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CONTRIBUTION OF SLEEP DISTURBANCES TO THE HETEROGENEITY OF COGNITIVE AND BRAIN ALTERATIONS IN ALCOHOL USE DISORDER

Running title: Sleep and alcohol-related brain structure and function

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Summary

Cognitive and brain alterations are common in alcohol use disorder and vary importantly from one patient to another. Sleep disturbances are also very frequent in these patients and remain largely neglected even though they can persist after drinking cessation. Sleep disturbances may be the consequence of specific brain alterations, resulting in cognitive impairments. But sleep disruption may also exacerbate alcohol-related brain abnormalities and cognitive deficits through common pathophysiological mechanisms. Besides, sleep disturbances seem a vulnerability factor for the development of alcohol use disorder. From a clinical perspective, sleep disturbances are known to affect treatment outcome and to increase the risk of relapse. In this article, we conducted a narrative review to provide a better understanding of the relationships between sleep disturbances, brain and cognition in alcohol use disorder. We suggest that the heterogeneity of brain and cognitive alterations observed in patients with alcohol use disorder could at least partially be explained by associated sleep disturbances. We also believe that sleep disruption could indirectly favor relapse by exacerbating neuropsychological impairments required in psychosocial treatment and for the maintenance of abstinence. Implications for clinical practice as well as perspectives for future research are proposed.

Keywords: Sleep disturbances, alcohol use disorder, cognition, brain, neuroimaging, relapse.

Abbreviations

AUD: alcohol use disorder AWS: alcohol withdrawal syndrome CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy CT: computed tomography DSM: diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders DTI: diffusion tensor imaging EEG: electroencephalography FCC: fronto cerebellar circuit GABA: gamma aminobutyric acid GM: gray matter KS: Korsakoff's syndrome MRI: magnetic resonance imaging NREM: non-rapid eye movement PC: Papez circuit PLMD: periodic limb movement disorder PLMs: Periodic limb movements PSG: polysomnography PSQI: Pittsburgh sleep quality index REM: rapid-eye movement SDB: sleep-disordered breathing SOL: sleep onset latency SWS: slow wave sleep ToM: theory of mind TST: total sleep time

WASO: wake after sleep onset

WM: white matter

INTRODUCTION

Alcohol is a widely promoted and consumed psychoactive substance that can lead to maladaptive patterns of use such as Alcohol Use Disorder (AUD). AUD is among the most prevalent mental disorders worldwide [1]. The 2018 World Health Organization's global status report on alcohol and health indicated that, in 2016, an estimated 283 million people had AUD (which represents 5.1% of adults aged 15 years and older in the world), with a large variation by countries and gender. Europe shows the highest prevalence (8.8% of the adult population) followed by the US (8.2% of the adult population), and the Western Pacific Region (4.7% of the adult population) and finally the lowest rate was found in the Eastern Mediterranean countries (0.8% of the same age population) [2].

AUD has significant personal, interpersonal, social and economic consequences and is associated with numerous physical and psychiatric comorbidities [3] leading to significant morbidity and mortality [4]. Despite all these considerable negative consequences, very few AUD patients seek treatment (20% of AUD patients in the US [5]) potentially because of social stigma, consequences on personal life and employment of cognitive disabilities leading to lack of insight regarding their situation [6]. Altered perception of these negative consequences may result from the harmful effects of AUD on brain structure and function. Alcohol-related brain abnormalities are associated not only with neuropsychological impairments but also with sleep disturbances that, all together, result in increased risk of relapse.

While there have been other recent reviews on sleep in AUD [7–9], the specific objective of this synthetic narrative review is to address the relationships between sleep disturbances and brain structure and function in AUD. We aim at offering a novel perspective of the pathophysiology of alcohol-related brain damage and cognitive deficits by introducing

sleep disturbances as a key factor. We will first review alcohol-related brain abnormalities, associated neuropsychological deficits and sleep alterations. Then, we will describe the relationships between sleep quality, and cognitive and brain alterations observed in AUD.

ALCOHOL-RELATED NEUROPSYCHOLOGICAL IMPAIRMENTS AND BRAIN ABNORMALITIES

AUD is defined as "a chronic relapsing brain disease characterized by compulsive alcohol use, loss of control over alcohol intake, and a negative emotional state when not using". According to the DSM-5 [10], AUD ranges from mild to severe depending on the number of criteria (out of 11) met by patients. The presence of two or three criteria indicates mild AUD, four to five criteria suggest moderate AUD and more than six criteria defines severe AUD. AUD will be used throughout the article even though this term is relatively recent. Before 2013, "alcoholism" and later "alcohol dependence" or "alcohol abuse" were used as a diagnosis (with specific criteria for each) based on the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV-TR; [11]) or the £International Classification of Diseases [12].

Chronic and excessive alcohol consumption affects brain macrostructure and microstructure as well as cognition and motor abilities. These consequences of AUD have been recognized by the DSM-5 as mild or major "alcohol-induced neurocognitive disorders" depending on the severity of the impact on daily life and autonomy. Globally, three brain networks, involved in episodic memory, executive functions and emotion and social cognition, are particularly affected in AUD patients. In the following paragraphs, we will describe how the gray matter (GM) nodes and white matter (WM) connections of these three brain circuits are altered in AUD patients, in absence of alcohol-related neurological complications such as Korsakoff's syndrome. We will also depict associated neuropsychological deficits observed in 50 to 80% of AUD patients [13].

Episodic memory network

Episodic memory deficits are observed in AUD patients, affecting learning, encoding, and retrieval abilities [14,15]. Moreover, patients had impaired recall of temporal and spatial context of encoding [14–16] as well as deficits of autonoetic consciousness, which gives a subject the conscious feeling of travelling in time to relive the original event or to project into the future [14,15]. These episodic memory impairments have been described as genuine as they do not seem to be exclusively explained by executive dysfunction [14,15].

