

Researchers investigate how COVID-19 has shaped our daydreams and nighttime dreams

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The COVID-19 pandemic has had a profound impact on the mental well-being of individuals worldwide. A recent study published in the journal *Emotion* examines the relationship between COVID-19-related concerns,

anxiety, and worry, and the emotional quality of daydreaming and nighttime dreaming during these challenging times.

We spend a large part of our days immersed in our inner experiences—daydreaming during the day and dreaming during the night. While there has been a lot of research on the effects of COVID on different aspects of people's lives, we know little about how the [pandemic](#) has shaped people's inner experiences.

The newly published study, conducted by an international team of researchers at the University of Turku, Finland, and U.K. and Australia, sought to understand how worry about COVID-19 is linked to the emotional content of daydreaming and nighttime dreaming.

In this study, more than a hundred of participants were asked how worried, anxious, and concerned they were during the COVID-19 pandemic. People also reported their daydreams every evening their nighttime dreams every morning upon awakening.

Analysis of more than 3,000 reports of daydreams and nighttime dreams revealed a clear association between worry about COVID-19 during a particular day and the emotional quality of their daydreams the same day. Specifically, on days when people experienced more worry about COVID-19, they also experienced more [negative emotions](#) and less positive emotions during daydreaming.

Individual differences play a major role

Unlike previous studies, worry about COVID-19 on a particular day was not related to the emotional quality of nighttime dreams or more nightmares. However, those individuals who generally tended to worry more about COVID-19, also tended to have more negative dreams.

These results suggest that daily fluctuations in worry may play a more significant role in shaping individuals' inner experiences during the day than during the night.

"These findings do show that our experiences during the day are associated with our nighttime experiences, but our dreams seem to rely more on particular [individual differences](#) rather than what exactly happens during the day. This is important because these differences may explain why some individuals may have better or worse mental health and well-being," comments Dr. Pilleriin Sikka, lead researcher of the study and a postdoctoral research fellow at Stanford University.

The study's results also indicate the need to rely less on general questionnaires and to use more longitudinal measures that capture day-to-day variations in COVID-19 worry and inner experiences.

More information: Pilleriin Sikka et al, COVID-19 on mind: Daily worry about the coronavirus is linked to negative affect experienced during mind-wandering and dreaming, *Emotion* (2023). [DOI: 10.1037/emo0001255](#)

The researchers are now conducting a follow-up study, trying to understand whether the pandemic may have some lingering effects on people's inner experiences. If you are interested in participating the study, please follow this link: sites.utu.fi/mind/en/

Provided by University of Turku

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