

# Parental Mental Health Status and Children Mental Health: The Mediating Role of Parental Aggravation.

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## Abstract

According to the Federal Data Systems data, pediatric mental illnesses start to develop during early childhood with anxiety and depression being the most common conditions (Bitsko et al. 2022). Established literature highlights the impact parental psychological health has on a child's emotional development. The family systems theory proposed by Bowen in 1978 emphasizes the strong interdependence within a household, meaning a change in one individual inevitably causes shifts in others. A parent's mental state can directly or indirectly influence their child's mental health.

While studies have linked parental aggravation, a distinct facet of parenting stress, to adverse outcomes in children (Suh & Luther, 2020), it remains unclear if this specific stressor acts as the conduit between a parent's overall well-being and a child's diagnosis. This study tests the hypothesis that parental aggravation functions as the essential link which connects parental psychological conditions to their children's mental health results.

## Methods

### Participants

- This study used data from the 2019-2020 National Survey of Children's Health (NSCH), a nationally representative survey assessing the health of parents and children.
- The total sample included 23,999 children aged 3-17.

### Measures

- Parental well-being: assessed using 4 items on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = Excellent/Very good to 3 = Fair/Poor), measuring parental physical and mental health status.
- Parental aggravation: measured with 3 items on a 4-point Likert scale (1 = Never to 4 = Usually/Always).
- Children's mental illness: measured using 2 items assessing anxiety and depression on a 3-point Likert scale (1 = Does not have condition, 2 = Mild, 3 = Moderate/severe).
- Covariates: child age, sex, family size, race/ethnicity, federal poverty level (FPL), and family structure.

### Analyses

- Path and Mediation analysis was conducted using SPSS PROCESS 4.2 tested based on 5000 bootstrap samples (Hayes, 2017)

Table 1  
Descriptive Statistics and Correlation across Key Variables (N = 23,999)

Variables	% or M(SD)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Parent Well-Being	9.46 (2.89)	—								
2. Parental Aggravation	5.29 (2.03)	-.13**	—							
3. Children Mental Illness	2.34 (.96)	-.16**	.27**	—						
4. Child Age	10.68 (4.42)	-.06**	-.01	.22**	—					
5. Family Size	3.9 (1.08)	.26**	-.02**	-.07**	-.09**	—				
6. Child Sex (Male)	51.6%	.00	-.07**	.05**	.00	-.01**	—			
7. Race/Ethnicity (White)	69.6%	-.04**	.02**	-.03**	-.01**	.02**	.01**	—		
8. FPL (400% FPL or greater)	31.7%	-.03**	.01**	.00	-.01**	-.01*	.00	.00	—	
9. Fam Structure (Married Parents)	40.9%	-.76**	.01**	.00	.01**	-.00	.01*	.01**	-.46**	—

Note. \*p < .05, \*\*p < .01 (Two-tailed).

## Results

- Preliminary correlation results showed that parental well-being was negatively associated with children's mental illness ( $r = -.16, p < .01$ ) and parental aggravation ( $r = -.13, p < .01$ ). Parental aggravation was positively associated with children's mental illness ( $r = .27, p < .01$ )
- Consistent with preliminary analysis, parental well-being was negatively associated with children's mental illness ( $b = -.04, p < .01$ ) in the final mediation model
- Parental well-being was negatively associated with parental aggravation ( $b = -.19, p < .01$ , and in turn, parental aggravation was positively related to children's mental illness ( $b = .13, p < .01$ ).
- The mediating effect was tested and the indirect effect of parental well-being on children's mental illness through parental aggravation was significant ( $b = -.03, SE = .00, 95\% CI [-.03, -.02]$ ).

## Conclusion

- Drawing from the lens of family systems theory, the current study examined the mediating role of parental aggravation in the relationship between parental well-being and children's mental illness.
- Results of this study suggest that parental aggravation mediates the association between parental well-being and children's mental illness, where parental well-being was related to lower levels of parental aggravation, which in turn was associated with lower levels of children's mental illness.

## Practical Application

- These findings highlight the importance of considering parents' well-being when addressing children's mental health.
- The interventions aimed at improving parental well-being could reduce both parental aggravation and, hence, improve children's mental health. Therefore, policy and practice should focus on family-based interventions to address these issues.

