

# BODY IMAGE-RELATED PSYCHOLOGICAL INFLEXIBILITY - A MODERATOR OF THE IMPACT OF BODY IMAGE

## DISCREPANCY IN WEIGHT CONCERN AND CONTROL BEHAVIOURS

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### Introduction

Extensive research has underlined the maladaptive character of **body image-related psychological inflexibility**, defined as the inability of wholly contacting feelings, thoughts, and beliefs about one's physical appearance in the present moment, accompanied by the engagement in strategies to alter their form, frequency and intensity (Sandoz & Wilson, 2006; Sandoz, Wilson, Merwin, & Kellum, 2013). As this strategy often results in the overvaluation of discomforting feelings and thoughts about one's appearance, it has been referred as being associated to unhealthy body-controlling strategies such as dieting (e.g., Ferreira, Pinto-Gouveia, & Duarte, 2013).

Taking together these premises, the present study aimed at analyzing the adequacy of a path model which hypothesized that body image-related psychological inflexibility acts as a moderator in the association of the perception of discrepancy between one's actual and idealized body appearance with body weight concerns and the intention of engaging in dieting behaviours.

### Methods

The sample of this study comprised **782 females from the Portuguese general population**. Participants were aged between 18 and 34 ( $M = 20,61$ ;  $SD = 2,18$ ). Body mass index values were in accordance with those found in the Portuguese population ( $M = 21,85$ ;  $SD = 3,14$ ).

Participants completed the following set of self-report measures:

- **Figure Rating Scale** (Fallon & Rozin, 1985; Thompson & Altabe, 1991; Ferreira, 2003) - to appraise **discrepancy between participants' actual and idealized body appearance (BID)**;
- **Body Image – Acceptance and Action Questionnaire** (Sandoz, Wilson, Merwin, & Kellum, 2013; Ferreira, Pinto-Gouveia, & Duarte, 2011) - to assess **body image-related psychological inflexibility (BIAAQ)**;
- **Dietary Intent Scale** (Stice, 2002; Mendes, Marta-Simões, Trindade, & Ferreira, 2016) - to evaluate **participants' intention to engage in dieting behaviors (DIS)**;
- **Eating Disorders Examination - Questionnaire** (Fairburn & Beglin, 1994; Machado et al., 2014) - to assess **pathological concern about one's weight (WeightC)**.

Descriptive and correlation analyses were conducted to explore the characteristics of the sample and associations between variables. To evaluate the moderator role of body image-related psychological inflexibility, a **path analysis** was performed (Figure 1). Finally, in order to further understand the results of the path analysis, two **graphic representations** were plotted (Figures 2 and 3).

### Results

Path analysis' results (Figure 1) showed that both body image discrepancy and body image psychological inflexibility have a positive direct effect on weight concern and dietary intent. The effects of the interaction term BID x BIAAQ on weight concern ( $\beta = .13$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and dietary intent ( $\beta = -.14$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were significant, thus **suggesting that body image psychological inflexibility acts as a moderator** in these relationships. The model presented an excellent fit to empirical data and accounted for the explanation of 54% and 47% of the variances of weight concern and dietary intent, respectively.

The first graphical representation (Figure 2) allowed to observe that body image psychological inflexibility acts as an **exacerbator** of the relationship between body image discrepancy and weight concern. Specifically, for any level of body image discrepancy (low, medium or high), women who presented higher levels of body image psychological inflexibility reported higher weight concern. The same was verified for the relationship between body image discrepancy and dietary intent (Figure 3): body image psychological inflexibility acts as an **exacerbator** of the aforementioned relationship since that, for any level of body image discrepancy (low, medium or high), women who showed higher levels of body image psychological inflexibility presented higher levels of dietary intent.

