

= Sogen Kato =

Sogen Kato ( 1900 , Kat? S?gen , 22 July 1899 ? c . November 1978 ) was thought to have been Tokyo 's oldest man until July 2010 , when his mummified corpse was found in his bedroom . It was concluded he had likely died in November 1978 , aged 79 , and his family had never announced his death in an attempt to preserve his record . Relatives had rebuffed attempts by ward officials to see Kato in preparations for Respect for the Aged Day later that year , citing various reasons from him being a " human vegetable " to becoming a Sokushinbutsu . The cause of death was not determined due to the state of Kato 's body .

The discovery of Kato 's remains sparked a search for other missing centenarians lost due to poor record keeping by officials . A study following the discovery of Kato 's remains found that police did not know if 234 @, @ 354 people over the age of one hundred were still alive . Poor record keeping was to blame for many of the cases , officials admitted . One of Kato 's relatives was found guilty of fraud ; his relatives claimed ¥ 9 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 ( US \$ 117 @, @ 939 ; £ 72 @, @ 030 ) of pension meant for Kato .

= = History = =

= = = Discovery of the body = = =

After tracking down the residence in Adachi , Tokyo , where Kato was reportedly living , attempts by officials to meet him were rebuffed numerous times by the family . Many reasons were given by his relatives , including that he was a " human vegetable " and that he was becoming a Sokushinbutsu .

Eventually , Kato 's body was found by police and ward officials in July 2010 , when ward officials intending to honour his achievement of longevity on Respect for the Aged Day later that year were again rebuffed and police broke into the house . Found in a first floor room , Kato 's mummified remains were lying on a bed wearing underwear and pajamas and were covered with a blanket . Newspapers that were found in the room dated back three decades to the Sh?wa period , suggesting that Kato 's death may have occurred around November 1978 . An official named Yutaka Muroi said , " His family must have known he has ( d ) been dead all these years and acted as if nothing happened . It 's so eerie . "

The day after the visit , Kato 's granddaughter told an acquaintance that " my grandfather shut himself in a room on the first floor of our home 32 years ago , and we couldn 't open the door from the outside . My mother said , ' Leave him in there , ' and he was left as he was . I think he 's dead . " One official had reported concerns about Kato 's safety earlier in the year to his ward office . An autopsy failed to determine the cause of Kato 's death .

= = = Fraud trial = = =

Following the discovery of Kato 's body , two of his relatives were arrested in August 2010 , and subsequently charged with fraud . Prosecutors alleged that Michiko Kato , 81 , Kato 's daughter , and Tokimi Kato , 53 , his granddaughter , fraudulently received about ¥ 9 @, @ 500 @, @ 000 ( \$ 117 @, @ 939 ; £ 72 @, @ 030 ) of pension money . In addition , after Kato 's wife died in 2004 at the age of 101 , ¥ 9 @, @ 450 @, @ 000 ( \$ 117 @, @ 318 ; £ 71 @, @ 651 ) from a survivor 's mutual pension was deposited into Kato 's bank account between October 2004 and June 2010 . Approximately ¥ 6 @, @ 050 @, @ 000 ( \$ 75 @, @ 108 ; £ 45 @, @ 872 ) was withdrawn before his body was discovered . Kato was likely paid a senior welfare benefit from the time he turned 70 , which the family may also have used to their advantage . Investigators said that the pair defrauded the Japan Mutual Aid Association of Public School Teachers , who transferred the money into Kato 's account .

In November 2010 , the Tokyo District Court sentenced Tokimi Kato to a 2 ½ year sentence for fraud , suspended for four years . Judge Hajime Shimada said , " The defendant committed a

malicious crime with the selfish motive of securing revenue for her family . However , she has paid back the pension benefits and expressed remorse for the crime . "

= = Aftermath = =

After the discovery of Kato 's mummified corpse , other checks into elderly centenarians across Japan produced reports of missing centenarians and faulty record keeping . When Tokyo officials attempted to find the oldest woman in the city ? 113 @-@ year @-@ old Fusa Furuya ? they found her last known address was vacant . Furuya 's granddaughter said she had not seen her grandmother for several years . The revelations about the disappearance of Furuya and the death of Kato prompted a nationwide investigation , which concluded that police did not know if 234 @,@ 354 people older than 100 were still alive . More than 77 @,@ 000 of these people , officials said , would have been older than 120 years old if they were still alive . Poor record keeping was blamed for many of the cases , and officials said that many may have died during World War II . One register suggested a man was still alive at age 186 .

