



The Impacts of Headaches on Individuals' Mental Health: a Literature Review

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Introduction

Headache, or head pain, is a condition characterized by frequent pain affecting the head unilaterally or bilaterally. The main symptoms include nausea, a tendency to vomit, light and sound sensitivity, which worsen with movement. Furthermore, headache also presents itself as a multifactorial neurological disorder, varying in intensity, and is classified as one of the most disabling health conditions by the World Health Organization (WHO). It is estimated that approximately 50% of adults experience some form of headache at least once a year, and 10% suffer from chronic headaches (CH). In Brazil, surveys indicate an average prevalence of headaches in adults of 70.6%. Moreover, the relationship between headaches and mental health is complex and multifaceted, involving biological, psychological, and social aspects. Headache is a common symptom in various neurological and psychiatric conditions, but it can also be a risk factor or exacerbate the development or occurrence of mental disorders. Conversely, mental health influences the perception, tolerance, and management of pain, potentially interfering with the quality of life and treatment of headache patients.

Objective

To discuss the relationship between headaches and the mental health of individuals.

Methods

This is an integrative literature review. A bibliographic search was conducted based on articles published in journals, from which secondary data were extracted. Access to articles was obtained through the PubMed and Scielo databases, using the keywords "headache," "mental health," "migraine," "psychological factors," and the Boolean operator "and." Initially, 89 articles were found. After applying analysis filters, 4 were selected for inclusion in the study, excluding works that did not meet the defined time frame, the addressed theme, or duplicate articles.

Results

Studies indicate that mood disorders and anxiety are present in 70 to 80% of patients suffering from migraine, one of the types of headaches. In another study, moderate to severe depression was present in 58.7% of migraine patients. A Brazilian study showed that just over 50% of patients with CH had or have episodes of major depression (MD), often accompanied by significant symptoms of anxiety, fear, and avoidance behavior, with 68% meeting the criteria for generalized anxiety disorder. Furthermore, another Brazilian study concluded that the chance of developing a headache is 1.8 times higher when there is a prevalence of common mental disorders (CMD). Additionally, a meta-analysis supports the suspicion of a relationship between migraines and CMD, with a 1.95 times greater chance of developing both conditions.

Conclusion

There is a clear prevalence of depressive disorders and anxiety disorders in patients diagnosed with chronic headaches and migraines. Therefore, it is important to further clarify the correlation between the comorbidity of chronic headaches associated with mental disorders, as they are related to a worsening of patients' social and economic quality of life. This can help improve the effectiveness of treatment for these individuals and, as a result, reduce the prevalence of headaches and CMD.

Keywords: Headache; Migraine; Mental Health.