

**FEDERATION OF EUROPEAN NEUROSCIENCE SOCIETIES**  
**10<sup>th</sup> FENS Forum of Neuroscience**

2-6 July 2016 – Copenhagen, Denmark  
<http://forum2016.fens.org/>

**PRESS RELEASE**

EMBARGOED UNTIL TUESDAY 5 JULY 2016, 17.30 CEST / 16.30 BST

**SEXUAL BEHAVIOUR IN SLEEP LINKED TO PSYCHOLOGICAL DISORDERS**

Sexual behaviour in sleep may sound funny to some, or intimate to others but it can be a source of huge embarrassment to sufferers. It may even have legal implications and has been suggested as a defence in cases of rape. A team of Edinburgh researchers studying the complex sleep behaviour said today (5 July) that SBS can originate from childhood and is linked to other underlying psychiatric and psychological disorders.

SBS is one of a range of disorders known as 'parasomnias', which include abnormal behaviours such as night terrors and sleepwalking, that occur during sleep. SBS – or sexomnia as it is also known - is a disorder where sufferers will engage in sexual activity during sleep, usually with no recollection. These behaviours include inappropriate and uncharacteristic sexual vocalisations, fondling, masturbation and sexual intercourse. These actions are uncontrolled, and can even be violent.

Much of the previous work in this area has been based on small case series or expert opinion. The team from the University of Edinburgh, examined a group of 20 men and three women who were referred to one of the largest specialist sleep disorders clinics in the UK.

The study is part of a wider research programme to understand the psychiatric and psychological causes of complex sleep behaviours. Led by Dr Ian Morrison and Dr Renata Riha at the University of Edinburgh, it involves neurologists and scientists from universities throughout Scotland, including the Universities of Edinburgh and Dundee, and specialists in sleep medicine, psychology, psychiatry and the law.

**Ms EmmaLee Maschauer** from Edinburgh told delegates at FENS 2016, "We identified features of sexomnia that haven't been described previously, including childhood onset, variable recall of the behaviours, and a possible link with other psychiatric conditions including post-traumatic stress or anxiety disorders. These issues are important, particularly in the forensic setting, and may influence outcome in criminal trials of serious sexual offences."

**END**

**Abstract Reference** 2448 – E08C

**Poster:** Sexual behaviour in sleep - a case series and review

**Contact**

**FENS Press Office and all media enquiries:**

Elaine Snell, Snell Communications Ltd, London UK (*English language*)

tel: +44 (0)20 7738 0424 (*before 1 July and after 10 July*); or mobile +44 (0)7973 953 794

email: [Elaine@snell-communications.net](mailto:Elaine@snell-communications.net)

Metha Loumann, methamedia, Copenhagen, Denmark (*Danish language*)  
tel: +45 60 82 04 03  
email: [ml@methamedia.dk](mailto:ml@methamedia.dk)

## NOTES TO EDITORS

**The 10th FENS Forum of Neuroscience**, the largest basic neuroscience meeting in Europe, organised by FENS and hosted by the Danish Society for Neuroscience will attract an estimated 6000 international delegates. FENS mission is to advance research and education in neuroscience within and outside Europe, to facilitate interaction and coordination between its members. FENS represents 43 national and single discipline neuroscience societies with about 24,000 member scientists from 33 European countries. <http://www.fens.org/>

### Further Reading

Medicolegal aspects of complex behaviours arising from the sleep period: a review and guide for the practising sleep physician. I. Morrison, J.M.M. Rumbold and R.L. Riha, *Sleep Medicine Reviews*, 2014 vol 18, no. 3, pp. 249-260

Calls for an International Consensus on Sleep-Related Violence and Sexual Behavior in Sleep Are Premature. J. Rumbold, I. Morrison, and R.L. Riha *Journal of Clinical Sleep Medicine*, 2014 vol 10, no. 11, pp. 1253-1253.

Psychiatric Comorbidity in Arousal Disorders: Chicken or Egg? K.E. Selby, I. Morrison, R.L. Riha. *The Journal of Neuropsychiatry and Clinical Neurosciences*, 2012 24(3), p. E36