

Bed sharing not as critical as claimed

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New research led by the University of Kent has found that there is no link between bed sharing, infant-mother attachment, and infant behavioral outcomes.

Contrary to previous beliefs that [bed sharing](#) is beneficial (or even

required) for [babies](#) to develop a secure attachment style and for mothers to develop a strong bond to their baby, researchers have found that it is neither associated with positive or negative outcomes related to infant attachment and maternal bonding.

There is a lot of controversial debate about bed sharing by parents and the infant sleep literature, in particular. Notably, researchers and practitioners recommend against bed sharing, particularly before four months of age due to the increased risk of Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS).

In reality, parents quite often share their bed with their baby due to several reasons such as practicality and breastfeeding, or because they follow the idea of 'attachment parenting'.

The [research paper](#), published by the *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics*, analyses data from 178 infants and their parents, at term, three, six and eighteen months. No associations between bed sharing during the first six months and infant-mother attachment and infant behavioral outcomes (attention levels/hyperactivity and task persistence) at eighteen months were found. Similarly, there were no associations between bed sharing during the first six months and maternal bonding and sensitivity in interacting with the infant at consequent assessment points.

This new study, led by Dr. Ayten Bilgin (Kent's School of Psychology) alongside Professor Dieter Wolke, Professor of Developmental Psychology and Individual Differences at the University of Warwick concludes that longer follow-up studies on effects on child development may be required.

Dr. Bilgin says that "a lot of people think that bed sharing is necessary to promote secure attachment with [infants](#). However, there is little research

in this area and quite mixed evidence. More insight into the outcomes of bed sharing is required to better inform parents, guardians and practitioners."

Professor Wolke explains that "Around a third of all [parents](#) share their bed with their infant during the first 18 months of life occasionally to most nights in this UK study. We found the practice was associated with ease of breastfeeding and dealing with night waking of the baby."

More information: Ayten Bilgin et al, Bed-Sharing in the First 6 Months, *Journal of Developmental & Behavioral Pediatrics* (2021). [DOI: 10.1097/DBP.0000000000000966](#)

Provided by University of Kent

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