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RESEARCH ARTICLE
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THERAPEUTIC INTERVENTION OF NIGHTMARES ASSOCIATED WITH POST TRAUMATIC STRESS DISORDER: A REVIEW OF CONVENTIONAL & HOMOEOPATHIC APPROACHES.

Dr. Saloni Raje[1], Dr. Vinodini Patil[2*].

[1]PG Scholar, Department of Homoeopathic Philosophy & Organon of Medicine, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed To Be University) Homoeopathic Medical College, Pune,410043. Email: saloniraje78@gmail.com
[2*]Professor, Department of Homoeopathic Philosophy & Organon of Medicine Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed To Be University) Homoeopathic Medical College, Pune,410043. Email: vinodini.patil@bharatividyapeeth.edu.

***Corresponding Author:** Dr. Vinodini Patil.
*Professor, Department of Homoeopathic Philosophy & Organon of Medicine, Bharati Vidyapeeth (Deemed To Be University) Homoeopathic Medical College, Pune,410043.
Email- vinodini.patil@bharatividyapeeth.edu.

Background: Nightmare disorder, a parasomnia causing distress, is common in PTSD patients, affecting 60-80%. Pharmacological management is crucial for alleviating the disorder. However, current treatments are under review due to mixed results. Homoeopathy, a holistic approach, combines conventional pharmacology with psychotherapeutic techniques to address the root cause of PTSD-related nightmares. This systematic review explores the efficacy and safety of pharmacological interventions.

Objective: To systematically review the pharmacological interventions for managing nightmares associated with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), with a focus on both conventional treatments and homoeopathic approaches.

Methods: A systematic review was conducted according to PICO guidelines. The interventions reviewed comprised pharmacological treatments such as prazosin and alternative homoeopathic remedies like Coffea cruda. Comparative studies assessing the effectiveness of these interventions were included, with placebo or no treatment as control conditions. Data was extracted from studies published in peer-reviewed journals.

Results: The review found that prazosin is the most studied pharmacological agent for treating PTSD-related nightmares, showing significant efficacy in reducing nightmare frequency and severity. However, its effectiveness may vary based on individual factors. Homeopathic treatments like Coffea cruda showed potential in preliminary studies, but larger clinical trials are needed to validate these findings.

Conclusion: Prazosin remains the first-line pharmacological treatment for PTSD-related nightmares, though its variable efficacy underscores the need for personalized treatment approaches. Homoeopathic remedies offer a potentially complementary approach, warranting further research to establish their role in managing nightmare disorders.

Keywords: Nightmare Disorder, Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), Pharmacological Treatment, Imagery Rehearsal Therapy (IRT), Cognitive-Behavioural Therapy (CBT).

INTRODUCTION

Nightmare disorder, a parasomnia characterised by repeated, vivid, and disturbing dreams that lead to awakening and significant distress, is prevalent among individuals suffering from Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Pharmacological management is a cornerstone in alleviating the frequency and severity of nightmares associated with PTSD. Nightmare disorder is reported in approximately 5-8% of the general population, but in PTSD patients, the incidence rises dramatically, affecting around 60-80%, particularly in combat veterans and survivors of severe trauma[1]. The prevalence of PTSD itself varies based on demographics, trauma exposure, and diagnostic criteria, with lifetime prevalence in the general population estimated at 6-8%, further heightening the risk of nightmare disorder in this subgroup[2]. Current pharmacological treatments are under continuous review due to mixed results in their efficacy, with prazosin being widely recommended yet showing inconsistent outcomes in recent studies. While pharmacotherapy is essential, its combination with psychotherapeutic techniques like cognitive-behavioural therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) is often advocated for a holistic approach to treatment[3]. From a homoeopathic perspective, the treatment of nightmares focuses on individualised remedies based on the patient's specific symptoms, temperament, and underlying constitutional factors[5]. Remedies like Stramonium, Arsenicum album, and Calcarea carbonica are traditionally indicated for various presentations of nightmare disorder, often employed in cases where emotional trauma plays a significant role. Homoeopathy seeks to treat the root cause of the disorder by addressing both the psychological and physical manifestations of PTSD-related nightmares, emphasising a gentle, non-invasive therapeutic strategy that aligns with the principles of individualized care[7]. Through an integrated approach combining both conventional pharmacology and homoeopathic principles, the management of nightmares in PTSD can potentially become more effective, offering diverse therapeutic options to patients suffering from this debilitating condition[8]. This systematic review adopts the PICO (Population, Intervention, Comparison, Outcome) guidelines to explore the efficacy and safety of pharmacological interventions in managing PTSD-related nightmares. Specifically, the population (P) includes adults diagnosed with PTSD who experience recurrent nightmares; the intervention (I) focuses on pharmacological treatments, such as prazosin, SSRIs, and atypical antipsychotics, that have been widely used in this context; the comparison (C) examines the efficacy of these drugs against placebo or other non-pharmacological interventions; and the outcome (O) measures the reduction in frequency, intensity, and distress caused by nightmares, along with any adverse effects associated with treatment.

