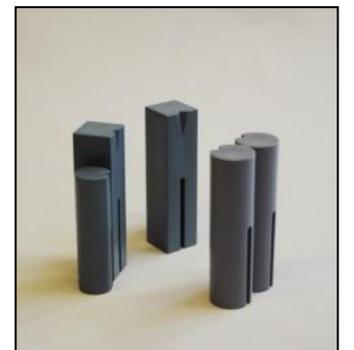


Theory and Empirical Research on Systemic Constellation Work

**Prof. Dr. Christina Hunger-Schoppe,
M.Sc., Dipl.-Psych.**

EFTA RESEARCH CAFÉ: THEORY AND EMPIRICAL
RESEARCH ON SYSTEMIC CONSTELLATION WORK

12 FEBRUARY 2026 ONLINE 18:30-20:00 CET



Heidelberg Efficacy Study on Family Constellations

Randomized controlled trial (RCT)
with 2-week, 4-, 8-, 12-month to 5-year follow-up

Intervention: Family Constellation (FC)

- Spatial arrangements of intra- and interpersonal social conflicts
- Family member are represented by strangers
- Group setting with about 15 to 25 clients
- Rationale: Clarification and modification of inter- and intrapersonal representations of conflicts lead to improvement in sociopsychobiological functioning.



Hunger-Schoppe, C. et al. (2022, 2020, 2015, 2014, 2013). *Journal of Counseling Psychology, Family Process, Zeitschrift für Psychiatrie, Psychologie und Psychotherapie, Familiendynamik*
Konkoly Thege, B. Petroll, C., Hunger-Schoppe, C., Rivas, C., & Scholtens, S. (2021). *Psychotherapeut*

Before I start...

Thanks to our team!



Core team members:

**Annette Bornhäuser, Christina Hunger,
Leoni Link, Jan Weinhold, Jochen
Schweitzer**



Facilitators:

Diana Drexler, Gunthard Weber

Diploma, Master and Bachelor students:

**Lena Krause, Pia Sailer, Julian Geigges, Jennifer Gradt,
Anna Halas, Julia Knieriem, Theresa Koch, Charlotte
Pervilhac, Mareike Schwedhelm, Julia Thom, Elisabeth Wolff**



230 publications on Family Constellations – but none was a randomized controlled trial (RCT)

Evidence (Harbour & Miller 2001)		Number of publications PsychINFO, PSYINDEX, PubMed; ISCA, DGFS, Infosyon
IV	Qualitative study	13
III	Controlled case study	5
IIb	Quasi-experimental study	—
IIa	Experimental study	1
Ib	Randomized controlled trial (RCT)	—
Ia	Meta-analysis or 2 RCTs	—



Weinhold, J. & Reinhard, A. (2014). Forschungsstand zu Systemaufstellungen. In Weinhold, J., Bornhäuser, A., **Hunger-Schoppe, C.**, Schweitzer, J. (Eds.) *Dreierlei Wirksamkeit*. Heidelberg: Carl-Auer.

Family Constellations are effective – but randomized controlled trial (RCT) still are limited in number

