Abstract

Previous research on maternal speech and depression has focused almost exclusively on how depressed mothers talk to their infants and toddlers in the U.S. and U.K., two English-speaking countries. This study considered how depressed Spanish-speaking mothers from a Latin American country talk about their preschool-age children. Five-minute speech samples were provided by 178 Chilean mothers who were asked to talk about their 5½-year-old children to a project psychologist. Maternal depressive symptomatology was measured by the Spanish-language version of the Center for Epidemiologic Studies Depression Scale (CES-D). In multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA), higher maternal depressed mood showed statistically significant associations with the following maternal speech characteristics: more criticisms, less laughter, fewer medium pauses, less positive satisfaction with the child's behavior or characteristics, a rating of a negative overall relationship with the child, and more crying (suggestive trend). A structural equation model confirmed these findings and found an indirect effect between laughter and criticisms: mothers with higher depressed mood who laughed less criticized their children less. The findings illustrate that depressed mood adversely affects how a group of Chilean mothers speak about their children.

Keywords

Depressed mood, Speech, Maternal, Latin American.