

# Maria Akademia's violence prevention programme

- for women who have used violence or are at risk of using violence



# Maria Akatemia ry

- A non-profit organization that works for sustainable well-being of individuals and communities
- Offices in Helsinki and Tampere and online work in the whole country.
- Our areas of focus are:
  - Preventive violence work and Tunnevaaka® [www.naisenvakivalta.fi](http://www.naisenvakivalta.fi)
  - Development projects [Toiminta – Maria Akatemia | Ihmisten ja yhteisöjen kasvun asiantuntija](#)
  - Training [Koulutukset – Maria Akatemia | Ihmisten ja yhteisöjen kasvun asiantuntija](#)
- 19 employees, expert trainers, as well as members and volunteers
- Our services are free of charge for clients
- Funding for operation comes from The Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations (STEA)



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Maria Akatemia ry 2025



# Violence prevention services for women at Maria Akatemia

**Naisenväkivalta.fi, For women over 29-years**

**Keijun varjo, For women who are 15-28-years old**

**VEERAT –project – For women who have problems with substance abuse and violence**

**Nettideittiturva –project, Victims of romance scams**



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# Violence prevention work

## Who is the service intended for?

Keijun varjo –service 15-28y. / naisenväkivalta.fi-service yli 29y.

For women who have  
used violence in  
intimate relationships

For women who are  
afraid of hurting others  
or themselves

For women who are  
concerned about their  
own uncontrollable  
feelings of anger and  
rage

For women who are  
afraid of using violence  
in intimate relationships

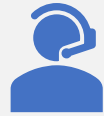
For women who need support  
in identifying challenging  
emotions and expressing  
them in a healthy way

For women who are  
wondering if they have  
used violence in  
intimate relationships

For women who need  
information about  
emotional regulation  
and tools to regulate  
their own emotions



# The path to our services



## Helpline/chat

- Phone
- Chat /Support email
- Online appointment booking



## Individual discussions

- 1-5 appointments
- On the phone, online or in person (Helsinki/Tampere)



## Peer support group

- 4-5 or 15 x 2 h/week
- 5-8 women/group
- In person or online



## Group follow-up meeting

- 5 months after the last group meeting

## Violence prevention work 2024



# Ehkäisevä väkivaltatyö 2024

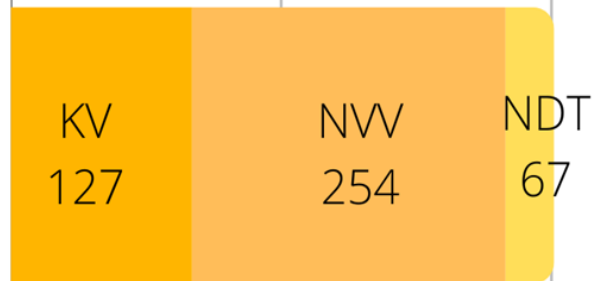
**Contacts:**  
Yhteydenotot

yhteensä 801



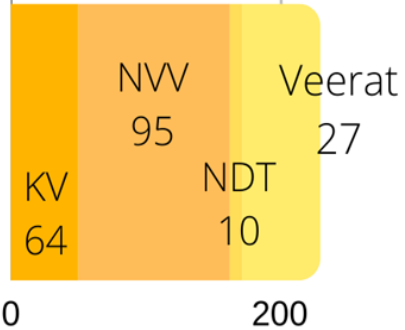
**Clients that started individual discussions:**  
Yksilökeskustelut

yhteensä 448



**Clients that attended our peer support groups:**  
Vertaisryhmiin osallistuneet

yhteensä 196



- Naisenväkivalta.fi: Most clients 25-44 years old, mothers of children under school age.
- Violence against children is most commonly manifested as rough behavior and uncontrolled outbursts of rage. Typically, the situation escalates after the birth of a second child. Emotional violence is recognized in relationships.
- In the case of young women, help is mainly sought for dating violence and violence against themselves
- More and more women with substance abuse and criminal backgrounds as clients



# What is our work based on

- Broad understanding of violence
- Psychodynamic and gender-specific framework: getting to know oneself and one's life history through self-reflection
- Central to our client work is the strengthening of emotion recognition and regulation skills, identifying one's own needs and boundaries
- Learning to take responsibility and trusting one's capabilities to have influence in life → increased self-esteem and self-compassion
- Opportunity to break chains of violence that has been passed along through generations
- Raising and maintaining hope essential
- Attending in our programs is always voluntary





A woman in a white hospital gown is shown from the waist up, with her hands clasped behind her back. The image is faded and serves as a background for the text.

