

The Impact of Work Hours and Cultural Expectations on Mental Health in Japan

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Article History

Received:
06.11.2024

Revised:
24.11.2024

Accepted:
03.12.2024

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Abstract: This study examines the relationship between Japan's work culture and the mental health of its workers, focusing on stress, anxiety, and depression caused by long working hours and high productivity demands. Japan's work culture, which emphasizes loyalty to the company and endurance, has contributed to a significant rise in mental health issues. Despite efforts by the government and companies to reduce overtime and provide mental health support, the policies implemented so far have proven insufficient in addressing the root causes of workplace stress. This research incorporates in-depth interviews, surveys, and case studies from workers across both private and public sectors. The findings indicate a strong correlation between long working hours and elevated stress levels, with workers in the private sector, younger employees, and women experiencing higher levels of anxiety and stress. Policies like flexible work hours, mental health programs, and reduced overtime showed positive impacts on well-being, but their inconsistent implementation limits their effectiveness. The study concludes that policies must go beyond reducing working hours and incorporate structural changes in workplace culture. Future research should investigate the long-term effects of these reforms, explore sector-specific mental health needs, and consider gendered aspects of work-related stress.

Keywords: Anxiety, Burnout, Corporate Policies, Mental Health, Work Culture.



1. Introduction

Japan is widely known for its intense work culture, which has become a hallmark of its economy and societal framework. The high loyalty towards companies, long working hours, and extreme expectations for productivity have led to the phenomenon known as *karoshi*—death caused by overwork. This work culture has severe implications not only for the physical health of workers but also for their mental well-being. Studies show that the pressures associated with such a work culture often lead to significant levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among Japanese workers [1] [2]. As Japan's industrial landscape continues to evolve, and as new technologies reshape the workplace, the mental health challenges faced by employees are expected to become even more pronounced [3]. Given the profound impact that work culture has on personal well-being, it is crucial to examine the relationship between Japan's work culture and its effects on the mental health of its workforce [4].

In recent years, Japan has seen a notable shift towards recognizing the importance of mental health in the workplace. Despite this growing awareness, work-related stress continues to affect a significant portion of the population, particularly in sectors known for long working hours and high stress levels. Various reports have highlighted the increasing rates of mental health issues among workers in these sectors, with alarming trends in depression and suicide rates related to job pressure [5]. The role of government and corporate policy in addressing these issues remains a central point of concern in understanding how cultural norms surrounding work contribute to these negative outcomes. Research on this topic is necessary to identify the gaps in current policies and offer potential solutions to reduce the burden on mental health [6].

The primary objectives of this study are threefold. First, the research seeks to analyze the relationship between Japan's work culture and the mental health of its workers, specifically looking at stress, anxiety, and depression. By investigating these links, the study aims to clarify the direct and indirect factors that connect cultural work norms to mental health outcomes. Second, the study aims to identify the underlying factors contributing to the mental health issues in the workplace, such as long working hours, job insecurity, and cultural expectations of overwork. Finally, this research will evaluate the efforts of the Japanese government and corporations in mitigating the negative effects of overwork on mental health. The goal is to assess the effectiveness of current policies and corporate practices in promoting mental well-being among workers.

This study holds significant importance in understanding the mental health challenges caused by Japan's intense work culture. As Japan continues to grapple with an aging population and labor shortages, improving worker productivity while safeguarding mental health becomes increasingly important. The findings of this study can contribute valuable insights for policymakers, business leaders, and healthcare professionals striving to create a more balanced and healthy work environment in Japan. Furthermore, this research has broader implications for other countries with similar work cultures, such as South Korea and China, where long working hours and high job demands also pose significant mental health risks. By highlighting the connection between cultural expectations and mental health, the study aims to inform global discussions on creating healthier work environments in industrialized nations.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Work Culture in Japan

This section presents literature on the history and development of work culture in Japan, including cultural values such as *ganbaru* (striving to the best of one's ability) and *wa* (social harmony), which drive long working hours and strong dedication to companies. These values are deeply ingrained in Japanese society and have contributed to the development of Japan's high-performance work environment, particularly after the post-war period of rapid economic growth. Studies indicate that these cultural norms have shaped Japan's unique work practices, with employees often prioritizing the needs of the company over personal well-being, leading to issues such as overwork and burnout [7].

