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Analysing the Impact of Participation in Community Activities (Festivals) on Mental Health

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Social capital is vital for community activities, such as those pertaining to area management activities. Furthermore, festivals and the existence of temples and shrines are crucial for enhancing social capital in Japan. Among all of the area management activities in Japan, festivals are typically held at shrines, which allow attendees to pray for their health and well-being. In this paper, we investigate the impact of participating in festivals and traditional events on mental health. We conduct a nationwide questionnaire survey in Japan and use ordered logit techniques to analyse the impact of participation in festivals and traditional events on mental health. It is found that community activities related to festivals and traditional events normalise mental health. The dependent variable (i.e., the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K6)), is negative and statistically significant, which denote that participation in community activities can stabilise mental health. Since landscape maintenance activities, such as cleaning, are not statistically significant, it would be effective to merge such activities with festivals and other community-based efforts. It is also important to consider how residents could be motivated to participate in community activities when ties with neighbours become weaker.

Keywords

Aging population, Community activities, Festivals, Mental health, Motivation, Social capital

1. Introduction¹

Singapore, a member of the UNESCO Creative Cities Network, strengthens its health, industries, and education through the field of design; in particular, the city implemented landscape design before other countries. The DesignSingapore Council, established as a public organisation in 2002, is the main driving force behind the project. As for urban development, a policy has been implemented in Singapore to disperse the functions of the central business district to the suburbs. In consideration of COVID-19, Singapore has further strengthened this policy by situating workplaces near residences and is now pursuing suburban decentralisation.

Incidentally, the Japanese people have become more aware of how community activities, including ancient Japanese festivals and traditional events, can be used to manage the negative impact of a pandemic and maintain good mental health after the outbreak of COVID-19. This notion is familiar to the Japanese people, who value both medical and spiritual methods to promote health. Since the ancient times, events have been conducted in Japan to pray for good health. Notable examples include Tango-no-Sekku, the shrine-centred Gion Festival that attracts many visitors from Japan, and the temple-centred Koya Fire Festival, a relatively new event. Tango-no-Sekku is held on 5th May each year; during the event, people ask for good health, and irises are displayed, which have been used as medicinal herbs since ancient times.

The Gion Festival, one of the three major festivals in Japan, began in 869 AD when the ‘Gion Goryoue’ was held at Yasaka Shrine to quell a plague that had spread in Kyoto. Many local people participate in this festival, which is known for its fascinating processions. The scale of the procession was reduced in 2020 and 2021 to prevent the spread of COVID-19. Nonetheless, a ritual was still performed to drive the plague away, which is the essence of the Gion Festival. The Koya Fire Festival began approximately 30 years ago at Koya-san in Wakayama, the head temple of the Shingon sect. Attendees pray for good fortune and to overcome difficult problems.

According to Itaba and Yagi (2009), social capital, such as trust and reciprocity within the community, is integral for community activities and festivals, and the existence of temples and shrines helps to enhance social capital. The advent of COVID-19 has succeeded in attracting even more attention to such events. Community activities (e.g. traditional events and festivals), which are expected to foster social capital, are essential for those living in the modern age. These activities are effective in attracting visitors and creating a lively atmosphere. However, people must be incentivised to participate in community activities to

¹The Japanese case studies presented in this paper are mainly based on interviews with the people involved (e.g. Yasaka Shrine and the Koya-no-Himatsuri Executive Committees).

promote the creation and strengthening of social capital, especially in regional areas.

In this study, we analyse the impact of participation in festivals and traditional events, which are considered to increase social capital, on mental health. The remainder of this paper proceeds as follows. First, the social capital theory is discussed. Second, we briefly examine examples of community activities in terms of social capital in Japan. Subsequently, an ordered logit model analysis is conducted with the data collected in Japan.

2. Social Capital Theory

Several studies have investigated the relationship between social capital and health (Kawachi et al. 1997; Rose 2000). It is widely accepted that the main components of social capital are trust, social norms of reciprocity, and networks. Social capital plays an important role in social and economic activities. For example, trust is an indispensable factor that facilitates economic activities, especially in transactions, since all transactions are based on trust between sellers and buyers (Miyagawa and Omori 2004). A considerable number of studies have focused on the influence of social capital on social and economic activities. Putnam et al. (1993) showed that the differences in social and economic performances among provinces in Italy are caused by differences in accumulated social capital. Knack and Keefer (1997) find that the level of social capital differs substantially among countries, and countries with high social capital show high economic growth.

