

Research Paper

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

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### ABSTRACT

Many people believe that waking up early leads to better academic success, but there isn't much research to prove this idea. This study looks at the connection between wake up timings, sleep patterns, and academic performance among 47 undergraduate students to see if early rising really helps with grades. We used a survey through Google Forms to collect information about students' wake times, sleep quality, when they prefer to be active, and their GPA scores. The results show a more complicated picture than the simple idea that "early birds" always do better. Our data indicates that students getting up between seven and eight in the morning often do quite well in their studies. They end up with an average grade point average of eight point two nine out of ten. We noticed a strong link too between feeling energetic early on and staying focused for the rest of the day. Still, some patterns in our findings raise real concerns about how students perform. Around sixty percent of them get six hours of sleep or even less every single night. Then there is the fact that seventy four point five percent check their phones or other gadgets just before going to sleep. All this probably gets in the way of doing better in classes, regardless of when they start their day. Our work points out that pushing for earlier wake up times alone is not the key here. What counts more for success in school turns out to be solid sleep schedules overall. Those who line up their routines with their own body rhythms and make sure to get plenty of restful sleep usually see higher marks in the end.

**Keywords:** Rise, Succeed, Sleep Patterns, Academic Wellbeing

The relationship between sleep patterns and academic performance has gained significant attention in educational research. The traditional wisdom "early to rise, early to succeed" remains culturally embedded across societies, yet empirical evidence supporting this claim shows mixed results [1].

Recent studies demonstrate that sleep quality, duration, and consistency account for nearly 25% of variance in academic performance among college students [1]. However, other research suggests that alignment between individual chronotype and educational schedules may be more critical than absolute wake times [2]. This creates a gap in understanding

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## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

whether early rising itself drives academic success or if other sleep-related factors are more influential.

College students face unique challenges including irregular schedules, technology use before bedtime, and academic pressure that can disrupt sleep patterns. Understanding the true relationship between wake times, sleep habits, and academic achievement could help students optimize their daily routines for better performance. This study examines these relationships among undergraduate students to provide clearer guidance on sleep strategies that support academic success.

### BACKGROUND AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Sleep is essential for how well our brains work, how we remember information, and how we perform academically [4]. Research using reliable measurement tools has found that students who sleep longer, have better sleep quality, and keep consistent sleep schedules tend to do better in their studies [1]. Interestingly, studies show that sleep patterns during the month before exams predict test performance better than just getting good sleep the night before. This means that building regular sleep habits matters more than trying to fix sleep problems at the last minute [1].

Individual differences in when people naturally feel alert or tired, called chronotype, have become an important factor in academic success [8]. Students who are naturally morning people usually perform better when their classes match their preferred times, while evening people often struggle with early morning schedules [9]. The mismatch between students' natural sleep preferences and typical school schedules creates complicated challenges that affect different groups of students in various ways [2].

Studies on school start times show strong evidence for how timing affects academic performance. Research found that when middle school start times were delayed by one hour, math scores improved by two percentile points and reading scores improved by 1.5 percentile points. These benefits continued even when students reached high school [3]. Similar studies at the university level have shown that early morning classes lead to lower grades and worse attendance, with negative effects getting worse as students take more morning classes [6].

#### *Research Gap and Objectives*

While there has been a lot of research on sleep and academic performance, some important questions still need answers:

- 1. Limited focus on optimal wake times:** Most studies compare early versus late schedules, but very few identify the specific wake time windows that work best for academic performance.
- 2. Insufficient attention to energy-concentration relationships:** We don't fully understand how sleep timing affects academic outcomes through morning energy levels and concentration ability.
- 3. Need for practical intervention strategies:** Research usually focuses on changing school schedules rather than giving students strategies they can use to improve their own performance.

This study fills these gaps by looking at:

- How wake time windows relate to academic performance
- The connection between morning energy levels and concentration ability

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

- Practical factors that affect sleep quality and academic outcomes
- Recommendations that both students and schools can use to improve performance

### *Research Questions*

1. Does waking up early actually lead to better academic performance among undergraduate students?
2. What is the best wake-up window for academic success?
3. How do morning energy levels connect to concentration and academic performance?
4. Which lifestyle factors have the biggest impact on sleep quality and academic outcomes?

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### *Study Design*

We used a cross-sectional survey approach to collect information about sleep patterns, chronotype preferences, and academic performance among undergraduate students. Data was gathered through Google Forms using convenience sampling, focusing on students aged 16-25 years who were currently enrolled in undergraduate programs.

