

# Are Long Working Hours in Japan Becoming Invisible? Examining the Effects of ICT-based “Spatial Flexibility” on Workloads

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## I. Introduction

This paper examines flexible working styles free from restrictions regarding time or location, which have attracted attention in recent years as new ways of working that have arisen along with the advances in information and communication technology (ICT). In particular, this analysis focuses on the effects of such working styles on working hours in Japan.

As symbolized by the Japanese term *karōshi*, which translates to “death from overwork,” labor in Japan has typically been characterized by long working hours. This became a significant problem both internationally and domestically particularly in the second half of the 1980s. Are Japanese today still overworked? Or have there been changes in the working styles of Japanese people?

When addressing the topic of overwork in the present day, especially overwork among white-collar workers, simply focusing on overtime working at the office may cause us to lose more and more sight of the core of the problem. We need to take into account the fact that advances in ICT have expanded the domain of work beyond the conventional boundaries of official workplaces and times.

With the developments in ICT and socioeconomic changes in recent years, the growing diversity and flexibility of working styles have been widely discussed in the developed countries. In the case of Japan, the first point to note is that the rapid rise in the numbers of part-time, non-regular workers has clearly been a key factor in shaping the increased diversity and flexibility of working styles. And even in the case of regular employees (employees on full-time, open-ended contracts), there are also calls for working hours to allow workers to balance work with the demands of their life courses and family lives, especially given the increasing expectations for women to take a role in the core of the labor force. Various systems have been developed to ensure that working hours can be flexibly arranged to accommodate workers’ individual needs.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, increased flexibility includes liberating workers from constraints regarding when and where they work. While the fundamental concept of the conventional working hour system was that workers work predetermined hours at the normal workplace (their employer’s place of business) under the control and supervision of their employer, the development of ICT has enabled flexible working styles free from the restrictions of such rigid ways of working. These have taken form as working styles in which workers use ICT to enable them to work outside of the normal workplace, such as work from home (otherwise known as “telecommuting”) and mobile working.<sup>2</sup> While such liberation from temporal and spatial constraints is said to make work more comfortable,

1. This covers all kinds of flexible working time arrangements suited to individual workers’ life courses and family lives, including not only the development of various systems for time off or leave, such as child care leave or family care leave, but also flextime and reduced working hours.

2. The development of such working styles has prompted important topics for discussion in recent years with regard to work using cloud

as it allows workers to organize their worktime as suits their own convenience, it has also been noted to generate problems such as the risk of excessive work. This paper will discuss such aspects of those working styles. Moreover, although such overwork is an issue affecting all developed countries, there are also thought to be distinctly Japanese features to this issue, given aspects such as the typical Japanese employment system and attitudes toward work. Let us start by looking at the statistics to gain an overview of the characteristics of working hours in Japan.

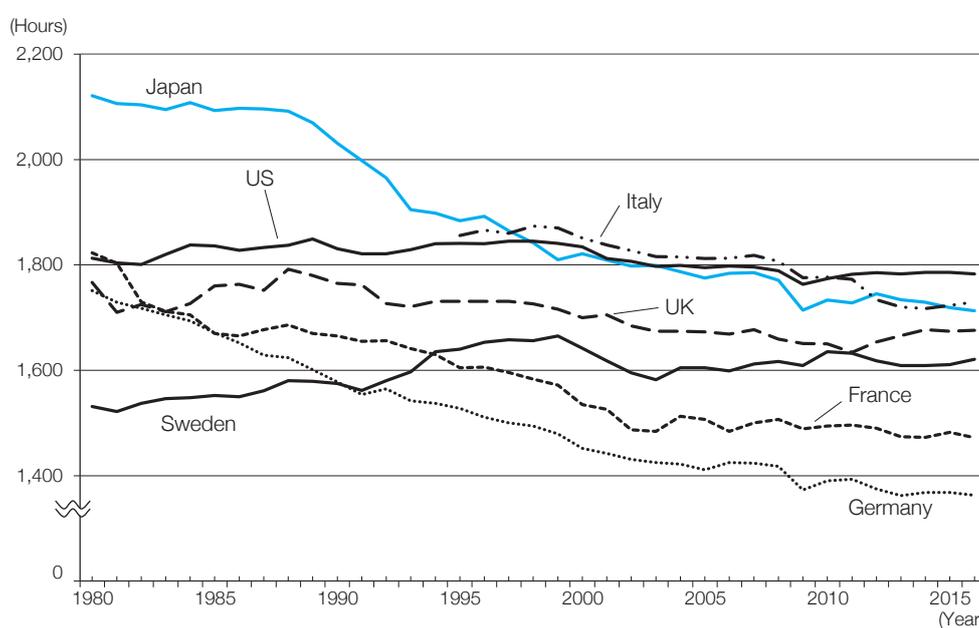
## II. Working hours in Japan: “Reduction” and “diversification” as seen in the statistics

### 1. Distinctive characteristics of working hours in Japan revealed by international comparison

Firstly, let us ascertain the distinctive characteristics of working hours in Japan by looking at an international comparison of statistical data. Figure 1 shows the trends in working hours of major countries. On a long-term basis, we can see that in many developed countries working hours are on the decrease. Possible explanations that have been suggested for this decrease in working hours include the increase in productivity along with the development of industry, and the results of activities by labor unions.

So, what features do working hours in Japan show in comparison with other countries? Up until the 1980s, Japanese working hours were extremely long in comparison with those of other developed countries. Since then, following a significant decrease in the period from the end of the 1980s to the early 1990s, working hours in Japan have been consistently on the decrease. Looking at the current levels, Japanese working hours can be described as close to those of the US and the UK, but still long in comparison with countries such as France, Germany, and Scandinavian nations.<sup>3</sup>

The reduction in working hours in Japan from the end of the 1980s was significantly influenced by legal



Source: OECD Database.

Figure 1. International comparison of average total annual working hours per capita (employed workers)

