Efficacy of cognitive behavioral interventions on complicated grief in adults: a quantitative meta-analysis

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Abstract

Most of the existing studies and meta-analysis deal with grief treatments in general, rather than complicated grief in particular. The main objectives of this meta-analysis were (1) to identify a mean effect size of cognitive behavioral interventions in complicated grief on adult population, (2) to provide indicators of the average effect size for co-morbid symptoms (e.g., depression and anxiety) and (3) to investigate potential moderators of the effect size. A comprehensive search of the literature identified 11 studies (n = 629) that were included in the final analysis. The results show that cognitive behavioral therapy is not efficient in reducing complicated grief symptoms, nor co-morbid symptoms of depression and anxiety. Implications are discussed.

Keywords

complicated grief intervention/treatment/therapy, cognitive techniques, cognitive behavioral intervention/therapy

People who suffer from complicated grief experience a sense of persistent and disturbing disbelief regarding the death of a loved one and resistance to accepting it, which causes intense yearning and longing for the deceased person, frequent pangs of painful emotions, distressing intrusive thoughts related to the death and avoidance of a wide range of situations and activities that serve as a reminder of the loss (Shear & Shair, 2005).

It is estimated that between 10 and 20% of people who lost a loved one experience complicated grief symptoms (Byrne & Raphael, 1994; Prigerson & Jacobs, 2001; Middleton et al., 1996), therefore it is understandable why complicated grief has increasingly become a very important research topic.

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