

# Exploring the Concept of *Ibasho*—A Place of Being—and Its Relationship to the Mental Health of Japanese Youth

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## Abstract

**Background:** The Japanese word *Ibasho*—a place of being—was originally used to encompass the physical meaning only, but nowadays in most situations, is understood as having a variety of psychosocial meanings. Harada and Takiwaki (2014) developed the *Ibasho* Scale, consisting of two subscales: *Social Ibasho*, and *Personal Ibasho*. However, the scale's two-factor structure has not yet been confirmed. In addition, whether the two factors are in a close relationship or in an inverse relationship has not yet been examined. Gender differences regarding the degree of experiences of each *Ibasho* also still need to be explored, as well as the relationship between each *Ibasho* and mental health among Japanese male and female youth. **Purposes:** This study aims at examining whether or not the *Ibasho* Scale has the two-factor model, whether the two factors are in a congruent or an inverse relationship, whether or not there are gender differences concerning each subscale score, and finally exploring whether each factor which comprises the *Ibasho* Scale is related to Japanese youth mental health for each gender. **Methods:** A questionnaire survey targeting Japanese university students was conducted in April 2023. The questionnaire included the Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation-Outcome Measure (CORE-OM) to assess mental health, in addition to the *Ibasho* Scale. The validity of the *Ibasho* Scale's two-factor structure was examined using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The t-test was applied to see gender differences concerning each subscale score. A partial correlation between the *Social Ibasho* and mental health was calculated by removing the effect of *Personal Ibasho*, and in the same way, a partial correlation between the *Personal Ibasho* and mental health was calculated by removing the effect of *Social Ibasho* for each gender, respectively. **Results:** Confirmatory Factor Analysis verified the validity of the *Ibasho* Scale's two-factor model, and showed a significant positive co-variance

between the two factors. Women were more likely than men to experience *Social Ibasho*, but there was no statistically significant difference between men and women in experiencing *Personal Ibasho*. The results of partial correlations between mental health and each *Ibasho* subscale differed depending on the respondent gender: for male respondents *Social Ibasho* was more likely than *Personal Ibasho* to be related to mental health, and for female respondents *Personal Ibasho* was more likely than *Social Ibasho* to be related to mental health. Conclusion: The concept of *Ibasho* was verified to consist of two factors: *Social* and *Personal*, which were found to be closely related with each other. For men, the ability to develop a social relationship, and for women, the ability to be alone were key factors in maintaining sound mental health.

### Keywords

*Ibasho*, Place of My Own, Factor Structure, Mental Health, Gender Differences

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## 1. Introduction

The Japanese word *Ibasho*—a place of being—is made up of two words, *i*—which means being, staying or existing, and *basho* which means place, setting, or field. Originally, *Ibasho* used to mean a physical place where a person physically exists, as defined by Kōjien (Iwanami Shoten Publishers, 2018) and Sanseidō Japanese dictionary (Sanseido, 2021).

Since the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (Tanaka, 1992) set the goal of securing *Ibasho* in the school for children and adolescents who are unable to attend school, the concept of *Ibasho* has broadened. More specifically, it has come to be used as having not only a physically meaning, but also psychological meanings. The Ministry stated that a school should function as a place where students can feel secure in their sense of self, i.e., psychological *Ibasho*. In other words, a psychological *Ibasho* is where an individual feels allowed to have, and actually has his/her own place, based on a physical *Ibasho*. Recently in Japan, children and adolescents who do not have an *Ibasho* at school, are given an opportunity to find an *Ibasho* outside of the school, under the name *free-school* or *free-space*.

Furthermore, daycare centers in psychiatric clinics also provide mental disorder patients with *Ibasho* (i.e., not only physical but also psychological settings). Likewise, day-services for the elderly function not only as physical *Ibasho* but also psychological *Ibasho*. As will be explained later in more detail, *Ibasho* seems to be closely related to the mental health of individuals in every generation. Needless to say, it is a crucial theme in the studies of clinical psychiatry and psychology, extending into the realms of pedagogy and social welfare, among others.

Nowadays, Japanese people share a common understanding of what psychological *Ibasho* is, but some researchers point out its polysemy as well as ambiguity. I

would like to go back to the semantic elements that *Ibasho* encompasses, by reviewing some articles written by these researchers.

