

Suicide Rate High in North Tajikistan

Author: IWPR

Soghd region has an unusually high suicide rate, and the majority of cases involve men. Reporter Kamari Ahrorzoda looked into the numbers, and found that a recent survey showing Tajikistan as the best of the Central Asian countries, with only 2.6 cases per 100,000 people compared with nearly 30 in Kazakstan may be misleading. The country's own statistical agency says the figure is higher, at between four and seven per 100,000 in recent years.

Soghd region in the north of the country is experiencing particularly rapid growth in suicide, and the majority are men, although female suicide is also rising at a faster rate than the national average.

Experts believe the poor state of Tajikistan's economy is a contributory factor. The deputy prosecutor for the region, Muhabbat Urunova, says it is no coincidence that of the 188 cases recorded in January-October 2008, 150 involved unemployed people.

Adult men in particular may be driven to take desperate measures if their job or business venture falls through and they feel they have failed their family.

"Sadly, young people and minors also take this step," said Dilavar Alizoda, a representative of the regional police force. "Sometimes it's after an argument in the family."

Some experts are now pressing for a research centre to be set up to focus exclusively on the issue of suicide.

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Women at Risk of Domestic Violence

Domestic violence coupled with a sense of powerlessness to do anything about it is a major factor in many suicide attempts by women.

As reporter Bek Rahmoni discovered, in Soghd region the divorce rate is going up, but so is the number of suicides among women, including by self-immolation.

When women are assaulted in the home, they can feel isolated by a feeling that they have no rights, and that they should not discuss such matters outside the family. Economic dependence also leaves them unable to act.

Munovvar Shakirova of the gender centre run by the government Committee for Women and the Family says the problem of domestic violence needs to be addressed by making women aware of their legal rights to protection.

Hikmatullo Saifullozoda, an expert on Islam, says the faith does not sanction violence against women, for which there is no excuse.

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Dushanbe Zoo Seeks Friends

The zoo in the Tajik capital has seen better days and is looking for animal sponsors.

Reporter Ismatullo Azizzoda interviewed one visitor, Tolibkhujja Nematov, who was last here in the late Eighties.

“Of course there’s a difference,” said Nematov. “There were more animals then and they looked healthy. Now I see our zoo is in a miserable state compared with Soviet times.”

Staff are more optimistic, saying the lions, tigers and camels have all had offspring recently. The camels are in fact the largest animals they have, but they are expecting a hippopotamus to be shipped in any day now, from the far end of Russia rather than Africa.

In a sign of the times, the zookeepers have also made winter preparations to cope with Tajikistan’s chronic electricity shortages. Like many Tajik homes, the enclosures are now equipped with wood-burning stoves.

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