



NPO Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima

Atelier
TARACHINE

Mental Health Care

**Our Testimonials:
Narrative Therapy for the Mothers &
Children in Fukushima**

**Reviving Traditional Asian Approaches to
Mental Health Care**



Atelier TARACHINE

NPO Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima- TARACHINE opened a mental health care facility, "Atelier TARACHINE" in 2018.

Our aim is to help relieving emotional damages of the survivors of the Fukushima's nuclear accident, especially of the mothers and children still living in evacuation.



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1. Background

The huge earthquake, tsunami, and nuclear meltdown in 2011 left deep emotional scars on us, especially parents and children living in Fukushima. Even now, 13 years later, many people are still suffering from anxiety and living with a sense of guilt. In a way, we have had the experiences that are comparable to war zones. It's still continuing to this day.

In order to provide a safe place for mothers and children to tell their stories and be healed, we provide a narrative therapy through various fun activists for both adults and children.

We, care providers who also have had similar painful experiences support them and heal each other through narrative therapy.

This is modeled after the peer counseling conducted by the local mothers after the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear disaster.



2. State of Fukushima's mothers at the time of the disaster

A 6-month pregnant mother with a infant

“ Without no gasoline in the car and no destination to go to, I was fearful and chose to remain at home in Fukushima.

In the chaotic situation, I was stressed out and restless because so many disagreements within the family.

I was really worried about whether my baby would be born healthy without any defect because of radiation.”

Being terrified of the approaching Tsunami

“Immediately after the earthquake, I rushed to the school where my child was. All school children were panicked and crying out for their mothers, I grabbed my child by the hand and fled from the approaching tsunami.

In the chaos, I tore apart a crying friend who was with my child. I still can't talk about this with my kids, fearing they might think me as a horrible person. I still blame myself for this, this is something I still can't face emotionally.”

Our approach *Narrative Therapy*

Mothers who threw away their own breast milk

Many of the mothers with the babies living in Iwaki City which is in 50km from the destroyed nuclear power plants threw away their own breast milk and fed the babies with powder milk.

They thought their bodies might be contaminated by radiation. Through their breast milk, they feared their babies might also get contaminated.

Also feared the tap water could be contaminated, they even wash the milk bottles with bottled water.



3. Mental Issues of the adolescents who were infants at the time of the disaster

The anxiety and distress experienced by the mothers have passed on to their infant children. Some infants were separated from their mothers and some mothers stopped breastfeeding fearing their milk might be contaminated.

The children felt the crisis of their mothers and have grown up trying to behave as “good children”. Growing up this way has exhausted them psychologically, and now, 13 years after the disaster, mind/body disorders have emerged.

The following symptoms are observed.

- Feeling unwell physically that cannot be explained in words
- Poor attendance to schools
- Mental fatigue
- Depression
- Various kinds of ticks



A child who was a baby at the time of the 2011 earthquake turned 13 this year.

4. Testimonials

Magic of Narrative Therapy and Psychosomatic Massage

A mother in her 30's and her 10-year-old daughter visited our center regularly. They have been moving around so many times, the daughter was brought in various places in evacuation. The mother was anxious and insecure who had to cope with living in new temporary locations for years.

When the daughter was 7 years old, she started to touch her mother's breast persistently like a infant would do. The mother was uncomfortable and schooled her and made her stop. Now a few years passed, the daughter is in adolescent wouldn't want to have any physical contact with her mother. The mother felt guilty and blamed herself for scolding the daughter years ago.

One day, we were chatting with the mother as a form of narrative therapy while the daughter was receiving a psychosomatic massage.

The vey next day, the daughter came to hug her for the first time in many years, the mother told us joyfully. We witnessed the effect of the massage releasing mental tensions in the child.



4. Testimonials

Peer Counseling Heals

One of the TARACHINE's staff is also a evacuee from the affected areas. She was pregnant at the time of the nuclear accident. A daughter was born and has been growing up while she had to move her family around a lot.

