

Rocking the Cradle, Dragging at Work: The Workplace Toll of Infant Sleep Schedules on Parental Motivation in Education Sector

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ABSTRACT

The collision of parenthood and work obligations poses unique challenges, especially for teachers who have to juggle their demanding jobs with the sleep disturbances brought on by infants. In this study, the effects of infant sleep schedules on the professional engagement and job motivation of parents working in the education sector are investigated. Since teaching and academic administration need a lot of cognitive and emotional energy, chronic sleep deprivation can affect job performance, lower intrinsic motivation, and increase stress at work. A qualitative research approach was used to investigate the lived experiences of 20 parents, 10 mothers and 10 fathers, working in the Indian education sector between the ages of 25 and 35. The study examined how disturbed sleep habits affected their motivation, productivity at work, and general well-being through in-depth interviews and thematic analysis. Frequent nightly awakenings caused parents to report chronic fatigue, which had a major impact on their capacity to stay focused and effective at work. Many reported that their weariness made it difficult for them to stay motivated throughout the day, focus, and finish activities quickly. Participants also reported emotional tiredness and irritation, with several mentioning strained relationships at work and a greater sense of discontent with their professional duties. Mothers experienced emotional tiredness and less patience in the classroom, and social expectations added to their stress levels. Despite facing less societal pressure, fathers had trouble focusing, meeting deadlines, and being productive because they were tired. In order to increase productivity and well-being in the education sector, both groups acknowledged that sleep deprivation negatively affected job performance and highlighting the necessity to lessen these difficulties caused by sleep loss, the study emphasizes the need for support networks, such as flexible work schedules, child care assistance, and workplace health initiatives. Adopting such rules can improve staff retention and long-term professional involvement in the education sector by creating a more encouraging and effective work environment.

Keywords: Infant sleep, Parental work motivation, Professional engagement, educational sector.

INTRODUCTION:

Every individual perceives sleep as a state of unconsciousness, which is a biological function that is homeostatically regulated. According to the studies conducted on rats, where complete sleep deprivation results in death within three weeks, sleep plays a significant role in healing, energy conservation, and survival. Losing even a few hours of sleep can have detrimental effects on a wide variety of cognitive processes (Diekelmann, 2014). We spend around one-third of our lives asleep and vital processes like cerebral growth, learning, memory (Peng et al., 2020), emotional (Worley, 2018), cardiovascular, and metabolic regulation, as well as the elimination of cellular toxins, all seem to depend on sleep (Mukherjee et al., 2015b).

According to research on newborn sleep, throughout the first two years of life, 20% to 30% of all infant's experience night awakenings (Tham et al., 2017b). During the first months of growth, infant sleep is

divided into many sessions that last around 4 hours each day. After 6 months, sleep becomes more steady, with nighttime sleep length increasing and daytime sleep dropping concurrently. By the age of 12 months, most infants no longer need to be fed at night, and sleep patterns further consolidate, with longer periods of unbroken sleep and fewer and shorter nightly awakenings. However, the majority of newborns establish stable sleeping practices and self-soothing abilities at 12 months of age (Knappe et al., 2020).

Most parents insist that the transition to parenting has been tough due to sleep issues such as difficulties going to sleep, frequent night awakenings, difficulty self-soothing, and crying. There is evidence that mothers and fathers experience increased weariness immediately after the birth of their kid (Gay et al., 2004). This results in insufficient, non-restful sleep, which is stressful for parental health, everyday well-being, and functioning. More focus has been placed on sleep regularity, the

intraindividual variation in sleep duration and its potential associations with health and performance as crucial indicators of healthy sleep (Latifi et al., 2018).

Modern society and work arrangements often encounter oscillations in the timing of sleep and light exposure, despite the belief that regular sleep at the proper circadian period is essential for optimal sleep, functioning, and health (Sletten et al., 2023).

