

"SO HOW DO THEY EXPECT YOU TO SLEEP?": A QUALITATIVE EXPLORATION OF SLEEP AT UNIVERSITY AMONG UNDERREPRESENTED EMERGING ADULTS DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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Introduction

- Poor sleep has been linked to negative psychosocial functioning, both before and during the COVID-19 pandemic (Lukowski et al., 2022; Tavernier & Willoughby, 2014).
- Members of underrepresented groups in the U.S. may experience both sleep disparities and disproportionate negative consequences of the pandemic (Dubar, 2022; Hoyt et al., 2021).
- Both the pandemic and the transition to university present unique challenges for healthy sleep among emerging adults (Orr et al., 2022).
- Few studies have employed a qualitative approach to document the unique sleep-related experiences of university students from underrepresented groups during the pandemic.
- To address this gap, the present study examined perceived barriers to sleep and the role of self-efficacy in changing sleep behaviors, among a sample of university students.

Method

Participants

- N = 14 emerging adults (Class of 2024) who identified as members of at least one underrepresented sociodemographic group.

Study Design and Procedure

- Participants completed a short online survey assessing demographics and other relevant information, followed by a 50-minute semi-structured interview via Zoom (www.zoom.us)
- Interview question: , "To what extent do you believe that it is possible for college students to have good sleep habits?"

Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis

Results

1) Oil and Water: Good Sleep Habits and College Life do not Mix (12, 87.7%)
Participants expressed that many aspects of university life got in the way of a good night's sleep. Unique academic and social demands, as well as obligations related to participants' identities, provided structural barriers to good sleep habits at college.

"If...like you have to work or you have to do this for like a scholarship....sometimes college is structured in a way where it's kind of impossible to get the full eight hours"

2) You Can Do It (If You Try) (10, 71.4%)
Participants also highlighted that good sleep habits are possible at university through self-discipline. Interestingly, participants acknowledged this possibility, but expressed that they themselves were poor examples.

"I think it's possible. I say that with the hypocrisy knowing I did not get that great of sleep last semester... Maybe if I was a little more disciplined...I feel like it's possible to get some better sleep"

Results

3) It's Personal (2, 14.3%)
Two participants spoke about how sleep needs simply differ among individuals. They did not consider the sentiments reflected in the other themes.

"That's really personal...I just know people who don't like to sleep that much, and I know people who like to sleep all the time."

Discussion

- Participants emphasized that university presents structural barriers to obtaining good sleep. These were especially relevant for those who had obligations relevant to their identities.
- Participants also acknowledged that through extreme self-discipline, it is possible to overcome these barriers. Most participants did not feel efficacious in their sleep habits, though.
- Sleep hygiene research suggests that intervention programs aimed at improving sleep may not be effective among students from underrepresented groups (Tavernier & Adam, 2017). Future research is needed to further address some of the unique barriers to sleep across diverse groups of emerging adults.
- Given the negative implications of poor sleep, universities should heed the call to support optimal sleep health for all students.