# Women who use violence: A hidden issue

- A topic that may cause confrontation and evoke various emotions
- Only a small portion of the violence committed by women comes to the attention of the police, other authorities, and professionals (increased)
- There are differences in recognizing different forms of violence
- The boundaries between the experience of violence and perpetration can blur in this phenomenon

**Experiencing violence does not eliminate the need for help with one's own violent behavior**





# Phenomena of female aggression: The mother myth

Strong cultural idea of the “ideal mother”

Seeing women as caregivers and givers of life

There is no other way to fit into the picture,  
aggression is difficult to accept and  
causes fear and conflict

Can be a barrier for women to seek help and  
for professionals to accept women’s feelings



# Challenges in seeking help

- Shame and guilt
- Difficulty recognizing violence
- Difficulty acknowledging violence
- Difficulty speaking out
- The experience of being the only woman using violence
- Images of a woman using violence
- Disbelief of professionals



# Gender in the context of violence

The gendering of certain traits begins at a young age, for example, through how parents or teachers address children or what kind of behavior they accept from them.

Traditionally girls are allowed more fear and crying, but expressions of anger are more restricted compared to boys. This does not decrease girls' anger but changes its expression to be less easily recognizable.

For example: The "good girl" syndrome, storing emotions and self-directed anger.

On the other hand, boys are allowed more expressions of anger than fear, leading boys to learn to convert fear into anger.

Female specific violence prevention services are needed because many violence prevention services are designed to meet the needs of men.








# Behind violent behavior

- Inter generational transmission: Experience of vulnerable interpersonal relationships in one's own life.
- Emotional atmosphere in the upbringing environment:
- How has one been seen and heard? How have conflicts been resolved? Have difficult emotions been allowed to be expressed? Has one been able to safely experience disappointments?
- Insufficient emotional regulation skills.
- Pursuit of perfection: Seeking significance for oneself through achievement, by being diligent, kind, and conscientious.
- Under pressure, a person may not be able to find creative solutions but acts based on their life experiences.
- Under the influence of substances, impulse control decreases. Substances can also act as harmful means of emotional regulation.
- Social circle influences what we perceive as "normal" or desirable.



# *“Hurt people hurt people”*

In childhood our clients have been:

- Victims of physical violence 82%
- Victims of emotional violence 89%
- Witnessed or heard violence 81%

In adulthood our clients have been

- Victims of physical violence 68%
- Victims of emotional violence 87%
- Witnessed or heard violence 76%"



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# Dare to ask about violence

- What happens, when you get angry or annoyed? What do you do? What feelings and thought can you recall?
- What happens before the situation escalates? How does your body respond to aggression?
- Does someone in your family use violence? Have you used violence before? Were the children involved?