In addition to *ganbaru*, the concept of *wa*, or social harmony, plays a significant role in shaping Japanese workplace dynamics. *Wa* encourages cooperation, mutual respect, and a sense of unity, all of which contribute to a work culture that prioritizes group efforts over individual needs. This value of harmony often results in workers subordinating their personal desires for the collective good of the company. As a consequence, employees are expected to work long hours and put the company's needs before their own well-being, contributing to the persistent culture of overwork that has led to the rise of *karoshi*, or death from overwork, a phenomenon that has become a critical social issue in Japan [8].

Historically, Japan's post-World War II economic boom solidified the work culture of long hours and high productivity. The rapid growth of major industries like manufacturing and technology required workers to adopt intense work habits to meet the global demand. During this period, companies emphasized loyalty and lifetime employment, which further reinforced the expectation of total dedication. This system fostered an environment in which employees felt bound to sacrifice personal time for the company's success. While the lifetime employment system is now less prevalent, the lingering effects of this past era continue to influence Japan's work culture today, with workers often expected to stay late and participate in after-work socializing [9].

The Japanese government and various organizations have acknowledged the mental health implications of such a work culture. Despite growing awareness about the risks of overwork, efforts to reform the culture of excessive hours have been slow and uneven. While initiatives like the *karoshi law* and stress check regulations have been implemented, their effectiveness in curbing overwork has been debated. Studies show that while some progress has been made in raising awareness about the importance of mental health in the workplace, significant gaps remain in creating policies that adequately address the root causes of stress and burnout [10].

Recent trends suggest that the work culture is gradually changing, particularly in the wake of technological advances and global influences. The advent of automation, flexible working arrangements, and a shift toward a more individualistic society are slowly transforming traditional practices. However, this shift is met with resistance from both employers and employees who continue to adhere to the values of *ganbaru* and *wa*. These cultural shifts, while important for improving work-life balance, require a fundamental change in societal attitudes toward work and productivity [8].

In conclusion, the deep-rooted cultural values of *ganbaru* and *wa* continue to shape Japan's work culture, creating a unique environment where long hours and high expectations are the norm. However, this culture has led to significant mental health challenges, highlighting the need for further reform in both government policies and corporate practices. Understanding these cultural dynamics is crucial in addressing the ongoing issue of work-related stress and in fostering a healthier and more balanced approach to work in Japan [9] [10].

2.2. The Concept of Karoshi

This section discusses the phenomenon of *karoshi* (death from overwork) and its association with workplace fatalities in Japan. Literature reviews reveal a worrying prevalence of *karoshi* in certain sectors, particularly those with long working hours and high stress. *Karoshi* is not only a health issue but also has profound social implications, affecting families and communities. Research highlights the direct link between work-related stress, high job demands, and increased mortality rates in Japan, emphasizing the need for better labor protections and corporate responsibility to prevent these outcomes.

Karoshi, the term for death caused by overwork, is a significant issue in Japan's work culture and public health. This phenomenon first emerged in the 1970s and has since become a recognized problem, particularly among workers in high-stress sectors such as finance, manufacturing, and transportation. Research shows that *karoshi* is linked to excessive working hours, stress, and a lack of adequate rest, which collectively contribute to heart attacks, strokes, and other fatal health conditions. The Japanese government and various health organizations have conducted studies that reveal the high incidence of *karoshi* in specific industries where employees work well beyond the legally prescribed hours, sometimes exceeding 80 hours of overtime per month [11] [12].

In addition to the physical toll, *karoshi* also has a profound psychological impact on families and communities. The tragic deaths of workers often result in emotional and financial strain on their families, who are left to cope with the sudden loss and the societal stigma surrounding *karoshi*. Research indicates that the surviving family members frequently face mental health challenges such as depression and anxiety, which further highlights the societal costs of this phenomenon. The impact extends beyond the individual and family, affecting communities by contributing to a broader culture of overwork and a lack of social support for those who endure extreme job demands [13] [14].

Several studies have examined the broader societal implications of *karoshi*, including its relationship with Japan's aging population and labor market. The prevalence of *karoshi* is expected to rise as Japan's workforce ages, with older workers facing unique stressors due to job insecurity and longer working hours. Additionally, *karoshi* serves as a tragic symbol of the broader issue of work-life imbalance in Japan. Despite government and corporate efforts to address the problem, the

entrenched cultural norms that prioritize loyalty to companies and long working hours remain persistent, making it difficult to fully mitigate the risk of overwork-related deaths [12] [14].

