

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

An international survey of sleeping problems in the general population

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This international omnibus survey investigated the prevalence and characteristics of sleep problems, as well as strategies for resolving sleep problems, in the general population of the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and Japan.

Research design and methods: A representative sample of the general population aged ≥ 15 years was recruited from each country. Questions focused on the nature of sleeping problems, the impact of problems on daily functioning and behavior with regard to resolving sleeping problems.

Results: A total of 10 132 individuals were included in this survey. The prevalence of sleeping problems was 56% in the USA, 31% in Western Europe and 23% in Japan. Most individuals with sleeping problems considered these to have an

impact on their daily functioning, with family life most affected in the Western European sample, personal activities in the US sample and professional activities in the Japanese sample. Almost half of individuals with sleep problems had never taken any steps to resolving them, and the majority of respondents had not spoken with a physician about their problems. Of those individuals who had consulted a physician, drug prescriptions had been given to approximately 50% in Western Europe and the USA and 90% in Japan.

Conclusions: Sleeping problems continue to present a considerable burden across Western Europe, the USA and Japan. Despite this, they are under-reported and under-treated, with almost half of affected individuals not taking any steps to resolve their sleeping problems.

Introduction

Insomnia can be defined as difficulty falling asleep, difficulty maintaining sleep, early-morning awakening and non-restorative sleep with associated daytime consequences¹⁻⁴. However, the wide range of distinctive etiologies and varying degrees of sleep disturbance often

make classification difficult. Depending on definition and regions, up to one-third of the population may experience insomnia symptoms⁵⁻¹³. For example, on a large cross-sectional telephone survey conducted in a representative sample of the populations of France, the UK, Germany, Italy, Portugal and Spain, difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep for at least three nights

per week was reported by 27% of the sample; however, half of these individuals did not have a diagnosis of a sleep or mental disorder as defined by the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders – 4th edition (DSM-IV)⁷. While data from Asian populations are limited, the overall prevalence of insomnia in a representative sample from the general population of Japan was 21.4% in the month preceding the survey, mainly attributed to difficulty maintaining sleep and falling asleep¹². Multiple logistic regression analysis showed that advanced age, being unemployed, lack of habitual exercise, perceived poor health, and stress were associated with a higher likelihood of insomnia.

Sleep disturbances have a potentially serious health impact. An analysis of 28 epidemiological studies found that insomnia is associated with psychological disorders, being a risk factor for depression, anxiety disorders, alcohol and drug abuse, and suicide¹⁴. This supports the findings of a number of other studies in various populations^{9,15,16}. Furthermore, there is at the very least an association between insomnia and decreased immune function¹⁴, and a possible association with cardiovascular disease¹⁶. Several studies have shown that daytime sleepiness is a risk factor for motor vehicle accidents^{9,17} and may have considerable socio-professional consequences, including increased absenteeism from work^{18,19}.

Health-related quality of life (HRQOL) is nearly always affected in patients experiencing excessive daytime sleepiness or difficulty initiating or maintaining sleep, according to the findings of the large Sleep Heart Health Study²⁰. In this study, HRQOL was evaluated with the generic Short-Form 36 (SF-36) Health Outcomes Questionnaire in over 5800 individuals in the general US population. Impairments in HRQOL associated with subjective sleep symptoms were found to be of a similar degree to other chronic diseases. Likewise, individuals self-reporting insomnia for at least three nights a week over a month had statistically lower scores on all subscales of the SF-36 compared with individuals without sleep problems²¹. These findings support those of a French study showing that, even after excluding patients with DSM-IV criteria for anxiety or depression, insomnia is associated with reduced emotional and mental health status²². In this analysis, reductions in SF-36 scores correlated with the severity of insomnia.

The impact of insomnia on health and HRQOL translate into economic consequences. Walsh and Engelhardt estimated the direct costs of insomnia (costs of substances used to treat the condition and related healthcare services) in the USA were almost US\$14 billion

in 1995, much of which was attributed to nursing home care for the elderly²³. In France in 1995, estimates of the direct costs of insomnia were US\$2 billion²⁴. It should be noted that these values do not take into consideration the indirect or related costs of insomnia such as reduced work productivity or increased likelihood of accidents, which would be expected to at least double the economic burden of sleep disorders²⁵. Indeed, a French study comparing individuals with severe insomnia with good sleepers matched for professional activities and work schedules found that those with sleep problems missed twice as many workdays during the previous year¹⁸. Furthermore, individuals with insomnia reported more difficulties with concentration and an increased frequency of work-related accidents.

