

[News](#) > [Science](#)

Coronavirus latest: Dreams could hold the key to understanding mental health impact of future pandemics

Researchers at Nokia Bell Labs in Cambridge have devised a computer code to make it easier to analyse people's dreams



By [Dean Kirby](#)

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Students wearing masks rest in Seoul, South Korea. Researchers say people's mental health during future pandemics could be examined by studying their dreams (Photo: Kim Hong-Ji/Reuters)

Scientists have developed a computer code that can analyse people's dreams – with hopes it could help psychologists study the impact of pandemics and [other world events on mental health](#).



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impact of major international events.

But now researchers at Nokia Bell Labs in Cambridge have devised a tool that can help to automate the process using techniques to analyse text with computers.

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It is hoped it could be turned into an app that would give millions more people a chance to understand their dreams.

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The experts have previously studied how the 9/11 terror attacks on the US had an impact on people's dreams (Photo: Spencer Platt/Getty)

Psychologists could also use the information to understand in real-time how events such as wars, natural disasters and **even a coronavirus pandemic are impacting people's mental health.**

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Dr Luca Aiello, one of the authors of a study published in the *Royal Society Open Science* journal, told **i**: "We hope more and more people would have an incentive to share their dreams.

"We would be able to run this dream analysis at large scale and understand if global events such as pandemics, wars, financial crises and even global warming have an effect on our psychological wellbeing as reflected in the dreams that we dream.

"This has already been done on a small scale on people's experience of the 9/11 terror attack in the US. Psychologists saw there was a correspondence between bad things happening in people's dreams in the US. Imagine if this could be scaled up with many more global events."

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The scientists used their code to analyse 24,000 dream reports from Dreambank, the largest public repository of dreams. The results were compared with assessments by psychiatrists.

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The scientists say dreams are "windows" through which people's waking lives can be observed from a "special perspective".

They added: "Our results suggest that it is possible to quantify important aspects of dreams, making it possible to build technologies that bridge the current gap between real life and dreaming."

Technological advances

Dr Luca said: "We are not trying to replace the experts, but we are trying to automate part of this process to make it easier for them.

"At large scale, you might imagine that events like the Covid-19 pandemic are most likely affecting how people feel and affecting their dreams.

"If most people were to share those dreams we could monitor over the different weeks of the pandemic, how people feel about it. In principle, if enough people shared their dreams, this could be done in real time."

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