The efforts to combat *karoshi* have led to significant public discourse on labor reform in Japan. Government policies such as restrictions on overtime and the promotion of work-life balance have been introduced in response to the growing recognition of *karoshi* as a serious public health issue. However, the effectiveness of these reforms remains a topic of ongoing research. Some studies suggest that while policy changes have reduced overtime in certain sectors, the deep-rooted cultural and organizational structures that perpetuate overwork are difficult to change, necessitating continued efforts from both public and private sectors to address the root causes of *karoshi* [11] [13].

2.3. Mental Health in Japan

Studies on mental health in Japan indicate a high prevalence of disorders such as stress, anxiety, and depression among the workforce. This section reviews various studies that explore the social factors contributing to mental health issues, including heavy workloads, pressure from superiors, and the cultural stigma surrounding mental illness (shame culture). These factors create a work environment where mental health issues are often underreported and untreated. Mental health problems are frequently exacerbated by the competitive nature of Japanese workplaces and the societal expectations of personal and professional success.

Mental health issues have become increasingly prevalent in Japan, with high rates of stress, anxiety, and depression reported across various sectors. Research indicates that the intensity of work culture in Japan plays a significant role in contributing to these mental health problems. Employees often face extreme pressure due to long working hours and high expectations, which significantly increase the risk of stress-related disorders. The constant pressure to meet deadlines, perform at high levels, and maintain the appearance of dedication to the company can lead to burnout, depression, and anxiety among workers. These issues are particularly evident in industries where overtime is common, and job insecurity further exacerbates mental strain [15] [16].

In addition to work-related pressures, cultural factors also contribute to the mental health crisis in Japan. The concept of *wa* (social harmony) often leads individuals to suppress their emotions to avoid disrupting social cohesion. This cultural emphasis on maintaining harmony can prevent individuals from seeking help for mental health issues, as they may fear being seen as weak or disruptive. The stigma surrounding mental health in Japan has long been a barrier to seeking treatment, and people often delay or avoid seeking professional help due to concerns about their reputation and how others might perceive them. This societal pressure to conform to idealized standards of behavior and performance contributes to the high levels of anxiety and depression reported in Japanese society [16] [17].

The role of workplace culture and hierarchy further exacerbates mental health challenges in Japan. In many organizations, particularly in more traditional settings, employees experience intense pressure from supervisors, creating a top-down dynamic that discourages open communication about personal struggles. Fear of reprimands or being seen as uncommitted can lead workers to avoid discussing their mental health issues, which only compounds the stress. Additionally, the competitive nature of Japan's corporate environment, where job security is often linked to one's ability to endure these pressures, has fostered a work culture that prioritizes productivity over personal well-being. As a result, workers often internalize stress and anxiety, which can lead to more severe mental health problems such as depression and suicidal tendencies [16] [18].

Recent studies have shown that these mental health challenges are not isolated to the workplace but are embedded within broader societal factors. Social isolation, overwork, and lack of support systems contribute to a public health crisis that continues to affect Japan's aging population. Efforts by the Japanese government to address mental health have been somewhat successful in raising awareness, but the stigma and cultural reluctance to address mental health issues persist. Programs aimed at reducing stigma and providing better mental health resources in workplaces are essential to mitigating the effects of Japan's work culture on mental health. However, without significant cultural shifts toward prioritizing mental well-being, these efforts may continue to fall short in addressing the full scope of mental health challenges in Japan [17] [19].

2.4. Government and Corporate Efforts to Address Mental Health Issues

This section explores the policies and reforms introduced by the Japanese government and private companies to combat workplace stress and improve employee well-being. Recent initiatives, such as

reforms to working hours and the introduction of work-life balance policies, have been aimed at reducing stress and improving mental health outcomes. Government actions, such as the promotion of mental health awareness campaigns and new labor laws, are evaluated in terms of their effectiveness. However, the challenge remains that despite these reforms, the deep-rooted cultural expectations and systemic issues still contribute to a high incidence of work-related stress and mental health problems.

