



## Original Article

## Pre-awake light exposure and sleep disturbances: findings from the HEIJO-KYO cohort



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## ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** To evaluate the associations between pre-awake light (PAL) exposure and subjective and objective measures of sleep quality.

**Methods:** In this cross-sectional study of 1108 elderly participants (mean age, 71.9 years), we measured bedroom light intensity using a bedside light meter for two nights and sleep quality using actigraphy and a questionnaire. PAL was determined as the 2h-average light intensity before rise time, and sleep disturbance was defined as the Pittsburgh sleep quality index score  $\geq 6$ .

**Results:** Sleep disturbance prevalence increased with increased PAL exposure ( $P = 0.002$ ). In multivariable models adjusted for potential confounders, the odds ratio (OR) for sleep disturbances was significantly higher in the highest quartile PAL group (Q4) than in the lowest quartile group (Q1) (OR, 1.65; 95% CI, 1.16–2.34). This association occurred independent of post-bedtime light exposure; and was stronger in the later chronotype group ( $n = 556$ ) (OR, 1.80; 95% CI, 1.05–3.09) than in the earlier chronotype group ( $n = 552$ ) (OR, 1.64; 95% CI, 1.01–2.64). Actigraphic sleep efficiency in the Q4 group was significantly lower by 2.6% (95% CI, 1.3–3.8) than that in the Q1 group. Moreover, longer wake after sleep onset by 7.5 min (95% CI, 2.8–12.2) and sleep onset latency by 0.2 log min (95% CI, 0.1–0.4) were observed in the Q4 group than the Q1 group.

**Conclusions:** Higher PAL exposure was significantly associated with a higher prevalence of sleep disturbances, independent of post-bedtime light exposure. Consistent results were observed in the actigraphy analysis.

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## 1. Introduction

Sleep disturbances are common in elderly and young populations, with prevalence estimates as high as 40% in recent years [1–4]. Poor sleep is associated with increased risk of a variety of diseases, such as depression, dementia, and cardiovascular diseases [5–7]. Several factors increase the risk of sleep disturbances; and circadian misalignment between internal biological and external environments is an important risk factor [8]. Chronic circadian misalignment (typically related to night-shift work or clock-gene variants), is associated with disrupted function of suprachiasmatic nucleus (SCN), the master biological clock, and increased risk of sleep disturbances [9–11].

Light exposure at an inappropriate timing against the sleep–wake cycles can lead to the circadian misalignment [12,13]. Numerous experimental studies suggested that nocturnal inputs of light information into the SCN increase core body temperature, suppress melatonin secretion, and stimulate brain activity under controlled laboratory conditions [14,15]. In epidemiological studies, sleep quality was affected by the light exposure at night [16,17]. To date, most studies reporting the effects of nighttime light exposure on sleep quality focused on light exposure around bedtime. To our knowledge, no studies have evaluated the effects of light exposure during the pre-awake period, which is several hours before waking up.

In our previous publication, we reported that humans are commonly exposed to pre-awake light (PAL), the main source of which is morning sunlight through the bedroom window [18]. Morning sunlight was believed to possess health benefits; however, human lifestyle in modern society often forces individuals to stay up late, resulting in late chronotype [19]. Therefore, PAL exposure may disturb circadian physiology and sleep in humans. In this

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cross-sectional study of 1108 elderly individuals, we evaluated the associations of PAL exposure measured using a bedside light meter with subjective and actigraphic measures of sleep quality.

## 2. Participants and methods

### 2.1. Participants

A total of 1127 community-based elderly subjects ( $\geq 60$  years) were voluntarily enrolled in a study entitled “Housing Environments and Health Investigation among Japanese Older People in Nara, Kansai Region: a prospective community-based cohort (HEIJO-KYO) study” between September and March in 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, and 2014 [20]. Among these, 1108 home-dwelling participants of the HEIJO-KYO cohort with complete measurement sets of bedroom light intensities and sleep questionnaires were included in this cross-sectional analysis. The study protocol was approved by the medical ethics committee of Nara Medical University.

