


## Literature Review

# Family Support Group to Reduce Loneliness in Caregiver of Mental Health Disorders Patients

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### Abstracts

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**Introduction:** Caring for patients with mental health disorders causes loneliness in caregivers. Therefore, interventions are needed to reduce the level of loneliness in caregivers of patients with mental health disorders. This literature review study aims to determine the effectiveness of family support groups in reducing loneliness in caregivers of patients with mental health disorders. **Methods:** This study used the ScienceDirect and Google Scholar databases and were searched using the following keywords family support group AND reduce AND loneliness AND caregiver And Mental Health Disorder in filtered journals published in 2013-2023. **Results:** Caregivers of mental health patients experience the main psychosocial problem, namely loneliness in the process of caring for patients with mental health disorders. Loneliness in caregivers of patients with mental health disorders is caused by stigma which causes feelings of isolation, disconnection, and lack of social relationships, increased stress, and emotional tension. Family support groups can reduce the level of loneliness in caregivers of patients with mental health disorders. **Conclusion:** Family group support intervention creates effective coping so that the cognitive control network in processing socio-affective information becomes a reflection. This stimulates the reduction of thoughts and perceptions which have an impact on reducing feelings of loneliness.

**Keywords:** Caregiver, Family Support Group, Loneliness, Mental Health Disorder, Reduce

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## INTRODUCTION

Mental health is a major component of public health that is experiencing a critical increase with an estimated 19% of the world's population suffering from mental health disorders each year [1]. Mental health problems are not only experienced by patients with mental health disorders but are also experienced by families as caregivers [2]. The role of the family as caregivers in the process of caring for patients with mental health disorders is the key to determining the success of the patient's recovery and accompanying the patient in carrying out daily life [3].

Mental health disorders cause psychosocial problems in patient caregivers, especially feelings of loneliness [4]. Victor et al., (2021) explained that almost half of the respondents in their study, 43.7% of caregivers experienced moderate loneliness and 17.7% experienced severe loneliness in caring for patients with mental health disorders. The high incidence of loneliness in caregivers in families with mental health patients requires intervention to reduce it.

Several interventions that implement support groups have significantly reduced feelings of loneliness in individuals [6]. Research Haslam et al., (2016), on the application of group support through online programs to young adults with affective disorders shows that there is a significant reduction in loneliness. In addition, support groups for community residents with depressive symptoms who are on outpatient services in Chinese clinics experience a decrease in feelings of loneliness [8]. Group support is a widely applied and effective intervention in reducing loneliness.

The family is the most important caregiver in the care of patients with mental health disorders who feel lonely [3]. Many interventions have been conducted to reduce loneliness, but there has been little research on the effectiveness of family-focused support groups. Thus, researchers are interested in exploring the effectiveness of family support groups in reducing loneliness in caregivers

of patients with mental health disorders.

## REVIEWS

### FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP

Family support groups are forums or initiatives specifically designed to provide support, understanding, and social interaction for family members who have similar experiences in dealing with specific challenges. The group aims to create a safe space where family members can share their experiences, emotions, and knowledge to support each other [9]. Family members can share coping strategies, useful resources, and their own experiences in caring for and assisting individuals with mental health disorders. Additionally, families can gain encouragement, inspiration, and hope from the successes of others in facing similar challenges [10]. Family support groups can be conducted in various forms, such as face-to-face meetings, online meetings, or through social media platforms. It is important to seek trustworthy and well-controlled support groups where family members can feel comfortable and safe to share their experiences.

Family support plays a significant role in caring for patients with mental disorders. Family support refers to the efforts and resources provided by family members to individuals with mental disorders to help, support, and improve their well-being. Family support can encompass various aspects, including emotional, practical, and informational support [2]. Emotional support involves providing support, understanding, and acceptance to family members caring for patients with mental disorders. This process includes listening, acknowledging their feelings, and providing a safe space to discuss the challenges and burdens they experience [3]. Practical support can take the form of physical assistance in caring for the patient, such as helping with daily activities, organizing care schedules, or providing financial assistance. This support can help reduce the physical burden and tasks borne by family caregivers, allowing them to focus on the necessary care

for the patient [2]. In addition, informational support consists of accurate knowledge and information about the mental disorder faced by the patient. This includes understanding symptoms, treatments, care strategies, and available resources. Informational support can help family members feel more prepared and capable in caring for patients with mental disorders [11].

Studies in Asian countries have shown that about 70% of patients with chronic mental disorders live with their relatives and family members, who oversee taking care of these patients. The families' responses and functions about the presence of a mentally ill patient and the pressures are not the same. Looking after patients with chronic mental disorders creates emotional burnout and might have destructive mental and spiritual effects on the caregivers. Family members play a key role in providing care and treatment to members with mental disorders [12]. Family members should be involved as a natural part of the mental health care team for the patient. In addition to standard treatment, mental health care professionals should facilitate an environment for families to share their beliefs about the illness and bring forth family strengths [1].