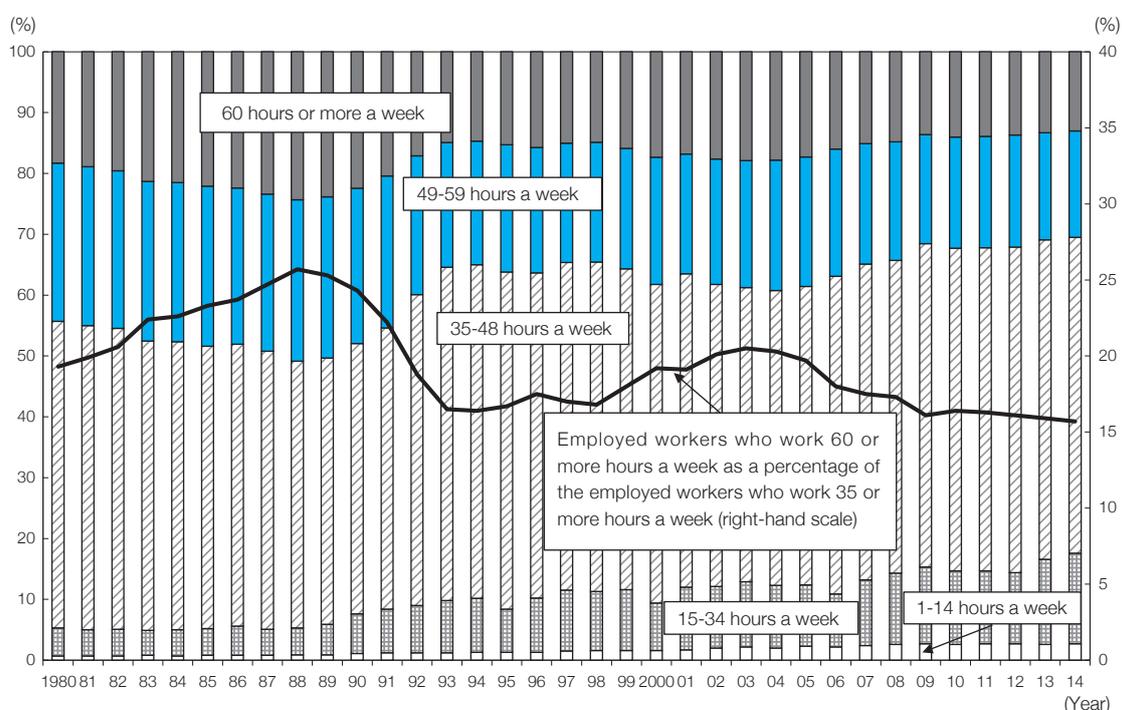
computing and other such forms of work that constitute self-employment or the boundary between self-employment and employed labor (including points such as low wages, or the lack of opportunity to improve skills). However, this paper focuses on employed workers (company employees) who adopt flexible working styles, looking at what those working styles entail and the resulting working hours.

3. We have not fully ascertained the figures on working hours for the other Asian nations, but as far as the statistics show, average working hours in South Korea for 2015 were 2,113 hours, longer than those of Japan.

policies. Reducing working hours became a key policy issue in response to the increased awareness of the problem both in and outside Japan in the second half of the 1980s.<sup>4</sup> Efforts were subsequently made to develop policies with the aim of reducing annual working hours to 1,800 hours, the level of the US and Europe. This came to fruition in the 1987 amendment to the Labor Standards Act, which set out a reduction in the legally-prescribed working hours (from 48 to 40 hours per week).<sup>5</sup> Further amendments were made to the act in stages, such that the system of a “five-day work week” (namely, the system by which every weekend and public holiday are days off) was quickly adopted by an increasing number of employers in the 1990s. This reduction in working days undeniably had a significant effect on the reduction of working hours in Japan.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. Diversification (de-standardization) of working hours

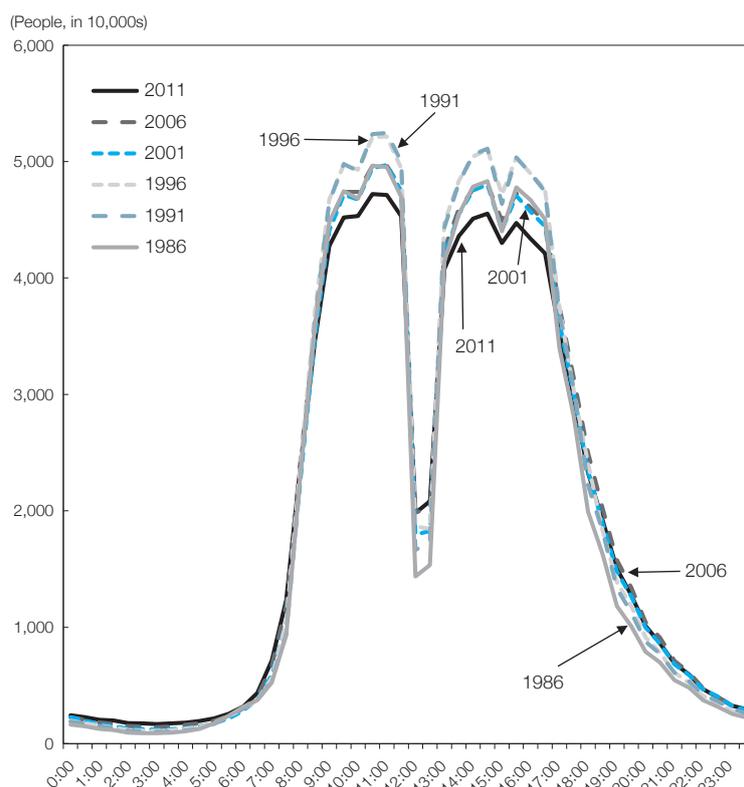
While working hours in Japan in recent years have been decreasing on average, this does not mean that all workers are working shorter hours. This is shown by the dispersion of the distribution in the statistics. Looking at Figure 2, while the percentage of workers working 49-59 hours per week is decreasing in the long term, there has been an increase in employed workers working less than 35 hours a week, and there continues



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, “White Paper on the Labour Economy 2015.”

Figure 2. Trends in the breakdown of employed workers’ working hours per week (male)

4. As a result of Japan’s vast trade surplus (particularly the trade imbalance between Japan and the US), coupled with the appreciation of the yen, which became an issue in the second half of the 1980s, Japanese people’s long working hours also became the target of international criticism on the suggestion that they constituted “social dumping.” Within Japan, people also began to readdress what makes for true affluence. In a Japanese society that had achieved material affluence through fiercely hard work, people saw increasing value in enjoying private time free from pressure.
5. Japan’s current legal provisions on working hours prescribe 40 hours a week and eight hours a day. The “normal working hour system” mentioned later in this paper refers to company working hours set within these legally-prescribed working hours.
6. At the same time, looking at the reduction in working hours by worker average, it can be seen that the increase in part-time workers has had a considerably large influence. The rapid reduction from the end of the 1980s to the beginning of 1990s is thought to be the impact of the amendment to the Labor Standards Act, but it is not possible to unequivocally claim that the long-term decrease that followed is a reflection of reductions in working hours for normal workers. (regular workers etc.)



Source: Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare, "White Paper on the Labour Economy 2015."

Figure 3. Trends in the numbers of workers by time of day on weekdays

to be workers working long hours, namely, 60 hours or more a week.<sup>7</sup> Some see this as a loss of clarity in the conventional standard working times—or, in other words, the “de-standardization” of working hours.<sup>8</sup> This provides something of an insight reflecting the diversification of working styles.

Furthermore, when discussing the diversification and de-standardization of working hours, the times of day at which people work is another characteristic that should not be overlooked. An increasing number of both regular employees and part-time workers are working in the evenings and at nights. Looking at the trends in the numbers of employed workers by time of day on weekdays (Figure 3), the number of workers working during the day is on the decrease, in contrast with a rising number of workers working at night.

Such a rise in the numbers of people working in the evenings and at night has been discussed in terms of non-standard work schedules in many countries.<sup>9</sup> While this trend toward work times stretching across all 24 hours of the day (tendency for work at night) can be seen to reflect greater options with regard to work,<sup>10</sup> the discussions also pick up on the potential problems, namely, the negative effects such a trend can have on workers’ health and family lifestyles.<sup>11</sup> Such de-standardization of working times and schedules is a result of

7. Looking at the statistics in the long term, it can be suggested that the percentage of people working 60 hours or more per week has dropped.

