

The Genogram as a Counseling Tool: Philosophical Foundations and Practical Implications



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Abstract: Genogram as a tool in the counselling process has a long history and is not just a term, but it is based on a clear philosophical foundation. This study uses a qualitative approach with a literature review method that includes primary articles and books. The results of the study indicate that a genogram is a diagrammatic representation of family conditions and information from several generations, which can explain status, work patterns, lifestyle, illness, gender, and other factors. By understanding the good or bad family history, individuals can use this information to anticipate and prevent future problems and guide them to achieve more positive conditions. The use of a genogram in counselling provides deep insight into hereditary patterns and dynamics, helps clients understand interpersonal relationships, and gives them strength to face life's challenges.

Key Words: Genogram; Family Theory; Philosophical Basis.

INTRODUCTION

Genogram is a method used to map the family system. The term genogram was first introduced by Monica McGoldrick, a genealogist who has conducted extensive research on family systems to address problems experienced by her clients for approximately three decades. She discovered that the events experienced by individuals within their family can transform them, increasing their concern for life developments (McGoldrick et al., 2020). Thanks to her passion for this family system, McGoldrick was nicknamed the godmother of Genogram. Some of the writings that led her to this nickname are Ethnicity and Family Therapy, The Genogram Journey, Genogram: Assessment and Treatment, Genogram in Clinical Treatment, Re-visioning Family Therapy: Race, Culture, and Gender in Clinical Practice, The Genogram Casebook. A Clinical Companion to Genograms Assessment and Intervention.

McGoldrick's (2011) journey in understanding the Genogram is stated in her writing entitled The Genogram Journey and has been republished fifteen years later. One part of the book explains about "going home again," implying that family is the most important emotional system that most individuals have ever had. Home is not a place but a concept. Individuals experience home as the beginning of all existence in life. By understanding the family, individuals can understand better about themselves and be free to determine the life they want to live in the future. Unpleasant yang experiences or the saddest events that occur in the family are part of forming an individual's identity. Understanding negative family conditions can help people learn about themselves and relate them to other family issues. Studying the family and its events can help people understand several previous generations, the difficulties they faced, the relationships they formed, the secrets they kept, the conditions of being

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trapped, and other things so they can determine their own role as a victim, reactor, or active actor in the family drama. Studying family heritage allows individuals to change the part they play and also their future freely. The term "family" has a deep meaning about who humans really are in the world. We have similarities with other family members, such as habits and gestures. All family members are there and involved—at least we believe they are—in every opportunity in life: birth, death, marriage, graduation, and pain.

The genogram is a primary orientation tool used to help clients understand their impasses and seek out the best resources available. In the context of studying a client's life, a therapist can support the client by identifying relationships they would like to change and help them gather strength for the effort (McGoldrick, 2016). The genogram "lets the calendar do the talking" by showing possible relationships between family events over time. Previous illness patterns and previous changes in family relationships caused by changes in family structure and other critical life changes can be documented in the genogram. The genogram provides a framework for hypothesising about conditions that may be contributing to the current crisis.

McGoldrick & Hardy (2008) explain that in the counselling process using a genogram, therapists can obtain complete and clear information about family and transgenerational patterns, family conflicts, assessing strengths and resources, and mapping relational dynamics. The information obtained was then analysed according to the needs and goals to be achieved in the counselling process. Genograms are widely used by experts to reveal various conditions experienced by their clients, including Okiishi (1985), Halevy (1988), Hardy and Laszloffy (1995), Dunn & Levitt (2000), Malott & Magnuson (2004), and Darwent et al. (2016). Halevy (1998) used genograms in cross-cultural counselling training to help clients understand themselves. On the other hand, Malott & Magnuson used it to explore the career development of clients, while Balaguer, Mary, & Levitt (2000) applied genograms to highlight the existence of mutually beneficial collaborations between family members. Wood & Stroup (Magnuson & Shaw, 2003) used genograms in premarital counselling to reveal the family tree of the couple for understanding and identifying dominant traditions, relationship patterns, gender roles, values, lines of power and authority, emotional expressions, problem-solving strategies, and decision-making styles. Okiishi (Supriatna, 2009) developed genograms as a tool in career counselling interviews to identify "significant others" in the family who can influence the client's career choices and planning. Darwent et al. (2016) used genograms to detect infant feeding history through semi-structured interviews with fourteen mothers in Scotland. Genogram is part of the systemic theory in family therapy. The key feature of the systemic formulation is looking at problems as the result of an interactional process, which means there is an influence from outside the individual towards the conditions he experienced. Until now, a genogram is considered one of the effective methods to reveal the relationship between previous generations and the current and future generations. By identifying previous generations, the current generation can identify the best and worst conditions that can or might happen to him.

