

Poor People and People of Color Are More Likely to Get Insufficient Sleep

People who are rich and white enjoy more and better sleep, but commonsense policy changes can help others get the shuteye they need.

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When it comes to health, wealth and overall well-being, the amount of sleep a person gets correlates with their class and race. A number of findings show that poor people and people of color get far less sleep each night than their rich white counterparts, and that's a huge public health problem, states [a news report published on PBS.com](#).

The American Academy of Sleep Medicine recommends adults should get a minimum of seven hours of sleep per night. But America's sleep divide is vast. For example, [a large survey from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention](#) (CDC) found that 35.2% of people with earnings below the poverty line reported sleeping fewer than six hours each night, compared with 27.7% percent of those who earn more than four times the poverty level.

Among racial groups, the differences are even greater. A 2015 study that reviewed lab tests and self-reports from over 2,000 participants showed that compared with white people, Black individuals were five times more likely to sleep fewer than seven hours a night. In addition, Latino and Chinese Americans were twice as likely to sleep less than their white counterparts.

Inadequate shuteye is a well-known risk factor for [cardiovascular disease](#) and stroke, dementia and increased inflammation, which can promote other illnesses, including cancer and arthritis. Recent studies also show that too little sleep can weaken the immune system, rendering people more susceptible to viruses and reducing their ability to respond well to vaccines.

Researchers believe that numerous economic, social and physical factors are responsible for these disparities. For example, residents of low-income neighborhoods experience more light and noise pollution and a lack of green spaces, which can affect health and sleep.

Stress, another obstacle to getting a good night's rest, also affects Black people disproportionately. African Americans consistently reported more job-related stress than their white peers. Findings also noted higher rates of [sleep apnea](#) in Black communities. This sleep disorder, often caused by excess weight, exacerbated the divide, with non-Hispanic Black people up to 1.3 times more likely to have overweight or obesity than their white counterparts.

Researchers suggested that instituting local noise ordinances, lessening light pollution and advocating for more compassionate work schedules that limit overnight shift work—jobs more likely to be staffed by people of color could help address sleep deprivation.

Finally, scientists proposed that sleep should be regarded as a public health priority requiring interventions that address the environmental, social and health disparities encountered by members of these population groups.

To learn more about America’s sleep deficit, read [“Why Can’t We Sleep?”](#)

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