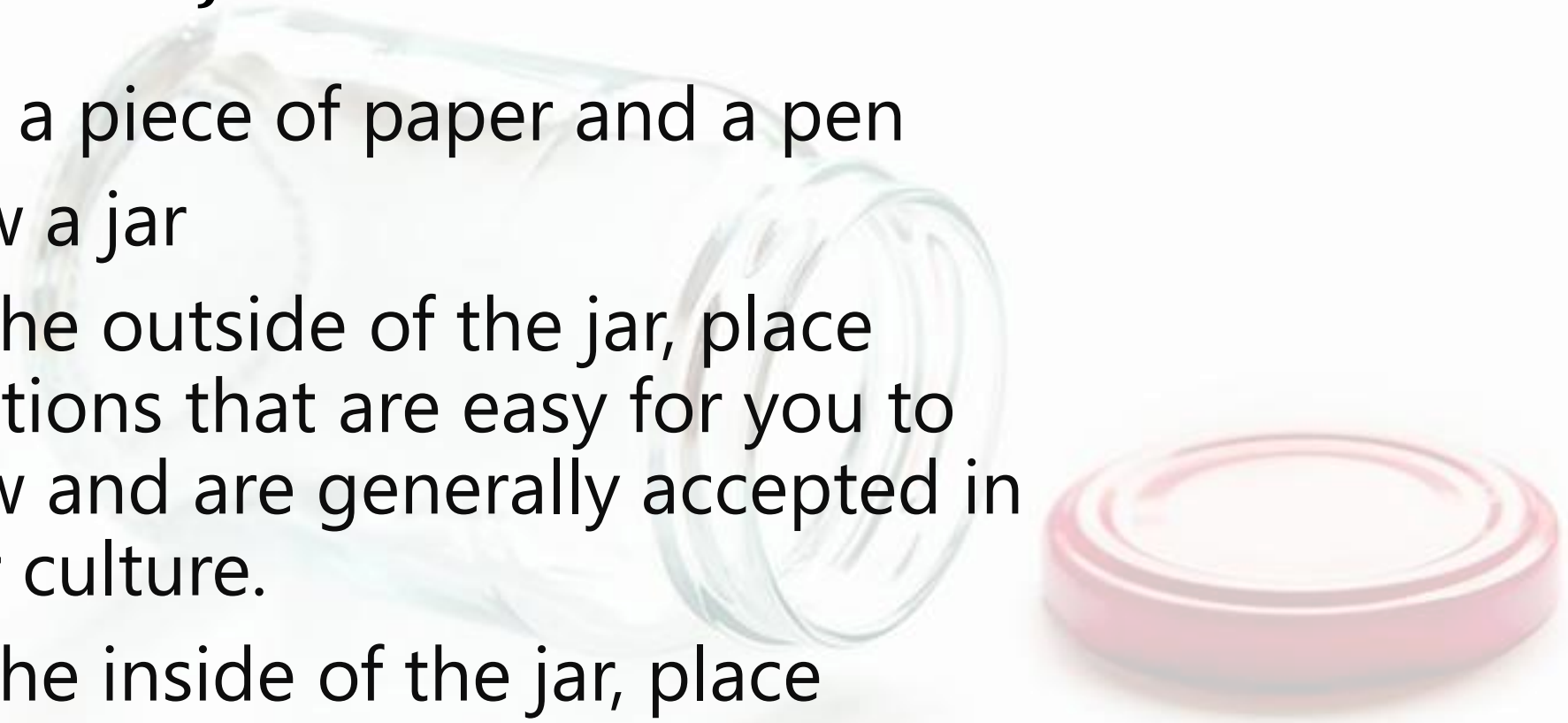
# Dare to ask about violence

- How do you solve conflicts?
- How do you calm yourself down while angry?
- What needs to change so that all of you can feel secure at home?
- What made you seek help now?



