

Abstract

Aim: Japan is the most aged society in the world, and the number of older people who actively work is also rising. Although willingness to engage in advance care planning (ACP) among the older population is the subject of the current research, little is known about the older population who work. The primary aim of this study was to assess the current situation of willingness to engage in ACP among older people who work in a local community.

Methods: We conducted a single-center cross-sectional study at the Silver Human Resource Center (SHRC) in F city, Japan. All members of SHRC were 60 years or older. Willingness to engage in ACP was assessed as to whether the participants had contemplated ACP, discussed ACP with their family, discussed ACP with their primary care doctor, and had ACP documentation. The preference when appointing a surrogate was also assessed as to whether the participants wanted a family or legal representative to be their surrogate. Participants' background factors of socioeconomic status, health-related quality of life, health literacy, and social networks were also collected to clarify their association with willingness to engage in ACP and surrogate preference.

Results: The median age was 74 years (interquartile range: 70–78 years), and 71.6% were male. Among all participants, 67.3% contemplated ACP, 57.5% had discussed ACP with their family, 8.6% had discussed ACP with a primary doctor, 63.6% were willing to document ACP, 4.9% reported having written ACP, 22.6% reported a potential surrogate, 75.8% wanted to appoint a family member as their surrogate, and 12.8% wanted to appoint a legal representative as their surrogate. In multivariable models, believing in a religion (adjusted Odds Ratio [aOR] 2.89, 95% confidence interval [CI] 1.54– 5.47, $p < 0.001$), and having adequate social networks (aOR 2.24, 95% CI 1.14–4.41, $p = 0.025$) were associated with higher odds of discussing end-of-life wishes with family, friends or relatives. A higher level of health literacy (aOR 1.06, 95% CI 1.02–1.11, $p = 0.009$) was associated with higher odds of designating family as the surrogate.

Conclusion: We revealed willingness to engage in ACP, preference for appointing a surrogate, and association with backgrounds among older workers who work in the community. Further studies are needed to extend this study into additional regions throughout Japan or internationally.

Keywords: *Advance Care Planning, Advance Directives; Surrogate, End-of-Life Wishes, General Population, Japan*

Background

Aging Society

It is projected that by the year 2050, one in six people will be over the age of 65 years worldwide compared with one in 11 people in 2019 [1]. Being a super-aging society, Japan has the most aged population globally, and the expectation is that this trend will continue until 2050. Notably, there has been a consistent increase in older people aged 65 years or older in Japan since the 1950s. Approximately 35 million people in Japan were over 65 years in 2018. In terms of population distribution, the proportion of older people in the total population was 28.1%. With regards to gender, 25.1% accounted for men and 31.0% for women [2]. The aging rate in Japan will increase due to the increasing elderly population, decreasing total population, and lower birth rate. It is anticipated that the proportion of older people above 65 years in Japan will be 33.4% in 2035 and 39.9% in 2060. Japanese people not only live the longest; approximately 80% of older people in Japan will live independently without nursing care by 2030 [3]. Since 2004, the yearly number of older workers has also consecutively increased in Japan. In 2018, the number of older workers reached 8.62 million, the highest number ever. The proportion of older workers to the total number of workers was also a record high of 12.9% [4]. Compared with the main OECD countries, the labor force participation rates of the older population were also high: Japan (men: 30.2%, women: 14.5%, hereinafter the same order), United States (23.0%, 14.5%), and France (3.4%, 1.8%) [5] Although the proportion of older workers in Japan has increased, 31% of older job seekers were unable to work due to health reasons [6].