

# Alcohol Dependence and Parenting: Examining Associations Between Maternal Alcoholism and Harsh Parenting Across Childrearing Contexts



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## Background

- Parental alcohol dependence is associated with deficits in parent’s abilities to provide sensitive, warm, and responsive caregiving (Velleman & Templeton, 2007)
- We currently understand little about whether alcohol dependence may differentially affect caregiving behaviors in different caregiving situations.
- Emerging conceptual frameworks have adopted a parenting domain approach to understand the impact and function of parenting behaviors in different parenting domains (Grusec & Davidov, 2010).
- Each domain of parenting is characterized by different challenges and requisite parenting behaviors that lead to specific child outcomes.
- In the reciprocity domain, the nature of the parent-child relationship is one of reciprocal exchange and equality. The requisite parental response involves replying with the child’s requests and influencing attempts to appropriately engage (Grusec & Davidov, 2010).
- Alternatively, the nature of the parent-child relationship is hierarchical in the control domain. In this context, the parent must use discipline as a method for obtaining child compliance (Grusec & Davidov, 2010).

## GOALS:

- Longitudinally test how maternal alcohol dependency may affect harsh caregiving in different parenting domains.
- Hypothesis 1:** Maternal alcohol dependence would be associated with changes in harsh caregiving across parenting domains (from free play to compliance)
  - Hypothesis 2:** Maternal alcohol dependence would be associated with increases in harsh parenting over time

## METHODS

**Participants:** 201 mothers and their 2-year-old child (*M* age = 2.14 years) (44% girls)

- African American (56% of mothers and children)
- European American (23% of mothers and children)
- Latino (11% of mothers and children)
- Multi-racial (7% of mothers and children)
- Other (3% of mothers and children)
  - Median Family Income per year- \$18,300
  - 95% of sample on Public Assistance, 99.5% living below 2012 US Poverty line

**Procedure:**  
Mother-child dyads visited the laboratory at University of Rochester when children were 2 (Wave 1) and 3 years old (Wave 2), as part of a three-wave longitudinal study of child adjustment in the context of interparental conflict. The three waves of data collection were spaced one year apart.

Construct	Method	Measure
Maternal Alcohol Dependence	Maternal self-report (Wave 1)	Diagnostic Interview Schedule-IV (DIS-IV; Robins et al., 1995)
Maternal Harsh Caregiving	Free-play (reciprocity) and clean up (control) (Obs. at Waves 1 and 2)	Iowa Family Interaction Rating Scale (IFIRS; Melby & Conger, 2001)

