

Childhood cumulative trauma and psychological distress: **the role of altered self-capacities**

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Cumulative trauma

The occurrence of different *types* of trauma

- High comorbidity

E.g. 97% of children victims of sexual abuse are also victims of at least one other type of trauma.

- Important consequences

Beyond the severity of each trauma, cumulative trauma is linked to worst psychological outcomes.

Impacts of cumulative trauma

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Cognitive disturbances



The Self-Trauma Theory

« Beyond its initial negative effects, early and severe childhood maltreatment interrupts normal child development, and interferes with the usual acquisition of *Self-Capacities* »



The Self-Trauma Theory

*Altered self-
capacities*

Altered Affect Control

Difficulties in regulating and tolerating strong affects ;
Tendency to use external tension-reduction behaviours.

Altered Relatedness

Difficulties in forming and maintaining meaningful
intimate relationships.

Altered Identity

Difficulties in maintaining a coherent sense of self ;
Susceptibility to others' influence.

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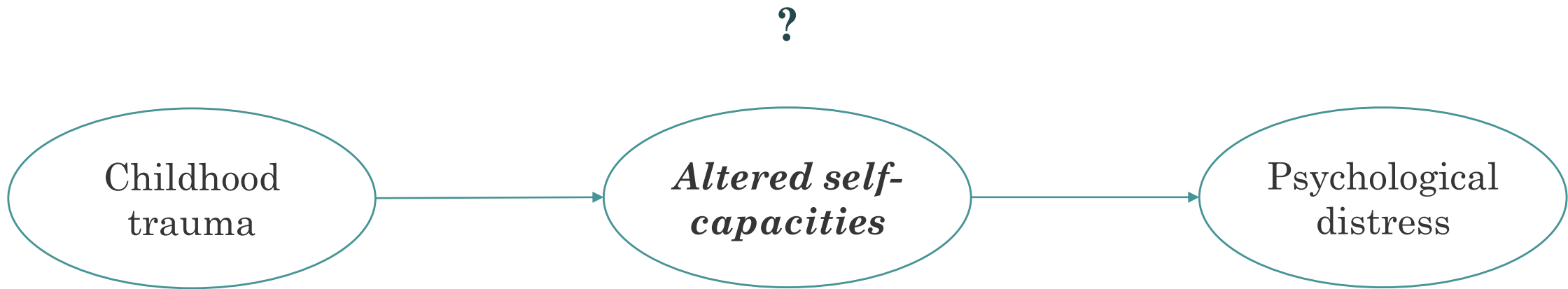
The Self-Trauma Theory



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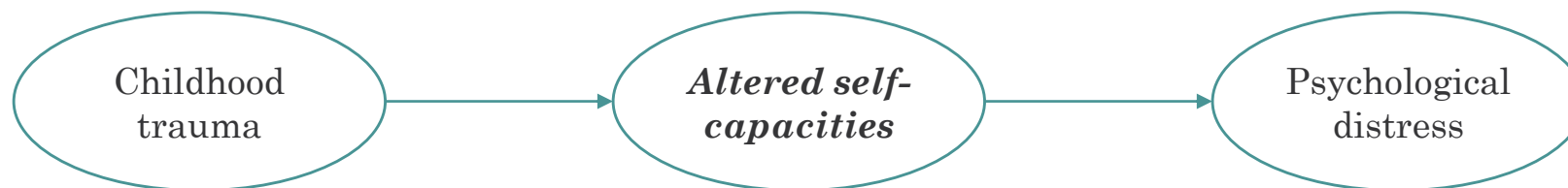


The Self-Trauma Theory



Goals and hypotheses

- 1) To verify the mediating role of Altered Self-Capacities in the relationship between cumulative trauma and psychological distress.
- 2) To explore the distinct mediating role of each Altered Self-Capacity between cumulative trauma and specific psychological distress symptoms.



Methodology

Participants

- Community sample of 270 French-Canadians (73% women)
- 17 to 60 years old ($M = 27.5 \pm 8.3$)

Procedure

- Recruitment using social media and email.
- Online or paper survey.



