



# Sleep Coercion in the Cycle of Violence

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## France Confronts Horror of Rape and Drugging Case as 51 Men Go on Trial

A man is accused of drugging his wife and then inviting dozens of men to rape her over almost a decade. The questions raised by the case have unsettled the country.

*“And you. What is your excuse?”*



Christophe Simon/Agence France-Presse — Getty Images

<https://www.nytimes.com/2024/09/02/world/europe/france-husband-rape-drug-trial-mazan.html>

# Goals

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- ❖ Introduce the concept of **sleep coercion**
- ❖ Provide novel data on this previously unstudied type of IPV that involves **violent or controlling behaviors that specifically target or impact sleep**



# Intimate Partner Violence (IPV)

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- ❖ Abuse in a relationship with any current/former romantic, sexual, or dating partner
- ❖ Over 1/3 of U.S. women
- ❖ IPV can also involve attempts to control a partner's decisions and behaviors: **coercive control**
- ❖ ***What about sleep?***

Physical  
Violence

Economic  
Abuse

Sexual  
Violence

Technology/  
Cyber Abuse

Psychological  
Aggression

Reproductive  
Coercion

Stalking

Substance  
Use Coercion



# Measuring Sleep in the Context of IPV

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- Focus groups with 17 female IPV survivors
- *“Fear becomes the...framework for the management of sleep”*
- Strategies to maintain safety
- Disruptions persisted even after the relationship ended

## Night Terrors

### Women’s Experiences of (Not) Sleeping Where There Is Domestic Violence

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Violence Against Women

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# Measuring Sleep in the Context of IPV

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- Sleep requires a sense of safety and security
- Do abusive partners attempt to restrict, interrupt, or control women's sleep as a method of control/abuse?



Physical  
Violence

Sexual  
Violence

Psychological  
Aggression

Stalking

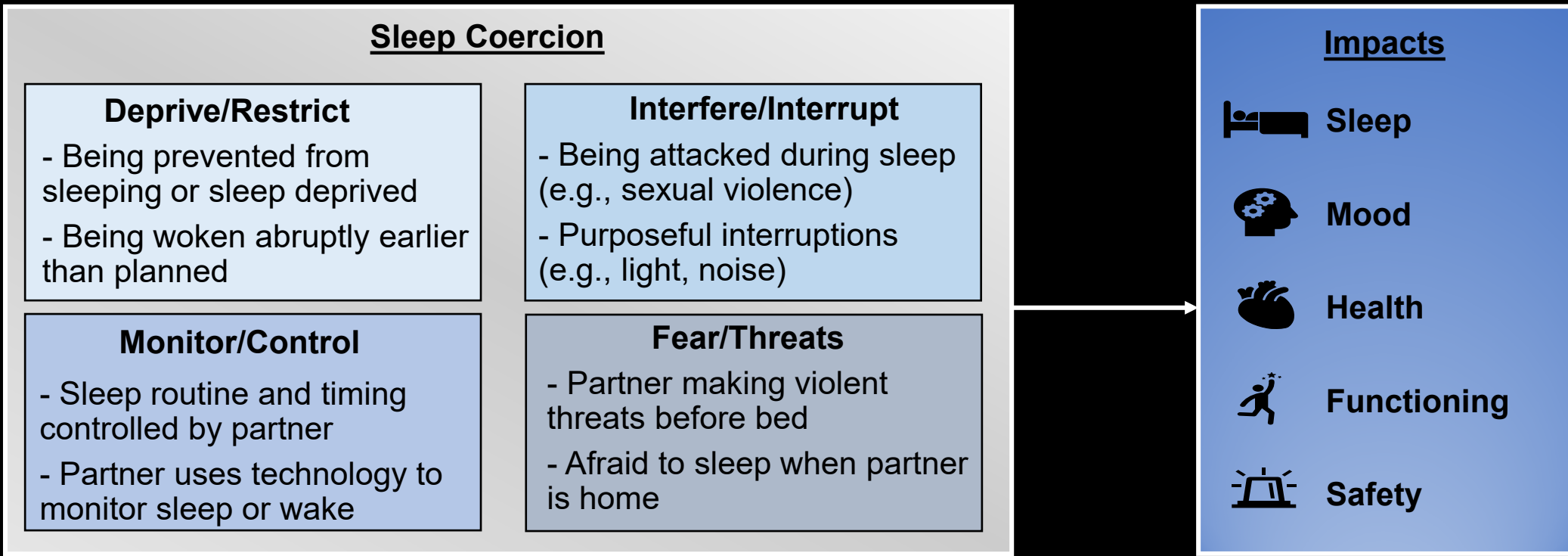
Economic  
Abuse

Technology/  
Cyber Abuse

Reproductive  
Coercion

Substance Use  
Coercion

**Sleep Coercion?**





# Methods



**IRIS Study**  
*Intimate Relationships  
Influencing Sleep*

## Recruitment/Screening (N=30)

- Local/state IPV shelters and agencies
- Women aged 18+ years
- 100% current or prior IPV history



