

Daytime father-child interactions and young children's sleep

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Introduction

- **Parent-child relationships' quality** is associated with young children's sleep duration and quality.
 - Research is largely based on the study of mother-child relationships.
- **Father-child relationships** are also proposed to be important for child sleep (e.g., Erath & Tu, 2011)
 - They could even playing a special role due to fathers' unique parenting styles (Sadeh, 2005).

Aim of the current study

- **Examine the associations between the quality of father-child interactions and children's subsequent sleep** at the age of 2, a period that witnesses many of the most important developments in sleep (Acebo et al., 2005; National Sleep Foundation, 2004).
- It was expected that **higher-quality father-child interactions would be related to more optimal sleep patterns** in children.

Method

Participants

- 53 father-child dyads (28 girls)
- Normative sample from the longitudinal project Grandir Ensemble

Measures

• Paternal Autonomy Support (15 months):

- Fathers completed the Parental Autonomy Support Scale (Mageau et al., 2014)
- To assess their autonomy-supportive behaviors in their interactions with their child.

• Father-Child Interactions (18 months):

- A 10-minute videotaped free-play sequence
- Coded with the Mutual Responsiveness Orientation scale (Aksan et al., 2006)

• Children's Sleep (24 months):

- Children wore an actigraph monitor, an objective sleep measure based on motor activity
- For three consecutive days

Results

Partial Correlations between Paternal Behaviors and Children's Sleep (2 years)

	Night awakenings length	Sleep efficiency	Duration of daytime sleep	Total 24h sleep duration	Proportion of nighttime sleep
Paternal Autonomy Support (15 months)	-.04	.03	-.35*	-.29^t	.34*
Father-Child Interactions (18 months)	.40**	-.40**	.03	-.14	.10

^t $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$

Note. Sleep values are averages of the three days of data. All partial correlations controlled for family income and fathers' education level.

Discussion

• Paternal self-reported autonomy support was linked to

- shorter daytime and total sleep duration
- greater proportion of sleep occurring at night

➔ **More optimal organization of sleep/wake cycles on a 24-hour period**

- It could be that fathers who support their child's autonomy thereby support the development of self-regulatory capacity, which leads to a more mature organization of sleep patterns.

• Quality of father-child interactions was associated with

- longer night awakenings
- poorer sleep efficiency

➔ **Lower sleep quality**

- Children involved in more pleasant interactions during the day may turn night awakenings into opportunities to interact with their parent, resulting in longer awakenings and lower sleep efficiency (as proposed by Scher, 2001).

Results suggest potential paternal influences on young children's sleep.



References

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