

18th European Research Conference on Homelessness

13th of September, 2024 (Central European University, Budapest)

Seminar 22: Welfare Arrangements and Homelessness



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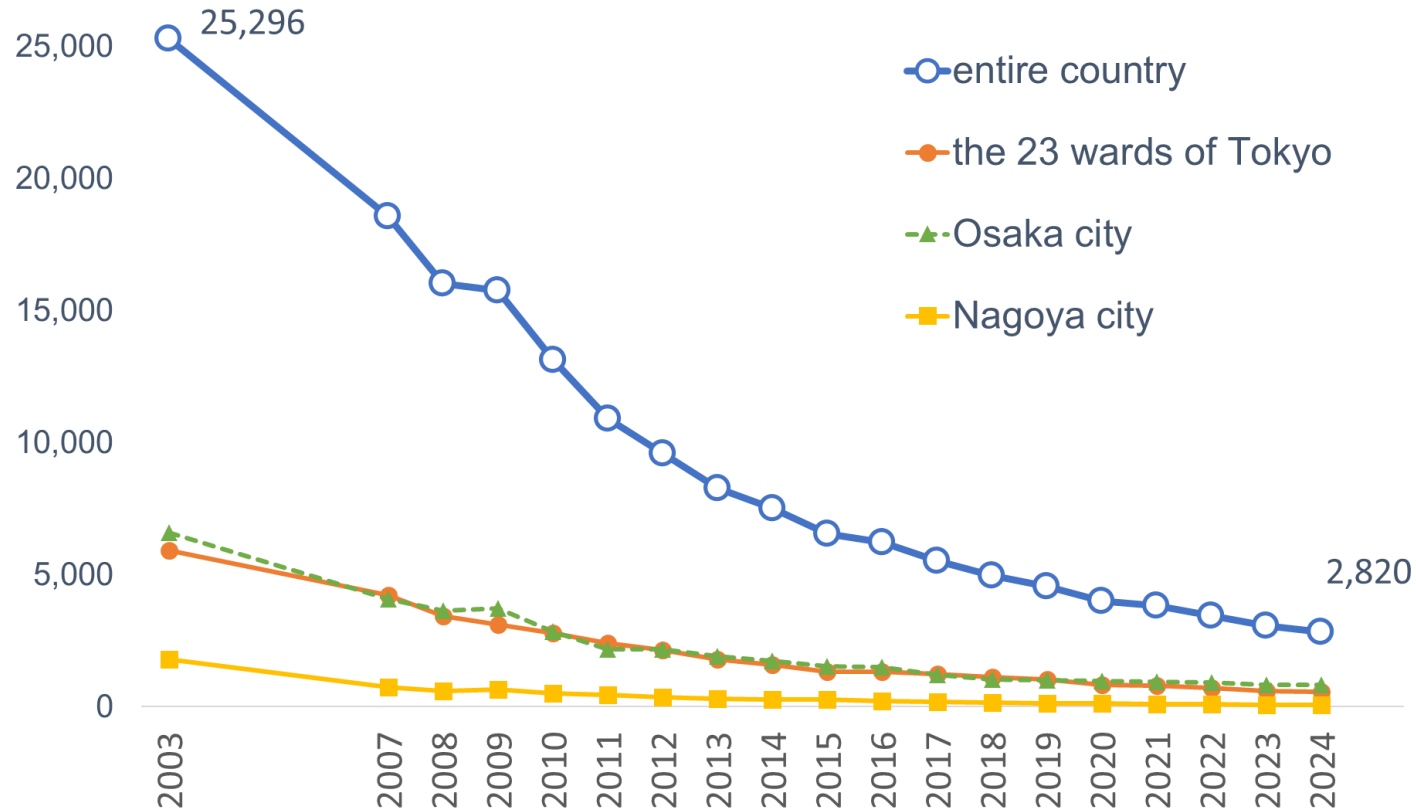
Well-being for All

The Sustainability of a Stable Life after Leaving Homelessness in Japan

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Gakuto Kawamura and Hiroshi Goto, JP

