

Depression surges among children in Korea

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The number of children aged 6 to 11 treated for depression doubled, with 822 child suicides, in 5 years. PHOTO: 123RF/THE KOREA HERALD

The incidence of depression in South Korean children has doubled in five years, and more than 800 elementary, middle and high school students here took their lives over the same period, data showed Thursday (September 7, 2023).

According to data submitted to Rep. Kim Woni of the Democratic Party of Korea by the Education Ministry and the National Health Insurance Service, the number of children aged between 6 and 11 who were treated for depression surged 91.5 percent, from 1,849 in 2018 to 3,541 in 2022.

Some 24,588 teens between the ages of 15 and 17 and 9,257 children between the ages of 12 and 14 were diagnosed with depression in the same period. The figure also showed the total number of children grappling with depression went up by 60.1 percent from 2018 to 2022.

Apart from depression befalling many children, the country also saw a surge in the number of child suicide cases.

A total of 822 elementary, middle and high school students died in apparent suicides from 2018 to 2022. By year, 144 kids took their lives in 2018, 140 in 2019, 148 in 2020, 197 in 2021 and 193 in 2022.

The deaths were driven by a range of factors, with academic pressures being the most common, followed by mental health issues and social relationships. Some students also took their own lives after suffering from school violence, the data showed. Other reasons for the child suicides remain unknown.

Rep. Kim noted that the COVID-19 pandemic has presented many challenges to students, making it difficult for children to adjust to the changing learning environment at school and leading them to experience feelings of depression and anxiety.

"Schools and local districts need to shore up measures (for children and students grappling with depression and anxiety) by expanding mental health personnel and creating programs that offer counseling and treatment," Rep. Kim said. -**asianews.network, September 8, 2023**