



Memo: New Study Highlights Safe Sleep Decision Making Around the World

Across the globe, safety is the biggest concern for parents when deciding where their infants sleep each night.

February 2017
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Overview

A recent study by researchers from University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee College of Nursing looked into how parents around the world make decisions each night about where their infants sleep. The study, although small, highlights that parents put a lot of thought and consideration into sleep location. While most of the participants were in North America, participants came from 10 different countries and five continents. Overall, a plurality of parents decided based on safety (45%). Other factors included comfort for baby, family sleep quality, ease of waking up, and ease of breastfeeding. This study goes to show that even though 29% of parents shared a sleep surface and practiced unsafe sleep methods, parents would be willing to change their habits if demonstrated that a certain practice is unsafe. Kids In Danger (KID) can use this study to tailor information to parents and address their specific concerns about safe sleep. KID also should continue to focus heavily on the safety benefits of infants sleeping separate in a bare crib.

Key Findings

The first data point this study analyzed was sleep location. The results showed that 89% of parents report one sleep location for their infant and 14% reported two locations. The largest group of parents stated that their infants sleep in a crib (43%). Other locations mentioned were: adult bed, pack-n-play, co-sleeper attached to the bed, inclined sleeper, bassinet, bouncer, and the floor. Overall, in 71% of the families, the infant slept alone and 29% slept with the parents.

When deciding where the infant sleeps, parents stated safety as their primary worry. Of the 45% of parents that listed safety as their main concern, 86% had their infants in a separate sleep space and 14% a shared space. The most common decision factor after safety was comfort for the baby (31%). Other thoughts highlighted were: family sleep quality, ease of waking up to calm the baby, and ease of breastfeeding.

A further finding demonstrated that the highest percentage of families (34%) reported not being worried about their child while they are sleeping. Of this group, 89% slept separately from their infants and 11% shared. Of the parents that shared a sleep surface, 71% worried about smothering their infant.

Parents reported different strategies used for providing safe sleep conditions in their household. The strategies were split over five themes: clear sleep surface (22%), no blankets (20%), no toys (16%), sleep sack use (16%), and firm mattress (14%). An overwhelming majority of the parents that mentioned using clear sleep space, no blankets, no toys, and using a sleep sack had their infant sleep separately from them (91%, 90%, 88%, 88% respectively).

Relevance to KID

As KID promotes safe sleep, it is important that parent decision factors and worries are addressed. Information from this study can guide KID in how to develop effective educational materials and trainings to engage parents from different backgrounds.

Many parents thought about safety (45%) when deciding where their infant would sleep. This being so, KID should continue to focus on safety when addressing parents and caregivers. If a parent practices an unsafe sleep method with their infant, KID can caution parents and demonstrate how this method creates an unsafe environment for their child. For example, 71% of parents that shared their bed worried about smothering their infant. KID can address this worry by using a safety lens and demonstrating that allowing the infant to sleep alone will

diminish this worry and keep their child safe. The heavy focus on safety as a theme may be able to change minds of parents and encourage them to practice safe sleep methods.

This study outlined how safety, although a major concern, was not the only concern parents had when deciding where their child sleeps. Parents also were concerned about the baby's comfort, family comfort, and ease of accessing the infant. Understanding this, KID can incorporate these factors into their safe sleep guidelines for parents. If KID demonstrates that a child sleeping alone in a bare crib can address these worries, the messaging will become much more effective with this group of parents.

Limitations to Study

The small sample size of this study severely limits the generalizability of their findings. Overall, they had 49 families participate in this study. Of the 49 families, 38 lived in North America, 4 in Asia, 4 in Europe, 2 in Oceania, and 1 in South America. It is impossible to assume that one to four families can represent families from all over the continent.

Families had to speak English and be able to electronically submit a photo of where their child sleeps to researchers. Both of these requirements limit this study. Families from a lower-income and more isolated areas often do not have access to the internet or the opportunity to learn English.