Following the revelations about Kato and Furuya , analysts investigated why record keeping by Japanese authorities was poor . Many seniors have , it has been reported , moved away from their family homes . Statistics show that divorce is becoming increasingly common among the elderly . Dementia , which afflicts more than two million Japanese , is also a contributing factor . " Many of those gone missing are men who left their hometowns to look for work in Japan ? s big cities during the country ? s pre @-@ 1990s boom years . Many of them worked obsessively long hours and never built a social network in their new homes . Others found less economic success than they ? d hoped . Ashamed of that failure , they didn ? t feel they could return home , " a Canadian newspaper reported several months after the discovery of Kato 's body .

Japan is the most elderly nation in the world ; as of October 2010 , 23 @.@ 1 percent of the population were found to be aged 65 and over , and 11 @.@ 1 percent were 75 and over . This has largely been caused by a very low birthrate ; as of 2005 , the rate was 1 @.@ 25 babies for every woman ? to keep the population steady the number needed to be 2 @.@ 1 . However , the issue of aging in the country has been increased by the government 's unwillingness to let immigrants into the country ? foreign nationals accounted for only 1 @.@ 2 percent of the total population as of 2005 . A 2006 report by the government indicates that by 2050 , 1 ? 3 of the population may be elderly .

The inquiry also noted that many elderly Japanese citizens were dying in solitude . " Die alone and in two months all that is left is the stench , a rotting corpse and maggots , " The Japan Times said in an editorial , one of many comments from the country 's press on the news . An editorial in Asahi Shimbun said that the findings suggested " deeper problems " in the Japanese register system . " The families who are supposed to be closest to these elderly people don 't know where they are and , in many cases , have not even taken the trouble to ask the police to search for them , " read the editorial . " The situation shows the existence of lonely people who have no family to turn to and whose ties with those around them have been severed . "

One Japanese doctor , however , said he was not surprised at the news . Dr. Aiba Miyoji , of the Tokyo Koto Geriatric Medical Centre , said many Japanese seniors were dying alone , ignored by their families . ? Some patients come in with their families , but many are alone or come in just with their social workers , ? he said . ? It happens especially in Tokyo . There are more and more single @-@ person families . ? Dr. Aiba added that a key reason for the statistics was because people in Japan are living longer than ever before . " That achievement is placing new burdens on a society where a declining number of working @-@ age Japanese have to fund rising health @-@ care and pension costs , " The Globe and Mail reported . Dr. Aiba said that because Tokyo was so crowded , families cannot possibly live together any more . ? There ? s not enough space for families to live together any more , ? he said .

A national census in 2005 found that 3 @.@ 86 million elderly Japanese citizens were living alone , compared with 2 @.@ 2 million a decade before . 24 @.@ 4 per cent of men and 9 @.@ 3 per cent of women over the age of 60 in Japan have no neighbours , friends or relatives on whom they could

rely , a more recent study discovered . In 2008 , the Associated Press reported that the number of elderly people committing suicide had reached a record high because of health and economic worries . " In what appears to be a collective cry for help , more than 30 @,@ 000 Japanese seniors are arrested every year for shoplifting . Many of those arrested told police they stole out of feelings of boredom and isolation , rather than any economic necessity , " The Globe and Mail reported after the discovery of Kato 's corpse . Jeff Kingston , the Director of Asian Studies at the Japan Campus of Temple University , said , " It is a humanising phenomenon ? the Japanese are traditionally seen as sober , law @-@ abiding people ? when they are in fact scamsters like the rest of us . [ The story of the missing centenarians ] holds up a mirror to society and reflects realities that many in Japan do not want to accept . "