## Self-Report Questionnaires

- Demographics, mood symptoms
- IPV + sexual violence (NISVS)
- Reproductive coercion (McCauley 2016)
- Technology-facilitated abuse (Dick 2014)
- Economic abuse (Postmus 2016)



## Qualitative Interview (Zoom)

- Adapted a standard sleep interview to query sleep-related abuse, control, disruption
- Semi-structured, 1-2 hours long
- Audio-recorded, transcribed, coded

## Sample Sleep Coercion Interview Items

*“What does going to sleep typically look like for you?”*

*“What does awake time during the night look like for you?”*

*“Who/what influences the time you wake up?”*

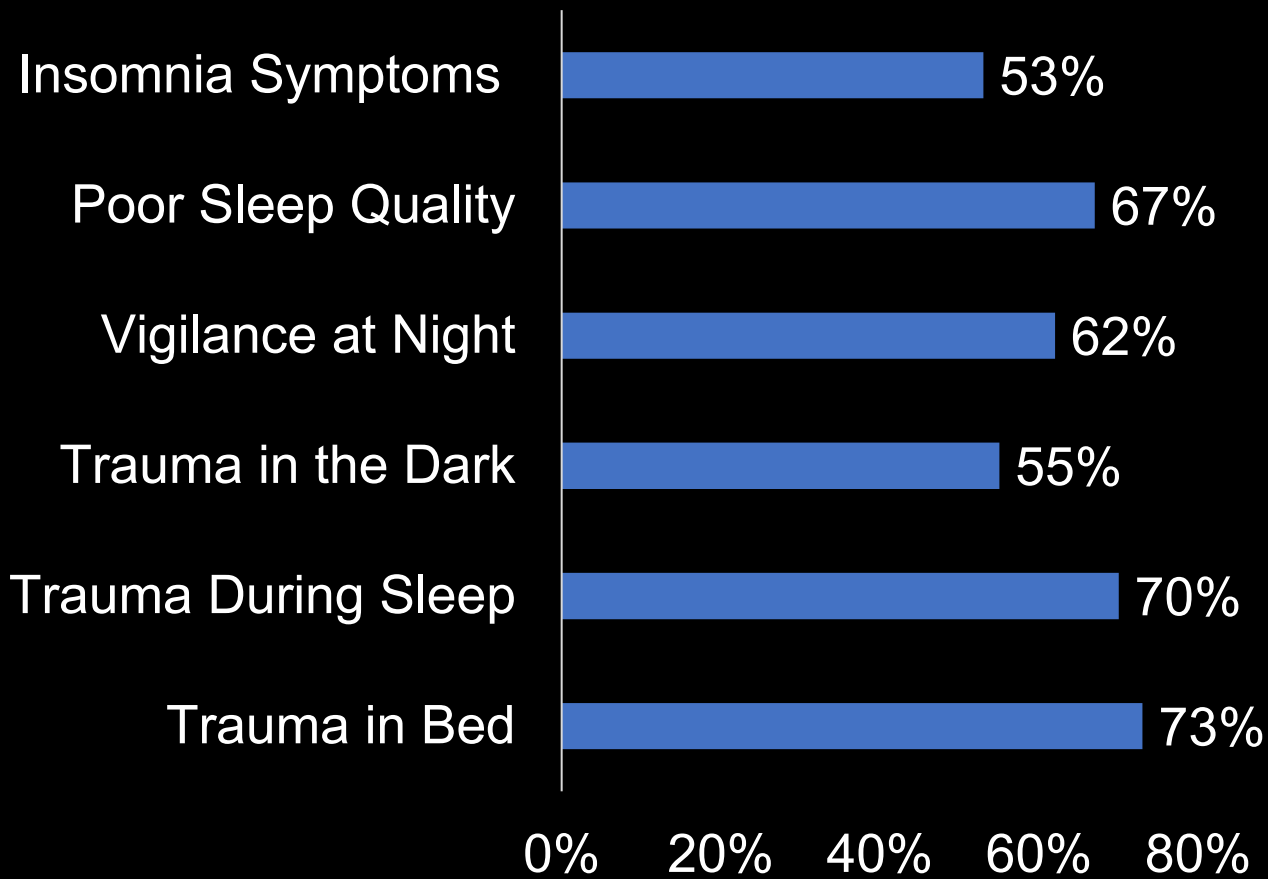
*“What strategies do you use to fall asleep? ...To stay awake?”*

