Dissecting Parental Warmth and its Associations with Callous-Unemotional Traits

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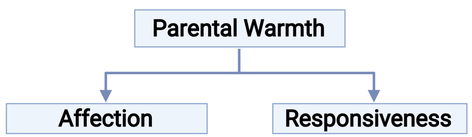
INTRODUCTION

Callous-unemotional (CU) traits (e.g., lack of empathy, guilt, & remorse) predict more severe & persistent antisocial behavior.

Studies show parental warmth predicts fewer CU traits and greater empathy but are limited by reliance on parents' self-report or vague, global observational measures to assess broad construct

Need observational measure that allows warmth to be broken down into specific components to assess critical aspects of warmth for CU traits



Is the affection or responsiveness component of parental warmth more signficant to the development of CU traits?

METHODS

58 parent-child dyads observed during a wordless picture storybook task over Zoom.

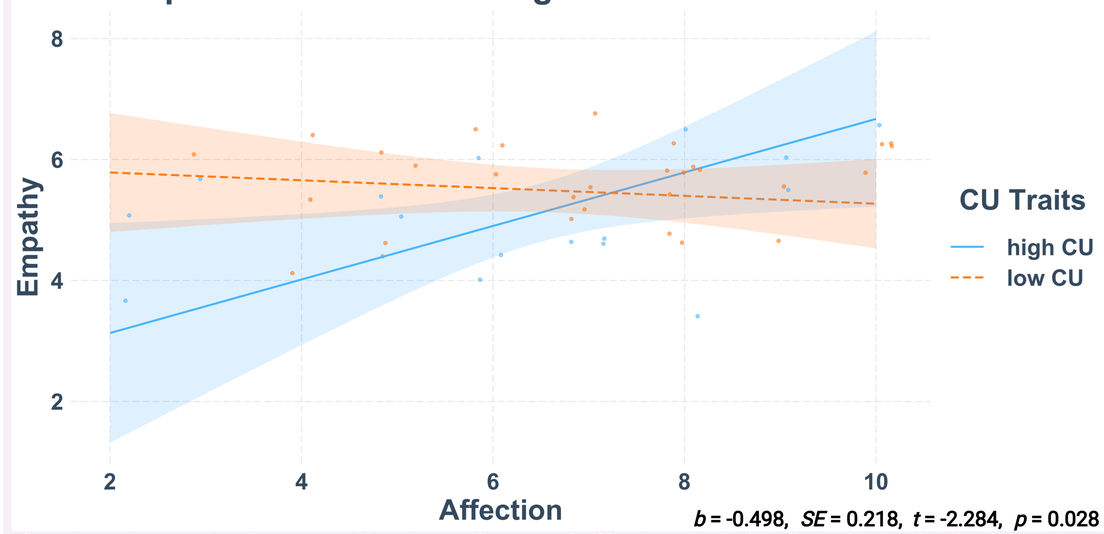
Adapted an existing validated coding scheme novel to study of CU traits to operationalize warmth into two specific components.

Sample Item	Observation Guideline	Scoring		
AFFECTION DOMAIN: positive regard, physical closeness, positive expressions (α = 0.78)				
Speaks in a warm tone of voice	Voice is positive in tone, may show enthusiasm or tenderness	0 (absent)	1 (barely)	2 (clearly)
Praises child	Says something positive about child characteristics or what child doing	0 (absent)	1 (barely)	2 (clearly)
RESPONSIVENESS DOMAIN: responding to child's cues, emotions, interests, behaviors (α = 0.75)				
Changes pace or activity to meet child's interests or needs	Changes, speeds up or slows down activity in response to where child looks, reaches for says, emotions	0 (absent)	1 (barely)	2 (clearly)
Responds to child's emotion	Shows understanding, acceptance, or similar feeling; suggests solution; labels/describes	0 (absent)	1 (barely)	2 (clearly)

Parenting **I**nteractions with **C**hildren: **C**hecklist of **O**bservations **L**inked to **O**utcomes **(PICCOLO)**

RESULTS

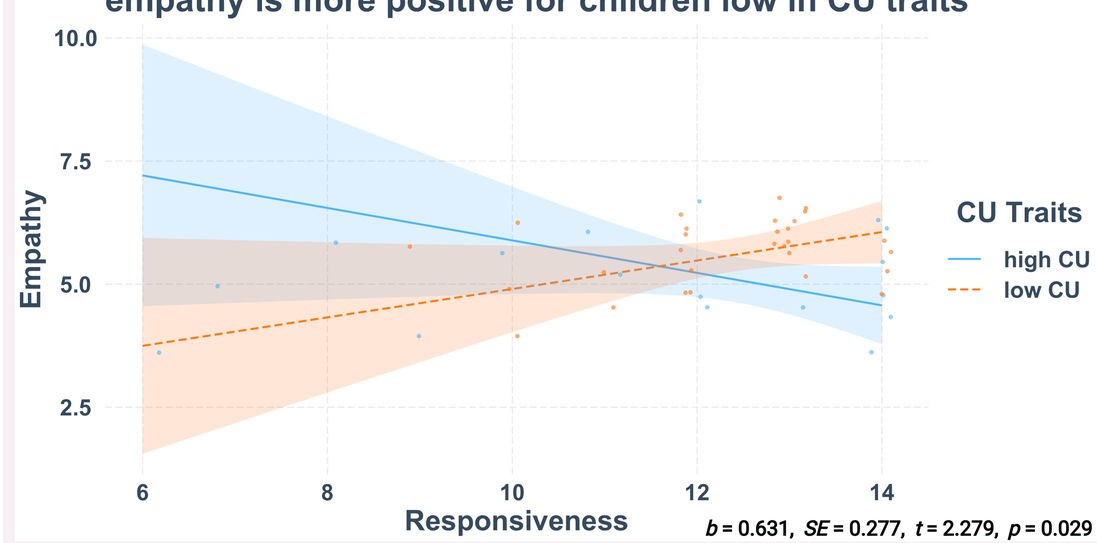
The relationship between parental affection and empathy is more positive for children high in CU traits



$b = -0.498$, $SE = 0.218$, $t = -2.284$, $p = 0.028$

There is an interaction between CU traits and parental affection such that the relationship between affection and empathy is more positive for high CU youth with greater affection predicting higher empathy.

The relationship between parental responsiveness and empathy is more positive for children low in CU traits



$b = 0.631$, $SE = 0.277$, $t = 2.279$, $p = 0.029$

There is an interaction between CU traits and parental responsiveness such that the relationship between responsiveness and empathy is more positive for low CU youth with greater responsiveness predicting higher empathy.

CONCLUSION

-Affection may be more significant than responsiveness for improving empathy deficits in youth w/ elevated CU traits

- Responsiveness component of warmth may be important for empathy development in youth w/o significant CU traits

- Study limited by small sample size & limited range of CU traits in sample

- Future studies should oversample for CU traits to better investigate affection & CU traits

- Future studies may include a measure of social affiliation to investigate whether increased motivation to affiliate with others mediates relationship between affection & empathy in high CU youth

- Coding scheme effective at measuring parental warmth over Zoom & shows promise for use in individualized parenting interventions

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This research was funded by the Millstein Family Undergraduate Research Grant. Thank you to Dr. Rebecca Waller, Dr. Rista Plate, and the EDEN lab.

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