

The Intergenerational Effects of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on a Child's Development

Kayla Bissell, M.S. in Speech-Language Pathology

FACULTY MENTOR: Elisabeth Mlawski, Ph.D., CCC-SLP



Katz
Katz School
of Science and Health

Introduction

What are Adverse Childhood Experience (ACEs)?

- ACEs encompass a range of stressful and traumatic events, including forms of abuse, neglect, social isolation, exposure to parental substance use or mental illness, incarceration, domestic violence, and early family loss (Westby, 2018).
- ACEs screeners are utilized to demonstrate a significant correlation between exposure to multiple ACEs and an increased susceptibility to negative health outcomes, such as obesity, depression, chronic health conditions, and negative physiological stress responses including engaging in high-risk behaviors (Crandall et al., 2019).

The Long-Lasting Effects of Toxic Stress Exposure

- Approximately 26% of children in the United States will witness or endure a traumatic event before reaching the age of four (Westby, 2018).
- Prolonged toxic stress exposure can result in:
 - Disrupted neurodevelopmental processes
 - Dysregulation of stress response systems
 - Altered reward and fight-or-flight mechanisms
 - Impairments in brain functioning that affect cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development.

Research Objectives: This study aims to examine the intergenerational transmission of trauma and its effects on early childhood development, particularly in areas such as language acquisition, expressive/receptive language delays, emotional regulation, and pragmatic language skills. A systematic review was done to answer the question: *If the maternal ACEs increase, do aspects of child language development decrease?*

