

Injury to a parent can lead to sleep issues in children and teens

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	Adjusted IRR [95% CI]
Any Sleep Diagnosis	1.17 [1.10-1.23]
Circadian rhythm disorder	1.91 [1.42-2.57]
Hypersomnia	2.14 [0.93-4.93]
Insomnia	2.13 [1.99-2.29]
Narcolepsy	2.56 [1.41-4.64]
Parasomnias	0.93 [0.81-1.09]
Restless Leg Syndrome	1.56 [1.23-1.96]
Sleep Disorders Breathing	0.90 [0.82-1.00]
Sleep Disorder-NOS	1.13 [1.06-1.20]
Days of Prescribed Sleep Medication	0.71 [0.67-0.76]

Adjusted Incidence Rate Ratio of Outpatient Visits for Sleep Disorders Following Parental Injury Credit: Saira Ahmed

Research has shown that getting a good night's sleep plays an important role in children's growth and development, both physically and emotionally. When children face an unsettling experience, such as the injury of a parent, it can alter their sleep habits, according to new research being presented at the 2018 American Academy of Pediatrics National Conference & Exhibition.

The study abstract, "Children's Sleep Issues after a Parent is Seriously Injured," examined how [sleep](#) habits of younger children and adolescents were impacted by the serious injury of a parent, such as post-traumatic stress disorder from military combat.

The serious injury of a parent can alter a child's daily routine, and the child may observe their parent's pain and recovery. Researchers examined whether children with injured [parents](#) had increased visits for sleep disorders, such as circadian rhythm disorder, excessive sleeping, insomnia, narcolepsy, sleep walking, restless leg syndrome and sleep disordered breathing.

They found that children of parents with both [post-traumatic stress disorder](#) and [traumatic brain injury](#) had a 48 percent increase in sleep visits.

"It's important that medical providers ask about stressors in the home such as an injury to a parent, and ask about how their child has been sleeping," said CPT Saira Ahmed, MD, pediatrics resident at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center. "These conversations are important to help the family catch and treat sleep issues early to avoid physical and emotional problems down the line"

Using records from the Military Health System to locate children up to age 18 years with a parent seriously injured in combat or daily life, the researchers examined the records of 485,002 children of 272,211

injured parents. Common injuries were brain or battle injuries. The child's median age at time of the parent's injury was 7 years.

Using outpatient pharmacy records, they compared visits for sleep disorders and sleep medication prescriptions before and after a parent's injury. Overall, the use of sleep medications decreased. However, following an injury, children were 17 percent more likely to seek outpatient care for sleep disorders. According to the study authors, this may be due to children being seen by a sleep specialist, as injured military personnel are often transferred to larger facilities for treatment, increasing their children's access to specialty care. They suggest that when seeing a new patient, especially young children, physicians may wean the child off sleep medications and begin behavior modification and non-pharmacological efforts to reduce [sleep disorders](#).

Teenagers had a 37 percent increase in sleep visits after a parent's injury. Teens especially may have more difficulty adjusting to the [injury](#) of a parent. Puberty and its altered sleep schedules, as well as the challenges of high school, can predispose teens to sleep issues, Dr. Ahmed said.

"It is imperative that medical providers discuss their children's sleep with parents and consider sleep in the care plan of [children](#) of injured parents," said Dr. Ahmed.

More information: Abstract Title: Children's Sleep Issues after a Parent is Seriously Injured

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