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employees, exceeding the overall average in both amount and rate. Rengo Headquarters states that this is the first time SMEs have exceeded the average in both amounts and rates.

### **Trend toward higher increases in non-manufacturing and domestic retail**

While metals industries laid a marker for wage hikes of 1,000-1,500 yen, smaller than last year's increase, some non-manufacturing and domestic retail employers have bucked the trend with offers in excess of 2,000 yen. UA Zensen, the largest industrial union in Japan (1.61 million members), which covers retail and distribution sectors suffering pronounced manpower shortages, reports significantly high base wage increases of 3,000-4,000 yen in drugstores (Matsumoto Kiyoshi 4,000 yen) and supermarkets (Maruetsu 3,200 yen, Inageya 3,027 yen), among others. Food-Rengo (110,000 members), an industrial trade union organization representing food manufacturing and allied industries, reports offers

exceeding last year's rise. Ajinomoto, with 10,000 yen, is the most eye-catching. Others offering upwards of 2,000 yen include Nippon Flour Mills with 3,300 yen, JT with 2,500 yen, Lotte with 2,304 yen, Morinaga with 2,000 yen, Meiji Group with 2,000 yen, and Sapporo Beer with 2,000 yen.

### **Higher increases in non-regular employment for the second straight year**

Part-time workers represent the core of UA Zensen's membership, accounting for half of its member bodies. The increase in hourly wages agreed by the end of March for 190 part-time workers' unions (530,000 members) was 22.3 yen or 2.39% on average (including systematic pay rises and base wage increases). The increase offered for regular employees' equivalent in time was 2.18%, lower than the rate offered for part-time workers. In the final figures last year, part-time workers were awarded higher wage increases than regular employees for the first time, and that trend continues this year.

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## **NEWS**

# One in Every Three Workers Experienced “Power Harassment”: MHLW is Taking Steps to Prevent It

“Power harassment,” a Japanese combination of English words for harassing behavior by someone in position of authority toward his/her subordinates in the workplace, is on the rise. According to the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare (MHLW), of cases brought for consultation to General Labour Counseling Desks throughout Japan since 2012, those related to “bullying and harassment” have been the largest in number. In a fact-finding survey conducted by MHLW in 2016, about one in every three employees had experienced power harassment in the previous three years. “The Action Plan for the Realization of Work Style Reform” drawn up by the

government in March included provisions for setting up a review panel aimed at reinforcing measures against power harassment in the workplace. Based on this, the Ministry has set up a study group consisting of labor and management representatives, among others, and discussions are currently underway.

### **The growing problem of “power harassment” in the workplace**

Japan's labor administration has set up “General Labour Counseling Desks” in Prefectural Labour Bureaus (regional branches of the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare) and Labour Standards

Inspection Offices (supervisory bodies in various parts of the country, provided under the Labor Standards Act). These receive cases of consultation on various workplace-related concerns.

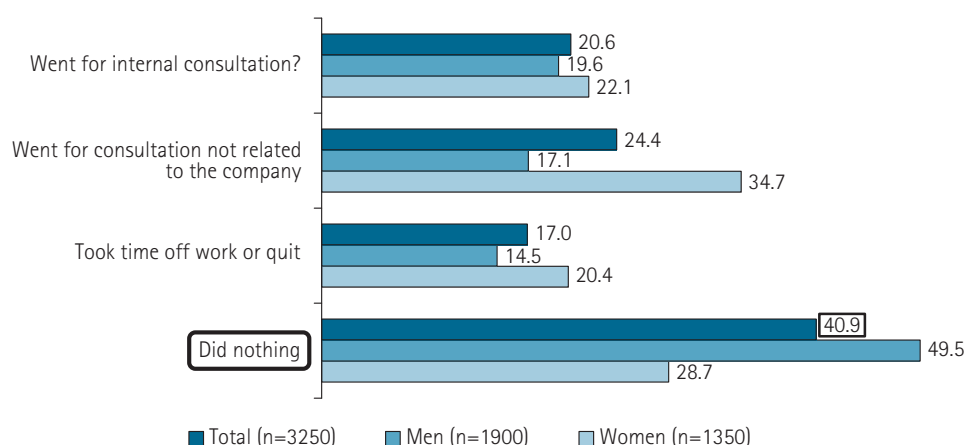
In a breakdown of the types of consultation handled by these Desks, in connection with individual labor disputes under civil law, cases of “bullying and harassment” (corresponding to power harassment) have continued to increase in recent years. Since FY2012, in fact, these have been more than any other type, accounting for nearly a quarter of all cases in FY2016. Statistics on industrial accident compensation paid out in cases such as “*karoshi*” (death caused by overwork) shows that compensation awards for psychological and other disorders caused by “(severe) harassment, bullying, or violence” are increasing. These data reveal how serious power harassment in the workplace has become in Japan.

