

Perinatal Mental Health Issues in Breastfeeding Consultations: Insights from the Japan Drug Information Institute in Pregnancy (J-TIS)

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Introduction

In the context of mounting global interest in perinatal mental health, the balancing of mental illness treatment during pregnancy and postpartum with breastfeeding has become an increasingly salient issue. In Japan, the "Perinatal Mental Health Consensus Guide" was published in 2017, leading to enhanced support for women with mental illness during the perinatal period, primarily through the efforts of obstetricians and psychiatrists. The Japan Pregnancy Drug Information Service (J-TIS), which is situated within the National Center for Child Health and Development, has offered specialized consultations on breastfeeding medication use since 2012.

The present study sought to achieve a comprehensive understanding of the challenges surrounding the use of psychotropic medication during breastfeeding in Japan, whilst also exploring potential improvement strategies for breastfeeding support. This objective was pursued through an analysis of J-TIS breastfeeding consultation cases.

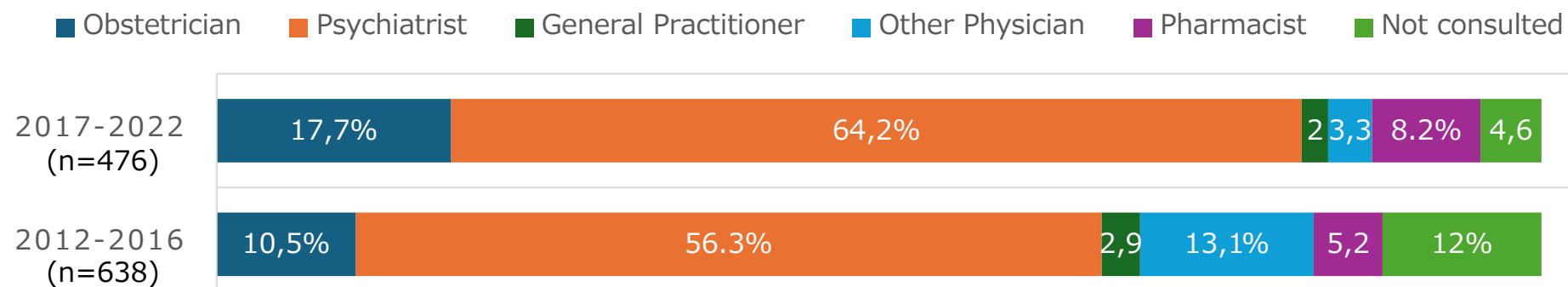
Methods

A detailed analysis was conducted on consultation records from J-TIS concerning the utilisation of psychotropic medications during breastfeeding from 2012 to March 2022. The study focused on the types of medications inquired about and the explanations provided by healthcare professionals, revealing temporal trends before and after the publication of the "Perinatal Mental Health Consensus Guide 2017."

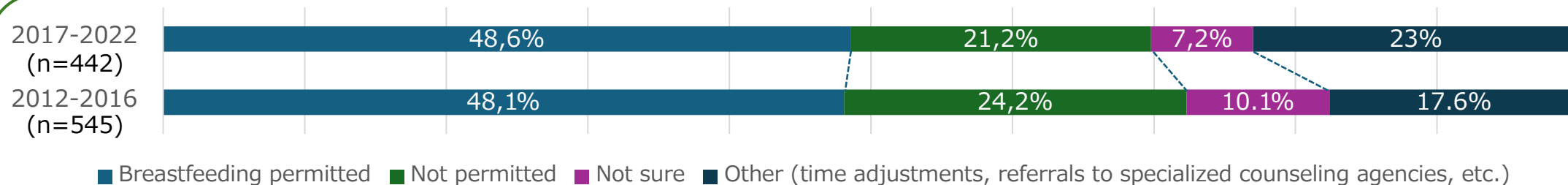
Results

From 2012 to 2022, 7,893 breastfeeding consultations were conducted. In the period after the guide's publication in 2017 and concluding in 2022, 3,276 consultations were conducted. The proportion of consultations concerning psychiatric medications and breastfeeding out of the total consultations was **694/4617 (15.0%) from 2012 to 2016** and **480/3276 (14.7%) from 2017 to 2022**, showing no significant difference.

