Why don’t older persons attend senior salons?
Interviews with older persons living in a rural area of Japan.

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Objective: Although population aging in Japan is an urgent concern, many older persons are healthy and do not require care. In many areas, “senior salons” have been created to allow older persons to congregate. While positive effects on health are claimed, attendance is low. In this study, we explored the potential reasons for such low attendance.

Methods: We conducted semi-structured interviews with 14 older persons living in a Japanese rural area. Data were analyzed qualitatively.

Results: Three themes in terms of attitudes towards the salons were identified: “I am sufficiently energetic,” “I am busy with other social activities,” and “I do not enjoy emotional connections with other people.”

Conclusion: We also need to consider self-awareness in relation to aging when we consider elderly participation in salons. Furthermore, when examining elderly people’s interactions with others, it is important to consider not only senior salons, but also take into account their overall “social participation,” including hobbies, work, and volunteer activities.

Key words: Aged, Aging, Japan, Senior Salon, Social Participation

I. Introduction

Japan has a rapidly aging population. In 2016, the proportion of those aged 65 years and above was 27.3%¹, and the proportion of over-60s is expected to rise to 42.5% by 2050⁰. As such, Japan has the fastest-aging population in the world and, consequently, faces significant problems in relation to its management. As the population ages, the number of older persons (65 years old and above) who require care also increases. In 2015, the number of care recipients over 75 years of age in Japan was 16.46 million, and it is predicted that this number will reach 21.79 million by 2025⁰. Importantly, it is also predicted that the number of elderly persons who do not need care will also increase.

For healthy elderly adults, “senior salons” have been established across Japan to help older persons remain active and maintain contact with their communities. These salons are based mainly in local meeting places, public halls, and so on. Specifically, senior salons were designed to promote and deepen older persons’ sense of connection with others, alleviate their social isolation, facilitate their participation in society, and help them maintain their health. Here, older persons can engage in

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pursuits such as recreational activities, educational courses, and health gymnastics. Several studies have reported that participation in such salons has a positive impact on the health of older persons\textsuperscript{4-6}. Thus, older persons who attend these salons should be able to enjoy more comfortable and healthy lives and live longer in their communities.

The operation of the salons in Japan is subsidized by an administrative agency\textsuperscript{7,8}, and older adults attend on a voluntary basis. As these salons are designed for healthy older persons, medical, nursing, and welfare care workers are not always present. Thus, salons represent a potentially valuable social service for older persons who do not require care in Japan.

Senior salons are also important assets for achieving policy measures related to older persons, such as the ability to “continue to live in a familiar area”\textsuperscript{9}. However, the estimated rate of participation in salons is not high. Indeed, the participation rate in clubs for older persons that facilitate similar activities was found to be only 11.0% of all older persons\textsuperscript{10}.

Thus, many older persons do not attend senior salons; however, the reasons for this low participation are not clear. Elderly people who are relatively healthy gather in the salon. These salons are designed to alleviate older persons’ social isolation and help them maintain their health. Therefore, we believe that salons are an important setting from the perspective of elderly preventive care. The objective of this study was to use a qualitative, interview-based approach to explore the reasons why older persons aged 65 or over do not prefer attending senior salons. Through this study, we hoped to identify ways to improve the management of salons and aspects that should be considered when designing programs for healthy older persons.

### II. Methods

**1. Design and sample**

A qualitative descriptive study\textsuperscript{11} was conducted to examine why most older persons do not attend senior salons. For our research, we chose one rural city with a particularly high number of older persons (35.7% of the population in 2015)\textsuperscript{12} and problems concerning the management of its senior salons. Further, since this area has many slopes, it is difficult for older adults to travel on foot; thus, the support offered by senior salons in this setting is considered particularly important.

