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Sleep Paralysis

Research Essay

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# ABSTRACT

Sleep paralysis is a common phenomenon here in the CNMI. One island beliefs is that the Taotao’mona (the people before us) can be the cause of sleep paralysis. Some believe that when a sleep paralysis episode occurs the Taotao’mona is in the room with us. The research reported explores some of the opinions on the phenomena. The study reports findings on what emerged, two different types of surveys and five interviews were used to collect islander’s beliefs of the causes of sleep paralysis. One interviewee could of sworn that he came face to face with a taotao’mona

# Introduction

The student researcher has been reading online about people in situations where they experienced sleep paralysis for more than five minutes. Sleep paralysis only happens for a few minutes then the person have the ability to talk and move again. With that being said, it is rare to find a case where people stay in sleep paralysis for a while. To collect information on the topic the student research developed some questions: What happens when people stay in sleep paralysis for too long? Can someone die from being in a sleep paralysis episode for too long? Does this happened in the island persistently? What does the tao’tao mona have to do with sleep paralysis? These questions will help her narrow down to the main question, what islanders believe is the main cause for sleep paralysis? The student researcher conducted multiple ways to collect data to finalize her research question.

Her main plan to gather her data and answer her research question simply by interviewing people who knows a good amount about sleep paralysis. At the beginning of the project the student researcher had a few people in mind who she could interview, her friends her family. Data was also collected by surveying random people because she predicted that they knew something about sleep paralysis and probably knew a person who shared their story. She also planned to also interview a sleep center in middle road so she knew how many people deal with this and what they do to prevent it. She gained knowledge by gathered literature sources and reviewed them so she could create her questions for her survey. Her survey was less than ten questions and her interview lasted less than or about thirty minutes. The survey will contain a minimal of six questions that has to deal with how often they experienced sleep paralysis and how they felt when it occured.

She started with gathered her data by at least next week Monday so she prepared herself with questions and knew more about this subject. It took her about a week to fully gather her data. She wanted to go deeper into sleep paralysis and gather as much information as possible. Here is how her method of collecting data will look like:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Survey one | Survey two | Interview |

The final questions was completed by 2/25. The interview would last about a week starting the last week of February 29-March 4.

# Background

“Sleep paralysis, a brief episode of partial or total paralysis occurring at the beginning or end of a sleep period, has been recognized by physicians at least since 1876.” (Aldrich.1975. p.570). In the islands sleep paralysis happens to almost every person once. It is an unforgettable moment where a person feel weaken in your sleep. Islanders believe that the Chamorro spirts are as powerful as us humans. Those Chamorro spirts are called “Taotao’mona”, which means the people before us. Usually a typical Taotao’mona is a seven foot dark figure, typically a male, with a masculine body. “Most of the taotao’mona are thought to be the ancient chiefs of various districts” (Cunningham.1992. p. 100).When a person makes a taotao’mona mad they have serious consequences. “Finger like marks on the body are thought to be caused by the taotao’mona (Cunningham.1992.p. 154). Stories across the island are very popular that can spiritually prove that the Taotao’mona exists.

# Literature Review

## General Knowledge

For the first part of the student researchers essay she portrayed her general knowledge about sleep paralysis. Her research was based on islander’s beliefs and also mainstream supernatural beliefs. She used an encyclopedia and collected information she can use for the introduction of her research essay. Encyclopedia of sleeping and dreaming by Michael Aldrich explained the basic information about sleep paralysis. “Sleep paralysis, a brief episode of partial or total paralysis occurring at the beginning or end of a sleep period, has been recognized by physicians at least in 1876” (Aldrich.1975.p. 569). It explained the relationship between sleep paralysis and narcolepsy and pathophysiology and possible treatments for sleep paralysis. Another encyclopedia article found in Academic American encyclopedia explains the different cycles of sleep and the two different types of sleeping (Slessor.2003.p. 361). He described the disorders that appear in indolence’s to adults and how it correlates to narcolepsy. In the encyclopedia written by Jennifer Martin she claimed that when a person experiences sleep paralysis it can often lead to sleep apnea which is when a person stops breathing during sleep (Martin.2003.p. 506-507).

