

## Abstracts

### Workplace Harshness as a Four-Layer Process: An Integrative Review of Japanese Research and Policy on Overwork-Related Deaths and Disorders

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Harsh working conditions contribute to overwork-related deaths and disorders, mental health problems, accidents, and turnover. Despite this, workplace harshness is often treated as a checklist of discrete hazards, such as long working hours or harassment, rather than as a cumulative process shaped by limited opportunities for recovery and uneven organizational support. This article provides an integrative narrative review of Japanese research on overwork-related deaths and disorders together with related policy documents to reconceptualize workplace harshness. Across case, cohort, intervention, and implementation studies, workplace harshness can be organized as a four-layer process linking exposure, cognitive appraisal, recovery and resources, and outcomes. Case studies illustrate how multiple demands compound harm; cohort studies show the population-level spread of repeated exposure and insufficient recovery; intervention studies indicate that redesigning rest opportunities and inter-shift intervals may reduce burdens; and implementation studies reveal institutional gaps in small workplaces, under dispersed responsibility, and across diverse employment arrangements. Sector-specific amplifiers include time scheduling in transport and postal services, fragmented corrective authority in construction, and emotional demands together with violence and harassment from patients or service users in health care and welfare. Although the model does not quantify relative contributions or causal effects, it offers a conceptual map for linking physical and psychosocial burdens to primary, secondary, and tertiary prevention and to policy implementation.

### The Acceptability of Power Harassment in Healthcare, Police and Fire Services, and Manual Labor: Can Behavior That Would Not Be Tolerated in Harassment Cases in Other Sectors Be Deemed Acceptable in These Sectors?

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This paper addresses the concept of harsh working conditions as outlined in the special feature's theme, defining it as work carried out in environments where the risk of harm to the life or physical well-being of oneself or others, whether caused by errors or other factors, is deemed to be higher than in other sectors. Motivated by the question of whether conduct constituting "power harassment" (workplace harassment or workplace bullying) that would not be tolerated in ordinary workplaces might be deemed acceptable in such harsh environments, this paper reviews a number of court precedents. Healthcare, police and fire services, and manual labor are identified as examples of workplaces with harsh working conditions. However, many cases were handled in much the same way as ordinary power harassment cases, and the characteristics of these workplaces were rarely used as grounds for denying the illegality of the conduct in question.

### Changing Challenges and Reform Directions in Japan's Industrial Safety and Health Act: Comparative Perspectives

**Takenori Mishiba** (Kindai University)

The "harshness" of work that calls for a response under occupational safety and health (OSH) law is shifting in focus, from physical hazards (traditional risks) to qualitative challenges (emerging risks), including fatigue and stress, insufficient accommodations for workers with chronic illnesses, and mismatches between the individual and the job or workplace relationships. At the same time, there is a growing tendency to expand both the range of persons to be protected and the range of actors responsible for protection. However, Japan's Industrial Safety and Health Act framework has been constrained, partly by the legality principle in criminal law (*nullum crimen, nulla poena sine lege*), to center on standardized, recurrence-prevention standards for physical hazards and on the development of formal safety and health management systems. Protection has remained focused primarily on employees, and responsibility primarily on employers, with only limited, exceptional extensions. Emerging risk responses have tended to lean toward quantitative

tools such as stress checks and medically dependent measures such as physician interviews, while human- and organization-centered responses have remained insufficient, and particularly those addressing “fitness” (the fit between the individual and the job or workplace relationships). Civil-law duties of safety care have helped fill gaps left by OSH statutes, but they also entail problems of legal foreseeability. In light of institutional comparisons with other countries, assigning responsibility upstream in the supply chain (e.g., at the stages of design and procurement) is effective for ensuring physical safety, and especially in the age of AI, co-regulation (the joint development of standards by public authorities and private actors) is necessary. For hazardous-substance risks, what is needed is the construction of systems for collecting and sharing information. For health-related risks, employers should be obliged to address egregious misconduct such as harassment, while better person–job fit and person–relationship fit should be promoted, preferably through certification rather than legal mandates. For the self-employed, stable access to work, the integration of data using health technology, and approaches such as precision health are needed. Against this backdrop, the author proposes the concept of “Preventive Architecture”: an attempt to integrate preventive practices that have been pursued in separate disciplines, while taking account of the multifactorial nature of risks observed on the ground and raising employers’ recognition of the need for prevention.