Our inclusion criteria for participants were aged 65 years old and above, not attending senior salons, not requiring medical, nursing or welfare care, and able to participate in the interview. We recruited 14 older persons in total, with a mean age of 74.6 (SD = 14.4) years; 7 participants were male; 3 lived alone and 11 with partners and/or their children (Table 1). No one refused to participate or dropped out during the study.

| ID  | Age  | Gender | Family members (Except for participant) |
|-----|------|--------|----------------------------------------|
| A   | Late 80s | Male   | Wife                                  |
| B   | Early 70s | Female | None                                  |
| C   | Late 70s  | Male   | Wife                                  |
| D   | Early 70s | Female | Husband                               |
| E   | Late 70s  | Female | None                                  |
| F   | Late 70s  | Male   | Wife                                  |
| G   | Early 70s | Female | Husband                               |
| H   | Late 70s  | Male   | None                                  |
| I   | Late 60s  | Male   | Wife and Child                        |
| J   | Late 60s  | Female | Husband and Child                     |
| K   | Early 80s | Male   | Wife                                  |
| L   | Late 70s  | Female | Husband                               |
| M   | Late 70s  | Male   | Wife                                  |
| N   | Late 60s  | Female | Husband                               |
2. Measures

Semi-structured interviews were conducted between September and October 2016 by two researchers (first author and third author) using an interview guide. One researcher (first author) was a female university faculty member at PhD level with experience in conducting qualitative research. The second researcher (third author) was a male nursing faculty student conducting qualitative research for the first time. These researchers interviewed all participants. The first author conducted the interviews and provided analysis training to the third author. The interview site for 13 of the participants was their home. One participant was interviewed at the researchers’ university. Only participants and researchers were present during the interviews to protect the privacy of participants at both their homes and the room in the university.

We ensured that the participant interviewed at the university could settle down and participate in the interview and would feel at home. The interview guide included questions such as, “Why don’t you attend the senior salon?” “What kind of commitments do you have with other people?” and “Do you think that you would like to join the salon?” In addition, we asked about participants’ age, gender, whether they lived with their families, and duration at the current residence (in years). Interviews lasted 11 to 55 minutes (median = 33 minutes) and were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Some of the interviews were shorter; however, all participants answered the questions in the interview guide.

First, the researchers explained the purpose and methods of the research to the staff of the Community Comprehensive Support Center and the Local Welfare Commissioner in the community area and ensured that they understood the study. Fourteen elderly people from these sites were introduced to the researchers. Subsequently, the researchers contacted these individuals who were eligible for participation (purposive sampling) by telephone, to formally ask them to engage in the research. On the day of the interview, all participants were again informed of the purpose, procedures, and contributions of the study, and their right to choose not to participate or to withdraw from the study at any time. The researchers then explained the process of data management, data handling, and publication to the participants. Written informed consent was obtained from all participants and they were assured that their interview data would be anonymous. The study protocol was approved by the institutional review board of the institution to which the researchers were affiliated (Oita University of Nursing and Health Sciences No. 16-52).

3. Analysis strategy

The interview was conducted by the first and third authors, and all three authors participated in the data analysis. The second author is a university faculty member at the PhD level with experience in conducting qualitative research. First, the researchers carefully read the participants’ responses to familiarize themselves with and gain a better understanding of the content. Next, participants’ reasons for not attending senior salons were extracted. After examining these responses, themes were generated.

We ensured the transferability, confirmability, and credibility of our results, as recommended by Lincoln. To ensure transferability, which refers to the extent to which the findings could be applicable in other situations, we described the results in as much detail as we could. To minimize prejudice and bias, the three researchers discussed (confirmability) each step of the analysis. We sent the results to the 14 participants and staff at the Community Comprehensive Support Center and the Local Welfare Commissioner in the area, so that they could confirm the content.
III. Results

Three themes were identified in the qualitative descriptive analysis of the narrative data: “I am sufficiently energetic,” “I am busy with other social activities,” and “I do not enjoy emotional connections with other people.” The themes, categories, subcategories, and raw data are described in depth (Table 2).

