

Toddler co-sleeping not associated with developmental issues, study says

July 19 2011, by Deborah Braconnier

(Medical Xpress) -- Researchers from the Stony Brook University School of Medicine in New York, led by Lauren Hale, released a new study in the August issue of *Pediatrics* that shows bed-sharing or co-sleeping with your toddler does not lead to an increased risk in behavioral or learning problems later in life.

While the American Academy of Pediatrics does caution against co-sleeping in the first year due to the increased risk of [SIDS](#), or [sudden infant death syndrome](#). This new study looked at [toddlers](#) over the age of one.

Co-sleeping is common in many countries and cultures, but still remains relatively uncommon in America. Parenting experts cannot seem to come to a [consensus](#) regarding the topic with some being against it, some supporting it and the remainder unwilling to commit one way or another.

This new study looked at 944 low-income parent and toddler pairs. As a part of the Early Head Start Research and Evaluation Study, families were asked about sleeping arrangements each year between the years of age one and five. At age five, the child's behavioral, cognitive and social outcomes were evaluated by the researchers.

At first the results were revealing a connection between negative behaviors and bed-sharing however, when other factors such as socioeconomic status, maternal education, ethnicity and parenting style were assessed, the connection to co-sleeping was ruled out as a cause.

One area that was not evaluated by the researchers was the reasoning behind the co-sleeping to begin with and outside researchers believe this could be important information. If co-sleeping is occurring because of economic reasons such as a need to share beds or as a parenting style in order to bond with the child, this is less likely to create behavioral issues. However, if co-sleeping is a result of poor sleep or trouble sleeping, this could be a first sign of possible developmental disorders.

For parents out there who choose to co-sleep with their toddlers, this study does provide reassurance that they are not affecting the development of their child negatively.

More information: Mother-Child Bed-sharing in Toddlerhood and Cognitive and Behavioral Outcomes, by R. Gabriela Barajas, MA, et al., *Pediatrics*, [doi: 10.1542/peds.2010-3300](https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2010-3300)

ABSTRACT

Objective: We examined the predictors and consequences of mother-child bed-sharing at 1, 2, and 3 years of age in a racially/ethnically and geographically diverse sample of low-income families across the United States.

Methods: We analyzed data from 944 low-income families who had children assessed at 1, 2, 3, and 5 years of age.

Results: Mothers who were Hispanic and black were more likely to bed-share with children at ages 1, 2, and 3 years than other mothers.

Maternal negative regard also predicted bed-sharing. Bed-sharing at ages 1 to 3 years was bivariately associated with poorer behavior and cognition at age 5 years. However, these associations lost significance when child and mother characteristics were controlled.

Conclusion: There seem to be no negative associations between bed-sharing in toddlerhood and children's behavior and cognition at age 5 years.

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