The social isolation of elderly people and local communities
-from "isolation" to "connection", and then towards "mutual support"-

In this section, the characteristics and background of elderly people prone to lapsing into social isolation (a state in which interaction with family or the local community is significantly scarce from an objective standpoint) are discussed along with consideration regarding the directional movement of initiatives for eliminating social isolation accordingly.

In order to prevent the isolation of elderly people and maintain human interaction with society even in old age, mutual support in the local community is a necessity and prompt initiatives are desired while working together with each main constituent.

1 Characteristics of Elderly PeopleProne to Lapsing into Social Isolation

○**Status of interaction between elderly people and their families or the local community as seen from survey results (Chart 1-3-1~4)**

・When observing the current status of persons over the age of 60, as a whole "persons who have daily verbal exchanges", "persons who have someone to depend on when in trouble", and "persons who associate with friends or neighbors" were around 90%, and interaction with family or friends and neighbors is being attained overall.

・Persons who live alone or with poor health, unmarried or divorced persons, and persons with troubled life circumstances lack in regular conversations and relationships with neighbors, and there are many who have no one to turn when in trouble.
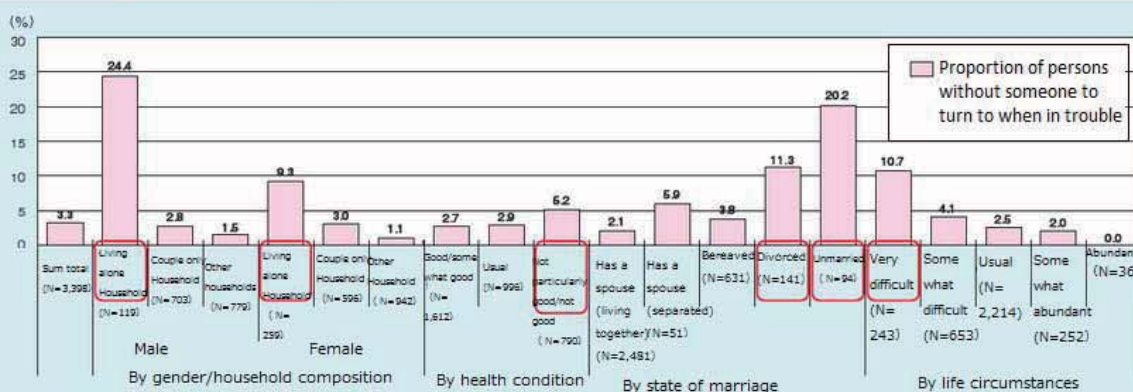

Chart 1-3-1 <Verbal exchange frequency> How frequently do you talk to people (including family members that live together)
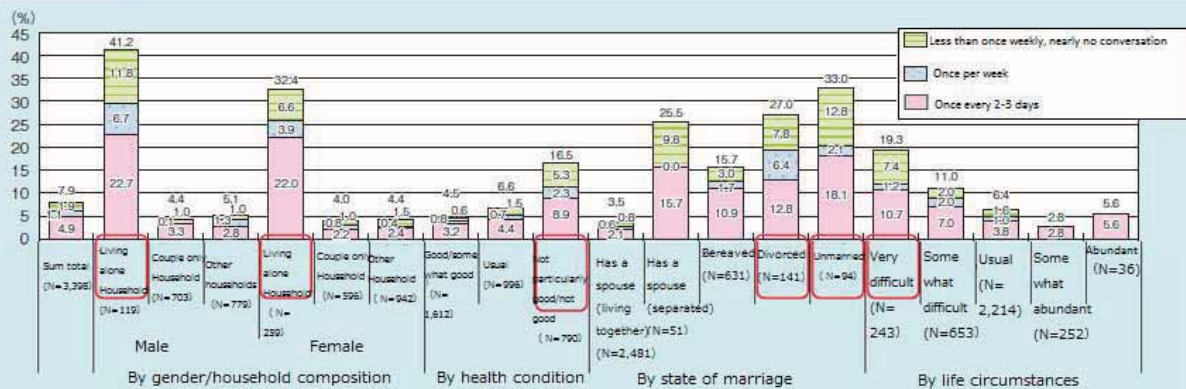
Source: Cabinet Office "Survey Regarding the Current Living Conditions of Elderly People" (2008)
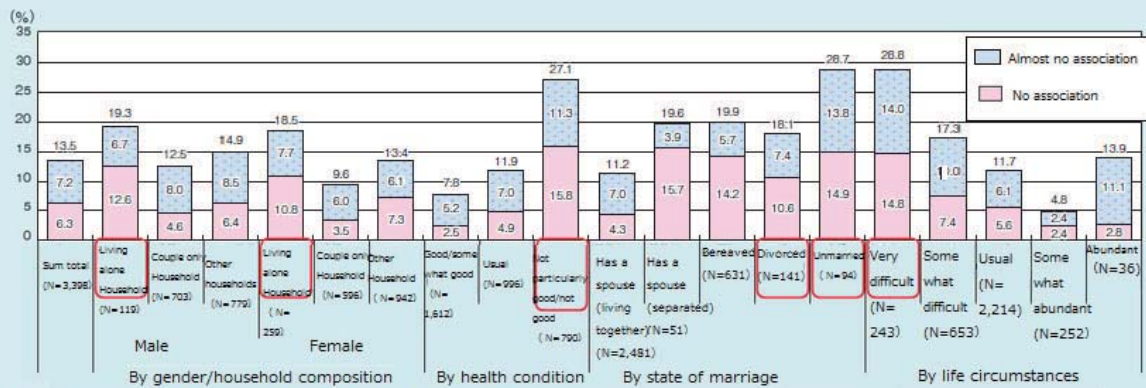