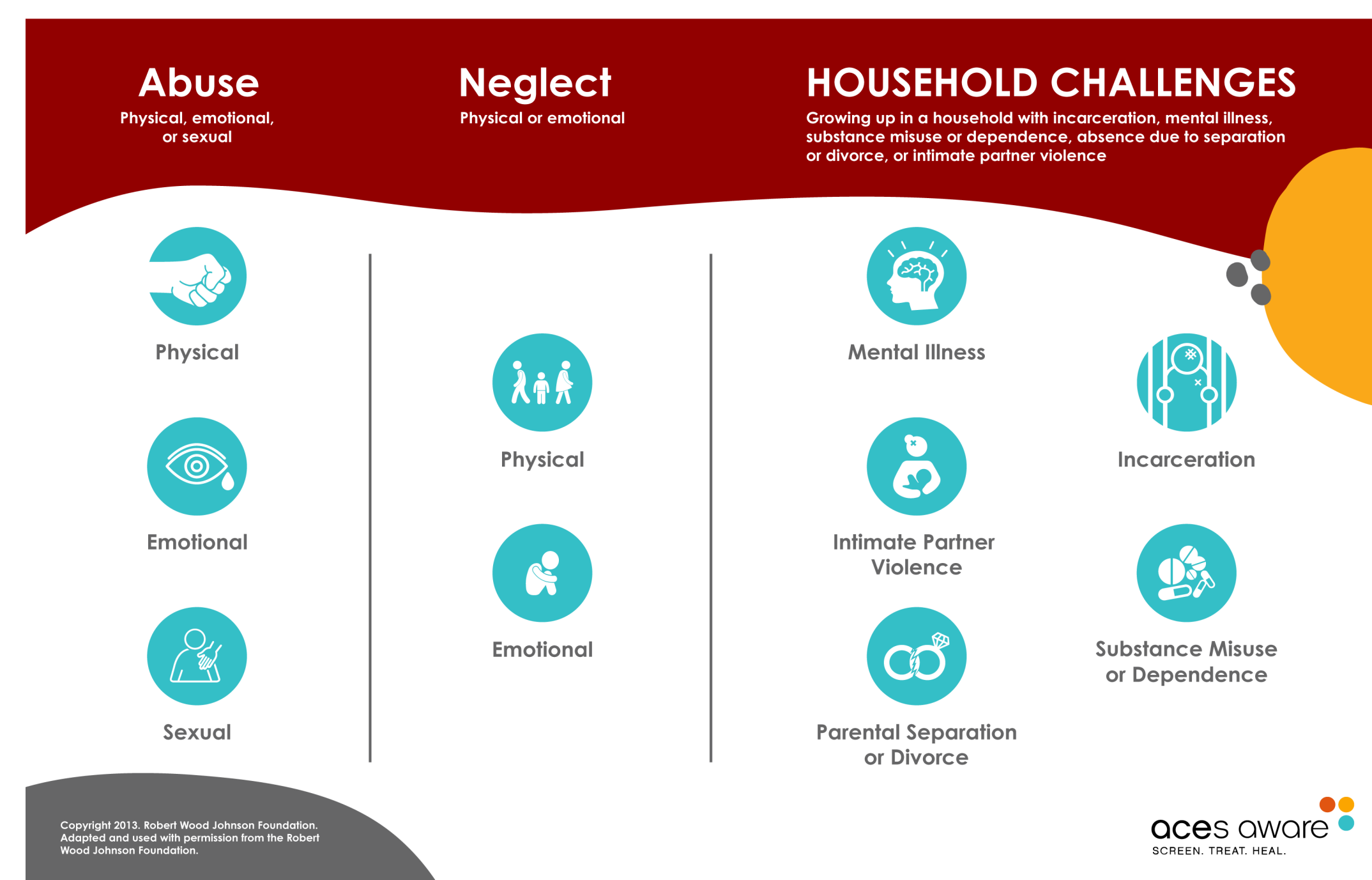


Figure 1

Approach

Data Collection: This study employed a qualitative approach through a systematic review of peer-reviewed literature. A comprehensive search was conducted using databases such as the Yeshiva University Library and Google Scholar. Articles were selected based on their relevance to recurring themes, key concepts, and their contribution to identifying gaps in existing knowledge related to the study's objectives. Sixteen articles were included in the analysis.

Findings

The Impact of Intergenerational ACEs

- Folger et al., (2018) found that ≥ 3 maternal or paternal ACEs significantly increased the risk of developmental delays, particularly in communication, problem-solving, and fine/gross motor skills.
- Folger et al., (2018) established a dose-response relationship concluding that for each additional parental ACEs, there was an 18% increase in the risk of a developmental delay.
- Exposure to ≥ 2 maternal adverse experiences was associated with a 2.23 \times increased likelihood of developmental delays in offspring (Folger et al., 2018).

