

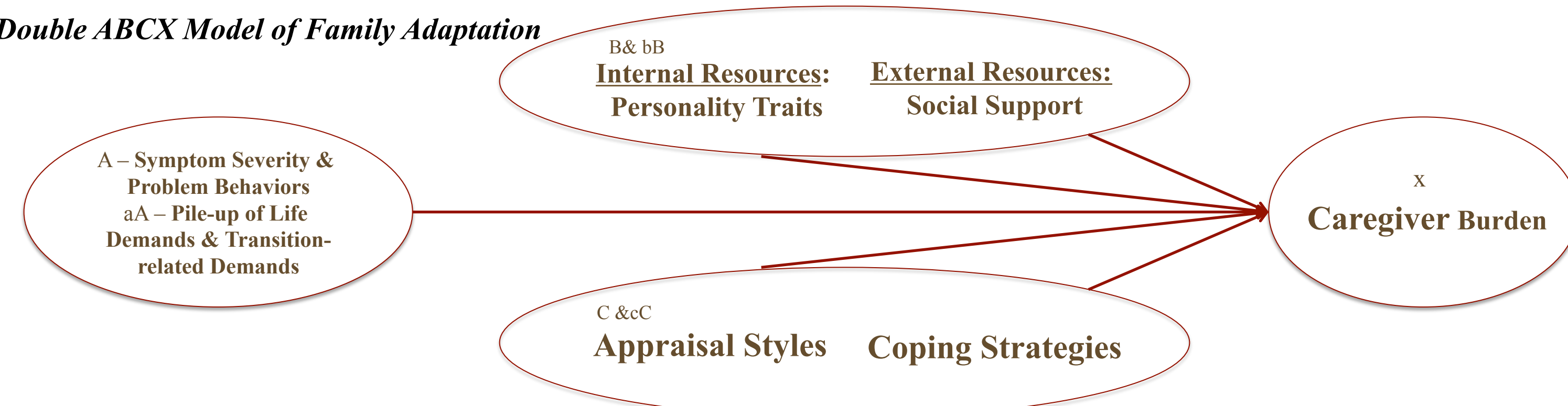
BACKGROUND

- Caregivers of children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD) report increased psychological distress, negative emotions, and poorer health-related outcomes.
- Previous studies have identified child (e.g., problem behaviors), family (e.g., social support), and parent factors (e.g., coping strategies) related to caregiving stress (Stuart & McGrew, 2009).
- However, few studies have examined the impact of the “big 5” personality traits (Costa & McCrae, 1992) on caregiving stress although this is an area of active research in understanding caregiving in other disorders (e.g., cancer).
- In addition, caregiving demands change over time and may be highest in response to developmental/illness milestones (e.g., exiting school).

Research Questions

- What is the relationship between caregivers’ personality traits and stress during the period when individuals with ASD transition out of high school?
 - What factors mediate this relationship?
- The Double ABCX model was used as a framework (McCubbin & Patterson, 1983), and views caregiving stress as the additive impact of independent factors: stressors, internal resources, external resources, and coping and appraisal strategies.

Double ABCX Model of Family Adaptation



METHODS

Participants (N = 117)

- Participants were recruited via Amazon Mechanical Turk (n = 105) and other methods (e.g., listservs, flyers; n = 12).
- All participants were primary caregivers of individuals with ASD, who either
 - Will graduate from high school in two years, or
 - Had graduated from high school within the past two years

Variables	Measures
Symptom Severity/ Diagnosis	Social Communication Questionnaire, Current form (SCQ; Rutter et al., 2003)
Problem Behavior	Problem Behavior Rating Scale (PBRs; Stone et al., 2010)
General Life Stressors	Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS; Holmes & Rahe, 1967)
Personality Traits	NEO Five Factor Index (NEO-FFI; Costa & McCrae, 1992)
Social Support –General	Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS; Zimet, 1998)
Social Support –Contextual	Contextual Perceived Social Support (CPSS; Stuart & McGrew, 2009)
Coping Strategies	Brief COPE (Carver, 1997)
Cognitive Appraisals	Stress Appraisal Measure (SAM; Peacock & Wong, 1990)
Caregiver Burden	Caregiver Strain Questionnaire (CGSQ; Brannan & Heflinger, 1997)

RESULTS

Table 1. Demographics

Parent Variables	
Age of participants – years ((Mean (SD))	43.05 (5.26)
Gender (%)	
Female	46.2
Male	53.8
Race (%)	84.6 (White)
Child Variables	
Age of child – years ((Mean (SD))	17.36 (1.48)
Gender (%)	81.2 (Male)
Graduation Status (%)	
Will graduate in two years	72.6
Have graduated within past two years	27.4
Status after graduation (%)	
Work/Employment	13.7
College/University/Vocational School	61.5
Day Program	6.8
Stay Home	12.8
Child’s Living Status after Graduation (%)	80.3 (Live with Parents)

Table 2. Caregiver Outcomes

Variables	Score Range of Scale	Mean (SD)
Transition-related Demands (Total score)	5-25 (1 = none; 5 = a lot)	14.50 (4.33)
Caregiver Strain (Mean score)	1-5 (1 = not at all a problem; 5 = very much a problem)	2.06 (.75)
Objective Strain		1.99 (.87)
Internal Subjective Strain		2.46 (.92)
External Subjective Strain		1.82 (.82)

Table 3. Correlations between Personality Traits & Caregiver Stress

Personality Traits	Caregiver Strain (r)
Neuroticism	.52**
Extraversion	-.31**
Conscientiousness	-.32**
Agreeableness	-.22 [†]
Openness	-.10

