

ABSTRACT

Purpose:

This study investigates shifts in the scientific discussion of hikikomori before versus after the COVID-19 pandemic, with particular attention to changes in terminology and conceptual framing, from an early, Japan-centric clinical/sociological model to more globally and digitally informed perspectives.

Materials and Methods:

A corpus of 210 English-language abstracts on hikikomori (sourced from PubMed, Scopus, and Web of Science, January 2002–March 2022) was compiled and segmented into 534 units of ~100 words each. Iramuteq was employed for statistical text analysis, including lexical profiling, co-occurrence mapping, Reinert (cluster) analysis, and correspondence analysis to detect thematic and temporal patterns.

Results:

Prior to 2019, abstracts were dominated by terms such as “hikikomori_syndrome,” “withdrawal_behaviour,” and “psychiatrists,” reflecting a unidimensional, clinically focused understanding largely situated in Japan. Post-2019, there is a marked integration of “mental_health” language with hikikomori, a raise in digital-tech lexicon (“online,” “internet,” “social_media,” “tweets”), and the appearance of preventive/supportive framing (“program,” “step”) alongside gender markers (“men,” “women”).

Conclusions:

Findings indicate that the pandemic not only intensified social withdrawal but also reframed it within virtual contexts, catalyzing a multidimensional, globally oriented discussion. Future research should prioritize cross-cultural validation of assessment tools, leverage social-media data for real-time monitoring, and develop gender-sensitive, technology-mediated intervention strategies.