# Paternal Warmth, Maternal Parenting Stress, and Children's Anxiety/Depression and Aggressive Behaviors: Trends across Time

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## Abstract

This study examined cross-lag links among paternal warmth, maternal parenting stress, and children's behavior problems over time. A total of 1,824 families with three-year-old children at T1 were interviewed or answered questionnaires. The main results showed that greater paternal warmth at T1 predicted lower maternal parenting stress at T2, and these lower stresses in turn predicted fewer children's behavior problems at T3. These findings confirm the importance of fathering that helps reduce mothers' parenting stress, which ultimately influences children's adjustment.

## Introduction

- According to **Family Systems Theory** (Bowen, 1974), families form a system of interactions by which parents and children influence one another (Cox & Paley, 2003). Positive parenting behaviors (Smetana, Crean, & Daddis, 2002) and less parenting stress (Baker et al., 2002) tend to be associated with fewer behavior problems among children.
- However, the majority of studies on these topics have focused on mothers, and little research has examined fathering behaviors and how those behaviors might influence children's adjustment (Bronte-Tinkew, Moore, & Carrano, 2006).
- Also, these associations among family stress, parenting behaviors, and child adjustment have been primarily conducted in the United States and have not been replicated in other countries.
- _**The present longitudinal study**_ examined the relationships among paternal warmth, maternal parenting stress, and children's behavior problems across three time points.

## Method

### Participants and Procedure

- We analyzed data from a **longitudinal** research project, _**The Panel Study on Korean Children**_, which was collected in South Korea in 2011 (Time 1; T1), 2012 (T2), and 2013 (T3). A total of **1,824 families** were interviewed or answered annual questionnaires while the child was between three (_M_ age = 3 years, 2 months) and five years old (_M_ age = 5 years, 2 months).

### Measures

- **Paternal warmth.** _The Warm Parenting_ scale developed by the Korea Institute of Child Care and Education (KICCE, 2011) was used. Fathers evaluated eight (T1) or six (T2 and T3) items using a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect greater paternal warmth. Cronbach's alphas were T1 = .88, T2 = .86, and T3 = .88.

## Method (cont.)

- **Maternal parenting stress.** _The Parenting Stress_ scale (Kim & Kang, 1997) was used. Mothers evaluated 11 items using a 5-point Likert scale. Higher scores reflect higher stress level. Cronbach's alphas were T1 = .87, T2 = .88, and T3 = .87.

- **Children's behavior problems.** A Korean version of _the Child Behavior Checklist_ (_K-CBCL_; Oh & Kim, 2009) was used to measure children's anxiety/depression (a) and aggressive behaviors (b). Higher scores reflect more behavior problems. Cronbach's alphas at T2 were .87 (a) and .88 (b), and at T3 they were .88 (a) and .88 (b).

