

A REVIEW ABOUT IMPACT OF DREAMS ON MENTAL HEALTH AND EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

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Abstract

The purpose of this review paper is to discover the understandings of the literature on the impact of dreams on emotional well-being and mental health.

This review studies and blends the existing literature on dreams nature and impact. It first draws the overview of the dreams and the role they play in human cognition and emotion. Second, it discovers the literature based on the academic and experimental insights from the available literature on dreams analysis. Additionally, this article highlights the methods that describes how dream works and impact on human mind. Third, this article suggests productive aspects for future research. This paper adds a body of knowledge to the area of dreams and its characteristics which reflect unconscious thoughts, desires and conflicts of human being. This paper highlights the significance of dreams in human mental health and well-being and also suggest further innovation for future psychological interventions and research.

Keywords:

Dreams, Nature and impact, Unconscious thoughts.

1. Introduction

Dream have been a subject of interest and research for many years. Dreams persuading cognitive science, psychological theories and mental health studies. According to researches, approximately 95% of dreams are forgotten, when someone awake. Dreams last between 5-20 minutes. Brain activity studies suggest that most teen over 10-year-old, dream between 4-6 times each night. In forming long-term memories dreams can help (Nichols, 2018). According to studies, negative emotions like worry and terror are most common on dreams than the positive ones (Frank J. Ninnivaggi M.D., 2023). Most common nightmares were falling and being chased. About 50%-85% adults have occasional nightmares and 2% to 8% suffer from nightmare that interrupt their sleep (Wilbanks, 2021). People who do not dream lack creativity. In dreams we only see the faces we have seen already (Bhatt, 2017).


DREAMS

OVERVIEW

DREAMS ARE STORIES AND IMAGES THAT ARE MIND CREATED WHILE WE SLEEP. THEY ARE MISTERIOUS OFFERING A WINDOW INTO OUR SUBCONCIOUS MIND AND REVEALING HIDDEN DESIRES, FEARS AND EMOTIONS

NIGHTMARES

DREAM FORGOTTEN	95%
DREAM DURATION	5-20 MINUTES
DREAM EACH NIGHT	B/W 4-6 TIMES
OCCASIONAL NIGHTMARES	50%-85%



Dreams play a significant role in emotional regulation as well as mental well-being and various elements including, dream recall frequency, dream content and emotional intensity and dream types etc., influence the relationship between them. Dream recall frequency (DRF) is the most common tool for analyzing the dream frequency a person sees in a time period that is given (Nemeth, 2023). Dream content refers to specific elements and detail of dream. In his work on dream analysis, Freud differentiated between the two contents of dreams, manifest and latent. Manifest dream is actual meaning of dream and, latent dream is hidden meaning of dream (Kendra Cherry, 2008).

Often dreams are emotionally deep they overstress ordinary feeling to a higher degree, but they give us a chance to experience our intense emotions in their fullness and density (Dreaming emotional experience, 2023). The most common type of dreams including nightmares, lucid dreaming, recurring dreams, normal dreams and daydreams. These dreams types can be influenced by the conscious and unconscious mind (MacDuffie & Mashour, 2010).

Between mental health of a person and dream content of a person there is a complex connection and dream different aspects has both positive and negative effect on the emotional well-being. Dream recall frequency plays an important role as individuals who remember their dream may experience stronger emotional effect. Study reported that there is abundant of emotional noticeable information in high dream recallers (Moyne et al., 2022).

Content and emotional intensity of dream also has an impact on mental health. If the dream is positive the impact should also positive, people experiencing more different and wide-range of positive emotion in their highly positive dreams (Labell et al., 2024). And if the dream is

negative then impact also negative i.e. nightmares. There is a close relationship between nightmares and a number of psychiatric disorders this relationship increased the risk for psychiatric illness (Kirov & Brand, 2011).

Different types of dream also effect mental health differently i.e. nightmare cause lot of stress and cause mental disorders like anxiety disorders and PTSD (Elmer, 2020). Psychological disorders like PTSD, anxiety, depression are associate with bad or negative dreams. There is a high risk of negative dreams and nightmares in a person suffer with depression and anxiety. Nightmares are defining feature of PTSD. Dreaming process is related to some part of the brains that are responsible for emotional regulation. Some people report emotions from both types of dreams (good or bad) affect their mood the whole day. Negative dreams and nightmare occur more in the people who suffer with mental health problems (Okoye, 2022). Lucid dreaming linked to reduce nightmares, relieve anxiety, improve motor skills and enhance creativity (Nunez, 2019).

