

Insufficient sleep amongst college students

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Introduction

Inadequate sleep is associated with a number of negative psychological and physiological consequences, including impaired memory, emotional lability, weight gain, and increased risk of diabetes and heart disease. Additionally, drowsy driving is estimated to be responsible for over 1,500 fatalities and 40,000 nonfatal injuries in the United States each year. Research suggests that inadequate sleep may be particularly prevalent amongst college students. The purpose of this study was to examine sleep quality and insomnia in a predominantly Hispanic sample of college students.

Methods

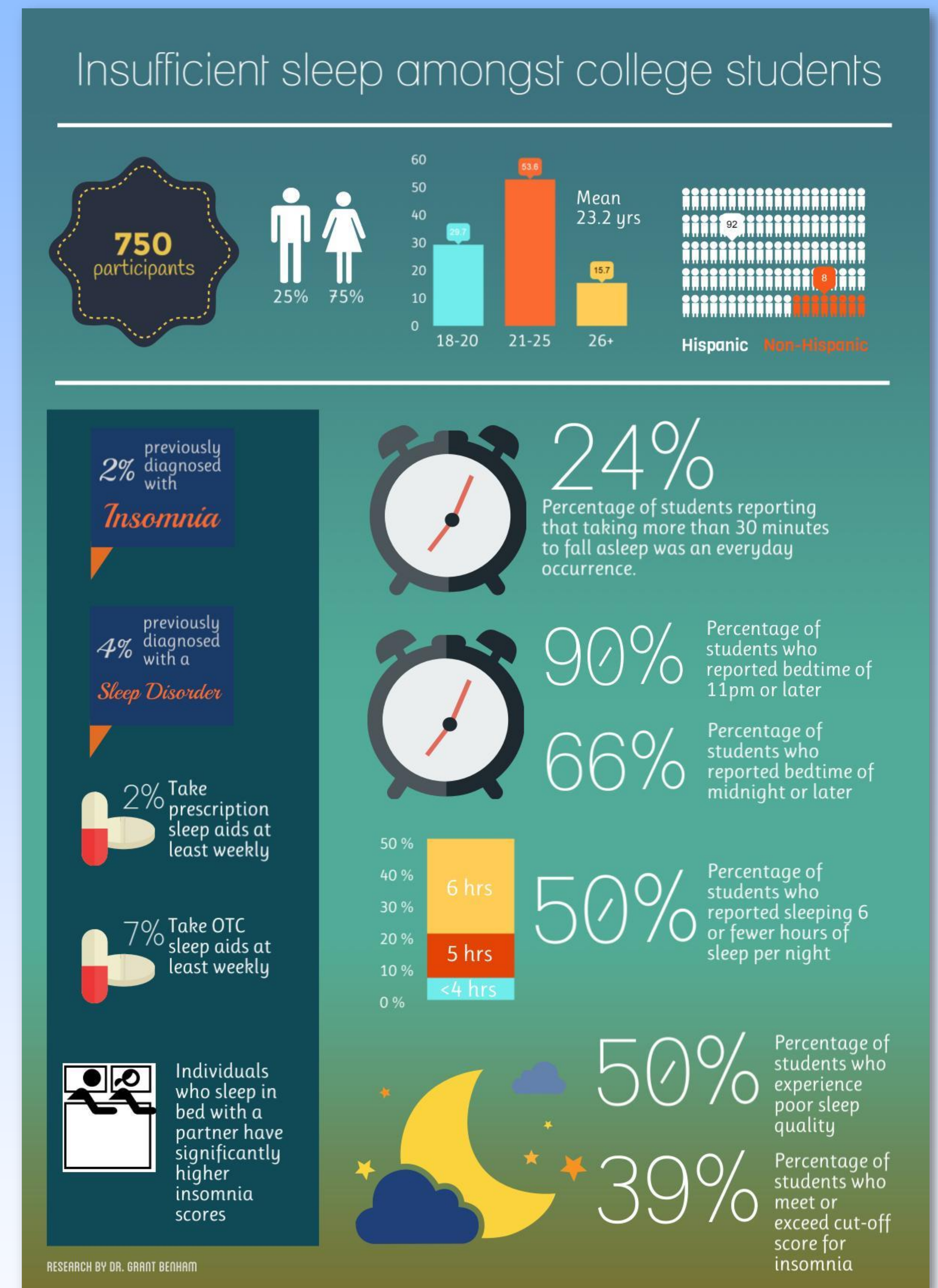
Seven hundred and fifty individuals completed an online survey that included demographic questions and self-report measures of sleep behavior and insomnia. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they used prescription and non-prescription sleep aids and whether or not they had been diagnosed with insomnia or a sleep disorder. Sleep quality was measured using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Inventory (PSQI); insomnia was assessed using the Insomnia Severity Index (ISI). Participants ranged in age from 18 to 56 (M=23.2, SD=5.3). Seventy-five percent of the sample was female and the large majority (92%) of participants classified themselves as Hispanic. Participants were recruited on a voluntary basis through class announcements, Facebook posts, and social networking.

Results

Approximately 2% of participants reported having been diagnosed with insomnia and approximately 4% reported having been diagnosed with a sleep disorder. Twenty-four percent of students indicated that taking more than 30 minutes to fall asleep was an everyday occurrence for them. Approximately 2% of participants reported taking prescription sleep aids (e.g., Ambien) at least once per week and approximately 7% reported taking over-the-counter sleep aids (e.g. Tylenol PM) at least once per week. Sixty-six percent of students reported generally going to bed at midnight or later, with almost 90% retiring at 11pm or later. Over 25% of the sample reported sleeping six or fewer hours of sleep per night. Based on established scoring criteria for the PSQI, 55% of the participants experienced poor sleep quality. Additionally, 39% of participants exceeded the established ISI cut-off score for insomnia. Poor sleep quality, as assessed by the PSQI was strongly correlated with insomnia ($r(718) = 0.73, p < 0.001$). Individuals who reported taking over-the-counter sleep aids at least once per week scored significantly higher on the measure insomnia ($t(719) = 6.88, p < 0.001$), as did individuals who reported generally sleeping in bed with a partner ($t(719) = 2.85, p = 0.002$).

Discussion

In spite of the well-established negative consequences of inadequate sleep, a large percentage of students are sleeping six or fewer hours per night, approximately half experience poor sleep quality, and over a third can be classified as insomniacs. The large majority of students are retiring at 11pm or later and almost a quarter of students appear to have difficulty falling asleep once in bed. Thus, interventions may need to focus both on behavioral approaches to encourage earlier bedtimes and on cognitive approaches to foster a more rapid sleep onset.



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