

REVISÃO SISTEMÁTICA, INTEGRATIVA E DE ESCOPO

SCIENTOMETRIC ANALYSIS ON THE APPLICATION OF COGNITIVE-BEHAVIORAL THERAPY IN SEXUAL HEALTH

ANÁLISE CIENCIOMÉTRICA SOBRE A APLICAÇÃO DA TERAPIA COGNITIVO-COMPORTAMENTAL NA SAÚDE SEXUAL

ANÁLISIS CIENCIOMÉTRICO SOBRE LA APLICACIÓN DE LA TERAPIA COGNITIVO-CONDUCTUAL EN SALUD SEXUAL

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Abstract: This study aimed to conduct a scientometric analysis of scientific production on the application of Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) in sexual health, identifying the main themes, the most influential authors, and emerging trends in this field. Articles published between 2020 and 2024 were analyzed, collected from the PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. The analysis was conducted using VOSviewer software, focusing on co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, and the geographical distribution of publications. The results indicated a predominance of research topics on sexual dysfunctions, such as erectile dysfunction and low sexual desire, representing 60% of the studies analyzed. In addition, there was a growing interest in specific groups, such as postmenopausal women and individuals with chronic diseases, as well as in the application of CBT for emotional issues, such as sexual anxiety and trauma. Individual CBT was the most tested approach, but there was a significant increase in the use of group and online formats. It is concluded that CBT is an effective and versatile approach for treating sexual health problems; however, there are gaps in the literature, especially in relation to marginalized groups, such as the LGBTQIAPN+ community, and diverse cultural contexts.

Keywords: Sexual well-being; Sexual dysfunctions; Mental health.

Resumo: Este estudo teve como objetivo realizar uma análise cienciométrica da produção científica sobre a aplicação da Terapia Cognitivo-Comportamental (TCC) na saúde sexual, identificando os principais temas, os autores mais influentes e as tendências emergentes nesse campo. Foram analisados artigos publicados entre 2020 e 2024, coletados das bases de dados PubMed, Scopus e Web of Science. A análise foi conduzida com o software VOSviewer, focando em redes de coautoria, co-ocorrência de palavras-chave e distribuição geográfica das publicações. Os resultados indicaram uma predominância de temas de pesquisa sobre disfunções sexuais, como disfunção erétil e baixo desejo sexual, representando 60% das pesquisas analisadas. Além disso, observou-se um crescente interesse em grupos específicos, como mulheres pós-menopáusicas e indivíduos com doenças crônicas, bem como na aplicação da TCC para questões emocionais, como ansiedade sexual e trauma. A TCC individual foi a abordagem mais testada, mas houve um aumento significativo no uso de formatos grupais e *on-line*. Conclui-se que a TCC é uma abordagem eficaz e versátil para o tratamento de problemas de saúde sexual, porém, há lacunas na literatura, especialmente em relação a grupos marginalizados, como a comunidade LGBTQIAPN+ e a contextos culturais diversos.

Palavras-chave: Bem-Estar sexual; Disfunções sexuais; Saúde mental.

Resumen: El objetivo de este estudio fue realizar un análisis cienciométrico de la producción científica sobre la aplicación de la terapia cognitivo-conductual (TCC) en la salud sexual, identificando los temas principales, los autores más influyentes y las tendencias emergentes en este campo. Se analizaron artículos publicados entre 2020 y 2024, recopilados de los resultados indicaron un predominio de temas de investigación sobre disfunciones sexuales, como la disfunción erétil y el



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bases de datos PubMed, Scopus y Web of Science. El análisis se realizó con el software VOSviewer, centrándose en las redes de coautoría, la coocurrencia de palabras clave y la distribución geográfica de las publicaciones. Los bajo deseo sexual, que representaron el 60 % de las investigaciones analizadas. Además, se observó un creciente interés en grupos específicos, como las mujeres posmenopáusicas y las personas con enfermedades crónicas, así como en la aplicación de la TCC para cuestiones emocionales, como la ansiedad sexual y el trauma. La TCC individual fue el enfoque más probado, pero hubo un aumento significativo en el uso de formatos grupales y en línea. Se concluye que la TCC es un enfoque eficaz y versátil para el tratamiento de problemas de salud sexual, sin embargo, existen lagunas en la literatura, especialmente en relación con grupos marginados, como la comunidad LGBTQIAPN+ y contextos culturales diversos.

