

Family functioning mediates the relationship between socioeconomic status and adolescent depression

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Overview and Objectives

While there is no doubt that socioeconomic status (SES) is related to depressive symptoms in adolescence, the mechanisms that explain this relationship are largely unknown. According to the Family Stress Model (Conger et al., 2010), we tested whether certain characteristics of family functioning as assessed in the McMaster Model (Miller et al., 2000) —Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, Affective Responsiveness, Affective Involvement and Behavioral Control— can buffer the detrimental effect of low SES on adolescents' emotional well-being.

Statistical Analyses

First, the role of SES in predicting scores on each dimension of the FAD was tested using regression analysis with IBM SPSS Statistics v25.0.

Second, the mediation analyses criteria and indirect effects were tested on the SES-predicted FAD dimensions to explain the BDI scores. For this purpose, we used conditional process analysis with 10,000-iteration bootstrapping through the Process v3.5 macro developed by Hayes (2018).

Method

Participants

636 Spanish adolescents, aged from 12 to 17 years ($M = 14.7$; $SD = 1.7$).

Measures

- Family functioning:** *McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD)* (Miller et al., 2000), with alphas in our sample of 0.96 for the full scale and a mean of 0.77 for the subscales. A confirmatory factor analysis showed an empirical factor structure compatible with the six-factor structure theorized by the authors of the FAD ($\chi^2/df = 3.34$; $RMSEA = 0.061$; $SRMR = 0.04$).
- Depressive symptoms:** *Beck Depression Inventory (BDI)* (Beck et al., 1961). It showed an alpha of 0.89 in our sample.
- SES:** *Socioeconomic Status Index (SSI)* (Caño & Rodríguez-Naranjo, 2023). This index, which yielded an alpha coefficient of 0.71 in the study, was obtained by assessing parents' education and occupation, and household conditions.

Results

First, Table 1 shows the dimensions of family functioning that were predicted by SES. The effect of sex and age was controlled for in each of the equations.

Table 1. Summary of the six hierarchical regression analyses.

Effects of the SES on each FAD dimension		β
Dimensions of Family Functioning	Problem Solving	-0.10**
	Communication	-0.09*
	Affective Response	-0.03 ns
	Affective Involvement	-0.03 ns
	Roles	-0.12**
	Behavioral Control	-0.11**

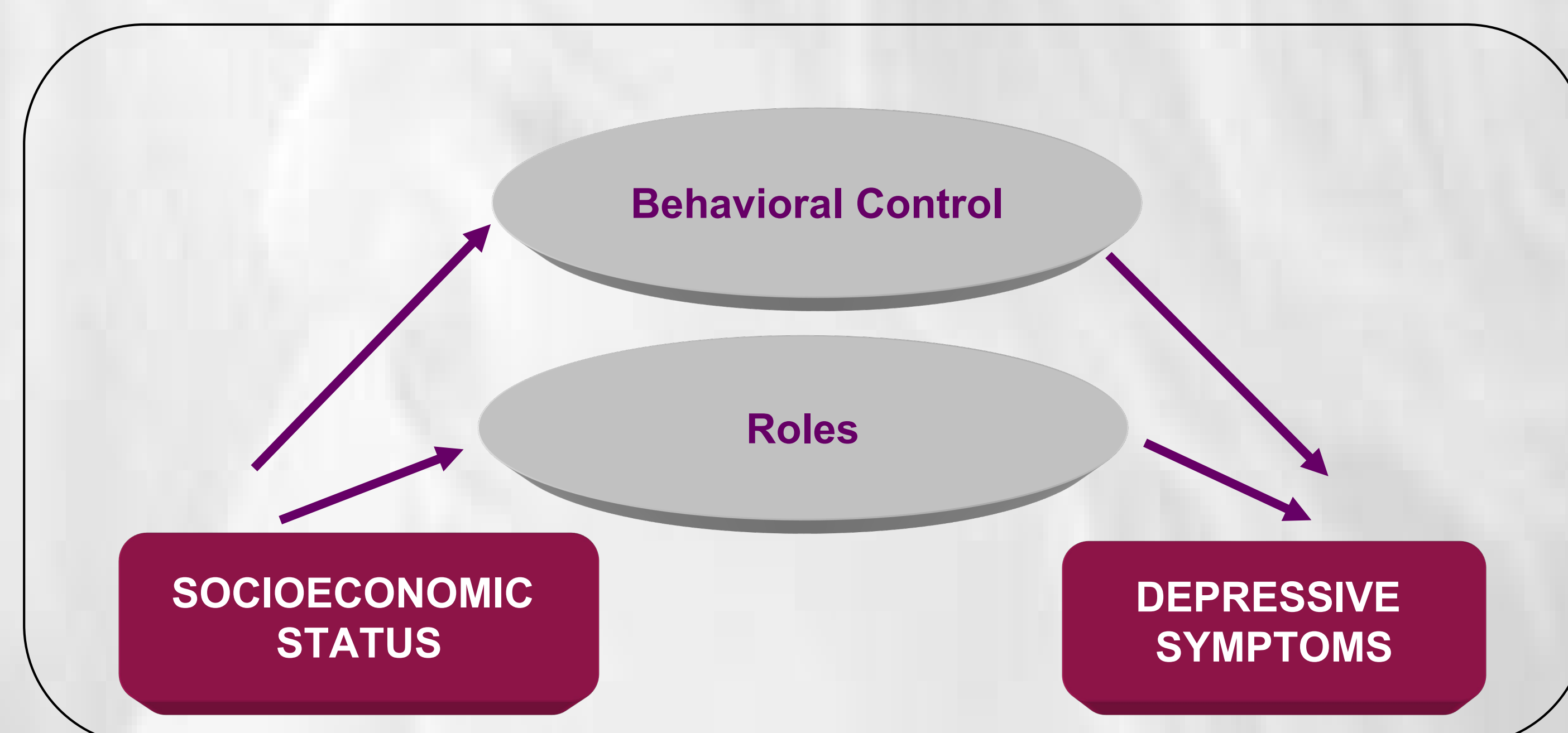
Note: ns (non-significant) * $p \leq .05$; ** $p \leq .01$; ***.

Second, as shown in Table 2, the family functioning dimensions predicted by SES (Problem Solving, Communication, Roles, and Behavioral Control) were tested as potential parallel mediators of the relationship between SES and BDI scores (Process, model 4, see Figure 1).

Table 2. Parallel indirect effects (ab) of SES on BDI through FAD dimensions.

Indirect effects		
Mediators	ab	95% BCCI
Problem Solving	-0.01 ns	-0.14, 0.08
Communication	-0.04 ns	-0.20, 0.03
Roles	-0.18*	-0.41, -0.06
Behavioral Control	-0.15*	-0.41, -0.02

Figure 1. Family functioning variables that mediate between SES and Depressive Symptoms.



Conclusions

Our results allow us to delve into the mechanisms underlying the relationship between SES and adolescent depressive symptoms and support the Family Stress Model's (Conger et al., 2010) assumption that SES affects depressive symptoms through family functioning.

The finding that Affective Responsiveness and Affective Involvement were the FAD dimensions not predicted by SES suggests that low SES would underlie adolescents' well-being through behavioral, not affective, management mechanisms. The mediation results specifically suggest that establishing clear rules within the family and adhering to family roles buffer the impact of low SES on adolescents.

The main practical implication of these findings is that compliance with rules and roles should be encouraged in low SES families to prevent adolescent depressive symptoms.

References

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