Table 1. *Correlations and Descriptive Statistics for Primary Study Variables*

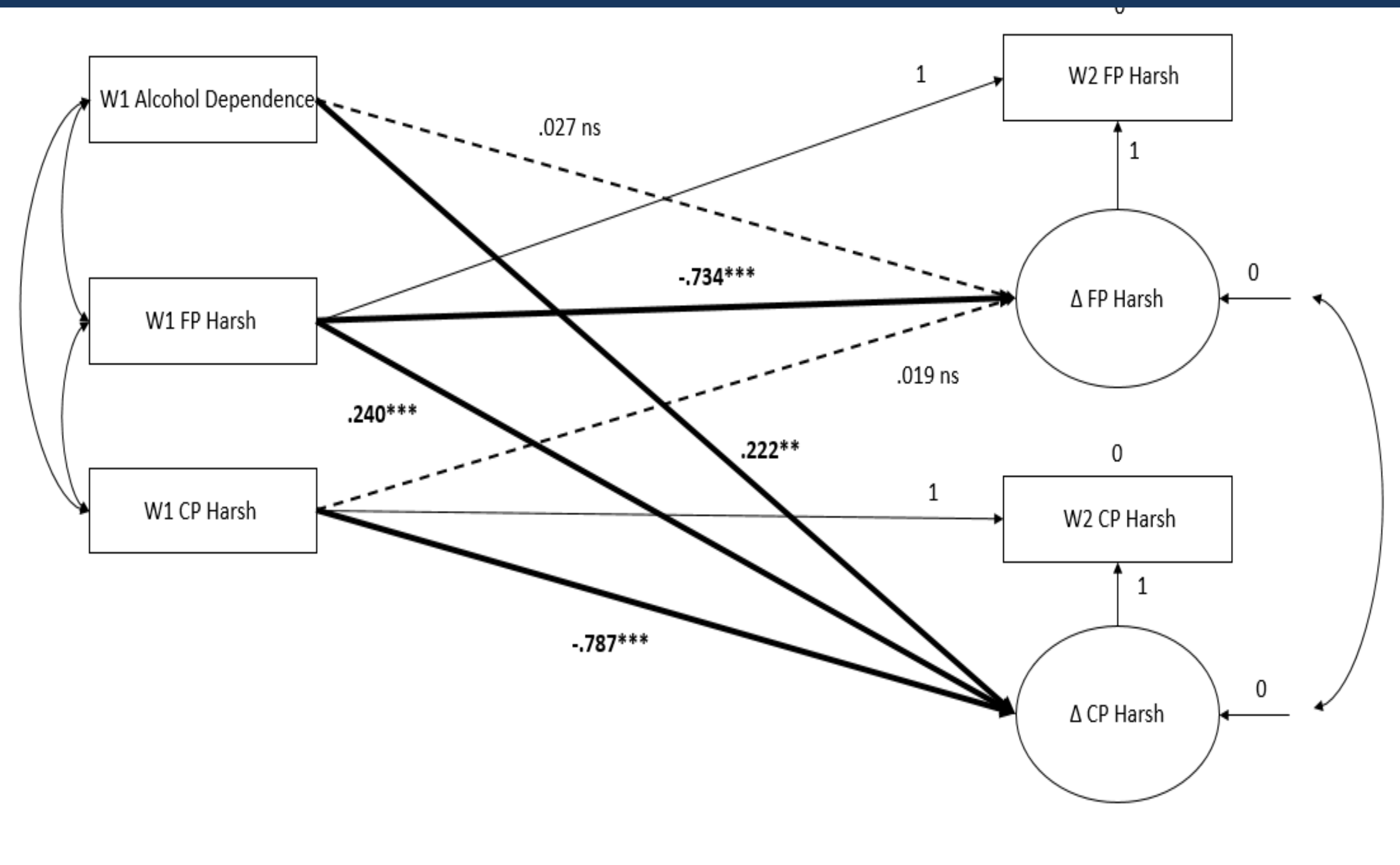
Variables	1	2	3	4	5
1. W1 Alcohol Dependence	—				
2. W1 Free Play Harsh	.03	—			
3. W1 Compliance Harsh	-.03	.64***	—		
4. W2 Free Play Harsh	.07	.38***	.27***	—	
5. W2 Compliance Harsh	.22**	.43***	.44***	.49***	—
<i>M</i>	.82	2.03	2.75	1.55	1.98
<i>SD</i>	1.33	1.62	1.95	1.15	1.57

Note. W1 = Wave 1; W2 = Wave 2. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

Note. Table 1 shows the means, standard deviations, and correlations for the main variables in the study. Mean levels of maternal harsh caregiving (in both the free play and compliance tasks) decreased over waves of data collection.

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Note. Path model examining associations among maternal alcohol dependence, and maternal harsh caregiving. All structural paths with standardized path coefficients are shown in the Figure. W1 = Wave 1; W2 = Wave 2. \*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

## RESULTS

- Maternal alcohol dependence was associated with changes in maternal harsh caregiving over time.
- Maternal alcohol dependence predicted increases in harsh caregiving in the control (clean up) task but not in the free play task.

## DISCUSSION

The results of this study suggest that mothers with histories of alcohol dependence may struggle in providing sensitive, child-centered parenting behaviors in challenging and demanding childrearing contexts.

Mothers without histories of alcohol dependence experienced an overall decrease in harsh caregiving across domains and over time. This suggest that this subset of mothers may be particularly prone to experience difficulties in flexibly adapting parenting strategies in situations when caregiving demands are increased.

These results highlight the effectiveness of utilizing parenting domain approaches to better understand the impact of maternal alcohol dependence on maternal caregiving during early childhood.