FAMILY PROCESS



Original Article

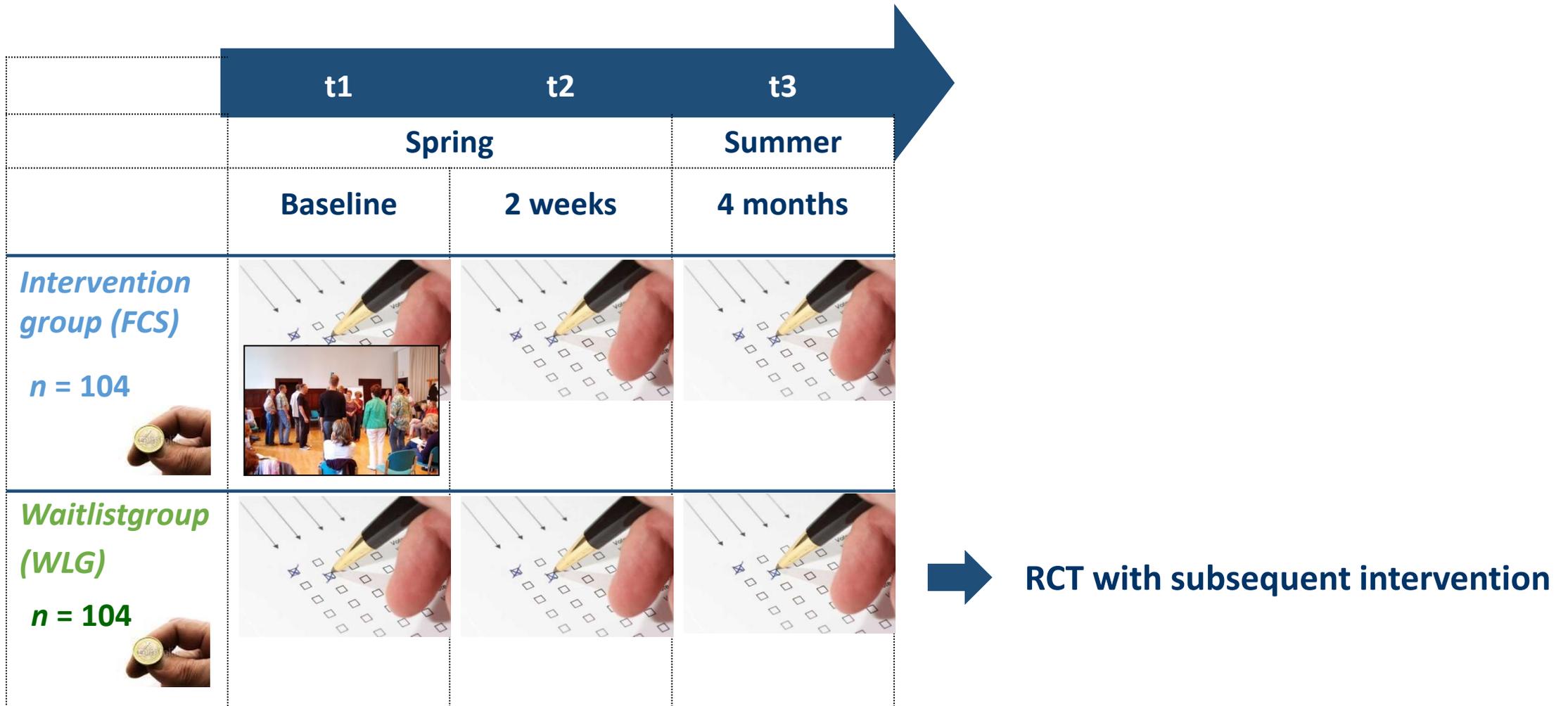
The Effectiveness of Family Constellation Therapy in Improving Mental Health: A Systematic Review

[Barna Konkolý Thege](#) ✉, [Carla Petroll](#), [Carlos Rivas](#), [Salome Scholtens](#)

First published: 02 February 2021 | <https://doi.org/10.1111/famp.12636> | [VIEW METRICS](#)

Abstract. Out of the 12 studies, 9 showed statistically significant improvement post intervention. ... The random-effect meta-analysis - conducted on 5 studies in relation to general psychopathology - indicated a moderate effect (Hedges' g of 0.531, CI: 0.387–0.676)...The data point to FCs as an effective intervention with significant mental health benefits in the general population; however, the quantity and overall quality of the evidence is low.

Design



Inclusion & exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria

- ≥ 18 years
- consent to be randomized to one of the Family Constellation Seminars (FCS)
- consent to abstain from participation in additional FCS within the next 4 months

Exclusion criteria, at the beginning of the FCS

- critical mental state
- acute suicidal and/or psychotic state
- acute intoxication

Clients

	FCS (n = 104) n (%)	WLG (n = 104) n (%)
Gender, female	51 (80%)	45 (70%)
Education, final exam for university entrance	57 (89%)	50 (78%)
Civil status, with partner	42 (66%)	46 (72%)
Occupation, employed	59 (92%)	55 (86%)
Professional category, social sciences and humanities	41 (64%)	32 (50%)
Nationality, German	63 (98%)	61 (95%)
Systemic constellations, previous experiences	51 (80%)	54 (84%)
	<i>M (SD) [range]</i>	<i>M (SD) [range]</i>
Age	47 (9) [24-64]	48 (10) [20-73]



