

# Measuring Subjective Well-being through an Important Concept in Japan: The Case of "Ikigai"

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**To what extent do you feel a sense of “Ikigai”, that is, purpose or meaning in life?**

1. Introduction
2. Life Satisfaction in Japan
3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement
4. Conclusions
5. Future Work

# **1. Introduction**

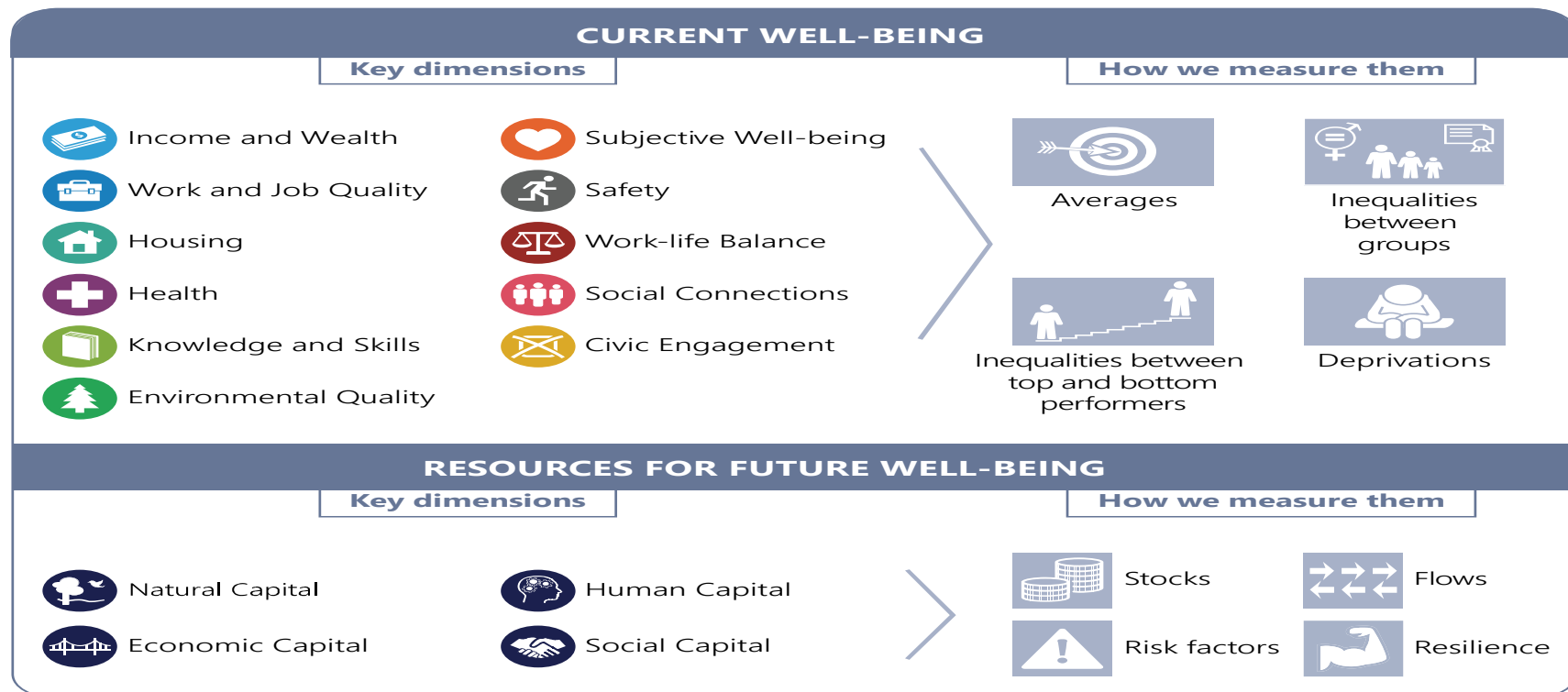
# Recent Expansion of Well-being Measurement

- In recent years, efforts to assess economic and social conditions using **well-being**—a concept that integrates diverse aspects such as economic prosperity, physical and mental health, and social connectedness—have been expanding both in Japan and internationally.
- One of the key drivers of change was the establishment of the **Commission on the Measurement of Economic Performance and Social Progress** by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2008.
- The commission's report, commonly known as the **Stiglitz Report**, highlighted the limitations of GDP and mentioned that “objective and subjective dimensions of well-being are both important” and “sustainability assessment requires a well-identified dashboard of indicators”.

## OECD's Initiative: Development of the Better Life Index

- In response to the Stiglitz Report, the OECD launched the Better Life Initiative in 2011.
- As part of this initiative, the OECD developed the Better Life Index (BLI).
- The BLI is a dashboard that presents a wide range of subjective and objective indicators related to well-being.
- It provides a clear and accessible format for comparing quality of life across countries.

The OECD Well-being Framework (OECD, *How's life 2024*)



# OECD's 2013 Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being

In 2013, the OECD published guidelines for national statistical agencies on the collection and use of measures of subjective well-being.

