

## HIKIKOMORI – IS IT THE NEXT NUCLEAR EFFECT ON JAPAN?

**DR. PRASANNA SIVANANDAM, PROF. BALA PRAVEENA**

**Abstract:** Hikikomori in Japanese means isolation from society or withdrawal. This has been the pressing issue in Japan which has affected the economy and culture of the country. Studies have shown that there were over one million youth who have Hikikomori, living in Japan. Japan as a country have the world's fastest growing negative population which have been further aggravated by the rise in Hikikomori, because these individuals do not seek relationships and this certainly affects propagation. Hikikomori would be prominent among adolescent male than female, the reason being expectation from male gender were more than female. The various symptoms of Hikikomori are depression, violent behavior, confined to their homes, minimal interaction and abnormal eating pattern. The reason cited for Hikikomori is high parental expectation from children in terms of good grades, joining premier institute and securing jobs in reputed firms, which leads to high stress levels in adolescent. This behavior is more prevalent in middle and higher income group because they are conscious of their social standing. Hikikomori is not common in lower income group because by default they take care of their children irrespective of their age, they are of their opinion that children are their responsibilities till they are independent financially and emotionally.

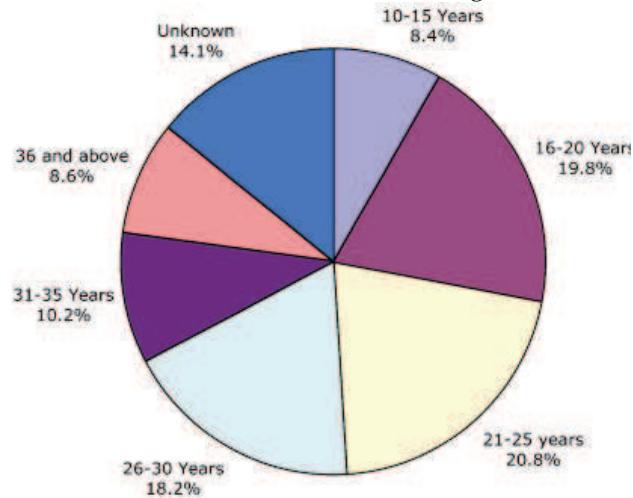
There are support groups and rehabilitation centers to assist individuals suffering from hikikomori so as to help them secure jobs and reenter the world and resume normal life. Unfortunately Japanese government is not very supportive because they don't classify hikikomori as mental illness. Hitherto this case study would analyse the various causes and symptoms on the individuals who have Hikikomori as well analyse the effect of the illness on the Japanese Economy.

**Introduction:** Hikikomori has been considered as a major threat in Japan both socially and psychologically. Hikikomori would be the way of life an individual life where he or she would completely cut the social aspect. And it could be triggered by facing a minor failure in school, issues in workplace or even break ups. The time span of hikikomori would somewhere between 6 months - 4/5 years' time. The entire period the person affected by Hikikomori would be taken care of by their parents. Some quote that Hikikomori was caused and were prevalent due to the fact strong cultural aspects of the country. There a set structured expectation from every individual once he starts school till he/ she gets married and settle down. IF they don't meet the expectation then they become a Hikikomori.

Hikikomori didn't limit itself to only Japanese youth but the traces of the same if not in large scale but in lesser numbers have been profound in many countries that would include England, Korea, and India etc. The loss to the nation because of hikikomori does not limit itself only socially and psychologically but it had been affecting the economy of the country. Japanese economy was on the rocks for so long. While every nation's attention was on Eurozone crisis seldom importance or attention was give into one of the largest economy in the world Japan. In certain studies it was stated that the one of reason for Eurozone crisis was due to the lack of innovative Japanese population. Hence the Japanese Government had started taking action but would it have the desired effect on the country's economy remains to be seen.

