

A History of the Occupational Mental Health in Japan (3)

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The fourth period, which I call the expanding period, is from the latter half of 1990s to the present. The Ministry of Labor commissioned a research study about mental stress for five years. But the government has begun to work on the issue of occupational mental health exponentially since the late 1990s. The government was forced to deal with two shocking affairs. The first is the sharp increase of suicide in 1998. The second is more direct pressure to the government. It lost two cases about workers' accident compensation in 1996. Then it had to re-examine the criterion to identify the work related accidents and formulate the guideline of the mental health care in workplace.

The government tried to strengthen its control over companies in terms of their duties to give attention to worker's health and safeties, because the claims of workers' compensation continue to increase more and more. Of course representatives of employers fought back against administrative officers of the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare in the council. Through these processes the mental health care in workplace which the government demands of companies has had its background of Industrial Safety and Health Act since 2005.

Recently the arguments and activities on this problem come to increase more than ever. Depression has been central issue since the early 2000s. Mental Health care has tended to be commercialized. It seems that the reflexive thinking which had existed in discussions of psychiatrists until the third period has disappeared. Certainly professionals have improved the methods and skills to care workers, for example, to return workers to workplaces. We have to appreciate this aspect. But the functions of these methods have to be examined from many different perspectives.