### Definition:

Subjective well-being is defined as *“Good mental states, including all of the various evaluations, positive and negative, that people make of their lives, and the affective reactions of people to their experiences “.*

### Key Components:

1. **Life Evaluation** – *a reflective assessment on a person’s life or some specific aspect of it.*
2. **Affect** – *a person’s feelings or emotional states, typically measured with reference to a particular point in time.*
3. **Eudaimonia** – *a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or good psychological functioning.*

OECD (2013), *OECD Guidelines on Measuring Subjective Well-being*, Paris: OECD Publishing.

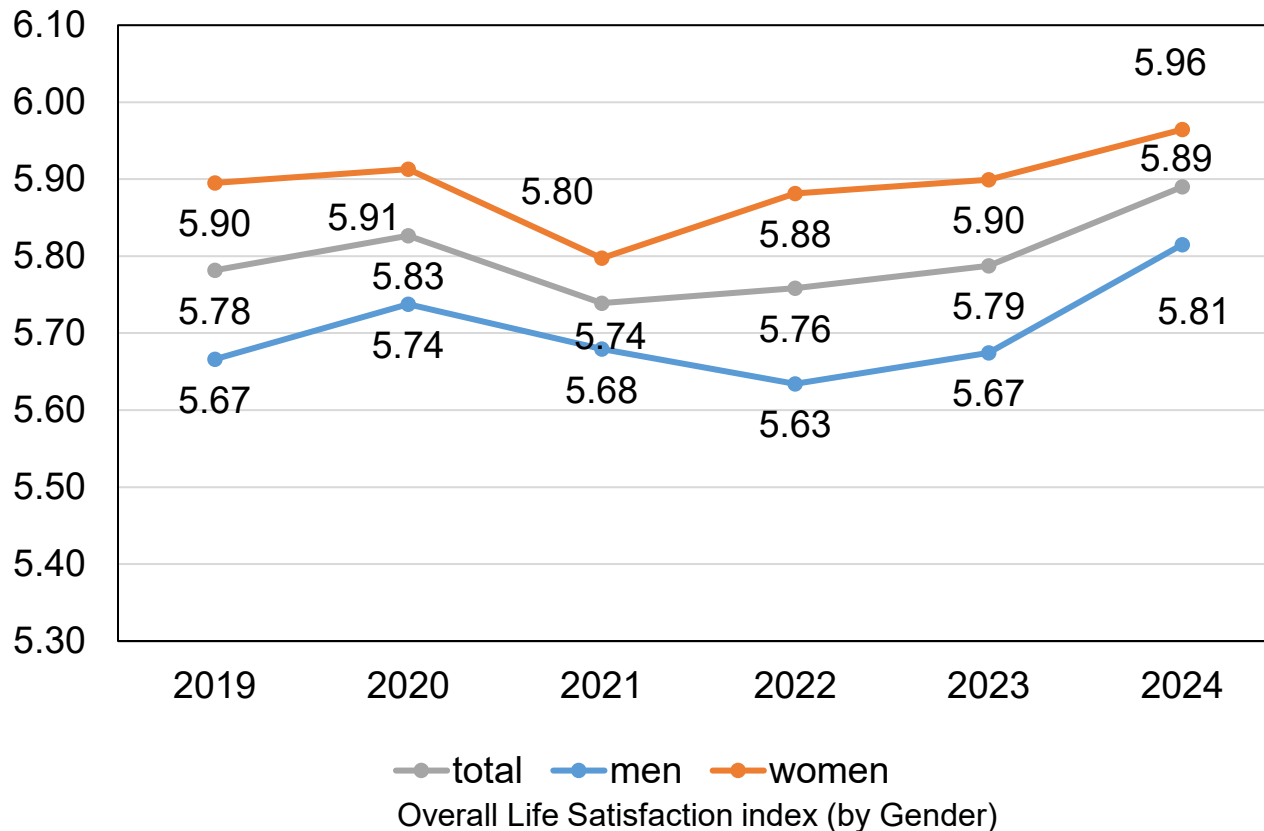
## **2. Life Satisfaction in Japan**



## 2. Life Satisfaction in Japan

### “Survey on Satisfaction and Quality of Life” in Japan

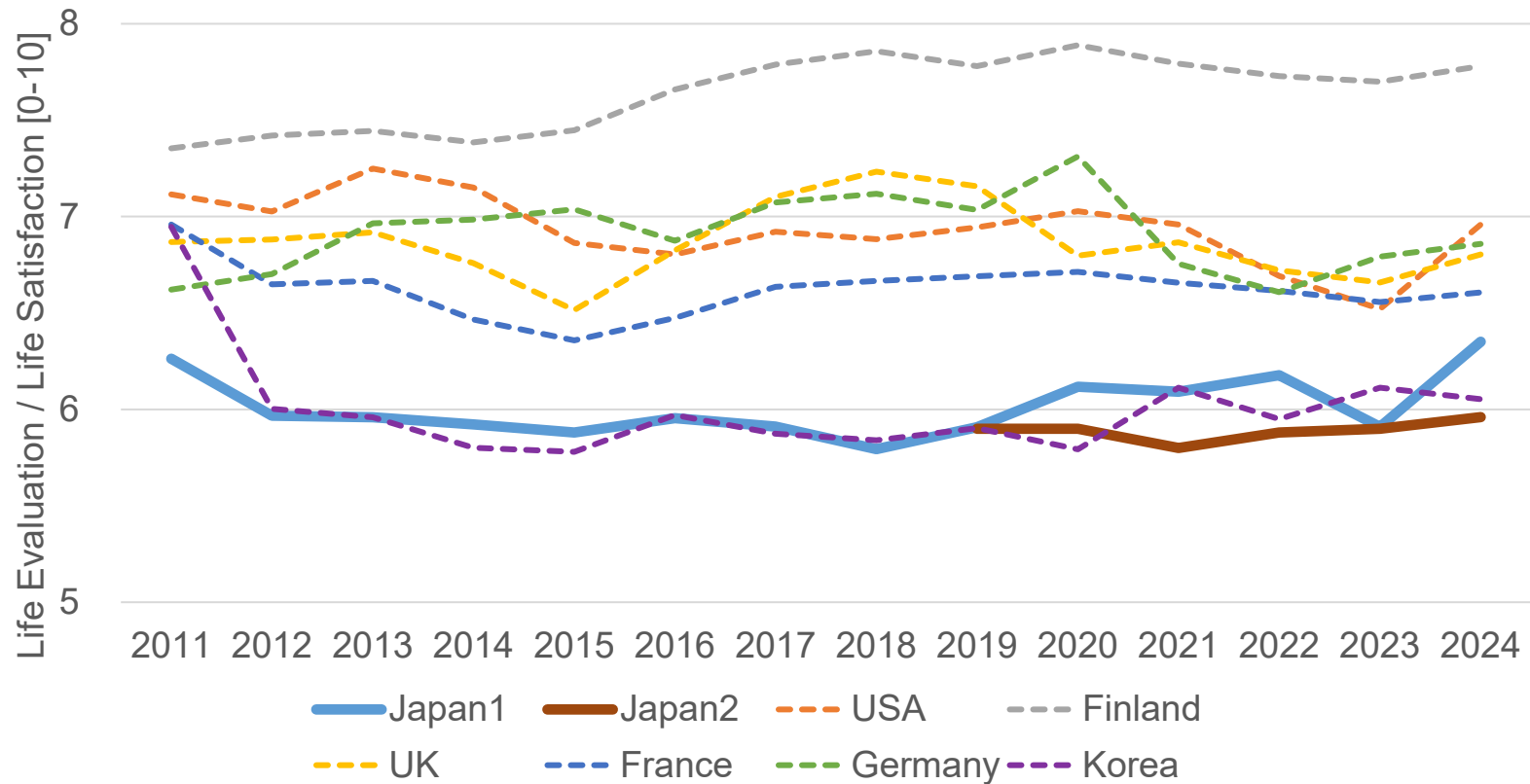
