	1950	1960	1970	1980	1990	2000	2005	2010
GDP per person (2005 international $)*	3415	6249	13734	18545	26926	29396	31129	31329
GDP growth rate (%)[3]	NA	12·0†	4·3	2·8	5·6	2·9	1·9	−5·2‡
Total population (×1000)[4]	82199	93189	103710	115915	122251	125720	126393	126536
Population older than 65 years (%)[4]	4·9	5·7	7·0	9·0	11·9	17·2	19·9	22·7
Total fertility rate[4]	3·0	2·0	2·1	1·8	1·5	1·3	1·3	1·4§
Female life expectancy at birth (years)[5]	61·5	70·2	74·7	78·8	81·9	84·6	85·5	86·4
Male life expectancy at birth (years)[5]	58·0	65·3	69·3	73·4	75·9	77·7	78·6	79·6
Total health expenditure (% of GDP)[6]	NA	3·0	4·5	6·4	5·9	7·7	8·2	8·5¶

GDP=gross domestic product. NA=not available. *Gakidou E, Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, personal communication. †GDP growth rate in 1961. ‡GDP growth rate for 2009. §Total fertility rate of medium-fertility variant estimate for 2010–15. ¶Total health expenditure for 2008.

Table: **Socioeconomic and demographic characteristics of people in Japan during 1950–2010**

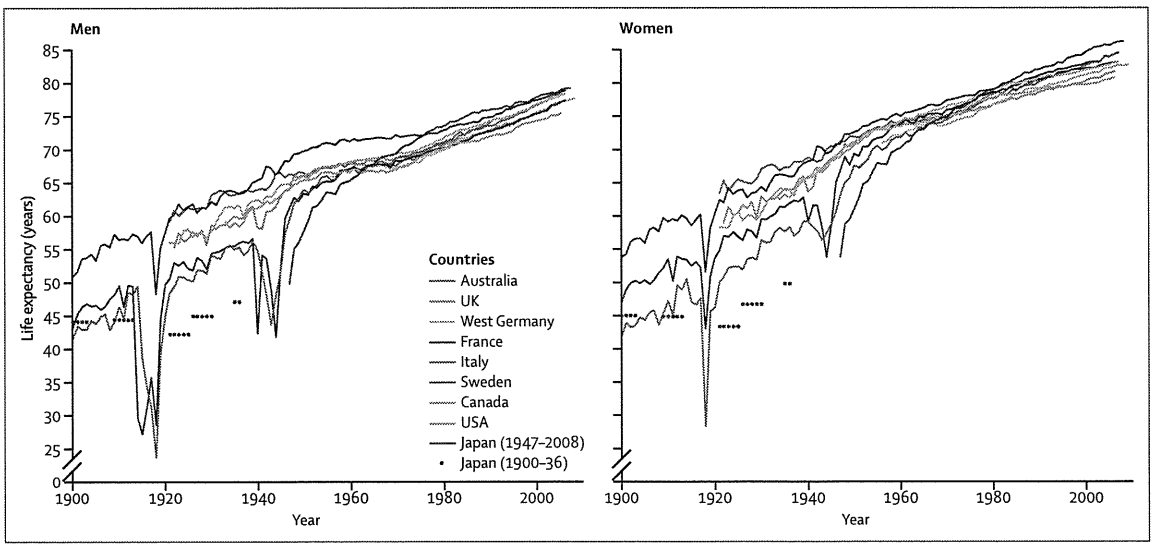

Figure 1: **Trends in life expectancy at birth, 1900–2008**
Data from University of California at Berkeley and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research[7] and Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.[8]

healthy in the future? Understanding what has contributed to making the Japanese population healthy in such a fairly short period is important for global health policy, particularly for countries struggling to improve health. Several aspects of the Japanese lifestyle provide appealing explanations for the first two questions. First, Japanese people give attention to hygiene in all aspects of their daily life. This attitude might partly be attributable to a complex interaction of culture, education, climate (eg, humidity, temperature), environment (eg, having plenty of water and being a rice-eating nation), and the old Shinto tradition of purifying the body and mind before meeting others.[11,12] Second, they are health conscious. In Japan, regular health check-ups are the norm. Mass screening is provided for everyone at school and work or in the community by local government authorities. A systematic check-up of the whole body, referred to as a human dry dock (panel 1), is another type of health screening, which is popular among business people—they stay at clinics or hospitals for several days to undergo thorough physical examinations. Third, Japanese food has a balanced nutritional benefit, and the diet of the Japanese population has improved in tandem with economic development over the five past decades.[15,16]

Healthy lifestyle is, however, only one dimension of Japanese life. Japan is now struggling to deal with several major health challenges, which are partly attributable to the striking changes taking place in the demographic and social structures of its rapidly maturing society. The population is projected to shrink from 128 million in 2005 to 95 million in 2050, while the proportion of people aged 65 years or older is expected to rise to 40%.[17] Since the early 1990s, prolonged political stagnation and economic recession have helped induce a feeling of increasing inequality among this ageing population. Moreover, overweight or obesity is an increasingly serious problem, emanating from a shift towards a western-style diet and sedentary lifestyle. About a third of men aged 30–59 years are overweight or obese,[18] although the prevalence of adult obesity (4%) is well below that in other developed nations.[6]

See Online/Series
DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)60987-2,
DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61176-8,
DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61048-9, and
DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61098-2

This is the first in a Series of six papers about Japan's universal health care at 50 years

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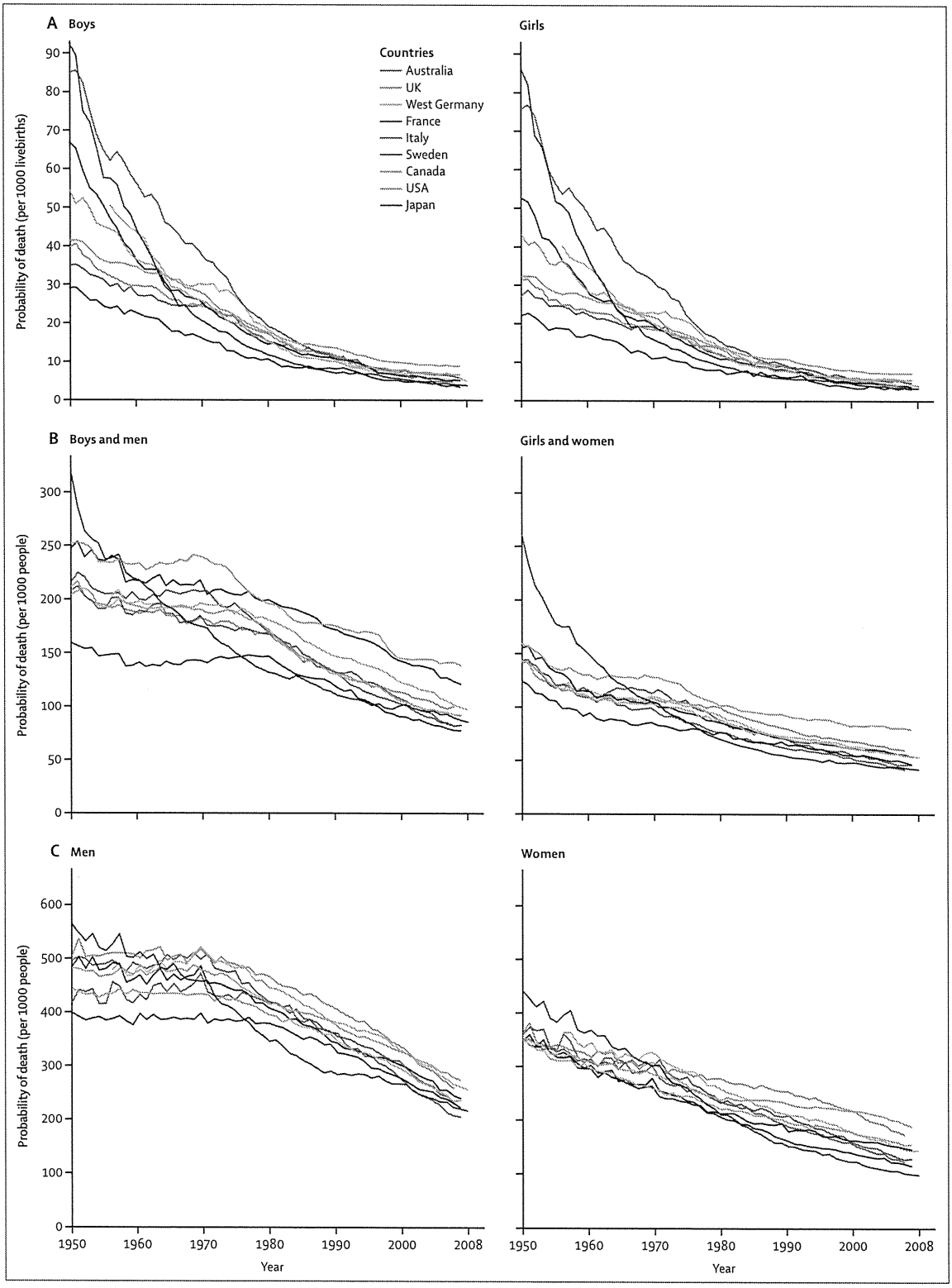

Figure 2: **Trends in the probability of death at age younger than 5 years (A), 15–60 years (B), and 60–75 years (C) in Japan and selected countries during 1950–2008**
Data from University of California at Berkeley and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research.[7]

Furthermore, the working life of typical salaried workers in Japan seems anything but healthy—often working from early in the morning until late in the evening, 6 days a week. To relieve daily stress, some of them resort to negative health behaviours such as smoking tobacco and getting drunk after work, or even suicide in extreme cases. Death from overwork is also a serious social problem. In the context of these demographic and social challenges, what are the best strategies for Japan to protect the health and wellbeing of its ageing population?