Although I wrote earlier that psychological *Ibasho* can be experienced based on a physical place, *Ibasho* no longer requires a physical place. Kajiwara (1993) regards *Ibasho* as *my* location brought about by generating reciprocally defined meanings and values in the relationships between *I* and person (s), object (s), and thing (s). Ueno (1992) presents the idea that *Ibasho* is brought about by realizing one's own place in a group and being able to be relaxed when interacting with other (s). Tanaka (2001) explains *Ibasho* as where an individual identifies his/her place and future direction through interactions with others. Nakanishi (2000) writes that psychological *Ibasho* is a psychologically secure state in an individual who has interpersonal bonds with other (s).

These definitions are based on the idea that *Ibasho* is created relatively in interpersonal relationships within a group or society constituted by more than one person. It does not matter whether the *Ibasho* is created at school or at the workplace, but it is created within relationships with classmates and/or teachers, and in the same way, with colleagues and/or bosses. These explanations do not necessarily premise a concrete physical place.

Many other scholars regard the existence of interpersonal or social relationships as a premise for defining the concept of *Ibasho*. In a review of studies on *Ibasho* in the fields of psychology, educational psychology, sociology, and pedagogy, Fujiwara (2010) concludes that *Ibasho* can be categorized into 10 functions. Among them are “a place where an individual feels a sense of belonging and satisfaction by being allocated a role”, “a place where an individual feels connected with other (s) and/or society”, and “a place where an individual feels a sense of self-presence and being accepted”. To briefly enumerate, the functions of *Ibasho* based on interpersonal relationships are as follows: to provide a feeling of acceptance (Miyashita & Ishikawa, 2005; Nakanishi, 2000; Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006), to provide a sense of security (Hata, 2000; Nakanishi, 2000), to provide a sense of belonging (Harada & Takiwaki, 2014), to give the individual a role (Hata, 2000; Nakanishi, 2000), to hold on to the individual (Hata, 2000; Nakanishi, 2000), to protect the individual's safety, to give the individual rest and new energy (Kimata, 1999), and to cherish the individual's irreplaceable self-worth (Miyashita & Ishikawa, 2005).

One of the interesting arguments regarding *Ibasho* is that an individual is able to recognize *Ibasho* for the first time when he/she loses it. Iwakawa (2006) likens *Ibasho* to air. In other words, *Ibasho* is too familiar to be noticed when it is there, but when it disappears the individual experiences difficulties in all aspects of living. This idea of *Ibasho* seems to presume that there are familiar people who are usually taken for granted and go unnoticed. Iida et al. (2011) extract elements which constitute the feeling of *having no Ibasho*, probably based on the same idea as Iwakawa (2006). They apply the exploratory factor analysis, concluding that the lack of *Ibasho* converges into three factors, a desire to escape (represented by “a

feeling of inability to stay” and “a desire to run away from the place immediately”), loneliness (represented by “longing to be talk to”, and “feeling uncertain”), and being puzzled (represented by items such as “feeling different from my usual self” and “feeling strange that I am here”). These are all difficulties in securing *Ibasho* that assumes a social group where other(s) exist in the surroundings.

In contrast to the above *Ibasho* definitions or functions from interpersonal perspectives, there also are some definitions which necessarily do not premise interpersonal relationships. For example, among the previously referred 10 functions proposed by Fujiwara (2010) are “a place of freedom” and “a place for growth where the individual is able to learn and experience a variety of things for his/her future through play and activities”. Other definitions include “a place of providing mental stability and self-esteem (Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006)”, and “a place to affirm the individual’s identity, i.e., to confirm self-image and self-concept (Harada & Takiwaki, 2014), to make him/her feel that he/she is who he/she is (Kitayama, 1993).

In addition, there are *Ibasho* definitions which clearly premise a place where the individual is alone, i.e., a place where interpersonal relationships are lacking. For example, among the 10 *Ibasho* functions proposed by Fujiwara (2010) is “a place where the individual can spend time alone”. Functions of *Ibasho* such as a place for “reflection/introspection (Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006)” and a place of “freedom from others (Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006)” also lead us to imagine places where other(s) are absent. Tsutsumi (2002), as Iida et al. (2011) did, developed another scale for *lack of a sense of Ibasho* constituted by two factors, one of which is the subscale named “sense of self-alienation”. In this subscale is the item, “I feel I am not able to reflect upon myself”. This item can be considered a psychological state where the individual fails to experience *Ibasho* when he/she is alone.

