

What is the significance of finding balance between work and lifestyle? How many work hours is too many? Attitudes toward work may vary throughout the globe.

An article and video was published on October 17 of last year from *USA Today*. This article, entitled “Japanese are working themselves to death--literally,” described yet another *karoshi* case. 24-year-old Maturi Takahashi took her life on Christmas Day of 2015. After being required to work over 100 hours of overtime per month at Dentsu, a well-known Japanese international advertising agency, Takahashi jumped to her death from the company dormitory.

Unfortunately, *karoshi*, or “death from overwork,” isn’t so uncommon in Japan. According to a Cabinet Office report issued in September 2016, employees at nearly one in four companies worked at least 80 hours of monthly overtime in 2015. By overworking, physical and psychological strain can take a toll on the health of employees and influence them to become victims of *karoshi*. According to the Labor Ministry, there are about 100 *karoshi* suicides annually.

If I were homestay in Japan, I would ask my host family what their thoughts are regarding death by overwork and exhaustion. I would also like to ask them if they know someone who has struggled or continues to struggle with excessive stress from work, and how their community views workaholism, or compulsive working. Furthermore, I would discuss the similarities and differences of work-life balance between Japan and the United States.

I would tell my host family that America has a different approach on controlling labor time. Workers in Japan are practically guaranteed job security, therefore it is difficult for them to experience layoffs when hardships arise. Because of this, businesses in Japan can increase or decrease work hours for current employees to adjust to the ups and downs of demands. On the

other hand, companies in the United States are more likely to release and hire workers in the event that business conditions change.

In addition to differences in managing labor time, I would tell my host family that balancing work and lifestyle is not only a problem for Japan. Americans continue to struggle with balancing their work and lifestyle to a lesser extent. In the U.S., 16.4% of people work an average of 49 or more hours a week. In Japan, about 22% of workers work at least 49 hours per week. Although there may be generous family leaves or vacation days, some American workers are afraid of taking breaks. This may be because promotions are less likely if one takes a family leave to care for children. The stress of catching up to missed work is also a feared problem. The same reluctance is evident in Japan.

Concerning my host-family's viewpoint, I believe that they have a negative outlook on death caused by overworking. Since they are kind enough to integrate a foreigner into their daily lives and busy schedules, I think that my host parents would disagree with the thriving workaholism in Japan despite its controversy. I would assume that my host family values family time more than overworking. To my understanding, workaholism is a massive contribution to Japan's decreasing birth rate and rapidly aging society. Through discussion with my host family, my intercultural knowledge of these topics would expand, and I would further my cultural competence.