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Study Suggests Ethnicity May Affect Sleep Patterns in Women

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Description

A new study conducted by researchers from the Brooklyn Center for Health Disparities Research at SUNY Downstate Medical Center and from Long Island University, examined whether differences in culture and ethnicity, socioeconomic and health factors, and coping styles influence sleep patterns among urban American women.

Newswise — An estimated 25 percent of adults suffer from insomnia—women more so than men—and for many, a drink or sleeping pill is the answer to a good night's sleep. Researchers have found that ethnic and cultural differences can strongly influence the sleep experience.

A new study conducted by researchers from the Brooklyn Center for Health Disparities Research at SUNY Downstate and from Long Island University, examined whether differences in culture and ethnicity, socioeconomic and health factors, and coping styles influence sleep patterns among urban American women. Their multiethnic sample of 1,440 women living in Brooklyn included African Americans, English-speaking Caribbeans, Haitians, Dominicans, Eastern Europeans, and European Americans.

"Understanding ethnic and cultural factors affecting the sleep experience will help us find better ways to treat sleep problems among women of different ethnic backgrounds," said the study's lead author, Girardin Jean-Louis, PhD, associate professor of psychiatry and medicine at SUNY Downstate.

Data from the study show that women of Eastern European ancestry had the highest rate of insomnia symptoms; 77 percent said they had difficulty falling asleep or maintaining sleep or had early morning awakenings. Among other white (European American) women surveyed, 70 percent expressed similar symptoms, as did African-American women (71 percent) and Dominicans (73 percent). However, only 34 percent of English-speaking Caribbean women and 33 percent of Haitians in the study reported having insomnia symptoms.

Differences in socioeconomic status and health seemed to influence the various outcomes. For example, women from Eastern Europe reported more physical ailments than other women in the study; however, white women, in general, were more likely to seek medical attention than African-American women. Dr. Jean-Louis believes better coping mechanisms may explain the low rate of insomnia among English-speaking Caribbeans and Haitians.

Lack of sleep can impair concentration, increase anxiety, and lead to depression. It also can increase the risk for heart disease and diabetes. Understanding the social and cultural factors that contribute to insomnia may shed new light on this troublesome condition.

"The results of the study represent the basis for future research into insomnia among women from different cultures," Dr. Jean Louis said.