

# Why Does Children's Temperamental Exuberance Increase their Vulnerability to Externalizing Symptoms?: A Process-Oriented Approach



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## Introduction

- Temperamental exuberance or surgency is characterized as a relatively stable disposition to exhibit high levels of approach to novelty, anticipatory pleasure, and activity

(Stifter & Dollar, 2016)

- Risk associated with exuberance is modest and inconsistent

(Nielsen et al., 2019)

- Children who are high in exuberance during the toddler and preschool years are at greater risk for concurrent and subsequent externalizing problems during middle childhood

(Dollar & Stifter, 2012; He et al., 2016; Morales et al., 2016)

**Limited work has been done to further investigate specific mechanisms that may account for this association**

## Aim

Examine whether children's negative internal representations of the family, hostile reactivity to family adversity, and exposure to family difficulties mediated the prospective association between their exuberance during preschool and their externalizing symptoms in the early elementary school years

## Participants

### Sample

- 243 children and their families
- 56% girls
- Age at W1 = 4.6 years

### Ethnicity/Race

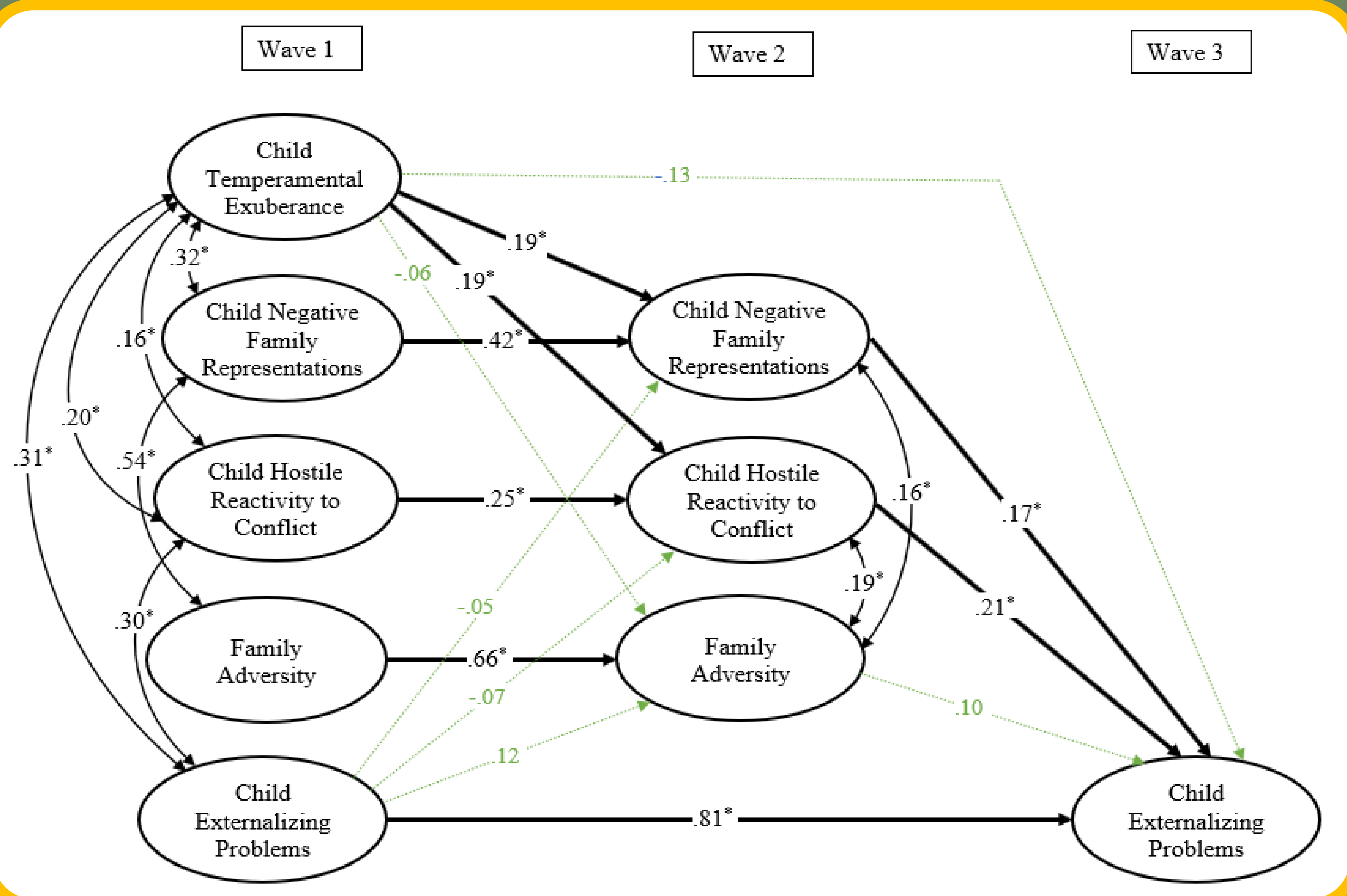
- 48% Black
- 43% White
- 9% Multi-racial or Other
- 16% Latino

