



GIFTEDNESS AND SLEEP

Manny Moerman & Noks Nauta
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It's clear to everyone that sleep is very important. A large number of studies show this to be true. However, many people have trouble sleeping. Surfing the net for half an hour provides you with a long list of sleeping disorders, as well as causes, consequences and any amount of advice. Approximately 30% of adults suffer from sleeping problems at one time or another.

Giftedness and sleep

Is there a link between giftedness and sleep? Do gifted people think too much and worry too much? It is often said that many gifted people need less sleep than others, this said to be evident in children. But is this true? There is no scientific research in this area. For this reason the IHBV (Gifted and Talented Adults Foundation) set out to create an overview of the prevalence of sleeping problems among gifted adults, as a way to prepare a grant request for a more comprehensive study.

Pre-study

By contacting gifted adults through LinkedIn the IHBV tried to find out how gifted adults perceive their sleep quality and in what measure to what extent they suffer from sleeping disorders. 46 Respondents (34 women and 12 men) have supplied enough information to give a first impression. In this pre-study questions were asked about how gifted adults perceive their sleep (good, moderate, bad), how many hours of sleep they need on average, and how they typify any sleeping disorder they have (falling asleep, continuing to sleep after waking up, or else) and what they think causes their sleeping disorder, as well as the solutions they have for their problems and what advice they would give to others who suffer as they do. The respondents also answered questions about their age and gender. The respondents were given the freedom to elaborate on their answers, as well as add their own questions or remarks.

Results in short

48% of respondents reported bad or moderate sleeping quality, and 41% say they have a sleeping disorder. Women experience sleeping disorders twice as often as men. The average duration of sleep required was 7.2 hours. For men the average was 6.6 (range 2.5 to 9) and for women 7.5 (range 4 to 10 hours). A major cause of sleeping disorders was reported as 'not being able to stop thinking'. This was not necessarily perceived as a bad thing: 'having ideas' was also named in this category. Besides this several medical issues were mentioned like apnoea and restless legs syndrome. Finally external stimulants like light and sound were also mentioned. Many respondents gave solutions and advice. The most common solution was to 'find a distraction'. This could range from reading to 'doing something with my hands'. Meditating and 'being relaxed about it' (acceptance) were also mentioned often.



Conclusions

The results of this study suit that sleeping disorders occur about twice as much in women as they do in men. In order to find out if sleeping problems are more common in gifted adults than in the average population a larger group will have to be interviewed. Preliminary findings suggest it to be so, as 41% of the gifted respondents reported having trouble sleeping, while the average population is recorded to score only 30%. We suggest further studies must be held in a larger group and selective participation must be discouraged. It is possible that more people with sleeping problems responded to our request. Since nothing has been published about this theme before, the results of this pre-study will be offered to an international medical publication about sleep, in collaboration with Marcel Smits, neurologist and sleep expert. We hope that focussing more on this group will lead us to increase our knowledge about the sleeping processes for gifted adults and perhaps offer some conclusive answers to our questions.

This pre-study left a number of questions unanswered that certainly require attention. During the HB-café¹ of February 25th 2011 about 'getting a good night's sleep' a large number of questions arose from the target audience. Participants touched base on themes such as the relationship to high sensitivity, the influence of dreams, the influence of food and the influence of the biological blueprint. More extensive research can elaborate on these issues.

The importance of more information on this subject is clear. A well-rested mind in a rested body can mean a lot more for society as a whole. And a rested gifted person can give even more. Further study is justified.

Authors

Manny Moerman is a freelance writer consultant on the effective use of language (www.mamoteksteffect.nl), and a communications consultant for Rabobank. About ten years ago she discovered she was gifted. The pieces of the puzzle finally fell into place. One of the pieces of the puzzle that hasn't found its spot yet was sleep and this is the reason she assisted in the pre-study.

Address: Distel 38, 3893GP Zeewolde

The author wrote this article at the request of IHBV (Gifted and Talented Adults Foundation).

Noks Nauta is an occupational health physician and a psychologist. She discovered she was gifted in 2000 and has since studied giftedness in adults professionally. She has worked for the IHBV (Gifted and Talented Adults Foundation) since 2010. www.ihbv.nl

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¹ A gathering for gifted adults in which a theme is discussed