

Missing sleep may hurt your memory

July 21 2014



A study co-investigated at the Sleep and Learning Lab at Michigan State University found that lack of sleep may hurt memory. Credit: Michigan State University

Lack of sleep, already considered a public health epidemic, can also lead to errors in memory, finds a new study by researchers at Michigan State University and the University of California, Irvine.

The study, published in the journal *Psychological Science*, found participants deprived of a night's sleep were more likely to flub the

details of a simulated burglary they were shown in a series of images.

Distorted memory can have serious consequences in areas such as [criminal justice](#), where eyewitness misidentifications are thought to be the leading cause of [wrongful convictions](#) in the United States.

"We found memory distortion is greater after [sleep deprivation](#)," said Kimberly Fenn, MSU assistant professor of psychology and co-investigator on the study. "And people are getting less sleep each night than they ever have."

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention calls insufficient sleep an epidemic and said it's linked to vehicle crashes, industrial disasters and chronic diseases such as hypertension and diabetes.

The researchers conducted experiments at MSU and UC-Irvine to gauge the effect of insufficient sleep on memory. The results: Participants who were kept awake for 24 hours – and even those who got five or fewer hours of sleep – were more likely to mix up event details than participants who were well rested.

"People who repeatedly get low amounts of sleep every night could be more prone in the long run to develop these forms of memory distortion," Fenn said. "It's not just a full night of sleep deprivation that puts them at risk."

Fenn's co-investigators include Steven Frenka and Elizabeth Loftus from UC-Irvine.

Provided by Michigan State University

Citation: Missing sleep may hurt your memory (2014, July 21) retrieved 23 April 2024 from

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