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A Failure to Confirm the Effectiveness of a Brief Group Psychoeducational Program for Mothers of Children with High-functioning Pervasive Developmental Disorders: A Randomized Controlled Pilot Trial

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Objective: The purpose of this trial is to examine the effectiveness of group psychoeducational psychotherapy aimed at alleviating the psychological distress of mothers with the children of high-functioning pervasive developmental disorders (HFPDD) and improving the behaviors of the children with disorder traits, in a randomized controlled trial.

Methods: Mothers of preschool outpatients with HFPDD were randomly assigned either to biweekly, seven weeks psychoeducational intervention added to treatment as usual (TAU) or to TAU alone. We evaluated maternal mental health, caregiver burden, maternal quality of life and aberrant behavior of children at baseline (week 0), at the end of intervention (week 7) and at week 21 after randomization. We tested group effects with interaction between the intervention and the evaluation points.

Results: The GHQ-28 score at week 21 was significantly higher in the GP+TAU group as compared to that in the TAU-alone group, indicating a greater improvement in the TAU-alone than that of the GP +TAU. There was no evidence that GP+TAU led to a greater improvement of the maternal mental health than TAU-alone at week 7. Similarly, no evidence was obtained to indicate that GP + TAU led to a reduction in the ABC or ZBI scores by week 7 or 21. The adjusted scores for the RF (role emotional) and MH (mental health) subscales of the SF-36 at week 21 were also significantly lower in the GP+TAU group, indicating a similar tendency to that of the change of the GHQ-28 score at week 21.

Conclusion: The psychoeducational program did not alleviate the maternal distress, aberrant behaviors of the children, or the caregiver burden.