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Ali Mohamed Nassur, Marie Lefevre, Damien Leger, Bernard Laumon, Anne Sophie Evrard. The effects of aircraft noise exposure on subjective sleep quality: the results of the DEBATS study in France. 12th ICBEN Congress on Noise as a Public Health Problem, Jun 2017, ZURICH, Switzerland. 6 p. hal-01635810

HAL Id: hal-01635810

<https://hal.science/hal-01635810>

Submitted on 15 Nov 2017

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The effects of aircraft noise exposure on subjective sleep quality: the results of the DEBATS study in France

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ABSTRACT

Objectives: Exposure to aircraft noise has been shown to have adverse effects on health and particularly on sleep. This study aimed to investigate the relationship between aircraft noise exposure and subjective sleep quality in the population living near airports in France.

Methods: Sleep interview was made through a questionnaire administered to 1,244 residents of three major French airports: Paris-CDG, Lyon-Saint-Exupéry and Toulouse-Blagnac. For each participant, aircraft noise exposure was estimated at home using noise maps. Logistic regression models were used with adjustment for potential confounders.

Results: Aircraft noise exposure was associated with the risk of being a short sleeper (sleep duration ≤ 6 h), and with the feeling of tiredness while awakening in the morning. An increase of 10 dBA in aircraft noise level at night was respectively associated with an OR of 1.66 (95% CI: 1.16 to 2.35) and an OR of 1.24 (95% CI: 1.00 to 1.63).

Conclusion: These findings contribute to the overall evidence suggesting that aircraft noise exposure at nighttime may decrease subjective quality of sleep.

INTRODUCTION

Noise is major cause of sleep disruption and global sleep dissatisfaction, with transportation noise at night at the first place. Aircraft noise is indeed perceived as a major environmental stressor in the vicinity of airports. It constitutes a major issue for public health, particularly in terms of sleep disturbance [1]. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), sleep disorders are the most serious consequence of environmental noise in Western Europe [2].

Both in laboratory and field studies, exposure to aircraft noise has been shown to disrupt sleep. Exposure to night time aircraft noise leads to an increased frequency of awakening,

increased motility, decreased slow wave sleep, changes in sleep structure, use of sleep drugs or sedatives, and a poor quality of sleep [3].

In France, the effects of aircraft noise exposure on sleep quality have insufficiently been evaluated. DEBATS (Discussion on the health effects of aircraft noise) is a French research program whose objective is to prospectively characterise the relationships between aircraft noise exposure and the health status, in particular sleep quality, of the population living in the vicinity of airports.

METHODS

Study population

1,244 individuals older than 18 and living in the vicinity of three French airports (Paris-Charles de Gaulle, Lyon-Saint-Exupéry and Toulouse-Blagnac) were randomly selected to participate in the longitudinal study of DEBATS. The study population was stratified on aircraft noise contours. These contours are based on the day–evening–night equivalent level (L_{den}) defined in four categories, <50, 50–54, 55–59 and ≥ 60 dB(A). All participants responded to a questionnaire administered by an interviewer at their place of residence. The questionnaire collected in particular socio-demographic information, the subjective sleep quality of the participants, their personal medical history and lifestyle factors such as smoking and alcohol consumption.

Noise exposure assessment

Exposure to aircraft noise was estimated with a 1-dB(A) resolution at the place of residence of the participants with noise maps produced by the French Civil Aviation Authority with the Integrated Noise Model. Four noise indicators were derived and used in the statistical analyses: L_{den} , $L_{Aeq24hr}$, $L_{Aeq6hr-22hr}$, and L_{night} .

Subjective sleep quality

Subjective sleep quality was assessed using two variables: sleep duration and the feeling of tiredness while awakening in the morning. For sleep duration, each participant indicated usual time for bed time (lights off) and get-up time. Sleep duration was calculated as the difference between these two times. It was then categorized into two classes: “short sleep” (sleep duration ≤ 6 hours) versus “normal and long sleep” (sleep duration > 6 hours). The participants also gave their feeling on awakening after a usual night sleep: well rested, rather rested, rather tired or very tired. This variable was categorized into two classes: well/rather rested versus rather/very tired.

Confounding factors

Several factors which could affect subjective sleep quality were obtained from the questionnaire: age, gender, education (<French high-school certificate/=French high-school certificate/>French high-school certificate), marital status, smoking habits (non-smoker/ex-smoker/occasional smoker/daily smoker), alcohol consumption (no/light/moderate/heavy), physical activity (no/yes), self-reported health (fair or poor/good or excellent), body mass index (body weight divided by height squared: obesity / overweight / underweight or normal weight),

anxiety (extremely or a lot/moderately or slightly or not at all), depression (extremely or a lot/moderately or slightly or not at all), work schedule (always at night/always during the day/shift work/not concerned), physical tiredness (extremely or a lot/moderately or slightly or not at all), nervous tiredness (extremely or a lot/moderately or slightly or not at all), cardiovascular disease (no/yes) and hypertension (no/yes).

