

Mortality Among the Elderly Workers in Japan: Does Company Size Matter?

Although Japan is one of the healthiest countries globally, health inequalities have recently become more pronounced because of the ever-increasing socioeconomic gap. To promote well-being and health, the Industrial Safety and Health Act requires Japanese companies to appoint health supervisors and physicians to workplaces with 50 or more employees. Because this requirement does not apply to smaller companies with less than 50 employees, some researchers consider it to be the source of health inequalities. However, one question still stands: Do these health disparities carry over into old age and lead to an increased mortality rate in these people?

In our longitudinal study, we sought to understand the relationship between company size for one's longest-held job and mortality in elderly Japanese people. We surveyed individuals aged 65 or older and followed up with the 35,418 respondents for approximately 6 years.

During the follow-up period, 3935 participants died. Through statistical analyses, we found that the mortality hazard ratio for elderly men decreased significantly as company size increased, even after adjusting our model to account for differences in age, education, type of job, and location. This difference in mortality was especially noticeable between both extremes of our scale, namely between companies with less than 10 employees versus those with over 10,000 employees.

In addition, another interesting finding was that the mortality hazard ratio did not change significantly with company size among Japanese women. This is consistent with the fact that many Japanese women only worked part-time after having children, which means that effect of working in smaller or larger companies is probably less pronounced than for men.

Our study is the first to shed light on the relationship between company size and mortality among the elderly in Japan. Further studies are needed to understand the underlying mechanisms and factors in this relationship so as to improve labor policies and occupational health systems accordingly.

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