

EDITORIAL

Japan's ongoing suicide problem

The basic law to cope with Japan's high suicide rate went into force in 2006. Then in 2007, the government adopted an outline of policies to deal with this serious social problem. But the government was slow in tackling the problem and even after the outline was adopted, ministries and agencies failed to take a unified approach to reduce the number of suicides.

2011 marked the 14th straight year that the number of suicides topped 30,000. A January 2012 poll by the Cabinet Office shows that the central and local governments should make greater efforts to enlighten citizens about the nation's suicide problem.

It found that 34 percent of those polled did not know that the number of suicides had topped 30,000 every year for 14 years in a row. The corresponding figure was about 50 percent among the pollees who were in their 20s and 30s.

It is important for both individuals and enterprises to be aware that Japan's suicide rate is very high compared with other developed nations, and to consider what they can do to prevent suicides. According to the Cabinet Office, the suicide rate among every 100,000 people in Japan is 24 — about twice the rate in the United States and about three times the rate in Britain.

Society as a whole needs to take a serious view of the fact that nearly 80 people kill themselves every day in Japan. Among suicide victims, people in their 40s, 50s and 60s account for a majority.

Japanese society is facing a crisis. Although the number of suicides in 2011 was about 1,000 less than in 2010, an increasing number of people aged 15 to 39 killed themselves because they could not find work.

The government should not be lulled into complacency by the nation's relatively low unemployment rate. Serious efforts must be made to change the present employment situation in which nearly 40 percent of workers are irregular workers.

The internal affairs ministry has called on government ministries and agencies to cooperate in taking effective measures to prevent suicides. For example, it has suggested utilizing suicide data compiled by the National Police Agency and learning from the successful experiences of local governments.

In Akita Prefecture, which had the highest suicide rate among prefectures

for 17 consecutive years, municipal governments, universities, the police and associations of doctors formed networks and succeeded in reducing the annual number of suicides from 519 in the peak year of 2003 to 346 in 2011.

The central and local governments and the private sector must come up with new, more effective ideas and make strenuous efforts to realize the ideal that forms the foundation of the basic law to cope with the suicide issue: The creation of a society in which people can live a healthy and purposeful life.

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