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## Evening shifts and sleep woes

A study says working at night is associated with sleep disorders, with an impact on physical and mental health.

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WHATEVER the job, working for around eight consecutive hours, five days a week, remains a standard reference in many cultures. However, some employees work unusual hours or even night shifts, which can be detrimental to their health.



A new study suggests that night shifts, in particular, can promote the onset of sleep disorders, with an impact on the physical and mental health of those concerned.

“There is a lot of evidence that shift work reduces the quality of sleep. However, little is known about the influence of different types of shifts on the prevalence of various sleep disorders, and how this may vary depending on demographic characteristics,” explains Dr Marike Lancel, researcher at the GGZ Drenthe’s Mental Health Institute in the Netherlands, in a statement.

This inspired a team of Dutch researchers to try to assess the association between different shift patterns, which result in employees working at night, certain sociodemographic factors, and sleep disorders.

To do this, they studied data from 37,662 workers, classified according to their work schedules (standard day, early morning, evening, night and shift work). In addition to the demographic information provided to the researchers, participants were asked to answer a questionnaire focusing on sleep disorders.

One out of two night workers concerned

Published in the journal *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, this research suggests that regular night work is the most debilitating condition regarding sleep. In particular, one out of every two participants in this category indicated that they had slept less than six hours within 24 hours, while 51% reported one sleep disorder and 26% at least two sleep disorders.

By way of comparison, almost a third of all participants were affected by at least one sleep disorder, and almost 13% by at least two such disorders.

Looking at demographic factors, men seem to be more affected by sleep deprivation than women, but the latter suffer more from sleep disorders. Disparities are also observed according to age group: older workers sleep less, but it's young people aged 30 and under who suffer most from sleep disorders.

"We showed that compared to working regular shifts during daytime hours, working other shift types is associated with a higher occurrence of disordered sleep, particularly in rotating and regular night shift work," noted Dr Marike Lancel.

She concluded, "because those working night shift will remain de-synchronised with the day-work focused environment they live in, it is unlikely to completely prevent all negative consequences of night work."

This isn't the first time these late-night working hours have been singled out for their impact on health. In 2018, France's Anses agency "Agence nationale de sécurité sanitaire de l'alimentation, de l'environnement et du travail" reported: "Changes in work organisation are now leading an increasing number of French people to work night shifts," citing in particular "the proven effects of these schedules on the occurrence of sleep disorders, as well as the probable effects on the onset of cancers and certain cardiovascular pathologies, and also repercussions on the worker's psychological health."

The French agency followed this with a report that encouraged better supervision of this type of work or reducing it to a minimum. – AFP Relaxnews