

Editorial

Health and safety situation of arts and entertainment workers in Japan

In 2019, the number of freelancers surveyed by the Japanese Government reached 4,600,000. Among them, 6.3% were artists, who were categorized together with lawyers, accountants, and professional sportspeople. This profession was defined as a specialized one that is independent on specific employers.

In Japan, no legal protection is in place for performers and staff working in the arts and entertainment industry; in 2021, the industrial accident compensation insurance for workers was implemented for the first time. At the time, they were named performing arts workers. According to a national census, Japan is home to 218,250 performing arts workers.

In Japan, the reform of work style came into effect in 2019. Freelance arts workers were offered protection since then; 94.6% of arts and entertainment workers in Japan are freelancers¹.

Limited research exists on the health and safety of freelance workers in arts and entertainment. Therefore, the actual situation remains unknown. A survey conducted by the Association of “Arts Workers Japan”, which is established to receive the compensation insurance of workers, revealed² that 35.5% of arts and entertainment workers do not undergo an annual health checkup. That is, their employers do not conduct health management adequately. Alternatively, those arts and entertainment workers might have not had the time to receive an annual health checkup.

The management of health and safety at the workplace is lacking, which has resulted in long working hours being the norm. Among these workplaces, 61.5% and 85.2% have no toilet facilities and changing rooms, respectively. Furthermore, 77% of employees work all night, and 59.2% sleep an average of less than 6 h, respectively. In one case, a film crew was sent to a hazardous area, such as a nuclear power plant, without any explanation, and forced to film without personal protective equipment. Approximately 60%–70% of occupational accidents occurred.

The most common types of accidents include falls, broken bones, and traffic accidents during commuting. The causes of workplace accidents are considered to be

the lack of safety measures, carelessness, lack of sufficient time, and ill mental health. Regarding harassment, 93% of cases were based on abuse of a superior position and 73% on sexual harassment³. Specifically, there are a number of terrible harms, such as psychological attacks 83% and raped without consent 11% (Fig. 1). And most unfortunately, suicidal thoughts account for 42.7%.

The association of Arts Workers Japan has established a mental care consultation service with a clinical psychologist to reduce psychological burdens and prevent suicides, this is the first in the sector. Moreover, industrial physicians have been set up, who note that measures to prevent accidents in the workplace do not reach the level of general companies.

In 2022, the Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare established an expert meeting on health and safety measures for solo proprietors, they are so-called freelancers. It examines the health and safety measures for independent contractors in sectors such as transport, forestry, IT, drawing animation and arts and entertainment workers. An outstanding problem in the entertainment industry is the multilayered subcontracting structure, which can reach up to seven tiers (Fig. 2). However, no safety manager, and employers rarely take responsibility when a death or injury

¹ “Survey of the people involved in cultural and artistic activities” conducted by Agency for Cultural Affairs on artists, performers, professors, instructors, production and technical staff involved in activities in the fields of literature, music, fine arts, photography and design, theatre and dance, traditional performing arts, popular performing arts, media arts, lifestyle culture and national entertainment, survey period: Wednesday 30 September–Tuesday 13 October 2020 (14 days in total), survey method: online form on the Agency for Cultural Affairs’ website and on LINE app (N=17,196).

² “Survey on workplace injuries and health and safety of freelance arts workers 2023”, conducted by the Arts Workers Japan on freelance workers in all arts and entertainment workers, survey method: Internet (N=245), surveyed period: 2023, survey period: February 17–May 31, 2023, survey target period: April 1, 2022–March 31, 2023.

³ “Survey on workplace harassments of media and arts and entertainment workers”, conducted by the Arts Workers Japan, survey method: Internet (N=418), surveyed period: 2022, survey period: Jun 23–August 31, 2022.

