

Launch of the New General Principles of Suicide Prevention Policy in Japan

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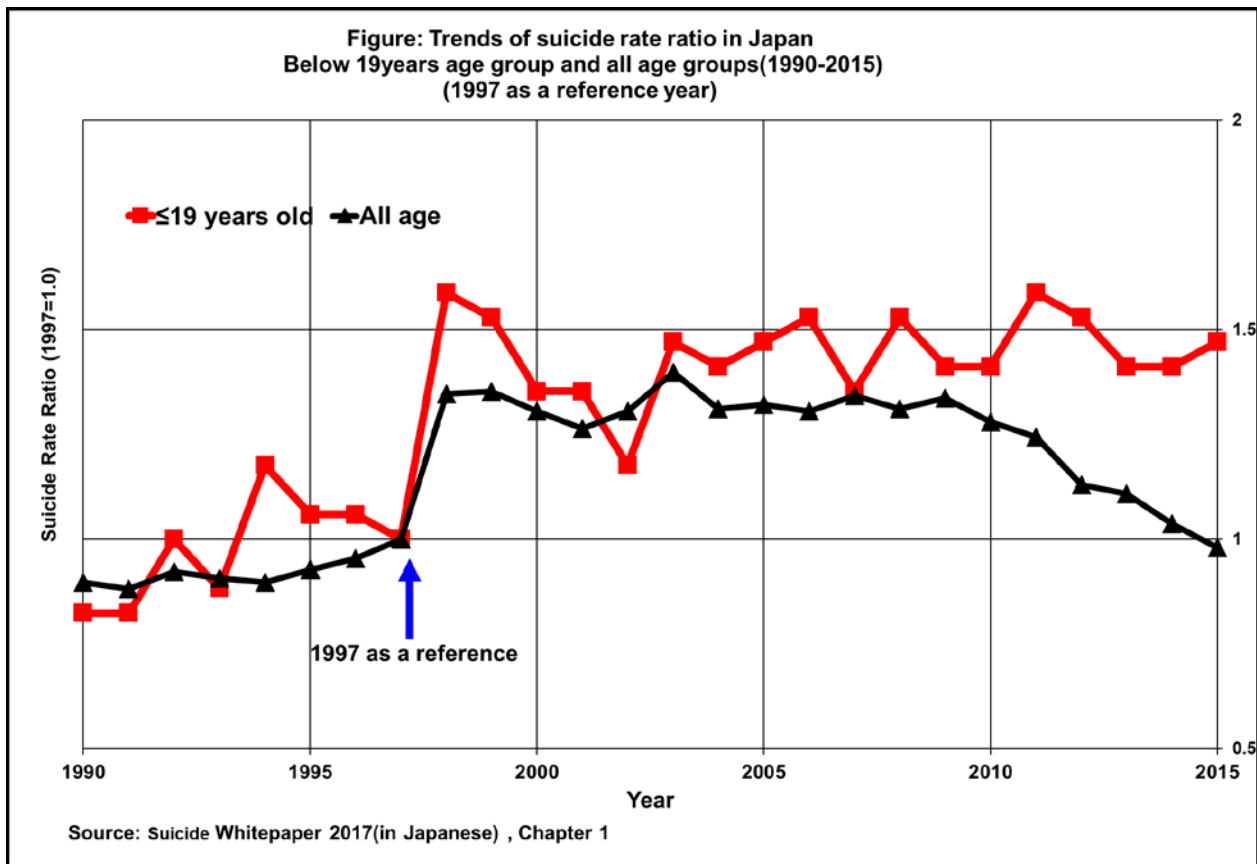
On July 25, 2017, the government of Japan approved the new General Principles of Suicide Prevention Policy (see Supplementary Information). The number of annual suicide deaths in Japan jumped up in 1998 with 32863 cases (see Supplementary Information), and has been continuously high.^{1,2} Japan was the only country among the G7 nations where suicide was the leading cause of death in the 15–39 age group (see Supplementary Information). To address this, the government of Japan drew up the Basic Law on Suicide Countermeasures in 2006, which highlighted suicide death as avoidable death. Suicide death rate in Japan has gradually decreased since 2010; and in 2016, the number of suicide deaths reduced to 21897.³ Thus, we succeeded in reducing the annual suicide rate by 23% in the past decade by these efforts (2015:18.5/2005:24.2).⁴ However, suicide rate per 100000 people in youth, particularly in below 19 years of age drastically increased in 1998, and did not decrease as other age groups. Even after the year 2010, suicide death rate of this age group increased (Figure). This issue is an emergency challenge to Japan.

The new General Principles of Suicide Prevention Policy preferentially addressed the following major issues. First, this aimed at 30% reduction in suicide deaths, and targeted a reduction

in annual suicide deaths to below 16000, the annual suicide rate per 100000 people from 18.5 in 2015 to 13.0 by 2026. Second, this Principles imposed all prefectures and municipalities to develop local plans on suicide countermeasures. Japan has high suicide rate in northern prefectures. For instance, in 2016, the suicide rate per 100000 people was 25.2 in Akita and 25.0 in Iwate, while it was 13.3 in Kanagawa and 14.0 in Osaka.⁵ Therefore, partnerships with local governments and private sectors are essential. Third, the Japan Support Center for Suicide Countermeasures not only develops local planning, but also focuses on a training program for school students entitled ‘How to raise an SOS when you face a crisis’. Fourth, in addition to reinforcing youth suicide countermeasures, we added suicide countermeasures for ‘Karoshi’, or death-by-overwork.⁵ Fifth, the new General Principles of Suicide Prevention Policy provides countermeasures for those who attempt suicide, and for bereaved family members. In Japan, however, such people are hard to reach, and suffer from traditional prejudices about suicide; we should first break through these invisible prejudices. Thus, community-based suicide countermeasures in addition to psychiatric services could be key to achieving this difficult task.

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Declaration of interests

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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