

## Record high for youth suicide / Suicide rates among students increased nearly 11% last year

The Yomiuri Shimbun

The number of students who committed suicide last year in the country hit a record figure of 1,029, up 101 cases or 10.9 percent from the previous year, the National Police Agency said Friday.

It was the first time that the number exceeded 1,000 since the NPA started recording statistics in 1978.

The NPA also reported the total number of suicides across the nation has exceeded 30,000 for 14 consecutive years up to 2011, though the number declined by 1,039, or 3.3 percent, to 30,651 from the previous year.

Of the students, the number of university students who killed themselves rose by 16 to 529 from the previous year while the number of high school students who did so increased by 65 to 269, according to the NPA. The combined figures accounted for about 80 percent of the total number of students who committed suicide.

By age group, the number of people 19 or younger who committed suicide rose by 12.7 percent to 622 from the previous year, and the figure for those in their 20s increased by 2 percent to 3,302.

Of the students, 140 committed suicide due to academic underachievement and 136 did so due to worries about their future after leaving school, the NPA said.

Of the total, the number of males who killed themselves decreased by 1,328 to 20,955 from the previous year, and the number of females increased by 289 to 9,696. The number of female suicides exceeded 30 percent of the total for the first time since 1997.

By age, suicide victims in their 60s numbered 5,547 and formed the largest group among all age brackets, though the figure was down 6.1 percent from the previous year.

Among the reasons given for 22,581 people committing suicide, the largest portion,

14,621, or 65 percent, left indications that they had killed themselves due to health problems. The reasons were found in suicide notes or other evidence.

Those who committed suicide because of economic problems totaled 6,406, those who did so due to domestic problems numbered 4,547. School issues accounted for 429 cases, according to the NPA.

Meanwhile, 56 people killed themselves for reasons related to the Great East Japan Earthquake in the period from June 2011 through January this year, according to the Cabinet Office.

Regarding reasons for the disaster-related suicides, health issues and economic woes were cited as the main reasons for 16 victims respectively.

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### Young people suffering

Universities and other organizations across the nation have begun efforts to understand young persons' anguish.

"I can't imagine a better life in the future. I feel it is easier to die [than to keep living]," a long-haired boy in his late teens wearing jeans was quoted as saying by Yusen Maeda, a chief priest of a temple in Minato Ward, Tokyo.

At his temple, Maeda, 41, counsels and discusses the problems of young people seeking his advice.

In the winter of 2008, a university student came to the temple and told Maeda he was unable to join a social circle or make friends with any classmates, even after six months had passed since he entered the university.

"I don't know why I'm living," he was quoted as saying.

Because the student spoke in a calm manner, Maeda did not feel a sense of urgency in his message. However, he then found fresh scars from wrist-cutting on both of his arms.

The student, who met Maeda about 100 times over three years, quit university. He now is going to technical school for music in hopes of becoming a musician.

"It seems he finally found a life of his own after experiencing agony. I think there should be more places where young people can bare their true feelings," Maeda said.

Tsukuba University has a psychiatrist and counselor on campus on a regular basis.

According to the university's lecturer Jun Sato, 39, who meets with students for consultations, many of the students are worried about getting jobs and having relationships with friends. And an increasing number of students are in financial distress, he said.

Tsukuba, Yamaguchi and other universities have created a manual for teachers on proper relationships with students.

Toyama University set up a suicide prevention office at the end of 2009.

The office sometimes confirms the safety of students whose parents cannot contact them by visiting the students' dwellings.

"There is little chance lately [for young people] to be present at the deathbeds of [relatives] at home. I think death has become a less serious issue because of TV games and other things. We need to teach them the importance of life and death," said Hironobu Ichikawa, advisor at Tokyo Metropolitan Children's Medical Center.

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