Palabras clave: Bienestar sexual; Disfunciones sexuales; Salud mental.

Introduction

Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a therapeutic method based on identifying and changing harmful patterns of thought and behavior (Zaffalon et al., 2023). By focusing on cognitive restructuring and the enhancement of behavioral skills, CBT aims to help people effectively cope with emotional and behavioral problems (De Almeida; De Almeida; Pucci, 2024). This therapy is frequently used in the treatment of various psychological conditions, such as anxiety disorders, depression, and stress, and stands out as a fundamental strategy in mental health (Al-Abyadh; Hoang, 2024). Recently, it has been applied in contexts where psychological factors impact the quality of sexual life, with the goal of improving sexual satisfaction and well-being (Amnh et al., 2022).

Sexual health plays a fundamental role in people's overall well-being and quality of life, impacting not only their personal lives but also their interpersonal relationships and emotional balance (Cesco, 2023). Issues such as sexual dysfunction, negative body image, and low self-esteem can have profound effects and, when left untreated, lead to social isolation and a decline in self-confidence (Bululoi; Negomireanu; Delcea, 2022). In this context, CBT emerges as a promising therapeutic approach because, by addressing dysfunctional thoughts and behaviors, it promotes the development of a more positive self-perception and effective coping with sexual difficulties, with benefits that extend to psychological well-being (Sharifipour et al., 2024).

The application of CBT in sexual health has gained prominence, primarily due to its effectiveness in treating sexual dysfunctions, improving self-esteem, and addressing issues related to body image (Sharifipour et al., 2024). Despite these advances, scientific research in this area remains fragmented, with studies often focused on isolated contexts, which hinders a comprehensive understanding of the potential of CBT (Beukes, 2021). There are also considerable gaps, such as a lack of research on specific groups, including the LGBTQIAPN+ population (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, Pansexual, Non-binary, and other identities), older adults, and culturally diverse groups, as well as the need to evaluate the effectiveness of interventions in various settings (Beukes, 2021; Hart et al., 2024). Although recent studies have addressed these specificities, they tend to employ independent methods (Hart et al., 2024). Given this landscape, an integrative approach such as scientometrics emerges as a valuable tool for synthesizing and comparing these scattered findings, offering a more holistic and essential perspective for comprehensively evaluating the effectiveness of CBT (Prima; Iqbal; Akbar, 2022). Thus, by highlighting the main themes and influential authors, this study provides a strategic perspective that can foster interdisciplinary collaborations and the development of more effective and inclusive interventions.

Materials and Methods

This study consisted of a scientometric analysis of scientific literature on CBT in sexual health. Scientometrics, as a quantitative approach, allows for the systematic evaluation of scientific output, facilitating the identification of collaboration networks, emerging themes, and gaps in the literature (Macias-Chapula, 1998). The study included articles that explore interventions, efficacy, and emerging trends, with the aim of identifying patterns in the literature and significant contributions to the field.

Search Strategy

Searches were conducted in the PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science databases. These databases were selected because they are compatible with the VOSviewer software—used for scientometric analysis and scientific mapping in this study—and because they align with the study’s thematic scope, ensuring the retrieval of relevant, standardized literature appropriate for the analysis techniques employed. The search string was developed based on terms related to CBT and sexual health, combining the following descriptors: (“Cognitive Behavioral Therapy” OR “Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy” OR “CBT”) AND (“sexual health” OR “sexuality” OR “sexual well-being” OR “sexual dysfunction” OR “sexual disorders”)) AND (populations OR individuals OR groups OR “specific populations”) AND (interventions OR applications OR trends OR effectiveness OR outcomes).