8. This trend is common in many developed countries. See sources such as Bosch (2006).

9. See sources such as Craig and Powell (2011), Presser (2003), and Barnes et al. (2006) on the current state and problems of non-standard work schedules.

10. For instance, allowing workers to work at night or weekends when they have insufficient time for work during the day or on weekdays due to childcare and other such reasons means an increase in the opportunities for work. In that sense, this trend seems to be helpful to working people.

11. Presser (2003) addresses the way in which non-standard work schedules lead to negative effects on married life, sharing housework, and relationships with children.

the impact of service economy (such as staying open 24-hours a day) and globalization, but it also appears to be a result of workers determining for themselves the hours that they work. The changes in the structure of industry and advances in ICT are particularly noted as factors that have widened the scope for work that is liberated from spatial and temporal constraints.<sup>12</sup> What effects do such working styles liberated from temporal and spatial constraints have on workers? More specifically, the factors to address are what kinds of working style such work free of temporal and spatial constraints entails, how such working styles affect working hours (in terms of their length or timing), and the implications that they have for workers' health and family lives.<sup>13</sup>

This paper focusses on the current forms of overwork that have developed amid such changes. Before doing so, let us summarize the distinctive factors behind long working hours in Japan.

### 3. Distinctive features of long working hours in Japan: Previous studies

As noted at the beginning of this paper, long working hours have been highlighted as a key characteristic and issue of labor in Japan. Let us look at an outline of the conventional explanations of the factors that lay behind this trend.

In discussions that addressed the factors behind Japan's long working hours in the past, constant overtime was explained by the fact that employers in the manufacturing industry and other such fields used overtime as a buffer for preventing the need for staff cutbacks.<sup>14</sup> In the case of small and medium enterprises, the workloads resulting from subcontracting arrangements (such as workloads due to tight deadlines) have also been a key point for discussion as a factor behind long working hours. Even now, such long working hours among blue-collar workers are still an unsolved problem and remain an issue that needs to be dealt with.<sup>15</sup>

It is also not uncommon for employees engaged in office work or other such white-collar work to work long hours. One of the factors noted to explain this is the fact that workers constantly work overtime due to workplace norms.<sup>16</sup> The Japanese employment system is characterized by the way in which it is fundamentally based on the notion of a worker's company being like a "community."<sup>17</sup> On the one hand, this perception of a company as a "community" serves to provide guarantee of livelihood for its members, while on the other it compels members to diligence, loyalty to the company, and sometimes to conform to such workplace norms. And there have been work ethics that workers have values and standards that put their companies first. In terms of working hours, it has been noted that these work ethics or workplace norms have led to the issue of large amounts of overtime for which workers do not receive the equivalent wages (namely, unpaid overtime), as reflected by the Japanese term "service overtime" (*sābisu zangyō*). This includes significant amounts of "take-home overtime" (*mochikaeri zangyō*) where employees take the work that they have not finished within

12. For research on the increasing flexibility in working locations, see sources such as Felstead et al. (2005).

13. For instance, it is noted that when workers engage in work from home, such as contacting people regarding work matters or putting together documents, the boundary between work and their lives outside work becomes unclear, increasing the risk of them sensing conflict between the two (see sources such as Schieman and Glavin (2008)). This is particularly a problem in relation to the ways of working of people with a high professional status, such as specialists or managerial-level employees.

14. It is suggested that companies choose to respond to increased demand in prosperous periods by allowing existing employees to take on more overtime, as opposed to hiring more personnel. This is in exchange for employment security, namely, that companies are able to avoid dismissing employees in periods of recession as far as possible.

15. A comparison of working hours from industry to industry shows that working hours in the transport and construction industries are particularly long. Along with those in the manufacturing industry, such long working hours remain an important issue that needs to be tackled.

16. The prime type of overtime resulting from workplace norms is working overtime because other employees are still working (*tsukiai zangyō*). This occurs due to the fact that employees find it difficult to leave when their manager or colleagues are working overtime.

17. The typical Japanese employment system involves characteristics such as long-term employment practices, seniority-based wages and promotions, cooperative relationships between labor and management, and internal company programs for developing skills and ability, such as on-the-job training and job rotation. (See JILPT, 2017.) Moreover, under the concept of the company as a "community," the company and the members of its community are joined by mutually-supportive relationships based on cooperation and unity, as opposed to relationships that are merely financial (Hazama, 1996).

the company working hours with them to complete at home or elsewhere outside of the office.<sup>18</sup> Such overtime has been raised as a problem in terms of regulating workloads, given that it makes it difficult to ascertain and manage working hours.

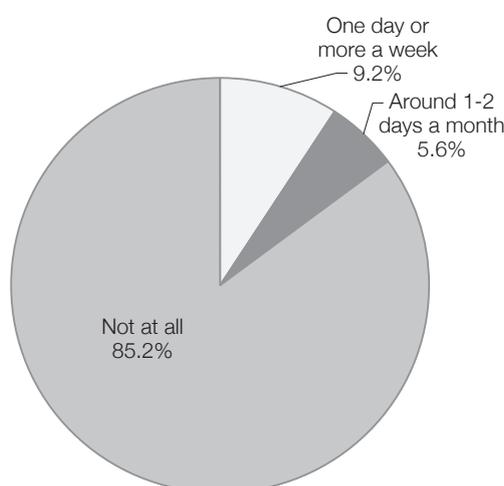
With such conventional characteristics of Japanese working styles in mind, let us look at flexible working styles and working hours today. The next section onward investigates such trends on the basis of survey data.

### III. Investigating ICT-based flexible working styles on the basis of survey data

In the previous section, we demonstrated the increasing diversity in Japanese working hours, and particularly noted the discussion surrounding the way in which long working hours arise. As touched on at the beginning of this paper, advances in ICT have given workers greater flexibility to choose where they work, as they are no longer restricted to working at the premises of their employer. What do such working styles—that is, working free from spatial constraints—mean for workers? More specifically, in what kinds of ways do workers work when they adopt such a spatially flexible working style, how does it affect their working hours (in terms of factors such as length or timing) and what kinds of implications does it have for their health and family life?

This section explores such questions by looking at the working styles of people who use computers, email, cell phones, and other such ICT-based methods to work at alternative workplaces (that is, places other than the normal place of work at their employer’s premises). The data used for analysis is taken from the “Survey on the Current State of Flexible Working Styles using ICT” (company survey and employee survey, 2014) conducted by the Japan Institute for Labour Policy and Training (JILPT). Here we focus largely on data from the employee survey.<sup>19</sup>

Firstly, let us look at what kinds of percentages of people use ICT to work in alternative work places.<sup>20</sup> Figure 4 shows that 9.2% of workers chose to adopt such an option of working away from the normal



Source: JILPT “Survey on the Current State of Flexible Working Styles Using ICT” (2014).

Figure 4. Frequency of working at alternative workplaces using ICT (N=4198)

18. This was formerly also known as “*furoshiki zangyō*,” in reference to the way in which workers would wrap documents and other such papers up in a traditional wrapping cloth (*furoshiki*) to take home.

