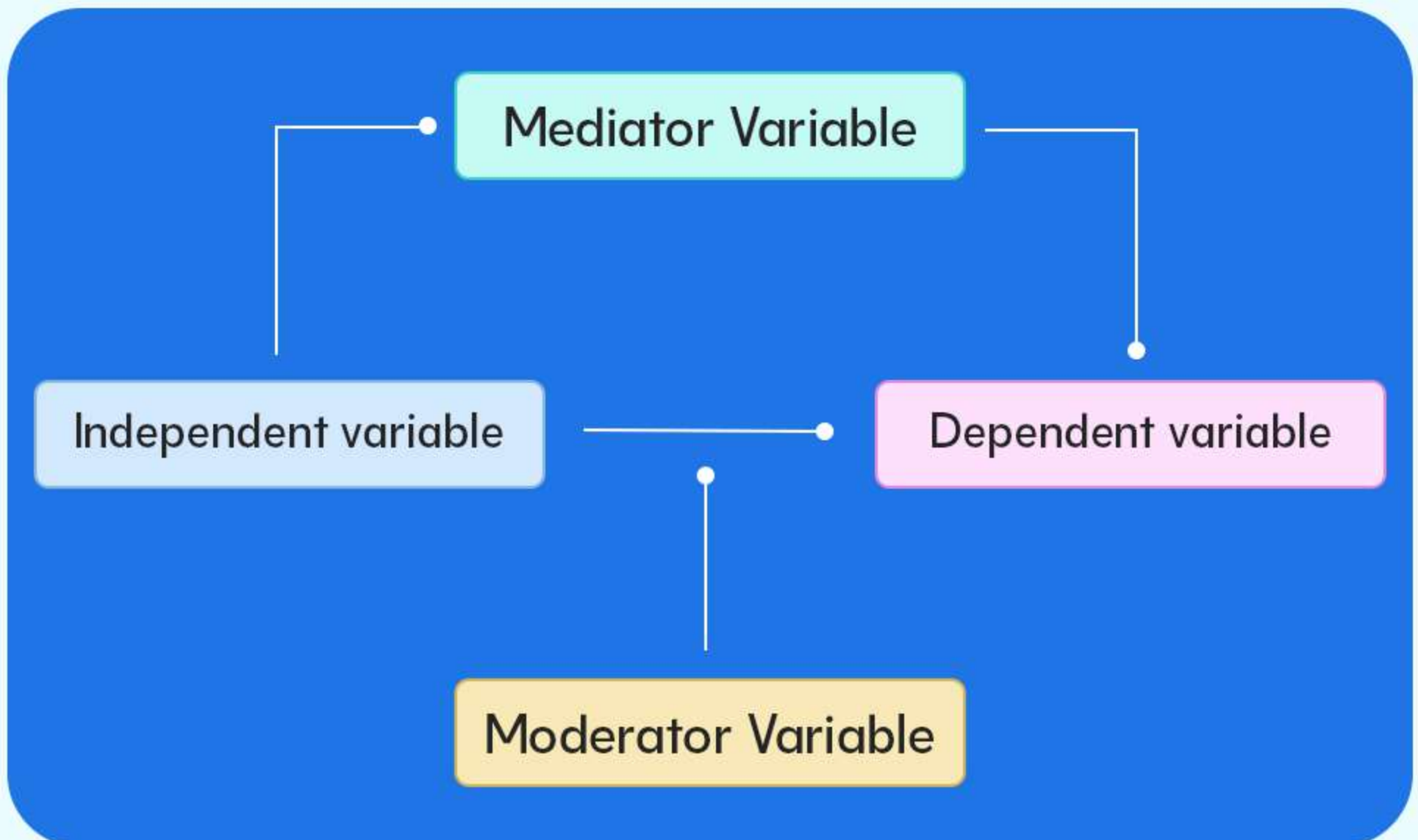


MEDIATOR VS MODERATOR VARIABLE

Research Concepts Every Psychology Aspirant Must Know

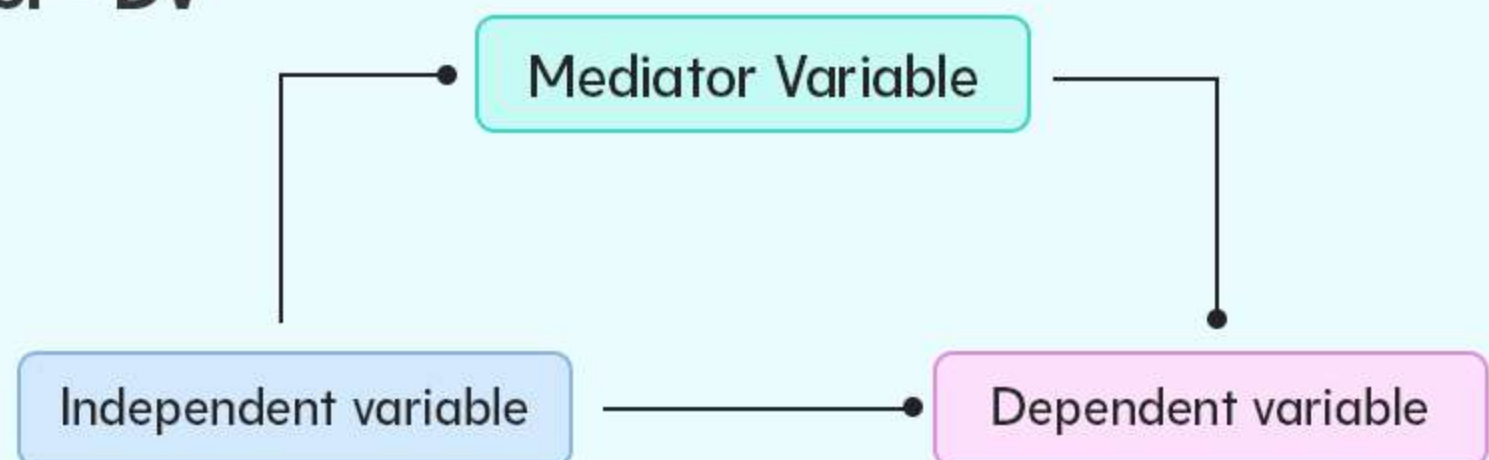


Students often mix these two up because both are third variables, but their roles are very different.

Mediator = Explains WHY / HOW

It explains the mechanism behind a relationship.

IV - Mediator - DV



Example:

Stress - Poor sleep - Low concentration

Here, poor sleep explains how stress reduces concentration.

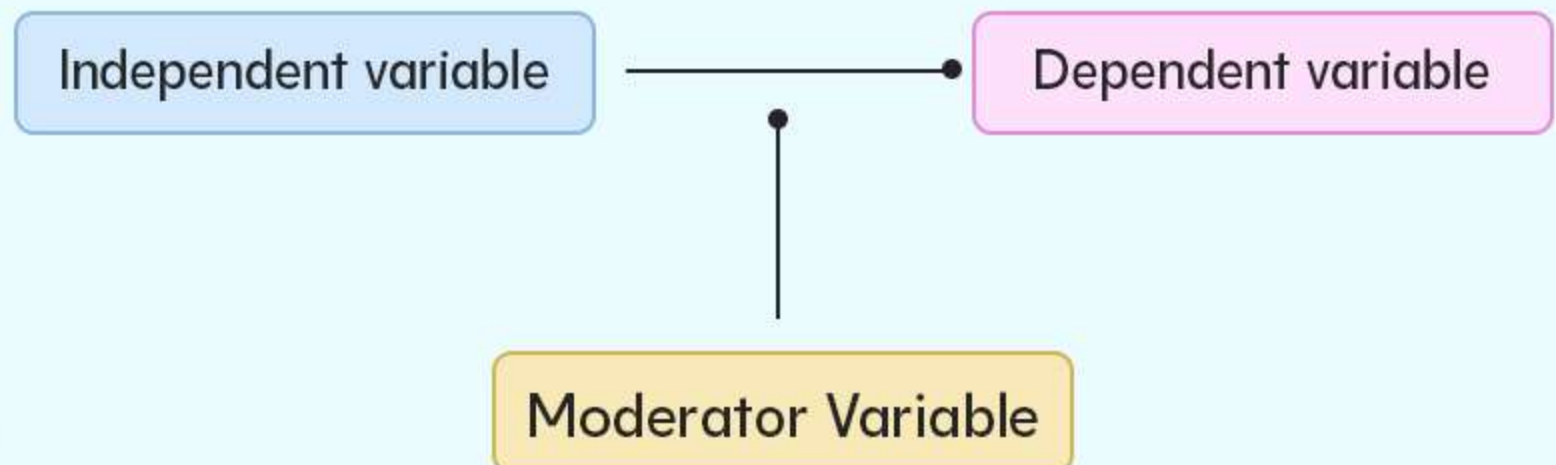
Think: Mediator = Middle pathway



What is a Moderator?

A Moderator changes the strength or direction of a relationship.

It answers: “When does this effect become stronger, weaker, or reverse?”



Example:

Stress - Performance

But the effect depends on social support

High support - stress impact weaker

Low support - stress impact stronger

Think: **Moderator = Changes the effect**

Statistically, moderation is usually seen as an interaction effect.



Easy Trick to Never Confuse Them

Ask 2 questions, if variable answers:

“How does X affect Y?”