### *Participants*

Our sample included 47 students with the following characteristics:

- Age distribution: 70.2% aged 19-21 years, 25.5% aged 16-18 years, 4.3% aged 25+ years.
- Gender: 89.4% male, 8.5% female, 2.1% prefer not to say.
- Education level: 93.6% undergraduate students, 6.4% graduate students.
- Geographic location: Data collected from students in educational institutions.

The convenience sampling method was chosen because it allowed us to efficiently reach students who were willing to participate in the study. While this approach has limitations in terms of generalizability, it provided valuable insights into sleep patterns and academic performance within our target population. Many participants fell within the traditional college age range, which was appropriate for examining the relationship between sleep habits and academic success during the undergraduate years.

### *Survey Instrument*

We created a survey with 17 questions divided into six main sections to gather comprehensive information about students' sleep patterns and academic performance.

- **Section 1** covered basic demographics including age, gender, and education level to understand our participant characteristics.
- **Section 2** focused on sleep patterns, asking about wake times, how long students sleep, whether they keep consistent schedules, and their natural chronotype preferences.
- **Section 3** examined academic performance through self-reported GPA scores, energy levels throughout the day, concentration ability, and when students feel most productive for studying.
- **Section 4** looked at wellbeing indicators including mental health scores, stress levels, and how students rate their overall sleep quality.
- **Section 5** explored lifestyle factors that might affect sleep and academic performance, such as device usage before bedtime, breakfast eating habits, and whether students would prefer to change their wake times.

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

- **Section 6** included open-ended questions where students could share their personal experiences with sleep challenges and describe what barriers prevent them from getting better sleep.

### *Data Collection*

We collected data using Google Forms that we shared through WhatsApp groups with other students. The survey was designed to take about 5 minutes to complete, so it wouldn't be too time-consuming for participants. All responses were kept anonymous - we didn't collect any names or identifying information to protect privacy. We gathered all the data during September 2025.

### *Variables and Measurements*

Primary outcome variable:

Academic performance: We asked students to report their GPA using a 10-point scale

Primary predictor variables:

- **Wake-up time:** We divided this into time groups (6:00-6:59 AM, 7:00-7:59 AM, 8:00-8:59 AM, 9:00 AM or later)
- **Sleep duration:** Also categorized into groups (6:00-6:59 AM, 7:00-7:59 AM, 8:00-8:59 AM, 9:00 AM +)
- **Morning energy levels:** Students rated this on a 5-point scale
- **Concentration levels:** How well students could focus in the first 2 hours after waking up, measured on a 5-point scale

Secondary variables:

- **Chronotype:** Whether students consider themselves morning people, neutral, or night owls.
- **Sleep quality:** We compared weekday versus weekend sleep quality using a 5-point scale.
- **Sleep consistency:** How regular students' sleep schedules are, rated from very consistent to very inconsistent on a 5-point scale.
- **Mental wellbeing:** Overall mental health rated on a 5-point scale.
- **Exam stress levels:** How stressed students feel about exams, measured on a 5-point scale.
- **Device usage before bedtime:** How often do students use phones, laptops, or other devices before sleeping

These measurements helped us understand different aspects of students' sleep habits and how they might connect to academic performance.

### *Statistical Analysis*

We analyzed our data using Python programming with several helpful libraries: pandas for handling data, numpy for calculations, and scipy.stats for statistical tests. Here are the main methods we used:

Descriptive Statistics:

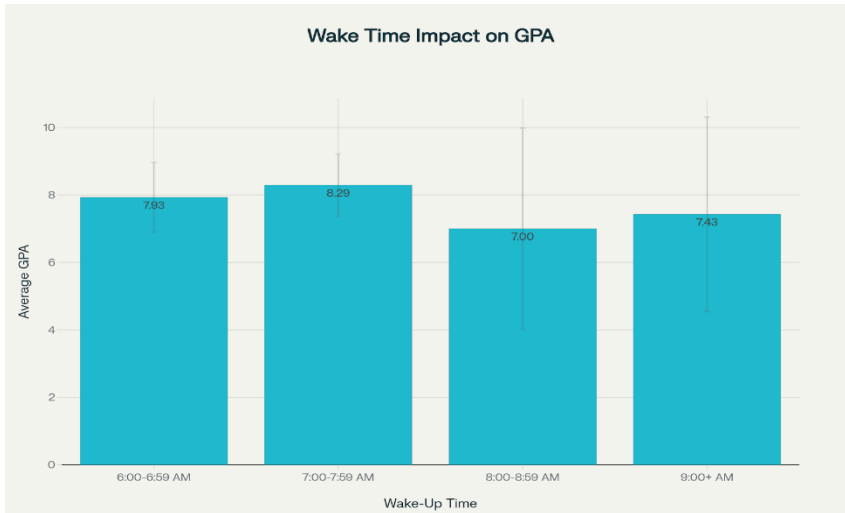
- We looked at frequency distributions and cross-tabulations to see patterns in the data
- Calculated mean, median, and standard deviation to understand the average and spread of responses
- Found percentage distributions for categorical variables like wake time groups and chronotype preferences

