Loneliness and Isolation in Japanese Society and Measures to Respond

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Today's Briefing

- Problems Facing Japanese Society
- Systems to Support People

1. Problems Facing Japanese Society

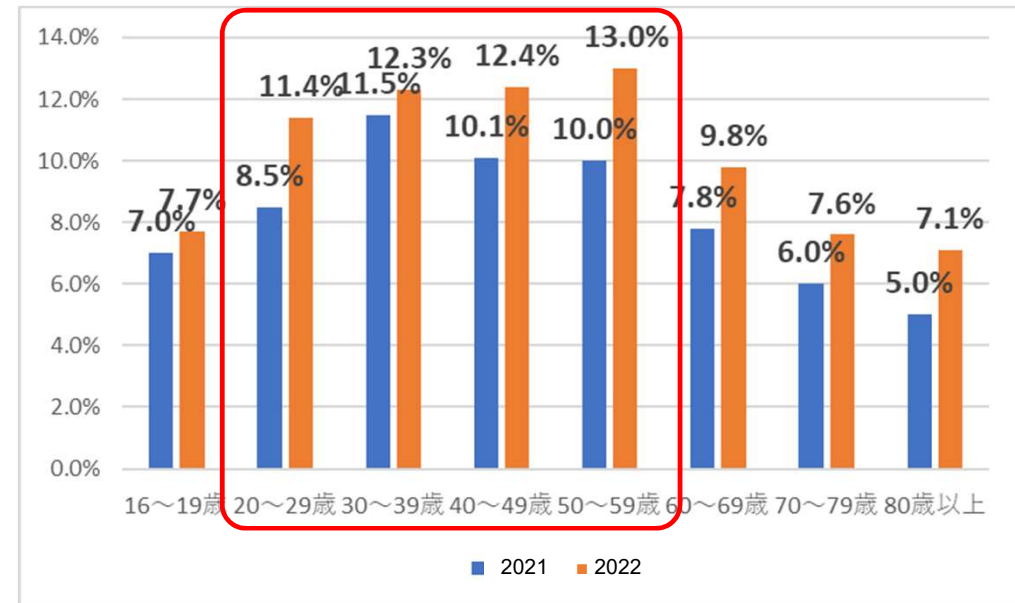# Concerns of Youth and the Middle-Aged, and of Seniors

- Difficulties of the youth and middle aged and worries over the future
  - ➢ High feelings of loneliness in youth
  - ➢ No one to talk to for youth and middle-aged

(From the Cabinet Secretariat Basic Survey on People's Connections)