While sleep disturbances clearly contribute to a significant health and economic burden, evidence suggests that they are under-reported and under-treated. In an omnibus consumer survey conducted in France, Germany, Italy and the UK, it was found that 37% of respondents with insomnia took no action to resolve it at all, while 10% used over-the-counter remedies and 13% adopted non-pharmacological measures²⁶. A recent survey conducted in Western Europe, the USA and Japan demonstrated that the burden of insomnia on sufferers is considerable, although only 3% (Japan) to 22% (France) of individuals consulted a physician about their symptoms²⁷. However, if insomnia and its consequences on daytime functioning are to be better understood, there is clearly a lack of understanding on the strategies used by patients with insomnia to cope with sleep disorders and daytime impairment.

Based on these preliminary data, we wanted to deepen our knowledge of insomnia in a more extensive and worldwide representative sample. The goal of this international omnibus survey was to further investigate the prevalence and characteristics of sleep problems, as well as strategies for resolving them in the general population of the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and Japan.

Methods

A representative sample of the general population aged ≥ 15 years was recruited from the USA, France, Germany, Italy, Spain, the UK and Japan in October 2005. Data were collected by computer-assisted telephone interviews as part of multi-client monthly omnibus surveys conducted by LH2 in France, TNS in Germany, TRIBE in Italy, TNS in Spain and QRS in the UK.*

* TNS (Taylor–Nelson Sofres group), www.tnsglobal.com; TNS Healthcare is a sector of the TNS group, www.tns-healthcare.com; LH2, previously named Louis Harris France, is a full-service MR company based in Paris, www.LH2.fr; TRIBE specializes in medical fieldwork and is based in Milan, no specific website; QRS is a fieldwork company based near London and specializes in quantitative data collection, www.qrs-research.co.uk; NRC (Nippon Research Center) is a member of Gallup International Network (GIA), www.nrc.co.jp/english/.

In the USA, data were collected via an online panel facilitated by TNS, and in Japan via a postal questionnaire facilitated by NRC. These local fieldwork agencies conducted this study according to international standards. TNS was selected because it has offices and a good reputation in poll studies in France, Germany, Spain, USA and Japan. TNS was not represented in Italy and the UK but has experience in the field with the selected companies TRIBE and QRS.

For the telephone interviews, an automated dialing system was used to randomly select telephone numbers based on files stratified according to region and city size. Quotas on age, gender and the employment status of the head of the family were applied. Recruitment of participants for the online and postal panels were based on representative files of national populations. Ethical rules regarding confidentiality of data were strictly observed in each country and guaranteed by each local fieldwork agency. Any third parties did not have access to respondents' identities.

A semi-structured omnibus survey, consisting of a standardized 10–15-minute interview, was conducted over the telephone by professional interviewers, or was provided as an online or postal questionnaire on a weekly or monthly basis. The questions were identical regardless of whether they were answered over the telephone, via the internet or on paper and the questions did not include features that would bias the responses. Respondents were eligible to complete the survey if they answered to the following question in the affirmative: 'Have you suffered from sleeping problems in the past 12 months?' The questionnaire asked respondents about the nature of their sleeping problems in terms of symptoms, frequency and duration. Questions also focused on which sleeping symptoms caused the greatest degree of concern, how sleeping problems had evolved over time and the impact of sleeping problems on daily functioning.

Insomnia was defined as having at least one sleep problem (difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep due to night-time awakenings, waking up early and not being able to go back to sleep, poor quality of sleep) experienced at least several times per week for more than 1 year, with daytime consequences. People who have been diagnosed with sleep apnea or restless legs syndrome were excluded.

Behavior regarding resolving sleep problems was also investigated: respondents were questioned as to whether they had consulted a physician about their sleep problems, or whether they had received a drug prescription for their symptoms. Questions included: 'have you ever talked about these sleep problems with a physician?', 'what type of physician did you consult?', 'did the physician prescribe you a drug for your sleeping problems?', 'did you take the drug prescribed

by the physician?', and 'for how long did you take it?' The level of satisfaction with treatment for sleep problems was assessed on a numerical 10-point rating scale, with 1 representing 'not satisfied at all' and 10 indicating 'very satisfied'. There was no question about continuous versus intermittent use.

Respondents were also asked whether they found sleep problems to be troublesome (phrased as whether they were 'very bothered', 'bothered', or 'not bothered').

Questionnaires were translated in each country and care was taken not only with linguistic aspects (checked by TNS writers) but also with sleep issues (validated by sleep specialists from each country considered). A special meeting between specialists at the beginning of the study was devoted to these issues.

Different channels were used to interview people depending of the country.

- Only face-to-face omnibuses are available in Japan because phone and web interviews are not accepted by the public.
- Web interviews are particularly suitable for the American market because of the large internet penetration in all age brackets (allowing large size samples).
- Phone interviews were the best solution in Western Europe because of the low penetration rate of the internet in the elderly population (which is the population having sleeping disturbances the most frequently) and a lower cost/effectiveness ratio for face-to-face methodology in this case.

