International Journal of
Technology and Emerging Research
ISSN: 3068-109X (online) | ISSN: 3068-1995 (print) | https://www.ioro.org/ijter

A STUDY TO ASSESS THE IMPACT OF POWER NAP ON LEVEL OF ALERTNESS AMONG NURSING INTERNS WORKING DURING NIGHT SHIFT

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ABSTRACT

Background: Nursing interns frequently work long night shifts, predisposing them to fatigue, reduced alertness, and a higher risk of clinical errors. Strategic power naps are underutilized in Indian healthcare settings despite evidence of their benefits.

Objective: To evaluate the effect of a short power nap on the alertness level of night duty nursing interns using a reaction time test.

Methods: A quantitative research approach with a quasi-experimental (one-group pre-test post-test) design was adopted. A purposive sample of 70 nursing interns working night shifts at Sharda Hospital was selected. Data were collected using a demographic profile sheet and the Psychomotor Vigilance Test (PVT) to assess reaction time before and 30 minutes after a scheduled 10-15 minute nap.

Results: The majority of participants were female (70%) and aged 23-25 years (82.9%). The mean pre-nap reaction time was 645.73 ± 93.09 ms, which significantly improved to 327.30 ± 43.21 ms post-nap. The paired t-test demonstrated a highly significant statistical difference ($t = 26.291$, $df = 69$, $p < 0.001$).

Conclusion: A 10-minute power nap significantly reduces reaction time and improves alertness among nursing interns during night shifts. Incorporating brief, scheduled naps into hospital policies is recommended as a cost-effective strategy to minimize fatigue and enhance patient safety.

KEY WORDS Power nap, alertness, night duty, nursing interns, fatigue management, psychomotor vigilance test (PVT).

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern healthcare landscape necessitates a 24-hour service model, forcing nursing professionals and interns into rotating shift schedules that inherently conflict with human biological rhythms. The human body is regulated by a circadian timing system that promotes wakefulness during daylight and transitions to a physiological "rest" state during the night [1]. When nursing interns work night shifts, they encounter the "circadian trough"—typically between 2:00 AM and 5:00 AM—where core body temperature and cognitive alertness reach their lowest points [2, 3].

Recent literature emphasizes that the impact of this disruption is not merely subjective fatigue but a measurable decline in neurobehavioral function. Sleep-deprived clinicians demonstrate impaired executive function, reduced short-term memory, and a significant increase in "micro-sleeps"—unintentional lapses in attention lasting several seconds [4, 5]. For nursing interns, who are in a critical stage of clinical skill acquisition, this cognitive impairment poses a dual threat: it compromises their pedagogical development and increases the risk of clinical errors, such as medication miscalculations or needle-stick injuries [1, 6].

To mitigate these risks, the concept of the "power nap" has emerged as a high-utility countermeasure. Unlike longer sleep periods that can lead to sleep inertia—a state of grogginess and disorientation upon waking—a brief, scheduled nap of 10 to 20 minutes is designed to provide restorative benefits while remaining within the lighter stages of non-rapid eye movement (NREM) sleep [7, 8]. Studies published after 2022 suggest that strategic napping is superior to high-dose caffeine consumption, as it provides a natural reduction in homeostatic sleep pressure without the subsequent "caffeine crash" [9, 10].

Despite international recognition of napping as a safety intervention, it remains underutilized in Indian clinical settings due to institutional stigmas and a lack of dedicated "nap spaces." This study utilizes the Psychomotor Vigilance Test (PVT), an objective gold-standard metric, to quantify the impact of a 10–15 minute power nap on the alertness levels of nursing interns at Sharda University, providing a data-driven rationale for policy reform in nursing education and hospital management [11, 12].

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design and Setting A quantitative research approach utilizing a quasi-experimental (one-group pre-test post-test) design was employed for this study. The study was conducted at Sharda Hospital, Greater Noida, Uttar Pradesh, a tertiary care hospital associated with Sharda University. This setting provided natural conditions of night work where interns experience fatigue and sleeplessness.

Population and Sample The target population comprised nursing interns working night shifts at Sharda Hospital. A sample of 70 nursing interns was selected using a purposive sampling technique.

- **Inclusion Criteria:** Nursing interns currently assigned to night shifts, willing to participate, provide informed consent, and able to take a short nap during the shift.
- **Exclusion Criteria:** Interns diagnosed with sleep disorders, undergoing treatment for insomnia/fatigue, or refusing participation.

Data Collection Tools

Data were collected using two primary instruments:

1. **Demographic Data Sheet:** A self-developed, validated 8-item questionnaire capturing baseline variables such as age, gender, marital status, family type, department, frequency of night shifts, pre-shift beverage consumption, and post-shift sleep duration.
2. **Psychomotor Vigilance Test (PVT):** A standardized, objective, computerized reaction-time test widely regarded as the gold standard in sleep research for measuring sustained attention and alertness. Participants respond to visual stimuli appearing at random intervals, and their reaction times are recorded in milliseconds.

