

Poor aged moms grope to help adult offspring financially cope

By MICHIKO MUNAKATA
Kyodo News

While it is true that parenting is lifelong work, in Japan, some elderly mothers are struggling as they try to help their grownup sons and daughters make ends meet despite their own financial difficulties.

There are increasing cases where elderly women living alone squeeze out their pension benefits — their only source of income in most cases — to financially support offspring who have seen their incomes fall or lost their jobs due to the tough economic situation.

"I just can't help but do something as a mother," said a 78-year-old woman in Tokyo who gives ¥20,000 out of her ¥110,000 in pension benefits every month to her married son.

"My son's pay has been cut due to the economic downturn. And I just hope that (my money) could be used for my grandkid's college tuition," said the woman, who lives by herself in an apartment run by the Tokyo Metropolitan Government.

Yoshiko Akutsu, a member of the Japan Pensioners' Union, sees a growing number of women, especially those whose husbands have passed away, coming and asking for help because they are in financial difficulty due to supporting offspring, who, while grown up, are not financially independent.

"If you have a husband, then you can make ends meet because you have pension benefits for both of you," she said. "But you face a problem when your husband dies and the total amount of pension benefits goes down."

While Japan is known as a country of longevity, the average life expectancy is considerably longer for women than for men — around 86 years and 79 years — so chances are high

wives will survive their husbands.

Many elderly women, however, are able to receive only a limited amount of pension benefits because until April 1986 women who were dependent on employed husbands were not obliged to join the national pension system.

A 2008 survey by the Cabinet Office revealed that elderly women who lived by themselves were in a more severe financial situation than elderly men who lived alone.

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