

Traumatic Appraisal and Traumatic Stress Symptoms: Examining the Moderating Role of Vocabulary and Matrix Reasoning Scales

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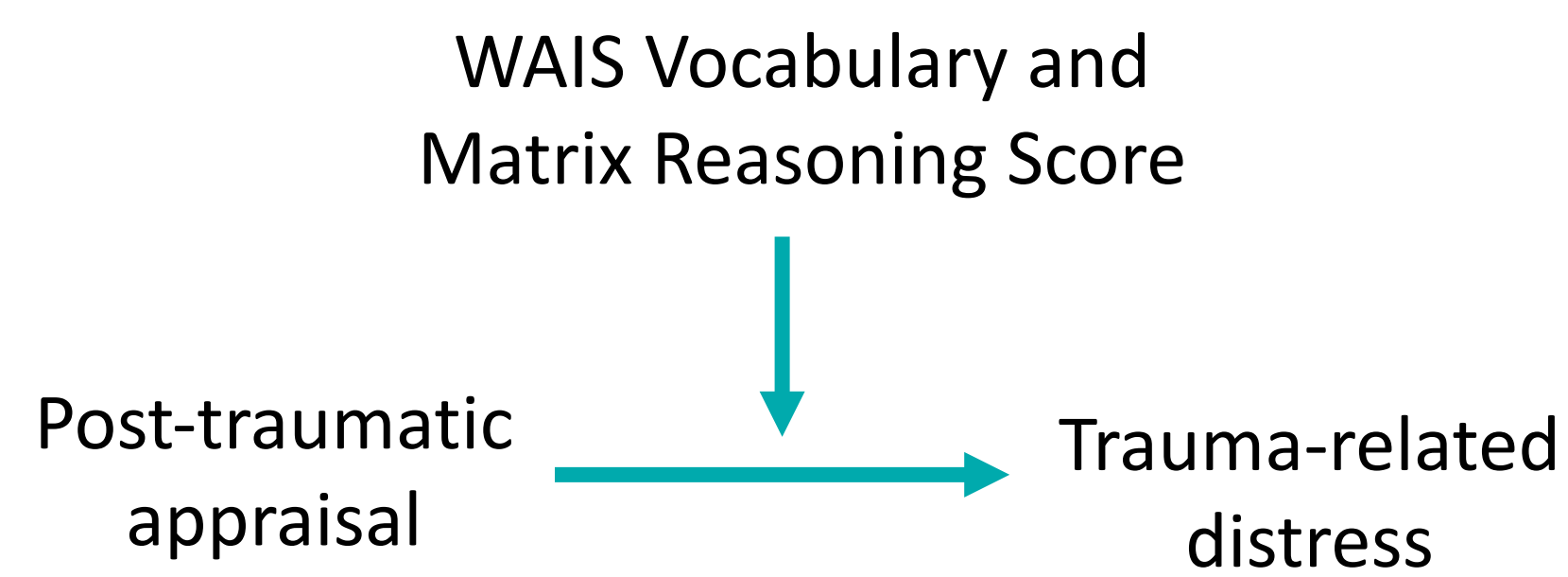
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INTRODUCTION

- The association between trauma symptoms and cognitive deficits is well supported.
- The Cognitive Model of PTSD: negative cognitive appraisals (e.g., feelings of guilt about the traumatic experience) result in worse traumatic symptoms.
- Higher global cognitive functioning is associated with adaptive coping following trauma and fewer psychiatric consequences.
- Taken together, these findings suggest that cognitive functioning plays a role in the success of cognitive coping strategies.
- The cognitive mechanisms underlying successful post-trauma appraisal and in turn, positive coping, are not well-understood.

HYPOTHESIS

Standardized intelligence testing scores are hypothesized to moderate the association between post-trauma appraisal and trauma-related distress.



