

# motivated to change habits that drive sleep insufficiency in effort to improve their academic performance.

## Informing a Population-Level Intervention to Improve the Sleep of Airmen: A qualitative analysis

### INTRO

- U.S. military leadership has demonstrated increased interest in sleep, noting sleep insufficiency as a main threat to military readiness and associated health and performance deficits.
- During technical training, Airmen are provided with ample time for sleep; however, preliminary research has shown that 50% are sleeping less than 6.5 hours per night and most report problematic sleep behaviors.
- The current study is a qualitative analysis of focus groups with Airmen involved in technical training aimed at evaluating sleep to inform the development of a brief population level sleep intervention

### METHODS

1. n = 30 technical school trainees (19 men), each attending 1 of 3 focus groups
2. Participants responded to questions about sleep knowledge, facilitators/barriers to sleep, and motivation to change sleep behavior
3. Content analysis using a directed approach was employed to code and analyze data; based on socioecological model framework

### RESULTS

- Trainees recognized negative sleep behaviors (e.g., excessive caffeine use, poor stimulus control, inconsistent sleep schedule) and identified behaviors that could improve their sleep.
- Sleep was often intentionally sacrificed for the prioritization of late night studying and socializing (in-person and social media/video gaming).
- Late night noise, swing shifts, and curfew checks were identified as organizational barriers to good sleep.
- Academic performance and physical recovery were primary motivators for improving sleep.
- Trainees expressed an overall interest and willingness to change behavior to improve sleep

### DISCUSSION

- Technical training is an ideal environment for the development of a population-level intervention for improving sleep early in an Airman's career.
- Initial focus groups validated leadership's concern about sleep insufficiency in tech training, revealed several intervention targets, and showed that Airmen are likely willing to make small changes to their sleep habits.

Ellis, J. M., Brown, L., Joiner, A., Ruggieri, J., Patience, M., Blue Star, J., & Talcott, G. W.  
Corresponding Author: Jordan M. Ellis, PhD, Capt, USAF, BSC; jordanellisphd@gmail.com

### Quotes from Airmen

#### Motivation:

*I definitely don't think that anybody thinks about sleep, but we just – as we progress through our classes and we realize just the gravity of our job, we realize how much responsibility we have; honestly, the dangers, the things like that. And we're making that conscious decision that "Alright, I need to be 100% in order to make sure that when I do my job that I'm also 100% in the team."*

#### Poor Stimulus Control:

*...some weekends I'll stay up until four o'clock and then I'll sleep in until like maybe 10 [am], and then I'll go about my day then I do play video games because that's what I talked about my friends back home.*

#### Excessive Caffeine Use:

*...the last...three months or so, because I'm always tired during class, especially when I'm doing mandatory PT [physical training] at 12:30...I'll have like an energy drink... I have an energy drink every 2-3 days a week, that's five energy drinks throughout the day... I relax over the weekend Saturday and Sunday and then I start again*

#### Inconsistent Sleep Schedule:

*I'm just tired all the time. And there's some days where maybe like Friday or Saturday I'll try to go to bed early, but then I end up sleeping in like 12 hours.*



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