

Negative Sexual Outcomes as a Mediator of the Association between Child Sexual Abuse and Couple Functioning

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INTRODUCTION

✦ Child sexual abuse (CSA) has been related to a variety of negative sexual attitudes and behaviors at different life stages:

- Childhood: intrusive or inappropriate sexual behaviors (e.g., Trickett et al., 2011)
- Adolescence: early age at first intercourse, high number of sexual partners, high-risk sexual behaviors (e.g., Loeb et al., 2002)
- Adulthood: low sexual desire, sexual dissatisfaction, sexual dysfunctions, sexual avoidance, sexual compulsivity, risky behaviors (e.g., Najman et al., 2005)

✦ Moreover, many adult survivors of CSA have difficulty forming close relationships:

- Poor dyadic adjustment, relational insatisfaction or instability (e.g., Miller et al., 2013)
- Extradysadic sexual involvement (ESI; Frias et al., 2014)
- Intimate partner violence (Brousseau, Hébert, & Bergeron, 2012)

✦ Yet, empirical data remain scarce and the available studies reveal that the magnitude of the association between CSA and relationship maladjustment is sometimes small or non-significant (e.g., Berthelot et al., 2014). These results suggest a need for further examination of indirect association: CSA → couple functioning

OBJECTIVE

Test two structural equation models in which the relation between CSA severity and couple functioning is mediated through adult sexual behaviors.

1. Examine a mediation model in which the relation between CSA and couple satisfaction is mediated through adult sexual avoidance and sexual compulsivity.

2. Examine a mediation model in which the relationship between CSA severity and extradysadic involvement is explained through sexual compulsivity.

METHOD

Participants

686 adults currently involved in an intimate relationship

- Women: 77%; Men: 23%
- Mean age: 27.5 years (SD = 9.24)
- Students: 61%
- Heterosexual: 86%
- Relationship duration: 5.24 years
- Married 14%
- Cohabiting 86%
- Dating 34%

Self-report computerized questionnaires

- **Child sexual abuse:** A sexual act before 16 years old with one individual who was at least five years older or in a position of authority or an adult stranger.
- **Sexual avoidance:** Sexual avoidance subscale (Katz et al., 1992) of the sexual aversion scale (Katz et al., 1989).
- **Sexual compulsivity:** Sexual compulsivity scale (Kalichman et al., 1994).
- **Couple adjustment:** Dyadic adjustment scale-4 (Spanier, 1976; Sabourin, Valois, & Lussier, 2005)
- **Extradysadic involvement:** Having sexual intercourse with one person or more since the beginning of the current romantic relationship, excluding the actual partner. (0 = no ESI; 1 = ESI)