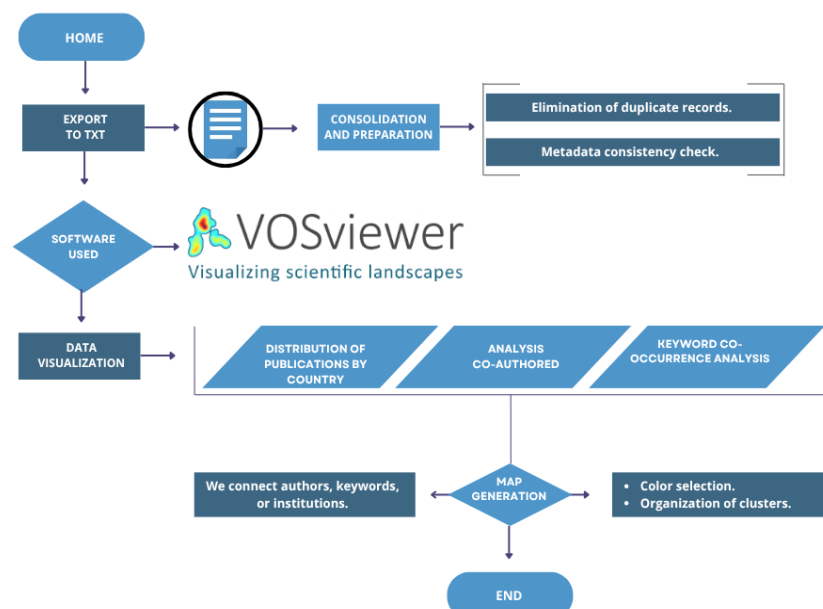
Eligibility Criteria

Studies published between January 2020 and December 2024, in any language, were included, provided they addressed the application of CBT in sexual health. The time frame was defined based on a preliminary analysis of scientific literature indexed in the selected databases, which allowed us to estimate the analytical feasibility of the study and ensure a consistent sample corpus, avoiding the inclusion of periods with low publication density or excessive methodological heterogeneity. Only peer-reviewed articles were considered, ensuring the methodological quality of the included evidence. Studies that did not present empirical data—such as systematic reviews, editorials, and letters to the editor—were excluded, as were articles that did not directly address CBT in sexual health. Duplicate articles across the databases were removed to ensure the uniqueness of the analyzed information.

Data Extraction and Scientometric Analysis

The information was collected from the databases in plain text format and compiled into a single file in the same format. To ensure the quality of the metadata, phases were carried out to eliminate duplicates, verify consistency, standardize formats, correct errors, and standardize terms, ensuring that the data were complete and suitable for analysis. Figure 1 illustrates the methodological procedure followed, encompassing the following phases: (1) data collection from the databases; (2) removal of duplicates and verification of metadata consistency; and (3) scientometric analysis using VOSviewer, with an emphasis on detecting co-authorship networks, keyword co-occurrence, and the geographic location of publications.

Figure 1 - Methodological workflow for scientometric data extraction and analysis



Source: Authors, 2025.

In addition, we note that additional inclusion criteria were established in the VOSviewer software to filter out authors, keywords, and countries that were less relevant to the topic. These criteria were necessary due to the large volume of data collected, enabling a more focused and meaningful analysis. Unlike the eligibility criteria applied in the initial selection of articles—which ensured the relevance and quality of the included studies—these new criteria served to identify collaborations, terms, and trends with the greatest impact in the literature.

For the co-authorship assessment, only authors with at least three indexed publications on the topic were considered. This filtering was essential to highlight the most productive and influential researchers and research groups, avoiding the inclusion of authors who, although they may have made specific contributions, are not necessarily recognized as experts in the field. Similarly, in the analysis of keyword co-occurrence, only terms with at least five occurrences were included, ensuring that the most relevant and recurring concepts were mapped. For geographic distribution, countries with a minimum of 10 publications were considered, ensuring that only regions with significant contributions were represented.

This filtering strategy was essential to avoid distortions in the analysis, such as the inclusion of authors or terms with little relevance to the study's central theme. Without these criteria, the software might have identified isolated collaborations or concepts that, while they may have a specific impact, do not necessarily reflect the most consistent trends and networks in the literature on the application of CBT in sexual health.

The maps produced by VOSviewer were adjusted to identify clusters based on similarities among authors, keywords, and countries. Each node represents a component of the network (such as an author, term, or country), while the edges indicate the strength of the connections, such as the frequency of co-authorship or co-occurrence. To facilitate visualization, the display settings were customized, including color selection and the arrangement of clusters.

Results

The study selection process resulted in the initial identification of 3,127 articles, combining the results from the various databases. After applying the eligibility criteria, 722 studies were excluded, leaving 2,405 articles for title and abstract screening. At this stage, 28 articles were discarded because they were duplicates, resulting in 2,377 studies eligible for full-text review. After a thorough evaluation, 1,874 articles were excluded.