Well-balanced groups

Outcome Questionnaire (OQ-45) (Lambert et al., 1996)

Core concept

- Mental well-being

Main areas

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance abuse

45 items

- High psychometrical soundness (i.e., internal consistency, validity)

Examples,
items are grouped
within the questionnaire

We are interested in how you have been feeling over the past week (*including today*).

	never <u>never</u>	some- times <u>some- times</u>		often <u>often</u>	almost always <u>almost always</u>
1. I get along well with others.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. I feel no interest in things.	Depression				
8. I have thoughts of ending my life.					
11. When I've had too much to drink, I have to drink again to get back on my feet.	Substance abuse				
13. I am a happy person.					
17. I have an unfulfilled sexuality.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
18. I <u>feel lonely</u> .	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
23. I <u>feel anjety</u> .	Anxiety				
29. My <u>heart is racing</u> .					
33. I worry much about the future.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
...	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

Experience in Social Systems Questionnaire (EXIS) (Hunger-Schoppe et al., 2017)

Core concepts

- Family functioning

Main areas

- Accord
- Belonging
- Autonomy
- Confidence

12 items

- High psychometrical soundness (i.e., internal consistency, validity)

Examples,
items are grouped
within the questionnaire

Please indicate of whom you were thinking while evaluating the above statements (multiple answers are possible)

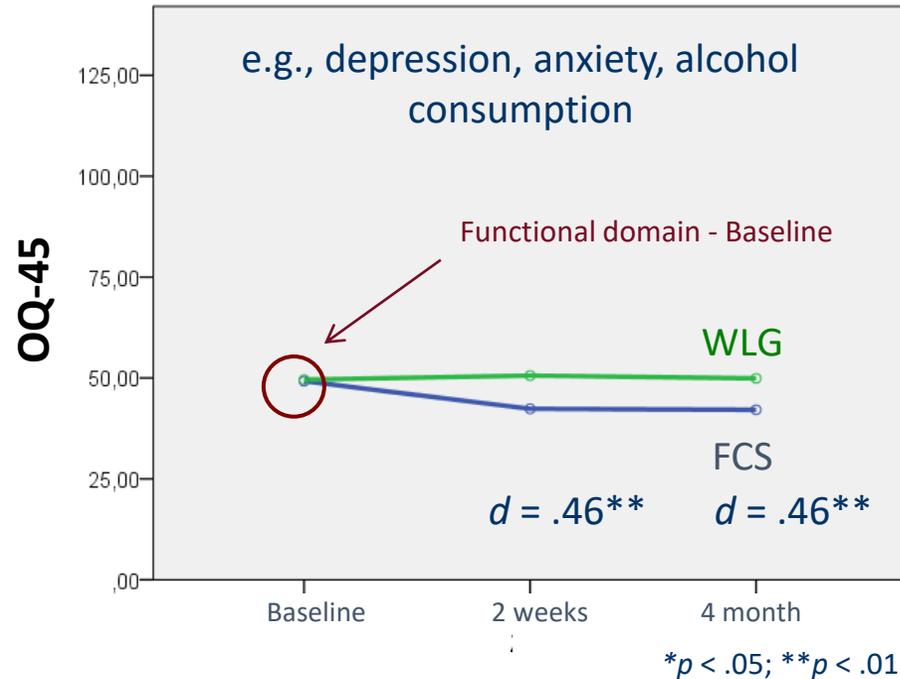
- Parent(s)
 Partner(s)
 Child(ren)
 friend(s)
- Others: _____