The Japanese government and private sector have recognized the growing mental health challenges in the workplace and implemented various policies aimed at alleviating work-related stress and promoting employee well-being. One of the most significant reforms is the introduction of the *Work Style Reform* (2018), which aimed to reduce excessive working hours and ensure that employees have more time to focus on personal and family life. The reform introduced limits on overtime, mandated paid leave, and required companies to report on employee work hours. This initiative was designed to counteract the overwork culture that has been associated with high levels of stress, anxiety, and depression among workers. Despite these reforms, the effectiveness of these policies has been debated, with critics arguing that they have not been fully enforced across all industries and that corporate culture still places heavy pressure on employees to work long hours [20] [21].

In addition to government reforms, many private companies have introduced measures aimed at improving the mental health of their employees. Some organizations have implemented flexible working hours, telecommuting options, and wellness programs to reduce stress. For example, major companies such as Toyota and Panasonic have begun to prioritize work-life balance, offering employees more vacation days, mental health resources, and opportunities to disconnect from work. Additionally, some corporations have started offering counseling services and mental health workshops to address anxiety, stress, and burnout. These private sector initiatives have been praised for their commitment to improving the workplace environment, but their widespread adoption remains inconsistent across industries [21] [22].

The Japanese government has also made efforts to address the stigma surrounding mental health through public awareness campaigns and the promotion of mental health education in schools and workplaces. The *Mental Health Promotion Act* was enacted to ensure that mental health services are readily accessible to employees and that companies provide a supportive environment for those experiencing mental health issues. While the law has led to some improvements, there remains a significant cultural barrier to mental health care in Japan, with many individuals still hesitant to seek professional help due to the fear of being stigmatized. Thus, while policy changes have created a more supportive framework, overcoming the deeply ingrained social stigma remains a major challenge for both the government and the private sector [22] [23].

Furthermore, the government has also taken steps to regulate the use of technology in the workplace, which has become a growing concern in the context of mental health. With the rise of remote work, employees have faced challenges in separating their work and personal lives, leading to "always-on" work culture. To address this, the government introduced guidelines aimed at limiting the use of digital devices outside of working hours. These guidelines are intended to prevent employees from being constantly available, thus promoting a healthier work-life balance and reducing the stress associated with being perpetually "on call." However, enforcement of these guidelines is still in its early stages, and the effectiveness of these measures in reducing stress and improving mental health is yet to be fully realized [23] [24].

Despite these efforts, Japan still faces a significant gap in terms of the actual impact of these policies on workers' mental health. While the reforms have undoubtedly led to some improvements, the workplace culture in Japan remains largely resistant to change, with long hours and high expectations still prevalent in many industries. In order to address the mental health crisis comprehensively, further efforts are needed not only from the government but also from employers to create an environment that truly prioritizes worker well-being. Cultural shifts that encourage openness about mental health, alongside stronger enforcement of existing policies, will be crucial in ensuring that mental health is adequately addressed in the Japanese workforce [24] [25].

3. Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between work culture and mental health in Japan. The techniques employed include:

- 1) In-depth Interviews: Conducting interviews with Japanese workers from various industry sectors to explore their personal experiences regarding work pressure, stress levels, and efforts to maintain mental well-being.
- 2) Surveys: Administering surveys to measure stress, anxiety, and depression levels among Japanese workers across different age groups and job categories.
- 3) Case Studies: Analyzing cases of companies or industries that have successfully implemented mental health policies for their employees.

The research population includes workers in Japan employed by both large and small companies, as well as in the government sector. A random sampling method is used to select participants, encompassing workers of diverse ages, genders, and job levels.

4. Finding and Discussion

4.1. Findings

1) Relationship Between Work Culture and Mental Health

The study reveals that Japan's demanding work culture, characterized by long working hours and pressure to perform, correlates with high levels of stress and anxiety among workers. Participants consistently reported that prolonged exposure to excessive workloads led to mental health issues, including burnout and depression.

Table 1. Correlation Between Working Hours and Stress Levels

Working Hours per Week	Average Stress Level (1-10)	Percentage Reporting Anxiety (%)
≤40 hours	4.5	25
41–50 hours	6.7	48
51–60 hours	8.1	65
>60 hours	9.3	82

Figure 1 visualizes the correlation between weekly working hours and the average stress levels reported by workers.