### 2.2. Measurement of PAL exposure

Bedroom nighttime light intensity (self-reported bedtime to rising time) was measured for two consecutive nights at 1-min intervals using a portable light meter (LX-28SD; Sato Shouji Inc., Kanagawa, Japan), which was placed facing the ceiling at the head of the participant's bed 60 cm above the floor [illuminance sensitivity, 0–100,000 lux; resolution, 1 lux (under 2000 lux); and accuracy,  $\pm$  (4% reading + 2 digits, under 2000 lux)]. PAL exposure was treated as the 2 h-average light intensity before rising time; post-bedtime light exposure was the 4 h-average light intensity after bedtime.

### 2.3. Measurements of sleep quality

Subjective sleep quality was measured using the Pittsburgh sleep quality index (PSQI) questionnaire [21]. Specifically, sleep quality over the previous month was determined using seven subscales that measured different components of sleep: sleep quality, latency, duration, efficiency, disturbances, sleep medication use, and daytime dysfunction. Each component was scored from 0 to 3, with 3 indicating the worst sleep quality. Sleep disturbances were determined as a global score  $\geq 6$  and/or a previous diagnosis of insomnia and current sleep medication use.

Objective sleep quality was measured using an actigraph (Actiwatch 2; Respironics Inc., PA, USA), worn on the non-dominant wrist, at 1-min intervals on two consecutive nights. The sleep statuses at each epoch, sleep onset, and sleep termination were determined by Actiware version 5.5 (Respironics Inc.) using the default algorithm. Epochs with higher-than-moderate-activity counts (40 counts/min) were treated as awake. Sleep onset was defined as the first minute followed by a 10-min period of immobility, comprising  $\geq 4$  counts/min. Sleep termination was determined as the last minute following a 10-min period of immobility. Four actigraphic sleep parameters were determined using the following objective data (sleep status and sleep onset and termination) and self-reported data (bedtime and rising time): sleep efficiency (SE) [percentage calculated from time spent sleeping (below the activity threshold of 40 counts/min) between sleep onset and sleep offset divided by the time between bedtime and rising time]; wake after sleep onset (WASO) [time spent awake (activity above the threshold of 40 counts/min) between sleep onset and rising time]; sleep onset latency (SOL) [time between bedtime and sleep onset]; and total sleep time (TST) [sleep duration (time between bedtime and rising time) multiplied by SE].

### 2.4. Measurement of covariates

Body mass index (BMI) was calculated as body weight divided by the square of body height ( $\text{kg}/\text{m}^2$ ). Smoking and drinking habits and medication use were evaluated using a self-administered questionnaire. The presence of hypertension was determined on the basis of medical history and current use of antihypertensive drugs. Diabetes mellitus was determined on the basis of medical history, current use of anti-diabetic therapy, and glycated hemoglobin levels  $\geq 6.5\%$  as per the National Glycohemoglobin Standardization Program value. Daytime physical activity was measured at 1-min intervals using an actigraph (Actiwatch 2) between rise time and bedtime. As an index of melatonin secretion, urinary 6-sulfatoxymelatonin excretion was measured from urine samples collected overnight as described in our previous publication [20]. Day lengths (sunrise to sunset), based on the measurement days in Nara, Japan, were extracted from the website of the National Astronomical Observatory of Japan.