Table 4. Correlations of Other Independent Factors & Caregiver Stress

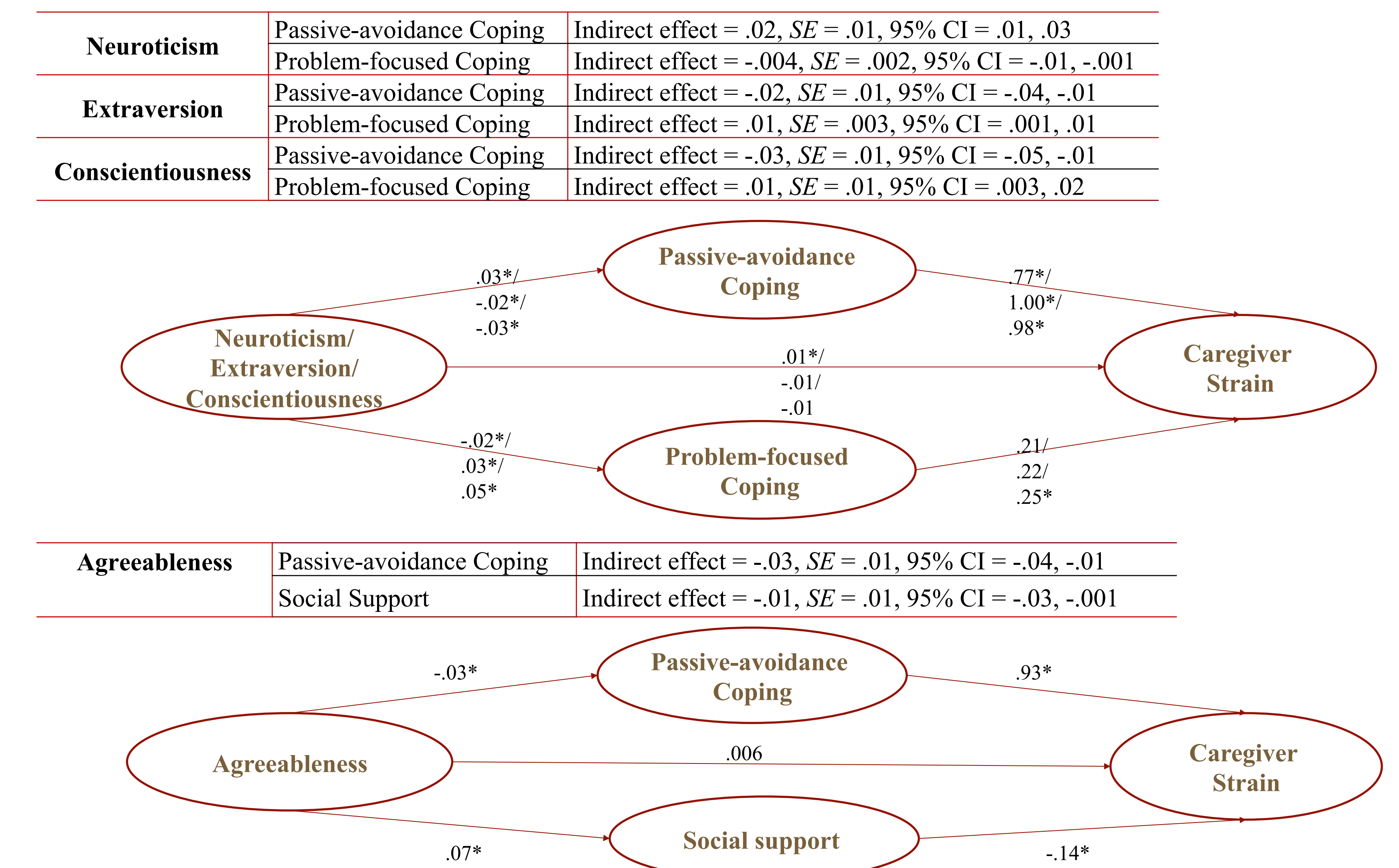
Independent Variables	Caregiver Strain (r)
Autism Symptom Severity	-.04
Problem Behaviors	.48**
Pile-up of Demands	.13
Transition-related Demands	.25 ^{††}
Social Support	-.34**
Challenge Appraisal	-.18*
Threat Appraisal	.45**
Problem-focused Coping	.08
Emotional Approach	.06
Passive-avoidance Coping	.67**

[†]p<.05 (one-tailed), ^{**}p<.01 (one-tailed), ^{††}p<.01 (two-tailed)

RESULTS Cont.

Mediators between Personality Traits & Caregiver Stress

- Parallel mediation analyses were conducted using PROCESS, model 4 in SPSS (Hayes, 2013).
- Passive-avoidance coping and problem-focused coping were significant mediators between three personality traits (i.e., Neuroticism, Extraversion, Conscientiousness) and caregiver stress.
- Passive-avoidance coping and social support mediated the link between Agreeableness and caregiver stress.



DISCUSSION

- Parents reported moderate levels of stress in the transition period.
- Personality traits explain some individual differences in caregiver stress. High levels of neuroticism are associated with greater stress, whereas high levels of conscientiousness, extraversion, and agreeableness are related to lower stress.
- Passive-avoidance coping strategies directly relate to higher caregiver stress and also explain the link between personality traits and caregiver burden fully or partially.
- Family interventions with parents may wish to target the use of passive-avoidance coping strategies.
- To address the impact of personality traits, professionals can target cognitive appraisal styles (e.g., threat) and coping strategies associated with those traits.
- Because contextual support is associated with lower burden, providers of families raising children with ASD should be encouraged to be sensitive to parents’ stress and ready to provide support.

REFERENCES

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