

SOCIAL ISOLATION AND LONELINESS IN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS AND RELATED FACTORS: AN INTEGRATIVE LITERATURE REVIEW**ISOLAMENTO SOCIAL E SOLIDÃO EM ESTUDANTES UNIVERSITÁRIOS E FATORES RELACIONADOS: UMA REVISÃO INTEGRATIVA DE LITERATURA** **AISLAMIENTO SOCIAL Y SOLEDAD EN ESTUDIANTES UNIVERSITARIOS Y FACTORES RELACIONADOS: UNA REVISIÓN INTEGRADORA DE LA LITERATURA**

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ABSTRACT

Objective: to identify publications on social isolation and loneliness in university students and factors related to these health problems. **Method:** Integrative literature review, based on a search in five databases: Medline, PsycInfo, Science Direct, Web of Science and LILACS, using the following terms: Social Isolation, Loneliness and Students. After applying inclusion and exclusion criteria, 28 articles of different nationalities were selected. **Results:** It was evident that social isolation and loneliness in university students are associated with numerous negative conditions and health risk behaviors. On the other hand, the important role of social support and a sense of community in coping with loneliness was identified. **Conclusions:** there are impacts of social isolation and loneliness on the health of university students, characterizing these two phenomena as important public health problems that demand attention from researchers and health workers.

Descriptors: Social isolation; Loneliness; Students; Mental health.

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RESUMO

Objetivo: identificar as publicações sobre o isolamento social e a solidão em estudantes universitários e os fatores relacionados a essas problemáticas de saúde. **Método:** Revisão integrativa de literatura, realizada a partir de uma busca em cinco bases de dados: Medline, PsycInfo, Science Direct, Web of Science e LILACS, a partir dos seguintes termos: Social Isolation, Loneliness e Students. Após aplicação de critérios de inclusão e exclusão, foram selecionados 28 artigos de diferentes nacionalidades. **Resultados:** Evidenciou-se que o isolamento social e a solidão em universitários estão associados a inúmeras condições negativas e comportamentos de risco à saúde. Em contrapartida, identificou-se o importante papel do apoio social e do senso de comunidade no enfrentamento da solidão. **Conclusões:** observa-se impactos do isolamento social e solidão na saúde dos universitários, caracterizando esses dois fenômenos como importantes problemas de saúde pública, que demandam atenção de pesquisadores e trabalhadores da saúde.

Descritores: Isolamento social; Solidão; Estudantes; Saúde mental.

RESUMEN

Objetivo: identificar publicaciones sobre aislamiento social y soledad en estudiantes universitarios y factores relacionados con estos problemas de salud. **Método:** Revisión integrativa de la literatura, basada en una búsqueda en cinco bases de datos: Medline, PsycInfo, Science Direct, Web of Science y LILACS, utilizando los siguientes términos: Aislamiento social, Soledad y Estudiantes. Tras aplicar criterios de inclusión y exclusión, se seleccionaron 28 artículos de distintas nacionalidades. **Resultados:** Se evidenció que el aislamiento social y la soledad en los estudiantes universitarios se asocian con numerosas condiciones negativas y conductas de riesgo para la salud. Por otro lado, se identificó el importante papel del apoyo social y el sentido de comunidad para hacer frente a la soledad. **Conclusiones:** existen impactos del aislamiento social y la soledad en la salud de los estudiantes universitarios, caracterizando estos dos fenómenos como importantes problemas de salud pública que demandan atención por parte de investigadores y trabajadores de la salud. **Descriptor:** Aislamiento social; Soledad; Estudiantes; Salud mental.

