

## Exploring The Impact of Insomnia on Emotional Regulation Across the Age Group

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### ABSTRACT

Insomnia or sleeplessness, affects people of all ages, however, the reasons and effects may vary depending upon the stage of life. Therefore, through this study, I aim to explore the relationship between insomnia and emotional regulation across various age groups, which also identifies certain causes, consequences, and patterns of sleep problems. 100 individuals, aged 19 to 80, became participants in this study. They shared their experiences with sleep disturbances and their effects on emotional and physical well-being. The younger population of the study, owed their sleep pattern disruptions to overthinking or environmental factors, while older adults owed it to ageing, menopause, and other medical conditions. Certain menstrual phases also contribute to sleep difficulties in women. Fatigue, headaches, and difficulty managing emotions were prominent complaints associated with poor sleep. By uncovering these varied experiences, the study addresses the need for tailored methods to assist people of different ages to enhance their sleep quality which in turn can result in better emotional regulation.

**Keywords:** *Insomnia, Emotional Regulation, Age Group*

Insomnia is characterized by trouble falling asleep, maintaining sleep, or getting up early and not being able to go back to sleep even in conducive environment or conditions. It is a very common disorder, yet a complex one.

Insomnia - “difficulty in initiating or maintaining a restorative sleep, which results in fatigue, the severity or persistence of which causes clinically significant distress or impairment in functioning. Such sleeplessness may be caused by a transient or chronic physical condition or psychological disturbance” (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.)

Daily functioning is affected significantly and impact is observed among all ages. Non frequent insomnia is very common and many people go through it, however, when insomnia becomes frequent it turns into a chronic illness which causes many mental and physical problems. Emotions and their regulation are affected as well causing day to day emotional and adjustment problems. Thus, it disrupts more than just sleep patterns.

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Causes of sleep pattern fluctuations can be manifold. Physical aspects such as medical condition, pain, or mental aspects such as stress, burnout, anxiety, or depression etc. can contribute immensely to the sleep disruptions. Biological factors like hormonal fluctuations or circadian rhythm are impactful as well. Environmental factors or lifestyle modifications combined with the natural aging process, can intensify sleep difficulties, leading to insomnia.

Emotional regulation basically means being able to control our emotions in a healthy and adaptive manner.

Emotion Regulation - "The ability of an individual to modulate an emotion or set of emotions." (American Psychological Association [APA], n.d.)

It refers to managing negative emotions like frustration, anger, or sadness; trying to withhold peace in the face of difficult situations and maintaining a balanced manner to positively respond to challenges. Sleep has a significant impact on a person's emotional regulation. Stress management, healthy mood and effective decision making, all can be achieved through good sleep. But in the case of insomnia these mechanisms are highly disrupted and the person feels in less control of his emotions. Experiencing irritation, confusion, mood swings and higher emotional sensitivity are very common symptoms. In extreme cases insomnia leads to burnout, depression, and anxiety.

Sleep patterns and their impact on emotional regulations vary among different age groups. Adolescents might experience heightened emotional sensitivity or poor control over their emotions due to low-quality sleep. "Poor sleep quality was robustly associated with more emotion regulation difficulties, especially those related to the ability to enact goal-related behaviour in the face of negative emotions, lack of emotional clarity, and lack of strategies to feel better when distressed" (Yang et al., 2023, Conclusion). Adults may feel irritable, anxious or face difficulties in the workplace and relationships. Elderly people may have difficulty maintaining a good quality of life and experience mood swings. "Insomnia has severe negative impact on older adults' quality of life and daily functioning, affecting cognitive, physical, and emotional health. As an inherently subjective experience, insomnia can be difficult to quantify, because it is frequently triggered or exacerbated by factors described by study participants, such as bereavement, recent relocation, anxiety, institutionalization, polypharmacy, or comorbidities" (Berkley, Carter, Yoder, Acton, & Holahan, 2020). Since the impact of insomnia on emotional regulation varies across age groups, it becomes important to comprehend these patterns and their significant consequences on mental health, quality of life and functioning.

