The Moscow Times
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Russia Reforms School Mental Health Services After Pskov Shootings

November 21, 2016



Vedomosti

Following an incident where two teenagers from Pskov killed themselves after shooting at police, Russia's government has decided to reform its system of mental health services for schoolchildren, the Interfax news agency reported Monday.

"To change the whole service of psychologists — that is our task," Deputy Prime Minister Olga Golodets said. "To give it a completely different professional content and lay down the methods of working with parents and teachers, and directly with children."

The program of reform will be prepared after research is completed on the statistics of teen suicide in Russia. Once finished, the findings will be presented by the V.P. Serbsky Federal Medical Research Center of Psychiatry and Addiction.

"The Serbsky institute is preparing a course of seminars and techniques for the analysis of all the tragic accidents that have occurred in Russia over the past few years and they will prepare new programs for training school psychologists," Golodets said.

The deputy prime minister sees the Pskov case as a clear example of how the current system of mental health services fails teens.

"Unfortunately, those children who fall into such difficult situations do not fall within the field of view of the so-called psychologists," she said. "That is, today psychologists in schools often focus on children in so-called difficult situations, that is, children who live in disadvantaged families ... But the hidden trouble, discomfort, lack of attention to the child and the lack of time that parents spend with the child lead to much more complex consequences."

The tragedy in the Pskov region occurred on Nov. 14, when two 15-year-olds shot at a police car which had been looking for them. They then barricaded themselves in the house where they had been hiding. While police tried to negotiate, the two teens broadcast their activities on the Internet. Police stormed the house once the teens had stopped responding. Inside they found the bodies of both teens, dead from apparent gunshot wounds. Investigators believe that one shot the other, then himself. Later the investigation revealed that one of the teenagers had come to the attention of law enforcement in May, due to disciplinary problems at school.

Russian authorities have also launched a case against so-called "Groups of Death" on social media. These communities allegedly encourage teenagers to commit suicide and have been linked to a number of teen suicides in different regions of Russia.

Read about Russia's fight against teen suicide***.***

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