

# Difficulties associated with the support for autism spectrum disorders (ASD)

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## Purpose:

The objective of this study was to identify the difficulties experienced by staff members providing autism spectrum support services in psychiatry day-hospitals and community institutions for persons with psychiatric disabilities.

In Japan, the number of individuals with mental disorders has increased from an estimated 2.18 million in 1996 to 3.23 million in 2008, with mental disorders listed as one of the 5 major diseases in 2011. Along with the increase in the number of elderly people with dementia and people with depression, people are increasingly becoming aware of developmentally disabled individuals as a high-risk group for depression; therefore, there is a pressing need for new measures.

It has been considered possible to improve the social prognosis of developmentally disabled individuals by involving them in society. If the present study successfully clarifies the problems faced by aid workers in providing support to these individuals, it would be possible to improve the quality of the support provided by them, as well as to consider support according to the severity of the problem in each developmentally disabled individual. The present study will facilitate social adaptation of developmentally disabled individuals and contribute to improving their quality of life.

## Ethical consideration

The present study was conducted after obtaining approval from the ethical review board at the author's university.

## Methods

A self-administered questionnaire survey was conducted of staff members of WAM NET-listed day-hospitals and community institutions for persons with disabilities in Japan. The questionnaire contained items to determine the experiences, difficulties, views, and other related issues to autism spectrum support services.

- 1) Investigation period: November 2014 to June 2016
- 2) Subjects of the survey: Staff belonging to day-hospitals and community institutions for persons with disabilities and having experience in supporting adolescents and adults with developmental disorders not associated with mental retardation
- 3) Investigation method: Self-administered questionnaire by mail
- 4) Survey items: Basic characteristics of the support staff, the support contents, difficult-to-care-for cases, future needs, etc.

## Results

A self-administered mail-based questionnaire survey was conducted with 1561 workers involved in support for adolescents and adults without intellectual disabilities at 1561 psychiatry day-hospitals and institutions for disability aid. The response rate was 17.9%. A total of 244 responses to the questionnaires were collected and the data was analyzed.

The percentage of staff who had participated in specialized training programs was 77.4% of the support to persons with ASD. **Table1.** The difficulties were related to the behavioral characteristics of the care receivers (48.9%) **Fig1**, coordination among care users (25.1%), support development (24.9%), and responses of the family and from the workplace (15.1%) **Fig2**. In addition, 89.4% of the staff predicted that the support for persons with developmental disorders in psychiatry day-hospitals and community institutions would increase in the future. **Fig5.**

In order to improve communication with users, the staff provided with some devices: to emphasize important information (50.5%), to give users concrete instructions (36%), to allow them to visualize their schedule(28.1%), and to utilize memos(19.1%), pictures, and photographs(15.8%). Of the respondents, 98.6% felt the need for support to the staff, and the types of support that many of the respondents wished for were case studies (39.3%) and study meetings to allow them to acquire medical knowledge(31.7%). **Fig4.**

## Conclusion

Currently, staff providing support to subjects with Autistic Spectrum Disorders have access to other persons that can give them support and that they can consult with, and are therefore able to participate positively in training programs, however, they still face some difficulties. For psychiatry day-hospitals and community facilities where increase in the numbers of adolescents and adults having ASD without intellectual disabilities are expected, a better understanding of persons with ASD by the staff providing care and improvements in concrete support skills may be necessary.

	n=141	n=103	
	day-hospitals	community institutions	
	n(%)	n(%)	
Age	15~19y	10(7.1)	0
	20~29y	53(37.6)	12(12)
	30~39y	47(33.3)	32(31)
	40~49y	24(17)	25(24)
	50~	5(3.5)	34(33)
Qualification psychiatric social worker	62(44)	68(47.9)	
Nurse	39(27.7)	2(1.4)	
Years of experience		12.5	
The duty	Full-time	136(96.5)	98(95.1)
	Participation of	Yes	95(67.4)
Existence of	Yes	130(92.2)	89(87.3)

