


Chapter 10

Healing the Mind: Family Constellations as a Complementary Tool in Mental Health Care

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ABSTRACT

Family Constellations, a therapeutic approach rooted in systemic psychotherapy, offers a novel method for exploring and healing intergenerational trauma and relational dynamics within families. This chapter examines the integration of Family Constellations into mental health care, emphasising its value as a complementary tool alongside conventional intervention. We delve into its relevance for older adults, demonstrating its potential to address issues such as loneliness, unresolved grief, and familial discord. By highlighting connections to nursing practice, emotional intelligence development, and Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) focused on health, well-being, and social cohesion, we present a holistic model that fosters healing, resilience, and community-centred care. The chapter discusses the evidence base, best practices, and case studies to illustrate practical applications and promote interdisciplinary collaboration.

1. INTRODUCTION

The exploration of family constellations as a therapeutic modality has gained traction in recent years, particularly in the context of mental health care for older adults. Family constellations, a therapeutic approach developed by Bert Hellinger in

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the 1990s, focus on the dynamics and relationships within families, aiming to reveal and address hidden patterns that may contribute to emotional and psychological distress (Arcury et al., 2013). This method posits that unresolved familial issues can manifest as psychological problems in individuals, thus emphasizing the importance of familial relationships in mental health outcomes (Arcury et al., 2013). The core principles of family constellations revolve around the concepts of belonging, balance, and the acknowledgment of family history, which can significantly impact an individual's mental health and well-being (Arcury et al., 2013).

In the broader context of mental health care, complementary therapies, including family constellations, have emerged as valuable adjuncts to traditional therapeutic approaches. These therapies are increasingly recognised for their potential to enhance psychological well-being, particularly among older adults who may face unique mental health challenges such as depression, anxiety, and cognitive decline (Arcury et al., 2013). The integration of complementary therapies into mental health care reflects a paradigm shift towards a more holistic understanding of health, where emotional, psychological, and social factors are considered alongside physical health (McIvera & Tayehb, 2017). This shift is particularly relevant for older adults, who often experience complex health issues that require multifaceted treatment approaches (McIvera & Tayehb, 2017).

The relevance of family constellations and complementary therapies to mental health care for older adults cannot be overstated. As individuals age, they often confront significant life transitions, including loss, isolation, and changes in physical health, which can exacerbate mental health issues (Cowley et al., 2023; Reis da Silva, 2024a). Family constellations provide a unique framework for addressing these challenges by facilitating a deeper understanding of familial relationships and their impact on individual mental health. Research indicates that older adults who engage in complementary therapies, including family constellations, report improved emotional well-being, enhanced coping strategies, and a greater sense of connection to their families and communities (Reis da Silva, 2024b; Reis da Silva, 2024c). This is particularly important in the context of ageing populations, where mental health care systems are often strained and traditional therapeutic modalities may not fully address the needs of older adults (Stub et al., 2016).

Moreover, the integration of family constellations into mental health care for older adults aligns with the growing recognition of the importance of social support and familial ties in promoting mental health. Studies have shown that strong family connections can serve as protective factors against mental health issues, while unresolved family conflicts can contribute to psychological distress (Kartina, 2021). By using family constellations, mental health professionals can help older adults navigate these complex dynamics, fostering healing and resilience (Shaw et al., 2006). This approach not only addresses individual mental health concerns but

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