

RELATIONSHIPS OF DEPRESSIVE SYMPTOMS AND ACCULTURATION IN LATINA MOTHERS AND THE SOCIO-EMOTIONAL HEALTH OF THEIR INFANTS AND TODDLERS

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Purpose: This is a descriptive analysis of initial data from a clinical trial of an in-home psychiatric nursing-Early Head Start (EHS) partnership intervention study designed to treat depressive symptoms in mono-lingual (Spanish-speaking only) Latina mothers. The purpose of this analysis was to compare Latina mothers who had significant depressive symptoms with a group of Latina mothers without depressive symptoms on acculturation levels and infant/toddler socio-emotional health.

Method: In the first wave of data collection, low-income monolingual Latina mothers participating in EHS programs or eligible to participate in EHS were surveyed regarding depressive symptoms, acculturation, partner support, infant socio-emotional health, and other socio-demographic characteristics. This analysis used data from the first 43 interviews, 17 mothers without and 26 mothers with significant depressive symptoms, to examine relationships among depressive symptoms, acculturation level, and infant socio-emotional health. Spanish version measures included the Center for Epidemiological Studies Depression Scale (CES-D), the Marin Acculturation Scale, the Psychological Acculturation Scale (PAS), a modified Parenting Stress Index (Parental Distress, Parent-Child Dysfunctional Interaction, Total Stress subscales), a modified Child Behavior Checklist (Aggressive Behavior subscale), and a baseline demographic interview. To compensate for literacy differences among mothers, all measures were read aloud to the mothers. Mothers were given visual response set cards and were asked to point to the answer of their choice. Data collectors were fluently bilingual and sensitive to Latino cultural practices and norms.

Findings: Significant differences existed between mothers with and without depressive symptoms on parenting distress and parent-child dysfunctional interaction, with symptomatic mothers scoring higher on these dimensions. Aggression was higher in toddlers of symptomatic mothers. Demographic characteristics also differed significantly between the two groups – symptomatic mothers were in the USA fewer years, were younger, had more children under the age of 6 years, were working full-time and had poorer health. Symptomatic mothers were significantly different on social support dimensions – more of them had no partner at home and poor/fair partner support. Both groups were newly-arrived and thus, psychological and language acculturation was not significantly different.

Discussion: In this sample of EHS Latina mothers, already isolated due to their monolingual Spanish-speaking status, additional stressors accompanied their elevated depressive symptoms. Early Head Start provides a critical link to improvement in their adjustment to life in the U.S. by facilitating their acquisition of English, improving their social support and guiding them to be successful parents.

EHS Latina Mothers: Reducing Depression and Improving Infant/Toddler Mental Health (ALAS [Wings] Project)

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