



# Understanding the experiences, needs and confidence of school nurses in advising and managing sleep in school-aged children and young people in the United Kingdom

Dr Georgia Cook<sup>1</sup>, Professor Luci Wiggs<sup>2</sup>, Tikki Harrold<sup>3</sup>, Rachel Hobin<sup>4</sup>, Jen Kirman<sup>4</sup> & Dr Fiona Tierney<sup>2</sup>.

1. Oxford Institute of Applied Health Research (OxInAHR), Oxford Brookes University. 2. Centre for Psychological Research, Oxford Brookes University. 3. Now retired: Clinical Education Lead, School Health Nurse, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. 4. Oxford School of Nursing and Midwifery, Oxford Brookes University.

## Introduction

Healthy sleep is essential for physical and mental health and wellbeing<sup>1,2</sup>. Yet, disturbed sleep is common in 20-25% school-aged and children and young people (CYP)<sup>3,4</sup>.

Poor sleep in CYP is associated with adverse physical, cognitive, emotional, psychological and behavioural functioning<sup>5,6</sup> and also impacts parents/caregivers sleep and functioning<sup>7,8</sup>.

No evidence from United Kingdom (UK) on school nurses (SNs) role in managing and support sleep in school-aged CYP.

**Study Aim:** To establish the experiences, needs and confidence of SNs in the UK of supporting CYP around sleep.

## Methods

Cross-sectional online survey study.  
82 school nurses (around 10% of qualified UK workforce)<sup>9</sup>

- Participants predominantly worked in England at **state schools** with **both primary and secondary** school aged children
- Nearly three quarters held the specialist community public health nurse (SCPHN) qualification
- Experienced professionals (1 to 38 years, Mean = 10.6, SD=8.53 years of experience)

Survey captured experiences of supporting CYP (primary and secondary), parents/caregivers and SNs own reflections on their practice and challenges faced.

## Results

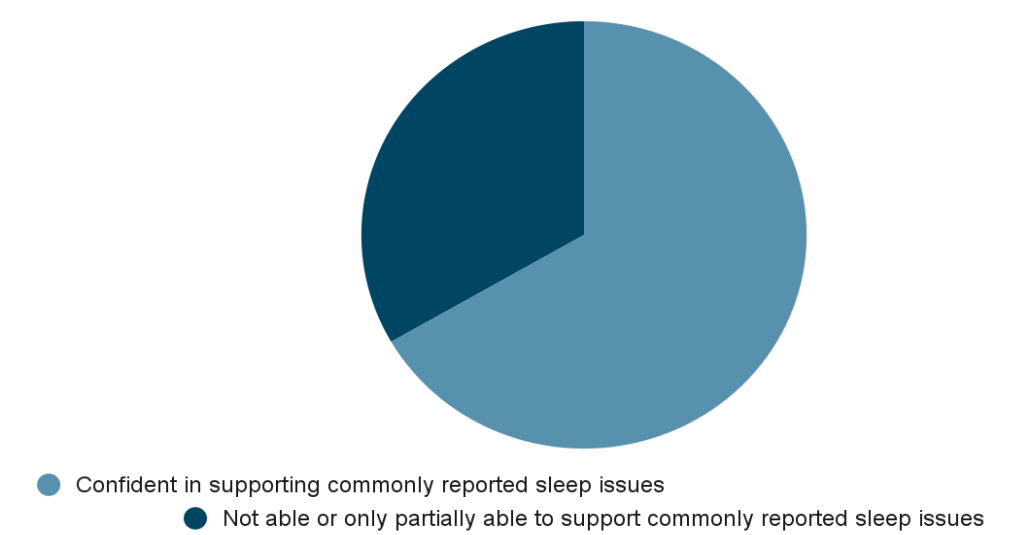
95% of SNs reported they were 'often' or 'very often' asked about sleep-related issues.

Common topics related to sleep disruption (e.g. anxiety or environment), sleep timing, settling issues and daytime functioning. In primary school-ages night wakings and daytime sleepiness were also issues raised.

### School nurse reported confidence

Levels were mixed. A third felt they were not able or only partially able to support around commonly-raised sleep topics.

School nurses reported confidence in supporting commonly reported sleep issues



### School nurse reported challenges

### School nurse reported needs

**Lack of training or knowledge**  
 '[SNs] not provided training in sleep support'

**Lack of confidence**  
 'I can give generic advice but don't feel confident on the evidence base'

**Training, information or resources for SNs**  
 '[I have never received training around this]'

**Resources for parents**  
 'I don't feel the resources we pass on are particularly good'

**Lack of time**  
 'Number of referrals, staffing shortages and time'

**CYP's receptiveness**  
 '[CYP] engagement, understanding and readiness to change'

**Lack of time**  
 'Lack of resources and information to share with parents and young people'

**PSHE programmes**  
 'Send stronger messages universally & embed in whole school approach'

## Discussion

Sleep is a modifiable prevention and intervention target and school nurses are ideally placed to deliver support around CYP's sleep.

This study identifies:

1. A need for further investment in the knowledge, skills and abilities of SNs around sleep and sleep-related issues
2. The development of engaging informational materials for CYP and their parents/caregivers
3. PSHE lesson plans

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gcook@brookes.ac.uk  
ftierney@brookes.ac.uk