**Hikikomori: The Parasite:** Hikikomori- the new social disease is a recent threat in japan. Shutting oneself from the world is known as Hikikomori. It is common that people withdraw from society when faced with failure at school, work, break-ups etc., but this is a temporary phase and in few days' time resume their regular regime. In the case of Hikikomori, usually seen in adolescent males, they spend months sometimes years inside their bedroom, only slipping out during midnight to the nearest convenience store. This behavior is also slowly dwindling with one line shopping becoming more popular. All this result in losing their social skills, they want to come out of their shell but are stopped by social fears. Japan has a population of 128 million, people suffering from Hikikomori range from 200,000 to one million; the average age has risen over the last two decades. The AVERAGE AGE WAS 21 NOW IT IS 32. (Exhibit No: 1 – Distribution of Age) Hikikomori is mostly seen in middle class families where they are able to support an adult child at home. Hikikomori is not prevalent in lower income group because the parental expectation is not high.

Saito Tamaki, a therapist told BBC THAT Hikikomori is culture specific mental illness that happens mostly to single men in Japan with cases seen in South Korea, Taiwan and Italy. He conducted a study and wrote a book in the year 1998 about these young people called "HIKKIKOMORI-ADOLESCENCE WITHOUT END".

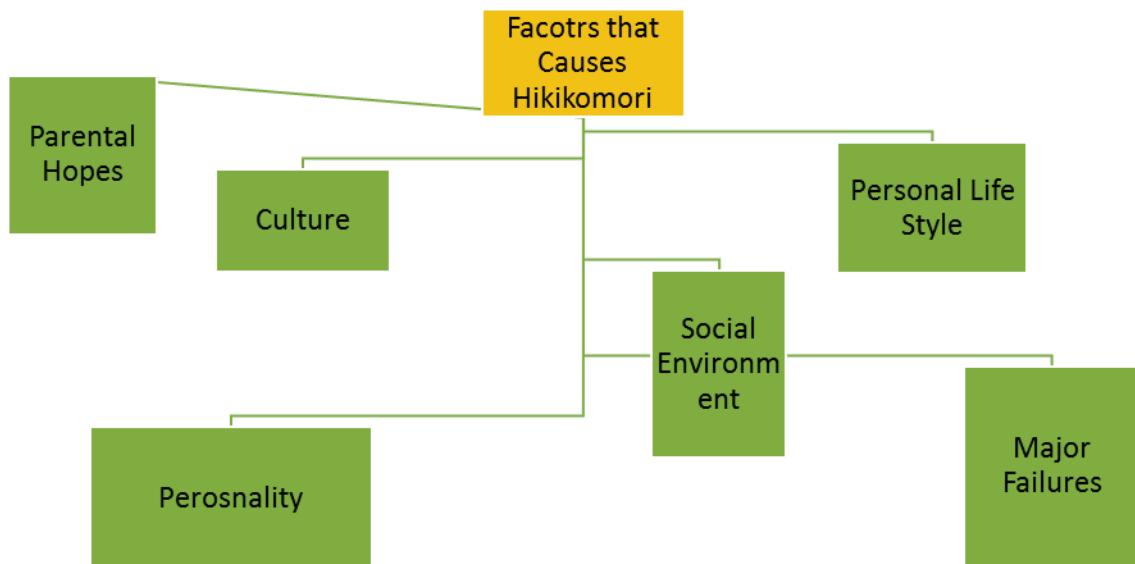
**Exhibit No. 1: Distribution of Age**

**Source:** Michael J. Dziesinski "Hikikomori Investigations into the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal in contemporary Japan", <http://towakudai.blogs.com/Hikikomori.Research.Survey.pdf>

Two years after the release of this book a 17 year old boy identified as Hikikomori hijacked a bus and stabbed multiple passengers. In another incident a girl was kidnapped and held prisoner for nearly a decade by a reclusive man who lived with his mother. These are rare cases; usually people suffering from Hikikomori are not violent. Saito after seeing lots of patients with similar symptoms came to a conclusion it's a "Family and social diseases".