- The Cabinet Office in Japan has conducted the Survey on Satisfaction and Quality of Life since 2019 to capture well-being trends from a comprehensive perspective that includes satisfaction and quality of life.
- This survey measures “life satisfaction” where respondents rate their satisfaction on a scale of 0 to 10 points.



## 2. Life Satisfaction in Japan

### Trend of Life Satisfaction in Japan

- According to the World Happiness Report (based on Gallup surveys), Life Satisfaction scores among Japanese people are relatively low in international comparisons.
- This trend is also observed in the Cabinet Office's own survey, which shows similar levels.



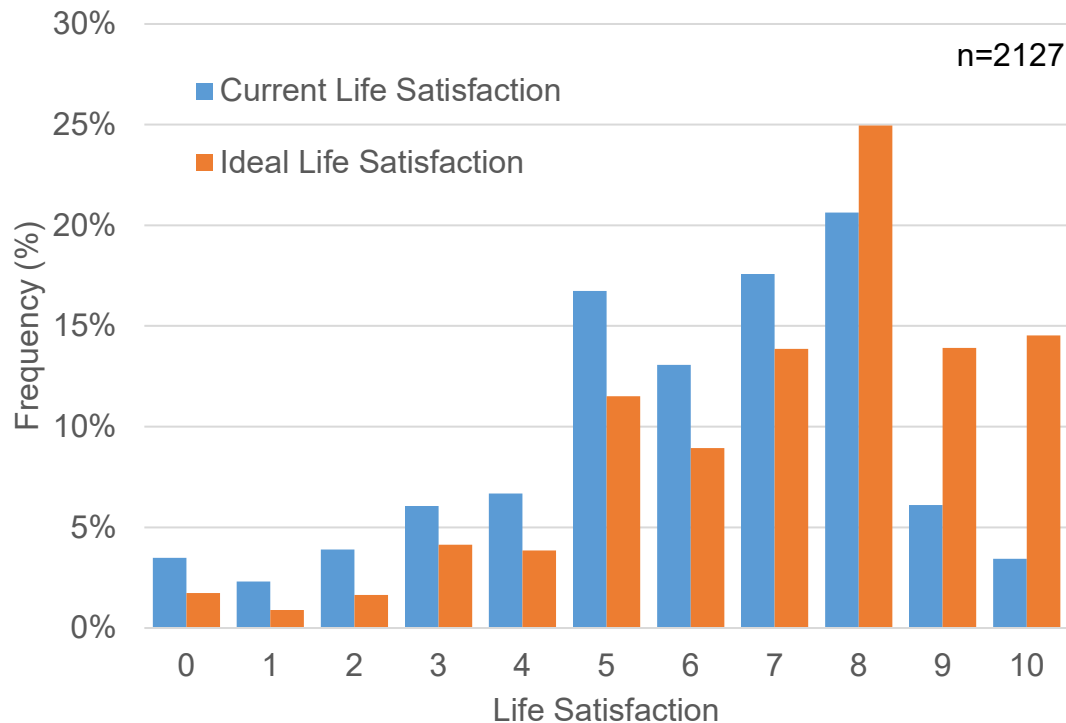
\*Japan1: Gallup, Japan2: Survey on Satisfaction and Quality of Life, Cabinet Office

