

SLEEP APNOEA AND MENTAL HEALTH

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Many have shared experiences of themselves or individuals they were sleeping with having struggled with breathing stops and restarts repeatedly in the course of their sleep. This could be a condition known as obstructive sleep hypopnoea syndrome (commonly referred to as sleep apnoea). Sleep apnoea is characterised by individuals trying to breathe against an airway that is obstructed. Individuals with sleep apnoea cannot sleep and breathe at the same time hence a significant sleep deprivation. Symptoms can also include disruptive snoring and excessive sleepiness.

Sleep apnoea is a very common as a comorbid condition with chronic physical conditions like chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, cardiovascular disease and hypertension. In addition to the above conditions, obesity is also another risk factor for development of sleep apnoea and/or can also exacerbate the onset of the sleep apnoea.

Having attributed sleep apnoea to the afore-mentioned physical conditions, is there any link of sleep apnoea with mental health problems? Sleep apnoea is a respiratory disorder that mimic psychiatric disorders that have sleep problems. There is link of sleep apnoea with mental health, as several studies have linked some mental health conditions with the sleep apnoea. Conditions like mood disorders, anxiety disorder, and post-traumatic stress disorder are associated with sleep apnoea. The risk of sleep apnoea have been documented to be high in psychotic disorders like schizophrenia. Some studies, although a smaller sample size was attributed to the studies, have linked the onset of sleep apnoea with suicidal ideation and thinking.

Sleep loss emanating from the sleep apnoea can have adverse consequences on the quality of life. As a result of inadequate sleep and excessive daytime sleep, there can be psychomotor impairments which can result in inattention and being gullible to errors in the workplace which facilitate work stressors. Relationships are also affected by snoring.

As earlier highlighted, obesity is a risk factor for sleep apnoea and therefore weight management can be pivotal in preventing sleep apnoea. In view of the co-morbidity with mental health conditions, it would be ideal for sleep apnoea patients to be regularly screened for mental health problems. In the same wavelength, those diagnosed with mental health problems should be done a comprehensive sleep evaluation. Addressing the mental health issues of sleep apnoea patients improve their quality of life, but it may as well improve compliance with treatment addressing sleep apnoea.