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## Statistical Compilation

### **Analysis of Consultation Records at *Hikikomori* (Social withdrawal) Regional Support Center in Gifu Prefecture: What Kind of Hikikomori Consulted for Support Center?**

Akihiro NISHIO<sup>1</sup>, Terumi YASUDA<sup>2</sup>

1 Health Administration Center, Gifu University

2 Gifu Mental Health Welfare Center

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## Abstract

This study analyzed the records of 225 new visitors at the Hikikomori Regional Support Center in Gifu Prefecture, Japan, to clarify their attributes and the relationship between their work histories and other attributes, such as their educational background, experience of school refusal, psychiatric diagnosis, and so on. As a result, it was found that those who visited the Gifu Prefectural Hikikomori Regional Support Center were younger and more highly educated, and that more experienced school refusal, than those in the surveys by the National Cabinet Office and the questionnaire surveys of the resident volunteers conducted by other local governments. In addition, those who experienced school refusal had a tendency to not have had continual work, and many did not even leave the home. Furthermore, by analyzing the participants aged 23 years and over, it was found that about half (45.8%) of those who had experienced school refusal had no work experience, whereas those who had not experienced school refusal had the most work experience, which was categorized as "more than 3 years". When examining the relationship with the final educational background, junior high school graduates had less job experience of more than a year than other educational categories.

In relation to the psychiatric diagnosis, most people with mental illness were found among those who had worked for more than 3 years (12.2%).

**Keywords:** *Hikikomori* (social withdrawal), school refusal, Hikikomori Regional Support Center

### **Introduction.**

In Japan, the first nationwide survey of the Hikikomori was conducted by the Japanese Cabinet Office in 2009, "Survey on Young People's Attitudes (Fact-finding Survey on Hikikomori)<sup>5)</sup>. This survey was conducted by research assistants who visited and collected survey forms from 5,000 randomly selected subjects aged 15-39. According to this survey, there were estimated to be 696,000 people of the target age group who were Hikikomori nationwide, and 541,000 in a similar survey conducted in 2015. A similar survey conducted in 2015<sup>6)</sup> estimated the number to be 541,000. In addition, in response to the suggestion that Hikikomori among those aged 40 and older was being overlooked, a survey<sup>7)</sup> was conducted in 2018 using the same method for 5,000 subjects aged 40-64. As a result, it was estimated that 613,000 people aged 40-64 were Hikikomori nationwide. As a result, it was estimated that there are 613,000 Hikikomori aged 40-64 nationwide. The government has not been sitting idly by. The Ministry of Health, Labor and

Welfare (MHLW) has been providing counseling and other support services for Hikikomori in the areas of mental health and welfare, child welfare, and NEET measures. The core of the "project to promote measures for Hikikomori" is the project to establish and operate a regional support center for Hikikomori. This is a project to establish and operate "Hikikomori Regional Support Centers" in prefectures and designated cities, which function as specialized primary consultation services for Hikikomori. The purpose of the centers is to make it easier for individuals and families in a state of Hikikomori to receive appropriate support by clarifying where should they visit to get an appropriate service in the community. The center will play a role as a base of support for Hikikomori in the community by building a network with related organizations in the community and providing information necessary for measures against Hikikomori, mainly through the support coordinators. In Gifu Prefecture, where we are involved, the Regional Support Center for

Hikikomori was opened in June 2016 in the prefectural mental health welfare center.

The purpose of this study is to clarify the current situation of the clients and the process leading to withdrawal from the records of new clients at the regional support center for Hikikomori in Gifu Prefecture. In addition, we will focus on whether the subjects have ever worked and how long they have worked, and analyze the relationship between these and other attributes such as school refusal, educational background, and psychiatric diagnosis. In addition, we compare the results with those of the above-mentioned survey by the Cabinet Office and the survey conducted by the local government on the actual conditions of Hikikomori, and clarify the attributes of those who are connected to the center and those who are not. To the best of our knowledge, there is no study that has analyzed the consultation records of Hikikomori support centers in other prefectures. The aim of this study is to clarify the attributes of those who are connected to the consultation of the regional support center for Hikikomori and those who are not, as well as to obtain knowledge about the necessary projects in the future by analyzing the relationship between the experience of school refusal and the experience of employment.