Methodology

Measure of cumulative trauma

Early trauma inventory

- *Sexual, physical and psychological violence ;*
- *Physical and psychological neglect ;*
- *Witnessed physical and psychological domestic violence ;*
- *Bullying.*

Methodology

Measure of Altered Self-Capacities



Inventory of Altered Self-Capacities

- *Altered Affect Control*
- *Altered Relatedness*
- *Altered Identity*

Methodology

Measure of psychological distress

Psychiatric symptom index

- *Depression*
- *Anxiety*
- *Anger*
- *Cognitive disturbances*

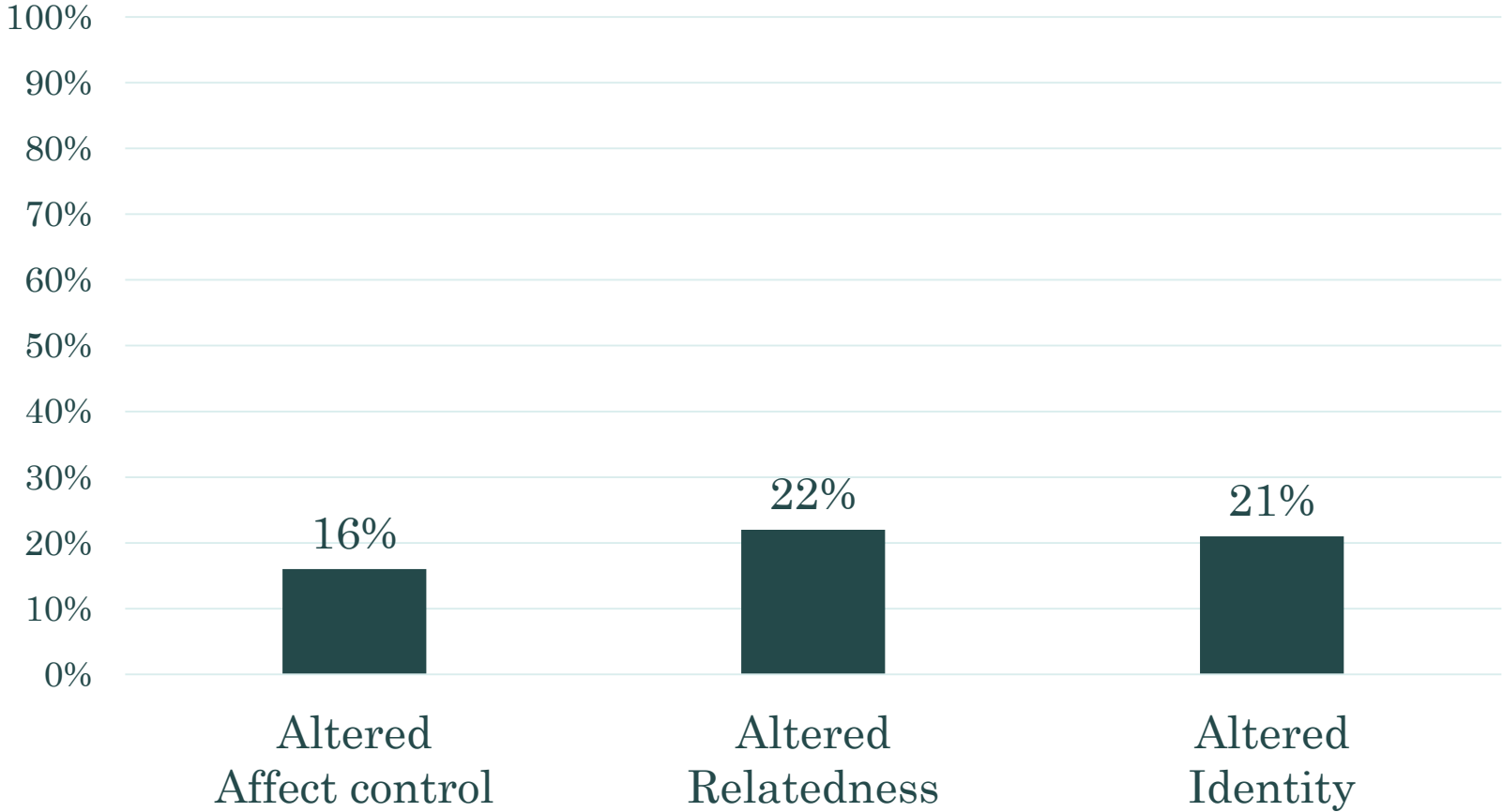


Results

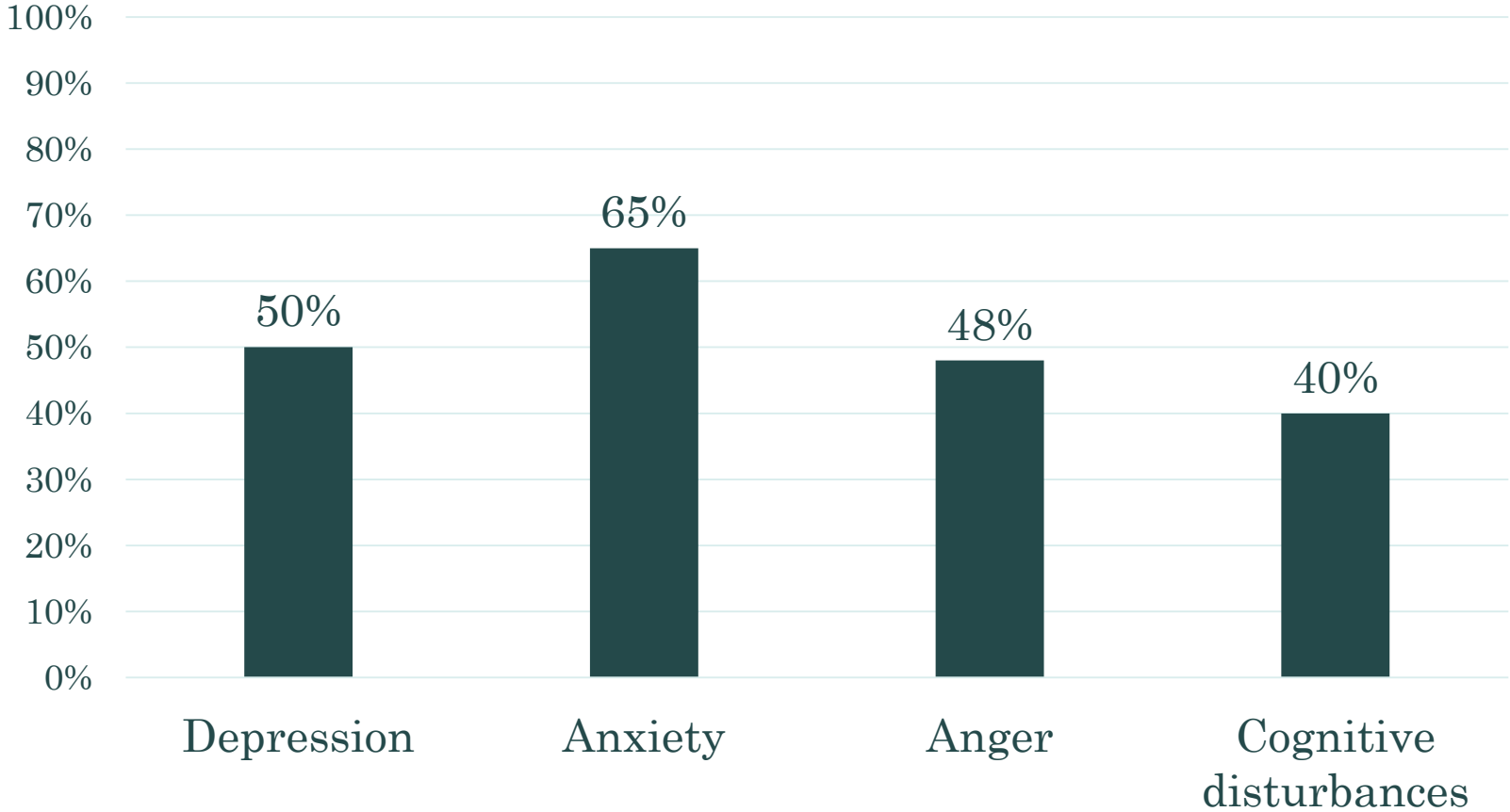
The majority of participant (**87.4%**) reported at least one type of childhood trauma, with a mean of **2.9** (\pm 1.9) reported trauma.

