Topographical relocation of adolescent sleep spindles reveals a new maturational pattern of the human brain

Ferenc Gombos [a, b], Róbert Bódizs [c, d], Adrián Pótári [b], Gábor Bocskai [a], Andrea Berencsi [b, e], Hanna Szakács [a] and Ilona Kovács [a, b, f, *]

[a] Laboratory for Psychological Research, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, 1088 Hungary

[b] Adolescent Development Research Group, Hungarian Academy of Sciences - Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Budapest, 1088 Hungary

[c] Institute of Behavioural Sciences, Semmelweis University, Budapest, 1089 Hungary

[d] National Institute of Clinical Neurosciences, Budapest, 1145 Hungary

[e] Institute for the Methodology of Special Needs Education and Rehabilitation, Bárczi Gusztáv Faculty of Special Needs Education, Eötvös Lóránd University, Budapest, 1097 Hungary

[f] Institute of Cognitive Neuroscience and Psychology, Research Centre for Natural Sciences, Budapest, 1117 Hungary

*corresponding author: Ilona Kovács, Laboratory for Psychological Research, Pázmány Péter Catholic University, 1 Mikszáth Kálmán sq., Budapest, 1088 Hungary, **Email:** dr.ilona.kovacs@gmail.com

Author Contributions: IK, FG and RB designed the experiments; FG, AP and GB analyzed the data; all authors contributed to writing the paper.

Competing Interest Statement: none

Classification: Biological Sciences, Neuroscience

Keywords: sleep spindles, adolescent brain, cortical maturation, precuneus

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Abstract

Current theories of human neural development and brain maturation emphasize the posterior-to-anterior or back-to-front pattern as an unequivocal ontogenetic feature that is largely due to the late maturing frontal lobes. The back-to-front pattern has received substantial support from both anatomical and electrophysiological studies, the latter looking at the age-related changes in the topography of sleep slow waves. However, the above scenario of a unidirectional developmental and anatomical route disregards the major hub of the so-called default-mode network, which is a human-specific and late maturing neural structure of the brain, undergoing significant differentiation during adolescence: the precuneus. In order to understand how the late maturation of the precuneus might modify the presently accepted large-scale maturational pattern of the human brain, here we focus on sleep spindles that are known to be involved in neural plasticity with major sources in the precuneus in adults. We provide evidence for the posteriorization in the prevailing anatomical localization of fast sleep spindles. The predominantly central maxima in density and amplitude of fast spindles at the age of 12 years becomes gradually shifted to the parietal regions until the age of 20. Similar changes, albeit at a smaller anatomical distance take place in terms of fast sleep spindle frequency. These findings indicate a front-to-back pattern of brain maturation and correspond with reports on an increased differentiation of the precuneus during adolescence.

Main Text

Introduction

The structural and functional development of the human brain has an exceptionally extended temporal window as compared to other vertebrates (1–3). This extension provides the developing adolescent human brain with an astonishing learning capacity for the final groundwork of adult life, and it is a period of marked vulnerability at the same time (4). It is of utmost relevance to describe the adolescent patterns of brain maturation in detail if we hope to see the next generation to grow into healthy and talented adults.

Details on the protracted maturational course of the human brain have been accumulating with increasingly advanced brain imaging technologies (5–7). Up to date, there are two relevant patterns described in terms of the process of reaching structural maturity in human brain development: one is the back-to-front propagation of brain maturation, with the frontal areas reaching adult proportions the latest (6–8), and the other is the dual-systems model where the ventral affective system precedes the maturation of the prefrontal control system (9–11). While these are generally accepted patterns of brain maturation, we would like to add a further, functionally relevant and supposedly human-specific maturational arrangement to this scenario.

According to the latest accounts of adolescent functional connectivity it seems that the association areas or the so-called default mode network (DMN) of the brain are remodeled during development at a later age than those areas that are more related to immediate sensory input and behavioral control (12, 13). While the latest maturing hot-spots in the network subserving "internal" cognition are believed to be fundamental to human evolution (14–16), their exact connectivity and contribution to adolescent development is not yet known. We suggest that more might be understood with respect to the developing large-scale functional networks through the investigation of spontaneous cortical activity in the absence of sensory stimulation such as sleep.

Dynamics of large-scale brain networks in humans are tightly linked with neural oscillatory activities, the latter reflecting underlying functional connectivity, as well as contributing to information coding and integration in the neural system. Sleep spindle oscillations are groups of 11-16 Hz waves emerging in non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep as a result of the rhythmic hyperpolarization rebound sequences of thalamocortical neurons, the inhibition being initiated in the thalamic reticular nucleus (17). Sleep spindles are hypothesized to reflect underlying large-scale cortical functional networks emerging from spontaneous neural activity during sleep (18, 19). A bimodal frequency and topography of sleep spindles has repeatedly been described in adults. That is, slow (~12 Hz) sleep spindles are frontally dominant, whereas fast (~14 Hz) sleep spindles are of parietal/precuneal origin in adult human subjects (20, 21).

The precuneus is a major hub of the DMN, part of the complex neurocognitive network involved in the maintenance of conscious awareness, self-reflection, visuospatial integration and episodic memory (16, 22). Similar to the frontal cortex, the precuneus expansion is a neurological specialization of Homo sapiens and is assumed to be associated with recent human cognitive specializations (23). In addition, the precuneus has been characterized by an increasing functional segregation from the frontoparietal network between 8 and 26 years of age (24). Thus, besides of the late maturation in frontal lobe functions, characterized by the well-known back-to-front maturation pattern of the brain (6–8, 25), a more posterior neuroanatomical structure, namely the precuneus is subject of significant developmental changes in pubertal and adolescent ages as well.

Based on the relatively late functional segregation of the precuneus from the frontoparietal network, as well as on the bimodal prefrontal versus precuneal sources of slow and fast sleep spindles, respectively, we postulate that these two sleep spindle types undergo a topographical transformation characterized by increasing anatomical segregation during adolescent development. We assume that slow and fast sleep spindles are gradually relocated from the more central toward the prefrontal and the parietal regions, respectively. The presumed age-related topographical transfer is supposed to reflect the increasing differentiation and segregation of the frontal and precuneal subsystems in the DMN, as well as the associated late development of the phylogenetically new neuroanatomical structures in humans.