INTRODUCTION

The social isolation is conceptualized as the absence of social relationships or meaningful ties.¹ In general, an individual in social isolation finds himself with a reduced network of family and non-family relationships.² Loneliness can be defined as the perception of social isolation or even as the subjective feeling of being alone.³ Loneliness is also understood as perceived social isolation.⁴

Social isolation can be characterized as the most worrying public health risk of all

time, and is considered an epidemic on the rise. It has been shown to have harmful consequences on people's health due to the lack of social connection, loneliness and social isolation, comparable to the effects of obesity, smoking and violence, which end up weakening and shortening people's lifespans.⁴

Likewise, loneliness represents a serious public health problem, as estimates indicate that about 8% of the adult population in Western countries experience intense loneliness and another 20%

moderate or mild loneliness.² However, it is worth noting that the prevalence of loneliness and social isolation may be much higher, considering the multidimensionality of these phenomena and their scope, and that precise global estimates are difficult to obtain, due to the variation throughout life in the incidence of loneliness and social isolation, cultural and gender differences and the use of different existing measurement methods and scales.⁵⁻⁶

Loneliness and social isolation can affect health through their effects on health behaviors.⁷ These two health problems are associated with increased tobacco use, cardiovascular disease and low levels of physical activity.⁶ Social disconnection may predict increased feelings of loneliness, which in turn predicts increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. Conversely, symptoms of depression and anxiety may also predict increased loneliness, which in turn predicts increased amounts of social disconnection. Thus, loneliness can be understood as a crucial point through which social disconnection leads to affective disorders, and from which depression and anxiety precipitate social withdrawal.⁸

It is evident that in addition to being associated with morbidity and mortality, loneliness is also involved in several deleterious physiological processes.⁹ The effects of loneliness on health occur both directly and indirectly and are difficult to

discuss individually. This is because the human body functions through the integration of different organs and systems, working together to ensure the survival and fitness of the individual.¹⁰

Two aspects of social relationships, social isolation and loneliness, are considered to be gaining increasing prominence in the scientific literature. However, research on these two topics involves a challenge, which is to understand the full scope and complexity of the influence of social relationships on health, and should consider, in addition to the absolute number or extent of social relationships, their quality.³

It is observed that although university life is a period marked by countless possibilities, it also involves the need for adaptation, demands and choices, thus representing a phase in which situations may arise that place the university student face to face with loneliness and social isolation. Thus, loneliness began to be studied in universities.¹¹ It is worth highlighting that feelings of loneliness in the academic environment can lead to the occurrence of depressive symptoms and harmful effects on students' health, as well as affecting their academic development.¹²

Minimal loneliness has already been evidenced in 53% of students and intense loneliness in 2.4% in a sample of 574 Brazilian university students, with a

correlation described between this and depression, university students' habits, course area and social support.¹¹ However, at the time of the search carried out in the databases of this review, no Brazilian study estimated social isolation in the way defined in the literature¹, demonstrating the need to focus on this research.

In this context, the importance of this topic, which has not yet been widely explored nationally, is evident, since social isolation and loneliness are associated with poor health outcomes⁷ and university students may be susceptible to these two health problems.¹¹ Therefore, the following guiding questions emerged for the study: what has been published about social isolation and loneliness among university students? What factors are related to social isolation and loneliness among university students?

Therefore, the objective of this study is to identify publications on social isolation and loneliness among university students and the factors related to these health problems.

METHOD

This is an integrative literature review, which aims to synthesize results obtained in research on a topic or issue, in a systematic, orderly and comprehensive manner. It was prepared based on the steps

described in the literature, namely: elaboration of the guiding question -What has been published about social isolation and loneliness in college students? What factors are related to social isolation and loneliness in college students?; search or sampling in the literature; data collection; critical analysis of the included studies; discussion of the results and presentation of the integrative review.¹³

To select the studies, a search was conducted in the following databases: Medline (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System Online, accessed via Pubmed), PsycInfo (American Psychological Association), Science Direct (Elsevier), Web of Science (Clarivate Analytics), and LILACS (Latin American and Caribbean Literature in Health Sciences). The terms used were the MeSH descriptors: "Social Isolation", Loneliness and Students and the Boolean operators used were "OR" and "AND", combined in the following search strategy: "Social Isolation" OR Loneliness AND Students.

