



# The Relationship Between Children's Emotion Regulation and Parent-Child Conflict in At-Risk Preschool Children

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## BACKGROUND

- Children's academic performance, emotional development, and social growth are affected by the quality of the parent-child relationship (Driscoll & Pianta, 2011).
- Associations have been found between children's cognitive and social abilities upon school entry and parental sensitivity and stimulation (Downer & Pianta, 2006; National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD] Early Child Care Research Network, 2003).
- Emotion regulation refers to goal directed processes that influence the intensity, duration and type of emotion experienced (Gross & Thompson, 2007).
- The development of emotion regulation depends on internal and external factors. Initially, children depend on others to help modulate their emotions, but as they develop children depend less on parents/caregivers to aid in emotion regulation (Eisenberg & Morris, 2002; Silk et al., 2003).
- Emotion regulation is particularly important as emotion regulation difficulties present in preschool-aged children predict current and later behavior problems (Cole et al., 2003; Gilliom et al., 2002).

## RESEARCH QUESTION

Is there an association between children's level of emotion regulation and parent-child conflict among preschool children of foreign born parents?

## METHOD

### Sample

N= 267 parents and 279 children (ages 3-5) from 3 Midwestern preschool centers.

### Measures

•**Conflict.** A subscale from the Child-Parent Relationship Scale (CPRS; Pianta, 1992), a self-report instrument completed by primary care givers that assesses their perceptions of their relationship with their child. The conflict subscale measures the extent to which the parent feels their relationship with their child is characterized by negativity.

•**Emotional Regulation** is measured using the *Disappointing Gift* task from the Preschool Self-Regulation Assessment (PSRA; Smith-Donald, Raver, Hayes, & Richardson, 2007), administer by a certified assessor the child was handed a gift bag and was encouraged to open it, after the child sees the disappointing gift, the child is asked what he/she thinks of the gift.

•**Parent Nativity.** A variable constructed from parent self-repot to indicate if the parent was born in the United States (N =116) or foreign born (N =151).

•**Child Gender.** If the child was male or female.

•**Mother's Education.** Mother's self-reported level of education.

## ANALYSES

A generalized linear model specifying a log-normal distribution was estimated in SAS PROC GLIMMIX (v.9.2, 2008) due to skewing of parent-reported conflict.