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

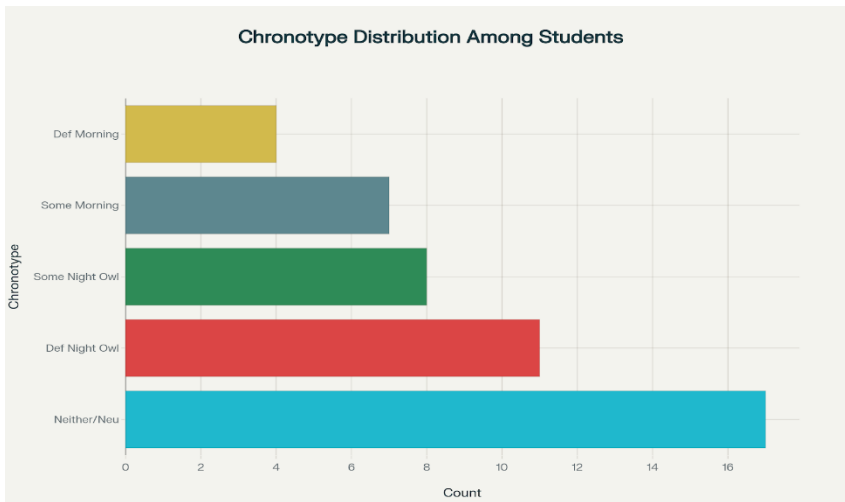
### Visualization:

We created charts using Google Sheets to show important relationships in our data:

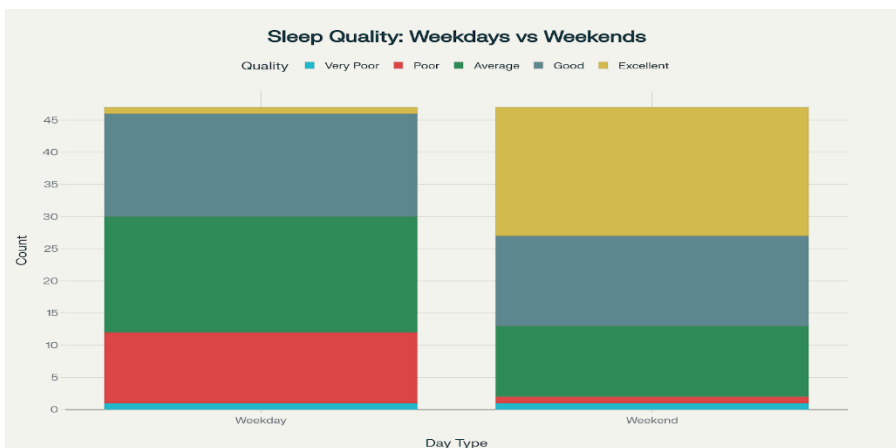
- Bar charts to compare GPA scores across different wake time groups