Categorical values are presented as percentages with 95% confidence intervals (CIs). A chi-squared analysis of survey results was conducted to assess relationships between respondent characteristics and the impact of their sleep problems on daily functioning or the likelihood of receiving a drug prescription to treat sleep symptoms as well as to identify country specificities.

Data were extrapolated to the population of each country (aged ≥ 15 years), based on 2005 USA Census Bureau data (USA: 234 934 412; France: 49 498 357; Germany: 70 586 441; Italy: 50 017 532; Spain: 34 531 882; the UK: 49 721 174; and Japan: 109 221 888).

A weighting was performed to adjust our sample to the structure of each population at a national level, in terms of age, gender and household socioeconomic level.

Results

Population characteristics

The study population was composed of a total of 10 132 individuals (3962 from the USA, 1002 from

France, 1001 from Germany, 1000 from Italy, 1002 from Spain, 1000 from the UK and 1165 from Japan), who were representative of the national population of their respective countries in terms of region, age, gender and head of family occupation.

Prevalence of sleeping problems

The overall prevalence of perceptions of sleeping problems was the greatest in the USA (56%; 95% CI 54–58%). In Western Europe, the prevalence was 34% in France (95% CI 31–37%), 33% in Germany (95% CI 30–36%), 30% in Italy (95% CI 27–33%), 23% in Spain (95% CI 20–26%) and 36% (95% CI 33–39%) in the UK, while the prevalence in Japan was 23% (95% CI 21–25%).

Subjects reporting sleep apnea or restless legs syndrome were excluded from the study:

- 6% of the population in Western Europe, 11% in the US, 3% in Japan declared that they suffered from sleep apnea.
- 11% of the population in Western Europe, 17% in the US, 2% in Japan declared that they suffered from restless legs syndrome.

The number of patients with insomnia *per se* (based on at least one sleep problem experienced at least several times per week for more than 1 year, with daytime consequences) can be evaluated to be 28%, 39% and 21% of the European, US and Japanese respondents, respectively who reported having sleeping problems during the previous 12 months (excluding sleep apnea and restless legs syndrome).

The gender and age characteristics of the total and sleeping problems groups are shown in Table 1.

The impact of age on the prevalence of insomnia differed according to region: in Japan, the highest prevalence of sleeping problems was in those aged

55–64 years (25%), while in Western Europe and the USA, the highest prevalence was in those in the 35–44 year age group (22% and 20%, respectively).

Types of sleep problem

Of the individuals reporting sleep problems (excluding sleep apnea or restless legs syndrome), difficulty maintaining sleep was the most common complaint in the USA and Western Europe, but problems with sleep induction was most common in Japan. More respondents from the USA reported poor sleep quality than those from other regions (Figure 1). A total of 43% (95% CI 40–46%), 62% (95% CI 60–64%), and 48% (95% CI 42–54%) of participants in Western Europe, the USA and Japan, respectively, reported more than one sleeping problem, with 17% (95% CI 15–19%), 26% (24–28%), and 11% (95% CI 7–15%) of respondents experiencing difficulty with all aspects: sleep induction, sleep maintenance and quality of sleep.

In individuals reporting more than one sleep problem, poor sleep maintenance was most common in the USA, while difficulty getting to sleep was more common in Japan. Both problems were reported to a similar extent by European respondents. Conversely, poor sleep quality was not as common as the other two sleep parameters in any region.

Development of sleep problems

In participants with sleep problems, 59% (95% CI 56–62%) of respondents from Western Europe, 52% (95% CI 50–54%) of those from the USA and 85% (95% CI 81–89%) from Japan reported that their main sleep problem had not changed in severity over time. In participants who did report a change in their main sleep problem, this was considered to be a deterioration by 46% (95% CI 42–50%) of European respondents, 78%

Table 1. Gender and age characteristics of the total population and of the sleeping problems group

	Participants (%)		
	USA (n = 3962)	Western Europe (n = 5005)	Japan (n = 1165)
Male gender, %	51 (44)	48 (39)	45 (41)
Age, %			
15–24 years	15 (14)	14 (15)	15 (13)
25–34 years	19 (19)	18 (13)	16 (14)
34–44 years	19 (20)	19 (22)	16 (13)
44–54 years	17 (17)	16 (21)	16 (14)
54–64 years	13 (13)	14 (15)	19 (25)
≥65 years	18 (17)	19 (15)	18 (21)

Significant differences (CI = 95%) between the total population. The subgroup with sleeping problems have been emboldened

(95% CI 75–81%) of US respondents and 15% (95% CI 9–21%) of Japanese respondents. The nature of the predominant symptom remained the same in most cases.