METHOD

The approach used in the study was systematic literature review (SLR). Systematic Literature Review (SLR) is a research approach used to identify, assess, and synthesise the results of relevant research to answer specific research questions (Petticrew & Roberts, 2006). The method used was PRISMA (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses). PRISMA is a guideline developed to improve the quality of reporting in systematic reviews and meta-analyses. This guideline provides instructions on how to report each step in the review process clearly and transparently, which aimed to reduce bias and increase study replication (Moher et al., 2009). The PRISMA method requires the completion of two crucial elements: the checklist and the flow diagram. For the checklist, there are five criteria that need to be fulfilled, which are the purpose of the study, inclusion and exclusion criteria, literature search strategy, study selection process, and synthesis of study results. We create a flow diagram to illustrate the process of selecting and eliminating articles according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The first stage is to determine the purpose of the study. The purpose of this study is to find the philosophical and practical basis of the genogram as a tool in the counselling process. The next stage is determining the inclusion and exclusion criteria; the following is Table 1 as the intended criteria.

Table 1. Inclusion and Exclusion criteria

No	Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria
1.	Publication year 2018 – 2024	Publications before 2020
2.	National and international journals, books	Web, blog
3.	Genogram in counseling	Non Genogram
4.	Use of English and Indonesian	Neither English nor Indonesian

The selection of articles was based on the year of publication, which was published in the last seven years, from 2018 to 2024, assuming that there is novelty that needs to be identified in the implementation of a genogram in counselling activities. We searched Semantic Scholar and Scopus for articles in the study using the keyword "Genogram in Counselling." In Semantic Scholar, sixteen articles were found related to the keywords, but after being searched, two articles were identified using Spanish and Polish, and two articles were less in accordance with the keywords searched, so only twelve articles could be taken. We found twelve articles related to the keywords in Scopus. Three were found to be unrelated to the genogram, while the other six had the same title as Semantic Scholar articles, leaving five for SLR analysis. The total number of articles used for the SLR study was seventeen (17), according to the inclusion and exclusion criteria that had been set. The results of the article search are presented in Figure 1.

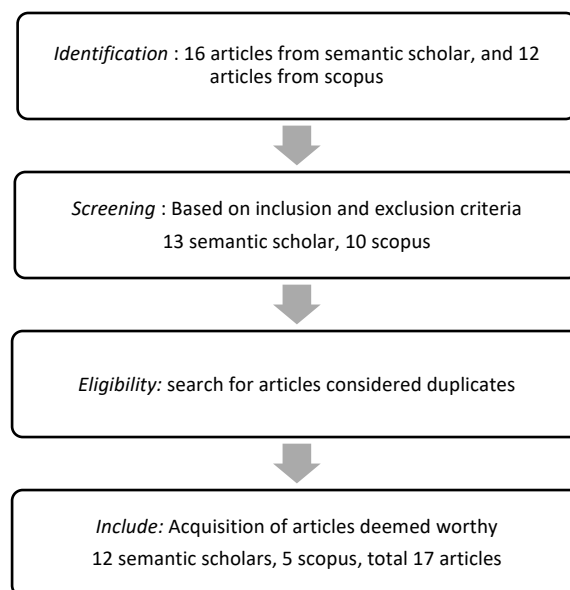


Figure 1. Article search scheme

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the literature study that has been conducted were then presented with adjusted data for the research problem. What is reviewed in this literature study research is the year of publication, research targets, fields of study, practical basis, and philosophical basis. We selected 17 articles from international and national journals in 2018-2024 using the PRISMA method.

