

Survey on Attitude toward Elderly People of Nursing Students: Comparison between Japan and Thailand

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Japan's percentage of elderly people was 26% in 2015, and is expected to continue increasing and reach 40% by 2060. The proportion of the old-old population among the elderly population will also intensify, so the establishment of a sustainable medical and welfare system is an urgent issue in Japan.

Meanwhile, it is expected in Thailand that the aging of the population will proceed more rapidly than Japan's experience. The doubling time for the elderly percentage to increase from 7% to 14% was 24 years (1970-1994) in Japan; in contrast, it is expected to be 22 years (2001-2023) in Thailand, which is essentially following the same course as Japan, except doing it more rapidly. Welfare facilities and the development of personnel with appropriate skills to staff them are national priorities in Thailand, but there are still not enough available spaces for the need.

How young people perceive elderly people can be expected to directly influence future quality of care and support for elderly people. "Comprehensive strategy for promoting dementia measures and policies", a report released by the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry in 2015, mandated an improvement in understanding of elderly people, including people with dementia, as a policy for education in schools. It is important to consider young people's attitudes toward elderly people and what kinds of understanding and education are needed.

This survey was distributed to university nursing students in Japan and Thailand to clarify the similarities and differences in attitudes toward elderly people between Japan and Thailand. We report the main results of this survey on our web site.

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This study employed a cross-sectional comparative research design. Participants were 761 first- and fourth-year university nursing students in Japan and Thailand. Convenient sampling was used and the data were collected in 2015. Ethical considerations were approved by each University Institutional Review Board.

Survey results

1. Characteristics of participants

The participants comprised 346 Japanese and 415 Thai nursing students from university nursing programs. Of those, 341 (98.6%) in Japan and 393 (94.7%) in Thailand were women, which represents a similar trend in the sex of nursing students. In terms of year of school, 157 (45.4%) of the Japanese and 232 (55.9%) of the Thai participants were first-year students.

2. About elderly patients care

For the question about whether society should support caregiving (figure 1), most agreed (“Agree” or “Strongly agree”) in both countries (Japan 96.5%, Thailand 99.3%), although Japanese respondents were less likely to strongly agree than Thai (Japan 44.2%, Thailand 72.3%). Respondents in both countries expressed that society should support caregiving. Thai respondents were especially strong in their agreement that social support is needed.

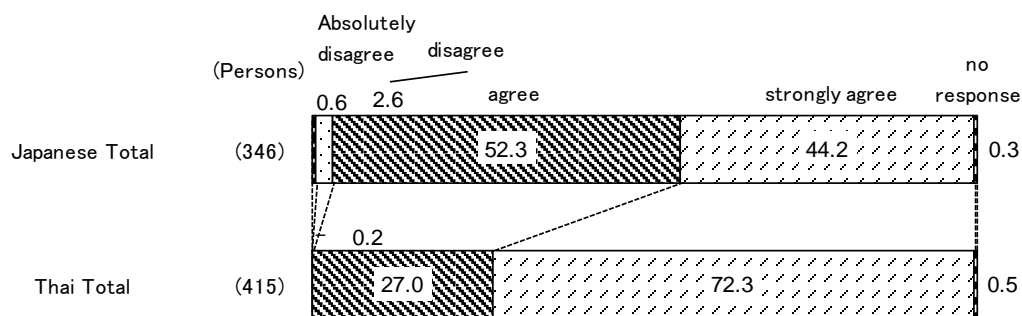


Figure 1. Society should support caregiving.

For the question about whether the family should support caregiving (figure 2), almost no Thai respondents disagreed (1.0%) and most strongly agreed (71.6%), whereas Japanese respondents were almost equally divided between agreeing and disagreeing, with relatively few strongly agreeing (5.8%) and some absolutely disagreeing (3.8%). Compared with Japan, Thai respondents strongly believe that the family should support caregiving.

