

THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL PROBLEMS CAUSED  
BY THE INCREASING POPULATION OF THE ELDERLY  
IN MODERN SOCIETIES:  
AN ISLAMICALLY ORIENTED STUDY

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*The Problem as Seen by Modern Industrialized Societies*

The problem as seen by modern industrialized societies is that they are disturbed by the fact that their population is greying. This is expected to cause very serious economic, social and psychological crises. The problem is now seen as most acute in Japan, but it is closely followed by America and Europe. It is projected that by the year 2025, Japan will have twice as many old people as it has children.<sup>1</sup> This is anticipated to have serious repercussions on its economy and social life. Sheryl<sup>2</sup> states that:

“Japan, once the fastest-growing economy on the globe (is) now the world’s most rapidly aging industrial society. With one person in six already older than 65, the challenge of how Japan will support its aging society grows more bedeviling with each passing year. Not that the United States will be exempt from some of the same hardships, but Japan will be the world’s guinea pig: No nation has ever had experience with such an elderly society, and Japan is greying faster than the rest of the industrial world in North America and Europe”.

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<sup>1</sup> Sheryl WuDunn, “The Graying of Japan: Pension Lab for a Cost Conscious World,” *The New York Times*, September 2, 1997.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

The blessings of affluence and improved health conditions in industrial countries have resulted in an increase in life expectancy. According to the UNDP *Human Development Report* of 1998, life expectancy of more than 70 years was achieved by only 12 countries in 1960; in 1998, all industrial countries achieved this. Economists see this disadvantage disguised in the form of an accomplishment as a double-edged sword. This is because the rapidly increasing armies of the elderly population would be an unproductive burden on the economy. This impending economic 'doomsday' is reported in an alarming manner by Japanese economists. In the above mentioned study by Sheryl WuDunn of the New York Times, Atsushi Seike, professor of economics at Keio University is quoted to have said,

"There is no golden egg"... "So we have to get money from somewhere, and that is only from the people or an increase in their productivity. Unless policies change substantially, high payments will exhaust Japan's pension reserve fund some time before the year 2025. By that time, the total social welfare burden—much of its retirement and health care costs for the elderly—could reach as high as 73 percent of national income."

Furthermore, an official forecast of an advisory council appointed by Prime Minister Ryutaro Hashimoto alarmingly stressed that "unless the government's finances are overhauled, the burden from social welfare and fiscal debt will balloon". As a result, the report concluded that if the present system is not altered, the "*economy will collapse*."<sup>3</sup>

The lessons that the industrial countries can learn from Japan are rather distressing since the only way to temporarily help in solving this economic enigma is to significantly increase

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., Bold and italics, ours.