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6 The importance of studying the increase in suicides and gender differences during the COVID-19
7 pandemic.
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12 Masahito Fushimi

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14 Akita University Health Center, Akita University, 1-1 Tegatagakuen-machi, Akita 010-8502, Japan

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16 Tel.: +81 188 892287; Fax: +81 188 363693.

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18 E-mail address: fushimi@gipc.akita-u.ac.jp, fushimi@sings.jp
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7 pandemic
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10 I read Leo Sher's article with great interest.^{1,2} He pointed out that the COVID-19 pandemic has a
11 profound effect on one's psychological state. He also emphasized the high probability of increased
12 suicides, with economic disruption caused by the pandemic as a contributing factor. His points are
13 precise and indicative.

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15 As an important addition to his points, I would like to suggest the need for considering the effects of
16 gender differences on increased suicides resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. In Japan, the
17 number of suicides among women increased significantly more than it did among men during the
18 pandemic.³ I think the causes of this situation have compounded, but economic problems—such as
19 unemployment—have been cited as one of the causes. However, I would like to point to the rapid
20 increase in suicides in Japan in the past.

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22 It is well known that the annual number of suicides in Japan skyrocketed in 1998.^{4,5} At that time, there
23 was a conspicuous increase in the number of male suicides; by age, the increase was most pronounced
24 among those in their 40s, 50s, and 60s. The increase in the number of middle-aged and older men who
25 committed suicide was behind the sharp rise, while there was no significant change in the number
26 among women. Furthermore, it is said that the suicide rate among Japanese men correlates very well
27 with the unemployment rate.^{4,6} Considering the number of suicides in Japan in the past, it has been
28 generally accepted that men are more sensitive to changes in social conditions, whereas women tend
29 not to be.^{6,7} However, the increase in the number of suicides in Japan attributed to the COVID-19
30 pandemic is more noticeable among women than men.

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32 Why? This is an important question and one that needs to be researched in the future. At this point,
33 however, the factors that I perceive, such as self-restraint in behavior and restrictions on interaction
34 with others, are different from stressors of the past.^{3,7} I surmise that the burden of restrictions on
35 socioeconomic activities has been greater for women. For example, the burden of childrearing due to
36 school closures has been greater for women, and the burden of balancing work and home life has also
37 been greater for women because of remote work that turned the home into a workplace.³ These factors
38 might have increased the risk of suicide among women. It is said that women are more likely to relieve
39 stress by interacting with others; thus, the number suicides in women might have increased because
40 of circumstances wherein social interaction has been prohibited to prevent infection. Consequently, it
41 has been difficult to consult with others.

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43 Depression and suicide are said to become more pronounced after some time has elapsed rather than
44 immediately after the occurrence of a stressor. It is feared that suicide among men will also increase
45 in the future. As the psychological effects of the pandemic become increasingly clear, adequate
46 consideration should be given to minimizing them.
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7 Conflict of interest. None declared.
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