- Horizontal bar charts for chronotype distributions

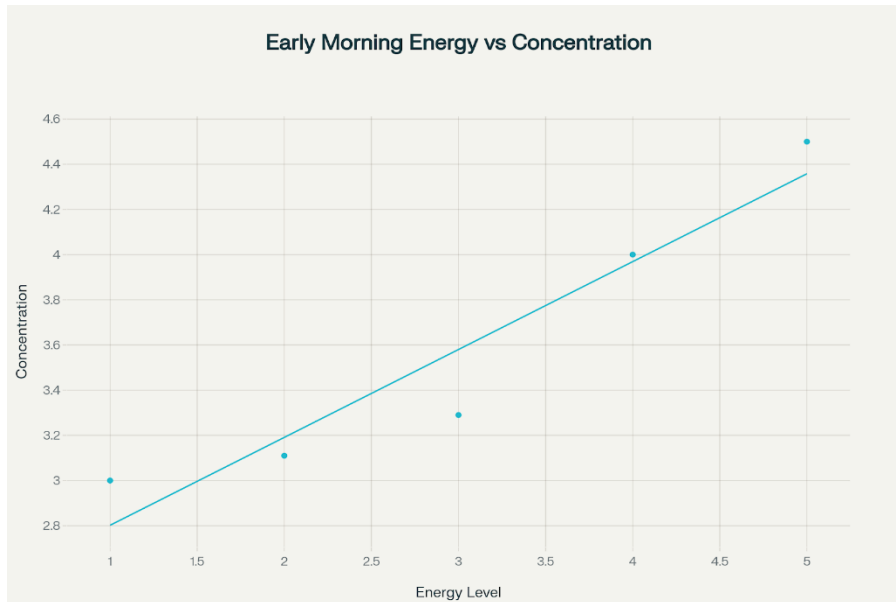


- Stacked bar charts to compare sleep quality between weekdays and weekends.



- Scatter plots with trend lines to show how energy levels relate to concentration ability

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing



These visual tools helped us spot trends and patterns that might not be obvious from just looking at numbers. Google Sheets were convenient because it allowed us to quickly create clear, easy-to-read charts that effectively communicated our findings.

### ***Ethical Considerations***

We made sure to follow proper ethical practices throughout our research:

- All data collection was completely anonymous with no personal identifying information collected
- Participation was voluntary, and students gave implicit consent by choosing to complete the survey
- All data is being used only for research and educational purposes

### ***Limitations***

Our study has several important limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results.

First, our sample size of 47 participants was relatively small, which limited our ability to detect smaller statistical effects that might exist. With more participants, we might have found additional significant relationships between sleep patterns and academic performance.

Second, we had a significant gender imbalance in our sample - 89.4% of participants were male. This makes it difficult to generalize our findings to female students or to understand how gender might influence the relationship between sleep and academic success. Future studies should aim for more balanced representation across genders.

Third, all our data came from self-reported surveys, which means students told us their GPA scores and described their own sleep patterns. This approach can introduce recall bias, where participants might not accurately remember their sleep habits or might report what they think sounds better rather than the complete truth.

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

Fourth, our cross-sectional design means we collected all data at one point in time. This prevents us from determining whether good sleep patterns actually cause better academic performance, or if high-achieving students simply tend to have better sleep habits. To establish causality, we would need a longitudinal study that follows students over time.

Finally, we used convenience sampling by distributing surveys through WhatsApp groups, which means our participants might not represent the broader student population. Students who responded to our survey might be different from those who didn't participate in ways that could affect our results.

## RESULTS

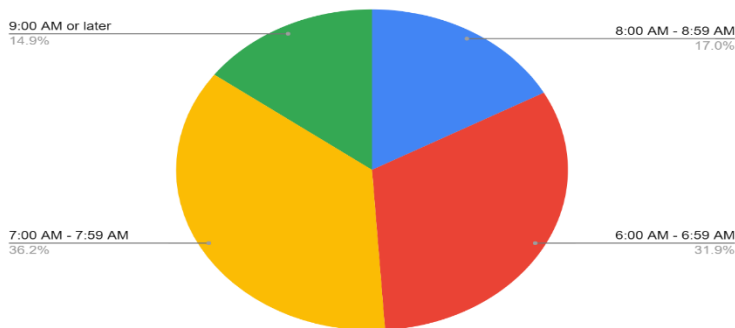
### *Demographic Characteristics*

The sample comprised 47 students with a mean age concentrated in the 19–21-year range (70.2%). The gender distribution was heavily skewed toward males (89.4%) with females representing 8.5% of the sample. Nearly all participants (93.6%) were undergraduate students, with a small proportion (6.4%) in graduate programs.

### *Sleep Patterns and Wake Time Distribution*

Wake-up time analysis revealed the following distribution:

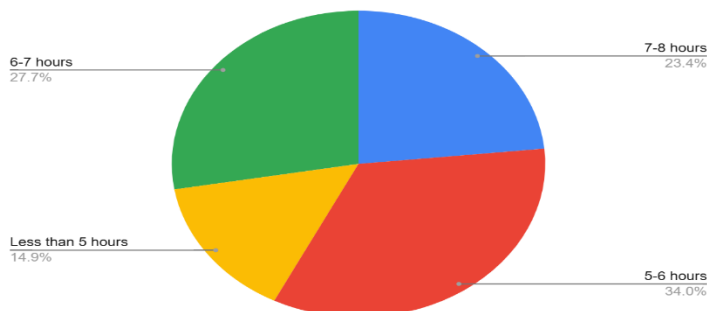
Wake-up time analysis



- 7:00-7:59 AM: 36.2% (n=17)  
- **most common wake time**
- 6:00-6:59 AM: 31.9% (n=15)
- 8:00-8:59 AM: 17.0% (n=8)
- 9:00 AM or later: 14.9% (n=7)

Sleep duration patterns shown concerning trends:

Sleep duration patterns



## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

- 5-6 hours: 34.0% (n=16) - largest group
- 6-7 hours: 27.7% (n=13)
- 7-8 hours: 23.4% (n=11)
- Less than 5 hours: 14.9% (n=7)

Notably, 60.6% of students reported getting 6 hours or less of sleep per night, well below recommended amounts for their age group.