	not at all	just a little	moderate	fairly	very much	entirely
Concerning my important <i>personal relationships</i> , in the course of the <u>last two weeks</u> I experienced...						
01 ...that I felt satisfied.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
02 ...that I felt at one with how things are.	Accord					
03 ...that I felt in harmony with others.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
04 ...that I felt a sense of belonging.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
05 ...that I felt respected.	Belonging					
06 ...that I felt welcome.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
07 ...that I could stand up for my needs.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
08 ...that I could decide to what degree I wanted to contribute.	Autonomy					
09 ...that I could maintain boundaries to others adequately.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
10 ...that I felt optimistic about having enough strength to cope with upcoming challenges.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆
11 ...hope that things will continue in a good way.	Confidence					
12 ...confidence that I will be able to cope with things I cannot change.	<input type="checkbox"/> ₁	<input type="checkbox"/> ₂	<input type="checkbox"/> ₃	<input type="checkbox"/> ₄	<input type="checkbox"/> ₅	<input type="checkbox"/> ₆

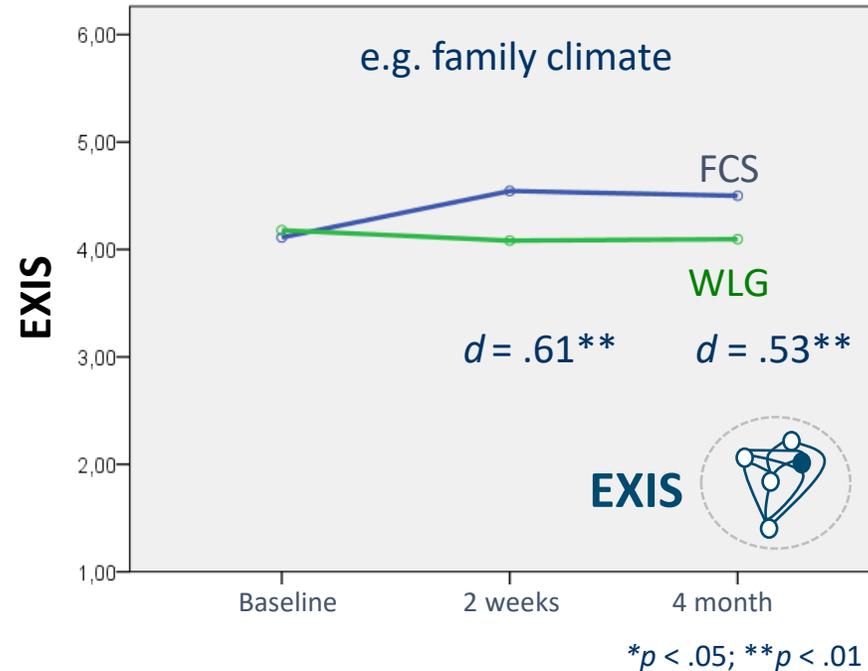
Results: short- to mid-term effects

208 clients: FCS ($n = 104$), Wait-List Group ($n = 104$)

Psychological distress



Family functioning



Results: long-term effects

	8 Months IG n = 104	12 Months IG n = 104	5 Years <u>IG & WLG*IG</u> n = 137
Psychological Distress (EB-45)	Stable d = .41	Stable d = .49	Not stable d = .01
35% of participants show clinically meaningful changes Caveat: 75% of participants were clinically unremarkable at baseline.			
System-related Functioning (EXIS)	Stable d = .61	Stable d = .57	Stable d = .48

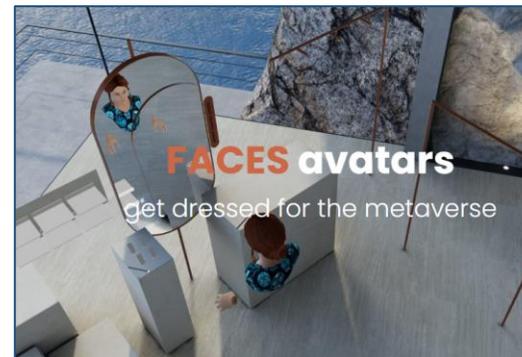
Witten Efficacy Study on Systems Constellations in Virtual Reality (SYSCO-VR)

Randomized controlled trial (RCT)
with 2-week, 4-, 8-, 12-month

Intervention: System Constellation (SC)

- Spatial arrangements of intra- and interpersonal social conflicts
- Important member are represented by strangers
- Group setting with about 15 to 25 clients
- Rationale: Clarification and modification of inter- and intrapersonal representations of conflicts lead to improvement in sociopsychobiological functioning.

