

A Study on Elderly People's Social Contribution Activities
-- Quantitative and Qualitative Analysis --
Summary

Authors

Akiko ONO

Vice Senior Researcher, Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training
(Part I, Chapters 1 and 2; Part II, Chapters 9 and 12)

MA, Xinxin

Assistant Fellow, Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training
(Part I, Chapter 1, Section 4; Part I, Chapters 3 and 4)

Junko URASAKA

Professor, Faculty of Social Studies, Doshisha University
(Part I, Chapter 5)

Yu ISHIDA

Lecturer, Akashi National College of Technology
(Part I, Chapter 6)

Shinya KAJITANI

Associate Professor, School of Economics, Meisei University
(Part I, Chapter 7)

Tomohiko MORIYAMA

Assistant Professor, Faculty of Social Studies, Doshisha University
(Part I, Chapter 8)

Akira YONEZAWA

Doctoral Program, Graduate School of Humanities and Sociology, University of Tokyo
(Part II, Chapters 10 and 11)

Research Period

October 2010 - March 2012

Background and Objectives

This report analyzes elderly people's¹ social contribution activities through questionnaire and interview surveys. As baby boomers have reached the age of 60, Japan is becoming largely an aging society. Elderly people now must shift from being supported by society to supporting society, and are expected to work until the age of 65. Their work may be broadly viewed to include volunteer and regional community activities as well as paid work.

In economic theory, compensation for 'labor' performed in volunteer and regional community activities may not be paid in the form of wages. However, the value and opportunity costs of such activities are provided to society and regional communities as 'contributions of time,' and such activities may thus be interpreted to be 'a form of labor.' For non-profit and other organizations which make social contribution and regional communities, elderly volunteers can provide important labor. They are especially expected to make significant contributions due to the massive retirement of the baby boomers.

For elderly people, a society in which they can continue working while having something to live for is important. Many elderly people find meaning in volunteer work (including paid and unpaid work) and social contribution activities and hope to devote their twilight years to these activities². If social needs match these elderly people's personal needs, the work of people aged 60 and above will be more diversified and fulfilling.

In this study, we use the term "social contribution activities." This term covers a wider range of activities than is indicated by "volunteer activities." Elderly people may not be familiar with the words "volunteer" and "NPO" as they have become generally known only recently³. Neighborhood community associations and many other organizations based on regional communities are a feature of Japanese society⁴. Participants in these organizations actually work for free, often without being conscious of the fact that they are serving as volunteers. It is our intention to include

¹ Elderly people in this report should be interpreted as those aged 55 and older, unless noted otherwise.

² In a survey of baby boomers conducted by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government's Bureau of Industrial and Labor Affairs in 2004, for example, about 40% of respondents were interested (ranging from "a little interested" to "very interested") in participating in volunteer or NPO activities.

³ The word "NPO" appeared in the Asahi Shimbun for the first time in 1992. The Nikkei Shimbun used the word only a few times annually until the early 1990s. The word "volunteer" began to be used frequently only after the 1995 Hanshin Awaji Great Earthquake (Yamauchi 1999).

⁴ There are only seven municipalities in Japan that have no local resident organizations. Neighborhood associations originated in the Edo Period. During the war, neighborhood associations were further utilized by the central government in order to control citizens under the rationing system. They were banned during the postwar occupation period. After the signing of the San Francisco Peace Treaty in 1952, however, the ban was lifted to allow neighborhood associations to be revived independently (Tanaka 1990, pp.27-60).

work for such community-based organizations in the term “social contribution activities.”

