



NEWS / MAGAZINE

Japan: A month's suicides surpass total death toll of Covid-19

2 DAYS AGO

In October, 2,153 Japanese people committed suicide - a number that exceeds the country's total Covid-19 toll which stood at 2,087 for the entire year to date.

Japan has witnessed a sharp surge in suicides, mostly among women, amid the novel coronavirus pandemic that has forced governments around the world to impose lockdowns, curfews and the suspension of several economic drivers.

According to Japanese government [statistics](#), the deaths by suicide in just one month have surpassed Covid-19's total death toll in the east Asian island nation.

Japan's National Police Agency said that suicides increased to 2,153 in October from 1,805 in September.

The number of suicides has also risen in the past four months, compared to the same period in 2019.

Japan has historically high suicide rates

Although suicide is a major societal issue in Japan, restrictions on social interaction have left people isolated, and many have lost their jobs due to the pandemic's economic fallout.

The suicide number in Japan was [21,897](#) in 2016, which puts it near the top for suicides in developed countries.

Before the pandemic, the suicide rate was decreasing in Japan - they fell by 4.2 percent in 2019 compared to the previous year, to a record low of 19,959.

Figures had been lower than 20,000 for the first time since 1978 when the authorities began compiling data.

Is the pandemic driving people to suicide?

The government is trying to determine if the increase is linked to the spread of the novel coronavirus, which has claimed over a million lives worldwide.

Mass unemployment, anxiety, and social isolation are suspected to be the main drivers for the surge of suicides in Japan, though also largely triggered by the pandemic.

"We didn't even have a lockdown, and the impact of Covid is very minimal compared to other countries ... but still we see this big increase in the number of suicides," Michiko Ueda, associate professor at Waseda University in Tokyo, [told CNN](#).

"That suggests other countries might see a similar or even bigger increase in the number of suicides in the future," Ueda added.

According to [research carried](#) out in the US, a considerable number of adults suffered mental health problems associated with Covid-19 in June.

However, "younger adults, racial/ethnic minorities, essential workers, and unpaid adult caregivers reported having experienced disproportionately worse mental health outcomes, increased substance use, and elevated suicidal ideation," researchers wrote.