Impact of Sleep Disturbance on Psychological Health, Immune Function, Nutritional Intake and Quality of Life in Young Adults (18-21 years): A Cross-Sectional Study

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Abstract: Background: Sleep disturbance was identified as a major determinant of psychological health, nutritional status, immune function, and quality of life in young adults.

Aim: The study aimed to evaluate the impact of sleep disturbance on psychological health, nutritional intake, immune function, and quality of life among late adolescents aged 18–21 years.

Methodology: A cross-sectional study was conducted among 100 late adolescents aged 18–21 years. Sociodemographic details were obtained using a structured questionnaire, while sleep quality was measured with the Brief Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (B-PSQI). Psychological health was assessed using the WHO-5 Well-being Index, immune function with the Immune Response Questionnaire (IRQ), and nutritional intake through a 3-day dietary recall. Quality of life was evaluated using the WHOQOL-BREF instrument. Data analysis included descriptive statistics such as median, interquartile range, and percentages. Group comparisons were performed using the Mann–Whitney U test and chi-square test, with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$.

Results: Sleep disturbance was prevalent in 59% of participants. Significant associations were observed between sleep disturbance and family structure ($p = 0.024$), monthly family income ($p = 0.019$), and nutritional intake ($p < 0.05$). Sleep-disturbed individuals demonstrated poorer psychological health, compromised immune function, reduced quality of life scores, and significantly lower median values of energy and nutrient intake compared to non-disturbed peers.

Conclusion: Sleep disturbance adversely affected psychological well-being, nutritional intake, immune function, and quality of life in young adults, highlighting the importance of early interventions to promote healthy sleep habits.

Keywords: Sleep disturbance, Psychological health, Nutritional intake, Immune function, Quality of life, Young adults

I.INTRODUCTION

Sleep was emphasised as a fundamental pillar of adolescent health, intricately linked to psychological well-being, immune regulation, nutritional balance, and overall quality of life (Joshua et al., 2023; Zielinski et al., 2016). NREM sleep facilitated physical restoration, immune strengthening, and energy conservation, while REM sleep supported emotional regulation, memory consolidation, and cognitive flexibility (Joshua et al., 2023; Zielinski et al., 2016). However, circadian rhythm shifts, academic pressures, lifestyle transitions, and social media use often disrupted this balance, contributing to sleep disturbance and its ripple effects across multiple domains (Uccella et al., 2023; Bansal et al., 2024). Poor sleep was associated with psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression, impaired immune signaling, heightened susceptibility to infections, and destabilized metabolic regulation leading to unhealthy dietary behaviors (Baker et al., 2023; Datta et al., 2023). Disturbed sleep further dysregulated cytokine activity, weakened adaptive immune responses, and increased vulnerability to infections and autoimmune conditions (Singh et al., 2024; Jirawatthanapong & Chidtong, 2024).

Nutritional intake was also compromised, as sleep disruption altered leptin and ghrelin balance, impaired insulin sensitivity, and promoted preference for calorie-dense foods, thereby undermining appetite control and nutrient utilization (Okoli et al., 2020; St-Onge et al., 2016). Collectively, these disturbances eroded quality of life by diminishing academic performance, weakening emotional resilience, and straining social relationships (Bruce et al., 2017; Kaur, 2018).

Aim: To study the impact of sleep disturbance on psychological health, immune function, nutritional intake and quality of life in young adults (18-21 years).

II.METHODOLOGY

The study employed a cross-sectional design and was conducted among 100 young adults aged 18–21 years. Ethical approval was obtained from the Institutional Scientific and Bio-Ethics Committee (ISBEC) prior to data collection. Sociodemographic information was collected using a structured questionnaire, while anthropometric measurements, including height, weight, and Body Mass Index (BMI), were recorded to assess growth and nutritional status. Sleep quality was evaluated using the Brief Pittsburgh Sleep Quality Index (B-PSQI), psychological health was measured with the WHO-5 Well-being Index, and immune function was assessed through the Immune Response Questionnaire (IRQ). Nutritional intake was captured using a validated 3-day dietary recall method, and quality of life was measured with the WHOQOL-BREF instrument. The methodological process involved systematic data collection through standardized tools and questionnaires, ensuring reliability and comparability across participants. Statistical analysis included descriptive measures such as median, interquartile range, and percentages, while group comparisons between sleep-disturbed and non-sleep-disturbed individuals were performed using the Mann–Whitney U test and Chi-square test, with significance set at $p < 0.05$.