In a large global sample of 10,000+ families, researchers discovered that consistent bedtime routines are related with improved sleep outcomes for children, such as earlier bedtimes, shorter sleep start latency, fewer night walks, and longer sleep duration (Mindell & Williamson, 2017). Maintaining a consistent sleep schedule helps infants develop a capacity for self-regulation, which may improve sleep quality. Working parents may struggle to maintain consistent bedtime routines for their children due to work schedules, long hours, and lack of sleep. In today's 24/7 economy, many jobs have unpredictable schedules that require evening, night, or rotating shifts, making it even more challenging (Craft et al., 2021). Long work hours or irregular schedules can cause fatigue and hinder a mother's ability to enforce structured sleep habits, sometimes leading to reliance on other caregivers, which may disrupt consistency. Given the increasing demands of professional life, particularly in sectors like education, where extended work commitments are common, understanding these dynamics is crucial (Kalil et al., 2014).

This study investigates how baby sleep patterns affect parents' motivation, productivity at work, and mental health in the educational field. Focus, productivity, and job satisfaction can all be severely hampered by disturbed sleep patterns brought on by nocturnal parenting, especially considering the high cognitive and emotional demands of teaching and academic responsibilities. In order to improve working parents' professional engagement and general well-being, this study highlights the vital need for workplace flexibility, fair caregiving obligations, and institutional childcare support.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Differences in sleep habits, job performance, and parental perceptions of infant sleep issues are highlighted by research on sleep disturbances among working parents. Postpartum sleep loss affects both dads and mothers, but mothers report more frequent awakenings and more fragmented sleep (Kalogeropoulous et al., 2022). According to studies, women are more likely to miss work due to chronic sleep deprivation, which also affects cognitive function and productivity. Additionally, dads perceive sleep problems in infants as behavioral challenges, while mothers regard them as distress signals.

Sleeping Patterns and Exhaustion in New Fathers and Mothers

A study done by Kalogeropoulos et al. (2022), found that after giving birth, both fathers and mothers have notable alterations in their sleep patterns. Mothers reported more frequent nocturnal awakenings and shorter consecutive sleep durations than fathers, as well as a more disturbed sleep. Mothers' overall sleep duration was marginally greater, but their sleep was more disrupted (Bai et al., 2019), according to quantitative sleep metrics. Their primary responsibility for providing care at night, especially for nursing mothers, probably contributed to these interruptions.

In contrast, fathers reported improved sleep continuity but shorter total nocturnal sleep (Gay et al., 2004). Both parents' sleep habits showed significant night-to-night variability in spite of these variations. Fathers were more likely than mothers to reach the six-hour sleep criterion, with mothers in particular only managing to do so less than three nights out of ten. The results emphasize that both parents are impacted by sleep loss during the postpartum phase, which emphasizes the necessity of mutual parental support and methods to enhance the quality of sleep for both moms and dads.

The demands of caring, work schedules, and personal sleep preferences all influence the unique postpartum sleep patterns of parents. Three different sleep trajectories for individuals and couples were identified by a study that looked at longitudinal sleep patterns in both mothers and fathers over a 36-month period after giving birth. Consistently Sufficient Sleep (C1) parents benefit from regular routines and nurturing surroundings, which help them maintain steady, adequate sleep with little interruptions. Moderate Sleep Decline (C2): Nighttime caregiving and outside stressors cause parents to gradually lose sleep, especially in the first several months. Parents of children with persistently short sleep (C3) have frequent disturbances and continuous sleep deprivation, and they frequently struggle to recover as their kid grows. This group of parents may experience more stress, more caring responsibilities, or lifestyle choices that hinder their ability to recover from sleep. The interconnectedness of parental sleep is shown by the fact that mothers are more inclined to modify their sleep habits to correspond with those of their spouses (Kim et al., 2024).

Impact of Sleep Deprivation on Working Parents' Performance at Work

Working parents, especially moms, suffer from sleep deprivation which impairs their ability to function at work, pay attention, and maintain emotional stability. Cognitive processes, decision-making, and the capacity to adjust to work demands are all hampered by poor sleep quality. Parents who don't get enough sleep have trouble focusing, which increases their risk of mistakes, disputes at work, and lower productivity.

According to a research done by Deng et al. (2022), Particularly mothers experience higher rates of tardiness, absenteeism, and frequent breaks from work, all of which contribute to organizational inefficiencies.

