

# Helping Children Overcome the Impact of Domestic Violence

Lynn Fainsilber Katz, Ph.D.

# Estimates of Domestic Violence

- Between 1 – 10 million women are battered each year
- Nearly 1 out of every 3 adult women experiences at least one physical assault by a partner during adulthood



APA, 2008; Bureau of Statistics Crime Data Brief, 2003; Rennison & Welchans, 2000; Straus, 1990; U.S. Department of Justice, 1997

# Forms of Domestic Violence

- Pushed/shoved
- Slapped
- Bit
- Kicked
- Choked
- Hit/punched
- Threatened
- Thrown objects
- Use weapon (knife, gun)
- Burned
- Pressured/coerced sex
- Restrained
- Hit with objects
- Acts of violence against property or pets
- Hostage taking
- Stalking
- Control of access to resources: money, car, etc

# Children Witnessing DV



15.5 million children witness DV each year

Exposure:

- 100% exposed
- 21% kids tell us they witnessed DV



Hughes, 1988; McDonald, Jouriles, Ramisetty-Mikler, Caetano, & Green, 2006; O'Brien, John, Margolin & Erel, 1994)

# Domestic Violence and Child Adjustment

- Associated with child behavior problems
  - Aggression
  - Delinquency
  - Depression
  - Anxiety

Edleson, 1999; Fantuzzo & Mohr, 1999; Margolin, 1998; Onyskiw, 2003; Rossman, 2001, Jouriles, Norwood, McDonald & Peters, 2001; Sternberg et al., 1993; Wolfe & Korsch, 1994

# Resilience

- Intraindividual factors (i.e., IQ)
- Parenting → having a good relationship with at least one parent
- Social support → grandparent, neighbor

Masten, 1984; Rutter, 1995

# Parenting in the Context of Domestic Violence

- Increased parenting stress levels
- Lower levels of parental warmth and nurturance
- Lower parenting effectiveness
- Higher rates of parent-child aggression

Graham-Bermann & Levendosky, 1998; Jouriles & Norwood, 1995; Levendosky & Graham-Bermann, 1998; McCloskey, Figuerado & Koss, 1995

# Blaming the Victim ?

- Focus on *negative* parenting that increases the risk of maladjustment
- Not describing the *positive* strategies that mothers can use to help

# Parental socialization of emotion

- Teach children about appropriate emotional expression and regulation
- Exposure to hostile and threatening interactions that can be highly emotionally arousing
  - High negative affect and reciprocity
- Power and Control

# Approaches to Emotion Socialization

- Emotion Coaching
  - Aware of Low Intensity Emotions
  - Validate Child's Emotions
  - Child's Emotions as Opportunity for Intimacy or Teaching
  - Verbal Labeling of Child's Emotion
  - Problem Solve
- Emotion Dismissing
  - Deny or ignore emotion
  - Change negative emotion quickly
  - Emotion is not important

# Emotion Coaching and Family Interaction

- Marriage
  - Less hostility
  - More happily married
  - Lower likelihood of marital dissolution
- Parenting
  - Less rejecting
  - More scaffolding/praising

Gottman, Katz & Hooven, 1997; Hooven, Gottman & Katz, 1996; Katz, Gottman & Hooven, 1996

