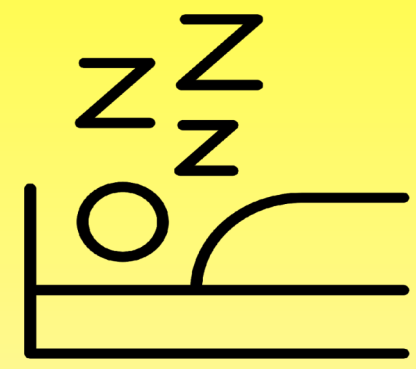


Relationship Context – not Status – Linked to Sleep among Emerging Adults during the COVID-19 Pandemic



Author: Gabriel Goldberg
Faculty Research Supervisors: Royette T. Dubar, Ph.D. & Nicole K. Watkins, Ph.D.

Sleep & Psychosocial Adjustment Lab

WESLEYAN
UNIVERSITY

Introduction

- Individuals who are married or in a committed romantic relationship report higher levels of general well-being and life satisfaction, relative to those who are single (Beckmeyer & Cromwell, 2019).
- Being married and experiencing lower relationship distress have been linked to better sleep quality (Meadows & Arber, 2015).
- Higher perceived social support predicts more positive psychological adjustment (Lane & Fink, 2015); while attachment anxiety has been associated with more negative emotional adjustment, which may have important implications for sleep.
- The purpose of this study was to investigate the relative importance of relationship *status* and relationship *context* (i.e., attachment anxiety, perceived social support), as well as COVID-19 stress, in relation to sleep and perceived health among emerging adults.

Method

Variable	Source	Example Question
Attachment anxiety	Experience in Close Relationship Scale	<i>I often worry that other people won't want to stay with me</i>
Perceived Social Support	Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support	<i>I can talk about problems with my family</i>
COVID-19 Stress	COVID-19 Stress contamination subscale	<i>I am worried that people around me will infect me with the virus</i>
Insomnia symptoms	Insomnia Severity Index	<i>Difficulty falling asleep</i>
Sleep duration	2 items averaged	<i>During the week [weekend] how many actual hours of sleep do you think you typically get per night?</i>
Sleep onset latency	1 item	<i>When you go to bed, how long does it typically take you to actually fall asleep?</i>
General health	General Well-being Schedule	<i>Have you been bothered by any illness, bodily disorder, pains, or fear about your health?</i>

Method (cont'd)

Participants

- N = 344 emerging adults enrolled at a U.S. college/university
- 65.1% Female; 59.3% Non-Hispanic White, 73.5% Heterosexual
- Mean age: 21.78 years old (SD = 2.07)

