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# National study of sleep health for student servicemembers/veterans

**PUBLICATION:** Journal of American College Health**AUTHORS:**Phillip A. Morris, Keston G. Lindsay, Patience Agana,  
Kathryn Watson, and Dale Willson**DATE:** November 2023**LINK:** <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/07448481.2023.2280778?scroll=top&needAccess=true>**KEYWORDS:** college students' sleep health, propensity score matching, student veteran sleep health, student veteran wellness**ABSTRACT:**

**Objective:** Investigate sleep health for student servicemember/veterans (SSM/Vs). **Method:** Data from the National College Health Assessment was used, including 88,178 participants in 2018 and 67,972 in 2019. Propensity score matching was used to compare SSM/Vs (n = 2984) to their most similar non-SSM/V counterparts (n = 1,355). Responses were analyzed using a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA). **Results:** SSM/Vs reported significantly higher levels of some sleep health issues than the matched peer group, including more instances of trouble falling asleep, waking too early, and higher rates of insomnia and sleep disorders. However, SSM/Vs reported fewer days per week feeling sleepy and similar impacts of sleep issues on academics when compared to the peer group. **Conclusion:** Institutions of higher education should consider training faculty and staff to recognize impacts of poor sleep health for SSM/Vs to establish effective practices to support this unique population."

**RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS:**

- This study delves into the sleep health and academic performance of student servicemembers/veterans (SSM/Vs), considering their elevated rates of disability, mental health issues, trauma exposure, and substance use during military service. Hazardous and non-hazardous military roles of SSM/Vs were compared with those of nonmilitary students using the National College Health Assessment (NCHA).
- Among SSM/Vs, 12.7% reported insomnia, and 9.8% reported other sleep disorders, significantly higher than non-SSM/Vs (6.4% and 3.4%, respectively). The study isolates the impact of military service on sleep health, highlighting the need to address these issues and improve sleep-related interventions for this population.
- This research addresses a literature gap by providing valuable insights into the wellness of SSM/Vs and offering targeted strategies for campus health professionals, faculty, and staff. The findings emphasize the importance of enhancing awareness and support mechanisms for SSM/Vs in navigating sleep challenges and adapting to academic demands.

## Implications

### FOR PRACTICE

This research underscores the critical need for institutions of higher education to proactively address sleep health issues among Student Servicemembers/Veterans (SSM/Vs). The study, which investigated sleep health and academic performance, particularly in the context of elevated rates of disability, mental health issues, trauma exposure, and substance use among SSM/Vs during military service, calls for targeted strategies. The significantly higher prevalence of insomnia and other sleep disorders among SSM/Vs compared to non-SSM/Vs highlights the necessity of developing and implementing interventions specifically tailored to this population. Campus health professionals, faculty, and staff should be equipped with training to recognize and respond to the impacts of poor sleep health on SSM/Vs. Overall, the findings suggest a holistic approach, combining targeted interventions, faculty/staff training, and increased awareness, to effectively support the sleep health and well-being of SSM/Vs in the higher education setting.

### FOR POLICY

Recognizing the significantly higher prevalence of insomnia and other sleep disorders among SSM/Vs compared to their non-SSM/V counterparts, the findings advocate for the formulation of policies tailored specifically to the unique needs of this population. To enact effective change, policies should include provisions for equipping campus health professionals, faculty, and staff with specialized training to recognize and respond to the nuanced impacts of poor sleep health on SSM/Vs. Furthermore, there is a call for policies that foster increased awareness and support mechanisms, acknowledging and addressing the distinct challenges faced by SSM/Vs in navigating sleep issues while adapting to the demands of academic life.

### FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

There are several avenues for future research to explore: 1) longitudinal studies could be employed to assess the long-term effectiveness of implemented policies and interventions in improving the sleep health and overall well-being of SSM/Vs. Understanding the sustained impact of these policies over time will contribute to the refinement and optimization of support mechanisms; 2) comparative studies across different institutions and their varying policy approaches could provide valuable insights into best practices and inform the development of standardized guidelines; future research could delve into the role of technology-based interventions in supporting SSM/Vs' sleep health, considering the prevalence of digital solutions; and 3) exploring the reciprocal relationship between sleep health and academic performance over an extended period which could deepen our understanding of the complex dynamics involved in sleep health for post-traditional students.

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