

SDG no. 8: How can we solve the problem of long working hours?

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R: Today in Japan, there are problems such as achieving good work-life balance. So, now we are going to talk about SDG number 8, decent working conditions and economic growth, and especially how to solve the issue of long working hours. This goal is important because we all want to have a better quality of life, right?

E: Yes. Have you ever considered how you want to live in the future? Do you want to have a stable income and a happy life? Or do you want to have a bad quality of life with lots of stress and demands? To achieve the lifestyle you want, you must imagine how you want to live in the future.

R: Overtime hours, which means working more hours than your contracted time, is a problem not just for workers, but for companies. Usually, it causes a decrease in operational efficiency, higher incidents of mental illness, and in the worst cases, death from overwork.

E: Please look at this graph. It shows the percentage of people who work 49 hours or more per week in six countries. As you can see, Japan ranks highly among these economically developed countries which include America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, and South Korea. Clearly, Japanese work longer hours.

R: We can deduce that the effects of long hours are that workers outside relationships worsen, such as with their family and friends, and they don't get enough time to spend on hobbies. Such a limited life means they are going to become narrow-minded.

E: Another effect is the deterioration of work efficiency. It is more efficient to work with a sense of fulfillment and purpose with shorter hours, than to work long hours with fatigue and poor concentration. If we don't solve this problem, life quality will not get better, we can't achieve work life balance, and death from over work will continue. This issue also relates to the decline of population.

R: To make this situation better, we came up with two solutions. The first is to increase remote work. We should take advantage of this movement which started due to the coronavirus pandemic and introduce it at least twice a week.

E: By using this system, we can save commuting time on trains and cars, and save money spent on tickets or gasoline. Also, we can feel less stress working at home, so your working environment is comfortable. R: There are also advantages for the company such as reduction of costs, increase of sales efficiency, and promotion of digitalization. It is a win-win relationship for both company and workers.

E: The second solution is to increase leave, such as childcare leave. According to a survey by the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare, childcare leave-taking rate in fiscal 2022 will be 80% for women but just 17% for men. This shows that men take less childcare leave. Often mothers carry the burden and have a hard time with stress from child rearing alone. Also, the

thinking we have in Japan is “child rearing is a woman’s job.” This must be changed. Parents should bring their up children “TOGETHER.”

R: To go further, it would be a good idea to introduce a system that allows employees to earn wages during periods of childcare leave. By offering salary, people will become more proactive about really taking leave and support child rearing. To make it happen, the government needs to change the law and help support the cost of living when both parents are not working.

Finally, the company culture has to be changed so that taking childcare leave, especially men, is no longer viewed negatively.

E: Japan has many other issues. We must not be complacent just because we think we are comfortable and safe in Japan.

R: Today, we have considered ideas to make working conditions better, eliminate unnecessary stress from work, and increase leave. We must reduce the number of people who suffer from long working hours.

E: Please try to actively change the problems in Japan, and all over the world.

R: Thank you so much for listening.