- Mediator

“When / for whom does X affect Y more?”

- Moderator

Example: Exercise improves mood...

Because it increases serotonin - **Mediator**

Only strong in young adults - **Moderator**

One explains mechanism, one explains condition.



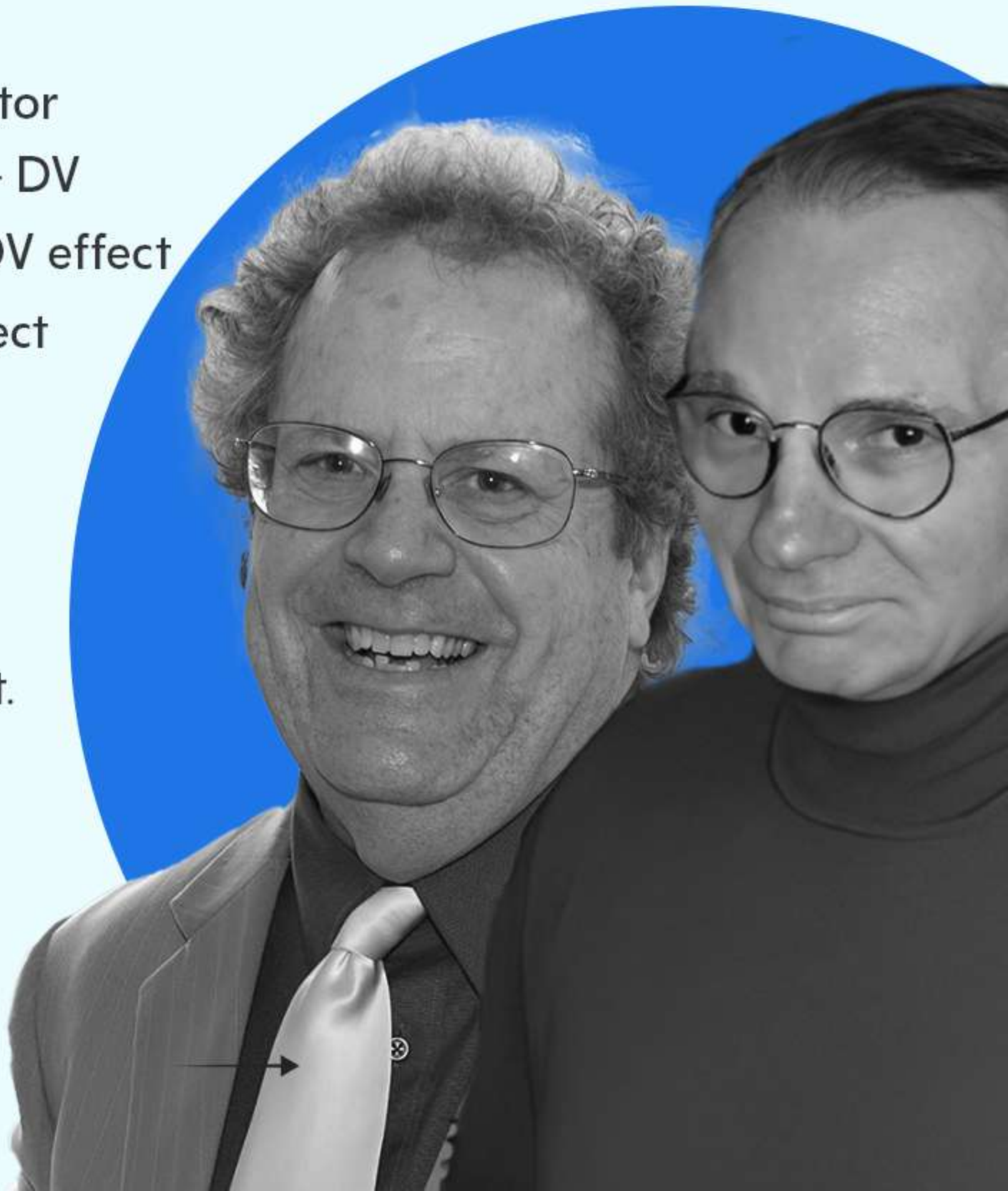
Classic Research Model

A landmark paper by Reuben M. Baron and David A. Kenny clearly distinguished mediator and moderator variables in psychological research.

Mediation paths:

- **Path a:** IV - Mediator
- **Path b:** Mediator - DV
- **Path c:** Total IV - DV effect
- **Path c':** Direct effect after mediator is controlled

If c decreases after adding mediator - mediation is present.