Number of people experiencing street homelessness in Japan

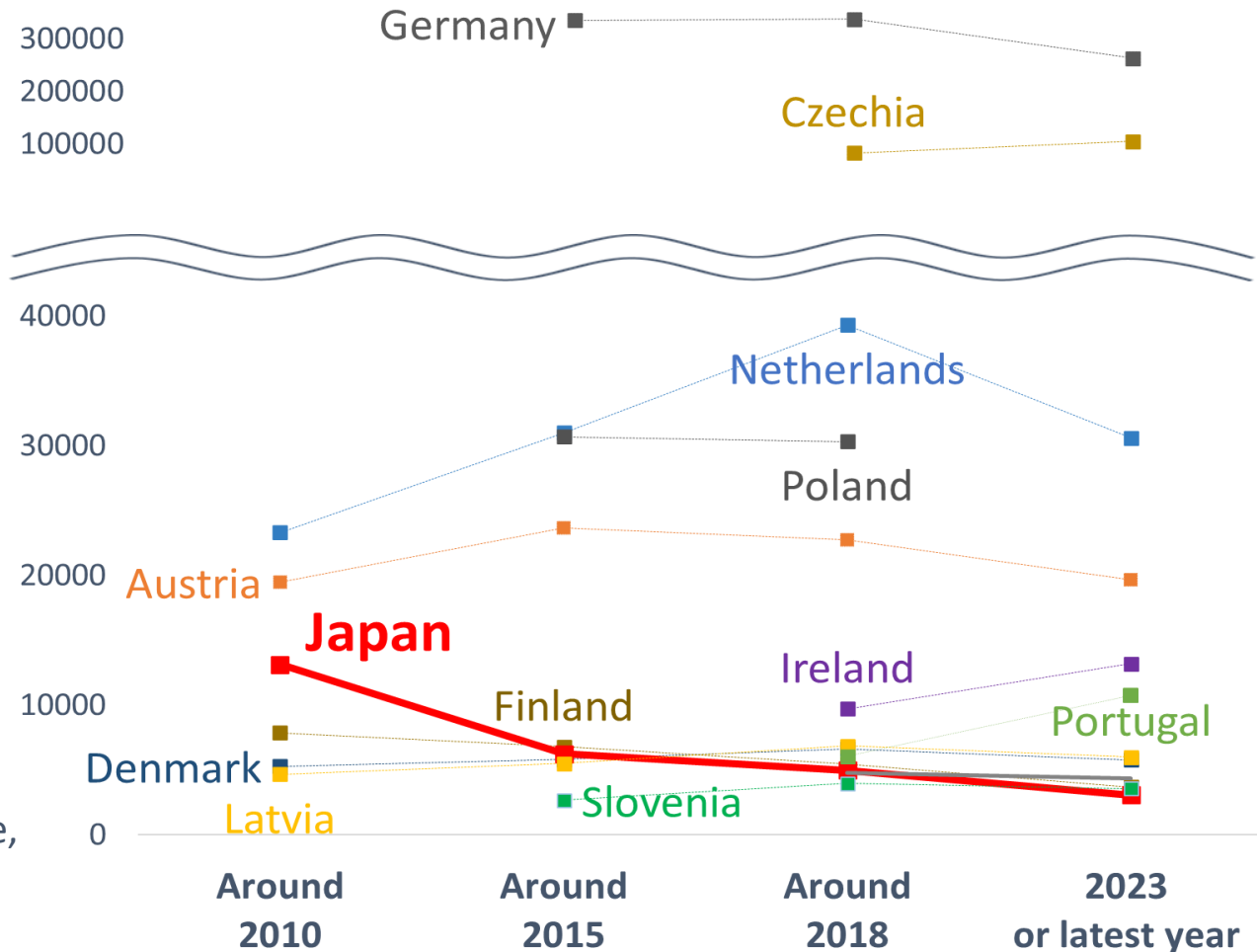
➤ Decreased by 90% over the past 20 years



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare

Trends in the number of people experiencing street homelessness in EU countries and Japan

- Fewer in number and greater decline in Japan



Source: OECD Affordable Housing Database, HC3.1 Homeless population estimates

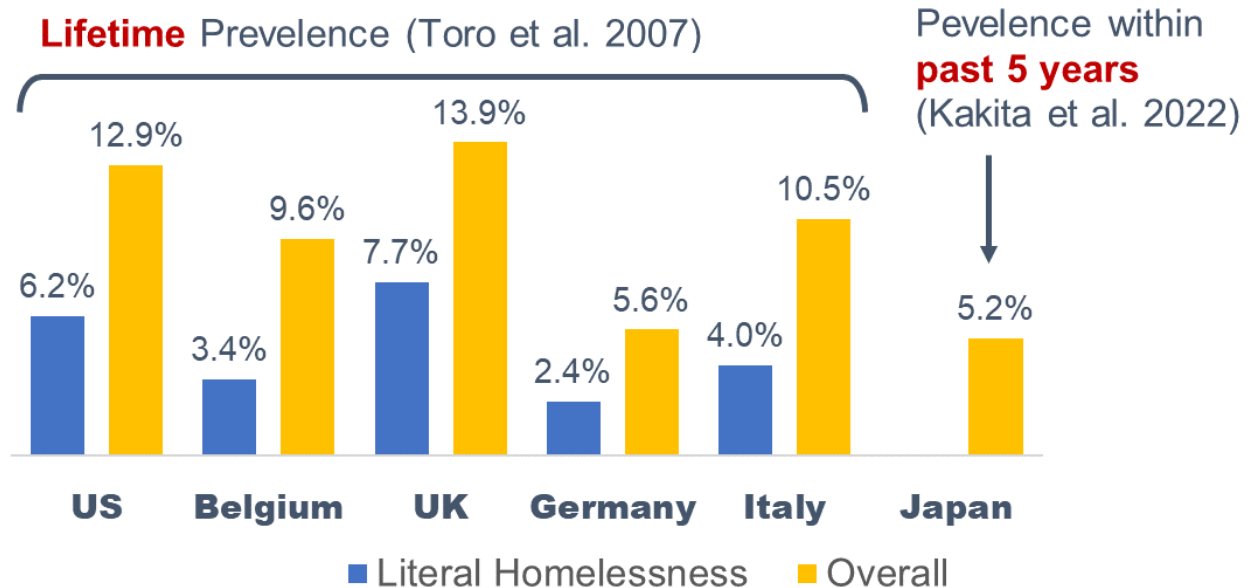
Factors behind the declining trend in Japan

- Since 2000, it has become easier for homelessness to receive public assistance (*Seikatsu Hogo*).
- Japan's public assistance program has three characteristics that can be expected to contribute to a decrease in the number of people living unsheltered (Goto et al. 2022).
 - **Generality:** People who are not disabled or elderly can receive public assistance benefits if they are in poverty.
 - **Comprehensiveness:** A wide range of needs can be met, including not only living expenses but also housing and medical expenses.
 - **Expediiousness:** In principle, 14 days from application to approval (maximum 30 days)

Can we evaluate Japan as a “success story”?

- Japanese government's definition of homelessness is **only rough sleeping**, it is narrow compared to international definitions (e.g., ETHOS).
- The decrease in homelessness might be merely a result of shelterization.
- Kakita et al. (2022) analyzed responses to an Internet survey of 40,000 adults living in Japanese metropolitan cities.

