

2023 Edition Annual Health, Labour and Welfare Report

**- Social Connections and Mutual Support in a
Community-based Inclusive Society -**

【Summary】

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厚生労働省
Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

* This annual report focuses on specific themes related to health, labour and welfare, analyzes the current situation and introduces relevant measures taken by the government in order to help people to deepen their understanding of the themes.

Part 1 (theme part*) Social Connections and Mutual Support in a Community-based Inclusive Society

- Japan faces increasingly complicated and complex challenges as well as issues on people falling through the cracks of the country's social welfare system such as young carers and those who are in a state of *hikikomori*, or social withdrawal, and such problems are becoming prominent. This comes as people have been less and less interconnected due to an increase in one-person households and the COVID-19 pandemic.
- As the concept of social connections and mutual support has been expanded, to tackle those challenges, the government proposes new ideas of social connections and mutual support that are necessary in the post-COVID-19 era, hoping that the new ideas will help the country create a community-based inclusive society where people can live with peace in mind while connecting with others.

- New Forms of Social Connections and Mutual Support That are Necessary in the Post-COVID-19 Era -

Promote “INCLUSIVE” social connections and mutual support

→ Create opportunities for social connections and a system for mutual support for everyone through varied new channels

- Create a place where people with diverse backgrounds can interact with one another, transcending generations regardless of their social identities
- Provide support to everyone without regard to recipients' social identities such as age and disability instead of providing support affected by those social identities
- Provide active support (outreach) instead of passive support (waiting calls for help)
- Provide support that starts with housing assistance
- Use digital technology and create a new opportunity for social connections and a mechanism for mutual support beyond time and space
(People can receive professional help and interact with others while staying at home regardless of where they live.)

Promote social connections and mutual support to ensure people can give full play to their abilities and demonstrate their willingness in the community

- Create new forms of social connections and mutual support by taking advantage of the nature of individuals and corporations and their expertise
- Promote a mutual support system that enables anyone to participate in a way that suits their lifestyles and interest (letting worker cooperatives get involved)
 - Use digital technology to involve members of a local community in discussions and activities that impact their community
 - Encourage individuals and corporations to work together and make use of their expertise for mutual support (the Social Welfare Collaboration Promotion Corporation System, efforts to refer people to a wide variety of community-based support services by focusing on issues they face in their social life (social prescribing))

Part 2 Annual administrative report “Response to Current Policy Challenges”

- The report explains to the public how the MHLW is dealing with various policy challenges in a way that is easier to understand.

1. Changes in the Environment Surrounding Social Security and Attitudes of People

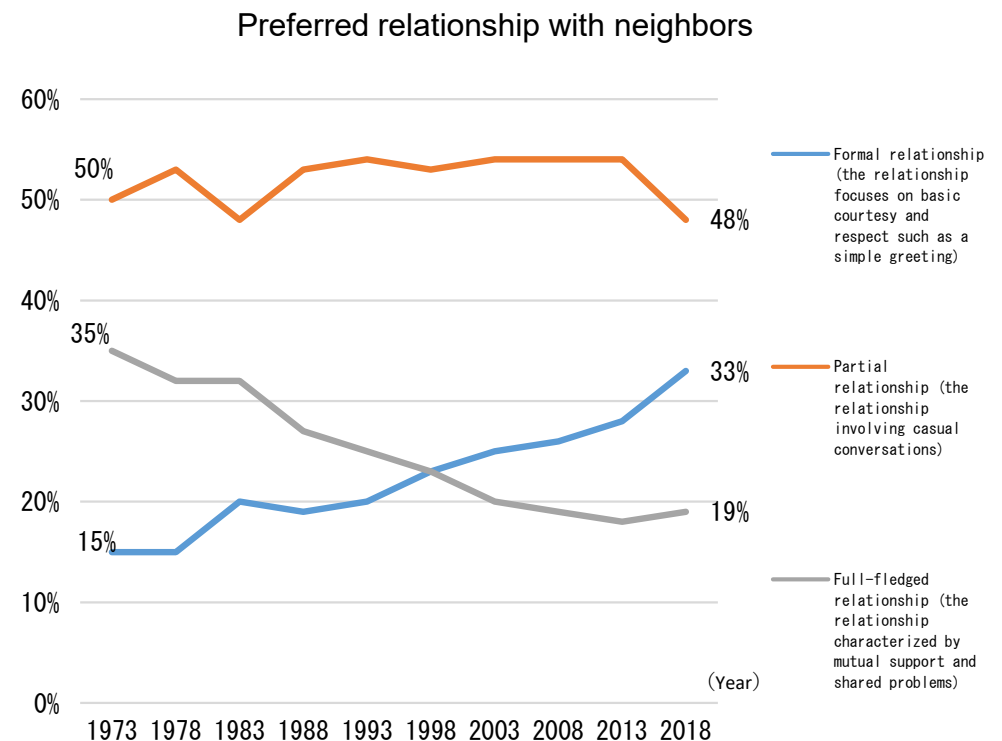
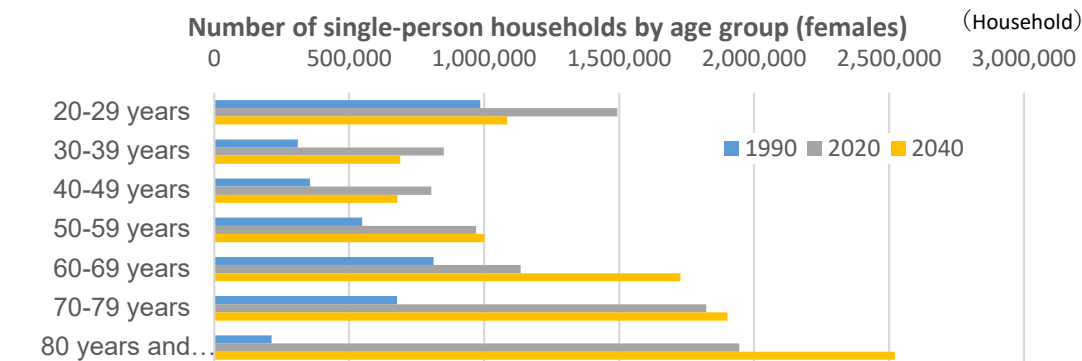
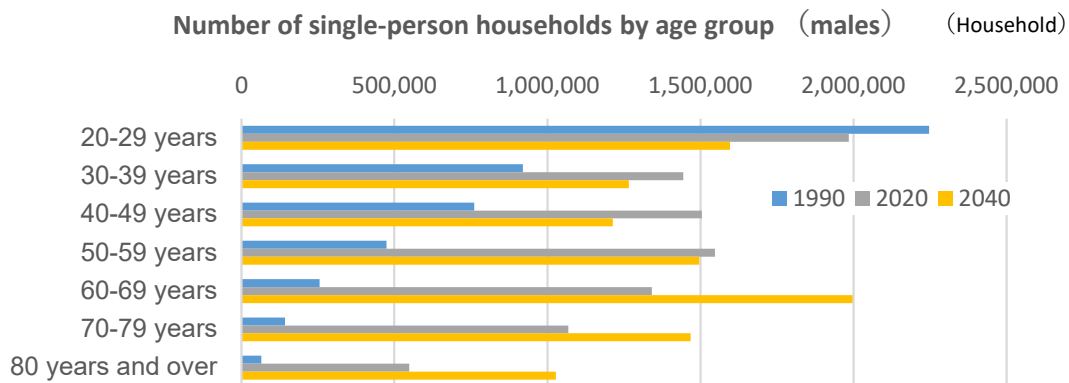
- Japan's population peaked in 2008 and began to decline thereafter. This demographic trend is a sign that Japan is entering an era of a real aging society with a shrinking population.