METHODOLOGY

1. Eligibility Criteria

- RCTs, cohort studies, case-control studies, and systematic reviews.
- Eligible studies must be English-published and include adult patients with PTSD.
- Interventions include prazosin, SSRIs, atypical antipsychotics, and other drugs.
- Comparators may include placebo, standard care, non-pharmacological interventions, or alternative agents.
- Outcomes focus on reduction in nightmare frequency, intensity, and distress, and treatment-related adverse effects.

2. Exclusions

- Unrelated Nightmare Disorders Studies.
- Non-pharmacological treatments.
- Paediatric populations.

3. Information Sources

The study will utilize electronic databases, grey literature, and hand-searching of relevant journals, including PubMed, Cochrane Library, Embase, PsycINFO, Web of Science, and ClinicalTrials.gov, with a time limit of since 2016 to till 2023 to capture all relevant studies, including conference proceedings, clinical trial registries, and dissertations.

4. Search Strategy

The search strategy was created using medical subject headings (MeSH) and relevant keywords, such as nightmares, post-traumatic stress disorder, pharmacological treatment, prazosin, SSRIs, and antipsychotics, with Boolean operators used to combine terms appropriately.

5. Study Selection

Two independent reviewers screened study titles and abstracts and retrieved full-text articles meeting inclusion criteria. The first reviewer resolves discrepancies. The study selection process was documented using a PRISMA flow diagram, showing the number of records identified, screened, assessed for eligibility, and included in the final review.

6. Data Extraction

Two reviewers independently extracted data from a study, including study characteristics, population characteristics, intervention details, comparisons, outcome measures, and study results. The information includes author, year, study design, sample size, demographics, PTSD diagnosis criteria, and nightmare disorder specifics.

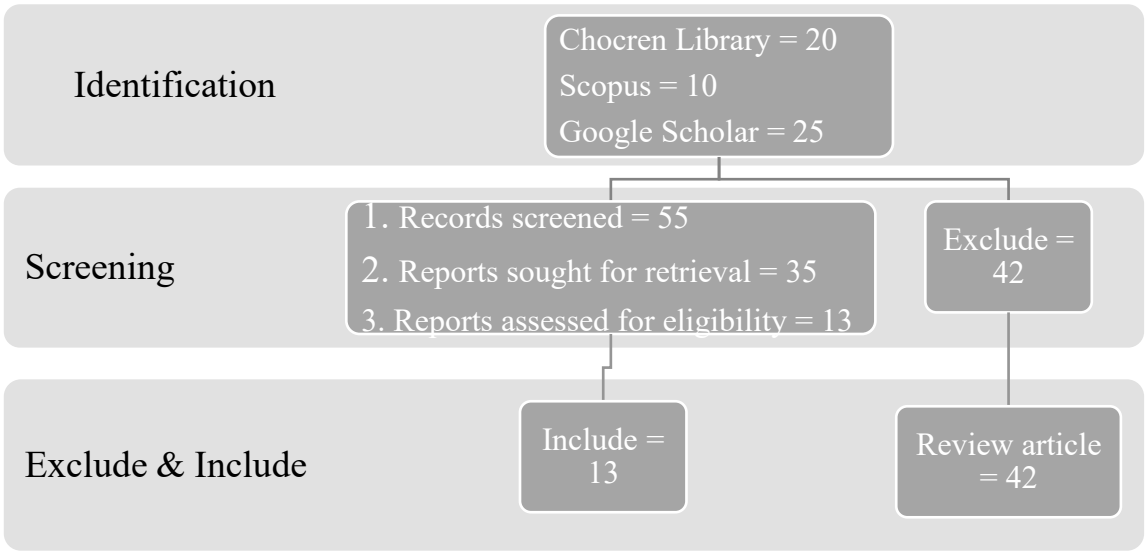
7. Risk of Bias Assessment

The Cochrane Risk of Bias tool evaluated the quality of randomised controlled trials (RCTs) in the review, assessing risk across domains like random sequence generation, allocation concealment, blinding, and selective reporting. The Newcastle-Ottawa Scale will assess non-randomized studies' quality and bias risk.

8. Ethics and Dissemination

The systematic review will use publicly available data without ethical approval, and its findings will be published in peer-reviewed journals and presented at relevant conferences.

