

Survey on people's perceptions of cancer research (がん研究に対する国民の認識に関する調査)

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Background

- To advance cancer research effectively, it is important to obtain the public understanding and support for research.
- People are linked to medical research in various forms, i.e., as the subjects of clinical and epidemiological studies, users of the study results, taxpayers for research grants from government, contributors of research fund, and non-expert members of IRBs.
- As the first step, we conducted an internet survey to know the general public perception and expectation to cancer research.

Methods

- We adopted opt-in panels to select subjects from the internet monitors aged 20 years or older.
- A total of 2,234 people participated in the survey by frequency matching for sex, age and area with Japan's population
- The survey was conducted in March 2009.
- In this survey, we categorized cancer research into four types; basic, epidemiological, clinical, and policy research.

- **Basic research** = "Exploration of the mechanisms of cancer development through in-vitro or animal experiments, possibly useful in developing innovative treatments or preventions against cancer in the future"
- **Epidemiological research** = "Identification of the causes of cancer based on the lifestyle of healthy people and/or patients, with the results obtained a decade later, and useful for the prevention of cancer"
- **Clinical research** = "Determination of the safety and efficacy of a cancer therapy in human, with the results obtained a decade later, and useful for the treatment of cancer"
- **Policy research** = "Evaluation of measures and policies implemented by the local or central government, hospitals, etc., to promote activities to overcome cancer"

Results

- The images of medical research were largely related to "the development of new drugs", "usefulness", "prevention", and "advancement compared to foreign studies". (Fig.1)
- Most of the respondents felt medical research is important overall. (Fig.2)
- Over 95% answered medical research should be useful to the society, not just of academic value. (Fig.3)
- Nearly 80% answered "Very important" to basic, epidemiological, and clinical research, while policy research was evaluated lower than the others. (Fig.4)
- Regarding priority of research as a national policy in Japan today, basic research was ranked first by more than half of the respondents. (Fig.5)
- Over 70% answered they have not donated to cancer research but may do so in future. (Fig.6)
- Common reasons for not having donated included budgetary constraint and lack of information. (Fig.7)
- Regarding a distribution of possible donation, the area which would obtain the largest amount was also basic research, followed by clinical and epidemiological research in this order, while policy research would receive the least. (Fig.8)

Table 1: Characteristics of the Respondents

Characteristics	N	%
Total	2234	
Sex		
Male	1064	47.6
Female	1170	52.4
Age		
20's	297	13.3
30's	383	17.1
40's	337	15.1
50's	384	17.2
60's≤	833	37.2
Education		
Junior high school (including elementary school)	69	3.1
High school	825	36.9
College(including two-year college and vocational school)	1246	55.8
Graduate school	92	4.1

Fig. 1: "What is your images of medical research?"

