

Sleep disturbances, nightmares are common among suicide attempters

January 2 2007

In the first known report of its kind, a study published in the January 1st issue of the journal SLEEP finds that sleep disturbances are common among suicide attempters, and that nightmares are associated with suicidality.

The study, conducted by Nisse Sjöström, RN, and colleagues of Sahlgrenska University Hospital in Göteborg, Sweden, focused on 165 patients between the ages of 18-68, who were admitted to medical units or psychiatric wards at Sahlgrenska after a suicide attempt. It was discovered that 89 percent of subjects reported some kind of sleep disturbance. The most common complaint was difficulties initiating sleep (73 percent), followed by difficulties maintaining sleep (69 percent), nightmares (66 percent) and early morning awakening (58 percent). Nightmares were associated with a five-fold increase in risk for high suicidality.

"Our finding of an association between nightmares and suicidality does not imply causality," said Sjöström. "However, our findings should inspire clinicians to include questions concerning sleep disturbance and especially nightmares in the clinical assessment of suicidal patients."

Nightmares are disturbing, visual dream sequences that occur in your mind and wake you up from your sleep. Nightmares are very common and can begin at any age. Between 50-85 percent of adults report having a nightmare at least on occasion. They tend to become less frequent and intense as you age. Teen and adult women report nightmares more often

than teen and adult men. Parents can also be disturbed of their sleep if their children have severe nightmares.

Nightmare disorder develops when you have nightmares on a frequent basis. Nightmare disorder is not as common. About two to eight percent of people have a current problem with nightmares. The use of some medications may be a cause of nightmare disorder. You may be more likely to have nightmare disorder if a relative also has it.

You should see a sleep specialist if your nightmares cause you great anxiety or often disrupt your sleep. A sleep specialist will help make an accurate diagnosis of your problem. He or she will also rule out possible underlying causes of the problem. While sleep specialists do not typically treat nightmares, most often they refer you to an experienced counselor or psychologist.

Source: American Academy of Sleep Medicine

Citation: Sleep disturbances, nightmares are common among suicide attempters (2007, January 2) retrieved 19 April 2024 from

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