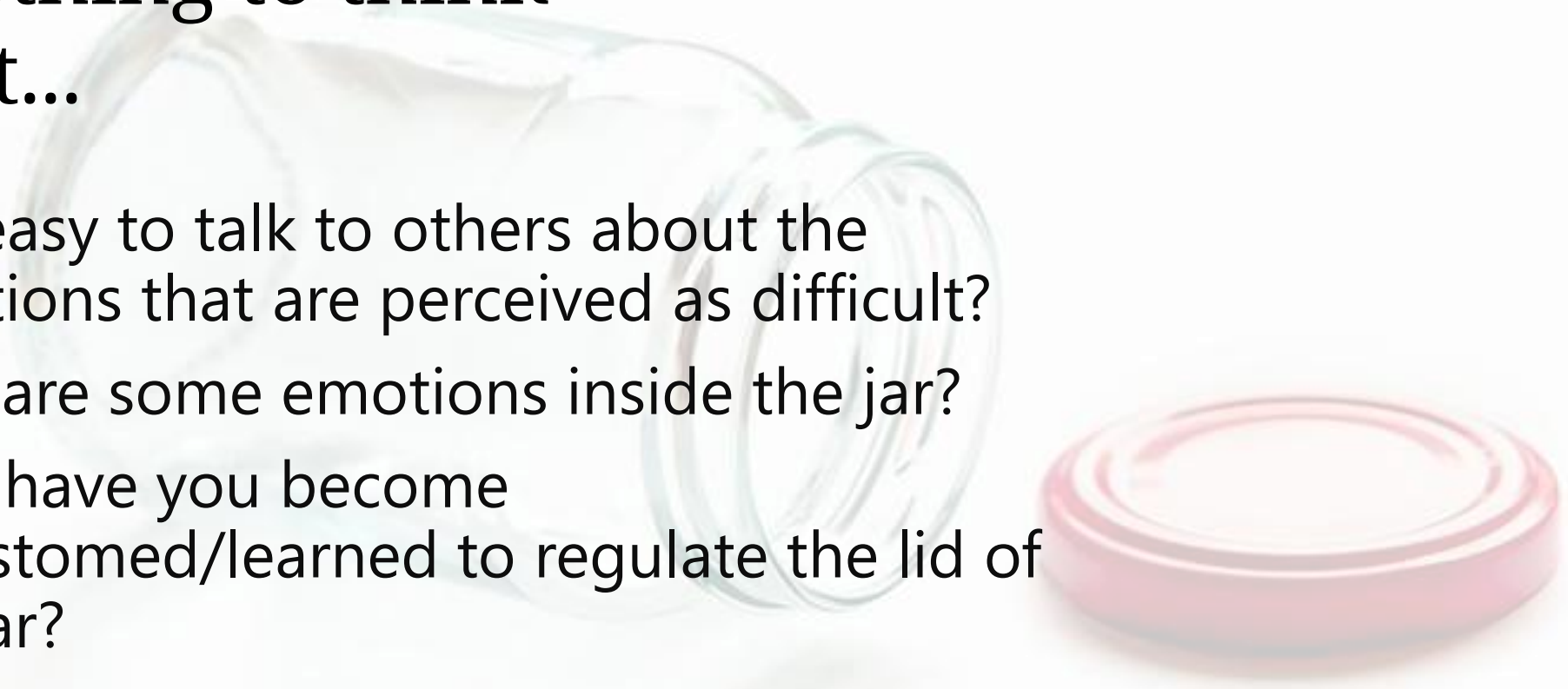
# Emotion jar

- Take a piece of paper and a pen
- Draw a jar
- On the outside of the jar, place emotions that are easy for you to show and are generally accepted in your culture.
- On the inside of the jar, place emotions that are difficult for you to show and are hard to talk about.



# Something to think about...

- Is it easy to talk to others about the emotions that are perceived as difficult?
- Why are some emotions inside the jar?
- How have you become accustomed/learned to regulate the lid of the jar?





# Vankemmaksi

Support for parents of adolescents and young adults  
(2024-2026 STEA)

Henriikka Laurola, Project Coordinator  
Marjo Lehtinen, Project Worker  
Vankemmaksi,  
Maria Akademy

4.2.2025

[mariaakatemia.fi/VANKEMMAKSI](https://mariaakatemia.fi/VANKEMMAKSI)



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# Vankemmaksi

- Three-year project (2024–2026) funded by the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health (STEA)
- Target group: Parents of psychologically struggling young people (aged 12–24) who experience challenges in parenting, coping, emotional regulation, or their own or their relationship's well-being
- **Forms of support and activities:**
  - One-to-one support discussions
  - Support discussions for couples
  - Professionally guided peer support groups
  - Mentoring based on peer parenting
  - Advocacy work and training of professionals
- The activities are carried out nationwide online and as in-person services in Helsinki and Tampere. All our services are free of charge.



