Review of the Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in the treatment of the perceived Loneliness

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Resumen:

Los sentimientos de soledad, independientemente de su origen o de las características de la persona afectada por los mismos, han sido uno de los grandes retos que afectan a la condición humana. Siendo la soledad un sentimiento multicausal (ya que puede verse relacionada con la edad, curso de trastorno o enfermedad, abuso de sustancias, profesión, condición económico-social, etc.), con el desarrollo de la psicología en los últimos tiempos también se está profundizando en su estudio, análisis y se proponen posibles terapias que puedan ayudar a mitigar o resolver esta problemática, atendiendo a la variabilidad de contextos en que se presenta. El objetivo de este estudio es realizar una revisión sistemática poniendo el foco en una de las terapias disponibles, para tratar de comprobar si se muestra efectiva a la hora de afrontar estos sentimientos. En concreto, se ha seleccionado la Terapia Cognitiva Conductual. Se han seguido las directrices PRISMA, y se ha buscado entre la bibliografía relevante disponible en diversas bases de datos (Scopus, Science Direct, APA PsycNet, PubMed, MDPI Open Access Journals, Google Scholar). Tras los procesos de selección, se obtuvo una muestra de siete estudios que se ajustaban al objetivo de este análisis. Los mencionados estudios arrojan unos resultados que parecen indicar que la terapia cognitiva conductual (CBT, por sus siglas en inglés) sí se muestra efectiva para tratar los sentimientos percibidos de soledad. Sin embargo, por las implicaciones que esta problemática conlleva, se recomienda seguir profundizando en su estudio para poder comprender mejor tanto sus causas como desarrollar y perfeccionar posibles formas de afrontar estos sentimientos.

Palabras clave: soledad, terapia cognitivo conductual, intervención, TCC, revisión sistemática

Abstract:

The feelings of loneliness, regardless of their origin or the characteristics of the person affected by them, have been one of the great challenges affecting the human condition. Being loneliness a multicausal feeling (since it can be related to age, the course of a disorder or disease, substance abuse, profession, economic and social condition, etc.), with the development of psychology in recent times, its study and analysis are also being deepened, leading to posible new therapies that can help to mitigate or solve this problem, taking into account the variability of contexts in which it occurs. The aim of this study is to carry out a systematic review focusing on one of the available therapies, to try to check if it is effective in dealing with these feelings. Specifically, the Cognitive Behavioral Therapy has been selected. PRISMA guidelines were followed, and the relevant literature available in various databases (Scopus, Science Direct, APA PsycNet, PubMed, MDPI Open Access Journals and Google Scholar) was searched. After the selection process, a sample of seven studies was obtained that met the objective of this analysis. The aforementioned studies yield results that seem to indicate that cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) is indeed effective in treating perceived feelings of loneliness. However, because of the implications of this problem, further study is recommended to better understand its causes and also to improve or develop new possible ways of coping with these feelings.

Keywords: loneliness, cognitive behavioural therapy, intervention, CBT, systematic review

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Introduction

Loneliness is a relatively common feeling that almost everyone suffers from at some point in their lives. However, in certain populations such as the elderly, people suffering from a condition that affects their social life, etc., it can become a pressing problem that could reduce their quality of life.

Loneliness may have deleterious consequences for an individual in industrialised societies in which the expected lifespan is nearly eight decades long (Cacioppo, J. T., Cacioppo, S., & Boomsma, D. I., 2014)

Even with differences between geographycal regions, loneliness at a problematic level seems to be a common experience worldwide (Surkalim, D. L. et al., 2022)

Therefore, it is important to have tools that can be used to treat its effects and reduce its impact.

And for the same reason, the aim of this systematic review is to check if whether one of the techniques currently in use is effective, being cognitive behavioral therapy the one selected, in reducing the perception of feelings of loneliness.

Method

The **keywords** used were: loneliness, cognitive behavioural therapy. Boolean operator used was AND

The search terms were found in title and full paper text.

Inclusion criteria: scientific articles, in English language, published in the 2015-2022 period, use of randomized controlled trials, using interventions based in the Cognitive Behavioural Theory.