## I. Method

From the opening of the Gifu Prefecture Regional Support Center for Hikikomori in June 2016 to the end of March 2019, 225 newcomers to the center were included in this study. From the consultation records, we collected the following information: gender, age, visitors to the consultation, type of residence, duration of withdrawal at the time of the consultation, educational background, experience of school refusal, longest duration of continuous employment, history of psychiatric consultation, psychiatric diagnosis, range of activities, and reasons for withdrawal. As for the reasons for withdrawal, most of the information was obtained from family members, and the exact details are not known, but were interpreted based on the consultation records. The following 13 categories were heard, and we classified them into one of the following categories: 1) school refusal at elementary and junior high schools, 2) school refusal, maladjustment, or dropping out of high school, 3) maladjustment or dropping out of college, junior college, or vocational school, 4) job separation after short period, 5) mental illness, 6) company bankruptcy, 7) failure of job employment, 8) maladjustment at work (after working for a certain length of time), 9) physical illness, 10) family

problems, 11) failure to find new employment, 12) unknown, 13) other.

We classified the subjects into five groups: A) no work experience, B) less than one year, C) one to three years, D) more than three years, and E) unknown, and compared their age, gender, duration of withdrawal at the time of interview, experience of school refusal, educational background, mental illness, and range of activities. In this study, we compared the age, gender, duration of withdrawal, experience of school refusal, last schooling, presence of mental illness, and range of activities.

In addition, in the discussion, we compared the data of the subjects obtained in this survey with the surveys conducted by the Cabinet Office in 2009 and 2015 for those aged 15-39, the survey conducted in 2018 for those aged 40-64, and the Survey of Withdrawal in Nagano Prefecture<sup>4)</sup>. The survey in Nagano Prefecture was chosen because of its geographical proximity to Gifu Prefecture. This study was approved by the Gifu Prefectural Public Health Center Ethics Review Committee (Approval No. 032) and the Gifu University Medical Research Ethics Review Committee (Approval No. 2019-186). The consultation records were compiled by the staff of the Gifu Prefecture Regional Support Center for Hikikomori according to our guidelines, anonymized, and provided to us.

## II. Results

Table 1 shows the attributes of the subjects in this study. The mean age was  $29.5 \pm 9.3$  years, of which 179 (79.6%) were males and 46 (20.4%) were females. Most of the cases were consulted by their parents (83.1%), and most of subjects lived with their families (94.2%). The mean duration of withdrawal at the time of the visit was  $6.4 \pm 6.7$  years, excluding the two unknown respondents. High school graduates were the most common final education (43.1%), 24.0% had a college degree or higher. In terms of the longest duration of employment, 37.3% had never worked before, but only 23.9% of those aged 23 years or older had never worked before. 36.9% had a history of psychiatric consultation, and 55.4% of them had been diagnosed with a mental disorder. The most common illness was mood disorder. Most of them went out, but 27.1% of them never left home.

Table 2 shows the possible triggers that led to withdrawal. Many of them were considered to have been triggered by maladjustment at school, accounting for 41.3% of the total from elementary school to university. In particular, maladjustment at higher educational institutions such as universities and junior colleges was conspicuous. The second most common reason was failure to find a job (17.8%), including those

who left their jobs for a short time. After working for a certain length of time, 14.7% of the respondents became withdrawn. In addition, 9.8% were triggered by mental illness or physical illness.

