

## Apathetically yours -- we don't wanna work

By MICHAEL HOFFMAN

Spa! (Feb. 13)

"For my parents' sake I suppose I should get a job," muses Hiroshi, 33. "But I've been saying that to myself for years now. The fact is, I'm fed and clothed whether I work or not . . ."

Is Hiroshi an extreme case?

Yes and no. Yes in the sense that he's been a NEET -- neither in education, employment or training; in short, doing nothing -- for four years. No in the sense that he's far from alone in that regard -- NEETs in Japan are currently said to number anywhere from 640,000 to 850,000 in Japan.



But Spa!'s subject is not specifically NEETs. It is grown children who, employed or not, are entirely or partially supported by their aging parents. The magazine's informal poll of 169 men and women aged 25-35 finds no fewer than 32 percent of them in that position.

Spa!'s report is timely. 2007 is a demographically charged year. The first baby boomers, turning 60, will retire en masse. The "junior" baby boomers, now entering their 30s, emerged from college in the 1990s to find the doors to the good life closed. Recession-pinchd firms were not hiring. For many young people, the only work available was part-time, low-end and ill-paid. Parental financial assistance came to be taken for granted. Can it continue, as the parents retire?

Some children don't intend it to end. Azumi, 24, is the daughter of a banker earning 20 million yen a year. Once she thought she wanted to work at "helping people," and in fact worked briefly as a caregiver, but "physically and mentally it was too hard." She quit, and her parents seem to find her idleness charming. They do nothing to discourage it, and support her in style -- dad even bought

her a car.

"No, I'm not worried about the future," she says. "My parents are loaded."

Still, Spa! pursues, shouldn't a person do *something*?

"Well, my friend and I are talking about starting a company."

"What kind of company?"

"No idea."

Yuya, 26, began his adult life 1.4 million yen in debt to three consumer loan companies. That can happen when you're unemployed and playing the slot machines. When he turned to his parents for help, his father replied, "It's your ass. Wipe it yourself!" That's good, but unsustainable when debt collectors start showing up on your doorstep. So Yuya would get bailed out after all. It weighed on him, though. "Every time we sat down to a meal I'd be thinking, 'There's really no excuse for this.' "

Finally, he landed a full-time job. Spa! doesn't tell us what it is, but his debt load is shrinking (it's down to 1 million yen), and an independent future is not impossible. His parents are keeping their fingers crossed.

But for Hiroshi there seems no hope. For six years after leaving vocational school he worked full-time at a printing firm. He quit after a row with his boss, then drifted through various part-time jobs into his current apathy.

"I'm retiring in September," says his father. "But with my son in this situation, how can I not work?" He's looking for a post-retirement job. Hiroshi, meanwhile, gets by on money his grandmother secretly gives him from her pension. His expenses are minimal: midnight snacks at the convenience store. "I don't want anything," he says, "so there's no real problem."

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