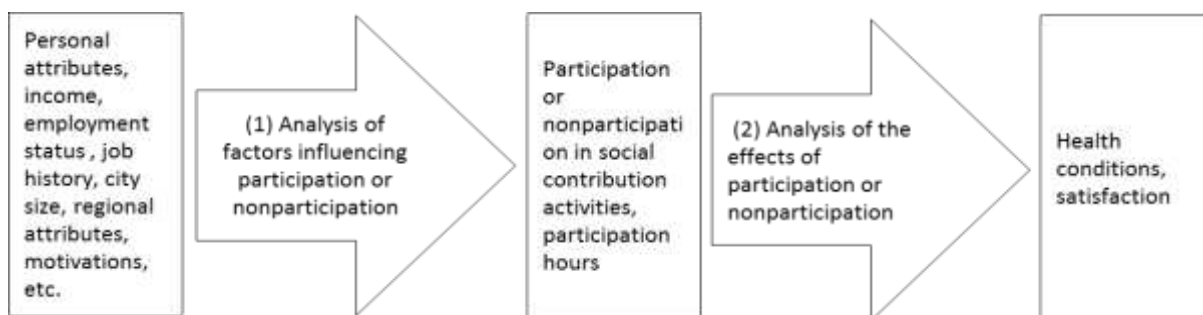
This report consists of two parts: Part I analyzes questionnaire survey data and Part II analyzes interview survey data. In Part I, we use data from the “Survey on the Employment Status of the Elderly⁵” to engage in a quantitative analysis of factors relating to the participation of elderly people in social contribution activities. Figure 1 illustrates the framework of the Part I analysis. The left arrow (1) in the figure represents an analysis of factors involved in the decision to participate in social contribution activities (Part I, Chapters 2 to 6). The analysis focuses specifically on the relationship of social contribution activities with previous/present employment status and wages/income. What are the characteristics of elderly people who tend to engage in social contribution activities? How are their social contribution activities influenced by pension benefit amounts, employment conditions, family environments and health conditions? How do elderly people utilize experiences and skills gained during their previous employment in their present social contribution activities? Are there differences according to age groups or regions (prefectures)? We also present a relationship between regional characteristics and social contribution activities, which we will discuss in Part II. The right arrow (2) represents an analysis of the effects of the participation of elderly people in social contribution activities (Part I, Chapters 7 and 8). The data obtained in this study indicates a strong correlation between the participation of elderly people in social contribution activities and their health. Therefore, discussions focus on the relationship between health condition and participation in social contribution activities. We also analyze whether those who do not participate in social contribution activities are different from those who do in terms of their motivations for living and life satisfaction, and whether engagement by elderly people in social contribution activities can boost their life satisfaction.

In Part II (Chapters 9 to 12), we turn our attention to a qualitative analysis of social contribution activities in three places in Japan. As noted earlier, social contribution activities should be defined to include activities engaged in by neighborhood community associations and other community-based organizations. Our interview survey focused on Chiba City in Chiba Prefecture, a metropolitan suburb featuring a rapidly aging population (an intermediate support organization); Mishima City in Shizuoka Prefecture, a rural city (environmental conservation activities for the Genbee River and so on); and Omori Town in Ota City in Shimane Prefecture, a rural town (regional activities in the Iwami Silver Mine area). We interviewed relevant persons in these locations about the participation of elderly people in regional community-based (volunteer) activities. In what ways do elderly people engage in regional community-based or NPO activities? What are their motivations, or what triggers their participation in such activities? What benefits do they obtain from engaging in such activities? What are the problems with or prospects of their participation in such activities? By asking these questions during our interviews, we attempted to extrapolate the process

⁵ For details of survey, see JILPT (2010).

behind the participation of elderly people in social contribution activities and problems experienced by NPOs and other regional organizations that accept their participation.

Figure 1 Framework of the Analysis of Elderly People’s Social Contribution Activities in Part I



Chapter-by-Chapter Summary

1. Summary of Part I, Chapter 2: “Elderly People’s Social Contribution Activities—Basic Data and Analysis”

Chapter 2 provides the basic data referenced in subsequent chapters and analysis thereof. Question 33 and its sub-questions in the “fact-finding survey on the employment of elderly people” are related to social contribution activities. Responses to these questions are cross referenced according to personal attributes, family structure, wages, income, savings and so on. At the same time, three dependent variables—“now participating in social contribution activities,” “willing to participate” and “not willing to participate”—are used in a probit analysis to estimate factors affecting the choice of whether to participate or not in social contribution activities and those affecting nonparticipants’ willingness/unwillingness to participate.