Table 3 shows the relationship between the longest duration of continuous employment and age, gender, duration of withdrawal at the time of the interview, experience of school refusal, educational background, psychiatric diagnosis, and range of activities of the subjects aged 23 and older. The mean age was highest for those who had worked for more than three years, and lowest for those who had never worked. The mean age of those who had worked for more than three years was the highest, and that of those who had never worked was the lowest. About half (45.8%) of those who experienced school refusal had no work experience, and the largest number of those who did not had experience of school refusal had more than three years of work experience. In relation to the educational background, the number of those who had worked for at least one year was higher than those who had never worked, except for those who had graduated from junior high school. In relation to psychiatric diagnosis, those who had worked for more than three years were most likely to have a psychiatric disorder, followed

by those who had worked for more than one year but less than three years and those who had never worked. Most of the subjects went out, but the group with no work experience had the largest number of subjects who did not go out (33.3%).

### III. Discussion

This is the first report on the analysis of the consultation records of the regional support center for Hikikomori. Since all the subjects are ongoing withdrawal, we cannot answer the questions we want to know most, such as "What kind of people become Hikikomori? What kind of Hikikomori withdraw long?". However, we had lots of new findings. First of all, the average age is very low. We compared the distribution of age with the Cabinet Office's survey and Nagano Prefecture survey in table 4. The age of the subjects in this survey was significantly lower than that in the Cabinet Office survey and the survey in Nagano Prefecture. In comparison with the surveys conducted by the regional support centers for Hikikomori in other prefectures, 52.7% (FY2017)<sup>10</sup> of the respondents in Shizuoka Prefecture were 29 years old or younger, and 73% (FY2017)<sup>3</sup> of the respondents in Miyagi Prefecture were 29 years old or younger. Considering that the survey by the Cabinet Office, which is a sample survey, may be the

closest to the actual situation, it can be seen that those who come to the regional support centers for withdrawal are heavily skewed toward the younger generation. On the other hand, the survey in Nagano Prefecture found many Hikikomori who were middle-aged or older<sup>4)</sup>. This is because the average age of the commissioned welfare volunteers/child welfare volunteers is 66.0 years old, and many of them are elderly<sup>8)</sup> It is thought that it is easy to detect those who are relatively close in age to the researcher. In addition, in surveys conducted in other prefectures, the percentage of those who had been withdrawn for more than 10 years was as high as 39.3% (Yamanashi Prefecture)<sup>12)</sup>, 40.1% (Nagano Prefecture)<sup>4)</sup>, 34% (Shimane Prefecture)<sup>9)</sup>, and 42% (Ehime Prefecture)<sup>1)</sup>. However, the capture rate of social withdrawal in the survey using commissioned welfare volunteers was 0.13% (Yamagata Prefecture)<sup>11)</sup>, 0.11% (Yamanashi Prefecture)<sup>12)</sup>, 0.20% (Nagano Prefecture)<sup>4)</sup>, 0.15% (Shimane Prefecture)<sup>9)</sup>, and 0.08% (Ehime Prefecture)<sup>1)</sup>, which is lower than the 1.58% (15-39 years old) and 1.44% (40-64 years old) rates in the Cabinet Office survey. This suggests that it is difficult to capture the withdrawal of the younger generation in the surveys conducted by welfare volunteers. In the Cabinet Office survey, 24.4% (15-39

years old) and 23.7% (40-64 years old) of the respondents graduated from a university or higher, including those who dropped out of school, indicating that the subjects of our survey tend to be highly educated. In addition, in the 2015 survey conducted by the Cabinet Office, 30.6% (15-39 years old) of the Hikikomori had experience of school refusal, but this figure only counted those who experienced school refusal in elementary school and junior high school; in the 2009 survey, the total number of those who experienced school refusal was 23.7% (15-39 years old). On the other hand, in the 2018 survey, the total number of experiences of school refusal from elementary school to high school was only 8.5% (ages 40-64). This significant difference may be attributed to the fact that society has changed in recent years to tolerate school refusal. In the present study, 41.8% of the respondents experienced school refusal, which is a high percentage.

