

Introduction

- First responders are regularly exposed to traumatic events, which are associated with negative mental health consequences (Jones, 2017)
- However, not everyone who is exposed to a trauma develops PTSD or other psychological symptoms (Santiago et al., 2013)
- Distress tolerance is the perceived and/or actual capacity to withstand exposure to aversive stimuli, including negative affective states (Simons & Gaher, 2005)
- Distress tolerance may buffer individuals against the potentially negative effects of trauma exposure (Bartlett et al., 2018, Smith et al., 2018, Banducci et al., 2016, Brooks et al., 2016)
- There is little research on the impact of distress tolerance, and tolerance of negative emotions in particular, on the mental health of first responders
- **Hypothesis:** The ability to tolerate negative affective states will be associated with lower levels of psychological symptoms in first responders

Method

Participants

- 71 first responders (professional and volunteer) completed on online survey
- Majority were Caucasian (94%), male (77%), and between ages 30 – 54 (76%)
- Affiliations: Police/Sheriffs Department (44%), Fire Department (46%), Emergency Medical Services (8%), and Trauma Intervention Program (<1%)

Procedure

- Participants were recruited through mass emails and meetings with local first responder agencies
- Informed consent was obtained and data were collected via Qualtrics, an online survey system
- Participants were compensated with a \$20 electronic Amazon gift card

Measures

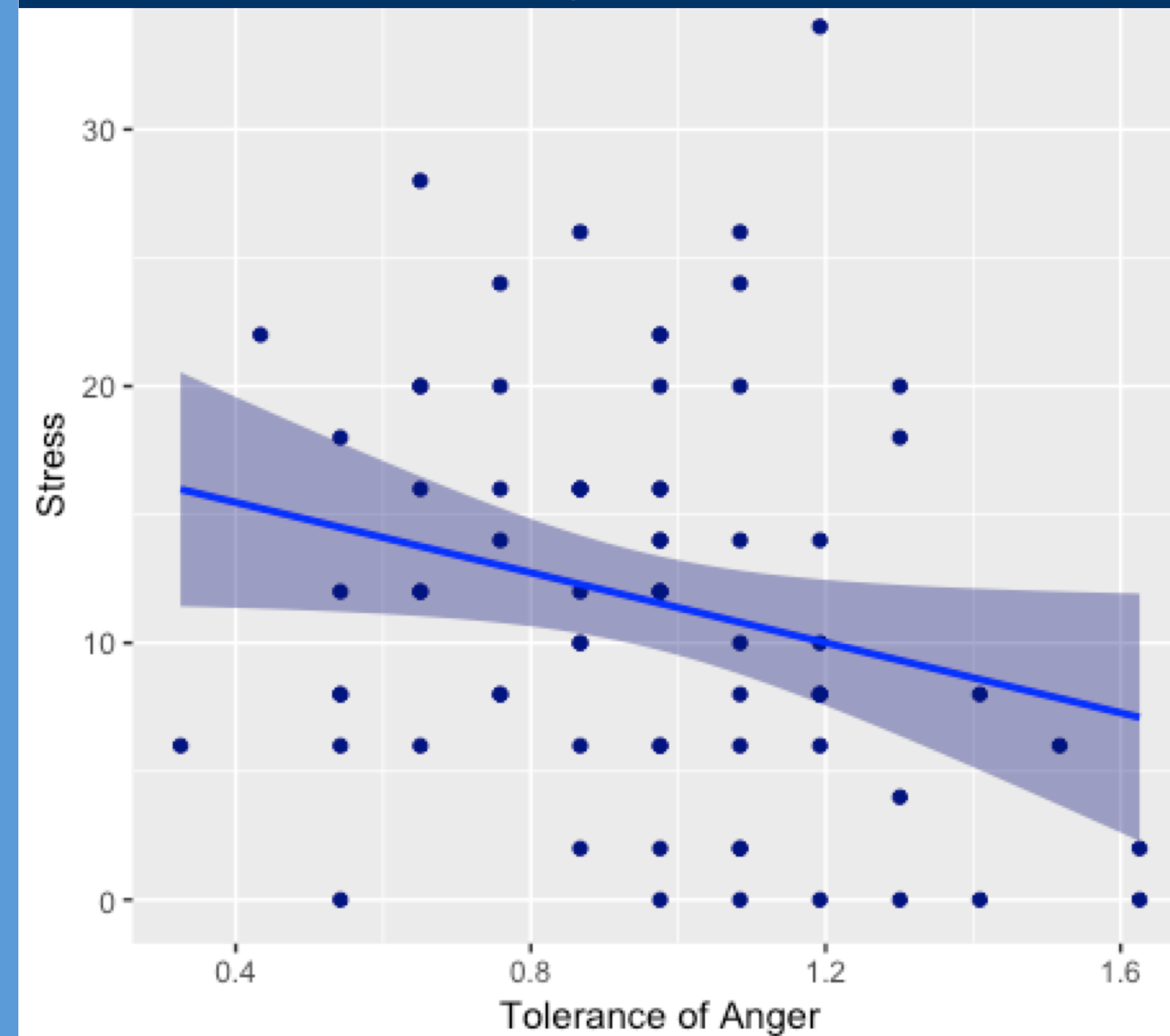
- **Distress Tolerance:** Tolerance of Negative Affective States (TNAS; Bernstein & Brantz, 2013)
- **Post-Traumatic Stress:** PTSD Checklist for DSM-5 (Blevins et al., 2015)
- **Secondary Traumatic Stress:** Secondary Traumatic Stress Scale (Bride et al., 2004)
- **Depression, Anxiety, and Stress:** Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale (Osman et al., 2012)
- **Burnout:** Abbreviated Maslach Burnout Inventory - emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and personal accomplishment subscales (Wheeler et al., 2011)
- **Substance Use for Coping:** Subscale of the Brief Coping Orientations to Problems Experienced Inventory (Carver, 1997)
- **Resiliency:** Brief Resilience Scale (Smith et al., 2013)