19. 10,000 companies across Japan (companies with at least one employee) and the 60,000 employees working at those companies were surveyed. The questionnaire response rates and numbers of questionnaires collected were as follows: 16.6% (1,661 questionnaires) for the company survey and 9.1% (5,451 questionnaires) for the employee survey. See JILPT (2015) for more details on the survey (only available in Japanese).

20. Given that we are investigating working hours, the analysis in this paper focusses exclusively on regular employees.

workplace “one day or more a week” and 5.6% do so “around 1-2 days a month,” while 85.2% do not work at alternative workplaces using ICT. In the analysis that follows, we will treat people who use ICT to work at alternative workplaces one day or more a week as “workers with an ICT-based flexible working style,”<sup>21</sup> and people who do not adopt such a working style involving alternative workplaces as “workers with a standard working style” (given the fact they account for the majority of workers). We will investigate the trends through a comparison of these two types of workers.<sup>22</sup>

Let us now look at the profile of the kinds of people who adopt a flexible working style. Table 1 compares the gender, age, and academic backgrounds of workers with an ICT-based flexible working style and workers with a standard working style. These figures show that in terms of gender, a large percentage of men adopt a flexible working style, and in terms of academic background, a relatively high percentage of university and graduate school graduates adopt such working styles. There are no significant differences according to age composition. Turning to look at the differences according to the composition of job types (Figure 5), we can see that a particularly large proportion of workers adopting a flexible working style are employed in “sales and marketing.” Specialist roles such as jobs with a “technical specialism”<sup>23</sup> also account for a relatively considerable proportion.<sup>24</sup> This suggests that it is largely such white-collar workers who are using ICT to adopt flexible working styles free from the restraints of having to work in a certain place.

Now we will look at data that shows the kinds of place in which workers with a flexible working style work and the frequency with which they work in such places (Figure 6).<sup>25</sup> A high percentage—66.5%—work at their “company’s business premises” “almost every day.” This, combined with the 17.2% who do so “around 3-4

Table 1. Gender, age, and academic background composition: By type of working style

(%)

	Gender		Age				Academic background		
	Male	Female	29 or under	30-39	40-49	50 or above	Lower secondary school/ upper secondary school	Junior college/ college of technology/ professional training college	University/ graduate school
Workers with a flexible working style (N=387)	79.3	20.7	11.9	31.3	35.4	21.4	22.2	14.2	63.6
Workers with a standard working style (N=3576)	61.0	39.0	17.6	30.6	31.2	20.6	30.5	20.3	49.2

Source: Same as Figure 4.

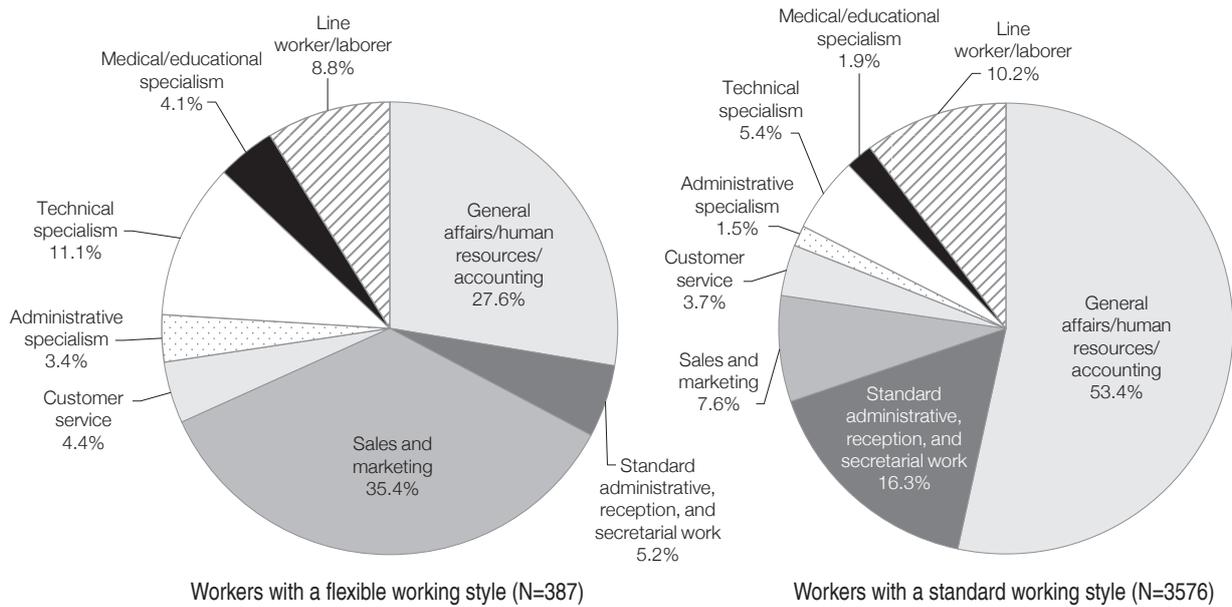
21. As we will see in more detail later, this includes workers who engage in mobile work (working at a customer’s premises or in transit) and workers who telecommute (work largely conducted in the home). Moreover, people who work at alternative workplaces “around 1-2 days a month” have been excluded from the following analysis because they cannot be classed as adopting a flexible working style.

22. As far as these responses suggest, it appears that the majority of employed workers in Japan do not adopt flexible working styles. However, it is possible that the numbers of workers who do may increase in the future. Statistics from the Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism (“2016 Survey on the Current State of the Teleworking Population”) show that at least 40% of workers (including the self-employed) “have the experience of using ICT, etc. to work in a place other than the typical business premises or place of work.”

23. Here, jobs with a “technical specialism” refers to work such as research and development, design, or system engineering. Jobs with an “administrative specialism” include surveying and analysis, and legal administration related to patents. See JILPT 2015 for more details (only available in Japanese).

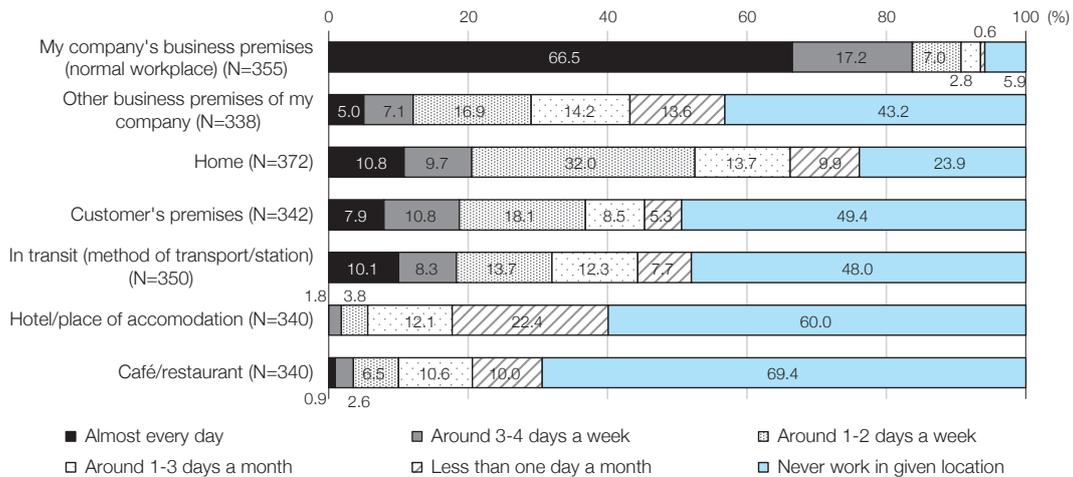
24. The diagram is not included here, but looking at the differences by industry type, the following industries have large percentages of people adopting flexible working styles: the manufacturing industry, information and communications industry, academic research and specialist/technical services industry, wholesale and retail industry, and other service industries not elsewhere classified. Moreover, looking at differences according to whether respondents held a managerial role, the percentage of workers adopting a flexible working style is also relatively high among workers with a managerial role of section manager or above.

