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Working Hours and KAROSHI Risk Assessment

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[Abstract]

Preventing death from overwork (*karoshi*) has become an important issue for Japanese companies. In November 2014, the Japanese government enforced the "Act to Accelerate Moves for the Prevention of *Karoshi*." In this paper, we analyze the relationship between working hours and *karoshi* using the Quality of Life Survey for Fiscal Year 2012, a household survey collected by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), part of the Japanese government's cabinet office. Our results indicate that working more than 60 hours per week significantly increases the risk of *karoshi* for males, while the threshold for females is around 45 hours. This agrees with the epidemiology literature, which shows that long working hours are associated with poorer health.

Survey data shows that Japanese women tend to bear more of the burden of housework than their male counterparts. When housework is added to working time, it becomes apparent that Japanese women face a serious risk of *karoshi*. We suggest that it is necessary to reduce the burden of housework in order to increase female employment in Japan. Additionally, elder care may be a common issue for both men and women, exacerbated by Japan's rapid population aging. Elder care must also be a part of work-life balance.

Policies of working time limits and overtime pay have been debated as potential solutions to the problem of overwork. However, previous studies have reported that the effect of overtime pay on working hours was ambiguous. We discuss labor market reforms to increase flexibility in order to boost female employment, the job market for new graduates, and work-life conflicts for all workers.