* Total population: approx. 124.95 million (2022) → approx. 87 million (population estimate for 2070)

- There are concerns about a decline in mutual support functions in families and communities due to shrinking household sizes, a rising proportion of single-person households and an increase in the number of municipalities with small populations.

* Household size: 2.99 persons (1990) → 2.08 persons (estimated figure for 2040) * Proportion of single-person households: 23.1 % (1990) → 38.0% (2020)

- As a growing number of people prefer to maintain a formal relationship with others and interpersonal bonds weaken, loneliness and isolation are becoming significant issues.

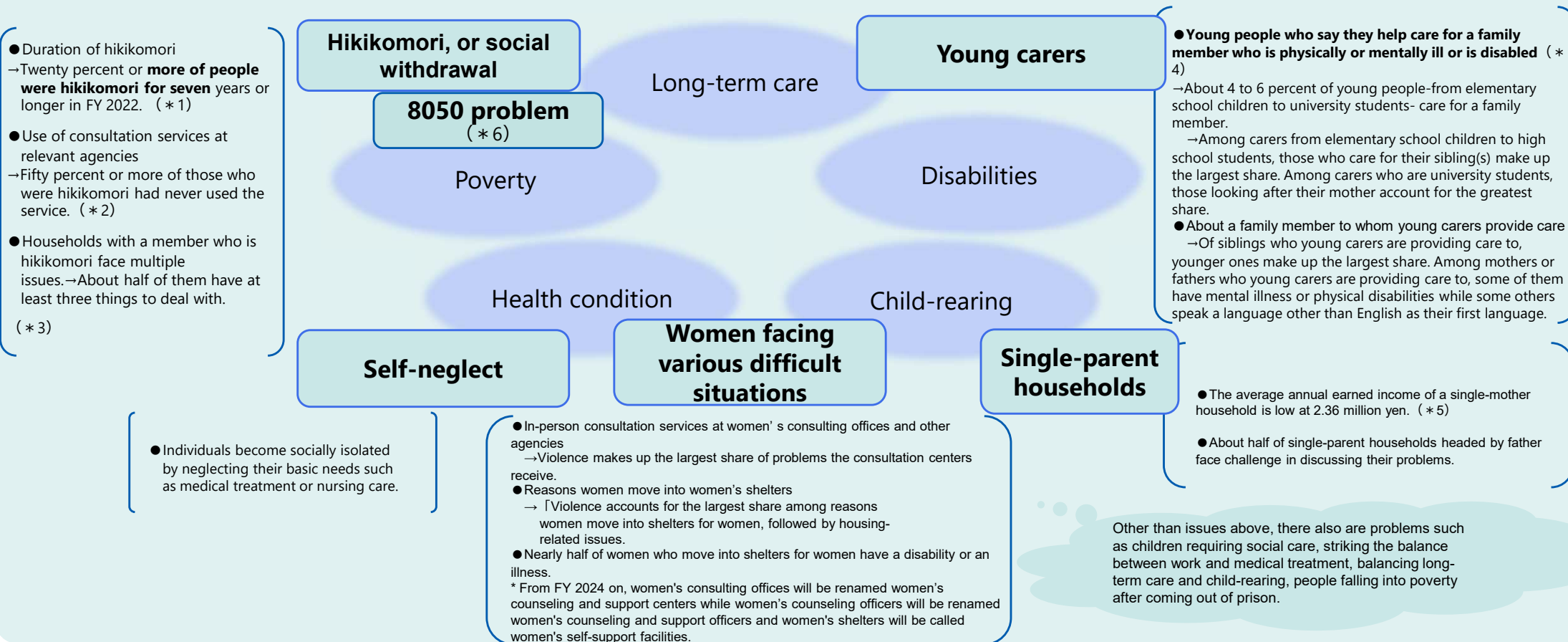


Source: Survey on Japanese people's attitudes, NHK Broadcasting Culture Research Institute

2. Challenges Requiring Cross-sectoral Approaches and Issues on People Falling Through the Cracks of the Country's Social Welfare System

- Multiple issues overlap and become more complex as the demographic structure and household composition change and relationships between family and community members weaken.
- Challenges requiring cross-sectoral approaches (such as the 80-50 problem) and issues on people falling through the cracks of the country's social welfare system including young carers and those who are in a state of *hikikomori*, or social withdrawal, are surfacing.

[Challenges requiring cross-sectoral approaches and issues on people falling through the cracks of the country's social welfare system (Examples)]



It is important to look at what is necessary to support a person's life rather than what assistant programs are available to the person.