The promotion of social capital via festivals supports the idea that behavioural norms are strongly influenced by both economic and cultural factors (Itaba and Yagi 2009). According to Itoh et al. (2017), the existence of temples and shrines increases social capital-promoting factors, such as reciprocity. Presumably, social capital in both the Gion Festival and the Koya Fire Festival will be synergised with that brought by the existence of temples and shrines.

Conversely, traditional festivals are not necessarily centred on specific religious groups, but can also be seen as a general community activity (Tamura et al. 2015). The social norms of reciprocity are an important element in community activities that involve group work because it encourages people to cooperate with each other. Regarding social capital and community activities, Ostrom (2000) emphasises the importance of social capital in a self-organised resource governance system. Furthermore, according to Ostrom and Ahn (2010), social capital is a cause of collective social outcomes.

3. Example of Community Activities with Social Capital in Japan

Community activities are very important to the local economy of Japan. For example, the Gion Festival originated as a way to ward off plagues. In another example, when commerce and industry first developed in Kyoto during the Muromachi period (1336–1573), merchants became wealthy and began to compete in terms of the attractiveness of their *yamahoko*². In addition, houses with folding screen decorations have also become famous and are opened to the public; they are considered a key part of today's tourism industry.

The Umeda district in Osaka city provides general community activities that exemplify advanced area management procedures in Japan. The district not only holds events, such as a summer festival and a 'snowman' festival, but also works diligently on clean-up activities. In the future, the city plans to focus on maintaining the landscape, such as cleaning, by utilising green spaces. To achieve a green-centred walkable city, the leadership of area management organisations needs to increase the involvement of the private sector.

4. Limitations of Existing Literature and Hypothesis

As the population ages, it is becoming more difficult to ensure a sufficient labour supply. Therefore, it is necessary to devise strategies to provide incentives for encouraging participation in community activities. There has been a lack of empirical analysis of incentives. Additionally, lifestyles have changed dramatically due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has caused economic and mental health problems. Many traditional events, mainly at temples and shrines, are held to pray for 'good health', and examining the impact of participation in such traditional events on mental health is imperative.

As in the case of the Umeda district in Osaka city, it is essential to utilise the private sector to create a walkable and green city. While highlighting economic incentives is important to facilitate the motivation of the private sector, we believe that emphasising non-economic incentives is critical as well because they have the potential to bring economic benefits to society from a long-term perspective (Itaba and Yagi 2009). For example, non-economic incentives are those such as better health through participation in community activities.

In recent years, there has been concern in Japan about the increasing number of patients with lifestyle-related diseases, which are also closely related to mental health (Hamano and Fujisawa 2010). Therefore, there are fears of

²*Yamahoko* are decorated floats built in some of the districts in Kyoto. These vehicles are decorated with arts and crafts and thus are also known as 'walking museums'.

increased medical costs and declines in the labour force and in international competitiveness (Hamano and Fujisawa 2010).

Particularly, the health policy in Japan has until now focused mainly on factors at the individual level; however, there is a need to incorporate a broader perspective into health policy that incorporates social structural factors (Fujisawa and Hamano 2010). In this sense, the concept of social capital has important potential.

It is crucial to examine the extent to which community activities such as festivals impact mental health, which is considered a non-economic incentive. Therefore, we hypothesise that participation in community activities such as festivals and traditional events, which are considered to increase social capital, is good for mental health.

5. Data Analysis of the Impact of Participation in Community Activities on Mental Health

5.1 Model Specification of the Ordered Logit Model

Here, we assume that the underlying categories are discrete realisations of some underlying continuous distribution of attitude.

The ordered logit model contains an observed ordinal value Y , and Y is a function of an unmeasured continuous latent variable Y^* that comprises various threshold points. The value of the observed variable Y is determined by whether a particular threshold has been crossed. For instance, when the ordinal values range from 0 to 24, the thresholds are:

$$\begin{aligned}
 Y_i = 0 & \quad \mu_{-1} < Y_i^* \leq \mu_0 \\
 Y_i = 1 & \quad \mu_0 < Y_i^* \leq \mu_1 \\
 Y_i = 2 & \quad \mu_1 < Y_i^* \leq \mu_2 \quad : \\
 Y_i = 24 & \quad Y_i^* > \mu_{23}
 \end{aligned} \tag{1}$$

The formula of the ordered logit model is:

$$Y^* = \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k X_k + \varepsilon = Z_i + \varepsilon,$$

where:

$$Z_i = \sum_{k=1}^K \beta_k X_k = E(Y_i^*), \tag{2}$$

and β = parameter value for X (explanatory value).