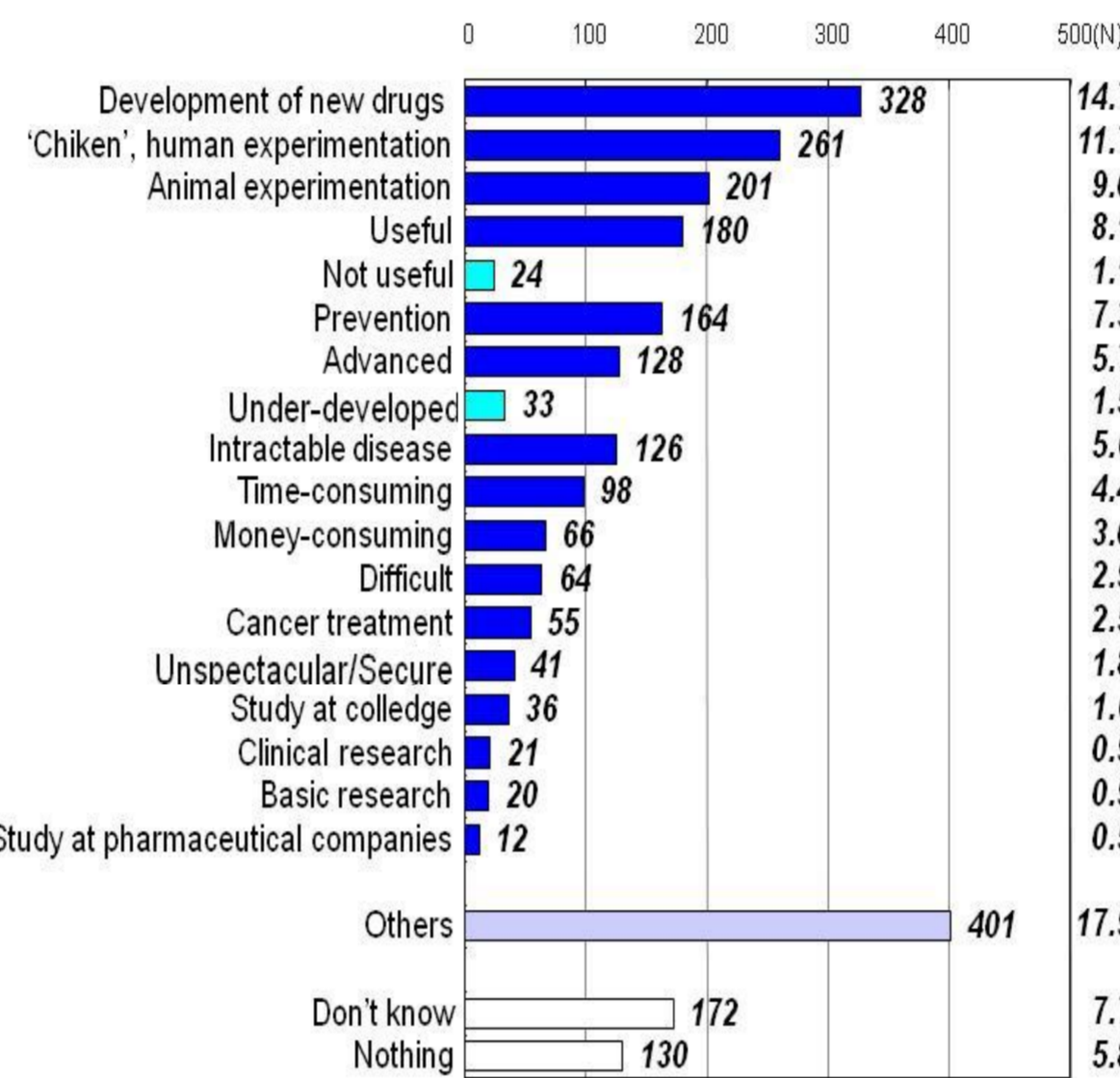


Fig. 2: "Do you think medical research is important?"