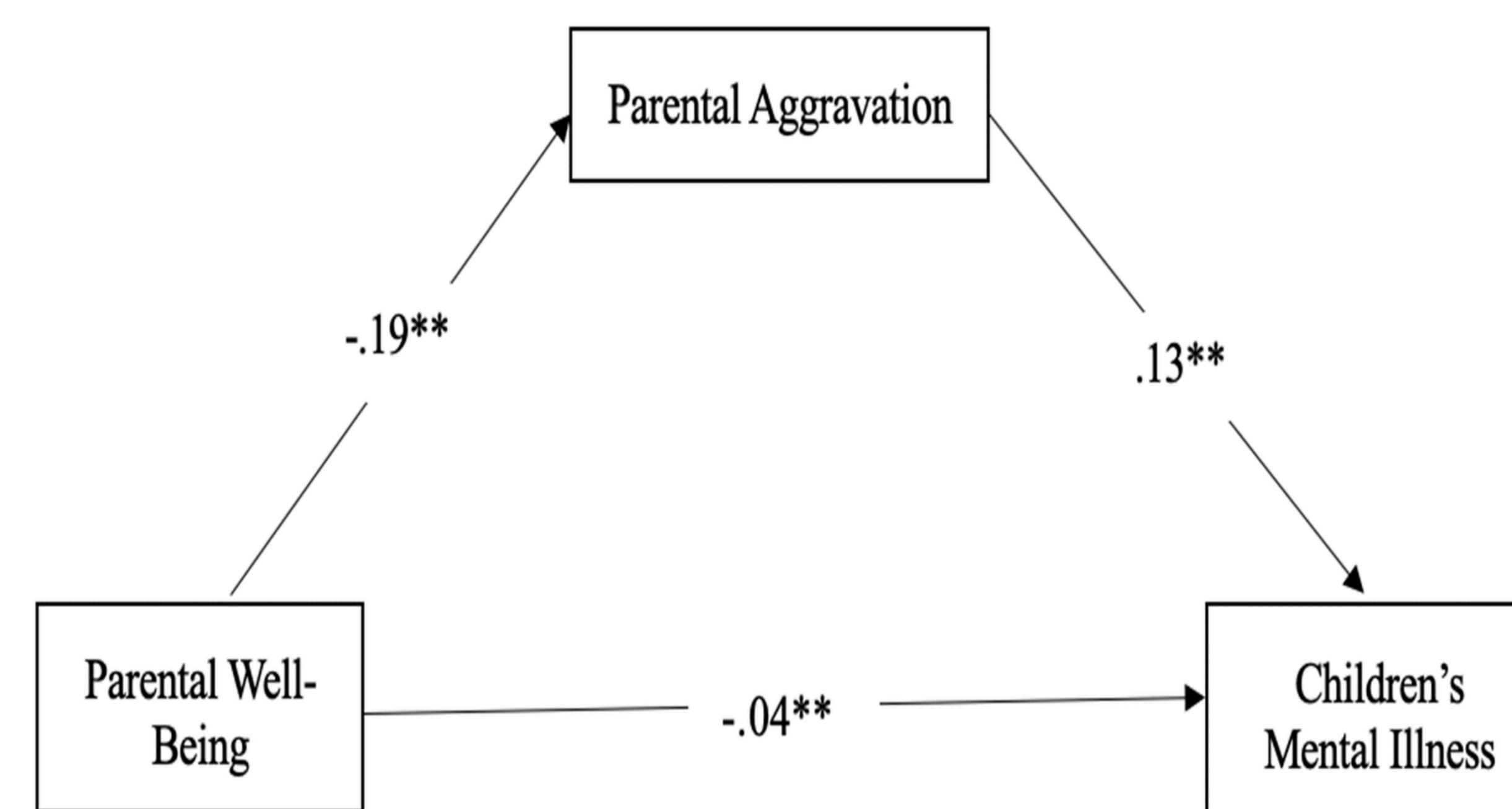
## References



## Acknowledgements

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to Chioma Opara for her invaluable guidance, technical expertise, and support throughout this project.

Figure 1.  
Mediating Effects of Parental Aggravation in the Association between



Note. Covariates were included in the model, but their paths were shown for clearer presentation. \*\*p < .01

