

Mental Health and Sleep

Research has shown that minorities are affected by poor sleep. On average, African Americans sleep for fewer than six hours a night and get up to an hour less sleep than their Caucasian counterpartsⁱ. Studies have shown that both African Americans and Hispanics are much more likely to get either less or more the recommended amount of sleep each night (7 to 9 hours) than Caucasians as wellⁱⁱ. Studies have also show that African Americans are at greater risk for sleep apnea and present at a much younger ageⁱ. More research is needed to fully understand the impact of the range of sleep disorders, such as insomnia and narcolepsy, on minorities.

Consistent poor sleep is detrimental to all aspects of an individual life. Daytime functioning is negatively affected, resulting in decreased attention and increased errors and slower reaction time and memory. Emotional wellness suffers as poor sleep leads to depression, anxiety and other emotional or mental issues. Other health issues linked with poor sleep, including heart disease and diabetes, affect minorities at a much higher rate^{i,iii}.

Why the difference in the quality of sleep each night? This lack of sleep can be attributed to a number of factors including untreated sleep disorders, environmental factors, other health conditions or other life pressuresⁱⁱ. In a recent speech in the U.S. House of Representatives, Representative Robin Kelly of Illinois, chair of the Congressional Black Caucus Health Braintrust, detailed the factors contributing to health issues affecting minorities, as well as other disadvantaged groups in the United States, namely the lack of access to care, including mental healthcare, that affects these communities.

Although it is clear that minorities are greatly affected by poor sleep, steps can be taken to mitigate some of the contributing factors of poor sleep. Establishing a healthy sleep routine is key to help combating the environmental or habitual factors that affect the ability to get the recommended amount of sleep each night. If it is suspected that you have a sleep disorder, talk to your physician, or seek out a board-certified sleep medicine physician. The American Academy Sleep Medicine (AASM) is currently focused on improving access to sleep care, which will affect these minority communities that are disproportionately suffering from poor sleep and untreated sleep issues.

ⁱ Kingsbury JH, Buxton OM, Emmons KM. Sleep and its Relationship to Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Cardiovascular Disease. *Current cardiovascular risk reports*. 2013;7(5):10.1007/s12170-013-0330-0. Doi:10.1007/s12170-013-0330-0.

ⁱⁱ Hale L; Do DP. Racial differences in sleep-reports of sleep duration in a population-based study. *SLEEP* 2007;30(9):1096-1103

ⁱⁱⁱ Zizi F, Pandey A, Murray-Bachman R, et al. Race/Ethnicity, Sleep Duration and Diabetes Mellitus: Analysis of the National Health Interview Survey (NHIS). *The American Journal of Medicine*. 2012;125(2):162-167. Doi:10.1016/j.amjmed.2011.08.020