The results indicate that elderly people who have children and are higher educated are more apt to participate in social contribution activities. People’s participation in social contribution activities diminishes as they get older until they reach the age of 60, when their participation in such activities begins to increase. Given the time conflicts which exist between work and social contribution activities, this result indicates that people begin to participate in social contribution activities upon retirement. With regard to economic factors, people with larger savings are more apt to participate in social contribution activities. Those with higher monthly wages are less apt to do so. Good health is the largest factor affecting participation in social contribution activities. In addition, individuals who are more satisfied with their lives are more apt to participate in such activities, as are people living in rural regions when compared with people living in large cities.

Women, better educated people, breadwinners, people with higher non-labor income and with larger savings are more willing to participate in social contribution activities. Those who are repaying home loans are more likely to participate in social contribution activities after completing repayment of their home loans.

2. Summary of Part I, Chapter 3: “Factors Determining the Participation of Elderly People in Social Contribution Activities—Focusing on Volunteer Supply”

Elderly people aged 60 to 69 are the target of the analysis in Chapter 3. They are categorized and factors influencing the supply of elderly volunteers are empirically analyzed. The chapter specifically analyzes the influence of a person’s employment history and verifies consumption and human capital models. Participants in social contribution activities are categorized into four types—“focused on volunteer activities,” “completely retired,” “focused on work,” and “balancing work and volunteer activities.” These types are used as explained variables for verification with a multinomial logit analysis. The results confirm that elderly people with higher non-labor income (income from other family members) are more apt to participate in volunteer activities, while those whose wages form a larger share of income are less apt to do so. Those with managerial, service and sales jobs at the age of 55 are less apt to focus on volunteer activities than those with administrative jobs. Specialists are also less apt to focus on volunteer activities than generalists. As far as personal attributes are concerned, women and highly-educated people are more apt to focus on volunteer activities, as are people living in smaller cities. A gender analysis on these categories indicates gaps between men and women. Section 2 analyzes the hours spent engaging in volunteer activities by participants in social contribution activities.

3. Summary of Part I, Chapter 4: “Middle-aged and Older People’s Motivations for Participating in Social Contribution Activities and the Effect of these Motivations on Patterns of Such Activities”

Chapter 4 divides the motivations of elderly people to participate in social contribution activities into three categories—egoistic, altruistic and mixed—and provides a quantitative analysis of the factors influencing these motivations and of how these motivations influence social contribution activities (probability of participation in social contribution activities, probability of participation in unpaid activities and hours of volunteer activities). First, it was found that the following factors significantly influence the motivation to participate in social contribution activities: gender, education level, whether a person has family members in nursing care and city size. These factors exert a greater influence on the motivation of those in their 60s to participate in such activities than they do on those in their late 50s. Second, an analysis of the effects of motivations to participate in such activities confirms that differences in motivation other than

economic factors such as working hours and non-labor income can influence volunteer supply. People with a combination of altruistic and egoistic motives (or impure altruism) are more likely to participate in social contribution activities and to devote more time to volunteer activities. Measures and NPO management efforts to stimulate both altruistic and egoistic motives and increase motivations may become important to promote participation by elderly people in voluntary activities.

4. Summary of Part I, Chapter 5: “Elderly People’s Work and Social Contribution Activities—Replacement and Complementary Relationships Seen in Transition Patterns”

Given that elderly people have worked for a long time, Chapter 5 analyzes the conditions of their social contribution activities from the viewpoint of their work-related status types. In the past, unpaid social contribution activities have replaced work. As society ages rapidly, however, paid activities and work may have a complementary relationship. Based on this hypothesis, this chapter seeks desirable conditions for future social contribution activities. Work status is categorized into three types: “working,” “seeking employment” and “retired.”