Meta Oculus Quest 2
All-In-One VR Headset



Before I start...

Thanks to our team!



Core team members:
Tobias van Bebber, Christina Hunger



Facilitators:
Peter Rost, Katrina Barry, Beate Ehmke, Thomas Gelert

Jette Lindenbaum



Maria Rostig

Diploma, Master and Bachelor students:
**Vera Pappenheimer, Malte Berg, Dania Iskenius,
Jette Lindenbaum, Maria Rostig,
Marian Christmann**

230 publications on Virtual Reality in Therapy - but none included an interactive VR setting

Psychotherapeutic interventions in VR are widely used in research (e.g. psychoeducation, exposure interventions, awareness of stigmatization, social skills training)

➤ **No study on interactive group interventions with real persons, such as Systemic Constellations, have been found in VR in the field of clinical psychology!**



Contents lists available at [ScienceDirect](#)

Clinical Psychology Review

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/clinpsychrev

Review

Virtual reality in the diagnostic and therapy for mental disorders: A systematic review

Annika Wiebe^{a,1}, Kyra Kannen^{a,1}, Benjamin Selaskowski^{a,1}, Aylin Mehren^a, Ann-Kathrin Thöne^b, Lisa Pramme^a, Nike Blumenthal^a, Mengtong Li^a, Laura Asché^a, Stephan Jonas^c, Katharina Bey^a, Marcel Schulze^a, Maria Steffens^a, Max Christian Pensel^a, Matthias Guth^a, Felicia Rohlfen^a, Mogda Ekhlas^a, Helena Lügering^a, Helena Fileccia^a, Julian Pakos^a, Silke Lux^a, Alexandra Philipsen^a, Niclas Braun^{a,*}

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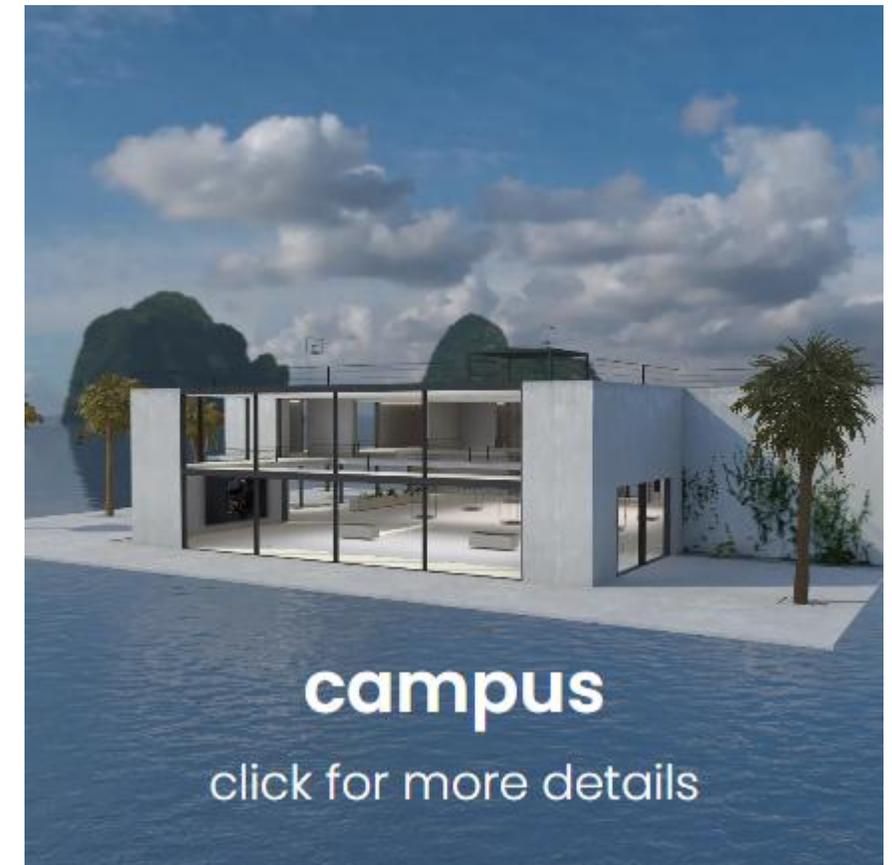
Clients

