

Childhood Sexual Abuse and Sex Trading Among Homeless Youth in Canada: The Mediating Roles of Emotional Dysregulation and Tension Reduction Activities

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Homeless Youth

- Poor sexual health outcomes
 - Sexually transmitted infections (STIs)
 - Chlamydia, gonorrhoea, hepatitis B, genital herpes
 - Prevalence: 21-32% (Public Health Agency of Canada [PHAC], 2006; Roy et al., 2000)
 - Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV)
 - Prevalence: 1.9-2.8% (Marshall et al., 2008; Roy et al., 2000)
- Risky sexual behaviours (PHAC, 2006)
 - Early age of first sex
 - Multiple sexual partners
 - Unprotected vaginal and anal sex

Sex Trading

- Exchange of sexual activities for shelter, food, drugs, or money (Greene, et al., 1999; PHAC, 2006)
 - Prevalence: 10-27% (Public Health Agency of Canada, 2006; Roy et al., 2000; Weber et al., 2002)
- Contextual factors do not fully explain sex trading among homeless youth

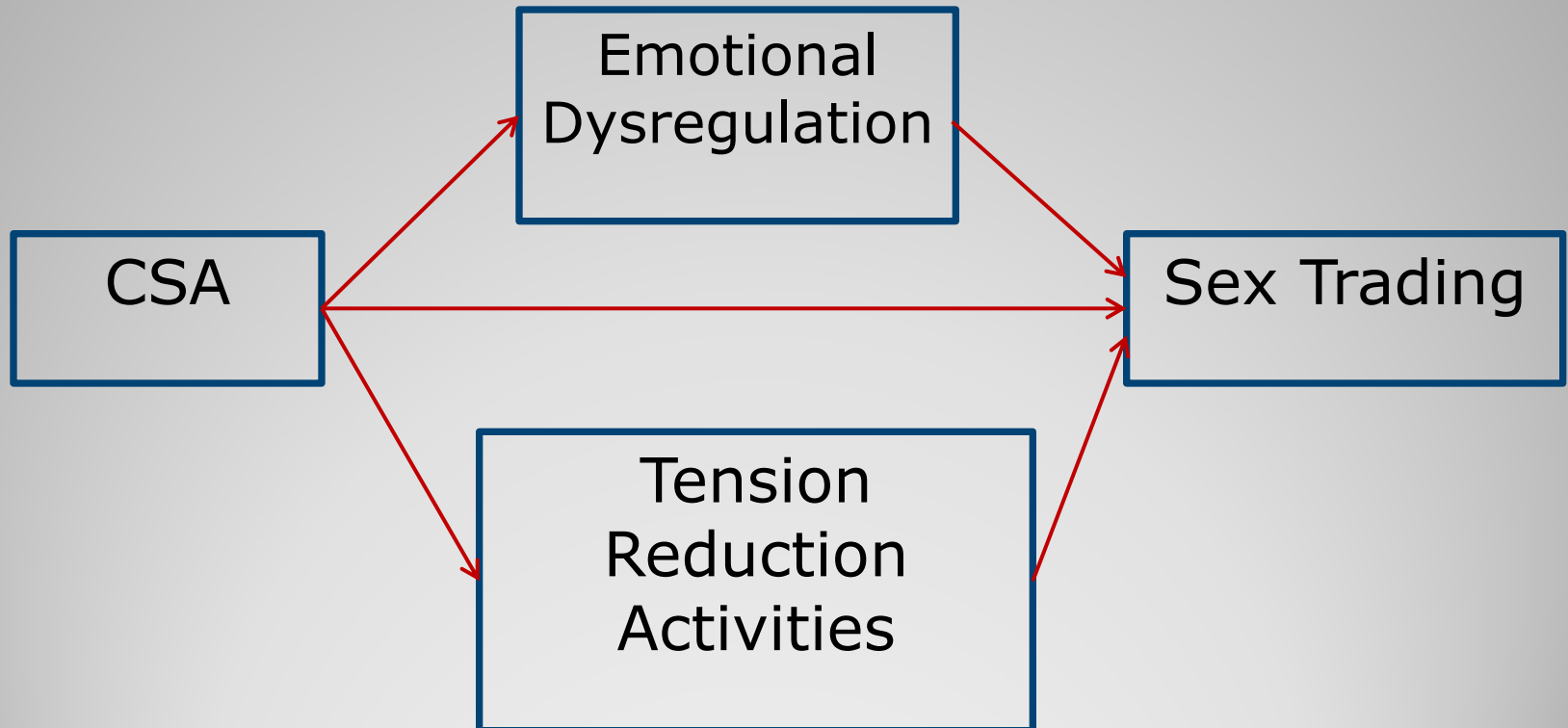
Childhood Sexual Abuse (CSA) and Sex Trading