25. As the following figures have missing values, such as non-responses, they may not be consistent with the N for the figures up to Figure 5.



Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 5. Composition of job types: By type of working style



(Workers with an ICT-based flexible working style)

Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 6. Frequency of working in each workplace: By workplace

days a week,” suggests that the majority of people usually also go to work at the normal workplace. Looking at the other locations in which such people work, a relatively high proportion work at “other business premises” of their company or “at home.” For instance, with 10.8% of such people working at home “almost every day,” 9.7% working at home “around 3-4 days a week,” and 32.0% working at home “around 1-2 days a week,” more than half of such workers work at home at least one day a week. There is also a considerable percentage of such workers who work at a “customer’s premises” or “in transit.”<sup>26</sup>

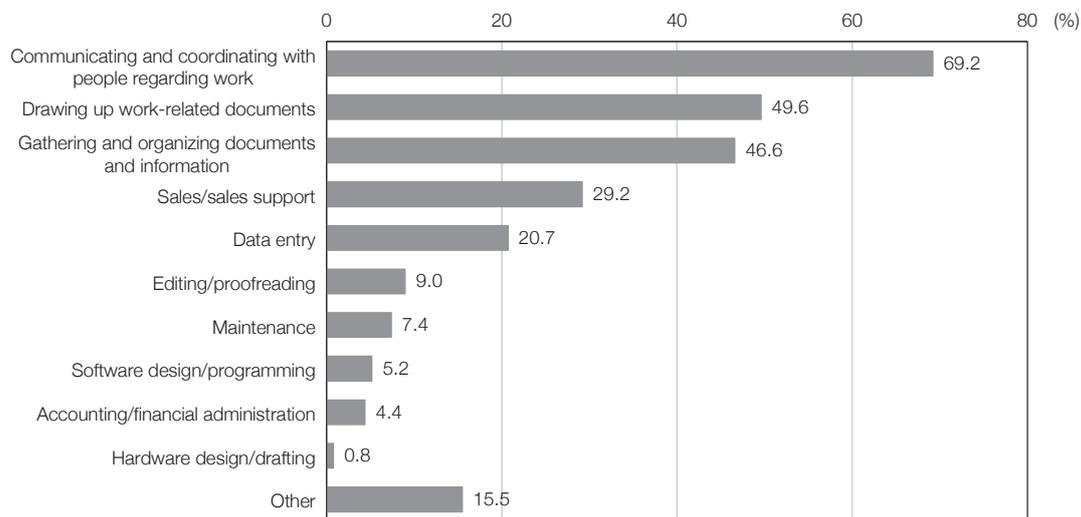
26. As far as can be seen from the survey data, people who work at a customer’s premises frequently (around 3-4 times a week) include a considerable number of people who use ICT to also work at home (or in some cases, in transit). Moreover, among those who work at home, a certain number work at cafes and other such places. This seems to reflect the possibilities for working “anytime, anywhere.”

Next, let us look at the particular work duties that workers with a flexible working style are conducting at alternative workplaces. Figure 7 shows that a significant percentage conduct work such as “communicating and coordinating with people regarding work,” “drawing up work-related documents,” and “gathering and organizing documents and information.”

We will now examine the reasons why people choose to work at alternative workplaces (Table 2). Among those who work at “other business premises” of their company or at “a customer’s premises” large percentages selected the response “because it is necessary given the nature of the work” (65.2% and 75.9% respectively). In contrast, the reasons for working at “home,” “in transit (method of transport/station),” at a “hotel/place of accommodation,” or at a “café or restaurant” are slightly different. Commonly selected reasons include “because I want to improve the efficiency with which I work” and “because it is work that can be done anywhere.” Moreover, in the case of working at home, certain percentages of respondents also selected such responses as “because I want to increase the time spent with my family” (15.2%) and “because I want to decrease the burden of commuting to work” (9.7%), in addition to the aforementioned reasons. This shows that the implications of working at alternative workplaces differ between cases where workers work at customer’s premises or other such location and cases where they work at home or in transit.

The reasons touched on above are also reflected in the advantages perceived by the workers themselves. Looking at the kinds of aspects that workers with a flexible working style sense as benefits of a flexible working style (Figure 8), an exceptionally high percentage selected the response “it improves the productivity and efficiency of work” (59.9%). This is followed by responses such as “it improves customer service” (23.4%). This suggests that flexible working styles have significant advantages in terms of raising work productivity and efficiency.

On the other hand, there are concerning factors when we consider the workload involved. Let us look at the disadvantages of flexible working styles as seen by workers with a flexible working style (Figure 9). The most commonly selected response is “it is difficult to draw the line between what is and isn’t work” (44.8%),



(Workers with an ICT-based flexible working style, N=367)

Source: Same as Figure 4.

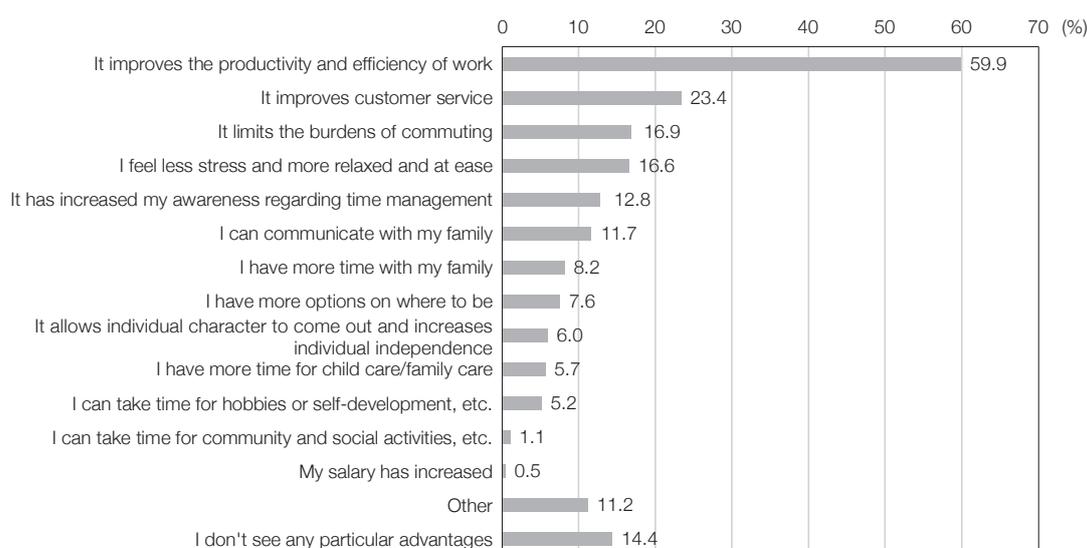
Figure 7. Particular work duties conducted at alternative workplaces (M.A.)