Here we focus on the late maturation of individually adjusted slow-frontal and fast-parietal sleep spindle features in adolescence by using HD-EEG recordings in three subgroups of different ages (12, 16 and 20 years). We hypothesize that the two sleep spindle types index distinct neurodevelopmental processes during the course of adolescent brain maturation and functional specialization. We rely on HD-EEG recordings in order to increase spatial resolution relative to classical EEG studies. We believe that focusing on the bimodal antero-posterior source and frequency distribution of sleep spindle oscillations (20, 21), contrasting the unimodal, largely frontal maxima of slow waves (26, 27) provides us with a better understanding of the adolescent remodeling of the human brain.

Results

60 adolescent and young adult subjects participated in the study (12, 16 and 20 years of age, n=20 in each age group, with a perfect gender balance). We recorded 128 channel full-night sleep HD-EEG data and detected individual-specific slow and fast spindles by the Individual Adjustment Method (IAM, see Methods and ref. 28). We analysed the derivation-specific topographical distribution of the spindle parameters and their age-dependent differences. We calculated average spindle density, duration, maximum amplitude and peak frequency parameters for NREM sleep. Peak frequency was determined using the centre of gravity (CoG) of the individualized spectral peak frequencies in the spindle range (11-16 Hz). Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run on averaged slow spindle measures of the frontopolar and frontal region (FPF), as well as on averaged fast spindle measures of the centro-parietal (CP) region. The null hypothesis was tested at the descriptive significance of $p<.05$ and post hoc test Fisher's LSD was conducted. We calculated the distribution of the spindle parameters along the midline derivations (from Fpz to Iz) and determined the maximum position of the distribution for every spindle parameter. Anterior-posterior shifts of the maximum locations were examined as a function of age.

Here we first describe age-, spindle type, and sex-related spindle parameters with illustrations provided in the Supplementary Information (SI), then we portray the topographical distribution and age-related topographical changes of slow and fast spindle parameters illustrated in Figures 2. and 3. Finally, we provide evidence for age-related antero-posterior shifts in sleep spindle parameters as it is shown in Figure 3.

ANOVA revealed no significant main effect of age on spindle density ($F=.599$; $df=2, 57$; $p=.552$), however the main effect of age was significant in terms of duration, ($F=4.217$; $df=2, 57$; $p=.019$), maximum amplitude ($F=6.498$; $df=2, 57$; $p=.002$) and frequency ($F=10.47$; $df=2, 57$; $p<.001$) (SI Figure 1.). Post hoc Fisher's LSD test demonstrated significant age-dependent decrease for slow spindle duration between the age groups 12 and 16 ($p=.003$) as well as 12 and 20 ($p=.022$), but not between 16 and 20 years (SI Figure 1b). Similarly, slow spindle amplitude decreased significantly from age 12 to 20 years

(p=.046), while the decrease of fast spindle amplitude was significant between ages 12 and 16 (p=.0001) as well as 12 and 20 (p<.001) (SI Figure 1c). Spindle frequency increased significantly in both spindle types between all age groups except for slow spindles between the age groups of 12 and 16 years, i.e., slow spindle frequency increased between 12 and 20 years (p=.002) as well as 16 and 20 years (p=.002), while fast spindle frequency increased between 12 and 20 years (p=<.001),12 and 16 years (p=.005) as well as 16 and 20 years (p=.024) (SI Figure 1d).

As revealed by ANOVA, the difference of density between the two spindle types was not significant (F=1.818; df=2, 57; p=.183), however slow spindles display significantly longer duration than fast spindles (F=32.073; df=2, 57; p<.001). This difference is prominent (p<.001) in all age groups. Fast spindles showed significantly higher maximum amplitude at age 12 than slow spindles (p<001), but the difference disappeared with ageing. The main distinctive feature of the slow and fast spindles is in frequency, where fast spindles display significantly higher frequency in all age groups at a significance of p<.001. (SI Figure 1a-d.)

We found no evidence for the influence of sex on the development of NREM sleep spindle parameters except for frequency, where we found significant main effect of sex on frequency (F=18.11; df=2, 57; p=<.001). Girls have a significantly higher frequency of slow spindles than boys in the age groups of 12 and 20 years (M_{12}=11.192, p=.04; M_{20}=11.73, p=.001), while the sex difference in fast sleep spindles is significant only in the age group of 20 years (M_{20}=13.595, p=.0009). Girls between 16 and 20 years exhibit faster increase in frequency than boys. (SI Figure 2.)

Topographical distribution and age-related topographical changes of slow and fast spindle parameters

The age-dependent topographical distributions of slow and fast spindle parameters are shown in Figure 1. and 2., respectively.

In terms of duration, decrease in slow spindles from age 12 to 16 is Rüger area significant for all recording locations (T= (-2.05 – -3.29), p= (.002 - .04). Maximum amplitude values of slow spindles decrease with frontal and frontopolar focus between all age bins from 12 to 20 years (T= (-2.03 – -2.99), p= (.0001 - .048)). Frequency increases Rüger area significantly at all derivations with a frontal focus throughout the entire adolescence period (T= (3.2 – 3.28), p= (.002 – .003), Figure 1).

Fast spindle density increases Rüger significantly at the perimeter of the scalp (T= (-2.07- -3.06), p= (.04 - .004)). Fast spindles reveal significant decrease in duration for all recording derivations over the entire adolescence period from age 12 to 20 (T= (-2.06 – -4.54), (p<.001 - .047)). Fast spindle maximum amplitude values decrease significantly in all areas with a frontal and central focus (T= (-2.05 - -4.54), (p<.001 - .048)). Fast spindle

frequency values monotonously increase with age. The differences are Rüger area significant for the entire cortex in all age bins (T= (5.37 – 5.46), p< .001, Figure 2).

Place Figure 1. and 2. about here

Age-related shifts in sleep spindle parameters

Topographical shifts of slow and fast spindle parameters reveal themselves in the topographical distribution maps in Figure 1. and 2., respectively. While slow spindle parameters tend to shift toward anterior, fast sleep spindle measures seem to shift toward posterior regions during adolescent development. In order to more precisely quantify these tendencies observable in the topographical maps, we calculated the distribution of the spindle parameters along the midline derivations (from Fpz to Iz) and determined the maximum position of the distribution for every spindle parameter.

