



ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Sexsomnia: Parasomnia associated with sexual behaviour during sleep^{☆,☆☆}

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KEYWORDS

Sexsomnia;
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Abstract

Introduction: The purpose of our study is to describe 4 cases of sexsomnia, a form of parasomnia characterised by sexual behaviour during sleep.

Methods: Clinical history and video-polysomnography recordings from patients diagnosed with sexsomnia in the Multidisciplinary Sleep Unit at Hospital Clínic in Barcelona.

Results: Three men and one woman between 28 and 43 years of age reported sexual behaviours during sleep with progression times ranging from 9 months to 7 years. Episodes consisted of masturbation without seeking the participation of a sleeping partner (2 cases) and attempts at sexual intercourse with inappropriate and uncharacteristic vocalisations and behaviours (3 cases). The frequency of the episodes ranged from 4 isolated episodes to 2–3 per week. Patients were amnesic of these events and surprised by their partners' accounts of their behaviour. Medical histories revealed that 1 patient was a somnambulist, 2 had confusional arousals, and 1 experienced somniloquy. Video-polysomnography did not disclose sexual behaviours during sleep but revealed sleep apnoea in 2 cases and periodic leg movements in sleep in another. The only patient treated with clonazepam reported decreased frequency of both confusional arousals and sexsomnia episodes.

Conclusions: Sexsomnia occurs in young adults and is characterised by masturbation and inappropriate attempts at achieving sexual intercourse followed by total amnesia of the events. It can be associated with other parasomnias such as sleepwalking and confusional arousals. Other sleep disorders, including sleep apnoea and periodic leg movement disorder, may trigger episodes of sexsomnia.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Sexsomnia;
Parasomnia;
Masturbación;
Coito;
Amnesia y sueño

Sexsomnia. Una forma de parasomnia con conductas sexuales durante el sueño**Resumen**

Introducción: El objetivo de nuestro trabajo es describir 4 casos de sexsomnia, una parasomnia caracterizada por conductas sexuales durante el sueño.

Método: Historia clínica y registro videopolisomnográfico de pacientes identificados en la unidad multidisciplinaria del sueño del Hospital Clínic de Barcelona.

Resultados: Tres varones y una mujer entre 28 y 43 años de edad referían conductas sexuales durante el sueño de entre 9 meses y 7 años de evolución. Consistían en la masturbación sin buscar la participación de la pareja, que dormía en la misma cama (2 casos), e intentar el coito con vigorosidad conductual y verbal inapropiada e inhabitual (3 casos). La frecuencia era variable entre 4 únicos episodios y 2-3 semanales. Los pacientes presentaban amnesia completa de los eventos y sorpresa cuando se les explicaba lo que habían hecho. Había antecedentes de sonambulismo (un caso), despertares confusos (2 casos) y somniloquia (un caso). Los registros polisomnográficos con vídeo no detectaron conductas sexuales pero registraron apneas (2 casos) y movimientos periódicos de las piernas (un caso). En el único paciente en que se probó clonacepam la frecuencia de la sexsomnia y los despertares confusos disminuyó.

Conclusión: La sexsomnia aparece en el adulto joven, consiste en intentar consumir de forma inapropiada el coito o masturbarse durante el sueño, con amnesia posterior de lo ocurrido. Puede coexistir con otras parasomnias, como sonambulismo y despertares confusos. Otros trastornos del sueño, como las apneas y los movimientos periódicos de las piernas, podrían desencadenar los episodios de sexsomnia.

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Introduction

Parasomnias are abnormal sensory or motor phenomena that occur during sleep, while falling asleep, and upon waking.¹ The International Classification of Sleep Disorders groups parasomnias as REM sleep parasomnias (REM sleep behaviour disorder, nightmares, and sleep paralysis), non-REM sleep parasomnias (sleepwalking, confusional arousals, and night terrors), and a third group of 'other parasomnias' that includes, for example, enuresis, sleep-related eating disorder, and sleep-related groaning.¹

Recent studies have described sexsomnia or sleep sex, a new parasomnia in which specific motor activation produces inappropriate and involuntary sexual behaviour.²⁻⁷ After falling asleep, patients with sexsomnia engage or attempt to engage in sexual intercourse or sexual behaviour in inappropriate and inhabitual ways. They are not conscious of this behaviour and cannot recall what happened the next day. Behaviour may include masturbation, attempting sexual activity with a partner sleeping in the same bed, or even attempting sex with a non-partner with whom the patient does not share a bed or a room. Sexsomnia may lead to marital repercussions, or even legal repercussions in very serious cases or those involving minor children.^{2,3} Prevalence of the syndrome is unknown since it is rare and probably underdiagnosed due to patients' and doctors' lack of awareness and reluctance to describe it.⁷ Medical literature on sexsomnia is very scarce. Fewer than 50 cases had been described prior to October 2012,²⁻⁶ and clinical symptoms may be mistaken for those of other entities such as epilepsy. Here, we present 4 cases studied in our sleep disorders

unit that may contribute to our understanding of this parasomnia.

Patients, methods, and results

The 4 cases we describe below were identified in the multidisciplinary sleep disorders unit in Hospital Clínic, Barcelona, between November 2007 and March 2012. None of these 4 patients had a history of psychiatric or sexual disorders. In these 4 cases, researchers completed a detailed medical history and a nocturnal polysomnography with synchronised audio-visual recording.

Case 1

The first case was a 38-year-old man, accompanied by his wife, who consulted due to a 7-year history of abnormal behaviour during sleep. He had no family or personal history of relevant medical or surgical episodes except for nasal septoplasty performed 5 years earlier. The patient had no history of traumatic sexual experiences. He reported isolated incidents of sleep talking as a child. The patient presented no other abnormal sleep behaviours, such as confusional arousal, sleepwalking, night terrors, or other types of parasomnia.

He had been in a stable relationship for 17 years and the couple had a daughter. They engaged in conventional and satisfactory sexual intercourse with a frequency of 2-3 times weekly. The patient's wife reported that in the

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