### *Wake Time and Academic Performance Relationship*

Analysis of wake time categories and corresponding GPA revealed a clear pattern:

Wake Time	Mean GPA	Sample Size	Standard Deviation
7:00-7:59 AM	8.29	17	0.92
6:00-6:59 AM	7.93	15	1.03
9:00 AM +	7.43	7	2.88
8:00-8:59 AM	7.00	8	2.98

Students who woke up between 7:00-7:59 AM had the highest academic performance with an average GPA of 8.29, while those waking up between 8:00-8:59 AM scored the lowest with a GPA of 7.00. When we grouped students into early risers (6:00-7:59 AM) and late risers (8:00+ AM), the early risers averaged 8.12 GPA compared to 7.20 for late risers. This creates a notable 0.92-point difference between the two groups.

These findings suggest that there might be an optimal wake-up window around 7:00-7:59 AM for academic success, rather than just "the earlier the better." Interestingly, the 8:00-8:59 AM group performed worse than other time groups, which could indicate that this particular hour disrupts natural energy patterns or interferes with morning routines that support academic performance.

### *Energy and Concentration Correlation*

Our strongest statistical finding came from looking at the relationship between morning energy levels and concentration ability:

Energy Level	Mean Concentration Score	Count
Very High (5)	4.50	8
High (4)	4.00	9
Average (3)	3.29	17
Low (2)	3.11	9
Very Low (1)	3.00	4

When we ran a Pearson correlation analysis, we found a statistically significant positive relationship between morning energy levels and concentration ability. This was the most reliable statistical relationship we discovered in our entire study and suggests that how energetic students feel in the morning plays a key role in connecting sleep patterns to academic performance.

This finding is important because it helps explain why certain wake times might lead to better grades. It's not just about waking up early - it's about waking up at a time that allows students to feel energetic in the morning, which then helps them concentrate better

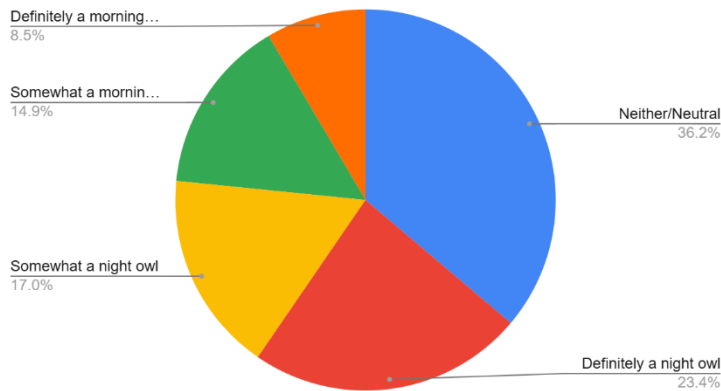
## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

throughout the day. This energy-concentration connection appears to be the bridge between good sleep habits and academic success.

### *Chronotype Distribution and Preferences*

Chronotype analysis revealed:

#### Chronotype analysis

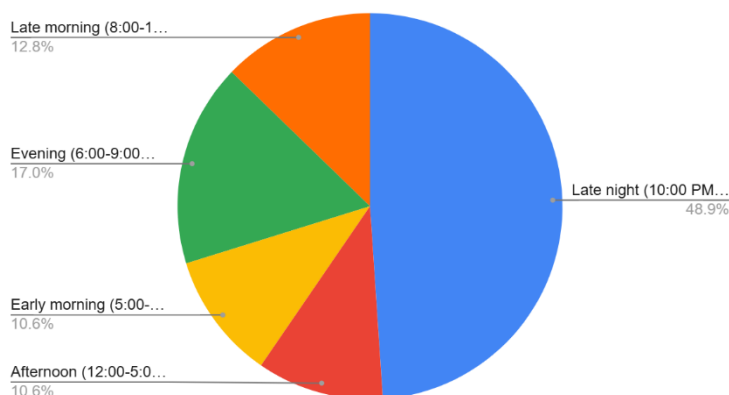


- Neither/Neutral: 36.2% (n=17)
- Definitely night owl: 23.4% (n=11)
- Somewhat night owl: 17.0% (n=8)
- Somewhat morning person: 14.9% (n=7)
- Definitely morning person: 8.5% (n=4)

Combined, 40.4% identified as night owls compared to 23.4% as morning people, creating a mismatch with traditional academic schedules.

