The Effect of Acculturation on the Meaning of Mothers’ Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects of culture and acculturation in the way depressive affects manifest itself in parent-child interactions and affects child behavior problems.

METHOD

Participants

Mother-child dyads were referred to Parent Child Interaction Therapy (PCIT) for treatment of the child’s disruptive behaviors. Dyads were categorized according to the language the mothers spoke: 82 English-speaking or 48 Spanish-speaking.

Procedure

Mother-child dyads were assessed before entering PCIT treatment. Videotapes of a 15-minute observational assessment were coded for the mothers’ verbalizations using the Dyadic-Parent Interaction Coding System-II (DPICS-II; Eyberg, Bessmer, Newcomb, Eders, & Robinson, 1994): questions, reflections, acknowledgments, directives, commands, and critical statements.

RESULTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group Differences in Verbalizations</th>
<th>English-Speaking</th>
<th>Spanish-Speaking</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Verbalizations</td>
<td>2.68 (1.51)</td>
<td>1.10 (1.24) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Positive Verbalizations</td>
<td>1.13 (1.23)</td>
<td>0.55 (0.66) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Verbalizations</td>
<td>1.55 (1.09)</td>
<td>0.55 (0.71) ***</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neutral Verbalizations</td>
<td>0.99 (0.92)</td>
<td>0.54 (0.79) ***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to examine the differences between English- and Spanish-speaking Latino mother-child dyads, and to explore the influence that maternal depression has on the parent-child relationship and reported child behavior problems.

Analyzes of the demographic and risk characteristics showed substantial differences in the population of clinic-referred Latino children. English-speaking children showed a significant history of exposure to drugs and alcohol, neglect, foster care, and greater socioeconomic risk. However, mothers in both groups reported similar levels of depressive symptoms and child behavior problems.

Parents’ verbalization patterns were similar for English- and Spanish-speaking mothers, but Spanish-speaking mothers were not as talkative on the whole. Furthermore, greater numbers of depressive symptoms predicted different interaction styles, with more depressive English-speaking mothers showing more and more depressive Spanish-speaking mothers talking less. In spite of the different manifestation of depressive symptoms in their interactions with their children, greater depression and child risk predicted more child behavior problems and parenting stress in both groups of mothers. This suggests that although the way depression affects parent-child relationships may differ by cultural groups, its effects on parenting stress and children’s behavior problems is invariant.