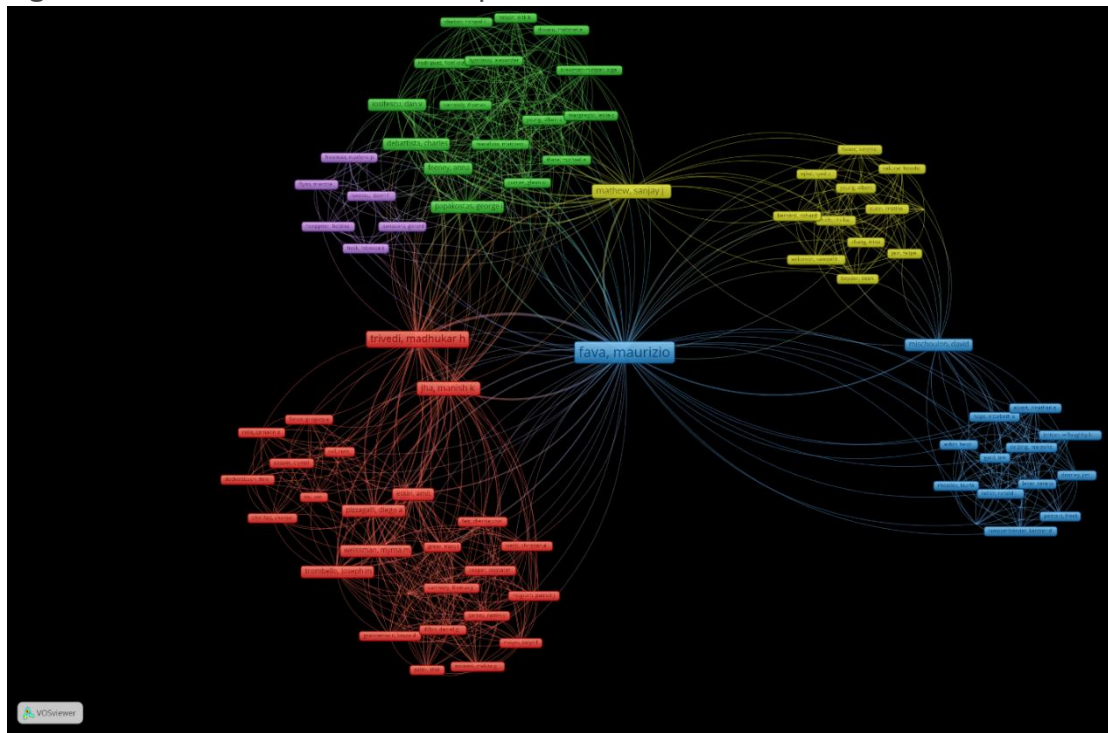
Most of these exclusions occurred due to the nature of the studies, which included literature reviews, editorials, and other formats that did not present empirical data relevant to the proposed analysis. In addition, a significant portion of the articles was discarded because they did not directly address the topic of sexual health and CBT, dealing, for example, with other therapeutic approaches or mental health topics unrelated to sexuality. Following this screening process, 503 articles were selected to comprise the final sample. These studies met all established criteria, including a direct focus on CBT in sexual health and the presentation of empirical data relevant to the scientometric analysis.

For the analysis of co-authorship networks, the data were processed using VOSviewer software, resulting in the identification of 73 authors with strong connections and significant collaborations in the field of study. These authors were organized into clusters, represented by different colors, reflecting specific collaboration groups.

Co-authorship Networks Among Authors

Analysis of co-authorship networks in VOSviewer revealed a well-defined collaborative structure in the field of mental health and behavioral therapies, consisting of five main clusters, each represented by a distinct color (Figure 2). The clusters were formed based on the frequency and intensity of collaborations among researchers, highlighting different thematic focuses and areas of expertise.

Figure 2 - Visualization of Co-authorship Networks



Source: Authors, 2025.

The red cluster, located in the lower-left corner of the image and comprising 25 authors, is the largest and most cohesive group. Centered on Trivedi, Madhukar H., this cluster stands out for its high density and cohesion, indicating a solid and highly collaborative research hub focused on therapeutic interventions in mental health. In contrast, the green cluster, positioned in the upper-left corner and consisting of 16 authors, is characterized by its multiple external connections, suggesting a broad network of interdisciplinary collaborations. This group, with Sanjay Mathew as one of its prominent figures, reflects a diversity of topics and partnerships.

