

The Protective Role of Childhood Social Support in the Association Between Early Parental Death and Later-Life Cognition

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Early parental death is associated with lower cognitive functioning in later life. However, childhood social support can buffer this negative effect.

INTRODUCTION

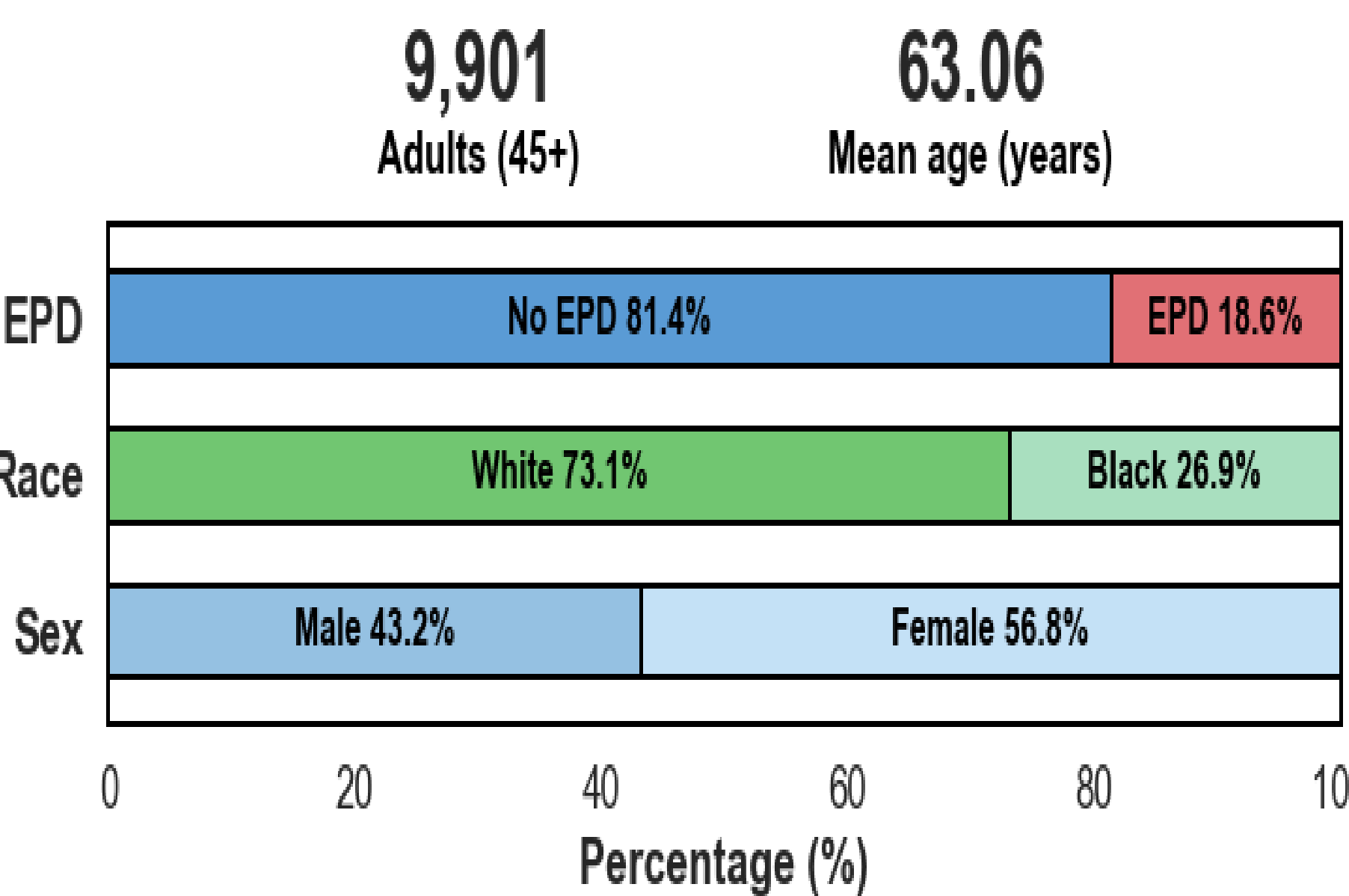
- Early Parental Death (EPD) is associated with adverse cognitive outcomes, including increased Alzheimer's risk^{1,2,3}.
- Prior research has focused on non-modifiable moderators (e.g., parents' gender, child's age at loss)^{2,3}.
- However, the role of modifiable protective factors remains understudied.

Aims

- Examine EPD's association with later-life cognitive function and decline.
- Test whether Childhood Social Support (CSS) moderates this association.