Dreams occurred during a specific phase of sleep know as rapid eye movement (REM) (Desseilles et al., 2011). REM stage during sleep plays a vital role in the management of emotional events and association of emotional memories. Mostly dreams or nightmares are linked to REM sleep deformities and psychiatric illness (Scarpelli et al., 2019). Various theories about dream also present like; Freud believes that dreams are often a form of wish fulfilment. Carl Jung considers; dreams were actually straight picture of mind thought process (Psychology of the Dreams: Inside the Dream Mind. 2016).

Regardless of extensive research, significant knowledge gaps remain in the study. Future researches focus on understanding long-term impact of dreams on mental health. Current studies focus on the specific aspects such as, nightmare or lucid dreaming but a thorough examination of different types of dreams and their psychological implication is limited and it requires further exploration.

This review aims to explore the impact of dreams on emotional well-being and mental health by associating existing literature and identifying areas for future research. The study will investigate various theoretical perspectives, neurobiological mechanism and psychological interpretations to provide a comprehensive understanding of how dreams contribute to mental health outcome. This review will study and synthesize existing theoretical literature on dream nature and its impact.

The novelty of this study lies in its versatile approach by combining, neurobiology of dream as REM sleep and dreaming link, psychological aspect that effect dreaming and cognitive effects of dream on mental health, to enhance current literature. By connecting evidence with theoretical framework this review has aimed to offer valuable insight into how dreams can be utilised as a diagnostic and therapeutic tool in mental health interventions.

The structure of this paper is as follow; the next section presents the literature review on dream and mental health, followed by the discussion on the mechanisms linking dreams to emotional processing and further explore the clinical implications and therapeutic applications of dreams analysis, the third section focuses on the methodology applied, the fourth section provide the conclusion finally the last section provides a direction for future researches.

2. Literature Review

This part of review paper gives literature on the impact of dreams on emotional well-being and mental health. Additionally, this study included dreams association with psychological process,

cognitive functioning and also dream role in psychotherapy. Dreams play a role in evolutionary role in the progression of processes involve in human cognition. Dreaming allows for threat rehearsal phenomena but there are also other strengthening aspects of dreams like virtual rehearsal mechanism that plays a significant role in development of human cognitive capabilities. Nature of dream is highly subjective and complex to challenge. Dreaming phenomena occur during REM sleep. These mental rehearsal and cognitive skills likely to have strong adaptive values. According to theories, dreams serve as the purpose of rehearsal of scenarios that are threatening for preparing an individual to threats if he experiences in real-life. Dreams also play an important role in social cognition. Processing of dreaming content, consist of different daily life scenarios in which person interact with social world and physical world and this influence person's cognitive abilities and assessment of real-world content (Franklin & Zyphur, 2005).

Dream is an imaginary experience during sleep, also said that dream provide an insight about the hidden feeling of a person. There is also a relationship between dreaming process and attitude of a person, as positive dreams attitude made a person more optimistic and it influence person decision-making, creativity and emotional problem-solving ability. Dream themes also correlated with individual's emotions and experiences. Dream effect behaviour of a person and this effect may be short or long living, this effect influence daytime worries, anxiety and also impacting relationships. Dream also give us knowledge about the mental health conditions, they play an important role in modelling individual's behaviour and mental health. Dreams also give understanding about the self-awareness, personal growth and mental well-being (Kumar, 2024).

Dream tells us about the mental state of a person. There are common dreams that everyone experiences once in his life, like crying, falling, eating food and having sexual experience. Dreams tell us the relationship between dream different themes and mental health symptoms. These themes may be positive or negative like negative themes show us about the mental health signs like anxiety and stress and positive themes like enjoying food tell us about person's satisfaction and pleasure (Sharma & Hawa, 2025).

Current life emotional experiences stimulate a process known as sharing emotions experiences socially. Dreams are full with emotional components and evidences shows that people share their different types of dreams with their close ones like friends, family and partners. Negative dreams are more emotional, disruptive and ego-threatening than the positive ones. Research found that portion of socially shared dream at least one is, 60% for positive ones and 72% for negative ones. This shows that dreams play a significant role in bringing people closer together (Curci & Rimé, 2008).