**Theme 1: I am Sufficiently Energetic**

Some of the participants who did not attend senior salons stated that “salons are where older persons who do not have the energy go.” Consequently, two categories emerged within this theme: *I think it is still too early to attend* and *I do not find salons interesting.*

### Table 2 Reasons for older people not participating in senior salon

| Theme                                      | Category                          | Sub-category                                           | Data                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|--------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I am sufficiently energetic.               | I still have normal, independent movement. | I think that the activities of the salon will be helpful if I become slightly disabled and cannot travel far (ID=N). I think I do not need to attend the salon (like playing miniature golf!) because I can still play real golf (ID=F). |
| I do not attend because I am young.        |                                   | (I am still in my late 70s) I think that it is too early to join the salon. I am planning to join the salon when I become 80 years old (ID=E).                                                                  |
| I do not find salons interesting.          | I do not like the purpose and operation method of senior salons. | (I do not like them) because I do not feel that salons are completely focused on a single purpose (ID=A).                                                                                             |
|                                           | The atmosphere of senior salons does not suit me. | I do not like them because there is encouragement to comfort each other (ID=A).                                                                                                                      |
|                                           | It is not what I want to do.        | I would like to participate in events that involve actively moving the body (ID=F).                                                                                                                   |
|                                           | There is no benefit from attending. | I do not think that there would be much to gain if I went to the senior salon (ID=M).                                                                                                                  |
| I am busy with other social activities.    | I would like to prioritize my hobbies over salon activities. | (If I join the salon), I would not be able to go on trips when I want to (ID=H).                                                                                                                     |
|                                           | My hobbies keep me busy.            | I constantly think about painting (hobby), so it is impossible for me to participate in other activities (senior salon, etc.) (ID=L).                                                                     |
|                                           | My hobbies would be restricted if I were to join a senior salon. | I feel that If I were to join a senior salon, I would not be able to do the things I enjoy (bowling and farming chores). I feel that my life would be regulated if I joined a salon (ID=R). |
| I am busy working.                         |                                   | Since I am working, I do not have time to attend a senior salon (ID=C).                                                                                                                             |
|                                           | I am busy engaging in volunteer activities. | I often travel to perform volunteer activities, so I cannot join a local senior salon or similar facility (ID=G).                                                                                |
|                                           | I am busy caring for family members. | Just when I began attending a senior salon, my husband was discharged from hospital (ID=D).                                                                                                         |
|                                           |                                   | I am busy because I take care of my grandchildren for their mother (ID=J).                                                                                                                         |
| I do not enjoy emotional connections with other people. | I have very different personality from those of the other salon attendees. | I feel that there are many people with strong personalities in the salon. Therefore, I do not think that I would enjoy attending (ID=E).                                                             |
|                                           | I heard a bad story about the salon. | I hear that there are factions in the salon (ID=N).                                                                                                                                                  |
| I do not want to bother the salon members. | I have poor legs. I do not want to go to places that I cannot go to by myself. I will go no farther than places I can reach by myself using a bus (ID=D).                                           |
|                                           | At the salon, participants make groups and work together. If I cannot attend for some reason, I will disturb the other people in the group (ID=N).                                            |
I think it is still too early to attend. Older persons who did not attend the salons often compared themselves to those who did. As a result, some felt that they were “not yet at a level at which I should attend a salon.” Although 65 years and older is defined as aged person in Japan, some participants also said: “I think I am still fine, and not an older person.” There were two subcategories (i.e., I still have normal, independent movement and I do not attend because I am young).

I do not find salons interesting. Some participants did not find salons interesting. Four subcategories could be extracted (I do not like the purpose and operation method of senior salons; The atmosphere of senior salons does not suit me; It is not what I want to do; and There is no benefit from attending).

Theme 2: I am Busy with Other Social Activities

This theme relates to individuals who did not participate in the salons held in the community but participated in society through other activities. Two categories emerged within this theme: I would like to prioritize my own hobbies over attending the salon and There are places where I can feel useful.

I would like to prioritize my own hobbies over attending the salon. The participants reported diverse hobbies and kept themselves busy with these activities and prioritized them over those of the salon. Since salon activities are generally held on fixed dates, the participants felt that their hobbies would be disrupted if they were to attend. There were three subcategories (i.e., I want to prioritize my hobbies over salon activities; My hobbies keep me busy; and My hobbies would be restricted if I were to join a senior salon).

