



Oct 01, 2019 09:11 BST

“Sexist sleep stigma” is holding women back in the workplace

- 8 in 10 working women suffer persistent sleep problems
- Poor sleep causes one in four women to underachieve and lack confidence at work
- “Sleep stigma” is rife and is exacerbating gender inequality in workplaces
- Calls for businesses and Government to prioritise sleep

supportive programmes

The report, titled *Ending Sleep Stigma in the Workplace*, from Loughborough University and commissioned by bed retailer Dreams looked at the impact of sleep on people's working lives and careers.

It found that 8 in 10 working women suffer persistently poor sleep and over half (54%) are unable to stay awake in the day. Women are disproportionately affected by poor sleep, with three quarters (72%) of the female employees who took part in the study reported a "medium" sleep debt, compared to just over half (55%) of men.

The study is the first of its kind to discover a direct link between poor sleep and inequality in the workplace. It reveals the sleep deficit is having a detrimental impact on the career progression of female employees.

- **Performance:** One in four (24%) women say poor sleep led them to not complete planned projects at work, while one in five (17%) say it led them to underachieve at work. Poor sleep had a greater impact on women's ability to do their work carefully (37% vs 21%), handle their workload (32% vs 21%) do their job well (23% vs 10%) and work quickly (27% vs 17% compared with men^[1]).
- **Workplace wellbeing:** One in four (23%) women report suffering with low self-esteem in the workplace following a bad night's sleep, while a quarter (27%) say poor sleep has led them to experience anxious thoughts.

With businesses of all sizes committing to delivering greater gender equality in their workplaces, companies are overlooking sleep as an opportunity to deliver greater gender parity.

Almost two thirds of business leaders (63%) say sleep is the sole responsibility of the individual and more than a third (39%) agree there is nothing they can do to help their employees' sleep health. Just 3% of companies have a sleep policy in place, despite guidance released from Public Health England last year that businesses need to do more to improve their employees' sleep.

The imbalance is being exacerbated further as female employees do feel unable to raise their sleep difficulties with their bosses. Half of women (49%) said they would feel uncomfortable talking to their manager about difficulties sleeping, while only two in five (42%) men felt the same. That's because a quarter (25%) of women didn't think their boss would understand, while a further quarter (27%) didn't think their boss would be able to help. As many as one in five (20%) women didn't speak up because they didn't want their colleagues to think they were struggling at work.

As a result, women are not getting the support they need to reach their career goals. In fact, [one in five \(18%\) women believe tiredness in the workplace would hold them back career-wise.](#)

With women more impacted by poor sleep than men, the report concludes that a sexist "sleep stigma" is rife across business and is hindering progress to gender parity at work.

Despite the concerning status quo, the report identifies a clear opportunity for businesses to prioritise sleep health – with women with the most to gain:

- **Performance:** Women were more productive and achieved more than men after a good night's sleep (34%vs 26%).
- **Stress:** Women are more likely to feel less stressed after a good night's sleep compared to men (34% vs 28%).
- **Workplace wellbeing:** Almost half of women (44%) said they approached the next day with a more positive mindset after a good night's sleep.

Dr Pixie McKenna, Sleep Expert for Dreams, said: *"Sleep is fundamental to everyone's good physical and mental health. But this research shows women are disproportionately impacted by persistent sleep problems and it is having a detrimental effect on their health, wellbeing and careers."*

"The good news is there are lots of ways that women can take control of their sleep health – whether making changes to their at-home-routines or championing a sleep supportive culture in their workplace."

Mike Logue, Chief Executive of Dreams, said: *“Now more than ever companies are rightly trying to address gender imbalance in their workforces. But they are overlooking sleep as an important factor that is currently holding women back. It is seen as an issue for the bedroom, not the boardroom. We need collective effort from businesses, employees and the Government to promote sleep supportive cultures in workplaces so everyone gets the benefits of better sleep.”*

Rebecca Davies, 32, from Llanelli Wales, took part in the Sleep Better Study: *“The study made me realise the impact poor sleep was having on my working day and my career. Now I’m tracking my sleep and taking steps to improve it I’ve found I’m more productive and more positive at work, I feel more satisfied in my job and have a lot more energy I can put towards reaching my career goals.”*

In response to the report’s findings, Dreams has launched its Sleep Better Programme to help support its 2,000 employees across the UK to sleep better. The programme includes:

- -Access to a 24-hour sleep helpline for all staff
- -Sleep health education training for managers
- -Monthly sleep surgeries with Dr Pixie McKenna for all staff, giving them bespoke sleep guidance
- -Sleep trackers for all staff to build understanding about their sleep patterns and how to improve it
- -Sleep to be integrated into professional development conversations
- -Email amnesty to discourage out-of-hours working

About Dreams:

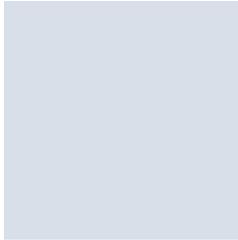
Established in 1985, Dreams is the UK’s number one specialist bed retailer.

Headquartered at ‘Bedquarters’ in High Wycombe, and with 1,850 employees across the UK, Dreams sells 10,000 mattresses, bases and headboards per week to customers nationwide through its store network of 190 sites and online.

Dreams is a proud British business, committed to continue making its products in this country, as it does now at the Dreams Bed Factory in Oldbury.

At the factory, Dreams manufactures over 200,000 mattresses a year and over 160,000 beds. These products are then distributed via nine dedicated delivery service to customers anywhere in the country via a fleet of over 100 Dreams delivery vans.

Contacts



Kelly Davis

Press Contact

Marketing Communications Manager

Media Requests

kellydavis@dreams.co.uk