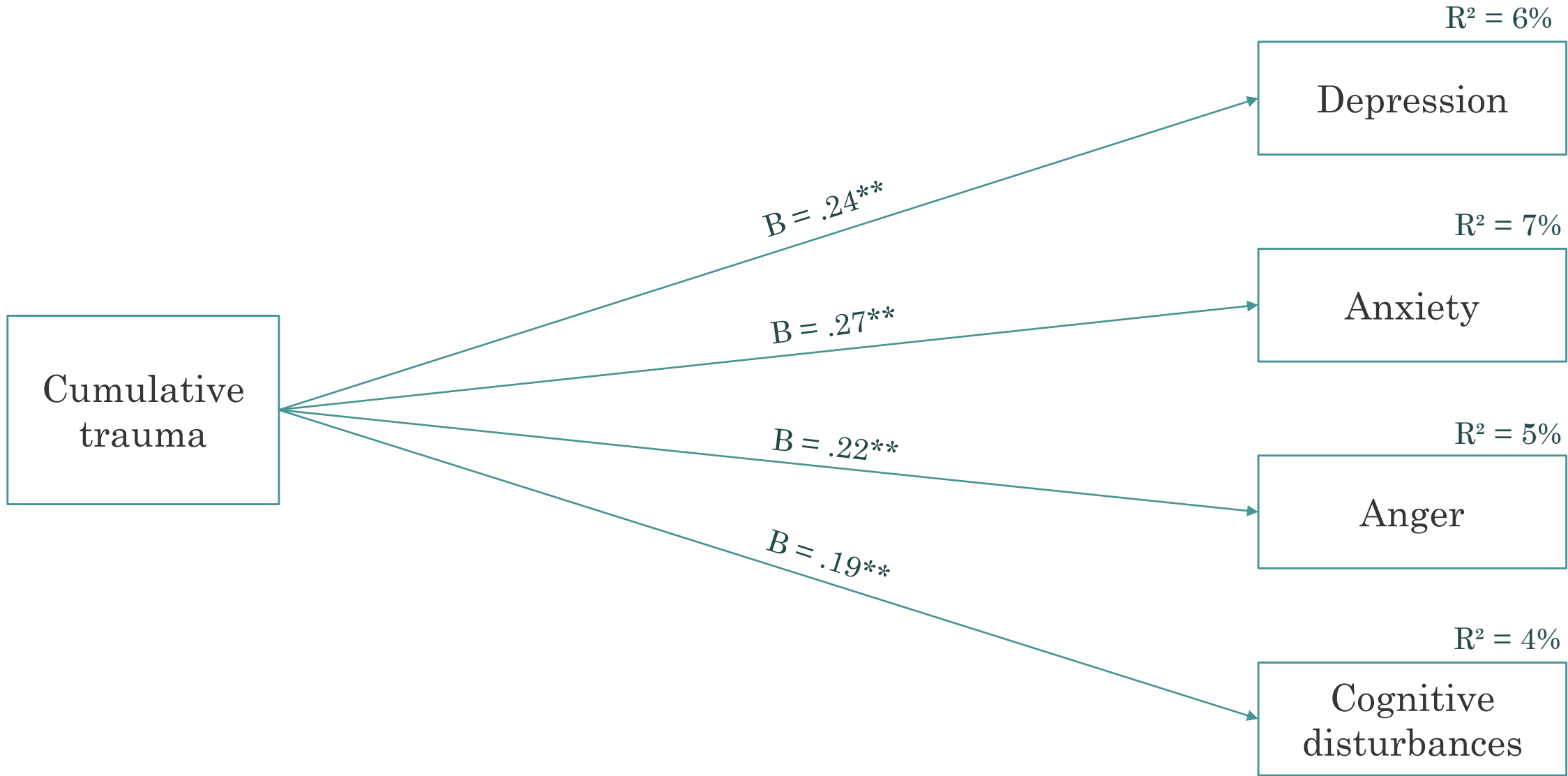
Physical violence	35,9%
Psychological violence	47,3%
Physical neglect	10,3%
Psychological neglect	63,4%
Witnessed physical violence	8,4%
Witnessed psychological violence	53,1%
Sexual abuse	21,8%
Bullying	54,6%

