

Suicides in Japan down for 9th straight year to 37-year low in 2018

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The number of suicides in Japan dropped 3.4 percent from a year earlier to 20,598 in 2018, down for the ninth year and the lowest in 37 years amid economic recovery, preliminary data by the National Police Agency showed Friday.

The number of suicides per 100,000 people fell to 16.3, a record low since the survey began in 1978, but an increase of girls aged 19 or younger who killed themselves raised concern, according to the data.

An official of the Health, Labor and Welfare Ministry who analyzed the data attributed the decrease to economic recovery and efforts by local communities to prevent suicide. The government aims to bring down the suicide figure to below 13 per 100,000 people to match the levels of the United States and Germany.

The total number of suicides in 2018 fell 723 from the previous year to come below the 21,000 mark for the first time since 1981, the data showed.

By gender, suicides among men decreased 701 to 14,125, while for women the number dropped 22 to 6,473.

By age group, the number of suicides committed in the January-November period by those in their 50s topped the list with 3,225, down 91 from the same period in the previous year, followed by those in their 40s with 3,222, down 220, and those in their 60s with 2,811, down 312.

Among youths aged 19 or younger, the suicide figure increased 16 to 543.

Suicides committed by girls rose 51, while those by boys dropped 35.

As for the causes of suicide, health-related issues lead the list with 9,450, followed by financial and life problems with 3,118. Among the youth group, school-related issues were the biggest concern with 169.

Following the 2017 serial murder case in Zama, near Tokyo, in which teens and those in their 20s who expressed suicidal thoughts in Twitter posts fell victim, the government has been stepping up counseling service via social networking services for vulnerable youths.

The NPA is scheduled to release a breakdown of data by occupation and suicide causes in March.

The annual number of suicides in Japan, including those committed by foreigners, stayed above 20,000 between 1978 and 1997 before topping the 30,000 mark for 14 years in a row from 1998. The figure hit a record low of 20,434 in 1981 and peaked at 34,427 in 2003.

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