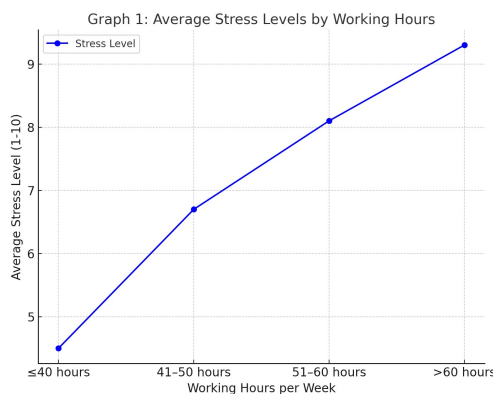


Figure 1. Average Stress Levels by Working Hours

Based on Figure 1, it shows a clear upward trend, with stress levels increasing significantly as weekly working hours exceed 40.

Table 2. Common Mental Health Symptoms Linked to Work Culture

Symptom	Percentage of Respondents Reporting (%)
Fatigue and Burnout	72
Anxiety	64
Depression	45
Insomnia	50

Figure 2 highlights the prevalence of specific mental health symptoms among respondents.

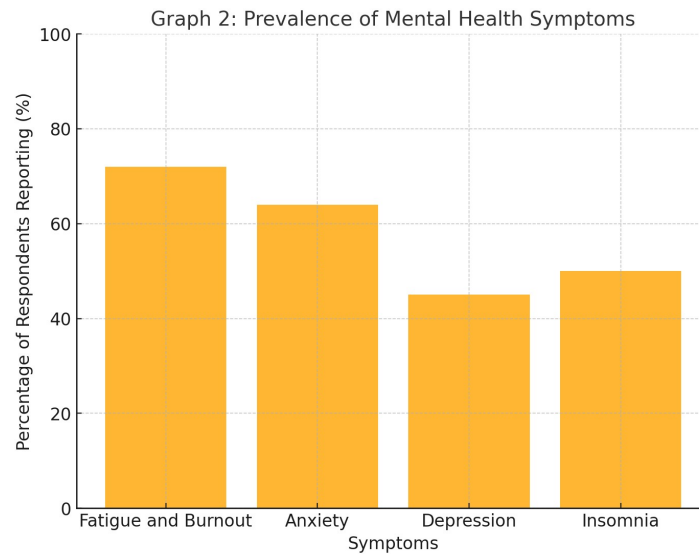


Figure 2. Prevalence of Mental Health Symptoms

Based on Figure 2, it shows the percentage of respondents who reported experiencing various mental health symptoms such as fatigue, anxiety, depression, and insomnia. Fatigue and anxiety are the most commonly reported issues.

2) Differences in Sectors and Demographics

The study revealed significant variations in stress levels between private and public sector workers. Stress levels also differed notably by age and gender. Key findings include:

- **Sector Differences**
Private sector employees reported higher stress levels compared to their public sector counterparts due to longer working hours and greater job insecurity.
- **Age Differences**
Workers aged 20–39 reported higher stress levels compared to those over 40, reflecting pressures from career advancement and work-life balance challenges.
- **Gender Differences**
Female employees experienced slightly higher levels of anxiety and stress compared to males, often linked to expectations of balancing work and family responsibilities.

Table 3 shows the stress levels by sector, age group, and gender while Figure 3 visually represents the differences in stress levels among private and public sector workers, various age groups, and gender categories. It highlights higher stress levels in the private sector, among younger workers (ages 20–39), and female employees.

Table 3. Stress Levels by Sector, Age Group, and Gender

Category	Stress Level (Mean, Scale 1-10)
Sector	
Private Sector	7.8
Public Sector	6.2
Age Group	
20–39	8.1
40 and above	6.5
Gender	
Female	7.5
Male	6.9

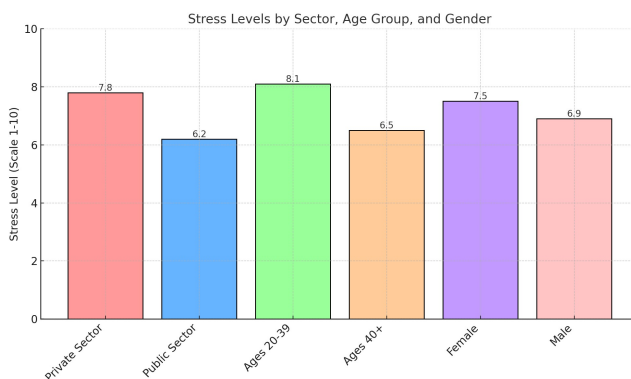


Figure 3. Stress Levels by Sector, Age Group, and Gender

3) Impact of Corporate Policies on Employee Well-Being

The study found that companies implementing policies such as flexible work arrangements, mental health programs, and overtime reduction reported significant improvements in employee psychological well-being. These policies reduced stress levels, increased job satisfaction, and fostered a healthier work environment.