## Key Findings and Conclusions

- **A three-wave cross-lagged path analysis** was utilized.
- **Model fits were good**: $\chi 2(4) = 13.522$, $p = .009$, CFI = .998, TLI = .984, RMSEA = .036, 90% CI [.016, .058], SRMR = .009 (Anxiety/Depression model); and $\chi 2(4) = 12.641$, $p = .013$, CFI = .998, TLI = .986, RMSEA = .034, 90% CI [.014, .057], SRMR = .010 (Aggressive behaviors model).
- **Direct effects** are depicted in Figures.
- **Higher levels of paternal warmth at T1 predicted lower maternal parenting stress at T2** after controlling for maternal stress at T1, **and this lower maternal stress subsequently predicted lower levels of children's anxiety/depression** ($b = -.003$, $p = .010$) **and fewer aggressive behaviors** ($b = -.008$, $p = .008$) **at T3** after controlling for those behavior problems at earlier waves.
- **Lower maternal parenting stress at T1 predicted lower stress at T3 via lower juvenile anxiety/depression** ($b = .014$, $p < .001$) **and fewer aggressive behaviors** ($b = .017$, $p < .001$), as well as **via paternal warmth at T2** ($b = .004$, $p = .037$ for anxiety/depression; $b = .004$, $p = .053$ for aggressive behaviors, marginally significant).
- The **predictions of later constructs through earlier constructs** were examined using a **longitudinal model,** focusing on the **positive aspects of fathering behaviors**.
- These findings confirm the **importance of fathering** that helps reduce mothers' parenting stress, which ultimately influences children's behavioral outcomes.
- Considering **gender differences** by analyzing **types of parent-child dyads** (e.g., father-son vs. father-daughter, etc.) could improve **future studies.**
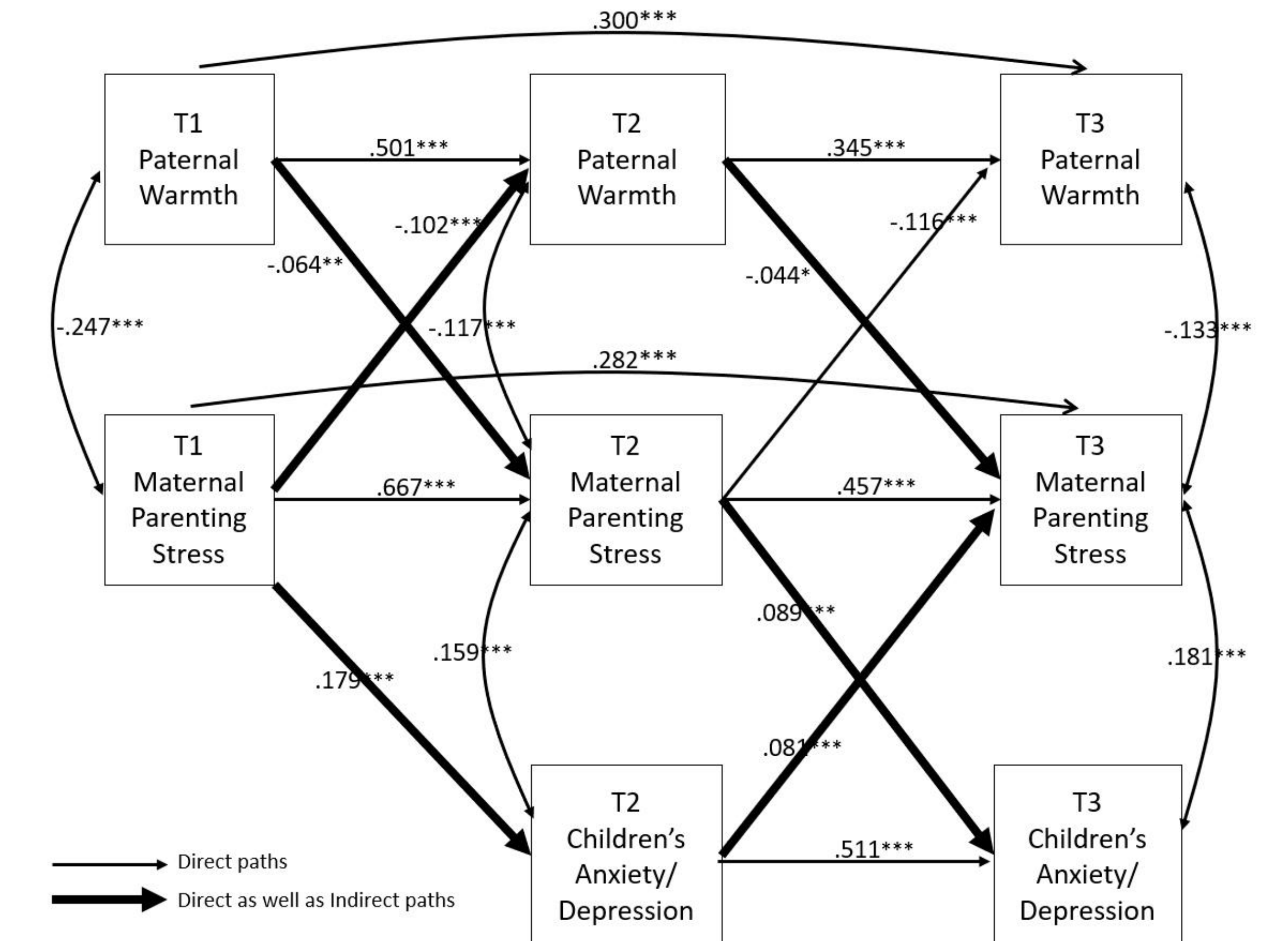
## Figures



