

The Reality of Sexsomnia: Characteristics and Manifestations of Sexsomnia

Lawrence M, Higgins S, Williams A, Muza R

OBJECTIVE: To further understand the characteristics and manifestations of sexsomnia; a parasomnia in which abnormal sexual behaviour is exhibited in sleep.

METHODS: We carried out a retrospective observational case series study of all individuals presenting to a tertiary Sleep Clinic between 2008 and 2014 describing symptoms of sexsomnia. These individuals were identified by searching for the terms 'Sexsomnia' and 'Sleep Sex'.

RESULTS: 41 individuals were identified; 37 male and 4 female. Demographically the majority were married, White-British, and between the ages of 20 and 35. The reported manifestations of sexsomnia were variable; sexual intercourse was most frequently reported overall, however the majority of females carried out masturbation. Violence and aggression were described in 11 occasions. Importantly, and invariably, in all patients was amnesia of events. It was also found that 73% of all individuals had a relevant past history of other parasomnias, most often Sleep Walking or Sleep Talking. Video-Polysomnography studies were performed in 40 of the 41 patients. Results showed that 70% had features consistent with a Slow Wave Arousal Disorder; that is multiple abrupt arousals from sleep; however no sexual behaviors were observed. In those without Slow Wave Sleep arousals other PSG abnormalities were noted, including loss of REM atonia, Obstructive Sleep Apnoea and arousals from REM sleep, but these were the minority.

CONCLUSION: Learning more about the demographics of sexsomnia can help clinicians to identify those who might be at risk, and importantly may trigger them to ask specific questions to those who may not volunteer this information freely. It is important to know some of the common manifestations and characteristics of those with sexsomnia in order to help distinguish between individuals who are truly suffering from this parasomnia and those who are not; this has important medico-legal implications.

REFERENCES:

Sexual behaviour in sleep. Trajanovic, N, Mangan, M and Shapiro, C., 2007, *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology*, Vol. 42(12), pp. 1024-1031.

Sleep and sex: what can go wrong? A review of the literature on sleep related disorders and abnormal sexual behaviours and experiences. Schenck, C, Arnulf, I and Mahowald, M., 2007, *Sleep*, Vol. 30(6), pp. 683-702.