

# Sleeping for a Better Start

Dr Elizabeth Pal  
Better Start Bradford



## Introduction

Better Start Bradford is a 'test and learn' programme funded by The National Lottery Community Fund, aiming to improve outcomes for 0-3 year olds in three Bradford wards via a range of innovative projects. Its focus is on health, social and emotional development and communication. As a Leadership Fellow and a Paediatric Registrar, I brought a fresh perspective regarding the importance of sleep in a child's early development, demonstrating its relationship to the programme's core goals.

I am now evaluating sleep as an area of potential future investment for Better Start Bradford.

## Background

There is growing evidence that good quality sleep is essential for a child's physical and mental development, and it is increasingly becoming a public health priority<sup>1</sup>. Sleep problems are common in children, with an estimated 20-30% of children having sleep difficulties at some stage in childhood<sup>2</sup>, rising to 75-80% among children with learning difficulties<sup>3</sup>. Good quality sleep is vital for the developing brain, emotional regulation, learning and resilience, and forms the foundation of good physical and mental health. Inadequate sleep is linked to problems with physical, social and cognitive development, and can increase the risk of obesity<sup>4</sup>. Poor childhood sleep also impacts negatively on parental health, increasing maternal depression, marital difficulties, and reduces parental resilience<sup>5</sup>.

Most childhood behavioural sleeping problems can be resolved with behavioural intervention and conservative management. Sleep intervention can lead to improvement in both child and parent wellbeing<sup>2</sup>. Implementing a universal sleep support provision has the potential to improve children's outcomes, giving them and their families the best start in life.

## Aims

- To review current child sleep services in the Better Start Bradford area.
- To establish community views on child sleep and current need.
- To make recommendations to the Better Start Bradford Partnership Board and Bradford Public Health.



## Health Needs Assessment

### Review

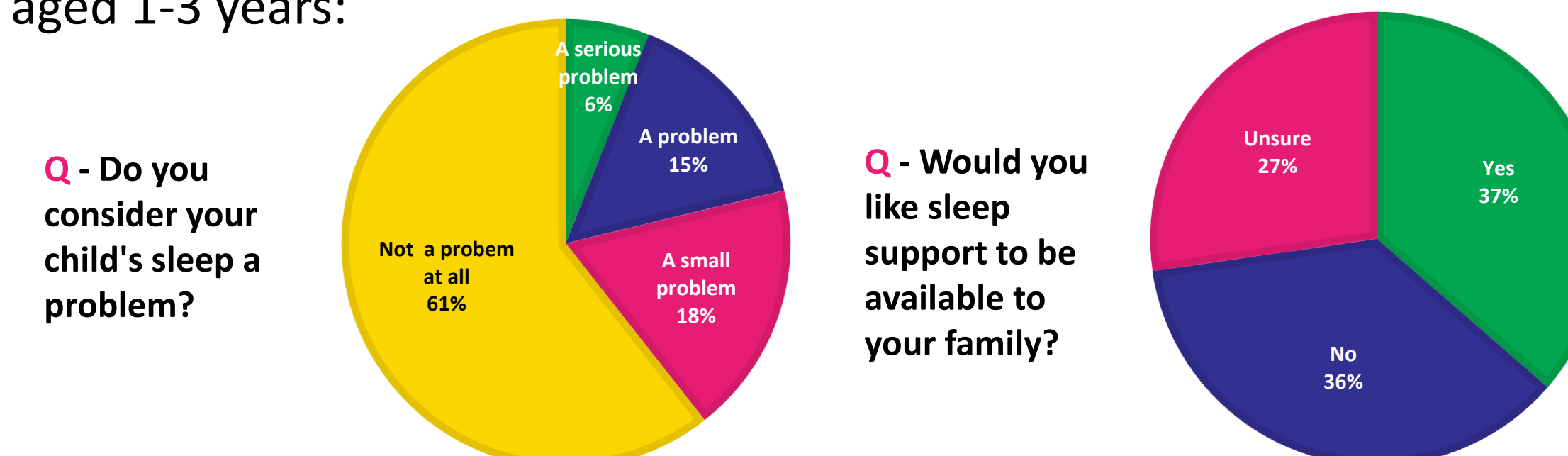
I engaged a range of stakeholders to review the current commissioned services in Bradford. Findings included:

- Better Start Bradford does not have a specific sleep initiative.
- There is no universal support in the area.
- Bradford compared unfavourably with other parts of the region on parental support and professional training around sleep.
- Current services consisted of support limited to children with a neurodisability or learning disabilities who have a social worker. There was high demand for these services.
- General paediatrics have seen a rise of non-medical referrals to their service, including behavioural sleep issues, raising concerns of capacity issues.