The Papez circuit (PC) [17], involved in episodic memory functioning, includes the hippocampal formation, which connects to the mammillary bodies via the fornix. The thalamus then receives information from the mammillary bodies via the mammillothalamic tract. The anterior limb of the internal capsule connects the thalamus to the cingulate gyrus, which is in turn connected back to the hippocampus through the cingulum bundle.

Shrinkage of the GM nodes of the PC have repeatedly been found in AUD patients, with volume deficits in the hippocampus [18], mammillary bodies [19,20] and cingulate cortex [21]. Structural abnormalities have also been demonstrated in the thalamus of AUD patients [22] and more particularly a disconnection between the hippocampus and the anterior thalamic nuclei [23]. Altered WM fibers were found in the cingulum, fornix and anterior thalamic radiation [24]. Several studies explored brain-function relationships within the PC of AUD patients. Reduced hippocampal volume was reported in AUD patients without episodic memory deficits, suggesting that hippocampal shrinkage itself cannot explain alcohol-related episodic memory impairments [25]. When considering brain microstructure, low episodic memory performance was associated with altered parahippocampal GM [26] and WM integrity in the fornix and cingulum bundle [24].

Executive functions and motor network

Executive dysfunction has been considered as the most frequent cognitive impairment among AUD patients [27], including flexibility, updating, planning, and inhibition deficits [28]. AUD patients also exhibit impaired decision making abilities [28].

Executive deficits have been associated with damage of the fronto-cerebellar circuit (FCC). The FCC consists of two parallel closed loops within the cortico-thalamo-cerebellar circuitry: one executive and one motor [29]. The frontal cortex (dorsolateral prefrontal cortex for the executive loop, motor cortex for the motor loop) is connected to the pons via corticopontine tracts and back to the cerebellum (crus I and II for the executive loop, lobules IV–VI of the vermis) through the middle cerebellar peduncle. Then, the superior cerebellar peduncle connects the cerebellum to the thalamus, which is linked to the frontal cortex through the anterior limb of the internal capsule and the anterior corona radiata.

Studies have reached consensus regarding the significant and prominent damage of the frontal cortex and cerebellum in AUD patients [30]. In addition, macrostructural WM alterations have been observed in the pons, cerebellum and midbrain [31,32]. Structural connectivity within the FCC is also affected with altered WM microstructure in the anterior limb of the internal capsule, the anterior corona radiata, middle and superior cerebellar peduncles [24] and fibers connecting the midbrain to the pons [33].

Executive deficits observed in AUD were first related to frontal lobe damage [30]. More recent investigations highlighted that alterations of other nodes of the FCC may be better predictors of executive dysfunction than damage of the prefrontal cortex [31,34]. Executive deficits were related to shrinkage of the pons, thalamus and cerebellum [31,33] as well as to the number of WM fibers between the midbrain and the pons [33]. In a combined MRI-DTI study, Crespi et al. [35] found that executive performance correlated with GM volume and DTI measures of key nodes and fiber tracts of the salience, default-mode and central executive networks

Social cognition network

Social cognition refers to the processes contributing to the perception and understanding of social environments and interactions [36]. It includes several abilities that enable an individual to behave appropriately in a social context or environment: the ability to decode emotions, empathy, and the Theory of Mind (ToM). Empathy refers to the ability to understand and experience what others feel without confusion between oneself and others. ToM refers to the ability to attribute mental (cognitive and affective) states to oneself and others. The social cognition network encompasses three circuits [37]. The cognitive ToM circuit is mediated by the medial and dorsolateral prefrontal cortex, dorsal anterior cingulate cortex, superior temporal sulcus, temporoparietal junction, and temporal poles [38]. The affective ToM (i.e., cognitive empathy) involves the ventromedial prefrontal cortex, temporoparietal junction, and precuneus. Finally, the affective empathy network is mediated by the inferior frontal gyrus, anterior cingulate cortex, amygdala, and insula.

Structural brain alterations in the frontal cortex have been described in the previous section. Temporal cortices are also affected, as well as the amygdala and insula [39,40]. As summarized in a recent narrative review [6], different emotional and social cognition impairments have been described in AUD: altered abilities to express emotions and to decode emotions on faces, in prosody, body postures, and music. Empathy and ToM abilities are also affected [9 for a review].

Very few studies examined the relationship between social cognition and brain structure in AUD. Trick et al. [41] found smaller GM volume in the inferior frontal cortex and insula in AUD patients with low fear recognition performance. Affective empathy was related to cortical thinning in the inferior frontal gyrus [42].

Heterogeneity of brain abnormalities and neuropsychological impairments among AUD patients

AUD is characterized by a marked variability between patients in the nature and extent of brain abnormalities and neuropsychological deficits [27]. Several factors were identified to explain this variability such as parameters related to alcohol history [43–46], or associated malnutrition, thiamine deficiency [47–49] and liver dysfunction [49]. Sleep quality is another factor that could contribute to the heterogeneity of altered brain structure and function in AUD. Indeed, many studies showed that sleep is essential for efficient cognitive abilities [50] and is related to brain integrity [51,52], and there is a considerable evidence that AUD is frequently associated with disturbed sleep.

ALCOHOL-INDUCED SLEEP ABNORMALITIES

Described as alcohol-induced sleep disorder in the DSM-IV and the DSM-5, sleep disturbances can manifest at each stage of AUD, from active alcohol use to sustained abstinence. We will describe, in this section, the nature of sleep complaint and objective sleep disturbances reported during periods of active alcohol use, acute alcohol withdrawal, early abstinence and late abstinence (respectively 1 to 2 weeks, 2 to 8 weeks and more than 8 weeks after drinking cessation; [53]; **Figure 1**).

