

Decisions of Black Parents About Infant Bedding and Sleep Surfaces: A Qualitative Study



WHAT'S KNOWN ON THIS SUBJECT: The American Academy of Pediatrics has recommended avoidance of soft sleep surfaces and soft bedding in infant sleep environments as a strategy for reducing the risk of sudden infant death syndrome. However, use of soft bedding and surfaces is common.



WHAT THIS STUDY ADDS: Many black parents use soft bedding in the mistaken belief that it will keep their infant safe. There is much misunderstanding about the meaning of a “firm” sleep surface. Additional educational messages apparently are needed to change parental perceptions and practices.

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KEY WORDS

SIDS, suffocation, bedding, sleep environment, parental decision, decision-making, racial disparity

ABBREVIATIONS

SIDS—sudden infant death syndrome
AAP—American Academy of Pediatrics
SES—socioeconomic status

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abstract



OBJECTIVE: The goal of this qualitative study was to examine factors influencing decisions by black parents regarding use of soft bedding and sleep surfaces for their infants.

METHODS: We conducted focus groups and individual interviews with black mothers of lower and higher socioeconomic status (SES). Mothers were asked about many infant care practices, including sleep surface and bedding.

RESULTS: Eighty-three mothers were interviewed, 73 (47 lower and 26 higher SES) in focus groups and 10 (7 lower and 3 higher SES) in individual interviews. The primary reason for using soft surfaces was infant comfort. Parents perceived that infants were uncomfortable if the surface was not soft. Many parents also interpreted “firm sleep surface” to mean taut; they were comfortable with and believed that they were following recommendations for a firm sleep surface when they placed pillows/blankets on the mattress as long as a sheet was pulled tautly over the pillows/blankets. The primary reasons for using soft bedding (including bumper pads) were comfort, safety, and aesthetics. In addition to using bedding to soften sleep surfaces, bedding was used to prevent infant rollover and falls, particularly for infants sleeping on a bed or sofa. Some parents used soft bedding to create an attractive space for the infant.

CONCLUSIONS: Many black parents believe that soft bedding will keep their infant safe and comfortable. There is much misunderstanding about the meaning of a “firm” sleep surface. Additional educational messages apparently are needed to change parental perceptions and practices. *Pediatrics* 2011;128:494–502