This study aims at exploring and investigating how insomnia affects emotional regulation in individuals of all ages. 100 individuals at various stages of life are utilized for this study, having varied ages and genders. Quantitative data is collected through questionnaires to identify the possible relationship between insomnia and emotional regulation.

This study contributes by providing insights into how insomnia can have an impact on emotional regulation across a lifetime. Age-specific strategies can be developed to combat age-specific problems related to insomnia and emotional management. Psychologists and clinicians can develop interventions to help people of all ages by helping them with age-appropriate methods to treat insomnia which can lead to better quality of life and emotional well-being.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Sleep and Emotions: A Focus on Insomnia*

There exists a complex relationship between sleep and emotions with emotional reactivity being an important factor that affects it. Individuals who tend to internalize their struggles become more emotionally sensitive that causes heightened emotional arousal in their body which in turn can disrupt sleep. Emotional problems like anxiety and depression are more common in individuals with insomnia, rather than behaviours like aggression or acting out. Emotional regulation that is the way we control our positive and negative emotions, has a significant impact on sleep. Poor emotional regulation leads to heightened sleep issues.

Biologically, interaction between sleep and emotions occurs within the brain's sleep-regulation systems, particularly during REM sleep, where sleep problems occur if arousal is heightened. Positive emotions like love have mixed effects on sleep, possibly increasing satisfaction of sleep and shortening sleep duration, while negative emotions such as loneliness and grief leads to more dissatisfied sleep. Limitations of this research includes smaller sample sizes, more emphasize on younger population and unclarity regarding specific effects of emotions or moods on sleep. More precise techniques are required to represent a larger and diverse population for future research. (Baglioni et al., 2010)

### *Epidemiology of Insomnia: from Adolescence to Old Age*

In recent years, research on insomnia has significantly increased, especially among adolescents, which indicates its prevalence and complex association with emotional regulation. Teenagers are suffering from increased sleep problems with prevalence estimates fluctuating between 7% and 40%, depending on the definition used and severity ratings used in different research. When severity is considered, the incidence drops to 11%, however, a general prevalence of almost 30% is noted for any insomnia symptom within the previous 30 days. Diagnostician studies using diagnostic criteria such as DSM-IV or ICD indicate that the prevalence of these disorders is lower, around 4%, and there is a higher likelihood of co-occurring psychiatric disorders. When it comes to girls, the onset is later, typically around the age of 11. Almost half of the teenagers have sleep difficulties which later lead to chronic problems. The syndrome is more prevalent in those who encounter it after puberty, but there is less racial and ethnic variance among females. Longitudinal studies have shown conflicting findings about the association between sleep problems and mental health disorders, requiring further research. Different studies define insomnia in different ways which has led to significant obstacle, underscoring the importance of using consistent diagnostic standards for better comparability. Risk factors and the typical course of insomnia must be examined further to get better insights on treating and understanding adolescent insomnia. (Johnson, 2006)

### *Insomnia and Emotional Regulation: Recent Findings and Suggestions for Treatment*

Research indicates that emotion regulation plays a vital role in mediating the effects of insomnia symptoms on psychosocial outcomes. Both acute and chronic sleep deprivation appear to hinder the ability to use adaptive emotion regulation strategies, leading to increased depressive symptoms, which in turn disrupts sleep and creates a harmful cycle that progressively worsens sleep and emotional difficulties. Studies have shown that adopting adaptive practices, such as mindfulness, can help ease insomnia. Furthermore, it has been found that a key neurophysiological mechanism linking insomnia and emotional dysregulation is sleep instability, particularly during REM sleep. Chronic fragmentation of REM sleep may disrupt the emotional neural networks essential for emotion processing. While these results are important, further research is necessary to fully grasp the intricate

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and interconnected dynamics between sleep and emotional regulation, especially among those struggling with chronic insomnia. Additionally, it is crucial to differentiate clearly between inadequate sleep and insomnia, since the patterns associated with ongoing poor sleep may entail different adaptive responses than those seen with temporary sleep deprivation. Given its encouraging outcomes in various areas, including the treatment of binge eating disorder, future research should aim to incorporate emotion regulation training, such as mindfulness techniques, into the management of insomnia. Additionally, further studies are needed to investigate the neurophysiological impacts of sleep disorders on emotional regulation and to create more comprehensive and effective insomnia interventions that address both emotional and sleep-related difficulties. (Cerolini et al., 2015)

