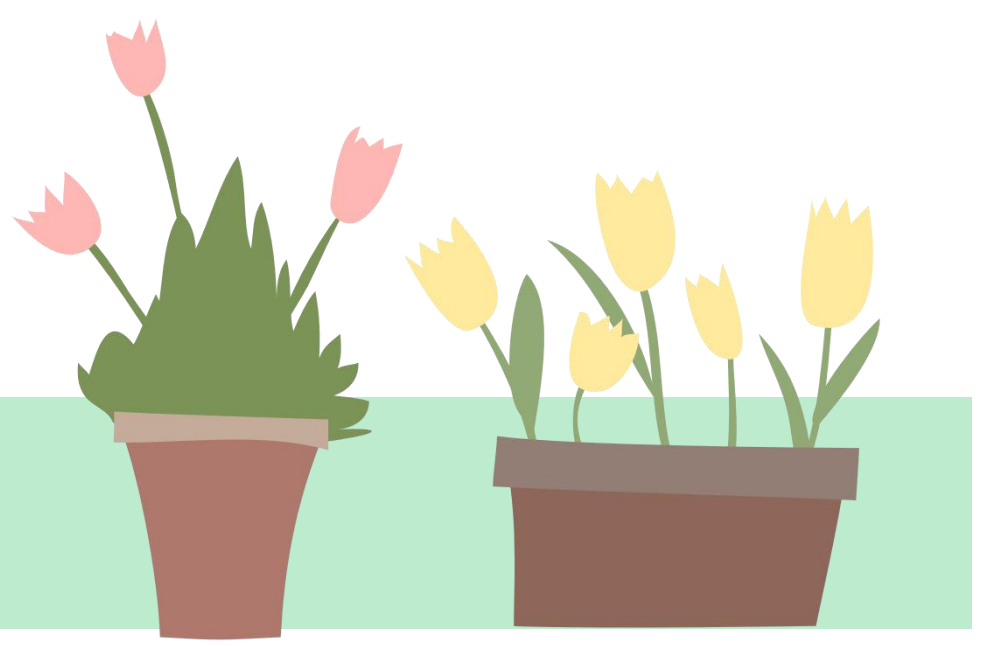




The Association between Early-Life Parental Control and Functional Ability Impairment among Adolescents with A Major Depressive Episode



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Introduction

- Nearly 1 in 5 adolescents in the United States experience a major depressive episode by age 17 (Compass Health Center, 2026).
- Research shows that higher psychologically controlling and lower autonomy granting parenting are associated with greater depressive symptoms (e.g., anxiety, suicidal thoughts) and poorer emotional regulation in adolescents (Barber, 1996; Steinberg et al., 1989; Prativa & Deeba, 2019; Liu et al., 2023).
- Additionally, depression is linked to functional impairment. Depressed teens and their parents report significant and lasting impairment in school, family, peer, and home responsibilities (Jaycox et al., 2009).
- However, less is known about whether parental control is associated with functional impairment among adolescents with depression. This study aims to fill that gap.

Methods

Sample:

- Adolescents with a major depressive episode aged 12 to 17 with consistent responses (n = 1,712) were drawn from the 2024 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH), a nationally representative survey of the non-institutionalized U.S. population (total N = 11,334).

Measures:

- Parental control** was a constructed quantitative score ranging from 1 (low level of parental control) to 4 (high level of parental control).
 - components included: whether parents limited electronics use, checked homework, helped with homework, and limited time out on school nights.
- Functional impairment** was measured using 4 items assessing difficulties in household responsibilities, school/work performance, family relationships, and social life, rated from 1 (none) to 10 (very severe) and averaged into a composite score (higher scores = greater impairment).

Research Questions

- Among adolescents with a past-year major depressive episode, how is parental control associated with functional impairment?
- Does this association vary across different domains of functioning (e.g., family, school, social life)?

Results

Bivariate

- Pearson correlation analysis showed that among adolescents with a past-year major depressive episode, the relationship between average parental control and average functional impairment was **NOT** statistically significant (r = -0.03, p = .1699).

Multivariate

- Since no overall association was observed, domain-specific analyses were conducted.
- Parental control (checking homework, helping with HW, limiting electronics and limiting time out) was significantly associated with:

- Household impairment** (p = .016)
- School/work impairment** (p = .001)
- Family relationship impairment** (p < .001)
- The strongest association was observed for parental help with homework.
- No significant association was found for social life impairment.