For the purposes of this estimation, an ordered probit analysis is applied to three explained variables: “now participating in social contribution activities,” “willingness to participate” and “not willingness to participate.” The results indicate that working people and those seeking employment are more willing to participate in social contribution activities than retired people. On that basis the following transition patterns were observed. Working people can be largely divided into two groups: a minority group satisfied with their fulfilling social contribution activities and a majority group devoted to work with little interest in social contribution activities. Those satisfied with their social contribution activities had generally been participating in various social activities for a long time since their younger days, irrespective of their ‘post-retirement lives.’ Instead of replacing work with social contribution activities upon retirement or transitioning from work to such activities, this group gradually engages in social contribution activities while working. For this group, there is a complementary relationship between social contribution activities and work. In some cases, people in this group may earn sufficient income through social contribution activities, indicating an economically complementary relationship. People seeking employment, who are free from work-related time constraints, devote more labor to social contribution activities than working people but receive no economic benefits from such activities. This may mean that it would be difficult for people to establish economically complementary relationships between their social contribution activities and their work unless they make deep commitment to such activities. Retired people participate in social contribution activities more frequently due to the absence of work. But they are generally less proactive toward social contribution activities, making less commitment to such activities. This may be the reason why they engage in unpaid volunteer activities more

frequently than in other social contribution activities.

5. Summary of Part I, Chapter 6: “An Empirical Analysis of Regional Characteristics for the Promotion of Social Contribution Activities by Elderly People”

In Chapter 6, data is aggregated by municipality. The ratios of people participating in social contribution activities and of those willing to participate in such activities in each municipality are used as explained variables for a regression analysis with regional demographic conditions and characteristics serving as explanatory variables to estimate influential factors. Population (log), the unemployment rate, the average age of people aged 55 and older, the ratio of elderly workers, the ratio of elderly people living with family members, education levels, health condition, the share of those owning detached houses, the share for those owning condominium units, social education expenditure levels and ordinances (dummy) are used as explanatory variables.

Regions with high ratios of people participating in social contribution activities are characterized by higher average ages, higher education levels, better health condition, more people owning detached houses, and higher social education expenditures. The ratios of people participating in social contribution activities are higher in regions with greater numbers of healthier elderly people. Those owning their own houses are more likely to participate in social contribution activities also. This may be because people who own their own houses are required to engage in social activities in the regions where they live and have a greater desire or commitment to improve the regional environments because of their long habitation there. Regions in which people are more conscious of participating in social contribution activities feature lower unemployment rates, higher average ages, higher education levels and healthier elderly residents.

Based on the above results, the presence of networks among local residents can be noted as a key regional environmental requirement for promoting social contribution activities. The children of elderly people have already grown up, and these people therefore have no reason to participate in social activities for their children. The presence of their houses in local communities, or their connection to an area may have larger influences on their motivation to participate in social contribution activities. Also, in view of the fact that higher social education expenditures and education levels influence elderly people’s participation in social contribution activities, it is considered that direct or indirect learning opportunities encourage elderly people to participate in social contribution activities.

6. Summary of Part I, Chapter 7: “Health Condition of Elderly People and Social Contribution Activities”

Chapter 7 empirically analyzes whether the social contribution activities of elderly men are linked to the maintenance and improvement of their health condition. The chapter first specifies what

types of elderly men participate in social contribution activities and then adopts an estimation method which takes into consideration the effect of health condition on the probability of participation in social contribution activities (an inverse cause-and-effect relationship), thereby indicating how the participation of elderly men in social contribution activities influences their health condition, and at the same time confirming how their health condition affects the probability of their participation in social contribution activities.

This analysis results in several important findings. (1) While having the status of an employee at the age of 55 tends to reduce the probability that elderly men will participate in social contribution activities, smaller local populations and higher levels of education and having a certain amount of savings can increase the probability. (2) If the effect of health condition on participation in social contribution activities is controlled, the positive (or negative) effect of participation in social contribution activities on the health condition of elderly men is not statistically significant. (3) However, the negative (marginal) effect of poor health condition on the probability of elderly men participating in social contribution activities is far smaller than their negative effect on the probability that they will work.