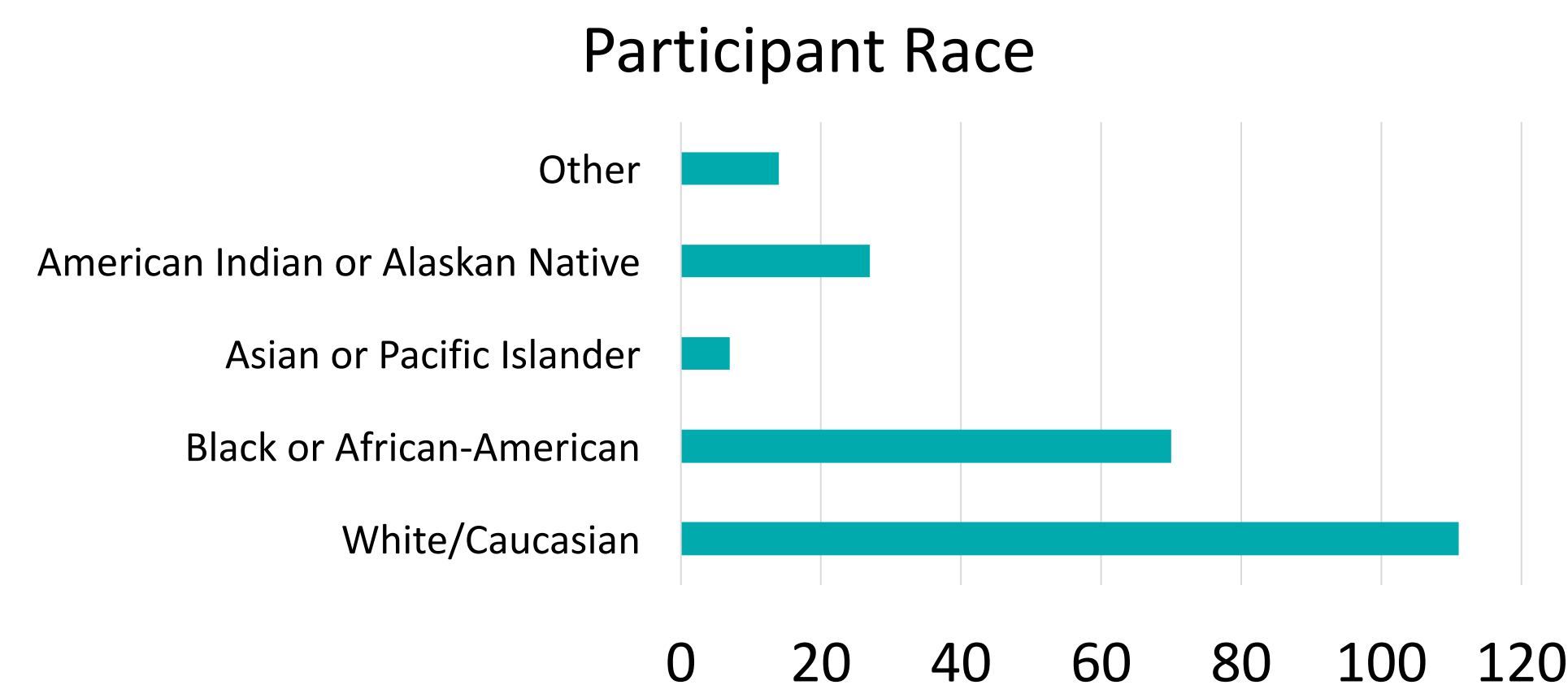
METHODS

- Data are from a study evaluating a community-coordinated victim-outreach program following police reports of intimate partner abuse (IPA).
- Participants: women involved in IPA incidents reported to police in a metropolitan area.

Measure Used	Description
Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale (WAIS-IV; Wechsler, 2008)	A standardized measure of cognitive ability in adults. Matrix Reasoning and Vocabulary subtests were used.
Trauma Appraisal Questionnaire (TAQ; DePrince, Zurbriggen, Chu & Smart, 2010)	A 54-item measure of posttraumatic appraisals, namely betrayal, self-blame, fear, alienation, anger, and shame.
Posttraumatic Stress Diagnostic Scale (PDS; Foa et al., 1997)	A 49-item measurement of PTSD symptom severity

DEMOGRAPHICS

	M (SD), N=228
Age	33.42 (11.01)
Hollingshead Socioeconomic Status	40.17 (20.33)
WAIS Standard Scores Sum	16.89 (5.23)