She says "My life in the last 12 years feels like a dream. I can't grasp what had happened was real." She still is suffering from emotional distress and generally unwell physically.

"I've been working as a staff in the mental health care center for 3 years, and have listened and talked with many women similar to my situation. Sharing our experiences and feelings are very healing, precious to our souls. Thanks for the peer counseling, I can say my heart is also being healed little by little."

Providing A Safe Place to Talk Without Judgement

She was a regular visitor to our center, and was a mother of three children and a husband. We talked many hours over the years, she became more open talking about her difficult feelings. We listened to whatever she had to say without judging.

She says "I came to know more about myself, and clear about what I want. I realized my problems with my kids stemmed from my relationship with my mother. I never had a healthy mother/daughter relationship growing up."

We provide a safe place for our visitors to talk and sort out things themselves.

5. Our Future Challenges *Narrative Therapy*

The chaotic changes in the living environment and fear of invisible radiation exposure at that time of the nuclear disaster left lasting scars in not only the children but also their mothers.

Even though they were still infants, they helped their mothers and coped together to survive in the new environment.

Those children had to grow up fast to survive, instead of growing up normally in a calm and usual developmental phases. As they are becoming adolescents, some of them are beginning to show mental fatigue.

Since we're also affected by the same disaster, it's important for us to relate to them as peers.

"Don't become an expert," as our motto, we try to create friendly atmosphere for the visitors to drop in as if they're visiting a relative's house.

Our Facility

We provide a “safe space” where each child can relax and play freely.

There are two rooms in our facility, the rooms are called "Morning Forest" and "Night Forest" .



Bright & Refreshing
"Morning Forest"



Quiet & Calm like a secret
play base, "Night Forest"

Here, various games and programs are provided free of charge for parents and children.

Mental Health Care Programs

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In our programs for both adults and children, we provide an environment where the visitors can study their minds, explore their hearts and sort out their emotions.

In the children's program, we provide various activities such as HAKONIWA sand play, drawing pictures, clay, handicrafts, pastel art, board games and etc. They can play in a safe space where they can talk freely. A body work is also available for children to relieve the fatigue of the mind through a psychosomatic massage.

To support and energize mothers, we incorporate yoga with narrative therapy, valuing in each person's story.



The Total Number of Visitors in 2023

The total number of visitors to our facility in 2023 will be 232 (87 children and 145 parents). Most of the visitors were children between the ages of 12 and 13 who were born before and right after the nuclear accident in 2011.

In addition to on-site staff, we provide outside support from specialists such as infant psychiatrists and clinical psychologists as needed.

The environment where the users can talk casually and also at the same time, they can receive professional care if needed leads to a sense of security for them.



We won't become experts!"

"We won't become experts!", we tell to ourselves. We try to create a space for the mothers to drop in at our center as if they are visiting a relative's house.

Traditionally, in many Asian cultures, women used to get together and form casual communities. They help each other to heal their emotional wounds just by spending time together talking or working, Without any mental health specialists.

Our care programs are somewhat akin to the traditional Asian way - Women supporting each other in a warm and relaxed community.

We believe this can be applied to other cultures in today's world.

Therapeutic Camping Retreats



Many children in Fukushima have lost the playground where they grew up in close contact with nature due to the environmental contamination caused by the nuclear accident.

Based on what he learned while supporting victims of the Chernobyl nuclear accident, “By spending time in a place free from high radiation exposure for a certain period of time, it prevents our immune system from damaging by radiation, and makes it less likely we will develop serious illness.” We started children’s therapeutic camping retreats in 2012.

Total of 5,026 participants (3,950 children and 1,076 adults) took part in the retreat in Kume Island, Okinawa by December 2023.





We cooperates with 3 organizations and serves as a liaison office for health resort therapy retreats where children in Fukushima can play in nature and spend a relaxing time.

