

Research project to support “family formation” for people with mental illnesses

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<https://researchmap.jp/kagemasako?lang=en>



Abstract

This research project aims to provide support so that people with mental illnesses can choose to form a family (with loved ones) and so that all family members can live their own lives. Multiple surveys were conducted to understand the needs of people with mental illnesses and their families, as well as the difficulties and support methods by professionals. Based on these knowledge, three programs were developed: “YURAIKU-PRO” (childcare support), a training program to support raising children with mental disabilities; “AIRIKI” (romantic and marriage support), a peer learning program to hone the ability to love; and “RIKASEKU SAPOPRO” (sexuality support), a sexuality support program aimed at the recovery of people with mental illnesses.

Background & Results

Mental illness is a common illness that affects one in five people in their lifetime. Because it frequently occurs during adolescence, it can affect life plans, such as forming a family. While traditional family support research has focused on relationships with their parents, this project aims to support people in forming a family in a more positive way. As care shifts from hospitalization to community-based living, it is expected that more people will find loved ones, get married, have children, and hope to live with their family members. In the future, we hope to expand this into social implementation in areas such as marriage support by professionals, corporate spouse support, and perinatal mental health measures in government and medical settings.

Significance of the research and Future perspective

Family is important to everyone, regardless of whether they have a mental illness or not. However, mental illness or mental disorder often creates barriers to forming a family, including the choices of romance, marriage, and child-rearing. This project aims to reduce these barriers, enabling people with mental illness to choose to form a family and supporting the happiness of all family members. Because child-rearing can be challenging when affected by illness or disorder, it is important for professionals to provide appropriate support. Proper support for the entire family can help ensure a stable life for not only the individual but also their spouse and children. A randomized controlled trial of the child-rearing support program “YURAIKU-PRO” conducted on 176 public health nurses nationwide found a statistically significant effect of support on feelings of difficulty and possibility of coping. Because mental illness commonly occurs during adolescence, opportunities to gain romantic experience are often missed. Furthermore, people often lack confidence in their communication and interpersonal skills. In a pre- and post-intervention study, the love and marriage support program “AIRIKI” demonstrated statistically significant improvements in self-esteem, hope, and recovery in 42 participants with mental disorders. In recent years, sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) have received global attention, and it is now widely recognized that everyone has the right to make decisions about their own bodies and to receive related services. However, sexuality support has received little attention in the mental health

field. In fact, there are challenges related to mental illness, such as exploitation through romantic feelings, sexual dysfunction, and the use of psychotropic medications during pregnancy and breastfeeding. Our research has revealed that many people give up on having children due to the impact of mental illness, and that they have no one to turn to for advice. Because sexuality is a taboo topic, we believe that our first priority is to ensure that professionals are able to respond when consultations or issues arise, and so we developed a training program for such professionals. The program, “RIKASEKU SAPOPRO,” is currently undergoing a randomized controlled trial to verify its effectiveness.



Photo 1. A scene where “AIRIKI” is being implemented

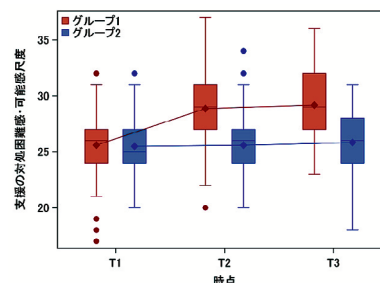


Figure 1. Group 1 (intervention) and Group 2 (control) before and after participating the “YURAIKU-PRO”



Figure 2. A pamphlet to give to pregnant women undergoing treatment for mental illness

Patent

Treatise

URL

Keyword

Kageyama, Masako; Yokoyama, Keiko; Ichihashi, Kayo et al. A peer-led learning program about intimate and romantic relationships for persons with mental disorders (AIRIKI): Co-creation pilot feasibility study. *BMC Psychiatry*. 2023, 23, 767. doi: 10.1186/s12888-023-05254-1

Kageyama, Masako; Koide, Keiko; Saita, Ryotaro et al. A randomized controlled study of an e-learning program (YURAIKU-PRO) for public health nurses to support parents with severe and persistent mental illness and their family members. *BMC Nursing*. 2022, 21, 342. doi: 10.1186/s12912-022-01129-0

mental illness, family, romantic relationship, marriage, child-rearing