

Promoting Disaster Preparedness among Community-dwelling Older Adults: A Focus on Neighborhood Interaction

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INTRODUCTION

The total population of Japan is 124.35 million people as of October 1, 2023. The percentage of the population aged 65 and over (percentage of the older adults) is 29.1%. The percentage of households with a person 65 years of age or older was 50.6% (Cabinet Office 2024). In addition, healthy life expectancy was 72.68 years for men and 75.38 years for women in 2019. However, when a natural disaster occurs, many older adults are affected. For example, in the Great East Japan Earthquake, 66.1% (as of March 11, 2015) of direct disaster-related deaths were among those aged 60 and over, and 88.9% of disaster-related deaths were among those aged 66 and over (Cabinet Office 2015). This suggests that disaster preparedness for the older adults is important.

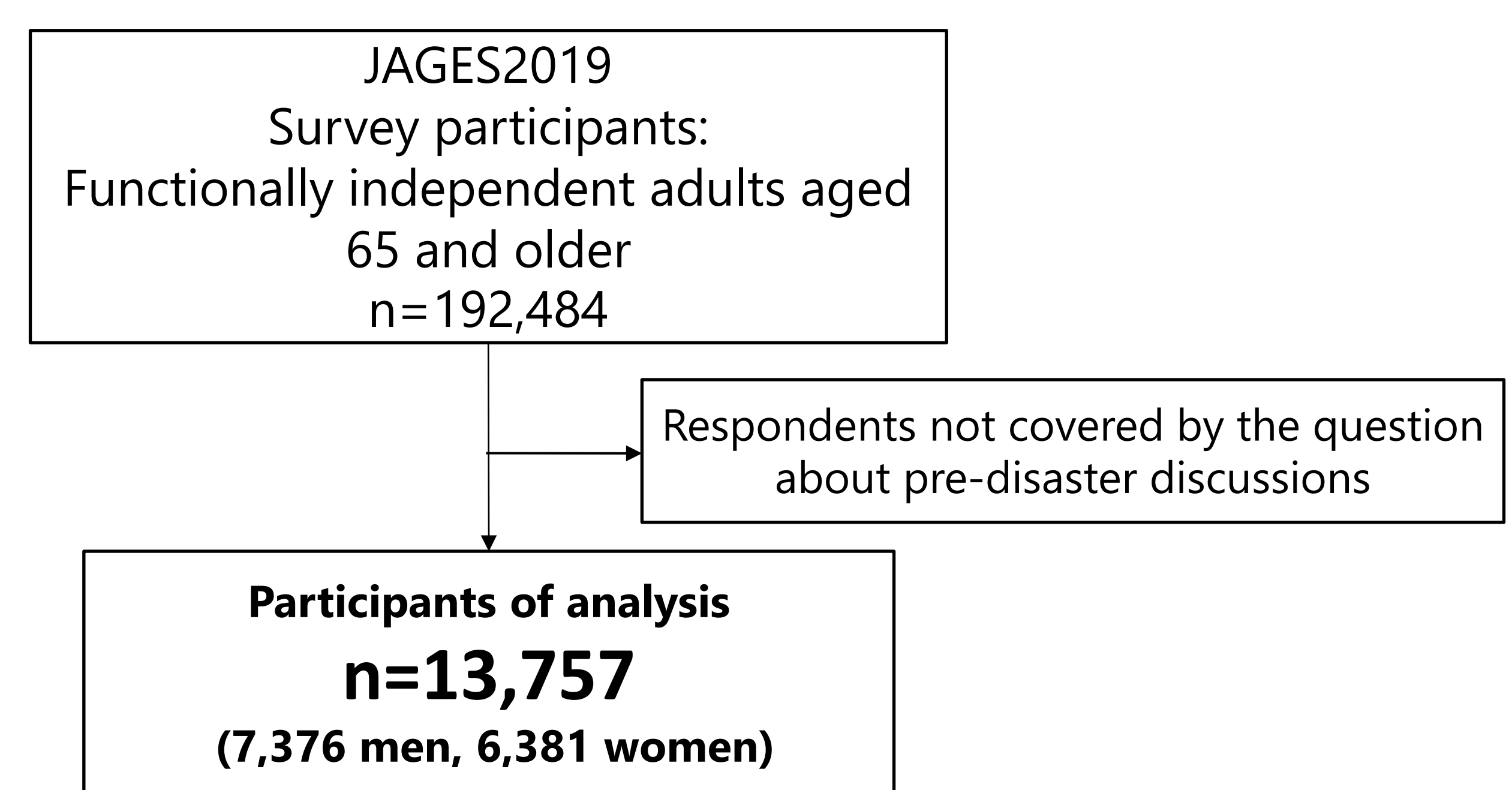
Therefore, We examined the disaster preparedness of community-dwelling older adults in Japan, focusing on discussions regarding disaster preparedness in relation to their regular neighborhood interaction.