Statistical analysis

Logistic regression models were estimated in order to study the relationship between aircraft noise exposure and the subjective sleep quality. They were adjusted for the confounding factors previously defined.

RESULTS

Almost 56% of the participants in the longitudinal study of the DEBATS research program were women and half of the participants lived in the vicinity of the Paris Charles de Gaulle airport. Table 1 shows the description of the study population. About 63% of the participants were married, 50% were never smokers and 51% were small alcohol drinkers. About 21% were extremely or much anxious and 13% were depressed.

Nine percent of the participants were considered as short sleepers and 54% of these short sleepers were male. Whatever noise indicator, the prevalence of short sleepers increased with aircraft noise exposure (Figure 1).

Approximately 30% of the study population reported to be rather/very tired in the morning after a night sleep, 68% of them were women. The prevalence of individuals feeling tired while awakening in the morning also increased with the level of aircraft noise (Figure 1).

The association between aircraft noise exposure and sleep duration was significant before and after adjustment for confounding factors. After adjustment for confounding factors, an increase of 10 dBA in aircraft noise level at night was associated with an odds ratio (OR) of 1.66 (CI 95%: 1.16-2.35) for sleep duration.

In addition to aircraft noise exposure, gender, smoking, anxiety and work schedule were significantly associated with sleep duration. Men, daily smokers, anxious individuals and night or shift workers were more likely to be short sleepers than others.

A significant association was also found between exposure to aircraft noise and the feeling of tiredness while awakening. An increase of 10 dBA in aircraft noise level during the night was associated with an OR of 1.24 (CI 95%: 1.00-1.63). Other factors were also significantly associated with the feeling of tiredness on awakening: gender, age, education, self-reported health, physical tiredness, nervous tiredness and anxiety. Women, young people, having a certificate <French high-school certificate, people with a fair or poor health, extreme physical fatigue and nervous fatigue were more likely to be tired while awakening in the morning.

Table 1: Description of the study population

	N	(%)		N	(%)
Sleep duration			Self-reported health		
≤ 6h	112	(9)	Good or excellent	1052	(85)
> 6h	1132	(91)	Fair or poor	191	(15)
Feeling of tiredness on awakening			Hypertension		
Well/rather rested	876	(70)	No	804	(65)
Rather/very tired	368	(30)	Yes	426	(34)
Airport			Cardiovascular disease		
Lyon Saint Exupéry	213	(17)	Yes	156	(12)
Paris Charles de Gaulle	620	(50)	No	1088	(87)
Toulouse Blagnac	411	(33)			
Gender			Anxiety		
Women	695	(56)	Extremely or a lot	266	(21)
Men	549	(44)	Moderately or slightly or not at all	978	(79)
Age			Depression		
18-34	226	(18)	Extremely or a lot	164	(13)
35-44	236	(19)	moderately or slightly or not at all	1080	(87)
45-54	266	(21)			
55-64	260	(21)			
65-74	185	(15)			
≥75	71	(6)			
Education			BMI		
< French high-school certificate	452	(36)	Underweight or normal weight	562	(45)
= French high-school certificate	397	(32)	Overweight	424	(34)
> French high-school certificate	395	(32)	Obesity	249	(20)
Marital status			Work schedule		
Single	253	(20)	Always during the day	662	(53)
Married, living marital	782	(63)	Always at night	22	(2)
Widow, widower	76	(6)	Shift work	57	(5)
Divorced, separated	133	(13)	Not concerned	499	(40)
Smoking			Nervous tiredness		
Non-smoker	625	(50)	Extremely or a lot	203	(16)
Ex-smoker	330	(27)	Moderately or slightly or not at all	1041	(84)
Occasional smoker	19	(2)			
Daily smoker	269	(22)			
Alcohol consumption			Physical tiredness		
No	348	(28)	Extremely or a lot	235	(19)
Light	637	(51)	Moderately or slightly or not at all	1009	(81)
Moderate	193	(16)			
Heavy	54	(4)			
Physical activity					
Yes	657	(53)			
No	587	(47)			