To classify *Ibasho* into the two categories *Social Ibasho*, experienced within interpersonal relationships, and *Personal Ibasho*, experienced when the individual is alone, I would like to introduce two articles. Fujitake (2000), author of the first article, classifies *Ibasho* into *Social Ibasho* and *Humanistic Ibasho*. The former is experienced within relationships and the latter without relationships. More specifically, Fujitake’s *Social Ibasho* is a place where the individual is expected to demonstrate his/her ability and potential, and where his/her presence is needed. Meanwhile, *Humanistic Ibasho* is a place where the individual is able to get himself/herself back together again, and he/she is able to feel calm and relaxed. Authors of another article (Nakajima, Hirode, & Konagai, 2007) also classify *Ibasho* as having two categories, *Social Ibasho* and *Personal Ibasho*. The former is a place where the individual is able to identify himself/herself by interacting with other(s), and the latter is a place where the individual is able to get himself/herself back together again, away from interactions with other (s).

Of particular interest is that both Fujitake (2000) and Nakajima et al. (2007) argue that the absence of a relationship does not only mean being physically alone. That is to say, when someone else is there, if the individual has an honest

relationship with that someone, he/she will not consider that person as an “other”. A place where an individual is with this kind of “someone else” is not a *social Ibasho*, but *Humanistic Ibasho* (Fujitake, 2000), and *Personal Ibasho* (Nakajima et al., 2007). This idea leads us to associate the previously referred Iwakawa’s (2006) argument that *Ibasho* is too familiar to be aware of, when it is there. It also reminds us of Winnicott’s (1958) concept *capacity to be alone*, which means the capacity to be absorbed in something by himself/herself in the presence of other(s). Development of this capacity necessitates the internalization of a good object and then relating with the object at the ego level based on a relationship of trust, resulting in the ability to be with other (s) without becoming anxious about the other (s)’ evaluation of him/her. Thus, in order for an individual to experience *Humanistic Ibasho* (Fujitake, 2000) and *Personal Ibasho* (Nakajima et al., 2007) despite the presence of other (s), the individual’s ability to trust others is crucial. This is not an external factor, but an internal one, deeply rooted in his/her personality.

The definitions and functions of *Ibasho* mentioned above suggest that with the times, the importance of the physical elements of *Ibasho* is weakening. Conversely, the importance of psycho-social elements has been strengthening. So far, several researchers have developed inventories of *Ibasho* (Hata, 2000; Nakanishi, 2000), or lack of *Ibasho* (Iida et al., 2011; Tsuthumi, 2002). It should be noted, however, that these inventories do not clearly distinguish between *Social* and *Personal Ibasho*, and therefore do not evaluate them separately.

In contrast to the weakening importance of whether or not a physical place is present in *Ibasho*, the classification of *Social Ibasho* and *Personal Ibasho* seems to be crucial in conducting studies targeting young adults as well as adolescents due to the prolonged adolescent period. This is because, as parental support decreases and they have to become independent from their parents, they need to seek a place outside the family. Generally, adolescents may secure *Ibasho* in relationships with peers (Tominaga & Kitayama, 2003) and young adults in a relationship with a romantic partner. Furthermore, it is reported that as they grow older, they are more likely to seek psychological *Ibasho* when they are alone (Sugimoto & Shoji, 2006).

This study, which targets young adults, will apply Harada & Takiwaki’s (2014) *Ibasho* Scale composed of two factors, i.e., *Social Ibaso* and *Personal Ibasho*. *Social Ibasho* is further classified into a place where an individual belongs, a place where an individual feels accepted, and a place where an individual feels approved. *Personal Ibasho* is further classified into a place where an individual can self-reflect and a place where an individual can get relief. Harada & Takiwaki (2014) conducted exploratory factor analysis but did not conduct a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to verify the two-factor structure of the scale. Thus, the first aim of this study is to verify the two-factor structure by CFA.

