

Japanese nuclear plant workers face stigma: Doctors

By MALCOLM FOSTER
in Tokyo
The Associated Press

A growing number of Japanese workers who are risking their health to shut down the crippled Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant are suffering from depression, anxiety about the future and a loss of motivation, say two doctors who visit them regularly.

But their psychological problems are driven less by fears about developing cancer from radiation exposure and more by something immediate and personal: Discrimination from the very community they tried to protect, says Jun Shigemura, who heads a volunteer team of about 10 psychiatrists and psychologists from the National Defense Medical College who meet with Tokyo Electric Power Co nuclear plant employees.

They tell therapists they have been harangued by residents displaced in Japan's nuclear disaster and threatened with signs on their doors telling them to leave. Some of their children have been taunted at school, and prospective landlords have turned them away.

"They have become targets of people's anger," Shigemura said. "TEPCO workers — in their readily identifiable blue uniforms — were once considered to be among the elite in this rural area 230 kilometers north of Tokyo. But after the March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami set off meltdowns at

the Fukushima plant, residents came to view them as 'perpetrators', Shigemura said.

Many TEPCO families in the area now hide their link to the company for fear of criticism, local doctors and psychiatrists say. Except in rare cases, TEPCO has repeatedly declined journalists' requests to interview workers, and the workers themselves have shunned virtually all media attention.

One former TEPCO employee who lived in Tomioka, inside the 20-km exclusion zone around the plant, said during a rare visit to the Fukushima plant in February that she was frequently harassed by evacuees among the 100,000 displaced by the disaster.

"Many people who want to go home are getting frustrated and they often yell at me, 'How are you going to make it up to us?'" said Saori Kanesaki, a former visitor guide at the Fukushima plant.

More than a half century ago, many Japanese survivors of the US bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki were stigmatized due to fears about their exposure to radiation. But the Fukushima disaster has thrown up a completely new kind of discrimination because of the workers' links to TEPCO, a company widely despised throughout Japan for its mishandling of the disaster.

In addition to the discrimination, the TEPCO nuclear workers, who are specially trained, are anxious that they will be transferred to a completely different

kind of job, such as clerical work, if they should surpass the exposure limit, the doctors say.

"More than health risks, they are worried about social risk and employment risk," said Takeshi Tanigawa, an epidemiologist with Ehime University's medical school who visited the plant after the disaster and was the one of the first to report its harsh working conditions, which have since improved. He has been back 15 times since, and Shigemura later volunteered to join him.

The Japanese public and media, meanwhile, has offered the workers little praise, unlike the Western media, which during the height of the crisis portrayed the remaining band of workers at the plant as the heroic "Fukushima 50". The domestic media instead emphasized how the dangers faced by the workers reflected the risks of nuclear power.

Culture helps explain some of these dynamics, including the strong Japanese sense of duty and group responsibility.

"People believe the workers share in the responsibility for the disaster even though they didn't cause it," Tanigawa said.

Such discrimination weighs heavily on the workers, said Shigemura.

"Showing appreciation to the workers is an urgent need. It's totally lacking," Shigemura said, adding that he believes stigmatization is a key factor in influencing the workers' psychological distress.



ONE SMALL STEP FOR ELEPHANT

PHOTO BY
EAN-FRANCOIS MONIER /
AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

Rungwe, the first elephant born from artificial insemination in France, takes his first steps near his mother, N'Dala, on Monday at the Beauval zoo, in Saint-Aignan, central France.

Businesses geared toward expats struggle in the new Afghanistan

By MIRIAM ARGHANDIWAL
in Kabul
Reuters

Behind high villa walls in Kabul's heavily guarded diplomatic district, restaurant owner Saju D'Cruz sits in a sun-washed courtyard and gives himself two more years in a country he has called home for a decade.