METHODS

- Participants were drawn from the REasons for Geographic And Racial Differences in Stroke (REGARDS) cohort.



- Cognition was based on raw score performance on four measures.
- Linear mixed-effects models controlling for key covariates.
- Moderation tested via interaction terms and stratified analyses.

RESULTS

- EPD was associated with lower cognitive function across all measures:
- EPD was not associated with longitudinal cognitive change (**Figure 1**).

Cognitive Measure	b	p
Animal Fluency	-0.34	< .01
Letter Fluency	-0.21	< .05
Immediate Recall	-0.21	< .05
Delayed Recall	-0.08	< .05

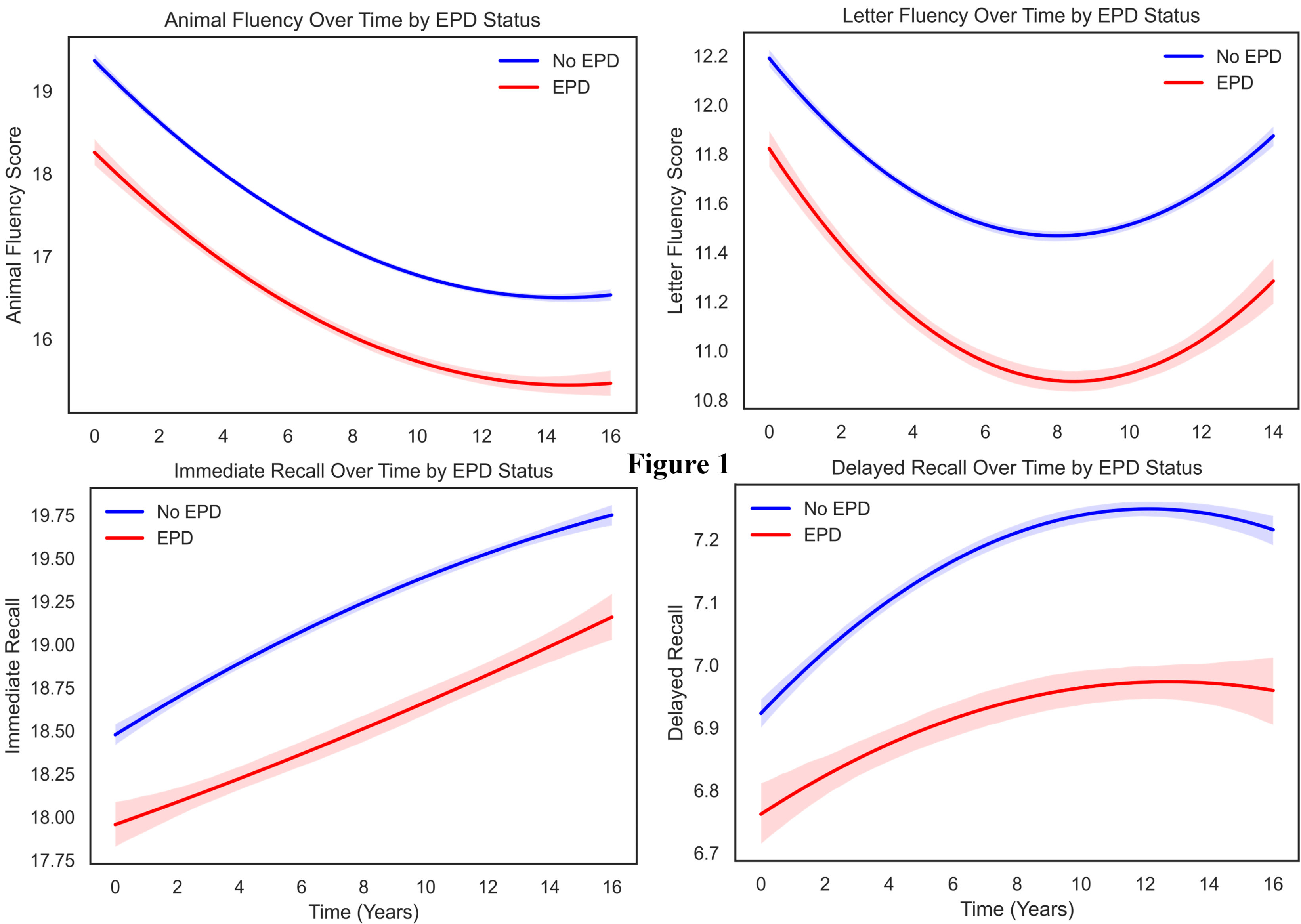


Figure 1

- EPD×CSS interactions approached statistical significance.
- Stratified analyses showed EPD was associated with lower Animal Fluency ($b = -0.67, p < .01$) and Immediate Recall ($b = -0.50, p < .01$) only among adults with high CSS (**Figure 2**).