The terms can be used to estimate the probability of whether Y takes on a particular value:

$$\begin{aligned}
 P(Y = 0) &= \frac{1}{1 + \exp(Z - \mu_0)} \\
 P(Y = 1) &= \frac{1}{1 + \exp(Z - \mu_1)} - \frac{1}{1 + \exp(Z - \mu_0)} \\
 P(Y = 2) &= \frac{1}{1 + \exp(Z - \mu_2)} - \frac{1}{1 + \exp(Z - \mu_1)} \quad : \\
 P(Y = 24) &= 1 - \frac{1}{1 + \exp(Z - \mu_{23})} \quad (3)
 \end{aligned}$$

We can calculate the probability of whether the unobserved variable Y^* falls within the various threshold limits (refer to Equation (3)) by utilising the estimated value of Z in Equation (2) and assuming a logistic distribution of the disturbance term. By relying on the maximum log-likelihood method, the explanatory variables can be estimated.

5.2 Dependent and Independent Variables

The dependent variable ‘K6’ is based on the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale, a simple measure of psychological distress that involves six questions about the emotional state of a person (i.e. ‘During the past 30 days, how often did you feel: 1) nervous; 2) hopeless; 3) restless or fidgety; 4) so depressed that nothing could cheer you up; 5) that everything was an effort; and 6) worthless?’). Each question is scored on a numbered scale from 1 to 5 denoting, in order, ‘none of the time’, ‘a little of the time’, ‘some of the time’, ‘most of the time’, and ‘all of the time’ (Oshio 2021).

Scores from the six questions are then added to yield a minimum total score of 6 and a maximum of 30. Low scores indicate low levels of psychological distress, and high scores indicate high levels of psychological distress. We investigate only the extent to which mental conditions change due to community activities, such as festivals and traditional events, which can be observed as a form of non-monetised value. The explanatory variables (i.e. independent variables) are descriptions of community activities, and this statistical analysis assesses the impact of community activities and their background (i.e. attributes). The independent variables are depicted in Table 1.

Table 1 Independent Variables

Age:	Elderly people (born before 1936) = 1; Young people (born after 1998) = 63 (in one-year increments)
Sex:	Male = 1, Female = 0
Current address different from the city where I lived until the age of 15 (dummy):	Yes = 1, No = 0
Community activities related to the operation of public facilities, such as cultural centres, parks, and public squares (dummy):	Yes = 1, No = 0
Community activities related to public safety, creation of liveliness, and landscape maintenance (dummy):	Yes = 1, No = 0
Community activities related to festivals and traditional events (dummy):	Yes = 1, No = 0
Other community activities (dummy):	Yes = 1, No = 0
People who grew up participating in community activities with their parents or grandparents:	Not at all = 1; Yes = 5
People who grew up watching the community activities of their parents and grandparents:	Not at all = 1; Yes = 5
People who grew up watching their parents and grandparents help others:	Not at all = 1; Yes = 5
People who learned the importance of helping others from their family:	Not at all = 1; Yes = 5
People who learned the importance of participating in community activities from their family:	Not at all = 1; Yes = 5
Annual household income (dummy):	-Less than 4 million yen ³ : Yes = 1, No = 0 -More than 6 million yen to less than 10 million yen: Yes = 1, No = 0 -More than 10 million yen: Yes = 1, No = 0
Household financial assets (dummy):	-Less than 4 million yen: Yes = 1, No = 0 -More than 6 million yen to less than 10 million yen: Yes = 1, No = 0 -More than 10 million yen: Yes = 1, No = 0

5.3 Data

This survey was conducted via the Internet by using a specialised company (NTT Com Online Marketing Solutions Corporation) from 1–10 March 2017, and responses were received from 11,371 respondents (the survey closed when

³ 1 US dollar = 109.81 yen on September 9, 2021

more than 10,000 responses were received. The participants provided informed consent⁴. Also, no conditions for exclusion criteria were set. Regarding the regional distribution of the respondents, 36.7% are from large cities (23 wards in Tokyo and government ordinance designated cities), 23% from medium cities (cities with a population of 100,000 or more), 31.9% from other cities (cities with a population of less than 100,000), and 8.4% from towns and villages. The survey comprises questions that concern basic demographic information, such as sex, age, education, job, and income, as well as some questions on the opinion and attitude of the respondents toward various community activities.

