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Cooking workshop for people with depression and their loved ones



A return to activity via psychoeducation and cooking together by individuals struggling with depression and people who support their loved ones in this condition



A cooking workshop for people in depression and their loved ones is an innovation that consists in supporting them via a joint activity – cooking workshop and two psychoeducational guides: ‘I need support’ for people with depression and ‘I support’ for those who support them.

The innovation that we have invented may have considerable impact on the condition of people with depression and on fighting stigmatisation related to this condition. We believe that the role of supporting loved ones can be essential in the recovery process. We are convinced that it is necessary to introduce both aspects of the innovation: education regarding communication and creating an opportunity for joint activities for ill individuals and their loved ones via the shared cooking experience.

Anna Maria Czaja, originator of the innovation

Who is the innovation is targeted at?

The innovation is targeted at two groups of beneficiaries:

- people struggling with long-term depression or in a depressive episode,
- people supporting their loved ones in depression.

Who can implement the innovation?

The innovation might be implemented by institutions that offer support to people in mental crisis with depression: local governmental bodies, including social policy centres, neighbour homes, social activity centres,



as well as mental health centres, catering collages, or schools and educational institutions having proper resources.

The 'I support' and 'I need support' guides can be used by anyone struggling with depression or by supporting persons, as they can be accessed for free on depresjaodkuchni.pl.

What problems does the innovation address?

The innovation has been developed for people suffering from depression and their loved ones.

Individuals struggling with depression suffer from long-term slump of motivation, depressed mood, apathy (inability to feel pleasure), insomnia, changes in appetite and body weight, chronic fatigue. Such individuals often face the sense of solitude (they do not understand their condition and they are not able to talk about their disease), they mask their illness due to the sense of embarrassment or stigmatisation, they tend to withdraw from social activities and experience suicidal ideation. They find it difficult to act, participate in meetings away from home, or finish their assignments.

Support from the loved ones (e.g., family members, friends) is one of the key factors contributing to recovery from depression). Unfortunately, in many cases friends or relatives do not have sufficient knowledge how to effectively support a person in depression and how to engage them in activities. As a consequence, they can neglect signals sent by a patient regarding their poor mental condition or they can select ineffective support methods. When providing their loved ones with help, they often feel overwhelmed, frustrated or even anxious about the condition of that person's health. They need assistance in taking care of their own mental

health hygiene to be able to effectively support their loved one in mental crisis in turn.

The innovation helps sick people come back to activity, and it engages those who support them in selecting effective aid methods, ensuring respite for them at the same time, while a shared cooking workshop experience can be of great help.

We focus on it in more detail in a part describing the outcomes of the innovation but what is noteworthy is the format of the cooking workshop that gives a sick person an opportunity to share the outcomes of their work (a meal) with other participants and family members, master concrete meal preparation tools and solutions (e.g., how to cook fast and tastefully, how to ensure order during the cooking process), and – last but not least – enjoy the effects already during the workshop and have their senses stimulated (taste, smell, touch).

Furthermore, thanks to psychoeducational materials created, addressees of the innovation can broaden their knowledge on depression and empathise with another person, which can largely contribute to their recovery. At the same time, a person in depression can learn how to communicate their needs related to the condition, talk about it, and seek help.

How to implement the innovation at your end, step by step?

Website

One of the components of the innovation is the depresjaodkuchni.pl website featuring, among others, illustrated psychoeducation guides for people with depression and those who support them in it. Both guides



have been developed in cooperation with individuals sharing similar experience, as well as psychotherapists and a psychiatrist. Guides talk about daily life with depression – where to look for help, how to talk about depression, what the recovery process looks like, and what difficulties can be encountered.

I really enjoyed the texts that are finally not ‘caring and protective’, but to the point and get to the bottom of the matter. Everything there is where it should be. Without feeling sorry for people with depression. I know a little about it because I experienced my own ordeal, and such a website would surely have helped me.

Website visitor

Cooking workshop

The idea behind the workshop is to utilise cooking as a method of support in mental crisis not only in terms of the diet and nutrients, but mostly in the context of a shared activity, strengthening agency via simple tasks related to preparing a meal, inviting supporting individuals to join the activity, and preventing patient isolation.

The pilot of the innovation was organised for adults:

- suffering from depression, along with a person supporting them (a couple),
- suffering from depression (single persons).

Registration for the workshop was carried out via a form on the depresjaodkuchni.pl website, which allowed individuals enrolling to read educational content at the same time.

At the pilot stage, the workshop was available for free. It is not a prerequisite, but attendees admitted that unpaid participation was crucial to them, as their condition often excludes them from professional activity and limits their earning opportunities.

