Being a/part: A study of young people's experience of belonging

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Background

- National research project
- Young people engaged with a range of social services
- What are the mechanisms that influence the relationship between childhood adversity and outcomes in early adulthood?

Sense of belonging

*"Having a sense of belonging is to have a relationship with people, or a group of people, that brings about a secure feeling of fitting in…Belonging, in the sense of fitting in with others, is closely related to finding meaning in life" (*Lambert, Stillman, Hicks, Kamble, Baumeister & Ficham, 2013, p. 1425)

"I know when I belong when I am able to walk back into work after being [away] and hearing people say 'Oh I am so glad you're back! We missed you! I'm glad you are still here'. I also know when I belong when I see that people are genuinely happy to see me and hear from me." (Being a/part project participant)

"When I feel like I'm appreciated or people go out of their way to talk or be around me." (Being a/part project participant)

Lambert, N.M., Stillman, T.F., Hicks, J.A., Kamble, S., Baumeister, R.F., & Fincham, F.D. (2013). To belong is to matter: Sense of belonging enhances meaning in life. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin, 39*(11), 1418-1427.

Perceived Social Support

- Affective and evaluative dimensions
  - Self-worth
  - Interconnectedness
- Multiple sources of perceived social support
  - Differential role based on where/who the support comes from?

Research questions

- Do sense of belonging and perceived social support mediate the relationship between childhood adversity and psychosocial outcomes in emerging adulthood?
- Are these relationships influenced by demographic characteristics?
  - Gender
  - ‘Level’ of childhood adversity

Data collection

- Survey methodology
  - On-line and hardcopy options
- Data collected on:
  - Demographic information
  - Experiences of childhood adversity
  - Belonging (psychological experience of belonging; community membership; cultural identity; school membership; teacher affiliation)
  - Perceived Social Support (family, friends, significant others, spouse/partner, co-workers)
  - Quality of life
  - Psychological distress

Sample

- N = 272
- OoHC (some jurisdictions only)
- Mean age = 18.87 (SD=1.39)
- 62.9% female
- 12.2% Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Mean number of adverse childhood experiences = 7.97 (SD=4.32)
- Data analysis on subsample of 254 participants

Sample demographics

- **25.9%** - more than 10 placements by age 17
- **12.6%** - homeless or in crisis accommodation
- **14.2%** - primary school education only
- **70.9%** - some secondary school education
- **47.6%** - not attending any educational/learning institution
- **25.8%** (n=120) – working and studying
- **22%** - had, or expecting a child
- **70.1%** - clinical levels of psychological distress

Results – Predictors of psychological distress

	b	SE B	β	*p*	95% CI
(Constant)	9.54	1.48		.000	6.63 to 12.48
Perceived Social Support – Family	-0.04	0.07	-0.04	.547	-0.17 to 0.09
Perceived Social Support – Friends	-0.04	0.08	-0.04	.587	-0.19 to 0.11
Perceived Social Support – Significant Others	**-0.19**	**0.09**	**-0.15**	**.031**	**-0.36 to -0.02**
Childhood adversity	**0.19**	**0.05**	**0.26**	**.000**	**0.11 to 0.29**
Sense of belonging	**0.09**	**0.02**	**0.25**	**.000**	**0.05 to 0.13**
Community membership	-0.09	0.27	-0.02	.756	-0.62 to 0.45