Simple Regression Results (*r*-values) Association between Tolerance of Negative Affective States (TNAS) and Psychological Outcomes

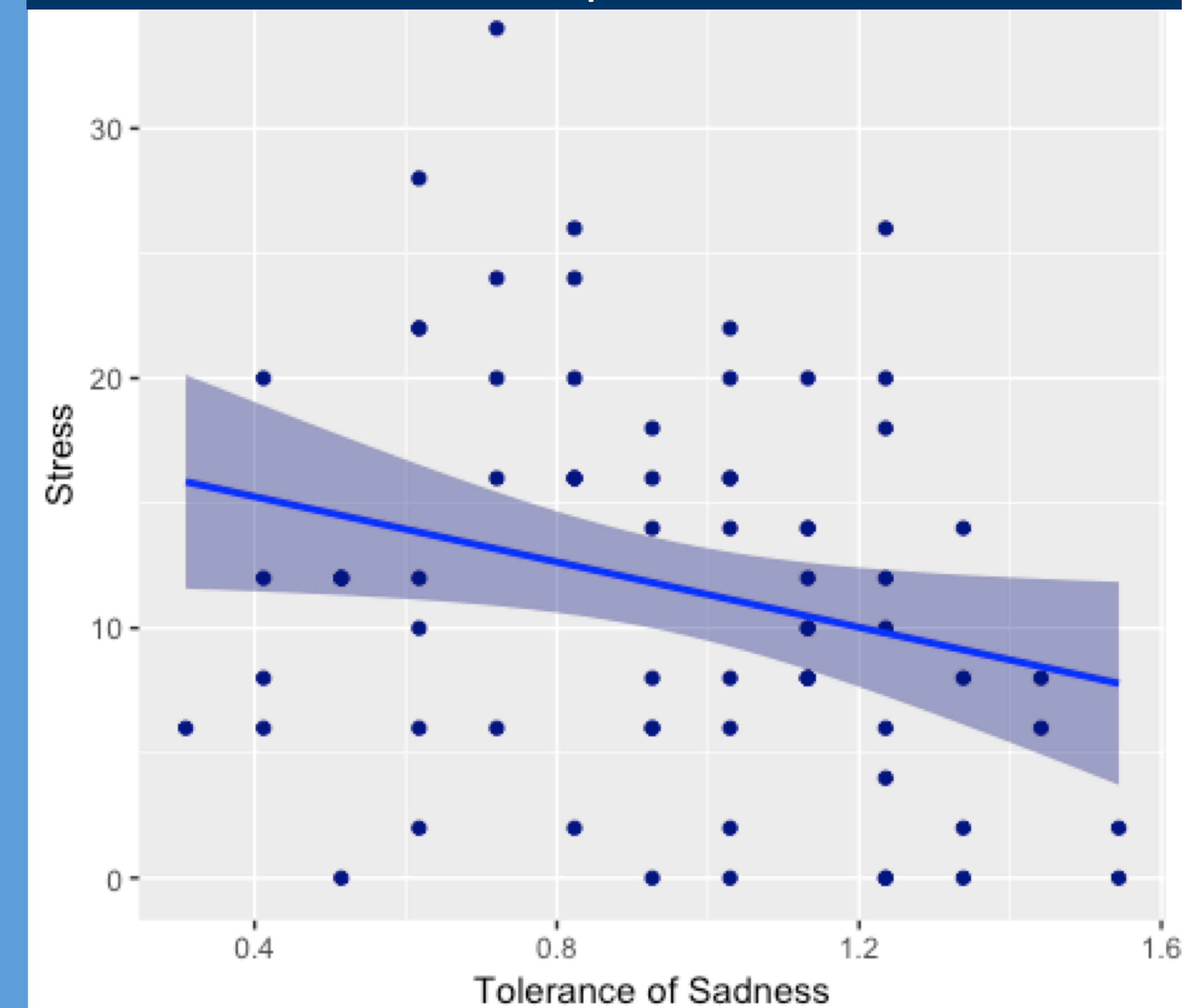
	TNAS: Anxious-Apprehension	TNAS: Fear-Distress	TNAS: Anger	TNAS: Sadness-Depression	TNAS: Disgust	TNAS: Negative Social Emotions	TNAS: Total
Post-Traumatic Stress	-.03	-.76 ^ψ	-1.25 ^ψ	-.83	-.89	-.46	-.16
Secondary Traumatic Stress	-.004	-.63	-1.19 ^ψ	-.79	-1.30 ^ψ	-.51 ^ψ	-.19 ^ψ
Emotional Exhaustion	-.47	-.31 ^ψ	-.68**	-.48*	-.62*	-.23 ^ψ	-.09*
Stress	-.12	-.42 ^ψ	-.74*	-.67*	-.39	-.31 ^ψ	-.10
Substance Use for Coping	-.02	-.10	-.11	-.06	-.13	-.07 ^ψ	-.02
Depersonalization	-.34	-.24	-.55*	-.54*	-.41	-.16	-.07 ^ψ
Resiliency	.01	.06*	.04	.03	.07 ^ψ	.03 ^ψ	.01 ^ψ

^ψ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$

Association between Anger Tolerance and Stress Level



Association between Sadness-Depression Tolerance and Stress Level



Results

- Simple regression analyses were used to determine the impact of predictors (tolerance of negative affective states) on psychological outcomes
- Tolerance of negative affective states (total score) was associated with lower emotional exhaustion
- Tolerance of fear-distress was associated with higher psychological resilience
- Tolerance of anger and tolerance of sadness-depression were associated with lower emotional exhaustion, stress, and depersonalization
- Tolerance of disgust was associated with lower emotional exhaustion

Discussion

- Tolerance of negative affective states promoted better mental health outcomes
- Across psychological outcomes, tolerance of anger and tolerance of sadness/depression produced the most consistent positive effects
- Prevention programs focused on increasing tolerance of negative emotions, with a particular focus on anger and sadness, might help improve mental health among first responders