

# Putting Research to Work for Families



**Focus:**  
Civilian

## Associations Among Adolescent Sleep Problems, Emotion Regulation, and Affective Disorders: Findings From a Nationally Representative Sample

Palmer, C. A., Oosterhoff, B., Bower, J. L., Kaplow, J. B., & Alfano, C. A. (2018). Associations among adolescent sleep problems, emotion regulation, and affective disorders: Findings from a nationally representative sample. *Journal of Psychiatric Research*, 96, 1-8. doi:10.1016/j.jpsychires.2017.09.015

**SUMMARY:** Sleep problems during childhood and adolescence are associated with higher instances of anxiety and mood disorders in later years. This study examined the association between sleep problems, emotion regulation strategies, and the risk of psychiatric disorders in adolescents. Findings suggested that sleep problems were positively associated with an increased likelihood for a mood or anxiety disorder and poorer emotion regulation.

### KEY FINDINGS:

- Youth with greater sleep problems were more likely to engage in more rumination and lower problem solving, both of which were associated with higher likelihood to meet criteria for a mood or anxiety disorder.
- Sleep problems were positively related to maladaptive emotion regulation strategies, such as avoidance, suppression, rumination, and negatively associated with adaptive strategies, such as problem-solving and acceptance.
- Sleep problems were positively associated with acceptance, which is an adaptive emotion regulation strategy meaning a non-judgmental awareness of emotional experience. Acceptance was also positively related to experiencing a mood disorder.
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### IMPLICATIONS FOR YOUTH DEVELOPMENT PROFESSIONALS:

- Collaborate with organizations connected with children, youth, and families to disseminate information about adaptive and maladaptive strategies for emotion regulation
- Enhance activities and programming with emotion regulation strategies to equip youth with ways to positively deal with emotional and mental health concerns

### IMPLICATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Promote the development of leisure activities for youth to help alleviate anxiety and stress and build stronger bonds with peers
- Provide workshops to help parents learn about available community resources for youth mental health services

### IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY MAKERS:

- Promote the development and implementation of evidence-based programs aimed to teach emotional regulation strategies to youth
- Recommend training for youth development professionals to educate them about challenges faced by youth with mood or anxiety issues

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## METHODS

- Participants were drawn from the National Comorbidity Survey-Adolescent Supplement, which is a nationally representative epidemiological survey conducted in the United States of America.
- Mood and anxiety disorders were assessed using the DSM-IV criteria. Sleep problems and emotion regulation were measured using the sleep module and items from the National Comorbidity Survey-Adolescent Supplement. A 16-item checklist was used to measure current life stress.
- Analyses examined the associations between sleep problems, emotion regulation strategies, and likelihood of psychiatric disorders.

## PARTICIPANTS

- A total of 10,148 adolescents were included in the study.
- The participants' age ranged from 13 - 18 years (M=15.18 years, SD=1.51).
- Gender distribution was 51.1% female and 48.9% male.
- Racial/ethnic distribution was 55.7% White, 19.3% Black, 18.9% Latino, and 6.1% from other races/ethnicities.

## LIMITATIONS

- Assessment of some anxiety and mood disorders included sleep difficulty questions, creating an overlap in assessment. This may have resulted in inflated associations.
- Participants' self-assessment of their response to social stressors are subject to social desirability bias, and may result in lower estimates of stress than they actually experience.
- The data were collected only at a single time point, limiting the ability to make inference about patterns of sleep and emotion regulation over time.

## AVENUES FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

- Conduct further research on the association between emotional regulation strategies and other sleep characteristics (e.g., sleep latency)
- Expand this study by collecting longitudinal data to examine the trajectories of the association between sleep and emotion
- Use other methods to measure sleep problems (e.g., polysomnogram) rather than relying solely on self-report data

## ASSESSING RESEARCH THAT WORKS



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