

On Considering the Problem of the Elderly

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Tamura, Akira. *Roujin Mondai wo kangaeuni atatte*, No.68, Toshikagaku Kenkyushitsu, Yokohama City, December 1980, p.2.(original in Japanese)

No one can escape the fate of aging while we live. It is said that aging has already begun physically at the age of 18. If this is the case, human beings live to get old. Aging well is the biggest challenge in anyone's life.

Aging in terms of physical aspect can be delayed considerably if people move and exercise continuously. Mental health can be improved considerably, and creative activities can be sustained as well, if mental abilities are used continuously and flexibly. To age well, we must continue to actively engage in physical and mental activities.

Even so, we cannot escape aging completely. According to Professor Yasukawa's estimate, Japan will have an aging rate of 15.4% for those aged 65 and over by 2000, making it the oldest country in the world, surpassing Sweden, West Germany, and other countries. In the U.S., U.K., and other countries, the aging rate is expected to decline after peaking in 1990. Therefore, it is inevitable to take measures for those elderly people becoming inactive.

The problems for the aged can be divided into the following five categories. The first problem is income, the second is housing, the third is medical care, the fourth is personal care in case of physical disability, and the fifth is mental stability and satisfaction.

The first issue can only be considered at the national level. The second and third would be ones including housing and senior citizen facilities to be responded jointly by the national and local governments. The fourth and fifth are the most difficult and challenging issues when coming up with precise measures to take for them. The first two issues are also major problems, and income and housing issues become major supports and requisites for the fourth and fifth ones. However, it is difficult to address and institutionalize issues of labor, love, and heart tangled with money, privacy, self-esteem, and constraint. Public administrations have no other option to rely on families, neighbors, volunteers, and local communities for support. The elderly people should make efforts to age well with self-awareness, and local governments are expected to play an important role in building a community that can respond to the modern needs of urban society.