

Healing Loneliness Post-COVID-19: A Review of Multicultural Exploration of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy's Success in Western and Eastern Cultures

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Abstract

The global COVID-19 pandemic threatened physical health and triggered a surge in loneliness, particularly post-outbreak in Western and Eastern societies. This study explores the psychological implications and societal impact of loneliness in the era of widespread lockdowns, social distancing, and the new norm, including work-from-home practices. Loneliness, a distressing sense of isolation, intensified during the pandemic due to genetic, cultural, and digital factors linked to adverse mental and physical health effects. The research highlights loneliness as a buffer against social pain or a correlate of illness, and findings associate loneliness with age, relationships, and behavior.

Comparatively, Eastern societies experienced heightened loneliness, driven by a cultural emphasis on collectivism and face-to-face interactions. Innovative adaptations, such as virtual gatherings and online communities, helped mitigate the psychological impacts of social distancing. Both Eastern and Western societies relied on the digital landscape—virtual events, online communities, streaming services, and online gaming—to combat loneliness and foster connection. Understanding and addressing loneliness are vital for promoting mental well-being and resilience in the evolving global landscape.

Keywords: Loneliness, COVID-19, Mental health, Social interactions, Cross-cultural comparison, Eastern societies, Western societies, Societal impact, Online communities, Resilience, Coping mechanisms, Societal values, Social distancing, Psychological effects on

Public health

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

In the wake of the global COVID-19 pandemic, an unexpected and insidious consequence has emerged alongside the physical health crisis: a pervasive surge in loneliness and its associated emotional toll. The pandemic, caused by the novel coronavirus, led to widespread lockdowns, social distancing measures, and quarantine protocols that drastically altered how people interacted and connected (Allen et al., 2021). As a result, individuals worldwide grappled with unprecedented isolation, which triggered or exacerbated feelings of loneliness and its detrimental effects on mental and emotional well-being. Loneliness, often described as the distressing feeling of being alone or disconnected from others, has long been recognized as a significant public health concern even before the pandemic (Horesh et al., 2020). However, the circumstances brought about by COVID-19 intensified this issue, highlighting the crucial role that social interactions play in maintaining mental health and overall quality of life (Tuason et al., 2021). The sudden loss of regular face-to-face interactions, the closure of public spaces, and limited opportunities for in-person gatherings created a void in people's lives, leading to feelings of isolation, sadness, and even depression for many (Beck, 2011). The research aims to identify the feeling of loneliness in the Western and Eastern world, especially after Covid 19 break-out for the new norm, including work-from-home and social distancing. Thus, society or psychological health will be identified and promoted after forming a new norm for the future to secure mental health (Hughes et al., 2004). Loneliness The definition of loneliness shows that it is an unpleasant emotion with perceived isolation or social pain seeking social connection. It could be induced because of genetic issues, cultural factors, lack of meaningful relationships, significant loss, and obsession with the internet or handphone (Lalwani et al., 2006). Loneliness can also result in lower cognitive capability, dementia, suicide attempts (McClelland Evans et al., 2020), and related physical diseases, including cardiovascular illness (Brown et al., 2018).

Furthermore, the definition of loneliness by Rajan's research (Rajan et al., et al. 2017) is the product of a perceived sense of lag between expectation and fulfilment. In parallel, loneliness and restrictions endure to distract from physical pain, fear of the future, and valuing joy and meaning in life (Gillsjö et al., 2021). Combined with Rajan and Gillsjö's research, they suggest that loneliness is either the buffer to prevent social pain or directly correlated to physical or mental illness.

A Comparison of Eastern and Western Societies in Terms of Loneliness in COVID-19 Based on Bruce's research (Bruce et al., 2018), the conclusion is that loneliness is associated with factors such as age, relationships, and behavior. In Eastern societies, loneliness during COVID-19 is higher than in Western societies. This is due to the cultural emphasis on collectivism and strong social ties in Eastern societies ((Gao et al., 2016). Consequently, when social distancing measures were introduced, people in Eastern societies were more likely to experience loneliness. This loneliness can profoundly impact individuals, leading to depression, anxiety, and suicidal thoughts (Horesh et al., 2020). Therefore, eastern societies

must find ways to maintain social connections while still adhering to social distancing measures. Eastern societies place a higher value on face-to-face contact and interpersonal relationships than Western societies, so these societies are particularly vulnerable to the psychological effects of social distancing. Without access to physical contact and social interaction, people can become disconnected from the world, leading to isolation and loneliness (Beller et al., 2018). To cope with this, Eastern societies have developed creative solutions to ensure that people can stay connected, such as virtual gatherings and online communities. For example, in Japan, the "Otaku" culture has flourished during the pandemic, with people participating in virtual "Comiket" events to share their love of manga and anime. These virtual events have become the new normal for many people, providing an outlet for creative expression and social contact. This has allowed many people in Eastern societies to remain connected and express themselves despite the physical separation brought about by the pandemic. This is similar to how people in Western societies have turned to digital media to stay connected, with video conferencing, streaming services, and online gaming filling the voids left by restricted physical interactions (Horesh et al., 2020). The digital landscape has provided people with new ways to communicate, socialize, and express their creativity despite the physical separations. Social media platforms, for example, have allowed people to stay connected and create virtual support networks, while streaming services have become an invaluable source of entertainment and distraction. Online gaming has become a way for people to unite and bond over shared interests. In a way, the digital landscape has provided a lifeline for people to stay connected and engaged during this challenging time (Beller et al., 2018)

