

Editorial

Non-work periods for a better working life

The main goal of occupational health and safety (OHS) is to realize a better quality of working life. Many lines of approach are available to make this possible. Most commonly, every effort is made to optimize the length and quality of working time. Here in Japan, the Government has been trying to reform our working life by setting an upper limit on overtime every month¹⁾. Creating healthy and productive workplaces has also been one of the essential targets through preventing any type of harassment at work or implementing more flexible work schedules.

At the same time, the authorities have been addressing an important challenge to non-work periods¹⁾. Preferably, a rest period after work, that is, a time interval between work periods, has to be protected on a daily basis, as in the European Union. This interval can principally be divided into two parts: non-sleep activities and sleep. The first part becomes a good opportunity for the family and the self, facilitating work–life (work–self) balance. The second part, which should be the longest during the non-work time, is crucial since recent findings support its effectiveness for sleep and fatigue recovery^{2–4)}.

Every working individual requires adequate sleep^{5–7)}. This is particularly true for night and shift workers whose sleep is occupationally deprived⁸⁾. Poor/short sleep is more likely to be associated with sickness absence^{9, 10)}, leading to significant increases in costs and burdens in the workplace. Furthermore, protecting good sleep can serve as a key to reducing the incidence of Karōshi and other overwork-related disorders as the worst consequences in working life^{11, 12)}.

Some people, including OHS experts and practitioners, seem to hesitate in sending clear messages about sleep and non-sleep activities to both workers and employees, just because it is a matter of “private” life. Now is the time to recognize how valuable non-work periods are, and in turn to take action for workers’ health, safety, and well-being.

References

- 1) Prime Minister of Japan and His Cabinet. Council for the Realization of Work Style Reform. https://japan.kantei.go.jp/97_abe/actions/201703/28article2.html. Accessed January 4, 2018.2
- 2) Tsuchiya M, Takahashi M, Miki K, Kubo T, Izawa S (2017) Cross-sectional associations between daily rest periods during weekdays and psychological distress, non-restorative sleep, fatigue, and work performance among information technology workers. *Ind Health* **55**, 173–9.
- 3) Ikeda H, Kubo T, Izawa S, Takahashi M, Tsuchiya M, Hayashi N, Kitagawa Y (2017) Impact of Daily Rest Period on Resting Blood Pressure and Fatigue: A One-Month Observational Study of Daytime Employees. *J Occup Environ Med* **59**, 397–401.
- 4) Ikeda H, Kubo T, Sasaki T, Liu X, Matsuo T, So R, Matsumoto S, Yamauchi T, Takahashi M Cross-sectional Internet-based survey of Japanese permanent daytime workers’ sleep and daily rest periods. *J Occup Health* (in press).
- 5) Czeisler CA (2015) Duration, timing and quality of sleep are each vital for health, performance and safety. *Sleep Health* **1**, 5–8.
- 6) Kottwitz MU, Gerhardt C, Pereira D, Iseli L, Elfering A (2018) Teacher’s sleep quality: linked to social job characteristics? *Ind Health* **56**, 53–61.
- 7) Nakada Y, Sugimoto A, Kadotani H, Yamada N (2018) Verification of effect of sleep health education program in workplace: a quasi-randomized controlled trial. *Ind Health* **56**, 20–29.
- 8) Oh JI, Yim HW (2018) Association between rotating night shift work and metabolic syndrome in Korean workers: differences between 8-hour and 12-hour rotating shift work. *Ind Health* **56**, 40–48.
- 9) Lallukka T, Kaikkonen R, Härkänen T, Kronholm E, Partonen T, Rahkonen O, Koskinen S (2014) Sleep and sickness absence: a nationally representative register-based follow-up study. *Sleep* **37**, 1413–25.
- 10) Fukuda Y, Iwasaki S, Deguchi Y, Ogawa K, Nitta T, Inoue K (2018) The effect of long-term sickness absence on coworkers in the same work unit. *Ind Health* **56**, 2–9.
- 11) Yamauchi T, Yoshikawa T, Takamoto M, Sasaki T, Matsumoto S, Kayashima K, Takeshima T, Takahashi M (2017) Overwork-related disorders in Japan: recent trends and development of a national policy to promote preventive measures. *Ind Health* **55**, 293–302.
- 12) Yamauchi T, Yoshikawa T, Sasaki T, Matsumoto S, Takahashi M, Suka M, Yanagisawa H (2018) Cerebrovascular/cardiovascular diseases and mental disorders due to overwork and work-related stress among local public employees in Japan. *Ind Health* **56**, 85–91.

Masaya TAKAHASHI

Deputy Editor, Industrial Health