The New York Times reports that Saito started seeing such cases from 1980's since then Japanese economy is declining dramatically. There is lot of pressure from parents to their children to find jobs and conform to parents or society's expectation. There is no sympathy shown to the Hikikomori who are struggling. So when they find it too much to handle, they stay out of sight altogether.

This created awareness in Japan and they are no more considered as "Hidden population." According to the ministry of health, labor and welfare, Hikikomori are people who do not participate in society (school or work) and has no desire to do so, and do not have close familial relationships. (Exhibit No: 2 – Factors That Causes Hikikomori)

**Exhibit No. 2: Factors That Causes Hikikomori**

**Source:** Michael J. Dziesinski "Hikikomori Investigations into the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal in contemporary Japan", <http://towakudai.blogs.com/Hikikomori.Research.Survey.pdf>

American Psychiatric Association (APA) does not consider Hikikomori as psychological disorder but falls under the umbrella of cultural bound syndrome. A mental health condition that occurs in specific cultures for specific cultural reasons.

**Hikikomori: The Cultural Aspect:** Why is Hikikomori prevalent in Japan and not seen or heard of in other parts of the world? The reason had been that in Japan the expectation from their offspring's

are very high, starting from school to finding a spouse. This is same across other culture, the only difference been that in other parts of the world there is a breathing space during the journey from school to finding spouse, where they have time to find about oneself and waffling is seen between job and career, but this is missing in Japanese culture where they expected to have a job waiting for them before they officially handed their diplomas. The societal shame

of failing in schools, college and not securing good job lead them to find solace in their bedroom which is comforting option.

In European and American cultures they have the flexibilities of settling down with career of their choice and parents do not expect children to fall in line with their expectations. Hikikomori exhibits symptoms similar to schizophrenia and obsessive compulsive disorder, where there is a break from reality which is the actual symptom of Hikikomori.

Hikikomori is also reported in other countries outside Japan like Korea and Italy which goes to show that Hikikomori is more than culture bound syndrome. Hikikomori is maladjustment or psychiatric disorder seen as form of internet addiction. It is an indicator of a pandemic of psychological problem that the global connected society will face in the near future. (Exhibit No: 3 – Acute Social Withdrawal)

**Exhibit No. 3: Acute Social Withdrawal**



**Source:** Michael J. Dziesinski "Hikikomori Investigations into the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal in contemporary Japan", <http://towakudai.blogs.com/Hikikomori.Research.Survey.pdf>

A Survey conducted by NHK found that 53 percentage of hikikomori are male that is close to 80 percent. So it is not seen in females, the reason being it is socially acceptable for female to stay indoors with their parents, which means Hikikomori among women are going unreported and untreated. Parents of Hikikomori patients are hesitant to seek professional help because they are conscious of their social standing. So they wait for months before they seek help. Powerful social force also contributes to Hikikomori. First social force – SEKENTEI means a person's reputation in the community, worried about

their social image. (Exhibit No: 4 – A Peek into Hikikomori Lifestyle)

Second social force -AMAE – DEPENDENCE- This talks about the family relationship. The men are depended on their parents, since they have no source of income and parents don't throw them out, in spite of some Hikikomori are violent. Job hopping Japanese were called "Freeters". "Neets" is a British acronym for or not in education, employment or training. Freeters, Neets and Hikikomori are categorized as good for nothing younger generation. Who are considered as parasites to flagging Japanese economy? The older generation, who were graduates

and had a career could not relate to this new generation. So they were not aware how to handle the current who are Hikikomori sufferers. The common reaction is lecture and anger, guilt and sometimes extreme measures where they hire health care professional to burst into their children's room and forcibly drag them out to correct their behavior. Such forceful methods can be disastrous, where the patients become violent to staff, parents and counselors. So to avoid such incident the patient must be briefed in advance about their arrival.

