

Background

◆ School connectedness relates to how students perceive they are supported, respected, valued and involved in the school environment (Goodenow, 1993).



◆ Students who feel connected to school are more likely to have positive health and academic outcomes (Bond et al., 2007; Dornbusch et al., 2001; Shochet et al., 2007).

◆ Some research suggests that low SES negatively influences school connectedness (Bonny et al., 2000; Ingersoll, 1999), leading us to question whether these positive outcomes related to school connectedness might also be impacted by SES.

◆ Recent research has found that the relationship between school connectedness and nonspecific psychological distress is stronger among low SES youth (Sampasa-Kanyinga & Hamilton, 2016). However, to the author's knowledge the relationship between school connectedness and depressive symptoms has not yet specifically been examined.

Objective

Primary Objective: To examine the relationship between school connectedness and depressive symptoms in a large, diverse community sample of early adolescents.

Secondary Objective: To investigate whether adolescents' perceived SES moderates this relationship.

Methods

Participants

- ◆ 1,009 7th and 8th grade students from five middle schools in the New England region of the United States
- ◆ 51% Girls
- ◆ 51% Non-Hispanic White, 20% Hispanic, 9% Black or African American, 3% Asian, 14% Multi-Racial/Ethnic, and 3% other race/ethnicity
- ◆ Age: M = 12.5 years, SD = 0.71, Range = 11-15 years

Procedures

- ◆ Adolescents completed surveys at school in the Fall of 2016
- ◆ Movie passes were given to adolescents upon completion



Methods

Measures

- ◆ The School Connectedness Scale (SCS; Levine et al., 1994) ($\alpha = .78$)
- ◆ The MacArthur Scale of Subjective Social Status (SSS; Goodman et al., 2001)
- ◆ The Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale for Children (CES-DC; Weissman, Orvaschel, & Padian, 1980) ($\alpha = .91$)
 - ◆ High Risk for Major Depression: CES-DC score ≥ 15

Analytic Plan

- ◆ Regression models
 - ◆ Independent variable: school connectedness scale score
 - ◆ Dependent variables: depressive symptoms total score, being at high risk for major depression (CES-DC ≥ 15)
 - ◆ Moderator: SES
- ◆ Covariates: age, gender, race/ethnicity

Results

Table 1. School Connectedness and Total Depressive Symptoms

Outcome Variable	B	SE	ΔR^2
Perceived SES	-0.92***	0.21	0.05
School Connectedness	-6.41***	0.40	0.22
SES x SCS	0.41**	0.21	0.026

Table 2. School Connectedness and the Likelihood of Being at High Risk for Major Depression

Outcome Variable	OR	95% CI (B)	R ²
Perceived SES	0.91*	0.84 – 0.99	0.05
School Connectedness	0.44***	0.37 – 0.53	0.16
SES x SCS	1.15*	1.03 – 1.29	0.01

* $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$

- ◆ Adolescents reporting higher levels of school connectedness had lower levels of depressive symptoms and had lower odds of being at high risk for major depression, adjusting for age, gender, race/ethnicity, and perceived SES.

- ◆ Perceived SES moderated these relationships.

- ◆ Follow-up simple slopes analyses suggested that the relationship between school connectedness and total depressive symptoms was greater in magnitude among adolescents with lower perceived SES relative to those with higher perceived SES.
- ◆ The negative association between school connectedness and being at risk for depression was more robust among adolescents with a lower perceived SES.

