



30. VIRTUAL REALITY IN PSYCHIATRY

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Introduction. Virtual reality (VR) is a computer simulation, a collection of images and sounds that form a real place or situation with which a person can interact using special electronic equipment. It allows to create therapeutically beneficial scenarios that are almost impossible to recreate in real life. These simulations give patients the confidence to deal with similar problems in real life. VR is gaining popularity as a promising tool for treating mental illness.

Aim of study. The purpose of the study is to analyze current information about the effectiveness of VR therapy in patients with mental disorders and identify areas of greatest effectiveness.

Methods and materials. Scientific articles from the PubMed and Google Scholar databases published during 2019-2023 were used.

Results. Several meta-analyses have reported the effectiveness of VR interventions in the treatment of various anxiety disorders and phobias (acrophobia, flying phobia, insect or animal phobia). On the contrary, the results obtained in the treatment of social phobia are still controversial and require further study. A meta-analysis of VR therapy for patients with PTSD reported significant reductions in PTSD and depressive symptoms after treatment. The effect of treatment lasted for 3–6 months. A meta-analysis of the treatment of compulsive overeating disorder showed that VR therapy leads to a change in a person's body image, increased self-esteem, and a decrease in compulsive overeating. These therapeutic effects lasted for about a year. A meta-analysis including only 6 studies found that applying VR to depressed patients can reduce the severity of their depression. Four studies examined different forms of VR in people with psychosis and schizophrenia. There is no clear evidence for or against using VR to encourage people with schizophrenia to take their medications.

Conclusion. Numerous studies provide evidence supporting the beneficial effects of VR therapy for several mental disorders. It is necessary to test how effective and safe VR therapy is compared to traditional treatment, and to establish the parameters of VR treatment that would be optimal for functional improvement in real life, and to identify the elements necessary for treatment. The problem with the availability of this type of therapy has remained relevant, mainly due to the high cost of developing a new clinical VR application and expensive technical support.

Keywords. Virtual reality, Mental health, Psychiatry, Meta-analysis.