

Suicides top 30,000 for 10th straight year

Kyodo News

The number of people who committed suicide in 2007 is estimated to have topped the 30,000 mark for the 10th straight year despite a recovery in the economy, a tally based on police data showed Tuesday.

The data provided by the country's 47 prefectural police departments put the number of suicides last year at about 32,000. Some of the departments provided only general figures.

The National Police Agency is expected to release its own statistics around June.

The number of suicides passed the 30,000 threshold for the first time in 1998, when the total was 32,863, an increase of 8,472, or 34.7 percent, from the 1997 total of 24,391, according to annual police data.

The figure swelled in 1998 amid an economic slump marked by a large number of businesses that went under.

The annual total has remained above the 30,000 mark each year since. In 2003, the figure reached a high of 34,427. In 2006, the figure stood at 32,155, down 1.2 percent from a year earlier, according to annual police reports.

Of the preliminary 2007 total, Tokyo accounted for the biggest number at about 3,000, followed by Saitama Prefecture at about 2,000.

The number of suicides in Akita Prefecture declined to 417 from 493, representing a decrease of 15.4 percent, after various suicide-prevention measures were taken by local authorities. Akita Prefecture has long had the highest number of suicides per

population of 100,000.

In most of the prefectures, the number of suicides leveled off or slightly increased, the tally showed.

Japan's suicide rate, or the number of suicides per population of 100,000, stood at 24.0 in 2004 — the ninth worst in the world and second worst among the Group of Eight nations, behind only Russia, whose rate stood at 34.3, according to data compiled by the World Health Organization.

For other major countries, the suicide rate was 18.0 in France, 13.0 in Germany, 11.6 in Canada and 11.0 in the United States.

The government adopted a set of suicide-prevention guidelines in June 2007 with a target of cutting the suicide rate by more than 20 percent by 2016. If the target is achieved, the suicide rate should decrease to 19.4 in 2016.

The Japan Times: Wednesday, May 28, 2008
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