

Ethnically diverse mothers, children living in poverty at risk for sleep problems

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African-American and other ethnically diverse mothers know the value of a good night's sleep, but they and their young children are at risk for developing sleep problems if they live in urban poverty, a Rutgers study finds.

The study, published in the *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, looked at the sleeping patterns of 32 women and their children ages, 15 months to 5 years, who were enrolled in a program for families at or below the poverty line in Newark, New Jersey.

The majority of the mothers said their children typically slept 10 hours a night on average and considered this normal, although that is slightly below the recommended amount for toddlers and [preschool children](#), as more [sleep](#) is encouraged.

The recommended [sleep time](#) for toddlers is between 11 to 14 hours, while that of preschoolers is 10 to 13 hours. Previous research shows that good sleep quality is critical to children's health, growth and development, and that children who live in poor urban neighborhoods are especially vulnerable to sleep difficulties.

"Many mothers know sleep is important for themselves and their children, which is why many learn sleep strategies from their own families—whether effective or ineffective," said lead author Professor Barbara Caldwell, director of the Psychiatric Mental Health Advanced Practice Nursing at Rutgers School Of Nursing. "These mothers showed enthusiasm in improving sleep habits for themselves and their children, providing an opportunity for behavioral and educational interventions that meet their unique needs."

The findings showed that majority of the mothers' studied struggled with poor sleep quality. Eight four percent of them were overweight, 74 percent were at high risk for developing [obstructive sleep apnea](#), and only 40 percent got seven to eight hours of sleep a night.

The study did not focus on primary sleep disorders or measure the prevalence of insomnia, but the findings showed that stress, poverty, excessive screen time, and noise outside the home contribute to [sleep problems](#) for both mother and child.

The researchers said strategies to reduce stress, electronic device time and increased daily exercise may improve mothers' sleep, while providing them with information about healthy sleep requirements, such as regular and early structured bedtimes, may improve their children's sleep. Health care practitioners who provide services for young mothers and their [children](#) need to assess sleep patterns, educate them on best practices for sleep, and refer them for further health services when necessary.

More information: Barbara A. Caldwell et al, Parent Perspectives on Sleep and Sleep Habits Among Young Children Living With Economic Adversity, *Journal of Pediatric Health Care* (2019). [DOI: 10.1016/j.pedhc.2019.06.006](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2019.06.006)

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