

The SLEEP Study: Prevalence, Patterns, and Psychophysiological Responses to Sexual Dreams in U.S. Adults

Emmanuel Eroume A Egom^{1,2,3*}, Elijah-Bill Christopher Nguem Nguem^{4,5}, Bernadette Sandrine Lema^{4,5}

¹Hartford Health Care Heart and Vascular Institute, Hartford Hospital, Hartford, USA

²Institut du Savoir Montfort (ISM), Ottawa, Canada

³Laboratory of Human Metabolism and Non-Communicable Diseases, Institute of Medical Research and Medicinal Plants Studies (IMPM), Yaoundé, Cameroon

⁴Heaven Foundation/Fondation CIEL, Hartford, USA

⁵Harmony Health Physical and Spiritual Wellness Center (Harmony Care), Woodland Medical Centre, Hartford, USA

Email: *egomemmanuel@gmail.com, *connect@heavenfoundationciel.com, *connect@harmonycare.care

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Abstract

Background: Sexual dreams are a common but understudied dimension of human experience. Despite their ubiquity, limited evidence exists on their frequency, content, and emotional or physiological effects. This study examined the prevalence and correlations of sexual dreams to better understand their role in emotional and sexual well-being. **Objective:** To assess the prevalence, frequency, and characteristics of sexual dreams and explore associations with demographic, psychological, and lifestyle factors. **Methods:** The SLEEP Study (Sexual Dreams, Emotional and Physical Impact) was a cross-sectional survey of 301 U.S. adults. Participants completed an online questionnaire assessing sexual dream frequency, gender of dream partners, post-dream physical and emotional responses, and effects on daily life. Descriptive statistics and Pearson correlations examined relationships between dream frequency and age, gender, sexual orientation, relationship status, and employment. **Results:** Nearly all participants (99.67%) reported experiencing sexual dreams. Over half (54.55%) experienced them “frequently” (a few times per month), and 9.09% “very frequently”. Dream content included opposite-sex (47.72%) and both-sex (47.02%) interactions, indicating subconscious sexual fluidity. Post-dream symptoms included increased heart rate (57.38%), sweating (34.97%), and anxiety (33.88%), reflecting autonomic activation. Frequent sexual dreams correlated positively with older age, male gender, and long-term relationships, and negatively with full-time employment ($p < 0.05$). While 43.86% reported no daytime effects, others noted mood changes (30.99%), distractions (25.15%), and relationship

impacts (11.11%). **Conclusions:** Sexual dreams are a nearly universal phenomenon marked by diverse content and measurable physiological and emotional responses. Their study may help normalize discussions of sexuality, dreaming, and emotional health within clinical and psychological contexts.

Keywords

Sexual Dreams, Dream Frequency, Emotional Impact, Physical Symptoms, Sexual Orientation, Mental Health, Relationships

1. Introduction

Sexual dreams represent an underexplored dimension of human consciousness [1]-[7]. Although dreams in general have received extensive psychological study, comparatively little is known about their sexual forms—how often they occur, what they contain, and how they relate to emotional and physical well-being [1]-[7]. These experiences, often considered private or taboo, offer a unique window into the intersection of sexuality, mental health, and the subconscious mind [1]-[9].

Dreams provide a rich source of insight into our deepest thoughts, fears, and desires [1] [2] [10]-[17]. Sexual dreams, in particular, may reflect one's psychological state, emotional needs, and societal influences [1] [2] [10]-[17]. Understanding them is critical not only for normalizing this near-universal phenomenon but also for exploring their implications for emotional well-being, relationships, and mental health [1] [2] [10]-[17].

In this study, *sexual dreams* refer to any dreams involving explicit sexual activity, erotic or romantic interaction, or emotionally intimate situations with a sexual or sensual element. This definition encompasses a continuum of experiences from overt sexual acts to emotionally charged or romantic imagery occurring during sleep.

The present research therefore explores the associations between sexual dream frequency and demographic, psychological, and lifestyle characteristics.

2. Methods

2.1. Study Design

The SLEEP Study (Sexual Dreams, Emotional and Physical Impact) was a cross-sectional, survey-based study aiming to examine the prevalence, frequency, and effects of sexual dreams on emotional and physical well-being. Conducted by the Heaven Foundation/Fondation CIEL, the study utilized an online questionnaire to gather both quantitative and qualitative data from participants.

2.2. Participants

A total of 301 adults residing in the United States participated in the study. Participants were screened to ensure relevance and diversity. Inclusion criteria in-

cluded consenting adults willing to complete the online survey.

Participants were adults aged 18 years or older, residing in the United States, who provided electronic consent and completed at least 90 percent of the survey items. Responses that were incomplete or internally inconsistent (e.g., contradictory demographic answers) were excluded from analysis to ensure data integrity. This yielded a final analytic sample of 301 participants with a mean age of 39.5 years ($SD = 12.3$; range 19 - 104 years). Demographic information, including age, gender, and general health status, was collected to aid in correlating sexual dream experiences with various lifestyle and health factors.

2.3. Procedure

- **Consent and Enrollment:** Participants received information about the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and data confidentiality before providing informed consent. Once enrolled, they completed a demographic questionnaire.
- **Questionnaire:** The primary data collection tool was an online questionnaire with sections covering:
 - 1) **Dream Experience:** Questions about whether participants had experienced sexual dreams, the frequency of such dreams, and the gender of individuals involved.
 - 2) **Physical and Emotional Symptoms:** Items assessing post-dream symptoms such as increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, or anxiety.
 - 3) **Daily Life Impact:** Inquiries into whether sexual dreams affected participants' mood, behavior, thoughts, and relationships.
 - 4) **Health and Lifestyle Factors:** Participants were asked about their long-term health conditions, sexual orientation, gender identity, relationships, living arrangements, mental health diagnoses, and treatments.

