Editorial

Unveiling the Interconnected Realms: The Intricate Link between Insomnia and Mental Health

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The profound impact of a good night's sleep on our well-being is universally acknowledged. Conversely, the detrimental effects of sleep deprivation are equally evident. Sleep is crucial for bodily repair, cognitive processing, nervous system restoration, integration, and balance of fear and extinction of memories. However, for individuals suffering from sleep disorders, these essential healing processes are consistently disrupted, leading to significant negative physical and mental health consequences.[1,2]

Insomnia is a common sleep disorder affecting 30-35% of people, characterized by poor sleep quality or quantity and difficulties in falling or staying asleep. It leads to daytime distress, fatigue, and cognitive issues. Recognizing and treating insomnia is essential to reduce its significant personal and societal impacts.[3] In Pakistan, it is reported that one in three people experience sleep problems, with a third of these individuals resorting to sleeping pills.[4] Insomnia's complex pathophysiology involves disruptions in sleep-wake regulation, neurotransmitter imbalances, circadian rhythm changes, and genetic factors.[3] Its under-recognition as a public health issue stems from patients' lack of awareness and inadequate training for primary care physicians in diagnosis and management.

Mental disorders are prevalent in Pakistan, causing disability, and premature death, and significantly impacting the economic and social well-being of affected families. Over 15 million people in Pakistan suffer from some form of mental illness, with depression, schizophrenia, and epilepsy being particularly common. However, the low priority for mental health, reliance on traditional healers, and stigma surrounding mental illness hinder effective treatment and open discussion. Additionally, an extreme shortage of trained psychiatrists leaves over 90% of those with common mental disorders untreated. WHO's Mental Health Atlas 2017 highlights the country's limited mental health infrastructure and substantial challenges in treating psychiatric disorders, underscoring the urgent need for immediate attention to this critical issue.[5]

Insomnia and mental health disorders have a complex, bidirectional relationship; mental health issues can cause insomnia, and insomnia can lead to mental disorders. About half of insomnia sufferers also have a mental condition, with strong links to anxiety, depression, PTSD, and schizophrenia. Shared biological factors, such as neurotransmitter dysregulation and hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis disturbances, contribute to this connection. Insomnia exacerbates mental health symptoms, highlighting the need for integrated treatment approaches.[1,3,6]

The substantial overlap between insomnia and mental health disorders underscores the need to address sleep issues to alleviate psychiatric conditions. Despite insomnia's high prevalence in primary care, many physicians fail to routinely screen for it and often resort to traditional sleep medications, which can lead to dependency. There is also a notable lack of training in differentiating insomnia types and offering varied treatment options, such as cognitive behavioural therapy (CBT) and healthy sleep habits.[3,4,7] In Pakistan, where mental health services are underdeveloped and there is widespread ignorance about mental health issues, prioritizing insomnia interventions is crucial. By addressing insomnia, we can enhance overall mental health outcomes and improve the

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quality of life for those affected by these interconnected disorders.

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