6. Results

Table 2 presents the survey results. Regarding age, many of the respondents are elderly, and regarding sex, many are male. In terms of current community activities, only ‘community activities related to festivals and traditional events’ have a high mean value. The mean value for the experience of the respondents in community activities during their childhood is high (i.e., three or more at all five levels), whereas the mean values of annual income and assets are low.

6.1 Results for Specific Variables

The results of the empirical validation obtained with the ordered logit model are presented in Table 3.

The *z*-statistics of the independent variables ‘sex’, ‘community activities related to public safety, creation of liveliness, and landscape maintenance’, ‘people who grew up watching the community activities of their parents and grandparents’, ‘people who grew up watching their parents and grandparents help others’, and ‘people who learned the importance of helping others from their family’ show that they are not important factors in the assessment of K6 (Table 3). ‘Current address different from the city where I lived until the age of 15’ is negative and statistically significant ($p < 1\%$). In terms of current community activities, ‘community activities related to the operation of public facilities such as cultural centres, parks, and public squares’ is positive and statistically significant ($p < 5\%$), while ‘community activities related to festivals and traditional events’ ($p < 1\%$) and ‘other community activities’ ($p < 10\%$) are negative and statistically significant.

⁴This survey was conducted as a part of the research under a Japan Science and Technology Agency-Research Institute of Science and Technology for Society (JST-RISTEX) project called ‘Investigation of the Intergenerational Inheritance Mechanism of Social Capital’. Moreover, the survey was administered in collaboration with the ‘Interdisciplinary Humanities and Social Sciences Project for the Construction of an Evidence-Based Society’ at the Research Center for Advanced Policy Studies, Institute of Economic Research, Kyoto University.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics

	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Maximum</u>	<u>Minimum</u>	<u>Std. Dev.</u>	<u>Skewness</u>	<u>Kurtosis</u>	<u>Observations</u>
Age	26.473	63.000	1.000	13.911	0.295	2.095	5422
Sex	0.666	1.000	0.000	0.472	-0.705	1.497	5422
Current address different from the city where I lived until the age of 15 (dummy)	0.589	1.000	0.000	0.492	-0.360	1.129	5422
Community activities related to the operation of public facilities such as cultural centres, parks, and public squares (dummy)	0.373	1.000	0.000	0.484	0.523	1.274	5422
Community activities related to public safety, creation of liveliness, and landscape maintenance (dummy)	0.463	1.000	0.000	0.499	0.147	1.022	5422
Community activities related to festivals and traditional events (dummy)	0.510	1.000	0.000	0.500	-0.038	1.001	5422
Other community activities (dummy)	0.071	1.000	0.000	0.256	3.352	12.233	5422
People who grew up participating in community activities with their parents or grandparents	3.125	5.000	1.000	1.070	-0.299	2.323	5422
People who grew up watching the community activities of their parents and grandparents	3.235	5.000	1.000	1.072	-0.401	2.441	5422
People who grew up watching their parents and grandparents help others	3.209	5.000	1.000	1.006	-0.309	2.628	5422
People who learned the importance of helping others from their family	3.164	5.000	1.000	0.982	-0.270	2.707	5422
People who learned the importance of participating in community activities from their family	3.101	5.000	1.000	0.978	-0.239	2.690	5422

(Continued...)

(Table 2 Continued)

Annual household income (dummy)							
Less than 4 million yen	0.368	1.000	0.000	0.482	0.546	1.298	5422
More than 6 million yen to less than 10 million yen	0.280	1.000	0.000	0.449	0.981	1.963	5422
More than 10 million yen	0.101	1.000	0.000	0.301	2.647	8.007	5422
Household financial assets (dummy)							
Less than 4 million yen	0.366	1.000	0.000	0.482	0.555	1.308	5422
More than 6 million yen to less than 10 million yen	0.172	1.000	0.000	0.377	1.741	4.031	5422
More than 10 million yen	0.335	1.000	0.000	0.472	0.701	1.492	5422