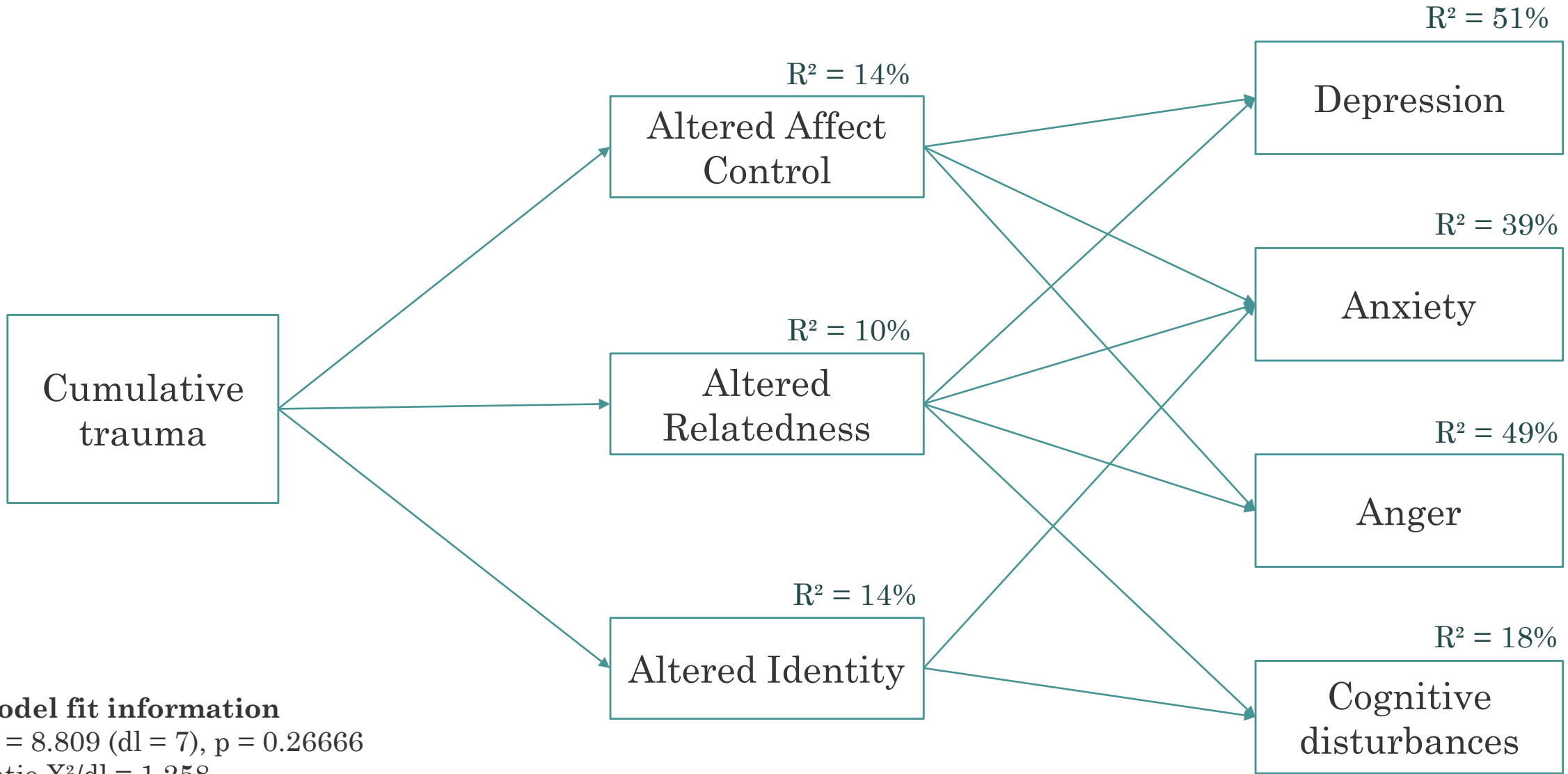
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Model fit information

