

HOW WELL DOES YOUR CHILD SLEEP?

In a recent study a La Trobe University researcher has found that knowledge of children's sleep patterns among parents and medical professionals is generally poor.



Associate Professor Amanda Richdale from the School of Psychological Science, Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre, worked jointly with Dr Kimberly Schreck, Penn State University, US, on a study that surveyed parents of 170 children aged 2-17 from Australia and the US..

'We found that parent's knowledge of paediatric sleep was generally poor. Fewer than 10 per cent of the parents sampled answered 50 per cent or more of the total questions correctly,' says Dr Richdale.

The results of this study were similar to studies related to medical professional's knowledge of sleep problems, which indicated low knowledge about child sleep development by many paediatricians, particularly in specific sleep areas according to Dr Richdale.

'This possible combination of lack of parental and medical professional knowledge of childhood sleep could have a significant impact on children.

'As research suggests that medical professionals typically rely upon parents to detect and report if their child has a sleep problem parental lack of sleep knowledge may

significantly impact children receiving care,' says Dr Richdale.

Similar research has estimated rates of childhood sleep problems in the general population of children to be between 25–50 per cent, with the rate varying with age, however the rate of sleep problems for children with disabilities ranging from 24—86 per cent.

'This suggests that millions of children worldwide could be experiencing the potentially debilitating effects of sleep disorders, such as day-time behaviour and mental health problems. The negative effects of sleep problems have been associated with a wide variety of family problems.

In children, sleep disorders can also negatively affect development in social and behavioural competence, cognitive and academic performance, and physical development.

Dr Richdale suggests better training for medical professionals and parents of children in order to better understand childhood sleeping patterns.

'Despite these possible debilitating consequences, many children with sleep problems may remain undetected due to health professionals and parent's insufficient training in and knowledge of childhood sleep,' says Dr Richdale.

MORE INFORMATION

Further information on the research opportunities available in the School of Psychological Science Olga Tennison Autism Research Centre can be found at: latrobe.edu.au/otarc/research/index.html