Accepted Manuscript

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Authors: Ana María Pedraza-Flechas, Virginia Lope, Pilar Moreo, Nieves Ascunce, Josefa Miranda-García, Carmen Vidal, Carmen Sánchez-Contador, Carmen Santamariña, Carmen Pedraz-Pingarrón, Rafael Llobet, Nuria Aragonés, Dolores Salas-Trejo, Marina Pollán, Beatriz Pérez-Gómez

PII: S0378-5122(16)30301-2
DOI: http://dx.doi.org/doi:10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.02.015
Reference: MAT 6780

To appear in: Maturitas

Received date: 25-10-2016
Accepted date: 27-2-2017

Please cite this article as: Pedraza-Flechas Ana María, Lope Virginia, Moreo Pilar, Ascunce Nieves, Miranda-García Josefa, Vidal Carmen, Sánchez-Contador Carmen, Santamariña Carmen, Pedraz-Pingarrón Carmen, Llobet Rafael, Aragonés Nuria, Salas-Trejo Dolores, Pollán Marina, Pérez-Gómez Beatriz. Sleep Patterns, Sleep Disorders and Mammographic Density in Spanish Women: the DDM-Spain/Var-DDM study. Maturitas http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.maturitas.2017.02.015

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Sleep Patterns, Sleep Disorders and Mammographic Density in Spanish Women: the DDM-Spain/Var-DDM study

Ana María Pedraza-Flechas, Virginia Lope\textsuperscript{a,b}, Pilar Moreo\textsuperscript{c}, Nieves Ascuncé\textsuperscript{d}, Josefa Miranda-García\textsuperscript{e}, Carmen Vidal\textsuperscript{f}, Carmen Sánchez-Contador\textsuperscript{g}, Carmen Santamariña\textsuperscript{h}, Carmen Pedraz-Pingarrón\textsuperscript{i}, Rafael Llobet\textsuperscript{j}, Nuria Aragonés\textsuperscript{a,b}, Dolores Salas-Trejo\textsuperscript{a}, Marina Pollán\textsuperscript{a,b}, Beatriz Pérez-Gómez\textsuperscript{a,b}, DDM/Var-DDM-Spain.

\textsuperscript{a}Cancer and Environmental Epidemiology Unit, National Center for Epidemiology, Carlos III Institute of Health, Madrid, Spain.
\textsuperscript{b}Consortium for Biomedical Research in Epidemiology and Public Health (CIBER Epidemiología y Salud Pública), CIBERESP, Spain.
\textsuperscript{c}Aragon Breast Cancer Screening Program, Health Service of Aragon, Zaragoza, Spain.
\textsuperscript{d}Navarra Breast cancer Screening Program, Public Health Institute, Pamplona, Spain.
\textsuperscript{e}Valencia Breast Cancer Screening Program, General Directorate Public Health, Valencia, Spain.
\textsuperscript{f}Cancer Prevention and Control Unit, Catalan Institute of Oncology (ICO), Barcelona, Spain.
\textsuperscript{g}Balearic Islands Breast Cancer Screening Program, Health Promotion for Women and Childhood, General Directorate Public Health and Participation, Regional Authority of Health and Consumer Affairs, Balearic Islands, Palma de Mallorca, Spain.
\textsuperscript{h}Galicia Breast Cancer Screening Program, Regional Authority of Health, Galicia Regional Government, Corunna, Spain.
\textsuperscript{i}Castile-Leon Breast Cancer Screening Program, General Directorate Public Health SACYL, Burgos, Castile-Leon, Spain.
\textsuperscript{j}Institute of Computer Technology, Universitat Politècnica de València.

**Corresponding Authors:**

Beatriz Pérez-Gómez & Ana María Pedraza-Flechas

Cancer and Environmental Epidemiology Unit. National Center for Epidemiology. Carlos III Institute of Health.

Avenida Monforte de Lemos 5. Madrid, Spain 28029.

Tel: 34-918222637; Fax: 34-913877815

E-mail: bperez@isciii.es, ampedraza@isciii.es
Highlights

- We explored sleep patterns and mammographic density, a marker of breast cancer risk.
- Sleep patterns or sleep disorders were not associated with mammographic density.
- These results do not support a relationship between breast cancer and sleep problems.