### Socio-economic Status

- Median income: \$36,000
- 69% received public assistance

## Methods

Latent Construct	Method	Reporter	Wave	Measure Description (Manifest Indicators)	Standardized Loadings of Manifest Indicators onto Latent Constructs		
					Wave 1	Wave 2	Wave 3
Temperamental Exuberance	Observation	TC	1	Gift Delay (Activity/Approach)	.66	-	-
	Observation	TC	1	Black Boxes (Activity/Approach)	.63	-	-
	Observation	TC	1	Transparent Box (Activity/Approach)	.79	-	-
	Observation	TC	1	Surprise! (Activity/Approach)	.59	-	-
Negative Family Representations	Observation	TC	1 & 2	MSSB-R (Antagonistic Relationships)	.64	.79	-
	Observation	TC	1 & 2	MSSB-R (Child Competence)	-.73	-.84	-
	Observation	TC	1 & 2	MSSB-R (Child Overall Insecurity)	.90	.94	-
Hostile Reactivity to Conflict	Observation	TC	1 & 2	Interparental Interaction Task (Coercive Control)	.82	.86	-
	Observation	TC	1 & 2	Interparental Interaction Task (Hostility)	.79	.80	-
	Observation	TC	1 & 2	Interparental Interaction Task (Dominant Reactivity)	.99	.98	-
Family Adversity	Observation	TC	1 & 2	Family Interaction Task (Maternal Parenting)	.77	.70	-
	Observation	TC	1 & 2	Family Interaction Task (Paternal Parenting)	.67	.68	-
	Observation	TC	1 & 2	Family Interaction Task (Family-Level Difficulties)	.84	.97	-
Externalizing Symptoms	Survey	Mother	1 & 3	HBQ (ODD, CP, Overt Hostility, Relational Agg.)	.62	-	.57
	Survey	Partner	1 & 3	HBQ (ODD, CP, Overt Hostility, Relational Agg.)	.55	-	.51
	Survey	Teacher	1 & 3	HBQ (ODD, CP, Overt Hostility, Relational Agg.)	.49	-	.53



A SEM examining children's exposure to family adversity, hostile reactivity to parental conflict, and negative family representations as mediating mechanisms in the prospective association between temperamental exuberance and externalizing symptoms across three annual waves of data. All path coefficients are standardized. \*  $p < .05$ .

## Conclusions

- Mediational paths examining children's hostile reactivity and their negative internal representations were significant
- Informs and refines theoretical models such as top-down and bottom-up regulation processes, mood congruent models, schema-congruent models, social learning, family system theories, and the revised version of emotional security theory
- No evidence for mediational role of increased family adversity
- Identification of negative family representations and hostile reactivity to family adversity as risk mechanisms may also offer new clinical opportunities for interrupting the pathogenic cascades

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