

Integrated research on psychotherapy and social work: A holonical approach to child abuse intervention in Japan

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Professor Norifumi Senga from [Kansai University](#) discusses his research on effective intervention methods for child abuse. His work emphasises the Holonical Approach, which focuses on understanding the complex interactions within systems to enhance child protection strategies

Child abuse has become a serious social problem in Japan, and the number of abuse cases handled by child guidance centres is increasing rapidly. Since there are many complex factors involved in child abuse, it is not effective to deal with it in isolation, with psychotherapy dealing with the internal world and social work dealing with the external world. Although ensuring child safety is an intervention in the external environment, the process of a child internalising a sense of security involves internal themes. Therefore, it is necessary to construct a model of an integrated approach that combines psychological therapy and social work, such as psychological support from a social work perspective and social work from a psychological perspective.

The Holonical Approach emerged in Japan

The Holonical Approach is a unique Japanese approach that integrates psychotherapy and social work. It is an integrated approach that treats both the internal and external worlds and was developed from practical work at child guidance centres in Japan. The word 'Holonical' is a Japanese-English word coined by Kyoji Sadamori. It is an original concept that means 'a dependent co-arising, inclusive relationship between part and whole'. At the core of the Holonical Approach is the idea that 'suffering is an opportunity for creativity'. The Holonical Approach believes that people can discover and create a way of life that is easier to live through the experience of mental anguish.

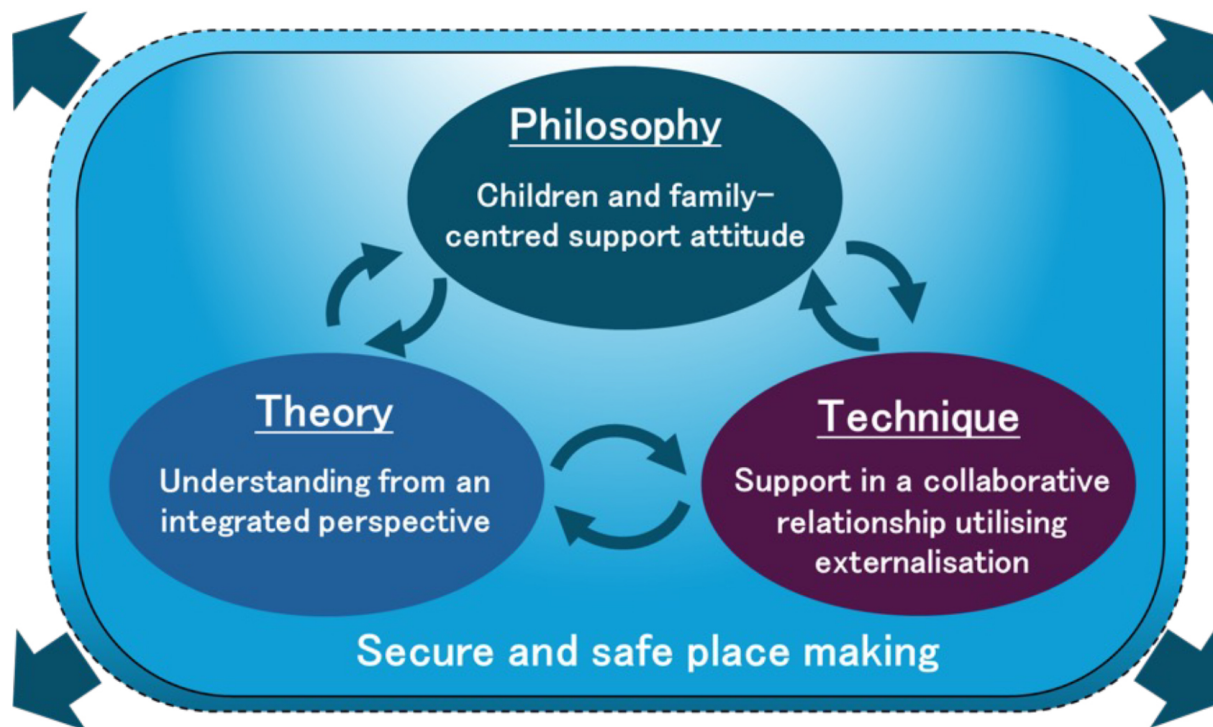


Figure 1: Support model of an integrated approach to child abuse cases

FUKAN

The key concept of the Holonical Approach is FUKAN. The direct translation of FUKAN is 'overlooking', but 'FUKAN' here has the nuance of observing flexibly from various perspectives, such as subjective/objective and micro/macro. In the support process of the Holonical Approach, the focus is always on building a place where you can safely and securely observe 'back and forth' between disunity and unity of the self and the world. In the Holonical Approach context, FUKAN means the act of resonantly enveloping any combination of the observing subject and the observed object from a position of un-criticality, non-evaluation, and non-interpretation while reflecting them back like a mirror.

Constructing a support model of an integrated approach to child abuse cases

I conducted interviews with practitioners of an integrated approach who had clinical experience in child abuse cases and analysed the data obtained using the grounded theory approach. Consequently, a model in Figure 1 is generated, which consists of a philosophy of 'Children and family-centred support attitude', a theory of 'Understanding from an integrated perspective', a technique of 'Support in a collaborative relationship utilising externalisation', and 'Secure and safe place making' (Senga, 2025). Furthermore, I conducted interviews with a psychotherapist who has extensive experience practicing with the Holonical Approach to examine the characteristics of the support process for abuse cases of the Holonical Approach. The results of the qualitative research analysis suggested that the characteristic of the Holonical Approach is to actively utilise externalisation with an emphasis on co-creative FUKAN (Senga, 2024).

The Support Process of the Holonical Approach

The Holonical Approach focuses on finding vicious patterns and carefully handling small, meaningful changes, paying attention to the fractal structure of the parts and the whole. Senga and Sadamori (2024) summarise the general support process of the Holonical Approach as follows:

1. The client's self-discordant experiences are externalised and shared with the worker.
2. The worker, from a position of un-criticality, non-evaluation, and non-interpretation, simply reflects back the vicious cycle of the client's observing subject and observed object as if in a mirror while also resonantly enveloping it. At this time, it is important that the worker's actions themselves are 'FUKAN by an appropriate observing subject'.
3. By providing this support, 'FUKAN by appropriate observing subject' is constellated for clients in the support place.
4. In a co-creative relationship that transcends the relationship between 'helper and helped', it becomes possible to discover and create ways in which the internal object relationship and external object relationship of the client can move towards a state of unity, when the client has a relationship with an observing subject and observed object in relation to an externalised problem.
5. Through this support, it is possible to promote appropriate self-organisation.

Future research issues for the Holonical Approach include the need to incorporate findings from existing psychotherapy and social work theories and techniques, and to promote systematisation, as well as the need for evidence-based research.

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