



An initiative of the

Canadian Consortium
on **Child & Youth Trauma**

NEWLY EMERGING RESEARCH

on child & youth trauma
and trauma-informed care

MONTHLY JOURNAL WATCH

Translating and disseminating research-based knowledge
to practice & policy settings.

RESEARCH TO PRACTICE & POLICY KNOWLEDGE BULLETIN

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MONTHLY SUMMARY

*By Katherine Scarvelis, Master of Art therapy Student
at Concordia University*

Summarised articles:

- *Exploring the Link Between Early Foster Care Experiences and Sleep Quality in Adulthood.*
- *The Human Cost of immigration detention: Health Impacts on Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Children.*
- *Childhood Trauma and the Developing Brain: Lasting Cognitive and Emotional Impacts.*

Exploring the Link Between Early Foster Care Experiences and Sleep Quality in Adulthood

Keller, A., et al. (2025). "Examining Sleep Quality in Adult Foster Care Alumni: Implications for Later Life Health and Well-Being." *Healthcare (Switzerland)* 13(14).

Background

Past research within the general population has established a **link between childhood trauma experiences and poor sleep quality**. However, there is limited research focused specifically on foster care alumni, who may experience sleep challenges linked to interpersonal trauma exposure, anxiety, and the quality of placement conditions. These sleep challenges **often persist** after leaving care and well into adulthood, contributing to **health issues** such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes and reduced overall well-being.

OBJECTIVES & METHODS

The study's primary objective was to examine the **associations between perceived care experiences and sleep quality among adults** in middle and later adulthood, focusing on care leavers over 30 years old. It also extended the analysis to explore associations between sleep quality and the current health of participants. The study sample of forty-one foster care alumni, aged 30–85 years, completed **questionnaires** regarding their demographics, youth protection experiences, social support network, sleep quality, and a health survey. A subset of participants also received **qualitative interviews**. Analysis methods included linear regression and qualitative content analysis.

RESULTS

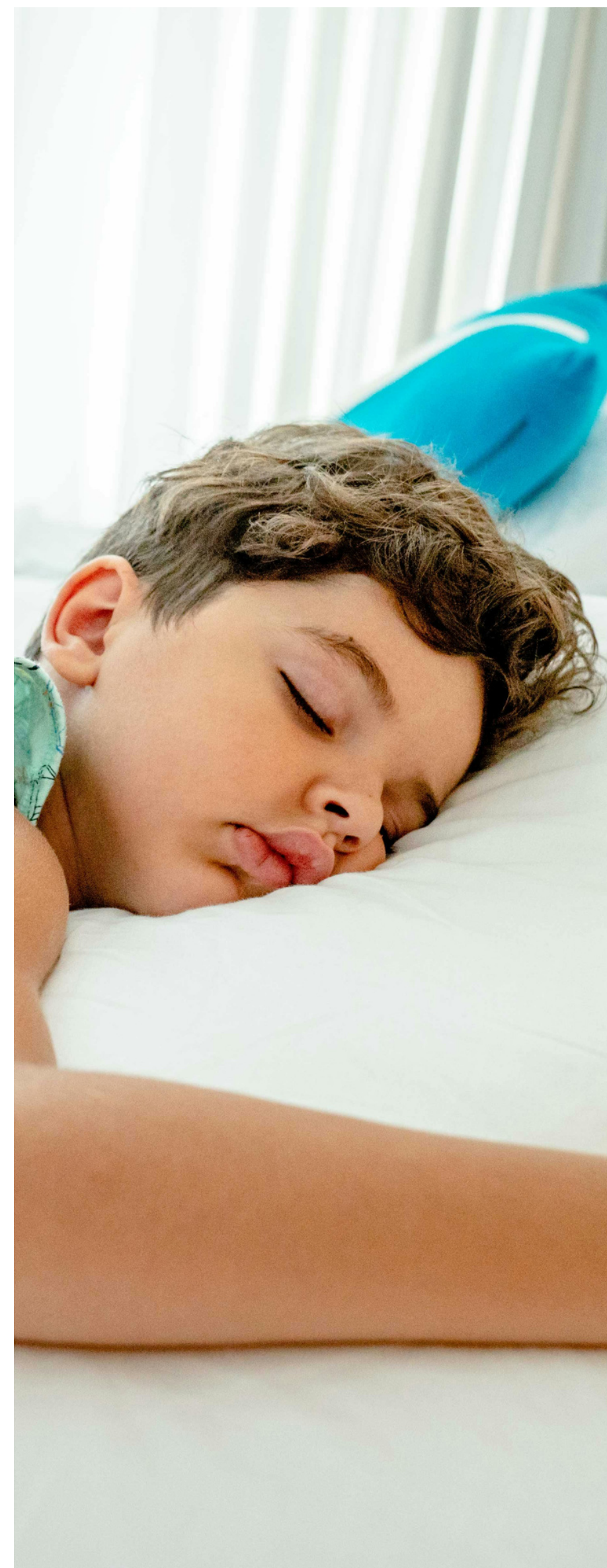
The research results showed significant **positive relationships between adult sleep and perceived quality of foster care / youth protection** experiences, after controlling for other factors such as the strength of one's friendship support network, demographics, education, and income. The quality of that early placement is a stronger long-term predictor of sleep problems than participants' current support system. In exploring the relationship between sleep quality and health outcomes among the foster care alumni, the study results were consistent with other research that has found a strong relationship between **better sleep and fewer health problems**, after controlling for the same demographic and social support factors. The study includes several testimonials from the qualitative interviews which reinforce the complex relationship between early foster care experiences and ongoing sleep and health challenges in later life. The authors do not propose causal mechanisms and acknowledge the value of further research using longitudinal studies that track foster care leavers over their lifetimes, enabling more targeted interventions.

