

Background

Existentialism (1)

- Philosophical movement
- Centers the individual
- Emphasizes freedom

Existential Therapy (2)

- Helps individuals face challenges of the human condition
- Facilitates self-reflection on beliefs and values
- Leads people to live a more meaningful and purposeful life

Existential Therapy & Chronic Pain

- Existential challenges more common among chronic pain population
 - E.g., concerns of meaningfulness, mortality, relatedness, freedom (3)
- Uses biopsychosocial approach (4)
- Addresses chronic pain holistically (3)

Purpose

This scoping review was aimed at identifying the characteristics and results of using existential approaches to treating chronic pain populations.

Methods

Search Strategy

- Databases included PsycINFO, Web of Science, CINAHL, Philosopher's Index, PhilPapers, Medline, and PubMed
- Search terms included chronic/continuous/persistent/long term pain and existential*/humanist*

Study Selection

- Two independent reviewers screened titles and abstracts and reviewed full texts

Data Extraction

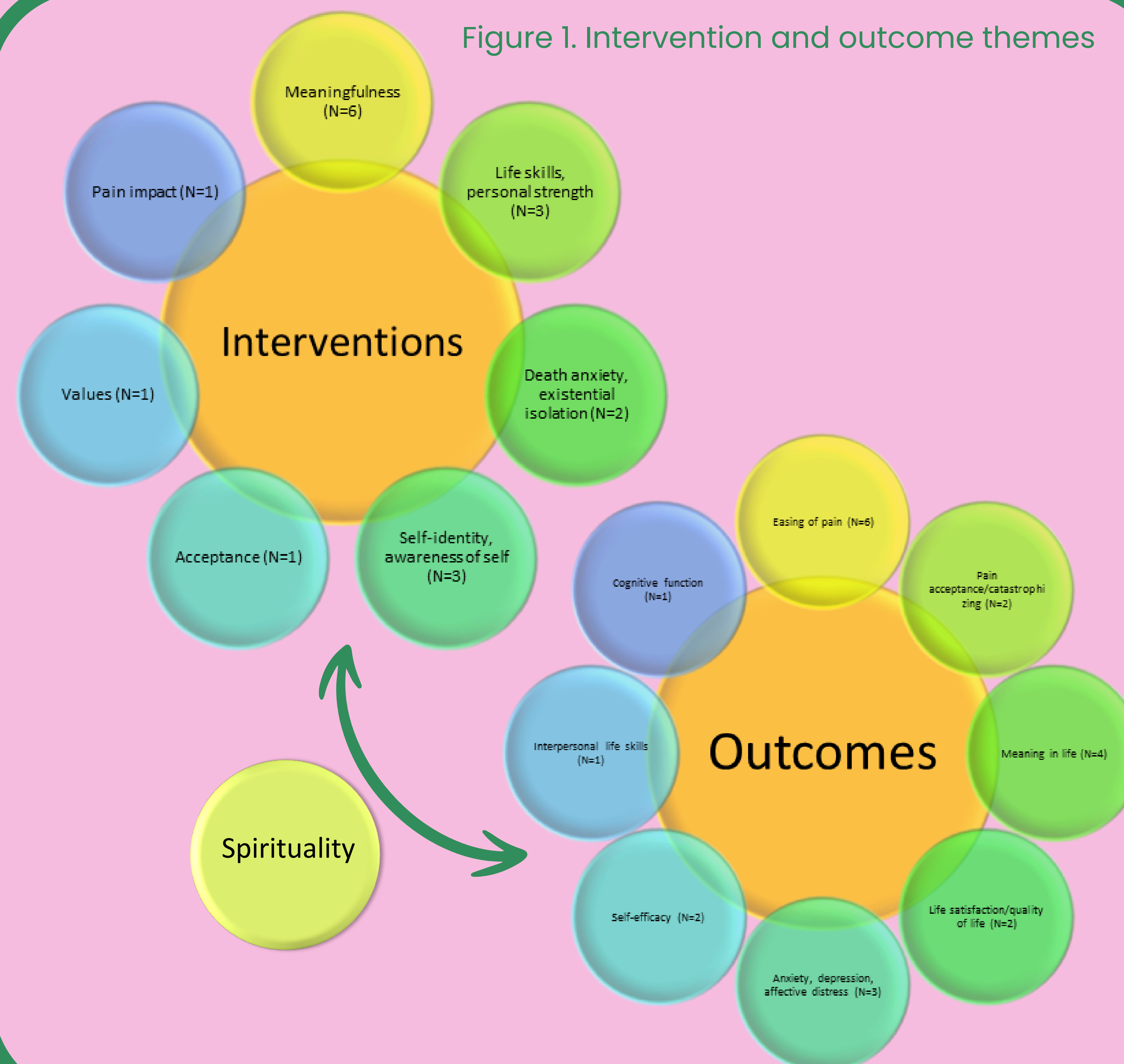
- Data extracted from each study included study characteristics (i.e., study design, participants) and main findings on the intervention themes and outcomes

Existential Therapy for Chronic Pain:

Kohlert, A., Hill, T., & Gallant, N.

A Scoping Review

Figure 1. Intervention and outcome themes



Results

Eligible Studies

- A total of 6 studies were deemed to be eligible

Study Characteristics

- Slight frequency increase in number of studies published over the years
- Studies were conducted in Germany (N=2), United States (N=2), Australia (N=1), and Iran (N=1)
- Study designs involved randomized control trial (N=2), non-randomized experimental study (N=2), case series (N=1) and case study (N=1).
- Measurements were used to record pain data, pain-related variables, quality of life, life satisfaction, and mental health

Main Findings

- All studies reported an easing of pain symptoms or severity
- Physical functioning improved with cognitive behavioural therapy, but not with only existential-spiritual therapy
- All intervention methods had a common theme of addressing meaningfulness, and nearly all of the studies reported improved meaningfulness or crisis of meaning (N=4)
- Spirituality acts as an influencing factor in participant outcomes, leading to larger and more sustained benefits

Implications



Existential therapeutic approaches are beneficial in improving a sense of meaningfulness



More therapeutic benefits can occur when existential and spiritual perspectives are integrated into a cognitive behavioural framework



Addressing existential needs can provide alleviation of physical pain symptoms



Spirituality can act as a prognostic tool for determining which treatment interventions to use and how likely they are to reduce pain and symptoms



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