

# Sleep and COVID-19, the history of sleep, chronobiology and insomnia

Dear members of the ESRS,

Dear readers of JSR,

Let me welcome you to the first issue of JSR in the year 2021.

First of all, let me wish you a Happy New Year 2021 and let's be optimistic, hoping that the worldwide COVID-19 health crisis will be overcome in the near future.

It should be mentioned here that this volume 30 of JSR reflects the third decade of existence of the Journal of Sleep Research – time to celebrate!

The first issue of JSR in 2021 encompasses a variety of topics ranging from sleep and COVID-19 to the history of sleep, chronobiology and sleep and several aspects of insomnia. I would like to highlight a few of the manuscripts in this issue for you:

Partinen et al. (2021) summarize the initiative of many European researchers and clinicians called 'The International Covid-19 Sleep Study (ICOSS)'. This group has developed a set of questionnaires leading to a harmonized survey that is recommended to be used in sleep and COVID-19 studies. The harmonized questionnaire will be used in anonymous cross-sectional surveys and the instruments within the questionnaire may also be used in prospective and clinical studies. The questionnaire survey by the end of 2020 has already been used in studies in Austria, Canada, China, Finland, France, Germany, Hong Kong, Italy, Japan, Norway, Poland, Sweden, the UK and the USA. We congratulate the authors for their efforts and for trying to harmonize and structure sleep and sleep disorders research on the very important topic of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Verhoeven (2021) came from a historical perspective and investigated sleep behaviour by looking at early modern criminal records from the local criminal court in Antwerp during the 18th century. This approach is based on the fact that seemingly many eyewitnesses report to some extent sleep, sleep times or sleep disorders. This article, when published, led to a controversy and discussion with Professor Roger Ekirch from Virginia. Professor Ekirch is an eminent historian who was the first author, upon inspection of many historical sources, to report about segmented sleep and claim that in preindustrial times people had a first and second sleep, which was interrupted around midnight. But read for yourself: there is this original paper and there are three letters to the editor, two by Roger Ekirch and one response by Verhoeven.

Another main topic of this issue is insomnia. Henry et al. (2021) ran a sub-analysis of participant data from two large randomized controlled trials of a digital sleep intervention. The question is whether

insomnia could be a mediating therapeutic target for depressive symptoms. Having over 3,000 datasets, the data analysis shows that digital interventions significantly improved insomnia but also depressive symptoms at post-intervention. It also was concluded that improvements in insomnia symptoms at mid-intervention mediated 87% of the effects on depressive symptoms at post-intervention. This is an extremely important result, because up to now it has been mainly postulated that insomnia treatment may prevent depression, but only a few original studies looking at this have been published. The authors are to be congratulated for their approach and for the publication of these extremely important data for psychiatry and psychotherapy.

Another paper I would like to highlight comes from Sedov et al. (2021) from Canada. The authors performed a meta-analysis of insomnia symptoms during pregnancy. It was possible to incorporate 24 studies with more than 15,000 participants in the analysis. It became clear that insomnia symptoms are very frequent during pregnancy, with a rate of 38.2%. Insomnia prevalence was higher in the third trimester compared to the first and second trimesters. This raises the urgent question of how to especially treat insomnia in this population. As of now, it seems that CBT-I (cognitive behavioral treatment of insomnia) will be the first-line therapy, as generally it is not advised to administer hypnotics during pregnancy.

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