Like many other entrepreneurs in an Afghanistan bracing for an exodus of foreign troops and aid workers in two years, D'Cruz thinks business can only get worse at his popular Namaste Indian restaurant, as expat customers vanish.

"Our customer base has decreased already. When international forces leave, we'll shut down," he said, gazing out onto a small lawn covered with empty plastic dining tables.

D'Cruz came to Afghanistan from India after the 2001 ousting of the former Taliban government, convinced the inrush

of political change would bring with it a demand from both Afghans and foreigners for services taken for granted elsewhere.

While the Taliban had bought only their own austere brand of oppression, Afghanistan's new freedom saw businesses flourish, transforming Kabul from a city of empty, pot-holed streets and ruined suburbs into one of bustling shops and car-choked roads.

D'Cruz and his restaurant caught the investment wave as more than \$50 billion dollars in reconstruction money flooded in, but now, like others, he is preparing for a receding tide, taking businesses with it.

With the average monthly salary of an Afghan in Kabul being \$300 or less, Namaste's dishes costing up to \$18 a plate are out of the reach of the majority of the Afghans who will be left behind after 2014.

"It's a lot to pay for and keep up with, without a steady cus-

tomers base," he said.

The deputy chairman of Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Industries, Khan Jan Alokozai, said with the end-2014 deadline for NATO's withdrawal telescoping in, D'Cruz's worries were being reflected in hotels, restaurants, guest homes and real estate, and even among companies supplying the Afghan and foreign military forces.

"We rebuilt Afghanistan. But we rebuilt it for foreigners," Alokozai said. "We didn't look at what our own people needed and now that they are leaving, we'll have to rebuild it again."

Vacant market

The World Bank, in its most recent assessment of Afghanistan, said while the economy had been expanding strongly in the past few years, bolstered by big aid flows helping real gross domestic product growth reach 8.4 percent in 2010/11, the pullout was expected to cut

that by about half.

D'Cruz's woes are echoed in Kabul's real estate market, where luxury homes in areas once in high demand by diplomats and foreign workers now have vacancy signs out front.

"Homes that used to rent for \$10,000 a month are down to \$4,000. It's 90 percent due to the decrease of foreign customers," said Shafikullah Mohammedi, a real estate agent who has just moved to a smaller office to save money.

Working mostly with foreigners, he used to rent out between two and three homes a month. Now he struggles to let that many in a year.

"I'm not sure what will become of the properties, they're just sitting there," Mohammedi said.

"I haven't been able to rent anything to foreigners, and none of my clients wants to lease their property to Afghans. They'll never see the rent money," he said.

CHINA DAILY

中国日报

WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM

COMMITTED TO
IMPROVING THE STATE
OF THE WORLD

The exclusive English outlet
covering the World Economic Forum in Tianjin

The World Economic Forum — Annual Meeting of the New Champions

Venue: Tianjin, China

Dates: September 11 to 13, 2012

Participants

- Globally influential company presidents
- New and dynamic worldwide enterprise leaders
- Mayors frequently in the global spotlight
- World-renowned economists

China Daily will organize a strong contingent of reporters and editors to provide detailed and comprehensive reports on the annual meeting of the New Champions — or Summer Davos — from the latest news to in-depth analysis. Our newspaper will be distributed to the venue and guest rooms to provide participants with authoritative coverage of the forum.

About the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting of the New Champions

Began in 1971 and held each winter in Davos, Switzerland, the World Economic Forum — known as the Davos Forum — has participants ranging from heads of state to senior company executives and renowned scholars. It has become an important platform for the global political and business elite to discuss economic trends and enterprise development strategies. It is recognized as one of the world's most influential non-official international economic forums.

Following the 2011 summer World Economic Forum in Dalian, the 2012 summer forum will be convened in Tianjin, one of China's rising economic hubs.

Advertising hotlines: 86-10-64918631/64995826 (Beijing), 86-21-63847568 (Shanghai)
E-mail: ads@chinadaily.com.cn