Maximum values of slow spindle duration shift towards frontal regions. The difference of the positions between the age groups of 12 and 16 years is statistically significant (p<.05). In terms of fast spindle density and frequency, the difference of positions of maximum values are significant in the age groups of 12-16 (p<.01) and 12-20 (p<.001), revealing a central to centro-parietal shift with ageing. Maximum values of the positions of fast spindle maximum amplitude shift significantly from central to centro-parietal regions in the age groups of 16-20 (p<.01) and 12-20 (p<.001), but not between ages 12 to 16 (Figure 3.).

Place Figure 3. about here

Discussion

Here we report evidence for distinct shifts in the prevailing location of slow and fast sleep spindle oscillations during adolescent development. We found evidence for slow sleep spindle duration maxima traveling from central to anterior brain regions, and fast spindle density, amplitude and frequency peaks traveling from central to more posterior brain regions. These findings coincide with reports of an age-related increase in the functional segregation of the precuneus (a major source of fast sleep spindle oscillations in humans) from the frontoparietal region from childhood to adulthood (24).

In the late maturing frontal and parietal cortical areas, the short-range local connections are dominated by long-range functional networks during development (29). In the course of adolescence, the anterior-posterior connectivity of frontal and parietal lobes increases in the DMN (30, 31). Although functional connectivity may be reduced in the DMN in deep sleep stages (32, 33), it is preserved to such an extent that oscillatory activity related functional connectivity between anterior and posterior areas corresponds to DMN characteristics during sleep spindling (34).

Former HD-EEG reports confirmed the anteriorization of sleep state-dependent neural oscillations during human ontogenesis (including the period of adolescence), although the findings have been derived from slow waves and did not indicate any sign of an age-related posteriorization of any frequency band (25). Thus, the late maturation of the frontal lobes is clearly supported by findings of former sleep neurophysiological studies, as well as our present report on slow sleep spindle oscillation, but the phylogenetically new precuneal region has not yet been targeted by such studies. Although the late maturing precuneus should be characterized by age-related posteriorization of neural plasticity related, sleep-state-specific oscillations, indexing the timing of prevailing developmental plasticity, such findings have potentially been obscured by the insufficient frequency resolution of former reports. Here we use an individually adjusted frequency analysis of sleep spindle oscillations, with high frequency resolution and 128 channel HD-EEG recording, which is sufficiently sensitive for capturing this process. Our present findings potentially indicate a new insight into late maturational processes as revealed by focusing on sleep spindle oscillations of thalamocortical origin. With these more sensitive methods we have been able to show that individual-specific fast sleep spindle features are unequivocally traveling to more posterior areas during adolescence. Considering the precuneal origin of fast sleep spindles in adult human subjects (20, 21), it seems that individualized sleep spindle analysis is a forceful tool to detect the dominant anatomical directions of brain maturation in humans.

Prevailing concepts of complex neural development and brain maturation emphasize the posterior-to-anterior or back-to-front pattern (6–8) as an unequivocal ontogenetic feature, finding its roots in the late maturing frontal lobes. The back-to-front pattern has received substantial support from HD-EEG studies examining the age-related changes in the topography of sleep slow waves (25). However, the above scenario of unidirectional developmental and anatomical route disregards the major hub of the DMN, which is a human-specific and late maturing neural structure of the brain, undergoing significant differentiation during adolescent ages. Besides slow waves, sleep spindles are the major hallmarks of NREM sleep, known to be involved in neural plasticity with major sources in the precuneus, at least in healthy adult human subjects. Here we provide evidence for a backward move in the prevailing anatomical localization of fast type sleep spindles, that is, the predominantly central maxima in density and amplitude at the age of 12 years becomes gradually replaced to the parietal regions until the age of 20 years. Similar changes, albeit at a smaller anatomical distance take place in terms of fast sleep spindle frequency. These findings complete the back-to-front pattern of brain maturation and coheres with the reports of an increased differentiation of the precuneus during adolescence. To the best of our knowledge this is the first report of an age-related front-to-back transfer of the maxima of a neural plasticity-related sleep EEG index.

Our findings of an age-related decrease in duration and amplitude, as well as an increase in frequency of sleep spindles indicate complex patterns of adolescent brain development. Sleep spindles of unusually high duration have been recorded in infants (35), whereas the decrease in the length of spindle bursts continues during the whole life span (36). Sleep spindle duration has been shown to reflect the level of thalamic inhibition and/or

corticothalamic feedback (37, 38). That is, our findings might indicate maturation of overall thalamocortical network states reflected in the decreasing length of sleep spindle oscillatory bursts in adolescents. The subtle differences in the developmental trajectories of slow and fast sleep spindle durations suggest the potential divergence in the thalamic and cortical mechanisms involved in generating the two sleep spindle types.

The amplitude of sleep spindles has been shown to reflect the overall level of thalamocortical recruitment and globality of neural sources involved in rhythmogenesis (39, 40). The age-related decreases in sleep spindle amplitude reported in the current study and other papers (41–43) cohere with the concept of ongoing synaptic pruning during adolescent development, potentially leading to lowering recruitability of neural generators.

Likewise, the age-related increases in the oscillatory frequency of sleep spindles have been reported by former studies in the field (41, 42, 44, 45). Sleep spindle frequency reflects the modal duration of the single thalamocortical hyperpolarization-rebound sequence embedded in the train of successive spindle cycles. Faster sleep spindles indicate shorter sequence durations, which in turn could be caused by accelerated, more efficient neuronal interactions. We hypothesize that the speeded-up nature of sleep spindles in late adolescence reported herein, might reflect ongoing myelination during late adolescence (46). Alternatively, rapid interactions might reflect the above-mentioned changes in network state, characterized by adolescence-related reorganization of the GABAergic system (47).

