

SLEEP HABITS IN NATIVE BRAZILIAN TERENA CHILDREN IN THE STATE OF MATO GROSSO DO SUL, BRAZIL

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ABSTRACT - Sleep habits in childhood vary in function of physiological factors. Cultural traits also influence sleep habits. This research evaluates sleep habits of Native Brazilian Terena children. The Terena group here studied live in the central region of Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, on the plains; they are peaceful and dedicated mainly to agriculture. Two villages were studied, Tereré and Córrego do Meio, both in Reservations. Sleep characteristics of 67 children (40M;27F), 2 to 10 year olds, were evaluated in interviews with their mothers. The results evidenced that cosleeping, in the same bed with family members is the standard Terena pattern present in every evaluated child. The presence of two or more beds and a mean of five or more people in each bedroom was the typical finding. The authors propose that cosleeping and the presence of numerous family members reflect the high values attributed to family links in the Terena culture.

KEY WORDS: sleep, sleep habits, child, native, indian, Terena, cosleeping, Mato Grosso do Sul - Brazil.

Hábitos de dormir da criança indígena Terena no Mato Grosso do Sul

RESUMO - Os hábitos de dormir variam, na infância, em função de fatores fisiológicos e sofrem influências culturais. O objetivo desta pesquisa foi avaliar os hábitos de dormir da criança indígena Terena, no Mato Grosso do Sul. Duas aldeias foram estudadas, Tereré e Córrego do Meio, ambas em reservas indígenas. As características do sono de 67 crianças (40 M; 27 F), de 2 a 10 anos de idade, foram pesquisadas por meio de entrevistas com as mães. Resultou que o hábito de dormir junto (*cosleeping*) na mesma cama, com os familiares, foi o padrão mais característico, sendo encontrado em todas as crianças avaliadas. Presença de duas ou mais camas e média de cinco ou mais pessoas no mesmo quarto foram achados típicos. Os autores propõem que dormir junto com familiares, e a presença de numerosos membros da mesma família no mesmo quarto, refletem os valores atribuídos a elos familiares na cultura Terena.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: sono, hábitos de dormir, infância, nativo, índio, Terena, Mato Grosso do Sul.

Sleep characteristics and sleep habits in childhood, vary due to physiological factors. They also adjust to social, economical and cultural influences^{1,2}. Understanding of sleep in childhood requires considering environment and culture³⁻¹⁰. We have no knowledge of previous literature on Native Brazilian sleep. Therefore, studies on the sleep habits of these children are unknown.

This research plans to evaluate sleep habits of Native Terena children. This is part of a broader project that plans to detail sleep patterns and habits in this ethnic group.

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Table 1. Distribution of Terena children according to age, in the Tereré and Córrego do Meio villages.

Age (years)	Tereré N	Córrego do Meio N
2-3	12	4
4-5	9	7
6-7	12	6
8-9	7	3
10	6	1
Total	46	21

METHODS

The Terena ethnic group is part of the large branch of Native Aruak language. In Brazil, the present Terena population living in Mato Grosso do Sul is 17174 inhabitants¹¹. The Group studied in this research lives in the central portion of Mato Grosso do Sul and their far ancestries have their origin in regions of Venezuela and Colombia, having crossed the Amazon Basin until reaching the Chaco region, in Paraguay. In the last two centuries, this group crossed from the Chaco to the present region, located between the Amazon and the Plata basins. They are peaceful people primarily devoted to agriculture, having adapted well in these fertile plains and tropical climate¹²⁻¹⁶.

Sixty-seven Native Terena children (40 M; 27 F) - 2 to 10 year olds - were evaluated. The mean age was 5.2 years (Table 1). Sleep characteristics were approached in interviews with the mothers, in the Autumn 1998. The interviews were personally performed by the four authors. Two villages were studied: Tereré (TE) and Córrego do Meio (CM), both in the municipality of Sidrolândia, Mato Grosso do Sul. Forty-six children were studied in the TE village and 21 in the CM village. Interviews were carried out house by house, in all homes having children in this age range with the exception of 3 houses in the TE village, which refused to answer due to religious beliefs. In the CM village, two houses were not included due to the same reason, and the houses chosen were closer to the village center.

Data obtained in each village will be presented apart because both have several slightly different social and cultural characteristics. CM is located in a Reservation far from urban centers; TE, is located in a Reservation contiguous to Sidrolândia city, receiving more intense external influences.

Sleep habits were evaluated in eleven multiple choice questions, and three discussion-type questions, focusing mainly on the habit of sleeping with other people (cosleeping) and the bedroom conditions. In selected cases, photographic report and video filming of the bedroom were performed, during daytime and nighttime, besides interviews with mothers. They will be presented elsewhere.

RESULTS

Terena homes are usually composed of an open rectangular area, without walls, covered with thatching, under which the social diurnal activities take place; next to it, in the open, daily activities such as cooking, eating meals and clothes washing are performed. Adult and child leisure and other activities are also carried out in this open area. The bedroom itself is traditionally in a small closed constructed area, measuring anywhere from 9 to 15 m² and is primarily used by children and adults when retiring at night. The walls measure about 170 cm in height. There is just one door and there are no windows. In the TE village, houses that were more recently built are made of bricks, covered either with thatching or hand-made shingles, the bedroom floor is of dirt.

It was observed that cosleeping (in the same bed) with family members is the standard pattern in Terena families, as none of the 67 children who we studied sleep alone (Table 2). They predominantly sleep with their brothers, followed by their parents, sisters and grandparents. Cosleeping is therefore the standard behavior in Terena, and is restricted to close family members.