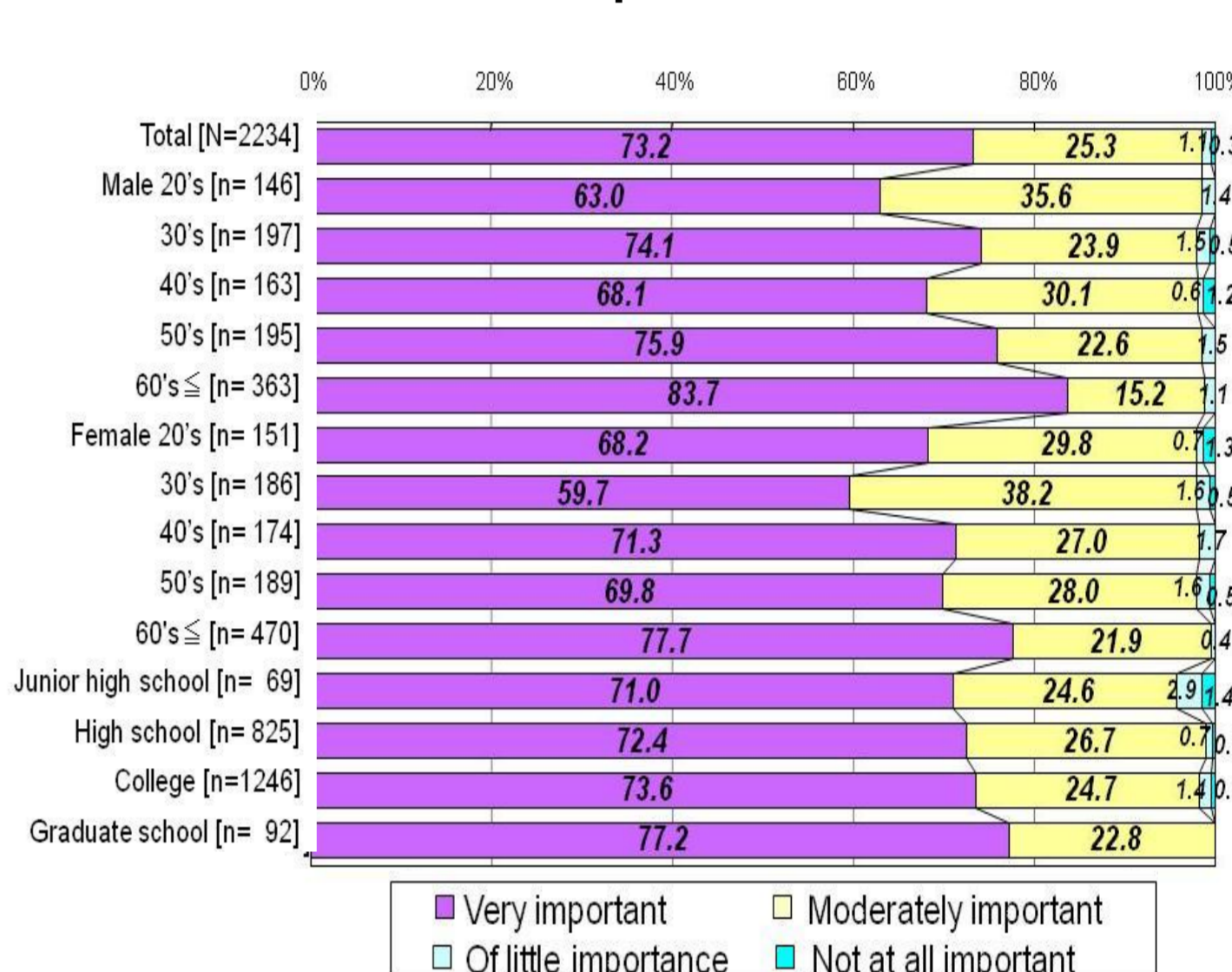


Fig. 3: "Should medical research be practically useful to the society, or is it OK to be valuable only academically?"