Long-term sleep loss causes workplace deviance, where workers participate in undesired behaviors including tardiness or careless task delegation.

Sleepiness is most likely to have an impact on the contextual performance components that depend on effect and interpersonal skills (Jiao & Ye, 2016). People who don't get enough sleep are more prone to misidentify feelings like happiness or rage.

People who are sleep deprived may be more prone to misread social settings since social interactions depend on the appropriate recognition of emotion (Van Der Helm et al., 2010). In addition to impairing cognitive and emotional abilities, sleep deprivation also increases social disengagement and productivity at work. Since humans are social creatures by nature, social connections are essential to general wellbeing. On the other hand, inadequate sleep has been connected to heightened loneliness and decreased social interaction. According to research, people who are sleep deprived are more likely to feel socially isolated, which can result in a vicious cycle of retreat and strained professional relationships (Simon & Walker, 2018).

Parental gender differences in perceiving and evaluating sleep problems

According to research done by Lollies et al. (2022c) , both parents are aware that their kids have sleep issues, but they react and see it differently. When their children woke up in the middle of the night, mothers often saw it as a sign that they needed to be comforted and helped right away. Fathers, on the other hand, were more prone to see nighttime disruptions as conduct that tested or needed boundaries.

Because mothers have historically been the major caregivers for their children, they are frequently more sensitive to their nightly awakenings, which may affect how they perceive sleep issues. They often use more calming techniques to assist the youngster fall back asleep, such as rocking or co-sleeping. In contrast, fathers report being aware of their child's sleep difficulties but are typically less involved in providing direct overnight care. Sharing a bed with their partner and witnessing the mother's responses to the child's sleep problems may have contributed to this awareness. Although both parents now acknowledge sleep disruptions more fairly as a result of fathers' growing childcare involvement in modern parenting, traditional caregiving roles continue to have an impact on how these problems are handled.

The study also shows how parental well-being is impacted by sleep issues differently for men and women. Women generally experience greater sleep issues than men (Fatima et al., 2016). Even though both parents complained of sleep interruptions brought on by their child's sleep issues, the mother's sleep quality was noticeably worse, particularly if the child was under 26 months old. Because mothers are more likely to wake up in response to their child's needs, this conclusion is consistent with other research showing that mothers

suffer from greater sleep fragmentation. Men and women also subjectively interpret and perceive the quality of sleep differently (Khorrami et al., 2024). In contrast, even when their child experienced sleep issues, fathers reported higher sleep efficiency and fewer sleep disruptions. On the other hand, fathers who actively provided evening care demonstrated better parental sleep quality over time, indicating that shared duties can lessen the detrimental impacts of sleep disruption.

The necessity of inclusive sleep interventions that involve both parents in managing their child's sleep issues is highlighted by these findings. Despite their inherent need for more sleep, women lose more hours of sleep when they become parents, even after accounting for other aspects of their lives, such as their jobs. Their health may suffer long-term consequences from this lack of sleep. Promoting shared parenting duties may help mothers sleep better and help fathers better control their emotions. Families can create better sleep habits that promote the development of both parents and children by acknowledging and adjusting for these gender differences (Chao et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

In order to investigate how infant sleep schedules impact parental motivation and work performance in the education sector, this study uses a qualitative research methodology that includes semi-structured in-depth interviews. In order to ensure representation of working parents juggling caregiving duties and professional obligations, a total of 20 participants, 10 moms and 10 fathers were purposefully chosen. The study explores important topics such total job motivation, workplace productivity, emotional control, weariness, and sleep quality. To methodically find the main topics pertaining to sleep disruptions and work performance, thematic analysis was done. The study provides a thorough understanding of the relationship between infant sleep schedules and professional engagement by examining the lived experiences of parents.

3.2 Sampling Technique

Participants were chosen using a purposive and snowball sampling technique, with an emphasis on working parents in the education industry. To ensure diversity in jobs and experiences, participants were found through institutions, personal networks, and referrals. This approach shed light on the unique difficulties in striking a balance between work performance and infant-induced sleep deprivation by capturing insightful feedback from parents combining caregiving and professional responsibilities.