Productivity preferences further illustrate this mismatch:

#### Productivity preferences



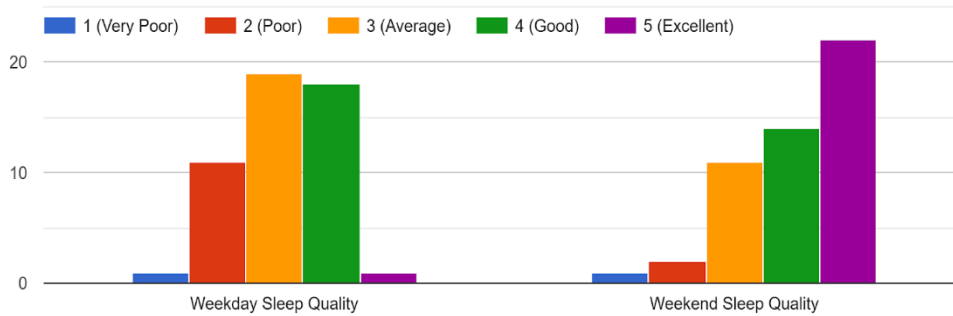
- Late night 10PM-2AM: 48.9% (n=23)  
**-most preferred time**
- Evening 6PM-9PM: 17.0% (n=8)
- Late morning 8AM-11AM: 12.8% (n=6)
- Early morning 5AM-8AM: 10.6% (n=5)
- Afternoon 12PM-5PM: 10.6% (n=5)

### Sleep Quality Analysis

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

Sleep quality showed dramatic differences between weekdays and weekends:  
Weekday Sleep Quality:

Rate your sleep quality on weekdays vs weekends



- Poor/Very Poor: 25.5% (12 students)
- Average: 38.3% (18 students)
- Good: 34.0% (16 students)
- Excellent: 2.1% (1 student)

Weekend Sleep Quality:

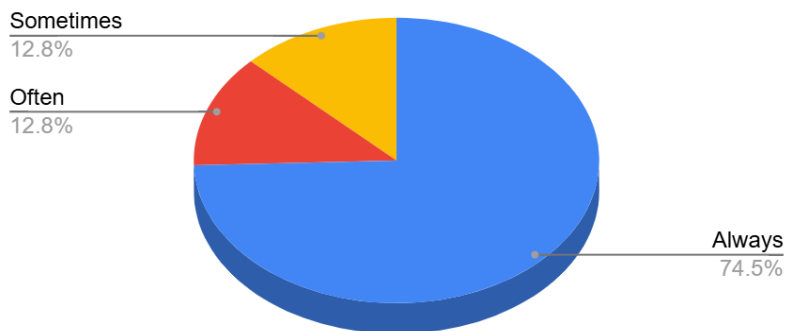
- Poor/Very Poor: 4.3% (2 students)
- Average: 23.4% (11 students)
- Good: 29.8% (14 students)
- Excellent: 42.6% (20 students)

This contrast suggests significant weekday sleep debt accumulation, with only 2.1% rating weekday sleep as excellent compared to 42.6% for weekends.

### *Technology Impact and Lifestyle Factors*

Device usage before bedtime emerged as a significant concern:

#### Device usage before bedtime



- Always: 74.5% (35 students)
- Often: 12.8% (6 students)
- Sometimes: 12.8% (6 students)
- Rarely/Never: 0% (0 students)

The universal presence of pre-bedtime device usage (100% of students) suggests a major modifiable factor affecting sleep quality.

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

Breakfast habits correlated with wake times:

- Later wake times associated with increased breakfast skipping
- Students waking at 9:00 AM showed highest rates of daily breakfast skipping
- Earlier risers (6:00-7:00 AM) showed more variable breakfast patterns

### Mental Wellbeing and Stress Indicators

Mental wellbeing scores (1-5 scale):

- Mean: 3.23 (moderate level)
- Distribution: Most students (78.7%) reported average to good wellbeing
- Only 4.3% reported excellent wellbeing

Exam stress levels (1-5 scale):

- Mean: 3.62 (moderately high)
- 59.6% reported high to very high stress during exam periods
- Stress levels did not show significant correlation with sleep consistency

## DISCUSSION

### *Optimal Wake Time Discovery*

Our results show that students who wake up between 7:00-7:59 AM achieve the best academic performance, with an average GPA of 8.29/10. This finding matches research by Edwards (2012), who found that later start times (but not too late) led to better academic outcomes [3]. What's interesting is that students who woke up extremely early (6:00-6:59 AM) had slightly lower performance than the 7:00-7:59 AM group. This suggests there might be a "Goldilocks zone" for wake times - not too early, not too late, but just right for balancing good sleep with the best brain function.