In this first report in the *Lancet* Series, we focus on the improvements in the health of the Japanese population after World War 2. We review and analyse the best available data and evidence for population health in Japan to explore what has made the Japanese people healthy (panel 2). We provide an overview of Japan's population health in terms of the rates and distribution of mortality, and assess possible factors that might account for the longevity of the people in Japan. We also draw attention to the future challenges for Japan in controlling risk factors and social determinants to further enhance the health status of its population. We conclude with the global lessons that can be learned from Japan's experience over the past 50 years.

Panel 1: Human dry dock

The Ningen Dock (or human dry dock) is a comprehensive medical check-up system that is unique to Japan.[13] The Ningen Dock started in 1954 at a hospital in Tokyo. At that time, this service could only be afforded by business and political leaders because it took 6 days of consecutive stay in hospital and cost the equivalent of 3–4 months of a civil servant's starting salary. Advances in automated blood analysers and other testing apparatus reduced the costs, and the 1-day or 1-night stay has become the main type of service. About 3 million people per year are estimated to receive the Ningen Dock at about 1500 medical institutions in the country. A key factor that underpinned the rapid growth in the use of the Ningen Dock was that several companies covered the cost for their employees to ensure their good health.

The Ningen Dock emphasises the importance of a consultation and a post-examination interview. Over 1–2 days, clients undergo a series of medical examinations, such as blood, urine and faecal tests, radiography, and ultrasonography, and a consultation with a doctor about their medical history and lifestyle habits. After the examinations, the doctor explains the results and gives lifestyle advice to the clients.

The Ningen Dock might play a part in the primary prevention of cerebrovascular and cardiovascular diseases through the control of risk factors, such as obesity, hypertension, hyperglycaemia, dyslipidaemia, and hyperuricaemia. It might also be important for secondary prevention through the detection of diseases such as the early stages of cancer. The brain dock with MRI has expanded nationwide since it started in 1988.[14] There has also been a focus on using PET scans to detect the early stages of cancer. However, the cost-effectiveness of the Ningen Dock has been questioned.

Mortality rates in infants and young adults

Most of the increase in longevity in Japan in the past 60 years happened during 1950–65. Life expectancy at birth increased by 10·1 years in men and 11·9 years in women during this time, and these increases accounted for almost 40% of the total increase during 1950–2010 (table). Much of the increase in longevity during this early period was indicative of an enormous reduction in mortality rates in children younger than 5 years and young adults. In 1950, the probability of death before the age of 5 years was greater than 80 per 1000 livebirths and was very high compared with the probabilities of death in other developed countries, but fell to about 20 per 1000 livebirths by 1965 (figure 2). The probability of death in individuals aged 15–60 years was also much higher than in other developed countries, but fell and was on a par with probabilities of death in some developed countries by 1965. Consequently, in the 1950s and early 1960s, lower mortality rates in children younger than 5 years accounted for an increase in male life expectancy at birth of 4·1 years and female life expectancy at birth of 4·3 years, whereas reduced mortality rates in adults younger than 60 years accounted for increases in life expectancies of 3·1 years in men and 4·0 years in women (webappendix p 3).

The health of children younger than 5 years improved greatly in 1950–65 through the control of intestinal or respiratory infections and vaccine-preventable diseases that occurred with a drop in the number of neonatal deaths. The age-standardised mortality rate for communicable diseases, other than tuberculosis, decreased by 90% in children younger than 5 years (webappendix p 7); the age-standardised mortality rates for neonatal illnesses fell from 990 per 100 000 boys to 173 per 100 000 and from 772 per 100 000 girls to 133 per 100 000 during 1953–70 (webappendix p 7). Reduction in mortality rates for infectious diseases, other than tuberculosis, in children younger than 5 years accounted for increases of 2·2 years in male life expectancies at birth and 2·4 years in female life expectancies at birth. The reduction in the mortality rate for neonatal illnesses increased life expectancy by 1·0 year in both sexes (webappendix p 3).

The effect of a reduction in the mortality rate for tuberculosis on the extension of life expectancy at birth in young adults was equivalent to the reduction in mortality rate for other infectious diseases in children younger than 5 years. A 95% reduction in the number of deaths from tuberculosis in adults (aged 15–59 years) in 1950–65 (webappendix p 8) contributed to the increase in life expectancy of 2·4 years in men and 2·3 years in women (webappendix p 3).

See Online for webappendix

These reductions in mortality rates in 1950–65 indicated increasing investment in the public health sector during

Panel 2: Data sources and methods

Mortality trends

To assess trends in mortality rates in Japan since 1950, we used life tables and individual cause of death data that were obtained from different sources (Naghavi M, unpublished).[19,20] Life tables were obtained from the human mortality database at the University of California, Berkeley, CA, USA, and the Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research, Rostock, Germany.[7] We also obtained the individual cause-of-death data for 1950–2008 from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan,[19] and the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation at the University of Washington, Seattle, WA, USA (Naghavi M, unpublished).[20] Japan has had a complete vital registration system since 1899. Although the gold standard is cause of death information from vital registration, a potential bias could be attributable to the inclusion of ill-defined codes (eg, cardiac arrest, heart failure, and senility) and unknown causes. With the algorithm developed by Naghavi and colleagues,[21] ill-defined codes and unknown causes on death certificates were redistributed and the consistency across revisions of the International Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems (ICD) was checked. We assessed the causes that are amenable to medical care, which was originally proposed by Nolte and McKee,[22] extracting the major causes of death from the list (webappendix p 1), because the ICD avoidable causes of death were no longer applicable to our analysis after redistribution of ill-defined and unknown causes.

Health disparities

We assessed the trend in regional disparities in longevity with data for municipal life expectancy at birth at 5-year intervals during 1985–2005.[23] Municipalities are the smallest administrative units for which life expectancy data at birth are available in Japan. Sample sizes were 3307–3354 in 1985–2000 and 1963 in 2005. The substantial drop in the sample size in 2005 was due to the municipal mergers that were undertaken after 2000. We assessed temporal trends in socioeconomic disparities in the age-standardised all-cause mortality rate in the working population (aged 30–59 years), using vital records from 1980 to 2005. We used occupational status as a measure of the socioeconomic status of individuals. We standardised death rates per 100 000 at 5-year intervals using the Japanese population in 1985 as a standard population.[24] We obtained population data according to occupational status from tables reported in the national census that is undertaken every 5 years.[17,24]

demilitarisation and democratisation in the early post-war years in Japan. 32 health laws were enacted during the first decade after the war.[25] The Japanese Government collaborated with the American occupation forces in scaling up public health interventions at the community level.[26] Water supply coverage and key interventions for maternal and child health rapidly improved after the war (webappendix p 10). The effective provision of essential interventions for child survival, such as access to safe drinking water and institutional delivery, was mediated through a high level of maternal education and health facility provision that had already been achieved before the war.[27] Moreover, free treatment for tuberculosis started in 1952,[28] and included systematic screening with chest radiography and the use of streptomycin. The incidence of tuberculosis decreased sharply at a yearly rate of 11% between 1961 and 1977.[29] Additionally, as elaborated in the second report in this *Lancet* Series,[30] health insurance coverage, which was applied to about 70% of the population before World War 2, ensured access to new interventions such as drugs and vaccines for tuberculosis.

Mortality rates for non-communicable diseases

Even after communicable diseases had been successfully tackled, life expectancy of Japanese people continued to increase steadily. Male and female life expectancies at birth, respectively, increased by 5·7 years and 5·9 years during 1965–80, 3·0 years and 4·0 years during 1980–95, and 3·3 years and 2·9 years during 1995–2008 (figure 1). The risks of people dying at the ages of 15–60 years and 60–75 years fell, becoming one of the lowest in the developed world by 1980 (figure 2).