There are places where I can feel useful. Some participants who did not attend the salons reported that there were other places where they could contribute, even though they were older persons. This category was divided into three subcategories (i.e., I am busy working; I am busy engaging in volunteer activities; and I am busy caring for family members).

Theme 3: I do not Enjoy Emotional Connections with Other People

Some participants thought that they would not like the other salon attendees, and that connections with others would be troublesome. Two categories emerged within this theme: I do not wish to engage in social interaction with the other salon attendees and I do not enjoy emotional connections with other people.

I do not wish to engage in social interaction with the other salon attendees. Some participants had previously considered attending a salon but had decided not to after hearing negative reports from actual attendees. There were two subcategories (i.e., I have very different personality from those of the other salon attendees and I heard a bad story about the salon).

I do not enjoy emotional connections with other people. Other participants reported feeling that, as they required help, they would be an inconvenience and thus did not want to attend the salon. This category was divided into two subcategories (i.e., I do not want to bother the salon members and I do not enjoy emotional connections with other people).

IV. Discussion

Through interviewing 14 older persons living in a rural city in Japan, we were able to examine the main reasons reported for not attending senior salons. These involved participants considering themselves sufficiently active or too young, having other commitments, and not wishing to be a burden on others or to require assistance from them. Some of the interviewees felt that salons were not facilities for energetic individuals, although
they were in fact designed for older persons who are healthy\textsuperscript{7,8}. In Japan, older peoples are defined as those aged more than 65 years. Because the Japanese tend to have a high life expectancy, older persons can range from 65 to approximately more than 90 years in age (approximately 25–year range). Thus, some participants did not consider themselves old: “I am still in my 60s; so, I think it is too early to join.” Our findings in this regard are supported by research on the management staff of nursing-care prevention activities in Japan, which has reported that individuals in their 60s disliked having to associate with other older adults when performing activities\textsuperscript{10}. Furthermore, in our study, some participants in their late 70s also felt that it was too early to join a salon. “Self-awareness regarding aging defines subjective awareness of mental and physical changes accompanying aging\textsuperscript{10}.” Although in their late 70s, some of the participants in this study said that they were young. This suggests that participation in a salon is not only based on age but also on the subjective awareness of changes in our minds and bodies. Therefore, self-awareness regarding aging should be considered.

In addition, participants who did not feel that salons were interesting did not attend. These individuals felt that the salons’ purpose, operation methods, atmosphere, and activities differed from what they wanted. Further, some felt that there was little to gain by attending. In a study by Sakoyama et al.\textsuperscript{10}, it was also found that the activities developed by the management staff eventually encountered similar attendance issues to those of salons. Since the main target population for salons is healthy older persons, another important endeavor is to examine whether the content offered by salons is satisfactory for such individuals. As a result of the potentially wide age range of attendees, safety may inevitably be emphasized for some content. It may also be helpful to diversify salon activities. For example, the content of salon activities should reflect regional characteristics. Thus, considering the wide range of characteristics of older persons, it may be better to create several different kinds of salons that offer different activities. Moreover, we also believe that it would be beneficial for health and welfare care professionals who are familiar with the characteristics of older adults in communities to attend salons, to assist in their management.

Other older persons in our study did not attend salons because they were already busy with other social activities such as hobbies, work, and volunteering. This refers to the concept of social participation. Hashimoto et al.\textsuperscript{16} defined social participation as “activities such as social, personal (involvement with neighbors and friends), and social/service activities (senior–citizen associations’ activities, hobbies, and volunteering), and four types of learning activities.” Since salon activities are similar to those at other associations for older adults, salon activities should also be included in the category of “social activities.” Similar to physical activity, social activities (e.g., visits to cinemas, restaurants, and sporting events; going on trips; participating in social groups) and productive activities (e.g., gardening, preparing meals, shopping, unpaid and paid community work, and other paid employment) are significantly associated with a lower mortality risk\textsuperscript{17}. Moreover, previous research has shown that community-dwelling older adults who participate in a variety of social groups have improved instrumental activities of daily living\textsuperscript{18}, while another study found that the frequency of social engagement was significantly associated with lower rates of disability\textsuperscript{19}. In Japan, social participation is expected to be an effective policy for preventing long-term care\textsuperscript{20}. Additionally, Smith\textsuperscript{21} reported that, short of engaging in active social participation, even having a social “role” has
a positive effect on health. Considering the above, it seems that salons should not have to be marketed towards older persons who are already participating in society through hobbies, work, and volunteer activities, given that this need has already been met. Using a broad definition of social participation, it seems necessary to develop a connection with older persons’ community. However, to achieve this, it is not necessary for the government to ensure that all services enable older adults’ contact with society, or to provide public grants for such places. Instead, it is important to consider processes through which older adults can participate in society by applying the attributes, hobbies, and roles that they have cultivated in their lives. However, such societal integration cannot be suddenly acquired once an individual reaches older age. Efforts must be made to develop a viewpoint of social participation and a desire to live as a member of a community much earlier in the lifespan.