➤ Prevalence of homelessness in Japan is not much different from that in Europe and the US



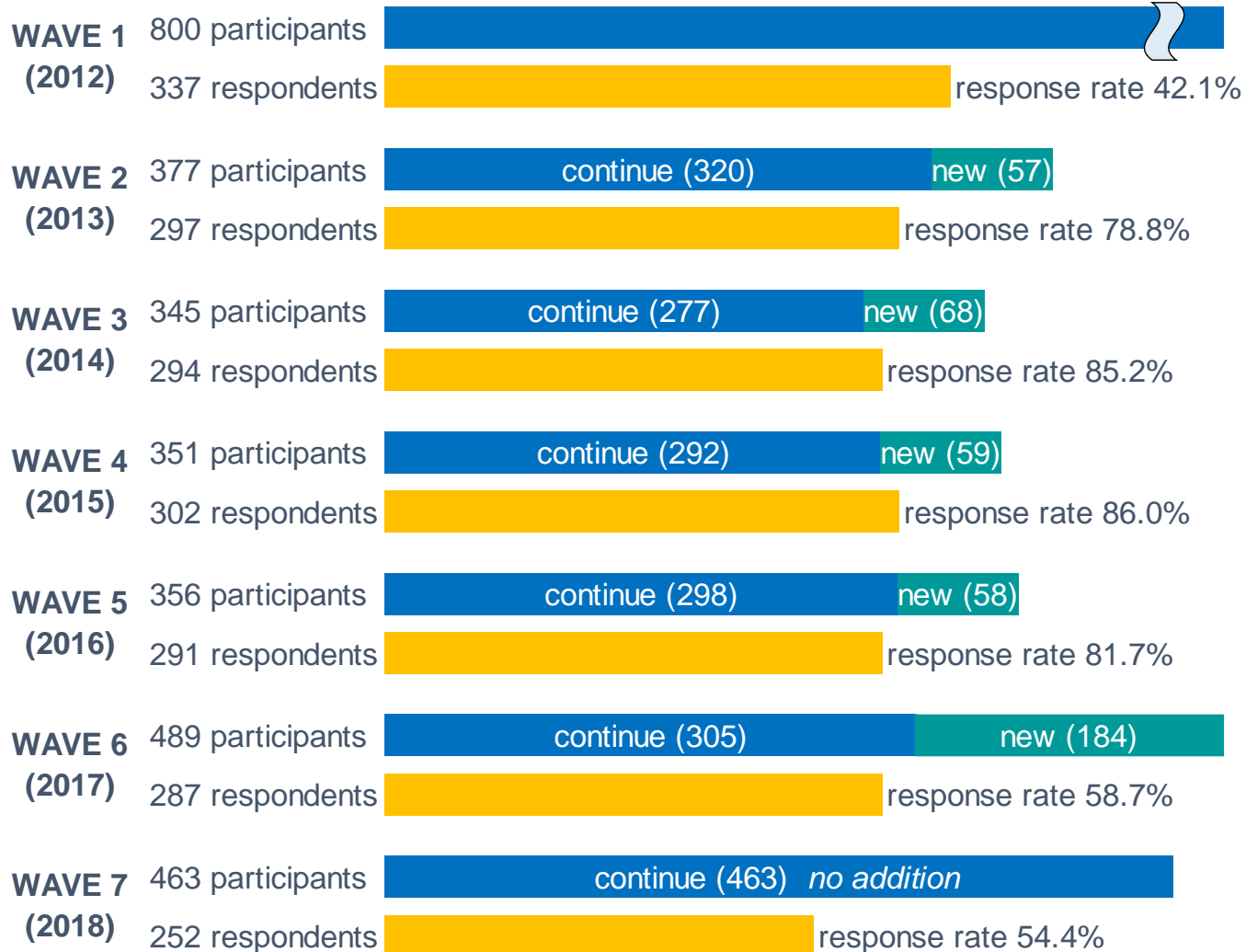
Can we evaluate Japan as a “success story”?

- Characteristics of homelessness (rough sleepers) in Japan (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare 2022)
 - Male: 95.8%, Female: 4.2% / 60-69 years old: 35.6%, 70 years old or older: 34.4% / Never married: 69.0%, Divorced: 25.9%
- Receiving public assistance means obtaining **housing** and **income**, but **not jobs** or **family interaction**
 - Risk of **isolation** from the community and **return to homelessness**
- 32% of Japanese rough sleepers have received public assistance in the past (Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, 2022).
- This study aims to analyze the factors related to the risk of returning to homelessness and to consider the support issues after leaving homelessness.

Data: Longitudinal survey of people who transitioned from homelessness to housing

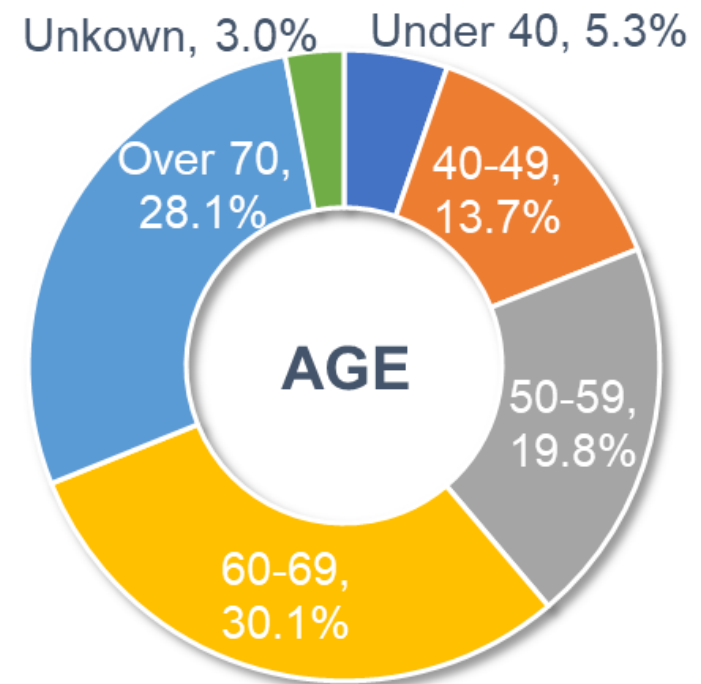
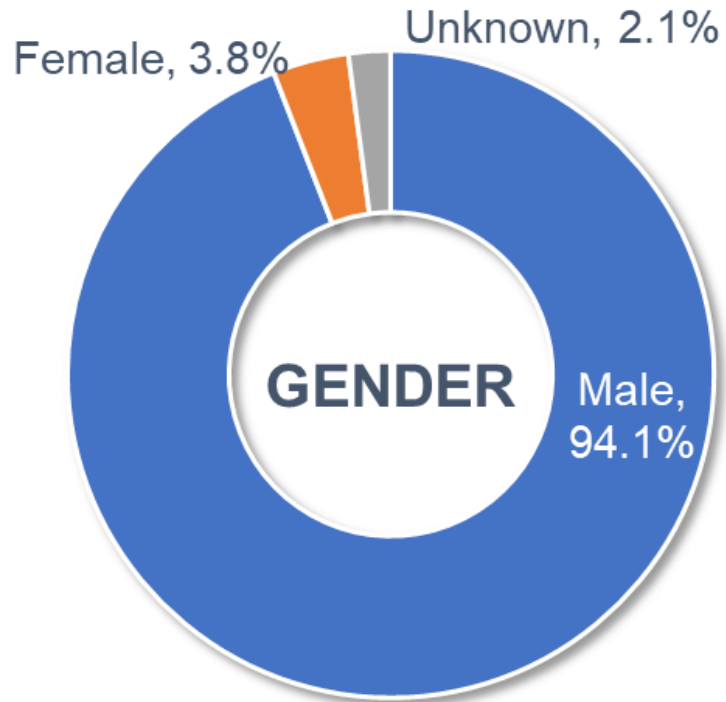
- Interviews were conducted with people who transitioned from homelessness to housing with the support of a non-profit organization (Sasashima Support Center).
- The survey was conducted annually from 2012 to 2018
 - In 2012, out of 800 clients of the NPO, 337 responded to the survey
 - From 2013 onward, new participants who transitioned to housing were added to those who agreed to continue to cooperate with the interview the following year