Figure: Trends in National Happiness (Life Satisfaction/Life Evaluation)

## 2. Life Satisfaction in Japan

### Ideal Level of Life Satisfaction

- In ESRI FY2024 survey, when asked about their ideal level of life satisfaction, responses varied, with the most frequent score being 8.



	mean
Current Life Satisfaction	5.95
Ideal Life Satisfaction	7.11

Figure: Distribution of Respondents' Ratings for "Current Life Satisfaction" and "Ideal Life Satisfaction"  
(Based on ESRI FY2024 Survey)

## 2. Life Satisfaction in Japan

### Gap between Ideal Life Satisfaction and Current one, at Individual level

- More than half of the respondents indicated that their current level of life satisfaction matches their ideal level.

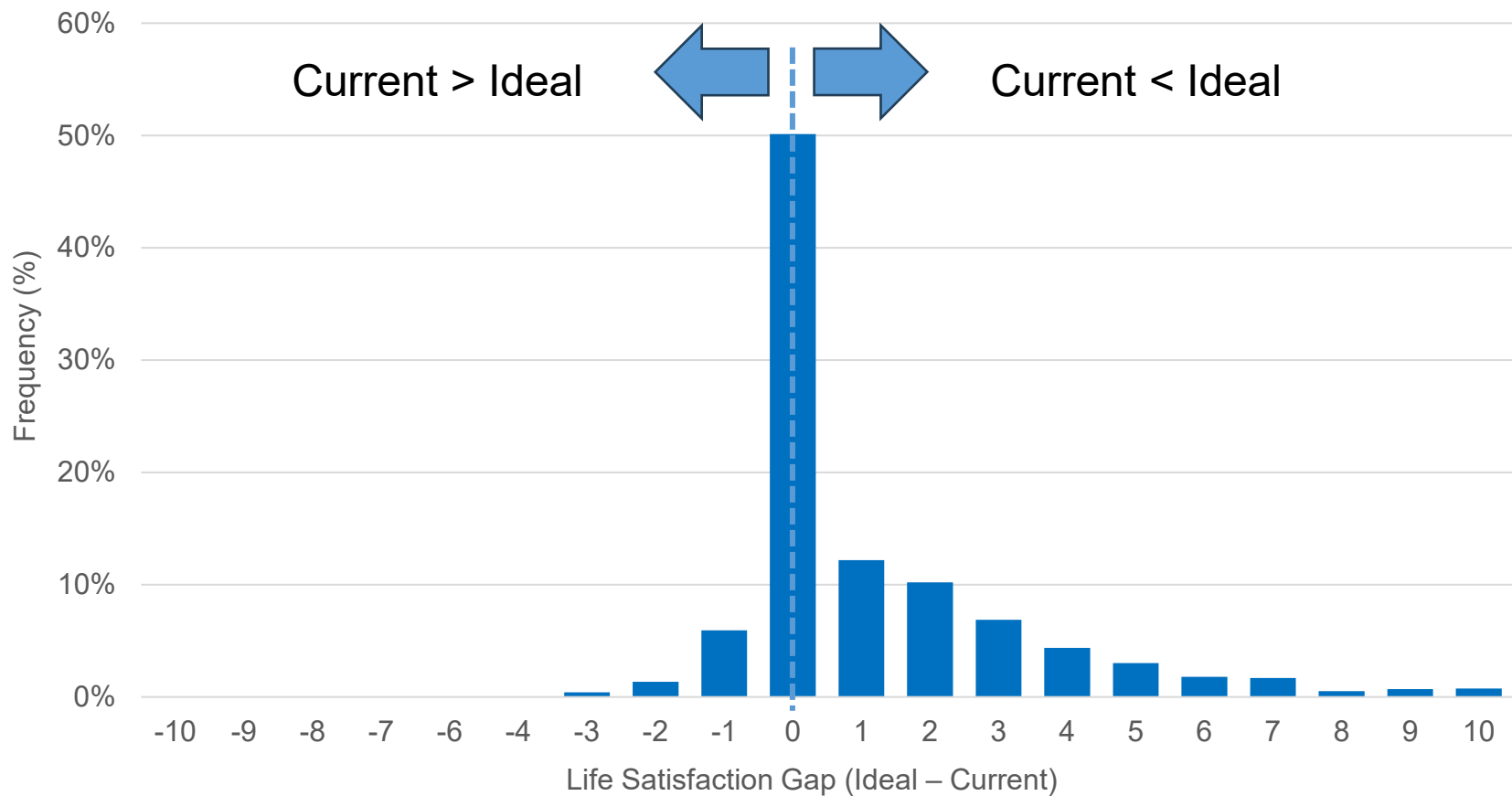


Figure: Distribution of Respondents Regarding the Gap Between Ideal and Current Life Satisfaction (ESRI FY2024 survey)