In the Cabinet Office survey, 2.0% (15-39 years old) and 10.6% (40-64 years old) of the respondents lived alone. In the present survey, 5.8% of the respondents lived alone, but considering the fact that many of the consultations were conducted by relatively young people, the percentage was not biased toward those who lived with their families.

The analysis of the triggers for

withdrawal is far from rigorous because it is mostly based on interviews with family members, the subjective categorization of the reporter, and the overlapping of triggers for withdrawal. However, there are no other similar reports, and we thought that understanding the rough proportion of each event that triggers withdrawal would be useful for planning policies for withdrawal. According to this survey, the majority of withdrawal was triggered by maladjustment at school, 41.3% of the respondents from elementary school to university. Among them, maladjustment in higher educational institutions such as universities and colleges was particularly noticeable. The second most common reason was failure to find a job, including leaving the workforce in a short period of time (17.8%). According to the Cabinet Office's survey of people over 40 years old, only 2.2% of the Hikikomori had never worked before. Considering the fact that many of the Hikikomori had withdrawn from their jobs for some reason after leaving the labor market, it is possible that such people were not connected to the consultation service of the regional support center for Hikikomori.

Next, we analyzed the relationship between the longest duration of continuous employment and the various attributes of the subjects who were 23

years old or older, and found that those who were older had a longer period of continuous employment, and the longer period of continuous employment, the shorter the period of withdrawal at the time of the interview. This means that the longer the longest duration of continuous employment, the shorter the period of withdrawal, albeit conditional on "at the time of the interview," despite the increase in the average age. It can be said that objective data shows that the less work experience a person has, the more difficult it is for them to escape from withdrawal. In addition, about half (45.8%) of those who experienced school refusal had no work experience, and many of those who did not experience school refusal had more than three years of work experience. In relation to the educational background, the number of those who had worked for one year or more was higher than those who had never worked at all, except for those who had graduated from junior high school. It is easy to imagine that those who have experienced school refusal and those with low educational background may have difficulties in employment, and support in this area is needed. In relation to psychiatric diagnosis, those who had worked for more than three years were most likely to have a psychiatric disorder, followed by those who had worked for more than one year but less than three years and

those who had never worked. It is important to keep in mind that a certain number of those who left the workforce and withdrew after working for some time require psychiatric support.

In summary, many of those who seek consultation at the Gifu Prefecture Regional Support Center for Hikikomori are young, well-educated, and experienced school refusal. This may be due to the fact that parents come to the center with a strong sense of crisis for those who are maladjusted from the time of schooling and are unable to find a job, or who leave their jobs after a short period of time even if they find a job. On the other hand, those who have been withdrawn since middle age and those who have been withdrawn for a long period of time since they were young are less likely to seek consultation.

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#### Conclusion.

This study is the first report on the analysis of the consultation records of a local support center for Hikikomori. It was found that many of the subjects of the consultation at the regional support center for Hikikomori were young, well-educated, and experienced school refusal compared to the general population of Hikikomori. This data is suggestive for the future development of the Hikikomori Regional Support Center project. In addition, those who have been away from school tend to be less likely to be continuously employed, and many of them do not even go out. There is a need for continuous support from the time they stop attending school to the time they gain an educational background and are able to continue working for some length of time.

There are no conflicts of interest to be disclosed in relation to this paper.

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Table 1 Attributes of the subjects