Frequency of sleep problems

Most individuals from Western Europe and the USA reporting sleep problems experienced symptoms at least several times per week. In Japan, problems were less frequent (Figure 2). The majority of respondents from each region indicated that they had experienced symptoms for at least 1 year (mean of 6 years, 5 years and 4 years in Western Europe, the USA and Japan, respectively). Despite having experienced sleeping problems for more than 1 year, only 51%, 55% and 52%

of respondents in Western Europe, the USA and Japan, respectively considered their problems to be chronic rather than occasional. However, if a chronic sleep problem is defined as having experienced a symptom for ≥ 1 month, 88% (95% CI 86–90%) of participants from Western Europe, 93% (95% CI 90–96%) from Japan and 93% (95% CI 92–94%) from the USA would have been categorized with chronic sleep problems. This was true for all aspects of sleep disorders (sleep induction, maintenance and quality).

Impact of sleep problems

Most individuals with sleep problems considered these to have an impact on their daily functioning (Figure 3),

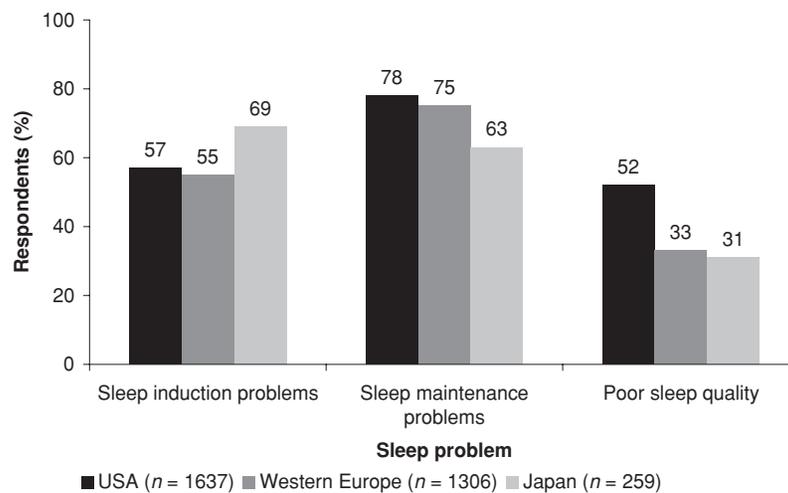


Figure 1. Types of sleep problems among individuals reporting sleep problems over the previous 12 months. Answers were in response to the following question: ‘What sleep problem symptoms do you currently suffer from?’. *p*-values for trends: USA vs. Western Europe ($0.025 < p < 0.05$), Western Europe vs. Japan ($0.05 < p < 0.1$), and USA vs. Japan ($p < 0.005$)

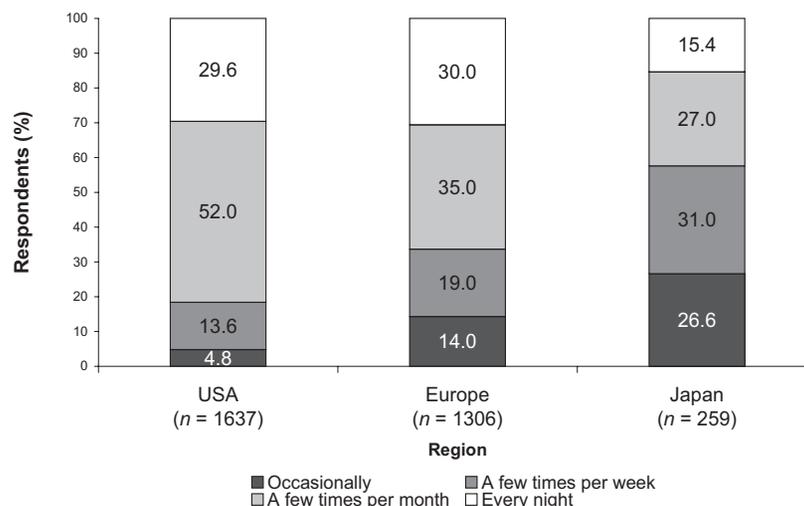


Figure 2. Frequency of sleep problems among individuals reporting sleep problems over the previous 12 months. Answers were in response to the following question: ‘How often do you have these sleeping symptoms?’. $p < 0.005$ for between-region differences

including family life, personal activities, professional activities and social relationships (Figure 4). In Japan, professional activities were the daily function aspect that were most affected by sleep problems, while family life was most affected in Western Europe and personal activities were most affected in the USA. Not surprisingly, the impact of sleep problems on daily functioning was linked to the number of symptoms reported by the individual: 91% (95% CI 88–94%) of US respondents experiencing sleep induction, maintenance and quality problems considered sleep to impact their daily function, as did 86% (95% CI 73–99%) of Japanese respondents and 62% (95% CI 56–68%) of Western European respondents.