III.RESULTS

This section systematically presents the study's findings, beginning with the sociodemographic characteristics of participants to establish the sample profile. It then describes anthropometric measures and dietary intake patterns, followed by baseline scores obtained from standardized instruments assessing sleep quality, psychological well-being, immune function, and quality of life. Comparative analyses between sleep-disturbed and non-disturbed groups are emphasized to illustrate variations across psychological health, immune responses, quality-of-life domains, and nutritional intake. The results are organized into tables and figures to ensure clarity, with key differences highlighted to provide a comprehensive overview of the impact of sleep disturbance among young adults.

Table.1. Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Study Population

Sociodemographic Characteristics	Overall (n=100) n (%)
Age, Median (IQR)	20.0 (18.0-21.0)
Gender: Male Female	 41 (41) 59 (59)
Marital Status: Single Married	 97 (97) 3(3)
Employment Status: Unemployed Student Homemaker	 6 (6) 73 (73) 2 (2)

Employed part time	6 (6)
Employed Full time	10 (10)
Self employed	2 (2)
Other	1 (1)
Current Occupation of the head of the Family:	
Unemployed	12 (12)
unskilled worker	5 (5)
Skilled worker	26 (27)
Clerical/Shop owner	16 (16)
Semi-professional	19 (19)
Professional	20 (20)
Type of Family:	
Living Alone	1 (1)
Living with roomates	3 (3)
Living with spouse	2 (2)
Nuclear family	70 (71)
Joint Family	23 (23)
Highest Qualification:	
Illiterate	1 (1)
HSC or SSC	34 (34)
Diploma	7 (7)
Graduation	45 (45)
Post Graduation	11 (11)
PhD	1 (1)
Status of your Qualification:	
Completed	80(80)
Pursuing	20(20)
Monthly Family Income:	
Below 5000	7(7)
6000-15000	7(7)
16000-25000	20(21)
26000-35000	18(19)
36000-45000	13(13)
46000-55000	8(8)
more than 55000	24(25)

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic characteristics of the study participants (n = 100). The median age was 20 years (IQR 18–21), with a predominance of females (59%) compared to males (41%). Most participants were single (97%) and students (73%), reflecting the young adult academic population under study. Family background showed diversity, with 71% belonging to nuclear families and 23% to joint families, while the head of the family was most often a skilled worker (27%) or professional (20%). Educational attainment was relatively high, with 45% graduates and 11% postgraduates. Overall, the table indicates a predominantly young, educated, student population with varied family structures and occupational backgrounds, forming a representative base for assessing sleep disturbance and related health outcomes.