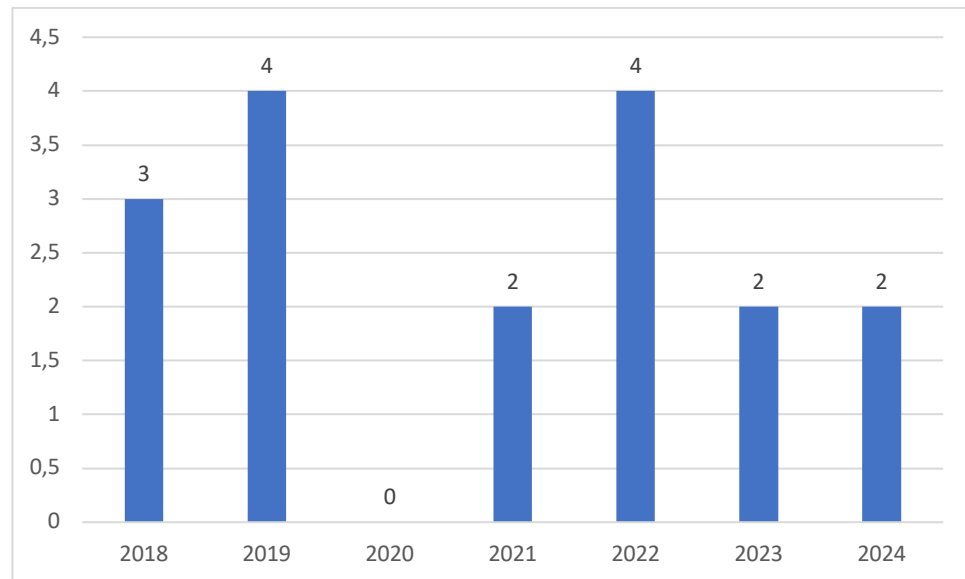


Figure 1. Number of articles by year of publication

Figure 1 shows that genogram research had different trends each year, with the most similarities in 2019 and 2022 and no mention in 2020. Various professions can leverage the vast scope of genogram application in counselling. Genograms can help experts determine the causes or possibilities of various client issues by providing detailed information about family conditions in each generation.

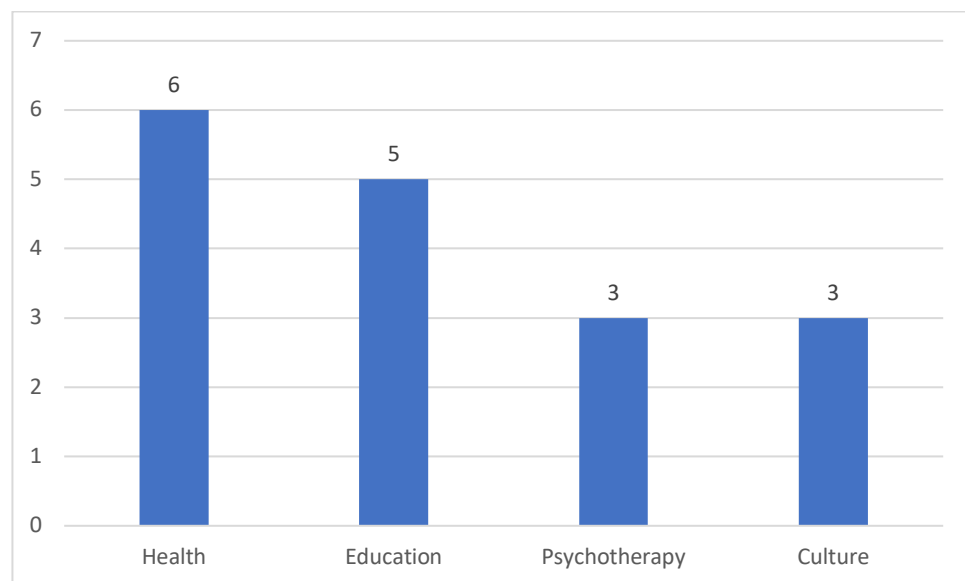


Figure 2. Number of articles by field of study

Figure 2 illustrates the use of a genogram in various scientific studies, tailoring it to the desired benefits and goals. There are four fields of study found in the publication of articles in 2018–2024: health with a total of six studies; psychotherapy with a total of five studies; education with a total of three studies; and culture with three studies.

Genogram: a Philosophical Foundations

The genogram is rooted in family systems theory, which views the family as a system of interacting parts. The systems approach sees the family not as a collection of individuals but as an interconnected unit, where changes in one part of the system will affect others. In this context, the genogram serves as a tool to map the relationships and dynamics within the family that can affect the psychological development of the individual. According to Bowen (1978), the concept of "differentiation of self" or separation of self is one important aspect in understanding family relationships. The use of genograms in counselling helps clients see the extent to which they are connected to their family patterns and how this affects their current behaviours and relationships. Bowen also emphasises that the family is the centre of the individual's care unit (Dallos & Dreamer, 2015).