Participants



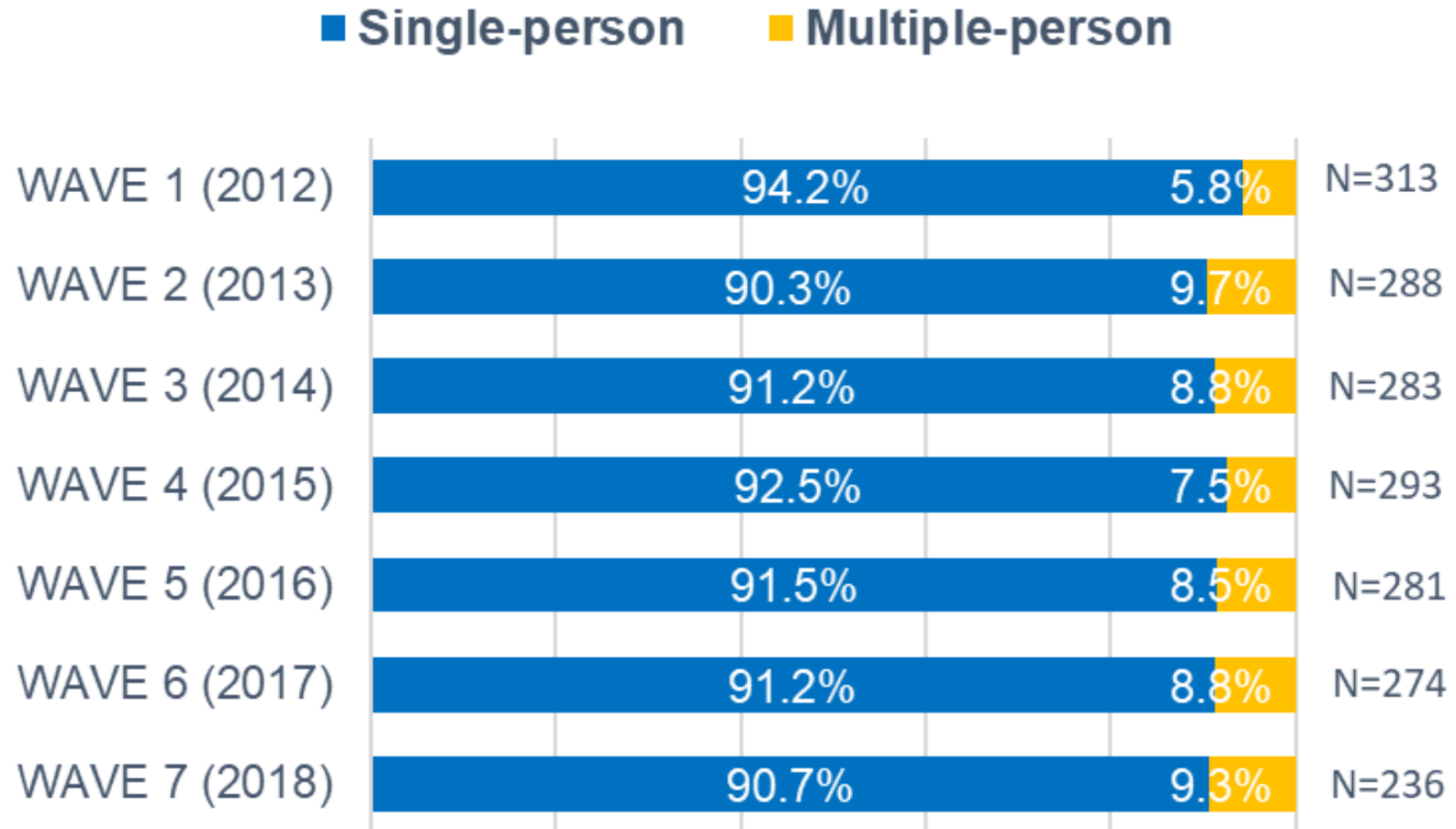
- ✓ 623 people responded at least once in the 7-year survey
- ✓ 70 people responded to all 7 surveys

