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Children's Bedtime Difficulties and Parental Psychopathology Predict Children's Sleep Problems Over Time

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ABSTRACT

Parents play a critical role in preschool-aged children's (aged 3-5) sleep health (Bell & Belsky, 2008) via facilitation of bedtime routines and other behaviors that influence children's sleep problems (Coto et al., 2018). In addition, parental anxiety and depression may be related to children's sleep problems (Roberts et al., 2020). Exploring longitudinal associations, as well as including both parent and coparent report, can help identify early indicators of children's sleep problems over time. It was hypothesized that children's bedtime difficulties and parents' and coparents' anxiety/depressive symptoms when children were ages 3-5 (Time 1) would predict children's sleep problems when children were ages 6-8 (Time 2). Parents (N=368) completed measures of children's bedtime behavior (Time 1), parental anxiety and depressive symptoms (Time 2), and children's sleep problems (Time 1 and Time 2). Multiple regression analyses showed parental and co-parental depression, parental anxiety, and child bedtime behaviors at ages 3-5 significantly predicted child sleep problems at ages 6-8; these associations were significant even when accounting for Time 1 sleep problems and demographic covariates. No other associations or moderations were identified. As hypothesized, children's bedtime difficulties and parents' anxiety and depressive symptoms when children were ages 3-5 uniquely predicted children's sleep problems at age 6-8. These findings highlight the importance of supporting families with preschool-aged children with sleep-promoting bedtime practices and treating parental anxiety and depression. Future research should further validate these findings by incorporating other sleep measures, such as actigraphy monitors, to evaluate whether these results are identified with more objective measures.

KEYWORDS: children sleep problems, children bedtime behaviors, parent psychopathology, parent depressive symptoms, parent anxiety symptoms