Maternal Emotion Coaching and Depressive Symptoms and Children’s Problem Behaviors
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Introduction

• Emotion socialization strategies mothers use with their children impact children’s socioemotional competence, such as internalizing and externalizing behavior problems (Eisenberg, Cumberland, & Spinrad, 1998).

• Maternal emotion socialization strategies may be particularly important for children of depressed mothers, as depressed mothers often show deficits in parenting and their children tend to have elevated behavior problems (Goodman, 2007).

• Studies on depressed mothers’ emotion socialization strategies are scarce.

• The present study examined how maternal emotion coaching and depressive symptoms were associated with children’s internalizing and externalizing behavior problems, and whether mothers’ emotion coaching served as a protective factors for children of depressed mothers.

Research Questions

• How are mothers’ emotion socialization strategies associated with children’s externalizing and internalizing behaviors?

• How is maternal depression associated with children’s externalizing and/or internalizing behaviors?

• Do mothers’ emotion coaching strategies moderate the association between maternal depression and children’s use of externalizing and/or internalizing behaviors?

Participants

• 74 mother-child dyads were recruited for this study

• 43 of the mothers had depressive symptoms above the clinical cutoff

• Mother’s mean age was 31.56 years (SD = 6.00)

• 66.2% mothers were Caucasian American, while 28.4% were African American

• 59.5% mothers had at least a bachelor’s or associates degree

• 55.6% had an annual household income of at least $40,000

• Children’s mean age was 3.24 years (SD = .2)

Measures

• Children’s internalizing and externalizing problems were assessed using mothers’ report on the Child Behavioral Checklist (CBCL; Achenbach & Rescorla, 2001)

• Mothers’ depressive symptoms were assessed using the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D; Radloff, 1997).

• Mother-child dyads were engaged in conversations about past events that made the child sad, angry, and scared during a laboratory visit. Maternal emotion coaching strategies were coded based on a coding system adapted from Gottman (1996) that measured mothers’ awareness and acceptance of children’s emotion, as well as their facilitation of children’s elaboration and problem-solving strategies.

Results

• Maternal depressive symptoms were directly associated with internalizing and externalizing behaviors, but emotion coaching was not directly associated with internalizing or externalizing problems.

• Depressed mothers who used more emotion coaching for child’s sadness and fear displayed lower levels of internalizing behaviors, and depressed mothers who used more emotion coaching for child’s anger displayed lower levels of externalizing behaviors.

Discussion

• The results of this study broaden our understanding about the effects of mothers’ emotion coaching on their children’s social and behavioral competence, and how mothers’ use of emotion coaching serves as a protective factor for the children’s negative social and behavioral outcomes associated with maternal depression.

• The results of this study can further inform research regarding interventions for mothers with depression.