Characteristics of respondents: Gender & Age

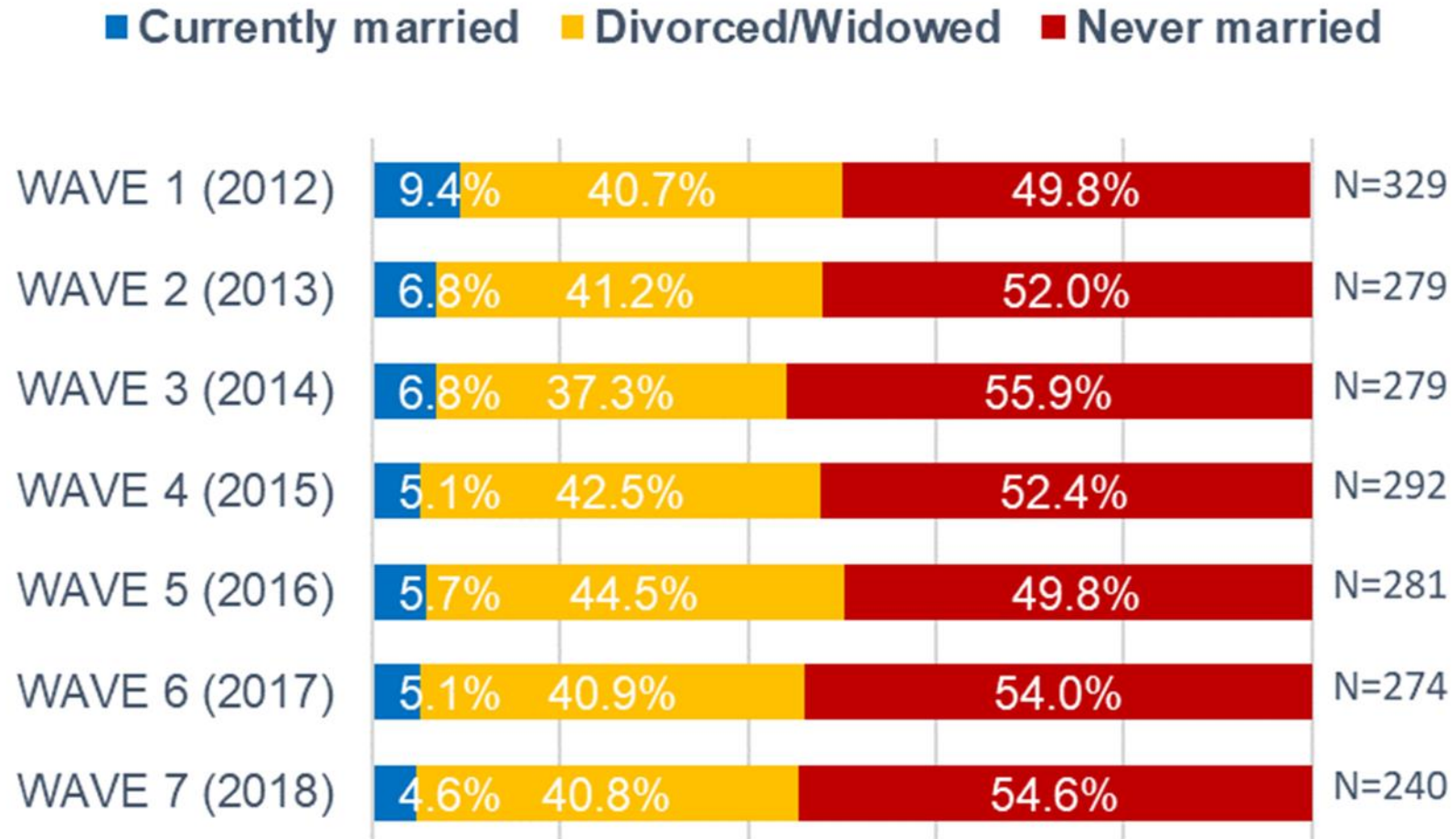


- N=623, Respondents who responded to at least one of the seven surveys
- Age as of 2018

Characteristics of respondents: Household composition

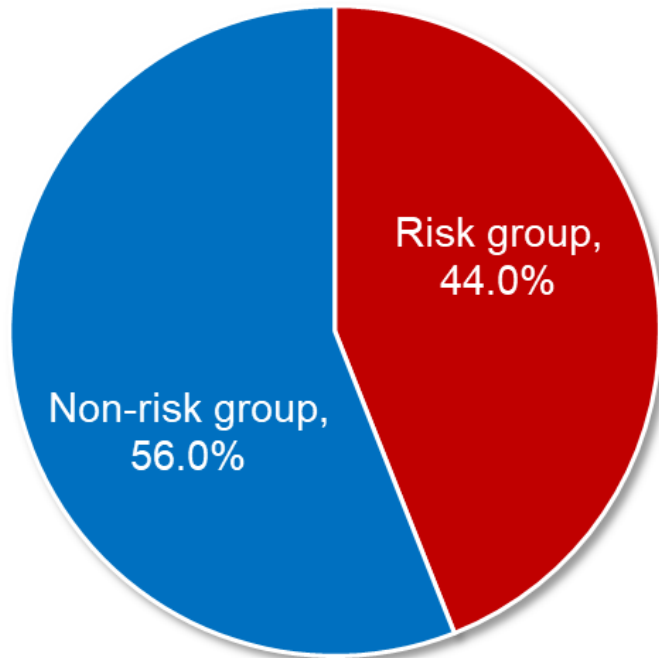


Characteristics of respondents: Marital status



Living conditions of respondents: Mental health

Mental health (WAVE 4)

