

# Crushing workload at schools is causing more Japanese teachers to suffer chronic depression

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Photo: PAKUTASO

Fresh out of university and with a teaching license, most Japanese teachers would be brimming with anticipation at helping shape the lives of the younger generation and inspiring them for years to come. But reality later hits some teachers hard, when the joys of teaching their favorite subjects become buried under an immense workload of juggling club activities, meetings, and endless tasks that have little to do with teaching.

Japan's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology has discovered that last year a total of 5,077 teachers suffered from depression and took a break from their jobs. That's 186 more than the previous year, and also the highest number in four years.

Elementary school teachers made up the largest group of the 5,077 who took breaks from teaching, coming in at 2,333 compared to 1,384 for junior high school teachers. The number of high school teachers taking a depression-related leave of absence was significantly less at 742, and special needs teachers last at 612.

Breaking it down by region, the top three most affected areas are heavily-populated Tokyo at 602, followed closely by Osaka at 430 and Aichi Prefecture at 331.

33 percent of these overworked teachers took respites of six months or less, while 13 percent were so burnt out that they took extended breaks for more than two years.

What's more, 1,023 employees suffering from depression gave up and resigned from teaching last year.

"Teachers are currently suffering from chronic depression due to the intense workload required by schools. Even after taking breaks and returning to their jobs, some of these people find it so overwhelming that they have to take time off yet again. We sorely need to have this issue addressed," said Makane Kaoruko, head of the Psychiatry Department at Sanraku Hospital.

Japanese netizens sympathized with the teachers:

"I think this is simply a matter of educators working extremely long hours. Leave the club activities to sports experts and let teachers teach."

"We used to make fun of junior high school teachers during club activities.

But come to think of it, they really looked after us even on Saturdays and Sundays. It's a tough job.”

“This has been brought up before, but no improvements have been made at all. There will be a drastic shortage of teachers at this rate.”

Perhaps the unrelenting workload is a result of Japan's declining birth rate as the country simply does not have enough hands to take up the educator's mantle, which means a ton of responsibilities being dumped onto Japanese teachers every day.

*Source: NHK News via My Game News Flash*

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