# Emotion Coaching and Child Adjustment

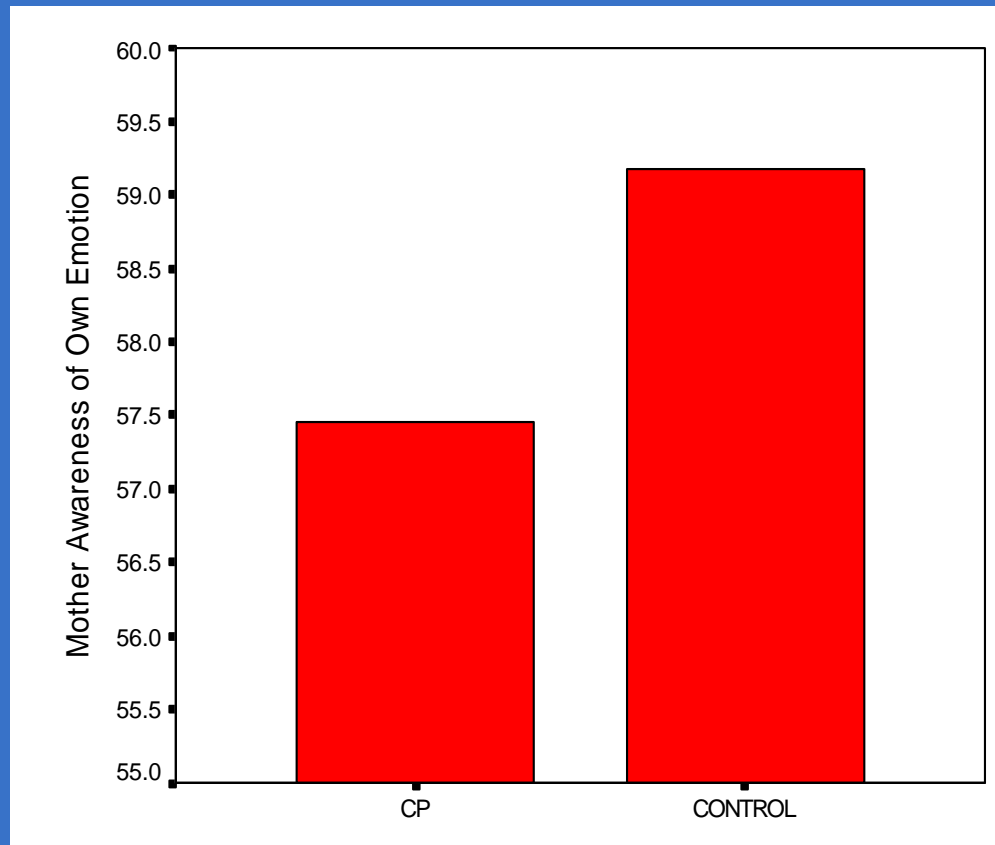
- Less physiological stress
- Greater physiological regulatory abilities
- Greater ability to focus attention
- Less negative peer interaction
- Less physical illness
- Higher academic achievement

Gottman, Katz & Hooven, 1997; Hooven, Gottman & Katz, 1996; Katz, Gottman & Hooven, 1996

# Replication with Conduct-Problem Children

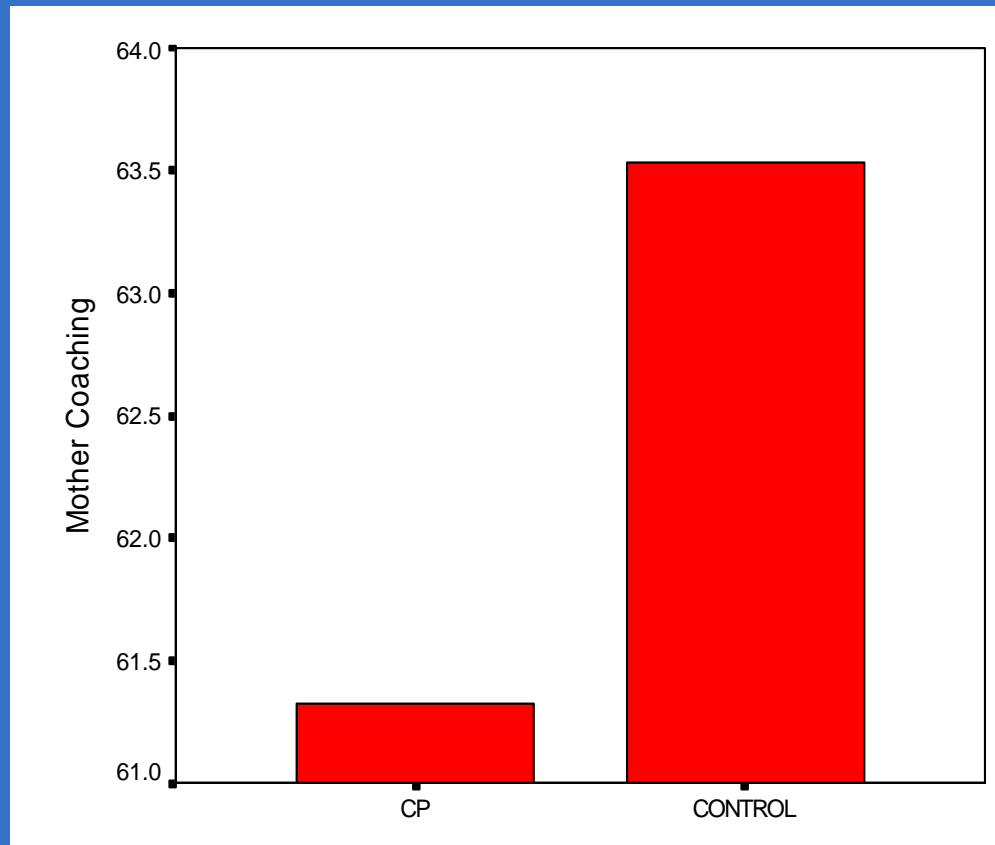
- Are parents of CP children less emotion coaching ?
- Does emotion coaching help CP children exhibit better skills with peers ?
  - Disconnected play
  - High level play