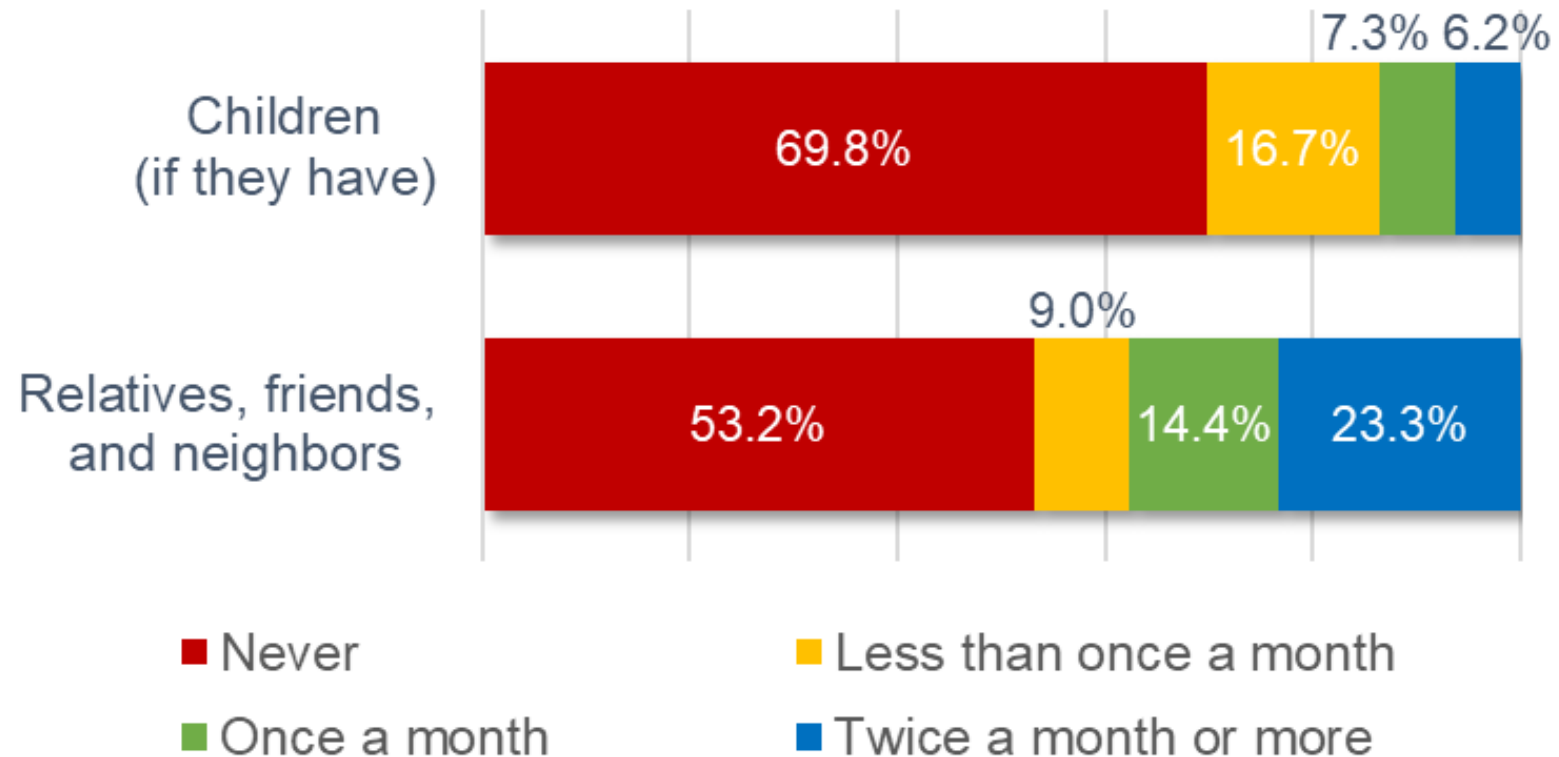


*Previous study targeting the general male population in Japan (Fuchino et al., 2003)
The proportion of risk group;
40's = 30.1% 50's = 19.2% 60's = 16.0%

- Mental health was measured using the General Health Questionnaire (GHQ).
- The GHQ is a self-administered screening questionnaire aimed at detecting those with a diagnosable psychiatric disorder (Goldberg & Hillier, 1979).
- The 12-item version of the GHQ includes questions such as:
Lost sleep over worry / Felt constantly under strain / Able to concentrate / Felt playing useful part in things / Been able to face problems...etc.
- Individuals were screened as being at risk if they scored 4 or more points.

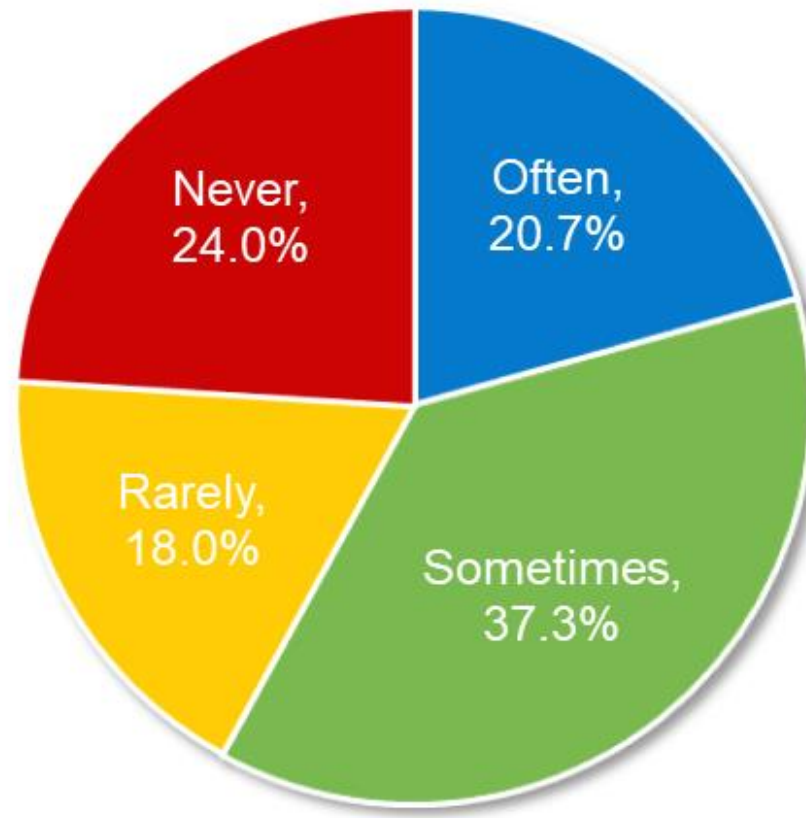
Living conditions of respondents: Social relationships

Frequency of Interaction with... (WAVE 4)



Living conditions of respondents: Loneliness

Do you ever feel loneliness in your daily life? (WAVE 4)



Risk of Return to homelessness

- Each year, approximately 10% of respondents say they have been in arrears of rent within the past year.
 - Being in arrears with rent can lead to the risk of eviction, resulting in the potential loss of housing and the possibility of returning to homelessness.
- **What factors are associated with the experience of rent arrears (risk of return to homelessness)?**

Have you been unable to pay your rent in the past year due to financial reasons?

