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Building Childcare and Work Support for Women Based on Scientific Evidence from the Perspective of Families in East Asia

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1. Background and Significance of this Research

Japan, China, and Korea share many common features geographically, historically, and culturally in the East Asian cultural sphere. For instance, while women in all three countries are recently expected to participate in society, the idea of the dutiful wife and devoted mother still persists in these countries. This imposes a social issue on mothers who have to balance their postpartum return to their workplaces with their childcaring responsibilities. What kind of resources for childcare do women in Japan, China, and South Korea use to address this issue under their respective cultures? How does this affect the well-being of working mothers and the development of healthy bodies and minds for their children? In order to compare the similarities and differences of the three countries from an international perspective and to provide mutually useful information and effective solutions, we initiated collaborative research involving researchers and experts from each country, with the goal of addressing common social issues affecting all three nations.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic not only directly affected our lives, but also had the effect of amplifying the past problems. For example, throughout the world, including these three countries under these severe conditions, the risks of domestic violence (DV) against women and child abuse from their spouses increased internationally as a result of various factors such as spending a longer time with their families, stress caused by the quarantine, the closing of schools, working from home, and fears about infection. Also, there was the problem that mothers could not play active roles in society, because the stay-home activities of their husbands and children increased the mothers' workloads more than before. This project carried out consecutive surveys on informants once every three months under the above backdrop, taking into account sociocultural factors in each country. This enables us to provide the required support to them based on evidence and to propose a new lifestyle in the post-COVID society.

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2. Objectives

The research was conducted to elucidate the mechanisms by which different child-rearing support and child-rearing styles affect parent-child relationships and well-being in Asian countries, intertwined with social, family, and individual factors. After clarifying the advantages and disadvantages of each child-rearing support style and cultural differences, we propose effective child-rearing support and support measures for postpartum women, aiming to contribute to the balance of women's work and child-rearing and to the healthy growth of their children.

3. Activities

(1) Japan

With the aim of exploring the diversity of childcare support and the well-being of mothers and children, an interview survey was conducted with 18 women who were returning to work while raising infants and toddlers. Narratives were obtained regarding their experiences of utilizing social childcare support, aspects of support from family members, advantages and disadvantages of receiving support, and current life satisfaction and career prospects. Child-rearing support was categorized into (1) public support, (2) private support, and (3) commercial support, specifically: (1) Ibaraki City child-rearing support centers, family support centers, city daycare, temporary childcare for sick children, nursery schools, kindergartens, baby massage, and a parenting support center, (2) support from husbands, birth/husband's families, sisters, mother's friends, acquaintances, and people they meet through their children, and (3) support from NPOs, NPO-run daycare centers, maternity yoga, baby/toddler sitters, kids' spaces, and company-led daycare centers. Focusing on the "family home" support provided by "returning home," which is characteristic of Japan, we captured what kind of support mothers receive (or do not receive) from their own or their husband's family for whatever reasons and examined the physical distance between their current house and their family home, their psychosocial relationships, and the diversity of their child-rearing policies. Thus, we captured aspects of multiple loose networks of different natures that are made more accessible to each individual mother through her own practices. The trigger for utilization was public information such as the Internet, city publicity, and announcements when the Mother-Child Handbook was distributed, as well as information from personal networks such as professionals, friends of the mothers, and people they met by chance. The latter were established through chance conversations at public child-rearing squares and through interactions with professionals under the city's system, while the former was more private, involving friends and other networks.

Relatedly, we conducted an exploration into the connections among mothers facilitated by their children, highlighting the bonds formed through chance encounters at childcare support facilities such as nurseries. The depth and continuity of these connections varied in degree, and we found a variety of ways in which they exchanged information on child-rearing, including private consultations and informal information (e.g., backdoor procedures for admission to daycare centers). The results suggest that it is important to form relationships among mothers in the early stages of child-rearing, which are different from those of "*Mamatomo* (mom friends)."

