

Parental sleep quality and behaviour problems of children with autism

Iulia Mihaila and Sigal L Hartley

The present study examined the impact of parents' sleep quality on the experience of behavior problems by their children with autism spectrum disorder (ASD). For 14 days, mothers and fathers (in 176 couples) each reported on their sleep quality the previous night. Mothers and fathers also reported on their level of positive and negative mood, and their child with ASD's level of behavior problems that day. For mothers, consistently poor sleep quality was related to ratings of higher child behavior problems. This pattern was not found for fathers. Across all parents, mothers and fathers who had higher sleep quality, on average, experienced more positive mood than mothers and fathers who had lower sleep quality. At the daily level, after a night of poor sleep quality, mothers and fathers experienced less positive mood and more negative mood. In addition, for fathers, experiencing a day with high child behavior problems only took a toll on their mood if they had experienced high sleep quality the previous night. Thus, poor sleep quality may have such a strong impact on fathers' mood, that child stressors have little additional impact on mood, following a night of disrupted sleep. Interventions aimed at increasing sleep quality in parents of children with ASD may be important for improving parent psychological well-being.