Another point of interest regarding the factor structure is whether the *Social Ibasho* and *Personal Ibasho* are in a congruent or inverse relationship. In other

words, statistically speaking, when the two-factor structure of the *Ibasha* Scale (Harada & Takiwaki, 2014) is verified, whether the correlation coefficient between the two factors is a positive or negative value.

If the inability to experience *Social Ibasha* is the reason for an individual to seek *Personal Ibasha* or the inability to experience *Personal Ibasha* causes an individual to desperately seek *Social Ibasha*, the two types of *Ibasha* (factors) will be in an inverse relationship. Another hypothesis that the two factors are in a congruent relationship is also possible, using Fujiyama's interpretation of the above mentioned Winnicott idea of *capacity to be alone* (Fujiyama, 2002), i.e., "[physically] alone but being with someone else (the mother can be used as internal environment)" and "[physically] with someone else (the external object), yet [psychologically] alone (his/her inner world has a space to relax)" both of which he regards as indices of emotional maturity. The former is precisely the *Personal Ibasha* and the latter is the *Social Ibasha*.

To provide some detail on Fujiyama's interpretation, Winnicott's idea of *capacity to be alone* in the presence of other (s) means the ability to be with other (s) without worrying about the others' evaluation of him/her, based on a trusting relationship with the internal object as well as the external object. This may enable him/her to experience *Social Ibasha*, i.e., he/she is able to be absorbed in something by himself/herself in the presence of other (s). Meanwhile, *capacity to be alone* in the physical absence of other (s) also reflects the existence of good internalized object. Namely, an individual with this capacity is able to spend time by himself/herself without brooding on past social experiences and being concerned about how other (s) previously perceived his/her attitudes or behaviors. He/she may experience *Personal Ibasha* as being priceless. These arguments lead us to the hypothesis that the two types of *Ibasha* are different aspects of the same phenomena, the internalized good object and the stable object relationship.

Another argument presents the two types of *Ibasha* as being close concepts. As explained previously, Fujitake (2000) and Nakajima et al. (2007) consider *Personal Ibasha* to include a situation in which an individual is with someone whom he/she does not perceive as another person. According to Harada and Takiwaki (2014), this type of *Ibasha* may be categorized as *Social Ibasha*, due to the physical presence of others. This means that the boundary between *Social* and *Personal Ibasha* is ambiguous, and supports the hypothesis that these two types of *Ibasha* are in a congruent relationship. It would be of great clinical interest to examine whether the two types of *Ibasha* are in a congruent or inverse relationship, or if there is no relationship.

The second aim of this study is to see gender differences in experiencing two types of *Ibasha*. Sugimoto and Shoji (2006) demonstrate that, regardless of whether a subject is a child or an adolescent, girls are more likely than boys to experience social acceptance, and argue that it is more important for girls than boys to maintain self-esteem in social relationships. This leads us to imagine that girls experience *Social Ibasha* more than boys. This study will likely demonstrate

a similar result as Sugimoto and Shoji's (2006), although the participants of this study are older (young adults aged 18 - 25).

The third aim of this study is to examine relationships between *Ibasho* and mental health, a particular interest among Japanese clinical psychology researchers. This study will look at each of the above two types of *Ibasho*—*Social* and *Personal*—to see if they are related to mental health and if so, to clarify whether the relationship is congruent or inverse.

In general, *Social Ibasho* tends to be considered as facilitating mental health, whereas it is controversial whether *Personal Ibasho* facilitates or exacerbates mental health. Some researchers demonstrate that *Social Ibasho* is positively related to mental health but *Personal Ibasho* is not (Ishimoto, 2010). There also are some scholars who mention that *Personal Ibasho* has temporarily beneficial aspects by helping an individual save and regain energy, but in the long run, it prompts the individual to apply avoidant behaviors and provides him/her with medium for shut-in (Wakayama, 2001; Yamaoka, 2002). It is intriguing to examine the validity of the dichotomous view that the *Social Ibasho* is the foundation of sound mental health, whereas the *Personal Ibasho* is the foundation of psychopathology.