- High prevalence of CSA (Cauce et al., 2000; Molnar, et al., 1998; Noell et al., 2001; Rew et al., 2001)
 - Up to 70%
- Association between CSA and sex trading (Senn et al., 2008)
 - Homeless youth with history of CSA 41% more likely to have ever engaged in sex trading compared to homeless youth without history of CSA (Tyler, 2009)

CSA and Sex Trading: Mediators

- Self-trauma model (Briere, 1992, 1996)
 - CSA disrupts normal development and interferes with acquisition of emotion regulation skills
 - Use of maladaptive avoidance behaviours to reduce distress
- Two possible mediators (Briere & Runtz, 2002)
 - Emotional dysregulation
 - Difficulties regulating and/or tolerating negative emotional states
 - Maladaptive tension reduction activities
 - Involvement in distracting maladaptive external activities to reduce painful internal states

Hypotheses



Methods

- Sample:
 - 208 homeless youth (59.1% male)
 - Homeless shelters throughout Toronto, Canada
 - Ages 16-21 ($M = 19.25$, $SD = 1.58$)
- Measures:
 - Childhood Trauma Questionnaire-Short Form (CTQ-SF; Bernstein et al., 2003)
 - CSA subscale
 - “Someone tried to make me do sexual things or watch sexual things”; “Someone molested me”

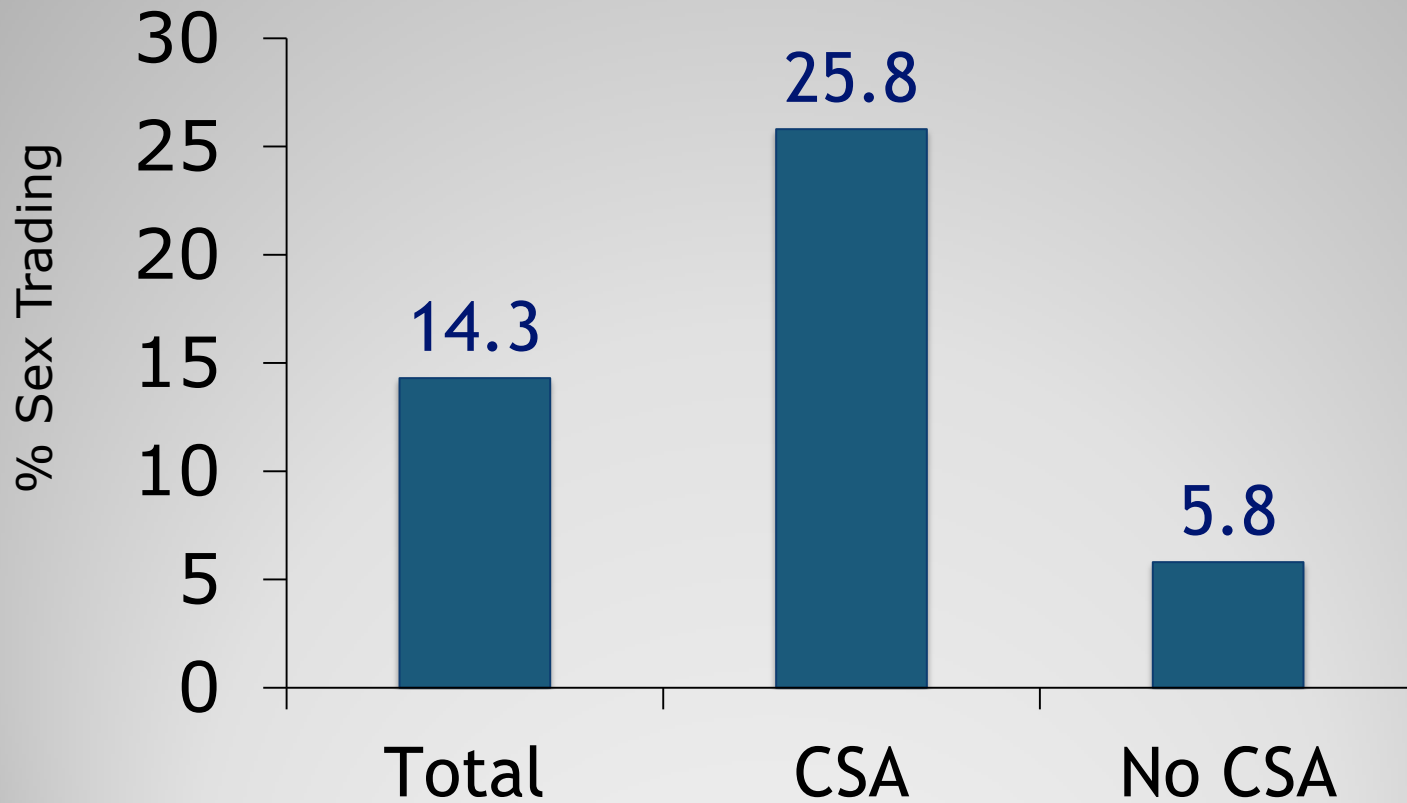
Methods (cont'd)