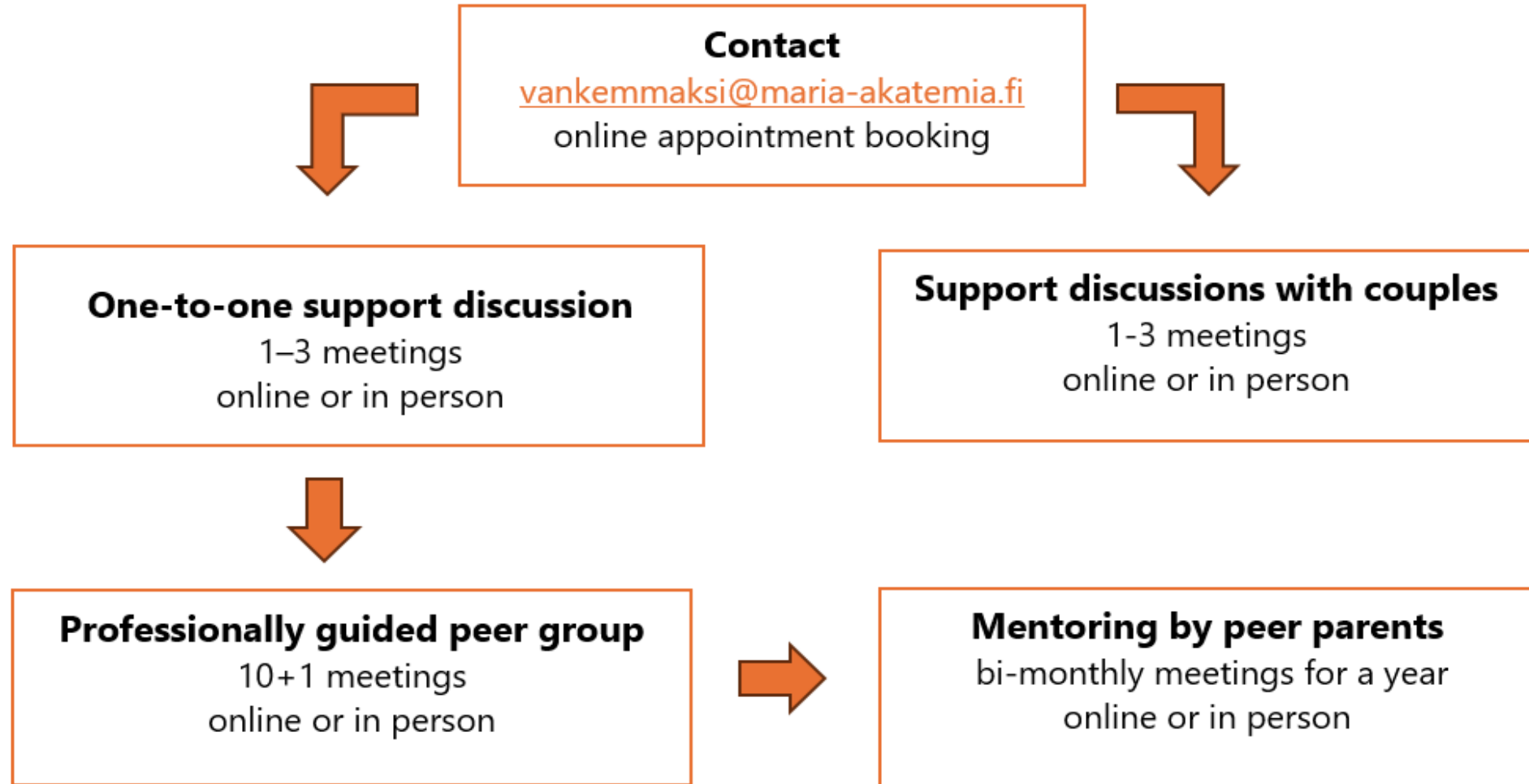
# Why this project?

- Up to 1/4 young people suffers from a mental health disorder in Finland, and symptoms that remain undiagnosed are even more common.
- Finnish parents are among the most burnt out parents according to international studies
- Adolescence and early adulthood are challenging developmental stages for parents. The need for parental support becomes especially emphasized when a young person's mental health is disrupted, as their development and well-being depend on relationships with their parents and the overall family atmosphere.
- Many parents have lacked sufficient support and security in their own developmental history – strengthening self-awareness supports growth as a parent and helps break intergenerational behavior patterns.
- There are not enough safe spaces where parents can openly talk about the challenging emotions related to parenting. These are often considered as a taboo in our society.
- In our services, unlike in many public sector services, even an early concern about a child is enough to receive help, and support is available quickly (within days).





# Our service path





# Who do we reach?

- Among the young people, whose parents we support, the majority are aged 12–17, experiencing long-term and complex symptoms, particularly depressive and anxiety symptoms, loneliness, and challenges related to neurodevelopmental traits (e.g., ADHD, autism spectrum), and school
- Many come from divorced families, where parents have different approaches and varying abilities to support the struggling young person.
- In couple's work, blended families and the challenging role of stepparents are strongly present.
- Families have often been involved with various services for years, including youth psychiatry, child protection services, and family work.
- There is a common experience of either lacking access to services or that interventions are too harsh for the needs of the young person or family.
- Many families express distrust towards the public sector and/or social and healthcare professionals.



HOPELESSNESS FINDING JOY IN SMALL THINGS ASTONISHMENT EXHAUSTION  
SHAME GRIEF TENSION FEAR DESBELIEF IRRITATION  
HORROR PRIDE WORRY FIGHT MODE GUILT ANGER  
AGONY PERSEVERANCE RAGE  
APPRECIATION FOR BEING ALIVE DESPAIR ENVY  
POWERLESSNESS DEMANDINGNESS UNFAIRNESS  
FRUSTRATION HELPLESSNESS  
DETERMINATION  
ANXIETY HOPE DISAPPOINTMENT INADEQUACY PERSISTENCE  
UNCERTAINTY BELIEF IN SOMETHING BETTER





