

## Sociological research on urban migrants' roles in supporting elderly residents' livelihood and maintaining farm and forest land in a depopulated rural village

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### [SYNOPSIS]

In Japan, several rural areas have experienced rapid demographic aging and decline. A report insists that several municipalities could face a situation wherein the number of young women in the population will decline, leading to a decline in the child population. Under such circumstances, some policymakers and researchers have focused on the roles of urban migrants, who have left their rural homes and moved to urban regions for higher education or employment. Previous studies point out that many urban migrants live in regional cities near their hometowns and frequently come home for providing care and livelihood support to their elderly parents.

In 2016, we conducted a quantitative survey and collected data about every household in a depopulated mountainous village, Tenryu Village, Nagano Prefecture, whose population aging rate is the second highest among all municipalities in Japan, according to the 2015 National Census. Our data analysis results revealed the following:

1) Although many residents experience anxiety about whether they can continue living in their village under the prevalent conditions of population aging and decline, most hope to settle in the village in the future and are unwilling to uproot themselves from their homes to settle in a city.

2) According to approximately 40% of the aged household in the village, the urban migrants come home once or more than once a month to support their elderly parents. Approximately half of them live in towns and regional cities near the village.

3) In the village, many residents do not practice farming as a business. However, several grow vegetables and fruits for personal consumption. Most of them regularly send these products to their families in the cities. These subsistence agricultures connect rural residents and urban migrants.

4) Although many village residents engaged in the forest industry, very few timber workers continue to work because of the current industrial downturn nowadays. Under these conditions, most residents lag behind in thinning their tree farms and regularly clipping the underbrush, although many of them own these tree farms. Furthermore, as expected, urban migrants who return home also do not restore the tree farms.