### **METHODOLOGY**

This study is an amalgamation of descriptive and exploratory research identify possible effects of insomnia on emotional regulation across various age groups. Study was conducted using an online survey through Google Forms platform. A total number of 150 participants were selected using convenience sampling method. These participants belonged to different age groups, ranging from young adults to older adults. No specification was made based on gender or any specific medical conditions to simply enhance the diverse representation of individuals facing insomnia.

A self-administered questionnaire through Google Forms included questions to identify various aspects of insomnia and emotional regulation concerning various age groups. Demographic details of age and gender were collected from the participants. Questions related to sleep patterns like “How often do you wake up during the night and find it hard to fall back asleep?” and “How many hours of sleep do you get each night?” were included. Its impact on emotional regulation was identified using questions like “Do you feel out of control when not sleeping well?” or “Do you feel stressed by not being able to sleep?” To understand its relationship to the age factor, questions like “Do you think your sleep pattern has changed as you’ve grown older?” and “At what age did your sleeping problems first start?” etc. were incorporated. These questions were in the form of multiple choice like “How rested do you feel upon waking up in the morning- Very well rested, somewhat rested, Neutral, not rested;” short answers and rating scales to elicit both quantitative and qualitative responses. Participants were instructed properly and were requested to provide their responses honestly based on their personal experiences

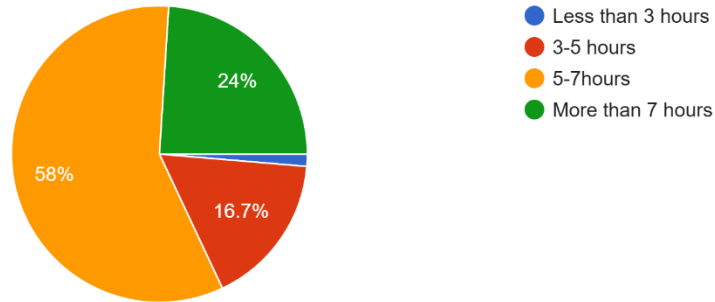
Open ended questions like “If you have difficulty in falling asleep, what do you think are reasons behind it? “or” What do you do before going to bed?” were incorporated to gain additional understanding of participant’s specific difficulties with sleep and potential reasons behind it. This helped in allowing participants to describe their own sleep routines and their emotional distress, which were unique to everyone.

The online medium for collecting data helped reach larger population with convenience of the participants. All participants were voluntarily recruited. They had been briefed about the purpose and nature of the study. Their right to stay anonymous or withdraw was not violated. Consent from each participant was taken and they had been ensured about the confidentiality of their responses and information. Hence this study was ethically conducted.

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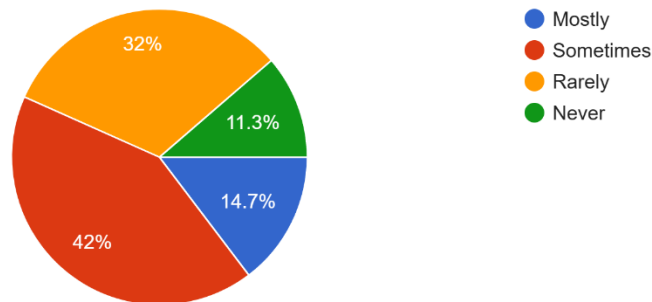
How many hours of sleep do you get each night?