2.4. Measures

The questionnaire covered:

- **Sexual Dream Frequency:** Responses ranged from "Never" to "Very frequently (a few times a week)".
- **Dream Content:** Participants were asked about the gender of individuals involved in their sexual dreams.
- **Physical and Emotional Symptoms:** Post-dream symptoms were assessed, including increased heart rate, sweating, muscle tension, and anxiety.
- **Mental Health Variables:** Information on conditions such as anxiety, depression, ADHD, and PTSD, including severity and treatment, was collected.
- **Lifestyle Factors:** Information on smoking status, relationship status, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, employment, education, and ethnicity was gathered to explore potential correlations.

2.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics to summarize the

prevalence and nature of sexual dreams. Pearson correlation coefficients were computed to examine relationships between mental health conditions and dream frequency. A p-value threshold of 0.05 was used to identify significant correlations. Categorical variables were one-hot encoded for analysis. Open-ended comments provided within the survey were thematically summarized to complement the quantitative findings.

2.6. Ethical Considerations

All data were anonymized to protect participants' privacy, with data stored securely and participants retaining the right to access, rectify, or erase their data. Ethical guidelines were followed, ensuring transparency and confidentiality throughout the study.

3. Results

3.1. Prevalence and Frequency of Sexual Dreams

Among the 301 respondents, an overwhelming 99.67% indicated that they had experienced a sexual dream at some point in their lives, underscoring the widespread and nearly universal occurrence of such dreams (**Figure 1**). This high prevalence suggests that sexual dreams are a common feature of human experience, cutting across various demographic and personal backgrounds. Only 0.33% of respondents reported never having had a sexual dream, a finding that highlights the rarity of non-occurrence and opens up potential avenues for further exploration into the reasons behind this minority group's experience.

Responses to "Have you ever had a sexual dream?"

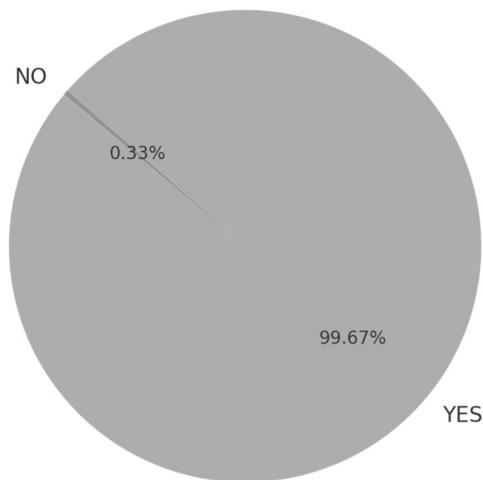


Figure 1. A pie chart representing the responses to the question, "Have you ever had a sexual dream?" The overwhelming majority of participants (99.67%) answered "YES", while only 0.33% responded "NO". This visualization highlights the prevalence of sexual dreams among the participants and supports the study's claim that such dreams are a nearly universal experience.

When looking at the frequency of these dreams, a significant portion of participants (54.55%) reported experiencing sexual dreams “Frequently”, defined as a few times a month. This indicates that for more than half of the sample, sexual dreams are a relatively regular occurrence. A smaller, yet notable group of respondents (9.09%) indicated that they experience sexual dreams “Very frequently”, or a few times a week (Figure 2). This suggests that for a minority of individuals, sexual dreams are a highly recurrent aspect of their sleep experience, potentially hinting at different psychological, spiritual, emotional, or physiological factors driving this increased frequency.

On the other hand, a considerable portion of the sample (36.36%) reported that they experience sexual dreams “Rarely”, meaning once a year or less. This highlights the variability in sexual dream frequency across individuals, emphasizing that while sexual dreams are nearly universal, the regularity with which they occur can vary significantly. These results demonstrate a broad range of experiences when it comes to sexual dreams, suggesting that individual factors such as age, stress levels, mental and spiritual health status, and personal beliefs may play a role in shaping how often sexual dreams occur.

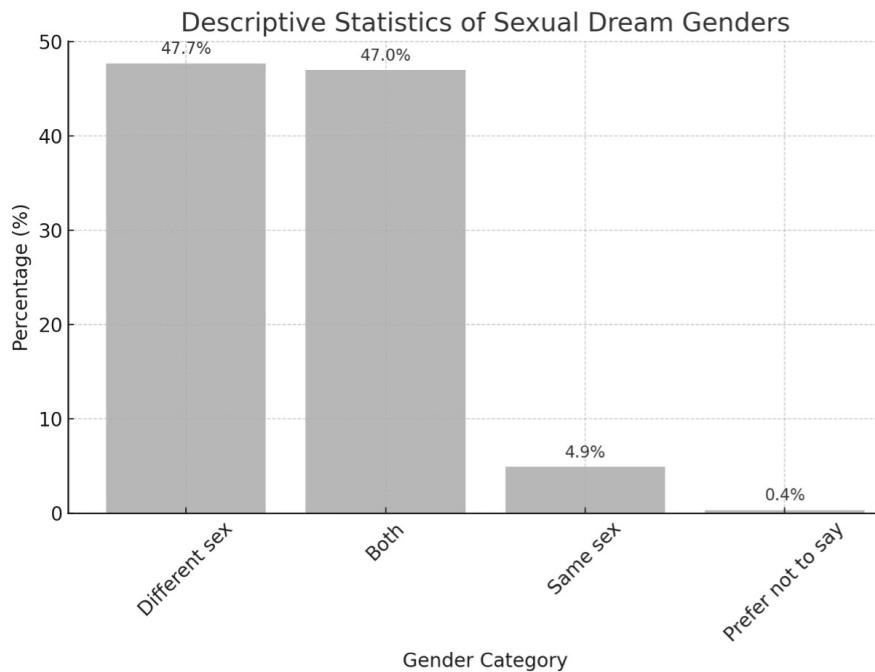


Figure 2. A horizontal bar chart visualizing the frequency of sexual dreams among participants. The chart reveals that the majority of participants (54.55%) report experiencing sexual dreams “Frequently (a few times a month)”, followed by 36.36% who experience them “Rarely (once a year or less)”. A smaller percentage (9.09%) report having sexual dreams “Very frequently (a few times a week)”. This figure highlights the varied frequency of sexual dream experiences among the participants.