(*1) Children and Young People Perception Survey in FY 2022, Cabinet Office (*2) Survey on Living Conditions (FY2018), Cabinet Office; Survey on Young People's Lives (FY2015), Cabinet Office
(*3) Report on the results of the FY 2021 Edogawa Ward Hikikomori Survey; the top two things that families with a member who is hikikomori are health of other family members, and incomes and financial resources needed to cover daily expenses.
(*4) Report of Survey Research on the Conditions of Young Carers in FY 2020 and FY2021, MHLW
(*5) Nationwide Survey on Single parent household in FY 2021, MHLW (*6) The term refers to a social issue concerning unmarried and often unemployed persons in their 50s living with their parents.

3. Social Connections and Mutual Support in a Community-based Inclusive Society (1)

● Promote “INCLUSIVE” social connections and mutual support

- Create social connections and a mechanism of mutual support for all through new diverse channel

Support for everyone

<Comprehensive support for everyone regardless of their social identities>

- Japan needs to further promote an initiative to develop a multilayered assistance framework aimed at creating a comprehensive system that provides support to everyone regardless of their social identities, generation or issues they face.
(※) Number of municipalities carrying out the initiative: 42 (FY2021) → 134(FY2022) → 189(FY2023)

<Build a network of relevant agencies>

- It is crucial to build a network of relevant agencies since complicated and complex issues are dealt with by various organizations and agencies.
(Examples) Divisions and departments responsible for dealing with welfare issues, the board of education, Hello Work public employment security offices, social welfare councils and private entities such as non-profit organizations and associations of families

<Promote a support system that protects the rights of persons in need of help>

- The support system that protects the rights of persons in need of help serves as a common foundation for assistance and actions that focus on individuals under a comprehensive support system.
- To promote the support system including adult guardianship, the ministry helps establish a regional cooperation network of authorities concerned. It also provides support to agencies playing a core role in the regional network in improving their services.

“Active” support through outreach

- It is necessary to identify the potential need for support early on and prevent issues from becoming serious when it is difficult for individuals to access assistance on their own.

• The percentage of people who are hikikomori and say that they are not willing to seek assistance from agencies concerned
→ 15-39 years: 57.6%, 40-64 years: 50.0%
• Of individuals who care for a family member, the percentage of those who identify themselves as a young carer
→ Junior high-school students: 16.3%; Full time high-school students: 15.0%; University students: 26.7%

- It is crucial to analyze challenges each person faces and ensure a sufficient pool of community supporters who help people requiring assistance receive appropriate support.

Create a place where people can feel a sense of belonging

- It is important to create a place where people from different backgrounds can feel free to get together or visit, transcending generations and social identities.
- If people in the community have opportunities to interact with one another in their daily lives, this will help them getting connected loosely to others and watch over their neighbors.

Use digital technology

<Use digital technology to foster interaction between people >

- Digital technology enables people who have difficulty going out to connect with others while they are at home.

<Column > General Incorporated Foundation Online Child-rearing Association [Online gathering for parents and caregivers]

● New forms of parenting support

The association offers a virtual venue for parents and children to meet and talk so that they do not have to deal with concerns about parenting all by themselves and feel lonely.

● Expand services to meet users' needs

The association organizes playdate activities, shares information about parenting, and offers parents opportunities for consulting with early childhood experts including nursery teachers.



Support starting with housing assistance

- It is important to promote non-physical aspect of assistance that includes helping people deepen their connection to the community and offering consultation services.

<Column> NPO Own Aid Zama City, Kanagawa Prefecture [Homes where everyone can live with peace in mind]

● Provide comprehensive support including watching over

The Zama municipal government provides consultations about household finances and employment support to people who are struggling to find housing since many of them face problems about managing their finances and finding a job.

● Continue to watch over people who have received housing assistance and moved into a house or an apartment

The organization, working together with private real estate companies, continues to watch over tenants and offers consultations given the concerns of landlords that their tenants might have disputes with neighbors and fill their houses with garbage.

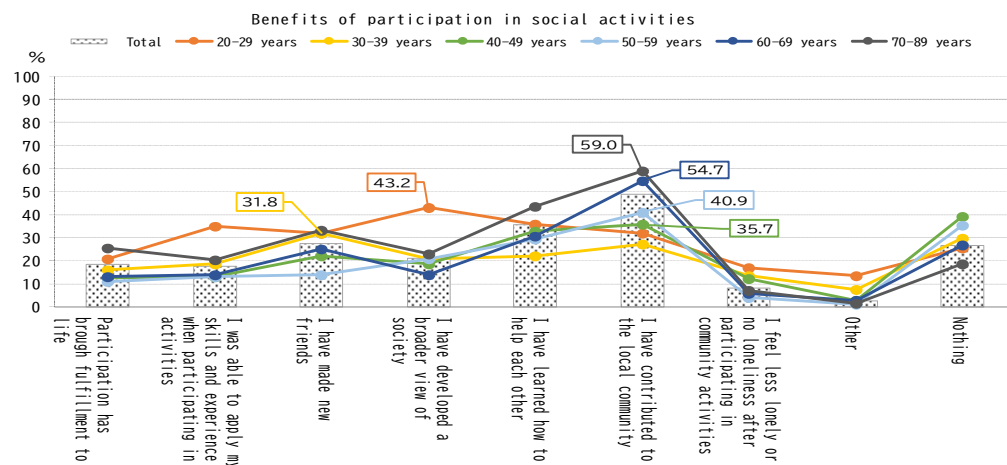
3. Social Connections and Mutual Support in a Community-based Inclusive Society (2)

- Promote social connections and mutual support to make sure that people can give full play to their abilities and demonstrate their willingness in the community
- Make use of areas of expertise of individuals and corporations to create new forms of social connections and mutual support

Promote a mutual support system that enables anyone to participate in a way that suits their lifestyles, etc.

<Social contribution activities through NPOs, volunteering and other activities>

- Participants realize that they have made contribution to the community.



Source: FY2022 Survey and Study on the Aging Society with a Declining Birthrate, MHLW

<Worker cooperatives>

- Worker cooperatives are a new corporate system that aims to address issues local communities face as people in those communities contribute money as workers, reflect their views and help each other. It is expected to enable diverse working styles and become one of the options for tackling community issues.
- * The Worker Cooperatives Act came into effect in October 2022. As of April 1, 2023, there are 34 cooperatives.

