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# Japan's Elderly Count Was Off by 234,000

By MARTIN FACKLER

KYOTO, Japan — More than 234,000 people listed on government records as age 100 or older are actually missing and probably dead, in some cases long dead, the Justice Ministry said Friday.

The findings are results of a nationwide survey begun last month after several local governments began turning up cases of centenarians listed on their records as alive and well, but whose whereabouts were unknown. Those reports set off an outcry in [Japan](#) over whether a nation that has long prided itself on its people's longevity was properly caring for its elderly.

The number of cases reported Friday was far larger than earlier local reports, which had estimated the number of missing centenarians in the low thousands.

The ministry blamed poor bookkeeping for most of the cases, saying that the individuals had apparently died or moved away, but that no one had bothered to update the records. Still, the sheer size of the problem underscores the challenges Japan faces in caring for its growing numbers of elderly — or in these cases, just keeping count of them.

"I can feel that these people were probably isolated from the rest of society," Japan's justice minister, Keiko Chiba, told reporters, "given that we do not even know if they were dead or alive."

According to the ministry, the survey of local records across Japan uncovered about 77,000 missing residents listed as at least 120 years old, and 884 were on the records as 150 or older. That would have made them far more advanced in age than the longest-lived person recorded in modern times, a Frenchwoman who died in 1997 at age 122.

The ministry said the findings would not affect Japan's average life expectancy figures — which are the highest in the world, at nearly 83 years — because those figures were based on census data, not the records in question.

The ministry did not say how many of Japan's centenarians were found to be still alive. The oldest confirmed person living in Japan is a 113-year-old woman in the southern prefecture of Saga.

The furor over Japan's missing centenarians began in July when the authorities in Tokyo discovered the body of Sogen Kato, the man thought to have been the city's oldest living man at 111, mummified in his bed, dead for more than three decades.

**In late August, the police arrested Mr. Kato's 81-year-old daughter and his granddaughter on charges of fraudulently collecting his pension and failing to report his death. They said Mr. Kato had gone into his bedroom after a family fight in the late 1970s and had never come out.**

**The authorities have found many similar cases of relatives collecting pension payments on behalf of aged residents who were missing or dead. In most cases, the older relative had moved away, but relatives failed to report this to keep collecting pension payments.**