		(Person)	(%)
Gender	Male	179	79.6
	Female	46	20.4
Age	10s	31	13.8
	20s	90	40
	30s	67	29.8
	40s	30	13.3
	50s	6	2.7
	60s	1	0.4
Visitors	Parent	187	83.1
	Sibling	6	2.7
	Relative	5	2.2
	Himself/herself	12	5.3
	Himself/herself and parent	13	5.8
	Other	2	0.9
Living style	Alone	13	5.8
	Living with family	212	94.2
Duration of withdrawal at the time of interview	Less than one year	20	8.9
	1-3 years	83	36.9
	4-5 years	25	11.1
	6-9 years	39	17.3
	10-19 years	44	19.6
	20 years and over	12	5.3
	Unknown	2	0.9
Education level	Junior high school	45	20
	Senior high school	97	43.1
	Junior college/technical school	18	8
	University	48	21.3
	Graduate school	6	2.7
	Unknown	11	4.9
Experience of school refusal	Yes	94	41.8
	No	98	43.6
	Unknown	33	14.7
Longest duration of employment	Never worked	84	37.3
	less than one year	47	20.9
	1 to 3 years	45	20
	More than 3 years	41	18.2
	Unknown	8	3.6
Experience of psychiatric consultation	Yes	83	36.9
	No	140	62.2
	Unknown	2	0.9
Psychiatric diagnosis	Schizophrenia	3	1.3
	Mood disorders	21	9.3
	Anxiety disorders	8	3.6
	Developmental disabilities	14	6.2
	Unknown	31	13.8
	Other	2	0.9
	No psychiatric disease	4	1.8
Range of activities	Own room	15	6.7
	Indoors	46	20.4
	Out of home	163	72.4
	Unknown	1	0.4

Table 2 Possible reasons for becoming a social recluse

Reason	(person)	(%)
School refusal at elementary and junior high schools	25	11.1
School refusal, maladjustment, or dropping out of high school	29	12.9
Maladjustment or dropping out of college, junior college, or vocational school	39	17.3
Job separation after short period	23	10.2
Mental illness	16	7.1
Company bankruptcy	6	2.7
Failure of job employment	17	7.6
Maladjustment at work (after working for a certain length of time)	33	14.7
Physical illness	6	2.7
Family problems	6	2.7
Failure to find new employment	2	0.9
Unknow	18	8.0
Others	5	2.2

Table 3 Classification of the maximum years of continuous employment

Maximum years of work experience	A) No experience	B) Less than 1 year	C) 1-3 years	D) 3 years over	E) Unknown	
Average age	29.9 ±7.4 y.o.	33.1 ±7.5 y.o.	32.7 ±7.3 y.o.	37.2 ±7.7 y.o.	35.8 ±9.4 y.o.	
Male predominance	79.5%	77.1%	82.9%	90.2%	87.5%	
Duration of withdrawal at the time of interview	10.9 ±9.0 years	9.4 ±7.7 years	6.1 ±5.3 years	4.6 ±5.2years	4.6 ±5.3years	
Experience of school refusal	+	22 (13.4%)	12 (7.3%)	6 (3.7%)	8 (4.9%)	0 (0%)
	-	15 (9.2%)	13 (7.9%)	26 (15.9%)	27 (16.5%)	8 (4.9%)
	Unknown	2 (1.2%)	10 (6.1%)	9 (5.5%)	6 (3.7%)	0 (0%)
Education	Junior high school	11 (6.7%)	5 (3.0%)	4 (2.4%)	5 (3.0%)	1 (0.6%)
	High school	16 (9.8%)	14 (8.5%)	15 (9.1%)	19 (11.6%)	3 (1.8%)
	Junior college or vocational school	2 (1.2%)	4 (2.4%)	7 (4.3%)	4 (2.4%)	1 (0.6%)
	Bachelor	6 (3.7%)	11 (6.7%)	11 (6.7%)	13 (7.9%)	3 (1.8%)
	Master or PhD	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)	4(2.4%)	0 (0%)	0 (0%)
Existence of psychiatric diagnosis	13 (7.9%)	8 (4.9%)	18 (11.0%)	20 (12.2%)	2 (1.2%)	
Range of activities	Only his(her) room	1 (0.6%)	3 (1.8%)	3 (1.8%)	1 (0.6%)	1 (0.6%)
	At home	12 (7.3%)	4 (2.4%)	3 (1.8%)	3 (1.8%)	2 (1.2%)
	Go out	26 (15.9%)	28 (17.1%)	35 (21.3%)	37 (22.6%)	4 (2.4%)

Figure1 Differences in the ages of the subjects in the Hikikomori survey