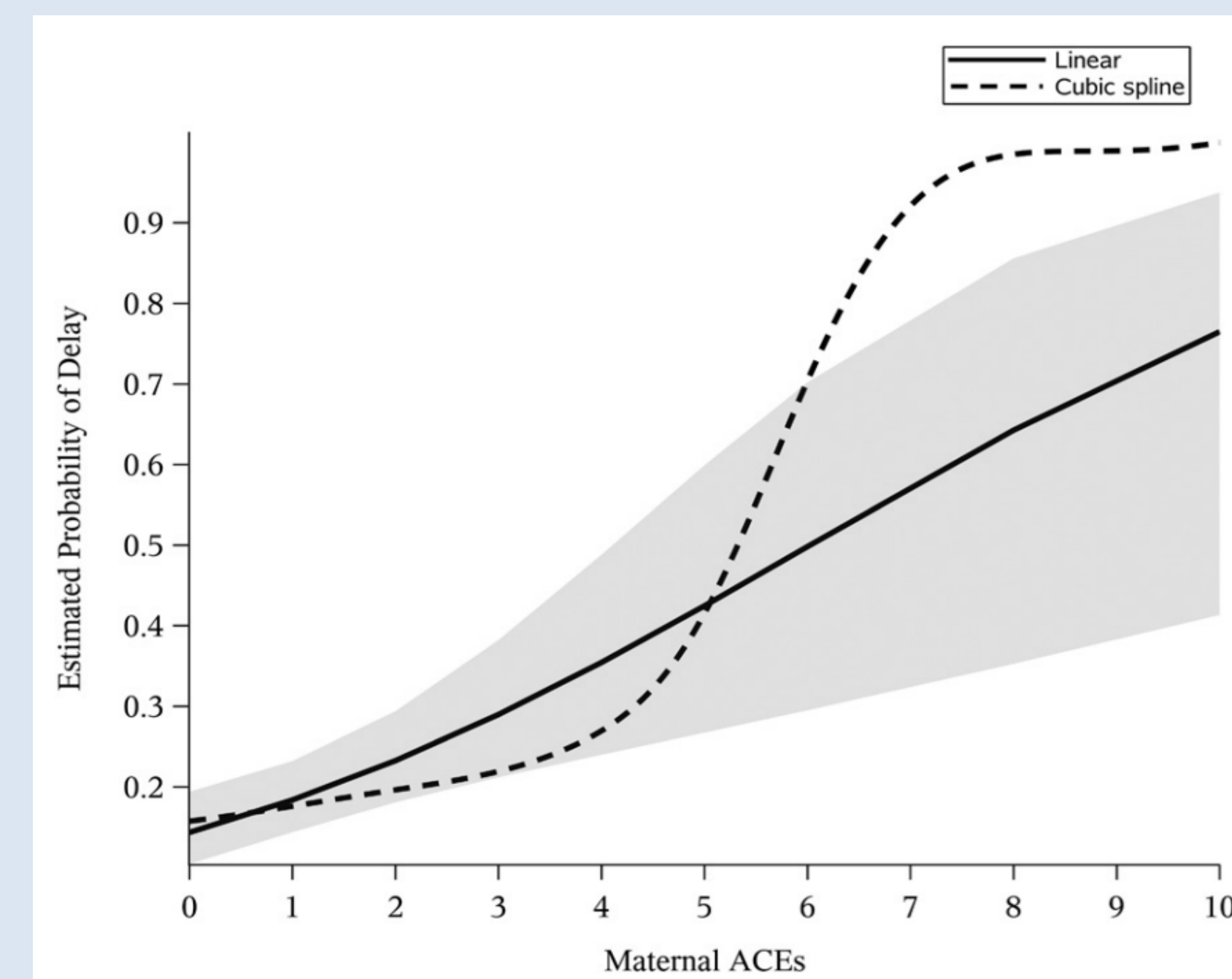


Figure 2. Folger et al., 2018

Expressive & Receptive Language Skills

- Using the *Preschool Language Scale-Fifth Edition* (PLS-5), Riggs et al., (2021) were the first to identify a direct relationship between maternal ACEs and language development in the next generation.
- Higher maternal ACEs scores were linked to reduced language competence in toddlers, emphasizing the increased probability of intergenerational trauma (Riggs et al., (2021).
- Riggs et al., (2021) found that after children received 56% of their allotted speech therapy sessions, the correlation between maternal ACEs scores and child language samples diminished significantly.

