

EDUCATION

An Exploration of the Sleeping Habits among the High School Students Enrolled in a Chinese Private School in Cebu City

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Published October 2026

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to explore the sleeping habits of high school students in a Chinese private school located in Cebu City, with an emphasis on understanding how they perceive these sleep patterns to affect their daily academic performance and classroom engagement.

Method: This study utilized the phenomenological study approach where the researchers seek to explore in detail and uncover the experiences of the participants regarding their sleeping habits. It was conducted through one-on-one semi-structured interviews. It was supplemented with data triangulation by interviewing a group of parents and another group of teachers to ensure precision and accuracy. Purposive sampling was based on the following criteria: must be enrolled in a Chinese private school in Cebu City and must be a high school student. A total of ten (10) high school students, with two (2) participants from each grade level (excluding Grade 12). For data triangulation, two (2) focus group discussions (FGD) were conducted, one composed of three (3) parents and the other composed of three (3) teachers. The data were gathered through verbatim transcriptions which were analyzed and interpreted through coding and themes.

Findings: This study revealed four main themes regarding the sleeping habits of high school students at a Chinese private school in Cebu City. The first theme, **Students' Usage of Time**, highlights how *bedtime procrastination* and *academic cramming* cause students to sleep late. The second theme, **Effects of Less Sleep**, shows how this lack of rest leads to *physical fatigue*, *mental fatigue*, and *strained family interactions*. To handle these daily challenges, the third theme, **Coping with Sleep Deprivation**, explains the students' survival strategies, such as *keeping awake in class*, *trying to fix sleep schedules*, and *napping*. Finally, the fourth theme, **Self-Realization**, captures the students' growing awareness of their habits, showing improvements in *time management*, the *recognition of unproductive academic performance*, and a better *recognition of parental guidance*.

Significance: This study provides critical insights into the sleep-related struggles of high school students, offering a foundation for teachers, guidance personnel, and parents to better understand and proactively respond to their structural and emotional well-being needs.

Conclusion: Sleep deprivation has become a crisis among high school students, which is detrimental to their physical, mental, and social well-being. Students get trapped in a loop of late-night academic cramming and bedtime procrastinations, causing their health at risk. Ultimately, building strict time management, mindful phone habits, and a strong self-awareness supported by consistent parental guidance is a necessity that students must not take it lightly.

Keywords: sleeping habits; high school students; Chinese private school

1 Introduction

Sleep is not simply a habit; it dictates a lifestyle. [Toyong \(2020\)](#) states that good performance starts with quality sleep. This is because rest is essential to a student's physical and mental health for survival ([Feingold & Smiley, 2022](#); [Kohyama, 2021](#)). Many previous research results have emphasized the importance of 8-10 hours of sleep in the routine of an adolescent to help their body handle the changes puberty brings ([Better Health Channel, 2018](#); [Uy et al., 2022](#)).

However, majority of teenagers have been reported to stray away from the ideal sleep schedule, leaving them to suffer the consequences of insufficient rest ([Better Health Channel, 2018](#)). Factors contributing to this issue include physical, social, and emotional changes, and school activities like exams and projects. When a student focuses on these responsibilities, the importance of rest becomes overshadowed ([Uy et al., 2022](#)).

According to [Toyong \(2020\)](#), the information retention among students who sacrifice sleep for academic requirements is decreased significantly. This is because the brain's processing ability rapidly declines after being awake for more than 16 hours ([Worley, 2018](#)). Studies conducted by [Short & Chee \(2019\)](#) also reveal the students' feelings of instability and stress that cause them to underperform. Meanwhile, outside of academic settings, the negative influence of multimedia on the sleep quality of students due to constant brain stimulation is also evident ([Kortesoja et al., 2023](#)). All previous data cited suggests that losing sleep is a global experience that most, if not all, teens will go through, which raises the question of what this means for students enrolled in a Chinese private school in Cebu City.