Another strong sleep habit of these children is the presence of several beds in the same bedroom and of many people - adults and children - in each bedroom (Table 3). Four beds in one bedroom was the maximum number observed. In the TE village, the mean was 5.6 people in each bedroom and in CM village, this mean was of 5.2. Thirteen people in one bedroom was the maximum number observed.

Every child evaluated used to sleep at night in a bed with a mattress. None used to sleep in any other kind of bed, mat or hammock. It is important to stress that a hammock is often used to

Table 2. Sleep characteristics of 2 to 10 year olds Terena children in the Tereré and Córrego do Meio villages.

	Tereré		Córrego do Meio	
	N	(%)	N	(%)
Sleeps with				
mother	16	34.7	14	66.6
father	11	23.9	13	61.9
brother	26	56.5	17	80.9
sister	12	26.0	9	42.8
grandfather	1	2.1		
grandmother	2	4.3		
others				
In the bedroom				
TV	11	23.9	9	42.8
radio	11	23.9	11	52.3
quiet	46	100.0	19	90.4
noise			2	9.5
Bedroom temperature				
pleasant	37	80.4	12	57.1
too cold	8	17.3	6	28.5
too warm	1	2.1	3	14.2
Total	46	100.0	21	100.0

Table 3. Number of beds and persons per bedroom, in the Tereré and Córrego do Meio villages.

	Tereré	Córrego do Meio
Beds per bedroom (mean)	2.0	1.7
Persons per bedroom (mean)	5.6	5.2

sleep during the daytime, usually for small children. However, these children are not put to sleep in hammocks during the night. In both villages, every child evaluated had industrially made bedlinen and blankets. No children was found covered with animal hide or other means.

Almost every house had electric lighting.

The only exception was a family with 5 children who temporarily used candle light due to construction. Gas candles and such likes were not found. However, lights are turned off early at night (around 2030 h).

One out of every four children in the TE village sleeps in a bedroom with a radio or TV; in CM village radios are found in 52.3% of the children's bedrooms and TV's in 42.8%. TV and radio sets are common in the homes, usually a single set per bedroom. Sleeping time schedule will not be focused in the present publication. However, it is important to observe that the smaller children tended to sleep early: at sunset, around 1800 h. Older children living in the homes with TV's or radio's, tended to sleep around 2030 h, when the appliances are generally turned off.

In the TE village the bedroom is always described as silent place, whereas in the CM village, 90.4% described it as a silent place. In the CM village, three children complained of noise; two cases were due to grasshoppers, and one from a TV.

In the TE sample, 80.4% reported that the bedroom temperature was pleasant, and in the CM village, this number was of 57.1%. Quite often, the tendency was to consider the bedroom colder than warmer. However, it must be remembered that the interviews were carried out in the Autumn, in relatively cooler days.

When considering if the care taken in putting the child to sleep could vary according to the child's age, we noticed that only two families of the TE village and one family of the CM village gave more attention to the sleep care in younger children. Despite trying to detect these differences, none were found due to gender or social position.

DISCUSSION

Cosleeping (in the same bed) with family members, was one of the most characteristic traits found in this group of Terena children, being a behavior that occurred in every child. This is markedly different from studies performed in other populations, such as in the present western urban culture, and in Asian studies^{7,9,16-20}. In present Anglo-Saxon culture, this habit is even culturally dissuaded¹⁹⁻²⁶.

In similar ways, another trait of the Terena children was having several beds and numerous people in the same bedroom. This also markedly differs from studies with western urban cultures, in which individual values are sought, and individual beds and bedrooms are emphasized since the first months of life¹⁹⁻²⁷. We consider such counselling, deeply culturally determined.

It is important to point out that cosleeping, observed in the Terena village, as well as the presence of several beds and numerous people per bedroom, is not related to the lack of housing or physical space, as these resources are plentiful in the Reservation. However, these characteristics put the Terena way of sleeping in a distinct position in regards to other populations such as those found in poor metropolitan outskirts that also have such traits (cosleeping, several beds, numerous people), but due to low social-economic income.

The opportunity that we had to evaluate bedrooms in which several children and adults sleep in one bed while another bed remains empty, illustrates the strength of the habit of cosleeping with family members showing that the Terena society attributes high values to family links.

Among the predominant characteristics in this group of Terena children, are the use of beds with mattresses, industrially made bedlinen and blankets, as well as electric lighting, which all replaced traditional customs. A minority of children evaluated in the TE village and in about half of those of CM village are exposed to TV and radio. The bedroom is described by Terena mothers as predominantly silent with pleasant temperature, being favorable for the child's sleep^{2,24,27}.

In the group observed, it was noted that Terena people cares for their youngster's sleep, putting the child to sleep in a proper environment, with adequate sleeping clothes, family care and protection, promoted by bedsharing^{18,25,28-30}. There were not differences in child care sleep, because of age range, gender or social position.

CONCLUSIONS

Theoretically, we conclude that the sleep habits observed, so characteristic of the Terena, reflect social-cultural traits. Cosleeping with numerous family members, in the same bed and in the same bedroom, evidence the importance of family links in the culture of Terena values; also, the architecture of Terena bedroom perfectly adapts to these family links. This culture is absolutely distinct from the contemporary urban western culture, including the Brazilian one, in which main values are attributed to individuality. Such urban western culture is reflected in the sleep habits requiring individual bedrooms, individual beds or individual TVs, even during early childhood, to the point of considering other alternative sleep habits as inexistent or inadequate. Therefore, Terena values emphasize strong family links, distinct from urban values, which emphasize individuality.

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