# The importance of supporting parents

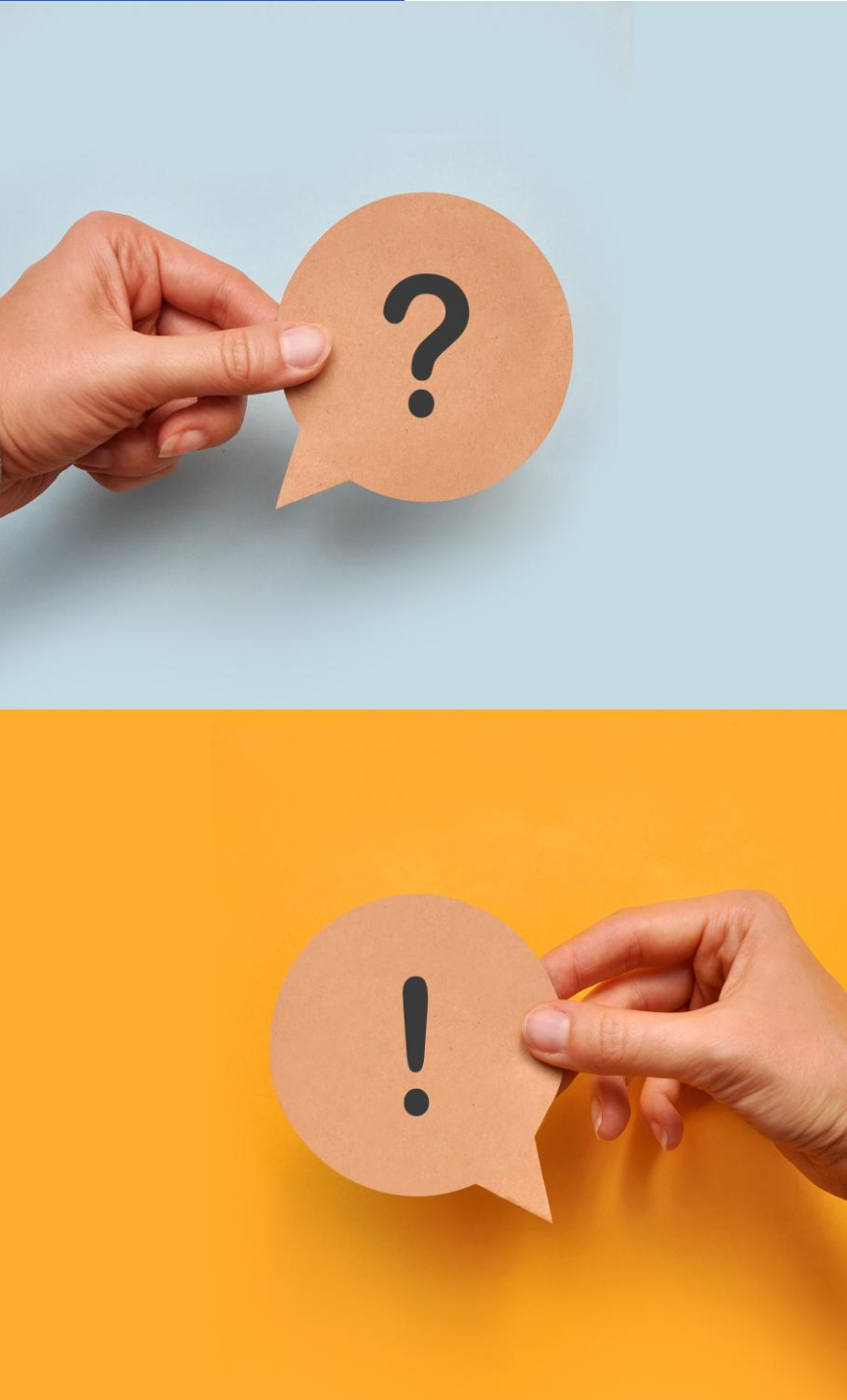
- When young people struggle, parents often face blame or at least a scrutinizing gaze in public discussions.
- Parents carry both external and internal expectations, leading to feelings of guilt and inadequacy when they can't meet them. Many feel they've failed as parents, often experiencing shame as a result.
- Parents need to feel seen, heard, and acknowledged. Most support services focus only on the young person.
- Living in a constant "survival mode" is exhausting and makes it difficult for parents to prioritize their own needs and well-being.
- A child's struggles affect the entire family's daily life, and parents don't always have the space or time to express their own emotions and needs to their partner.
- Connecting with other parents in similar situations can ease the emotional burden and offer a much-needed moment for themselves.