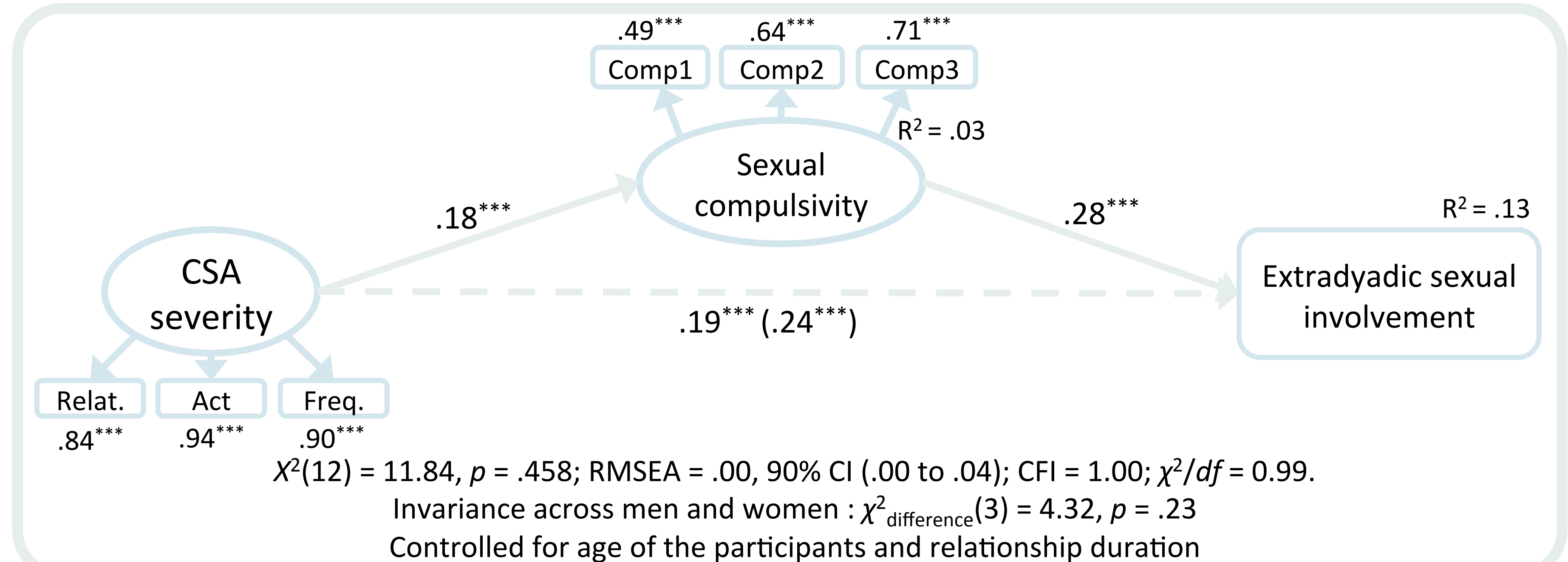
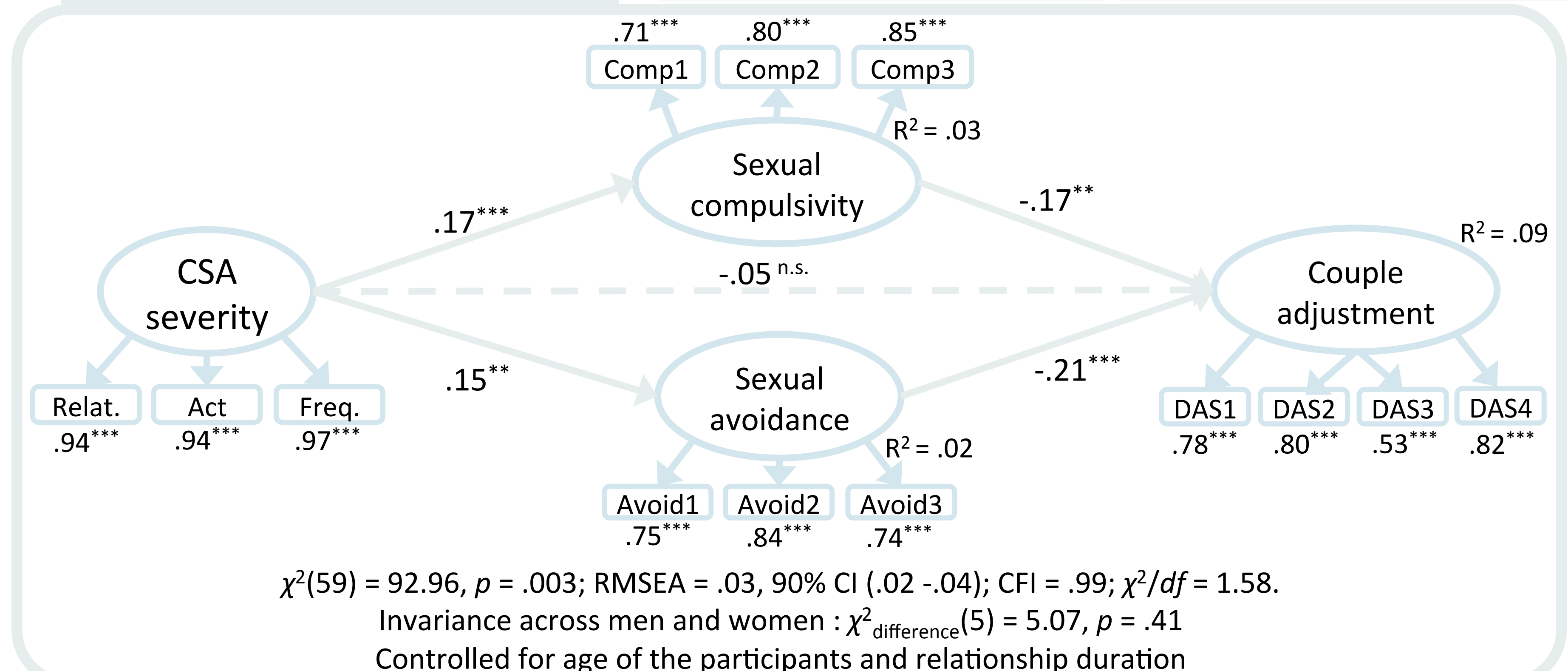
RESULTS

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. *** $p < .001$.

Prevalence:

	CSA		Extradysadic Involvement	
	%	(n)	No-CSA	CSA
Women	19.7%	(104)	14.9%	31.7%
Men	18.5%	(29)	25.8%	57.1%

Structural equation models



CONCLUSIONS

Adult sexual behaviors are key mediators in the relation between CSA severity and couple functioning :

- ✦ For both women and men, CSA severity was associated with :
 1. more sexual avoidance and sexual compulsivity, which, in turn, predicted lower couple adjustment.
 2. more sexual compulsivity, which, in turn, predicted elevated extradysadic sexual involvement.
- ✦ Importance to consider sexual functioning, couple adjustment and their interconnection.
- ✦ Support for the dual-pathway model of sexual outcomes in CSA survivors (Aaron, 2012; Colangelo & Keefe-Cooperman, 2012). CSA is associated with sexual avoidance and sexual compulsivity in adult couple relationship.

Clinical implications

- ✦ Considering the two sexual pathways in the assessment of CSA survivors for both women and men.
- ✦ Taking into account the complex interplay between sexual and couple difficulties.
- ✦ Both sexual compulsivity and avoidance might be key intervention targets with couples in which one or both partners are CSA survivors.
- ✦ Helping survivors to understand how their CSA experience can lead to maladaptive sexual behaviors due to intimacy fears or maladaptive representations of self and of others might promote couple adjustment.
- ✦ Interventions focussing on both sexual pathways after CSA may offset the development of long lasting couple distress in adulthood.