Winnicott's concept of *capacity to be alone* mentioned earlier may support wholesome, not pathological, characteristics of *Personal Ibasho*. As explained, the concept describes an individual's *capacity to be alone* when he/she is with someone else. This could also be applied to the *capacity to be alone* when physically alone, when using Fujiyama's previously introduced interpretation of *capacity to be alone*. That is to say, regardless of whether an individual is with someone, only after having established a trusting relationship with significant others can he/she spend time by himself/herself. Okonogi (1979) also points out beneficial aspects of psychological growth and creative works attained by being alone. One of the main objectives of this study is to examine whether the *Personal Ibasho* is related to mental health beneficially or detrimentally, based on these arguments.

Furthermore, this study aims at seeing whether *Social Ibasho* is beneficial or detrimental to mental health. The idea and strategy of providing *Social Ibasho* for children who are not able to attend school mean that *Social Ibasho* is believed or at least expected to bring about beneficial effects on the mental health of the children. This can also be applied to people in general.

On the other hand, it is also valuable to take into account the probability of negative aspects of *Social Ibasho*. Behind the attitudes and behaviors of an individual who always seeks *Social Ibasho* may be an intense desire to be approved. When self-esteem is supported only by approval from others because the individual is unable to approve his/her own values, it is probable that he/she had failed to internalize the ego-supporting object (usually, the mother) (Winnicott, 1958) in his/her mind. Desperately seeking *Social Ibasho* can be regarded as defensive behavior by an individual who is not able to find the benefits of *Personal Ibasho*, if there are any. It is interesting to newly examine the question of whether *Social Ibasho* is beneficial or detrimental to young adult and adolescent mental health.

If the above hypothesis that women are more likely than men to experience

*Social Ibasho* is correct, it is probable that the significance of each *Ibasho* and its relationship to mental health are different, depending on the gender. Taking this presumption into account, this study will examine the relationship between each type of *Ibasho* and mental health for each gender.

To summarize, targeting Japanese young adults, this study aims at:

- 1) verifying the validity of the two-factor structure of the *Ibasho* Scale, and if it is verified, to see whether or not correlation between the two factors is statistically significant, and if it is, whether the correlation is congruent or inverse,
- 2) examining whether or not there are gender differences in the degree of experiencing *Social* and *Personal Ibasho*, and
- 3) to see if *Social* and *Personal Ibasho* are related to mental health at a statistically significant level for each gender, and if so, whether the relationship is congruent or inverse.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1. Procedures

This study was based on a questionnaire survey conducted in April 2023, targeting under- and post-graduate Japanese freshmen. The questionnaire was sent to every student scheduled to be enrolled as a first year student at a university in Hyogo Prefecture, Japan in 2024. They were instructed to submit their answered questionnaire after the entrance ceremony. The total number of respondents was 228 (men: 96, women: 130, gender unknown: 2), mean age (SD) 19.4 (2.0). The protocol of this study was approved by the Ethical Committee of Hyogo University of Teacher Education. Anonymity and voluntary participation were guaranteed.

### 2.2. Scales

#### *Ibasho* Scale

The *Ibasho* Scale, developed by Harada & Takiwaki (2014), consists of 23 items with 15 *Social Ibasho* subscale- and 8 *Personal Ibasho* subscale items. Details of the 23 items are shown in Table 1. Items 1 to 15 are *Social Ibasho* and 16 to 23 are *Personal Ibasho* items. Respondents were instructed to choose the number that best applied to him/her, 5 being the most and 1 being the least applicable.

Clinical Outcomes in Routine Evaluation-Outcome Measure (CORE-OM: Evans et al., 2000, 2002).

CORE-OM was developed as a standardized brief outcome measure for use in both routine clinical training and psychotherapy research. It consists of 34 items, with each item being used to assess one of four subscales: symptomatic problems, life functioning, psychological well-being, and risk to self and others. The reliability and validity of the Japanese version of the CORE-OM were confirmed by Uji, Sakamoto, Adachi, & Kitamura (2012). In this study, in order to reduce respondent burden, 12 items belonging to the Symptomatic Problem subscale with the one-factor structure that Uji et al (2012) had also confirmed, were applied. Respondents were instructed to choose the number that best applied to him/her, 5

being the most and 1 being the least applicable. The higher the score, the more severe the level of Symptomatic Problems.