Abstract

We explored the relationship between sleep patterns and sleep disorders and mammographic density (MD), a marker of breast cancer risk. Participants in the DDM-Spain/var-DDM study, which included 2,878 middle-aged Spanish women, were interviewed via telephone and asked questions on sleep characteristics. Two radiologists assessed MD in their left craneo-caudal mammogram, assisted by a validated semiautomatic-computer tool (DM-scan). We used log-transformed percentage MD as the dependent variable and fitted mixed linear regression models, including known confounding variables.

Our results showed that neither sleeping patterns nor sleep disorders were associated with MD. However, women with frequent changes in their bedtime due to anxiety or depression had higher MD (eβ:1.53;95%CI:1.04-2.26).

Abbreviations: BC, Breast Cancer; MD, Mammographic Density.

Keywords: Sleep patterns; Sleep disorders; Breast Cancer; Mammographic density.
1. Introduction

Hormonal changes around menopause affect sleep quality, and middle age women frequently experience sleep disorders [1]. Nightshift-work involving circadian disruption is a known risk factor for breast cancer (BC) [2]. Sleep deficit and sleep disorders can lead to circadian disruption and some authors have suggested that they might also modify BC risk.

Mammographic density, the most commonly used risk marker for BC, is the proportion of radiopaque area of the breast projection in the mammogram. Women with very dense breast have a 4 to 6-fold excess risk of BC compared to those women, with the same age and weight, which have low MD [3]. The association between sleep patterns, sleep disorders and mammographic density (MD) could provide additional data on their role on BC, but it has been barely investigated [3]. Our aim is to explore the relationship between sleeping patterns, sleep disorders and MD in Spanish women attending BC screening programs, and its possible interaction with menopausal status.

2. Methods

This study was carried out in in 7 public population-based Spanish screening regional centers (Aragon; Balearic Islands; Castile-León; Catalonia; Galicia; Navarre; Valencia). These government-sponsored programs invite women aged 50-69 (45-69 in some regions) to biennial screening. In 2007-2008 we recruited 3,584 women (DDM-Spain) (participation rate: 74.5%; range: 64.7–84.0% across centers), and collected basic epidemiological data; 3119 of these participants (age range: 47-71 years old), answered a telephone-administered questionnaire in 2010 (Var-DDM), which updated previous information and included several questions on sleeping habits and sleep disorders. In addition, they allowed access to their mammographic history; we could locate mammograms of 2,890 participants from this new screening round (average time between mammogram date and interview: 7.9 months). Postmenopausal status was defined as self-reported absence of
menstruation in the last 12 months. We excluded 12 women without weight data or night-shift work history information.

Two trained experienced radiologists estimated the percentage of MD in a continuous scale, assisted by DM-Scan, a free semi-automated computer tool (http://dmscan.iti.upv.es) that has demonstrated high reproducibility and validity. 44.9% of the mammograms were fully-digital mammograms, while analogical (11.7%) and digital images printed on film (43.4%) were digitalized (Totalook MammoAdvantage, max. optical-density: 4.2; and Microtek Medi-700 max, max. optical-density: 4.0). Both intra- and inter-rater intra-class correlation were >0.8.

The possible association of MD with sleep pattern and sleep disorders was evaluated by multivariate mixed linear regression models with random screening-center-specific intercepts. We used log-transformed percentage of MD as the dependent variable and included as potential confounders: age at mammogram; menopausal status; body mass index (BMI); number of childbirths; family history of BC; hormonal replacement therapy use; tobacco use, alcohol consumption; calorie intake; physical activity; night-shift work history; radiologist and type of mammogram. The regression coefficients and standard errors of these models were exponentiated to calculate the relative increase of geometric means (GM) of MD comparing groups of participants across categories. Models were constructed separately for pre and postmenopausal women and a statistical interaction served to test heterogeneous effects according to menopausal status.