Therefore, the aim of this study is to explore the sleeping habits of high school students in a Chinese private school located in Cebu City, with an emphasis on understanding how they perceive these sleep patterns to affect their daily academic performance and classroom engagement. Similar studies have quantified the loss of sleep among students, but their personal experiences remain largely unexamined ([Godsell & White, 2019](#)). Specifically, this qualitative study seeks to understand and describe how the high school students in a Chinese private school in Cebu City experience and understand their sleeping habits, rather than just measuring how long they sleep. In this way, the study's significance lies in raising awareness for teachers, guidance personnel, and parents to better understand and respond to the sleep-related struggles of high school students.

2 Research methodology

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological design where the researchers explored in detail and uncovered the experiences of the participants regarding a specific phenomenon or event ([Pilarska, 2021](#)). In this type of research, the researchers took note of the participants' emotional experiences through their narratives ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)).

In this phenomenological study, data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Afterwards, data analysis were written in narrative form following the six steps of thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke (2006, as cited in [Pecson & Pogoy, 2021](#)): reading the data repetitively, identifying the initial codes, discovering potential themes, refining those themes, defining and naming them, and finally, producing the report.

2.1 Research environment

This study was conducted in a Chinese private school in Region VII, specifically in Barangay San Antonio, Cebu City. This school was selected based on the following criteria: majority of the enrolled students come from Chinese middle-class to affluent families; a Level 3 Accredited School by the Association of Christian Schools, Colleges, and Universities Accrediting Council (ACSCU-ACI); with a population exceeding 500 students; and a location within a highly urbanized area.

2.2 Research participants

In this study, purposive sampling was based on the following criteria: must be enrolled in a Chinese private school in Cebu City and must be a high school student. This study involved semi-structured one-on-one interviews with a total of ten (10) participants, with two (2) students from each grade level from Grade 7 to Grade 11. Also, there were two (2) sets of focus group discussions (FGD): one consisting of three (3) high school teachers; and one consisting of three (3) parents of high school students. The purpose of these FGDs was to assist in the precise triangulation of the data.

2.3 Research instrument

The researchers were the main instruments of this study because they are responsible for the generation, collection, and analysis of data. The researchers also used prompts to gather information from both the semi-structured one-on-one interviews and FGDs.

2.4 Data gathering and ethical considerations

Prior to collecting data, a formal consent letter was submitted to the school director to request approval of this research. After the approval from the school director, the researchers carefully handpicked high school students, high school teachers, and parents of high school students. A written consent form was provided to the chosen participants for their willingness to be interviewed. A parental consent form was also provided to the selected high school students.

After receiving approval from the school director, the researchers interviewed the selected participants through semi-structured one-on-one interviews and FGDs. The allotted time for each interview was about 30 minutes to amplify the ability to gather thorough data from the interviews and FGDs.

The interviews were transcribed in a verbatim format, which were then stored in a secure, protected folder located in Google Drive to guarantee the privacy of the information shared by the participants.

2.5 Data analysis

Through verbatim transcriptions of the interviews, the researchers analyzed the data using Braun and Clarke's six-step thematic analysis (2006). To ensure precision and credibility, the researchers obtained the necessary ethical considerations which led to data saturation, where all information has been acquired from the data.

3 Results and discussions

This study revealed four main themes regarding the sleeping habits of high school students at a Chinese private school in Cebu City. The first theme, **Students' Usage of Time**, highlights how *bed-time procrastination* and *academic cramming* cause students to sleep late. The second theme, **Effects**

of Less Sleep, shows how this lack of rest leads to *physical fatigue*, *mental fatigue*, and *strained family interactions*. To handle these daily challenges, the third theme, **Coping with Sleep Deprivation**, explains the students' survival strategies, such as *keeping awake in class*, trying to *fix sleep schedules*, and *napping*. Finally, the fourth theme, **Self-Realization**, captures the students' growing awareness of their habits, showing improvements in *time management*, the *recognition of unproductive academic performance*, and better *application of parental guidance*.