Changes occur in or mental and physical processes while dreaming, and this can also effect dreaming content. These changes occur during the REM sleep, firstly body is paralyzed during this cycle due to this people will enable to run and cry out during dreams. Secondly, it reduces control and thinking due to this people forget dream when they wake up. Lastly, there is no external stimuli to secure our dreams content and due to this many questions remain unanswered. Dream can also be used for psychological diagnosis and interventions (Lowis, 2010).

Dreams use in psychotherapy and it has four potential contributors and these can apply in clinical settings. Dream smooths the therapeutic process and providing comfort to client as by sharing dreams in session can be beneficial in rapport building, researches also show that working with dream analysis in sessions is more functional. Dreams facilitate the client's

insight and self-awareness. Positive outcome of therapy is necessary and it can also be achieved by using dream related approaches like psychodynamic approach and this enhance self-awareness. Alternatively called insight, awareness, understanding or recognition. Dreams give clinically appropriate information to therapist, one significant advantage of using dream is that a therapist, of any orientation, is present to question, support and challenge the client based on what the dream reveal about client's life and waking concerns. Dreams provide a modification in therapeutic process as dreams content sometimes change over time and it can reflect the improvement within the therapy (Eudell-Simmons & Hilsenroth, 2005).

Dreams from self-psychological perspective studied by Heinz Kohut. Self is the description and the theme of the dream. There are five features of the dreaming processes. Dreams and their relationship with self, as dream content, experience and complexity are indicator of self. Narrative and imagistic texture present in dreams, colors in the dreams are the reflection of affect and intense state of dream and dream images express the state of the self. Dreams also have a rich narrative character that is an element in the unfolding story of the dream. Symbolic function of the self, dreams create meaning through a diversity of forms and representation and they reflect the self. Proactive nature of the dreams, imageries of the past that are shaped and structured in dreams make it possible to bring together the self and self-object relation in a new way in future. Dreaming in the therapeutic context of the self-self-object relationship, sometimes dream repeat itself, and this recurrence of dreams over a time show progress in therapeutic process (Strozier et al., 2014).

We dream in different phases of dream mostly during REM sleep, but in NREM sleep we also dream like lucid dreaming but in this we have control over our dream. Nature of dream is different in both phases of sleep, and this influence cognition, memory, mood and temperaments, this can also increase achievement and efficacy of an individual, and it is also effective in healing, learning and stress management. Dream is an effective tool in enhancing our state of mind and overall mental well-being (Krishnan, 2021).

Perceptual openness is related to broad-mindedness and it is the personality trait that is related with the dream recall frequency and creativity. Perceptual openness is the cognitive coordination that human acquire through growing up with culturally specific understanding of the world around them. Neuroscientific research of dreams proposes that there are number of dreams features experience in REM stage sleep, particularly productive to creativity. Creativity process acknowledges the individual to make a connection between things like images, thought and experiences of the dream. There is an association between dreaming process and memory, the delicacy of dream recall frequency is because of shutdown of neurochemical systems associated with our recent memory throughout our sleep processes and people mostly remember those dreams whom they at the start of sleep. Dream which we experience is mostly shaped due to our socialization (Glaskin, 2015).

People construct belief about the theme of their dream rely upon the level of our dream recall frequency (DRF). People with high DRF beliefs that their overall dream content is closely linked with their actual dreaming experiences. When the DRF is low, people beliefs that the content of their dream is formed by their emotional state. The relationship between dream experiences and conviction about dream is assumed to be change by the availability of memories of dreams, but the memories are not available then the belief about dreams correlated to person's current affective state of mind (Beaulieu-Prevost & Zadra, 2005).

There is a positive relationship between DRF and measure of psychological boundaries, dreams awareness and immersion. Immersion and psychological boundaries aren't associated to DRF

but rather people's trend to undervalue their DRF but dreams awareness is related to both DRF and to people's estimation preference. DRF as measure of people's cognitive representation. Psychological boundaries, dreams awareness and immersion, appear to affects people cognitive illustration of their DRF but not their daily level of DRF as measured by the dream log (Beaulieu-Prevost & Zadra, 2007).