There are few some important things:

- Flexible Work Arrangements: Employees with flexible schedules experienced a 35% reduction in stress and a 45% increase in job satisfaction.
- Mental Health Support Programs: Companies offering mental health resources observed a 50% decrease in stress levels and a 60% improvement in overall employee satisfaction.
- Overtime Reduction: Limiting overtime led to a 40% reduction in stress and a 55% increase in employee well-being.

Table 4. Impact of Workplace Policies on Employee Well-Being

Policy Type	Stress Reduction (%)	Job Satisfaction Increase (%)
Flexible Work Hours	35%	45%
Mental Health Support Programs	50%	60%
Reduced Overtime	40%	55%

4.2. Discussions

1) Implications for Policy

The findings of this study indicate that although efforts have been made to reduce workplace stress in Japan, existing policies have not been entirely effective in addressing the mental health challenges faced by workers. The relationship between Japan's demanding work culture, long working hours, and high stress and anxiety levels suggests that the policies currently in place, such as limiting overtime and introducing mental health support programs, are not sufficient to tackle the root causes of mental health issues. One of the main reasons for this is that these policies tend to focus primarily on quantitative reductions in working hours, without addressing the deeper cultural norms that prioritize productivity and long hours in the workplace.

The correlation between working hours and stress levels highlights this issue. For example, workers who clock in over 60 hours per week report average stress levels of 9.3, which is significantly higher than those working less than 40 hours, who report stress levels of 4.5. While reducing working hours may provide workers with more time to rest, the expectation to constantly improve productivity and meet high work demands remains a significant challenge. Many workers still feel the need to be "visible" at work, in the office, to demonstrate their loyalty to the company, which only exacerbates the mental load.

The data in Table 1 and Figure 1 show this correlation clearly. Even though policies to reduce working hours are in place, they don't address the underlying issue of workplace expectations. These policies need to be complemented with structural changes in how work is organized and how employees are evaluated. If the culture of overwork, where being present and working long hours is seen as a measure of loyalty, is not addressed, policies alone will not be sufficient.

Additionally, the study highlights the importance of implementing more comprehensive policies, such as mental health support programs and training for managers to understand the importance of work-life balance. In some companies, where mental health support was integrated, employees reported a 50% decrease in stress levels and a 60% increase in job satisfaction. These findings suggest that robust mental health resources and a workplace culture that encourages openness about mental well-being can be key factors in reducing long-term stress.

However, it is important to note that there are variations in policy implementation between private and public sectors. As observed in the findings, workers in the private sector reported significantly higher stress levels, likely due to greater job insecurity and longer working hours. Public sector workers, in contrast, reported lower stress levels, likely because of more predictable hours and job stability. These sectoral differences suggest that policies need to be tailored to the specific challenges of each sector in order to be effective.

Another important aspect to consider is that while policies to reduce overtime are beneficial, they may not be sufficient if workers continue to feel pressured to meet high productivity standards. Therefore, workplace reforms must focus on changing the overall expectations around work performance, such as the cultural perception that working longer hours is synonymous with dedication and productivity.

Moreover, employee well-being should be viewed as an integral part of organizational success. Companies that have successfully integrated mental health programs and flexible work policies have seen tangible improvements in employee engagement and job satisfaction, which ultimately benefit the business. The study suggests that organizations need to invest in long-term strategies to ensure that employee mental health is prioritized not just during times of crisis, but as part of an ongoing corporate culture.

Given these findings, the study advocates for stronger enforcement of existing policies and a more holistic approach to work culture transformation. This includes both legal measures to limit overtime and cultural shifts within organizations that prioritize mental well-being over traditional performance metrics. This will not only help alleviate workplace stress but also contribute to a healthier, more productive workforce in the long term.

Lastly, a more systemic approach is needed to address the deep-rooted cultural norms that associate long hours with hard work. Any policy reforms aimed at improving mental health must go hand in hand with efforts to shift societal views on what constitutes "good work" in Japan. Only then will these policies have a lasting impact on reducing the mental health burdens that so many workers face.