Treatment for Hikikomori is cognitive behavioral perspective and uses of talk therapy technique that were normally used for patients who suffer from depression and anxiety. Parents of Hikikomori seek help from support group. Some organization and halfway homes, who talk to Hikikomori patients by visiting their homes and provide reassurance and coax them to come out of their rooms and seek help. Companies called Avex have produced a collection of videos called "JUST LOOKING" in which girls look straight into the camera for a minute or so, the idea is to make Hikikomori maintain eye contact while still in the comfort zone of their room. In addition to this the most promising treatment is to give them work so they can work and experience responsibility and daily social interaction. The people who will be suited to address Japan's social withdrawal problem are ex Hikikomori themselves, as more Hikikomori enter the world again they can share firsthand experience and bring more Hikikomori out of the dark are "HIKKIKOMORI AND THE RENTAL SISTER" by Jess Back Haus, talks about rental sisters who are not clients sister but outreach counselors, who are hired to help patients come out of their rooms and rejoin society and lead a normal life. The story revolves around the main character Thomas who becomes an Hikikomori after losing his son, so the rental sisters is hired to help him resurface.

**Hikikomori - Around the World:** Hikikomori as mentioned earlier is a parasite that has not only infected Japan but many individuals around the world. According to Zielenziger, Hikikomori is specific to the cultural context as nearly 1.2% of the populations in Japan are affected by it. Yet another name for hikikomori was termed as NEET Syndrome. NEET was termed as "NEET is an acronym for the government classification for people currently "Not in Employment, Education or Training". It was first used in the United Kingdom but its use has spread to other countries, including Japan, China, and South Korea. In the United Kingdom, the classification comprises people aged between 16 and 24 (some 16 year olds are still of compulsory school age). In Japan, the classification comprises people aged between 15 and 34 who are unemployed, unmarried, not enrolled in school or engaged in housework, and not seeking

work or the technical training needed for work. The "NEET group" is not a uniform set of individuals but consists of those who will be NEET for a short time while essentially testing out a variety of opportunities and those who have major and often multiple issues and are at long term risk of remaining disengaged". In Countries like Wales and England, nearly 9.4% of the prescribed age group of individuals were termed as Hikikomori as well through a study it was determined due to NEET the cost to the UK Economy is £3.65 billion per year which is roughly (363.092 Billion). In Japan, the Hikikomori is increasing in alarming rate as of 2015 around 1 million individual are affected by it. The Japanese unemployment benefits terminate itself in 3 month period contrasting to other western countries of similar economic status. And a unique factor in Japan that might be leading to increased hikikomori population could be because the affected individuals know that there would be someone constantly taking care of their basic necessities. According to Dr. Alan Teo (Teo), , stated that people affected by hikikomori in Japan often are taken care of by their parents in spite of their age which might not be acceptable by western parents.

Dr. Takahiro Kato (Kato), stated that "In Western societies, if one stays indoors, they're told to go outside. In Japan they're not. Our play has changed, it's all on screens and not real-life situations any more. There are cultural reasons also, a strong sense of embarrassment and an emotional dependence on the mother." Researchers have also found out the fact that Hikikomori though is in higher numbers in Japan it is indeed have made its presence all over the world including France, Hong Kong, India, Korea, Oman, Spain and the United States.

In a study conducted by Yukiko Uchida (Uchida) and Vinai Norasakkunkit (Norasakkunkit) , they developed a scale called NEET-Hikikomori Risk Factors (NHR) scale. The NHR scale would treat the affected individuals not on a discreet diagnosis but on a broad gamut of psychological tendencies which were associated with possibility of being disregarded in the society. Uchida and Norasakkunkit also identified three major factors that are linked to the NHR spectrum scale which were a) Freer Lifestyle, b) Decreased Self - Competency, c) Lack of setting determined goals for the future. A second study carried out by the same researchers led them to the investigation, confirmation and validation of the NHR Scale. And their study concluded that NHR were related to of psychological tendencies which were associated with possibility of being disregarded in the society.