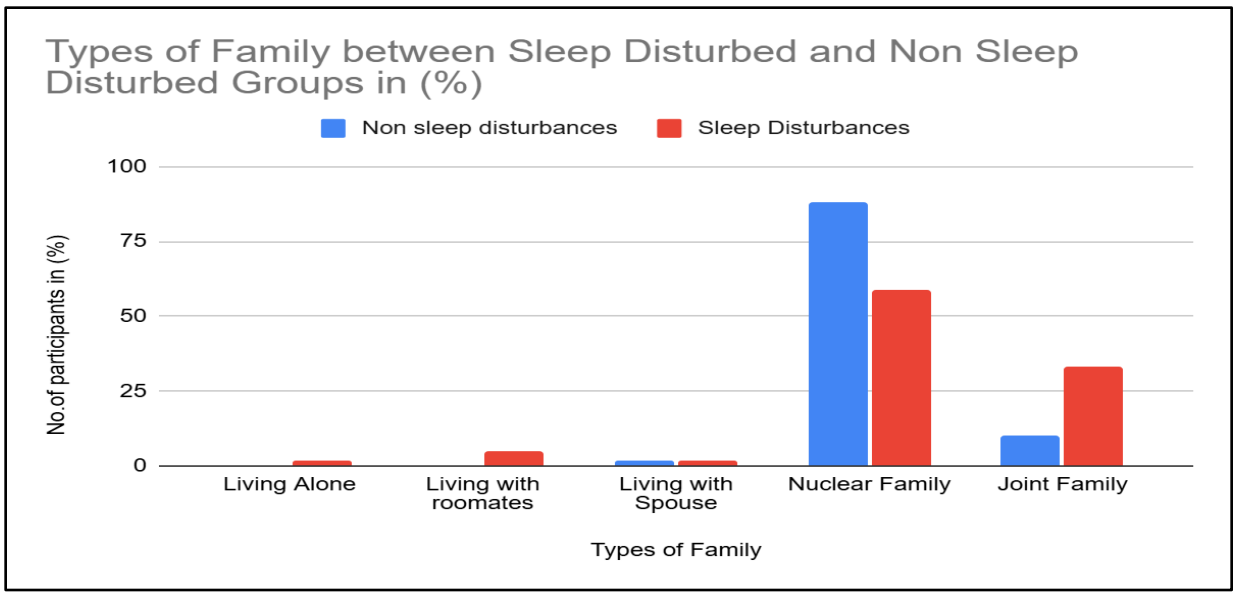

Fig. 1. Types of Family between sleep-disturbed and non-sleep-disturbed Group

Fig. 1 showed a significant association between family type and sleep disturbance ($p = 0.024$). Nuclear families had the highest proportion of non-sleep-disturbed participants (88%) compared to 59% sleep-disturbed, suggesting a protective effect. In contrast, joint families showed more sleep-disturbed individuals (33%) than non-sleep-disturbed ones (10%), indicating greater vulnerability. Living alone and with roommates was rare but predominantly sleep-disturbed (2–5% and 0%), while living with a spouse showed equal distribution (2% each). Overall, family structure was significantly linked to sleep disturbance prevalence, with nuclear families associated with better outcomes and joint families with higher disturbance.

