

Fathers' involvement: Correlates and links to children's sleep



Émilie Tétreault, Élodie Larose-Grégoire, Annie Bernier, Marie-Ève Bélanger, & Julie Carrier

Department of Psychology, University of Montreal, Canada

e.tetreault@umontreal.ca



Introduction

- In contrast to maternal influences, paternal influences on young children's sleep have received little attention to date. Furthermore, much of this emerging research has focused on infancy only or has relied on subjective measures of children's sleep.
- One paternal factor that is hypothesized to contribute to children's sleep is the degree of fathers' involvement in children's care.
- In addition, it has been proposed that sociodemographic factors like mothers' and fathers' level of education, family income, and duration of paternity leave are associated with fathers' degree of involvement with their child (e.g. Coles, Hewitt, & Martin, 2015; Marsiglio, 1991)

Aims of the study

- The current study aimed to examine the associations between sociodemographic factors and paternal involvement, and then to investigate the associations between paternal involvement and child sleep during toddlerhood, a period that witnesses increased paternal involvement in child care and marked developments in child sleep.

Method

- Participants:** Forty-six father-infant dyads (50% girls) participated in this study
- Sociodemographic factors:** When children were 6 months old, mothers reported on their own and the child's father's level of education, their family income, and duration of the parental leave taken by the father.
- Father's involvement:** When children were 2 years old, fathers reported on their involvement in different spheres of their relationship with their toddler using the Montreal Father's Involvement Questionnaire (MFIQ; Paquette, Bolté, Turcotte, Dubeau, & Bouchard, 2000).
- Children's sleep:** When children were aged 3 years, child sleep was assessed objectively using an actigraph (a small computerized monitor that the child wore for three days). *Sleep duration at night* (total time spent asleep between sleep onset and offset on average) was derived from actigraphy.

Results

	Mother's education	Father's education	Family income	Duration of paternity leave
Dimensions of paternal involvement				
Emotional support	-.08	-.05	-.08	-.09
Evocation	-.21	-.03	-.06	-.23*
Discipline	.05	.11	-.09	-.20[†]
Basic care	.37**	.15	.12	.04

[†]p < .10; * p < .05; ** p < .01

Hierarchical Regressions Predicting Sleep Duration at Night from Level				Involvement					
Block	Predictors	R ² total	R ² unique	β	Block	Predictors	R ² total	R ² unique	β
1.	Covariates	6.6%	6.6%		1.	Covariates	6.6%	6.6%	
	Child sex			.16		Child sex			.16
	Gestational age			.33*		Gestational age			.33*
	Number of siblings			.31*		Number of siblings			.31*
	Child age			.01		Child age			.01
2.	Paternal involvement	25.2%	18.6%		2.	Paternal involvement	22.0%	15.4%	
	Involvement in home chores			.01		Involvement in home chores			-.14
	Emotional support			.51**		Evocation			.50**

* p < .05; ** p < .01

Results

Three aspects of paternal involvement were unrelated either to sociodemographic factors or to child sleep, : Opening to the world, Physical play, and Discipline.

Discussion

Sociodemographic factors and fathers' involvement

- Maternal education** was associated with more paternal involvement in basic care.
- Duration of paternity leave** was associated, for the father, with **evoking** his child less often and with a marginally lower involvement in his child's discipline.

Fathers' involvement and children's sleep

- Fathers who reported **engaging more frequently in emotional support** with their 2 year-old child, and those who reported **evoking the child more often**, had children who slept longer at night one year later.
- The current findings tend to suggest that **fathers' perceived emotional engagement** with their children, rather than their involvement in roles traditionally seen as "more paternal", **may be a key aspect of fathering** likely to play a role in the **development of young children's sleep patterns**
- These results are among the first to suggest potential paternal influences on children's sleep after the infancy period.

References

- Coles, L., Hewitt, B., & Martin, B. (2015). Fatherhood in the 21st Century: Who are the fathers who combine long work hours and caring for children?. In *Refereed Proceedings of TASA 2015 Conference*, p. 66.
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- Paquette, D., Bolté, C., Turcotte, G., Dubeau, D., & Bouchard, C. (2000). A new typology of fathering: Defining and associated variables. *Infant & Child Development*, 9, 213-230.