3.1 Theme 1: Students' usage of time

This first theme, **Students' Usage of Time**, highlights how *bedtime procrastination* and *academic cramming* cause students to sleep late. Oftentimes, students delay going to sleep because they continue engaging in entertainment-related activities or because they still have academic responsibilities to complete. They are usually results of poor time management skills on the student's part. Research findings by [Jaya et al. \(2025\)](#) suggest that time management has a noticeably substantial impact on academic procrastination by showing that higher levels of academic procrastination have lower levels of academic performance. Similarly, evidence reveals that greater time management planning is directly proportional to greater academic responsibility and self-discipline ([Valente et al., 2024](#)).

3.1.1 Theme 1.1: Bedtime procrastination

Bedtime procrastination usually shows up as late-night screen time. Instead of sleeping, students stay awake watching YouTube, playing games, or scrolling through social media. The interviews highlight this pattern:

"I like to stay up late to play." – Student 1
"I doom scroll before going to sleep." – Student 5
"I usually watch YouTube..." – Student 4

These responses show that digital entertainment is a major reason students delay their sleep. Phones and tablets are often related to academic procrastination and time management ([Liu et al., 2022](#)). Additionally, technology keeps students hooked until they are very tired and fall asleep, as seen in these responses:

"I usually use my phone...until I fall asleep." – Student 3
"...they're still on their phones until they fall asleep." – Parent 1 of FGD with Parents

These responses demonstrate how students may continue using their phones even when they are already supposed to be sleeping. Poor time management and gadget usage before bedtime are the two factors that largely contribute to delayed sleeping schedules ([Valente et al., 2024](#)). These delayed bedtimes result in insufficient sleep, which has been widely associated with fatigue, stress, impaired cognition, and poorer academic performance ([Romero-Blanco et al., 2020](#)).

Students often stay hooked to their devices instead of sleeping, and all the above findings support the claim that device use directly aligns with the occurrence of bedtime procrastination.

3.1.2 Theme 1.2: Academic cramming

Academic cramming is a separate time-management behavior in which students postpone their academic responsibilities until close to their deadlines and then attempt to complete them within a

limited amount of time. This habit can affect students' efficiency and time management (Alhasani et al., 2022). This is evident in the following statements given by the students:

"I do my assignments due the next day." – Student 5

"Sometimes, I cram the assignments." – Student 9

This constant delaying of academic responsibilities usually results in students resorting to late-night cramming, affecting their sleeping schedules negatively. Instead of following their planned schedules, students end up postponing their tasks until late at night, leading them to sleep even later. This can be seen in the following statements from the gathered data:

"I stay up late for assignments." – Student 2

"...their sleeping time can still depend on how many assignments they have...one of the main reasons they stay up late is because of playing computer games." – Teacher 2 of FGD with Teachers

These responses show that some students postpone their academic responsibilities until they are close to their deadlines, resulting in the need to complete their work within a short period of time. The findings from Jaya et al. (2025) are relevant to these responses as the researchers found time management to be a significant factor affecting academic procrastination. If students learn how to manage their time, they may be able to avoid repeated practices of academic cramming.

Students who engage in academic procrastination may also experience mental fatigue because of the amount of work they need to complete within a limited period (Yuan, 2022). Though it may seem similar to the first subtheme, academic cramming differs from bedtime procrastination as it is more about delaying academic work, which makes delayed sleep become a byproduct instead of an intentional choice.

Another reason students may repeatedly resort to cramming is that it can sometimes be successful (Sunarti et al., 2022). When students cram and succeed, it leads them to continue practicing it. Since they can constantly cram studying tests and assignments while still receiving passing marks, this creates an unhealthy habit which leads students to think that cramming is an efficient way to finish schoolwork.