### Discussion

By revealing the moderator role of psychological inflexibility related to body image on both relationships of body image discrepancy with weight concern and with dietary intention, the present study underlines the previously found in literature (Ferreira et al., 2013; Sandoz et al., 2013) non-adaptive and malign character of being unable to fully contact appearance-related internal events in the present moment. Specifically, results showed that **for any level of body image discrepancy, women who were more inflexible towards body image-related internal events revealed higher concern about their weight and more marked intentions to engage in dieting practices**, which are considered important risk factors for the development of eating disorders.

The present results may be particularly important for the construction of **intervention programs for the promotion of a balanced and healthy relationship with body image** in women, which might benefit from targeting body image inflexibility.

### References

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- Sandoz, E. K., & Wilson, K. G. (2006, July). *Body Image Acceptance Questionnaire: Embracing 'Normative Discontent'*. Paper presented at the Association for Contextual Behavioral Science ACT/RFT World Conference, London, England.
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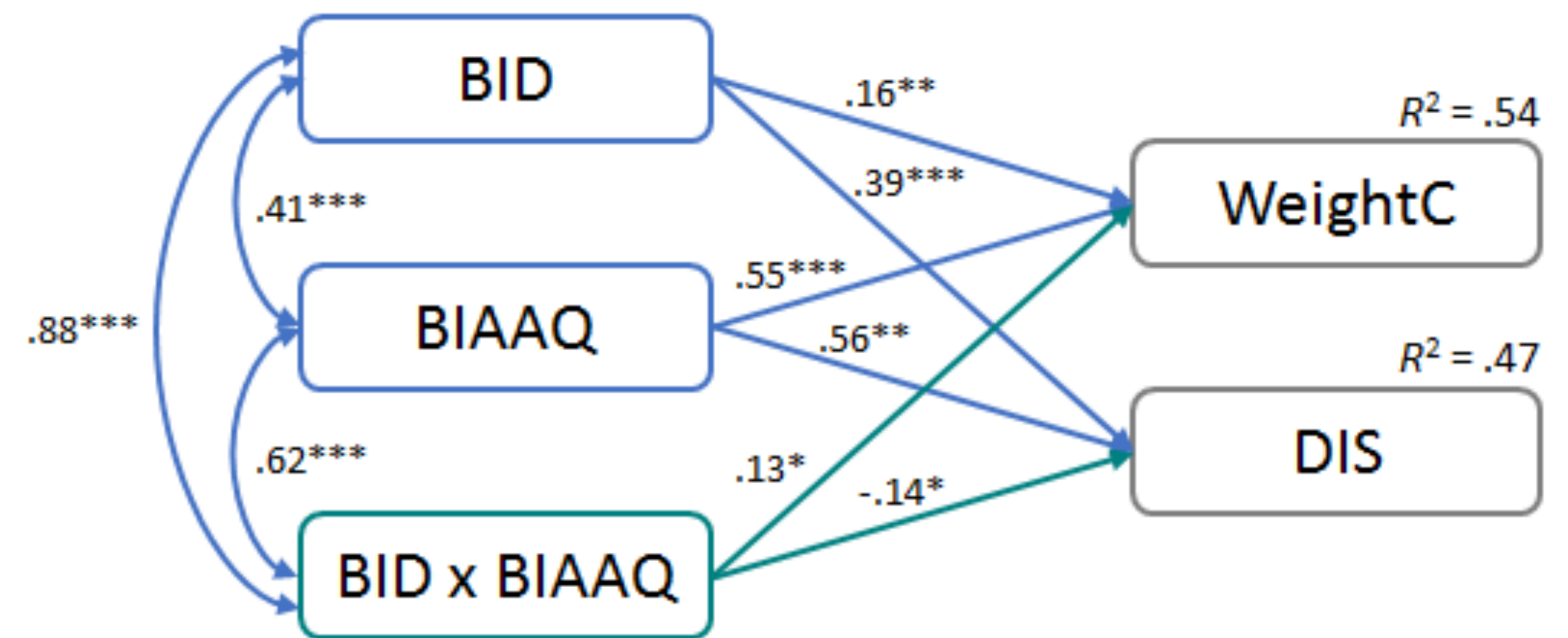


Figure 1.