The following inclusion criteria were established: studies related to the theme published in the last five years and with free access. The search was carried out in June 2020, through access to the Coordination for the Improvement of Higher Education Personnel (CAPES) Journal Portal, using keywords in the PsycInfo and Web of Science databases, by title, abstract and

keywords in Science Direct and LILACS, and by MeSH words in Medline/Pubmed.

It is worth noting that the study was conducted by three independent researchers. Two researchers conducted the literature search and selected studies, while a third researcher resolved disagreements regarding the eligibility of a study that generated ambiguity. An instrument developed based on other literature reviews and available guidelines was used to guide the conduct of this type of study. The instrument contained columns to identify the study, objectives, methodology, and to describe the summary of results and conclusions.

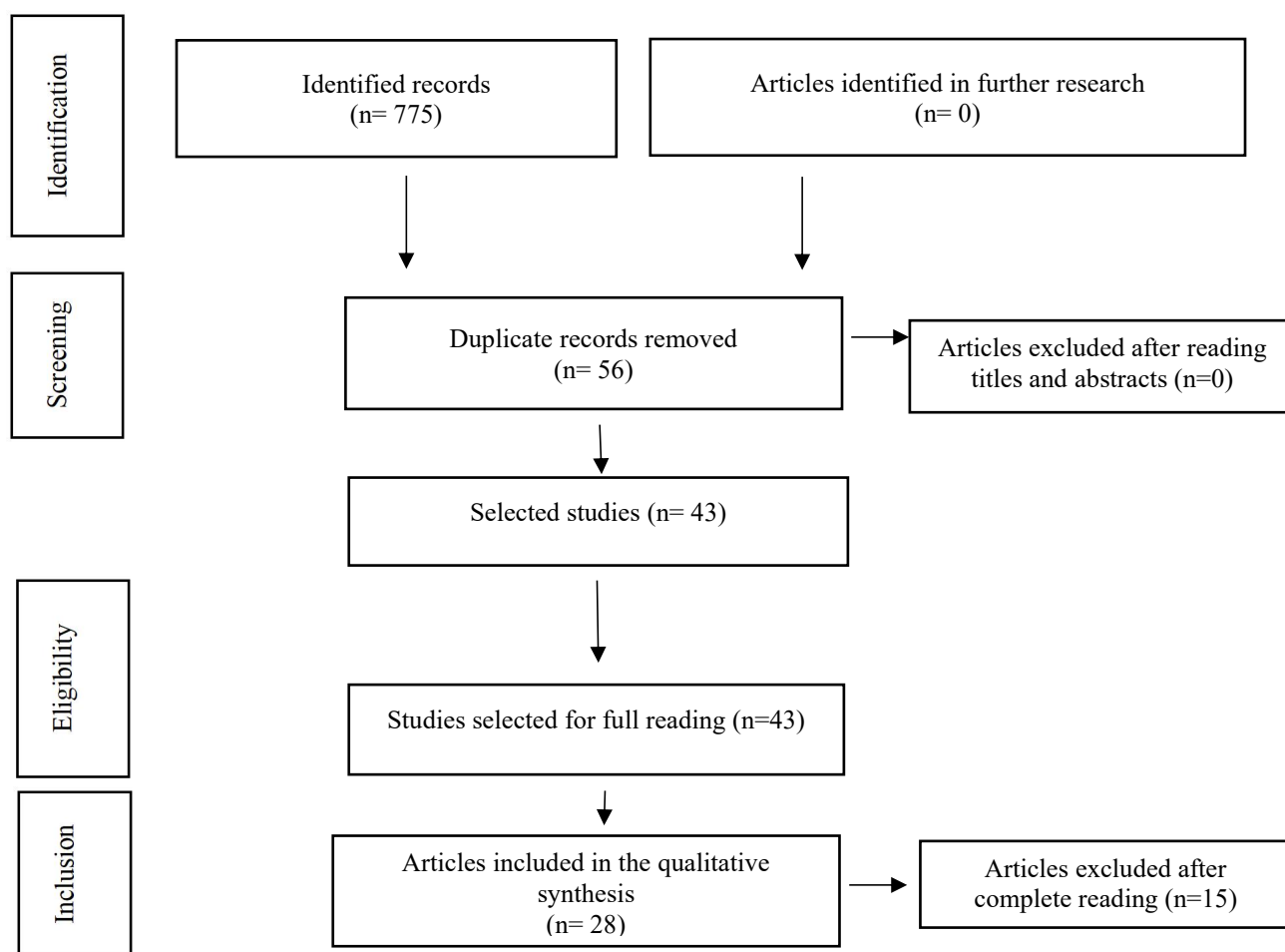
In addition, information regarding the authors, title and country of origin of each publication was extracted. The Mendley® bibliographic reference management software was used to organize the references. An assessment of the level of evidence of each study was carried out, with level I being considered: systematic reviews or meta-analyses of randomized controlled clinical trials or clinical guidelines based on systematic reviews of randomized controlled clinical trials; level II: well-designed randomized controlled clinical trials; level III: well-designed clinical trials without

