

The Dark Side of Japanese Society, *Karoshi*, Overwork Death

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Karoshi, the Japanese word for death from overwork is one of the most serious and latest social issue in Japan. A recent example of this occurred in December 2015. A 24-year-old woman named Matsuri Takahashi had only recently started working for the major Japanese advertising agency, Dentsu Inc. Takahashi killed herself because of enduring harassment and excessive overwork she was subjected to during her time with the company (Soble, 2016). Karoshi is obviously an unethical workplace habit, and this study will help to clarify how karoshi is influenced by the Japanese culture. To understand why karoshi happens, we must consider the factors that led to the death of Takahashi; excessive work time and workplace harassment.

Firstly, why do Japanese people work such long hours and does excessive work time occur? The Japanese working style is influenced by the Japanese culture, which is based on collectivism which prioritizes harmony and cohesiveness. For example, it is ideal to agree with others and follow the majority in the Japanese society. Therefore, people don't object an old system and bad working condition they are facing. Secondly, harassment often occurs in the Japanese society. I assume that both top-down organization and the hierarchical relationship trigger harassment. Japanese society is based on the hierarchical relationship, such as showing respect to older people and people who are in the higher statue. Also, Japanese organizations are basically top-down design, thus both factors create the situation that especially young lower status workers follow the organization or their managers.

As a consequence of karoshi, specifically the incident that came about in Dentsu, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe has launched a "work-style reform" panel in March 2017 to alter the practice of long working hours and set strict penalties for companies that permit excessive work. The government also announced in December 2016 that it would disclose the names of companies with deaths related to overwork and beef up monitoring of unpaid overtime. (Yasuhara, 2016). However, to actually solve the issue, we need to consider how karoshi happens in the perspective of the culture and the organization system.

Karoshi
Collectivism
Hierarchical relationship