Apparently, adolescence is a timeframe of significant changes in the EEG spectra, including shifts in sleep spindle characteristics (48–50). Sleep spindles have outstanding relevance from a clinical point of view since adolescence-related psychiatric disorders such as schizophrenia (51), ADHD (52) and depression (53) have all been associated with anomalies in sleep spindles. It has also been suggested that sleep spindle abnormalities are an endophenotype of schizophrenia (51, 54). Moreover, these disorders can be characterized with cognitive impairments as well (55–57). It has been demonstrated that sleep spindles and cognitive function are strongly associated (58, 59), and as such, sleep spindle abnormalities might provide a key to interpreting cognitive malfunction (17). Further investigating the mechanisms and developmental trajectory of sleep spindles in adolescence could lead to a better understanding and novel treatment of the aforementioned disorders.

In conclusion, we focused on the late maturation of individually adjusted slow-frontal and fast-parietal sleep spindle features in adolescence by using HD-EEG recordings. Our hypothesis assuming that the two sleep spindle types might index distinct neurodevelopmental processes during the course of adolescent brain maturation and functional specialization have been confirmed by the data. We are convinced that focusing on the bimodal antero-posterior source and frequency distribution of sleep spindle oscillations have taken us closer to the better understanding of the adolescent remodeling of the human brain.

Materials and Methods

Participants

We recruited 60 adolescent and young adult participants (30 females and 30 males, mean age 16.55 ± SD 3.70) via social media in three age-groups: 12-year-olds (n=20, mean age=12.45 ± SD .57 years), 16-year-olds (n=20, mean age=15.91 ± SD .48 years), and young adults referred to as 20-year-olds (n=20, mean age=21.29 ± SD .51 years). All subjects received a voucher in the value of HUF 20,000 (cca. USD 70.00) for their participation. The study was approved by the Ethical Committee of the Pázmány Péter Catholic University for Psychological Experiments, and participants provided written informed consent.

Procedure

We performed 128 channel HD-EEG polysomnographic (PSG) sleep recordings of two consecutive nights in the Sleep Laboratory of Pázmány Péter Catholic University Budapest (n = 60). Participants were requested to maintain a regular sleep-wake schedule for 5 nights before recordings but were not monitored to check compliance. We asked participants not to consume any drugs other than contraceptives and coffee and to refrain from napping on the afternoons of the days of the experiment. Participants with any history of sleep problem or mental disorder, or any neurological or medical condition were excluded. Such criteria were verified by personal interviews and questionnaires filled out by the parents or young adult participants themselves. Electrodes for electroencephalography (EEG), electromyography (EMG) and electrooculography (EOG) were applied. After electrodes were checked for skin contact and impedance levels, all participants went to sleep in the laboratory between 10.00 p.m. and 11.30 p.m. according to their preference. They slept until they awoke spontaneously.

From the recorded night-time EEG, the current analysis deals with the second night data as it was free from adaptation effects (first night effect). We used a built-in EEG channel-Quick Cap (Compumedics, Australia) with 128 electrodes in three different head sizes to record EEG signals. The passive Ag/AgCl electrodes down to the line T9-Iz-T10 were roughly evenly spaced. The monopolar channels were referenced to a fronto-centrally placed ground electrode. Bipolar EOG and EMG channels were applied to measure eye movements and muscle tone respectively. The EOG channels were placed below and to the left of the left eye (1 cm below the left outer canthus), and above and to the right of the right eye (1 cm above the right outer canthus). The EMG electrodes were placed according to the recommendations of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine (AASM) (60). The data were recorded using a BQ KIT SD LTM 128 EXPRESS (2 X 64 channels in master and slave mode, Micromed, Mogliano Veneto, Italy) recording device, and was subsequently visualized, saved and exported by the System Plus Evolution software (Micromed, Mogliano Veneto, Italy). All HD-EEG, EOG and EMG data were recorded with an effective sampling rate of synchronous 4096 Hz/channel with 22-bit equivalent resolution, pre-filtered and amplified with 40 dB/decade high- and low-pass input filters of

0.15–250 Hz. A digital low pass filter was applied at 231.7 Hz, and the data were down sampled to 512 Hz/channel by firmware.

We scored sleep states of 20 sec epochs of whole night NREM EEG recordings manually by visual inspection according to standardized criteria (61), and revised hypnograms. Artifact removal was performed on four-second-long epochs. The whole-night recordings were scanned four times in terms of artefact removal to overcome the limitations of the capacity of the visual inspector (only 32 channels of the 128 were visually inspected in a run) and finally any epoch which was marked as artefact in any run was excluded from further analysis.

We detected individual-specific slow and fast spindles by using the IAM (28). This method is based on the average amplitude spectra of (in this case all-night) NREM sleep. The frequency criteria of slow and fast sleep spindles were derived from the individual-specific peaks of these spectra (between 9 and 16 Hz), based on the inflexion points. The slow- and the fast sleep spindle frequencies were tested for frontal- and centro-parietal dominance, respectively. The amplitude criteria for slow- and fast spindles were determined in individual- and derivation-specific manner by multiplying the number of intra-spindle frequency bins with the mean amplitude spectrum values corresponding to lower and upper frequency limits. The EEG was then band-pass filtered for individual slow and fast sleep spindle frequencies using a fast Fourier transformation filtering method and the precise envelopes of the filtered signals calculated. EEG segments corresponding to the envelopes transcending the amplitude criteria for at least 0.5 s are considered spindles (a scheme of the detection is provided in Fig. 1 of Ujma et al., 2015 (62)). In fact, these segments were contributing to the individual- and derivation-specific lower and higher frequency spectral peaks between 9 and 16 Hz. Based on the IAM approach, individual- and derivation-specific densities (spindles × min−1), durations (s), and amplitudes (μV) of slow, frontally dominant and fast, centro-parietally dominant sleep spindles were determined.

We determined the peak frequency for each channel and for each subject using the CoG of the spectral activity of the 0.25 Hz wide bins between 11 and 16 Hz. We obtained values of COG by using the method described in the study conducted by Dustman (63) We excluded outliers from the original data set by using Tukey's fences method (64). For testing our hypotheses, we used T-test, post-hoc Fisher LSD test and GLM model Repeated Measures ANOVA.

In order to test our hypotheses, we analyzed the effects of age and gender on the frequency, amplitude, duration and density of slow- and fast sleep spindles separately.