### 2.3. Statistical Analyses

CFA will be conducted to see the validity of the two-factor structure model of *Ibasha* Scale. The compatibility of the two-factor model with the data will be evaluated by the Comparative Fit Index (CFI), the Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and  $\chi^2/df$ . According to conventional criteria, a good fit is indicated by CFI > .97, RMSEA < .05, and  $\chi^2/df$  < 2, and an acceptable fit by CFI > .95, and RMSEA < .08, and  $\chi^2/df$  < 3. If the two-factor structure model is found to be invalid, another factor model will be explored. After confirming the number of factors constituting *Ibasha* Scale, gender differences in *Ibasha* subscale scores will be examined, and furthermore, the relationship of each subscale with mental health (indicated by CORE-OM Symptomatic Problem Score) will be examined by calculating partial correlation indices, for men and women respectively.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Validity of Two-Factor Model

The CFA proved favorable compatibility of the two-factor model structure, i.e., CFI = .99, RMSEA = .039, and  $\chi^2/df$  = 1.35, verifying its validity. Between the two factors, statistically significant correlation was observed with a positive value (the standardized covariance between the two factors was .68 ( $p < .001$ )) (Figure 1).

### 3.2. Internal Consistency of Each Subscale

Correlations between each *Ibasha* Scale item and its subscale score ranged from .79 to .92 (Table 1). Cronbach's coefficients alpha of *Social Ibasha* and *Personal Ibasha* were .98 and .95, respectively. These indicate good internal consistency of both *Social* and *Personal Ibasha* subscales.

### 3.3. Gender Differences

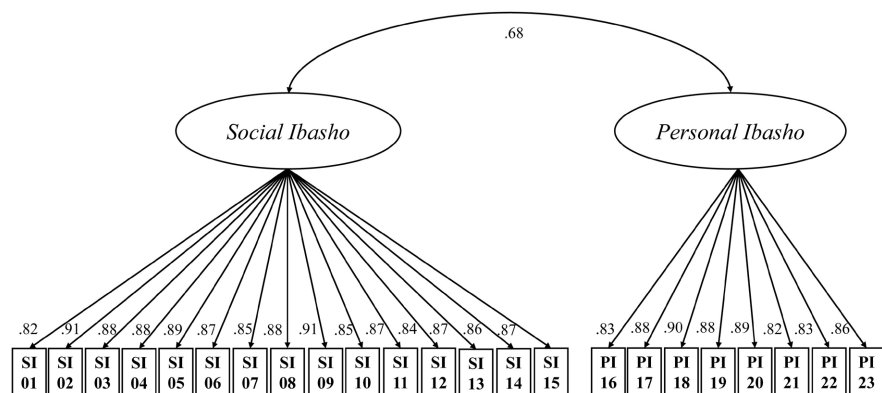
The mean score for each *Ibasha* subscale (*Social-* and *Personal-Ibasha*) were calculated for men and women respectively (Table 2). Women were more likely than men to mark a high score in *Social Ibasha*, whereas there was no statistical gender difference in *Personal Ibasha*.

### 3.4. Partial Correlation between Each *Ibasha*-Subscale Score and CORE-OM Symptomatic Problem Score

As demonstrated in the CFA, there was a significant positive correlation between *Social Ibasha* and *Personal Ibasha*. Therefore, a partial correlation index was applied to see the relationship between one *Ibasha* score and CORE-OM Symptomatic Problem score to remove the effect of the other *Ibasha* score, for each gender.

Among men, the partial correlation between *Social Ibasho* and CORE-OM Symptomatic Problems (removing the effect of *Personal Ibasho*) was  $-.33$  ( $p = .001$ ), which meant that *Social Ibasho* is positively related to mental health in a congruent direction. The partial correlation between *Personal Ibasho* and CORE-OM Symptomatic Problems (removing the effect of *Social Ibasho*) was  $-.17$  ( $p = .10$ ), which meant that *Personal Ibasho* is not significantly correlated with mental health.

Among women, the partial correlation between *Social Ibasho* and CORE-OM Symptomatic Problems (removing the effect of *Personal Ibasho*) was  $.04$  ( $p = .65$ ), which meant that *Social Ibasho* is not significantly related to mental health. The partial correlation between *Personal Ibasho* and CORE-OM Symptomatic Problems (removing the effect of *Social Ibasho*) was  $-.20$  ( $p = .024$ ), which meant that *Personal Ibasho* is significantly correlated with mental health in a congruent direction.



