

Evaluation of sleep support workshop- what parents think

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Research Article

Keywords: Sleep disorders, children, training

Posted Date: April 4th, 2022

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-1506259/v1>

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Abstract

Poor sleep can lead to neurodevelopmental, academic and behavioural consequences in children and young people. Sleep disorders, although common in children but appropriate diagnosis and support is often not available locally. We conducted a single centre survey among parents who attended sleep support workshop offered by Bedford community paediatric service. 28 parents responded (out of 70). 12 had already seen paediatrician for assessment of neurodevelopmental disorders, 11 waiting and 5 had isolated sleep issues. Difficulty in falling asleep (23), difficulty in maintaining sleep (11) and early morning waking (9) were main complains. The survey showed subjective improvement in knowledge about sleep problems in parents and 16/28 parents felt some improvement in their child's sleep. This small scale, single centre observation suggests that sleep support training can improve parental understanding of sleep problems and may improve sleep problems in children.

Introduction

Adequate amount of sleep is essential for a child's development. Poor sleep can lead to behavioural difficulties, poor academic performance, inattention, impulsive behaviour and can worsen chronic medical problems like epilepsy [1]. It can also have a follow-on impact on the parents' relationship and mental health. Sleep difficulties are common in children and have been reported in 25–50% of preschool children and up to 40% of adolescents [2]. It is more prevalent (up to 75%) in children with neurodevelopmental disorders and neurodisability. A significant proportion of these are due to insomnia – sleep disorder characterised by difficulty in falling asleep, early waking or a combination thereof. Behavioural interventions such as encouraging good sleep hygiene, limiting number of naps according to age, extinction techniques, positive bedtime routines and scheduled awakenings have all been associated with improved outcomes in patients with insomnia [3].

Bedford Community Paediatric Services provide a sleep workshop run by nursery nurses and nurse practitioners. They were trained by Sleep Scotland and locally by consultant paediatricians. Workshops are run once or twice per month, of which the majority are in the format of a group discussion, however 1:1 sessions can be provided if requested. Since March 2020 this service has been provided remotely due to COVID restrictions.

We performed a service evaluation to determine to what extent this workshop improves parents' knowledge of sleep disorders and whether they feel that there has been a noticeable improvement in their children's sleep.

Methods

Parents who attended the sleep workshop from the months of January to July 2021 were requested to complete an anonymous online survey consisting of 8 questions (appendix 1). Necessary ethical

approval was obtained from the trust research team lead and medical director. Of the 70 parents who we attempted to contact via telephone or email, 28 went on to complete the online survey.

Results

All 28 participants who completed this survey were parents or carers. We did not receive any feedback from teachers or other professionals who attended the workshop. Of all 28 children involved, 21 were boys and 7 were girls. 12 had already seen a paediatrician for assessment of associated neurodevelopmental disorders, 11 were still waiting for such an assessment, while 5 were involved with the workshop due to isolated sleep problems (no neurodevelopmental concern). The most common problem encountered by parents with their children was difficulty in falling asleep (23) followed by difficulty in maintaining sleep (11) and early morning waking (9). The survey found that parents subjectively felt an improvement in their knowledge of sleep disorders. Before the workshop only 10 parents felt that they had good knowledge about sleep in children and none had very good knowledge. After the workshop 23 parents felt that their knowledge about sleep in children was either good (19) or very good (4). 16/28 parents felt that their child's sleep had improved a lot (4) or a little bit (12) whereas 12/28 felt that it did not improve their child's sleep.

Discussion

Although sleep difficulties are common in children, dedicated sleep clinics are not easily available in the United Kingdom. The scope of pharmacological treatment is limited and therefore behavioural modification and sleep hygiene training is the mainstay of improving sleep quality in children. This training can however have limitations and often further support by specialist sleep clinicians is necessary. Our survey asked for suggestions for improvement to our current service provision, of which the responses are summarised in Table 1. 12/20 parents indicated that they want to see a sleep clinician locally for further investigation and treatment and 2/28 wanted a referral to a tertiary sleep clinic. This study has limitations including a single centre observation and recruitment of a small number of participants.

Declarations

Acknowledgments:

We would like thank all the wonderful children and their parents who provided their valuable feedbacks. Authors would like to thank Dr Paula Waddingham, research manager and Dr David Vickers, medical director of Cambridgeshire community services NHS trust for their support. We also thank Ms Deborah McNeill, patient experience information analyst, who helped in developing our online questionnaire.

Funding- None

Competing interests- No competing interest

Author contributions:

Tapomay Banerjee led this service evaluation project along with Callum Fernando and they contributed equally to this paper. Tapomay Banerjee developed questionnaire with help from Chinnaiah Yemula. Callum Fernando, Sarah Holmes, Elizabeth Taylor and Sharon Albone contacted parents for feedback. Elizabeth Taylor, Sarah Holmes, Gurdip Josan and Sharon Albone are members of the specialist nursing team that runs the sleep workshop. All authors contributed to the article and approved final draft.

Ethical approval- yes

Data and materials availability: No restrictions

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3. Halal CSE, Nunes ML. Education in children's sleep hygiene: which approaches are effective? A systematic review. *Jornal de Pediatria* 2014;**90**:449–56. doi:10.1016/j.jped.2014.05.001

Tables

Table 1
Participants Suggestions for improvement

1. If I required further management would use the Nurse Led Team I feel for other families a sleep service would be most beneficial
2. When I attended this course it seemed to be largely aimed at toddler sleep, with things about naps, routines, food that could be eaten before bed e.g. bananas etc. The course was in no way relevant to my autistic 10 year old - when I asked the facilitators autism-focused questions they said they did not have any training in specifically supporting children with ASC. I had been hoping for strategies my daughter could use, with my support, to help her calm her brain as her issues with sleep have always been that she can't get her brain to stop whizzing around. I did not learn anything in the course which could help her, or which we had not already tried. It was not an appropriate course for us.
3. Happy with the sleep workshop, only limitation is that some/many cases might need more specific advice or guidance which couldn't be covered in a workshop.
4. To guide me as to how I get support, what networks etc

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