### **3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement**

## **Research Focus:**

**Can the sample question for Eudaimonia proposed in the OECD Guidelines adequately capture Eudaimonia in the Japanese context?**

## Eudaimonia in the ESRI Survey

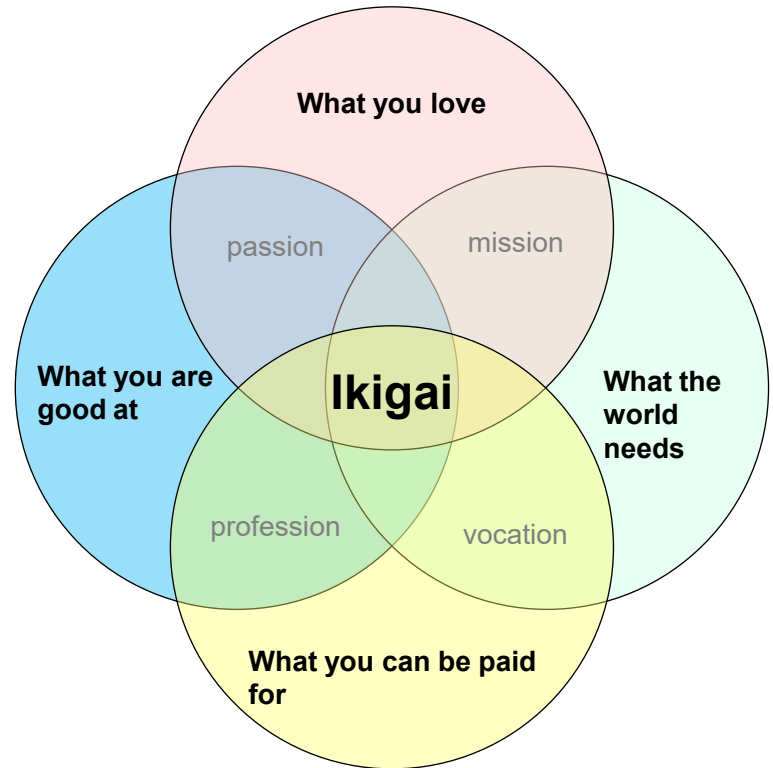
- The OECD identifies Eudaimonia as a key component of subjective well-being, defined as “a sense of meaning and purpose in life, or good psychological functioning”.
- The OECD Guidelines propose asking the following question to measure Eudaimonia: “Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile?”
  - Until recently, the Japanese government had not conducted surveys that directly addressed Eudaimonia.



- Can the sample question for Eudaimonia proposed in the OECD Guidelines adequately capture Eudaimonia in the Japanese context?
- To answer this question, we ask about "Ikigai"—a concept reflecting meaning and purpose in life—which may capture Eudaimonia more effectively.

## “The Four Elements of Ikigai”

- The diagram was proposed by American entrepreneur Marc Winn to illustrate the concept of "Ikigai". It is considered that "Ikigai" lies where four elements overlap.
  - What you love
  - What you are good at
  - What the world needs
  - What you can be paid for



*Venn diagram created by Marc Winn, originally published on marcwinn.com (2014)*



## Eudaimonia in the ESRI Survey

- In the ESRI survey, we chose to explore Eudaimonia in Japan through two distinct questions.
  - (1) Following the OECD Guidelines, we asked about “Worthwhile” (“Yarigai” in Japanese).
  - (2) We also included a question of “Ikigai,” a concept familiar to many in Japan that closely reflects “meaning and purpose in life.”

## Survey Overview

- The ESRI FY2024 survey aimed to better capture Eudaimonia in Japan by approaching it through two dimensions:
  - (1) “Yarigai,” reflecting the OECD’s sample question on “Worthwhile”; and
  - (2) “Ikigai,” a concept familiar to many in Japan that closely corresponds to “meaning and purpose in life.”
- Mode: Online survey
- Period: November 29 to December 10, 2024
- Target Respondents: Men and women aged 15 to 89 living in Japan
- Number of Respondents: 2,127

### 3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement

## Questions related to subjective well-being in ESRI FY2024 survey

### 1. Life Satisfaction

The following question asks how satisfied you feel, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel “not at all satisfied” and 10 means you feel “completely satisfied”.

A1. Overall, how satisfied are you with life as a whole these days? [0-10]

Focus on what you do recently

### 2. Worthwhile/"Yarigai"(Eudemonia)

The following question asks how worthwhile you feel the things you do in your life are, on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel the things you do in your life are “not at all worthwhile”, and 10 means “completely worthwhile”.