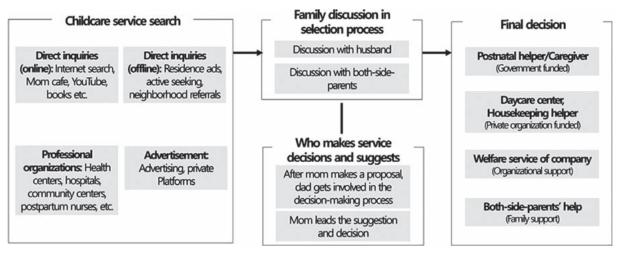
In addition, we examined the experiences of six women who underwent advanced maternal-age childbirth and parenting, focusing on the meaning attributed to late childbirth and the actual state of child-rearing thereafter. Negative aspects such as anxiety and physical discomfort, especially during

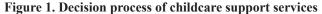
pregnancy and the early postpartum period, were revealed, as well as positive aspects such as having built a career at work and being able to raise children with mental comfort because of their advanced age. The concept of advanced maternal age, frequently highlighted for its potential risks viewed from a medical standpoint, was examined through the lens of the mothers' personal life experiences, revealing a positive reinterpretation. In addition, we captured the aspects of parenting situations that could be termed as childcare conflicts and the invisible struggles of mothers, recognizing the compatibility with the concept of "micro-conflict." Through this, we gained a perspective to analyze the relationship with social and cultural environments, such as institutional barriers, and to explore the concept further.

We summarized these findings and presented them at a comprehensive symposium, reporting on informational support derived from connections through children, physical support after advanced maternal-age childbirth, and support aimed at resolving conflicts related to the utilization of childcare support. Several of these are in the process of being submitted, but they require reconsideration and will be resubmitted in the future. At another symposium we suggested the need to focus on the impact of differences in family views and religion (such as the Confucian spirit characteristic of China) from the perspective of an international comparison between China, Japan, and Korea. We recognize that conducting international comparative research using both qualitative and quantitative methods is challenging and comes with its own set of issues. However, by analyzing the "parenting images" formed from the daily experiences of mothers raising children, we can shed light on the social and cultural aspects that are often unconscious or invisible. This approach holds the potential to reveal these aspects and link them to international comparisons.

(2) Korea

The Korean team initiated qualitative research on the psychological experiences of postnatal working mothers regarding childcare service use by interviewing 10 working mothers starting in mid-October 2021. On October 16, the team participated in a project symposium hosted by the Taiwan Psychological Association, presenting a review titled "Review of Emotional Developmental and Social Psychological Research on Social Supports and Psychological Experiences for Postnatal Working Mothers in Korea." This review encompassed developmental social psychology research on social supports and psychological experiences among working mothers in Korea. Joonha Park provided an update on the Korean team's progress at a project report meeting hosted by the Institute of Human Sciences, Ritsumeikan University, on February 25, 2023. Subsequently, Eunji Kim presented the results of the Korean team's qualitative research analysis at a symposium of the Japanese Society for Developmental Psychology on March 3. Following these presentations, the team has been developing a questionnaire for a quantitative study, organizing qualitative research findings, and preparing to submit a paper for publication. Figures illustrating experiences and life satisfaction in deciding on and utilizing childcare support services are provided below. Currently, the paper titled "The Process of Utilizing Childcare Support Services for Working Mothers in Korea" is under review at the Korean Psychological Journal of Culture and Social Issues.





(Source: Kim, E., Han, J., Do, S., Choi, E., and Park, J. (in press). The Process of Utilizing Childcare Support Services for Working Mothers with Children under Age 2 in South Korea. *Korean Journal of Culture and Social Issues*, 30(3).)

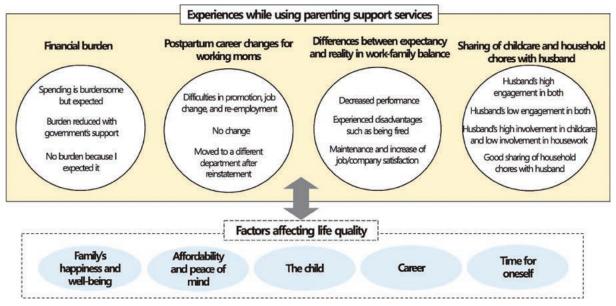


Figure 2. Postnatal working mothers' experiences and life satisfaction while using childcare support services (**Source**: Kim, E., Han, J., Do, S., Choi, E., and Park, J. (in press). The Process of Utilizing Childcare Support Services for Working Mothers with Children under Age 2 in South Korea. *Korean Journal of Culture and Social Issues*, 30(3).)

