Psychological treatment for sleep problems in adults with intellectual disabilities

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Background
- Disordered sleep is a common and often lifelong problem among people with ID. Settling problems, excessive daytime sleepiness, night waking problems, and sleep apnoea are some of the most common sleep problems that adults and children with ID experience. There is considerable evidence to suggest that sleep problems are highly associated with a number of problematic factors in the individuals themselves, their first line carers (i.e. mothers) and their families as a whole. Insufficient sleep has been highly associated with increases in aggression, self injury and property destruction.
- Improving sleep and providing successful treatment for individuals with ID can benefit the families and alleviate, if not reverse these trends.

Aims:
1. To assess the efficacy of psychological sleep treatment techniques, such as extinction and sleep hygiene, for severe sleep disorders in adults with ID using a RCT design.
2. To assess changes in the adults’ daytime behaviour in relation to psychological sleep treatment.

Methods
NHS Ethical approval was obtained

Sample:
62 adults with ID and sleep problems were recruited and randomly assigned to the experimental and the control group from 2 different London Boroughs.

Measures:
- The Adaptive Behaviour Scale (ABS- RC:2), part I (Nihira et al., 1993)
- Actigraphy recordings & sleep diary (5 days/night)
- Simonds & Parraga (1982) sleep questionnaire
- Semi-structured sleep interview (for adult with ID)
- The Aberrant Behaviour Checklist (ABC; Aman & Singh, 1986)
- Staff experience & satisfaction questionnaire

Four 1 hour sessions were held with carers of participants in the experimental group. The following treatment techniques were discussed in the training sessions:
- Positive reinforcement
- Sleep hygiene
- Bedtime routine
- Graduated extinction
- Jacobsonian relaxation exercises (CD provided)
- Booklets to share with other members of staff were provided

Results

Kruskal-Wallis
- Non parametric analysis was performed via the use of Kruskal-Wallis one-way ANOVAs on the two groups (experimental and control).
- No significant differences were identified for all sleep variables and ABC variables.

Spearman rho correlations
- Spearman rho correlations were carried out between the sleep variables and the ABC. The majority of the variables were found to correlate significantly.

Case study

Potential formulation of Ben’s sleep and sleep habits

Staff experience & satisfaction questionnaire
- 145 questionnaires were sent out to staff members of participants in the experimental group.
- Achieved 32% response rate
- 22% of the carers identified correctly the participants assigned to the experimental group, 65% gave a wrong answer and 13% did not answer the question.
- Majority of carers found the training very helpful.

Conclusions
- Group training of carers on psychological treatment for sleep problems proved to produce no significant change in the measures used.
- There is good evidence that the techniques taught are effective when implemented with individuals. It seems likely, therefore, that the staff trained were unable to implement techniques sufficiently to produce change.
- In support of this conclusion, 2/3rds of staff members working with individuals in the experimental group appeared to be unaware that the individual was in the experimental group, suggesting that the staff attending training had not disseminated information or applied techniques in practice.