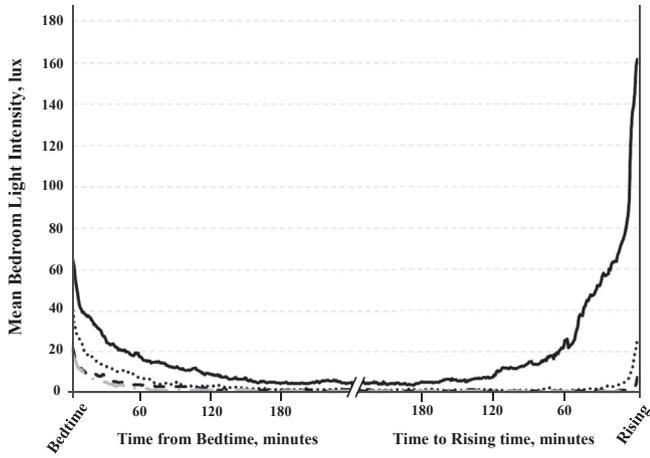
### 2.5. Statistical analyses

Participants were divided into quartiles according to their PAL intensity (lowest–highest, Q1–Q4) and we analyzed association trends for the variables using linear and logistic regression models or the Jonckheere–Terpstra test, as appropriate. In the logistic regression analysis and analysis of covariance, odds ratios (OR) for sleep disturbances and mean values of sleep quality in relation to quartiles of PAL intensities were adjusted for age ( $\geq 70$  years), gender (male vs. female), BMI ( $\geq 25 \text{ kg}/\text{m}^2$ ), current smoking status (yes vs. no), alcohol consumption ( $\geq 30 \text{ g}/\text{day}$ ), hypertension (yes vs. no), diabetes (yes vs. no), daytime physical activity (per 100 counts/min), melatonin secretion (per  $\log \mu\text{g}$ ), bedtime (per 1 h delay), rising time (per 1 h delay), day length (per quartile), and post-bedtime light exposure (per quartile). A stratified analysis was performed using the median value of sleep–mid time (earlier vs. later chronotypes). All analyses were performed using SPSS version 23.0 for Windows (IBM-SPSS, Inc., Chicago, IL, USA). A two-sided  $P$  value  $< 0.05$  was considered to be statistically significant.

## 3. Results

The mean age of the 1108 participants was 71.9 (SD, 7.1) years, and 521 (47.0%) individuals were male. Time-dependent changes in light intensity from bedtime to rise time between the lowest quartile group (Q1) and highest quartile group (Q4) of PAL exposure are shown in Fig. 1. The mean bedroom light intensity of the Q4 group increased from 2-h before rise time; at 30 min before rising time it was over 50 lux. The overall median PAL intensity was 0.7 lux (interquartile range, 0–5.1); the median PAL intensity in Q1 was 0 lux (range,  $<0.004$ ); Q2, 0.2 lux (0.004–0.8); Q3, 1.9 lux (0.8–5.1); and Q4, 11.7 lux ( $>5.1$ ). Higher PAL intensities were significantly associated with older age, lower daytime physical activity, later rising time, and longer day length (Table 1).

The overall prevalence of sleep disturbances was 37.2%; the prevalence of sleep disturbances increased with increasing quartiles of PAL exposure (Q1, 32.2%; Q2, 33.7%, Q3, 37.7%, and Q4, 45.4%;  $P$  for trend = 0.002; Table 2). The unadjusted OR for sleep disturbances was significantly higher in Q4 than in Q1 [OR, 1.75; 95% confidence interval (CI), 1.25–2.47;  $P = 0.001$ ]. This was consistent in the analysis where sleep disturbances were determined using the PSQI score only (prevalence, 35.3%) (OR, 1.71; 95% CI, 1.21–2.42;  $P = 0.002$ ). In addition, this association between PAL exposure and sleep disturbances was consistent in the age- and gender-adjusted model (model 1: OR, 1.66; 95% CI, 1.17–2.36;  $P = 0.004$ ) and multivariable models (model 2: OR, 1.65; 95% CI, 1.16–2.34;



**Fig. 1.** Time-dependent changes in light intensity from bedtime to rising time. The solid line indicates the average pre-awake light intensity in the highest quartile group (Q4); the short-dotted line indicates the average pre-awake light intensity in the second highest quartile group (Q3); the long-dotted line indicates the average pre-awake light intensity in the third highest quartile group (Q2); and the grey-dotted line indicates the average pre-awake light intensity in the lowest quartile group (Q1).

$P = 0.006$ ; model 3: OR, 1.56; 95% CI, 1.07–2.25;  $P = 0.019$ ). Furthermore, after adjusting for post-bedtime light exposure, the results remained significant (model 4: OR, 1.63; 95% CI, 1.10–2.42;  $P = 0.016$ ). When divided into two groups using the median value of sleep-mid time, this association between PAL exposure and sleep disturbance was stronger in the later chronotype group ( $n = 556$ ) (model 2: OR, 1.80; 95% CI, 1.05–3.09;  $P = 0.033$ ) than in the earlier chronotype group ( $n = 552$ ) (model 2: OR, 1.64; 95% CI, 1.01–2.64;  $P = 0.044$ ).