*“Has a partner ever prevented you from sleeping?”*

*“Has a partner used technology to monitor/disrupt your sleep?”*

# Results (N=30)

## Sleep-Related Trauma & Impairment (Surveys)



Sample Characteristics	N (%)
Age, M(SD) [range]	40.2 (11.5) [23-62]
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	
Black or African American	9 (30%)
White	21 (70%)
<b>Sexual minority</b>	5 (16.7%)
<b>IPV History</b>	
Psychological abuse	30 (100%)
Stalking	29 (96.7%)
Physical abuse	28 (93.3%)
Sexual assault	18 (60.0%)
Reproductive coercion	14 (46.7%)
<b>Mood Symptoms</b>	
Depression	10 (36.7%)
PTSD	13 (41.9%)

# Qualitative Results



## (1) Sleep Deprivation

“Sometimes I wasn’t allowed to sleep, sometimes it would be days and days, he would just be screaming and yelling and ranting and raving.” (SV02)

“...the worst abuse I went through was sleep deprivation.” (SV20)

## (2) Opportunistic Violence During Sleep

“He’s hit me in my head [with a baseball bat]...to wake me up.” (SV02)

“He would wake me up because he... started, you know, having sex ...and I wasn’t really even awake for it in the beginning.” (SV17)

“He would make me take Xanax...feed me stuff so that I would sleep, and I don’t even know what happened during that time.” (SV18)

# Qualitative Results



## (3) Control of Sleep Conditions

“I was not allowed to set an alarm... and even if he knew I had to start working, he would not wake me up...” **(SV12)**

“If I just wanted to...watch a movie or something – I wasn’t allowed. He would be like, *‘You need to go to bed. You need to come to bed.’*” **(SV01)**

## (4) Interrupt/Disrupt Sleep

“We were having an argument and I wanted to go to bed...I had the covers up, and he’d come and whip them off and keep screaming...five minutes later, he’d come in and do it again.” **(SV01)**

“We had a camera Alexa...and he put one in the room and he would call a bunch of times, to wake me up when he was at work.” **(SV20)**

# Qualitative Results



## (5) Emotional Abuse Related to Sleep

“He would tell me that I didn’t do enough, I don’t deserve to sleep. Like, *‘You haven’t worked hard enough. This ain’t done, that ain’t done. You’re not sleeping.’*” (SV02)

“I was ridiculed for naps. Because lazy people take naps...you know, people that don’t have energy, or people that are less-than.” (SV10)

## (6) Importance of Sleep

“I have insight into how my relationship affected my sleep...it was one of the biggest things that broke me. But you don’t hear about it.” (SV05)

“Rest and sleep are essential [for the recovery process], but it can be challenging to do that sometimes after certain experiences.” (SV24)





**IRIS Study**

*Intimate Relationships*

*Influencing Sleep*

**El Estudio IRIS**

**Intimas Relaciones Influyendo en el Sueño**

**Aim:** Interview 18 Latina IPV survivors on exposure to sleep coercion and immigration-related stress and sleep issues

**Progress:** 10 interviews completed. Recruiting through November!



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# Summary / Future Directions

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Sleep coercion is an under-recognized issue in research and clinical care with potential long-term impacts on sleep and health

For clients with sleep complaints or disturbances, consider additional inquiry around sleep coercion

Create new research collaborations and partnerships with IPV advocates and agencies – let's connect!

NIH grant (under review) to create a sleep coercion measure & test in a diverse sample of 2,000+ women

Study associations of sleep coercion with IPV survivors' sleep, mood, functioning, cardiovascular and cognitive health

Develop, test, and disseminate interventions to improve sleep and health among survivors in clinical and community settings

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## Women's Biobehavioral Health Lab



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