1.2 Purpose of the Study and Research Questions

The research aims to identify the feeling of loneliness in the Western and Eastern world, especially after Covid 19 break-out for the new norm, including work-from-home and social distancing. Thus, society or psychological health will be identified and promoted after forming a new norm for the future to secure mental health (Van Lange Paul et al., 2015). The literature review began with the formulation of a clear and focused research question: "How do individuals from Western and Eastern cultures experience and perceive the effectiveness of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy in healing post-COVID-19 loneliness?" This question guided the entire review process.

1.3 Defining Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

In order to maintain rigor and relevance, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria were established. Relevant studies included those focusing on loneliness post-COVID-19, interventions involving Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and studies examining the experiences of individuals from Western and Eastern cultures. Exclusion criteria were defined to ensure the selection of studies aligned with the research focus.

1.4 Systematic Search Strategy, Screening and Selection Process

A systematic search strategy was developed to identify relevant literature. Multiple databases, including PubMed, PsycINFO, and Google Scholar, were systematically searched using a

combination of keywords and controlled vocabulary related to loneliness, Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, culture, and the post-COVID-19 period. Articles retrieved from the systematic search underwent a two-stage screening process. In the initial stage, titles and abstracts were reviewed to assess relevance to the research question. In the second stage, full-text articles were assessed for eligibility based on the predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria.

1.5 Data Extraction, Synthesis and Quality Extraction

A standardized data extraction form was developed to systematically collect relevant information from each included study. This form included details such as study design, participant characteristics, key findings related to post-COVID-19 loneliness and Cognitive Behavioural Therapy, and cultural considerations. Each included study underwent a quality assessment to evaluate the methodological rigor and relevance to the research question. Commonly accepted tools for assessing the quality of different study designs were employed, ensuring a nuanced understanding of the strengths and limitations of each study. Data synthesis involved organizing and summarizing the extracted information. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns and themes across studies, allowing for a comprehensive exploration of how individuals from Western and Eastern cultures experience and perceive Cognitive Behavioral Therapy in the context of post-COVID-19 loneliness

2. Results

2.1 Cultural Differences, Perceptions of CBT, and Experiences of Loneliness

Cultural differences, perceptions of Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT), and experiences of loneliness can be interconnected and influence each other in complex ways. The research from Lykes (Lykes, Kemmelmeier, 2014) showed that European countries recruited 42769 participants for the questionnaire on the correlation between loneliness and different cultures like individualistic or collectivistic societies. (Murphy, 2020) The results indicated that meaningful daily interaction, relationships with family, connections with friends, or social support are associated with loneliness. It implies several factors like family bonding or friends-ties to be explored. Additionally, the study found that loneliness is higher among younger generations and those living in urban areas. The study found that the prevalence of loneliness in individualistic societies was due to the emphasis on independence and autonomy in those cultures. In contrast, in collectivistic societies, the emphasis on community and togetherness was linked to lower rates of loneliness (Beck, 2011). Additionally, the researchers found that the younger generations and those living in urban areas were more likely to experience loneliness due to their lack of close relationships and isolation in the city. This suggests that loneliness is not simply a result of being young or living in an urban area but is likely due to a combination of factors. Further research is needed to understand the factors contributing to loneliness and how they interact. (Beller et, al, 2018)

2.2 Public Health Perspective on Cognitive Behavioral Therapy

Additionally, policies and programs should be developed to address the issue of loneliness, especially among vulnerable groups. The survey found that more Americans say they are

lonely, associated with increased risk for physical and mental health problems. Interventions should be tailored to the needs of different populations and should focus on the prevention and treatment of loneliness. Effective interventions should also examine the underlying causes, such as social isolation, lack of meaningful relationships, and stigma. Such interventions should prioritize access to mental health services, social activities, and resources that foster social connections and support (Horesh et al., 2020).

Public health messages should also be tailored to raise awareness about the risks associated with loneliness and encourage help-seeking behaviors. This is important because tackling the underlying causes of loneliness will provide a holistic approach that addresses the immediate symptoms and provides long-term solutions to prevent future episodes of loneliness. In addition, providing access to mental health services and resources can help individuals develop the skills they need to manage loneliness and create meaningful connections with others. This, in turn, can improve overall wellbeing and quality of life and reduce the stigma associated with loneliness. Moreover, it can also lead to more robust, resilient communities (Brown et al., 2018).

