

Research Brief

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PREVALENT INSOMNIA CONCERNS AND PERCEIVED NEED FOR SLEEP INTERVENTION AMONG DIRECT-CARE WORKERS IN LONG-TERM CARE

Keywords: Insomnia, sleep concerns, direct care workers, sleep intervention

Purpose of the Study: To examine sleep concerns among direct care workers in an assisted living community, and to better understand their interest in sleep interventions.

Key Findings:

- ✓ Many direct care workers in the study reported insomnia-related sleep concerns that were also observed through objective sleep measures.
- ✓ Many direct care workers who reported insomnia-related sleep concerns expressed interest in sleep interventions, particularly mindfulness-based interventions.

Major Policy/Practice Implication: Sleep interventions, especially insomnia-related interventions, could help improve well-being of direct care workers and, in turn, the quality of care and staffing in long-term care communities.

IMPORTANT BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Direct care workers, such as nursing assistants, are integral to providing quality care in long-term care (LTC) communities. They may be the first to notice safety concerns or residents' changes in condition because they spend more time with residents than most other LTC workers. However, nonstandard work shifts and high job stress can impact direct care workers' sleep quality, particularly contributing to insomnia-related sleep issues. Even more, direct care workers are often some of the lowest paid staff in LTC communities, and they may lack financial resources to deal with job and sleep stressors, such as insomnia. This trend of poor sleep among direct care workers likely contributes to their high rates of burnout and turnover.

STUDY METHODS

Researchers evaluated the sleep of 35 direct care workers (personal care assistants, medical aides, and nurses) in an assisted living community. Participants reported their sleep concerns on an initial survey (see responses on next page), responded to daily real-time prompts via smartphones, and wore sleep tracking devices for 14 days. This mixed methods approach enabled researchers to analyze sleep concerns from multiple angles. Participants were also asked about participation and preferences concerning future sleep improvement programs. Finally, researchers collected sociodemographic data and workplace characteristics to better understand insomnia-related sleep concerns among direct care workers.

KEY FINDINGS

- ✓ **57% of participants reported they had insomnia-related sleep concerns.**
 - Concerns included: difficulty falling asleep, difficulty staying asleep, and not feeling rested upon waking
 - The majority of participants who self-reported insomnia-related sleep concerns also demonstrated insomnia sleep patterns, such as frequent wakings
- ✓ **Work seemed to be associated with insomnia-related sleep concerns.**
 - Insomnia concerns were more prevalent among participants who worked rotating/split shifts (75%) than those who worked set shifts (54-57%)
- ✓ **65% of participants expressed interest in sleep interventions.**
 - Interest was higher among participants who reported insomnia
 - Participants preferred online or group formats, and mindfulness-based strategies

PRACTICE AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For policy makers: Policies that support the wellbeing of direct care workers, particularly regarding sleep quality, could improve some staffing issues such as turnover and poor performance due to exhaustion.

For providers: Consider setting schedules that support good sleep quality, such as set shifts. Also consider providing direct care workers with access to sleep interventions to help minimize stress and improve care.

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

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