

The Impact of PTSD and C-PTSD symptoms on mothers' prenatal attachment

1 Background

- Mothers exposed to childhood maltreatment are at greater risk of experiencing difficulties in their attachment relationships with their children pre- and post-natally.
- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and complex post-traumatic stress disorder (C-PTSD; comprising PTSD and Disturbances in Self-Organisation (DSO) symptoms) are mental health conditions caused by exposure to highly threatening external stimuli, including childhood maltreatment.
- The association between PTSD / DSO symptoms with prenatal attachment is poorly understood.

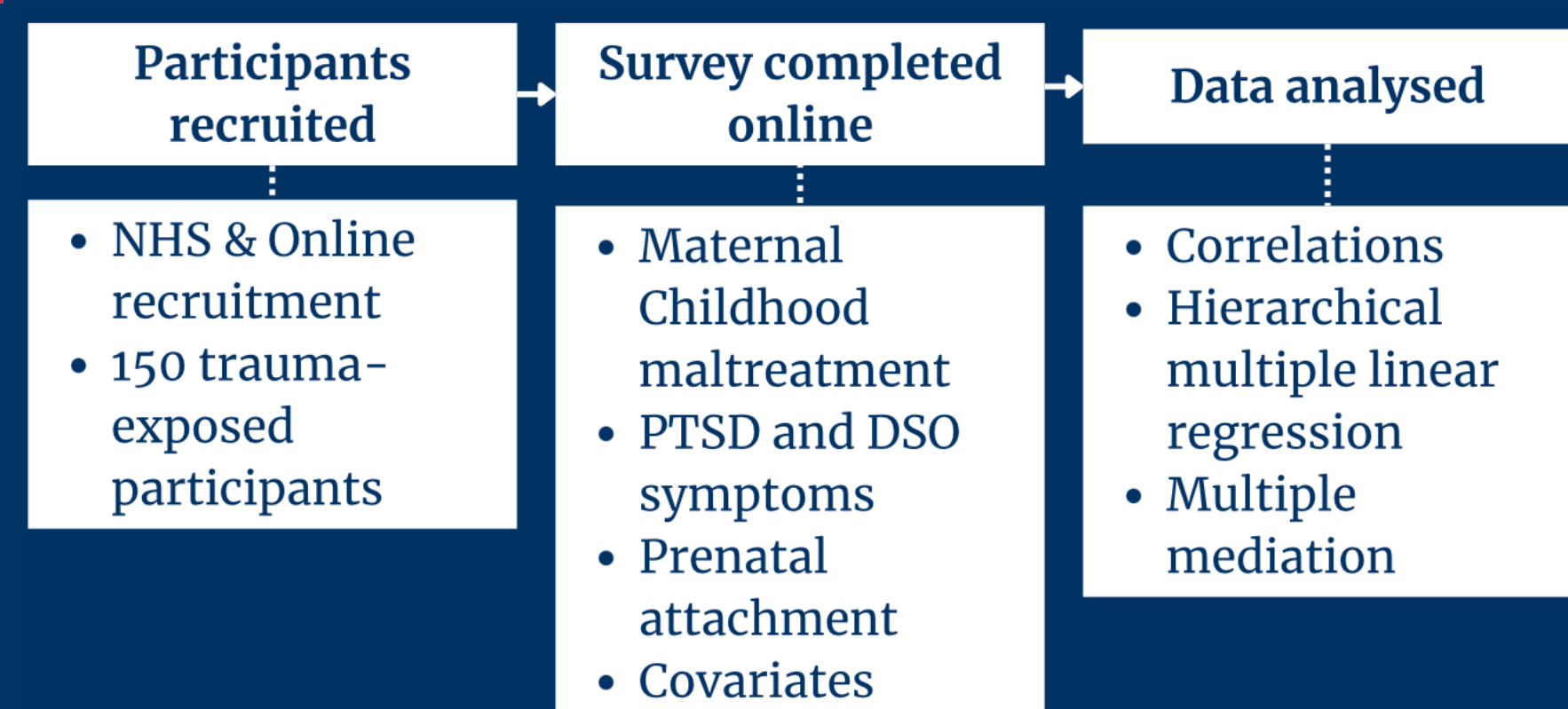


2 Objective

The study explores whether maternal exposure to childhood maltreatment, maternal PTSD and DSO symptoms are associated with prenatal attachment. Specifically, the study examines whether:

