

## LIFESTYLE

# Japan's deadly culture of overwork

JAPAN IS BEING FORCED TO CONFRONT ITS working culture after national broadcaster NHK revealed on Oct. 4 that reporter Miwa Sado, 31, died of heart failure in 2013 after clocking nearly 160 hours of overtime in a month. Workers in Japan routinely take short vacations and work long hours—a lifestyle that is taking its toll:

**WORK-LIFE IMBALANCE** *Karoshi*, meaning “death by overwork,” first came to light in the 1980s with reports of blue collar workers dropping dead. By 2015 more than 2,000 suicides and 96 deaths by brain and heart illnesses were linked to it. Campaigners put annual fatalities at 10,000.

**INEFFECTIVE LEGISLATION** Japanese lawmakers passed a law in 2014 to prevent *karoshi*, which compelled employers to find ways to reduce hours but failed to introduce penalties for non-compliance. Today nearly 1 in 4 companies



◀ Sado took only two days off in the month before her death

in Japan say some employees put in as much as 80 hours of overtime a month.

**OFF THE BOOKS** The culture of overwork is not only a problem for Japan. Almost 40% in Turkey say they work over 50 hours a week, compared to only 21% in Japan where, at least on paper, the average Japanese worker spends fewer hours in the office per year than the average American. But statistics fail to capture “service overtime,” unpaid extra hours that employees feel obligated to work every month. Until employers move to rectify that, more Japanese will work themselves into early graves. —TARA JOHN