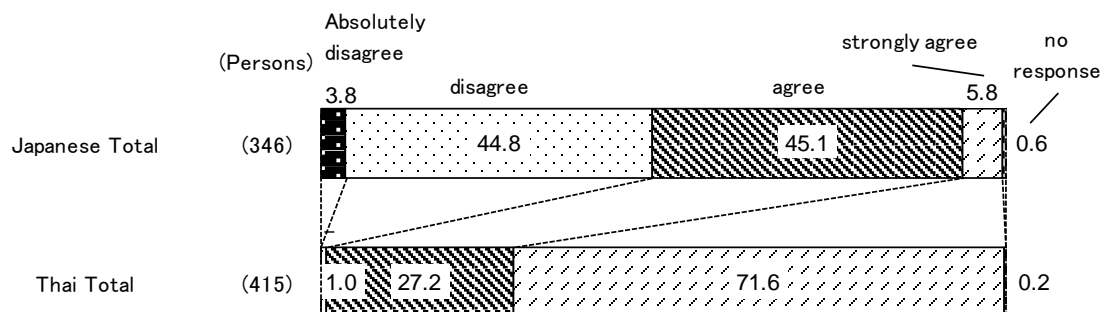


Figure 2. Family should support caregiving.

For the question about whether we should use social resources for caregiving as much as possible (figure 3), there was generally agreement among respondents in both countries, although more Japanese respondents strongly agreed (32.7%) than absolutely disagreed (13.0%), whereas roughly equal proportions of Thai strongly agreed (20.2%) as absolutely disagreed (17.8%).

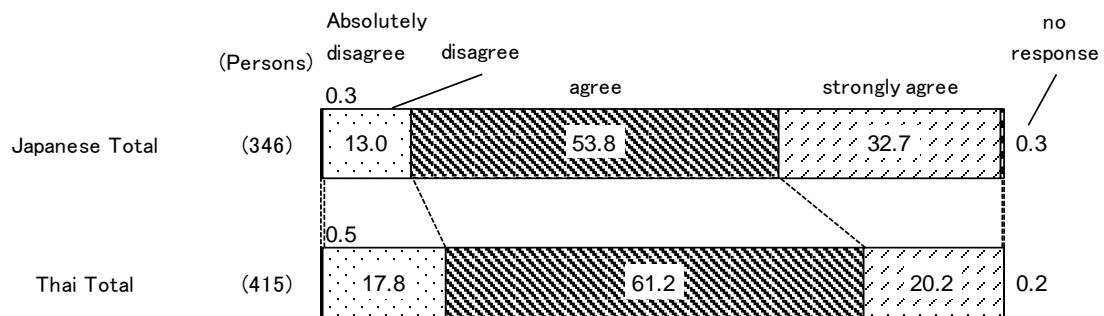


Figure 3. We should use social resources for caregiving as much as possible.

For the question about whether caregivers should give priority to their own lives over caregiving (figure 4), there was generally similar agreement among respondents in both countries, although more Thai respondents strongly agreed (24.6%) than absolutely disagreed (14.7%), whereas the reverse was true for Japanese (“Strong agree” 7.5% versus “Absolutely disagree” 19.9%).

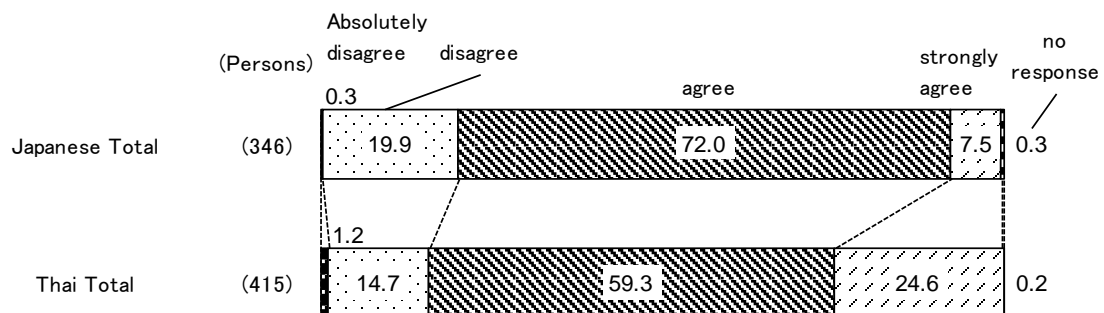


Figure 4. Caregivers should give priority to their own lives more than caregiving.