In 1950, mortality rates for cancers and ischaemic heart disease were already quite low in Japan compared with those in other developed countries, whereas the stroke mortality rate was very high. The age-standardised mortality rates for men with cancers and other neoplasms, ischaemic heart disease, and stroke were 163·8 per 100 000, 143·4 per 100 000, and 363·1 per 100 000, respectively, and for women 137·8 per 100 000, 124·8 per 100 000, and 326·5 per 100 000, respectively (webappendix pp 11–13). The low mortality rates for cancers and ischaemic heart disease in the early post-war years is one of the features of the health transition in the Japanese people. Although it is not known why the mortality rates for non-communicable diseases, other than stroke, were already low at this time, the reasons might be a favourable lipid profile and glucose metabolism, a generally low body-mass index, and other lifestyle factors relating to diet and low to moderate alcohol intake.[31] Indeed, the results of the Ni-Hon-San study[32,33] and the Honolulu Heart Program[34] showed that Japanese Americans (first-generation immigrants) were more likely to develop ischaemic heart disease and less likely to develop stroke than were Japanese people living in Japan, drawing attention to the importance of lifestyle rather than genetic background in determining the risk of disease.[32–34] The sustained increase in life expectancy at birth after the mid-1960s was largely attributable to reduced mortality rates for non-communicable diseases (webappendix p 4). From 1965 to 1980, reduced mortality rates in adults with these diseases had a substantial effect on increasing life expectancy. Reduction in the mortality rate for stroke in people aged 60–74 years increased male life expectancy at birth by 1·1 years and female life expectancy at birth by

1·0 years (webappendix p 4). Reduced mortality rate for stroke in women aged 75 years and older also accounted for a substantial increase (0·9 years) in female longevity.

The fall in stroke mortality rates slowed during 1980–95, while ischaemic heart disease mortality rates continued to fall steadily. Although not decreasing so rapidly as that of stroke, the mortality rate for ischaemic heart disease in adults aged 60–74 years nevertheless constantly decreased in this period (webappendix p 9). Consequently, although improved stroke mortality rates continued to be a major determinant of increased life expectancy, the effect of decreased mortality rates for ischaemic heart disease became pronounced during 1980–95, particularly in elderly women (webappendix p 5). Moreover, a reduction in the mortality rate in women aged 75 years and older had the largest effect on the increase in female life expectancy at birth, accounting for a change of more than 2 years (webappendix p 5). The distribution of the effects of change in mortality rate on increased longevity by age and cause of death was similar for both sexes during 1995–2008 (webappendix p 6).

An improved stroke mortality rate coincided with a reduction in average blood pressure that started in the late 1960s.[19,35,36] The numbers of deaths from stroke associated with high blood pressure have decreased over the past three decades.[37] Two factors that might be important in contributing to the falling trend in blood pressure in the population are the increased coverage of antihypertensive drugs in patients with hypertension and improved lifestyles that include reduced dietary salt intake.[38]

A population-wide approach with easy access to primary care as a result of universal health coverage has proved to be especially successful in reducing the incidence and prevalence of stroke.[39] The national government launched a strategy for the prevention and control of hypertension and stroke in 1969 and applied the strategy nationwide in 1982. This strategy included the measurement of blood pressure for screening high-risk populations, provision of national health insurance coverage for the clinical treatment of hypertension, and population-wide health education for reduction of dietary salt intake and improvement of other lifestyle-related factors. On the basis of this strategy, occupational health acts were enacted in 1972 and community health acts in 1982 to mandate the provision of programmes for primary and secondary prevention, including annual health check-ups. More than 70% of Japanese men aged 45–54 years have some form of health check-up at least once a year.[40]

A reduction in dietary salt intake has been very important for the health improvement of the Japanese population. Average salt intake among middle-aged men decreased from 30 g/day in the 1950s to 14 g/day in the 1980s.[41] Some aspects of a westernised Japanese diet, such as the improved preservation of food might have contributed to the reduction in dietary sodium consumption.[16] These results partly support the claim that both a population-based approach and subsequent advances in modern medical technologies with the scale-up of their access have made a substantial contribution to the improved life expectancy of the Japanese population.

Cultural background

Japan's success in terms of the increased life expectancy of its population is unlikely to have resulted solely from the achievement of good access to health care. Instead, other cultural background factors might be involved. Marmot and Smith[42] hypothesised that the way Japanese people relate to each other and groups might partly account for the longevity of the Japanese population.[42] Results of previous studies have lent support to this hypothesis because strong ties in Japanese communities seem to be associated with improved outcomes in mental health, dental health, and physical functioning, while buffering against the adverse effects of income inequality.[43] More than 50 years of peace and political stability might also have contributed indirectly to Japan's success in population health.

Health inequality

The homogeneous and egalitarian nature of Japanese society is shown in terms of strong educational policies, formal and informal regulations that ensure employment security, and universal access to health care. Disparities in life expectancy at birth between prefectures had started to decrease before World War 2 and continued to decline steadily until they were very low in the 1970s.[2] Indirect evidence suggests that people living in prefectures in the northeast of Japan might have shorter life expectancies than do those living in the prefectures in the southwest.[44] This geographical gradient might be attributable to differences in risk profiles such as a higher prevalence of hypertension and diabetes in the northeastern prefectures that are related to lifestyles, health-care resources, and socioeconomic status. Our additional analysis showed that the variability in life expectancy at birth across municipalities remained low from 1985 to 2005—standard deviations of longevity changed by about 1·0 for male life expectancy and 0·8 for female life expectancy, and were small compared with 2·0–2·5 and 1·5–2·0, respectively, for counties in the USA.[45]

Gaps in all-cause mortality rates for men in different occupational groups were reduced from the early 1960s to the late 1980s, except for workers in the service industry and those working in the agriculture, fishery, and forestry industries.[2] An additional analysis we undertook showed that the downward trend in socioeconomic disparities in mortality rates continued in the early 1990s, and the mortality rates for managers and professionals rose in the late 1990s, which coincided with the Asian financial crisis in 1997 (webappendix p 14).

The rapid reduction in mortality rates in Japan might have been partly attributable to the narrowing gap in income during the period of high economic growth in the 1960s and 1970s.[42] By the 1990s, more than 90% of

