

Impact of sleep on health, wellbeing and work

Sleep research centre, Loughborough University

Meeting Global Challenges

Sleep is renowned for its regenerative properties, but when it comes to the specific medical impact of sleep, or a lack thereof, on day to day activities more research must be carried out to discover what lies at the heart of our ability to snooze. This project ties in directly with the UK Research Councils 'Health and Well-being Global Challenge programme', particularly in its focus on the impact of sleep and lack of sleep on activities such as work, driving, and on the medical implications of insomnia and sleep apnoea.

A Multidisciplinary Approach

Loughborough's Sleep Research Centre developed in the context of Loughborough's Department of Human Sciences, where psychologists, physiologists and ergonomists were brought together to provide a unique combination of disciplines to explore aspects of how human beings behave. Interdisciplinarity is the heart of the Centre's work. Publications have appeared in journals in a range of subjects, including transport studies and other social science-oriented outlets, as well as medicine, psychology, biology, pharmacology, neurology and neuroscience.

Evolving from and within the Sleep Research Centre, the Clinical Sleep Research Unit is a unique collaboration between researchers, clinicians and service providers in the UK. Established in 2003 the CSRU provides a focus for expertise in the psychological management of sleep and insomnia, and enjoys links with other centres of sleep research both in the UK and internationally.

Research Impact

For many years, a particular specialism has been the impact of sleepiness on daily life, especially in relation to road safety and the effects of drowsiness on drivers. This work has been very widely publicised. Quite apart from its scientific results, it led to changes in the Highway Code, and the erection of the now familiar warning signs about the dangers of tiredness on motorways reminding drivers to take regular breaks.

PhD graduates and staff have taken up posts at other leading sleep research institutions in other European countries and in the USA. Staff are regularly invited to address international conferences, and to advise agencies internationally as well as in the UK on sleep-related scientific and social issues.

Its ultimate mission is to improve the understanding and evidence-based management of insomnia and chronic sleep disturbance through applied research, knowledge transfer and professional training.

Funding Sources

The research has always attracted substantial external funding, but was initially developed from core-funded infrastructure from HEFEC QR funding. Over the years, the University has supported the provision of laboratory space, and has used its own Development Fund money to support research studentships for the Centre. SRIF money has been allocated to support the complete refurbishment of the building where the Centre is housed, and to provide equipment. Supported by the University, the Sleep Research Centre at Loughborough has become one of the most renowned in its field.

The Centre has attracted funding from both MRC and ESRC, reflecting the cross-disciplinary nature of their work. Other funding has come from the Wellcome Trust, the EU, UK government departments and agencies, and from the private sector. Applied research in the Centre's programme includes work on driving and sleepiness, sleepiness at work, the social neuroscience of sleep loss, and work, stimulation and distraction.