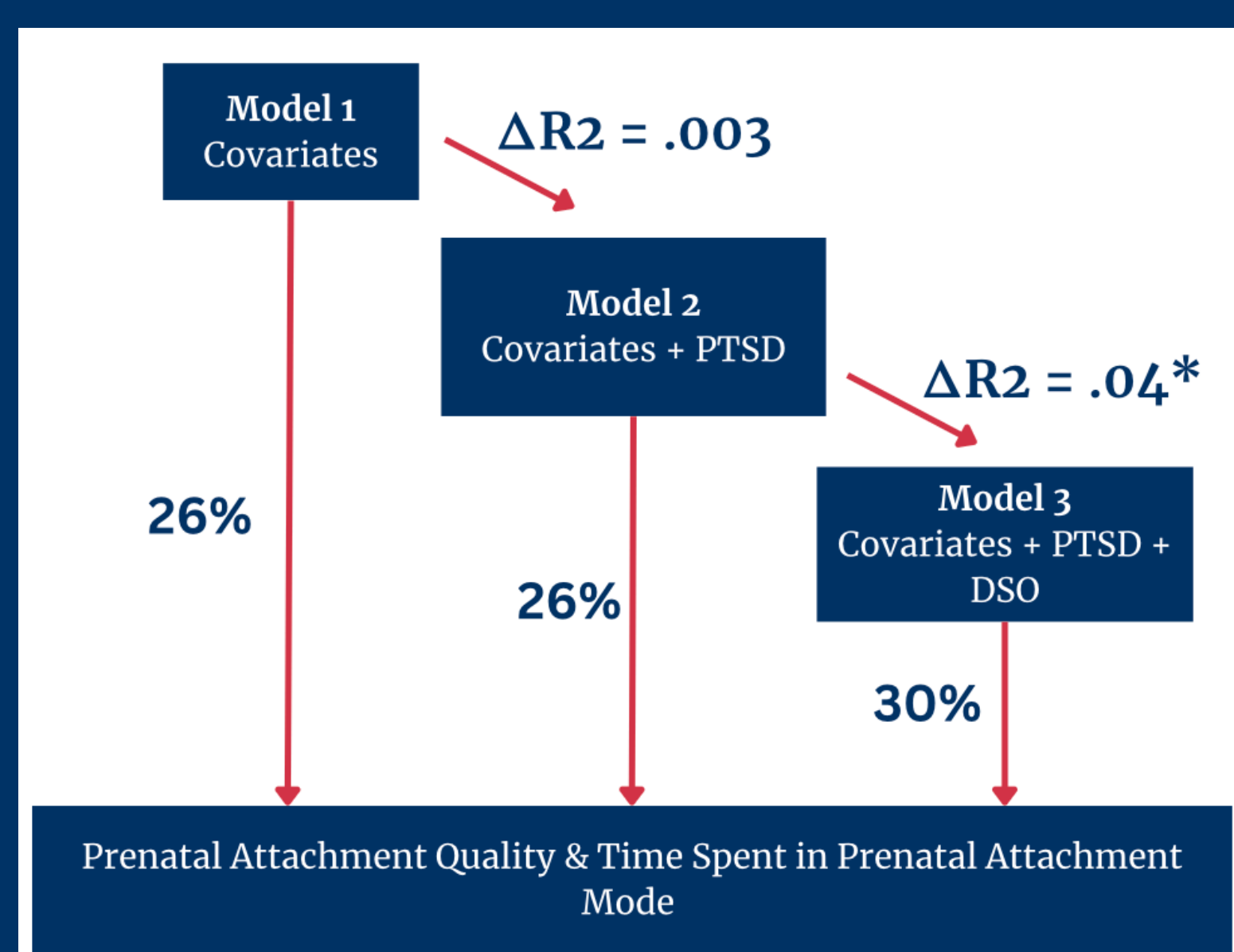
- PTSD and DSO symptoms uniquely contribute to prenatal attachment when control variables are accounted for.
- PTSD and DSO symptoms mediate the association between maternal maltreatment and prenatal attachment.

