

Increasing prescription of sleeping pills and melatonin to children in Sweden

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Summary

People in Sweden complain over sleeping problems such as short total sleeping time or often interrupted sleep. Since a good sleep is of importance for the production of melatonin and other hormones involved in the immune system, a reduced sleep quality may in the long run also affect the health of the general population.

A reduced production of melatonin has been associated with an increased growth rate of babies [1]. Similarly, a fast increase in the average body-length of 18 years old boys was noticed from 1955-1965 more slowly increasing thereafter. It cannot be ruled out that the new radio (FM) and TV broadcasting commencing from that time had an effect on melatonin and growth hormones production during puberty [2].

Since beginning of the 21st century a remarkable increase in sleeping problems has been noticed among young people. This problem can be quantified by the increasing prescription and sales of sleeping pills and melatonin for children. Figure 1 shows the increasing use of these pills measured in daily doses (DDs) [3].

It is well known that the use of mobile phones, wireless networks within homes, wireless broad band Internet etc. has increased dramatically during the past decade. Figure 1 shows as an example the total spoken time via a mobile phone in Sweden. The estimate takes into account speech time from mobile to mobile, from fixed to mobile and from mobile to fixed phones [4-5].

According to the Swedish Radiation Safety Authority the similarity between the two curves may well be just a matter of coincidence, which any basic knowledge of statistics should tell [6].

An expert group headed by Prof. Anders Ahlbom has recently presented a summary report on Research on electro sensitivity and other effects from electromagnetic fields. The expert group also addressed the possible connection between radiation and sleep disturbance [7]. However, when asked for a comment to the information given in Figure 1 below, the group refrains from giving any comments.

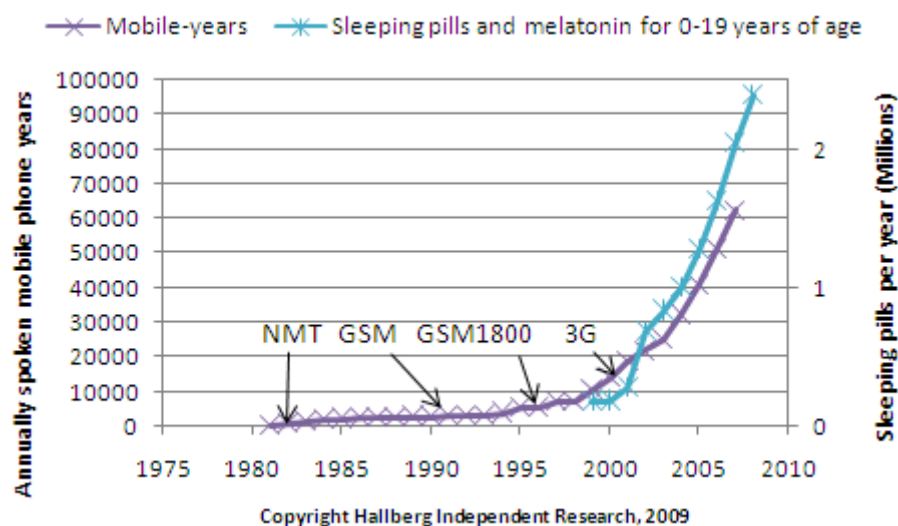


Figure 1. The combined sales of sleeping pills and melatonin to children and young people 0-19 years in Sweden shown together with the annual total speech time via a mobile phone by the whole population.

References

1. Article in Dagens Nyheter 1998-02-22 p 18, Sunday.
2. Hallberg Ö. Length and weight by 18-year old males during the 20th century in Sweden. <http://hir.nu/length2.html>
3. National Board of Health and Welfare. Message about prescription of sleeping pills to young people. Dnr 34-2458/2009 (In Swedish)
4. Hallberg Ö. How much do we use mobile phones in Sweden? <http://hir.nu/Mobile.htm>
5. Larsson J, Öst F. Svensk telemarknad 2006. National Post and Telecom Agency, PTS-ER-2007:15. ISSN 1650-9862, p 39.
6. Swedish Radiation Safety Authority. Message Dnr SSM 2009/1035 (In Swedish).
7. Ahlbom A, Feychting M, Hamnerius Y, Hillert L. Research on electro sensitivity and other effects from electromagnetic fields. The 6th annual report to Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research, December 2008. P 18:
"En svensk tvärsnittsstudie rapporterade att personer som använde mobiltelefon regelbundet hade mer huvudvärk, koncentrationssvårigheter och astmabesvär än de som använde mobiltelefon mer sällan [Soderqvist, et al. 2008]. Det förelåg ingen skillnad mellan grupperna avseende självskattad hälsa när resultaten justerats för otillräcklig sömn och trötthet. Det är dock oklart om även dessa faktorer skulle kunna vara kopplade till mobiltelefonanvändning."

TRANSLATION: "A Swedish study reported that persons, who regularly used a mobile phone had more of head ache, concentration problems, and asthma than those who used mobile phones more seldom. There was no difference between the groups when results were adjusted for insufficient sleep and tiredness. It is, however, unclear if also those factors might be connected to mobile phone use."