Note: “SI” stands for “*Social Ibasho*” and “PI” stands for “*Personal Ibasho*”. Causal coefficients and covariance between *Social Ibasho* and *Personal Ibasho* are standardized.

**Figure 1.** Two-factor model of *Ibasho* Scale.

**Table 1.** Internal consistency of each *Ibasho* subscale.

	<i>Social Ibasho</i> subscale	Item-total correlation
SI_01	I have a comfortable relationship with friends, whom I can always be together with.	.85**
SI_02	I have a comfortable relationship with people who accept both my strengths and weaknesses.	.91**
SI_03	I have a comfortable relationship with people who need my ability.	.89**
SI_04	I have a comfortable relationship with groups of people I can easily join.	.91**
SI_05	I have a comfortable relationship with people who always accept me the way I am.	.88**
SI_06	I have a comfortable relationship with people who always have good expectations about what I do.	.85**
SI_07	I have a comfortable relationship with friends who are always willing to help me.	.89**

## Continued

SI_08	I have a comfortable relationship with someone who always cares for me.	.90**
SI_09	I have a comfortable relationship with someone who always appreciates what I do.	.88**
SI_10	I have a comfortable relationship with someone whom I always feel I can blend in with.	.87**
SI_11	I have a comfortable relationship with someone who always tries to understand my feelings.	.92**
SI_12	I have a comfortable relationship with someone who always depends on me.	.87**
SI_13	I have a comfortable relationship with people who make me feel that all I have to do is be there.	.88**
SI_14	I have a comfortable relationship with someone who always understands what I'm thinking or worried about.	.86**
SI_15	I have a comfortable relationship with someone who is always pleased when I am active .	.88**
	<i>Personal Ibasho</i> subscale	Item-total correlation
PI_16	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I am able to think about my future.	.79**
PI_17	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I am able to get rid of stress.	.87**
PI_18	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I am able to take a look at myself.	.91**
PI_19	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I am free to do as I like, without being bothered by anybody else.	.86**
PI_20	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I can look at past events.	.90**
PI_21	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I am able to forget about bad things and refresh my mind .	.87**
PI_22	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I can think about this or that by myself.	.90**
PI_23	I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I can reflect upon the day by myself.	.89**

Note: "SI" stands for "Social Ibasho" and "PI" stands for "Personal Ibasho". "Item-total correlation" means "item-subscale score correlation". \*\* $p < .01$

**Table 2.** Gender differences in *Social* and *Personal Ibasho* subscale scores.

	Mean score (SD) male/female	t-value
<i>Social Ibasho</i>	64.6 (12.3)/68.1 (10.8)	-2.3*
<i>Perrsonal Ibasho</i>	34.1 (6,4)/34.5 (6.2)	-.5

\* $p < .05$

#### 4. Discussion

In this study, the following findings were identified. *Ibasho* Scale consisted of two factors, *Social Ibasho* and *Personal Ibasho* that were positively correlated. Among men, *Social Ibasho* was significantly related to mental health in a congruent

direction, whereas among women, *Personal Ibasho* was significantly related to mental health in a congruent direction. Women were more likely than men to experience *Social Ibasho*, but there was no significant gender difference in experiencing *Personal Ibasho*. These findings will be discussed in order.

I would like to discuss the first finding that *Ibasho Scale* consists of two factors, *Social* and *Personal*. This means that although these two types of *Ibasho* are correlated in a congruent relationship, they are distinct from each other.

The statistically significant correlations between the two factors suggest the probability that they represent different aspects of the same phenomenon. Fujiyama's interpretation of the Winnicott idea of *capacity to be alone*, i.e., [physically] alone but being with someone else (the mother can be used as internal environment)" (*Personal Ibasho*) and "[physically] with someone else (the external object), yet [psychologically] alone (his/her inner world has a space to relax)" (*Social Ibasho*), endorses this result. It can be said that stable object relationship is a prerequisite for *Social Ibasho* and also for *Personal Ibasho*. An individual who is able to experience *Social Ibasho* is also able to experience *Personal Ibasho*, and vice versa.