Overall, the findings show that academic cramming is connected to students' management of their academic responsibilities. Procrastinating on schoolwork can cause tasks to accumulate, forcing students to complete them within a limited amount of time. Although this may sometimes allow students to finish their responsibilities successfully, it also contributes to cognitive fatigue, reduced productivity, and disrupted schedules, making it negative.

3.2 Theme 2: Effects of less sleep

The second theme, **Effects of Less Sleep**, shows how this lack of rest leads to physical fatigue, mental fatigue, and strained family interactions. Sufficient sleep is important in physical and mental development, especially in that of teenagers. According to Li et al. (2020), adolescents who sleep less than the recommended 9 hours struggle with functionality during the day. Lack of sleep has been known to be linked to long-lasting health problems including cardiovascular diseases, migraines, psychiatric disorders, and more (Harding et al., 2026). Disrupted sleep also detrimentally affects the efficiency of various parts of the brain, leading to a decline in academic performance (Cao et al., 2025). It is important for adolescents to earn the appropriate amount of rest during this crucial stage

of development. However, lack of sleep is a prevalent issue in modern society, which is why its effects are so visibly rampant.

3.2.1 Theme 2.1: Physical fatigue

The first and most obvious visible effect of lack of sleep is physical fatigue. The disruption of a normal sleep cycle makes it harder to focus and process information after restless sleep. The setbacks of insufficient rest on the brain and thinking are consequences of staying up late, while persistent damage can be observed on daily activities for those with insomnia (Suni, 2023). Sleeping for only a few hours makes students drowsy and tired in class. Below are the statements that support this:

"I will be very tired, very less motivated and have less energy in doing things... As a student, lack of sleep makes me less participative..." – Student 4

"I can't focus most of the days... There was a time where I didn't get any sleep at all, then I couldn't answer the teacher..." – Student 5

"My teacher gave an activity right after the discussion, I did not understand it since I kept falling asleep during class." – Student 6

Physical exhaustion can manifest as daytime drowsiness and lack of focus and motivation. The students' experiences corroborate with the studies that show that insufficient sleep can not only trigger brain-fog and tiredness but can also cause problems with executive and cognitive function and increase impulsivity (Alencar et al., 2025). Based on these accounts, this fatigue caused by lack of sleep can cause simple, routine learning activities to turn into challenging processes for the students. This physical fatigue can also affect other areas of a student's well-being.

3.2.2 Theme 2.2: Mental fatigue

Students have expressed frustration of not being able to perform as they usually would be due to their lack of sleep. Insufficient sleep often leads to impaired focus and concentration, which results in less participation in class. These students tend to have mood swings and become easily irritated. Lack of focus or attention, reduced problem-solving efficiency, and difficulty retaining information are all results of sleep deficiency (Kayser et al., 2022).

Students usually forget their lessons and requirements due to their compromised cognitive capabilities. This information is based off the following statements:

"I forget most of the things that I studied" – Student 2

"It affects me... I can't focus anymore ... how am I going to answer my teacher's questions, the tests, or anything." – Student 7

Insufficient sleep can also lead to mental and emotional instability, signs of which include anxiety and irritability (Palagini et al., 2022). The excerpt below supports this fact.

"... I get irritated easily and get mood swings regularly." – Student 6

Issues with sleep can be both signs and causes mental and emotional unwellness; sleeping disorders could even be early symptoms of serious mental health problems. (Howarth, 2024). Getting enough rest does not only improve the mental performance, but emotional well-being and motivation as well (Cao et al., 2025).

Overall, based on the experiences of the students, lack of focus, irritability, and mood swings are common results of an irregular sleep schedule.

3.2.3 Theme 2.3: Strained family interactions

According to Kelty and Wakabayashi (2020), research shows that when families are actively involved in their children's education, students are more likely to succeed in school. However, based on the research conducted in this study, family interactions have been strained due to effects such as reduced communication, becoming distant or withdrawn, showing disrespectful behavior, and skipping family meals due to insufficient sleep and rest.