3 Methods



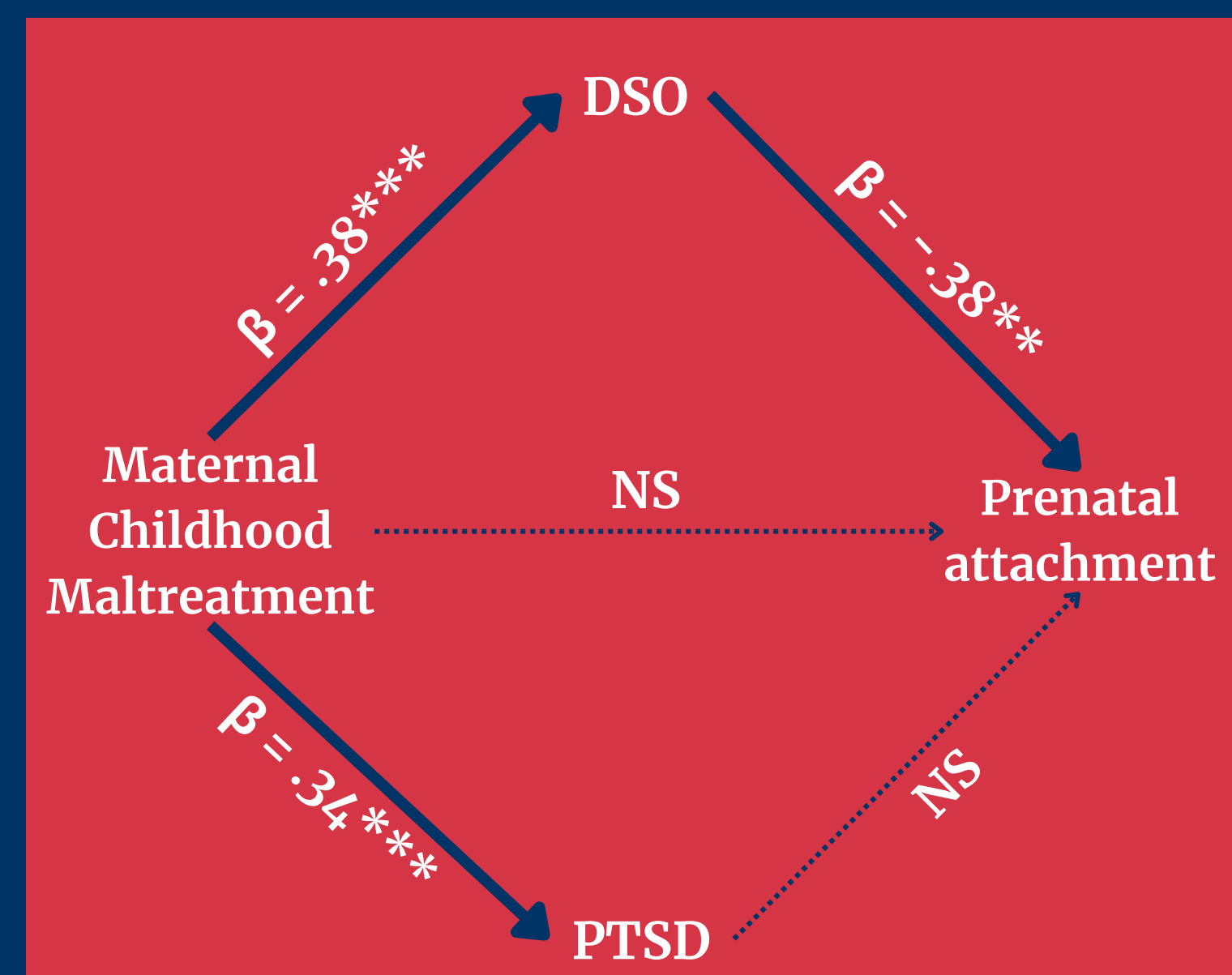
4 Results

After accounting for covariates, DSO symptoms uniquely contributed to the prediction of prenatal attachment. PTSD symptoms did not offer unique contribution.



% indicates the variance in prenatal attachment explained by the combined variables in the model. * = ΔF of $p < .05$.
 Covariates: maternal ACEs, anxiety, depression, social support, maternal age, gestational age, maternal education & primigravida

DSO symptoms mediated the association between exposure to maternal childhood maltreatment and prenatal attachment.



PTSD = Symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, DSO = Symptoms of Disturbances in Self-Organization (symptoms of C-PTSD, alongside PTSD symptoms). * = $p < .05$, ** = $p < .01$, *** = $p < .001$. NS = No significant association.

5 Conclusion

DSO symptoms during pregnancy may explain part of the association between exposure to childhood maltreatment and lower levels of prenatal attachment. These findings aid the identification of mothers who may benefit from additional support in the prenatal period. Evidence-based healthcare and intervention is required for women and birthing-parents who were exposed to maltreatment during childhood and exhibit DSO symptoms during pregnancy to support the development of their prenatal attachment towards the developing baby.

Related literature

- Souch, A. J., Jones, I. R., Shelton, K. H. M., & Waters, C. S. (2022). Maternal childhood maltreatment and perinatal outcomes: A systematic review. *Journal of affective disorders*, 302, 139-159. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.01.062>
- Enlow, M. B., Egeland, B., Carlson, E., Blood, E., & Wright, R. J. (2014). Mother–infant attachment and the intergenerational transmission of posttraumatic stress disorder. *Development and psychopathology*, 26(1), 41-65.