During active alcohol use

Using the Insomnia Severity Index [54], Chaudhary et al. (2015) reported insomnia symptoms in 74% of AUD patients [55]. Patients actively consuming alcohol complained of difficulties falling asleep (i.e., longer sleep latency; [56] as well as fragmented sleep [57]. Recent studies using the Pittsburgh Sleep Quality index (PSQI [58]) revealed that sleep disturbances are very frequent at this stage of AUD ($> 70\%$ of AUD patients [57,59]), independently of age, sex and duration of alcohol dependency [59]. All the dimensions of

sleep explored in the PSQI (subjective sleep quality, sleep latency and duration, habitual sleep efficiency, sleep disturbances, use of sleeping medications, daytime dysfunction) are affected [57]. The PSQI score during active drinking predicted sleep disturbances after two weeks of detoxification [59]. Mello and Mendelson reported that active alcohol use induces sleep fragmentation, which is not associated with a decrease in TST. In addition, patients also experience daytime sleepiness combined with occasional naps [60]. Sleepiness would concern about one-third of AUD patients [57].

Polysomnography (PSG) studies conducted at this stage of AUD are scarce but revealed substantial changes in sleep architecture. Thus, sleep onset latency (SOL) and REM sleep latency are increased. Total sleep time (TST) is generally decreased (but see [61] for different results). The amount of slow wave sleep (SWS) increases while time spent in REM sleep is reduced [62–64].

During acute alcohol withdrawal

Drinking cessation is associated in about 50% of AUD patients with clinical symptoms that constitute the alcohol withdrawal syndrome (AWS [65]). The severity of AWS is variable, ranging from a mild clinical form to a more severe one with seizures or *delirium tremens* potentially leading to death [66]. AWS results from a brain hyperexcitability due to increased glutamate transmission combined with decreased GABA transmission [66]. Sleep disturbances are mainly reported during the first week of drinking cessation, in more than 90% of AUD patients assessed with the PSQI [67,68].

These subjective sleep disturbances have been confirmed by actigraphy and PSG recordings. More precisely, studies revealed the persistence of decreased TST [69] and sleep efficiency [57], and increased SOL. The amount of SWS decreases [70], associated with higher sleep fragmentation [57,69,70]. Of note, the proportion of REM sleep, which was reduced during active alcohol consumption, increases during the withdrawal phase. This phenomenon, called REM sleep rebound [60,70–72], results from an increase in the number of REM episodes and shorter intervals in between. The severity of sleep disturbances during this phase varies importantly across patients, depending on the severity of AWS [69], the history of previous severe neurological complications related to withdrawal (such as *delirium tremens*; [73–75]) or even the global health and nutritional status of the patient [76].

Early in abstinence

Once the acute signs of withdrawal have disappeared and benzodiazepines prescribed during withdrawal no longer affect brain and cognition, AUD patients are generally referred as "early in abstinence" until about 8 weeks of abstinence [9]. Numerous studies have been conducted during this phase and indicate that patients still complain about their sleep [59,67,68,77–89]. They mainly complain of difficulties falling asleep, numerous nocturnal awakenings, decreased TST and daytime sleepiness [9]. Insomnia symptoms are very common in patients, being reported in 36 to 72% of them [53]. This variability can be explained by methodological issues such as different AUD diagnosis criteria, duration of abstinence, sleep measures or contexts in which the assessment was done (in a clinical setting or at home) [72].

Even if it is a little bit out of the scope of this review, it is important to mention that cognitive deficits are not prominent in non AUD insomnia patients. The studies have provided inconsistent findings that can be explained by methodological differences, the definition of the insomnia group and the tasks used that may not be sufficiently sensitive to reveal subtle deficits [90]. A meta-analysis showed that individuals with insomnia exhibit deficits in manipulation and retention in working memory, episodic memory and problem solving, these impairments being of small to mediate magnitude [91]. In another meta-analysis focusing on executive functions, insomnia patients were impaired on reaction time-based tasks assessing inhibitory control and mental flexibility [92]. Insomnia-related cognitive deficits appear to be observed in tasks relying to some extent on the integrity of the prefrontal cortex. In the case of AUD, we can surmise that insomnia symptoms do not induce major cognitive impairments, but rather exacerbate alcohol-related deficits.

Despite an improvement in sleep quality during the first month of abstinence (in particular, decreased SOL and increased TST), PSG studies revealed that AUD patients early in abstinence still exhibit longer SOL and poorer sleep efficiency than controls after drinking cessation [77,88,93–99]. In addition, such sleep changes are not systematically reported. SOL and SE did not differ from controls in the following studies [78,87,100], while Brower et al. found that only SOL was in the normal range[101].. Sleep is also more fragmented, due to nocturnal awakenings, increased time spent awake and numerous stage shifts [7]. Most of the studies reported significant changes in NREM sleep [7], including a decrease in time spent in N2 and N3 sleep [96,99–101], contrasting with an increase in lighter N1 sleep [77,78,87,88,93–96,98,100]. Compared to controls, EEG analyses showed lower delta activity in N1-N2 [98] and N3 sleep [96,98], supported by visual observation of lower amplitude of K-complexes (evoked delta waves) [85,102]. Changes in REM sleep appear less consistent. Indeed, some studies reported an increase of about 10% in REM sleep proportion related to shorter REM latency [7,70,78,93,96,100,103], an increase in the number of REM sleep episodes and a shorter interval in between [77,88,93,96,101]. An increase in beta activity during REM sleep was also reported [98]. On the contrary, other studies did not observe any change in REM sleep [87,97,99]. These heterogeneous findings could be explained by the presence of psychiatric comorbidities such as depressive symptoms [78,104].

Late in abstinence

Sleep disturbances may persist for a considerable period of time after drinking cessation. The perception of sleep quality remains significantly poorer compared to healthy controls after 3 months [67,79,89], 6 months [77,81] or even one year of abstinence [86]. The significant improvement of insomnia symptoms during the first six months is explained by drinking cessation (55% of the variance explained ; [81]) but is also observed with a reduction of alcohol consumption [105].