<Colum> Workerscoop Chiba [Working and starting business in the community]



- The cooperative implemented organizational change from an enterprise cooperative to a worker cooperative in December 2022.
 - Members meet once a month to discuss challenges faced by the community.
 - The cooperative has taken varied steps based on issues faced by the community in addition to initiatives to help people in need.
- Examples: Food bank Chiba, School Uniform Bank Funabashi (recycling uniforms of public schools, free assistance services), etc.

Take advantage of corporate bodies' areas of expertise for mutual support

<Social Welfare Collaboration Promotion Corporation System>

- The system enables multiple corporate bodies that are the members of the Social Welfare Collaboration Promotion Corporation to jointly conduct surveys to identify living-related issues faced by community residents and plan new approaches to address them.
- (*) The system is joined by two or more social welfare corporations, NPOs and other entities involved in social welfare services and promotes business collaboration between them. It started in FY2022, and 15 corporations are taking part as of May 2023.

<Colum> HATTENDO Co., Ltd. and MUNAKOSHI FUKUSHIKAI SOCIAL WELFARE CORP. [Collaboration between agriculture, commerce, industry and welfare to create a community-based inclusive society]

- ◆ HATTENDO Co., Ltd. is taking care of farmlands, processing grapes and selling processed products.
- MUNAKOSHI FUKUSHIKAI SOCIAL WELFARE CORP. helps people in need and the likes by providing them with an opportunity to grow grapes as part of job training.
- ◆ They generate revenue by processing grapes to make jam and other products and pay part of the revenue as wages for people in need, establishing a sustainable business model.

<Colum> Adult guardianship center in Usa City, Oita Prefecture [Possible cooperation between financial institutions and welfare facilities in the local community]



- ◆ The municipal government and financial institutions have concluded an agreement.
- ◆ Clerks of financial institutions contact welfare offices including the municipal adult guardian support center and comprehensive community support centers when they find something unusual about their customers and share information with the municipal government.

Use digital technology to get involved in local communities

<Use digital and information and communications technologies to enhance functions of local communities>

- Using digital technology enables people raising children, caring for a family member or having a disability to choose a working style and how to get involved in the community from diversified options, allowing them to contribute their share as a member of the community.

(Reference materials)

<Reference 1> Changes in the Environment Surrounding Social Security and Attitudes of People (1)

- About 70 percent of respondents said that they had fewer opportunities to meet people in person and communicate with others during the COVID-19 pandemic.

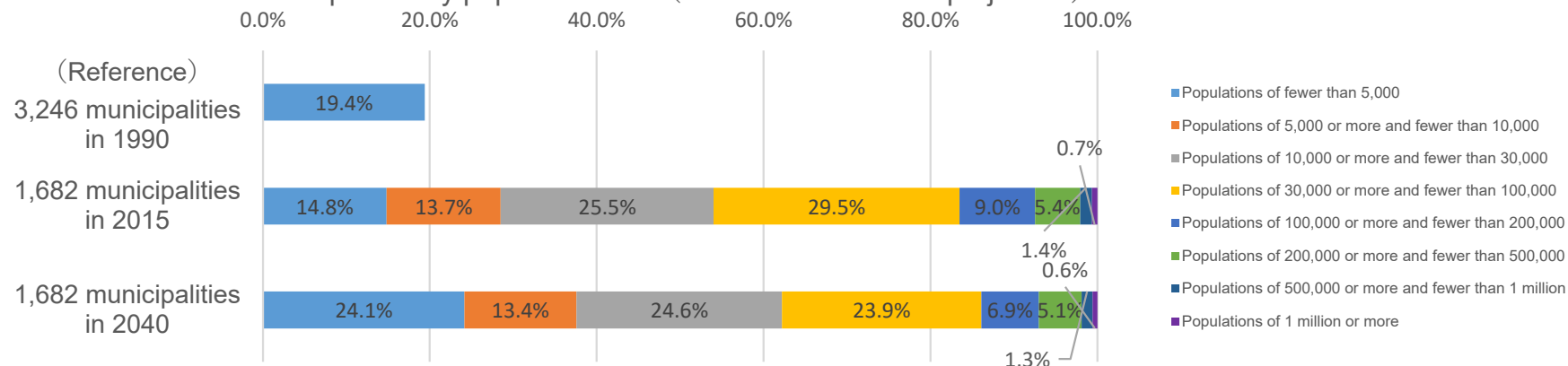
How the COVID-19 pandemic has affected your pattern and frequency of communication (2021, 2022)



Source: Basic Survey on Social Connections (2021 and 2022), Cabinet Office

- Municipalities with populations of fewer than 5,000 accounted for 14.8% of all municipalities in 2015. However, the proportion is projected to rise to 24.1 % in 2040, and an increasing number of municipalities are expected to see a decline in population.

Distribution of municipalities by population size (current situation and projection)



Source: "National Census", Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications (for 1990); Regional Population Projections for Japan: 2018 estimates, National Institute of Population and Social Security Research

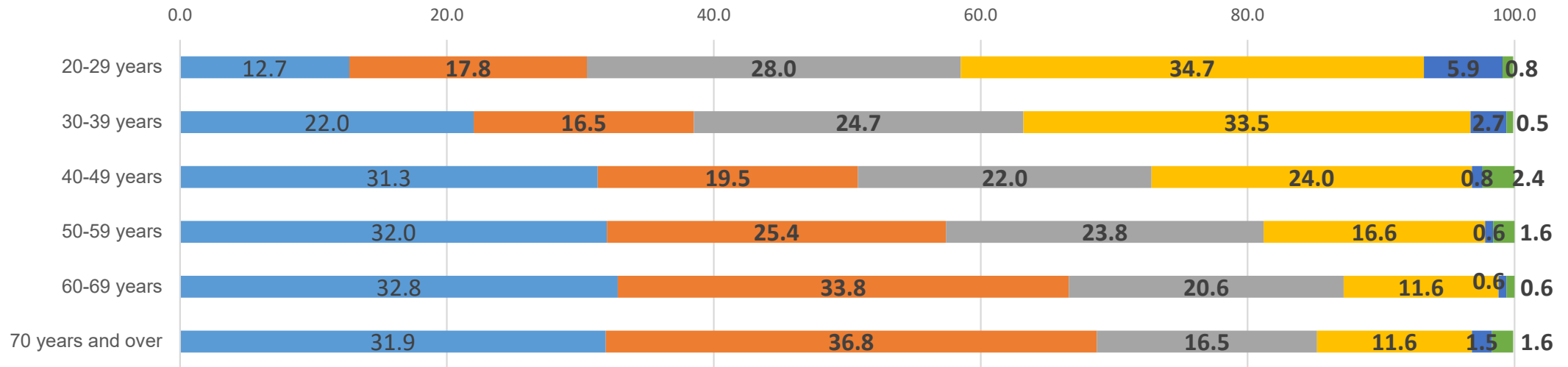
(Note) To calculate the number of municipalities, Tokyo's special wards are regarded one city.