#### Income, Longevity, and Redistribution in Public Pension Systems

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In recent years, a growing body of evidence has shown that higher-income individuals tend to live longer in many countries. Such longevity inequality calls for a reassessment of the fairness and redistributive effects of public pension systems. This paper first reviews theoretical studies that conceptualize social security from the perspectives of insurance and redistribution, as well as empirical studies analyzing the relationships between income, education, occupation, and mortality or longevity. Next, using a model based on Sheshinski and Caliendo (2020), we conduct numerical simulations that approximate the Japanese Employees’ Pension Insurance system, and examine how lifetime net transfers change when there is a positive correlation between income and longevity. The results show that as longevity inequality widens, lifetime net transfers to low-income individuals decrease, while the excess burden borne by high-income individuals is mitigated, thereby weakening intragenerational redistribution within the pension system. Furthermore, empirical analyses using industry-level mortality data and municipality-level data in Japan confirm the existence of disparities in mortality rates across income levels and industries. These findings suggest that longevity inequality should be taken into account when evaluating Japan’s public pension system, and that revisiting institutional design such as benefit formulas may become an important policy issue.

#### Harsh Workplace Environments and Responses to Social Isolation and Loneliness

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This paper conceptualizes workplace isolation and loneliness as important experiences that may arise under harsh working conditions. Workplace isolation refers to an objective lack of social contact or access to supportive resources, whereas workplace loneliness is an unpleasant subjective experience caused by a gap between desired and actual relationships at work. Although related, these concepts are not identical: employees may feel lonely even when surrounded by colleagues if they lack support, trust, recognition, or a sense of belonging, while structural isolation such as telework or solitary work does not necessarily lead to loneliness. Workplace factors such as long working hours, excessive workload, understaffing, low psychological safety, workplace bullying, telework, and solitary work may increase loneliness by limiting opportunities for social interaction, information sharing, help-seeking, recognition, and inclusion. Workplace loneliness is associated with burnout, depression, anxiety, fatigue, reduced well-being, lower job satisfaction, poorer job performance, lower organizational commitment, and turnover. A longitudinal study of Japanese workers showed that higher workplace loneliness predicted job turnover six months later. Interventions should combine individual support with organizational efforts

to create work environments that prevent isolation and loneliness. Workplace isolation and loneliness should be understood not as individual weakness, but as health and work-related issues shaped by workplace conditions.

#### Algorithmic Management and Autonomy of Labor

**Satomi Mikamoto** (Fukushima University)

In recent years, algorithmic management has been restricting worker autonomy. This is because the introduction of AI into the labor process reduces opportunities for workers to think and make decisions. Particularly in the manufacturing sector, production plans are now being drawn up by AI rather than humans. In capitalist modes of production, conceptual aspects of the labor process have traditionally been controlled by capital, but now algorithms are taking control of them. In addition, AI not only manages worker schedules and task assignment, but also motivation and discipline. Algorithmic management can be viewed as an extension of the separation of conception and execution. By having AI handle the conceptual aspects of the labor process, managers can transfer knowledge without encountering resistance from workers. The need for management to suppress worker resistance is fading, and AI itself is increasingly taking on management roles. The widespread adoption of such AI and algorithms is readily accepted by workers because it eliminates the arbitrariness of supervisors and managers. Furthermore, AI and algorithms have permeated our daily lives, as evidenced by our routine use of social media and generative AI. This total subsumption has the effect of accepting and promoting capital's dominance in the workplace. In such circumstances, far from increasing, worker autonomy is actually being limited.