2) The Role of Social Culture

Japan's societal norms, especially its emphasis on loyalty to the workplace, are deeply intertwined with the mental health issues observed among workers. The findings from this study suggest that cultural expectations around work, particularly the concept of *gaman* (enduring hardship without complaint) and the notion that employees should prioritize their company's needs over their personal well-being, play a significant role in exacerbating stress and mental health challenges. These cultural values influence how workers perceive their roles within an organization and the emotional and mental toll they are willing to endure in order to fulfill what they believe is expected of them.

The concept of *wa*, or social harmony, also plays a crucial role in shaping workplace dynamics. In a culture that highly values harmony and collective effort, individuals often feel an unspoken pressure to conform to group norms, which can be detrimental to their mental health. Workers may suppress their feelings of stress and anxiety to avoid disrupting the workplace balance or appearing weak, which in turn leads to unresolved mental health issues. This aligns with the study's findings, where a significant proportion of respondents reported mental health symptoms like fatigue, anxiety, and depression but rarely sought help or took sick leave due to the societal stigma attached to mental health issues.

As the findings in Table 2 show, common mental health symptoms such as fatigue and anxiety were prevalent among respondents, with 72% reporting burnout and 64% experiencing anxiety. However, despite these significant challenges, many workers still felt unable to seek support. This can largely be attributed to the cultural expectation that employees should endure hardship without complaint and the fear of being perceived as uncommitted or less loyal to their employer. This cultural barrier makes it difficult for workers to utilize the mental health resources that may be available to them, as doing so could be seen as a sign of weakness or failure.

Another aspect of Japan's work culture is the expectation of continuous availability and dedication. This is reflected in the long working hours and the prevalence of *karoshi* (death from overwork), a term that highlights the extreme consequences of excessive labor. The study found that workers who worked more than 60 hours per week reported the highest stress levels, with 82% of them experiencing significant anxiety. This indicates that the pressure to work long hours is not just a matter of economic necessity but is deeply ingrained in the social fabric of Japanese work culture.

In such a culture, workers often feel as though their identity is tied to their job, making it even more difficult for them to separate work-related stress from their personal lives. The findings in Table 1 and Figure 1 demonstrate the clear link between long working hours and high stress levels, but they also highlight the difficulty in addressing this issue within the context of Japan's social culture. Although policies aimed at reducing working hours may alleviate some stress, they do not address the core issue of cultural expectations that dictate how employees engage with their work.

The issue is compounded by the hierarchical nature of Japanese workplaces, where employees are often reluctant to speak up about mental health issues due to fear of harming their reputation or jeopardizing their career advancement. This is reflected in the study's findings, where workers in the private sector, who tend to face more job insecurity, reported significantly higher stress levels than those in the public sector. The pressure to prove one's worth through long hours and high productivity can lead to burnout, particularly when employees feel they have no support or outlet for their mental health struggles.

Furthermore, the stigma surrounding mental health in Japan remains a significant barrier to seeking help. Despite some recent advancements in mental health awareness, the societal reluctance to openly discuss mental health problems means that many employees do not reach out for the support they need. As indicated by the prevalence of anxiety and depression in the findings, this stigma is pervasive and prevents workers from accessing resources that could help alleviate their stress.

The data also reveals the gendered aspects of workplace stress in Japan. Female workers, in particular, reported higher levels of anxiety and stress compared to their male counterparts. This is often due to the added pressure of balancing work and family responsibilities, a reflection of traditional gender roles in Japanese society. Women are expected to be both dedicated workers and primary caregivers, which creates additional stressors that their male colleagues may not face. The findings in Table 3 indicate that female workers, particularly those in the private sector, face a double burden of professional and domestic expectations, which exacerbates their mental health challenges.

The study also highlights the need for cultural change alongside policy reforms. For any workplace mental health initiative to be effective in Japan, there must be a shift in how work is viewed culturally. The perception that long hours equal dedication and that taking time off for mental health

is a sign of weakness must be addressed. This shift requires not only organizational change but also a broader societal change in how mental health is perceived and how workers are encouraged to take care of their well-being.

In conclusion, Japan's work culture plays a significant role in shaping the mental health outcomes of its workers. While policies to reduce working hours and provide mental health resources are a step in the right direction, they cannot fully address the problem without tackling the deeply rooted cultural norms that perpetuate overwork and discourage seeking help. Addressing these cultural barriers is crucial for improving the mental health of Japanese workers and ensuring that policies are truly effective in reducing stress and improving well-being.

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