Regarding objective sleep quality, the overall mean SE was 84.7% (SD, 7.6); WASO, 49.6 min (SD, 29.0); SOL, 3.0 log min (SD, 1.0); and TST, 420.1 min (SD, 69.0). Multivariable analysis adjusted for age, gender, BMI, smoking and drinking habits, and sleep medication use, revealed significantly lower SE in Q4 than in Q1 (mean difference: 2.6%; 95% CI, 1.3–3.8;  $P < 0.001$ ) (Table 3). WASO and SOL were significantly longer in Q4 than in Q1 (mean difference: WASO, 7.5 min; 95% CI, 2.8–12.2;  $P = 0.002$ ; SOL, 0.2 log min; 95% CI, 0.1–0.4;  $P = 0.002$ ). In contrast, TST was significantly longer in Q4 than in Q1 (mean difference: 15.1 min; 95% CI, 3.8–26.3;  $P = 0.009$ ).

**4. Discussion**

The results of the present study suggest that higher PAL exposure was significantly associated with a higher prevalence of sleep disturbances in the general elderly population, independent of post-bedtime light exposure and other several potential confounding factors. Quantitative associations between PAL exposure and sleep quality were suggested in the analysis using actigraphy data. Furthermore, the association between PAL exposure and sleep disturbances may be stronger in the later chronotype group than in the earlier chronotype group. This is, to the best of our knowledge, the first report of the association between PAL exposure and sleep quality in a large population.

PAL exposure is common and its intensity seems to be high to disturb sleep. Bedroom light exposure patterns at night include three phenotypes ‘the first-sided’, ‘constant’, and ‘the last-sided’ patterns [22]. ‘The last-sided’ pattern was the PAL exposure in the present study, and humans are exposed to PAL, mainly caused by morning sunlight through the bedroom window. As shown in the figure, the mean bedroom light intensity of the highest quartile PAL group increased beginning 2-h before rising time, reaching over 50 lux 30 min before rising time. These light levels may affect sleep physiology and daytime brain function [12,15]. In addition, PAL exposure may be reduced by blackout curtains, window shutters, or eye masks.

Our data suggested morning sunlight in the bedroom was a potential risk factor for sleep disturbances; however, for a long time, morning sunlight was thought to be beneficial for health [23]. The human circadian timing system developed based on the solar 24-h cycle. However, in modern society, human sleep–wake timing has shifted away from the solar cycle [19]. Therefore, it is possible that morning sunlight can disturb circadian physiology and behaviors, resulting in sleep disturbances. The present study suggested that higher PAL was significantly associated with a higher prevalence of sleep disturbances in our study cohort. Although PAL intensity correlated with post-bedtime light intensity as shown in the figure, the association between PAL exposure and sleep disturbances was independent of post-bedtime light exposure. Notably, in our subgroup analysis, the later chronotype group exhibited a stronger association between PAL exposure and sleep disturbances than the earlier chronotype group. This suggest that PAL exposure may partly explain the underlying mechanism of the previous knowledge of the high prevalence of sleep disturbances in

**Table 1**  
Basic and clinical characteristics according to PAL exposure ( $n = 1108$ ).

Characteristics	Quartiles of PAL intensity (lux) [median, range]				$P_{trend}$
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
	0 [ $<0.004$ ]	0.2 [0.004–0.8]	1.9 [0.8–5.1]	11.7 [ $>5.1$ ]	
No. of participants	289	273	273	273	
Basic parameters					
Age, mean (SD), years	70.9 (7.1)	71.2 (7.1)	72.5 (6.9)	72.9 (7.1)	$<0.001$
Gender, male, number	137 (47.4%)	115 (42.1%)	137 (50.2%)	132 (48.4%)	0.43
Body mass index, mean (SD), kg/m <sup>2</sup>	22.8 (2.9)	23.4 (3.2)	23.0 (3.0)	23.2 (3.1)	0.28
Current smoker, number	12 (4.5%)	15 (5.5%)	13 (4.8%)	15 (5.5%)	0.56
Alcohol consumption ( $\geq 30$ g/day), number	47 (16.3%)	32 (11.7%)	38 (13.9%)	43 (15.8%)	0.97
Clinical parameters					
Hypertension, number	128 (44.3%)	117 (42.9%)	120 (44.0%)	127 (46.5%)	0.57
Diabetes, number	36 (14.3%)	33 (12.1%)	43 (15.8%)	42 (15.4%)	0.18
Daytime physical activity, mean (SD), count/min	312.2 (105.6)	291.2 (99.8)	299.8 (102.1)	279.0 (105.3)	$<0.001$
Melatonin secretion, median (IQR), $\mu\text{g}/\text{night}$	6.7 (3.8, 10.5)	6.4 (4.2, 10.0)	7.1 (4.1, 10.9)	6.8 (4.1, 10.9)	0.31
Bedtime, mean (SD), clock time	22:25 (1:06)	22:36 (1:07)	22:30 (1:11)	22:24 (1:17)	0.73
Rising time, mean (SD), clock time	6:23 (1:01)	6:45 (0:47)	6:55 (0:49)	7:03 (0:57)	$<0.001$
Day length, median (IQR), min	648 (613, 676)	645 (619, 676)	658 (628, 692)	662 (625, 700)	$<0.001$

