Poor sleep has negative implications for children with and without ADHD, but in different ways.

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Abstract

BACKGROUND:
Sleep problems are commonly reported in attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), and are also a familiar characteristic of typical development (TD). We sought to elucidate the relationship between sleep, ADHD-trait behaviours and cognitive inattention, and how it manifests between ADHD and TD children.

PARTICIPANTS:
18 children diagnosed with ADHD and 20 age-matched TD controls aged 5-11 year-old participated in the study.

METHODS:
Sleep profiles were assessed using Children's Sleep Habits Questionnaire and actigraphy measures. Behavioural functioning was examined using Conners' Parent Report Scale and attention using the computerised Conners' Continuous Performance Task.

RESULTS:
We found evidence of 1) poorer sleep quality in the ADHD group, despite no difference in actual sleep time; 2) poor sleep quality in TD children predicted increased ADHD-trait behaviours, despite no association with attention; 3) a consistent trend for poor sleep quality predicting reduced attentional control in ADHD children, despite no association with behaviour.

CONCLUSIONS:
Poor sleep quality affects developmental sub-groups in different ways. For ADHD children poor sleep worsens their predisposed attentional deficit, whilst for TD children it mimics ADHD behaviours. These findings have important implications for the debate on over-diagnosis of childhood ADHD, and the use of sleep-based interventions. Above all, they highlight the importance of promoting good sleep hygiene in all children.