For the question about whether we should care for elderly people at home (figure 5), most Japanese respondents disagreed or absolutely disagreed (68.3% total), whereas almost all Thai agreed or strongly agreed (95.9%).

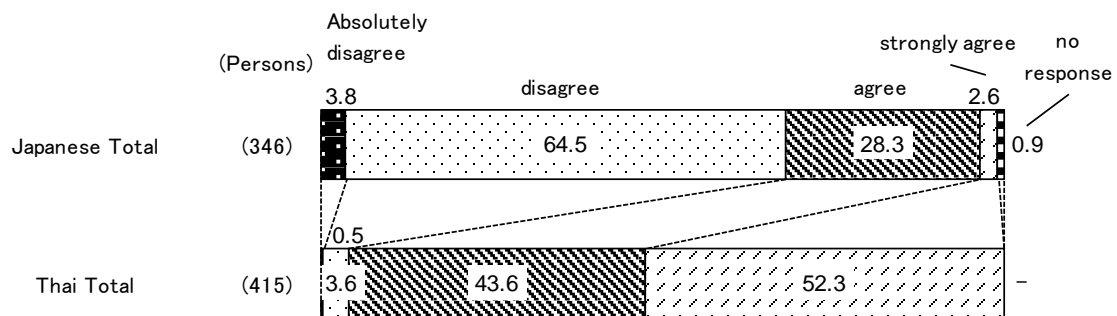


Figure 5. We should care for elderly people at home.

These five questions (just mentioned above) about elderly patient care were compared by academic year, first versus fourth. As a result, only one question, “We should use social resources for caregiving as much as possible”, had a difference between Japanese first- and fourth-year students. The Japanese fourth-year students answered positively more than Japanese first-year students. Similarly, only this question, following the same pattern, differed for the Thai students. That is, the other four questions yielded similar results by academic year for both Japanese and Thai students.

3. Important values

For the question about choosing two values which they thought were important (figure 6), the most commonly selected answers among Japan respondents were “Appreciate the people who have helped you and help people who need it” (69.1%) and “Take care of, love, and respect your parents” (68.8%). The same two answers were also the most commonly selected one among Thai respondents, but with almost all (96.4%) choosing the latter and fewer selecting the former (56.1%). Among Japanese respondents, “Respect individual freedom” (32.4%) and “Respect individual rights” (28.9%) were also selected by sizable minorities, but among Thai, few selected “Respect individual freedom” (8.7%) versus “Respect individual rights” (38.3%).