Q. Have you ever experienced, seen or heard the following ? (Multiple answers allowed) 417 answered.

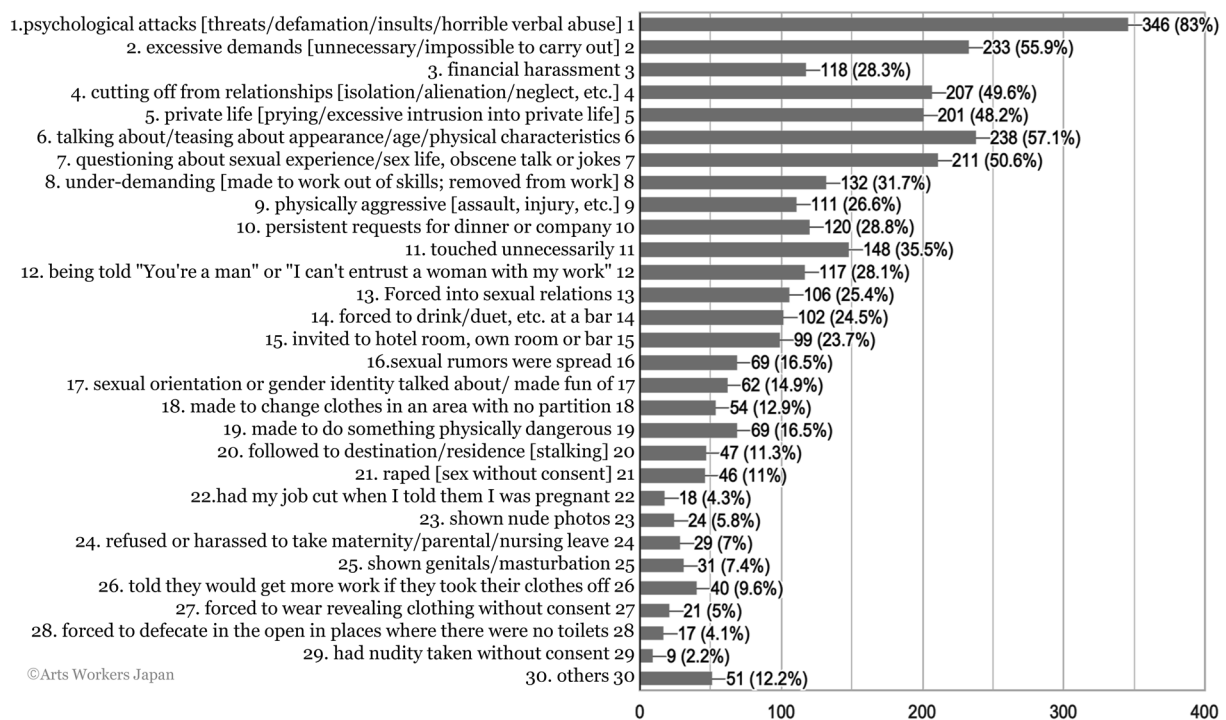


Fig. 1. Survey on workplace harassments of media and arts and entertainment workers.

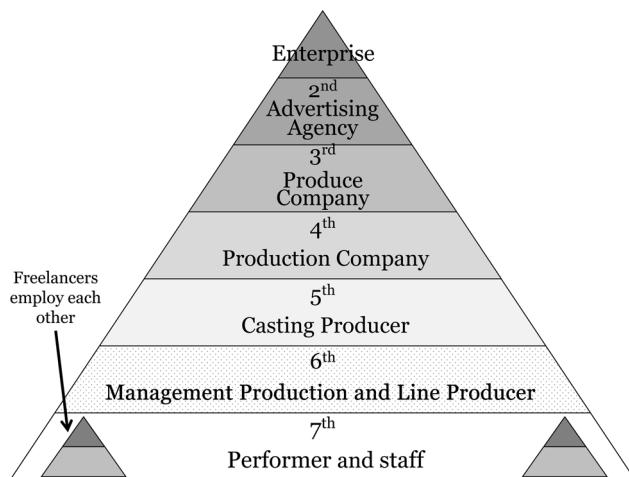


Fig. 2. Poly-hierarchical subcontracting structure in Japanese entertainment industry.

accident occurs.

This expert meeting has made it possible for freelancers to report to the prefectural labour director, labour standards supervisor or labor standards inspector and request that necessary corrective measures are taken if there is a violation of labour safety and health-related laws and regulations with regard to the place where they work or the work they have undertaken.

In 2023, the government adopted the law on the proper trading of specified businesses in parliament. The future challenge for the government will be the modernization of appropriate health and safety measures and governance for freelance arts and performing arts workers.

Megumi MORISAKI

Actor

President, General Incorporated Association Arts Workers Japan

Chairperson, Nationwide Centre of Arts Workers' Accident Compensation Insurance