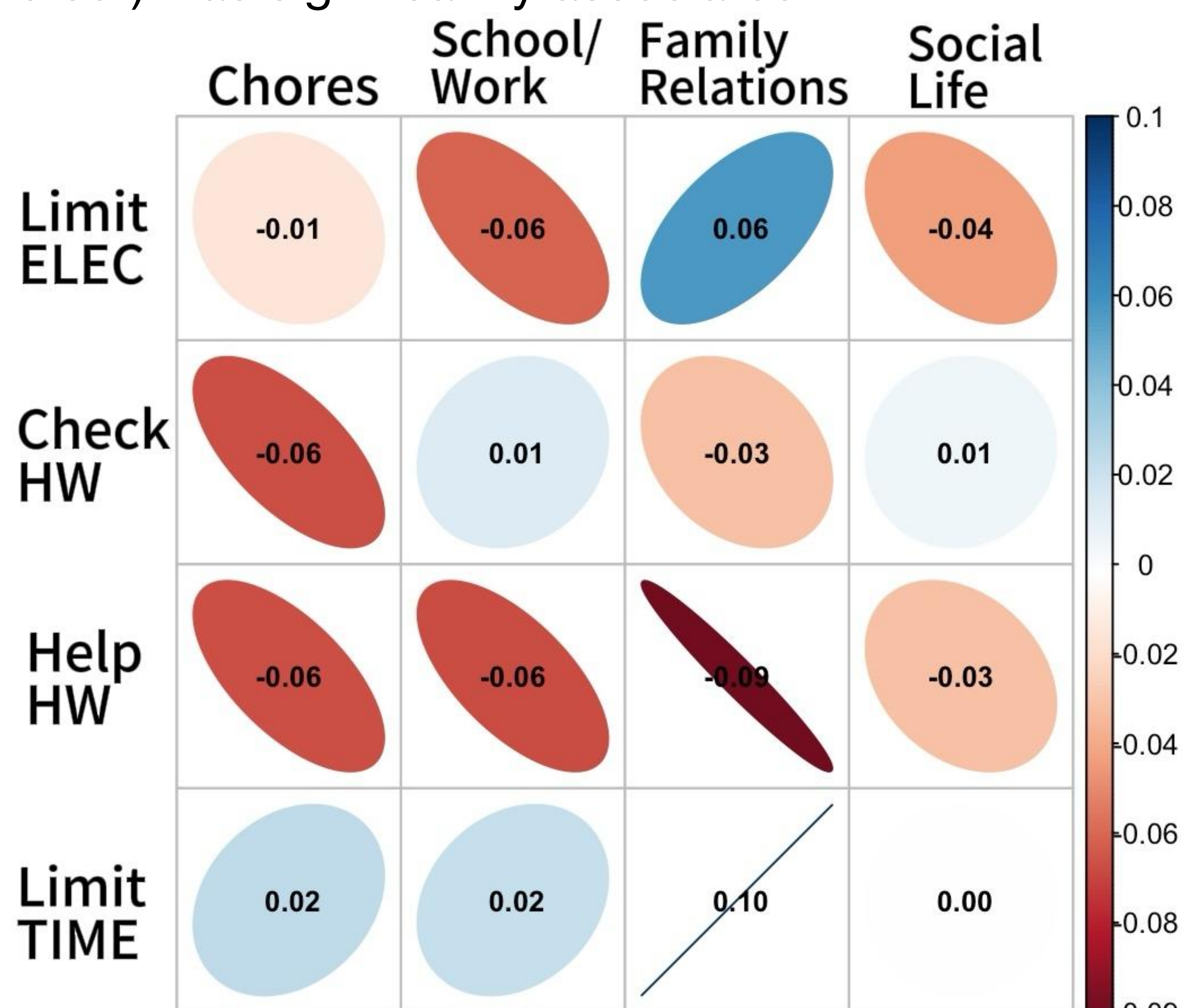


Figure 1: Domain-Specific Correlations Between Parental Control Behaviors and Functional Impairment

Discussion

- The measures used may conflate parental involvement with control.
- Checking and helping with homework** were **negatively associated** with impairment in household and family domains, suggesting that these behaviors may reflect **parental support or involvement**, which may be linked to better functioning.
- In contrast, **limiting electronics use and time out** were **associated** with higher impairment in family relationships, suggesting more **restrictive forms of control**, which may be related to reduced autonomy.
- Future Research Should Consider:
 - Defining parental control more narrowly as actions that directly restrict adolescent autonomy (e.g., limiting self-planned time, decision-making, or peer interactions)

--The potential for bidirectional relationships, where higher impairment may also correlate with increased parental control

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