Chi-squared analysis showed that there were several demographic or behavioral characteristics that

were common to individuals across the regions who perceived their sleeping problems to impact their daily function (Table 2). These included having several symptoms, experiencing symptoms quite often, and suffering from sleep-related comorbidities.

The most frequent disorder caused by sleep problems was physical fatigue, either in the morning or later in the day. Bad mood, poor concentration and mental fatigue were also commonly considered to be caused by sleep problems.

Individuals with sleep problems often had other comorbidities that may have been associated with their sleep. In all three regions, stress and overworking was the most common comorbidity. In the USA, being overweight was also a dominant comorbidity, with joint pain/rheumatism, anxiety/anguish and

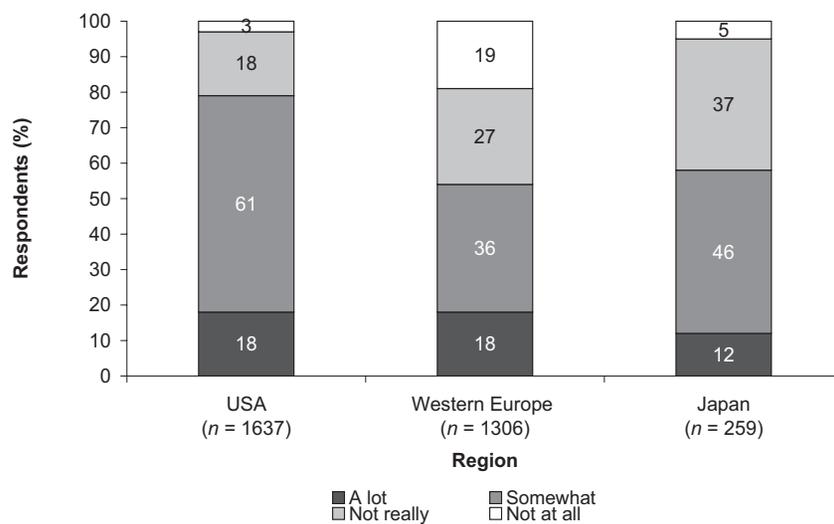


Figure 3. Perceived consequences of sleep problems on daily functioning. Answers were in response to completing the following statement: ‘Would you say that your sleep problems impact your daily functioning...?’ $p < 0.005$ for between-region differences

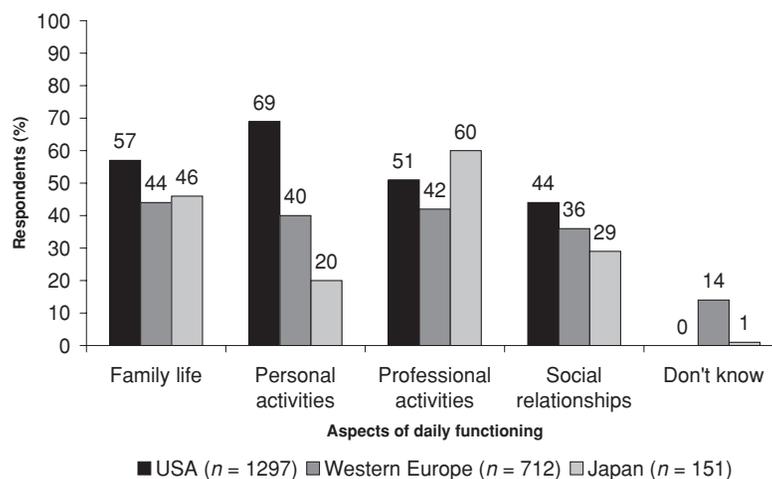


Figure 4. Perceived consequences of sleep problems on specific aspects of daily functioning. Answers were in response to completing the following statement: ‘Would you say that your sleep problems impact...?’ $p < 0.005$ for between-region differences for each aspect of daily functioning (‘Family life’, ‘Personal activities’, ‘Professional activities’, ‘Social relationships’)

Table 2. Chi-squared analysis showing statistically significant demographic or behavioral characteristics of individuals who perceive their sleep problems to impact on their daily functioning

	USA	Western Europe	Japan
Age ≥ 65 years			✓
Female	✓		
Have an occupation			✓
Poor sleep quality			
Have difficulty falling asleep	✓	✓	
Experience several sleep symptoms	✓	✓	✓
Experienced an evolution in sleep problems	✓	✓	
Experience problems as a consequence of insomnia	✓	✓	✓
Experience sleep problems quite frequently	✓	✓	✓
Consider their sleep problems to be chronic	✓	✓	
Experience comorbidities as a result of sleep problems	✓	✓	✓
Have consulted a physician about sleep problems	✓	✓	
Have consulted a psychiatrist about sleep problems			✓
Take a prescribed medication or another means of resolving their sleep problems	✓	✓	
Use a non-prescribed medication			✓

nervousness/irritability occurring comparatively frequently in Western European respondents. The two most common comorbidities in Japanese respondents were stress/overworking and nervousness/irritability, although over a quarter of Japanese respondents did not have an associated comorbidity.