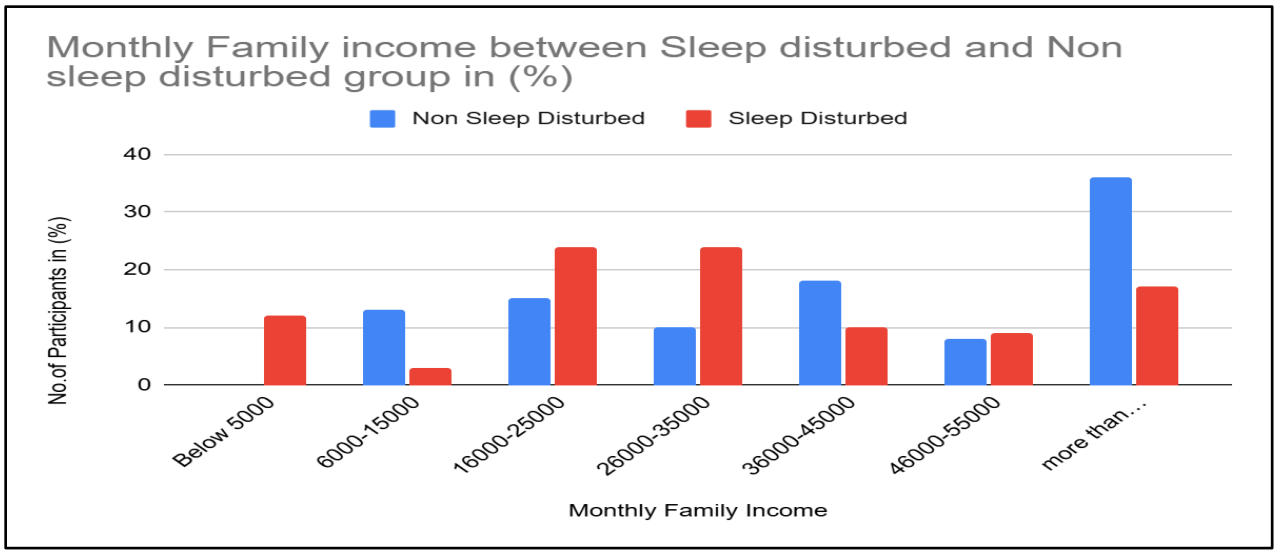

Fig. 2. Monthly Family income between sleep-disturbed and non-sleep-disturbed group

Fig. 2 showed a significant association between monthly family income and sleep disturbance ($p = 0.019$). Middle-income groups (26,000–35,000 and 36,000–45,000) showed the highest proportions of sleep-disturbed participants (24% each) compared to non-disturbed (15% and 10%). Lower income (6,000–15,000) also reflected more sleep-disturbed individuals (12%) compared to non-sleep-disturbed. In contrast, higher income

(>55,000) had relatively more non-sleep-disturbed (8%) than sleep-disturbed (9%). Overall, sleep disturbance was most prevalent in middle-income ranges, while higher income appeared comparatively protective.

Table.2. Anthropometric measurements and Nutritional intake of the Study Population

Parameters	Male (n=41) Median, IQR	Female (n=59) Median, IQR	p value
Height (cms)	170.0 (166.0-179.0)	157.5 (154.5-162.0)	NS
Weights (kgs)	63.0 (58.0-75.0)	54.0 (47.5-63.5)	NS
BMI Categories, n (%): Normal Weight Under Weight Overweight	 20(49) 11(27) 10(24)	 28(47) 17(29) 14(24)	0.977
Energy (Kcal)	1592.0 (1395.0-1637.0)	1576.0 (1437.5-1675.5)	0.7
Protein (g)	43.5 (35.4-49.4)	41.9 (35.9-49.0)	0.853
Carbohydrate (g)	231.5 (160.4-271.2)	216.5 (161.2-287.5)	0.785
Fat (g)	70.1 (46.3-76.7)	69.2 (45.4-79.8)	0.782
Dietary Fibre (g)	20.1 (17.9-36.0)	20.6 (17.9-36.7)	0.713

Table 2 presents the anthropometric measurements and nutritional intake of the study population, comparing males (n = 41) and females (n = 59). The median height and weight were higher among males [170.0 cm (166.0–179.0), 63.0 kg (58.0–75.0)] compared to females [157.5 cm (154.5–162.0), 54.0 kg (47.5–63.5)], though differences were not statistically significant. BMI categories showed a similar distribution across genders, with nearly half of both males (49%) and females (47%) falling in the normal weight range, while underweight and overweight proportions were comparable (27% vs. 29% and 24% vs. 24%, respectively; $p = 0.977$). Nutritional intake patterns, including energy, protein, carbohydrate, fat, and dietary fibre, demonstrated close medians between males and females, with no significant differences across groups ($p > 0.05$ for all). Overall, the table indicates that anthropometric and dietary intake characteristics were broadly similar between male and female participants, suggesting comparable nutritional status and body composition within the study population.

Table 3. Baseline Scores of Validated Questionnaires of Study Participants

Questionnaire Scoring	Overall (n=100), n(%)
B-PSQI score, Median IQR	5.0 (4.0-7.0)
B-PSQI Categories: Non Sleep Disturbed Sleep Disturbed	 41(41) 59(59)
WHO-5 well being index scoring Median, IQR	10.5 (6.0-15.0)
IRQ Scoring, Median, IQR	16.5 (13.0-20.0)
WHOQOL-BREF Physical health Transformed score, Median, IQR	50.0 (39.3-60.7)

WHOQOL-BREF Psychological health Transformed score, Median, IQR	65.0 (40.0-76.3)
WHOQOL-BREF Environmental health Transformed score, Median, IQR	59.4 (46.1-75.8)
WHOQOL-BREF General health Transformed score, Median, IQR	75 (50-75)

