

Sleep deprivation can lead to serious health issues: MMA

Rajvinder Singh
20-10- 2022 09:44 AM



Pix for visual purpose only/PEXELSPIX

PETALING JAYA: Sleep deprivation is a serious medical condition that can potentially cost the economy billions of ringgit in lost productivity, apart from leading to chronic diseases and conditions such as Type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease, obesity and depression.

It can also contribute to road crashes, warned Malaysian Medical Association (MMA) president Dr Muruga Raj Rajathurai.

While no government studies have been conducted in Malaysia on the lack of sleep and its contributory factors or repercussions, a "Malaysia's Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality 2019" survey found

that 17% of employees felt fatigued daily, while the highest percentage of employees reporting poor or very poor quality of sleep were those in the 18 to 20, 21 to 25 and 26 to 30 age groups.

“Sleep deprivation is an issue that is often ignored. But when examined closely, it is frequently the root cause of decreased productivity, injuries, accidents and mistakes that cost companies millions of ringgit each year,” Muruga told *theSun*.

The Malaysia’s Healthiest Workplace by AIA Vitality 2019 survey analysed the productivity of 230 Malaysian companies as well as the health of their 17,595 employees.

Of the employees, 53% who were polled said they get less than seven hours of sleep every 24 hours.

Studies have shown that sleep deprivation costs the typical Fortune 500 company approximately US\$80 million (RM377.8 million) annually. While there is no specific breakdown for Malaysia, the country has two companies on the list – Petronas and Maybank.

Muruga said insufficient sleep can affect hormone production, including that of growth hormones and testosterone.

It can also cause the body to release additional stress hormones, such as norepinephrine and cortisol.

“Sleep is an important component of strengthening the immune system, which if weakened, can cause a person to contract infections more easily.

“Poor sleep hygiene, lifestyle choices, sleep disorders and certain work obligations are among some of the causes of sleep deprivation. Stress can also keep a person up at night.”

He warned Malaysians not to use digital devices before bedtime.

“Several studies have shown that exposure to blue light from digital devices such as smartphones and computers can affect melatonin production and disrupt the body’s circadian rhythm,” Muruga said.

He said ageing is also another factor. Older people can have issues getting to sleep for a variety of reasons.

“A person suffering from sleep deprivation should first acknowledge the issue and seek help by going to a doctor. It is best to see a general practitioner first, and then be referred to a specialist if needed.”

He added that if a person’s work involves driving, it could increase the risk of road crashes and put others in danger.

Sleep deprivation can also affect work performance and productivity.

Muruga said a person with insufficient sleep can have difficulty concentrating, communicating, learning and making good decisions.

He said relationships can also be affected as poor sleep has a direct effect on a person’s mood.

“Sleep deprivation can also impact the economy due to lower productivity.

“According to the Sleep Research Society in Australia, the estimated overall cost of inadequate sleep in that country in 2016 to 2017 (population: 24.8 million) was A\$45.21 billion (RM135 billion).

“Research by Marco Hafner et al reported that the US economy can experience losses of up to US\$411 billion annually due to insufficient sleep.

“On an annual basis, the US loses an equivalent of about 1.23 million working days due to insufficient sleep. Japan loses on average 604,000 working days per year. The UK and Germany have similar

working time loss, with 207,000 and 209,000 days respectively," Muruga said.

He said another research study published in the American Psychological Association reported the estimated cost of productivity loss due to disturbed sleep in the US as US\$2,516 (RM11,880) per employee.

He added that a decrease in productivity related to tiredness or sleepiness is estimated at 4.5 to 6%.