Treatment for sleep problems

Almost half of individuals with sleep problems had never taken any steps to resolve their sleeping problems. The majority of respondents reporting a sleep disorder had not spoken to a physician about it (47% [95% CI 44–50%] in Western Europe, 65% [95% CI 63–67%] in the USA and 67% [95% CI 61–73%] in Japan). Of those respondents who had consulted a physician with regard to their sleep problems, approximately 50% in Western Europe and the USA received a drug prescription, compared with 90% of respondents in Japan. Of those who received a prescription drug, the average length of time taking this treatment was 2 years in the USA, 3 years in Japan and 4 years in Western Europe. In all, 29% of patients in Western Europe, 10% in the US, and 24% in Japan were taking the last treatment prescribed for more than 5 years. Prescription drugs were taken more frequently across all regions than drugs advised by a pharmacist, drugs without any medical advice or treatments other than drugs. In Western Europe, significantly more individuals with sleep maintenance problems were not receiving any form of treatment compared with other symptoms ($p < 0.05$). In contrast, in the USA, more individuals with sleep quality symptoms were not receiving treatment

($p < 0.05$). Chi-squared analysis showed that there were several demographic or behavioral characteristics that were common to individuals across the regions who had a medical treatment prescribed for their sleep problems (Table 3). These included having several symptoms, considering their sleep problems to be chronic, and suffering from sleep-related comorbidities. Another predictive factor was using other strategies to resolve sleep problems, whether this be non-prescription drugs or other remedies. While individuals in Western Europe or the USA were more likely to have experienced a negative change in their symptoms over time, Japanese individuals were more likely to have experienced a positive change in their symptoms.

Discussion

The magnitude of sleep problems in three economically developed parts of the world (Western Europe, Japan and USA) is clearly shown in this study. When extrapolated to the general population, this indicates that 131.3 million people in the USA ($\pm 1.5\%$), 82.3 million people in Western Europe ($\pm 1.3\%$), and 25.6 million people in Japan ($\pm 2.4\%$) have had sleep problems within the past 12 months. Even with a more stringent definition of insomnia, it still concerns 38.1 million people in the USA ($\pm 1.1\%$), 18.8 million people in Western Europe ($\pm 0.7\%$) and 5.2 million people in Japan ($\pm 1.2\%$). Clearly Japan appears to be less effected by sleep problems than the two other continents. It could be speculated that the lower prevalence in Japan may be a function of under-reporting

because of the possible cultural reticence among Japanese people to associate sleep problems and psychiatric disorders²⁷. Indeed, the relatively short mean time spent in bed (6.5 h) reported previously in the Japanese adult population¹³ might lead to reduced difficulty maintaining sleep, as bedtime restriction has been shown to improve sleep efficiency²⁸. The prevalence of insomnia we found in the Japanese is consistent with that found by Doi and colleagues in a nationwide sample of 2800 subjects: 17.3% in males and 21.5% in females²⁹. However in young people, Kaneita and colleagues recently found in a survey of 102 451 Japanese adolescents that insomnia concerns 23.5% of the sample, which was more than in our study³⁰. Interestingly, the reported prevalence in this study is notably greater than in the previous survey (37%, 27%, 28%, and 6.6% in France, Italy, the USA and Japan, respectively)²⁷. The relatively dramatic difference in the prevalence in the USA in this study may be a consequence of an increased awareness and perception of sleeping problems in the general population due to national public and private education on sleep disorders; however, it is interesting that it appears to have had a limited effect on physician consultation rates or prescriptions. Although cultural factors are likely to influence responses, the prevalence in the USA obtained in this study does not differ substantially from the findings of previous surveys, in which approximately a third to one-half of respondents reported sleep disturbances. The 2002 National Sleep Foundation poll reported that 58% of adults said that they had at least one symptom of insomnia at least a few times

per week. However, these people did not necessarily experience daytime sleepiness as a consequence of their insomnia. The higher prevalence in the Japanese population in this study compared with the previous survey may be linked to the inclusion of individuals aged ≥ 65 years in the Japanese sample in this study (who were not included in the previous sample). The prevalence of sleep problems obtained in the present survey is also consistent with the findings of a previous epidemiological study including 3030 participants recruited throughout Japan¹². In Western Europe, there has only been a limited change in the prevalence of insomnia between this survey and the previous one and the frequency of sleep disorders and insomnia found in this study are similar to those reported in previous epidemiological studies carried out in Western Europe (19–25% for sleep disorders, 9–12% for severe insomnia)^{6,10,31}.