**"You cannot  
always remove  
the bad, but  
you can  
strengthen and  
add more  
good."**





# The ways we support parents

- By seeing and listening to the person – without evaluating their parenting.
  - Parents in challenging life situations have a strong need for encounters where they do not have to maintain the role of a strong, self-reliant caregiver – but can instead be supported by someone else for a moment.
- By strengthening the good and recognizing the parent's strengths and resources.
- The concept of "good enough parenting" – increasing awareness of self-directed and self-imposed expectations.
- Striving to increase hope and trust in the future.
- Enhancing understanding of how a parent's own developmental history influences their parenting.





# Client feedback in numbers

- All (100%) parents experienced benefits from one-to-one discussions (N=27)
- All experienced that their wellbeing improved, they received support for their coping and felt being seen.
- 93% of those who participated in the peer group felt they had gained tools to maintain their well-being, better understood their emotions, and were more compassionate toward themselves as parents (N=14).
- 93% felt benefits of the peer support group and 100% had experienced peer support
- **The positive change in the parent is reflected for the benefit of the young person and the whole family!**



A photograph of a chessboard and several chess pieces on an orange background. The chessboard is white with brown squares and is tilted. It contains several white and black pieces. Below the board, there are three more pieces: a black king, a black knight, and a black pawn. The background is a solid orange color.

# Client feedback

*"A tremendously big thank you to [the employee] for their genuine warmth, loving gaze, and compassionate listening. For the first time, I was able to safely talk about a deeply wounding situation, cry out my pain and worries to them. They received my sorrow with understanding. Thank you so much."*

*"The meetings have been very pleasant. I felt heard but not judged, which is very important to me. The employee provided me with various tools and support to face and overcome a difficult life situation. The encounters were warm and unhurried, leaving me feeling lighter and more empowered afterward."*



# Let's stay in touch!

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# For discussion

- Do you recognise this phenomenon in your countries? Is it openly discussed or are parents easily left alone with their concerns? (cultural differences)
- In Finland parental support is mostly available for parents of young children - what kind of services are there in place for parents of young people and early adults in your countries? Are the parents' needs being met sufficiently?
- What kind of cooperation could we do on an European level to help ease the stigma related to this phenomenon and/or to develop services?





# TYÖNIMUUN!

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## Support for Young Women's Integration into Employment 2023-2025