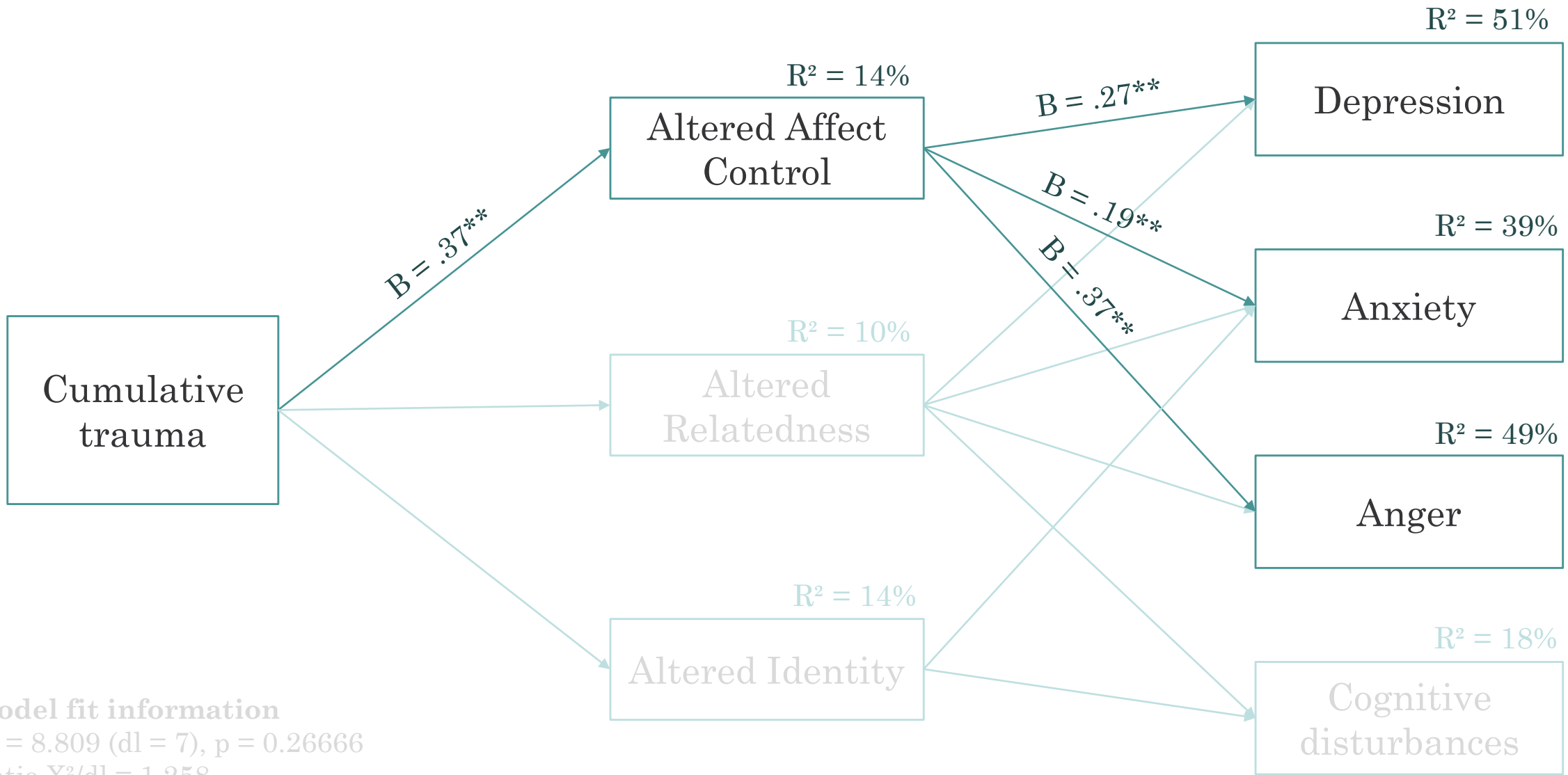
$\chi^2 = 8.809$ (dl = 7), $p = 0.26666$

Ratio χ^2 /dl = 1.258

RMSEA = 0.031 [0.000; 0.085]

