

FEATURED ARTICLE



SURVEY OF MOTHERS' SLEEP AND FATIGUE: PRELIMINARY FINDINGS

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In July 2008, we launched our online Survey of Mothers' Sleep and Fatigue, and we asked for your help in recruiting mothers. Our study is timely. Bed sharing is once again in the news this week, as results from a new paper warn that bed sharing increases the risk of accidental strangulation (Shapiro-Mendoza et al., *Pediatrics*, 2009). We decided to conduct our study because we were concerned that many of the policies around co-sleeping and bedsharing were made with limited empirical data about how the majority of mothers and babies actually sleep. Indeed, many of the cautions about bed sharing come from studies of infants who have died of SIDS. These cases are tragic, but in terms of policy-making, the samples are not necessarily representative of the practices of families around the world. They also often include a broad range of safe and unsafe practices grouped together. In order to make wise policy decisions, and the implications of those decisions on SIDS, we must know more about what average families are doing--and may or may not be telling their doctors.

Another concern we wanted to address in this study was whether nighttime breastfeeding increased risk of postpartum depression. There are an increasing number of books that tell mothers not to breastfeed at night in order to prevent depression. While this advice is well-intended, no one knows if it even works. We wanted to examine if there was a relationship between nighttime feedings, sleep deprivation, and depression, while accounting for other depression risk factors, such as trauma history, postpartum pain, and lack of support. All of these other factors can compromise sleep quality and increase daytime fatigue.

At the beginning of this study, we optimistically hoped that we would have a final sample of 1,500 mothers after a year of data collection. Instead, 6,418 mothers have completed our survey in the past six months—dramatically exceeding our wildest expectations. We have you to thank for this tremendous response. Below is a first look at the findings. We will present a vastly larger review at the Hartmann-Hale Conference this summer.

STUDY PARTICIPANTS

The sample was 6,418 mothers of infants ages 0-12 months (Mean age=6.96 months), from 60 countries. The largest group was from the U.S. (N=4,725), followed by Canada (N=416), the European Union/Eastern Europe (N=544), Australia and New Zealand (N=182), the Middle East (N=53), Central and South America (N=32), Asia (N=30), and Africa (N=12). The average current age of the mothers was 31.2. The women were primarily in their 20s and 30s: less than 1% were teens, 36% were 20-29, 59% were 30-39, 4% were 40-49, and one woman was 50. When asked about their age at their first births, the ages were younger, with a mean of 28.2: 4.2% were teens, 56.3% were 20-29, 38.3% were 30-39, and 1.3% were 40-49.

The sample was predominantly Caucasian (89.7% in the U.S. sample, 100% in Australia, 84% in New Zealand, 75% in Great Britain), 91% were married, and 97% were living with a partner. The sample was quite well educated, with 70% having a bachelor's degree or higher. We collected income data for the U.S. sample, and it was reasonably well distributed across categories: 2.6% (<\$15K), 4.7% (\$15-\$25K), 18% (\$26-50K), 21.3% (\$51-\$75K), 20% (\$76-\$100K), 17.5% (\$101-\$150K), 10.2% (>\$150), and 5.5% (declined to state).

Regarding feeding, 78.5% breastfeed, 18.6% combine breast and bottle feeding, and 2.9% formula-feed only. The high percentage of breastfeeding mothers is not surprising given the channels by which we recruited mothers. But we still have enough of a sample of formula-feeding mothers to allow some comparison (N=171).



INITIAL ANALYSIS

Our preliminary analysis were in three topic areas: where babies sleep, mothers' self-reported fatigue, and mothers' history of psychological trauma.

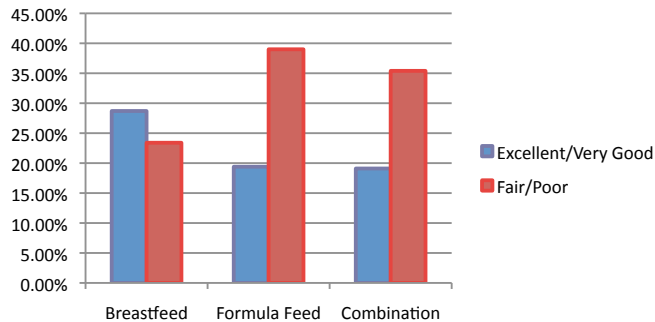
WHERE BABIES SLEEP

Interestingly, even with a predominantly breastfeeding sample, the respondents were not uniform in their belief that babies should share a bed or even be in the same room as mom: 44% indicated that their babies are in a crib in another room, 16.6% had babies in a crib or bassinet in their room, 4.8% in a co-sleeper, and 32.6% indicated that their babies were in their beds. In the U.S. sample, the percentage of bedsharing among African Americans (52%) and Mexican Americans (51%) was higher than the percentage Caucasian Americans (42%), consistent with other studies. Even comparing U.S. and Canadian mothers found slightly more babies in bed among the American vs. Canadian mothers. Our data has a lot more detail about babies' sleep arrangements that we will be analyzing in the next month or so.

TABLE 1

LOCATION	PERCENTAGE
CRIB IN ANOTHER ROOM	44.6%
CRIB, BASSINET IN MOTHER'S BEDROOM	16.6%
CO-SLEEPER	4.8%
IN MY BED	32.6%
SOMEPLACE ELSE	1.3%

Mothers' Fatigue by Feeding Method



MOTHERS' FATIGUE

Mothers' self-rated fatigue levels were spread evenly from "very fatigued" to "not at all fatigued." We found that fatigue varied by feeding method. When asked to rate their energy on most days, 28.7% of breastfeeding mothers rated their energy as excellent or very good, compared to 19.4% of formula feeding mothers, and 19.1% of women who combined methods. In looking at the other end of the scale, 23.4% of breastfeeding women described their energy level as fair or poor, compared with 39% of women who formula feed, and 35.4% of women who combined methods. Women's friends were twice as likely to think the women would get more rest if they formula fed than the women thought themselves.

MOTHERS' TRAUMA HISTORY

Trauma history can be an important predictor of fatigue in that it often compromises sleep quality. An astonishing 51.6% had experienced at least one type of traumatic event, and approximately one third had been exposed to parental substance abuse, mental illness, or intimate partner violence. Moreover, 13% reported rape or sexual assault. Not surprisingly, there were repercussions of these events. In our sample, 58.4% had been depressed, with 34.8% of those mothers having 3 or more episodes of depression. The good news is that almost all of the mothers reported happy, stable and safe relationships with their current partners.

We are very pleased with the amazing data set you have entrusted to our care. Our pledge to you is that we will get this research out in the field as soon as possible. Thanks again for your help with this study. We'll keep you posted on our progress.

TABLE 2

HAVE YOU EVER BEEN DEPRESSED?	
YES	58.4%
NO	41.6%

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