

Tajik Event Spurs Action on Suicide

IWPR event instrumental in mobilising community efforts to deal with growing problem of suicide in Tajikistan.

Some local authorities in Tajikistan have been spurred into making fresh efforts to tackle a rising tide of suicides by an IWPR round table on the subject.

Religious leaders and teachers also followed suit, offering talks on how to cope with difficulties of life without resorting to a tragic solution.

Students and teaching staff from Khorog University in Badakhshan, a mountainous region of eastern Tajikistan, who attended the meeting showed a particular determination to put into action some of the ideas voiced during the IWPR event.

They introduced weekly discussions and plan to start a campaign for their university to open a psychology department.

The IWPR round table on the issue of suicide and ways of dealing with it was held on October 22. A similar debate was held in Badakhshan in June.

The latest session resulted in setting up a working group that intends to petition the regional administration for help in preventing suicide and raising awareness about the issue.

Organised within the European Union-funded IWPR Human Rights project, the meeting in Khorog aimed to bring together the human rights community and media to raise awareness about the rising trend in suicide attempts.

The event was part of IWPR's activities and publications addressing the alarming trend of an increase in suicide attempts across Tajikistan against a backdrop of an economic crisis that has hit the country badly.

According to the deputy head of the interior ministry department in Badakhshan, Nazarbek Khudoyorov, who also took part in the IWPR round table, over the first nine months of this year there were 28 suicides and attempts compared a total of 12 last year.

Of this year's total, 20 were men and eight women and among them nine youngsters, Khudoyorov said.

The proposed working group would include members of local government bodies, youth groups and non-governmental organisations to work with the public on preventing suicide attempts and to raise awareness of the issue.

A participant in the round table, social activist Aziz Gaesov, said, "People always have problems but against the backdrop of the [financial] crisis, they have become particularly numerous. As a result, depression sets in from which no one is immune."

According to Gaesov, each university and each organisation that has a large enough number of employees should have a room where people can talk to a psychologist.

The meeting received extensive coverage on regional TV and radio stations. In the words of radio journalist Safarmon Butabekova, it was the first time that the debate on suicide had involved such a wide range of people, "There was a huge response and as a result the problem was raised at the highest level."

Follow-up events to the IWPR meeting were held based on ideas and proposals discussed during the round table.

According to Butabekova, city administration and district governments arranged public events to demonstrate that the issue of suicide and its causes should be talked about openly. She said that it also raised the authorities' profile and brought them closer to the community.

According to Butabekova, "For the first time people feel that they can discuss their concerns and worries with officials."

One of the participants at the IWPR meeting, the head of the department for youth affairs and sport in Darvaz, a district neighbouring Badakhshan, Komron Mirov, said that having participated in the round table he now pays more attention to the problem when visiting public places for his job. During a recent school visit, he reminded students that problems are an inevitable part of life and should not be an obstacle to living.

He also told of his own experience of having a conversation with a woman who was on the verge of taking her own life and was persuaded to seek help.

Students now also find it easier to discuss the issue with their teachers and peers.

Zebinisso Asanova, dean of the faculty at Khorog University, told IWPR that this year seven students took their lives, "At these meeting we discuss the reasons that prompted our students to end their lives.

"It turned out that for some it was a personal tragedy, for others financial problems."

According to Asanova, there have been no suicide attempts at the university since they introduced the practice of weekly debates.

Khudoyorov told IWPR that the problem is very complex and requires the participation of all parties involved, "I believe that society should deal with this problem collectively. On their own, law enforcement bodies and other organisations or government agencies won't be able to do anything."

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