Table 2. Reasons for working at alternative workplaces (M.A.): By workplace  
(Workers with an ICT-based flexible working style)

(%)

	Because it is necessary given the nature of the work	Because it is work that can be done anywhere	Because I want to improve the efficiency with which I work	Because I want to decrease the burden of commuting to work	Because I want to increase the time spent with my family	Other
Other business premises of my company (N=184)	65.2	16.3	30.4	1.6	0.5	4.9
Home (N=269)	27.9	32.7	40.1	9.7	15.2	11.2
Customer's premises (N=166)	75.9	9.0	25.3	0.0	0.0	4.2
In transit (method of transport/station) (N=174)	28.2	31.0	49.4	4.6	4.6	6.9
Hotel/place of accommodation (N=126)	27.8	35.7	50.0	3.2	1.6	4.8
Café/restaurant (N=101)	23.8	44.6	45.5	5.0	1.0	9.9

Source: Same as Figure 4.



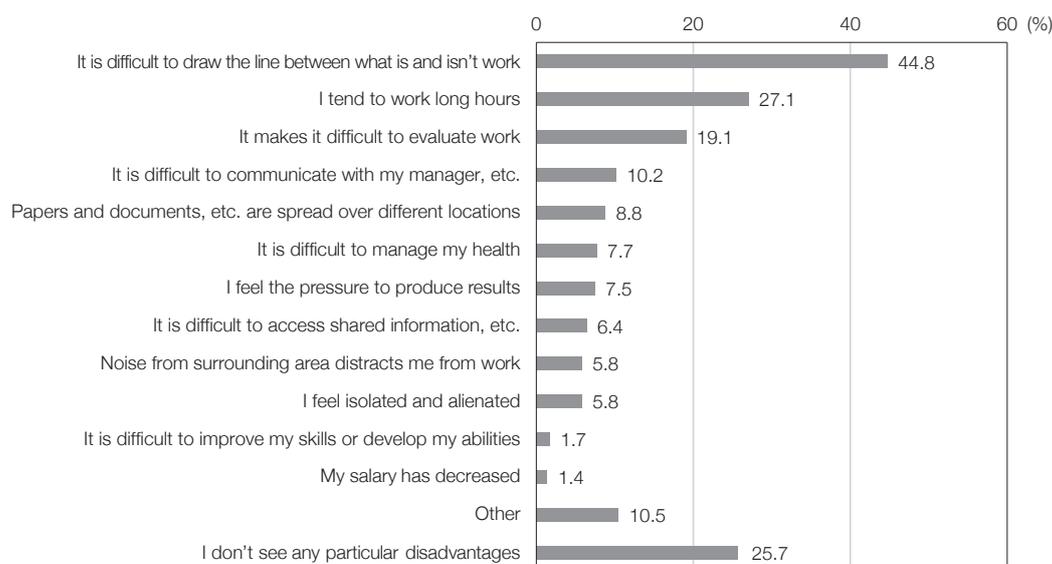
(Workers with an ICT-based flexible working style, N=367)

Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 8. Perceived advantages of a flexible working style (M.A.)

followed by “I tend to work long hours” (27.1%).<sup>27</sup> On the other hand, 25.7% selected the response “I don’t see any particular disadvantages,” indicating a divide in workers’ opinions toward flexible working styles.

27. “It makes it difficult to evaluate work” was another response selected, but it is unclear what this means. This could be a reflection of workers’ dissatisfaction that the way they work does not receive sufficient recognition from their company or manager.



(Workers with an ICT-based flexible working style, N=362)

Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 9. Perceived disadvantages of a flexible working style (M.A.)

#### IV. Flexible working styles and working hours

This section investigates what kind of hours are worked by workers with an ICT-based flexible working style (a working style not restricted to a certain workplace) and identifies where the problems lie.

##### 1. Application of working hour systems

We will start by considering the kinds of working hour systems under which such workers are adopting flexible working styles. Looking at the working hour systems applied (Figure 10), in a significant percentage of cases “the normal working hour system” is applied (60.7%). Flexible working hour systems such as “discretionary working systems”<sup>28</sup> or the “deemed working hours system for work outside of the employer’s business premises”<sup>29</sup> are only applied in the minority of cases.<sup>30</sup> As far as we can see in the working hour systems applied, the systems currently provided can hardly be described as an environment that allows workers to flexibly arrange their time and location as suits them.<sup>31</sup>

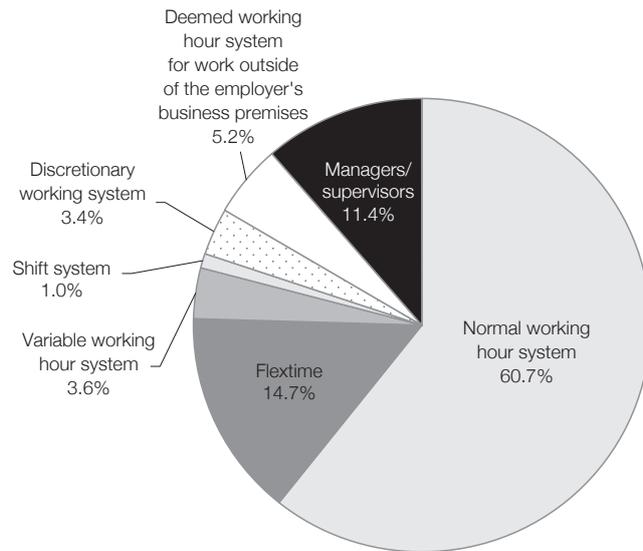
Moreover, while for people who work at home on a daily basis the application of “telecommuting systems” is a conceivable option, looking at the extent to which such systems are applied to people who work at home at least one day a week (Figure 11), only around 10% are “using a telecommuting system etc.” The majority of

28. Discretionary working systems (*sairyō rōdō-sei*) are applied whenever necessary due to the nature of the work in question, to largely entrust the method of performing the work to the discretion of the workers who are engaged in the work. There are two types, which differ according to the type of work they are applied to: the “discretionary working system for professional work” and the “discretionary working system for planning work.”

29. The deemed working hours system (*minashi rōdō-sei*) for work outside of the employer’s business premises is applied to account for the actual circumstances of work in the case of workers who often work at locations other than their employer’s business premises, such as salespeople who visit customers, etc. Under the system, when a worker has engaged in work outside of the business premises for all or part of the working hours, and it is difficult to calculate working hours, they are deemed to have worked the prescribed working hours.

30. As this includes workers in managerial roles, over 10% are managers/supervisors for whom working hour restrictions do not apply.