Finally, older persons who did not wish to attend salons also reported not wishing to engage in social interaction with others. Specifically, some did not want to receive assistance from others in salons. For example, if the salons were situated far from their homes, some older persons would need assistance from other salon members or volunteers with regard to transport. However, some participants wished to travel unaided, even if the salon was far away. Previous studies have reported that individuals who live far from facilities are less likely to participate in routine health examinations, and that the farther the distance from such facilities, the lower the attendance frequency. In contrast, our finding that individuals were willing to travel long distances by themselves shows that distance to the facility had no impact in the current study, suggesting that the attendance issue would not be resolved even if salons were made more accessible. Thus, it is necessary to understand the specific characteristics of older adults and consider that salons may have an atmosphere of caring for others.

A limitation of this study is that only individuals from one rural city were interviewed. Further, the sample size of 14 was small. Although, because all the older persons who were introduced to us participated in the research, the sample can be said to be representative. Some participants also had shorter interviews. There is a possibility that we could not obtain a deep narrative from them. In addition, since one person was not interviewed at home, we cannot confirm the homogeneity of the research environment, although we tried to make the interview environment as relaxing as the participant’s home. Moreover, we could not conduct a member check by simply sending the results to the participant and the staff at the Community Comprehensive Support Center and the Local Welfare Commissioner because the contents did not explicitly reflect the participants’ views. Future research should aim to further explore detailed reasons as to why older adults from a variety of contexts do not attend salons, so that services could be effectively targeted to healthy older persons.

V. Conclusions

As a result of interviews with 14 elderly residents living in the rural city, the following three themes relating to attitudes towards salons were identified: “I am sufficiently energetic,” “I am busy with other social activities,” and “I do not enjoy emotional connections with other people.” When considering ways in which older persons can interact with other people, we found that, other than age and physical and mental conditions, self-awareness in relation to aging must also be taken into consideration. Furthermore, when examining interactions between elderly people, it is important to consider not only the senior salon, but also overall “social participation,” including hobbies, work, and
volunteer activities.

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和文抄録

目的：急速な高齢化が進む中、要介護状態に移行する前段階の比較的健康な高齢者が増加している。要介護状態への移行や認知症予防のためにも、高齢者が自宅から地域に出て他者と交流することは重要とされる。高齢者サロンは、他者との交流の場として、健康の保持増進に効果的と報告されている一方で、不参加者も多いとされる。本研究では、サロンに参加しない理由を探るために、地方都市に暮らす14名の高齢者にインタビュー調査を行った。

方法：データ収集方法は、半構造化面接とした。対象者の平均年齢は74.6±14.4（67～89歳）で、男女各々7名であった。インタビューデータは質的に分析した。

結果：高齢者がサロンに参加しない理由として、「元気な自分にはサロンは合わない」、「他の社会活動で忙しい」、「人間関係が煩わしい」の三つのテーマが抽出された。

結論：今後のサロン運営のためには、高齢者の年齢、自立レベル、老性自覚、地域性等に配慮しながら内容を検討することが必要であると考える。加えて、今後、高齢者の対人交流を検討する際、サロン活動に加え、趣味、仕事、ボランティア活動等幅広く社会参加を捉えることが重要であると言える。