The team has recently welcomed two experts in child psychology, Dr. Yeji Hong and Dr. Eujung Park, along with their students. They are planning observational and implementation studies with families of infants aged up to 2 years old. These studies are scheduled to be conducted throughout the summer and fall of 2024, following the collection of survey data.

(3) China

In order to clarify the actual situation of working women's return to work after childbirth and their early childcare support and nurturing style in Chinese society and culture, we conducted a semistructured interview survey of 27 working women with children aged up to 2years in order to understand how different childcare support and nurturing styles influence parent-child well-being and child development in relation to social, family, and individual factors. Of the 27, 11 were in Shanghai, 8 in Suzhou, and 8 in Chengdu. We obtained interesting narratives about the childcare support being used, the mothers' work/childcare balance, their requests for childcare support, and their development and quality of life as mothers.

First, in terms of childcare support, the Shanghai mothers used postnatal care centers and parttime housekeepers, and in addition to their parents' help, they often used live-in housekeepers. Mothers in Suzhou were more likely to use live-in housekeepers and assistance from their own mothers at the end of the pregnancy. The analysis using the Trajectory Equifinality Model (TEM) yielded the following results: (1) In terms of the current status of women's employment in China, many women face many difficulties in balancing childcare and work, and employment policies need to be more flexible and secure. (2) To promote gender equality in childcare and work, men should be encouraged to share childcare by using parental leave and childcare benefits. This would allow women to maintain their own time outside of childcare and work and ensure that they have time to enjoy the things they want to do. (3) We should focus on the mental health of postpartum women and affirm their efforts before and after childbirth and support their wish to maintain contact with society, instead of thinking that parenting is the sole responsibility of women. (4) When women return to the workplace, their work skills and efficiency are expected to have declined rapidly due to the months of parental leave and child-rearing. In addition, there is a gap between their imagined return to work and the reality of the situation, and these women will need to take time and energy to adjust to work again. In summary, we suggest that national policies should focus on improving family functioning from external forces, such as employment, income maintenance, gender equality in childcare, and childcare support, to solve the childcare/work dilemma faced by working women.

We also noted regional differences between Shanghai, Suzhou, and Chengdu. Each had different narratives in terms of their desires for childcare support. Mothers in Shanghai said they expect specialists to provide timely and accurate advice on child-rearing. Mothers in Suzhou said they would like their parents and parents-in-law to be more involved in child-rearing so that their children would have different experiences from different caregivers. And mothers in Chengdu said they would like to have a specialist nearby who can provide guidance on childcare and counseling on their own mental health, and they would like their companies to make it easier for them to balance childcare and work.

These findings suggest the need to focus not only on international comparisons among China, Japan, and Korea, but also on regional perspectives within China (Shanghai, Suzhou, and Chengdu), such as the impact of family values. Although there are difficulties and challenges in international and regional comparative research across qualitative and quantitative research methods, by clarifying international and regional differences, it would finally be possible to examine child-rearing support from the perspective of culture, family, and community.

4. Results and Perspectives

Our studies have shown that mothers in each country struggle to balance work and child-rearing, influenced by their culture-specific views of the family, their country's unique sociocultural backgrounds, and their country's policies. In addition, this study shows that social factors, such as family support and childcare support resources, and individual factors, such as the mother's temperament and upbringing history, have a complex influence on mothers' well-being. Asian countries are currently experiencing a serious decline in fertility rates. In the Gender Gap Index, Japan ranks 125th, China 107th, and South Korea 105th, which are low by global standards. We hope that

the findings from our research project will improve the well-being of caregivers and children in Asian countries by establishing scientifically based recommendations for childcare employment support and interpersonal support that contributes to the healthy growth of children, thereby resolving issues common to all Asian countries, such as the declining birthrate and the gender gap.

Recently, in order to further develop this project, which has been conducted mainly in Japan, China, and Korea, we have expanded the research area to Southeast Asian countries (Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, etc.) and are developing field surveys and clinical intervention support targeting caregivers and children. In recent years, Muslim women have increasingly been playing an active role in society. However, there are not sufficient objective data and psychological approaches regarding differences in family views and conditions of childcare between Islamic societies, Japan, China, Korea, and the Western world. This research project tries to conduct sufficient field research and establish more local (indigenous) frameworks in Islamic society.