A2. Overall, to what extent do you feel the things you do in your life are worthwhile? [0-10]  
(A2. あなたは全体として現在の生活の中でしていることにどの程度やりがいを感じていますか。)

Focus on purpose and/or meaning

### 3. "Ikigai"(Eudemonia)

The following question asks to what extent you feel a sense of “Ikigai”—that is, purpose or meaning in life—on a scale from 0 to 10. Zero means you feel no “Ikigai” at all, and 10 means you feel “Ikigai” to the fullest.

A3. Overall, to what extent do you feel a sense of “Ikigai”, that is, purpose or meaning in life?  
[0–10]

(A3. あなたは全体として生きる目的や生きる意味といった生きがいをどの程度感じていますか。) 18

### 3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement

#### Difference between “Yarigai” and “Ikigai” Assumed in ESRI FY2024 Survey

	“Yarigai”	“Ikigai”
Where from?	Work, roles, tasks	Life as a whole, existential meaning
When? How long?	Short-term, daily	Long-term, lifetime
What type of feeling?	Sense of achievement, fulfillment	Sense of meaning, purpose
In English?	Sense of fulfillment, Meaningful work, Rewarding, Worthwhile	“Ikigai”, Purpose in life, Meaning in life, Reason for being

### 3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement

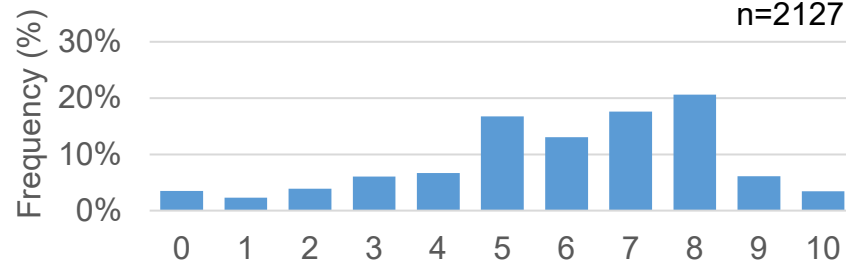
## Basic statistics and Frequency

- No significant differences were observed in the basic statistics.
- Responses for all scales were concentrated between 5 and 8 points, life satisfaction with the most frequent score being 8, “worthwhile/Yarigai” and “Ikigai” with the most frequent score being 5.

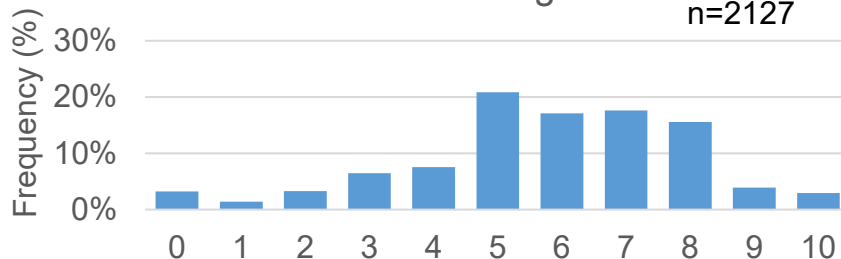
Simple Tabulation

	Sample size	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Life Satisfaction	2127	5.95	6	8	2.35
“Worthwhile /Yarigai”		5.77	6	5	2.17
“Ikigai”		5.71	6	5	2.26

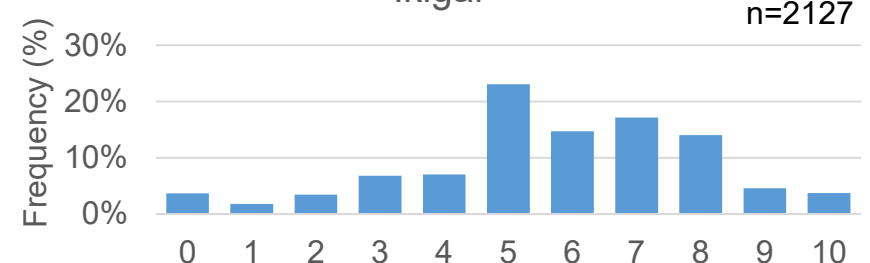
Life Satisfaction



“Worthwhile/Yarigai”



“Ikigai”



### 3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement

#### Do life satisfaction, “worthwhile/Yarigai” and “Ikigai” capture different aspects of well-being?

- The correlation coefficients between elements ranged from 0.6 to 0.8.
- Compared to “worthwhile/Yarigai”, “Ikigai” shows a lower correlation with life satisfaction (0.68 vs. 0.79), indicating that “Ikigai” may reflect a different aspect of well-being that is not fully captured by life satisfaction.

Note: Although there is no consensus about the correlation cutoffs that indicate the presence of discriminant validity, a correlation of less than 0.7 is usually considered acceptable (Hodson, 2021)

- Further accumulation of data and empirical analysis are necessary to clarify which dimensions of well-being are captured by life satisfaction, “worthwhile/Yarigai” and “Ikigai”.