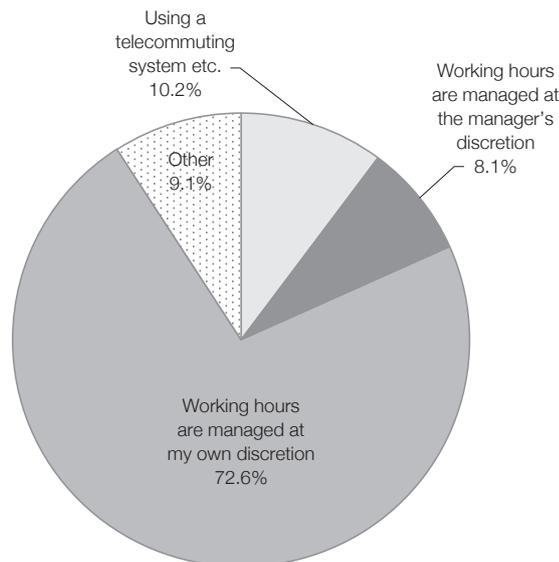
31. “Flextime systems” are also treated as flexible working hour systems, but while they allow workers flexibility in setting their starting and finishing times, they cannot really be described as suitable for working styles in which workers flexibly arrange their time and location, as they are essentially based on calculating working hours according to the time spent at the employer’s business premises.



(Workers with a flexible working style, N=387)

Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 10. Working hour systems applied



(Workers who work at home at least one day a week, N=186)

Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 11. Use of telecommuting and other such systems

such people (72.6%) selected the response “working hours are managed at my own discretion.”<sup>32</sup>

These results suggest that currently many workers who adopt such flexible ways of working are not doing so under company systems. Instead, such workers manage their working hours at their own discretion. In other

32. The results of the company survey also reflect that such systems are only being put into practice by a limited number of companies, with only 1.7% of companies implementing telecommuting as a company system.

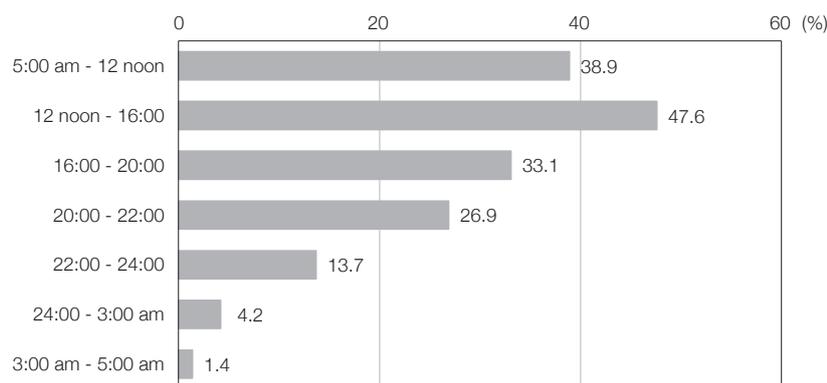
words, we can say that this working style includes informal overtime at home in great amount, so companies are not fully ascertaining or managing such workers' working hours.<sup>33</sup>

## 2. Actual working hours

Here we will investigate the actual working hours of people with a flexible working style, starting by looking at the times of day that people work at alternative workplaces.

Looking at Figure 12, which shows compiled data on the main working times,<sup>34</sup> large percentages of such workers work at times during the daytime—namely, “5:00 am to 12 noon,” “12 noon to 16:00,” and “16:00 to 20:00.” At the same time, there are also certain percentages of such workers who work at night or late at night, that is, from “20:00 to 22:00,” “22:00 to 24:00,” and “24:00 to 3:00 am.”<sup>35</sup>

Now, let us look at the length of working hours, by comparing the actual monthly working hours (the actual hours worked, including overtime) of workers with a flexible working style and workers with a standard working style (Figure 13). The figure shows us that in comparison with workers with a standard working style, there are particularly high percentages of workers with a flexible working style who work “200 hours to under 220 hours,” “220 hours to under 240 hours” and “240 hours or more.” This suggests that there is a general tendency among workers with a flexible working style toward long working hours.<sup>36</sup> This seems to imply that at present, cases in which workers work at alternative workplaces often involve informal overtime at home or elsewhere.<sup>37</sup>



(Workers with an ICT-based flexible working style, N=357)

Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 12. Main working times when working at alternative workplaces

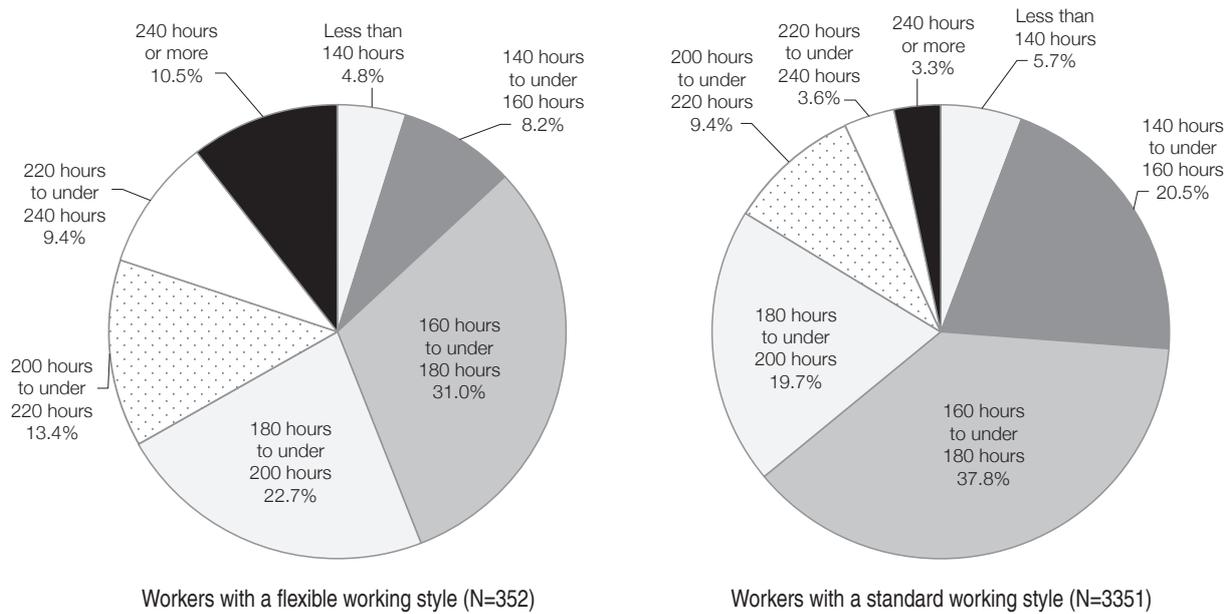
33. This is also corroborated by the fact that a low percentage of people who work at home gave the response that “working hours are managed at the manager’s discretion.”

34. This data is gathered on the basis of responses to a survey question asking the main times of day in which workers actually work when working at alternative workplaces (respondents selected two main working times).

35. While the diagram is not included here, looking exclusively at workers who work from home at least three days a week, the percentage whose main working times are at night “from 20:00 to 22:00” and “from 22:00 to 24:00” are higher than the percentage whose main working times are during the daytime.