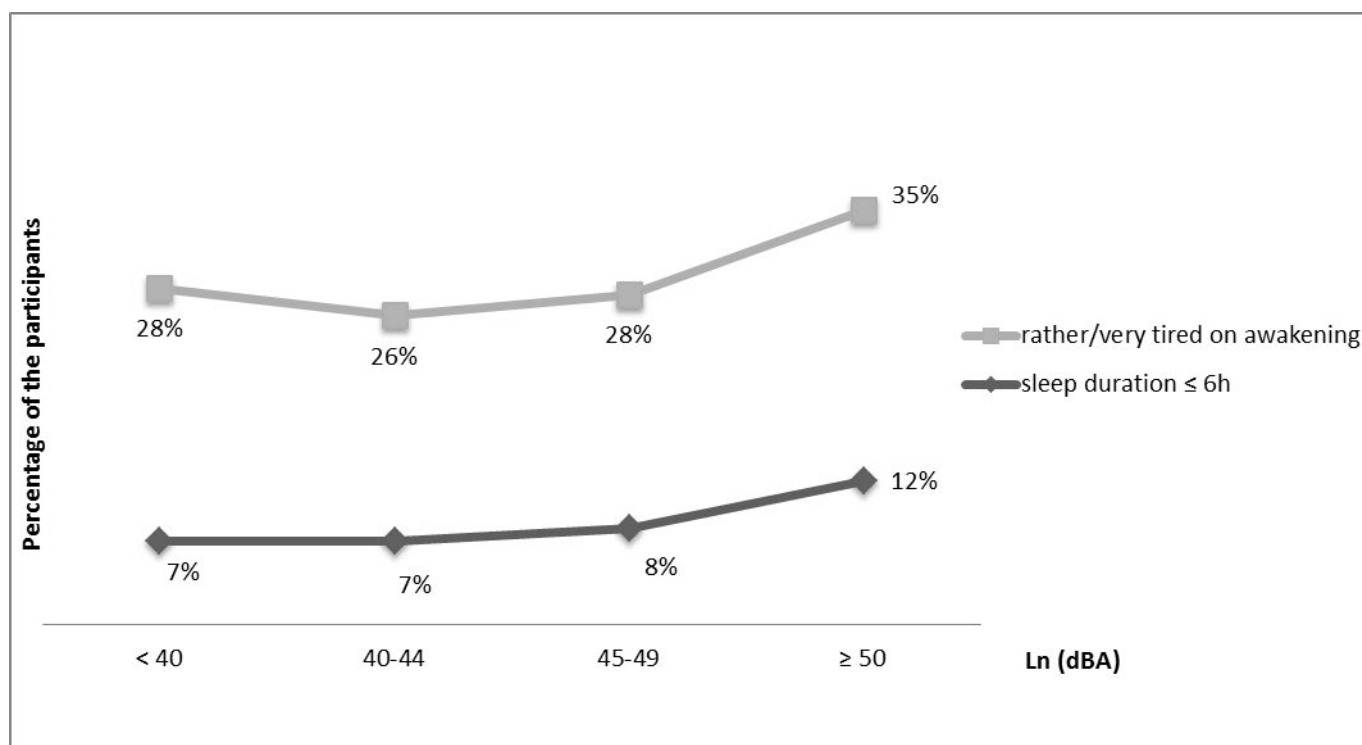


Figure 1 : Distribution of the prevalence of short sleep duration and of the feeling of tiredness while awakening by aircraft noise level

DISCUSSION

The present study evaluated the effects of aircraft noise exposure on subjective sleep quality in the vicinity of three French airports (Paris-Charles de Gaulle, Lyon-Saint-Exupéry and Toulouse-Blagnac). Subjective sleep quality was characterized through two variables: sleep duration and the feeling of tiredness on awakening in the morning. Among the participants, 9% were short sleepers and 30% reported to be rather or very tired on awakening. In the French population, the prevalence of short sleepers is approximately 8% (<5 hours / day) [4] and 34% reported to be tired while awakening [5]. These two variables were found to be significantly associated with the level of aircraft noise exposure in the present study.

Some studies evaluating the effects of aircraft noise exposure on sleep duration showed evidence of a decreased sleep duration when aircraft noise exposure increased [6]. Kim et al for example found that sleep duration near a military airfield was more deteriorated in the highly exposed group, followed by the low-exposure group and finally the control group [6]. Other studies did not show any association between aircraft noise exposure and sleep duration [7]. Basner and Samel [8] found an unexpected increase in sleep duration with aircraft noise exposure, 2.5 minutes on average.

Concerning the feeling of tiredness while awakening, the results of the present study confirm those found in the literature, namely a significant association between noise exposure and the feeling of tiredness after sleep [9]–[11].

The findings of the present study contribute to the overall evidence suggesting that aircraft noise exposure at nighttime may decrease subjective quality of sleep.

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