

Regional Differences in Healthcare and Long-Term Care Resources in Super Aging and Shrinking Communities: Evidence from Remote and Island Municipalities in Japan

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Japan is experiencing simultaneous population decline and population aging, raising concerns about the sustainability of healthcare and long-term care services, particularly in remote and island municipalities. While previous studies have mainly focused on differences in average resource levels across regions, less attention has been paid to variations among municipalities sharing similar demographic and geographic characteristics. This study examines regional differences in healthcare and long-term care resources among municipalities experiencing advanced aging and population decline. Using an integrated municipality-level dataset, we focused on municipalities in the highest tertile of aging rates and classified them into four groups according to remoteness and island status. Physician density and long-term care facility density were compared across groups using descriptive analyses. The results showed that regional differences were not fully explained by average resource levels. Considerable variation was observed among municipalities within the same regional category. In particular, remote non-island municipalities exhibited substantial variation in resource levels, whereas remote island municipalities tended to show a more limited upper range of resource availability. These findings suggest that healthcare and long-term care resources are distributed unevenly even among municipalities with similar characteristics and that differences in geographic conditions and service catchment areas may contribute to these variations.

Keywords: healthcare and long-term care resources, regional disparities, population decline, remote and island municipalities