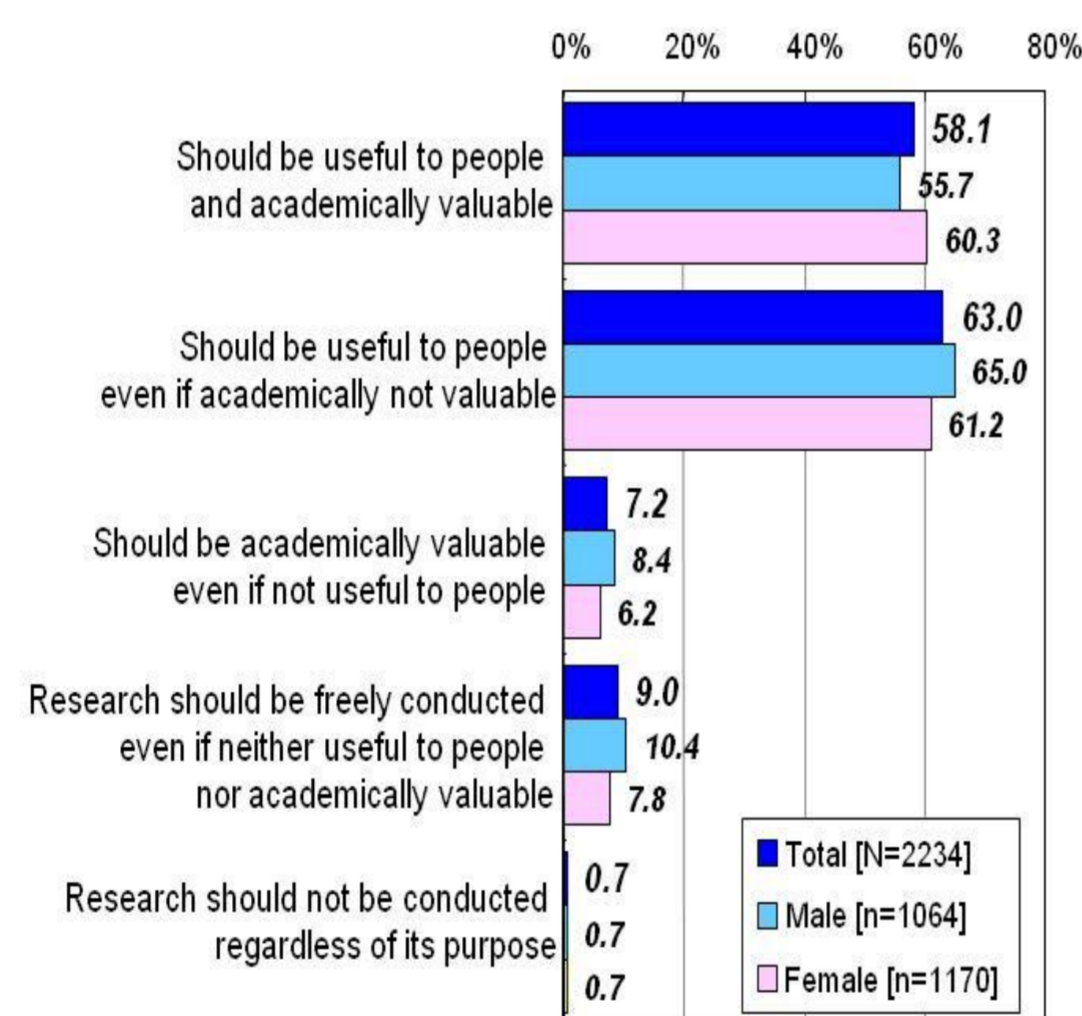


Fig. 4: "To what extent each research area is important?"

