

# Sleeplessness and mental health in children and young adults

Since 2007, three times more children under the age of 14 have attended hospital for sleep deprivation linked issues. The sleeping pill, containing the hormone melatonin, has been administered ten times more in the past ten years to children and adults under 55. Melatonin is a hormone which causes the body to feel sleepy.

Things that affect the production of Melatonin:

- **Blue light in smart phones** – this was designed to prevent the user from falling asleep whilst doing work for example, but the increasing use of social media amongst adolescents means they are able to stay up late using it, disrupting their sleep schedule.
- **A household with both working parents** – this creates a busy, late evening for children causing them to stay up too late.
- **High sugar and caffeine drinks** – popular amongst young adults, drinks high in sugar and caffeine affect the secretion of melatonin, as it stimulates the central nervous system

After conducting a survey of 44 students in a range of 11-19 year olds at our school we found that:

- 52% of respondents get the recommended sleep of 7-8 hours
- 20% of respondents get only 6 hours or less sleep - this is under the recommended amount
- 59% of respondents believe they struggle to get to sleep and 81% of these use their phones directly before going to sleep – suggesting a link between blue light and sleeping issues. Furthermore, 50% of respondents, who struggle to fall asleep, drink sugary or caffeine drinks at least once a week or even every day.

Sleeplessness is linked to many other issues in young adulthood including obesity, lower immunity, poor school performance, lack of emotional control and **mental health**.

## Mental Health

ComRes researchers questioned a representative sample of more than 1000 UK based 11 to 16-year olds for BBC School Report. It found that:

- Around 70% had experienced negative feelings in the past year, ranging from upset and unhappy, to feeling anxious, frightened or unsafe
- 11% described themselves as “unhappy” overall
- 86% described themselves as “happy” overall

Prime Minister Theresa May announced plans in January to transform attitudes towards mental health with a focus on children and young adults. She proposed better links between schools and NHS specialist staff and mental health first aid training for teachers because from 700 teachers interviewed, a quarter said that they wouldn't know how, or when, to refer a young person to a doctor when in mental health distress.

Conducted in the same survey as the one regarding sleep, we asked 44 students aged 11-16 and found that:

- Only 16% of respondents have had an experience with mental health issues - 86% of these said that they struggled to get to sleep.