It is a good idea to invite a chef for the workshop. Such a person should be provided with training on mental health and communication with people in depression beforehand. We recommend a workshop scenario and recipes available on <https://inkubatorpomyslow.org.pl/innowacja/warsztaty-kulinarne-dla-osob-w-depresji-i-ich-bliskich>, which were discussed with a clinical dietitian at the innovation pilot stage. They can be used directly or treated as a source of inspiration.

The workshop should take place in a professional workshop space that should evoke no associations with healthcare facilities or day-care centres. This will give attendees the sense of uniqueness and comfort of work, which is essential.

Workshop participants prepare meals themselves and finally consume them during a shared dinner. The chef discusses the dishes, appoints tasks, and supports participants in performing them. Another important element is to encourage attendees to keep kitchen clean during their work.

Pilot experience indicates that:

- a workshop should last for about 3–4 hours;
- the number of participants should not exceed 15;
- it is a good idea to immediately propose a series of thematic meetings (during the pilot these were workshops on Mediterranean, Asian, Tex Mex, and Middle East cuisine) and provide participants with an opportunity to enrol in one or several meetings;

- after the workshop, it is good to send recipes prepared during the meeting by e-mail so that participants can recreate them at home;
- the participation of a loved one is essential – people in depression stressed how much easier it was for them, and at the same time, what positive surprise it was to them that they could attend the event with a companion;
- another good solution is to invite a mental health specialist to the cooking session (a psychotherapist);
- engaging a self-advocate assisting workshop attendees also turned out to be valuable.

I needed a trigger to leave home during disease exacerbation. I enjoyed spending time with others and learnt something new at the same time.

Workshop participant

I wanted to spend quality time with my wife away from home, free of fear and pressure, in the atmosphere of acceptance and understanding, without the need to explain myself.

Workshop participant

Does it work? How does the innovation help its beneficiaries?

The innovation had impact on:

- strengthening relations between sick individuals and those who supported them by creating shared positive experience and memories, joint work in the kitchen, namely learning how to engage a sick person in activities and find inspiration for further activity by cooking at home together and providing support for meal preparation;
- increasing competencies among supporting individuals by encouraging them to take care of their own mental condition, learning about topics related to mental health, including the way in which people with depression feel, as well as specific support ideas;
- improving the mental condition of people in depression by preventing isolation and solitude, including them in social activities, boosting their self-esteem (a sick person prepared a meal that they could share with others and could take home), diverting attention from negative thoughts by shared activity, learning specific meal preparation tools and solutions (how to cook, how to make work in the kitchen easier, how to keep the place clean during cooking), stimulating senses (taste, smell, touch), natural integration with other participants (exchange of experience, establishing new relationships) and education on the condition (on emotions, on where to look for help, how to communicate poor mental condition to others);
- increasing competencies of the workshop host by expanding their knowledge on mental health and providing them with an opportunity to look at people with depression from a different perspective.





How much does it cost?

The organisation of one workshop costs around PLN 6,000 (including venue rental, fee for the host and assistant, products, utilities). Other costs include the coordinator's fee, printing of educational materials.

The exact cost will obviously be determined by the number of workshops (venue rental for a series of meetings should be cheaper), size of the group, location.

Who are the authors of the innovation?



Anna Maria Czaja – innovation originator, artist, designer. For several years affiliated to Akademia Kulinarna K5 in Gdynia where she discovered that kitchen can be a place of positive energy and a meeting point, but also a place where you can rest from depression, which is why she decided to share this space with other individuals suffering from depression when testing the innovation.



Kamil Sadkowski – originator and founder of K5, a proprietary cooking academy at which he trains chefs and dedicated amateurs. He has been through nearly all the career steps in the catering business. He started as a waiter, then was a bartender, kitchen manager, but also worked at a company providing restaurant supplies. Accompanied Robert Makłowicz during his most recognisable 'Makłowicz w podróży' TV culinary show.



Marta Łukasiewicz – health and clinical psychology graduate at the University of Łódź, and a behavioural and cognitive psychotherapist. She also graduated from the first stage of Solution Focused Brief Therapy training and regularly participates in workshops and training raising her qualifications.

She acquired her knowledge and experience during residency at the Central Research Hospital of the Medical University in Łódź, at a District Family Support Centre, and as a school psychologist. She works at a private office in Gdańsk with adults and teenagers.

Other individuals contributing to the innovation creation and the pilot included:

- **Agata Leśnicka** (psychiatrist, psychotherapist, sex therapist),
- **Paula Łysakowska** (clinical dietitian),
- **Joanna Piekarska** (psychotherapist representing Pracownia Dialogu), and
- **Piotr Drygas** (social innovation specialist).



Contact details and more information

The 'I support' and 'I need support' guides can be found on the depresjaodkuchni.pl and <https://inkubatorpomyslow.org.pl/innowacja/warsztaty-kulinarne-dla-osob-w-depresji-i-ich-bliskich> websites.

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