People who feel lonely "frequently" or "always"
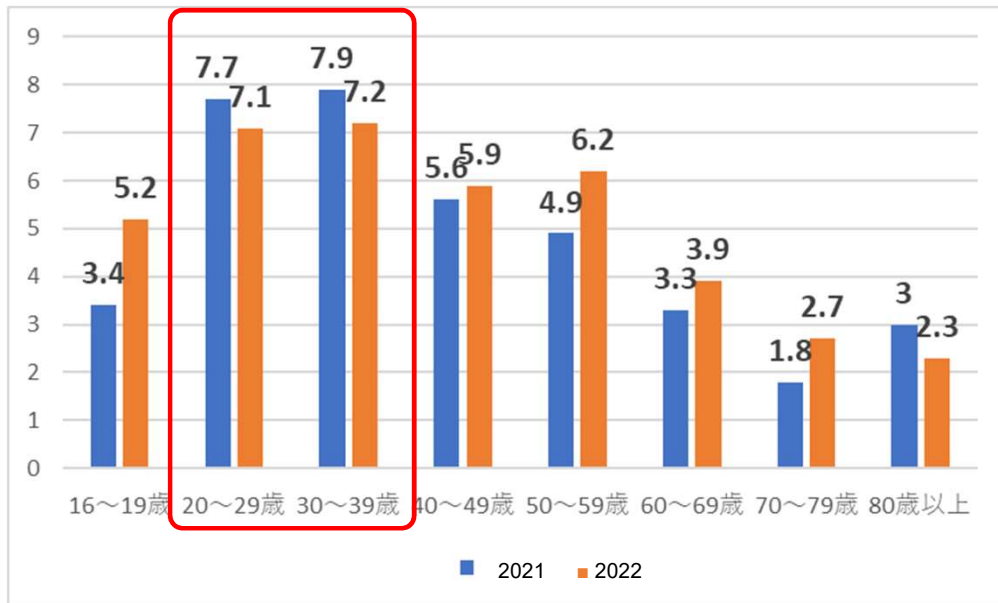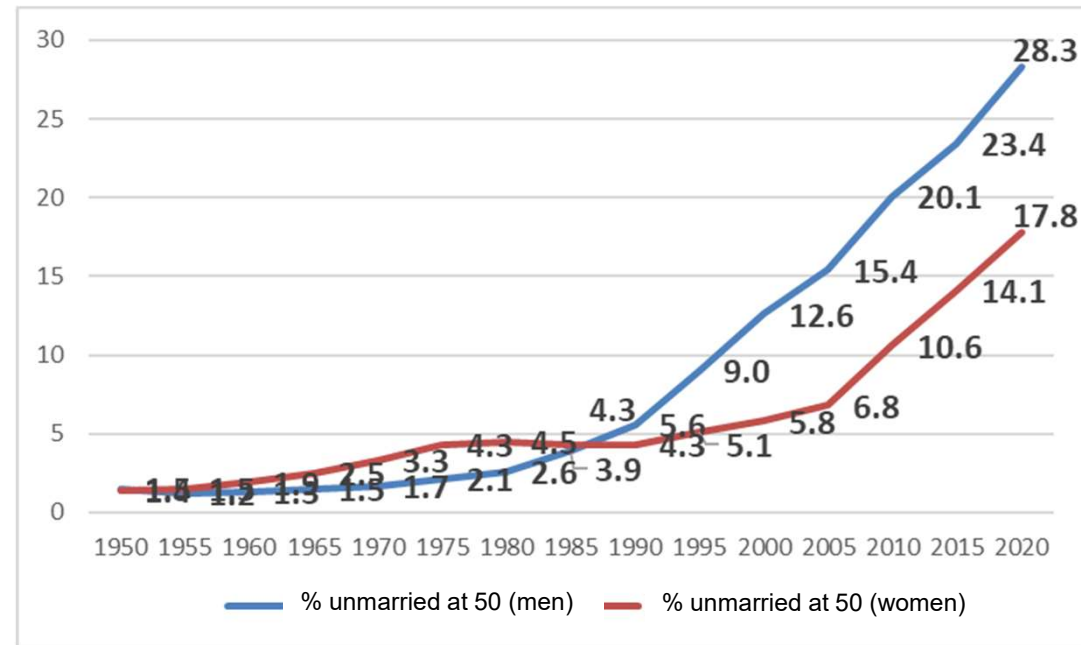

People who have no one to talk to

- Youth and Middle-Aged in a Post-Family Era
  - Rapid increase of "lifelong unmarried" (unmarried at 50 years old)
    - ✓ Over 1 in 4 men and 1 in 6 women are unmarried at 50 years old
    - ✓ People with no spouse or children are growing older
  - Family support has a major effect
    - ✓ Research on support shows that parents, spouses, and children provide by far the most support
    - ✓ In Japanese society, not marrying means not having any family aside from parents

| | 1.4 | 1.2 | 1.3 | 1.5 | 1.7 | 2.1 | 2.6 | 3.9 | 4.3 | 5.1 | 5.8 | 6.8 | 10.6 | 14.1 | 17.8 |
(chart values, men line: 28.3, 23.4, 20.1, 15.4, 12.6, 9.0, 5.6, 4.3; women line shown with — % unmarried at 50 (men)   — % unmarried at 50 (women))

It is becoming an era where family support is not the norm!

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- ✓ Single children supporting elderly parents
- ✓ Lack of relations to support the child (acceleration of loneliness/isolation?)

- Worries of Seniors
  - Increase in "lonely deaths" expected (cases where no one is present for the death and it is not discovered for some time)
    - ✓ People who died at home and 4 or more days passed before discovery (National Police Agency report, 2024)
    - ✓ 65 and over: 10,887 cases in six months, 21,774 cases if annualized
    - ✓ Total: 15,072 cases in six months, 30,144 cases if annualized
  - Growing shift towards aged population and being single
    - ✓ Japan's "2025 Problem": The "Dankai generation" (baby boomers) will all be 75 or older
    - ✓ Issues in dealing with people without any guarantors, too many locations to visit

