Conceptualising Belonging in Psychiatric Spiritual Care: A Scoping Review

Abstract

Belonging is widely recognised as a fundamental human need and an increasingly recognised concern in mental health care. Within psychiatric contexts, and particularly in practices such as spiritual care, experiences of belonging and non-belonging are often at stake. Yet the concept itself remains conceptually diffuse.

This paper presents findings from a scoping review examining how belonging is conceptualised in spiritual care and related mental health literature. The analysis shows that belonging is approached from multiple conceptual and disciplinary perspectives, including relational, existential, social, and institutional viewpoints. Across studies, belonging is understood in different ways: as a lived experience, a fundamental need, a relational process, or a normative ideal. Empirically, it is often explored indirectly through related constructs such as connectedness, inclusion, or community, while explicit conceptualisation and measurement are often limited.

These findings raise philosophical questions about the nature and status of belonging in psychiatric contexts: is it best understood as an individual experience, a relational process, or a fundamentally existential condition?

By clarifying how belonging is currently understood and studied, this paper contributes to bridging conceptual analysis and empirical practice and offers a foundation for more precise and reflexive research in psychiatric care.