

Towards a more harmonious workplace

Mental wellness is the health care of the employee's mind. Although also frequently referred to as mental health, in English this often indicates mental disorder or mental disability. Rather than providing remedies for one's unhealthy condition, mental wellness is used to mean the improvement of one's current condition. It targets all employees within a company as primarily preventive and improvement activities.

What sort of stress or anxiety does a typical employee feel in today's world? Looking at the large-scale survey, Survey on State of Employees' Health (August 2003), which the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW) conducts every five years, "Relationships at the workplace" 35.1% is the highest, with: "Workload" 32.2%, "Jap characteristics" 30.4%, "Company prospects" 29.1%, "Occupational aptitude" 20.2%, "Employment stability" 17.7% in that order making up the factors for stress and anxiety.

The top three items for this survey: "Relationships at the workplace," "Workload," and "Jap characteristics," have always occupied the upper ranks since the earliest surveys, and "Company prospects" and "Employment stability" are recently provided options which had been added to already existing items such as relationship worries and difficulties of work. However, the survey results reflect the recent economic situation, and anxieties towards employment have grown.

An interesting fact can also be seen from the large-scale data of Japan Institute of Labor (currently The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training) concerning the employee situation. From the survey on the workplace of approximately 10 thousand employees (JIL Research Report No.161), definite trends could be seen in the graph for comparing stress and levels of job satisfaction, job involvement, organizational commitment, etc., among people in their 20's, 30's, and 40's. The younger the people were, the higher the stress level; on the other hand, the older

the people were, the higher the level of job satisfaction, job involvement, and organizational commitment. Difficulties of finding employments and joblessness have become recent issues for young people, but it is clear that they are faced with difficult circumstances even in the office.

Suicide due to overwork

The issues of mental health and mental wellness have suddenly become hot topics within the past several years among the mass media. These have derived from rulings for large compensations to be paid to family members of the deceased, with the negligence liability of the company recognized as related to possible suicides from overwork. These have also derived from the great increase in the number of demands and cases approved to provide workers' compensation for those that have suffered mental disorders from emotional burdens of work, or that have resulted in a suicide. When referring to stress, there may be an image of middle-aged to older people, but it is indicated from the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training's survey that younger people must not be overlooked. Furthermore, while deaths or suicides from overwork are extremely rare, they do occur. It is worthwhile to think of introducing activities by understanding mental wellness as health care for the employee's mind, in order to further vitalize both individuals and organizations instead of conducting any type of measure just because it has become an issue in society, or as "measures for the sake of measures."

6-1 Comparison of awareness towards stress and job by age

Stress	20's > 30's > 40's
Level of job satisfaction	20's < 30's < 40's
Job involvement	20's < 30's < 40's
Organizational commitment	20's < 30's < 40's