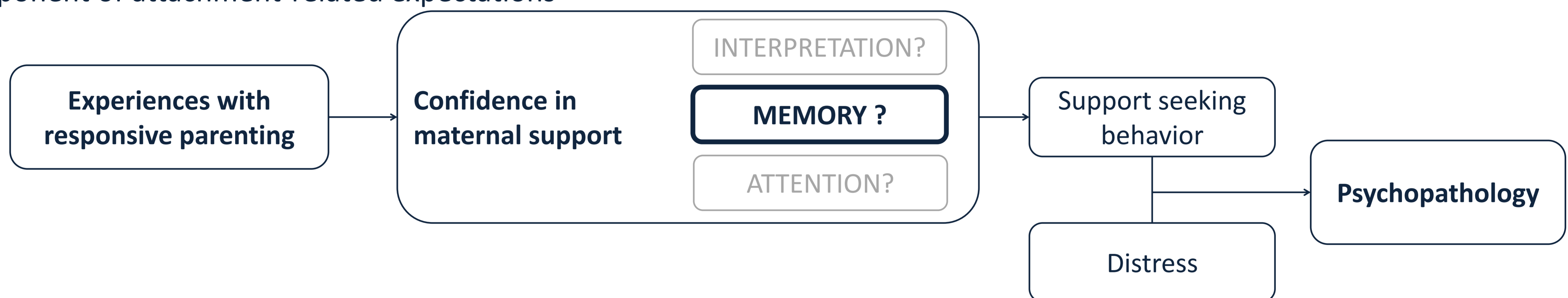


## Theoretical background:

- Attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969, 1973; Ainsworth, 1973) states that children's repeated experiences with responsive mothers lead to **confidence** in maternal support, guiding children's **support seeking behavior**, which protects them against the pathogenic effect of **distress**. Uncertainty regarding maternal support, however, is a liability (Sroufe et al., 2000).
- While attachment theory struggles to explain the association between attachment-related expectations and behavior, cognitive schema theory would assume that these associations are explained by biases in the interpretation, attentional processing, and recollection of attachment-related information. Therefore, the current study investigated whether a biased recollection of mother-related information is one component of attachment-related expectations



## Hypothesis:

Confidence in maternal support is characterized by a more positive mother-related Memory Bias

### Method:

#### Participants:

- N = 50 general population children
- Middle childhood (aged 10 – 12)

#### Procedure:

##### Mother-referent encoding task:

Children are presented 20 positive and 20 negative adjectives (and 4 buffer words in order to prevent recency- and primacy-effects :