Chart 1-3-2 Proportion of persons without someone to turn to when in trouble

Source: Cabinet Office "Survey Regarding the Current Living Conditions of Elderly People" (2008)
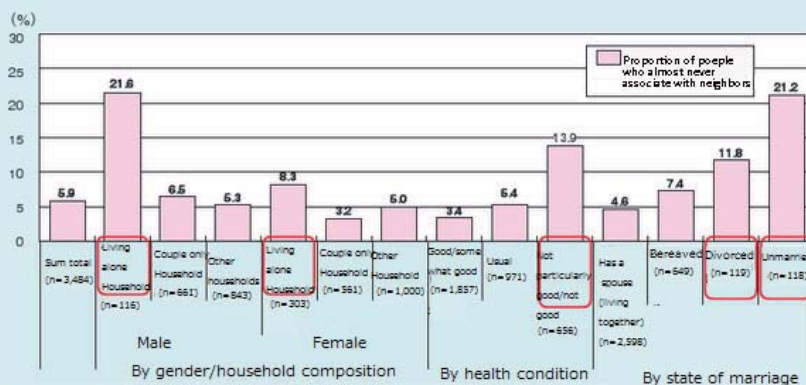
Chart 1-3-3　Regarding association with friends

Source: Cabinet Office "Survey Regarding the Current Living Conditions of Elderly People" (2008)

Chart 1-3-4　Proportion of people who almost never normally associate with neighbors

Source: Cabinet Office "Survey Regarding the Current Living Conditions of Elderly People" (2008)

2　Background of the Social Isolation of Elderly People

○Change in household composition

・Among households with elderly people above the age of 65, 3-generation households are decreasing and couple-only households are on the rise. As such, the risk of social isolation is rising as seen from the point of view of household compositions.

・The rate of marriage in recent years is decreasing, and the possibility exists that the rise in the divorce rate will exacerbate the social isolation of elderly people in the future.
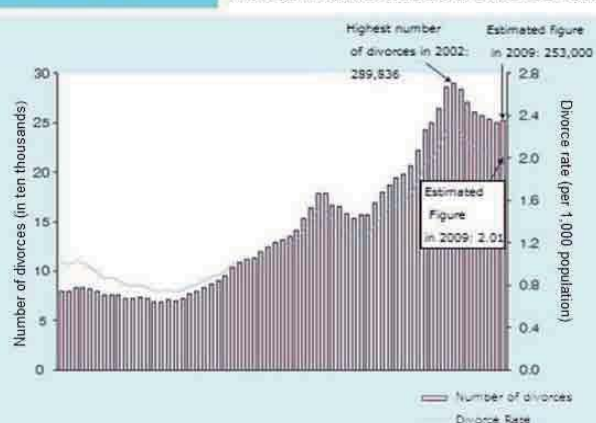
Chart 1-3-5　Trends in marriage and marriage rate
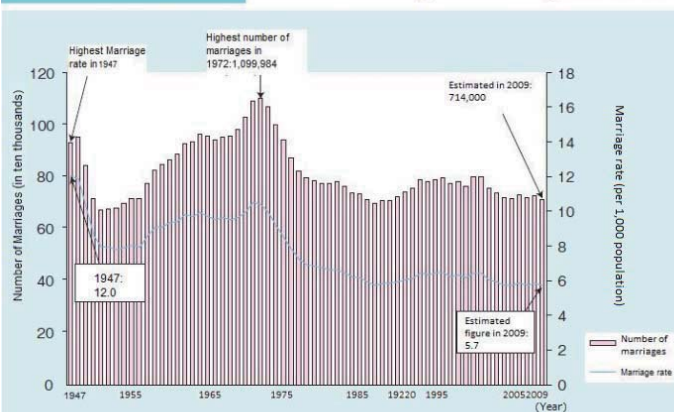
Source: Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare "Annual Estimates of Vital Statistics" (2009)

Chart 1-3-6　Trends in divorces and divorce rate

Source: Health Labor and Welfare Ministry "Annual Estimates of Vital Statistics (2009)"

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○Course of creating employed workers

・The course of creating employed workers , in which workplace and residence are separated and the connection to a region is a superficial trend, is becoming a cause for weakening regional human relationships. It is possible that this is becoming the primary factor for the social isolation of elderly people.

