

The better off sleep better

March 4 2011

Analysis of the early data from Understanding Society based on 14,000 UK households found that overall the best sleep was reported by people with higher levels of education and by married people. The type of work a person does also impacts on sleep, with those in routine occupations reporting worse sleep than those in professional occupations.

Professor Sara Arber at the University of Surrey who analysed the findings said: "Given the links between sleep, social and economic circumstances and poor health found in this and other surveys, health promotion campaigns should be open to the possibility that the increased incidence of [sleep problems](#) among the disadvantaged in society may be one factor leading to their poorer health."

Understanding Society is funded by the Economic and Social Research Council and managed by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Essex. It follows 40,000 UK household over many years, and sleep data will be collected annually.

Initial analysis of the sleep data collected in the first survey also found that:

Men and women

- women are more likely to report problems getting to sleep within 30 minutes, 24% on three or more nights a week, compared to 18% of men

- problems getting to sleep on three or more nights per week are particularly high under age 25, then decline slightly for men with age, but increase with age for women
- half of men and women over age 65 report sleep maintenance problems on three or more nights a week, compared to under a fifth of men and a third of women under 25
- More men than women report that snoring or coughing disturbs their sleep, 30% of men and 20% of women more than once a week
- women are more likely to negatively rate their [sleep quality](#), 26% compared to 20% of men

Sleep medication

- one in 10 people report taking sleeping medication on three or more nights a week (9% of men and 10% of women)
- 25% of women and 15% of men over 85 report taking sleeping medication on three or more nights a week

Researchers working on Understanding Society have also examined the data from the perspective of work and sleep. 15,000 employees were asked questions about their work and sleep patterns.

Work and length of sleep

- 14% of men and women working part-time sleep for more than

eight hours per night, declining to about 6% of men and 10% of women for those working more than 30 hours per week, and remaining at this level even for people working very long hours (more than 48 hours per week)

- However, for people of both genders working long hours brings an increase in shorter sleep periods: 14% of women and 11% of men working more than 48 hours sleep less than six hours per night
- Poor sleep quality is more frequently reported by long-hours workers and especially among women: 31% of long-hours women report poor sleep quality compared to only 23% of those who work 31-48 hours per week
- Looking at these findings altogether suggests that the increase in shorter sleep periods for those working long hours is not only due to time constraints but other pressures such as stress

Managerial duties

- Only 6% of managers report more than eight hours sleep per night compared to 11% of those without managerial responsibilities

Job satisfaction and [sleep](#)

- 14% of respondents least satisfied with their jobs reported regularly sleeping for less than six hours per night, compared with only 8% of those most satisfied with work

More information: The first findings book is published online at [research.understandingsociety. ... dings/early-findings](https://research.understandingsociety.dings/early-findings)

Provided by Economic & Social Research Council

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