

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Mediators between Sleep Problems and Suicide: Response to Littlewood et al.

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We congratulate Littlewood et al. for their important work showing that the relationship between nightmares and suicide is mediated in part by the psychological constructs of defeat, entrapment, and hopelessness.¹ However, they err in asserting that no prior “work [has] elucidated the psychological mechanisms which underpin” the relationship between sleep problems and suicidal behaviors. Three years ago, our group reported in this same journal the results of a mediation path analysis regarding the relationship between insomnia and suicidal ideation.² Consistent with Littlewood et al., we found that nightmares were an important factor mediating the role of insomnia in posing risk for suicidal ideation. We also found a near-significant trend for Dysfunctional Beliefs and Attitudes About Sleep in serving as a mediator between insomnia and suicidal ideation. Elsewhere we have also posed a series of psychological and biological mechanisms worthy of investigation in explaining the association between sleep problems and suicide.³ We also agree with Littlewood et al.’s statement of need for longitudinal studies of insomnia/nightmares/sleep problems as possible modifiable risk factors in suicide risk mitigation. Indeed, we are undertaking such as study now.⁴ The association between sleep problems and suicide has been described in more than 60 observational studies—it is time to move forward to interventional studies.⁵

CITATION

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