



Evaluation of the impact of psychological and behavioral factors on the presentation of headaches

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Introduction

Headache is one of the most prevalent pathologies in the healthcare context, often being a primary motive for seeking medical attention. Furthermore, pain, as defined by the IASP (International Association for the Study of Pain), "is an unpleasant sensory and emotional experience associated with actual or potential tissue damage." In other words, it is a complex concept influenced by biological, psychological, and social factors. Within this framework, it is intriguing to note that the occurrence and etiology of headaches vary among individuals, not only due to variations in symptom severity but also due to intrinsic aspects of the individual's experience. Just as the consumption of certain foods or substances can impact the intensity and frequency of pain, so too can a person's family and personal history. In this context, establishing the relationship between pain and the patient's biopsychosocial aspects can offer insights into various aspects, from improving headache management to reducing episode intensity and even enhancing long-term prevention.

Objective

This study aims to explore potential connections between psychological and behavioral factors and the manifestation of headaches.

Methods

The present study conducted a systematic literature review, focusing on the relationships between key psychological and behavioral factors and the clinical presentation of headaches.

Databases utilized for this review were PubMed and Scielo. The inclusion criteria encompassed articles in English and Portuguese languages published between 1968 and 2023.

Results

Migraine exhibits direct associations with psychological and behavioral factors, with multifaceted explanations for this comorbidity. Among these, there is the recognition of both unidirectional and bidirectional relationships between migraine and depression, indicating that individuals with either condition are prone to developing the other. Moreover, genetic predisposition plays a role in the shared link between migraine and psychiatric disorders.

Individuals with Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD) are up to 5 times more likely to experience migraines than the general population. Studies conducted in Canada have demonstrated that the likelihood of individuals with migraine also having GAD is twice as high as in those without this condition. Additionally, research has revealed a higher prevalence of depression among migraine patients, serving as a risk factor for the chronicization of this condition, although the incidence varies significantly within a range of 8% to 48%. Furthermore, an association was observed between migraine patients and difficulties in both initiating and maintaining sleep.

Conclusion

In summary, the robust correlation between migraines and psychological factors, including depression and Generalized Anxiety Disorder (GAD), involves intricate bidirectional relationships. Genetic factors contribute to this linkage, and the elevated occurrence of depression among migraine sufferers complicates their management. Additionally, migraines can significantly disrupt sleep patterns, underscoring the significance of holistic approaches to diagnosis and treatment that consider both the physical and psychological dimensions of the condition.

Keywords: Headache disorders; Migraine; Social factors; risk factors.