- Inventory of Altered Self-Capacities (IASC; Briere & Runtz, 2002)
 - Emotional dysregulation
 - “Not being able to calm yourself down”; “Being out of control emotionally”
 - Tension reduction activities
 - “Hurting yourself as a way of getting rid of upsetting feelings or thoughts”; “Using sex as a way to stop feeling bad”
- Sex trading
 - Have you ever traded sex for money or gifts (including food, shelter, clothes, and drugs)?

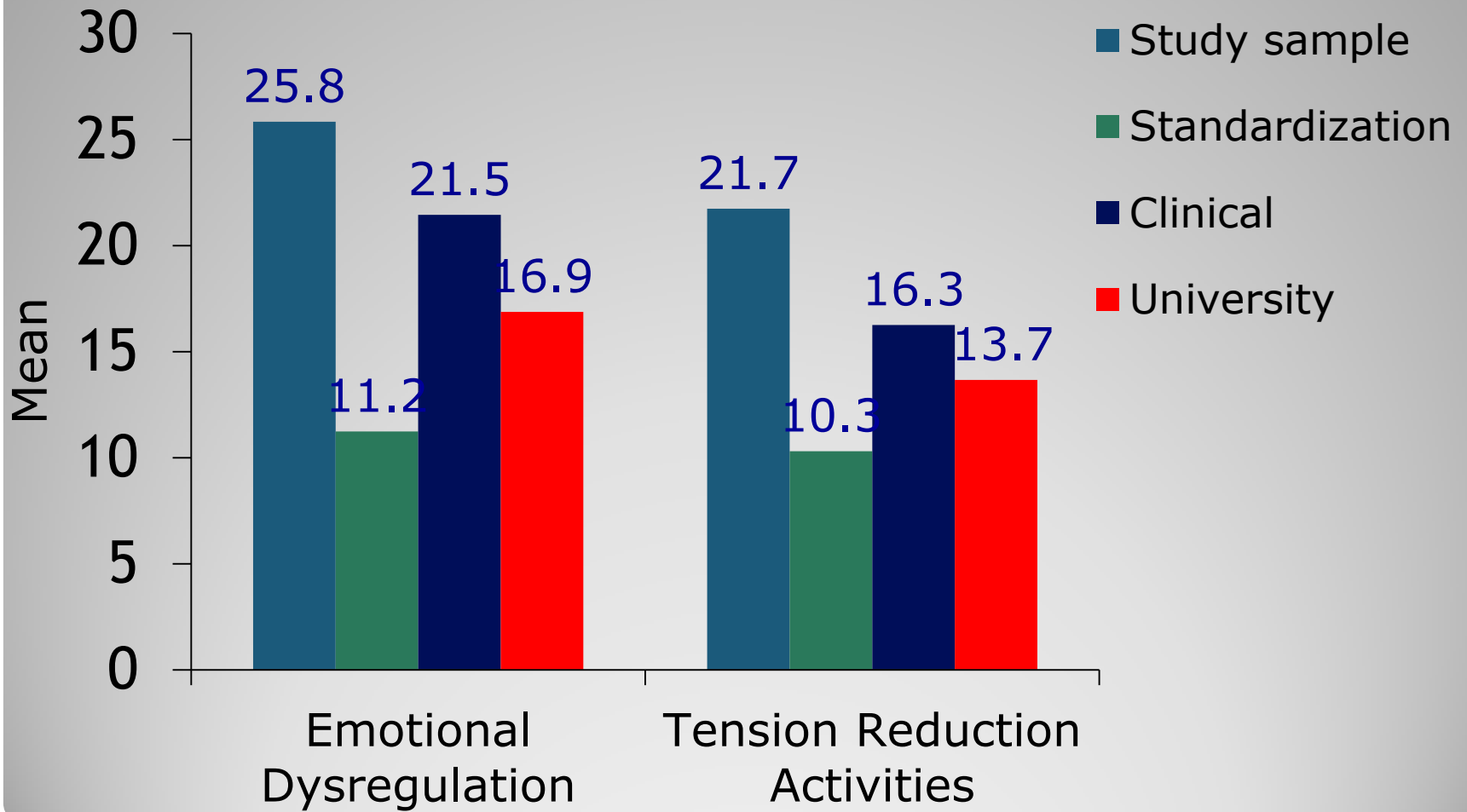
Data Analytic Plan

- Regression analyses
 - Linear
 - Logistic
- Bootstrapping analyses
 - Mediation model
 - 5000 random samples from data
 - Indirect product for both mediators
- Effect sizes
 - R^2 for regression and bootstrapping analyses