Overall, the data illustrate that the majority of individuals experience sexual dreams on a relatively regular basis, with only a minority either having them very

frequently or very rarely. This range of frequencies underscores the need for a nuanced understanding of sexual dreams, as they appear to be a common, yet varied, phenomenon in the lives of many individuals. Future research could explore the factors influencing these differences in frequency, potentially offering deeper insights into the psychological and emotional functions of sexual dreams.

3.2. Dream Gender Content

The gender of individuals involved in sexual dreams varied significantly among the participants, reflecting a broad spectrum of experiences. A large portion of the respondents (47.72%) reported that their sexual dreams involved individuals of the opposite sex, indicating that heteronormative dynamics were prevalent in the dream content for nearly half of the participants (Figure 3). This aligns with traditional expectations of sexual attraction, where many individuals' sexual experiences—both in waking life and in dreams—tend to follow societal norms of opposite-sex interactions.

Interestingly, an almost equal percentage of participants (47.02%) reported having sexual dreams involving both sexes (Figure 3). This nearly equal distribution between dreams involving individuals of the opposite sex and dreams involving both sexes suggests that many individuals exhibit a form of sexual fluidity in their dream states, even if this may not necessarily correspond to their waking-life sexual orientation or experiences. This finding is particularly insightful as it highlights the flexibility of sexual exploration in the subconscious mind, where boundaries and preferences seen in conscious life may blur or shift. It raises intriguing questions about the role of dreams in exploring different aspects of sexuality that might not be part of an individual's conscious or everyday sexual identity.

A smaller but notable percentage (4.91%) of participants reported having same-sex sexual dreams, indicating that while same-sex attraction in dreams does occur, it is less commonly reported than opposite-sex or both-sex experiences (Figure 3). This could be due to a variety of factors, including personal comfort with disclosing same-sex dreams, societal influences on sexual expression, or internalized beliefs that might affect how participants interpret or recall their dreams. Despite its lower prevalence, the occurrence of same-sex sexual dreams suggests that, for some individuals, their subconscious mind may be a space where they explore same-sex attraction, even if this is not a predominant feature of their waking sexual life.

Finally, a very small percentage of participants (0.35%) chose not to disclose the gender of individuals in their sexual dreams (Figure 3). This could indicate discomfort in sharing this information or uncertainty in recalling the details of the dreams. This low rate of non-disclosure suggests that most participants felt relatively comfortable discussing the gender dynamics within their sexual dreams, further reflecting the normalization of such experiences in the context of this study.

These findings illustrate the diversity in sexual dream experiences, underscor-

ing the complexity of sexual expression in the subconscious. The nearly equal distribution between opposite-sex and both-sex dreams suggests that gender fluidity in dreams is common, even among individuals who may not identify with fluid sexual orientations in waking life. This points to the potential of dreams as a safe and uninhibited space for exploring aspects of sexual identity that might not be fully expressed or understood in the conscious mind. Further research could delve into the psychological or emotional factors that influence this fluidity in sexual dreams, offering deeper insights into the interplay between subconscious desires and waking-life sexual identity.

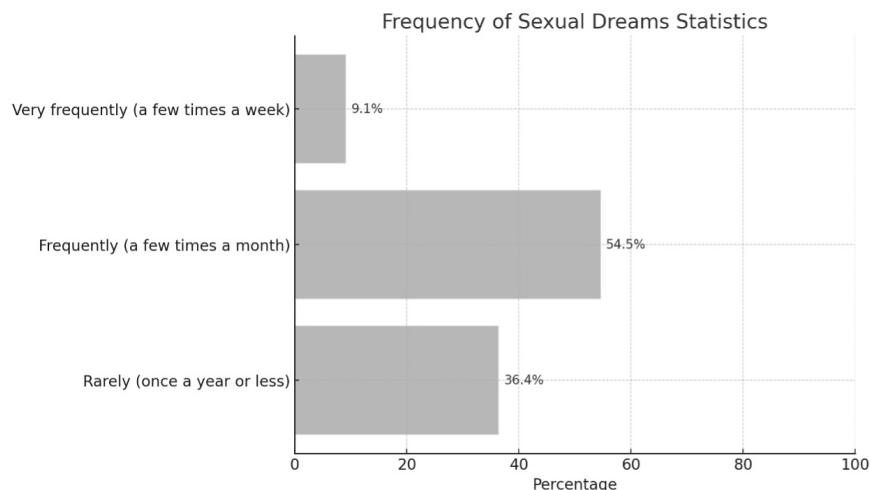


Figure 3. A bar chart displaying the descriptive statistics for the gender of individuals involved in participants' sexual dreams. The chart provides a comparative analysis of responses, showing the distribution across different categories, including "Different sex", "Same sex", and "Both", offering insights into the diversity of sexual dream content.