7. Summary of Chapter 8, Part I: “Effect of the Participation of Elderly People in Social Contribution Activities on Their Life Satisfaction”

Chapter 8 takes into account changes in age-related working condition, differences in life circumstances and family makeup and specifies how the participation of elderly people in social contribution activities influences their life satisfaction levels, from the viewpoint of the role theory. This means that the chapter looks into whether the assumption of new social roles by elderly people after they no longer work or care for children can motivate their life satisfaction. The hypothesis is that the benefits of social contribution activities depend on personal conditions and social integration levels, and that the effects of these activities are greater for people who are in more disadvantageous positions in terms of human and social resources. Variables representing human and social resources include working conditions, family income levels and family makeup.

The verification of this hypothesis has the following four implications. First, the life satisfaction levels of elderly participants in social contribution activities are higher than those of nonparticipants, indicating that participation in such activities in itself is significant for elderly people. Therefore, it is effective to encourage elderly people to participate in social contribution activities to improve their life satisfaction. Second, engagement by women with local communities can increase the benefits to them irrespective of their ages, while men reach a turning point in their early 60s. The promotion of a smooth transition from work to local community activities at this age can prevent men from losing human and social resources upon retirement and can help create new resources. At the same time, seen from the demand side, local communities can be vitalized by

accepting the participation of retired men in social contribution activities. Third, elderly people with lower family income can realize greater improvements in their life satisfaction through participation in social contribution activities, indicating that these activities, though failing to provide economic resources, are meaningful for providing human and social resources. Fourth, married people can improve their life satisfaction through their participation in social contribution activities, while the participation in social contribution activities of unmarried, divorced or bereaved people has no effect on their life satisfaction. This indicates that human and social resources gained through social contribution activities complement, rather than replace, the social and emotion support provided by family members.

8. Summary of Part II, Chapter 9: “Aging Urban and Rural Societies and Social Contribution Activities—An Anecdotal Survey Framework”

Chapter 9 provides a framework for the anecdotal surveys in subsequent chapters. Part I indicates that social contribution activities differ depending on city size. From this viewpoint, Part II focuses on social contribution activities in a metropolitan suburb, a rural city and a rural town/village. The subjects of our anecdotal surveys are Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture (a metropolitan suburb), Mishima City, Shizuoka Prefecture (a rural city) and Omori Town in Ota City, Shimane Prefecture (a rural town/village). The population census is used to analyze population and aging trends in these prefectures and municipalities. Depopulation and aging in rural towns/villages started in the 1970s. The population decline in Shimane Prefecture and the population rise in Chiba Prefecture were remarkable in the 1970s, indicating that mainly baby boomers moved from rural areas to urban ones.

The subsequent chapters focus on social contribution activities in a rural town/village that has faced depopulation and aging for more than 30 years, a metropolitan suburb that is soon to face rapid aging through the aging of its many baby boomers, and a rural city positioned between them. Members of organizations promoting social contribution activities are divided between the core leaders of such activities and the individuals who support them. Core and supporting members play their respective roles in operating such organizations. The two layers' characteristics and their relationships with elderly participants in these activities are analyzed.

9. Summary of Part II, Chapter 10: “Regional Activities of Grand Work Mishima as A Problem-Solving Organization Rooted Deep in the Local Community Mainly for Environmental Protection”

Chapter 10 looks at Grand Work Mishima (hereinafter referred to as “GW Mishima”), an NPO located in Mishima City, Shizuoka Prefecture. GW Mishima is a network of various organizations launched by local leaders for the purpose of environmental conservation in Mishima City against the background of pollution-induced environmental degradation. Local leaders serve as

the core. The supporting level includes many local residents who started engaging in social contribution activities after retirement. GW Mishima itself conducts business operations while serving as a network of civic activity groups. Within the network is the Yusui Takuminokai Association that aims to vitalize the local community through wood working, including the creation of water wheels and the refurbishment of elderly people's houses. The core consists of elderly people who have worked in Mishima City for a long time and who have demonstrated advanced personnel management capabilities. Elderly people in the supporting level are given opportunities to engage in social contribution activities which feature a light labor load and flexible working times. These activities are reportedly suitable for elderly people who are physically weak and who have survived major diseases.

