

Study suggests travel can help balance out sleep hours

March 2 2022, by Bob Yirka

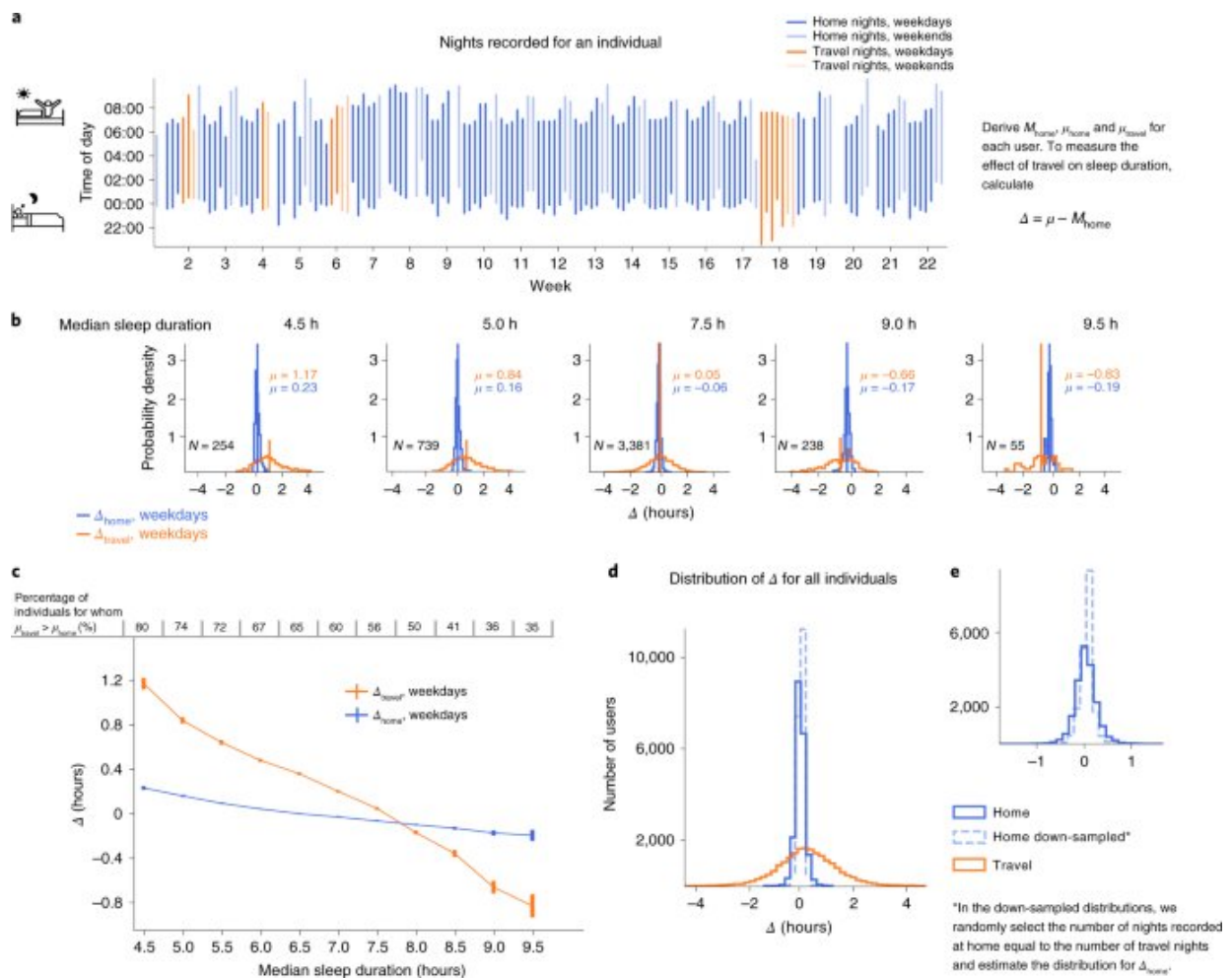


Fig. 1: Sleep activity patterns and the relative change in sleep duration for travel nights. Credit: DOI: 10.1038/s41562-022-01291-0

A trio of researchers from Technical University of Denmark, the University of Vermont and Copenhagen Center for Social Data Science, respectively, has found that in some cases traveling can help people balance out the number of hours of sleep they get. In their paper published in the journal *Nature Human Behavior*, Sigga Svala Jonasdottir, James Bagrow and Sune Lehmann, describe how they studied wearable wrist recording device data from 20,000 people who were traveling and what they found by doing so.

Over the past several years, electronic device makers have developed sensor devices that can be worn on the wrist. Such devices can measure things like [heart rate](#) and movement via accelerometers, and this allows for the measurement of [sleep](#) patterns. In this new effort, the researchers began their work by obtaining access to a dataset holding sleep information for approximately 20,000 people obtained from wrist-worn devices. Information in the dataset came from people in 121 countries and represented approximately 3.17 million nights of sleep, of which approximately 218,000 were away from home. Notably, approximately 85% of those not-at-home sleepers were deemed to be traveling but only within their own time zone—and most of those trips were of short duration.

In studying the data, the researchers found that people who tended to get an average of less than 7.5 hours of sleep each night, slept a little more when they traveled. And people who tended to sleep more than 7.5 hours normally, slept a little less while traveling. This proved contrary to anecdotal evidence, at least on short trips. Leaving home, they found, tended to balance out sleep patterns. They also found that the difference in the amount of sleep changed linearly.

The researchers also found that both kinds of sleepers tended to lose sleep if they traveled to different time zones. And they also found that people who tended to get less sleep than average during their normal

lives, tended to sleep more when vacationing on weeknights, but not on weekends. They conclude by suggesting that their work has demonstrated that consumer worn devices can be used to better understand how behavior and environment can impact sleep quantity.

More information: Sigga Svala Jonasdottir et al, Sleep during travel balances individual sleep needs, *Nature Human Behaviour* (2022). [DOI: 10.1038/s41562-022-01291-0](https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01291-0)

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