

'Parasite singles' no longer can afford to live on their own

By NATSUKO FUKUE

Staff writer

In sharp contrast with a decade ago, when working women who lived with their family were called "parasite singles" because they wanted to enjoy an affluent lifestyle, young women now stay at home because they don't have a choice.

According to a recent Cabinet Office survey, they can't afford to live on their own as the economic downturn is hitting them just like everyone else.

In the late 1990s, when the phrase "parasite single" was invented, single working women living at home were criticized for depending on their parents for daily living expenses while using their salary for expensive clothes and overseas trips.

But Shingo Kukimoto, a researcher in the Cabinet Office's Institute for Research on Household Economies, said young women now feel insecure about the future because of the worsening job market. As a result, they are less likely to take risks and live alone compared with a decade ago, he said.

According to the survey, 71 percent of single women from their mid-20s to their mid-30s had full-time jobs in 2007, down from 77.7 percent in 1998, and their average monthly net income has dropped from ¥170,000 to ¥157,000.

"The figures show that young people these days have less opportunity to be financially independent," Kukimoto said.

The survey also found that these women are more likely to help out with the family budget and

housework than their counterparts a decade ago.

In 2007, 57.1 percent respondents said they put money into the family budget, while the figure was only 49.1 percent in 1998. On average, they spent 49.3 minutes a day doing housework in 2007, compared with 43.4 minutes in 1998.

Miyoko Namura, a part-time English instructor in her late 20s, gives money to her parents and does most of the housework, including cooking, laundry and cleaning the bathtub.

She said she is not thinking about moving out because she her future is unclear.

"It's not that I stay with my parents to lead an affluent life. It's my turn to support them," she said.

"Being a part-time worker, I came to realize it's important to have benefits that full-time workers receive, such as unemployment insurance."

Researcher Kukimoto said some stay at home because they need to take care of their elderly parents.

Mitsuka Oba, 27, who lives with her parents in Fukuoka's Itoshima district, is one of these.

Oba, once a full-time employee at an advertising agency, often working until midnight, but she is now looking for a job near her home to spend more time with her parents.

She said she stays with her parents because she is worried about their health.

"Both of my older sisters live on their own, so I'm staying with my parents. They have high blood pressure and can easily become sick. They feel worried if nobody is at home," she said. "If I ever move out, it's when I get married."

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