Effect of EPD on Later-life Cognition By Childhood Social Support (CSS)

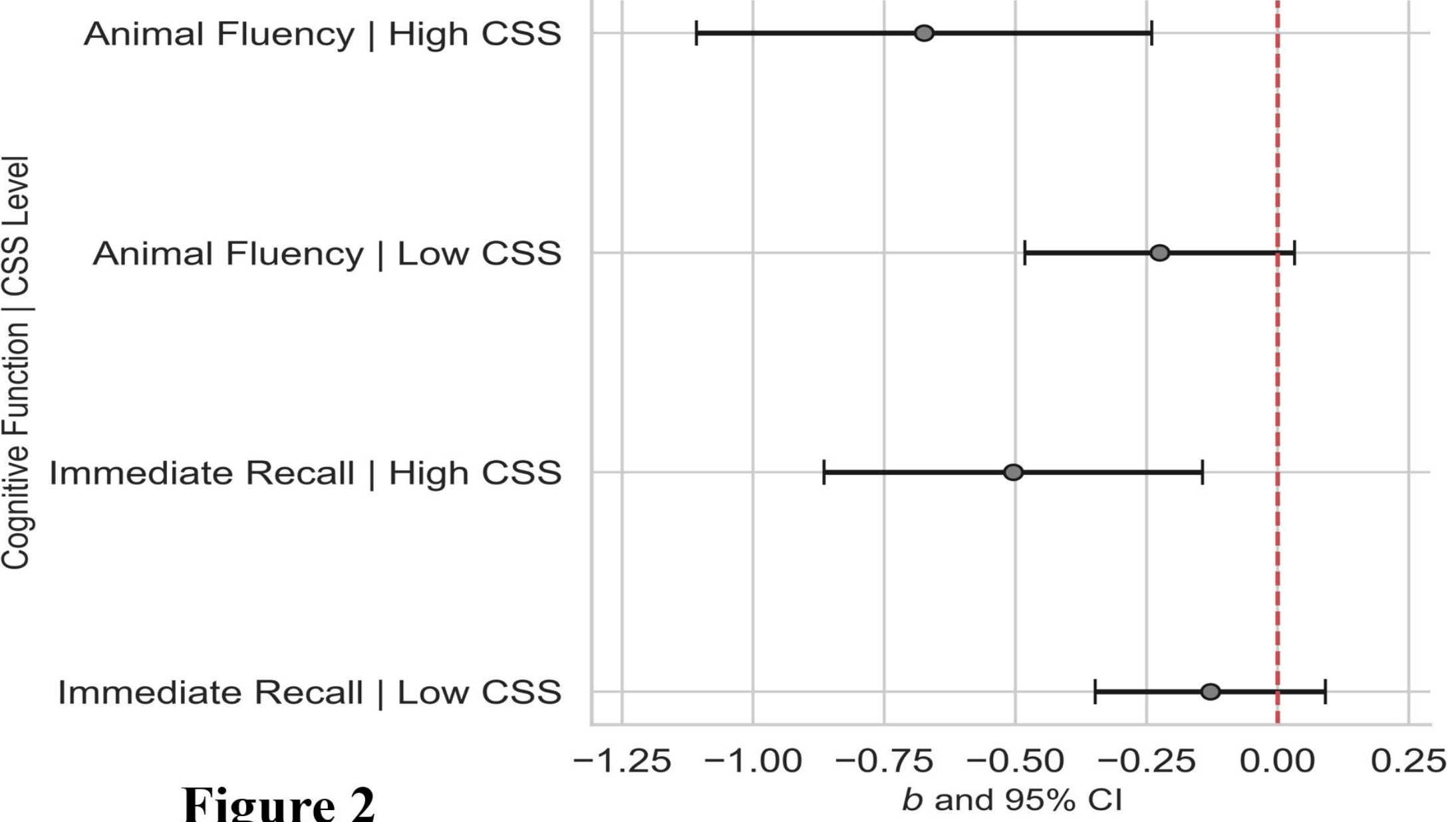


Figure 2

CONCLUSIONS

- EPD is associated with lower later-life cognitive functioning, but not the rate of cognitive decline.
- CSS appears to play a protective role.
- Future research should investigate the mechanisms through which CSS plays this protective role.

REFERENCES

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