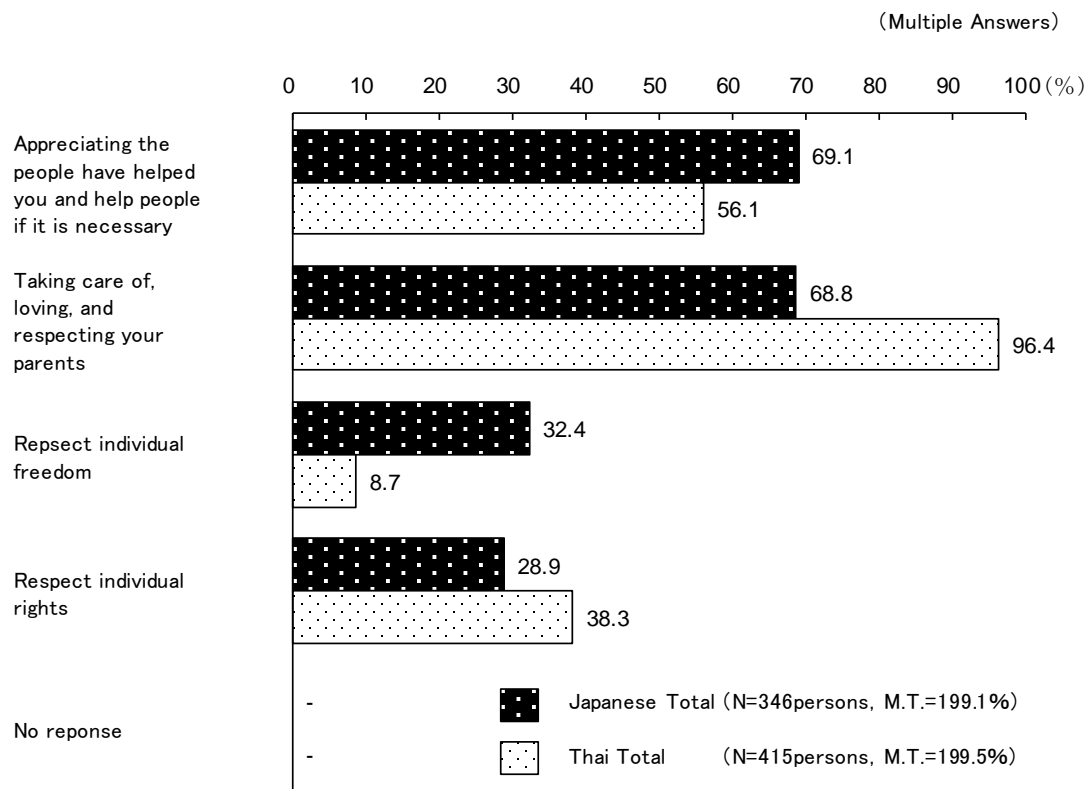


Figure 6. Important values.

Note: "M.T." means "Multiple Total", the percentage obtained by dividing the sum over all answers by the number of respondents (N). In general, the percentage exceeds 100% when respondents could answer multiple answers.

For the question about who should take care of elderly parents (figure 7), for both countries, majorities of respondents selected "Children should take care of their parents", but at a much higher rate among Thai respondents (Japan 69.1% versus Thailand 93.0). Few selected "Parents should take care of themselves" in either country (Japan 3.1%, Thailand 5.3%), but "Society should take care of them" was selected by some Japanese respondents (25.7%) but by very few Thai (1.7%).

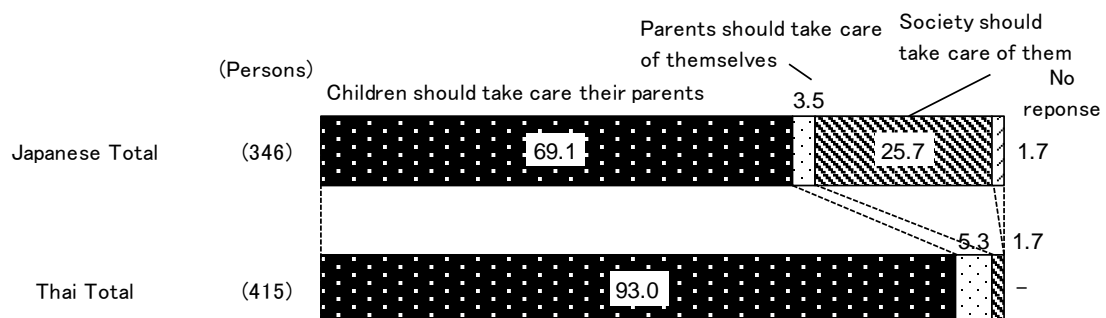


Figure 7. Taking care of elderly parents.

For the question about valuing respect for ancestors (figure 8), majorities among respondents of both countries agreed (Japan 74%, Thai 99.3%), but most Thai respondents chose “Strongly agree” (73.3%), whereas more Japanese disagreed (26%) than chose “Strongly agree” (19.7%).

