, 2005).
- Documented association between parenting stress and adverse child outcomes such as insecure attachment, impaired peer relations, and aggression (Creasey & Jarvis, 1991; Danseco & Holden, 1998).
- Literature suggests that maternal stress may be an antecedent of child abuse (Chan, 1994).
- Empirical evidence to support either the stability or an increase in parenting stress over time (Deater-Deckard et al., 1996; Hauser-Cram et al., 2001).

Rationale for the Study

- African American families are underrepresented in the stress literature
- Sparse research specifically on the impact of maternal stress on African American children in middle childhood
- Perceived social support may buffer the negative effects of maternal stress on child outcomes
- Implications include the development of programs, services, and coping strategies to strengthen family functioning

Theoretical Model

Ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1986)

- the individual, the family, and the community systems that may influence the behaviors of both parents and children



Microsystem (Individual Level)

Mesosystem (Family Level)

Exosystem (Community Level)

Risk/resiliency model (Bogenschneider, 1996)

- adopting a risk and protective factors perspective at each level may contribute to differences in child outcomes

Theoretical Model

Control Variables

Maternal age
Maternal education
Yearly household income
No. children in household

Family

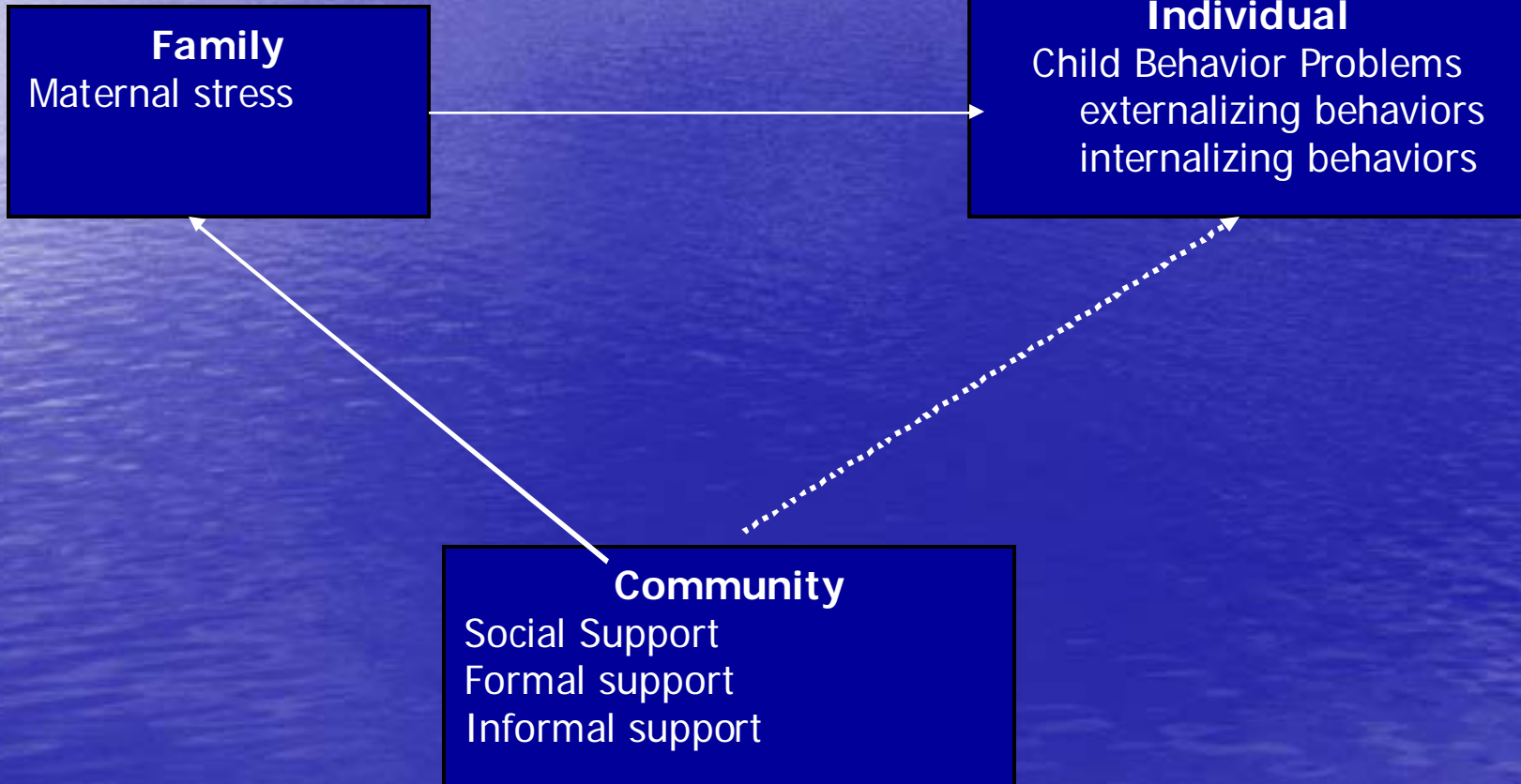
Maternal stress

Individual

Child Behavior Problems
externalizing behaviors
internalizing behaviors

Community

Social Support
Formal support
Informal support



Research Questions

1. Is maternal stress related to child behavior problems among African American children in the middle childhood years?
2. Does social support moderate the effect of maternal stress on child behavior problems?
3. At various levels of social support (low, medium, and high), would the association between maternal stress still be significantly associated with child behavior problems?

Methodology

Sample

- Sample is part of a larger, longitudinal study
- Subset of only baseline data
- 193 African American mothers or female caregivers that participated in a parent education program
- All caregivers had a child 6-12 years old

Methodology

Measures

Demographics

mother's race, mother's age, mother's marital status, yearly household income, current employment, child's age, child's sex, number of children under 18 in household

Maternal Stress: Parenting Stress Index-Short Form (PSI-SF; Abidin, 1990)

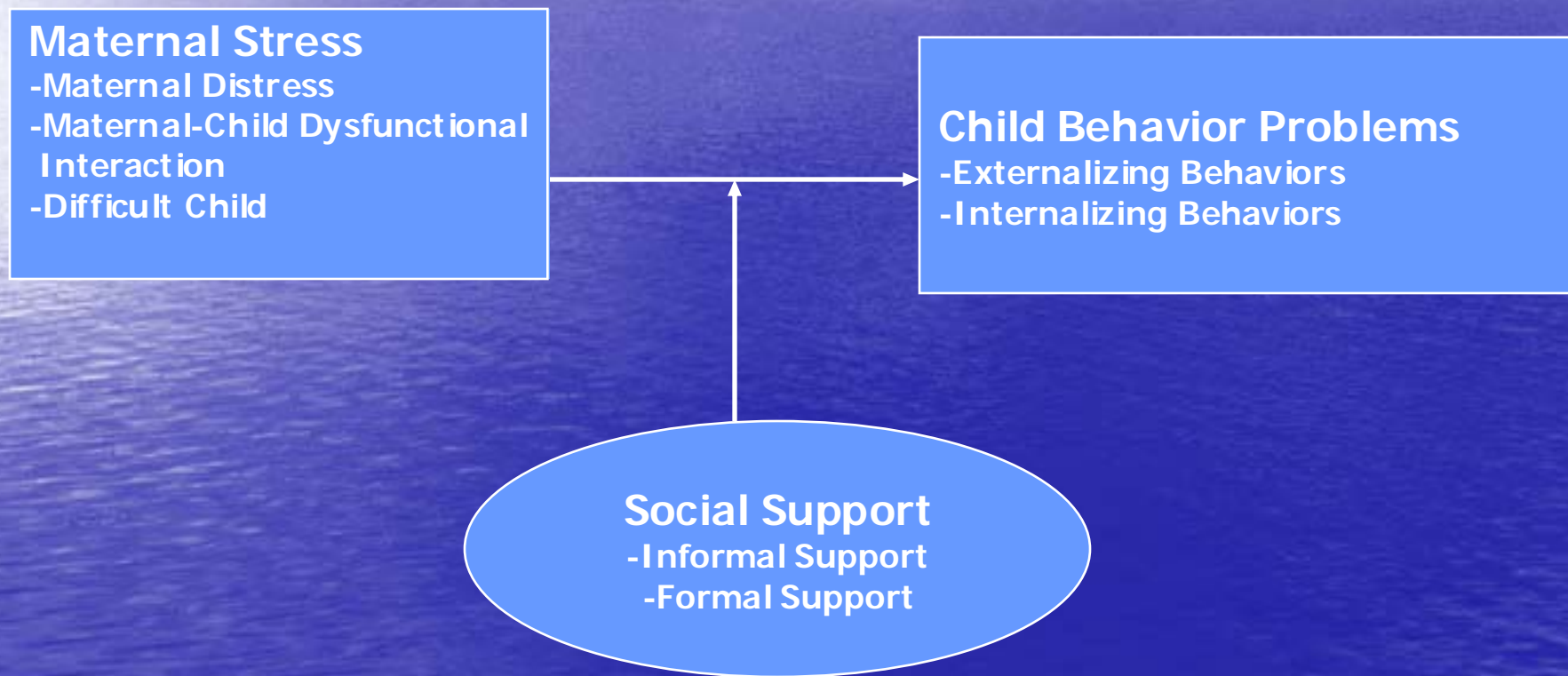
Social Support: Family Support Scale (FSS; Dunst, Jenkins, & Trivette, 1984)

