Effect of Sleep Health Literacy on the Sleep Hygiene Practices of Emerging Adults

Angel Thampy, Undergraduate Student
Patricia Carter, PhD, RN, CNS
The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing

Funding Source: This project was supported by an Undergraduate Research Fellowship from The University of Texas at Austin Office of Research.

Background: Sleep often falls low on the priority scale of many college students. Although reducing the hours sleeping appears to be a short-term solution to time management problems, sleep deprivation can pose unintended consequences like poor academic performance, negative health outcomes, and an increased likelihood of accidents. Little focus has thus far been given to the relationship between sleep health literacy and sleep hygiene practices in these emerging adults.

Objective: The purpose of this research is to measure the change in sleep hygiene practices in association with improved sleep health literacy following exposure to a sleep science course.

Methods: This study uses a descriptive paired design to explore the relationship between sleep beliefs and sleep quality as a proxy for sleep health literacy and sleep hygiene practices, respectively. Undergraduate students were recruited from an elective sleep science course taught at a large southern university in the United States. The same online survey was used to measure student sleep beliefs using the Sleep Beliefs Scale (SBS) and sleep quality with the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) before and after taking this semester long course.

Outcomes: Of the 161 survey responses, students are primarily female (54.7%), Asian (49.1%), freshmen in college (89.4%), live on campus (55.9%), and share their bedroom with a roommate (73.3%). The initial mean SBS score (13.50) and PSQI global score (5.95) reflect the baseline sleep literacy and sleep quality of the students. After taking the sleep course, the mean SBS increased to 14.44 while the PSQI increased to 6.63 indicating a statistically significant improvement in sleep literacy ($p=0.005$) and a decline in sleep quality ($p=0.012$), respectively.

Conclusion: Emerging adults, roughly from the ages of 18 to 22, are vulnerable to sleep deficiencies. Evidence suggests that education yields a statistically significant improvement in sleep literacy. Equipped with this new sleep knowledge, students managed to maintain their sleep quality better than expected given the academic stressors and environmental restrictions that likely limited a positive change in sleep hygiene practices.