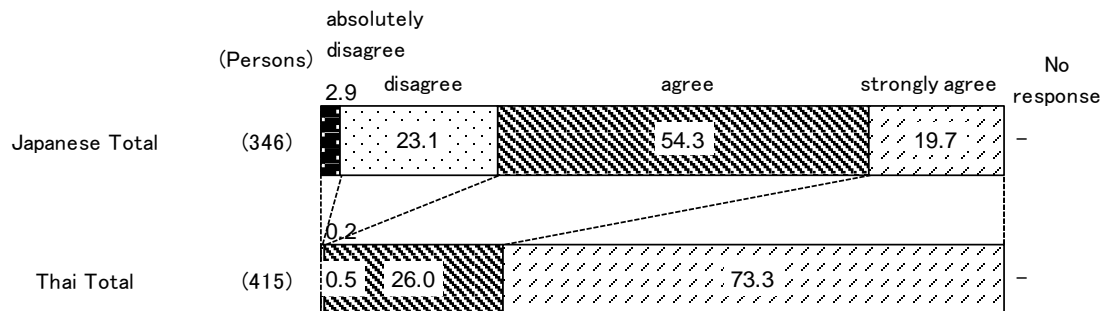


Figure 8. Respect ancestors.

For the question about valuing a wife obeying her husband (figure 9), although majorities disagreed in both countries (Japan 95.7%, Thailand 70.6%), some Thai respondents agreed (29.4%), whereas almost half of Japanese chose “Absolutely disagree” (45.1%), compared to only 11.1% of Thai respondents.

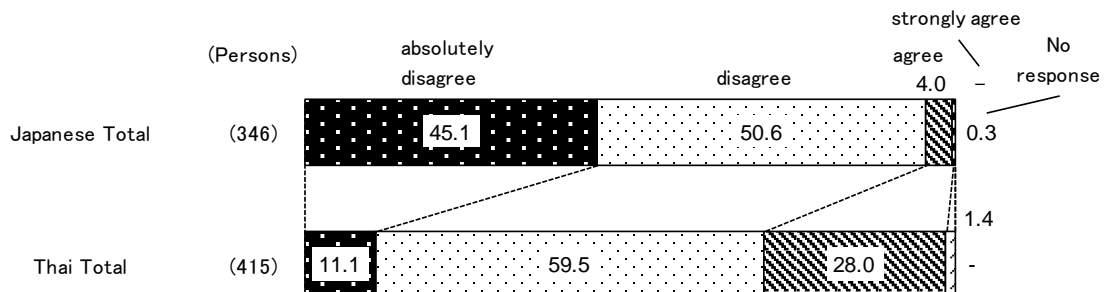


Figure 9. A wife obeying her husband.

For the question about valuing not getting married if the marriage is opposed by one’s parents (figure 10), most respondents disagreed in both countries, although slightly fewer among Japan students than Thai (Japan 73.1% versus Thailand 69.4%).

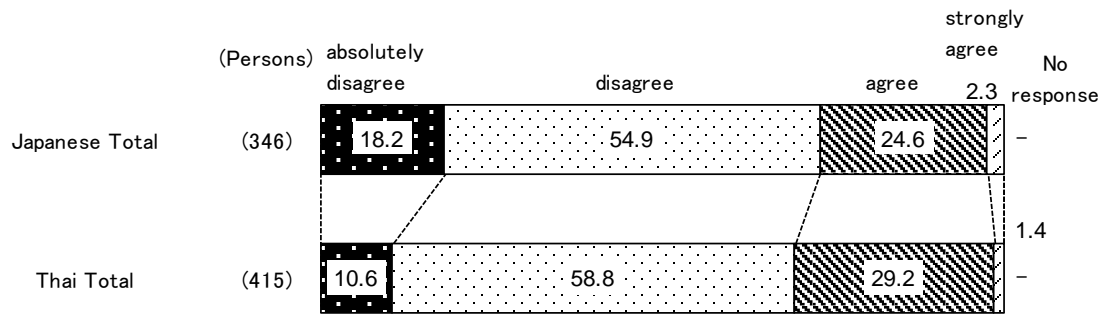


Figure 10. Not getting married if parents oppose.