- “Kumi no Sasto” in Kume Island, Okinawa (4 - 5 days stay)
- "Orto dei Soni" in Pietra Ligure, Italy (One month stay)
- “Kumabekeo” in Tadami, Fukushima (2 - 3 days stay)

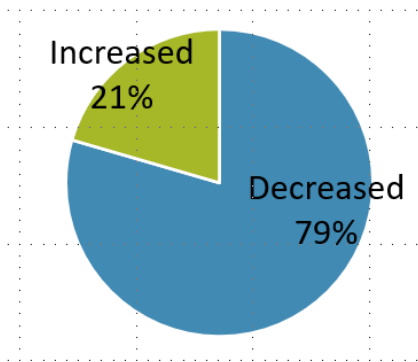
The children in the affected areas can spend the relaxed time in natural settings



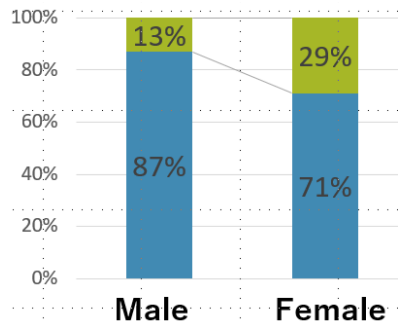
Comparison of the Amount of Cesium in the Urine Before and After Therapeutic Camping Retreat

Internal radiation exposure can be measured by measuring Cesium in the urine. About 80% of the retreat participants had the lower amount of Cesium in the urine after the retreat than before the retreat.

Changes in the Amount of Cesium in the urine after the Retreat



Male/Female Comparison



When comparing male and female, the rate of decrease is slightly higher for the boys.

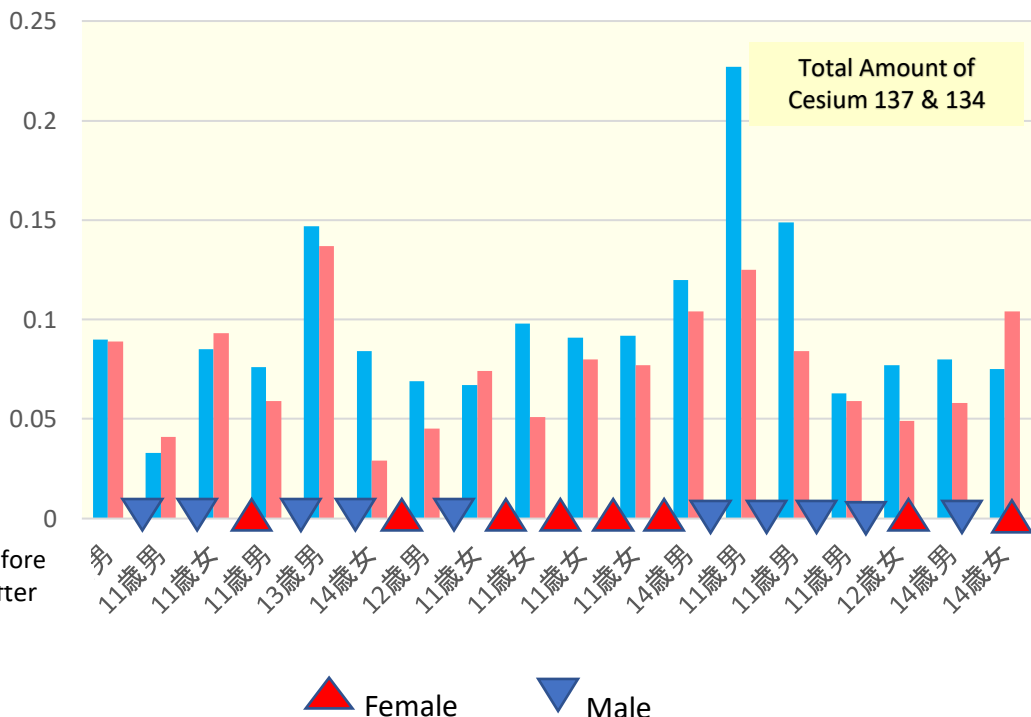
Child/Parents Comparison

The amount of cesium in children is higher than that in their parents, even if they have the same diet and lifestyle.