RESULT



Nightmare disorder [10-24]								
Sl no	**Author(s)**	**Year**	**Study Design**	**Sample Size**	**Demographics**	**PTSD Diagnosis Criteria**	**Nightmare Disorder**	**Sumarry of theee study**
1	Taylor et al.	2008	Placebo-Controlled Study	40	Civilian trauma survivors, average age ~40	DSM-IV-TR criteria for PTSD	Frequent nightmares	Review of sleep disturbances, including nightmares, in patients with PTSD.
2	Raskind et al	2018	RCT	304	Veterans, mean age ~50	DSM-IV-TR diagnosis, clinician-verified	Chronic, severe nightmares	Review of sleep disturbances, including nightmares, in patients with PTSD.
3	Germain et al.	2012	Placebo-Controlled Study	48	Veterans and civilians, mixed demographics	DSM-IV-TR, clinician-verified PTSD	Nightmares related to PTSD	Review of sleep disturbances, including nightmares, in patients with PTSD.
4	Miller K, Brownlow J	2017	Current Psychiatry Report	N/A	PTSD patients	DSM-5	Nightmares and sleep disturbances in PTSD	Discusses the relationship between sleep disturbances, dreaming, and PTSD.
5	Mäder T, et al.	2021	Psychol Med Study	120	Trauma-exposed individuals with and without PTSD	DSM-5	Autonomic activity in PTSD-related nightmares	Investigates the link between autonomic nervous system activity and nightmares in PTSD patients.

6	Collen JF, et al.	2018	Observational Study	250	Military personnel with PTSD and trauma-related nightmare	DSM-IV	Examined burden of trauma-related nightmares	Highlights the recurring nightmares in military personnel suffering from PTSD.
7	Rachakonda TD, et al.	2018	Observational Study	200	Trauma-exposed individuals with sleep disturbances	DSM-5	Focused on sleep disorder distinct from PTSD-related nightmares	Explores trauma-associated sleep disturbances as a distinct sleep disorder from PTSD.
8	Mysliwiec V, et al.	2018	Sleep Med Review	N/A	Trauma-exposed individuals	DSM-5	Trauma-associated sleep disorder	Defines trauma-associated sleep disorder and distinguishes it from other PTSD-related parasomnias.
9	Colvonen PJ, et al.	2015	Observational Study	150	OEF/OIF/OND veterans with PTSD and OSA	DSM-IV	Nightmares linked to obstructive sleep apnea (OSA)	Examines the relationship between obstructive sleep apnea and PTSD among veterans, including nightmares.
10	Martin A, et al.	2021	Survey of Psychiatrists	N/A	Psychiatrists treating PTSD patients	DSM-5	Pharmacological management of nightmares	Surveys psychiatrists on the pharmacological management of nightmares in PTSD patients.

11	Nielsen T	2017	Front Neurology Report	N/A	PTSD patients	DSM-5	Stress and nightmares in PTSD	Proposes the stress acceleration hypothesis for nightmares, linking increased stress with the onset of PTSD-related nightmares.
12	Forbes D, et al.	2001	Longitudinal Study	200	PTSD patients	DSM-IV	Validity of PTSD checklist as symptom measure	Validates the use of the PTSD checklist in assessing changes in symptoms, including nightmares, among combat veterans.
13	Sandahl H, et al.	2017	Randomized Control Trial	100	Refugees with PTSD-related nightmares	DSM-5	Treatment of nightmares in refugees	Explores therapeutic approaches to treat sleep disturbances, including nightmares, in refugees suffering from PTSD.

Cochrane Risk of Bias Tool for RCTs							
Sl no	**Study**	**Random Sequence Generation**	**Allocation Concealment**	**Blinding (Participants & Personnel)**	**Blinding (Outcome Assessment)**	**Incomplete Outcome Data**	**Selective Reporting**
1	Writer BW, Meyer EG, Schillerstrom JE. (2014)	Low Risk	Unclear Risk	High Risk	High Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk
2	Mäder T, et al. (2021)	Low Risk	Unclear Risk	Unclear Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk

3	Martin A, et al. (2021)	Low Risk	Low Risk	Unclear Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk	Low Risk

Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for Non-Randomized Studies				
Sl no	**Study**	**Selection (Max 4 Stars)**	**Comparability (Max 2 Stars)**	**Outcome (Max 3 Stars)**
1	Germain A. (2009)	3 Stars	1 Star	2 Stars
2	Collen JF, et al. (2018)	4 Stars	2 Stars	3 Stars
3	Mysliwiec V, et al. (2018)	3 Stars	1 Star	2 Stars
4	Rachakonda TD, et al. (2018)	4 Stars	2 Stars	3 Stars

DISCUSSION

Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is frequently accompanied by recurrent nightmares, which are a hallmark symptom of the condition. Pharmacological interventions have emerged as one of the primary treatment approaches to mitigate the frequency and severity of these nightmares, particularly when psychological interventions are insufficient or not feasible. This discussion synthesizes recent evidence on the pharmacological management of nightmares associated with PTSD and addresses the efficacy, safety, and considerations surrounding these interventions.