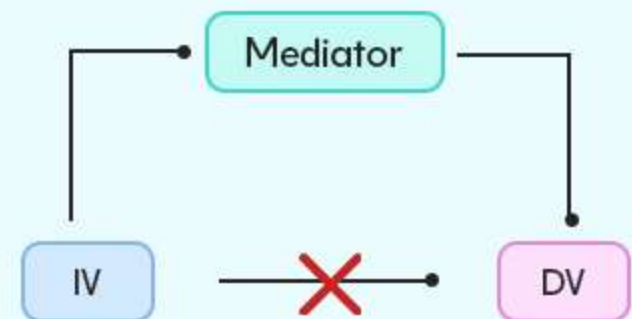


Types You Should Know

Mediation

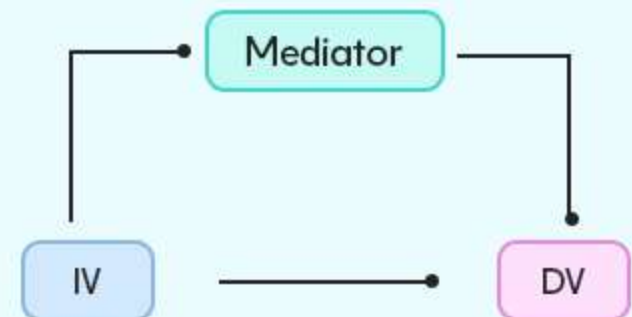
1. Full mediation

- IV affects DV only through mediator



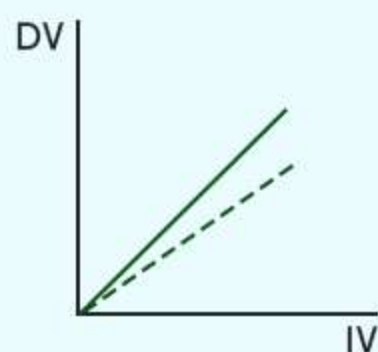
2. Partial mediation

- The mediator explains some effect, but IV still directly affects DV

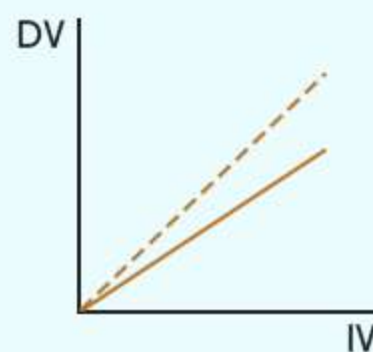


Moderation

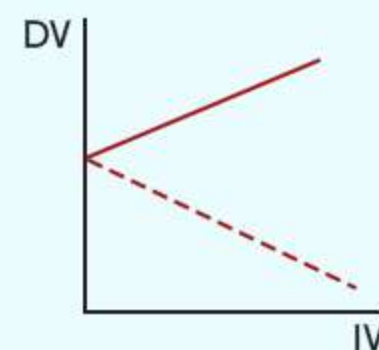
1. Enhancing moderator - strengthens relationship



2. Buffering moderator - weakens relationship



3. Reversing moderator - flips direction



Examples from Psychology

Mediation:



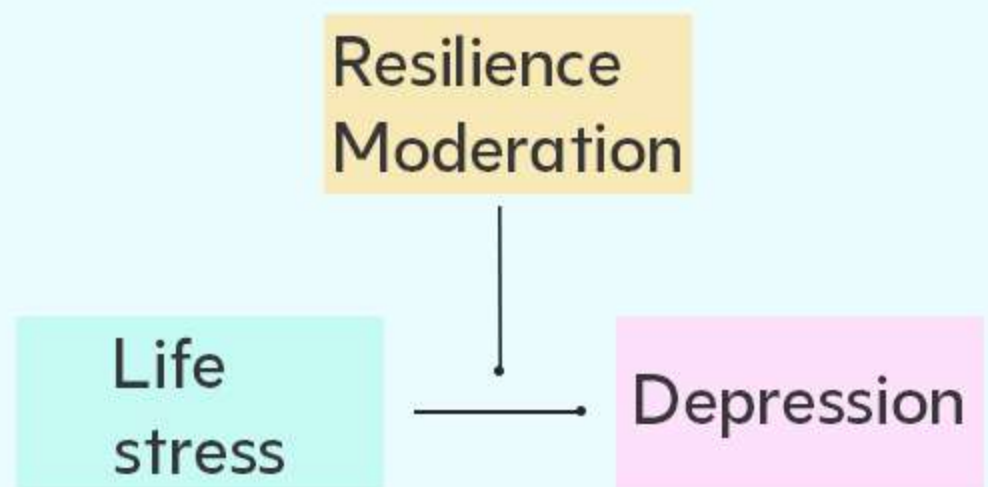
Self-esteem explains how parenting affects mental health.

Moderation:

depends on resilience

High resilience - weaker effect

Low resilience - stronger effect





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