The distribution of sleep problems according to age varied between regions; in Japan, but not in Western Europe and in the USA, respondents aged ≥ 65 years experienced a high prevalence of problems. This is not consistent with previous studies which regularly found higher percentages of sleep problems in the elderly. We have no explanation for this unusual result. Conversely the fact that more females than males reported sleep problems is consistent with previous studies investigating the epidemiology of sleep disorders^{5–10,32}.

The most frequently reported sleep problem varied according to region: in Japan, sleep induction was the most prevalent problem, as was found by Doi *et al.*²⁹,

Table 3. Chi-squared analysis showing statistically significant demographic or behavioral characteristics of individuals who are prescribed a medical treatment for their sleep problems

	USA	Western Europe	Japan
Age ≥ 65 years	✓		
Female	✓	✓	
Have an occupation			✓
Have difficulty falling asleep	✓	✓	
Experience night-time awakenings			✓
Experience several sleep symptoms	✓	✓	✓
Experienced an evolution in sleep problems		✓	
Experienced a negative evolution in sleep problems	✓	✓	
Experienced a positive evolution in sleep problems			✓
Experience an impact on daily functioning	✓	✓	
Experienced problems as a consequence of insomnia	✓		✓
Have frequent and long-lasting sleep problems	✓	✓	
Consider their sleep problems to be chronic	✓	✓	✓
Experience comorbidities as a result of sleep problems	✓	✓	✓
Use sleep remedies frequently	✓	✓	
Use a non-prescribed medication	✓		
Use other means of medication			✓

while in Western Europe and the USA, more individuals had problems with sleep maintenance. Taken together, it is clear that the most prevalent global sleep problem is sleep maintenance, with 75 million people in the USA, 51 million people in Western Europe and 15 million people in Japan likely to report difficulties with sleep maintenance. The majority of respondents reported problems with more than one sleep parameter. Sleep problems changed in severity over time in just under half of participants in each region: in Western Europe and the USA, a considerable proportion of respondents considered that their sleep had deteriorated, while most Japanese respondents reported their sleep problems improving over time. Many factors may explain this change. One simple one is age, as we know that sleep quality decreases with age³³. Potential differences in time spent in bed, which is strongly influenced by the regional culture and socioeconomic status of the population, might explain the variation in types of sleep problems that were reported by participants in this study from different countries. Environmental issues, transportation and security consideration may also have an influence on sleep³⁴. We do not have enough sociocultural data in this study to explain why the development of a sleep disorder differs from one country to another. Interestingly, while most sleep problems may have changed in severity, they rarely changed in nature, with the predominant symptom remaining the same for most individuals.

One of the most interesting observations from this survey is the perception that many individuals have regarding the chronic nature of their sleeping problems. Almost half of respondents did not consider their symptoms to be chronic, despite having experienced them for a considerable length of time. This suggests that the perception of chronic status may be more linked to the frequency of the symptom rather than its duration, and possibly partially explains the under-reporting and under-treatment of these symptoms.

The relevance of cultural issues with regard to the concepts explored by the questionnaire, and also in the observed results are very interesting. Are the differences observed between countries only due to cultural habits and perception, or is it possible to say that the Japanese sleep better than people in other countries? It is particularly interesting to observe that when patients with insomnia are recognized in Japan, 90% are treated with a hypnotic. One hypothesis to explain the difference would be to imagine that sleep disorders are less frequent and better treated in Japan. Another would be that, taking account of cultural issues, the Japanese are less likely to report/complain of insomnia than Western Europeans or Americans, and are treated only if the complaints are severe (particularly if they impact on work ability).

Zammit and colleagues have previously shown that sleep problems impair ability to perform work and

daily activities²¹, as have several other studies^{18,19}. In our study, chi-squared analysis found a number of common predictive factors for impairing ability to perform daily activities across the regions. These included experiencing several symptoms, experiencing symptoms frequently, and experiencing problems or comorbidities related to sleeping problems. In the USA and Western Europe, those who had impaired daily function were more likely to take a prescribed medication (hypnotic) or another means of resolving sleeping problems, whereas in Japan, individuals were more likely to take other kinds of medications. This difference may be due to the fact that Japanese physicians often prefer to use the terms 'sleep-inducing drug', or 'hypnotic tranquilizer' rather than 'hypnotic' when prescribing benzodiazepines or newer non-benzodiazepine hypnotics, because in Japan the term 'hypnotic' is associated with the older, relatively harmful hypnotic barbiturates.