Witten Efficacy Study in VR - Feasibility
Adaptation of the Heidelberg Effectiveness Study

ClinicalTrials.gov

Registration-ID: NCT05557890

	Intervention group <i>n</i> = 24, <i>n</i> (%)	Wait-list group <i>n</i> = 29, <i>n</i> (%)
Gender, female	87 (84%)	77 (74%)
Education, high school dipl.	92 (89%)	89 (86%)
Marital status, married or in a relationship	69 (66%)	77 (74%)
Occupation, employed	98 (96%)	94 (90%)
Profession, social sciences and humanities	41 (64%)	32 (50%)
Nationality, German	101 (97%)	99 (95%)
System constellations, Previous experience	83 (80%)	82 (79%)
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)
Age	47 (9) [24-64]	48 (10) [20-73]



Acceptability in the SYSCO- VR study

53 clients recruited within ~3 months

100% attendance at assigned VR group sessions.

→ No dropouts due to VR discomfort (e.g., cybersickness) or emotional overload.

Clients reported low levels of cybersickness (theoretical range: 1-7)

- Nausea (M = 1.5; *very mild*), Vestibular strain (M = 1.9; *very mild*), Oculomotor strain (M = 2.2; *mild*)

Clients reported high levels of presence (theoretical range: 1-7)

- Physical (M = 5.5), Social (M = 5.0), Self (M = 5.5)

- The SCs in VR successfully created an interesting, physically and psychologically safe environment.
- They created a meaningful *sense of being there (presence)*, supporting emotional and cognitive involvement.

Voices from the clients



- **Presence in VR**

"That was crazy. I felt it very strongly. I was exhausted after the weekend."

"If I had to rate it on a scale of 0 to 10, then it would be a solid 10."

"Yes, it was very intense."

"I was 100% focused, just like I would have been in person."

- **Usability**

"I liked it: I had no experience with VR before, and the SC work was a good beginning."

"When I put on the glasses and became the avatar, it felt completely real to me. I was me."

"I can imagine that corporal and facial expressions come across much better in person."

"I found it very well-structured, how they used the various elements. It was very well-organized."

"I had limited space in which to move around during these days, and I think that's something that restricted me. For the next time, I definitely need more space in my physical room."

Discussion

Strengths

First RCT on FCs in presence, and first RCT on SCs in VR

- Need for confirmatory RCTs, especially by independent research groups

Challenges

No clinical study considering clients demography

- Need for clinical samples

Mechanisms of change are still unclear

- Restructuring of cognitive problem to solution images
- Emotional exposition and adaptation to solution feelings
- ...or, any third option?

For facilitators and therapists:
What is the right balance between technical expertise and constellation experience?



References

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Instrument: Family Functioning

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Defintion: Constructionist System Representation

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Acknowledgements

Clients

Bachelor & Master students

Prof. Jochen Schweitzer (Heidelberg)

Prof. Martin grosse Holtforth (Bern)

Prof. Jan Weinhold (Berlin)

Prof. Annette Bornhäuser (Mannheim)

Dr. Theresa Koch (Munic)

Dr. Julia Thom (Berlin)

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Dr. Gunthard Weber (Wiesloch)

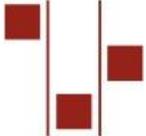
Kathrina Barry (Bad Hersfeld) (VR)

Beate Ehmke (Darmstadt) (VR)

Peter Rost (Cologne) (VR)

Deutsche
Forschungsgemeinschaft

DFG

 **SFB 619**
Ritualdynamik

 **SG** SYSTEMISCHE
GESELLSCHAFT


HEIDELBERG
UNIVERSITY
HOSPITAL


WIFU
STIFTUNG



Thank you for
your attention!

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