○Improvement of living convenience

・Living has come about even without interacting with family and regional people.Because of this, inconveniences arise with old age such as health problems, and it becomes likely only with purchasable goods and services in the market that there is no one to ask help from when living becomes difficult.
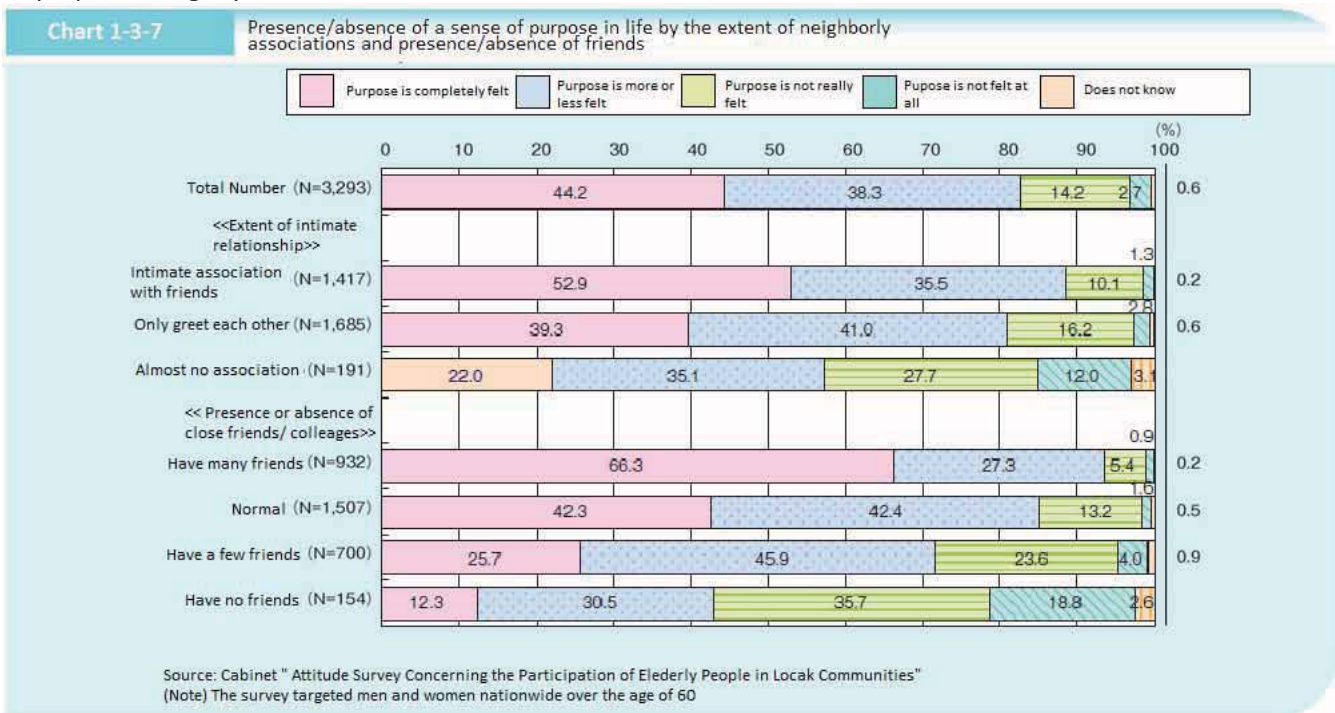
○Living and socioeconomic circumstances

・People who have difficult living circumstances often do not have friends or people to turn to.
・In addition, with the influence of socioeconomic circumstances reaching up to old age, it is conceivable that the results of inhibiting the formulation of stable work, residence, and personal connections through family life over the long term are emerging cases as social isolation in old age.

3 Problems Brought Forth by Social Isolation of the Elderly

○Lessened purpose in life

・80% of all elderly persons feel a purpose in living, but there are 40% without friends and 60% who don't associate with neighbors. As such, social isolation is bringing about serious effects even among elderly persons with a sense of purpose or dignity in life.

Chart 1-3-7   Presence/absence of a sense of purpose in life by the extent of neighborly associations and presence/absence of friends

	Purpose is completely felt	Purpose is more or less felt	Purpose is not really felt	Pupose is not felt at all	Does not know
Total Number (N=3,293)	44.2	38.3	14.2	2.7	0.6
<<Extent of intimate relationship>>				1.3	
Intimate association with friends (N=1,417)	52.9	35.5	10.1		0.2
Only greet each other (N=1,685)	39.3	41.0	16.2	2.8	0.6
Almost no association (N=191)	22.0	35.1	27.7	12.0	3.1
<< Presence or absence of close friends/ colleages>>				0.9	
Have many friends (N=932)	66.3	27.3	5.4		0.2
Normal (N=1,507)	42.3	42.4	13.2	1.6	0.5
Have a few friends (N=700)	25.7	45.9	23.6	4.0	0.9
Have no friends (N=154)	12.3	30.5	35.7	18.8	2.6

Source: Cabinet " Attitude Survey Concerning the Participation of Elederly People in Locak Communities"
(Note) The survey targeted men and women nationwide over the age of 60

・Additionally, in comparison to elderly people in other countries, elderly people with lower frequencies of contact with children who live separately are common in Japan, and those who feel a purpose for living through interaction with family and friends are few (Chart 1-3-8).