



## MT. HOPE FAMILY CENTER

# RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

### **Background Information:**

Mothers who were maltreated as children are at greater risk for developing depression as adults, especially in the early years of their child's life. A mother's experience of maltreatment in her own childhood, and her feelings of sadness, can impact her sensitivity toward her baby.

Less sensitivity from mothers can be harmful to children's attachment and development.

### **What is the MIGHT study?**

MIGHT is a study of mothers and babies who were experiencing limited access to financial resources. The majority of participants were families of color and the majority of mothers were coping with depression.

The purpose of this study was to learn about how a mother's childhood adversity and mental health impacted her child's early development.

### **Here's a quick summary of what we found:**

- Mothers who were maltreated as children were more likely to have babies with disorganized attachment. This means the babies showed disoriented and fearful behavior around their mothers.
- Disorganized attachment in young children is concerning because it's a sign of a breakdown in the parent-child relationship. As children with disorganized attachment grow, they may have trouble managing their feelings, problems with friends, and mental health challenges.
- This study found that part of the reason mothers who experienced maltreatment in their own childhoods are more likely to have babies with disorganized attachment and behavior problems is because of their own feelings of sadness. Because of their own challenges, mothers experiencing depression may have a harder time being sensitive, soothing, and attuned to their babies.

### **Why does this research matter??**

- The majority of mothers in this study were women of color. It's important to recognize that in addition to experiences of child maltreatment, they also face the added traumas of discrimination and disparities in access to care which can contribute to depression and ongoing stress.
- If we offer mothers supportive services that address 1) their depression, and 2) their experiences of maltreatment in their childhood, we can prevent challenges in the next generation.
- Interpersonal psychotherapy (IPT) is a talking form of therapy that focuses on relationships and social supports. Research from Mt. Hope Family Center has shown that IPT is helpful to families of color in which the mother is dealing with depression (Toth et al., 2015; Handley et al., 2017). Helping mothers overcome depression can lead to improved well-being for the entire family.
- Prenatal care providers such as doctors, nurses, midwives, social workers, and community health workers who support pregnant women can partner with pregnant women to identify mothers at risk for depression, especially if they were maltreated as children, and offer connections to support services.

## WANT TO LEARN MORE? READ:

[Developmental pathways from maternal history of childhood maltreatment and maternal depression to toddler attachment and early childhood behavioral outcomes](#)

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