CLINICAL IMPLICATIONS

People with a history of involvement in the foster care system should be **routinely screened for sleep difficulties in clinical settings**, as there are several potential interventions to improve sleep quality. Front-line professionals should be empowered to offer **psychoeducation on sleep hygiene** and provide referrals to sleep specialists where indicated. Screening can also lead to therapeutic interventions around unresolved loss or trauma. Those experiencing trauma-related issues like nightmares or hyperarousal may benefit from targeted therapies such as trauma-informed cognitive behavioural therapy or music relaxation.

TAKEAWAY QUESTIONS

- *How can we adapt foster care processes to enable earlier, more rigorous sleep quality assessment and mitigation measures?*
- *How can we adapt our trauma-informed care to address life experiences associated with foster care and youth protection environments?*



The Human Cost of immigration detention: Health Impacts on Refugee and Asylum-Seeking Children

Sherif, B., et al. (2025). "Immigration detention of children: a systematic review and meta-analysis of physical and mental health impacts." *European Child & Adolescent Psychiatry*: 1-27.

In the past decade, there has been a major **increase in global forced displacement** caused by armed conflict and human rights violations. Many **wealthy countries still detain asylum-seeking and refugee (ASR) children**, even though this is known to harm their health.

This review aimed to **assess the physical and mental health** impacts of immigration detention on ASR children.

Researchers systematically reviewed findings from **15 studies including 4,890 children** to identify common physical and mental health conditions and their risk factors.

A **random-effects meta-analysis** was then conducted to measure **social, emotional, and behavioural issues**.

The review found that **immigration detention has severe and wide-ranging impacts on children's mental health**. PTSD rates ranged from **6.5% in short detentions** to nearly **100% for those held a year or longer**. Major depression affected **44-95%** of children, and up to **half experienced anxiety disorders**, including **separation and generalized anxiety**. Between **25% and 57%** reported **suicidal thoughts/self-harm**, while **developmental delays** were common among those detained long-term, with **75% showing delays after 12 months**. Across **three studies using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire (SDQ)**, detained children scored **more than twice as high** as their peers on measures of **emotional distress, conduct problems, and peer difficulties**. Physical health was also affected, with high rates of **malnutrition, vitamin D deficiency, dental disease, and somatic complaints such as headaches and bedwetting**. Systemic risk factors like **long detention duration, family separation, and past trauma** further worsened children's harmful outcomes.

These findings provide strong evidence that **immigration detention is a serious form of early-life adversity with lasting effects on children's emotional, physical, and social development**. **Policy changes are urgently needed** to eliminate the use of prolonged or routine detention for asylum-seeking and refugee children. Efforts should **prioritize keeping families together** and **ensure access to trauma-informed care** to **mitigate harmful consequences** for ASR children.



Childhood Trauma and the Developing Brain: Lasting Cognitive and Emotional Impacts

Fan, L. and T. Kang (2025). "Early childhood trauma and its long-term impact on cognitive and emotional development: a systematic review and meta-analysis." *Annals of Medicine* 57(1).

This article explores how **childhood trauma** affects long-term **cognitive and emotional development**, aiming to bring together existing evidence to guide interventions and public health strategies.

The review had three main goals: first, to identify studies examining the connection between **early childhood trauma and cognitive skills** such as processing speed, attention, memory, and executive functioning; second, to evaluate how trauma affects **emotional outcomes**, including emotion regulation, recognition, and vulnerability to anxiety and depression; and third, to investigate the **neurobiological changes** linked to these difficulties, focusing on brain structure, function, and connectivity.

A total of **465 studies were systematically reviewed**, with **9 meeting the inclusion criteria**. A **random-effects meta-analysis** and subgroup analyses were conducted for processing speed, attention, working memory, emotion regulation, and executive function.

The results showed **widespread cognitive impairments**, with early trauma significantly disrupting processing speed, attention, working memory, and executive functioning—effects that often persisted into adulthood. Trauma was linked to **impairments in working and long-term memory** and this was associated with dysfunction in the **hippocampus** and **prefrontal cortex**. Emotionally, trauma-exposed individuals showed **difficulties in emotion recognition and regulation**, and this is mediated by maladaptive coping strategies. Neuroimaging revealed **heightened amygdala activity** and **weakened connections with the pregenual anterior cingulate cortex (pgACC)**.

The review also highlighted **intervention potential**. **Neurofeedback training (NFT)** in children with developmental trauma led to significant **improvements in PTSD symptoms, executive functioning, and behavioral regulation**, though these gains were not sustained over time, showing a need for ongoing interventions.

The findings emphasize the importance of **early screening, trauma-informed care, and evidence-based treatments** to reduce and reverse trauma-related cognitive and emotional difficulties.





AN OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT

JOURNAL WATCH GROUP

Once a month, we gather a group of researchers, practitioners, policy-makers, and students to read and discuss newly emerging research publications on child and youth trauma, and trauma-informed care.

Meetings take place online in a friendly and casual atmosphere; all are welcomed.

Our students pull highlights from these publications and discussions to create Research to Practice & Policy Knowledge Bulletins. We share these research-based knowledge bulletins with practice and policy settings who are actively working to improve the lives of children and youth across Canada.