

Insomnia affecting younger worker productivity, study finds

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Daytime drowsiness, mental health issues and even road accidents are all connected to sleep disorders, leading experts to examine workplace productivity losses among as many as one-in-five younger Australians

affected by sleep disorders.

The new Flinders University study used data from the West Australian longitudinal Raine Study Generation 2 cohort, which includes 554 workers aged 22 years, and found significant workplace productivity losses among young Australian adults, primarily caused by insomnia.

The new study showed that total workplace productivity loss was up to 40% greater among 22-year-olds with clinical sleep disorders compared to their peers with no sleep disorders.

"This is equivalent to total workplace productivity loss (followed up on multiple occasions across 12 months) of about four weeks for young people with clinically significant sleep disorders, compared with less than one week for those without," says Flinders University Associate Professor in Clinical Sleep Health Amy Reynolds, who led the study published by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

"The Raine study previously showed that about 20% of the [young adults](#) surveyed had a common clinical sleep disorder, so this work eventuated because we wanted to know how much of an impact these disorders have on workers in their workplaces.

"The take home message is just how prevalent sleep disorders are in young adults, and that these disorders are having an impact on our young adults and their workplaces.

"By middle age, it's obstructive sleep apnoea that's more prevalent, so it does change across the lifespan. But in young workers it is insomnia which is more common, rather than other sleep problems, and is driving productivity loss."

Associate Professor Reynolds, a provisional psychologist with the

Insomnia Treatment Program at Flinders, says the productivity loss is largely driven by "presenteeism." "So, they're at work, but they're just not working to their best capacity or potential," says Reynolds.

Supporting management of sleep disorders is a priority for researchers at the Flinders Health and Medical Research Institute Sleep Research group, formerly the Adelaide Institute for Sleep Health

Senior co-author Professor Robert Adams and colleagues are focusing on giving GPs in [primary care](#) the ability to access appropriate, evidence-based care and resources for [sleep disorders](#) across all sectors of the population.

Supporting [young people](#) to access CBTi ([cognitive behavioral therapy](#) for insomnia), for example, can reduce the need for prescribing sleeping tablets or other interventions which may not tackle long-term sleep problems.

More information: Amy C Reynolds et al, Insomnia and workplace productivity loss among young working adults: a prospective observational study of clinical sleep disorders in a community cohort, *Medical Journal of Australia* (2023). [DOI: 10.5694/mja2.52014](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.52014)

Provided by Flinders University

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