Selection process shown in PRISMA flow chart:
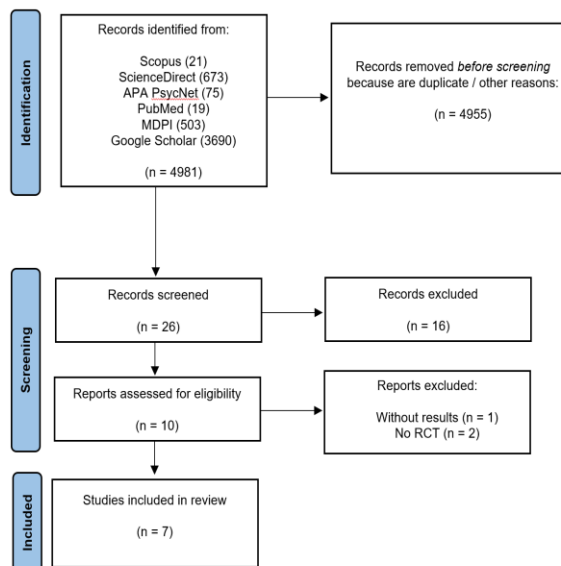
Discussion

Results of the scientific literature reviewed seem to suggest that the cognitive behavioural therapy may be a useful tool treating the feelings of loneliness, even in a variety of diverse populations. However, this findings are limited by data scarcity and methodological limits met by the researcher. Further research is recommended, to check with more data it's effectiveness and to refine the existing treatments, to provide better care, and to develop new ones that may help in the future.

Results

Authors	Sample (Country, Population, Mean age, Subjects)	Description (Intervention and Control group, Loneliness measure)	Findings
Alaviani, M. et al. (2015)	Iran, Older women, Mean age = 67, N = 150 (I = 75, C = 75)	**I:** 4 group meetings of 60 minutes each, in two weeks at a rate of twice per week **C:** Without treatment **LM:** UCLA Loneliness Scale, version 3	Intervention led to a significant decrease in the perceived loneliness, and an increase in perceived social self-efficacy, compared to the control group.
Cacioppo, J. T. et al. (2015)	United States, Army personnel, Mean age = 24, N = 817 (I = 489, C = 328)	**I:** 5 group meetings of 2 hours each, in 5 consecutive days. **C:** training in Afghanistan cultural awareness **LM:** UCLA Loneliness Scale (short version)	Intervention lead to a significant decrease in perceived social isolation, compared to the control group.
Choi, N. G. et al. (2020)	United States, Older adults, Mean age = 74, N = 89 (I = 43, C = 46)	**I:** Videoconference sessions of short-term behavioral activation (Tele-BA) **C:** videoconferenced friendly visits (Tele-FV) **LM:** PROMIS Social Isolation Scale (PROMIS-L)	Intervention led to a decrease in perceived loneliness, as well as an increased satisfaction in perceived social support, compared to the control group.
Cohen-Mansfield, J. et al. (2018)	Israel, Older adults, Mean age = 77, N = 89 (I = 45, C = 44)	**I:** Administration of I-SOCIAL intervention (based in CBT), consisting in group and/or individual meetings **C:** Without treatment **LM:** UCLA Loneliness Scale (short version)	Intervention group showed a significant decline in perceived loneliness, at the end of the intervention and at the 3 month follow-up, compared to the control group.
Jarvis, M. A. et al. (2019)	South Africa, Older adults in care homes, Mean age = 75, N = 32 (I = 15, C = 17)	**I:** low-intensity CBT administered as a group using a chat group in a phone app, and a weekly individual meeting **C:** generic routine wellness programme for residents **LM:** De Jong Gierveld Loneliness scale	Intervention lead to a decrease of perceived loneliness compared to the control group.
Jing, L. et al. (2018)	China, Housebound older adults, Mean age = 75, N = 80 (I = 40, C = 40)	**I:** CBT combined with Baduanjin training **C:** 2 groups, one subject to CBT alone, and the other to Baduanjin training alone **LM:** Self-evaluation of each participant's perceived loneliness on a 3 point Likert like scale	Both control and intervention groups showed a significant decrease in perceived loneliness, even if the effects of the joint training in the intervention group exceeded those of the CBT alone group.
Käll, A. et al. (2020)	Sweden, General population, Mean age = 47, N = 73 (I = 36, C = 37)	**I:** Individual CBT program administered online **C:** Subject to a waitlist **LM:** UCLA Loneliness Scale, version 3 (swedish translation)	Intervention lead to a significant decrease in perceived loneliness post-intervention, compared to the control group.

Alaviani, M., Khosravan, S., Alami, A., & Moshki, M. (2015). The effect of a multi-strategy program on developing social behaviors based on pender's health promotion model to prevent loneliness of old women referred to Gonabad urban health centers. *International Journal of Community Based Nursing and Midwifery, 3*(2), 132. Retrieved from www.scopus.com

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