ISSN: 2584-0355
DOI: doi.org/10.51219/MCCRJ/Ian-Caldeira-Ruppen/209

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Medical & Clinical Case Reports Journal

https://urfpublishers.com/journal/case-reports

Vol: 3 & Iss: 1

Review

Impact of Sleep on Mental Health: A Brief Review

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Citation: Gois GA, Ruppen IC, Martinez NM, et al. Impact of Sleep on Mental Health: A Brief Review. *Medi Clin Case Rep J* 2025;3(1):791-792. DOI: doi.org/10.51219/MCCRJ/Ian-Caldeira-Ruppen/209

Received: 14 March, 2025; **Accepted:** 16 March, 2025; **Published:** 18 March, 2025

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ABSTRACT

Sleep plays a crucial role in maintaining mental health, directly influencing cognitive, emotional and physiological processes. Changes in sleep patterns are associated with various mental health conditions, such as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorders. This article reviews recent literature on the impacts of sleep on mental health, highlighting evidence on how sleep quality and duration affect brain function and emotional well-being. The findings emphasize the importance of sleep-based interventions as a strategy for mental health promotion.

Keywords: Mental health; Sleep; Depression; Anxiety; Well-being

Introduction

Sleep is an essential biological function that affects virtually all aspects of human health. It plays a vital role in rest and physical recovery, in addition to being fundamental for emotional regulation and cognitive functions such as memory, learning and attention. Although science has significantly advanced in understanding sleep mechanisms, much remains to be explored regarding its interaction with mental health. Scientific literature consistently demonstrates that sleep disorders can be both a cause and a consequence of various mental disorders. For example, insomnia is commonly associated with depression and anxiety, while sleep apnea has been linked to cognitive impairment and an increased risk of dementia. Furthermore, inadequate sleep duration-both excess and deprivation-has been associated with an increased risk of suicide, mood alterations and difficulty in stress management.

The impacts of sleep on mental health can also be observed in specific populations, such as night shift workers, adolescents and

the elderly. Each group presents unique vulnerabilities related to sleep quality and duration, which result in a higher prevalence of mental disorders in these segments. Thus, understanding the relationship between sleep and mental health is not only relevant but essential for the development of effective public policies and clinical interventions.

Objectives

This article reviews recent studies on the impact of sleep on mental health, aiming to consolidate current knowledge and highlight priority areas for future research. It emphasizes how sleep quality and duration affect brain and emotional processes and examines the clinical implications for the prevention and management of mental disorders.

Materials and Methods

A bibliographic review of articles published in the PUBMED, ScienceDirect, Scielo and PsycINFO databases was conducted to support this study.

Discussion

The review findings support existing literature, showing that sleep quality is a crucial determinant of mental health. Several studies have identified that individuals with insomnia are at a higher risk of developing anxiety and depression disorders. A longitudinal study with more than 5,000 participants demonstrated that chronic insomnia increases the probability of developing depression by 60% over five years. Additionally, sleep disorders such as obstructive sleep apnea have been associated with higher levels of oxidative stress, which can compromise neuronal health and lead to mental disorders. The underlying mechanisms include alterations in neurochemical and hormonal systems, such as dysregulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis, which is crucial for stress response. Sleep deprivation also interferes with brain reward circuits, affecting dopamine levels and increasing vulnerability to disorders such as depression and substance abuse.

Another relevant aspect is the impact of sleep on cognitive and emotional functioning. Lack of sleep impairs working memory, judgment and emotional regulation, which can worsen symptoms of anxiety and irritability. Neuroimaging studies show that sleep-deprived individuals exhibit greater amygdala activation and weaker connections with the prefrontal cortex, areas involved in threat evaluation and decision-making.

Adolescence is a critical period in which sleep alterations can have long-term impacts on mental health. Studies show that adolescents with chronic sleep deprivation are at a higher risk of developing depressive and anxiety disorders. Similarly, elderly individuals with sleep disorders, such as insomnia or sleep fragmentation, are more prone to cognitive decline and dementia. Interventions such as cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I), sleep hygiene techniques and melatonin use have shown promising results in improving sleep quality and reducing mental disorder symptoms. However, further studies are needed to investigate the long-term efficacy of these interventions and their application in diverse populations.

Conclusion

Sleep plays a fundamental role in maintaining mental health, influencing emotional, cognitive and physiological aspects. The literature review shows that sleep disorders are strongly associated with the development of mental disorders such as depression, anxiety and bipolar disorders. Early identification and effective treatment of these disorders can significantly reduce their impact on mental health. However, it is crucial that therapeutic approaches consider individual particularities, including biological, psychological and social factors. Future studies should expand the understanding of the underlying mechanisms linking sleep and mental health and explore new interventions that can optimize these outcomes. Investments in education and awareness about the importance of sleep are also essential for promoting stronger mental health.

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