For the question about valuing a senior person's opinion (figure 11), a majority disagreed among Japanese respondents (58.1%), whereas most Thai respondents agreed (73.7%).

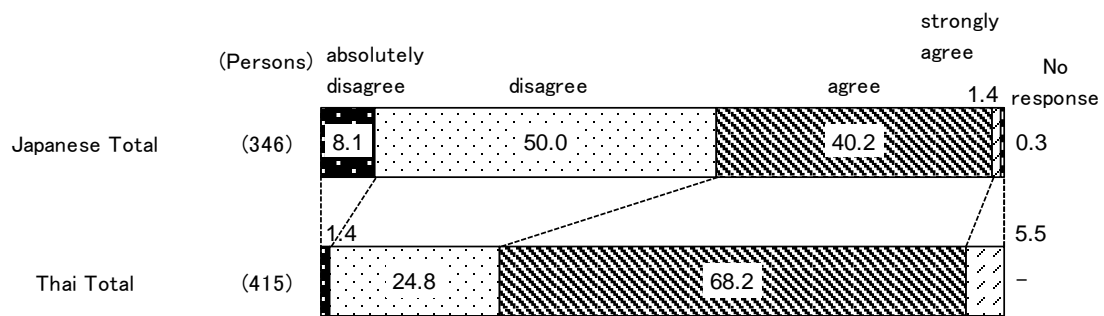


Figure 11. Follow a senior person's opinion.

For the question about a son being needed to continue the family line (figure 12), most respondents disagreed, although more so among Japanese respondents than Thai (Japan 83.6% versus Thailand 79.2%).

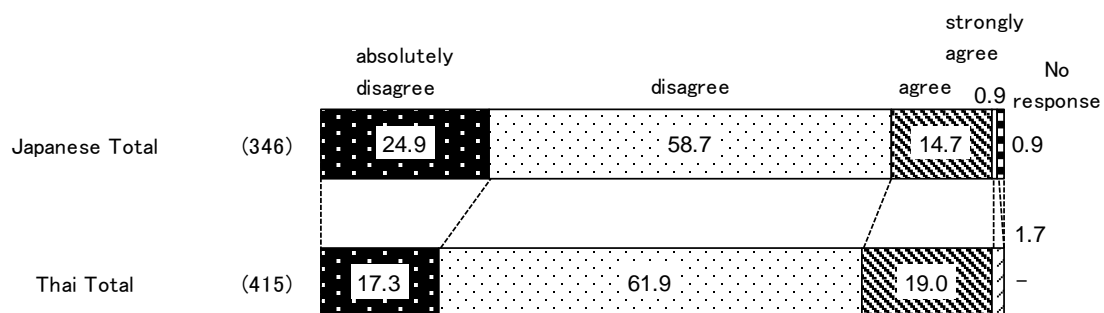


Figure 12. A son is necessary to continue the family line.

For the question about valuing the idea that men and women should assume different roles in society (figure 13), most Japanese respondents disagreed (76.3%), whereas only slightly more than half disagreed among Thai respondents (53.8%).