2.3 Covid -19 and Behavioural Therapy

Behavioral therapies can help reduce anxiety and stress levels during the pandemic. These therapies involve relaxation, and Behavioural therapies can also help people develop coping skills to manage their thoughts and reactions. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in covid 19 CBT can help individuals identify and modify the thoughts and behaviors that can lead to anxiety and depression. It also helps people develop effective strategies for coping with the fear, uncertainty, and stress of the pandemic. Finally, CBT can help individuals develop a more positive outlook and build resilience (Heidenreich et al., 2021). CBT can help people cope with the physical and emotional impacts of the pandemic and improve overall mental health. It can also help individuals build positive relationships with family and friends and help them maintain a healthy lifestyle. CBT can also help individuals identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide them with the tools and strategies to manage their emotions and behaviors. (Fisher, 2022)

Furthermore, CBT can help individuals set realistic goals and develop problem-solving skills, enabling them to gain control over their lives and find solutions to their problems. It can also increase their self-confidence and self-esteem, enabling them to face any challenges they may encounter in life. It also encourages individuals to recognize and challenge negative thoughts and behaviors and replace them with more positive ones. By doing this, individuals can build self-confidence, improve their communication skills, and better understand how their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors are interconnected. This can help them to better cope with stress, anxiety, and depression and make healthier lifestyle choices. CBT in Western countries during COVID-19 CBT has become increasingly popular as many countries experience lockdowns due to the pandemic, as it allows individuals to access therapy virtually. It is an effective tool in helping individuals cope with the psychological effects of the pandemic (Perkins et al, 2022). CBT is an evidence-based practice focusing on the connection between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. It is a collaborative approach between the therapist and the

client, where the therapist helps the client identify and challenge negative thought patterns and develop healthier coping mechanisms. CBT focuses on the present instead of the past and helps the client solve current challenges. It emphasizes self-reflection and encourages clients to develop their coping strategies. CBT aims to help clients develop skills and tools to manage their emotions. (Shay, 2022)

2.4 How CBT Reduces Anxiety & Stress

Behavioral therapies can help reduce anxiety and stress levels during the pandemic. Behavioral therapies can also help people develop coping skills to manage their thoughts and reactions through relaxation. Cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) in COVID-19 CBT can help individuals identify and modify the thoughts and behaviors that can lead to anxiety and depression. It also helps people develop effective strategies for coping with the fear, uncertainty, and stress of the pandemic. Finally, CBT can help individuals develop a more positive outlook and build resilience. CBT can help people cope with the physical and emotional impacts of the pandemic and improve overall mental health. It can also help individuals build positive relationships with family and friends and help them maintain a healthy lifestyle. CBT can also help individuals identify their strengths and weaknesses and provide them with the tools and strategies to manage their emotions and behaviors. (Ali, et, al 2021).

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2.5 The Impact of Loneliness in COVID-19 Eastern & and Western Societies

The difference between Eastern and Western societies on the impact of loneliness in Covid-19 is more significant than in individualistic or collectivistic cultures. However, the female gender contradicted the core cultures represented by the male was also reported (Stolz et al., 2021). Combined with the research from Li (Li, 2002) and Markus (Markus, Kitayama,

1999), they suggest that the individualists' behaviors toward close friends, family members, and self-concepts are different from collectivists with gender differences. It implies that the research scope for loneliness shall extend from individualistic or collectivistic mindsets and demographic studies like gender differences. Another interpretation from the features of individualists and collectivists (Triantis, 1998) reinforced the importance of internal process, consistency, self-enhancement, and fit to stable self-concept for individualism. Collectivists, who focus on contexts, have fewer concerns about consistency and less self-enhancement and fit into a stable social environment. It suggests that the behaviors to fit a stable self-concept or to a stable social environment are distinctly different from two cultures, individualists and collectivists. This dissertation aims to identify the different impacts of individualistic or collectivistic behaviours from social distancing and home-based learning with the COVID-19 pandemic. (Beck 2011; Allen et al, 2021)

Moreover, the impact of decision-making behaviors on individualistic and collectivistic cultures differs based on Mann (Mann et al., 1998). The decision-making style of Asian students tends to be avoidant. The authors recruited 1692 participants to join the investigation. The decision-making style of American students tends to be more confident than that of Asian countries, including the United States, Australia, Japan, Hong Kong, and Taiwan, with collectivistic cultures. Japanese students showed the lowest self-esteem, highest procrastination, and hypervigilance, which was proven in the culture of Asian countries. The difference between Eastern and Western societies on the impact of loneliness in Covid-19 Furthermore, the different impacts on depression were investigated (Wang et al. et al., 2012). The participants were recruited in India for 132 college students. Under a highly collectivistic situation, the higher the family standard, the higher the tendency to get depression. In parallel, maladaptive perfectionists showed higher depression scores and higher family discrepancy. (Brown, et al, 2018)