Perhaps there needs to be more to the interpretation that experiencing the two types of *Ibasho* depends only on the stability of one's internal object relationships. Would it not be problematic to dismiss the effects of external factors such as socio-cultural, family environmental-, economic-, and socio-political factors? These external factors could dictate whether or not an individual with a stable object relationship is able to secure both types of *Ibasho*. At least, however, it can be concluded that an individual with a stable object relationship is more likely than an individual with an unstable object relationship to secure both types of *Ibasho*.

The second finding, the difference between men and women regarding the relationship of each type of *Ibasho* with mental health, should be discussed. *Social Ibasho* for men, and *Personal Ibasho* for women were significantly related to favorable mental health. As noted earlier, whether *Personal Ibasho* is related to mental health in a congruent or inverse direction has been controversial. In this study, it was found that *Personal Ibasho* assessed by the *Ibasho Scale* (Harada & Takiwaki, 2014) is not related to poor mental health, suggesting it is not the foundation for social maladjustment, including shut-in. Particularly for women, *Personal Ibasho* was positively related to sound mental health, which can be interpreted that an individual's ability to use the mother as internal environment enables her to experience *Personal Ibasho*, according to Fujiyama's (2002) interpretation of Winnicott's (1958) idea of *capacity to be alone*. It is assumed that experiencing *Personal Ibasho* necessitates the internalization of the trustworthy mother, which leads to the ability to trust oneself and the development of autonomy.

Meanwhile, among men, a positive relationship of *Social Ibasho* with mental health was found. It is assumed that the *Social Ibasho* subscale enables us to assess the *capacity to be alone* in the presence of other(s) (Winnicott, 1958). It is

intriguing that for women, *Social Ibasho* was not related to mental health despite the above result that they were more likely than men to experience *Social Ibasho*. This will be interpreted briefly in the next paragraph.

Third, the result regarding the gender difference in the experience of *Social Ibasho* should be discussed. As referred to in the Introduction, Sugimoto and Shoji (2006) report that regardless of an individual being a child or an adolescent, a female respondent is more likely than a male respondent to recognize social acceptance. The result that female young adults participating in this study were more likely than male participants to experience *Social Ibasho* (one of its functions being social acceptance) suggests that even after adolescence, for women in particular, social acceptance plays a big role in endorsing self-esteem. However, as mentioned earlier, *Social Ibasho* was not significantly associated with women's mental health. It is probable that for women, *Social Ibasho* has not only beneficial elements to facilitate sound mental health, but also psychologically energy-consuming elements such as subtle interpersonal conflicts and social requirements such as consideration for others, consequently off-setting one another in their relationship to mental health.

Here, limitations of this study should be noted. First, this study was a cross-sectional study, meaning that some identified significant relationships between the *Ibasho* and mental health are not causal, but merely related in some way. Secondly, both *Social Ibasho* and *Personal Ibasho* assessed by the *Ibasho* Scale (Harada & Takiwaki, 2014) had positive relationships with mental health. It is probable that this was partially due to the fact that every item in the Scale uses relatively positive wording. For example, if "I have a comfortable relationship with friends, whom I can always be together with (*Social Ibasho* item)" were "I have a relationship with friends, whom I am always together with", or if "I always have a comfortable place or time of my own where I am able to think about my future (*Personal Ibasho* item)" were "I always have a place or time of my own where I think about my future", the positive aspects of each *Ibasho* would have been less emphasized. Thirdly, this study was conducted at a university in Japan, where it is regarded as a virtue to keep harmony and not to express different opinions within interpersonal relationships. It is assumed that this cultural norm is one of the crucial factors influencing the results of this study, in particular, the results concerning *Social Ibasho*. It is too bold to generalize the results of this study as if they could be reflected in other cultures.

Be that as it may, this study was very valuable because of the finding that the type of *Ibasho* related to mental health was different between men and women. This result suggests that it is preferable to differentiate the intervention strategy for an individual with poor mental health, depending on the gender, i.e., providing men with *Social Ibasho* and supporting women to acquire the ability to spend time alone.

## 5. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that the *Ibasho* Scale consists of two factors, which are

closely related. The *Social Ibasho* factor was found to contribute to male youth mental health, whereas the *Personal Ibasho* was found to contribute to female youth mental health.

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## Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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