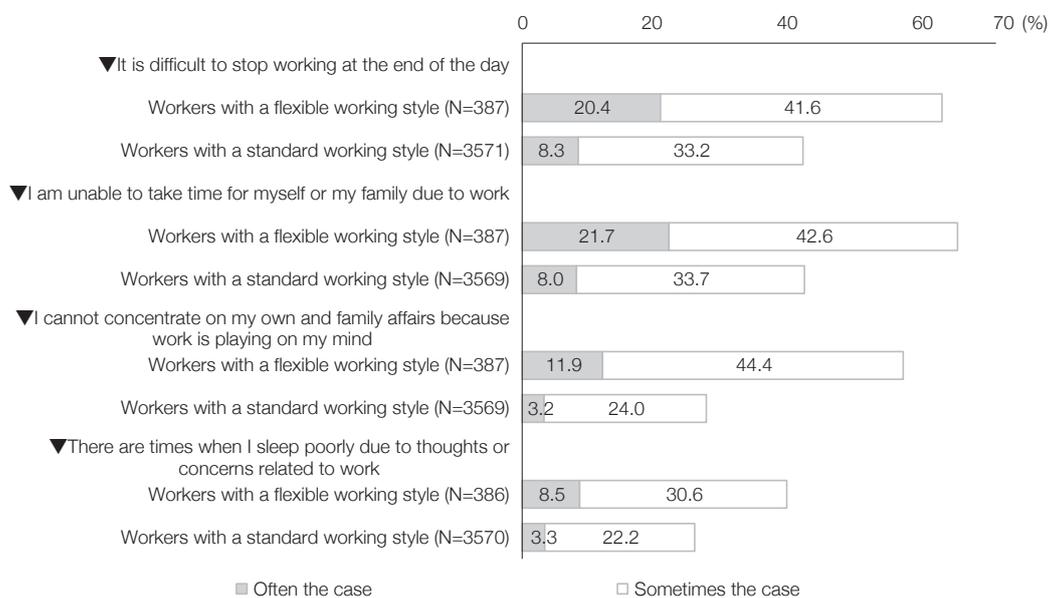
36. Furthermore, looking at income levels, workers with a flexible working style have higher income levels, but as this is related to factors such as managerial positions and years in continuous employment with their current employer, it would be wrong to make the generalization that flexible working styles pay off in terms of the salaries that such workers receive. This is a point to clarify in future research.

37. However, while the figures are not included here due to the low number of responses, working hours among people who use telecommuting systems are (although shorter in comparison with workers who manage their hours at their own discretion) likewise longer in comparison with people with a standard working style. In other words, this is not to suggest that it is invariably the case that working hours are longer due to informal overtime at home. This is a point to be addressed in future research.



Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 13. Actual monthly working hours: By type of working style



Source: Same as Figure 4.

Figure 14. Impact of work on family and private life: By type of working style

Earlier in this paper, it was noted that many workers identified the fact that “it is difficult to draw the line between what is and isn’t work” as a disadvantage of flexible working styles. Examining the length of working hours alone is not sufficient to investigate this point. Let us look at the questionnaire responses on the impacts on private and family life to see how workers with a flexible working style perceive such workloads. Figure 14

shows that the percentages of workers with a flexible working style who selected the responses “it is difficult to stop working at the end of the day,” “I am unable to take time for myself or my family due to work,” and “I cannot concentrate on my own and family affairs because work is playing on my mind” are higher than those of people with a standard working style. In addition to these negative effects on work-life balance, there is also a difference in terms of issues that affect health, with higher percentages of people with flexible working styles selecting the response “there are times when I sleep poorly due to thoughts or concerns related to work.” As we have just seen, this appears to be related to the fact there is currently a common trend among people with flexible working styles to work long hours and work late at night. It is a serious issue to deal with such problems affecting workers’ health and private lives. That needs to be addressed through employment management by companies and policy support, rather than simply reduced to an issue of workers’ self-discipline.

## V. Conclusion

This paper started by giving an overview of the growing diversity in working hours in Japan, and then went on to examine the current ways of working and other such factors concerning people who use ICT to adopt a flexible working style free from temporal and spatial constraints.

What does liberation from temporal and spatial constraints (or, in other words, “increased flexibility”) mean for working people? Firstly, such flexibility is called for due to the demands of family life, such as the need to balance caring for children or relatives with work, and it has the advantage that it does enable such balance. With the increasing percentages of women in employment and other such growing diversity in the labor force, there is a high necessity to ensure flexibility in working styles to suit such people’s needs. On the other hand, it is also necessary to practice caution given the potential for flexible working styles to lead to overwork. More specifically, there is a risk of workers being expected to work “anytime, anywhere,” as flexibility becomes solely for client convenience,<sup>38</sup> and workers face demands from their companies or managers to fulfill excessive work quotas. The analysis results in this paper have touched on just some of the issues this creates, namely, problems that affect workers’ health and their ability to balance work with their private lives.

As far as can be seen from the survey data, a considerable proportion of people with ICT-based flexible working styles (who work somewhere other than the normal workplace at their employer’s premises) work at locations such as customer’s business presences or at home or other such locations on a daily basis. At the same time, people who do so under flexible working hour systems or telecommuting systems are in the minority, and many are managing their work at their own discretion. The data also showed that people who adopt such working styles may work long hours and late at night, and such workers were also seen to be sensing conflict between work and their private lives.

It goes without saying that such trends and issues are not unique to Japan. As we have seen at the beginning of this paper, in recent years other developed countries have also faced a number of issues such as the diversification in the times of day at which people work and the related problems, as well as the problem of the erosion of boundaries between work and private life when working at home or other such locations. This led us to address which characteristics are particular to Japan.

As noted in Section II, constant overtime such as “unpaid overtime” and “take-home overtime” has always been a distinctive feature of the long working hours in Japan. These working styles—which have typically been explained as a reflection of Japanese peoples’ work ethics and Japan’s workplace norms—have spawned the trend of workers long working hours out of sight from companies and managers. As the advances in ICT make it increasingly easier to work at home or other such locations beyond the normal workplace, it is possible that workers may be compelled to engage in long working hours in such alternative locations in order to meet excessively high demands for results from their employers or customers. If this is the case, it is necessary for

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38. Takami (2018) examines overwork due to the demands of client convenience.

institutional or social measures to be adopted to put a check on such a trend.<sup>39</sup> Such flexible working styles make it difficult for companies and managers to ascertain and manage working hours, meaning that it is also unclear what workloads workers are tackling. In that sense, overwork problems could become invisible for companies and managers. While recognizing the advantages of flexibility, we also need to keep a careful eye on what this entails and what trends it prompts, with a view toward preventing overwork.

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39. It is critical to ensure that systems are not only provided for the appropriate management of working hours, such as restrictions on work late at night, but also to ensure that the amount of work is managed correctly. With the growing spread of specialist white-collar work, which is difficult to manage and supervise, it is becoming ever more vital for management to address the risks of overwork by assigning work on the basis of accurate calculations of the time required for each task. It is also important for management to adopt measures to protect workers' health, such as medical checkups and tests to ascertain psychological stress.