

### Causes of Suicide in Middle-aged Men in Prefectures in Japan During the Recent Spike in Suicides

The Editor,

Sir,

In Japan, the National Police Agency has reported that the number of suicides totalled approximately 31 000 to 34 000 per year from 1998–2008. The main reason for this increase is reported to be Japan's current "economic slump" (1). The current report focussed on and reviewed recent studies of causative factors of suicide among middle-aged men in several prefectures of Japan.

Abe *et al.* (2) found that "socio-economic problems" "illness", "mental disorder", and "family conflict" were often the main motives for suicide in all age groups in Fukushima Prefecture from 1999–2004, and they noted the seriousness of the increase in suicides by middle-aged males due to "socio-economic problems" (2). In Saga Prefecture, the number of suicides increased rapidly in 1998, and the most frequent cause of suicide among 40- and 50-year old males was debt (3). In Ehime Prefecture, causative factors for suicide among men were often "debt troubles", "work-related troubles", and "a slump in business" (4). The number of suicides in Kagoshima Prefecture increased significantly from 1999–2001 to 1.25 times the level from 1989–1991, and one of the distinctive features of this increase was the significant increase in suicides of males in their forties to sixties due to "pessimism" and "economic reason" (5). The number of suicides in Mie Prefecture has been increasing since 1998 (6) and the most significant causative factor among middle-aged men was "economic difficulties". A report from Nagano Prefecture indicated that 92% of suicides due to "economic problems" were in men (7).

"Economic difficulties" for suicide among middle-aged men was common to six prefectures, so it should be dealt with by relevant organizations nationwide and in individual prefectures to decrease suicides.

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