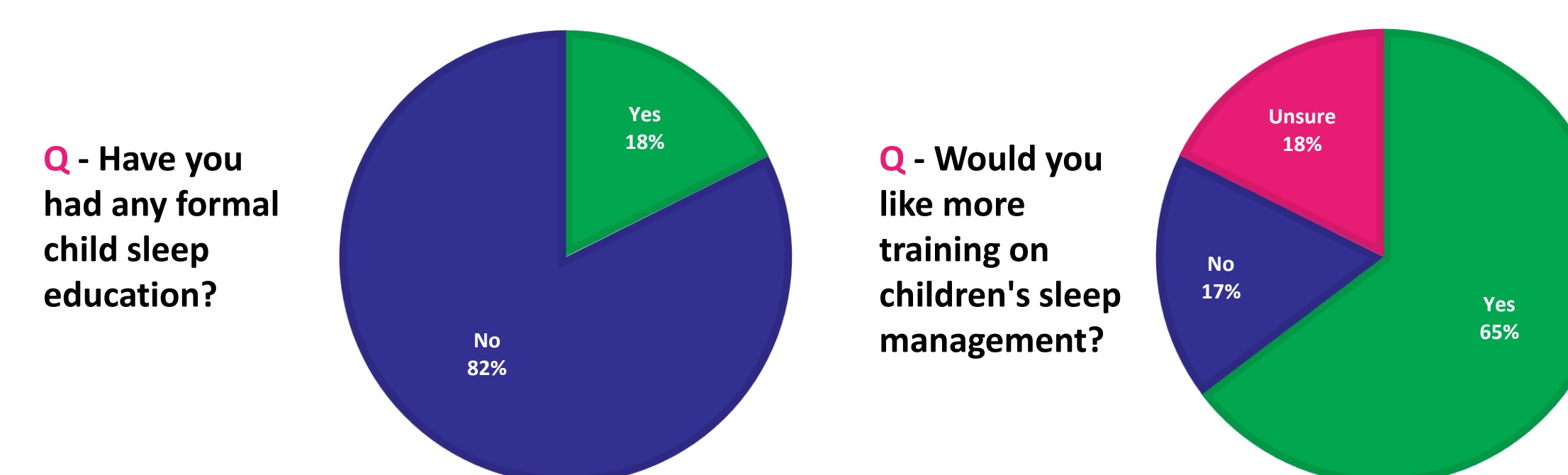
### Surveys

A snapshot review of current parental and professional experiences of children's sleep was conducted using the validated Brief Infant Sleep Questionnaire (BISQ) and a bespoke questionnaire for professionals distributed to Health Visitors and Early Help and Prevention Workers via Survey Monkey.

- We received 33 completed questionnaires from parents of children aged 1-3 years:



- We received 17 responses to the professionals' questionnaire:



### Provision options

There are several UK companies and charities that provide professional training including The Sleep Charity, Millpond Sleep Clinic and Sleep Scotland. Local areas with established sleep support provision include:

- Doncaster** – A tiered approach with sleep-aware community workers and 1-to-1 sleep clinics. They see 300 children a year - two thirds of cases are neurotypical children.
- Sheffield** – An integrated model with Children's Services: sleep workshops and 1-to-1 sleep clinics with paediatric nurses. Complex patients are referred to Sheffield Children's Hospital sleep service.

## Conclusion

Sleep impacts on all three core focus areas for Better Start Bradford. There is good evidence of the impact inadequate sleep has on children. Almost 40% of families feel their child has a problem sleeping and a similar number would like more support. Strikingly, 82% of professionals have had no sleep training and 65% would welcome more training. The unmet need in Bradford regarding parental support and professional training, coupled with the growing awareness of the impact of children's sleep, suggests there is a clear case for further investment in the area.

## Recommendation

### Establish a tiered model approach:

- Run an awareness campaign with public health messages surrounding good sleep hygiene.
- Integrate sleep training into mandatory 0-19 workforce professional training.
- Develop parental education/ workshops.
- For more in-depth support for complex cases, commission 1-to-1 clinics run by sleep specialists.
- Develop services with links to GPs and secondary care to enable care to be delivered promptly, closer to home and to avoid unnecessary medical referrals.
- Establish links to secondary care for prompt referral for primary sleep problems or suspected neurodisability.

## Next Steps

- Carry out further analysis of parental BISQ questionnaire results.
- Present findings to the Better Start Bradford Partnership Board.
- Follow up on a recently submitted briefing paper on childhood sleep to Bradford Public Health.
- Support organisations with their submission of sleep provision proposals for the Better Start Bradford Innovation Fund.

### Born in Bradford Collaboration

The Born in Bradford cohort study tracks the health of 13,500 children. Analysis of sleep data from the BiB1000 sub-study in collaboration with Born in Bradford researchers is ongoing.

### My Leadership Journey

Through my work at Better Start Bradford I am developing skills in stakeholder engagement, influencing, policy development and project management, and multi-agency working. Through these I am supporting collaboration and integration across agencies and have a direct impact on children and families, helping to give them the best start in life.

## References

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- Photo: Girl sleeping with her brown plush toy. Pexels. 2020 [online] Available at: [www.pexels.com](https://www.pexels.com) [Accessed 4 Mar. 2020]