Bowen's point of view is heavily influenced by Freud's psychoanalytic approach, which involves the past, especially situations that occurred in childhood that affect individuals in their current condition. This view reinforces in family therapy that the conditions that occur in individuals cannot be separated from the conditions that surround them, especially the family. Freud's thinking is heavily influenced by the thinking of the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, who adheres to the pessimism school. He considered that "... the scope of human vision covers the whole of his life and extends far into the past and the future" (Schopenhauer & Saunder, 2005, pp. 11). This statement is closely related to the future of humans, which can be predicted through the past conditions they experienced. Forecasting the future for humans can be a long-awaited hope because even though they are not yet in that time, it can make humans anticipate various possibilities that occur after they see and review experiences that have appeared in the past.

Genogram: In a Health Studies

The field of health studies has the largest number of articles discussing genograms in counselling, although some do not explicitly mention the title of the genogram, but the content leads to the use of genograms in counselling. The six articles are as follows:

- a. Maione et al. (2018) used a genogram in genetic counselling to summarise the genetics of CHH/KS and discuss the challenges of oligogenic transmission, as well as its role in incomplete penetration and variable expressivity. Congenital hypogonadotropic hypogonadism (CHH) and Kallmann syndrome (KS) are rare diseases that can prevent normal pubertal development and cause infertility in both men and women. Patients' offspring can inherit CHH/KS, which are genetic diseases. CHH and KS are phenotypically and genetically heterogeneous diseases in which the risk of transmission depends largely on the responsible gene.
- b. A genogram was one of the tools that Dias et al. (2019) used to figure out how diseases are passed down in families, especially in women who have the human T-lymphotropic virus (HTLV).
- c. Canessa, Glasinovic, and Nuñez (2021) used a genogram as one of the tools used in primary health care (PHC) and outpatient treatment. A patient-centered approach can be used to determine the specific needs of patients and their families, the resources they have, and to increase participation in decision-making and better health outcomes.
- d. Putri et al. (2022) utilised a genogram as an early detection of disease risk factors for integrated health post cadres in Pringsewu district. Genograms in the health sector are used as a tool in the form of a schematic map (visual map) of the patient's family tree, which is useful for health service providers to obtain information immediately, especially about the family health history and the patient's family who are at risk of a disease or disorder.
- e. Campacci et al. (2024) used genograms as one of the tools in cancer genetic counselling (CGC) and genetic testing (GT) interviews. The study examined the effects of CGC and GT on women with cancer who are at risk of developing hereditary breast and ovarian cancer (HBOC) predisposition syndrome. Genogram analysis revealed the impact of CGC and GT processes on families at risk of hereditary cancer.

- f. Garcia et al. (2022) used a genogram to identify Allport Syndrome (AS), which is a hereditary kidney disease. The onset of AS disease is characterised by progressive loss of kidney function and is often accompanied by sensorineural hearing loss and eye abnormalities. The various symptoms and their severity are closely related to the mode of inheritance, type of mutation, and gender of the patient. In cases of twins with Allport syndrome, the genotype-phenotype manifestations show great intrafamilial heterogeneity, although only a few reports have been published.

Genogram: In a Psychotherapy

Dane et al. (2024) conducted an SLR study by collecting nine research articles in the context of genetic counselling that met the study's inclusion criteria. Utilising psychotherapy approaches could enhance counsellors' ability to shape sessions, increase insight, and optimise efficacy; flexibility moving between models could maximise the impact. This review shows that there isn't a lot of research on how well these types of psychotherapy work in genetic counselling. More outcome-based research is needed to find out how well narrative therapy or family therapy work in genetic counselling.

Turns et al. (2019) explained that socially constructed genograms allow clients to include individuals who are emotionally close to them, which include biological relatives as well as others. While identifying important close family relationships can be difficult for some, those with autism spectrum disorder may have even greater difficulty defining and describing relationships that are meaningful to them. By integrating play and socially constructed genograms, individuals who often experience developmental delays can discuss topics such as close relationships and boundaries and how to improve specific relationships in greater detail. This paper presents one such intervention, the socially constructed genogram.

