

Chapter 38

Workers' Mental Health Problems and Future Perspectives in Japan: Psychological Job Stress Research

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ABSTRACT

*This chapter reviews data on the mental health problems of Japanese workers. Some of the main theories that analyze mental health problems are introduced, including occupational/job stress theory, work motivation, work engagement, and social skills. In light of Japan's disgraceful record of more than 30,000 suicides every year the past ten years or more—a level that is rare in developed nations—an issue related to work circumstances, represented by the term *Karoshi*, is suggested. This chapter presents an argument toward a solution to the mental health problem in Japan.*

1. PRESENT CONDITION OF MENTAL HEALTH PROBLEMS IN JAPAN

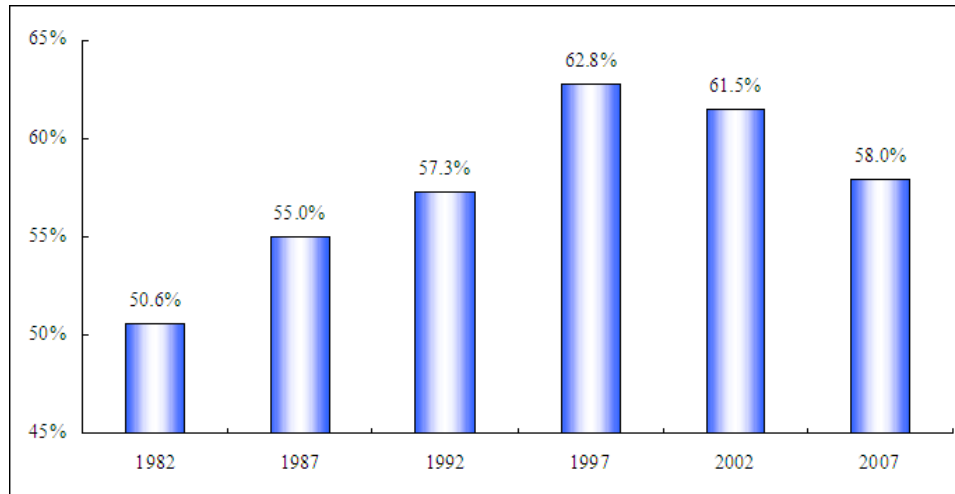
1.1 Workers' Health Situation

When examining the mental health problem in modern-day Japan, the data typically used as a starting point are from the “Worker’s Health Situation Investigation”, conducted by the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) every

five years. This investigation aims to assess the situation of workers’ health and to promote the administrative management of labor health. The most recent investigation was conducted in 2007 and reported in October 2008 (17785 candidates, 64.3% valid response rate) (MHLW, 2008b). According to Article 9 of the “Labour Standards Law” of Japan, regardless of the type of occupation, “workers” are those in an enterprise or an office to whom wages are paid. In the 2007 investigation, which is closely related to the subject of this chapter, 58% of workers felt significant stress, including psychological stress, from work (Fig-

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Figure 1. The percentage of workers who feel significant work stress, Workers' Health Situation Investigation (MHLW, 2008b)



ure 1). Moreover, the study found that 38.4% of workers reported problems with human relations in the workplace, 34.8% reported problems with work quality, and 30.6% reported problems with the quantity of work (multiple answers allowed). These data suggest that slightly less than 60% of the workers in Japan are affected by psychological stress in their daily work, particularly in human relations.

1.2 National Livelihood Survey

The “National Livelihood Survey” of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare is useful for understanding mental health issues among Japan’s workers. This study investigates basic life issues, such as health, medical treatment, welfare, pension, and income. In the results of the investigation in 2010 (released on July 12, 2011; MHLW, 2011), 46.5% of people over 12 years old (excluding inpatients) reported “troubles or stressors in daily life”. In the results of the 2007 investigation (released on September 9, 2008; MHLW, 2008a), 45.9% of working males and 56.7% of working females over the age of 15 reported “troubles or stressors in daily life”,

whereas 41.2% of male non-workers and 49.2% of female non-workers reported these stressors. These results suggest that both male and female workers have more “troubles or stressors in daily life” than do unemployed people.

1.3 Industrialist Mental Health White Paper (San-gyo-jin Mental Health haku-syo)

The “Industrialist Mental Health White Paper (San-gyo-jin mental health haku-syo)” is published every year by the Mental Health Research Institute of The Japan Productivity Center (JPC). This report provides information on the general condition of Japanese workers’ mental health. The most recent report was issued in 2011 (The Mental Health Research Institute of The Japan Productivity Center, 2011).

Based on the present situation of Japanese mental health, mental health management appears to be an important issue for workers’ quality of life as well as for the maintenance and improvement of work and society. Investigations of workers’ health situations have found that 58% of workers reported significant stress from work in 2007,

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