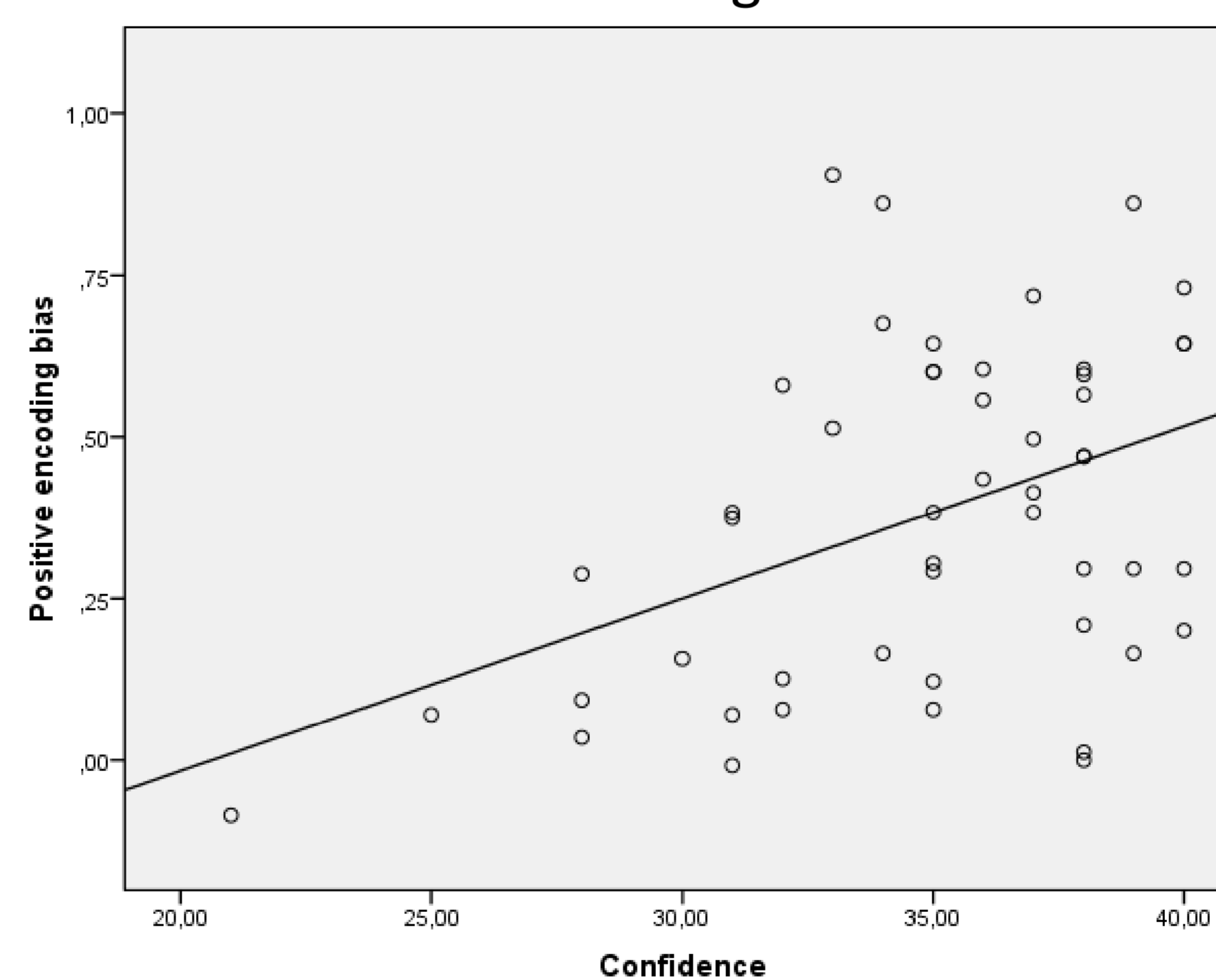
- Encoding Task:** Decide whether each adjective is descriptive for the relationship with their mother or not
- Recall Task:** Recall as many of these adjectives as possible for 2 minutes.

#### Measures :

- Confidence in maternal support:** Trust scale of the People In My Life Questionnaire (Ridenour, Greenberg, & Cook, 2006)
- Depressive symptoms:** Child Depression Inventory (Kovacs, 1992),
- Memory Bias Scores:**
  - Encoding Bias:** The difference between the proportion of positive and the proportion of negative words encoded as mother-referent.
  - Recall Bias:** The difference between the proportion of positive and the proportion of negative recalled mother-referent words.

