Toddler Sleep Problems, Co-Sleeping, and Maternal Sleep and Mental Health

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Background

Toddler Sleep Problems
- 20-30% of parents report concerns about their infants’ or toddlers' sleep.
- Toddler sleep problems are associated with insufficient maternal sleep and poor maternal mental health (i.e. increased stress and decreased sense of competence).

Co-Sleeping
- Defined as parent and child sleeping in the same bed and/or same room, but on separate sleeping surfaces.
- Associated with decreased maternal sleep quality and duration and poor maternal mental health.
- Likely to occur in minority, low-income households.

Purpose and Hypothesis

Purpose: To examine the effects of toddler sleep problems on maternal health symptoms (stress and sense of competence) through maternal sleep duration based on co-sleeping arrangement.

Hypothesis: Shortened maternal sleep duration mediates relations between toddler sleep problems and maternal stress and sense of competence, among mothers who co-sleep with their toddlers.

Methods

Sample: Biological mothers of toddlers (age 12-32 months) completed surveys as part of a larger RCT to prevent toddler obesity.

Measurement Tool | Concept Measured
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Brief Infant Sleep Questionnaire (BISQ) | Toddler sleep patterns and behaviors over the past week
Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) | Maternal sleep duration over the past month
Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) | Maternal stress symptoms
Parental Sense of Competence (PSOC) | Maternal sense of competence as a parent

Data Analysis

- Moderated mediation models were conducted to predict maternal symptoms of stress and parental sense of competence.
- SPSS macro PROCESS was used, controlling for poverty, maternal age and marital status.

Results

- Maternal sleep duration significantly mediated relations between toddler sleep problems and maternal stress and sense of competence.
- Specifically, toddler sleep problems were related to short maternal sleep duration, which in turn related to increased stress and decreased sense of competence.
- These associations were moderated by co-sleeping, such that short maternal sleep mediated relations between toddler sleep problems and mental health symptoms, only among co-sleeping mothers.

What We Learned

- Findings indicate that toddler sleep problems are associated with increased maternal stress and decreased sense of competence, mediated through maternal sleep duration.
- This relationship holds only when co-sleeping is occurring.
- Co-sleeping appears to be a vulnerability factor for mothers; in that it is related to increased mental health symptoms in the presence of adversity (i.e. toddler sleep problems).