(Note) The numbers of municipalities for 2015 and 2040 are the figures as of March 1, 2018 (excluding the number of municipalities of Fukushima Prefecture): 1682 municipalities comprising 778 cities, Tokyo's 23 wards, 713 towns and 168 villages,

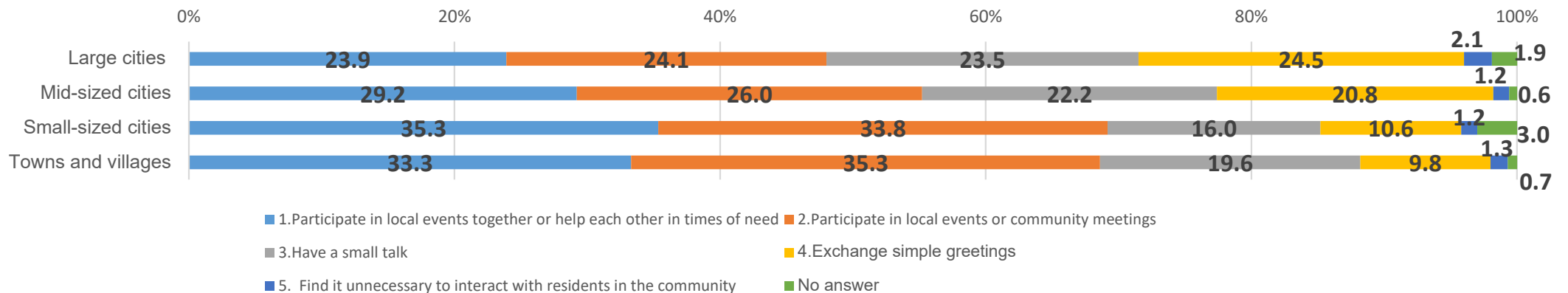
<Reference 1> Changes in the Environment Surrounding Social Security and Attitudes of People (2)

● Young people and people living in larger cities are more likely to say they prefer greeting or having a small talk when asked whether they interact with residents in their community.

Preferred extent to which you interact with residents in your community (by age)



Preferred extent to which you interact with residents in your community (by city size)



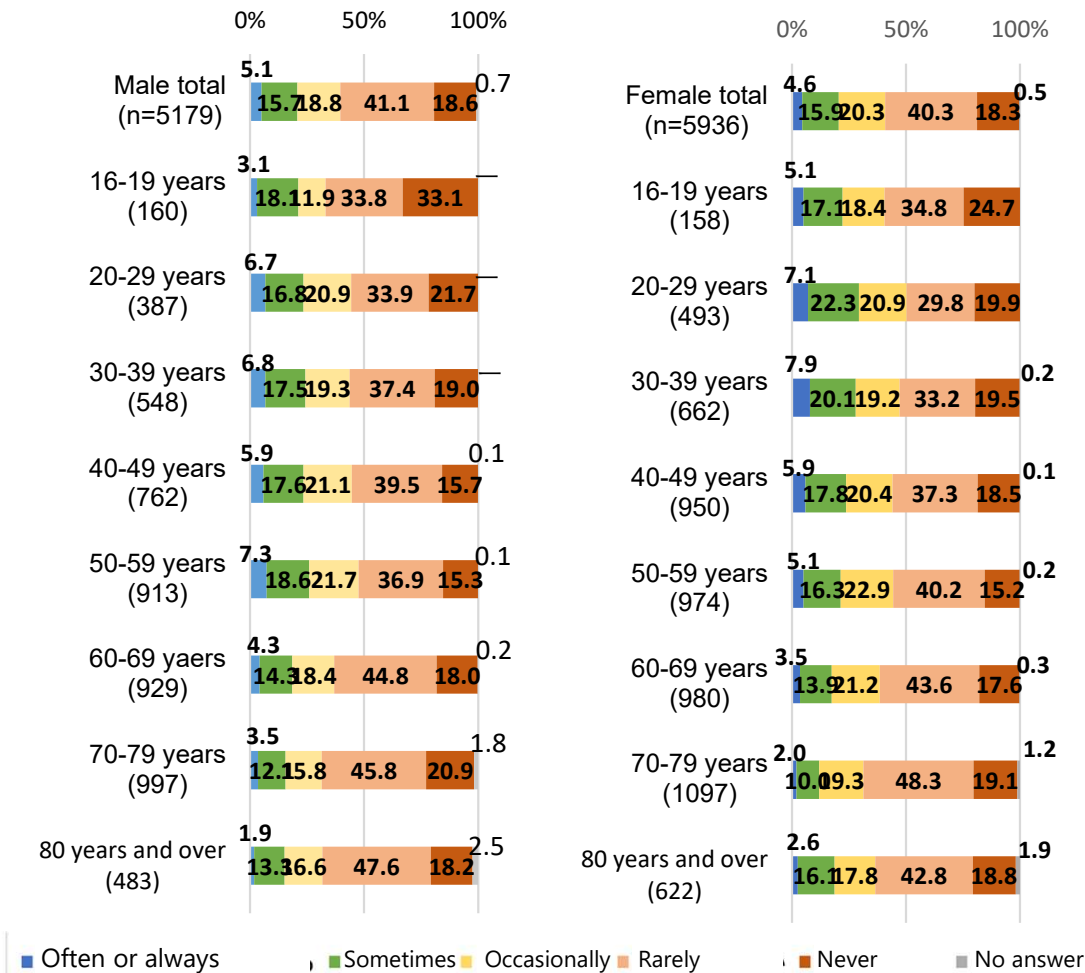
Source: The 2022 Public Opinion Poll on Social Awareness, Cabinet Office

Note: Classification of city size are as follows: large cities are special wards of Tokyo and cities designated by government ordinance; mid-sized cities are cities with a population of 200,000 or more and those with a population of 100,000 or more; small-sized cities are cities with a population fewer than 100,000, towns and villages.

