

# Japan's Thalidomide Lawsuits: Compensation Needs in the 2020s

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▲Since 2010, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare has been creating educational materials for learning about drug-induced suffering (D.I.S.), called “Yakugai wo manabou,” and distributing them to high schools and junior high schools.

<https://www.mhlw.go.jp/content/11120000/001266220.pdf>

## 1. Background: Thalidomide Tragedy

- Drug:** Non-barbiturate sedative (late 1950s-early 1960s)
- Impact:** Severe limb malformations (phocomelia) in fetuses
- Japan:** **1,000-1,200** affected births
- Significance:** Japan's first major drug-induced suffering (D.I.S.)

## 2. Research Purpose

- Examine:** Japan's first D.I.S. class-action lawsuit (1970s)
- Analyze:** How 1974 settlement addresses current needs
- Argument:** **1970s framework inadequate for 2020s victims' needs**

## 3. The Lawsuits and 1974 Settlement

- 1965:** First D.I.S. lawsuits filed (20+ victims)
- 1966:** National plaintiffs group formed
- 1974:** Out-of-court settlement reached
- Outcomes:** **309 victims** recognized; pension program, welfare center established
- Limitation:** **Government liability remains unresolved**

## 4. Discussion and Conclusion: Current Crisis and Inadequate Framework

Victim compensation relies entirely on the 1974 settlement. By 2025, survivors averaging **over 60 years** old face severe secondary disabilities. Lifelong compensatory overuse of unaffected body parts (feet, mouth, remaining limbs) causes chronic severe pain and progressive functional decline. Enhanced social welfare measures are critically needed. Yet the government has implemented no new support measures. **The 1970s compensation framework fundamentally fails to address victims' evolving medical and social needs in the 2020s.** New comprehensive measures must be implemented recognizing the government's continuing responsibility toward thalidomide victims.

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