3.3 Inclusion Criteria

To ensure applicability to workplace dynamics in this profession, the study included parents who worked in the education sector, including academic staff, teachers, and administrators. Because this stage is marked by numerous night awakenings and disturbed parental sleep, participants had to have at least one infant, aged 0–18 months, who was having abnormal sleep patterns.

In order to ensure firsthand knowledge of how infant sleep cycles affect job motivation and performance, only parents who actively participated in overnight caregiving were taken into consideration. The study focused on people in the 25-35 age range, who are early to mid-career professionals juggling parenting duties with professional advancement. In order to ensure ethical compliance and data validity, participants also gave their informed consent and indicated a willingness to discuss their individual experiences in in-depth interviews.

3.4 Exclusion Criteria

Parents who did not have a child between the ages of 0 and 18 months or who were not directly in charge of providing nighttime care were not included in the study. To remain relevant, professionals outside of the education industry were also not included. Participants were excluded if they had serious medical or psychological issues, chronic sleep difficulties, or language barriers that could interfere with their ability to participate. To guarantee thorough data collection, people who couldn't dedicate themselves to in-depth interviews because of scheduling constraints were also excluded. These standards made research easier to identify individuals whose stories truly captured how baby sleep patterns affected parents' motivation in the classroom.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

In order to protect participant rights, privacy, and wellbeing, ethical integrity was given top priority. A thorough informed consent form explaining the goals, methods, possible dangers, and the ability to withdraw at any time was given to each participant. To preserve confidentiality, all interviews were anonymized, and the safe handling of sensitive data was guaranteed by secured data storage. Interviews were sensitive and empathetic in order to create a supportive environment for participants, considering the intimate nature of conversations about sleep deficiency and work-related stress. By adhering to ethical research norms, this study makes sure that the knowledge gathered will significantly advance our understanding of how newborn sleep cycles affect parental motivation in the educational field.

RESULTS

Several important topics that shed light on the significant influence of baby sleep cycles on parental motivation and productivity were revealed through semi-structured in-depth interviews with ten mothers and ten fathers employed in the education sector. The results show how sleep deprivation affects parents physically, emotionally, and cognitively; how caregiving responsibilities vary by gender; and how difficult it is to strike a balance between parental responsibilities and job goals.

4.1 Thematic Qualitative Analysis

4.1.1. Sleep Deprivation Toll on the Body and Mind

The extreme fatigue parents felt as a result of many night awakenings and irregular sleep cycles was one of

the most startling discoveries. Instead of getting undisturbed sleep, many parents described sleeping in brief spurts, which left them feeling exhausted, headachy, and mentally foggy all day. One mother explained, "By the time I step into my classroom, I've already gone through multiple night awakenings, diaper changes, and feedings. My body is here, but my brain is barely functioning."

Similar difficulties were also mentioned by fathers, some of whom mentioned ongoing worry and reduced immunity. "I used to work out before school, but now I'm too tired even to eat breakfast properly. Lack of sleep has impacted not only my energy levels but also my way of living in general" said one father. Many parents agreed that mental health issues including worry, mood swings, and irritation were caused by the physical toll of sleep deprivation. A number of mothers reported experiencing mental haze, forgetting basic chores, or having trouble controlling their emotions.

Isolation and neglect of self-care were also significant issues. One father said, "I don't meet my friends anymore because all my free time is spent either working or catching up on lost sleep," as parents expressed difficulty sustaining social interactions. Additionally, a lot of parents found it difficult to find time for hobbies, reading, or physical activity. Their inability to take care of themselves resulted in increased stress and emotional exhaustion, which made it more difficult for them to manage their dual roles as teachers and caregivers.

These difficulties combined to result in a decline in general wellbeing, with many parents acknowledging that they were always worn out. Some even said that, in spite of the detrimental effects on their emotional and professional well-being, they had come to accept perpetual exhaustion as their new normal.