A statement given by a parent suggests that students who don't get an adequate amount of sleep tend to be less responsive. Moreover, from a student's perspective, they tend to isolate themselves from people in fear of offending someone. These were their excerpts:

"I noticed she gives very short responses to question, like one or two responses ..." – Parent 2 of FGD with Parents

"I have less energy to interact with my family when I lack sleep." – Student 4

"There are also times I feel I might offend somebody..." – Student 9

These strained interactions have significant implications, as research shows that family relationships greatly mold a person's overall well-being across psychological, physical, and behavioral health aspects (Bueno Fernandez et al., 2025). This finding is also supported by Bai et al. (2022), who found that family interaction quality and adolescent sleep are closely associated. When students get sufficient sleep, they can control their emotions better and their empathy is restored, enabling more patient, healthy, and positive interactions with their family (Demichelis et al., 2023).

3.3 Theme 3: Coping with sleep deprivation

To handle these daily challenges, the third theme, **Coping with Sleep Deprivation**, explains the students' survival strategies, such as *keeping awake in class*, trying to *fix sleep schedules*, and *napping*.

3.3.1 Theme 3.1: Keeping awake in class

Sleep deprivation is related to decreased mental abilities and difficulties in focusing, which leads to poor academic performance (Guadiana & Okashima, 2021). It is important for students to stay awake in class to ensure that they acquire the necessary information needed to learn. When students lack sleep, they come up with various kinds of methods to keep themselves awake in class. Listening to music, scrolling through the internet, or doing physical activities like moving around and participating in class are ways students have come up with to try and stay awake in class (Parantar et al., 2021).

However, due to the strict rules and regulations of the specific Chinese private school where this study was conducted, participants were restricted from utilizing digital coping mechanisms. Consequently, these students developed unconventional, creative, and often fascinating methods to keep themselves awake. Below were their statements:

"...I'll just splash water on my face." – Student 1

"I try to do jumping jacks..." – Student 10

"Two students were standing at the back..." – Teacher 2 of FGD with teachers

These statements show the different kinds of coping mechanisms students come up with to avoid sleeping in class.

3.3.2 Theme 3.2: Fixing sleep schedule

Maintaining a consistent and fixed sleep schedule usually requires changing habits to accommodate and give time to rest. A fixed sleep schedule is essential for physical and mental health, daily productivity, and cognitive function (Li et al., 2025). One of the few ways to improve sleep schedules is by managing screen time, going home earlier to finish assignments, and waking up at the same time every day.

Below were the narratives given by Student 4 and Student 6:

“I would try to sleep earlier and manage my screen time better to improve my sleeping habits.” – Student 4

Irregular sleep schedules can lead to mental and physical fatigue, difficulty concentrating, mood changes, and reduced performance, which is why effort must be put into making one's schedule consistent, as Student 6 notes.

“I would try to have a consistent sleep schedule, no matter how busy I am, so that I won't already feel tired the moment I wake up” – Student 6

Well-established practices can help regulate the human body clock (Walker et al., 2020) and promote better quality sleep. Consistency and discipline are essential to maintain a healthier sleep schedule and its benefits (Windred et al., 2024).

3.3.3 Theme 3.3: Napping

If these other coping mechanisms fail, the student's last resort is usually just to succumb to sleep whenever they can, which is not an uncommon occurrence among adolescents (Cruz, 2023). Research conducted by Rea et al. (2022) shows that the average number of naps taken by a student in a week is 1.33. The times they do this vary depending on the student's schedule. Some would nap when they have free time. These were some of their excerpts:

“She would sleep in the car while going home or going to school.” – Parent 1 of FGD with Parents

“She takes a nap when she gets home before dinner.” – Parent 2 of FGD with Parents

“If I lack sleep during a busy day, I would take a nap first when I go home.” – Student 4

“If I have free time, I will use that time to rest...” – Student 4

Here, it mentioned that the most convenient time to nap is usually while in the car and after arriving home. Short daytime naps are commonly used by young learners to temporarily reduce feelings of fatigue (Mendoza, 2024). However, Student 4 also shared a different perspective that worked for them.