150 responses



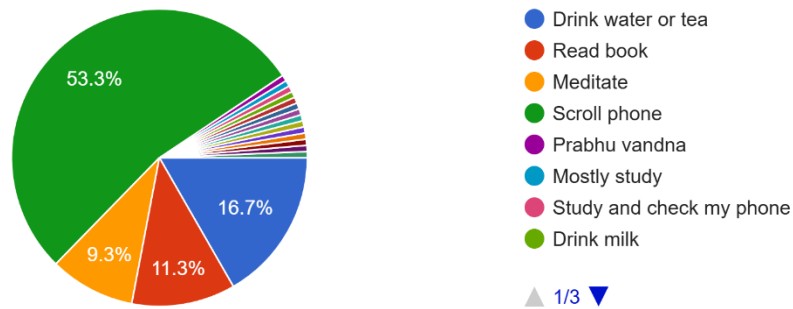
Do you face difficulty in sleeping?

150 responses



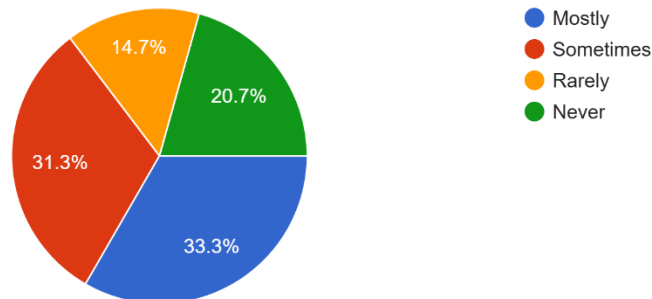
What do you do before going to bed?

150 responses



Do you use phone on bed till you fall asleep?

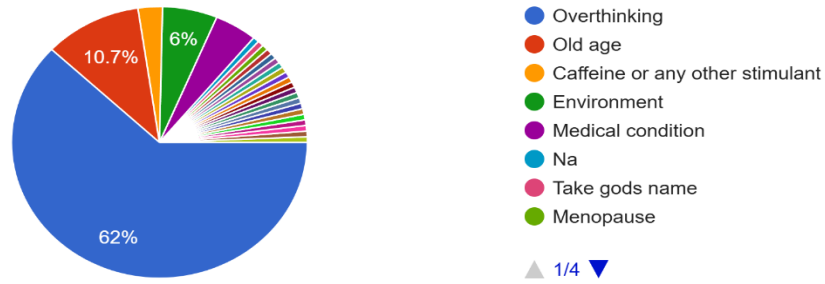
150 responses



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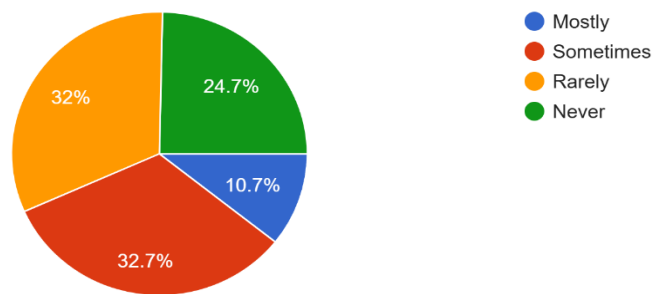
If you have difficulty in falling asleep, what do you think are reasons behind it?

150 responses



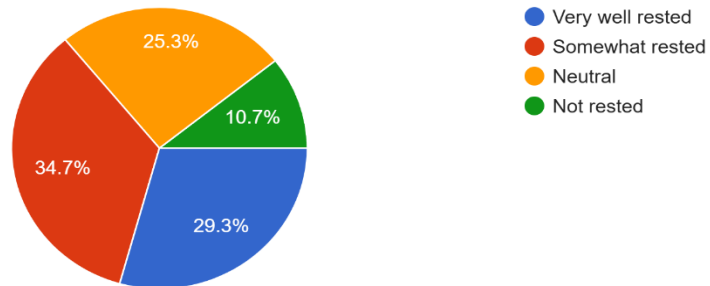
How often do you wake up during the night and find it hard to fall back asleep?