_Figure 1._ Cross-lag model for paternal warmth, maternal parenting stress, and children's anxiety/depression. All paths are reported in standardized path coefficients. *_p_ < .05. **_p_ < .01. ***_p_ < .001. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.
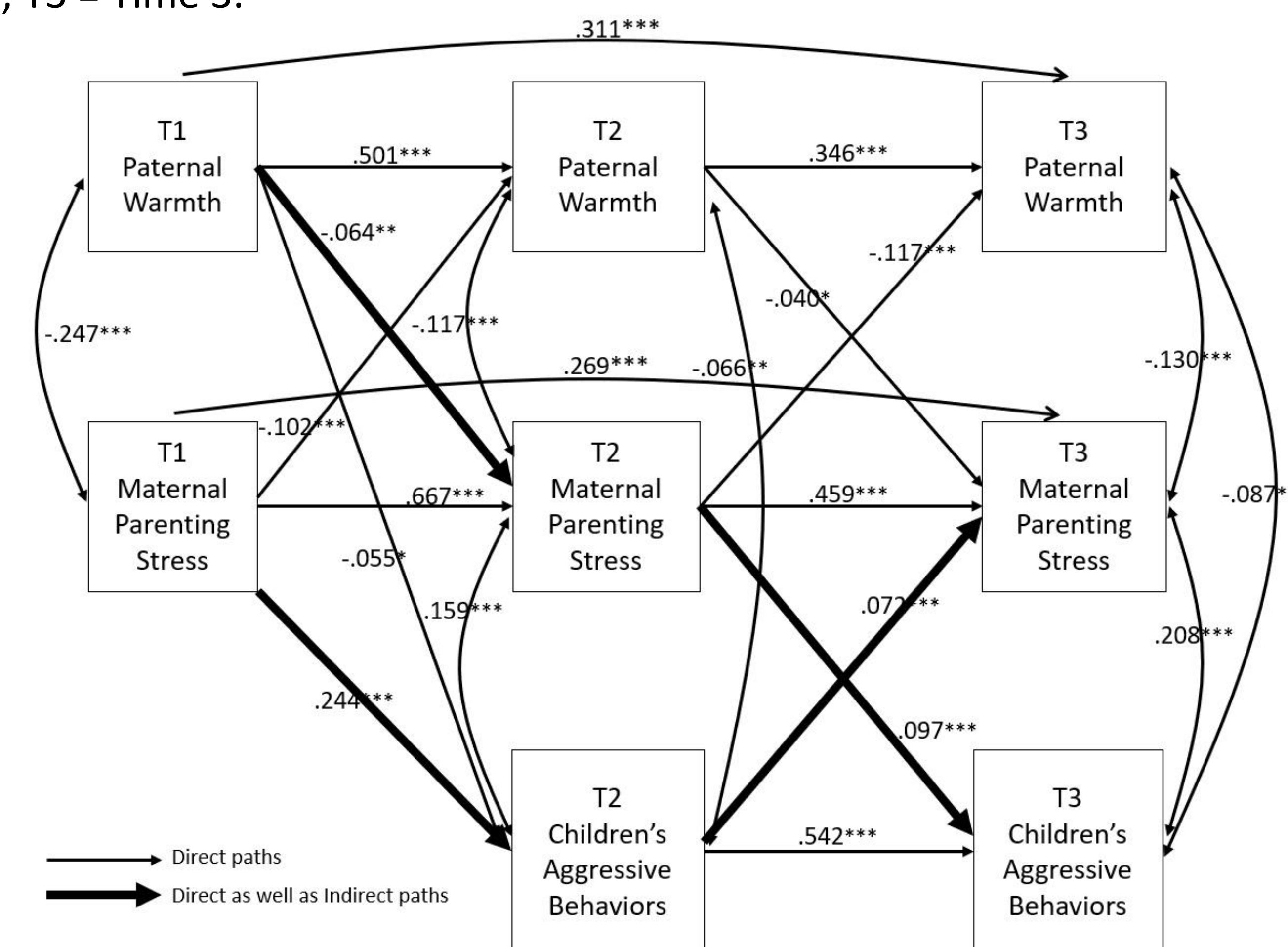


_Figure 2._ Cross-lag model for paternal warmth, maternal parenting stress, and children's aggressive behaviors. All paths are reported in standardized path coefficients. *_p_ < .05. **_p_ < .01. ***_p_ < .001. T1 = Time 1; T2 = Time 2; T3 = Time 3.

*To learn more about this study with references, please contact ylee260@utexas.edu.