Longitudinal PSG studies confirmed the persistence of all sleep disturbances listed above. Increased SOL, decreased TST as well as SWS and REM sleep stages abnormalities are still observed in late abstinence. Lower slow wave activity was reported in NREM sleep, especially over frontal derivations [85]. Difficulties falling asleep (reflected by longer SOL) tend to disappear 5 to 9 months after drinking cessation, while sleep fragmentation seems to persist during 21 months, and TST to normalize within 2 years [93,103]. SWS progressively reaches normal amounts by 2 years of sobriety [93,103]. Regarding REM sleep, here again findings diverge across studies. Drummond et al. reported that, after 27 months of abstinence, most of sleep measures recovered within the normal range, except the proportion of REM sleep which was still higher an REM sleep latency which remained shorter in AUD patients compared to controls [93]. By contrast, other data indicate that after only 3 months of abstinence, REM sleep returns to normal values, and others did not find any significant differences in REM sleep when comparing patients to healthy controls [103,106,107]. These inconsistencies in the dynamic of sleep recovery may be explained by differences in patients' characteristics and the duration of sobriety.

Other sleep disturbances in AUD

Besides changes in sleep quality and architecture, AUD patients also frequently suffer from sleep-disordered breathing (SDB) and periodic limb movement disorder (PLMD) that can both contribute to alter sleep quality. We will also briefly describe alterations in circadian rhythms.

A recent meta-analysis showed that alcohol consumption is a risk factor for the development or worsening of SDB [108]. Few investigations have been conducted on SDB in recently detoxified AUD patients. In a study carried out in 188 AUD patients, a moderate SDB (defined as 10 or more apneas-hypopneas per hour of sleep) was observed in 23,5% of patients aged 40 or over and 50% of patients aged 60 or over [109]. Respiratory events are both central [110] and obstructive [97,109,110]. Several hypotheses have been proposed to explain the high prevalence of SDB in AUD patients. First, alcohol consumption reduces genioglossal muscle tone, favoring upper airway collapse [109]. Second, excessive alcohol consumption represents an important caloric intake, that may lead on the long-term to overweight or obesity, which are known as risk factors for SDB [111]. Finally, alcohol has neurotoxic effects on the brain stem and vagus nerve that are involved in respiratory functions $[107]$.

PLMD is diagnosed when a patient meets the criterion of 15 repetitive limb movements per hour of sleep. The prevalence of PLMD in the general population is 3.9% [112]. Alcohol use has been shown to increase the frequency of periodic limb movements (PLMs; [113]) but, to the best of our knowledge, there is no prevalence estimation in AUD patients. Two studies observed more PLMs in AUD patients compared to controls [106,114] but this result was not consistently reported [97]. In a study conducted in 139 AUD patients, Brower & Hall [115] showed that AUD patients, and especially those aged over 55, had more

PLMs than younger ones and healthy individuals. This higher PLMs-index in AUD patients may be explained by a decrease in dopaminergic neurotransmission [114].

Finally, alterations of circadian rhythms are also common in AUD (see [116] for a recent review). Briefly, acute alcohol intake induces dose-dependent changes in biological rhythms (e.g., core body temperature, melatonin and cortisol secretions) but these changes normalize within 24 hours. In AUD patients, because of chronic alcohol use, those changes are more severe and persist over time. During acute alcohol withdrawal, the desynchronization of circadian rhythms correlates with the severity of AWS and is associated with neurological complications. With abstinence, alterations of circadian rhythms generally recover within one month, except for melatonin secretion whose disruption can last several months [116].

IMPACT OF SLEEP DISTURBANCES ON COGNITIVE IMPAIRMENTS IN AUD

The role of sleep in cognitive and emotional functioning has been well described in healthy individuals [117,118] and accumulating evidence suggests that sleep disturbances are associated with cognitive deficits in ageing [119], Alzheimer's disease [120] and in psychiatric diseases such as schizophrenia [121]. However, the impact of sleep disturbances on cognitive deficits in AUD remains unclear. In this section, we will focus on episodic memory, executive functions, emotion and social cognition, which are known to be frequently impaired in AUD patients as previously mentioned **(Table 1).**

Sleep and episodic memory

One of the essential functions of sleep is to favor the consolidation of recently acquired information into long-term stores [122,123]. For episodic memories, this process mainly operates during NREM sleep [122], but some studies also reported a beneficial effect of REM sleep [124], especially for emotionally-laden memories [125].

To our knowledge, only one study investigated sleep-dependent memory consolidation in AUD patients [79]. The authors proposed a face-name association task to two groups of patients with different lengths of abstinence (short-term (2-4 weeks) and long-term (10-22 weeks) abstinence). In both groups of patients, daily alcohol consumption before drinking cessation negatively correlated with memory performance, and the duration of alcohol dependence negatively correlated with the amount of NREM sleep. The two groups did not differ from each other with respect to sleep parameters and presented similar overnight decline in recall performance. In the group of long-term abstainers, the duration of abstinence positively correlated with the amount of SWS. The authors concluded that chronic and excessive alcohol consumption negatively affects NREM sleep, which in turn impairs sleepdependent memory consolidation. In this study, patients also performed a mirror tracing task to assess procedural memory consolidation. Both groups improved significantly their performance with practice. The overnight improvement in mirror tracing performance negatively correlated with SOL and positively correlated with the amount of REM sleep. Compared to normative data, AUD patients showed higher amount of REM sleep [79], but this may not be pathological, as increases in REM sleep were observed after procedural learning [126]. Overall, sleep-dependent memory consolidation has been seldom investigated in recently sober AUD patients. Even though the available data suggest a dissociation between episodic and procedural memory consolidation, the former being impaired and the latter one rather preserved, further studies are needed to confirm these results.

Beyond its contribution to overnight memory consolidation, poor sleep before learning has a negative impact on new learning. Yoo et al. [127] showed that one single night of sleep deprivation reduces hippocampal activity during encoding and modifies functional connectivity in alertness networks, compromising successful encoding of new experiences. A similar phenomenon was also described after multiple nights of partial sleep restriction [128] and in individuals reporting short sleep duration [50]. No study has been conducted in AUD patients, but these results suggest that poor sleep may also have an impact on patients' encoding abilities.

