

# Japan's youth suicide rate highest in 30 years

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Schoolgirls walk home at Ebisu district in Tokyo on September 4, 2017. Young people are killing themselves in Japan at a high rate.

Tokyo (CNN)More Japanese children and teenagers killed themselves between 2016 and 2017 than in any year since 1986, according to a new government report.

The latest survey shows 250 elementary and high school age children took their own lives in that year for a variety of reasons including

bullying, family issues and stress, the country's Ministry of Education said Monday, according to local media.

Those figures were 5 up on the previous year, and the highest since 1986, when 268 pupils died.

"The number of suicides of students have stayed high, and that is an alarming issue which should be tackled," ministry official Noriaki Kitazaki told reporters. He said the cause of the rise was unclear. Most of those who killed themselves were high school students. The government previously recorded an annual spike in suicides on September 1, the start of the new school year.

"The long break from school enables you to stay at home, so it's heaven for those who are bullied," Nanae Munemasa, then 17, [told CNN in 2015](#). "When summer ends, you have to go back. And once you start worrying about getting bullied, committing suicide might be possible."

Munemasa considered suicide herself due to bullying, before going public with her story in an attempt to help other young people.

While the youth suicide rate was up last fiscal year, the total number of suicides in Japan fell to 21,321 in 2017, from a peak of 34,427 in 2003, [according to the National Police Agency](#).

In 2016, Japan's government announced a plan to cut the country's suicide rate by 30% by 2026, particularly among young people, [according to the Japan Times](#). Part of the plan includes hiring counselors for every elementary and junior high school in the country, and launching a 24-hour helpline.

"We'd love to eliminate such tragedies altogether, but the reality is several hundred children are taking their lives (each year)," education ministry official Koju Matsubayashi told the newspaper. "It's important to teach children how to get help as soon as possible ... because it becomes harder and harder to find help once they're already suffering. The light at the end of the tunnel gets darker and darker until they begin to start seeing the light at the end of the tunnel as death."

## **Suicide crisis**

While Japan has long struggled with high suicide rates -- it is the

leading cause of death among young people -- the issue also persists across the wider Asia-Pacific region.

In Asia, only South Korea has a higher suicide rate than Japan, [according to the World Health Organization](#), at 26.9 deaths per 100,000 people in 2017, compared to 18.5 for Japan and 3.2 for the Philippines. It is also [one of the leading causes of death in Hong Kong](#).

As well as stress [caused by East Asian countries' intense work cultures](#), experts said many parts of the region also have a stigma against seeking treatment for depression or other interventions that could help reduce suicide.

[Research shows that suicide can also be contagious](#), with the death of one person or multiple people contributing to a rise in suicidal behavior among others, especially those who already have suicidal thoughts or a known risk factor for suicide.

**How to get help:** In the US, call the [National Suicide Prevention Lifeline](#) at 1-800-273-8255. [The International Association for Suicide Prevention](#) and [Befrienders Worldwide](#) also provide contact information for crisis centers around the world.