The Moscow Times
30 YEARS
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Suicide Costs Russia Equivalent of Large City

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October 10, 2011



An alarmingly high suicide rate in Russia has cost the country the equivalent in population of a large metropolis since the Soviet collapse, a leading expert on the matter said Monday.

"About 800,000 people have taken their own lives from 1990 to 2010," Boris Polozhy, a director at the Serbsky Institute for Social and Forensic Psychiatry in Moscow said at a news conference marking World Mental Health Day.

"That's nearly a million people — or a city — that we've lost," he said, Interfax reported.

Russia's suicide rate ranks second in the world after only Lithuania, according to data compiled by the World Health Organization.

The average age of a Russian who commits suicide is 45 for men and 52 for women, Polozhy said.

For example, a 52-year-old man killed himself in St. Petersburg on Sunday after firing at police responding to a call about shots fired from inside his apartment, authorities said. No one else was hurt and police recovered a rifle with a telescopic site and a pile of bullets.

The suicide rate grew so out of hand during the economic cataclysm of the 1990s — when it surged to 42 suicides for every 100,000 people — that authorities were forced to take notice. Over the past decade they have made some headway in bringing it down, cutting the rate to 23.5 suicides per 100,000 people in 2010, Polozhy said.

Still, much remains to be done, he warned.

"We have developed a system [for suicide prevention], and it is ready to be implemented," he said. "But the reality is that there is a complete lack of coordination.

"This is a question that must be addressed, financed and supervised at the highest state level," Polozhy said.

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