Sleep and executive functions

Executive functions are particularly vulnerable to poor sleep quality [129], total sleep deprivation and chronic sleep restriction [50] in young and middle-aged individuals. Sleep deprivation impairs flexibility [130], inhibition (by increasing perseverations, errors, omissions and the sensibility to interference [50]) and working memory [131]. Sleep duration has an inverse U shaped relationship with executive functions: short and very long sleep durations are associated with lower working memory and mental flexibility performance in young individuals [132,133]. Beyond sleep quantity, impaired sleep continuity (reflected by increased time spent awake after sleep onset) and lower proportion of SWS also have a negative impact on working memory performance [131,132]. In addition, sleep is essential for decision making, which requires the integration of complex cognitive and emotional information. Sleep deprivation impairs decision making [134], favors risk taking [134], and increases impulsivity [135]. Indeed, total sleep deprivation may alter the functioning of brain areas involved in the reward network, which in turn may favor unrealistic expectations of gains and underestimation of the consequences of losses [136]. Concerning the impact of sleep restriction, results are less clear. Although some studies showed that sleep restriction impairs decision making abilities [137,138], a meta-analysis concluded that evidence in favor of a negative impact of chronic sleep restriction on risk taking is insufficient [50]. Finally, Seeley et al. [139] proposed trials of the Iowa Gambling Tasks prior and after a period of sleep and showed that post-learning sleep, especially theta activity during REM sleep, enhanced decision-making performance.

The impact of sleep disturbances on the executive deficits frequently observed in AUD was explored in only one study reporting that the amount of REM sleep positively correlated with performance on a backward span task, suggesting a relationship between REM sleep and the ability to manipulate information in working memory [140]. Two hypotheses were proposed to explain these results. First, chronic and excessive alcohol consumption alters REM sleep, which in turn impairs the processes underlying the central executive of working memory. Second, chronic and excessive alcohol consumption disrupts common neurobiological mechanisms involved in both sleep and working memory.

A recent study combined an assessment of subjective sleep quality using the PSQI, with cognitive testing and a neuroimaging examination in a sample of AUD patients with and without Korsakoff's Syndrome (KS). The authors found that only the AUD patients who did not complain about their sleep presented executive deficits, similar to those of KS patients who did not complain either [141]. These results suggest that certain cognitive deficits,

especially executive dysfunction, may alter the ability to self-evaluate sleep quality. From a clinical perspective, sleep problems could be neglected in AUD patients who are not cognitively able to complain and would therefore remain untreated. Such a situation would worsen sleep-related consequences in AUD patients, and affect the treatment outcome.

Sleep, emotion and social cognition

In healthy individuals, chronic sleep restriction and total sleep deprivation impair the ability to decode emotional expressions, especially anger [142], happiness [142,143] and sadness [143,144]. In addition, total sleep deprivation [145], lower subjective sleep quality [146], and shorter sleep duration [146] alter the ability to infer the emotional state of other individuals (affective ToM). Sleep deprivation has also been related to more stereotyping and implicit bias toward minority groups, influencing social decision made about individual's trustworthiness based on facial features [147,148]. Finally, poor sleepers are more susceptible to social rejection and conflicting relationships, contributing to social withdrawal and loneliness.

Overall, these studies highlight the links between poor sleep and impaired social cognition abilities, which could accentuate social issues and interpersonal difficulties frequently observed in AUD patients [6]. Complaining about sleep is associated with more severe subjective reports of alcohol-related psychosocial problems in AUD [55,149]. However, no study has investigated the potential moderation effect of sleep disturbances on the relationships between AUD and impaired emotional and social cognition. Finally, social difficulties (loneliness, interpersonal conflicts, perceived social rejection) also have an impact on both subjective and objective sleep quality, suggesting a potential bidirectional relationships between sleep disturbances and interpersonal problems [150].

To sum up, only a few studies have explored the links between sleep alterations and cognitive and emotional impairments in AUD patients. First, these studies show that sleepdependent episodic memory consolidation is impaired and associated with the amount of SWS. In contrast, consolidation in procedural memory appears as preserved [79]. Second, executive deficits are related to low amounts of REM sleep [140] and an altered ability to self-evaluate sleep quality leading to rare or mild sleep complaint in those patients [141]. Finally, greater self-reported psychosocial problems are associated with major sleep complaints [55,149]. Further studies are now required to deepen our understanding regarding the role of the different sleep components/parameters on cognitive and emotional deficits and to determine whether these associations last with sustained abstinence.

RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN SLEEP DISTURBANCES AND BRAIN ALTERATIONS IN AUD

Considering the relationships between sleep disturbances and cognitive impairments, it is relevant to investigate how sleep is related to structural (including GM and WM volume) and functional brain alterations in AUD patients.

Structural brain imaging

Cross-sectional studies conducted in middle-aged individuals revealed that poor selfreported sleep quality [51], early morning awakening [151] and daytime sleepiness [152] are associated with lower GM volume in frontal areas. In addition, short sleep duration was related to global atrophy [153], to lower thalamic volume [154] and to altered white matter microstructure in frontal areas, superior corona radiata and the inferior longitudinal fasciculus [155]. In addition, the presence of subjective sleep disturbances correlated with reduced white matter integrity in frontal, anterior cingulate and limbic regions as well as in the insula [155] but see [156] for different results).

Three studies investigated the association between sleep abnormalities and structural brain alterations in abstinent AUD patients. Using a descriptive analysis of 9 AUD patients, Ishibadi et al. [157] showed that with prolonged abstinence, a recovery of structural damage measured with computerized tomography (CT) scans was observed in 5 patients, four of them also presenting an increase in the amount of SWS. The authors concluded that early in abstinence, low amounts of SWS may result from cortical atrophy. In a more recent study, Colrain et al. [158] showed that lower regional GM volumes (in frontal, temporal, sensorimotor, parietal and occipital cortices) contributed to the changes in the amplitude of Kcomplexes observed in long-term abstinent AUD patients. Regarding subjective sleep quality, a relationship was found between subjective sleep disturbances and brain structure: only the AUD patients who did not complain about their sleep presented brain shrinkage and altered white matter integrity in fronto-temporal regions and in the thalamus. These brain alterations were as severe as those observed in KS patients who did not complain either [141]. Such findings reinforce the idea that preserved brain integrity is required to be able to efficiently self-evaluate sleep quality.

