

Aged Japanese are pressed into service as carers

Japan

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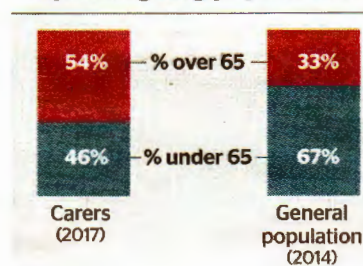
Japan's demographic crisis was thrown into **stark relief** by a government report showing that more than **half of all live-in carers** are themselves pensioners.

The survey shows that in households across Japan where the elderly require full-time care both the caregiver and care recipient are aged over 65 in 55 per cent of cases.

For the first time the proportion of shared-care households where both parties are aged over 75 has risen above 30 per cent, according to the research by the Ministry of Health, Welfare and Labour.

In Japan this phenomenon is known

Japan's ageing population



as *rou-rou kaigo*, meaning care between the elderly. People looking after their partners or their parents are included in the survey. In two thirds of cases women are the caregivers.

Experts warn that this situation creates a huge mental and physical burden for the caregivers, who may also need their own support.

Japan has long been aware that it is facing a demographic crisis driven by declining birthrates and longer life expectancy, causing problems for politicians wary of reform. Over time there will be fewer working-age taxpayers to support the increasingly high welfare bill.

Shinzo Abe, the prime minister, has described the declining birthrate and ageing population as "the root of the

obstacles in economic growth" in the country, the world's third largest economy. He has set a goal of increasing women's role in the workforce.

The survey results on elderly care came as a major Japanese financial **company said** that it would ask older employees to keep **working** because clients trusted their experience.

Daiwa Securities Group's head office plans to abolish its age cap of 70 next month. Those who agree to keep working will be paid at normal rates and have their contracts renewed every year, subject to medical check-ups.

Atsushi Mochizuki, managing director in charge of personnel affairs, said: "Under the society of super-ageing, in a few tens of years there is a possibility that the idea of retirement will disappear. We judged that it is important to prepare alternatives so that people can keep working, raising one's skill levels as well."

Yasuhiro Yuki, a professor at Shukutoku University, said: "Under the environment of *rou-rou kaigo*, it is often the case that carers are also at the stage who may require care [themselves]." Professor Yuki added that the government should not cut services to assist carers, some of which were met by insurers.

Most Japanese businesses still set a retirement age of 60, although many employees stay on at lower pay rates. The pension age in Japan is gradually being raised to 65 by 2025.

In an increasing number of cases people who are even older than this are staying in work. In 2005 about one third of people aged 65 to 69 were employed. By 2015 more than four in ten people in this age group were doing so.

Japan has the world's longest-lived and most rapidly ageing society. A quarter of the population are over 65, and an estimated 15 per cent of them suffer from some form of dementia. The country's birthrate is in long-term decline and by 2060 the proportion of "elderly" Japanese is expected to rise to 40 per cent. By redefining old age as 75 and over, this statistic would be halved.