The blue cluster, located in the lower-right corner and composed of 13 authors, is led by Fava, Maurizio. This group acts as a bridge between different clusters, integrating diverse perspectives and playing an important role in interconnecting research areas. The yellow cluster, situated in the upper-right corner and consisting of 12 authors, has a less dense structure, possibly reflecting emerging or specialized research areas. Although smaller, this group maintains significant connections with other clusters, reinforcing the interdisciplinary nature of the field.

Finally, the light purple cluster, located near the green cluster and composed of six authors, represents a smaller group but one with significant collaborations within its field. In addition, a light blue central node, represented by a single author, connects to several clusters, playing a central role in integrating the networks and acting as a link between different research groups.

The overall configuration of the network is characterized by a well-established scientific community, with clearly defined leadership and specific thematic specializations. The connections between the clusters demonstrated strong interdisciplinary collaboration, with significant points of contact between psychology, mental health, and sexology. This integration reflects a collective effort to address the complex challenges of mental health from multiple perspectives. The physical proximity of the names on the map indicated the intensity of interactions, suggesting ongoing, long-term collaborations.

This visual representation not only highlights the leading authors in the field but also outlines research trends and opportunities for interdisciplinary studies.

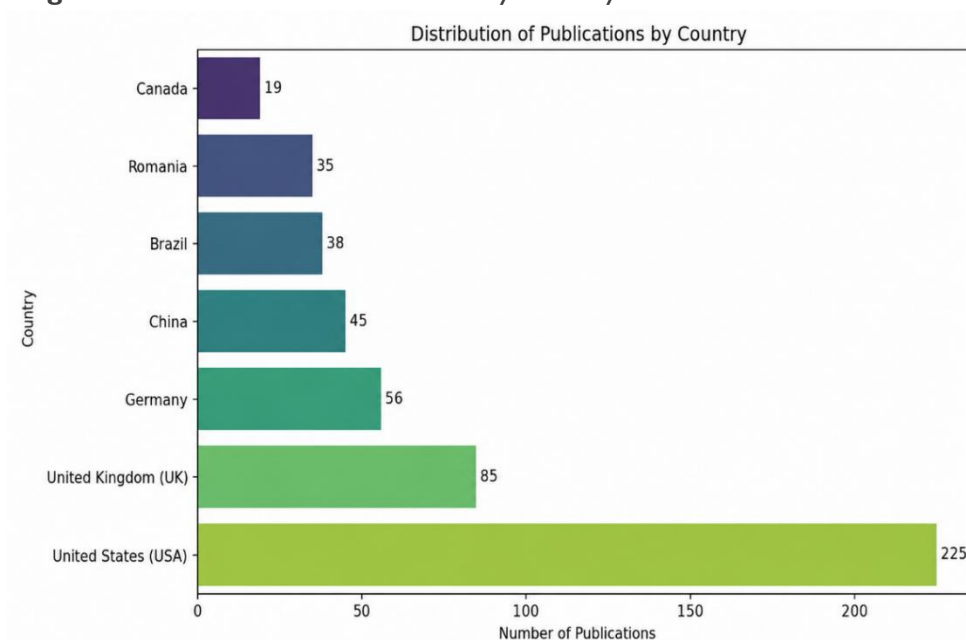
Researchers such as Fava, Maurizio; Trivedi, Madhukar H.; Mischoulon, David; and Jha, Manish K. emerged as key links, strengthening collaborations and serving as bridges between different subnetworks, while researchers located on the periphery of the network showed potential for new collaborations. The joint analysis of the co-authorship networks and the heat map highlighted the importance of an interconnected

scientific community for advancing knowledge and promoting innovations and solutions to the complex challenges of mental health.

Geographic Distribution of Publications

An analysis of the geographic distribution of publications, illustrated in Figure 3, shows that research from seven countries predominates.

Figure 3 - Distribution of Publications by Country



Source: Authors, 2025.

The United States stands out with 225 publications, representing almost half of the global scientific output on the topic. The presence of renowned universities and research centers, such as Harvard University and the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), also contributes to this leadership.