## Culture

In an article the student researcher found in ebscohost they elaborated about how people across the world believed that witchcraft caused sleep paralysis. The article was written by Owen Davies. He believed that, “The nightmare encapsulates a unique aspect of human experience: a moment when reality, hallucination, and belief use to form powerful fantasies of supernatural violation” (Davis 2003). In his article he focused on sleep paralysis and the super natural. “This nightmare experience can also be identified in other accounts where people claimed to have been nocturnally oppressed by such supernatural beings as the Devil, animalistic fairies, and spirits of the dead” (Davis 2003). In the book “Ancient Chamorro Society” written by Lawrence J Cunningham they explained how the taotao’mona could possibly look and the strengths and weakness of the ancient Chamorro. Cunningham explained how the ancient Chamorros were strict with respect and especially the consequences of the Taotao’mona. This helped the student researcher understand what the islanders believe when sleep paralysis appears. The taotao’mona is very respectful but once they feel that a person failed to give them the respect they expected they get punished. That is when a witch doctor can help cure the sickness that the taotao’mona gave them. “The Makahna would also invoke ancestral spirits to help the client and counteract evil curses” (Cunningham.1992.p. 101).

## Scientific Background

For her scientific background she used a case report that she found in DOAJ. The article was based on sleep paralysis and how they pay very little attention to it.” Sleep paralysis is one of the many conditions of which visual hallucinations can be a part but has received relatively little attention” (Stores 1998). The authors name is Gregory Stores and his article generalized sleep paralysis in medical ways. He used a young man as an example who suffers for mental disorders. “A diagnosis of predormital isolated sleep paralysis was made and appropriate treatment recommended” (Stores 1998). He concluded that, “Sleep paralysis, common in the general population, can be associated with dramatic auxiliary symptoms suggestive of a psychotic state” (Stores 1998). The student researcher looked at a website where there was tips to how to wake up from sleep paralysis. The tips was written by Ryan Hurd, the steps are don’t fight, go with the flow, wiggle your toe, clench your fist, focus on your breathing, pray getting support by your sleep partner, cough for attention and lastly write out a plan (Hurd 2010).

# Research Questions

The student researcher main research questions was, what do islanders believe causes sleep paralysis? This is a very interesting question because she has heard about sleep paralysis often. Most of the islanders believe in the taotao’mona but do they blame it for the cause of sleep paralysis?

Another question was could we prevent it? What is the island way to prevent sleep paralysis? Can we take any medication or go through some ritual for the possible cure of sleep paralysis? The student researcher plans to answer this after all the research is finalized.

Does this happen on island persistently? People all over the CNMI shared stories about the taotao’mona consequences. Can the taotao’mona punish you repeatedly? Is the taotao’mona always there when sleep paralysis occurs? In the interview that the student researcher conducted, do they mention the taotao’mona?

What does the tao’tao mona have to do with sleep paralysis? How does this correlate to each other? This question can helped the study towards the main question. The taotao’mona does not just punish you for no reason. The main reason why they punish you is lack of respect according to the book “Ancient Chamorro Society”.

# Methodology

The first way the student researchers gathered information was to distribute two different type of surveys. The first was given strictly people who knows a person who had a sleep paralysis episode. The student researcher wanted to know how common sleep paralysis is and how they diagnose it. She wants to figure out if they can blame the taotao’mona for sleep paralysis. She wants to know how much people believe about sleep paralysis and the taotao’mona being in the room.

The second way the student researcher is distribute another survey for students who has had sleep paralysis. The survey will include questions about their episode and the feelings they went through. This survey will be strictly for locals so that the student researcher can generalize information just about locals. The student researcher wants to compare the different types of sleep paralysis episodes and to see if they witnessed super natural or the taotao’mona in the room. This survey was important to see what other people think causes sleep paralysis. The student researcher can find out what the islanders believe causes sleep paralysis and how they handle it.

Lastly, the student researcher will interview people who has had sleep paralysis episodes. This way the student can hear it herself how it is like and gather information about the taotao’mona if mentioned. She can hear the different perspective of people during their sleep paralysis episode. Islanders may believe in something other than the taotao’mona that causes sleep paralysis.