GLM Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was run on averaged slow spindle measures of the frontopolar and frontal region (FPF), as well as on averaged fast spindle measures of the centro-parietal (CP) region. Two types of models were used, in the first the categorical factors were the age group and the spindle type (slow, fast), the dependent variable was the spindle parameters of slow and fast spindles. Within effect was calculated for spindle type (slow and fast). Interaction was calculated for Age group, Spindle type and Age group*Spindle type. In the second model the categorical factors were

the sex and the age group, the dependent variable were the spindle parameters of slow and fast spindles. Between effects were calculated for Sex, Age group and Sex*Age group interaction. The null hypothesis was tested at the descriptive significance of $p<.05$ and post hoc test Fisher's LSD was conducted.

Distribution of the spindle parameters were calculated along the midline derivations (from Fpz to Iz) and the maximum position of the distribution was determined for every spindle parameter. Anterior-posterior shifts of the maximum locations were examined as a function of age.

Finally, the derivation-specific topographical distribution of the spindle parameters and their age-dependent differences were analyzed. Multiple comparisons correction was performed using a modified version of the Rüger area method (20, 21). We calculated Rüger area global significance as follows: 1/3 of the descriptive significances at $p=.05/3=.017$ AND/OR half of descriptive significances at $p=.05/2=.025$. In this study, we considered data Rüger area significant under the „AND" condition (65, 66).

For the processing of sleep data (sleep state classification, artefact rejection and spindle detection with IAM) we used the FerciosEEGPlus 1.3 program (FerciosEEGPlus, Ferenc Gombos, 2008–2021, ref. 63). CoG values and Rüger area corrections were calculated using Microsoft Excel. All statistical tests were conducted using TIBCO STATISTICA 13.5.0.17 software (TIBCO Software Inc., 2018).

Acknowledgments

The authors thank T. Jáger for generating the figures and tables. We also thank the adolescents and young adults who participated in this project, and Z. György who assisted at all the sleep recordings. This research was supported by the Hungarian National Research, Development and Innovation Office grants NK-104481 and K-134370 to I.K., and K-128117 to B.R., and by the Higher Education Institutional Excellence Program of the Ministry of Human Capacities in Hungary, within the framework of the Neurology thematic program of the Semmelweis University.

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Figures

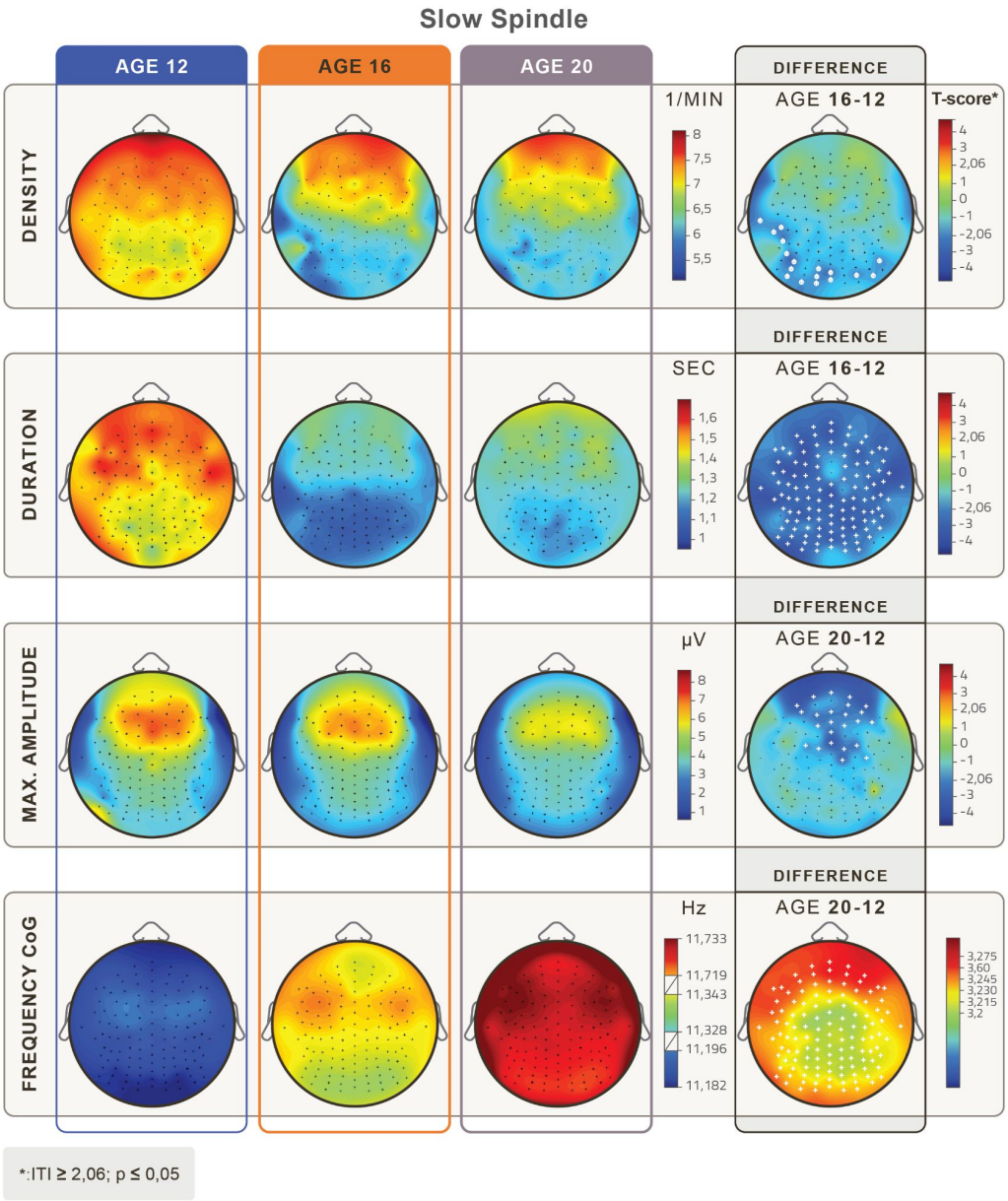


Figure 1. Topographical distribution of mean slow sleep spindle parameters in the age groups of 12, 16 and 20 years. Rows depict age-related changes in slow sleep spindle density (1/min), duration (s), maximum amplitude (µV), and frequency based on the center of gravity (CoG) (Hz), respectively. Prevailing age-group differences are depicted in the 4th column. White crosses depict Rüger area significant differences and white circles depict significant but not Rüger area significant differences. Age related decrease of density is significant with an occipital and left temporal focus. There is a significant overall decrease in duration and frontal-frontoparietal decrease in maximum amplitude. Frequency increases at all derivations with a frontal focus from the younger to the older age groups. (Level of significance: $p < .05$, T-score values are matched with the color bar, $T \geq |2.06|$ $p<0.05$, at $T \geq |2.787|$ $p<0.01$ and at $T \geq |3.725|$ $p<0.001$.)