Genogram: In Education

Storlie et al. (2018) in their study involved sixteen students who were exploring their majors by participating in in-depth interviews to explore their family career genograms. Through the use of the constant comparison method, five main themes emerged from the qualitative interviews. We provide important insight that informs family counselling and family-focused career practices for students with undecided majors.

Shefer (2018), in his research, describes the concept of 'narrative' in Michael White's philosophy and therapy techniques and its application in narrative career therapy. The narrative career therapy model developed by the researcher is meant to help clients in their career considerations throughout the life cycle. Various narrative approaches use metaphors to describe the constructions that regulate individuals' identities and reconstruct them during the counselling process by adding more positive and optimistic alternative meanings.

Barrow et al. (2019) conducted a study on professional school counsellors, who play a critical role in addressing a variety of population needs. This article suggests best practices for utilising genograms in the digital age to identify friendships and address varying levels of crisis experiences in school-age children. The use of genograms in a school counselling setting can be an easily adopted approach and technique for use with a vast range of students that can be applied in a variety of settings.

Lewis & Domene (2021). This article discusses research on life-design interventions in career counselling, known as "life design." This new paradigm has resulted in many new interventions in the field of career counselling. We conducted this study to provide an overview of the empirical evidence supporting the effectiveness of these interventions. A total of 12 articles were found that evaluated the effectiveness of eight types of interventions. The interventions included Individual and Group Career Construction Interviews, My Career Story, and other group-based interventions such as the Career Construction Genogram, online interventions, and classroom interventions for elementary school children. Assessment of "career adaptability" was the most frequently evaluated outcome, and the majority of participants were from Italy, with no studies involving North American participants. The research designs used were generally experimental or quasi-experimental, although some articles used case studies. The authors recommend that future research combine case studies with experimental

designs and test these findings with a Canadian population. The article also highlights the synergistic potential of a social constructionist approach in the development of new interventions in counselling and psychotherapy.

Sookwah et al. (2023) sought to identify how a sample of engineering students described family patterns that influenced their engineering success. The construction of a career genogram and semi-structured interviews reflected intergenerational family patterns that contributed to the success of senior engineering students. Observing family members with engineering experience, involvement in STEM-related pre-college activities, and family attitudes about career values were integral to engineering selection and success. The genogram reflected the use of family systems communication to cope with stressors in pursuing a career. The findings have the potential to inform engineering undergraduate recruitment and retention planning efforts, improve academic career services, and provide counselling.

Genogram: In a Cultural Studies

Falasca. & Falasca (2023) used genograms as an effort to help students explore themselves and cultural issues through the implementation of family counselling and therapy using telesupervision during the COVID-19 PANDEMIC. Michiel, and Derksen (2022) introduce the Seven Generation Concentric Circular Genogram, which incorporates culturally relevant concepts for use with Aboriginal clients. The Seven Generation Concentric Circular Genogram is based on the sacred circle, concentricity to show connection, and seven generations that are important to the culture. This novelty in the genogram is useful in helping Aboriginal clients explore historical family stories in the context of intergenerational trauma.

Robinson (2022) explains the ethical profile that provides an overview of how a person makes the right decisions. This profile is very important for rehabilitation counsellors in the decision-making process in professional practice. Reviewing the background, including family history, as well as their decision-making style, is essential for the development of a counsellor's professional ethics. This article examines the history of ethics. In addition, this article also discusses how ethics can help in providing services and practices that are just and socially equal. By reviewing ethical autobiographies and personal decision-making styles, as well as understanding the genogram, one can understand their influence on the overall development of ethics.

CONCLUSION

Genograms are an effective tool in mapping and understanding family systems, serving as a means to reflect on intergenerational relationships and explain the dynamics that affect individuals. Developed by Monica McGoldrick, genograms are based on family systems theory, which views families as interconnected units. Using a genogram, individuals can gain in-depth information about their family heritage, including the experiences and events that shape their identity.

Through this approach, individuals become more aware of the patterns that influence their behaviour and life choices so they can take anticipatory steps to face future challenges. Genograms also have vast applications in various fields, such as health, psychotherapy, education, and culture, and they serve as a tool that can help counsellors identify clients' strengths and resources. Thus, the knowledge and understanding that result from the use of genograms can be very instrumental in the counselling process, allowing individuals not only to understand themselves but also to change their life narratives to be more positive.

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