

Sleepy workers impacting gross domestic product

By Sendhil Mullainathan, New York Times

The problem is very simple: Many of us need more sleep.

Here's an alarming statistic: A survey by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention found that one in 25 people admitted to having fallen asleep while driving during the previous month. To put that in perspective, mathematical models based on this data imply that an estimated 15 to 33 percent of all fatal crashes in the United States might involve a drowsy driver. But even that may be an underestimate, as some people who fall asleep at the wheel may be sheepish about acknowledging as much in a survey.

What does sleep have to do with economics? Doesn't it sit squarely in the realm of physiology?

First, the economic consequences of inadequate sleep are surely huge. There may be more sleepy workers than drivers. In one month in 2008, a poll showed that 29 percent of workers had fallen asleep or had been very sleepy at work. The effects can add up: one study in Australia calculated the cost of sleeplessness at 0.8 percent of the country's gross domestic product.

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