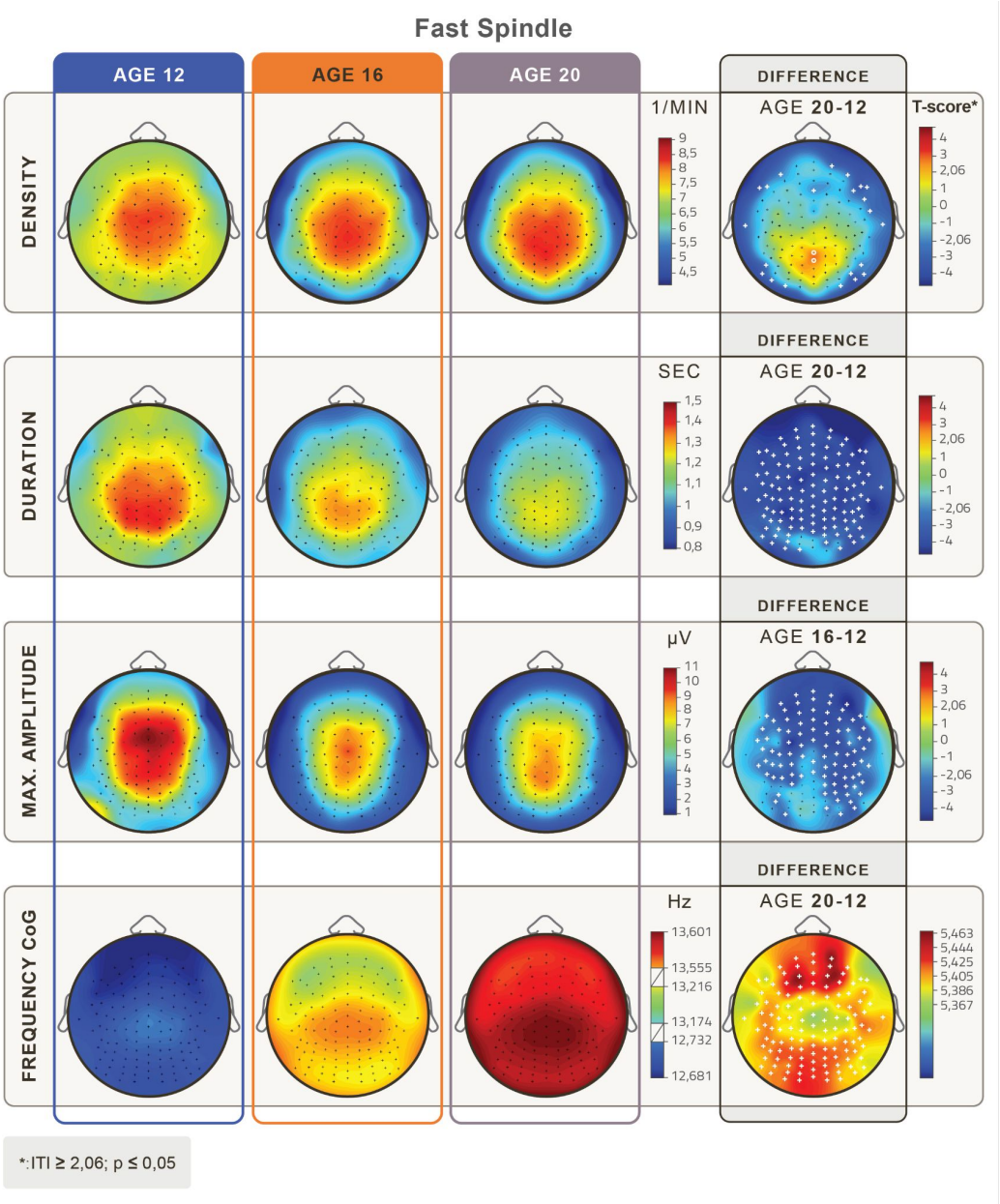


Figure 2. Topographical distribution of mean fast sleep spindle parameters in the age groups of 12, 16 and 20 years. Rows depict age-related changes in slow sleep spindle density (1/min), duration (s), maximum amplitude (µV), and frequency based on the center of gravity (CoG) (Hz), respectively. Prevailing age-group differences are depicted in the 4th column. White crosses depict Rüger area significant differences and white circles depict significant but not Rüger area significant differences. Fast spindle density increases significantly, but not Rüger significantly centro-parietally between 12 and 20 years of age and Rüger significantly decreases at the perimeter of the scalp. There is a significant overall decrease in duration and a frontal decrease in maximum amplitude. Frequency significantly increases at all derivations with frontocentral maxima from the younger to the older age group. (Level of significance: $p < .05$, T-score values are matched with the color bar, $T \geq |2.06|$ $p<0.05$, at $T \geq |2.787|$ $p<0.01$ and at $T \geq |3.725|$ $p<0.001$.)

