Everyone is Responsible for the Culture Fatality Report



The death of a 22-year-old Chinese tech employee shows the industry's toxic '996' work culture, championed by top execs like Jack Ma

A 22-year-old employee of Pinduoduo, a Chinese e-commerce platform, collapsed and died after leaving work at 1:30 a.m. on December 29.

Pinduoduo gave no official cause of death, but the woman has been hailed as the latest victim of the "996" culture fuelling China's tech industry.

"996" sees staffers work from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., six days a week, and has been praised by top executives like Alibaba founder Jack Ma and JD.com CEO Richard Liu Qiangdong.

Chinese tech workers have long protested the rise of the trend, but authorities have taken few steps to counter it.

At 1:30 a.m. on December 29, a 22-year-old woman was walking home from work on the outskirts of Urumqi, the capital city of China's Xinjiang region, when colleagues saw her grab her stomach and fall to the sidewalk.

Paramedics spent six hours trying to revive her, but it was in vain. She died six hours later in the hospital, according to the South China Morning Post.

The woman, identified only by the last name Zhang, had been an employee of Pinduoduo, one of the largest e-commerce companies in China and the world.

Zahng was six months into a job at Pinduoduo, and has been hailed as the latest victim of what is known as the "996" work culture plaguing China's tech industry.

Under "996," early-career tech employees are encouraged – and expected – to work gruelling shifts from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m., plus overtime, for six days a week.

The regimen has been praised by top Chinese executives including Alibaba founder Jack Ma and JD.com founder Richard Liu Qiangdon, but has been slammed with equal vigor by activists and employees.

Ma, who came from nothing and became China’s richest man, said in April 2019 it was a “huge blessing” to work overtime and 72-hour weeks as a young employee.

Over the weekend, a hashtag used to mark Zhang’s death and identify her as a victim of “996” had garnered millions of views on Weibo, Bloomberg reported.

In its Monday statement, Pinduoduo did not give a cause of death for Zhang, the South China Morning Post reported.

Her death is widely believed to have been caused by overwork, and the woman’s family has reportedly declined the offer of a post-mortem examination.

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