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Review Article

Racial/Ethnic and Social Inequities in Sleep Medicine: The Tip of the Iceberg?

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Abstract

Purpose

It is known that racial disparities exist in terms of disease prevalence and access to health care. However, the link between race/ethnicity and sleep quality is often under-recognized.

Results

Current evidence shows that differences exist between Blacks and Whites in terms of sleep duration, sleep quality, and the likelihood of acquiring a sleep disorder. It has been argued that the adverse effects of ethnicity on sleep quality or duration interact with other social or personal factors (such as employment) and that the effects of these factors are interactive and need to be analyzed simultaneously. There is a growing body of evidence showing that disturbed sleep is a mediator of the effect of environmental stressors on personal health, which is more pronounced in ethnic minorities.

Conclusions

These findings support the notion that perceived discrimination or unfair treatment has significant associations with complaints of sleep disturbance and disturbed objective measures of sleep quality and sleep architecture. Hence, greater efforts are needed to demonstrate how racial/ethnic factors influence different sleep processes.

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Keywords

Disparities; Ethnicity; Minorities; Race; Sleep

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