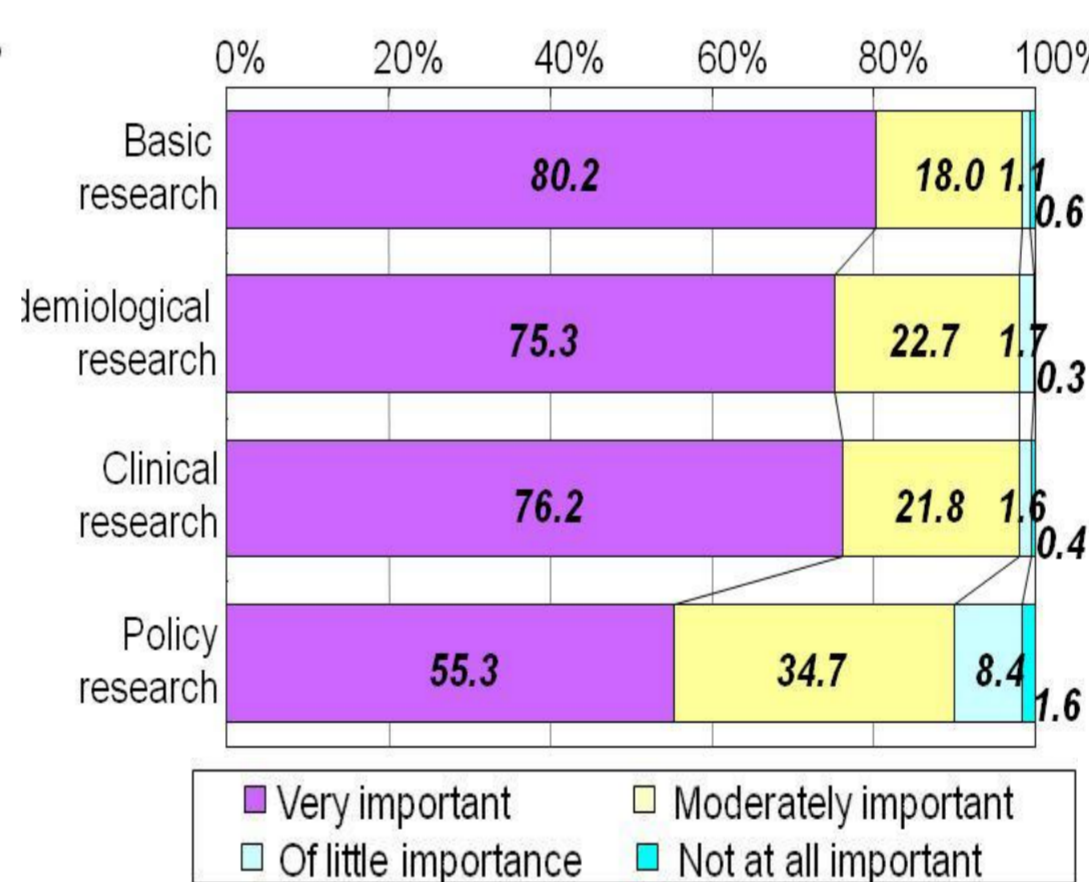


Fig. 5: "How would you prioritize each research area as a national policy today?"

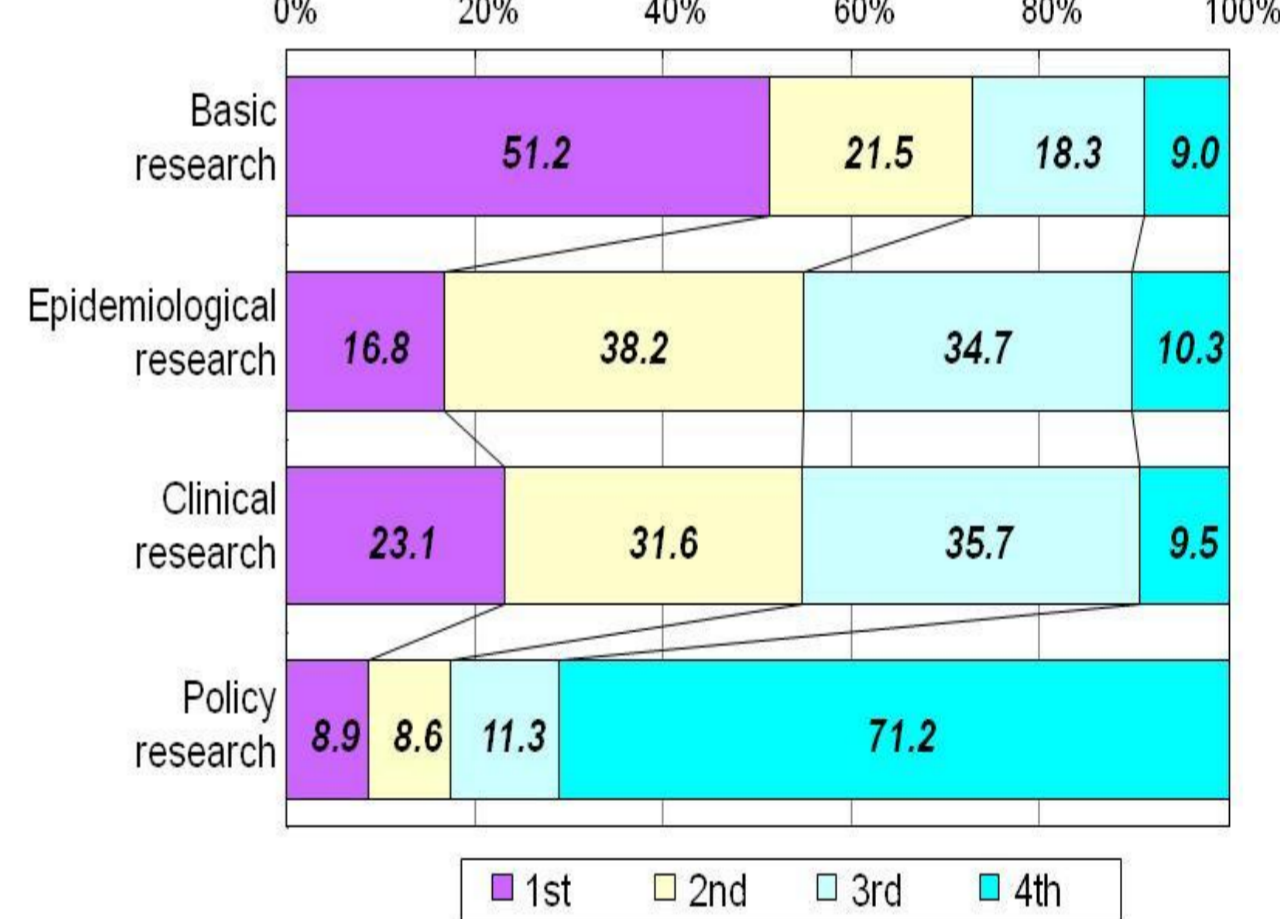


Fig. 6: "Have you ever donated to any cancer research?"