Child Behavior Problems: Social Skills Rating Scale (SSRS; Gresham & Elliott, 1990)

Externalizing and Internalizing behavior subscales

Control Variables: mother's age, mother's education, yearly household income, current employment, number of children under 18 in household

Hypothesized Model



Methodology

Data Analysis

Four phased approach:

1. Descriptive statistics

-Frequencies, means, standard deviations

2. Cronbach's alpha coefficient

3. Correlational analyses

4. Hierarchical linear regression with interaction effects

-Plot interactions

Findings

Research Question #1: Is maternal stress related to child behavior problems among African American children in the middle childhood years?

- Mothers who experience higher levels of parenting stress tended to report their child had more behavior problems.
- The PSI-SF subscales were significant predictors of children's behavior problems.

Findings

Research Question #2: Does social support moderate the effect of maternal stress on child behavior problems?

- Total social support did not moderate the relation of maternal stress and behavior problems.
- None of the interaction terms between the PSI-SF subscales and social support were statistically significant.

Findings

- Subsequent analyses included only informal support or formal support as moderators.
- Formal support moderated the relation of maternal/child dysfunctional interaction to child's internalizing behavior problems.

Research Question #3: At various levels of social support (low, medium, and high), would the association between maternal stress still be significantly associated with child behavior problems?