“I will take a nap and rest first, then I will do my school responsibilities after I wake up.” – Student 4

Though these nap times help the student cope in the short-term, it is important to recognize that repeating it too frequently will contribute even further to the problem of sleep deprivation by decreasing sleep quality during nighttime (Santos, 2021).

3.4 Theme 4: Self-realization

Finally, the fourth theme, **Self-Realization**, captures the *students' growing awareness of their habits*, showing improvements in *time management*, the *recognition of unproductive academic performance*, and better *application of parental guidance*.

3.4.1 Theme 4.1: Self-awareness of sleep habits

Good sleep habits matter a lot for how well students do in school and their overall well-being, but many students find it hard to keep these habits because of other responsibilities (Ma et al., 2022). In this study, the students realized the importance of having proper sleeping habits. They understood the need to balance their sleep and academic responsibilities. This was the testimony given by Student 4 as shown below:

“I have to choose between finishing everything or going to sleep early.” – Student 4

This shows that the students see sleep and schoolwork as two priorities competing, and choosing one means giving up the other. According to the students in this study, some of the ways mentioned to improve sleeping habits are to minimize procrastination and sleeping at earlier times.

“I keep on procrastinating... that's one of the things that I really need to fix...” – Student 10

“I guess one thing I would change...is that sleep early genuinely.” – Student 9

This matches other studies where students who reflected on their sleep pointed to procrastination and irregular sleep times as habits to change (Tkaczyk et al., 2023), reinforcing the idea that teens must learn to prioritize sufficient sleep for their learning and development, even as it remains an ongoing, lifelong habit to manage (Pan et al., 2025).

3.4.2 Theme 4.2: Time management

The time management of students' daily routines heavily dictates how much sleep a student gets; it is also deeply integrated with their overall sleep quality. It is crucial for a student to be able to learn how to properly allocate time for their activities and responsibilities to balance their tasks and their sleep (Gaarde et al., 2020). As more work is handed out, most students bear the consequences of the lack of time management and tend to overwork themselves even after their physical activities, which can lead to students sacrificing their sleep just to clear their plate (Brown, et al., 2022). Students' extracurricular activities may also have an impact on the amount of time they can allocate to their responsibilities, which could impact their sleeping hours. The following statements support this claim:

“I'm frustrated sometimes when I really have to do this chore but at the same time, I really have to do this one assignment.” – Student 10

“My extracurricular activity I do is volleyball, it affects my schedule because I'll go home late and get tired after, but I force myself to do my work, sometimes I just fall asleep...” – Student 5

Due to these issues with students frequently postponing academic tasks or struggling to unwind after school, delayed bedtimes and insufficient rest are common results (Jakobsson et al., 2022). They expressed their desire for change with their parents finding ways to help their time management and improve the overall lack of time management from their children. This was the statement given by Student 6:

"I think...studying right away instead of going on my phone for a couple of minutes the moment I arrive home." – Student 6

The effect of proper time management on sleep quality of students is not negligible at all. If done properly, students could sleep on time and finish all their responsibilities comfortably.

3.4.3 Theme 4.3: Recognition of unproductive academic performance

Another aspect that students need to recognize is the unproductive academic performance that emerges because of their lack of sleep. This meddles with students' ability to remain active and engaged in class discussions or activities. According to Teacher 1 of the FGD with Teachers:

"Lack of sleep, resulting to low grades. Because you cannot understand, you're sleeping in class, you don't have any concentration." – Teacher 1 of FGD with Teachers

The teacher explains that because students do not get enough sleep at night, they tend to grow drowsy in school, which may cause them to sleep in class. Consequently, this diverts their attention from listening and participating in class to recovering lost sleep. This leads to difficulties in concentration and understanding lessons, potentially lowering their academic performance. Additionally, [Limpiado \(2024\)](#) found that daytime sleepiness and shortened attention spans are associated with the lack of sleep, primarily from doing schoolwork at night.