# Mothers of Conduct Problem children were less aware of own emotion

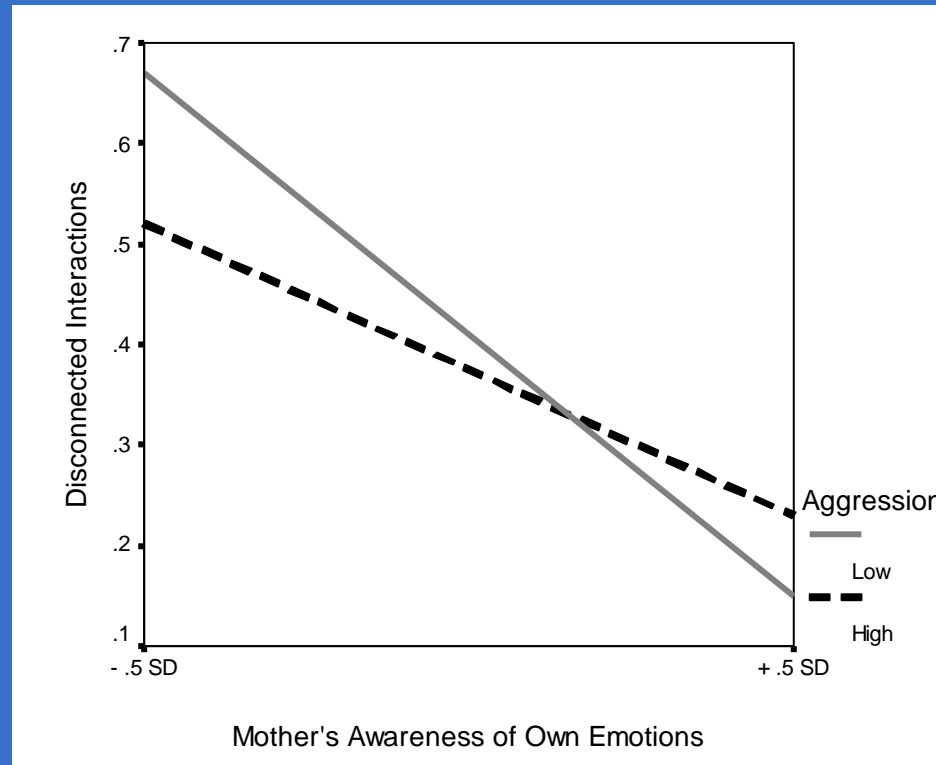


Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004

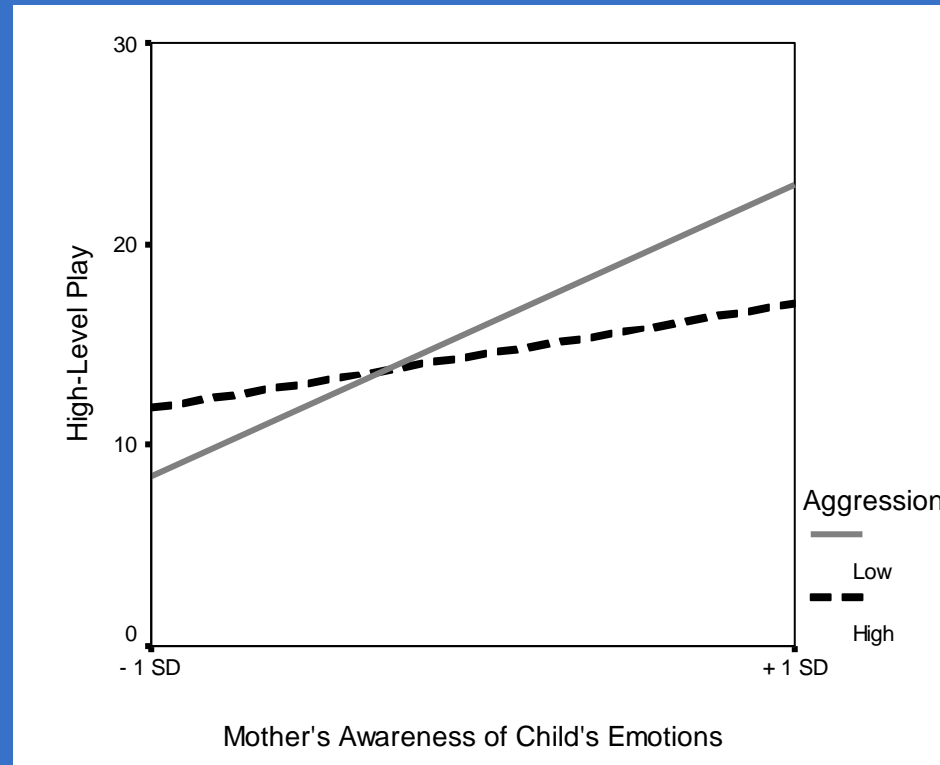
# Mothers of CP kids less coaching of child emotion



Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004