**Japanese Economy and Hikikomori - The ticking Time Bomb:** In order to understand the relationship between Japanese Economy and Hikikomori it is

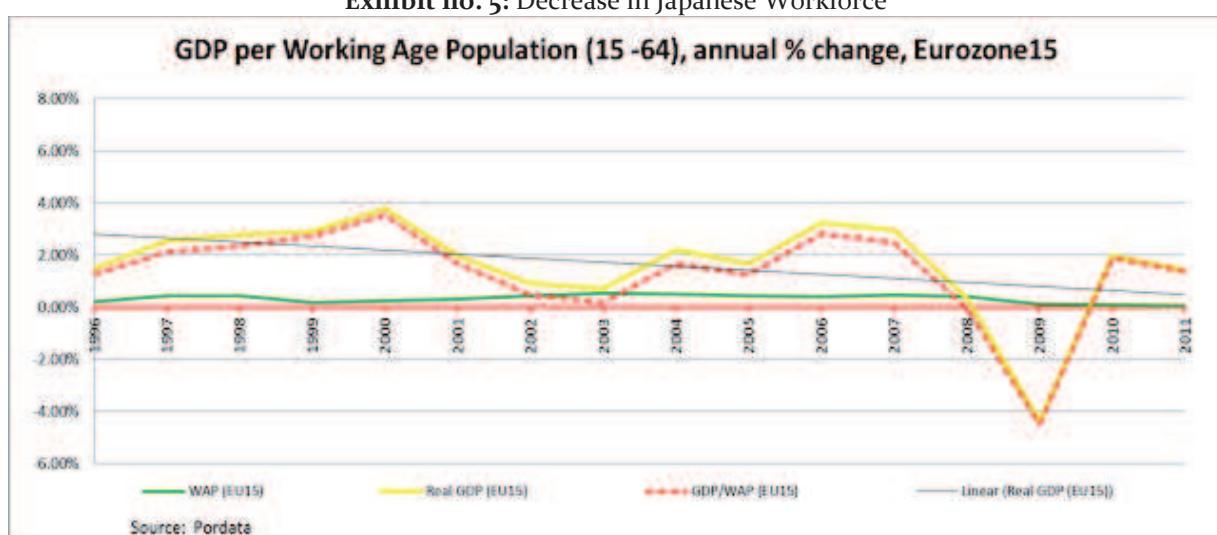
essential to understand where Japanese economy stands does! After an enormous economic growth Japanese Economy have reached a stagnation point. Every other nation while looked into the issue of Euro and Greece crisis, they seldom forgot to take a look at Japan which also have serious economic issues. The major issues that the Japanese economy faces were the financial sector of the country is very weak, the rules and regulation in this sector is very high that there are only a very few players in the market and hence the competition between the companies are very less or completely absent. And also the any production that was happening in the country is now moved to South East Asia.

It was also stated that Japan's Economy ranks third largest in the world and any trouble that the country's economy creates would have much bigger loss and effect on the global economy than compared to the economy of Greece. Takatoshi Ito, opined that

"unless the Japanese government can raise its sales tax to north of 15%, from its current 8%, Japan's economy will suffer a fiscal crisis sometime between 2021 and 2023. That's because as Japan's population continues to age, its famously high savings rate will have to fall, and the Japanese public will no longer be able to absorb the large amount of debt the government is assuming".

