

INTRODUCTION

- Given adolescents spend majority of their lives in school, it is crucial to investigate how their relationship with their school impacts developmental outcomes.
- Key features of school connectedness, such as support and acceptance, serve as protective factors against depressive and anxiety symptoms during adolescence (Waters et al., 2009; Joyce & Early, 2014).
- Longitudinal research suggests that school connectedness is negatively correlated with behavioral problems and psychopathology (Lester et al., 2013; Loukas et al., 2009).
- However, extant research has yet to investigate potential developmental pathways among these constructs.
- The current study examined depressive and anxiety symptoms as mediators of the relationship between school connectedness and later problem behavior.**

METHOD

Participants

- Data were drawn from the Predictors of Anxiety and Depression During Adolescence Project (PANDA; Ohannessian & Vannucci, 2018), which surveyed adolescents from 5 Northeastern State middle schools.
- Participants completed surveys in schools during fall 2016 (T1), spring 2017 (T2), and fall 2017 (T3).
- $N = 1,556$
- $Age = 12.75$ ($SD = .71$) and 51% female at Time 1 (T1)

Measures

- Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children was used to measure depressive symptoms ($\alpha_{T1} = .91$; Weissman et al., 1980).
- Screen for Child Anxiety Related Emotional Disorders was used to assess social anxiety ($\alpha_{T1} = .87$; Birmaher et al., 1999).
- A five item scale measured school connectedness ($\alpha_{T1} = .71$).
- Adolescents reported how frequently they engaged in risk behaviors (e.g., start physical fights; $\alpha_{T1} = .95$; American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

RESULTS

- Structural equation modeling was used to conduct path analysis to examine whether depressive and anxiety symptoms (T2) mediated the relationship between school connectedness (T1) and later problem behavior (T3) (Figure 1).
- School connectedness negatively predicted later depressive and anxiety symptoms.
- Only depressive symptoms in turn positively predicted later problem behavior.
- The direct effect of school connectedness to problem behavior 1.5 years later remained significant after accounting for the mediated pathways, suggesting that depressive symptoms partially mediated this effect.

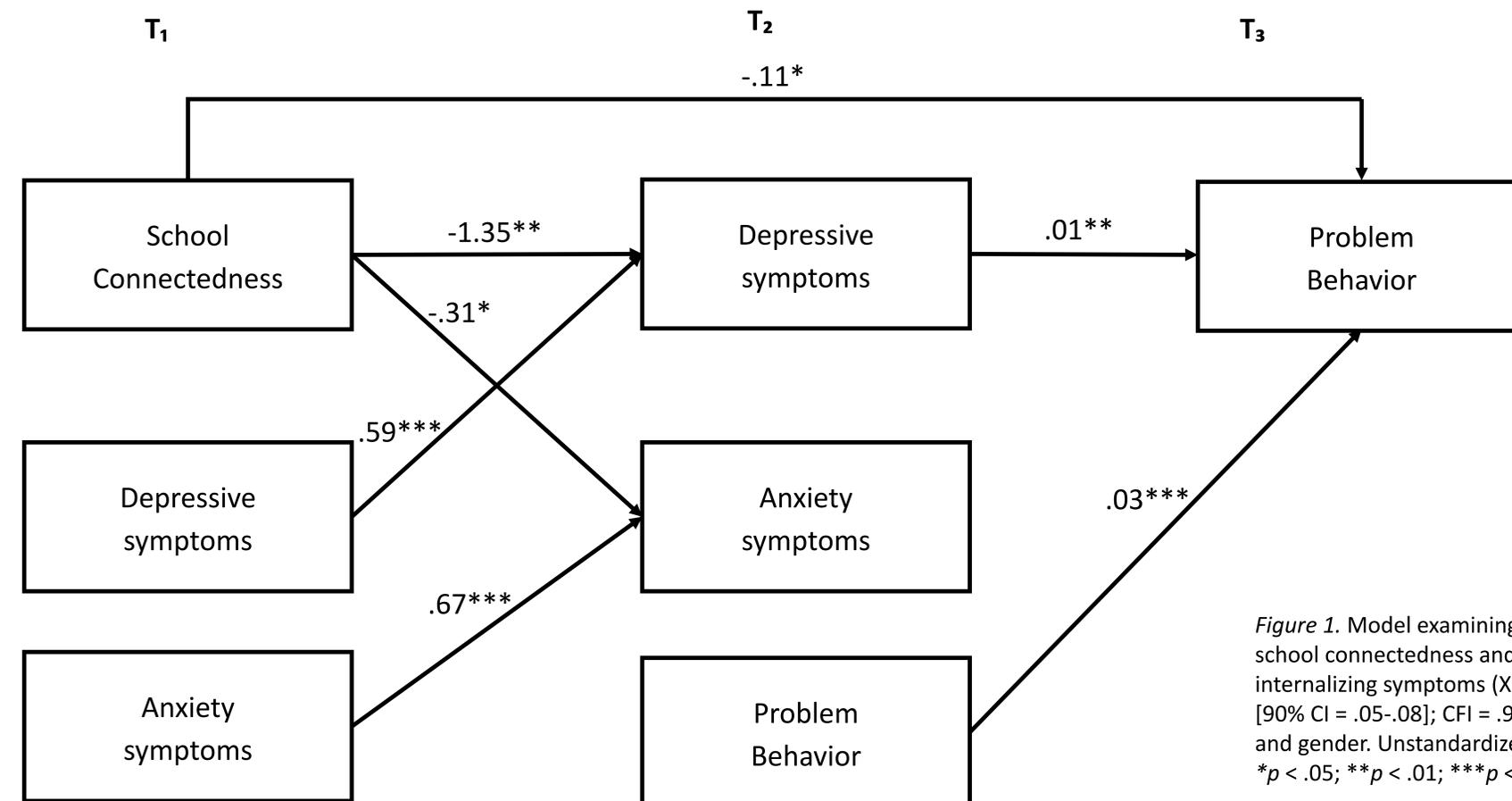


Figure 1. Model examining the association between school connectedness and problem behavior through internalizing symptoms ($X^2 = 76.29$, $p < .001$; RMSEA = .07 [90% CI = .05-.08]; CFI = .95). Model controlled for age and gender. Unstandardized coefficients are shown. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

DISCUSSION

- Current study findings highlight a developmental pathway from school connectedness to later problem behavior through adolescents' depressive symptoms.
- Findings may aid schools in identifying at-risk youth for developing later emotional and behavioral problems and point to the importance of promoting school connectedness among young adolescents.
- Results can be particularly useful to inform school-based intervention efforts for middle school adolescents, which may have lasting positive impacts on later adjustment outcomes.