Participants in the USA were more likely to report a disorder attributed to their sleeping problems, particularly fatigue or tiredness. Very few participants considered that they did not have any disorders associated with their sleeping problems. Stress and overwork were commonly associated with sleeping problems across all regions. In the USA, being overweight was a common association (as has been recently shown by Vorona *et al.*³⁵), while nervousness and irritability was more pronounced in Western Europe. Japanese respondents were more likely to report that they did not have any associated comorbidity compared with respondents from Western Europe and the USA. This is possibly a function of different cultural and societal practices across regions. Individuals who experienced comorbidities were more frequently treated for their sleeping problems than those without comorbidities.

Importantly, and unsurprisingly, this study reinforces the findings of the previous survey²⁷ that show that sleep problems are under-reported and under-treated across all regions. Extrapolation to the general population highlights the level of under-treatment: 31.9 million ($\pm 0.9\%$), 49.1 million ($\pm 1.3\%$), and 8.2 million ($\pm 1.5\%$) people with sleep problems in Western Europe, the USA, and Japan, respectively, have never taken any steps to resolve their sleep problems and 49.6 million ($\pm 1.1\%$), 80.3 million ($\pm 1.5\%$), and 17.2 million ($\pm 2.1\%$) people with sleep problems have not taken a prescription drug for their sleeping problem in the past 12 months, respectively. The reasons for this have yet to be clearly established; however, previous studies have suggested that this might be attributed to the short duration of primary-care consultations, lack of recognition of sleep problems as a medical concern and lack of knowledge and understanding of available treatments³⁶⁻³⁸. Japanese respondents who did consult a physician regarding their sleep problems were considerably more likely to receive a

prescription medication than those in Western Europe or the USA. Those who experienced several sleep symptoms, who considered their problems to be chronic, or who experienced comorbidities as a result of sleep problems, were more likely to receive a drug prescription across all regions. Interestingly, those in Japan who experienced an improvement in their symptoms were more likely to have a prescription medication, whereas those in Western Europe and the USA who experienced a worsening were more likely to have a prescription medication for their sleep problems. This difference may be due to the time restriction of 28 days for the prescription of hypnotics in Western Europe which means that when sleep problems and comorbidities improve, physicians tend to limit the prescription.

As a result of the international scope of this project, the study had several limitations.

Different types of interviewing technique (internet, telephone or questionnaires via post) were used depending on the country and may impact the results obtained. We understand that these different techniques of interviewing people may deeply impact the responses of subjects and that it is a limitation of the study. However, these different techniques were used in an attempt to follow the cultural habits of each participating country and to try and match as closely as possible the usual conventions of interviewing people. Several comparative studies have also shown that using DC channel is low. When asking a respondent if they have difficulties falling asleep, the answer is similar by phone, by post, or by internet. However, if the DC channel is not adapted to the specific culture of each country, the risk of introducing a bias in the recruitment is high (particularly with an elderly population).

The authors are also conscious that interviewing people about sleep problems may substantially influence their answer on daytime correlates and functioning. It is, however, difficult to avoid this kind of bias in focused epidemiological studies.

We also understand that the translation of the questionnaire into different languages is a very difficult issue. Local questionnaires have been validated by sleep specialists and double-checked by the national poll institutes on the linguistic aspect. However we did not use the complete process of validating a questionnaire (translation forward and translation backward, use in pilot group...) and it is possible that this limitation had an impact on the differences found between countries.

Another issue is excluding subjects suffering from other sleep troubles from the survey. We are conscious that sleep apnea and restless legs syndrome are underdiagnosed and that people may not be conscious that their sleep disorders may be related to them. However this study was not based on objective measures of sleep, and it was not possible to avoid this bias.

The results of the five European countries were combined in this paper to aid the comprehension of the global results. We believe, however, that it would be of value in a future paper to show the differences between these culturally different countries in more detail.

Conclusions

In conclusion, this survey highlights the considerable burden of sleep problems across Europe, the USA and Japan, with sleep maintenance of particular concern to individuals in Western Europe and the USA and sleep induction a particular issue in Japan. Sleep problems continue to be under-reported and under-treated. While Japanese individuals who consult their physician about their sleeping problems generally receive a drug prescription, only half of those in Western European or the USA who consult their doctor are likely to receive a prescription, even if they complain about deterioration in their ability to perform daily activities. Primary care physicians may be the most effective means of diagnosing sleep problems in their patients and initiating the appropriate treatment strategy; however, greater education and provision of guidelines for primary care physicians may be required to ensure that this occurs.

Future research focusing on the impact of educating primary care physicians on the prevalence and severity of chronic insomnia would be of value.

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All authors have participated in the design and the analysis of this study.

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Appendix

A detailed description of the questionnaire used for this study is available as electronic supplementary data (doi:10.1185/030079908X253825) published with the online version of this article.

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