### Acts constituting “power harassment” divided into six categories

To address this problem, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare set up the “Round-table Conference regarding Workplace Bullying and Harassment” in July 2011. The Conference brought together representatives of labor and management as well as experts and the government with the purpose of studying measures

to prevent and resolve bullying and harassment. The Conference then set up a Working Group to discuss matters for inclusion in its report.

The Working Group defined power harassment as “any act by a person using his/her superiority in the workplace which causes mental distress or physical pain or a degradation of the working environment beyond the appropriate scope of business.” On this basis, acts that could constitute power harassment in the workplace were divided into six categories, namely: (i) assault or injury (physical abuse), (ii) intimidation, defamation, insult or slander (mental abuse), (iii) isolation, ostracization or neglect (cutting off from human relationships), (iv) forcing an employee to perform certain tasks which are clearly unnecessary for the business or impossible to be performed, or interrupting their normal duties (excessive work demands), (v) ordering an employee to perform menial tasks which need far below the employee’s ability or experience, and not providing any work at all for an employee without any business reasonableness (insufficient work demands), and (vi) excessively inquiring into the private affairs of an employee (invasion of privacy). In March 2012, the Conference published its “Recommendations for Prevention and Resolution of Workplace Power Harassment” based on the above.



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, *Fact-finding Survey on Workplace Bullying and Harassment: Employee Survey*, 2016.

Note: Respondents are workers who had experienced being subjected to power harassment within the previous 3 years, those who responded “Experienced it repeatedly,” “Experienced it occasionally,” and “Only experienced it once.”

Figure 1. Subsequent actions taken by workers who felt they had been subjected to power harassment within the previous 3 years (multiple responses, by gender, %)

### More than 30% of employees have experienced “power harassment”

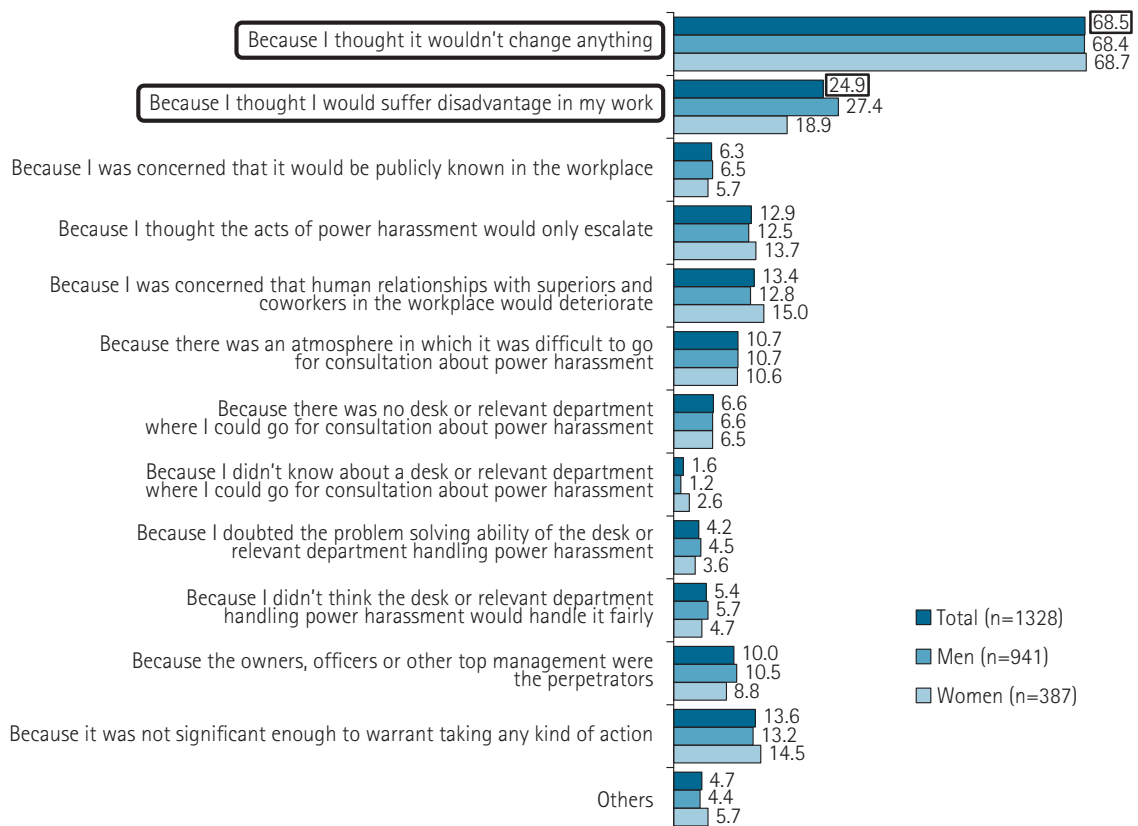
As part of its efforts to urge prevention and spread awareness based on the recommendations, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare conducted fact-finding surveys of companies and employees from summer to fall 2016. The aim of the surveys was to ascertain the actual facts of companies tackling preventive measures and employees subjected to power harassment, and to use the results for reinforcing countermeasures in future.