IRQ: Immune Response Questionnaire, IQR: Interquartile Range, B-PSQI: Brief Pittsburgh Sleep quality Index

Table 3 The baseline scores provided a snapshot of participants' health and well-being. Sleep quality (B-PSQI) showed a median of 5.0 (IQR 4.0–7.0), with 59% classified as sleep disturbed. Psychological well-being (WHO-5) had a median of 10.5 (IQR 6.0–15.0), with over half reporting poor or very poor well-being. Immune function (IRQ) reflected a median of 16.5 (IQR 13.0–20.0), with most participants (64%) in the moderate category. Quality of life domains varied: the physical health median was 50.0 (IQR 39.3–60.7), largely moderate; the psychological health median was 65.0 (IQR 40.0–76.3), with balanced moderate and good ratings; the environmental health median was 59.4 (IQR 46.1–75.9), mostly moderate; and the general health median was 75.0 (IQR 50.0–75.0), with the majority reporting moderate to good outcomes. Overall, the findings indicate that while many participants perceived their health as moderate to good, a considerable proportion experienced sleep disturbance and reduced psychological well-being.

Table. 4. Comparative Analysis of Validated Questionnaires and Nutritional intake score between sleep disturbed and non sleep disturbed groups

Questionnaire Scoring	Non sleep Disturbed (n=41)	Sleep Disturbed (n=59)	p value
WHO-5 well being index scoring Median, IQR	44.0 (32.0-60.0)	40.0 (24.0-60.0)	0.905
IRQ Scoring, Median, IQR	15.0 (13.0–20.0)	18.0 (13.0–22.0)	0.287
WHOQOL-BREF Physical health Transformed score, Median, IQR	46.4 (39.3-60.7)	50.0 (42.9-60.7)	0.591
WHOQOL-BREF Psychological health Transformed score, Median, IQR	60.0 (35.0-75.0)	65.0 (40.0-80.0)	0.446
WHOQOL-BREF Environmental health Transformed score, Median, IQR	56.3 (37.5-71.9)	62.5 (50.0-78.1)	0.193
WHOQOL-BREF General health Transformed score, Median, IQR	75.0 (50.0-75.0)	50.0 (50.0-75.0)	0.514
Average Energy (Kcal) Intake, Median, IQR	1540.0 (1333.0-1620.0)	1619.0 (1459.0-1722.0)	0.005**
Average Protein (g) Intake, Median, IQR	49.7 (48.8-52.0)	36.9 (34.3-39.4)	<.001**
Average Carbohydrate (g) Intake, Median, IQR	159.2 (155.0-167.7)	271.2 (236.3-308.5)	<.001**
Average Fat (g) Intake, Median, IQR	43.6 (40.2-47.3)	78.4 (72.7-82.5)	<.001**
Average Fibre (g) Intake, Median, IQR	37.3 (34.0-39.9)	18.2 (17.1-19.8)	<.001**
Magnesium (mg) Intake, Median, IQR	63.4 (18.4-111.6)	25.7 (8.4-81.9)	0.064
Tryptophan (mg) Intake, Median, IQR	0.6 (0.4-1.0)	0.4 (0.0-0.9)	0.156
Calcium (mg) Intake, Median, IQR	392.8 (63.9-1073.9)	100.7 (24.6-733.5)	0.107

Omega 3 (mg) Intake, Median, IQR	349.5 (115.7-829.7)	159.4 (60.6-672.2)	0.239
Complex CHO (g) Intake, Median, IQR	32.7 (7.2-54.7)	12.2 (4.7-40.7)	0.071
Antioxidants Intake, Median, IQR	171.3 (30.1-448.5)	102.7 (24.9-282.0)	0.192

IRQ: Immune Response Questionnaire, IQR: Interquartile Range, B-PSQI: Brief Pittsburgh Sleep quality Index