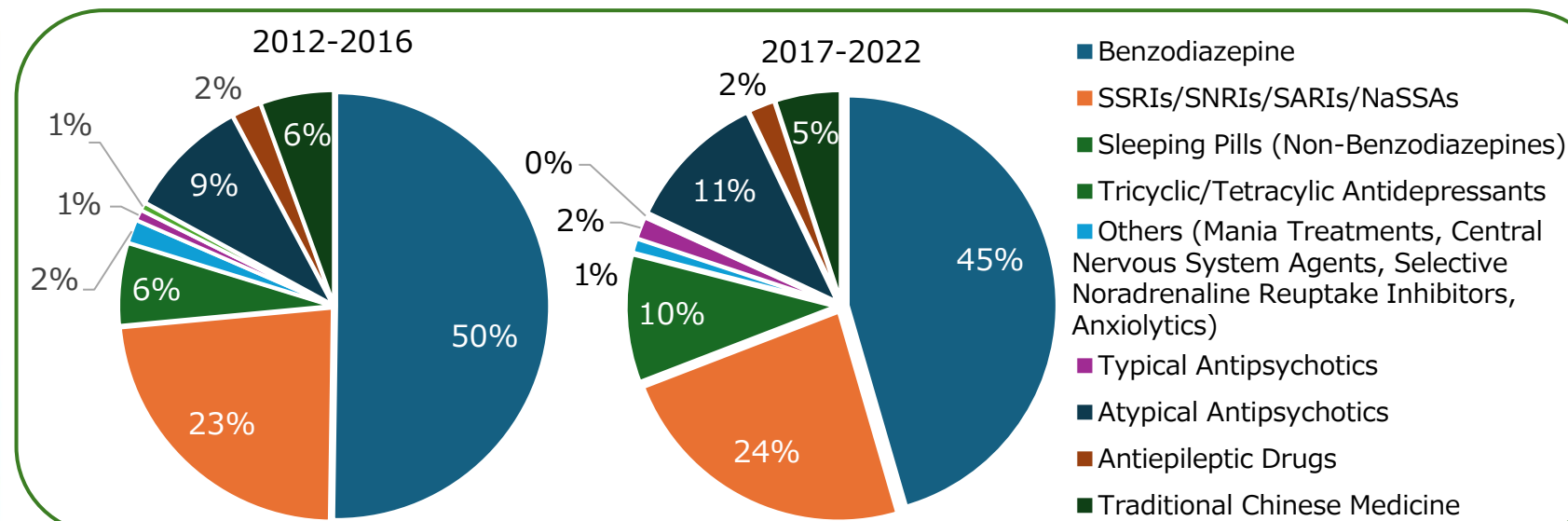
Figure 1. A detailed breakdown of the healthcare providers consulted before receiving J-TIS breastfeeding counselling.



From 2017 to 2022, the proportion of cases consulting obstetricians and psychiatrists increased. The proportion reporting no consultation with healthcare providers decreased. The number of instances consulting both obstetricians and psychiatrists doubled from 41 cases between 2012 and 2016 to 84 cases between 2017 and 2022.

Figure 2. Before consulting J-TIS, the content of breastfeeding guidance received from healthcare providers

The proportion of mothers reporting that healthcare providers advised them to stop breastfeeding while taking psychotropic medications decreased from 24.2% to 21.2%. Concurrently, the proportion of healthcare providers providing specific explanations increased.

Figure 3. Details of Medications Used in J-TIS Consultation Cases

In a 2022 user survey, the most common reason for seeking J-TIS consultation was **insufficient explanation from a healthcare provider (33%)**, followed by **anxiety triggered by internet information (13%)** and **receiving conflicting information from different professionals (11%)**.

Discussion & Conclusions

A detailed analysis of JTIS consultation cases revealed that the proportion of consultations related to psychotropic drugs and breastfeeding remained high even after the publication of the "Perinatal Mental Health Guide 2017."

This result suggests a continuing need for individualized information provision in this field. Although the proportion of cases where healthcare staff involved in perinatal mental health care advised discontinuing breastfeeding due to psychotropic medication use decreased, the fact that many mothers reported anxiety and insufficient explanation when utilizing J-TIS breastfeeding consultations suggests a need for further education.

This study clarified the current status and challenges of breastfeeding consultations regarding psychotropic drugs in Japan.

Departments involved in perinatal mental health should collaborate to develop strategies for strengthening information provision.

We believe that J-TIS's provision of data promotes mutual understanding between healthcare professionals and consultants and improves perinatal mental health.