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| **Prevalence of unsafe sleep factors and mechanisms attributed to infant deaths classified as explained suffocation and unexplained possible suffocation** |
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| **Introduction** Little is known about the presence of unsafe sleep factors and the mechanisms most frequently attributed to sleep-related infant deaths. We describe the prevalence of unsafe sleep factors and mechanisms among infant deaths classified as explained suffocation or possible suffocation.  **Material and Methods** We analyzed data from the National Center for the Review and Prevention of Child Deaths Case Reporting System. Deaths from 10 states participating in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s Sudden Unexpected Infant Death Case Registry during 2011—2012 were included. Cases were categorized and assigned a mechanism using the Registry’s classification system. Frequencies and percentages of the prevalence of selected unsafe sleep factors and mechanisms attributed to death were reported for explained suffocation and possible suffocation deaths. Unsafe sleep factors are defined as environmental factors present in the sleep environment, their role in the death undefined. Mechanisms are defined as factors to which the suffocation or possible suffocation are attributed.  **Results** Among deaths in the explained suffocation (n=95) and possible suffocation (n=132) categories, soft bedding was the most prevalent mechanism (52% and 68%, respectively), followed by wedging (23% and 9%) and overlay (22% and 18%). The most prevalent unsafe sleep factor was non-supine sleep position (82% and 80%), followed by not sleeping in a crib or bassinette (72% and 73%) and sleeping on a shared-surface (56% and 56%). A new or different sleep environment than usual was reported for 8% and 7% of deaths respectively.  **Conclusions** Contrary to widespread belief, being overlaid was not the most frequently reported mechanism for deaths classified as suffocation or possible suffocation; these deaths were most frequently attributed to the mechanism of soft bedding (e.g., airway occlusion by a pillow), which accounted for more than half of the cases examined. Quantifying the mechanisms and factors associated with accidental sleep-related suffocation can inform prevention strategies. Greater emphasis on educating caregivers about the importance of removing potentially hazardous bedding from the sleeping environment may strengthen safe sleep interventions and reduce infant suffocation deaths. |
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