

## How Has the Disaster Affected People with Mental Disabilities?

Hara Clinic/MDMHCC  
Yuichi Watanabe

As a result of the Great East Japan Earthquake, lifelines in the affected areas were disrupted, and for some time we were forced to live a life in which we could not even secure information, let alone water and food. People's peace was threatened by the aftershocks that occurred day and night. Even now, the use of public transportation is restricted, and it remains difficult to obtain gasoline.

Such drastic changes in the living environment have had serious consequences, especially for people with mental disorders and illnesses. Disruption of transportation and lack of gasoline make it difficult to visit psychiatric institutions, and the resulting interruption of medication can pose a serious risk of recurrence. The days of having to spend time in shelters with strangers have become a mental burden for many.

According to a survey conducted by Sendai City in 2013, many parties were not evacuated to evacuation centers and were forced to live in a place with little information, whereas others spent too much time in evacuation centers. It became clear that he was stressed and had problems such as insomnia. Furthermore, the number of parties who answered that they knew about the existence of the disaster support registration system was low at less than 10% of the total, indicating that it is still difficult to obtain support in the event of a disaster. At that time, at some of the evacuation shelters I visited, I got the impression that many people, despite seeming calm, were feeling burdened. It has been almost three years now that I've learned that the situation was very different.

The Great East Japan Earthquake has highlighted several issues, such as the difficulty of spending time in shelters for people with mental disabilities and illnesses, and the difficulty of receiving information on medical care and daily life. At the same time, there were many who said that they felt reassured that there was a place to stop by, connecting with familiar staff and familiar friends.

Based on these lessons, in the event of a disaster, welfare service establishments scattered around the area can become places where people can gather; therefore, they should play a role in the dissemination of medical and other relevant information. Further consideration of its role is required when considering future disaster countermeasures. The good and bad aspects of daily relationships become even more pronounced in the event of a disaster. We value connections with various fields even in normal times, but believe that welfare service establishments that are open to the community can play a particularly valuable role after a disaster.

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