High maternal awareness of own emotions associated with less disconnected play in CP and non-CP children (Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004)



High mother awareness of child emotions associated with more high-level play in CP and non-CP children (Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2004)

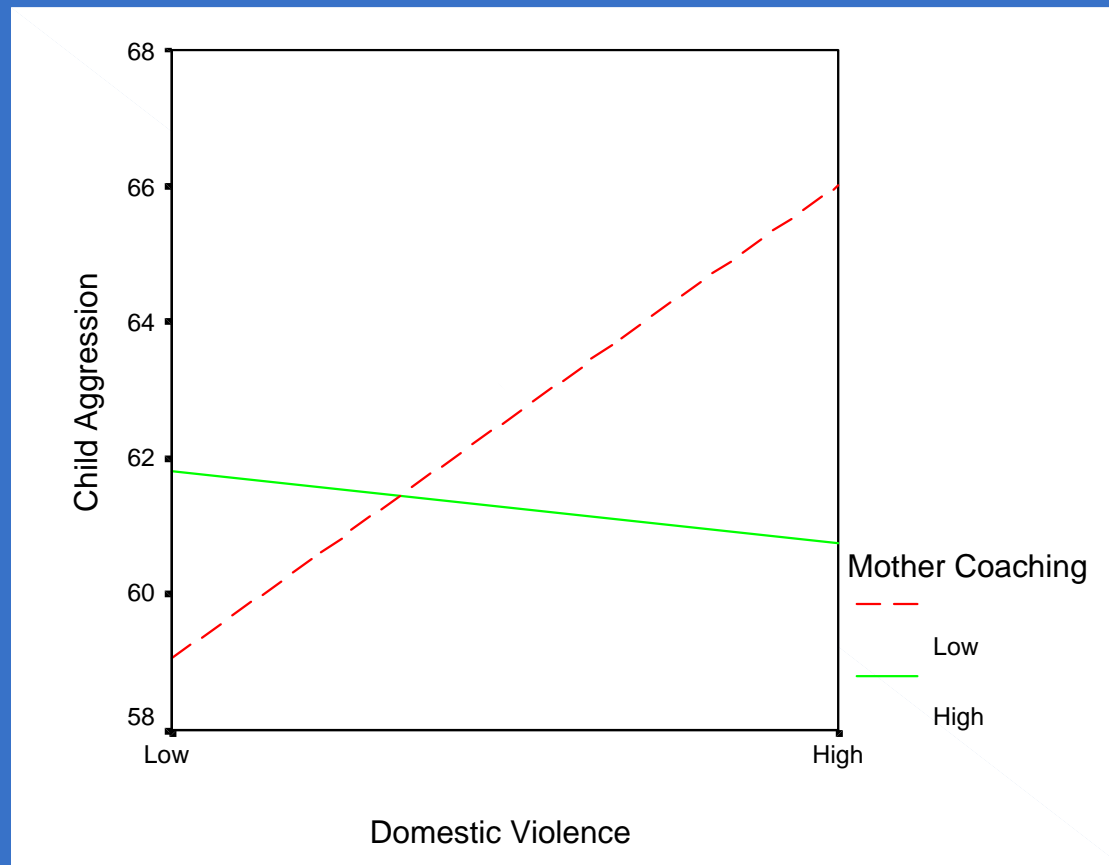
# Domestic Violence and Emotion Coaching