3.3. Symptomatology after Sexual Dreams

The most frequently reported symptom following a sexual dream was an increased heart rate, experienced by 57.38% of participants (Figure 4). This finding highlights the physiological arousal that often accompanies sexual dreams, demonstrating that the body may react in ways similar to real-life emotional or physical stimulation during sleep. The fact that more than half of the participants reported this symptom suggests that sexual dreams frequently elicit a significant autonomic response, characterized by heightened cardiovascular activity. This increase in heart rate may be linked to the emotional content of the dreams, particularly if they evoke excitement, desire, or anxiety, all of which are known to stimulate the sympathetic nervous system.

Closely associated with this heightened heart rate was the presence of other physical symptoms, such as sweating, which was reported by 34.97% of participants (Figure 4). Sweating is another indicator of autonomic arousal, often linked to emotional states of stress, anxiety, or excitement. The occurrence of sweating in conjunction with an increased heart rate indicates that sexual dreams may trig-

ger a broader physiological response, akin to what individuals might experience during real-life scenarios that provoke strong emotions. This suggests that sexual dreams are not only mentally stimulating but can also induce physical reactions that may mirror the body's response to emotional or stressful events in waking life.

Additionally, anxiety was reported by 33.88% of participants, further underscoring the emotional complexity of sexual dreams (**Figure 4**). The combination of increased heart rate and anxiety points to the possibility that, for some individuals, sexual dreams are not purely pleasurable or neutral experiences. Instead, they may evoke feelings of discomfort, stress, or unresolved emotional and spiritual tension. The presence of anxiety as a post-dream symptom suggests that sexual dreams can provoke a spectrum of emotional reactions, potentially tied to personal beliefs about sexuality, past experiences, or conflicts within current relationships. This anxiety, when paired with physiological symptoms like a rapid heart rate and sweating, indicates that sexual dreams can trigger a stress-like response, making them more than just innocuous fantasies.

Muscle tension, experienced by 22.95% of participants, adds another layer to the physical response elicited by sexual dreams (**Figure 4**). Muscle tension is often associated with states of stress or physical exertion, suggesting that sexual dreams may correlate with the body reacting as though it is experiencing a physically intense situation. This could reflect the emotional intensity within the dream itself, where the body mirrors the mind's engagement in a scenario that feels real, even though it is occurring in a subconscious state. The presence of muscle tension alongside other symptoms like increased heart rate and anxiety further reinforces the idea that sexual dreams can be a source of significant physical arousal and tension, not unlike the body's reaction to real-world stressors or challenges.

Interestingly, 20.77% of participants reported experiencing no physical or emotional symptoms after sexual dreams, highlighting the variability in how individuals respond to such dreams (**Figure 4**). For these participants, sexual dreams may have little lasting impact on their physiological or emotional state, suggesting that some individuals are either less affected by the content of their dreams or that their dreams are less emotionally intense. This lack of physical or emotional symptoms could also indicate differences in how people process sexual experiences within the dream state, with some individuals experiencing a level of detachment or emotional distance from the dream's content.

In addition to the commonly reported symptoms, 6.01% of participants cited "Other" symptoms, which could encompass a range of less frequently reported physical or emotional reactions. These might include feelings of shame, confusion, elation, or even discomfort related to the dream content. The diversity of responses within this "Other" category highlights the complex and varied ways in which individuals react to sexual dreams, pointing to the possibility that personal, cultural, or psychological factors may shape the nature and intensity of these reactions.

The combination of physical and emotional symptoms, particularly the frequent pairing of increased heart rate with anxiety, suggests that sexual dreams can evoke a broad physiological response similar to that of stress reactions. This implies that the body interprets sexual dreams in much the same way it would interpret real-life events that correlate with emotional arousal or tension. The activation of the sympathetic nervous system during sexual dreams could lead to a “fight-or-flight” response, in which the body is prepared for action even though the individual is still asleep. This heightened state of arousal may explain why some individuals wake up feeling physically restless or emotionally unsettled after such dreams.

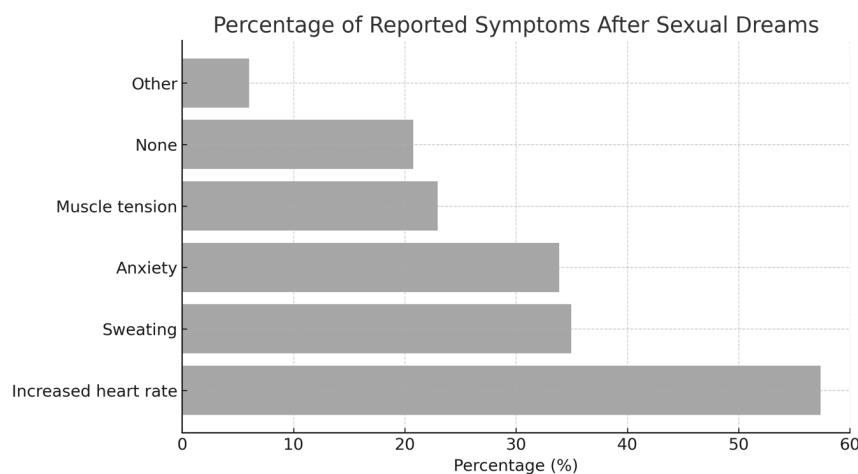


Figure 4. A bar chart illustrating the percentage of each reported symptom experienced after sexual dreams. The most commonly reported symptom is “Increased heart rate”, followed by “Sweating” and “Anxiety”. This figure offers a comparative overview of the frequency of different physical and emotional responses associated with sexual dreams, shedding light on their potential physiological impact.

3.4. Impact of Sexual Dreams on Daily Life

The majority of respondents (43.86%) reported that sexual dreams had no significant impact on their daily lives, suggesting that for many individuals, these dreams are simply a passing experience with little residual effect on their emotions, thoughts, or behavior (**Figure 5**). This finding indicates that for a substantial portion of participants, sexual dreams may not carry emotional weight or provoke reflection during waking hours. It may also reflect a level of detachment or normalization, where sexual dreams are considered a routine part of sleep without broader implications for daily life.