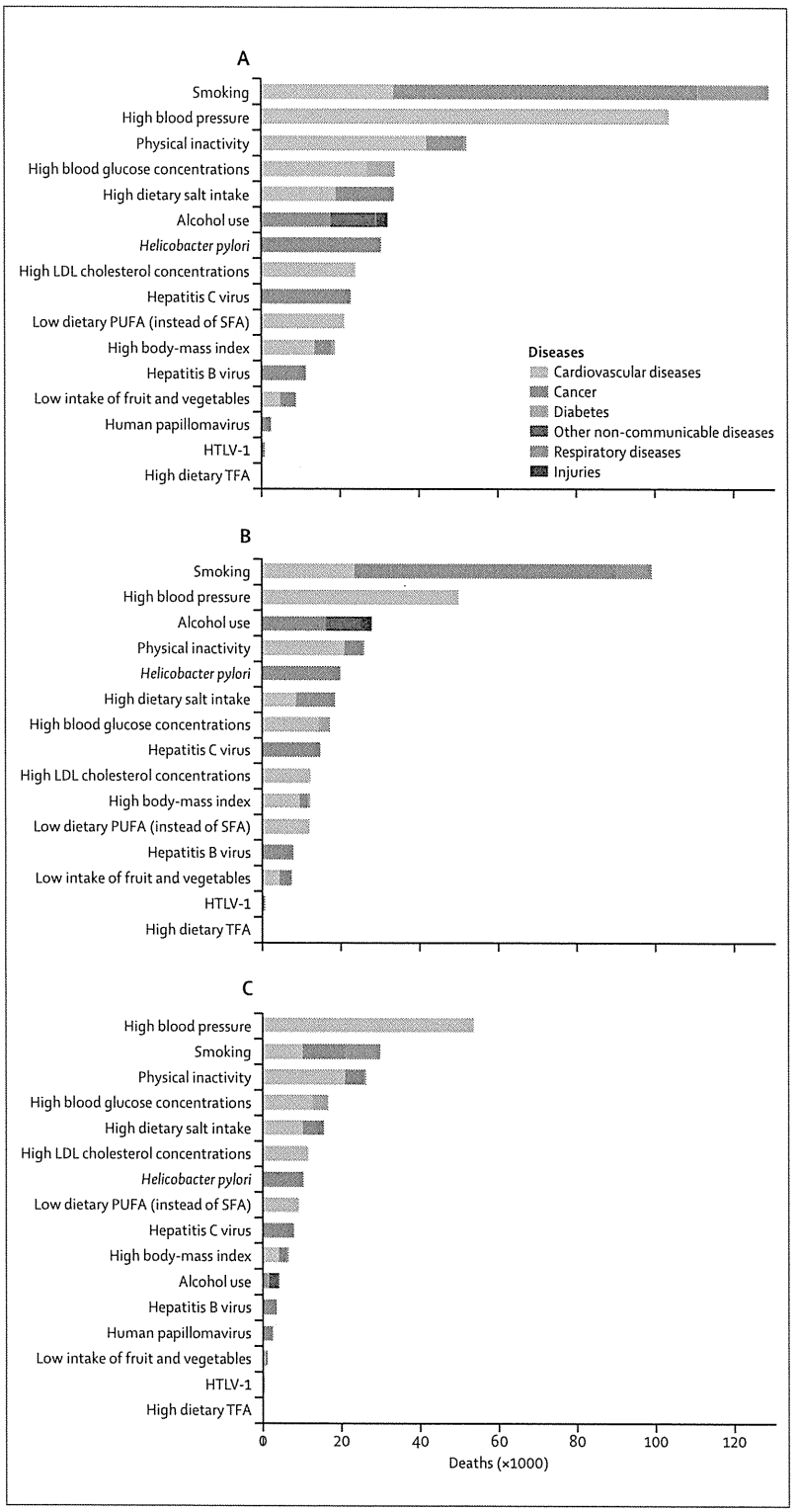

Figure 3: **Deaths from non-communicable diseases and injuries that were attributable to risk factors in Japan in 2007**
(A) Both sexes. (B) Men. (C) Women. Data from Shibuya.[37] PUFA=polyunsaturated fatty acids. SFA=saturated fatty acids. HTLV-1 =human T-lymphotropic virus type 1. TFA=trans fatty acids.

people believed that they were middle class.[46] However, this belief might no longer be applicable. During the past two decades, Japan has had economic recession. Income inequality has increased to match the average for the member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development,[47] which accords with reports suggesting widening health disparities in recent years,[48] despite the decreasing trend and fairly small health disparities until the 1990s.[2]

Challenges for Japanese population health

Increase life expectancy

Cancer, heart disease, and cerebrovascular disease are the three leading causes of death in Japan, accounting for more than 50% of the risk that a person at age zero will die in the course of their lifetime.[5] To strengthen the extension of Japanese life expectancy, mortality from these non-communicable diseases must be prevented. Although the use of advanced medical technology is a promising strategy for improving survival, modifying the profile of the underlying population risk factors is also important to ensure a long-term increase in population health.

A comparative assessment of preventable risk factors in Japan showed that tobacco smoking and high blood pressure were the two distinctive determinants of adult mortality from non-communicable diseases in 2007 (figure 3).[37] Of 834000 deaths from non-communicable diseases and injuries, the exposure to tobacco smoking in terms of smoking impact ratios accounted for 129000 deaths, whereas high blood pressure accounted for 104000 deaths. A similar estimate of the number of avoidable deaths from tobacco use was reported in a pooled cohort study of the current smoking status.[49] The comparative risk assessment also showed that male life expectancy at birth would have been extended by 1·8 years and female life expectancy at birth by 0·6 years if all adults abstained from smoking; and by 0·9 years for both sexes if the systolic blood pressure was reduced to a pressure that resulted in minimum harmful effects in the population.

Tobacco smoking has a striking effect on population health in Japan. Despite its well known harmful effects, smoking is still commonplace—about 50% of young men smoke—and the rate has been gradually increasing among young women.[18] The Health Promotion Law was enacted in 2003 to support the prevention of smoking and passive smoking in public places. Although compliance with this national tobacco control legislation has improved, disparities still exist in the progress of tobacco control policy across local governments,[50] and no mandatory clean air law has been passed nationally. The retail price of the most popular brand of cigarettes was only US$3·3 in 2008, much lower than the average price in high-income countries ($5·0).[51] These circumstances, favouring smokers, show to some extent that tobacco tax was one of the most important sources of revenue for the government in the past.[52] Further, the rate of mortality attributable to

this risk factor has increased in recent decades because of the accumulation of negative health effects in the older population.[37] Without effective policy interventions, the rate of mortality from tobacco smoking will continue to rise in the coming decades. A renewed emphasis on tobacco control, especially through its pricing mechanism, is necessary to discourage the consumption of tobacco products and promote smoking cessation.

Despite the decline in population blood pressure in the past four decades, the management of blood pressure is still not satisfactory in Japan. Blood pressure is effectively controlled with drugs in less than a fifth of the population with hypertension.[37] Additional efforts in the community and clinical practice in terms of early detection, lifestyle modification, and the effective treatment coverage of high blood pressure have the potential to extend life expectancy through a reduction in the mortality rates for cardiovascular diseases. In relation to this, strengthening adherence to standard clinical guideline recommendations[53] in general practice through continued medical education could be the key to increasing the effective coverage of outpatient services and to ensure the compliance of patients, as discussed in the third report in this Series.[54]

A large improvement in population health is still possible through the reduction of several risk factors for non-communicable diseases, such as high concentrations of blood glucose, physical inactivity, alcohol use, overweight and obesity, and high dietary salt intake. The control of several cardiovascular risks could also increase longevity for both sexes by reducing the risk of death.[37] A comprehensive prevention package is needed to lower the combined effects of several risk factors or metabolic syndrome, including the improvement of lifestyles and diet, and to increase the coverage of antihypertensive drugs. This package would be particularly relevant in the current obesity-friendly environment in Japan because, although lifestyle changes generally seem to matter more than do genetic factors, evidence suggests that the Japanese might be genetically more susceptible to being overweight or to developing diabetes mellitus.[55,56] Since 2008, in response to soaring health costs, the government has made it obligatory for people aged 40–74 years to have an annual check-up and a health education intervention that is focused on the prevention of metabolic syndrome,[57] although the effectiveness of health check-ups is not known in Japan.

Japan, similar to other east Asian countries, has many cancer-associated deaths from infectious causes.[58] Infections with hepatitis C virus and *Helicobacter pylori* account for many of the deaths from cancer.[37] In 2007, *H pylori* infection was the cause of 31000 deaths from gastric cancer. Infection with hepatitis C virus was associated with 23000 deaths from liver cancer, with clustering in people aged 70–79 years—ie, individuals born in the 1930s. Chronic infection with hepatitis C virus plays a major part in the cause of hepatic carcinoma in Japan.[59] A decreasing prevalence of infections with hepatitis C virus after the birth cohort of about 1935 suggests that the disease burden of this virus will decrease in the future. The fairly high prevalence of *H pylori* is similar to that of stomach cancer.[58] However, a fall in the prevalence of *H pylori* infection has been noted in people born after 1955,[60] which indicates a future reduction in the burden of gastric carcinoma attributable to this risk factor in Japan.

Prevention of suicide

Suicide prevention is another challenge for population health in Japan. Suicide rates contribute to premature mortality rates and profoundly affect society—by 2006, an estimated 3 million people had lost a loved one to suicide in Japan.[61] The number of suicides has been greater than 30000 every year since 1998, when a sharp rise was recorded from the previous year (figure 4).[62] Roughly 70% of people who commit suicide are men and 50% are unemployed, and 40% of suicides in men are in individuals aged 45–64 years.[63] Major motives for suicide among working age men include psychiatric disorders such as depression, business failure, unemployment, and debts.[64]

The trends in suicide mortality rates might be associated with the increasing economic and social insecurity resulting from a stagnating Japanese economy since the beginning of the 1990s, especially in response to the Asian financial crisis in 1997.[65] The unemployment rate in the working age male population rose from 2·0% in 1991 to 3·4% in 1997 and then up to 5·5% in 2003.[66] Additionally, the work environment has greatly changed because of the easing in employment contract regulations in the late 1990s.[67] The employment pattern has shifted from the permanent employment that underpinned high economic growth in the past. The percentage of non-regular workers among male employees has increased from 9% in 1991 to about 19% in the late 2000s.[66] The government has responded to the suicide epidemic with a comprehensive strategy (ie, the Comprehensive Suicide Prevention Initiative[68]) that follows on from the Basic Act for Suicide Prevention, which was enacted in 2006, although its effect is not yet notable.