Table 3 Results for Ordered Logit Model

	Y=K6		
	<u>Coefficient</u>	<u>z-Statistic</u>	
Age	0.031	15.335	***
Sex	0.059	1.093	
Current address different from the city where I lived until the age of 15 (dummy)	-0.139	-2.808	***
Community activities related to the operation of public facilities such as cultural centres, parks, and public squares (dummy)	0.108	2.064	**
Community activities related to public safety, creation of liveliness, and landscape maintenance (dummy)	0.025	0.479	
Community activities related to festivals and traditional events (dummy)	-0.245	-4.725	***
Other community activities (dummy)	-0.194	-1.944	*
People who grew up participating in community activities with their parents or grandparents	-0.111	-2.965	***
People who grew up watching the community activities of their parents and grandparents	-0.047	-1.196	
People who grew up watching their parents and grandparents help others	-0.030	-0.729	
People who learned the importance of helping others from their family	0.019	0.418	
People who learned the importance of participating in community activities from their family	0.077	1.715	*
Annual household income (dummy)			
Less than 4 million yen	0.181	2.834	***
More than 6 million yen to less than 10 million yen	-0.031	-0.459	
More than 10 million yen	-0.119	-1.268	
Household financial assets (dummy)			
Less than 4 million yen	-0.171	-2.180	**
More than 6 million yen to less than 10 million yen	-0.082	-0.918	
More than 10 million yen	-0.342	-4.176	***

Note: Log likelihood $Y=-13861.7$. Pseudo R -squared $Y=0.016$. ***, **, and * indicate significance at the 1%, 5%, and 10% levels, respectively.

In terms of annual household income, only 'less than 4 million yen, is positive and statistically significant ($p<1\%$). In terms of household financial assets, 'fewer than 4 million yen' ($p<5\%$) and 'more than 10 million yen' ($p<1\%$) are negative and statistically significant.

In considering ‘community activities related to festivals and traditional events’, which enhance social capital, we find that the values of the dependent variable ‘K6’ are negative and statistically significant. This means that participation in community activities such as festivals and traditional events, which are considered to increase social capital, is good for mental health. Moreover, we find ‘people who learned the importance of helping others from their family’, which indicates reciprocity, is not an important factor in the assessment of K6. In other words, gaining experience rather than learning as social capital has a good effect on mental health in adulthood.

7. Conclusions

In this study, we analyse the impact of participation in festivals and traditional events, which are considered to increase social capital for mental health. We find that ‘community activities related to festivals and traditional events’ have a good effect on mental health. According to Ide and Kondo (2021), a higher percentage of social participation tends to result in fewer mental and psychological problems. In other words, participation in community activities is one of the factors that mitigates mental health disparities among regions. The main findings on promoting community activities in several areas are as follows.

First, as landscape maintenance activities, such as cleaning, are not statistically significant, they would have a more effective impact on mental health if they are merged with festivals and other community activities. For example, in the case of the Umeda district in Osaka city, conducting landscape maintenance activities could be combined with its annual summer and fashion festivals to construct a ‘Walkable City’.

Second, regarding annual household income, only ‘less than 4 million yen’ is positive and statistically significant. In other words, ensuring septimal industrialisation, meaning that a positive non-economic value is added to the “sextiary” (sixth) industry (combining the activities of the primary, secondary, and tertiary sectors) business returns, is of utmost importance, considering that low annual income can negatively affect mental health. By fulfilling both the business and environmental aspects of social contribution, we can expect to improve mental health through community activities that target landscape maintenance.

Third, the participation of children in such activities with their parents needs to be promoted, as ‘people who grew up participating in community activities with their parents or grandparents’ are found to have better mental health. In addition to mental health, physical health can be facilitated through the deployment of the ‘Umeda Connect Road’, which aims to create a city that is fun to walk in. In the future, it is vital to measure the impact of participation in complex community activities on physical health.

Incidentally, the Gion Festival is an event wherein people parade through the streets in a procession. In Japan, there are several festivals where people walk in a procession, including the three major festivals in Kyoto (i.e. Gion, Aoi, and Jidai Festivals). As a future research topic, it is necessary to measure not only the impact of ‘community activities related to festivals and traditional events’ on mental health but also physical health.

Considering the promotion of ‘Walkable Cities’ in various countries, it is necessary to clarify both non-economic and economic incentives (e.g., physical health and increase in income) provided by various community activities rather than just focusing on ‘community activities related to festivals and traditional events’.

Responding to ‘other community activities’ that can improve mental health, it is necessary to scrutinise the contents of ‘other community activities’ from the perspective of enhancing social capital.

Finally, the relationship between ‘current address different from the city where I lived until the age of 15’ and ‘people who grew up participating in community activities with their parents or grandparents’ should be the focus in future studies.

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