

SEASONAL VARIATIONS IN CHILDREN'S NERVOUS SYMPTOMS AND SLEEP IN THE NORTH

H. F o r s i u s (Oulu , Finland)

The parents of 90 schoolchildren aged 7-12 years living North of the Arctic Circle recorded supported by the Health Nurse ,the sleeping times of their children four periods of four weeks each: during midsummer , with the very bright summer nights , during midwinter with 24 hr darkness for many days and around the spring and autumn equinoxes. The child's mood at bedtime and an waking was noted , and also its activities at home and any appearance of nervous symptoms. The teachers similarly recorded the child's activity at school twice daily during the same periods. The control group consisted of 70 children living more than 1000 km further south in Finland, where the seasonal differences are less pronounced.

The duration of sleep was as long during the summer as during the winter , in both the North and the South , but the mean times for going to bed and waking up in the morning were more than one hour later in the summer period. There was also seen a later hour for going to bed during the school-term against a free day than against a working day , and because the waking time was the same , the duration of sleep was thus shorter against a free day. These results together with the other findings which still are under evaluation seem to support the conclusion , that the influence of seasonal variations in light and darkness on sleeping patterns in schoolchildren is less pronounced than that of social activities. This is also in agreement with other recent findings. Furthermore the interaction between the natural illumination circumstances and other environmental factors and their effect on the mental health, and are the variation of the nervous symptoms in the two groups of children are discussed.