randomization; level IV: well-designed cohort and case-control studies; level V: systematic review of descriptive and qualitative studies; level VI: descriptive or qualitative studies; level VII: opinions of authorities and/or reports of expert committees.¹⁴ After critical analysis of the studies, a thematic categorization of the studies was carried out, considering the factors related to loneliness and social isolation.

RESULTS

Identifying publications on social isolation and loneliness among university students

Initially, 490 results were retrieved from Medline/Pubmed, 7,796 from PsycInfo, 2,743 from Science Direct, 1,687 from Web of Science and 52 from Lilacs. After applying the filters and reading the studies that met the inclusion criteria in full, 28 articles were selected for critical analysis and discussion of the results, as shown in Figure 1, prepared based on the recommendations of the PRISMA model.¹⁵ Furthermore, the articles were coded and characterized, as shown in Table 1.

Figure 1. Diagram of identification and selection of studies, according to the PRISMA model.

Source: authors, 2020.

Table 1. Characterization of identified studies according to authors, year, level of evidence, title, database/journal and location. Rio Grande, RS, Brazil, 2020.

Code	Authors, year, level of evidence	Title	Databases / Periodicals	Location
A01	Adams et al., 2016 ¹⁶ , VI	The relationship between financial strain, perceived stress, psychological symptoms, and academic and social integration in undergraduate students	Medline / Journal of American college health	United States of America (USA)
A02	Chu et al., 2016 ¹⁷ , VI	Is Insomnia Lonely? Exploring Thwarted Belongingness as an Explanatory Link between Insomnia and Suicidal Ideation in a Sample of South Korean University Students	Medline / Journal of clinical sleep medicine	South Korea
A03	Bolaños Reyes e Rodríguez Blanco, 2016 ¹⁸ , VI	Prevalence of academic burnout syndrome among nursing students at the University of Costa Rica	Lilacs / Nurse. current Costa Rica (Online)	Costa Rica