Note. \* $p < .05$ ; \*\* $p < .01$ ; \*\*\* $p < .001$ .

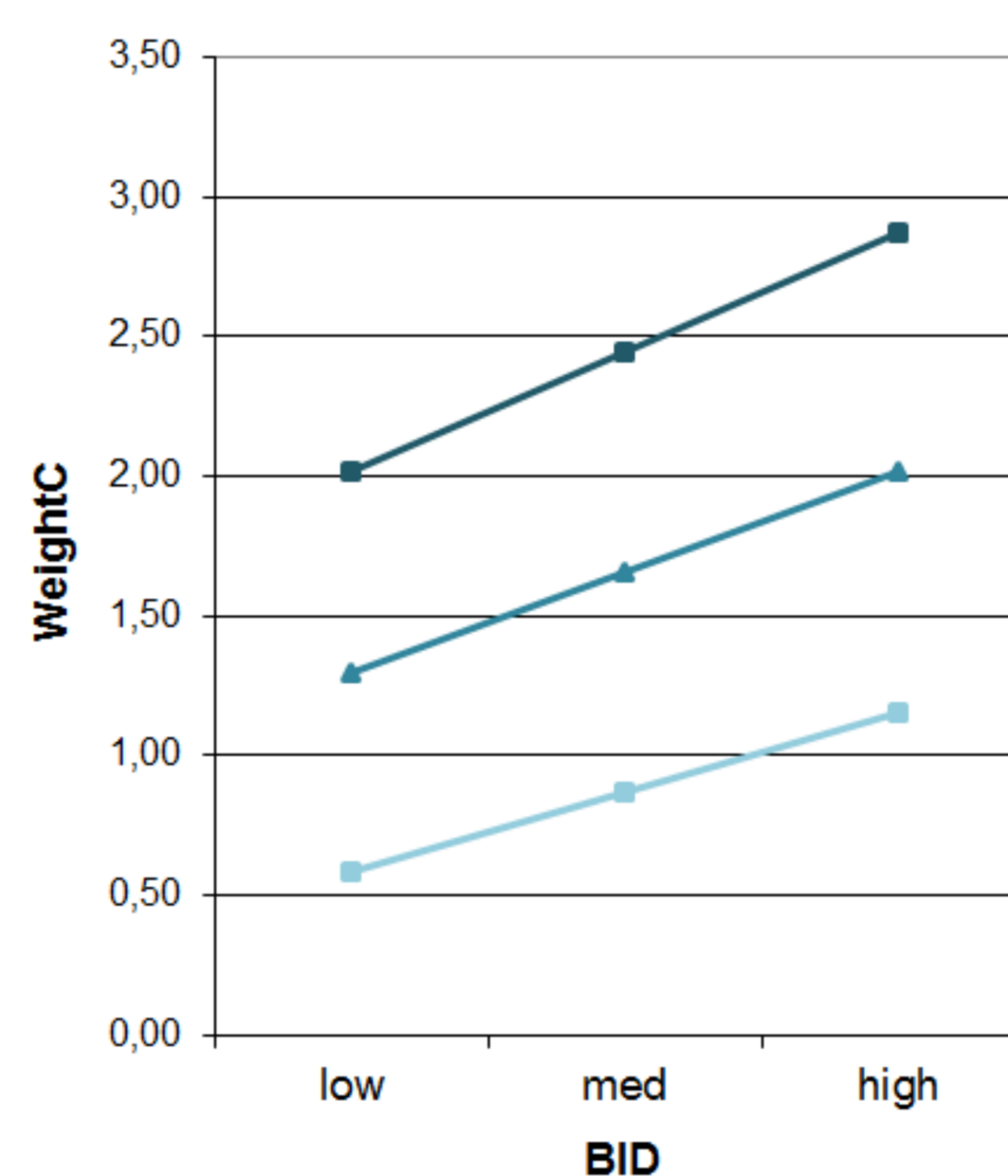


Figure 2.