CFI = 0.999

SRMS = 0.016



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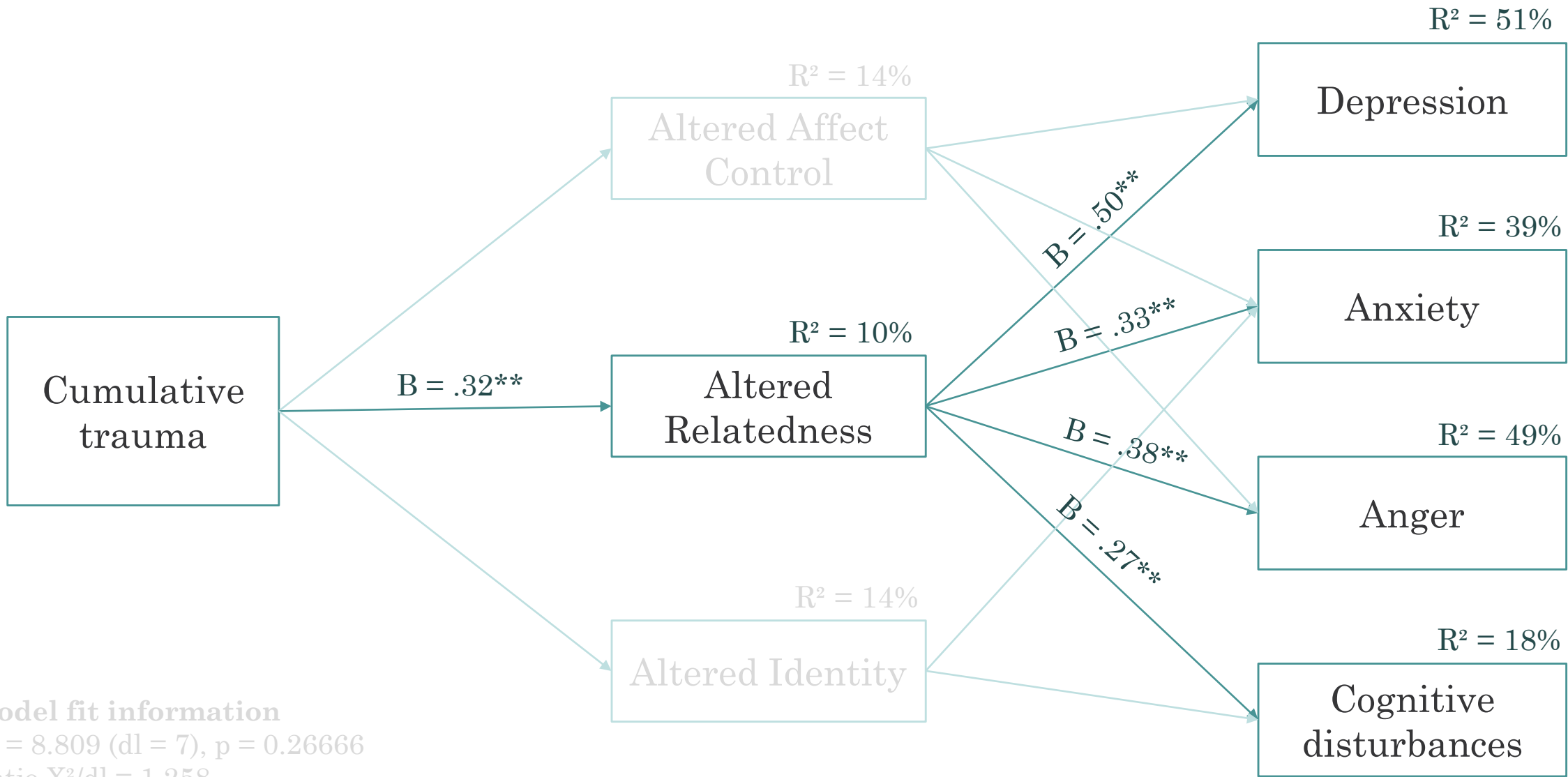
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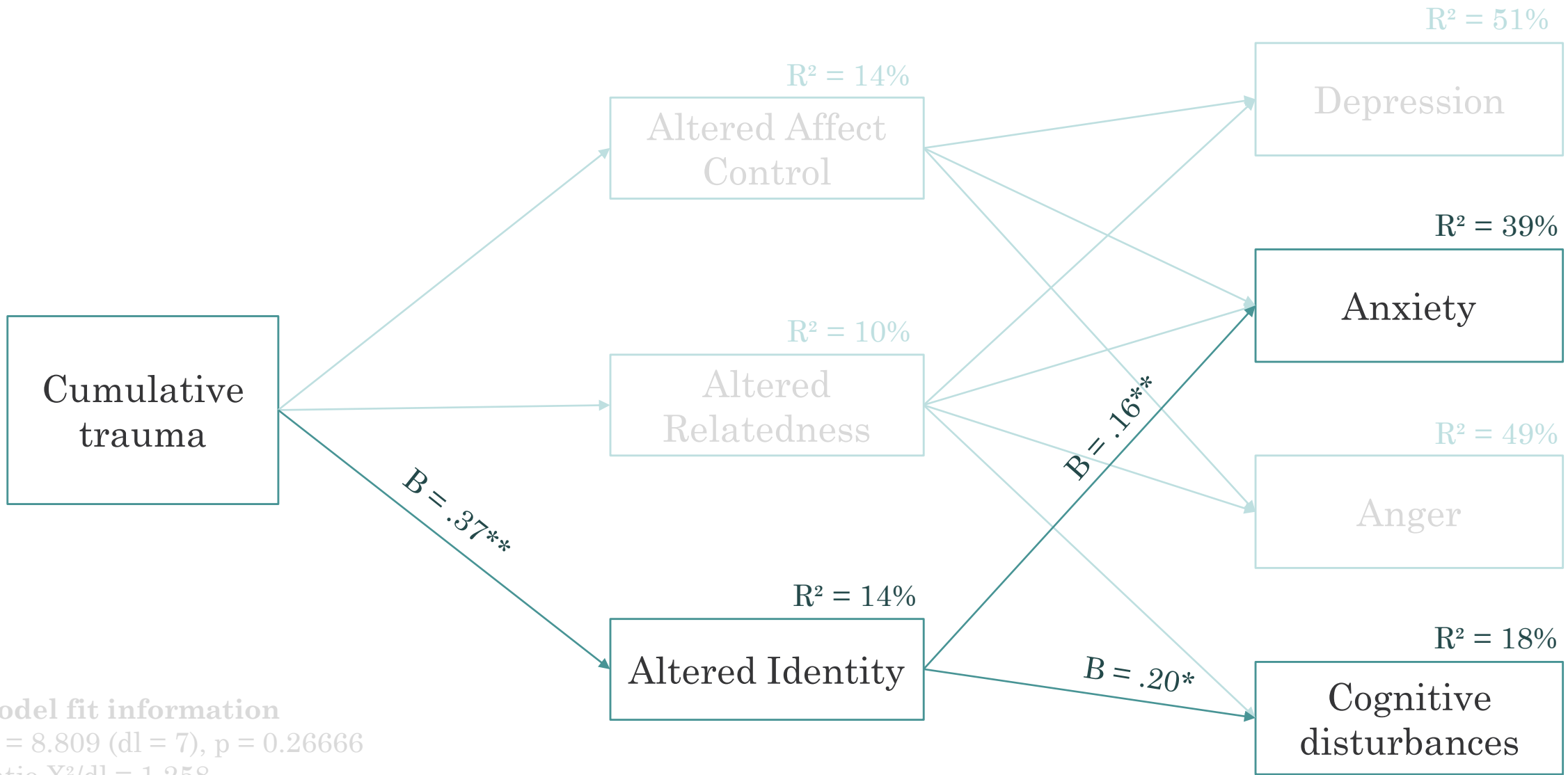
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Discussion