Functional brain imaging

Sleep disturbances are also associated with changes in brain metabolism and functional connectivity in healthy individuals. In young to middle-aged adults, a decrease of the metabolic activity in the frontal cortex, anterior cingulate gyrus, thalamus, basal ganglia and cerebellum has been described following sleep deprivation [159]. Moreover, several brain regions constituting the default mode network, the limbic*,* salience and executive networks are functionally altered following sleep deprivation [160]. Changes in functional connectivity have been commonly reported after sleep deprivation, notably between the thalamus and middle temporal regions, superior and medial frontal areas, and anterior cingulate cortex

[161]. In particular, functional changes in frontal and anterior cingulate areas induced by sleep deprivation have been related to executive deficits [162]. When exposed to emotional faces, sleep-deprived subjects exhibited higher amygdala activation and lower activity in the prefrontal cortex compared to individuals who slept normally, resulting in a prefrontalamygdala disconnection [163]. Moreover, sleep-deprived individuals exhibited lower activity in the ToM network (including the temporo-parietal junction, the precuneus and the medial prefrontal cortex) associated with higher subjective rating of loneliness [164].

Poor sleep quality may thus contribute to the changes in brain metabolism and functional connectivity reported in AUD patients. However, studies conducted on that topic are scarce. Only a recent investigation showed that the severity of AUD was associated with poor subjective sleep quality, this association being mediated by the strength of the functional connectivity between the thalamus and the medial prefrontal cortex in AUD patients [165]. However, patients were asked to stop drinking for at least 48 hours before inclusion, which may have directly altered sleep and modified functional brain connectivity through potential AWS.

To sum up, sleep disturbances appear to be associated with structural and functional brain alterations in abstinent AUD patients. While the number of studies is too limited to draw definite conclusions, integrity of fronto-temporal regions and thalamus may be related to sleep quality in this disease [141,165]. Previous studies differ in terms of inclusion criteria, sleep parameters analyzed and neuroimaging approaches used. Further studies are thus needed to specify the brain regions that are particularly vulnerable to poor sleep quality in AUD using multimodal neuroimaging (brain structure, metabolism and functional connectivity), and to determine whether recovery occurs with sustained abstinence.

DISCUSSION

Overall, very few studies have explored the relationships between sleep quality, brain alterations and cognitive deficits in AUD patients. Regarding sleep complaint, subjective sleep quality was associated with both structural [141] and functional brain alterations [165], notably in fronto-temporal regions and the thalamus. Subjective sleep disturbances were also related to poor executive abilities [141] and more severe interpersonal difficulties [55,149]. Regarding objective sleep quality, the decrease in SWS was associated with structural brain alterations [157] and impaired episodic memory consolidation [79]. In contrast, low amounts of REM sleep were rather related to executive deficits [140]. While further studies are required to confirm these relationships, these data suggest that both subjective and objective sleep quality correlate with alcohol-related brain damage and cognitive deficits in AUD patients. Below, we discuss the directionality of these relationships and their time course, as well as their potential role in alcohol relapse **(Figure 2).**

• **Sleep disturbances and alcohol-related brain damage: bidirectional relationships?**

A crucial question concerns the directionality of the relationships between sleep disturbances, and alcohol-related brain abnormalities and dysfunction in AUD. We propose that two complementary hypotheses may explain these bidirectional relationships (❶**, Figure 2).** First, sleep disturbances may be a consequence of alcohol-related brain damage. Both chronic and excessive alcohol consumption, as well as alcohol withdrawal, induce brain damage in sleep-promoting regions. Structural and/or functional abnormalities in frontal temporal and parietal cortices, as well as in the thalamus and the insula [166–168] may contribute to sleep disturbances, which may in turn result in cognitive deficits in AUD patients. Second, poor sleep quality may contribute to the development of alcohol-related brain damage. Alcohol-related sleep disturbances and brain damage may co-occur since resulting from common mechanisms such as impaired neurogenesis [169], increased glutamate levels [170,171], neuroinflammation [172] and oxidative stress [173]. Brain abnormalities and cognitive deficits would thus be exacerbated in AUD patients with poor sleep quality. These two hypotheses seem difficult to disentangle in clinical studies and require preclinical investigations to be put to the test. However, exploration of sleep quality in the course of the disease may provide some first insights.

• **Contribution of sleep disturbances at all stages of AUD**

Sleep disturbances are present at all stages of AUD i.e. during acute alcohol intoxication, the acute alcohol withdrawal phase, as well as early and late in abstinence (2) , **Figure 2).** Several studies indicated that sleep disruption may even precede the development of AUD. Retrospective investigations showed that some AUD patients report sleep disruption before the onset of the disease [86]. Moreover, studies conducted in adolescents [174,175] and young adults [176,177] suggest that difficulties in initiating and maintaining sleep may favour excessive alcohol consumption and binge drinking. Finally, the disruption of circadian rhythms may also be a factor contributing to the development of addictive behaviors [116]. In particular, the evening chronotype has been associated with a higher risk of developing AUD [116]. These results first suggest that sleep disturbances may be considered as an early vulnerability factor for substance abuse [178] and notably AUD. In addition, alcohol-related brain abnormalities and cognitive deficits tend to recover [179], at least partially, with sustained abstinence while sleep quality remains poor even in long-term abstainers. It will be relevant, in future studies, to understand how sleep could modulate cerebral and cognitive recovery, and whether poor sleep quality could explain, at least partly, the persistence of some

cognitive deficits despite sobriety. Long-lasting sleep difficulties may thus contribute to persisting functional and structural brain abnormalities in AUD.

