

HIKIKOMORI – BEHIND CLOSED BLINDS

It is 4PM in the afternoon. Aside from the little sun rays creaking through the shuttered window of the apartment, the luminance from the computer screen the only source of light in that room, seems to blind anyone not used to it. Aside from the endless clacking of the keyboard and the muffled sound from the video game through the headphone, the rain outside seems ever so incessant. For any anime enthusiast, this scene is no newcomer. It is a familiar scene where the main character is a hikikomori or a shut-in. *Hikikomori* are often teenagers or adults who cease contacts with the outside world, or even their family, and hole up in the comfort of their room. The trigger for one person to become a hikikomori is often the psychological traumas that one has throughout his/her life, whether it is bullying at school, the loss of close family member(s), the loss of one's job, and so on. The portrayal of the hikikomori phenomenon in anime acts as a (rose-covered, comic) wakeup call for the government to take measures to alleviate the societal problem. Take for example the latest series release written by Hirasaka Yomi: *Imouto sae ireba ii* (episode 3) where one of the characters, Nayuta Kani suffers the hikikomori problem in the past due to severe bullying at school which has her end up locking herself in her room, avoiding contact with other people and have communication problems after the fact. Kani is eventually “saved” under very specific circumstances. This reveals there are complex triggering events to becoming a hikikomori, so the resolution is not very simple either. Hikikomori is not exclusive to Japan, but rather Japan has the clearest and largest apparition of the hikikomori phenomenon. Under different names, there are other places showcasing similar phenomenon like other Asia-Pacific countries (India, Korea, Australia, etc.) and the United States as well, according to one study published in the Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology journal (see reference).

In Kingston's book *Contemporary Japan*, he mentions none about hikikomori. That is his mistake, Kingston does not consider that such group of people not only indirectly contributes to the stagnation of the economy, but also has a high potential of rejuvenate the economy itself. It is a shame that hikikomori are left out of the book just like they are left out of society because of their presumed insignificance. When we look at the situation, the number of hikikomori in Japan is at least 541,000, according to a 2016 survey of acute social withdrawal by The Japanese Cabinet. (<http://apjjf.org/2017/05/Tajan.html>. Accessed Nov. 1, 2017); considering Japan's current census consisting of 60.2% of 15- to 64-year-old citizens (<http://www.stat.go.jp/english/data/nenkan/1431-02.htm>. Accessed Nov. 1, 2017) and the fact that surveyed hikikomori by the Cabinet are in the age range of 15- to 39-year-old, we can say that there is strong correlation between boosting Japan's underpowered labor force and the rehabilitation of hikikomori patients. What more important is what Japan can do to prevent the outset of hikikomori in the first place. Government needs to have more progressive methods in rehabilitating and re-inserting them into society such as implementing more friendly and close approach to hikikomori. More friendly approaches would be visiting homes and assigning some social workers to befriend with the patient. For student hikikomori, the school or the faculty can help by finding out more about the student and forming connections with the student thus giving the student a motivation to stay in school and ultimately not becoming a hikikomori. In conclusion, individuality needs to be considered when it comes to treating hikikomori because each hikikomori is a clinical case without precedence.

Q: What other ways could hikikomori be prevented and treated?

Commented [AH1]: It is practical to say that to revive Japan's declining economy and demography, as specified in *Contemporary Japan*, the government would need to undertake more progressive methods in rehabilitating and encouraging the hikikomori to put their talents in good use for the Japanese society. We must also consider the fact that most hikikomori become one due to their past suffering and mischiefs, whether losing their job or being bullied at school. Prevention is better than trying to remedy once it is already there. Prevention can be done by general education, as well as more psychological reassurance from the municipal to those who are at risk of becoming hikikomori.

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