Code	Authors, year, level of evidence	Title	Databases / Periodicals	Location
A04	Chow et al., 2017 ¹⁹ , VI	Using Mobile Sensing to Test Clinical Models of Depression, Social Anxiety, State Affect, and Social Isolation Among College Students	Medline and Psycinfo /Journal of medical Internet research	USA
A05	Hom et al., 2017 ²⁰ , VI	Investigating insomnia as a cross-sectional and longitudinal predictor of loneliness: Findings from six samples	Medline / Psychiatry research	USA
A06	Kim et al., 2017 ²¹ , VI	Structural Equation Model of Smartphone Addiction Based on Adult Attachment Theory: Mediating Effects of Loneliness and Depression	Medline and Science Direct / Asian nursing research	South Korea
A07	Pereira et al., 2017 ²² , VI	Searching for psychological predictors of suicidal ideation in university students	Psycinfo / Psychology: Theory and Research	Portugal
A08	Thomas et al., 2017 ²³ , VI	Understanding social media and identity work in young people transitioning to university	Science Direct / Computers in Human Behavior	United Kingdom
A09	Dutta e Chye, 2017 ²⁴ , VI	Internet Use and Psychological Wellbeing: A Study of International Students in Singapore	Web of Science / Journal of International Students	Singapore
A10	Mcintyre et al., 2018 ²⁵ , VI	Academic and non-academic predictors of student psychological distress: the role of social identity and loneliness	Medline and Web of Science / Journal of mental health	United Kingdom
A11	Sadeghi Bahmani et al., 2018 ²⁶ , VI	Is emotional functioning related to academic achievement among university students? Results from a cross-sectional Iranian sample	Medline, Lilacs, Psycinfo and Web of Science / Brazilian Journal of Psychiatry	Iran
A12	Dinçyurek et al., 2018 ²⁷ , VI	Identifying the relationship of food addiction, impulsiveness and loneliness with different variables in university students	Psycinfo and Web of Science/Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education	Cyprus
A13	Ozdemir et al., 2018 ²⁸ , VI	Prevalence of nomophobia among university students: A comparative study of Pakistani and Turkish undergraduate students	Psycinfo/Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science & Technology Education	Pakistan and Türkiye
A14	Diehl et al., 2018 ²⁹ , VI	Loneliness at Universities: Determinants of Emotional and Social Loneliness among Students	Medline and Web of Science / International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health	Germany
A15	Muyan-Yilik et al., 2018 ³⁰ , VI	Predictors of Loneliness among University Students in Turkey: Shyness and Gender	Web of Science / Cukurova University Faculty of Education Journal	Türkiye
A16	Barroso et al., 2018 ³¹ , VI	Loneliness as a predictor of depression in adults	Lilacs / Estud. Interdiscipline Psychol	Brazil

Code	Authors, year, level of evidence	Title	Databases / Periodicals	Location
A17	Fonsêca et al., 2018 ³² , VI	Use of social networks and solitude: psychometric evidence from scales	Lilacs / Bras. Psychol. Arch.	Brazil
A18	Moeller e Seehuus, 2019 ³³ , VI	Loneliness as a mediator for college students' social skills and experiences of depression and anxiety	Medline / Journal of adolescence	United States of America
A19	Jafari et al., 2019 ³⁴ , VI	The relationship between addiction to mobile phone and sense of loneliness among students of medical sciences in Kermanshah, Iran	Medline / BMC research notes	Iran
A20	Dagnew e Dagne, 2019 ³⁵ , VI	Year of study as predictor of loneliness among students of University of Gondar	Medline / BMC research notes	Ethiopia
A21	Çinar e Toker, 2019 ³⁶ , VI	An examination of the effect of loneliness on the innovative behavior of health science faculty students	Medline/Chinese medical journal	Türkiye
A22	Sæther et al., 2019 ³⁷ , VI	Alcohol consumption, life satisfaction and mental health among norwegian college and university students	Psycinfo and Science Direct /Addictive Behaviors Reports	Norway
A23	Aydiner-Boylu et al., 2019 ³⁸ , VI	The Investigation of the Effect of Perceived Social Support on Loneliness in University Students	Web of Science / Sosyoekonomi	Türkiye
A24	Chang et al., 2019 ³⁹ , VI	The positive role of hope on the relationship between loneliness and unhappy conditions in Hungarian young adults: How pathways thinking matters!	Web of Science / Journal of Positive Psychology	Hungary
A25	Primack et al., 2019 ⁴⁰ , VI	Positive and Negative Experiences on Social Media and Perceived Social Isolation	Web of Science / American Journal of Health Promotion	United States of America
A26	Anderssen et al., 2020 ⁴¹ , VI	Life satisfaction and mental health among transgender students in Norway	Medline and Web of Science /BMC public health	Norway
A27	Thomas et al., 2020 ⁴² , VI	Student loneliness: The role of social media through life transitions	Psycinfo and Science Direct /Computers & Education	United Kingdom
A28	Ribeiro et al., 2020 ⁴³ , VI	Prevalence of and Factors Associated with Depression and Anxiety in Brazilian Medical Students	Lilacs / Rev. bras. education. average	Brazil