The United Kingdom appears in second place, with 85 publications, reflecting academic excellence and its history of investment in interdisciplinary research in the field of mental health. Institutions such as the University of Oxford and King's College London are known for their pioneering contributions to psychology and behavioral therapies, which explains the country's relevance in this area. Germany, with 56 publications, and China, with 45, occupy prominent positions, indicating growing interest in the topic. Brazil, with 38 publications, and Romania, with 35, also made significant contributions, although in smaller numbers. On the other hand, Canada, with only 19 publications, had the lowest representation among the countries analyzed.

Keyword Thematic Network

The analysis of the keyword cloud highlighted the central themes and their connections within the field of mental health and behavioral therapies, as illustrated in Figure 4. The identification of the thematic pattern revealed a clear emphasis on topics related to mental and behavioral health, establishing strong links between psychological, therapeutic, and demographic elements. Among the main topics discussed, mental disorders such as depression and post-traumatic stress stand out, as well as issues related to sexual dysfunction and its consequences across various ages and genders. The relevance of "cognitive-behavioral therapy" and its connection to "treatment outcomes" underscored the fundamental importance of this approach as the primary focus of therapeutic interventions.

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Emerging Trends

An analysis of emerging trends in the application of CBT to sexual health was conducted based on the keywords and selected articles, enabling a critical analysis that identified the main emerging themes, as well as the advances and challenges associated with this area of study (Table 1).

Most studies focused on sexual dysfunctions, such as erectile dysfunction, low sexual desire, and anorgasmia, reflecting the clinical relevance of these conditions. CBT, with its ability to modify cognitive and behavioral patterns, has proven effective, especially when psychological factors are involved. However, this emphasis may indicate a bias in the research, with little attention paid to marginalized groups and diverse cultural perspectives, pointing to the need for a more inclusive approach.

In addition to sexual dysfunctions, there has been an expansion of CBT to address emotional and psychological issues, such as sexual anxiety, negative body image, and sexual trauma. CBT-based interventions for sexual trauma, for example, have been shown to be effective in reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress and improving sexual intimacy. This advancement reflects a broader understanding of sexual health that incorporates emotional and relational aspects.

Individual CBT remains the most widely used approach, but there is a growing trend toward group and online formats. Online CBT, in particular, is emerging as a promising alternative for increasing accessibility, especially for populations facing geographic limitations or stigma associated with seeking help. The effectiveness of CBT has been widely documented, with improvements in outcomes such as sexual satisfaction and a reduction in symptoms of anxiety and depression. However, effectiveness varies depending on the condition and the population, with less consistent results in cases of complex trauma or severe psychiatric comorbidities.

Another relevant trend is the integration of CBT with other strategies, such as mindfulness and pharmacotherapy. The combination of CBT with mindfulness has proven effective in treating anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress, while the combination with pharmacotherapy shows promise in treating depressive and anxiety disorders. However, this combined approach faces challenges, such as the need for coordination among professionals and the personalization of treatment.

Table 1 – Emerging Themes in the Application of Cognitive-Behavioral Therapy to Sexual Health

Trend	Description	Challenges and Limitations	Examples of Interventions	Target Population
Focus on Sexual Dysfunctions	It addresses erectile dysfunction, hypoactive sexual desire, and anorgasmia.	There is little research on marginalized groups and cultural diversity.	CBT programs for erectile dysfunction and hypoactive sexual desire.	Men with erectile dysfunction, women with hypoactive sexual desire, and couples.
Expansion into Emotional Issues	Focus on sexual anxiety, negative body image, and sexual trauma.	Mixed results in populations with complex trauma and psychiatric comorbidities.	CBT-based protocols for victims of sexual abuse.	Women who are victims of violence, the LGBTQIAPN+ community, and people with body dysmorphia.
Services for Specific Groups	A growing focus on postmenopausal women, people with chronic conditions, and couples.	Lack of longitudinal studies on efficacy and adherence.	CBT-based couples therapy for sexual difficulties.	Postmenopausal women, people with chronic illnesses, couples.
Adoption of Alternative Formats	Increasing use of CBT in group and online formats.	The need to validate efficacy in different populations.	Online CBT programs for the treatment of sexual anxiety.	People who have difficulty accessing in-person care.
Integration with Mindfulness	Combining CBT with mindfulness to treat anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress.	It requires specialized training for therapists.	Combined interventions to improve emotional well-being.	People with anxiety, post-traumatic stress, and depression.

