Sleep Well, Be Well: Teaching students positive sleeping habits to create a less stressful environment

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Sleep Well, Be Well: Teaching Students Positive Sleeping Habits to Create a Less Stressful Environment.

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Preliminary Research

• Proper sleep is essential for good health, yet it is too often viewed as a “disposable resource” and an “expendable luxury” instead of a main priority.
• Bowling Green State University undergraduate students receive an average of only 6.83 hours of sleep each night, according to data collected in Fall 2014 Communication Research Methods course. This is far below the national recommended average of 8 hours per night for people in a similar age group.
• Our research team wanted to explore why students do not receive more sleep, and whether this lack of sleep results in negative health consequences.
• Our research used a combination of the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Health Belief Model to focus on the variables of: sleep intentions, sleep behavior, and anxiety levels.

Methods

Design and Data Analysis

• The survey, administered to a nonrandom sample population (n= 404) of volunteer undergraduate students, sought to determine whether a relationship exists between students’ current sleeping patterns and levels of anxiety.
• Survey questions consisted of Likert-type (1-5) scales and open-ended responses. The survey was made available online. It was disseminated by Research Methods students who had received prior Human Subjects training. Participants took the survey independently over the course of one week.
• We also utilized the American College Health Association-National College Health Assessment Data for BGSU.
• We conducted stepwise linear regressions, and comparison of means, and a variety of descriptive statistical analyses.

Results

Sleep Intention

• Among who intended to sleep at least 8 hours per night and more presented from attaining that 8 hours, 35% attributed sleep complications to stress, 33% attributed complications to... a partner.
• 68% of students reported having non-academic school activities preventing proper sleeping habits.

Sleep Behavior

• 55% of respondents receive more sleep at home than at school.
• 35% of students reported having primarily fragmented sleep.

Anxiety Level

• 33% of respondents take longer than 30 minutes to fall asleep, and 43% unintentionally awaken at least once per night.
• 20.1% of students believe stress interferes with their ability to obtain sleep at least once per week.
• When asked what one factor most compromised their sleep, 39% reported it was academic stress and 25% reported emotional stress.

Suggestions for Further Research

• Cross-sectional data is not sufficient to determine causation. The results do not explain how stress levels affect sleep and/or how sleep affects stress levels.
• It is difficult to differentiate between the experiences of undergraduate students living on-campus versus those living off-campus.
• We did not account for other variables that may explain college students’ sleep behaviors and motivations, for example, differences in sleep and stress experienced during academic breaks.

Sleep Well, Be Well Campaign

• The data suggest that student consideration of sleep as important is a prerequisite to any successful campaign. Students will not respond to a campaign if they do not first deem sleep important.
• The data suggest students are prioritizing other commitments, such as social outings and homework, as more important than sleep. The campaign must demonstrate how healthy sleeping habits can increase students’ productive navigation of other life experiences.
• The campaign must address how to navigate both the sleep barriers a student can control (such as dietary intake) and those they cannot control (such as noise levels in the residence hall). The data suggest many students become frustrated after unsuccessful sleeping attempts.
• The campaign should implement a multi-part approach that is not rooted in purely behavioral components. It should target an individual’s self-regulatory capacity and ability.
• The campaign must respond to the origination of sleep attitudes and how attitudes change between adolescence and adulthood. Because students live in a shared campus environment, their sleep attitudes may differ.
• The campaign should target students’ sense of susceptibility (e.g., to negative health outcomes) when proper sleep is not obtained.
• It is possible for students to sleep too much. The campaign must promote appropriate sleeping habits to create a healthier, happier student body.