Correlation coefficient

	Life Satisfaction	“Worthwhile/Yarigai”	“Ikigai”
Life Satisfaction	1.00		
“Worthwhile /Yarigai”	0.79	1.00	
“Ikigai”	0.68	0.77	1.00

### 3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement

## Relationship Between “ikigai” and Domain Subjective Satisfaction: OLS Analysis

- The regression analysis between the three well-being indicators—Life Satisfaction, “worthwhile/Yarigai,” and “Ikigai”—and domain-specific subjective satisfaction revealed that: While some domains showed statistically significant relationships with all three indicators, distinct patterns were also observed:

A) life satisfaction appears to relate to financial factors (see 1), and “worthwhile/Yarigai” and “Ikigai” appear to relate to emotional and relational factors (see 7, 13).

B) Certain domains (see 2, 3, 6) were significantly correlated only with Life Satisfaction and “worthwhile/Yarigai.” Conversely, some domains, possibly related to common good (see 8, 9), were significantly associated only with “Ikigai.”

Table: Relationship Between Three Key Elements and Domain-Specific Subjective Satisfaction

Domain-Specific Subjective Satisfaction (Independent Variables)	Dependent Variable	Life Satisfaction	“Worthwhile/Yarigai”	“Ikigai”
Note: ***p < 0.01, **p < 0.05, *p < 0.10				
1. Household income and assets		0.195***	0.080***	0.077***
2. Employment conditions and wages		0.041*	0.053**	0.026
3. Housing		0.136***	0.054***	0.035
4. Work-life balance (WLB)		0.055**	0.055**	0.056**
5. Health		0.089***	0.112***	0.112***
6. Respondents’ own education level and learning environment		0.059***	0.039*	0.041
7. Social connections		0.148***	0.188***	0.176***
8. Politics, administration, judiciary		0.003	0.028*	0.054***
9. Natural environment		-0.016	-0.012	-0.077***
10. Personal safety		0.013	-0.026	0.016
11. Ease of child-rearing		-0.002	-0.045**	0.032
12. Ease of caregiving and receiving care		-0.077***	-0.031	-0.096***
13. Enjoyment and fun in life		0.386***	0.426***	0.446***
Constant term		0.013	0.594***	0.677***
Adjusted R-squared		0.702	0.662	0.587
Number of observations		2,127	2,127	2,127

### 3. “Eudaimonia” Measurement

#### Comparison between high and low “Ikigai” groups : Frequency of Participation in Volunteer Activities and Community Events

- Respondents in the low-“Ikigai” group ( $\leq 5$ ) are more likely to be non-participants or to have low participation frequency in activities and events.
- Respondents in the high-“Ikigai” group ( $\geq 6$ ) are more likely to have high participation frequency in activities and events.

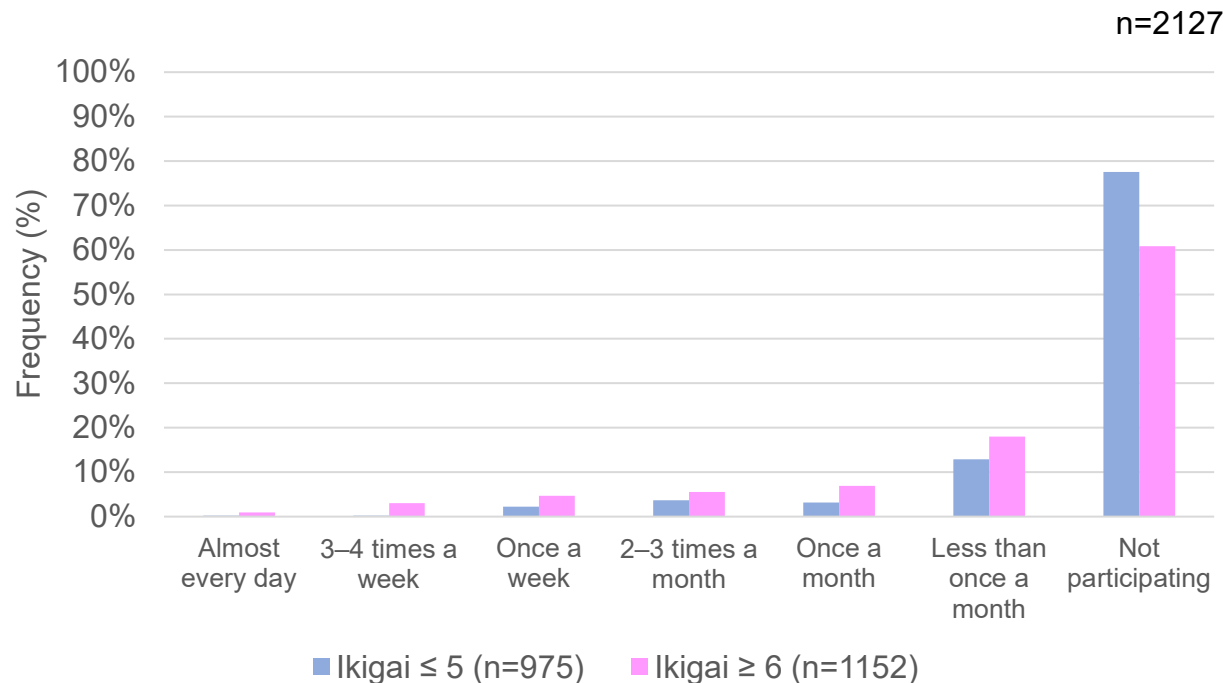


Figure: Comparison of Social Participation Rates by “Ikigai” Level (High vs. Low)



## Comparison between high and low “Ikigai” groups : Job Satisfaction

- Job satisfaction in the low-“Ikigai” group ( $\leq 5$ ) were concentrated at 5 points.
- Job satisfaction in the high-“Ikigai” group ( $\geq 6$ ) were concentrated between 6 and 8 points.