The survey of companies found that power harassment was the most common topic of consultation brought by employees to consultation desks for employees. Of all the responding companies, 36.3% had handled at least one case of consultation corresponding to power harassment over the previous three years. In the employee survey,

similarly, 32.5% of employees responded that they had been subjected to power harassment over the previous three years. But although one in every three employees had been subjected to power harassment, only 52.2% or around half of the companies in the company survey had made any efforts to prevent or resolve power harassment.

### As many as 40% of those subjected to “power harassment” “did nothing”

In the employee survey, 40.9% of respondents who felt they had been subjected to power harassment over the previous three years stated that they “did nothing” about it afterwards (Figure 1). The most common reason for doing nothing was they “thought it wouldn’t change anything” (Figure 2). More of these harassment victims who “did nothing” were men (49.5%) than women (28.7%). However,



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, *Fact-finding Survey on Workplace Bullying and Harassment: Employee Survey, 2016*.

Note: Respondents are workers who had experienced being subjected to power harassment within the previous 3 years, those who responded “Experienced it repeatedly,” “Experienced it occasionally,” and “Only experienced it once,” and “Did nothing” despite being subjected to power harassment.

Figure 2. Reason for doing nothing despite feeling that they had been subjected to power harassment (multiple responses, by gender, %)

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this survey showed that the more employers “made positive efforts” to prevent or resolve power harassment, the higher the ratio of having “no experience” of power harassment tended to be.

The survey report points out that “if employers make positive efforts, it is easier for employees to ask them for consultation on power harassment, and also easier for the companies to ascertain the actual situation of power harassment.”

### **Start of studies aimed at reinforcing prevention measures**

The Abe administration cites “Work Style Reform” as its most important task. In March 2017 the government drew up an “Action Plan” indicating the future direction of initiatives to this end. The Plan asserts that “to develop workplace environment so that workers can work healthily, we need not only to

increase the rigor of working hours management but also to promote the creation of good human relations with superiors and coworkers.” For this reason, the Plan clearly states that “to reinforce the prevention of power harassment in the workplace, the government will conduct a review of countermeasures through dialog with labor and management representatives.”

Based on these moves, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare set up a “Study Group on Measures to Prevent Power Harassment in the Workplace” in May 2017, to discuss countermeasures with reference to the results of the fact-finding surveys.

### **Reference**

JILPT. 2013. *Workplace Bullying and Harassment: 2013 JILPT Seminar on Workplace Bullying and Harassment*. JILPT Report no.12. Tokyo: The Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training.