• **Direct and indirect role of sleep disturbances in relapse**

Previous studies demonstrated that sleep disturbances constitute a poor prognostic for treatment outcomes in AUD patients, by directly increasing the risk of alcohol relapse [180]. An association was observed between relapse and sleep disruption assessed using both questionnaires (global sleep complaint and difficulty to fall asleep) and objective measures (longer SOL, number of awakenings, increased REM sleep pressure, higher beta activity during REM sleep and decreased amount of NREM sleep; increased PLMs-arousal index) [77,83,88,93,104,114,181,182]. More recently, some authors proposed that sleep disturbances may indirectly contribute to relapse notably by increasing psycho-affective symptoms [94] and alcohol craving [84,183]. Psycho-affective symptoms, such as anxiety and depression, often co-occur in AUD [184,185] and increase the risk of relapse [186]. In AUD, sleep disturbances, and more particularly REM sleep abnormalities have been associated with more severe depressive symptoms [78,104] and relapse [77,83]. We can thus hypothesize an association between sleep disturbances, psycho-affective symptoms and relapse.

Craving, defined as the persistent urge or desire to use a substance [10], is experienced by 54-72% of AUD patients [84]. Some studies reported that a higher alcohol craving score (assessed using the Penn Alcohol Craving Scale, [187]) was related to difficulties falling asleep in recently detoxified AUD patients [84,183] but also after 3 months of abstinence [183]. Different hypotheses have been proposed to explain this relationship. At first, during the acute alcohol intoxication, many AUD patients use alcohol as a coping strategy to treat their sleep problems [80,188,189]. With prolonged alcohol consumption, the initially helpful effect of alcohol to fall sleep is reduced, due to a progressive tolerance to this hypnotic effect, leading to increased sleep disturbances, fatigue and/or negative mood state. These alterations, together an ineffective coping response to sleep problems or positive expectancies about the effects of alcohol on sleep, may in turn increase their urge to drink [183]. Other mechanisms have been reported, notably the existence of common neurobiological substrates between sleep-wake regulation [190] and the modulation of alcohol consumption by regions involved in the reward system [191]. Further studies are needed to clarify the interactions between sleep, psycho-affective symptoms and craving in the context of alcohol relapse but their coexistence suggests the clinical relevance to manage them simultaneously.

Here, we propose that alcohol-related sleep disturbances may also indirectly increase the risk of alcohol relapse through their contribution to brain alterations and cognitive deficits (❸, **Figure 2)**. In this review, we highlighted the fact that alcohol-related sleep alterations are associated with structural and functional abnormalities mainly in fronto-temporal regions and their connections, as well as in the thalamus. These brain regions, involved in several brain networks underlying episodic memory, executive functions, emotion and social cognition, are commonly damaged in recently detoxified AUD patients and such cognitive deficits are consequently frequently observed. Altered episodic memory abilities, executive function or social cognition could have negative consequences on patients' capacity to benefit fully from treatment [192] or to maintain abstinence or reduce alcohol consumption. Indeed, psychosocial treatments, including cognitive-behavioral therapies or motivational interview, require these cognitive abilities [28]. When they decide to change drinking behavior, patients must plan new strategies, inhibit old routines and make the right decision in risky situations. From a clinical perspective, improving sleep quality should thus not only be considered as a therapeutic target to directly reduce alcohol craving and psycho-affective symptoms, but also to improve brain structure and function, which would indirectly favor treatment outcome.

Overall, sleep quality seems 1) to constitute a critical factor for the development of AUD, 2) to be a consequence of alcohol-related brain damage, 3) to contribute to the development of alcohol-related brain damage and cognitive deficits, and 4) to affect alcohol treatment outcome. It is thus crucial to manage sleep disturbances in AUD patients.

MANAGEMENT OF SLEEP DISORDERS IN AUD

Clinical observation and questioning of the patient are fundamental to reveal and characterize sleep difficulties. Identifying the nature of sleep complaint (difficulties falling asleep, early morning awakening, daytime sleepiness…) is essential to propose adapted intervention strategies and to avoid the use of alcohol as self-medication. In addition, it is of utmost importance to interpret sleep complaint in the light of the cognitive deficits of the patients, especially when those patients present severe executive dysfunction that may alter their self-evaluation abilities [141]. Sleep quality should be assessed in a dynamic way, at each step of the patients' management, to determine the origin of sleep disturbances and when they began. Indeed, a particular attention should be provided to AUD patients who used alcohol as a coping strategy for sleep problems because it may be associated with high risk of craving and subsequent relapse [183].

In this way, treatment of sleep disturbances requires therapeutic options that result in both rapid and lasting sleep improvements. The very first strategy to improve sleep quality must systematically be to favor alcohol drinking cessation [81]. Non-pharmacological sleep interventions can be used from the acute withdrawal period to long-term sobriety. Psychoeducation on sleep hygiene, aiming notably at identifying and correcting the false beliefs about sleep and about the effect of alcohol on sleep, is generally a good starting point but is not sufficient *per se*. Cognitive behavioral therapies can be conducted in case of persistent insomnia (CBT-I; [193]). This kind of therapy has been successfully used in AUD patients [9]. CBT programs require experienced staff, potentially limiting their application in clinical settings, and their efficacy is observed after several weeks of therapy. However, studies assessing internet-based [194–196] and app-based [197] versions of CBT-1 revealed similar efficacity to more traditional therapy. Thus, these tools could be a relevant option in the treatment of insomnia. In parallel, a short-term prescription of pharmacological agents could also be proposed to promote a rapid sleep improvement in AUD patients with severe sleep difficulties [198]. For instance, a 12 week treatment by Gabapentin, a widely prescribed generic calcium channel/γ-aminobutyric acid-modulating medication, has been shown to improve the rate of abstinence and reduced the number of heavy drinking days in AUD patients. The treatment also improved mood, sleep disturbances and craving [199]. However, a recent meta-analysis of 16 studies indicated that the effect on mood and sleep are not consistently observed [200]. Physical activity may also have a beneficial effect on sleep both in the general population and in patients with psychiatric diseases [201,202]. Thus, the development of physical activity programs, adjusted to patients' comorbidities, may be useful to improve sleep, but also cognitive abilities and quality of life, in AUD patients.