10. Summary of Part II, Chapter 11: “Moderate Link between Regional Activity Groups and Elderly Volunteers— Cases of ‘Local Creative Network Chiba’ and the ‘Mokurakukai’ Wood Working Association”

Chapter 11 looks at the activities of “Local Creative Network Chiba”, an intermediate social activity support organization in Chiba City, Chiba Prefecture, and the “Mokurakukai” wood working association, for which the intermediate support organization provides volunteer matching services. Local Creative Network Chiba mainly coordinates the smooth participation of elderly people in regional social contribution activities. As its primary objective has been to promote the acceptance of elderly people for participation in social contribution activities, the network deals with organizations that have more segmented purposes than local revitalization as a whole. The core of the network consists of women who have engaged in co-op activities. In the metropolitan suburbs, coordination by Local Creative Network Chiba is of great significance. Most elderly people lack sufficient information about regional community activities after retirement. Therefore, they must have the opportunity to become aware of local organizations. These organizations take advantage of the coordination not only to attract elderly people but also to publicize their activities to local residents.

The “Mokurakukai” wood working association, which takes advantage of the volunteer matching services provided by Local Creative Network Chiba, produces wooden handicrafts for sale to local welfare and childcare facilities and so on at affordable prices. The core of the association consists of local residents who were active in it before retirement and master carpenters with wood working skills (these carpenters founded the association to ensure that their skills would be passed on to future generations). The association started with hobby activities and later established an organization to engage in social contribution activities. Therefore, the association features linkage between hobby and social contribution activities. Participants in the association master wood working skills after three years of hobby activities. Those who take part in social contribution

activities are selected from these participants based on their aptitude (i.e., while all people can take part in hobby activities, a more limited group of elderly people participate in social contribution activities). This is because higher level wood working skills are required for social contribution activities than for hobby activities. Furthermore, elderly participants in social contribution activities are required to communicate smoothly with organizations receiving their support.

11. Summary of Part II, Chapter 12: “Regional Activities Facing Aging Populations and the Inheritance to Future Generations —Focusing on the Autonomous Activities of Residents of Omori Town regarding the UNESCO World Heritage Iwami Silver Mine Site”

Chapter 12 looks at the complementary relationship between the autonomous activities of residents and an NPO in Omori Town, Ota City, Shimane Prefecture. Shimane prefecture has the most aged population in Japan. Omori Town now has a population of some 400, of which about 40% are at least 65 years of age. Some 500,000 tourists annually visit this small town, where depopulation has accelerated since the period of rapid economic growth period which started in the 1960s. It is now in transition from decline to recovery. Until the Iwami Silver Mine was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site, there were steady autonomous activities by local residents. While the town was falling into ruin, its neighborhood community association launched a cultural asset conservation club and required all households in Omori Town to join it. With little support provided by the public sector, local residents improved the streetscape independently at their own expenses. In the 1980s, members of youth groups in their 30s and 40s in the town, who had previously moved to urban areas, started to return, invigorating the town reconstruction efforts. These returnees are now past the age of 60. In 1987, the town was selected as a district for the conservation of important traditional buildings. The town then began to recover its beauty gradually, and was registered as a UNESCO World Heritage site in 2007. This was the result of long discussions between proponents and opponents of the registration amid efforts to conserve working space and monuments.

Town building efforts are now proceeding in a manner which is satisfactory to both proponents and opponents. As the key persons responsible for these efforts have aged, however, they are now facing the problem of how to maintain local tangible and intangible assets. As the town has become a World Heritage site, it now boasts a nostalgic beauty, but local manpower falls short of what is necessary to maintain the cultural assets. Will the town proceed with regional activities under a new framework, where an NPO or other non-local organization would be introduced along with youths willing to live in rural regions? Or will it end up with a decline without making new efforts? The town may be about to see the birth of a new form of regional activity.