5. Project Members and Roles

YATO Yuko is the project leader of this study and is responsible for managing the research teams in Japan, China, and Korea. She specializes in infant and child psychology based on behavior observation. She also contributes to the activities of Ritsumeikan Asia Japan Research Institute. As a representative of this project, she has visited and conducted surveys in Asian countries and has been invited by academic societies in China, Korea and other Asian countries to give lectures.

SUN Yi specializes in personality and developmental psychology. She is responsible for coordinating research in the three countries and is also an important member of the Chinese team for this project. She actively contributed to the project, especially in the area of quantitative research. She participated in the evaluation and revision process of the survey questionnaires. She also led several presentations at academic conferences as a representative of the Chinese team.

YASUDA Yuko is the leader of the Japanese team. She specializes in clinical and developmental psychology. She conducted an interview survey from psychosocial perspectives in corroboration with Takuto Mishina.

MISHINA Takuto specializes in family sociology. He was responsible for the actual work of conducting interviews, conducting qualitative analysis, and writing papers. He played a leading role in raising the motivation of students and graduate students enrolled in the Ritsumeikan University Faculty of Comprehensive Psychology and the Graduate School of Human Sciences' Master's Course to participate in the research.

PARK Joonha is the project coordinator of the Korean team and has been involved in all aspects of the project. She has been inviting additional Korean researchers, connecting with the Japanese team, organizing Korean team meetings, and coordinating the qualitative research (data collection, analysis, and writing). As a social psychologist and expert in survey research, she also participated in the development of the questionnaire, providing comments on the initial draft.

HAN Juyeon, who majored in qualitative research psychology, made important contributions throughout the qualitative research, including reviewing and advising on interview items, conducting interviews, analyzing data, and writing the paper. She earned her PhD in February 2023.

KIM Eunji, who majored in sociocultural psychology, was also the main member of the Korean team on this project during her doctoral program and made active contributions to both qualitative and quantitative research. In the qualitative research, she helped conduct and analyze the interviews and

played a key role in the writing process of the Korean team's paper as the first author. In the quantitative research, she participated in the process of evaluating and revising questions for the questionnaire survey. She received her PhD in August 2023.

JI Yuanhong is the project coordinator for the China team and is fully involved in the project. She built the Chinese team by leveraging the relationships she has developed with Chinese psychologists. She held research meetings and coordinated qualitative research (data collection, analysis, and writing). As a clinical psychologist who straddles research and clinical practice, she also participated in determining the content of the interviews and developing the survey items.

WU Weili and TAO Xinhua, both clinical psychologists, were key members of this project. They made important contributions throughout the qualitative study, including reviewing and advising on interview survey items, conducting interviews, and analyzing data. They also provided specific advice on the development of survey items and were involved in the conception of the parenting empowerment program.

CHEN Tingting is a doctoral student in the Graduate School of Human Sciences at Ritsumeikan University. She was involved in conducting and analyzing the interview survey for this project and made a significant contribution.

SATO Tatsuya framed and backed up the overall research project based on his experience with longitudinal studies on the relationship between parenting stress and depression severity, and fieldwork research on family relationships in East Asia. He also made research contributions related to qualitative research methodology and cultural psychology theory.

6. Selected List of Publications

Journal Articles

- Abakoumkin, G., PsyCorona Collaboration (Park, J.), Myroniuk Myroniuk, S. and Reitsema, A. M. 2023. Conceptual Replication and Extension of Health Behavior Theories' Predictions in the Context of COVID-19: Evidence Across Countries and over Time. Social and Personality Psychology Compass, 10.1111/spc3.12909.
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- Mohd Saiful Zaidi Mazlan and Tan, J. S. 2023. Disaster Volunteering During Covid-19 Pandemic: A Systematic Review. In Aqeel Khan et al. Psychological Implications in Health and Wellbeing: Looking Beyond the Boundaries. *Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities*, UTM. 56-62.
- Olsson, M. I., Van Grootel, S., Block, K., Schuster, C., Meeussen, L., Van Laar, C. and Martiny, S. E. 2023. Gender Gap in Parental Leave Intentions: Evidence from 37 Countries. *Political Psychology*, 44(6), 1163-1192.
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Books

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Academic Conference Presentation

