

Teaching is becoming a 'black occupation' in Japan

Japan is working itself to death. The frequently recurring term *karoshi* (death from overwork) suggests as much. It's an indirect rather than a direct cause of death, which makes statistical precision difficult, but, as a rough standard, 80 hours a month of overtime work in the months leading up to a victim's death from a heart attack or stroke will back a claim for *karoshi* compensation.

Karoshi is generally associated with the private sector and its ruthlessly exploitative companies," but among workers lately toiling "borderline *karoshi*" overtime hours, Shukan Toyo Keizai (Sept. 16), professionals you might not expect to find include public school teachers.

Not all of them, but significant percentages: Nearly 60% of junior high school teachers and 30% of their elementary school counterparts, work 60 hours or more a month, education ministry figures show.

It's a relatively new development, brought on by aging teachers whose retirees cannot be replaced rapidly enough, and by social change, of which more in the past. Teachers today work on average 4.5 hours a week more than they did 10 years ago, counting work done at home," one teacher is quick to point out – and though the case of officially recognized *karoshi* among teachers is mentioned, teachers complain of endless working days and no time off. "At this rate," says one, "I'll be down physically."

The one who succumbed – in June 2011 – was a 26-year-old Osaka-area junior high school teacher. It was his second year on the job and he was highly dedicated, much so. To teach good lessons requires preparation. He prepared. There's also a club activity to supervise. He threw himself into that too, and into keeping in touch with parents. He was working 60-70 hours a month overtime, but actually more than that.