

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

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