# Findings

Based on the student researcher data collected on her first survey it was shocking how people already knew about sleep paralysis. This proves to her that it is very common and people have a sense of what is going on when they experience it. Out of her ten surveys that she distributed all of it contain prior knowledge about sleep paralysis. The people who took the survey were mostly teens and adults. Most of their answers were similar to each other and related to the TaoTao’mona. In appendix a most of the question the survey questions will be displayed. (See Appendix A).

On her second survey that she distributed she asked questions to those who already experienced or knew someone who has experienced it. Unlike her first survey, her second survey asked participants to be more descriptive with their experiences. The second survey she noticed that everyone had different scenarios and that they related to the TaoTao’mona All of the episodes lasted about two to three minutes and some were alone and some people were with other people. When you compared was there more of one or the other another interviewee had a different scenario but started off as sleep paralysis. In appendix b it will portray the survey questions and analysis. (See Appendix B).

Her last method of collecting data was to do interviews to selected people. She chose the most interesting sleep paralysis episodes. She interviewed five people, in that five people were different and shocking stories. People has dealt with sleep paralysis personally and more than once. They explained how they felt during their episode and the phrases they went through. By phrases she means the different emotions they felt. From scared, when the person first realized that they were having a sleep paralysis, to an adrenaline rush, when the person tries to fight the paralysis, to finally relieve they stressed different phases during her interview. In the student research she explained how her client went through, it started out as a sleep paralysis to a vivid dreaming. She felt a rush at first before the sleep paralysis episode occurred. (See Appendix C).

# Important Findings

The student researcher interviewed a twenty year old girl and she told me everything that happened to her on the night of August 2013. She told the student researcher that she felt uneasy before she slept and that she had a bit of anxiety during the day because of her work. She finally rested in her bed around ten thirty at night and watched some television before she fell asleep. She was already asleep till around three in the morning, she has a clock on her bed stand so she knew what time her episode happened. When the clock hit three o’clock she felt a rush going down her body followed by goose bumps that appeared. She knew it was sleep paralysis because she tried experiencing it before. This time she felt different, she saw her own body sleeping as if she came out of her body. She felt she had died but it only lasted a few minutes till she finally awakened. During those few minutes she was staring at her own body sleeping. She think she has experienced vivid dreaming as well. She and her family also believed in the Taotao’mona. They explained what they think happened to her spiritually saying that the Taotao’mona wanted to take her life because he was attracted to her. She visited a witch doctor, also known as a siruwanu in Chamorro, and he explained how the Taotao’mona was attracted to her and wanted her for his own. This finding was important to my research essay because medically stress/anxiety can trigger sleep paralysis and her story proved it to me. I can also use this information because it was linked to lucid dreaming. The student researcher findings in this story is that it is not just sleep paralysis that can occur and that they believe that indeed the taotao’mona has caused it.

Another important finding was during the student researchers’ survey where he shared what had happened to him. He fell asleep angry at his girlfriend about relationship problems. He was not too sure what time this happened but he as soon as his sleep paralysis episode occurred he saw a figure looking down at him. He said he did not believe what was happening till the figure stood closer to him. The figure was about six foot long and was a male. When he tried to scream or yell the figure finally left him and he awakened. He was awaken by his mother because he was screaming in his room. He also explained how he thinks he saw the Taotao’mona face to face. The student researcher findings in this story is that he explained how the taotao’mona looked like and linked with the book “Ancient Chamorro Society”.

# Discussion

In this research the student researcher has linked the literature review and the important findings. The information collected was very important to the research questions because the student researcher found out new information about sleep paralysis. Different types of people have different types of answers from medical to supernatural. In this research it was based on the super natural creature, the taotao’mona. In the island this is a major believe so most of the answers were about supernatural instead of medical studies. The student researcher can share the information gathered for a better study in the future. The information can be used in the method of a presentation or through hard copy documents. The student researcher could have interviewed a doctor or anyone in the medical field to improve the medical studies that have to do with sleep paralysis. The medical center refused the interview because they were busy at the time but next time it could help shape this research paper.