However, a notable percentage of respondents (30.99%) reported that their sexual dreams led to mood changes (**Figure 5**). This finding underscores the emotional impact these dreams can have, suggesting that sexual dreams can influence an individual’s emotional state, either positively or negatively. For some, these mood shifts may be tied to the content of the dreams, with sexual dreams possibly triggering feelings of desire, happiness, or satisfaction, but also anxiety, guilt, or

discomfort depending on the dream's context and the individual's personal beliefs or life circumstances. The emotional ripple effects of such dreams could affect how individuals approach their day, shaping their interactions, productivity, or mental well-being.

In addition to mood changes, 29.24% of respondents indicated that their thoughts or behavior were influenced by their sexual dreams (**Figure 5**). This suggests that these dreams can occupy a person's mind even after waking, potentially causing preoccupation with the dream content or prompting reflection on what the dream may signify. For some, sexual dreams might lead to curiosity or introspection about their sexual desires or relationships, while for others, the content of the dreams could create anxiety or discomfort that affects how they engage with others. The influence on behavior could manifest in subtle ways, such as increased intimacy or distance in relationships, or changes in attitudes and decisions related to personal or romantic matters.

Distractions were another common effect, with 25.15% of respondents indicating that their sexual dreams were associated with disruptions in their daily focus (**Figure 5**). This suggests that for a quarter of participants, sexual dreams can linger in their minds, diverting attention away from tasks or causing daydreaming or reflection throughout the day. Distraction from sexual dreams could impact productivity at work or school, or lead to feelings of frustration if the individual struggles to concentrate because their mind is preoccupied with the dream content. This finding highlights the capacity of sexual dreams to intrude on waking life, not just emotionally, but cognitively, potentially interfering with daily routines and responsibilities.

An important aspect of these findings is the impact of sexual dreams on relationships, as reported by 11.11% of respondents (**Figure 5**). For this subset of participants, sexual dreams influenced how they interacted with their partners or other close individuals. These dreams could lead to changes in romantic or sexual behavior, create tension or awkwardness in relationships, or even provoke jealousy or insecurity if the dream involved someone other than their partner. In some cases, the dreams might prompt deeper reflection on the state of the relationship or the individual's desires, which could either strengthen or challenge the existing dynamics. The ability of sexual dreams to influence interpersonal relationships highlights their potential significance beyond the individual, affecting social and romantic connections in both subtle and profound ways.

Furthermore, a considerable number of respondents (24%) reported multiple impacts from their sexual dreams, with many citing a combination of mood changes, behavioral influences, and distractions. This overlap in effects points to the complexity of how sexual dreams can ripple through different aspects of daily life, suggesting that the impact of these dreams is not confined to a single domain. For example, a sexual dream might simultaneously alter a person's mood, influence their behavior toward a partner, and distract them from tasks, creating a multi-faceted and interconnected response. This complexity underscores the powerful influence dreams can have on both emotional and cognitive processes, illustrating

how the subconscious can shape conscious life in intricate and sometimes unexpected ways.

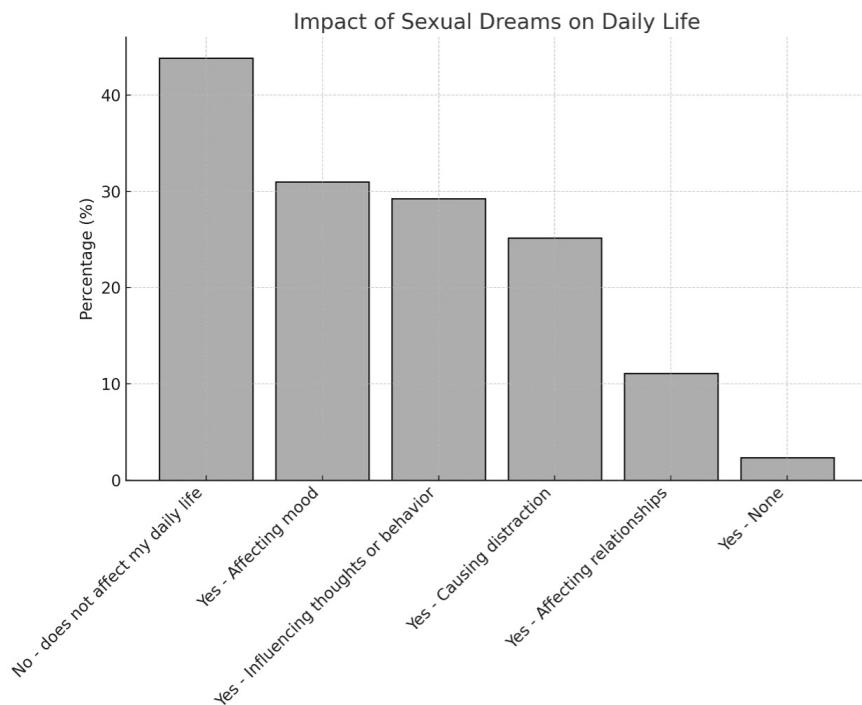


Figure 5. This chart visualizes the reported effects of sexual dreams on daily life. The data indicate that a significant portion of participants report no impact from their sexual dreams; however, there are notable percentages of individuals who experience various effects, including mood changes, distractions, and relationship impacts. This figure emphasizes the multifaceted nature of how sexual dreams may influence everyday functioning.