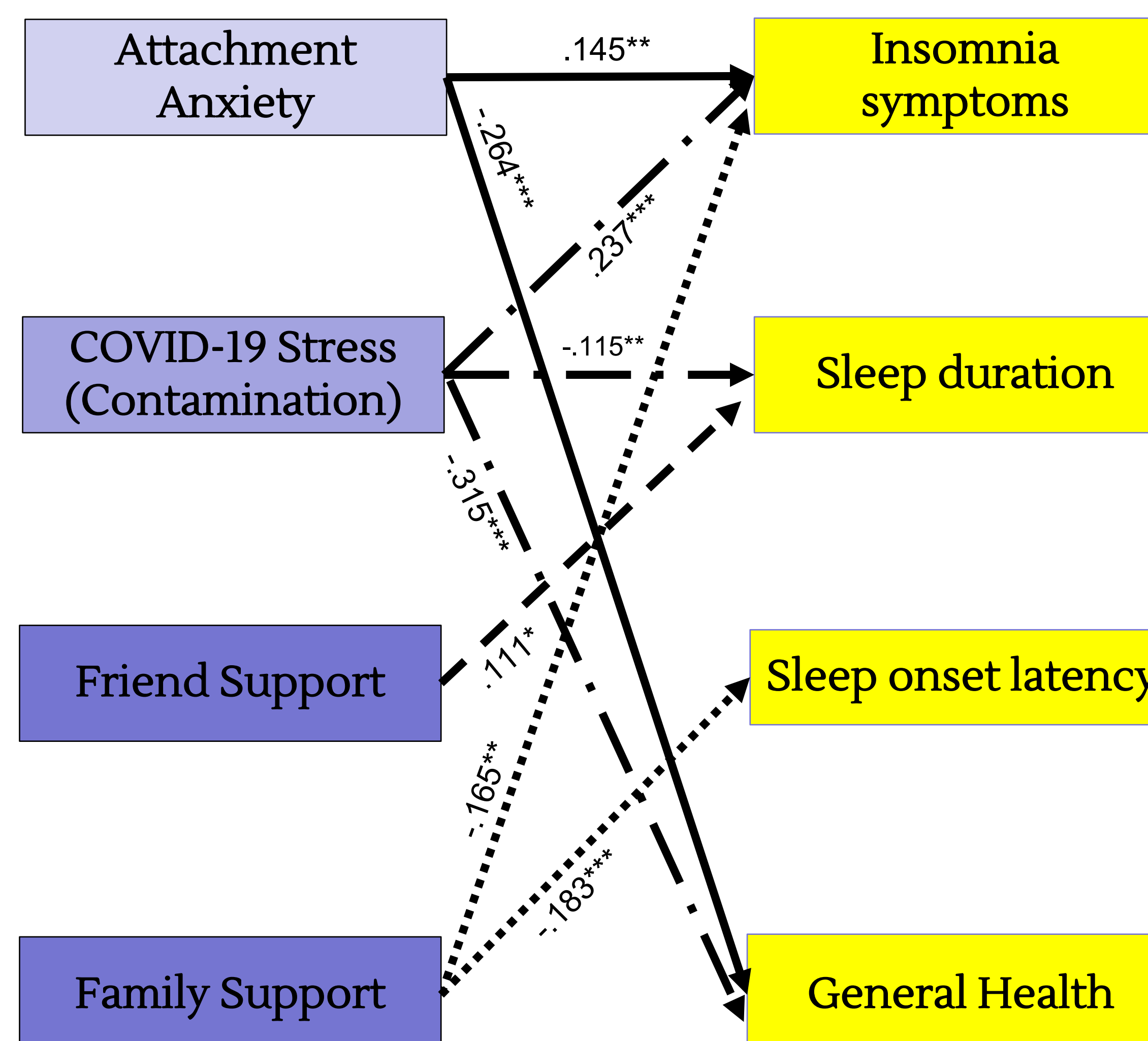
Results

ANCOVA: No main effect of Relationship status (i.e., 'Single, not wanting to date'; 'Single, wanting to date'; 'In a committed relationship') on sleep and health

Insomnia symptoms: $F(2,10) = .115, p = .892$ Sleep duration: $F(2,10) = .175, p = .839$
Sleep onset latency: $F(2,10) = 2.901, p = .056$ General health: $F(2,10) = 1.407, p = .246$

Figure 1

Results of a Concurrent Path Model Examining Relationship Context and COVID-19 Stress as Predictors of Sleep and Health



Discussion

- Contrary to findings from past research, relationship status was NOT linked to sleep or general perceived health.
- Recent research has shown a weakening link between relationship status and well-being, particularly among *emerging adults* since they are increasingly delaying committed relationships and placing less value on their importance.
- In line with previous studies, attachment anxiety was linked to worse sleep quality (but was not associated with sleep duration or sleep onset latency). One possible mechanism is the increased activation of the HPA Axis (e.g., cortisol) which may disrupt sleep quality.
- Family and friend support were linked to better sleep, perhaps due to the positive role of social support for emotional functioning, which may facilitate good sleep.
- COVID-19 stress was the most consistent predictor of negative adjustment relating to both sleep and health, which highlights the negative toll of the pandemic for emerging adults.
- Future research should examine these associations longitudinally, with more diverse samples. Additional health outcomes, including indices of both mental and physical health should be examined.
- Despite limitations, this research is informative on the link (or lack there of) between relationship status and health outcomes, as well as the importance of social support for sleep and overall physical health.

References

- Beckmeyer, & Cromwell, S. (2019). Romantic Relationship Status and Emerging Adult Well-Being: Accounting for Romantic Relationship Interest. *Emerging Adulthood* (Thousand Oaks, CA), 7(4), 304–308. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2167696818772653>
- Brennan, K. A., Clark, C. L., & Shaver, P. R. (1998). Self-report measurement of adult attachment: An integrative overview. In J. A. Simpson & W. S. Rholes (Eds.), *Attachment theory and close relationships* (pp. 46–76). New York: Guilford.
- Lane, & Fink, R. S. (2015). Attachment, Social Support Satisfaction, and Well-Being During Life Transition in Emerging Adulthood. *The Counseling Psychologist*, 43(7), 1034–1058. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011000015592184>
- Meadows, & Arber, S. (2015). Marital Status, Relationship Distress, and Self-rated Health: What Role for "Sleep Problems"? *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 56(3), 341–355. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022146515593948>
- Morin, Belleville, G., Belanger, L., & Ivers, H. (2011). The Insomnia Severity Index: Psychometric Indicators to Detect Insomnia Cases and Evaluate Treatment Response. *Sleep* (New York, N.Y.), 34(5), 601–608. <https://doi.org/10.1093/sleep/34.5.601>
- Taylor, Landry, C. A., Paluszek, M. M., Fergus, T. A., McKay, D., & Asmundson, G. J. (2020). Development and initial validation of the COVID Stress Scales. *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*, 72, 102232–102232. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.janxdis.2020.102232>
- Zimet, G. D., Dahlem, N. W., Zimet, S. G., & Farley, G. K. (1988). The multidimensional scale of perceived social support. *Journal of personality assessment*, 52(1), 30-41.