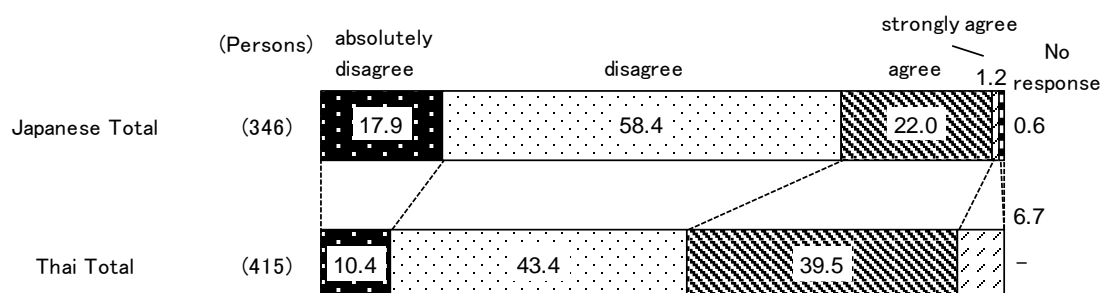


Figure 13. Men and women should assume different roles in society.

As for important values, looking by year of school, there were no differences regarding the 8 items on important values between the Japanese first- and fourth-year students. On the other hand, for Thai students, the responses to the three questions “A wife obeying her husband”, “Not getting married if parents oppose”, and “Follow a senior person’s opinion” differed, with Thai fourth-year students answering more negatively than the Thai first-year students.

4. Attitude toward elderly people

Kogan scale Japanese version, negative items: 17 (range 17-102), positive items: 17 (range 17-102), and total: 34 (34-204), was used to assess attitude toward elderly people. This scale uses a 6-point Likert scale from “absolutely disagree 1” to “strongly agree 6”. Higher scores show more negative (negative items) or more positive (positive items) attitude.

Total negative score, positive score, and total scores are created for each respondent who answered all questions. For the negative score (figure 14), which is the sum of the numerical responses to the 17 negative statements, the average was lower among Japanese respondents (44.6) than among Thai (55.1).

For the positive score (figure 15), which is the sum of the numerical responses to the 17 positive statements, as with the negative score, the average was lower among Japanese respondents (57.8) than among Thai (70.9).

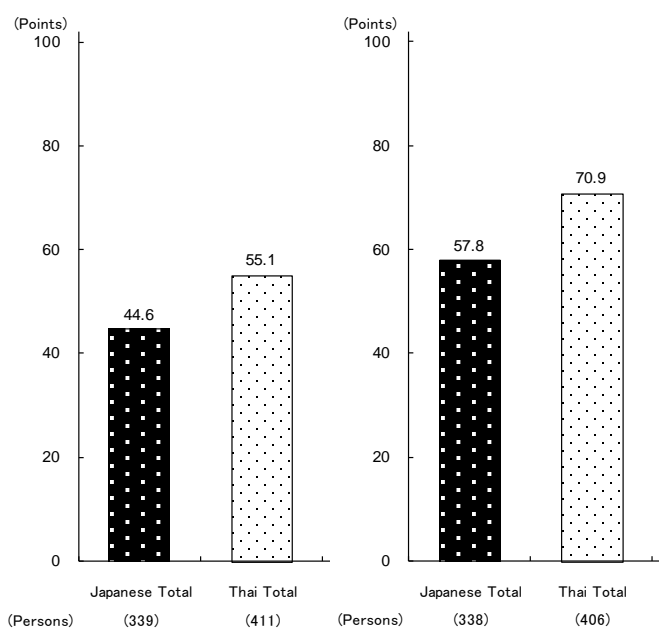


Figure 14. Negative (left) and positive (right) score averages.

Note: A higher score on a negative item indicates a more negative attitude toward elderly people. Similarly, a higher score on a positive item indicates a more positive attitude toward elderly people.

The total score (figure 15) is calculated by combining the negative and positive scores. This is done by reversing the numerical values of the responses to negative statements. The resulting mean total scores are very similar between the two countries (Japan 132.2, Thailand 134.7).

Looking by year of school, there was little difference between Japanese first- and fourth-year nursing students, due to little or no average difference in either the positive or negative scores, whereas there was a difference in the negative scores between Thai first- and fourth-year students (but little difference in the positive scores), resulting in a similar difference in total scores among Thai students, with fourth-year students having overall more positive attitudes than first-year students (4th year 138.3 versus 1st year 131.7).