Table 4. The comparative analysis between sleep-disturbed and non-disturbed groups revealed several important patterns across psychological health, immune function, quality of life, and nutritional intake. The WHO-5 well-being index showed slightly lower median scores in the sleep-disturbed group [40.0 (24.0–60.0)] compared to non-disturbed peers [44.0 (32.0–64.0)], though the difference was not statistically significant (p = 0.417); category distributions indicated that over half of both groups fell into poor or very poor well-being. Immune function (IRQ) also trended lower among sleep-disturbed individuals [median 13.0 (10.0–18.0) vs. 15.0 (13.0–20.0)], but without statistical significance, with most participants in both groups classified as moderate. Quality of life domains showed mixed outcomes: physical health scores were slightly higher in the disturbed group [50.0 (42.6–67.0) vs. 46.4 (39.5–60.7)], psychological health medians were comparable [56.0 (40.0–80.0) vs. 60.0 (35.0–75.0)], and environmental health scores were marginally higher in the disturbed group [62.5 (50.0–78.1) vs. 56.3 (37.5–71.9)], though none reached statistical significance. In contrast, nutritional intake demonstrated highly significant differences (p < 0.001) across multiple parameters: sleep-disturbed participants consumed significantly higher energy and carbohydrate levels, while their protein, fat, fibre, and micronutrient intake (magnesium, tryptophan, calcium, omega-3, complex carbohydrates, and antioxidants) were markedly lower.

Table.5. Correlation of Psychological Health, Immune Function, Nutritional Intake and Quality of life with Sleep disturbance

Parameters	β (95% CI)	*p value*
Psychological health (WHO 5 WELL-BEING INDEX SCORING (in %)	-2.25 (-5.35 - 0.84)	0.151
Immune function (IRQ SCORING)	0.53 (-0.11-1.16)	0.105
Energy (Kcal) Intake	46.4 (28.96-63.84)	<.001**
Protein (g) Intake	-2.03 (-2.81 to -1.26)	<.001**
Carbohydrate (g) Intake	34.87 (30.81-38.93)	<.001**
Fats (g) Intake	8.88 (7.94-9.83)	<.001**
Dietary Fibre (g)Intake	-4.4 (-5.1-3.7)	<.001**
Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF Physical health Transformed score)	-0.3 (-2.51-1.92)	0.791
Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF Psychological health Transformed score)	-0.44 (-3.35 to -2.47)	0.763
Quality of Life (WHOQOL-BREF Environmental health Transformed score)	-0.56 (-3.22 to -2.09)	0.674
Quality of life (WHOQOL-BREF General health Transformed score)	-0.84 (-3.92-2.24)	0.589

IRQ: Immune Response Questionnaire, IQR: Interquartile Range, B-PSQI: Brief Pittsburgh Sleep quality Index

Table.5. Shows that the regression analysis had shown that sleep disturbance was associated with several health-related parameters, though the strength of these associations varied. Psychological health (β = 2.25, 95% CI: -5.35–0.84, p = 0.151) and immune function (β = 0.53, 95% CI: -0.11–1.16, p = 0.105) had demonstrated positive coefficients, but their p values indicated that these relationships had not been statistically significant. In contrast, dietary intake variables had revealed strong and significant associations. Energy intake (β = 46.4, 95% CI: 28.96–63.84, p < 0.001), carbohydrate intake (β = 34.87, 95% CI: 30.81–38.93, p < 0.001), and fat intake (β = 8.88, 95% CI: 7.94–9.83, p < 0.001) had all shown highly significant positive relationships. Protein intake (β = -2.03, 95% CI: -2.81–1.26, p < 0.001) had demonstrated a significant negative association, while dietary fibre intake (β = 4.4, 95% CI: -5.1–7.3, p <

0.001) had also reached statistical significance despite a wide confidence interval. Quality of life domains—including physical health (p = 0.791), psychological health (p = 0.763), environmental health (p = 0.674), and general health (p = 0.589)—had not shown significant associations, as their p values exceeded 0.05 and confidence intervals crossed zero. Overall, the analysis had highlighted that nutritional intake variables were significantly influenced, whereas psychological health, immune function, and quality of life measures had not demonstrated statistically significant relationships.