PAL, pre-awake light; SD, standard deviation; IQR, interquartile range.

**Table 2**  
Odds ratio for sleep disturbances in relation to PAL exposure.

	Quartiles of PAL intensity				P <sub>trend</sub>
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
No. of participants	289	273	273	273	
No. of cases, prevalence	93 (32.2%)	92 (33.7%)	103 (37.7%)	124 (45.4%)	
Unadjusted OR (95% CI)	1.00 (ref)	1.07 (0.75–1.52)	1.28 (0.90–1.81)	1.75 (1.25–2.47)	0.002
	P	0.70	0.17	0.001	
Model 1					
Adjusted OR (95% CI)	1.00 (ref)	1.03 (0.72–1.47)	1.21 (0.85–1.72)	1.66 (1.17–2.36)	0.003
	P	0.88	0.30	0.004	
Model 2					
Adjusted OR (95% CI)	1.00 (ref)	1.02 (0.71–1.47)	1.21 (0.85–1.72)	1.65 (1.16–2.34)	0.003
	P	0.90	0.30	0.006	
Model 3					
Adjusted OR (95% CI)	1.00 (ref)	1.00 (0.69–1.45)	1.19 (0.82–1.72)	1.56 (1.07–2.25)	0.012
	P	0.998	0.35	0.019	
Model 4					
Adjusted OR (95% CI)	1.00 (ref)	1.01 (0.70–1.46)	1.23 (0.84–1.80)	1.63 (1.10–2.42)	0.010
	P	0.96	0.29	0.016	

PAL, pre-awake light; IQR, interquartile range; OR, odds ratio; CI, confidence interval.

Model 1: adjusted for age and gender.

Model 2: adjusted for variables in model 1 plus body mass index, smoking, and drinking.

Model 3: adjusted for variables in model 2 plus hypertension, diabetes, daytime physical activity, melatonin secretion, bedtime, rising time, and day length.

Model 4: adjusted for variables in model 3 plus post-bedtime light exposure.

the late chronotype. Moreover, our result suggests the effects of PAL exposure on sleep quality may be stronger among younger populations whose chronotypes are later than those of our study participants aged older than 60 years. Further epidemiological studies evaluating PAL exposure and sleep quality in younger populations are needed.

The present study included important strengths in that we used objective measures in a large study cohort. First, PAL intensity was measured using a bedside light meter. Most previous studies evaluating the association between nighttime indoor light levels and

health outcomes assessed light levels using self-reported questionnaires; however, self-reported indoor light levels have not been validated [24,25]. Second, our results suggest consistent associations of PAL exposure with both subjective and objective sleep measures. These associations may improve the reliability of our results because some inconsistencies between subjective and objective sleep measures were reported [26]. In addition, our results suggested quantitative associations between PAL exposure and actigraphic measures of sleep quality, specifically an association between PAL exposure and longer sleep durations. This requires further investigation