Findings

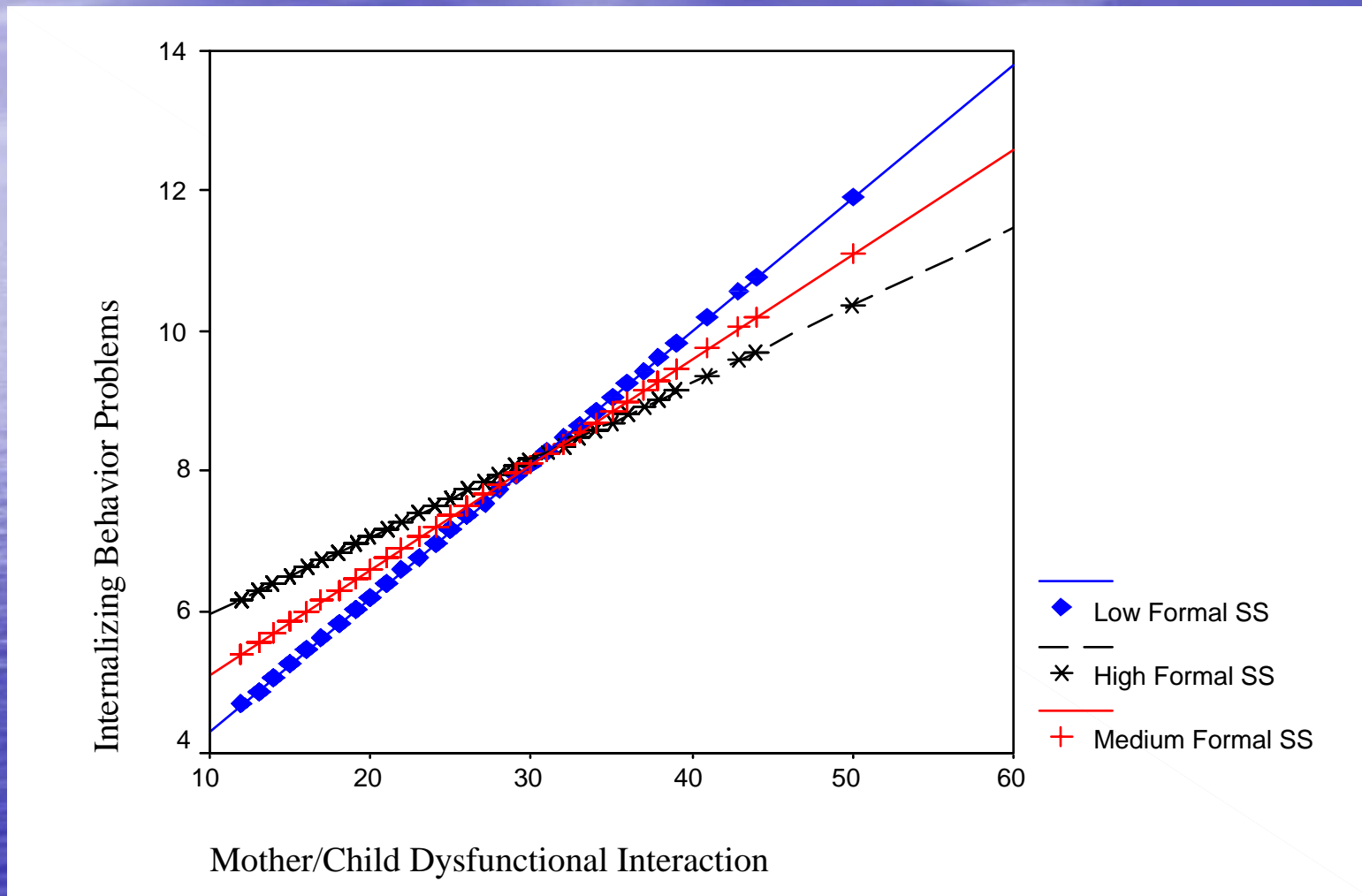


Figure 1. Depiction of moderation effect of formal support on relationship between maternal/child dysfunctional interaction and child internalizing behavior problems (N=169)

Findings

- Dataset was divided into two sets: grandmothers and female caregivers
- Hierarchical regression analyses for informal and formal social support revealed two significant interactions.
- First, formal support moderated the relation of maternal/child dysfunctional interaction to child's internalizing behavior problems only for female caregivers (not grandmothers)

