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A social issue that will substantially impact Japan 20 years later: Measures to address social withdrawal need to be promptly promoted

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Social withdrawal refers to “staying at home for 6 months or longer without going to school or work and interacting little with anyone other than family members”.¹ The 2004 survey reported that about 320,000 households in Japan include an individual who is socially withdrawn¹, and 1.18% of individuals ages 20–49 indicated that they had become socially withdrawn at some point. Various factors underlie social withdrawal. Over the past few years, the issue of social withdrawal has garnered considerable attention in Japan of all 47 prefectures nationwide.

The 2016 survey by the Cabinet Office suggested that about 540,000 individuals ages 15–39 were socially withdrawn nationwide.² According to the survey to ascertain the extent of social withdrawal in each prefecture, individual surveys have been conducted or the extent of social withdrawal has been determined in 18 of 47 prefectures nationwide, surveys are underway in 2 prefectures, and plans are to conduct the survey (it has already been planned) in 1 prefecture. The number of individuals who were socially withdrawn was specifically estimated in 12 of those prefectures, and the number of individuals age 40 or over who were socially withdrawn was estimated in 9 of the 12 prefectures mentioned. In 5 of those 9 prefectures, individuals age 40 or over who were socially withdrawn outnumbered individuals age 39 or younger who were socially withdrawn.²

According to one study of 150 municipal offices that provided counseling regarding social withdrawal, most offices (62%) had provided advice regarding individuals in their 40s who were socially withdrawn.³ Fifty-two percent of offices had provided advice regarding individuals in their 30s who were socially withdrawn, 46% had provided advice regarding individuals in their 20s who were socially withdrawn, and 45% had provided advice regarding individuals in their 50s who were socially withdrawn.³

Based on these findings, individuals age 40 or over who are socially withdrawn need to receive more social resources and increased outreach to encourage their interaction with the rest of society. Experts in different fields and different bodies dealing with individuals who are socially withdrawn need to address individual situations and they need to consider coordinating their efforts when necessary.⁴ Moreover, measures to address social withdrawal need to be analyzed and response options need to be considered in accordance with local conditions rather than formulating a uniform action plan for the country as a whole.⁵ At the current point in time, there is a lack of data and research with which to examine social withdrawal from various perspectives, so efforts to ascertain the specifics of that issue must be promoted.^{2,3}

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Conflict of Interest:

None declared.

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