4.1.2 How Motivation Takes a Hit

Many participants talked about how the tremendous fatigue brought on by infant-induced sleep deprivation had made them less passionate about teaching. "I used to get excited about my classes when I woke up, but now I just focus on getting through the day without making a mess," one father explained. "I love my students, but my patience runs out quicker now. I feel as though I no longer offer them my all" said another educator.

For many parents, the main problem was a lack of concentration and mental clarity. Instructors discovered that class participation decreased, course planning took longer, and grading was more taxing. Some said that it was physically taxing to stand in front of a class for hours on end, which made it more difficult to stay enthusiastic and energized throughout the day.

Additionally, sleep-induced amnesia caused performance anxiety in other parents. "I once had to improvise on the spot after forgetting a whole section of a lesson, I had never experienced that prior to the birth of my child." one mother acknowledged. In a similar

vein, one father wrote, "I question myself more today. I used to feel secure in my choices, but when you're tired, everything seems hazy".

Some found that their career trajectory and professional engagement were equally important sources of motivation. Many participants expressed that they felt trapped in survival mode and lacked the energy to pursue more education, career advancement, or promotions. One mother said, "I just don't have the mental bandwidth to take on anything extra," even though she had intended to assume a leadership role this year.

4.1.3 Gender Disparities in the Effects of Nighttime Parenting on Work

The distribution of responsibilities and the impact on each parent's work performance showed distinct gender differences, even though both parents experienced sleep deprivation and difficulties at work.

Even when their partners assisted with childcare, mothers frequently reported being the primary caretakers at night. According to one mother, "I'm the one who wakes up first, checks on the baby, and makes sure everything is okay, even when my husband offers to help ". Many mothers believed that they were under more pressure to meet social norms, which made them feel entirely in charge of their child's welfare.

Fathers, on the other hand, admitted to having trouble sleeping, but many of them thought their fatigue was disregarded. "People assume moms have it harder, which they do in many ways, but no one asked how I get by on just three hours of sleep". Other fathers expressed difficulty focusing, completing deadlines, and sustaining productivity.

Some women felt unsupported and frequently disengaged from caring as a result of the disparity in perceived duty. "I get frustrated when my husband sleeps through the baby's cries, it is not fair", one mother explained. "I want to help more, but I don't always know how to", a father confessed.

4.1.4 Juggling Parenting and Professional Goals

The duties of caring for an infant forced many parents to reevaluate their employment objectives. While some moms had to reduce their job obligations, others thought about taking a career sabbatical. "I wanted to apply for a degree, but I can't handle more responsibilities when I barely get enough sleep", one mother said.

One father explained, "I had planned to open a small business, but right now, my priority is just getting through this job". Other fathers also mentioned needing to slow down their plans for career advancement.

Many participants expressed a need for further workplace assistance, such on-site childcare, remote work choices, or flexible hours. Some, however, were concerned that asking for modifications may be interpreted as a sign of weakness, which could hinder

their long-term professional development. "I don't want my boss to think I'm not committed just because I have a baby," one parent clarified. One mother said, "Yes, it's exhausting, but I know this phase won't last forever." Despite the career sacrifices, many parents felt a strong sense of purpose in both their work and parenting duties. The difficulty of striking a balance between aspirations and parenting responsibilities, however, continued to be a significant worry, underscoring the necessity of improved workplace regulations to assist new parents.

DISCUSSION

The study's conclusions demonstrate the significant influence that baby sleep patterns have on parents' emotional health, productivity at work, and motivation. When their sleep is disturbed by frequent night awakenings, parents in the education sector who depend on emotional control and cognitive acuity to oversee classrooms and administrative duties face serious difficulties. Many participants talked of having trouble focusing, feeling constantly tired, and feeling stressed out, all of which made it difficult for them to do their jobs well. Their struggles to balance work and home obligations were made worse by the chronic lack of sleep, which resulted in medical problems like headaches, exhaustion, and decreased immunity.

One important effect of sleep deprivation was emotional weariness, as many parents reported feeling more irritable, less patient, and having trouble controlling their emotions. In particular, educators said that their passion for their work had waned since the ongoing exhaustion sapped their vitality for interacting with pupils. Some acknowledged that they felt disengaged from their work and were only performing the tasks at hand rather than giving it their all. Others talked of the emotional toll of attempting to strike a balance between their love of learning and the demanding duties of providing care at night, which frequently results in feelings of frustration and insecurity.

