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Guided internet cognitive behavioral therapy for insomnia after the loss of a child:
randomized controlled trial

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Abstract

Background: Disturbed sleep is a common problem in bereaved individuals (Buckley et al., 2012).

Aims: The aim was to evaluate the satisfaction with and effects of internet-delivered cognitive behavior therapy (ICBT) treatment for insomnia in parents up to 5 years after the loss of a child to cancer.

Methods: Participants were 21 bereaved parents with insomnia. The parents were randomized to an intervention or a control group. The intervention was a 9-week ICBT for insomnia. The control group received a short booklet with psychoeducation on sleep via the internet. Primary outcome was symptom of insomnia and secondary outcomes were prolonged grief, depression, posttraumatic stress, grief rumination, assessed pre- and post-intervention with follow-up after 9 and 18 months. Satisfaction with treatment was assessed at post-intervention (n=7) and by telephone one month after (n=6) the intervention.

Results: The intervention group improved from pre- to post-intervention with regard to symptoms of insomnia (Cohens $d=1.56$), however there was no significant difference between the two groups at post-measure ($d=0.11$) due to a large reduction also in the control group ($d=1.12$). At the 9 months follow-up there was a significant difference between the two groups in symptoms of insomnia ($d=1.54$) as well as the secondary measures ($d=0.62-1.54$). Of six individuals who responded by telephone, no one had experienced any negative consequences of the treatment. Some parents thought it was time-consuming. One person reported being quite dissatisfied with the treatment, although the majority of participants reported being very satisfied.

Conclusion: The preliminary results, due to small sample size, indicate that the internet-delivered treatment with CBT had a positive effect on reducing insomnia as well as psychological distress in bereaved parents, short-term and long-term.