3. Discussion

It suggests that the potential trauma may be induced by the standard set by family members in collectivistic culture. It implies that friendship in an individualistic culture may induce potential trauma. Thus, immunity to mental diseases is correlated to the individualistic or collectivistic types mediated by friendship or family bonding. To sum up, the purpose of this article can be extended from the analysis of the impact of loneliness related to social distancing and home-based learning in Covid 19 pandemic to the efficacious interventions. It unveiled the meaning and purpose to illustrate the details in this work. Social Distancing and Work-from-Home Countries worldwide escalated the containment measures to reduce the virus transmission in COVID-19 (Williams et al., et al., 2021). The strict social distancing and lockdown orders imposed a mental burden on the people as the new normal phenomenon. Self-isolation measures have been introduced occasionally to ease the pandemic spreading. (Gao, et, al, 2018))

Furthermore, there are many arguments for work-from-home, including relationships in different working places (Shao et al., 2021) or environments with dedicated segmentation (Allen et al., 2021) to allow for disengagement from work to recovery, or whether it impacted

the social norm for public daily emotions or The difference between eastern and western societies on the impact of loneliness in Covid-19 women's reaction on fear and hope for work-from-home (Couch, O'Sullivan, Malatya, 2021). Finally, the research study by Wang (Wang et al., et al. 2020) showed that social support was positively associated with lower levels of all challenges for work-from-home in Australia and China. It implies that work-from-home has pros and cons for mental health associated with gender, environment, relationship, recovery, etc. (Beller et al., 2018)

The research in the United States (Luchetti et al., 2020) showed that loneliness did not change in 3 specific assessment times from Jan, Feb, and April 2020. One thousand five hundred forty-five participants joined the assessment. The average age is 53 years old. The report indicated that the individuals who lived alone experienced loneliness more than the baseline but did not experience loneliness after social distancing measures. It further concluded that loneliness is the gap between desired social connection and perceived quality of social connection. It suggests that living alone is one factor that triggers loneliness rather than social distancing. However, it may be perceived as a manageable gap in social connection in America. The hidden factors include individualists or collectivists and gender differences (Markus, 1999). As a result of this implication, more studies are needed.

Another research from India (Lahiri et al. et al., 2021) showed that poor coping skills and perceived social distancing seriously impact psychological distress. One thousand two hundred forty-nine participants were recruited from India for the online nationwide survey. It also suggests the different levels of stress or loneliness by different people perceiving social distancing. It also echoed the implication of Markus and Li's studies (Markus, Kitayama, 1999; Li, 2002). People tend to attend to others in collectivistic culture. In an individualistic culture, people tend to attend to themselves, resulting in different immunity to loneliness.

4. Conclusion & Implications

However, the family bonding showed more social connection to ease the psychological distress. It suggests that the feeling lonely for social distancing is not equivalent to loneliness in individualistic or collectivistic cultures. It implies that the Protective factor for a collectivistic culture is the family ties to cope with Covid 19. Alternatively, the individualistic culture addressed the self, which may differ from the mechanism for immunity to loneliness. In an individualistic culture, people may rely on their resources to cope with the pandemic, leading to increased loneliness.

On the other hand, in a collectivistic culture, family ties provide emotional and practical support. This can help individuals better manage the stress and anxiety caused by the pandemic. This support can help reduce loneliness and isolation, making it easier to cope with the pandemic. Mutual aid networks, such as those organized in many communities, can also be an essential source of social support and provide a sense of belonging. This sense of community can help people feel connected and less alone, leading to better mental health outcomes for individuals during this crisis. This can also help to reduce feelings of depression and anxiety.

Additionally, these mutual aid networks can provide tangible and practical support, such as helping to meet basic needs, providing a listening ear, and offering emotional support. This can allow people to share their concerns and struggles, leading to feelings of validation and understanding. Having an understanding support system can be invaluable in helping people to cope with the pandemic. These networks can also provide access to resources, such as mental health services, job training, and financial assistance. This can be a great way to foster community resilience and build networks of care.

Additionally, it can help to build a sense of solidarity and foster a sense of belonging. This can be especially important for those feeling disconnected or isolated due to the pandemic. The connections formed through these networks can provide people with emotional support and create an environment of compassion and understanding. For instance, a community organization could put out a call for volunteers to help deliver groceries to elderly neighbors who are unable to leave their homes. This could be a life-saving act of kindness for people who may not have access to the help they need. Furthermore, it can also benefit volunteers by providing them a sense of purpose and connection in times of need (Fong et al., 2021).

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