

**MAGNITUDE OF ADVERSE EFFECTS ON PARENTAL HEALTH DUE TO SLEEP
DISTURBANCES IN THEIR CHILDREN WITH NEURODISABILITIES*****Anum Shumail, Muhammad Zia, Orla Flanagan, Irfan Ahmed**

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Moderate to severe sleep problems are reported in 17% of infants and 11% of preschool children, these sleep problems are even more common in children with neurodisabilities and the prevalence rate as high as 75% to 80% has been reported.^[1] The high prevalence of sleep problems in children with learning disabilities is particularly worrying since these sleep problems are associated with parental stress and add considerable burden on already stressed family.^[2] The psychological effects of a child's sleep disorder on other family members should not be overlooked. Parents may be seriously affected by the condition of their child or by persistently disrupted sleep caused by the child's sleep disturbance. Depression, impaired parent-child relationships and parenting skills, marital disharmony and under functioning at work are all possible consequences. Other children in the family may also suffer.

METHODS

A question-based survey was applied. Participants were recruited through the records of patients attending early childhood and school age services of the Brothers of Charity, Galway region during 2005 to 2006 from the age ranging from 0 to 18 years. The outcome of the study was effect on parental health and general well being and parents/caregiver rated the level of negative impact from negligible, significant to very significant. The primary care givers/parents reported whether their child's sleep was a problem (no, mild, moderate or severe problem). Data was entered into database, transferred on excel spreadsheet and then exported to SPSS version14 (a statistical package) for analysis of the data. Descriptive statistical analysis was conducted on all the appropriate variables, followed by examination of inferential statistics.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 136 sleep questioners, which were sent to parents, 77 questioners were returned, which, constitutes a response rate of 56.6%. It was reported by 42% of responders that their child's sleep is a problem (mild 13%, moderate 40.6%, severe 26.4%) and 58% of parents did not consider their child's sleep as a problem. Parents of children with current sleep problems reported

that their own sleep was significantly affected by the sleep problems in their child (90. 3%) where as 9. 7% of parents felt that their sleep is not disturbed at all.

Sleep disturbances in children negatively affects the sleep of their parents, caregivers and other siblings. It was reported in our study that 90.3% of parents/caregivers reported significant problems during the day, majority of them reported fatigue, mood disturbances and difficulties at work. The prevalence sleep disturbance among parents is significantly high in our study *i. e.* 42% vs, 20% reported by Didden *et al.* (2002). This difference may indicate that parents tend to over- or underestimate the sleep problems of their children and perhaps a good number of these children were having some kind of behavioural therapy.

It was also reported that 34. 5% of siblings of children with sleep problems had serious sleep disturbances, further stressing the already tired caregiver. The sleep disturbance in children had negative impact on the family life which was graded as; negligible, significant and very significant. It was reported that sleep disturbances in their child has negligible affect on their family life in 15. 6%, a significant effect in 50% and very significantly effect in 34. 4% of cases, so 74. 4% of

families exhibited significant to very significant effect on their family life due to sleep disturbances in their child.

Depending on circumstances, the consequences for parenting and family function may be very serious. Mothers of children with learning disability and severe sleep problem has been described as more irritable, concerned about their own health and less affectionate towards their children than mothers of such children without sleep problems^[3, 5] The psychological effects of a child's sleep problem on other family members should not be overlooked. Parents may be seriously worried about their child's health or by their own persistently disrupted sleep caused by the child's sleep problems. Depression, impaired parent-child relationship and parenting skills, marital disharmony and underfunctioning at work are all possible consequences.^[3] A study of parents with disabled children highlighted too little rest and sleep as being the major problem in dealing with these children. They suggest it makes the parent feel as if they are in a prison with an infant who will never grow up.^[4]

Given the high prevalence and co-occurrence of paternal psychological distress and child sleep problems, health professionals should regularly ask about both. This is important because of the known negative impact on the family and child's development. It is also important to identify the sleep problems in children with neurodisability and effective treatment is offered. This will result in improvement in quality of mental health of parents and caregivers.

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