

Young children in mostly Caucasian countries obtain more sleep than those in Asian countries

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Young children in predominantly Caucasian countries obtain more overall sleep, have earlier bedtimes, and are less likely to room-share than young children in predominantly Asian countries. These results indicate substantial differences in sleep patterns in young children throughout the world, according to a research abstract that will be presented on Wednesday at SLEEP 2008, the 22nd Annual Meeting of the Associated Professional Sleep Societies (APSS).

The study, authored by Jodi Mindell, PhD, of Saint Joseph's University in Philadelphia, focused on 28287 infants and toddlers, whose parents completed an expanded version of the Brief Infant Sleep Questionnaire.

Of the subjects, 4,505 were from the United States, 800 from the United Kingdom, 1,073 from Australia, 1,081 from New Zealand, 501 from Canada, 1,049 from Hong Kong, 1,036 from Korea, 896 from Taiwan, 988 from Thailand, 967 from Indonesia, 872 from Japan, 7,505 from China, 3892 from India, 997 from Malaysia, 1034 from Philippines, and 1001 from Singapore.

According to the results, significant variability in bedtimes and total sleep time were found. Room-sharing ranged from 15.1 percent in Canada to 94.5 percent in Thailand. There was also a wide-range in the percentage of parents who perceived that their child had a small or severe sleep problem (11 percent in Thailand to 76 percent in China).

Overall, children from predominantly Asian countries had significantly later bedtimes, shorter total sleep times, increased parental conception of sleep problems, and were more likely to room share than children from predominantly Caucasian countries. On the other hand, there were limited differences with no clinical significance in night wakings and naps.

“This study is the first one to ever look at sleep in infants and toddlers cross-culturally, and the results are astonishing,” said Dr. Mindell. “We found vast differences in amounts of sleep and parents' perceptions of sleep problems across countries. These results raise more questions than provide answers. For example, ‘Are these differences simply the result of differing cultural practices?’ and ‘What is the impact, if any, of these vast differences?’”

It is important to make sure that your child gets enough sleep and sleeps well. The value of sleep can be measured by your child’s smiling face, happy nature and natural energy. A child who does not get enough sleep may have behavior problems. A child’s sleep problems can also cause unnecessary stress for you and the other members of your family.

Parents who suspect that their child might be suffering from a sleep disorder are encouraged to consult with their child’s pediatrician or a sleep specialist.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

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