Yet another study states that Regardless of regional variation due to internal migration, the working age population in Eurozone had been drastically decreased and is continuing, if the same case extends for longer period it would definitely have a long term negative impact on the economic growth. Hence it was concluded in the study that one of the major reasons for Europe crisis was due to ( as termed in the article ) "Shortage of Japanese" .Exhibit no :5 (Decrease in Japanese Workforce)

**Exhibit no. 5:** Decrease in Japanese Workforce

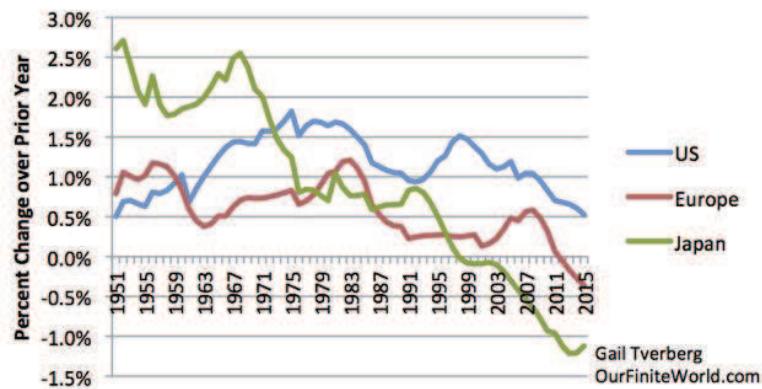


**Source:** Valter Martins, "Is the Eurozone suffering from a "Shortage of Japanese"?", <http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoe/can-demography-explain-portugals-slump-before-the-crash/>

All through the case study it was stated that hikikomori affects those age group from late teens to early thirties sect of people in Japan. This age group of people in any country were the major reason for any economic growth and when this age group itself

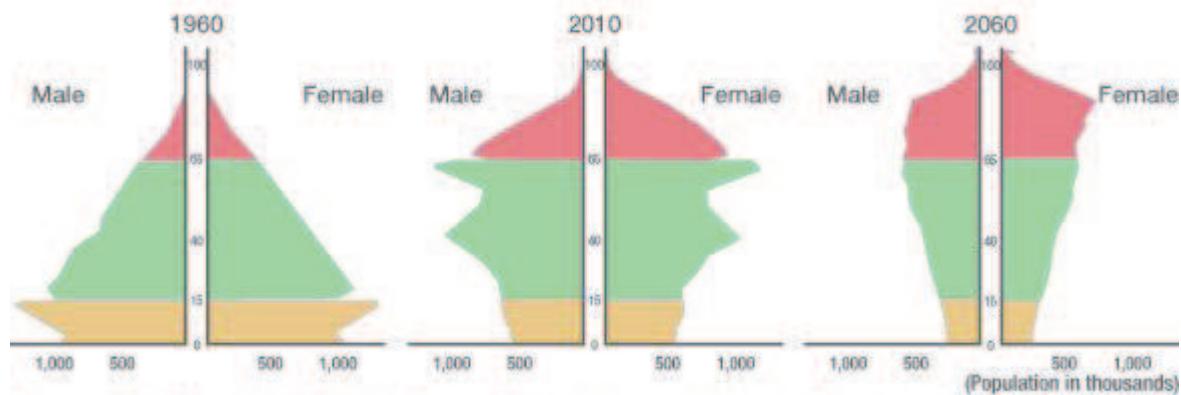
shuts themselves down so does the economy of the nation they live in . In there is a higher rate of people who suffer from hikikomori and hence become a burden to the family and have very less or complete seclusion from the family.

**Exhibit no 6:** Japanese age 20- 64 declined growth



Source: "The Peak Oil Story We Have Been Told Is Wrong", <http://peakoil.com/consumption/90495>, 30<sup>th</sup> September 2015

**Exhibit no 7: The population Shrink**  
**Japan's Changing Population Pyramid (population by age)**



Sources: (For 1960 and 2010) Statistics Bureau (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications), *Population Census of Japan*; (for 2060 projection) National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, *Population Projections for Japan* (January 2012), based on medium-variant fertility and mortality assumptions.