# Conclusion

In the research the research suggest that most of the islanders believe in the taotao’mona and that they blame them for sleep paralysis. By using academic and literature review it help conclude this essay. The literature review helped define sleep paralysis and the super natural creatures that come with it. Most of the studies indicated that there are medical terms in which sleep paralysis is cause and possible treatments but islander choose not to believe it. Sleep paralysis is common in the CNMI but also all over the world. By my surveys and interview says that there are people who has different types of sleep paralysis and disorders. Thus the data collected has been clear that most of the islanders do not use the medical way but instead using their beliefs in the super natural creature, the taotao’mona.

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# APA Format: Appendices

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# Appendix A Sleep Paralysis

SURVEY ONE QUESTIONS:

1. Age
2. Ethnicity
3. Do you believe in the Taotao’mona?
4. Do you know anyone who has experienced sleep paralysis?
5. What does sleep paralysis mean to you?
6. What does the taotao’mona have to do with sleep paralysis?
7. What advice do you give to people who has sleep paralysis disorder?
8. What do you think causes sleep paralysis?

Appendix B Sleep paralysis

SURVEY TWO QUESTIONS:

1. What did you feel when you FIRST experience sleep paralysis?
2. What age were you when you first experienced sleep paralysis?
3. What did you do during the day that you think caused it?
4. Do you believe in the taotao’mona or any supernatural creatures?
5. What did you see during or after the sleep paralysis?
6. Do you know anyone who has experienced sleep paralysis?
7. Was anyone with you in the room when you experienced sleep paralysis?
8. What do you think caused your sleep paralysis?

# Appendix C Sleep Paralysis

INTERVIEWS QUESTIONS:

1. What was the first thing you did when you noticed you were in a sleep paralysis episode?
2. What mental state were you in before you slept?
3. Did you stress anytime of the day before you slept?
4. Is this your first time expirencing sleep parlysis?
5. How did you feel throughout the sleep paralysis?
6. Describe your scariest episode.
7. How long did your episode last?
8. Was there anything different from your past episodes? Or was this your first?
9. Do you believe in the Taotao’mona?
10. Did you see anything during or before your sleep paralysis episode?
11. What do you think caused your sleep paralysis?

INTERVIEW ANWERS: (Important findings)

20 year old

1. I noticed it around 3pm that I was in a sleep paralysis episode and I felt a rush going through my body I was scared and felt I was going to die.
2. I had some stress and anxiety from work because I had a deadline to meet in a few hours and I had so little work done.
3. Yes I felt as if I wasn’t able to complete the task that my boss had told me to do.
4. No, I have experienced sleep paralysis a few times.
5. Scared and confused.
6. Around 3pm I noticed that I was staring at my own body and felt as if I were dead, I had no control over my body and this lasted a few minutes. I knew something was going on because I have never seen myself sleep.
7. About a few minutes, when I woke up it was 3:09.
8. YES, I STARED AT MY OWN BODY!!
9. Yes, my mom is a witch doctor.
10. No
11. The taotao’mona is the main reason my mom blamed because she thinks I bothered them during the day.

INTERVIEW TWO

1. I have dealt with this before but every time it happens it gets scarier.
2. I was mad at my girlfriend because of personal problems.
3. Yes.
4. No I experienced it about three times in my whole life.
5. Scared because I think I saw someone and it was not familiar.
6. I fell asleep angry at my girlfriend about relationship problems. I was not too sure what time this happened but I as soon as my sleep paralysis episode occurred I saw a figure looking down at me. I did not believe what was happening till the figure stood closer to me. The figure was about six foot long and was a male. I tried to scream or yell till the figure finally left and I woke up. My mother woke me up because I was screaming in my room. I knew I saw the taotao’mona.
7. I don’t know.
8. Yes, because I saw something looking down at me and I did not know what to do till I knew it was a taotao’mona.
9. Yes
10. (I did not ask this questions because he stated the answer in number six)
11. I honestly think it is the taotao’mona because I have shared this story a few times and my family and friends and I agreed that it was the taotao’mona.