3. Results

A total of 2,878 women provided information on sleep pattern characteristics. Most of the women reported regular sleep schedules (i.e. going to bed every day at the same time in the last 10 years), with average bedtime at 11:52 pm and average nighttime sleep duration of 6.8 hours/day. Prevalence of regular naps was 44% and almost half of those women took naps daily (657 women).
Sleep disorders lasting at least one year were reported by 45.5% of the women, usually difficulties falling or staying asleep at night. Less than 1% of the women reported obstructive sleep apnea (n:23) or restless legs syndrome (n:6). Nine percent of participants had history of night-shift work (n: 269).

The GM of the percentage of MD in all participants was 13.3% (95%CI:12.9-13.8), in premenopausal women 20.0% (95%CI:19.8-24.5) and in postmenopausal 12.6% (95%CI:12.2-13.1). As expected, MD was inversely associated with age (P:0.001) and BMI (P:0.001).

Overall, sleeping patterns were not associated with MD, and neither sleep duration (e^β_trend/hour:1.01; 95%CI:0.98-1.03) nor usual bedtime (P:0.534) were related to MD (Table 1). Regarding sleep disorders, no association was found with reporting sleep disorders (e^β:1.04; 95%CI:0.98-1.10), years with sleep disorders, age at sleep disorders onset, or type of sleep disorders. However, premenopausal women with more than 10 years of sleep disorders had lower MD (e^β:0.64; 95%CI:0.41-0.99), although this category included only 13 women.

Finally, frequent changes in bedtime for at least one year, overall, were not associated with MD. Nevertheless, women that attributed these bedtime time changes to anxiety or depression had higher MD than the rest of the women (e^β:1.53; 95%CI:1.04-2.26), especially postmenopausal women (e^β:1.71; 95%CI:1.11-2.64). Menopausal status didn’t modify any of the reported results.

4. Discussion

We did not find any association between MD and sleep patterns, napping or sleep disorders. Sleep deprivation, which might be a surrogate for circadian disruption, has been hypothesized to be related to BC. The lack of association of sleep duration with MD, a risk marker for BC, is coherent with the results of a recent meta-analysis that don’t support the association of sleep deficiency with BC [2].

Regarding MD and sleep disorders, the only published study on this issue found no association in premenopausal Chinese women [3], which is consistent with our results. As an isolated result, we
found higher MD in women reporting changes in their bedtime because of anxiety or depression; these problems imply other exposures unrelated to sleep disruption (i.e. prolactin changes due antidepressants [4].)

One limitation of this study is the use of self-reported sleep information; however, there is evidence that self-reported sleeping habits may be accurate at capturing sleep duration [5]. Also, we used different types of mammograms and had two readers; however, all models were adjusted for these possible sources of error. Among our strengths are the population-based nature of the study sample and the use of continuous measure of MD, as recommended by previous authors.

In conclusion, our results suggest that sleep patterns or sleep disorders are not associated with MD, and do not support the possible relationship between them and BC.

Contributors

All authors participated in the design of the study, the interpretation of the data and the writing of the manuscript, and all authors saw and approved the final version.

Funding

This work was supported by grants from the Spanish Ministry of Economy and Competitiveness - Carlos III Institute of Health (ISCIII) (FI14CIII/00013, FIS PI060386 & PS09/0790), from the Spanish Federation of Breast Cancer Patients (FECMA 485 EPY 1170–10), Gent per Gent Fund (EDEMAC Project), the EPY1306/06 collaboration agreement between Astra-Zeneca and the ISCIII and partially funded by the European Regional Development Fund (FEDER).
Ethical approval

The DDM-Spain and Var-DDM study protocol was formally approved by the Bioethics and Animal Welfare Committee at the Carlos III Institute of Health and all participants signed a consent form, including permission to publish the results from the current research.

Provenance and peer review

This article has undergone peer review.

Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

Other members of DDM-Spain/Var-DDM Spain: María Casals, Inmaculada Martínez, María Ederra and Jesús Vioque.
Reference

Interaction with menopausal status was not significant P>0.05.

1* women didn’t report their nighttime sleep duration
2** women didn’t report their age at sleep disorders onset
3* women didn’t report the number of years with sleep disorders.
4** women didn’t report the number of childbirths.
5 Categories not exclusive
6 Includes obstructive sleep apnea and restless legs syndrome