

# Lack of sleep may produce unethical behavior, management research shows

April 24 2012, By Sookhan Ho

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(Medical Xpress) -- Can lack of sleep make you behave unethically? Researchers think so.

Many studies have looked at the impact of [sleep deprivation](#) on workers' health, safety, and morale, says Pamplin College of Business management assistant professor Christopher Barnes, but few have considered its implications for unethical behavior. "[Sleep](#) deprivation may also contribute to unethical conduct in the workplace, which is costly to organizations," says Barnes, who co-authored a recent study on the subject.

Barnes and three other scholars conducted four studies in different settings and situations to examine the influence of low levels of sleep in decision-making situations involving ethical considerations. "We consistently found that people were more likely to behave unethically when they were short on sleep," he says.

An important practical implication of their research, he says, is that [managers](#) and organizations may play a larger role than previously thought in promoting unethical behavior — through excessive work demands, extended work hours, and shifts that result in night work, each of which, other studies show, has diminished employee sleep.

"We are not arguing that managers can or should completely control the sleep and unethical behavior of their subordinates," Barnes says, "but that managers should recognize that many of their actions may have

second-order effects on sleep and thus unethical behavior. Managers who push their employees to work long hours, work late into the night, or work sporadic and unpredictable schedules may be creating situations that foster [unethical behavior](#).”

Barnes is the lead author of “Lack of sleep and unethical conduct,” co-authored with John Schaubroeck and Megan Huth of Michigan State University and Sonia Ghumman of the University of Hawaii and published in *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 115 (2011), 169–180.

**More information:** Read more about their study in “[When you don't snooze, your ethics lose](#),” in the spring 2012 [Pamplin magazine](#).

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