Reduction in morbidity and disability

Do Japanese people not only live longer but better in terms of their physical and psychological functioning? Globally, evidence suggests an increasing prevalence of morbidity in accord with the ageing population, while disability has been falling.[69] In Japan, research suggests that trends in disability prevalence differ between the young elderly (65–74 years) and the oldest old (≥85 years). For example, falling disability rates for those aged 65 years and older were recorded during the 1990s in a nationally representative sample of the Japanese elderly

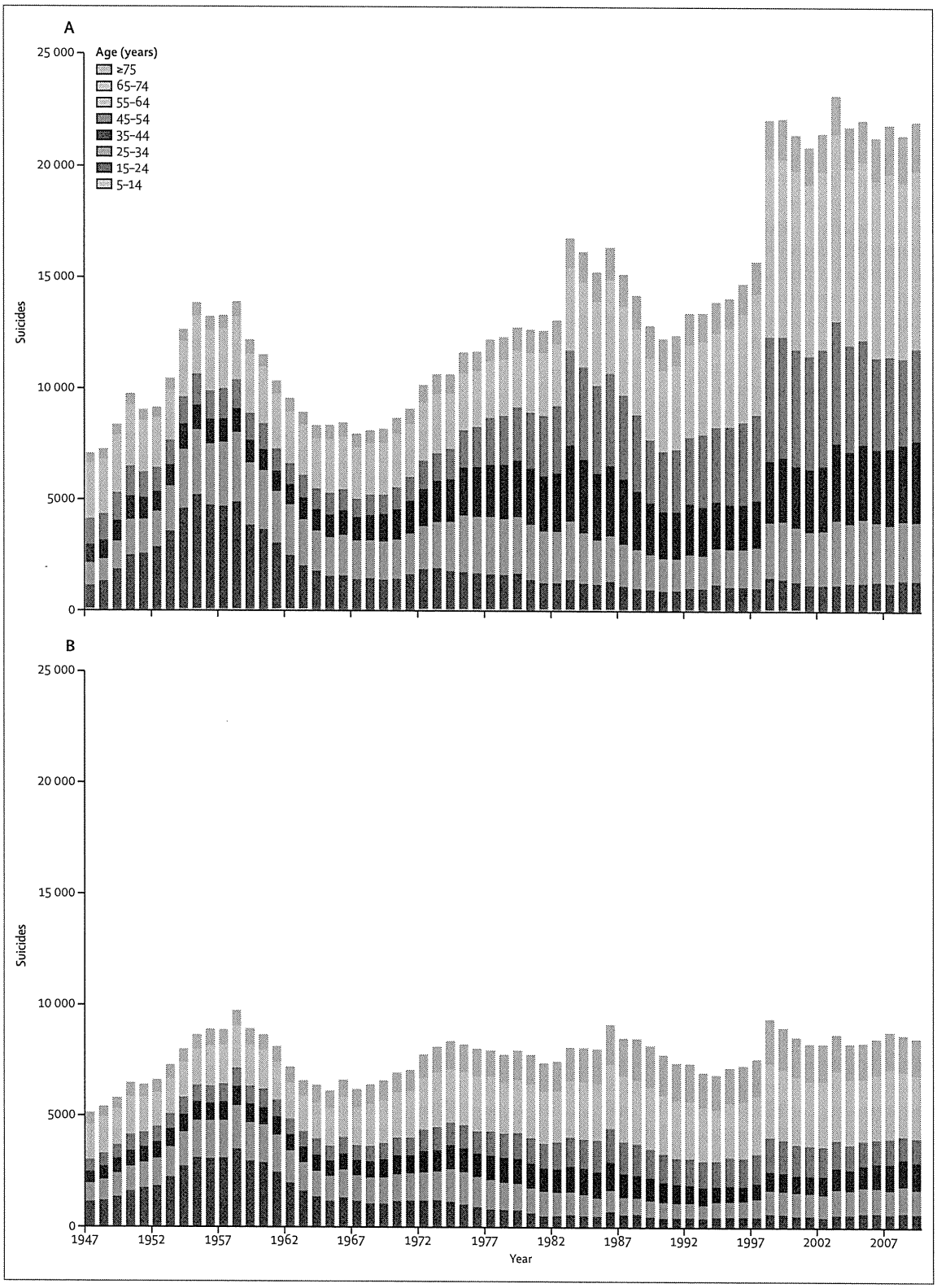

Figure 4: **Deaths from suicide by age in Japan, 1947–2009**
(A) Men. (B) Women. Data from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare.[62]

population,[70] whereas increasing rates were reported for centenarians in other studies.[71,72] National health interview survey data have been used in studies to show that the functional health status of the Japanese people deteriorated during 1995–2004;[73] and morbidity rates decreased from 1984 until 1995, but the trend reversed in the late 1990s until 2004.[74] However, self-reported data were used for a few of the health domains in these studies. The survey questions and response categories are not detailed enough to obtain a reliable measure of the non-fatal health status of the population. Therefore, the national information infrastructure needs to be urgently improved to gather valid, reliable, and comparable data for the rates of disability and morbidity in the Japanese population.

Medical and long-term care

An unprecedented and unexpectedly steep reduction in mortality rates in older age groups[75] is contributing to the rapid increase in remaining life expectancy in Japan. The country has shown the most rapid increase in remaining life expectancy over the past six decades. For Japanese women, life expectancy at age 60 years increased from 16·4 years in 1950 to 28·1 years in 2007 (webappendix p 2), while life expectancy at age 80 years also increased substantially from 5·5 years to 11·4 years (webappendix p 2). The stagnating rate of increase in remaining life expectancy in other developed countries during the past two decades draws attention to Japan's exceptional improvement in life expectancy at older ages.

The nature of health care is also changing in this ageing society. The proportion of deaths resulting from illnesses that are no longer amenable to medical care, and Japanese society's concern about health have been increasing. A close link between medical care and long-term care should be further promoted to enhance population wellbeing and will be elaborated further in the fourth report in this Series.[76]

Global lessons

The experience of post-war Japan suggests that countries with low socioeconomic development can achieve progress in terms of their population health. Japan's national income was low in the beginning of the 1950s, when a tremendous increase in life expectancy at birth started largely as a result of the scale-up of the coverage of essential child survival interventions and provision of free treatment for tuberculosis. The main driving force for improved population health during this period was undoubtedly the strong stewardship of the new Japanese Government in implementing major structural reforms in the health sector and placing priority on investment in key interventions for public health in the early phase of economic growth.

The path towards universal coverage should be encouraged globally. Stroke mortality reduction was a major determinant of the sustained extension of the longevity of the Japanese population after the mid-1960s. The control of blood pressure improved with population-based interventions such as salt reduction campaigns and an increased availability of anti-hypertensive drugs through universal health insurance coverage. A reduction in mortality rates can be brought about by the interplay of improvements in both medical care and other societal factors (eg, income, education, nutrition, and sanitation). In turn, this reduction can vary by individual, place, and disease type.[77,78] A recent assessment of worldwide adult mortality rates[79] identified three important factors—socioeconomic development, increased access to health care and the progress in health technologies, and the diseases of affluence. Universal coverage is one of the most important factors and is essential in enhancing access to cost-effective health care at affordable prices that has indirectly contributed to the longevity through reduced cardiovascular-associated mortality rates in Japan. The lessons learned from the challenges and successes of population health in Japan lend support for the implementation of the current global health strategies to develop domestic health financing and risk-pooling mechanisms through health insurance and to scale up cost-effective interventions.[80]

Health disparities across regions and socioeconomic groups are quite small in this egalitarian society and have narrowed over time with increasing average population health. The establishment of free compulsory primary education early in the 20th century, a social insurance system before the war, and universal health insurance coverage in 1961 enabled the provision of equal opportunities for health promotion. These experiences confirm that working on population averages is not enough. Countries that have the least regional or socioeconomic disparity in longevity tend to be those in which the populations enjoy the longest life expectancies in the world.[69] Globalisation and rising economic disparity contribute to health inequalities and are increasingly causes for concern in many countries, and Japan is no exception. The goals of a health system include not only improvement of the averages but also reduction of health inequalities to a minimum.[81] By doing so, countries could accomplish what Japan has achieved.

Japan now has challenges for population health that many other countries will have soon. Further progress in terms of longevity in Japan is dependent on the prevention of major risk factors for non-communicable diseases such as tobacco smoking, high blood pressure, and metabolic syndrome. Prevention of premature mortality from suicide is another major issue requiring a comprehensive societal response that involves, for example, stabilisation of the labour market, and improvement of the promotion and provision of mental health services.[82] The rapidly ageing population as a result of improved survival also challenges financing and quality of care in Japan's health system.[30,54,76] The tsunami and nuclear crisis caused by the

magnitude 9·0 Great East Japan Earthquake on March 11, 2011, might also affect future population health, which will need to be monitored and assessed. How should Japan respond to these challenges? Policy options to tackle the challenges are addressed in the other five reports in this *Lancet* Series on Japan, which we hope will serve as a guide that will help other countries to develop policies that fit their specific circumstances. Indeed, this Series will draw attention to how Japan is unique in overcoming different and changing population health challenges in the past 50 years to achieve population longevity, and how the country's experience can be an important resource for the global health community and could transcend geographical, social, cultural, and political boundaries for understanding and helping enhance population health worldwide.