DATA & METHODS

We used cross-sectional survey data collected for the Japan Gerontological Evaluation Study (JAGES) in 2019. This survey was conducted by mail and asked about health, living conditions, disaster preparedness, and so on. In this study, 13,757 people who agreed to cooperate in the survey were included in the analysis.

A logistic regression analysis was conducted with the dependent variable being discussion about disasters (with family or neighbors, or only with neighbors) and the control variables being sex, age, economic status, education, and housing status. Independent variables included living alone, family caregiver or not, and social relations with neighbors. We used IBM SPSS Statistics 27.

STUDY DESIGN



RESULT

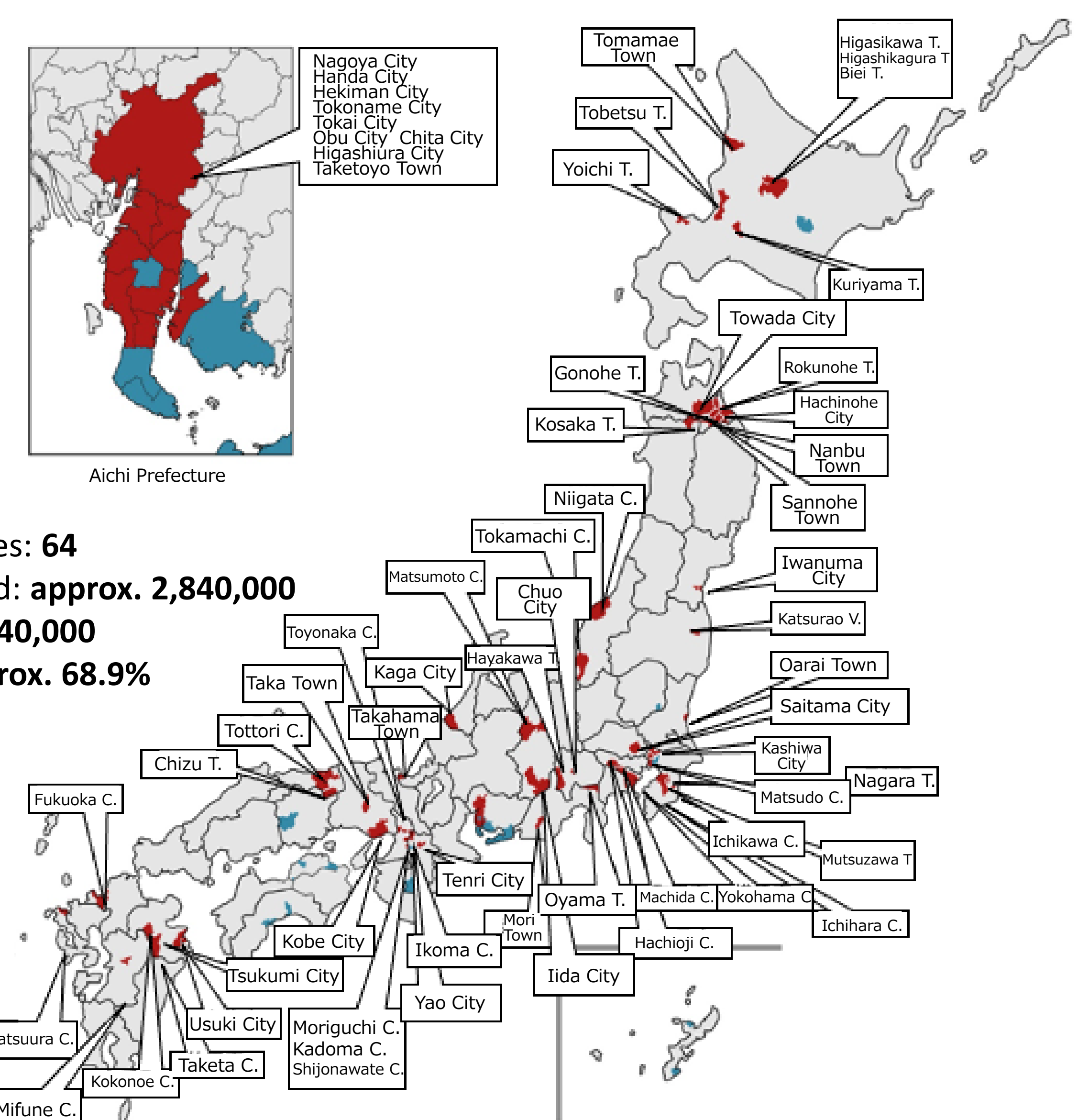
Table 1. Discussions about disasters with family or neighbors