Findings

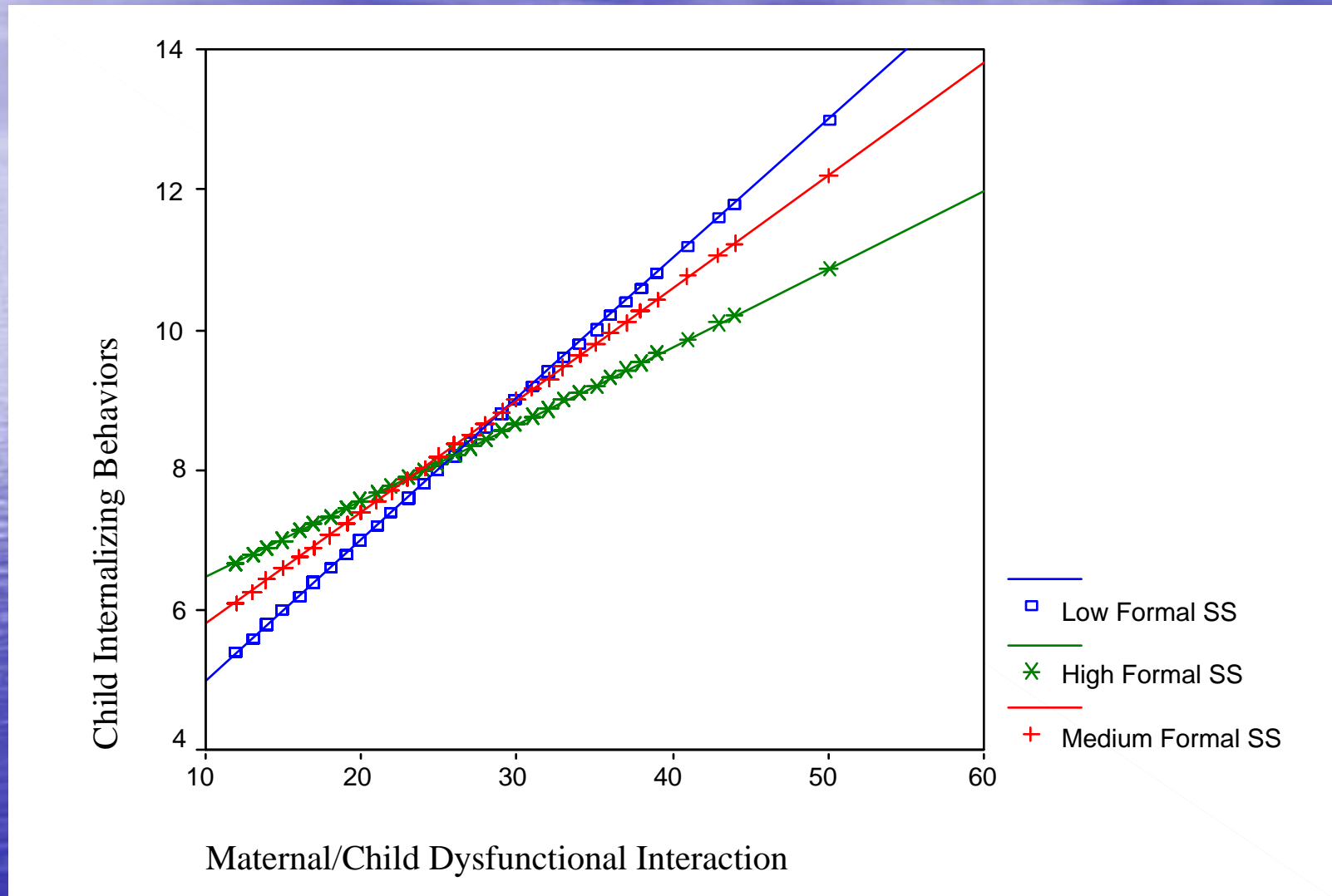


Figure 2. Depiction of moderation effect of formal social support on relationship between maternal/child dysfunctional interaction and child internalizing behavior problems for female caregivers other than grandmothers

Findings

- Second, informal social support exacerbated the negative association between maternal-child dysfunctional interaction and child internalizing behavior problems for grandmothers.