Results: CSA and Sex Trading

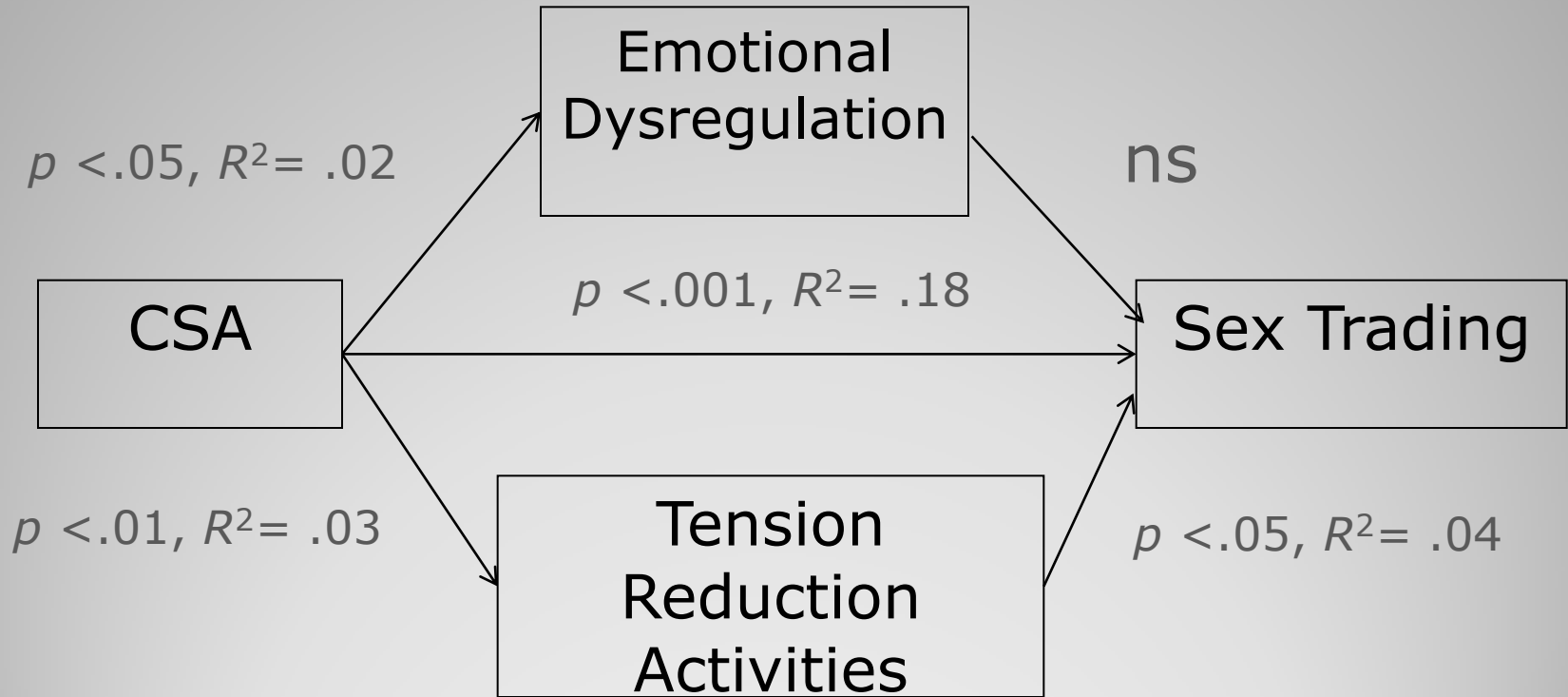


Results: Mediators



(Briere & Runtz, 2002)

Results: Mediation



Emotional Dysregulation: 95% CI [-.05, .003], $R^2 = .004$

Tension Reduction Activities: 95% CI [.005, .06], $R^2 = .03$

Discussion

- CSA associated with sex trading
- CSA associated with emotional dysregulation and tension reduction activities
- Indirect effect of CSA on sex trading through tension reduction activities

Limitations and Future Directions

- Limitations
 - Cross-sectional study
 - Self-report data
 - Convenience sample
- Future research
 - Gender differences
 - Additional mediators (e.g., abandonment concerns, susceptibility to influence)
 - Other sexual health outcomes and populations

Theoretical and Clinical Implications

- Self-trauma model may partially explain increased sexual risk among homeless youth
- Treatments that target tension reduction activities may be useful in reducing sexual risk behaviors
 - Dialectical Behaviour Therapy (DBT)

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