Nelli Peiponen,  
Project Coordinator,  
Maria Academy

Marjo Nevalainen,  
Project Worker,  
Naistenkartano

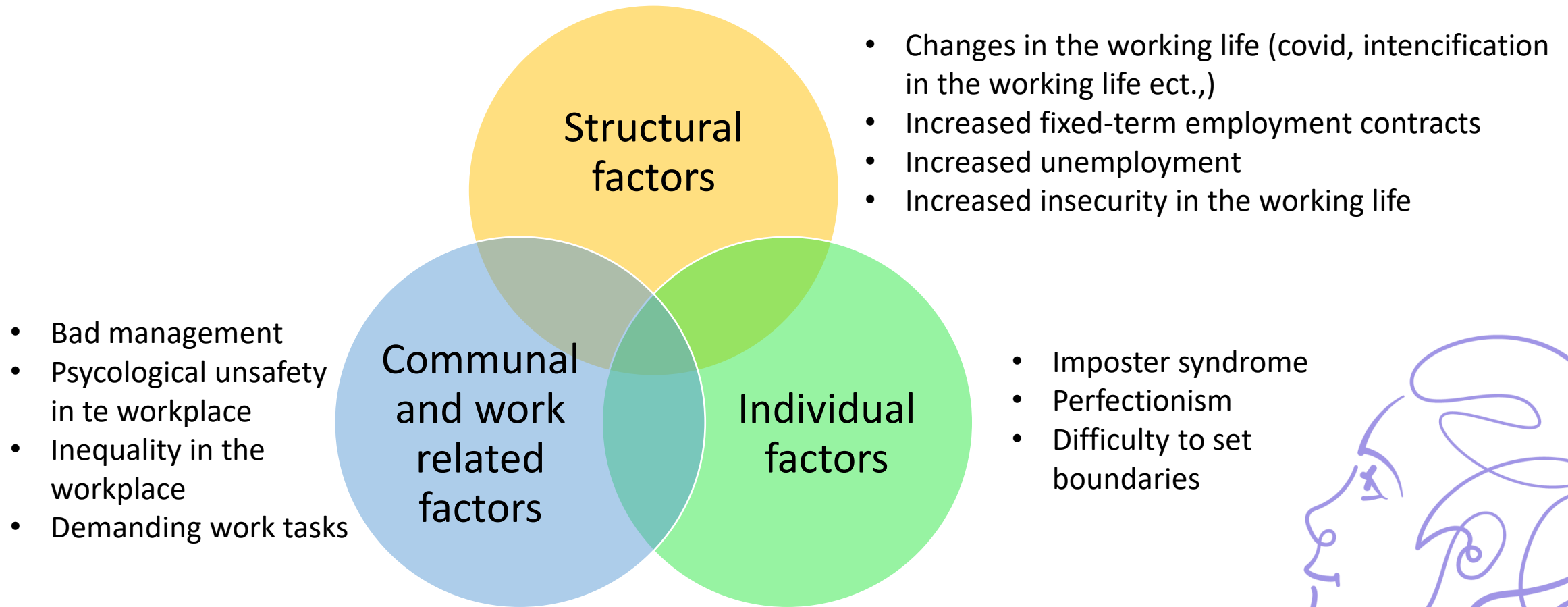
# Background

- The mental health challenges faced by working adults aged under 35 have grown rapidly in Finland and other Western countries.
- In recent years, mental health disorders have become the most common reason for long-term sick leave among young women in Finland.
  - Burnout or an increased risk of burnout affects one in four individuals under the age of 36.
- Currently there is no specific diagnosis for burnout in Finland; it is a set of symptoms often diagnosed as depression, anxiety, or sleep disorders.
- The well-being of young professionals can be supported by strengthening their professional self-esteem and knowledge to improve their personal mental health skills.
- Workplace representatives and supervisors also seek information on how to lead young women and promote their well-being at work.





# The reasons behind the increasing phenomenon are complex





# Work engagement -project

- A development project supported by STEA (**Funding Centre for Social Welfare and Health Organisations**) for the years 2023–2025
  - A joint project by two female –focused Non-Governmental Organizations: Maria Academy ry and Naistenkartano ry
- **The project aims to prevent young (under 36 years) women's exclusion from working life by strengthening their work endurance and enhancing employers' ability to support their integration into employment.**
- The activities/functions are carried out through both in-person service in Tampere and nationwide online. *All our services are free of charge.*
- The project also includes doctoral research (Ida Nikkola).
- Project website: <https://www.mariaakatemia.fi/tyonimuun>

# THE PROJECT'S OPERATIONS



## INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT

**Psychoeducational individual support meetings  
→ 1-3 meetings per client**



## PEER GROUPS

**Professionally led peer group models focused on strengthening psychological resources and self-awareness  
→ 5 or 12 meetings**



## MENTORING

**Work life mentor training and support for approximately one year of the mentor-mentee pair process**



## EMPLOYER COLLABORATION AND OTHER ACTIVITIES

**Workshops, webinars, professional presentations and employer collaboration**



## Project results so far

- Over 150 young women have been met in individual meetings and 14 professionally facilitated peer groups have been implemented.
- Successfully trained and implemented mentoring activities with the involvement of 36 mentors
- Everyone involved in the program has experienced an improvement in their work and performance capabilities
- After participating in individual and group work, participants felt more aware of their available resources, were better able to set boundaries to support their well-being, and experienced less feelings of inadequacy
- All participants in the peer groups found the group beneficial and felt they received emotional support from it.
- Over time, the peer group improved participants' sense of satisfaction and self-esteem and increased their sense of belonging.





## Project findings

- Most customers have either a lower or higher university degree.
- Young women tend to be really hard on themselves, self-demanding and highly conscientious.
- The work community, work culture, and work atmosphere have a very significant impact on workplace well-being.
- At the beginning of a job, the instructions about the work substance and culture is often insufficient
- Generational differences can be seen in how younger and older generations view work life
- Mentoring can be a great help at the beginning of a career – Mentoring could be utilized more within work communities.
- Many young women are afraid to start a family when work life is so demanding
- Young women desire more humanity in the workplace, the development of emotional and communication skills within work communities, psychological safety, and the opportunity to be their authentic selves at work.

# Thank you!

## Contact info:

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You can contact us if you are interested in short presentations, e.g. to your work community or other types of collaboration.