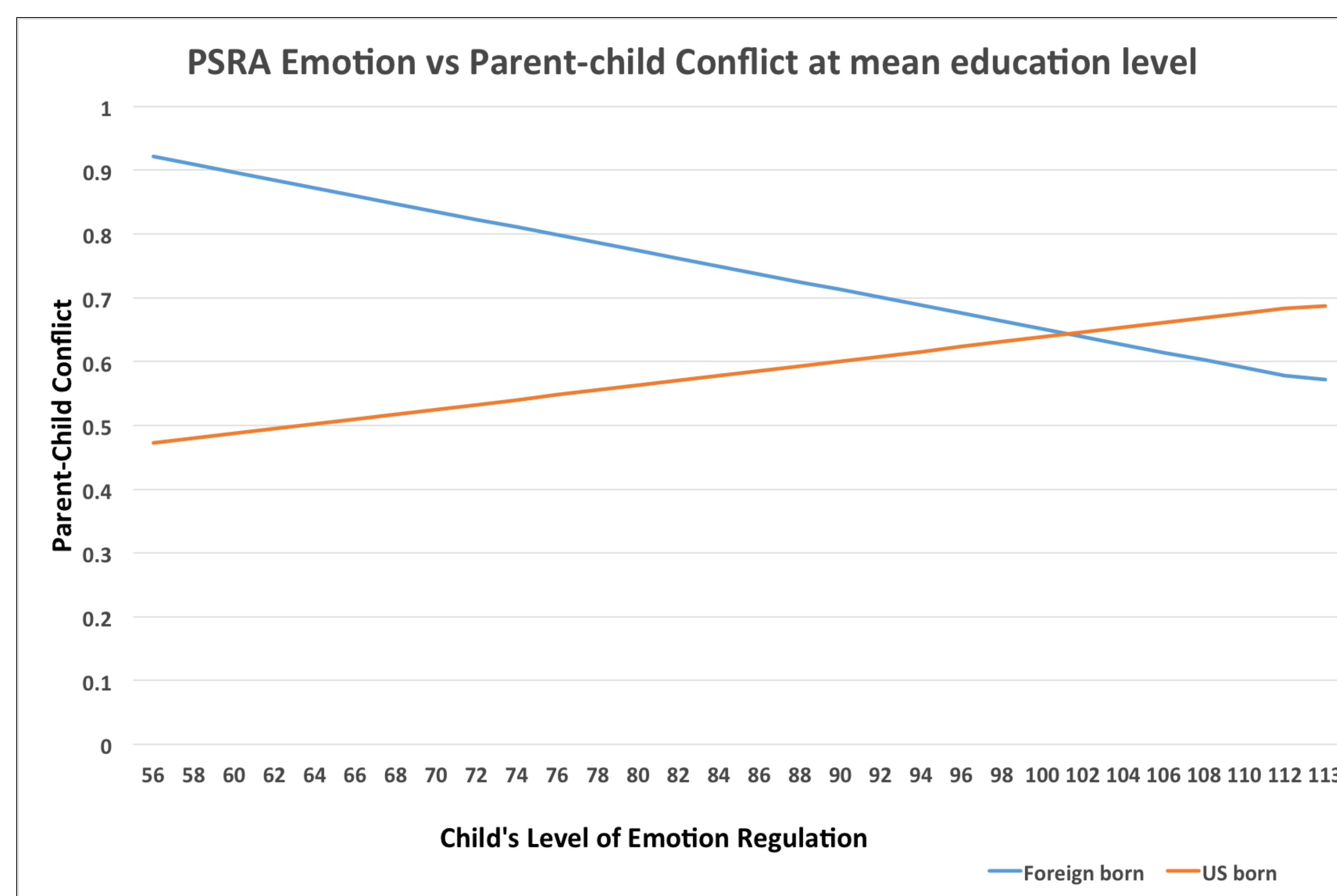
- Parent-child conflict was specified as the dependent variable.
- Child sex and maternal level of education served as controls.

## TABLES & FIGURES

Table 1

Effect	Estimates	Std Error	P Value
Intercept	0.040	.038	.292
Emotion Regulation	.003	.003	.328
Foreign Born Parents	1.003	.502	.047
Emotion Regulation X Foreign Born	-.009	.004	.048
Male	-.020	.059	.728
Mother's Education	-0.036	.017	.042
Error Variance	.17	.02	

Figure 1



## RESULTS

- Parents reported generally low levels of conflict.
- The relationship between parent-child conflict and child emotional regulation is moderated by parent nativity ( $p = .048$ ).

## DISCUSSION

- Foreign born was found to be associated with higher parent-child conflict, but for foreign parents, conflict decreased slightly when their children demonstrated greater emotion regulation skills.
  - Limited research is available on ethnically diverse populations regarding children's emotion regulation and parent-child conflict during the preschool years; the bulk of prior research has predominantly focused on white, middle-class, parent-adolescent samples (Weaver, Shaw, Crossan, Dishion, & Wilson, 2014).
- No change in conflict was reported as child emotional regulation increased among native born parents. This could be due to the low levels of parent-child conflict reported.
- These findings highlight the need to consider family-level characteristics, such as culture, in interventions aimed at improving children's emotion regulation skills.

## FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Further explore parent-child relationships and emotion regulation among children of foreign born parents.
  - Does parental country of origin influence parent-child relationship (e.g., parenting style, values, etc.) and, in turn, influence children's emotion regulation skills?
  - Does children's developing proficiency of a second language influence their level of emotion regulation and the parent-child relationship?

## REFERENCES

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