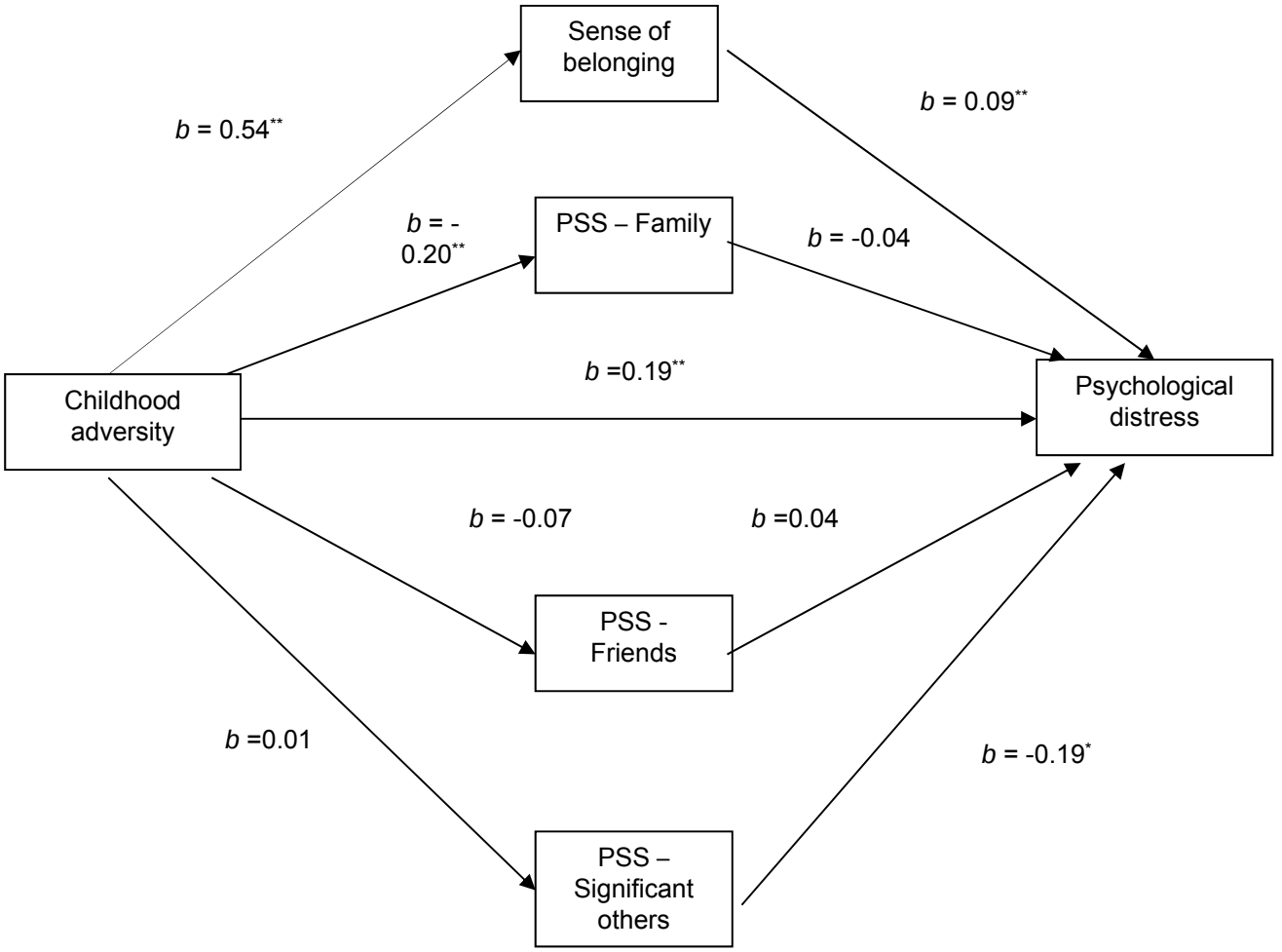
Results – Predictors of early parenthood

	b	SE B	Wald	*p*	Odds ratio	95% CI
(constant)	-0.73	1.24	0.35	.554		
PSS – Family	0.04	0.05	0.42	.516	1.04	0.93 to 1.15
PSS – Friends	-0.09	0.06	1.82	.178	0.92	0.81 to 1.04
PSS – Significant others	0.08	0.07	1.25	.263	1.09	0.94 to 1.25
Childhood adversity	0.03	0.04	0.69	.406	1.03	0.96 to 1.11
Sense of belonging	-0.01	0.02	0.31	.577	0.99	0.96 to 1.03
Community membership	-0.36	0.23	2.43	.119	0.69	0.44 to 1.09

Results – Predictors of educational engagement

	b	SE B	Wald	*p*	Odds ratio	95% CI
(constant)	-0.19	1.08	0.03	.861		
PSS – Family	0.01	0.05	0.08	.772	1.01	0.92 to 1.11
PSS – Friends	0.09	0.06	2.33	.127	1.09	0.98 to 1.22
PSS – Significant others	**-0.18**	**0.07**	**6.83**	**.009**	**0.84**	**0.74 to 0.96**
Childhood adversity	**-0.08**	**0.03**	**4.93**	**.026**	**0.93**	**0.87 to 0.99**
Sense of belonging	0.03	0.02	2.80	.094	1.03	0.99 to 1.06
Community membership	0.36	0.20	3.26	.071	1.44	0.97 to 2.12

Results – The mediating role of sense of belonging and perceived social support



Summary of results

- Psychological distress and educational engagement = only outcomes predicted by variables in this study
- Mediation relationship found for sense of belonging on psychological distress
- Role of perceived social support slightly more complex
  - For educational engagement in particular

Practice implications

- Case managers and support workers as ‘significant others’
- Importance of interpersonal relationships
  - *Quality* not just presence
- Therapeutic practice
  - Trauma informed
  - Attachment focussed

- For more details, please contact

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  Thank you!