- Choi, E. "The Role of Coping Strategies in Maintaining Well-Being." 2021 China-Japan-Korea Tri-National Psychology Symposium, online, 2021/09/04.
- 神崎真実・李星鎬・鶴原美佑・連傑濤・矢藤優子・孫怡・木村駿斗「コロナ禍における母親の QOL と子ど もへのかかわり いばらき×大学連携共同研究③」,日本心理学会,日本心理学会第86回大会,日本大学文 理学部+オンライン,2022年9月8日.
- 木村駿斗・連傑濤・孫怡・小林藍・矢藤優子「母親の QOL への新型コロナ禍の影響: 産後3ヵ月,6ヵ月, 12ヵ月の3時点におけるコロナ禍前後の比較分析」,日本心理学会,日本心理学会第87回大会,神戸 国際会議場・神戸国際展示場,2023年9月17日.

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- 連傑濤・王ギョク・孫怡・矢藤優子「食事場面における親子関わり指標作成への試み ―行動観察を用いて―」, 日本発達心理学会,第34回日本発達心理学会,立命館大学大阪いばらきキャンパス,2023年3月4日.
- 連傑濤・肥後克己・孫怡・矢藤優子「12ヵ月齢児の養育者の養育態度と被養育体験一行動観察・質問紙調査・ 生理指標を用いた分析一」,日本発達心理学会,日本発達心理学会第35回大会,大阪国際交流センター, 2024年3月6日.
- 孫怡·矢藤優子「共同育児の調和性が母親の Well-being に及ぼす影響」,日本健康心理学会,日本健康心理学 会第 35 回大会, 2022 年 11 月 20 日.
- 童連"健康中国,健康家庭"研讨会,主办:北京师范大学,「亲子互动评估技术及在儿童心理健康和家庭干预 指导中的应用」,大会主题报告(珠海,オンライン開催),2021年6月5日.
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- 矢藤優子・孫怡・藤戸麻美・岡本尚子・安田裕子・サトウタツヤ・鈴木華子・肥後克己・中田友貴・破田 野智己・土元哲平・神崎真実「6ヵ月齢児の表情刺激への注視時間と養育者との社会的関係性との関連」, 日本心理学会,日本心理学会第85回大会,オンライン開催,2021年9月1日.
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- 矢藤優子・孫怡・連傑濤・木村駿斗・山口祐司・陣内里紗・近江涼音・小林藍「乳児の気質と母親の QOL についての縦断研究 一産後6ヵ月・9ヵ月・12ヵ月の3時点調査一」,日本パーソナリティ心理学会,日本パーソナリティ心理学会第31回大会,沖縄県市町村自治会館,2022年12月4日.
- 矢藤優子・三品拓人・Chen Tingting・Han Juyeon・サトウタツヤ・呉宣児「東アジアにおける女性の産後育 児支援の多様性及び母子の Well-Being への影響」,日本発達心理学会,日本発達心理学会第34回大会,立 命館大学大阪いばらきキャンパス,2023年3月3日.
- Yato, Y. "Postpartum Childcare and Work Support for Asian Women in a Society with Declining Birthrates." The Korean Psychological Association, Trinational Symposium on Psychological Exploration to Rebuild Continuity and Connection in Life, Suwon Convention Center, 2023/08/17 -2023/08/19.

Press Releases and Lectures

- 矢藤優子 花王株式会社 HP「くらしの現場から」達人コラム『「見ているよ」が伝わる子育てが子どもを伸 ばす』 kao.co.jp/lifei/life/column-60/ (2021/05/11).
- 矢藤優子・三品拓人・Tingting Chen, · Joonha Park · DUAN Jiaobo「AJI 国際シンポジウム 2022『東アジアに おける女性の産後育児支援の多様性及び母子の Well-Being への影響』」, 2023/2/25.
- Yato, Y. "A Comparative Study on the Diversity of Postpartum Childcare Support for Working Women and the Wellbeing of Mothers and Children in Asia." 台北師範大学講演会,台北師範大学, 2023/3/14.
- Yato, Y. "Longitudinal Study on Postpartum Childcare and Work Support for Asian Women in a Society with Declining Birthrates." The Fourth Forum on ECEC and Early Childhood Development, Nanning, Guangxi province/online, 2023/05/26.
- 矢藤優子「現代中国の子育てと教育 発達心理学からみた課題と未来展望」,アジア・日本研究所,ブックロー ンチ,オンライン,2023/05/31.
- 矢藤優子「留守児童の経験を持つ大学生の心理健康状況と問題介入」,司会者・コーディネーター,立命館 大学 大阪いばらきキャンパス,2023/06/16.
- 矢藤優子「東南アジアの心と子どもをめぐる課題」,司会者・コーディネーター, 立命館大学 大阪いばらき キャンパス, 2023/11/23.

