

Japanese Civil Power to Stop Moral Harassment at Work

What is Association of Anti-Workplace Moral Harassment (AAWMH)?

We are a voluntary organization to help the victims of moral harassment at work who have suffered from harassment or bullying in their workplaces. We were established about 3 years ago, and the organization is comprised of about 10 members, including consulting staff, experts of law and of mental health, and academics. By coordinating with the relevant organizations and individual specialists, we provide them with necessary information, support the victims, and try to grasp the actual cases in detail (Figure 1). In general, moral harassment issues at work are not well acknowledged in Japan and many are suffering without achieving any satisfactory outcomes.

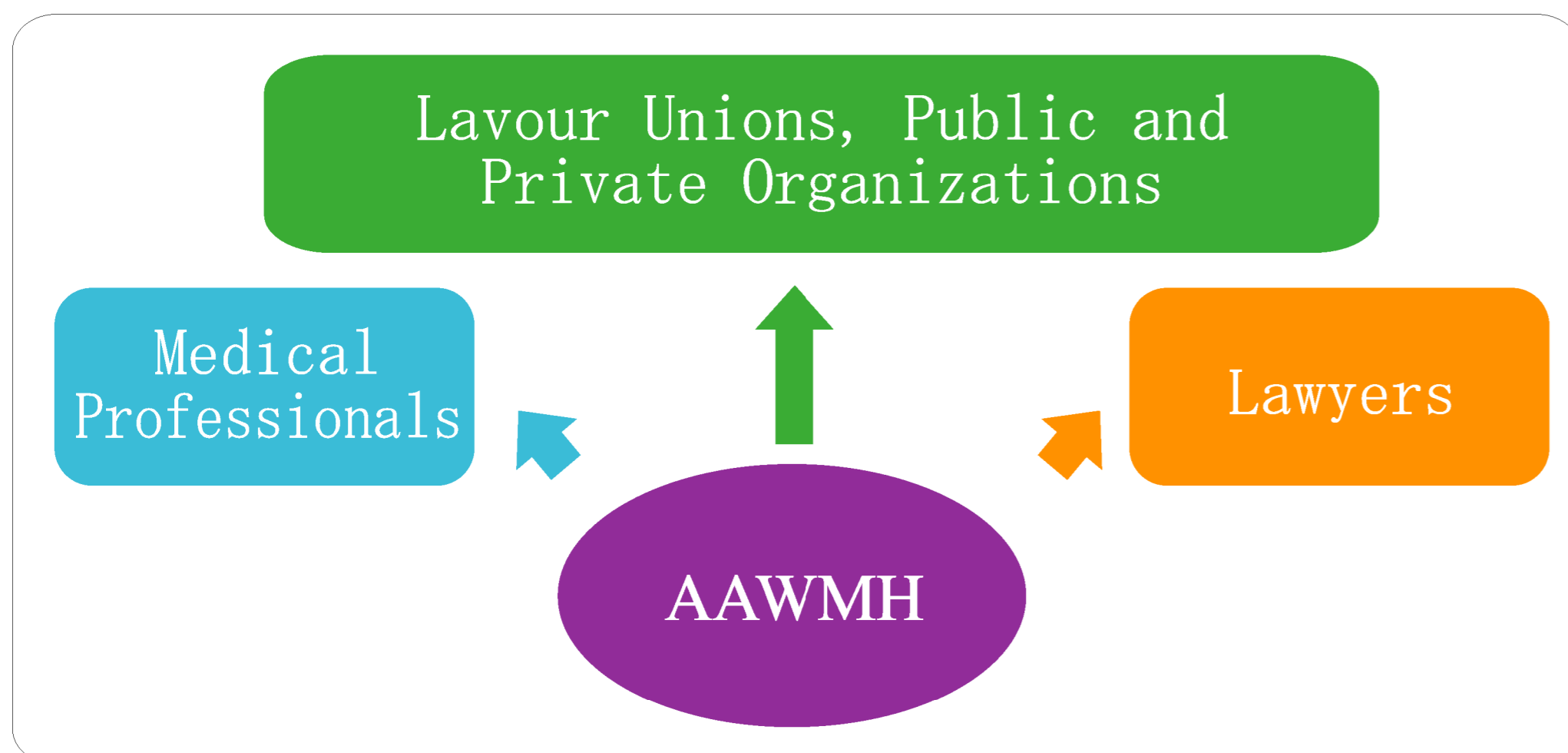


Figure 1 . Alliance Partners (AAWMH)

What We Do

We conduct Free Telephone consultation 5 times a month, hold regular bimonthly meetings and publish newsletters few times a year.

