



Since January 2020 Elsevier has created a COVID-19 resource centre with free information in English and Mandarin on the novel coronavirus COVID-19. The COVID-19 resource centre is hosted on Elsevier Connect, the company's public news and information website.

Elsevier hereby grants permission to make all its COVID-19-related research that is available on the COVID-19 resource centre - including this research content - immediately available in PubMed Central and other publicly funded repositories, such as the WHO COVID database with rights for unrestricted research re-use and analyses in any form or by any means with acknowledgement of the original source. These permissions are granted for free by Elsevier for as long as the COVID-19 resource centre remains active.



Letter to the Editor

Combined approaches to the efforts in psychiatry and public health are crucial to dealing with COVID-19



Dear Editor,

Over a year has passed since COVID-19 broke out in Japan and elsewhere around the world, and people continue to contract this disease and die. According to reports from Japan's Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare and the Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications, the country of Japan has entered a major economic slump ([San-in Chuo Shimbun, 2021](#); [Yomiuri Shimbun, 2021](#)). Compared to 2019, 2020 saw (1) a substantial decline in the ratio of job openings to job applicants, (2) a decrease in the number of new job openings, (3) increases in both the total unemployment rate and the number of unemployed, (4) a decrease in the number of employed, (5) a decrease in the number of temporary or contract workers, (6) an increase in the number of employees on a leave of absence, and (7) a decrease in the percentage of college students receiving tentative job offers ([San-in Chuo Shimbun, 2021](#); [Yomiuri Shimbun, 2021](#)). The sharp decline in the ratio of job openings to job applicants (1) was the third such decrease in Japan's history. The decrease in the number of new job openings (2) reflects an extremely dire situation, i.e., a decrease of 210,000 annually. The increases in the total unemployment rate and the number of unemployed (3) are the first such increases in 11 years since the collapse of Lehman Brothers in 2009. The number of employed individuals (4) decreased for the first time in 8 years. The number of temporary or contract workers (5) decreased for the first time since 2014, when the number was comparable. The number of employees on a leave of absence (6) was the largest number ever. The percentage of college students receiving tentative job offers (7) also declined substantially.

Information provided by the media must be carefully and accurately understood. Instead of obtaining accurate information by studying facts (1) - (7) statistically, trends in the data should be discerned. A study has reported that unemployment is associated with poor mental and general health ([Herber et al., 2019](#)). Follow-up by specialized agencies in clinical disciplines and medical treatment of symptoms to address the rudimentary causes of those symptoms indicate the need for efforts to improve mental health impacted by the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. That aspect is also part of the association between COVID-19 and mental health as described by Prof. Tandon ([Tandon, 2021a](#)). Prof. Tandon cited the challenges of "balancing the twin imperatives of timeliness (expedited reviews) and scientific rigor (managing contributions with new and less certain information)" ([Tandon, 2020a,b](#)), and these two competing requirements reflect the difficulty of overseeing a medical journal during a health crisis. A study reported on unemployment and suicide in the early stages of the COVID-19 pandemic ([Kawohl and Nordt, 2020](#)). In Japan, detailed data on suicides will be published by the National Police Agency next March. Until then, the only figures available are total suicides and suicides by men and by women, which are reported monthly and which are not broken down by age group, and

total suicides by prefecture (not broken down by sex or age group). Under such circumstances, suggestions cannot be readily offered until definitive conclusions about the data have been reached, as mentioned by Prof. Tandon ([Tandon, 2021b](#)), and the twin imperatives of timeliness and scientific rigor must be balanced ([Tandon, 2020a,b](#)).

What is most important is that people around the world do not die from the direct or indirect effects of COVID-19 or become ill. To that end, combined approaches to and efforts in psychiatry and public health are needed, and all relevant areas should work together as necessary.

Funding

None.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The authors report no declarations of interest.

Acknowledgments

None.

References

- Herber, G.C., Ruijsbroek, A., Koopmanschap, M., et al., 2019. Single transitions and persistence of unemployment are associated with poor health outcomes. *BMC Public Health* 19, 740.
- Kawohl, W., Nordt, C., 2020. COVID-19, unemployment, and suicide. *Lancet Psychiatry* 7, 389–390.
- San-in Chuo Shimbun, 2021. 2021 January 30, 1 and 3.
- Tandon, R., 2020a. The COVID-19 pandemic, personal reflections on editorial responsibility. *Asian J. Psychiatry* 50, 102100.
- Tandon, R., 2020b. COVID-19 and mental health: preserving humanity, maintaining sanity, and promoting health. *Asian J. Psychiatry* 51, 102256.
- Tandon, R., 2021a. COVID-19 and the Asian Journal of Psychiatry: keeping 2020 in the rear-view mirror. *Asian J. Psychiatry* 56, 102569.
- Tandon, R., 2021b. COVID-19 and suicide: just the facts. Key learnings and guidance for action. *Asian J. Psychiatry* 60, 102695.
- Yomiuri Shimbun, 2021. 2021 January 30, 1.

Ken Inoue*

Research and Education Faculty, Medical Sciences Cluster, Health Service Center, Kochi University, Kochi-shi, Kochi, Japan

Tatsushige Fukunaga
National Research Institute of Police Science, Kashiwa-shi, Chiba, Japan

* Corresponding author at: Research and Education Faculty, Medical Sciences Cluster, Health Service Center, Kochi University, 2-5-1 Akebono-cho, Kochi-shi, Kochi, 780-8520, Japan.

<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ajp.2021.102797>

Received 21 July 2021

Available online 24 July 2021

1876-2018/© 2021 Elsevier B.V. All rights reserved.

E-mail address: ke-inoue@med.shimane-u.ac.jp (K. Inoue).