3.5. Correlations with Demographic Factors

The analysis of correlations between sexual dream experiences and various demographic factors revealed intriguing patterns that highlight how different aspects of identity, relationship dynamics, and life circumstances may influence the frequency and nature of sexual dreams. These correlations provide a deeper understanding of the factors that may shape individuals' dream content and their overall experience with sexual dreams.

3.5.1. Sexual Orientation and Diversity of Sexual Experience

A strong positive correlation ($r = 0.486, p < 0.0001$) was found between participants identifying with individuals with opposite-sex attraction orientation and the occurrence of different-sex sexual dreams. This suggests that individuals with opposite-sex attraction participants are significantly more likely to report dreams involving individuals of the opposite sex, aligning with their waking-life sexual orientation. These findings may reflect a consistency between individuals' conscious sexual preferences and their dream content, where individuals with opposite-sex attraction participants predominantly experience sexual dreams that mirror their waking-life sexual orientation.

ror their romantic and sexual experiences in real life.

Conversely, participants with diverse sexual orientations exhibited a strong negative correlation with different-sex sexual dreams ($r = -0.498$, $p < 0.0001$), indicating that individuals from sexual minority groups were less likely to report sexual dreams involving individuals of the opposite sex. This could suggest that individuals from sexual minority groups are more likely to have dreams involving same-sex partners or more diverse and fluid sexual scenarios, which may reflect their sexual orientation or the broader exploration of sexual identity in their dreams. This difference highlights how sexual orientation plays a key role in shaping dream content, with participants identifying with diverse sexual orientations possibly using their dream world as a space for exploring aspects of their sexual identity that may not always be fully expressed in their waking lives.

These contrasting correlations between individuals with opposite-sex attraction participants and participants identifying with diverse sexual orientations emphasize the impact of sexual orientation on subconscious experiences and sexual dream content. They also underscore the potential for sexual dreams to serve as a reflection of both lived experiences and the exploration of desires or identities that might differ from day-to-day reality.

3.5.2. Gender Identity and Sexual Dreams

Male participants were found to have a positive correlation with the frequency of sexual dreams ($r = 0.141$, $p = 0.014$), indicating that men are more likely to report frequent sexual dreams compared to their female counterparts. This finding aligns with previous research suggesting that men generally report higher frequencies of sexual content in their dreams [1]. The reasons behind this could be multifaceted, possibly linked to hormonal differences, societal attitudes towards male sexuality, or the role of sexual imagery in male fantasy. It may also reflect broader cultural norms where men are encouraged to express their sexual desires more openly, and this socialization may extend into their dream experiences.

The positive correlation between male gender and sexual dream frequency may also point to differences in the ways men and women process sexual thoughts and experiences. Men may be more likely to incorporate sexual scenarios into their dreams as part of their broader cognitive engagement with sexuality, while women might express or experience their sexual thoughts in different ways, perhaps through emotional or relational dream content rather than explicitly sexual scenarios.

3.5.3. Relationship Status

Participants who had been in long-term relationships, particularly those lasting more than five years, demonstrated a positive correlation with reporting sexual dreams ($r = 0.142$, $p = 0.013$). This finding suggests that being in a stable, long-term relationship may increase the likelihood of having sexual dreams. There are several potential explanations for this correlation. Long-term relationships may create a comfortable and familiar environment in which individuals feel safe ex-

ploring their sexual desires, even in their dreams. Additionally, the emotional and physical intimacy experienced in such relationships may naturally extend into the dream world, where participants revisit or reflect on their romantic and sexual interactions with their partners.

Alternatively, it is possible that individuals in long-term relationships may experience sexual dreams as a form of compensation for any unmet sexual desires or emotional needs within the relationship. For some individuals, sexual dreams might serve as an outlet for exploring fantasies or desires that they may not feel comfortable expressing in their waking lives, particularly if they are in a monogamous relationship. This highlights the complex role that long-term relationships can play in shaping sexual dream content, with dreams potentially acting as both a reflection of relational intimacy and a space for the subconscious to explore unfulfilled desires.

3.5.4. Age

The analysis also revealed a notable correlation between age and the frequency of sexual dreams. Older participants, particularly those aged 58 and above, were more likely to report frequent sexual dreams. This finding challenges common assumptions that sexual content in dreams diminishes with age, suggesting instead that sexual thoughts and desires remain present and active in the subconscious well into later life. The reasons behind this increased frequency of sexual dreams among older participants could be tied to a range of factors, including the retention of sexual desires, reflections on past experiences, or even the subconscious processing of life changes such as aging and shifts in relationship dynamics.

On the other hand, younger participants, particularly those aged 20 - 23, reported fewer sexual dreams. This may be linked to the developmental stage of young adulthood, where individuals are still navigating their identities, relationships, and sexuality. Younger participants may be more focused on other aspects of personal and emotional growth, and their dreams may reflect a broader range of concerns, with less emphasis on sexual content. Additionally, younger individuals may experience higher levels of stress or uncertainty related to career, education, and social dynamics, which could influence the themes of their dreams.

3.5.5. Employment Status

Interestingly, full-time workers demonstrated a negative correlation with frequent sexual dreams ($r = -0.178$, $p = 0.002$). This suggests that individuals engaged in full-time work are less likely to report frequent sexual dreams, possibly due to the demands and stressors associated with full-time employment. The pressures of work, long hours, and the mental exhaustion that often accompany full-time roles may leave individuals with less mental and emotional space to process sexual thoughts during sleep. Additionally, full-time workers may experience sleep disruptions or a lack of restorative sleep due to work-related stress, which could impact the occurrence of vivid or sexually charged dreams.