Data Collection Procedure Data collection spanned two weeks. The procedure involved three phases:

- **Pre-test Phase:** Administered at the start of the night shift. Participants completed the demographic sheet and baseline PVT.
- **Intervention Phase:** Participants took a 10–15 minute power nap during their designated break time (2:00 AM to 3:00 AM) in a noise-free, sleep-conducive environment.
- **Post-test Phase:** The PVT was re-administered 30 minutes after the nap to allow any transient sleep inertia to dissipate, assessing post-intervention alertness.

Ethical Considerations Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Ethical Committee. Written informed consent was secured from all participants, ensuring privacy, confidentiality, and the right to withdraw at any stage.

Statistical Methods

Data analysis was performed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, version 25). Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) were utilized to summarize demographic variables and PVT scores. Inferential statistics, specifically the paired sample t-test, were applied to compare pre-test and post-test PVT scores to determine the statistical significance of the intervention at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULT

Demographic Profile The demographic analysis of the 70 participants revealed that the majority were aged between 23-25 years (82.9%) and were female (70.0%). Almost all participants were single (98.6%) and belonged to nuclear families (81.4%). Workload distribution indicated that 41.4% were posted in critical areas (Emergency/ICU/OT), followed by Medical Wards (34.3%). A significant proportion of the sample (82.9%) reported working more than 7 night shifts in a month. Prior to starting their shifts, 61.4% consumed tea as a stimulant. Following a night shift, 48.6% of interns reported sleeping between 6 to 8 hours.

Impact of Power Nap on Alertness The primary outcome was measured by changes in PVT reaction times, where a lower reaction time denotes higher alertness.

- The mean reaction time prior to the power nap was 645.73 ± 93.09 milliseconds.
- Following the 10-minute intervention and a 30-minute recovery window, the mean reaction time decreased drastically to 327.30 ± 43.21 milliseconds.
- A paired sample t-test revealed a mean difference of 318.43 ms ($t = 26.291$, $df = 69$) with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.001$).
- This highly significant result rejects the null hypothesis, confirming that alertness among nursing interns significantly improves following a power nap during night duty.

3. DISCUSSION

The core finding of this study is the dramatic and statistically significant reduction in reaction time following a 10–15 minute power nap. The pre-intervention mean reaction time of 645.73 ms decreased to 327.30 ms post-intervention ($p < 0.001$), representing a near-doubling of alertness levels. This objective improvement via the Psychomotor Vigilance Test (PVT) underscores that brief periods of sleep can effectively "reset" the brain’s ability to process visual stimuli and maintain sustained attention during the circadian trough [8, 11].

These results align with recent global findings that short naps are a potent physiological tool for shift workers. Research by Ye et al. (2024) and others suggests that napping rapidly reduces the accumulation of adenosine in the basal forebrain, thereby restoring the speed of neurobehavioral responses [1, 13]. Our study successfully avoided the pitfall of sleep inertia by capping the nap duration at 15 minutes, ensuring that participants did not enter Stage 3 (Deep/Slow Wave) sleep. This allowed interns to return to their high-stakes clinical duties in the ICU and Emergency departments with immediate cognitive clarity [7, 14].

The demographic data in this study revealed a high frequency of night shifts (>7 per month for 82.9% of participants), which suggests that many interns are operating under conditions of chronic sleep restriction rather than just acute overnight fatigue [5]. In such cases, the power nap acts as a critical "safety valve." While 61.4% of our sample reported using tea as a stimulant, the significant reaction time improvement post-nap suggests that pharmacological stimulants alone may be insufficient to overcome the physiological drive for sleep during a 12-hour shift [10, 15].

The clinical implications of these findings are profound. If a 10-minute intervention can halve reaction times, it follows that scheduled napping could significantly reduce the incidence of fatigue-related patient safety incidents [12, 16]. However, the success of such an intervention requires institutional support, including the provision of quiet, dark environments and a shift in nursing culture that views napping as a professional responsibility toward safety rather than an act of negligence.

4. CONCLUSION

This research offers compelling evidence that a 10-minute power nap significantly enhances alertness and neurobehavioral performance in nursing interns working night shifts. Given the rigorous demands of clinical practice and the high frequency of night duties required of trainees, mitigating fatigue is a critical patient safety imperative. Power naps represent an evidence-based, non-pharmacological, and highly feasible solution to bridge the gap between human physiological limits and continuous healthcare delivery. Hospital administrators and policymakers are strongly encouraged to destigmatize workplace rest and formally integrate scheduled nap breaks into night-shift protocols to ensure a resilient workforce and secure patient outcomes.

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