

An exploration of the sleep needs, experiences and perspectives of adolescents who have been excluded from mainstream education

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BACKGROUND

- Sleep is fundamental to human health and wellbeing. Research indicates numerous and varied associations between sleep and adolescent learning, development and wellbeing. There is limited research about UK adolescents specifically, and more to be learned about the sleep of specific subgroups of adolescents.
- Bringing about changes in adolescents' sleep-related behaviours is challenging, and motivation for behaviour change is relevant¹.
- Adolescents who have been excluded from mainstream education may have similar characteristics to adolescents that research suggests experience poor sleep, (e.g. relating to socioeconomic status, mental health, social and emotional skills and externalising behaviour).
- This study aims to bring about deeper insight into adolescent experiences and views regarding sleep in order to inform approaches to understanding and supporting adolescent sleep needs.

METHODS

- Participants were nine adolescents (one female) aged 11-15 years attending a pupil referral unit and a special school for children and young people with social, emotional and mental health needs.
- Data was collected via individual semi-structured interviews and completion of a questionnaire. The questionnaire included self-reported sleep duration, use of sleep medication and three published sleep measures: Chronic Sleep Reduction Questionnaire (CSRQ)²; Paediatric Daytime Sleepiness Scale (PDSS)³; Adolescent Sleep Hygiene Scale – revised (ASHSr)⁴.
- Interviews were audio recorded, transcribed and subsequently analysed using Thematic Analysis⁵.

RESULTS

- Five themes were identified, each with one to five subthemes (Figure 1). Participants described having sleep patterns involving often staying up late and having different sleep timing on weekends than weekdays, which was linked to school demands and lack of demands on weekends. Participants described having difficulties with their sleep such as struggling to fall or stay asleep. Participants depicted themselves as lacking control over aspects of their sleep and their lives.
- Questionnaire data indicated three participants had sleep measure scores indicating concerns, and six participants had poor sleep hygiene behaviours. Six participants reported having less than the recommended amount of sleep for their age on school nights.

"I think I get exhausted, I get annoyed, I get easily angry"

"It's not my fault I can't get out of bed"

"I wish I could, I wish if like, I wish if like I snap my fingers [snaps fingers] I could go to sleep"

"What I is like is not really happy, I ain't happy, I ain't joyful"

"My brother that sleeps in the same bed keeps kicking me"

"If I can't sleep I'll just go on my phone ... and then just wait until I fall asleep"

"... they are getting their full sleep, I'm not ... They're concentrating, I wouldn't be"

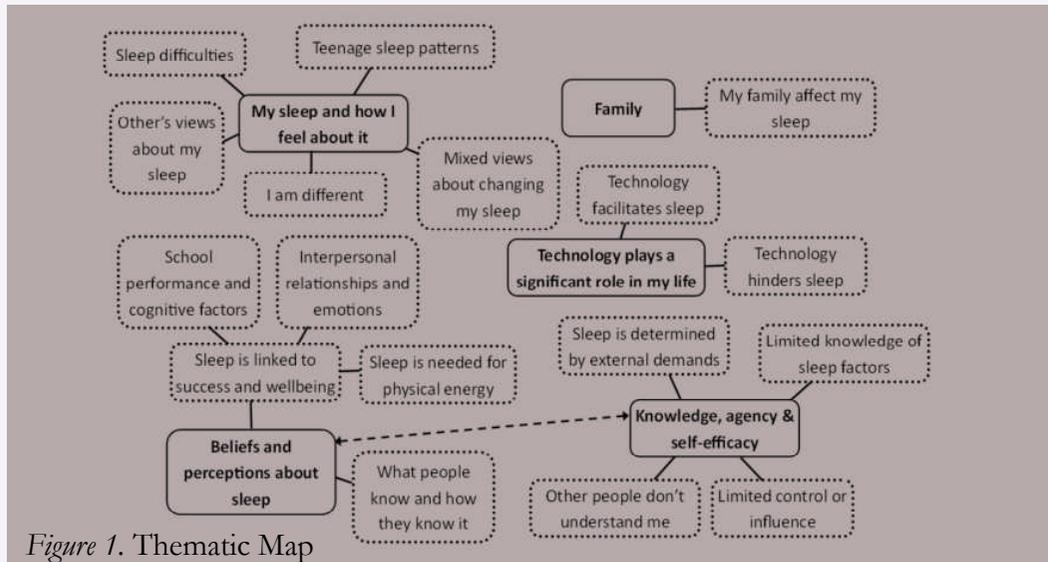


Figure 1. Thematic Map

DISCUSSION

- The sleep patterns, habits and difficulties described link to adolescent patterns of sleep described in the research literature (e.g. homeostatic and circadian regulation of sleep, school start times, social jetlag, use and impact of technology)
- Views and experiences described here were similar and different to previous research. Other populations of adolescents identified barriers to sleep that those in this study did not, namely excitement, stress, emotions, homework and participating in sports in the evening⁶.

IMPLICATIONS

- Development of sleep education strategies for adolescents would be timely and beneficial.
- Adults aiming to motivate and influence adolescents will benefit from understanding their perspectives, experiences and priorities as these can differ to those from an adult perspective, and can differ by population characteristics.
- The importance of considering home and environmental factors is highlighted.
- Educational Psychologists can use structured interviews and published measures to gather relevant data about sleep needs in their practice.

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