Moral Harassment

Marie-France Hirigoyen (French Psychiatrist) defined moral harassment as "any vexatious behaviour in the form of repeated and hostile or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures that affects an employee's dignity or psychological or physical integrity and that results in a harmful work environment for the employee". We use this concept, believing it the most appropriate term to describe the distorted relationships at workplaces. The term "harassment" has been popular for the last several years in Japan, hence the concept of harassment often includes both sexual harassment and moral harassment.

Our Consulting Cases

We receive about 50 cases a year and more than 150 cases in the past 3 years by emails and phone calls. They were categorized according to different kinds of bullying and harassment they have experienced (Figure 2) and why they have consulted us (Figure 3). Some only like us to listen to what they have experienced or simply want to ask us to confirm that what they are suffering is moral harassment or not. However, recently, more people are seeking our consultations, knowing that their cases are recognized as moral harassment. Through our consultation we came to know that when a perpetrator indirectly distressed a victim by not providing necessary information at work or if a perpetrator is a capable businessman and is high on the social ladder, it is sometimes difficult to identify the damage over the victim. We also became aware of the importance of networking with experts in local areas. Some young generations are more hesitant to consult with their seniors at workplaces, and some senior victims, for the fear of not finding a new job, would not leave their workplaces even if they were under harassment. Overwhelmingly, majority of the victims who have contacted us are women, while we noticed that men are likely to feel ashamed of being a victim and unable to contact us, suffering severely. Also, there are a great number of depressed people who need proper medical treatments. Some request us for legal advice before consulting lawyers and we introduce the experts of medical and legal fields and try to bridge between such clients. The following actual examples can be specific to Japanese society, such as; the cases where a perpetrator placed an employee's work desk at a boiler room to isolate him from other employees in the office or some employees intentionally and continuously ignore a target victim without informing him of after-work parties and weekend events out of the office hour so as to excluding him out of the group.