150 responses

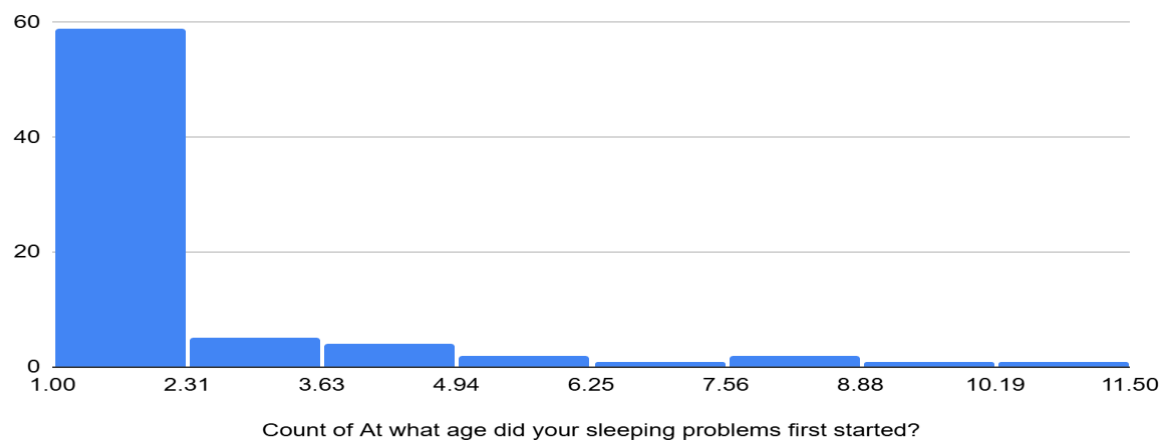


How rested do you feel upon waking up in the morning

150 responses



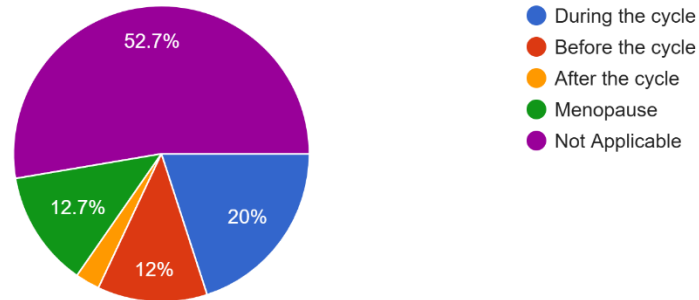
Histogram of Count of At what age did your sleeping problems first started?



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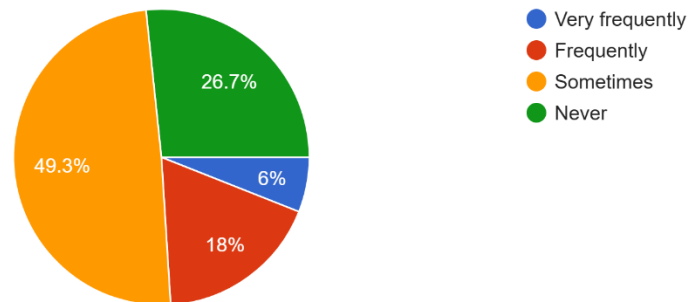
If you're a woman, during which menstrual phase does your sleeping problems occur?

150 responses



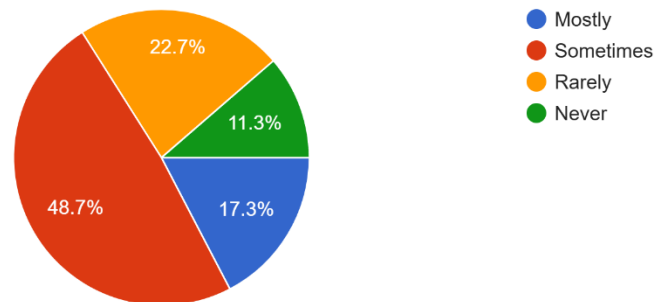
How frequently do you take naps during the day to compensate for lack of sleep?

150 responses



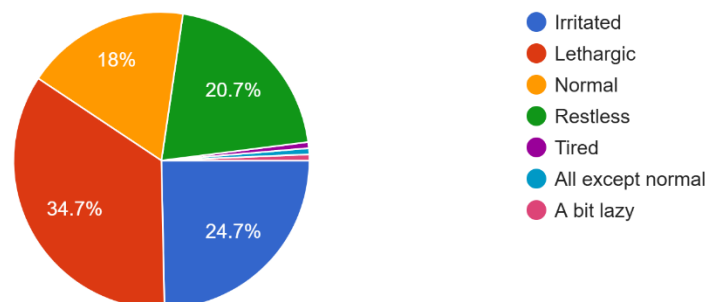
Does the lack of sleep affect your functioning during the day?

