

The problem of nightmares



Dreaming is an important part of our lives. According to E. Hartmann (1998, p. 1.), we spend 5-15% of our lives dreaming. That's approximately 10 years of a human life! Dreams can be pleasant and they are important for biological processes in our body. However, sometimes dreaming is not so enjoyable. Of all the adults, 2-8% has one or more nightmares per month (L. Chanin, 2011, Nightmares in Adults). Unfortunately, I am one of them. In general, nightmares are not regarded as serious issues but I think they should be because they can cause serious physical and psychological problems. According to H. Kellerman (1987, p. 217), the word nightmare derives from the Old English word "mare", which was a mythological demon who brought frightening dreams to people. The belief in the Mare goes back to the 13th century, maybe even further. Throughout history, nightmares have played a role in peoples' lives. Evidence of that can be found in many different media. In Ancient Greek plays, nightmares are often a symbolic representation of a fact, like in Aeschylus's *Oresteia*, where Clytemnestra dreams of giving birth to a snake and later gets murdered by her son, Orestes. Other examples can be found in Shakespeare and a lot of horror movies. Nightmares are common; everyone has them once in a while. You wake up, feel relieved, and move on or go back to sleep. L. Chanin (2011, *Nightmares in Adults*) states that usually, nightmares occurring at an adult age are related to stress or fever. Children are more likely to have nightmares because they have a strong imagination and fears start to develop. It is not yet proven what kind of function dreams have, therefore it is unknown why people experience nightmares, and if they might have a function (E. Hartmann, 1998). Freud's opinion on dreams is that "Every dream is the fulfilment of a wish", but if that were true for nightmares we

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would have a lot of masochists in the world. Although we don't know why we experience nightmares, we do know that it can be caused by psychological and even genetic factors. When someone suffers from nightmares, there's a chance that other members of the family also suffer or suffered from nightmares (L. Chanin, 2011, Nightmares). My grandmother, for example, also has sleeping problems and nightmares. There are other factors that can cause nightmares, for example some medicines can be a potential cause for nightmares. If nightmares become problematic, it is mostly due to the frequency or intensity of the bad dreams. Macalester. edu (2012) states there are four criteria to determine a nightmare disorder: nightmares should occur frequently and they should lead to awakening, when the dreamer awakes he/she should be fully alert, the dreamer should experience significant distress during their daily life caused by nightmares, and the nightmares cannot be caused by the use of medication. To help understand the problems a nightmare disorder can cause, I will explain what their influence is on my life. I have had nightmares for as long as I can remember, almost every night and usually more than one per night. This causes sleep deprivation, because it's hard to fall asleep after having experienced something very disturbing. Also, it has an impact on me during the day, because I remember the dreams or get flashbacks from nightmares while I am awake. A combination of sleep deprivation and flashbacks can cause a panic attack; furthermore, nightmares tend to get worse if you don't get enough sleep, which causes a negative spiral. A lot of people do not realise the problems nightmares can cause because their own experiences are not that extreme. Also, nightmares are often not mentioned as a serious sleeping disorder. And that while even Shakespeare understood the impact

of nightmares! Hamlet refrained from committing suicide out of fear of having bad dreams forever; “ To sleep, perchance to dream- ay, there's the rub.” The conclusion of this essay is that frequent nightmares can lead to a sleep disorder that can have serious effects on an individual’s life. I think there should be more research about nightmare disorders and that awareness of this disorder should be raised so more people with this problem feel that their problems are taken seriously, because they can make your life a living hell. References Chenin, L. R. " Adult Nightmares: Causes and Treatments." WebMD. WebMD, 30 July 2012.. . Chenin, L. R. “ Nightmares" WebMD. WebMD, 15 October 2012. Retrieved from <http://children.webmd.com/guide/nightmares>. Hartmann, E. (1998). *Dreams and Nightmares: The New Theory on the Origin and Meaning of Dreams*. New York: Plenum Press. Kellerman, H. (1987). *The Nightmare: Psychological and Biological Foundations*. New York: Columbia University Press “ Nightmares". Nightmare Disorder is.... 2012. Retrieved from: http://www.macalester.edu/psychology/whathap/ubnpr/nightmares/zNightmare_Disorder_definiton.html