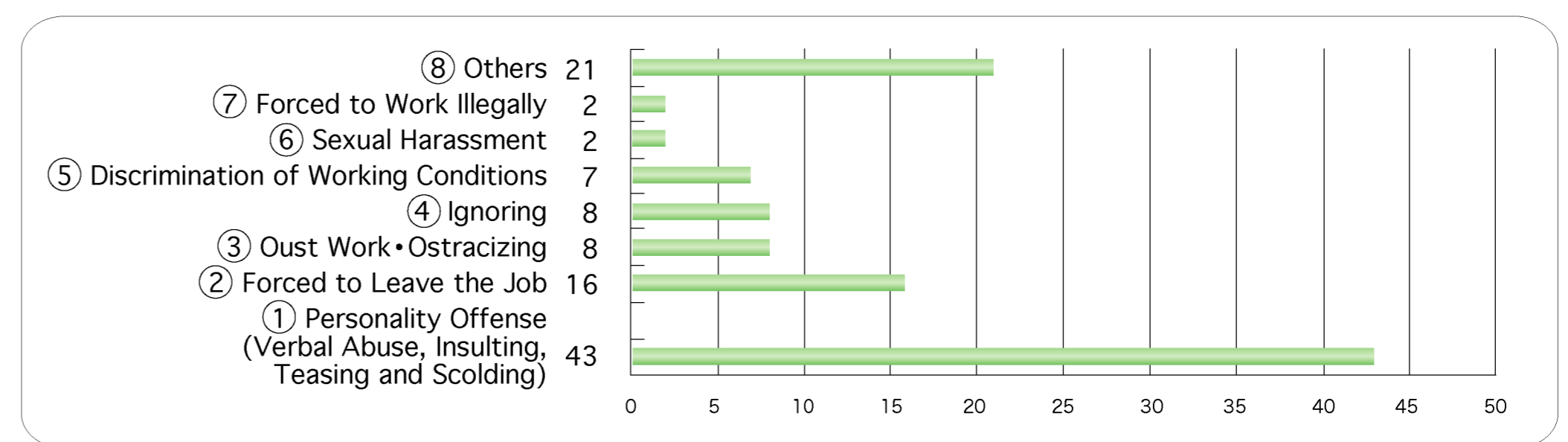


Figure 2. Experienced Bullying and Harassment (AAWMH)

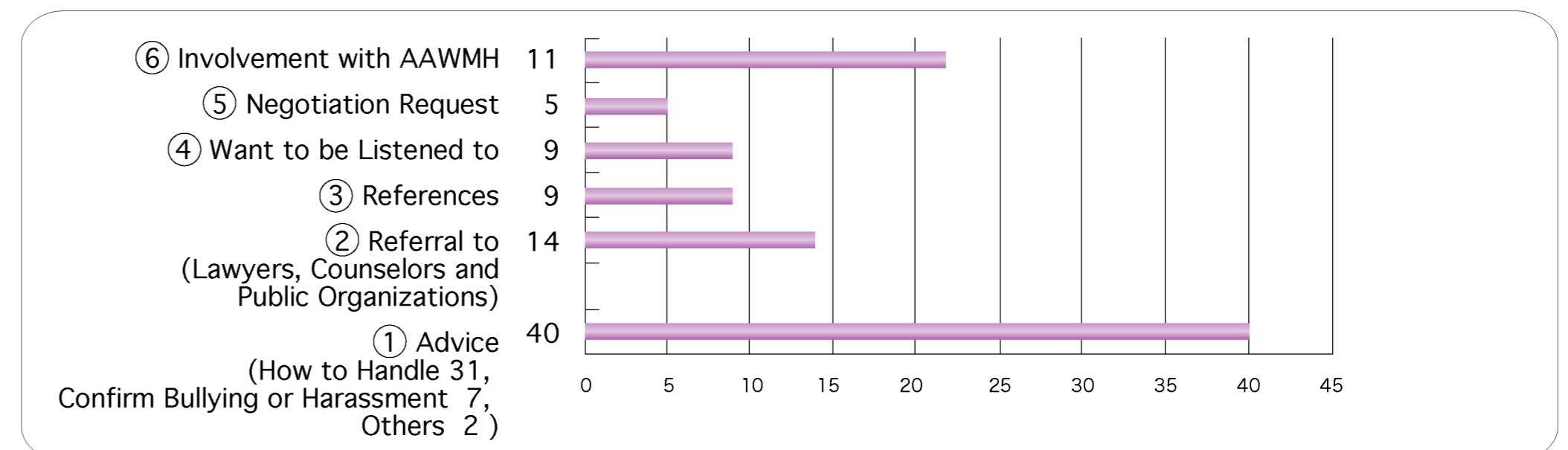


Figure 3. What They Need (AAWMH)

What's Going On in Workplace?

Japan Industrial Counselor Association (JICA) had 1,093 consulting cases that are twice as many as that of the previous year (535 cases in 2008) for the 3 days "Telephone Consultation for Workers", conducted during Suicide Prevention Week throughout their 13 branch offices nationwide in Japan in September 2009. There were the consultations of many wished or attempted suicide, and it supports the information that the number of suicide is more than 30,000 annually for last several years in Japan. It seems that their poverty is so severe that they find it difficult to live, and because of it, they feel inferior, thus causing complex and chain-reaction burden. More than half of the cases fell into "Workplace problem" or "Mental illness or disease" (Figure 4). Many are in their 40's and 50's, and 7.5 % are in the 70's or more. Male-female ratio was almost even (582 men and 511 women). People in the 60's and 70's have respectively increased from 14.2% to 16.9% and 5.2% to 7.5% from the previous year. It tells that more senior people are getting into troubles.