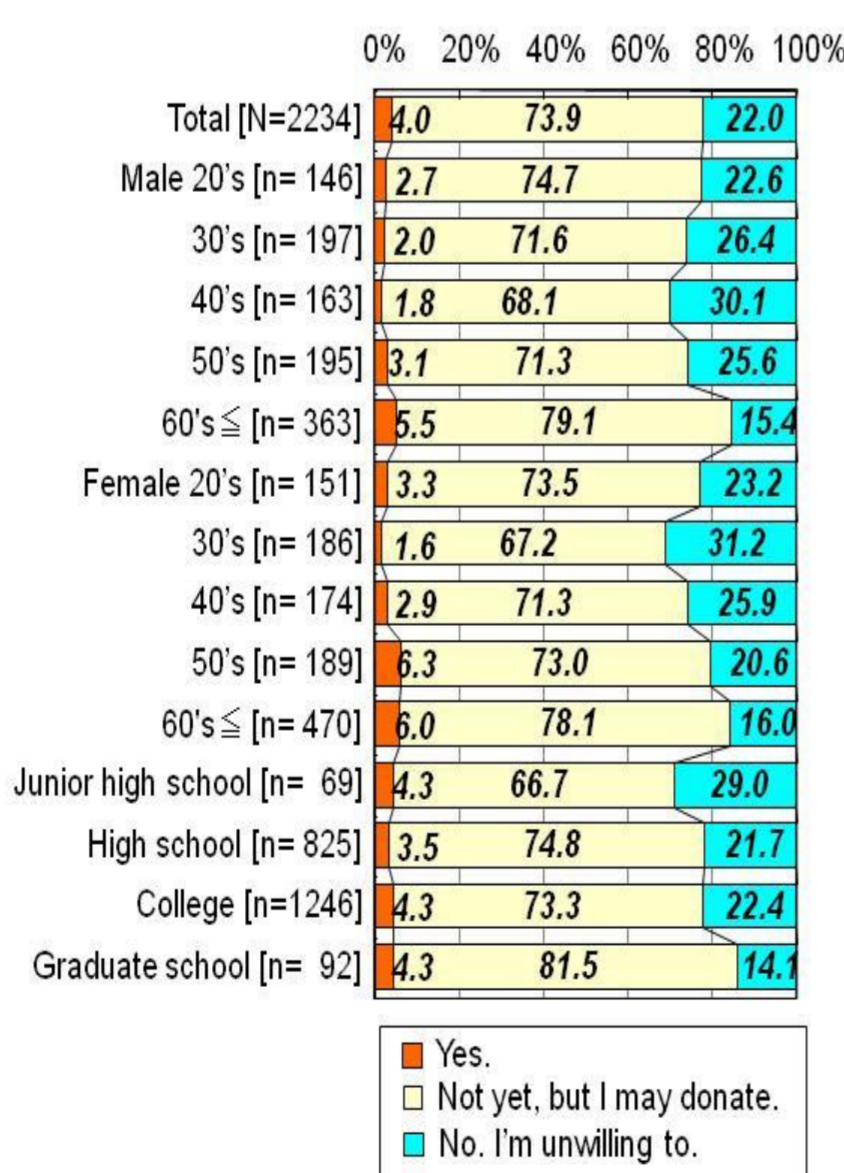


Fig. 7: "Why have you not donated?"