	1960	1985	2010	2035	2060
A. Population in millions (index, 2010=100)	93.42 (73.0)	121.05 (94.5)	128.06 (100)	112.12 (87.6)	86.74 (67.7)
B. Children, 0-14	28.07 (166.7)	26.03 (154.6)	16.84 (100)	11.29 (67.0)	7.91 (47.0)
C. Working, 15-64	60.00 (73.4)	82.51 (101.0)	81.73 (100)	63.43 (77.6)	44.18 (54.1)
D. Elderly, 65 and over	5.35 (18.1)	12.47 (42.3)	29.48 (100)	37.41 (126.9)	34.64 (117.5)
(75 and over)	1.63 (11.5)	4.71 (33.2)	14.19 (100)	22.78 (160.5)	23.36 (164.6)
Proportion of elderly in pop. (D/A)	5.7%	10.3%	23%	33.4%	39.9%

Old-age dependency ratio (D/C)	8.9% (1 supported by 11)	15.1% (1 supported by 7)	36.1% (1 supported by 2.8)	59.0% (1 supported by 1.7)	78.4% (1 supported by 1.3)
Reference data					
Old-age dependency ratio if C=20–69 and D=70 and over	6.0% (1 supported by 17)	10.6% (1 supported by 9)	25.3% (1 supported by 4)	43.9% (1 supported by 2.3)	62.2% (1 supported by 1.6)
Births in millions	1.61 (149.9)	1.43 (133.6)	1.07 (100)	0.71 (66.5)	0.48 (45.0)
Deaths in millions	0.71 (59.0)	0.75 (62.8)	1.20 (100)	1.66 (138.3)	1.54 (128.3)

Sources: Statistics Bureau (Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications), *Population Census of Japan*; National Institute of Population and Social Security Research, *Population Projections for Japan* (January 2012), based on medium-variant fertility and mortality projections.

**Source:** Shimazaki Kenji "Defusing Japan's Demographic Time Bomb", <http://www.nippon.com/en/in-depth/ao1001/>, 24th August, 2012.

The growths in Japanese population were declining drastically. (Exhibit no 6: Japanese age 20- 64 declined growth And Exhibit no 7: The population Shrink). With such a decline in working class, and production units being placed outside the country, and added to the fact hikikomori shutting themselves inside their house would be a serious threat to the nation. And from the above mentioned studies it had become clear that not only the Japanese economy but the global economy would get affected if hikikomori

cannot be taken into consideration. Even other nations, especially the euro zone are in need to Japanese economy as well their workmanship. Hitherto it remains to be seen whether the Japanese Government take into consideration seriousness of Hikikomori and its side effects that plagues it nation. Because production, innovation, creativity would be possibility only when there is workforce , if a country suffers from eligible human resource then it would become a global crisis in a few years.

## References:

1. Dr. H.S Adithya, An Empirical Study on Consumer Behaviour; Business Sciences International Research Journal ISSN 2321 – 3191 Vol 2 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 171-178
2. Mark Patrick McGuire , "From the City to the Mountain and Back Again: Situating Contemporary Shugendō in Japanese Social and Religious Life", <http://www.der.org/resources/study-guides/from-the-city-to-the-mountain-mark-p-mcguire.pdf>, April 2013
3. Ulrich Heinze and Penelope Thomas, "Self and salvation: visions of hikikomori in Japanese manga", [www.degruyter.com/.../s002fj\\$002fcj\\_cj.2014.26.issue-1\\_2014022610](http://www.degruyter.com/.../s002fj$002fcj_cj.2014.26.issue-1_2014022610), 26<sup>th</sup> February 2014
4. "From the City to the Mountain and Back Again: Situating Contemporary Shugendō in Japanese Social and Religious Life", op.cit
5. P. Mariappan, G. Sreeaarthi, R. Mumtachejo, Performance Efficiency Analysis Of Thirteen Power Generating Corporations Functioning In India – Using Data Envelopment Analysis; Business Sciences International Research Journal ISSN 2321 – 3191 Vol 3 Issue 1 (2015), Pg 191-202
6. William Kremer and Claudia Hammond, "Hikikomori: Why are so many Japanese men refusing to leave their rooms?", <http://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23182523>, 5<sup>th</sup> July 2013
7. "Hikikomori Investigations into the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal in contemporary Japan", op.cit
8. P. Mariappan, M. Antony Raj, G. Calabmesiya, A Study On Performance Efficiency Analysis Of Nine Cement Industries Functioning In India – Using Dea Approach; Business Sciences International Research Journal ISSN 2321 – 3191 Vol 3 Issue 1 (2015), Pg 207-217
9. "Hikikomori: Why are so many Japanese men refusing to leave their rooms?", op.cit
10. "Hikikomori Investigations into the phenomenon of acute social withdrawal in contemporary Japan", op.cit
11. Yukiko Uchida and VinaiNorasakkunkit, "The NEET and Hikikomori spectrum: Assessing the risks and consequences of becoming culturally marginalized", <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/2812051>