7. Selected List of Research Funding/Grants

- 矢藤優子(代表者),科研費・国際共同研究加速基金国際共同研究強化(B)「女性の産後育児支援の多様性 及び母子の well-being への影響の日中韓比較研究」(2020/10-2025/03)
- 矢藤優子(代表者),研究支援制度分類:女性研究者国際共同研究活動支援制度「少子化が進むアジア諸国 における科学的根拠に基づく育児・就労支援の構築」(2023/05/30-2024/03/31)
- 矢藤優子(代表者),科研費・基盤研究(C)「親子の社会的関係性に関する胎児期からの縦断研究:子育て 支援政策への提言をめざして」(2020/04/01-2023/03/31)
- 矢藤優子(代表者),研究助成金「コロナ禍前後における子育ての変化と支援の充実:感染拡大前からの経時的調査の継続日本心理学会2021年度第2回「新型コロナウイルス感染拡大に関連した実践活動及び研究」」(2021/08/18-2022/08/31)
- 矢藤優子(代表者),研究助成金「with コロナ時代における子育て世帯の実態・ニーズ調査と支援の充実— 茨木市をさらに 子育ての街に(「いばらき×大学連携共同研究提案」研究助成金)」(2021/04/01-2022/03/31)
- 矢藤優子(分担者),国立研究開発法人科学技術振興機構,プログラムマネージャー(PM)の育成・活躍推進プログラム「"子育ち"に繋がる親子の愛着形成を起点とした社会システムの構築」に係る調査研究, 2023-2024
- Park Joonha (代表者), The Academy of Korean Studies (Category: Korean Studies Grant Program): Things that Matter in the Birth Rates in Korean Society: Psychological Investigation of Individual-level Predictors of Family Plans (2023/02/01-2024/01/31)
- 田中千尋(代表者), サトウタツヤ, 安田裕子, 土元哲平, 吉田さとみ, 下條三和, 坂本貴子(分担), 科研費・基盤研究(C)「TEA とイマジネーションが拓く文化を創造する看護教員の力量形成プログラム開発」 (2022/04/01-2024/03/31)
- サトウタツヤ(代表者),福島イノベーション・コースト構想推進機構,大学等の「復興知」を活用した人 材育成基盤構築事業「人文社会科学の復興知に基づく標葉地域の循環型共同教育の実践」(2021/04/01-2025/03/31)
- サトウタツヤ(分担者),科研費・基盤研究(C)「総合的な探究の時間の「キャリアと社会課題の2つの探究」 の可視化と支援に関する研究」(2023/04/01-2026/03/31)
- 安田裕子(分担者),科研費・基盤研究(A)「脱刑事罰処理を支える「治療法学」の確立に向けた学融的総合的研究」(2019/04/01-2024/03/31)
- 安田裕子(代表者),科研費・基盤研究(B)「理論と実践の往還を通した越境的学びによる日本語教師養成 プログラムの開発と検証」(2024/02/28-2026/03/31)
- 安田裕子(代表者),科研費・基盤研究(B)「10代母親の逆境的小児期体験(ACE)を踏まえた妊娠期からの訪問プログラム開発」(2019/04/01-2024/03/31)
- 安田裕子・サトウタツヤ(代表者),科研費・基盤研究(C)「TEA とイマジネーションが拓く文化を創造す る看護教員の力量形成プログラム開発」(2022/04/01-2025/03/31)
- 安田裕子(代表者),科研費・基盤研究(C)「法と心理の連携による離婚紛争の合意解決支援―修復的司法の家族法への展開」(2020/04/01-2023/03/31)
- 孫怡(代表者),科研費・若手研究「親子の関わり方が幼児の食事問題行動および母親の精神健康に与える 影響一日中比較」(2020/04/01-2023/03/31)