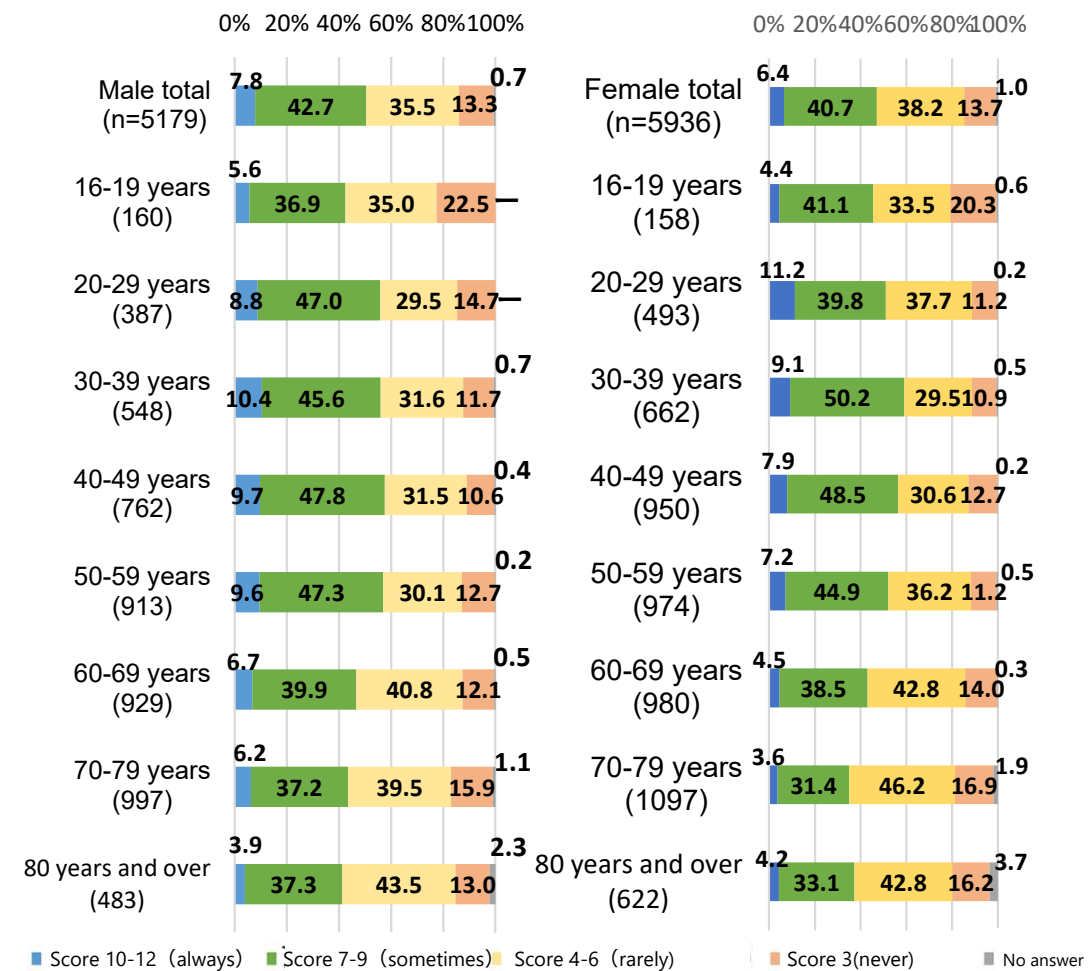
<Reference 1> Changes in the Environment Surrounding Social Security and Attitudes of People (3)

- The share of respondents who said “often” or “always” to a direct question asking how often they have a feeling of loneliness was 5.1 % for males and 4.6 % for females. By gender and age group, males in their 50s and females in their 30s accounted for the largest share (7.3 % and 7.9 %).
- The share of respondents in an indirect questionnaire who have a loneliness score of 10-12 (always) was 7.8% for males and 6.4% for females. By gender and age group, males in their 30s and females in their 20s accounted for the largest share (10.4 % and 11.2 %).

Feeling of loneliness by gender and age group (Direct question)



Feeling of loneliness by gender and age group (Indirect questions)



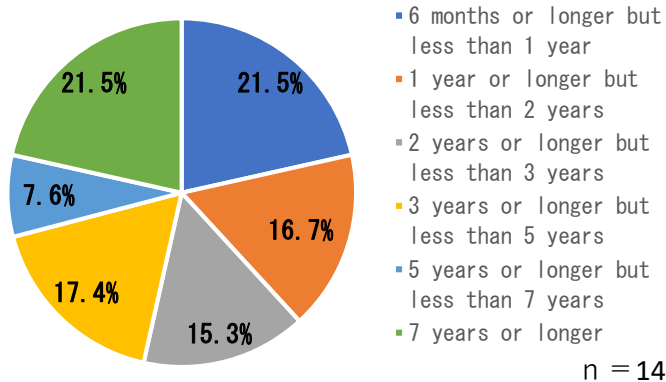
Source: The 2022 Basic survey on interpersonal connection, cabinet secretariat

The survey asks respondents two types of questions (a direct question and indirect questions) to precisely measure one's subjective feelings of loneliness. In a direct question, respondents were asked how often they felt lonely. In indirect questions, the Japanese version of the three-item loneliness scale originated from the UCLA Loneliness Scale developed by Daniel Russel was used to measure feelings of loneliness through indirect statements that do not use the word "loneliness."