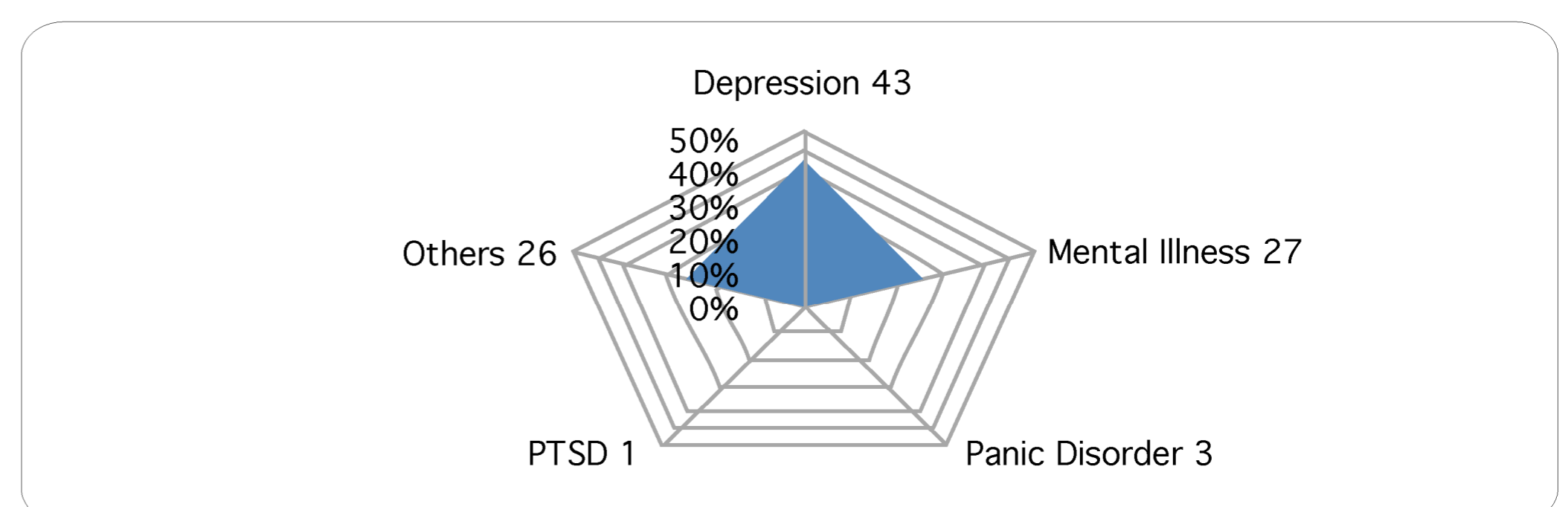


Figure 4. Mental illness and Disease (Japan Industrial Counselor Association)

What We Need Now!

Workplace security duties started to be partially paid more attention through *Industrial Safety and Health Act* and *Labour Contract Act* and by revisions of *Equal Employment Opportunity Act for Men and Women* and *Workmen's Compensation Approval* standards or enacting Bullying ordinance in Ono city, Hyogo in Japan. However, more drastic improvements are needed as the poverty has increased, the economic gap has widened, and there is a rapid increase of more unstable and irregular workers. The prohibition of free and insurance applied medical diagnosis is making it harder to provide clients with reasonable and efficient counseling services, and there are cases of legal approval of sexual harassment, but it does not always ensure Workmen's Compensation approval, which shows that the seriousness and actual conditions of workplace bullying and harassment are not well received in Japan still. We feel that it is necessary to define and prohibit wrong act publicly and therefore establish safe, fair and comfortable work environment and relationships. Thus, our major aim is to facilitate to realize the legislation of Workplace Harassment Prevention law in Japan.

Author and Affiliation: AAWMH and Prof. Kanta Owada (Shiga Univ.) / Aims: Legislation of Workplace Harassment Prevention law / Objectives: Understanding the legislation necessity/ Method: Introduce Japan situations mainly with AAWMH findings/ Findings: Current Japan situations and their analysis/ Knowledge and References: Marie-France Hirigoyen "Malaise dans le Travail", Year 2009 Telephone Counseling data analysis by JICA and AAWMH data between 2007and 2010.