PRESS RELEASE
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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

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

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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