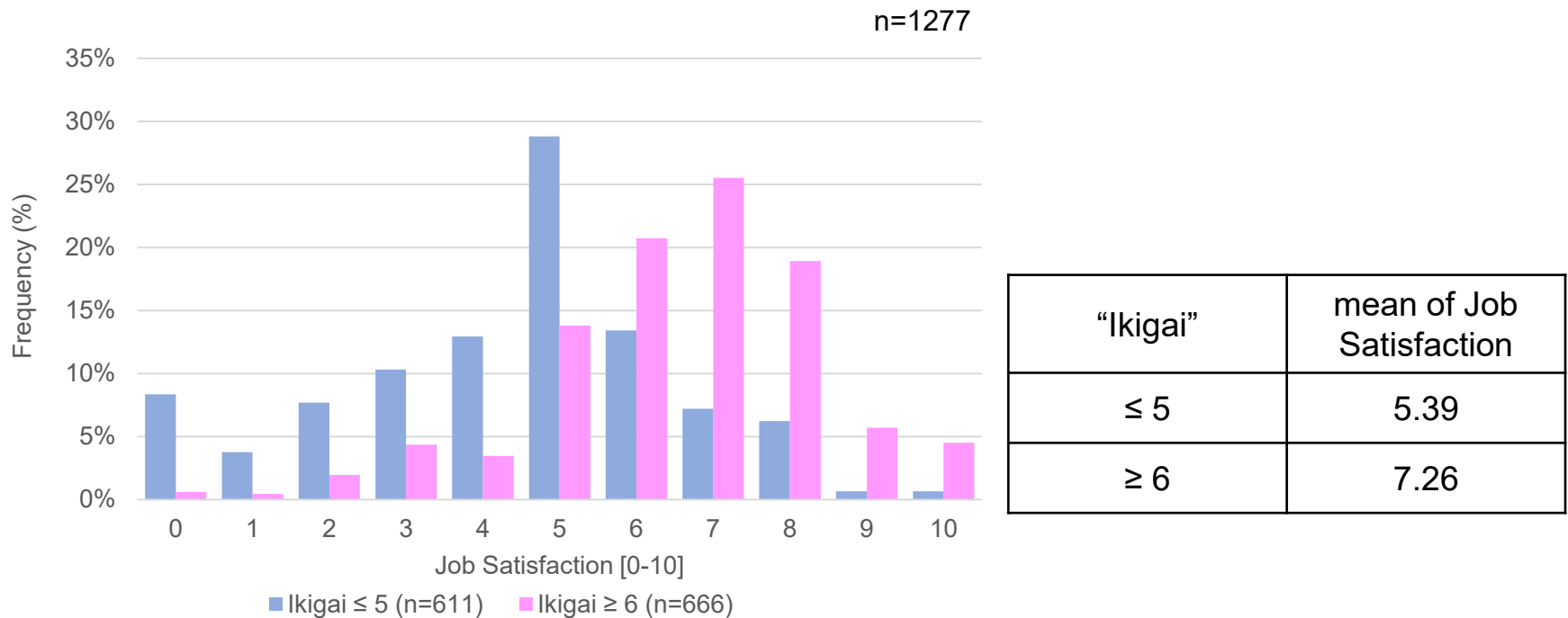


Figure: Comparison of Job Satisfaction Rates by “Ikigai” Level (High vs. Low)

## **4. Conclusions**

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- In the ESRI FY2024 survey, we explored Eudaimonia by asking two questions of "Worthwhile/Yarigai" and "Ikigai."
- Compared to "worthwhile/Yarigai", "Ikigai" shows a slightly lower correlation with life satisfaction, indicating that "Ikigai" may capture a different aspect of well-being that is not fully captured by a single question of life satisfaction.
- OLS analysis suggests:
  - (A) life satisfaction appears to relate to financial factors, and "worthwhile/Yarigai" and "Ikigai" appear to relate to emotional and relational factors.
  - (B) "Ikigai" appears to relate to common good.

## **5. Future Work**

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- Further accumulation of data and empirical analysis are necessary to clarify which dimensions of well-being are captured by life satisfaction, “worthwhile/Yarigai” and “Ikigai”.
- This requires adding the questions that are relevant to aspects of “Ikigai”.
- The subjective well-being scholarship has been critiqued as Western-centric, both in terms of the location of research participants and scholars, as well as in terms of the very ideas and values through which well-being is understood (OECD, 2024).
- We aim for our research in Japan to contribute to the development of well-being scales that are culturally inclusive and globally applicable.

## **Note:**

- During the Q&A in Session 1, our responses will be given in Japanese and interpreted into English by simultaneous interpreters to ensure clarity and accuracy.
- We appreciate your understanding and look forward to your thoughts and questions.

Thank you for your attention!