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Does maternal autonomy support in infancy matter for child sleep in the preschool years?

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Introduction

A growing body of literature suggests that mother—child interactions play a role in **child sleep** (Tikotzky, 2017).

Maternal autonomy support

- Supporting children's autonomy rather than using controlling behaviors (Grolnick et al., 2002)
- Rarely assessed **longitudinally** using **observational** measures (Vasquez et al., 2015)
- Could foster **child sleep** by promoting emotional security and self-regulatory skills (Bordeleau et al., 2012)

Child sleep

- Actigraphy superior to parental reports, as it is free of parental subjective biases (Sadeh, 2015)

Aim

To investigate the longitudinal associations between observationally assessed **maternal autonomy support** in infancy, and actigraphy-derived **child sleep** at preschool age.

Method

- Low-risk community sample
- 58 mother—child dyads (32 boys)

Maternal autonomy support (*M* = 15.5 months; Whipple et al., 2010)

- 10 min. videotaped mother—child interactions
- Maternal behaviors coded for:

  1) Appropriate help
  2) Maternal verbalizations
  3) Perspective taking
  4) Supporting volition

- Scores are averages of 3 tasks (2 puzzles, a tower of blocks)
- Excellent inter-rater reliability (*ICC* = .97)

Child sleep (*M* = 4.1 years)

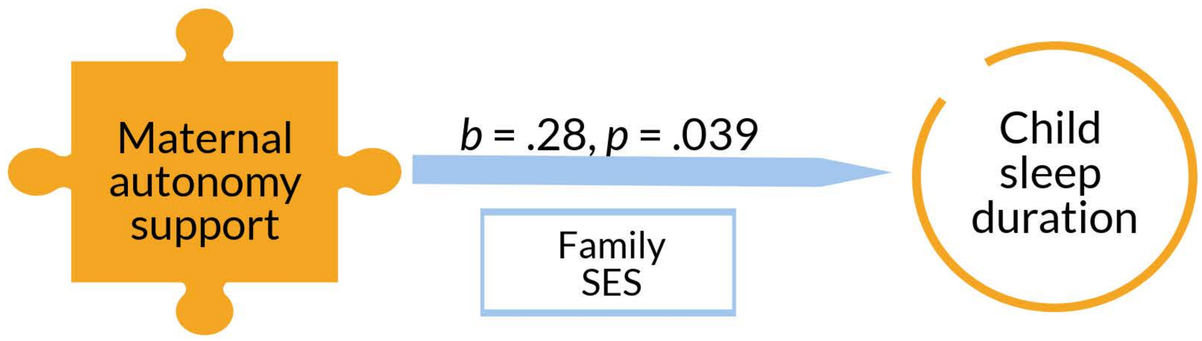
Sleep **duration**: Total number of minutes of sleep between sleep onset and offset
Sleep **efficiency**: Ratio of sleep to total time in bed

- Assessed 3 consecutive nights using **actigraphy** (Actiwatch-2, Mini Mitter Co. Inc., Philips Respironics Inc.)
- Sleep values are averages of the 3 nights
- Sleep diaries were used to double-check actigraphy-derived data (e.g. artefacts)

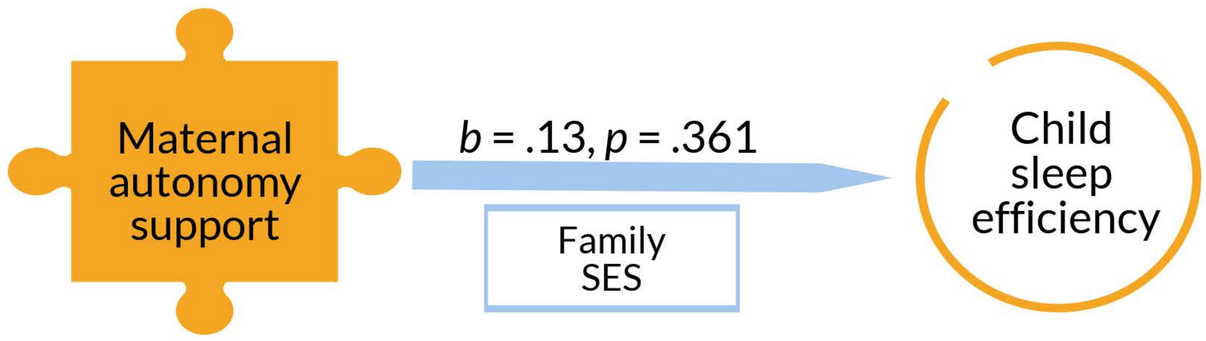
Results

Controlling for family socioeconomic status (**SES**),

- maternal autonomy support *significantly* predicted sleep duration.



- maternal autonomy support *did not* predict sleep efficiency.



Conclusion

Infants whose mothers were more autonomy supportive slept longer, but not more efficiently nearly three years later.

These findings reinforce the idea that positive mother—child relationships in infancy could foster child sleep at preschool age.

Inconclusive results with sleep efficiency suggest that it might not be as influenced by environmental factors as sleep duration.

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