- 04\_The\_NEET\_and\_Hikikomori\_spectrum\_Assessing\_the\_risks\_and\_consequences\_of\_becoming\_culturally\_marginalized,AUGUST 2015
12. Dr. K.N. Ushadevi, Siljo Johnson, Impact of Organised Retailing in Rural Area; Business Sciences International Research Journal ISSN 2321 – 3191 Vol 2 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 179-184
13. “Are you NEET?”, <http://www.psychforums.com/asperger-syndrome/topic47802.html>
14. An assistant professor of psychiatry at Oregon Health & Science University and a leading U.S. specialist on hikikomori
15. “Solving The Mystery Of 230,000 People In Japan Who Won’t Leave Their Bedrooms”, <http://www.mtv.com/news/2147849/hikikomori/>, 5th July 2015
16. Dr. Takahiro Kato is one of the few hikikomori experts in Japan.
17. Sean Martin, “Hikikomori: Health Conditions Mount Over condition as a Million Japanese men Lock Themselves Away”, <http://www.ibtimes.co.uk/hikikomori-health-concerns-mount-over-condition-million-japanese-men-lock-themselves-away-1509910>, 8<sup>th</sup> July 2015
18. Shiferaw-Mitiku Tebeka, Ushadevi K.N, Agricultural Marketing and Price Analysis: the Case; Business Sciences International Research Journal ISSN 2321 – 3191 Vol 2 Issue 1 (2014), Pg 167-170
19. “Solving The Mystery Of 230,000 People In Japan Who Won’t Leave Their Bedrooms”, op.cit
20. Freeter is a Japanese expression for people who lack full-time employment or are unemployed, excluding housewives and students. The term originally included young people who deliberately chose not to become salary-men, even though jobs were available at the time.
21. Jayendra Venkataraman, A Prognosis Of Destination Marketing In India; Business Sciences International Research Journal ISSN 2321 – 3191 Vol 3 Issue 1 (2015), Pg 203-206
22. “The NEET and Hikikomori spectrum: Assessing the risks and consequences of becoming culturally marginalized”, op.cit
23. “What is Wrong With Japan?” <http://web.mit.edu/krugman/www/nikkei.html>
24. Chris Mathews, “Forget Greece, Japan is the worlds real economic time bomb”, <http://fortune.com/2015/02/26/japan-economic-time-bomb/>, 26<sup>th</sup> February 2015
25. An economist at Columbia’s School of International & Public Affairs
26. “Forget Greece, Japan is the worlds real economic time bomb”, op.cit
27. Valter Martins, “Is the Eurozone suffering from a “Shortage of Japanese”?”, <http://fistfulofeuros.net/afoe/can-demography-explain-portugals-slump-before-the-crash/>
28. Tina P Singh, Preemal Maria D’souza, A Study On The Response Of Consumers Towards Agile Marketing; Business Sciences International Research Journal ISSN 2321 – 3191 Vol 3 Issue 1 (2015), Pg 183-190

\*\*\*

Dr. Prasanna Sivanandam  
 Director, ITM Business School Chennai  
 Prof. Bala Praveena/