- Children can be more susceptible to radiation.
- It is also possible that inhalation while outdoor activities during the day and school lunches may affect the higher Cesium level.

The changes in the amount of Cesium in the urine of the 11 to 14 year-old participants before and after the retreat

- Amount of Cesium **before** the retreat
- Amount of Cesium **after** the retreat



Pediatric / Internal Medicine Clinic



Our clinic offers thyroid examinations, whole-body radiation measurements using a whole body counter machine, ionization examinations, and regular health check-up.

The examination is **free of charge** for the children who were 18 years old or younger on the day of the Great East Japan Earthquake. The fee is covered by the donation to NPO TARACHINE.

We try to create space where our patients can freely talk about their health concerns while living in an affected area. We welcome anyone from babies to the elderly.



Health checkup Booklet for Record-Keeping



We issue “**Health checkups booklet**” for children who visit our clinic for comprehensive health checkups. In addition to regular health checkup items, important health information will be recorded in the booklet, such as the results of thyroid ultrasound, Cesium levels in the urine, internal exposure dose measured by the whole body counter. It'll make easier to grasp their health history in future.

Also, it will help them who were exposed to the initial high level radiation and are growing up with daily low-dose exposures to take control of their own health.

When they become parents themselves, if they worry that their children may be affected by the radiation exposure, we hope this booklet will give them peace of mind. It's a gift filled with our wishes for them to continue to protect their health for generations to come.

Main recoded items in the booklet

- Thyroid echo exam result
- Cesium levels in the urine
- Whole Body Counter result
- Hearing test result
- Blood test result
- Electrocardiogram

年 月 日		項目						
内科検査		甲状腺超音波(エコー)検査	A-1	A2-a	A2-b	A2-c	B	C
		尿中セシウム測定	送付記録簿		検出下部値			
検	セシウム 134	(Bq/kg)						(Bq/kg)
検	セシウム 137	(Bq/kg)						(Bq/kg)
		ホールボディカウンター/全身放射能測定						
検	セシウム 134	(Bq/全身)						(Bq/全身)
検	セシウム 137	(Bq/全身)						(Bq/全身)
	身長	cm /						kg
	視力	右	()	左	()			
	聴力	右		左				
	立正							mm/Hz
	心電図検査							
血液検査		項目	結果	単位	基準値			
	赤血球数			×10,000/μL	男 438-577 / 女 376-516			
	血色素量 (Hb)			g/dL	男 13.6-18.3 / 女 11.2-15.2			
	ヘマトクリット			%	男 40.4-51.9 / 女 34.3-45.2			
	白血球数			×10,000/μL	14.0 ~ 37.9			
	白血球数			/μL	3500 ~ 9700			
	FT4(甲状腺ホルモン)			ng/dL	0.90 ~ 1.70			
	TSH(甲状腺刺激ホルモン)			μIU/mL	0.500 ~ 5.000			
	総ビリルビン			mg/dL	0.3-1.2			
	AST(GOT)			U/L	10 ~ 40			
	ALT(GPT)			U/L	5 ~ 45			
	ALP			U/L	104 ~ 338			



**Our operations are entirely supported by
donations.**

We are grateful for your gift.

Please visit our Website to donate via PayPal or Bank
Transfer: <https://tarachineiwaki.org/english>



NPO Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima - TARACHINE

Address: 3F Kaneman Bidg., 11-3 Hanabatake-cho,
Onahama, Iwaki, Fukushima, Japan 971-8162

Email: atorie@tarachineiwaki.org

Website: <https://tarachineiwaki.org/english>