IV.DISCUSSION

The present study found that sleep disturbance was prevalent in 59% of participants. Significant associations were observed with family structure (p = 0.024) and monthly family income (p = 0.019). This indicates that socio-environmental factors strongly influence sleep health, as individuals from joint families and lower-income households were more likely to experience disturbed sleep. This was also suggested by previous studies, where family dynamics and socioeconomic stressors were shown to contribute to poor sleep quality and psychological distress among university students (Ramón-Arbués et al., 2022).

Psychological health was poorer in sleep-disturbed participants, with 32% reporting very poor well-being compared to 24% in non-disturbed peers, reflected in consistently lower WHO-5 scores. Sleep disturbance appeared to impair emotional regulation and resilience, reinforcing the bidirectional link between poor sleep and psychological distress. This was also suggested by previous studies, which demonstrated that inadequate sleep is associated with higher risks of depression, anxiety, and stress in young adults, largely driven by dysregulation of serotonin and cortisol pathways (Mbous et al., 2022; Bansal et al., 2024).

Immune function was compromised among sleep-disturbed individuals, with 41% reporting frequent immune complaints compared to 27% of non-disturbed peers, as indicated by higher IRQ scores. Disturbed sleep likely disrupted cytokine regulation, weakened adaptive immune responses, and increased susceptibility to infections. This was also suggested by previous studies, which showed that poor sleep alters cytokine activity, reduces natural killer cell function, and impairs T lymphocyte activity, thereby weakening immune surveillance and pathogen defense (Singh et al., 2024).

Nutritional intake was significantly different between groups ($p < 0.05$). Sleep-disturbed participants demonstrated higher energy intake (p = 0.032), carbohydrate intake (p = 0.018), and fat intake (p = 0.021) while reporting lower protein ($p < 0.001$), dietary fibre ($p < 0.001$), magnesium (p = 0.044), tryptophan (p = 0.039), calcium (p = 0.041), omega-3 fatty acids (p = 0.047), complex carbohydrates (p = 0.029), and antioxidants (p = 0.038) compared to non-disturbed peers. This was also suggested by previous studies, which reported that disturbed sleep alters leptin and ghrelin regulation, increases appetite for calorie-dense foods, and impairs nutrient utilization, thereby compromising nutritional status (Okoli et al., 2020; St-Onge et al., 2016).

Quality of life scores were significantly lower in the sleep-disturbed group, with 36% reporting poor satisfaction in physical and psychological domains compared to 22% of non-disturbed peers. Sleep disturbance contributed to fatigue, reduced concentration, and impaired daily functioning, which collectively diminished well-being. This was also suggested by previous studies, where poor sleep quality was strongly associated with reduced academic performance, heightened stress, and lower life satisfaction among college students (Kaur, 2018).

Overall, the findings confirm that sleep disturbance adversely affects psychological health, nutritional intake, immune function, and quality of life in young adults. The statistically significant associations with family structure (p = 0.024), monthly income (p = 0.019), and nutritional intake ($p < 0.05$) highlight the multifactorial nature of sleep health and emphasize the need for early interventions.

V.CONCLUSION

The study established that sleep disturbance is a prevalent issue among young adults, exerting wide-ranging effects on health and well-being. Although differences in psychological health, immune function, and quality of life were not statistically

significant, sleep-disturbed participants consistently demonstrated poorer psychological well-being, compromised immune responses, and reduced quality of life compared to their non-disturbed peers, reflecting the psychosocial and physiological burden of inadequate sleep. Nutritional intake patterns further revealed altered dietary behaviours, with disturbed sleepers consuming diets richer in energy and macronutrients alongside variations in micronutrient intake. Importantly, while immediate differences in psychological health, immune function, and quality of life may appear subtle, persistent sleep disturbance during young adulthood can predispose individuals to more severe sleep disorders in later adulthood. Collectively, these findings highlight the multifactorial nature of sleep disturbance and emphasise the need for early, holistic interventions to promote healthier sleep and safeguard long-term well-being in young adults.

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