

TRAUMA OR TRANSCENDENCE? THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES AND DREAMING

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Background: Near-death experiences (NDEs) are exceptional states of consciousness reported by many individuals who come close to death. Such experiences are often transformational and can catalyze a wide range of psychosocial aftereffects. Unusual dream phenomena such as more intense and vivid dreams, higher dream recall and increased lucid dreaming have been purported to occur after NDEs, however a comprehensive assessment of the dream experiences and attitudes of NDE survivors remains unexplored. Moreover, it remains unknown whether anomalous dream experiences stem from the actual NDE or the traumatic experience of coming close to death. Trauma has also been associated with an increased frequency of atypical dream states such as nightmares, sleep paralysis and lucid dreaming.

Aims: This study aimed to explore the dream-related experiences that occur in association with NDEs. Although previous studies have explored observable, quantifiable sleep indicators such as sleep duration, latency, and efficacy in relation to NDEs, little is known about inner, subjective experiences such as dreaming. A further goal was to ascertain whether any variations in dreaming could be reliably linked to the conscious experience of the NDE (phenomenology) or instead to psychological or physical trauma (pathology) that can often accompany a near-death event.

Method: Three hundred and twelve participants (210 females, 96 males, 2 non-binaries; 18-65+ years old) completed a survey assessing trauma symptoms and a range of dream related variables. Three groups of participants were assessed; those who have had NDEs in the context of a life-threatening episode (NDE group, $n = 138$), those who have experienced a life-threatening episode but not the subjective phenomena characteristic of NDEs (non-NDE, $n = 45$), and those who had never experienced a life-threatening event (control, $n = 129$).

Preliminary results: The NDE group reported significantly more lucid dreams, creative or problem-solving dreams, precognitive dreams and out-of-body experiences during sleep than both other groups of participants. Furthermore, these experiences appeared to be primarily related to the NDE rather than trauma symptomology. Findings continue to suggest a relationship between non-ordinary states and expanded awareness more broadly—whether experienced during sleep, wakefulness or somewhere in between—offering further insights into the phenomenon of consciousness in general.

Keywords: Near-death experiences, NDEs, Lucid dreaming, Precognitive dreams, Out-of-body experiences, Paranormal experiences, Atypical dreaming, Trauma, Meta-awareness

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