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## 'The streets smell like death:' Iran's suicide epidemic

4 hours ago

Zhakaw Tari (<https://www.rudaw.net/english/authors/zhakaw-tari>)

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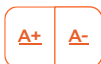
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ERBIL, Kurdistan Region - A suicide epidemic has swept across the provinces of Iran in recent months, with around 120,000 suicide attempts reported in 2023, prompting a call for action from mental health specialists and civil society actors.

Iran's suicide rate has increased from five to seven per each 100,000 people over the past ten years, according to official statistics from authorities.

A suicide note left by 12-year-old Yasna from Iran's southwestern city of Yasuj sent shockwaves through Iranian social media channels and left her family and loved ones in a state of utter despair. Yasna is survived by her younger sister Yakta. The two had begun living with their uncle's family after their parents separated a few years back and could not agree on the custody of the children.

"Dear aunt-in-law. I will miss you. I am fed up with life. Yakta, I leave you our phone as a memory. Aunt-in-law, take care of Yakta, I leave her

in your care. Goodbye," read the letter from young Yasna, which she gave to one of her friends to hand to her family in case of her death.

Yasna took her own life through an intentional drugs overdose in early January.

Hassan Mousavi Chalak, head of Iran's Social Workers Association, said that the young girl's suicide should be investigated, partly blaming the lack of mental health care in Iranian schools for the tragic death.

"Now the main question here is: How many schools have social workers? The answer is that no school has a support unit. In many cases, the social worker can receive signs and identify high-risk people by communicating with the person or family and the environment," Mousavi Chalak told Etemad, a reformist newspaper calling for social freedoms in Iran.

High suicide rates among teens have also been reported in Iran's western Kurdish region (Rojhelat) since the start of the year.

On January 24, 17-year-old Farzaneh Ghaderi from Piranshahr committed suicide by hanging herself in her room. A day later, Hawzhin Mustafahpour, 15, ended her life by jumping from the balcony of her family's fifth-floor apartment in Mahabad.

Mousavi Chalak decried that Iran's surging suicide rate carries a threatening message "but unfortunately it is not heard." He predicted that at this rate, the country would surpass the global average for suicides committed per portion of the population.

Ilam province has recorded the highest suicide rates in Iran consistently for the past seven years. The country's crumbling economy and lack of job opportunities has been cited as one of the main factors contributing to the suicide epidemic.

"What we witness in Ilam is a terrifying situation which is only seen in movies. Not a day passes without a wake being held in the province for someone who committed suicide. There is no family here that has not lost a loved one to suicide," Vahid\*, an activist from Ilam, told Rudaw English last month.

Vahid pursued a degree in Sociology at the University of Tehran, in hopes of returning home after his graduation and helping save the youth of his town from the bottoms of despair and melancholy; a dream shattered by his younger brother's unexpected suicide.

"I couldn't even save the person closest to me. My 23-year-old brother committed suicide two years ago, and my dreams were shattered. I am devastated that I could not help my brother and fix his problems, even though no one in our family knows the reason for his suicide to this day."

The activist accused Iranian authorities of negligence in addressing the woes of the people, especially economic struggles, contributing to the high suicide rates. He claimed that the numbers published by authorities are "fake news" and that the actual figures are way higher.

"All of the streets here smell like death," he concluded.

A petrochemical plant in Ilam province has reported six suicide cases among its workers in the past two years. Two workers hanged themselves at the site of the plant after being let go in December, but were rescued following the immediate intervention of their coworkers.

At least four high school students and one recent graduate committed suicide in Ilam province's Abdanan city in the last two months of last year, including cousins Baran Ghanbari and Sanaz Ghanbari. Sanaz took her life on the day the family mourned the 40th day since Baran's death.

Around 120,000 suicide attempts were reported across Iran in 2023, according to Hamid Peyravi, deputy head of the Iran suicide prevention community.

*\*The name is an alias chosen by the subject to protect their anonymity.*

*Additional reporting by Chenar Chalak*

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