



## MT. HOPE FAMILY CENTER

# RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT

### **Background Information:**

Mothers with histories of alcohol dependence often struggle in their parenting role, specifically when responding to their children's emotional needs. Few studies have examined the ways these mothers respond when their children express vulnerable emotions like sadness or fear. Even fewer have linked those caregiving behaviors to children's risk for future mental health problems.

### **What is the Project FUTURE study?**

Project FUTURE is a 3-year study examining family conflict and child development in a majority Black and Latino/a/x sample of 201 two-year-old children and their mothers. We used these data to address the following questions:

- How do mothers with alcohol dependence respond to their children's emotional distress?
- Does maternal alcohol dependence affect mothers' responses in different ways?
- How do these mothers' responses impact children's risk for future psychological problems?

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

- Mothers with alcohol dependence symptoms may struggle to identify, process, and sensitively respond to their children's expressions of sadness or fearfulness.
- Maternal alcohol dependence was associated with increased emotional disengagement and was not associated with intrusive, domineering or overstimulating parenting in response to children's distress.
- Children displayed more symptoms of anxiety (such as nervousness) when their mothers were more intrusive and domineering.
- Children are an increased risk to experience depressive symptoms across early childhood (such loss of interest in activities) when their mothers are emotionally disengaged.

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

- Our study demonstrates that alcohol dependence affects mothers in dynamic ways, with mothers more likely to become emotionally disengaged and emotionally unavailable when their children are sad or fearful than they are to become intrusive, overstimulating, or domineering.
- We hope our work informs interventions for Black and Latino/a/x mothers with alcohol dependence to help increase awareness of their children's emotions and emotional needs.
- Our findings highlight the need for interventions for Black and Latino/a/x children of mothers with alcohol dependence to better identify and target the signs of early childhood emotional challenges and prevent serious mental health issues from developing. Child parent psychotherapy (CPP) is one treatment that can help improve mothers' sensitivity to their children's emotions.
- Future research that continues to center the experiences of Black and Latino/a/x families in culturally informed ways may help us better identify and address the unique needs, challenges, and experiences these families face.

### **WANT TO LEARN MORE? READ:**

**Parsing alcohol-dependent mothers' insensitivity to child distress: Longitudinal links with children's affective and anxiety problems** by Debielle Jacques, Melissa

Sturge-Apple, Patrick Davies, & Dante Cicchetti