Poor Sleep Among Community Dwelling Older People
Workpackage 2

The primary focus of this SomnIA workpackage is an exploratory study of the lived experiences, perspectives and opinions relating to sleep of older men and women living in the community. This workpackage aims to provide a detailed understanding of older people's experiences of poor sleep, sleep needs, perceptions of causes of poor sleep, strategies used to improve sleep, and attitudes to sleep medication.

In brief, SomnIA researchers have:

- conducted a survey of the prevalence of poor sleep among 1158 people aged 65 and over,
- conducted interviews with 62 older people to obtain an in-depth understanding of the meanings and experiences of poor sleep, together with their coping strategies,
- obtained two weeks of sleep, activity and food consumption diaries, two weeks of actigraphy and two weeks of audio sleep diaries from older people who were interviewed.

Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI)*

In this first briefing paper on Workpackage 2, we illustrate some of the findings from the postal survey of older people, which was kindly distributed by ten GP practices in the Thames Valley area. The questionnaires were sent to an equal number of men and women aged 65-74 and 75+. Questions were taken from the PSQI (Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index) - which is a self-rated questionnaire to assess sleep quality and disturbances over a 1-month time interval. Other questions were asked about living circumstances, age, employment and health status. The questionnaires were returned from similar proportions of men and women, and the two age groups.

Survey Responses by Age Group and Gender

n=1158

- Male: Age group 65-74: 26%
- Male: Age group 75+: 24%
- Female: Age group 65-74: 26%
- Female: Age group 75+: 24%

The following are just some of the questions taken from the PSQI:

- During the past month, how often have you had trouble sleeping because you had to get up to use the bathroom?
- During the past month, how often have you taken medicine (prescribed or 'over the counter') to help you sleep?
- During the past month, how would you rate your sleep quality overall?
- How long in minutes has it taken you to fall asleep at night?


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The PSQI is a reliable, validated and standardised questionnaire which is commonly used to measure sleep quality and discriminate between ‘good’ and ‘poor’ sleepers. The questionnaire is made up of seven different components which add together to make a global score. A global score of more than 5 indicates a ‘poor’ sleeper. The chart below illustrates how ‘good’ and ‘poor’ sleepers were distributed by age group and by gender. For example, 62% of women over 75 were ‘poor’ sleepers.

A minority of those reporting sleep disturbances took medication to help with their sleep, including prescribed sleeping medication, or over the counter remedies such as herbal tablets. The table below shows that 90% of men and 84% of women had not taken any medication to help them sleep over the last month. Therefore, in spite of so many people experiencing poor sleep according to their PSQI score, few took any medicines to help with their sleep.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>During the past month, how often have you taken medicine (prescribed or ‘over the counter’) to help you sleep?</th>
<th>Question 6—PSQI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Not during the past month</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>90%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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