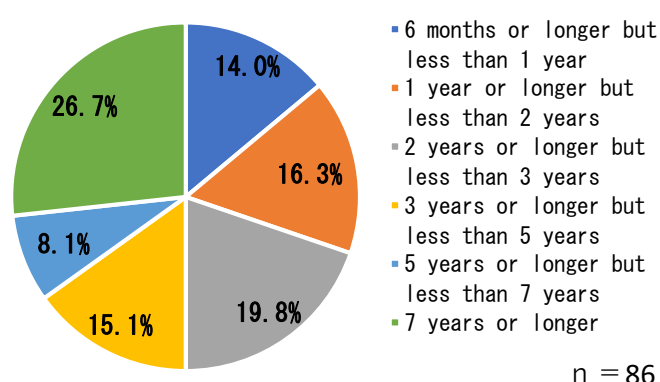
<Reference 2> Challenges Requiring Cross-sectoral Approaches and Issues on People Falling Through the Cracks of the Country's Social Welfare System (1)

- When asked about the duration of hikikomori (social withdrawal), about 50 percent of respondents in the 15-39 age group and those in the 40-64 age group said more than three years, and 20 percent or more reported more than seven years.
- About half of households have at least three things they have to deal with.

Duration of hikikomori, or social withdrawal
(Persons age 15-39)



Duration of hikikomori, or social withdrawal
(Persons age 40-64)



- Number of things to be dealt with by a household with a member who is hikikomori

Number of things to be dealt with	Number of responses	Percentage
0	54	1%
1	1,757	23%
2	1,917	25%
3	1,871	25%
4 or more	1,965	26%
No response	7,604	

Source: Reports of the result of the 2021 Actual Survey on Social Withdrawal in Edogawa Ward of Tokyo

Source: The Survey on Attitudes and Lives of Children and Young People in FY 2022, Cabinet Office

- Siblings account for the largest share (about 40 percent to 70 percent) of family members young carers other than university students provide care for. Mothers have the highest percentage (35.4 percent) of family members young carers who are university students care for.

Family member who needs to be cared for (multiple answers allowed) (%)

	Number of participants in the survey	Mother	Father	Grandmother	Grandfather	Sibling	Other	No answer
Students in sixth grade of elementary school	631	19.8	13.2	10.3	5.5	71.0	1.9	5.7
Students in the third year of university	987	35.4	20.5	32.8	17.2	26.5	4.7	—

* The figures for university students are the total of university students who said they are caring for a family member and those who said they are not caring for anyone now but used to provide care.

Source: Report on Survey and Research on Young Carers
The report on junior-high school students and high school students is based on the results of the FY 2020 survey while the report on elementary school students and university students is based on the results of the FY 2021 survey.

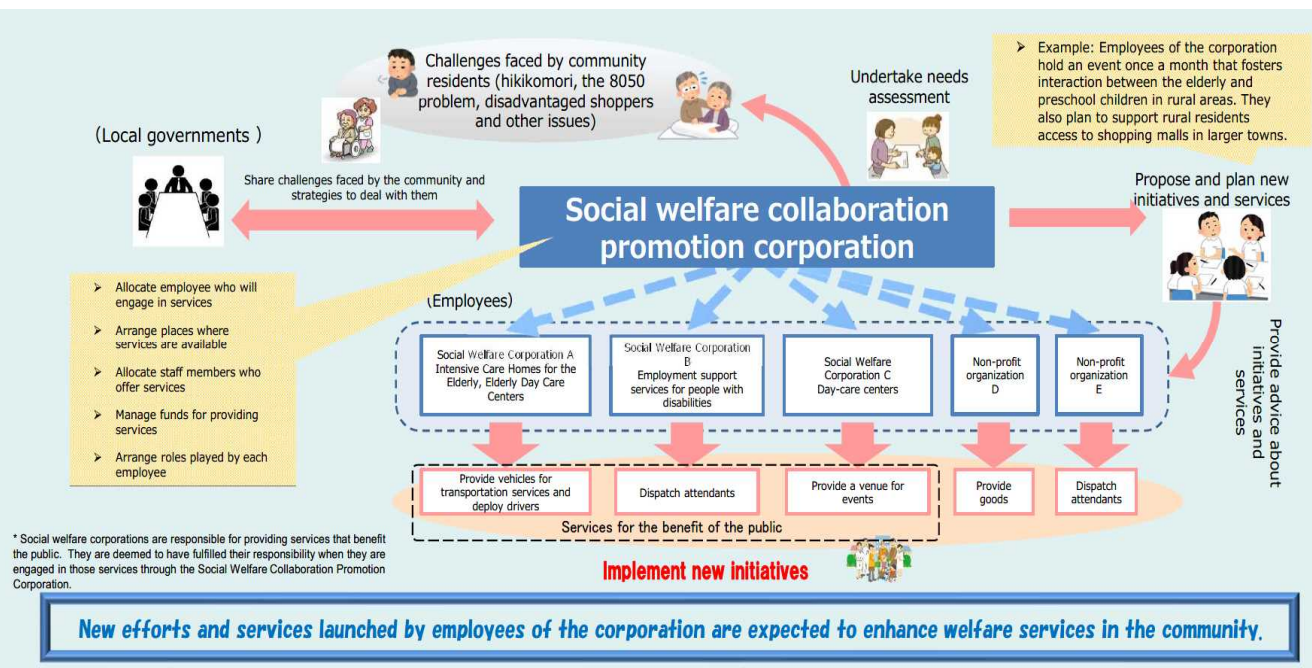
(%)

	Number of participants in the survey	Father or mother	Grandfather or grandmother	Sibling	Other	No answer
Students in the second year of junior high school	319	23.5	14.7	61.8	3.8	9.4
Students in the second year of regular high school	307	29.6	22.5	44.3	5.5	8.8
Students equivalent to those in the second year of evening high school	31	35.5	16.1	41.9	12.9	9.7
Correspondence high school students	49	32.7	22.4	42.9	12.2	0.0

* The figures for correspondence high school students are the total of those ages 18 or younger and those ages 19 or older.

