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PREVALENCE AND RISK FACTORS OF HIKIKOMORI IN YOUNG ADULTS IN THE MIDDLE EAST

by

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Abstract

Hikikomori, a form of severe social withdrawal that can occur without the presence of any other psychological disorder, was once thought to be a Japanese culture-bound phenomena. However, studies have emerged from several parts of the world showing that this may be a global issue. Extant literature suggests associations between hikikomori and behavioral addictions such as gaming addiction and problematic social media use (PSMU). Since there is a relative paucity of research examining this phenomenon in the Middle Eastern context, this study aimed to determine the prevalence and risk factors of hikikomori in young adults of the Middle East. It also had the objective of studying loneliness as a potential mediator between hikikomori and two types of problematic behaviors (gaming and social media use). The study employed a cross-sectional correlational design, collecting a sample of 220 participants residing in Middle Eastern countries ($M_{age} = 21.49$ years, $SD = 3.31$) using a mixture of convenience and snowball sampling. SPSS was used to investigate demographic details, run a hierarchical regression, and Process Macro was used to perform a mediation analysis with loneliness as a single mediator. Results showed that 57.27% of the sample was at high risk of hikikomori. Notably, passive social media users demonstrated significantly greater hikikomori-like traits compared to active users. Furthermore, hikikomori-like traits exhibited significant positive associations with problematic gaming, PSMU, and loneliness. Mediation analysis unveiled loneliness as a significant mediator between problematic gaming and hikikomori-like traits ($\beta = .55$, $SE = .11$, $95\%CI .33, .77$), as well as between PSMU and hikikomori-like traits ($\beta = .33$, $SE = .14$, $95\%CI .04, .62$). These findings suggest that interventions targeting behavioral addictions such as problematic gaming and PSMU, or interventions addressing loneliness, hold promise in alleviating symptoms of social withdrawal.

Keywords: Hikikomori, social withdrawal, problematic gaming, problematic social media use, loneliness, mediation analysis, young adults, Middle East.