### Results:

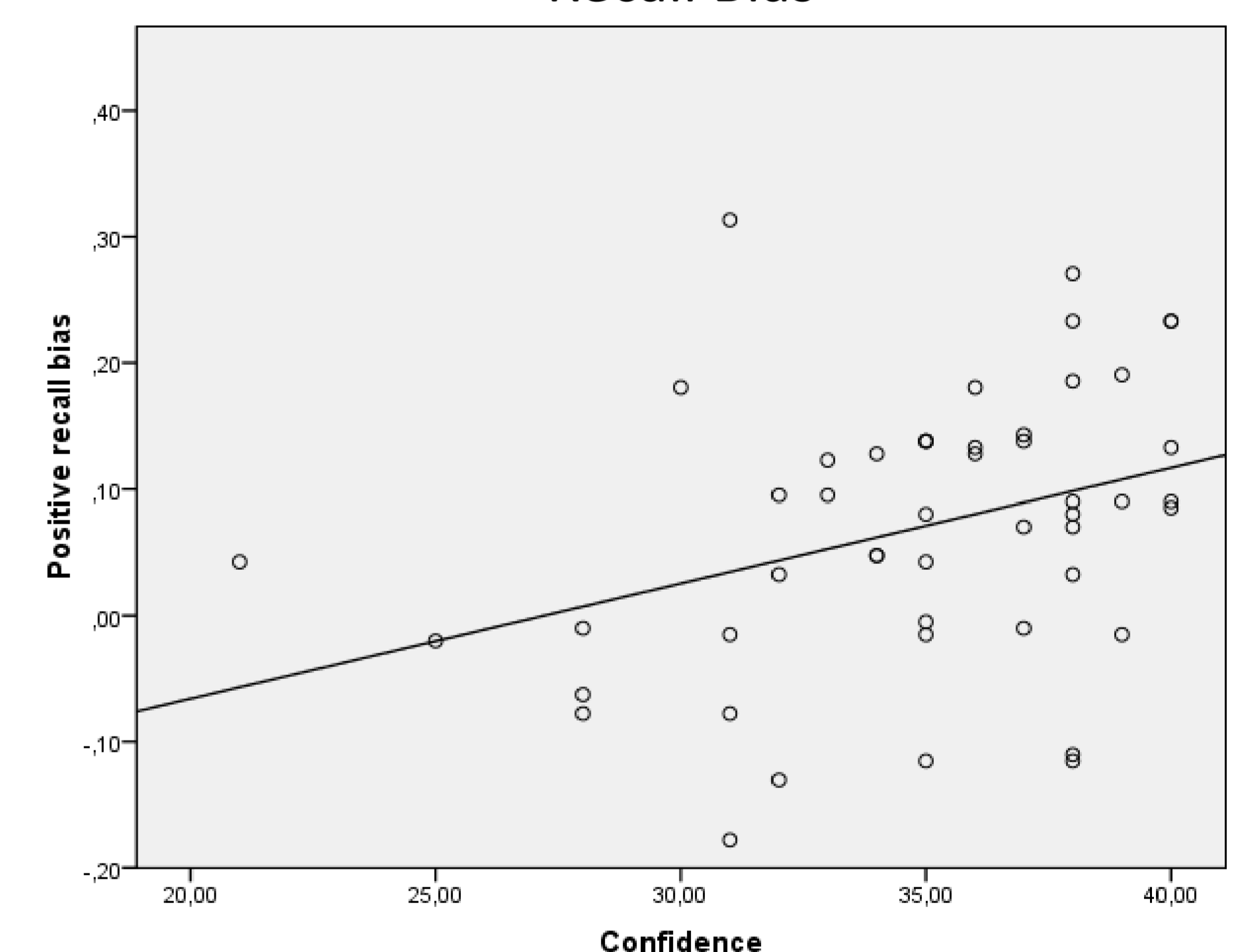
#### Encoding Bias



$$r_{\text{ConfidenceBias}} = .43, F(1,48) = 3.70, p < .01$$

$$r_{\text{ConfidenceBias.Depression}} = .38, F(1,47) = 7.76, p < .01$$

#### Recall Bias



$$r_{\text{ConfidenceBias}} = .34, F(1,48) = 6.45, p < .01$$

$$r_{\text{ConfidenceBias.Depression}} = .30, F(1,47) = 3.95, p = .05$$

## Conclusion:

Confidence in maternal support is related to a more positive mother-related Encoding- and Recall Bias, even when controlling for depressive symptoms

## Clinical implications:

If insecurely attached children's expectations regarding parental support are characterized by information processing biases:

- These biases possibly reduce the effect of parent management training: Uncertain children's tendency to recall more negative information regarding their parents might make them less sensitive to notice changes in parental behaviour.
- Uncertain children may benefit from a treatment that explicitly focuses on restoring the child's confidence in parental support. For example, Attachment Based Family Therapy successfully reduces adolescent depression through learning parents to acknowledge and empathize with their children's disappointment regarding their parental support (ABFT, Diamond et al., 2002).