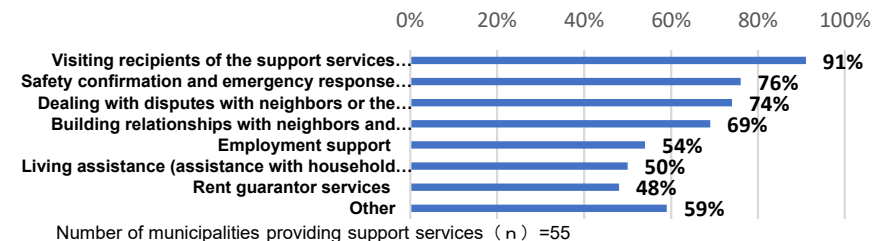
<Reference 3> Social Connections and Mutual Support in a Community-based Inclusive Society (1)

● Social welfare collaboration promotion corporation system



● Housing assistance for people in need

Support services for stable housing



Source: 2021 survey on services provided based on the Act on Services and Support for Persons in Need

● Social prescribing (Revision of long-term care fees in FY 2021)

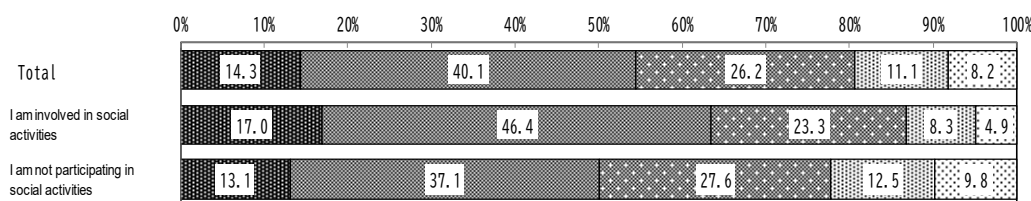
- The revision ensures that medical professionals such as physicians, dentists, pharmacists, registered dietitians or dental hygienists:
 - Visit the homes of patients who have difficulty visiting clinics,
 - Assess the patients' physical and mental conditions and living environment while looking at what challenges they face in their social life,
 - Monitor the patients' medical conditions and provide health guidance based on the assessment,
 - Work together with municipal long-term care support specialists, etc. to connect the patients to a wide variety of support services in the community.

● People involved in community activities are less likely to experience a feeling of loneliness. Those who are willing to join community activities but have not participated yet are most likely to say they do not know what kind of activities are taking place.

Involvement in social activities and loneliness

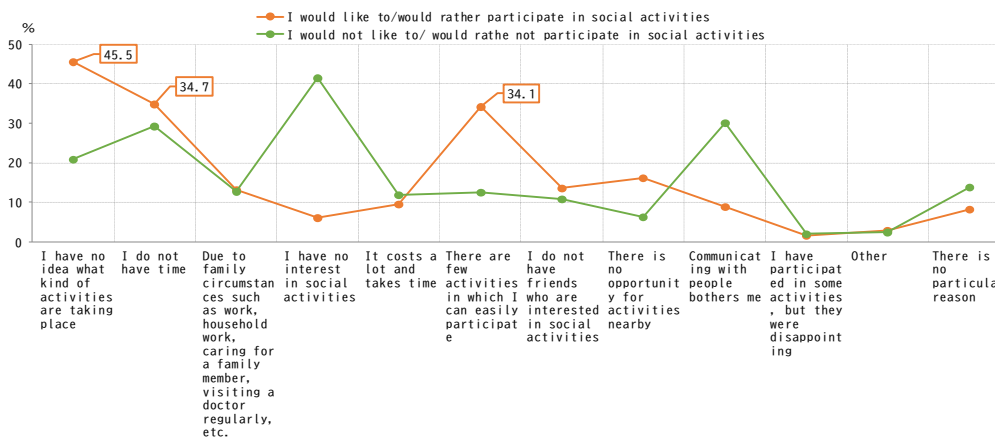
I ____ feel lonely.

■ Never ■ Rarely ■ Occasionally ■ Sometimes ■ Often or always



FY2022 Survey and Study on the Aging Society with a Declining Birthrate, MHLW
Community activities in this survey refer to volunteering in communities, activities by NPOs, local community-based activities by neighborhood associations, residents' associations, parent-teacher associations and other civil activities.

Main reasons not to participate in social activities (multiple answers allowed)



<Reference 3> Social Connections and Mutual Support in a Community-based Inclusive Society (2) (Specific cases)

<Establishment of a comprehensive support system>

<Consultation services for everyone>

(Okayama city, Okayama prefecture)

The city:

- ◆ has introduced check sheets to share information between agencies that provide consultation and support services to households struggling with several issues; and
- ◆ identifies issues, refers people seeking help to relevant agencies, passes on information about issues faced by those people and visualizes roles played by each agency offering consultation and support services.

A multi-page check sheet with various sections for recording information, including names, addresses, and details of issues and support services.

Check sheet



A multiagency meeting to discuss cases involving multiple issues

<Support people who are hikikomori through cooperation between relevant agencies, outreach support and providing places where they can have a sense of belonging>

(Kitakami City, Iwate Prefecture)

The city:

- ◆ has built a platform comprising administrative agencies and supporting organizations to share information on hikikomori, or withdrawal from society; and
- ◆ has started offering a space that allows anyone to drop in at anytime.



Regular gathering place "Waratane Square"

<Places where people can feel a sense of belonging>

<Community building by residents>

(WaCreation Co., Ltd. (Nagareyama City, Chiba Prefecture))

The company:

- ◆ holds events such as cooking lessons in a space for social gathering; and
- ◆ uses vacant and abandoned houses as Children's Cafeterias to provide meals to children of families in need while offering an opportunity for children to play outdoors with little supervision and on their own risk.



Community residents sitting on a wooden veranda and chatting

<Housing assistance>

<Rental housing that offers young people and older adults an opportunity for mixed-age interactions>

(Nobishiro Co., Ltd. (Fujisawa City, Kanagawa Prefecture))

The company:

- ◆ operates and manages an intergenerational rental apartment where younger and older adults and wheelchair users live together; and
- ◆ encourages younger residents to have regular communication with older ones and to hold a tea party that all residents can attend. (Younger residents get 50 percent off the rent if they have worked on such efforts.)
- ◆ Mixed-age interactions make the residents of the apartment start helping each other with trivial things such as changing batteries.



A small tea party

<Digital technology and ICT>

<Use an app for frailty prevention>

(Fuchu City, Tokyo)

The city:

- ◆ has launched frail prevention measures by using "Minchalle," a habit-forming app designed to help older adults maintain a regular exercise routine including walking in a group of five;
- ◆ holds classes for seniors to learn how to use the "Minchalle" app at a community salon; and
- ◆ uses a reward system that allows older adults to earn coins when they continue to use the app and to donate the coins to their community with the aim of keeping them motivated.



Participants learning how to use the app in the class



Fuchu City's donation project