

学位論文の要旨

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- 学位論文名 Solving Social Problems in Aging Rural Japanese Communities: The Development and Sustainability of the Osekkai Conference as a Social Prescribing During the COVID-19 Pandemic
- 発表雑誌名 International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health
(巻, 初頁～終頁, 年) (18, 1-15, 2021)
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論文内容の要旨

INTRODUCTION

Health is affected by social factors as well. Loneliness and a lack of social capital hinder overall well-being. Because these social problems differ across cultural, economic, and geographic contexts, communities need collaborative discussions that involve citizens, governments, healthcare providers, and social professionals. Social prescribing—using non-medical, culturally grounded interventions—offers a way to address these broader determinants of health and strengthen community sustainability. Osekkai, a traditional practice in Japanese communities, can serve as a form of social prescribing. While aging, multiculturalism, and COVID-19 have reduced its prevalence, Osekkai conferences led by nurses and community members provide opportunities to address local challenges and strengthen social connections, promoting sustainable rural communities and improving human relationships through the revival of traditional practices.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study examines the origins, development, challenges, and continuity of Osekkai conferences to inform practical community development and demonstrate how reviving traditional behaviors can enhance human connections. Semi-structured interviews, each lasting about 60 minutes, were conducted via Zoom from September to December 2020 by the first and second authors. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically by three authors. The interview guide focused on four key questions about the origin, improvement, benefits, and sustainability of the Osekkai conferences. Thematic analysis, consisting of six steps—familiarization with data, coding, theme identification, theme revision, theme definition and naming, and report production—was used to examine the development of Osekkai conferences

and their role in addressing social problems to support sustainable communities. This study was approved by the Rural City Hospital Clinical Ethics Committee (approval code: 20190021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Twelve participants were interviewed, including 4 recipients of Osekkai, 4 supporters, and 4 providers/organizers. Thematic analysis identified 5 main themes and 14 concepts.

1. Driver of the Development of the Osekkai Conference

1.1 Limitation of Governments

Participants noted that government processes are too slow to respond to emerging issues. The COVID-19 pandemic further exposed these limitations, highlighting the need for more flexible and rapid community-based solutions.

1.2 Needs for Relationship among Various Organizations

Rural social problems are multifaceted and cross multiple domains, making it difficult for any single organization to address them. Effective responses require coordinated and comprehensive support across sectors.

2. Trajectory of Continuity

2.1 Construction of an Atmosphere Friendly to Osekkai

As individualism spread in Japan, Osekkai came to be viewed as awkward or intrusive. To address this, the organizers of the Osekkai Conferences encouraged residents to develop their own Osekkai plans and engaged in dialogue with rural residents and local governments to foster a more positive view of *osekkai*.

2.2 Continuous Reflection on Organizing

In the initial stages, participants had not yet fully familiarized themselves with the concept of "Osekkai," and therefore the organizers found it necessary to repeatedly explain its significance at each conference.

2.3 Induction of Osekkai by Organizers

The ongoing facilitation of participants and the identification of motivated individuals were crucial for the introduction and development of Osekkai.

3. *Chain of Osekkai*

3.1 Dispelling the Negative Image of Osekkai

Initially, negative perceptions of Osekkai hindered residents' participation; however, through conferences and the promotion of positive community perceptions, attitudes gradually shifted, leading to engagement in Osekkai activities.

3.2 Social Capital Driving Osekkai

Through the planning and implementation of Osekkai, diverse connections among community members were revealed, and linking these connections may enhance the meaningfulness of the activity.

3.3 Spontaneous Appearance of Osekkai

The initial introduction of Osekkai by the organizers served to motivate community residents. Subsequently, new Osekkai plans emerged without direct intervention or support from the organizers, and concrete activities were carried out with their assistance.

4. Changes in Communities and Participants

4.1 Reconstruction of Social Capital

Through the provision of Osekkai, participants were able to reconstruct new interpersonal relationships based on their previous connections.

4.2 Interaction among Different Generations

During the conference, participants from different generations collaborated in conducting Osekkai, which facilitated the development of new interpersonal connections.

4.3 Advanced Complexity of Communities

Local communities include individuals with diverse characteristics, including those with mental disorders, and while conflicts sometimes arise requiring organizers' mediation, such diversity enables multiple perspectives on issues and makes Osekkai conferences more inclusive for minority groups.

4.4 Outreaching of the Conference

As participant issues grew in number and diversity, Osekkai conferences adopted community-specific approaches, held within each community with both organizers and residents. This approach effectively promoted Osekkai locally.

5. Sustainability of the Conferences

5.1 Collaboration with Public Officials

To ensure the continuity of the Osekkai conferences it is desirable to have both historical precedent and support from central and local governments. Collaboration with local post offices, which are familiar to the community, is expected to facilitate the stable mobilization of participants.

5.2 Diffusion of the Conference to Other Communities

Initially, the conferences were held within a limited area of the city; however, as the organizational structure was developed, they began to be conducted in other regions as well. Expanding the areas of implementation increased interest in the conferences, resulting in a higher number of participants.

CONCLUSION

This study highlighted how Osekkai conferences managed initial challenges and showed their potential to enhance community social capital. The relationships formed contributed to addressing new challenges during the COVID-19 pandemic. Future research should quantitatively assess their impact on social capital and social isolation as a form of social prescribing.