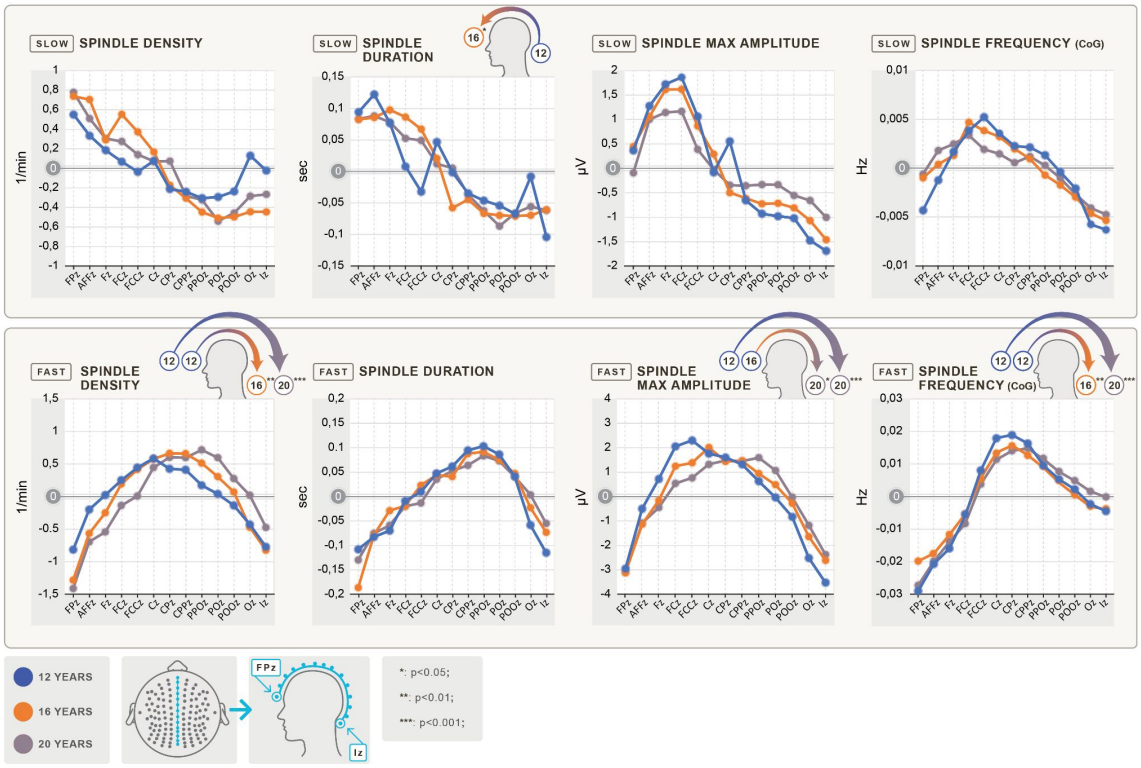
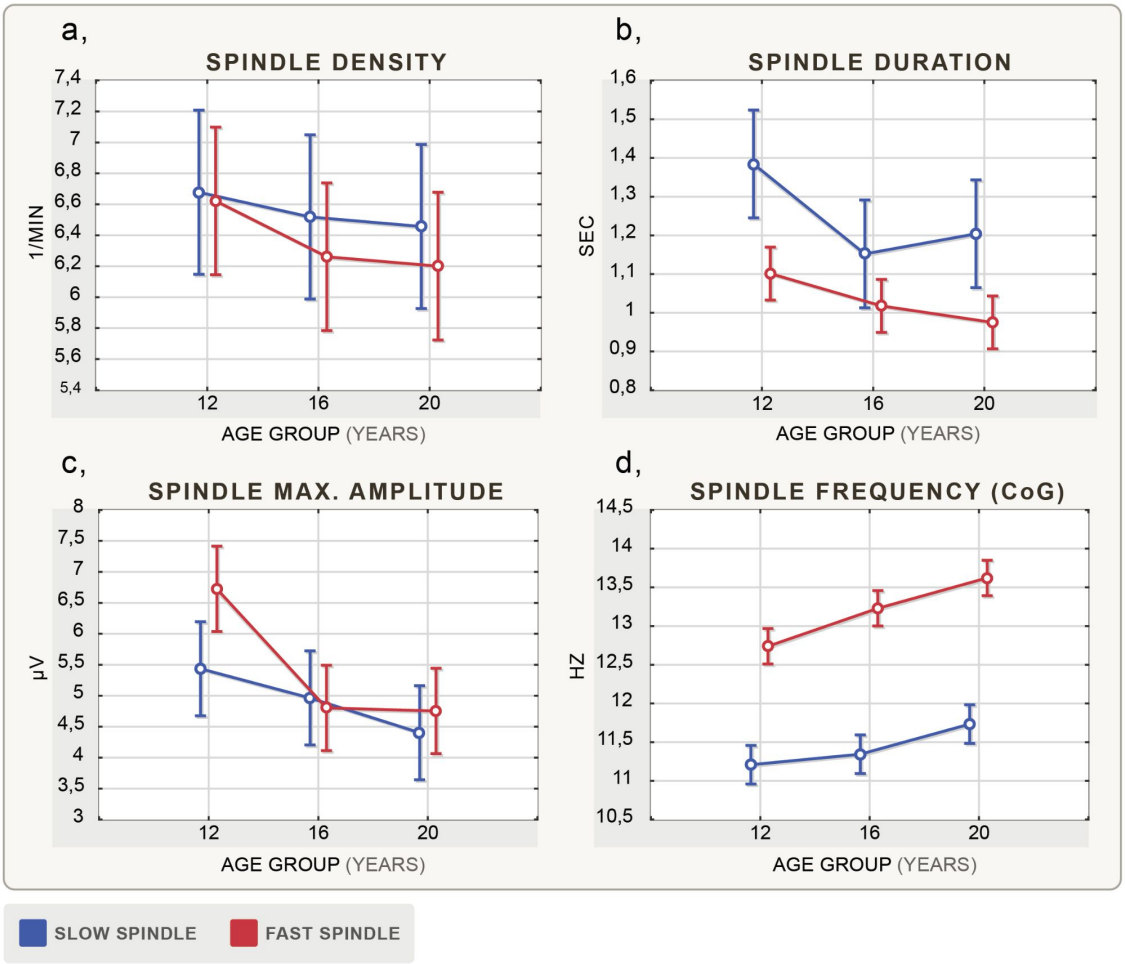
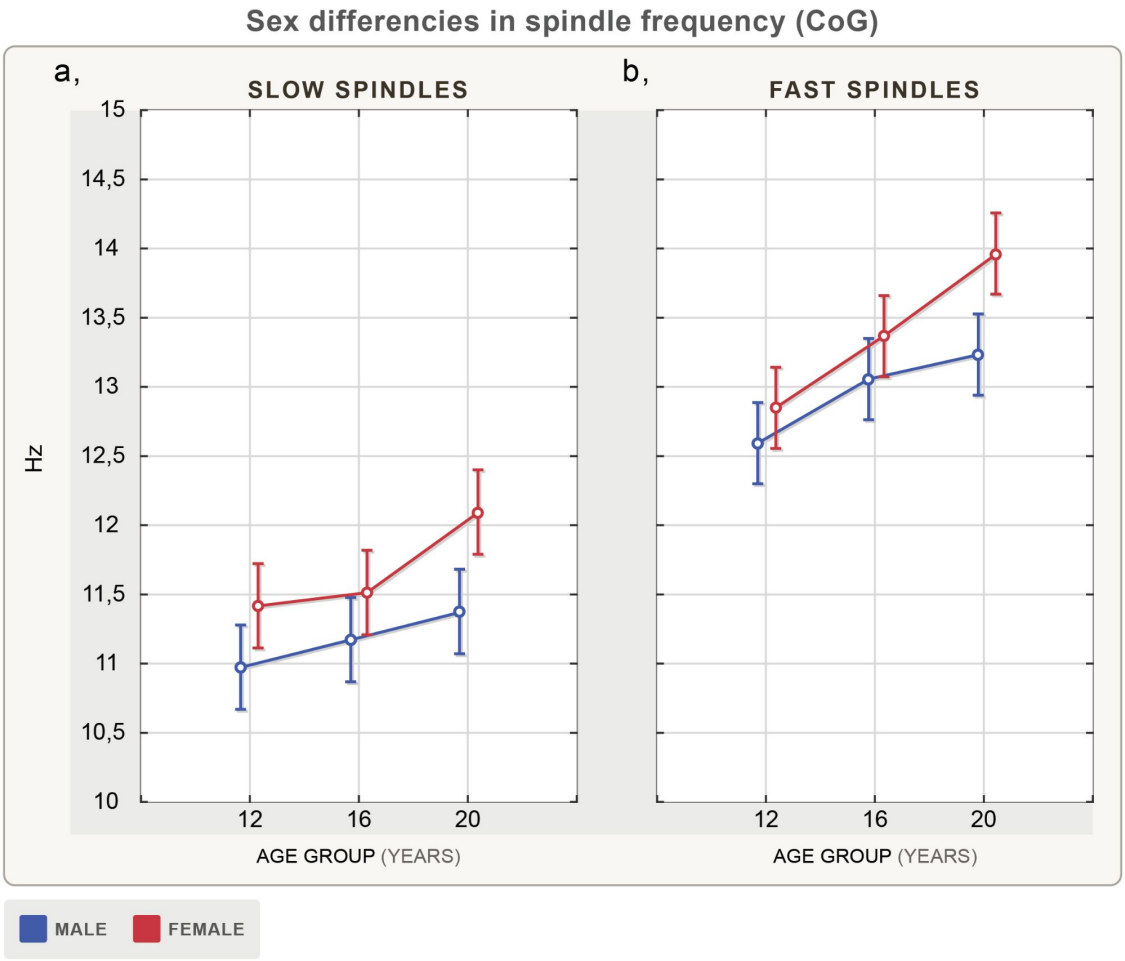


