

# Family functioning, socio-economic status and adolescents' depressive symptoms: the mediating role of hopelessness

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## Overview and Objectives

Research has shown that difficulties in family functioning contribute to developing adolescents' depressive symptoms. The purpose of this study was to carry out an analysis of the specific family functioning variables that predict depressive symptoms at these ages. We also focused on the moderating effect of gender on these relationships, and studied the role of socio-economic status (SES) to predict adolescent depressive symptoms. Finally, we tested a dual serial mediational model in which the relationship between SES and depressive symptoms would be mediated by family functioning and hopelessness.

## Statistical Analyses

Firstly, six hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in which BDI was regressed separately on every FAD dimension in Step 2. In Step 1 of each equation, gender, age and SES were entered for control purposes. In Step 3, the interaction of the sociodemographic variables with FAD dimensions was studied.

Secondly, a dual serial mediational model was tested using the Conditional Process Analysis methodology developed by Hayes (2013).

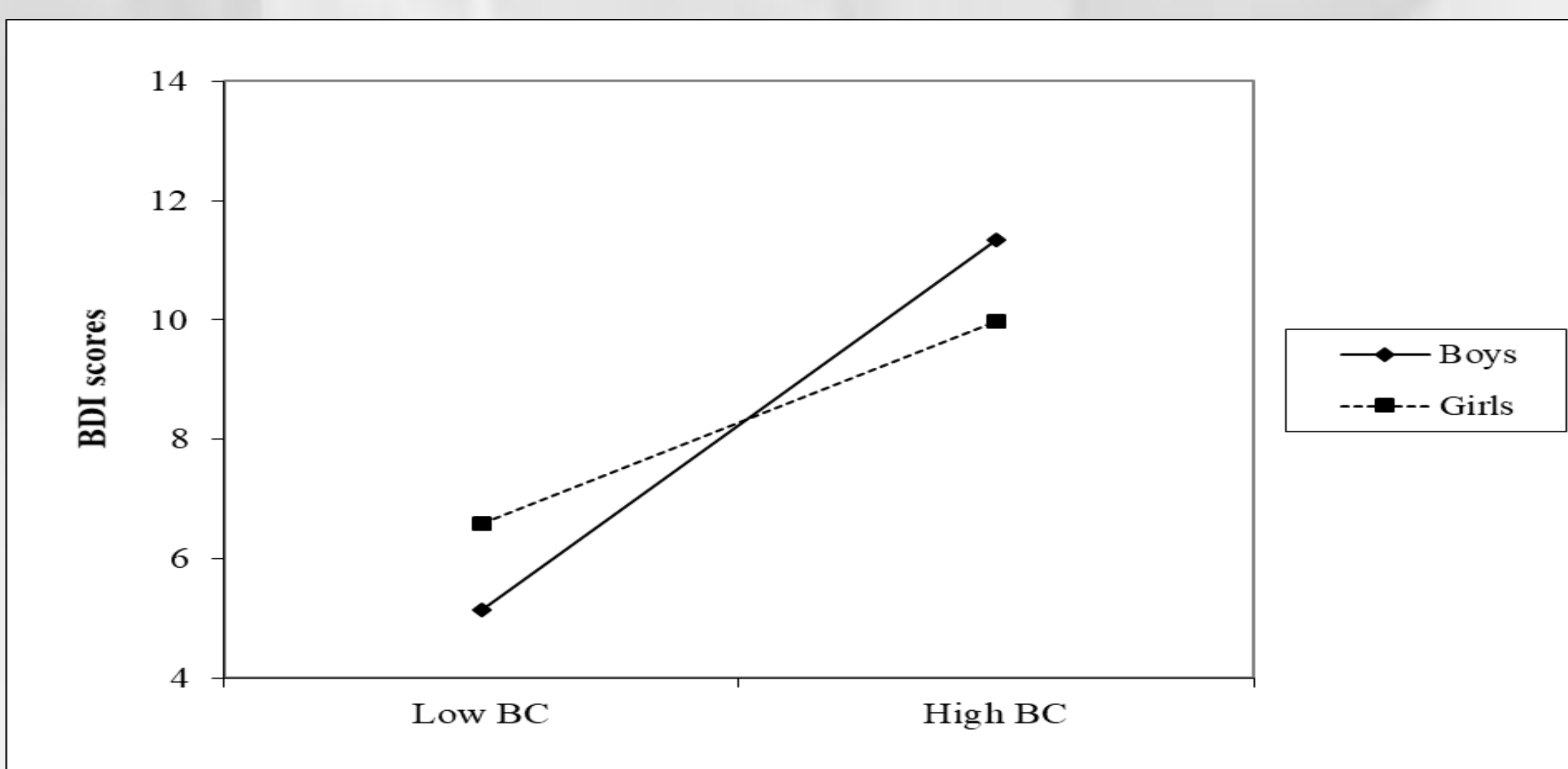
Table 1 shows that (1) SES significantly contributed to the prediction of depressive symptoms, with higher levels of SES predicting lower depressive symptom scores, (2) all the family functioning variables predicted depressive symptoms; and (3) gender moderated the effects of family difficulties in roles assignment and behavioral control. Moderation is explored in Figure 1.