On the other hand, findings by [Bacaro et al. \(2023\)](#) concluded that better sleep quality was linked to a gradual improvement in school engagement, which led to better grades by the students.

Overall, it is essential to recognize the effects of sleep quality because it allows students to grasp an idea on how it affects their concentration and participation in class. Additionally, it helps students to understand how better sleep can bolster their learning and academic performance.

3.4.4 Theme 4.4: Application of parental guidance

Parents influence the habits of students. Both must recognize this fact for changes to be made. According to Parent 1 of FGD with Parents:

"...as parents we have to really step in and be intentional in helping them." – Parent 1 of FGD with Parents

Parents should help students recognize how their decisions affect how they spend the day. Helping them be more self-aware, letting them reflect and be more efficient with how they use their time are all ways that parents can support their children in this. According to ([Ewing et al., 2024](#)), students that are granted appropriate autonomy and support gain increased sleep regularity and duration.

However, studies done by [Maratia et al. \(2023\)](#) also warn that granting complete autonomy does not make students develop good habits, which is why setting rules plays a major role. Schools can also help parents guide students. According to ([Burkart et al., 2026](#)), teachers communicating with parents about the student's behavior helps parents understand their children's situation.

Additionally, research shows the huge positive impact family interactions can create. It has built a relationship between parental involvement and students' academic achievement, showing how family support plays an important role in motivating students when it comes to their educational growth ([Ates, 2021](#)). These are essential in supporting students' academic development, emotional well-being, and overall adjustment.

4 Conclusion

Sleep deprivation has become a common crisis among high school students, which is detrimental to their physical, mental, and social well-being. Students get trapped in a loop of late-night academic cramming and bedtime procrastinations, causing their health at risk. Ultimately, building strict time management, mindful phone habits, and a strong self-awareness supported by consistent parental guidance is a necessity that students must not take it lightly.

Acknowledgment

To the resilient Wakesleepers of Academic Year 2026–2027—encompassing our graduating Grade 12 Batch of 2027 together with selected Grade 11 cohort—we extend our warmest congratulations on completing this rigorous collaborative research study. This milestone is a testament to the dedication of the following researchers:

Grade 12: Reilla Lexine B. Cabalse, Jennifer Hazel C. Cai, Maybelle O. Carvajal, Laura Dei S. Castro, Steven C. Chen, Justin Adrich U. Ching, Kirsten R. Chua, Saffi Jessica P. Co, Julie C. Cu, Michael William A. Dayata, Kahl-l Andrei B. Diamante, Jazlene Chloe G. Dy, David B. Ee, Jonathan Herry Ming Feng G. Fu, Holden G. Genobiagon, Ronald Dean N. Go, Nickson Wayne Y. Jao, Wayne Jade L. Lim, Alrich F. Lin, Ying Chun Lu, Jeffrey Dean S. Miranda Sy, Matthew Kenzie U. Rasines, Jianne Jane L. Rodriguez, Josiah Joseph R. Tan, Maleea Jamina A. Urbina, Andre Josh C. Uyquiengco, Sophia Anika C. Uyquiengco, Nestor Noel C. Valendez, Lance Matthew Y. Villamor, and Ethan Jenson G. Yu.

Grade 11: Wilfred O. Armendarez, Shania P. Co, Zachary L. Pada, Quinn H. Peña, Heal G. Raguindin, Andrei E. Uykintian, and Alyssa L. Yu.

We are incredibly thankful to all the participants who openly shared their personal experiences during our interviews. Their honest stories formed the backbone of our entire project, giving us the exact real-life details we needed to understand this sleep crisis and come up with these final conclusions.

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