The dream recall frequency influenced by major factors. Dream recall frequency can be affect by demographics (gender, age), sleep variables (sleep stages, circadian rhythms, duration of intra-sleep awakening, the time passed between awakening and dreaming, report sleepers environment and sensory stimulation during sleep), psychological characteristics (influence of previous waking experiences, attitude towards dream, memory, personality), pathological dimensions (sleep disorders, PTSD, anxiety, depression, schizophrenia) and substance consumption (hypnotic drugs, antidepressants, alcohol, cannabis, tobacco, prazosin) (Putois et al., 2020).

There is a relationship between psychological needs (satisfaction and frustration), as perceived from self-determination theory viewpoint, and dream theme and their emotional interpretation. Psychological need satisfaction is related with autonomy (feeling a sense of free will in one's functioning), competence (feeling operational in acting on the realm and accomplishing desired outcomes) and relatedness (feeling linked and associated to others in one's social circle), and it is more modest and related with more positive understanding of dreams. On a day-to-day basis psychological need frustration related with frequent negative dream theme and interpreting their dreams further negatively (Weinstein et al., 2018).

This literature review summarizes the key studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of impact of dreams on emotional well-being and mental health.

3. Methodology

In this paper author succeeding the review of the literature process under the essence of efficient literature review (Jesson et al., 2011) to gather information and analyzing the literature that is relevant to the study. For this critical and extensive analysis, author embellish a review to analyse numerous important points of the former studies concentrate on the title of the paper, bibliographic details and research philosophy (Zikmund et al., 2013).

For literature author searched literature from 2004 to 2024. To identify most relevant data about dreams impact on emotional well-being and mental health, after recognition of the papers, researcher conducted an inclusive research by assessing the appropriate papers downloaded from (1) North American Journal of Psychology; (2) Journal of Sleep Research; (3) An International Journal of Evolutionary Approaches to Psychology and Behavior; (4) Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies; (5) Frontiers; (6) International Journal of Psychoanalytic Self Psychology; (7) Google Scholar; (8) Research Gate.

For this review of the literature, author form the literature selection criteria constructed on following features, for example, study contain relationship between dream and emotional regulation, psychotherapy, REM sleep and psychological disorders. Study collected from papers related to psychology, neuroscience and cognitive science and also papers that publish in English would be preferred. Papers omitted that are not dealing with dream related content such as book, summaries, abstracts and keywords, literature reviews, newspapers and magazines articles). When relevant papers are gathered, author reviewed its abstract, titles and methodology where necessary.

- **Ethical Consideration**

The article is based on previous literature as it is a review article and no direct interaction with other human being so there is not ethical approval require for this purpose. All the article uses for reviewing literature are cited properly with references, the study is entirely conducted by following proper ethical guidelines.

4. **Conclusion**

The research reviewed indicate the significant impact of dreams on emotional well-being and mental health. Dreams offers an exceptional frame to look into our psychological experiences that show person personality and its emotional state of mind, its psychological need and social connections. We can also use dream analysis into our therapeutic practice during a session with client understand the ongoing therapeutic process more smoothly and this can provide a valuable insight for improving mental health and well-being of client. Dream analysis in psychotherapy show a positive outcome and enhance self-awareness and clinical interventions.

Human cognition and daily life experiences can also be explored by deepen study of dreaming processes. Dreaming has a strong association with conditions like anxiety, depression, PTSD and overall psychological well-being. Researches shows that DRF and dream theme also has an impact on emotional stability. Individual differences shows that there is a need for further exploration to add dream researches into psychological and neuroscientific fields.

5. **Future Recommendations**

This literature review calls for further research on different topics. Firstly, the long-term impact of dreaming on mental health should be further investigate what processes involve during this impact. Secondly, thorough examination of different types of dreams and their psychological implication should be studied as types like nightmare, lucid dreaming has vast variety of researches but all types thorough researches are not much available so it requires further exploration. Lastly, dream analysis and interpretation should be a part of modern therapeutic therapies like CBT, DBT, REBT and mindfulness. Their implication and outcome on mental health of client and their benefit during the session should be further studied.

6. **Author Contribution**

Iqra Gulzar: Conceptualization, Introduction, Literature Review, Writing and draft preparation; **Saira Majid:** Supervision, Methodology validation, Review of manuscript, Final Approval of manuscript; **Tanzeela Iqbal:** Methodology, Conclusion, Discussion, Formatting and Referencing.

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