



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

The mediator role of psychological morbidity on sleep and health behaviors in adolescents[☆]



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KEYWORDS

Adolescents;
Psychological morbidity;
Sleep;
Health behaviors

Abstract

Objective: This study examined the mediation role of psychological morbidity, defined in this study as depression/anxiety, in the relationship between excessive daytime sleepiness and sleep quality, and between sleep habits and health behaviors, in adolescents.

Methods: A total of 272 students, between 12 and 18 years old, underwent a psychological protocol assessing excessive daytime sleepiness, sleep quality, sleep habits, health behavior, and psychological morbidity.

Results: Psychological morbidity was not associated with the relationship between excessive daytime sleepiness and sleep quality, but was associated, with statistical significance, in the relationship between sleep habits and health behaviors. These results emphasize the role of psychological morbidity in adolescent health behaviors.

Conclusion: Analyzing the symptoms of depression and anxiety in pediatric patients may help in a more accurate diagnosis, especially in relation to sleep problems and health behaviors.

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PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Adolescentes;
Morbidade Psicológica;
Sono;
Comportamentos de saúde

O papel mediador da morbidade psicológica em hábitos de sono e comportamentos de saúde em adolescentes

Resumo

Objetivo: Este estudo analisa o papel mediador da morbidade psicológica, definida neste estudo como depressão e ansiedade, na relação entre a sonolência diurna excessiva e qualidade do sono, e entre hábitos de sono e comportamentos de saúde, em adolescentes.

Método: 272 Estudantes, entre 12 e 18 anos, foram entrevistados através de um protocolo de avaliação que acessou dados acerca da sonolência diurna excessiva, qualidade do sono, hábitos de sono, comportamentos de saúde e morbidade psicológica.

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Resultados: Os resultados mostraram que a morbidade psicológica não estava associada, com significância estatística, na relação entre a sonolência diurna excessiva e qualidade do sono, mas estava associada, com significância estatística, na relação entre hábitos de sono e comportamentos de saúde. Esse resultado reforça a importância da morbidade psicológica nos comportamentos de saúde dos adolescentes.

Conclusão: Investigar sintomas de depressão e ansiedade nas consultas pediátricas, pode auxiliar o profissional num diagnóstico mais preciso, principalmente em relação a problemas de sono e comportamentos de saúde.

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Introduction

Adolescence is marked by several biopsychosocial changes. Adolescence is also a period where sleep undergoes several structural changes, which may cause problems in sleep quality, and consequently, a negative impact in several areas of an adolescent's life, including mental health.¹ It is known that sleep is essential for the proper functioning and maintenance of life,² and recently it was concluded that a major function of sleep is to allow neurons to perform cell maintenance.³ Despite this complex function, adolescents are sleeping less than what was expected.⁴ This reduction in quality and time of sleep may be due to several factors, including poor sleep habits and poor health behaviors, which can lead to negative consequences, such as excessive daytime sleepiness.

The lack of healthy sleep habits has been commonly observed in studies with adolescents. One of the factors that is closely linked with the decline of healthy sleep habits is the use of electronics, which have a large negative impact on adolescent's sleep quality⁵ since they are one of the main distractions that compete with sleep. However, the problem may worsen when beyond the use of electronics, adolescents make use of psychoactive substances, such as caffeine drinks to stay awake longer, which have an impact on sleep quality and on daytime sleepiness.⁶ This type of behavior may become a vicious cycle, *i.e.*, the adolescent needs to wake up early to go to school, will show daytime sleepiness (reduced sleep time), and thus needs caffeinated beverages to help to stay awake during class.

The literature shows a connection between excessive daytime sleepiness and sleep deprivation.⁷ Moreover, a systematic review found a strict relationship between sleep problems and health risk behaviors, such as consumption of psychoactive substances and unprotected sex.⁸ Furthermore, sleep problems were connected with emotional and behavior problems among adolescents.⁸ Previous studies have found that adolescents with less hours of sleep showed higher levels of depressive symptoms and higher prevalence of anxiety disorders.⁹ Literature has also found high rates of comorbidity among adolescents that have sleep problems and depression, *i.e.*, adolescents who suffer from sleep disorders also show depressive disorders concomitantly.⁵

A recent study found that when young students had a few hours of sleep during the week, there was considerably more self-reports of complaints regarding anxiety and tension.¹⁰ A meta-analysis found that 20% of adolescents suffers from depression and sleep problems.¹¹ Literature has found a relationship between psychological morbidity (depression and anxiety solely or combined) and adolescents' sleep disturbances. Psychological morbidity is the distress caused by the lack of physical and psychological well-being, which has an impact on the individual's health. In the present paper, the term psychological morbidity includes the combination of depression and anxiety.¹²

According to the Stress-Coping Model from Maes et al.¹³ illness related events, disease treatment, and demographic characteristics are linked with emotional and cognitive responses as well as coping, predicting psychological, physical, and social consequences of illness. Coping is also influenced by the individual's internal and external resources. Based on the Stress-Coping Model, in this study, emotional response was analyzed as psychological morbidity, the health related event considered was excessive daytime sleepiness, and the psychological consequences included both sleep quality and health behaviors. Sleep habits were considered an internal resource that, through coping, could also influence health behaviors. With these goals in mind, the focus of this research was to analyze the plausible mediation role of psychological morbidity in the relationship between excessive daytime sleepiness and sleep quality, as well as the mediation role of psychological morbidity in the relationship between sleep habits and health behaviors.

Methods

Participants

Two public schools in the north of Portugal agreed to participate in this research. The sample was composed of adolescents aged 12–18 years of both genders. The inclusion criteria included age 12 to 18 years old, completed authorization by the parents, and being present in the application day, in the class. There were no exclusion criteria.

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