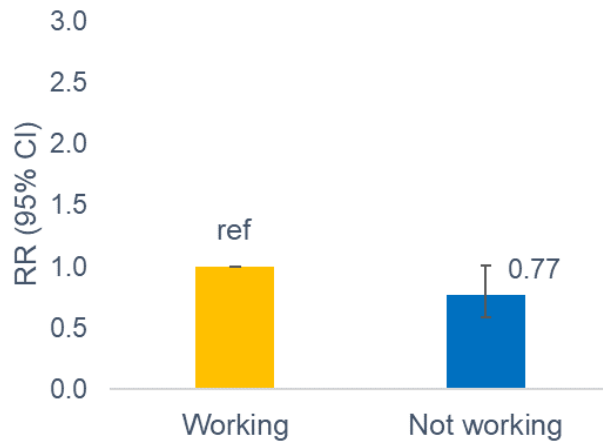
	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
WAVE 2	33	11.2	261	88.8
WAVE 3	32	11.1	256	88.9
WAVE 4	46	15.3	254	84.7
WAVE 5	42	14.5	247	85.5
WAVE 6	40	14.1	243	85.9
WAVE 7	33	13.4	214	86.6

Independent variables

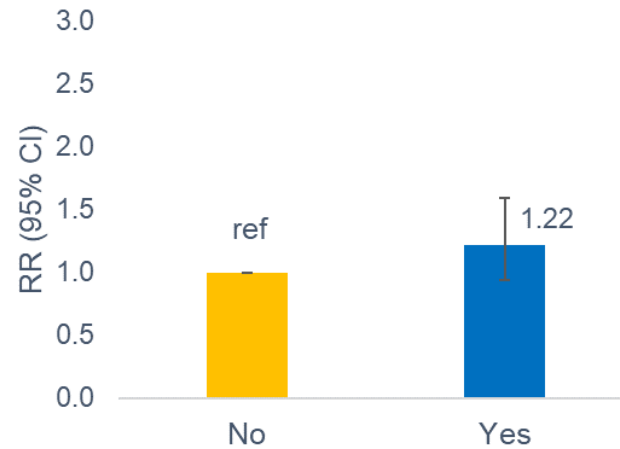
- Current employment status: working / not working
 - Subjective symptoms of poor physical health: Yes / No
 - Status of ADL: How many of the following 4 items apply; 1) weight change of ± 3 kg or more, 2) exercise at least twice a week, 3) go out at least once a week, 4) go out less frequently than last year
→ Good (0 items) / slightly good (1 item) / slightly bad (2 items) / bad (3 or more items)
 - Frequency of drinking: Everyday / Sometimes / Hardly ever
 - Smoking habit: Yes / No
 - Gambling habit more than once a month: Yes / No
 - Mental health (GHQ-12): risk group / non-risk group
 - Feel loneliness: often / sometimes / rarely + never
- Poisson regression analysis adjusted for year of survey