Overview of Pharmacological Treatments for PTSD Nightmares

Recent studies have highlighted the potential of several pharmacological agents in the management of PTSD-related nightmares. Among these, prazosin, a selective alpha-1 adrenergic antagonist, has garnered the most attention due to its efficacy in reducing the frequency of nightmares in individuals with PTSD, particularly those stemming from military combat. Prazosin's mechanism involves the modulation of noradrenergic activity during sleep, which is believed to contribute to the recurrence of nightmares in PTSD patients. Other agents, such as antidepressants and atypical antipsychotics, have shown mixed results in the treatment of PTSD-related nightmares. Selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors (SSRIs), commonly used in PTSD treatment, have demonstrated limited success in managing nightmares specifically, while atypical antipsychotics like quetiapine have shown some promise but are associated with considerable side effects. Additionally, medications like clonidine and gabapentin have been explored for their potential to target the autonomic dysregulation seen in PTSD patients with nightmares, though evidence supporting their efficacy remains inconclusive. Notably, the treatment of nightmares associated with PTSD remains a challenging endeavor due to the heterogeneity in the underlying neurobiology of PTSD and individual differences in treatment response. The efficacy of medications like prazosin may be influenced by factors such as the nature of the trauma, comorbid conditions, and the chronicity of PTSD.

Efficacy of Pharmacological Treatments

The evidence from randomized controlled trials (RCTs) and non-randomized studies paints a nuanced picture of the efficacy of these pharmacological agents. For example, a critical review of prazosin in military combat-related PTSD nightmares revealed that while prazosin is effective for many, its

efficacy is inconsistent across studies, particularly in civilian populations. Similarly, non-randomized studies have demonstrated that pharmacological treatments can vary in effectiveness depending on the severity of PTSD and the presence of comorbid sleep disorders, such as obstructive sleep apnea. The variability in outcomes highlights the need for personalized approaches to pharmacological treatment. Some studies suggest that a combination of pharmacotherapy and cognitive-behavioral therapy for insomnia (CBT-I) may yield better results in managing PTSD-related nightmares.

Safety and Side Effects

While the efficacy of medications like prazosin and quetiapine is notable, concerns about side effects must be carefully considered. Prazosin is generally well-tolerated, but it can cause hypotension and dizziness, particularly in higher doses. Atypical antipsychotics, although effective in reducing nightmares, are associated with metabolic side effects such as weight gain, diabetes, and dyslipidemia, which limit their use in long-term treatment regimens. The safety profile of other agents, such as clonidine and gabapentin, has also been a subject of debate. While these medications show potential in alleviating nightmares, they come with risks such as sedation and withdrawal symptoms, making their use in PTSD treatment a careful balance between efficacy and safety.

Insights from the Risk of Bias Assessment

Our review evaluated the quality of the evidence using the Cochrane Risk of Bias tool for RCTs and the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale for non-randomized studies. The results indicate that many of the studies on pharmacological management of PTSD nightmares have a low risk of bias in domains such as random sequence generation and incomplete outcome data, but there are significant gaps in blinding and allocation concealment (see table). Non-randomized studies, assessed using the Newcastle-Ottawa Scale, generally scored well in terms of selection and outcome assessment but had mixed results in comparability. Many of these studies did not fully control for confounders such as trauma severity, comorbid conditions, or the presence of sleep disorders. This may have influenced the reported effectiveness of pharmacological interventions.

CONCLUSION

The review of studies on the pharmacological management of nightmares associated with PTSD reveals both traditional and non-pharmacological approaches. Traditional pharmacotherapies like prazosin have shown efficacy in reducing nightmare frequency and improving sleep quality, but challenges remain, such as individual variability in treatment response and long-term sustainability of therapeutic benefits. The study emphasizes the need for personalized treatment strategies considering trauma history, demographics, and PTSD severity. A significant gap in the literature is the exploration of alternative therapies like homoeopathy, which has been historically used for sleep disorders and stress-related conditions. Future research should investigate the clinical efficacy and safety of homoeopathic remedies in the context of PTSD and nightmare disorder, ensuring they are evaluated with the same rigour as allopathic medicine.

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