Another possible explanation is that individuals who are more focused on their

careers may prioritize professional or personal goals over romantic or sexual pursuits, and this shift in focus could influence the content of their dreams. The mental energy dedicated to work-related tasks might suppress the subconscious processing of sexual experiences, leading to fewer sexual dreams overall. This finding suggests that lifestyle factors such as employment status and work-life balance play a significant role in shaping not only waking experiences but also the nature and frequency of dream content.

4. Discussion

The findings of this study offer valuable insights into the nature of sexual dreams, revealing that they are a near-universal experience among participants. The overwhelming majority of respondents (99.67%) indicated having experienced sexual dreams, reinforcing the notion that these types of dreams are a common, if not intrinsic, aspect of human consciousness. This prevalence challenges the notion of sexual dreams as taboo or rare, suggesting instead that they are an integral part of the dream world and play a potentially significant role in emotional, spiritual, and psychological well-being.

4.1. Normalizing Sexual Dreams

One of the key takeaways from this research is the importance of normalizing sexual dreams. Given the high prevalence, it is clear that these dreams are not an anomaly but a routine part of many people's sleep experiences. This insight is critical in the context of therapeutic settings, educational discussions, and broader societal conversations about sexuality. Recognizing that sexual dreams are commonplace can help reduce the stigma associated with discussing such topics and encourage individuals to engage more openly in discussions about their sexual health and psychological well-being.

Therapists and mental health professionals may find these findings useful in normalizing the occurrence of sexual dreams for their clients, particularly those who may experience distress or shame regarding these dreams. By fostering a more open and accepting dialogue around sexual dreams, professionals can help individuals process these experiences in a healthier way, potentially uncovering deeper emotional or psychological issues that may be reflected in their dream content [1].

4.2. Gender and Sexual Orientation in Sexual Dream Content

The study's findings regarding the gender of individuals involved in sexual dreams revealed an almost equal distribution between those who reported having sexual dreams with individuals of the opposite sex (47.72%) and those who reported dreams involving both sexes (47.02%). This nearly equal split suggests that many individuals' sexual dreams are not confined to their waking-life sexual orientation or preferences. The presence of sexual dreams involving both sexes may reflect the subconscious mind's exploration of a wider range of sexual experiences, po-

tentially pointing to a more fluid or open conceptualization of sexuality within dreams.

Interestingly, the relatively small proportion (4.91%) of participants who reported same-sex sexual dreams indicates that while same-sex attraction in dreams does occur, it may not be as prevalent as dreams involving different-sex or both-sex interactions. This may suggest that cultural, societal, or personal factors influence how individuals report and interpret these dreams [1]. It is also possible that some participants may feel discomfort or reluctance in acknowledging same-sex sexual dreams due to social stigma or internalized beliefs, even in the relatively anonymous setting of an online survey.

Moreover, the strong correlation between sexual orientation and dream content, with individuals with opposite-sex attraction participants more likely to report different-sex dreams and participants identifying with diverse sexual orientations showing a negative correlation with different-sex dreams, provides further insight into the complex relationship between waking-life sexual orientation and dream experiences. These findings invite future research into the ways sexual orientation influences subconscious sexual experiences and how these experiences may impact one's identity, relationships, and mental health.

4.3. Frequency and Emotional Impact of Sexual Dreams

The frequency of sexual dreams reported by participants varied, with the majority (54.55%) indicating that they experience such dreams "frequently" (a few times a month), while a smaller but notable group (9.09%) experienced them "very frequently" (a few times a week). This suggests that for a significant portion of the population, sexual dreams are a regular part of their sleep experience. On the other end of the spectrum, 36.36% of participants reported experiencing sexual dreams "rarely" (once a year or less), indicating considerable variability in sexual dream frequency across individuals.

The varying frequency of sexual dreams could be influenced by numerous factors, including stress levels, hormonal fluctuations, sleep quality, and emotional states [1] [18]. For instance, older participants were found to have a positive correlation with frequent sexual dreams, particularly those aged 58 and above. This finding challenges the common perception that sexual content in dreams might decline with age. Conversely, younger age groups [19]-[22] were less likely to report frequent sexual dreams, raising questions about how life stages, emotional maturity, and relationship dynamics influence dream content.

The study also reveals that sexual dreams often evoke a strong physiological response. Over half of the participants (57.38%) reported experiencing increased heart rate following a sexual dream, and many also reported anxiety (33.88%), sweating (34.97%), or muscle tension (22.95%). These findings suggest that sexual dreams can elicit significant physical arousal, akin to real-life emotional or physical stressors. This heightened sympathetic nervous system activity, reflected in symptoms like heart rate elevation and sweating, demonstrates the deep interplay

between physical and emotional responses during sleep [19]-[21] [23].

4.4. Psychological Implications and Mental Health

Although many participants (43.86%) indicated that sexual dreams had no significant impact on their daily lives, a substantial portion reported mood changes (30.99%), distractions (25.15%), and even relationship effects (11.11%) due to these dreams. These findings underscore the complexity of the influence sexual dreams can have on emotional and psychological well-being. For some individuals, these dreams may trigger residual feelings of anxiety, stress, or emotional conflict, which can spill over into their waking lives and affect relationships, work, and self-perception [1].

The potential for sexual dreams to impact mental health is particularly relevant for individuals who experience these dreams frequently and report associated anxiety or distress [1] [10] [22] [24] [25]. For these individuals, sexual dreams may serve as a reflection of unresolved emotional issues, relationship tensions, or internal conflicts regarding sexuality [1] [10] [22] [24] [25]. This is especially pertinent in cases where sexual dreams evoke feelings of discomfort or shame, which may stem from cultural, religious, or personal beliefs about sexuality [1] [10] [22] [24] [25].