Results

Figure 1. Simple slopes for total depressive symptoms

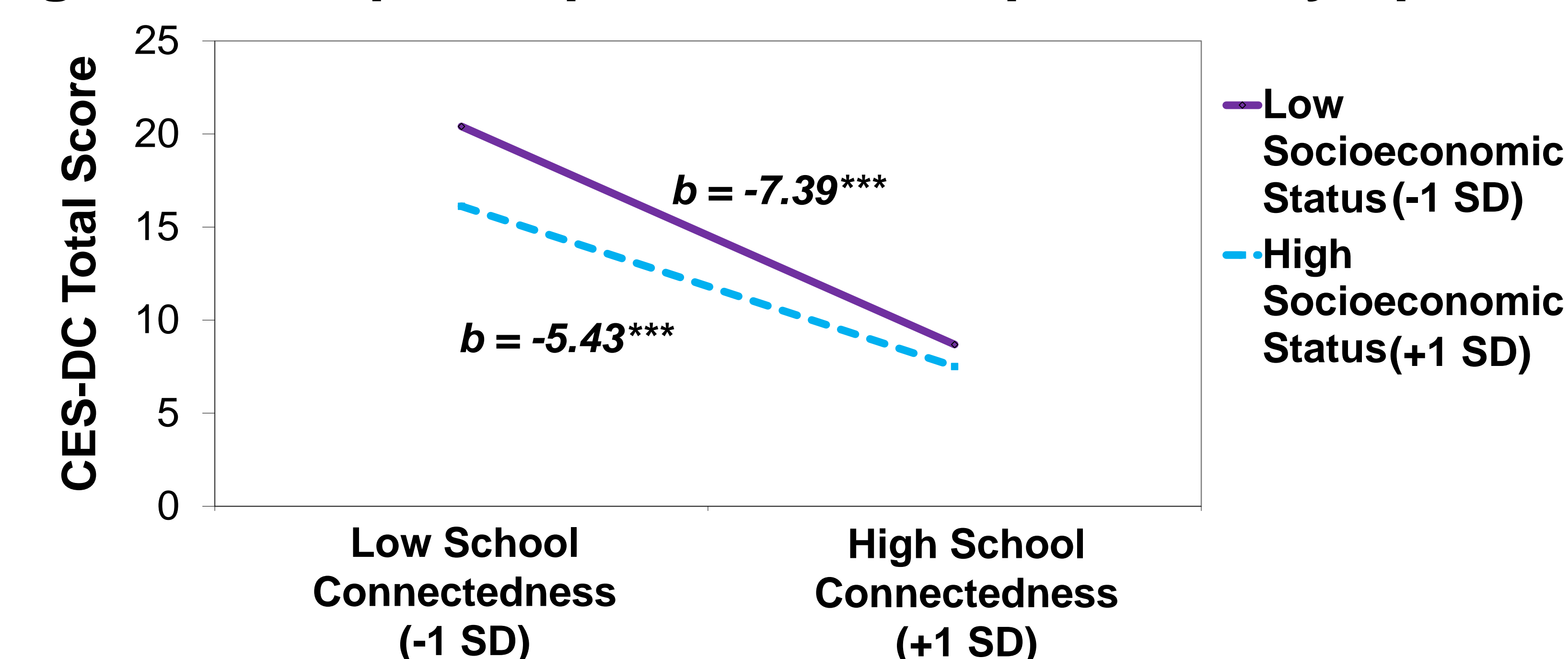
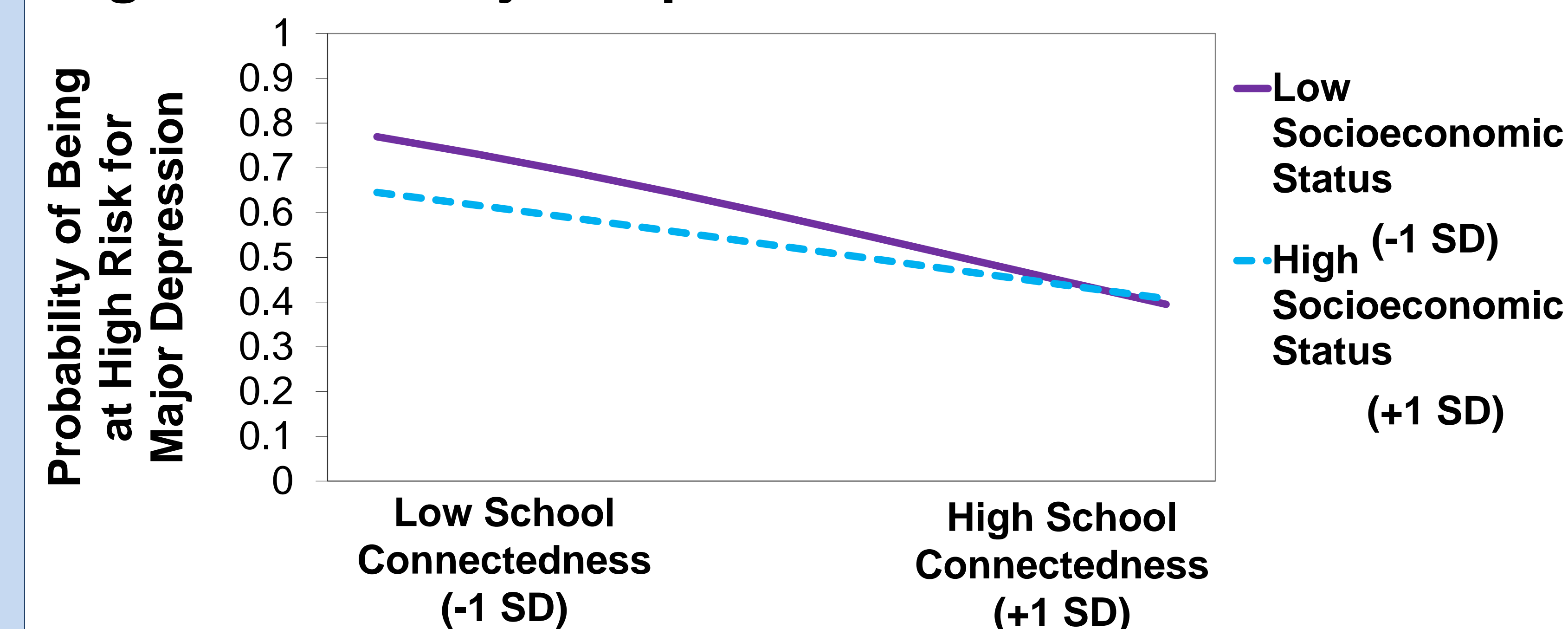


Figure 2. Simple slopes for probability of being at high risk for major depression



Conclusions

- ◆ School connectedness may be an important protective factor against elevated depressive symptoms, especially for students of lower perceived SES.
- ◆ It is possible that lower SES adolescents have greater psychosocial stressors at home and in their neighborhood environment, making the school an especially salient protective context.



Implications

- ◆ Findings underscore the importance for school systems to keep their students connected, engaged and valued, especially attending to students of lower perceived SES.
- ◆ Future research should evaluate these relationships prospectively and examine factors that contribute to students feeling connected to their school.