150 responses



How do you feel after not sleeping well?

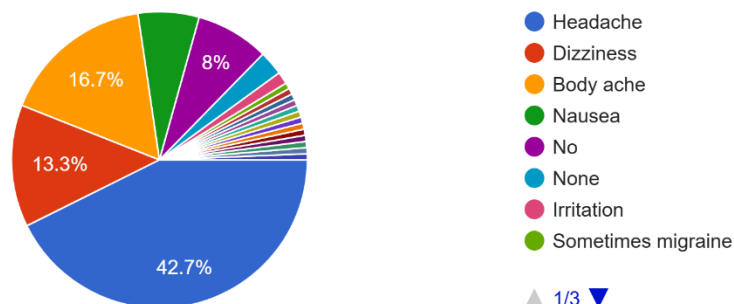
150 responses



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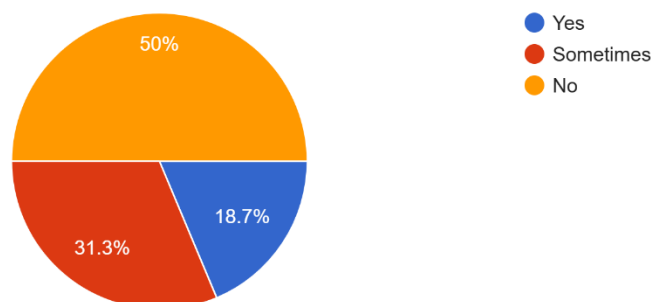
Do you have any physical symptoms after waking up from poor sleep?

150 responses



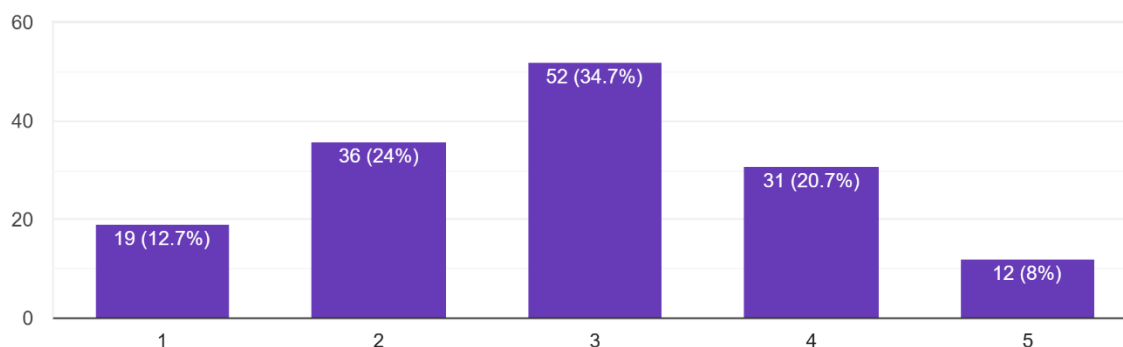
Do you feel out of control when not slept well?

150 responses



How much do you rate your sleep quality?

150 responses



## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Recent findings revealed intriguing insights into people's sleep habits and challenges. The majority of individuals reported sleeping between 5 to 7 hours per night, while those who averaged less than 3 hours frequently expressed feelings of restlessness, fatigue, and dissatisfaction with their sleep quality. Younger participants, particularly those in their 20s and 30s, mentioned that overthinking often prevented them from falling asleep at night. In contrast, the older individuals, especially those over 50, pointed out that medical issues and age.

Younger participants preferred scrolling through social media and using their phones before going to bed. Many individuals aged 20 to 30 recognized that prolonged screen time hinders

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their ability to fall asleep and leaves them feeling less refreshed. In contrast, older individuals, particularly those over 60, cited medical conditions, frequent wakefulness during the night, and environmental disturbances as the main reasons for their sleep issues.