Factors associated with risk of Re-homelessness

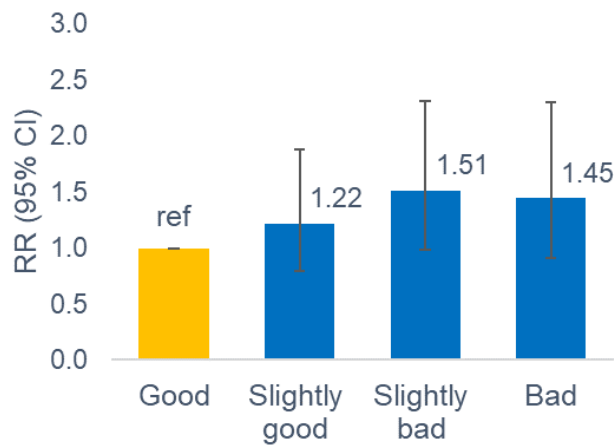
Employment



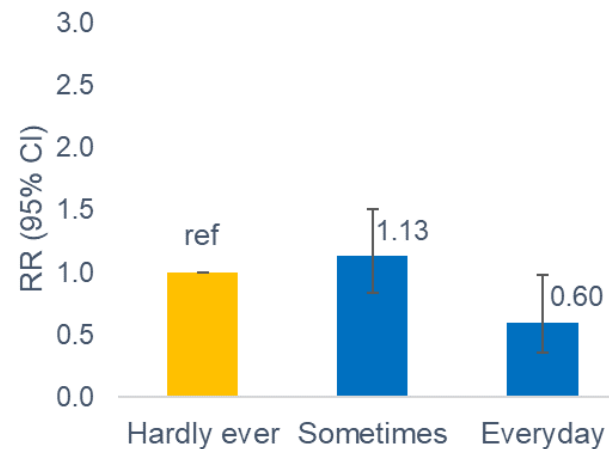
Subjective symptoms



ADL

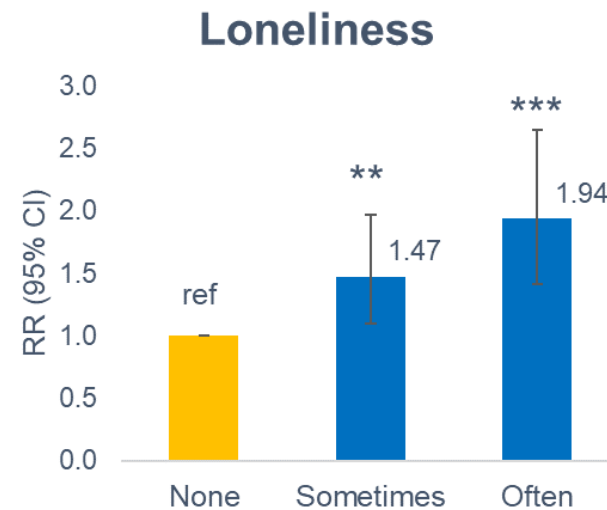
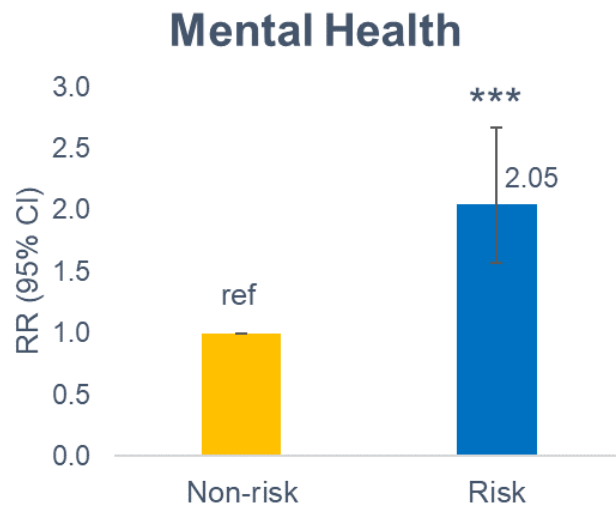
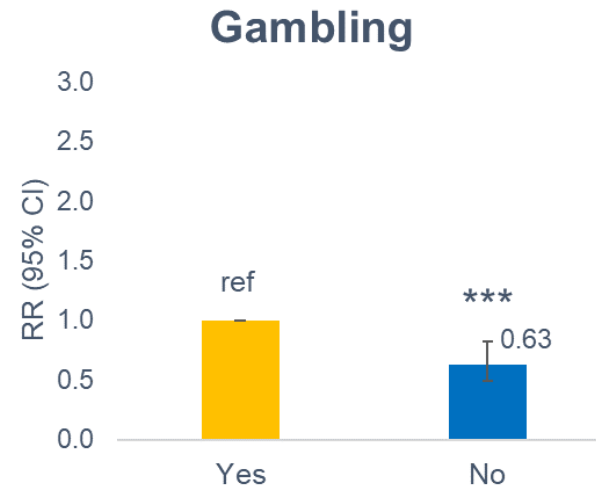
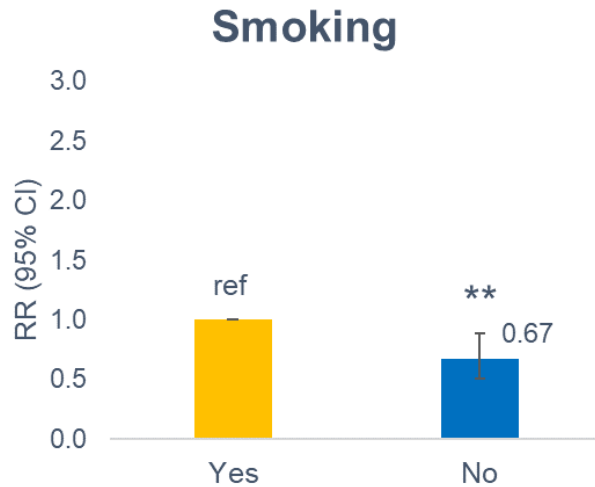


Drinking



(continued)

Factors associated with risk of return to homelessness (continued)



Note. The result of a Poisson regression analysis with the experience of rental arrears within one year as the dependent variable. All independent variables were entered simultaneously, with survey year included as a control variable. The sample comprised responses from WAVE 2 to WAVE 7 surveys where rental arrears experience was queried (N=1,710).
 ref = reference category, RR = Risk Ratio, CI = Confidence Interval
 * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$, *** $p < .001$.

Discussion

■ Findings of this study

- Mental health issues, limited social relationships, and feelings of loneliness among people who transitioned from homelessness to housing with public assistance
- Approximately 10% of respondents experienced rent arrears within the past year (risk of return to homelessness)
- Smoking and gambling habits are related to the risk of return to homelessness.

■ Japan's public assistance benefits includes rent subsidies

- Rent arrears indicate that the public assistance benefits are being spent on items other than rent
- Low financial literacy causes rent arrears and debt (Crane et al., 2014)

To reduce the risk of return to homelessness, support is needed to develop the ability to manage household finances properly

Discussion (continued)

- Mismanagement of household finances (wasteful spending) does not solely stem from personal moral failings
 - Mental health and feelings of loneliness are more strongly related to the risk of rent arrears
 - “The biggest factor leading to failed attempts at re-housing is a sense of loneliness.” (Kakita, 2004)
 - Loneliness, anxiety, and depression → unwillingness to consult others or seek help → inability to solve household management issues
 - Mental stability, recovery of relationships, and professional services are key to successful re-housing (Crane & Warnes, 2007; McNeill & Bowpitt, 2021; Tischler, 2008)

The risk of return to homelessness arises from the lack of access to professional services and social infrastructure

Discussion (continued)

- What does it mean to manage household finances skillfully without wasteful spending?
 - Elderly people who find it difficult to work and those who have lost family relationships
 - for what purpose should they manage their household finances?
 - Loss of *ikigai* (reason for living, purpose in life)
 - reducing wasteful spending does not easily become a goal of life
 - spending on items other than rent
 - increasing the risk of rent arrears and re-homelessness

Conclusion

Homelessness



Housing

Loneliness

Mental Health

Lack of support
Loss of *ikigai*



Rent
Arrears



**Return to
homelessness**



Connect to services
Create *ikigai*



Household
Management



Re-settlement

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