Contributors

All authors contributed to the study concept, design of the report, data analysis, and interpretation of the results. NI, ES, NK, and KS wrote the first draft. MI, HI, and ME did a systematic review. NI, ES, NK, HI, SI, TS, AS, and KS contributed to drafting and critical revision. All authors contributed to the discussion and have seen and approved the final version of the report.

Conflicts of interest

We declare that we have no conflicts of interest.

Acknowledgment

This work is in partly funded by the generous support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the China Medical Board, a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research from the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (H22-seisaku-shitei-033), and a Grant-in-Aid for Scientific Research (grant category B) from the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (number 22390130). The views and opinions expressed by the authors are provided in their personal capacity and are their sole responsibility. We thank Hironori Imano and Zentaro Yamagata for their valuable contributions; Amarjargal Dagvadorji, Jinghua Li, Hatoko Sasaki, Mengru Wang, and Windy Mariane Virenia Wariki for their technical support; and Tomoko Suzuki and Tadashi Yamamoto for their administrative support.

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Supplementary webappendix

This webappendix formed part of the original submission and has been peer reviewed. We post it as supplied by the authors.

Supplement to: Ikeda N, Saito E, Kondo N, et al. What has made the population of Japan healthy? *Lancet* 2011; published online Sept 1. DOI:10.1016/S0140-6736(11)61055-6

Webappendix

Webtable 1: Causes of death amenable to medical care by ICD10

Causes of death	Age	ICD10
Tuberculosis		
1 Tuberculosis	0–74	A15–A19, B90, P370
Other infectious diseases		
2 Intestinal infections	0–14	A00–A09
3 Other vaccine preventable diseases (diphtheria, tetanus, poliomyelitis and other VPD)	0–74	A36, A35, A80
4 Whooping cough	0–14	A37
5 Measles	0–14	B05
6 Acute respiratory infection	0–14	H65–H66, J00–J22, J85, P23
Cancers		
7 Malignant neoplasm of colon and rectum	0–74	C18–C21
8 Malignant neoplasm of breast	0–74	C50
9 Malignant neoplasm of cervix and corpus uteri	0–74	C52–C55
Ischemic heart disease		
10 Ischemic heart disease	0–74	I20–I25
Cerebrovascular disease		
11 Cerebrovascular disease	0–74	I60–I69
Other avoidable causes of death		
12 Diabetes mellitus	0–49	E10–E14 (except E10.2, E11.2, E12.2, E13.2, E14.2, E28.2)
13 Respiratory diseases	0–14	D86.0, D86.2, D86.9, J31–J32, J34 (except J34.2), J36–J68, J70, J82–J85, J92, J93.0–J93.1, J95, J98 (except J98.1–J98.3, J98.9)
14 Maternal deaths	All	O00–O99
15 Neonatal conditions	All	P00–P22, P24–P29, P36, P38–P94, P96 (except P96.9)

Webtable 2: Remaining life expectancy at age 60, selected countries, 1950–2007

Year	Australia	Canada	France	West Germany	Germany	Japan	Sweden	UK	USA
Males									
1950	15.4	16.5	15.4	-	-	14.0	17.1	15.0	15.7
1960	15.7	16.8	15.7	15.3	-	14.8	17.3	15.2	15.8
1970	15.1	17.0	16.2	15.2	-	16.0	17.9	15.3	16.0
1980	17.1	17.9	17.3	16.4	-	18.3	17.9	16.1	17.4
1990	18.8	19.1	19.0	17.7	17.4	20.0	19.1	17.5	18.6
2000	21.2	20.6	20.4	19.5	19.4	21.4	20.7	19.5	19.8
2007	22.8	22.1	22.0	21.0	20.9	22.6	21.9	-	21.2
Females									
1950	18.5	18.6	18.4	-	-	16.4	18.1	18.0	18.7
1960	19.6	20.0	19.5	18.2	-	17.8	19.3	19.1	19.7
1970	19.5	21.4	20.8	18.9	-	19.3	21.0	19.8	20.7
1980	22.0	22.7	22.4	20.7	-	21.9	22.1	20.7	22.2
1990	23.2	23.8	24.2	22.1	21.7	24.3	23.3	21.8	22.9
2000	25.0	24.5	25.6	23.8	23.6	26.8	24.3	23.1	23.1
2007	26.1	25.5	26.9	24.8	24.7	28.1	25.0	-	24.4

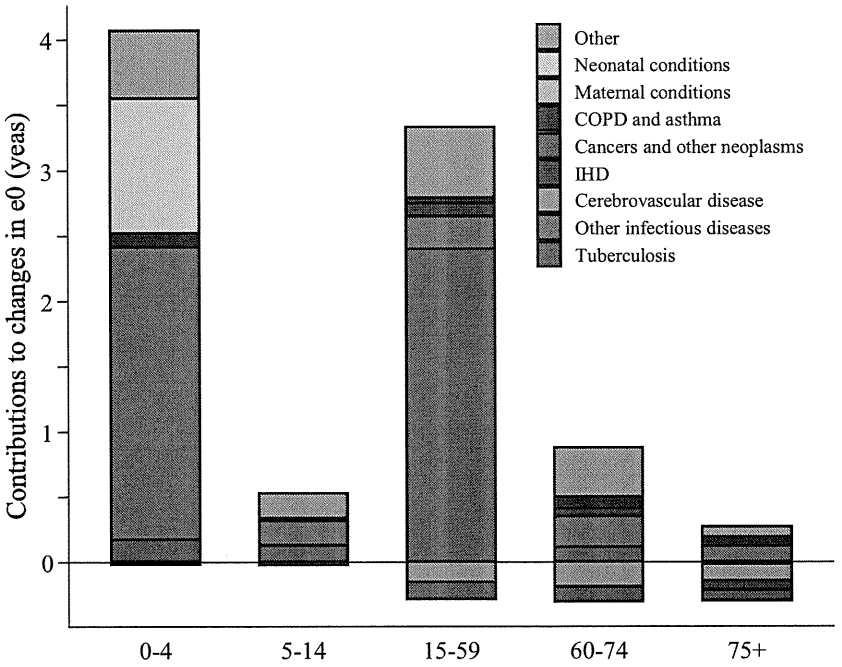
Source: *Human Mortality Database*. University of California, Berkeley (USA), and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany). Available at www.humanmortality.de (data downloaded on October 25, 2010).

Webtable 3: Remaining life expectancy at age 80, selected countries, 1950–2007

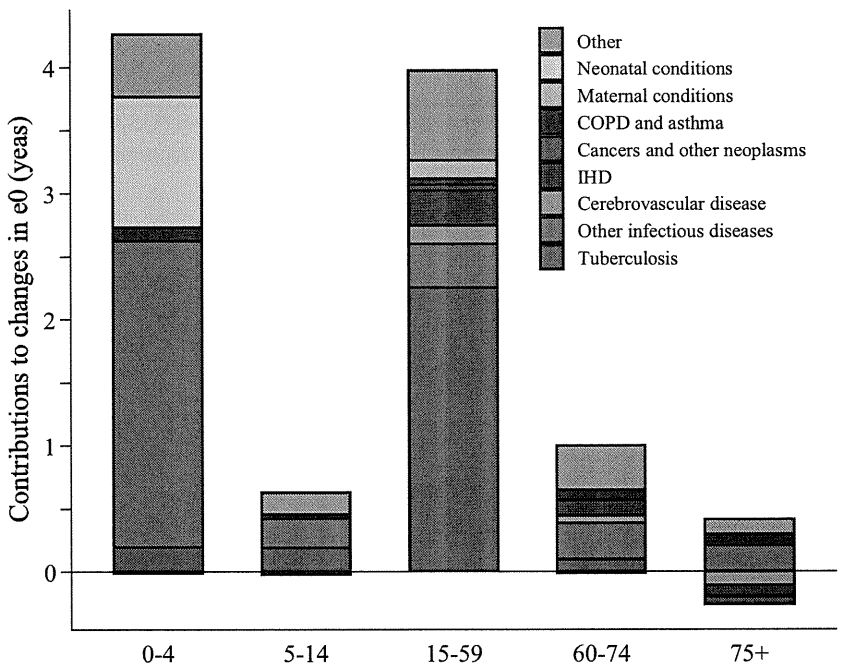
Year	Australia	Canada	France	West Germany	Germany	Japan	Sweden	UK	USA
Males									
1950	5.6	5.9	5.0	-		4.7	5.5	5.4	5.9
1960	5.8	6.3	5.4	5.2		4.8	5.7	5.4	6.0
1970	5.6	6.5	5.6	5.4		5.3	6.3	5.8	6.3
1980	6.3	6.8	5.7	5.7		6.1	6.1	5.8	6.7
1990	6.8	7.1	6.3	6.0	5.9	6.9	6.6	6.7	7.1
2000	7.6	7.5	7.0	6.9	6.8	7.9	7.1	7.4	7.4
2007	8.4	8.4	-	7.6	7.6	8.5	7.6	-	8.3
Females									
1950	6.5	6.7	6.0	-	-	5.5	5.7	6.0	6.9
1960	6.9	7.2	6.5	5.7	-	5.8	6.2	6.1	7.1
1970	7.0	8.0	7.0	6.1	-	6.3	7.2	6.7	7.8
1980	8.1	8.8	7.4	6.9	-	7.3	7.7	7.1	8.6
1990	8.7	9.2	8.2	7.6	7.4	8.7	8.3	8.2	9.1
2000	9.4	9.5	8.7	8.5	8.5	10.6	8.9	9.2	9.0
2007	10.0	10.1	-	9.0	9.0	11.4	9.2	-	9.8

Source: *Human Mortality Database*. University of California, Berkeley (USA), and Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research (Germany). Available at www.humanmortality.de (data downloaded on October 25, 2010).