Figure 3. Age-related antero-posterior shifts in sleep spindle parameters. The spindle parameter values (y-axis) for the midline electrodes (Fpz to Iz on the x-axis, from left to right from frontal to occipital) are plotted by age groups. As the differences are significant but small (differences due to spatial position are much smaller than differences between age groups), the visualization of the y values has been done in each case by displaying the difference from the mean value of the midline electrodes of the specific age group. The upper row shows the slow spindle parameters, the lower row the fast spindle parameters. The different columns show different spindle parameters, as density (1/min), duration (sec), maximum amplitude (µV) and frequency (Hz) based on center of gravity (CoG), respectively. The small head figures indicate significant differences and the direction of the difference in the positions of the maximum values between the specific age groups. Blue indicates age groups 12, orange 16 and grey 20 years. Slow spindle parameters tended to shift toward anterior, whereas fast sleep spindle measures toward posterior regions with ageing. The shift of the maximum values of slow spindle duration towards frontal regions is statistically significant. In terms of fast spindle density, maximum amplitude and frequency the shift of the maximum values from central to centro-parietal regions is statistically significant.

Supplementary Information



Supplementary Information Figure 1. GLM Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the age-related changes of NREM sleep spindle parameters. Categorical factors: age-groups (12 years,16 years, 20 years) and dependent variables a, spindle density (1/min), b, spindle duration (sec), c, spindle maximum amplitude (µV), d, spindle frequency (Hz) based on center of gravity (CoG) of individually adjusted spindle bands. Vertical bars denote 0,95 confidence intervals, the central point of bars represent average values for each age group. Blue denotes slow spindle; red denotes fast spindle. Both slow and fast spindle densities depict slight but non-significant decline with age. Slow spindle duration decreases significantly between the age groups 12 and 16 as well as 12 and 20. Slow spindle amplitude decreases significantly from age 12 to 20 years; fast spindle amplitude decreases significantly between ages 12 and 16 as well as 12 and 20. Spindle frequency increases significantly in both spindle types between all age groups except for slow spindles between the age groups of 12 and 16 years. Slow spindles display significantly longer duration than fast spindles in all age groups. Fast spindles show significantly higher maximum amplitude at age 12 than slow spindles, but the difference disappears with ageing. Fast spindles display significantly higher frequency in all age groups.



Supplementary Information Figure 2. GLM Repeated Measures Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) of the sex and age-related changes (12 years,16 years, 20 years) of NREM sleep spindle frequency based on the center of gravity (CoG) of individually adjusted spindle bands (Hz) is depicted on the left side of the figure for slow spindles, and on the right side for fast spindles. Vertical bars denote 0,95 confidence intervals, the central point of bars represent average values for each age group. Color codes blue: male, red: female. a, Slow spindle frequency is significantly higher in females than males at age 12 and 20. b. Fast spindle frequency is significantly higher in females at age 20.