Trend	Description	Challenges and Limitations	Examples of Interventions	Target Population
	and trauma.		regulation in sexual health.	stress, and low sexual self-esteem.
Combination with Pharmacotherapy	The use of CBT in combination with medications for depressive and anxiety disorders.	Coordination among professionals and personalized treatment are challenges.	Combination treatments for treatment-resistant depression and their impact on sexual health.	People with severe depression, generalized anxiety, and sexual dysfunction associated with psychiatric disorders.

Discussion

This study conducted a comprehensive scientometric analysis of the scientific literature related to the use of CBT in sexual health, identifying patterns, emerging trends, and gaps in the literature. The findings indicated a growing field of study focused primarily on sexual dysfunctions, such as erectile dysfunction and reduced sexual desire, which accounted for the majority of the studies examined. This emphasis highlights the clinical importance of these problems and the effectiveness of CBT in altering cognitive and behavioral patterns that perpetuate such dysfunctions (Zwielewski et al., 2024). Furthermore, the increased focus on specific groups, such as postmenopausal women and people with chronic illnesses, highlights CBT's ability to adapt to different contexts, enhancing its potential as a personalized intervention (Tamashiro et al., 2024).

The expansion of CBT beyond conventional sexual dysfunctions to address issues such as sexual anxiety, negative self-image, and sexual trauma is a promising trend (Gonzales; Vizcaino, 2024). These topics, which accounted for 25% of the studies, highlight CBT's ability to address emotional and psychological issues that affect sexual health. In particular, interventions for sexual trauma have proven effective in reducing symptoms of post-traumatic stress and improving sexual intimacy, indicating that CBT can be a valuable resource for groups with a history of trauma (Paz; Araújo, 2022).

Regarding intervention formats, individual CBT remains the most widely used; however, the increase in group and online formats signals progress in implementation strategies. In particular, online CBT has proven to be a viable option for expanding accessibility and reducing barriers to treatment, especially among groups facing geographic constraints or stigma related to seeking help (Célem et al., 2024). This trend is a response to the current need for adaptable and flexible interventions.

The effectiveness of CBT has been extensively demonstrated, with research indicating notable improvements in outcomes such as sexual satisfaction, reduced symptoms of anxiety and depression, and increased self-confidence. However, variations in efficacy depending on the condition and population point to a need for more customized and integrated strategies. For example, the integration of CBT with other approaches, such as mindfulness and pharmacotherapy, has been explored as a strategy to improve outcomes, particularly in cases that are resistant to traditional treatment (Linhares et al., 2024).

Although progress has been made, the research has revealed significant gaps in the literature, such as the lack of studies on LGBTQIAPN+ groups and the use of CBT in diverse cultural contexts. This points to the need for future research to deepen our understanding of CBT's effectiveness among underrepresented groups and in various sociocultural contexts. Furthermore, the scarcity of longitudinal studies examining the long-term impacts of CBT on sexual health is an obstacle that needs to be overcome (Mendes, 2024).

This study has some limitations that should be taken into account when interpreting its results. First, the analysis was limited to three databases (PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science), which may have resulted in the exclusion of relevant studies indexed in other sources. Furthermore, the selection of articles published between 2020 and 2024 may have limited the incorporation of earlier evidence, which could have contributed to a broader understanding of the field's historical development. There is also a predominance of studies published in English, which may have introduced linguistic and cultural bias into the analysis of the results. Finally, although the scientometric approach is effective in identifying patterns, networks, and trends in scientific output, it does not allow for an in-depth assessment of the individual methodological quality of the included

studies, which constitutes an inherent limitation of this type of method.

Concluding Remarks

It can be concluded that CBT is an effective and versatile approach, with applications ranging from the treatment of sexual dysfunctions to addressing emotional and psychological issues. Its expansion into online formats and integration with other therapeutic approaches reflect CBT's adaptability to contemporary demands.

However, the identification of gaps—such as the scarcity of research on LGBTQIAPN+ populations and diverse cultural contexts—points to the need for future studies that expand our understanding of CBT's effectiveness among underrepresented groups. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term effects of CBT on sexual health. Data analysis suggests that there is a significant focus on adult and gender-diverse populations, while older adult and LGBTQIAPN+ populations may present opportunities for future research. CBT, being a versatile approach, can be explored more deeply in these areas to offer more inclusive and effective interventions.

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