**Table 1:** Summary of the six hierarchical regression analyses.

Predictors on BDI scores		$\beta$
Step 1: Socio-demographics	Gender	.01
	Age	.04
	SES	-.12**
Step 2: Family Functioning	Problem Solving	.24***
	Communication	.24***
	Affective Response	.34***
	Affective Involvement	.33***
	Roles	.29***
	Behavioral Control	.29***
Step 3: Moderation effects	Roles x Gender	-.14*
	Behavioral Control x Gender	-.12*
	(Only significant moderation effects of gender are showed)	

Note: \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$ .

Figure 1 shows the plotted moderation effects of gender on behavioral control. It can be observed a steeper slope for boys compared to girls, illustrating that the effect of the family dysfunction in behavioural control was higher in boys. The pattern was fairly the same for roles.



**Figure 1.** Gender moderation of the association between behavioral control (BC) and BDI.

## Method

### Participants

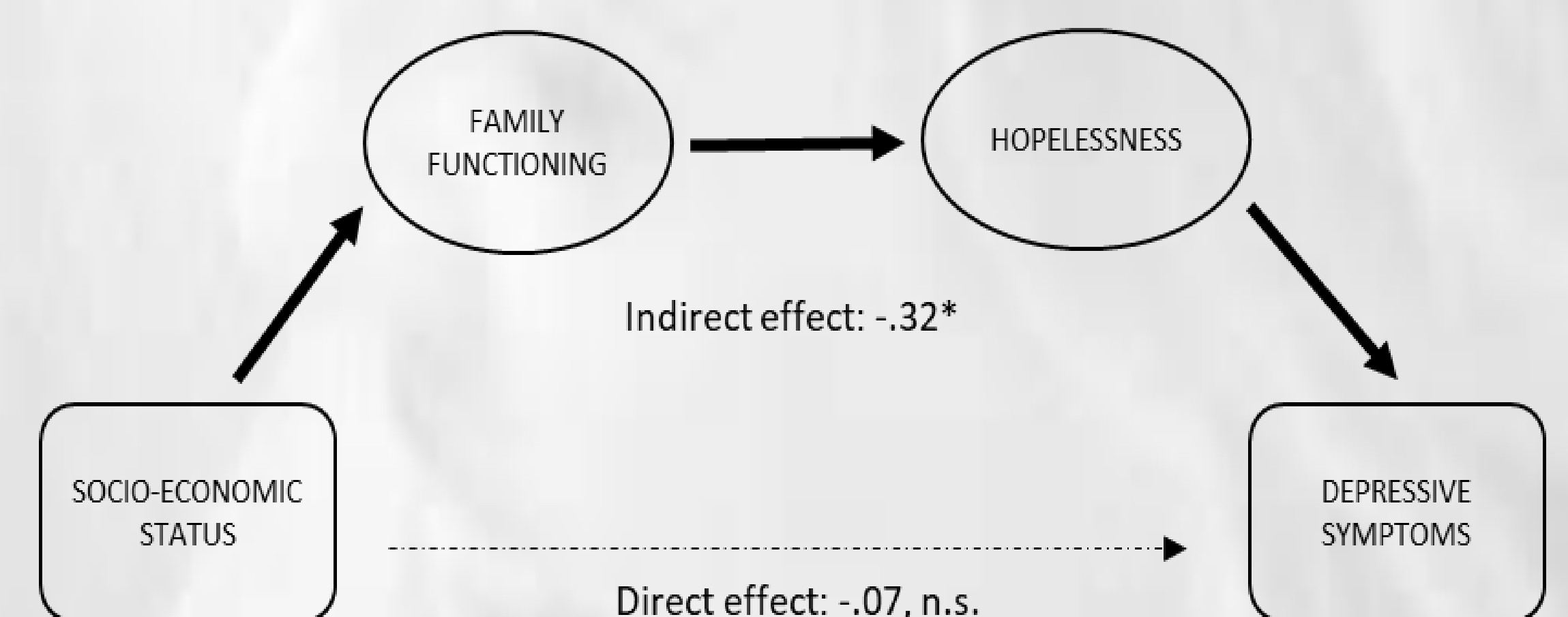
643 Spanish adolescents, aged from 12 to 17 years ( $M = 14,7$ ;  $SD = 1,7$ ).

### Measures

- Family functioning: *Family Assessment Device (FAD)* (Epstein, Baldwin & Bishop, 1983).
- Depressive symptoms: *Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)* (Beck, Ward, Mendelson, Mock & Erbaugh, 1961).
- Hopelessness expectations: *Hopelessness Scale (HS)* (Beck, Weissman, Lester, & Trexler, 1974).
- SES: *Socio-economic Status Index*, measuring parental education, occupation and housing conditions.

## Results

Figure 2 shows a serial mediational model to predict depressive symptoms from SES through family functioning and hopelessness. The figure shows that the direct effect of SES on depressive symptoms was non-significant, while the indirect effect through family functioning and hopelessness was significant ( $-.32$ , 95% BCI:  $-.82, -.13$ ), thus indicating a total mediation effect.



**Figure 2.** Dual mediational model in the relationship between SES and depressive symptoms

## Conclusions

- Our results confirm that the more dysfunctional their family are, the more likely adolescents will experience depressive symptoms. All the family dimensions significantly contribute to depressive symptoms.
- Interestingly, the relationships of roles and behavioral control with depressive symptoms are moderated by gender, such that higher dysfunctions in these variables are more dysfunctional for boys than for girls.
- Our results also show that SES contribute to adolescents experiencing higher depressive symptoms and we propose a serial conditional model to explain this effect, that would be occurring through the effect of SES on family dysfunction and, in turn, on hopelessness expectations, which would lead to depressive symptoms.

## References

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