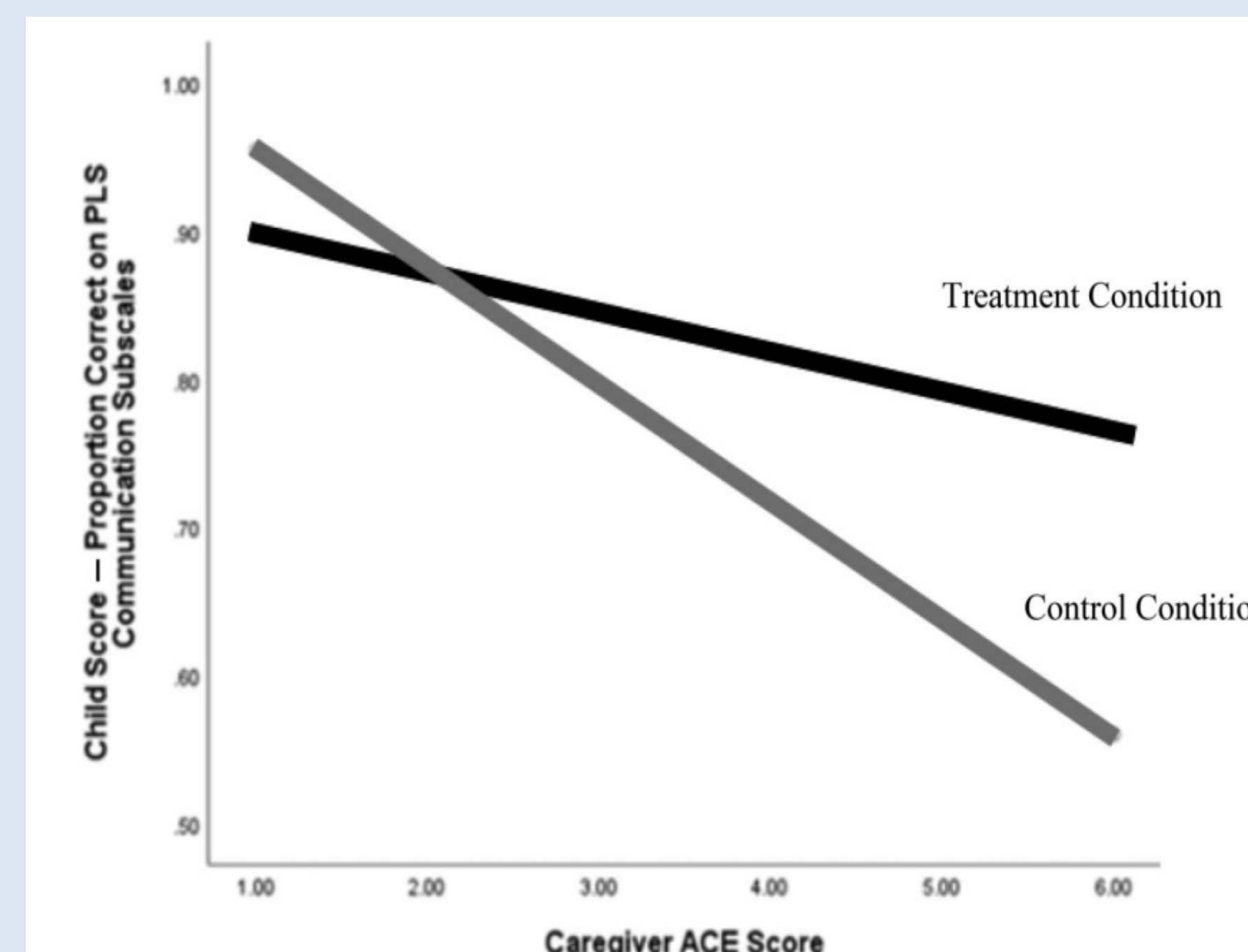


Figure 3. Riggs et al., 2021

Conclusions

Evidence Supporting Intergenerational Trauma

- Parental childhood adversity plays a role in development domains in areas such as language development, behavioral control, and socioemotional regulation.
- Findings consistently demonstrate that maternal ACEs are consistently linked to increased toxic stress, developmental delays, reduced school readiness, and a higher risk of emotional, mental, and behavioral challenges in children.

Importance of Screening in Early Intervention

- Early intervention screening for ACEs is essential for identifying at-risk children during developmental assessments, enabling targeted support for language acquisition and reducing the impact of toxic stress on social-emotional growth.
- Accessible, consistent intervention strategies are critical for disrupting intergenerational adversity and promoting more positive, long-term developmental outcomes.

Limitations

- Limited Research Scope: Existing literature may not fully address all aspects of the topic.
- Maternal vs. Paternal ACEs: Most studies emphasize maternal ACEs; further research is needed to explore the impact of paternal ACEs on child language and developmental outcomes.
- Publication Bias: The selection process may favor studies with significant results, potentially limiting diverse perspectives.

Acknowledgements

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