The assassination of Japan’s former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe on July 8 has stunned the country and sparked controversy over a number of social and political issues. Among them is the rising social interest in the "Lost Generation", as the suspect in this case has been revealed to be a typical figure of the generation.

“I feel like life is nothing more than struggling to somehow get back to zero after a negative start, ” a social media account thought to belong to Tetsuya Yamagami, unemployed 41-year-old suspect who shot the former PM, posted a few years ago.

As media coverage of the suspect's background - unemployed, financially struggling after graduating from high school in 1990s, isolated from society, and harboring grudge against society rather the political figure – and posts on the account spread, attention, especially from people of his generation, began to focus on the suspect's life story.

According to Google Trends analysis, searches for "ロスジェネ(Lost Generation)" surged in Japan on the day of assassination.

Lost Generation in Japan refers to those who graduated from high school or college in 1990s and early 2000s after the bursting of the bubble economy, and some, like Yamagami, have yet to find stable jobs and are now in their 40s and 50s.

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During the period of their graduation, Japan was in the midst of decades-long economic slump, dubbed as the “lost 20 years”, and the labor market was worse than ever.

Between 1999 and 2005 more than 40% of newly college graduates were frozen out. The situation was even harder for high school graduates.

At that time most of the employment in Japan consisted of lifetime employment. As companies stuck to their traditional recruiting policy of hiring new graduates en masse even after the economy recovered, those who could not land a regular job remained left out and became low-paid, non-regular workers dim career prospects.

Their struggles continue to this day. "I had been working as a temp since I graduated from college in 2000, but I've been out of work for the past 2 years due to the pandemic," a 44-year-old woman in Tokyo said. "I live with my parents to cover my living expenses. But they are already in their mid-70s, and I cannot imagine how I can survive after they are none”.

”It could have been me, ” an anonymous account, appeared to be from the same generation as Yamagami,posted after the assassination. "The crime he committed should never be justified. Having said that, how he suffered socially and economically can be understandable. I feel the same pain.”

rom the 1990s onwards, Japan has experienced dramatic social and economic shifts that have changed the outlook on Japanese society significantly. Prolonged periods of low economic growth and recessions paired with structural change – meanwhile dubbed as the “lost 20 years” – coincided with a rapidly aging population,

The cohort of young people who left university and attempted to enter the workforce during the decades-long slump that hit the Japanese economy from the late 1990s.

are now in their forties—normally the prime working years of a person’s career. But many of these survivors of the “employment ice age” struggled to get a foot on the career ladder immediately after graduation, and still face low pay and dim career prospects today. Stagnant consumption among this demographic has widespread knock-on effects, and is hampering efforts to revitalize the wider economy. The debate about finding a comprehensive solution to this problem needs to start now—before it is too late.