It was observed that, of the selected studies (96.5%) used a quantitative approach, studies, only one (3.5%) presented a qualitative approach (A08). The remaining (96.2%), with the exception of one (A02 -

3.8%), which presented longitudinal results. Only three selected studies (A17-A18, A28) were of Brazilian origin, which denotes few publications related to the topic in Brazil. All studies (100%) were classified as having level of evidence VI. It is also noteworthy that in one of them (A28), loneliness and social isolation did not appear as a central theme; however, it was included because it mentioned students who felt isolated in its results.

Factors related to loneliness and social isolation in university students

An association between loneliness and male gender (A15, A20) and year of study (A20) was determined. Greater loneliness was evidenced in university students aged 21 years or older (A20), those studying social sciences (A14), those living in rural areas before going to college (A20), and immigrant students (A14). It is also noteworthy that being married or in a relationship emerged as a protective factor for loneliness (A14).

Loneliness in university students has been related to a series of negative conditions, namely: mental health problems (A10), depression (A05, A07, A11, A14, A16, A18, A24, A28), suicidal ideation (A2, A07, A24), anxiety (A14, A24), insomnia (A02, A05), smoking (A12, A20), alcohol consumption (A22), consumption of khat (an indigenous plant originating in Ethiopia

and Yemen with a stimulant effect) in Ethiopian students (A20), financial difficulties (A01), burnout syndrome (A03), lower social satisfaction (A11), self-harm (A26), lower life satisfaction (A26), dependence on social networks (A17), low self-esteem (A17), impulsivity (A12), food addiction (A12), nomophobia (A13), and physical inactivity (A14). greater shyness (A15), lower verbal social skills (A18), lower innovative behavior (A21) and negative experiences on social media (A25).

It was identified that social isolation was associated with more time at home (A04) and greater social anxiety (A04). Both loneliness and social isolation were associated with depression (A06), negative emotions (A06), smartphone addiction (A06, A19) and problematic internet use (A09).

Furthermore, it was pointed out that social support (A23) and a sense of community (A27) reduce loneliness, establishing a protective relationship against it. It is also worth noting that one study (A08) indicated that social media can both exacerbate and help in coping with loneliness and social isolation. Other findings demonstrate that emotional loneliness is more frequent than social loneliness (A14).

DISCUSSION

The review identified characteristics of university students and factors related to

loneliness and social isolation. It was also possible to identify factors related to social isolation and loneliness that negatively impact students' lives and those that act as protective factors against social isolation and loneliness. The results of the review can serve as a basis for developing strategies to address social isolation and loneliness in university students.

Regarding the sex of university students who experience loneliness, two studies highlighted an association with the male sex.¹⁶⁻¹⁷ Highlights-It is known that male university students more frequently use passive coping mechanisms, such as denial, substance abuse and depressed mood, when making decisions to deal with their mental health, whereas female university students seem to more easily use active coping mechanisms, such as involvement in social support activities and seeking spiritual guidance.¹⁸ However, the remaining studies showed divergent results or did not test the association between loneliness and sex, thus referring to the existence of mixed results in the identified studies.