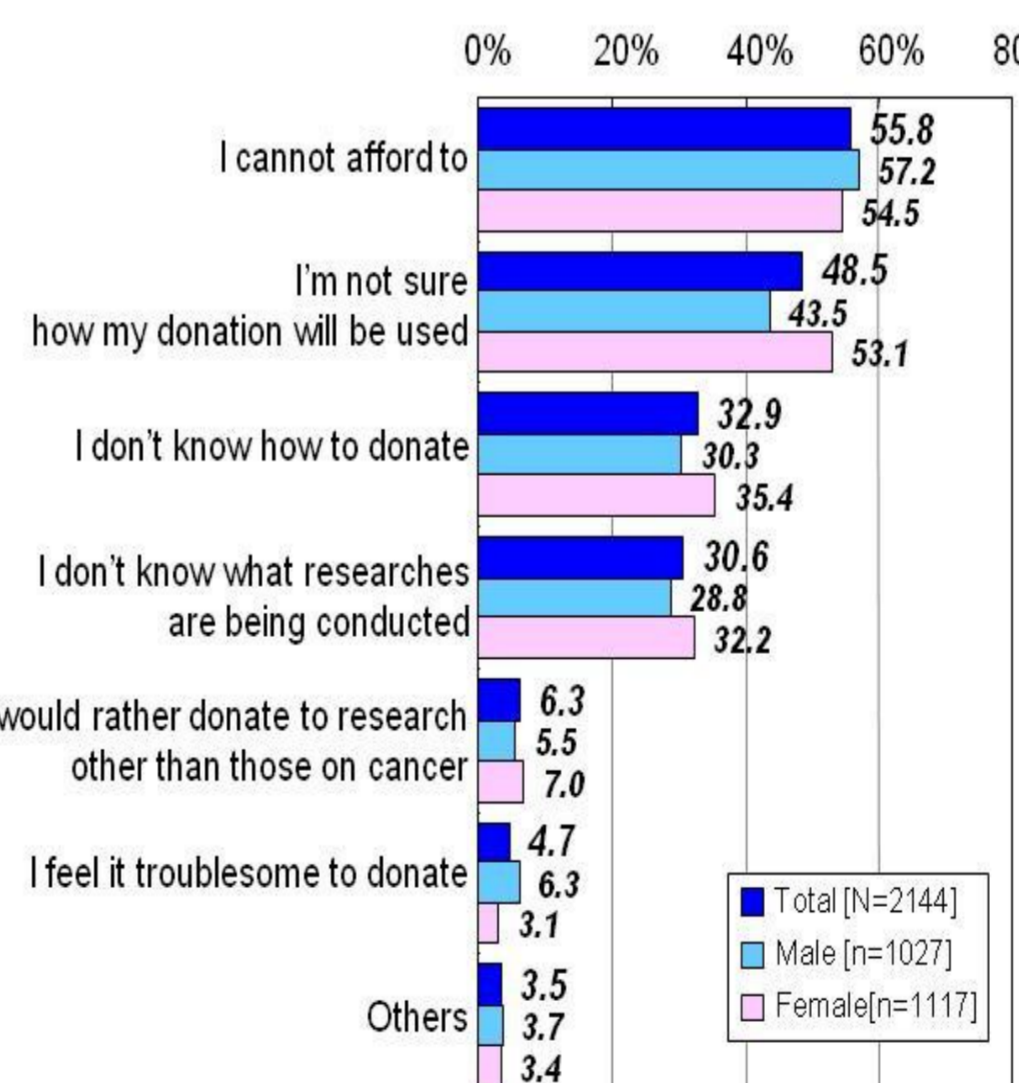
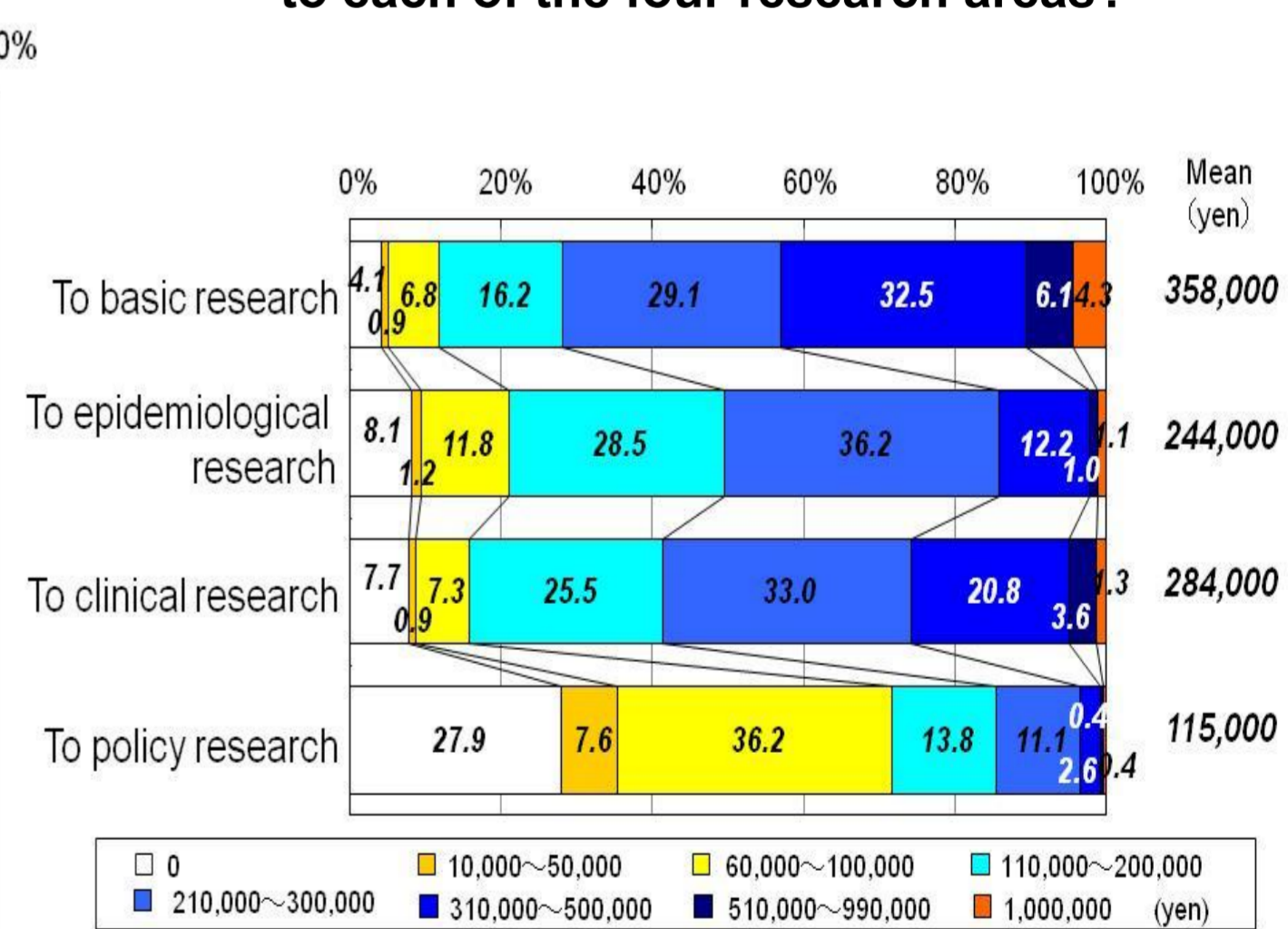


Fig. 8: "If you donate one million yen, how much would you assign to each of the four research areas?"



Discussion

- Although people's image of medical research was "medical research = development of treatments = clinical research", basic research was more highly evaluated.
- The high evaluation of basic research may be more attributable to the expectation of its potential benefit in practical applications in developing treatments and preventions against cancer in the future than to its contribution in the elucidation of the mechanisms of disease development. The high recognition may be also related that the basic research results tends to receive more attention in the media than the other area of research.

- The high evaluation of epidemiological study may reflect the situation that the importance of preventive medicine for cancer has been gradually understood in the society. The frequent report from epidemiological researchers to publicize their results might also contribute to the evaluation. However, this high public recognition seems to contradict the relatively small number of researchers in this area in Japan and the actual allocation of research funds.
- The low evaluation of policy research may stem from its low presence and exposure in current education system in Japan, along with people's poor image of "politics" in general. However, policy research such as development and evaluation of effective measures to support patients and their families and to equalize and spread cancer care in the nation is becoming a new important field.
- Although it is difficult to grasp people's needs accurately and comprehensively, it is important in promoting research for the cancer control. This line of efforts should be continued and improved.