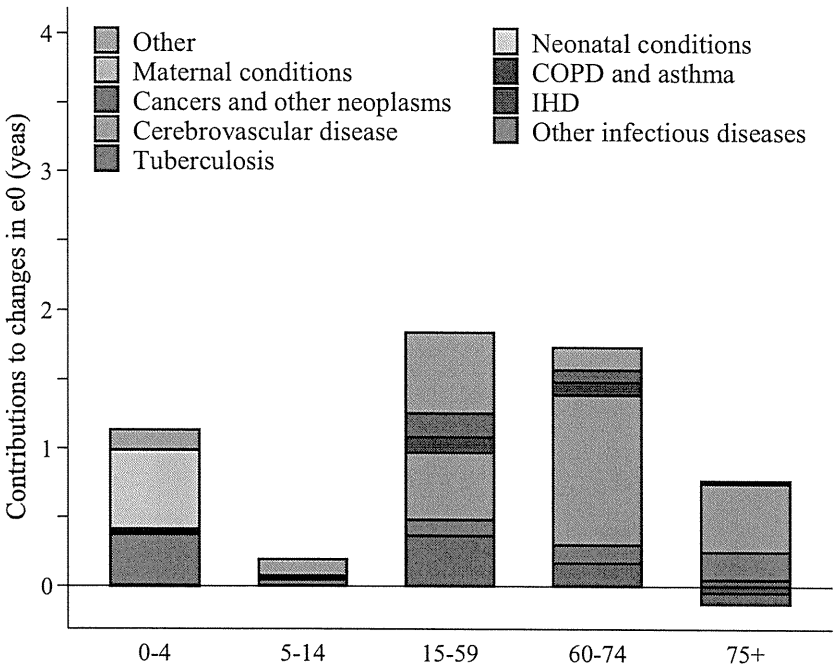
Webfigure 1: Age and cause specific contributions to changes in life expectancy at birth in Japan: 1950–2008
A) 1950–1965
Males