The study also highlights the importance of considering individual differences in the psychological processing of sexual dreams. While some individuals experience no emotional or physical effects, others report multiple symptoms, such as increased heart rate combined with anxiety, suggesting a more complex emotional or stress-related reaction to these dreams. This points to the need for a more personalized approach in understanding the psychological impact of sexual dreams, taking into account factors such as mental health history, emotional regulation, and personal beliefs about sexuality.

4.5. Study Limitations

Sample Size and Diversity: While the sample size of 301 participants provides valuable insights, it may not be sufficiently large or diverse to capture the full spectrum of experiences related to sexual dreams. The underrepresentation of certain age groups, ethnicities, and socioeconomic statuses limits the generalizability of the findings to broader populations. Additionally, the limited number of participants identifying with diverse sexual orientations restricts a deeper exploration of sexual dream patterns in this demographic, potentially skewing the data toward more heteronormative experiences. The focus on USA residents introduces a potential cultural bias, as attitudes and experiences of sexual dreams may vary significantly in other countries.

Cross-sectional Design: The cross-sectional nature of the study presents significant limitations in establishing causal relationships between the frequency or content of sexual dreams and their emotional or physical outcomes. This design only provides a snapshot in time, making it difficult to track changes in sexual

dream patterns over time or in response to life changes. Furthermore, the study cannot account for confounding variables such as stress levels, sleep quality, or hormonal fluctuations that may influence both sexual dream frequency and emotional well-being.

Self-reported Data: The reliance on self-reported data introduces inherent biases, including response bias and recall inaccuracy. Participants may underreport or exaggerate their sexual dream experiences due to social desirability or discomfort with the topic. Memory effects may also compromise the accuracy of dream frequency reporting, particularly for those who experience dreams infrequently or have difficulty recalling specific dream details. Additionally, subjective interpretations of the emotional and physical impacts of sexual dreams may vary based on personal beliefs, cultural norms, and emotional states.

Participant Selection and Recruitment: The recruitment method using an online survey platform may have introduced selection biases. Participants who are more comfortable discussing sexual topics or have more vivid dream experiences may have been more likely to participate. The exclusion of individuals without internet access or those less technologically savvy may have led to an overrepresentation of younger, more educated, or more digitally connected individuals. This recruitment method may not reflect the broader population, limiting the study's generalizability.

4.6. Implications for Future Research and Clinical Practice

The results of this study open up several avenues for future research. Given the high prevalence and diverse experiences of sexual dreams, further investigation into the psychological, biological, and cultural factors that influence these dreams is warranted. Longitudinal studies could provide deeper insights into how sexual dreams evolve over time and how they may be linked to changes in mental health, relationship dynamics, or life transitions. Additionally, research could explore the role of sexual dreams in specific populations, such as individuals with anxiety or trauma histories, to better understand the intersection between mental health and dream content.

Clinically, these findings emphasize the importance of addressing sexual dreams in therapeutic settings. Individuals who experience distress or confusion about their sexual dreams may benefit from discussions with mental health professionals to explore the emotional or psychological underpinnings of these dreams. Therapeutic interventions that focus on dream analysis, emotional regulation, and relationship dynamics could offer valuable support for those who find their sexual dreams impacting their mental health or daily life.

In conclusion, sexual dreams are a widespread and multifaceted phenomenon that can offer insights into an individual's emotional state, subconscious desires, and mental health. By recognizing their prevalence and impact, we can foster more open discussions about sexual dreams and their significance, helping to integrate this natural part of human experience into broader conversations about

sexuality, mental health, and well-being. The findings from this study lay the groundwork for future exploration into the psychological and physiological mechanisms behind sexual dreams, contributing to a deeper understanding of how they shape our emotional and mental landscapes.

5. Conclusions

This study provides valuable insights into the prevalence, frequency, and impact of sexual dreams, offering a clearer understanding of a largely underexplored aspect of human consciousness. The near-universal occurrence of sexual dreams, reported by 99.67% of participants, underscores their importance as a common and natural part of the dream experience. By normalizing sexual dreams, this research contributes to reducing the stigma associated with discussing such personal and intimate experiences, paving the way for more open conversations about sexuality and mental health.

The diversity of sexual dream content—ranging from dreams involving different sexes to those featuring both sexes—reflects the complexity and fluidity of human sexual expression in the subconscious mind. The correlations identified between sexual dream frequency and demographic factors such as age, gender, sexual orientation, and relationship status suggest that sexual dreams are influenced by various aspects of an individual's life, relationships, and personal identity.

Importantly, this study also highlights the potential emotional and physical effects of sexual dreams, with many participants reporting increased heart rate, anxiety, and even mood changes or distractions in daily life. These findings reveal that sexual dreams are not simply fleeting nighttime fantasies but can have tangible effects on individuals' emotional and physiological well-being. For some, these dreams may even trigger stress or anxiety, particularly when tied to unresolved emotions or relationship dynamics.

The results of this research lay the groundwork for future studies to explore the psychological and biological mechanisms underlying sexual dreams. Investigating how factors such as stress, sleep quality, and emotional health interact with sexual dream experiences could deepen our understanding of their role in overall well-being. Additionally, the impact of sexual dreams on relationships and personal identity could provide rich avenues for further inquiry, especially in therapeutic or counseling contexts.

In conclusion, sexual dreams are a widespread, multifaceted phenomenon that can offer insights into an individual's emotional state and subconscious mind. By recognizing their prevalence and impact, we can foster more open discussions about their significance, helping to integrate this natural part of human experience into broader conversations about sexuality, mental health, and well-being.

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Data Availability Statement

Data supporting the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request.

Ethics Statement

This study involved anonymized, non-interventional survey data and did not require formal institutional ethics board review. All participants provided informed consent electronically before participation, in accordance with the Declaration of Helsinki.

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors report that there are no competing interests to declare.

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