	OR	95%CI	p
sex (Ref. men)	1.18	1.070 - 1.299	0.001
age (Ref. <75 years old)	1.25	1.136 - 1.375	0.000
subjective economic status (Ref. not difficult)	0.89	0.793 - 1.001	0.052
education (Ref. <13 years)	0.94	0.850 - 1.042	0.243
housing status (Ref. rented house, etc)	1.66	1.370 - 2.010	0.000
living status (Ref. living not alone)	0.72	0.614 - 0.837	0.000
family caregiver (Ref. not caring)	0.97	0.770 - 1.216	0.779
social relations with neighbors (Ref. not relations)	2.43	2.188 - 2.690	0.000

Table 2. Discussions about disasters only with neighbors

	OR	95%CI	p
sex (Ref. men)	0.88	0.763 - 1.021	0.092
age (Ref. <75 years old)	1.52	1.315 - 1.746	0.000
subjective economic status (Ref. not difficult)	1.05	0.893 - 1.241	0.541
education (Ref. <13 years)	0.91	0.779 - 1.063	0.234
housing status (Ref. rented house, etc)	1.03	0.825 - 1.296	0.770
living status (Ref. living not alone)	2.82	2.375 - 3.338	0.000
family caregiver (Ref. not caring)	1.69	1.247 - 2.290	0.001
social relations with neighbors (Ref. not relations)	2.55	2.177 - 2.997	0.000

Japan Gerontological Evaluation Study



No. of participating municipalities: **64**
No. of questionnaires distributed: **approx. 2,840,000**
No. of respondents: **approx. 2,640,000**
Percentage of respondents: **approx. 68.9%**
(As of July 2020)

■ Long-term care insurers who participated in the 2019 survey
■ Long-term care insurers who participated in surveys conducted before 2019

For more information on the data, please visit <https://www.jages.net/>.

CONCLUSION

Those who live alone or are family caregivers are more likely to face difficulties during a disaster. The study found that they tend to discuss disasters only with their neighbors. This result may be indicative of the Japanese proverb, "A neighbor (can be relied upon) is better than a distant relative. And this suggests that interaction with neighbors is especially important for older adults, who are more vulnerable in the event of a disaster, as a way to prepare for a disaster.

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