

Recurring nightmares could reflect your daily frustrations

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People who are frustrated because their basic psychological needs for autonomy, relatedness and feeling competent are not met are more likely to have a recurring bad dream and to analyze their dreams negatively. This is according to Netta Weinstein of the University of Cardiff in the UK, who is lead author of an article on dreams published in Springer's journal *Motivation and Emotion*.

Dreams and their interpretation have been investigated since the days of Jung and Freud. However, the research done by Weinstein's team is the first to explore whether [people's](#) daily frustration or fulfilment of psychological needs plays out in their dreams.

The researchers conducted two studies. In the first, 200 people were asked to reflect on their most common recurring dream. The second study analyzed the entries that 110 people made over a period of three days in "dream diaries". This was done to explore whether [experiences](#) related to

psychological needs in waking life are related to the deeper level of processing that dreams provide, and that so-called "bad" dreams might be "left-overs" of poorly or even unprocessed daily experiences.

"Waking-life psychological need experiences are indeed reflected in our dreams," says Weinstein.

The results from both studies show that frustrations and emotions associated with specific psychological needs influence the themes that will occur in people's dreams. Participants whose so-called psychological needs were not met, either more enduringly or on a day-to-day basis, felt more frustrated. They reported having more negative dream themes such as frightening dreams, or ones in which sad or angry emotions surfaced. When asked to interpret their own dreams, they tended to do so using more negative words. Participants whose psychological needs were met were more likely to describe their dreams positively.

"Negative dream emotions may directly result from distressing dream events, and might represent the psyche's attempt to process and make sense of particularly psychologically challenging waking experiences," explains Weinstein.

People who were frustrated with their daily situation tended to have recurring dreams in which they were falling, failing or being attacked. According to Weinstein, recurring dreams may be more sensitive to distressing psychological experiences that a person still needs to process.

"Researchers and theorists have argued that recurring dreams challenge people to process the most pressing problems in their lives, and these may be thought to result from their failure to adapt to challenging experiences. As such, [dream](#) content may be more affected by enduring need-based experiences," says Weinstein.

More information: Netta Weinstein et al, Linking psychological need experiences to daily and recurring dreams, *Motivation and Emotion* (2017).
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