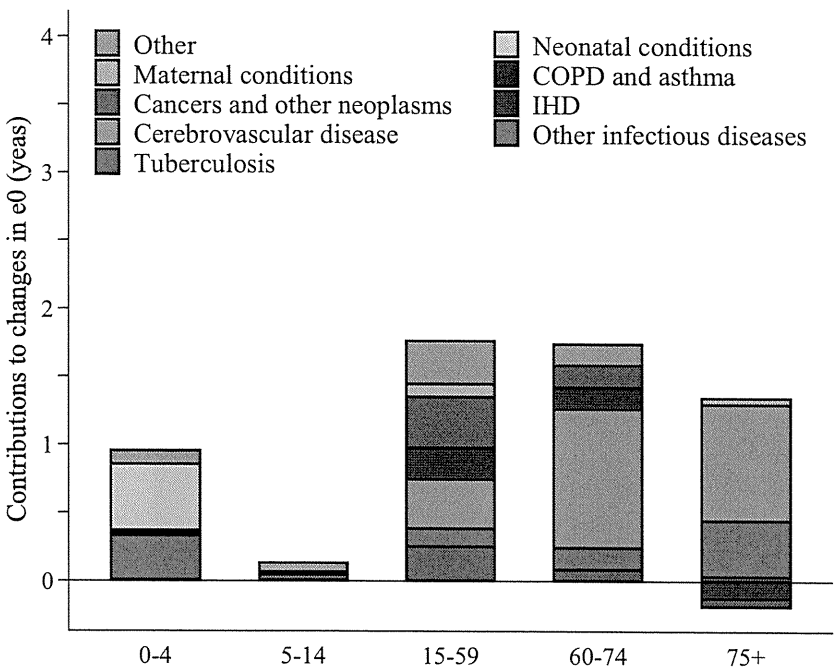
Females



B) 1965–1980
Males

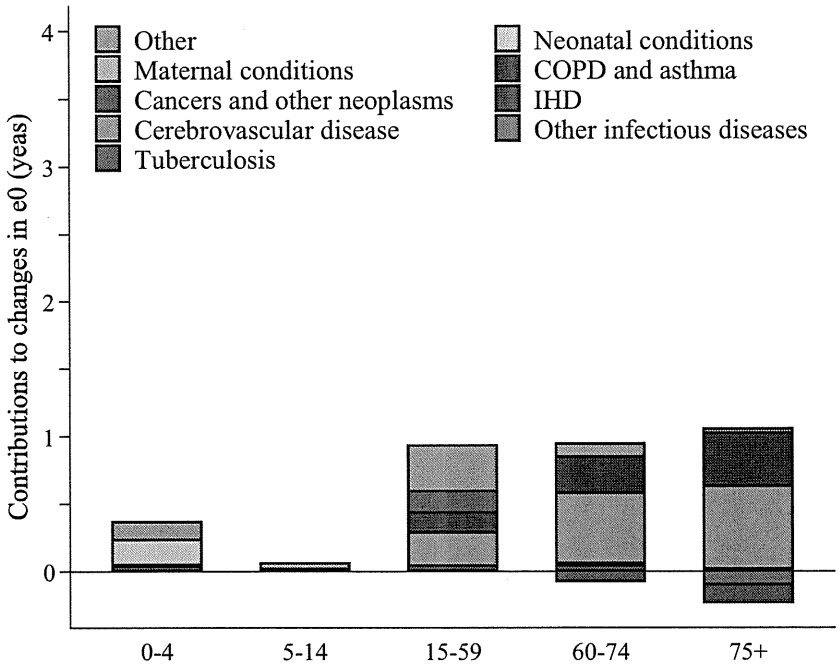


Females

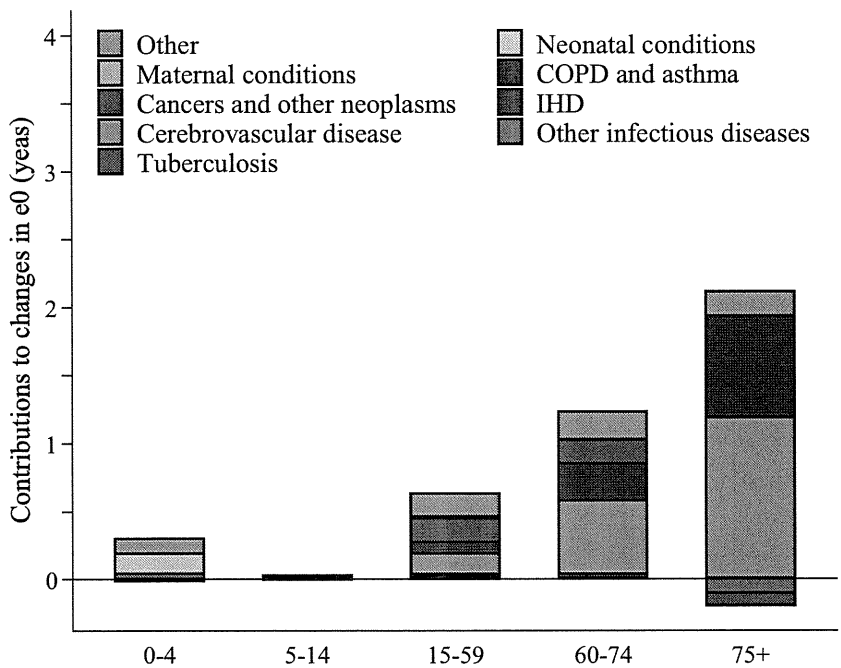


C) 1980–1995

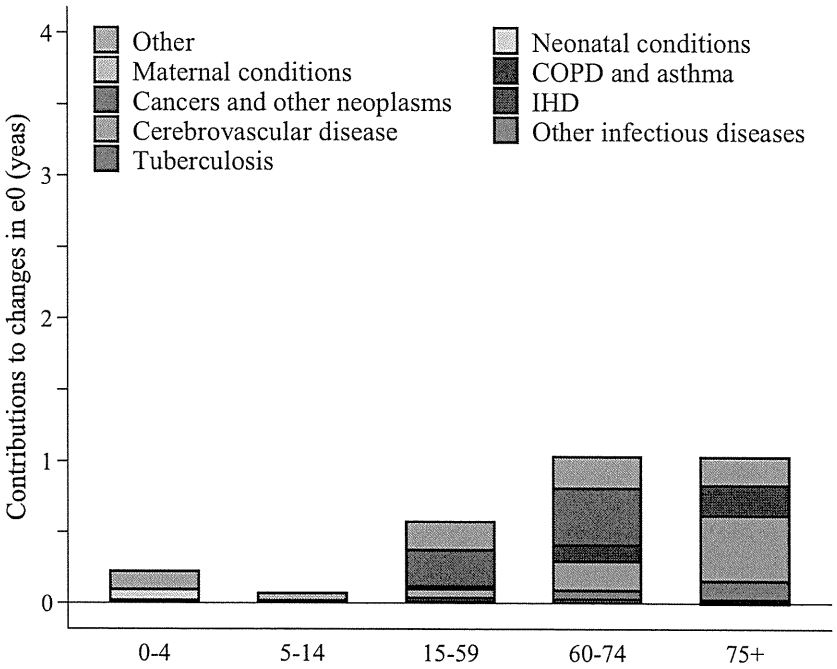
Males



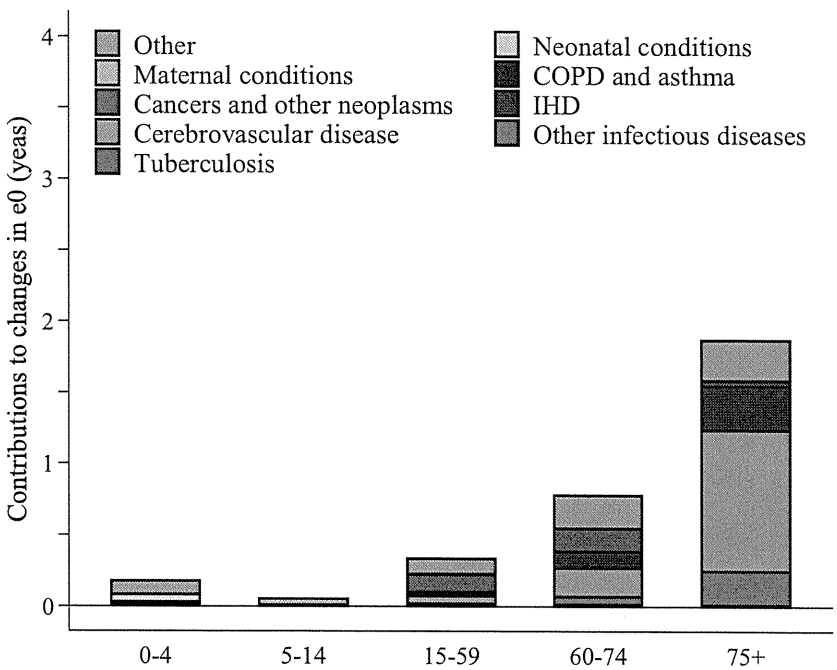
Females



D) 1995–2008
Males



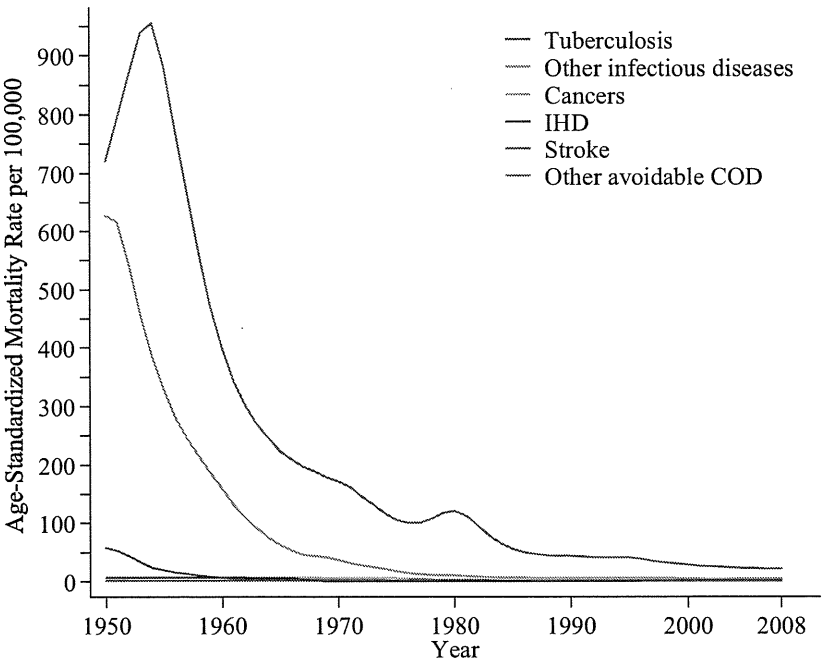
Females



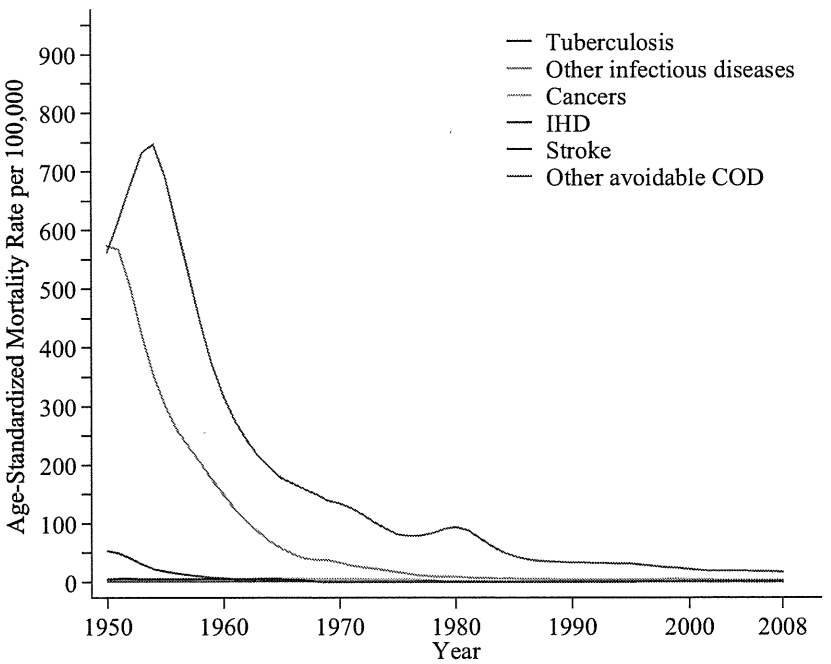
Webfigure 2: Age-standardized mortality rates by causes of death amenable to medical care in Japan, by age group and sex, 1950-2008

A) 0–4 years

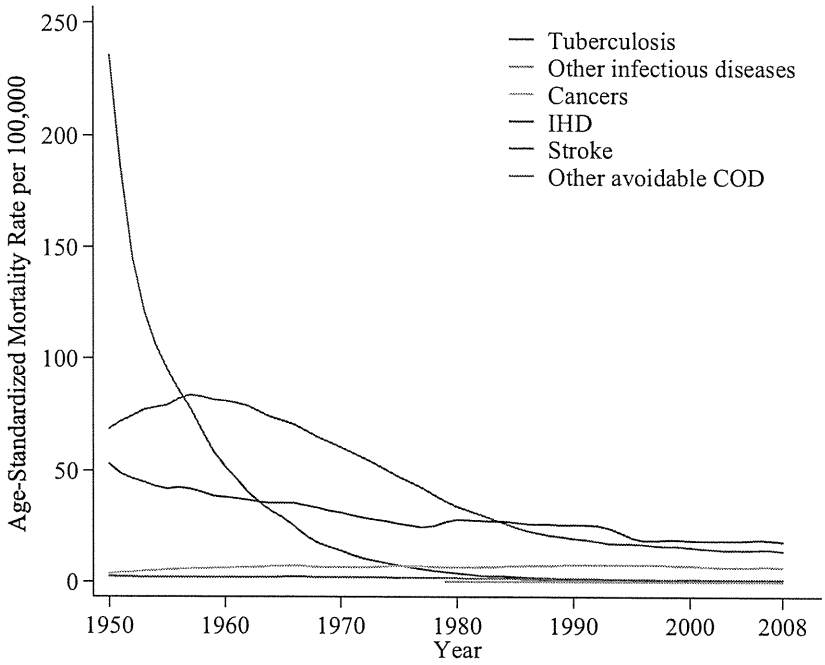
Males



Females



B) 15–59 years
Males



Females