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## **EXISTENTIAL CONSTRUCTS IN THE MODEL OF MENTAL HEALTH OF OLDER ADULTS**

Contemporary demographic processes, particularly population aging and increasing life expectancy, have intensified scholarly interest in the preservation of mental health in later adulthood. This shift is not merely quantitative but qualitative: longer lives inevitably bring more complex trajectories of loss, transition, and redefinition. At the same time, ongoing social transformations, instability, and prolonged exposure to stress-inducing factors foreground the question of internal psychological resources that enable individual adaptation. In this context, traditional approaches to mental health – primarily focused on biomedical and social determinants – appear increasingly insufficient, requiring supplementation through an analysis of the existential dimension of personality functioning.

The existential perspective makes it possible to conceptualize mental health not merely as the absence of disorder, but as an integrative state encompassing the meaningful coherence of life, the clarity of self-concept, and the capacity to endure and interpret uncertainty. In a sense, mental health here appears less as a fixed condition and more as a delicate architecture – one that must continually reconcile experience, identity, and meaning across time. Particularly in later adulthood, where the future narrows and the past expands, this architecture becomes more visible, and at the same time more vulnerable.

Within this framework, particular attention is given to such constructs as meaning in life, identity integration, and sense of coherence. These constructs do not function in isolation; rather, they form a layered system through which individuals organize, interpret, and sustain their psychological reality.

Meaning in life is defined as a subjective experience of significance, coherence, and direction in one's existence [3]. It performs a crucial function of organizing experience, allowing life events to be interpreted within a unified framework rather than as fragmented or accidental occurrences. In later adulthood, when processes of life review and existential reflection become especially salient, meaning in life serves as a central mechanism for integrating biographical experience and accepting one's life narrative – not necessarily as perfect, but as internally justified. Empirical studies indicate that higher levels of perceived meaning are associated with greater psychological well-being, increased resilience, and lower levels of depressive symptoms among older adults [5].

Identity integration refers to the degree of coherence and unity within the self-concept formed across the lifespan. It implies the individual's ability to synthesize diverse, and sometimes contradictory, aspects of experience into a stable and continuous sense of self. In later life, this process becomes particularly significant due to the necessity of re-evaluating one's life course, coping with the loss of social roles, and adapting to changing life conditions. Identity here is not simply preserved – it is reworked. Self-concept clarity, as an indicator of identity integration, has been shown to correlate with psychological stability, emotional regulation, and reduced vulnerability to internal conflict [2; 4].

The sense of coherence, introduced by A. Antonovsky, is understood as a global orientation reflecting the extent to which individuals perceive the world as comprehensible, manageable, and meaningful [1]. This construct plays a regulatory role by integrating cognitive appraisals, emotional responses, and behavioral strategies into a coherent adaptive system. In older adulthood, the sense of coherence supports the preservation of inner order and continuity, even when external circumstances become fragmented or unpredictable. It allows individuals not only to endure uncertainty but to situate it within an interpretable structure.

Theoretical analysis suggests that the integration of these constructs within a unified model of mental health is both conceptually and empirically justified. Meaning in life functions as a semantic core that shapes the interpretation of experience; identity integration ensures the structural integrity of the self; and the sense of coherence regulates the individual's interaction with the world. Thus, these constructs correspond to distinct yet interrelated levels of functioning: semantic, structural, and adaptive. Their interdependence reflects the complexity of psychological life, where meaning, identity, and adaptation are not separate processes but mutually constitutive dimensions.

Their combination within a single model allows for overcoming the fragmentation of existing approaches and for conceptualizing mental health

as a systemic phenomenon. In the proposed framework, meaning in life is considered a predictor of psychological well-being and emotional states, while identity integration acts as a mediator of this relationship, translating meaning into internal coherence. The sense of coherence, in turn, is viewed as a resource that may strengthen and stabilize these connections, supporting adaptation under conditions of uncertainty and change.

Such an approach provides a more nuanced understanding of psychological adaptation in later life, as it simultaneously accounts for the internal organization of meaning, the structural properties of personality, and its dynamic interaction with the environment. The integration of existential constructs opens new perspectives for developing comprehensive models of mental health that reflect the multidimensional and processual nature of human functioning.

Therefore, the combination of meaning in life, identity integration, and sense of coherence is theoretically grounded and allows mental health in older adulthood to be understood as an emergent outcome of the interaction between semantic, structural, and adaptive processes. This model offers a foundation for further empirical research and may inform the development of psychological support programs aimed at strengthening the inner resources of the individual – not by eliminating vulnerability, but by deepening the coherence through which life is experienced.

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