Ambulance transport for people without guarantors

Handling affairs after death

And Yet, Our General Lack of Awareness

- Consumer Co-operative Institute of Japan 2023 survey of people aged 25 to 54

A	B	A, Slightly A	B, Slightly B
A society with close interactions with people is better, even if annoying	A society that respects individual freedom is better, even if lonely	34%	66%
No need to interact with people without a goal or some benefit	Interactions with people are vital, even without a goal or some benefit	51.2%	48.8%
Many people think only of themselves when they act	Many people think of others' happiness when they act	78.4%	21.6%

Japanese Society, Where People Cannot Ask for Help or Show Weakness

State of connections

Important to read the room and other people

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Basis of society

Earn money to live by making an effort

People with hardships

Think negatively

Might ruin the mood

Might not be chosen anymore

Would bother them

Will think I didn't try hard enough

Being helped by people

Cannot ask for help

Hardships overlooked as a result

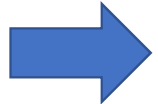Also...

People who want to help

Shouldn't interfere too much in personal affairs

Everyone's situation is different

Excessive respect for the individual

Don't offer unasked for help

2. Systems to Support People

Characteristics of People Who Do Not Connect with Support

- 3 "don'ts"
  - Don't think the support is for them
  - Don't have the time or energy to find the support
  - Don't know how to receive support
- Cabinet Secretariat survey (2022): Reasons not to receive support by degree of loneliness

Effort is needed to ensure support reaches people!

- ✓ Not needed, can persevere
- ✓ Don't know how to receive support
- ✓ Too much effort

	n	Don't need it	Not needed, can persevere	Don't know how to receive support	Too much effort	Embarrassing	Will burden the other person	Asked for support but was refused
Never	1098	81.1%	13.0%	9.1%	4.7%	1.5%	0.9%	0.7%
Almost never	2783	74.0%	18.0%	12.0%	6.8%	1.9%	1.1%	0.5%
Occasionally	1633	64.2%	22.4%	20.2%	12.3%	5.6%	3.1%	0.7%
Sometimes	1361	52.5%	22.6%	28.4%	16.2%	8.0%	4.6%	1.0%
Frequently/always	426	35.9%	20.4%	39.9%	20.0%	13.1%	10.8%	4.9%

An Era Where Places to Belong and Connections Are Intentionally Arranged

A society where it is easy to be alone and feel distant from people

A society where preparations have to intentionally be made for opportunities to connect with people
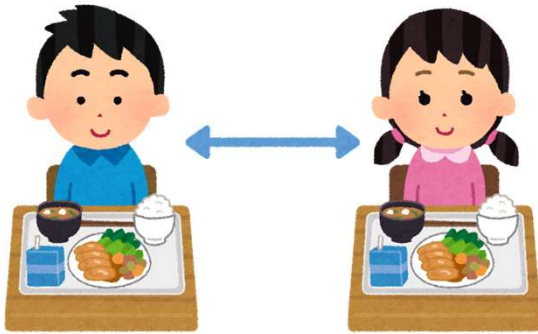
- ➤ To each their own
- ➤ Can't say what you really feel
- ➤ Shift to online
- ➤ Avoiding offense

Shift to Policies for Places to Belong

- 1980s："Free schools" and "free spaces"
- 2000s: "Places to belong" gained a special meaning beyond a place to be
- 2020s: Explosion of policies for places to belong

A society where places to belong have to intentionally be made

Operating a Place to Belong

- Key point for making a place to belong: Two kinds of access
  - ✓ Physical access: Efforts to make it simple to go there
    - ➢ Nearby
    - ➢ Difficulty of asking for help or interacting
    - ➢ Connect it with normal daily activities (meals, haircuts)
  - ✓ Psychological access: A place where it feels comfortable to be there
    - ➢ Virtuous cycle of acceptance and empathy

- Gradual participation and multiple sources of funding
  - ✓ Gradual participation: Users and operators
    - ➢ User perspective: Efforts to ensure it reaches people who need it
    - ➢ Operator: Create a loose system of participation that does not separate participants and supporters
  - ✓ Operation with multiple sources of funding: Where to take money, and where to provide free services
  - ✓ Consider funding sources depending on the goal: Business income, subsidies/grants, donations

Conclusion: Future Issues for Japanese Society

- Pressing issue: Seniors
  - ➢Checking in on the growing number of seniors living alone
  - ➢Responding to lonely and isolated deaths, and similar situations

- Mid- to long-term issue: The middle-aged
  - ➢Rebuilding connections for youths and middle-aged without the support of families
  - ➢Building places to belong (places to gather)
  - ➢Dealing with people not interested in connections