Significant shift occurred in sleep habits of people of older age. Over 70% of individuals aged 50 and older reported a decline in their sleep quality with advancing age. In elder people, physical issues were primary cause of their sleep problems and in youngsters it was their unhealthy lifestyle habits. Gender differences were also accountable. Menstrual issues like menopause or irregular cycle were also reported as a significant factor causing sleep problems in women. Environmental and lifestyle factors played key role in males causing sleeplessness.

Considerable effects of inadequate sleep were present. Participants reported experiencing headaches, bodily aches, light-headedness, and weariness during the day. A large number of people reported that they didn't feel rejuvenated upon waking up, which made it more difficult to manage their daily routine. These results highlight the profound impact that sleep quality can have on one's physical and mental wellbeing.

### *Discussion*

This study offers important perspectives on how factors like age, gender, and lifestyle habits influence our sleep quality and subsequently affect our everyday activities. Different demographic groups have different needs relating to their sleep, and thus it is important to target their sleep concerns through tailored approach. Older adults often reported age-related challenges. Those aged over 60 mentioned that alterations in their body's natural rhythms and the presence of health conditions have resulted in lighter and more irregular sleep patterns. Conversely, younger participants identified psychological stress, like excessive worrying, and lifestyle habits, such as late-night phone use, as the main causes of their sleep disruptions. This diversity highlights the necessity of addressing sleep-related concerns that are unique to different age groups.

Gender-related factors also influenced sleep patterns. In women, hormonal fluctuations related to menopause and menstrual issues significantly affected their sleep. Increased awareness and focused interventions, such as medical assistance for menopause or education on the effects of hormones on sleep, can aid in managing these challenges. Although men reported fewer hormonal changes, they indicated that lifestyle and environmental issues were their primary concerns. This implies that men could improve their sleep significantly through effective sleep hygiene practices and in turn their overall well-being.

Sleep quality was significantly influenced by lifestyle habits, especially among younger participants. Many acknowledged that using their phones excessively right before bed made it difficult for them to fall asleep. This reflects our understanding of how blue light affects the production of melatonin. On the other hand, individuals who practiced relaxing activities such as meditation or reading experienced improved sleep quality. The findings suggest that adopting tranquil bedtime routines could greatly influence sleep outcomes.

Participants shared their experiences regarding how lack of sleep affected both their mental and physical health, in addition to sleep itself. Many reported that issues like headaches, fatigue, and irritability affected their daily lives. This highlights the critical role of sleep in overall health and the necessity for increased public awareness of its importance.

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The summary of this research points out the various factors influencing sleep and its importance in people's lives. To address these problems, a blend of medical treatment, psychological assistance, and healthier lifestyle choices will be essential. Future studies could investigate solutions to contemporary issues like smartphone usage before sleep and examine gender- or age-specific strategies.

### CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study gives insight on the various factors that affect sleep and the impact it has on various areas of life. It emphasizes how lifestyle choices, along with age and gender, affect overall health and sleep quality. Younger individuals often reported difficulties in falling asleep due to stressors like overthinking or engaging with electronic devices before going to bed. On the other hand, older adults face issues related to sleep owing to their age and medical conditions. Women's sleep difficulties were frequently linked to the hormonal imbalance or changes during menopause, whereas men indicated that lifestyle and environmental issues were their primary concerns.

Numerous participants noted feelings of fatigue, headaches, irritability, and trouble concentrating on everyday tasks as a result of inadequate sleep. These findings underscore the necessity for personalized approaches to improve sleep. While older adults may benefit from addressing medical or age-related concerns, younger individuals could find relief in reducing screen time and adopting soothing nighttime routines. Moreover, women might be in need of specialized care due to their experience with hormonal fluctuations. At last sleep enhancement involves combination of appropriate medical treatment, psychological therapy and changes in lifestyles for good. Upcoming studies should concentrate on present issues, like technology usage, and seek to create solutions that address the diverse requirements of various groups.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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