#### Changes in Subjective Perceptions of “Black Companies” and the Current State of the Black Company Problem

**Toru Kobayashi** (Dokkyo University)

Although the issue of “black companies,” referring to firms criticized for illegal or exploitative labor practices, became widely recognized as a social problem around 2013 in Japan, attention to the issue has declined in recent years, partly due to economic recovery and the implementation of work-style reform policies. According to Kobayashi (2015), long working hours, refusal to allow the use of paid leave, and unpaid overtime are major factors that lead employees to subjectively perceive their workplace as a black company. This paper examines time-series changes in scores for subjective black company evaluations and scores for the factors mentioned above. In addition, using the Blinder–Oaxaca decomposition, the paper investigates whether recent changes in subjective black company scores are mainly caused by improvements in these workplace conditions (e.g., unpaid overtime) or by structural changes in the formation of workers' subjective perceptions regarding black companies. The results found that subjective recognition of black company scores has increased, while subjective evaluations of key workplace conditions such as long working hours, unpaid overtime, and restrictions on paid leave have declined. Furthermore, the results of decomposition analysis show that the increase in subjective black company recognition is explained primarily by changes in the structure of subjective perceptions rather than by changes in subjective evaluations of workplace conditions themselves.

#### Changes in Task Distribution in the Japanese Labor Market, 1980–2020: The Roles of Industrial Composition and ICT Adoption

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This study examines changes in task distribution in the Japanese labor market from 1980 to 2020 and how these changes are associated with changes in industrial composition and information and communications technology (ICT) adoption. By matching quantitative task data from the Occupational Information Network of Japan (job tag) to occupational classifications in the Population Census, we construct five task measures: non-routine analytic, non-routine interactive, routine cognitive, routine manual, and non-routine manual. Three main findings emerge. First, non-routine analytic and interactive tasks increased,

and non-routine manual tasks also increased slightly, while routine manual tasks declined substantially. By contrast, routine cognitive tasks increased, despite being classified as routine tasks. Second, the contraction of the agriculture, forestry, and fisheries sector made the largest contribution to changes in task distribution from 1980 to 2000, while the expansion of the health and welfare sector after 2000 contributed particularly to the increase in non-routine manual tasks. Third, industry-level analysis using the Japan Industrial Productivity (JIP) Database shows that the accumulation of non-ICT capital, rather than ICT capital, was more strongly associated with the growth of non-routine analytic and interactive tasks, and that ICT adoption did not necessarily substitute for routine tasks. These results are consistent with the predictions of routine-biased technological change in terms of the increase in high-level cognitive tasks, such as non-routine analytic and interactive tasks, and the decline in routine manual tasks. At the same time, the increase in routine cognitive tasks and the absence of clear evidence that ICT adoption substituted for routine tasks suggest limits to simply applying this theory to the Japanese labor market.

What Freelancers Need for Better Work Satisfaction: A Comparison of Freelancers and Regular Employees through the Lens of the Job Demands-Resources Model

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Freelancing has been gaining attention in recent years, but empirical research remains scarce. The present study focuses on the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model to compare what matters to and satisfies freelancers versus regular employees, identifying effective factors for improving freelancing work conditions. A survey was conducted with 413 freelancers and 387 regular employees (N=800). The results showed that freelancers valued and were more satisfied with work engagement, career commitment, and marketability compared to regular employees. Additionally, the relationships between job resources, job demands, and various satisfaction levels in the JD-R model were examined through multiple regression analyses. For both freelancers and regular employees, developmental resources, such as learning opportunities and organizational career support, were significantly and positively associated with all satisfaction measures. Furthermore, only for freelancers, a positive significant association was found between social resources, including servant leadership and colleague support, and satisfaction measures. Moreover, the moderating effects of hindrance demands, such as role ambiguity and role conflict, differed between freelancers and regular employees. These results suggest that organizational policies for freelancers should consider their needs while enhancing communication that enables recognition and support by client organizations, promoting a more supportive and inclusive working environment for freelancers.