The effects of sleep loss on working parents were significantly influenced by gender differences. Because they were frequently the primary caregivers at night, mothers reported more frequent awakenings and more fragmented sleep. Numerous parents reported feeling overworked, both mentally and physically, from worrying about their child's demands. More emotional exhaustion, increased forgetfulness, and a persistent feeling of overload resulted from this. Fathers were more likely to report issues with focus, productivity at work, and completing deadlines, even if they acknowledged their own sleep deprivation concerns. Because of the continued emphasis on maternal caregiving duties in society, some people felt that their tiredness was disregarded.

This mismatch in caregiving roles sometimes led to difficulties between partners, with moms feeling unsupported and males expressing a wish to participate more but struggling to do so successfully.

Balancing their professional goals with the responsibilities of caring for a newborn was another significant obstacle that parents had to overcome. Many participants acknowledged that the tremendous tiredness they felt on a daily basis caused them to reduce their professional goals, postpone promotions, or avoid taking on more tasks at work. Some mothers, in particular, thought about taking a career hiatus or lowering work obligations because they were at a crossroads between pursuing professional advancement and carrying out their caregiving responsibilities. Though they frequently hesitated to ask for employment modifications out of concern that it would be interpreted as a lack of commitment, fathers also voiced concerns about professional stagnation. Stress and anxiety over long-term work advancement resulted from this internal conflict between parental duties and professional goals. Many parents acknowledged that this period of severe sleep deprivation would eventually end and exhibited a strong commitment to their jobs and families in spite of these difficulties. However, in order to lessen the detrimental impacts of sleep deprivation on their job performance, they underlined the necessity of improved workplace support systems, such as flexible work schedules, maternity leave extensions, and childcare assistance. A more helpful and accommodating work environment may result from increased workplace awareness and comprehension of the challenges experienced by new parents, according to some participants.

The results emphasize the necessity of institutional guidelines that assist working parents in the field of education. Parents who don't get enough sleep have trouble being motivated, productive, and healthy. Employer understanding, shared caregiving, and workplace flexibility are crucial. Furthermore, child care assistance areas at colleges and universities can reduce parental stress, boost employee happiness, and foster a family-friendly workplace.

CONCLUSION

This study emphasizes how important baby sleep schedules are for parental motivation, productivity at work, and emotional health in the educational field. One significant issue that has been identified is sleep deprivation, which has an impact on parents' cognitive abilities, productivity, and general participation at work. Teachers and other academic staff, who need to be able to control their emotions and think clearly, experienced weariness, less patience, and trouble focusing on their work. Parents found it more difficult to manage their personal and professional obligations due to the physical and mental strain of frequent night awakenings, which frequently resulted in decreased productivity and work unhappiness.

The results also show that the effects of sleep deprivation on working parents varies by gender. Due to their major caregiving responsibilities, mothers' sleep was more fragmented, which increased their emotional tiredness and decreased their ability to focus at work. Although they were equally impacted, fathers were

more likely to report issues with focus, productivity at work, and meeting deadlines than emotional exhaustion. These distinctions frequently caused conflict between partners, which strengthened the case for shared caregiving responsibilities as a means of more fairly juggling work and family obligations.

The report also emphasizes the tension that exists between parenting obligations and professional goals. Many parents said that their extreme fatigue caused them to put off promotions, cut back on work obligations, or be reluctant to pursue career advancements. Working parents may find it difficult to sustain their professional development without sufficient assistance, which could have an effect on their long-term professional growth.

Workplaces must adopt family-friendly practices including flexible scheduling, longer parental leave, and on-site childcare help to solve these issues, especially in the education sector. In addition to greatly reducing parental stress and increasing job satisfaction, childcare facilities at colleges and universities can promote a more welcoming and encouraging work atmosphere. In order to assist working parents in successfully juggling their duties as caregivers and professionals, it is imperative that these challenges be acknowledged and addressed.

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