**Table 3**  
Actigraphic sleep parameters in relation to PAL exposure.

	Quartiles of PAL intensity				P <sub>trend</sub>
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	
Unadjusted	Mean (5%–95% range)				
SE, %	86.2 (85.5, 86.9)	84.9 (83.8, 85.9)	84.3 (83.4, 85.1)	83.4 (82.4, 84.3)	<0.001
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	–1.3 (–2.6, –0.1)	–1.9 (–3.2, –0.7)	–2.8 (–4.1, –1.6)	
	P	0.037	0.003	<0.001	
WASO, min	45.1 (42.1, 48.2)	48.2 (44.8, 51.7)	51.2 (47.5, 54.9)	54.0 (50.4, 57.5)	<0.001
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	3.1 (–1.7, 7.9)	6.0 (1.2, 10.8)	8.8 (4.0, 13.6)	
	P	0.21	0.014	<0.001	
SOL, log min	2.8 (2.7, 2.9)	2.9 (2.7, 3.0)	3.1 (2.9, 3.2)	3.1 (3.0, 3.2)	<0.001
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	0.4 (–0.1, 0.2)	0.2 (0.1, 0.4)	0.3 (0.1, 0.4)	
	P	0.62	0.003	0.001	
TST, min	411.8 (404.0, 419.6)	413.8 (405.5, 422.1)	424.1 (415.9, 432.3)	430.9 (422.6, 439.3)	<0.001
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	2.0 (–9.5, 13.4)	12.3 (0.9, 23.7)	19.1 (7.7, 30.5)	
	P	0.74	0.035	0.001	
Adjusted <sup>a</sup>	Mean (95% CI)				
SE, %	86.1 (85.2, 86.9)	84.7 (83.8, 85.6)	84.4 (83.5, 85.3)	83.5 (82.6, 84.4)	<0.001
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	–1.3 (–2.6, –0.1)	–1.7 (–2.9, –0.4)	–2.6 (–3.8, –1.3)	
	P	0.035	0.009	<0.001	
WASO, min	45.8 (42.6, 49.1)	48.9 (45.6, 52.3)	50.4 (47.1, 53.7)	53.3 (50.0, 56.6)	0.002
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	3.1 (–1.5, 7.8)	4.6 (–0.1, 9.3)	7.5 (2.8, 12.2)	
	P	0.19	0.054	0.002	
SOL, log min	2.8 (2.7, 2.9)	2.9 (2.8, 3.0)	3.0 (2.9, 3.2)	3.1 (3.0, 3.2)	0.001
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	0.03 (–0.1, 0.2)	0.2 (0.1, 0.4)	0.2 (0.1, 0.4)	
	P	0.57	0.010	0.003	
TST, min	413.8 (406.1, 421.6)	415.5 (407.4, 423.5)	422.3 (414.3, 430.3)	428.9 (420.9, 437.0)	0.004
Mean difference, % (95% CI)	reference	1.6 (–9.6, 12.8)	8.5 (–2.7, 19.7)	15.1 (3.8, 26.3)	
	P	0.78	0.14	0.009	

PAL, pre-awake light; SE, sleep efficiency; SOL, sleep-onset latency; WASO, wake after sleep-onset; TST, total sleep time; CI, confidence interval.

<sup>a</sup> Adjusted for age, gender, body mass index, smoking, drinking, and sleep medication.

because long sleep in the elderly may affect health outcomes [27]. Third, the large sample size allowed multivariable statistical models to be constructed that included important confounding factors and enabled stratified analyses based on chronotypes.

Our study has several potential limitations. First, the cross-sectional design limited causality inference for association between PAL exposure and sleep disturbances. Furthermore, prospective studies investigating the influence of PAL exposure on sleep quality are warranted, although a longitudinal association between PAL exposure and metabolic parameters were reported in our previous study [28]. Second, participants were not randomly selected, possibly leading to selection bias. However, body mass index and estimated glomerular filtration rate were similar to the corresponding national data for the elderly Japanese population. Third, bedroom light intensity was measured only over two nights, possibly leading to misclassification of PAL exposure status. Yet, our previous studies reported moderate night-to-night reproducibility of bedroom light intensity [20].

In conclusion, our study suggested that higher PAL exposure was significantly associated with a higher prevalence of sleep disturbances in the general elderly population. This association occurred independent of post-bedtime light exposure and several potential confounding factors, where the association may be stronger in the later chronotype group than in the earlier chronotype group. This suggests that PAL exposure may partly explain the underlying mechanism of the previous knowledge of the high prevalence of sleep disturbances in the late chronotype. Further prospective studies investigating the influence of PAL exposure on sleep quality in younger populations are warranted.

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## Conflict of interest

KO and KS received research grant from YKK AP Inc., Ushio Inc.; Tokyo Electric Power Company; EnviroLife Research Institute Co., Ltd.; and Sekisui Chemical Co., Ltd. YY and NK reported no conflicts of interest

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