- Are survivors less emotion coaching than non-survivors ?
- Does emotion coaching reduce problem behaviors in DV-exposed children?

## Main findings (Katz & Windecker-Nelson, 2006)

- There were no differences in emotion coaching in battered women and women who had not experienced domestic violence
- *But*, when battered women were emotion coaching, their children showed fewer behavior problems (e.g., aggression, depression, withdrawal)

# Domestic Violence and Emotion Coaching



# Excerpts from Transcripts

# From Understanding to Helping

Implications for Helping Children Exposed  
to Domestic Violence

# Why develop an evidence-based parenting program ?

- Only 2 evidence-based program parenting program specific to DV

# Why does it matter if program is evidence-based ?

- Programs being used but don't know if work
  - Some may be doing nothing
  - Some may be helping but we don't know how or how much
  - At worst, harming people
- If put resources into program, want to know that it's helpful

# In our work

- Building an emotion coaching parenting intervention
  - Goals:
    - Reduce problem behaviors in children
    - Improve the quality of the parent-child relationship
      - Builds trust
      - Sets the stage for intimacy
      - Conveys to child that parent is on their side
    - Increase children's emotional competence
      - Teach children how to self-soothe
  - Approach:
    - Skills-based approach
    - Leads to changes in parenting behavior

# Overview of Emotion Coaching Program

# Overview of Emotion Coaching Parenting Program

- Week 1: Introduction
  - Introductions, goal-setting
- Weeks 2 & 3: Mother's Awareness of Emotion
  - Expanding emotion vocabulary; labeling emotion
  - Identifying behavioral expressions of emotion

# Overview of Emotion Coaching Parenting Program (cont'd)

- Weeks 4-6: Mother's Acceptance of Emotion and Emotion Regulation Abilities
  - Identifying self-soothing strategies (proximal and distal strategies)
  - Becoming aware of own reactions to child's emotions

# Overview of Emotion Coaching Parenting Program (cont'd)

- Weeks 7-11: Emotion Coaching
  - Acknowledge and validate child feelings
  - Soothing: Providing calm, comfort and understanding
  - Dealing with an angry child
  - Talking about the abuse and the abuser
- Week 12: Wrap Up

# Sample Exercise

# Our assessments

- Talk to moms and kids
- Fill out questionnaires
- Look at how bodies respond
  
- Why do this ?

# Participation

- 2 initial assessments
- 12 week program
- Midpoint assessment
- End of program assessment
- 3 month follow-up
- Paid for assessments = up to \$285
- Childcare, bus tickets, meals provided during program

# Eligibility

- Out of the violent relationship for at least 6 months
- Child 6-12 years old
- Child - No developmental delays or Pervasive Developmental Disorder
- Comfortably use English to communicate with child

# We need your help

- Referring women to our program
- Hosting groups at your agency
- For further information:  
[katzlf@u.washington.edu](mailto:katzlf@u.washington.edu)