

Sleepless in Chennai: The Consequences of Sleep Deprivation among the Poor

Abstract:

We know little about how people sleep in the developing world and about the medium-run impacts of improving sleep from any context. To study the impacts of improving sleep among the urban poor, we hired 450 individuals as data-entry workers and offered a random subset of (i) devices to improve their home-sleep environment, (ii) financial incentives to increase sleep, and (iii) the opportunity to take a short afternoon nap. We present five sets of results. First, workers are severely sleep-deprived at baseline: they sleep 5.6 hours per night on average, despite spending 8 hours in bed, implying a strikingly low sleep efficiency. Second, our night-sleep interventions increased sleep by 21 and 38 minutes respectively, effects larger than those typically achieved by sleeping pills. Finally, we will present the impacts of increased night sleep and naps on (a) health and well-being, (b) labor supply, productivity, and earnings, and (c) decision-making.