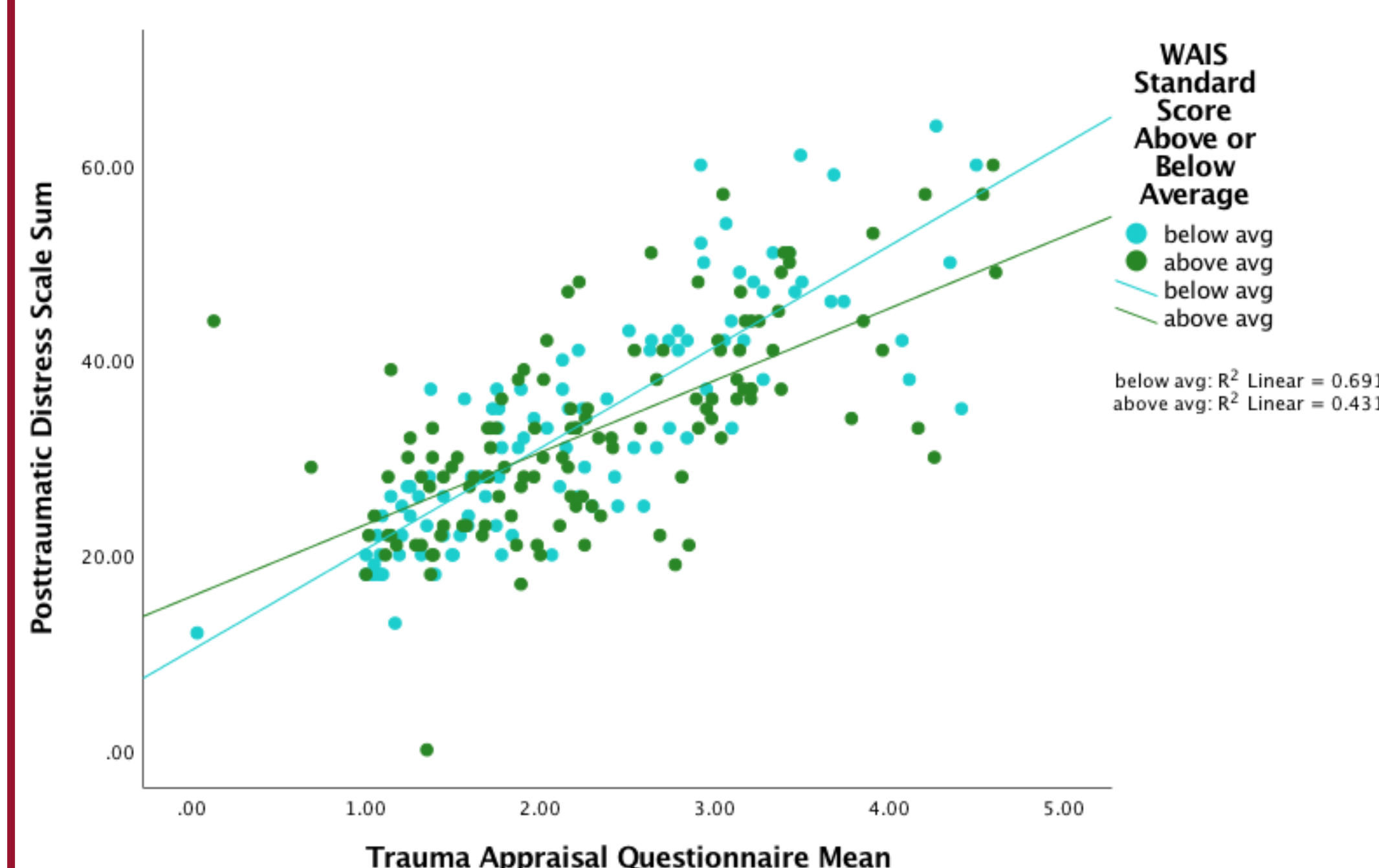


RESULTS

	Trauma Appraisal Questionnaire Mean	WAIS Standard Score	Posttraumatic Distress Scale Mean
Trauma Appraisal Questionnaire Mean	--		
WAIS Standard Score	0.058	--	
Posttraumatic Distress Scale Mean	0.743**	0.022	--

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Linear Regression analyses were used to examine the moderating effect of standardized intelligence test scores on the relationship between trauma appraisal and PTSD symptoms.



- Regression analyses showed a main effect of trauma appraisal on PDS, consistent with previous research.
- WAIS Score was a significant moderator of the relationship between TAQ and PDS ($p=0.005$). For individuals with below average WAIS scores, the correlation between PDS and TAQ was stronger than those with above average WAIS scores.

Discussion

WAIS scores moderate the relationship between traumatic appraisals and trauma-related distress such that:

- High scores may buffer the consequences of maladaptive traumatic appraisals.
- Low scores may amplify the relationship between appraisals and distress or limit potential for constructive coping.

LIMITATIONS

- Comprehensive assessments of cognitive functioning should be used in future studies.
- A broader range of traumatic experiences should be examined.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

- Examine extremes of cognitive functioning (e.g., giftedness and intellectual disability).
- Explore how different cognitive skills interact with trauma types (e.g., social intelligence as protective for coping with interpersonal trauma).
- Characterizing these patterns developmentally.

DISCUSSION

- The current study provides insight into one mechanism by which cognition and trauma symptoms are associated.
- Understanding this relationship is critical in understanding risk for PTSD and tailoring intervention.

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