Findings

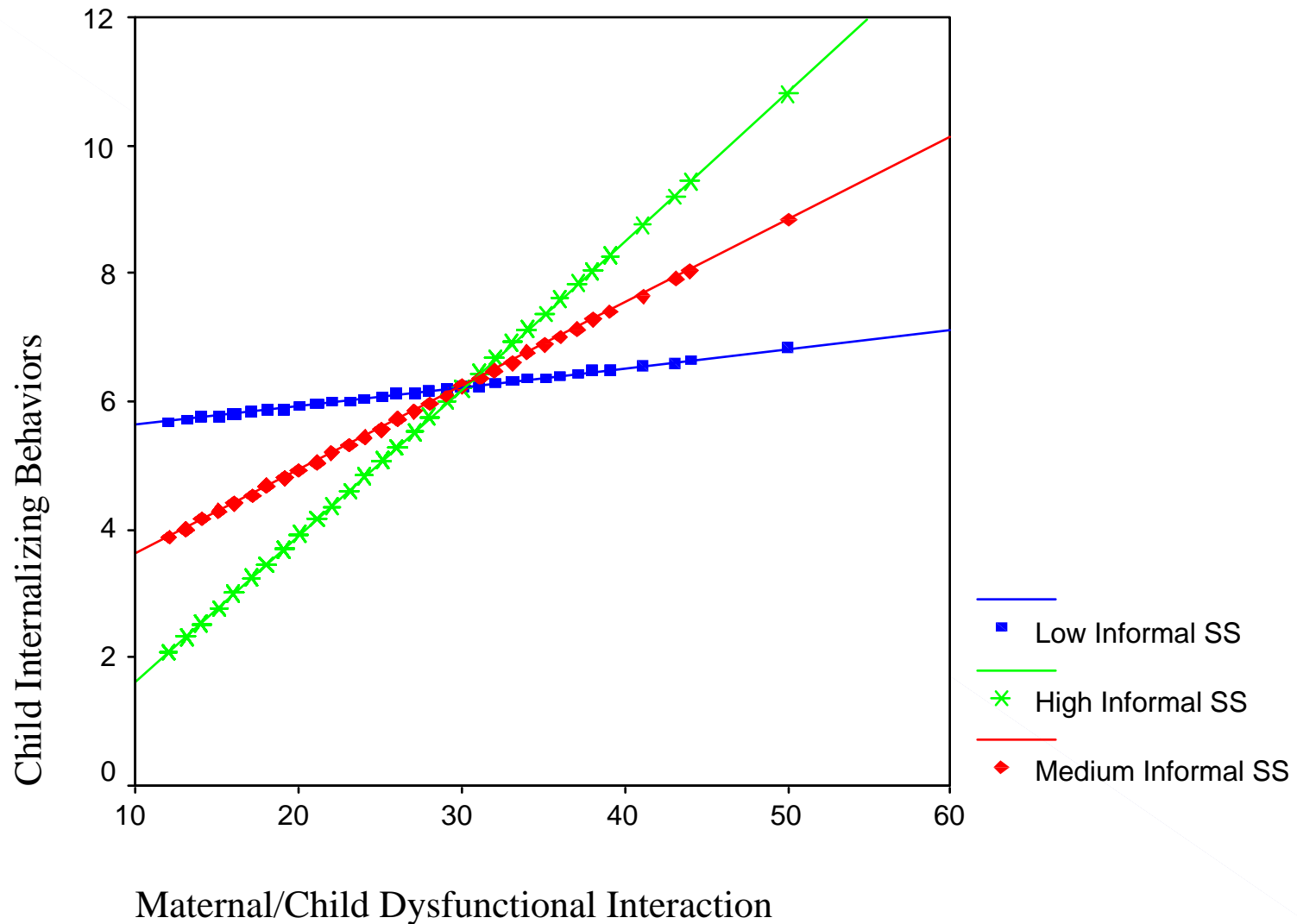


Figure 3. Depiction of moderation effect of informal social support on relationship between maternal/child dysfunctional interaction and child internalizing behavior problems for grandmothers

Discussion

Maternal Stress As a Predictor

Mothers experiencing high levels of maternal stress may have negative or dysfunctional interactions with their children who may begin to emulate these behaviors.

Formal Support As a Buffer

Mothers may turn to formal sources of social support for assistance with parenting concerns.

Informal Support As Detrimental

Friends and relatives provide criticism even as they offer assistance with parenting.

Limitations to the Study

- Limited to using data collected
- Data were cross-sectional
- Measures were based on mothers' self-reports

Implications

- Programs developed should take into account specific sources of parenting stress
- Programs can provide opportunities for mothers to form connections
- Develop policies that address the needs of grandmothers caring for grandchildren



Questions?