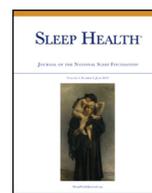




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# Sleep Health

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## A 9-month lag in the effects of contraception: a commentary on Vitzthum, Thornburg, and Spielvogel



Fragmented sleep is a frequent complaint of new mothers caring for infants. I have argued that maternal tiredness is one of the evolved functions of infant waking because it delayed the mother's return to fertility and the conception of a younger sibling who would compete with the current infant for maternal care and attention.<sup>1</sup> I wrote that costs, for the infant "are greatest for conception during the first year of postnatal life, with birth of a sib 9 months later." In support of this statement, I referenced a Senegalese study in which there was 16% mortality during a child's second year if a younger sib were born in that year, but only 4% mortality if the younger sib were born after the older child's second postnatal year.<sup>2</sup> I noted that infant sleep was reported to become more fragmented after 6 months and then gradually consolidates.

In a recent issue of *Sleep Health*, Vitzthum and colleagues reported that the frequency of night nursing in a group of women from rural Bolivia shortened maternal sleep more than any other predictor during the first year postpartum.<sup>3</sup> Breastfeeding rates then declined during the second year. These observations were said to contradict my hypothesis because I was interpreted as claiming that night waking should be most intense around 2 years postpartum. I will simply note that the prevention of an 18-month interbirth interval requires contraceptive action at 9 months, not at 18 months. Therefore,

these observations of Bolivian women appear supportive rather than contradictory of my hypothesis.

### Conflict of Interest Statement

I have no conflict of interest.

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