Altered Self-Capacities mediate the relationship between cumulative trauma and psychological distress.

{ **Altered Affect Control** → Symptoms linked to mood.

{ **Altered Relatedness** → All symptoms.

{ **Altered Identity** → Symptoms of anxiety and cognitive disturbances.

Implications

Better understanding of the mechanisms through which cumulative trauma leads to psychological distress.

Suggests that therapists who work with cumulative trauma survivors could target specific Altered Self-Capacities based on their clients' clinical profile.

Particular importance of Altered Relatedness.

Limits and future research

Limits

- Limited number of items on the psychological distress measure ($\alpha = .83$ to $.89$)
- Retrospective ; correlational.

Future research

- Clinical sample and measure of clinical distress.
- Explore other psychological outcomes (e.g. PTSD, BPD)

Questions?
Thank you very much!



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Annexe I – Types of trauma

	Altered Affect Control	Altered Relatedness	Altered Identity	Depression	Anxiety	Irritability	Cognition
Cumulative trauma	,370**	,319**	,371**	,245**	,275**	,207**	,190**
Physical violence	,177**	,141*	,171**	0,095	0,067	0,086	0,060
Psychological violence	,234**	,256**	,249**	,168**	,181**	0,089	0,089
Physical neglect	,234**	,219**	,318**	,150*	,159*	,185**	,176**
Psychological neglect	,309**	,299**	,319**	,242**	,304**	,254**	,196**
Witnessed physical violence	0,071	0,004	0,047	0,062	0,070	-0,011	0,003
Witnessed psychological violence	,237**	,166**	,185**	,145*	0,069	0,091	0,068
Sexual abuse	0,107	0,033	0,060	0,045	,132*	0,016	0,077
Bullying	202**	208**	240**	133*	197**	163**	150*

Annexe II – IASC item examples

Altered Affect Control:

- « Your mood changed quickly »
- « Wishing you could calm down but not being able to »
- « Hurting yourself as a way of getting of getting rid of upsetting feelings or thought »
- « Doing something sexual to calm yourself down ».

Atered Relatedness:

- « Having a lot of ups and downs in your relationship with others »
- « Finding out people you thought were wonderful weren't wonderful at all »
- « Feeling afraid that someone you care about might leave you ».

Altered Identity:

- « Wishing you understood yourself better »
- « Getting confused about what you want in life »
- « Losing your identity when you are in a relationship »
- « Getting confused about what you want hwen you are with other people »
- « Believing what someone told you, even thought it didn't make sense »