

# Mental health and productivity

**T**he National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) of the USA defines a healthy work organization as “a competitive organization that can realize profit with satisfied and productive workers and fewer stress patients.” A 1999 NIOSH report claimed that, “Stressful labor conditions actually increase the ratio of absenteeism, delays in work, and the ratio of leaving the workforce.” While many disregard this warning, according to Deputy Director Shinichiro Iida, Mental Health Research Institute (MHRI), Japan Productivity Center (JPC), the issue of mental health in the workplace has never been as important and is critical to securing the competitiveness of enterprises and even entire nations.

Mental health and productivity was the topic of an APO multicountry observational study mission in Japan, 18–22 January. Increasingly pressing concerns over mental health in the workplace were discussed by 19 participants from 11 member countries who work in this field. They observed the measures implemented by the government and in both public and private sectors in Japan to enhance workers’ mental health.

The JPC, the mission’s implementing organization, is a leading player in the struggle to improve mental health in the workplace. In 1980, it introduced the Japan Mental Health Inventory (JMI), a tool for surveying the mental health status of workers in four topic areas: body; mind; personality; and workplace. Using the JMI, the MHRI has processed data from 2.8 million workers in 2,800 enterprises. The results are analyzed and reported in two formats: an individual report for the employee and an establishment report for the employer. The reports are followed by self-care and workplace improvement measures, respectively.

The Japanese government has also played a key role in promoting better



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mental health. In 2000, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare released guidelines on ensuring mental health in the workplace. It instructed employers to establish mental health development plans organized around “four cares”: self-care by workers; line care by managers or supervisors; care by industrial health staff in the workplace; and care by external resources such as therapists.

“The program reminded us of the importance of mental health in connection with productivity improvement in organizations. It was also a great opportunity to learn the various preventive and management measures and a support program for employees who return to work after medical leave and healthcare,” commented Senior Researcher Ga Woon Ban, Korea Productivity Center. 