

Emotional eating is associated to sleep quality in Spanish young adults

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Background and objectives:

Poor sleep quality (SQ) independently influences dietary intake (food and nutrients) and weight outcomes. However, few studies have studied the potential relationship between SQ with eating behaviors (EB) (the cognitive-behavioral nature of food intake) and its three dimensions: emotional (EE), uncontrolled (UE) and restraint (RE) eating. Our aim was to study potential associations between SQ and EB in young adults.

Methodology:

One hundred forty-nine students (20–32 years; 78.5% females) from the University of Barcelona (UB) were included in a cross-sectional study. SQ was assessed with the Pittsburg Sleep Quality Index (PSQI) and EB with the Three Factor Eating Questionnaire, which allows to evaluate the three dimensions of eating: EE, UE, and RE. Lowest scores for PSQI indicate good SQ, whereas highest scores of each factor indicate higher EB. All the data were collected using the free software Open Data Kit. Scores were treated as continuous variables, and the significance level was considered at $p < 0.05$. Linear regression was performed and EE questions were categorized by the median and divided into two groups: high emotional and low emotional eating. ANCOVAs were also carried out to compare PSQI scores within EE groups and adjusted by confounding factors.

Results and conclusions:

Higher PSQI scores predicted higher EE ($\beta = 0.298$, $p < 0.029$, $r^2 = 0.056$), but not UE and RE. We also found that high emotional eaters with poor SQ tend to overeat when anxious ($p = 0.030$), sad ($p = 0.039$) or depressed ($p = 0.022$). We conclude that poor SQ is associated with EE, specifically people tend to overeat when sad, depressed or anxious. These findings suggest that improving SQ in young population may reduce individual susceptibility to overeat when coping with emotionally negative situations, which could help to attenuate weight gain during adulthood.

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