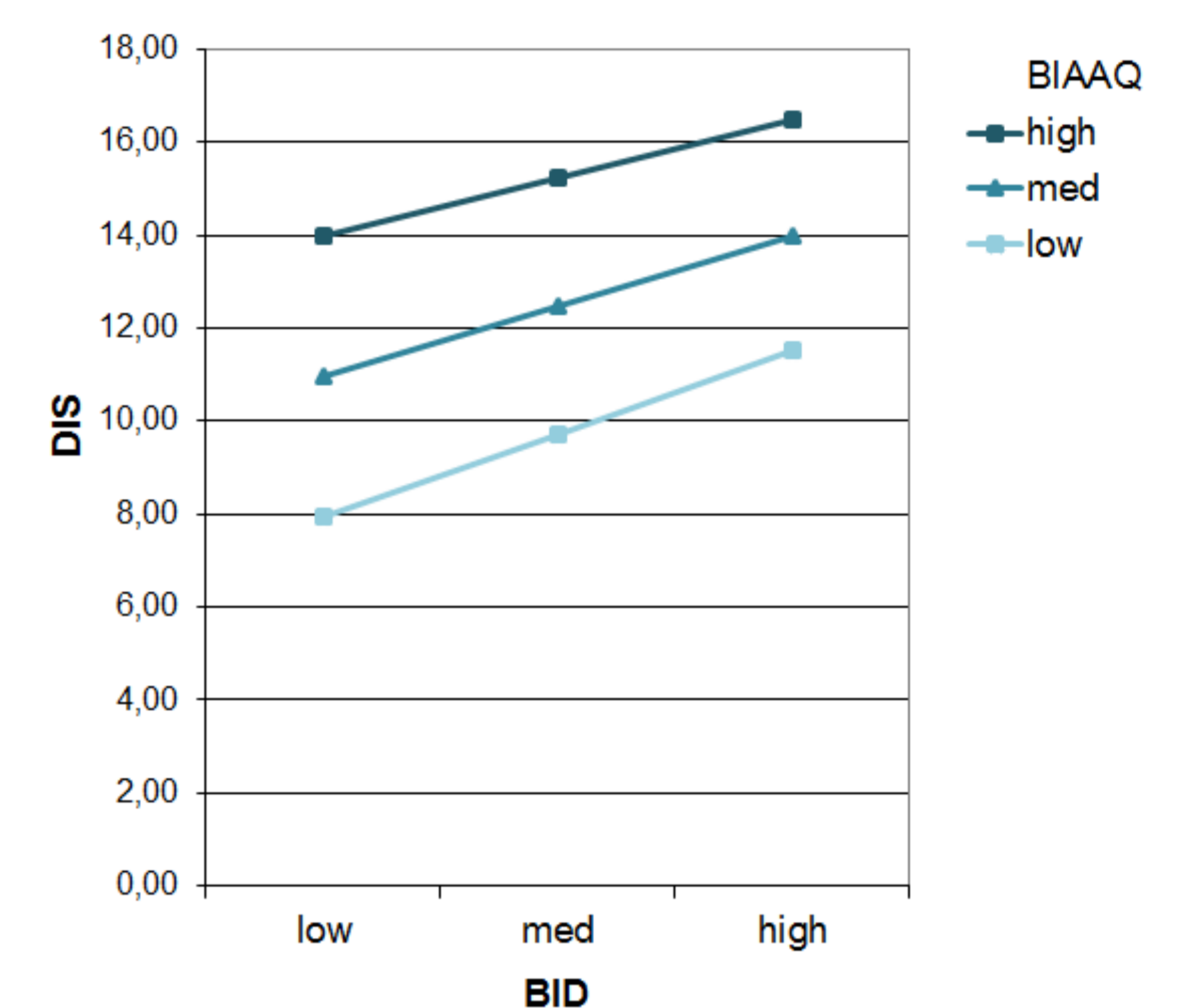


Figure 3.