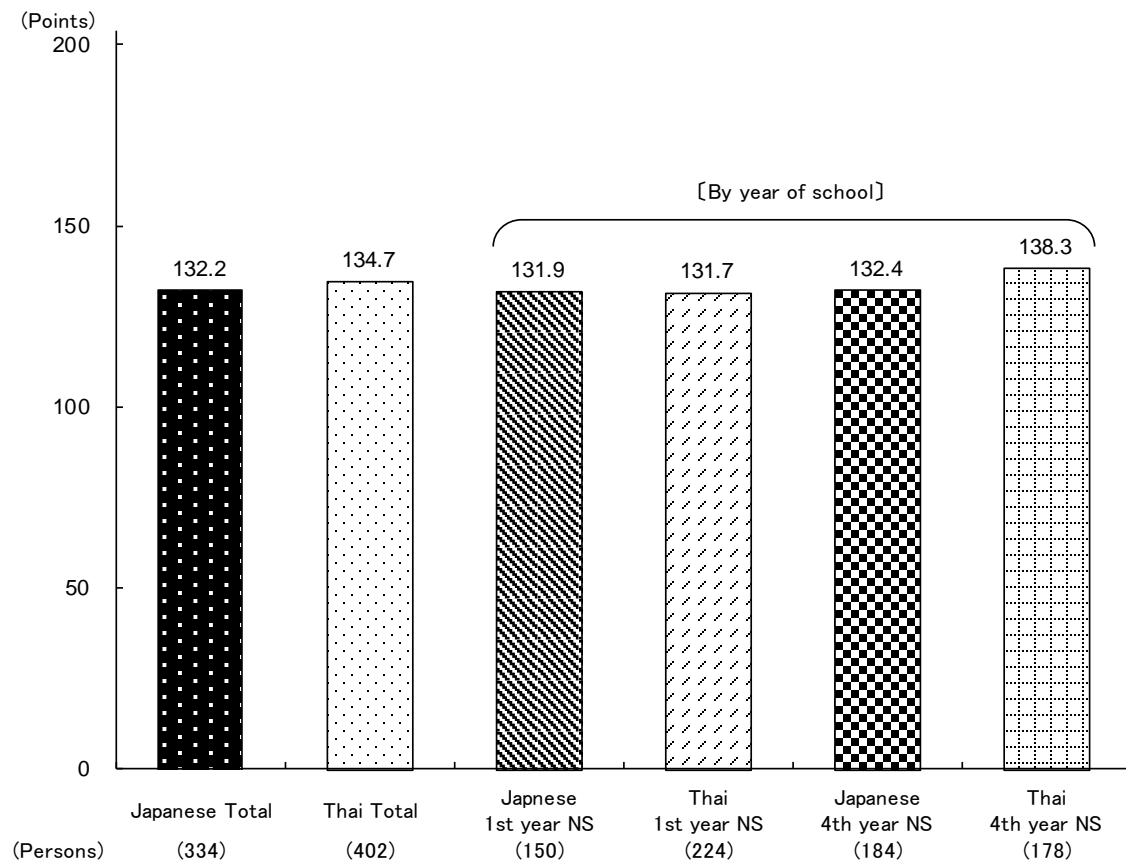


Figure 15. Total average.

Note: A higher score indicates a more positive attitude toward elderly people.

5. Summary

Our study clarified the differences in attitude toward elderly people between Japan and Thailand. Although Thai respondents agreed with the opinion that society should support caregiving, they also agreed with the opinion that the family should support caregiving. This is an interesting difference from the attitude among Japanese respondents, who did not agree that the family should support caregiving, and reflects an important difference in caregiving values between the two countries, despite respondents in both countries respecting and having a positive attitude toward elderly people. The reason for this might be that after the long-term care insurance system has established in 2000, recognition of the need to respect individual freedom and individual rights became established in Japan. Further research is needed to verify and clarify the differences and these factors between Japan and Thailand.