

A real eye-opener -- Researchers uncover which gender is losing sleep

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Even with growing progress toward gender equality in the workplace, women continue to carry the most responsibility for family care, a load that according to a new study could indicate why women report more sleep disruption than men. The research led by David Maume, a University of Cincinnati professor of sociology and director of the UC Kunz Center for Research in Work, Family and Gender, UC graduate student Rachel A. Sebastian and Miami University (Ohio) graduate student Anthony R. Bardo, was presented Aug. 10 at the 104th annual meeting of the American Sociological Association (ASA) in San Francisco.

Health researchers have traditionally dominated the field of sleep research, examining [biological differences](#) and their effects on sleep patterns. The University of Cincinnati study delved into the social issues of how work and family obligations could trigger tossing and turning when it came to a good night's sleep. "Drawing on scholarship on gender inequality on time use, we contend that sleep is an activity that is affected by gender inequality in waking role obligations," write the authors.

The UC researchers conducted a phone survey of 583 union workers represented by a Midwestern chapter of the United Food and Commercial Workers (UFCW). The phone survey took place between January and April of 2007. Sixty-two percent of the respondents were women.

Participants were asked about the number of hours they slept, as well as about sleep-related questions that health care workers would review in examining the health effects of sleep loss, such as, "In the past three months, did you never, rarely, sometimes or often..."

- Have trouble falling asleep
- Wake up before you wanted to
- Wake up feeling refreshed
- Get the right amount of sleep
- Have sleep interrupted by another family member
- Feel tired even on days when you weren't working
- Sleep longer on days when you weren't working
- Have trouble with memory
- Feel sluggish or rundown at work
- Fall asleep at work

The researchers also factored in demographics such as age, race and education, as well as health predictors such as pain frequency that would affect sleep, and body mass index (BMI).

To examine how family obligations would affect sleep, the researchers also differentiated between respondents married to non-working spouses, part-time working spouses and full-time working spouses as well as non-

married respondents. Stress was also measured by asking participants about the stability of their relationships and having children.

In examining work demands on sleep, the researchers reviewed overnight shifts and rotating schedules as well as job satisfaction, number of years on the job and job autonomy.

The researchers found that gender differences in health status accounted for a substantial portion (27 percent) of the [gender gap](#) in sleep disruption, with women more likely to report health effects on sleep disruption. Women were also more likely to report conflicts in balancing the demands of their work schedules with finding the time, energy and enthusiasm to meet family responsibilities accounting for 17 percent of the gender gap in sleep disruption, with parental status accounting for an additional five percent of the gender gap in sleep disruption.

The authors say that women were more likely than men to report more sleep disruption when they were concerned about their marriages, worked nonstandard schedules, when job demands spilled over into family lives and when family issues affected job performance. The authors found that men whose wives worked full-time reported more sleep disruption, and when jobs and family lives spilled into each other, but significantly less than women. "Overall, the results show that gendered reactions to work-family situations accounted for more than half of the gender gap in sleep disruption," state the authors.

Men who considered their work/family roles on equal footing with their partner were also more likely to report sleep disruption.

"To the extent that sleep, as a specific type of discretionary time, is an activity that may be fragmented, curtailed or otherwise re-scheduled in order to meet the often conflicting demands of jobs and loved ones, these results suggest that this is more characteristic of women's lives than

men's," write the authors.

The sociologists conclude that sleep differences should continue to be examined in terms of gender inequality in contemporary society.

Source: University of Cincinnati ([news](#) : [web](#))

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