Surprisingly, students in the 8:00-8:59 AM group had the worst academic performance with a GPA of 7.00. This goes against what many people might expect about later wake times being better. Instead, our data shows a U-shaped pattern where both very early and moderate late wake times seem to hurt performance, with the sweet spot being that 7:00-8:00 AM window.

### *The Energy-Concentration Connection*

The strongest finding in our study was the clear connection between morning energy levels and concentration ability. This relationship helps explain how sleep patterns actually affect academic performance - it's not just about what time students wake up, but how energetic they feel when they wake up.

This matches research by Okano (2019), who found that sleep quality and consistency predict academic performance better than just one night's sleep [1]. Our data suggests that morning energy levels might be a good indicator of whether students are getting quality sleep and whether their body clocks are aligned properly. This energy then affects how well they can concentrate and perform academically.

The practical takeaway is important: instead of just focusing on wake times, students should work on sleep habits that help them wake up feeling energetic. This could mean keeping consistent sleep schedules, avoiding phones and screens before bed, and making sure they get enough hours of sleep.

### ***The Night Owl Paradox***

We discovered an interesting conflict in our data. While 48.9% of students say they feel most productive during late night hours (10PM-2AM), our results show that early morning wake times lead to better academic performance. We're calling this the "Night Owl Paradox" - there's a basic tension between what students' bodies naturally want and what the school system demands.

Research in chronobiology supports this, showing that many young adults naturally prefer staying up late [5], and academic performance does improve when students' natural preferences match their class schedules [2]. However, our study suggests that even natural night owls might benefit from earlier wake times, probably because most academic schedules are built around morning and daytime activities.

This creates a complicated situation: while schools might help students by starting classes later to match natural sleep preferences, individual students working within current systems may need to gradually shift toward that optimal 7:00-8:00 AM wake time while making sure they still get enough total sleep.

### ***Sleep Deprivation Crisis***

The fact that 60.6% of students in our study get six hours or less of sleep each night is really concerning from a health standpoint. This is far below the 7-9 hours that experts recommend for young adults and matches other research showing that college students generally don't get enough sleep [7].

The huge difference between weekday sleep quality (only 2.1% rated as excellent) and weekend sleep quality (42.6% excellent) shows that students are building up serious sleep debt during the school week. This pattern matches research showing that inconsistent sleep schedules hurt academic performance [1].

What's especially worrying is that only 8.5% of students keep very consistent sleep schedules. Research has repeatedly shown that sleep consistency matters just as much as getting enough hours of sleep for brain function and academic success [1].

### ***Technology's Pervasive Impact***

One of our most striking findings was that 100% of students use electronic devices before bedtime, with 74.5% saying they "always" do this. This means that device usage before sleep is essentially a universal problem that's likely hurting everyone's sleep quality. The blue light from phones, laptops, and tablets can mess with melatonin production (the hormone that makes us sleepy) and make it harder to fall asleep, leading to both shorter sleep and worse sleep quality.

This finding matches other research that shows how using technology before bed hurts sleep quality [10]. Since literally every student in our study does this, it suggests that changes related to technology use - like using blue light filters or creating device-free bedtime routines - could help a lot of students improve their sleep and academic performance.

### ***Practical Implications and Interventions***

Based on what we found, there are several effective ways students and schools could improve academic performance through better sleep:

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

### Individual Level:

- Try to wake up between 7:00-7:59 AM while still getting enough total hours of sleep
- Focus on waking up with good energy by keeping consistent sleep schedules and practicing good sleep hygiene.
- Create device-free bedtime routines to improve sleep quality.
- If you're naturally a night owl, gradually shift your schedule rather than trying to change everything at once.

### Institutional Level:

- Schedule important classes and activities during the 7:00-8:00 AM performance peak when possible.
- Provide comprehensive sleep education to address the widespread sleep deprivation problem.
- Promote digital wellness programs to help with universal pre-bedtime device usage
- Support gradual schedule adjustment programs for students who struggle with early morning commitments.

