



Communicating Research in Clear Language

Sleep and Pediatric Obsessive Compulsive Disorder

What is the research about?

Sleep problems are common in children with Obsessive Compulsive Disorder (OCD). However, there is little research on what forms they take and how they relate to the OCD, itself. Since sleep disturbances are known to affect learning ability and mood, it is important to understand if they also affect the symptoms of OCD. It is possible that they may affect the overall functioning of children with the condition.

What did the researchers do?

For this pilot project, the researchers recruited 12 children, aged 7 to 11, with a diagnosis of OCD, and their parents, who lived Washington, D.C. All of the children had other diagnoses, such as ADHD, anxiety disorders, oppositional defiant disorder and Tourette Syndrome. None had a diagnosis of depression and none was on medication for OCD. Six children with similar ages and backgrounds were recruited as the comparison group. All of the children and their parents were interviewed to confirm the diagnosis, rate its severity, and determine how much the condition interfered with the child's daily life. The researchers also tested the children for symptoms of depression. Both the children and their parents reported on the child's sleep habits. The parents maintained sleep logs and data were collected from activity monitors, which measured sleep patterns.

What did the researchers find?

The major finding was that the children with OCD had an average of one hour less sleep than children in the control group. Both groups had the same number of awakenings during the night. However, their length in children with OCD was more than twice as long as those experienced by the control group children. As well, the children with OCD tended to have more severe compulsions the less sleep they got.

Take home message

In this study, a small group of children with OCD were found to have significant problems with sleep, which were related to the severity of their symptoms. These findings suggest that studies with much larger groups of children should be done to determine whether or not there is a relationship between OCD and sleep disturbances. Such information could lead to better diagnosis, treatment, and outcomes for children with the condition.

NOTE: The original [Research Report](#) was written by C. Alfano and K. Kim and published in the *Journal of Anxiety Disorders*. 2011.