



Health Briefs, Sleep Medicine

Study: Tired parents may overestimate children's sleeping problems

by Melissa Jenco, News Content Editor

Parents who don't sleep well may mistakenly believe their children don't either, according to a new study.

"It seems that tired parents present an observation bias as regards their child's sleep compared to parents not suffering from sleep problems," researchers said in the study. "Therefore, in the field of pediatric sleep disorders, future diagnosis methods and treatments should take into consideration not only the examined child but also the whole family, including the parents."



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Researchers in Finland studied the sleep of 100 2- to 6-year-olds and their parents by asking the children to wear an actigraphy bracelet for a week. The bracelets monitor movement acceleration and can estimate sleep duration and quality.

Parents kept a sleep diary for their children and filled out a Sleep Disturbance Scale for Children questionnaire. They also answered questions about their own sleep and health with the Jenkins' Sleep Scale and 12-item general health questionnaire.

Researchers detailed the results in the study "Poor Parental Sleep and the Reported Sleep Quality of their Children" (Rönnlund H, et al. *Pediatrics*. March 24, 2016. <http://pediatrics.aappublications.org/content/early/2016/03/22/peds.2015-3425>). They found an association between high levels of parental sleeping problems and frequent reports of children's sleeping problems. However, readings from the children's actigraphy bracelets did not support their perceptions.

"Hence, in the clinical field, it is of paramount importance to aim the interventions of a child's sleeping difficulties at the well-being of the whole family instead of only the child under examination. ... Tired parents can unconsciously exaggerate their child's sleeping difficulties, which could lead to misplaced interventions," the authors said.

They noted several limitations to the study including the homogeneity of the families which mostly were white and highly educated. In addition, roughly 26% of the children slept in their parents' bedroom and the brand of actigraphy bracelet used hadn't been validated for pediatric sleep studies although it has been shown to be reliable.



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