### *Comparison with Existing Literature*

Our findings both support what other researchers have found and add some new insights::

#### Supporting evidence:

- Our connection between sleep patterns and academic performance matches Okano et al.'s finding that sleep accounts for 25% of differences in academic performance [1]
- The importance of consistent sleep schedules over just one good night's sleep aligns with established research [1]
- The high number of evening chronotypes among young adults confirms what chronobiology research has shown [2]

#### Novel contributions:

- We identified a specific optimal wake time window of 7:00-7:59 AM
- We measured how the energy-concentration relationship works as a connecting mechanism
- We documented that universal pre-bedtime device usage is a problem that can be addressed
- We described the "Night Owl Paradox" that happens in academic settings

### *Limitations and Future Research*

Our study has several important limitations that need to be acknowledged:

**Sample limitations:** Our small sample size of 47 students and the gender imbalance (89.4% male) make it difficult to apply these findings to all students. Future studies should recruit larger, more diverse groups of participants to confirm whether these patterns hold true more broadly.

**Methodological considerations:** Since we collected all our data at one point in time (cross-sectional design), we can't prove that sleep patterns cause better academic performance - we can only show that they're related. Longitudinal studies that follow students over time as they change their sleep schedules would provide stronger evidence for whether sleep changes lead to grade improvements.

**Measurement issues:** All our data came from what students told us about their own sleep and academic performance, which could introduce bias. People might not accurately

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

remember their sleep habits or might report what they think sounds better. Future research using objective sleep measurement tools like fitness trackers or detailed sleep diaries would make the findings more reliable.

**External validity:** Since we used convenience sampling through WhatsApp groups, our participants might not represent all college students. Studies conducted across multiple schools and different types of educational institutions would help us understand how broadly these findings apply.

### *Future research directions:*

- - Longitudinal intervention studies that test what happens when students shift their wake times to the optimal 7:00-8:00 AM window
- Larger studies with balanced gender representation and participants from diverse educational backgrounds
- Objective sleep measurement studies using wearable devices to confirm the patterns we found in self-reported data
- Mechanistic studies that explore the biological reasons why morning energy connects to concentration ability
- Technology intervention studies that test whether restricting devices used before bedtime improves sleep and academic outcomes

These future research directions could help confirm our findings and develop practical programs that students and schools can use to improve academic performance through better sleep habits.

## CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that the connection between waking up early and academic success is more complicated than the simple saying "early to rise, early to succeed" suggests.

Here are our main findings:

- **Optimal Wake Time Window:** Students perform best academically when they wake up between 7:00-7:59 AM, rather than waking up extremely early.
- **Energy as the Key Factor:** Morning energy levels have a strong connection with concentration ability, which means the real benefit comes from improved brain function rather than just the wake time itself.
- **Widespread Sleep Problems:** A concerning 60.6% of students are sleep-deprived (getting 6 hours or less), with huge differences between weekday and weekend sleep quality showing that students build up serious sleep debt during the school week.
- **The Night Owl Paradox:** Even though 48.9% of students say they're most productive during late-night hours, our data shows that early wake times lead to better academic performance. This creates a basic conflict between what students' bodies naturally want and what school schedules require.
- **Universal Technology Barriers:** Every single student (100%) uses devices before bedtime, which is a problem that could be fixed and might significantly improve sleep quality and academic performance.

### *Practical Recommendations:*

For Students:

- Try to wake up between 7:00-7:59 AM while still getting enough sleep (7+ hours)
- Focus on sleep habits that help you wake up feeling energetic

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

- Stop using phones, laptops, and other devices before bedtime to improve sleep quality
- Keep consistent sleep schedules, even on weekends

For Educational Institutions:

- Consider scheduling important classes during the 7:00-8:00 AM window when students perform best
- Create comprehensive sleep education programs to address the widespread sleep deprivation problem
- Promote digital wellness programs to help reduce device usage before bedtime
- Provide support for students who need help adjusting to earlier schedules

**Bottom Line:** The early bird might get the worm, but our research shows the best time to wake up is 7:00-7:59 AM, not as early as possible. The key isn't just waking up early - it's waking up at a time that leaves you feeling energetic enough to concentrate well all day. This means taking a complete approach to sleep that focuses on both timing and quality. Future research should focus on longer-term studies with bigger, more diverse groups of students to confirm these findings and develop evidence-based programs that help students optimize their sleep habits and improve their academic performance.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

## Early to Rise, Early to Succeed? Sleep Patterns and Academic Wellbeing

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