Abstract

Title: Are we really sleeping less? Systematic review of secular trends in adult sleep duration

Introduction: Little evidence exists to support the common assertion that adult sleep durations have decreased in recent years. Short sleep durations have been linked to poorer health outcomes and therefore significant decreases in sleep duration may pose a challenge to public health.

Methods: We investigated whether sleep duration has changed in the past 40 years through a systematic review of the literature. Five bibliographic databases were searched to identify observational studies of secular changes in sleep duration in community-dwelling adults. Sources of grey literature were also accessed. No studies were excluded based on language or publication date. Two hundred and seventy eight studies were retrieved from the search and abstracts were independently checked by two reviewers.

Results: Twelve relevant studies were obtained with results for 15 countries from the 1960s until the 2000s. Self-reported average sleep duration had increased in 7 countries: Bulgaria, Poland, Canada, France, Britain, Korea and the Netherlands (range: 0.1 – 1.7 minutes per night each year) and had decreased in 6 countries: Japan, Russia, Finland, Germany, Belgium and Austria (range: 0.1 – 0.6 minutes per night each year). Equivocal results were found for the United States and Sweden.

Discussion: There has not been a consistent decrease in adult sleep durations of adults from the 1960s to 2000s. It is unclear whether the proportions of short (and long) sleepers have increased over the same period, which may be of greater relevance to public health.