The year of study was also associated with loneliness, with it being identified that being a first-year student makes the student more prone to loneliness.¹⁷ In a study conducted in Ethiopia, freshmen students had greater problems adjusting to a new environment.¹⁹ It is worth noting that students leaving home for college can make

them susceptible to loneliness.²⁰ This association may be due to the short duration of the stay at university, which does not yet allow for adaptation to this new environment.¹⁷

A study highlighted a higher prevalence of loneliness in university students aged 21 and over.¹⁷ However, it is worth noting that the identified study reported no significant differences.²¹ Regarding the subject of study, greater loneliness was identified among social science students, considered a new finding that requires further exploration, but which may be due to the fact that students in this area live in small groups and have little contact with other students.²¹

Living in a rural area before university, as well as migration, were responsible for a higher prevalence of loneliness among university students, as indicated by the studies analyzed.^{17,21} It is evident that migration is a condition of vulnerability to illness. A Brazilian study with students of rural origin identified that more than half of them are at risk for the occurrence of Common Mental Disorders, characterized by the appearance of somatic symptoms and problems of social integration at university.²² Therefore, it makes sense that these students present a higher level of loneliness.

As in this study, research with different age groups and segments of the

population reports an association between social isolation and/or loneliness with negative conditions, highlighting the negative impacts of social isolation and loneliness on health^{4,7,23-24}, well-being²⁵⁻²⁶, and also in people's life expectancy, since they were associated with a higher mortality rate.⁴

Regarding the impacts on mental health, studies with other age groups and with the general population confirm the findings of this research, showing an association between social isolation, loneliness and depression²⁵⁻²⁸, loneliness and Burnout syndrome.²⁹ A relationship between loneliness and social isolation and suicidal ideation and parasuicide (suicidal behavior) was also demonstrated.³⁰⁻³² Furthermore, it appears that the literature supports the association between loneliness and anxiety^{8,28,32} and loneliness and panic attacks.³²

In this review, studies were identified in which loneliness was associated with greater shyness¹⁶, less innovative behavior³³, lower verbal social skills³⁴ and lower social satisfaction³⁵ and with life.³⁶ Furthermore, social isolation was associated with more time at home and greater social anxiety.³⁷

Regarding these aspects, it is highlighted that relationship life is crucial for the development of individuals, being important for the expression of one of their basic human needs, communication, and for

the establishment of interpersonal relationships, with loneliness interfering in morbidity and mortality and reducing quality of life.³⁸ Thus, it is assumed that, in a situation in which a university student finds himself isolated and lonely, significant changes also occur in other aspects of his social life, as demonstrated in this review.

It was also revealed that loneliness was also associated with financial difficulties.³⁹ Authors identified that lower family wealth was correlated with loneliness.⁴⁰ In this context, the study highlights that among the challenges that students face in higher education are emotional problems, financial difficulties, adaptation to the academic environment, and reconciling university, work and others, capable of triggering mental health problems.⁴¹ Thus, this relationship finds support in the literature.

The results of the extensive review carried out show that risk behaviors, such as smoking, prevailed among lonely students^{17,42}, alcoholism⁴³, khat consumption in Ethiopian students¹⁷, and food addiction.⁴² The association of loneliness with tobacco and alcohol use is reinforced by Peltzer and Pengpid.⁴⁰ It is known that tobacco and alcohol consumption are extremely harmful to human health, however, they are often seen by students as sources of refuge from their anxieties.⁴⁴ A study with university students identified the predictive role of

emotional dysregulation (including impulsivity) and loneliness in food addiction.⁴⁵

This work also found a relationship between loneliness and insomnia⁴⁶⁻⁴⁷ and physical inactivity.²¹ Research shows that lonely college students are more likely to report sleep problems and short sleep duration.⁴⁰ A study with results from cross-sectional and longitudinal analyses highlights that loneliness is an independent risk factor for physical inactivity and that it increases the likelihood of interrupting physical activity over time.⁴⁸