A persisting sleep complaint and/or the observation of daytime symptoms such as fatigue or excessive daytime sleepiness, may be signs of sleep disturbances and especially sleep apneas. Complementary examinations should be proposed to those patients to confirm the presence of sleep apneas and treat them (for instance with continuous positive airway pressure). Finally, it is also crucial to take psychiatric and other addictive comorbidities into account for the treatment of sleep disorders. These comorbidities could exacerbate existing sleep difficulties. For example, nicotine substitutes should be proposed in smoking AUD patients to reduce the effects of nicotine withdrawal overnight (i.e., multiple awakenings contributing to sleep fragmentation, [203]).

CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

To sum up, alcohol-related sleep disturbances are present at all stages of AUD, can persist several months after drinking cessation and predict relapse. They can also be observed before the onset of AUD, favoring the emergence of substance abuse. In AUD patients early in abstinence, sleep disturbances seem to be related to altered structure and function of brain networks underlying episodic memory, executive functions, emotions and social cognition. Sleep disturbances may rather precede the development of AUD than be a consequence of alcohol-related brain damage, and may thus contribute to the pathophysiology of AUD. The understanding of the interactions between sleep disturbances, cognitive deficits and brain alterations in AUD is still in its infancy. Studies combining sleep assessments, multimodal neuroimaging examinations (structural MRI, brain metabolism and functional connectivity) and fine-grained cognitive measures will undoubtedly improve our knowledge of this disease, favor the development of adapted treatment strategies and limit the risk of relapse.

FIGURES AND TABLES

Figure 1: Objective and subjective sleep disturbances at each stage of AUD.

This figure summarizes objective and subjective sleep disturbances in AUD patients during active alcohol use, acute withdrawal phase, early in abstinence (< 2 months of abstinence) and late in abstinence (> 2 months of abstinence).

↑ : increased compared to controls or baseline in the case of longitudinal studies ; ↓ : decreased compared to controls or baseline in the case of longitudinal studies. The doted arrows indicate inconsistent results (for more details, see section 2: Alcohol-induced sleep abnormalities).

Figure 2: Contribution of sleep disturbances to alcohol-related brain alterations and cognitive deficits in AUD.

This figure summarizes the potential relationships between sleep disturbances and alcohol related brain damage and cognitive deficits in AUD. First, bidirectional relationships may exist between sleep disturbances and alcohol related brain damage in AUD (represented by the green arrows **❶**): sleep disturbances could be a consequence of alcohol-related brain damage, but may also contribute to the pathophysiology of AUD by exacerbating pathophysiological mechanisms underlying alcohol-related brain damage in AUD. Second, these bidirectional relationships may exist from acute alcohol consumption to alcohol recovery, suggesting precocity and persistence of these associations (represented by the purple arrow **❷**). Finally, sleep disturbances have direct consequences on alcohol relapse through increased craving notably, but may also indirectly influence alcohol relapse by increasing alcohol-related cognitive deficits (represented by the yellow arrows **❸**)**.**

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics and main findings of studies conducted on the relationships between sleep disturbances, brain abnormalities and cognitive impairments in abstinent AUD patients.

Abbreviations: AUD : alcohol use disorder (this term is used here to refer to patients with either "alcohol-dependence" according to the DSM-IV criteria or "alcohol use disorder" according to the DSM-5); HC: Healthy controls; KS: patients with Korsakoff's Syndrome; PSG : polysomnography: PSQI: Pittsburg sleep quality index [58]; ISI : insomnia severity index [54] ; SIP questionnaire: short index of problems [204]; IDTS questionnaire: inventory of drug-taking situations [205] ; CT: computed tomography; GM: gray matter; WM: white matter; DTI: diffusion tensor imaging; REM: rapid eye movement; SWS: slow wave sleep; NREM: non rapid eye movement; /: not available.

For age, duration of alcohol dependence and abstinence before inclusion, the mean was reported and the standard-deviation when this information was available.

RESEARCH AGENDA

- Research needs to clarify the particular aspects of sleep quality, architecture and microstructure that are related to specific cognitive deficits in alcohol use disorder.
- Future studies are needed to specify the brain regions that are particularly vulnerable to poor sleep in alcohol use disorder.
- Longitudinal designs are required to better understand how sleep can modulate brain and cognitive recovery and to determine whether long-lasting poor sleep can explain, at least partly, the persistence of some cognitive deficits in patients with AUD.
- Studies combining sleep assessments, multimodal neuroimaging and cognitive evaluations are needed to improve our knowledge about sleep disturbances in alcohol use disorder, and adapt treatment strategies to reduce the risk of relapse.

PRACTICE POINTS

- Sleep disturbances are very frequent at all stages of alcohol use disorder (i.e. from active alcohol use to sustained abstinence) and can favor relapse.
- Complex bidirectional relationships seem to exist between sleep and alcohol use disorder: sleep disturbances could be the consequence of alcohol-related brain damage, but may also contribute to brain alterations and cognitive deficits.
- Sleep may contribute to the heterogeneity of brain alterations and cognitive deficits observed in patients with in alcohol use disorder.
- Long-lasting sleep difficulties may contribute to persistent functional and structural brain abnormalities in alcohol use disorder.
- Clinicians in Addiction departments should pay a particular attention to sleep disorders to optimize treatment of AUD patients.

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FROM ALCOHOL CONSUMPTION TO AUD RECOVERY

Table 1: Descriptive characteristics and main findings of studies conducted on the relationships between sleep disturbances, brain abnormalities and cognitive impairments in abstinent AUD patients.