



# The Relations Among Psychiatric Adolescents' Emotional Trust, Depression, and Suicide Attempts

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## Background

Emotional trust is an individual's belief that others refrain from emotional harm by being uncritical of personal disclosures and maintaining confidentiality (Rotenberg, 2010). One study (Lester & Gatto, 1990) has shown that generalized interpersonal trust beliefs statistically moderated the relation between depression and suicide ideation in a small sample of community adolescents. There is a lack of research, however, regarding whether the moderating role of trust beliefs is evident when the following is examined: (a) trust beliefs in parents, specifically mothers; (b) emotional trust beliefs because of its role in promoting disclosure; (c) psychiatric patients, and (d) suicidal attempts, as opposed to ideation.

## Aims

Against this background, the aim of the current study was to examine the relations between emotional trust with mothers, depression, and suicide attempts in an ethnically diverse sample of N=200 psychiatric adolescents. In specific, we aimed to test a moderation model examining whether adolescents' emotional trust with mothers moderates the relationship between depression and suicide attempts.

## Measures

- **Depression:** Beck Depression Inventory-II (BDI-II; Beck, Steer, & Brown, 1996)
- **Suicide attempts:** Life Stress Interview (Hammen, Ellicott, Gitlin, & Jamison, 1989; Marks, Mayol, & deMayo, 1985) was used to assess characteristics of suicide attempts, such as frequency of previous attempts and dates of occurrence.
- **Emotional trust with mothers:** The emotional trust beliefs in mothers subscale of the Interpersonal Trust Scale (Rotenberg et al., 2005) was utilized.

## Data Analytic Approach

Descriptive and bivariate analyses were conducted to examine relations between emotional trust with mothers, depression, and suicide attempts. Hierarchical linear regression analyses were conducted to test whether emotional trust with mothers moderates the relation between adolescent depression and number of suicide attempts.

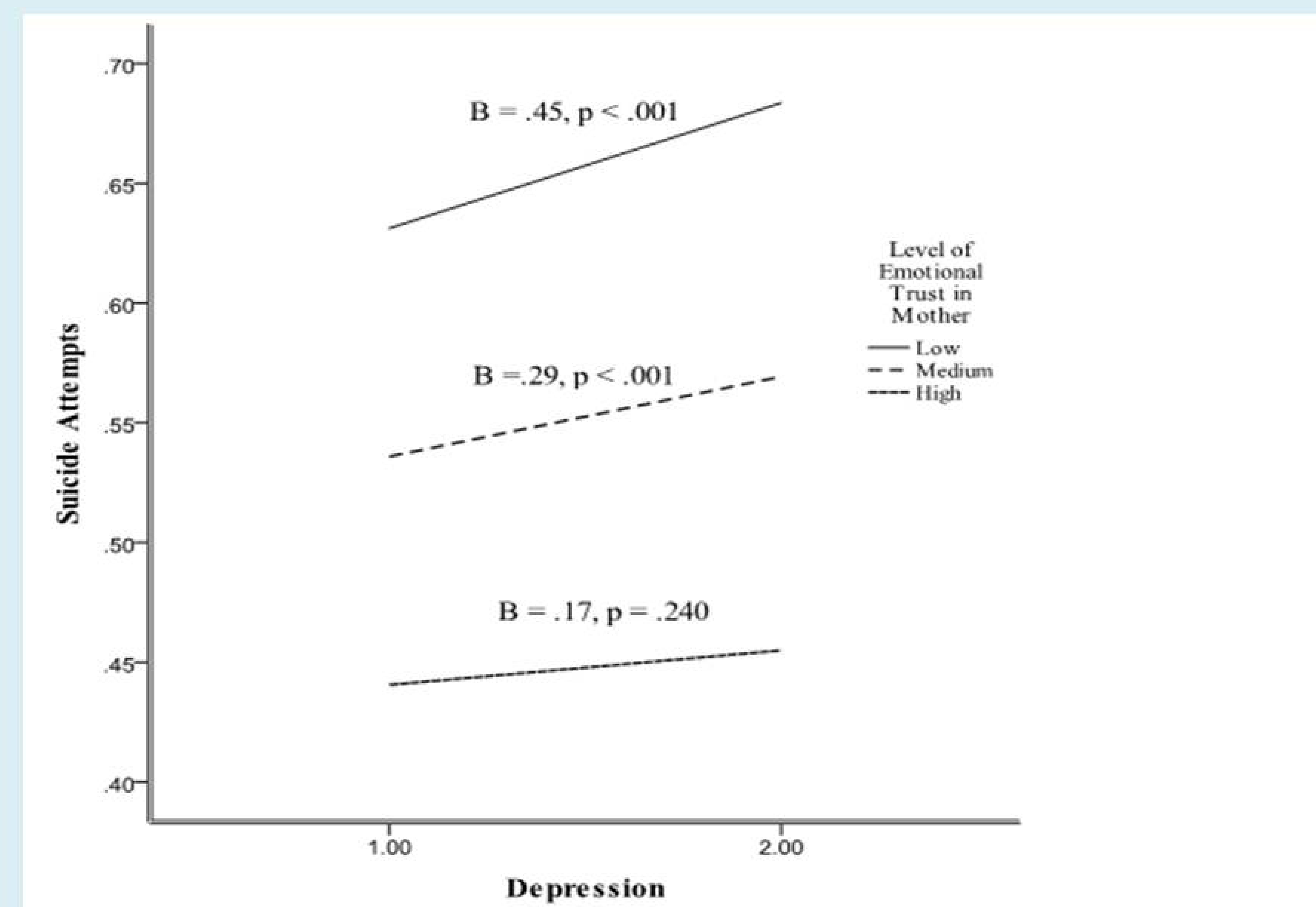


Figure 1. The moderating effect of maternal emotional trust between depression and attempts.

## Results

Bivariate analyses revealed significant relations between main study variables such that our moderating variable, emotional trust with mothers, was negatively correlated with both depression ( $r = -.17, p < .05$ ) and suicide attempts ( $r = -.15, p < .05$ ). Depression was positively correlated with suicide attempts ( $r = .30, p < .001$ ). Hierarchical regression analyses showed that adolescents' emotional trust beliefs in mothers moderated the relation between depression and suicide attempts ( $\beta = -.337; SE = .004; t = -2.22; p = .028$ ). The slopes of the relation between depression and suicide attempts as a function of three levels of emotional trust beliefs in mothers are shown in Figure 1. When emotional trust in mothers was low or medium, depression was positively associated with suicide attempts, but not when emotional trust in mothers was high. Overall, suicide attempts were inversely associated with emotional trust beliefs in mothers.

## Discussion

Findings indicate that emotional trust in mothers serves as a buffer of the effects of depression on suicide attempts. Potentially, mothers who engender beliefs in their adolescents that are not critical of personal disclosures and maintain confidentiality, buffer the effects of depression on suicide attempts.