#### **LONELINESS IN CAREGIVERS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS PATIENTS**

Loneliness is a distressing feeling where one's desired and actual social relationships do not match. This is different from social isolation and occurs when a person feels lacking in their relationships. Loneliness often affects human health, indicating unsatisfying social relationships lead to adverse consequences. Being lonely can contribute to changes in one's behavior and physiology, leading to serious adverse health implications and mortality. Those who are reported to be lonely are more likely to suffer from mental illnesses, such as depression and anxiety. One study found that loneliness predicted increased depressive symptoms, decreased self-rated health, and additional

functional limitations [4].

Loneliness in caregivers refers to the experience of feeling isolated, disconnected, or lacking meaningful social connections while fulfilling the caregiving role. Caregivers often face unique challenges and responsibilities in caring for individuals with physical or mental health conditions. These challenges can lead to increased stress, emotional strain, and a sense of social isolation, which contribute to feelings of loneliness. It is important to recognize and address the loneliness experienced by caregivers, as it can have negative impacts on their mental and physical well-being. Providing social support, respite care, and opportunities for caregivers to connect with others who share similar experiences can help alleviate loneliness and improve the overall well-being of caregivers [13].

Loneliness in caregivers arises due to social isolation resulting from caregiving responsibilities. Caregivers do not have enough time or energy to interact with friends, family, or other social environments. The responsibility of caring for patients can take up most of caregivers' time and energy, often causing them to sacrifice their own time and attention [14]. Caring for patients with mental health disorders can impose a significant emotional burden on caregivers. They may experience anxiety, stress, and sometimes depression due to facing complex challenges that are draining [15].

It is important for caregivers to receive adequate support and attention from family, friends, and the social environment. Involving caregivers in support groups or seeking assistance from professionals can help reduce feelings of loneliness and provide them with opportunities to share experiences and find ways to maintain a balance between their role as caregivers and their personal social life [1].

#### **FAMILY SUPPORT GROUP IN REDUCING LONELINESS IN CAREGIVERS OF MENTAL HEALTH DISORDERS PATIENTS**

Caregivers feel lonely due to stigma and thus feel isolated, disconnected, or lack meaningful social relationships when fulfilling a parenting role. A high burden is felt by caregivers of patients with mental health disorders so they tend to experience anxiety, stress, and depression [15]. In addition, increased stress, emotional tension, and feelings of social isolation increase feelings of loneliness [13]. Lack of understanding in caring for families and relatives with mental health disorders contributes to feelings of loneliness [16]. Caregivers of patients with mental health disorders need interventions to reduce feelings of loneliness so that they are optimal in the treatment process [3].

The intervention that is often carried out to reduce loneliness in caregivers of mental health patients is group support [14]. Group support interventions provide both emotional and social support, broaden social networks and provide psychoeducational materials. A Family support group is a group forum to provide support, understanding, and social interaction for family members who have similar experiences dealing with problems [9]. Family support groups can take many forms, such as face-to-face meetings, online meetings, or through social media platforms. Research [17], explains that family support groups have a significant impact on reducing feelings of loneliness in a group of rural families with severe illness. Family support groups provide a place for groups with the same problems in carrying out their daily lives. This creates effective coping in individuals thereby reducing feelings of loneliness. Effective coping regulates the cognitive control network to process socio-affective information into reflection so that regulation becomes effective in situations. This process will reduce the burden of thought and perception, thereby reducing feelings of loneliness [18].

The experience of families with schizophrenia experience problems with stigma and coping strategies that cause feelings of loneliness [19]. Family group support with

various media, either directly or online, can be applied to reduce caregivers' feelings of loneliness. Stress management, spiritual reflection, mutual reinforcement, and psychoeducation can be included in family support groups with caring for patients with mental health disorders [20].

## CONCLUSION

In the process of treatment, it is not only mental health patients who experience problems. However, the main psychosocial problem of mental health patient caregivers is loneliness. Loneliness in caregivers of patients with mental health disorders is caused by the many challenges in the care process. Loneliness is triggered by stigma which causes feelings of isolation, disconnection, and lack of social relationships, increased stress, and emotional tension. Family group support by providing a forum for sharing experiences and strengthening each other in the process of caring for patients with mental disorders can reduce feelings of loneliness inpatient caregivers. Family group support interventions create effective coping so that the cognitive control network in processing socio-affective information becomes a reflection. This stimulates a reduction in the burden of thoughts and perceptions which has an impact on reducing feelings of loneliness.

## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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