The findings of this review also suggest that being a socially isolated and/or lonely college student is associated with smartphone addiction⁴⁹⁻⁵⁰ and problematic internet use.⁵¹ Loneliness has also been linked to impulsiveness⁴², negative experiences on social media⁵², nomophobia⁴² and dependence on social networks.³² Previous study confirms that loneliness in college students was associated with addictive behaviors, including prolonged internet use (six or more hours per day).⁴⁰ According to the findings of Savci and Aysan⁵⁴, impulsivity directly, positively, and significantly predicts social media use, which in turn directly, positively, and significantly predicts loneliness, and that impulsivity indirectly positively and significantly predicts loneliness.

However, one study found in this review highlighted that social media can both exacerbate and alleviate feelings of loneliness.³² In this sense, it is highlighted that the need to belong and the need for self-representation are two basic social needs that drive the use of social media, which has the potential to enable interaction and the formation of friendships. There are unclear results in the literature regarding this association, which requires further investigation.⁵⁵ However, the results of this study are reinforced regarding the possibility that social media can alleviate and exacerbate loneliness.

Other findings from this review demonstrate that emotional loneliness is more frequent than social loneliness among university students.²¹ This result is supported by the literature⁵⁶, it is important to study these two aspects of loneliness. To Weiss⁵⁷, an important theorist, social loneliness is characterized by the absence of an acceptable social network for the individual, that is, a wider circle of friends and acquaintances that provide a sense of belonging, companionship and that make the individual feel like a member of a community, while emotional loneliness is identified by the absence of an attachment figure in life and the lack of someone to turn to (e.g., a partner, best friend, family member). Therefore, it is suggested that university students, when facing a period of

adaptation, are faced with the lack of someone who offers support.

Another aspect highlighted in the articles analyzed is the relationship between loneliness, social support and sense of community, just as the fact of being married or in a relationship emerged as a protective factor for loneliness, with these aspects having an influence on loneliness.^{58,59} In this regard, it is evident that a social network of meaningful personal relationships is crucially important for feeling socially integrated and for alleviating feelings of loneliness. It is important to note that the social network that provides social support is essential for recreating an academic environment that is more favorable to students' mental health.²²

CONCLUSIONS

Publications on social isolation and loneliness among university students worldwide were identified. The studies identified are, for the most part, quantitative in approach, cross-sectional and of international origin, and are all classified as evidence level VI. Factors related to social isolation and loneliness in university students were highlighted, highlighting numerous negative conditions and health risk behaviors. On the other hand, the important role of social support and a sense of community in coping with loneliness was

identified, configuring it as a protective factor.

Some limitations should be acknowledged in carrying out this study, such as the fact that the literature search was restricted to free studies in English, Spanish and Portuguese and in the last five years. However, it would be very costly to expand this spectrum due to the volume of production in the area, and it is believed that the search allowed the exhaustion of the topic, enabling a robust data collection. A strong point is the novelty of this review at a national level, considering such a relevant topic.

This review makes it possible to broaden the view on the impacts of social isolation and loneliness on the health of university students, characterizing these two phenomena as important problems to be studied in the academic environment. Public policy makers, as well as professionals in the health and education fields, should consider the phenomena in question as important public health problems and dedicate efforts to implementing effective interventions, aiming to strengthen social support networks and reduce the levels of social isolation and loneliness among university students.

It is worth noting that knowledge gaps still remain unclear, based on the observation of ambiguous results in the researched literature, and that Brazilian

scientific production on these topics is still incipient, in relation to other countries. Therefore, studies are needed at national and international levels to clarify, in a more conclusive manner, the association between social isolation, loneliness and gender, student age, subject of study and use of social media. Furthermore, research should consider and distinguish differences between social and emotional loneliness. No Brazilian study was identified that studied loneliness from this typology. Mixed and/or qualitative methods designs that explore longitudinal associations are recommended.

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