

Japan government creates a minister of loneliness

25th February, 2021



The Japanese government now has a "minister of loneliness". It is the first time Japan has had such a minister. Japan's Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga created the role in early February. He asked Tetsushi Sakamoto to fill the new position. Mr Suga wanted to do something about the rise in suicide cases. The number of people taking their own lives has risen during the pandemic. Japan's National Police Agency showed that 20,919 people died by suicide in 2020. This is 750 more than the previous year. It is also the first consecutive rise in suicides in 11 years. Mr Sakamoto told reporters: "I hope to promote activities that prevent loneliness and social isolation and to improve the ties between people."

The police agency reported that there has been a much bigger rise in suicides among women and young people. Prime Minister Suga said women have been struggling with loneliness since the coronavirus pandemic started in early 2020. He told reporters: "Women are suffering from isolation more than men are, and the number of suicides is on a rising trend." There has been a 70 per cent year-on-year increase in the number of women taking their own lives. Yoko Suzuki, a 23-year-old designer who lives in Tokyo, said she has suffered from loneliness since coronavirus started. She said: "Not seeing people smile behind their mask makes me sad and lonely." She added: "I want to see happy faces."

Sources: thehill.com / nypost.com / japantimes.co.jp

Writing

Schools should give lessons to teach children about loneliness. Discuss.

Chat

Talk about these words from the article.

minister / loneliness / role / position / rise / suicide / pandemic / reporters / isolation / police / young people / coronavirus / suffering / trend / designer / mask / happy faces

True / False

- a) Japan appointed a minister of loneliness in late January. T / F
- b) The number of deaths by suicide rose in Japan in the pandemic. T / F
- c) Over 20,000 people took their own lives in Japan in 2020. T / F
- d) The loneliness minister wants to improve ties between people. T / F
- e) Japan's police said there was a bigger rise in suicides among men. T / F
- f) Japan's leader said women are feeling lonelier than men. T / F
- g) There has been a 17 per cent increase in suicides among women. T / F
- h) A young woman in Tokyo does not like seeing masks on people. T / F

Synonym Match

(The words in **bold** are from the news article.)

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. role | a. announced |
| 2. rise | b. push |
| 3. consecutive | c. unhappy |
| 4. promote | d. successive |
| 5. ties | e. position |
| 6. reported | f. shift |
| 7. struggling | g. began |
| 8. trend | h. links |
| 9. started | i. fighting |
| 10. sad | j. increase |

Discussion – Student A

- a) What do you know about loneliness?
- b) What health problems can loneliness cause?
- c) What do you think of the idea of a minister of loneliness?
- d) How has the pandemic affected your mental health?
- e) What can governments do to cut numbers of suicides?
- f) How good are you at helping people who are lonely?
- g) What advice do you have for lonely people?
- h) What can the minister do to help with social isolation?

Phrase Match

- | | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------|
| 1. the first time Japan has | a. prevent loneliness |
| 2. This is 750 more than | b. their own lives |
| 3. the first consecutive | c. behind their mask |
| 4. I hope to promote activities that | d. the previous year |
| 5. improve the ties between | e. with loneliness |
| 6. a much bigger rise in suicides | f. faces |
| 7. women have been struggling | g. people |
| 8. the number of women taking | h. rise |
| 9. Not seeing people smile | i. among women |
| 10. I want to see happy | j. had such a minister |

Discussion – Student B

- What do you think about what you read?
- When have you been lonely?
- Why might the pandemic be affecting women more than men?
- How would you deal with isolation?
- Are you happy being by yourself for a long time?
- What do you think of everyone wearing masks?
- How important is it to see happy faces?
- What questions would you like to ask the minister of loneliness?

Spelling

- fill the new tioionps
- risen during the dpicnaem
- 750 more than the verspoiu year
- I hope to rpotome activities
- prevent loneliness and social oanlostii
- mivpreo the ties between people
- police anegy
- women have been sngrgliutg
- Women are suffering from otlisoian
- on a rising tnrde
- a 23-year-old isdenegr
- she has edfuersf from loneliness

Answers – Synonym Match

1. e	2. j	3. d	4. b	5. h
6. a	7. i	8. f	9. g	10. c

Role Play

Role A – Doctors

You think doctors are the best people to help with loneliness. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their forms of help. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): neighbours, social media or you.

Role B – Neighbours

You think neighbours are the best people to help with loneliness. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their forms of help. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): doctors, social media or you.

Role C – Social Media

You think social media is the best way to help with loneliness. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their forms of help. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): neighbours, doctors or you.

Role D – Yourself

You think you are the best people to help with loneliness. Tell the others three reasons why. Tell them what is wrong with their forms of help. Also, tell the others which is the worst of these (and why): neighbours, social media or doctors.

Speaking – Help

Rank these with your partner. Put the people who can best help others with loneliness at the top. Change partners often and share your rankings.

- | | |
|----------------|-------------------|
| • friends | • family |
| • co-workers | • doctors |
| • social media | • neighbours |
| • yourself | • local community |

Answers – True False

a	F	b	T	c	T	d	T	e	F	f	T	g	F	h	T
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Answers to Phrase Match and Spelling are in the text.