# 'Bumping men' are a uniquely Japanese class of criminals that are hard to deal with

TOKYO

Although Japan is widely considered a safe country, there is a violent crime going on that goes under-reported but has been caught on social media for years. The perpetrators are called butsukari otoko or “bumping men” because they do just that; bump into people in crowded places like train stations or on the street.

The severity of the bump — or in some cases even a punch — can vary quite a bit as does the purpose, whether releasing some sort of aggression, as a form of molestation, or in an attempt to claim the victim damaged an item of theirs. In most cases, they take advantage of the ambiguity of whether their actions are intentional and the general passiveness of Japanese society to get away with their attacks.

A relatively high-profile bumping man incident occurred in Fukuoka City in early April. Police had gotten reports of a bumping man in the Nishi Ward area and were staking it out when they spotted a man in his 50s bumping into a high school student who was riding his bike. The man turned out to be an associate professor at Seinan Gakuin University and denied the charge, claiming that the student bumped into him.

Police seem to disagree though, because on May 28, the professor was rearrested for the third time on new charges of assault. The investigation is still ongoing, but according to the police, reports of a bumping man in that area go back to December 2024, which means there may end up being a large number of assaults in total.

It would seem that in cases like this, the bumping men may see themselves as the victim in the same psychological way that harassers sometimes do. That’s only speculation though, and online comments about the news were just as baffled as everyone else about why bumping men do what they do while also sharing some experiences about dealing with them.

“I’m surprised the university hasn’t fired him yet.”

“What kind of mental state do you have to be in to do that?”

“These guys are just letting off stress, but they need a good butt-kicking.”

“I once intercepted someone who was running at me by putting my knee up. Was I wrong?”

“If my parents had money, that’s the university I would have gone to.”

“We should just put all the bumping men in the country in one place and let them battle to be the king of bumping men.”

“I’m a big guy and often bump into people, but I always make sure I’m the first to apologize.”

“I caught one once, but he started crying and begging for mercy. I let him go, but I wonder what he was thinking.”

There is some anecdotal evidence that bumping men tend to shrink when confronted. A report by News Post Seven, interviewing people in places where bumping men are known to lurk, mentioned that incidents involving them may have decreased significantly with the rise in foreign tourism in Tokyo. One restaurant owner in an underground shopping area recalled seeing a known bumping man there attack a Chinese woman, who then quickly berated the man and demanded an apology while her friends took video. He hadn’t been seen since.

According to the legal experts at Bengoshi.com, since bumping is a form of assault, people are entitled to defend themselves and others, and citizen’s arrest is also permitted under Japanese law. However, doing these things would put yourself at risk with the law if excessive force is said to have been used. Anyone who encounters a bumping man would do best to stay clear of them and report it to the police while taking video evidence if possible.