HEALTHY AGING FOR OLDER ADULTS IN JAPAN

Session 1: What can we learn about healthy aging among older adults in the U.S., Sweden, and Japan?

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I. To shed light on covert social issues in Japan by delineating a current picture of Japan as the world’s fastest aging society combined with dwindling birthrate

II. To review physical, social, psychological predictors of healthy aging in Japan

II. To make propositions in answering where Japan should be headed for healthy aging
LIFE EXPECTANCY AT BIRTH

Source: World Bank
TOTAL SOCIAL WELFARE BENEFIT

(in million Yen)

Source: National Institute of Population and Social Security Research
HEALTHCARE SYSTEM

Healthcare of the Aged

Employees’ Health Insurance

Private company employees

Public employees

National Health Insurance

Self-employed, Unemployed, Non-regular employees
Both pension and healthcare systems are pay-as-you-go financing method, rather than funding method.

Primary balance of the systems is largely dependent on current active employees.

Increasing elderly population accompanied with decreasing children is a simple threat to the financial management.
PREDICTORS OF HEALTHY AGING AT MICRO LEVEL

- **Lifestyle**
  - Japanese style diet
  - Sanitation-conscious

- **Psychological well-being**
  - Link between life enjoyment and cardiovascular diseases/mortality (Shirai et al., 2009)
  - Elders are happiest and least anxious among the population (JGSS, 2008)
PREDICTORS OF HEALTHY AGING AT MACRO LEVEL

- **Social Services**
  - Long history of universal healthcare and pension system (since 1961)

- **Egalitarianism**
  - Link between Income equality and population health and life expectancy (Subramanian & Kawachi, 2004; Wilkinson & Pickett, 2006)
EMERGING SOCIAL ISSUES

- **Increase in poverty**
  - Poverty rate is the forth largest among developed countries (OECD, 2008).

- **Widening disparity**
  - Income inequality has grown in the past few decades (Tachibanaki, 2005; Fukawa & Oshio, 2007).
  - Increasing number of people have reported low stratum identification (Shishido & Iwai, 2010).
POVERTY RATE (mid 2000s)

Source: OECD
GINI COEFFICIENTS (mid 2000s)

Source: OECD
Japan still remains as a longevity society.
WHAT ACCOUNTS FOR LONGEVITY IN JAPAN?

Japanese Elderly has a strong desire to work (Cabinet Office, 2008).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of HH</th>
<th>Labor Participation Rate (2000)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50-54 yrs old</td>
<td>80.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55-59 yrs old</td>
<td>71.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>60-64 yrs old</td>
<td>50.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65-69 yrs old</td>
<td>26.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>70-74 yrs old</td>
<td>15.4</td>
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<tr>
<td>75 and over</td>
<td>5.6</td>
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</tbody>
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*Act for Stabilization of Employment of Older Persons in 2006

Source: Shirahase (2009)
DISCUSSION

- Retirement has potential health implications due to the loss of worker role (Liang et al., 2005).

- Social ties may be key for healthy aging (Sugisawa et al., 2002).

- Given the current social issues in Japan, maintenance of social connection is getting harder.
REFERENCES


